

Town of Tellico Plains, Tennessee

Recreation and Culture Plan



Prepared by:
The Tellico Plains Municipal Planning Commission and
State of Tennessee Local Planning Assistance Office
East Tennessee Region

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**Tellico Plains Recreation and Culture Plan
2005 - 2015**

Prepared For

The Tellico Plains Board of Mayor and Aldermen

Developed By

The Tellico Plains Municipal Planning Commission

Roger Powers, Chairman

Don Barney

Travis Hamilton

Ray Tallent

Harkey Yates

Assisted By

The Local Planning Assistance Office

Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development

East Tennessee Region

Knoxville, Tennessee

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Section I: Background and Introduction

Recreation and Culture as Town Goals

Identified in the *Tellico Plains Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan*, a key objective for the Town in the next ten years is to provide diverse quality cultural and recreational opportunities. The Plan also outlines specific policies that Tellico Plains should focus upon to achieve this objective. Selected policies pertaining to this Plan are listed below:

- The Town should promote the joint use of parks and other public facilities, especially schools.
- The Town should increase the opportunity for passive recreation through creation of a Town-wide greenbelt/greenway system that includes walking and biking trails.
- Community and neighborhood parks should be developed and appropriately located within the Town.
- The Town should maximize the use of public recreation land through close coordination with federal, state, and county officials.
- The Town should encourage the creation of public access to the Tellico River within the Town limits.

This Plan is aimed at providing an inventory and assessment of the Town's recreation and cultural assets, while identifying linkages, coordination, and potential impacts upon residents and commerce. The inventory consists of routes, structures, as well as spaces that provide or have the potential to foster increased recreational opportunities and cultural awareness.

Recreation, Culture, and Quality of Life

Throughout the twentieth century and into the new millennium, the public sector has made an effort to provide its citizens with different forms of recreation. Whether it is walking trails, athletic courts, museums, or just open space, Americans have recognized that recreation is a fundamental of a healthy life. Local governments have also recognized this fact and continue to take an active role in providing recreational and cultural opportunities to increase their residents' quality of life.

Nestled at the base of mountains, in the midst of a National Forest, and along the scenic Tellico River, Tellico Plains is inherently surrounded by natural forms of recreation and culture. These aesthetic qualities are coupled with man-made points of interest as well. The aim of this Plan is to identify what natural and constructed aspects are present in and around the Town, how they can be better used or improved, and how they are and can be linked to provide a thriving cohesive recreational and cultural network.

As recognized in the *Tellico Plains Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan*, the Town has numerous opportunities for renovation of historical sites such as the Town Center and

reuse of abandoned sites conveniently located within the heart of Tellico Plains. If the Town is to be truly prepared for growth, sufficient recreational opportunities should be identified, expanded, and properly connected to maximize their use and preserve the open space qualities found today.

Residents' quality of life is often judged by both material and intangible things. Where automobiles, homes, and other goods can be physically seen, there are also many "untouchables" that contribute to an individual or family's overall well being. These aspects may include a steady job, social interaction, and opportunity for leisure. Although people generally seek leisure activity on their own, public recreation helps to create different leisure opportunities that have possible social interaction with other members of the community. Recreation and culture can be a mode to help unite the community and help raise its overall morale and quality of life.

Section II: Recreation and Culture Inventory

Routes

The Town of Tellico Plains is located in southern Monroe County at the axis of four routes. Within the corporate limits pass State Route 68, Highway 360 (Ballplay Road), the Cherohala Skyway, and the Tellico River.

State Route 68

Serving as the primary access to Tellico Plains from Monroe County, the route extends north to Madisonville, Sweetwater, and Interstate Highway 75. Southbound, Highway 68 goes to Coker Creek and into Polk County. As identified in the *Tellico Plains Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan 2004 - 2014*, the average daily traffic count on Highway 68 north of the existing town limit had tripled between 1990 - 2000. This signifies an increase in travel to and from Tellico Plains as well as through the Town.

Highway 68 Artisan Trail

Connecting Tellico Plains and Coker Creek, Highway 68 doubles as an “artisan trail” through this area. As many as nineteen shops can be found along this stretch of highway, with unique arts and crafts handmade by local artisans. A large percentage of the features shops are actually located within the Town limits and comprise a portion of Tellico Plains’ cultural assets.

Highway 360 (Ballplay Road)

Terminating at Tellico Plains, Route 360 follows the Tellico River through rural Monroe County to the Town of Vonore at U.S. Highway 441. It is near that point that the Tellico River also intersects with the Little Tennessee River. The sole bridge crossing the River in Tellico Plains is found on Ballplay Road, which connects the Town with some developing areas that include the KOA Kampground and rental cabins east along the River.

