Study the use of local hiring and

• Establish target industries and desired

Establish a workgroup of the sustainability

purchasing agreements

# MIDWESTERN SUSTAINABILITY: THE "WRIGHT" FIT



#### Abstract

he Mason City Sustainability Plan creates the first **pility framework** for a small-sized Midwestern community. Created in conjunction with a comprehensive plan update, the project uses arts and culture as a starting point for community engagement and to stimulate dialogue for envisioning a sustainable future for the community. It creates a sustainability framework based on the community's cultural assets, location, and needs indicated by residents to build a durable community identity. The plan encourages collaboration by giving ownership of strategies to stakeholders brought together in a sustainability

# MASON CITY, IOWA

Mason City, lowa is the case study for the project. It is a smal size Midwestern regional health care and retail hub, seeking to embrace sustainability concepts to lead future development of the community. Mason City is the hometow of the creator of **The Music Man**, Meredith Willson, and a place with iconic architecture by Frank Lloyd Wright. The city is distinguished as a Blue Zone community to improve its social wellbeing and has an increasing number of senior

Population: 27,366 White: 91% Over 65: 18% Median Age: 42 Median HH Income: \$42,009 Bachelor or higher: 21%

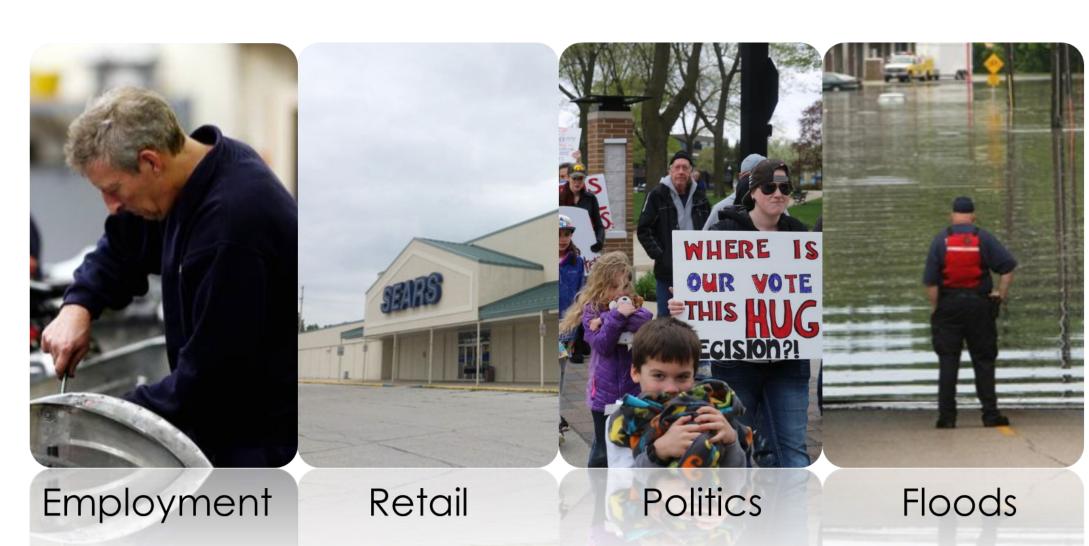
Health Care and

Retail Hub

#### Key Findings

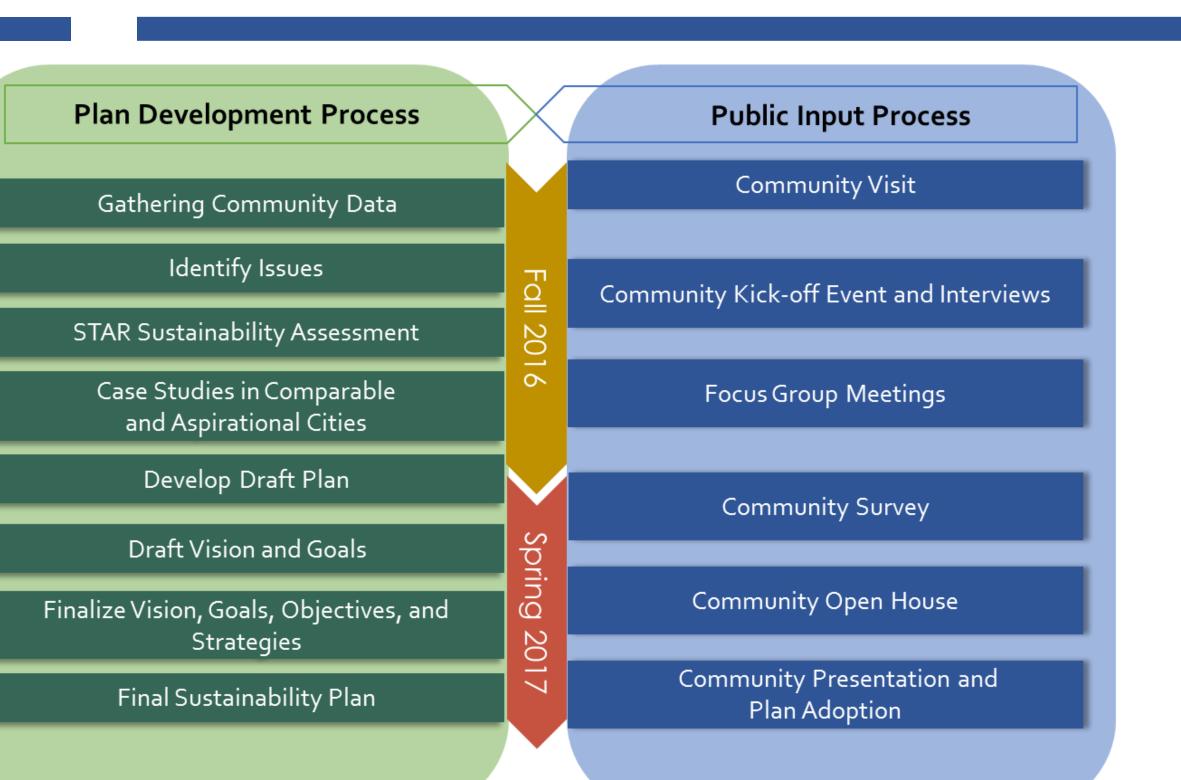
- Communication between stakeholders in similar industries and services is lacking, thus limited resources are not combined for optimal use.
- Economically distressed areas take interest in sustainability if it leads to increased efficiencies and costs savings.
- Multiple rounds and types of public participation allow residents to stay engaged in the planning
- Educating and exciting a community about sustainability is necessary to establish support for long term goals.
- Building on community assets and supporting a local identity is key to attract and retain residents.





#### Community Challenges

The city is at a cross-roads to identify how to move the community forward as it is facing challenges with a slow population decline, a reduction in manufacturing employment, an ailing downtown shopping mall, and looding vulnerabilities. Following the contentious rejection by the city of a proposed pork processing plant, the city needs to find **a new way forward**. The framework recognizes those challenges and promotes local assets to achieve sustainability goals and create new opportunities for sustainable practices.



