



**2003 Final Report  
Topeka to Oklahoma City  
Inter-City Visit  
September 25-26, 2003**

*Today. Tomorrow. Topeka.*



**Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce  
Inter-City Visit  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
September 25-26, 2003**

The Greater Topeka Chamber of Commerce held its second annual Inter-City Visit to Oklahoma City with 49 community leaders making the trip. Although Oklahoma City (OKC) is over 3.5 times as large as Topeka, it was determined that OKC had achieved much success in a rapid period of time with similar issues Topeka is facing in its effort to catch-up with the growth that other communities experienced in the last decade.

Oklahoma City is located in the central part of the country, like Topeka. They are the capital city of Oklahoma and are at the cross road of major highways. Their per capita income is \$19,414 which is similar to Topeka's \$19,264 and their workforce is similar in nature. They are experiencing over double the growth in population at 6.9% compared to 3.19% population growth here in Topeka.

Oklahoma City was ranked in Expansion Management at the #4 most desirable city to expand or relocate a business. They have been ranked #18 among U.S. cities in the 2003 Forbes "*Best Places for Businesses and Careers*" and #3 in the "*Cost of Doing Business*" category. OKC has been listed in Places Rated Almanac as one of the "*Best Places to Live in North America.*"

The 2003 Inter-City Visit focused on economic development, downtown redevelopment and private investment in the downtown area, business and government partnerships for economic growth, use of Urban Renewal, CDBG funds, Tax Increment Financing and federal funds for economic growth, tourism growth by leveraging a national monument and riverfront development.

An over-riding message that weaved throughout all the presentations was the need for a strong community vision supported by unwavering elected officials and the business community. The strength of leadership's unified resolve excited OKC citizens and has kept them focused on bettering Oklahoma City. This vision came from the depths of crisis in their economy and a loss of self-worth within the community. The public and private sector committed to traveling the road to success arm in arm, with a harmonious voice and a cooperative spirit. OKC's leadership was committed to bringing the city out of its depression and to the forefront of major cities across the nation.



The messages heard by the Topeka delegation were the following:

- Create a community vision.
- Encourage and seek out consensus throughout the community.
- Strong, positive committed leadership is critical to success.
- A city must have a focal point, a strong vibrant, fun downtown.
- Foster the excitement of the public to further goals.
- Community decision-making is successful only when it's inclusive.
- The public is willing to invest in quality public/private projects when there is trust.

**GREATER TOPEKA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
**INTER-CITY VISIT TO OKLAHOMA CITY**  
**September 25-26, 2003**  
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## Current Economic Development Activities in Oklahoma City

The Topeka delegation began with an introduction to OKC by talking about their chamber's role in the city's growth. The chamber's economic development mission includes fostering entrepreneurship, business retention and expansion, promoting and assisting with domestic and international trade, research and marketing, and focusing on development of the OKC downtown area.

The City of Oklahoma City contracts with the chamber to provide economic development services. They believe this arrangement enhances the public/private partnership and allows for the right people to be "at the table" when information must be provided and decisions made. The comment noted was "*the public and private sector must be joined at the hip to have a successful economic development program; in OKC we are joined at the soul.*"

One of the challenges OKC is working on is to bring their universities into their economic development partnership. They believe it is critical to their continued economic growth and the community's future. The governor of Oklahoma is also pushing this agenda. The universities' involvement is focused on applied research and commercialization of that research. The chamber has worked with the universities to tap sources of federal grants to assist with the growth of bio-science research which has led to the development of their Bio-Science Research and Development Park at the edge of their downtown area.

The OKC chamber came to the realization that another important component for the success of economic growth is regionalization. They began by researching the commuter patterns of persons within their MSA traveling to and from the work place. From that information they extrapolated income exchange information for each county. This information demonstrated the importance of regional cooperation and common goals to ensure the growth of jobs and income for Oklahoma City and the entire region.

The Greater Oklahoma City Partnership was created to focus on the creation of an economic development service delivery system for the region. They are in the process of reducing barriers to growth such as minimizing the limiting effects of defined governmental boundaries and enhancing the systems for disbursement of resources without the limitation of these defined boundaries.

