



Imagine Durant: PUBLIC Dialogue Harvest Report

Sandra Jones
with
Marilyn Hamilton
Harvest Storyweavers

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Imagine Durant Public Dialogue Participants

Tim Boatmun

SOSU

Ticia Burkhalter

Citizen, Families Feeding Families

Emily Brittingham

City of Durant, Accounting Specialist

Kaymon Farmer

Imagine Durant Director, SOSU

Russell Jones

Landmark Bank, I.T.

April Lehring

SOSU, Director of Student Wellness

Janet Reed

Chamber of Commerce

Pam Robinson

United Way, Director

Lynn Skocdopole

Citizen

Jona Tucker

The Nature Conservancy

Renee Turvey

APO Accreditation

JJ Wilson

City of Durant, Program Manager

Monica Woodall

Citizen

John Wyatt

City of Durant

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Scott Moore

Principal Community Builder

Blue Star Studio Inc.

Integral City Team

Kara Hendrickson

Imagine Durant Executive Director

Sandra Jones

Harvest Storyweaver

Imagine Durant Convenes Public Dialogue 2

““If [you are] not part of it, become part of it.”

-Janet Reed

Why, What, When, Where, Who

On April 23rd, Imagine Durant convened a public dialogue to consider Durant’s future in regard to issues of the current and future health and environment of the city. Seventeen members of the general public attended the event, held at George Washington School, the current site of Families Feeding Families. Kara Hendrickson and Scott Moore (from the Integral City Meshworks Team), Co-facilitators explained that “today is an opportunity to expand on February’s Thought Leaders’ Dialogue” and the participants’ job was to demonstrate that when people care and become involved, change happens.

Intentions

The purpose of the public dialogue was to build and expand upon the insights reported in the Imagine Durant Harvest Report. This report was the official record of Imagine Durant’s fifth dialogue, which took place February 19th and 20th, 2016 and included participation from twenty-seven of Durant’s thought leaders.

The intentions of the public dialogue were shared with attendees as follows:

- Meet people you don’t know; circle up with new acquaintances; make new friends
- Create interpersonal connections across the diversities of Durant: age, gender, students, workers, employers, ethnicity, race
- Create connections between people’s perspectives of the environment and health
- Discover common ground to build on and respect differences that make a difference.
- Imagine how in 30 years we can improve the quality of Durant’s environment and health in a way that neither set of improvements is at the expense of the other.

Context of Health and Environment Dialogues

The context of the dialogue was set up with presentations by Jona Tucker on the environment as nature, Renee Turvey on health MAPPING (Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships), Tim Boatmun on the Nowa Oka walking trail as an early Imagine Durant win and Janet Reed on the city Trash Off.

Attendees were debriefed on the four facets named in relation to the current health and environment of Durant that had emerged from the Thought Leaders' Dialogue.

The **Current Health** expounded on the city's heartbeat at this point in time, showing how Durant already has many health assets such as free medical clinics and fitness centers. The **Health Future** imagined what the health of the city should be 30 plus years down the road by improving public health with opportunities to decrease obesity and increase healthiness.

The **Current Environment** maps where we are today with Durant's natural beauty and lakes and the **Environment Future** is where we see the environment down the road, “

“The environment is bigger than just the city of Durant.”

-Jona Tucker

Tim Boatmun presented an excellent example of how Durant is currently at a new crossroads, as was illustrated just that morning. Our environment is one of having a small town feeling, i.e. knowing police officers by name and saying “hello” when they walk through the door. However, the large town growth is coming because police officers are not always just there to say hello; they may be there because someone had requested help in the area (as happened the morning of this meeting). So, while we are all familiar and love our small town, we must prepare for the health and environment issues that present themselves, as the town grows.



How to Participate in Dialogue

To get started with the dialogue Kara Hendrickson gave attendees a brief lesson on how to have a successful dialogue. Key points she stressed included:

- Listen compassionately
- Honor and respect each person's contribution
- Speak from own experience
- Avoid criticism and persuasion
- Be aware of how often and how long you speak
- Seek to understand and learn
- Make sure everyone has a chance to talk

Small Groups Dialogue about Key Questions

After receiving instructions on how to dialogue, participants were invited to form groups of 6 to 8 people to discuss issues of the economy and community framed by the following questions.

