


"We the People" 2010

An AmericaSpeaks 21st Century Town Meeting®

October 23, 2010

Owensboro Sportscenter



HOW WILL WE
WORK &
LEARN
—IN 2020?—



**Shaping a vision for a thriving
Owensboro-Daviess County**

Learning from the past • Examining the present • Envisioning the future

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

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Introduction



What is “We the People?”

“We the People” is a community project spearheaded by the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro. The foundation fosters broad and meaningful public participation in community decisions and public policy. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, the foundation

- researches public issues
- publishes articles and reports
- conducts surveys
- prepares issue briefs that are used as dialogue guides in public forums
- organizes and conducts events involving public deliberation
- supports the efforts of citizens who want to make a difference

John and Marjorie Hager established the Public Life Foundation of Owensboro in 1996, the year of the sale of the *Messenger-Inquirer* to a Dallas media company. John and his brother Larry (Lawrence W. Hager, Jr.) were third generation co-publishers of the family newspaper. Larry retired in 1989. The next year Larry and Frankie Hager established the Lawrence W. and Augusta B. Hager Educational Foundation. In the 1980s a national study named the *Messenger-Inquirer* one of the five best small dailies in the nation.

Who is AmericaSpeaks?



AmericaSpeaks is the partner to “We the People” guiding the development and delivery of Owensboro’s 21st Century Town Meeting® in 2007 and now in 2010. Based in Washington DC, AmericaSpeaks is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that engages citizens in important public decisions that impact their lives. Thousands of people have had an impact on their communities through citizen engagement methodologies pioneered by AmericaSpeaks. Since 1995, AmericaSpeaks has conducted 21st Century Town Meetings® across the country and around the world on topics such as:

- the federal budget deficit
- health care reform
- the redevelopment of the World Trade Center after 9/11
- regional economic development in Ohio
- the Washington DC municipal budget
- childhood obesity
- adults living with autism

- global priorities at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland
- the Clinton Global Initiative
- and much more

“The most important office in a democracy is the office of citizen.”

Justice Louis Brandeis

“Have you not learned the most in your life from those with whom you disagreed – those who saw it differently than you?”

Walt Whitman

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Citizenship is not a spectator sport.”

Robert Putnam

“We’re not trying to get people to the table; we want people to set the table.”

John Hager, Founder
Public Life Foundation of Owensboro





What has been the impact of the 2007 Town Meeting?

In November 2007, more than 600 participants examined community assets, challenges, and deliberated over five goals for an exciting vision for Owensboro-Daviess County:

- A Community Committed to Education and Learning
- A Region of Opportunity and Appeal
- A Uniquely Green and Clean Environment
- A Healthy and Caring Community
- A Government for the 21st Century

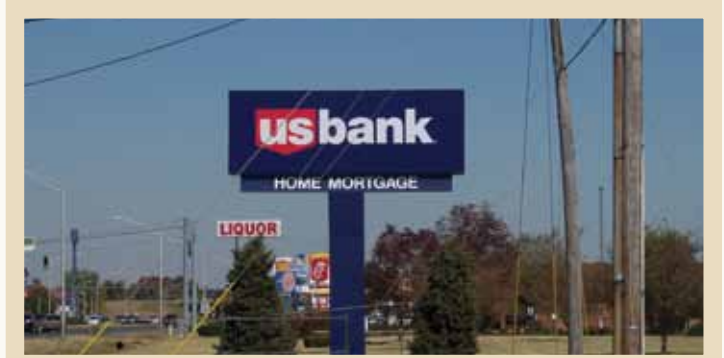
Hundreds of participants stayed involved following the town meeting. The “We the People” database has grown to more than 1,200 citizens. And notable community progress has been made on most of the top recommendations, including the following initiatives of “We the People” volunteers:

- Citizens for Good Government sponsored public forums on local government structure and taxation, a banquet for public officials that featured presentations on transparency in government. They subsequently developed an Openness and Transparency Pledge for public officials.
- The Environmental Impact Council conducted a 13-week educational campaign on the benefits of recycling.

Recycling services were expanded and curbside service is under consideration.

- The Region of Opportunity Team partnered with other groups in promoting and hosting public forums on downtown redevelopment, including the unveiling of an ambitious master plan and a public workshop to help bring into focus a community vision for the Executive Inn property.
- The Healthy and Caring Community group sponsored a two-month promotion to increase participation in the Kentucky Children’s Health Insurance Project (K-CHIP).
- An education committee helped promote a Generations United and a school mentoring program to increase community involvement in our schools.
- Two committees joined together to establish an inter-agency mechanism to facilitate collaboration among schools, social and health service agencies.

For our second *AmericaSpeaks* 21st Century Town Meeting®, once again our goal is to inform and engage citizens from all walks of life and all areas of Owensboro-Daviess County in deliberations about the future of our community.



