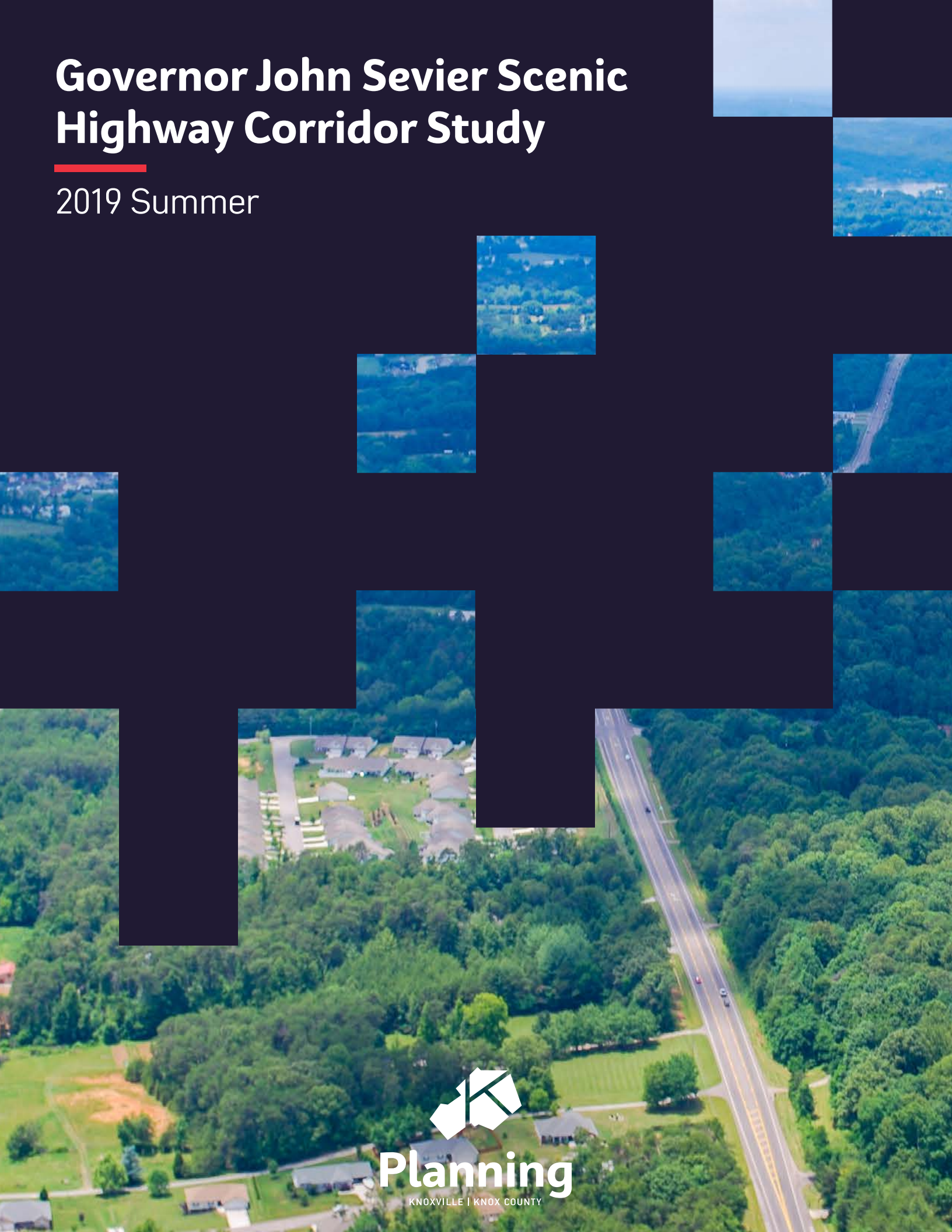


Governor John Sevier Scenic Highway Corridor Study

2019 Summer



Planning

KNOXVILLE | KNOX COUNTY

Governor John Sevier Scenic Highway Corridor Study

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Adopted:

