

YORK, NEBRASKA
EMBEDDED COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE
Deb Brown, SaveYour.Town

March 18 to 21 of 2019 I visited York, Nebraska for an Embedded Community Experience. My name is Deb Brown, and I'm the co-founder of SaveYour.Town. A community embedded experience (ECE) is when I come to town and meet as many people as I can, see what you have to offer, stay with a local resident (thank you Jim and Jamie Ulrich!) and have conversations that move your community forward.

In this ECE we began the process of Gather Your Crowd and learned how to use the Idea Friendly method. We brought together positive people to crowd-source the future of your town. At SaveYour.Town, we developed the Idea Friendly method for small towns to do big things. There are just 3 parts. You will Gather Your Crowd around your big idea, create a powerful network by building connections and then take small steps to achieve the big idea.

In the course of the visit I spoke with nonprofits, government officials, entrepreneurs, business owners, students and citizens. I asked all of them "what do you want?" This report will focus on those answers and give stories and suggestions of ideas you can use in your small town. I do want to emphasize that you have a lovely community doing a whole bunch of things that are working. It really was a pleasure to visit and spend time with you.

Community and Collaboration

Far and above every answer to the question "What do you want for York" was community belonging and involvement. This includes better communication among locals, being ready for the new job market, and support all the schools including the college. A stronger focus on quality of life is important. What does that mean? It sounds good, but most people identify quality of life differently. In York's case, people want locals to notice what is already here, for starters. Starting local when they shop is next. There is a misconception that you must drive to Lincoln (or another city) to get what you need.

Let's look at what York does have. For a town of just under 8,000 you've got a strong employer base. Your location in the state and on major roads makes it possible for people to drive to York to work.

York County Major Employers	
Company Name	Business Sector Name
251-500 Employees	
Cornerstone Bank	Finance, Insurance, & Real Estate (F.I.R.E.)
York General Health Care Services	Health Care & Pharmaceuticals
100-250 Employees	
ASI	Service

	Central Valley Ag	Agriculture
	Champion Home Builders	Building & Construction / Manufacturing
	Collins Aerospace	Advanced Manufacturing
	Corteva Agriscience	Agriculture
	CTEC Ag	Manufacturing
	Henderson Health Care	Health Care & Pharmaceuticals
	NE Correctional Center for Women	Government
	Nebraska Public Power District - York	Energy & Energy Utilities
	Petro	Logistics
	State of Nebraska	Government
	Walmart	Retail
	York College	Education
	York Public Schools	Education
51-99 Employees		
	City of York	Government
	Cyclonaire	Advanced Manufacturing
	Green Plains Energy	Bio-Fuels Energy
	Klute Inc.	Advanced Manufacturing
	Kroy Industries	Manufacturing
	Monsanto/Bayer Agri-Science	Consumer Goods Producer
	Mosaic	Human Services
	Overland Sand & Gravel Company	Building & Construction
	Ply Gem Fence & Railing	Advanced Manufacturing
	York Cold Storage	Advanced Manufacturing
	York Medical Clinic	Health Care & Pharmaceuticals

Need a place to enjoy the area? Choose your type of recreation and York probably has it.

Parks and Recreation

Bird Watching Witness the annual duck and geese migration at Kirkpatrick Wildlife Basin.

Bowling Throw a strike on one of the 16 lanes at Sunset Bowl in York. Open year round, Sunset Bowl offers youth, women's and men's leagues and cosmic bowling on Fridays and Saturdays.

Campgrounds Choose from over 5 different campgrounds in Henderson, McCool Junction, Waco and York. All offer various amenities.

Disc Golf Try your skills on the 6-hole course at Mincks Park in York or the course at Recharge Lake.

Fishing Spend time on the water for fishing for bluegill, largemouth bass and catfish at Recharge Lake or set your sites on channel catfish, white bass, bluegill and rainbow trout at Lakeview Park.

Golf Improve your handicap at one of York County's 3 grass green golf courses – Henderson Golf Association (9 holes) in Henderson, Sandy Meadows (9 holes) near Waco or York Country Club (18 holes) in York.

Henderson Mennonite Heritage Park was built to teach the Mennonite history. It includes a replica building of the original Immigrant House that housed the first Mennonite settlers in the area, a Country Mennonite Church. The park also features a turn of the century farm house, summer kitchen, granary, outdoor oven, windmill, water tower, outhouses, chicken house, a general store and fully restored barn built in 1911. Nestled in the back corner of the park is a metal machine shed housing large pieces of equipment and a shop.

Hiking/Biking Take in the scenic hiking and biking trails along Beaver Creek Park in York or around the lake at Henderson's Lakeview Park.

Horseshoes Practice your throws at any of the many horseshoe pits in the municipal parks throughout York County.

Hunting Take aim at deer, ducks, pheasant, quail, geese, grouse, dove, squirrel and rabbit during the open Fall and Winter seasons. Hunt DC offers professionally guided bird hunts from September 1st through March 31st.

Junction Motor Speedway catch the excitement of stock car racing in McCool Junction. Cheer on your favorite driver every Saturday night from April to October.

Kilgore Memorial Library Children's story hours, reading programs and other activities are offered.

Movie Theater Come see the latest blockbuster hit at the Sun Theatre in York on one of three of the theater's screens.

