

Citizens comment on Citistates recommendations

As a follow-up to the Citistates Report: *What's Done, What's Next: A Civic Pact*, the Public Life Foundation convened a cross-section of interested citizens to share their impressions of the report, its recommendations, and to identify individuals and organizations that may be well-positioned to advance various proposals and suggestions.

Review of report, recommendations

Participants were provided a copy of the Citistates Executive Summary and directed to the project website (www.civicpact.org) for the full report.

Key Findings:

Citistates found that Owensboro-Daviess County ranks high in Kentucky and nationally in a host of performance measures such as job creation, education, downtown development, health care, and transportation.

But there is unmistakable evidence that in an era of rising energy prices, globalization, stagnant incomes, and diminished government resources Owensboro's work to set a stronger economic and cultural foundation can't rest.

Following a review of the report and recommendations, participants shared their impressions:

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Openness and Transparency checklist

Town Meeting Bearing Good Fruit

"We the People" volunteers continue tracking and promoting recommendations.



1. Undertake a new community strategic plan.

According to Citistates researcher-writer Keith Schneider, such a planning exercise could bring into focus “the next big thing” for Owensboro-Daviess County that everyone could rally around.

Citizen Responses:

- Does our community have a strategic plan, or when was the last one conducted? In the past, strategic plans have been conducted by the city, the city-county parks department, the school districts, and others. Several community plans have been conducted by the Chamber of Commerce (Strategies for Tomorrow, Regional Vision 2020).
- It may indeed be time for another community-wide strategic plan, involving the leading organizations and the general public – if there is an effective implementation dimension to the plan.
- There could be pull back in certain circles when it comes to developing a new strategic direction for our community. How can that be pre-empted? This concern is not a reason to abandon a strategic planning project.
- A strategic plan should be a collaborative effort involving many organizations and agencies. The Chamber of Commerce is a natural leader/coordinator.
- A lot of initiatives are underway. We need good, solid communication.

Who participated?

December 5th Meeting

Ed Allen	retired school superintendent, volunteer
Merritt Bates-Thomas	county school board member
Joe Berry	downtown project manager
Joe Castlen	District Judge
Shirley Cecil	Chamber President, bank president
Martha Clark	CPA, philanthropist and volunteer
Larry Conder	downtown entrepreneur, natural gas marketing
Sharla Austin Darnell	Kenergy
Sara Hemingway	Marilyn & William Young Charitable Foundation
Hervey Howell	retired engineer, volunteer
Helen Mountjoy	former state education cabinet secretary, Regional Alliance for Education
Roger Stacy	city commission
Arnie Weiner	retired educator (moved here from California)

December 8th Meeting

Belinda Abell	marketing, We the People volunteer
Cathy Armour	former city commissioner
Candance Brake	former city commissioner
Phil Casper	photographer, formerly with AEP (Rockport power plant)
Gabrielle Gray	bluegrass museum director
Mike Gray	interim county school superintendent
Reid Haire	former county judge-executive
Barbara Ingram	neighborhood leader
Roger Ingram	neighborhood leader
Dan Lanham	transportation director, Audubon Area Community Services
Al Mattingly	county judge-executive
Fred May	incoming EDC chair
Ben Taylor	retired scientist, farmer, local Sierra Club president
Dr. Gene Tice	director, WKU – Owensboro
George Wathen	county commissioner

Note: City-County participation was good. Low representation of young adults, minorities, low-income.

- Could tie-in with the Chamber's upcoming planning meeting. Copies of the Executive Summary will be provided to the participants.
- Consultant Libby Alexander coordinated a strategic planning study with the city in 2010. Given that there was no money to implement anything at the time, the city was supposed to revisit the recommendations in three years. It was the genesis of a lot of important projects. A key element was both internal and external communications. That has not been addressed.
- The city has a \$10 million surplus. People from the outside see us in a different way. Like the idea of synchronizing the plans of the Economic Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce, City and County to avoid repetition. They all have plans.
- City government shouldn't conduct the next strategic plan. It needs to be done by someone not connected with government, such as the Public Life Foundation.
- Regional Vision 2010 was a huge undertaking. At the end of it there was no unit to force these things to happen. The City and County made the parks master plan happen by assigning people to make it happen. Need an entity to not only convene but one that has the power to implement it.
- Our community conducts all sorts of studies. In order for real change to happen we need a study and a plan that includes action steps along the way.
- There is a lot of private capital flowing so how do we synchronize the various plans?
- We need to see the plans from an educational point of view. It would be helpful in academic planning to identify what degree programs are needed, etc.
- We need to have everyone on the same page. Need to offer courses in civic life.
- We are missing young people at public meetings.
- We need all entities to talk to one another so we all know where each is going.
- Three months ago the mayor said the number one

community priority was the proposed bluegrass music center and he went to the state asking for money. The community did not set that priority.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Convene representatives of leading public and private entities. Share a summary of the community strategic plans that have been prepared in recent years. Explore their sense of the need for a new community strategic plan.

