

**The State of Planning
in Blount County, Tennessee
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September, 2006**

The state of planning in Blount County is active and sustained.

We have an active Planning Commission of long standing, and a professional support staff.

We adopted a long range Policies Plan based on substantial citizen input in a three-year planning process.

We implemented zoning regulations and addressed many substantial land use issues.

We revised our Subdivision Regulations to better address quality development.

We adopted building codes, and regulations addressing care of property.

We adopted a Water Quality Plan addressing pollution of our waterways, and received grants for activities in the Little River Watershed.

We addressed many infrastructure issues such as roads, schools, and recreation facilities.

We supported an innovative group exploring linkages between public health and planning.

We forged linkages at the local and regional level to address issues of growth. We completed a Growth Strategy that will provide guidance as we consider growth issues in the future.

We sustained a planning work program based on a long range implementation agenda.

The Blount County Planning Commission has planned for the county since November of 1967. The Blount County Planning Department has been a part of County government since 1975, and is presently staffed by John Lamb - Director, Doug Hancock - Planner, and Gaye Hasty - Planning Administrative Assistant. John and Doug have Master of Science degrees in Planning, and many years of professional experience.

In the 1990's, the county was growing faster than at any time in its history. Many saw the need to look forward and define what would be necessary to maintain or create a quality future.

In 1996, the County Commission launched a countywide planning process. About 250 citizens participated in a first round of 17 community meetings to define a framework of issues for policy consideration. About 450 citizens participated in a second round of meetings to prioritize a set of policies and implementation options. An eleven member Citizens Advisory Committee formulated proposed policies and implementation actions.

The Planning Commission considered citizen input and Committee proposals to formulate the Blount County Policies Plan, including a 21 item implementation agenda. The Plan was adopted June 24, 1999. It was the first general county plan in more than 20 years.

The Plan immediately provided guidance for planning activities. The County first addressed zoning, and this resulted in a set of regulations, including flood plain management regulations, adopted in July of 2000 (effective September 1, 2000). The County hired a Building Commissioner to administer the regulations, and appointed a Board of Zoning Appeals.

The Planning Commission adopted a Conceptual Land Use Plan along with the zoning plan. The County Commission and the Planning Commission continue to address substantial land use issues, most notably concerning the location and quality of commercial development in the county.

In December 2000, the Highway Department completed the Blount County Roadway Needs Study. The process included five community meetings for citizen input. The study included a plan of priorities for road improvements over the next 25 years. The study was updated in March 2005. The updated study identified more than \$84 million in road construction needs in the next 20 years, including \$51 million for immediate improvements.

In April 2001, the County Commission adopted regulations addressing trash and junk on properties. The regulations are administered by the Building Commissioner, and apply only to a property that is not owner occupied.

The County and the cities completed a Growth Plan under state mandate (Public Chapter 1101) in 2001, identifying urban growth boundaries, planned growth areas, and rural areas. The Plan was completed after arbitration by a state appointed panel, and final adjustment by the Local Government Planning Advisory Committee of the State.

The Planning Commission adopted a Water Quality Plan on April 24, 2003, after a one year planning process. The Plan built on the 1999 Policies Plan, and provided a detailed set of policies and implementation activities addressing the issues of pollution of our rivers, lakes and streams. The County conducted 22 citizen input workshops in support of the process, with 189 citizens participating. A Citizens Advisory Committee also reviewed and made recommendations for the plan.

The water quality planning process was aided by research from the Integrated Pollutant Source Identification (IPSI) project. Under IPSI, the Tennessee Valley Authority mapped water pollution sources from aerial photography. The planning process also was aided by the Tennessee Growth Readiness project of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, assisted by the Tennessee Valley Authority. The project provided a concentrated education component on water quality issues. Blount County was a pilot community in developing and applying the education materials.

Provisions of the Clean Water Act mandated participation by Blount County in the Phase II Storm Water Program. The program includes required measures for public education, public involvement, detection and elimination of illicit discharge, construction site storm water management, post construction storm water management, and pollution prevention measures for public agencies. The County hired a new Stormwater Program Coordinator. The County, in cooperation with Maryville and Alcoa, adopted erosion and sedimentation control regulations, and illicit discharge regulations, and is continuing to develop other required regulations.

Both the Water Quality Plan and the Phase 2 Storm Water program identified further planning activities. The Community Partnership Center of the University of Tennessee in cooperation with the Little River Water Quality Forum, secured grants to conduct community based planning in the Little River watershed, completed in 2005. The County was awarded a grant of \$858,000 in December 2005 by the Environmental Protection Agency to continue and expand water quality improvement activities in the Little River Watershed.

The County Commission adopted building codes in 2005. Implementation commenced July 2006. with hiring of a building codes department head, and setting up implementation procedures.

Blount County, the City of Alcoa and the City of Maryville have sustained a long term cooperative effort to provide parks and recreation programs and facilities to citizens. The Parks and Recreation Board received a Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Plan from consultants in April 2005.

Over the past two years, the Planning Commission adopted standards for approval of subdivisions considering adequacy of roads and school infrastructure, and adopted new standards for septic capability and requirements for underground utilities. After a lengthy review, the Planning Commission adopted new revised Subdivision Regulations in July 2006 to address the quality of subdivision developments in the county.

The Planning Department participates in the Tuckaleechee Cove Advisory Board, addressing unique development issues in Townsend and the surrounding area that acts as a gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains Park. The Department continues long term participation in the Knoxville Transportation Planning Organization to address transportation issues along with Maryville and Alcoa, and other counties and cities surrounding the larger regional urban center.

The Director of Planning participates in Friends of Quality Growth, a regional initiative that is addressing a wide range of issues including growth management. The Director of Planning also participates in the Environmental Health Action Team (EHAT) of the Blount County Community Health Initiative, an innovative group that is addressing three priority areas of concern – air quality, water quality and land use – from the perspective of public health. The EHAT has gained statewide and national recognition for its community based collaborative efforts, and received a \$20,000 supporting grant from the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

The County received the Blount County Growth Strategy from consultants in August 2005, paralleling a similar strategy produced for Maryville. The Growth Strategy will provide input into deliberations and decisions on land use issues, and further planning on growth issues in the county.

The Planning Commission is reviewing the Growth Strategy, and reviewing past plans and implementation agenda in preparation for revising plan documents and extending the process to a more formal comprehensive plan. Citizens are invited to continue their participation in the County planning process.

In summary, the state of planning in Blount County is active, is continuous and sustained, is participatory, is progressing on a path guided by a long range plan, is applying substantial internal and external resources, and is addressing a wide range of issues. For copies of planning documents, and information on Planning Commission activities, visit us on the internet at: **www.blounttn.org/planning/**