



**TOWN MEETING
KANSAS**

SUMMARY REPORT

JUNE, 1978

THE TOWN MEETING KANSAS PROJECT

Communities sense that citizen input is an essential ingredient to their continued development. Town Meeting is a community-wide event designed for this purpose.

Concerned citizens in communities were invited by posters, flyers and news articles to an evening meeting, usually from 7-10 pm. A workshop format was used to define the challenges facing the community and to develop on-target proposals to meet these challenges. In addition, each group wrote a short community story, designed a symbol and composed a song set to a popular tune. At the conclusion of the evening, each participant received a document containing the results of their Town Meeting.

The meetings were led by volunteers trained in the unique Town Meeting format. The Institute of Cultural Affairs, located at 1604 North Fairmount, Wichita, was the sponsoring agency for Town Meeting: Kansas.

Town Meetings were held in one city in each of Kansas' 105 counties that had not previously held a Town Meeting. Between November 1977 and May 1978, 73 publicly announced events were held in 69 counties, attended by 10-100 residents each. In addition, 30 were held with private groups or were demonstration Town Meetings involving selected community leaders.

This report summarizes the current situation, aspirations, proposals and spirit of the 73 communities that participated in this project. Hopefully, you will benefit from some new ideas that you can use in your town and see how you and **your** organization can help the continued development of our communities. We are including some recommendations at the conclusion of this report and welcome your thoughts, suggestions and any questions you may have.

PRACTICAL VISION OF KANSAS COMMUNITIES

ACHIEVE A SOLID ECONOMIC BASE

A Thriving Retail Trade

- . expanded downtown area
- . filling stations
- . restaurant or cafe
- . motel
- . grocery, drug and shoe stores

Additional Industries

- . processing industry
- . airport
- . improved truck & train lines
- . transportation
- . employment for youth
- . new industry

CREATE AN ATTRACTIVE ENVIRONMENT

In the Downtown Area

- . new signs on stores
- . repaired walks/streets
- . occupied buildings
- . adequate traffic control & parking
- . kept-up stores

In the Residential Area

- . street signs & house numbers
- . trees planted
- . snow and trash removal
- . paved & guttered streets
- . adequate police & fire protection

PROVIDE CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

Recreational Activities

- . picnic areas and parks
- . playground
- . golf course
- . municipal pool
- . recreational activities for all ages

Cultural Possibilities

- . community center
- . expanded library services
- . maintain schools
- . educational & cable TV
- . youth & senior citizen center

DEMONSTRATE COMMUNITY VITALITY

Supported Community Events

- . filled churches
- . working together
- . well attended meetings
- . festivals and celebrations
- . more community wide activities

Visible Signs of Progress

- . more houses
- . younger families
- . continued growth
- . doctor & dentist
- . ambulance service

CHALLENGES FACING KANSAS COMMUNITIES

DEALING WITH GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES

Complying with mandated federal/state regulations

No voice in larger governmental bodies: legislature, county commission

Governmental over control (EPA, OSHA)

Inequitable tax distribution (We send more to Washington or Topeka than we get)

Inflation squeezing local governments

High utility rates

EXHIBITING COMMUNITY PRIDE

Lack of motivation for people to care for their property

Unsightly trash: old cars, building materials, junk, dead trees

Deteriorated downtown area: unpainted, unoccupied and dilapidated buildings, broken sidewalks, etc.

Overgrown vacant lots

Intentional decay to maintain low taxes

PROMOTING LOCAL ADVANTAGES

Negative community image

Poor public stories of the community

Little enthusiasm for the community

Complaisant attitudes

'Few opportunities here'

PROVIDING CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES

High proportion of retired people (30-80%)

Vandalism and public disrespect

Inadequate youth and senior citizen programs and facilities

Too few local recreational facilities

Lack of family unity

People shop and seek entertainment out of town

Drug and alcohol abuse

CHALLENGES FACING KANSAS COMMUNITIES

EXPANDING THE ECONOMIC BASE

Overdependence on agriculture
Low wage rates and farm prices
Housing inadequate, no rental or low cost available
Declining retail trade
Inadequate tax base to fund needed services
No jobs to attract and hold younger people

