



PRIORITY: GATLINBURG FINAL REPORT



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PRIORITY: GATLINBURG
AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE GATLINBURG VISION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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

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,

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- 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 imminent 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

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“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.”

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.

It is our experience that communities are best served by identifying achievable components of a vision or strategic plan. The recommendations in this report are made in that spirit. We believe that 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.

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PROCESS RECAP

- February 2004 The Gatlinburg Vision Conference establishes a set of goals, divided by topic into Aesthetics, Business Development, Heritage, Quality of Life, Traffic and Transportation.
- 2004-2007 Significant progress is made in all areas, including the City's undergrounding of utility lines along the Parkway. Also, the Chamber of Commerce takes the lead on sustainable business practices, and the Gatlinburg Partnership Council begins to discuss the creation of a heritage craft center.
- October 2007 Kennedy, Coulter, Rushing & Watson is hired to update the vision and set new near-term priorities with strategies for implementation.
- January 2008 KCRW conducts a day-long series of workshops to identify progress in the six areas and to gauge citizen input on re-prioritization. Results of the workshops are presented in a public meeting on January 29.
- March 2008 KCRW conducts a daylong series of meetings to identify tactical approaches to the identified priorities.
- August 2008 The results of the planning work and recommendations for implementation are presented in a public meeting.
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PRIORITIZATION WORKSHOPS SUMMARY

The citizens who participated in these sessions were passionate about the future of Gatlinburg. Many of them participated in the original vision work and they were eager to see the original vision elements implemented. But they also had new ideas.

The six activity areas provide a significant amount of overlap, so certain themes and specific issues associated with them cropped up in different sessions. For example, the “Greening of Gatlinburg” ran through Aesthetics and Environment to Business Development and Traffic & Transportation. Workforce housing spanned Quality of Life, Business Development and Aesthetics. Arts & crafts were included in Heritage and Business Development and Quality of Life.

Most of the work was characterized as being “begun and ongoing,” and virtually all of it was characterized as “important.” The group was judicious in their application of “urgency” to the work, saving that designation for those aspects of community development that had negative points of no return. For example, the Aesthetics bullet that calls for “constructing buildings that minimize obstruction of mountain views” was deemed urgent, because once the development is done and the views are gone, there will be no re-claiming them.

Principles of Responsible Building Design Matrix

Much of the discussion revolved around issues of code and enforcement and when to move from “guidelines” to “ordinances.” The *Principles of Responsible Building Design Matrix* is the poster child for this debate. The Matrix is widely recognized and applauded, but the participants in these sessions wanted to see more aggressive application and enforcement of the principles. At the heart of this

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discussion is the civic dilemma – not peculiar to Gatlinburg – of when the good of the community trumps the rights of the individual property owner.

“Gatlinburg Goes Green”

Those in attendance seemed to understand that Gatlinburg is built on a tourist economy, and the health of the economy hinges on the City’s ability to attract visitors and to bring them back. That calls for a visitor experience that is safe, clean, fun and hassle-free. This group also understands and accepts that most of Gatlinburg’s visitors are here to enjoy the regional traditions, the walk-ability of the city, and the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. They are expecting an outdoor experience that implies environmental aesthetics and a pleasing complement of the natural and built environments. The citizens who attended the sessions seemed intent on meeting that expectation through a more vigorous approach to environmental stewardship.

“Gatlinburg Goes Green” has immense potential. First of all, as a Chamber-based initiative, business involvement is implicit, and the Chamber’s Environmental/Green Work Group was given a lot of credit for raising the awareness of environmental matters. Second, the environmental aspects of the vision are critical to the long-term aesthetic appeal of Gatlinburg and, therefore, its viability as a tourist destination. Third, there appears to be solid support for the initiative, at least among the people who attended these sessions.

Some citizens embrace the ambitious goal of making Gatlinburg “the Greenest Destination East of the Mississippi.” If the community can truly get behind that vision, it can become a powerful marketing

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message, especially for a town already positioned as “the Gateway to the Smokies.”

Great progress has already been made, most notably in the burying of several blocks of utility wires. The City’s utility undergrounding program has broad-based and enthusiastic support, and people want to see more of it accomplished as funding allows.

Hillsides and Ridges

There is also considerable excitement about the recently published Hillsides and Ridges Study, which addresses slope and ridge top development and its impact on the community. The question is: how far will the Task Force and the City take the report recommendations and how aggressive will they be in applying its principles to future private development?

Authenticity of Experience

These discussions underlined another important opportunity when they urged Gatlinburg to celebrate what is authentic about its heritage and history. Clearly, the city’s location and its rich arts and crafts heritage point to a special niche, but filling it requires a rigorous adherence to what’s real about Gatlinburg.

