

Results of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oxford Amos Network House Meeting

UUCO held an Amos Network house meeting Sunday, September 9, 2007, to determine the current concerns of the members of our congregation in response to the question, “What concerns you personally right now about life in Oxford and Lafayette County?”

We had 20 responses to this question. We had 15 responses to the follow-up question, “If you could fix one problem that has affected your life in Oxford and Lafayette County, what would it be?”

Here is the report that was submitted to The Amos Network:

Top Five Concerns

1. Our top concern is uncontrolled development.

The need for careful planning of development, plan for a sustainable economy that all can share in, and the need for maintenance of and additional green spaces downtown, on the Square, and throughout the city and county are elements of carefully planned growth and development. The destruction of native forests for “developments” that leave no trees makes for eyesores where there was once beauty. Regulations need to become enacted to save some of our natural beauty.

We value the natural beauty of our community and our county. We value the wild life, lakes, and forests of our county that adds to the economy, as well as adding to the beauty and value of the land. We believe that recreational opportunities such as parks, lakes, forests, and the walking and biking paths add to the economic and esthetic value of Oxford and Lafayette County. We urge leaders to protect, preserve, and maintain it.

2. We want “no child left behind” to mean more than children being taught to pass arbitrary tests in our public schools.

While we appreciate the better than average public school system in Oxford and Lafayette County, it is important that we make a diverse education available to all children. We are concerned about the content of the education our children are getting in public schools (No Child Left Behind, teaching to the test, abstinence only health education). We believe that all children should have the advantages of art, music, drama, physical education, and complete, intelligent health education in school.

We want support for education and education-related activities, such as libraries. We have concerns such as the school bus system and the nutritional quality of the foods available to our children in the public school lunch and additional foods made accessible to them in school. There should be more high-quality pre-schools.

We feel there should be more attention to children’s needs, in school and out. There is not enough for young people to do. Many students, both in the public schools and at UM, seem to have a lack of respect for teachers and for each other.

3 We have concerns about affordable housing, the cost of living, and shopping.

We feel there is still a lack of affordable housing, including rental property for a reasonable rate within accessible distance of work and schools. We think that there is a lack of affordable, reasonable shopping, other than Walmart which has more issues than opportunities.

We’d like to see more support for the farmer’s markets and markets for locally grown food and locally made or manufactured goods. The narrow choices in shopping cause increases in the costs of living.

We'd like to see more opportunities and assistance for the poor. Too often, salaries are low in comparison to the cost of living, including public school employees who are not paid for holidays, spring break, and summer vacation.

4 We are concerned about the increasing segregation of all elements of our community. There is an "invisible" underclass: families that are not well off are not able to take advantage of the rich culture, art, music, and community that Oxford and Lafayette County offer. In addition to racial segregation, there is economic segregation. There is a wide gap between rich & poor, and that divide between rich and poor seems to be growing. We have an increasingly segregated life style that leads to lack of understanding and lack of respect. The separation (still) between blacks & whites remind us that there are still vestiges of racism that need to be addressed in our communities.

5 We are concerned about traffic and transportation issues. This includes traffic, congestion, too many cars, and a lack of affordable public transportation that would reduce our dependence on cars. In related issues, we are concerned about college students drinking and driving. We are concerned about the high incidence of littering in our communities, and we are concerned about animal control issues.

5 A tie is concern over the poor health of our community, particularly the children. We are concerned about the high rate of obesity with its accompanying ills of heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure even among our children. We are concerned about inadequate health care, the high cost of health care, and the need for more affordable alternatives for those who cannot afford decent health care (free clinics, family planning and well-woman clinics, well-baby health care and parenting classes).

What concerns you personally right now about life in Oxford and Lafayette County?

Uncontrolled development:

Need for green space downtown – too much development.

Poor planning; sprawl

Development which is not well planned

Loss of trees & natural beauty related to #1 (development)

Overdevelopment and lack of opportunities for less wealthy to own properties

Unchecked development

Over building and what will happen with all the new buildings once the boom is over

Sprawl – tree cutting, paving over, clear cutting

Sprawl!

Uncontrolled development

Destruction of native forest with NO concern for leaving any trees or the erosion

The overbuilding of condos and McMansions

Urban sprawl along Jackson & University

Need for careful planning of development; plan for affordable, sustainable economy

1 main issue:

1. Population growth.
2. Unchecked development.
3. Over-development.
4. Human input to Oxford (development)
5. Put some constraints on land development
6. The destruction of native forests for “developments” that leave no trees makes for eyesores where there was once beauty. Regulations need to become enacted to save some of our natural beauty.
7. Planning for sustainable local economy, community

Education and education related issues:

Children who are “left behind” in the Oxford Schools.

Public schools

Concern that we may not be supporting education and education-related activities, such as libraries.

Lack of attention to children’s needs, in school and out

Lack of respect of some students

School bus system

Lack of respect of school & UM students

Public school lunch

No music lessons available for kids (or adults)

Not enough pre-schools

Content of the education our children are getting in public schools (No Child Left Behind, teaching to the test, abstinence only health education), lack of alternative schools

1 main issue:

1. Education for the children “left behind” – they are our future
2. Schools – eliminate the “two track system”

Related:

not enough for young people to do.

Issues of lifestyle, affordable housing, income:

Affordable housing

so many part time residents

lack of affordable housing

lack of shopping

Living costs

condos & ridiculous shopping places, money rules everything

affordable living is decreasing

non-resident ownership of homes

higher cost of living

Housing

too many “rich” people coming in, upsetting the economy

over commercialization

too many poor people

public schools NOT paying workers when there are holidays, summer, etc.

too little \$ to help poor people

Greedy over consumption of too many rich people.

low salaries vs. cost of living

affordable housing

Issues of segregation, social equity:

The “invisible” underclass. Taking advantage of the offerings in the 1st question, I don’t run into the families that are not well off.

racial segregation

Segregated life style on campus and in the community

wide gap between rich & poor

continued racial segregation, whether social or religious

income disparity

lack of courtesy

segregated life style

segregation (racial, economic, religious, etc.)

voter registration/turn-out

the separation (still) between blacks & whites

vestiges of racism

divide between rich and poor growing

1 main issue:

1. Continued racial reconciliation.

Traffic and transportation issues:

traffic

transportation issues – can't we have a community that doesn't require cars for everyone?

Traffic

traffic congestion

transportation

too many cars!

traffic – not helped by the idiocy of light timing on Jackson

1 main issue:

1. De-center cars from our local culture; which I hope would make equality more possible.
2. shuttle transportation for students and seniors

Related:

Too many college students at large – driving, throwing trash, etc.

College students drinking & then driving, and killing people

Littering

Bad animal control program

1 main issue:

1. A homeless animal shelter on the square similar to the House of Mews in Cooper-Young in Memphis.

Health care:

poor health./diet; obesity

inadequate health care

high cost of health care, need for more affordable alternatives for those who cannot afford decent health care (free clinics, family planning and well-woman clinics, well-baby health care and parenting classes)

Miscellaneous issues:

City is too focused on religion/church.

Religion – everything seems to be connected to the question, “what church do you attend?”

People are afraid to dance in public

Cops and other lawmakers too controlling

Car break-ins near the low-income housing (such as near the pool, the Healthplex, etc.)

1 main issue:

2. Millionaires out of idiots.
3. Stop political hypocrisy