Who conducted the study?



Keith Schneider, the chief researcher and writer of the report, is a nationally known journalist and public policy specialist. Since 1981, he has been a special correspondent for the *New York Times*, including ten years as a *New York Times* national correspondent based in Washington. He also serves as senior editor and producer at Circle of Blue, an independent online multi-media news organization covering the global freshwater crisis. He has won two George Polk Awards, among the most prestigious in American journalism.



Curtis Johnson, CEO of Citistates, supervised the project and edited the report. Johnson is the former chairman of the Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis-St. Paul, a former college president, leader of a public affairs research organization, policy advisor and chief of staff for a Minnesota Governor Anne Carlson. He has authored and co-authored several books, numerous articles and reports.



2. Cultivate and recruit women to serve as elected and appointed leaders.

Progress has been made since the 1991 report, but elected officials and appointees to important community leadership positions are still largely held by white, middle-aged males.

Citizen Responses:

- The public needs to recognize the importance of women not only holding public office but serving on boards and commissions. For example, women make 85 percent of the health care decisions in a household but for a long time there was only one woman on the hospital board.
- Who could lead this effort to attract more women into public life? There is a new organization that encourages women to participate in government. Other suggestions: BPW (Business and Professional Women), Junior League, and Leadership Owensboro (now Emerge Owensboro).
- The Junior League compiles a list of members who are interested in serving on public boards. Leadership Owensboro previously published an alumni directory that included a cross-referenced index of interests and skills. This proved to be a valuable resource as organizations filled vacancies on boards and committees.
- The number of women serving in a public office in Daviess County is paltry compared to other parts of the state. We do, however, have more women serving in nonprofit leadership roles.
- We need to mandate that all public boards reflect the demographics of the population.
- Create an electronic database where people could sign

up if they are interested in serving on public boards. Their skills and interests could be cross referenced to help find the best match when there are openings on boards.

- We have to proactively find leadership.
- Officials are not going to appoint someone they don't know.
- Unless we are forced to do this it won't happen.
- There needs to be training programs to educate people serving on boards.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Convene women and minority leaders to explore strategies for increasing public participation.

OWENSBORO 
Kentucky's Festival City

3. Strengthen internal and external communications.

Citistates found a desperate need for stronger governmental communications and public education to inform the public of the rationale behind various proposals and policies. Owensboro needs to improve its community videos, promote community pride, form a new brand.

Citizen Responses:

- Information is often lagging on important public decisions. For example, the Chamber of Commerce finally called a news conference to share concerns about the escalating size and cost of the proposed downtown convention center. There were concerns that important features in the downtown plan would be eliminated. When information and explanations were shared openly and thoroughly in a series of three forums, there was more public support.
- OMHS and OMU have a professional communications

staff person, but the city and county governments do not. Should there be?

- Public officials will respond when a question or concern is raised at a city or county government meeting. Officials need to do a better job of developing ways to get ideas out in the community. Need to develop some way to engage the public.
- The timing of the dialogue is important.
- There needs to be more information on the city and county web sites about what is going on.
- Difficult to get people to pay attention. How do you get 80 percent of the population who don't have a college degree to pay attention?

TAKE-AWAYS:

Convene a task force of local communication professionals to craft an appeal to city and county governments to take such an initiative. The recommendation should include the rationale for this action.



4. Establish a joint city-county office of the ombudsman.

Citistates recommended a city-county office to create a "surer path through the permitting thicket." This office would also advance public education, provide citizens with better access to information and a meaningful role in decision making, particularly on proposed major projects.

Citizen Responses:

- This is necessary.

- First we need to define what that person would do before hiring someone. There are issues that arise a lot. Funding could be problematic. The budget would be \$300,000 to \$400,000.
- Is this something that communities our size have?
- Officials have to commit to this.
- We have the City Action line, but the service has been cut back. The city needs to start capitalizing on it and provide more information on their website.
- The city and county would have to be the ones to start it, but the city and county should not have control of the ombudsman.
- The permitting process creates a daunting task for businesses. The office is staffed to be efficient all year, but there needs to be more staff there in spring and summer when most construction occurs.
- The streamlining of the permitting process needs to be aligned with the strategic plan.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Convene stakeholders to explore this further: planning and zoning staff and board member, developer, home builder, architect, others.



5. Establish and fund the Owensboro Promise

Modeled after a Kalamazoo, Michigan program, Citistates recommended a comprehensive college tuition assistance program for all high school graduates as well as students from other places to attend college in

Owensboro. Employers are attracted to communities with a well-educated workforce.

