

Oklahoma County, Oklahoma 2020 Master Plan Public Participation Element



September 2005

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report details the process and findings of the public participation element of Oklahoma County, Oklahoma's Master Planning effort. The report provides an overview of three public meetings held pursuant to the project with an emphasis on providing Oklahoma County with an understanding of citizen sponsored priorities for the *Oklahoma County 2020 Master Plan*. Primary concerns about growth and development in Oklahoma County shared by county residents at all the public meetings include: Concerns for loss of open space and farmland, road conditions and traffic congestion, the provision of adequate stormwater controls and the general process of growth management: public notification of development, maintaining a balance between permitting and service provision and expansion, as well as school capacity concerns.

Oklahoma County residents also indicate support for the following land development techniques:

- Supporting development in an environmentally sensitive fashion (Develop away from floodplains, protect farmland, open space and prime soils)
- Adopting regulations for 1-acre lots or larger (often 2.5 acre and larger)
- Adopting Adequate Public Facility (APF) programs/ordinances
- Adopting more stringent signage, fencing and design requirements
- Encouraging a break in development patterns from existing cities

The report summarizes the findings from the public meetings and provides a preliminary list of land planning strategies in support of citizen sponsored desires. Working to identify county policy and ordinances that reflects the concerns in this document will allow for the creation of a Master Plan that addresses the primary concerns of Oklahoma County residents.

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Cover Photographs taken by the author and represent pictures from both the Oklahoma County Commission District One and Three public meetings

INTRODUCTION

This report provides the findings from three public meetings held by Oklahoma County in preparation for their Oklahoma County 2020 Master Plan. This is the first Master Plan amendment performed by the County since 1947 when original enabling legislation was passed by the state of Oklahoma. Given rapid population growth and land development in the unincorporated portion of the county over the last few years, updating the Master Plan and going through a formal review of various county ordinances that govern the land development process is warranted.

Essential to any master planning project is creating a formal process for citizen participation throughout the general phases of plan making: data acquisition and analysis, the consideration of different development alternatives, drafting goals/objectives statements and getting feedback from citizens so as to have their primary concerns and desires addressed in the formal document. Oklahoma County's public survey efforts (distributed April 2005 to 500 randomly selected Oklahoma County households) is a complement to the three public meetings detailed in this report and together can be used to focus the efforts of county planning staff and consultants engaged in drafting the master plan.

Public Meetings and Process Overview

Three public meetings were held in the three separate commissioner districts across Oklahoma County. Notification of the meetings was done through local newspapers and the County's website. Commission districts, meeting locations and meeting dates included:

- District One, Luther Community Center, Tuesday, July 12
- District Two, Del City-City Hall, Tuesday, July 19
- District Three, Deer Creek Middle School, Tuesday, August 12

The two hour meetings included approximately 25-30 minutes of information presented about Oklahoma County's master planning effort (timing, process), information about some key issues facing Oklahoma County and some general demographic, housing, income and land development trends occurring in the county. The remaining portion of the meetings involved hearing from citizens about their concerns regarding growth and development in the county. Handouts of all information presented (MS PowerPoint slides, maps, etc.) were available for meeting attendees.

Central to the meeting was leading attendees through a *nominal group technique* process designed to identify citizen priorities and concerns that are to be addressed in Oklahoma County's new Master Plan. The nominal group technique is a well-known and relatively simple way to lead citizens through a process of collaborative decision-making. Briefly, it entails having individuals voice their concerns in a structured format, then having individuals meet in small groups and finally a large group to collectively identify and rank the concerns they have about land development trends in the county.

The true importance of this process is two-fold. First, citizens have a chance to speak freely about their concerns with their neighbors and second, citizens get a chance to hear from county officials about some

of the state laws, fiscal limitations and jurisdictional issues that complicate true comprehensive planning in Oklahoma. Having a common understanding about some of the challenges and opportunities facing Oklahoma County is first essential to having a productive meeting where constructive and feasible citizen sponsored visions for the future are forged.

At each meeting, citizens were first asked to complete a worksheet (Appendix A), with which meeting attendees could provide a score for how they feel about a number of land development issues. This was meant to identify a ranked, priority list that Oklahoma County and its consultants can focus on when drafting the new Master Plan and subsequent ordinances and other development codes (e.g. builder's guidelines) meant to implement the Master Plan. After completion, individuals were asked to identify their three top concerns. Table 1 below provides a summary of individual response to the worksheet.

