



# Imagine Durant: POLICY MAKERS Dialogue Harvest Report

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Harvest Reporter

Sept. 11, 2015



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## Imagine Durant Policy Makers Dialogue Participants

### **FEDERAL**

**Eddy Dempsey** (Field rep, Congressman Mark Wayne Mullins)

**Amanda Hill** (Field rep, Senator James Lankford)

### **STATE**

**Doug Ishmael** (Department of Human Services)

**Raye Mickle** (Children's Advocacy Director)

### **CITY**

**Jim Dunegan** (Former Durant City Manager)

**Destry Hawthorn** (Durant City Council)

**Tommy Kramer** (Durant Industrial Authority)

**Larry Mincks** (Durant Economic Development Council)

**Sarah Sherrer** (City of Durant)

### **CHOCTAW NATION**

**Sara Jane Smallwood** (Promise Zone)

### **EDUCATION**

**Sean Burrage** (Southeastern Oklahoma State University)

**Jarvis Dobbs** (Colbert Superintendent)

**Kathy Hendrick** (Southeastern Oklahoma State University)

**Duane Meredith** (Durant Superintendent)

### **COMMUNITY**

**Jason Copeland** (Woodman Life)

**Bert Davison** (First United Bank)

**Scott Dewald** (REI Oklahoma)

**Robert Holliday** (OGE)

**Kara Hendrickson** (Imagine Durant)

**Tara Hull** (REI Oklahoma)

**Lenzie Knight** (Theorem)

**Greg Massey** (First United Bank)

**Tiffany Newton** (THECOLOR11)

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**Marilyn Hamilton** (Integral City Team Leader, Integral City Meshworks Inc.)

**Beth Sanders** (Integral City Team, POPULUS Community Planning Inc.)

### **POLICY MAKERS NOT PRESENT**

**Chief Gary Batton** (Choctaw Nation)

**Ron Boyer** (Bryan County Commissioner)

**Josh Brecheen** (Oklahoma Senator)

**TR Kanuch** (Choctaw Nation)

**Kate McDonald** (Silo Superintendent)

**Joyce Northcutt** (Durant ISD School Board)

**Bill Orr** (Durant City Council)

## Surrounded by history, working toward the future

Imagine Durant, a community-based initiative for creating a unified vision and the strategies to implement it, convened a dialogue for Policy Makers on Sept. 11, 2015, to discuss the future of Durant as it relates to economy and community.

Participation in this dialogue was by invitation and included field representatives for state and federal government, state and civic agency leaders, appointed officials from surrounding school districts, and representatives from both the Choctaw Nation and Durant City Council. Other attendees included local community leaders.

The meeting was held at the Choctaw Nation Community Center in Durant. Attendees sat in a circle in the middle of the room, each wall lined with photos of Elders and past Chiefs of the Choctaw Nation.



The Choctaw tribe has a tradition of calling a circle from the four cardinal directions. The four directions encompassed in this circle were represented by the four voices of the city – citizens, business, civil society and civic managers – and formed a container for the dialogue. At the center of the circle was the information held in the reports that came from two previous dialogues with community Thought Leaders and the Public.

**There were also some empty seats in the circle, which led to the question – Who is not here, and who else needs to be here?**

### Intention

The purpose of the dialogue was to provide an opportunity for the Policy Makers in attendance to respond to the hopes and concerns expressed by the 24 Thought Leaders and 39 members of the Public during the dialogues held in April and June 2015.

The dialogue began with an agreement by all to support the ground rules for a successful dialogue:

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

### Introduction

Kara Hendrickson, Executive Director, Imagine Durant, opened the session by welcoming the Policy Makers and introducing Marilyn Hamilton, PhD, Founder and President, Integral City Meshworks, Inc., and lead visioning consultant; Beth Sanders, a Canadian professional city planner and civic meshworker; Sarah Pate, scribe; and Greg Massey, Chair of the Imagine Durant Board.

Greg Massey spoke fondly of Durant and noted the pictures hanging on the walls all the way around the room of the various Chiefs of the Choctaw Nation. He recalled how Imagine Durant began as a result of a conversation between himself and the current Chief of the Choctaw Nation, Gary Batton, about how to grow this community in the right way.

