

## RoundAbout August 2007

[http://www.roundaboutmadison.com/Inside%20Pages/Archived%20Articles/2007/08\\_07OCVision.htm](http://www.roundaboutmadison.com/Inside%20Pages/Archived%20Articles/2007/08_07OCVision.htm)

### A Vision for Oldham County

## Report urges cooperation to tackle growth challenges

### Murner guides community-wide study with open mind

**By Helen E. McKinney**  
Contributing Writer

LA GRANGE, Ky. (August 2007) – After six months of examining critical issues facing Oldham Countians and then meeting seven times to debate them, the Oldham County Vision Council has formed a collective view of where the county should be in the next four years.

County Judge-Executive Duane Murner appointed 20 Oldham County citizens to the council in January 2007. He created the council for the purpose of focusing on the major issues facing the county. He said he was curious to know “what Oldham County would look like in four years and how to pay for it.” The council stemmed from Murner’s election campaign promise made while running for office. His slogan, “Together We Can Do Better,” expressed his intent to discover the future path of the county.

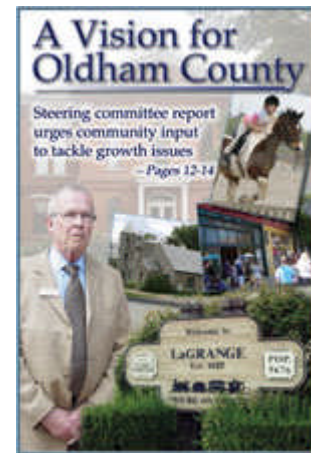
The idea was born from his experience as a magistrate and the variety of opinions he encountered from local citizens. Murner chose 20 members of the community to represent each area of the county. Some are retired, some own and operate their own businesses, and others are employed by small or major corporations.

The council was charged with addressing seven key questions related to achieving a vision for the future. Each member sought input from at least 10 to 20 citizens. They then wrote their own vision before coming together to debate them and reach a final verdict on all seven questions.

In an effort to reach more citizens, a website was established to offer residents a chance to share ideas and voice their opinions about the debated issues until June 15. The website contained additional information about the county’s economy, demographics, an agricultural profile and many more statistics. It also reports findings on the county’s current status.

The results were presented July 17 to Fiscal Court. Murner only attended the kickoff session, letting the council members come to their own conclusions.

Vision Chairman Kevin Eldridge said the process had a “funneling effect.” Eldridge had just put in his resignation as chairman of the Planning and Zoning Commission when Murner asked him to chair the Vision Council.



**August 2007 Kentucky Edition Cover**

His initial thought was, “This is a council that will work together for Oldham County.” Eldridge said he thought the council was a diverse group of people, even though coming to a consensus was easy, he said.

The seven questions asked concerned the issues of residential-commercial split in development, destination tourism, public ownership of land, budget reserves, bonding capacity, utilities, parks and how to pay for the vision.

Eldridge said the questions were intertwined, once you got into them. “People want to maintain and keep what we’ve got,” he said.

Planning was a common thread that linked the questions and suggestions. The council decided that the Oldham County Comprehensive Plan includes most of the necessary steps needed to proceed with the vision.

On the issue of residential-commercial development, the council decided the Planning and Zoning Department should be re-organized to better accomplish their goals. Current regulations should be used to carefully monitor all development.

It was decided that the tourism commission must be re-organized to institute a county-wide logo and should produce a web-based and paper-based brochure that can be mailed and accessed through the tourism website and distributed to hotels and rest areas. The council also suggested expanding Westport Park and the Ohio River front, and exploring the viability of installing a private-public marina area.

On the question of the parks system, the report recommended that the county establish a goal of acquiring an additional 1,000 acres of park land by 2030.

The county’s utility systems are experiencing growing pains as the county expands a rural water system when an urban one with multiple loops for continued expansion is required. The council suggested contracting with Metropolitan Sewer District (or private operating firms) or the Louisville Water Co. It was determined that the county’s bonding capacity be used only for longer-term capital improvements and/or acquisitions that are in keeping with the county’s vision, such as infrastructure, facilities and public lands.

Bonding can create a larger overhead in the future, resulting in a larger budget. Bonding was suggested as an option for implementing the parks and open space programs.

