

Report of the Blount County Citizen Advisory Committee

Recommendations

January 1999

Background: The Blount County Commission and the Blount County Planning Commission undertook a long range planning process for land use and roads starting in 1996. After a period of population data analysis, review of the previous version (1976) of the county plan, and general discussion of process alternatives, the County Commission and the Planning Commission decided that citizen input should be a priority for the planning process.

A first round of 17 community based Citizen Input Workshops was held in April, May and June of 1997, with 253 citizens participating and identifying their concerns. This was summarized in a July 1997 report. The results of the first round of citizen input were reported to the 17 communities in a second round of workshops in which 459 participating citizens also were asked to record their preferences for prospective land use and roads policies. The second round of workshops was held in September, October and November of 1997, resulting in a summary report of policy preferences in November of 1997. The results of the workshops formed the basis for a plan for mountain areas approved in February of 1998. At that time, the County Commission decided to defer any implementation until the whole county could be covered by a plan.

To facilitate continued, but more focussed, citizen input into the planning process, the County Commission appointed the Blount County Citizen Advisory Committee in June of 1998. A pool of prospective committee members was created in May by interested individuals submitting an application form as published in the Daily Times newspaper, and also available at the Courthouse. A pool of 62 applicants was listed by Commission district. One applicant was appointed from each Commission District, except for District 4 having two appointments. The eleven members of the Committee were as follows: W. Reid Jopling (elected Chairman), Harry Grothjahn (elected Vice-Chairman), Dee Ann Ostby, Dr. J. Albert Wiberly, Evelyn F. Renfro, Duane Peters, William Marrison, James F. Borden, Barbara Hatcher, Ben Greene and Richard Everett. Coley Odell sat as alternate to Dr. Wiberly in several sessions.

The Citizen Advisory Committee held 15 meetings to final report as follows: July 14 and 21, August 11 and 25, September 15 and 29, October 13 and 27, November 3 and 17, December 1 and 15 of 1998, and January 5, 12 and 14 of 1999. In addition to the above schedule of meetings, the Committee also separated into four subcommittees and met as such on several other occasions, usually once or twice a month, from September to November of 1998. The Committee also attended one local citizen gathering at the Big Springs Community Center on August 10, 1998, and one Planning Commission meeting on October 22, 1998. Throughout all meetings, the Blount County Planning Department provided staff support.

The purpose of the Committee was to focus attention on selected priority issues, make policy recommendations, and identify possible implementation strategies. The Committee members were provided with copies of the 1976 version of the County Plan, population data analysis, summary results of the two citizen input workshops, state statutes on county planning, and other planning related background material. At the August 11 meeting, the Committee identified 23 issues for further consideration. These issues were divided among four subcommittees, and reported back as a consolidated set of subcommittee recommendations at the November 17 meeting. During November and December of 1998, and January of 1999, the full Committee discussed the subcommittee recommendations, added alternative policies and implementation strategies, and voted on each policy and strategy combination for final reporting. The Committee also indicated high, medium and low priority for each issue.

Recommendations: The following are the final recommendations of the Citizen Advisory Committee. The recommendations are purely advisory. The Planning Commission has prime responsibility for adopting plan content, and the County Commission has prime responsibility for adopting most implementation strategies. Where multiple policy alternatives are indicated under an issue, the alternatives are not necessarily mutually exclusive and may be considered as a complementary set if appropriate. Implementation strategies are integral to respective policies.

High, medium and low priority preference results of the Committee are reported for each issue. The voting results for each policy and implementation strategy combination are provided under each issue. A policy and strategy combination with a majority negative vote may be interpreted as having lack of affirmative recommendation, but is provided for completeness of record. The order of issues does not denote any order of priority. Issues have been sequentially rearranged and numbered from the order of original consideration by the Committee to present related issues closer together.

Issue 1. Some form of land use planning is needed.

