

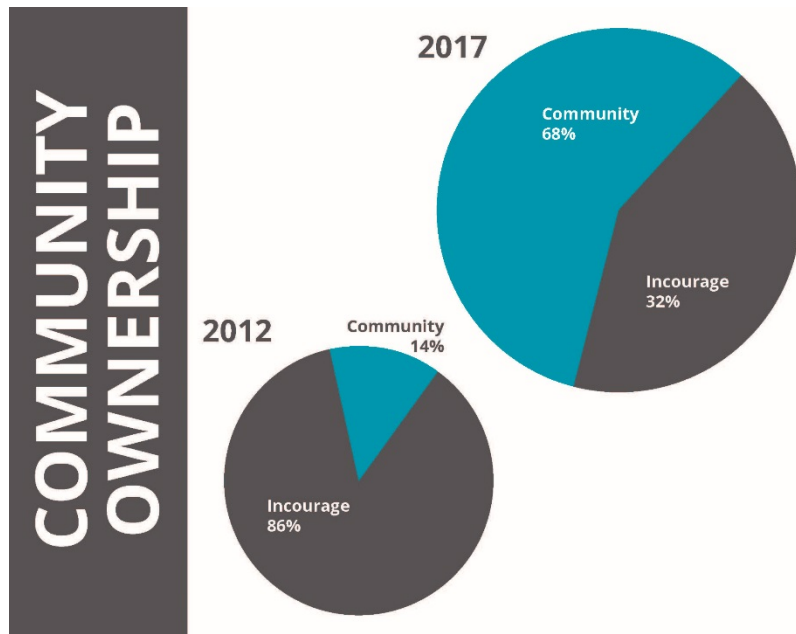
Fostering Community

As managers we wear many different hats as part of our job. This is especially true of smaller localities. We are leaders, mentors, supervisors, managers, directors, administrators, facilitator, and so much more. One of our most important roles with Council, Staff, and the Community is that of facilitator. We must be the individuals that facilitate community dialogs, both formally and informally. We must facilitate an environment that builds a sense of community.

While pondering things that the Town of Windsor could do to help facilitate the sense of community, the idea of having a series of community picnics came up. We envisioned a handful of small cookout type events that could be held on a cul-de-sac or other community space. We would invite everyone in the neighborhood to come out and enjoy an evening together. The Town would have no special agenda or topic to discuss, no purpose other than to get everyone together and talking.

I started to look for examples from other localities that had done something similar. In my research I ran across a community picnic held in Wisconsin Rapids. The picnic was started in 2012 by a local community foundation to provide a setting for “fostering connections among neighbors, highlighting local assets, and promoting collaboration between local businesses and organizations.” This event is one large community picnic for everyone in the Wisconsin Rapids area, whereas our vision is for more local, neighborhood based events, but both have the same goals in mind.

When the Wisconsin Rapids community picnics started back in 2012, 86% of the event was run by the community foundation, but by 2017 that number had dropped to 32%. This is great evidence that if we facilitate this type of event, the community will come out and support, and take ownership of it. If we can create events that the community is willing to take ownership of, it will not only be well worth our initial investment of time and money, but may be the catalysts for bigger and greater outcomes than we could ever imagine.



As I read through comments from the citizens of Wisconsin Rapids, I was encouraged by several of the quotes about the community picnic from residents and business owners: “It’s just people coming together to collaborate and make the community the best they can.”, “It’s important for people to be involved in their community because it’s all about karma. If you help people, they’re going to help you.” Aren’t these things we want people to say in our communities?

During the upcoming year, I plan to hold a series of these community picnics in the Town of Windsor. I will report back via my March 2019 article on our outcomes.

I encourage everyone to take a look at their communities and work to identify a way that you can help facilitate a sense of community among your residents. Whether it is with a series of community events, workshops, training, or any other ideas that work for your community, it will be well worth your time and effort to bring the community together.

More information about the Wisconsin Rapids community picnic can be found at <https://incouragecf.org/act/community-picnic>