Parks & Playgrounds With over 10 municipal parks in York County feel free to relax, have a picnic, take in the arboretum, stay fit by utilizing the numerous sports courts or trails and let the kids play on safe and imaginative playground equipment.

Racquetball Courts A court is located inside of the York Community Center for all enthusiast.

Skating Roller skate...do it now! Roller skate...we'll show you how! Call (402)362-3520 for open skating hours and private parties.

Sledding Hills Those who say Nebraska is flat haven't been to York County to experience the numerous hills to sled down during the winter season.

Swimming Three municipal pools, including, 2 aquatic centers and 1 indoor facility for year-round swimming, will exceed your swimming expectations and provide hours of excitement. To take a dip visit York or Henderson.

Tennis Perfect your forehand at one of many courts in Benedict, Gresham, Henderson, McCool Junction, Waco & York.

Wessels Living History Farm The 145-acre farm now features an early 1900's home, a red, timber frame barn, corn crib, machine shed, garage, chicken coop and a large windmill typical of the 1920's. These structures were chosen to begin the "living history farm" experience. To the south, there is a modern tractor display building with many tractors, stationary engines and combine. Surrounding the buildings is a modern farm operation that is still producing crops. Offered at the farm are many educational opportunities.

Yorkshire Playhouse Come laugh, cry and figure out "whodunit" at the Yorkshire Playhouse, a community theater that has provided excellent live productions for over 30 years

York's Community Center is the place to be for indoor family recreation. It includes a 25-meter lap swimming pool and hot tub, a state-of-the-art fitness room featuring over 40 cardio/weight/fitness pieces of equipment, a racquetball court, squash court, gymnasium, game room featuring Xbox Kinect, PlayStation 3 with Sony Move, and Wii active games, and a meeting room. The Community Center also houses the Palmer Museum which chronicles the history and settlement of the York County Area.

York County offers a variety of retail and specialty shops and service centers. Here is a list of a few of the major shopping and service providers located in York County, Nebraska.

Retail, Specialty and Service
Baer's Furniture
Blue Knight Security
Casey's General Store
Eakes Office Supplies
Fitness Worx
Flower Box
Get Realistic LLC
Ginny's Hallmark Shop
Goodwill Industries
Grand Central Foods
Jensen Lumber Company
Kirtsey Clothing and Boutiques
Marlas Choice Consignment
Maurices
McNeill Floral
Mead Lumber Company
Miller Seed & Supply Company
Mr. Dukes Mercantile
Once Upon a Dream
Orschlen
Patina Studios
Peterson's Petal Company
Rasmussen Auto Supply
Renegades Antiques and Uniques
Renewable Relics
The Quilt Basket
The Review
The Trading Post
Triple Crown Boutique
Wagner Decorating/Isaiah's Toy Box
Walmart Supercenter
Wellness Center
Western Edge
York Ace Hardware
York Boot and Repair
York Chiropractic Center and Essential Massage
York Jewelry
North Office Supply/York Printing Company
Five Telephone/Communications Companies, Three roofing companies, 5 Advertising/Awards/Printing businesses, 21 Agriculture/Farm Services Businesses, 4 Health/Diet/Fitness businesses, 10 Hotel/Motels, 19 Insurance and Investment businesses, 4 Office Supply companies

There are several choices when it comes to food. Many people did ask for more restaurants that were not fast food, and you could sit down and enjoy your meal in a family friendly environment.

Food
Captain Red Beards
Alladin Food Services
Applebee's
Chances R
Dairy Queen
Dickey's Barbeque Pit
Elks Lodge
Golden Gate Express
Huddle House
JW's Catering
KFC/Taco Bell
LaCacina
McDonald's
Kerry's Restaurant and Catering
Little Oven Creations
Runza
Valentino's
Wendy's
York Country Club

Housing

Many people wanted more housing options. Share the news that there are currently three housing projects that are on-going with YCDC's help.

- The Duplex project on 19th Street by Prairie Fire Development. This is 24 buildings (48 units), income based utilizing Low-Income Tax Credits. 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, club house and playground.



- You also formed a Rural Workforce Housing Revolving Loan fund in 2018. This was formed with donations from 25 businesses/individuals (\$256,000), \$250,000 from Nebraska Investment Finance Authority, \$323,000 from Nebraska Dept of Economic Development (NDED). There are 2 apartment buildings, 24 units each, market rate breaking ground late spring/early summer ground breaking.

- The City of York has a Community Development grant from NDED, that is Purchase/Rehab/Resale for 6 housing units. If we meet the goals, the City will receive another round. This is income based as well.

There are several contractors building spec housing, and/or doing flips. Those units have no subsidy and are not based on income, other than being able to get a housing loan.

There are other options for housing. Champion Builders does a great job of making smaller units. This gray and white building would be perfect in a small lot! Or as a granny pad in your back yard.

In Centerville, SD they are rehabbing old buildings, with funding help from the state. Much like Habitat for Humanity, the buyer is involved in the process. <https://www.dakotaresources.org/housing-heros-story-series-2-of-4-centerville>



Why not start an investors club and buy one house? Fix it up, and sell it a reasonable price? This is a great way for your affluent residents to help create a town people want to live in. PeerFinance addresses this idea with a lot of information to pursue. <https://peerfinance101.com/real-estate-investment-group/>

Retail and Downtown



A more robust retail area of shops was heavily requested. So was a pedestrian friendly, revitalized downtown. People wanted to connect the highway stores to the downtown stores in some fashion.

