

REVITALIZING QUALITY OF LIFE IN UNION, NEBRASKA THROUGH
IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY AMENITIES AND
BROWNFIELD REMEDIATION

by

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A REPORT

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Abstract

This document is a Master's Project for a proposal of a sustainable community amenity to be implemented in Union, Nebraska. The idea that I have considered best fit for Union is the concept of a multi-functional structure that will have many uses, such as office space for city government, a community center, a visitor center, public restrooms, and indoor and outdoor recreational space. There may also be space that can be utilized for a small commercial function, such as a coffee shop, bakery, or convenience store. Right now, Union only has a handful of businesses, most of which only operate part-time. There is nowhere currently where a person can purchase a drink, a meal, groceries, or even use a restroom. Although Union lacks those amenities, Union is home to two historic finds: an old Union Pacific Railroad caboose car and a single-room jail cell. Without a proper place to showcase Union's unique character or a place for people to stop in the town, Union may take a turn downhill economically and socially. Many sites in the town are deteriorating and are in definite need of rehabilitation.

The implementation of the proposed structure will improve the quality of life for the community as well as benefit passersby by providing an attraction. The social equity of the community is an important concern and providing a space where the community can thrive within Union is an integral factor for sustainability in the town. By also targeting the people driving through Union, the town can benefit economically by getting these visitors to stop and spend money in the town. Environmentally, Union can be improved by addressing the aging properties along their main street. Many parcels along Main Street are potential brownfield sites and could be revitalized through cleanup funding opportunities.

Within this document I will be identifying potential sites and funding opportunities and focusing on composing a feasible course of action for implementing the multi-functional structure. Research has been done through many methods including literature reviews, case studies, site visits, and through a community survey process. Funding for my research is provided by the Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) program through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) because of the potential brownfield interests in Union.

Working with Union, Nebraska constitutes a valid planning situation because it is in need of essential planning practices that can boost the social, economic and environmental equity of the town. With only about 230 residents, Union has only one governmental official, the city clerk.

The city clerk must wear many hats in order to keep Union running smoothly. Having help with planning recommendations will greatly benefit the town and take some weight off of the city clerk's work load. By focusing my efforts on creating a concept for a multi-functional building, I could produce the optimum outcome in the most efficient manner.

The final goal of my work is to not only graduate with a Master's Degree in Regional and Community Planning through the College of Architecture, Planning and Design at Kansas State University, but also to impact the town of Union, Nebraska in a positive and lasting way. I am truly pleased to be able to produce something that could improve the quality of life in a realistic way for a real community. If I can use this project to make any positive influence in a community, then I have succeeded.

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CHAPTER I: ABSTRACT

I. Abstract

This document is a Master's Project for a proposal of a sustainable community amenity to be implemented in Union, Nebraska. The idea that I have considered best fit for Union is the concept of a multi-functional structure that will have many uses, such as office space for city government, a community center, a visitor center, public restrooms, and indoor and outdoor recreational space. There may also be space that can be utilized for a small commercial function, such as a coffee shop, bakery, or convenience store. Right now, Union only has a handful of businesses, most of which only operate part-time. There is nowhere currently where a person can purchase a drink, a meal, groceries, or even use a restroom. Although Union lacks those amenities, Union is home to two historic finds: an old Union Pacific Railroad caboose car and a single-room jail cell. Without a proper place to showcase Union's unique character or a place for people to stop in the town, Union may take a turn downhill economically and socially. Many sites in the town are deteriorating and are in definite need of rehabilitation.

The implementation of the proposed structure will improve the quality of life for the community as well as benefit passersby by providing an attraction. The social equity of the community is an important concern and providing a space where the community can thrive within Union is an integral factor for sustainability in the town. By also targeting the people driving through Union, the town can benefit economically by getting these visitors to stop and spend money in the town. Environmentally, Union can be improved by addressing the aging properties along their main street. Many parcels along Main Street are potential brownfield sites and could be revitalized through cleanup funding opportunities.

Within this document I will be identifying potential sites and funding opportunities and focusing on composing a feasible course of action for implementing the multi-functional structure. Research has been done through many methods including literature reviews, case studies, site visits, and through a community survey process. Funding for my research is provided by the Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) program through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) because of the potential brownfield interests in Union.

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greatly benefit the town and take some weight off of the city clerk's work load. By focusing my efforts on creating a concept for a multi-functional building, I could produce the optimum outcome in the most efficient manner.

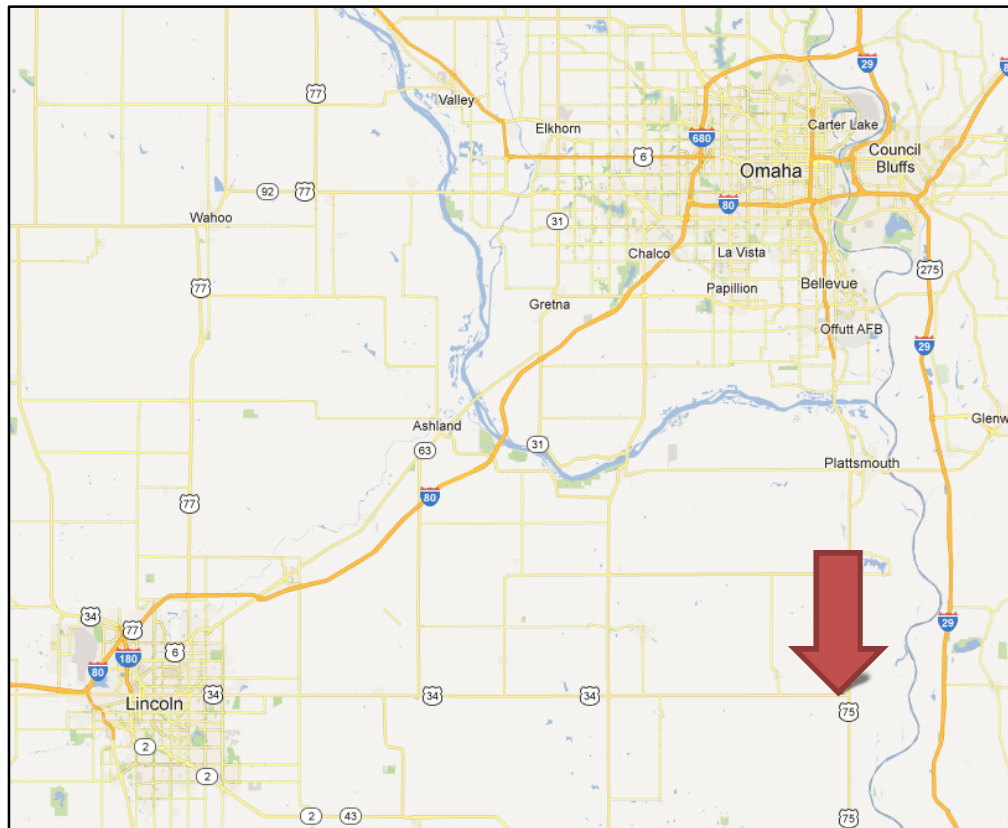
The final goal of my work is to not only graduate with a Master's Degree in Regional and Community Planning through the College of Architecture, Planning and Design at Kansas State University, but also to impact the town of Union, Nebraska in a positive and lasting way. I am truly pleased to be able to produce something that could improve the quality of life in a realistic way for a real community. If I can use this project to make any positive influence in a community, then I have succeeded.

CHAPTER II: INTRODUCTION TO UNION, NEBRASKA

II. Introduction to Union, Nebraska

Union was first introduced to our group through our major professor, Huston Gibson. Professor Gibson had met with community members for a workshop during the summer and recognized the desire that citizens of Union had for revitalization of their hometown. He informed us that Union was a small town of less than 300 people, located between Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska (see Figure 2.1).

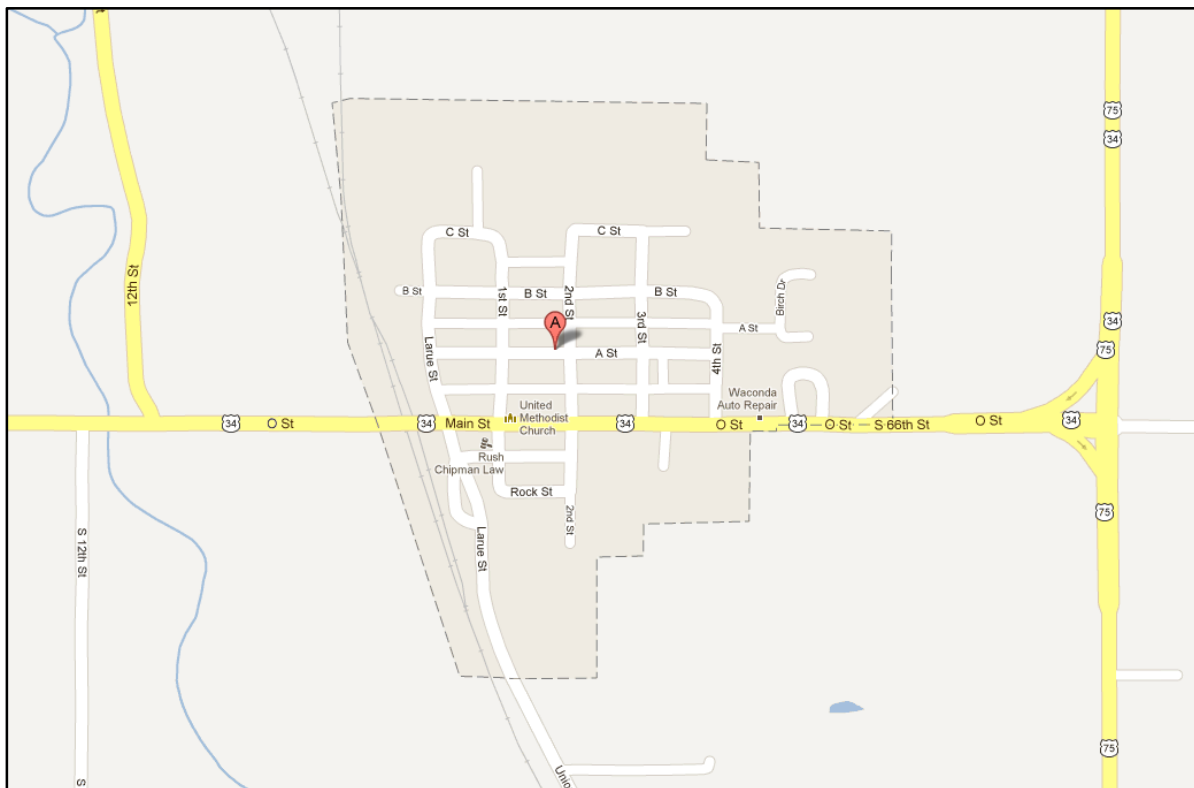
Figure 2.1: Location of Union, Nebraska (Google Maps, 2012).



Due to Union's small size, the village does not have direct access to local planning practices. Professor Gibson proposed that we could use Union as a feasible model for which to demonstrate a planning project. One other planning student and I agreed to take on the challenge of planning for revitalizing Union. Each student is choosing a different aspect to drive their project. The students working with Union will also be working with the Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) program through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). TAB is offering funding for our research because the town has been impacted by a significant number of potential brownfields. TAB offers support to the brownfield sites in the redevelopment process.

Figure 2.2 displays the size of Union. The town is mostly formed by a grid-like pattern and consists of a handful of streets. The majority of the buildings in Union are used as residences. Potential brownfields include several buildings on and near Main Street and the railway property. Because of the possibility of brownfields in Union, TAB and the EPA are interested in revitalizing Union as well. TAB will play a key role in making research options feasible for me throughout my project by providing funding as needed for site visits. Union is roughly three hours away from Manhattan, Kansas. Visiting Union will be very important to the project since it is the focus of my efforts to create a realistic planning strategy to revitalize and unify the town.

Figure 2.2: Map of Union, Nebraska (Google Maps, 2012).



Upon further analysis, I was curious to know how Union compared size-wise to other places. In order to compare the size of the locations accurately, I used the same scale through Google Maps in different locations. I began with seeing how it compared to Kansas State University.

Figure 2.3: Comparison of Kansas State University to Union, Nebraska (Google Maps, 2013).

