

Priorities (cont.)

Protect the Public Realm

Enhance the Gatlinburg experience by promoting quality design, construction, maintenance and merchandising downtown.

1. Clear up the sign ordinance confusion. Research the ordinance, enforce what is on the books, and then consider a 5-year moratorium to allow for “compliance by attrition,” as older signs cycle out.
2. Build upon the Principles of Responsible Design Matrix.
 - a. Re-commission, re-focus and re-energize the Environmental Design Review Board, equipping the members with the information and insight they need to assess the current impact of the Design Matrix and to offer assistance to property owners wishing to comply but lacking the understanding of how to do it.
 - b. The City and at least one other partner should publicly announce that any future building or site improvements will fully comply with the Design Matrix guideline, and they should challenge others to join them in the commitment.
 - c. Carefully move the Principles of Responsible Design Matrix from a set of guidelines to codified compliance.

Put Someone in Charge

Advance these priorities by collaboratively creating a position or positions armed with responsibility, authority and resources to make things happen.

- Convening key stakeholders around the action steps;
- Research associated with initiatives and best practices;
- Technical assistance for associated entities assigned tasks growing out of the plan;
- Communication among all parties to gauge progress.

Gatlinburg is in an enviable place. With a sense of momentum coming from recent infrastructure improvements, a real partnership between business and government, and a shared vision for the future, there is no reason why Gatlinburg should not be able to “reach higher ground.”



KENNEDY, COULTER, RUSHING & WATSON



PRIORITY: GATLINBURG

AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE GATLINBURG VISION

We are a vibrant community that honors our mountain heritage and embraces our responsibility as the gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park

Executive Summary

Following up on the Gatlinburg Vision, which was created in 2004, the City of Gatlinburg, in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce and the Gatlinburg Gateway Foundation, hired the firm of Kennedy, Coulter, Rushing & Watson to facilitate a community discussion aimed at assigning new priorities to the previous objectives.

All phases of the work built on the founding vision statement that grew out of the 2004 process: “We are a vibrant community that honors our mountain heritage and embraces our responsibility as the gateway to Great Smoky Mountains National Park.”

The first step was to assess the progress thus far. During a day-long series of open meetings (January 29, 2008), participants discussed what had been achieved in each of six priority areas: Aesthetics, Business Development, Environment, Heritage, Quality of Life, and Traffic and Transportation. During the sessions, participants were also asked to identify what remained to be done and to assign a designation of importance and/or urgency to the ideas.

From that work, major themes were identified and categorized as either opportunities or challenges, identifying two of the former and four of the latter.

There were two key opportunities:

- the Greening of Gatlinburg, and
- the commitment to identify, celebrate and promote that which is authentic to Gatlinburg.

The opportunities were balanced by the following challenges:

- the need to improve the quality of workforce housing,
- the need to educate the community about key issues, including the green movement and overall importance of implementing that essential part of the vision,
- the question of how far to take regulation vs. voluntary compliance with proposed design and land development guidelines, and
- the need to prioritize the myriad component parts of the community’s vision.

These conclusions were presented back to the community at the end of the day-long session, first to the community leadership, then to the public. The consensus reaction was that the findings accurately reflected the outcomes from the working sessions.

After further analysis, KCRW crafted the opportunity and challenge list into a list of five present-day priorities for the community:

- The Greening of Gatlinburg,
- Improving Workforce Housing,
- Preserving Mountain Views,
- Authentically Representing Gatlinburg’s Place, History and Culture, and
- Developing More Attractive Buildings and Public Realm.

These five priorities were fully vetted during another daylong series of meetings, attended by community leaders who cared about the particular issue and had some capacity to positively influence the issue. During these “implementation sessions,” specific steps were identified to move forward in each of the five priority areas.

One consideration in all of this is the recent launch of a new advertising campaign. Under the theme, “Reach Higher Ground,” the campaign marks a bold new step for Gatlinburg with its emphasis on the exquisite natural setting the city enjoys. The timing of the campaign is fortuitous, since much of the shared community vision centered on the idea of heritage and authenticity – ideas that are beautifully reinforced in the campaign. It is a strong call to action to prospective visitors.

But it is also a strong call to action for the people of Gatlinburg. In truth, the effective delivery of the campaign promise will take dedication and focus from everyone who comes in contact with a Gatlinburg visitor. Similarly, the theme calls to the people who will work together to make this plan come true.

Communities are best served by identifying achievable components of a vision or strategic plan. The recommendations in this report are made in that spirit. By addressing the opportunities identified here, Gatlinburg will create a strong sense of momentum, and the citizens and business owners will be convinced that the overall vision is attainable if pursued in manageable steps.

Priorities

Continue to “Green” Gatlinburg

Promote a business-based movement toward environmental sustainability, with a goal of becoming the “Greenest Destination East of the Mississippi.”

1. Create a Cabinet of Environmental Concern comprising partnership representatives and others with a presence in City Hall or someplace similar to create exposure and credibility.
2. Keep business in the lead via the Chamber of Commerce “Go Green” program. Identify a corporate model to become a showcase for environmental business. Attain the goal of enlisting 25% of the membership in its “Go Green” program this year and growing that percentage to 75% by the end of next year. Encourage broad implementation of existing green business initiatives (Green Custodial, Green Power Switch).
3. Begin a *real* recycling program, including cardboard pickup, visible recycling bins throughout the city, bio-degradable shopping and garbage bags, and recycling for phone books and electronics.
4. Continue to advocate for structured parking and the trolley – get people out of their cars and onto public transit.

Improve Workforce Housing

Pursue the creation of affordable, livable work force housing through collaboration, communication and code enforcement. Given that workforce housing cuts across many social and cultural issues, developing ongoing assessment, evaluation and community response is critical.

1. Explore the creation of a local housing authority or work in partnership with Sevier County to facilitate the connection to federal housing money to assist in addressing the housing challenge.
2. Tap into networks such as the National League of Cities to stay current on best practices and possible resources for addressing the challenge.
3. Through the Chamber, convene an ongoing community conversation to make sure the various constituencies remain committed to the task.

Preserve Gatlinburg’s Mountain Views

Make the Hillsides and Ridges Study work by honestly confronting difficult issues and proceeding with “cautious courage,” recognizing that this is the crossroads where the good of the community must be reconciled with individual property rights.

1. Pursue the dialogue in a transparent way that engenders trust rather than suspicion.
2. Continue to include the City Commissioners, who must ultimately decide how rigorously to enforce the study’s (and the Task Force’s) recommendations.
3. Proceed with “cautious courage.” Protecting the hilltops for the good of the community may well trigger disputes and dissatisfaction from the some property owners, but if it is indeed for “the good of the community,” then those battles are worth waging. However, caution, care and forethought will minimize the conflicts, and the Task Force should proceed accordingly.

Authentically Represent Place, History and Culture

Rise above the competition by being true to Gatlinburg’s heritage and history, including the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the area’s craft heritage, and its history as an early Appalachian Mountain community.

1. Capitalize on the proximity to the Park by honoring and celebrating the Park and its history with particular focus on the 75th anniversary.
2. Engage a qualified and credible group to assess the downtown business mix, and use the results to move toward a collective experience that is pleasantly memorable for the visitor.
3. Use the “Reach Higher Ground” campaign to solidify the community culture of authenticity and quality.
4. Continue to work with merchants and property owners to define “authentic,” and encourage the sale of retail goods (especially craft) that reflect that authenticity and differentiate Gatlinburg.
5. Embrace the Arrowmont School strategic plan and its cornerstone strategy of forging better connections with the community.