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White Earth Strategic Planning Community Report

Executive Summary

In January 2015, The White Earth Tribal Council directed the Economic Development Department to develop a 10-year strategic plan for the Tribe. To begin this process, the Economic Development Department partnered with Mino-Mashkikiwan Consulting, owned by Dr. John Gonzalez, a White Earth member, to conduct community forums in each village. The community forums were designed to ensure that tribal members could provide input on the needs of their community. This information would be used to guide the strategic planning process.

Over the course of 8 weeks, community forums were held in the following communities on and off-reservation:

Location	Dates
White Earth	1/17/15 & 2/22/15
Pine Point	1/18/15 & 2/22/15
Mahnomen	1/25/15 & 3/7/15
Naytahwaush	1/25/15 & 3/8/15
Elbow Lake	1/31/15 & 3/7/15
Rice Lake	1/31/15 & 3/8/15
Bemidji	2/1/15
Iron Range	2/7/15
Waubun	3/1/15
Callaway	3/1/15
Cass Lake	3/14/15
Minneapolis	3/21/15

In total, more than 150 people attended the community forums. Each forum followed the same format: after a smudging and brief introduction of the process, attendees were asked to share their ideas and voice with the following prompt questions:

- What is the dream or vision for your community?
- What kind of community do you want to live in?
- What are the strengths/positives in our community & how can we use those to make our community better?
- How can we use the Seven Teachings of the Anishinaabe to make our community better?
- What would you like to see change or what are the major issues/concerns?
- How can tribal programs better serve the members?

The facilitator used additional prompting for details and specific ideas for action as the forums progressed. When a community forum was held twice in a community, the attendees were provided a summary of comments and ideas from previous forums.

Recognizing that that not every community member who has something to share could attend a forum or felt comfortable sharing their voice publicly, a survey is being developed that will allow additional community members to share their ideas and expressed their voice.

Over the course of the 18 community forums, numerous ideas/thoughts were repeated and echoed by multiple community members. For readability, the summary below will not duplicate comments made by more than one participant.

The remainder of the report captures the comments from the community forums organized into 5 overarching themes.

It is important to note that community members expressed the importance of Anishinaabe values throughout each of the themes and that all of the themes are interrelated, where each can and does affect the others.

Health, Safety, & Security

Overwhelming, all community members expressed concerns about drug and alcohol abuse in the community. This was a top priority for everyone who attended.

Community members insisted on using our cultural ways and values to address the drug and alcohol abuse. Investing in opportunities for everyone to learn cultural values and activities to treat and prevent drug and alcohol abuse.

Many of the suggestions for treating and preventing drug and alcohol abuse were embedded in the other themes of Culture & Education and opportunities through Employment & Economic Development.

- Drug abuse (and alcohol abuse) is destroying our families and making our communities unsafe. The drug dealers are known, we all know who they are. Why can't the police arrest them? (100)
- Instead of punishing the users, the cops should go after the dealers. Let's get rid of them first. Then we can help those who are addicted with love and our cultural teachings. They are our family members who need our help. (80)
- We should also consider banishment for anyone caught dealing drugs on the Rez. That was a traditional form of justice in the past and we should use it again. Other tribes are using it and it works. (40)
- Is Oshki Manido doing any good? Many of our youth just keep going back through the system. Seems like that place needs to be evaluated. (25)
- A culturally based corrections/treatment facility is needed here on the reservation. Put it out in the woods somewhere around here, make it a workhouse program where the residents have to work to keep the house going. (15)
- Our youth don't have anything to do. There are not many places to go to do things that are drug free. (135)
- The Boys and Girls Club is not enough. (67)
- We need to allow open gym times and support other organized activities for sports. (128)
- We also need more culturally based activities for youth. We need to invest in our youth. They are our future. (140)
- Every young person, adult too, who wants a dance regalia should be able to get one. Let's invest in a program in each community where people can come and make, or get help making dance regalia. We have lots of people who know how to sew, or make bustles, and other dancing materials. Let's hire them. It helps them and it helps our youth. (91)
- We also have experts who know how to make drums and drumsticks. The drum is powerful at protecting and healing people. We need to encourage that more. (47)

- We need a community wide healing process. A historical trauma conference and healing ceremony should be held. Have a big event first. Then, take that process to each community and have ceremonies in each community. Drugs, alcohol and all the abuses that happen are manifestations of this trauma and people don't even know why this is happening to them. (76)

Law enforcement needs to be a key partner in making our communities safe, secure and healthy. More work needs to be done by leadership in law enforcement to make the police force a part of the community.