- 1. Tell us a story about a time when you had an emotional connection with Durant related to health or the environment. How has that or does that influence your relationship to the community?**
- 2. What level of growth do you think is sustainable for Durant in the next 30 years?**
- 3. How will balancing the environment and the health matter to Durant's children or grandchildren?**
- 4. What are the burning questions (for this group) about Durant's future environment and health?**



Imagining the Future Together

At the end of this breakout session, participants rejoined the larger group for a plenary discussion. The room was rearranged into a large circle with all participants facing each other. Scott and Kara asked others to share their thoughts with everyone on the following questions:

- *What will you tell the future generations about how you approached these burning questions?*
- *What would you tell policy makers we should do now?*
- *In the next year, what is one step you will take to move from contemplation to action regarding these questions?*



Health & Environment: Key Themes

Five themes emerged from an analysis of the notes taken from the break-out groups, the burning questions (see Appendix A), and the plenary discussion about what we will tell future generations (see Appendix B). These five interrelated themes were as follows:

1. **Funding & the Economy**
2. **Controlled Growth & Planning**
3. **Amenities & Services**
4. **Education of Citizens & Self Reliance**
5. **Being Proactive & Working Together**

1. Funding & the Economy

With the decline in oil prices and news reports of the budget crisis in the state of Oklahoma, it is natural that funding and the economy were key concerns that emerged from the group dialogues. The drop in oil prices has had a ripple effect throughout the state and many programs that fund the needy are facing deep cuts. Because of this, many citizens wonder, “Where does the funding come from and how much should we grow?” (Wilson).

Participants considered how future improvements for the health and environment of current and prospective citizens of Durant will be funded and sustained. For instance, creating and maintaining sidewalks throughout the city was discussed many times as a key starting point for helping citizens with a healthy lifestyle. However, sidewalks cost money for upkeep and will always require funding for maintenance. Who will take care of these? Other concerns arose regarding improving the health and environment of Durant citizens and how to pay for the changes needed to grow.

“With the current economy in Oklahoma, I think a lot of things are struggling. We will be facing economic hardship in the next few years and it will be hard to grow in those things.”

“If we don’t have the money, we can’t keep saying, ‘Let’s keep growing’.”

“How do we create a quality of life that each citizen of Durant deserves? How will we fund the changes needed?”

2. Controlled Growth & City-County Planning

With Durant being the 3rd fastest growing town in Oklahoma, “all signs point for there to be a big increase in the population of Durant” (Tucker). While some may be opposed to it, growth is necessary for Durant to stay vibrant and alive. Without growth, Durant could become like a “stagnant pond, where you can see micro life but the pond eventually deteriorates until there is no water at all” (Skocdopole).

Many participants wondered about the planning for such growth and if it could be controlled. Calling upon the city and county to work together to create a vision and plan strategically so that young families will want to come here and stay here, were the top concerns of many of the participants. However, while the town is growing, participants recognized that protecting the environment and keeping our town beautiful needs to also be a part of the planning process.

“Are we planning strategically for the future, especially around land development and zoning?”

“A strategic vision drives how fast we grow.”

“There needs to be a greater integration of city and county thinking.”

“How will you balance growth and keep the small town compassionate feeling?”

3. Amenities & Services

Many participants echoed the same thought about wanting people who visit Durant to be able to say “Hey, Durant is growing!”. However, the question became, how do we do that? Providing healthy environments and opportunities were foremost in mind such as building more walking trails, more parks and more sports complexes. Keeping college students in Durant with more job and pay opportunities was given as a good starting point. Many SOSU graduates are seen as leaving town for job opportunities elsewhere. How do we make it so that college graduates see that they should stay in Durant because “The grass isn’t always greener on the other side, it’s greener wherever you fertilize it” (Boatmun)? On the opposite end was concern about senior citizens and providing for their health and well-being in the future with things such as housing.

“We need more health education and health classes.”

“This community has so much to offer and we need to explore that with our youth.”

“What are we doing in terms of job opportunities for SOSU students to keep them here? What are we doing for new graduates to connect them with job opportunities to match skill sets of graduates?”

4. Education of Citizens & Self Reliance

Much of the day’s discussion centered around the call to action for the citizens of Durant to become educated on not only what programs the town already offers but also what programs are at risk because of state budget cuts.

Durant is fortunate to have a community center and library right in the heart of the city. Built in 2011, it is an easily accessible resource where people convene to ask questions, utilize computer skills and many other activities. In addition, citizens have the ability to access a free health clinic on Tuesday evenings, courtesy of the Great Physician’s Medical Clinic and Pharmacy.

A program such as Families Feeding Families Community Kitchen, which provides meals and other assistance, is also available to the community. While services such as these are available, citizens must also know about how they could be in jeopardy because of state funding for such services being cut. Citizens were called to become aware and educated on how these issues could or does affect them.

At the same time, being self-driven and self-motivated were strong notions permeating the conversation. Kaymon Farmer, board director for Imagine Durant, was given as an example. Kaymon started his own business, “instead of waiting for a company to provide for him, he created his own company.” It is this self-reliance that makes a town’s citizens strong and what makes a town stronger.



“How do we educate and communicate to [people in] our town all ... the programs we currently have?”

