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# Eight statements of hopes and dreams

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Since 2022, the Great Falls Heart & Soul community initiative has spent many hours gathering stories and questioning residents about what they want to see in the town in terms of recreation, education and other areas.

They compiled the answers they received into a series of eight resident-driven "community statements" that will ultimately lead to an action plan that the initiative can begin working on.

At the August Great Falls Town Council meeting, Heart & Soul asked the Town Council in the form of a Proclamation to formally adopt the resident driven statements.

For the record, those statements are:

Youth Spaces: Great Falls recognizes the importance of increasing youth community spaces that are secure and welcoming for all youth. These spaces encourage a sense of connection, belonging and contribute to youth safety and well-being.

Sports: Great Falls values school-based and recreational sports opportunities for the hometown pride, teamwork and sense of community they foster among residents of all ages.

Education: Great Falls recognizes that our schools are important to the development of our community and our people. Residents value quality education and appreciate the opportunities for community connections that schools offer for students, parents and teachers.

Community Culture and Tradition: Great Falls cherishes vibrant cultural events that bring all residents together, promote community identity and foster tradition and celebration.

Economic Development: Great Falls recognizes the importance of conditions that draw economic development, honoring our small- town character while revitalizing our community. Residents envision responsive decision-making for economic development that generates employment, business and tourism opportunities to benefit all community members and strengthen our local economy.

Small Town Feel and Community Roots: The people of Great Falls, whether born and raised here or drawn to our town from elsewhere, treasure the deep community roots and the neighborly spirit that the small town provides. Lifelong residents and newcomers alike value community safety for all and appreciate the caring quality of our close-knit town and its residents.

History: Great Falls treasures its rich history, which includes being a historic mill town, that shaped our legacy as a resilient and proud community. Residents reminisce about the vibrant town from years past and are hopeful for opportunities to preserve our downtown and deepen learning about our history while embracing the future of Great Falls.

Nature: Great Falls appreciates our town's natural resources, especially the river, the dam and the trails, because of their potential to attract visitors and offer residents opportunities to engage with the town's environmental beauty.

The proclamation states: 'That the following Statements recognized by this Proclamation have been identified as deeply shared values that provide insight to what matters most to Great Falls residents, providing a framework and meaningful guidance to the Town Council and other local decision-makers, when faced with important community decisions. on a day-to-day basis as well as longer term strategic planning activities' and resolves, 'That the Great Falls Town Council. hereby approves and adopts the Great Falls **Community Heart** & Soul Statements, listed herein, and commit to using them to evaluate decisions in preparation of future policy, strategic plans. and operational and investment determinations.'

The N&R recently caught up with Great Falls Heart & Soul Project Coordinator Elizabeth Bowen to get more details on the statements and the proclamation.

"The eight statements are resident driven; we went out and we collected through stories

and surveys and data points and we asked all the residents what matters most to them? So this is a collection of what matters most to them," Bowen said.

She said the group noticed a post by Great Falls Mayor Keevi Worthy asking about value statements for the town and thought, 'Hey, that's us!' so we went to the Town Council workshop and we proposed having them adopt (our resident statements) and by adopting the statements, they can serve as a tool for programs and projects, that can help determine if (the town projects and programs) align with the residents' priorities and values," she said.

At the next Town Council meeting, Bowen and her Heart & Soul group had the draft proclamation ready to be adopted by council. The resident statements were adopted as guiding principles, not only for Heart & Soul but for the Town of Great Falls as well.

"The next step is we are working on a draft action plan, and that is coming from all of the residents here, asking what their hopes and dreams are. We gathered up all of the ideas for action: we had the Idea Summit, and now from gathering all of that information, we will create an action plan, take it out to the community and ask if we got it right. The action plan will be based on these eight statements that matter most and will likely have three or so ideas of actions the people of the town want to see happen," Bowen said.

One of the concrete ideas that goes across a lot of the data is the creation of a community center or rec center, someplace indoors, where there can be programming and activities for seniors, adults and young people, Bowen said.

Some of the actions have already begun happening, Bowen disclosed. People said they'd like to see more festivals and more community events, and from that idea, an ad hoc festival committee was born and is already working.

Once the draft action plan is created, the Heart & Soul group will soon be once again visiting residents in the community "to make sure we got it right."

The action plan is not just for Heart & Soul group to accomplish, Bowen said. The process is once the action plan has been thoroughly vetted, to find "community champions" who can take the actions and run with them, seeing a certain project is done.

Bowen hopes the draft action plan will be ready for looking at by the end of September.

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