

VILLAGE OF BROWN DEER FOCUS GROUPS

On March 12, 2003, over 40 residents and business-owners participated in nine 45-minute focus group sessions facilitated by Barb Grant and Dave Vaclavik of Public Management Partners, LLP.

Visioning Committee members chose nine customer categories to solicit input from specific groups of Brown Deer residents and businesses that might be significant or unique to Village customers. The nine focus groups chosen were:

- Large service and manufacturing sector employers
- Commercial businesses providing general services and goods
- Hospitality sector businesses
- Developers and commercial property managers
- Realtors and apartment managers
- Health care providers
- Ethnic minority residents
- Senior citizens
- Youth and youth organizations

SELECTION AND INVITATION PROCESS

Visioning Committee volunteer coordinators took the lead submitting names and contact information for ten to twenty invitees per group, and other members were encouraged to make additions. Formal invitations signed by Mayor Jaberg and Manager Van Gompel were sent out in two batches during February.

When invitees responded that they were interested but unable to attend, opinions were recorded or individuals were encouraged to put their thoughts in writing; five invitees did so before the meetings. When reservation responses indicated there might be too few in attendance, selected Visioning Committee coordinators were requested to make follow-up calls to encourage participation. Although attendance was lower than anticipated, discussions were still lively and insightful. All responses have formed the basis of this Focus Group Report.

FOCUS OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

After introductory welcome remarks by Russ VanGompel, Village Manager, facilitators lead discussions geared to determining participants' experiences and opinions regarding:

- Customer satisfaction with current Village services, officials, and staff
- Customer needs and wants
- Quality of life characteristics valued
- Trends that will affect satisfaction with living and doing business in Brown Deer
- Preferred courses of action by Village in response to trends

The following is a summary of the input from these facilitated discussions. Detailed results of the Community Vision Focus Groups are available at Village Hall.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Participants were generally satisfied with the current mix and quality of Village services.

- **Public Safety:** Businesses were satisfied with police services, response times, and pro-active patrol. Residents generally felt safe in their neighborhoods. Parking lot thefts were seen as a growing issue. Black-Americans were satisfied but cautious about decreasing racism and increasing diversity. Youth expressed dissatisfaction with police contacts. Health care providers approved of 911 and EMS responses. Health care and senior participants were approved of public safety education through the Senior Center. Satisfaction with response times had dropped for some since fire department consolidation.
- **Transportation:** Businesses and residents alike were pleased with easy vehicular access to/from Brown Deer. Large employers voiced dissatisfaction with snow removal on Brown Deer road medians, especially at shift change time. Shifts in traffic and street configuration have created dissatisfaction with signalization and Brown Deer's ability to affect changes controlled by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. Seniors were dissatisfied with transportation options for non-drivers.
- **Maintenance:** Satisfaction with median maintenance varied but was high with industrial park maintenance. Although park maintenance was not mentioned, dissatisfaction with the "creek" area was.
- **Inspections:** Many felt decreased satisfaction with the Village's willingness to regulate those failing to "keep up appearances" in the private sector.
- **Recreation:** Dissatisfaction with recreational activities for older youth and young adults was widespread. Many were satisfied with the services and drawing capacity of the Schroeder YMCA. Youth in particular were dissatisfied with lack of affordable and varied activities outside of organized sports.
- **Health:** Many expressed high satisfaction with the variety and availability of health care service providers in Brown Deer and the metro area. Health care providers expressed satisfaction with the availability of the 211 information & referral system, but dissatisfaction with its marketing and use. There was general dissatisfaction with the loss of funding and volunteers to continue school screening and non-profit support services. Many were very dissatisfied with outreach and support services to isolated and frail seniors, a growing population.
- **Library, Village Administrative Services, Water and Sewer:** Positive comments received about manager's knowledge and responsiveness.

CUSTOMER NEEDS AND WANTS

All focus group participants expressed a desire for Brown Deer to maintain a high quality of life in a community that is safe, economically healthy, and “small-town” friendly. All groups expressed a fear of community degradation based on perceived and/or real erosion of property value and quality of life as Brown Deer ages and changes. All want redevelopment of struggling commercial areas. Many feel that the regional media have not been kind to Brown Deer and want the Village to promote a more positive image focused on what they feel are the real strengths of the community.