October 28, 2019 - County Commission

October 22, 2019 - City Council

September 12, 2019 - Planning Commission

Governor John Sevier Scenic Highway Corridor Study

Stakeholder Committee

Facilitated by: Knoxville-Knox County Planning

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INTRODUCTION

Governor John Sevier Highway (State Route 168) is 18.1 miles long and connects Alcoa Highway (State Route 115) to Asheville Highway (State Route 1) in Knox County. Classified as a Major Arterial from Alcoa Highway to Strawberry Plains Pike with a right-of-way of 112 feet, and from Strawberry Plains Pike to Asheville Highway the roadway is classified a Minor Arterial with a right-of-way of 88 feet.¹



The corridor is characterized by its scenic beauty and historical significance to Knox County, with farms and historical sites abutting Governor John Sevier Highway. However, growing concerns about maintaining the rural character and traffic safety in the corridor are continually noted by members of the community living, working and traveling along the corridor on a daily basis. In the last decade, as new development is proposed in the corridor concerns regarding signage, landscaping, historic resources, tree protection and building design have been voiced by community members at public hearings. In response to these concerns the 9th District Knox County Commission, Carson Dailey, proposed a resolution for consideration by Knox County Commission to address these concerns in a comprehensive manner.

¹ Major Road Plan for the City of Knoxville and Knox County. May 2011.
https://archive.knoxmpc.org/zoning/Major_Road_Plan.pdf (accessed 2018).

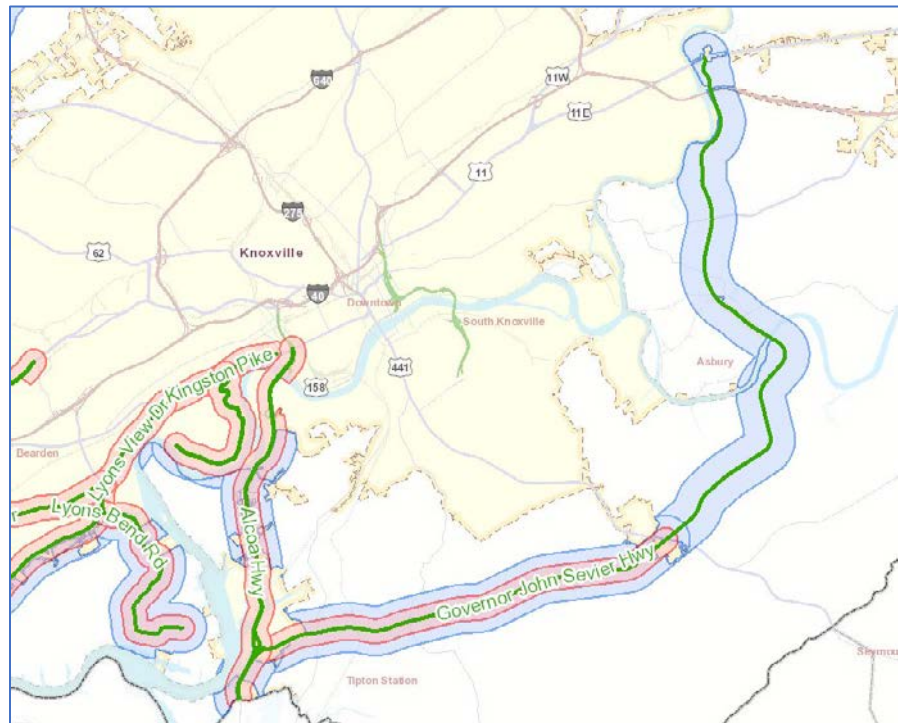
In June of 2017, Knox County Commission approved the resolution requesting the Knoxville-Knox County Planning to undertake a study to develop an approach and policies for managing the development along the John Sevier Scenic Highway Corridor and to present this approach and policies to the Knox County Commission for review and approval (R-17-6-902).

