

# **Executive Summary**

## **Report, Analysis and Summary of 17 Citizen Input Workshops**

**In Support of the Blount County Planning Process  
April 14 to June 9, 1997**

**Blount County Planning Department  
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## **INTRODUCTION.**

The Blount County Commission and the Blount County Planning Commission jointly sponsored a series of 17 Citizen Input Workshops throughout the county from April 14 to June 9, 1997. The meetings were in support of the county long range planning process. The intent of these workshops was to ask citizens their opinions on two questions: What is good about Blount County which should be preserved in the future? What needs to be changed in Blount County to make a better future?

The workshops were advertised in the local newspapers and on local radio stations. The Blount County Planning Department staff acted as facilitators of the workshops, and County Commissioners acted as moderators. Citizens attending the workshops were asked to comment on the two questions. Comments were written down as given on poster size sheets and displayed at the meetings. Each question was taken in turn, and citizens voted separately on their top three priority comments for each question. Voting was accomplished with three colored dots, with options to vote all three

dots on one comment, or vote dots on any combination of two or three comments. Each workshop was reported individually to the County Commission and the Planning Commission.

There were 289 citizens registered over all 17 workshops. Not all registered persons participated in the workshops. Based on number of votes, there were about 250 persons actively participating. The participation in the first question was slightly lower due to some late registrations.

Note that the workshop process was not random, and reflected only the comments and opinions of those citizens attending. Nonetheless, the process did give some insight into citizen thinking on the future.

This executive summary analyzes comments for the two questions across all workshops, along with results of voting across all workshops. This executive summary categorizes comments by question in order to give a structured summary of what was considered important by participating citizens. See the

main report for a more detailed analysis.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.**

A tabular summary of voting results by category and subcategory for both question 1 and question 2 is presented on the following page. The table reports categories in descending order of percentage of votes for comparison across questions.

To summarize question 1 results, the physical characteristics of rural, small-town, and natural setting were seen as the most important aspects of Blount County which should be preserved in the future. This included aspects of rural character, beautiful and scenic landscape, agriculture and farmland, lakes, rivers, streams, mountains, a quiet and peaceful setting, an unspoiled natural environment, a small-town atmosphere, and a lack of tourist commercialization.

The lack of restrictions on land use was seen as the next most important aspect of the county which should be preserved. This

included aspects specific to a desire for no zoning, and also a more general desire to preserve freedom in the use of land.

Schools and education were seen as the next most important aspects of the county which should be preserved. Many saw desirable qualities in school facilities, education programs, community schools, good teachers, and good access to quality higher education in the area.

A strong economy was seen as an important positive aspect of the county. Many saw good employment opportunities, strong industrial base, and good trade and services sectors as worthy of preservation.

Many saw the local heritage as something which should be preserved in the future. Law enforcement, both the agencies concerned and a resultant safe county, were also seen as an important positive aspect of the county.

Recreation and parks, particularly the greenways and parks in the two cities of Alcoa and Maryville, along with youth sports programs,

were seen as good aspects of the county which should be preserved. It is interesting to note that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park received so few votes in this category.

