

Visual Image Study Code and Ordinance Review



VISCOR

*Visual Image Study, Code
and Ordinance Review*

Prepared for
The City of Kingsport
by
The Walker Collaborative
with
Community Associates, Inc
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and
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September 2005

Kingsport

I. Executive Summary

Prepared by:



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September, 2005

VISCOR Overview

“VISCOR” is an acronym for “Visual Image Study Code and Ordinance Review.” Since 1990, citizens of Kingsport, Tennessee, have conducted at least ten major visioning efforts to solicit the public’s views on how to make Kingsport a better community. During this fifteen year period, the greatest amount of visioning activity occurred between 1998 and 2002. Now that a broad consensus and collective community vision has been firmly established, the latest phase of VISCOR has been to take the following steps:

- 1) Evaluate and interpret the results of fifteen years of visioning
- 2) Synthesize a single community vision for a variety of important planning issues
- 3) Review Kingsport’s existing public policies related to planning and development
- 4) Identify consistencies and inconsistencies between the community’s vision and existing public policies
- 5) Create a set of recommendations for Kingsport’s planning and regulations to help achieve the community’s desire vision for the future

VISCOR Findings

Below is a brief synopsis of the results of this five-step process, which is detailed in the following full report.

I. Executive Summary

This three-page document constitutes the executive summary and provides a concise overview of the results and recommendations coming out of the VISCOR project.

II. List of Potential Projects

This two-page section of the report is borrowed from the implementation section of the Planning Recommendations report. It features a list of 18 recommended public sector “regulatory actions,” 13 public sector “direct actions,” and 4 private sector actions for improving Kingsport. Accompanying each recommendation is a page reference to the detailed explanation within the Planning Recommendations report, a designation of the appropriate responsible entity, a relative cost level, a priority rating, and the recommendation’s suggested timing for implementation. Recommendations range from zoning amendments that can be accomplished relatively quickly and cost-effectively to streetscape redevelopments that are much more expensive and, therefore, will require a longer time-frame.

III. Potential Funding Sources

This section identifies likely sources of funding to implement the VISCOR report’s various recommendations. The report is organized by issue category, including: Transportation, Streetscape and Infrastructure Funding; Property Redevelopment Funding; Public Art Funding; Parks and Tree Planting Funding; Historic Preservation Funding; and Other Funding Approaches. The potential funding sources typically depend upon the issue category to be funded. However, approaches range broadly from traditional federal sources such as TEA-21 for transportation and CDBG for housing and infrastructure, to local approaches such as business improvement districts and tax increment financing. This report section also suggests that the City consider establishing the position of a grant writer to pursue various available funds that might not be otherwise realized.

IV. Visual Image Study Results

This 51-page report contains the results of the extensive VIS project that was begun in May of 2000. Over a ten-month period, quantitative data was collected through 51 meetings involving 1,015 participants in the VIS survey and 85 focus group participants, represented by ages ranging from 12 to 89 years, and a broad socio-

economic cross-section of the community. The VIS results were grouped into 15 different issue categories, such as roadways, office buildings, and vistas. For each of these 15 categories, three pages contain the following information: a chart featuring each image tested within that particular category and where it placed in the rankings, a summary of the positive characteristics and negative characteristics identified by survey respondents, an enlargement and description of the two highest rated and two lowest rated images within that category, a summary of the images evaluated, example comments from VIS focus group participants, and conclusions related to the survey's implications for planning. The bottom-line theme that came of the VIS findings and describes what Kingsport citizens want was "*Green – Clean – Sidewalks – Parks – Neighborhoods.*"

V. VIS Data & Analysis

This section of the VISCOR report includes important supplementary material to provide another level of detail to the VIS. Materials include a map of VIS respondent locations, VIS survey tabulations by demographics and lifestyles, and "demographic slices" that examine the preferences of Kingsport citizens by demographic categories. That examination determined that the variation level in preferences by demographic categories was surprisingly small.