Longer store hours and Sunday hours were asked for. More color downtown and better signage was also brought up. The ideas of shared spaces and utilizing the food and entertainment to bring more people downtown were mentioned too.

With the advent of Amazon and online shopping, retailers have been hit pretty hard. I think retail is NOT dead, but it does need to be revamped. Start with the stores you have, and perhaps organize them into a Specialty Stores market. One complaint I hear from many communities is **that stores don't stay open late enough** for working people to shop. There are 7 most common weaknesses of local shops and they include:

- Limited business hours
- Poor customer service
- Limited selection
- High prices
- Dated appearance or ugly buildings
- Not marketing
- Failing the showroom test.

Limited business hours lead the list. I get it, you own a store and you want to spend time with your family too. What we know, though, is that 70% of shopping occurs after 6 pm, and the best money-making times for retail are on the weekends. Spend some time on this site and find out how to address these 7 weaknesses:

- <https://smallbizsurvival.com/2013/10/weakness-1-limited-business-hours.html>
- <https://smallbizsurvival.com/2014/05/how-to-draw-customers-to-your-store-for-evening-hours.html>
- <https://smallbizsurvival.com/2018/02/hours-retail-store-open-small-town.html>

The Small Business Majority did a major study about the challenge's rural businesses face. I recommend reading the entire report but skip to page 22 for their recommendations.

- https://smallbusinessmajority.org/sites/default/files/research-reports/Opportunities_and_Challenges_Facing_Rural_Small_Businesses.pdf

Create events people want to come to. Try things out! Cheyenne McGriff from Wall, SD and her team created the Wall Crawl and Poker Run. No one had done it before. The Committee of Negativity weighed in with 'it will never work' and 'we've never done that before.' They ignored them and just did it! Here's their story:

- <https://needalittleadvice.com/wall-crawl/>

Be open during your downtown events. I heard "we tried that, no one bought anything." They also said "no one came in the store." Try bringing the store outside! Set up lovely vignettes, provide a place for people to sit down. Be charming. Attitude is contagious! Even if they don't buy anything, they will remember you when they need something. Capture emails while you're at it and add them to your newsletter list.



How could you create more color?

We painted the streets in Webster City. For one day the street was closed, and each business that wanted to could pay \$50 for a square to paint. The funds raised went to support an arts event in the park. Each year they paint over it with white paint and start again.

- <https://needalittleadvice.com/painting-the-streets/>

Why not a lighted bike path like they did in Poland? Using phosphor and recharged daily by the sun.

<http://expand-your-consciousness.com/poland-unveils-glow-in-the-dark-bicycle-path-that-is-charged-by-the-sun/?t=HHL&fbclid=IwAR3e6ayNND6J5tUBdoCjPKIBkECmY9b2dmx9G9TfFuNWWh1V1KSFuXdimMXw>

How can you connect your highway area to your downtown? Start with some simple signage that states "The best of the rest of York is one mile this way." Okay, maybe not those words – but be sure to have some fun with it.

Attracting visitors to your downtown is important, but I think the bigger goal for York is get your locals downtown shopping too.



A Start Local campaign would be a great way to begin.

American Independent Business Alliance, AMIBA, offers Buy Local resources, many free of charge.

<https://www.amiba.net/buy-local-campaigns/>

Becky McCray has written a Shop Local eBook.

<https://saveyour.town/shop-local-campaigns-small-towns/>

Here's one more [https://ilsr.org/wp-](https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/buylocal_howto4.pdf)

[content/uploads/2012/04/buylocal_howto4.pdf](https://ilsr.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/buylocal_howto4.pdf)

Marketing

Let's talk marketing. Marketing is a big part of encouraging your locals to support you. They need to find you, like the things you're doing and then support you. Your visitors and tourists also need to find you! Marketing will help make your downtown a destination and encourage more tourism.

First, **make sure your businesses are registered with Google.** <https://www.google.com/business/> Then talk to your SBDC folks, they do trainings on how to register your business and will come to your community. People use their cell phones to find your business, or a business like it. If you're registered with Google, you show up on the first page in the upper right-hand corner of the Google search engine. Free.

Next **let's look at how your windows look.** Are they inviting? Do you change them out at least once a month (twice would be better)? You have many vehicles that go through your downtown, are you appealing to them?

Even if you don't have a retail business, you can still change out the windows and promote other places in town. Invite a local non-profit to decorate! Maybe even create a schedule for all the nonprofits to decorate your windows.

- <https://www.retaildoc.com/blog/10-insights-merchandising>
- <https://www.shopify.com/guides/ultimate-guide-to-pop-up-shops/visual-merchandising-101>

Signage on your stores is important too, it's some of your best marketing. For people walking around town, vinyl letters at eye level work. For people driving, blade signs that say what kind of business you have are good. Here's some great advice from Glen Muske:

- <https://smallbizsurvival.com/2016/07/your-small-business-needs-a-sign.html>

Learn to tell your own story. You can start with a press release that talks about the next cool event you are doing in your business. That means you need to do a cool event, like teaching us how to make empanadas or how to refinish furniture. Customers today want to have an experience at your store! Give them one.