**“Since Imagine Durant started, I’ve never been more engaged in the community in my life. I’ve never been more excited about the community.”**

**Greg Massey, Chair of the Imagine Durant Board**



Because Policy Makers are often put into adversarial conditions, Dr. Hamilton felt it necessary to note the difference between dialogue and debate.

<b>Dialogue</b>	<b>Debate</b>
Work toward common understanding	Two sides oppose to prove the other wrong
Listen to understand	Listen for flaws
Reveal assumptions for re-evaluation	Defend assumptions as truth
Open minded – suspend judgment	Hold tight to certainties
Demonstrate concern for others even when holding different perspectives	More important to hold position than respect feelings or perspectives

### Summary of previous sessions

Dr. Hamilton explained to the policy makers that the people of Durant have expressed concerns around strategic planning as well as social and economic concerns centered around seven major themes (see Appendix A for details):

- Population growth
- Infrastructure
- Community engagement
- Business development and a growing economy
- Jobs
- Housing
- Culture and recreation

Representatives from the Thought Leaders and Public dialogues were asked to speak to the Policy Makers to expand on the ideas that came out of those earlier sessions.

**Tiffany Newton, THECOLOR11**

“Diversity is a blind spot in Durant. People with different backgrounds can give different perspectives. Diversity will increase the cultural understanding of who we are. We can use our differences to work together and make the community better.”

**Lenzie Knight, Theorem**

“We need to use all the things about our community to look forward and progress. People have energy. They are volunteer minded. We have a tendency to go our own way rather than leaning on each other and building upon each other’s work.”

**Sarah Sherrer, City of Durant**

“During this process, I’ve gained a lot of insight into the priorities of the community. What’s really surprising is we’ve all been thinking the same things. This has been good for connecting people.”

Sherrer noted that the City has already been thinking of addressing some of the issues that are important to the community, but those connections between city and community and between community organizations were not there. The City was not aware of what the community wanted, and the community was not aware of what the City was planning.

**Tommy Kramer, Durant Industrial Authority**

“Dialogue is so important, especially in the role of government and community. Listening is more important than your voice. It is critical that we work together as a team.”

**Sara Jane Smallwood, Choctaw Nation**

“People coming here have a misconception of what the community is really like. Durant is really an anomaly when you think about a community this size and what Imagine Durant is doing. Durant is a role model for Southeast Oklahoma.”



### Opening the circle

The Policy Makers were then asked to introduce themselves around the circle.

A common theme brought out during the introductions was how impressed everyone was at how Durant has grown over the years and the efforts made to keep moving forward. Many had left the community at some point during their lives and returned home because they were drawn to a community like Durant and still felt a lot of pride for the area.

**“Positive thinking and a community of people who will pull together – that’s the key to success – a ‘let’s do it’ attitude; making an investment in your own community – not just Durant, but also Bryan County and Southeast Oklahoma.”**

**Jim Dunegan, former Durant City Manager**

### What do you notice about the economy and community of Durant through the eyes of the Thought Leaders and the Public?

Beth Sanders began the discussion by noting that people tend to be deeply attached to the past and what home feels like. According to Sanders, we are also attached to the present and what we want right now. There’s also something pulling at us in the future that doesn’t always get enough attention.

**“Policy is a key tool that helps point us in the direction we want to go.”**



As the conversation moved around the circle, it went from praising Durant for an effort to create teamwork and a desire to see an even brighter future - which was further explored in the workshop following the dialogue and summarized in Appendix B. Policy Makers also reiterated concerns expressed by the community, such as:

- A multitude of jobs to fill and a lack of qualified candidates
- A lack of affordable housing and land to build on
- The number of executives who work in Durant and live in Texas
- Small schools that are not equipped for growth
- A need for long-term planning
- A need for more entertainment for youth and families
- Issues with diversity
- The number of people without a home and children living in shelters
- A lack of emphasis on the globalization of business
- A lack of emphasis on education in specific areas that would have the most long term impact for our community

### **What is the community trying to tell you as Policy Makers?**

One thing that stood out as most important to those in attendance was a lack of strategic planning.