A tourism economy is dependent on meeting visitor expectations. As Gatlinburg contemplates revamping its marketing message to broaden its demographic reach, it will be important to ratchet up the experience itself – from the quality of the storefronts to the quality of the merchandise available inside. To put it another way, the reality of the experience will have to match the perception and expectation created by the marketing campaign.

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Workforce Housing

Workforce housing is a pressing issue. The current situation has hospitality workers living in former motels. The conditions are poverty-level and the communities are becoming breeding grounds for domestic abuse and other crimes. This can quickly become a vicious downward cycle if a strategy is not soon developed for affordable, livable housing for the Gatlinburg workforce. The first step to eliminating the problem could be the enforcement of existing safety and sanitation laws. The group said this work was urgent as well.

Storefront Neglect

According to some attendees, commercial lease rates are expensive, resulting in lots of empty storefronts, and they feel some of the landlords lack civic engagement and stewardship needed to feel any concern about the impact of those empty spaces. Regrettably, some of the people in question were absent from the planning sessions, and they are historically slow to engage in these types of community efforts or accept the recommendations.

Implementation

Paying for civic visions is always a challenge. Infrastructure improvements are expensive, and businesses want incentives to offset the cost of complying with guidelines. Throughout these sessions, participants pointed to “public/private partnerships” as the best way to fund the vision, and the Gateway Foundation is most often identified as the private side catalyst.

Communication is key. As Gatlinburg’s civic and political leadership decide to act on various aspects of the community’s vision, it will be

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“As Gatlinburg’s civic and political leadership decide to act on various aspects of the community’s vision, it will be incumbent on them to inform citizens and business owners why the action is being taken and the public benefit that will accrue as a result.”

incumbent on them to inform citizens and business owners why the action is being taken and the public benefit that will accrue as a result.

A vision needs a champion; an action plan needs an overseer. Someone or some organization needs to wake up every morning focused on getting the job done. The Gateway Foundation has proven that it can muster public and private collaboration. Careful consideration should be given to making the Foundation the private non-profit organization officially charged with the implementation of the Gatlinburg Vision, including the application of sound design principles to all future development.

The Chamber has an important role to play by making the business case for the vision and answering the ultimate question: “What’s in it for my business?”

Along with the City, the Foundation and the Chamber constitute a formidable alliance for positive change in Gatlinburg. Arguably, the three of them should come to any issue armed with enough constituent support to get things done and done right.

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SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES

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- **Established collaboration.** Many cities struggle to establish substantive levels of cooperation among public and private sectors. The City, the Chamber of Commerce, the Gatlinburg Gateway Foundation, the National Park Service and others have proved they can work together to achieve joint objectives through the Gatlinburg Partnership Council and cooperative efforts like *Priority: Gatlinburg* and the formative work on a heritage craft center. The value of this collaborative spirit cannot be overstated.
 - **“Reach Higher Ground” campaign.** The new marketing campaign is much more than a new photo and tagline. Gatlinburg has radically re-positioned themselves with a bold new look. People will take notice, and Gatlinburg will have an opportunity to deliver a new experience to a new universe of visitors and a fresh experience to those who have visited in the past.
 - **Great Smoky Mountains National Park’s 75th Anniversary.** Seventy-fifth anniversaries have inherent significance, made more so when they involve the country’s most popular national park. There is a tremendous opportunity to focus attention on the Park and Gatlinburg in 2009.
 - **The price of gas.** Grudgingly, Americans are coming to the conclusion that it’s expensive to be behind the wheel of a car. While this may discourage some travel, it also means people may be more pre-disposed to public transit as a way to move around a city, especially one with scale like Gatlinburg’s. Therefore, the driving public is likely to be more receptive to wayfinding directives aimed at getting them into public parking structures and onto public transit.
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SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES

“The hills of Western Carolina and other East Tennessee attractions vie for the Gatlinburg visitor’s discretionary dollars.”

