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Advocate

Zeroing in on Owensboro's **NEXT BIG THING**

With a new hospital, downtown hotel, convention center and expanded riverfront park already in the works, we present a list of potential projects and programs that could be Owensboro's "next big thing."

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Zeroing in on Owensboro's **NEXT BIG THING**

“From 2006 to 2008 Owensboro completed several strategic planning initiatives in and outside government. They led directly to the focus on downtown development, the Gateway Planning Group’s inventive master plan, and the realignment of city government staff and services to reflect the fast-changing fiscal environment.

A new strategic planning initiative is needed in 2012 and 2013 to coincide with the opening of the convention center and to propel the city and county to the next stage of its progress as a center of opportunity.”

– Keith Schneider, Author of the Citistates report



What is “the next big thing” for Owensboro-Daviess County? What can we rally around as a community? What project, program or process can give us distinction as a community? Which community goal is most ambitious and also attainable?

Projects

Is our next big thing a **brick and mortar project**?

A new hospital is under construction, as is an expanded riverfront park, downtown hotel and convention center. We have a progressive Centre for Business and Research (our first business incubator). What’s our next big project?



In no particular order, the following project ideas are already circulating in the community:

- Phase Two – OCTC Advanced Technology Center

- Building #2 – Western Kentucky University – Owensboro

- Continuous private and public-private developments to further implement the downtown plan

- Interstate 67

- A Bluegrass Music Center

- Long-term plan (and possible replacement?) of OMU power plant

- Riverport expansion and modernization

- An air cargo or maintenance hub at the airport

- A complex to attract biotechnology firms

- An open air marketplace for farmers, artists, vendors, etc.

- Outdoor amphitheater

- Painting of the Glover Cary Bridge

- Expansion of the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art into the Western Kentucky Museum of Fine Art Arts Academy

- Campgrounds at local park

- Expansion of the Greenbelt

- Pharmacy School

- Expansion of public art

- Consolidation of local governments and/or school districts

- Conversion of current OMHS campus to a new use

- Ohio River Marina

- Minor league baseball team/stadium

- Renovated Sportscenter

- Tennis complex



Programs and Policies

Rather than brick and mortar projects, perhaps our focus – and resources – should be directed toward **programs or policies**. Perhaps our next big thing should be:

- Programs to attract talent, entrepreneurs, business start-ups and expansions

- A program to guarantee college or technical education for all graduating high school students

- A well-funded sustained campaign to improve our cultural value of education and lifelong learning

- Expansion of the Community Campus initiative

- An aggressive, sustained program to dramatically increase the number of working-age adults with a college degree

- Local governments, public agencies and major nonprofit organizations embrace and practice openness and transparency in deliberations and decision making

- To achieve health and environmental goals, uphold the highest standards of air and water quality

- Develop effective community strategies to be the most physically fit county in the state, and one of the fittest communities in the nation

- Establish a United Fund for the Arts

For the public to embrace one or more of these projects or programs as “the next big thing,” a significant number of citizens need to be involved in the discussions. They need to trust that the information provided them is complete, balanced and reliable. They deserve to know of the costs and consequences, the tradeoffs connected with various options.

A community strategic plan may be the most effective way to engage the community in examining and prioritizing our most promising initiatives – our “next big thing.”

Local governments, public agencies and commissions, major nonprofit organizations, business/economic development groups, labor, planning agencies, educators, philanthropies, advocates and others should lead the effort, and all interested citizens should have an opportunity to share their own ideas and react to those submitted by others.



When should **the people?** have a say ■

“I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society than the people themselves; and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them, but to inform their discretion by education.”

– Thomas Jefferson

Trusting the people

Valuing the collective wisdom of the people has been demonstrated and challenged throughout our history and culture. Our founding fathers envisioned a new way of governing with a radical notion that the ultimate powers of society should lie with the people themselves. Trusting in the judgment of the people is at the very heart of our democratic process.

From a practical perspective, when the goal is to inform, engage and facilitate responsible action, how do we make it work? What have we learned? When is public participation most effective? From our experience in organizing civic engagement programs, we have found that it is important that...

