

# FARMINGTON Independent

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## UMORE discussions begin

*Nathan Hansen*

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A few key themes emerged Monday night at a listening session to discuss what the education system might look like on the University of Minnesota's planned UMORE Park development.

The 100 or so people who showed up at Dakota County Technical College talked about a community that is invested in its schools and schools that offers the latest technology for learning. Where students might say hello to their teachers at the local grocery store but will also have the opportunity to interact, via the Internet, with students in other states and other countries.

Call it Mayberry for the 21st century.

It's hard to say how much of what was discussed Monday might actually become reality. Charles Muscoplat, the U of M vice president in charge of the UMORE project, called Monday's session — the first of six the University will hold this week and next to discuss different aspects of the project — the "blue sky, 30,000-foot visioning stage." Any idea was fair game.

"We're looking at building this with the idea we're building something once-ever," Muscoplat said Monday. "This is a once-ever opportunity and we need to make the best of it."

There was a wide range of ideas at the 12 tables set up for discussion Monday night, from finding a way to get parents and children together in the classroom to chucking the K-12 model altogether. But terms like partnership and community seemed to pop up everywhere, whether that meant building a school and a senior living complex close enough to share a parking lot — and perhaps give seniors and students a chance to interact — or involving the business community in the schools through internships and other opportunities.

Torrance Harriel, a parent who attended Monday's meeting, said he'd like to see the teachers who work in the schools live in the community. He likes the idea of running into his children's teachers on the street, not just seeing them a couple of times a year at conferences.

"I think that would be a great way to really nurture children," Harriel said.

Rosemount city administrator Jamie Verbrugge, sitting at a different table, said he'd like to see the UMORE project become a community identity that drives residents to get involved in their schools.

That was the small-town part of Monday's discussion. The high-tech part focused on connecting students in the UMORE development's classrooms to the wider world.

"Your kids aren't going to live in this community forever," said Dawn Dibley, whose children graduated from Rosemount High School. "They're going to go out and meet all kinds of people."

Technology is increasingly making it possible to bring the world into a classroom. One participant Monday referred to the Cisco Systems commercial in which an American student and a student in a foreign classroom hold a staring contest via video conference.

The trick, some said, is to have a global reach without losing sight of the local community and Rosemount's history. To experiment with new methods without making the system seem foreign to parents and students.

"Are we going to slow it down or are we going to speed it up," Harriel said. "The big challenge is to do something that's both. We want to supply the best with having them understand the rest of the world."

Whatever happens, Farmington superintendent Brad Meeks expects the development to have an impact on the school district and Farmington as a whole.

“I think it will have an impact on the whole region,” said Meeks, who was at Monday’s meeting. “They’re going to pull in business. It’s going to draw people. Maybe those people won’t live in that community but they’ll live in Farmington.”

The project

Over the next quarter century or so development at UMORE Park will have a significant impact on the way things look in Empire Township. In that period the 5,000-acre property in question, located largely in the township, will grow into a University-planned community of between 20,000 and 30,000 residents.

The University will use the community, built on property it got from the U.S. government after the closing of the Gopher Ordinance Works following World War II, in part to put into practice theories about everything from wind power to designing healthy communities.

Charles Muscoplat, the U of M vice president in charge of the project, said the development is the University’s attempt to do something special with a unique piece of land.

“There are no 5,000-acre developments next to major metropolitan areas anywhere,” Muscoplat said. “This is from scratch. We have a blank slate.”

The University will continue to conduct agricultural research on part of the property it owns in Empire. It will also maintain natural areas Muscoplat expects will be in some way connected to the community that develops.