

PUBLIC LIFE

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Owensboro, Kentucky

Advocate

Coal-fired POWER PLANTS

An economic opportunity or
a threat to the health and
livability of our region?

Editor's Notes (and Responses):

On the proposed riverwalk connecting
downtown and English Park

Owensboro's Wal-Mart Presence:

Economic boon or bad for business?

Merger in Owensboro:

An Ongoing Conversation

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Coal-fired POWER PLANTS

An economic opportunity or
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On the proposed riverwalk connecting downtown and English Park



by Rodney Berry

Following a June 22 public presentation on the next phase of the Riverfront Master Plan, this column ("Special Bulletin") was circulated electronically to various foundation lists of citizens who may have a keen interest in this issue. Readers were invited to respond. Those received by June 30 follow the column.

Citizen participation

Since the initiation of the Riverfront Master Plan in 2000, it appears to me that there has been a good faith effort to engage the entire community, including the riverfront property owners, in dialogue regarding the improvement options. Numerous meetings, hearings and workshops have been held. These were advertised and the public was welcomed.

Were certain people (opponents) or constituencies always contacted personally about every meeting? I doubt it. Perhaps we could all have been more deliberate in communicating with the parties potentially directly affected by the project.

Would it have been better if more people were involved? Of course. Do some people still feel disconnected from the process of community decision making? Unfortunately, yes. We still have work to do to bring more people into the process. But one would be hard-pressed to find any comparable community project that has come close to generating the same level of public interest and participation.

Conceptual stage

Of course, until just recently, the focus of the design efforts has been on the Smother's Park area. As the EDSA consultants stressed during the June 22 public hearing, the firm is still focused on the conceptual design phase of the portion of the master plan from downtown to English Park. It seems as if the opposition mobilized before any proposals were presented or understood.

Weak arguments

I do not subscribe to the conspiracy theories. It is ridiculous to suggest that "gambling money" is behind the riverfront master plan. Community leaders, downtown advocates and others have been promoting riverfront improvements for decades.

Notwithstanding legitimate concerns over the federal budget deficit and the earmarking of community projects in the recent federal transportation bill, it would not make sense to return the money. Owensboro-

Daviess County typically has not received its fair share of federal dollars; a refund would only shift our allocation elsewhere. This is a unique opportunity that our community should maximize.

Private property owners do not have much of a case in suggesting that government does not have the right to acquire their property for this purpose. Whether city government purchases the property at fair market value (the average of three independent appraisals) or acquires an easement, the walkway essentially will be a public sidewalk to a city park – hardly an unprecedented action by a governmental body.

Improvements proposed for First Street between the Executive Inn and English Park would be a nice complement to the riverfront improvements. However, this should not supplant the riverfront connection. The aesthetic appeal of using First Street, however enhanced, pales in comparison to the experience of walking, jogging or biking along the riverfront.

Strong public support

I have attended most every meeting or workshop since 2000, and my recollection is that no feature was more consistently supported by the public than the connection between English Park and downtown through some sort of walkway.

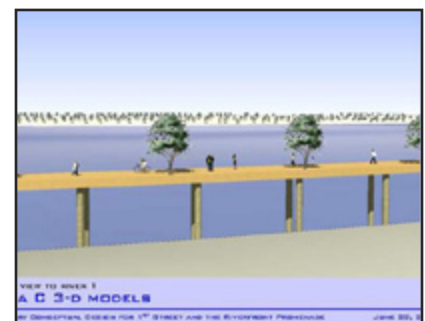
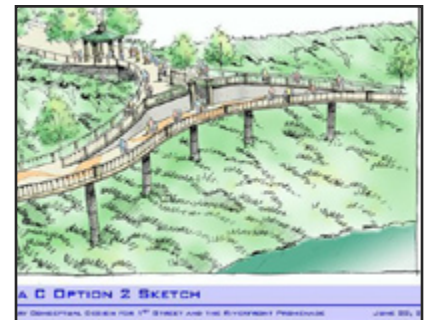
Legitimate questions and concerns

All that being said, riverfront homeowners between the Executive Inn and English Park have legitimate questions and concerns: view obstruction, security, safety, structural capacity, erosion and other issues. The general public and riverwalk proponents should empathize and appreciate these homeowners who have made important and valuable investments in the area.

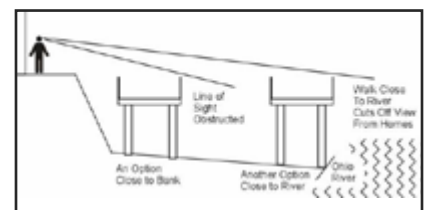
Who has it right?

At this point, many of us do not know who to believe: city officials and EDSA presented sightline perspectives that indicate homeowner views would not be obstructed; opponents counter with their own experts

The three renderings (below) of the proposed walkway prepared by EDSA.



Rendering and sketch (below) of the proposed walkway prepared by riverfront property owners opposed to the project.



continues on page 4

Editor's Notes: Proposed Riverwalk

and images that conclude otherwise. Let's resolve this right away.

Design reactions, options and considerations

I am not wild about the proposals so far. I would like to see further consideration given to some sort of modest floating walkway or natural path along the water's edge. In hearings and workshops, the public expressed interest in being close to the water, and that is a shortcoming of the Smother's Park plan. Moreover, a waters edge walkway toward English Park would not obstruct homeowner's views.

There are two potential complications: 1) Last night during the hearing, the EDSA designer said a floating walkway would be too costly to maintain. That could be, but there would also be significant savings in not having to build the extensive structure required to support the proposed elevated walkway. That structure would also collect an enormous amount of driftwood. 2) If a floating walkway is too difficult to engineer or maintain, a fixed natural path near the water's edge would be underwater for much of the year. There would be an annual cleanup required once the water levels drop, but the walkway would be open much of the warm weather months when the path would most likely be used.

I do not understand why a floating walkway system could not be designed that is comparable to that which is used for the many restaurants along the Covington and Newport riverfront. Those floating barges move up and down with an attached beam and wheel that shifts with the water levels.

I find the prominence of the Executive Inn's Showroom Lounge an unsettling aspect of the plan. While an important dimension of the hotel and community nightlife, the facility is nearly 30 years old, has needed some structural support from settlement, and is not architecturally significant. How would costs compare if the walkway did not have to be wrapped around it? What kind of design would EDSA propose if the Showroom Lounge were not there? What are the long-term uses and prospects for the Showroom Lounge? Would the hotel be better off building a new, larger venue connected with a possible future addition: arena, convention center expansion or casino?

Are there other options for the area between the hotel and English Park? Could a retaining wall (shorter than what is proposed for Smother's Park) be installed along that stretch that would allow for

angled infill soil in order to create a grassy slope from the top of the bank? This would be easier to clean and provide a natural base for a path or walkway. This would also end continuing erosion problems that the homeowners are facing.

The importance of private investment

A key issue that did not surface during the June 22 forum: How do we stimulate private sector investment along this \$45 million taxpayer investment? How do we ensure that it is appropriate and substantially complements the master plan? Some say that once the public sector makes the investment, the private sector improvements will follow. They point to the condominiums near English Park already announced by homebuilder Benny Clark.

Others are not so sure that substantial private sector development will occur unless it is packaged by the public sector or a public-private partnership. They claim that private investments (in retail, restaurants, hotels, housing, offices, etc.) are what will make the area come alive and justify the public investment. Should we request that some of the \$45 million be used to stimulate private investment?

Point person

A Riverfront Master Plan Steering Committee is in place. If the committee does not have a representative of the riverfront property owners or Northwest Neighborhood Alliance, one should be added. It is also important for a point person to be clearly identified so that the public knows who to contact with a question or concern.

Toward the greater good

During the forum, Laura Morris, one of our community's most active volunteers and community boosters, challenged all of us – as a community – to find the balance between respecting personal interests while we strive for the greater good.

A gentle and wise voice amidst the emotional debate of the forum. Thank you, Laura.

To review the EDSA Master Plan:

www.owensboro.org/page.php/Riverfront/

To review the information prepared by those opposing the proposal: www.owensbororiverwalk.info

To share reactions to this column: info@plfo.org

Responses (received by June 30):

Toward common ground

Once more, the *Public Life Advocate* has looked at all sides of an issue and given background, present status, and prospects for a synergistic coming together over an issue with many stakeholders.

Congratulations and thank you.

- Barbara C. St. John

Walkway should be close to river

Responding to the Special Bulletin of June 26, 2006, I want to say that I am in harmony with those observations.

As an old river-rat, I would like to add the statement that walk-way usage will be in proportion to its closeness to the water. An "elevated" walk-way would be "nice", but it doesn't attract repetitive use like getting "down to the water." Considering all aspects, a ground based walk-way that will withstand the occasional flooding seems to be the best answer.

I still say, also, dump a bag of sand at the river bank each spring and have a beach for sun-bathing, wading, and canoe and kayak launching.

- Jay Burns

Good points

Well said. You make excellent points and have good ideas. I appreciate your suggestions and overview.

- Joe Bowen
State Representative

High standards and empathy for property owners key to riverwalk's success

I appreciate that you are stimulating discussion of riverfront development, and your comments and those at Thursday's public hearing led me to think some more about it.

The work completed has far exceeded my expectations. The BB&T and McConnell plazas are world class in design and execution, and make an extremely positive statement about Owensboro to residents and visitors alike.

Now, to comment on two of your points:

1) You wrote, "Improvements proposed for First Street between the Executive Inn and English Park would be a nice complement to the riverfront improvements. However, this should not supplant the riverfront connection. The aesthetic appeal of using First Street, however enhanced, pales in comparison to the experience of walking, jogging or biking along the riverfront."

I totally agree, and would put this in even stronger terms. People want a riverfront walk, and the only way to have a riverfront walk is on the riverfront. Whatever else it may be, a walk down First Street is NOT a riverfront walk.

2) You wrote, "Private property owners do not have much of a case in suggesting that government does not have the right to acquire

Editor's Notes: Proposed Riverwalk

their property for this purpose. Whether city government purchases the property at fair market value (the average of three independent appraisals) or acquires an easement, the walkway essentially will be a public sidewalk to a city park – hardly an unprecedented action by a governmental body.”

Although you are correct that private property can be taken through eminent domain for the riverfront walk, I find your wording of this, shall I say, “cavalier.” Americans -- Kentucky and Daviess County residents in particular -- hate the use of eminent domain, even for roads, let alone “non-necessary” uses such as riverfront walks. Remember the years of turmoil over the “Road to Nowhere” (Byers Avenue extension)? Further, the local school boards traditionally make generous free-market offers for property to avoid such turmoil.

So even if the people want a riverfront walkway, I would not underestimate the power of riverfront property owners to turn a substantial portion of the community against it, precisely because most people dislike forced sales through eminent domain, and may identify, as property owners, with riverfront property owners rather than with city government. The Owensboro City Commission, rarely known for bold leadership, could well buckle under the pressure.

Thus, it is extremely important to treat the riverfront property owners with dignity, and with the highest ethical standards, even if some of them do not return the favor. After all, by rule of law, it is their property that is now deemed to be valuable to the city. I realize fully that some property owners will never be placated, but their concerns must be addressed better than they were at Thursday’s meeting. EDSA representatives seemed to listen well but did not voice any real concern for property owners’ concerns. The company could not even give full assurance that people or trees on the walk would not rise above the yards of property owners.

I trust a more thorough response is forthcoming. Three-dimensional models need to be constructed. Parts of the walk should probably be constructed below the 100-year flood plain. A budget adequate to buy out most property owners without use of eminent

domain should be adopted. In short, it is critical that property owners be treated fairly and with respect, and that the public realizes this is the case. If not, the river walk could, at best, end up dividing the community, and, at worst, never be built.

- **Paul Morsey**

PS: I share your concern that the Smothers Park plan does not allow adequate access to the water. Many people will be disappointed when they see the view and access to the water between St. Ann and Frederica streets disappear. I hope I am wrong but I fear the walk down to the water in the new design will pose security issues and end up being gated off a good part of the time. To me, having virtually everything high above the water is a gargantuan flaw in the entire riverfront development project. I’ve noticed in Evansville people even negotiate the riprap near the museum to get down close to the water.

