

Virtual Community Meeting

February 19, 2025

About the Event

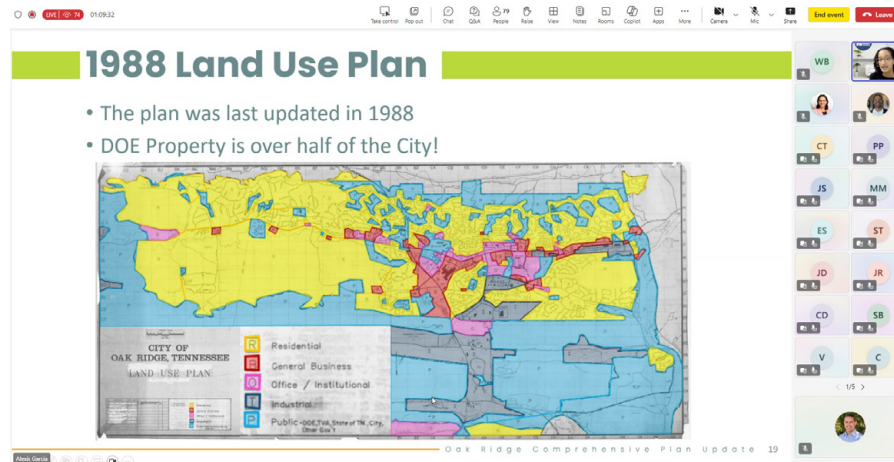
On February 19, 2025, the consultant team conducted a virtual community meeting to inform the public about the comprehensive plan project, provide an overview of the process, and gather input from the community. The virtual community meeting was hosted on Microsoft Teams and participants were able to register for the event or use a direct link to join the call. During the virtual event, the consultant team gave a presentation about the project with interactive polling questions attendees could participate with using Mentimeter to provide input. Following the presentation, the consultant team and city staff answered questions from the public.

Event Statistics

- 35 Registered
- 80 Attendees

Key Takeaways:

- Residents living in Oak Ridge find the City convenient due to its proximity to work and school.
- Residents love the green spaces, arts and culture in Oak Ridge and especially treasure the small-town feel compared to Knoxville.
- Enhanced accessibility is needed to connect points of interest and to provide opportunities for other modes of transportation (biking, public transportation, etc.) to meet residents' needs.
- More unique and interesting commercial, retail, and entertainment spaces should be developed in the future to encourage youth and young adults to stay in Oak Ridge.
- The City should maintain the cleanliness of the community and find innovative ways to address vacant buildings and properties.
- Oak Ridge has a unique history, which can attract more tourism to the community and enhance its economic diversity.



In **ONE** word, what would make this plan successful?

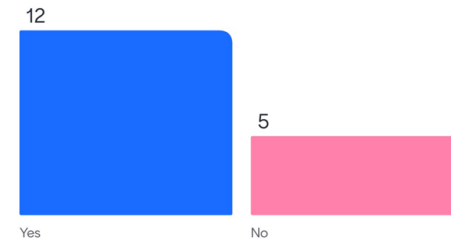


Polling Questions

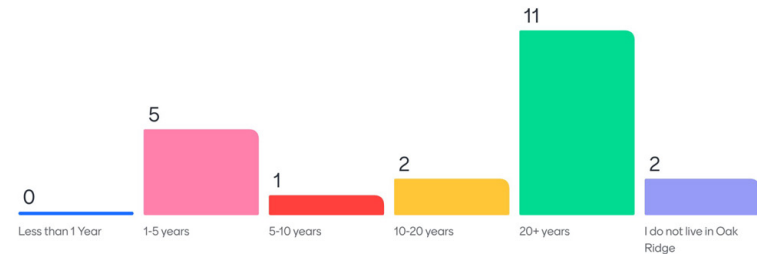
What are some things that you consider uniquely Oak Ridge?

- The river, the labs, the topography, the people
- The nuclear industries – allows a relatively small City to have a much larger impact.
- Not enough outreach to visitors
- Science, History, Schools, Rowing, Community Involvement, Historical Jackson Square
- History
- Natural Resources that draw people here
- History, natural recreational spaces, the arts community
- Manhattan Project background, International population, Lots of Scientists. Good School System.
- Our very unique history
- Our history emphasis on education multitude of cultural options
- Rowing! Support for nuclear energy/research/etc.
- Celebration of greenways and green spaces
- The unique origin and great small town feel
- There are more community organizations, per capita Oak Ridge than any place I am aware of, with a rich history in their development
- Unique history, great school system, waterways and greenways
- The City of Oak Ridge has a unique arts culture and history heritage. Our vibrant parks and greenways
- There is a diversity of citizens
- Supporting great schools
- Open and welcoming environment
- Pet friendly
- Yes. Oak Ridge has had several comprehensive plans. We usually don't do much with them.

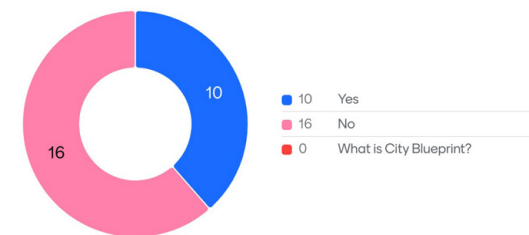
Have you heard of a comprehensive plan before?