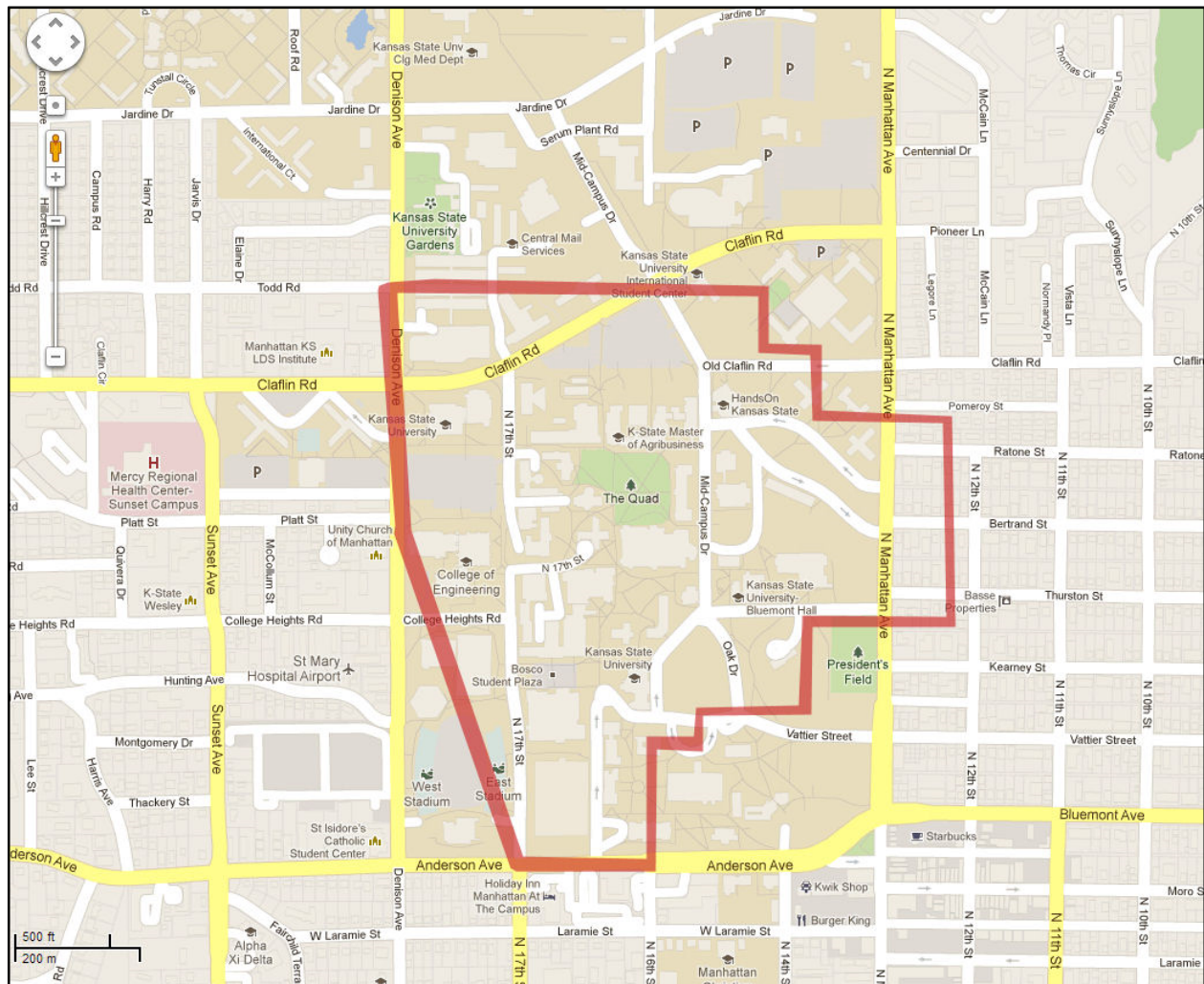


Figure 2.3 shows Union, Nebraska as a red-toned boundary overlay over the core campus of Kansas State University. Union is roughly the same size as the main part of campus, located between the quadrant of Claflin Avenue, Manhattan Avenue, Anderson Avenue, and Denison Avenue.

This map shows the Pentagon area in Arlington, Virginia. The Pentagon building is highlighted with a red outline. Major roads include S Washington Blvd, S Joyce St, S Lynn St, and S Eads St. Landmarks such as the Pentagon 911 Memorial, Pentagon Center Courtyard, and Pentagon Force Protection Agency are labeled. The map also shows the Pentagon City T1c Minicampus and the Pentagon City T1c Minicampus. A scale bar indicates 500 ft and 200 m.

Understanding the scale of Union is important because people need to realize the potential that this small community could have from implementing new planning practices. Many people pass through Union each day, and if Union offered more amenities to travelers, the town could benefit from the commerce and be able to grow and prosper in new ways.

CHAPTER III: PAST

III. Past

a. History

Union was originally settled as Factoryville and was located to the southwest of present-day Union. According to the Union website, "In 1890, when the enterprising Missouri Pacific Railroad started laying a line northward to Omaha, the village of "Union" was established. It was this junction or "union of the two rail lines" that gave our town its name" (Unionnebraska.com, 2012). In 1892, Cass County commissioners gave approval for the village to be established. By the mid-1890s, eight passenger trains passed through Union daily. "With easy access and the many daily freight trains, Union became a busy shipping point for area farmers to the larger grain and livestock markets. It is a certainty that the growth and permanence of the town at that time, as well as today, is due to the stable elevator system that has been in operation over the years" (Unionnebraska.com, 2012).

Union's Main Street became a popular commercial district near the beginning of the 20th century. Originally there were three general stores, a hardware store, drug store, and furniture included on Main Street. There was also the Union Bank and a millinery shop. The first newspaper, "The Union Ledger," was started in 1888 by William Todd.

Union was also home to a school. "The contract for building a schoolhouse was let to D.W. Foster in 1889 at a cost of \$2,747. That building burned in 1912 and was replaced with a large brick structure in time for the fall term. Sports were always popular in Union's school. The Union district merged with the Nebraska City school system in 1956" (Unionnebraska.com, 2012). The school is now in disrepair and is no longer used. The businesses on Main Street have been affected by fire multiple times, which has led to several rebuilds. There has also been major flooding in Union that destroyed much of the area near the current park.

Union embraces their current diverse community. "'Home in the Heartland" is a motto that very accurately describes what Union, Nebraska is about. Old-fashioned values, strong family, and neighbors one can rely on. Union is fortunate to have residents of all ages and backgrounds, as well as singles, young couples and families to diversify our community. Union has many life-long residents, whose families have made Union their home for generations. The wealth of history, knowledge and community spirit that these residents provide is an invaluable asset that cannot be duplicated. Drawn by the

excellent location and the small town way of life, many younger families have made Union their home. These newer residents bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm to making a difference in the community. The combination of new and old residents allow community members to work together at all levels to preserve our small town traditions while at the same time enabling positive change” (Unionnebraska.com, 2012).

In past decades, Union was a thriving place for business and education. Due to changing economic conditions and complications with nature, much of the small town has been impacted negatively and few businesses remain.

CHAPTER IV: PRESENT

IV. Present

a. Vision

During the summer of 2012, the community created a vision statement to guide the future of their town. The vision was formed during a community workshop session with Professor Huston Gibson.

The Village of Union shall move forward while honoring its history by involving our community and rural neighbors in becoming an attractive, self-promoting, clean, safe and secure community for people and business. We will provide basic and innovative public amenities and services that support the environment, our community and surrounding area. We will focus on economic development to support our region through providing reliable and sustainable infrastructure, with a well-maintained street system for vehicles and pedestrians. We will provide family-oriented programs and opportunities for play, affordable housing options, and local attractions, while cultivating a healthy environment. Through this Vision, together we will preserve our cultural and natural heritage in Nebraska, while providing opportunities for our future (Unionnebraska.com, 2012).

My project focuses on important aspects that coincide with what is outlined in Union's vision. Below I have highlighted the key parts of the vision statement that I am basing my efforts on:

*The Village of Union shall move forward while honoring its history by **involving our community and rural neighbors** in becoming an attractive, self-promoting, clean, safe and secure community for people and business. We will provide basic and innovative **public amenities and services that support the environment, our community and surrounding area**. We will focus on economic development to support our region through providing **reliable and sustainable infrastructure**, with a well-maintained street system for vehicles and pedestrians. We will provide **family-oriented programs and opportunities for play**, affordable housing options, and **local attractions**, while **cultivating a healthy environment**. Through this Vision, together we will preserve our cultural and natural heritage in Nebraska, while providing opportunities for our future (Unionnebraska.com, 2012).*

b. Conditions

I worked with Union, Nebraska on primarily a social level, but also partially economically and environmentally through brownfield remediation. The members of the community who work are primarily commuters by day and residents by night. Union has few amenities for its people, and my project will strive to offer a solution to the needs and desires of community members.

Much of Union is in need of rehabilitation and revitalization. The town has good bones per say, but many structures are in disrepair and are not safe to occupy. Many properties are in disarray and have not been properly cared for. Figure 4.1 shows an example of the lack of aesthetic quality near the town's prized caboose on the west end of Main Street.

Figure 4.1: The Caboose's Lot Condition in Union, Nebraska.



Union has a deficiency of community amenities. I propose to create a plan for Union that provides many uses within one central structure. This building can provide many items on their community's wish list, which was discussed at the visioning workshop in August 2012. Amenities that the community voiced desire for included:

- public restrooms
- a visitor center/historical information display
- a place to display their prized caboose
- indoor and outdoor community gathering space
- a small restaurant or café
- office space for potential city governmental use
- an exercise equipment space/gym

Figure 4.2: Current Village Office of Union, Nebraska (Unionnebraska.com, 2012).



Figure 4.2 shows an image of the current Village Office in Union, Nebraska. It looks more like a storage unit than a formal community office space. If I were to implement a multi-functional building that included office space for town employees, then the town would have a more identifiable community gathering space for both work and play.

This idea of a multi-functional structure would heighten the quality of life in their community because it would create a home to many of their desired amenities. By creating a structure that encompasses many amenities, its uses can bring the community together and generate a sense of place within the area.

The addition of the structure would also potentially bring more jobs to the city government as well as to the possible restaurant or café. The structure could be on a brownfield site and revitalize that area through the help of TAB. The site will be easily accessible since Union is located directly on a major highway that has thousands of daily travelers.

c. Population

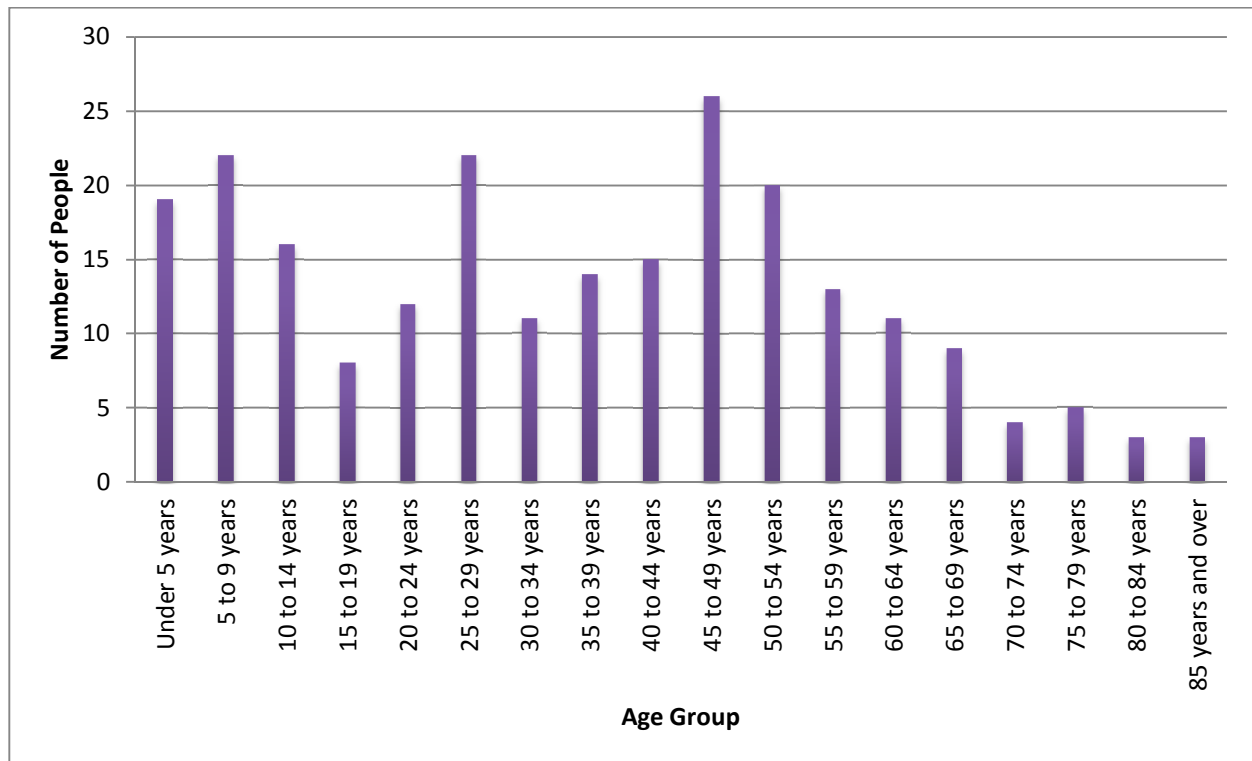
The total population is 233 as of 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2013). Table 4.1 shows the population in Union by age group. The median age is 36.1 years old. The male population makes up 129 of the 233 residents, while 104 are female. Racially, 225 people are white, one is American Indian and Alaska Native, one is Asian, three identify with some other race, and three identify with two or more races.

There are 91 total households according to the US Census Bureau. The average household size is 2.56 people. There are 105 total housing units in Union.

Table 4.1: Population by Age Group in Union, Nebraska (US Census Bureau, 2013).

Age Group	Number of People
Under 5 years	19
5 to 9 years	22
10 to 14 years	16
15 to 19 years	8
20 to 24 years	12
25 to 29 years	22
30 to 34 years	11
35 to 39 years	14
40 to 44 years	15
45 to 49 years	26
50 to 54 years	20
55 to 59 years	13
60 to 64 years	11
65 to 69 years	9
70 to 74 years	4
75 to 79 years	5
80 to 84 years	3
85 years and over	3

Figure 4.3: Chart of Population by Age Group (US Census Bureau, 2013).



The chart shown in Figure 4.3 provides a visual of the age group distribution within Union. The majority young age range is from 0-14 years old, while the older majority age range is from age 45-54.

d. Quality of Life

The driving force behind my master's project is improving quality of life. I define quality of life as the measure of well-being within a place. The well-being feeling can come from happiness, health, safety, or a number of forces depending on the individual's values. In Union specifically, quality of life has many meanings to each community member. I want to boost the quality of life at a community level rather than just individually through a successful planning technique that brings a multi-functional purpose to the community. Union currently has many areas that could be improved upon to achieve a greater quality of life. Some of these areas include rehabilitating Main Street, making streets and sidewalks safer for travel, updating playground equipment to meet safety and educational standards, and cultivating a greater sense of pride within the community.

e. Stakeholders

The stakeholders identified in my project are the citizens of Union, Nebraska, the passersby through Union, Union United, people that live outside Union in more rural areas, Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the other students working with Union through Master's Projects and class projects.

The community is important to recognize because they will be the group that is directly impacted by the conclusion of the project that I am preparing. Union United is a non-profit group whose mission is to "solidify the future of Union by restoring a sense of community and providing a place where residents are proud to call home." Union United is an important stakeholder because it is comprised of a group that cares immensely about the well-being of their community.

TAB and the EPA are stakeholders because they are providing resources for my project and are involved in the outcome of my project. They could possibly help Union compete for funding to complete projects proposed by my umbrella topic group. The other students in my group are stakeholders because we are working in conjunction to develop related yet unique strategies for Union to become more sustainable for the future. By creating projects that work together like puzzle pieces, we are tackling many issues at once.

