



PROMOTING, ADVANCING the citizen role

2010 ANNUAL
REPORT



CONTEXT OF OUR WORK: community conditions and prospects

Given the extent of community challenges and opportunities, it is more important than ever to promote and advance the role of the public in public life. People from all walks of life and all areas of Owensboro-Daviess County offer ideas, skills, relationships, influence and more. It is essential that our community captures that capacity so that citizens realize their role and power in our democracy.

In our continuing efforts to inform, engage and energize citizens, in 2010 the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro (PLFO) focused on ways to spark citizenship and increase effectiveness in solving problems – all toward building a stronger sense of community.

Many citizens are informed and involved in worthy causes. They participate and share their views. They have confidence in leaders and are bullish on our community.

Unfortunately, others are removed from public life. They don't believe their voice is valued or heard. They don't feel that leaders are mindful of their day-to-day challenges. They assume decisions are made by the few to benefit the few.

Therefore, our task stays in the forefront: to examine public issues, to be a reliable source of information and analysis, to ask questions, to bring people together to find common ground for action, to coach and support and challenge the public toward a rich and rewarding public life.

What was the context for our work in 2010?

Unemployment and social consequences

The economic plight of thousands of individuals and families affected by the recession was uppermost on the minds of Owensboro-Daviess County citizens and community leaders in 2010. Nearly 5,000 local residents were unemployed during the year at an average length of 34 weeks.

Our community was not hit as hard as others across the state and region, and local strategies connected with workforce

development, education, support for existing business and entrepreneurs appear to be among the most effective community response models.

Among the encouraging economic developments in 2010:

- U.S. Bank Home Mortgage announced it will add 500 jobs and a new facility to accommodate that growth is under construction at the MidAmerica Airpark.
- Construction of the new OMHS hospital is expected to create up to 1,500 jobs over the next three years and 800 additional operating jobs in the next ten years.
- First Security Bank acquired a downtown building and will add 50 jobs.

High unemployment was reflected in greater pressure on social service agencies, including homeless shelters. One school reported 100 homeless students, another 40. A citizens task force assessed the needs to resources, and challenged community organizations and governments to pull together to ensure that shelter is available to all.

The recession chipped into state government revenues, reducing allocations to public education and placing a greater burden on local schools.

These and other social implications resulted in the selection of economic development and education as the topics for the "We the People" Town Meeting – PLFO's most ambitious project of 2010.

Downtown plan advancing

In 2010, construction continued on the riverfront park expansion and Riverfront Crossings plaza. Site planning and preliminary design continued on a new convention/events center, the centerpiece of the downtown master plan. A hotel developer was selected through an RFP (Request for Proposal) process.

When environmental concerns led officials to reverse plans to raze the state office building, its use as a Bluegrass Music Center gained momentum and is currently under study.

A traffic study, a requirement whenever federal highways are transferred to local governments, indicated how a two-way Second Street could reduce traffic, noise and congestion to enhance pedestrian appeal of the street. Subsequently, officials concluded that the same “calming” objectives could be achieved without a conversion to two-way.

Improved transportation connections

Highway connections to I-64 came closer to completion in 2010. The painting of the Cary Bridge in downtown Owensboro was postponed until 2017 while concerns intensified over maintenance and truck traffic.

The Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport had notable success with its nonstop connection to Orlando. Airport officials hope to offer a comparable package to Las Vegas this year.

New and expanded schools

With the construction of the new West Louisville Elementary School, Daviess County Public Schools has replaced all of the district’s outdated school buildings.

The Owensboro Board of Education has not constructed a new school building since the 1960’s. In 2010, the board completed a new gymnasium and enhanced arts facilities at Owensboro High School.

Western Kentucky University-Owensboro opened its new building near Owensboro Community and Technical College. The \$6 million facility was made possible through the initiative and financial support of Daviess County Fiscal Court. The WKU-O campus plan includes four more buildings.

Environmental-health challenges

Three proposed coal-to-gas power plants have been proposed for Muhlenberg, Henderson and Spencer counties and are advancing through the permitting process. Synthetic gas is more expensive than natural gas; however, developers are pushing legislation that would force utilities to purchase their higher priced electricity.

Coal-to-gas plants are reportedly cleaner than traditional coal-fired plants, but environmental groups have expressed

concerns about emissions and the injection of hot waste water into area rivers. Apparently there are no plans to phase out the older coal plants as the newer plants are added to the area that has the highest concentration of coal plants in the U.S.