- **Development guidelines vs. property rights.** Gatlinburg’s vision of managing slope and ridgetop development points to a classic struggle between the landowner who has an opportunity to sell or develop at a profit, and the public who wants natural view sheds preserved. It’s a battle that can become pitched and it calls for committed, convincing leadership that is willing to absorb the response.
 - **Image and perception.** Candidly, many people perceive Gatlinburg to be overdeveloped and congested. The new marketing campaign – “Reach Higher Ground” – will help shift perception, but all of Gatlinburg’s tourism and business interests will have to work hard to make the reality meet expectations.
 - **Absentee ownership.** Some owners of downtown businesses are very removed from the day-to-day life of the community and seem to care little if their storefronts stand empty.
 - **Traffic Congestion.** In Gatlinburg’s case, getting there is not half the fun. Depending on the season, the trek from I-40 through Sevierville and Pigeon Forge can be long and exhausting.
 - **Regional tourism competition.** Despite congestion problems, Sevierville is a competitive tourism environment. Likewise, the hills of Western Carolina and other East Tennessee attractions vie for the Gatlinburg visitor’s discretionary dollars.
 - **Disengaged stakeholders.** Throughout the process, participants spoke of key developers and businesspeople who were not at the meetings. Despite best efforts, neither the prioritization meetings nor the implementation workshops were able to lure these players to the table. Yet, there is general consensus that true progress cannot be achieved without their active engagement.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Greening of Gatlinburg

Gatlinburg is wise to promote a business-based movement toward environmental sustainability, but its stated objective of becoming the “Greenest Destination East of the Mississippi,” explicitly poses a challenge to the entire Gatlinburg community to “walk the environmental walk.”

Almost four decades after the first Earth Day, the country is facing up to the realities of environmental neglect, with solid waste treatment and recycling and fossil fuel consumption being foremost among the issues. Throughout the U.S., cities and states are launching initiatives to “Go Green.” (Tennessee is no exception. In late April, the State Department of Tourist Development’s Sustainable Tourism Conference in Knoxville drew more than 500 people to learn about the state’s green initiatives.) Hence, Gatlinburg’s efforts will not be without comparison, so their efforts must combine meaningful actions (like the resuscitation of the Sevier County solid waste treatment facility, and the city-wide conversion to LED lighting) with high visibility actions (like recycling at restaurants and hotels). In other words, the “Greening of Gatlinburg” needs to deliver substance and style.

1. Create a Cabinet of Environmental Concern – partnership reps and others – put it in City Hall or someplace similar to create exposure and credibility. It is reasonable to expect that “The Greenest Destination East of the Mississippi” would have a collaborative panel in a place overseeing the program.

The formalization of a collaborative not only sends a message of commitment, it allows Gatlinburg to hold its own feet to the fire. It

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also provides an opportunity for cooperative funding for programs to keep the Greening initiative going.

2. Have Business and the Chamber Lead the Way – There should be aggressive support for the Gatlinburg Chamber’s “Go Green” program, which includes seeking out a corporate model to become a showcase for environmental business. The Chamber has a stated 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.

Historically, businesses (and the Chambers that represent them) have been reluctant to embrace environmental initiatives that they perceive to be onerous and unfair to their interests. If the Gatlinburg Chamber and its member businesses take the lead in the initiative, it will provide instant momentum and credibility. Moreover, the Chamber’s “Go Green” program is incremental, allowing businesses to grow into full compliance.

Note: Other business initiatives include Green Custodial – performing building cleaning and maintenance with environmentally friendly products and practices; and Green Power Switch – converting to TVA power from renewable energy resources.

3. Begin a *Real* Recycling program – This includes cardboard pickup, visible recycling bins throughout the city, bio-degradable shopping and garbage bags, and recycling for phone books and electronics. Above all, it requires a commitment to education and persistence.

As a tourist destination, Gatlinburg hosts guests with varying understanding about and experience in recycling. Those who are

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recycle-savvy will reasonably expect a city calling itself “green” to have a comprehensive recycling program. Those who are not as well-versed will have to be educated about the program and why it exists and how they can participate.

4. Other Activities:

- a. Continue to advocate for the structured parking and the trolley – get people out of their cars and onto public transit; develop a campaign (with incentives?) to make trolley-riding cool.

Improving Workforce Housing

Despite the urgency of this issue, successfully providing livable, affordable workforce housing will take persistence, consistency and focus. But it will also take coordination and careful communication. For example, some participants were surprised to learn that two existing workforce initiatives had received funding: the Sevier County Workforce Group, which has been partially funded by the State; and the Gatlinburg United Methodist Church’s program to develop a model for workforce housing in tourism markets. Despite some joint representation on the two, there still seemed to be room for clarification. Obviously, considerable synergy can be achieved as the housing issue is addressed on two fronts.

Regrettably, the deteriorating conditions in Gatlinburg’s workforce housing are largely the responsibility of one property owner, who seems to care little about the maintenance and upkeep of his properties.

Two years ago, Gatlinburg adopted the International Property Maintenance Code, and they now have two fire inspectors and two building inspectors who are pursuing enforcement more vigorously

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“Workforce housing is an issue of growing national concern...the community response is critical.”

despite cultural differences that make the application of code to international families delicate at best.