**“We better be careful in managing our future with our community and its growth. We need a strategic plan to continue in a safe manner in protecting our resources. Bryan County is the 11<sup>th</sup> fastest growing population in Oklahoma. We must manage our economy with a plan.”**

**Tommy Kramer, Durant Industrial Authority**

### **How can we call on you as Policy Makers?**

When asked what they could do about the challenges expressed, the conversation bounced between strategic planning and education.

**“Before planning can be effective community wide, we have to look at our organization in the City. We are trying to bring in the best people to fill positions we know we need. We have the same challenge as everyone else for finding employees – for the entire range of jobs**



**available, from top to bottom.”**

**Sarah Sherrer, City of Durant**



Many, if not all, hands raised when asked who has trouble finding qualified employees and most related that to a lack of proper education as well as a teacher shortage.

**“Southeastern is a teaching school, but no one wants to be a teacher. This is a statewide problem.”**

**Sean Burrage, Southeastern Oklahoma State University**

Sarah Jane Smallwood, representing the Choctaw Nation, challenged everyone to take these concerns to the state capitol.

**“The problems in Durant and Bryan County have are the same problems being faced by the state. It takes leaders in the community to have a more active voice at the state capitol. If you’re not there, they don’t always think of you. These challenges will keep damaging our cities and schools if we don’t take the time to drive to the capitol and meet our state legislators.”**

**What is the key theme you heard today?**

Strategic planning seemed to be the topic of the day. All other concerns circled back to the need for a well-thought-out, integrated plan to work toward a common goal.

Dr. Hamilton noted an assumption that we know how to strategically plan, but maybe we don't.

***When asked what our future leaders learned about strategic planning during their time at the local university, the answer was unclear.***

Doug Ishmael, Department of Human Services, talked about the benefit of strategic planning for his organization, something they were asked to do as a result of a federal investigation of the agency.

**Strategic planning has had a huge impact on our organization. The changes we've made in the first two or three years are amazing. The agency is so much better off because of these changes."**

Everyone agreed on the importance of strategic planning and began to question how to better educate the leaders of the community on the process of creating a strategic plan.

### **TORNADO CULTURE**

Lenzie Knight made an observation regarding the local culture as it relates to planning.

**"Some things we plan really well for, like tornadoes. We address what hurts us the most. The majority of us have a tornado shelter because that tornado can kill us. We invest in that, but there are a lot of other things that could really hurt us that are not as obvious."**

### **Assumptions that need evaluation**

The group was asked to name assumptions they have made about the community or this process that might need further evaluation.

**Assumption:** We are utilizing our resources to the best capacity that we can.

**Evaluation:** Some of those resources are right here in our community, and we don't realize it or take advantage of them.

**Assumption:** Because we're so well connected, we are also cross-connected.

**Evaluation:** Some of the connections that take place within the older generation may not ring true for the younger generation.

**Assumption:** All these initiatives are going to work.

**Evaluation:** People around town think: *We've done this before and nothing happened; nothing is going to happen this time.*

**Assumption:** All parts of Durant are involved and engaged in this process.

**Evaluation:** There are probably parts of this community that don't have access or feel like they don't have a voice. How are we reaching them?

**“Getting people involved comes down to trust. This group involves all the ‘who’s who’ of Durant. How do we involve everyone else? What is the community’s perception of us? We need to have open communication about why we are doing these things and how we are doing them.”**

**Destry Hawthorne, Durant City Council**

## Conclusion

Although everyone agreed that the community needs help with strategic planning, most attendees shared a lot of excitement about the possibilities that lie in the future. Hope for further community engagement was expressed from all sectors, and there was a desire to reach out to the people of Durant, not just the community leaders.

Imagine Durant is a long-term visioning process for the community of Durant. It is grassroots in nature and is an integrated, community driven plan. The end goal is that we have a tangible vision, steps for sustainably arriving at that vision, and accountability and transparency for what our local government should be working toward. At the end of the visioning process, we will have a comprehensive plan to put into action.

