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## City following up on FICE recommendations

### News

By [aviveiros@winklertimes.com](mailto:aviveiros@winklertimes.com)

Posted 3 months ago

By Ashleigh Viveiros

Winkler has moved forward on several of the recommendations from last year's First Impressions Community Exchange program.

Last fall, Winkler and Portage la Prairie swapped teams of "tourists" to secretly explore and evaluate one another's communities.

Each group filed a detailed account of their experiences during the visit, complete with recommendations for how the host community could improve itself for both visitors and residents.

For Winkler, the FICE suggestions revolved around eight key areas: signage, transportation, housing, education, social services, downtown, industrial park, tourism, and recreation/entertainment.

Late last month, members of the Winkler team met with Mayor Martin Harder to assess how far the city has come in following up on the recommendations made by by the Portage visitors.

"A majority of items have been addressed," Harder said.

In fact, most of the issues identified were already known to city council, Harder said, and a solution had either already been found, or was being pursued.

"There's a lot of things recommended that were in progress already when we got this," he said.

For example, the Portage group noted it was difficult for them to find the airport and the industrial park when entering the city for the first time, and that truck routes in industrial areas could be better marked as such.

They also suggested prominent "Thank You for Visiting" signs would be a good addition to the exits leaving the city.

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Plans to upgrade signage in these areas have been in the works for some time now, Harder said, and, in most cases, should be in place by next summer.

Similarly, the city was well aware of the perceived lack of entertainment/recreation options for the 15-30-year-old demographic in Winkler, Harder said.

To address this, council is taking a look at possibly building a skate park in the Parkland area, and is investigating other potential recreation ideas, he said.

For other FICE recommendations, the Winkler Chamber has taken the lead, Harder said.

These include plans to approach businesses with signage on the highways surrounding Winkler - where the city itself has no jurisdiction - with a request to repaint, repair, or remove signs that have become eyesores, he said.

The Chamber also recently approached the owner of Hi-Way Groceteria regarding the idea of putting benches out for passengers waiting for the Greyhound bus, Harder said.

Other FICE-related suggestions the city and the Chamber are working on include developing new printed and online maps that feature key points of interest and business locations, taking a look at ways to increase public transportation options through a joint initiative with Morden, designating a two block section of downtown for targeted revitalization, including more up-to-date information on the city's website about the infrastructure available in the industrial parks, and setting up kiosks at area hotels and tourist sites with all the information visitors to town would need to find their way around.

A VALUABLE TOOL

Although many of the issues identified in the FICE report didn't come as news to the city, having outsiders point them out further solidifies council's need to address them, Harder said.

"It helps us as one of the tools we use when developing the (city's) master plan," he said, referring to a document city council is working on for Winkler's development in both the long and short-term. "It helps us make Winkler a better place to live, because we're identifying the areas we need to improve in."

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