<b>Comparative Summary of Votes by Category and Subcategory for Questions 1 and 2.</b>					
<b>What is good about Blount County which should be preserved in the future?</b>			<b>What needs to be changed in Blount County to make a better future?</b>		
Category	Number of Votes	Percent of Total Votes	Category	Number of Votes	Percent of Total Votes
Subcategory			Subcategory		
<b>Rural/Small Town/Natural Setting</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>29.99</b>	<b>Land Use Management</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>19.89</b>
Rural Character	53	7.29	Zoning and Land Use Regulations	109	14.36
Beautiful/Scenic	39	5.36	Mountain and Ridgetop Protection	13	1.71
Agriculture/Farmland	26	3.58	Flood Plain Management	9	1.19
Lakes/Rivers/Streams	26	3.58	Junk Control	8	1.05
Mountains	21	2.89	Building Codes and Permits	3	0.40
Quiet/Peaceful	19	2.61	Billboards & Visual Pollution Control	1	0.13
Natural Environment	19	2.61	Miscellaneous	8	1.05
Small-Town Atmosphere	9	1.24	<b>Schools/Education</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>12.38</b>
Not Like Pigeon Forge	6	0.83	Education Funding	40	5.27
<b>No Restriction of Land Use</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>18.71</b>	School Facilities	21	2.77
No Zoning	86	11.83	Education Programs	12	1.58
Freedom to Use Property	50	6.88	Community Schools	4	0.53
<b>Schools/Education</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>9.08</b>	Miscellaneous	17	2.24
Schools and Education Program	38	5.23	<b>No Land Use Regulations</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>11.86</b>
Community Schools	16	2.20	<b>Roads/Traffic/Transportation</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>9.09</b>
Teachers	6	0.83	Roads and Highways	45	5.93
Higher Education	5	0.69	Traffic Problems	16	2.11
Miscellaneous	1	0.14	Transportation Alternatives	3	0.40
<b>Economy</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>6.88</b>	Miscellaneous	5	0.66
Employment	19	2.61	<b>Planning</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>8.17</b>
Industry	12	1.65	General Plan	51	6.72
Trade and Services	7	0.96	Roads Plan	11	1.45
Miscellaneous	12	1.65	<b>Litter/Garbage/Recycling</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>5.93</b>
<b>Heritage</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>5.64</b>	Litter Problem	20	2.64
<b>Law Enforcement</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>5.50</b>	Garbage Facilities & Illegal Dumping	16	2.11
<b>Recreation/Parks</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>5.09</b>	Recycling	9	1.19
Greenway and Parks	16	2.20	<b>Government</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>4.87</b>
Youth Sports	13	1.79	<b>Growth Control</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>4.74</b>
Great Smoky Mountains National Park	2	0.28	<b>Conservation</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2.77</b>
Miscellaneous	6	0.83	<b>EMS/Fire Protection</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2.11</b>
<b>Taxes</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>4.68</b>	<b>Animal Control</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1.98</b>
<b>Quality of Life</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1.93</b>	<b>Utilities</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1.98</b>
<b>Community Involvement</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1.65</b>	<b>Development Impact Fees</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1.71</b>
<b>Hospital/Medical/Nursing Care</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1.51</b>	<b>Economy</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1.58</b>
<b>Government</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1.24</b>	<b>Recreation/Parks</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1.45</b>
<b>EMS/Fire Protection</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1.10</b>	<b>Law Enforcement</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.32</b>
<b>Religion/Churches</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>Taxes/Budgeting</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.32</b>
<b>Local Values</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>Social Services</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0.79</b>
<b>Roads/Traffic</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>Annexation</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.79</b>
<b>Litter/Garbage/Recycling</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.69</b>	<b>Library</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.66</b>
<b>Arts/Culture</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>Jail/Justice Center</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.66</b>
<b>Regional Proximity</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>Farming Protection/Assistance</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.66</b>
<b>Air Quality</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>Civic Center</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0.53</b>
<b>Conservation Programs</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>Air/Water Quality</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.40</b>
<b>Library</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>Abolish Planning</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>2.11</b>
<b>Airport</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>			
<b>People</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.00</b>			
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>2.06</b>			
<b>Total (of bold categories)</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>Total (of bold categories)</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The remainder of the categories did not individually receive over 5 percent of total votes in question 1. This is not to say that the categories were not important to some people, but only that the collective voting on important aspects of the county did not result in a substantial clustering of votes in these categories.

To summarize question 2 results, land use management was seen as a very important need to make a better future. This included a desire to consider zoning and land use regulations, measures to protect mountains and ridgetops, flood plain management, junk control measures, building codes and permits, and controls on billboards and other visual pollution.

Items related to schools and education were seen as the next most important needs for change. This included needs for education funding, school facilities, better education programs, and community based schools.

