

A TOOLKIT FOR
CONTRIBUTING
YOUR IDEAS

CREATING A PLACE IN BALANCE

A sustainable community in the making

WHAT IF OUR REGION BECAME A LEADING EXAMPLE OF A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY?

Our community has what it takes to make this future possible.

What you are holding:

You hold in your hands a toolkit for contributing ideas to a working “blueprint” of our local region as a sustainable community. More than 100 residents of our local area contributed the ideas in this document during a collaborative—or “co-creative”—process from April to June 2019, led by members of a Sustainable Communities Working Group, convened by Inourage. This is a first draft, and is just the beginning of a longer creative effort.

In order to take the next step, we need input from people all across our local region. What does a *sustainable community* mean to you?

How to use this tool:

1. Read the following pages.
2. Write down your answers to the questions and any other ideas that you have.
3. Send your ideas to Inourage. You can mail this toolkit to us, or you can take photos of what you wrote and email the photos to us.
4. Be sure to include your contact information so we can invite you to join in next steps with the blueprint co-creation process.

Next Steps

The blueprint will inform the work of the new Partnership for Sustainable Communities, formed between Inourage and University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point; a center for research and action on sustainable communities—the first of its kind in the state.



WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU

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Over the next 18 months, the Partnership for Sustainable Communities will host community strategy sessions to prioritize concrete next steps, funding, and coordination. These will include a series of special sessions, each focused on a specific “current” of sustainability in our community. Each session will bring together people and organizations interested and invested in that topic.

To help implement these sessions’ results, the Partnership will:

- Provide resources to residents who want to take action through Inourage’s *What If* grant program;
- Spark coordination around the identified priorities; and
- Support youth leadership to take next steps, by engaging students and other young people in the Partnership’s work.

We believe a sustainable community is about being in balance.

Five currents that are important for our community:

Our **civic spaces** where we come together to work, play, shop, gather, pray, and more.

The **natural resources** we use, enjoy, and care for.

The **local food and agriculture** we grow, consume, and share.

The **community fabric** that connects us to one another.

The **community wealth** that we all have access to.

Being in balance means these five elements are present in every current:

1. Healthy: Being in balance means we prioritize the holistic health of our community—of our people (in body, mind, and spirit), of our natural ecosystems, of our buildings and infrastructure, our community culture, and more.

2. Inclusive: Being in balance means we seek out, welcome, support, and include all members of our community. It means having multicultural, multigenerational, and diverse socioeconomic civic participation and leadership.

3. Equitable: Being in balance means we address injustices, past and present. It means being a community striving for opportunity and access for all.

4. Community-driven: Being in balance means that we ask for the ideas of our fellow community members to guide our plans and actions.

5. Interconnected: Being in balance means that we are aware of the impacts of our plans and actions on our earth, one another, and future generations.

LET'S CREATE
A BLUEPRINT
TO GET THERE



CIVIC SPACES

Right now, our community lacks vibrant civic spaces. Our downtown areas feel empty; buildings are underused and run-down. There are not enough spaces to gather in nor enough things to do for families, youth, and young adults. But we do have many local non-profits and clubs, sporting events, community theater, and more. We imagine a future in which we build on our civic assets and turn under-utilized buildings into multi-use centers of community. We believe we can make our downtown a place that actively supports diverse, local business owners offering local goods and services. In balance, our civic spaces have a small-town feel with opportunities that rival bigger urban areas. Through art, events, and more, our civic spaces teach us the history of this place, and its significance to the indigenous peoples, including the Ho-Chunk Nation, who have been present here for thousands of years.

TRIBUNE BUILDING OPENS

WHAT DO YOU THINK
ABOUT THIS DESCRIPTION?
WHAT DO YOU AGREE WITH,
AND WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

EVENTS
REFLECTING OUR CULTURAL DIVERSITY

HERE ARE SOME
INITIAL IDEAS
FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO
YOU HAVE?

SUPPORT FOR NEW
AND EXISTING LOCAL BUSINESSES

PUBLIC ART DOWNTOWN

CIVIC SPACES

BALANCE WE SEEK

Buildings that used to be empty, or underused, are now vibrant, bustling structures—accessible to all—where community members live, work, gather, and have fun. Our downtown is alive again, and is a place inclusive of all of our community members.