“Will the leaders of today educate the next generation how to not depend on the government for their happiness.”

5. Being Proactive and Working Together

Much of the day’s conversation was concentrated on how to be a positive force for the community. All of the participants agreed that being proactive and working together were the keys to improving the health and environment of the city.

How would the citizens of Durant talk about the town 30 years from now? The participants imagined that the future townspeople would be able to say, “we were tired of status quo, we saw the need to fix our community and we worked together to make a difference” (Jones).

The conversation circled back around to planning and how creating “a priority list so we can address things proactively instead of just how they come up” should be a goal of the city and county. A bright future would include “churches, volunteers and money supporting hungry and homeless by educating the population and workforce development. Joint ventures could be established to collaborate and consolidate services to get people off the street” (Turvey).

Someday, we will be able to say, “A long time ago, developed by citizens, we imagined the way Durant is today because citizens led leadership. The citizens worked with the city to create a vision and strategic plan that works for growth and sustainability and they imagined the way Durant is today. It is because citizens led the community” (Tucker).

“Be proactive and be more involved in legislature. Be more vocal.”

“Show up, show support, be a presence.”

“Keep looking and thinking about solutions and how you can be a part of it.”

” Be an example and spread the word. Keep it positive!”

Focus on Policy Makers

Participants were asked to imagine they were speaking to policy makers and what they would suggest to them that we should do now in regards to the health and environment of Durant’s current and future citizens. Those suggestions proved to revolve around ***Developing Citizen Health, Building Health and Environment Management Performance Capacity, Engaging Community and Influencing Healthy Business and Environmental Systems*** (summarized in Table 1.)

| Table 1. Imagine Durant Public Dialogue – What to Tell Policy Makers to Improve Health and Environment | |
|--|---|
| <p><i>Develop Citizen Health - Leadership Vision, Personal Capacity, Education</i></p> <p>Think holistically for growth.</p> <p>What are we doing in terms of job opportunities for SOSU students to keep them here?</p> <p>What are we doing for new graduates to connect them with job opportunities to match skill sets of graduates?</p> <p>We need more health education and health classes.</p> | <p><i>Build Civic Management Performance and Capacity for Health & Environment</i></p> <p>Be strategic when deciding what budget cuts to make and don’t just move money to fix a temporary problem (Robbing Peter to pay Paul).</p> <p>Think socially about how to redistribute funding strategically with a solution that works with what your constituents are saying...especially through a process like community dialogue.</p> |
| <p><i>Engage Community Wellbeing – Cultural Diversity, NFP, Faith</i></p> <p>What ideas do policy makers have to empower citizens to take responsibility with community led initiatives?</p> | <p><i>Influence Healthy Business Development and Environmental Systems</i></p> <p>What thoughts have the policy makers given to prepare for all the rapid growth in terms of vision and goals.</p> <p>Come up with tangible 1, 3, 5 year goals people can see. Map a plan for growth.</p> <p>Create a priority list so we can address things proactively instead of just as they come up.</p> <p>Don’t create codes, zoning, etc. that is adversarial to Imagine Durant’s initiatives, i.e. walking trails, etc.</p> |

Act Today

With enthusiasm and high energy, the participants concluded the dialogue by making some impassioned offers to act now. These offers could be summarized in as working together and being proactive as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Imagine Durant Public Dialogue – Generative Ideas & Offers to Improve Health & Environment

Working Together & Being Proactive

Think, Ask & Act

- Be an example and spread the word. Keep it positive – Farmer
- Talk about the positive things happening in the community – Lehrling
- Keep asking “How can I help?” – Lehrling
- Show up, show support, be a presence (i.e. walking trail) – Boatmun
- Keep looking and thinking about solutions and how you can be a part of it – Tucker
- Ask someone else to come – Skocdopole

Connect & Collaborate

- Become more involved in Imagine Durant - Turney
- Spread the word through word of mouth and Facebook – Woodall
- Join the housing revitalization committee – Hendrickson
- Adopt a stretch of road – Boatmun
- Show up and take part in Imagine Durant for future forums - Lehring
- Reach out to legislature – Woodall

What's Next?

The emerging visions for Durant's vibrant economy and community were explored in 2015. Visions for Durant's health and environment expressed by Thought Leaders in February 2016 and by the Public in April will be conveyed to the Policy Makers in June, 2016.

In September the third Round of Dialogues will start with the focus on Education and Culture.

