

**Public Life Foundation of Owensboro
First Quarter 2008
Report to the Board of Directors**

**Rodney Berry, President
April 2, 2008**

Restructuring for impact

Our first quarter has been a period of transition and regrouping for the foundation. We are still winding down, dealing with loose ends, and focusing on meaningful outcomes and applications from our most ambitious project to date: our “We the People” *AmericaSpeaks* 21st Century Town Meeting held in November.

We worked with Fran Ellers who prepared the town meeting final report. We convened two meetings of town meeting participants, attracting 150 people for each meeting. We coordinated the meetings and activities of five new work groups that have been established to implement the priorities identified from each town meeting deliberation period. We established an Executive Committee, Leadership Council and, with the Executive Committee, interviewed candidates and hired an executive director.

We were invited to a Washington DC conference of community development officials to “share the story” of our town meeting. We were asked to share the town meeting results with the Downtown Development Corporation, Daviess County Fiscal Court and GRASP (as it related to city-county merger) and the noon Rotary Club. We coordinated a pilot program for an ongoing “We the People” program on OCTV Channel 51.

Several town meeting priorities have gained momentum and a strong sense of community acceptance. Among these:

- The people want a “green” community: expanded recycling, closer scrutiny on coal-fired power plants, more innovation and leadership in renewable energy alternatives.
- The people are ready to transform our downtown and riverfront.
- The people want a government for the 21st century that is open, transparent, effective, efficient and fair.

Family grantmaking will expand significantly in 2008. Sally Wood has assumed a part-time position to examine community needs, identify prospective grant recipients and administer a proposal solicitation-review process.

Beverly Mills retired on March 14 and Liz Seibert resigned in February and relocated to Winchester where her husband accepted a position. At this point, we do not plan to fill these positions.

Shelly Nichols, the “We the People” Executive Director, will begin April 7th.

Information

Public Life Advocate

The first edition of the *Public Life Advocate* included the following articles:

- “We the People” Town Meeting underscores need for meaningful public participation in major community decisions
- State shortfall
- Re-examining the Peirce report: On downtown and the riverfront
- Let the sunshine in
- OHS, Vick recognized
- Reflections on city-county school study
- Regional coalescing
- Another power plant
- Citizen initiative was catalyst for WKU project

The text for the second edition has been forwarded to our graphic designer. It will feature an issue brief (discussion guide) on the exploding prison population problem. The research for the brief included a meeting with the Daviess County Jailer. To ensure accuracy and objectivity, we invited several judges, public defenders, prosecuting attorneys; sheriff, drug court administrator and University of Kentucky law professor to share impressions and recommendations.

We hope to re-establish some relationships with freelance writers and assign stories associated with community issues and priorities from the town meeting that warrant continued examination.

Information gathering – resources for troubled youth

At Susie Alford’s suggestion, we have organized an April 8 luncheon-focus group discussion to explore our community’s capacity to serve our troubled youth and to introduce our community to the work of Bellewood Homes, a Presbyterian outreach program that has a presence throughout Kentucky, but not in Owensboro. We have invited social workers, shelter managers, youth advocates, ministers and others.

Networking

In order to share information and learn about community issues, we participate in meetings and events of governments, public agencies and private nonprofit organizations.

During the first quarter, this included:

Chamber of Commerce Rooster Booster, annual meeting, legislative breakfasts,
Owensboro legislative reception
Citizens Committee on Education
Citizens Health Care Advocates – board meetings, general meetings/programs, retreat
City of Owensboro strategic planning
Coalition for the Poor

Community Solutions for Substance Abuse
Daviess County Fiscal Court
Dental Task Force
Downtown Development Corporation
Economic Development Corporation
Education Alliance
International Bluegrass Music Museum
Gateway Consulting (Ft. Worth) – downtown master plan
Governor Fletcher presentation/news conference
Greater Owensboro Area Leadership (GOAL)
Grass Roots Association Supporting Progress (GRASP)
Hager Educational Foundation
Healthy Horizons
Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday march, speaker, activities
Minister-Laity Panel Discussion with the Governor
David Osborne, Jailer
Owensboro Area World Affairs Council
Owensboro Community and Technical College President and Dean of Students
Greater Owensboro Venture Club
Ron Payne, candidate for mayor
Philanthropy Roundtable
PRIDE
Public Advocacy Training
Rotary Club
Jeff Sanford, candidate for mayor
We are Downtown
“We the People”
 five Work Groups
 Education and Learning Committee
 Region of Opportunity Team
 Environmental Impact Council
 Citizens for Good Government
 Healthy and Caring Community
Executive Committee
Leadership Council
 general meeting
Western Kentucky University – Owensboro Advisory Committee