The steady enforcement of existing codes and a determined focus on the major violator will produce results. Gatlinburg should make sure the “workforce housing” remains at the forefront of the public discourse until those positive changes happen.

Communities are rarely able to create new affordable housing without some state or federal assistance. Gatlinburg may want to 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 problem.

Workforce housing is an issue of growing national concern, and the City should tap into networks such as the National League of Cities to stay current on best practices and possible resources for addressing the challenge.

1. Workforce housing cuts across many social and cultural issues, so ongoing assessment and evaluation of the issue and the community response is critical. The Chamber of Commerce may want to assume the role of convener to make sure the various constituencies remain committed to the task.

Preserving Mountain Views

In 2007 Gatlinburg joined with Sevier County and its other municipalities to commission the Hillsides and Ridges Study, in which Saratoga Associates “examined with the public the issues surrounding development on the region’s hillsides and ridgelines.” Acting decisively in the wake of the study’s release, the City of Gatlinburg appointed a Task Force to make recommendations specific

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to Gatlinburg. Developing consensus has been hard for a variety of reasons, including:

- The report set county-wide benchmarks, but applying them county-wide is difficult.
- There are contradictory issues; for example, the study prescribes that a building must be set back fifty feet from a ridgetop, but a fifty-foot setback in Gatlinburg very often constitutes a non-buildable site.

Furthermore, the high community expectation that came with the study is now standing face to face with sometimes contradictory visions for development. Still, the Task Force is determined to come to the City Commission with recommendations that will help deliver the spirit of the study, which is very much in line with the Gatlinburg Vision objective of preserving the quality of the area’s mountain views. This is the most sensitive of the six vision areas because it is, in the words of one Task Force member, “where the good of the community must be reconciled with property rights.” It is recommended that the Task Force and the community:

- 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.

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Authentically Representing Gatlinburg’s Place, History and Culture

All communities – whether their economies rely on an industrial base, a knowledge base or a tourism base – strive to differentiate themselves from their competition. Many try to achieve this by trying to become something they are not. They build more amusement parks or more malls or try to attract a big box retail anchor. Consequently, they wind up being more like their competition.

Precious few are the communities that are trying to rise above the competition by being true to themselves and their heritage and history. For a time, it seemed as though Gatlinburg was trying to become the best by building the most, but that notion is changing, and conveying a sense of the authentic will be extremely important to all that Gatlinburg wants to achieve. The city’s position as the Gateway to the Smokies is enviably unique, but it poses the challenge of satisfying the expectations of the tourist traffic without tipping over into becoming a stereotypical tourist trap, replete with souvenir shops and chain restaurants that can be found in any of a number of other tourist sites throughout the country. Contributing factors to Gatlinburg’s authenticity include the Park, the area’s arts and craft heritage (as well as Arrowmont, which is so integral to preserving and perpetuating the craft), and its history as an early Appalachian Mountain community. Any steps that Gatlinburg can take to reinforce these historic and cultural aspects are important.

1. Capitalize on the Proximity to the Park – Clearly, Gatlinburg takes very seriously its role as Gateway to the most visited national park (nearly ten million people now visit Great Smoky Mountains National Park annually). Referring to Gatlinburg’s “responsibility as the gateway” to the Park, the vision statement also establishes a firm foundation on which to build a culture of “authenticity” by

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“[Authenticity] can mean different things to different people, but it should, at a minimum, be reflected by retail goods that are intrinsic to the Gatlinburg area.”

honoring and celebrating the Park and its own history. This will be especially meaningful when the Park celebrates its 75th anniversary next year. Gatlinburg business and tourism leaders should establish an active dialogue with the Park Service to ensure a wholly collaborative and mutually rewarding approach to this very special event. This is an auspicious moment that Gatlinburg and the Park Service can use to help establish the brand for “Reach Higher Ground.”

Once the 75th anniversary is past, the next real opportunity to celebrate an anniversary won’t come until the hundredth.

2. Contract with International Downtown Association or National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street program to evaluate downtown business mix. Either one of these groups would be willing to come in and conduct a retail study and make recommendations regarding mix and appearance. As a tourist destination, Gatlinburg is a sum of its parts. Consequently, it is important that the retail, restaurants and other street-level activity provide a collective experience that is pleasantly memorable for the visitor. As there is some disagreement among the Gatlinburg stakeholders as to whether their retail mix is right, calling upon the expertise of either one of the aforementioned downtown groups will help settle the issue while it charts a course of action to bring the commercial activity into line with the “Higher Ground” positioning.
3. Continue to work with merchants and property owners to define “authentic.” The word can mean different things to different people, but it should, at a minimum, be reflected by retail goods that are intrinsic to the Gatlinburg area. Because craft is such an important part of heritage, craft retail will be especially effective at

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delivering an air of authenticity to Gatlinburg’s visitors. Once again, there is a wonderful opportunity to deliver this message on the back of a new campaign that is very much about the authentic history, culture and natural surroundings that differentiate Gatlinburg.

