Policy Guidance

Regional Planning:

Plan East Tennessee (PlanET) was a process to imagine the future of the region and chart a path to reach a shared vision. Started in 2011, the 30-month process focused on Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon and Union Counties. The ideas, goals, and strategies that have been developed are relevant to the larger East Tennessee region. PlanET was designed to: 1) Foster ongoing citizen involvement in planning for the region’s future; 2) Develop a regional playbook to share strategies and provide guidance for local policy; and 3) Increase local capacity for dialogue and action. A changing economy and rapid rates of development have brought challenges to the region, including rising housing and transportation costs, diminished employment opportunities for many segments of the population, air and water pollution, and growing rates of health problems. The five-county region has grown by 300,000 people in the last 50 years and is forecast to grow by an additional 300,000 people and 240,000 jobs by 2040.

The Preferred Regional Growth Concept was the culmination of the PlanET Process. There were three broad concepts from the public input process.

1) Keep it focused – Participants gravitated toward concepts that focused our growth into activity centers, whether they are existing places, such as downtown Knoxville or downtown Maryville, or places yet to define a true center, such as West Knoxville. Growth concepts focused on centers garnered an average participant rating of almost four out of five stars, while the concept that portrayed future growth as more spread out received a rating of less than two stars on average.

2) Use our resources wisely – Water quality, air quality and local agriculture are top priorities for the region. These three items consistently emerged as the most important among participants when asked about what is most important to our future. Inherent to each of these is the need to use our natural resources wisely and to think carefully about the impact of the built environment.

3) Provide more choices – Whether it’s housing, lifestyle or transportation, East Tennesseans want more choices available to them in the future. This means the ability to live an urban or rural lifestyle, to raise a family in a freestanding home then transition to a townhome – within the same neighborhood – and the choice of whether to walk, cycle, take a bus or drive to meet daily needs.

The preferred growth concept for East Tennessee was built around a hierarchy of centers ranging in size, scale and function. This approach to shaping the region’s growth proved to be the most popular as it maximizes transportation and housing choice, minimizes impacts to our prized natural resources, makes efficient use of infrastructure and was where economic and social capital are strongest.

City and County Plans:

Knoxville-Knox County General Plan 2033

As the official 30-year comprehensive plan for Knoxville and Knox County, the General Plan outlines a long-range vision and policy framework for...
physical and economic development. The plan is a cooperative effort, created through a public participation process that involved community members with varied viewpoints and interests. It gives the MPC, the Knox County Commission and the Knoxville City Council a policy framework for making day-to-day decisions about the timing, location, character and extent of development. The plan identifies areas that should be conserved and areas that can be responsibly used to meet the needs of our growing population. By providing a long-range perspective, it helps the city and county governments anticipate changes in services and capital improvements that citizens will expect. The plan includes twelve sector plans, corridor and small area plans, system-wide plans, and the Growth Plan.

The Growth Plan for Knoxville, Knox County, and Farragut, Tennessee was mandated under the Tennessee Growth Policy Act (Public Chapter 1101), and requires that city and county governments prepare a 20-year Growth Plan for each county. At a minimum, a growth plan must identify three classifications of land outside of the city limits: Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB) must be drawn for all cities and towns. The land within the UGB must be reasonably compact, but adequate to accommodate all of the city’s expected growth for the next 20 years. Planned Growth Areas (PGA) must be reasonably compact, but large enough to accommodate growth expected to occur in incorporated areas over the next 20 years. Rural Areas are to include land to be preserved for farming, recreation, and other non-urban uses. The study area is entirely within the Central City Sector which is entirely within the Knoxville city limits so it is not in a growth plan area.

Comprehensive Planning Process
Sector plans are a component of the Metropolitan Planning Commission’s comprehensive plan. Sector plans are interrelated to several laws, processes and plans, which are described below. The Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), under state law, is directed to create a comprehensive plan to provide recommendations for:
- Roads, and other transportation systems;
- Parks and other public property;
- The general location and extent of public utilities, including sanitation and water;
- The general character and location of community areas and housing development;
- Uses of land for trade, industry, housing, recreation, agriculture, and forestry; and
- Appropriate zoning relating to the land use plan, outlining permitted uses and the intensity of those uses, such as height and locations of buildings on their parcels.

Sector Plans
Sector plans provide a detailed analysis of land use, community facilities, and transportation for twelve geographical divisions in Knox County. The focus is to take goals contained in the General Plan and draft a sector plan that is to guide land use and development over a 15-year period. Also included is a five-year plan with recommended capital improvements and other implementation programs.

Central City Sector Plan (2014)

The Central City Sector Plan provides a Community Profile including information pertaining to Public Facilities and Infrastructure, Transportation, Natural Resources and Environmental Constraints, Land Use
and Development Trends, and Redevelopment Areas. It then makes specific recommendations for five year and fifteen year plans pertaining to Land Use, Community Facilities, Green Infrastructure, Historic Resources, and Transportation Plans.

One Year Plan (2014)
On November 2, 1982, Knoxville voters approved by referendum a revision of the City Charter which strengthened the relationship between planning and zoning. The Charter —Article VIII, Section 801— requires that future zoning in the city conform to the community’s comprehensive development plans. Previously, plans were guides for zoning, but conformance to the plans was not legally required.