- Law enforcement really seems inadequate. It doesn't feel like we have any rule of law in our communities. You call the cops and it takes an hour or more for them to come. You call they county and they say it is a tribal matter, you call the tribal police and they say it is county – what are we supposed to do? (123)
- The cops are supposed to protect and serve us. Instead, they seem more threatening instead of making us feel safe. (88)
- I don't do drugs or drink, haven't for a long time, but I still don't want to talk to the cops. They make me feel like I am some kind of criminal. (10)
- Most of the cops are not from here. They are strangers to us. They don't even live here. (33)
- We need to hire more Native cops. And the non-Native cops need more training in our values and culture. They should be required to come to community events, like our powwows and feasts and things. (57)
- The cops should also be encouraged, maybe even be required, to live here with us. I remember, we used to have some police living in our villages and that was better. (25)

Additional concerns involved making our communities safer and healthier places to live in. This included housing concerns, building safe healthy places to be active, bike paths, community gardens, recreation spaces etc.

- We have a lack of housing for single adults. Our current housing policies and programs require you to have a family or kids, but we have many people who don't have kids but still need a place to live. We should invest in some apartments or single adult homes. (78)
- We also need better housing and facilities for our elders. I think we need to have an assisted living center that is culturally based, here on the reservation. Many of our elders have to go to the communities surrounding the reservation. (47)
- We need to also be intentional in designing our communities. Create more safe and healthy places for people to be active. Build walking and biking paths to get around the villages. (57)
- If you build those things, this encourages people to use them and be healthier, it will also be safer to walk or ride a bike on the paths instead of on the roads and streets. (55)
- We talked a lot about the youth, yes that is important. But we can't forget about our Elders. We need to do a better job of taking care of them.(48)
- I would like to see us do more with our food systems. Growing more of our own food. Family and community gardens are good, very good things, but we should really think about producing food as a tribe. Food security is real sovereignty. (37)

Culture, Education, History

Community members stressed that Anishinaabe culture needs to be the foundation for everything that we do in our communities. The 7 Teachings of the Anishinaabe were considered missing for the most part. Some people know them, or know a few them, but most people don't know them or how to practice them. It was suggested that these 7 Teachings must be a part of everything we do: All tribal programs should be developed based on the 7 Teachings. Finally, there was much discussion on investing in cultural programming and camps around specific activities for community members: Drum and dance programs – regalia for every youth (and adult) who wants one. Drum making and singing programs. Rice Camps, Sugar Bush Camps, Berry Camps, traditional foods camps etc.

- We can't just rely on the school to teach the 7 values. Yes, it should be in the schools, but it also has to be at home and in the community. We need a reservation wide effort – starting with the tribal council and all programs. There are all kinds of ideas and ways, for example, on our letterhead, making it official value system as part of all programs. Creating signage and symbols that are displayed in all our buildings and around the communities. Murals are another way. We have a lot of artists who could do beautiful and amazing work. There you go, that could create some work and a job for someone at the same time. (63)
- We have drum ceremonies here in our community at least 4 times a year, and the sad thing is most people who come to those are not from White Earth. We need more community members from right here to come to these. This is healing, this is part of our way, and the 7 teachings and other Anishinaabe values come through the drum ceremonies. (30)
- We need to do more to support and honor the drums we have here. We need a new round house/community center for drum ceremonies and other cultural events and activities. (25)
- I would like to see that too. Perhaps we need to start some fundraising for that, but the tribe really needs to provide funding for this. We could have lots of cultural activities in a new community center. Sewing, beading, teaching how to make dance regalia.(53)
- And drum making, we did have a grant to have a drum making class. The young people loved it. But that is the problem with grants and relying on grants, once the funding is gone, the program is gone. We need to have ongoing stuff for the youth. (38)
- We need an overall cultural revitalization plan for our people. (23)

Ojibwemowin was another major concern for community members.