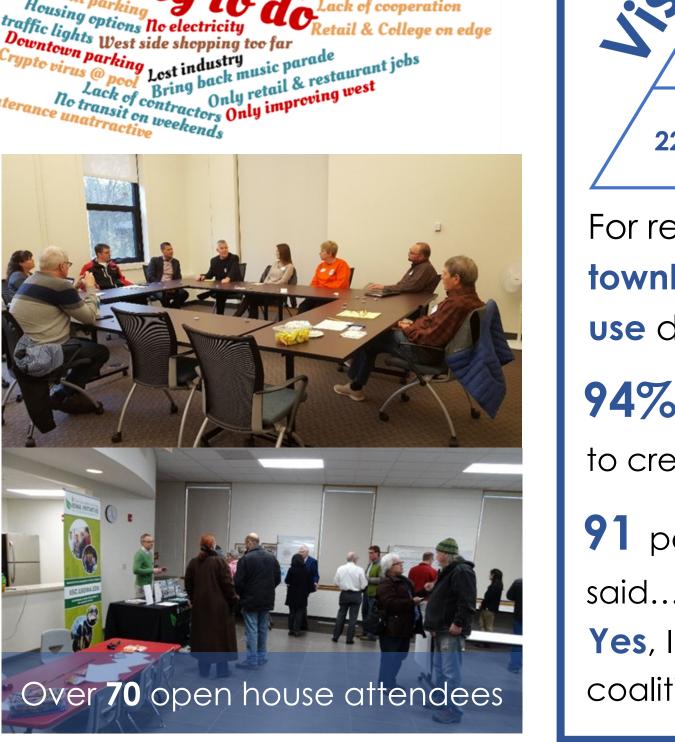
# Comprehensive Plan Coordination

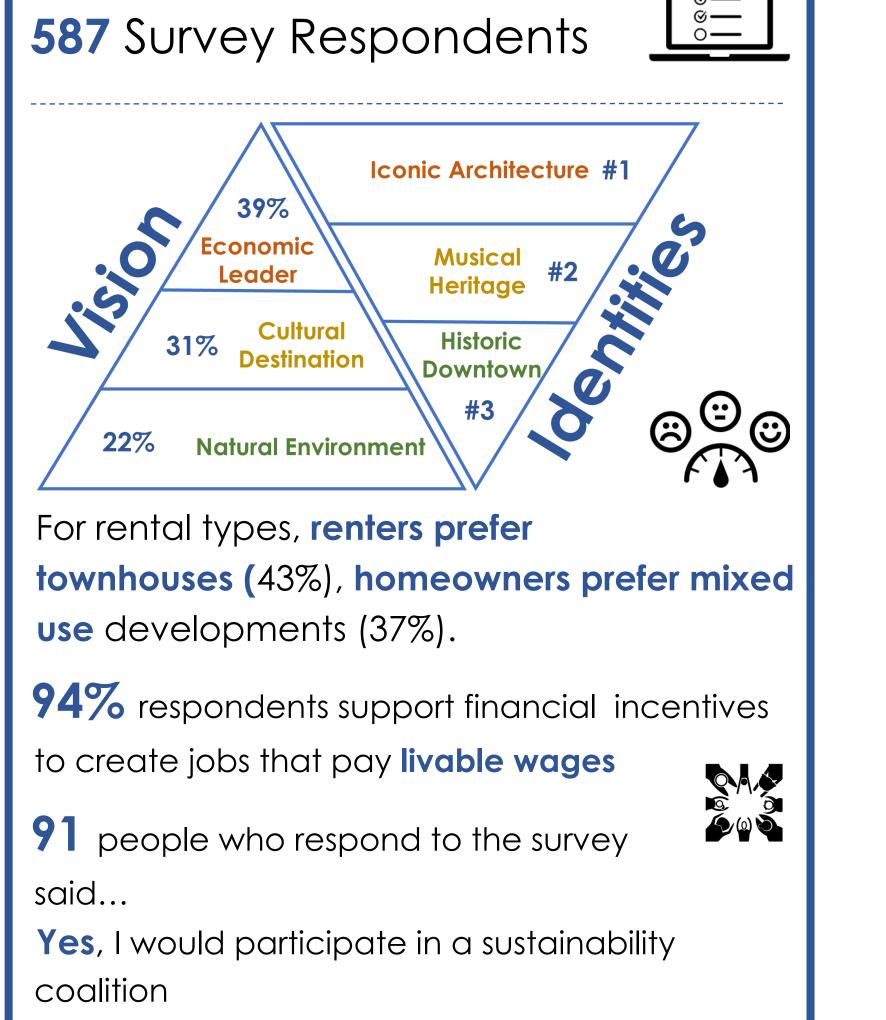
Community Survey

### Community Input









## STAR Sustainability Assessment Overview

Exceeding

5.3% walk or bike to work **EPA air quality** report shows **0** 

consumption

SUSTAINABILITY
TOOLS FOR
ASSESSING &



increased \$1,300 (2010-14)



## Doing Well - Almost Need Improvement

ation costs (27%) are 8% higher than

Drove alone **commuting** is **5%** higher than **icteria** in water prevents swimming ost 47 business establishments (2009-14) Lost **700 jobs** (2010-16)

Post-secondary educational attainment decreased (2009-14) Share of creative industries declined (2010-15)

The poverty rate (15.5%), is 3% higher than the overty among vulnerable populations increased

3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading proficiency (65%), is 11.7% below the statewide average (2015-16 school

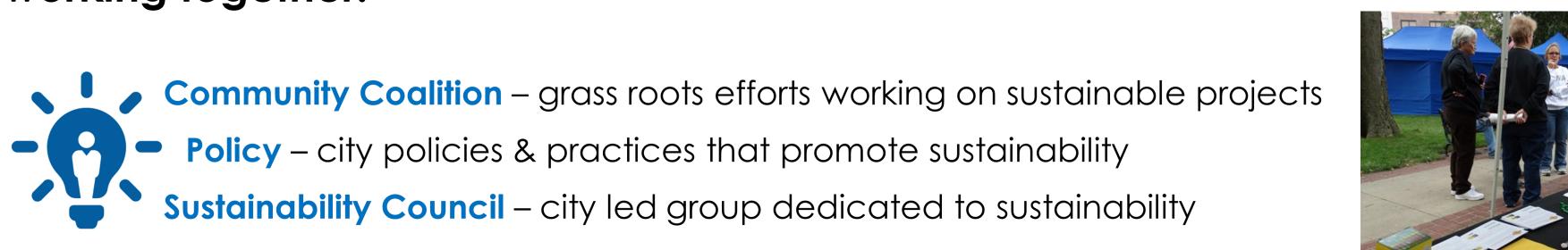
Overall Graduation Rate (87.6%), is 3.2% below the statewide average