A substantial number of votes were cast in support of a need to insure that no land use regulations are allowed in the county. This is in sharp contrast with the first

identified need for land use management, and particularly a need for zoning and land use regulations. These results mirror a long standing division of opinion in the county over land use controls.

Items related to quality of roads, traffic problems, and transportation alternatives were identified as areas in need of change for a better future. This was followed by planning, both general planning and roads planning, as a needed activity. The category of planning also included some comments which would be related to the need for land use management noted above.

Litter problems, problems with garbage and illegal dumping, and a need for recycling were also identified as items needing attention for a better future.

The remainder of the categories did not individually receive over 5 percent of total votes in question 2. Again, this is not to say that the categories were not important to some people, but only that the collective voting on important needs in the county did not result in a substantial clustering of votes

in these categories. Of note in the remaining categories are growth control, conservation, and development impact fees, all of which contained some comments which would be related to the need for land use management noted separately above.

The results as a whole across both questions present a set of plausible conclusions.

There is wide-spread support for preserving a desired character of the county, that character being its rural, small-town, and natural setting. However, it is recognized by many that growth and development may adversely impact that desired character, and that some sort of planning for the future and some sort of land use management measures may be needed.

In contrast to this is a set of opinions opposed to any form of land use controls. Overall, this set of opinions was in the minority in the citizen input workshops. However, this minority status was strong, and should be considered in any plans or actions to address land use management issues.

In short, any land use management measures should also consider, as much as feasible, the need to preserve freedom in the use of land. Put another way, any land use management measures should not unduly infringe upon the desired freedoms to use ones own property for ones own enjoyment and benefit. A division of opinion such as indicted in the results requires a balanced approach.

The schools and education programs in the county were seen in a very positive light. The main issue identified was the need to keep pace with growth in the school population. Many recognized that this would require extra funding, but felt that this was necessary in order to preserve a quality of education in the county. This may be contrasted with the results that many are satisfied with the low tax rate in the county, but there were several indications that tax related issues would not dominate school related issues.

The strong economy was seen as an important aspect of the county worth preserving. In contrast to this were several comments showing an awareness that the

strong economy was at least indirectly related to problems of growth and threats to preservation of the desired rural and small-town character of the county.

Heritage was seen as an important aspect of the county, but had no directly parallel category of needed changes. However, there were some comments in categories relating the need to adopt land use management measures to protect the character of Townsend, a community recognized for its unique mountain heritage.

Law enforcement was seen in a very positive light as a good thing about the county which should be preserved in the future. In contrast, there were very few comments on needed changes. There thus seemed to be a general satisfaction with law enforcement in the county.

In a similar vein, recreation and parks were seen in a very positive light as good things about the county. In contrast, there were very few comments on needed changes. There thus seemed to be a general satisfaction with recreation and parks in the county.

There was also a general satisfaction with taxes in the county, this category showing positive comments for the first question, and few comments for needed changes in the second question.

Government showed few comments and votes as a positive factor of the county in question 1, but showed a number of comments and votes as a factor needing change in question 2. This would indicate a level of dissatisfaction with the form and/or operation of government at present.

In similar vein, issues related to litter, garbage and recycling showed a low level of recognition as good aspects of the county, but showed higher levels of recognition as items which need change to make a better future.

Roads and traffic showed little recognition as a positive aspect of the county in question 1, but showed greater recognition as an items which need to be addressed to make a better future in question 2. This was particularly true for roads and highways and related traffic problems.

It is worthy to note that some of the recent issues facing the county, such as the jail and justice center, the library, development impact fees, animal control, and annexation, were not identified in either of the questions with a substantial clustering of priority votes. This is not to say that these issues are not important in their own right, but only that they seem not to have a high relative priority in relation to other

identified issues.

The results of the first phase of citizen input workshops should provide needed information for the long range planning process as the County Commission and the Planning Commission consider policies for the future.

There seems to be a willingness to look at new avenues for addressing issues of growth and development in the county. The

next step in the process is to again consult the citizens of the county, present the results of this first phase of citizen input, and to ask the very important question of what is to be done to address the issues identified in this report.