Otwell on Its Way to Getting a Sanitary Sewer

Janet Ayres Weitz
COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT IDEAS

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by Janet Ayres Weitz, Community Improvement Specialist

The Indiana Cooperative Extension Service Community Improvement Program offers help to citizens of small Indiana towns in addressing the questions they have in regard to community concerns. This service is explained in EC-552 of the same name and is available at no charge to Indiana residents by ordering from: Publications Mailing Room, 301 South 2nd Street, Lafayette, IN 47905. Such was the procedure followed by Haubstadt in obtaining the library and other improvements discussed in this publication.

Facts About the Community
County: Northeast Pike County
Location: 9 miles southeast of Petersburg on State Road 257
Population: Approximately 500
Unincorporated

Introduction
The program in Otwell began when Linda Blackwell, Resource Developer from Vincennes University, surveyed the senior citizens in Otwell to determine who they felt were the community leaders. In other words, who in the community did they look to for making community decisions? Approximately fifteen persons were named. These identified “leaders” were then asked to come to a meeting where several community concerns were discussed. It was decided that the next step would be a survey of all the residents in order to determine what they felt were community needs.

Citizen's Attitude Survey
A survey committee was formed of three individuals to construct the questionnaire. The survey was very broad, covering issues on medical care, housing, recreation, public services and facilities, shopping, and many others.

In November, 1979, the survey was taken door-to-door by 18 senior citizens who volunteered their time. The questionnaire was collected the following day. To insure confidentiality, the surveys were sealed in envelopes by the respondents. Of the 161 households contacted, 139 surveys were returned (86%). However, only 127 were usable, thus giving a 78% usable response rate.

In February, 1980, the results were presented to the community leaders and the Jefferson Township Ruritan Club. Written copies of the results were made available to everyone. Three issues emerged from the survey: the need for more housing, industry, and a laundromat.

Alternatives Studied
After the survey results were presented to the Ruritan Club, the leadership group met and Bill Beach presented alternative ways to meet the needs. The group decided to explore the possibilities of incorporation. Pat O'Rourke, Extension Economist from Purdue, was asked to develop this alternative and gave a presentation at a community meeting on the costs and benefits of incorporation. The citizens felt this was not a feasible alternative. A committee was formed to study other alternatives. Bill Beach presented the information on the formation of a Sewer District. After learning the procedure, it was found that $500 was needed up-front to do an engineering feasibility study. Joe Gray, a farmer and past president of the Ruritan Club, approached the organization about the needed funds. They voted to donate the $500. Meanwhile, a local attorney drew up the necessary petition. A town meeting was again held to determine whether or not the citizens felt this alternative should be pursued. Fifty persons attended the meeting and over thirty signatures of land owners were obtained.
that evening in support of this alternative. Later, the senior citizens took the petition door-to-door to obtain a total of 100 out of 141 free-holding land owners in the community. The petition is now in the hands of the Indiana State Stream Pollution Control Board. Otwell is now well on its way to forming a Sewer District and solving its sanitary sewer problem.

Summary
A significant aspect of the Otwell program was the way in which the leaders took the steps to identify community concerns and analyze the alternatives, then went back to the citizens for the evaluations and decisions at each step.

Instrumental in the leadership of the community were Joe Gray, a local farmer, and Elmer Buchta, Jr., President, Elmer Buchta Trucking Company.

Additional information regarding the Community Improvement Program and the results of the Otwell survey are available through: Janet Ayres Weitz, 612 Krannert Building, Agricultural Economics Department, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, 317/494-4232.