Citizen Responses:

- There are so many reasons people give for not completing degrees. Tuition is one. We need jobs for people who have degrees. There are a variety of models to look at to start down this path. If we don't invest in our people, no one else will.
- It will take big bucks. The Kalamazoo program gives out \$4 million annually. We are very fortunate to have the John B. and Brownie Young Scholarship program that primarily helps Daviess and McLean County graduates with their first year of tuition.
- One of the Emerge Owensboro projects was to look at creating a scholarship fund.
- The Citizens Committee on Education has been working on developing a scholarship program for five to seven years. Madisonville has a scholarship program. Many scholarship programs are funded through Rotary Clubs. They're very new and there is not enough data to conclude that it makes a difference in people completing their degrees.
- A lot of people are looking at ways to increase degree holders. "Promise" is something bigger than scholarship services (e.g., for working adults that return to college, those that need child care, etc.) We need to offer wrap-around services.
- Given the low income population in this community, scholarship programs are certainly needed.
- Guidance counselors are doing an incredible job of looking for grant opportunities but the students need to take some initiative also.
- There is not much assistance for students unless they are in the top 15 percent of the graduating class or athletic stars.
- I'd like to see a community scholarship implemented. Every time there's a rate tuition hike we lose students.
- Not everyone needs to go to college. There are other

ways to be successful in the trades and college is expensive.

- Many adult learners that want an education don't qualify for grants and scholarships; they have to take out loans.
- A group that graduated from Emerge Owensboro (formerly Leadership Owensboro) has been researching and trying to build up support for such a scholarship program. The Citizens Committee on Education is working with them.
- We need to set a community goal and develop a plan for that target number of college graduates.
- In Louisiana there are state-funded scholarships.
- The market for WKU-Owensboro is a 29-year-old with two kids.
- The emphasis now is on career readiness. Students can earn work certifications. The program is expanding at OCTC.
- We need to look at a college education as something more than a way to get a job.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Monitor and support efforts by various community groups who have an interest in such a program: Citizens Committee on Education, Regional Alliance for Education, school boards/superintendents, local colleges, Chamber of Commerce, counselors, etc.



6. Establish the Owensboro Top 20 Young Achievers program.

In order to keep talented young adults connected to their hometown even as they pursue their careers elsewhere,

Citistates recommended the establishment of a Young Achiever's program. High school graduates would compete for a Top 20 distinction in academics, community service and more. Beyond a recognition program, the honorees would be encouraged to periodically return to Owensboro, network, build cohesion and promote hometown improvement and visibility.

Citizen Responses:

- Sounds like a natural for the Chamber of Commerce.
- OHS has a Hall of Achievement, but it lacks the ongoing networking that Citistates is suggesting, and honorees are older and already accomplished in their careers.
- The *Messenger-Inquirer* once named a "Top 10 under 40" (years of age). How do we increase participation of people between 30 and 40?
- Theatre Workshop does a good job.
- It's been suggested that we have an annual conference to network with others who are from here but moved away.
- The Economic Development Corporation is working with schools on alumni outreach.
- Around the Christmas holidays Gambrinus is full of young people who have returned to visit with family and they go there to reconnect with old friends. That might be a good start and time to have such a conference.
- We could invite 50 high school juniors and seniors to apply to be part of a leadership panel. Twenty of these students become the nucleus. This creates a pool of people with leadership skills who would agree to stay in touch.
- This would not be difficult to do. One part-time director. \$20,000 per year.
- I don't like the name.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Encourage the Chamber of Commerce, Emerge Owensboro and Community Ambassadors to take on such a project.



7. Foster local foods and develop more recreational infrastructure.

To counter the health and economic problems associated with obesity, Citistates recommended a campaign to acknowledge best practices in local restaurants, expansion of wellness programs and the farmer's market, technical and financial assistance for local food producers, expanded bike lanes, a public swimming lake, and more.

Citizen Responses:

- Look at food as an industry. Owensboro has food processing, food science, a strong agricultural base and companies like CRS OneSource. We're developing a food hub concept that works with producers, manufacturers and logistics. There are new ways to cross reference.
- We have a strong farmers market. There are 40 vendors and most accept WIC (a health department food subsidy program). These local growers have an interest in a permanent market being developed. They want to pair local farmers with local restaurants on Farm Tuesday.
- Healthy Horizons is interested in making Owensboro a healthier community. They could oversee this and keep this effort moving forward.
- There are more local growers than people recognize: Reid's Orchard, Trunnell's, the local blueberry farm.
- Make some connections. Bring food processing to this

community. There is research in food science going on at the Centre for Business and Research. The EDC is working on this.

