



"An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic."
Thomas Jefferson

Position Paper #3

What Is A Community?

Prepared by:
Richard Bradley
April 17, 2023

For more information contact:

Citizens 4 A Strong Fairmont
P.O. Box 1076
Fairmont, MN 56031
Email: Citizens4AStrongFairmont@Proton.me

This page intentionally blank



What Is A Community?

Since returning to Fairmont in 2020 I have heard a lot of comments related to the construction of a community center (CC) in this town. There has been much discussion and reasons presented for or against the proposed CC by individuals and groups on both sides of this issue.¹ The relative merits of those arguments continue to be debated.

Those in favor of building the CC claim they have answered the issues and concerns raised by those who have expressed hesitancy or outright opposition toward constructing such a facility. Those against building the CC disagree and continue to ask questions about the cost of construction, the cost of operating and maintaining the facility, who will be responsible for those costs, the cost of memberships, and more importantly, who will own the facility. All of these issues are components of determining whether these costs are even justifiable. This is especially important when you take under consideration Fairmont's infrastructure commitments.

Debating these points will likely continue into the foreseeable future. Such concrete issues as costs, and responsibilities can be settled with actual numbers and documentation. This issue should be settled on the basis of actual costs to the citizens, and, more importantly, the real, not perceived benefits that such a facility may, or may not bring to Fairmont. However, when discussion descends to strident accusations about the condition or future fate of Fairmont as a community, or that question people's desire to see Fairmont grow and thrive, it helps no one.

Accusations Against Fairmont

No one individual or group possesses a "crystal-ball" or the prophetic ability to see into the future of this town. The world in which we live today has become very complex, and there are a myriad of factors that can affect our future as a community. Many of those factors are beyond our control. Despite these larger issues, there has been one common theme that can be gleaned from comments repeated by those in favor of the CC. Those comments actually level significant accusations against Fairmont. Let's begin with the Fairmont Area Community Center (FACC) Foundation.

¹ See for example: Mike Garry, "Matter of Independence", Fairmont Sentinel, Oct. 30, 2018; Hank Roehler, "No To Community Center", Ibid., Nov. 2, 2018; Verlus Burkhart, "Where Are Our Priorities?", Ibid., Dec. 10, 2018; Hugh Fraser, "Questions Abound", Ibid., Dec. 22, 2018; Linda Meschke, "Time For Referendum", Ibid., Dec. 12, 2019; Don and Harriet Richards, "Is There Public Support for Proposed Community Center?", Ibid., Feb. 15, 2022; Eugene Koch, "Community Center Input — Don't Build It", Ibid., Feb. 16, 2022; Richard Bradley, "Seek Feedback on Community Center", Feb. 24, 2022; Marvel Snyder, "Take A New Pole On Community Center", Ibid., Mar. 12, 2022; Lawrence Vogel, "Remember the Abandoned Pool?", Ibid., Mar. 17, 2022; Ann Osborn, "Strong Community Center Concept Presented", Ibid., Jul. 27, 2022; Kent Barker, "Most Bang For The Buck", Ibid., Nov. 11, 2022; Darlene Lutz, "This Is All Common Sense", Ibid., Nov. 26, 2022; Ann Osborn, "Close-mindedness Creates Division", Ibid., Nov. 29, 2022; Jan Fickbohn, "Let Taxpayers Vote For This", Ibid., Dec. 17, 2022.



- “This is yet another watershed moment for our community and City Council. Soon, it will be up to our City Council to acknowledge where we have been, where we are now, and ultimately, decide if Fairmont will join the long list of prospering communities that enjoy the benefits of a Community Center. **“...And perhaps most importantly, vote to invest in the health, well-being, and future growth of our community.”**
- “Join in building a community center **to build a better community...**”
- “Contribute to building the community center **and demonstrate the value of building a strong, healthy, and vibrant community...**”²

The implication is that if you are not in favor of building their proposed CC then you are not in favor of building Fairmont into a better, strong, healthy and vibrant community. In addition to these comments are the statements that were made by various individuals at the December 12th, 2022 City Council meeting who were in favor of the CC. It can be debated as to their intent. However, what cannot be debated is the accusation these comments level at Fairmont. They include:

- “There is nothing that draws me to this town...”
- “There is nothing in Fairmont for my children to do...”
- “The lakes are only a seasonal attraction...”
- “There is nothing to do on the lakes in the wintertime...”
- “Fairmont will eventually die out if we don’t move forward with a community center...”
- “If we don’t build the community center then Fairmont will become like Ceylon...”³

The implied accusations in the above statements both by the FACC Foundation and these various individuals, who are in favor of building the community center, is that Fairmont is not a strong, vibrant and healthy community. They leave a person thinking that Fairmont is practically a dead community, barely surviving on its last gasping breath. These statements make a person wonder just what is wrong with Fairmont’s existing community? Frankly, there is nothing wrong. Fairmont is already a strong, healthy and vibrant community without the need to add a multi-million dollar YMCA “gym & swim” facility.

Definition of Community

These comments do raise the question, “What constitutes a community?” Various definitions have been offered for community. Everything from a group of people with common interests who live in a particular area (e.g. a local organization, such as a church, would fit this description), or a body of people

² The above comments appeared on the Fairmont Area Community Center website (www.fairmontcommunitycenter.com) and their FaceBook page (www.facebook.com/FairmontAreaCommunityCenter/).