- Our language is very important to who we are. Yes, the tribe has made Ojibwe the official language, but we need action to back that up. (71)
- It is really bad here on White Earth, most people don't speak the language, and many don't even know it. There are probably only 2 or 3 people who I could speak to, beyond the basic greetings. (2)
- There are lots of things we could do, lots more than what seems to be happening now. Start with small things like signage, and using it in more settings. Again, we have drum ceremony where the language is spoken, supporting that can help get more people there, even hearing the language helps people learn more – especially the young people. (57)

- Maybe we need to think about an immersion school. You ask about a dream or vision; that is one dream I have - that all our people learn and speak their language. (39)

A stronger stance on improving education outcomes and educational standards for our youth and community was expressed. Much of the discussion involved the importance of being 21st Century Ojibwe, by reclaiming our culture and sense of identity as Anishinaabe while also seeking a higher education to improve our own lives and life in the community.

- You know, many of our people don't know our own history. I am talking about the history of what happen to Indian people in general, but even more specifically about White Earth – how this reservation came to be. And then what happened after that as well. It is very important for young people to know who they are – that is empowering. This should be a basic required class in our schools – not just Circle of Life, but all the schools on White Earth. (89)
- The history of White Earth should not just be in the schools, a community wide effort should be done – we could create a traveling exhibit that goes to each village, you know, like that “Treaties Matter” exhibit that was done. (57)
- I would like to see a White Earth History Center/Museum be created. That is what I want to do and work on when I am done with school. This center would be a place of pride for our own people, but also be a place of education. That would create some jobs as well, could also create some revenue, it could be a tourist attraction. We need this at White Earth. We also need to work on repatriating our items that are in museums around the state and country. (59)
- You know, us Native people have the highest high school dropout rate in the state. We need to improve that, we need to emphasize the importance of education here at White Earth. We need to change the attitude about education in our youth and community – so that getting an education is a positive thing and is rewarded. Every young person from White Earth who graduates and wants to go to college, should get support, get scholarships and grants. (90)
- We could have a service payback program. Where they come back and work for the tribe for so many years after they graduate from college. (24)
- We also have to be honest, we need to improve the standards at Circle of Life, a lot of those kids are just getting passed along, and when they graduate and want to go to college, they are not prepared at all. That is only hurting our youth, and when they realized they are not prepared they are discouraged. That is really sad. We need to let our young people know that we love them and that we want them to be successful, so that is why we are also going to be tough on them also in school. There is a culturally appropriate way to do that. (76)
- Again, I don't want to knock our school too much, but some of those teachers we have, don't know shit about our people and our culture. They should be required to have training and experience in working with Native youth and families. We also need to invest in training our own teachers, having a qualified Native teacher in front of the class is what our young people need. (63)
- We also have to pay our teachers more. It is hard work, and if you want the best teachers you have to pay for it. (27)
- We could really do more with parenting classes, but make them based on our cultural values. Young women need to understand the sacredness of being women. (46)

Employment & Economic Development

The need for more jobs and economic opportunities were strongly expressed by community members. The lack of jobs and poverty contributes to drug and alcohol abuse. While the Shooting Star Casino does provide some jobs, there was a call more for than just Casino or tribal departments. Regarding Casino employment, most jobs are low paying making it hard to support a family. In addition, there are issues of transportation and child-care that makes it difficult to stay employed. Finally, Casino management needs to invest more in training employees in strong customer service and reward employees for providing outstanding services to customers.

