
The Blount County Growth Strategy



Blount County Growth Strategy

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Part I. Introduction

Blount County, Tennessee has been experiencing population growth for several decades, and this trend is expected to continue for the foreseeable future. The rate of this growth will vary depending on a host of local, regional, and national trends, as well as the employment of management tools. It should be clear from the outset however, that the Blount County Growth Strategy does not seek to limit population growth. Rather the purpose is to manage and guide the attendant growth in residential development, commercial development, impacts on the environment and other factors that will determine the physical nature of the County in the future.

Population projections were completed during the course of the study process and compared/balanced with projections done by the U.S. Census Bureau, Blount County, and the State of Tennessee. Currently, the County has a population of approximately 106,000. Projections show that the County's population could increase to over 200,000 by the year 2050, doubling the relative number of dwellings, need for public facilities and services, and carrying with it an implicit impact on open space, transportation and utility infrastructure, and other aspects of life and living in the County.

To put this in perspective however, it should be understood that this amount of growth reflects an increase rate of approximately 2% per year. This is within the parameters of what would be considered desirable growth (1% is considered healthy; 2.5% is considered excessive, although some communities such as Glendale and Chandler Arizona are thriving under a 5% growth rate). Therefore, Blount County's growth can be seen as moderately strong which bodes well for continued economic prosperity. This prosperity recognizes the importance of the real estate development industry, tourism, and other economic drivers. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #1: Blount County Population Growth Projections; Technical Memorandum #3: Market Analysis; and Technical Memorandum #10: Experience in Comparable Counties)

The Blount County Growth Strategy was developed over a one-year period, during which time numerous parallel efforts were undertaken by a combination of the consulting team, Blount County officials, many stakeholders in the community, and the public at large. The desire was to create a growth strategy for the County that would ensure a future that reflects the collective vision of the people. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #4: Blount County Citizen Input, and Technical Memorandum #8: Growth Strategy Charrette Notes.)

The Growth Strategy for Blount County builds on five “Guiding Policies” recommended in the Blount County Policies Plan adopted in June 1999 by the Blount County Regional Planning Commission. The plan listed the primary policy agenda for guiding the County’s growth and development. The Blount County Growth Strategy should then be viewed as one of the implementation strategies for the Blount County Policies Plan.

The Guiding Policies provide a strong foundation for a growth strategy formulated to shape the form and character of future County development. This strategic plan focuses on recommending a series of key actions for implementing the guiding policies. The proposed implementation actions are based on reviews of previous plans and reports prepared by County staff and other agencies, as well as ideas gleaned from dozens of interviews with local officials and citizens, from discussions with the County Commission and Planning Commission, and from several public forums and charrettes conducted by the consulting team.

The recommendations presented and discussed in the following sections are organized according to each guiding policy. For each, the objectives spelled out in the Policies Plan are outlined, opportunities and issues that will affect future implementation are identified, and recommended actions are described. The rationale, potential phasing, and related actions are discussed.



Figure 1

This view illustrates potential gateway development and incorporates key design principles. Hotel, restaurants, and specialty retail uses are combined to create visitor/destination attraction.



Figure 2
This view captures the Village feel that clustered development can provide.



Figure 3
Blount County's open space is gradually being developed.



Figure 4
This view shows 321, the Little River and a Gateway orientation.



Figure 5
Schools and other infrastructure are important considerations.

