Pittsburg County Listening Session Report

http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/ocls/

December 10, 2002
The mission of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service is to disseminate information to the people of Oklahoma and encourage the adoption of research-based knowledge relating to agriculture, family and consumer sciences, 4-H youth development, and community development.
Sixty-two (62) individuals interested in a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities participated in the Pittsburg County Listening Session. The Listening Session was an effort to get a broad base of citizen input to identify local issues so a plan can be developed to create a better economic, environmental, and social situation for Pittsburg County. Participants from across the county provided input and identified, discussed, and defined their community’s needs and opportunities while building on the assets that presently exist.

The purpose of this report is to share publicly the process and the information that was collected from the Pittsburg County Listening Session. The report lists the needs and concerns of the county as identified during the open forum process. This report also will be used as a starting point for the upcoming Focus Forum, in which an assembled group of stakeholders will define, discuss, and begin to address the needs and concerns identified in the Listening Session. Many of the needs and concerns of Oklahoma can be addressed through partnerships with other groups and organizations. The report can be found on the Oklahoma Community Listening Session website at http://www.dasnr.okstate.edu/oces/ocls/.

The Listening Session revolved around a single, key question: “Considering the next 3 to 5 years, what are the critical issues in your community and in Oklahoma that need to be addressed to realize a positive future for you, your family, and your community?” The needs and issues identified by participants reflect several broad areas of interest. Available data do not show that any one area is more significant than another, but they do show that all these issues are vitally important to the people of Pittsburg County.
Considering the next 3 to 5 years, what are the critical issues in your community and in Oklahoma that need to be addressed to realize a positive future for you, your family, and your community?
Small Group Discussions

The following issues were discussed in one or more of the small group sessions.

- **Drugs**  
  ○ Tougher laws  
  ○ Enforce present laws

- **Property rights**  
  ○ Control taxation  
  ○ Legal trespass (limit) – oil and gas, other entities  
  ○ Preservation of agricultural lands  
  ○ Use restriction (acreage)

- **Recreation and tourism**  
  ○ Litter control  
  ○ Park improvement – more variety of activities

- **Law enforcement**  
  ○ More rural patrolling by county sheriff, game wardens

- **Support schools**  
  ○ Financial support – sources other than property taxes  
  ○ Consolidate administration – not schools

- **Economic development**  
  ○ Better housing – tax incentives  
  ○ Attract professionals  
  ○ Develop industry – retain youth  
  ○ Land care codes  
  ○ Take advantage of natural resources  
  ○ Promote transportation system

- **Improve education**  
  ○ More funding  
  ○ Better money management  
  ○ Address administrative salaries  
  ○ Improve higher education

- **Address drug issues**  
  ○ Promote drug awareness for youth in a “cool” way (prevention)  
  ○ Improve public safety  
  ○ Eliminate drugs

- **Stop child abuse**

- **More after-school activities for youth**  
  ○ Life skills training for youth by experienced people

- **Improve state budget**  
  ○ Better management for all agencies – more money

- **Increase health education**  
  ○ Awareness and prevention  
  ○ Heart disease  
  ○ Teen pregnancy
Small Group Discussions

- Responsive health care system (public/private)
- More service-oriented
- More accessible
- Drug abuse awareness
- Eliminate methamphetamine labs

**School funding**
- Address declining financial support for public schools

**Economic development**
- Develop skills to enable workers to get jobs beyond entry level
- More jobs
- Higher paying jobs that offer insurance

**Increase environmental awareness and tougher laws**
- Establish recycling program
- Notify neighbors when herbicides and pesticides are used

**Medical care for elderly**
- Insurance costs
- Prescriptions

**Health issues**
- Accessibility
- Awareness education
- Employment (in health related areas)
- Reduced prescription cost
- Insurance for low-income families
- Improve poor health practices
- Provide support for people/senior citizens with chronic diseases

**Education**
- Keep all county schools open – no consolidation
- No unfunded mandates

**Infrastructure**
- Roads, water, sewer, gas

**Jobs**
- Bring businesses to the area

**Youth issues**
- Structured, supervised activities
- Educate youth/young parents on life skills
- Continue to offer family living/home economics classes in school
- Child abuse and neglect prevention

