

A Publication of the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro

# PUBLIC LIFE *Advocate*

February 2010 – Volume 7, Issue 1  
Owensboro, Kentucky

## Framing the Issue

# Three more coal plants proposed for our area:

## EXAMINING THE TRADEOFFS

# Forum Planned for March 22, 2010

*This document is separate. Click here to download.*

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Additional photos of the proposed new hospital can be found at <http://www.omhs.org>

## Survey shows public against hospital plan

A survey of 500 registered voters in Daviess County was conducted from January 8 – 10, 2010. The results show overwhelming opposition to the Owensboro Medical Health System (OMHS) plan to build a new \$385 million 447-bed hospital on Pleasant Valley Road east of the bypass.

By 62 to 32 percent, respondents opposed the OMHS plan and by 65 to 27 percent, they said it is better to expand the existing hospital on Parrish Avenue. They also said that the public has not been given enough say in the decision to build a new hospital by a margin of 68 to 22 percent.

“This is a strong public statement,” said David Smith, a spokesman for Advocates for Responsible OMHS Development (AROD). “Despite the immense amount of advertising that has been done to sell the community on this plan, the survey certifies what we have been suspecting all along: The public prefers that OMHS continue to develop and expand on its existing campus rather than move the hospital.”

“Much of the hospital is relatively new and OMHS has already acquired dozens of properties around its campus for future growth and development. By expanding on-site, OMHS would not have to take on such a huge amount of debt. Plus, when you build in an undeveloped rural area, you add many millions of dollars in cost for roads, drainage, utilities, extended police and fire services and much more. These results clearly indicate the public is not for more costly urban sprawl,” Smith said.

“The survey underscores the importance of meaningful public dialogue early in the decision making process. Many people we’ve talked to think that OMHS officials had already made a decision before there was an opportunity to consider all the options publicly,” said Smith.

The project was conducted by SurveyUSA, a leading independent na-

tional market research firm. The margin of error was + 4.2 to 4.5 percent.

The survey was paid for by volunteer donors. AROD is an ad hoc group of citizens that has raised questions about the OMHS plan. They are not entirely opposed to a new hospital, but have shared concerns about the Pleasant Valley Road site, the financial risk and implications in taking on \$502 million of debt in addition to the \$155 million cash contribution that is required to relocate the hospital. OMHS current debt is \$168 million.

The complete survey results are available on: <http://www.surveyusa.com/client/PollReport.aspx?g=6b21cbb2-054b-48b4-b2da-281325d37702> and [www.plfo.org/reports](http://www.plfo.org/reports).

For more information, contact David Smith: 316-3790.

*Editor's Note: The Public Life Foundation was the fiscal agent for AROD and supports the survey's intent to provide vital information on one of the most important decisions our community has faced in decades. The survey questions were vetted by SurveyUSA's experienced staff. AROD members had nothing to gain from their involvement in the OMHS plan. The group made a good faith effort to gather accurate, balanced information and raise legitimate questions. They are the kind of concerned civic volunteers we are proud to encourage and support.*

## A missed TIF opportunity

One of the downsides to the building plan of Owensboro Medical Health System (OMHS): the missed opportunity to take advantage of state tax increment financing (TIF).

Based on OMHS projections that the new hospital will create 500 or more jobs at an average compensation of \$40,000 per year, if OMHS expanded at its current location (a redevelopment area) the City of Owensboro could qualify for \$1,000,000 in state income taxes, plus additional funds through sales taxes on new equipment, associated income and property tax increases from spin-off jobs such as medical offices and residential development.

These funds, that otherwise would be going to state government, could be used by city government to pay for infrastructure projects associated with hospital construction. Those incentives will not be available on the proposed Pleasant Valley Road site.

## Coalition helping low-income families

During this 2010 tax season, volunteers through the Green River Asset Building Coalition are offering free income tax services for low-income clients at 11 sites. This enables families to save on tax preparation, maximize their refunds, and in many instances, qualify for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

Since the coalition was established five years ago, more than 7,000 tax returns have been filed through the program at an average refund of \$1,700. The coalition's work has attracted \$3.6 million.

"The program rewards work and helps lift families out of poverty," said Keith Sanders, executive director of the Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation who was instrumental in establishing the program. "Many families are not aware that they qualify for a refund and nearly 20 percent who don't owe income taxes don't file a return," he said.

The coalition is partnering with local banks for a "Bank on Owensboro" program to reduce the use of high interest payday loans.

The Progeny Fund (a charitable trust of the John and Marjorie Hager family), recently awarded a grant to promote the services of the asset building coalition.

## Your ideal downtown: an online survey

The unprecedented number of participants in the 2007 "We the People" Town Meeting ranked the "transformation" of downtown Owensboro as one of their top community priorities. Since then, ambitious plans have been developed, land has been acquired and a hotel developer has been secured. There are plans for an expanded riverfront park, convention center, market square plaza, traffic improvements, arts academy and more.

There are both public and private sector dimensions to the plan. But ultimately, the success of the plan will have a great deal to do with the types of uses that succeed in space in the historic core of

downtown and along the riverfront: retail shops, restaurants, businesses and services. These could be tenants or property owners involved in new ventures, those that relocate or expand to downtown from other areas of our community, or those that relocate or expand from outside of our community.

Who or what would you like to see occupy space or build new in our downtown? We invite you to indicate your preferences.