Cherohala Skyway

The Cherohala Skyway (State Route 165) is anchored on one end in the heart of Tellico Plains at Route 68. The Skyway stretches approximately 52 miles through the Cherokee National Forest to Robbinsville, North Carolina. Elevations along the route range from 920 feet in Tellico Plains to over 5400 feet in North Carolina. Some key attractions along the way include Bald River Falls, Hooper Cove, and the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest.

Oosterneck Creek, located just miles from Tellico Plains, provides an opportunity for canoeists as well as observers and fishermen. Along the lengthy road are several trailheads, scenic vistas, campgrounds, and picnic areas. The Cherohala Skyway provides a great opportunity for both local residents and regional visitors to experience the natural offerings and explore what the Town has to offer.

Tellico River

This waterway originates in the mountains east of the Town and flows approximately 28 miles to its confluence with the Little Tennessee River near Vonore. The Tellico Blueway Group has inventoried established boat ramps, put-ins, take-outs, and other points of note such as the Sequoyah Birthplace Museum. Just like the Cherohala Skyway, this has potential to become a recreational route with a terminal end in Tellico Plains.

Walking Trail

The Town Walking Trail currently extends from the park near the Community Center to the Cherohala Skyway. However, grant money has been secured for the extension of the trail from the existing location to the Skyway between the Tourism Information Center, Library, and Charles Hall Museum. The extension plan is part of the proposed Botanical Gardens plan. Money for this project should be awarded sometime in 2005.

Sidewalks

Where connectivity plays an important role in maximizing use and effectiveness of the Town's existing recreation and cultural assets, sidewalks are key to promoting a walkable community. Since this aspect is important to linking new and existing opportunities, this Plan will focus more in-depth with a sidewalk assessment.

Spaces

The low-density, rural atmosphere of south central Monroe County and the Cherokee National Forest does not end at the Town's corporate limits. Tellico Plains boasts a variety of open spaces both developed and undeveloped such as the following:

Public Park

The park located on Bank Street near the Community Center offers 2 baseball fields, a tennis court, a basketball court, and a play area for kids and other youth activities. The Town Walking Trail currently has a terminal end at this park, connecting it to the Skyway through open land.

Town Square/War Memorial

The historic Town Square boasts a row of shop fronts an ample parking for such commercial activity. These retail establishments and restaurants have been fitted with uniform awnings, while new trees and planting areas have spruced up this center of activity. A gazebo is located between the commercial area and the Town Hall down Southard Street, and is freshly painted to match the other restorative efforts. The Square should serve as a center for the newly formed Tellico Plains Merchants Association, aimed at improving the commercial climate of the Town for residents and visitors alike.

Botanical Gardens

Money for the proposed Botanical Gardens has been secured and is scheduled to be released in 2005. The Gardens are planned in the area behind the Charles Hall Museum

and Library. They will be bounded by the existing Walking Trail that stretches from the Public Park to the Skyway. A proposed extension of the Trail system will actually bisect the Gardens and provide another non-vehicular access point to/from the Skyway. The Botanical Gardens are planned to contain a fountain, pavilion, benches, strolling paths, and an assortment of plantings, trees, and open space for the community to enjoy.

Arts and Crafts District

An area of Town centered on the Memorial Drive-Scott Street intersection can be considered a hub for local artisan shops. In fact, Scott Street Gallery becomes a spot for live music on Tuesday nights as local musicians and residents gather in the heart of Town. In close proximity to the Town Square, this district contains several locally owned establishments including:

- Scott Street Gallery - carvings, photography, original paintings, and more
- Weaving Arts Studio (Scott Street) - textile & fiber arts
- The Stone Cottage (Scott Street) - pottery & paintings
- Tellico Arts Center (Scott Street) - local art
- The Castle (Scott Street) - pottery and sculpture
- Tellico Flowers & Gallery (Stout Street) - paintings, prints, and floral design
- Tellico Trading Company (Highway 165) - local arts & crafts, and furniture
- Tellico Grains (Depot Street) - artisan breads & pastries
- Michael Hannan Prints (Memorial Drive) - paintings, landscapes, and prints

KOA Kampground

Located between the Cherohala Skyway, Tellico River, and an apple orchard, the 20-acre campground boasts a variety of outdoor-oriented amenities. The site includes a swimming pool, volleyball court, horseshoe pits, and a river walk. Both campsites and rental cabins are available, and a meeting room can be rented out for events. Since it is along the River, fishing and a river walk are also part of the complex.

Structures

An inventory of recreational and cultural assets would not be complete without a look at the buildings and structures that help shape the community. Within the Town and the surrounding areas are a variety of places that offer things to do, provide history and information, and house services and unique commercial activities.

Tellico Plains Public Library

Part of the Monroe County Library system, this branch contains over 7,500 books as well as a collection of audio and video materials. A relatively new construction, it is located near the museum and visitors center at the beginning of the Cherohala Skyway.

