

Think Quality - Think Future

Blount County Planning Department

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TO: Blount County Planning Commission

FROM: John Lamb

DATE: April 23, 2009

SUBJECT: Items for Long Range Work Session, April 30, 2009.

1. Discussion on the Green Infrastructure Plan.

The municipal and county Planning Commissions were invited to a mapping workshop January 26, 2009. This was a continuation of previous mapping workshops for the public held in October and reported previously. See attached a report of the January workshop labeled APPENDIX B of the Green Infrastructure Plan for review and discussion.

The municipal and county Planning Commissions along with the public were invited to a workshop on implementation options for the Green Infrastructure Plan on February 23, 2009. See attached a report of the workshop labeled APPENDIX C of the Green Infrastructure Plan for review and discussion.

The County Commission by action on February 12, 2009 referred the report of the Growth Management Advisory Committee to the Planning Commission for consideration in the Green Infrastructure Plan. See attached that report labeled APPENDIX D of the Green Infrastructure Plan for review and discussion.

All the attachments may be found at www.blounttn.org/planning under the meeting button along with this memo.

Staff is nearing completion of a draft Green Infrastructure Plan and needs discussion and guidance on the following, particularly implementation strategies for inclusion in the Plan. The following is presented for discussion.

Definition of green infrastructure. The workshops used a broad, ecological focused definition of green infrastructure as follows:

An interconnected network of natural areas and other open spaces that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions, sustains clean air and water, and provides a wide array of benefits to people and wildlife. Used in this context, green infrastructure is the ecological framework for environmental, social and economic health – in short, our natural life support system. (Green Infrastructure – Linking Landscapes and Communities, p. 1, Mark A. Benedict and Edward T. McMahon, The Conservation Fund, 2006.)

While broad ecological systems are important in concept, our Plan will not provide the detail of research and analysis in biological systems to claim a comprehensive approach to conserving a wide array of natural ecosystem values and functions. This does not mean that such values and functions are unimportant, but does imply that we can only assume that our planned actions may address broader ecosystem concerns. As an alternative, staff proposes the following definition to fit our planning context:

Green infrastructure includes farmlands, forestlands, rivers, streams, mountains, and the natural and constructed areas of green and open space that enhance and preserve rural character, provide recreation opportunities, conserve and protect the natural environment, and enhance the livability of the county.

Staff requests guidance on the definition of green infrastructure.

Use of county funds. Some would prohibit any use of county funds for green infrastructure projects. Others would at least limit the range of projects to those clearly of public use such as parks and recreation. Others see county funds as being part of a larger mix of resources, particularly as leverage for larger amounts of resources outside the county.

Staff proposes inclusion of the following statement in the Plan as a caveat:

County Government will be one of many agencies involved in implementing this Plan. However, a caveat is needed. This Green Infrastructure Plan is a plan of the Blount County Planning Commission, but this does not imply that the main agency for implementation should be County Government using County resources. Given the severe economic difficulties present at time of writing this Plan, it is doubtful that County Government resources will play a major role in the near future without substantial outside assistance.

Staff requests guidance on how and under what circumstances county funds may be included in strategies for implementing green infrastructure projects.

Pursuit of grants. The Sheriff Department has been successful in aggressively pursuing sources of grant money for law enforcement (now in excess of \$7 million over ten years). The Emergency Management office has been successful in aggressively pursuing sources of grant money for security and emergency management (now in excess of \$ 3 million over five years). The Soil Conservation District has been successful in aggressively pursuing sources of grant money for water quality (now in excess of \$1 million). In all cases, existing county staff had to commit substantial time and effort in grant writing and administering the grants. Pursuit of grants may require commitment of matching funds and resources from local government.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on the priority that should be given to pursuit of grants for green infrastructure.

Formation of a support group. In the case of water quality grants, forming the Little River Water Quality Forum (LRWQF) as a support group was instrumental in the grant request process. The LRWQF was formed by citizen initiative, with participation by local governments.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on formation of a separate group dedicated to pursuing green infrastructure implementation.

Partnering. County Government in the past has successfully partnered with the cities of Alcoa and Maryville on parks and recreation and other programs and projects. County Government in the past has successfully partnered with other governmental and non-governmental agencies, including partnering with TVA and the Southeast Watershed Forum for the Green Infrastructure Planning Process. The County is considering an inter-governmental agreement to partner with other jurisdictions to pursue greenway connections to the Great Smoky Mountains Park.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on partnering as an appropriate strategy for implementation.

Dedication of personnel. Some jurisdictions, such as Knox County, have dedicated personnel to the pursuit of green infrastructure components such as parks and open space preservation. If green infrastructure activities reach a high level, it may be appropriate to consider new personnel to support the activities.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on use of existing personnel and possible new personnel in pursuit of green infrastructure implementation.

