

Knoxville-Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

Fiscal Year 1999-2000



Knoxville-Knox County Metropolitan Planning Commission

Annual Report

FY-1999-2000

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From the Chairman



Fiscal 1999-2000 was a busy year for the Metropolitan Planning Commission. In monthly public hearings, the Planning Commission acted on over 2,000 applications for rezonings, subdivisions, development plans, ordinance amendments, street closures and other development approvals. We recognize that each decision by the Planning Commission can have good or bad effects on our community, and we take each decision very seriously.

Some of our decisions take place amid controversy. The Planning Commission strives to make sure that all projects are evaluated according to fair and objective criteria. These criteria are found in the comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations for Knoxville and Knox County. Most projects are not contested, but when there is opposition to a development proposal, we listen carefully to both sides before making a decision, and often postpone action to allow time for opposing parties to sit down and listen to the other side's viewpoint.

The development projects that won this year's MPC Excellence Award illustrate the benefits of our emphasis on comprehensive plans and citizen participation. These projects also demonstrate that there are many developers with strong commitments to creative design and quality construction. The winners included:

- *White Oak*, a residential subdivision in West Knox County featuring new homes carefully sited on heavily wooded lots. The developers went to great pains to preserve much of the tree cover on this property.
- *Fountain City Park Bank*, a new architectural landmark for Fountain City. Rather than introducing an anonymous cookie-cutter design, the developer patterned the new bank on a historic North Knoxville residence, Belcaro. The new bank helps reinforce the unique image of Fountain City.
- *Mechanicsville Commons*, a traditional neighborhood development replacing the College Homes public housing project. The developer, KCDC, used a new, innovative zoning district to create a neighborhood that will be an extension of Knoxville's first historic zoning district in Mechanicsville.
- *The Centre at Deane Hill*, a heavily landscaped "power center," will strengthen Knoxville's role as the retailing capital of East Tennessee.

You can read more about the Excellence Award winners on page 7. This year's winners, like the winners in MPC's 18 previous annual awards competitions, will set the planning and design standard for future developments.



PLANNING FOR KNOXVILLE-KNOX COUNTY'S FUTURE SHOULD CAPITALIZE ON STRATEGIC ASSETS

MPC has started work on an updated General Plan, the 30-year policy framework for physical development in Knoxville-Knox County. The first step in a planning process is usually an inventory of problems and opportunities. Problem identification gets a lot of attention, and, for most people, is pretty easy. There's a limit, however, to how far a community can progress by only identifying problems. To make significant strides forward, a community has to identify assets and opportunities and capitalize on them. Here are a few of the major assets and opportunities which Knoxville-Knox County have to work with, according to our staff and citizens who have worked on recent comprehensive planning projects:

Knoxville and Knox County are the business and cultural center for East Tennessee. Depending on whose definition of "region" you use, the region consists of six counties and 680,000 people (U. S. Census Bureau Metropolitan Statistical Area); 16 counties and 1,016,627 people (East Tennessee Development District) or over 1.1 million people in Knoxville's "area of dominant influence," an expanded trade area and media market identified in the *Latitudes and Attitudes*¹ marketing atlas. When we look at these larger geographic areas, we see that many of the topics of greatest interest to our citizens, including economic development, transportation, environmental quality, recreation, and higher education, are best addressed at the regional level.

The Knoxville area has an excellent quality of life. This has been confirmed in many well-publicized national surveys. The Millennium Edition *Places Rated Almanac*², one of the most comprehensive and prestigious community rating surveys, lists the six-county Knoxville metropolitan area as the 13th best overall place to live among the 339 largest metro areas in the U.S. and Canada. Knoxville was the highest-rated metro with a population under 1 million.

Knoxville is the most urban place in East Tennessee. The population of Knox County is much denser than the surrounding rural counties. Our downtown area is compact, walkable, and architecturally rich. The downtown area is ringed by dozens of pre-World War II neighborhoods, with the kind of convenience, character and ambiance not available in the suburbs. While most population growth continues to be directed to suburban areas, there is a strong, national "back to the cities" trend. For people who prefer an urban lifestyle, Knoxville is the place to be in East Tennessee.

It is not too late for Knoxville-Knox County to avoid the fate of Atlanta. The impacts of suburban sprawl development patterns on quality of life in Atlanta, southern California, and northern Virginia provide a clear warning that, while growth is generally good, uncoordinated, leapfrog development can result in transportation problems that leave less time for family activities, exacerbate air and water quality problems, and obliterate the unique character of communities. Many people in the outlying suburbs in these areas spend an extraordinary length of time on commuting and other routine travel. By encouraging a more compact and convenient development pattern, Knoxville-Knox County can grow *and* stay livable.

