



Central Oklahoma *Perspective*

January 2004

Association of Central Oklahoma Governments

Region, State Receive Letter of Attainment

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) sent a letter to the state of Oklahoma last month that recognized Central Oklahoma as an attainment region. The announcement had been expected for months, based on ozone readings from the summer of 2003, but the official decree from EPA still came as a significant pronouncement that validated years of voluntary community efforts.

The state of Oklahoma was notified of its attainment status through an official letter from EPA, which began a formal designation process several months ago. Recommendations of "attainment" or "non-attainment" were based on the agency's 8-hour standard, which, after its introduction in 1997, had gone through lengthy court battles before a federal appeals court gave EPA the final green light to issue the stringent standard in 2002. Local officials generally agree that the 8-hour standard still reflects a more realistic measure of ozone levels than the one-hour standard.

EPA based its designation for the state on three-years of data from 2001-2003. Based on the sets of data, the Central

Oklahoma and Tulsa metro regions were in compliance with federal standards. In its letter, the agency commented that "voluntary efforts in the state helped to improve the air quality," and noted that the efforts were especially important regarding early air quality planning in both regions.

"This is a snapshot of where we are today in Central Oklahoma," said Zach Taylor, executive director of ACOG. "It is an affirmation that recognizes a decade of attention from the entire community on the impact and importance of air quality to the region. However, it also shows that we must remain vigilant in promoting good air quality habits and that, because of weather and aberrant conditions, we cannot simply rest on our laurels and ignore the issue. If anything, it confirms that our programs are working and that we need to continue to work hard to assure that they remain successful."

ACOG considers the impact on air quality in its planning efforts and has managed the Clean Air Alert Day Program

and the Let's Clear the Air campaign for 12 years. The program is designed to help citizens and employers take individual responsibility for keeping the region in compliance with federal air quality standards. Throughout the year, the ACOG Clean Air Committee, which includes partners such as the Central Oklahoma

Transportation and Parking Authority, Metro Transit, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), OGE Energy Corp., the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Redbud Energy and Cox Communications promotes clean air habits that Central Oklahomans can implement in their daily lives.

Even with the announcement of the region's "clean" air status, Central Oklahoma and the state are not exempt from remaining in compliance with the federal Clean Air Act, especially if future ozone readings exceed federal standards. Concerted efforts by citizens, businesses and local governments will have to continue to keep Central Oklahoma's air clean.



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Regional Stakeholders Develop Traffic Incident Management Guide

More than half of the congestion in the Oklahoma City metropolitan area is caused by traffic incidents. An incident is defined as any non-recurrent event, such as a vehicle crash, vehicle breakdown, spilled debris, roadway infrastructure failure or special event that causes either a reduction of roadway capacity or an abnormal increase in traffic demand.

While responding to traffic incidents

is not new, incident management is an evolving area with new approaches being implemented successfully across the country. Stakeholders in the ACOG region have long recognized the need for coordinated traffic incident management. They have been supporting multiple Incident Management related activities, one of which is the development of a ...See "Incident Guide" on page four.

MAPS for KIDS Project Takes First Swing

Cold weather prevented a groundbreaking ceremony last month for the new Douglas High School, so supporters and community leaders swung celebratory hammers signaling the start of the rebuilding process of the first major MAPS for KIDS project.

Built in the early 1950's, Douglas High School educated thousands of students throughout the decades. But it had been apparent for years that better educational facilities were needed to strengthen the school, the community and the entire Oklahoma City Public School District. In Nov. 2001, voters in Oklahoma City approved the Metropolitan Area Projects [MAPS] for KIDS initiative, which calls for a seven-year city sales tax that will raise more than \$500 million for schools within

the Central Oklahoma region.

MAPS for KIDS is based on the belief that changes in infrastructure are only a part of the potential solution to curing the district's woes. Efforts to improve the educational quality of the district will have to be long-term and will need to involve the community and the region to be successful. The ambitious plan is one of the largest community projects in the country and includes massive construction of new schools and dramatic upgrades to many others. Funding for technological improvements will put advanced computer equipment in each school, and students will be riding to school in a new fleet of safe and efficient buses.

