

Summary notes from interviews with people of color and other “unexpected innovators”

July 30, 2019

Introduction:

During June and July, the Econogy team interviewed nearly 30 persons in Sheboygan (in addition to the Steering Committee members) who appeared likely to have insights into the Sheboygan area’s relationship with new ideas, members of non-majority cultures, and emerging social and economic trends. Due to the wide scope of interviewees, interviews were generally structured to develop empathy with the speakers’ perspective and did not follow a standardized script.

The following elements are drawn from multiple interviews and are sorted according to generally the same questions that were asked of the Steering Committee. To facilitate honesty in interviews, the person who made the observation is not identified, or is identified in a generic fashion to protect their identity. Short lines (____) separate one person’s comments from another’s.

Because of the complexity of these issues, comments may be provided here that are not accurate, or represent a perception that others might disagree with. These are **Please note that each statement is a summary of the words of one person and may represent only one point of view.** They are provided as a means of enabling more transparent understanding of issues or perceptions that the speaker may have found easier to say to the interviewer than to others

1. Can you elaborate on your primary concern as it relates to the need for innovation in Sheboygan?

Major concern is the lack of willingness to make a plan for execution that could make the Innovation District project successful. To take the time and make the effort to make sure the project is successful. We haven't spent the time needed to fully understand the district. We don't have the right capacity or resources, especially proper public engagement to allow for that to happen

The EDC is really focused on serving the C suite because that's their customer but I know that the project won't work without widespread community buy in

The city staff is over capacity to even take on some of the duties for innovation district planning and execution

Also a huge focus on diversity and inclusion. This needs to be cracked but it's going to take a long time.

The crux is that it's a community that has unlimited potential for a long time, but we haven't tapped that potential for awhile.

Our bread and butter is good, but it could disappear in the next decade. Need to adjust our strategic thinking to address this concern.

Not enough resources and opportunities to grow new entrepreneurship

- Referenced the brain drain issue

People at the table now think they know what's best. Summit happened a year too late, after it was created and sold. They haven't been asking the right questions to everyone or asking enough questions to enough people. Transparency is a major concern, as well as access to information and resources, open mindedness, inclusivity.

Not enough creatives and visionaries are involved. Too many of the same people involved. It's a community of not welcoming new things and different perspectives. We have too many numbers people involved.

There are a lot sails but no rudder to steer things

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They don't know how to paint a picture well enough for people to envision it. The companies know the culture is failing and morale is down. They're constantly shifting things to create a culture. If we can adapt that into the community, we'd be in good shape.

The community's niche could be food industry science - Johnsonville, old Wisconsin, sargento, sartori, vollrath, Kohler hospitality

Sheboygan is an easy place to outgrow

The leadership in Sheboygan is not good at listening

Diluting what little resources we have and things already happening for the city to throw all the time, money and energy into one tiny part of the community

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2. What has your company / organization tried to do to address that concern to date? Has anyone else in the community done anything to try to address that concern?

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College Here and Now - first public private partnership of its kind - full career pathway to take classes they need for their career choice -
SASD, LTC and Lakeland - Acuity has been a huge partner in this
Hospitality going to be launching more opportunities
[INCubatorEDU program](#).

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Red Raider program - fully private donations that is increasing number of students in robotics (year 4)

Etude - Not necessarily involved with red raider program

INSPIRE Sheboygan County - works closely with Jason Duff

Heavy focus on getting students work experience before hitting the career market
Real life opportunity in the workforce

Grassroots stuff... word of mouth activity, 3 Sheeps is starting to step up, unlikely partnerships, people trying to fill gaps, active8 forming a board and designating as NPO. Community members are stepping up to help the low hanging fruit. SOUP has been a huge help in uncovering the unusual suspects and problems nobody is talking about

Active8

3. What does the concept of an Innovation Hub mean to you? What does it look/sound/feel like? Who is there? What are they doing?

It would be awesome to see a lot of coming and going at a very basic level- critical mass of people just coming and going and working on things together.

Innovation District is making the community more livable and more attractive
Innovation District is looking to address the strategic thinking and entrepreneurial thinking environment.

Innovation District will put Sheboygan on the map

I would hope that it would celebrate ideas, community, elements of Sheboygan that are unique to the community to cultivate a sense of pride around the impact that Sheboygan has had on the country and people's homes

Ideally it would be an adaptive reuse of a historic building that has a story that people can identify with and rally around - centrally located and accessible - walkable

Makerspace, coworking spaces, innovation spaces, multiple definitions of innovation, competitions/challenges.