The Partnership has discovered there is tremendous power in regional partnering. They have worked to define the "actual" economic region using access to market and supplier's information instead of governmental boundaries. They have brought all the stakeholders within the region together with a signed agreement to work together on economic development issues and raise the level of service to businesses in the region by developing a chain of services at the state, regional and local levels. The links of the chain must be strong at each level or the plan will not work. The region is working to find agreement on funding without creating a new organization. Regional partnerships are fragile and must be nurtured. Individual governing bodies must move past the competitive issues; the intent of the partnership is making the pie bigger. It is a challenge to stay focused with the changes in elected officials but the concept of regionalism will prevail if it is engrained within all local governments and the state.

Emphasized throughout this presentation was the necessity that both public and private entities must agree on the goals and the actions it takes to achieve the goals. *“What really matters are the attitudes of the people . . . the leadership of the community makes the community great . . . it’s the excitement.”*

### **Funding Process for Economic Development in OKC**

The Topeka delegation was presented a capsule view of the funding process utilized for industrial and economic growth in Oklahoma City over the last 50 years. This historical perspective of public/private partnerships set the stage for the OKC that is succeeding today.

In the 1940’s a foundation purchased property for three airports including one to attract military investment; Tinker Air Force Base is still in existence today. The foundation was funded through private contributions, bank loans and city bond issues. Today the presence of Tinker Air Force Base and the surrounding airports is an integral component of the city’s economy.



Over the course of the next 50 years, OKC developed three industrial parks and built 12 industrial plants utilizing the sale of common stock. They continued to purchase land for industrial sites through the creation of revolving loan funds. They utilized Industrial Revenue Bonds, continued to raise private capital contributions and created many trusts to process public and private dollars to maximize revenue thereby bringing about industrial and business growth.

### **The Latest Decade of Economic Development Funding and Marketing**

In the late ‘80’s and early ‘90’s OKC experienced a series of failed bond issue elections for education funding. In ’91-’92 the community approved a \$125 million tax increase to lure the United Airlines Company to OKC by providing the best financial package available to the company from a group of communities vying for location of United. United chose to locate elsewhere because they believed their employees would not like living in Oklahoma City. This blow to the community followed the “bust” in the oil industry in 1990 which devastated the entire state. The city suffered from a lack of direction and an image problem.

The OKC community clearly received a “wake-up call” that they must do something to make the city more exciting and appealing in order to facilitate economic growth.

After studying other successful cities, a common thread emerged. Successful cities established a visionary project, a huge project that took a number of years to complete. It became evident that Oklahoma City must invest in itself. Between 1990 and 1992 the idea of the Metropolitan Area Projects (MAPS) was discussed, nurtured and created. MAPS’ intent was to create and transform Oklahoma City’s entertainment, cultural, sports and convention offerings. City leaders recognized this vision and the corresponding projects as crucial to the future of Oklahoma City. In 1993, the OKC citizens passed a 5-year, one-cent sales tax to fund the most comprehensive and aggressive downtown revitalization program ever undertaken in the U.S.

MAPS is a \$330 million revitalization package comprised of nine cultural, educational, entertainment, sports and recreational projects:

- **SBC Bricktown Ballpark** – 12,000 seat ballpark, project cost \$32.4 million, opened in 1998



- **Oklahoma State Fairgrounds Improvements** – new livestock show facility and horse barns, renovation of the arena, project cost \$14 million, opened in 1998



- **Bricktown Canal & Entertainment District** – canal links downtown Bricktown entertainment district and the river, project cost \$23.1 million, opened in 1998



- **Cox Convention Center expansion** – added more than 100,000 sq. ft. of convention space, project cost \$63.1 million, opened 1999



- **Trolley System** – 9 vintage trolleys were purchased to serve the downtown and surrounding area, project cost of \$5.3 million, started in 1999



- **Library/Learning Center** – multi-level facility that will include business information center, classrooms, and meeting space, project cost \$20.5 million, near completion

- **North Canadian Riverfront** – A seven mile section of river with a series of dams and locks in place, landscaping and trails complete; river will connect with Bricktown Canal for boat access, the shores will be available for private development, project cost \$34.5 million, near completion



- **Civic Center Music Hall** – renovated old civic center to state-of-the-art music facility, project costs \$52.4 million, opened in 2001



- **Ford Center Arena**– 20,000 seat arena for sporting events, concerts, shows and exhibits, project cost \$86.7 million, opened in 2002

The campaign to pass the MAPS sales tax increase was carried on by the OKC chamber. Since that first campaign, they have become the “go to” organization that successfully runs issue elections. The city also, since that time, has entered into an agreement to provide \$325,000 yearly to the chamber to handle economic development. This agreement has been a cornerstone in the public/private partnership between city government and the business community.

