

**Hillside Task Force  
Public Involvement Committee  
August 21, 2008 Minutes**

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Elaine called the meeting to order at 11:40 a.m. Members present: Elaine Clark, Chair; Will Skelton, and Scott Frith.

Staff present: Liz Albertson, Mike Carberry, and David McGinley.

1. Mike Carberry provided an overview of the extent of development in relation to hillsides in Knox County. The following findings related to questions originally posed by the Land Use Committee were discussed:

- How much development has already taken place in relation to hillsides and ridges?
- What are the opportunities and threats to hillside protection, given current zoning?
- What are the alternatives in forming a hillside and ridge conservation program relative to (1) degree of slope and (2) ridges that are largely intact?

He went on to explain that staff began to answer these questions by hypothesizing that the extent of development would be the least on the greater slopes. Staff noted that, in general, buildings were toward the toe of ridges, not on steep forested areas.

A series of maps were then presented in relation to a degree of slope. The maps included: (1) an overview of forested areas; (2) building footprints, and (3) a zoning analysis, showing vacant land in relation to developed land (see \_\_\_\_\_ for link to these maps). The highlights of that overview follow.

Forest cover in relation to slope:

- Roughly one-third (about 110,000 acres) of Knoxville/Knox County land is on hillsides in excess of 15 percent slope.
- The steeper the slope, the greater the proportion of forested area: about 120,000 acres of Knox County's 336,000 acres are forested and about 70,000 acres of that forested land is on hillsides greater than 15 percent slopes.

Buildings and paved areas in relation to slope:

- The most level land (0 to 15 percent slope) accounts for 215,000 acres of the county's 336,000 acres. About 74,000 of that acreage is in the rural-designated areas.

The greater the slope, the lesser amount of development:

- About 25 percent of Knoxville's level (0 to 15%) area covered with buildings, about 13 percent of the moderate slopes are covered with buildings. Only small proportions (6 percent or less) of the steeper slopes have building coverage.
- Within the areas that have best access to sewer (the city, the urban growth boundary and planned commercial areas, the map shows that the observation that "the only thing left to develop is hillside land" is substantially accurate in that much of that area has been developed. (Staff noted though that some portions of that area could be redeveloped. Staff also pointed out that the level rural—designated area is largely undeveloped (only 4 percent of that area is covered buildings and pavement. In making this observation, it was noted that there may be two-fold concerns: (1) if development eventually is directed to level farmland, loss of agricultural land could be a concern; (2) if directed to slopes, loss of forested hillsides could be a concern.

Vacant and developed land in relation to zoning:

- Almost half of the county's level land (100,000 of 215,000 acres) is composed of developed, non-agricultural parcels.
- Developed parcels on steep slopes (25% or more) account for only 7,300 acres of the county's 336,000 acres (just over 5 percent of the county's landscape).
- Zoning (agricultural and low density residential zones) allowing limited development account for vast majority of zoning on vacant hillside areas.
- Of concern could be the zoning of 4,300 acres of steeper land (15% or greater slope) that is zoned for commercial, industrial or medium density housing purposes.

## 2. Discussion on the role of the committee:

Will Skelton said that at this time the committee and task force can continue to raise issues; solutions are not ready yet.

Carol Evans raised the question “Should we be advocates or should we be neutral”? The general consensus was that advocacy is needed in some form in that the task force was put together in recognition of certain problems. She went on to say that the committee needed to form an overall goal of what they want to propose. Discussion proceeded to formulate that goal.

Scott Frith noted that misinformation can be something that scares everyone, and the work of the committee and task force need to address that issue. Carol Evans continued that the committee should educate the public on slope issues and approaches to understand the issues. She then summarized what she felt were the three basic needs. (1) ongoing public information on the process; (2) framing the issues and then proceed to address those issues, and (3) outlining the greater public input process such as meetings, newsletters, etc.

Liz Albertson noted that MPC has a website, and it contains the information in the notebooks and will contain minutes and other deliberations of the task force. It was suggested that future meetings be posted and that the public input process be outlined. Further, that a general statement should be in there to contact staff if a citizen had questions regarding the work of the task force.

Joe Hultquist noted that the process, when developed, has to be very visible, and all the committees of the task force need to maintain an awareness of the total effort.

Carol Evans noted that the greater role of the committee is to get the issues out there. Liz Albertson mentioned that a western Carolina publication *Mountain Landscapes Initiative* helps frame the benefits of various approaches to ridge top and hillside development and could be food for thought in framing issues. Will Skelton suggested that “a dirty dozen” of ridge top development practices be formed so that citizens could see some of the problems that have been created. Such a list can be brought to the attention of the media, he noted. Mike Carberry suggested that a list of targeted groups be formulated, ranging from development interests like the homebuilders to some of the larger community-based groups like Fountain City Town Hall.

Joe Hultquist wondered if a visual preference survey could be used as a means to understand public viewpoints on conservation and development practices. MPC staff said that is possible and would look at such a tool to be placed on the website.

In conclusion, Carol Evans offered the following multi-point program:

1. Providing information to the public on the process
2. Providing information to the public on the issues related to steep slope and ridgetop protection to the public
3. Developing an outline of types of meetings and a means for public input.

There was also some discussion of bringing in someone from an area where they have implemented ridgetop / hillside protection strategies successfully. Mike Carberry mentioned that MPC staff may visit Asheville to gain an understanding of their program. Carol Evans mentioned bringing in a homebuilder or someone that has done a successful development that protected hillsides. Carol and Elaine mentioned that, we, as a task force, need to draft key “talking points” to stay on message about what it is that we are doing. The Task Force, they noted, will have to concur on these talking points.

Elaine Clark adjourned the meeting at 1:20pm.