The natural beauty of Knoxville-Knox County is what makes this area unique. Although it is easy to find examples to the contrary (just drive down any of our older commercial strips), most people agree that we live in an exceptionally beautiful area. With good planning and responsible regulation, we can protect the beauty of our surroundings and undo damage done in the past.

Other frequently mentioned assets include relatively low housing costs and cost of living, an ever-expanding park and greenway system, being home to Tennessee's flagship university and TVA, and an independent-minded populace with a strong work ethic. All of our planning and community development efforts should use these strategic assets to our greatest advantage.

¹Weiss, Michael J. *Latitudes and Attitudes*. New York: Little Brown, 1994.

²Savageau, David and Richard Boyer. *Places Rated Almanac*. New York: Prentice Hall Travel, 2000.

Development Activity and Economic Overview



In 1999 staff attended some 200 community and legislative meetings and reviewed over 2,300 cases submitted to MPC, the Historic Zoning Commission, or the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Rezoning

There were 224 rezonings approved in 1999, affecting almost 2,000 acres of property. While the number of rezonings in 1999 was fewer than in 1998, the amount of affected acreage



was higher, increasing by 20.5 percent. Rezoned properties averaged 8.9 acres in size, compared to the previous year's 5.6 acres per request.

Subdivisions

During the year 224 new subdivisions were approved, with a total of 2,700 lots. These represent only a small portion of the 1,000-plus final plats that staff reviewed for new subdivisions and resubdivisions of property.

Building Permits

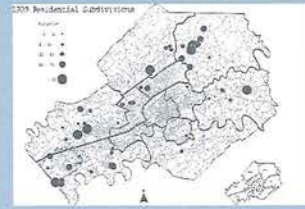
Approved building permits totaled 3,561 in 1999. More than 93 percent of these were residential permits, with the majority issued for single family homes. The dollar value of new residential construction was the highest since 1996 for a total of \$266 million. Dollar value of non-residential permits was \$136 million, a slight drop from the previous two years.

Development in the '90s

A look at the entire decade of permits shows a gain of 32,843 new dwelling units in Knox County. This brings the total inventory of dwelling units in the county to 175,000. During the '90s, the countywide value of new construction topped the \$3 billion mark, while renovation permits added another \$1 billion of spending. Subdivision activity for the decade shows 27,135 new residential lots and 991 non-residential lots created in Knox County during this 10-year period.

Ordinance Amendments

Hope VI: A major new project approved last year is Mechanicsville Commons, part of the Hope VI project which encompasses the former College Homes housing project site near Mechanicsville. MPC staff were involved in the review and approval of the Phase I and Phase II Concept Plans which include residential lots, church sites, commercial areas, commons area, and park. Mechanicsville Commons is the first example in the Knoxville area of traditional neighborhood design. This type of development, similar to many pre-World War II neighborhoods, was made possible by a recent amendment to the city zoning ordinance. The



Tennessee Chapter of the American Planning Association presented a statewide planning award last year to MPC for creating the amendment.

Towers: Another ordinance change requires restrictions on telecommunications towers in the city, including co-location on existing towers, certification of new tower plans by a licensed engineer or architect, and review of all new towers as use-on-review.



Economic Overview

Staff published an updated version of the MPC Economic Overview this past year. The overview is a detailed sourcebook on community resources and economic conditions in the Knoxville area. Some key sections include:

Employment and Labor Force: The workforce in Knox County reached a total of 200,091 in 1999, with

about one-third of workers employed in service industries. Local unemployment rates declined throughout the '90s, and last year the rates for the county and the metro area were among the lowest in the state. The local labor force is steadily becoming more educated, both at the high school and college level. In 1997, more than a fourth of workers here held college degrees, and more than 80 percent had graduated from high school.



Wages and Income: Per capita income has grown steadily for local residents, although at rates slower than the national average. In 2000, the county average should reach \$28,229 and the metro average, \$25,765. Wage earners in the manufacturing and services industries saw the largest gains.

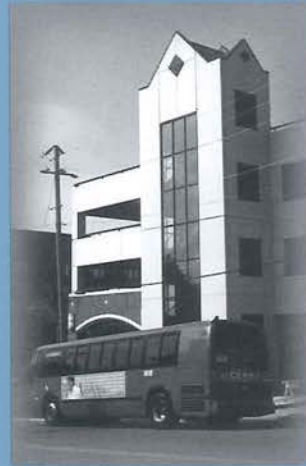
Business Establishments: Over 11,000 businesses operate in Knox County, and about 18,500 commercial establishments are found in the metro area. Retail businesses in the county generated almost \$7.8 billion in sales revenue in 1998.

Property Markets: The county has nearly 34 million square feet of industrial/warehousing floor space, 15.5 million square feet of office space, and 12.6 million square feet of shopping center space. Vacancy rates are low. This information is based on a series of separate market surveys conducted annually or bi-annually by MPC staff.