CHAPTER V: DILEMMA

V. Dilemma

Union, Nebraska is a small, rural town that lacks amenities and commercial purpose. At its present state, Union is mostly what one would classify as a “bedroom community” because most of the residents go to work, school, or activities in places other than Union and primarily use their residences for their bedrooms. While a generalization, the reality is that Union currently does not have many amenities for the community to utilize for entertainment or revenue. The principal task for my project for Union is providing a feasible planning solution that addresses the lack of community amenities and improves the quality of life for the people living and visiting the area. My project will aim to offer a foundation for Union to begin looking into ways that it can make sustainable improvements to the community. The project can also demonstrate the use of planning strategies for small towns in general and could be regarded by other similar communities.

The dilemmas that Union faces are based on politics, initiative, size, and resources. Some members of Union are excited to see change and revitalization in their community, while some prefer to keep Union unchanged. With many planning dilemmas, politics play an important role in moving the community forward. My planning strategy is driven by data from community input and survey. The implementation of a multi-functional structure will become a realistic approach for the town to use that accounts for many requested improvements. Small towns like Union often lack strong government of their own and therefore the power to easily make necessary changes. Because small towns have many outlets to go through to get things accomplished, they often lack initiative to make change. By offering a solid concept, my project could essentially “get the ball rolling” on future change in Union.

Spatially, finding a promising site for my multi-functional structure concept and integrating the various desired amenities to the concept will be an important component of my project. Because of the small overall area of Union there is limited space that is appropriate for the site. Determining the best possible location for the multi-functional structure will require in-depth analysis of sites along Main Street as well as considering other possible areas to locate that are not directly on Main Street.

Union is also concerned with the funding for proposed improvements. Later in this document, I will identify possible funding opportunities for suggested changes. One major initial funding opportunity for Union would be securing funding for Brownfield Assessment/Cleanup Grants. The Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) is a national program that is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

that assists communities by providing direction throughout the brownfields process by methods of identifying a plan for remediation, finding funding sources, aiding in community involvement strategies, and helping support communities with knowledge about brownfields and the route to cleanup. Unlike my individual project, TAB can continue to guide Union long-term through the ongoing process of brownfield remediation once a plan is put into action.

The opportunity to work with Union is both rewarding and challenging. Having a real town that needs aid in the form of planning strategies is much more fulfilling than having a fictional conceptualization of a place with a typical planning problem. Forming a feasible vision for a real community will have the potential to make a difference in people's lives. While the aspect of reality in my project is exciting, it also presents its own challenges. The actuality of the subject makes it difficult in the sense that the project must have conceivable objectives and outcomes.

a. Research Question

How can I use planning to provide a multi-functional sustainable community amenity that will have a positive effect on the quality of life for the citizens in Union, Nebraska?

b. Boundaries

The boundaries of my project are relatively straightforward. As seen previously in Figure 2.2, the geographical boundaries of Union are well defined and the area overall is small. A major task with my project will be to define a site within Union for my proposed multi-functional structure.

Theoretically, my boundaries lie within what is feasible to conceptualize within the timeframe of my Master's Project. I will develop a complete analysis of my findings for the people of Union to be presented with at the conclusion of my work.

c. Unknowns

The major unknown is if the Village of Union will actually be able to proceed with what my document proposes based on my research. To ensure the least amount of unknowns within the project, I created a survey that was distributed throughout Union for community members to voice their opinions on the

conditions of the town. The people that chose not to respond to the survey are considered part of the unknown opinion. The survey is discussed in a later section of this document.

d. Relevance to Planning

My project is relevant to planning practices because it offers planning strategies to the community. Members of the community have voiced a concern for various needs of improvement, and my project will address some of those needs. The multi-functional structure will also provide office space for community officials and, therefore, present the community with a formal governmental structure. Because it is a multipurpose structure, it can be seen as an amenity that the entire community can use for public space and gatherings.

Planners strive to improve the public space and available amenities for citizens. By creating these new places and spaces, the people of Union will muster a greater sense of community and a higher quality of life. My project will contribute to planning by offering a study of rural revitalization through the objectives of brownfield remediation and sustainable community amenities. If my proposed plan for Union is carried through, it would be beneficial to study the effects that the multi-functional structure has on the town. Planners typically see the big picture of a comprehensive plan. I am trying to take a step back and start small. Sometimes small towns need small plans. In Union's case, they also need small changes to ease the residents into the new ideas because people don't generally like outsiders to come and change their environment. Because of this, interviewing and public involvement strategies will be necessary to gain the approval and trust of the people in the Union community.

CHAPTER VI: LITERATURE REVIEW

VI. Literature Review

a. Quality of Life

In one article, Luiz D’agostini wrote about the correlation between quality of life and how it is very subjective. “In the last decades, large amount of effort and resources have been spent in projects and programs aiming to develop rural communities” (D’agostini, 2008, p. 1). The ultimate goals of these projects and programs have been to improve the quality of life for the members of the community.

A common problem is often defining exactly what quality of life is because it has different meaning to different people. “Because quality of life is such a subjective notion, improving people’s living condition does not necessarily result in an increase on their satisfaction. What living conditions are more likely to promote good quality of life vary, certainly, from individual to individual, a fact itself that challenges project planners. However, as far as the goal of a community or regional development program is concerned, more important than recognizing this fact is to promote the conditions that are collectively perceived as important to the human satisfaction” (D’agostini, 2008, p. 488).

b. Community Psychology

When first thinking about community, I had a hard time defining exactly what community is. I decided that “community” can be defined as “the perception of belonging within a group that identifies with a specific place.” By 1955 sociologists had over 90 definitions for their idea of community. The only point of agreement between the sociologists was that communities consisted of people (Lyon, 1987). As history tells, defining “community” seems to be a daunting task itself, let alone trying to measure the value of it.

The most prominent idea in studying a sense of community is the aspect of psychology. Researchers want to know how the people perceive the areas in which they reside and what is important to them. When choosing a place to live, people consider many aspects, such as safety, environment, accessibility, and location. In order to find the value of these topics, a researcher must delve deep into the emotional ties of importance that people have when choosing their place of residence.

Many believe that the sense of community in places has decreased over time. Researchers have tried to study the truth in this. Theorists blame issues like industrialization, loss of local self-sufficiency, large-scale bureaucracies, and changing cultural patterns for the decline in sense of community. Our culture, both in the United States and all around the world, is constantly changing and adapting to mobility, privacy, and convenience, and with those changes sometimes the basic values of places and spaces are forgotten.

Jane Jacobs (1961) believed that residents in mixed-use neighborhoods have more social interaction, and, therefore, a greater sense of community than those in single-use neighborhoods. It will be interesting to test Jacobs's idea of mixed-use neighborhoods having a higher sense of community. If the mixed-use neighborhoods truly showed a stronger sense of community and social interaction, then planners may consider implementing more mixed-use neighborhoods if they desire to increase the strength of the community in their area. People who want more local social interaction will gravitate toward these mixed-use areas while people seeking privacy tend to choose single-use areas. Design does not directly influence the interactions and the community; it only attracts people with certain desires and perceptions of these types of areas (Jacobs, 1961). Mixed use neighborhoods are areas that are composed of both residential and commercial spaces. By using the two together, it creates a more diverse and walkable community.

Understanding the mental processes through which people associate attachment to community are important to planners because we must consider these feelings when designing successful places and spaces. The mental conceptualization of the community often is related to the term space, while the actual physical association is related to the term place.

c. Rural Development

In an article from *Amenities and Rural Development*, it is mentioned that research has concluded that “creating attractions to rural life can result in increasing populations and sustainable development, primarily by building economies based on promoting environmental quality” (Amenities, 2006, p. 12). Research shows that “rural areas characterized by high levels of natural amenities continue to experience relatively greater population growth than areas lacking desirable natural contexts” (Hunter, 2005, p. 452). Since the amenities that I am proposing are not natural or environmental amenities,

population growth may not necessarily occur because of the implementation of a newly constructed amenity.

“As America becomes more urban the resources that rural areas offer, like open space, natural amenities, and “small town values,” become more valuable. Increasingly, people appear to be placing greater value on natural resource-based amenities and related attributes that contribute to regional quality of life” (Deller, 2001, p. 352). Many studies have documented that quality of life has an increasingly important role in the community’s economic growth. Literature-wise, the articles I found related to rural amenities were mostly composed of material covering natural amenities rather than planned community amenities such as the structure I am proposing through my project.

d. Economic Development

As noted in a similar rural region, “Descriptive data and qualitative research with artists, planners, and residents of Chatham County, North Carolina, suggest that, in terms of sustainability, creative economic development projects can be more effective as economic strategies than as environmental and social justice strategies” (Fleming, 2009, p. 61). This author suggests that arts can be used to promote economics in rural areas. This has made me expand upon my vision for the town hall structure in that arts can be incorporated into the design scheme. Local people can contribute art in forms of sculpture or paintings as examples. The historic monuments in Union will also likely be incorporated into the plans for the structure.

“Rural communities are at a competitive disadvantage economically; their capacity to respond is limited. Rural governments are organizationally less sophisticated, have fewer leadership skills, less access to resources, and have less access to training and technical support” (Reed, 1993, p. 7). This is much like Union’s governmental situation. There is a minimal amount of government and it seems to be a long and complex process to get large projects for the city completed since projects must go through several hands in other areas. The city clerk is in charge of all actions within Union and much of her job entails involvement with other government members outside Union.

CHAPTER VII: SITE VISITS

VII. Site Visits

a. October 2012

After the almost three hour journey from Manhattan, Kansas down two-lane highways through rural Nebraska, we came upon Union. The three planning students studying Union and Professor Gibson arrived for the initial visit to Union around 10:30am on Monday, October 8, 2012. As expected from prior information, we saw for ourselves that Union is without many common staples: public restrooms (with the exception of the restroom in the park, which is usually locked), a place to get a soda or a meal, and common indoor community space.

Figure 7.1 shows the railroad tracks that vehicles cross to enter Union from the west as we did. This stretch is considered part of their main street since it flows right through the center of their town. This street is Highway 34 as well as Union's Main Street. Although no cars are present at the time of the photo being taken, there was plenty of traffic constantly driving down Main Street. There are no traffic calming devices in use to deter traffic speeds other than the railroad tracks. Vehicles speed through the main street well above the posted speed limit.

Figure 7.1: Highway 34 coming into Union, Nebraska from the west.



As we wandered in our group throughout the small town, we got a feel for the condition and functionality of the place. Union seems to me like what I think of as a “drive-through” town: its sole

purpose to most people is just another stretch of road to pass on the way to their destination. Union itself is not the destination for people other than the residents. Because of this, we were outsiders and we were instantly noticed by the locals, although many locals had heard about our projects through the grapevine already.

I noted that the town was very easily walkable, yet there was no pedestrian activity on any of the streets. We did witness one person swinging at the park. This is likely because it was mid-day on a Monday when children are in classes and adults are at work. The local children do not have a school to attend in Union; instead they choose a school in a surrounding town to attend. The adults do not seem to work in Union because there are few businesses.

Figure 7.2 shows a view looking west down the majority of Union's Main Street. Many of the buildings on either side of the street are not in use because they are dilapidated. Some old commercial buildings are now used for storage or have been converted to apartments.

Figure 7.2: Extended view looking west down Main Street in Union, Nebraska.



The only operable businesses on Main Street are a barber shop, a bank (which is only open a select few hours on one day of the week), and a law office. A new bar is set to open in November 2012 which will give the people of Union a place where they can have food and drinks without leaving town.

While walking down Main Street, the condition of the buildings is apparent. It seems as though the buildings were just left to deteriorate. The structures are unsafe and even the sidewalk is in disrepair (see Figure 7.3). The sidewalk is actually so sloped in places that it is difficult to walk on. Parts of the sidewalk are cracked and have gaps. There are steps that don't quite make sense (see Figure 7.4). It would be very difficult to get a wheelchair down these sidewalks in their current condition.

Figure 7.3: Sloped and dilapidated sidewalk down Main Street in Union, Nebraska.



Figure 7.4: Another sidewalk on Main Street in Union, Nebraska.



Figure 7.5: A typical building along Main Street in Union, Nebraska.



Figure 7.5 shows a picture of one of the many buildings in poor condition on Main Street. I could tell that it was in bad shape from the outside, but then I saw the opening in the boarded-up door (shown with red circle) and curiously aimed my camera through the hole. Figure 7.6 is what is inside this building. It seems as though the building is serving as storage area for the tractor. It almost looks as though the building is collapsing around the tractor. We couldn't see inside many other buildings, but people that we talked to in the town said that this condition was common among the Main Street buildings

Figure 7.6: Interior of building seen in Figure 7.5.



A resident who goes by the name “Wild Bill” owns many of the buildings on Main Street as well as the old school. The residents told our group that Wild Bill is a notorious hoarder who also runs an excavating business. He uses the old buildings around town to store his possessions. The school (see Figure 7.7) is in such bad condition that it is being held up by hydraulics on one side. The grounds surrounding the

school are overgrown and covered in Wild Bill's materials. Supposedly the entire interior of the school acts as his personal storage shed. We were told that it is unsafe to enter the school because of the condition of the structure and the amount of clutter inside. Currently Union and Wild Bill are undergoing a lawsuit in relation to the cleanup of his properties. It has been ruled that he must clean his properties, but an appeal is forming.

Figure 7.7: The old schoolhouse in Union, Nebraska.



The school closed in the 1950s when Union's school merged with Nebraska City's schools. The school has not been in use since then and is in obvious disrepair. Although the school is not known to be a historic building, Union does have one building listed on the historic registry: an old jail (see Figure 7.8). The jail was used decades ago as a holding cell until county officials could transport the criminal to a larger county jail. This jail is something unique to Union and needs to be restored and preserved as a landmark.

Figure 7.8: The historic old jail in Union, Nebraska.



Keeping the character and ideals of Union will be essential to developing planning strategies that will be successful and sustainable. Revitalizing existing landmarks, such as the jail (Figure 7.8) or the signature red caboose (Figure 7.9, 7.10 and 7.11), will boost the community's morale and sense of pride for these unique places. The end result of the project is to improve the quality of life for Union community members, strengthen the sense of community, and provide a plan for a sustainable community amenity that could be implemented.