Charles Hall Museum & Gift Shop

This museum provides a living history of the Town, including a wide array of vintage photographs detailing Tellico Plains' past. A scale model of 1911 Tellico Plains is also on display with an active locomotive setup. The founder and long-time local resident,

Charles Hall has gathered impressive collections of Native American artifacts, toys, telephones, and weapons. A visitor to this museum would be impressed to see an authentic Ford Model T on display along with all of the other pieces.

Cherohala Skyway Visitors Center

Owned and operated by a collection of public groups including Monroe County and the USDA Forest Service, the Visitors Center has a friendly staff with a large assortment of information pertaining to the Town, County, and National Forest region. Pamphlets for local businesses, attractions, restaurants, and lodging can be found here along with several maps.

Tellico Plains City Hall

The center of local government in Tellico Plains, City Hall is located in an addition constructed in 1949. Along with administrative offices, one can find the Police Department headquarters here. The jail is in the rear of City Hall, which is actually the original structure that dates back to 1927.

Tellico Plains Community Center

Located adjacent to the Town park, the Community Center contains two meeting rooms of differing size. In addition to public and community meetings, the Center is also available to rent for special events.

Tellico Plains Elementary and High Schools

Besides offering public education services to the local residents, these places also provide a recreational hub for students. Both schools have football fields, indoor basketball courts, and baseball fields.

ILLUSTRATION 1
Local Area Map w/ Points of Interest

Section III: What Can Be Done?

Key Conclusions

The collection of information regarding Tellico Plains' cultural and recreational assets has provided the Town, its residents, and the planning commission with several opportunities to improve and build upon them. In the introduction, it was mentioned that the Tellico Plains Land Use and Transportation Policy Plan had established several goals that focused on these aspects. From this preliminary study and the associated scoping sessions, the following issues have been pushed to the forefront:

- Public access to the Tellico River is very important to the Town for two main reasons. This could be accomplished with a canoe launching ramp and/or beach along the riverbank. First, the residents will be provided with another recreational alternative that channels a key part of the Town's existence. Second, creating such an amenity can help efforts to attract visitors to the area. These visitors can also be enticed with both the natural opportunities that this would provide and a cultural draw that fits into Tellico Plains' historic, artisan-based economy.
- The pedestrian circulation system needs upgrading and expansion. Similar to a river access project, this has the potential to benefit both residents and merchants. Where grants have already been applied for to meet some of these needs, other target areas in Town still exist.
- Part of the circulation system upgrades could include developing pedestrian routes to help circulate people through the artisan business center and to the recreational features. With such a close-centered community, promoting walking and biking trails through Town and the surrounding area could help increase patronage of area business and use of Tellico Plains' recreational facilities.

Connection with the Local Economy

When considering the impacts of recreation and culture upon the community, a blind eye should not be given to economic and financial impacts or needs. There are two sides to the economic picture in municipal programs and this subject is no different. One should understand potential economic improvements in the overall scheme as well as financial expenditures required to fulfill any goal.

Nearly all public projects, recreational and cultural included, must be performed with some level of expenditure. There is no doubt that such projects should be justified in serving the health, welfare, and prosperity of the community. Proper cost valuation and budgeting is important to bring it to fruition. In recreational and cultural projects, one of the largest and most difficult areas in financing and coordinating is land acquisition. Through the course of this Plan, proposals and goals may present opportunities that

would require municipal access or acquisition of land held in private. The following are some options to a municipality in the implementation of such plans:

- *Purchase:* A traditional way to obtain land, this option would require the Town to directly purchase the land from the owner. Although a costly method, the funding for outright purchasing of land can be obtained through grants, loans, bonds, or tax revenue.
- *Gifts:* Many parks and recreation systems have been bolstered by the generosity of landowners or non-profit groups. This is a very attractive option for the municipality in that little or no cost is required to secure a site.
- *Easements:* Without having to actually obtain the property, the Town could enter into a cooperative agreement with a private owner(s) like a lease, use permit, or some form of an easement.

There should be no doubt, however, that a well-planned and cost-effective recreation project is a benefit to the community. These benefits incorporate both calculable and intangible dividends. For a resident, recreation and culture presents opportunities for leisure and educational elements. It has been noted that education, recreation, and culture effectively work as a team and none of those elements are as efficient without the others.

Recreation and culture can also prove beneficial to the economic growth of the community. These aspects are not only enjoyable by the Town's residents, but could become an attraction to visitors from throughout the surrounding region. How does this translate to the local business community? If the Town is able to draw visitors to enjoy the natural and built environment, those visitors are likely to bring the community financial gains if they can eat, shop, and lodge there. The evolution of a strong local economy and recreation program should be coordinated. This should help to return tax spending to the community in the form of increased recreational and cultural opportunities from increased tax revenues.

Incorporating These Issues into Local Decision Making

A set of recreation-oriented goals is more likely to be achieved if included in the overall scheme of providing public services to the community. Fortunately, the Town has a recently completed land use and transportation plan that does consider the needs of improving the recreational and cultural value of Tellico Plains. When the public and decision-makers are aware of how improving and providing for the cohesiveness of these aspects can help the community as a whole, the program is more likely to succeed and fully serve the public.