Speaking of being gated off, I am offended that BB&T Plaza is frequently gated shut by late afternoon, even when the plaza is vacant and not rented for an event. I asked Zev Buffman about this at a recent PRIDE meeting, and he said it is done because skateboarders were ruining the surface. Certainly, there must be an alternative to this plan. Can’t the police see skateboarders from First Street?

Keep up the good work. If the river walk is built, a lot of credit will go to PRIDE and its work at garnering public input.

Creating Great Places

Thanks for the Special Bulletin. I’ve looked through the riverfront plan and sent a question through the City of Owensboro website. It also prompted a quick Internet search of Clinton, Iowa (where I went to high school), a river town with a nice waterfront. This led me to “Iowa’s Great Places” – that possess a sense of place that values historical roots while embracing a shared vision which welcomes, includes and involves both natives and newcomers and promotes itself as a great place.

- **Kim Johnson**

EDSA

City design consultant responds

We concur with Mr. Berry’s comments regarding the citizen participation. The City of Owensboro and the EDSA Master Planning Team went to great lengths to engage as much of the community that wanted to participate. The meetings were advertised; the public was welcome and in many cases, the presentations were actually televised.

The EDSA Master Planning process began after PRIDE and the community invested and participated in an intensive public consensus building process that included numerous meetings and workshops. In addition outreach efforts included going into the schools for input from the children of the community. EDSA initiated the Master Planning process from this point and facilitated a series of seven focus group meetings, as well as a number of public presentations that occurred during the planning process. As presented in the adopted Master Plan and during EDSA’s recent preliminary conceptual design presentation, a walkway connection to parks either along the riverbank and 1st Street was the top priority from the community. Improving public access to the riverfront was one of the goals of the Master Plan. As Mr. Berry mentioned, throughout the master planning process, no other feature was consistently supported by the majority of the public than a connection between English Park and the downtown through some type of riverfront walkway.

As a courtesy to the individuals that live along the river, the City

extended a special invitation to the homeowners to attend a “preview” of the preliminary conceptual design presentation at the RiverPark Center on April 13, 2006. EDSA presented the conceptual walkway plans in an effort to better understand the concerns of the homeowners and to facilitate more public participation. During the June 22, 2006 public presentation, EDSA reiterated many of the concerns that were brought up during the April meeting with the homeowners.

EDSA understands the small group of residents that live along the river have the following concerns:

- security
- lighting
- maintenance of the bank
- erosion
- structural capacity of the bank
- the ability to construct private docks
- impairment of their views towards the river
- property rights

As leaders of the design team, EDSA certainly respects the concerns of the homeowners along the river and has been tasked by the City administration to provide a riverfront walkway solution that maximizes

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the ability of the public to enjoy the river as an amenity, while minimizing and mitigating the concerns of the homeowners.

With respect to the accuracy of the materials presented by either the EDSA design team or the opponents of the riverbank walkway, we can only speak to the work EDSA prepared. We have taken great pains to develop accurate depictions of the proposed conceptual design based on the technical information provided to EDSA. The topography or landform of the riverbank condition was based on the electronic information provided by the City of Owensboro. This information is currently part of the City's Geographic Information System. EDSA utilized this information to study the riverbank conditions and to prepare the scaled illustrations and sections.

We furthermore respect the opinion of Mr. Berry regarding the proposed walkway proposals however we believe it is important to respond specifically to Mr. Berry's comments:

During the preliminary conceptual design process, the design team recommended that the elevation of the walkway be set at the 100 year flood elevation, or approximately elevation 390. The reason for this recommendation was to reduce the risk of ongoing maintenance and damage to the walkway from flood stage waters. Elevation 390 or the 100 year flood elevation is typically an acceptable degree of risk. Elevations below 390 typically increase the frequency of flooding, thereby increasing the risk of damage and maintenance, resulting in an increase in life cycle costs.

Floating walkway: EDSA examined a floating walkway system during the development of the preliminary conceptual design. One of the advantages of the floating system is that when the water is at its non-flood level, the walkway itself would be close to the water, approximately at elevation 370. However, two of the primary negative aspects of the floating walkway system included increased construction costs due to the complexity of the structural system and the visual appearance of the structural support columns when the river is at its lowest elevation. It is important to understand that if a floating walkway was built, it would need a structural and mechanical system that would allow the walkway to rise and fall with the elevation of the river. This structural and mechanical system would need to include a system of columns or piers that would be over 30 feet above the normal pool elevation of the water. Contrary to Mr. Berry's opinion, a floating walkway would be a more costly solution. Not only does the walkway need to be built so it could rise to the 390 elevation (the same elevation as with a fixed walkway solution), it would also have the additional costs associated with the flexible system so the walkway could move with the rise and fall of the river. Although the walkway might be close to the water on a more consistent basis, the "forest of columns" would have a detrimental impact on the views to the river. Additionally, a floating walkway system may severely impact the abilities of the homeowners to maintain a private dock along the riverbank.

Fixed natural path near the water's edge: The costs associated with a fixed natural path would be nominal compared to an elevated walkway system and would be the solution that was closest to the river's edge. As mentioned in Mr. Berry's article, it would be underwater for much of the year. The proposed walkway includes barrier free access. A consistent, barrier free natural fixed path along the river would be very difficult to develop. Due to the dynamic aspects of the river, a natural pathway system would need to be rebuilt each year. One would simply need to examine the City's efforts and costs associated with the maintenance and upkeep of the downtown boat ramp. Additional issues such as security may be more difficult to address as a walkway along the riverbank could provide the ability for people to climb the bank into people's homes. If a fence were developed along the natural walkway to keep people from climbing the bank, the fence would create large long term maintenance and life cycle costs issues, as the debris floating down the river would destroy the

fence on an annual basis. The life cycle costs associated with a linear fixed natural path would be commensurate with building the walkway system each and every year. EDSA does understand the desire for the community to "get down to the river's edge" and is currently planning for these opportunities where the City owns larger tracts of land. More specifically, the proposed boat ramp improvements at English Park provide for access down to the river's edge where the flood plain is the widest within the Riverfront District. Additionally, the modifications to the Riverfront Amenities between the Executive Inn and the RiverPark Center include an inlet water feature with a proposed boat dock and access down to the river's edge.

Shorter retaining wall along the Riverbank: A shorter retaining wall along the riverbank was examined and illustrated as an option during the development of the master plan. However, during this examination several of the same concerns arose. Specifically, the perception of security issues by having the walkway close to the existing bank, the diminished ability for the homeowners to pursue a private dock for their property, the cost of armoring the entire riverfront with a angled infill slope and , the potential for damage to the infill slope, as well as the costs associated with rebuilding or at a minimum repairing the slope on a consistent basis due to the dynamic action of the river.

Executive Inn: EDSA, as riverfront planners for the City, is tasked with developing a walkway system based on the existing conditions found along the riverfront. The Executive Inn is certainly one of the existing conditions. EDSA, in conjunction with City officials have met with the Executive Inn leadership to discuss the proposed walkway. During the conversation, a number of opportunities were discussed. However, at this point, the Executive Inn leadership continues to develop their long-term plan for improvements at the hotel. The positive result of our meetings was that the Executive Inn supports the City of Owensboro and Riverfront Development. If the Executive Inn's long-term goal was to alter or remove the Showroom lounge, certainly the proposed riverfront walkway system would need to respond to this change. If the Showroom lounge was removed, it may be possible to go parallel to the river's edge, thereby reducing cost of the proposed walkway. The City of Owensboro, in conjunction with EDSA will continue its conversations with the Executive Inn and look forward to learning more of their long-term plans.

Private Investment: A large part of stimulating private investment within a city includes a commitment to increasing the quality of life through catalytic public improvements. Time and time again, throughout this country, city's make capital improvements such as parks and recreation facilities, improved infrastructure, improved streets, pedestrian walkways, landscape improvements and in the case of Owensboro in their downtown, a commitment to putting the overhead utilities underground and the development of the RiverPark Center, RiverPark Center Patio Expansion and the Mitch McConnell Riverwalk and Plaza. A Master Plan and the successful implementation of capital improvement projects is a key ingredient to promoting private investment. However, in addition to the bricks and mortar, municipalities need to examine their land use regulations and zoning and determine if it promotes and supports the type of development and redevelopment desired by the community.

Point Person: Currently the Riverfront Master Plan Steering Committee has a member of the Northwest Neighborhood Alliance as a member. EDSA would welcome additional members of the City Commission, however, EDSA will defer to City officials to determine its appropriateness.

In conclusion, we concur with Mr. Berry's reference to Ms. Morris's remarks, the community must strive for "the balance between respecting personal interests while we strive for the greater good".

EDSA remains committed to the implementation of the Community's Master Plan and looks forward to reaching the balance between personal interests and the greater good of the community.



Framing the Issue

Coal-fired POWER PLANTS

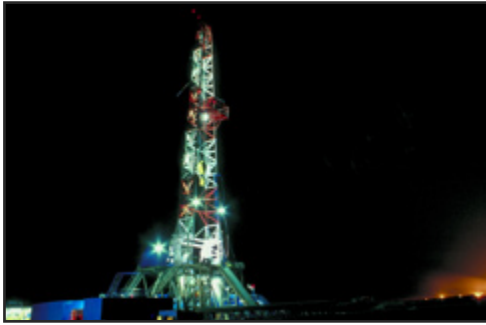
An economic opportunity or
a threat to the health and
livability of our region?

*By Rodney Berry
Kathy Strobel, Research Assistant*

Through the years, abundant coal reserves and good river access resulted in a concentration of coal-fired power plants being constructed in this region. Concerns over U.S. dependence on foreign oil and rising gasoline prices have led to proposals to expand coal production and build more power plants. Taking these steps could improve our economic position and create jobs but threaten environmental quality.

Should we push ahead to capitalize further on this unique natural resource, trusting our environmental regulatory system to protect us from the effects of pollution? Should we intensify environmental enforcement and toughen standards on existing plants? Should we draw the line on construction and expansion of new power plants?

BACKGROUND



Dependency on foreign oil

U. S. oil reserves comprise only three percent of world reserves, yet we use more than 20 percent of the oil that is produced worldwide. Because of the demands of the market, inadequate reserves and limited refining capacity, the U. S. imports vast amounts of oil products from around the world.

Each day, the U. S. imports more than a million barrels of crude oil and another million barrels of petroleum from Canada, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Nigeria. Many other countries export oil and petroleum to the U.S. as well.

Most analysts predict that recent price increases in crude oil and gasoline will be sustained and intensify. This increases the appeal of alternative sources of energy such as coal, as well as the pursuit of other technologies.



Immense reserves

Kentucky is, in effect, the Saudi Arabia of coal. Only three states (Montana, Illinois and Wyoming) have more coal than Kentucky's 88 billion tons. The U.S. leads the world with reserves of 265 billion tons.

Kentucky reserves are concentrated in 39 counties of eastern Kentucky (52.3 billion tons remaining) and 17 counties of western Kentucky (35.8 billion tons remaining).



Big business, cheap power

More than half of all electricity generated in the U. S. comes from coal-fired power plants. In Kentucky, all but three percent of electricity comes from coal.

In 1999, 62 Kentucky utilities served two million customers and generated \$3.3 billion in sales.

Kentucky boasts of the lowest electricity rates in the nation – 60 percent of the national average. Economic development specialists say this gives our state a competitive edge in recruiting heavy industries that use huge amounts of power.

Coal and other fossil fuels are the cheapest mass form of available energy and the easiest to extract. Other minor sources of electricity in Kentucky are hydroelectric power, petroleum and natural gas. Nuclear power is prohibited in the state.



