

Kingsport

VIII. Public Policy Analysis: City Plans & Studies

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Summary of Most Relevant Policies

There are numerous plans and regulations that, combined, determine the character and quality of Kingsport's built and natural environment. In some cases these policies are consistent with the community's collective vision for the future, but in many cases they are not. The most relevant plans and regulations include the following:

Relevant Plans

- Land Use Plan (City of Kingsport - 1988)
- Beyond MeadowView (University of Tennessee - 1994)
- Redevelopment Plan for Core Urban Study Areas (Kingsport Housing and Redevelopment Authority - 2000)
- Kingsport Major Streets & Road Plan (Kingsport Regional Planning Commission - 2001)
- Economic Analysis of Redevelopment Areas (Kingsport Housing and Redevelopment Authority - 2001)
- Redevelopment Corridors Transportation Study (Kingsport Metropolitan Planning Organization - 2002)
- Strategic Initiative & Plan (City of Kingsport – 2003-2004)

Relevant Regulations

- Zoning Ordinances
- Landscape Ordinances
- Historic Zoning Regulations
- Gateway District Regulations
- Parking Regulations
- Subdivision Regulations
- Roadway Regulations & Policies
- Sidewalk Regulations & Policies

Below is an overview of each of these most relevant public policies:

RELEVANT PLANS

Land Use Plan

Adopted / Updated: 1988
Entity: City of Kingsport

Kingsport's Land Use Plan is a thorough 90-page document prepared by the City's Planning Department in 1988. Because of the many planning issues it addresses, the background portion of the plan describing existing conditions is in some ways more like a comprehensive plan than merely a land use plan. For example, this document includes the 1919 plan by John Nolen, and it describes and maps a variety of environmental conditions, such as severe slopes and soils. It also quantifies and makes projections related to the economy, population and physical growth of the community. While most of the maps for existing conditions are in black and white, the existing land use map is color coded, as is the conceptual land use plan, which has a planning horizon of 2010. In addition to addressing the entire city boundaries, it also focuses specifically on the central business district. In 1990 an amendment was made to provide an additional plan component addressing "Old Kingsport," focusing on the stretch of Netherland Inn Road located between I-181 and Industry Drive. A similar amendment was made in 1991 to focus on the area surrounding the intersection of East Stone Drive and John B. Dennis Highway.

At its time of preparation and adoption, Kingsport's Land Use Plan served as a current and useful planning tool. However, the passage of time has now rendered it somewhat obsolete at two levels. First, the facts that the plan is based upon, most importantly the existing land use patterns, have changed with time. Secondly, widely-accepted planning philosophies have changed over time to reveal shortcomings for some aspects of this plan.

One of the most notable shortcomings is the strict separation of land uses. Even the existing and proposed land use maps for the central business district (CBD) lack any mixed-use land classifications. Without question, the most vibrant and desirable downtowns feature land use patterns dominated by ground floor retail and restaurants and upper floor offices and residences. However, Kingsport's Land Use Plan encourages the physical separation of differing land uses. To

further use the CBD plan as an example, it also proposes two entire blocks for parking. In order to be used conveniently, downtown parking needs to be distributed in smaller sizes and more frequent locations. Parking lots fronting onto downtown streets also create “dead spaces” that will kill the continuity and vitality of the street.

Another aspect of the current Land Use Plan that is inconsistent with today’s planning philosophies related to commercial development patterns. Compared to the community’s older commercial “nodes,” such as Downtown Kingsport and Kingsport’s smaller pre-World War II commercial areas, there are many negative characteristics associated with linear commercial patterns flanking highways (“strip commercial development”). However, a comparison of the 1986 existing land use map with the 1988 conceptual land use plan reveals the proposed expansion of strip commercial development patterns along several corridors. Based upon the community visioning that has occurred over the past several years, that feature of the Land Use Plan may be at odds with the community’s vision for the future.