A stakeholder committee, consisting of property owners, community advocates, business professionals, and those with real estate interests in the corridor was formed to guide the development of policy recommendations brought forth by this study. Community meetings were held to vet the draft recommendations before bringing the study to the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission and the Knox County Commission for review and approval.



Background

Prior to this study, Governor John Sevier Highway was designated a Scenic Highway by the State of Tennessee in 1971, from the intersection with Alcoa Highway to the intersection with Chapman Highway. Within 2000 feet of highway, this legislation limited the size, frequency and location of advertising structures, and prohibited junkyards. The act also limited building height to 35



The State of Tennessee's Scenic Roadway designations were mapped for Knox County as part of this study. To view the map, please visit the following [link](#).

feet above the level of the highway for structures within 1000 feet of the highway. Then in 1982, the state passed the Tennessee Parkway System Act, which designated the entire length of John Sevier Highway

(SR-168) from Alcoa Highway to Asheville Highway as part of the parkway system. The building height limitation was exempted from this section, so the portion of John Sevier Highway that does not have the state limitation on building height of 35 feet within 1000 feet of John Sevier Highway is the section from Chapman Highway to Asheville Highway.

Study Findings

Through the community input process for this study, the following recommendations were identified and prioritized for the John Sevier Scenic Highway Corridor in Knox County. These prioritized recommendations identify implementable next steps for the community to address as growth continues to put pressure on the safety, scenic beauty, rural character and historical significance of the corridor.

The top three prioritized recommendations are described in further detail below. If the Knox County Commission adopts this study, the following recommendations will need to be implemented to address the community concerns regarding the corridor.

Staff from the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) and Knox County Traffic Engineering participated in the study and provided an overview of the state of transportation in the corridor to the stakeholder committee. TDOT staff reviewed traffic and safety data and improvement plans and projects for John Sevier Highway. The upcoming interchange project for US-129 (Alcoa Highway) and SR-168 (Gov. John Sevier Highway) was reviewed, and staff noted a future project that is on the horizon year for 2034 in the Knoxville Regional Transportation Planning Organization's (TPO) Long Range Plan. This project is described as a 6.5 mile widening of John Sevier Highway from a 3 to 4-lane divided roadway for the segment of roadway from Alcoa Highway to Chapman Highway.



Both the stakeholder committee and the larger community that participated in the public input process for this study noted traffic safety as their primary concern in the corridor. Staff from TDOT noted the potential of a Road Safety Audit (RSA) to study and address safety concerns in the short term. The following describes the recommendation in further detail and provides an estimated timeline for implementation.



PRIORITY # 1 – TRAFFIC SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommend that the TDOT Project Safety Office conduct a Road Safety Audit of Governor John Sevier Highway. TDOT describes a Road Safety Audit as the following:

RSAs are intended to eliminate or alleviate safety concerns that have been identified when studying crash data and from actual field investigations. RSAs are used primarily as “quick” improvements to correct safety issues such as lack of signing or striping or to correct minor geometric deficiencies. Typically, all improvements occur within the existing right-of-way and are completed within one (1) year of the final report. ²

To request that TDOT conduct an RSA individuals and local agencies can directly ask TDOT to consider it. To help support and increase attention for the need of this audit the following should be pursued.

1. Letters of support from the Knoxville Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), Knox County Commission, the John Sevier Scenic Highway Stakeholder Committee & other South Knox community organizations to TDOT requesting an RSA.
 - a. As part of this request to TDOT, discussions with TDOT’s Maintenance Division, Knox County, and area utilities (Knoxville Utilities Board and Knox Chapman Utility District) should begin to address the potential for tree and vegetation preservation agreements within the right-of-way to maintain the tree lined, vegetated characteristic of the corridor.

² TDOT. Road Safety Audits. <https://www.tn.gov/tdot/strategic-transportation-investments/project-safety-office/road-safety-audits.html> (accessed 2018).