Jobs and economic impact

Proposals for two coal-fired power plants in Kentucky illustrate the effect of such plants on the economy:

The proposed Peabody Thoroughbred plant in nearby Muhlenberg County would employ more than a thousand construction workers and create 450 permanent jobs. Muhlenberg County's unemployment rate was 8.9 percent in 2005. That year, the average national wage for power plant operators was \$25.56 per hour.

A proposed Clark County power plant in Central Kentucky would produce 700 construction jobs with an average wage of \$60,000 per year. It would generate \$11 million in state property taxes in its first 20 years and \$1 million per year in county payroll taxes. It would ensure a market for 1.2 million tons of coal per year and provide electricity for 19 cities the size of Winchester. And this reportedly with 98 percent less sulfur dioxide and five times less nitrogen oxide emissions than conventional plants.

Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants



Aging facilities

Up to 600 of U. S. coal-fired power plants are 30 to 50 years old. Forty-five percent of coal-fired power generation occurs in plants that are 25 years or older. Older plants emit up to 10 times more pollution than facilities built today.



Pollution

To meet environmental regulations, high-sulfur western Kentucky coal must either be mixed with low-sulfur coal from other areas and/or be cleaned prior to burning.

Fifty percent of electricity comes from coal, but coal-fired power plants emit a much higher percentage of certain pollutants. Among all generators of electricity, the plants account for:

- 97 percent of fine particle soot and sulfur dioxide emissions
 - 92 percent of smog-forming nitrogen oxide emissions
 - 86 percent of carbon dioxide that emits greenhouse gases
 - 100 percent of toxic mercury emissions.
- Much of the pollution from power plants is invisible.

Air and water quality is not always consistent. According to the *2002 Scorecard* (The Pollution Information Site), Daviess County ranked among the dirtiest/worst 10 percent of all counties in the U.S. in terms of cancer risk score (air and water releases). But the *Scorecard* also rates Daviess County's air quality (with respect to soot and smog) as "good" 321 days (88 percent) of the year and "moderate" 44 days (12 percent) of the year.



Global warming

Critics claim that certain emissions are misrepresented as pollutants and that global warming has not been substantiated. They say that greenhouse gases are natural substances. They stress that plant life thrives on the carbon dioxide produced by humans. Warmer winters and more rain could mean richer and more productive applications for agriculture, they say.

Most scientists disagree, however. They say that increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases are changing global climate and threatening the ecosystem, and that carbon dioxide is the principal culprit. Recent studies confirm 2005 as the second hottest in 150 years (when weather records were first maintained).



Health implications

Although estimates vary, researchers conclude that each year coal-fired power plant pollution shortens the lives of hundreds of Kentuckians, causes many people to miss work, induces asthma attacks, increases cancer risk, and is consistently linked with heart attacks, lung disease, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome and other health problems.

Compared with other states, Kentuckians have the second highest risk of dying from power plant pollution. Those who live within 30 miles of coal-fired power plants have the greatest exposure. In Kentucky, this represents 3.3 million people, 812,000 children and 44,000 people with asthma. In Daviess County, per 100,000 population, 84 people die from lung cancer compared to 55 nationwide (attributed to smoking and other factors).

Scientists stress that while the toxic effect of individual substances can be damaging, the cumulative effect of exposure to multiple toxins over a long period of time is particularly alarming and exposes children to the greatest risk.

Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants

Special concerns with mercury

Mercury is a toxic heavy metal that can cause serious, irrevocable neurological and developmental damage, particularly to fetuses, pregnant women, infants and children. It can contribute to cognitive, language, motor, attention and memory deficits, and has been associated with autism, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's and Muscular Sclerosis. One in six women in America has mercury levels that present a risk of permanent brain damage to a child in utero.

Mercury has been rising in the air, in waterways, in fish and in people due to a century of global combustion of coal, which contains traces of the element. Not until 2002, when president George W. Bush proposed the "Clear Skies" legislation, was mercury from coal-fired power plants ever regulated anywhere in the world.

Global mercury emissions are estimated at 5,000 tons annually. U. S. power plants emit 48 tons per year. Mercury emissions in the U.S. were nearly cut in half during the 1990s as the result of stricter regulations on municipal waste incinerators.

More than half of global mercury emissions are thought to come from Asia. A recent study, however, found that 70 percent of mercury found in rainwater in Ohio came from nearby coal burning industrial plants.

Coal combustion has increased dramatically in China and throughout Asia with very few controls. Moreover, Chinese coal contains more mercury than most U. S. coal. Mercury, smog, acid rain, and other forms of pollution are global, drifting on the winds, affecting air and water quality everywhere.

In our country, coal-fired power plants are the single largest source of mercury, emitting 41 percent of the mercury that is released into the air and water annually. Half of mercury pollution comes from eight states, including Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois. In 2003, Kentucky coal plants emitted 3,486 pounds of mercury, the eighth highest level of any state. Some comparisons rank Kentucky in the top three of mercury polluters.

One hundred percent of Kentucky waterways are under a mercury fish advisory – a recommendation that the public not eat more than one meal per week of freshwater fish pulled from Kentucky lakes, streams and rivers. Twenty other states are under a similar advisory.



Relaxed standards and violators

The Clean Air Act of the 1970's included a loophole for older plants that do not comply with new regulations. The majority of these plants are still operating.

In the past 10 years, the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took action against 51 power plants in 12 Midwestern and Southern states for pollution violations. However, in June 2001, EPA froze investigations and enforcement actions.

Current EPA regulations require that power plants reduce mercury emissions by 21 percent by 2010 and 70 percent by 2018. States have until November 17, 2006 to adopt their own stricter standards.

In March 2005, however, federal regulations were adopted that, through "banking" (capping and trading), allowed utilities to assign mercury emissions from a complying plant to a non-complying plant. Critics say this essentially allows power plants to postpone compliance until 2018 and may result in concentrated areas of mercury emissions around certain generating stations.

Despite governmental directives, because of various exemptions, EPA estimates that there will only be a 43 percent reduction in mercury emissions by 2026. If regulations were enforced on all (old and new) coal-fired power plants, mercury emissions from power plants already would be reduced by 90 percent.

Some states, including Wisconsin, Minnesota and New Jersey, are placing greater restrictions on mercury emissions. Kentucky has not done so.

The technology is available to reduce mercury emissions to a safe level. A Pennsylvania group promoting tougher mercury emission controls estimates that such controls would cost the average household \$1.08 a month.

Opponents of those controls say the plan "would cost billions and billions of dollars" and that utilities should not be expected to install expensive controls since power plant emissions produce such a small percentage of mercury emissions worldwide.

They point to the significant reductions in mercury since the 1990s, and that it is more important to convince other countries, particularly China, to reduce emissions.

Local Air Quality

Owensboro Municipal Utilities (OMU) Elmer Smith Power Plant Emissions (2002):

317 tons of carbon monoxide
380 tons of PM-10
12,702 tons of nitrogen oxide
174 tons of PM-2.5
8,402 tons of sulfur dioxide
49 tons of volatile organic emissions

Daviess County Air Quality Rankings: Health Risks, Exposure and Emissions

Carbon Monoxide emissions	...in the worst/dirtiest 30 percent in U.S.
PM-10 emissions	...in the worst/dirtiest 40 percent in U.S.
Nitrogen Oxide emissions	...in the worst/dirtiest 10 percent in U.S.
PM-2.5 emissions	...in the worst/dirtiest 30 percent in U.S.
Sulfur Dioxide emissions	...in the worst/dirtiest 20 percent in U.S.
Volatile Organic Compound emissions	...in the worst/dirtiest 20 percent in U.S.

Daviess County Air Quality Index:

Ozone 1-hour average concentration	...in the best/cleanest 20 percent in U.S.
Ozone 8-hour average concentration	...in the best/cleanest 20 percent in U.S.
PM-2.5 24-hour average concentration	...in the best/cleanest 40 percent in U.S.
PM-10 24-hour average concentration	...in the best/cleanest 10 percent in U.S.

Source: Pollution Locator: Smog and Particulates: County Report
(www.scorecard.org/env-releases)

Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants

Significance and consequences of coal production

Coal that fuels power plants is extracted through underground and surface mining. Surface mining includes traditional strip mining as well as the mountaintop removal process that has become increasingly controversial.

In 2004, more than 73 million tons were extracted from Kentucky's 296 underground mines; more than 45 million tons from 312 surface mines. The Kentucky mining industry employs nearly 20,000 people. In 2005, the coal mining median hourly wage was \$18.97 per hour.

Coal mining is one of our nation's most dangerous occupations. In 2006, there have been 10 coal mine fatalities in Kentucky, 31 in the U.S. Since 1995, there have been 101 fatalities in Kentucky, 398 nationwide.

Pneumoconiosis (or "black lung" disease) is caused by continuous exposure to coal mine dust. The disease kills an estimated 1,500 miners per year nationwide. In Kentucky, less than one in 20 applications for black lung Workers Compensation benefits is approved.

Environmentalists have objected to surface mining for many years and advocated stricter reclamation laws and enforcement. Coal mining is also unpopular because of blasting, noise, road damage from heavy trucks, massive sediment flow and other outcomes.

However, many property and mineral right owners support mining and benefit financially from royalties off production.

In eastern Kentucky, mountaintop removal techniques are increasingly challenged due to the disruption of the natural contour, clear-cutting of forests, clogging of streams and the elimination/displacement of plant and animal life of the region.

The Bush administration weakened environmental oversight and protections against mountaintop removal, repealing a 25-year prohibition against dumping the residue (forest cover, mine debris, and silt) in streams.

Supporters of surface mining say the methods, practiced for 30 years, involve techniques similar to highway construction. They claim that property owners approve the process and are well-compensated, hollow fills are approved by government agencies and stream loss is minimal.

Defenders of the industry say that through mountaintop removal, flat land can be created in Appalachia to provide sites for commercial growth, industry and tourism. Mining creates good jobs in regions plagued by chronic high unemployment and allows the region to maximize its natural resources.

Coal Facts

Kentucky coal reserves	88.1 billion tons
Kentucky coal mined or lost due to mining	16.8 billion tons
U. S. coal reserves	265 billion tons (world leader)
U. S. coal production	1.1 billion tons per year
World coal production	4 billion tons per year
Value of annual coal production	\$20 billion
Percent of coal used for U.S. electricity production	88 percent
Percent of recoverable coal as reserves in U. S.	64 percent
Number of coal-fired power plants in Kentucky	22

Power Plant Emissions in Our Region

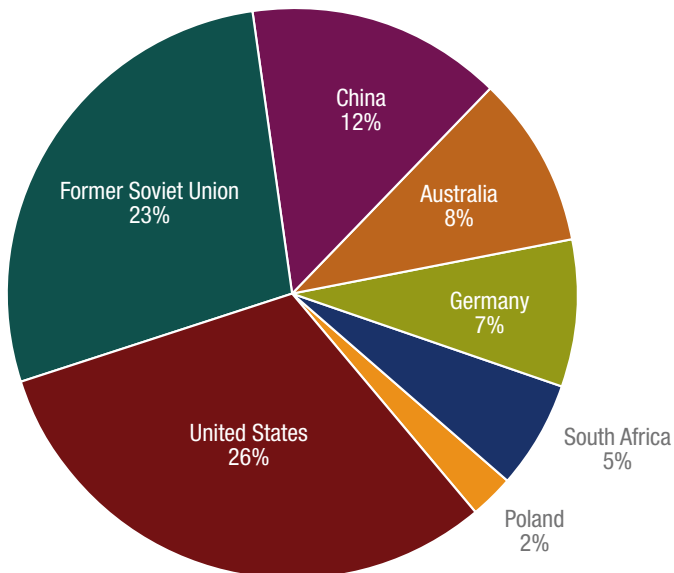
Of Kentucky's 22 coal-fired power plants, nine (41 percent) are located in the Owensboro-Daviess County area:

Plant Name	Location	Total Reported Air Releases (2000)
Paradise	Muhlenberg County	14.8 million tons
D. B. Wilson	Ohio County	4.1 million tons
K. C. Coleman	Hancock County	3.7 million tons
R. D. Green	Webster County	3.6 million tons
Elmer Smith	Daviess County	3.4 million tons
HMP & L Station 2	Henderson County	2.6 million tons
Green River	Muhlenberg County	1.4 million tons
R. A. Reid	Henderson County	364,000 tons
Henderson 1	Henderson County	45,000 tons
TOTAL		34 million tons
TOTAL KENTUCKY		104 million tons

Note: Our region is also affected by emissions from coal-fueled power plants in Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and other areas. Indiana leads the nation in carbon emissions from coal.