The next series of dialogues will focus on health and environment, and will again involve community Thought Leaders, the Public and our Policy Makers.

If you would like to become a part of this process, make your voice heard by contacting Imagine Durant directly or engaging with us online:

**Email:** [imaginedurant@gmail.com](mailto:imaginedurant@gmail.com)

**Phone:** 580-380-0743

**[www.imaginedurant.org](http://www.imaginedurant.org)**

[www.facebook.com/ImagineOurDurant](https://www.facebook.com/ImagineOurDurant)  
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## Appendix A: Imagine Durant Convenes Dialogues on Economy & Community

*Imagine Durant* is a community-based initiative for creating a unified vision and the strategies to implement it.



In April and June, 2015, *Imagine Durant* along with the Integral City team convened two dialogues where 24 Thought Leaders and the 39 members of the Public met to explore possibilities for the future of Durant, with a special focus on the Economy and Community.

**The 4 Voices of Durant – Citizens, Civic Managers, Civil Society and Business** valued family, education, and the power of community in exploring these key questions:

- What do we imagine for Durant's future?
- What are your biggest hopes and concerns for the future?
- How are we preparing for resilience?
- What examples can we identify as signs of progress?

Durant imagined the 2065 Economy and Community with overlapping but unified ideas:

1. A healthy environment
2. A diverse, thriving economy
3. A community built around people

**Fears** about Durant's future primarily arose from concerns regarding:

1. **Strategic Planning**
2. **Economic Concerns**
3. **Social Concerns**

**Aspects of Wellbeing** in Durant included: **living, learning, working and relating as a community**. Most people valued a sense of wholeness and belonging. A sense of community and a passion to help others contributed to a strong sense of pride in the community.

**Four scenarios for Durant 2065** revealed: the darkest possible future, the status quo, the ideal future and the view from outside. It was agreed that:

*"Status quo is scarier than the dark side. The dark side has some things that we can't control or help. But status quo, to step back and do nothing and achieve what you can get is just sad."*

**Themes of Hope and Progress**, from both the Thought Leaders and Public Dialogue included:

1. **Population Growth**
  2. **Infrastructure**
  3. **Community Engagement**
  4. **Business Development, Growing Economy**
  5. **Jobs**
  6. **Housing**
  7. **Culture & Recreation**
1. Durant faces the opposite problem of many other communities its size – it has more jobs than qualified applicants to fill them (see below). On the other hand the usual population of Durant (approximately 14,000) can swell to 50,000 on occasions where entertainment events attract people. Such a variation in population size puts critical demands on infrastructure
  2. Balancing the economy with the infrastructural demands is critical for economic success. Water is a major issue and needs to be addressed now in order to meet both current and future economic needs. The whole road system needs a Master Plan. There is a great longing for safe mobility options for biking and walking trails. Questions arose about local transit services and the need for planning sustainably and supporting environmentally-wise practices like recycling.
  3. Public dialogue participants representing thousands of people, supported the attitude of "passing it on" and "paying it forward". People intend that the

benefits and opportunities they have experienced can grow through mentoring others (especially young people).

4. Attracting business to Durant to address the unmet needs of a college town is a strong desire as is the spirit of entrepreneurship to build on assets that Durant already enjoys – such as the university, health facility, airport and casino. Everyone recognizes the value of building a diverse economic base.
5. Available jobs need training programs to match them. Questions exist about helping investors to see Durant's job-force needs and what would inspire them to invest in the opportunities for training and education?
6. Genuine curiosity existed about how to improve housing options through more effective interaction amongst developers, prospective buyers, bankers and the city.
7. People seek opportunities to link university life with arts life and imagine new arts opportunities for film arts, arts festivals, YouTube Channel and arts conference(s) that could feature the Choctaw Nation and distinctive Durant culture.