**Economic development**
- Reduce unemployment in community/state
- Create more jobs to bring in revenue statewide
- Support existing local businesses
- Improve compensation for nurses at McAlester Regional Health Center
- Clean up litter in Pittsburg County and Oklahoma
Small Group Discussions

- **Create review board for government programs**
  - Mechanism for pass-through dollars for local level
  - Public meeting for tax commission to explain where road money comes from and where it goes
  - Review government regulations on a regular basis, allowing government officials to better serve the public

- **Enhance existing public health programs**
  - Increase drug and tobacco prevention
  - Increase penalty for drug use/selling

- **Children and youth programs**
  - Increase enrollment in colleges, universities, and trade schools
  - Child abuse prevention
  - Increase opportunities for young people
  - Reduce juvenile crime
  - Lower death rate from drugs, alcohol, etc.
  - More affordable child care

- **Better funding for school systems throughout the state**
  - Incentives to keep teachers in Oklahoma
  - More efficient use of education funds

- **More youth involvement in activities**
  - Youth center
  - Sports (skating, wall climbing, skate boarding)

- **Revamping education**
  - Newer equipment
  - More dollars/more accountability
  - Voucher system
  - After-school program
  - Tougher school system/honor system
  - Character Counts!®
  - More 4-H
  - High cost of college
  - Mentoring programs – elderly to youth

- **Address high divorce rate**
  - Highest in nation – reduce it
  - Parenting skills
  - Self-esteem

- **More industry in Oklahoma**
  - More quality, higher paying jobs
  - Mall in Pittsburg County
  - Create new jobs for local economy
  - More rental housing

- **Police accountability**
  - Crank-free community (enforcement/educational treatment)
  - More dollars for prisons – eliminate county jails being used as prisons
  - Profiling
The large group addressed the ideas that were generated during the small group discussions. Those ideas were then used as the basis for defining the five issues of most importance to Pittsburg County.

- **Drugs**
  - Tougher laws
  - Enforce present laws
  - Increase drug and tobacco prevention
  - Eliminate drugs
  - Drug awareness
  - Prevention in a “cool” way

- **Economic development**
  - Better housing, tax incentives, attract professionals, develop industry – retain youth
  - Land care codes
  - Take advantage of natural resources
  - Promote transportation system
  - Develop skills to enable workers to get jobs beyond entry level
  - More higher level, higher paying jobs
  - Support existing business – bring businesses to the area
  - A mall in Pittsburg County
  - More rental housing
  - Reduce unemployment

- **Increase health education**
  - Awareness and prevention
  - Heart disease
  - Teen pregnancy
  - Responsive health care system (public/private)
  - Service-oriented
  - Accessible
  - Drug abuse
  - Methamphetamine labs
  - Employment in health-related areas
  - Reduce price of prescription drugs
  - Insurance for low-income people
  - Life-style changes to address poor health
  - Support for people with chronic diseases/senior citizens
  - Improve compensation for McAlester Regional Health Center and all regional health care workers
  - Enhance existing health care programs

- **Children and youth programs**
  - Increase enrollment in colleges, universities, and trade schools
Large Group Discussion

- Child abuse prevention
- Increase opportunities for young people
- Reduce juvenile crime
- Lower death rate from drugs, alcohol, etc.
- More affordable child care
- More after-school activities for youth
- Continue to offer family living/home economics classes in schools
- Create youth center
- More structured supervised activities
- Educate youth/young parents on life skills

➢ Revamping of education
  - Newer equipment
  - More dollars/more accountability
  - Voucher system
  - After-school program
  - Tougher school system/honor system
  - Character Counts!SM
  - More 4-H
  - Address the high cost of college
  - Mentoring programs – elderly to youth
  - Keep all county schools open
  - More effective use of financial support
  - Discover why financial support for schools has diminished
  - No unfunded mandates
  - Property tax for financial support
  - Consolidate administration – not schools
  - Incentives to keep teachers in Oklahoma
  - Address administrative salaries
  - Improve higher education

In the months following the Listening Session, Pittsburg County Extension Educators will invite community leaders and representatives from organizations and agencies to a Focus Forum to consider what the people are saying and to devise action plans for Pittsburg County. As Extension begins its long-range strategic planning process, the involvement of citizens in identifying needs and opportunities in the county and community will be extremely valuable. Through the upcoming Focus Forums, education and service providers will learn more about community concerns while forging new partnerships with other groups to address identified issues.
Facts About Pittsburg County

The intent of these data is to provide local perspective and context for discussion. Local circumstances can change the demographic and economic data; the following is the most up-to-date information that is currently available.¹

◆ History

Pittsburg County was created at statehood from Tobucksy County in the Choctaw Nation, Indian Territory. The new county took its name from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Perryville, which no longer exists, was the place in Tobucksy County where court was held and elections were designated to take place. It was located a few miles south of present-day McAlester and was also an important military post and depot for Confederate forces. In September of 1863, Perryville was burned to the ground by Union troops.