At about the same time the MAPS program was beginning, the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce developed a task force to address the need for a long-term vision for economic development for OKC. They developed a 5-year plan to position OKC as a premier location for growth. In 1995, the chamber launched a \$10 million fundraising effort called Forward Oklahoma City I. The goals they determined were:



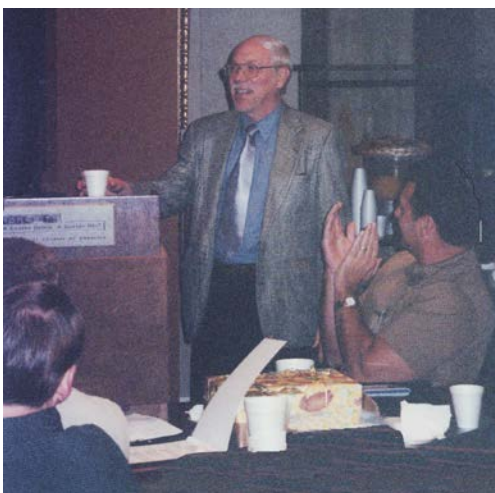
- Aggressively market OKC to the world
- Promote a pro-business environment and seek passage of Right to Work
- Expand existing businesses
- Develop infrastructure for technology commercialization and growth
- Expand international trade and seek foreign investment
- Promote private sector development with MAPS
- Expand the role of Tinker Air Force Base

They have since embarked on a second private sector fundraising campaign called Forward Oklahoma City II. Additionally, the city in collaboration with several Native American Tribes is working to develop a Native American Cultural Center on the banks of the river to celebrate the city's upcoming centennial. It is a \$180 million project of which the first \$70 million phase is underway.

After these presentations the Topeka delegation was given a tour of the projects in the downtown area that resulted from the MAPS program and the subsequent \$83 million in private development that has been spurred by the public investment and which continues to expand. The MAPS funding, the private investment and the \$52.5 million federal dollars for bomb recovery in their downtown has created a \$1 billion Renaissance for OKC. The tour culminated with a visit to the Oklahoma City Museum of Art which is a recently opened \$40 million privately-funded project in the heart of the downtown.



### **The Participation of the Business Community in OKC's Growth and Success**



An example of Oklahoma City's strong leadership was unmistakable when the Topeka delegation heard from the Chairman of the chamber and the Mayor. These two powerhouses portrayed the synergism created when local government and the business community work together. They attributed OKC's entire transformation and success to cooperation, hard work and trust. Individually they expounded on the importance of embracing diversity within the community and bringing all the community-interest groups to the table. The message was clear that times have changed and no longer can decisions affecting the community be made without being inclusive.

The Mayor listed the following:

### ***Ingredients for Change:***

1. There must be a pressing need for change to create the willingness to “pay any price” to fix the problem.
2. Local leaders must place political capital on the line; it takes strong leaders to support a big vision.
3. There must be unity between the mayor and council, between government and business and civic groups.
4. Provide something for everyone, don't throw away money, but be sure to include projects that appeal to everyone.
5. Invest in projects that provide spin-off growth, OKC has invested public dollars in private development in order to spur new growth.

### ***Lessons Learned***

1. Deal with the greatest need in your customer's eyes.
2. Be conservative in what you promise, in budgets, and timelines.
3. Deliver what you promise; there is an innate distrust in government's ability to deliver.
4. People are willing to pay for quality; the voters will buy an intelligent plan.
5. Turning a city around takes time; it has been 10 years for OKC. Keep pressing forward; keep looking to the future.
6. People are willing to pay for projects if they trust.

Oklahoma City's success was also fostered through a commitment by the state and legislative leaders to partner with their city and business community. The point was made that there is strength in local and state advocacy and the business community must be the vanguard of the economy. The legislature must understand the needs of the business community and the business community must work to elect pro-economic development leaders.