- If adopted, Knoxville-Knox County Planning will provide assistance to facilitate the letters of support and meetings with TDOT, Knox County and the local utilities.

The next recommendation was developed in response to concerns for the look and feel of new development corridor, as it pertains to the scenic beauty and rural character of lands surrounding the highway. Protecting the base zone rights of property owners was a paramount concern to stakeholders and the larger community. Thus, an overlay zone is proposed that would not affect permitted uses, but would address how new development looks. This priority will require additional steps and could take up to a year to implement because of the necessary public involvement for adoption of an overlay zone district throughout the corridor.

PRIORITY # 2 – SCENIC CORRIDOR HIGHWAY OVERLAY STANDARD RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommend to Knox County Commission that Knoxville-Knox County Planning begin working on public engagement for a draft corridor overlay zone, which does not affect base zone use rights. Other sectors of Knox County have also expressed an interest in a



The tree line along Governor John Sevier Highway is a defining characteristic of the corridor. Conserving this vegetated buffer during new construction will help protect the rural, scenic character of the corridor. Working with TDOT and utilities to conserve trees within the right-of-way that do not pose safety hazards should be addressed as well.

corridor overlay zone that would address the look and feel of new development without impacting base zone rights. An individual with commercial, office, residential or other zoned land could still develop their property under that zone, the overlay zone would provide additional standards that relate to how new development looks in the corridor. Overlay standards generally address design related items, such as landscaping, tree preservation, building orientation, parking location, signage style and size. The existing

zone districts in the Knox County Zoning Ordinance do not cohesively address design concerns as they relate to corridors or other geographic areas.

Landscape screening standards for commercial and industrial uses would protect the rural, scenic character of the corridor by camouflaging the stark nature of uses such outdoor storage of materials and equipment and storage buildings.



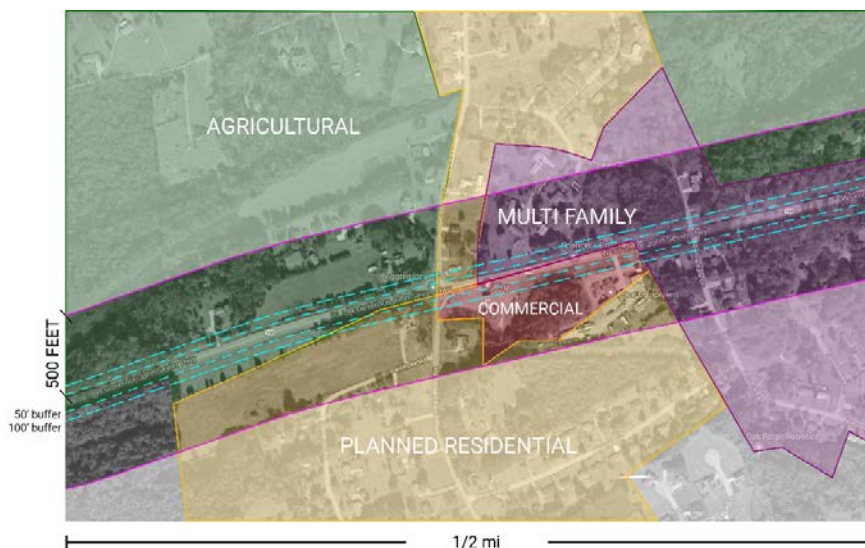
The following is an example of what a Governor John Sevier Highway Corridor Overlay could address, if adopted into the Knox County Zoning Ordinance.

The overlay zone could implement the following standards for new development in the corridor:

Addressing all non-agricultural new construction and land disturbing activities within 500' of the centerline of right-of-way of Governor John Sevier Highway.

An overlay zone could provide consistent standards in the corridor for:

1. A tree protection and replacement buffer for 50' from right-of-way of John Sevier Highway.



An illustration of a possible overlay area where standards could be applied for tree protection, landscaping, location of parking and screening for outdoor storage could be applied to protect the rural, scenic character of the John Sevier Highway Corridor.