- ... a substantial number of people are energized.
- ... people from all walks of life are involved.
- ... people have been introduced to balanced and reliable information.
- ... people are willing to listen and be open to other perspectives.
- ... people are civil and respectful to one another.
- ... people are willing to wrestle with the complexity of issues, the costs, consequences, and tradeoffs – even to the point of changing their mind.

A tool for decision makers

This kind of high quality civic engagement can be a valuable tool for public officials. Constituents are more likely to support

things when they've had a voice or role. They gain a greater understanding of the difficult choices facing officials.

Better decisions

Meaningful civic engagement builds trust and enhances our sense of community. It can bring forth a torrent of ideas. And when leaders take into consideration the input of informed, engaged citizens, we inherently make better decisions.

Not a perfect process

Of course, it's not so simple. Some people only get involved when they have a personal interest or agenda. They may not be open to other information or perspectives. Many of their suggestions may not be good ones. Some people may be cynical, apathetic or disruptive.

All the more reason to reach out to them.

Openness is essential

Even when the best of public dialogue is demonstrated, everyone won't be pleased. Decisions have to be made, and some inevitably will be unpopular. However, a sense that something underhanded is involved can be minimized when deliberations occur in the open before decisions are

made and when officials explain the options they face and why they did what they did.

Growing opportunities to participate

Like most places, Owensboro-Daviess County has a mixed record with regard to citizen participation. However, in recent years there have been more opportunities for the public to be involved in a meaningful way in important community decisions. Thousands of people have participated in public hearings, town meetings, public forums, and focus group discussions. They've written letters and editorial columns for the newspaper. They've formed organizations and task forces to push for or carry out recommendations. We need to keep that going and build upon that.

“So the overarching community challenge for us in the 21st century is not economic development, not health care, not crime, not urban-county government, but how we practice democracy. Will we trust regular citizens to participate in resolving difficult public issues for the good of the individual and community?”

– John S. Hager
KWC's Ed Ryan Lecture
April 22, 1996

A regular way of doing business

We would be well-served if all major community challenges and opportunities were characterized by broad and meaningful public participation. That may not be achievable; it takes time to conduct research, to frame issues in a balanced way, to plan and promote community meetings. But whenever possible, we should make public participation an expected part of the decision making process beyond what is required by law.

What decisions? ...whose decisions?

Public participation should extend to:

- Public entities with the authority to tax and set fees: City of Owensboro, Daviess County Fiscal Court, Owensboro Municipal Utilities, Owensboro Public Schools, Daviess County Public Schools, Green River District Health Department, Regional Water Resource Agency, Daviess County Public Library, and more.
- Public agencies, commissions and advisory committees that do not have taxing authority.
- Nonprofit corporations that have a public mission.

Whether pending decisions are related to saving an historic building, community health, a strip mine proposal in Daviess County, steps to curtail energy costs, reducing the detention center subsidy or more, our community will be well-served to incorporate public dialogue in the decision making process. In so doing, Owensboro-Daviess County will gain distinction, build good will, and bring forth the energy, creativity and support of the citizenry.

Logsdon Center will serve nonprofits, foster grass roots action



Once funds are secured to complete equipping and furnishing the facility, the Ronald Lee Logsdon Community Center will serve as Owensboro-Daviess County's first nonprofit resource center.

Located in President's Place, a senior housing facility located behind The Springs medical complex, the facility will offer qualifying local nonprofits work space with computer, Internet access, use of office equipment and supplies, conference room, multi-purpose room and kitchen for luncheon and dinner meetings, storage space for organizational files, continuing education programs for nonprofits, and more.

Nonprofits and ad hoc citizen groups will benefit from efficiencies, collaboration and networking. Community benefits include:

- stronger, more efficient, more sustainable community organizations (nationally, 30 percent of nonprofit organizations dissolve each year)
- cost-sharing to stretch the philanthropic dollar
- incubator for emerging nonprofits
- more collaboration and cooperation among nonprofits

- coaching and support for grass roots advocacy and activism
- more professional development and continuing education for nonprofits
- resource library for foundation research and nonprofit management
- increased public awareness for nonprofit organizations, and more.