A lot has happened in Owensboro-Daviess County since our 2007 event, notably:

- A national recession led to layoffs, several plant closings and an increase in homelessness.
- Health care reform has been adopted on a national level and a new hospital is under construction at the local level.
- A tax increment financing proposal to build a public arena and convention center with a shopping/lifestyle center on the outskirts of the city was disqualified by the state.
- Construction began on riverfront improvements, an ambitious downtown master plan was adopted, and the Executive Inn was acquired and razed, making 18 acres on our downtown riverfront available for redevelopment.
- Construction was completed on the first building of the new campus of Western Kentucky University – Owensboro.
- Three coal-to-gas plants have been proposed for our area.
- A new business incubator was established in a renovated warehouse.
- Downtown design standards and new economic development incentives were adopted.
- Recycling facilities were added, and curbside recycling is under consideration.
- US Bank Home Mortgage announced plans to add 500 new jobs.

...an effective economic development strategy for the 21st century is really an education strategy, and a sense that the best thing we can do to address social concerns (generational poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, etc.) is to not only be a caring community, but a prosperous one. We must offer people hope for a dependable job at good wages through education and training.

Since our town meeting three years ago, we've seen progress and disappointments. It is time to reassess our circumstances, prospects, and shape a vision for a greater Owensboro-Daviess County through meaningful public participation.

More than 300 citizens were involved in selecting the topics for the 2010 town meeting through focus group discussions, surveys, individual and group meetings. In these recessionary times, it was not surprising that the issue in which citizens clearly expressed their greatest concern was **employment**.

There is also increasing recognition that an effective economic development strategy for the 21st century is really an education strategy, and a sense that the best thing we can do to address social concerns (generational poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, etc.) is to not only be a caring community, but a prosperous one. We must offer people hope for a dependable job at good wages through **education**.

Consequently, the town meeting will focus on how we can continue this community transformation by focusing on employment and education within the context of **learning from the past, examining the present, and envisioning the future**.

Introduction

Why are we coming together? What will be discussed?

The “We the People” 2010 Town Meeting is our opportunity to help shape the future of **employment** and **education** in Owensboro-Daviess County. Hundreds of residents will come together at this unique town meeting to ensure that our community becomes an even greater place to call home.

This event is designed to challenge us to think differently about how we see our community’s economic and education systems. Together we will define the community we wish to become and prioritize strategies to accelerate improvement in these vital areas. We will conclude the day by identifying next steps and support from participants and community leaders. And just as important, we will consider our individual and collective roles in helping Owensboro-Daviess County achieve its highest potential.

Participants in the 2007 “We the People” Town Meeting identified the following unique economic assets and strengths:

- Greater diversity in employment opportunities
- OMHS/health care (cancer research, HealthPark)
- Agriculture (farming, bio-tech and bio-diesel)
- Mid-America AirPark development
- Central location to two-thirds of east coast
- Ohio River’s transportation, recreation and economic opportunities
- Strong education focus (four colleges, The Learning Community initiative)
- Cultural facilities (RiverPark Center, museums, festivals, etc.)
- Active and recognized Chamber of Commerce
- Transportation infrastructure is improving

What are the desired outcomes of the town meeting?

- Develop a shared vision for the future of Owensboro-Daviess County in the areas of employment and education.
- Identify priorities, strategies, and first steps that must be pursued to achieve the community’s vision.
- Generate commitments from leaders and citizens to take actions to achieve the vision.

How will your participation be used to make Owensboro-Daviess County a better place?

Public officials, candidates for office, policymakers and community leaders will be in attendance and will attest to the significance of this impressive community gathering. Many of us will be amazed by the civic energy and ideas that will come forth from this exercise. It will rekindle our belief in grass roots participatory democracy. And to ensure that we make progress on our top priorities, participants will identify next steps and form working groups for follow-up action.

A preliminary report containing the results of the day’s work will be distributed as we leave the town meeting and will be available on the event website as soon as possible:

www.wethepeopletownmeeting.org

“At my table were a minister, a single mother, an attorney, several retirees and a disabled person. What we had in common were the desire to participate in shaping Owensboro’s future... it was participatory democracy at its finest.”

Marjorie Flowers
2007 Town Meeting participant

ASSESSMENT OF OUR COMMUNITY

Conditions and Trends in Owensboro-Daviess County

Envy of many communities. Many people consider Owensboro-Daviess County to be one of Kentucky's most successful and progressive communities. Given our ambitious riverfront and downtown plan, four colleges, improving transportation connections, ventures into research, programs for entrepreneurs, plans for a new hospital and more, we are the envy of many cities and counties.

A great place to live. Owensboro-Daviess County is often referred to as an ideal place to raise a family. A few months ago, we were named one of the top 100 places to live in the U.S. and prior to that, Kentucky's top sports town by *Sports Illustrated*. Our hospital was named in the top five percent in the nation for quality. There is great pride in our symphony orchestra and performing arts center, three museums, popular festivals, award-winning schools, safe and attractive neighborhoods. We like that there is very little traffic congestion. We have great parks and an expanding network of paths for walking, jogging and biking.