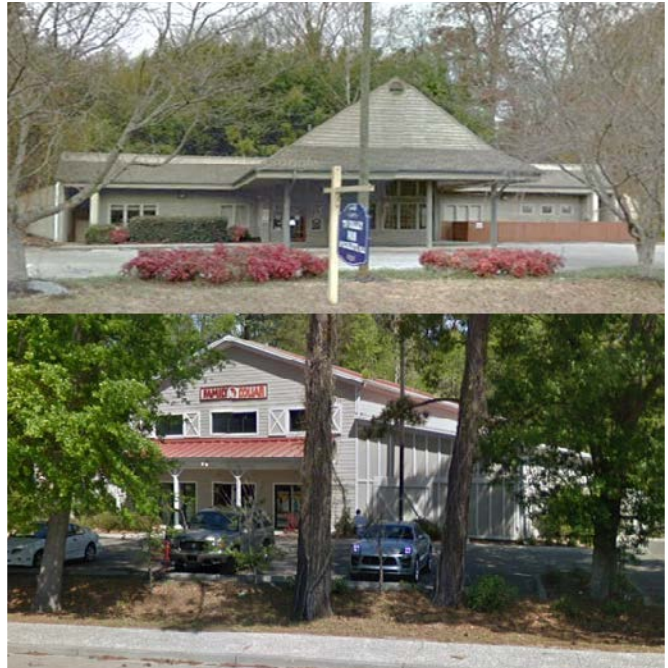
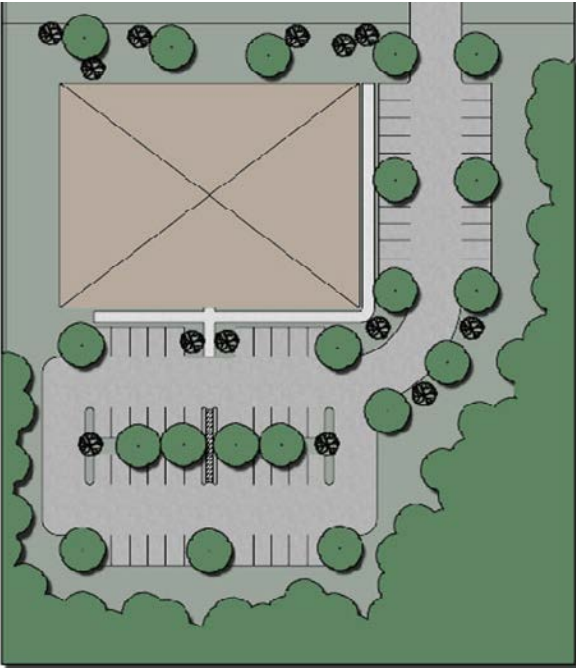
2. Landscape screening standards for outdoor storage and parking (in commercial, office, industrial zones and multi-family residential projects) and/or standards for the location of outdoor storage and display and parking to be located behind primary structures.

Commercial and office uses that utilize outdoor storage and display of items detract from the scenic nature of the corridor. Vegetation screening would soften the impact these types of uses in the corridor. And/or providing a standard for outdoor storage and display to be located to the rear of the primary structure would also protect the corridor



3. Non-residential design standards addressing;
 - a. Orientation of building (e.g. if lot has frontage on Gov. John Sevier Hwy, primary structures shall front on the highway)
 - b. Location of parking (e.g. to rear or side of primary structures)
 - c. Façade materials (e.g. varied fenestration required)

Non-residential design standards in an overlay district can help protect the rural, scenic character of the corridor. Location of parking, landscaping and tree protection can help soften the stark nature of some office, commercial and industrial uses.



4. Signage to reflect rural-scenic character of corridor addressing:
 - a. Size
 - b. Height (e.g. no pole signs)
 - c. Illumination (e.g. no internal illumination)
 - d. Materials (e.g. no glossy or reflective plastic molded signs)



A theme of smaller size signs, non-glossy, and non- interior illuminated signage in corridor will help maintain in the long term the rural character of the highway.