“The Logsdon Center will memorialize our visionary leader, Ron Logsdon, foster collaboration and enable us to learn from one another.”

Aubrey Nehring, Executive Director
Audubon Area Community Services

“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.”

Martha Clark CPA, Board Member Emerita
IMPACT 100

The \$5 million, 60-unit complex is a joint venture of Audubon Area Community Services (AACS), Wabuck Development and the Kentucky Housing Corporation. The Logsdon Center comprises 11,500 square feet and will have up to 20 work stations. AACS and Wabuck have made additional contributions for tables, chairs, catering kitchen, information technology, and more. AACS

is also contributing significant in-kind support and a center manager position. The Public Life Foundation of Owensboro and the Lawrence and Augusta Hager Educational Foundation have provided support and leadership as well.

Approximately \$180,000 is needed to purchase equipment and furniture.



PRIDE symposium points to importance of gateways, first impressions



PRIDE (Public Responsibility In Designing our Environment), an organization that supports aesthetic improvements in Owensboro-Daviess County, is hosting a symposium on May 23 to focus on first impressions, particularly as it relates to the challenges and opportunities to enhance the new community entrance from the Natcher Bridge.

“How often does a community have an opportunity to create a new entrance and project a dynamic new image?” asked Catherine Shelton, President of PRIDE. “We have a window of opportunity and a chance to do something very special with what will be our most heavily traveled thoroughfare,” she added.

The symposium will feature remarks by Lt. Governor Jerry Abramson, who as Mayor of Louisville was a champion of beautification through his “Operation Brightside “ program.

Paul Kissinger, Principal of the Ft. Lauderdale firm EDSA, the firm that designed the downtown Owensboro riverfront improvements, will follow the Lt. Governor’s remarks with a presentation on the importance of community gateways.

A panel will then react to the presentation. The panel will include Morgan McIlwain, Lexington landscape architect

who PRIDE retained several years ago to design a plan for the road from the new bridge. Bill Tyler, co-founder of the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden, will participate. A state highway department representative has been invited to participate, as well as a local landscaper.

The symposium will run from 11:30 to 2:00pm at Western Kentucky University – Owensboro.

Lunch will be provided, but seating is limited. **Please RSVP: 685-2652 or kathy.strobel@plfo.org.**

Showcase connects citizens to economic development efforts

Citizens with a keen interest in community and economic development are taking part in a noon speaker series to learn more about local economic assets and growth strategies. The Business and Industry Showcase, developed by ROOT (Region of Opportunity Team) is one of the groups that emerged from the 2007 “We the People” AmericaSPEAKS 21st Century Town Meeting®.

The town meeting was sponsored by the Public Life Foundation. The foundation has provided financial and administrative support for all the citizens groups that were formed following the 2007 and 2010 town meetings.

The Showcase recently featured Madison Silvert, director of the Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation’s Emerging Ventures program and manager of the Centre for Business and Research. Bob Whitmer, general manager of the Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport, was the next presenter.

Future programs include Gary Braswell, President and CEO of MPD (June 21), Jeff Barber, Owensboro Medical Health System CEO and President (Sept. 20) and, Terry Woodward, owner and President of Wax Works (Nov. 15). All meetings are held at the Centre for Business and Research.



Community health plan involved hundreds

The Green River District Health Department recently conducted an extensive outreach effort to engage stakeholders in the department’s community health assessment and plan. More than 250 citizens participated in nine forums throughout seven counties, sharing their perspectives on pressing health needs. In addition, more than 500 citizens were surveyed to determine their primary healthcare concerns.

Facilitated by Dr. Angela Carman of the University of Kentucky, College of Public Health, the results were released in Daviess County on May 9th. The recommendations for focus areas for Daviess County included access to care, obesity and substance abuse. Each focus area will have a workgroup assigned to determine goals and objectives for each area.