- The Extension Office could help implement this.
- Audubon Area Community Services rents bicycles for \$2 per day through the GRITS program. The Welborn Foundation in Evansville wants to replicate the program there.
- We're missing an opportunity for Owensboro to benefit financially from athletics. We attract many tournaments, but we could do much more with better and bigger facilities. Fisher Park is inadequate for ballgames. The Convention and Visitors Bureau could have a key role.
- There's a lot of competition out in sports promotions. Other cities (Bowling Green, Elizabethtown) are doing what we've done – only more.
- We need to connect and expand the Greenbelt from downtown and throughout the county. The YMCA and others could advocate.
- It takes political pressure and political leadership. The City has finished their part of the Greenbelt; now the county must complete its network. Need to look for grant money.
- The city paid for Fisher Park and the Greenbelt through the Community Vision fund – an additional .33 cents on the occupational tax that was designated for capital projects. That revenue is now being used to fund the convention center.
- We should consider expanded gaming. In other cities it generates significant dollars and tourists.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Convene representatives of various groups that are already involved in related programs: Farmer's Market, local restaurants, agriculture community, extension office, 4H, Farm Bureau, EDC, city and county parks and recreation, Healthy Horizons, etc. to explore how they can collaborate to achieve this goal.



8. Generate more diversity in civic life and improve business.

Citistates sees immense opportunity for Owensboro-Daviess County to grow economically and to establish more diversity by attracting investment from Asia, particularly China. This will require a focused approach, an international trade office, relationships cultivated over time, technical assistance, and more.

Citizen Responses:

- There are three or four concentrations of Burmese refugees here now who work in factories in Evansville.
- The Owensboro Human Relations Commission should follow up on this recommendation.
- We generally look to the Chamber of Commerce as our business advocate.
- First Presbyterian Church has promoted diversity through its Multi-Cultural Festival.
- In exchange for offering more scholarships to racially diverse college students, they could be required to stay in this community for a period of time.
- We should involve the Neblett Center more in what we're doing.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Explore with Chamber of Commerce, EDC, multi-cultural festival committee, Friendship Force, Sister Cities, International Center (at Brescia University), how education and cultural exchanges can be expanded to include a commerce dimension.



9. Promote new and cleaner energy sources

Following an assessment of energy investments, resources and trends, Citistates concluded that coal, natural gas and oil will continue to be the primary supplier of energy in the Ohio Valley. However, given the City's ownership of Owensboro Municipal Utilities and the Elmer Smith power station, and growing concerns about higher prices, climate change, health, environmental, and economic consequences, this community is uniquely positioned to seize opportunities and be a leader and innovator in carbon reduction technology.

Citizen Responses:

- Solar power is not viable here without government intervention. No one is anxious to look at wind energy. There is no shale gas available. And it would be difficult to get natural gas from where it is to where it is needed.
- This is going to impact everyone in three years. New regulations from the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will result in additional costs for coal-fired power plants which won't impact residential customers much, but industry such as the aluminum manufacturers in Hancock County will be greatly impacted. The cost might be so great they will have to shut down. And loss of jobs affects everyone.
- The taxes paid by the aluminum industry there also funds Hancock County schools.
- The next OMU General Manager will be tasked to resolve this.
- We need to look at more efficient residential use.
- Global warming is a planetary crisis that will affect every-

one. Owensboro-Daviess County should plan to position ourselves to be part of the solution. We could look at the Elmer Smith plant for CO2 emissions. We need to begin to plan to get away from the coal-fired paradigm. We could do it in small steps. Push energy conservation more. Encourage use of renewable sources. There are a number of things that could be done that would be modest to begin with.

- We also need to use mass transit.
- Why not restrict the use of automobiles in certain parts of town.
- People don't want to pay the added cost for cleaner energy. If you rebuild OMU it costs a lot of money.
- Organizations that need to work together on this include: OMU, Economic Development Corporation, Environmental Impact Council, the Ministerial Association, health department, medical community, GRADD, OMHS, etc.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Meet with OMU and Kenegy officials to learn more about their long-term plans, interest in being a leader and innovator in carbon reduction technology.



10. Strengthen transportation hubs, build a streetcar line.

Citistates sees opportunities in various forms of transportation. They recommend investments in the airport, riverport, and a streetcar line (that in other cities has been a catalytic project that attracts significant private investment along the route).

Citizen Responses:

- We should concentrate on expanding the Greenbelt to bring people downtown.
- Streetcars are very expensive.
- We don't have a dense enough population for this to be effective.
- A cheaper alternative would be to use buses.
- GRITS/GRADD applied for a \$10.2 million grant to double the size of the GRITS parking garage in order to bring all public transportation vehicles (i.e., GRITS, OTC, etc.) into one area, but the grant was not approved. They will apply again.
- The streetcar line is not that far-fetched. It would tie the community together. There is federal money for this also.
- The service cannot be free.

TAKE-AWAYS:
Contact officials associated with the airport, riverport, downtown plan (streetcar) to explore what the community can do to advance important transportation projects.



