

# **Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Livability**

## **A Report to the Kingsport Board of Mayor and Aldermen**

### **Introduction**

In March, 2010, AARP of Tennessee presented to the City of Kingsport its report "A Livable Community Survey of the Greater Kingsport Tennessee Area: A Place to Live, Work and Play For A Lifetime.

The majority of survey respondents were AARP members 50 and over in greater Kingsport plus a number of surveys randomly drawn from Kingsport zip codes. Results provided a range of views that serves all residents.

The findings were remarkable. There was a 44% response and 96% of the respondents indicated they were either very satisfied, satisfied, or somewhat satisfied with the area as a place to live. Concerns and/or needs were identified, as well as "gaps" in services, facilities and programs. These findings provide opportunities for identifying improvements in those "need" areas.

Upon receiving the report, Mayor Dennis Phillips appointed a "Blue Ribbon" Task Force drawn from former Kingsport mayors and aldermen to review the AARP report and survey results and to determine what short-term as well as long-term goals should be developed for presentation to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen. Those appointed were: Frank Brogden, Chair, Jeanette Blazier, C.B. "Boots" Duke, Gardner Hammond, Ruth Montgomery, and Hunter Wright.

Additionally, four community organization leaders were appointed by the mayor to participate in the task force's work, to provide information, counsel, and recommendations. They were: Doris Bush (United Way), Charlie Glass (YMCA), Susan LaGuardia (Kingsport Tomorrow), and Margot Seay (AARP).

As a beginning point, the Task Force looked back to the 1915 original plan developed for Kingsport by Dr. John Nolen, an eminent city planner and engineer. The plan was designed to allow the city to grow and prosper, avoiding the common errors of growth and expansion. In the succeeding years, Kingsport has, indeed grown and prospered, now embracing over 49.84 square miles, as compared to 4.55 square miles at the time of the City's incorporation in 1917.

The Task Force reviewed virtually every function of the City's operation and received several reports from many of the City's staff and a number of leaders of other community services who sat with the Task Force as consultants and advisors. From those reviews and in-depth consideration, the Task Force's recommendations to the Board—and the community are based.

These reports will be made available at [www.development.kingsporttn.gov/livable](http://www.development.kingsporttn.gov/livable) for more in-depth review.

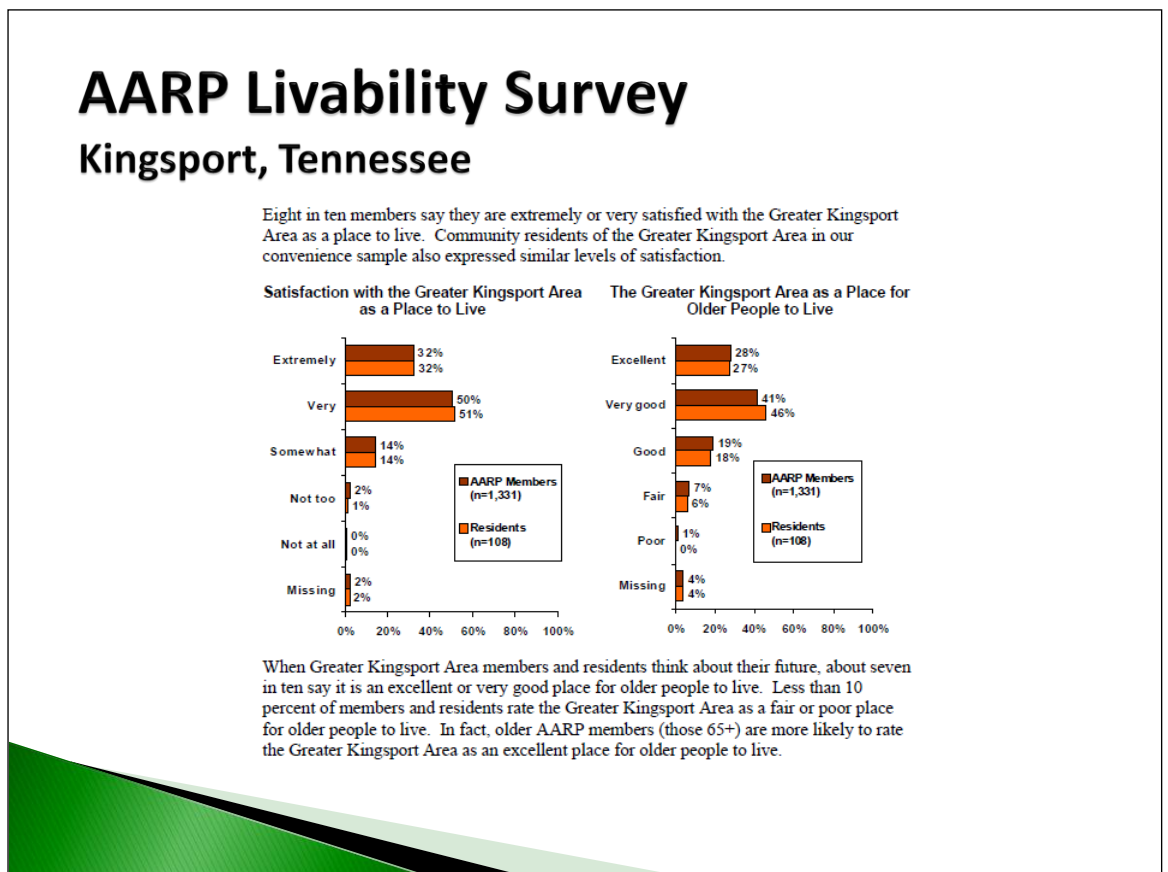
The process used by the Task Force was:

1. Review of the AARP Survey
2. Define what is meant by livability
3. Meet with city staff members to review current status and learn about needs and plans for growth and development
4. Hear reports from community organization leaders who are in partnership with the city regarding current status, needs, and future plans
5. Develop short and long-term goals to be recommended to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen.
6. Present reports to the Board of Mayor and Aldermen (BMA) and community
7. See Appendices for Task Force's Agenda

Significant results and conclusions emerged:

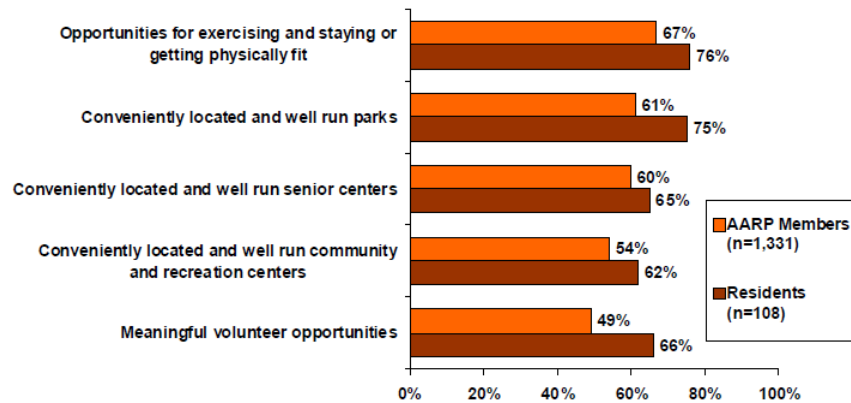
1. The city is very well governed and operated. No significant deficiencies were observed. Kingsport is a good place to live defined by good services, good management, good facilities and excellent planning. Kingsport area residents are blessed by having a number of unique programs, facilities, and services. A summary of these is attached as an appendix to this report.
2. The Task Force identified a number of opportunities for additional growth and improvement, which are included in this report as short and long-term goals

### AARP Survey Excerpts



## AARP Livability Survey Kingsport, Tennessee

Activities of Importance (Extremely & Very) to AARP Members & Community Residents



## AARP Livability Survey Kingsport, Tennessee

The biggest gap identified between what is important and what exists in the Greater Kingsport Area in our list of activities is well run and located community and recreation centers.

However, the spread of this gap is relatively low. No gaps were present in terms of senior centers and meaningful volunteer opportunities.