How long have you lived in Oak Ridge?



Did you participate in the 2019 City Blueprint process?



Have you taken the Oak Ridge 2045 online survey?



What is your TOP reason for living in Oak Ridge?

- Proximity to work
- Job
- Work
- Homebase for the rest of my life
- Schools
- Schools
- Close to our work
- Great schools
- Near to work (support)
- Exemplary schools
- Family
- I've grown up in Oak Ridge and its vibrant community, aside from copious amounts of chains
- Near school and work
- Close to Knoxville, but not Knoxville
- Work, ability to access mountain biking and trails close to my house
- Small community feel with larger community amenities. (i.e. arts, great schools)
- Its centrally located and isn't gridlocked with traffic like Knoxville
- Great Arts Community
- Convenience - my church, doctors, dentist, shopping are within five minutes of home
- The history and cost of living- I left a city the size of Knoxville in SW Florida.
- Close to work
- Close to work, family, great schools
- Accessible housing availability (aging in place)
- Schools
- Safe Place to live
- Its in East TN. We moved here from CO. We wanted a good school system and a neighborhood on the water. A place to put down roots and stay long term
- Greenways
- It's centrally located and hasn't suffered the traffic gridlock like West Knoxville.
- Diverse population of the community and Community Engagement
- Family
- Was born here and retired here
- Greenways, BORCE, Rails to Trails
- Arts community
- Access to a variety of jobs in the energy profession
- Schools
- Safer than Knoxville
- Schools - Arts and Science opportunities
- Medical practice, MMC used to be a splendid hospital
- Small community feel
- Welcoming small town feel
- Semi-rural
- Outdoor activities and great schools
- You have a voice
- Diversity!
- Diversity
- Unique places Calamity's coffee, hops and hounds
- Outdoor activities and great schools
- Natural amenities
- Potential
- Convenience to DOE facilities and quality of schools
- Schools
- Community
- Greenways
- Mountain Biking trail access
- Safe place to live
- Unique shopping venues
- Eliminate poorly zoned industrial areas. Clean up and improve Warehouse Rd. area. Potential for great mixed area, Light Industrial, Entertainment, Rails to Trails

If you could improve **THREE** things about Oak Ridge, what would you change?

- More Restaurants
- Affordable homes
- More diverse (non-chain) restaurants
- More things for teens
- More shopping
- South Illinois visual impact is terrible
- Decrease the parking lot sizes
- Slow growth as there is nothing wrong with being a small town
- More roads in and out of Oak Ridge
- More destinations within walking distance of west Oak Ridge
- A centralized 'hub' or downtown
- More things for young adults
- More investment in our outdoor resources
- Better choice of restaurants and more recreational facilities
- Not just fast food
- More younger residents (under 50); tighter governance of commercial development; better traffic enforcement
- Renew sidewalks, slow traffic in all residential areas
- Better restaurants
- Public transport, clean it up! And take economic advantage of events like rowing
- Stop all ridge top clearing
- More interesting local businesses and housing
- Improved accessibility (sidewalks, etc.)
- Parks instead of a large amount of concrete
- Encourage Covenant Health to invest more in Methodist Medical Center as a full service hospital
- Improving roadways, manage traffic better on busier roads community space (i.e. Jackson Square conserving the greenways)
- Public Transportation
- Better internet options
- Sidewalks everywhere in town
- Connect points of interest
- Great open spaces and almost unlimited involvements in community
- More walkable/bikeable. Food truck Park. Affordable/denser housing
- Municipal internet/broadband, more bikeable, conserve greenspaces
- Bike access east to west
- Downtown improvements
- Street and sidewalk maintenance, park maintenance, zoning enforcement, how will future infrastructure be paid for?
- Revamp of Warehouse Road area
- Smaller parking lots
- Better public transportation, especially for handicapped citizens, better sidewalks - wider and not blocked by poles, brush, or trashcans. Find a way to make use of empty businesses
- Shopping that offers walkability and restaurants. A performing arts center outside of school. Larger than the Grove to attract larger artists.
- Non-vehicular car access to points of interest
- More bicycle friendly
- Awareness of the 20,000 acres we could have
- Making our roads more beautiful
- Bike Access
- An ongoing visioning process with input from grassroots to top level stakeholders
- Centralized hub!
- Bike trails
- A freeway that goes over Oak Ridge to reduce traffic
- Clean up the trash!
- Entry ways to greenways
- Covered Parking in commercial areas
- Mountain bike trails
- Government land is not unavailable
- Clean up blight
- Commitment
- Collaboration
- Listen

Questions and Answers

How were the small areas selected? These are located in central and east, Oak Ridge. A lot of things are happening out west.

Things are happening all over the community. The Planning Commission is officially in charge of this process, and even though there were more places we wanted to focus on than were possible for this process, the Planning Commission ultimately selected these five. It's important to know that it doesn't mean the rest of the community doesn't get included or planned. The entire City is in this plan; these are just areas that get an extra level of planning and more detail, but all areas are important.