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

Land not available for building or business
Current plans not communicated
No agreement on community goals
No comprehensive community plan
Unprioritized use of funds
Inadequate communication between citizens and governmental groups

FUNDING NEEDED COMMUNITY SERVICES

Lack of knowledge on existing governmental programs
Many families living on fixed incomes
Town tax base too small
Fear that higher taxes will discourage growth
Inadequate public services: health care, trash removal, public safety, sewer,
water and roads
Discolored, unsafe or inadequate water supplies

STIMULATING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Little or inadequate communication between groups
Poor attendance at public meetings
Too few committed leaders
Lack of support for leaders
The "let George do it" attitude
Concern for individual over community needs

PROPOSALS FOR LOCAL ACTION

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY CONSENSUS

- . Town Meeting forums
- . Quarterly community meetings
- . Candidate's meetings
- . Special project community meetings
- . Suggestion box
- . Public debates on key issues

COMMUNITY PROMOTION CAMPAIGNS

- . Local advertising
- . Welcome wagon
- . Highway signs
- . Brochures on industrial and residential possibilities
- . Hold community promotion days
- . Hire county or city Chamber of Commerce executive

MANAGING SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

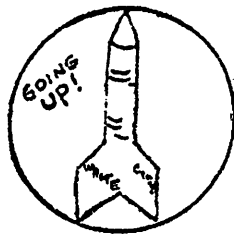
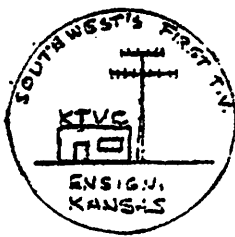
- . Reorganize Chambers of Commerce
- . Establish coordinating groups for projects
- . Institute PRIDE programs
- . Initiate inter-club coordinating groups

EXPANDING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

- . Work with Regional Planning groups
- . Contact FmHA and other agencies for available programs
- . Annex additional land
- . Establish local housing promotion group
- . Research housing in other cities
- . Hold public meetings to give facts to the community
- . Provide local incentives to builders and developers

ATTRACTING ADDITIONAL BUSINESSES

- . Establish industrial development committees
- . Survey existing business and labor force possibilities
- . Provide financial incentives; taxes and loans
- . Work with KDED and Regional Planning
- . Prepare attractive brochures
- . Get community agreement on having industry
- . Issue private bonds for Industrial Development Corporation



PROPOSALS FOR LOCAL ACTION

CELEBRATIONAL EVENTS

- . Homecoming celebration
- . Summer festivals
- . Community talent and fun night
- . Annual celebrations
- . Establish local theatre group
- . Parades (Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Old Timers)
- . Square dance and supper

FINANCING LOCAL IMPROVEMENTS

- . Seek federal funds for water, houses, sewers, etc.
- . Establish youth & senior citizen centers using local facilities and volunteers
- . Expand recreation programs
- . Build miniparks and expand existing park facilities
- . Raise local funds for paint, service station, doctor's building, fire station and hoses

INFLUENCING POLITICAL DECISIONS

- . Hold protest meeting on county tax allocations
- . Confront county attorney and judge on law enforcement practices
- . Support farm strike
- . Unite small towns through Regional Planning organization
- . Write and consult Congressmen

DEMONSTRATING COMMUNITY PRIDE

- . Town clean-up days
- . Revamping the downtown area
- . Paint-up/cleanup campaigns
- . Block clean up parties
- . Paint City Hall
- . Enforce local codes

ENSURING FOLLOW THROUGH

- . Industrial development committee
- . Key needs task force
- . Committee to work with regional planning
- . Park beautification boards
- . Doctor's task force
- . ICC contact group
- . Service station committee
- . Establish housing & recreation committees

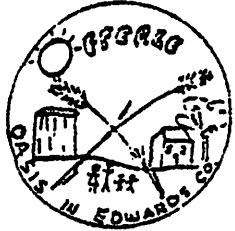
PROVIDING NEEDED INFORMATION

- . Community surveys: housing, buildings, medical care, community needs, competitive prices, local talent
- . Community bulletin board
- . Studies: swimming pool funding, costs of police, water & streets
- . Publish community information sheets
- . Public information campaigns using TV, radio, newspaper & newsletters

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THE TOWN MEETING?