TOO LITTLE

No spaces to gather;
a shuttered
downtown; having
to drive out of town
to shop or go out to
eat; no recreational,
non-profit, or
community activities;
many empty
or under-used
buildings.

TOO MUCH

Excessive focus on
new businesses
and neglect of
existing businesses;
revitalization efforts
erase our history;
too many multi-use
living & working
spaces making
private space harder
to access.

HERE ARE SOME INITIAL
IDEAS FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE?

YOUR IDEAS HERE:

MORE MULTI-USE COMMUNITY
BUILDINGS OPEN IN THE FUTURE

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN • INTERCONNECTED

HEALTHY • INCLUSIVE • EQUITABLE

NATURAL RESOURCES

For thousands of years, the people of the Ho-Chunk Nation cared for the lands, waters, forests, and air of this place. Over the past two centuries, timber and paper industries have done the opposite. Now, large-scale agriculture is further harming these ecosystems by introducing new levels of pesticides and water-use. We are only just starting to help our river and natural ecosystems return to health. We cherish the lakes, trails, parks, and the beautiful Wisconsin River that runs through our community, and we imagine a future in which we are giving back to our natural environment and caring for our earth. In balance, we use our local natural resources for livelihood, nourishment, shelter, and joy, and we fulfill our responsibility to protect and replenish these living systems.

EXPANDED AND IMPROVED BIKE PATHS

REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

MORE GREEN SPACES WITH NATIVE PLANTS

HERE ARE SOME
INITIAL IDEAS
FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO
YOU HAVE?

NEW AND REMODELED BUILDINGS
USE RENEWABLE ENERGY

WHAT DO YOU THINK
ABOUT THIS DESCRIPTION?
WHAT DO YOU AGREE WITH,
AND WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

NATURAL RESOURCES

TOO LITTLE

No or limited recycling, reuse, or composting; no or limited renewable energy; no native plants used in green spaces and gardens; lack of education about pesticide safety and alternatives; transport within and among our communities reliant on cars.

TOO MUCH

Creating green spaces in a way that undermines access to affordable housing

BALANCE WE SEEK

We use a significant percentage of clean renewable energy to power our community, and we transform materials we used to throw away into new sources of value. We actively restore native habitats and care for the other-than-human species with which we share this place.

TRAININGS ON PESTICIDE ALTERNATIVES AND SAFETY
COMPOSTING AND RE-USE PROGRAMS

HERE ARE SOME INITIAL IDEAS FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE?

YOUR IDEAS HERE:

HEALTHY • INCLUSIVE • EQUITABLE • COMMUNITY-DRIVEN • INTERCONNECTED

LOCAL FOOD & AGRICULTURE

Even though we are surrounded by rich farmlands and have a proud and continuing tradition of farming, livestock, and craftsmanship, we import the vast majority of the food and products we consume. Our local region includes some of the country's best cheese, plus cranberries, potatoes, seasonal fruits and vegetables, and wool. Farmers markets are starting to grow and get more popular, and we have started some farm-to-table programs in our schools and elsewhere. We envision a future in which we have a thriving local food and agricultural system that supports our farmers and producers, and we ensure that everyone in our community can access and afford healthy food. In balance, our local food and agriculture is central to our community's health, nourishment, livelihood, and culture.



HERE ARE SOME
INITIAL IDEAS
FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO
YOU HAVE?

WHAT DO YOU THINK
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LOCAL FOOD & AGRICULTURE

SCHOOLS SERVE HEALTHY,
LOCALLY-SOURCED MEALS

FARMERS MARKET HAS A PERMANENT SPACE/SHELTER

INVENTORY OF LOCAL PRODUCERS AND WHERE TO BUY

BALANCE WE SEEK

Households, businesses, organizations, and agencies across our community are buying a significant portion of their food from local small farmers. Our community is proud of our farmers and the beautiful, healthy produce that our local region offers.

HERE ARE SOME INITIAL
IDEAS FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE?