Issue Priority Preference High 8 Med. 2 Low 1

1A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Adopt an updated land use plan for the county, including workable implementation strategies.

Implementation: Integrate and update the analysis sections of the 1976 Plan, accepting most of the physical analysis as unchanged. Produce a present land use map to show existing geographical structure of development in the county. Pursue the present land use and roads planning process to conclusion, including definitive implementation actions.

Issue 2. There is a resistance to zoning, but also a realization that some sort of control on development is needed.

Issue Priority Preference High 9 Med. 1 Low 1

2A is recommended on vote of: Yes 8 No 3

The County should develop a zoning plan that recognizes the need for mixed uses and emphasizes an open and public process of setting zones and rezoning if needed.

Implementation: Formulation and adoption of a zoning ordinance within an open process with provision for public review and input. Explicit provision for notification of neighboring property owners of any rezoning requests.

2B is not recommended on vote of: Yes 5 No 6

Formulate performance based land use guidelines for development stage only with no enforcement and no required permits for individual property owners. If guidelines are not followed, then property owner will be prohibited from transferring property (prohibition on registering any subsequent deed of transfer.)

Implementation: Voluntary compliance with guidelines, with mandatory prohibition on registering any subsequent deed of transfer if guidelines are not followed.

Issue 3. Compensation of loss of property through government actions, and a general loss of land use options with government regulations.

Issue Priority Preference High 4 Med. 3 Low 4

3A is recommended on vote of: Yes 7 No 4

Property owners should be compensated by the county government for any reduction in property value resulting from county regulations of land use.

Implementation: This would require a budget for compensating land owners, and a procedure for determining compensation.

3B is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

A mechanism for relief for undue impact on property values should accompany any regulation of land use.

Implementation: As part of any land use regulations, establish a grievance, review and relief or variance process for property owners whose land value is substantially affected by county regulation of land use.

Issue 4. How to treat grandfathered or non-conforming uses.

Issue Priority Preference High 2 Med. 6 Low 3

4A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Existing uses and structures should be treated fairly if any land use regulations are adopted.

Implementation: In a land use regulation situation where a use or structure is made non-conforming, the non-conforming use or structure should be allowed to continue in its present state unhindered. A non-conforming use should be allowed to reestablish to the same use, or a similar use of less local impact, after vacating up to a reasonable maximum time. In a situation where the structure housing the non-conforming use is totally destroyed and the use is thereby discontinued, rebuilding and use should conform to any applicable regulations. Applicable state statutes exempting commercial, industrial and agricultural structures and uses from regulation shall apply.

Issue 5. Manufactured home parks and multifamily uses.

Issue Priority Preference High 5 Med. 5 Low 1

5A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Manufactured homes are an acceptable housing type, but should be regulated when designed in multi-unit developments (parks), or at densities greater than two units per acre.

Implementation: Adopt regulations addressing density of development consistent with present subdivided development densities. Manufactured home parks should be required to design for buffering from surrounding uses, minimum paved internal streets at least 16 feet wide, safe access to public roads, drainage, off street parking, common open space, and provision for fire and emergency service, and garbage service. Location of higher density developments should be limited to areas with adequate provision of utilities and services. (See also discussion under Issue 6 below.)

5B is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Multifamily residential is an acceptable housing type, but should be regulated for consistency with overall density characteristics in the county.

Implementation: Adopt regulations addressing density of development. Multi-family developments should be required to design for buffering from surrounding uses, minimum paved internal streets at least 16 feet wide, safe access to public roads, drainage, off street parking, common open space, and provision for fire and emergency service, and garbage service. Location of higher density developments should be limited to areas with adequate provision of utilities and services. (See also discussion under Issue 6 below.)

Issue 6. Prevention of Urban Sprawl.

Issue Priority Preference High 5 Med. 4 Low 2

6A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Higher density development should be limited to the cities or near to the cities along major arterial and collector status roads with sewer. Lower density development should be encouraged farther from the cities, and especially in situations where there is no sewer and limited road capacity.