Source: Environmental Release Profile (2000), EPA's Continuous Emissions Monitoring System, Clean Air Network

World Coal Reserves



State Rankings in Coal Reserves

Montana
Illinois
Wyoming
Kentucky
Virginia

Pennsylvania
Ohio
Colorado
Texas
Indiana

Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants

More plants coming

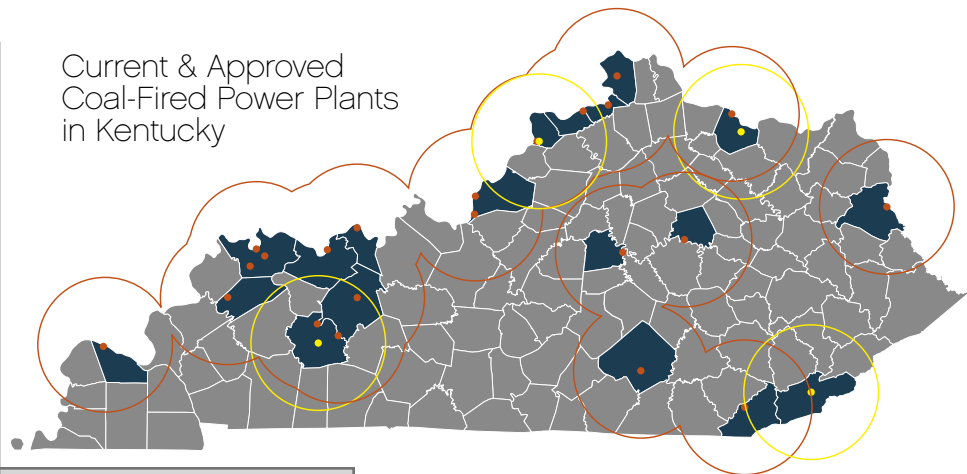
The resurgence of interest in coal-fired plants has been sparked by demand for energy, an increased desire to wean our nation away from foreign oil, relaxed environmental regulation and government subsidies. Generally, proposals for such plants are driven by speculation, boom and bust cycles, and swings in market reactions to events such as the California power crisis and the Enron scandal.

In the past few years, more than a hundred coal-fired power plants have been proposed nationwide. More than 20 of those were planned for Kentucky. Currently, five power plant proposals have received final permits for construction:

- Kentucky Mountain Power (Harlan County)
- Bluegrass Energy (Oldham County – gas-fired)
- Peabody Thoroughbred (Muhlenberg County)
- East Kentucky Power Spurlock – Units 3 & 4 (Mason County)
- Louisville Gas and Electric – Unit 2 (Trimble County)

Other plants are in various stages of approval and some proposals may resurface. When that occurs, Kentucky sites will certainly be among the most appealing to investors.

Current & Approved Coal-Fired Power Plants in Kentucky



Exposure Within 30 Mile Radius
(represented by circles)

Total population	3,331,201
Total children	811,993
Total children w/ asthma	44,158

Existing plants 22
Approved plants 4

Source: www.cleartheair.org/relatives/20036.pdf

Our air and water quality is also affected by coal-fired power plants in Indiana, Illinois, Missouri and other areas west of our state. More than a dozen sites have been considered for coal-fired power plants in these areas as well.

Among the projects closer to home that warrant close public scrutiny:

Peabody Thoroughbred Plant

A \$2.1 billion 1500 megawatt plant proposed for Muhlenberg County, the plant has been presented as a test case for a new generation of large coal-fired plants. It would be fueled by six million tons of coal per year from Peabody's new adjacent underground mine. The plant would create 450 permanent jobs and make a \$100 million annual economic impact.



LaJuana Wilcher, Kentucky's Environmental and Public Protection secretary, recently rejected a hearing officer's ruling that would have required Peabody to make extensive changes in its air quality permit proposal. Environmental groups filed suit in May 2006 to overturn the secretary's action.

The lawsuit claims that the Peabody plant

- would not be required to use the best available technology
- would sell the power on the open market since Kentucky already has enough generating capacity
- would decrease air quality downwind from the plant in counties that already do not meet ground level EPA ozone levels
- would account for 12 percent of the state's mercury emissions
- would impair visibility at Mammoth Cave National Park

Muhlenberg County officials point to the need for high wage jobs in an area of high unemployment and the overall economic impact of the investment.

Peabody officials say the plant

- would be among the cleanest coal-fired generating plants ever built
- would emit one-fifth of the pollutants of average coal-fired power plants
- cannot justify the use of certain new technologies
- would stabilize the mining industry by providing critical power sources for distributors who otherwise would purchase electricity out of state

FutureGen Power Plant



An artist's conception of the facility proposed for a Henderson County site across the Daviess County line on the Green River near Curdsville.

This plant would be a \$1 billion public-private project (\$250 million private, \$750 million public). Intended to be the world's first coal-fueled plant with zero carbon dioxide emissions, it would test the feasibility of producing electricity and hydrogen from coal while capturing and permanently storing carbon dioxide in a geological formation 7,400 feet below the ground. Nine states are competing for the plant.

- Several sites will be eliminated in July 2006
- The site will be selected in the fall 2007 and the plant operational by 2012
- Site advantages: proximity to coal reserves/production, geological features, confluence of Green and Ohio rivers
- Plant would sell its power rather than be used in neighboring areas
- Would produce electricity for 150,000 homes
- Hydrogen would be used in fuel cells
- In a June 2006 special session, Kentucky legislators approved up to \$90 million in tax incentives. Kentucky has also offered to team with Ohio and Pennsylvania to supply the coal and offer research support.
- The project would create 1,300 to 1,500 construction jobs and 150 permanent jobs.

Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants

Coal-fired power plants in Kentucky and our region:

What should we do?

OPTION 1. STAY THE COURSE. NO MORE REGULATION. THE CURRENT SYSTEM WORKS FINE.

This option suggests that we have a solid system in place with an appropriate balance of market-driven resource development and common sense environmental oversight. U. S. coal-fired power plants are cleaner than in most other countries, and we should maximize this natural resource while alternative energies are developed.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ The public appreciates the cheap electric rates available in our state. More regulation will increase costs and customer rates.■ Industries seek sites with low-cost utilities and taxes. We need every advantage possible to attract industry and good jobs to our region.■ Many areas are envious of our natural resources. We are blessed to live atop major coal reserves and should take advantage of it.■ Environmental concerns are often exaggerated. Coal industry and power plant employees and their families live near areas of mining and power generation. They are as concerned about air and water quality as anyone.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ We should not underestimate the effects of air and water pollution, particularly on children who will be exposed to multiple toxins over longer periods of time.■ There have been too many coal and power plant operators who have been fined or shut down for violations to assume that officials will always protect the public interest.■ The technology is available to reduce emissions to a safe level, and the cost per household, when spread out over a period of time, is minimal.■ The utility industry benefits from significant taxpayer incentives – funds that could otherwise be used to produce cleaner alternatives from renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power.

OPTION 2. HALT CONSTRUCTION OF NEW COAL-FIRED POWER PLANTS.

This option suggests that our area should not succumb to the pressures and enticements to provide electricity for other areas. Enough is enough.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...	THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Kentucky (and our area) should not produce electricity for the rest of the nation and be left with the remains: polluted air and water, health consequences, ravaged forests and ecosystem, tarnished aesthetic appeal.■ Some coal-fired power plants, such as the facility near Owensboro in Rockport, Ind., do not even purchase local coal and the generated electricity is shipped to northern Indiana and Michigan. Our area is left with the pollution and an uninviting industrial image.■ The coal industry should not expand until miners can be assured of safer working conditions.■ Expanded mining means more nearby houses with damaged foundations from blasting, lower property values, more noise, dust, damaged roads and clogged streams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ It makes more sense for our nation to develop its own natural resources, such as coal, than to rely on foreign oil. We should seize this opportunity.■ Clean coal technologies are available and new power plants emit a small percentage of the pollutants of the aging facilities. Coal companies are obligated to reclaim the land.■ More power plants in this area will ensure a steady market for Kentucky coal which means more good jobs, increased tax revenues and payroll that turns over many times in local communities. Families that own mineral rights will benefit from royalties.■ In some areas, such as the Appalachian mountains of eastern Kentucky, there are few employment opportunities other than coal mining.

Those promoting coal-fired power plants say:

"Providing (tax) exemptions for clean-coal facilities makes Kentucky an even more appealing place for the federal government to build the FutureGen project. FutureGen is an outgrowth of this administration's emphasis on working toward finding real solutions to Kentucky's energy challenges."

Ernie Fletcher, Governor
Commonwealth of Kentucky

"(The FutureGen facility will be) the cleanest coal facility known to man, and it's going to present this state and this country with an opportunity to utilize our most significant energy resources in a clean, environmentally friendly manner."

Andrew McNeil
Kentucky Office of Energy Policy

The proposed Peabody Thoroughbred power plant project "is being overscrutinized from an environmental standpoint."

Jerry Rhoads
Kentucky Senate
(D-Madisonville)

"As a member of the legislature's Subcommittee on Energy, I am very interested in projects that can help Kentucky's economy benefit from our state's mineral wealth."

Denise Harper Angel
(D-Louisville)

"The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) projects that energy consumption will increase 27 percent through 2030. Substantial coal reserves to meet these growing needs are available in more than 25 states, allowing for widespread coal production, liquefaction and gasification. As a result, the standard of living for all Americans will increase due to lower energy prices, a surge of industrial activity and creation of wealth. America has enough coal reserves to support this robust use for more than a century."

Greg Boyce
President & CEO
Peabody Coal



Those concerned
about coal-fired
power plants say:

"The biggest problem with our bounty of coal is not what it does to our mountains and the atmosphere, but what it does to our minds. It preserves the illusion that we don't have to change our lives. Given the profound challenges we face with the end of cheap oil and the arrival of global warming, this is a dangerous fantasy."

Jeff Goodell
valleywatch.net

(Reclaimed strip mine sites are characterized by) "a devastated landscape, without topsoil, unrecognizable to anybody who ever lived there, its splendid native plant community replaced by a scraggly growth of alien species. It's a dirty deal for everybody except the coal companies."

Wendell Berry
Author, Farmer, Environmentalist

"The bottom-line is that we have the technology to reduce mercury emission by 90 percent... This administration allows more pollution, longer periods of time for conformance to emission controls, and trading provisions whereby companies that don't use all their pollution credits can sell them to another company that needs more. Insanity!"

Aloma Dew
Sierra Club Midwest

"...because of potentially devastating consequences, the risk of abrupt climate change ...should be elevated beyond a scientific debate to a U. S. national security concern."

2004 Pentagon-commissioned report

"...there are no specific plans for offsetting the pollution from existing plants."

Tom FitzGerald
Kentucky Resources Council

Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants

OPTION 3. ALLOW NEW PLANTS TO BE BUILT, BUT INSIST ON HIGHER STANDARDS, BETTER REGULATION, END LOOPHOLES AND EMISSIONS TRADING.

This option suggests that additional coal-fired power plants should be approved if the latest technology is used to reduce pollution. Older plants should conform to new regulations or be phased out. Plants that emit more pollution than the amount allowed should not be able to credit it against another plant that pollutes less.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- This is a practical compromise that allows for increased coal production and power generation as long as there are stronger environmental considerations.
- The technology is available, for example, to remove 90 percent of the mercury from coal-fired power plant emissions. We owe it to our children to use this technology. If other states can adopt stronger emissions standards, Kentucky can as well.
- It is unconscionable to allow a loophole whereby pollution credits can be assigned from one plant to another. This will result in concentrated areas of emissions that will endanger the health of nearby residents.
- Since Kentucky has the lowest electric rates in the country, we are in the position to absorb the added cost of pollution controls even if it increases costs.

THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- Power plants already do an impressive job of reducing pollution. Utility company employees and their families value clean air and water as much as anyone.
- We should not spend excessively on pollution controls. Kentucky needs to keep costs down to sustain its competitive edge as the lowest-price provider of electrical power.
- With sharp increases in natural gas prices in recent years, there is increasing consumer pressure to keep electrical rates down.
- Emissions trading provides utilities with the flexibility necessary to phase in investments in pollution controls.

OPTION 4. CONSERVE AND INVEST IN RENEWABLE ENERGY ALTERNATIVES.

This option suggests that we phase out the burning of fossil fuels in exchange for cleaner, renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power to meet energy needs of the future.

THOSE WHO SUPPORT THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- We cannot continue to drill and mine our way out of our energy challenge; oil and coal are finite resources (with environmental consequences).
- There are ample, if not endless, supplies of renewable energy sources: solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, biofuel, fission and fusion power and much more. Some analysts say that midwest wind energy alone could meet 25 percent of America's energy needs and create thousands of jobs.
- Research and investments in agriculture present significant energy alternatives. Examples include Owensboro Grain's recent biodiesel initiative and ethanol.
- The problem is not a lack of energy, but the ability to harvest it. We simply need to unleash our collective ingenuity to develop these new technologies.
- We can reduce the need for electricity from coal-fired power plants through a comprehensive energy conservation and efficiency plan.

THOSE WHO OPPOSE THIS OPTION MAY SAY...

- Energy companies and government researchers have been studying energy alternatives for years. Despite great progress, we simply cannot meet worldwide energy demand without fossil fuel production.
- If alternative technologies become feasible, it will still be impractical to quickly retool electric power generation in this region or anywhere else; changes must occur incrementally.
- Many of the promising technologies that are promoted offer limited capacity; some are far-fetched.
- Conservation programs are well and good, but to stay competitive within the growing global economy, an enormous amount of electric power will have to be produced. This will require coal production and coal-fired power plants.

Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants

LEARN MORE

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Center for Energy and Economic Development (ceednet.org)

Owensboro Council of Labor

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Group Chair, Ben Taylor

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth

<http://www.kftc.org/>

Environmental Defense Fund

<http://www.environmentaldefense.org/home.cfm>

Alternative Energy Information

<http://alt-e.blogspot.com/>
<http://www.eere.energy.gov/>
<http://www.nrel.gov/>

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Scorecard: The Pollution Information Site

www.scorecard.org/community/index

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Which option(s) do you prefer and why? Are there other options? Are there better ways to balance economic and environmental interests?

What are the costs, likely consequences and tradeoffs with regard to each option? Are they worth it? Are we willing to pay higher taxes, electric rates or fuel costs for cleaner air and water?

If increased coal production and more coal-fired power plants are one way to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, should we compromise environmental standards to position coal to meet this challenge?

What should be more important to communities: jobs that pay well or a healthy, attractive, appealing environment?

The FutureGen plant, proposed for a site on the Henderson County-Daviess County line, is promoted as the first step in making Kentucky “the Silicon Valley of energy research.” The “sequestration” technology proposed will involve injecting carbon dioxide emissions 7,400 feet underground. The site is near the New Madrid fault. Should we be concerned of leakage if (or when) an earthquake occurs in the region?

When Kentucky coal is mined and burned to generate electricity that is shipped to other states, Kentuckians receive the jobs, a steadier market for coal and the overall economic impact that a major investment brings to an area. Is this worth what those who live nearby must endure?

What can each of us do to contribute to energy conservation? Does your home, church or workplace have an energy efficiency plan?

GET INVOLVED

Sierra Club, Pennyriple Group

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Group Chair, Ben Taylor

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The Nature Conservancy

<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/kentucky/>

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Framing the Issue: Coal-Fired Power Plants

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OWENSBORO'S WAL-MART PRESENCE: Economic boon or bad for business?

By Charly Wood

Wal-Mart is big, and almost everything said for or against the giant in our midst comes down to just that. Wal-Mart is the largest retail business in Owensboro, with two Supercenters and a Sam's Club, where customers who pay a membership fee can buy groceries and other items in bulk. The three stores employ 617 full-time and 323 part-time workers altogether.

As the largest retailer in America -- in fact, the world -- it is thus one of the most controversial retailers as well. Supporters point out that Wal-Mart's low prices have influenced the marketplace on behalf of consumers. Critics claim Wal-Mart's business practices weaken the viability of smaller competitors who can't offer the same low prices.

What is the case in Owensboro? Views vary, but there is no doubt that Owensboro's economic landscape is changing as other retailers, small and large, shift their sales strategies to compete with Wal-Mart -- or risk going out of business.

Why is Wal-Mart so dominant?

Any analysis of Wal-Mart's impact probably should begin with asking just why the stores are so popular. The simple answer is that the company's size allows it to offer lower prices, greater variety and convenient one-stop shopping for customers. The stores themselves are big and easy to reach, featuring gargantuan parking lots. Inside, the stores are usually bright and clean. They can be addictive to shoppers.

However, the trend toward large chain stores locating in small communities did not begin with Wal-Mart -- rather it began with J.C. Penney, Woolworth's, Sears, Montgomery Ward and other department stores.

The muscling out of locally owned stores by multipurpose "big boxes" didn't start with Wal-Mart either. In Owensboro, shopping habits began shifting away from downtown and smaller retailers with the opening of Towne Square Mall in 1978.

What Wal-Mart has done, however, is to combine the concept of the large department store and the mall. Under one roof customers can buy clothing, shoes, books, appliances, prescription drugs, prescription eyeglasses, auto services and groceries. And Wal-Mart is now moving to sell gasoline and open its own banks.

Among the casualties are the department stores and malls that initially displaced the locally owned retail stores. In 2002 the *Messenger-Inquirer's* editorial board brought together 13 people to discuss the economic future of Owensboro. Developer David Hocker pointed out that Towne Square Mall was having difficulty

and alluded to a Wal-Mart factor. "Wal-Mart will probably generate about as much retail sales in that one store as the entire mall does," he said. And this was before the Supercenter on KY 54 and the new Sam's Club opened.

More recently Wal-Mart has begun having an impact on grocery chains. Nationally, with Winn-Dixie in bankruptcy and the Albertsons chain being bought out, only Kroger remains as a

major competitor. Wal-Mart is challenging Kroger aggressively, even defiantly, with plans to open 20 Supercenters in Kroger's hometown of Cincinnati in the next two years. At the same time, Kroger is opening its own version of a Supercenter called "Marketplace" -- twice-as-large grocery stores that also handle items such as office supplies, furniture, kitchenware and jewelry.

Closer to home, the Wyndall's grocery chain announced in April that it was closing Owensboro's oldest existing grocery, the Parrish Avenue Foodland. Ted Belcher of Wyndall's Enterprises declined to say that Wal-Mart contributed to that closing, commenting only that

"any business that is in competition with you will have an effect on your business."

"Wal-Mart will probably generate about as much retail sales in that one store as the entire mall does."

- David Hocker

But the closing of the Parrish Avenue store may say more about how even small retailers are trying to combat Wal-Mart. In recent years, Wyndall's has been shifting from smaller to larger

Wal-Mart in Kentucky as of June 2006

Supercenters -- 60
Discount stores -- 21
Neighborhood markets (smaller groceries) -- 2
Sam's Clubs -- 7
Distribution centers -- 2
Average store size (national)
Supercenter, 186,077 sq. ft. with 116,000 items
Discount store, 98,079 sq. ft. with 62,500 items
Neighborhood market, 42,286 sq. ft. with 38,845 items
Sam's Club, 127,776 sq. ft. with 6,000 items

Owensboro's Wal-Mart Presence

but fewer stores. The company closed its US 60E store in 2005, hoping its customers would shop instead at its newest and largest store on KY 54. The Parrish Avenue Foodland was comparatively small with only 10,000 sq. ft. and 20 employees, and to keep it open, Wyndall's would have had to upgrade its aging building. Closing it may simply allow Wyndall's to compete more effectively with Wal-Mart and other big outlets.

Wal-Mart affects communities

Wal-Mart itself has evolved in Owensboro much like it has nationally. It began here with a single store in the strip mall which now houses Big Lots. David Epling of The Earle men's clothing store in Owensboro recalled, "They attracted a lot of other merchants who came in there because of the traffic Wal-Mart brings. Then Wal-Mart left. That created quite a hardship for some of the merchants that had joined them, particularly ones that had signed long-term leases. Wal-Mart can leave and pay their lease for years and years ... But that practice leaves a lot of stores in limbo when Wal-Mart leaves."

Wal-Mart has been criticized for similar practices in many other communities; its critics argue that it holds onto the leases to keep competitors away, and that the businesses left behind, clustered around a vacant building, must either move or go under. Wal-Mart says it is merely honoring its leases.

And some local businesspeople defend Wal-Mart's approach, saying it would be unrealistic to expect Wal-Mart to curtail its own growth for fear of hurting small businesses around it. Nor is it likely that Wal-Mart is trying to drive those small businesses into the ground, said Kirk Kirkpatrick, video division president of WaxWorks in Owensboro. Kirkpatrick believes Wal-Mart is simply focused on finding the most profitable locations.

Wal-Mart may not provide high-paying jobs...but any successful business returns tax dollars to the city and county. ...other retailers have come to Owensboro at least partly because of Wal-Mart, including the Bob Evans restaurant and other businesses on KY 54, site of the new Supercenter.

- J. Todd Inman

Wal-Mart also contributes significantly to the local economy, businesspeople say. Its sheer size as the city's largest retailer helps the area, said J. Todd Inman, president of the Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce. Wal-Mart may not provide high-paying jobs, he said, but any successful business returns tax dollars to the city and county. He also pointed out that other retailers have come to Owensboro at least partly because of Wal-Mart, including the Bob Evans restaurant and other businesses on KY 54, site of the new Supercenter.

Wal-Mart itself answers its critics by detailing the ways it contributes to state and local economies. For instance, the company spent \$1.9 billion with 1,177 Kentucky suppliers in 2005, it says. Wal-Mart also has nearly 32,000 employees in Kentucky and estimates that about two-thirds of them working full-time for an average of \$9.94 an hour, nearly twice the minimum wage.

Wal-Mart Information on the Internet

www.wal-mart.com is the company's source of information and is positive in its views about the company

www.wakeupwalmart.com presents a negative view of Wal-Mart's business practices

www.aficio.org/corporatewatch/walmart is recommended by the Sierra Club and deals with business and environmental issues

Local businesses adapt

Still, there is no question that Wal-Mart affects existing businesses in large and small ways. Some are driven out by the giant, but others manage to co-exist.

For example, some smaller businesses are expanding their products and services in order to compete. Wal-Mart sells gasoline and so does Foodland at its Carter Road and KY 54 stores. Kroger recently opened a gasoline station at its Parrish Avenue store.

Other businesses have lost sales and regrouped. Ten years ago WaxWorks, a video and DVD distributor, was a supplier to Wal-Mart. But as Wal-Mart grew it began buying products directly from manufacturers, Kirkpatrick said. "Wal-Mart's clout is such now that they are able to dictate prices to the extent that it does impact WaxWorks. Wal-Mart even undersells the wholesalers," he said. "That part does concern me. I think you can make a case for the American dream of supply and demand run amok."

Wal-Mart even undersells the wholesalers...That part does concern me. I think you can make a case for the American dream of supply and demand run amok.