Table 1. Mean Scores on Planning Issues by Political District

Issue	District One	District Two	District Three	Notes
Visual character of development	3.00	3.42	3.29	
Neighborhood/Area attractiveness	3.13	3.50	3.60	
Public safety	3.60	3.58	3.24	
Quality of new housing developments	2.73	2.75	3.14	
Quality of existing housing	2.38	2.33	3.45	
Location of new housing	2.73	2.50	2.81	
Traffic congestion	3.13	2.73	2.53	
Road conditions	2.23	2.67	1.75	**
Ped/Bike access within a subdivision (if applicable)	2.83	2.90	2.67	
Street signage (appearance)	3.50	3.18	3.02	
Water quality	4.07	3.58	3.50	
Septic/waste system problems	3.57	3.58	3.52	
Loss of open space and farmland	1.87	2.25	2.09	**
Drainage and stormwater systems	3.07	2.50	2.74	
Local government responsiveness	3.67	2.75	3.03	
Sheriff and Fire protection	4.53	3.08	3.41	
Building code inspection (code enforcement)	3.07	2.91	2.88	
Management of growth (residential and commercial services)	2.60	2.50	2.28	**
Number of issues scoring below three (3.0)	7	11	8	
Number of respondents (n)	14	13	71	Total=98

Notes. 1) The following scale was used to determine citizen concerns with the assigned planning issue: 1=Dissatisfied, 2=Somewhat Dissatisfied, 3=Neutral opinion, 4=Somewhat Satisfied, 5= Very Satisfied. Scores below three (3.0) indicate a degree of dissatisfaction with the manner in which Oklahoma County is managing the growth and development process.

2) **Bolds** indicate the five highest concerns citizens in each district have about growth and development. Scores below three (3.0) indicate a degree of dissatisfaction with current development trends.

3) ** indicate the issue was ranked among the top five concerns at each meeting

The information in Table 1 suggests that across commission districts *road conditions, the loss of open space and farmland and general growth management are the top three concerns among Oklahoma County residents.* These aspects of urbanization should come as no surprise as these are the typical and most notable impacts associated with land development. Management of growth in this instance refers to public notification requirements about growth, development review for large and small subdivisions and striking a balance between permitting and service provision in the county, i.e. thinking about road and school capacity, stormwater improvements and other services (police, fire) when reviewing requests for development permits.

In general, county residents in all districts are satisfied with police and fire protection, water quality and report limited environmental problems associated with septic and well systems. Residents also feel positive about public safety in their area and are generally satisfied with the visual character of existing development.

County residents can be said to be less satisfied with the location and quality of new housing (notably in the eastern portion of the county), building inspection and code enforcement services and somewhat surprisingly, bike and pedestrian access within subdivisions. The top three concerns previously mentioned (road conditions, loss of farmland/open space and general growth management) score the lowest on the satisfaction scale among respondents.

While there is general agreement across commission districts on key issues, some important differences should be addressed. Because the highest proportion of county residents and the most rapid land development is found in District Three, due consideration must be given to issues in this portion of the county. Respondents in District Three are generally more satisfied with new housing developments, as a number of high-end subdivisions are in the process of development. Consequently, with many new developments in this part of the county, residents have a greater concern for traffic congestion, road conditions, loss of open space/farmland and the provision of adequate stormwater controls than in other parts of the county.

The scores in Table 1 represent the responses of individuals. Because the nominal group technique requires a collective statement of concerns, individuals were then asked in small groups to openly discuss their individual responses and generate a list of shared concerns ranked in order of importance. From here, representatives from small groups were asked to voice and explain their top three concerns for all attendees at the meeting. These are included in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Three Top-ranked Priorities by Commission District

District One	District Two	District Three
1. Farmland/Open Space Preservation	1. Road conditions/Traffic congestion	1. Road conditions and transportation improvements
2. Road Conditions	2. Quality of Housing (raise county minimum standards, code enforcement)	2. Public Safety (police and fire)