Beyond MeadowView

Adopted / Updated: 1994
Entity: University of Tennessee – College of Architecture & Planning

This planning document focuses exclusively on the area including and surrounding the MeadowView Conference and Convention Center, located on the south side of Reservoir Road immediately east of I-181. The subtitle of this document is “A Development Impact Study and Plan for the Meadowview Conference and Convention Center Environs,” which provides a general idea of the study’s contents. To prepare the document, the City of Kingsport contracted with UT’s planning program to address the development of the center’s surrounding area, as the center had already been designed and ground was about to be broken for construction. The three stated purposes of the study were to:

1. Provide a set of recommendations for the promotion of orderly and compatible development around the MeadowView Conference and Convention Center site;
2. Provide a set of recommendations for the orderly development of the South Wilcox Drive corridor west of I-181, and;
3. Provide a general development plan and strategy for the development of land lying generally between I-181, I-81 and Reservoir Road.

Recommendations:

- Work with the County in rezoning Sullivan County land to be consistent with the plan
- Create an Annexation Task Force
- Develop detailed plans for improving public utilities and roads in the study area
- Support TDOT plans to improve Route 93, construct an interchange at Reservoir Road, and realign a portion of Reservoir Road
- Adopt an updated Major Road and Street Plan consistent with this plan
- Conduct public meetings and revisit plans related to improving Route 347 and connecting the road with I-81
- Meet with affected property owners and the local political leadership to build support for the adoption of a Gateway Overlay District
- Adopt the Gateway Overlay District, develop design guidelines and adopt any zoning amendments needed to implement the new district
- Establish an administrative process and an advisory group to implement the district

Redevelopment Plan for Core Urban Study Areas

Adopted / Updated: 2000
Entity: Kingsport Housing & Redevelopment Authority

This plan was prepared by a group that included the City of Kingsport Aldermen, City of Kingsport planning staff and KHRA staff. The plan was overseen by the Redevelopment Sub-Committee of the KHRA, and it was an outgrowth of the City's 1999 Economic Development Summit. The plan follows the criteria of the State's redevelopment planning laws, and the Kingsport Regional Planning Commission approved it in July of 2000. This plan recognizes that "While certain areas of the City have continued to be visible contributors to the local economy, others have declined because of obsolete design, decaying structures, vacant buildings, and out-of-date infrastructure." The stated purpose of the redevelopment program is:

1. To improve quality of life
2. Enhance Kingsport's tax base, and
3. Prevent and/or eliminate slum and blight

The plan identifies two redevelopment areas calling for the most immediate attention: the Downtown Redevelopment District and the N. Eastman Road Redevelopment District. While the downtown district consists of numerous individual properties and encompasses most of the area lying south of Sullivan Street, the Eastman Road district consists of only three properties featuring vacant or underutilized suburban commercial development. The plan also identifies ten "study areas" that are considered future candidates for redevelopment district designation, and they include the following areas: Sevier Terrace, Old Kingsport, Wilcox, Reedy Creek, Memorial Blvd., Miller/Freels, Fort Henry Drive, Gibson Mill, Stonegate, and Broad Street Hill.

A key part of this plan is the fourteen "Plan Objectives" beginning on page 43. In general, these objectives appear to be benevolent and typical redevelopment goals. However, some of them are inappropriate for the revitalization of a historic downtown such as Downtown Kingsport. Objective #9 suggests the "Elimination of obsolete and substandard buildings," while there are no objectives advocating the preservation and restoration of the many historic buildings that dominate Downtown Kingsport. Likewise, objective

#10 is "The assemblage of property into larger tracts" despite the fact that future infill development in Downtown Kingsport should respect the historic scale of buildings on relatively small lots. The tone of these objectives is more in keeping with the language associated with ill-advised urban renewal efforts of the 1960s and 1970s than with contemporary approaches to urban revitalization. However, it is noteworthy that the term "preservation" is used in the opening paragraph of the section entitled "Redevelopment and Market Opportunities" (page 45). In summary, the plan is more of a policy document than an actual physical master plan or a strategic plan for action, but it serves its intended purpose sufficiently. The key issues to consider are the need for redevelopment policies that are sympathetic towards historic buildings, and new "infill" development that occurs at an appropriate scale to blend with historic development patterns.

