



A fresh start in Fort Scott

Fort Scott has big dreams – and step-by-step plans for how to bring them into existence.

Split into four groups at Fort Scott Community College, about 70 people gather around tables, leaning in closely to discuss plans for their town. Fingers run over large blueprints to help explain the details of ambitious projects.

“The community deserves this. The community NEEDS this,” one attendee says.

Fort Scott’s plans spring from five years of work with Public Square Communities, an organization funded in part by the Kansas Health Foundation that helps towns bring citizens from four sectors – business, education, government and human services – together for the common good.

“It really gave us a structure,” says Clayton Tatro, co-convenor of the Fort Scott Visioning Committee. “It was a way to define involvement, and it was a way to set tangible goals that involved the entire community.”

Building trust

When Fort Scott started the Public Square process in 2005, the town was struggling through a contentious time, Tatro says. “There had just been a downtown fire, and people had issues with city government,” he says. “There wasn’t a lot of trust in the community. Public Square really helped pull the community out from that, and now we’re going full bore.”

Today, Fort Scott has reached the final phase of the Public Square process: accreditation. Signs are coming to the entrances of the city to announce this milestone that only five other Kansas communities have achieved so far.

“It’s amazing where you are and where you’ve come from since 2005,” Public Square facilitator Rick Behrens tells the group.

Action teams

Residents formed action teams – Riverfront Authority Renovation, Good Neighbor Action Team, Youth Action Team and the Wellness Action Team – and over time, they developed plans to improve Fort Scott in those areas.



The Good Neighbor Action Team recruited volunteers to do repair work on 75 area homes, while the Youth Action Team has raised \$100,000 toward park improvements.

But the Riverfront Authority and Wellness action teams have even bigger projects in mind.

Riverfront plans

The riverfront renovation plans come with a \$5.8 million price tag, and the group has broken the project down into stages. They’ve already raised \$50,000 through a community gala,

and they’re looking for other sources of funding including government grants. A landscape design firm developed these plans. They want to tie the area into downtown Fort Scott and include a fishing lake, walking trails, botanical garden, equestrian trails and RV parking.

“This is quite a dream, but think what an impact this could have on our community,” a team member said.

Fort Scott’s swimming pool is 73 years old and won’t last much longer, so the Wellness Action Team plans to build a new swimming pool and year-round health and wellness center that would cost \$3.9 million.

They hope to fund the health and wellness center through a ½-cent sales tax for 10 years. This proposal will go on the ballot in April.

Moving forward

The meeting buzzes with conversation, movement, opinions, questions and people engaged in seeing the possibilities for their community.

“There’s a sign-up sheet if you’re interested in helping us,” action team members say, and some new people sign up to join the effort.

Two hours later, the group leaves with new hope for their town.





Fort Scott residents discuss how to revitalize the town for area youth.



309 East Douglas Wichita, KS 67202-3405

Kansas Health Foundation



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A fresh start in Fort Scott

Five years ago, Fort Scott was struggling. A local fire, looming issues with city government and general distrust had divided the town.

But with help from Public Square, a Kansas Health Foundation grantee dedicated to strengthening and enriching Kansas communities, Fort Scott is now poised to prosper.

How did Public Square do it? By showing residents the power of organization, communication and, most importantly, community. Read on to learn more.



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