A public forum on the tradeoffs connected with the new coal-to-gas plants led the Green River District Health Dept. to secure a grant for a Health Impact Assessment of the proposed plants. In 2010, consultants were hired and a citizens advisory committee was named. Surveys are being conducted and a report is expected in 2011.

Changes in local governance

The public outcry connected with the increase in the insurance tax to finance the downtown master plan had political consequences in 2010.

John Kazlauskas, an incumbent on the city commission, was defeated. Commissioner David Johnson was re-elected. Commissioner Candance Brake decided not to run for re-election. City Commissioner Charlie Castlen was elected to the county commission. Political newcomers Pam Smith-Wright, Roger Stacy and Jeff Sanford were elected to the city commission. All express support for the downtown master plan.

The 2011 Daviess County Fiscal Court includes Al Mattingly, the new county judge-executive (and former city commissioner), newcomer George Wathen, former city commissioner Charlie Castlen, and incumbent Jim Lambert.

On the state level, veteran state senator David Boswell was defeated by former state representative Joe Bowen.

One of Kentucky’s U.S. senate seats was secured by Rand Paul who defeated Secretary of State Trey Grayson in the Republican primary and then state Attorney General Jack Conway in the general election.

information → deliberation → action

In 2010, the foundation responded to various community challenges and opportunities by:

- researching issues and producing information
- bringing diverse citizens together for dialogue and deliberation
- supporting citizens who take responsible action

information

Civic Engagement

- “We the People” 2010: You can help shape the event!
- “We the People” 2010 AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting®: *What topics would you like to see discussed?*
- How we make important community decisions: *A checklist to ensure openness and transparency*
- The new convention center: an important opportunity for public participation
- Citizen perspectives on creating jobs and improving education: Report on 2010 “We the People” AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting®
- Building trust: Ten things officials of governments, public agencies and major private nonprofit institutions can do to build the trust and confidence of the people



Community/Economic Development

- A missed TIF opportunity
- Attractive additions
- How will we work in 2020? Discussion Guide: “We the People” AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting®
- Economic Facts and Views
- Video: “Envisioning the Future” in economic development



Downtown

- Your ideal downtown: an online survey
- Report on downtown survey: *What specific uses or tenants would you like to see in downtown Owensboro?*
- Restructuring downtown master plan: *implementation to maximize citizen participation*

Education

- Citizens Committee on Education measures dropout impact
- Haire, court leave legacy with WKU-O building
- How will we learn in 2020? Discussion Guide: “We the People” AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting®
- Education Facts and Views
- Video: “Envisioning the Future” in education



information

Environment

- Reports on community forum: "Examining the tradeoffs," three coal-to-gas plants proposed for our area
- Are storage facilities, factory farms an environmental threat?
- Recycling: Which option makes the most sense?
- Discussion Guide: Examining the Tradeoffs: Three more coal plants proposed for our area

Governance

- Report on public forum on state budget challenges
- "Here's An Idea For Congress: Try Democracy," by Lee Hamilton
- National discussion on the federal budget
- Congratulations... and thank you, to all the local candidates

Health/Health Care

- Survey shows public against hospital plan
- Health Care Reform: Opposing views of two Kentucky Congressmen

Parks and Recreation

- Citizens oppose decision to close Hillcrest Golf Course
- Public forum followed by community-wide SurveyUSA poll
- What next for Hawes Park?
- Discussion Guide: Hillcrest Golf Course: Best use for golf, a park, or a subdivision?

Poverty/Social Services

- Volunteers make asset building initiative work
- Goodfellows Club campaign sets record
- A tribute to Ron Logsdon



deliberation

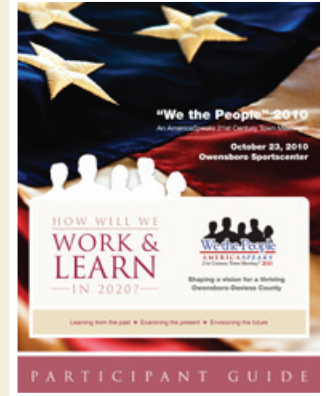
How will we work and learn in 2020?

Shaping a vision for a thriving Owensboro-Daviess County “We the People” AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting®

“Learning from the past...Examining the present... Envisioning the future”

The full day town meeting attracted 300 citizens from all walks of life who examined community challenges and strategies to create jobs, develop our economy and improve education. Through a printed guide, fact sheets, video and small group dialogue, participants learned about our economic and educational history, current data, model programs from other cities and more.