- We really more jobs here on the Rez. More types of jobs. The casino is just not enough. You know, not everyone is cut out for those casino jobs, or has an interest in that. Working for tribal programs is good, but those jobs are hard to get too, and we all know that they are not always secure. You can get fired for just talking out, or saying something about tribal council – or even after an election. That is not right. (103)
- I would like to see more manufacturing jobs on the Rez. We could be making toilet paper, not out of trees, but something like industrial hemp. That is just an example, doesn't have to be hemp, my point is we need to have more types of jobs here. (74)
- We could invest in green energy manufacturing. Why not, we talk about caring for the earth, taking care of the land. Why don't we invest in a solar panel plant or something? There as damn empty building sitting in Mahnomen. (82)
- We really need more down here in Pine Point. Everything is in White Earth or Mahnomen – that is 30 to 50 miles one-way. If the tribe is going to build something or create a new industry, they should think about Pine Point. (33)
- We need to diversify our businesses, not only in types but also where. Like we could build a “satellite casino in the Pine Point area, that could capture the tourist customer base that visits those lakes areas. Plus they need jobs down there too. (3)
- I heard White Earth Land Recovery did a study where they identified how much money is spent of foods on and off the reservation. As a whole, about 8 million dollars is spent each year on food, but most of that, like 7 million, is spent off the reservation. This is something we should really think about - developing some type of local food system, where those dollars are spent here and stay here. (45)
- How about development and investment in programs for Indian-owned small businesses and local employment opportunities. We have a lot of existing knowledge and expertise in the communities to create self-employment opportunities. There are experts in sewing, beading, drum making, maple syrup, hunting, harvesting, ricing, wood cutting, carving, basket making, etc. These local experts should be put to work in the cultural camps/programs and other economic development programs. If a White Earth History Center/Museum is built, many of these local community members could be employed at the center as well. (88)

Land, Environment, & Natural Resources

Community members discussed the importance honoring and protecting Mother Earth and making sure we are using our land and resources appropriately so they will still be here for future generations. There were several thoughts that community members shared on this issue.

- The tribe must declare a war on climate change and exercise sovereignty over land use and resources within the reservation borders. (10) We should create and enact ordinances that ban the use of pesticides & herbicides within the reservation borders. (48)
- We need to re-establish territorial jurisdiction within our borders. (56)
- The tribe needs a comprehensive climate change plan. (24)
- We need to audit White Earth expenditures of sub marginal lands section of North American Industrial Act of 1934 – specific to Becker County. (3)
- We need to re-look at the Tamarac Refuge lands. (28)
- A study should be commissioned that identifies and documents the health hazards/effect of chemicals to the land and water. (97)
- There are some potential partnerships we could do with other tribes on wild rice and maple syrup production. I think there are some Native groups looking at trying to create some cooperatives. (36)
- Health is linked to Land, Environmental and Food sovereignty. Invest in local development of traditional food sources that will empower communities to live healthy lives. (77)

Tribal Governance and Programs

Community members strongly expressed the need for more transparency and accountability in all aspects of Tribal Governance and Departments/Programs. Several ideas were suggested:

- All White Earth Tribal Council and governmental functions should begin with smudging and prayer. We are Anishinaabe – we were instructed by the creator to do things in this way. (48)
- Develop a code of ethics, centered on Anishinaabe Values, which all employees and Tribal Council members must receive training in and adhere to. (133)
- Communication needs to be better across aspects of tribal government and departments. Most of the time we don't know what is happening or when things are happening. (148)
- Council Members, Department/Program Directors need more visibility and accessible in community. You rarely see leadership at community events and functions. That is true leadership, when they are active in the community. (79)
- All non-native employees, such as mental health, teachers, and other service providers also need to be more visible in the communities – as part of their cultural training for working with Native people. If they want to work for the tribe and serve Native people, they must also receive training and work to become part of the community. (86)
- Perhaps we should make background in Ojibwe Language or Indian Studies a part of job requirements – when people apply for a job with the tribe. (42)

Community members want more native employees working for the tribe, particularly at the levels of leadership. Many attendees recognized that White Earth has a high percentage of college graduates who don't come back to the reservation to work – these members should be encouraged to come back and serve their communities.

Tribal Governance received significant discussion. This discussion included changing government to make it more accountable and transparent. Constitutional Reform was raised at each community forum. There were clear supporters and opponents of the constitution. However, there were many communities members who had mixed feelings about the constitution.