Here's more info:

- <https://us1.campaign-archive.com/?u=ffa03598c2894cc939218d450&id=3eae689ebb>
- <https://buildingpossibility.com/what-story-are-you-telling/>

Social Media. If you're not going to use it, don't set up accounts. Unmanned accounts look like you don't care about your business. If you are using it, try one or two platforms that work for your business. You don't have to be everywhere. You don't want to be where your customers are. Do you need training on Social Media? See if your community colleges offer training, ask the SBDC (Small Business Development Center) for courses, follow other business that are using it well and learn from them. Remember that social media is a marketing tool, and not the end all be all.

Make video. That's right take your smart phone and shoot video. Talk to us about your products. Show us your employees. Tell us a story. People are curious and want to see more of you. Make them short – under a minute works. Invite locals to come and shoot Facebook Live videos at your event, like Legacy Learning Boone River Valley did. Here's that story:

- <https://us1.campaign-archive.com/?u=ffa03598c2894cc939218d450&id=5e94f7c1b7>

Be Tech Savvy and promote it. Have an iPad for customers to look up product information. Teach them Alexa or Google dot and how-to re-order. Put a smart tv in your store to loop a presentation about your town. Have a charging station they can use while they shop. Ask your vendors for any tech tools or sites you can showcase. Today's shoppers are smart, and you want to be as smart as they are. You also want your store to be engaging and offer more of an experience for your shoppers. Tech can help with that.

Support your businesses with a thank you. I enjoyed visiting with the owner of Triple Crown. I even bought a cool hat. I also thanked her for doing business in town. It's important to recognize people for the work they are doing!

One more thing. **Don't put a sign in the window that says, 'no public bathroom'.** How welcoming is that? Does that make you want to shop? Let people use your bathroom. Make your bathroom a fun place to use. Make sure that fun extends into the rest of the store too! When someone is using the bathroom, you have a captive audience. What can you promote at eye level in your bathroom?

New Businesses



Sports stores, men's clothing stores, places for adults to hang out, community arts and an art store, bike shop for bicycles, brewery and a childrens store were all new businesses listed.

We created the Idea Friendly platform that says gather your crowd, build connections and take small steps. The importance of taking small steps is it gives you the opportunity to test your ideas, try your products, see if you have a market and a product that will sell. The Rural Jobs Creations Strategies get you started with small steps. Here's a couple of those strategies that you could easily duplicate.

Yolanda Almaguer, Brownsville, TX "we have a **Small Business Group that we call Shop Hopping Around Brownsville**, we have a couple of *re-sale shops, a baker, restaurants, massage therapist and boutiques*. We started this 3 years ago. We get together once a month at every one's location for about an hour on the first Monday of the month. That is the only

time we get to see each other's place of business. We get to see what they have to offer where they're at and we sometimes end up buying from each other. Plus, we get to send our customers over when in search of a particular item especially because we know firsthand that this particular business has it."

Makerspace and Coworking

Both options give startups room to grow. Coworking gives anyone a place to work in a location that provides fast Wi-Fi, tables and some amenities. Another benefit is the cross-pollination effect. Working in a place where you mix with others, get questions answered and have enlightening conversations helps your brain work better! Maker spaces often generate businesses after someone has tried an idea out in a cultured, protected environment. It's an opportunity to try a skill you may not know, to work on projects you can't do at home and to get coaching from others. This is a picture from the Old Geezer Makerspace in Akron, Iowa. A group of retired farmers meet for coffee every day and they decided to bring their old woodworking tools into town. And created a Makerspace!



There are places in your town that would support a Maker Space. In fact, at the high school there's already a space set up. That maker spaces can be centered around the Arts as well. Imagine that, artists working together and creating products for sale but also to be placed in stores and businesses around town!

<https://smallbizsurvival.com/2017/01/innovative-rural-business-models-spread-opportunity-in-small-towns.html>

You could start smaller with a Library of Things. This is founded on the idea we all need a place where we could go borrow things to get some work done. Check out these links for more information.

- Tools <http://www.shareable.net/blog/how-to-start-a-tool-library-in-your-community/>
- How to start a library of things <http://www.shareable.net/blog/how-to-start-a-library-of-things>



Entrebash

Invite all your want to be entrepreneurs, and your current entrepreneurs to an event where they can meet with the resources necessary to start a business. Have a lawyer, a CPA, a social media expert, the Small Business Development Center, the local Community College present, each at their own table. Then attendees can visit the table where they need the most help. Webster and Hamilton Counties in Iowa, along with the University of Northern Iowa did this and called it **Entrebash**. One new business then shared their story of how they got started and the challenges they faced. There was food to nosh on, and a bit of music to listen to as well. It was an event! <https://bcs.uni.edu/eda/region-ii>

Networking Events

Why not try **Coffee and Calendars**? Coffee and Calendars is another great way to connect. Invite all your organizations to come, have coffee and bring their calendars. They can then share their events and work on maybe collaborating on some events, scheduling more on the same day but at different times, and perhaps rescheduling. It's also an opportunity to share about what they do. <https://smallbizsurvival.com/2011/09/how-to-build-more-cooperation-in-your.html>

