Final Report
Community Reconsidered Conversation – Extension’s Role in Communities
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Community Reconsidered – Extension’s Role in Communities

Conversation Report.

Fayette County, Ohio

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Foreword:

Extension Reconsidered (as it is known at the national level) is an Imagining America initiative that engages diverse group of participants in constructive and critical deliberation about the future of the land-grant system’s Cooperative Extension programs. The initiative challenges groups from across the nation to reconsider the past and imagine alternative futures for extension and outreach that is unique to land-grant institutions. Land-Grant institutions have resonance and relevance across the whole of American higher education.

The Community Reconsidered Conversation (The Ohio State University version of Extension Reconsidered) in Fayette County was designed to bring the youth together to reflect and deliberate on issues of the community and their relevance for Extension service. It was also an opportunity to evaluate the value of Extension and its potential to renew and strengthen the community and its civic culture.

Fayette County was selected to participate in The Ohio State University (OSU) Extension’s Community Reconsidered Conversation when its application was accepted. A team of four people consisting of an extension educator, two young individuals between the ages of 14 and 19 and 19 and 24 respectively and an adult mentor came together to complete the application after receiving notice of invitation.

http://osucares.osu.edu/extension-reconsidered.htm

The major contribution of the community reconsidered conversation was the time and aptitudes of the students from Southern State Community College - Fayette Campus, Home schooled Students, Fayette Christian School and the two school districts of Washington Court House City Schools and Miami Trace Schools. In all, 36 students and their teachers participated in the conversation at SSCC – Fayette Campus.

The committee/team is grateful to these institutions noted above and in particular the following individuals for their enormous support and cooperation: Kristen Conn, Kim Pittser, Jennifer Enocks, Dr. David Gaffner, Mallory Bihl, and Monica Jones, see appendix for details.
The data reported in this project will serve as a foundation for planning and implementing future economic and social development strategic programs in our community.
Introduction:

Rural communities in the Country are no longer the way they were several decades back as most communities are beset with many social and economic problems such as unemployment of youth, drug and substance abuse and the lack of social amenities. Though we cannot have a “perfect” community, extension educators are challenged to mobilize community leaders, residents and local resources for a collective action to respond appropriately to these problems. Most communities also lack the courage to engage the youth to discuss their views on issues of the community and ways to solve them. The goal of the Fayette County Community Reconsidered Conversation was to bring the youth (future leaders) together to reflect and deliberate on the value of The Ohio State University Extension services and its potential to renew and strengthen our community and our civic culture.

Brief History about the Extension Reconsidered Initiative:

Extension Reconsidered is an Imagining America initiative that is engaging a diverse range of participants in constructive and critical deliberation about the future of the land-grant system’s cooperative extension programs.

The initiative challenges groups from across the nation to reconsider the past and imagine alternative futures for extension and outreach that is unique to land-grant institutions. Land-Grant institutions have resonance and relevance across the whole of American higher education. To date, 13 states including Ohio, are participating with more wanting to replicate these conversations in their communities.

Organizational Partners to the Extension Reconsidered Initiative:

Extension reconsidered is sponsored by Imagining America and supported the following organizations:

The Charles F. Kettering Foundation - is a nonprofit operating foundation rooted in the American tradition of cooperative research. Kettering’s research is conducted from the perspective of citizens and focuses on what people can do collectively to address problems affecting their lives, their communities, and their nation.

Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) - is a nonprofit membership organization that promotes health equity and social justice through partnerships between communities and academic institutions.
The Engagement Scholarship Consortium - is a non-profit educational organization composed of higher education member institutions. Their goal is to work collaboratively to build strong university-community partnerships anchored in the rigor of scholarship, and designed to help build community capacity.

Art of the Rural - is a collaborative organization with a mission to help build the field of the rural arts, create new narratives on rural culture and community, and contribute to the emerging rural arts and culture movement.