Large, illuminated and glossy or reflective signage detracts from the rural characteristic of the corridor.

Implementation of the corridor overlay zone could occur through the Use-on-Review process through Knoxville-Knox County Planning or via Knox County Codes Administration and Enforcement, this would be determined during the drafting and adoption process of an overlay.

- If the study is adopted, Knox County Planning will provide support for the public engagement, drafting and the adoption process of the Governor John Sevier Highway Corridor Overlay.

STEPS NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF CORRIDOR OVERLAY ZONE DISTRICT

1. Draft proposed recommendations with Stakeholder Committee
 - a. Timeline: +/- 2 months (CONT'D on next page)
2. Hold community meetings to review draft
 - a. Timeline: +/- 2 months
3. Educate Appointed and Elected Officials
 - a. Workshops with Knoxville-Knox County Planning and County Commission to discuss proposal
4. Begin Legislative Process: Propose formal resolution to the Knoxville-Knox County Planning Commission to ask for a recommendation on the John Sevier Scenic Highway Corridor Overlay Zone.
 - a. Timeline: +/- 2 months
5. If recommended by Knoxville-Knox County Planning, prepare resolution for adoption by Knox County Commission into the Knox County Zoning Ordinance, with a general rezoning for the overlay zone along the highway extending 500 feet out from the centerline on both sides of the highway the entire length from Alcoa Highway to Asheville Highway (only for the areas outside of the city limits of Knoxville within Knox County).
 - a. Timeline: +/- 2 months

TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION/ADOPTION OF CORRIDOR OVERLAY: 8-9 MONTHS

The third priority relates directly to community involvement in maintaining the scenic beauty and rural character of the highway. It was noted during the stakeholder committee meetings that enforcement of existing codes and regulations in Knox County is largely complaint driven. Other parts of Knox County, such as the Powell Community, have created active community groups of business and property owners, local government staff, elected officials, school representatives, and others interested in working on community building projects in the downtown Powell area. This group has worked to implement several beautification projects in the downtown and park and blueway projects along Beaver Creek. While many

community groups exist in South Knox County, there isn't a specific group or project currently focused on Governor John Sevier Highway.

PRIORITY #3 – SCENIC HIGHWAY BUSINESS & PROPERTY OWNERS BEAUTIFICATION PROJECT RECOMMENDATION

A community driven effort involving property owners, business owners, community groups, schools and churches along the corridor to create a project focused on beautification and protection of the scenic qualities of the corridor.

1. Report code violations & enforcement concerns along corridor to Knox County Codes and TDOT promptly.
 2. Implement volunteer-driven and community sponsored beautification projects, such as tree planting and landscaping along the corridor.
- The timeline for implementation of this recommendation is dependent on community interest. It could become a project of an existing organization in the community, such as the South Knoxville Alliance and/or the South Doyle Neighborhood Association.



Knox County would likely have to act as a liaison between TDOT and local community groups to ensure that safety and maintenance concerns are addressed as part of the beautification/corridor enhancement projects.

Public Engagement Summary

During the course of the John Sevier Scenic Highway Corridor Study the stakeholder committee met 7 times and 3 community meetings were held to collect community knowledge regarding issues in the corridor and develop draft recommendations. The draft recommendations were reviewed at the community meetings and input was collected from over 150 attendees during the process. The following individuals were participants in the stakeholder committee and volunteered their time to review information regarding the corridor, develop the draft recommendations and provide feedback regarding the input received during the community meetings.

Terry Barnwell

Mike Brown

Jim Buckenmyer

Carson Dailey

Art Dyer

Bob Dykes

Joyce Feld

John Gammon

Tim Graham

Buddy Gregory

Cherry Johnson

Mike Kidd

DJ Krahwinkel

Judy LaRose

Dr. Ted Lewis

Jan Loveday-Dickens

Mark Mugford

Jim Sturdavan

Bob Thompson