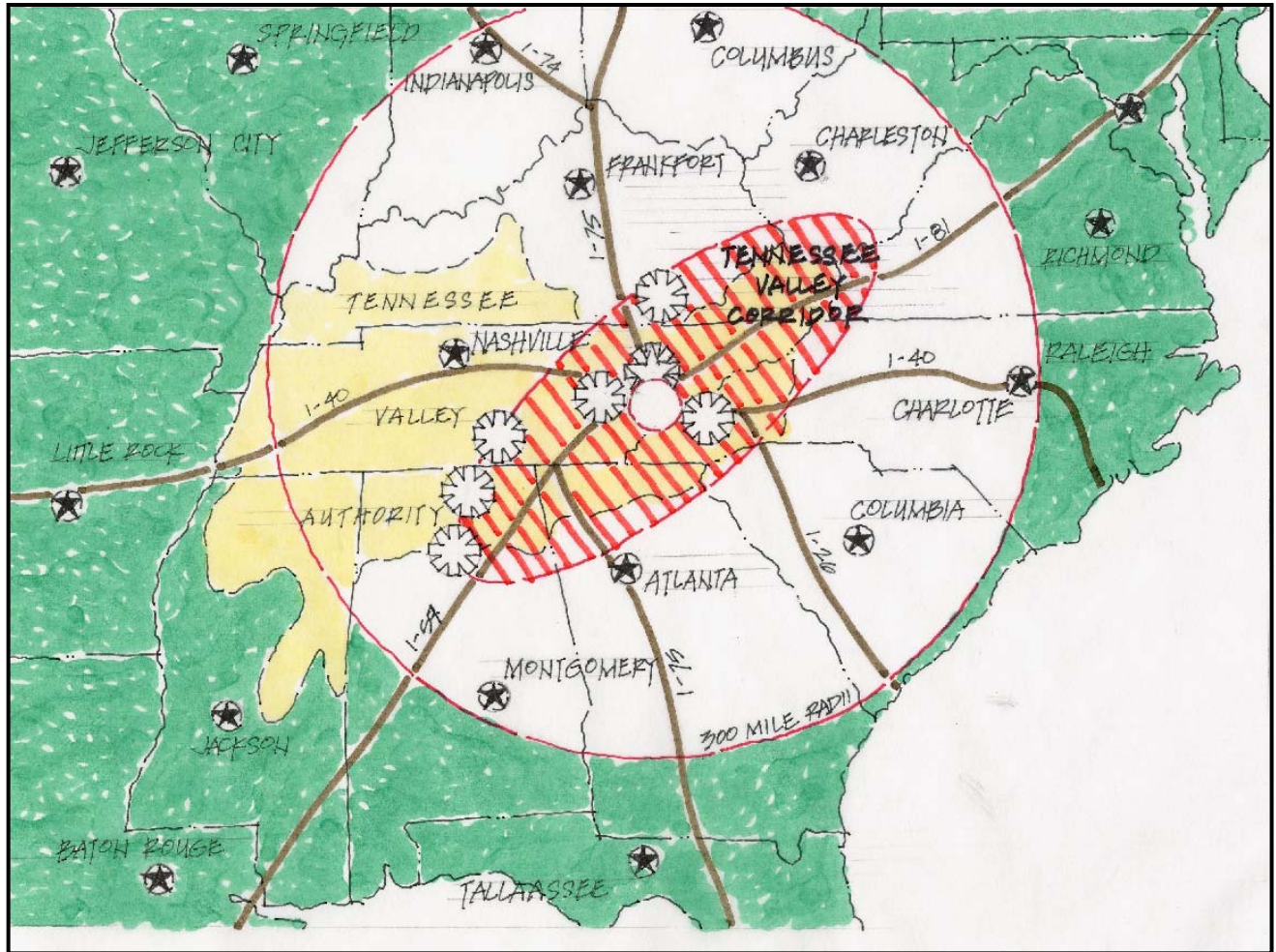


Figure 6

Growth in the Tennessee Valley Corridor includes urban hubs, suburban rings, and rural/agricultural land. The future of Blount County needs to be viewed in a regional context with multi-state influences.

Part II. The Blount County Growth Strategy: The Five Guiding Policies

In order to ensure a future that is consistent with the public vision, the Growth Strategy includes five action areas that will be the subject of policy decisions as time and implementation move forward. They are summarized as follows:

Guiding Policy 1: *The rural, small town, and natural character of the County should be preserved.*

Guiding Policy 2: *Land use and development should be managed and regulated to preserve the quality of our growing County.*

Guiding Policy 3: *The guiding policy in any government actions in relation to the use and development of land should be to **limit regulations** to specific public health, safety, and welfare objectives, balanced with responsible freedom in the use of the land.*

Guiding Policy 4: *County roads should be improved and maintained to serve existing and future development.*

Guiding Policy 5: *Growth and development should be matched with provision of adequate infrastructure such as utilities, roads, and schools.*

Part III. The Blount County Growth Strategy: The What, The How

This section presents the five Guiding Policies of the Blount County Growth Strategy in a format that seeks to explain the basic mechanics of each. Each Guiding Policy includes a description of the *What* and the *How* in order to convey an understanding of the background and substance of recommendations, as well as implementation options for consideration.

Guiding Policy 1: Preserve the County’s rural, small town, and natural character:

The What:

This Guiding Policy represents perhaps the core value of the community as expressed in public forums, planning and policy documents, media coverage of the growth issue, and a historical connection to Blount County’s agrarian past. It is also closely linked to the cultural and economic foundation represented by the Great Smoky Mountain State Park and the experience associated with its visitation. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #4: Citizen Input; Technical Memorandum # 8: Growth Strategy Charrette.)

This Guiding Policy is directed at a combination of County assets and resources including the Little River Watershed, active farming land, mountainsides and ridge tops, wooded lands, wetlands, and just plain open space. Scale of development is also an embedded element of the Policy, as should be design considerations and other factors.

Future policy decisions and the degree to which the Blount County Growth Strategy is implemented will obviously be strong determining factors in the region’s future, which could in fact be dramatically different depending on these and other factors. (For more information, please see Technical Memorandum #18: Alternative Futures)

According to the Blount County Policy Plan this policy calls for, among other things:

- Conserving trees and natural vegetation, open space, and natural features
- Protecting farmland, the scenic environment, and the water quality of lakes, rivers, and streams

- Fitting new development, including commercial development in Townsend and Tuckaleechee Cove, into the County's rural and small town character.

Citizen input during the policy planning process and opinion surveys of County residents rate these objectives highly as an essential part of the quality of life they enjoy. However, to achieve these goals will require new and strongly proactive efforts by the County, including some or all of the following initiatives:

The How:

Curb low-density development now spreading into farmland and scenic areas.

The County cannot continue to encourage very low-density development throughout the jurisdiction without losing much of its heritage of farmland and scenic areas. One-acre to five-acre and even larger lots consume land at a rapid pace. Agricultural and scenic areas make prime building sites. Concerted efforts to preserve substantial amounts of open space from development should utilize a broad-based approach using several techniques such as the following:

- Zone designated lands as reserves for future development, by establishing densities such as (up to) 20-acre minimum lot sizes that will discourage building, and compensating landowners with tax abatements to be repaid upon later sale—the agricultural district technique used in many states. (For additional information, please refer to Technical Memorandum # 17: Selected Zoning Recommendations)
- Adopt a County program to purchase development rights in high-priority scenic areas, funded by public bonds underwritten by a small countywide increase in property or sales taxes. Use federal and state programs if available and conservancy programs to supplement such a program. Take advantage of but do not depend on donations and other voluntary efforts that can assist but not carry the whole effort. (For additional information please refer to Technical Memorandum #13: Sample Purchase of Development Rights Program)
- Prepare an open space plan to supplement the upcoming plan of the Parks and Recreation Facilities Commission that designates significant farmland, scenic, and other natural areas desirable to conserve, including opportunities for extending greenways. Identify lands best acquired through purchase of development rights and other lands in developing areas where subdivision developers would be required to dedicate open space.

