

# Key Stakeholder Interviews Summary

October 30, 2024

As part of the kickoff and community engagement phase of the Galena Comprehensive Plan process, the Project Team held confidential discussions with several focus groups to discuss issues, concerns, and opportunities within the City. Participants from the school system and students, major employers and local business community, non-profit and local/regional organizations, and property owners and residents were asked to provide unique and direct insight to the community.

A total of seven focus group discussions were conducted with 51 participants on October 30, 2024. Each group discussion lasted approximately one hour. Discussions were framed around a sequence of questions regarding the community and conducted in a conversational style. The input from the focus group discussions were combined into seven categories and are thematically summarized below.

<b>Focus Group Participants</b>	<b>No. of Participants</b>
Education	7
Major Employers	6
Non-Profits	9
Property Owners	4
Local and Regional Partners	7
Businesses	10
Residents	8

**Note on Summary Context:**

*The following summaries reflect the thoughts, comments, and opinions received in the workshops. The items identified in this summary are not recommendations or observations of the consultant, but represent feedback and comments received from those who participated in the workshops.*

## Residential Areas and Neighborhoods

Focus group participants highlighted challenges and opportunities related to housing in Galena, emphasizing the need for a more diverse and affordable housing stock, including workforce housing. Concerns were raised about the preservation of the historic character of housing in Galena.

- **Short-Term Rental Impacts.** Participants in all focus groups highlighted the impact of short-term rentals, noting a decline in rental housing stock, increased property values and rental costs. Many emphasized the lack of housing for the workforce, young professionals, and families, with existing units being repurposed as short-term rentals or AirBNBs. The number of short-term rentals was identified as a challenge for both residents and workers to find homes.

- **Historic Preservation.** Participants stated that maintaining historic properties is valued but challenging due to high costs and stringent regulations. Some stakeholders stated that historic preservation standards limit housing development.
- **Community Character.** Galena's small-town charm and historical ambiance were praised by participants. However, participants expressed concerns about retaining this character amid modern development pressures, particularly around affordable housing.
- **Infill Housing.** Participants expressed a desire for increasing housing in Galena. Many suggested that any new development should complement the architectural style and scale of historic neighborhoods, ensuring new residential units blend with the Village's character while accommodating growth.
- **New Developments and Housing Diversity.** The focus group emphasized the need for diverse housing options, including apartments, townhouses, affordable housing for low-income residents, and age-restricted communities for seniors.
- **Housing Affordability.** Participants expressed significant concerns about the lack of affordable housing options overall, particularly for young families, working professionals, and the senior population.

## Commercial/Industrial Areas and Economic Development

Stakeholders highlighted several challenges and opportunities related to Galena's economic development, emphasizing the need for industry diversification, support for local businesses, and strategies to retain young professionals in the community.

- **Tourism-Driven Economy.** Galena's economy heavily relies on tourism, which offers some benefits but limits economic diversity. Participants expressed a desire for business development that caters to residents' needs beyond tourism, such as small tech startups or trade industries.
- **Challenges with Large Business Growth.** Many participants expressed concerns that the City's business regulations are restrictive, particularly in the historic district and along the Highway 20 corridor. Participants stated that businesses struggle to modernize due to historic district ordinances and some have opted to locate outside the City limits.
- **Employment and Retention.** Participants stated that limited job opportunities for young professionals, lack of local trade training, and the prevalence of low-wage service roles contribute to "brain drain" as young people leave for better prospects.
- **Workforce Development.** While Galena's education system was praised by many, participants expressed the need for job training and education programs to address challenges in attracting and retaining talent. Many are concerned that job opportunities are limited and that there is a lack of diversity in employment sectors.
- **Challenges with Tourism.** Participants across the board praised tourism in Galena but many highlighted challenges with having a tourism-driven economy, including seasonal employment, economic fluctuations, increased traffic and congestion, and low-wage jobs in the tourism industry.

# Transportation

Participants identified key transportation challenges in Galena, including inadequate downtown parking, limited regional connectivity along Highway 20, and insufficient public transit options.

