

What Does 2016 Hold for Roane County?
By Ron Woody, County Executive

Maybe the question is where do you want to go? A couple of times each year we focus our efforts on trying to answer the question of where do our citizens want to go for the next decade? We don't plan just a year in advance, instead we plan five to twenty years into the future. Ask that question of yourself where do you want to be next year and the next ten years and set out a plan to reach those goals.

Here are a few things we see for the future:

The Oak Ridge National Lab (in Roane County) will continue to be an economy engine for Roane County, but more importantly, one of our nation's greatest assets. The lab will continue to accomplish breakthroughs in technology. Engineering and computer science jobs await our students.

The Spallation Neutron Source (in Roane County) will experience growth as an expansion is planned. More engineering and science jobs await.

The Uranium Processing Facility (in Anderson County) will be under construction for a decade or more employing laborers and technical/skilled workforce. This rebuilding of Y-12 is Tennessee's single largest construction project in history.

The fourth government project will be continuing the environmental management clean-up effort of the legacy waste of the Manhattan Project. Work will continue to take place at the old K-25 site, Y-12 and ORNL.

These government projects have been the economic base for our local economies and will continue to play an important role; however, we must be ready as a community for change and be prepared as the federal budget changes and our communities have negative impacts of a dependency on federal dollars that come and go.

A transition is underway with transfer technologies from our premier national lab. We will continue to see advancement in the carbon fiber and metals. Many of these new companies are forming in the region but often not in Roane County. We ask how can we capture some of these new companies?

We hope part of these answers rest at the East Tennessee Technology Park (old K-25 site) as the DOE Environmental Management (DOE EM) continues a successful cleanup mission. Currently, we have a 200 acre flat parcel available for the next corporate investment. Companies looking at these sites could be game changers for our community with the potential for employing hundreds, if not thousands of workers. The DOE EM cleanup work must continue.

Speaking of the ETPP site, a general aviation airport is also in the planning stage.

Carbon Fiber technology continues to be the buzz word along with 3D printing. The Horizon Business Park hosts the carbon fiber demonstration center. Roane County has Toho Carbon Fiber in our Roane County Industrial Park.

Before I completely leave the topic of industrial development, I must mention that 700 plus acres of TVA land (the proposed Clinch River Breeder Reactor site of the early 1980s near DOE) is in the permitting process for maybe the nation's first small modular nuclear reactor.

We could say more and more about the hopeful possibilities for our industries, but we must be cautiously optimistic about where we are going with our industrial prospects.

Let me transition briefly to what your government needs help on answering:

Are we to be a retirement community?

Are we to be a bedroom community?

Are we to be an industrial community?

How about an educational community?

Will our graduating students work here and also live here in a new or aged community?

We could be partially all of the above named types of communities, but we must make sure we are not too much of all of them.

Yes, we are a retirement community with our many lakefront housing developments.

Yes, we are a bedroom community with a large number of our citizens commuting to other counties to work. A previous newsletter article addressed this topic.

Yes, we will have some industry and will always be an industrial community, both light and heavy, mostly related to the federal government or spin off technologies.

Yes, we are an educational community with not only secondary schools but also higher education with a community college and a college of applied technology.

Yes we will have both new and aged communities.

We must be ready to succeed and our communities must be ready to change. Whether we want change or not, we will see change and we need to be prepared to make the most of the opportunities that often come with change.

Information about Roane County Government can be found at www.roanecountytn.gov under County Executive see Newsletters to the Commission, Article and Speeches, and Executive Summaries.