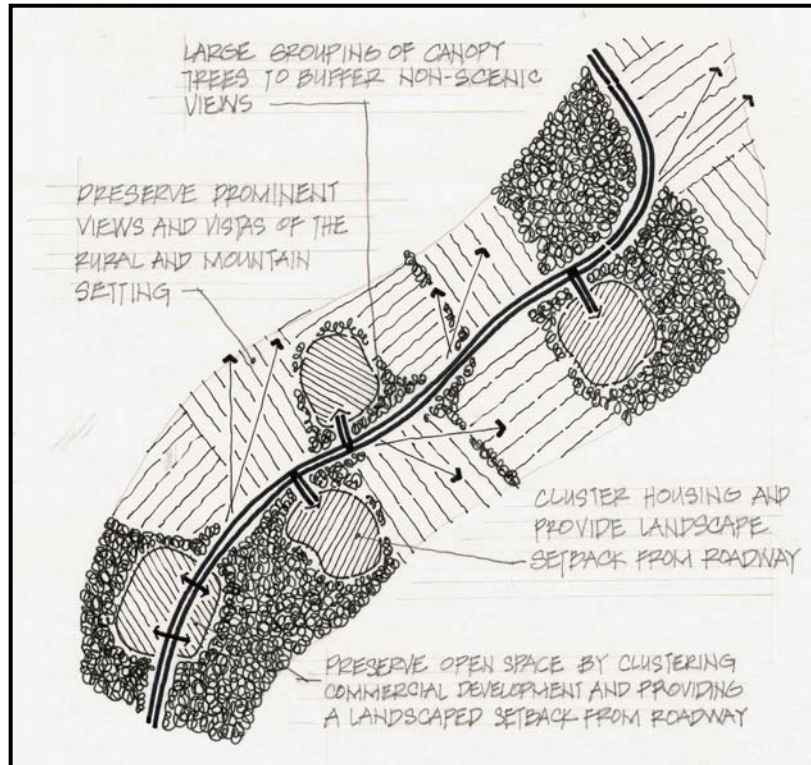
- Adopt a plan and implementation program (similar to one previously proposed) for preserving land and preventing harmful effects of development in the environmentally sensitive lands of the mountain area.
- Establish open space standards in subdivision regulations and require developer dedication of parks, recreation areas, and natural areas such as stream valleys; also, provide incentives for conservation in subdivisions of other types of open spaces, including farmlands, forests, and wetlands. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #5 Evaluation of Subdivision Regulations and Procedures; Technical Memorandum #10: Experience in Comparable Counties; and, Technical Memorandum #17 Selected Zoning Recommendations)
- Adopt an impact fee for open space preservation to apply in subdivisions where dedicated acreage would be too small for efficient management, to be used to assist in purchase of nearby, off-site open space. (For additional information please refer to Technical Memorandum #16: Adequate Public Facilities Discussion.)

Promote compact development in sewerred growth areas around existing cities and towns and in designated growth areas within the County.

To relieve pressures for development in rural areas, the County can take steps to increase the share of future growth taking place within sewerred areas, especially in already designated growth areas. This would place the County in a collaborative rather than competitive position with its municipalities in managing growth. (For additional information please refer to Technical Memorandum #11: Wastewater Treatment Alternatives; and, Technical Memorandum #16: Adequate Public Facilities Discussion.)

- Establish intergovernmental agreements to promote compact development in city and town growth areas to reduce development pressures on rural lands elsewhere in the County. Such agreements could tailor County zoning to achieve such a goal and promote collaborative arrangements for funding sewer extensions. (For additional information please refer to Technical Memorandum #15: Implementation Process.)
- Consider designation of “villages” or “hamlets” in rural areas that would cluster development in densities suitable for community sewer service. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum # 17: Selected Zoning Recommendations.)

- Prepare a countywide evaluation of long-range sewerage needs based on projected densities of development in various areas, and adopt a policy plan to guide decisions concerning the location and funding of future sewerage improvements.



*Figure 7
Cluster Development can play a large role over time in
managing the direction/character of growth.*

Improve management of stormwater runoff and surface and subsurface water quality.

Although the County's subdivision regulations currently mandate requirements for managing stormwater runoff and protection of lakes and streams, and significant studies have been prepared to assess water quality issues, more could be done to understand and support rather than interfere with hydrologic systems of water and stormwater flow. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum # 11: Wastewater Treatment Alternatives.)

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- Amend subdivision regulations to require retention of natural cover in wetlands and along streams, retrofit ground cover in degraded areas, and minimize disturbance and compaction during construction.
- Work with developers to identify and protect wellhead and aquifer recharge areas in proposed subdivisions.
- Promote innovative techniques for retaining stormwater and improving groundwater recharge in higher-density developments, such as use of constructed wetlands, permeable pavements, design reductions in impervious surfaces, and tree wells.
- Review and upgrade standards for septic fields as appropriate and pursue enforcement of best practices in managing them.
- Continue working with various local, state, and federal agencies to identify and eliminate sources of water pollution, especially in the Little River (the principal supplier of water for the County).
- Assess problems and formulate retrofit drainage plans in drainage basins most threatened by mismanaged stormwater flows.

Adopt design standards to guide development in heritage areas such as Townsend and Tuckaleechee Cove.

These areas are considered significant contributors to the quality of the living environment in Blount County. The experience of rampant and unattractive commercial development in Pigeon Forge teaches that public guidance is necessary to protect the special character of such areas. Heritage areas can be protected and enhanced by formulating and adopting recommended guidelines for the design, appearance, and relationships of buildings, parking areas, signs, pedestrian paths, landscaping, and other aspects of the visual and functional environment. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum # 17: Selected Zoning Recommendations.)



Figure 8
Blount County close up of Commercial.

Guiding Policy 2: Managing and regulating land use and development to preserve the quality of the growing County:

The What:

This Guiding Policy refers to the accumulated land use, zoning, subdivision regulations, and allied plans and documents that have evolved over time, and the implicit goals of the community that they represent. This Policy is really a process, the results of which hopefully will be related to Guiding Policy #1 as well as all others.

The Blount County Policies Plan spells out the following objectives for this policy:

- Formulating and adopting zoning and other land development regulations
- Regulating development on mountains and ridge tops to protect sensitive slopes and views
- Regulating development in flood plains to allow opportunities for residents to purchase flood insurance
- Improving management of junk on private property
- Reviewing regulations to ensure the safety and quality of buildings
- Reducing negative impacts of billboards, signs, towers, and other structures.

(For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #2: Evaluation of Policies Plan, Conceptual Land Use Plan, and Zoning Ordinance.)

The County has already adopted several types of regulations to advance toward these objectives, including a basic zoning ordinance, detailed subdivision regulations with special attention to hillside development, and a flood-plain ordinance. In several respects, however, existing and future County growth calls for additional regulations to ensure the quality of development that will retain its desirable living and working environment. In addition to the zoning for conservation of farmland and scenic areas recommended in the previous section, the following actions are timely.

The How:

Complete the updating of the comprehensive plan to guide future County growth as the framework for regulating land use and development.

