



# METRO PULSE



## **Nine Counties. One Vision's Mark**

by: Joe Sullivan

This month marks the fourth anniversary of the launch of Nine Counties. One Vision. So the question arises: What have we got to show for the most extensive public goal-setting process this area has ever seen?

The answer is that while progress has been made toward achieving some goals, the input up to this point far exceeds the output.

More than 3,600 residents participated in goal-setting during the first half of 2000. Their myriad ideas were distilled by volunteers into 28 action plans. And to oversee the implementation of each action plan a task force was appointed, supported by Nine Counties. One Vision's full-time staff of three. As set forth in a summation on the organization's website:

"Nine Counties. One Vision has given the region (Anderson, Blount, Grainger, Jefferson, Knox, Loudon, Roane, Sevier, and Union Counties) a clear agenda for its future. This agenda—reached through a meticulously designed participatory process where residents suggested ideas, developed goals, and set priorities—spells out what is important for the future of this region. It provides a snapshot of needs and desires that must be addressed expeditiously. Two characteristics stand out.

"First, the Nine Counties. One Vision agenda is holistic. It addresses issues that go beyond the four categories that have received the most support: education, environment, transportation, and downtowns. It includes goals and strategies for growth management and rural preservation, culture and arts, community places, human relations and quality of life, to list a few.

"Second, the Nine Counties. One Vision agenda is clearly regional in scope. Its goals and strategies cross professional, institutional and jurisdictional lines. Its regional emphasis ranges from creating a regional education foundation, to developing a regional trail and greenway system; from developing a regional light rail system, to firmly establishing downtown Knoxville as the region's hub; from protecting the region's natural areas, to establishing a regionwide annual arts event that focuses on the region's rich heritage; from protecting the welfare of animals, to recruiting businesses through a regionally coordinated effort."

Just getting hundreds of people engaged on an ongoing basis by serving on the task forces that are charged with making good on such a diverse agenda represents a meaningful accomplishment in its own right. And even if tangible results are lacking, their pursuit of lofty goals is laudable. Moreover, purely framing them in public consciousness, as the Nine Counties. One Vision process has served to do, has no doubt contributed to their fulfillment in some longer run... Consider:

\* Downtown—Nine Counties. One Vision's boldest initiative has been the comprehensive plan for downtown development it has fostered. Portland-based consultant Crandall Arambula, with public input at several forums, has produced a sweeping plan that encompasses every facet of development in every block of the downtown area. Locations for offices, residential, and retail growth are intertwined with plans for streetscapes, public transit and parking to support it—all within a framework of exemplary urban design standards.

Yet the totality of what's envisioned seems overwhelming in a city that's strapped for resources to make good on much more limited redevelopment plans that have already been set in motion. Indeed, if Crandall Arambula's involvement had just been a onetime planning exercise, there's a good chance its grand design would end up gathering dust or at best serving as a conceptual frame of reference for the distant future.

But the terms of the firm's engagement charge it with producing implementation strategies for "catalyst" projects. So Crandall Arambula will be returning to Knoxville next month fortified with data compiled by yet another consultant, Economic Research Associates, assessing downtown's retail potential. The focus will be on jumpstarting development along a four-block stretch of Gay Street that the consultant's have identified as downtown's primary shopping district...

Beyond the tangible, Fugate believes that Nine Counties. One Vision has made its mark intangibly as well. "I believe we've grown into thinking of ourselves more as a region. There's been a mind-shift toward more acceptance that regional cooperation is good for us," Fugate claims.

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