### **Oklahoma City's Growth and Annexation**

Oklahoma City encompasses 620 square miles; 82% of the county is incorporated, most of which is OKC. Oklahoma City has a city manager form of government. Much of the city manager's time is spent fostering relationships between the council and the mayor. There is a strong belief held by council members that the council must move forward in the same direction. When disagreement does exist, they vote and move on – issues do not become personal. When the MAPS projects were being developed, the Mayor and chamber leadership worked together to solicit input from the entire community. Including multiple projects in their MAPS plan helped create the successful votes; there was something in the plan for everyone to cast a positive vote for. There was a tremendous focus on communications with the community which actually caused some impatience by the public. Once the projects actually began to be built, the public's excitement was sparked.

There has been no annexation since the early 60's. In 1958, OKC comprised 60 sq. miles, city leaders began seeing the growth of the suburbs so in 1958-1962, 560 sq. miles was annexed to the city. About half of the area is urbanized while the rest is being managed. As the city extends

infrastructure they see development follow that infrastructure. The biggest issue at this time is providing fire safety throughout the city. Oklahoma City has been such a “boom or bust” community that the city’s philosophy has been, if opportunity exists for development – “get it done.” Today, however, they have become more concerned about growing with quality.

They do not turn projects down, but do defer projects in order to negotiate with developers to enhance the quality of the projects.

With the Chamber’s emphasis on downtown development, OKC’s downtown has become a location people desire to be in. There has been new investment in housing, restoration, and museums. Museums have been a big draw to the downtown area which was unanticipated. The emphasis now is to foster the needs of “highly creative people” which will help draw high tech businesses, keep college graduates from leaving the area, and increase visitors in the downtown area. The biggest obstacle has been communication.

A strategic plan to address downtown communication issues was developed. City hall, the chamber, Downtown OKC, Inc. and others came together and created one entity which meets weekly to go over issues affecting the downtown area. Once those meetings are over, each agency’s staff is activated to address the issues at hand. They have found this to be an effective means to decisively move in one direction. An example was given of a local hospital that had decided to move out of the downtown area to a suburban location. The downtown group met and subsequently completed tasks to resolve the hospital’s issues with their downtown location. It is believed the ultimate decision by the hospital will be to remain in the downtown area.

### **Utilization of Federal Funding**

The Oklahoma City’s Planning Department has raised the level of assembling federal dollars to an art. The Planning Department receives approximately \$35 million in federal grants and appropriations yearly.

#### **Entitlement Grant Funding:**

- Community Development Block Grant \$6,514,000
- Home Investment Partnership \$3,284,389
- Emergency Shelter Grant \$220,000
- Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS \$461,000

#### **Competitive Grant Funding:**

- Section 108 Loan Guarantees
- Brownfields Economic Development Initiative
- Economic Development Initiative
- Economic Development Administration
- Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community
- Continuum of Care
- Safe Neighborhoods/Drug Elimination
- Youth Build
- Department of Transportation TEA21
- EPA Superfund Innovations Grant

- EPA Brownfields Grants
- Urban Forestry Grants
- Historic Preservation/Certified Local Governments

John Dugan, the OKC Planning Director, who formerly was the Topeka Planning Director, explained that Topeka would also qualify for many of those federal programs and should attempt to capture additional federal dollars. The OKC Planning Department has staff who exclusively works to bring federal dollars and grants to the community. The citizens of OKC understand they are getting tax dollars back into the community that they invested through payment of their federal taxes. The city is also careful not to use any tax dollars to compete with the private sector.

Oklahoma's Constitution was recently changed to allow for Tax Increment Financing (TIF). Although it has not been used often, this is a financing tool for redevelopment that has been successful. Property tax abatements are not used in Oklahoma; within their tax structure they have relatively low property taxes. Property taxes are primarily reserved for state and education funding.