The Policies Plan takes a significant step toward updating the 1976 land use plan. However, the Policies Plan recognizes that its general proposals require more detailed statements to specify desirable land use patterns and qualities and to lay out the related public facility systems necessary to support growth. These statements will provide a policy framework for guiding decisions on regulating development. Comprehensive plans typically incorporate the following types of proposals and supporting information:

- Existing and future land use patterns, indicating what, where, and when various types of residential, commercial, and industrial development would desirably take place, based on consideration of existing public facilities, market trends, natural assets, and other factors.
- Pursuing the State and County road network required to interconnect development within the County and the rest of the region. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #9: Transportation Issues and Recommendations.)
- The system of parks, recreation facilities, natural areas, and other open spaces proposed to be conserved and protected from development.
- Other facility systems, such as schools, libraries, and fire stations, that will be needed to serve County growth. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #16: Adequate Public Facilities Discussion.)
- Many of the “secondary” policies spelled out in the Policies Plan would be appropriate to incorporate and expand upon in the new plan.

Reconsider current zoning for commercial development along major highways.

Zoning that promotes strip commercial development along highways is often based on the following reasons: 1) that it is a traditional means for attracting tax-generating businesses; 2) that other communities already have generated substantial development along highways; and 3) no other development finds highway locations desirable. These reasons ignore the downsides of highway strip development, including impacts on highway safety and travel congestion, the unsightly conditions of scattered strip development, and inefficient use of key

sites for resident services, all of which combine to devalue rather than add value to the future development in the County. Widely known design practices that can avoid these negative effects are available, such as:

- Concentrate zoning for highway-oriented commercial development at key intersections.
- Prepare access management plans to limit access for most of a highway's frontage to reduce turning movements and provide intersections with streets and frontage roads rather than allowing access directly to bordering development.
- Prepare and execute a planting plan for trees and shrubs along the highway right-of-way to screen bordering development.

(For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #17: Selected Zoning Recommendations.)

Adopt zoning and subdivision provisions to promote mixed-use development and innovative subdivision designs such as clustering, conservation subdivisions, traditional neighborhoods, and traditional town centers.

Many communities are interested in promoting innovative forms of development that promise to provide high-quality living environments while preserving open space and improving travel options. Although the County allows mixed uses in planned unit developments, the concept can be promoted through other types of zoning and subdivision regulations as well, as suggested below.

- Cluster and conservation subdivisions are allowed under the County subdivision regulations but are feasible only with sewer service. Recommendations in the first section suggest approaches to promoting such types of development in Blount County.
- Mixed-use development can be encouraged through mixed-use zoning, which can be written to be either as-of-right or as conditional or overlay zoning subject to special reviews. Allowing a mix of uses increases the convenience of satisfying several errands or business visits within a small area, often by foot rather than by car.
- Traditional town centers have been built in many communities. They offer a mix of uses attractively designed along traditional shopping blocks rather than in a center surrounded by shopping. Many include residential

uses as well. Such town centers have proven to be a tested competitor with standard shopping centers and strips, and provide a special “landmark” identity for the area. Zoning and subdivision regulations, especially with design guidelines, can promote such developments.

Adopt regulations to protect sensitive and scenic areas.

Recommendations for implementing the first Guiding Policy pertain to this objective.

Enforce the new building code.

Most counties as populous as Blount County have adopted a building code. Building codes are essential tools for assuring safe building construction and provision of electrical, plumbing, heating and ventilation, and other systems. Several national model codes for all of these aspects of building construction are available; states also provide model codes. They are tedious to review and adapt to local conditions but absolutely essential to the well-being of residents and tenants of buildings constructed in future development. We are informed that the County has formed an advisory committee to consider and make recommendations on this matter. The County should move forward to adopt a building code as soon as possible.

Further regulate signs and communication towers.

To establish the quality-of-life atmosphere that will maintain community and property values over the long term, sign and tower regulations are a must to avoid trashing up the visual environment.

- Regulations of signs and billboards are standard elements in zoning regulations, although the sign and billboard industries are adamantly opposed to any regulation and many businesses are leery of restrictions on sign sizes and gimmicks such as flashing lights. Nevertheless, most people appreciate the reduction in visual clutter that restrictions achieve.
- Regulations of towers to blend them into surroundings or reduce their number by combining locations help to retain scenic values in the landscape. Increasingly, restrictions on tower locations and heights have become standard provisions in zoning ordinances.

Guiding Policy 3: Government regulations on the use and development of land should be limited to those intended to achieve specific public health, safety and welfare objectives.

The What:

This criterion and the stated objectives spell out the normal police powers given by states to local governments for planning and regulating development. They also conform to the usual criterion for avoiding “taking” issues under the U.S. Constitution. Therefore this statement allows use of the planning and regulatory approaches that most communities employ. Some techniques for guarding against undue impacts of public regulatory actions on property values include the following.

The How:

- Enforce an explicit requirement for any regulation to evidence a clear relationship to health, safety, and welfare objectives.
- Establish a process for reviewing grievances and providing relief— through, for example, variances or waivers—for property owners whose land value is significantly affected by County land use regulations.
- Provide relief for non-conforming uses or structures that are destroyed or discontinued for a reasonable maximum time, including commercial, industrial, and agricultural uses and structures for which state exemptions apply.
- Provide a training program for public officials concerning the meaning of the “health, safety, public welfare” clause, focusing on the need to balance private property rights with the community benefits of regulations to manage growth and development.

Guiding Policy 4: County roads should be improved and maintained to serve current and expected future development.

The What:

Getting around the County, the safety of it, the overall experience, and the implications of growth are one of the key elements of public concern. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #4 Blount County Citizen Input; Technical Memorandum #8: Growth Strategy Charrette Notes; and Technical Memorandum #9 Transportation Issues.)

There are broad, high impact transportation issues such as the Pellissippi Parkway and the proposed Southern Loop, corridor development along Routes 411 and 321 particularly, and general throughput issues associated with tourism and general population growth in the further reaches of the County.

There are also more localized issues that range from ingress and egress to subdivisions, to County road safety and serviceability. The basic thrust of this Guiding Policy is the understanding that County roads need to be improved, period.

The objectives stated for this principle establish a basic expectation that County roads serving substantial development and with substantial traffic will have pavement at least 18 feet wide and that greater widths should be planned for arterial and collector roads as necessary to accommodate existing and projected traffic. Currently the County requests subdividers to provide 18 feet of paved road width as a condition for high or moderate density development, unless the right-of-way is not obtainable. A pavement width of 16 feet is allowed for lower-density development.