The Charter requires the annual preparation and adoption of a one year comprehensive development plan covering the entire city. Fifteen-and-five year development plans (sector plans) are prepared to provide policy guidance on long and mid-range development issues and as a guide to development of the One Year Plan. The One Year Plan is specifically designed to be the basis for land use regulations and short-term public improvements.

The One Year Plan, by law and practice, is developed with a high level of community involvement. The required updates keep the plan a current and accurate guide for community growth, preservation, and enhancement. The structured amendment process allows the entire community to participate in the consideration of changes to the plan and provides more complete information on which to base decisions.

In 2014, there were no plan amendments for the Central City Sector Plan area and therefore no amendments to the study area.

Design Guidelines

Downtown Knoxville Design Guidelines
There have been several plans regarding the development of downtown Knoxville. The most recent City of Knoxville Downtown Improvement Strategy (March 2005) is a document that takes into account the work of Crandall Arambula and the Nine Counties One Vision Task Force. It includes an action plan that calls for the development of “downtown urban design guidelines” with the purpose that the establishment of design guidelines and streetscape improvement programs will enhance developer confidence and stimulate new investment.

In addition to the action plan, the Downtown Improvement Strategy created a civic vision: “Downtown Knoxville...will be a vibrant, walkable place where people congregate to live, work, shop and play.” The goals of the Guidelines are to define expectations and allow flexibility, while fostering high-quality design.

The Guidelines were drafted to respect the existing downtown qualities, community desires and the need for reasonable provisions for both public and private improvements. In order to accomplish this, MPC hosted several public meetings.

The Guidelines are formatted into three sections: 1) General Principles relating to the Public Realm, the Private Realm and Historic Resources, 2) Specific recommendations regarding Districts - the Grid district, the Boulevard district, the Warehouse district and the Promenade District, and 3) Administration of the Guidelines.
Corridor Plans and Studies

Corridor plans primarily cover land use and transportation recommendations along existing transportation corridors. These plans are more detailed than sector plans because they have a smaller geographical area. Recommendations often deal with economic development, aesthetics, and public safety. Several Corridor studies have been conducted in the last decade to assess and make recommendations for improvements to key streets within the community.

Magnolia Avenue Corridor Study (2009) and Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue Corridor Plan (2006) promote “complete street” designs that reduce travel lanes, provide on-street parking, improve sidewalk and transit connections, provide bike lanes, and recommend pedestrian-scaled lighting and landscaping.

Cumberland Avenue Corridor Plan (2007) proposes a “road diet” for Cumberland Avenue, reducing the street from four lanes to three lanes with a median to control turning movements.

I-275 North Central Street Corridor Plan (2007) calls for several improvements, including: developing frontage roads along Woodland Avenue and Baxter Avenue for development opportunities and improving operational safety; at East Fifth Avenue and Bernard Avenue, create a connection between Seventeenth Street and Baxter Avenue interchanges; at Dale Avenue and Blackstock Avenue, realign/vacate Dale Avenue right-of-way to foster redevelopment; and, create a greenway along Second Creek.

Broadway-Central-Emory Place Small Area Plan (2007) recommends rehabilitation and redevelopment of the Central Street corridor, enhancement of neighborhood stability, creation of a “downtown north,” improvement of Broadway’s aesthetic character, and enhancement of non-motorized transportation systems and alleys.
Downtown Plans

Downtown Knoxville Plan (1987)

This was the final report for the Downtown Task Force and was intended as a guide to the challenges downtown Knoxville faced in the coming decades. The plan was a means of ensuring that the values and virtues of the “Resource Valley” were represented by Downtown. The plan made several recommendations including: improving beautification; maintaining a consistent urban form; supporting activity areas; upholding parking and circulation strategy; focusing on waterfront development; increasing residential development; broadening cultural, entertainment and tourism development; continuing to build economic development and recruiting and creating an organization to support these activities.


The Civic Vision for Downtown Knoxville outlined a series of “Guiding Principles” and “Opportunities for Consideration” that would help to coordinate decision-making regarding the development and physical improvements of the downtown, resulting in a more vibrant social heart for the East Tennessee region.

Over a few years, thousands of citizens discussed ideas and dreams for the downtown, which helped to formulate this Civic Vision. Most recently, the Nine Counties One Vision process identified the importance of Downtown Knoxville as the heart of the region, with a series of suggestions. A Downtown Task Force established as part of the Nine Counties One Vision effort explored and summarized these ideas. The Civic Vision also builds on the many recent developments in the Downtown under the leadership of both the city and county governments, while laying the groundwork for future decisions that will complement recent efforts.

The report had three goals:

• To summarize and interpret the public processes of recent years, involving ideas from thousands of citizens while respecting efforts of elected public officials.

• To establish flexible guidelines for current and future decision making regarding downtown development.

• To lay the groundwork for the public to work with a consultant to develop a more specific Urban Design Plan.

This process culminated in hiring Crandall Arambula, PC to create an Implementation Strategy.


The plan by Crandall Arambula outlined an Implementation Strategy, Catalyst Projects, Priority Projects, Organization, and a Market Study. The conclusion was that there is substantial potential to re-create a vibrant retail environment in downtown Knoxville. But that process will require documentation of the area’s economic and market advantages, establishment of a management program that will allow for coordination of multiple downtown stakeholders and partners as well as encouraging leadership among the many players involved. Finally, the grease for the wheel of momentum will be direct and indirect funding and policy support for the Downtown Master Plan. Significant, multiyear funding commitments will accelerate progress, maintain momentum for the program and increase the potential for success.