The Oklahoma City School District is receiving 70 percent of the funding, with 30 percent shared with 24 other school districts on a per-student basis for students living within the city's limits.

Frederick Douglas High School will be the first new high school constructed in the plan. To accommodate the construction, Moses F. Miller stadium will be torn down, so the new school can be built while students continue to attend the current school. Oklahoma City councilmember Willa Johnson, herself a graduate of Douglas, said that the ceremony

signified a great day for the community.

"It will make our community more intelligent and economically viable," Johnson said. "MAPS for KIDS showcases unlimited potential for a promising future."

Cliff Hudson, chairman of the Oklahoma City School Board, remarked that collaboration and communication would make the plan successful. "MAPS for KIDS, as a partnership with the community, has already lead to fantastic results. It is a tremendous investment in public education that will lay the foundation for a completely new school system."



Community leaders swing hammers signifying the rebuilding of the new Douglas High School.

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Association of Central Oklahoma Governments

*"Providing Regional Leadership in
Central Oklahoma Since 1966"*

Established in 1966, the Association of Central Oklahoma Governments (ACOG) is a voluntary association of cities, towns and counties. ACOG helps member governments plan for common needs, cooperate for mutual benefit and coordinate for sound regional development.

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State Accepting Applications for Two Grant Programs

The Oklahoma Tourism and Recreation Department (OTRD) is accepting applications for two different grant programs that will provide funding for recreational trails and projects involving water and land conservation.

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) provides an 80 percent federal reimbursement share for projects involving the construction, restoration, enhancement, development of trailside and trailhead facilities, and land acquisition of motorized and non-motorized recreational trails.

OTRD is also accepting applications for the Land and Water Conservation Fund

(LWCF) program. This program provides a 50/50 match for projects related to park-land acquisition, installation of playground equipment, construction of athletic fields and development of picnic areas, boating facilities, nature centers, recreational trails and support facilities for outdoor recreation activities.

Visit www.otrd.state.ok.us/rd/ for additional information and application guidelines for both the RTP and LWCF grants. Eligible communities and organizations are encouraged to apply as soon as possible, with a January 30, 2004 deadline looming for both grant programs.

Logan County

By Jerry Church

Mark Sharpton has just celebrated his one-year anniversary on the job as Logan County Commissioner, District 1, and he pauses to reflect on the past year. In that short time, he's learned a lot about public service, and as he figures, one of the most important things he's learned is to ask a lot of questions.

"I've spent time asking questions because I think it's the easiest way to find answers to things I don't know," said Sharpton. "The help is normally there, but if you don't ask, you'll never know."

If this approach seems too simple for some, it's not the case with Mark Sharpton.

He's had to cut to the quick for many reasons. One, he's relatively new to the arena of county administration, and he doesn't have time for an extreme learning curve. Two, he entered into the race because he wanted to see results. Fast.

"I got into this for one reason, and that is to do things the right way. I think we can make Logan County a better place to live. I really do!"

Getting Started

Sharpton decided to run for County Commissioner after realizing he needed to be a participant rather than an observer. "There seems to be a point where you quit sitting on the sidelines, and put yourself into the game," he said. "So, I guess I put myself in the game."

Born and raised in Stillwater, Sharpton attended Northern Oklahoma College at Tonkawa, and has lived in the district that he now serves for several years. Prior to becoming commissioner, he and his father operated a commercial roofing company.

Active in the Federation of Young Republicans, Sharpton knew that becoming commissioner would take a lot of time and commitment, and that included the potential impact on his family. Once he decided to run for office, Sharpton assumed that his work hours were going

to change and that quality time with his family could be affected. Still, that didn't change his commitment to family when he recently met his daughter downtown on a field trip to see a historical exhibit with her schoolmates, before he attended a meeting with ACOG staff. That's just a good example of how to manage a busy day.



Mark Sharpton

"I'm normally at work by 6:30 in the morning and usually I'm the last to leave," Sharpton said. "There are sacrifices that have to be made. My family knew that before I ran for office. It was a family decision, and had we decided sacrifices were too great, we probably would not have done it."