Strip Mining Opponents Mobilize

In response to Western Kentucky Minerals revised 700-acre rezoning application, Save Our Homes (the opposition group) spoke out at the May 10th meeting of the Owensboro Metropolitan Planning Commission (OMPC).

The mine is proposed for properties along Girl Scout Road, Russell Road, and U.S. 231. The OMPC approved the application on a 5-4 vote after seven hours of testimony.

A dozen property owners leased coal or surface rights for the mine; then 750 local citizens objected to the proposal because of concerns over blasting, air and water contamination, damage to the habitat, increased coal truck traffic, and more.

The OMPC staff approved the rezoning. In 1986 and 1993, the OMPC overruled the staff on comparable proposals.

The Save Our Homes group plans to appeal the ruling to the Daviess County Fiscal Court.

The collective wisdom of the people

At a 1906 livestock fair, 787 visitors guessed the weight of an ox after it had been slaughtered and dressed. Not one person guessed the correct weight of 1,198 pounds, but the average of the guesses came to 1,197 pounds.

On a popular television game show, “Who Wants to be a Millionaire,” when contestants were stuck on a question, they were offered two “lifelines” – they could “call an expert” or “poll the audience.” The “expert” was correct 65 percent of the time; the “audience,” 91 percent of the time.

Local advocates share their experiences, offer tips

Once citizens or community groups are ready to take action to promote a position on a public issue, they use different strategies. Which ones are effective? What is central to effective advocacy/activism? What is the key to earning credibility from officials and leaders? What can be learned from these experiences? If given the opportunity, what would advocates/activists do differently?

The Public Life Foundation, in cooperation with Owensboro Community and Technical College Television (OCTV), is capturing those stories and recommendations in a series of videotaped interviews. These interviews will be available at the Ronald Lee Logsdon Community Center as a resource for individuals or groups interested in effective advocacy.

Interviewees include:

Forrest Roberts, is a local attorney who has been an active leader on the Citizens Committee on Education, Western Kentucky University (WKU) Board of Regents, women's issues and more. Under her leadership, research was commissioned that documented the need for additional WKU courses and degrees in Owensboro, which in turn sparked the leadership of Daviess County Judge-Executive Reid Haire and the Fiscal Court to authorize \$6 million toward a WKU campus in Owensboro.

Nelda Barnett, a pioneering advocate for seniors for decades, rose through various leadership posts to the national board of AARP, where she advocated and testified to Congressional Committees on topics such as Social Security, health care and more.

PLFO hopes to schedule additional interviews with local citizens who have:

- advocated for a local ordinance to restrict smoking in public places.
- raised funds to light the downtown Glover Cary Bridge and add white fencing along major thoroughfares to enhance the aesthetic appeal of our community.
- opposed a coal ash dump in eastern Daviess County.
- promoted the value of a county-wide curbside recycling program.
- opposed the location of the new hospital.
- pushed for tighter controls on beer sales by the keg.
- promoted a skateboard park.
- led an effort to inform the public of the importance of wearing seatbelts.
- tirelessly advocated for a botanical garden for our community and region.
- opposed a planned Daviess County surface coal mine.

In its eighth year

World Affairs Council connects Owensboro to the world

Since 2005, the Owensboro Area World Affairs Council (OAWAC) has presented an impressive array of speakers on diverse



global issues. Led by Marc Maltby, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Owensboro Community and Technical College, program sites alternate between local colleges and universities. The council is the only such organization in Kentucky outside of Louisville.

In its eighth year, OAWAC has presented 45 programs on topics such as the state of affairs in other countries and regions, terrorism, international elections, torture, genocide and ethnic cleansing, famine, the plight of refugees, energy, economics, and more.

Speakers and panelists have included academics, journalists, diplomats, authors, columnists, visiting scholars, relief workers, and government workers, among others.

"We are so fortunate to have a council such as this in Owensboro. These kinds of programs are typically not available in communities or postsecondary institutions our size. It's increasingly important for us all to be well-informed about global issues," said council member Carol Mark.

The council is supported by its 65 member contributions. The Public Life Foundation provided staff support and seed money in the early years of the council.