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1. Resource center - entrepreneurs and innovators can meet up "the how types meet up with who types"

2. A Place for funders to go and look at investments -

3. Creative community - like Jake's but more focused on tech and innovation

- Jake's Cafe - its a good start but since it's not funded, it's not sustainable
- Believes that we should add more resources like jakes

4. "It's not an either/or, it's a this and that"

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Likemindedness - people who are interested in the same things who are having the same issues and everyone is trying to figure it out together.

I think we have people like that here, but they aren't congregating like they should be.

A sense of community where people can talk about their future aspirations for Sheboygan

A sense of pride about living in Sheboygan.

**4. What does a culture of innovation look/feel like to you?
When you've been in an environment with an innovation culture, what jumps out to you as being different than what you see/feel in Sheboygan today?**

Organic, grassroots, culture by proximity, I don't think innovation can be built into a structure

neutral ground

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Innovation - doing something that hasn't been done in a space that it hasn't been seen in before

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The first and most crucial piece is diversity

- a. Hmong community - has been a lot of tension but have started to integrate better in the recent past (Vu Yang - Union Market, Radio station)
- b. Rapidly growing Hispanic population

Challenge we face with all of this is that when we talk with members of these communities, there is a lot of tokenism, kids deal with the unwelcoming nature for diversity

- Mentioned Laura Kohler being an advocate for change in this arena, also Paul Bartelt from Vollrath,

People who come here with diversity never really feel like they're part of the community

SASD is focused on equity at the youth level

- A lot of this will come organically through their college and career readiness program
- Are conscious of how doing specialized programs for minorities is ultimately still separating that population from the rest of the community
- I don't think that we have enough services/resources to tackle this issue
- Doing an equity focus

5. In terms of entrepreneurship and innovation, who are the unusual suspects (i.e. disruptors, dreamers, etc.) and how does the community interact with those individuals/entities?

Mini maker faire (Mead Library)

Over 1,000 attendees the first two years

- working in forming a non profit by the end of the year (Make on the Lake)

Maker in residence program starting this year

- Friends of the library helped support the acquisition of the equipment
- Kohler co foundation
- Other machines have been donated

Innovation Week throughout the week ending with the maker faire Saturday (next June)

Digital media Lab

- don't have anyone who's an expert is using the equipment
- Would like to see podcasts

Girls who Code

- Warner school?
- Jason Duff
- Someone from Sargento teaches the class

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6. What does your personal vision for the Innovation District look like?

It comes from working all together and not in silos.

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- Diversity and inclusion
 - —we have such a diverse community but you wouldn't know that
 - HR should do a better job at selling the place
 - —seems to be just checking the box
 - Mentality
 - —experiences that shift perspectives and change mentality
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I don't have a direct vision, I just want to see something that doesn't exist already. I don't know what that looks like because if I did I would do it.

I'm a person who knows the people to connect you with. I could lean in if I were given an opportunity to connect people to ideas

If we could be a hub of non profits doing great stuff, there is a lot of opportunity to expand.

- Entire need for services within different companies.
- Hub that promotes entrepreneurship would be great. Know a few people who have had desire to start company. They know a trade, but, how do I start a company in a country where I don't know the details? How get off the ground?
- Diversity of ideas... how great would it be to have group thinking from different points of view.
- Companies like Kohler looking for vendors... not too many choices in Sheboygan. Would create more places of employment. Part of what schools want is stop brain drain. Want those kids to stay!

7. If you had to create or choose your *personal* three main objectives (outcomes) for our portfolio of innovation opportunities today, what would you choose?

- talent retention and attraction, an identity overhaul for Sheboygan, nucleus of activity
- Diversity and inclusion - it's not about changing people's minds...it's about figuring out the message and sticking to it so that the culture changes down the road

8. If you had \$3-5M over 2-3 years, how would you spend that money?

- I would create a master plan for neighborhood between downtown and lakefront

- The bottom line is that we need to focus on the things that will keep people here and that's definitely not just having an innovation district

Public market - food and entrepreneurs

9. Is there anything else that you think we ought to know about? Any questions you wished we had asked? Anything else you want to tell us? Any examples of best practices that you'd like us to consider?

Diversity and Inclusion

It's exciting to see development at the Indiana Ave. corridor but there is displacement happening as a result

"Are you really raising all boats or are you sinking some to raise others?"