Organization of these goals into a Plan such as this one can help to create and improve relationships between individuals, agencies, and other groups. Likewise, detailing costs and benefits with proposed time frames will better serve those who make decisions in the

community. It is the intent of this Plan to inventory present recreational and cultural features of the Town, propose improvements and connectivity, and produce goals and recommendations to the local government and all interested parties through public input and planning commission collaboration.

Section IV: Tellico River Access

It is well understood that the Tellico River has been a key economic and cultural asset to the Town, its residents, and the surrounding area for generations. However, there is currently no public access within the corporate limits for residents and visitors to utilize. A plan of action should be constructed in order to make this wish a reality. Below, three sites are listed as possible locations for this project along with proposed plans for each and potential sources of funding. In addition, each potential area will be analyzed from the bases of location, cost, and other factors.

As a note, there has been local movement towards creating a “blueway”, or a water trail developed to access locations by watercraft. Potential assets that such a route could bring include nature-based recreation, public health and activity, environmental awareness, and the enjoyment of local recreation and culture. The Tellico River flows through an area rich with heritage and opportunities for both education and recreation. A group working to establish the Tellico Blueway notes that the route is proposed to run between Tellico Plains and Vonore. If such a route were to be used by numerous regional visitors, the Town could benefit economically as well. Creation of a Tellico Plains Blueway Park would truly be an asset to local and regional residents as well as the local economy.

Site Selection

Potential locations for public Tellico River access must take into account accessibility, size of site, and grade for canoe launching. Illustration 2 identifies the sites selected by the planning commission as viable areas for the Town to provide river access.

- **Site #1: Ballplay Road Bridge**

The area around the Ballplay Road Bridge is a prime location for providing public river access. Placed at the top of the list, this site is near the Cherohala Skyway so vehicular and pedestrian accessibility can both be accommodated. Land near the River is relatively level, but well below grade of the surrounding roadways.

Visibility of this site is very high for both locals and passers-by. Placement of the public access park in this area may create a node of activity that could pull future development towards it and/or preserve a small riverfront parcel for generations to come. The high level of visibility and proximity to the Tellico River may also require more funds to obtain enough property to create another excellent recreational opportunity.

- Pros:**
- Vehicular and non-vehicular accessible.
 - Well visible from nearby roads (Cherohala Skyway & Ballplay Road)
 - Land is flat.
 - Plenty of area to create a recreational asset.

- Cons:** - Cost of land.
- Site is well below grade of surrounding roadways.

- **Site #2: Behind Charles Hall Museum and Visitors Center**
Along Cherohala Skyway, there is a recently created hub of culture and history that includes the Tellico Plains Public Library, Charles Hall Museum & Gift Shop, and Cherohala Skyway Visitors Center. In addition, the walking trail and proposed botanical gardens are in the immediate vicinity. The Hunt Branch located behind these buildings is somewhat shallow, but does flow to the Tellico River.

Since the Hunt Branch flows west-to-east towards the Tellico River, there are multiple locations for this project. Because of this flexibility, public access could be sought near the cultural buildings or closer to the Tellico River. In either instance, access is available either through the Museum/Visitors Center parking lot or Babcock Street. Regardless of exactly where it would be sited, the park should be connected to the walking trail via a greenway along the creek and/or the Cherohala Skyway sidewalk.

- Pros:** - Location near the cultural hub.
- Parking is plentiful around the Museum and Visitors Center.
- Nearby other recreational features.
- Multiple locations along Hunt Branch.

- Cons:** - Hunt Branch is shallow, and may need dredging.
- Some bridges exist between site and Tellico River.

- **Site #3: Near Old Bridge Upstream from Ballplay Road.**
The final site is located near an abandoned bridge upstream from the Ballplay Road Bridge. Located a bit farther from Town, this area is squeezed between the Tellico River and the Cherohala Skyway. This site is likely the least desirable because of its distance from the Town's heart, which includes the shopping district and its cultural buildings. However, this site is located at the end of the Cherohala Skyway sidewalk.

- Pros:** - Cost of land.
- Along Tellico River.
- Located along existing sidewalk system.

- Cons:** - Farther from Town.
- Site design may be limited by size of land.

ILLUSTRATION 2
Proposed River Access Sites & Parcel Information

Access and Connectivity

As part of the overall Recreation and Culture Plan, the public river access aspect needs to be connected to the Town's existing and proposed features, especially routes accessible not only to vehicles but pedestrian and bicyclists alike. Looking at Illustration 2 again, accessibility is a very important theme in this Plan.