11. Put a brake on sprawl.

To improve efficiency, convenience, and quality of life, Citistates has long been an advocate for well-planned, compact patterns of development. They were encouraged by certain trends in Owensboro (downtown and riverfront development, infill development, pedestrian-

friendly patterns); they found other patterns misdirected (large surface parking lots that dilutes streetlife, sprawling subdivisions and retail, etc.).

Citizen Responses:

- We have to have a plan and think about when cars and gas aren't going to be available. Owensboro needs to be a more compact community.
- If people are too close together there will be increased crime.
- Actually studies indicate just the opposite. The key is to have a concentration of activities for people to be involved in.
- It all boils down to dollar signs. It costs more to build up than out.
- There are lots of new buildings. It's unfortunate to see so many old buildings that could be rehabilitated.
- The EDC once had incentives in place to do that. We need to bring this back up city-wide. Look at annexation incentives.
- When Jagoe built Heartland he had to extend 26th Street and Byers Avenue at his own expense.
- We need to focus investments on bringing city residents to the city.
- Parking is a problem downtown. The new theme in retail is not malls but lifestyle centers. All are built in the middle of nowhere but re-create appealing features of downtowns.
- Tax disparities between the city and county governments – particularly the city and county school systems – result in some businesses moving from the city to the county.

TAKE-AWAYS:
Encourage OMPC, GRADD, EIC, Sierra Club and other planning agencies and advocates to educate the community on the importance of curbing sprawl and instead to redevelop in areas where public facilities and services already exist.



12. Promote events and bluegrass music.

Owensboro's unique connection to bluegrass music is seen as a formidable opportunity by Citistates. However, whether the state office building can best accommodate such a use or make a compelling architectural statement needs to be subject to community dialogue, as does the designation of the Bluegrass Center as the community's top priority going into the 2012 state legislative session.

Citizen Responses:

- I've heard some people complain that we're stressing bluegrass too much.
- Kentucky is the home of bluegrass. The potential for this center would be phenomenal. It would be a 12-month per year draw.

- The Public Life Foundation should conduct a forum to see what the public thinks about having a Bluegrass Center.
- The Bluegrass Center is the community's best opportunity for a worldwide tourism venue.
- Other areas of arts and recreation could build on that.
- This is the most important thing that could happen in this community. Barbecue. Banjo and Bluegrass – one thing we can lay claim to.
- The Bluegrass Center should be about bluegrass, not political power. We shouldn't pit one project against another.
- A music center that focuses on more than bluegrass – to include its roots and branches – would fill a lot more seats.
- We need to hear what the community thinks about the Bluegrass Center.

TAKE-AWAYS:

Conduct a public forum on the Bluegrass Music proposal, alternatives for maximizing our bluegrass potential, and options for the use of the state office building if state funding is not secured.



Public Forum Results

A Nation in Debt: How Can We Pay the Bills?

[CLICK TO VIEW RESULTS](#)



Proposed Surface Mine in Daviess County

Project Description

History

Brian Howard, senior planner for the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission, reports that, since the late 1970s, several properties have been zoned for coal mining in the area that adjoins or is near the pending proposal by Western Kentucky Minerals.

According to Carla Williams, a resident near the proposed Western Kentucky Minerals surface mine site in southern Daviess County, since 1981 there have been two attempts to secure permits for comparable projects in the area. Both were rejected. During those years, the area has seen considerable residential growth and a Girl Scout Camp that now attracts youth groups from western Kentucky and southern Indiana for environmental education and nature experiences (including a bird sanctuary).

On a parallel track, the coal market has been sporadic despite the growing need for low-cost energy for residential and industrial uses in this area. Low-cost electricity from coal has generally met such a need, but most of the coal that is the easiest and cheapest to extract has been mined.

Recent Initiative

A 685-acre coal surface mine to be operated by Western Kentucky Minerals is proposed for Daviess County near the Ohio County line along U.S. Highway 231, Girl Scout and Russell roads.

The coal and surface rights are owned by more than a dozen property owners and are under lease to this Philpot-based company.

Coal reserves of more than 2 million tons are estimated from the leases.

The mine would create jobs, many at high-level wages. The mine could also generate state severance taxes.

The mine would be visible from U.S. Highway 231 and on property that adjoins the Pennyroyal Girl Scout Camp.

Regulations require that mining operations be at least 300 feet from an occupied structure.

The Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission staff recommended the zoning change for the mine. The proposed use complies with the OMPC Comprehensive Plan and its criteria.