3. Development Review: All development go through review (no min/max acres limits and increase notification requirements of zoning/other changes from 300-1,000 feet)	3. Minimum lot size at 1 acre (stormwater protection, protect wells, maintain open space)	3. a. Protect farmland/open space b. 2.5 acre min lots c. School concurrency d. High quality housing *a-d were tied for most votes among tables
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Oklahoma County 2020 Master Plan Priorities

In addition to questions designed to solicit opinions on citizen priorities during the Oklahoma County 2020 Master Plan project, the second portion of the worksheet (Appendix A) sought opinions on types of development scenarios that citizens would like to see in the future. This was designed to test support for separate land planning techniques. Citizens were asked whether they agree, disagree or have no opinion on a number different planning and regulatory strategies meant to ensure that future development conforms to citizen desires. While recognizing growth will occur, county residents seek to strike a balance between ensuring that growth occurs in a well managed and designed fashion that protects the property interests of existing residents and those seeking to develop. Most importantly, new growth should conform in visual character and density with surrounding areas.

Table 3 provides a summary of citizen support for different land planning techniques broken down by District. Note that due to the large number of attendees at the District Three meeting, a weighted average of responses is provided.

Table 3. Support for Various Land Planning Techniques

Issue	District One	District Two	District Three	Weighted average*
Adopting regulations to retain a low-density, rural residential environment (1 acre lots and greater)	1.00	.85	.92	.90
When possible, clustering new development near existing development	.75	.45	.60	.59
When possible, cooperate with school districts and cluster new development near schools	.43	.64	.57	.55
Encouraging a break in development patterns from existing cities	1.00	.70	.71	.75
Adopting regulations controlling signage, fencing and design of new development	.71	.82	.88	.83
Preventing "strip-type" development down county roads/state highways (maintain country road character)	1.00	.67	.63	.67

Allowing new development only if it can be shown adequate public facilities (police and fire, road capacity) exist to serve that development	.93	.69	.96	.90
Supporting development in an environmentally friendly fashion	.93	1.00	.95	.91
Willingness to Pay (WTP) for:				
Traffic and Road improvements	.77	.45	.33	.40
Increased police and fire protection	.85	.55	.30	.40
Increased code enforcement	.38	.36	.35	.35
<p>Notes. 1) Scores were 1= agree and 0= disagree. The dummy variable structure allows for a percentage interpretation, i.e. numbers can be read as the percentage of persons supporting the statement. Numbers thus range from .00 to 1.00 and the higher the number the more support for that planning technique.</p> <p>*Weighted average refers to the scores multiplied by the number of respondents (Table 1). For example the weighted average of the first planning technique (adopting regulations to remain low-density, rural environment) is: $[(14*1.00)+(13*.85)+(71*.92)]= .9037$. This can then be interpreted as 90% of respondents agree with this statement.</p> <p>2) Bolds refer to the five statements that enjoy the highest support.</p>				

The findings in Table 3 allow Oklahoma County and its consultants to begin thinking about land planning strategies that seek to implement, within legal, fiscal and political constraints, the will of the people.

The above questions were designed to first elicit support and then perhaps more importantly test support for an individual's willingness to pay (WTP) to achieve these goals. In general, respondents in all three jurisdictions support the following planning strategies in rank order (note that all statements enjoy 75% support or greater):

- Supporting development in an environmentally sensitive fashion (Develop away from floodplains, protect farmland, open space and prime soils)
- Adopting regulations for 1-acre lots or larger
- Adopting Adequate Public Facility (APF) programs/ordinances
- Adopting more stringent signage, fencing and design requirements
- Encouraging a break in development patterns from existing cities

While it is easy to agree with statements in the abstract, subsequent questions about WTP for traffic, public safety and code enforcement arguably provide a basis for thinking about fee structures on proposed developments and additional techniques to have public facilities concurrently in place with new development. While strict APF ordinances can be inflexible and difficult to administer, they provide a way for new developments to contribute to their fair share of the costs associated with incremental service additions. While making no statements about the equity aspects and legality of new development

charges, these should be investigated as a manner with which to pay for service expansion.

The low scores on the WTP scale are to be somewhat expected as new residents have invested in their homes and feel that anyone moving to the area after them are the ones contributing to declines in existing public services. What is remarkable is that in areas of higher income and more rapid development (the NW portion of Oklahoma County), there exists the lowest WTP scores of any district. Because of the large number of attendees at the District Three meeting (71 worksheets were completed and attendance was estimated at approximately 85 people), they act to bring down the average WTP score. While this accurately reflects the number of respondents completing the worksheet, it can generally be stated that WTP for additional services is higher in District's One and Two. Additionally, among all services, respondents have a greater WTP for road improvements and increased police and fire services compared with code enforcement.