Figure 7.9: The Old Caboose (Unionnebraska.com, 2012).



Figure 7.9 shows a picture from the Union, Nebraska website. Figure 7.10 is a photo of the same caboose that I took when I visited Union on October 8, 2012. Union residents used to decorate the old caboose for Halloween festivities. It currently needs some refurbishing on both the interior (see Figure 7.11) and the exterior.

Figure 7.10: The Old Caboose from the exterior in as seen on our visit.



Figure 7.11: An interior view of the caboose in Union, Nebraska.



Other areas we visited in Union were the residential streets, two local church sites, two parks, and the current Village Office (Figure 4.2). We also ventured to a few surrounding areas to get a feel for the local environment. We drove to the nearest gas station, which is located on the way to Nebraska City a few miles out of Union to the southeast. We then drove to Lake Waconda, a popular spot for recreation and vacation. The lake was lined all the way around with quaint lake homes. The lake itself seemed to be more of a canal or a pond than a lake. It was ideal size for jet skiers, but large boats would have no place at this body of water.

We headed back through Union and then to the west down Highway 34 to Nehawka to see what the neighboring town was like. Nehawka had a few different restaurant establishments and seemed to be in

better condition overall than Union. Nehawka is also a few miles north of Highway 34, which gives it distance from the main traffic hub. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Union has a potential economic advantage by being so accessible because of its direct association between Main Street and Highway 34. Nehawka may have a more connected and exclusive feel to its residents because of its location off of the main road.

Overall, much was observed and learned from the initial visit. Union has a lot of potential because of its valuable location between major cities; it just needs to give passersby a reason to stop.

b. February 2013

On February 9, 2013 I visited Union with my State and Local Economic Development Policy (PLAN699A) class. This class is also studying Union and working to provide economic development strategies that would be best suited for the town. While visiting Union this time, I wanted to make note of the park areas. The current park area has a small play area with some outdated (and notably unsafe) structures, a pavilion, concession stand, and a baseball field that has had some recent renovations. Figure 7.12 shows the pavilion and concession stand. The concession stand is also home to a restroom, but is usually locked.

Figure 7.12: The Pavilion and Concession Stand at the Park in Union, Nebraska.



Figure 7.13 shows the baseball field view from the pavilion. It has been approved to use for tournaments following regrading and a few more updates. The dugouts were recently rebuilt.

Figure 7.13: The Baseball Field in Union, Nebraska.



There is a second small park located in the east neighborhood of Union. This park has a few structures that appear in good condition. This cul-de-sac was alive with the presence of children but no children were found playing at the park this day.

Figure 7.14: The Small Park in the East Neighborhood in Union, Nebraska.



Overall, Union has provided the community with some public park amenities but it seems that they need some updating to meet safety standards. If these spaces were fully updated and utilized, then the community would have a better place to play.

c. March 2013

I visited Union for a third time on March 2, 2013 to distribute community surveys door-to-door. While I was there I talked to the city clerk, Melissa Hansen, about the Methodist Church in Union. The Union United Methodist Church is seen in Figure 7.15 below.

Figure 7.15: The Union United Methodist Church in Union, Nebraska.



Melissa noted that the church has planned to be used as a community center. The sign outside the church reads “Union Community Center Coming Soon” and lists a phone number for inquiries. With the church being used as an initial location for the community center that the citizens have been yearning for, Union can begin to get the community to support further efforts to create more community amenities. This building can also be used to develop an understanding for the needs of the community and the frequency in which they use the amenities available at the community center.

CHAPTER VIII: METHODOLOGY

VIII. Methodology

a. Survey Development

The methods used to gain knowledge about Union are very valuable to my project. I cannot create a sustainable community amenity without the support of the community. I chose to create a survey that I would pass out to community members door-to-door. By completing a survey, community members will be able to voice their opinions about their community. Any and all information that community members are willing to give us will help me in determining the best ways to accommodate the needs of Union as a whole. Upon completion of development, the survey had to be processed through the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The letter of review is attached in the Appendix section. The survey component created can be found in the Appendix section of this document.

More site visits had to be conducted to not only collect survey results but to refine knowledge and importance of materials covered on the survey. Letting the community be involved in our work will strengthen our projects as well as help to unify the community in their vision for the future of Union.

b. Survey Distribution

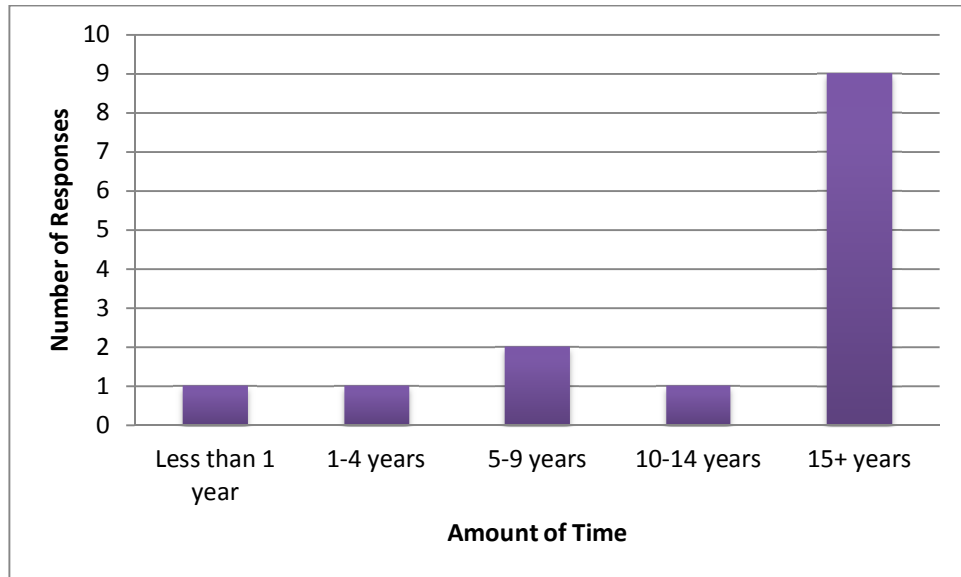
Surveys were distributed door-to-door on Saturday, March 2, 2013. Seventy copies of the survey were handed out throughout the afternoon, one per household. The majority of residents were not home or did not answer the door and the survey was left in their door where it was easily accessible upon return. Residents that answered the door, with the exception of three people, chose to take a survey and seemed agreeable when asked to complete it within the week. The accompanying cover letter (see Appendix) instructed the survey-taker to complete it by 1pm the following Saturday, March 9, 2013, and return it to Melissa Hansen at the City Clerk's Office. Melissa agreed to collect the surveys and mail them to me during the following week to allow for time for proper analysis.

c. Survey Collection and Results

A total of 14 households completed and returned the survey, earning a 20% household response rate. Although there was not as high of a response rate as I would have hoped, there is still much to be learned from the surveys that were received.

i. How long have you lived in Union, Nebraska?

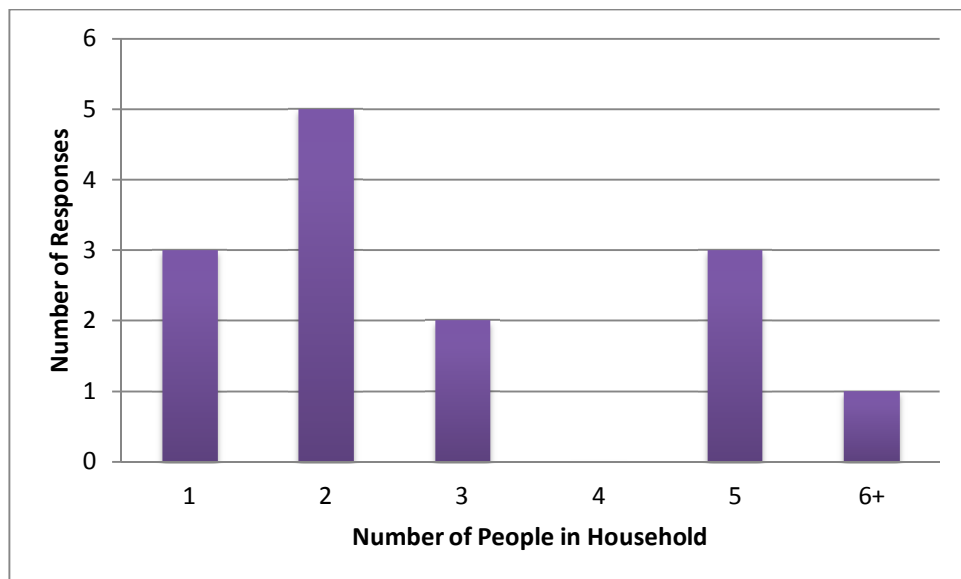
Figure 8.1: Chart of Responses to Length of Residency.



As Figure 8.1 shows, the majority of survey takers were long-time residents of Union. This may indicate that these residents show greater concern with the future of the town since their participation rate was high.

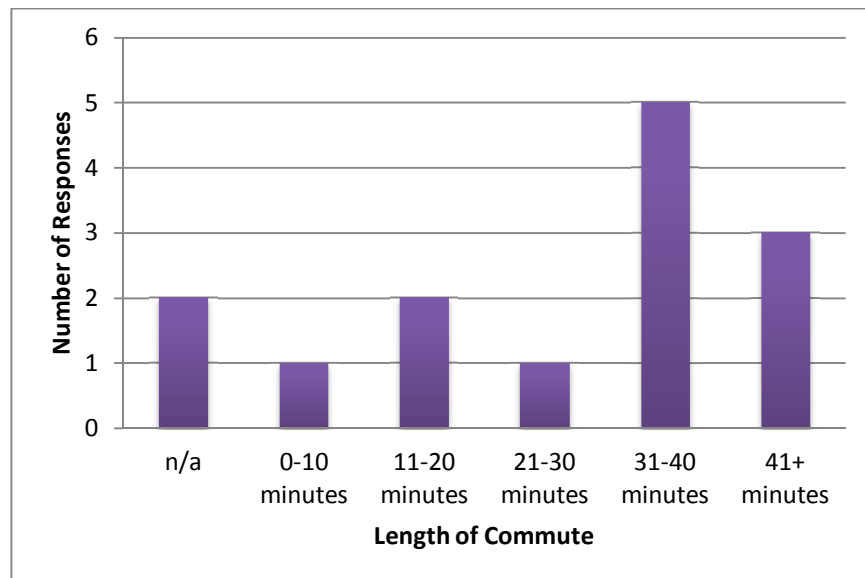
ii. How many people are in your household?

Figure 8.2: Chart of Responses to Number of People in Household.



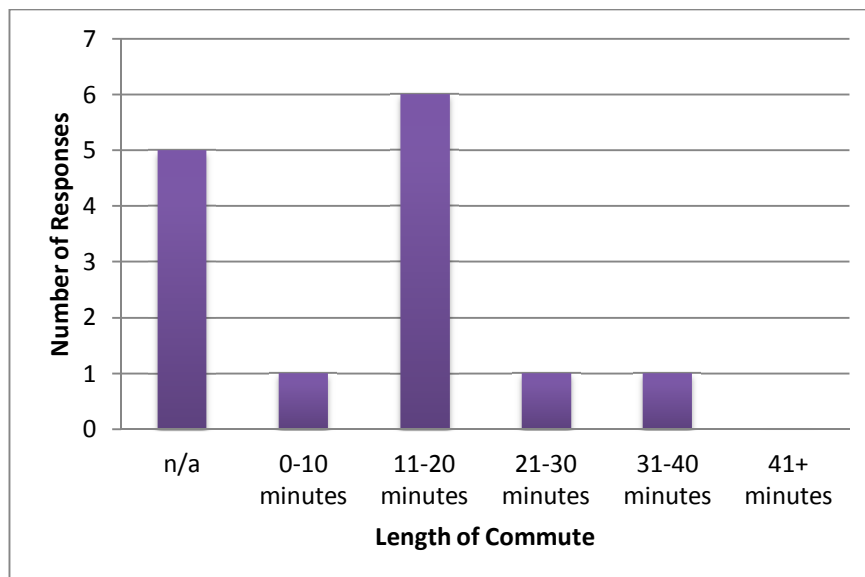
iii. How long is the commute to your job?

Figure 8.3: Chart of Responses to Employment Commute.



iv. How long is your commute to school?

Figure 8.4: Chart of Responses to School Commute.



The commute times for work are generally greater than the commute to schools. Children in the area have a couple of public school options outside town but can choose which school they would like to

attend. Non-applicable responses likely denote retired or unemployed in Figure 8.3, while it probably means homeschooled or no children in the household in Figure 8.4.

v. How do you define community?

Table 8.1: Responses of Community Definitions.

Group of people that come together because of common interests and concerns, working together for the group's benefit
A place where people are family. Friends and family
A group of citizens living in a common demographic area with common goals for their families
People looking out for each other
Where people live
The town is getting better
Our town (as a whole)
Neighboring, caring, communication, purposeful
A place where you can raise a family, enjoy life and neighbors
A small town where people work together
Community is a group of people who live, work, or play together. It means, basically people who share a general space.
A group of residents in common living conditions that work together. It means, to me, a group with common interest in making local lives better.
Community provides services as well as opportunities for service. Community members are a part of the greater good.

Overall, the survey participants had similar definitions of community. The main consensus was that community can be defined as a group of people in a common place with common goals that treat neighbors in the community with kindness and respect.

vi. What is the most important factor in choosing a place to live?

Table 8.2: Responses to Most Important Factor in Choosing a Place to Live.

I have to love the house
Children, safety
Affordable housing
Friendliness, safety
Comfortable living at a cost I can afford
Cost, taxes, what is has to offer my children
Quiet, school
Neighbors, safe, neat, respecting others property
Being away from the busy big city. Like the slower, quieter atmosphere
Good water, sewer and electrical
Reasonable utilities
Quality of life

Although there were a variety of answers to factors that determine choosing a place to live, some key concepts were safety, respect, atmosphere, amenities for children, and quality of life.

vii. What do you like most about your community?