Pros & Cons

Those who support the proposal may say...	Those who oppose the proposal may say...
Western Kentucky Minerals has been working on this project for several years and it meets all the regulatory requirements.	Despite efforts to minimize the impact of the mine, nearby property owners are concerned about damages to their homes from blasting, increased noise, dust and airborne toxins, truck traffic, road deterioration, contamination of well water, disruption of wildlife, and reductions in property values.
To reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, we need to develop our domestic mineral reserves. Alternative energy simply cannot meet the need. Coal provides 94 percent of Kentucky's electricity.	The answer to our energy and environmental problems is not the use of more coal, but the expansion of renewable energy resources. Coal in this area is high sulfur which creates additional problems and costs.
Mineral owners have the right to extract those minerals to recover their investment.	Mineral owners and coal operators do not have the right to threaten the health and productivity of others or to reduce the appeal and value of their property.
Surface mining reclamation techniques have improved significantly through the years. Regulations and monitoring are stricter than ever.	After surface mining, it may be many years before the aesthetic appeal, ecosystem, and production capacity of cropland, pastures or forests can be restored. The mine is incompatible with the community's strategic vision and is only phase one of what could be a project that is two to three times the size of the current proposal.
During these times of high unemployment, we need the good jobs that this mine would support. Increased local tax revenues support services such as schools, fire protection, law enforcement, parks and more.	Jobs and taxes can also be created through sustainable green energy sources. The mine could actually lower tax revenue because of reduced property values, road repairs, health consequences, and reduced tourism.

Public Meetings

Public Forum (conducted by Western Kentucky Minerals)

Monday, January 30, 2012 ■ 6:00pm - 8:30pm
Owensboro Christian Church (Community Room)

Consideration of Rezoning (Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission)

Thursday, February 9, 2012 ■ 5:30pm
4th Floor ■ City Hall

For More Information

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Carla Williams or Tony Isbill

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Sources:

Campbell, Joy, "Debate likely over strip mining request," *Messenger-Inquirer*, Jan. 10, 2012
Howard, Brian, Senior Planner, Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission
Save Our Homes Neighborhood Alliance (SOHNA) – five members who live near the proposed mining site

Owensboro-Daviess County's wish list for future Kentucky General Assemblies:

**Who should determine our priorities?
 What criteria should be used?
 Is there a better way?**

Prior to each state legislative session, Owensboro-Daviess County leaders attempt to speak with one voice in requesting and prioritizing local projects for state government funding assistance. This year, a local delegation, led by Mayor Ron Payne, determined that an \$18 million request for a Bluegrass Music Center was our community's top priority.

Was county government involved in the process? Did the public or stakeholder groups have a role in identifying and determining local priorities? What's to keep other local leaders or organizations from proposing and competing with other

projects? How can we best get our act together as a community and truly make this a "community" decision?

Whether the proposal is for a Bluegrass Music Center, an advanced technology center at Owensboro Community and Technical College, a pharmacy school for the existing OMHS campus, a parking garage to accompany a major downtown project, an international trade center, or others... perhaps each major project under consideration should go through a similar assessment in order to objectively rank the proposals.

The following is an example of one way to structure such a ranking system.

Citizen Support

There is a need for the project.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project represents an exciting community opportunity.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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There is an active constituency promoting the project.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Many citizens have expressed support for the project (surveys, hearings, forums, etc.)

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Community Appeal

**The project will enhance the appeal of our community...
...to businesses looking to expand or relocate.**

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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...to young people when they graduate from college.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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...to families looking to relocate here.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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...to seniors looking to retire here.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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...to tourists that may visit our community.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Impact

**The project will generate a significant number of jobs ...
...during construction.**

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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...after construction is complete.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will serve a significant number of local people.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will attract a significant number of people from outside our community.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will be a valuable visual enhancement to our community.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will generate spin-off investment.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will be a boost to downtown development.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will require a significant amount of local purchasing.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will generate significant sales, payroll, property or other tax revenue.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Funding

Funds are available for the project (or to complete the project).

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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There is a good plan to finance the project.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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If funds must be borrowed, there is a good plan to absorb the debt service.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will not likely require a tax increase.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project will not likely require a significant operating subsidy.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The project leverages local funds with state, federal, or private funds.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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The value of the project justifies the cost and/or risk.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Somewhat Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Somewhat Agree	5 Strongly Agree
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Criteria could be weighted to adjust for the importance of certain criteria (e.g., quality job creation capacity) over others. Such a process would be a unique and valuable demonstration of how projects can be ranked for their community benefit over personal preferences of key leaders.

It is too late for such a process to be applicable to the 2012 legislative session. Perhaps Owensboro-Daviess County can set a higher standard by instituting such a system in the future.

Openness and Transparency Checklist

Inherently better decisions

If decisions were made in the open rather than behind closed doors, would we have avoided the collapse of Enron, decades of child abuse in various institutions, and the meltdown in the financial sector?

Would we have seen the excessive spending by the Lexington Airport Board, the Kentucky League of Cities and the Kentucky Association of Counties? Would there be as many conflicts of interest?

If openness and transparency characterized how officials in positions of public trust conduct business and make decisions, would we have had the same kind of public outcry over the Highway 54 TIF proposal, insurance tax, and the escalated downtown convention center size and cost?

