

SWOT Analysis (Draft 5/26)

This SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) Analysis is offered by MPC Staff from the perspective of the existing structure of Knox County Government (and associated State, Federal and non-profit programs). The strengths and weaknesses include those associated with existing codes and programs as well as conventional TDR programs. The opportunities and threats are outlined more from the perspective of what TDR might accomplish and the concerns that may arise in discussing such a program.

SWOT analysis is best accomplished in relation to an objective or objectives. Staff used two basic Task Force discussion points as the basis of the objectives:

1. Conservation of several natural and historic resources, including farms, ridges, stream and river corridors, and historic sites.
2. Direct growth to specific areas that can sustain higher intensity development while avoiding urban/suburban sprawl.

Strengths

- Knoxville-Knox County Growth Policy Plan designates a rural area and a Planned Growth Area. Policies include conservation of rural assets while directing moderate intensities of development to the Planned Growth Area.
- The Farm and Ranch Land Protection program, enabling federal (50%) matching grant to purchase development rights of farmers.
- “Greenbelt Law”, offering a reduction of property taxes as long as farm and forestry practices continue.
- Legacy Parks Foundation, Foothills Land Conservancy and Tennessee Land Trust have conservation programs (including potential purchasing ability and holding conservation easements)
- TDR programs can have several fiscal benefits, offering a means to compensate for down zoning and maintain overall tax generating capability (further enumerated under opportunities)
- TDR requires no tax dollars to conserve land other than those that may be needed to administer the program.

Weaknesses

- Agricultural (A) zoning, while fostering farm-related uses, also allows residential development at one dwelling unit per acre (a size tract is recognized by agricultural economists as too small for meaningful farming).
- Existing zoning (in some instances) that cannot protect ridges (such as General Residential (RB) zoning).
- Historically, there has not been political resolve and commitment to preserve agricultural and natural resources.
- Utility extensions, a factor in conserving resources and reducing sprawl, is largely controlled by utility companies.
- Several disadvantages face some farmers: productivity of soils, inability to sustain full-time farming (most farmers are part time operators), competitive advantages in other regions, and age/generational concerns (mean age of farmers is about 60; children who do not wish to farm).
- Current laws on ridge conservation have not proved to adequately protect steep slopes.

Opportunities

- TDR program offers a means to compensate land owners who want to conserve and sell their development rights.
- In allowing higher intensity development at same location, TDR can balance tax generating revenue (i.e., overall development value continues at another location).
- TDR provides compensation for down zoning.
- A TDR program could preserve areas of Knox County that the community wants conserved (example: French Broad and Beaver Creek Watershed).
- The growth policy agreement between the county, city and town of Farragut expired in December of 2008, a update of the Growth Policy Plan could include areas that could be potential sending and receiving areas.
- TDR could encourage some growth into areas that are better to equipped for growth with adequate infrastructure.
- TDR could help to conserve agricultural resources such as existing farms, prime and locally important soils.
- TDR could help to conserve environmentally sensitive areas such as open spaces, ridges and watershed areas.
- TDR could help to preserve historical resources.
- The program can be voluntary and developers/land owners can decide not to partake of the program.
- TDR can direct growth away from areas that the community wants protected.
- TDR allows for growth and economic development.

Threats

- The horse may have truly left the barn: at one dwelling unit per acre, a formula for down zoning at a rate to sustain a reasonable size farm (variously described as about 1 unit per 25 acres by some Federal and State agricultural scientists) may be difficult to achieve.
- County residents and developers would need to be educated on details associated with a TDR program.
- Potential receiving areas and sending areas may not equally distributed throughout the county, causing alarm in some quarters.
- The incorporated areas of Knoxville and Farragut are not incorporated within this analysis, but the task force feels they should be. Portions of Knoxville and Farragut could be ideal receiving areas since they already contain infrastructure (examples include roads, sewer, parks, and schools).
- A general rezoning that would entail down-zoning properties in a potential receiving area would likely be needed. Historically, Knox County has not undertaken general rezonings.
- Presently, there is not strong development pressure in the county that would be needed to successfully implement a TDR program. Historically, there does not appear to be the political resolve and commitment needed to develop a successful TDR program.
- The administration of the program can be complex and could be cumbersome and costly to administer.
- The impact of how densities are assigned to residential districts would have to be revisited through possible zoning code changes.
- Residents may not be receptive to receiving added density within their communities.