**Stay tuned. Stay connected. Stay active ...
A growing number of people are
committing to a Vision of Wellbeing for
Durant's Future.**

Appendix A: Imagine Durant Public Dialogue – Burning Questions About Health & Environment

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|--|---|
| <p><i>Developing Citizen Health - Leadership Vision, Personal Capacity, Education</i></p> <p>How do we give a voice to those who don't have a seat at the table?</p> <p>How do we involve leadership in Imagine Durant and recommendations to service community?</p> <p>How do we encourage/foster pride in the environment?</p> <p>How do we service seniors and children?</p> <p>How do we decrease the level of obesity?</p> <p>What percentage of Durant citizens want change as related to Imagine Durant vision?</p> | <p><i>Building Civic Management Performance and Capacity for Health & Environment</i></p> <p>How do we demonstrate environment health needs and the need of County and City Collaboration?</p> <p>Do our city ordinances assist us in allowing for the financial demands of growth?</p> <p>How do we reduce deserted land, tear down and rebuild to sustain tax base level?</p> <p>What tax base do we need to grow?</p> <p>How to handle rapid growth?</p> <p>How to create a quality of life that each citizen of Durant deserves. How will we fund the changes needed?</p> <p>How are we going to intervene on these budget cuts to prevent Durant from being affected?</p> <p>How do we protect our local support (families feeding families, docs, teachers) from the budget cut?</p> <p>Will we have a totally broken health care system before we fix it?</p> <p>Where will the community get the assistance they need for medical assistance when they can't afford to see a doctor?</p> |
| <p><i>Engaging Community Wellbeing – Cultural Diversity, NFP, Faith</i></p> <p>How do we educate and communicate to our town all for the programs we currently have?</p> <p>Will the leaders of today educate the next generation how to not depend on the government for their happiness? Create it themselves and compress the work time so they can live freely?</p> <p>How will you balance growth and keeping the “small town” compassionate feeling?</p> <p>How do you keep Durant’s best qualities as you grow?</p> <p>How do we meet the situation with the potential that has come to stay?</p> <p>With the town growing so quickly, how do we protect our land to keep it beautiful?</p> <p>How do we reach out to those individuals that are missed by state programs regarding health? Age 19-55?</p> | <p><i>Influencing Healthy Business Development and Environmental Systems</i></p> <p>Are we planning strategically for the future (especially around land development and zoning)?</p> <p>What is the city of Durant’s strategic vision for the next 5-20-15-30 years?</p> <p>What percentage of businesses want Imagine Durant-type changes? Is the city government in favor of these changes? If so, what steps are they taking to help?</p> <p>How can you enhance Durant’s natural beauty (because that is what makes people, families, want to stay)?</p> <p>How do we balance property usage with drives, parking, sidewalks?</p> <p>Where is Durant going to put the influx of homeless and hungry who come to Durant?</p> |

Appendix B: Imagine Durant Public Dialogue – What We Tell Our Children in 30 Years About Health and Environment

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| <p><i>Develop Citizen Health - Leadership Vision, Personal Capacity, Education</i></p> <p>Woodall - We made people feel like they mattered.</p> <p>This community has so much to offer – explore that with our youth. We created enough of a separation and inclusion balance to keep youth engaged in our community and wanting to stay.</p> | <p><i>Build Civic Management Performance and Capacity for Health & Environment</i></p> <p>Turvey – More volunteers and more funding was a result of what we did. Look at what we did for the hungry and homeless by educating our citizens and workforce development. Churches, volunteers, money are now supporting hungry/homeless by educating the population and workforce development. Joint venture to collaborate and consolidate services to get people off the street.</p> <p>Skocdopole - We went to city and county and said, “you guys gotta get together and get a solid tax base.”</p> <p>Wyatt – We said there needed to be a rapport between city and county.</p> <p>Skocdopole – We said we needed to get a solid tax base and keep it from getting stagnant.</p> |
| <p><i>Engage Community – Cultural Diversity, NFP, Faith</i></p> <p>Tucker - A long time ago, developed by citizens, we imagined the way Durant is today because citizens led leadership. The citizens worked with the city to create a vision and strategic plan that works for growth and sustainability and they imagined the way Durant is today. It is because citizens led the community.</p> <p>Jones - We were tired of status quo, we saw the need to fix our community and we worked together to make a difference to get the results that you now enjoy. We used expanded community surveys and invitations through social media, community service involvement and street outreach (bring the questions to them) to make sure all voices were represented.</p> <p>Turvey - We kept Imagine Durant going as a vehicle to keep the conversation going. We created opportunities to contribute time and energy (“sweat equity”) to keep things moving forward. We created inspiration through opportunities to contribute.</p> | <p><i>Influence Healthy Business Development and Environmental Systems</i></p> <p>Turvey - We fixed the broken health care system by being proactive.</p> <p>Farmer – [We figured out how to generate] residual income and how to keep generating it.</p> <p>Boatmun - We have the technology infrastructure (high speed internet) to sustain working from a distance.</p> <p>Boatmun - You don’t have to worry about the cost associated or the availability of going to the doctor. You can stay here and get what you need.</p> |

