

WATERTOWN, SOUTH DAKOTA

H₂O-20: Watertown's Vision for 2020

Market Street brought exactly the level of experience, expertise, and hard work we needed to accomplish our goals as a community. The end result is above and beyond our expectations.

-Steering Committee Leadership



Background

Community leaders in Watertown are no strangers to initiating successful community visioning processes. Past processes have resulted in numerous successes providing great benefits for local residents and businesses. Emerging from the Great Recession largely unscathed, however, Watertown faced new challenges. Diminishing population growth, a rising demand for diverse and more abundant amenities, a tight labor market, and dwindling supply of young talent prompted leaders to embark upon a new process to define the community's consensus vision for its future. Watertown's Vision for 2020 (H₂O-20) would leverage assets such as Lake Area Technical College – an institution that has repeatedly made Aspen Institute's Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence Top Five List – Redlin Arts Center, Lake Kampeska, and the historic Uptown area while establishing a proactive, forward-thinking, and progressive vision.

A group of community leaders formed the volunteer-driven H₂O-20 Steering Committee in 2011, and hired *Market Street* to facilitate the development of an inclusive community vision, one that incorporated the thoughts and wishes of every Watertown resident. To accomplish this goal, the H₂O-20 Steering Committee, guided by *Market Street*, engaged in an aggressive public information campaign in order to garner public input. Their efforts resulted in over 2,200 resident responses to an online survey – over ten percent of the population. Combined with numerous focus groups and interviews, the public input phase of the process received greater participation than anyone anticipated, and shattered *Market Street's* records for community participation in such a process. Brad Johnson, columnist at the *Watertown Public Opinion*, opined that "it is perhaps the most intensive citizen-driven effort ever developed in South Dakota."

The Steering Committee thoroughly reviewed a wealth of research, including all resident input, and began developing a Vision Plan that reflected the community's aspirations. The Plan was guided by a vision statement that incorporated key words and phrases submitted by residents that defined the community desired future in 2020, and had five focus areas, each drawing from a key phrase in the vision statement.

"Watertown is a progressive community with collaborative leadership, characterized by our commitment to public education, diversity of employment opportunities, safe and attractive neighborhoods and business districts, and vibrant cultural and recreation amenities. Our dedication to developing and maintaining these attributes will ensure that our community is welcoming, family-friendly, and appealing to all ages for many years to come."



Implementation Highlights

Watertown's Steering Committee, empowered by the wealth of community input, took early steps to ensure fruitful implementation. The then newly formed Implementation Committee held its Public Rollout Party in January 2013, inviting residents to view the final product that was derived from their input. Implementation Committee members wrote op-ed columns and appeared on local radio to ensure that residents who participated in the process were afforded the opportunity to view their Vision for 2020 at the Public Rollout Party. Over 600 community members attended the event at Lake Area Technical Institute. The H₂O-20 Implementation Committee has demonstrated incredible progress in just a few years, and the community is without question a best practice in the engagement of volunteers in implementation.

Community Beautification: The Safe and Attractive Neighborhoods and Business Districts committee has completed work with the City on the development of a public park in Uptown Watertown and begun work on the development of a second public park. The committee has also organized two Clean and Green community cleanup days. During the first event, more than 300 volunteers and 45 participating business contributed more than 1,000 volunteer hours. Corporations and community groups have adopted public parks, and the first piece of public art (a new sculpture) was installed in Uptown Watertown in June 2014. In less than a year, nine additional sculptures were installed, birthing the Watertown Art Walk. Numerous alleyways in Uptown have been beautified and improved through utilities burial and additional lighting. The Watertown Community Foundation established a special fund to provide monies for various beautification initiatives (plantings, public art, etc.) and incentivize historic preservation and redevelopment. The City is working to convert an old water treatment plant at Lake Kampeska into a phosphorous-removal facility that will help eliminate algae and beautify the community's largest recreational asset.

Education and Workforce Development: The school system launched its inaugural Parent University to support parental engagement in 2014. The Chamber of Commerce helped launch the Young Entrepreneur's Academy (YEA!) in 2014, a year-long class designed to transform middle and high school students into entrepreneurs. With the support of the Kaufmann Foundation, the program serves thousands of students in 168 communities and Watertown will host the first pilot program in the State of South Dakota. Nearly 200 community leaders attended the Watertown Workforce Summit in 2014, designed to bring together local leaders and local businesses to ensure workforce needs are met. The H₂O-20 Committee began working with local and state institutions of higher education to remove barriers to their physical expansion in Watertown.

Community Events, Facilities, and Amenities: In 2014, Watertown residents approved the construction of a new 116,000 sq. ft. Multi-Use Facility and Recreation Center and the development of a new softball complex. Bramble Park Zoo has partnered with the H₂O-20 Committee to launch an adults-only "Zoofari" event. Sites are currently being evaluated at Lake Kampeska for the construction of a new public marina.

Economic Development: The Pheasant Ridge Industrial Park was recently designated a South Dakota Certified Ready Site. Community leaders helped launch Kampeska Capital, a new \$750,000 angel fund to support local entrepreneurs.