Would we have as much distrust, cynicism and apathy?

Progress worth noting

Openness and transparency is a frequent topic these days, and this has resulted in some encouraging applications.

- Openness and transparency was the top priority identified in the government discussion period of the “We the People” *AmericaSpeaks* 21st Century Town Meeting®. One of the action teams that formed following the town

meeting, Citizens for Good Government, continues to promote openness, transparency and accountability in government, public agencies, and private organizations with a public mission.

- Government expenditures are increasingly posted online (but state government conference committee meetings, where the deals are made, are still closed).
- Civic engagement programs on college and university campuses are introducing students and faculty to public issues, research, deliberative dialogue, and grass roots citizenship. In fact, a new endowed program at Owensboro Community and Technical College will feature collaboration between Brescia University, Kentucky Wesleyan College, and Western Kentucky University – Owensboro.
- Our local governments are
 - holding public work sessions
 - experimenting with different meeting dates and times to make attendance more convenient for more people
 - hosting television call-in shows, public breakfast and luncheon meetings throughout the community, and
 - partnering with community groups on public forums and workshops.
- Many local officials have signed an Openness and Transparency Pledge, developed by Citizens for Good



Government. The pledge will set a higher standard for our community and keep opportunities and techniques for civic engagement and accountability front of mind.

Openness and transparency is a requisite to an informed citizenry, effective civic engagement and meaningful public participation. Stephen Carden, Ph.D., and Professor of Philosophy at Owensboro Community and Technical College stated it poignantly:

“We owe reasons to each other, and once we engage in the examination of reasons, once we hold them up to the light, we are better able to understand each other’s will, including our own, and including the general will.”

The primary concern: how we make decisions

The Doble Report

In 1999, a public opinion study conducted by Doble and Associates sponsored by the Public Life Foundation, Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation and Audubon Area Community Services found that the root of civic tension was how decisions are made in the community. Again and again, participants in the study said that major decisions are made by a small group of influential people, a “clique,” who carry on behind the scenes, with minimal public input. As a result, they said, decisions on key issues generally benefit a few people instead of the community as a whole. Participants from both the city and county said that the greater, broad, public interest is not as important as the interests of small segments of the community.

Such characterizations may not be accurate or fair, but they are commonly held opinions.

Checklist for becoming more open and transparent

To build trust, local governments, public agencies and commissions, ad hoc task forces, and private nonprofit organizations with a public mission should all have a responsibility to be open, transparent and accountable.

On all major decisions:

- Were the decisions made in the open?
- Did the public have a meaningful role?
- Did the process build trust in officials and our institutions or contribute to public discontent and cynicism?
- Was there a genuine effort to engage the public in major community decisions early in the process?
- Were opportunities provided for public dialogue beyond the mandated public hearings?
- Were public meetings conducted at convenient times and places for most people?
- Was relevant information on the choices connected with the pending decision shared with the public in an easy to understand and balanced manner?
- Was the public given ample time to digest the information and respond to officials before votes were taken?
- Did officials deliberate publicly or simply promote their pre-selected preference?

In response to a recent article on Owensboro's downtown and riverfront initiatives published in the *New York Times*, *AmericaSpeaks* invited the Public Life Foundation to submit an article for its website/blog. A 2007 Owensboro town meeting directed by *AmericaSpeaks* demonstrated strong support for downtown transformation and was a contributing factor in the advancement of the downtown plan.

The following article is now posted on the *AmericaSpeaks* website.

Town Meeting bearing good fruit

Nov. 18, 2011

The November 16 *New York Times* article ("A Kentucky City Reinvents a Faded Downtown") is a hearty acknowledgement of a feisty community investing in its future. It is also a demonstration of the impact of public dialogue and deliberation.

The seeds for these initiatives were planted during an event that is now blossoming four years later. On a chilly November day in 2007, more than 600 Owensboro-Daviess County, Kentucky residents devoted an entire Saturday – the first day of deer season – to participate in the "We the People" *AmericaSpeaks* 21st Century Town Meeting®. This unprecedented assembly and community work session attracted an impressive mix of people from all walks of life and all areas of the city and county.

The town meeting was an uplifting community-building experience. It created a buzz about town. And it provided the ammunition for hesitant leaders to take heat – and take action.

The need to "transform downtown" emerged as the top recommendation during the portion of the town meeting in which community development was examined. This priority reflected frustration over the many downtown studies and plans through the years that had not been implemented. Moreover, it was a rebuke of developers who had been proposing a suburban convention center complex that, if built, would have undermined efforts to improve the downtown.

Armed with this strong public sentiment, officials, advocates, donors, stakeholders and everyday citizens came together. They embraced the latest urban planning strategies, hired a top firm, and welcomed public input in the planning process.