In preparation for continued development that will generate increased traffic loads on state and County roads, the County should consider the following approaches:

The How:

Prepare for future increases in traffic demands as the County grows.

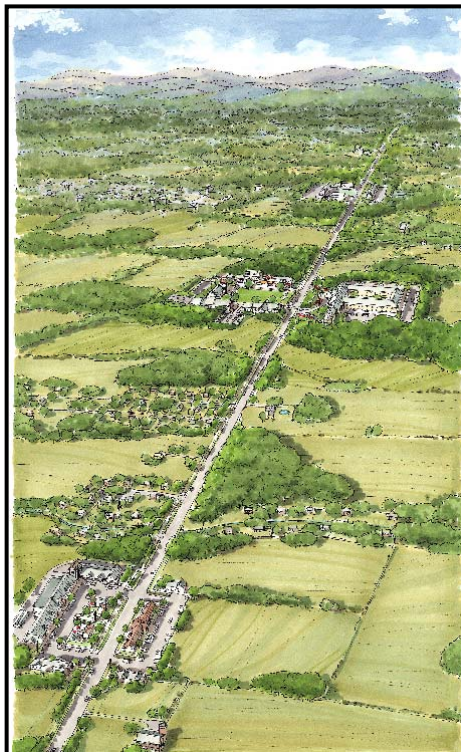
The County needs to anticipate growth by providing now for future road needs before right-of-way options are foreclosed by development. Recommended approaches include:

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- Collaborate with Maryville to fund and build arterial road segments that will create a connected system of major roads to serve developed and developing areas. Work with Alcoa and other towns to identify similar types of improvements that will improve traffic flows without the major expenditures needed for new highways.
- Review and update as necessary the roads study conducted about three years ago, particularly focusing on long-term traffic projections that may call for major improvements of arterial and collector roads. The County should prepare for constructing a functional network of such roads to connect the many low-density subdivisions now being developed to the state highway system.
- Upgrade subdivision road standards. Current standards for paved widths and bordering drainage are lower than many communities require even under innovative design conditions (such as for neo-traditional neighborhoods) that also require sidewalks and planting strips within the rights-of-way. Consider that current standards provide roads that will be used for decades ahead.
- Require developers to make off-site road improvements, including improvements as necessary to create the network of arterial and collector roads called for in the second item above. Consider adoption of road impact fees as an option to having developers construct off-site improvements.

(For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #9 Transportation Issues; Technical Memorandum #5: Evaluation of Subdivision Regulations and Procedures; Technical Memorandum #16 Adequate Public Facilities Discussion; and, Selected Zoning Recommendations.)



*Figure 9
Blount County Aerial*

Begin now to anticipate opportunities for increasing the use of travel options such as transit, walking, and biking.

Although these options may not come to fruition for some time, subdivisions and commercial projects can be designed to make development “transit-ready” and pedestrian-friendly. Clustered subdivisions and traditional town centers, for example, emphasize walkable environments that provide transit-friendly forms of development as well. Proposed actions include:

- Work with regional planning and transportation agencies to identify County areas that are or will be serviceable by mass transit. Adopt subdivision design requirements to make new developments in those areas capable of adapting to future transit service.
- Adopt subdivision regulations to require sidewalks on one or both sides of roadways and/or pedestrian pathways that link subdivisions with each other and with nearby arterial and collector roads.

- Prepare a Countywide plan for bikeways and trails linked to the highway and road system.

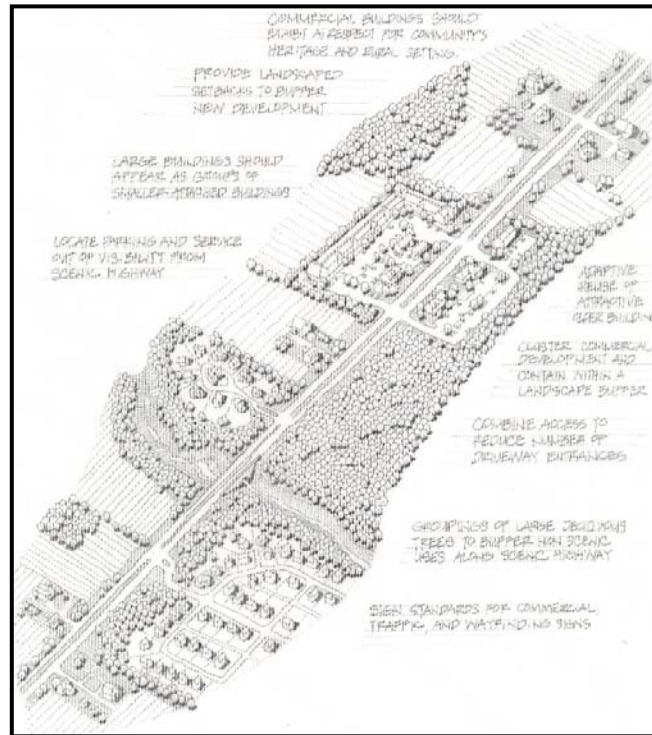


Figure 10
Corridor Development can serve both aesthetic and economic goals

Guiding Policy 5: Match the timing of development with provision of adequate infrastructure such as utilities, roads, schools, and open space.

The What:

The subdivision regulations incorporate a policy that the County will approve subdivisions only when adequate infrastructure to serve the approved development is available. Requirements for ensuring that public facilities to be used by future project residents have adequate capacities to support the planned development are quite common in today's subdivision regulations. They are intended to alleviate impacts on overcrowded or congested facilities and provide improvements beneficial for new residents and tenants of the development.

The County's current standards for facilities impacted by new development are either lacking or not up to par with those of many other growing communities. Measures of facility needs generated by proposed developments and of facility capacities are often complex and need careful study. Road and drainage standards have been established but should be upgraded as recommended in the sections on Guiding Policies 1 and 4. However, the Planning Commission is not applying the requirement for adequacy of schools, parks and recreation facilities as a condition of approval for proposed subdivisions due to a lack of standards for determining the adequacy or inadequacy of such facilities. The bottom line is that current subdivision approvals are undoubtedly creating needs for planning and funding future public improvements, an unwelcome burden for current and future residents

(For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum # 2: Evaluation of Policies Plan; Conceptual Land Use Plan and Zoning Ordinance; Evaluation of Subdivision Regulations and Procedures; Technical Memorandum # 12: Utilities Issues Discussion; Technical Memorandum # 9: Transportation Issues; and, Technical Memorandum # 10: Experience in Comparable Counties.)