Activities in the Greater Kingsport Area (n varies based on awareness of attribute)	Gap	Importance of Attribute	Existence of Attribute
Conveniently located and well run community and recreation centers (n=870)	-11.9%	92.8%	80.9%
Conveniently located and well run parks (n=1,102)	-2.7%	95.2%	92.5%
Opportunities for exercising and staying or getting physically fit (n=1,101)	-1.8%	94.6%	92.8%
Conveniently located and well run senior centers (n=1,067)	0.4%	92.7%	93.1%
Meaningful volunteer opportunities (n=1,014)	7.3%	89.5%	96.8%

### **Definition of Livability**

The Task Force defined “livability” as a community’s ability to provide and sustain a quality of life for all of its inhabitants. The idea of a ‘livable’ community encompasses things many of us take for granted. This includes areas for community activities, clean roads, and sufficient neighborhood lighting. Through citizen participation, communities can establish a sense of urban identity and develop their own ideas of community.

Livability evolves out of a wealth of existing resources and conditions that promote healthy living, such as clean air, water, and soil. Good schools, convenient shopping, safe community spaces, and secure infrastructure all play an important role in making a community a success and relate to what makes a community livable.

The Task Force concluded that livability is ageless. Therefore, Kingsport should continue to focus on economic health, services and amenities that support active living for all ages such as recreation/community centers, walking/nature trails, bicycling, aquatics, a modern library and golf. Public safety, medical, housing options and public transit will continue to grow in importance.

The Task Force study led to the following conclusions and recommendations:

### **Communications**

With so many ongoing positive initiatives of which the Task Force was not fully aware, it became clear that an overarching need is to effectively communicate this information to the community at large. It is equally important that citizens have the opportunity for input. With increased access to a dedicated television channel and a first class website, more resources should be dedicated to capitalizing on these assets and telling Kingsport’s story to the community and world. Job responsibilities for ‘community relations’ have been combined with ‘government relations’ (legislative initiatives) and countywide economic development (NETWORKS) over the years. NETWORKS functions well with State prospects; however, the role of the Kingsport Economic Development Board could be redefined to fill the “middle” to address the needs of current and potential businesses that are not large enough to be state prospects, but not small enough to be small, incubated businesses. The absence of a dedicated KEDB employee who is particularly passionate and knowledgeable specifically about Kingsport is a gap that should be filled.

#### **1) Short Term Goals**

- a) Communication
  - i) Place PowerPoint presentations from Task Force on Channel 16 (multi-faceted, high rotation)
  - ii) Communicate in an ongoing, pre-planned way about all that’s going on in the community and how to access available services

- iii) Use all avenues for communicating – water bills, Times-News supplement, City website
  - iv) Explore and develop a year around communications plan Review frequency and variety of programming on Channel 16, keep it fresh
  - v) Produce “Livability Tips” – left side of front page like the current “Frugal Tips”
  - vi) Work with other mass communication media to tie into this message – newspaper, radio, TV – get the message to the community re scheduling and ‘when to watch’ for fresh content
  - vii) Provide updates of positive information on a regular basis
  - viii) Build community awareness about current and pending state and federal mandates (for example, stormwater, education, etc.)
  - ix) Through effective communications and promotion, build awareness, and use of the existing information and referral system – 211 and case management. The 211 system is designed to provide the comprehensive information necessary when individuals and families find themselves in need of assistance. This one-stop information and referral system is available for access to community resources for those in need. The Task Force learned that between the years of 2007 and 2009 there was a 300% increase in referrals for basic necessities through the local 211 call system.
- b) Services
- i) Provide a centralized location for service referral (with prices) to minimize embarrassment and increase access (perhaps grow the 211 service)
  - ii) Prepare, distribute and regularly-update a comprehensive list of services for residents who need help. The list should include phone numbers and fees involved.
  - iii) Develop a network to promote the use of public/private partnerships and public/public partnerships
- c) Transportation and Wellness
- i) Continue to construct access trails/paths from neighborhood areas to the Greenbelt
  - ii) Continue to include requirement for sidewalks on streets (commercial and residential) when possible and encourage pocket parks in new subdivisions
  - iii) Add bicycle lanes to streets and roads where traffic is heavy and/or give alternate access to schools, pharmacy and grocery stores
  - iv) When constructing or reconstructing future streets/roads, keep in mind ‘complete streets’ (plan for pedestrians as well as vehicles). It’s not a one-size fits all solution. This applies to local and state routes, as well.
  - v) Continue to expand and improve transit service. 47% of Kingsport residences and businesses are within 1,000 feet of a fixed transit route. Additional service is available for qualified residents within the City of Kingsport through the ADA/Paratransit service. In order to qualify for the ADA/Paratransit Service residents must be qualified by their doctor and by the Kingsport Area Transit Service