YOUR IDEAS HERE:

TOO LITTLE

Few farmers; hardly any young or new farmers; lack of systems promoting pesticide safety and alternatives; few organizations and businesses committed to sourcing significant percentage of food locally; lack of information about local producers and what they offer

TOO MUCH

Losing access to the imported products that we enjoy, such as fruits, vegetables, and specialty products, or to more affordable products that are non-local.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN • INTERCONNECTED

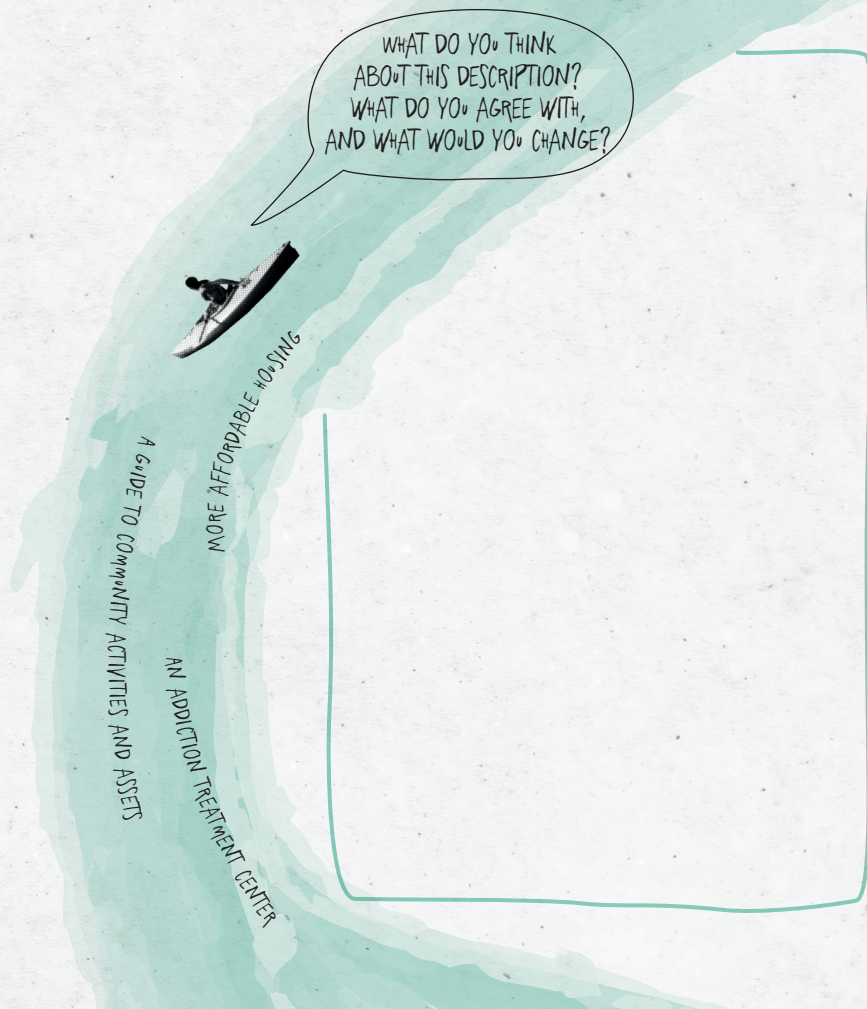
HEALTHY • INCLUSIVE • EQUITABLE

SMALL VEGETABLE GARDENS
THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY

COMMUNITY FABRIC

Many community members report feeling stereotyped, excluded, and discriminated against. Residents of color and those who are LGBTQ, formerly incarcerated, differently abled, or otherwise in a minority often feel that neighbors, classmates, and coworkers do not seek—or even know how—to ask about their lives. Many newcomers say it is hard to break into social circles here. Despite these challenges, our community is caring for its fellow residents:

We have nationally-recognized educational institutions, healthcare, public health programs, and civic organizations. We envision a future in which our programs and services continue to prioritize addressing past and current injustices between different kinds of people, and our residents care for and connect with one another in everyday ways.



BALANCE WE SEEK

We are proud of our growing diversity. We are taking steps across all realms of community life to make this an inclusive, accessible, and welcoming place for all. The leadership of our agencies, businesses, and civic organizations reflects our diverse demographics.

Through the events we organize and the everyday ways we reach out to one another, we are seeking to understand one another's experiences and histories and be part of creating a just and inclusive present.

TOO LITTLE

Residents of color face discrimination and marginalization; formerly incarcerated residents are left without support services they need to rebuild their lives; our neighboring towns feel disconnected, or even in competition, rather than united.

TOO MUCH

We rush to implement superficial changes without taking the time and care to understand with one another the specific changes that would be most meaningful for our community.