A lot of the latino business owners are not members of the chamber - why would I want to sit in that room if I already have a successful business?

Did we spend enough time listening to minority stakeholders or did we listen better to people with the deep pockets (the usual suspects)? Each part is valuable but we need to listen better to the folks we haven't listened to in the past

Sargento does not have a diversity and inclusion plan. Some discussion going on around doing this. Do have affirmative action plan.

Professionals [from diverse backgrounds] who relocated to Sheboygan tend to hang out with people from their company. Stick with people in your company. So relationships with people from similar racial / ethnic backgrounds can be limited.

[team lead by UCC pastor] has been holding a series of “conversations for empowerment” via JMK Arts Center. Series, multiple per topic over several months. Topics:

Race

Sex/gender

Ability

Have had up to 30 participants per

African American population appears to be moving here to get out of Milwaukee situations,

Common threads in students who need mentoring:

- Lack of vision, guidance, direction in kids
 - Narrow world view
 - Lack of parental supervision and support
 - Lack of positive role models
 - Lack of proactive resources
- Lack of cultural diversity awareness
 - Lack of trust in people who don't look like me
- Lack of entrepreneurial role models
 - Saw gangsters, pimps as successful people, not connect this to entrepreneurship
- Need for a youth center
 - No where to go for sports independent of school district
 - Rec department uses school facilities
 - But there are conflicts

She sees big gap in LGBTQIA+. No organized group, a quarterly potluck at Paradigm. Held first Pride picnic in June 2019 -- 200 people! Started by 2 UW Students.

In general, people are friendly, but not “honest”

Education system has no comprehensive sex education

No gender inclusive bathrooms

Public schools have Gay Straight Alliance, trying to figure out a countywide GSA

Aurora is trying to figure out how to be a resource

Need for an LGBTQIA+ Community Center. Right now scattered and hidden - B&G Club
Care providers
Events
Support groups

Companies need empowerment training -- LGBTQIA+ people don't know if it will be safe for them in a company, need to be able to show them that it's safe.

Sheboygan North and South high schools are at or near minority majority. Not just Hmong anymore, but people from many places.

Indiana Avenue (Little Mexico) has been controversial because of the demolition of buildings.

Challenge we face with all of this is that when we talk with members of these communities, there is a lot of tokenism, kids deal with the unwelcoming nature for diversity

People who come here with diversity never really feel like they're part of the community

[Partners for Community Development] used to provide small business support, especially for immigrants -- business plans, etc. -- but funding was cut. Can't provide anymore.

Common problem they saw then: business is based on family skill set, lack experience with actual business management. Did a lot of profit analysis, competitiveness analysis to demonstrate that even though business was selling products, costs were preventing owners from earning decent returns. .

Built Environment

We don't have the housing stock (owner) to support the need for young professionals

Okay housing stock for people that have the means and a terrible housing stock (quality) for people who don't have the means. Those housing conditions aren't the quality that most families wouldn't consider living in

The apartments are built and people are living in them. Now what? What is there for people to do?

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Paradigm the one place that can consistently congregate the most diverse audience of people

- Everyone from staunch republicans, corporate folks, artists, any color

3 Sheeps is another space like this

- They consider themselves a partner in community development

8th Street Ale Haus, Field to Fork (Stefano), (food and drink often is the convener)

Arts Center is focusing 2019-2020 on Indiana avenue

Culture and Decision-Making

The culture of the C suite is the driver ...(of the lack of widespread employee development)

The good old boys club is the nemesis

The companies that are shifting cultures tend to be the ones with younger CEOs

[EG:]Dave Bolland - CEO of Plymouth Foam

- Brought in outside consultant to shift the culture of the org
- You go in there now and you can feel the change
- The only reason it worked is because the CEO bought into it

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The city are bad listeners. They just tell people what they're going to do, rather than actually work to engage people with the process

The money and the people want the same thing but the city is getting in the way.

The major employers offer their own [training] because they don't want to send their employees outside of the company for fear of the employees being attracted to something/somewhere else.

The fear-based culture of employees getting developed and leaving for other companies starts in the C suite...which trickles down through the company.

The biggest issue isn't employee attraction, it's employee retention. There are conversations happening with Lakeland, LTC and UWGB around a theory based leadership program.

Skills and training demand

Coding is a demand but they [library] don't have an expert to teach it

- hosted a couple classes focused on adults
- Python class

Library does try to send people to other places after they've gotten an intro into a topic or activity at the library

- but there is no plan for where those people go next, next steps after library is not