Table 8.3: Responses of What Residents Like Most About Their Community.

Our group works hard
Nothing
The small town feel
Neighbors
Neighbors
Small town atmosphere
Mostly people and that we have a nice ball park that we need to keep nice and use it for our kids.
My community was a great place to raise my family - now - ?
Being away from the busy big city. Like the slower, quieter atmosphere; my neighbors
Very seldom have a power outage
The people
It's quiet
"Small town" living - rural but close to metro areas

The majority of responses concluded that residents enjoy the small town feel of Union. They also like the neighbors and members in the community. It is important in future planning techniques to keep the small town atmosphere intact.

viii. What do you like least about your community?

Table 8.4: Responses to What Residents Like Least About Their Community.

The level of involvement is not impressive
Falling down buildings, yards not kept
The strong divide between long-time residents and newer residents
Looks run down. People live (sleep) here and don't get involved with other
Taxes way too high
Need more money for park equipment, etc.
That we don't have any businesses or stores
The come and go renters that don't care about the mess they have - some owners too
The people that argue with each other about whatever. Don't get between any of it
Bullies
We have a "don't judge a book by its cover" sort of village. Driving through on Main Street, it appears the place has nothing to offer. Few businesses and a rundown look are what people see.
There are no businesses in this community
Unsafe and unsightly conditions

Surveyed residents are concerned with hazardous building conditions, properties that are not well-kept, the shortage of commercial businesses, the lack of involvement from community members, and disagreements between some community members.

ix. What improvements can be made?

This question includes responses in regard to general improvements, improvements for children, and improvements for elderly community members.

Table 8.5: Responses to Improvements that can be made in Union.

OVERALL IMPROVEMENTS
Activities to bring more of us together
More for seniors
Regular community events, newsletters
Events without drinking
Cut taxes in the whole state and more so in Union
More people getting involved
Get the parks updated and help Main Street more attractive
Main Street improvement, trash cans removed from street side of houses - respect
All ready connected
Less lawsuits, more communication one on one
I think that the more places on Main Street open up, it will present opportunities for more people to meet and connect.
Maybe if there were more businesses you would meet more people in the village. Also, more town meetings.
Improve unsafe and unsightly conditions
IMPROVEMENTS FOR CHILDREN
New playground equipment with a nature or educational theme
Already like the progress
Community center with activities
Some safe place to play. Organized sports
Union to have its own school
More sports activities, playground equipment
Parks and ball park - lights fixed and field
Some type of community center like a Rec Center with a gym, or something similar

Make their parents responsible
The parks need to be updated to meet safety standards
Having a learning/activity center
Clean up and provide safe places for children to play, gather, etc.
IMPROVEMENTS FOR ELDERLY
More transportation services, safer walkways and community activities they would enjoy
Community center - bingo, cards, coffee
Affordable housing/assisted living, outreach programs for volunteers to help seniors with everyday activities, transport
Help in home - yard, meals
A doctor (good young one)
Not sure
Have a big enough place to have meetings (hall) and a Handi Bus would be nice
I'm getting to be elderly but don't know of anything that's needed
Meals on wheels
A senior center
Clean up and provide services and social opportunities

x. Rate your feeling of Agreement.

The number “1” signifies the most disagreement and the number “5” signifies the most agreement. Responses are also charted in the Figure 8.5 – 8.12.

Table 8.6: Responses to Agreement of Conditions in Union.

AGREEMENT							
I feel like a part of my community.	I know my neighbors.	My community is important to me.	I am proud of my community.	I care about changes that are made in the area that I live in.	I feel that my community contributes positively to my quality of life.	I like what my community has to offer.	I am aware of events within my community.
5	5	5	4	5	2	2	5
5	5	5	2	4	3	1	3
5	4	3	3	4	2	2	4
4	4	-	3	4	2	1	1
3	5	3	2	4	3	-	4
5	5	5	5	5	5	3	5
5	5	5	5	5	5	2	2
2	1	2	2	4	3	2	2
4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1
5	4	5	4	5	5	4	4
1	4	4	1	5	1	1	1
4	5	4	3	4	4	3	4
3	1	3	2	4	4	1	3

Figure 8.5: Chart of Agreement to "I feel like a part of my community."



Figure 8.6: Chart of Agreement to "I know my neighbors."

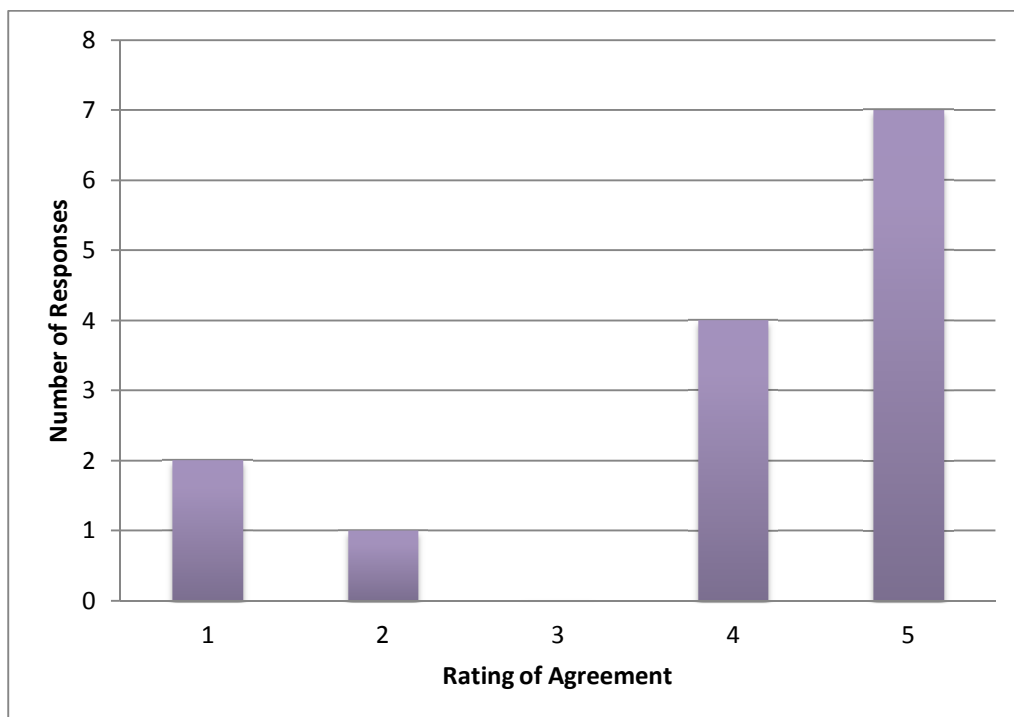


Figure 8.7: Chart of Agreement to “My community is important to me.”

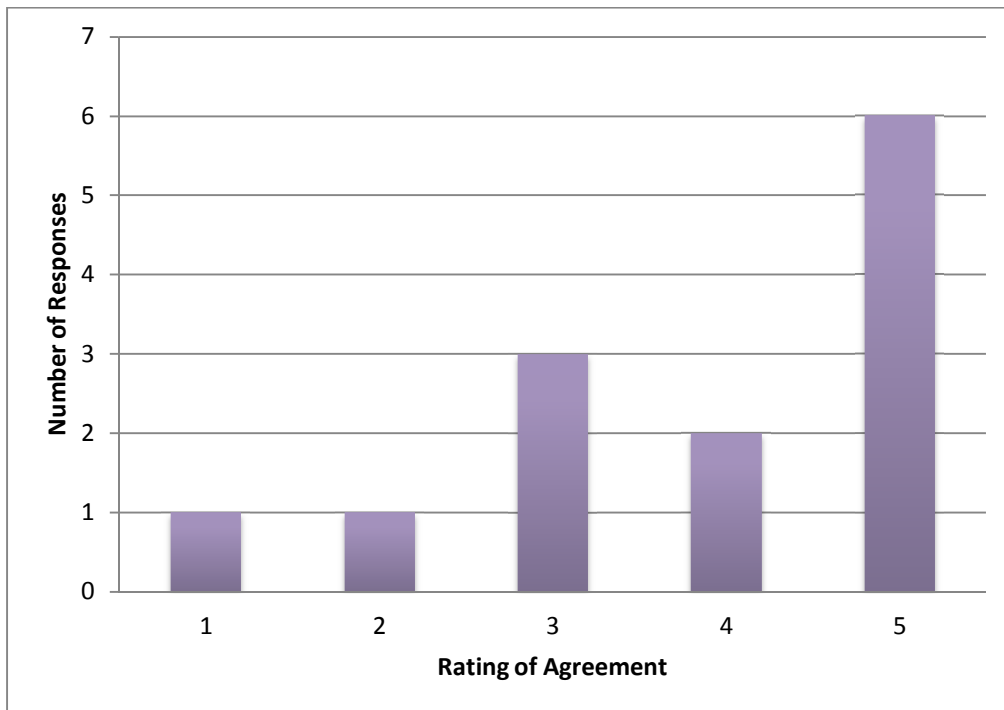


Figure 8.8: Chart of Agreement to “I am proud of my community.”

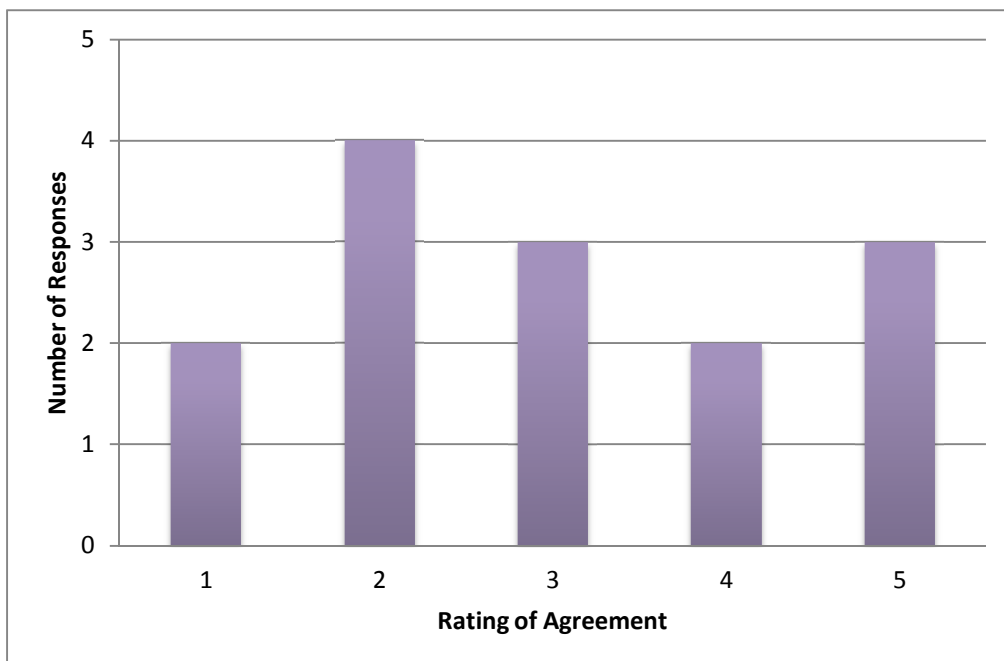


Figure 8.9: Chart of Agreement to “I care about changes that are made in the area that I live in.”

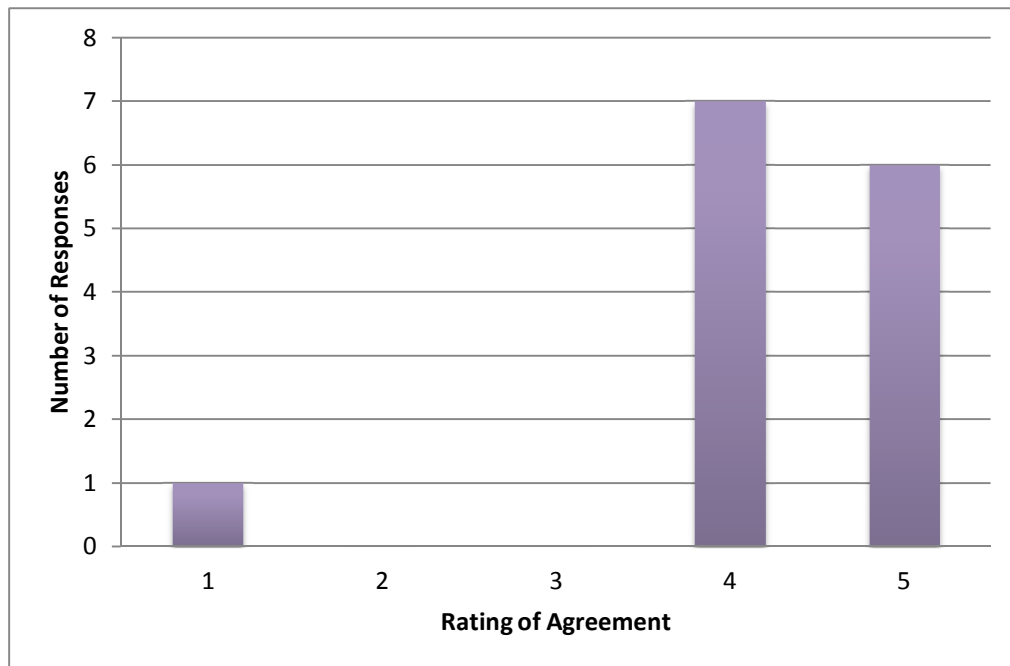


Figure 8.10: Chart of Agreement to “I feel that my community contributes positively to my quality of life.”