Advice was given to the Topeka delegation to not stop the growth of water and sewer service at the city's border; utilities are critical for future growth. Further expressed, was that Topeka has a wonderful downtown. The perception that it is a "dangerous place" needs to be changed and the creation of entertainment venues in the downtown area are critical to the downtown thriving. Downtown Topeka will not be the center of retail as it once was. It is time for the community to look to new concepts, such as: emphasizing service retail which enhances the office development in the downtown area, encouraging specialty retail, developing entertainment opportunities for locals and tourists. Highway access near downtown Topeka is an asset that should be used to help pull people from the highway to visit the downtown area. Annexation in Topeka should move to the point that annexation is completed prior to building homes or businesses; annexing areas after construction can be very contentious.

In OKC there are 229 neighborhood groups. They are defined as stakeholders and are involved in decision-making as much as possible. They are sent notices of every zoning issue in their specific neighborhoods. They have become team players in the partnership and there are very few battles between neighborhoods and the city.

Oklahoma City primarily utilizes bonds for building new infrastructure. There are no impact fees. When developing new areas, agreement is reached with developers to provide land to the city for infrastructure development. The city also utilizes a number of trusts and user fees.

Oklahoma City recognized early the importance of Tinker Air Force Base to the city. They have worked with the military and the county to retain the 25,000 jobs associated with the Base. That has included a partnership to expand the size of the base. The city donated the land, the county utilized their bonding authority for building a new facility and the private sector built the building which the military leases to pay off the bonds.

Urban Renewal has been an effective tool in the revitalization of the downtown area. Much of the area for the Bio-Medical Research Park was acquired and cleared by the Urban Renewal program. It was also utilized in the downtown central business district and in a residential area. Although the re-building was slow to develop after the 60's when Urban Renewal was first

instituted, it was a significant tool for acquiring land for the MAPS projects. It also was used in reclaiming the Deep Dence area.

Deep Dence was once the center of African-American commerce and a jazz district in the '20's and '30's but had become run-down and vacant in the '60's. The area is now a premier urban housing district bordering Bricktown, retaining its strong cultural and historical roots. Automobile Alley is another district bordering the central business district that once was the home of 52 car dealerships. Although much of the area was vacant at the time of the OKC bombing, most of the buildings were damaged and several were destroyed. Seven million federal dollars were pumped into the area for recovery and another \$35 million of private sector investment has brought this area back. There are still car dealerships, but the area has become a center for banking and high-tech companies.

Garnering public support for major condemnations has not been difficult in OKC. The relationships that have been developed with the neighborhood groups have facilitated that cooperation. Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) dollars have been utilized in OKC to assist with major projects to revitalize blighted areas. CDBG funds have been used to purchase property, provide relocation expenses, site preparation, and provide assistance with costs associated with acquiring furniture, fixtures and equipment for major projects. The political courage of the city council is important to utilizing CDBG funds for major projects; there appears to be a never-ending supply of courage exhibited by the leadership of both the public and private sector in OKC.

### **Tourism and the National Monument**

Oklahoma City Convention and Visitors Bureau received \$2.6 million in funding which is 100% of the 2% transient guest tax. The MAPS projects have provided a new product to sell and they are seeing results with a 13% increase in inquiries. Additionally, they are experiencing growth in hotel rooms being built in the downtown area. It was stressed to the Topeka delegation the local quality of life and tourism run parallel. The ability to draw travelers to OKC has necessitated a new marketing strategy; their focus in marketing has become stronger in tourism than marketing for conventions.

The Oklahoma City National Monument was developed with the guidance of a 350 member task force. The community has struggled with its image after the bombing and they recognized the importance of how they handled their response. Once the monument was developed they have had to deal with a segment of the community who wish it wasn't there and those who feel the community is profiting from the tragedy. They have struggled with how to address those issues.

In their research, officials from the national site have found almost 100% of their visitors are from outside Oklahoma City and 80% of those are from outside the state. Their marketing efforts are to reach outside of the state. They work with the OKC CVB and the state tourism to promote the site along with other attractions in the community. The advice given was to preserve even when the community does not recognize the importance of the monument in the midst of acclaim outside the community.

## Riverfront Development

The North Canadian River runs through the city. It was rechannelled by the Corps of Engineers in the '50's, after problems with flooding, causing the riverbed to virtually dry up. The MAPS project provided \$40 million in funding to damn the river in three locations and install locks so the river is still navigable, resulting in a seven mile stretch of an attractive river of water traveling through the city. The MAPS project has also funded a series of 15 trails along the banks and landscaped the shores with 5,000 trees, with another 7,000 trees scheduled to be planted. Plans are underway to place boats on the river that can travel from the airport to the downtown area and connect with the Bricktown Canal.