Transportation

MPC transportation planners are continuing to work on easing traffic congestion at a regional level. This past year they held public meetings in 10 counties to gather input on transportation issues in preparation for a \$600,000 study on regional transportation alternatives. They selected a consultant, Wilbur Smith and Associates, to begin the next phase of the study, which involves examining major corridors as well as existing alternative routes. Later the study will focus on the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Foothills Parkway, and the park's gateway communities.

Staff obtained federal funding for two smaller studies: one will focus on origin and destination trips made by some 15,000 households, and the other on analyzing traffic around major work zones.



Federal funding also was approved for part of the Knoxville Downtown Linkages Plan. A handicapped-accessible sidewalk will be built linking the waterfront with Main Street along Walnut Avenue, and another sidewalk will link the waterfront with Hill Street near the Gateway Visitors Center. Funding will be sought in the future for a transfer center for buses and trolleys.

Staff organized the annual legislative luncheon for the Metropolitan Planning Organization—a transportation planning board for Knox and parts of Blount counties. City, state, and federal officials were invited to hear about the area's long-range transportation plan and efforts to meet stringent new air pollution standards. The local MPO is coordinated by MPC Deputy Executive Director Jeff Welch and is staffed by MPC planners.

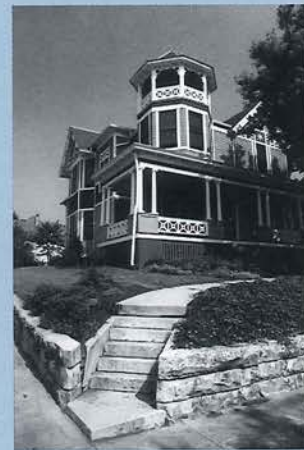


Historic Preservation



MPC staff provided technical support and graphic design work for a report by the Mayor's Task Force on Historic Preservation titled Preservation Works. The task force spent six months examining programs in other cities and programs in progress in Knoxville before publishing a list of specific suggestions on what should be done and who should be responsible.

Meanwhile, staff have assembled a major database listing thousands of older homes, buildings, and structures. Already more than 15,000 properties with structures at least 50 years old have been surveyed and are being photographed throughout Knox County. This information is being linked with other planning data through GIS software. The project is



funded in part by the Tennessee Historical Commission, and is the first effort of its kind in the state. The information will be used by other agencies as well as by MPC for making rezoning decisions.

A plan that promotes new development compatible with historic buildings has finally emerged for the Fort Sanders neighborhood. MPC planners and graphic artists worked closely for more than a year with the Fort Sanders Forum—a diverse group of residents, property owners, developers, and hospital and university officials. Their efforts resulted in the adoption of a neighborhood plan and a conservation overlay, including specific design guidelines for the area.

Excellence Awards



The 2000 MPC Excellence Awards set new records with the highest number of nominations submitted and the largest crowd attending the banquet. Eleven local developments were honored at this annual event—now in its nineteenth year—which showcases both new and restored projects contributing to our community's appearance, well being, and reputation.

The neighborhood/civic achievement award went to *Knox Heritage and its Inner City Ventures Program*, through which blighted historic properties are purchased and restored.

There were two winners in the residential category. Richard Brower and Bill Farnham developed *White Oak*, a new subdivision off Westland Drive in west Knox County. It is an outstanding example of blending new homes with a natural wooded setting.

Also a winner was *Mechanicsville Infill Housing*, planned and developed by a diverse team organized by the Knoxville Community Development Corporation. Roughly half of 78 new units in Queen Anne or Craftsman styles have been constructed on vacant lots through a Hope VI grant.

There were two winners in the office category. The expanded *Scripps Technology Center* at 9721 Sherrill Road now includes offices and production studios for three TV networks (Home and Garden Television, Do It Yourself, and the Food Network).

The other office winner was *U.S. Cellular Regional Operations Center* at 800 Cornerstone Drive. One of four regional centers in the country, it includes a walking trail and soccer fields.

In the commercial category, the *Fountain City Park Bank* at 5320 North Broadway was designed to be



Parks, Greenways, and Open Spaces



reminiscent of the Belcaro mansion of Fountain City. The developer is Middlesboro Federal Bank of Kentucky.

Also a winner in that category, the *Centre at Deane Hill* on Morrell Road features traditional and specialty shops with extensive landscaping. The developer is Isakson and Barnhart.

The special use award for landscape design went to the *Knoxville Zoological Gardens* at 3500 Knoxville Zoo Drive for its new entrance and parking lot.

The special use award for buildings went to the *Women's Basketball Hall of Fame*, 700 Hall of Fame Drive, developed by the Knoxville Sports Corporation.

