

I am writing in opposition to 12-G-21-RZ and 12-A-21-SP. The area along Alcoa Highway from Woodson to Maloney has been the focus of many different studies and proposals that eventually lead to the construction now nearing completion. The construction in progress was fully examined in Alternative 1 of the Alcoa Highway Small area Plan (see attached). Changes were recommended for property along McCarrell Lane on the west side of the highway as well as properties adjacent to the highway at Ginn and South Roads. Under no alternative was rezoning of the property in question ever recommended. Even though a portion of it was taken for the new service road and entrance at Mount Vernon, the one change was to identify a portion of it as a Ridgetop and Hillside Protection area. I believe its highest and best use is to remain as currently zoned or see that it be included as a Ridgetop and Hillside Protection Area.

The Small Area Plan specifically includes the Objective of "5. Protect the character of neighborhoods adjacent to Alcoa Highway," and the Principal of "2. Create more intensive buffers for the adjacent established neighborhoods [Emphasis mine].

A major amenity of Martha Washington Heights since its inception had been a well buffered separation between the highway and the subdivision. An entrance sign at the highway was not merely decorative but helpful to visitors as even the presence of the neighborhood was otherwise obscured.

Those of us who have lived in MWH for a while also know the 'buffers' currently in place between the commercial businesses and the neighborhood have frequently provided inadequate protection. Until the City of Knoxville finally installed sewer lines in the commercial area, overtaxed and leaking septic systems of commercial businesses often produced a foul odor that drifted in the adjacent homesites. A cell tower was proposed, but delayed, that would have dominated the neighborhood skyline until opposition was unnecessary as a result of new County wide siting criteria. And then there was the two year bout to reduce noise pollution from the National Fitness pool area that penetrated more than a quarter of a mile into the neighborhood [I for one lived at that distance and could clearly hear the announced names of swimming contestants even though I was inside my home with doors and windows closed]. The remedy for the neighborhood was only accomplished after obtaining the cancelation of a "special" status for the the Center by the State Legislature. I mention these examples to illustrate how much MWH residents value the character of their neighborhood. I think I should also mention that this same property in the 80's was rumored to be the future site of a Hardee's. That lead to formation of the MWH Neighborhood Association to focus opposition. Yes, a Hardee's was eventually built but well within the established commercial area.

As I noted above the Small Area Plan calls for the creation more intensive buffers for adjacent established neighborhoods. The highway and service road construction has

already compromised that Principle. However, that is not a justifiable reason to further compromise the Principle by the rezoning of the property before you. Growing more commercial opportunities seems unrestrained. Growing or preserving buffers and green spaces once lost is typically irretrievable.

The commercial areas along both sides of this portion of Alcoa Highway offer some interesting possibilities for future commercial use, including commercial use that is far more compatible with our neighborhood. Given the many other future possibilities I urge the Commission to keep to the spirit and the letter of the Small Area Plan and reject the rezoning proposal.

Alcoa Highway Small Area Plan

Alcoa Highway and its adjacent development patterns will change significantly in the coming decade. Since the late 1970s, various proposals have been made for traffic capacity and safety improvements. Since 1985, average daily traffic has increased from 39,482 to 47,189 vehicles, an increase of 19.5%. The residential population surrounding the corridor has stayed relatively stable since 1970, with an average population of approximately 3,600 persons living in the area surrounding Alcoa Highway.

The dominant land uses contiguous to Alcoa Highway are commercial, office and civic institutional, with a large church campus south of the Maloney Road intersection. Commercial development began along Alcoa Highway around the 1950s/1960s. The dominant style of strip commercial development began in the 1960s with the construction of the Southgate Shopping Center. Other new commercial and civic institutional structures continued to develop until the mid-1980s/early 1990s. However, little new development or redevelopment has come to this corridor in recent years and vacancy rates of commercial structures have also risen.