Lingering tensions and cynicism. However, like any community, Owensboro-Daviess County is not without its challenges. Planned community projects are expensive, and many people are concerned about the debt burden incurred by the hospital, arts organizations, Owensboro Municipal Utilities and others. City-county urban-rural suspicions linger from a raucous 1990 campaign to merge local governments. A controversial insurance tax increase was used to finance public projects in the downtown master plan. Many have become cynical about how important decisions are made without meaningful public participation.

Shortcomings and struggles. Despite progress, the education level of our workforce is not impressive. We still have inadequate highway and air transportation connections. Daviess County ranks poorly in non-farm business formation. Sprawling suburban developments could soak up demand and make downtown projects more difficult. Our community lacks a sense of excitement often necessary to bring back or attract bright, educated young people.

Difficult challenges. Tragically, substance abuse destroys many families and drug offenders fill our jail. Until health care reform is implemented, many people will be unable to afford medical care and be forced into bankruptcy. We have too many families stuck in a recurring cycle of poverty, particularly those headed by single parents. Far too many of us smoke, eat carelessly and do not exercise. A large percentage of incoming students at Owensboro Community and Technical College are in need of remedial work. Industrial emissions affect air and water quality and contribute to public health problems. Some issues and trends seem beyond our capacity to address effectively.

Caring, responsive citizens. Yet we can point to successes and compassion: caring citizens who build Habitat homes, volunteer at soup kitchens, tutor, mentor, contribute to shelters and clinics, plant trees and pick up litter. Several charitable foundations have been established in recent years.

Owensboro-Daviess County is blessed with dedicated citizens who care about one another and care about their community. Our capacity to effectively address challenges and seize opportunities is only limited by our imagination and our ability to work together.

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Learning from the past



PAST

What has shaped our economy in the past?

Early Commerce

- Frontier river town, roots in trading, agriculture and distilling.
- By early 1900's, major wagon and buggy manufacturing center.
- Oil boom in late 1930's creates wealth, hampered by boom and bust cycles.

A GE Town

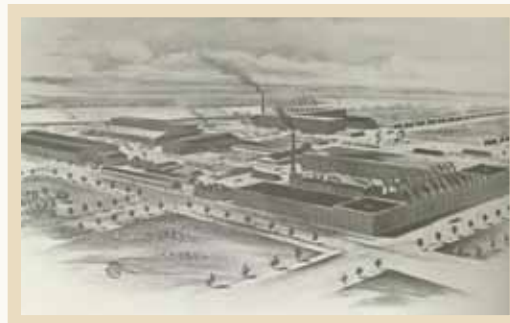
- General Electric buys Ken-Rad, local vacuum tube manufacturer in 1952.
- By the 1960's, more than 6,000 GE workers.
- GE phases out tube plant, adds small motors plant.

Low-Cost Energy

- Coal reserves and commercial rivers spur development of regional energy cooperatives and low-cost electricity – a key factor in attracting industry, including aluminum plants to Hancock County.

Corporate Anchor

- Texas Gas Transmission, once Kentucky's second largest company, keeps local headquarters, provides jobs, community support and employee leadership.



Owensboro Wagon Company



A shift lets out at General Electric

- No longer locally owned, Texas Gas employment has decreased through the years.

Diverse industrial base

- Through the years, O-DC attracts Pinkerton Tobacco (now Swedish Match), Ragu (now Unilever), Dart Polymers, Willamette (now Domtar) and others.
- MidAmerica AirPark attracts UniFirst, Toyotetsu, DANA (now Metalsa), Large Scale Biology (now Kentucky Bioprocessing), CRS Foods, U.S. Bank Home Mortgage expansion (planned) and others.
- Recruitment of a Scott Paper Company (1989) manufacturing facility (now Kimberly-Clark) lifts spirits in time of record unemployment.
- Energy firms still major employers: Texas Gas (now Boardwalk Pipelines), Southern Star Central Gas Pipeline, Atmos Energy, OMU, Kenergy, oil, coal and gas production and marketing firms.
- Local plants attract area workers while many local residents work in southern Indiana, surrounding counties.

Workplace ups and downs

- Plant closings through the years include: Green River Steel, Westinghouse, Whitehall Furniture, HON (furniture), GE tube plant and others.
- Other employers have up and down hiring cycles.

Local business leaders

- Other home grown companies – fewer but still important today include: MPD, Modern Welding, Wax Works, Miles Enterprises, Owensboro Grain, Kentucky Electronics (now Ken-Tron), Premium Allied Tool, Field Packing (now Specialty Foods Group), Titan Fabricators, Yager Materials, OMICO Plastics, developers, homebuilders and others.



National chains move in

- Big box department stores, chain restaurants and supermarkets provide many jobs, but local competitors (department stores, grocers, etc.) struggle.
- Shopping centers and malls replace downtown as the retail core.
- Changes in banking attract more institutions into this market.