Sites #1 and #2 apparently have the upper hand in this area, being located near the Cherohala Skyway and its sidewalks. In fact, an argument can be made for Site #2 having the best accessibility options with the nearby Skyway, walking trail, and expansive parking lots for the Charles Hall Museum and Visitors Center. Whereas parking may be a large part of the site design for Sites #1 and #3, an agreement with these organizations may allow for parking to be shared in the development of Site #2.

Where Site #3 lacks in this concern is its inaccessibility to sidewalks. If this is the case, the only mode of transportation to Tellico Plains' river access will be via automobile. Combined with the constricted size of the site, parking may become a land-consuming aspect of designing the facility. From an access and connectivity standpoint, Sites #1 and #2 vastly overshadow the proposed Site #3. Within the entire Plan's perspective, this is very important to its implementation and utility but must be weighed with other considerations in mind as outlined above.

Funding and Acquisition

Illustration 2 also displays the parcelization of land near each of the three potential sites, with ownership and related information. In conjunction with finding funding opportunities, land acquisition for this project is another key to the project's success.

With shrinking municipal budgets becoming a normal environment to work in within the local government framework, a large part of funding recreation and cultural projects is often found in the form of public grant moneys. Understanding this, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) is responsible for administering the following grant programs through its Recreational Educational Services (RES) division, which may be contacted at (615) 532-0748.

- *Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF)* - Provides grants to local government entities for the purchase of land for parks, natural areas, greenways, and recreation facilities. In addition, funds may be used for trail development and capital improvements to such parks.
- *Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF)* - Established to assist in preserving and assuring accessibility to citizens of all future generations to quality outdoor recreation resources. These grants are available for acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

- *Recreation Trails Program* - Made available through the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), these funds are allocated for recreation trail projects. Although various groups are eligible for these grants, government agencies are given priority.

Because this Tellico River access project involves both the establishment of a trail (Tellico Blueway) and a local park based on a water feature, application to any of the above grant sources can be adequately justified. Other references for grant searches include the East Tennessee Development District, the Center for Federal Domestic Assistance, and the Federal Government's grant website (www.grants.gov). However, there may be alternative funding opportunities that the Town may consider pursuing, which include donations, easements, and conservation trusts such as:

- *The Trust for Public Land* - (www.tpl.org) This organization can assist with developing public-private partnerships for city parks and negotiating for new properties for parks. They have helped nearly 200 communities throughout the nation complete over 400 park projects.
- *The Land Trust for Tennessee* - (www.landtrusttn.org) A 501(c)(3) nonprofit, this organization can be used to work with willing landowners to create a conservation easement. This could be used by the Town to obtain a long-term lease for the placement of public access to the Tellico River. Pursuing this option may be somewhat of a last resort since the original owner will still own the land and improvement to the site may be limited.
- *Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA)* - A community resource of the National Park Service, Rivers & Trails staff works with local governments to conserve rivers, preserve open space, and develop trails and greenways. This service is not a funding source, but could provide technical expertise for developing the regional water trail (Tellico Blueway). More information on this will be discussed in greater detail within the Route Development section.

Section V: Sidewalk System Inventory and Extension Plan

The sidewalk assessment map and improvement plan is designed with the intent of improving accessibility within Tellico Plains for increased utility of local recreation and cultural assets, reduced dependence on vehicular travel, and increased circulation within the central business district. The map and improvement plan can be utilized as a basis for future grant proposals and public decisions involving sidewalks, pedestrian access, and other related projects.

Existing Sidewalk System

An initial sidewalk inventory was taken in Tellico Plains during April 2005. A system of marking both existing and proposed sidewalks and pedestrian trails was designed under the following criteria for current and future designation, as shown in Illustration 3:

- ◆ “GOOD” (green line) - The sidewalk surface is stable and safe.
- ◆ “OK” (yellow line) - The sidewalk surface is somewhat broken and cracked, but still generally considered to be safe.
- ◆ “POOR” (red line) - The sidewalk surface is unsafe and unusable.
- ◆ Proposed (blue line) - A sidewalk that has not been constructed yet, but planned for and funded.

Each existing and proposed sidewalk section in the Town was evaluated and mapped according to its relative condition on a base map. This current inventory was then used to help guide the planning process for future system proposals such as extensions and renovations with the intent of ongoing evaluations and updating.

As of the April 2005 field assessment, there are approximately 12,640 linear feet of sidewalks in the Town of Tellico Plains (see Illustration 3). Of this distance, over 11,400 linear feet are classified as GOOD sidewalks. Most of the GOOD sidewalks are located along the Cherohala Skyway and the walking trail.

The Town has also applied for and was awarded a grant for the extension of the current walking trail that begins at the municipal park. Grant monies will be used to extend the trail on out to the sidewalk along the Cherohala Skyway. Also sidewalk will be taken from the Babcock Street/Barn Street intersection out to the Skyway, essentially completing a non-vehicular route from the park to the Town Center.