The last neighborhood shopping center will likely become a church property in the coming year. One premise of the planning for this area has been consideration in creating a greater market potential. Along with the difficulties in highway access a population loss of about one thousand residents has impaired business success. According to the Urban Land Institute, a neighborhood shopping center is comprised of a "supermarket and drug store as the most common anchors."¹ Presently, the surrounding population, primarily residing in low-density residential subdivisions, is too low to support a neighborhood shopping center along the commercial strip.² Presently, Alcoa Highway is a four lane highway with many curb cuts for the adjacent commercial areas and neighborhood roads. High rates of speed and cars accessing the highway at many locations have contributed to increased traffic fatalities and accidents.

The most recent transportation improvement plans (dating from 2000) are being reviewed through the Environmental Assessment (EA) process by the Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT); the review is projected to end 2013. The project will add additional lanes to Alcoa Highway creating a six-lane highway with median separation. As of the 2000 design plans, the project provides additional access management for Alcoa Highway by creating fly-overs and interchanges for some of the existing at grade intersections and frontage roads for portions of the project. However, the design is still under review and frontage roads may not be part of the final design.

This project still must go through detailed engineering design, right-of-way acquisition and construction. Given that some improvements are expected to commence in the near future, the following concepts should be considered for development adjacent to Alcoa Highway.

The highway widening and new access roads will necessitate changes in the relationship of parking to existing buildings. For decades much of the retail activity was in response to easy-off, easy-on consumer trips. Although traffic in the corridor increased the number of households has remained stable since the 1970s. This has resulted in major retail changes, including significant vacancies and changes in use (retail services to storefront church).

The proposals and policies that are outlined on the following pages are premised on the expected narrowing in the depth of lots, a continued trend in less spontaneous shopping behavior (given that access will not be allowed directly from the highway), and more destination-oriented land uses (such as a health club, churches, offices and limited retail uses that meet day-to-day needs of the nearby neighborhoods). Also, rather than relying solely on a commercial, a mix of uses is proposed for the larger parcels making office and apartment uses more viable, especially with frontage roads construction.

The ultimate decision on Alcoa Highway improvements is critical to the adjacent future land uses. Frontage road improvements and grade separation would greatly foster economic development. Without those improvements, the development of more intense uses will be impaired. Once the TDOT decision is made, this small area plan should be revisited.

Alcoa Highway Small Area Plan Objectives

MPC staff has premised the development of this plan to address the following objectives.

1. Increase traffic safety along Alcoa Highway.
2. Create a sense of place and identity for Alcoa Highway by promoting local businesses and protecting/strengthening both commercial, office and residential areas.
3. Enhance and further promote the redevelopment of existing commercial areas, particularly for a grocery store or small market retailer.
4. Enhance connectivity and walkability of the area through sidewalks, greenways, and parks.
5. **Protect the character of neighborhoods adjacent to Alcoa Highway.**

MU-SCo-3:

Alcoa Highway Small Area

Since a decision has not been made on whether frontage roads will be part of this highway improvement project, two alternatives are included in this plan. Both alternatives would allow a mix of uses based on underutilized parcels and redevelopment opportunities for large commercial tracts.

Listed below are the transportation and land development principles for both alternatives.