³ You can view various people at the December 12th, 2022 city council meeting making the above comments at: (<https://boxcast.tv/view/fairmont-city-council-meeting-12122022-n9it2rjgwi2ywxfp6ox>).



of common and professional interests scattered throughout a larger society (e.g. a business, or other similar type institution with offices in multiple locations would fit this description), or a body of people who share a common history or common social, economic and even political views (e.g. members of a political party would fit this description), to simply an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location (e.g. the combined citizenry of the State of Minnesota or the United States would fit this description).

When we consider Fairmont it can certainly be said that a large majority of the people share a common European heritage and history (England, Spain, France, Norway, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, etc.).⁴ Yet, despite the common heritage, history and location of the majority of the people, the town is remarkably diverse in its interests. This gets to the distinction that needs to be made between community and interests.

A Diversity of Interests

Fairmont is a vibrant community of people choosing to live in this geographical location. It is the very diversity of those interests that demonstrate that Fairmont is a strong and healthy community. This diversity of interests cuts across all ethnicities currently living in Fairmont. There are many reasons why people have chosen to live in, and continue to stay in Fairmont. Those reasons include:

- Low crime;
- Low cost of living;
- Rural setting;
- Excellent schools;
- Many options for activities;
- Natural resources;
- Great senior health care;
- Spiritual life;
- Jobs availability;
- And, other reasons

The people of Fairmont have a very wide diversity of interests. We have people involved in everything from: quilting and sewing clubs, to ice fishing and snowmobiling, from handgun training to target - trap - skeet shooting, from golf to mini-golf to frisbee golf, tennis, boating, cross-county snow skiing and snow shoeing, water skiing, football, soccer, track, basketball, softball and baseball leagues, auto racing, archery,

⁴ The most recent census data indicates that roughly 87% of the population of Fairmont is white of European descent. This continues to change as we see an increasing percentage of people who are black, hispanic and asian descent move into our community. I believe this is a very good change for Fairmont. As the town becomes increasingly diverse in its ethnic population these groups will bring fresh ideas and opportunities to the town for growth and economic success of the entire community.



pickleball, weight and cardio-training, robotics sciences, speech competition, triathlons, pheasant and deer hunting, chess club, computer gaming, etc.

And, this does not even begin to address the myriad of educational classes that are available through Fairmont's Community Education & Recreation (CER) organization for youth, young adults, the middle-aged and seniors. Classes are offered at different times throughout each week. They include topics about adult health and wellness — everything from acupuncture to body strengthening and weight-control to improving brain creativity. Many other classes are offered on basic education, arts and music, computer classes and software training, gardening, PADI open water scuba diving, furniture making, dancing, various athletic skills such as roller skating, archery, basketball, bowling, gymnastics, and many other topics.

The list of interests and activities that people are involved in Fairmont is staggering. And, these are not just for adults and seniors. These programs and activities are also available for kids, youth, and high school age. And, they are not just a few individuals. They oftentimes number in the dozens and hundreds. A good example would be the Fairmont Youth Hockey Association (FYHA) that has more than 300 dedicated families. Another good example would be the hundreds of individuals and families who play golf during the spring, summer and fall at the Interlaken Golf Club or the Rose Lake Golf Club.

Another example is the hundreds of people who attend the dirt track racing that takes place at the fairgrounds race track in the summer. On any given race night several hundred people come out to watch and cheer on their favorite race driver and team. The large number of diverse interests and activities is also attested to by the more than 150 organizations that provide a myriad of services and actives, either at a modest cost or for free to the residents of Fairmont. There is a fundamental difference between Fairmont's current diversity of interests and activities versus what the FACC Foundation is proposing with the construction of a YMCA "gym & swim" facility.

A Freedom to Assemble

Fairmont's diversity of interests and activities flow out of the citizen's god-given freedom to assemble according to their personal interests, likes and dislikes, which they can engage in on-demand. This is a freedom that few living outside of America can experience. There is no need to purchase a membership to participate in many of these activities — Some activities may require a modest fee, but many can be done at little or no cost. You simply get together with your friends and go the movies or races, or pick up a game of tennis, basketball, or go water-skiing on the lakes, or cross-country snow skiing, etc. There is also the very common social activity of getting together over meals — either at breakfast, lunch or dinner at a friend's home, in one of the many parks in town, or at one of Fairmont's signature restaurants.

The proposed CC will limit the choices of everyone who joins to only what is available from the programming that will be controlled by a single entity, the YMCA, which is being pushed by the FACC Foundation. And, the cost of using that facility and participating in those programmed activities will be significantly higher than any of the above-mentioned activities already being offered in Fairmont. This is especially true when you include the cost of construction, operations and maintenance, and membership



fees. This naturally raises the question, “Why do we need a YMCA when we already have such a diverse selection of amenities and activities from which we can choose to participate?” The obvious answer is we don’t. I will be addressing this question in a subsequent paper.

The Problem Is Marketing

Frankly, this town does not need a CC like the multi-million dollar facility proposed by the FACC Foundation. What this town needs to do is a better job of advertising what it already has to offer by way of its many natural resources and amenities, which support the myriad of interests and activities that many people are already accessing and taking advantage of using everyday.

The recent rollout of the revised and updated “Fairmont Area Life” website (<https://fairmontarealife.com>) by the Chamber of Commerce is a huge step in the right direction of awareness of the myriad of amenities and natural resources Fairmont has to offer.

There is much more to say about this issue of marketing. Especially, as it relates to where that marketing should be focused, which is soliciting new manufacturers to move their operations to Fairmont. If we want this town to grow and thrive then we need to focus on increasing its base of wealth. That will never happen unless we can get manufacturing to move into Fairmont. The importance of manufacturing to Fairmont is addressed in more detail in Position Paper # 6 — The Strategic Importance of Manufacturing.