Current OK sections of sidewalk in Tellico Plains include a short stretch on the west and east sides of Babcock Street and fragmented pieces on the west side of Scott Street. However, the broken section on the east side of Babcock Street is likely to be upgraded in the proposed improvements already funded. The elevated sidewalk located along Main Street east of City Hall is also in fair condition and could become a key link between the Town Center and Cherohala Skyway.

ILLUSTRATION 3

Sidewalk System (Existing and Planned)

Future Proposals

The final step in producing the Sidewalk System Plan is determining what would be beneficial upgrades to the existing system. This process involves input from the Tellico Plains Municipal Planning Commission and staff, public officials, and interested citizens. Taking into account other planning tools, studies, and proposed improvement projects, these upgrades can become reality with the cooperation of these parties and both public and private funding sources. Listed below are proposals for two sidewalk projects that would benefit the Town from economic, recreational, and aesthetic points of view.

Town Center Loop (Proposal #1)

If the commercial core for Tellico Plains' tourist economy is located in the Scott Street/Town Square area, a safe and defined way for pedestrians to circulate through the area would be a benefit. Illustration 3 shows where these improvements could help in upgrading the condition of the shopping district. Other potential benefits to the Town could include an increase of pedestrians passing by historic Town Hall and the War Memorial. The next section of this Plan will discuss more about developing this route and what other improvements could play together in enhancing the attractiveness of Tellico Plains' shopping district. Pride in the Town's cultural and natural heritage should work hand-in-hand with efforts to improve the local economy.

This extension could become important in providing residents and visitors with a "park-and-walk" system. Expanding the sidewalk system further south along Scott Street and wrapping around to Southard Street is necessary to safely conduct pedestrians if the central business district sees a considerable increase in patronage. Increasing business here will likely create a higher demand for parking as well. Although planning for a "parking shortage" at some point is not particularly in the scope of this Plan, it is imaginable that some of the parking south of downtown may be needed for those vehicles. Extending the sidewalks down to Harrison Street would be an effective planning measure if this parking situation were to occur.

Old Elementary School Site Connection (Proposal #2)

Previous plans to renovate the Old Tellico Plains Elementary School building into a modern community center nearing fruition were abruptly halted because of fire. However, there is still a good probability that the site will be redeveloped. Increased traffic flow to this location is imminent if a commercial, multi-family residential, or lodging facility is constructed there. It would be beneficial to provide non-vehicular access to this site in these circumstances to promote walking, biking, and the safety of those people doing so.

Illustration 3 proposes the placement of sidewalks along paralleling Harrison and Spence Streets. If completed in conjunction with Proposal #1, the linked systems would help to channel people from Scott and Southard Streets to and from the community center. Any commercial or lodging activity on this site could use these sidewalks to connect with the arts and crafts shopping district. Tellico Plains may be able to do more with the current amount of parking in the CBD if non-vehicular connectivity is improved and utilized. In

addition, these sidewalks would also be part of a network to the Cherohala Skyway, the Town's cultural hub, and its recreational features like the botanical gardens and walking trail.

Funding Sources for Sidewalk Improvements

Besides using municipal money to build and repair sidewalks or provide other public works services, a common alternative way to help fund these proposed projects is through public grants. As in the previous section, the following are some sources of public moneys that can assist in the construction and upgrade of Tellico Plains' sidewalk network, administered by the State of Tennessee Department of Economic & Community Development's (ECD) Community Development division:

- *Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) Program* - A flexible federally funded program aimed at achieving four goals, one of them being "build and improve Appalachia's infrastructure to make the region economically competitive. The non-highway funding from the ARC could be justified for these sidewalk expansion projects since they are based on improving three aspects of Tellico Plains: the non-vehicular circulation pattern, access to its recreational and cultural opportunities, and the local business climate (as an ultimate benefit to a tourism-based economy). These applications are typically due by the end of June.
- *Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program* - Every grant or loan through this program must either 1) benefit low and moderate income persons, 2) eliminate or prevent slums and blight, or 3) address imminent health and safety problems. The program offers "grants for community livability" and these proposed sidewalk projects are part of the Town's mission of fulfilling that goal. Applications for these grants are typically required to be submitted by February.
- *Economic Development Administration (EDA) Grants* - The Public Works Program within the EDA framework is designed to empower distressed communities to revitalize, expand, and upgrade their physical infrastructure. Although there are stipulations regarding what the infrastructure is for, these projects could conform because they are intended to "diversify local economies, and generate or retain long-term, private sector jobs and investment."

As with all grant applications, resources such as the East Tennessee Development District can provide assistance. ETDD also helps with finding grants as well, since the examples listed above are through more mainstream funding sources. Federal grant indexes such as the website www.grants.gov are also beneficial resources.

Section VI: Route and District Development

Earlier sections of this Recreation and Culture Plan have inventoried local assets and discussed improvements and expansions thereof. The route and district development section is just as important in the mission to tie Tellico Plains' spaces and structures together with non-vehicular access routes designed for better utility of these assets and increased economic activity.