Agriculture

- Advances in agriculture significantly increase crop yield.
- Tobacco buyout eliminates the middle man, growers sell directly to tobacco companies – squeezes out small tobacco farmers and tobacco warehouses.
- Advent of factory farms.

Transportation and infrastructure

- State completes parkways to Bowling Green and Henderson.
- Cary (downtown) and Natcher (Maceo) bridges built.
- City-owned water and electric company: Owensboro Municipal Utilities. (OMU provides a dividend to city government.)
- Owensboro Riverport develops, expands.

- Airport makes improvements; commercial flights in and out through the years (recently expanding).
- Flooding problems require extensive drainage work.

Health Care

- In 1995, City-County hospital and Our Lady of Mercy hospitals merge. Eight years later, public entity buys out Mercy, converts to a private nonprofit hospital, Owensboro Medical Health System.

Suburban commercial and residential growth

- Residential and commercial developments continue to expand the urban area, requiring additional public facilities and services.
- Towne Square Mall (1978) advances Owensboro as a regional retail hub.
- Suburban/rural sites chosen for Southern Star Central Gas Pipeline, Atmos Energy, OMU, Social Security Administration, U.S. Bank Home Mortgage, OMHS, and others.

Tourism

- 1976 construction of the Executive Inn Rivermont attracts tourists, conventions and top-name entertainment. After closed and vacant, city government acquires and razes the building (2009).
- Community celebrates bar-b-q heritage with annual festival (since 1979).
- In mid-1980's, community attracts the International Bluegrass Music Association headquarters, annual trade show, festival and award show – events later moved to Louisville, then Nashville.
- Construction of several new hotels.

Community Amenities

- City builds Owensboro Sportscenter (1949).
- Owensboro Oilers (New York Yankees minor league affiliate) leave town and Miller Field razed (1955).
- Park system includes softball, youth football, soccer, tennis, ice arena and more.
- Arts boosters establish Owensboro Symphony Orchestra; Theater Workshop; Owensboro Dance Theater; museums of fine art, science and history and bluegrass music; RiverPark Center; Western Kentucky Botanical Gardens and more.



South Frederica Street commercial strip

Governance

- City of Owensboro adopts city manager form of government.
- County government restructures, removes judicial role from county judge/executive.
- City and County establish metropolitan planning commission.
- Voters reject city-county merger proposal.



Longfellow Elementary School, razed in 2009 to make way for Owensboro High School expansion

LEARN

PAST

What has shaped education in the past?

Policies

- Officials establish a fixed city-county school district boundary (1950's).
- School boards approve racial integration in public schools (1960's).
- Revenue stream from local property taxes support quality facilities and programs.
- Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) adopted.
- No Child Left Behind, a federal initiative, replaces KERA.

Postsecondary Initiatives

- Higher education opportunities expand with four local colleges: Brescia College (now Brescia University), Kentucky Wesleyan College, Owensboro Community College (now Owensboro Community and Technical College) and Western Kentucky University – Owensboro. Daymar College (a private, for-profit college) also serves our community.
- Community colleges merge with state vocational schools.

Community Support

- Local campaign raises \$1,000,000 to attract Kentucky Wesleyan College to Owensboro (1950's).



Mount St. Joseph's Academy



South Frederica Street School



Kentucky Wesleyan College



- Daviess County Fiscal Court makes a \$6 million contribution toward land and a building for Western Kentucky University – Owensboro.
- Local students benefit from college scholarship funds (e.g., John B and Brownie Young Memorial Scholarship, KEES, Pell grants, others).
- Daviess County Public Library builds new, visible facility on Frederica Street.
- “The Learning Community” initiative promotes education and lifelong learning as a central community value (funding expired 2010).

Societal Trends

- An explosion of information is accessible worldwide through the Internet, personal computers, web sites, email, social networking, etc.
- Shift in population growth to the county school district requires construction of new schools.

Pre-K-12 Initiatives

- Daviess County Public School’s Graduation 2010 program (1997-98) incorporates research in learning and brain development.
- Owensboro Catholic Schools reorganize and consolidate several schools (1988, 2004).
- Daviess County Schools provide a laptop computer for every student (2005-2006).
- Owensboro Public School’s arts program wins national awards.
- Research points to the importance of quality early childhood education.
- Local Head Start and all-day kindergarten (1999-2000) expand.
- Owensboro High School adds a gymnasium and fine arts facilities (2010).



PRESENT

What is currently shaping our economy?

Impact of the Recession

- Since 2008, more than 1,700 jobs have been lost in the Owensboro metro area (Daviess, McLean and Hancock Counties) due to the global recession.
- Unemployment (9 percent Aug 2010) has intensified social concerns: homelessness, poverty, child support, substance abuse, etc.
- Low wages and part-time employment add to economic pressures in families, requiring multiple jobs or both spouses to work.

