



Williamstown Public meeting
Williamstown High School
Listening Session on the Ark Project
August 9, 2011

Mayor Skinner began the meeting by describing the agenda for the evening. He introduced Mike Zovath, general manager of Answers in Genesis, and noted his leadership role with the Creation Museum in its beginning.

Mr. Zovath came forward to give an overview of the project. He expressed appreciation for the interest everyone in the County has shown and hopes to get helpful comments and suggestions tonight. He offered architectural drawings for viewing, featuring the technical things that people might have questions about.

In providing details he mentioned the constitutionality issues that continue to come up through the media. He stated that the organization has gone over this point for more than a year with state government. The tax incentive the state is offering is not a constitutional issue. Mr. Zovath pointed out that his organization would be discriminated against if they don't get the same offerings that other tourism attractions get. He introduced the company's attorney who was on hand to answer any specific questions.

Secondly, the real estate tax credit the city of Williamstown is offering has also generated interest and questions. The lower percentage rates are typical for projects all over the state. He cited projects in Louisville, Lexington, northern KY and Bowling Green as examples. He further stated that this process of tax credits is a standard operating procedure for local governments to incentivise developments in their communities.

The Ark Encounter (AE) is privately funded and is a for-profit tourist attraction. The theme is centered around Noah's Ark, one of the more popular themes in the Bible. The AE is centered on the ark, a full sized boat, 510 x 85 wide, 51 feet tall. It will be built upon pilings off the ground, and the top of the sail will be at 100 feet at completion.

A walled city will be built to house retail, shopping, restaurants, food venues, gift shops, and street theatres. There will be a petting zoo, along with a top notch animal trainer and live animal

entertainment. There will be an interactive children's area, a 3-D Tower of Babel, and a journey through Jewish history will provide the only ride on the property. It will appear as a first century, Middle Eastern village, like Bethlehem, in the time of Jesus.

There will be a 3000 seat amphitheater with live entertainment all summer. A 24,000 square foot special exhibit hall will handle world class traveling exhibits such as King Tut and Dinosaurs. They do plan on booking major exhibits each year. There will be seven retail establishments, four restaurants, public paths will cover 2 miles, and there will be 3,200 parking spaces.

A nationwide study was done on economic development possibilities. Of those queried, 63% said they'd come to see the AE. The consulting group that predicted the number of visitors to the Creationist Museum came within 4,000 of actual numbers. The same consultant conducted the AE survey.

There plan is to design and build for approximately \$1.6 million attendees the first year. The feel they are very conservative with attendance projections and hope to open by 2014. They have used a Kentucky model to determine the economic impact of their development, using actual data from Creation Museum on spending habits. They anticipate the economic impact from construction to be \$591 million. This gives \$35.4 million to the state in taxes while investors get a rebate of \$4.3 million, netting the state \$31 million the first year. The risk is shouldered by the investors, with little risk to government, yet offering a large reward.

Jobs are a hot topic. 170,000 travel and tourism jobs in KY generated \$210,000,000 in wages. One in 5 new jobs was in tourism/travel related jobs this past year. These figures just re-enforce why Kentucky is big in tourism. AE will employ 900 full-time, part time and seasonal jobs.

Over the first 10 years there will be a positive impact of \$4.8 million dollars. This estimate does not include new payroll, property taxes, etc.

Development timeline: AE is partnering with Williamstown in several areas such as utilities and zoning ordinances. They are also partnering with Grant County for improving the lane in front of Veterans cemetery, leading to their property. The State Transportation Cabinet is working to get traffic counts, flow. The Corp of Engineers is working to make the best use of natural terrain, tree removal, retaining walls, etc. They are dealing with the Indiana brown bat, wet lands, streams, water retention considerations, etc. They are working to make this one of the greenest projects in the country, desiring to keep it green from start to finish.

They plan to finalize the master plan by first of September to submit to Grant County. The grading plan is scheduled to be delivered to the state for an environmental application by the 15th of September. Utility plans will be provided to Williamstown by September 15th. The longest process is the environmental process, and they are hoping to see approval by mid November. They plan to close on remaining properties in mid October, with grading to begin by mid November.

Mr. Zovath was proud to announce that 75% of the funding is committed now, with over \$100 million committed, leaving very little left to raise.

Ground breaking could take place in about 8 weeks, depending on how things take place. He reiterated that this is a very complicated project that has a lot of pieces to synchronize. He anticipates construction to begin in earnest in the spring of 2012. They will be constructing 75 buildings, creating a small town. All will need air, heat, and water, to meet code, and will provide a lot of local jobs. Grand opening in 2014 as planned now.

None of the above takes into account the hotels, restaurants and other amenities for guests that will be coming. Twenty 100-room hotels are the projected need.

Mayor Skinner came forward to mention the city's involvement. They began learning about the development in October of last year when he and former Mayor Caldwell and another community member learned of the project. Council is very supportive, but very cautious. They don't want to put the city in any undue financial risk. No money is dedicated to the project as of yet. He does anticipate agreements to be formulated in due time.

The new wastewater treatment will be open my mid September and will have capacity for new developments. He also noted that the city can add to it quickly if needed. A water plant will need to be replaced, and the city is looking at new plant options now. They will look for grant funding and think they can get economic development money to replace the system because of job creation. As in all developments, there will be an impact fee for developers to hook up.