The report also revealed the suggestion to only dip into budget reserves as an exception, rather than the rule. “Fiscal Court should not rely on the availability of a reserve to balance annual budgets,” the report read.

The final report stated the council’s conclusion that “we must become and strive to remain the best rural-suburban county in Kentucky.” It went on to say that residents want



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– Oldham County Judge-Executive Duane Murner**

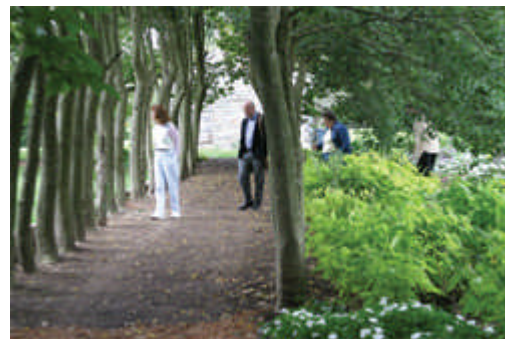


Photo by Don Ward

**Visitors stroll through the treelined path at Yew Dell Gardens in Crestwood, Ky.**

“to preserve the delicate balance between future growth and the preservation of the county’s rural attributes.”

Frankie Culbertson, who works for Metts Co. Realtors, served on the council. “Our county is already a great place to live. We just want to maintain that,” he said.

Culbertson, like other council members, said he was honored that Murner would want his input and ideas for the community vision plan. Murner was not worried about the outcome of the council. He said that a county leader was not the only person who gets to decide the future (or vision) of a county. This should be the responsibility of the citizens as well, and to debate these issues among themselves, he said.

Oldham County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Deana Epperly Karem also served on the council. “It’s important to preserve the qualities that make Oldham County special while at the same time preparing it for the future,” she said.

She agreed with Eldridge, who said that there is no question there will be growth within the county’s future. “It must be addressed in a manageable way,” he said.

“These recommendations have been thoroughly discussed with lots of viewpoints under consideration,” said Karem. She believes they can be used by Fiscal Court as a “starting ground for change. These suggestions set the tone for Fiscal Court’s decisions.”

Fiscal Court has the option to do something about the vision council’s recommendations, do nothing or do something in between. “It will not be put on a shelf,” said Murner.

The report concluded that better planning, coordination, and communication are needed to effectively address future growth challenges. Lack of communication emerged as prevalent issue during the six months the council was at work. Members decided the county needed to fill a liaison/public relations position to better inform citizens about current issues and coordinate organizations and government projects.

The council recommended Deputy County Judge-Executive Paula Gish to fill this position, seeing her as a natural choice since “it should be fulfilled by someone vested at a senior level of county government and would not require hiring additional staff,” the report stated.

Culbertson said: “We as a county like to know what’s happening around our towns. We want to be able to have one person or one department to call if information is needed.” Lack of communication is always a challenge when dealing with large organizations and community issues, said Karem. She suggests first establishing an atmosphere of collaborating and partnerships, followed by finding ways to work together.

The council suggested that separate groups working on projects, such as a Greenways Master Plan, a Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and a fair-convention-exposition center should communicate better and attempt to work together to enhance the county’s existing



Photo by Don Ward

**A woman takes aim during an open house at OpenRange Sports Inc. in Crestwood as owner Barry Laws looks on. The indoor rifle shooting and paintball/reball facility has become a popular attraction in Oldham County.**

assets. By bringing these groups together and increasing public communication, the county's comprehensive plan can become a reality.

The council deemed the county's financial situation serious. To maintain the existing budget, it recommends raising revenues or continuing to cut expenses. Other alternatives will be considered first, the report said.

The vision calls for better constituent services and preservation of Oldham County assets, said Karem. "If Fiscal Court will work together to find ways to increase our tax base and provide quality services, then I think the future of business and economic growth is positive." Culbertson believes the vision set forth is attainable. "We have terrific leaders in our county government who will do everything in their power to make this an even better county than it is now."

A committee has been formed to review the vision report and recommend any necessary action. Members include Gish and magistrates Steve Church, Steve Greenwell and Iva Davis.

- For more information on the Vision Council report, visit: [www.oldhamcounty2020.com](http://www.oldhamcounty2020.com).



Photo by Don Ward

**Horses and horse riding schools for all ages are a popular activity in Oldham County. Tourism officials are seeking ways to capitalize on the horse industry.**