This matter of authenticity is extremely important. Not only was it one of the community’s over-arching goals, but it holds the key to legitimizing the new Gatlinburg marketing campaign. Gatlinburg has taken the bold step of conveying its essence in its new materials rather than the easy route of showing bright lights, cotton candy and colorful t-shirts. The end result can and should be a new image for Gatlinburg based on what Gatlinburg has been, is, and wants to be.

4. Embrace the Arrowmont strategic plan – the Arrowmont School has a considerable following across the country and, in a few cases, beyond. Recently, the school completed a strategic plan, a cornerstone of which is to create more opportunities for tie-ins with Gatlinburg. Given the centrality of craft to the Gatlinburg brand, the City should do all it can to create synergy between this unique learning institution and the craft enterprises that surround it.

Developing More Attractive Buildings and Public Realm

The quality of building architecture, design and construction has a tremendous impact on both the public realm and the experience it creates for the Gatlinburg visitor. If storefronts are ill designed, or if they are neglected and run-down, the City pays a price in terms of disappointed visitors and the dilution of the overall sensory experience made so potentially powerful by Gatlinburg’s natural surroundings. Furthermore, shabby merchandising and on-site

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marketing can compromise an otherwise-appealing storefront and deliver the same net negative effect. Of course, the public realm is of utmost importance, and the design and feel of the street and sidewalk – improved so dramatically by the City’s undergrounding of the downtown utilities – has a direct effect on the overall quality of the Gatlinburg experience. To its credit, Gatlinburg realizes the power of good design, construction and maintenance. They have backed it up with the publication of the *Principles of Responsible Design Matrix*, which carefully and thoughtfully lays out guidelines for building design in order to maintain the quality of the public realm. There is real forward progress in this area, and the City should continue to focus on this area.

1. Build upon the *Design Matrix* – currently the *Design Matrix* is only a set of guidelines. It does not have the force of code or ordinance to enforce its precepts. With the full understanding that design ordinances represent one of the arenas in which personal property rights and community good come to a head, Gatlinburg should take a serious look at codifying the *Design Matrix*, mandating compliance.
2. As a first step, the City should 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. This advice could come in the form of computerized representations of what storefronts ought to look like along with information about grants and incentives that might help them comply.

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“Gatlinburg is justifiably proud of the collaborative spirit behind this vision work, and the collaboration needs to continue if this ambitious agenda is to be fully implemented.”

3. 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* guidelines. Then they should challenge others to join them in the commitment. This approach could increase the visibility and awareness of the *Design Matrix* without requiring that it become ordinance. Ideally, one or more developers would join in this action, which should be undertaken as soon as possible.
4. Clear up the sign ordinance confusion. For a city so interested in aesthetics, there is an alarming amount of confusion about the sign ordinance (or lack thereof). The City should 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.

Responsible Parties

Gatlinburg is justifiably proud of the collaborative spirit behind this vision work, and the collaboration needs to continue if this ambitious agenda is to be fully implemented. Very often, work of this kind falls short because there is no one whose job is “to wake up every morning” and implement the plan. Collaborations like Gatlinburg’s are not immune to this, since the various partners can sometimes assume that some other member of the coalition is taking charge.

Therefore:

1. The *Priority:Gatlinburg* partners should seriously consider creating a position or positions to take this document from a working level. This could be a three-year commitment in which the City, Chamber and Gateway Foundation divide or share commitments for office space, compensation, travel and expenses and other

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resource requirements. Among the roles for this position would be:

- 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.
2. Finally, it must be recommended that the “missing” decision makers be engaged in this process. With that handful of business people in the room and behind the vision, progress on all fronts cannot help but proceed at a faster pace.

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FINAL THOUGHTS

As the community partners continue the implementation of the Gatlinburg Vision, they should be mindful of two basic tenets that were included in the public presentations:

1. **Cities are never finished.** They are dynamic, with shifting social, economic and political forces. Periodic reassessment, reprioritization and recommitment are important if a city is to thrive.
2. **Working together works.** As cities – and their citizens – identify what needs to be done, it takes collaboration and cooperation to accomplish tasks and realize visions. The most effective partnerships include both the public and private sectors.

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.”