There were glitches. For example, when it was time to discuss funding, too many decisions were made behind closed doors. But ultimately the pros and cons came into focus and officials increased taxes despite the political consequences.

Within a few months, construction will begin on a new riverfront convention center and hotel. A public plaza and the expansion of a riverfront park are under construction.

Pedestrian-friendly streets and sidewalks are in the works. Several mixed use residential-office-retail projects are coming together.

Most every leader agrees: Owensboro's downtown and riverfront initiatives would not have occurred had it not been for the public outcry to make it a priority. That outcry came forth from the town meeting.

Now our challenge is to institutionalize the process. Whenever our community faces a major public decision, before leaders – however well-intentioned – push along their plan, they need to take the time to objectively frame the issue with balanced and reliable information. They should set forth the choices they face and the potential costs, consequences and tradeoffs of those options. And then they need to not only share that information, but create settings in which citizens can come together and listen, deliberate and learn from the perspective of others before they are asked to come to judgment.

This kind of deliberative dialogue, this form of participatory democracy, is a more valuable gauge of public opinion than surveys, polls or public hearings when participants may or may not be well-informed.

This is not to say that officials won't have to make difficult, unpopular decisions. Leaders must be thick-skinned. Some issues bring forth intense emotions and raucous behavior. However complex or contentious the issue, communities and leaders simply make better decisions when they factor in the voice and conclusions of informed constituents.

The process of public dialogue and deliberation – and the methodology pioneered by *AmericaSpeaks* – is inherently valuable. Using reasonable ground rules, these assemblies are civil, transparent, and meaningful.

They cultivate fertile ground for rich and rewarding civic experiences. They bring forth the color and fragrance of fresh ideas. They yield a stronger sense of community. They help us harvest the collective wisdom and capacity of the people.

Rodney Berry, President

Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, Kentucky





“We the People” Update

“We the People” volunteers continue tracking and promoting recommendations.

The “We the People” Leadership Council remains intact and continues to meet monthly. In 2011, the council added three new members with a variety of skills. The group consists of workgroup chairs, community leaders, concerned citizens, Public Life Foundation staff and volunteers. The Council champions the implementation of the priorities from the Town Meetings. Currently, the group is working on the 2010 meeting goals as well as keeping track of the 2007 meeting workgroups and their progress.

Leadership Council Members

Chair: Belinda Abell	Martha Clark
Vice-chair: Shelly Nichols	Bruce Kunze
Secretary: Nancy Whitmer	Tom Milton
Rodney Berry	Neil Bradley
Keith Sanders	Larry Bidwell
Craig O’Bryan	Jim Zabek
Patricia McKeegan	
Ed Allen	

We the People: 2007 Town Meeting Workgroups

Education and Wellness Network (previously Community of Education and Learning and Healthy and Caring Committee)

Group met April 29, July 15, and December 9, 2011.

Each meeting consisted of social service providers, school social workers, family resource and youth service coordinators, healthcare providers as well as other nonprofit workers throughout the community. The purpose for each meeting was to network, share agency/school news, resources and get new information provided by the meeting’s key note speaker. Each meeting was well attended with more than 25 members present.

Environmental Impact Council

Group recommitted early in the year to work towards their goal of curbside recycling. A subcommittee was formed and members met to discuss a new plan. They did research, worked with elected officials and finally had enough information to present to city hall. Before that date, the Mayor announced that the City was to issue a request for proposal to private contractors for curbside pick up. Although the group did not present to the city, they felt that this was a “win” for them.

Citizens for Good Government

During 2011 Citizens for Good Government presented an openness and transparency document to Daviess County Fiscal Court. The court adopted the document and further commented it would be presented to the Court’s appointees to other boards and organizations.

CGG also assisted in the Downtown Convention Center forums, and is planning a workshop for citizens running or considering a run for a political office in 2012. CGG will continue to examine and review the various topics and items before the citizens of Owensboro and Daviess County.

We The People 2010

Learn

Education

Goal: Make quality preschool available to all children....

How to energize those efforts rather than duplicate? The We the People 2007 Workgroup (Education and Wellness Network) was assigned by the Leadership Council to work on this goal. The group invited “Great by 8” to speak to the group on their efforts statewide. The Education and Wellness Network will report back to the Leadership Council at the next meeting.

Work

Jobs and Economic Development

Goal: Promote Green Industries... be a national leader and create more jobs

Organizations addressing this goal currently: Groups were identified

Next Steps: Group representatives will be invited to join We the People- EIC (Environmental Impact Council) for “Green” Community Goal Setting

Learn

Education

Goal: Improve educational attainment

We need more scholarship assistance if tuition continues to increase

Organization addressing issue: Community Scholarship—Board

This group is currently looking at ways to come up with money for a community scholarship fund.

Next Steps: Council will track

How? Shelly Nichols—Vice Chair is on the board of Community Scholarship and will keep the council updated.