Transportation and Land Development Principles

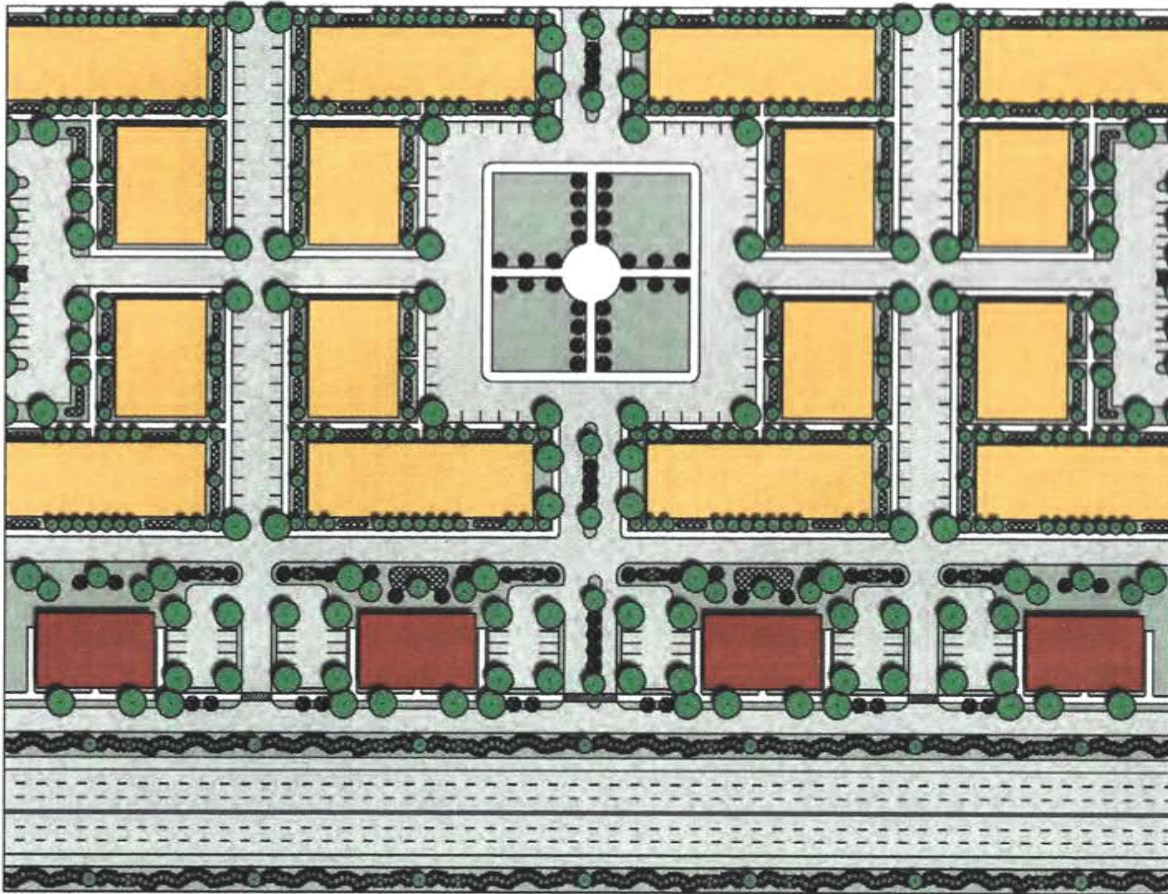
1. Consolidate access points onto highway or frontage roads and/or create interparcel access between properties.
2. **Create more intense buffers for the adjacent established neighborhoods.**
3. Diversify development to include commercial, office and, if frontage roads are built, medium to high density residential.
4. Reduce parking requirements to increase outparcel development potential for smaller office and commercial buildings.
5. Landscape parking and frontage areas to increase aesthetic appeal and reduce stormwater runoff.
6. Provide safe pedestrian and cyclist circulation throughout the area with walking and biking connections for the established neighborhoods and the Knox-Blount greenway.

¹Urban Land Institute, 1999, *Shopping Center Development Handbook*, p.53

² Ibid, p.46



The Village Plaza Shopping Center off Alcoa Highway is characterized by a high vacancy rate and extensive parking.



A conceptual design plan for reuse/redevelopment of a site utilizing the principles of the Alcoa Highway Small Area Plan: The red rooftops represent commercial or office buildings adjacent to the frontage roads, while the yellow roofs could be office or apartment development.

Alternative 1:

This alternative is based on Alcoa Highway improvements that would include six travel lanes, an interchange at Maloney and Montlake Roads, and two frontage roads (as proposed by TDOT in 2000).