Needs and wants particular to the nine focus groups are as follows:

- **Large Employers:** Need for tax base to continue to grow and for taxes to stay reasonable. Need for taxes, services, and quality of life to be in balance in order to attract high-level employees in the national market. Image of Milwaukee metro area needs to be recognized for its importance to local companies with national/international markets. Desire for Brown Deer to improve its image.
- **Commercial Businesses:** Need for differentiation from Milwaukee & Northridge (lower quality of life, higher crime areas) not only for keeping and attracting new customers but also for recruitment of quality workers. Need for healthy replacement or adaptation of unproductive commercial areas such as Bradley Village, others; question Village’s ability to sustain two commercial areas (Bradley and Brown Deer). Interest in businesses learning to work together for success.
- **Health Care Providers:** Need for strong EMS response system to feed into strong health care system. Need to promote alternatives to 911 as an information/referral source. Need for better coordination of services to frail elderly as means of improving outcomes and decreasing emergency-style responses. Desire for systematic changes to funding and access for a growing portion of the community. Desire to promote healthier lifestyles.
- **Redevelopment and Commercial Property Management:** None present.
- **Realtors:** Need to project Brown Deer as a location that provides good value to homebuyers and homeowners. Need to promote better community image. Desire to increase code enforcement of community aesthetic standards.
- **African-American Residents:** Need to promote Brown Deer as a location that provides good value to homebuyers and homeowners. Need to embrace rather than accept racial diversity, especially at Village level. Need to “keep up appearances” thru code enforcement; beautification programs; maintenance of streets, trees, and Beaver Creek; redevelopment of underutilized commercial properties. Desire for a central gathering place and more neighborhood and community interaction.
- **Hospitality Businesses:** Need to manage traffic shifting from/toward different commercial areas. Need to redevelop underutilized commercial properties. Need

to promote 24/7 activity, build on YMCA and other healthy “outsider” customers. Need to improve image of Brown Deer. Desire support and incentives for growth of small businesses and “sprucing up” of older properties; suggest handbook for small businesses wanting to upgrade.

- **Senior Residents:** Need to promote Brown Deer as a location that provides good value to homebuyers and homeowners and a strong community image. Need for access to reliable, affordable transportation for non-drivers. Desire for stronger, more centralized coordination of senior services. Desire for more recreational staff time and programming.
- **Youthful Residents:** Need for affordable variety of places and programs for youth beyond school, organized sports, and homes. Need for recognition that the “bad few” have reduced the availability of places and services appropriate and desirable to the “good” majority of youth. Desire for more respect from adults.

QUALITY OF LIFE CHARACTERISTICS

Quality of life characteristics valued by participants varied little. They include:

- Safety, low crime rate
- Affordable, quality housing
- Good value for dollars invested in property
- Strong public schools and library
- Quality village services
- Strong economic health, both regional and local
- Proximity to Milwaukee metro area
- Small community atmosphere

TRENDS AND PREFERRED VILLAGE RESPONSE TO CHANGE

Future trends often overlapped in their influence on focus groups. For example, the graying of America is a concern not only to senior residents, health care providers, and first responders but also influences businesses (large, small, service, and goods) and the real estate market. For the sake of brevity, discussions of trends are highlighted below.

TREND	PREFERRED VILLAGE RESPONSE
- Growth in industrial park and YMCA employees & visitors	Support spread of economic vitality into Village businesses Develop 24-hour activity in Village 7 days a week
- Aging population	Coordinate regular meetings of service providers to determine means of improving services and access Consider addition of appropriate recreational programming Facilitate easy access to information/referral outside of 911
- Shift away from older commercial areas	Promote redevelopment of commercial property; consider supporting dramatic change of land use as commerce has moved toward high traffic, visibility, and population areas.



- Encourage owners to maintain and light property in interim

- Retail and parking lot theft Step up patrol and enforcement at night, when police are “stretched thin”
 Increase consistency of service when regular beat officer is off
 Educate businesses on prevention
 Promote Brown Deer as “zero tolerance for theft” community
 Compile and communicate clearance rates
 Protect and promote Brown Deer’s low crime rate
- Aging of housing stock More active enforcement of no junk car and other “aesthetic” ordinance requirements
 Refresh visible public infrastructure wherever possible
 Maintain and improve quality of life measures
 Improve and promote Brown Deer’s IMAGE
- Increased racial diversity Embrace rather than tolerate diversity
 Village should actively seek minority involvement
 Combat potential to return to prejudices based on color
 Find ways to promote community friendliness & integration
- Loss of teen recreational opportunities Offer a variety of low-cost recreation alternatives
 Support businesses doing the same
 Don’t let the few permanently alter opportunities for the many
- Desire for downtown or village center Develop one that offers easy mixing of generations, business-development opportunities, and opportunities for community “bonding.”