A GUIDE TO ALL SUPPORT SERVICES

A CIVIC ACTION LEADERSHIP ACADEMY



HERE ARE SOME INITIAL IDEAS FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE?

YOUR IDEAS HERE:

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN • INTERCONNECTED

HEALTHY • INCLUSIVE • EQUITABLE

COMMUNITY WEALTH

The contrast between the “haves” and the “have-nots” in our community is striking. Over the past 20 years, household income has declined and inequality has risen in housing, educational opportunity, and access to quality food and other resources. Yet we do have tremendous community wealth: natural areas, local foods, first-rate services, funding opportunities, and more. We envision a future in which all residents enjoy equal access to the many forms of wealth our community holds.

WHAT DO YOU THINK
ABOUT THIS DESCRIPTION?
WHAT DO YOU AGREE WITH,
AND WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?



INCREASE WORKS WITH RESIDENTS TO MODEL
NEW FUNDING AND PROGRAMS THAT THE COMMUNITY WANTS

MORE COOPERATIVES ARE FORMING,
WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO JOIN

COMMUNITY WEALTH

BALANCE WE SEEK

We are brave in naming the power dynamics and barriers that currently prevent so many people from being able to access community wealth. We have a coordinated network of support programs and funding opportunities so that anyone in our community with a worthy idea for positive change has equal access to the support needed to bring that idea to life.

TOO LITTLE

Many people and groups feel that they do not have the information or connections needed to access grants and other funding resources locally; it feels risky and daunting to start a new business; many people are not earning a living wage.

TOO MUCH

Local financial and funding entities immediately enact new practices they assume will create more equitable access without asking the residents who they aim to serve to identify real barriers and solutions.



HERE ARE SOME INITIAL
IDEAS FROM RESIDENTS.
WHAT IDEAS DO YOU HAVE?

YOUR IDEAS HERE:

MEMBERS TO GET THEIR BUSINESS OR NON-PROFIT IDEA FUNDED

A LIVING WAGE FOR ALL

TEACH, TRAINING AND MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT

HEALTHY • INCLUSIVE • EQUITABLE • COMMUNITY-DRIVEN • INTERCONNECTED

IMAGINING A LETTER FROM A FUTURE RESIDENT...

Here's one version of what our community could be like in the near future.

What would YOUR letter say? Feel free to mark this letter up—or write a new one!

Either way, send it to us!

From: Alison Johnson

Date: Sat, May 5, 2029 at 9:33 AM

Subject: wanted to share this with you

To: Nicole Johnson

Hi Nicole,

I can't believe you're about to graduate from college! Remember when you visited me during my senior year? Time flies! Anyway, I was just about to call but realized it's probably still way too early on a Saturday, given college life—so thought I'd write this email instead.

I'm helping mom and dad do a big clean-out this weekend, and I just found an old diary of mine, from ten years ago, in 2019, when I was 16! The page I opened to was an entry from right after we returned from that family trip to Chicago, the one we all helped save money for. Here's the photo of the page I opened to:

A small illustration of a person in a kayak on a river, with a speech bubble pointing to the text.

LET'S EDIT
THIS LETTER
TOGETHER

May 28, 2019

Took a long walk along the river today, and felt a whole storm of feelings, but mostly sadness. It was amazing to be in the big city, to see so many young diverse people, and art, and signs everywhere for cool events happening. I know that I should probably move to a city as soon as I graduate, so I can get a good job and be able to start helping out our parents, after all these years of them working so hard, and the sacrifices they are making for me to be able to consider college. I know that moving to the city to get the best job I can is what I should do, and the city is really exciting to me. But I also realized, standing on a bustling street corner in Chicago this past weekend, surrounded by fast-moving strangers and towering buildings and asphalt and city lights and speeding cars, that my heart is back home.

I don't idealize this place. I see the ways that our parents still feel a bit like outsiders, even though we've been here since I was two. It can feel like this is a place stuck in the past sometimes, with so many people remembering and wishing for the days of the mill booming. There are not many good job opportunities here now. It's hard to pay for

healthy food—and to have the time to cook it, with mom and dad working multiple jobs and me working while I'm in school. I am not blind to all these things.