My chamber in Webster City, Iowa hosts a **quarterly coffee**. Four times a year chamber members meet at 7:30 am, always at a different location. The chamber keeps track of events that have happened in the previous quarter – like new businesses, new employees, events, activities and general things. Then one person from that organization gets one minute, 60 seconds, to talk about their news. It's a great way to catch up on what has happened in the town, and to network afterwards to find out more information. You don't need a chamber to do this – you can organize it with volunteers! We invite the local paper to attend as well! <http://www.freemanjournal.net/news/local-news/2018/03/coffee-talk-2/>

Online and Offline Training

Tony Guidroz, Director EDC, City of San Saba, Texas, population 2700, brought in SBDC for a night of meetings for new and existing businesses. First night: 22 attended. So, then the SBDC started coming every 2 weeks. They created **13 new businesses, 88 new jobs**. The SBDC is part of the Small Business Association and your tax dollars pay for their services. <https://americassbdc.org/>
<https://www.thebalancesmb.com/online-business-training-for-small-business-owners-2951646>

Host an Empty Buildings Tour

You've got empty buildings that could use some love (and clean up). You could host a **Tour of Empty Buildings**. It's simple to do. Get the owners and/or the realtors to agree to be onsite for the tour. Have a local person share during the tour what used to be there and maybe what could be there. Then you invite everyone you know.

Natchez, MS partnered with local artists and creative entrepreneurs to showcase some of their work in the empty buildings. It gives the viewer an opportunity to see just what might be possible.

<http://www.natchezdemocrat.com/2015/02/10/natchez-possibilities-tour-honored-with-award-from-medc/>

How you market your tour and the degree to which you market it will be up to you. I will give you the following basics, and then add in some bonus ideas. I know you have your own way of doing things, so take these ideas and adapt them to your own community.

- A. Write the press release. Include everything, and I mean EVERYTHING in it.
 1. What (the tour)
 2. Where (list of locations)
 3. When (once? twice?)
 4. Who (realtors/tour guides)
 5. Why - you can use the quotes in the sample or create your own!
 6. Check the toolkit for the sample press release
- B. Send press release to your local paper/radio station and your neighboring towns and we even sent it to the state economic development office.
- C. If you have a website, be sure to build a page all about the tour - use lots of pictures!
- D. Create a Facebook Business Page
 1. make your marketing team all administrators
 2. assign jobs to members of your marketing team
 3. make sure all the admins invite their friends to like the page
 4. write a post with the details and include a picture - you can boost this post for \$1 a day and create a new audience to see your page (Do not include your friends in the audience. Do include surrounding towns, women and ages 30-65.)
- E. Determine one more social media platform that fits with your community
 1. Instagram - for those who like to use photos to promote
 2. Pinterest - for someone who can gather the ideas and create boards for each building
 3. twitter - for someone who can share all the info in 140-character sound bites and has a strong local following
 4. Note: you probably won't want to use all the platforms unless you have a big team! One or two is enough.
- F. Speak to your local service organizations like Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions and Elks. Anyone who will listen!
- G. Make your flyers and pass them out in the community
 1. locations: grocery stores, convenience stores, bars and restaurants, inside the windows of the buildings on the tours.
 2. give to the local churches and ask them if they would either post the flyer or include it in their bulletins
 3. pass them out when you speak to your service organizations

By the way, this marketing advice can be used with any event you host!

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pzwBdRAUKIE>
- <https://smallbizsurvival.com/2013/05/small-town-economic-development-idea-tour-empty-buildings.html>
- <https://saveyour.town/tourkit/>

Your city codes could also be adjusted for adaptive reuse of empty buildings. This article lays out the problem and solution.

<https://localprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Small-Business-Support.pdf>

Another article shares stories of other communities: <https://savingplaces.org/stories/how-to-support-adaptive-reuse-of-historic-buildings#.XhrSxohKg2w>

Here are a few examples of changed city codes: <https://buildingpossibility.com/city-codes-can-be-changed/>

Activities and Entertainment

More entertainment was high on the list. But the question really is ‘what do you mean by entertainment?’ Adults wanted a place they could go after work and have conversation with friends. Adults also wanted family friendly activities. Kids wanted go carts, little league (not team ball), mini golf and a splash pad on the west side. They too wanted a place to hang out. I encourage you to make your Recreation List (above) more available in the community. Many of these wants are already available.

Let’s talk about the ones that are not there. A splash pad is one of them. But how do you know your town members really want it? How could you test out the idea? Use the Idea Friendly method! Invite those people who want a splash pad on the west side to get together and talk about it? One small step could be to take a garden hose, put holes in it, and set it up in a yard. Invite the neighborhood to try it out. Who do they know that might have a place to try out the idea? Who’s got a water hose? Who knows who to contact at the city to make sure it’s okay? Also give Ace Hardware a call and talk to the owner – he loved the idea and talked about hosting it, using sprinklers, having adults bring lawn chairs and everyone have a great day.

I visited with the students at York College and they were excited about helping kids set up a Little League environment. There were kids in your school that told me they really wanted to play baseball but couldn’t because they couldn’t afford the uniforms and their folks wouldn’t let them travel. I suggested to the college students to start small – maybe have pick up game and see who shows up. Contact Dr. Steve who teaches the business class at York College, he can put you in touch with the students who want to help.

