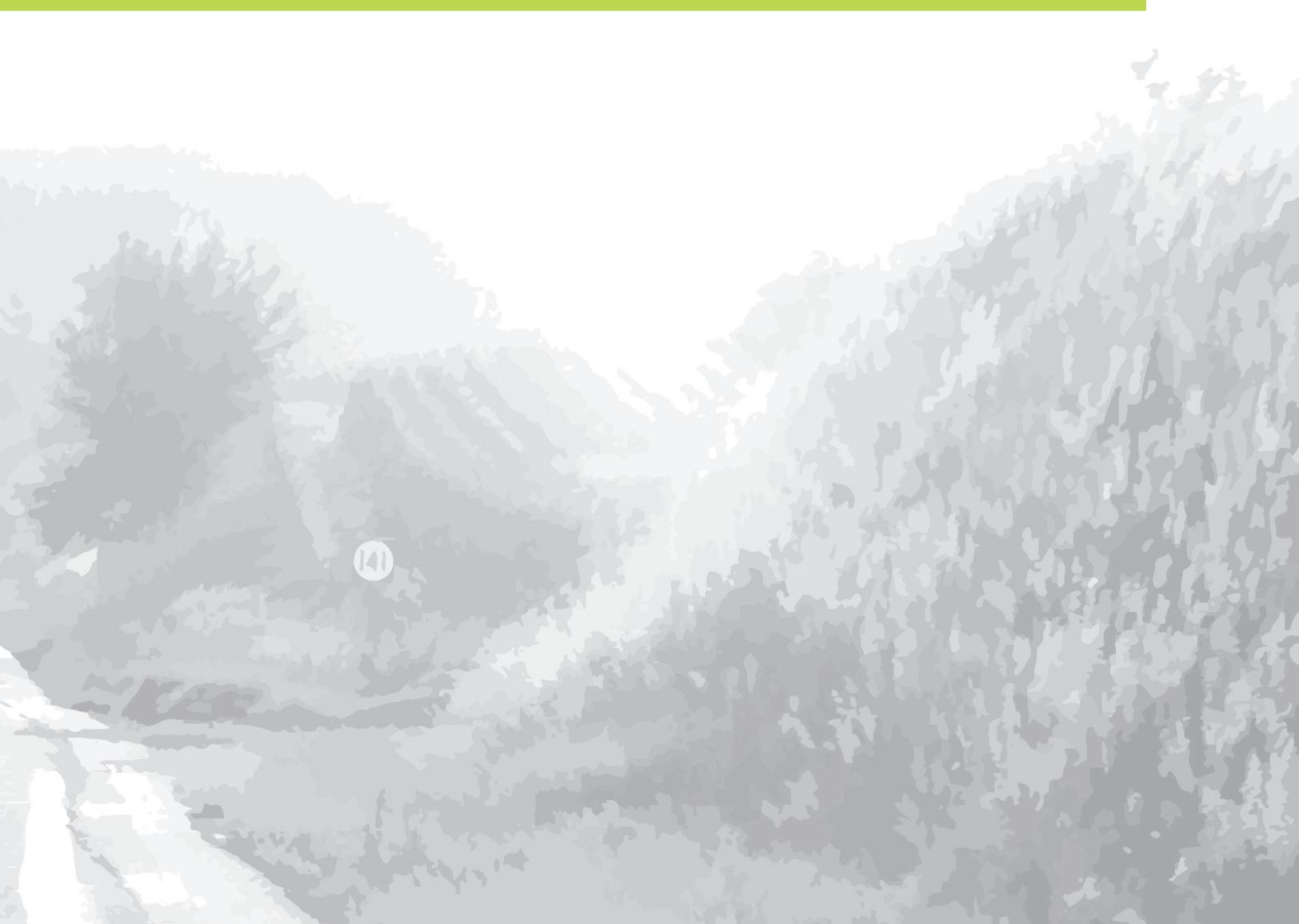




Ripple Effects of Community Visioning

Accomplishments and Future Actions

Prepared by Iowa State University Summer 2018



Introduction

Since its inception in 1996, the Iowa's Living Roadways Community Visioning program has made visible impacts in small Iowa communities, ranging from entrance signage and corridor enhancements to recreation trails and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.

Program staff have documented these impacts over the years through site visits, surveys, and one-on-one interviews. However, little has been done to understand the impacts of the program beyond physical changes to the landscape.

To identify the learning outcomes of participation in Community Visioning, program director and Iowa State University professor of landscape architecture Julia Badenhope decided to employ a relatively new research technique called "ripple effects mapping" in past visioning communities.

Methodology

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is defined as "a group participatory evaluation method that engages program and community stakeholders to retrospectively and visually map the chain of effects resulting from a program or complex collaboration" (*A Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping*, p. xi).

REM engages participants to reflect on and visually map intended and unintended changes through four techniques:

1. Appreciative inquiry – participants pair up and interview each other about peak experiences
2. Participatory approach



Research associate Hatvany Gomez-Concepcion explains the ripple effects mapping process to participants in Tripoli.