Two renovation/restoration award winners were Sandra McCall and her partner Larry Holland for their work at *1614 Washington Avenue*, and the Knoxville Utilities Board and the City of Knoxville for their restoration of the *Miller's Building* at 445 S. Gay Street.

Last year, the Knox County Park and Recreation Facility Plan received Governor Sundquist's award for the best park plan in the state. Developed by MPC staff in conjunction with the county parks department, the plan already has been the basis for extensive park improvements, including:

- The Cove at Concord Park
- The walkways and youth golf course at Hillcrest Nursing Institute
- The French Memorial Park and Bonnie Kate Library
- The Rifle Range Soccer Complex

MPC planners recently assisted the city parks department on a resource inventory on parks, greenways, and open space. This inventory is expected to serve as the basis for a new city parks plan in the future.

The MPC graphic design team designs, illustrates, and publishes all our printed material. They provide support for several city and county departments in the form of newsletters, brochures, logos, displays, and sign presentations. They also assist the Great Smoky Mountain Regional Greenway Board.

Addressing

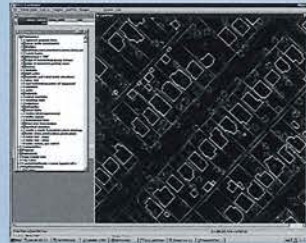
There are a total of 185,000 addresses and 7,430 street names in Knox County. The MPC addressing staff coordinates efforts to keep them straight with the 911 Emergency System, the Post Office, utility companies, Bell South, the property assessor, and law enforcement agencies—all of whom depend on a correct address to deliver services. This past year, staff changed or added over 30,000 addresses to the addressing database.

Staff worked at length with the Census Bureau to verify their address list for the 2000 census. Through this joint venture, more than 55,000 new and corrected addresses were added to the census address file.

Addressing staff also maintain the digital base map for the city and county, adding new subdivisions, street center-lines, and intersections, as well as data from the newest aerial photographs. This past year 200 new streets were added to the base map, which serves every city and county department using GIS.

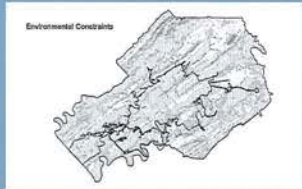
Technology

The availability of GIS or geographic information systems has made it much easier for planners to analyze current conditions, prepare reports, and present ideas to others. In sector planning, GIS's layering capaci-



ties are used to show developmental constraints for an area combined with existing land use, proposed land use, and capital improvements. Staff also supplied GIS maps to the Knoxville-Knox County Growth Policy Committee, and are working on a series of animated maps that show residential and commercial density change over time. MPC is part of a local GIS consortium that includes the city, the county, and the Knoxville Utilities Board. Together they have accumulated a huge volume of data, and are considered well ahead of many other local government GIS efforts in the nation.

The office continues to benefit from an earlier streamlining of procedures at the Development Services Counter using in-house designed software. Improvements in our network resources, databases, and e-mail have allowed staff to better collaborate with each other and better communicate with those outside the agency.



MPC Web site

Maintaining our Web site, www.knoxmpc.org, continues to be a team effort among various MPC divisions. New features are being added on an ongoing basis, and it now contains the zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations for both the city and county, a complete list of all local street names, the monthly MPC meeting agenda, commissioner profiles, and demographic trends.



MPC Library and Publications

Open to the public, the MPC Library contains thousands of reports, journals, and books on everything related to planning for a metropolitan area. It also serves as a State Data Center Affiliate in distributing census data. The library prints a catalog of MPC publications, a monthly list of newly acquired materials, and a weekly news bulletin. Some recent publications are:

1999 Industrial Space Inventory
Apartment Trip Generation Study for Knox County
Billboard Regulation Reading File
Development Activity Report
Development in Knoxville/Knox County
 1999: New Construction, by Sector and Type
Development in the 90's: A Summary of Building Permits, Rezoning, and Subdivisions in Knox County
Directory of Neighborhood Organizations
Economic Overview: Knoxville/Knox County and the Metropolitan Area
Five-Year Capital Improvement Plan for FY 2001-2005
Fort Sanders Neighborhood Conservation District Guidelines
Fort Sanders Neighborhood Plan
Fourth and Gill Historic Neighborhood Design Guidelines
Knoxville-Knox County Facts and Figures
Knoxville Parks, Greenways, and Open Space: A Resource Inventory
Knoxville Urban Area MPO Annual Report
1999 Office Market Analysis
One Year Plan for the City of Knoxville
Preservation Works: Recommendations of the Mayor's Task Force
Tennessee Technology Corridor Development Authority Annual Report



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KNOXVILLE-KNOX COUNTY

M P C

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