Other Ideas

Creating Art in your Windows

You could involve your students in creating artwork to cover the windows of your empty buildings. Perhaps choose a theme related to things to do in your community. Or organize a photo walk and invite everyone to show up with their smart phones and cameras to take pictures. Imagine the windows of empty (and not empty) storefronts filled with images of things to do in York! It’s an opportunity to have students work with volunteers, build your town pride, and create an activity all rolled into one. You’ll also learn the best way to get more volunteers is not to ask them to serve on a yearlong committee. Simply ask them to help for a couple of hours at a time!

The photos could be blown up to fit the windows. They could also be printed and framed and placed in shops around town. The benefit to that is parents and grandparents will visit those shops to see their kids work!

Why not invite your local photographers, both professional and amateur? Ask them to show up on installation day with their weedwhackers and Windex to help clean up a spot in town. Wash windows and trim the grass in an empty lot, help make the town look a bit brighter.

- <http://needalittleadvice.com/weed-whackers-and-windex/>
- <http://www.freemanjournal.net/news/local-news/2017/10/grab-your-camera/>
- <https://us1.campaign-archive.com/?u=ffa03598c2894cc939218d450&id=7b47fb61eb>

Build some Ninja Teams.

Use the Idea Friendly Method to get things done.

Gather Your Crowd – who will do fun stuff with you?

Build Connections – who’s got a power washer?

Take Small Steps – power wash the sides of buildings.

Your kids could ninja up some of the parks and earn hours for National Honor Society at the same time. How about helping homeowners who are elderly plant flowers, remove snow, and even paint the house. A group of locals in my town posted on Facebook to come downtown to help clean up a bit. The city posted if residents did that, they’d give them garbage bags and even come pick them up! The city doesn’t have enough staff and they really want to help.

“Every person that lives downtown brings another \$10,000 to the town ,”Dr. Nick at York College.

Host a Newcomers Meeting

You could do this quarterly and invite all new people in town to attend. Bennettsville, SC does it and they are finding that people are excited to attend. They have their realtors personally invite new homeowners to attend. Feed them, provide answers to questions like:

- What are the laws about garbage?
- Where can I get a job?
- What events and activities are there?
- What can my kids do in town?
- What if I have a bad landlord?
- Where can I volunteer?
- Where can I start a business?

Get Your Youth on Boards

It’s so easy to think we know what our youth want in our towns. But the truth is, we don’t. The 6th, 7th and 8th graders said they wanted a trampoline park, Freddy’s, a formal sit down restaurant, and baseball for everyone (not just club ball). The high schoolers wanted a diner they could go to after games. Each group of kids learned the Idea Friendly Method (gather your crowd, build connections and take small steps). Then they sat down, in an hour’s time, and began the process of creating ways to test out their idea and see if it’s a good one. The York College students wanted a dog park, community football for adults, more food choices, a bakery, an amusement



park and several other things. They to learned the Idea Friendly method and got to work creating plans. You can see these plans in the addendum.

Wouldn't you want these smart, active students helping on your boards? One of the advantages of doing this is you are helping to connect them to your community. These are the exact same students you want to stay here or return here. Give them a great reason to do so.

565 kids under 5 in town, are you making plans to get them involved in York?

Why not start a Didcha Know Campaign?

Imagine going around to local businesses, finding something you didn't know they had, and posting photos of that online. If you didn't know they have it, others don't know either! You can start this project with just you! You can go take pictures and post them. You'll be leading the way to new cooperation, gathering your crowd and building connections with people even as you're taking small steps.

- Why it works:
 - you're helping people find out about things they didn't know they could buy or support in town. Trust me, lots of people have no idea what's available!
 - This builds on your existing networks, and the networks of all your crowd members who participate.
 - And it's so easy to do! Just simple online posts, photos and a few words.
 - A bonus is that you'll build connections with local store owners and other partners. Community happens when people talk to each other, even when they're there to take photos to post online.
- Examples:
 - Becky did this for Shop Small Saturday in her town. And she found something surprising in every single store she visited.
 - The Waynoka, Oklahoma, Chamber of Commerce has "Where is it in Waynoka Wednesdays." They post a few photos of a local business, featuring things people might not know they have. For the grocery store, they posted pictures of the gift wrap, the tools, markers and pens, auto supplies like oil... you get the idea!
 - It doesn't have to be just your retail stores. Think about how your hospital could partner with you. Or your insurance agencies. This is an opportunity to have your businesses collaborate and really inform your community of what they might be missing.

Talk to each other!

Find ways to get together and share what is happening in your town. Start a Downtown Association – or use your chamber or YCDC for this. Meet regularly, share marketing ideas and money for marketing. Be friendly and not competitive. Did you know if you have three similar stores in town, you become a destination? Work on once again becoming a destination.

Keep Informed

I receive several newsletters each day that keep me on top of the things I need to know. I've stopped relying on television for unbiased news. Here's a few of the sources I think you might find useful.

Morning Brew – current financial news delivered in a way I can understand (and a bit snarky). This is a referral link: <https://www.morningbrew.com/?kid=613892>

High Plains/Midwest Ag Journal – don't we all need to follow ag news? I also receive the digital version of the Ag Journal each month. <https://www.hpj.com/>

Want to know more about what is coming related to tech? Sure, you do. Subscribe to Peter Diamandis <https://www.diamandis.com/>

Look at more ways you can encourage small scale manufacturing.

