



Ainsworth, NE

November 6th 2023

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NE CARES COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSION

This report serves to document and summarize the main themes discussed at the NE CARES Community Listening Session, held on November 6th, 2023 at Ainsworth Community Schools in Ainsworth, NE.

Participants included representatives from the following organizations and agencies:

- Ainsworth Community Schools
- Ainsworth Family Clinic
- Brown County Hospital
- Community Foundation
- Educational Service Unit 17

SUMMARY

Participants reported that Ainsworth is a great place to live with outdoor opportunities, a rich agricultural tradition, and members who want the community to succeed. The school and community hospital provide great opportunities for the community to thrive, and students are hard working and polite. Participants discussed housing, childcare, absenteeism, and a declining population as challenges.

THEME ONE: HOUSING IS THE KEY

Participants reported several interrelated challenges to economic growth and positive change in Ainsworth, and a lack of housing as the lynchpin keeping the community from growing in ways that participants desired. Participants described wanting main street's shops to be full of entrepreneurs, restaurants to eat at, and for kids to return home after post-secondary experiences. However, for any of these things to happen, affordable and appropriate housing had to be available to families. Participants recounted several attempts made by the community to alleviate the housing shortage, including building apartment buildings for older couples to move into, leaving larger houses for young families. These apartments were a great success, and more are needed. The city has also previously purchased properties to update, but once the renovation is finished, they are expensive. Participants also reported a desire for more service providers, specifically childcare and nurses. Housing is also key for these service providers to live in the community. There is a missing middle in the housing stock, very

expensive renovated homes, or very dilapidated homes and apartments, but not much in between, and very little affordable and appropriate rental property.

Figure 1 Participants at the Ainsworth listening session



THEME TWO: COMMUNITY WANTS AINSWORTH TO SUCCEED

Participants expressed a profound desire for Ainsworth to succeed, and they believed that Ainsworth's people would be the key in making progress in the community. They recounted how the childcare center was something the community wanted, so they came together and raised the money quicker than they expected. The school and the hospital are bright spots in the community, and the outdoor experiences bring people from all over. Participants reported that the students in Ainsworth are hard working and polite, coming from an agricultural background. Participants also discussed how agriculture-friendly the community was, and how they are being creative in thinking about value-added agriculture. They mentioned that the community has a progressive mindset and would be open to having new opportunities, like the hog confinement that also brought in a new immigrant population.

The participants reported several needs of the community:

- Mental health care, especially for youth
- Capacity building for parents, getting them the information they need to help their kids succeed
- Transportation to healthcare
- Construction workers
- College courses closer to home
- More jobs that are open for high school students after school

- Businesses helping to pay for school for students who will come back to the community

Participants noted, nobody is going to care about our community more than us, so we need to come together to solve these challenges.

THEME THREE: UNL AS A PARTNER

Participants reported on how they interact with UNL; examples included:

- UNL Extension, especially Blair Speck the 4-H Educator, and Hannah Smith, the Livestock Systems Educator. They both added value to the school system and the ag producers.
- Agricultural Educators network; this is a very tight-knit community that provides resources from UNL to Ag educators across the state.
- A speech pathology grant that helps grow their own professionals in the community.
- The hospital tries to recruit providers from UNL
- Generational transition training from UNL
- Fundraising communications from UNL

Participants were asked what they would want from their land grant institution. Participants expressed wanting:

- Providing people to complete their student teaching and clinical rotations in the school and hospital
- Housing help
- Revitalize Main Street
- Career and Technology conference on how to buy, design and renovate a home, perhaps high school students could become involved in this process.

NEXT STEPS

- Pam Barrow has volunteered to be part of the NE CARES Steering Committee
- The NE CARES team and NE Extension will continue to act as connectors for ideas from the communities to UNL. Please reach out as you continue to have ideas!

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