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Workshop seeks participants to shape county's future

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Warren County's population is projected to grow from roughly 140,000 to more than 200,000 by the year 2050.

Now is your chance to help shape that growth, starting with how others learn of it.

The BG2050 initiative, spearheaded by county officials and organized by Suspenders of Disbelief and Innovation Engine, will host a 2050 Civic Imagination Living Lab to design a communication campaign for the project.

Researcher Karine Halpern, one of the event's organizers, said everyone is invited to participate — tradesmen and designers, young and old, high school graduates and doctors, parents and singles.

"We want to have everyone and for very good reason — everyone is using the tools (of communication) today," Halpern said. "We can allow ourselves to make mistakes and try experiments to see if it's feasible to mix people from the general public together with professionals on specific issues to solve together."

The BG2050 initiative stems from a 2023 "Future of Bowling Green and Warren County" workshop hosted by Warren County Judge-Executive Doug Gorman and organized by media consultancy firm Suspenders of Disbelief.

"Bowling Green 2050 is a project that we're working on to map the progress, growth and thoughts of what this community is going to look like in 2050," Gorman said at a May 23 fiscal court meeting. "Our objective is to get a pretty large group of people and start mapping out how that can look.

"My objective on that is so we can continue to have a great community that we have a larger version of, but not be a different type of community."

Gorman said the initiative will pull from local leaders and residents and "hopefully have a report by the end of the year."

Halpern took an interest in the work as a researcher of cultural and transmedia studies in France with her doctoral work. Her work has brought her across the European Union and even to Bowling Green previously in 2022.

"I can understand very well what's going on (locally) even though I don't understand the details or the history of the city, or I don't know much about Kentucky," Halpern said. "I was interested because I find this very accurate to what is happening in the world right now."

Halpern said the lessons taken from Warren County's growth and from the work of BG2050 could be used to help similar communities across the world.

She said the upcoming workshop will seek to lay the groundwork for the way the project is communicated and look at "futures studies" — essentially asking how the community can marry innovation and culture in the coming decades.

Halpern said the process can "be a little bit of a mess" getting started with so many possibilities, but "the mess is very good for innovation."

"I think we can allow ourselves to be a little bit messy in this phase of innovation," Halpern said. "Maybe people will decide to do something on their own."

The workshop will be held at WKU's Center for Research and Development, 2413 Nashville Road, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. June 14-15 beginning with introductions.

Participants are invited to attend at any time throughout the day. Children are welcomed and encouraged to attend.

More information and registration can be found at cocreate-ic.com/living_lab and Halpern can be contacted at karine@transmediaready.com.

— *Reporter Jack Dobbs contributed to this story.*

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