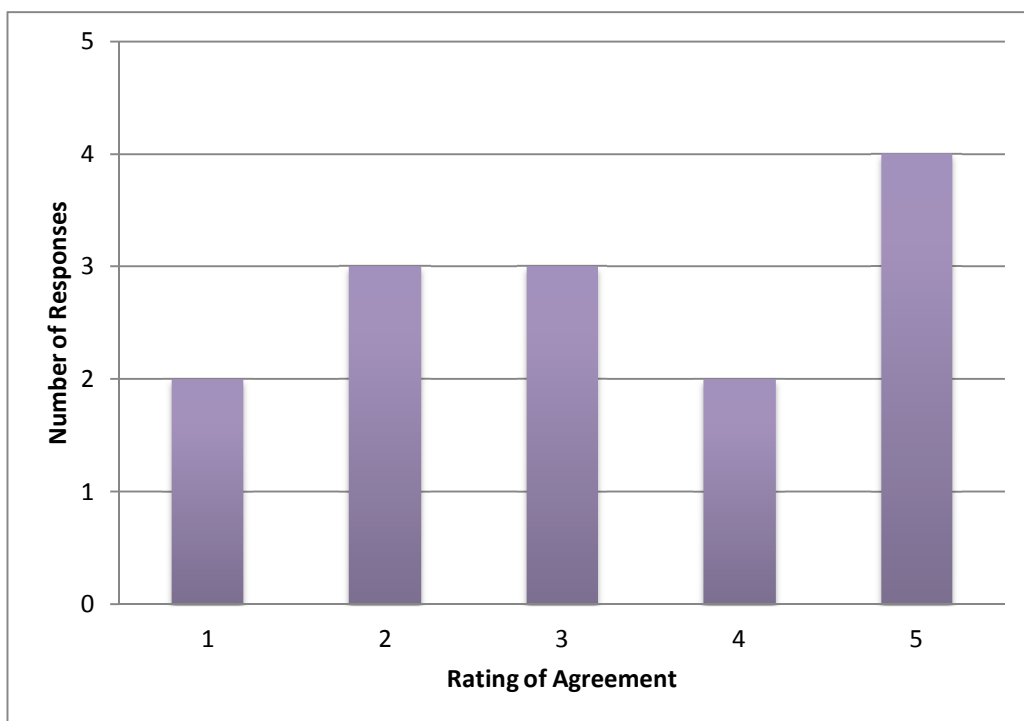


Figure 8.11: Chart of Agreement to “I like what my community has to offer.”

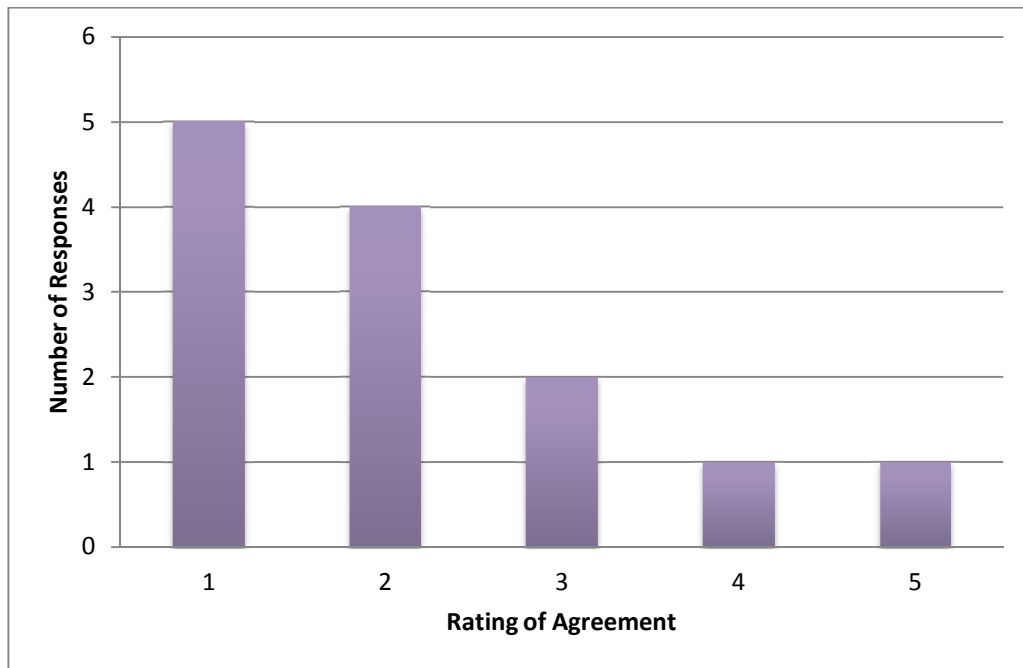
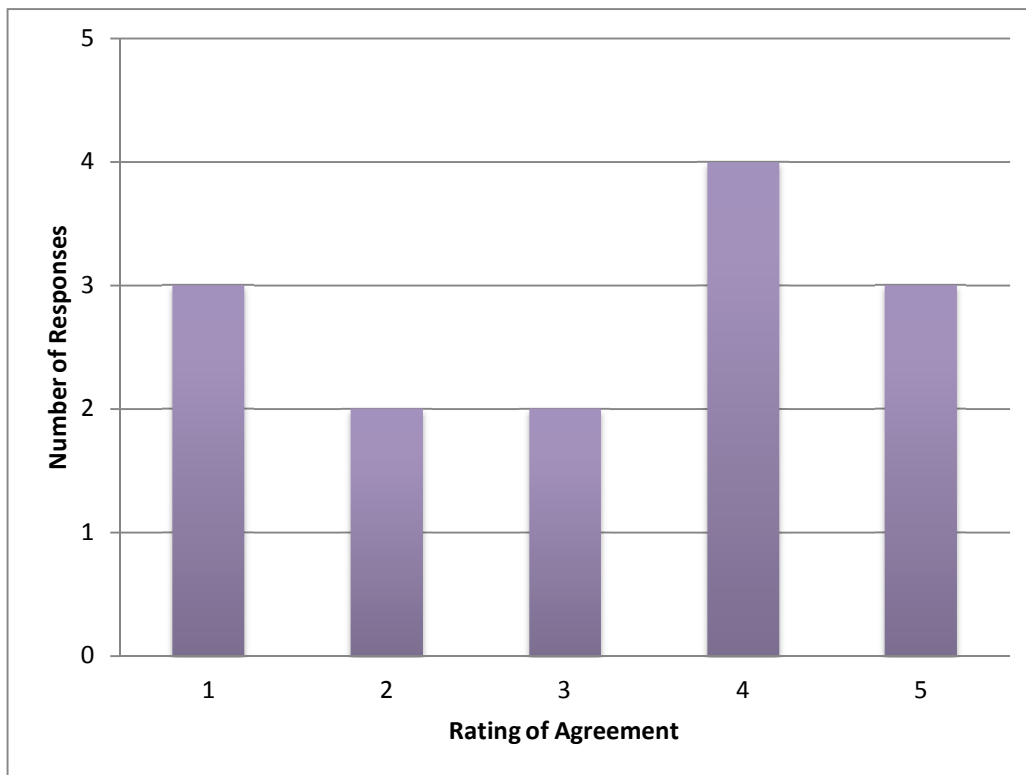


Figure 8.12: Chart of Agreement to “I am aware of events within my community.”



Overall, the majority of residents agreed that they felt like a part of the community, knew their neighbors, think that their community is important, and care about changes made in their community. Residents that were surveyed had mixed opinions on being proud of their community, thinking that their community contributes positively to their quality of life, and being aware of events within their community. Survey takers concluded that they were not satisfied with what the community has to offer.

These conclusions from the agreement portion of the survey speak to planning strategy by clearly distinguishing the downfall of the community: amenities and offerings. It is clear that the residents care about Union and want to be proud of their community, but improvements need to be addressed.

xi. Rate your feeling of Frequency.

The number “1” signifies the least frequency and the number “5” signifies the most frequency.

Responses are also charted in the Figure 8.13 – 8.15.

Table 8.7: Responses to Frequency of Feelings.

FREQUENCY		
I feel safe in my community.	People in my community seem approachable.	I participate in community events.
4	3	5
4	4	4
4	3	5
5	4	2
5	4	2
5	5	3
5	4	4
4	3	3
4	4	5
1	1	2
5	4	4
4	4	1
3	3	4
4	3	3

Figure 8.13: Chart of Frequency of "I feel safe in my community."

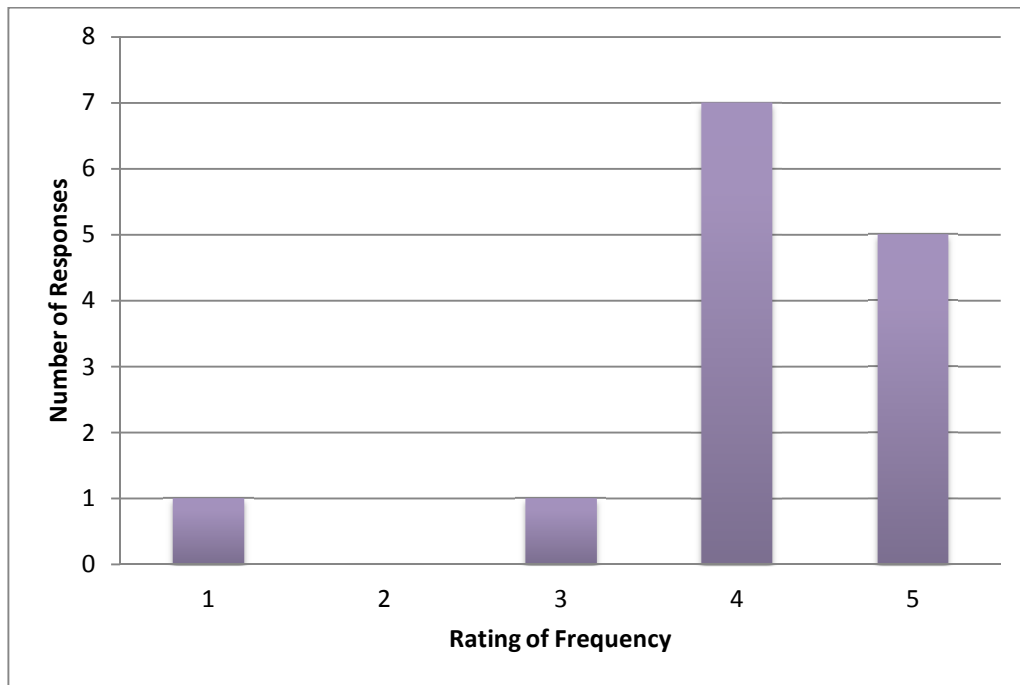


Figure 8.14: Chart of Frequency of "People in my community seem approachable."

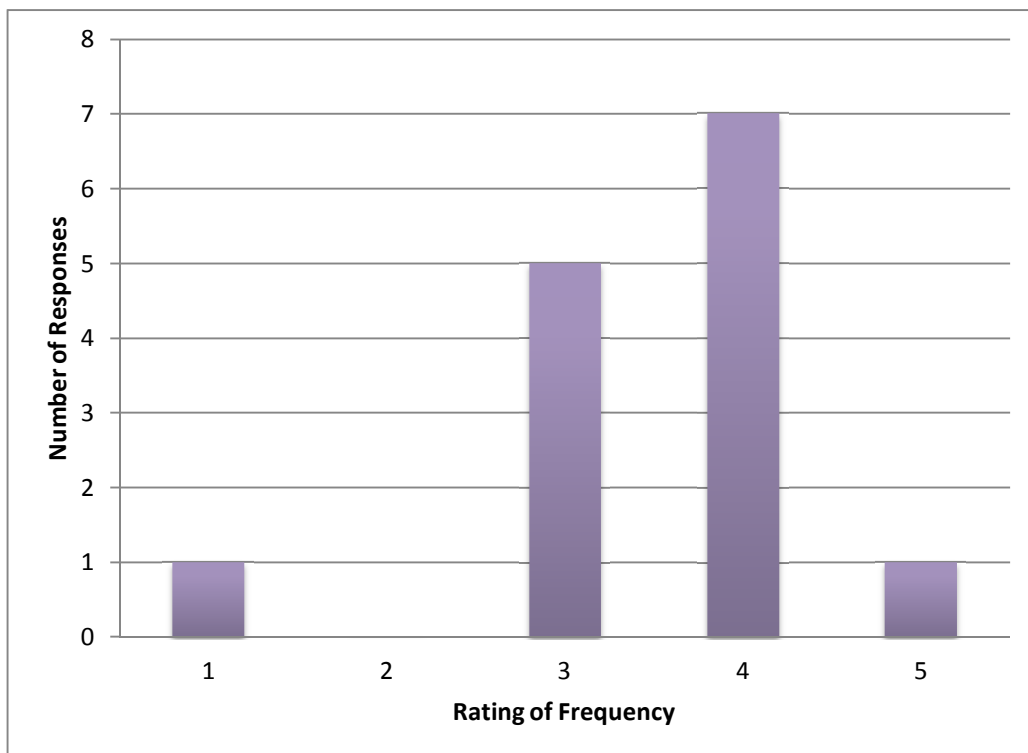
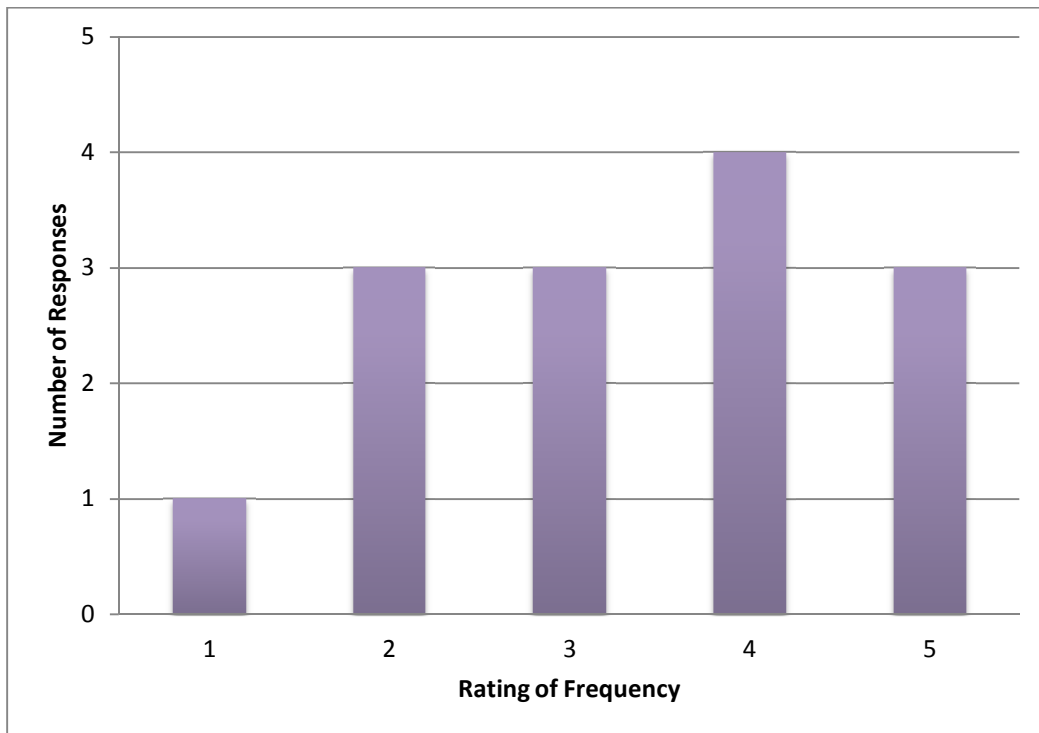


Figure 8.15: Chart of Frequency of “I participate in community events.”



