

Feedback on the 5/10/18 City of Oak Ridge “Blueprint” for DOE lands

I would propose that in the future, any disposition of DOE properties is made public before the land is transferred, and the public has opportunity to provide real feedback that is sincerely considered. The greatest use of the DOE's lands is to keep them in green space. As pointed out in the meeting, the Oak Ridge area is incredibly unique in having large amounts of green space, and any disposed DOE lands should probably become parks. Parks sell homes, and young people want to live where there is green space and recreational opportunities. Look no further than South Knoxville to see what kind of transformation can happen. Parks add real value to a community.

I was pleased to see the planning commission's report acknowledge that residential developments do not pay for themselves and end up costing the City money in infrastructure. I was also pleased that the report acknowledges the environmental and historical value of the Three Bends area. And I appreciated hearing that the Spallation Neutron Source, which brings massive economic growth to our area, located here because of the available DOE land. So in general, for the future of our economic development, leaving DOE lands as DOE lands is best. While I understand the City's hesitation with Clark Center Park, I would hope that they would be working with Legacy Parks or other entities to try to secure the necessary funds to stabilize the park for our community. Finally, I think that the idea of the Self-Sufficiency Parcels is no longer valid. As pointed out in the meeting, these concepts were developed at a time when the entire ORR might be closed down. Since that is never going to happen, it is better that the City stop thinking they have a right to these additional land areas, when in fact there is poor management of land already in their boundaries, i.e., the many derelict and underutilized commercial properties. In this way, the City's focus on acquiring new DOE lands devalues existing properties. Further, there are many residential properties and multi-family housing that are in shocking states of disrepair and neglect. The City would be better to focus its efforts on achieving compliance with current codes, enhancing current codes to provide better quality of housing, and attempting to upgrade the existing housing and commercial stock.

I do have a couple of comments on the meeting itself. It was described as a part of the City's "blueprint" process, which is about planning for the city's future. The citizen planning commission and planning staff were involved, and it was ostensibly a public meeting. But no one speaking introduced themselves. There was no opportunity for any public member to provide any comments or ask questions.

The same problem can be said of the topic of the meeting itself. DOE basically said that if you are interested in a parcel, you should approach them. If that parcel is available, then after some paperwork, perhaps the land could be made available through the GSA. Again, no opportunity for public involvement in the disposition of US government (ie public) lands. This process needs to be changed. If lands are available and arrangements are being made to dispose of those lands, this needs to be disclosed publicly with sufficient notice to garner feedback. The citizens of this community, the state, and in fact the nation, all have a stake in what happens to DOE land. Recently, our community's museum (the AMSE) was disposed in incredibly short notice to a developer. The City, in fact, facilitated this. So the citizens lost a wonderful spot of green space in town, located near the park, library, recreation center, and amphitheater, to a developer who will make even more strip malls and destroy a lovely and irreplaceable green space. The problem is lack of public notice, all the way around.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this process. Best wishes, Melanie Mayes, citizen of Oak Ridge and member of TCWP and AFORR