The largest city and the county seat of Pittsburg County is McAlester, which was originally developed as a rail center for the coal mining industry. Today, it is the site of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary.

Pittsburg County
• Located in the southeastern region
• County population is 43,953
• Labor force within 30 miles is 58,600

¹ County statistics from Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management, May 2000
Industry

Agriculture is an important factor in the present-day economy of Pittsburg County. Graze-out wheat and alfalfa are important components of the Pittsburg County agricultural industry. McAlester Union Stockyard, which is one of the largest in the Southwest, and a large army ammunition plant are also vital to the county. Krebs, the largest Italian community in Oklahoma, is known for its ethnic food.

According to the 1997 Census of Agriculture, Pittsburg County had 1,586 farms (averaging 310 acres). Average gate receipts were $15,530 in 1997, and the county had three farms with gate receipts in excess of $500,000. Agricultural production was divided between livestock (87 percent) and crops (13 percent). Contrasted with the 1992 Census of Agriculture, average gate receipts decreased 14 percent, from $17,978 in 1992 to $15,530 in 1997; the average farm size decreased 12 percent.

Profile

Pittsburg County is located in southeastern Oklahoma. The county is comprised of 1,377 square miles of hills and valleys in the north and mountains in the south. The average annual rainfall is 57 inches. Average temperatures range from 41.4 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 80 degrees Fahrenheit in July.

According to the 2000 census, the county seat, McAlester, had a population of 17,783 residents. The city is located 106 miles south of Tulsa.

Households

Pittsburg County had 17,157 households in 2000. Statistics regarding those households are included in the table on the final page of this report.
Facts About Pittsburg County

◆ Population Characteristics
The population density of the county is 31.1 persons per square mile.
The median age of the population is 39.4 years.

◆ County Population - 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County population</td>
<td>43,953</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male population</td>
<td>22,139</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female population</td>
<td>21,814</td>
<td>49.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 5 years</td>
<td>2,455</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 9 years</td>
<td>2,829</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 to 14 years</td>
<td>3,048</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 to 19 years</td>
<td>3,091</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>2,325</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 34 years</td>
<td>5,307</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35 to 44 years</td>
<td>6,532</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45 to 54 years</td>
<td>6,040</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 to 59 years</td>
<td>2,601</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 to 64 years</td>
<td>2,189</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 to 74 years</td>
<td>3,948</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 to 84 years</td>
<td>2,569</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 years and over</td>
<td>1,019</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Census 2000

◆ Poverty
Poverty in Pittsburg County decreased by 7.5 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 7,624 individuals living below the poverty level. This number decreased to 7,049 by the year 2000. The poverty level for family households with related children under 18 years of age decreased 2.1 percent between 1990 and 2000. In 1990 there were 1,180 such families, but by the year 2000 the number had declined to 1,155 families. Households headed by women with no husband present and with children under 18 years of age numbered 524 in 1990. By 2000 the number of such households had risen to 603, an increase of 12.9 percent.
Facts About Pittsburg County

◆ **Labor Force**
The Pittsburg County labor force numbered 17,303 in 2000, with 59.2 percent of males and 45.2 percent of females employed. The county recorded an average annual unemployment rate of 4.7 percent in 2000. The per capita personal income for the county in 2000 was $18,802.

◆ **Tourism and Points of Interest**
The major waterways in Pittsburg County are the Canadian River and its tributaries and tributaries to the Kiamichi, Muddy Boggy, and other rivers.

Some cultural and historical offerings in the county are the Old Chate House in Indianola, Naval Ammunition Depot Museum, Scottish Rite Temple, and the Supreme Temple of International Order of Rainbow Girls in McAlester. Arrowhead State Park, north of McAlester, offers recreational opportunities.