District Identification

The following areas within Tellico Plains have been established through visual identification, map analysis, and logical connection of land uses. Evolution of the Town will continue to change these areas and different peoples' conceptions of where places are. Where the areas listed below are somewhat simplistic in nature at this point, efforts to better define and connect them will hopefully take place with the guidance of the objectives and proposals detailed later.

Cultural and Historic Hub

Recent construction in the Town has helped to create the Cherohala Skyway and a collection of cultural centers near its intersection with Main Street. The public library, Cherohala Skyway Visitor's Center, and Charles Hall Museum are located in close proximity to each other, offering residents and visitors venues of local history, education, and regional awareness.

Recreation District

To the north of the Cultural and Historic Hub lie the Tellico Plains Park, Community Center, and Botanical Gardens (under construction). These facilities provide venues for both passive and active recreation activities as well as a view of the adjacent Tellico River and its wide floodplain. As discussed in Section IV, siting of access to the river will play a large part in expanding the recreation district. Looking at the two "best" options for a river access park, this district may be further concentrated near these existing features or stretched out along the Cherohala Skyway towards the Ballplay Road bridge and the KOA Kampground.

Shopping District

The shopping (or arts & crafts) district in Tellico Plains is best characterized as being the area from the Town Square south to Harrison Street between Scott and Southard Streets. Although this is not the only commercial area in Town, it is likely to be the primary destination shopping district for regional residents and visitors. Although the focus of this Plan is not commercial growth per se, this district cannot be overlooked in the entire scheme. This district can also be widened to include the War Memorial and historic City Hall located on the periphery.

Putting it All Together

Since this Plan's primary focus is to improve the Town's recreation and cultural amenities, proper access to, from, and between these districts should be established. Developing the routes will help increase non-vehicular accessibility and visibility. A large part of connecting these districts has been addressed in the Sidewalk System Extension Plan, but this section will expand upon that even further by defining the following areas and paths.

Walking Trail/Cherohala Skyway

One of the most beneficial routes in Tellico Plains in recent history has been the walking trail between the park and Cherohala Skyway. With other linkages like Babcock Street, access to and from Town Square and the surrounding residential areas has been made easier. The walking trail extension (under construction) and the Cherohala Skyway form a long route somewhat paralleling the Tellico River with views of the Town and the natural landscape.

Downtown Circulation System

This route could be better described as a network through the Town's heart. Streets such as Main Street, Scott Street, Southard Street, Spence Street, and Harrison Street in this area double as vehicular and non-vehicular accessways. Limited sidewalks exist in the system, but any proposal for expansion is an important one. If the Town wishes to increase patronage in the CBD, traffic will likely increase and the need for pedestrian safety will become greater. This network is central to the residential areas found west, south, and east of the district. Also, Babcock Street is a key link to the Cherohala Skyway and the other cultural and recreational features to the north.

Tellico River Blueway

Rushing out of the mountains and heading north from Tellico Plains, the Tellico River is a natural route that has predated any early human settlement. Section IV explains how this feature is such a huge asset to the area, especially if the Tellico River Blueway is made to be a more prominent recreational route between the Town and Vonore. The proposals for a public river access park play into this concept as a beginning point for canoe travelers. Development of the Blueway is a double-edged proposition in that it would be an obvious benefit to local and regional recreation as well as a unique economic draw to the Town.

Steps in Linking the Routes and Districts

Route and district development can be as simple as adding signage or as intricate as establishing guided tours through an area. The variety of Tellico Plains' attributes coupled with the limited area of the Town creates many opportunities in this aspect. As with many public projects, the limit to what can be accomplished often falls back upon the availability of funding. Since it is unclear as to exactly how much or how soon funding can be sought, the following proposals are varied in both magnitude and cost. A

plan must rely on the creation of visions and concepts, but at the same time be confined by fiscal realism.

Signage

After the construction of the Cherohala Skyway, people traveling through Tellico Plains may not realize that a collection of arts and crafts shops are located only several hundred yards from this main thoroughfare. Pulling potential customers from the Skyway to the Town Center could be as simple as placing appropriate signage at the two intersections with Main Street. To achieve this purpose, a sign at the eastern intersection would be best placed in the north right-of-way of the Skyway pointing into the CBD. Likewise, a sign located near the cultural hub would draw off of the attention already being given to those structures that almost command visual notice. Especially in this circumstance where the intent of such signage is more for grabbing attention than for displaying information, the design must take into account the local setting and share some sort of a common theme with other area features.

The linked walking trail and Cherohala Skyway pedestrian route is not only a transportation feature important to the Town, but a key passive recreation asset as well. Upon completion of the trail's extension, there will be a route extending over one mile in length. Since walking is a healthy low-impact recreational activity, residents of all ages can benefit from utilizing this trail. Simple distance signage can help walkers to keep track of how far they have walked. Since some residents use the park's parking lot as a place to start their exercise, distance could begin at the trail's terminus there and go all the way to Ballplay Road.