3. Interactive group interviewing and reflecting
4. "Radiant thinking" (mind mapping)

In July 2018, a research team of two staff people and two students conducted a pilot study in which they facilitated REM workshops in four target communities: Tripoli (program year 2012), Mapleton (program year 2013), Preston (program year 2014), and Manning (program years 2012 and 2016). These communities were selected because they represent different program years, they represent different parts of the state, and all have either completed projects or are in the process of completing projects.

Visioning committee members, stakeholders, and residents from each community participated in the two-hour REM workshops. The Trees Forever field coordinators who worked with each of the communities were also invited to attend. Each workshop started with participants

Projects

Three of the study communities—Manning, Mapleton, and Tripoli—have completed all the projects proposed through the visioning program, while Preston is still in the project implementation phase. The following summarizes the accomplishments discussed at the workshops in each community.

Manning

- Downtown improvements
- Creation of a green space at the entrance to Main Street
- Signage and monuments along Highway 141
- Great Western Park improvements
- Creation of Trestle Park



After completing community visioning in 2012, Manning residents planted roadside vegetation along Highway 141.

Mapleton

- Complete streets
- Pedestrian crossing nodes
- Integrated green infrastructure
- Street tree restoration



Volunteers planted a bioswale along a roadside in Mapleton in summer 2018.



Residents of all ages helped build and landscape the Tripoli welcome center.

Tripoli

- Sweet Water Trail
- Welcome center and trailhead
- Sidewalk extension along Highway 93
- New park space along Sweet Water Creek
- Sweet Water Creek bank restoration



This play equipment in Two Good Park in Preston was constructed completely by volunteers.

Preston

- Basketball court
- Two Good Park play equipment
- Community grocery store
- Accessible sidewalks

Ripple Effects

After sharing their stories, participants reflected on them and considered the activities that they should keep doing, those they should stop doing, and some new ideas that could be beneficial to their community.

"Accomplishments promote conversation—nothing is done alone. Partnerships and having a plan are why we are where we are today!"

—Manning

"The community realized the value of applying for grants, understanding that not all would be awarded."

—Preston

"We learned an outstanding process for community involvement. We received great feedback from community member of all ages. Many community members of all ages participated in the implementation as well as costs. We learned how to raise funds, wrote letter of support to Sumner."

—Tripoli

"You get the resources when you have managed money."

—Mapleton



"The community, as a whole, is open to new ideas."

—Preston

"Once people saw that the projects were real, more people started to donate."

—Tripoli

"Understanding differing perspectives from the age groups; community improvements should appeal to all age groups."

—Manning

Although the projects completed or in process in each study community are unique to that community, the learning outcomes across the four communities are similar. Examples of what residents in all four communities discovered through the visioning process include:

- The need for expanding the volunteer base, whether that means more youth, families, or simply more residents.
- The need to have patience when working on projects. Things may not happen as fast as anticipated.
- The importance of understanding the perspectives of different age groups and user types.
- The ability to raise funds through writing grants, soliciting donations, and increasing local buy in through communication.
- The importance of partnerships with local organizations, such as businesses, schools, and clubs.

Through shared experiences and stories of residents, the REM workshops illustrated the "ripple effects" of the Community Visioning process on participating communities. Specifically, the workshops were designed to reveal new ways of thinking and new habits among residents, as well as new community practices that emerged through the planning and project implementation processes. In addition, the workshops explored lessons learned and addressed future goals and plans for action.

One of the "ripple effects" of Community Visioning on all four study communities is increased volunteerism, as demonstrated by residents' willingness to help with planting in Mapleton and Manning, to build the playground equipment in Preston, and to build and landscape the welcome center in Tripoli.

Another outcome of the visioning process is that the communities learned to do strategic planning before undertaking projects. As a result, workshop participants said they feel "more organized." Other impacts include more environmental stewardship and increased buy in among local businesses.

In terms of future goals for the four communities, themes that emerged from the REM workshops include improving communication, revitalizing downtown, improving connectivity and accessibility in the community, engaging with local businesses, and engaging younger residents and youth.

Next Steps

Using the Community Visioning Program process and focus groups in town to get different insights.
—Tripoli

Use food to unify the community at events and volunteering.
—Preston

**New
Ideas**

Partnering with Economic Development Crew, universities, more communities, interns, students, and the county.
—Tripoli

Increase teacher involvement.
—Manning

Create a network among schools, the library, and craftswomen and men.
—Mapleton

Communicate within the community!
—Mapleton



New Ideas

Show people concrete benefits of our community projects.
—Preston

Conduct competitions for kids on design proposals; integrate community projects into classwork.
—Manning

Accomplishments



Roadside park (left) along Highway 141 and the Carhart Conservation Area Trail in Mapleton



Entrance signage along Highway 141 (left) and Main Street lighting fixture (right) in Manning



Basketball court (left) and walking path (right) in Westside Park in Preston



Pedestrian bridge over Sweet Water Creek (left) and sidewalk extension to Casey's General Store parking lot (right) in Tripoli

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