

To The Oak Ridger:

What if we who live and work in one of the most unique spots on Earth, otherwise known as Oak Ridge, Tennessee, universally embraced The Oak Ridger's current marketing slogan, "Community Unity ... building a better future" and started systematically putting it into practice in our daily lives?

What if we could find ways to harness and integrate the tremendous momentum that supported each side of the bond referendum issue and subsequent promotion of various future options, to devise a community development plan that would achieve near-unanimous support as a beneficial initiative for the entire Oak Ridge community?

Regardless of how we voted on the bond referendum or what development paths we think Oak Ridge should pursue, we are all here together in an exceptional community with countless opportunities to create a future which utilizes the best of our ability and available resources.

The primary intent of this letter is to inspire creative thinking and action related to collectively building a better future for Oak Ridgers and the people whose lives we touch.

My prayer is that the following ideas will help at least one, if not many individuals and organizations succeed in their efforts to improve the well-being of our community.

This letter will address "the power of community unity" and the concept of an Oak Ridge Community Development Laboratory. Subsequent letters will introduce ideas, questions and perspectives related to potential Centers of Excellence within the Oak Ridge Community Development Laboratory.

The Power of Community Unity

With respect to making decisions and choosing paths of action in complex environments, there may be no such thing as "the right decisions" disassociated from the way in which people make and respond to those decisions.

Ultimately, the "rightness" of our Aug. 1 and future community development decisions is likely to depend more on the degree of unity with which we create our future, in the context of those decisions, than the decisions themselves.

If we choose to collectively support a vision and plan for the development of our community which turns out to have some significant deficiencies, we will have tremendous momentum to figure out how to overcome those deficiencies.

If, however, we are unable to achieve unity in support for a comprehensive community plan which then fails, how will we ever know whether it failed because it was a bad idea, or because it was sabotaged by lack of support or worse.

This call for unity is not a call for uniformity in our collective thinking about our community development. Rather, it proposes that the process of establishing unity in diversity, with respect and consideration for minority views, is ultimately the most cost-effective, efficient and enjoyable means for getting things done in a way that will benefit the entire Oak Ridge community.

Oak Ridge Community Development Laboratory and Potential Centers of Excellence

A dynamic community of 27,000 people, in a region of exceptional natural beauty, resources and temperate climate, with a premier national laboratory is no small point of distinction.

What if we were to draw on the community-minded leadership of the Oak Ridge National Lab, as well as our

numerous residents with laboratory experience and/or community development interests, to build a model community development laboratory?

Most cities in the world were built before we were able to see the oneness of our world from outer space, or simultaneously consult with multiple friends or customers throughout the world, via Internet video conferencing, as if they were in the same room.

Our world has changed significantly in just a few years, and yet we still take a relatively traditional approach to much of our community development.

Developing our community within the context of a community development laboratory is the type of initiative that every interested individual, organization and institution in Oak Ridge could participate in.

And just where would the resources come from for such an initiative?

When we Oak Ridgers become convinced that our ideas and perspectives are welcome and see ways in which we can have a positive influence in the development of our community, our "sweat equity" and dollars will follow.

Also, with broad-based, public/private/government partnerships, viable plans for building innovative community development models to overcome some of the most challenging obstacles to sustainable community development, and practical strategies for replicating these models in other communities, we will also be able to attract external funding.

There are many areas in which we have exceptional capacity to build Centers of Excellence associated with an Oak Ridge Community Development Laboratory, including the following:

Community learning and resource development.

Community knowledge integration and utilization.

Personal, organizational and public accountability systems.

Sustainable community visioning.

Digital downtown development and virtual community prototyping.

Community-oriented social and economic development.

Emergency preparedness, avoidance and response systems.

Peace resource integration, development and application.

Over the next few weeks, specific ideas, questions and perspectives related to these potential Centers of Excellence will be submitted, the intent being to at least foster discussion, if not inspire champions to facilitate consultation and action which will turn some of these ideas into reality.

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Oak Ridge

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