

Report on citizen input workshop on revised Policies Plan.

The following is excerpted and adapted from the staff memo for the Long range agenda items for the July 24, 2008 regular meeting.

The Planning Commission held a workshop to hear citizen input on the draft revised Policies Plan on July 15. In attendance were Commissioners Blankenship, Burchfield, Farmer, Harrison, Helton, Hodge, Ramsey, Scully and Stucky. From an audience of about twenty-five, 14 persons spoke. The Raven Society had previously mailed separate written comments to the Planning Commissioners, and a copy of the document will be posted on the web page. One citizen, James White, mailed comments which were distributed at the meeting (reproduced below). County Commissioner Wendy Pitts-Reeves submitted written comments to staff at the meeting in addition to her comments below, and the document will be posted on the web page. The following are summary comments from the workshop.

(Written comments from James White)

I am writing this letter to give input on the Blount County Policy Plan, for which there is a hearing on July 15, 2008, which I will not be able to attend.

I was very surprised to learn that lot density bonuses for clustering in a hamlet were part of the plan. Being allowed to cluster homes to save on roads and piping is its own reward in considerable cost savings. That's what developers want to do anyway. No incentive is needed!

This is particularly upsetting to see this in the Plan for any rural part of the county. Please consider removing this. I have even heard some developers comment, "Oh, that will just be for certain clique developers."

We have so many homes empty for resale. Why in the world would we want to increase the profits of certain developers when they will most certainly cluster anyway for their own cost savings.

Thank you for allowing my input.

The following are summary notes of comments by speakers at the workshop:

Marian Fitzgerald

Stated that she was pleased with proposed changes. Support regulations to protect rivers and streams. Five foot stream buffer is inadequate. Need to seek advice from TDEC and Little River Watershed Association.

Gordon Wright

Noted original settlers in county did not need others to tell them what to do and what the county should look like, and questioned if we need others telling us what to do now. Concerning Policy 1A, we already have a lot of open space in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, TVA land, community centers and parks, and required set asides in subdivisions. In his subdivision he has 16 acres of open space that no one uses. This open space is either not taxed or is under reduced taxes, and this has an effect on the tax base. Requiring more dedication of open space in new developments will exacerbate the problem. Notes that our ancestors were protective of property rights. If you have an influx of population you need some regulations, but need to be uniform in application, for example do not single out the looks of a house in the mountains if you will not also address the looks of a house in the lowlands, and do not single out development clear cutting in the mountains if not also in the lowlands. Objects to mandating conservation easements to be assigned to a third party thus losing the use of the property, and the effect of reducing taxes from developable property. Does not agree to Purchase of Development Rights with County funds which would better be applied to needed roads. Concerning Policy 1D notes that Phase II storm water mandates already required by state, and under the state law agriculture is exempt. Concerned that local laws may interfere with agriculture such as encouraging best management practices. Concerning open space dedication, does not totally disagree but disagrees with larger scale mandates. Encouraging urban concentration of development and discouraging dispersed rural development can be good and bad since there are also social problems with concentration of population. Notes that people are choosing to move out from urban areas. Notes that there is no relationship between visual impact and the protection of public health, safety and welfare under Policies 3A and 3B, and law supports that visual impact alone cannot be basis for regulations. Opposed to wheel tax, but would support use of hotel/motel tax. Government that governs least governs best.

The proposed policies plan is unneeded overregulation and restriction of property rights. Overregulation is detrimental to those who pay taxes and pay the bills.

Kathleen Skinner

Open space conservation, and protection natural areas and agricultural land, is an important part of planning that benefits all of the citizens. Provides recreational opportunities and scenic landscapes for our quality of life. It protects wildlife habitat. Sustains agricultural land for food production. It protects water quality and replenishes groundwater. It maintains oxygen production for clean air. Citizens have shown support for preserving open space. Concerning tax revenues, open space demands less of the tax base than does residential development. Homes are always a drain on the county budget. Low density subdivision cause sprawl that consumes agricultural land, increases housing cost, and impact the ecology. Should encourage compact development in and around existing urban centers. Citizens need more alternatives for housing, including urban lifestyles.

