

FRENCH BROAD PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION [FBPA]
Position Statement on the Current Growth Plan for Knox County (1/9/2024)

To: Mayor Jacobs, Advance Knox Planning Committee, County Commission and the FBPA e-mail list.

We citizens of East Knox County applaud and thank the Advance Knox committee members for their hard work in dealing with the migration of folks into Knox County and especially with the need to maintain the French Broad River Corridor a rural and agricultural gem for the foreseeable future.

While we realize there is a need for more affordable housing to accommodate present citizens and newcomers, we respectfully request that more thought be given to this need. We understand the Plan has just been refined based on changes suggested in various public meetings. The public needs time to fully consider and comment upon these refinements. There is no need to rush decisions that are so important to the future of Knox County.

With regard to the Plan, the FBPA would like to emphasize the following considerations.

GENERALLY:

- The principal beneficiaries of the plan should not be developers who merely consider prime farmland to be the next profit frontier. Rather, current residents of Knox County should be the primary beneficiaries. It was those residents and their predecessors, including indigenous peoples, who made and kept our area so attractive to new migrants. The current residents should not become the victims of the in-migration brought on by poorly planned development and insufficient infrastructure.
- The developers should bear the burden of convincing the community that the changes they propose will be palatable, and they should bear more of the burden of consequential costs.
- The final Plan needs to exclude all prime farmland from the proposed growth areas.

SPECIFICALLY:

The FBPA has attempted to educate residents about the consequences of incompatible development in the French Broad River Corridor. In the recent past, the FBPA made concessions for the Midway Road Business Park, which consumed prime farmland, because promises were made that development would be confined to agreed-upon borders. Recent attempts by the Knox County Commission to expand that commercial area have been resoundingly denounced by many residents. Expanding commercial land use around the Midway Business Park violates past promises made and is in opposition to the will of the community and even of the will of the County Commission according to past official statements.

Expansion of the commercial area at Midway Road will likely lead to even more questionable development, such as is evident in the River Islands subdivision adjacent to Seven Islands State Birding Park, which has consumed a large swath of prime agricultural river bottom land for the benefit of developers and a few short-sighted landowners. Very likely, new residents, especially the affluent, will spur developers in the future to duplicate this poor planning in the Tuckahoe Creek area and other portions of the French Broad River corridor.

Hence, the FBPA requests modification of the Proposed Future Land Use Map to change the areas north of Thorn Grove Pike and east of the Midway Business Park from “Rural Crossroads Commercial” (pink) to “Parks and Open Space” (green) so that they connect with the current “Parks and Open Space” area. This would be much more attractive to future workers in the Business Park as well as local residents, especially if the greenway path around the business park is extended.

If this specific proposed change is made, FBPA would agree to help raise funds for this greenway extension.

IN CONCLUSION:

The FBPA encourages further consideration and revision of the Plan to incorporate the recommendations of Kevin Murphy and Advocates for Advanced Growth, we request more time for the public to review and comment upon the plan revisions, and we request modification of the Planned Growth Map near the Midway Business Park as described above.

Respectfully,

Mark Crockett, President
Stephanie Mueller, Secretary
Wayne Whitehead, Treasurer
Lydia Pulsipher, Board Member
Billy Freeman, Board Member