under the Americans With Disabilities Act (AD). ADA service is available for doctor's appointments, shopping trips and work to any qualified resident of the City of Kingsport.

- vi) Examine the policies within the city government related to the built environment using via the City's 20-year transportation plan, using Wellness, Infrastructure, and Policy (WIP) Task force, appointed by mayor, to provide ongoing input as to priorities.
  - vii) Make sure policies related to the development of streets, pedestrian and bicycle safety lanes, and the vision for developing outdoor physical activity opportunities that are congruent with livability.
  - viii) Continue providing for greater flexibility, availability and accessibility in our current public transportation public system. Awareness needs to be built in the right target audience – lower socio-economic. Transportation becomes a barrier to many areas of need for families and individuals, including employment. Any job requires reliable transportation to and from the workplace at the time the employee is to report for work. Without reliable transportation, the job is not obtained, without a steady income basic needs suffer.
- d) Jobs and Economic Development
- i) Continue to market Kingsport as a home for small/midsize businesses and entrepreneurs by leveraging relationships with banks and state agencies. Emphasize quality of life, good schools, available training, and workers who have a good work ethic. The Task Force learned that small businesses pay 45% of the total U.S. private payroll, employee half of all private sector employees, have generated 60-80% of new jobs annually over the last decade, and employ 41% of high tech workers such as scientists, engineers, and computer workers. (Reference: [www.smallbusinessnotes.com](http://www.smallbusinessnotes.com))
  - ii) Reaffirm and recommit to recruiting new residents through [www.MoveToKingsport.com](http://www.MoveToKingsport.com). According to information the Task Force received, each newcomer generates an economic impact of \$25,000/year (Reference: UNC Wilmington). With 444 net new families (1,021 people) in the past 4 years, that brings \$25.5 million annually to the community, consuming services and creating demand for jobs in medical, pharmacy, finance, insurance, real estate, food, retail, etc.
  - iii) Continue to develop the workforce by stressing the value of education, particularly higher education. Nationally, the unemployment rate among workers with bachelor's degrees or higher was 4.7%. The unemployment rate for people without a high school diploma was 15.3% and 10.1% for high school graduates (MSN Money, 11/5/2010). Support secondary education, emphasizing advancing academic achievement of the high percentage of local high school graduates to make them job ready
  - iv) Continue to develop Kingsport as a hub for medical jobs, the fastest growing and best paying segment of the local economy.

- v) Develop unique (or notable) selling points for Kingsport
  - vi) Continue to use the Visitor Enhancement Program (VEP) to develop Kingsport's tourism assets to maximize economic impact
  - vii) Recommit the mission of KEDB to mid-size business, technology, warehousing & distribution firms and small/medium corporate headquarters (similar to those found in Interstate Park South, Brookside & Regional Parks).
  - viii) Develop a network of former local residents (graduates of local education systems) that would promote the silent force of the "Kingsport Spirit".
  - ix) Consider positioning a full-time city employee to facilitate the administration and coordination of the expanded KEDB operation.
- e) Arts and Leisure
- i) Continue community education of the multiple benefits the Aquatic Center facility will provide the citizens of Kingsport.
  - ii) Remodel/expand our library to a state of the art facility for greater Kingsport as a community center which builds upon our commitment to education and enriches a broad range of educational and leisure opportunities (for example, ebooks, digital media, literacy, archives)
  - iii) Consider a plan for a future multigenerational Community Center as needed.
  - iv) Build new park space on the east side of Kingsport
  - v) Support of sculptures and Sculpture Walk
- f) Education
- i) Preserve and enhance Kingsport's K-12 school system as the primary cornerstone of the community's livability
  - ii) Monitor local performance against national standards and strive to implement cutting edge programs and technology as a means to attract top teachers and students.
  - iii) Parental, community, and business involvement is critical to the overall success