To read more go to: [http://imaginingamerica.org/research/extension-reconsidered-initiative/about-the-extension-reconsidered-initiative/](http://imaginingamerica.org/research/extension-reconsidered-initiative/about-the-extension-reconsidered-initiative/)

**Community Reconsidered: The Ohio State University Extension Focus:**
Community Reconsidered is The Ohio State University's (OSU) version of the Reconsidering Extension's Role in Communities conversation. The OSU conversation is focused on the youth voice of individuals under the age of 30 and the vision they can provide concerning the future of our communities. In specific, the conversation is being led by individuals between the age of 14 and 24 with the support of adult mentors. Fourteen Ohio Counties participated in the dialogue and Fayette County was privileged to participate, [http://osucares.osu.edu/extension-reconsidered.htm](http://osucares.osu.edu/extension-reconsidered.htm)
Questions considered for the discussion and their respective responses by participants:

**Question 1: What are three words that would describe your community?**
The youth identified many words that describe their community. Among them included:

- Aging
- Agricultural
- Behind / technology
- Bland
- Boring
- Centralized
- Close knit
- Close minded
- Compact
- Connected
- Conservative
- Considerate/caring
- Decaying-run down
- Dependable
- Drug problem
- Educational based
- Evolving
- Family oriented
- Fast food dependent
• Friendly
• Giving
• Gossip
• Growing
• Potential
• Huge
• Lacking
• Extras
• Minimum wage
• No activities for kids
• Non-caring
• On the verge
• Outreach
• Poor
• Progressing, rural, small, social, supportive, and unwelcoming.

Question 2: What are the strengths of your current community?

There were many great answers given the highlights of the best of the best in the county. The answers given were:

• Active churches
• Agricultural
• Bowling alley
- Centralized location
- Community support
- Economic growth possibilities
- Education (SSCC) (WCH) (MT) (FC)
- Employment opportunities
- Extension/resource
- Fair
- Fitness center
- Good infrastructure
- Hard workers
- Helpful
- Humane society
- Kroger
- Law enforcement
- Library
- Local politicians
- Locally owned business
- Low population
- "Needy" The Well food pantry
- New business
- Outlet mall
- Pizza
• Radio station,
• Resilient
• Resources for low social / economic
• School
• Community involvement
• Self-reliant
• Supportive
• Tight knit/loyalty community
• Walmart
• Well connected
• YMCA
• Youth programs

Question 3: Think of the type of community you would want to live in the future. Describe: The groups had different views but generally wanted a community that would offer them more social and economic opportunities. Their views included the following:

• Access to more activities
• Affordable gas
• Appearance of community
• Alternative energy sources
• Better paying jobs/careers
• Bike trails
• Caring
• Clean & well kept
• Community educational opportunity financial
• Community educational opportunity
• Financial jobs
• Community festivals
• Conservative
• Diverse & accepting
• Drug free
• Economic security
• Family center
• Fishing
• Grow economically jobs
• Grow economically new businesses/corporations
• Growth opportunities
• Jobs
• Keeping businesses
• Local bands
• Low crime rates
• Loyal
• More local businesses than chains
• More welcoming community events
• Movie theatre
• Options
• Outdoor movies
• Parks- more fun / update
• Planning for future
• Post-educational opportunities
• Pride
• Progressive
• Public areas
• Recycling
• Safe community / kids
• Safety and health
• Self- sufficient (energy-food)
• Skating and bowling alley –updated
• Sport facilities (batting cages & putt-putt)
• Support for small business
• Supportive
• Swimming pool
• Youth fountain
• Teens-things to do
• Well balanced diverse
• Business
• Work force hand on training
• Youth activities available.

Question 4: What are the strengths of that future community?

For many in the groups, the strengths include less stress. However they include following:

• Attraction to bring people in
• Citizens highly educated
• Community support
• Cultural diversity
• Drug & alcohol use decreased
• Education more available
• Employed community
• Enjoyable / inviting
• Family friendly, jobs / security
• Keeping money in Fayette County
• Law enforcement
• Less crimes-drugs
• Modern but traditional
• Motivation for life enhancement
• Peaceful
• Population-higher- drawing in people
• Population growth
• Productivity increased
- Recreational options
- Recycling sustaining
- Residents are loyal
- Safe
- Stability
- Stimulated economy
- Stress- less worry
- Teen pregnancy decreased
- Vacancies filled
- Visually pleasing
- Youth involvement
- Youth oriented activities.

**Question 5: What can we do as a community to get from where we are now to where we want to be in the future?**

The list of ideas was endless:

- Add new & original business
- Bring stuff in
- Bringing more businesses to community
- Businesses
- Community activities etc.
- Downtown improvement
- Educate voters
- Encourage voter turnout
- Establish program to clean up abandoned homes & buildings
- Fill stores
- Get youth invested
- Increase recycling-clean up
- Market our community
- More "voice" to youth
- More information re-voting issues
- Ore vocalized young generation
- Open communication / dialogue
- Organize community events
- Possible reform in education / testing
- Re-invigorate the American dream
- Start small festivals
- Support local businesses
- Tailor college classes to needs of community
- Utilizing Extension to find internships
- Opportunities, etc.
Question 6: What are the resources needed to get the ideal community?