Economic Analysis of Redevelopment Areas

Adopted / Updated: 2001
Entity: Kingsport Housing & Redevelopment Agency

This analysis was prepared for the KHRA by the Washington, DC office of Economics Research Associates (ERA), an economics consulting firm. As stated in the report's introduction section, the project purpose was to "assess the overall retail market capacity in Kingsport and, more specifically, to examine the redevelopment potential of commercial districts throughout the city." The study assessed the relative strengths and weaknesses of eight specific areas, and it estimated the future prospects for commercial development in each. The eight areas considered included: Downtown Kingsport, Green Acres / Crown Point, Fort Henry Mall / Southland Center, Kingsport Mall and Stone / Eastman Area, Stone East of John B. Dennis, Stonegate, Parkway Plaza, and Church Circle Radial Streets.

In addition to making visual inspections of each area and meeting with local real estate professionals, the consultants also conducted a survey of over 400 Kingsport households to determine their current shopping preferences and habits. In addition to the full 63-page report, a three-

page executive summary includes a list of key findings and recommendations. Among the most significant were the following:

- There are four distinct major retail nodes in Kingsport: Downtown, Fort Henry Mall area, East Kingsport and West Kingsport.
- Kingsport residents spend more money on most retail categories than do other residents of the Tri-Cities.
- For the most part, residents of the Tri-Cities' three major communities shop primarily within their particular community. However, many of Kingsport's upper-income residents shop at the Johnson City Crossing / Johnson City Mall area, and overall "the City is losing a considerable amount of potential retail sales."
- Kingsport's existing commercial areas are not viewed positively by most people surveyed.
- Kingsport is a strong retail destination. Despite containing only 10% of the metro area's population, it captures over a third of the area's retail sales (excluding automobile sales, fuel sales and non-store retailers).
- To remain competitive in the region, Kingsport must develop new, up-to-date retail centers in strong locations. Existing older centers will likely struggle in the future. New development and redevelopment should both occur.
- Based upon the existing 2.05 million square feet of retail space comprised by Kingsport's eight commercial areas analyzed, there is potential for only approximately 150,000 square feet of new space within those eight areas.
- Despite the overall lack of retail demand within the eight existing areas, key categories for strong future demand include restaurants, home furnishings, and leisure and entertainment.
- Four of Kingsport's commercial areas meet the State's definition of "blighted," and they include Green Acres / Crown Point, Kingsport Mall / Stone-Eastman, Stonegate, and Parkway Plaza. The most likely alternative uses for these and the other existing commercial areas are office and "back-office" uses.
- The proposed one million square feet of space proposed for the new MeadowView Point and Crossroads centers should

not substantially impact the eight existing commercial areas because Kingsport's trade area will geographically expand, and residents now shopping out of town can be captured.

- Redevelopment areas, particularly Green Acres / Crown Point and Parkway Plaza, need to maintain mixed use and residential land uses, including neighborhood groceries.

In general, this is a high-quality study that should continue to serve as valuable public policy that guides the City's priorities and initiatives. Its only limitation, as with all studies and plans, is that it will become more and more obsolete with the passage of time.

Kingsport Major Street and Road Plan

Adopted / Updated: 2001

Entity: Kingsport Regional Planning Commission

This document was originally prepared in 1994 by the Kingsport Planning Department, and updated in 2001. The 2001 update was formally adopted by the commission. The plan has a time horizon to the year 2010, and it addresses all lands within Kingsport's designated Urban Growth Boundary. The plan inventories all key roads and streets in the study area, ranging from interstates to collector roads, and it cites their right-of-way (ROW) width, paved width, and number of driving lanes. The 2001 update features a map designating the various road and street classifications, and the plan prescribes corresponding design standards for each classification.