There's no "I" in Team

Another key component to Sharpton's successful first year is his emphasis on teamwork, communication and quality staffing. Sharpton's administrative assistant, Mary Murphey, attends many meetings with him and together, she and the commissioner have increased their knowledge of county government. Both have been actively coming to meetings at ACOG and the Association of County Commissioners of Oklahoma in their quest to learn how to perform their jobs better.

Sharpton has a staff of 10 in his district, and aside from his open-door policy and emphasis on accessibility, he also asks for feedback from long-time staff. Some of the District 1 crew have been attending classes in the Roads Scholar program through the Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP) at Oklahoma State University. The program serves counties and municipalities by providing training and technical assistance for road and bridge construction, and other transportation-related issues.

"LTAP has been a great resource for us," said Murphey. "It has increased our learning opportunities."

A quarterly newsletter has been created to keep district citizens informed of issues and projects. Sharpton said that a lot of news doesn't make the local papers and that this was the easiest way to reach everyone without going door-to-door.

Sharpton said that balancing important issues such as road building, public safety and resolving the over-crowding at Logan County jail is going to be difficult, given current budget constraints. By improving the county's vehicles, trailers and equipment, he hopes to assure the safety of the public and his staff, and to boost morale. A growing population in the district also has Sharpton concerned, as he hopes to accommodate the influx of new Logan County residents with a strategic plan that addresses issues that accompany growth in a rural community.

"People come here for good schools and to buy land. We need to be ready to manage the growth. What's suitable for a small rural county may not be suitable for a small urban county, and that's where we appear to be heading."

Coming Regional Events

The State of the City

- Jan. 28, 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Cox Business Services Convention Center

Join Oklahoma City Vice-Mayor Guy Liebmann and others as they present the objectives of the city and the region in the coming year. Call the Greater OKC Chamber at 297-7076 to register.

“Incident Guide”

...Continued from page one.

Regional Incident Management Procedures Manual and Resource Guide (Incident Management Guide).

To improve current incident and emergency management practices, Incident Management Stakeholders began working with PB Farradyne and Traffic Engineering Consultants to document response procedures and issues, as well as to recommend additional policies to enhance the process.

Several recommendations for the Oklahoma City Regional Transportation Study (OCARTS) Area were presented at a briefing held in November 2003, including the development of a Multi-Agency Incident Management Training course, regular Multi-Agency Post-Incident Reviews, and Public Education.

Other recommendations include: Ongoing Incident Management Training, Use of Message Signs for Motorist Information, Changes in Incident Site Management, and Review of the current Towing Regulations.

The next steps in the process will be to identify a local champion and cooperatively work towards the implementation of the early recommendations.

The benefits of a regionally coordinated Traffic Incident Management program are that incidents are cleared faster, and roadways opened sooner, which in turn

January

- 1st ACOG Offices Closed for New Year’s Day
- 9th Garber-Wellington Technical Committee, 10 a.m.
- 15th Areawide Planning Technical Advisory Committee, 9 a.m.
Intermodal Transportation Technical Committee, 10 a.m.
- 19th ACOG Offices Closed for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- 20th Operation FireSAFE, 10 a.m.
Clean Cities Stakeholders, 1 p.m.
- 29th 9-1-1 Board of Directors, 1 p.m.
Intermodal Transportation Policy Committee, 1:20 p.m.
ACOG Board of Directors, 1:45 p.m.
Garber-Wellington Policy Committee, 2:30 p.m.

February

- 12th Intermodal Transportation Technical Committee, 10 a.m.
- 16th ACOG Offices Closed for President’s Day
- 26th 9-1-1 Board of Directors, 1 p.m.
Intermodal Transportation Policy Committee, 1:20 p.m.
ACOG Board of Directors, 1:45 p.m.
Garber-Wellington Policy Committee, 2:30 p.m.

will reduce the congestion. More importantly, however, clearing incidents faster saves lives, not only by reducing the probability of secondary incidents, but also reducing the exposure time for responders and motorists alike.

The OCARTS Area Incident Management Guide was finalized in December 2003 and contains the complete list of recommendations, available at ACOG’s Web site at www.acogok.org. Call ACOG for more details.

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