Most groups suggested money, people and having the courage to stay in community rather than leaving. They recommended the following:

- Advertisement
- Caring people - motivation
- Change willingness
- Community meeting/input
- County/city officials
- Dedication
- Educational opportunities
- Family oriented organizations
- Focus on staying - not leaving high schools (government & FCS classes) teacher
- Parents students
- Initiative and willingness/risk for businesses to come fill vacancies
- Investment - small business
- Job availability
- Jobs for youth
- Leadership programs
- Local businesses/jobs
- Money
- More information
- More knowledge
• Organization promotion and educating community

• Out of the box ideas

• Professional educated people

• Reform healthcare

• Space

• Support within and outside our community

• Unique motivated individual

• What jobs are there?

• Willing workers / build work ethic

• Working together

• Youth

• Youth and adult involvement

• Time- collective efforts
  
  o 6. i. Keeping motivation, need more "doers", lobbying, Knowledge, open - minded, having a vision

  o 6. ii. Commit, together

  o 6. iii. Giving back (older), pay forward, businesses
Question 7: Thinking back through this discussion, what is the one thing that stands out the most to you?

The groups decided that Fayette County and Washington Court House needed to:

- Take action now
- Balance of new
- Modern & updated facilities
- While holding on to our community’s traditional and conservative values
- Businesses
- Community must want to change
- Drug problem
- Economic opportunity
- Education
- Ideas thought up
- Late mentioning of health care
- Make community more for the community
- Money
- Opportunities
- Potential for jobs relating to education
- Progressive change
- Re invigorate the American dream
- Same mindset
- Stepping up
- Sustainability

- We can-strategies

- Work ethic
  - Education:
    Post-secondary information /voting issues, programs/ resources in community

- Small business:
  Support them more, why do they fail?
Appendix

Participating Educational Institutions and Organizations

Kristen Conn
Fayette Christian School
1350 Dayton Ave, NW
Washington Court House, Oh 43160

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Washington Court House, Oh 43160

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Miami Trace School District
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Washington Court House, Oh 43160

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3722 Oh 41,
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Mallory Bihl
Washington Court House High School
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Washington Court House High School
400 Elms Street
Washington Court House, Oh 43160

Southern State Community College
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Washington Court House, Oh 43160

Fayette County Developmental Disability
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Washington Court House, Oh 43160

Home Schooled Students

Monica Jones
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QUESTIONS for the "Communities Reconsidered "CONVERSATION:

1. What are three words that would describe your community? (Ask everyone to respond.)

2. What are the strengths of your current community?

3. Think of the type of community you would want to live in in the future. Describe that community:

4. What are the strengths of that future community?

5. What can we do as a community to get from where we are now to where we want to be in the future?

6. What are the resources needed to get the ideal community?
   i. What can we do as individuals?
   ii. What can we do as a community?
   iii. Who else needs to be involved?

7. Thinking back through this discussion, what is the one thing that stands out the most to you? (Ask everyone to respond.)
Demographic check card for Extension Reconsidered

Data items to request:

**Gender:**

**Highest level of education completed:**
- ___ some high school
- ___ high school
- ___ some college
- ___ two-year degree
- ___ bachelor's degree
- ___ master's degree
- ___ Ph.D.
- ___ other professional degree – list

**Age:**

**Where do you live?**
- ___ urban community
- ___ rural community
- ___ suburban community

**Ethnicity:**

**What languages do you speak fluently?**

*Choose all that apply:*

- ___ American Indian or Alaskan Native
- ___ Black or African American
- ___ Hispanic/Latino
- ___ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- ___ White/Caucasian
- ___ Appalachian
- ___ Other, please describe
- ___ English
- ___ Spanish
- ___ German
- ___ French
- ___ other – list
- ___ other – list
- ___ other – list

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- ___ Appalachian
- ___ Other, please describe
- ___ English
- ___ Spanish
- ___ German
- ___ French
- ___ other – list
- ___ other – list
- ___ other – list
Pictures of the Community Reconsidered Conversation in Washington Court House, Fayette County, Ohio