At least two of the street designations for streets that traverse the historic downtown deserve reconsideration. Center Street is classified as a Major Arterial. The existing segment of Center Street within the downtown features only an 80 ft. ROW, a 52-60 ft. street width, four driving lanes, two parking lanes and no central median. However, among the four design options for such streets, even the most minimal option calls for a minimum ROW of 100 ft., a minimum street width of 84 ft., four driving lanes, two parking lanes, and a 16 ft. wide

median lane. Any future attempts to expand this existing street to meet the plan's standards would clearly have a negative impact on downtown, and likely be in conflict with the community's vision for this important corridor. In fact, serious consideration should be given to redeveloping this street to consist of one driving lane in either direction, on-street parking lanes on each side, and a central landscaped median in which left turn lanes are integrated at intersections.

Similarly, West Sullivan Street is classified in the plan as a Minor Arterial. The street's existing ROW is 60 ft. and its paved width ranges between 24 ft. and 34 ft. The 24 ft. segment located west of Church Circle features only two driving lanes, no parking lanes, and an occasional turn lane at intersections. The plan's minimal standards among the five design options for Minor Arterials features a minimum 80 ft. ROW, a 44 ft. street width, two driving lanes, and two parking lanes. While redeveloping Sullivan Street to such standards without negatively impacting the adjacent areas and the street's character is conceivable, it would take a great deal of attention to detail. More appropriate standards for such an urban street segment would entail 10 ft. to 11 ft. driving lanes and 8 ft. parking lanes. Those dimensions would result in a total paved width of 36 ft. to 38 ft., compared to the recommended 44 ft. width. Also, the plan fails to address aesthetic issues for streets, such as the provision of street trees and attractive human-scaled lighting.

It is noteworthy that the "Radial Streets Report" prepared by the City's Planning Division in 2003 includes an addendum reporting the outcome of a community meeting held on January 12, 2004. That meeting resulted in a strong public consensus to keep Sullivan Street's current two-lane design, as well as to provide aesthetic improvements to the corridor.

Kingsport Redevelopment Corridors Transportation Study

Adopted / Updated: 2002

Entity: Kingsport Metropolitan Planning
Organization

This plan, prepared by Neel-Schaffer, Inc., evaluates Kingsport's key roadways and proposes a series of "short-term" and "long-term" improvements. There are 14 short-term improvements, of which 7 are for intersections and 9 improvements involve Sevier Avenue. Each of the short-term improvements has an estimated six-figure cost, ranging from \$81,000 for signage to \$954,000 for Netherland Inn Road improvements. The plan's 8 long-term improvements are more substantial and are each estimated as seven-figure costs, ranging from \$1,304,000 for Gibson Mill Road realignments to \$4,125,000 for one of the Union Road Connector alternatives. Some of the short-term and long-term improvements include multiple alternatives for the same general project.

This award winning plan has many positive attributes. However, it should be noted that many of the designs found within this document are inconsistent with the community's vision for a more attractive Kingsport based upon the Visual Image Study (VIS). Although, it is important to note that the recommendations found within the "Kingsport Redevelopment Corridors Transportation Study" were developed in conjunction with a citizen-based team, with representatives from each community that would be potentially affected by a corridor being reconstructed. Furthermore, as projects from this study are implemented, City staff should pay particular attention to the civic design aspect since that was not part of the overall scope for this study. A good example of this can be found when comparing the size of the downtown directional signs recommended in the "Kingsport Redevelopment Corridors Transportation Study" with those that were installed by the City. The study recommended oversized directional signs which go against the VIS results. However, City staff elected to go with smaller signs which, in turn, have been well received by the community. This same process should be carried out as further projects from this study are implemented.

The “Kingsport Redevelopment Corridors Transportation Study” provides multiple options for many of its recommendations. A good example of this can be found with the recommendations for Netherland Inn Road. Two options for Netherland Inn Road were explored during this study, with Alternative B receiving the highest score from the committee. However, after this document was received by the Kingsport Board of Mayor and Alderman, a third option was later developed during a visioning session for King’s Port on the Holston, led by the Mayor of Kingsport. This option called for the construction of a roundabout at the intersection of Netherland Inn Road and Industry Drive. While this option was not part of the study, the initial ideas generated from the study provided this team with ideas to generate a design that would further enhance the proposed redevelopment area along the Holston River. Additionally, the roundabout concept fits into the community’s vision for a more attractive Kingsport.

