

Vision Council presents goals

By Andrea Uhde

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Strengthen the Oldham County tourism commission. Strive for 1,000 more acres of park land by 2030. Avoid draining the county's reserve fund.

These are some of the goals a council of 20 residents presented to Fiscal Court members last week.

The Vision Council was created in January to consider several facets of the county, including the budget, tourism, parks, utility ownership and the approach to residential and commercial development. It also was asked to offer an idea of how to pay for this vision.

The council's members "come from all walks of life in Oldham County," said Judge-Executive Duane Murner, who formed the council. "They were all free to speak their own minds."

A committee of three magistrates will consider the council report and possibly form other committees to look at specific areas, Murner said.

Each Vision Council member considered census data, planning documents and other information during the six-month study. They met eight times and spoke with at least 10 residents on their visions for the county in the next five years. The members then each wrote a paper presenting their vision, and these were pared down to a six-page presentation for Fiscal Court.

Kevin Eldridge, a former planning and zoning commission chairman who led the Vision Council, said people offered a mix of ideas for Oldham's future, but they all shared some core values.

"It was really amazing how everybody really came to a consensus," he said.

Patricia Osborne, a council member who lives on a 200-acre farm in Ballardsville, said getting "clean commercial businesses" such as insurance offices and keeping the parks safe are among her biggest goals.

"It's grown so much in the 45 years we've been in this community," she said. "It's not what it was, so we have to try to retain our rural atmosphere out here but adapt to being suburbia."

The council's report lists a number of goals, including making the county financially sound, having a "managed growth" philosophy, and having a spirit of cooperation and communication among government, private and nonprofit organizations.

"We feel Oldham County can no longer afford the word 'I,' " Eldridge said during his presentation.

"We must become a county unified in its government, unified in its citizenry and perhaps most importantly, unified in its vision."

The report says the county should explore a contract with Louisville's Metropolitan Sewer District and the Louisville Water Co. for possible operation and maintenance of facilities.

This could help avoid building facilities and hiring staff.

Also, the tourism commission should expand its impact on the county by creating a logo and a brochure.

The council could work with others to develop a fair or convention center, and the county should encourage the expansion of Westport Park and the riverfront and look at having a private/public marina area, the report said.

The county should continue to work on its bike and pedestrian trails and also get more land along the Ohio River to "enhance the public's access to one of its key assets," the report said.

"We feel strongly that the river is an underutilized resource," Eldridge told Fiscal Court members.

He said the county also needs to continue to focus on cutting costs and waste.

He said there should be a study of the income stream and what's necessary to produce the amount needed for expenses without having to dip into the reserves.

The report outlined several more initiatives, but was careful to state: "We are loath to even suggest an increase in the amount of money that our citizens must pay."

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