Given limited revenue streams for Oklahoma County government, state laws that limit the ability of counties with large populations to implement a sales tax, as well a state land planning system that often complicates cooperation among municipalities, school districts and other taxing districts in a linked region, Oklahoma County faces significant hurdles in creating a master plan that can effectively manage current and future development. Due to continued development pressures in the county, the county should entertain the adoption of policy/ordinances that seek a set of development charges providing for off-site transportation improvements (improvements external to the subdivision) as permitting decisions made today carry with them long-term fiscal commitments.

Public Participation and Land Development Recommendations

The key challenge facing any jurisdiction when implementing a master plan is making sure that it can be feasibly enacted and enforced, is legally defensible and is flexible enough to guide that government through periods of growth and change. Because development trends, county budgets and public support for government activities are often uncertain, the true strength of a master plan is that it provides a guide to elected officials. This guide is created from citizen input and then molded through a process of professional planning standards and recommendations, all under the rubric of state statute and additional agency, e.g. Department of Environmental Quality, restrictions.

Table 4 provides a preliminary overview of how to turn citizen desires as generated through the series of public meetings into action steps. These can be interpreted as potential land planning strategies that the county can consider for adoption. The county must perform its due diligence with respect to the legality and formal program structure before these policy suggestions can be adopted. Some techniques may be within existing ordinances and some may be outside of the realm of current statutory power and the planning mindset of the county. The feasibility of enacting programs such as these refers as much as to the county's ability to administer and enforce these regulations given staff size, resources and political will. Regardless of the outcomes of the Master Plan, Oklahoma County should not be reticent to go above and beyond the minimum standards regulating land development found in state

enabling legislation and should think about setting the standards for development in the Oklahoma City metropolitan region.

Table 4. Potential Planning Techniques

Issue	Planning Technique	Notes
Farmland and Open Space Preservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) or Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) programs -Land conservation efforts (special tax status for lands kept in agricultural use), Land Legacy (Tulsa based) is working on these issues -Large lot zoning, increase minimum lot size to 1 acre or larger -Increase minimum open space requirements in PUD applications -Density bonuses for clustering housing units and preserving open space within subdivisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -TDR feasible though difficult to create and maybe need regional cooperation -PDR unfeasible without state support -Conservation easements and farmland protection programs exist in state (non-regulatory techniques to ensure open space/farmland preservation) -Easy to administer, difficult politically -Go from 15-20% minimum open space
Environmentally responsible development (Floodplain management, soil conservation, open space protection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No development in floodplains, all floodplain land deeded to the county (or don't deed and require this as open space) -No development on prime soils (have developers provide soil maps with development requests and cluster homes away from prime soils) -Revise (create) builder's guidelines regarding erosion controls on site, protection of trees over a certain diameter, stormwater retention basins -When possible, make developers extend water lines from OKC, Edmond, or Deer Creek Water District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use Master Plan to buttress floodplain/stormwater management plan -If deeded to the county, the county now responsible for maintenance of floodplain land -Protect prime soil which provides for adequate stormwater drainage and farmland protection, requires analysis of soils -May be cost prohibitive, however expanding minimum distance from existing lines that developers must extend from will allow for controls of