Tax resistance

- Some citizens say that if only governments lowered taxes, employers would be in the position to hire more workers and consumers would spend more.
- To others, the issue is not taxation in general, but efficiency in government, fairness in taxation, and leveraging public funds to stimulate private investments.

Encouraging news

- U.S. Bank Home Mortgage announces 500-job expansion.
- First Security Bank expanding downtown.



“Despite the challenges faced by Owensboro during the recession, our region has not been hit as hard as the nation over all. Regional unemployment remained below the national levels for all but one month of the recession and Owensboro was not impacted as severely as the nation with many of the housing problems and foreclosures.”

Nick Brake
Greater Owensboro Economic
Development Corporation

- In the past five years, Owensboro has retained 90-95 percent of its manufacturing jobs compared to the national retention rate of 80-85 percent.
- Workforce training and retraining programs are available.
- Many unemployed people are going back to school.
- Some technical/vocational occupations are in high demand.

Policies and programs

- Clustering economic development organizations at the Commerce Center.
- Greater Owensboro Economic Development Corporation adopts new strategic plan (see sidebar)
- EDC attracting entrepreneurs and high pay, high tech jobs.

- Community opens first business incubator-accelerator facility for entrepreneurs.



Health Care

- Constructing a new hospital to better serve and attract the region.
- OMHS supporting research in biotechnology/plant-based pharmaceuticals.
- OMHS and University of Louisville partnering in cancer research.
- Clinics and programs serving the poor and uninsured.

Transportation

- Construction concluding on four-lane highway connection to I-64.
- Riverport fostering river commerce.
- Airport expanding flights, exploring commercial-industrial possibilities.

Downtown/Urban Neighborhoods

- Implementing first phases of downtown master plan: convention center, hotel, riverfront park expansion, streets and plazas.
- Redevelopment programs improving urban neighborhoods.



Economic Development Corporation (EDC) Strategic Plan:

- Recruiting and retaining talent
- Supporting innovation and industry
- Creating a quality place to live and do business

Role and initiatives include:

- Targeting existing industry, companies poised for growth, and entrepreneurs
- Liaison with state economic development agencies
- Venture capital facilitation
- Start-up support through incubator facility
- Promotion of Owensboro as a college town
- ...and more

Suburban Development

- Growth creates jobs, increases tax base, but also requires expansion of roads, drainage, utilities, schools, parks, police and fire protection and more.

Community Amenities

- City opens Edge Ice Arena.
- Adkisson Greenbelt Park expands.
- Bicycle Owensboro initiative underway.
- Public art program launched.
- Effort to save and renovate Goldies Opryhouse.
- City considering maintaining the Sportscenter.
- Owensboro is the home of the Bisons semi-pro basketball team.
- Owensboro is the home of the Oilers college baseball summer team.
- Effort to shore up and potentially restructure arts organizations.

Environment

- Emissions levels are problematic; may limit future industry.
- Three coal-to-gas power plants proposed near Daviess County.
- Factory farms expanding in Daviess County.
- Concerns with industrial discharges into waterways.
- Concerns over health impact of air and water conditions, industry proposals.

Philosophical differences

When it comes to economic development, some say...	Others say...
...we need to aggressively recruit a major plant, like Toyota	...we need to track all economic development opportunities, but our prospects are better if our strategy focuses more on a diverse economy and many smaller employers
...people follow jobs; quality of life amenities are secondary	...many of the jobs of tomorrow allow people to choose where they want to live
...low costs, low taxes will attract business and people	...you can always find places with lower taxes and labor costs, few people want to live there
...our local taxes are high...	...when comparing the three major sources of revenue of the 14 largest cities in Kentucky, City of Owensboro taxes rank near the middle or low end
...we need to restrict corporations from moving jobs to other countries	...we can't have it both ways when we recruit manufacturing plants (such as Toyota) to our state and region
...to be competitive, we must be prepared to offer incentives to recruit, retain or expand business	...incentives put existing businesses that do not benefit from incentives at a competitive disadvantage
...we need more industrial park property	...we have more than 400 acres available; we need to put more resources into growing our own businesses

Examining the present



LEARN

PRESENT

What is currently shaping our educational systems?

Early Childhood Education

- A growing understanding of the importance of high quality early childhood education.
- An award-winning Head Start program serves 61.5 percent of eligible three to four year olds.



Local K-12 schools highly regarded, well-financed

- Local schools have been leaders in all-day kindergarten.
- Local schools have been recognized among the state's best.
- Local schools rank well on standardized tests, particularly when adjusted for poverty.
- School finances are healthy. Recently, neither the city nor county school board took advantage of the four percent property tax increase allowed by law.



West Louisville Elementary School

Postsecondary Education

- As state funds have decreased, officials have had to increase tuition, yet college enrollment has reached an all-time high in our community: more than 9,000 students.
- Campus improvements at local schools and colleges.