Will the results of the survey be shared?

Yes, we will post the survey results once they are compiled. The survey will be open throughout the process so we can ensure that we're getting a lot of engagement. We will post a survey summary online that will also be included in the report document that is published.

What lessons has the City learned from the past 15 years regarding development. What mistakes have been noted?

One thing we have learned is that we have had no growth. Working with the Chamber, we analyzed some reasons why growth has not occurred. An essential part of it was the lack of new and variety of housing. Recently, we've had more new subdivisions and residential developments open, in addition to the prospect of downtown development with more urban housing, which has helped to spur our growth. The other thing we heard was the lack of things to do. A part of the plan is to figure out the kind of things that the community would like to have that we don't have already.

Why was "Grow Oak Ridge" selected as the main theme? That does not seem to represent the vision we worked on.

The Planning Commission conducted the Blueprint process in 2017; the main theme the consultant team reviewed in the Blueprint summary was the top things people said the most. Although there is great appreciation for our small-town character, there is also a need to grow particularity to take care of our infrastructure. We have an 80-year-old infrastructure system that was built all at once, is wearing out, and is in need of improvements. We haven't had any increases in our tax base to allow that. Nobody wants to pay higher taxes, so the way to avoid that is to have high-quality growth that contributes to quality of life.

Could Warehouse Area/Belgrade Rd. be enhanced to promote recreational use and retail opportunities and support surrounding neighborhoods?

Yes, that's definitely something we talked about as one of our initial ideas for opportunities for revitalization and better use of the area, especially capitalizing on the proximity to nearby recreational trails and water. This can be incorporated in the plan moving forward regarding the different land uses and the plan recommendations.

Do we know what young people want? How are we including our high school students and Millennials?

So far, we know from youth and young adults that there is a desire for things to do. We are encouraging both youth and young adults to participate in this process. One of our Ambassadors is focused on young professionals in the community. We don't have all the answers yet; this process is in the early stages of engagement, and we will continue to collect input from the youth and young adults.

What benchmarks will we use? We've done this process before, so how have previous processes worked?

The last comprehensive plan was done in 1988, and they're typically 20-year plans. The blueprint plan that the Planning Commission had the foresight to begin in 2019 helped to give us a general direction. The hope right now is to update that as it was about five years ago, in addition to implementing that plan.

It's not a new idea, but can we offer knowledge, guidance and/or financial assistance to those who seek to modernize or upgrade legacy properties?

Absolutely, the point of this planning process is to come together as a community and decide on our highest priorities. We can't do everything, but having priorities and the most important objectives and projects the community agrees on is important so that people like the City Council and the City Manager can focus on those and try to accomplish the highest priorities that citizens have wanted to see.

The city was originally designed as walkable with many neighborhood centers, is there anything in those plans that the team can refer back to and use?

The plan is just coming together; there is an emphasis on the small area plans on both Jackson Square and Grove Center to create nodes with more activity near people's homes, which is a high priority from our standpoint. The City was originally built to be walkable, so we want to consider those principles in our new planning effort and incorporate them as much as possible. The federal government ran a bus system 24/7 that connected all of those nodes, community centers, and employment centers in the community. We don't have that asset now, but it has dramatically helped connectivity.

Will the comprehensive plan be a living document updated as needed for growth in the community?

Yes, the Comprehensive Plan is not intended to be a static document. It provides guidance for future growth, and changes in the community should update it. Some triggers will require examining the new conditions in the community, the new demographics, and the new trajectories and making adjustments as necessary. Typically, you would update a comprehensive plan fully every 10 years, but we are building on the 2019 plan.

Are we identifying public facilities where cultural and educational events can be held with engagement resources?

As part of the document, we will examine some of those elements in terms of cultural resources and community resources as key places that people will want to go. We will look at this, and it could potentially result in future recommendations as well.

Is there a separate transportation plan or is it a function of the comprehensive plan?

Land use and transportation planning go hand in hand. As part of this process, we will not draft a thoroughfare plan; however, we will examine mobility and connectivity throughout the City.

What percentage of the older homes are rentals? How does this impact planning?

We do not have an exact number for the percentage of rentals in the community specific to older homes. The comprehensive plan will look at existing and future development patterns as well as opportunities for providing affordable housing options for all residents.

Has a location been determined for the in-person meeting next week?

Yes. The in-person community meeting will be held at Oak Ridge High School from 6:00–8:00 pm. There will be a similar presentation to the virtual meeting, interactive input station and members from the project team will be available for questions.

Are additional businesses planned near The Preserve?

Yes, the adopted Master Plan for the Preserve shows additional commercial development both within the development near the existing club house and along the state highway near the neighborhood's entrance. Timing of the commercial development is unknown, as it is based on growth of the residential population nearby.

Is there any interest in making OR a green city?

Oak Ridge continues to be committed to the conversation of open space in our greenbelts, parks, etc. The Natural Assets Guidebook sets guidelines on how to maximize natural assets in a way that engages residents, promotes wellness, attracts tourism, and increases economic development.