[http://www.plfo.org/downtown\\_survey.php](http://www.plfo.org/downtown_survey.php)







## CITIZENS COMMITTEE MEASURES DROPOUT IMPACT

What is the fiscal impact of high school dropouts in the Greater Owensboro area? According to a study commissioned by the Citizens Committee on Education, local governments lose \$2.2 million per year in occupational taxes.

An alarming 30 percent of Kentucky high school students do not graduate in four years. They earn approximately \$30,000 less per year than those who graduate. Dropouts are more likely to be uninsured and to be in poor health, more likely to be involved in criminal activity which translates to higher corrections cost.

More than 6,500 Kentucky students dropped out of school in 2008. More than a quarter of Kentucky adults do not have a high school diploma. Many teachers say that, by the third or fourth grade, they can identify which students will drop out of school.

There is increasing interest in taking steps to reduce the number of high school dropouts in Kentucky. Rep. Brent Yonts (D-Greenville) filed legislation to require students to stay in school until they are 18 years of age. (The change would be phased in over three years.) Currently, students may dropout at the age of 16. Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia require school attendance to age 18. Seven states raised the requirement to age 17.

Organizations representing different constituencies and political perspectives agree on the need to address this challenge. However, some officials are concerned that support services (e.g., vocational-technical programs, alternative schools, classes in non-traditional places, truancy officers and flexible schedules) will not be funded and schools will end up “warehousing” students who don’t want to be there. This could be disruptive, they say.

In September 2009, a statewide summit on the dropout problem, hosted by first lady Jane Beshear and education secretary Helen Mountjoy, examined promising programs to address the problem. The summit was followed by six regional summits to be concluded in the spring of 2010.

## Attractive additions

The new buildings on the campuses of WKU-Owensboro and Owensboro High School are splendid additions to our community. So often, officials allow economics to trump quality design or they sign-off on a plan without consideration of the context, scale or architectural vocabulary of a building's environment.

### OHS gymnasium and fine arts expansion

Unlike the OHS gymnasium and classroom additions of the 1960's, with the new gym and fine arts expansion, architectural features from the original building were extended to the new facilities to convey a sense of connection: the new building belongs to the old.



### Site right for WKU-O



After many years using space that was a moving target, WKU-O has a home with room to grow. While costly urban sprawl generally should be discouraged, the site will be convenient for many students who will be transitioning from OCTC to WKU-O through the 2+2 program. In fact, some students will be taking courses on both campuses simultaneously.

### Lessons learned

These projects underscore the importance of guiding principles as our community makes decisions about its architecture and aesthetic appeal. Whenever possible, we should:

- set high standards for the design of our public buildings
- build public facilities in the right place – preferably in the downtown area
- save interesting old buildings
- replace great buildings that are torn down with new great buildings (parking lots are not adequate substitutions)
- welcome meaningful public participation in community design

## Haire, court leave legacy with WKU-O building

Through the initiative and funding authorized by Daviess County judge-executive Reid Haire and fiscal court members Bruce Kunze, Jim Lambert and Mike Riney, Western Kentucky University – Owensboro (WKU-O) now has a home in the largest city in its service area.

In January, WKU-O officials opened the new facility that provides classroom space, faculty offices, a community room and more. The master plan calls for five buildings, conveniently located across New Hartford Road from the Owensboro Community and Technical College. WKU-O now offers 20 undergraduate majors, 23 graduate degrees and has added full-time faculty. Several programs are offered at the Owensboro campus exclusively.

Judge Haire and the commissioners responded to a higher education study commissioned by the Citizens Committee on Education that pointed to our community's low ranking in higher education attainment and limited postsecondary course and degree offerings compared to benchmark communities. County government "stepped up" to provide the pivotal funding - \$6 million toward land, infrastructure and building costs.

We salute Judge Haire and commissioners Kunze, Lambert and Riney for their vision and leadership.

## Goodfellows Club campaign sets record

Congratulations to the Goodfellows Club for its most successful campaign ever! Despite the economic downturn, hundreds of "good fellows" found a way to generously support the 2009 Roll-Call appeal to bring in nearly \$160,000. One hundred percent of these funds will be used for clothing, shoes, coats and dental care for disadvantaged youth in our community. The campaign also makes possible the annual Goodfellows Christmas party that this year attracted more than 1,000 children. This was the 94th Christmas party.

Kudos to the contributors, volunteer board, PRIDE, Western Kentucky Botanical Garden, Settle Memorial United Methodist Church, Third Baptist Church and other sponsors and hosts of "soup day" fund raisers, the Cromwell Radio Group for on-air promotion and the Messenger-Inquirer for providing print space for the donor listings and contributing text for the daily features during the campaign.





## **“We the People” II**

### **You can help shape the event**

Another mega town meeting is planned for 2010. We expect the assembly to be bigger and the event even better than the November 2007 town meeting that attracted 650 people.

The town meeting topic(s) have not been selected; that will be the decision of the steering committee through the input of a content and program development committee, focus groups, meetings and surveys.

Citizens from all walks of life and all areas of Daviess County are invited to not only participate, but to help us plan the event.

#### **We invite you to be involved. We will be forming a ...**

- Steering Committee
- Program Development Committee
- Outreach Committee
- Marketing Committee
- Fundraising Committee
- Volunteer Recruitment/Training Committee
- ... and more!

**Do you have special interests or talents that could be useful to the project?**

If you are interested in serving on a committee, contact:

**Shelly Nichols**

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