Implementation: Regulate density of development, with different regulations for areas close to the cities and areas farther away from the cities, and with different regulations for areas adequately served by high capacity infrastructure (especially sewer) and areas not adequately served by infrastructure (especially rural roads). Commercial development should be allowed throughout the county with performance standards when adjoining residential areas.

Issue 7. Mountain Top and Mountain Side Development.

Issue Priority Preference High 7 Med. 1 Low 3

7A is recommended on vote of: Yes 9 No 2

Formulate regulations for mountain areas designed to limit the visual impact of development and to minimize public service issues such as fire protection.

Implementation: Adopt an ordinance of some type, limited to areas above 1000 feet elevation above sea level and projecting more than 300 feet above the adjacent valley floor. Regulations are to address setback of structures from ridge tops, color of structures, the timing or shielding of outside lighting, tree cutting, maximum slope for construction, maximum slope of cross cut for roads, required looping of all roads for emergency access, and increased standards for roads (over present road standards in mountains). A study of fire hazards on steeply wooded slopes should also be made.

Issue 8. Loss of farmland

Issue Priority Preference High 6 Med. 3 Low 2

8A is recommended on vote of: Yes 7 No 4

The County should adopt a formal, systematic, well funded program to preserve open space, farmland, and wild vegetation areas, with the goal to create throughout the county scattered farms, forests and other important open spaces in private ownership but in permanent green belt program.

Implementation: Adopt a flat recordation fee of \$20 (with provision for inflation adjustment) on all documents recorded in the Register of Deeds office, and institute a program to purchase development rights, with geographical allocation of funds based on a strategic plan for preservation of open space. The program would be coordinated and administered by an autonomous citizen board appointed by the County Commission. This proposal would be subject to a referendum to be held in the year 2000.

8B is recommended on vote of: Yes 8 No 3

Encourage private conservation groups or the establishment of a private Blount County Farm Trust to accept voluntary donations of land, and to accept money contributions for purchase of development rights.

Implementation: Any program would be voluntary and purely private with no government input.

8C is recommended on vote of: Yes 8 No 3

Pursue possible grant and other funding sources for either private or public purchase of development rights.

Implementation: Rigorous search for alternative funding sources not requiring separate local fees or taxes (may require local matching funds for grants).

Issue 9. Preservation of open space to preserve rural character.

Issue Priority Preference High 6 Med. 3 Low 2

9A is recommended on vote of: Yes 9 No 2

Support and access the national level “Open Space Preservation Plan Initiative”, and pursue possible grants and other funding sources for open space preservation.

Implementation: Notification of support to Vice President Gore and other appropriate officials of the national level initiative, noting also highlights of open space preservation components of the county plan, and rigorous search for funding sources through the national level initiative and other sources.

Issue 10. Natural vegetation buffers are needed to lessen impact of new developments.

Issue Priority Preference High 4 Med. 4 Low 3

10A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Natural vegetative buffers should be retained or established as land is being subdivided.

Implementation: Within present subdivision regulations, utilize and restrict required drainage and utility easements as vegetative buffers along all rear lot lines. The exterior boundary easement of a subdivision (ten feet wide) would be retained or established as a natural vegetative buffer easement subservient to the drainage and utility easement. All creeks would retain a buffer fifty feet wide on either side of the creek. The buffer easements would be held by a property owners association within each new subdivision. Easements so established may at the option of the developer be either allowed to revert to a natural state or be landscaped in a natural manner using native species.

Issue 11. How to make regular subdivisions look better.

Issue Priority Preference High 3 Med. 6 Low 2

11A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Require use of buffering and designated open spaces or reserved naturalized areas in subdivision design. Require identification of and design for preservation of natural and/or sensitive areas.

Implementation: Revise Subdivision Regulations to require the above.

11B is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Encourage developers to build with innovative designs, allowing mixed uses, and providing for pedestrian friendly, esthetically pleasing, and livable neighborhoods.