Owensboro Community and Technical College

- WKU-O in new facility, expands course and degree offerings.
- OCTC and WKU-O offer new unique associate and baccalaureate degree programs.
- Improved college credit transfer system among all institutions.
- Innovative alternative programs are offered: weekend college, distance learning, online courses, Discover College, remedial education, alternative schools, etc.
- Local colleges and RiverPark Center develop collaborative theater tech degree program.
- Internships, service learning and civic engagement programs.

Workforce training

- Increasing focus on workforce training – matching vocational training to opportunities in the job market.
- Programs through OCTC, GRADD, etc. OCTC established a satellite campus at Lewisport.

Challenges remain

- Seventeen Kentucky counties have a greater percentage

of their adult population with a baccalaureate degree than Daviess County. And Kentucky is ranked 48th in the nation in adults with a college degree.

- Daviess County is ten percentage points below the national average in educational attainment.
- One in five OHS freshmen will not finish high school in four years.

Philosophical differences

Some educators and parents say...	Others...
...too much emphasis is placed on standardized tests and some expectations (e.g., for special needs and disadvantaged students) are unrealistic;	...see testing as the best way to hold our system accountable.
...school choice should be allowed so that students can transfer from failing schools;	...see this as a step toward vouchers for private schools.
...teacher compensation should be based on the success of their students;	...think it's not fair to teachers of difficult or special needs students.
...charter schools with more local control are the answer;	...are concerned that funds will shift from public schools that are already underfunded.
...home schooling is their right;	...are concerned about their lack of accountability.
...the old way of educating our kids is still the best way;	... point to the need to teach students how to think, communicate and adapt to change since most of the jobs for the future have not yet been invented.



- A large percentage of student applicants at Owensboro Community and Technical College need remedial work to enroll in college classes.

Community Support

- Scholarship funds assist many students each year.
- Junior Achievement offers business education in schools.
- School nurses continue important services to schools.
- Community Dental Clinic is a new resource for schools and students.
- Programs are being developed to reduce childhood obesity.
- Residential facilities opened to support education/training for single parents.
- Goodfellows Club, Hager Fund, Rotary Club, Alma Randolph Foundation and other groups assist students in need with clothing, emergency assistance, dental care and more.

Policies

- Funding cuts affect nearly all aspects of education: instructional days, special needs, teacher and staff compensation, training, number of teacher aides, classroom size, alternative programs, funds for research, tuition increases, field trips, etc.
- Unfunded mandates add to school financial pressures.
- New requirement for dental screenings in schools was established beginning with the 2010-2011 school year.
- Advocates continue to push state legislature to raise the high school dropout age to 18.

Societal Trends

- Greater understanding of the correlation between educational attainment and economic development.
- Growth of home schooling.
- Generational poverty and its effect on student performance and the education experience.
- Lack of a deep-seated cultural value of education and the need to continue education beyond high school.
- Increase in the immigrant/refugee population resulting in language, cultural and logistical challenges.
- An increase in occupations that require associate degrees and alternative certification tests for technical-vocational skills, work sample programs, apprenticeships, etc.

To reach the national average in terms of baccalaureate degree attainment by 2020, Kentucky needs to double its number of college graduates.

College degrees are simply not necessary for many jobs. Of the 30 jobs projected to grow at the fastest rate over the next decade in the United States, only seven typically require a bachelor's degree, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Steinberg, Jacques

"Plan B: Skip College," New York Times



FUTURE

**What forces, what initiatives will shape our economic future?
How will we (and how will our children) work in 2020?
What is our vision for a thriving Owensboro-Daviess County?**

What is driving economic change?

Our economy is changing. With the instant availability of information, there is more of a level playing field worldwide and more international competition. Many U.S. companies have moved manufacturing facilities to other nations where the cost of doing business is much less. U.S. manufacturing is still important and business recruiting efforts will continue, but most analysts agree that there will be fewer opportunities for communities like Owensboro-Daviess County to attract traditional manufacturing facilities.

New approaches to economic development

Given these circumstances, economic development specialists are embracing new ways to expand employment opportunities for the future:

- 1. Grow from within.** Focus on assisting local employers, particularly small businesses, in their expansion. Help them find new markets; follow trends; support training and re-training programs; foster innovation by networking with trade associations, think tanks and universities; assist in securing support for retooling equipment and more.
- 2. Encourage, support entrepreneurs.** Help with business plans. Match people with ideas with venture capital. Provide start-up space to reduce overhead and clerical needs.



3. **Attract talent.** A growing pool of bright, talented residents leads to good things: ideas, enterprises, collaboration and partnerships. Nothing is more important to local employers as the quality of the workforce, and that hinges on talent.
4. **Seize opportunities.** Our community needs to seize any special opportunities. Have we capitalized on our central location? River commerce? Our expanded airport? Can we attract more retirees? After a new convention center is built, there will still be 10-15 acres to redevelop in our downtown. A new regional hospital, biotechnology, cancer research, plant-based pharmaceuticals, new and cleaner forms of energy production may offer unique and significant economic potential.
5. **Enhance livability.** To attract and hold on to talented people, Owensboro-Daviess County must be a place that draws people because of the lifestyle and amenities it offers. An attractive, alive downtown and urban neighborhoods. A vibrant music and cultural scene. Great sports options. Trails and paths. Attractive architecture and great restaurants and neat places to hang out.