The How:

The following approaches to correcting this situation are recommended:

The Planning Commission should continue to work with the Board of Education to define school capacity standards appropriate for determining the adequacy or inadequacy of school capacities to serve proposed subdivisions.

Specific recommendations include:

- Establish reasonable measures of pupil generation from the various types of residential development occurring in the County to determine school capacity needs of proposed subdivisions. Share this information with the Board of Education to assist in planning future school facility needs.
- Establish reasonable measures of available capacity, based on appropriate capacity standards. Determine how and when changes in school service boundaries or changes in the school year could alleviate capacity shortages. Determine a policy for use of portable classrooms to provide temporary capacity.
- Reach an agreement between the Planning Commission and Board of Education about methods of forecasting future pupil generation as a basis for planning future school needs.

(For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #16: Adequate Public Facilities Discussion.)

Adopt and apply standards and requirements for parks, recreation facilities, the protection of natural areas, scenic areas, and farmland as recommended for implementing Guiding Principle 1.

(For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #5: Evaluation of Subdivision Regulations and Procedures; Technical Memorandum #10: Experience in Comparable Counties; Technical Memorandum # 13: Sample Purchase of Development Rights Program; Technical Memorandum #14: Sample Transfer of Development Rights Program; and, Technical Memorandum #16: Adequate Public Facilities Discussion.)

Require specific information from developers of proposed subdivisions for items selected from the list shown as “Assessment Information” in the subdivision regulations.

The Planning Commission has ceased asking for this information because it was too difficult to obtain and responsibilities were divided between developers and Commission staff. Nevertheless, some of the listed data, such as projected traffic generation, is key information for the Commission’s deliberations on approval. This kind of information is required by many communities and should be a matter of course in Blount County. The Planning Commission staff can identify the most important types of information and establish a means of obtaining it.

(For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum: #5 Evaluation of Subdivision Regulations and Procedures; and, Technical Memorandum #17: Selected Zoning Recommendations.)

Prepare an annual six-year capital improvements program.

Such programs are adopted by many jurisdictions to identify facility needs, determine priorities for timing of construction, and determine funding resources, including public sources and developer contributions. The programs are based on an adopted comprehensive plan that shows areas intended for development and types of proposed land uses. If rigorously adhered to, capital improvement programs alert public officials and the general public to future needs and provide a predictable plan for making facility improvements, thus easing concerns over growth. For decisions on subdivision approvals, they also provide a ready source for determining when additional facility capacities are expected to come on line.

Establish policies and programs to identify and respond to the cumulative effects of minor and one-lot subdivisions on adequacy of facilities.

Consider:

- Establishing a threshold ceiling on annual permits for development of such subdivisions to allow for timely additions to facility capacities to serve them.
- Imposing impact or “in-lieu” fees for building permits in such subdivisions to equalize requirements with larger subdivisions.

(Fore more information please refer to Technical Memorandum #2 Evaluation of Policies Plan, Conceptual Land Use Plan, and Zoning Ordinance; Technical Memorandum #5 Evaluation of Subdivision Regulations and Procedures; Technical Memorandum #10 Experience in Comparable Communities; Technical Memorandum #16 Adequate Public Facilities Discussion; Technical Memorandum #17: Selected Zoning Recommendations; and Technical Memorandum #18: Alternative Futures.)

Part IV. The Growth Strategy Implementation Process

In conjunction with adoption and implementation of the Blount County Growth Strategy, many recommendations and actions will require not only follow-up, but ongoing oversight and administration into the future as well. These efforts will include, but not necessarily be limited to, elements of the Five Guiding Policies such as defining, securing and expanding the green infrastructure; developing expanded transportation plans and building the connectors and other infrastructure necessary to improve circulation and access; pursuing both zoning, regulatory, and project-based efforts to focus development in Blount County; ensuring economic growth through business development and harnessing the growth dynamic; and, implementing a phased annexation process.

In order to accomplish this far-reaching undertaking, there will need to be an unprecedented level of cooperation and joint effort between Blount County and the City of Maryville, as well as Townsend, Friendsville, Louisville, Sevierville, and the public at large. Organizations such as the Foothills Land Conservancy, the School Board, the Little River and the Maryville Housing Authority, the Industrial Board, the Chamber of Commerce, etc. will also be involved. Indeed, the implementation of the Growth Strategy will involve virtually every public, private, and institutional entity, and every citizen in some fashion. In order to provide an organizational base for coordinating various decisions, actions and activities, it is recommended that a body be created that has representatives of all key sectors involved. This body is henceforth referred to as the Growth Management Advisory Committee (GMAC).

The Growth Management Advisory Committee (GMAC)

The GMAC can serve many functions depending on how its mission is ultimately defined. Its makeup will have to be determined as one of the early implementation steps of both the Blount County Growth Strategy and the City of Maryville Urban Growth Strategy. An outline of form, function, and long-term goals is provided below.

GMAC Form

The GMAC is envisioned as an entity that would reflect a diverse base of representation including individuals in Blount County government/staff, City of Maryville government/staff, Alcoa and other incorporated jurisdictions, conservancies, developers, and the general public to name but a few general categories. It may be appropriate to include a State of Tennessee representative, a regional economic/planning representative, cultural, historic, tourism, or other representatives to help reflect the diversity of the population as well as the nature of things that will be affected by future growth and, by extension, the growth

strategies that are emerging as a result of the Chapter 1101 legislation. The GMAC could be structured as a public non-profit, a development authority, a development corporation, or other entity that has certain powers that may be useful/required as the implementation and oversight process continues. It is envisioned that there would be a voting board charged with taking specific actions with regard to growth issues, and an advisory board that would, in turn, form various sub-committees and task forces, and be responsible for much of the on-going public awareness and involvement. A chairperson should be named who is greatly respected across political and social lines, and who can effectively guide the vision for the future represented by intersecting aspects of the growth strategies and other planning and development trends.

GMAC Function

The GMAC could function at a number of levels including, but not limited to, overseer of Purchase of Development Rights and Transfer of Development Rights programs, coordinator of green-space acquisition and preservation programs, interpreter of planning and zoning changes proposed over time, point of contact for public awareness and interface, point of interface for governmental decisions on water, sewer, air quality, environmental health, etc.