As in Topeka, the concept of developing the river had been discussed and many studies completed since the '60's. In the '90's a Riverfront Authority was created to focus only on the issue of river development. A trust was developed and the trust took responsibility and control of all the city-owned land near the river through a master lease. The trust receives funds from sand mining, land leases, and agricultural, oil and gas activities. The revenues from these operations allowed the members of the Authority to work with consultants to develop a master plan for the river. When the MAPS program came along they were ready with their plan to make the concept a reality.

The next phase of riverfront development is private investment along the 7-mile stretch. There will be a large area of open park space but the plan includes shoreline development of restaurants, specialty retail and residential. The plan also includes mixed used development behind the park.

The Corps of Engineers participated financially and in the decision-making process of the re-design of the river. There are upstream damns and the channel itself was designed to carry water in the event of a 100 year flood. The Corps agreed to working with the River Authority as long as proposed changes would not cause flooding. There are Water Quality Agencies who are also becoming involved and it is believed they will bring additional federal dollars to the project.

The Riverfront project will be anchored on the west with the airport and 5,000 hotel rooms and anchored on the east with the new \$180 million Native American Cultural Center that is under construction. Insight passed on to the Topeka delegation was *“adding a water feature enhances the value of any public property and is a relatively inexpensive way to add value.”* The advice was *“don't overcome the naysayers, just outlive them.”*

## **Topeka Delegation Findings**

- There is a resounding need to come together to form a community vision. There are individual visions but not an agreed upon community vision. It is important to bring groups together to create that vision.
- Federal dollars should be utilized wherever possible in Topeka/Shawnee County.
- Blending projects together; such as OKC did with MAPS, provides a great opportunity for success; the Topeka community needs to look at local projects, prioritize and determine if people are willing to pay for them.
- Tax Increment Financing is a tool that should be utilized more in Topeka.
- Integrating higher education into an economic development program is important. It can be important to the goal of encouraging graduates to stay in Topeka.
- It may be logical to package the Topeka Blvd. Bridge with other projects to get it rebuilt.
- Riverfront development has happened all over the country utilizing Riverfront Authorities. This type of development usually leverages private development such as restaurants, museums, retail, etc.
- Topeka should pursue riverfront development and look into the possibility of creating canals.
- The city may need to dedicate resources to have a professional grant-writer on staff.
- Marketing is critical to the success of the projects.
- There needs to be an emphasis on quality in the projects that Topeka undertakes.
- Topeka needs to invest in developing quality of life projects that are in close proximity to each other; the synergy will cause further development.
- Once a plan is developed, the community must stick to the plan.
- Projects must make a big difference – impact the community; little projects won't achieve the goal of changing Topeka.
- The city must continue to work on improving self-image.
- A gateway into the community is important as is a quality way-finding system.

## **Topeka Delegation Observations**

- The Inter-City Visit experience was very rewarding; this experience builds a Topeka team.
- It's important not to lose the momentum; time is critical to creating action.
- The Inter-City Visit brings people from throughout the community together, from both sides of the river; it is important to continue to work together to accomplish goals.
- Focused, passionate people make things happen.
- OKC's political leaders are passionate for the community; involvement in politics pays off.
- The river provides opportunities although these are obstacles to overcome.
- The Corps of Engineers are currently doing a study of the Topeka levee scheduled to be completed in 2005.
- There is a developer that is interested in developing a casino on the north side of the river using a railroad theme.
- Topeka has a unique opportunity next year with the opening of the Great Overland Station, Brown v. Board site, and the city's 150 years birthday celebration.

- Topeka has reached the “pain-point” that is many times needed to create change; that came when the decision was made to raise tax dollars for economic development. The issue now is to build on that success and create an attitude that no problem is too big.
- We have been playing not to lose; now it is time to play to win.
- It is important to keep the “creation of jobs” as a focus of any project.
- The OKC business community is involved in supporting candidates for local office; we need to think about doing that.
- Emotions and relationships drive activity.
- Topeka has a need to beautify the highway corridor into the downtown area; it will help to create a positive attitude about the perceptions of the community.