Implementation: Review Subdivision Regulations and any land use regulations to encourage such design of new developments.

Issue 12. Development along Highway 321 in relation to preserving rural character, especially preserving the heritage character of the Townsend area.

Issue Priority Preference High 3 Med. 5 Low 3

12A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Encourage and support efforts of the Tuckaleechee Cove Advisory Board to formulate a plan along with input from the citizens of Townsend and Tuchkaleechee Cove.

Implementation: Continue membership and support of area planning activities.

Issue 13. Preserving Views.

Issue Priority Preference High 6 Med. 1 Low 4

13A is recommended on vote of: Yes 9 No 2

Encourage a type of construction for communications towers which would blend in with the natural surroundings.

Implementation: Adopt regulations to require that communications towers be disguised in such a manner to blend in with the natural surroundings.

13B is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Encourage co-location of telecommunication facilities on existing towers.

Implementation: Adopt regulations requiring an effort to co-locate facilities and show specific reasons for lack of feasibility if not feasible.

Issue 14. Need of existing businesses to improve appearance of and upkeep of property.

Issue Priority Preference High 2 Med. 5 Low 4

14A is recommended on vote of: Yes 7 No 4

There should be a requirement that commercial buildings should be kept suitably painted and in proper upkeep so that they will not be a detriment to surrounding properties.

Implementation: Guidelines with requirement for compliance within 6 to 12 months.

14B is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Businesses should keep their property in proper upkeep voluntarily.

Implementation: Guidelines for voluntary compliance with incentives such as public recognition or monetary awards for well kept businesses.

14C is recommended on vote of: Yes 9 No 2

Adopt sign regulations.

Implementation: Use Maryville sign regulations as a starting point for formulating county regulations.

Issue 15. Roadside Litter and Garbage/Refuse.

Issue Priority Preference High 7 Med. 3 Low 1

15A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Groups such as Beautiful Blount, Blount County Sheriff’s Department Litter Crew, and other groups concerned with litter should be given more support.

Implementation: Increase support in the form of equipment and enforcement.

15B is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Individuals who want to dump a small, non-recurring amount of trash at the land fill need some sort of consideration.

Implementation: Possible no-fee days for general citizenry, and/or reduced fee at all times for small loads of trash dumped by general citizenry. This should be recommended to the Solid Waste Authority.

15C is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Provide more opportunities for toxic waste disposal.

Implementation: Schedule more days each year for hazardous/toxic waste disposal at a central site in the county. Provide handling facility/drop-off point for more routine hazardous/toxic waste products form households.

15D is recommended on vote of: Yes 9 No 2

Take steps to control garbage/refuse in the county.

Implementation: Reintroduce the former resolution on the collection and storage of garbage, litter, refuse, and rubbish for consideration by the County Commission.

Issue 16. Pollution of the Little River and its tributaries by septic failures, farm animals, and trash/junk along tributaries.

Issue Priority Preference High 7 Med. 4 Low 0

16A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Conduct a study of pollution sources of the Little River, and formulate a county wide pollution prevention program.

Implementation: Coordinate a study of pollution sources with other agencies, such as TVA, and create an advisory committee to formulate a pollution prevention program.

16B is recommended on vote of: Yes 9 No 2

The county should undertake a county-wide sewer study and plan.

Implementation: Create a task force to study the feasibility of creating a county sewer system.

Issue 17. Health and water quality concerns in relation to septic fields.

Issue Priority Preference High 8 Med. 1 Low 2

17A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Protect the health of the citizens of Blount County, and protect the quality of water in the county.

Implementation: Adopt more stringent septic field standards specific to Blount County (revision of existing minimal state standards). Pursue more stringent enforcement and penalties for violation of septic disposal standards. The County should develop a water and pollution prevention program of its own. The county should undertake a county-wide sewer study and plan.

Issue 18. Drainage problems.