VI. Analysis of Past Visioning Efforts

This section of the report analyzes ten major visioning efforts that have occurred in Kingsport since 1990. For each effort, it identifies the time-frame, sponsor, purpose, issues addressed, approach, and number of participants. It also summarizes the results of each effort, it references other past visioning efforts, and it identifies common findings among them all. This section reinforces the notion that a monumental visioning process has occurred in Kingsport over the past 15 years involving thousands of individuals.

VII. Community Vision Synthesis

Building upon the 51-page "IV. Visual Image Study Results" report, this 20-page report is organized around the same 15 issue categories that were tested out in the VIS. For each issue, it provides the two highest rated images, a list of the community's "desired characteristics" relative to each issue category, a relevant quote from a survey respondent, and a single "composite vision" image. Because no single image tested in each issue category of the VIS can serve as the sole representative "vision" for Kingsport, the composite vision is an image obtained elsewhere as best embodying the desires of Kingsport's citizens relative to the particular subject category. In order to emphasize that the image is not from among the photographs used in the VIS, and to suggest further that selecting a single image is not a fool-proof science, the composite vision images have been "water colored" using computer technology in order to provide a more vague and abstract vision. Also included in this report is a series of four visual simulations in which a photograph of an existing "before" condition in Kingsport is electronically manipulated to yield an improved "after" condition that reflects the community's preferences. The four corridors simulated include a suburban residential road (Essex Drive), an urban / mixed use residential street (West Sullivan Street), a redeveloped commercial corridor (East Stone Drive) and a developing commercial corridor (Wilcox Drive).

VIII. Public Policy Analysis: City Plans & Studies

With a complete understanding of the community's desires for the future vision of Kingsport well-established by the previous report sections, this section examines the city's existing plans and studies to determine the level of consistency between the vision and adopted public policies. It reviews eight different public policy documents and determines that many discrepancies exist between Kingsport's collective vision and its policies related to planning and growth. In particular, current policies encourage more suburban sprawl, cluttered signage and hilltop development than is desired by the community, and they fail to deliver the amount of mixed use areas, sidewalks, landscaping, parks and general cleanliness than is sought by the public.

IX. Planning Recommendations

This 48-page report serves as the basis for the section II “List of Potential Projects.” It features a list of 18 recommended public sector “regulatory actions,” 13 public sector “direct actions,” and 4 private sector actions for improving Kingsport. Examples of some of the key regulatory actions include: updating the City’s existing land use plan to discourage sprawl, reconsidering certain recommendations contained in various transportation plans, creating a pedestrian mobility plan, and revising zoning and development regulations to achieve many of the planning objectives that came out of the VISCOR project (summarized below). The 13 public sector “direct actions” include projects such as redeveloping major street corridors, making physical improvements to the downtown area, introducing traffic calming measures, burying overhead wiring, and installing more sidewalks and street trees where needed. Examples of this section’s private sector recommendations include a commercial property enhancement campaign and a re-energized “adopt-a-spot” program. All of these recommendations have been prioritized, phased, assigned to responsible entities, and classified by their relative cost ranges.

X. Code Analysis & Recommendations

This final 38-page section of the VISCOR report provides the most fine-grained level of detail for Kingsport’s recommended next steps. It carefully evaluates, section-by-section, the existing zoning ordinance, development standards and subdivision regulations. Furthermore, it offers suggestions on how they might be revised in order to better reflect the community’s vision for the future of Kingsport. Key issues for existing codes include curbing sprawl, reducing the volume of road-side signage, and providing for more mixed-use areas. In addition to amendments to existing codes, several new codes are recommended to address certain issues that were previously not addressed or were insufficiently addressed, including hilltop development, design

standards, transfer of development rights, and riverfront development standards. While this section of the report does not provide the actual language needed to adopt new policies, it provides the City with detailed direction on how to proceed with such a project.

Final Report

VISCOR

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