

City & County Plans Emphasize Quality of Life, Natural Beauty

In March, 2004, both Silver City and Grant County adopted comprehensive plans intended to guide policy and form the basis for funding requests. Many residents participated in the development of the plans, which were written by Tom Leatherwood of Planners Ink, a contractor hired jointly by the city and county.

The plans have no teeth, but the principles and goals they describe can provide added legitimacy to proposals for further community planning efforts. Following are the principles adopted in each plan. (Sentence fragments and problems with syntax are in the original.)

Grant County:

- Maintain and improve the quality of life that makes Grant County a desirable place to live for long-term established residents and newcomers alike;
- Manage growth in Grant County in a manner that can be sustained by its natural resources and is beneficial to its residents;
- Accommodate only growth that is occurring in the county which is consistent with scarce water resources, as well as the limited ability of the county to keep up with demands for water and other services;
- Protect and enhance those values – clean air and water, the beauty and diversity of the land, the friendliness of residents, and the security that comes living in from small traditional communities with a unique heritage, including easy access to large tracts of public land providing a wide and varied number of recreational uses.

Silver City:

- Provide direction to both short-term and long-term economic recovery as the town seeks to collaborate with the county and other municipalities to develop a diverse and sustainable regional economy.
- Establish principles and goals to guide the town's collaboration with Grant County in creation of a growth management strategy for the ETZ, including procedures for joint planning and development review.
- Protect the community's historic downtown and neighborhoods, including the town's distinctive architecture and settlement patterns.
- Preserve the quality of the natural environment, open space, water and other resources.
- Maintain and enhance community facilities and provide park, open space and recreational opportunities to serve the entire community.
- Protect Silver City's "small town" feel and character, and shape new growth to promote walkable livable neighborhoods and districts.
- Ensure that the town's cultural diversity is maintained and historic traditions are protected and celebrated.



Pigeon Forge, TN: natural beauty obscured by lack of vision

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Two pairs of towns in particular served as interesting cases. On the edge of the Great Smokey Mountains National Park, Pigeon Forge had lost its character to strip-style development by businesses serving tourists. Since it had not defined itself, invested in attractive infrastructure, or asked businesses to adhere to community standards, it ended up looking like Anytown, USA. And, faced with a confusion of signs, driveways, and lights, it would have been nearly impossible for any individual business to try to improve things on its own.

Pittman Center, alarmed by what had happened down the road to Pigeon Forge, conducted a series of community meetings. Without much difficulty, different sectors of the community agreed that what defined Pittman Center and made it a great place to be was its location in the mountains next to the national park. From there it was a short step to deciding that the quality of residents' lives and the attractiveness of their community to tourists would both be enhanced by adopting standards for development more in keeping with the community's identity. The town invested in rustic street signs and worked with businesses to encourage signs and landscaping that were consistent with the community's vision. As a result, said Carter, Pittman Center is a far more attractive destination for tourists.

The second pair of towns, Ketchum and Challis, border a proposed, 500,000-acre wilderness area in central Idaho. Ketchum, on the south side of the area and next to the Sun Valley ski resort, has followed the path of communities such as Aspen. Certain businesses, including trail outfitters and river runners in addition to the skiing industry, have prospered mightily. The natural beauty and recreational opportunities of the area have attracted wealthy vacation-home owners who have made realtors and land owners prosperous as well.

Many longer-term residents of Ketchum and many others attracted to the area by economic opportunity can not afford to live in the town, however. According to Carter, small towns an hour's drive away have seen radical change as subdivisions have replaced ranches to meet the demand for housing in Ketchum.

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