Richard Furgerson

Policy 4C should not endorse a particular project, e.g., Pellissippi Parkway or southern loop. There is too much reliance on the TPO plan which is too much a promotion of projects with little public input.

Derrick Harmon

Policy 1A part 3 concerned with density bonus for cluster development. Cluster has substantial benefit in itself. Do not give away a gift to use up more of our farmland. It takes a long time for a residential development to pay off in taxes, and we do not want more development in our farmland. We may need the farmland for survival. A density bonus sounds like a perk for certain select developers. It is more stress on roads and school infrastructure.

Ingrid Haun

Notes that Cracker Barrel is a play on nostalgia of a rural way of life, but it is ironic that it is usually located next to a large interstate highway. The Policies Plan is so important in that it can protect real rural character and a

way of life. We have some things here that make us different from other places in the US. We are at the point where we can go one of two ways, the market way which will make us similar to Knox County and Pigeon Forge, or we can preserve what is unique and important to us. We need to control it and plan for it, and not just let the market decide for us. The Policies Plan is important for this.

Caron Beard

Three major problems: urban sprawl, strip development along highways, and lack of quality of development along highways. Cluster development will decrease cost of infrastructure. If we set minimum standards on development we will increase visual quality. Need landscape ordinance, using communities such as Maryville and Farragut as examples.

Ellis Bacon

Need sustainable economy, and ecotourism should be part of this. National Geographic study showed that 60 percent of tourism was focused on genealogical themes, ecotourism and special places. We need to protect such things in Blount County. Tourists spend their dollars to come to look at the mountains and the ecology. Ecology and economy are intertwined. You often see that there is a polarization involved in public discussion of issues. It is not a dichotomy, and the Plan is a wonderful compromise. The majority of the people have spoken in Nine Counties One Vision to maintain rural quality of the county.

Doug Gamble

Issue of time frame. We need to look beyond the immediate time frame and out to 50 to 100 years in setting direction and desired outcome. Should not let market forces for the last 200 years to dominate the next 100 years. The Raven Society has provided some suggestions to improve the Plan. Do not let short term window of five or ten years guide your views. Have we set our county on a course that will protect it in the next 100 years.

Don Headrick

Concerning Policy 1C, the people who own the ridge tops and riverbanks pay taxes on them, and those who want to regulate others should pay the

price of burden on the value of the property owner. Those who identified the visual areas to preserve do not pay the taxes on the properties to be preserved. A few should not be able to dictate to others. It should be a democracy. Only about 250 people responded to develop the Policies Plan and this is a very small minority. Working people do not have the time to attend these types of meetings, and they should be considered also.

Wendy Pitts-Reeves

Likes unique ideas like picking out a stream to mitigate each three years. Many times such ideas are presented as an either or type of proposition, either you regulate or you let development go like crazy. Notes example of Hilton Head, and that community's effort to preserve that island. The property values on that island are not cheap. Gets comments from people in Sevier County that Blount County should not make the same mistakes as in Wears Valley. We have a chance to do what is right, and that can be good for business too. Cites example of comments from Ed McMahon who showed that open space is what people like to build houses next to, and that enhances the value of all the property. Doing things right also can make money. Good planning is good business, and is good for the people.

Mary Gregory

Notes that regulations have had impact on her family land in the Townsend area, but she is happy about this. Development in the past has impacted the mountains. She wants Blount County to remain the beautiful place it is now. Appreciate Blount County for what it is and its history. Hope we can live with our environment. Need also to allow for such things as trailer parks so that those who can only afford this can be accommodated. Need to protect all classes of people in county.

Billy Newton

Values the rural character of county. County has both urban and rural character, and natural beauty. It is important to move forward on protecting this by looking ahead. It will be very obvious in the future those communities that took a stand to preserve the natural beauty and rural character of their community. The economy and preservation are tied together as an economic engine of the community, that will regenerate the greatest revenues decade after decade. Responsibility of government to look

out for greater good to insure longevity and sustainability of benefits. Good that voluntary guidelines have now become required. Greatest prosperity is to preserve natural beauty and health environment as our capital into the future.

Booty Miller

All the things that were true a century or two ago cannot be held true today. Our population has grown so that we are getting in each other's way. Do into those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you. Gave example of local lake that has filled up with sediment. We need to think of effects of our actions.