

# All About Little River, Big Future

## ***What is Little River Big Future?***

Little River Big Future is an experimental planning process designed and conducted by the Community Partnership Center of the University of Tennessee. The goal of this project is to get residents of Blount County more involved in making decision that will affect the future of the Little River Watershed.

## ***Hasn't there already been a lot of planning in Blount County? What makes this process different?***

This process will be very different from what you may have experienced in the past. Conventional planning processes are expert driven. Experts in various field make decisions about the future, then hold public meetings to get a response to their ideas.

Increasingly, planners are adopting stakeholder driven processes. Stakeholders, people who live and work in the community, make the decisions and help develop recommendations for the future. Experts still play an important role in the planning process. They offer advice and describe alternative solutions, but residents ultimately make the decisions which characterize the final plan.

Stakeholder driven processes are also known as participatory processes, because they call on ordinary citizens to actively participate in the decision making process. Over the past several years, Blount County has been a leader in the development of public participation. Many recent local plans, including the 2003 Water Quality Plan, used extensive public input to develop recommendations for the county's future. Little River, Big Future is an effort to build on these experiences and get residents even more involved in planning for the protection and preservation of the watershed.

Over the next few months, we will be using tools and methods used for watershed planning in other parts of the world that have not been widely adopted in the United States. We hope that our experiences here will not only lead to better water quality for the Little River, but also help develop ways that people in other communities can help improve their environment.

## ***Why use a participatory planning process? What was the matter with the old way of doing things?***

Participatory processes, like Little River, Big Future, have a number of important advantages over conventional planning processes:

- No one knows the watershed better than the people who live and work in it every day. By

getting these people involved in the planning process, we are much more likely to find solutions that work.

- Since residents take part in every phase of the planning process, they are much more likely to support the plan when it is finished.
- Government agencies and private foundations like to fund proposals that have public support. Ideas coming from participatory plans are more likely to get funding.
- Participatory plans tend to stress education and cooperation over regulation.
- For these reasons and others, participatory plans are more likely to be successful. In fact, studies show that participatory plans are more than twice as likely to be implemented than traditional plans.

***I don't know anything about water quality. How can I possibly help develop a plan?***

To help people learn more about some of the issues facing the Little River, we will be conducting a series of educational forums over the next few weeks. These brief forums will help you learn more about your watershed, its wildlife, threats to its health and preservation, and teach you some easy things you can do to help protect water quality in your community.

***How much of my time will this take?***

Not much, just a few evenings over the next several months to learn about and discuss local issues.

***What will be the result of this process?***

This process will result in the creation of a citizen generated plan with specific recommendations for improving and protecting the Little River Watershed.

***Sounds great. How can I get involved?***

Getting involved is easy. Just sign up to become part of Little River Big Future. Also feel free to invite your friends and neighbors to sign up or attend a forum or workshop. It is a free, fun, and easy way to help take care of your environment and help insure the future of your community.

For more information or to get involved call the Community Partnership Center of the University of Tennessee at 974-4542 or visit our web site at [www.littleriverbigfuture.org](http://www.littleriverbigfuture.org).

***Little River Big Future is a project of the Community Partnership Center of the University of Tennessee. Established in 1994, the CPC's mission is to link university resources with urban and rural grassroots community groups to understand and address the core problems facing low- and moderate- income communities. Project partners include TVA, the Tennessee Department of Environment and***

***Conservation, Blount County, and the Little River Watershed Association.***