

PUBLIC LIFE

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Advocate

Forum reveals support for arena, downtown

On May 9, nearly 90 citizens devoted an evening to examine potential strategic options connected with a pressing community challenge: Given the circumstances surrounding the Executive Inn (its continuing importance as a hotel-convention center, its financial difficulties and challenges to stay competitive) what should be our response as a community?

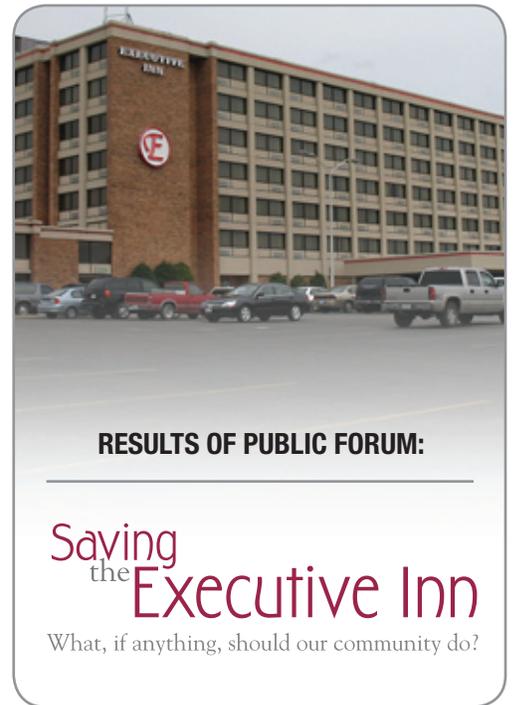
Following a review of the history and background leading up to the current situation, participants examined several potential community strategies in a small group deliberation format. Each group completed a report that was presented to the entire audience, and then all participants were invited to complete a confidential questionnaire.

The Results

A summary tabulation underscores the complexity of the issue. Participants wrestled with questions of cost, risks, tradeoffs and ramifications of various options.

A large number of participants remained undecided on various options. However, there was strong support for a new downtown public arena-events center, and considerably less support for a casino.

- Forty-eight percent said that our community should do nothing and let the marketplace drive the future of the Executive Inn.
- Forty-nine percent said that we should provide incentives (e.g., tax breaks, low-interest loans) to help the Executive Inn through this difficult time.
- Thirty percent said that we should support the hotel's efforts to land a casino. Fifty percent disagreed and 19 percent were neutral.
- Seventy percent said that we should build a public arena-events center near the hotel. Sixteen percent disagreed and 13 percent were neutral.
- Forty-eight percent supported building an arena-events center near the Executive Inn only if the hotel is positioned for long-term success. Thirty-two percent disagreed and 20 percent were neutral.
- Twenty-seven percent preferred that we build a public arena-events center with one or more new hotels rather than the Executive Inn. Thirty-three percent disagreed and 30 percent were not sure.
- Forty-three percent said that the Executive Inn property should be acquired and the land used for a new complex of projects and expansion of riverfront improvements. Thirty-nine percent disagreed and 18 percent were neutral.



Who Participated

Half of the forum participants were between 45 and 64 years of age. Thirty-four percent were 65 or older. Seventy percent were men; 30 percent were women.

City residents comprised 65 percent of the participants. Daviess County residents who live outside the city limits represented 30 percent, and six percent were from outside Daviess County.

Seventy-nine percent of forum participants said that they voted in every election and 15 percent vote in most elections. Sixty-eight percent of the forum participants said that this is a pivotal issue that would determine their vote; 32 percent said it would not be a pivotal issue.

Ninety-seven percent were white and 3 percent reflected minority participation.

Forum participants were generally well-educated: 80 percent have at least a college degree and 15 percent have earned some college credit.

A detailed report, including a compilation and analysis of the qualitative responses (notes taken from each table discussion) will be posted on our foundation web site (www.plfo.org) when complete.

Be on the lookout for the broadcast of the forum on public access OCTV Cable Channel 51.

To share your views on this article: letters@plfo.org