- There were community members who expressed support for the new constitution and want it to be enacted.
 - We voted, and it was overwhelming passed. What happened, why is the new constitution not being put into place? You asked what I would like to see change – the new constitution. (58)
 - Many people who are opposed to the new constitution also are the ones who complain all the time about our tribal council and the problems with corruption. Don't they know that the new constitution will solve those issues? It calls for a separation of powers, gives more voice to the communities. Yeah it is not perfect, but it is way better than we got right now. (49)
 - Opponents of the new constitution say we have no legal authority to break from the MCT, but the treaty we signed happened long before the MCT. We were an Ojibwe band before the MCT was even dreamed up. Are we sovereign or not? (33)
 - I know some people worry about the descendant article and who can be a member, they worry this will just allow anyone who has a “great great grandmother” or something to become an enrolled member. But what about our family members right now? These are our own children, their own children and will someday be their grandchildren. Are they just going to abandon them? Are they going to say to their grandkids; too bad, your mom or dad married someone not from White Earth? (41)

Supporters also expressed some limits of the new constitution:

- Lack of clear language around environmental issues and land sovereignty – what is the programmatic and environmental impact of implementation.
 - The amendment process (article) was very restrictive, making it almost impossible to amend in the future.
 - There needs to be an additional article that specifically addresses the 7th Generation and beyond.
- There were also community members who opposed the new constitution and do not want it to be enacted.
 - There is no legal authority to even vote on a new constitution. We are part of the MCT, we are one Anishinaabe tribe and White Earth is only a band. Instead of trying to go off on our own, we should do more to unite our reservations. We should be able to go to any one of the MCT bands and get the same services and recognition. (50)
 - They are only a Reservation Business Committee, they are making decisions they don't even have authority to make. (15)

- I question the whole reform process that took place. It seemed like a lot of the people who were involved at the beginning, the delegates, left during the creation of the new constitution. That tells me something was not right. (38)
- I also still question the delegation process. How did they get selected? (18)
- The voting process really bothers me. The whole thing was problematic. It is like they didn't want everyone to vote. Why did we have to send in and request a ballot? And then send your ballot in to New Mexico or somewhere? I know several people that got their ballot requests returned, and others who got their ballots returned. On something as important as a new constitution voting on it should have been easier to make sure everyone voted. (54)

Additional ideas on improving/changing government included empowering Community Councils more, giving them a seat on the tribal council.

- Our local community councils really have limited power. We cant create any ordinance or enact any ordinances. Right now, we are just 501c3s. We have no governmental authority or power. (79)

Some thought that moving back to a pre-IRA traditional government that relied on district (community) chiefs chosen by local communities.

- Constitutional reform is important, and will make things better, but what we really should do is have a true Tribal Council, made up of district chiefs who are chosen by their local communities – even those off the reservation. That is our way. That is true representation. (28)

Finally, the off-reservation communities shared some specific concerns that centered on the following issues:

- We don't really have any representation on the tribal council. We always provide significant numbers of votes during elections, but don't have any district rep advocating for us. (All off reservation communities expressed this) (73)
- Just because we live off the Rez, does not mean we don't care about what happens back home. That is still our home. Many of us don't choose to be here off the Rez, we, or our parents, were forced here back in the 50's and 60's. I want to go home someday, I would go home now but there is no work or jobs there. (66)
- Here in Leech Lake, we have a lot of White Earth band member, but we lack so many services. We even get discriminated by Leech Lake, because we are White Earth enrolled. (26)
- Many of us have lived here our whole lives. Are parent and grandparents live here on Leech Lake, but we don't get any services from Leech Lake. Something needs to be done about that. White Earth and Leech Lake need to communicate about that and reach some kind of agreement, or White Earth needs to provide use the same services they do to members on the reservation. (27)
- Leech Lake counts us in their numbers for claims they make for grants and funds from the feds and states and other programs, but we don't get the services cause we are White Earth. (25)

All of the off reservation communities expressed the need for a White Earth Band Community Center. In Cass Lake and Minneapolis the size of the current space was considered insufficient.