Deliberation

We are planning a public forum on the prison population problem, using our issue brief as a discussion guide. We are exploring the possibility of using Turning Point software and keypads comparable to those used during the “We the People” Town Meeting.

Community and downtown development leaders have asked if we would be willing to accept a key role in coordinating the public participation phase of the downtown master plan.

Action

“We the People” group initiatives

Since the “We the People” Town Meeting included extensive information sharing and deliberation over strategic options, the town meeting participants are ready for action. Some groups have more tangible action items than others, and some are better equipped for success than others. All appear determined to follow-up with meaningful applications.

- The Education and Learning Committee plans a “citizen’s guide” for getting involved in education.
- The Region of Opportunity Team has a seat at the table as the downtown master planning process begins. They are anxious to accomplish some short term goals as well: promoting the city-county acquisition of the Executive Inn, removing through truck traffic on Second Street, etc.
- The Environmental Impact Council plans a community education campaign on the benefits of curbside recycling following field trips to facilities in other communities and presentations by firms that provide such services for nearby communities.
- Citizens for Good Government hopes to develop a set of principles regarding openness and transparency that can set a new standard for local governments, tax districts, public agencies, and major private nonprofit community organizations.
- The Healthy and Caring Community group tracked and advocated for action in the state legislature that will help low-income families get on their feet. The group is also collaborating with Community Solutions for Substance Abuse to expand awareness and expand local resources.

Downtown implementation plan, Executive Inn

John Hager’s generous challenge grant (\$100,000) to help fund the downtown master plan has given important momentum to that effort and a complementary challenge to acquire the Executive Inn property.

We will also be serving on the advisory committee that will supervise the work of the consulting firm that has been selected.

We will be encouraging a participatory process that goes beyond “public input” and engages citizens in the process of “deliberation” over carefully framed options.

Community group resource center

We recently introduced to the Philanthropic Roundtable the concept of a Center for Citizen Action – facilities and services that would enable nonprofit organizations

(established, emerging and ad hoc groups) to benefit from efficiencies and collaboration by clustering citizen groups in a central setting.

We are working with Owensboro Community and Technical College (OCTC) to refine the concept for a Center for Civic Engagement at the college, established through a \$500,000 endowment by John and Marjorie Hager. At one point, we were hoping that OCTC would provide space for such a center. Unfortunately, OCTC is unable to provide space for this purpose. The Center, as envisioned by the OCTC president, will feature a web site with links to civic engagement resources, professional development for local nonprofits, service learning projects (e.g., internships) for students, faculty projects and more.

Dental clinic

Since examined as a community challenge in a *Public Life Advocate* article in January 2006 (followed by an issue brief published in May 2006), we have been closely involved with efforts to establish a community dental clinic. Models from other cities have been considered, the district health department researched the issue and took a leadership role. Local dentists, school nurses and social workers, county government, Goodfellows Club and others have been involved. A plan has been developed, a facility identified, a new nonprofit corporation established, and a campaign will be launched soon to acquire the facility and equipment of a dentist who is moving to another community.

Grants will make a difference

The Progeny Fund has refocused its mission and established a strategic grantmaking process for the distribution of \$200,000 in grants annually. Under the coordination of Sally Wood, select agencies were invited to submit letters of interest. Finalists will be invited to submit more comprehensive proposals that will be considered during the summer board meeting.

Kentuckians CAN (Civic Action Network)

We have convened a May 12 meeting in Louisville to introduce the AmericaSpeaks methodology and the Public Life Foundation experience with the “We the People” Town Meeting to a cross section of public policy groups and organizations with statewide networks. If there appears to be interest and support, we hope to explore a pilot project to apply this methodology to a pressing state issue in multiple locations across Kentucky prior to a session of the state legislature.