

## Leaders talk about Hometown Fremont, pillars



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FREMONT – City, school and community leaders talked frankly with each other Tuesday night about what the city does well and what it could do better in the future at a Hometown Fremont Opportunity Retreat.

"We've never had a conversation like that, as far as I know," said Joseph Smith, the city's economic development director during a break in the meeting.

A good portion of Tuesday's meeting zeroed in on reaching the city's youth population and finding ways to engage with them and keep them invested in Fremont so they return as adults.

The meeting, held at the Pontifex Center, focused on ways Fremont could prepare for the future, groom new leaders and business owners, and retain young people or bring them back to the city after they finish their postsecondary education.

Fremont residents were asked to take part in a survey regarding four pillars related to community development: entrepreneurship, leadership, philanthropy and youth involvement.

Craig Schroeder, of the Lincoln, Nebraska-based Center for Rural Entrepreneurship, delivered some final assessment highlights of those resident responses.

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He said Fremont, like a lot of communities throughout the country, needs to mentor young leaders and work on ways to involve area youths in economic development and community projects.

"We learned, when you engage young people, you need a project-oriented approach," Schroeder said.

Schroeder said Fremont had an exceptional resource in Terra State Community College for workforce development, especially given the increasing interest from students nationwide in postsecondary technical and vocational education.

He said the city needed to continue to work on developing homegrown entrepreneurs.

Area students also were asked their opinions in focus groups on the city and what they liked, disliked and wanted to see in Fremont's future.

A group of 115 area middle and high school students took an online survey about the city, with more than 50 high school students taking part in focus groups.

From the survey and focus group participants, 86 percent of respondents plan to attend college or technical school but only 37 percent see themselves living in their hometown in the future.

City Auditor Paul Grahl said he was surprised that the latter percentage was so low and thought it would be closer to 50 percent.

Schroeder said a perceived lack of job opportunities played a significant factor in that percentage.

Smith said the next step would be to develop an action plan to stimulate community development, based on the assessment results and feedback from Tuesday's meeting.

He said other cities have taken part in Hometown community development efforts for 10 to 12 years. Smith said he thought the community needed to make a commitment to meet on a regular basis and talk about some of the pillar issues discussed Tuesday.

"There's a lot of benefit from talking to each other," Smith said.

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Our **Solution Area Teams** empower community leaders to find their own answers to the economic development challenges and opportunities they face:

- **Community Development Philanthropy** provides effective strategies to build local philanthropic capacity and generate development resources.
- **New Generation Partnerships** provides a framework for engaging young people now and attracting them in the future.
- **Entrepreneurial Communities** provides a roadmap for designing and delivering entrepreneurship strategies that work.

For tools and resources, visit the departments in e2 University at <http://www.energizingentrepreneurs.org/library/e2university.html>.

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