But, standing on that street corner in Chicago, I realized that I carry this place in my heart; it is where I feel at home. I love the turning of the seasons here, the specific birds that call out to mark the different times of year. I have walked so often along our river—when I've been happy, or figuring things out in my mind, or simply being. The river feels like a part of my soul. And I feel so close with my parents and Nicole; our little family feels like such a strong team! It makes me sad to think of being far away and not being able to share all the small moments and meals together. And when I really think about it, there are a lot of people in this community that I love—my friends, my coach, my English teacher and our principal who have both supported me so strongly. All of the fun community events we have, and sports, and beautiful places I love to walk and swim and bike and hike. I know I'm supposed to want to move away. But if I'm honest with myself, in my heart I want to stay. But I don't think I can. Because I need to go where it makes sense for me to build my career.



USE THE MARGIN
FOR YOUR
NOTES

Wow! I had actually forgotten how worried I was back then! It felt impossible to stay in our community to me at that time. It makes me just realize how incredible what has happened here in the last ten years is. And that's what made me want to call you—in case you're worried in any way, as graduation approaches, and in case in your heart you also want to return home. I want to share with you what it's like living here in your 20's. My 16-year-old-self would have been amazed and so happy to see what our community is like now :)

Since you were last here, I finally moved—to the new live-work-community space here! It's in that newly restored big old building near downtown. I LOVE having my own beautiful little apartment, and there are lots of young people my age living in the building, and families, and older residents too. All the apartments are on the upper two floors of the building. And there are so many things about the building that I appreciate—from the bike rack in the basement to the shared veggie garden on the roof!

The lower floors have a co-working center, plus little shops for all locally owned businesses. You will love the pottery studio and gallery—it's a co-op business owned by all local artists! And the new cafe that opened has all kinds of hot drinks, and an amazing selection of baked goods and cheeses and other (delicious!) treats, almost all of them made locally. There's a commercial kitchen that some of businesses use and it's also available for residents of the building to use in the evenings—we can sign up to cook and share dinner together. Last week I signed up to join a cook crew for dinner on Friday, and I had such a great time! My cook crew was hilarious; I actually can't remember the last time I laughed that hard! The price I paid for the dinner (there is a fee you pay when you sign up) is way cheaper than eating out, and even cheaper than if I'd bought my own groceries. Plus the woman who manages of the commercial kitchen sources more than half of the produce and ingredients from local farms. (By the way, there are more and more new small farms popping up all the time—it's really exciting to see all the variety and new faces and stands at the farmers market every weekend.)

On top of all that, you cannot believe how affordable my rent is. And because the building is one of the most energy efficient buildings in the state, my monthly utility bills are almost nothing! As a former environmental studies major, it's really inspiring for me to experience how a building that is better for the environment can be more affordable—and more joyous too.

And maybe even more exciting than my apartment is the co-working space. As you know from when you were here at Christmas, when I was deciding about my new job, I was really worried about how it was going to work out for me to be based here and working remotely for the environmental consulting firm based in San Francisco. But Nicole, it's been awesome! I have a very professional space to work from at the co-working center on our first floor, and really nice rooms for video conference calls. And the company just hired another person based here, too! I really like working with her. The company feels that it is a big asset to have two staff "on the ground" here in the Midwest, and I feel like I have the best of all worlds. I feel like I'm living the big city life in my work-day—on conference calls with passionate and smart colleagues all around the country—working to make companies and municipalities more environmentally friendly. And then I step out the door after work and I can bike over to mom and dad's house—on the beautiful new bike path—to join them for dinner. The bike path goes through the new green spaces with the native plants and pollinator-friendly gardens, and I see so many monarch butterflies along the path in the summer.

Finding that diary entry this morning made me pause for a minute, and feel really grateful. And I wanted to share that with you.

Well, I better get on with my Saturday here. Oh—one other thing I keep meaning to tell you! That new cafe in my building—they have "meet the artist" evenings once a week, where a local artist shares their story. Your friend Ana is the artist sharing next week—her work has really taken off! She's sharing about how her family's roots in Mexico have influenced her style. Mom, dad, and I are all going to go. You'll be with us in spirit!

Much love from back home, Alison

YOUR IDEAS FOR TAKING ACTION

In the ideas you have shared in this packet, are there one or two ideas that really stand out for you—that you feel passionate about?

Do you have suggestions for specific, concrete actions that would start to make the idea(s) a reality?

Is there an action that you personally would be willing and interested to take?

If so, what support would you need to make this action possible?



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COMMENTS AND IDEAS