Investing in our community's future

Investments in our community will generate jobs and spending during and after construction:

- A new convention center and downtown hotel will enable us to once again attract trade shows and conventions.
- Investments in health care will position our community to meet the needs of aging baby boomers and as a center of care for the region.
- Improvements to the riverfront and downtown are expected to attract private investments: hotels, residences, office buildings, restaurants, retail stores.
- A farmer's market pavilion will attract and support local growers.



- Public facilities (e.g., streets, sewers, drainage, parks, etc.) and services (e.g., police, fire, sanitation) that are in good repair and convenient (e.g., curbside recycling).

Arts as economic development

The arts can be an economic engine that attracts audiences, tourists and school groups from the region, creates local jobs and improves the quality of life. Our special alliance to bluegrass music connects Owensboro with a global following of that musical genre. An amphitheater or multi-purpose stadium could host concerts, sports, festivals and more and complement the venues we have in RiverPark Center, Theater Workshop's Trinity Center and Goldie's Opryhouse.

Promoting our community

Some believe that Owensboro-Daviess County is already a best kept secret and that we just need to market our community more effectively and creatively to attract businesses, tourists, young people and retirees who may want a riverfront condo or appreciate the arts.

Aesthetic appeal could give us an edge

To some, projects to enhance the appearance of Owensboro-Daviess County are cosmetic. Others think that tree-lined boulevards, landscaping, subdued signs, attractive architecture and more make an important statement about community pride and leave an impression with tourists and people who may consider living or doing business here.

Low-cost electricity may be threatened

Many major industries in our area rely on low-cost power generated by coal-fired power plants. This incentive involves health and environmental tradeoffs since our area has the highest concentration of coal-fired power plants in the nation.

Business groups are concerned that environmental regulations, such as the “cap and trade” proposal, will be devastating to some industries, particularly the aluminum industry that is one of our area’s largest employers. Others say that “cap and trade” will benefit coal and industries it serves by providing incentives to use clean coal and underground carbon capture technologies.

Environmental conditions may limit industry options

In the near future, the Owensboro area is expected to be designated a “non-attainment” zone by the Environmental Protection Agency. This will significantly limit the kinds of industry that can locate in our region.

Industry spokespersons point to the cost of environmental conformance, while environmental groups stress the impact of toxic emissions and industrial discharges on air and water

quality, food safety, fish and aquatic life, climate change and more.

How we balance these interests will be a key factor in the development and appeal of our community and region.



An open process will foster accountability

The task of economic development is typically assigned to professionals, consultants and government officials. Taxpayers absorb the cost of incentives and infrastructure to accommodate certain projects, but they are seldom engaged in a meaningful way in policies or important decisions. In a thriving community of the future, will important decisions be made openly or behind closed doors?

A thriving Owensboro-Daviess County – now and in 2020

Thriving communities of the future will be well-positioned for an economy and job market of tomorrow. They will learn from their past, examine their present conditions and prospects, and envision a future that builds upon assets and embraces change. They will be challenged to innovate, to attract and hold on to talent, and to create a uniquely livable place. They will imagine possibilities, and work together to make them happen.





FUTURE

What forces, what initiatives will shape the future of learning in our community?

What do we want education to look like in 2020?

Where do we go from here?

Recognizing that our goals in economic development can only be achieved through advances in education, what is our community to do? What can our educators and policy makers do differently or more aggressively? And what can the rest of us do to improve the learning base for our future? What are leaders and citizens in other communities doing? What can we learn from other communities?

As a public institution, education may be unmatched in the number of people involved in trying to make it better: educators, school boards, school councils, community leaders, associations, think tanks, researchers, advocates, legislators, booster groups, PTO's, parent volunteers and more. Theories and strategies shift with the release of new studies or reports on programs and policies. Among the steps that communities and citizens can take:

- 1. Elevate the value of learning.** Instill a greater appreciation of education and lifelong learning into the culture of our community. If education is valued, students are more likely to succeed and continue in school.
- 2. Raise expectations.** We need to raise expectations and excite students about their possibilities. Dropping out of school at age 16 is unacceptable. Schools need alternative programs to ensure that these students stay engaged.



- 3. Recruit the best classroom teachers.** Attract the most talented and dedicated people into teaching. Raise the stature of teaching as a profession.

Compensation alone is not the answer. Great teachers are drawn to schools where there is a strong sense of mission and enthusiasm. And even the best teachers need smaller classes, teacher aides and other support.