- **Parking and Traffic Flow.** Downtown parking was highlighted in multiple focus groups as inadequate, with participants suggesting parking garages and better traffic flow management to ease congestion during peak tourist seasons. Some stakeholders suggested off-site parking with a shuttle service to reduce downtown traffic.
- **Highway 20 and Regional Connectivity.** Highway 20's limited capacity and lack of pedestrian infrastructure were recurring concerns among multiple focus groups. Participants expressed support for expanding Highway 20 to four lanes and improving multimodal connections for bikes and pedestrians.
- **Public Transit and Accessibility.** Stakeholders identified limited public transit options as concerns, especially for non-tourist areas. Some mentioned the need for a more comprehensive shuttle service or rideshare options to help residents without cars.
- **Traffic and Safety Concerns.** Participants highlighted the need to address traffic flow at the intersection of U.S. Highway 20 and S. Main St. near the bridge, suggesting that a traffic study be undertaken. Additionally, participants highlighted the need for a turn lane at the Galena Golf Club off U.S Highway 20.
- **Multi-modal Connections.** Participants expressed a desire for prioritized pedestrian safety and walkability. Suggestions included enhancing pedestrian infrastructure, addressing traffic calming measures near parks, and exploring a walking bridge from the ARC (Galena Art and Recreation Center) to schools. Some participants suggested expanding the bus system to meet capacity demands.
- **Bike and Pedestrian Improvements.** Participants expressed the need for improved connectivity between neighborhoods. Many noted that Galena lacks safe pedestrian connections and adequate bike lanes.

# Parks, Open Space, and Recreation

Participants emphasized the need for expanded recreational opportunities in Galena, highlighting the importance of year-round activities for youth and families, as well as enhancing parks, trails, and green spaces.

- **Lack of Year-Round Activities.** Limited recreation options for youth were mentioned by participants. Suggestions for indoor entertainment, like a movie theater, bowling alley, and sports facilities, were offered. Participants also suggested adding these amenities to keep families and youth engaged locally.
- **Green Space and Trails.** Participants stated a desire to enhance the natural landscape by expanding parks and trails, including possible extensions to regional trails to connect Galena with neighboring areas. Some stakeholders proposed utilizing underdeveloped areas like Highway 20 for green spaces or trails.
- **Parks and Recreation.** Participants noted that without a dedicated Parks and Open Space Department, maintenance on existing parks is lacking.
- **Environmental Impacts.** The focus group raised concerns with potential growth in Galena and how that may potentially impact City services like managing water quality and waste management.

# Community Facilities

Participants highlighted critical community service needs in Galena, recognizing strengths in healthcare while identifying challenges in emergency services, childcare availability, and youth programs.

- **Healthcare and Emergency Services.** Healthcare facilities were mentioned as a strength in Galena, but emergency services face challenges due to reliance on volunteer staff and an aging population. Many stakeholders expressed a need for a more sustainable, possibly paid, emergency response system.
- **Childcare and Youth Programs.** Limited childcare options impacting families and employers, especially in the service industry, were identified concerns. Representatives from nonprofits and schools also noted a shortage of programs and facilities tailored to young people, urging investment in these areas.
- **Education.** Focus groups highlighted challenges within Galena's education system, including funding issues, teacher shortages, and the need for more advanced placement and vocational programs in school districts.

# Infrastructure

Focus group participants stressed the importance of modernizing Galena's infrastructure, highlighting the need for reliable internet and cell service throughout the City to support economic growth.

- **Internet and Cell Service.** Reliable high-speed internet and cell service were identified as critical needs, particularly for attracting remote workers and tech businesses. Some groups highlighted limited internet coverage as a potential barrier to economic growth and safety.
- **Historic District Infrastructure Needs.** Needed infrastructure maintenance in the historic district, including ADA compliance, was emphasized by some participants. However, challenges with historic preservation regulations related to improvements were mentioned by participants in several focus groups. Some participants expressed a need to modernize public amenities, such as EV charging stations, to meet residents and visitor expectations.
- **Road Infrastructure.** Road conditions and congestion on major roads, particularly during peak tourism season, were emphasized by some participants. Additionally, challenges with the poorly maintained sidewalks and sidewalk availability thought the City was an issue for several.

# Other Themes

Other topics were discussed during focus group meetings, including governance and community planning, regulatory issues, community support, and enhanced local amenities.

- **Governance and Planning Transparency.** Stakeholders expressed concerns about the government transparency and adherence to the existing comprehensive plan. Some participants expressed a desire for more public involvement and consistent enforcement of City regulations.
- **Social Integration and Inclusion.** With a growing Hispanic and Latino population, some participants expressed a need for greater inclusivity in City planning and community engagement efforts. It was noted that integration and support of these communities was needed within Galena.

- **Enhancing Local Amenities.** A desire for more dining, retail options, and a larger event center in Galena was expressed. It was stated that many residents travel to Dubuque for activities, weddings, and events due to the limited number and capacity of local venues like Turner Hall and the Center for the Arts.
- **Aging Population.** The focus group expressed concerns about the aging population in Galena, including greater demand for healthcare services, strain on social services, an aging workforce, and a decline in emergency services volunteerism.