The frequency part of the survey responses indicates that residents feel safe in their community, usually find members of the community approachable, and have varying levels of participation with community events. The varied participation likely is also subject to the results of Figure 8.12 (awareness of community events), which was also mixed in levels of awareness. If people were more aware of the community events, they may in turn participate more often.

xii. What would you like to see in a community center?

Table 8.8: Responses to Ideas for a Community Center.

Video game center, café or vending machines, facility to hold events, public restrooms
Cards, games, coffee, things for kids, dinner, little workout center
Arts/crafts events, community sales, movie nights, bingo
WiFi, meeting rooms, gym, pool, coffee, educational classes, 4H
Meals on wheels, old people games, meeting room
Weight and exercise machines
Weights and exercise machines
Places for senior lunches, crafts, doing things for those not able to do for themselves
Recreation for kids and adults. Gym and workout center
Parties, bands, dances
Family movie nights, dinners, possibly a small gym or arcade - lots of possibilities. I love this idea.
Basketball court for the community (mostly for the kids). Learning center, exercise equipment.
Community events (movies, performances, bingo, etc.) Meeting facilities, kitchen facilities, technology for public use
Activities for all

Many responses indicated excitement and need for community center amenities. Popular responses included a meeting room, space for large group games, a gym, space for group meals, recreation space, a movie gathering space, and a gaming or arcade space. These responses are important to note when creating parameters for the creation of the new community center portion of the proposed multi-functional space.

xiii. What would you like to see in a visitor center?

Table 8.9: Responses to Ideas for a Visitor Center.

History of the area, attractions and business info for surrounding areas
Info on historic sites: jail, caboose. Info on community groups
Restrooms
Museum, welcome center, info center
Old pictures, how the town used to be
Pictures of the town in earlier years
We have a caboose we intended to open as a museum/history but was wrecked/trashed
Don't think we need one but if we had one put up pictures and info on Union's history etc.
Pictures of our history
As I've never been to any visitor center, I'm not sure what Union would have in one. I don't really see a need for this.
There's nothing to visit here.
Historical information, information on events, things to do, etc.
Food/maps/information on the area/postcards

Responses specified that Union may not necessarily need a stand-alone visitor center, but showed a desire for historical data and attractions to be showcased. Rehabilitating the caboose is important to residents and has also been addressed in other responses. If the multi-functional structure had a space dedicated to displaying historical information of Union, it would be appreciated by residents.

xiv. What other types of amenities are important to you? What improvements can be made to existing amenities?

Table 8.10: Responses to Importance of Amenities and Improvements to Existing Amenities.

Food, entertainment
Small town grocery would be convenient, restaurants would be nice. Some buildings have potential but many are too dilapidated to be safe.
Store, good roads, café, clean water, car wash, laundromat
A gas station
A convenient store/gas/coffee shop/breakfast, lunch, meeting place
Doubtful
Water pressure could be better
Good restaurant. The flood buy-out annihilated the best one the town ever had.
As stated before, I think something needs to be done with the parks.
Businesses to avoid all the miles traveled for simple things. There are no existing amenities here.
Streetscape, especially downtown/Main Street. Improve/make safe: Main Street buildings, sidewalks, etc.
Groceries/gas/park

Residents that responded to this question gave many possible options for another amenity to be included in the multi-functional structure. A popular choice for an additional amenity included a convenience store, café, or other business that offered food. People care about improvements that can be made to Main Street and the park.

xv. What other comments do you have?

Table 8.11: Responses to Additional Comments.

Union has a strong community base but there have been too many negative events in the past 20-30 years that cause residents to be cautious for change. The number one thing needed are more volunteers to help with community events and spreading the word about changes being made.
When we moved here (1977) we had 1 child. We were glad there was a school, store, café, laundry mat, car wash, 2 churches, library. My son and other children play on Union ball team. Now without children I'm not so in touch with others. My neighbors clean my snow in winter (my husband died in December). Our block has a 4th of July block party. I feel we look out for each other. A lot of people have gardens - maybe a place to sell produce?
Union missed a chance to the flood buy out land into a pay campground and use the profits to improve town. Also Union could have a justice of the peace and a town cop and probably clear (after expenses) \$1,000 a day stopping speeders going down the hill on Main Street. Use that money to improve everything. Nobody does 25 including officers of the law.
I think people who are running things now are doing a wonderful job and we appreciate your hard work and sacrifices.
If events aren't advertised very good we miss out. Update our parks - there are a lot of kids. Basketball, volleyball, park for baseball. Put a wind shield on picnic area down at ball park. Fix lights and restrooms and concession stand updated. There are people to donate time to help. Paint?
Perhaps our time has passed - it is the same core of people at this time as it was at our centennial and earlier at the nations bi-centennial when you have just a few willing to do, they soon get burned out and no cooperation. I praise this group but until the others take pride in their homes and respect others property I'm afraid not much will be accomplished.
Like our mayor. Like our town clerk. In general love living here. Especially love my neighbors.
The current policy of Sue Thy Neighbor is only creating hate and discontent. Three businesses have had lawsuits brought against them and a fourth business is moving to Missouri. What makes any business want to come into Union under the existing atmosphere? Once wedges are driven and bridges burnt, the memory lasts a long time. It will be difficult for Union to ever have peace and harmony again!
The Village of Union is almost as down of a town you can find. If you don't live here, or know family here, you just pass right through. There is only a bank, post office, and an auto-shop in this village. It would be nice to have a small grocery store here at least.

This section is valuable to note because it fills in information about the respondent's feelings about the community. Residents believe that involvement is needed in order to make important changes in the community. Another resident noted that Union was a thriving place to be when she initially moved here but now it has lost many amenities that it once had. One resident suggested that Union needs to address the problem with speeding vehicles on Main Street. This is a problem that I witnessed firsthand during my visits to Union. The posted speed is rarely obeyed by passing travelers. Many aspects of the park could be improved, as stated in previous responses. Some believe that Union is in a decline that will be difficult to turn around. Without the proper care of properties and relationships in the community, the town will continue to decay.

CHAPTER IX: FUTURE

IX. Future

a. Strategy

i. Survey Data Analysis

The data found from the results of the survey are conclusive that the community would be in favor of a community center and a place to display town history. My proposed multi-functional structure can encompass many of the needs discussed through survey responses. Although some did not see the relevance of a visitor center, the historical elements of Union could be displayed within the multi-functional center as a component of the community center. Evidence from the responses supports my project's likability and importance.

The responses from the survey also indicated the need for improvements to existing amenities and structures. Residents believe that the park area should be improved to meet safety and educational standards with playground equipment, the existing concession stand and restrooms should be functional, and there should be an expansion to include more outdoor sports areas. People also mentioned that properties need to be improved for safety and be cleaned and well-kept both on Main Street and in residential areas.

It is evident that residents care about their community and want to make improvements and changes that will make Union a better place to live, work and play.

ii. Brownfield Remediation

Researching brownfields is important to my project because there are possible brownfields in Union. Brownfields are "real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties protects the environment, reduces blight, and takes development pressures off greenspaces and working lands" (Brownfields and Land Revitalization, 2012). There are many advantages to revitalizing brownfields and also many incentives.

1. Technical Assistance to Brownfields & the Environmental Protection Agency

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has established a program to help communities clean up and redevelop their brownfields. “EPA’s Brownfields Program is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields” (Brownfields and Land Revitalization, 2012).

“The Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) program is a national program funded by the U.S. EPA via grants to four entities. K-State is one of these entities and assists communities in EPA Regions 5 and 7, a 10 state area” (TAB, 2012). Through TAB, Union could receive help redeveloping the areas classified as brownfields. “TAB works closely with federal and state agencies to assist communities in their revitalization efforts of brownfields sites. The K-State TAB program brings university educational and technical resources as well as industry/consulting experience to communities affected by environmental issues at brownfield sites. K-State TAB serves as a neutral, non-biased party in a community’s revitalization efforts” (TAB, 2012).

TAB can provide many services to areas in need. Some ways that TAB can be of assistance are providing guidance through the brownfields process, plotting a course of action, identifying potential funding, assisting communities with access to resources, reviewing grant applications, reviewing technical documents, assisting with community outreach, and providing presentations.

TAB is providing funding for research with my project. Since Union is thought to have possible brownfields, TAB is interested in being involved with the planning practices created by our student projects. The redevelopment that we propose for Union may occur on the brownfields and therefore may be eligible for funding through the EPA’s Brownfield Program. Since Union is concerned about funding new projects, having the possibility of funding from the EPA would aid the town in redevelopment and revitalization.

iii. Community Involvement

Community members can be involved in the planning stages of the multi-functional structure. Since 20% of surveyed households responded to the survey for my project, the village could attempt a second round of surveying to households. It is important to note that all households had the opportunity to respond to the survey, attend workshops, and attend meetings. Hopefully more interest and participation will be generated from the increase in community outreach opportunities. If the community utilizes the upcoming community center (found at the Methodist Church) then it will also show support and need for a new fully-dedicated community center. Since the community center would be the prime component in the multi-functional structure, it is important for community members that use the center to have input on the features within.

iv. Goal Setting and Priorities

Upon reviewing survey results, it may be important for Union to use the data to set goals for what amenities the village will provide. A prioritized list of projects will be helpful in determining the feasibility of improvements in the town. I have been informed by Professor Gibson that a session will be held during summer 2013 to develop priorities for improvement in Union.

b. Implementation

The implementation of the multi-functional structure will address many requests from the residents of Union. The multi-functional structure will include:

- A community center component
- A space to display history of Union
- Municipal office and meeting room
- Public restrooms
- A space for a community-oriented commercial business (preferably offering food and drink)

Within the community center component, the potential offerings will include:

- A gym with exercise equipment, weights, and space for indoor recreation activities
- A computer area that offers wireless internet connectivity, computers for community use, printing, scanning, copying, and faxing

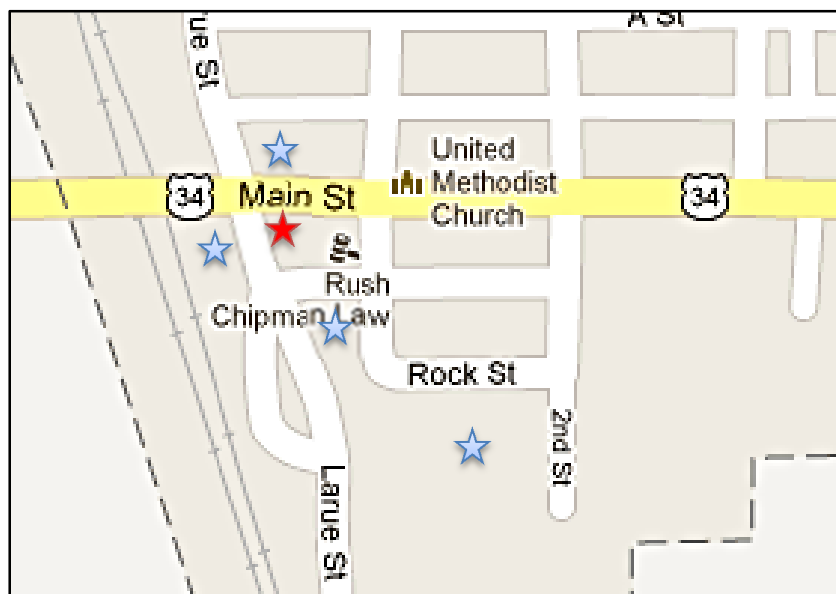
- A gathering space with capabilities for large group activities such as games, meals, and meetings
- A dedicated space that displays historical elements of Union
- An arcade/gaming area
- A theater room equipped with a projector for community movie nights or presentations
- A study room and classroom for educational use

By offering a variety of desired amenities, the multi-functional structure can be a successful component of Union's community. The community center will offer tools to help residents stay healthy, connected, educated and entertained. There will be many opportunities for community members to gather and use the spaces provided. The multi-functional structure will also provide a means of unity within Union by establishing a base for community involvement. By locating the municipal office space, meeting rooms, town history, community center, and commercial space within the same structure it will encourage unification of identity and create a sense of place for community events.

i. Location

The best location for the multi-functional structure needs to be further determined in future community meetings. Mapped are the most feasible possibilities I identified. Figure 9.1 shows the various locations, denoted by stars. The red star is where I determined the prime site recommendation for the multi-functional structure.

Figure 9.1: Map of Potential Multi-Functional Structure Sites (Google Maps, 2012).



The five sites that I chose were centered around the existing properties and locations of features. I felt that it was most appropriate for the structure to be located near the west side of Union because of the symbolic gateway view of the Main Street and Union Pacific Railroad.

Figure 9.2: View of Union, Nebraska looking east from the west side of the railroad tracks.



A position on Main Street could be ideal for the structure because of the ease of access and potential funding opportunities. By choosing a site on Main Street, a potential brownfield property could be utilized and remediated within the process of construction. My site recommendation is a section on the south side of Main Street that is near the location of the caboose.

Figure 9.3: Site Selection for the Multi-Functional Structure (Google Maps, 2013).