These are the artisan makers, the prototyping to small scale, it's the production at scale, the makerspaces and the shared commercial kitchens and workshops. You'd be looking for craft brewers, artisan businesses, contract manufacturing, commercial kitchens, farmers market organizers, and the 'connectors. I think your industrial businesses would like to work with you on this project.

- <https://buildingpossibility.com/is-small-scale-manufacturing-a-thing-for-small-towns/>

Opportunity Zones

York County has property that falls into an opportunity zone. According to Wikipedia the purpose of this program is to put capital to work that would otherwise be locked up due to the asset holder's unwillingness to trigger a capital gains tax. I'm not the expert on Opportunity Zones, but I trust my resources at Main street. I encourage you to bring your investors together and explore this possibility. We know that when people talk to each other, community happens.

- <https://www.mainstreet.org/blogs/national-main-street-center/2018/12/10/opportunity-zones-come-into-focus>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opportunity_zone
- <https://opportunitydb.com/location/nebraska/>

Don't forget the farmers

During my visit a giant chunk of Nebraska was hit by flooding. It's a disaster and I know the farmers, lenders and ag related businesses are in a world of hurt. I was asked to talk about property tax relief, better marketing with grain and livestock and to encourage folks to think about specialty grains as a market. Why not bring a group of ag folks together and go visit a couple of breweries? Have conversations about what kind of grain they are looking for, where they currently get it and how you might be able to help? Property tax relief is a thorny subject, isn't it? I defer to the folks that can really help your community address this issue, The Center for Rural Affairs. I've added a link at the end of this section with an article and on that site you'll find contact information.

Today I think those topics are still important, but no longer at the top of priority list. I've read that the biggest need is hay and coming soon more fencing will be needed. How can you work with your community to help these areas that need it? Bring people together to talk about it – that's the gather your crowd portion of Idea Friendly. When people focus on solutions for challenges, instead of just complaining, it's amazing the things that come out of it.

<https://www.cfra.org/news/190222/antiquated-tax-code-hinders-property-tax-relief>

https://www.omaha.com/news/the-major-proposals-to-reduce-nebraska-property-taxes-explained/article_86a069a5-2fc0-5220-8b07-96ae635f18df.html

<https://www.agweb.com/article/7-grain-marketing-mistakes-to-avoid-naa-sara-schafer/>

<https://www.northernbrewer.com/blogs/customize-your-brew/grain-guide>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_breweries_in_Nebraska

Thank You

I encourage you to work on sharing all the good things about your community. I believe in York. You've got all the necessary parts to make it so. It was a wonderful trip and I spent time with your wonderful people. I look forward to hearing about more of your successes!

I'm available to you by email if you have questions.

deb@saveyour.town

I've also got a gift for you! Visit <https://saveyour.town/gift/> Then host Watch Parties with your town and learn how to make it more Idea Friendly. You'll also receive our newsletters each week that shares more information about small towns and the challenges they face and how to overcome them.

Again, Thank you.

Deb Brown
Cofounder of SaveYour.Town

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YOUR**
.town



Final Report for York, NE

Addendum to Full Report

The following tables are sorted by groups we met with. You may want to refresh their memory as you begin utilizing the suggestions given during the presentation and in the final report. If there is no number in the column only one person wanted that item. You will also see that some are very similar! I've highlighted yellow the items you can begin today and finish relatively soon.

YCDC Executive Board

housing	3
bigger trail systems	2
entertainment	2
have jobs for young people	2
be ready for the new job market	
better notice of York College	
better quality of life	
brewery	
bring diversity here	
bring young people back	
commercial kitchens	
gathering places	
hotel attached to convention center	
keep retirees here	
keep young people	
more collaboration	
more parks	
more prominent in a smart way	
more restaurants	
more services	
opportunities for families	
pedestrian friendly	
revitalized downtown	
serve as a regional base	
support schools and college	

Community Meeting

a new library	2
bicycle club for 3 wheelers	2
housing	2
more diversity	2
0-5 early learning center	
better communication	
better community center	
child care	
community arts space	
community belonging	
connect interstate to town	
downtown development	
Entertainment	
more community involvement	
more inclusive community	
more positivity	
more public transit	
more robust retail	
more youth programs	
public calendar	
shop local program	
shopping	
trails	
youth leadership	
youth serve on boards	

Private meet and greet

art
children's store
empty buildings full
focus on people
makerspace
men's store
positivity
shopping center at interstate
sports store
vibrant business community

Business Roundtable

workforce	4
housing	1
be ready for new job market	
connect interstate to town	
focus on subcontractors	
keep citizens educated	
local ag markets	
maker space	
marketing	
prominent in smart way	
property tax relief	
save our farmers	
signage	

Retail

brewery	2
local support	

Education

2-way streets	3
activities to draw new families	2
retail, variety	2
address LMI issues	
adult hang out	
arts	
attention to mental health	
attract others	
downtown revitalization	
entertainment after work	
extend shopping hours	
fix up the town make it look good	
gaming center	
hands on community learning	
health resources	
ice cream shop	
kids' activities	
locations for programming for students	
lower cost access to internet	
more traffic downtown	
murals	
parenting resources	
parents need educating	
pedestrian friendly	

programming at Community Center	
project based learning with businesses	
rec infrastructure maintained	
safe downtown	
splash pad on west side	
Thriving downtown	
vision for downtown	
way to bridge generation gap	
youth center like a Y	

Chamber Board

housing	2
activities for kids	
daycare staffing	
entertainment for adults	
entertainment for families	
support health industry	
variety of food choices	
work space at the schools	

Community Meeting 2

brewery	2
clothing choices	2
bakery	
bring young people back	
butcher	
continue to think ahead	
continued sustainable growth	
destination downtown	
employees live here	
green spaces	
Haymarket feel	
local app	
marketing at ball parks	
men's store	
open schools during summer	
places to sit downtown	
resources	
shop local campaign	
shopping	
smart online ordering for retail	
sports store	
uber drivers	
Wi-Fi	

City Staff and Department Heads

more local support	3
more shopping	2
shops open later	2
daycare	2
better marketing	2
better parks and equipment	
better paying service jobs	
brewery	
city infrastructure	
clean the town up	
get city workers more involved	
housing	
keep and bring in young people	
more sales tax	
more sit-down food	
more volunteers	
quality of life needs to be respected as much as the streets	
restaurants and bars	
retain good employees	
stay current	

York College Business Class Students

entertainment	2
fresh fruit smoothies	2
activities like go carts and roller coasters	
Caine's	
Dutch bros coffee	
expanded movie theater	
healthy eating options	
high school baseball	
little league	
men's clothing	
mini golf	
more jobs	
more people	
outlet mall	
shoes	
sports store	
sushi	

High School Students

youth hangout	2
adult hangout	
bakery	
better social life	
more jobs	
place to eat after games	
splash pad	
things to do	
vibrant downtown	

YCDC Full Board

more inclusion	2
activity center	
affordable housing	
art in public	
bring back youth	
collaboration	
communication about activities	
connect interstate to downtown	
entertainment	
entertainment in the evening	
jobs	
keep youth	
little league	
local involvement	2
mini golf	
more eating choices	
more places to play	
place to play sports w/o appointment	
start local	
support	
swimming	
York more of a destination	

Idea Friendly Projects Created by Students

York College Students

Big Idea	24 Hour Gym
Gather Your Crowd	healthy individuals locals athletes
Build Connections	motivated backers give discounts to promote healthy lifestyle sports coaches month long trial during graveyard hours in existing gym
Take Small Steps	pop up gym online voting to support the idea

Big Idea	Sporting Goods Store
Gather Your Crowd	high school athletes college athletes parents McCool athletes
Build Connections	get to know coaches
Take Small Steps	survey community discounts for teams event to get people to want to wear their goods

Big Idea	Little League Baseball
Gather Your Crowd	local kids parents
Build Connections	get to know coaches
Take Small Steps	flyer in elementary schools impromptu game say when we'll be at the field college team hosts clinics set up private lessons with college athlete create way to keep kids entertained

Big Idea	Panera Bread
Gather Your Crowd	the community
Build Connections	put near Walgreens find the owner of the land city council members-Christi Jones
Take Small Steps	survey using social media discount for York College college nights

Middle School Students

Big Idea	Recreational Baseball Team
Gather Your Crowd	middle school kids parents
Build Connections	city parks and rec people businesses to sponsor
Take Small Steps	runza, Grand Central College make surveys meetings with Cheree Volunteer parents willing to coach other surrounding town rec teams talk about fields to use small pick-up game to see who's interested

Big Idea	Trampoline Park (two groups did this)
Gather Your Crowd	kids 5-18 years old parents city officials
Build Connections	social media ask Dr. Lucas if they could rent the gym ask if they could use the auditorium for meetings
Take Small Steps	survey posters visit other trampoline parks go door to door and collect signatures fund raise and GoFundMe host an event

Big Idea	Trampoline Park
Gather Your Crowd	kids' parents and grandparents 5-15 and 25-70 ages
Build Connections	chamber of commerce economic development senior center
Take Small Steps	host a gathering fund raise collect donations advertise and find sponsors put flyers up everywhere visit the senior center

Big Idea	Freddy's
Gather Your Crowd	big organizations like banks those who go to drive throughs family
Build Connections	talk to businesses college students day crowds from Husker games
Take Small Steps	tell people about it talk to Freddy's for requirements, cost, location do a traffic count figure out the sales tax added to the community research other cities

High School Students

The high school group did things a little differently. They followed the Idea Friendly Format and I wanted to share exactly what they wrote.

Big Idea – Diner/Hangout Spot

- High schoolers and their parents get interest (survey)
 - Assure it will be a place where they can be safe
- Find someone who likes to cook for diner
 - Burger, shakes, open late, retro 80's style diner
 - Arcade games, juke box music playing
 - Lots of seating
 - Find location that is centralized
- To find location, run a test in fall after football
 - Pop up diner
 - At park
 - Empty building? Talk with Lisa and rent out for a few months to test it
 - Partnership with York college
- Student run business? Research grocery in Cody
- Ask for partnership/participation from whole community
- Some can call and talk about promoting
- Next meeting: April 17

Duke Diner founded on March 20, 2019

AND THEY ALL SIGNED IT!