**Policy Makers** are asked to support strategies that **Develop Citizens, Build Civic Performance and Capacity, Engage Community and Culture and Influence Business Development**. Examples of policies that would offer support include:

1. Creating Small Business Incubators (using high speed internet for global access) for aviation, safety, IT, arts
2. Creating a Jobs Fair for all Industries and invite education institutions to learn job opportunities that need training support.
3. Locating funding for infrastructure and capital projects.
4. Hiring a city planner.
5. Connecting city/county/state policy makers with developers who are building houses.
6. Making city intentions clearer for developers and builders when city has building projects.
7. Wiring the city for high speed internet – city could own the internet service like Nebraska City NB
8. Setting up Durant as a free Wi-Fi City like Ponca OK
9. Creating progressive city transportation codes for independent shuttles/jitney service/ Uber.
10. Adapting /updating Oklahoma regulations for the selling and creation of craft alcohol to help facilitate that creativity in our communities.
11. Exploring and developing adult sports teams in Durant.
12. Supporting and mentoring students seeking volunteer opportunities.
13. Making community engagement fun – e.g. sponsoring *Art of Hosting*
14. Supporting the spread of Community Gardens into brownfield sites, corners, and large private gardens, offered for community gardening to inner city folk.

**Participants concluded** the dialogues by making some very substantial offers to take action themselves. These offers can be summarized in a similar frame as the requests to policy makers – **Supporting Citizen and Leadership Development,**



**Building Civic Management and Engaging Policy Makers, Engaging Community and Culture and Influencing Business**

The *Imagine Durant* visioning process, is a series of nine conversations on Durant's future. Starting in November 2015 a new round will commence on the themes of Health and the Environment. In 2016 the third round will address Education and Culture. As the dialogues proceed, the Vision, Values and Strategic Direction necessary to align Durant's Planning will be documented and shared with the community for ongoing consideration and feedback.

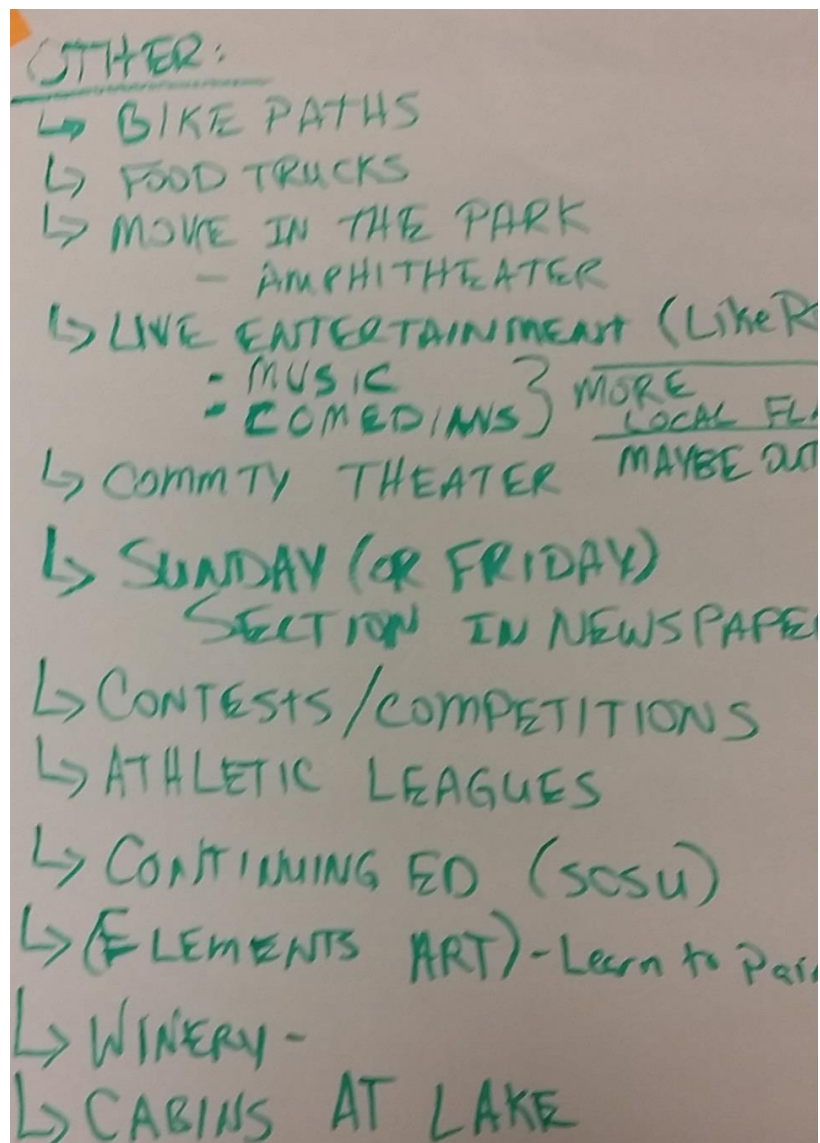
See the full Economy and Community Harvest Reports here:

- [Thought Leaders](#)
- [Public](#)



## Appendix B: Hosting Dreams for Durant

Following the Policy Makers Dialogue, an *Art of Hosting Taste Test* workshop offered community engagement processes for 15 participants to try out while imagining their “wildest” dreams for Durant. Using *World Café* and *Open Space*, working in small groups and teams, some of the key ideas that emerged are presented below. Policy Makers can take these into consideration as they set direction for Durant’s Future.



## Physical Wellness

### Outdoor Venues

Trail system (paved and/or natural)

- Bike/Run/Walk (stroller/pet friendly)
- Safe lights
- Length (loops and mile markers)

### Multi-Purpose

- Community of few to many
- tennis

- Ultimate Frisbee
- Rental (bike/??/??)

### Fitness

- Movement within? Community

### Food Source

- More than one section (Walmart)
- Healthy
- Organic
- Farm to market
- Fresh/local (rural to city)

## Family Quality of Life

### Young

- Children
- Education
- Activities
- Options – schedules
- Spiritual
- Network

### Middle

- Work
- Recreation
- Spiritual
- Network – community
- Health care

- Education
- Investment
- Destination – environment

### Senior

- Health
- Commute
- Support
- Recreation
- Spiritual
- Network

\*McKinney has activities for the whole family

## Children's Activities

### Hands-On Education

- Organized activities
- Better/more daycare options (more than just “daycare”)
- Public schools

### Holiday Kid Activities

- Parades
- Carve pumpkins, hay rides, etc.

### Parks/Open Spaces

- Clean and neat with grass and trees
- Multi-age groups
- Splash parks

### Organized Sports

- Broad selection
- Excellent facilities (clean, good seating)

### Specialized Education Opportunities

- Museum
- Fire station

## The Arts

### Children

- Education quality
- Plays
- Museums
- Music

### Venue for Learning

- Clean
- Structured
- Ability to house multiple cultural events

### Heart of Durant

- Individuals & organizations give their unique gifts to create reality

## Entertainment/Downtown Life

### Entertainment

Young Adults (currently go to Sherman or Dallas)

- Upscale pubs
- Top Golf
- iFly
- Main Event
- Disc Golf
- Window shopping

### Restaurants

- Buffalo Wild Wings
- Chipotle
- Applebees
- Local flavor
- Mini river walk (Bricktown)

### Downtown Life

- Quality apartments
- Walkable

- Farmers Market
- Arts district
- Movie theater

### Other

- Bike paths
- Food trucks
- Movie in the park (amphitheater)
- Live entertainment (music, comedians, more local flavor – maybe outdoor)
- Community theater
- Sunday (or Friday) section in the newspaper
- Contests/competitions
- Athletic leagues
- Continuing education (SOSU)
- Learn to paint at Elements Art
- Winery
- Learning at Lake

## Beautification

### Roads

- Potholes
- Striping
- Sidewalks
- Curbing
- Lights

### Entrances/Gateways

- Appearance

### Business Core

- FUB/CVS – 4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup>

### Parks

- Graffiti
- Maintenance
- Connecting to bike/walk trails

### Neighborhoods

- Rental influence within core
- New developments on fringes
- Community within development

## Housing Communities

- Many small communities to choose from
- HOAs, covenants, etc.
- Sidewalks
- Bike trails
- Community pools
- Entrances
- Roads

## Industry Diversity

- Choctaw
- Cardinal Glass
- Big Lots
- Southeastern Oklahoma State University