	<p>-Entertain the adoption of "package" sewer treatment plants for large subdivisions, e.g. over 150 units)</p>	<p>water use</p> <p>-Package treatment plants are increasingly becoming efficient and affordable</p>
Road conditions and transportation improvements	<p>-Consider engineering study on trip origination and destination studies from county residents and identify trip generations and locations to enact off-site road improvement fees and identify lane mile additions needed</p> <p>-Crucial feature of an Adequate Public Facility (APF) mindset</p>	<p>-Legality of ordinance unknown, county transportation road fund funded by developers will need to be assessed as to legal structure; program structure can be difficult to create but is easy to administer</p> <p>-Structure program so that road expansion plans happen concurrently with development so new residents do not burden existing residents</p> <p>-Raises housing prices by uncertain extent</p>
Increased Public Safety services	<p>-Development charges for law enforcement (Sheriff and fire protection), another core part of APF mindset</p>	<p>-Legality of ordinance unknown (tax vs. fee issue), distance based charges should be investigated, if developing further from existing fire station, should pay higher charges based on service costs</p>
Clustering development and maintaining a break in urbanization patterns from existing cities	<p>-Density bonuses for those seeking permits near existing developments (clustering becomes more feasible with package treatment plants)</p> <p>-Maintain AA zoning for certain time period in areas adjacent to cities. Future Land Use Map shows area of high density ldu:1a or higher and low density residential ldu:2.5a and higher. Zoning decisions need to be consistent with this, review and amend Future Land Use Map once a year</p>	<p>-May exacerbate traffic congestion in area</p> <p>-School crowding issues</p> <p>-Increase minimum acres in zoning categories AA become ldu:10 acres (from current 5 acre), RA become ldu:5a, RE-Residential Estate becomes ldu:1a</p> <p>-Allow lot splits below five acre, but cluster development to preserve three acres as open space (create two, 1 acre lots with 3 acres open space rather than two, 2.5 acre lots)</p>

Appendix A

Citizen Participation Worksheets

- Yellow** Oklahoma County Commission District One, Luther Community Center; Tuesday, 12 July 2005
- Blue** Oklahoma County Commission District Two, Del City-City Hall; Tuesday, 19 July 2005
- Purple** Oklahoma County Commission District Three, Deer Creek Middle School; Tuesday, 9 August 2005

9 August 2005

Oklahoma County Master Plan Project: District Three, Deer Creek Middle School
 Citizen Participation Worksheet

The first exercise is intended to aid in the identification and ranking of various issues and concerns deemed most important to residents of Oklahoma County. The ranking system reflects the following approval values: 1 = Dissatisfied (DIS), 2 = Somewhat Dissatisfied (SD), 3 = Neutral Opinion (N), 4 = Somewhat Satisfied (SS) and 5 = Very Satisfied (VS). Please record your opinion on the current status of each topic or issue in the table below.

LIST OF ISSUES OR CONCERNS	1	2	3	4	5
	DIS	SD	N	SS	VS
QUALITY OF LIFE					
Visual character of development					
Neighborhood/area attractiveness					
Public safety					
HOUSING/BUILT ENVIRONMENT					
Quality of new housing developments					
Quality of existing housing developments					
Location of new housing					
TRANSPORTATION					
Traffic congestion					
Road conditions					
Pedestrian or Bicycle access/safety within your subdivision (if applicable)					
Street signage (appearance - including traffic signs, advertisements, shopping signs, etc...)					
ENVIRONMENTAL					
Water quality					
Septic/waste system problems					
Loss of open space and farmland					
Drainage &/or stormwater systems					
COUNTY GOVERNMENT					
Local government responsiveness					
Sheriff and fire protection					
Building code inspection (and code enforcement)					
Management of growth (residential & commercial services)					

Of the above topics or issues, please rank which three (3) are of most concern to you.

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

The following questions are designed to get information from residents about planning and development priorities. Please circle the opinion you have on the following land development issues.

THE OKLAHOMA COUNTY 2020 MASTER PLAN SHOULD FOCUS ON.....

- | | | | |
|--|-------|----------|------------|
| 1. Adopting regulations to retain a low-density, rural residential environment (1 acre lots and greater) | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 2. When possible, clustering new development near existing developments | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 3. When possible, cooperate with school districts and cluster new development near schools | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 4. Encouraging a break in development patterns from existing cities | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 5. Adopting regulations controlling signage, fencing and design of new development | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 6. Preventing "strip-type" development down county roads/state highways (maintain country road character) | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 7. Allowing new development only if it can be shown adequate public facilities (police and fire, road capacity) exist to serve the development | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 8. Supporting development in an environmentally responsible fashion | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |

Of the above, which three (3) are most important to you (#s):

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.....

- | | | | |
|---|-------|----------|------------|
| 1. You are willing to pay more for traffic and road improvements | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 2. You are willing to pay more for improved police and fire protection | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |
| 3. You are willing to pay more for improved code inspection/enforcement | Agree | Disagree | No Opinion |

Which one (1) statement do you support most: # _____?