

Owen County Economic Comprehensive Plan

Steering Committee Meeting 3 • Feb. 9, 2022 • Owen County Family YMCA

Note

Full details of this meeting – including the PowerPoint presentation - and other components of this planning process can be found at <https://owencountycompplan.com/>. The site is regularly updated.

Attendees

Lisa Abbott, Grant Beaman, Chris Bault, Linda Bertrum, George Brinson, Matt Cazzell, Aaron LaGrange, Debbie Holcomb, Marce King, Kristen Portteus, Kurt Rosenberger, Larken Seymour, Sonya Seymour, Matt Sword, Norm Warner.

The meeting was facilitated by Scott Burgins, of SB Planning & Research and Rachel Christenson, of HWC Engineering. HWC's Craig Luedeman also attended.

Warm-Up Question

The committee started by answering these questions:

- What's the biggest question you have about the comp plan so far?
- What's the biggest question you anticipate from fellow residents?

They answered:

- How is this going to restrict my rights?
- How does it affect property tax and value?
- What does this mean to me in terms of cost?
- What should we focus on?
- What does this do *for me* or *to me*?
- Why?
- Are we really going to be able to accomplish this?
- What are the positives and negatives that has come from previous plans?
- What do we experience in Bloomington that we do not want to experience here?

Review of Planning Process

The committee reviewed the basics of the comprehensive plan, its schedule and their role in the planning process. Details can be found in the PowerPoint presentation "Owen County SC 3 2-9-22" on the project website.

Review of Challenges Facing the Comp Plan

Last meeting, the committee discussed what obstacles the comp plan process would have to overcome to be effective. The topics getting the most votes were divided into three groups:

Civic Engagement	Code & Regulation	Other
Unplanned growth	Enforcement of policy and ordinances through	Taking local businesses for granted (Boston Scientific, etc.)
Fear of growth	Property improvement/ clean-up	Entry-level housing and rentals
Lack of understanding		Age of community (we must increase tax base)
Disagreeable people, no two-way communication		

Exercise: Addressing Challenges to the Comp Plan

The committee then broke into three groups to tackle this problem: “There is both a fear of growth and a lack of understanding about community development issues among some residents. These problems, combined with the fact that there’s not enough two-way communication on this issue, could lead to unplanned growth that harms our community.”

They groups discussed:

- The root of the problem.
- What other information is needed (stats, etc.) to either to address the root or create a solution.
- Who are the targets of change?
- Who are the agents of change (partners)?
- What are reasonable first few steps?

Their answers for each component:

Root of the Problem

- Owen County residents don’t want to “be like Bloomington” -> because they fear too many rules on how to use their property -> because they don’t want to be told what to do -> because it could cost them money and cut into their independence.
- People want to live in a small community and don’t want to grow because they already have their property and everything they think they need and don’t want to pay for anything else.
- People’s tax rates have gone up because of the county’s fiscal problems and people are worried they will go up more.

What Additional Data do we Need?

- How high are our tax rates in comparison to similar communities?
- Proof that population growth can actually *lower* taxes for everyone (because of property tax caps). This must be in a *very* easy to read format.
- Proof that the comp plan will not eat up prime farmland. Is Owen County primarily agricultural?

- We may have to admit that the comp plan, in and of itself, does not have many teeth because it is an advisory document, not a regulatory one.

Targets of Change (people we need to convince)

- Retirees.
- A very active social media presence on Facebook, particularly “Owen County Chatter” with 10,600 members, run by Crystal Lanham, and “Owen County Budget, Roads and Government” with 487 members, run by Victor Vaillette.
- People who need to be able to access good rental units or other affordable housing, which they can’t get now.
- We need to reach the “middle of the road people,” those who aren’t on either end of the screaming spectrum. They constitute a majority.

Agents of Change (possible partners)

- Directors of the two popular Facebook sites.
- Young people, sons and daughters of residents who might want to stay here or come back one day.
- Business owners who want more residents and visitors.
- “Grumpy old men” who are deeply influential in various sectors of the community.
- Trusted individuals with personal relationships (example: Ryan White) and home-grown celebrities. We must go to them.

First Steps

- Meet with directors of the two popular Facebook sites to make our case.
- Hear from businesses outside Owen County who would like to come to our community, but first need infrastructure, regulatory guidelines, etc. Maybe survey them?
- Local, well-respected **non-political** people willing to say, “Let’s keep an open mind and see if a new comp plan can help us get the community we all want.”
- Introduce the public to benefits/freedoms/opportunities that good planning can bring.
- Find the proverbially “5 grumpy old men” who are deeply influential and make our case to them – show increase in property values, separate myths and fears from facts. Create a running FAQ sheet.
- Have one-on-one meetings with formal and informal ‘influencers’ to strategize on how best to work with groups (approachable, natural conversations). The goal is **listening** and understanding.

Exercise: Elevator Pitch

The groups then studied the elements of an effective elevator pitch – which is a 30-second or so speech they can deliver to other residents.

Committee Member Why a Comp Plan is Needed

- Local leaders, such as the plan commission, have no guidelines on how to make good decisions about growth. As a result, too many projects end up in the hands of lawyers.

- Growth is passing up by, but problems are not.
- Plans for a trash transfer station showed us how little control we actually have over what happens in our county.
- This is the roadmap to our future.

Committee Member State Solutions

- The land along SR 43 is a great place to plan for the type of growth we want.
- We can use zoning and regulations to preserve our own identity, one that is different from Bloomington.
- Planning gives us a say in our future.
- Frame the conversation in a way that emphasizes how we can grow **and yet** still protect what is most important to us.
- How do we know what to do without some sort of agreement or guidelines. What happens if we **don't** have a plan?
- Give examples from other communities like ours that show the consequences of haphazard development.
- Give examples of rules and regulations from other communities like ours that will be beneficial to residents. Show how it can protect investments.
- Create a benchmark study to show the effects that regulations will have over time.
- People must be told how important it is to participate: "If you don't have a seat at the table, you're probably on the menu."

Example Elevator Pitch from Consultants

Owen County is facing some exciting projects, but also some scary challenges.

Much-needed new housing and other economic projects are coming, but we don't have everything we need in place yet. This includes water and sewer lines as well as guidelines for directing growth.

We must work with developers now to create the future we all want, and we do that with land use planning and zoning regulations.

We need your opinion about our land use plan. Please take a look at owencountycompplan.com.

Homework: Make the Elevator Pitch

Committee members were assigned the following homework:

- When someone asks, "What's new?," present your elevator speech at least twice (at work, church, a neighbors, etc.).
- Secure at least 3 people to complete the on-line survey.

Public Engagement

The online public survey is up and running at [Owen County Comprehensive Plan - Public Input Survey \(surveymonkey.com\)](#).

Stakeholder meetings are being scheduled for March and the community open house (online and in-person) will be in April.

Next Steps

- County planning officials will have their own workshop with K.K. on Feb. 15.
- Consultants work on public input and the existing conditions section of the report.
- Steering Committee complete their elevator pitch homework.
- Steering Committee Meeting #4 on **April 13** @ 6 p.m. at the Family YMCA in Spencer.

For more information or if you have questions, contact Scott Burgins at scott@sbresearchandplanning.com.