## **2) Long Term Goals**

- d) Housing
- i) Work with community partners, developers to develop housing stock
  - ii) Focus on ways to rehabilitate/improve 1920's-1940's housing options in neighborhoods downtown and the hospital area (for example, Church Circle, Five Points, Cherokee Village, Park Hill/The Fifties, etc.). Encourage razing/rebuilding housing in a manner compatible with the existing architecture, as necessary, introducing neighborhood shops/businesses where appropriate.
  - iii) Encourage the Kingsport Economic Development Board to include housing as one of its economic initiatives by working with developers of single and multi-family housing as appropriate.

- iv) Emphasize current and future code enforcement (dilapidation/removal) as a strategy for stabilizing neighborhoods and encouraging reinvestment
  - v) Continue to encourage new housing construction through the Materials Agreement (reimbursing developer costs for water/sewer infrastructure) to develop housing choices that allow Kingsport to remain competitive regionally
  - vi) Promote rehabilitation of mid-to-high income housing by developing a creative incentive program to encourage modernization while preserving historic character of neighborhoods
  - vii) Continue to partner with outside agencies for the purpose of rehabilitating low-to-moderate income homes working with community partners such as Habitat for Humanity, Kingsport Alliance for Housing Rehabilitation, Eastern Eight, CDBG, Carpenter's Helpers, Kingsport Housing & Redevelopment Authority, etc.
  - viii) Promote the development of non-traditional housing, such as downtown lofts, apartments, and universal housing
- e) Transportation and Wellness
- i) Continue to increase pedestrian mobility by working to ensure that greenbelt, existing sidewalks, developer-installed sidewalks, and city-installed sidewalks connect to each other
  - ii) Improve gateways/pedestrian gateway from Downtown to hospital
  - iii) Better access to Riverview finding and providing roadways
  - iv) Rework exits and ramps at 81/26 and at JBD/Fort Henry
  - v) Consider connecting our Greenbelt with neighboring cities throughout the Tri-Cities
  - vi) Better access to Greenbelt at various points
- f) Environmental
- i) Continue to expand wastewater system to protect groundwater and stream quality  
Continue to work with Tri-Cities Ozone Action Partnership to promote clean air and explain publicly that local air quality has been consistently improving, but stricter standards make it appear otherwise.
- g) Arts and Leisure
- i) Promote downtown growth in arts-related small businesses and cultural activities
  - ii) Continue support of the Sculpture Walk
- h) Neighborhood Improvements
- i) Focus on the 26% of the Greater Kingsport population that lives in areas totaling 3 square miles. There are 5 neighborhoods that make up the 3 square miles in which more than a quarter of our population lives. These neighborhoods are high density, low homeownership, lower socio-economic and high-crime. Nearly 50% of the violent crimes committed in the City of Kingsport happen in these neighborhoods.



Find means for developing representation and a community voice in these neighborhoods.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, the Blue Ribbon Task Force has spent several hundred hours of meeting and individual study and review to develop these recommendations for improvement. We recognize that our study does not include an in depth review and consideration of many organizations which also influence the community's quality of life, such as the Kingsport Area Chamber of Commerce, youth service organizations, and church-related community service activities. We consider it a privilege to have been asked to conduct this review and to make recommendations for improvement. It has been a great learning experience for the Task Force. This learning process has underlined to the Task Force the importance of not only opportunities for improvement, but equally important, the need to be diligent in communicating the current excellent services and facilities provided by the city. But don't let the report die 'on the vine'.