#### Sustainability Vision

Mason City will be a statewide leader in sustainability practices with thriving local businesses and employment opportunities for all. The community will work together towards a peaceful, culturally vibrant, resilient, an and family friendly place — Mason City Sustainability Vision Statement 2017

#### Future Community Sustainability Engagement

Goal - The community sustainability coalition will drive sustainability efforts through education and action with citizens and public leadership working together.



bjectives	Rationale	Strategy
reate a community sustainability oalition	<ul> <li>Focus groups</li> <li>Need for collaboration and unified work toward community goals</li> <li>Identified lack of communication</li> </ul>	Coalition membership and structure is determined and regular meetings occur
	among stakeholders	<ul> <li>Optional next steps</li> <li>City creates a sustainability office</li> <li>Coalition becomes a 501c3</li> <li>Public private partnership - Sustainability council is codified</li> </ul>

#### **Environmental Stewardship**

expansion of wildlife habitat in

green spaces and parks

Goal - The community will promote environmental awareness and promote protection of ecosystems and natural areas



Expand understanding and awareness of natural systems	Environment not a major issue during community outreach events	Awareness & education campaign in schools and community
Protection of Natural Resources:	Water quality issues beyond municipal boundaries	Expand cooperation beyond borders to form <b>Watershed</b>
Water quality	Devotorier outloroetro (outobous Fooli)	Management Authority
Flooding	<b>Bacteria outbreaks</b> (such as E.coli.) prevent the use of public waters for recreation.	Target sensitive areas along waterways for native vegetation and stormwater best management
	Recent flooding events have caused disruptions including road closures and	practices
	property buyouts (2008)	Encourage private landowners to implement stormwater management practices on their property
Promote biodiversity through	Lack of biodiversity and native plants	Write plan to identify areas for

Community survey found support for

parks improvements

Strategy

native plantings

#### **Economic Prosperity**

Grow small, locally owned

businesses in nodes identified

#### Goal - The Community will have a thriving local economy with livable wages for all

Lost 47 business establishments (2009-14)

by the Comprehensive Plan Focus groups indicated desire for locally owned

by the Comprehensive Plan	businesses	Study potential <b>local supply</b> sources for businesses	
		Prioritize locally owned businesses in decision making processes	
Use tax incentives to support businesses that increase the number of livable wage jobs	92% of survey respondents <b>support tax incentives</b> for businesses that expand the number of <b>livable wage jobs</b>	Study to determine local livable wage	
		Develop and implement guidelines for tax incentives supporting <b>livable wage</b>	
	Median household income increased slower than rate of inflation	jobs	
		Use livable wage recommendations for employees and contractors	
	The poverty rate is 3% higher than the statewide average		
Support businesses that align with the current economic base and community identity, yet diversify and expand	Lost over 700 jobs (2010-16)	Develop an economic and workforce development plan  Identify labor shortages  Fetablish target industries and desired	
	Exporting industries: Manufacturing, Health Care, and Transportation are doing well		

yet diversify and expand products and services

September interviews revealed community tensions businessulting from recent economic development decisions A housing study identifies rental needs for Between 2009 and 2014, the population with a young professionals bachelor's degree declined

Ensure **adequate childcare** is available • Need for short term, high quality rental options Childcare waiting lists

#### Social Responsibility

#### Goal - The community will collaborate to expand arts and culture, celebrate

the 'best things' about Mason City

### diversity, and increase educational success

workgroup among local artists, businesses, and

Increase diverse

Focus groups identified need for collaboration an unified work toward community goals • 51% support new city sponsored events and festivals

September interviews revealed architecture as one of

resulting from recent economic development

representation on local boards and organizations Focus groups identified resistance to change and Local boards and organizations strive to negative perceptions of minority population have membership that is **representative** negative perceptions of minority population

9.3% - Mason City minority population 18.9% - School district minority enrollment 3rd grade literacy is 11.7% below the state rate of 76.8% Complete a feasibility study to examine 32% of survey respondents support increased community resources for English Language Learners A school – parent partnership develops

Focus groups Lack of Childcare - waiting lists Desire to attract young professionals and families

of the community demographics gaps between childcare available and local employer needs

Identify current level of minority

and implements new reading projects specific to English Language Learners Implement policy changes that reduce barriers for childcare entrepreneurs

Music therapy in community settings

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