The GMAC could be empowered as part of the development approvals process, acting much as a design review committee does within a zoning overlay district/design guideline scenario. The appropriateness and logistics associated with this possible function would need to be worked out over time as the organization develops its mission and role in the community.

GMAC Funding

The GMAC could be funded through a combination of sources including, but not limited to, development impact fees, pro-rata general fund allocations, special tax districts, voluntary taxes, special use taxes, etc. The funding streams could coincide with a funding and finance strategy for the PDR and TDR programs, as well as the other green infrastructure development programs.

Maintaining a small paid staff and a large volunteer constituency could limit budgetary requirements of the organization, thus ensuring that a majority of any funding directed at smart growth programs would be put to use in a manner positively impacting quality-of-life and other related issues.

Action Agenda/Using the Blount County Growth Strategy Report

The Blount County Growth Strategy is a living document that has the ability to guide and manage growth only to the extent its recommendations are implemented. A wide array of options is contained in the strategy, all of which may, or may not, ultimately prove appropriate for Blount County. Nonetheless, they represent a comprehensive toolbox from which policy and decision makers may select in order to effect the desired changes thus influencing the future character of the County.

Many decisions regarding growth and related issues are pending recommendations contained in the Blount County Growth Strategy. It will be important for the Blount County Mayor's Office, the Blount County Commission, the Blount County Planning Commission, the Blount County Planning Department, County staff, and the general public, to understand all of the interrelated observations, findings and recommendations contained in the report. The growth strategy itself is embedded in the various Guiding Policies, "the What," "the How," the economic and fiscal impact model, the recommendations pertaining to adequate public facilities, subdivision regulations, etc.

Various actions are called for immediately, including adoption of certain zoning and land-use recommendations, forging an alliance with the municipalities and other involved parties through development of the Intergovernmental Commission on Smart Growth. (For more information please refer to Technical Memorandum # 15: Implementation Process.) A successful regional growth management plan will require an unprecedented level of cooperation between the County, the City of Maryville, the City of Alcoa, Townsend, Friendsville, Louisville, Sevierville, State of Tennessee, etc.

One of the early action items will be for representatives of jurisdictions and the general public to discuss the interrelationships and growth dynamics evidenced in both the Blount County Growth Strategy and the City of Maryville Urban Growth Strategy. This may be accomplished through a combination of continuing public outreach, as well as the more formalized approach of working within the GMAC.

The Blount County Commission and the Blount County Planning Commission are facing difficult decisions that must be addressed. Hopefully, the Blount County Growth Strategy will provide the necessary background information, observations, logic and recommendations to embolden policy makers to adopt needed change.

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To a great extent, despite the comprehensiveness of the Blount County Growth Strategy, the effort must be viewed only as a starting point from which decisions and their impact will emanate for decades to come. There are numerous additional studies to be undertaken, which in turn will assist future policy makers with decisions that need to be made. Carefully following the Five Guiding Policies and their implementation activities will afford Blount County with a future that meets high expectations for the future.

Part V. The Continuing Public Awareness Process

A. Overview

The involvement of the public in growth management efforts is integral to the success of both the Blount County Growth Strategy and the Maryville Urban Growth Strategy. While in the past, public outreach efforts have focused on determining a vision for the future, and gauging support for a growth management effort, the continuing public awareness process must focus on specific proposals, policies, ordinances and other aspects of implementation.

It is envisioned that the GMAC would serve in part as a clearinghouse for public information, and coordination of the public awareness program, although the County, City, and other entities would also participate heavily in the process. Indeed, as part of the GMAC these entities would be coordinating their public awareness activities anyway.

As an important part of the implementation of the Blount County Growth strategy, it may be prudent for the public awareness program to be crafted and guided by a professional public relations firm. Particularly during the first year or two as strategies are prepared or adopted as public policy, and key foundation pieces (formation of the GMAC, Action Area Working Groups, zoning ordinance changes, etc.) are put into place, a well coordinated awareness program will be especially important. Continuing media relations, issuance of press releases, dissemination of information on specific proposals, coordination with elected officials, and developing a unified message on growth management would be among the task areas a public relations firm could assist with.

B. The Potential for National Heritage Area Designation

In an effort to solidify the combined growth management efforts of the Blount County, City, the to-be-formed GMAC, and other local, state and federal agencies, these groups together may seek to have all or part of the County designated as a National Heritage Area. In fact, the GMAC could be designated as the management entity, thus closing the circle on the coordinated growth management effort. Some facts pertaining to the National Heritage Area designations follow. Language is from the National Park Service unless otherwise indicated.

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“A National Heritage Area is a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography.”

HII Observation: Clearly, development in Blount County has been, and will continue to be, shaped by geography. Indeed, the Great Smoky Mountains are at the center of the region’s history, culture, and economy.

“National Heritage Areas are a strategy that encourages residents, government agencies, non-profit groups and private partners to collaboratively plan and implement programs and projects that recognize, preserve and celebrate many of America’s defining landscapes. The Heritage Area seeks short and long-term solutions to their conservation and development challenges by fostering relationships between regional stakeholders and encouraging them to work collaboratively to achieve shared goals.”

HII Observation: This description is in keeping with both the spirit and the practical applications of both the Blount County Growth Strategy and the Maryville Urban Growth Strategy. It also emphasizes the relationships and goals suggested for the GMAC, as well as several of the Guiding Policies contained in the Blount County Growth Strategy.

“In addition to enhancing local pride and retaining residents, designation comes with limited technical and financial assistance from the National Park Service. NPS primarily provides planning and interpretation assistance and expertise, but also connects regions with other Federal agencies. Federal financial assistance provides valuable “seed” money that covers basic expenses such as staffing, and leverages other money from state, local and private sources.”

HII Observation: Many proposed actions in the combined Blount/Maryville growth strategies will require funding of different levels. As a conduit to Federal funding, the National Heritage Area designation could be of particular value.

“The management entity may be a State or local agency, a commission, or a private nonprofit corporation. The management entity is empowered to create a management plan for the heritage area, and is authorized to receive Federal funds on the area’s behalf.”

HII Observation: As envisioned, the GMAC would fulfill the management entity’s role.

