

Cumberland Ave. Public Meeting Set for July 24th

The City of Knoxville and the Metropolitan Planning Commission are hosting a public meeting about the Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project.

The meeting is set for 5:30 p.m., Thursday, July 24th at the University of Tennessee Visitors' Center (formerly the UT Faculty Club) at 2704 Kingston Pike.

The event has two primary aims according to Anne Wallace, the city's Cumberland Avenue Project Manager.

"One is to update the public on where we are in terms of implementing the plan," Wallace said, "and additionally we want to discuss the form based code so everyone understands what it is and how it could affect their property or business."

The Cumberland Avenue Corridor Plan was adopted by Knoxville's City Council last year after a long development process.

The corridor is defined by White Avenue to the north, Lake Avenue on the south, 17th Street to the east and the railroad tracks near the intersection of Volunteer Avenue and Cumberland mark the western boundary - though the plan will also influence the Fort Sanders neighborhood, UT and the hospitals.

The Cumberland Avenue Corridor Plan provides the guidelines for the city's effort to work with property and business owners, the University of Tennessee and the hospitals in Fort Sanders to transform Cumberland Avenue into a more attractive, thriving and pedestrian-friendly corridor featuring a strong mix of retail, residential and business establishments.

"We're trying to create places people want to go, not places people want to go through," said Bob Whetsel, the city's Director of Redevelopment.

At the same time the plan seeks to more effectively move travelers - whether in cars, buses or on foot - along Cumberland and particularly into the UT campus and downtown areas.

Rezoning the area to a form based code is a key to the effort being successful.

Currently the corridor is zoned C-7, the only such zoning in the city, and is primarily a commercial zone featuring numerous small shops, restaurants and bars.

A form based code - instead of controlling land use by parcel - would allow a mix of uses on each piece of property. For example under a form based code a single building could contain retail, business and residential elements - a more urban landscape that the city would like to encourage along the corridor.

In this case it would also encourage taller structures along Cumberland and some other parts of the corridor.

"The rezoning directly affects what property owners will be allowed to do with parcels and we'll talk about what the requirements will be for new construction and renovations," Wallace said.

Part of the plan also calls for reconfiguring Cumberland from four lanes to three, one of which would

be a dedicated turn lane, and widening the sidewalks.

Currently the city is studying the logistics of moving utilities off of Cumberland and is in the process of hiring a consultant to produce the detailed design work for the street, sidewalk and utility improvements.

There are also ongoing traffic circulation and parking studies to determine how best to manage those issues.

Construction on the project won't start until 2010. It will take at least a year to complete the various studies and design work and the Tennessee Department of Transportation has requested that no work begin until it finishes its SmartFix 40 project in 2009.

The City is partnering with UT and Covenant Health, which are providing funding, on this project as well as working closely with the members of the Cumberland Avenue Merchants Association, the Fort Sanders Neighborhood Association and other key stakeholders.