Using the “Kingsport Corridor Redevelopment Study” as a guide in developing alternatives should be considered in future transportation planning studies, though there may not be exact adherence to specific study recommendations, as illustrated above. Furthermore, in future transportation projects, context-sensitive designs should be considered during planning and design phases in order to address the impacted community’s concerns and provide an improved, safer, more attractive corridor.

2003-2004 Strategic Initiatives and Plan

Time-Frame: Last Updated – August 9, 2004
Entity: City of Kingsport
Purpose: To serve as the basis for how the City delivers services to its customers, and to plan for key initiatives for the future
Issues: Primarily those issues tied most directly to the functions of city government (planning, capital improvements, and municipal services), as well as education, economic development and quality of life

Approach: Developed during the Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BMA) annual retreat in September, and drafted by the Office of the City Manager.

The SIP is tied directly to the City’s annual budget, and it helps to dictate the budget’s priorities. The measuring stick for the SIP’s contents are the “core values and principles” of the City’s leaders. There is a strong emphasis on public input, providing City services efficiently and cost-effectively, and measuring results for accountability. The City identified six Core Values, as follows:

- Value Citizens
- Integrity
- Leadership
- Value Employees
- Excellence
- Partnerships

The SIP also includes a set of eight “Key Success Factors,” as well as thirteen “Key Strategic Objectives.” It is noteworthy that among those objectives is “KSO 9: Civic Design and Visual Preference.” This visioning process also produced a vision statement and mission statement, as follows:

Vision Statement: To be a planned regional center for people and business – the community of choice for the Northeast Tennessee Valley.

Mission Statement: To provide economic, educational and quality of life opportunities that create a safe, vibrant and diverse community.

RELEVANT STUDIES

Sidewalk Regulations & Policies

Adopted / Updated: 1994 / 1996 & 2002

Kingsport's sidewalk regulations and policies come from two different sources. The current official policies are part of Article V ("Required Improvements") from the City's subdivision regulations, which were first adopted in 1994 and revised in 1996, and are reviewed in the Codes Recommendations of this project. A report was written by the City's planning division in 2002 to suggest alternatives, and it is entitled "Subdivision Regulation Options for Sidewalks in Business-Commercial-Industrial Parks."

Subdivision Regulation Options for Sidewalks in Business-Commercial-Industrial Parks

This document is a study of potential options to standard sidewalks rather than a set of adopted regulations. It was prompted in 2001 when the Planning Commission reviewed the Springdale Commercial Park subdivision. The application received a partial variance from the City's sidewalk requirements, but only after much debate. The final solution to the variance problem included the sidewalk on Wilcox Boulevard in front of the Springdale Commercial/Industrial Park. This solution addressed the need for sidewalks and inter-connectivity that is noted throughout Kingsport, and especially along its major thoroughfares. The study entertains the notion of not requiring sidewalks for business and industrial parks with an M class zoning designation, but allowing the developer the option to come up with a palatable compromise for the Planning Commission to consider. It evaluates examples of developments in Kingsport, and it also examines sidewalk standards in Bristol, Johnson City and various Oregon communities. Not surprisingly, the standards of the other Tri-City communities are not very demanding regarding sidewalks, while the Oregon communities are. In summary, areas that seem to have no need for sidewalks are not very good places for people. The Planning Commission created an avenue to open dialogue with developers so that similar compromises can be reached. While it might be reasonable to waive sidewalks, either altogether or for one side of the street, in exclusively industrial areas, it does not release the developer from the responsibility of extending sidewalks on an adjacent public street or creating connectivity to or along the greenbelt or other such street

or trail from which it may cross or extend. Sidewalks should also be required on existing public streets adjacent to new multi-family or commercial development. Pedestrian connectivity is key.