**- Kirk Kirkpatrick
Wax Works**

Of course it's common in business to sell some products below cost to attract customers and to hurt or even eliminate competing businesses. But Wal-Mart has another edge, Kirkpatrick said. "I'm convinced because Wal-Mart is so big that they are getting better pricing than we are. I mean, we're a distributor so we sell to thousands and thousands of stores. But they have thousands and thousands of stores. And the studios can move 30 percent or 40 percent of a new (video) release through Wal-Mart in the first weeks. So the studios need Wal-Mart. It's kind of become an addiction—they've got to go to Wal-Mart."

Still other businesses have felt Wal-Mart's impact only indirectly. Epling's business is Owensboro's only men's apparel store. He has not been seriously impacted by Wal-Mart, he said, because The Earle competes in a higher-end market.

However even some higher-end retailers are expanding so they can move more merchandise, allowing them to charge lower prices –

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Merger in Owensboro: *An Ongoing Conversation*

By Ben Hoak

When considering merging Owensboro and Daviess County governments, attitudes range from apathy to outrage. Some residents remember the rancor that characterized the previous merger attempt in 1990, while many others – perhaps most, judging by a recent Messenger-Inquirer article – wonder what the big deal is all about. They're just not interested.

The idea of joining city and county governments into one entity does have advocates in Owensboro – most notably Mayor Tom Watson, who campaigned on his support for merger. Why then, if the duly elected mayor of our town is so in favor of merger, are so many residents indifferent to the idea? What needs would merger meet, and are there alternatives to make local governments more efficient?

Here's a look at how community leaders here and elsewhere are approaching these and other questions.

Are citizens interested?

A May 22, 2006, article in the Messenger-Inquirer revealed that many elected officials in Owensboro and Daviess County see little or no citizen interest in merger. That's because citizens don't see the relevance of merger to their daily lives, officials said in interviews for this article. They need details about the benefits of merger before becoming engaged in the issue, the officials added.

"People are more concerned with day-to-day issues that impact them -- getting kids to soccer practice, how much they pay for gasoline, homeland security," said Steve Johnson, a project manager for Daviess Fiscal Court. "That's not new, that's just where we are."

(Citizens) need details about the benefits of merger before becoming engaged in the issue...

"The pro (-merger) side has been unable to paint a clear picture, to have citizens buy into that," said Daviess County Judge-Executive Reid Haire, who is also waiting to hear the details before deciding whether to advocate for merger. "They have yet to address the questions of 'How much will it cost me?' 'Will I lose representation?' 'Will the city tell me how to live my life?' People want to be able to know the change that's going to occur will result in eventual savings to them."

Mayor Tom Watson says the discussion simply hasn't reached that point yet. He has been focused on the passage of a state law requiring communities such as Owensboro to form a committee that would put together a merger proposal to present to the voters. The city and county would each appoint half of the committee. The law, passed by the 2006 General Assembly, is intended to provide equal rights to a city and county as they consider merger.

The mayor is now putting together what he calls a grassroots group of supporters to decide on the best way to get his message out. "Emotionally and financially, people are too busy (to think about

merger)," he said. "The community shouldn't have to figure out the facts; they should be presented to them. The discussion ... should be fact based."

The apparent lack of interest raises a question, though: Should leaders push for a change their constituents don't seem to care about? Watson and Haire both say it's their job as leaders to provide direction and long-term planning for the community, even if residents aren't ready for it. "Change scares the daylight out of people" who are often wary of leaving their comfort zone, Watson said. "I welcome change. I think the status quo is ... sad."

"It's the responsibility of elected leaders to come up with a vision for the community," Haire said. "If we waited for citizen initiative, we never would have had the AirPark, the RiverPark Center, the (new) health department." At the same time, there has to be some positive support. "I'm reluctant to embark on an initiative I know is going to be divisive and no one is interested in," he said.

Cooperation is happening; problems persist

City and county governments are working as well together as they ever have, officials said, with a number of merged services already. The Regional Water Resource Agency, the new Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation, the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission and the Daviess County Public Library all have required some form of cooperation or consolidation between city and county departments. "There's great cooperation in a lot of areas between the city and county," Johnson said.

"The city manager and his staff are really good about engaging the county in decisions on the front end," Haire said. "The number of times I interact with city officials is much greater than 20 years ago." "We cooperate about as well as the (government) structures allow," added Bob Whitmer, the Owensboro city manager.

And that's the crux of the matter: there is no structural mechanism that will guide cooperation between the governments on critical issues such as:

- Determining who is in charge during emergencies and natural disasters

- Deciding who cleans a blocked drainage ditch that's half in the city and half in the county

- Handling police investigations and pursuits that cross jurisdictions

- Speaking for the community on important matters

- Taxes are a particularly sore issue for many voters. No one likes to see taxes raised, but merger probably won't lower them either. Some city residents question whether they receive equivalent services in return for the county taxes they pay (if they even realize they pay county taxes), while county residents who work in the city wonder what services they receive in return for their occupational taxes (the city's occupational tax rate is higher than the county's).

Merger in Owensboro

Haire said city and county officials simply deal with issues such as these on a case-by-case basis. Mayor Watson thinks there's a better way than the current system. "We're smarter than that," he said.

Merger can be controversial

So how do the governments deal with or remedy the structural problems? Mayor Watson makes the argument that if you sat down with a piece of blank paper, you'd never design two sets of governments that work so differently for a common goal. His solution: merge the two governments to form one centralized system under one leader. Other merger proponents use the analogy of the city and county functioning as a single business: Why would you hire two CEOs and two boards of directors? Rather than just consolidating certain operations, "Why is it not a good idea to consolidate your government so all these tasks can be done in a more efficient manner?" Whitmer said. "I think we could position ourselves much better to deal with them if everyone is headed in the same direction."

...if you sat down with a piece of blank paper, you'd never design two sets of governments that work so differently for a common goal...would you hire two CEO's and two boards of directors?

– Mayor Tom Watson

While it makes sense to eliminate inefficiencies, merger is a dramatic step that communities have historically resisted. In fact, out of the approximately 3,600 county governments in the United States, fewer than 40 have undergone structural consolidation since 1805. "One of the reasons is that citizens can't grasp the complexity of that issue," Johnson said. "Once it makes it to a vote, it's very divisive and citizens default to leaving it where they are."

Johnson, who is about to complete a two-year study of government consolidation as part of earning a master's degree in public administration, differentiates between structural consolidation (joining two different governments) and functional consolidation (focusing on certain aspects of how the existing government performs). When most people use the term merger, they're talking about structural consolidation. Functional consolidation is much more popular, Johnson said. "It allows local governments to take a look at specific areas of delivery (of services) piece by piece and find areas where money can be saved," he said. The Regional Water Resource Agency and metropolitan planning agency are two examples, he said. "It didn't require divisiveness. It required local elected officials to cooperate with each other."

Based on the experience of local governments in other areas of the country (including Louisville and Jefferson County, which voted to merge in 2000), the National League of Cities has joined with the Alliance for Regional Stewardship to produce a guide to local government cooperation that will be published by the end of this year. The guide describes a continuum of 19 distinct steps that governments can take to improve cooperation. The steps range from relatively easy options, such as informal cooperation and interlocal agreements, to more challenging choices; consolidation lies at the difficult end of the spectrum.

"The advice we give to other communities is decide what you want as a community," said Joan Riehm, the deputy mayor of Louis-

ville. She frequently speaks around the country about lessons Louisville has learned from merger as well as alternatives to merger. "Does the community government have a way to meet those goals?" she said. "(If not), fixing it may mean you only want them to cooperate more on big issues. It may mean you want to go a little further."

Louisville offers lessons

Louisville is one of the latest examples of a successful merger, but success didn't happen overnight. The city's first vote on merger came in 1956 and citizens voted it down. After more than 40 years and two more defeats, merger finally passed in 2000. Riehm said the community went through many steps along the way. "It's very difficult," she said. "It usually depends on a whole variety of circumstances. It's a conjunction of timing, desire and luck. We wanted it for a long time."

Louisville's main goal was to pursue a unified public agenda. Officials wanted Louisville to be a large, world-class city that could compete economically with cities like Indianapolis and Nashville (both of which operate under merged government, as does Lexington). Riehm said the business community was the most consistent driver of unification. "They thought it was crazy having two major governments in one county," she said.

Before the community reached the point of merger, officials tried several other plans. They combined a number of city and county departments and services, including parks and recreation, purchasing, planning and zoning, disaster and emergency services, public health, libraries, tax collection services and air pollution control. In 1986, the city and county ratified a formal compact to deal with three especially difficult issues: They pooled earnings taxes and directed them to economic development, they froze annexation for 12 years to stop turf wars and they provided policy direction and funding to several of their combined departments, which reduced conflicts about who controlled what. The compact worked well and was renewed in 1998 for another 10 years.

They (the Louisville business community) thought it was crazy having two major governments in one county...

- Louisville Deputy Mayor Joan Riehm

Riehm said the compact showed the community that the local governments could work together, but conflicts still existed (mostly over whether the city or county's agenda was more important), so leaders developed a simplified merger proposal: They would merge only the executive and legislative branches of government. All taxes and services would remain the same and suburban cities and fire districts would remain intact. Proponents ran a direct campaign with their simple message and scheduled the vote for a presidential election year to increase turnout. The referendum passed by a 54 to 46 percent margin, vaulting Louisville from the 67th largest city in the country to the 26th largest.

"We didn't promise savings or efficiencies," Riehm said. "We just said we want a unified community (and) this is the way to get it." The evidence so far has shown that Louisville has indeed saved money, reduced inefficiencies and been able to provide better services to citizens, Riehm said, adding that the community can also recruit businesses and plan for the future in a more focused way.

Merger has worked for Louisville, but it may not be necessary for all communities. "Any step along the continuum is suitable if it

Merger in Owensboro

serves their goals,” Riehm said. “Some communities may only go to step three, that’s all they need. Some go farther; the early steps didn’t go far enough for (them).”

What next?

What comes next in Owensboro is up to community leaders. Mayor Watson’s grassroots group will begin looking at ways to get their message out, but neither Watson nor Haire expect much movement on the issue until after the elections this fall. Watson believes merger is a valuable tool that can be used in economic development, which will in turn benefit the community. As Whitmer said, “A strong economy tends to resolve a lot of other issues.”

Watson thinks the first step should be to look at public safety. Haire, who represents citizens in both the city and the county, agrees that law enforcement is a big issue and adds two more major challenges that merger discussions will have to overcome: tax equity and convincing people to come to the table without an agenda. He thinks that’s more difficult for county residents. “They have a different mindset,” he said. “There’s a greater level of independence.”

...neither Watson nor Haire expect much movement on the issue until after the elections this fall.

For that reason, Haire thinks any possible merger attempt should be driven by the county. “Those in the city can go to city or county government,” he said. “Those outside (in the county) can only go to county government. As long as the city drives merger, it may be suc-

“I’d love to see it on the ballot in 2007,” (Mayor Watson) said. He may wait until 2008, though, when a presidential election will be held and voters in the Evansville area will also be voting on merged government...

cessful, but there will be greater divisiveness.” Haire is also waiting to see the positive vision of merger. “I’m not apathetic, but I haven’t seen the vision yet,” he said. “I haven’t seen the striking benefits of combining governments.”

Watson would like the process to move fairly quickly. “I’d love to see it on the ballot in 2007,” he said. He may wait until 2008, though, when a presidential election will be held and voters in the Evansville area will also be voting on merged government, leading to greater television news coverage. He knows the process won’t be easy and doesn’t want it to be. “If we disrupt 100,000 lives, it shouldn’t be easy,” he said.

Regardless of how they feel about merger in Owensboro, officials agree that merger is a means to an end, not an end in itself. If leaders determine their goal is more efficient delivery of services to the people, then steps other than merger may be the answer. If they decide the ultimate goal is to be able to speak with one voice as a large city fighting for better economic development, merger could be the best solution. “The reason for doing something as dramatic as changing government has to be bigger than government,” Riehm said. ■

WAL-MART

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which eventually could affect The Earle. Epling recently heard from a customer that a Nashville Costco store was selling some sweaters retail at a lower price than he was paying wholesale for the same item. He asked the manufacturer and was told that the company had an unsold inventory of those sweaters and Costco offered to take all of them at a low price.