Regulations. The Growth Strategy and the Policies Plan identified regulations as an avenue of pursuing certain aspects of green infrastructure, such as dedicated open space in new subdivisions.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on regulations appropriate as implementation tools for green infrastructure.

Identification of priority areas. The mapping workshops have provided a basis for identifying priority areas in the county for green infrastructure implementation activities.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on specific areas of the county that may be identified as high priority areas for green infrastructure implementation.

Integration of the GMAC report. The County Commission referred the Growth Management Advisory Committee report to the Planning Commission for consideration in the Green Infrastructure Plan.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on components of the GMAC report that the Planning Commission may wish to be included as implementation strategies.

Future coordination with other county offices. The Growth Strategy proposed extending the Parks and Recreation Master Plan of the joint Parks and Recreation Board to include aspects of a Green Infrastructure Plan. Provision of parks and recreation facilities may also bear on actions of the School Board and School Department.

Staff requests discussion and guidance on what may be appropriate future coordination strategies with other county offices.

Other issues of implementation. Staff requests discussion and guidance on any other issues of green infrastructure implementation that are of concern to the Planning Commission.

2. Discussion of the Conceptual Land Use Plan and land use issues for the Comprehensive Plan.

One of the main components of a comprehensive or general regional plan is a land use plan. The regional plan one of the duties charged to a planning commission by state statutes as follows (highlighted for emphasis and reference):

TCA 13-3-301. Regional plan

(a) It is the function and duty of a regional planning commission to make and adopt a ***general regional plan for the physical development of the territory of the region***. Any such plan shall include the planning of municipal territory to the extent which, in the commissioner's judgment, the same is related to the planning of the region as a whole; provided, that the plan shall not be deemed an official plan or part of the official plan of any municipality having a municipal planning commission unless adopted as such by the municipal planning commission. ...

(b) The regional plan, with the accompanying maps, plats, charts, and descriptive matter, ***shall show the regional planning commission's recommendations for the development of the territory covered by the plan, and may include***, among other things, the general location, character and extent of public ways, ground and other public property; the general location and extent of public utilities and terminals, whether publicly or privately owned, for power, light, heat, sanitation, transportation, communication, water and other purposes; the removal, relocation, extension, widening, narrowing, vacating, abandonment or change of use of existing public ways, grounds, open spaces, buildings, properties, utilities or terminals; ***the general character, location and extent of community centers, town sites or housing developments; the location and extent of forests, agricultural areas and open development areas for purposes of conservation, food and water supply, sanitary and drainage facilities or the protection of urban development***, and the identification of areas where there are inadequate or nonexistent publicly or privately owned and maintained services and facilities when the planning commission has determined the services are necessary in order for development to occur; ***a land classification and utilization program; and a zoning plan for the regulation of the height, area, bulk, location and uses of buildings, the distribution of population, and the uses of land for trade, industry, habitation, recreation, agriculture, forestry, soil and water conservation and other purposes.***

Note that Section (a) above sets the duty, and Section (b) suggests the content. The wording of Section (b) is mandatory in requiring “recommendations for the development of the territory covered by the plan,” but is permissive, using the phrase “may include,” in addressing overall content. The overall content includes the elements of what traditionally would be called a comprehensive plan. This includes elements of what would traditionally be called a land use plan, particularly a land use plan as a basis for defining zones for regulation.

To begin discussions on land use issues, please refer to copy of the Conceptual Land Use Plan, also found at www.blounttn.org/planning under the meetings button along with the memo for this workshop. The Conceptual Land Use Plan was developed in tandem with development of the zoning regulations, and not only maps the recommendations for physical development, but also provides the underlying description of uses intended in different areas of the county.

Staff notes that two County Commissioners have requested consideration of specific land use zones. First for a neighborhood zone, implying a specific set of uses in a neighborhood context.

3. Discussion on scheduling of Comprehensive Planning activities.

Staff began the Comprehensive Planning Process at the regular meeting in February with presentation of basic population trends and projections. The Commission lost its quorum for that presentation.

Goal is still to complete a draft Plan by April or May of next year, with formal approval by June or July of next year. We have much to do, particularly: complete analysis of population and economy data; consider details of land use and transportation; integrate the Policies Plan and the Green Infrastructure Plan; integrate sections on infrastructure components such as schools and utilities; address any other issues that the Commission considers priority; and pull it all together in a cohesive plan.

Staff requests discussion of dedicated comprehensive planning sessions in the months ahead in order to focus activities and encourage participation.