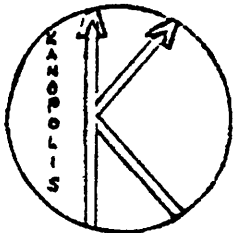
The Chamber of Commerce is in the process of painting the business fronts. (Glen Elder)



Completed tennis courts, still working on railroad and highway problems and held a community clean-up day. (Offerle)



The Lions Club plans to initiate work on the Town Meeting proposals next fall. (Jetmore)



Instituted a community newsletter which has received some positive comments. Held a community clean-up project and applied for a government grant for housing improvement, street improvement, etc. (Kanopolis)



Group is working on a Senior Citizen housing project. (Riley)

High school sponsored a clean-up day. We held two meetings to discuss a HUD grant for water line repair and to get water from Madison. Hired an engineering firm to check feasibility of building our own lake. (Hamilton)



New land has been annexed for future housing and the town industrial survey is to be done soon. The community really got together in setting up an excellent Christmas light display all over town. (Onaga)

WHAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THE TOWN MEETING?

The City has applied for a HUD grant that would improve some of the citizen's suggestions such as the park area, street improvements, etc. (Burden)

The PRIDE committee organized as a result of the Town Meeting is conducting their survey using the newspaper and door-to-door distribution of the questionnaires. (Claflin)

Besides holding a second Town Meeting attended by more than 40 residents, there is an active committee at work on a day care center, a community trade show (Almarama) is being organized, and a PRIDE committee chairperson is being sought. (Alma)

Replanted the ball field and plan a second Town Meeting to involve more people. (Herndon)

People are helping to control loose dogs, a water storage problem has been dealt with by applying for a CD Block Grant. The railroad right of way has been cleared and mowed, and elderly citizens are organizing a Senior Citizens Program. (Galva)