Issue Priority Preference High 3 Med. 6 Low 2

18A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

Protect detention areas and drainage ways in a natural state to enhance drainage capabilities.

Implementation: Amend subdivision regulations and any other development related regulations to require retention of natural cover for drainage facilities, require additional ground cover for degraded drainage facilities, and require minimization of disturbance and compaction during construction phase.

18B is recommended on vote of: Yes 8 No 3

Formulate a county-wide drainage plan by drainage basin, addressing quantity of runoff as well as quality of runoff, such plan to form the basis for judging needed drainage requirements of individual new developments.

Implementation: Appoint a committee with professional technical help to formulate a plan.

Issue 19. Roads – buildup of traffic on roads and capacity of narrow roads in relation to new development.

Issue Priority Preference High 7 Med. 4 Low 0

19A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

To improve roadways functionally and structurally so that they meet today’s traffic needs.

Implementation: Conduct a formal objective study of road capacity and constraints, for road segments and intersections, and for present traffic with expected growth. Improve roadways that are identified as a high priority from the objective study. Funding for improvements may come from existing gasoline taxes and shared revenues (with effort to change sharing formula at state level), with possible new sources from local wheel tax and property tax.

19B is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

To ensure that roadways and intersections can handle traffic that is generated from all types of development in the county.

Implementation: Adopt a minimum standard of 18 feet of paved road width as condition precedent for development. Require a formal traffic impact study for subdivisions or other developments that would generate 1000 or more trips per day (approximately 100 lots in a subdivision). Require as a design standard that developments provide adequate sight distance at all intersections of public or private roads (including driveway entrances serving more than one house or serving any commercial establishment).

19C is recommended on vote of: Yes 8 No 3

Attention should be paid to alternative transportation modes such as busses and bicycle friendly roads.

Implementation: Study the feasibility of establishing a bus link of major commercial centers in Blount County, and to Knoxville. Formulate a bicycle route plan for the county.

Issue 20. Study impact fees as part of development.

Issue Priority Preference High 3 Med. 3 Low 5

20A is recommended on vote of: Yes 10 No 1

To insure that developers and residents of new subdivisions and developments (either commercial or residential) pay for impacts that are directly made by the development.

Implementation: Contract with an independent non-profit group (e.g., the University of Tennessee, Center for Business and Economic Research) to study the impacts of new developments to compare public revenues generated by the developments with costs in increased public services required by the developments. If the public costs are equal to or less than the public revenues, then impact fees would not be warranted. If the public costs are greater than the public revenues, then an equitable impact fee should be considered.

Issue 21. Population growth and its impact on schools, also need for better utilization of existing school facilities by the community.

Issue Priority Preference High 6 Med. 5 Low 0

21A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

To ensure that the current and proposed schools will be able to handle anticipated growth.

Implementation: The Planning Department should develop estimates of new students generated by each new subdivision, and should report these estimates along with location and number of lots created to the school board. The school board should determine the need for redistricting schools to make the best use of existing facilities and transportation options.

21B is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Formulate a plan to utilize existing school facilities for community sports, recreation and civic events.

Implementation: Appoint a working advisory committee composed of at least representatives from the School Board and the Parks and Recreation Commission.

21C is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Formulate a county-wide parks and recreation plan, including utilization of existing public facilities.

Implementation: Appoint a working committee composed of representatives from the Parks and Recreation Commission and citizens.

Issue 22. Inappropriate siting of utility structures.

Issue Priority Preference High 2 Med. 1 Low 8

22A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Encourage more appropriate siting of utility structures in relation to private driveways and in relation to sight distances at public road intersections.

Implementation: General oversight by the County Executive to inform utilities of concerns and public complaints.

Issue 23. How to move ahead with Townsend annexation of surrounding land.

Issue Priority Preference High 0 Med. 2 Low 9

23A is recommended on vote of: Yes 11 No 0

Encourage local citizens in the Townsend area to address the issue locally.