Under this proposal, a mix of commercial, office and medium to high density residential uses would be allowed where larger tracts exist. The additional opportunity for residential density would increase support for retail, which is currently in decline. Both office and higher intensity residential uses are warranted in light of a safer highway and proximity to downtown, UT Medical Center and the airport. These uses can be located separately or as vertical mixed uses (for example, shops at ground level with office or residential above).

Medium density residential uses are also proposed west of the current Village Plaza Shopping Center, contingent upon access from an Alcoa Highway frontage road.

Recommended Uses: Commercial, office, and medium to high density residential

Recommended Zoning: Commercial, office or residential zoning that requires site plan review.

Alternative 2:

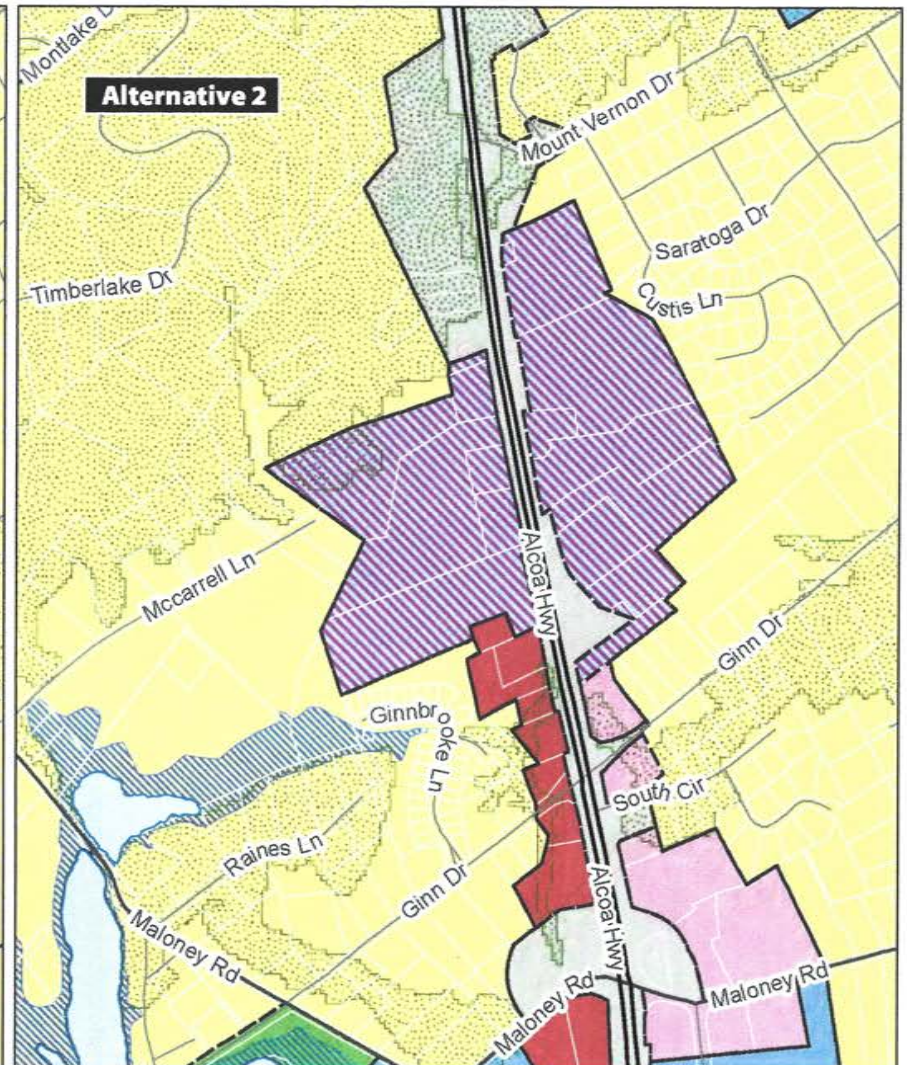
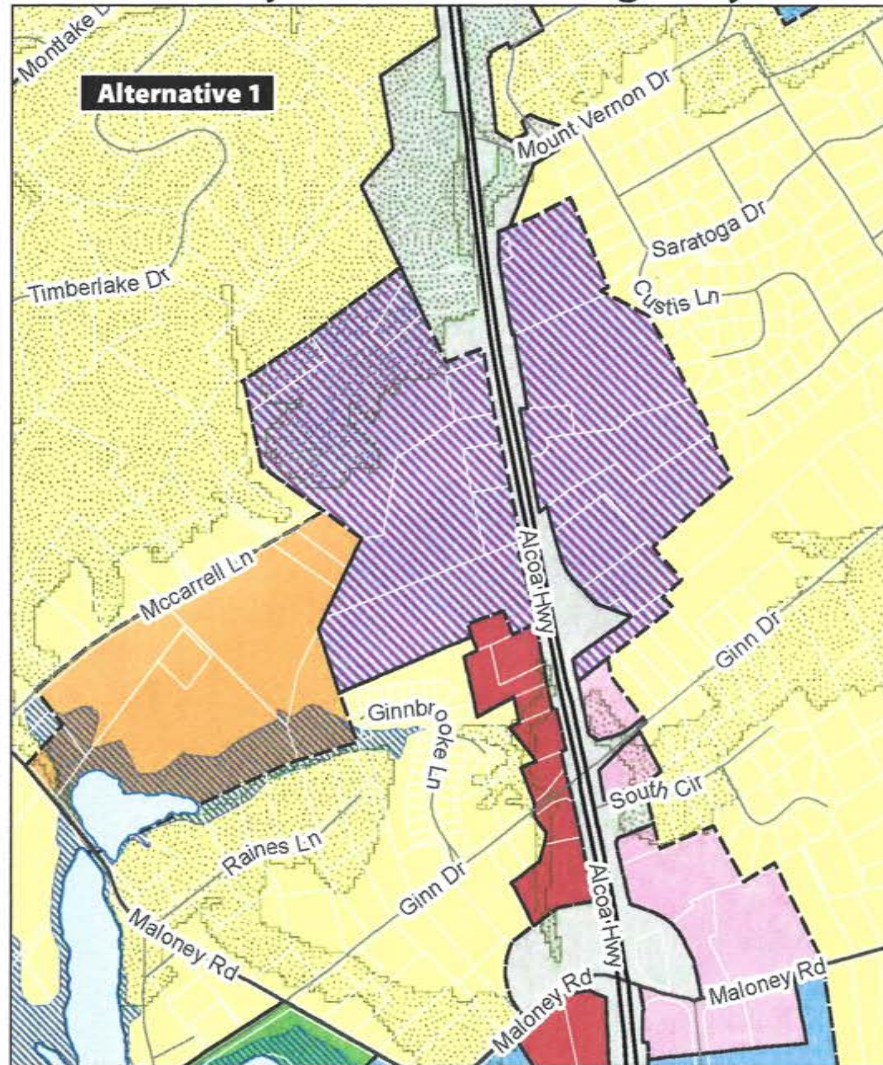
This alternative is based on the six lanes, an interchange at Maloney and Montlake Roads, but no frontage road construction. Without the frontage road, right-in access and right-out egress will be necessitated. In view of the existing commercial zoning, only office and commercial uses are recommended.

Medium to high density residential uses are not recommended in this alternative. This recommendation arises from safety concerns related to additional traffic generation from higher density residential, and the only partially controlled access. The right-out egress would in all likelihood necessitate rapid acceleration at selected points of many onto a heavily used highway. Consequently, additional residential development is not a part of this alternative.

Recommended Uses: Commercial and office

Recommended Zoning: Commercial or office zoning that requires site plan review.

South County Sector: Alcoa Highway Small Area Plan



Integrated Land Use Classification System

CI (Civic/Institutional)	O (Office)
GC (General Commercial)	W (Water)
LDR (Low Density Residential)	ROW (Major Rights of Way)
MDR (Medium Density Residential)	Hillside/Ridgetop Protection Area
MU-SD (Mixed Use Special District)	Stream Protection Area

