

City of New Richmond: Mayor says city is listening

By Tom Lindfors, March 4, 2018



New Richmond Mayor Fred Horne began the morning's program by calling out community members for their criticism that the City isn't listening to them. Tom Lindfors / RiverTown Multimedia

New Richmond Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Rob Kreibich welcomed a crowd for breakfast before the Chamber's annual "State of the City" event Friday, Feb. 23, hosted by WITC.

New Richmond Mayor Fred Horne began the morning's program by calling out community members for their criticism that the city isn't listening to them.

"The city's easy to hate. Everybody wants to complain about the city, the city doesn't listen. I'm here to say, I call bull. I look at the projects we've been doing for the last couple years, North Shore Drive, Paperjack, North Fourth this past year in 2017. For each of these projects we do about four community meetings where we meet with the neighborhood. What do they want for a street? What do they want for a project in their neighborhood? As you look at each of those streets, they're all different. They all

have a local flair to them. That's my proof to you guys and the community that the city does listen. We do take your feedback and we incorporate it into our projects," said Horne.

To help make the mayor's case, City Community Development Director Beth Thompson followed with an abbreviated overview of the city's innovative review of its comprehensive plan carried out by a small volunteer army of citizen planners, members of the Community Action Plan (CAP) Committee.

"Comprehensive plans are a look some 10 to 15 sometimes 20 years into the future. The State of Wisconsin recommends that we review our plan every 10 years. We're in about our 12th or 13th year of our previous plan. We've spent the last seven months working with a community group to work out our new plan moving into the future," said Thompson.

After admitting the planning process got off to a rough start and required a reboot, Thompson introduced Todd Streeter of Community Collaboration. Streeter introduced a completely new approach to comprehensive planning which required citizen volunteers to do the actual planning as opposed to paid professional planners. It also required the city to relinquish control of the process and trust its community members.

Early on, Streeter shared this advice with Thompson.

"You should listen to your community members first. Spend six to eight months listening to what they have to say, having them do the work, having them put the projects together, having them present to the community, having them show the face of New Richmond. Don't let it be you, or Mike, or Fred, or the City Council. Let it be the people who live here, who have a vested interest here, who work here, who enjoy your parks and trails here. Let's let this group of people be the people who lead you into the next 10-15 years."

Various members of the CAP Committee took turns briefly describing the fruits of their labors, describing a variety of projects designed to lead the City of New Richmond into the future. From featuring the Willow River as a focal point for recreation and commerce to infilling and land recycling vacant and undeveloped land close to and in the city center, to the construction of interactive parks and a trail system designed to connect all corners of the city, the committee members' imaginations and excitement were clearly on display.

"I was super impressed and amazed with the amount of ideas and the thoughtfulness they put into this project. They have dedicated over 860 hours to our comp plan and they're all volunteering their time. Today you are seeing the result of that," said Thompson.

As if to reinforce the mayor's point one last time, Thompson invited audience members to place stickers of various colors (indicating the degree of like or dislike) on a collection of maps hung on the walls of the conference room illustrating a number of the projects that had been described by committee members.