



THE PONCA CITY NEWS

PONCA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Consultants Wrap Up Stakeholders Meetings

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Consultants from Kendig Keast Collaborative wrapped up the third and final day of stakeholders meetings with Ponca City residents and city staff on Friday with discussions on challenges to leadership and planning for a diverse community.

The meetings are part of the preliminary work being done by city staff and consultants to develop a Comprehensive Master Plan for Ponca City.

And for the third day, housing was the primary concern discussed by participants.

Members of Ponca City's banking community said that from a developer's point of view, the risk of capital investment and rate of return on investment are not favorable for building speculative housing.

The bankers said the problem is an economic development issue because the size of Ponca City's economy is not great enough to spur housing development.

The Catch-22 situation is that without a larger stock of housing, many employees coming to Ponca City will have to find housing options outside the city.

Some of the bankers discussed the possibility of a larger builder, either from Oklahoma or a national builder, might consider a project in this market and would have the capital infusion to provide a safety net.

Consultant Jonathan Grosshans asked the group to identify the risks that keep developers and builders out of Ponca City's market. Members of the group said

the market is decent, but the city simply does not have the product to sell. They estimated Ponca City is 15 years behind in providing even medium-value housing and there is pent-up demand in all segments.

Brett Austin, vice president and manager of the RCB Pioneer North Branch, said one factor was the age of the population.

"Young couples are not in the \$350,000 price range and in the market it's either that or rent houses," he said. "Not a lot of younger people have those resources."

Keni Ray of Home National Bank said that what consumers consider affordable can be very different from what bankers and builders consider affordable. Housing in Ponca City also tends to be more expensive than homes in neighboring communities, he said.

There is little diversity in the style of housing in the market, the group said. Almost all of the housing stock consists of single-family detached homes.

Fox Run, a new development in northeast Ponca City, is expected to include a section of patio homes, but even that developer has contracts for five custom single-family homes.

Several of the bankers suggested that builders and developers need to have incentives and financial assistance to reduce their costs for lot sales. They also said Ponca City needs to step up to build speculative homes in the \$200,000 to \$220,000 price point for move-up buyers.

They also identified a growing need for housing for seniors.

Participants discussed finding a mechanism that would allow Ponca City to help attract housing and retail developers.

Larry Buck said the Ponca City Development Authority's charter does not allow that authority to help with housing or retail sectors.

"We have an opportunity to become more of a retail hub," Buck said.

The group also discussed the need to involve younger residents in leadership positions to create a new and vibrant community.

The corporate culture in Ponca City has changed, the

group said. In the past, community participation and involvement was often required by employers. That no longer is the case in many instances.

Austin said there is a need to get younger business people into the pipeline to prepare to take leadership responsibilities in the future.

The group discussed Ponca City's neighborhoods and described some areas which could be improved. Some areas are showing a cumulative effect of slumlords, inattentive homeowners and an aging population which is no longer able to attend to home maintenance as it has in the past.

"Every city has exactly the same problem in Oklahoma," Mayor Homer Nicholson said. "We're all about 100 years old and many of our neighborhoods are running their life span. Older homes have become rentals. Every city has the same syndrome and Code Enforcement has to pick up the pieces."

The bankers asked if there were various grants available to help young owners upgrade properties and help with energy efficiency projects and downpayment assistance.

Participant Ann Berry asked if Ponca City has community service programs that can help older residents with yard and minor home repair issues.

The last meeting in the series focused on planning for a diverse community. Grosshans asked participants in this group to identify the issues that they thought would be the highest priority for residents in the next 10 years.

Hugh Pickens said he thinks Ponca City needs to decide on its new identity.

"We have gone from a Land Run frontier town to an early 20th Century boom town to a company town in the 1960s," he said. "That ended in the mid-1980s with DuPont's purchase of Conoco. Now we need to decide what is the new Ponca City? What is our vision for our future?"

He said he would like to see the city preserve the best of its history preserved as the community moves forward.

Ann Berry said the community needs to prepare for an influx of crime as times get tougher economically.

"We have a very good police department and we need

to keep it up," she said.

Dr. Sunday June Pickens, who said she is a relative newcomer to Ponca City, said she has experienced a lack of ethnic diversity.

"I have seen few Native Americans or African Americans," she said. "I came from an urban environment on the East Coast."

She said she has attended Juneteenth and local powwows but has found such events few and far between.

Ponca City is more diverse in an economic sense, she said, with several income levels apparent.

"A person can buy wherever they can afford," she said.

Berry said Ponca City has social diversity, especially if neighboring areas are considered.

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