Wal-Mart’s influence is felt in other ways

Less clear than Wal-Mart’s effect on sales strategies of other businesses in Owensboro is what its influence will be in employee pay and benefits and environmental matters. Nationally, Wal-Mart has been criticized for employing about a third of its workers part-time, influencing other retailers to do the same. These employees may earn so little that they qualify for food stamps and Medicaid, costs borne by taxpayers. Reacting to that criticism, Wal-Mart recently improved its part-time benefits, allowing part-time employees to become eligible for health insurance after one year instead of two.

Wal-Mart also announced recently that to save expenses all stores will move toward solar energy and low-energy electrical use in general.

Aloma Dew an activist with the local chapter of the Sierra Club, praises Wal-Mart for such efforts but says Wal-Mart will remain a target of critics simply because its reach is so wide. While another major retailer might not treat its employees well or be very environmentally oriented (the Sierra Club argues that Wal-Mart contributes to counterproductive sprawl in local communities) Wal-Mart as the

biggest retailer must be dealt with first, she said. In addition, attacking other retailers might backfire by weakening them while strengthening Wal-Mart, she said.

(Wal-Mart will) succeed not on what they do but what we, as consumers, do... And we all shop at Wal-Mart.

- Kirk Kirkpatrick

Ultimately it may come down to what Wal-Mart’s customers are willing to accept. Kirkpatrick, of WaxWorks, praises Wal-Mart’s efficiency and says he doesn’t blame it for negative impacts on other businesses.

“They are going to succeed not on what they do but what we, as consumers, do,” he said. “And we all shop at Wal-Mart.” ■



Citizens Speak... LEADERS RESPOND

Mercury forum raises concerns

On May 15, 2006 nearly a hundred citizens assembled at the Homebuilders Association office to learn more about the research connected with mercury poisoning. The forum was sponsored by the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro.

Project Manager Laurel Gibson assembled materials representing diverse points of view on the issue and recruited prominent researchers: Dr. George Rogers, M.D., Ph.D., University of Louisville Pediatrician and Toxicologist; and Dr. Boyd Haley, Ph.D., University

of Kentucky Professor of Chemistry. "Mercury is Rising" the Sierra Club – Chris Karow documentary film, was also shown.

Following the presentations, audience members posed numerous questions of the presenters. Parents of autistic children demonstrated special interest in the subject.

Nearly a third of the participants completed and returned a questionnaire following the forum, with the following results:

The information presented at the forum concerning the potential damaging effects of mercury is alarming.

22	agree strongly
4	agree somewhat
1	not sure
0	disagree somewhat
1	disagree strongly

The information presented at the forum was credible and based on solid research.

14	agree strongly
13	agree somewhat
0	not sure
1	disagree somewhat
1	disagree strongly

The information presented was conclusive and warrants action.

16	agree strongly
9	agree somewhat
2	not sure
1	disagree somewhat
1	disagree strongly

The information presented was inconclusive and warrants additional research.

7	agree strongly
6	agree somewhat
2	not sure
6	disagree somewhat
7	disagree strongly

I support a moratorium on the construction of coal power plants in Kentucky.

15	agree strongly
4	agree somewhat
6	not sure
3	disagree somewhat
1	disagree strongly

I support stronger enforcement of the federal Clean Air Act.

25	agree strongly
3	agree somewhat
0	not sure
1	disagree somewhat
0	disagree strongly

I support the elimination of "banking" of pollution by power plants.

18	agree strongly
9	agree somewhat
2	not sure
0	disagree somewhat
0	disagree strongly

I support stronger regulation of vaccinations.

24	agree strongly
3	agree somewhat
1	not sure
0	disagree somewhat
1	disagree strongly

I support stronger regulation of dental fillings.

19	agree strongly
2	agree somewhat
4	not sure
1	disagree somewhat
2	disagree strongly

How did you learn about the forum?

10	Newspaper
8	Email
2	PLFO & Sierra Club
1	Speech therapist
1	TV
4	Letter/Flyer
1	Autism Support Network of Owensboro
1	Friends

Other comments:

Please keep me on your mailing list. Would like copies of materials on dangers of mercury.

Conclusions seemed adequate – however, numbers can be skewed when reported. I will continue to seek further information.

Haley went on way too long. Need to set time limits. Also, his talk needed to be more geared toward general public. Nevertheless it was thought-provoking.

As a parent of a child with autism I was delighted to hear from Dr. Haley.

Dr. Boyd Haley needs to pare his presentation to be more concise and to the point. His important message was lost in all the detail that very few people could grasp technically but the more important "bottom line" message needs a better platform. Everyone got the message that he knew his "stuff".

Very informative and enlightening.

I have already sent in my reaction to the breakdown in the moderator's role. Both presenters should have been given equal time. There was little discussion between the two presenters. One presenter was allowed to bore the audience to tears with acres of documents shown in his PowerPoint – too much of the same information over and over. I did not trust his research as it seemed to indicate a case of "the lady doth protest too much!"

A filibuster and confusion of an audience works to get your agenda across. Boyd Haley is an extremist. He presents multitudes of information and statistics which do nothing more than confuse an audience. I could personally refute some of his arguments with information from my own textbooks and journals, but he didn't allow for the other side to be presented. He simply put out 50 charts and stats which were meant to confuse the audience so much that his was the only opinion which could be accepted. His

Citizens Speak ... LEADERS RESPOND

presentation was also long enough to where the audience was tired and needed to get home which completely eliminated anyone from presenting opposition. I have a very large problem with Dr. Haley's presentation, not simply because I disagree with him, but because he doesn't allow the audience to be in a frame of mind to receive an alternate view. To his credit, that is how you become a good speaker, but that's not what a community forum is for. Only one view was presented, and that leads to a misinformed public.

It seems some mothers were very concerned about mercury in vaccines. If anybody needs additional information on vaccine ingredients please call me, Dr. S.R. Simone 683-1188/926-2009. Because this issue involves children parents should have more access to the darker side of vaccines and not just what the pediatrician says.

We need coal power plants. We can make them environmentally clean. If we could get nuclear power plants it would solve most of our environmental problems.

The second speaker inundated us with graphs. He also talked too long to be effective. About half of what he said sunk in.

The most important issue of our time.

I have read a lot about Dr. Boyd Haley from other national sources. I was very impressed that this foundation could get him here. It's very needed especially for this area.

There were some there who were jealous of the presentation.

I have a child with autism.

As the mother of a 6 year-old autistic son, I have long studied effects of mercury. I sometimes feel as though society isn't aware of this problem. It was nice to know that there are people fighting for this issue. Thanks for the forum!

The federal government is currently researching this with large grants. You may want to look into their findings.

The information was presented to be alarming. Dr. Rogers gave an excellent scientific presentation. Boyd Haley is an alarmist that presents his so-called science in a way that is impossible to follow and his conclusions are very suspect. He stated that the high school basketball player must have died because of silver fillings. He has no information to support such a ridiculous statement. He states that the CDC is corrupt but he has nothing but his claim to support that. He presents his so-called "data" in such a rapid matter of fact way that who knows what it indicates. The AMA has recently completed a study stating that dental amalgam has no affect on children, but Boyd Haley is sure that they are corrupt too. Then we have the claim that mercury is responsible for autism. How cruel to tell this to parents of autistic children. This reminds me of the fellow in Owensboro who gave people enemas to cure cancer. This fellow should be in a circus instead of presenting at a meeting that is supposedly based on science.
— Thomas W. Hulse, DMD

These results were shared with the forum participants, state and federal elected officials representing this area, officials in the state environmental protection department and members of legislative committees that oversee environmental laws, regulations and proposals.

Upon receipt, responses from officials will be published. ■

Making a Difference

WOMEN LEADERS ESTABLISH CHARITABLE FUND

Fresh off the Leadership Kentucky experience, Martha Clark and Marianne Smith Edge brought back an idea to their hometown: What if 100 women stepped forward and made a thousand dollar contribution annually toward a \$100,000 gift to a worthy charity? So many grant programs consist of important, valued (albeit small) gifts, Impact 100 leaders envisioned a targeted, powerful impact through a substantial annual gift program.

The proposal has attracted enthusiastic responses from the donor and nonprofit communities. More than 150 contributors have already participated and 29 local nonprofit organizations are competing for the \$150,000 grant to be awarded in October.

The Owensboro response exceeds the first-year contributions of comparable programs in much larger cities such as Austin, Texas and Cincinnati, Ohio.

NEW NEBLETT CENTER DEDICATED

On May 31, U. S. Sen. Mitch McConnell joined local dignitaries to cut the ribbon on the \$3 million H. L. Neblett Center in Owensboro's west end. The center has been a focal point for the African American community and programs that serve the youth of our community for more than 68 years. The new 24,000 square foot building includes a gymnasium, multi-purpose recreation-community rooms, study rooms, library, wellness center, computer work stations, kitchen, audio-visual equipment, office space, outdoor playground and more.

The facility, funded through a federal Housing and Urban Development grant and local contributions, replaces the structure on the same site. The Neblett Center is a United Way agency that serves more than 3,500 children annually, operates on a \$563,000 annual budget with five (full-time) and eight (part-time) staff, and 280 volunteers.

PROGRAM FOR THE UNINSURED CITES PROGRESS

The Daviess County Community Access Project (DC-CAP) recently reported on its first year of coordinating health care for the uninsured of our community.

According to director JAT Mountjoy, 86 physicians representing 15 specialties, including family practice, are now offering services through the program. Each physician agrees to provide a complimentary "medical home" for a certain number of uninsured, qualifying patients. Primary care physicians are encouraged to accept 12 patients; other specialists are encouraged to take 24 patients since they generally would not be seen as often.

During this start-up period, DC-CAP placed 126 patients into the program. The value of those services received is \$220,000, or \$1,750 per patient.

Once enrolled, more than 12 percent of DC-CAP patients have either acquired insurance or increased their income to a level in which they no longer qualify for the program.

An estimated 13,000 Daviess Countians are uninsured year-round; nearly 25,000 go without insurance at some point during the year. The percentage of uninsured is higher in the region served by Owensboro health care providers.

REACH CLINIC PROVIDES ALTERNATIVE FOR MANY

Since its October 2004 opening, the REACH Clinic has served 736 individual patients through 1,155 office visits and distributed \$6,500 in free medications. Forty-five percent of the clinic's patients are uninsured, forty-six percent are covered through Medicaid and nine percent through Medicare.

Located in the new Daviess County Health Center, the clinic is open two and a half days per week. Nearly one in five patients served said they would have sought treatment in the OMHS emergency room had the clinic services not been available. More than a third said they would have forgone care had it not been for the clinic. Nearly 73 percent rated the care as "excellent."

The cost to operate the clinic has been nearly \$73,000 or about \$63 per office visit. Nationwide, the average cost of an emergency room visit is more than \$500.

The OMHS emergency department serves 34,000 unduplicated patients through nearly 64,000 annual patient visits. Two other health care clinics serve our community: the Free Clinic serves the working poor one evening per week (500 unduplicated patients through 1,900 visits); the McAuley Clinic serves the uninsured five days per week (2,500 unduplicated patients through 8,000 visits). The Christian Dental Mission provides dental care on an as-needed basis.



JULY/AUGUST Public AGENDA

Meetings, hearings, and forums open to the public. Please contact us if your organization would like its events listed by calling 685-2652 or sending an email to info@plfo.org. (Meetings are subject to change.)