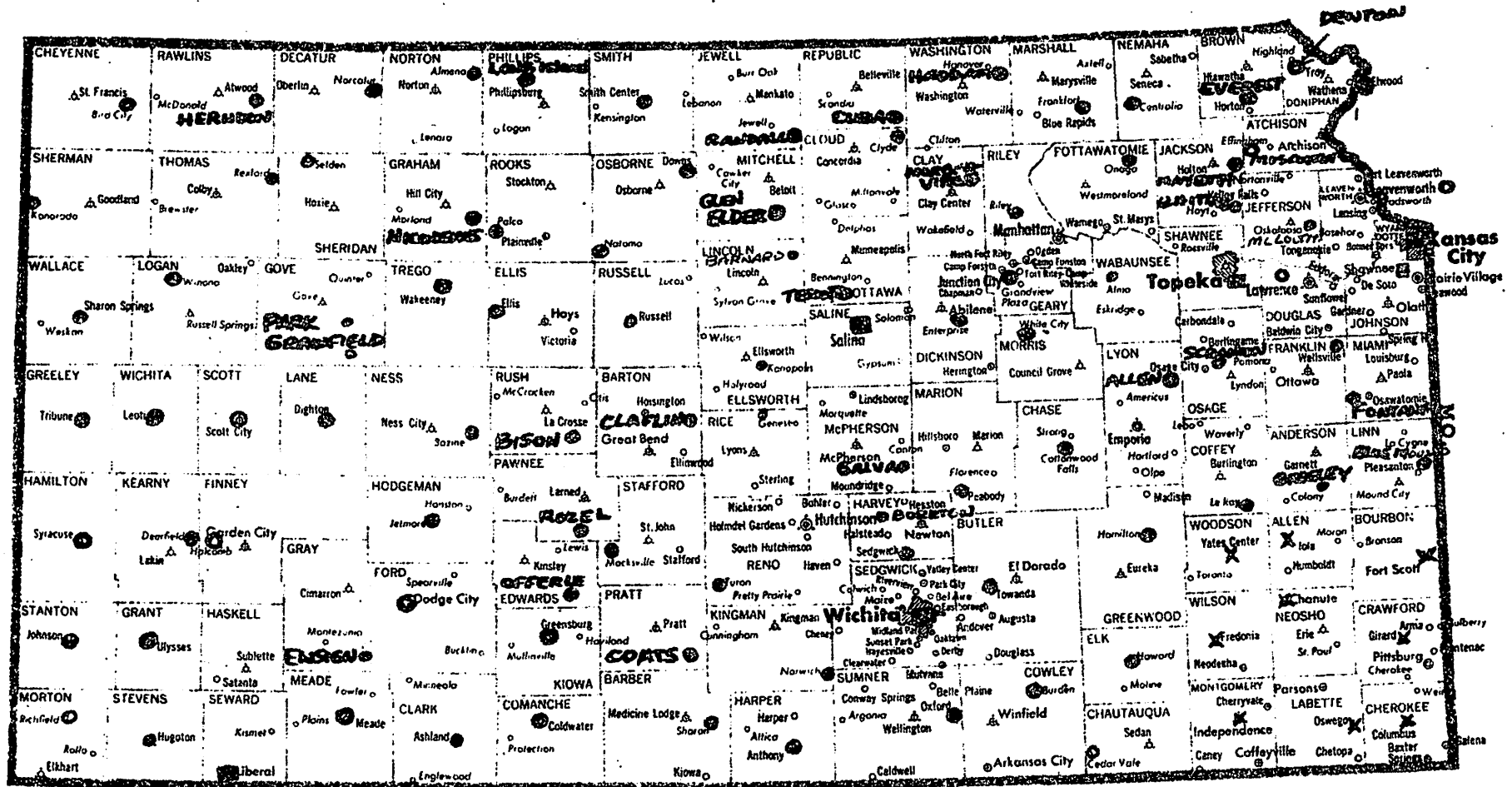
Well into an active PRIDE program, forty three people attended the last committee meeting. (Frankfort)

An expanded summer recreation program is planned. The community walk-a-thon was extremely successful and investigation of the PRIDE program is underway. (Tescott)

Held a second Town Meeting as are planning a third. (Deerfield)

Housing authority and zoning committees have been established and a grant for 30 low income housing units has been approved. Application has been made for a comprehensive housing rehabilitation program. (Downs)

TOWN MEETINGS IN KANSAS 1976-1978



Public Town Meeting

Demonstration Town Meeting

County wide Area Agency
on Aging Consult Workshop

Full day urban Town
Meetings, 1976-1977

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A longer time period for the meetings - two evenings or all day Saturday would be beneficial, so that implementation plans could be made when everyone is together.
2. In communities of over 1,500, organization of a local steering committee before the Town Meeting would help ensure attendance of a significant number of citizens.
3. The use of out of town volunteers to conduct meetings should be continued. Community leaders are free to participate with their peers. Furthermore, the presence of the volunteers and their familiarity with the format minimized personal comments and petty wrangling.
4. It would be helpful for communities to have ways to trade ideas and information on a regular basis. Regional meetings of representatives from cities or a newsletter would do this.

NEXT STEPS FOR TOWN MEETING

Additional Town Meetings

The Town Meeting program will continue across Kansas this fall and winter. Communities can elect to hold 3 hour evening meetings or day long events. In larger communities, formation of a local group or 'ad hoc' committee is recommended to assist with local arrangements.

In selected counties, Town Meetings will be held in each city in the county, followed by a county-wide meeting to consider common challenges and proposals.

Special Consults

Town Meeting is a consensus building and planning workshop and is adaptable to many situations such as:

- . Youth
- . Senior Citizens
- . Chambers of Commerce
- . Clubs and organizations
- . Churches

Town Meetings for groups or with special focus are available on request.