Annual events include the Italian Festival in McAlester during May, the Ethnic Festival in Krebs in September, and the Prison Rodeo held in McAlester in September.

◆ **Housing**
The county has 21,520 housing units, and 79.7 percent of these are occupied by owners. Statewide, 68.4 percent of housing units are occupied by owners. The median owner-occupied home value in the county is $53,400. Statewide, the median owner-occupied home value is $70,700. The median housing rental contract is $386 per month in Pittsburg County. Statewide, the median housing rental contract is $456 per month.
Facts About Pittsburg County

◆ Tax Structure

The average mill levy for ad valorem taxes in Pittsburg County is 78.24 mills. It generated $10,988,583 in 2001-2002. Also, Pittsburg County received $4,711,610 from the state for the county’s proceeds from the gas, diesel, and special fuel tax, as well as from the gross production tax and motor vehicle collections.

Pittsburg County collects sales tax at two levels: state and local. There is no county sales tax. The state sales tax rate is 4.5 percent. The local sales tax rate varies from city to city, as shown below.

Sales Tax Rates and Revenue, 2001-2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Sales Tax Rate (%)</th>
<th>Revenue ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alderson</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>20,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>62,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowder</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>59,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haileyville</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>57,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartshorne</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>367,893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianola</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>18,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiowa</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>69,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krebs</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>532,592</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAlester</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>8,546,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburg</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>23,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinton</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>136,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savanna</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>91,420</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Facts About Pittsburg County

**Education**

Pittsburg County is home to Kiamichi Technology Center, McAlester campus. There are 76.2 percent of Pittsburg County residents over 25 years of age who are high school graduates, compared to 74.6 percent statewide. College graduates 25 years and older number 12.9 percent, compared to 17.8 percent statewide.
## Facts About Pittsburg County

### Primary Employers in the Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Employers</th>
<th>Products/Services</th>
<th>Number Employed</th>
<th>City/Town</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Army Ammunition Plant</td>
<td>ammunition</td>
<td>1,172</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McAlester Regional Health Center</td>
<td>medical services</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Komar and Sons</td>
<td>ladies’ lingerie</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma Penitentiary</td>
<td>state penitentiary</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma Aerotronics</td>
<td>electronics</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>Hartshorne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simmons Foods, Inc.</td>
<td>poultry plant</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockwell International</td>
<td>electronics</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Oilwell</td>
<td>centrifugal pumps</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoenix Industries, Inc.</td>
<td>re-manufacture engines</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic Meeco</td>
<td>flotation products</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edison Plastics</td>
<td>plastic film</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big “V” Feeds</td>
<td>animal feed</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>McAlester</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Oklahoma Department of Commerce, Information Management, May 2000*
### Facts About Pittsburg County

**County Demographics – 1990 vs. 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>1990</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>County population</td>
<td>40,581</td>
<td>43,953</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino population</td>
<td>479</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White population</td>
<td>33,765</td>
<td>33,932</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American population</td>
<td>1,505</td>
<td>1,768</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian and Alaska Native population</td>
<td>5,005</td>
<td>5,493</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian population</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age of all persons in the county</td>
<td>37.52</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labor force</td>
<td>17,294</td>
<td>17,303</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual unemployment rate</td>
<td>8.89%</td>
<td>4.68%</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County per capita income</td>
<td>12,615</td>
<td>18,802</td>
<td>49.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with related children under age 18</td>
<td>1,180</td>
<td>1,155</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - families with female householder with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty - individuals</td>
<td>7,624</td>
<td>7,049</td>
<td>-7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a high school diploma</td>
<td>8,587</td>
<td>11,017</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of persons over age 25 with high school diploma</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons over age 25 with a college degree</td>
<td>2,821</td>
<td>3,892</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent over age 25 with at least a Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - family household with own children under age 18</td>
<td>4,988</td>
<td>4,968</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - married couple family with own children under age 18</td>
<td>3,845</td>
<td>3,533</td>
<td>-8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Households - female householder, with own children under age 18, no husband present</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>County housing units</td>
<td>19,433</td>
<td>21,520</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner-occupied housing units</td>
<td>12,000</td>
<td>13,041</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: U.S. Bureau of Census, Census 2000*
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