## Appendix 1 – Meeting Schedule and Topics

### June 14, 2010 – Mayor Dennis Phillips

- The committee
- The charge
- The AARP report (Margot Seay)

### June 21, 2010 – Organization

- Frank Brogden, Chair
- Jeff Fleming appointed as staff liaison
- Set meeting schedule

### July 12, 2010 – Jeff Fleming, Asst City Mgr/Development

- What is Livability? Sustainability?
- Set the context
- Kingsport's past, present, future initiatives
- Current demographics and social/economic/housing characteristics of Kingsport

### July 19, 2010 – Chris McCartt, Asst to the City Manager

- Plans for Aquatic Center / YMCA (Charlie Glass)
- Plans for Community Centers (or Neighborhood Centers)
  - Renaissance Center
  - V.O. Dobbins
  - Lynn View
  - Multi-generational? Age specific?
- Plans for Parks
  - Bays Mountain Master Plan
  - Neighborhood Parks (retrofitting gaps)
  - Working with developers (Edinburgh Park, for example)
- Transit
  - Status report, history, future plans
  - Scheduling, shelters, call-ahead for doctor's appointments, ADA
- Wetlands/Open Space program
  - Floodplain of Reedy Creek and Horse Creek
  - Acquire, manage ecosystem
  - Future greenbelt expansion opportunities
  - Stormwater utility to fund/manage?
- Library Expansion/Renovation
- Visitor Enhancement Program – what is it? How does it work?

### August 9, 2010 – John Campbell, Financial Update

- Overview of City's financial position, budget, and enterprise funds
- Hotel-Motel Tax, Regional Sales Tax (MeadowView)
- Debt Roll-Off
- Stimulus funding – status report

### August 23 – Ryan McReynolds, Public Works Director

- Sidewalks – past, present, future
- Sidewalks on new local road projects
- Sidewalk Committee – who's on it, how does it work?
- Commercial Sidewalks – future ordinance

### September 13, 2010 – Housing, Code Enforcement, Safety

- Chris McCartt (City Manager's Office)  
Update on Housing Rehabilitation Partnerships (KAHR, Carpenter's Helpers, Eastern Eight, KHRA, etc.)
- John Blessing (Legal)/Joel Spencer (Building)  
Update on code enforcement, removal of dilapidated structures, explanation of the process
- Dale Phipps (Police)  
Police perspective on public safety from a livability point-of-view
- Scott Boyd (Fire)  
Fire perspective on public safety from a livability point-of-view

### September 27, 2010 – Jerry Petzoldt, Developer

- What is a certified AARP builder?
- Kingsport's housing stock
- Universal housing
- Remodeling
- What incentives would attract builders to buy/remodel/redevelop housing stock?

### October 11, 2010 – Partner initiatives

- Community Healthy Living Index (CHLI)
- Pioneering Healthier Communities (YMCA grant)
- Infrastructure and Policy (WIP) committee.
- Community Vision Councils (Aging With Choices, Helping Children and Youth Succeed, Ensuring Safety & Stability, Promoting Self Sufficiency)

### October 25, 2010 – Partner initiatives (continued)

- Charlie Glass, YMCA

### November 2010 – Discuss findings/recommendations

### December 2010/January – Prepare draft

### February/March 2011 – Finalize report and present findings

## **Appendix 2 - Unique to Kingsport**

- 1) Santa Train
- 2) Bays Mountain Park
- 3) United Way
- 4) Long Island of Holston
- 5) Greenbelt
- 6) Volunteer Spirit
- 7) Major Historical Sites
- 8) Model City Concept
- 9) Low Cost of Living
- 10) Distinct Seasons

The following appendices are available at [www.development.kingsporttn.gov/livable](http://www.development.kingsporttn.gov/livable)

**Appendix 3: Jeff Fleming, Assistant City Manager / Development**

**Appendix 4: Chris McCartt, Assistant to the City Manager / Leisure Services**

**Appendix 5: John Campbell, Financial Update**

**Appendix 6: Ryan McReynolds, Public Works Director (or designee)**

**Appendix 7: Chris McCartt, Update on Housing Rehabilitation Partnerships**

**Appendix 8: John Blessing (Legal)/Joel Spencer (Building), Code Enforcement**

**Appendix 9: Dale Phipps, Police**

**Appendix 10: Scott Boyd, Fire**

**Appendix 11: Jill Salyers, United Way**

**Appendix 12: Kim Rucker, Pioneering Healthier Communities**

**Appendix 13: Charlie Glass, YMCA**