- 4. Invest in early childhood education.** Research supports that high quality early childhood programs are cost-effective and one of the best ways to improve chances for student success in later years.
- 5. Connect students with role models.** Establish and sustain community involvement and mentoring programs. Programs such as these help many students set goals, find support and encouragement.
- 6. Support anti-poverty programs.** Research continues to affirm the correlation between poverty and academic performance. Students from low-income families must overcome many barriers to achieve educational success.



Other ideas

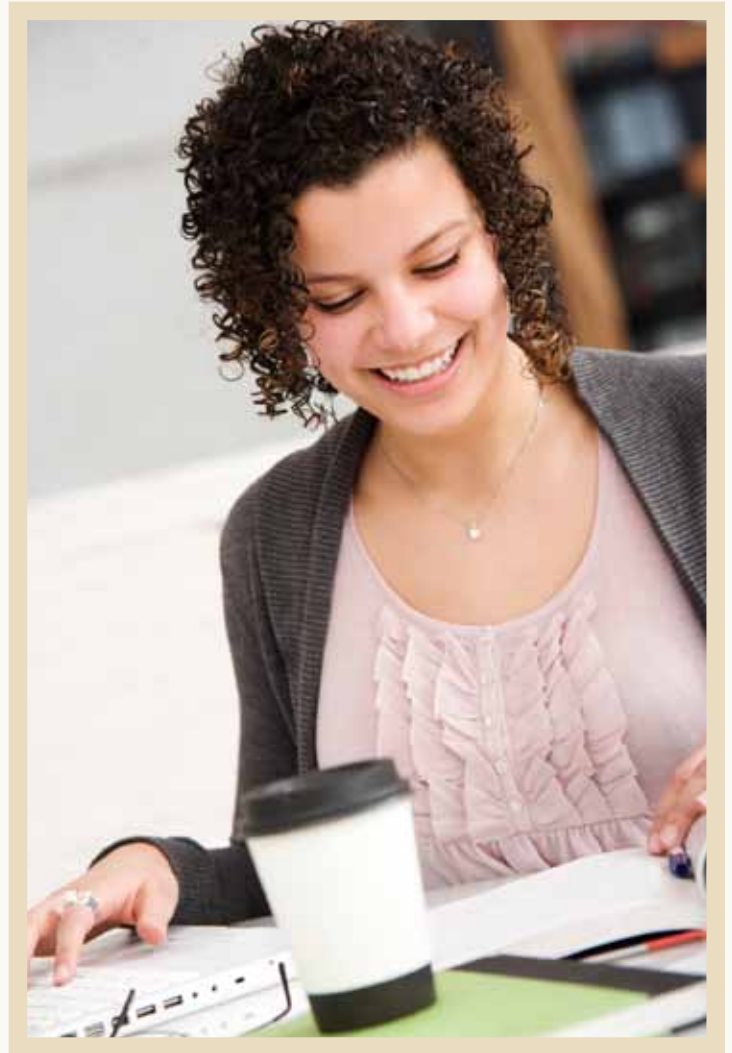
Education advocates place priorities in other areas as well. They may, for example, propose that we:

- expand the number of instructional days.
- set a higher community standard so that every local high school graduate is guaranteed tuition toward an associate degree.
- experiment with charter schools and magnet schools.
- aim higher - compare our schools with national and international benchmarks.
- establish a prestigious arts academy that will attract students from throughout the state and region.
- raise the minimum dropout age to 18.
- offer more high school students college and vocational preparation courses so they can gain confidence in their capacity to succeed.
- expose students to master teachers through distance learning and expanded online courses.
- ensure accountability in home schooling.
- discourage students from working so many hours that it interferes with their studies.

- eliminate testing of students to evaluate teachers. Let teachers evaluate teachers.
- build a new downtown school as a component of urban neighborhood revitalization efforts.
- establish a higher education learning center that brings all local institutions together.

A thriving educational system for our community – now and in 2020

For Owensboro-Daviess County to have a thriving educational system in 2020, we will be challenged to educate and train residents for new occupations and new opportunities in a new economy. We will need to think boldly, envision possibilities, and work together...to make exciting things happen.





NEXT STEPS

The town meeting takes an enormous amount of work by many volunteers. We hope that it has been a valuable learning experience for you and that you have been invigorated by this exercise in civic engagement and participatory democracy. However, the town meeting is just the beginning of realizing our community vision.

Implementation efforts are more likely to succeed if there is a shared public voice supportive of change. These are steps you can take to help ensure that your priorities are heard by leaders:

- Join a working group to support the implementation of the town meeting priorities.
- Write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper.
- Contact your elected representatives.
- Educate your friends and family about what we talked about today.
- Join a community group that supports the views you have.
- Stay informed about what is happening.



**STAY
INFORMED**

To stay informed about the latest news on the priorities of the town meeting, visit our website:
www.wethepeopletownmeeting.org



WWW.WETHEPEOPLETOWNMEETING.ORG