The city is talking now with city planners to work on comprehensive zoning plans so the city can define where we want development. There is a desire to stay away from where there are no utilities. Everyone is working well together, regionally. Want to make sure it is a success for the city, but the region as well.

Questions from audience

Set up with discussion about getting comments and suggestions on the front end. This is not just any project, this is transformational. Get one chance to do this right. If you're interested in updates to the project, please provide an email address as you sign in. Completely voluntary.

Q. What are the entrances and exits to the park?

A. Planning on main entrance at route 36, across from horse barn. Other off Highway 25

Q. Rumors are that there are plans to expand Highway 25, is that true?

A. Judge – not aware of anyone asking to widen 25 to Ivec Lane. As has been stated, the entrance is Route 36 west. Do intend to provide a service entrance at Ivec Lane, have built soccer fields out there. Let me say when Gov an I were together a lot of the media gave us a difficult time about it being religious theme park. The community of Grant County embraces this project, because it is a religious theme – hope you'll let Mike know that.

Q: Besides the development, curious where you plan on getting the water supply for the development.

A. Mayor responded that currently they are under the figure the state has provided.

Q. Rumor around the lake that the Northern Kentucky water district can provide it cheaper than the city can pump it and purify it.

A. Mayor – I don't think so.

Q. Is a bond issue going to be needed and if so will council be in favor?

A. Jim Parsons answered about the legal agreement with the city. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) bonds are common, and those bonds are not an obligation of the city. The bonds are subject only to the pledge of taxes made by government to pay them.

Q. Will Williamstown instigate a payroll tax?

A. The Tax Increment Financing statute allows a payroll tax within the district itself, that is, the AE site.. It allows the possibility for a payroll tax within the AE district only to support the project itself. The TIF would not impact the city, only the project. The TIF does not apply across the city.

Q. Will it open in stages or at once?

A. At once.

Q. Hope it isn't like Speedway project. My concern is the number of people coming, lighting of ramps, extra lanes to carry the flow of people coming in.

A. Judge answered that they have met with the Transportation Cabinet and know that this project is very important to the government. The Secretary is committed to get the plans to the general assembly in time for the upcoming session. Commitment is there.

Q. What about fire, police ambulance, etc.?

A. Judge responded that currently the fire protection is done by volunteers. Don't know what our specific needs will be in the future. EMS is coming from Dry Ridge and rural metro providing rest of the county coverage. This is not sufficient now, we can do better. I'll be asking Fiscal Court to address this issue in the future. Currently under study, but know we need to shore up what we're doing.

Q. Concern about 900 employees turning off Ivec Lane may cause traffic problem?

A. Mr. Zovath acknowledged that he had not considered this element, has made note of it and will consider the implications.

Q. What about lake expansion?

A. The Mayor said they're still working on it, think expansion will happen, one stimulus will be the AE, but not sure when expansion will occur.

Q. Rumor has it that James Street may be adjusted.

A. Mayor, said yes it is under consideration, they have asked the city planner to look at options.

Q. What about the hiring of the 900 people – when?

A. Mike felt that hiring could begin about six to nine months from the grand opening.

Q. Will local agencies assist in the hiring process?

A. AE has their own HR department.

Q. Are Grant Countians going to get a first look at those jobs? Lots of folks that will put elbow grease in, come early and stay late.

A. Mike: We would like to hire local folks, but we have to follow state and federal laws regarding hiring and are not able to give preferential treatment. That would be considered discrimination. If you're qualified, apply for a job.

Q. Is there any thought of incentives for local businesses to improve properties, or contact names for local labor to get involved.

A. Mike: one of the green builders is looking at as much local purchasing as possible. Definitely want to use local labor as much as possible. There will be a lot of work happening at the same time, so plenty of opportunity.

Q. What will extra jobs do to expanding the community and the school system?

A. Mike responded that elderly folks, empty nesters, will be some of the employees, so there shouldn't be as much impact on schools, but will change things for the community. The school board chairman spoke about future growth planning. She indicates they will manage internal growth, and have plans already to accommodate growth.

Facilitator comment: The community has time to work and adapt curriculum to provide training for the new workforce to be prepared for the job opportunities.

School board chair: She noted that the school is a Microsoft assessment center, offering courses later this fall at reduced rates to prepare the community for jobs.

Q. You described business within the development, will they be AE owned or contracted to local business?

A. Mike: AE will own and operate the food venues in the park. We will have craft shops, we will be looking for vendors to be part of that. Not looking for name brand, name places inside the park. Expect those outside the park in the surrounding area.

Q. Will home owners have higher utilities, taxes, etc.?

A. Mayor said they should go down with use; this development should make things more efficient.

Q. How many acres do you think will be in a parking area? Concerned about water run off.

A. Mike: 40 acres off Route 36 for parking, another 10 acres elsewhere.

Tony Brewer Comment: Mayor of Dry Ridge would like to work with Williamstown to discuss all the water off the parking lots of Marathon, KFC and Waffle House and the east side of Blackburn Lane...water flows off the blacktop into the back of our farm. I've never known to go over water to go over the top of McCoy road. Is the Ark at the headwaters of Clark Creek for the safety of the waste disposal plant, need to look at water run off.

Mayor Skinner responded: I appreciate your concern and now understand what you're referring to. We will definitely look at that to address any runoff problems.

Q. Is there a way for local churches to begin promoting this project?

A. Facilitator responded that the project would be appreciative of any support it receives.