Cherohala Skyway Banners

As mentioned several times in this Plan, the Cherohala Skyway is a major thoroughfare through Tellico Plains. It conducts traffic into the Town as well as through the mountains and into North Carolina. Combined with tactically placed signage to conduct people into the CBD, a progression of banners with a particular theme may help define this main corridor as well as link it to efforts within the shopping district.

Shopping District Lighting

In the attempt to create a close-feeling shopping district where a quaint craft and art-based business community is located, there should be a common element (or elements) that ties the buildings together. Some cities attempt to do this with architectural or signage standards for a district's businesses, but the proper land use controls are not currently in place in Tellico Plains. These standards may come about if the need arises down the road, but currently a feature like unique lighting (gas lamps, ornate light poles, poles with hanging planters, etc.) could reach the same desired effect. Because this project may be somewhat costly as compared to other proposals like signage, it would be advised that this be undertaken as part of the sidewalk improvement efforts. In fact, construction of lighting should take place where sidewalks exist or are proposed to be built.

Southard Street Memorial Park

Southard Street creates sort of a buffer between the commercial activity in the shopping district and the residential land uses to the east. However, since City Hall and the War Memorial are located on this street, it would be important to convert the strip of land between Spence Street and Main Street into an urban park or reflection area. This grassy area would not necessarily need to be “constructed” into a traditional park, but simple improvements could be made such as flower beds, a gravel or mulched trail, and plaques detailing historic buildings and activities such as City Hall and the War Memorial.

Section VII: Summary of Findings and Goals

Key Findings

During the development of the Tellico Plains Recreation and Culture Plan, a number of findings have been produced. They encompass concepts ranging from visual elements to conceptual relationships among the Town's characteristics. The following list has been compiled from the previous six sections and the work used to produce them:

1. Tellico Plains is anchored at the intersection of two regional scenic routes: the Cherohala Skyway and State Highway 68 (designated scenic byway).
2. The Tellico River is a major historical, cultural, and economic factor in the Town's development.
3. Within the last five years, development of the Town's cultural and recreational systems has taken off. This is evident with the construction of the walking trail, the Tellico Plains Public Library, Charles Hall Museum and Gift Shop, and the Cherohala Skyway Visitors Center.
4. Tellico Plains' artisan community is concentrated in the "shopping district" located in the heart of the Town.
5. Public river access is important from the standpoints of increasing recreational opportunity and expanding the economic viability of the Town.
6. The sidewalk system is generally in good shape, but is also in need of expansion for the improvement of non-vehicular circulation.
7. Development of pedestrian routes can help with circulation through the recreation and cultural venues, including the artisan shopping district.
8. Generally speaking, improvements made to municipal recreation and cultural systems can have positive side effects in other areas, including the local economy.
9. Public grant monies are viable sources of funding for these types of projects, but are not as abundant as in the past.
10. Establishment of a Tellico River Blueway between Tellico Plains and Vonore will require the creation of a canoe launching point in each community.
11. A river access park should be conveniently located with access by both vehicular and non-vehicular transportation.
12. Both the Cherohala Skyway and walking trail make up the majority of sidewalks in good condition.

13. Pedestrian circulation infrastructure should be improved in and around the shopping district in anticipation of increased patronage.
14. Route development efforts to promote Tellico Plains' recreational, cultural, and economic districts can include signage, banners, and lighting with a common theme.

Planning Through Goal-Setting

It is likely that the information and proposals set forth in this Plan appear to be ambitious in their entirety for the Town of Tellico Plains. However, a set of goals can be used to organize the proposals into manageable (and achievable) projects that may incorporate elements from one or more of the Plan's recommendations. The following goals are derived from the findings listed above as well as the entire document:

1. Apply for public grant money to obtain land for a public river access park, which has the potential to become the Town's recreation anchor and a regional attraction as both an active and passive recreational activity.
2. Promote non-vehicular transportation in the Town by expanding and upgrading the sidewalk system, especially in the shopping district where remote parking can be maximized.
3. Coordinate efforts with private groups to help realize the regional Tellico Blueway project, which would connect Tellico Plains with Vonore via the Tellico River.
4. Construct appropriate signage to tie the Town's recreation and cultural elements together (i.e. walking trail, Cherohala Skyway, and Town Center) as well as provide direction to the shopping district.
5. Investigate the use of lighting, banners, or other similar accessories to create a sense of place within the recreation district, cultural hub, and shopping district.
6. Consider converting the strip of land in the Southard Street right-of-way into a passive urban park or reflection area that would act as a buffer area between the shopping district, City Hall, the War Memorial, and the surrounding residential areas.
7. Prepare a Vacant/Redevelopable Land Plan that would coordinate planning efforts with private ownership for the development of prime sites throughout Town, including the Old Tellico Plains Elementary School Site.