

Our Community's Future

Bill Ziemendorf, *Leading Edge Economy* signals team



When the Envision brand went public in 2020, following 30 years' service as Bay Area Community Council, the plan was to teach Strategic Foresight to the entire community, sharing what the Envision board members had, themselves, learned. But the board knew they'd have to commit to more than *sharing* what they'd learned; they'd have to *live* it.

Then, with the "Envision" brand came a new long-term vision – "*Community leaders in Northeast Wisconsin systematically drive decisions toward a preferred future*" – and the board created a domain map to capture and define the key elements necessary for a thriving community – a "community of choice." This is how their map looked:



The Domain Map is the "ecosystem" of your central topic, showing key elements and establishing boundaries.

Determined to employ the skills and tools futurist Garry Golden had taught them, the board divided itself into five "signals teams," actively scanning for signals about the future of Greater Green Bay. For each of the "domains" above, they established a team of board members, and they opened the door to community members who might be particularly interested in that aspect of the future:

- Upward Mobility
- Arts, Culture and Entertainment
- Livable Neighborhoods
- Health and Well-Being
- Leading Edge Economy

A Signal is a small, often early, indicator of potential change in the future, possibly even an early warning of disruption or an emerging pattern.

How Signals Teams Work

Each team has been gathering signals specific to their "focus area" within the *community of choice* domain map. Done properly, the process is quite rigorous and yields meaningful insights about *potential* changes that can be planned for to support our shared goal for a preferred future.

Scanning involves identifying signals in each of three time horizons, defined by the board. These are referred to as Horizon 1 (now through 2025), Horizon 2 (2025 through 2028) and Horizon 3 (2028 through 2035). For simplicity, we refer to these as H1, H2 and H3 signals.

Horizon 3 signals are what futurists consider to be the most meaningful since they are furthest into the future and potentially could have the most significant impact on changes to our world.

As they investigate and monitor these signals of change, the teams analyze them within a STEEP framework relative to their area of focus.

“STEER” means:

- Social signal
- Technological signal
- Economic signal
- Environmental signal
- Political signal



A signals team meeting

Time to Report Out

Collectively, Envision signals teams have gathered hundreds of signals ranging from Horizon1 to Horizon3, collecting for the community an abundance of data in the form of *signals* and *trends*.

At the beginning of 2024, the Envision Board reflected on our signals team work and determined the time had come to take those hundreds of signals and start “pulling it all together,” with a goal of reporting to the Green Bay community in the near future. The process we’ve been following is detailed in the charts below:

A Trend is a discernible and sustained movement or direction in a particular element that shapes the future over time.





Leadership from Within

Our Envision Board has four University of Houston certified Futurists:

- Dave Wegge, retired professor, St. Norbert College
- Randy Lawton, retired President, The Lawton Companies
- Jeff House, President, Oneida ESC Group
- Alexa Naudziunas, Executive Director, Envision

Additionally, board member Gratzia Villarroel, professor at St. Norbert College, began taking the course this October. These graduates bring a wealth of knowledge and insight to bear on the overall work of Envision.

Our University of Houston grads recently trained the remainder of the board on developing "drivers" from these signals. The process involves grouping the signals into thematic clusters and then applying a variety of forms of analysis to discern the driver rising from the data. As Nan Nelson explained in an article in last month's *Foresight Network News*, "Drivers provide critical context for analyzing signals because they allow us to understand both the context through which a signal came to be and the implications that a signal might have for the future."

As I write this article, all five signals teams are in the process of identifying drivers and are looking forward to the next step in understanding their implications for Green Bay's future.

Stay tuned for a future update as we refine the vision of our community's future. Then join us at **World Futures Day on February 28, 2025**, where you will hear firsthand about the drivers we've identified and their possible early implications for the future of Greater Green Bay.

A Futurist is a professional trained to study the future by using foresight techniques to help anticipate potential outcomes and make informed decisions.

A Driver is a thematic cluster of related trends/signals that is a significant force or factor that influences change in a system or domain, often having broad and deep impact on shaping the future.