



Mercer County: Better Together

Success through collaboration.

#MCBT

Civic Engagement Forums Showcase Similarities, Embrace Community

Aledo, IL – September 26th, 2016 – Following a four-month process which featured four local forums, Mercer County: Better Together (MCBT) has completed its community engagement phase. These forums brought together county residents on many topics, from what projects they view as successful to how they would like to see quality of life improve in Mercer County. Common goals, hopes and ideas emerged, bringing together Mercer County residents from east to west. Held in Aledo, Keithsburg and Viola, key themes surfaced, and citizens were united in their passion for the place they call home. Over 60 percent of those who attended these forums decided to volunteer their skills or services to the Mercer County: Better Together (MCBT) initiative.

Forums were designed around five main goals –

- Introduce a countywide planning process and discuss how it will be used to set goals and objectives
- Establish a committee structure
- Discuss the vision residents have for Mercer County
- Identify county qualities/assets and successful county projects
- Determine how participants wanted to be involved going forward

Each of the four community forums followed the same structure, with participants asked three questions –

- 1) What projects do you feel have been successful in Mercer County over the past 10 years?
- 2) What projects do you feel would improve quality of life in Mercer County going forward?
- 3) What regional opportunities do you feel there are, or should be, for Mercer County?

The bonds of community were strong at each forum, and the priorities of residents varied slightly, providing a rich base of knowledge for MCBT's next phase. Below are key topics from each forum –

June 14 – St. Catherine's Hall, Aledo

- Improve, expand roads & bridges
- Recreation development
- Economic development
- Agricultural opportunities
- Improving education
- Job training

June 22 – Viola Fire Station, Viola

- Healthcare
- 'Farm to Plate' opportunities
- Business development
- Preservation & marketing of local history
- Community amenities

June 29 – First Christian Church, Keithsburg

- Developing infrastructure
- Utilization of river assets
- Turning recreation opportunities into commerce
- Creating/marketing tourism opportunities

July 6 – La Belle Vie, Aledo

- Developing healthy food systems
- Agri-tourism opportunities
- Skills-based education
- Countywide programs

East to west, it is apparent residents are motivated to improve Mercer County as a whole. Each community features unique qualities, and each has something to offer to Mercer County's process of collaborative strategic planning. Mercer County and its municipalities have already begun working together to achieve the long-term goals of Mercer County: Better Together.

Over the next 18 months, Mercer County: Better Together will work to identify additional community information and prioritize ideas into goals for the future. To learn more on how Mercer County: Better Together is planning for the future of Mercer County, follow us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.