By selecting this location, the structure is in close proximity to the west entrance point of Union, is near the caboose and historical jail, and is close to the park. This block is home to some dilapidated properties that may reside on brownfields. Locating the multi-functional structure on Main Street may be a stable starting point for revitalization of the Main Street as a whole. Passersby will see the prominent structure and be intrigued to stop and find out its purpose. There is currently a surplus of parking space because of the lack of use of the commercial space on Main Street, but if necessary more parking could be expanded to the south of the proposed location.

The location identifies with the namesake of the town and offers a welcoming amenity to the community. However, the best location for the site needs final determination by the community through public workshops with residents of Union at future meetings.

ii. Funding Sources & Partners

I looked into the most promising sources for partnership and funding opportunities. The following organizations offer a range of resources that Union could utilize to implement the proposed multi-functional structure as well as create change and improvement opportunities within the community.

1. Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB)

Since TAB is aiding Union in steps to compete for brownfield remediation funding, they are considered a potential source of assistance for finding financing for the site component of the multi-functional structure. With the help of TAB, many potential brownfield sites along Main Street can be assessed and evaluated. Having a clean site to build the structure on is important and overall rehabilitation of Main Street depends on revitalizing the properties currently there.

2. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

The EPA Region 7 website (<http://www.epa.gov/region07/>) lists various resources for communities to use when working with the environment. Region 7 covers Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas and nine tribal nations. One key program that offers resources applicable to Union's concerns is the Community Action for a Renewed Environment (CARE) Program. Some publications of interest include a project sustainability checklist, federal environmental grant resources for planning and implementation, a guide to resolving environmental conflicts in communities, and a guidebook for paying for sustainable environmental systems. The TAB Program is also a component of the EPA.

3. Heritage Nebraska

Heritage Nebraska is a statewide non-profit organization whose purpose is to preserve historic Main Streets in Nebraska. Heritage Nebraska works with a variety of groups including the State Historic Preservation Office, the University of Nebraska, the Nebraska Department of Roads, the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the Nebraska State Historical Society and the Mountains/Plains Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The organization is responsible for education, advocacy, outreach, preservation and stewardship. Some funding sources that their website (<http://www.heritagenebraska.org/>) lists are The Johanna Favrot Fund for Historic Preservation and The Hart Family Fund for Small Towns. Union may have some salvageable buildings along Main Street that would be able to work with Heritage Nebraska's help to be revitalized and restored.

Heritage Nebraska practices The Main Street Four Point Approach of organization, economic restructuring, design, and promotion that was developed by the National Trust's Main Street Center. This approach is led by eight guiding principles. "The Main Street program is a comprehensive effort focusing on incremental change, requiring self-help and, public-private partnerships to make things happen. It's about using and enhancing existing assets, quality workmanship and image, and it is implementation oriented" (Heritage Nebraska, 2013).

4. *Cass County Nebraska Economic Development Council (CCNEDC)*

The Cass County Nebraska Economic Development Council is a joint venture between public and private sectors that aims to help communities in Cass County grow, obtain, and retain commercial, industrial and agricultural businesses. The CCNEDC is a partner of the Greater Omaha Economic Development Council.

5. *Union United*

Union United is a local non-profit that is dedicated to community improvement and revitalization. They will be an important partner throughout the revitalization of Main Street and with other projects of rehabilitation in Union.

6. *Union Pacific Foundation*

The Union Pacific Foundation has a community-based grant program that awards annual grants to non-profit organizations in Union Pacific communities. This organization is especially interested in assisting community-based organizations that contribute to the quality of life in the community.

7. *United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development*

The Rural Development sector of the USDA is committed to the future of rural communities and offers a few grant opportunities that Union is qualified for. The Community Facility Grant aids in the development of rural community facilities. Funds can be used for the construction, enlargement, or improvements on community facilities for community and public services. Communities with severely small populations and median household incomes are given priority to funding. The Rural Business Enterprise Grants (RBEG) Program provides grants for rural projects that finance and facilitate the development of emerging rural businesses. This could be useful in attracting commercial businesses to Union. The Rural Community Development Initiative Grants help to develop the capacity and ability of private non-profit community-based housing and community development organizations. This initiative also aims to improve community facilities and economic development in rural areas.

iii. Next Steps

The next steps that Union needs to take in initiating revitalization are suggested as follows:

1. Analyze the data collected by the various student projects completed through Kansas State University in conjunction with town data.
2. Create a prioritized list of goals for improvement, revitalization, and construction.
3. Evaluate the most feasible options in an incremental timeline. This includes assessment of financing and acquisition opportunities.
4. Investigate and apply for funding opportunities. Find partnerships for planning and construction of selected projects.
5. Once plans and funds are secured, begin implementing the scheduled improvements and create positive change for the town socially, economically, and environmentally.

CHAPTER X: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

X. Executive Summary

My master's project investigated the needs necessary for revitalization in the small, rural Village of Union, Nebraska. I have studied the history of Union and various literatures to support my planning strategy. Following background research and an initial site visit to Union, the preliminary component in generating a strategy was creating a tool to gauge the importance of issues in Union. A community survey was distributed to 70 households door-to-door on Saturday, March 2, 2013 and completed surveys were collected Friday, March 15, 2013 with a response rate of 20%.

After conducting multiple site visits and the community survey, I have concluded that many changes are necessary to improving the quality of life for the community members of Union. To address the greatest volume of needs, I propose a multi-functional structure located on Main Street of Union that will serve as a sustainable community amenity. After analyzing the survey responses, the community's input has determined that the best uses for the multi-functional structure will be:

- A community center component
- A space to display history of Union
- Municipal office and meeting room
- Public restrooms
- A space for a community-oriented commercial business (preferably offering food and drink)

Within the community center component, the potential offerings will include:

- A gym with exercise equipment, weights, and space for indoor recreation activities
- A computer area that offers wireless internet connectivity, computers for community use, printing, scanning, copying, and faxing
- A gathering space with capabilities for large group activities such as games, meals, and meetings
- A dedicated space that displays historical elements of Union
- An arcade/gaming area
- A theater room equipped with a projector for community movie nights or presentations
- A study room and classroom for educational use

While the multi-functional structure tackles multiple needs within one project, there are still evident improvements necessary for revitalization of the community in spaces such as the park and Main Street.

Safety is an important concern in the form of pedestrian travel and vehicular travel throughout Union. It has also been noted that playground equipment is outdated and should be replaced with safer and more educational equipment. Main Street properties should be cleaned up by property owners and/or through brownfield remediation with support from the Technical Assistance to Brownfields (TAB) program. By revitalizing Main Street, Union can establish a renewed sense of place and attract passersby and new businesses to the town. The revitalization of Main Street has been covered in further detail by my classmate, Taylor Cox, in his project titled “Main Street Revitalization Effort for the Village of Union, Nebraska.”

In conclusion to my findings, I have discovered that many residents of Union seek change and support improvements in their community. While it should be noted that few people find Union as a “lost cause” in some sense, the majority of community members seemed optimistic and excited to envision changes to the town and implement community amenities that would improve their quality of life and sense of place. Union will be opening a community center within their Methodist Church and it will be interesting to see how the space is utilized. The people of Union should strongly consider my proposal for a multi-functional structure to be implemented to their Main Street because it offers a variety of uses that are desired by residents and it would serve as a foundation for positive change for the community. Union needs to come together as a community and embrace the potential that it has to revive the thriving atmosphere it once had. Every accomplishment begins with a decision to try, and I believe that Union has the determination and passion to succeed in revitalizing their community.

CHAPTER XI: COMMUNITY PRESENTATION

XI. Community Presentation

On the evening of Wednesday, April 10, 2013 I traveled to Union with my classmate Taylor Cox and Professor Huston Gibson to attend the regularly scheduled board meeting. There were about 30 attendees. They listened to presentations from Wendy Griswold about TAB and brownfields before Taylor Cox and I presented our projects. A PowerPoint presentation was created to summarize our projects and our findings for the Village of Union. Attendees also received a copy of my Executive Summary, as seen in Chapter 10 of this document.

Figure 11.1: Photo of Stephanie Kisler in front of the Village Office in Union, Nebraska.



After the presentation concluded, attendees were encouraged to ask questions or provide comments on our work. Two key questions that were asked in regard to my project were:

- How can we get the community involved?
- What needs would you prioritize for the proposed community center?

First, I answered the community involvement question by suggesting that Union hold more community meetings and workshops. It should be noted that at the visioning workshop in August 2012 there were less participants than at the meeting we attended for our presentation in April 2013, so it suggests that more of the community is becoming involved in the process. By continuing to engage the community in informational meetings, workshops, and other various activities the support for local projects and awareness will increase.

Second, I found that the question relating to prioritizing the amenities for the community center was an important focus for Union since they plan to create a community center in the current Methodist Church building. According to the analysis of my survey results, I suggested that the highest priority items in the community center should be a multi-functional meeting space (meaning a space that potentially has movable walls to create various layouts and can accommodate various uses), a gym and recreation component, and an office-type center with access to computers, internet, printers, fax machines, scanners, copiers and study functionality for students. A separate study room for school purposes would highly benefit the students in the community because there is currently not a school in Union and having dedicated space to perform schoolwork could increase their sense of community and improve their grades.

Overall, I was thrilled to have to opportunity to present my project to the community members. After the presentation, a few people approached me and said things to the tune of “Come back in five years and see what we have done with your work.” These kinds of statements instilled a sense of pride and accomplishment toward my project as a whole. Working with the community of Union has been a valuable experience and has not only helped me develop further knowledge of planning, but has created a document for the community to use for the future.

CHAPTER XII: REFERENCES

XII. References

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c. Glossary of Terms

Amenity – tool for achieving an end goal or greater objective; contributes to social equity. Also known as the tangible or intangible features of property that makes the property more highly valued or appealing.

Brownfield – real property, the expansion, redevelopment, or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or

contaminant. Cleaning up and reinvesting in these properties protects the environment, reduces blight, and takes development pressures off greenspaces and working lands (Brownfields and Land Revitalization, 2012).

Community – the perception of belonging within a group that identifies with a specific place; a group or association of people with similar interests or objectives; often defined by a geographic location; a social unit.

Economics – concentrated actions in development, policy-making and commerce; promotes a high standard of living and quality of life.

Environment – the natural capital that compose unique ecosystems and ecologies.

Main Street – the main corridor in a place where economic and social activity occurs; sometimes literally named “Main Street”.

Place – the physical entity of a location; often in relation to the feeling of attachment that someone possesses to it.

Quality of Life – the measure of well-being within a place; this feeling can come from happiness, health, safety, or a number of forces depending on the individual’s values.

Social Equity – the value of community components as they affect people in and outside of a community; equal opportunity and a safe, healthy environment.

Space – the mental association in relation to a place, made on a unique and individual basis.

Sustainability – the ability to support, maintain, endure, or grow through factors of economics, environment, and social equity.

Sustainable Community Amenities – tools, assets, and enhancements that satisfy the triple bottom line (environmental, economic, and social equity) and provide a common good for the members of the community.

d. Union, Nebraska Community Survey IRB Review Letter



University Research Compliance Office

TO: Huston Gibson
LARCP
302 Seaton Hall

Proposal Number: 6564

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 02/20/13

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Union, Nebraska Community Survey"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 2, subsection: ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

e. Union, Nebraska Community Survey Cover Letter

Saturday, March 2, 2013

Dear Resident of Union,

In the months since the August 2012 Community Visioning Session, Kansas State University students in the Regional and Community Planning program have been studying Union to find ways to use planning practices to benefit your community and help to make your approved vision statement a reality. A graduate student has created a survey to evaluate various aspects of importance within Union, Nebraska. The survey is designed to take five to ten minutes to complete and your participation would be greatly appreciated. Each survey will remain anonymous and data collected will be used to influence the direction of the graduate student's master's project.

Please return the completed survey to Melissa Hansen at the City Clerk's office by Saturday, March 9, 2013 at 1pm. If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Stephanie at skisler@k-state.edu. Thank you very much for your time and participation.

f. Union, Nebraska Community Survey

*This section has been adapted to fit within the format of this document. The following survey may be sized differently when printed and distributed, but all information is the same.

Union, Nebraska Community Survey*

The following survey has been put together by a Kansas State University Regional and Community Planning graduate student to help assess the present quality of life in Union, Nebraska and to gauge the importance of various existing or future community amenities. The results of this survey will be used to develop plans for improvements that appear feasible based on the desires of the community. By completing this survey, you are acknowledging your informed consent to participate in this evaluation. If you feel any question improperly invades your privacy, please feel free to not respond. Thank you for your time and your contribution to the research.

Please answer all of the following questions to the best of your ability. Your honest opinions are valued and appreciated.

1. How long have you lived in Union, Nebraska?
Less than 1 year 1-4 years 5-9 years 10-14 years 15+ years
2. How many people are in your household?
1 2 3 4 5 6 +
3. If you or someone in your household is employed, how far is the commute (one way)?
0-10 minutes 11-20 minutes 21-30 minutes 31-40 minutes 41+ minutes
4. If you have children, how far away is the school (one way)?
0-10 minutes 11-20 minutes 21-30 minutes 31-40 minutes 41+ minutes
5. How do you define "community"? What does community mean to you?

6. What is the most important factor that you consider when choosing a place to live?

7. What do you like the most about your community?

8. What do you dislike the most about your community?

9. What could be improved overall to make you feel a closer and more positive connection to your community?

10. What could be improved to benefit the children in your community?

11. What could be improved to benefit the elderly in your community?

Please rate your opinions on these statements on a scale of agreement.

Strong Disagreement --- Strong Agreement

<i>I feel like a part of my community.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I know my neighbors.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>My community is important to me.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I am proud of my community.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I care about changes that are made in the area that I live in.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I feel that my community contributes positively to my quality of life.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I like what my community has to offer.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I am aware of events within my community.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

Please rate your opinions on these statements on a scale of frequency.

Never ----- Sometimes ----- Always

<i>I feel safe in my community.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>People in my community seem approachable.</i>	1	2	3	4	5
<i>I participate in community events.</i>	1	2	3	4	5

12. If Union had a community center, would you use it? Please explain your answer.

13. If Union had a visitor center, would you use it? Please explain your answer.

14. What other types of amenities are important to you? Can improvements be made to existing amenities?

15. Additional comments: