

The UDO must state clearly that it is focused to the benefit of residents and taxpayers; individuals/developers who do not live here (residency must be certified) must be noted in all records/permits/plans and have less say than neighbors, residents, and individual taxpayers in all development issues.

Sustainable energy must be emphasized. All permitted buildings must be sited and oriented so that roof top solar can be reasonably and efficiently installed by any future owner.

The UDO must clearly define what “respecting rural character” means in practice. This includes:

- Context-Sensitive Development Standards: Limit building heights, require adequate setbacks, and adopt landscaping requirements to provide visual buffers between new subdivisions and existing rural homes.
- Tree Preservation & Open Space: Require tree preservation plans and establish minimum open space requirements for all developments, in line with the Hillside & Ridgetop Protection Plan framework
- Noise & Light Protections: Adopt quantitative lighting standards (e.g., Dark Sky model ordinance) and reasonable construction hours. Current allowances permit construction as late as midnight, which is incompatible with rural areas. Construction hours should be limited to 8:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m. on weekdays and more restrictive on weekends and holidays to preserve residents’ ability to enjoy their property.

Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA) Reform

Under current rules, a Traffic Impact Analysis is only required for developments of 75 units or more. This unit-based threshold fails to account for road safety and capacity in rural areas. The UDO should:

Tie TIA Requirements to Road Conditions: Require TIAs based on road geometry, sight distance, and existing traffic counts rather than unit counts alone.

- Adjust for Rural Road Conditions: Currently, the sight distance requirement is 10 feet of sight distance times the speed limit, so if the speed limit is 30mph, the sight distance only needs to be 300 ft, but curves, hills, and mph actually driven (generally above the speed limit) make standard thresholds insufficient. The ordinance should allow county engineers to require TIAs and additional mitigations (turn lanes, signage, speed reduction measures) whenever road conditions present safety concerns, regardless of development size.
- Mitigation Before Occupancy: Require that any traffic improvements identified in the TIA be installed before issuance of a certificate of occupancy, not deferred until after build-out.

Infrastructure and Growth Management

Advance Knox emphasized infrastructure investment as the #1 community priority.

The UDO should require:

- **Infrastructure Adequacy Findings:** Before approving rezonings or development plans, confirm that schools, roads, stormwater, and emergency services can support the added growth.
- **Coordination with Capital Improvement Plans:** Tie rezonings and subdivision approvals to funded infrastructure improvements or require developers to contribute proportionally to the needed upgrades.

Reduce required road widths in new subdivisions. 26 foot wide subdivision streets encourage speeding, and also encourages parking in the public right-of-way instead of on private property. Require sidewalks and greenways that connect neighborhoods/developments.

Strengthen Compatibility Standards

UDO should adopt compatibility requirements to prevent new developments from significantly injuring the value or livability of adjacent properties through noise, lights, fumes, vibration, or traffic congestion

This should include:

- **Drive-Through & High-Traffic Uses:** Limit these uses to commercial corridors and prohibit them adjacent to residential and agricultural properties.
- **Performance Standards:** Include measurable noise, lighting, and air quality thresholds to protect neighbors from adverse impacts.

Conservation Tools and Agricultural Land Protection

Advance Knox calls for creating a conservation toolkit and a large-lot agricultural zone.

The UDO should:

- Establish clear incentives for conservation easements and cluster subdivisions that permanently protect open space.
- Require soil assessments to protect prime farmland soils from unnecessary conversion.
- Consider maximum densities of 1 unit per 5 acres or lower in agriculturally designated areas.

Require Neighborhood Connectivity. In Knox County, neighborhood connectivity is encouraged but not required. The Planning Commission and County Commission do not make it a requirement of rezoning or development plans. Without requirements in the new UDO, we will continue to make this mistake and build a county where our neighborhoods and communities are disconnected from each other and our community resources like schools, parks, and natural areas.

Tree Preservation Plan. We have experience with how developers develop in Knox County in the absence of codified requirements. Many applicants have stood up at the podium and said “We don’t want to cut down any more trees than we have to. It’s expensive to cut down trees.”

Then, after they get approval for the development plan and their grading permit, they promptly clear cut and grade the entire property. We must require tree preservation plans, and should adopt tree ordinances similar to the city, with a minimum number of trees required per lot and per acre.

Stop requiring curbs on all new subdivision streets. Curbs eliminate vehicles pulling off the road (or even partly off the road); instead the vehicle stays parked in the public right-of-way. For roads without sidewalks, a curb keeps a bicycle pedestrian from gently crossing over into a yard if there is an oncoming obstacle and the bicycle or pedestrian needs to swerve / get out of the road. People with compromised mobility have issues stepping over curbs. Grass swales would be preferred instead. Swales cost less to build than curbs.

Open Space Management Protection. Open space is not just parks and recreation amenities.

Advance Knox identified Conservation as a key public priority. The bench-mark in new zoning and subdivision regulations must mandate open space protection. This should include determining conservation areas for open space, establishing permitted and prohibited uses of open space. The adopted Hillside and Ridgetop Protection Plan has an excellent framework.

Incentives for keeping property as agricultural / conservation. Today’s zoning ordinance includes no incentives for a property owner to voluntarily place a more restrictive zoning, such as Agricultural Conservation, on their property. The appraisal value is de-minimis between agricultural and agricultural conservation property. Possible incentives could include having agricultural conservation zones as a negative factor for adjacent plan amendments and rezonings (i.e. if property is zoned agricultural conservation, that would be a reason against a plan amendment or rezoning that an adjacent property would propose).

Development of Agriculturally-zoned land. Counties that have successfully slowed the development of agricultural land have implemented development densities of 1 dwelling unit per 5 acres.

Assessment of farmland soils. Prime and locally important soils should be identified on zoning and building applications. The UDO should adopt specific criteria for limiting or prohibiting development on those soils

Heavy Industrial Uses in non-Industrial zones. In particular, the Mining use should be removed from the Agriculture zone.

Zoning Administration Rezoning.

The UDO needs to clarify precisely what is a substantially changed or changing condition. Right now this is a subjective statement and can often be argued in favor of an application or against an application. This would provide more certainty in the application and analysis process - certainly for both the community and the applicant. It would stop speculative rezonings, where an applicant attempts to make a bad case for the bodies and it's more "who you know" for getting approved. Saying that a road project is planned 2 miles away from a site is not "changing conditions" to justify a rezoning.

Stop using the availability of utilities to justify a rezoning. As it stands now, it seems that utility districts are in charge of where development occurs, rather than land use planning. Their mission is to provide service to any customer who desires it. If an applicant can get a utility to say that the utility can provide service (and doesn't have to disclose the cost and how the applicant can make this feasible), the applicant then uses that to justify a "change in conditions" even if it may cost millions of dollars that they can't afford.

Appeals to legislative bodies. Allow appeal of administrative actions, planning commission, and BZA to the legislative body (county commission) similar to how Knoxville City Council does.

These appeals are rare, but providing an appeal to the legislative body serves two purposes: 1) it brings lower body actions to the attention of the legislative body, which may not be aware of the types of decisions occurring at BZA or planning commission, and 2) it places the final administrative authority into the hands of elected officials instead of appointed officials, allowing residents to have accountability at the voting booth.