Important Upcoming Public Meetings

JULY

- 11 Unity Coalition**
5:30 p.m.
Program: Immigration Issues
(Understanding Mutual Respect)
Wendell Foster Campus

AUGUST

- 3 Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce Rooster Booster Breakfast**
7:30 a.m.
Executive Inn, International Room A

- 10 Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)**
5:30 p.m.
Program: Rodney Berry, Public Life Foundation
"Community options for expanding dental care for disadvantaged youth"
Green River District Health Department
Bedford Walker Community Room
- 28 Waging A Living**
6:00 p.m.
Program viewing and discussion
Settle Memorial United Methodist Church

Regularly Scheduled Public Meetings

Meeting Dates and Times Subject to Change

Citizens Health Care Advocates
Second Thursday each month
5:30 p.m.
GRDHD, Bedford-Walker Community Room

Daviess County Board of Education
Third Thursday each month
6:00 p.m.
1622 Southeastern Parkway

Daviess County Fiscal Court
First and Third Thursday each month
4:00 p.m.
Daviess County Courthouse

Greater Owensboro Chamber of Commerce "Rooster Booster" Breakfast
First Thursday each month
7:30 a.m.
Executive Inn

Green River Health Council
Second Tuesday every other month (Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec)
10:00 a.m.
GRADD

Neighborhood Alliance Meetings

Apollo Area Alliance
Fourth Tuesday each month
5:30 p.m.
Apollo Heights Baptist Church.

Audubon Bon Harbor Area Alliance
Second Monday each month
6:30 p.m.
Audubon Church of the Nazarene

Dogwood Azalea Neighborhood Alliance
Third Thursday each month
5:30 p.m.
Daviess County Public Library

Dugan Best Neighborhood Alliance
Fourth Tuesday each month
6:00 p.m.
Dugan Best Recreation Center

Hillcrest Area Alliance
Second Tuesday each month
6:30 p.m.
Daviess County High School Media Center

Midtown East Neighborhood Alliance
First Thursday each month
5:00 p.m.
Buena Vista Baptist Church

Northwest Neighborhood Alliance
Fourth Tuesday each month
5:30 p.m.
Foust Elementary School Media Center

Old Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance
Second Tuesday each month
5:30 p.m.
Wendell Foster Center Administration Building Boardroom

Seven Hills Neighborhood Alliance
First Thursday each month
7:00 p.m.
Trinity United Methodist Church

Shifley-York Neighborhood Alliance
Second Tuesday each month

continued on pg. 20

The TRACKER

DATA OF INTEREST



Compiled by
Chad M. Gesser

EDUCATION DEMOGRAPHICS AND ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

- In 2003-04, 47 percent of college students in the U.S. attended four-year institutions, and 43 percent attended two-year institutions.
- Women are more likely than men to attend two-year institutions (44 percent vs. 41 percent), whereas men are more likely than women to attend four-year institutions (50 percent vs. 44 percent).
- In 2003-04, 77 percent of college students attended public institutions, 15 percent attended private not-for-profit institutions, and eight percent attended private for profit institutions.
- Older college students are more likely than younger college students to attend public two-year institutions.
- College students whose parents had a bachelor's degree or higher are more likely than their peers whose parents had less education to attend college full time for a full year.
- In 2003-04, 89 percent of college students attended a college in their home state.
- Annual tuition costs at two-year public, four-year public and four-year private college institutions has more than doubled since 1990.
- From 1970-2000, Kentucky had the second highest percentage increase in K-12 per student spending. During that same time period Kentucky had the seventh lowest actual K-12 per student spending.
- In 2004, the National Education Association suggested that Kentucky would need to generate nearly \$69 million to fund a two percent increase in the state's K-12 education budget.
- Kentucky ranks in the top five states in the U.S. for the percentage of adult residents of working age (ages 18 to 64).
- Kentucky ranks in the bottom five states in the U.S. for the percentage of children in the population (ages 5-17).
- In 2004, the rate of high school graduates in Kentucky increased by 5.2 percent over the rate in 1994. This increase was the sixth lowest in the U.S. over that time.
- In the U.S. in 2003, the median household income (total income of all household members 15 and older) in Daviess County was \$39,035. The median income of full-time, full-year wage and salaried individuals ages 25-34 with a bachelor's degree was \$45,450.

This Index and other items of interest can be found at The Owensboro Blog:
<http://owensboro.blogspot.com>



Citizen Action UPDATE

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Margaret Mead

To submit updates on citizen action: 685-2652 or info@plfo.org.

Owensboro-Daviess County Asset Building Coalition

Contact: Keith Sanders (685-5707, keithsanders@omuonline.net)

- Making plans for an expanded program in 2007.
- Recruiting volunteers to help low-income people prepare tax returns and qualify for the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Developing financial literacy programs.

Bring Back Baseball Committee

Bruce Brubaker, chair

bbrubaker@champion-ford.com

- Sharing information about the group's proposal (stadium, Frontier League franchise) with community groups and political candidates.
- Recent endorsements include: Chamber of Commerce, Economic Development Corporation, Downtown Owensboro, Tourist Commission.
- Tracking state government legislation concerning tax increment financing.

Citizens Committee on Education

Marianne Smith Edge, co-chair

msedge@smithedge.com

Forrest Roberts, co-chair

robrook@adelphia.net

- Supporting the Higher Education Advocacy Group to facilitate increased local opportunities in undergraduate and graduate education.
- Hired Tracy Marksberry to direct "The Learning Community" initiative that seeks to instill a higher value of education and lifelong learning into the fabric of community life.
- Updated mission statement, values, goals, objectives and bylaws.

Citizens Health Care Advocates (CHCA)

Don Crask, chair

don.crask@grdhd.org

www.CHCA.US

Meetings: Second Thursday of each month, 5:30 p.m., Green River District Health Department, Bedford Walker Community Room

- Continuing monthly programs on relevant topics and issues
- Tracking "Five Fields of Focus" for 2006:
 - access to health care
 - healthy lifestyles
 - governmental affairs
 - health care costs
 - organizational development
- CHCA now has 121 members and 574 attendees and participants at meetings
- Meetings are broadcast on OCTV

Coalition for the Poor

Nancy Keeton, Keith Sanders, and Sharon Sharp (Steering Committee)

c/o Public Life Foundation, 401 Frederica Street, B203, Owensboro, KY 42301 (685-2652)

- Formed a task force to plan an August 28 community event around the broadcast of the PBS documentary, *Waging a Living*.
- Featured Terry Brooks, executive director of Kentucky Youth Advocates, on issues and state legislation affecting youth and families.
- Building a network of citizens who are concerned about the plight of the poor.
- Sharing information and concerns regarding the impact that government social program cuts have on the poor.
- Interested in leadership development programs that empower the poor.

Dental Task Force

Contact: Rodney Berry (rodney.berry@plfo.org, 685-2652)

- Exploring ways to expand the youth dental model at Foust Elementary School.
- Featured David Hinson, founder of a community dental clinic in Frankfort.

Goodfellows Club

Bruce Kunze, president

bkunze1@aol.com

- Hosted a successful benefit tennis tournament (June 16-18); partnered with Luke Woodward Memorial Tournament.
- Participating in task force on youth dental needs.
- Raised \$110,000 through 2005 "Roll Call" campaign.
- Recently were named as a beneficiary in a will.
- Providing more than 1,000 children with winter coats, shoes, clothing and emergency assistance each year.

Owensboro Area World Affairs Council

Marc Maltby, Ph.D., president

marc.maltby@kctcs.edu

- Planning 2006-2007 series to begin in the fall.
- Recent programs: Leonard Pitts, syndicated columnist; John Stempel, senior professor and former director of the University of Kentucky Patterson School of Diplomacy; George Russell, international elections consultant for the U.S. State Department.

Owensboro Neighborhood Alliance

Contact: Robin Cooper

cooperrw@owensboro.org

- Conducting leadership training program through a Public Life Foundation partnership.
- Strengthening alliances, recruiting members, sharing information, and developing programs to improve neighborhoods.

PRIDE of Owensboro-Daviess County

Donna Risley, president

drisley@visitowensboro.com

www.prideodcky.org

- Developing cost estimates for the master plan for enhanced community entrances from the Natcher Bridge and West Parrish Avenue from the airport.
- Hosted a community forum on the next phase of the Riverfront Master Plan.
- Committees active in areas of beautification, public projects, architecture, and more.

Unity Coalition

Hervey Howell, president

hervey@myway.com

- Held a public forum on immigration issues on July 11.
- Presented a "Fair Housing" forum on February 16.

Public AGENDA, cont.

5:30 p.m.
Lewis Lane Baptist Church

Southeast Alliance

Second Thursday each month
6:30 p.m.
Newton Parrish Elementary School

Wesleyan-Shawnee Neighborhood Alliance

Fourth Tuesday each month
6 p.m.
Kentucky Wesleyan College, Winchester Center

Owensboro Board of Education

Fourth Tuesday each month
4:30 p.m.
Boardroom

Owensboro City Commission

First and Third Tuesday each month
5:00 p.m.
City Hall

Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport

Third Monday of each month
4:30 p.m.
Airport terminal building conference room

Owensboro Historic Preservation Board & Downtown Design Review Commission

Fourth Wednesday each month
5:00 p.m.
City Hall

Owensboro Housing Authority

Fourth Thursday each month
11:30 a.m.
2161 E. 19th St.

Owensboro Metropolitan Board of Adjustment

First Thursday each month
6:00 p.m.
City Hall

Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission

Second Thursday each month
6:00 p.m.
City Hall

Owensboro Riverport Authority

Fourth Friday each month
12:00 p.m.
1771 River Road

Owensboro Utility Commission

Third Thursday each month
4:00 p.m.
2070 Tamarack Rd., Third floor board room

Preservation Alliance of Owensboro-Daviess County, Inc.

First Friday every other month (Feb, Apr, June, Aug, Oct, Dec)
12:00 p.m.
Campbell Club

RWRA

Third Monday each month (except January, Fourth Monday)
3:30 p.m.
RWRA, 1722 Pleasant Valley Road

Tobacco Control Coalition

Fourth Wednesday each month
11:30 a.m.
GRDHD

Tourism & Convention Bureau

Third Thursday each month
7:45 a.m.
215 E. Second St.

ABOUT THE PUBLICATION

The *Public Life Advocate*, published bi-monthly, is committed to be a trusted resource of information and analysis of public concerns and community issues. The *Advocate* is a community-driven publication, grounded in a commitment to be "of the people, by the people, and for the people."

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Public Life Foundation of Owensboro, Inc. is a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c) operating foundation (not a grant-making entity) founded in 1996 by John and Marjorie Hager. Mr. Hager is the former owner, editor, and publisher of the Owensboro *Messenger-Inquirer*.

The foundation fosters broad, meaningful citizen participation in community decisions and public policy. We believe that open, accessible, and trustful institutions are essential to an enlightened and engaged citizenry and the democratic process.

Foundation activities are driven by the importance that people attach to issues. We are committed to the people's agenda. To assist citizens in solving problems and seizing opportunities, we facilitate a process of information > deliberation > action.

Contributors

Chad Gesser



Chad recently assumed full-time faculty status as Instructor of Sociology at the Owensboro Community and Technical College. He serves on a committee that is producing Theatre Workshop of Owensboro's summer musical, *Cinderella*.

Chad also founded the health data website "Project Healthy Owensboro: Progress and Evaluation" (www.octc.kctcs.edu/ir/HOPE).

Benjamin Hoak



A regular contributor, Ben gives a fresh, thoughtful perspective on the circumstances and dynamics surrounding the consideration of city-county government unification.

Following his graduation from Kentucky Wesleyan College, Ben taught at a local middle school. He is a fellow of the World Journalism Institute and is a special publications writer for the *Messenger-Inquirer*.

Charly Wood



Charly's report on the increasing dominance of Wal-Mart in our local retail economy required finding a balance between anti-Wal-Mart zealots and the public relations spin from the chain's Arkansas corporate office.

A retired college-level English teacher, Charly has also worked in small town newspaper publishing and community theater.

LETTERS

Geary Court residents grateful for Boulware article



Thank you for Carrie Blackham's well written article pertaining to the Boulware Mission expansion and my neighborhood. I was apprehensive as to how she would portray the Geary Court neighbors and what quotes of mine would be used, but after reading your article several times, I could not find fault in anything written and for that I am very grateful. I was advised to not give you the interview, but I am glad I did.

Thank you again for the nice article.

- Dusty and Donna Embry