Within the framework of six goal areas, participants developed dozens of recommendations.



Hillcrest Golf Course

Best use for golf, a park, or a subdivision? **Public Forum**

An overflow crowd of more than 90 participants learned about the history of the Hillcrest Golf Course, current use of local courses, trends in recreation and golf, financial implications, changes in Hawes Park ownership, options under consideration and points, pro and con, with regard to each option.

Many participants were regular Hillcrest golfers, so the overwhelming support for maintaining the property as a golf course was not surprising.

However, the forum was supplemented by a professional survey that also indicated strong public support for the keeping the course.



Examining the Tradeoffs

Three more coal plants proposed for our area: **Public Forum**

Nearly 90 people participated in this forum that focused on the economic, environmental and health tradeoffs connected with three coal-to-gas plant proposals for nearby counties.

Environmentalists, public health officials, coal industry representatives, residents who own property near the proposed sites were among the participants.

Included in the recommendations: Participants overwhelmingly supported phasing out older coal plants as newer, cleaner plants are built.

Subsequently, the Green River District Health Department received a grant to conduct a Health Impact Assessment of the three proposed plants. That study should be completed in 2011.



In 2010, the foundation supported citizens making a difference, including groups that emerged from the 2007 “We the People” Town Meeting:

Environmental Impact Council

- Continued efforts to expand recycling, including developing a plan for curbside recycling
- Supported DC Sweep’s efforts to receive a grant to acquire a recycling trailer
- Promoted and participated in the public forum on the three proposed coal-to-gas plants

Citizens for Good Government

- Met with elected officials regarding an openness and transparency pledge
- Co-hosted a candidate forum with Kentucky Farm Bureau that was broadcast and re-run on a public access channel.

Healthy and Caring Community/ Education Committee

- Established a new agency council to foster communication and collaboration (more than 50 agencies participated)
- Featured speakers, panels
- Merged with the “We the People” education group

Region Of Opportunity team (ROOT)

- Launched “Food for Thought” luncheon series to focus on community development: Ed Riney, CEO Riverport – 30 attended
- Hosted public meeting on the EDC’s new strategic plan
- Promoted walking tour of Centre for Business and Research
- Supported Bicycle Owensboro’s efforts which led the City of Owensboro to establish shared bicycle routes

Other citizen initiatives and groups in which PLFO has participated or supported in 2010:

- Action teams formed following the 2010 town meeting
- Cable Advisory Committee
- Candidates for local elected office
- Center for Civic Engagement
- Citizens Committee on Education
- Community Dental Clinic
- Citizens Health Care Advocates
- Downtown Development Commission
- Education Alliance
- ENTRAN (Downtown traffic study)
- Environmental Impact Council
- Field Foundation
- Foundation for Healthy Kentucky
- Wendell Foster’s Campus
- Girls Incorporated
- Goodfellows Club
- Green River Area Development District
- Green River District Health Department (Health Impact study)
- Hager Educational Foundation board
- Healthy Horizons
- Junior Achievement
- Kentucky Commission on Philanthropy
- KentuckySPEAKS (statewide town meeting project)
- Kentucky Engagement Conference
- (civic engagement initiatives at Kentucky colleges and universities)
- Kentucky Youth Advocates
- Leadership Kentucky
- H.L. Neblett Community Center
- Nonprofit Resource Center
- Owensboro Area World Affairs Council
- Owensboro Human Relations Commission
- Owensboro NAACP
- Pioneering Healthy Communities
- PRIDE
- Rotary Club of Owensboro
- We Are Downtown
- Western Kentucky University-Owensboro Advisory Committee
- “We the People” Leadership Council

about

Founders

John and Marjorie Hager

Administration

Rodney Berry | President

Rodney.Berry@plfo.org

Shelly Nichols | Director of Civic Engagement

Shelly.Nichols@plfo.org

Sharon Hagerman | Administrative Assistant to John Hager

Sharon.Hagerman@plfo.org

Kathy Strobel | Office Manager

Kathy.Strobel@plfo.org

Sally Wood | Progeny Fund Grants Administrator

Board of Directors

Sally Wood | Chair

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Bill Speciale | Director

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Public Life Foundation of Owensboro

401 Frederica Street, B-203
Owensboro, Kentucky 42301

270/685-2652 | www.plfo.org



"We the People" Town Meeting 2010 photos courtesy Phil Casper