“The partnership approach creates the opportunity for a diverse range of constituents to come together to voice the range of visions and perspectives that exist in any community that has strong connections and interests in the place in which it lives and works. Resident participation in the collaborative exercise of idea sharing and planning encourages the dialogue that needs to occur to reveal the goals and visions that members of a community have in common. Basing regional planning upon the shared goals of its constituent communities, and pursuing and encouraging cooperation regardless of other perceived differences can unite the energies and resources of multiple voices in a common goal to preserve and enhance the qualities of the place in which they live. Partnering also provides opportunities to leverage financial and in-kind resources and reduces the possibility of duplication efforts.”

HII Observations: As a layer of the public awareness effort undertaken as part of the implementation of the Blount County Growth Strategy, designation of a National Heritage Area would afford a number of opportunities to merge outreach efforts.

HII Recommendation: In conjunction with forming a coordinating body of growth management effort (GMAC as envisioned), the County and other entities should further explore the potentials associated with a National Heritage Area designation. If deemed appropriate for all or part of the County, there is a process for gaining Congressional support and designation legislation.

C. Employing the Blount County Growth Strategy

The Blount County Growth Strategy is a far-reaching plan for the future. It is not however a rigid blueprint to be followed in a simple execution of a few implementation steps. Rather, it is a guide that contains numerous options for consideration and possible application, an organizational device that sets forth priorities—the “Five Guiding Policies,” and a vision for the future as set forth by the people of Blount County. A thorough reading of the Blount County Growth Strategy reveals a host of suggested actions, possible courses of policy and decision-making, references to additional studies and plans that should be undertaken, and various contingencies placed in a framework of “if this then that.” In order to maximize the value of the Blount County Growth Strategy, a series of implementation steps are recommended. They are summarized as follows:

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- Each Guiding Policy should be assigned to a County department, purposely-formed committee, staff persons, or other group that can focus on the options, issues, opportunities, and strategic implications associated with it. Henceforth, these groups will be referred to as Guiding Policy Working Groups.
- Each Guiding Policy in the report is broken out in a discussion of The What and The How. The focal groups should work to fully understand The What, but concentrate on The How as the portion of the Strategy that contains most recommendations for action, options for action to be considered, and suggestions for follow-up activities to be undertaken. For example, Guiding Policy 1 reads: *The rural, small town, and natural character of the County should be preserved.* The How associated with this Guiding Policy begins; “Curb low-density development now spreading into farmland and scenic areas” an important element for the Working Group to grasp—but goes on to summarize approximately 30 sub-action areas. Each of these sub-action areas in turn imply, suggest, or recommend additional actions, options, or possibilities that also need to be incorporated into the overall implementation process.
- The Guiding Policy Working Group’s makeup should include logical members who can contribute their professional experience, knowledge, and enthusiasm to the growth management effort. Again using the example of Guiding Policy 1 (rural charter preservation), it would be logical to include representative rural communities such as Townsend, Foothills Land Conservancy, Little River Watershed proponents, etc.
- As there are five Guiding Policies, each with a similar breakout of sub-action areas and follow up activities, there are literally thousands of elements to the Blount County Growth Strategy that need to be followed up over time. It is important to realize that while there are various near-term actions suggested (summarized below), this is a long-term strategic plan designed to influence and manage growth in Blount County (and by extension/interface the City of Maryville) out to the year 2050.
- The Guiding Policy Working groups should prepare reports detailing their review of action items and include recommendations for next steps as appropriate. These reports should be submitted to the City Mayor’s office, County Commission, the County Planning Commission, and/or other bodies as appropriate, including the growth management coordinating body referred to in this report as the Growth Management Advisory Committee (GMAC). Each body would then take action as appropriate to move the

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Working Group's recommendations forward, and work to assimilate/coordinate them with findings and recommendations of the other Guiding Policy Working Groups.

- The GMAC will have among its roles the task of furthering continued public awareness of growth management efforts as they are introduced, debated, adopted as policy, enacted as ordinance, and otherwise incorporated into the growth management activities of the future. It will be important for the Guiding Policy Working Groups to interact closely with the GMAC to ensure that the public's involvement is consistent and meaningful. It is envisioned that the GMAC would work to forward the recommendations of the Guiding Policy Working Groups both through the public awareness process, and through its coordinating role between governmental bodies and other entities.

In addition to formation of the GMAC (or similar body), and formation of the five Guiding Policy Working Groups and their launch, there are certain priority items that Blount County should address. These are summarized as follows within the Guiding Policies to which the pertain:

Guiding Policy 1: (Preserve rural character)

- Begin immediately to prepare an open space plan to supplement the upcoming plan of the Parks and Recreation Facilities Commission that designates significant farmland, scenic and other natural areas that are desirable to conserve.
- Begin immediately to prepare and adopt design standards to guide development in heritage areas such as Townsend and Tuckaleechee Cove.

Guiding Policy 2: (Land use and development should be managed and regulated)

- Begin immediately to enforce the new building code, which is essential to the well being of residents and tenants of buildings, constructed in future development.
- Begin immediately to prepare for zoning overlay districts that will guide development along major highways and corridors.

Guiding Policy 3: (Limit regulations)

- Enforce the requirement for any regulation to evidence a clear relationship to health, safety, and welfare objectives.
- Establish a process for reviewing grievances and providing relief for property owners whose land value is significantly affected by County land use regulations.

Guiding Policy 4: (County roads should be improved)

- Begin immediately to collaborate with the City of Maryville to fund and build arterial road segments that will create a connected system of major roads to serve developed and developing areas.
- Begin immediately to upgrade subdivision road standards.

Guiding Policy 5: (Adequate infrastructure)

- Begin immediately to prepare a six-year capital improvements program to identify facility needs, determine priorities for timing of construction, and determine funding resources including public sources and developer contributions.
- Begin immediately to address the issue of increasing the County's tax basis to cover the need for adequate public facilities that are required at this time, and those that will be required as the County population continues to grow.

By forming the Guiding Policy Working Groups as recommended, providing them with assignments as suggested, and focusing on the immediate action items as summarized above, the Blount County Growth Strategy will automatically move into its implementation phase. Furthermore, undertaking these actions will prepare the foundation for a series of growth management activities that will unfold well into the future.