

Moving to the past

Loudon restoration efforts bring residents perks of history

BY VICKY NEWMAN
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From around the mid-19th through early 20th centuries, a young settlement was growing up on the banks of the Tennessee River.

Surrounding the 1872 Loudon County Courthouse, which originally faced the river, businesses lined Grove Street. The thriving district included a bank, a drug store, a furniture store and a grocery.

The commercial area shifted slightly when the railroad came and the bridge was built. The Summer Hotel that sat near the railroad depot at 201 Alma Place now serves as the city of Loudon's Parks and Recreation Department headquarters and before that had been converted to a fire department.

Surrounding downtown, people lived in tight-knit neighborhoods within walking distance from providers of necessities.

From homes on Mulberry, residents were able to stroll to town for shopping and business or walk to church.

Now, many historic commercial buildings are getting a new lease on life as residential apartment spaces, while residential buildings are becoming prime locations for offices and small businesses. The trend, more than a century later, again is toward more contained residential neighborhoods, with walking paths, shops and dining spots.

Saving the charm

Municipalities everywhere struggle to balance the need for preserving their core, downtown areas with the reality of ever-widening developmental sprawl and must dovetail the desire to protect historical properties with the rights of property owners and the market's demands. Loudon adopted a historical zone in the early 1980s in an effort to preserve its historical charm.

Mayor Judy Keller said she was involved early on in Loudon historical preservation efforts. Keller said Loudon County Economic Development Agency Director Patrick Phillips, who was city planner at the time the historical zoning was initiated, was behind the effort.

"I think it has made a big difference in our town when you compare the way Loudon looks to some other towns," Keller said. "It was good that we were able to get a jump on it early."

Regulation of historical zone requirements has been a challenge at times and a learning experience, Ham Carey, chairman of the Loudon Historic Zoning Commission, said. Some residents steadfastly resisted being zoned historical and their wishes were honored. Learning what was historically appropriate was a necessary first step.

Rick Dover, owner of Family Pride Corporation, recently spoke on a panel in Knoxville about the importance of historic building preservation. Dover has renovated or restored numerous buildings in Loudon County. Former hospitals and a high school became assisted living centers, while a commercial building was repurposed for apartments.

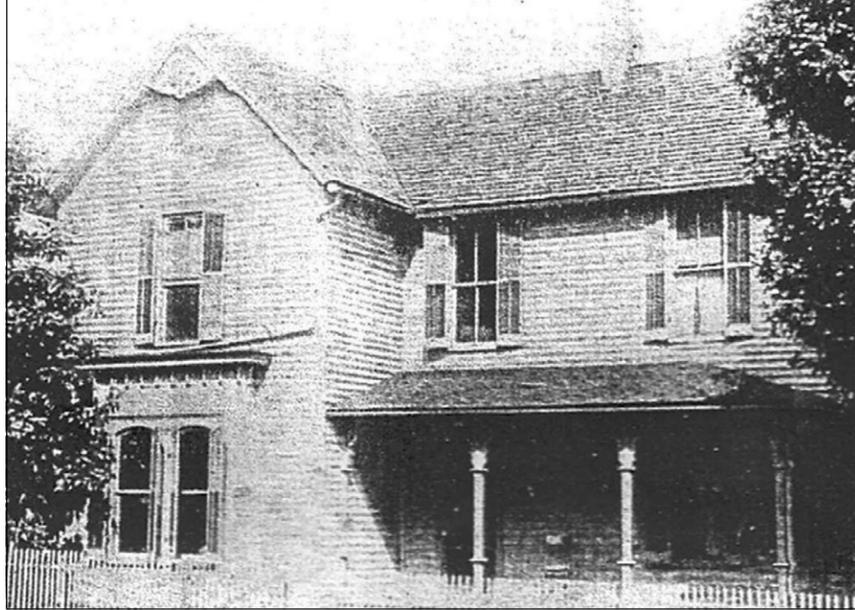
The longtime trend toward the suburbs has turned around, and a new generation is heading closer to the heart of cities and towns.

"This has been a trend all over the country," Dover said.

In some instances, buildings have



The Victorian house at 506 Mulberry St., Loudon has new life today as office spaces for University of Tennessee Home Care Services.



The house at 506 Mulberry St., Loudon, was built in 1890.

Gaining new life

A Victorian-style house at 506 Mulberry St., was built around 1890, and features Eastlake-style interior woodwork. The fireplace in the parlor is adorned with Victorian ceramic tiles. The house originally had no indoor plumbing, but a back section of the home, likely added before 1930, provided the first indoor bath. A second bath was added later with conversion of a side/back porch.

Sometime in the 1950s, the house was divided out into apartments and a second

kitchen was added upstairs. Another back/side porch was incorporated to enlarge the kitchen area.

According to "Landmarks of Loudon County, Its History Through Architecture," the house's early owners included the J.W. Johnston family, R.M. and M.E. Jones, and J.D. and Emma Roberson. The house was bought by Mae Wilson in 1920 and was divided into apartments during that time. It remained in the Wilson family until 1971, when it was purchased by Jack Lefler Sr.

The house was used as a chiropractic office from the late 1950s to the late 1990s. Lefler deeded the building in 2002 to his son, Joe Mourfield, who started renovations after it had fallen into disrepair.

Christina Shurina and family members

'What matters is not so much the original use of the building, but what is appropriate today. If the current demand is for residential, which is hugely up in urban areas, the No. 1 thing you've got to create is a walkable, workable downtown.'

Rick Dover
Family Pride Corporation

purchased the building in 2009 and completed renovations.

"We are hoping this home will last another hundred years," Shurina said. "We're trying to renew the face of Loudon, one house at a time."

University of Tennessee Medical Center Home Care Services, LLC leased the building in 2011.

"What matters is not so much the original use of the building, but what is appropriate today," Dover said. "If the current demand is for residential, which is hugely up in urban areas, the No. 1 thing you've got to create is a walkable, workable downtown. That is most important thing in urban areas. Residential buildings can go commercial and vice versa. What drives the trend, what the market wants today in a given location, is urban-style living in well-designed neighborhoods."

Dover said wider sidewalks and

SEE HISTORY | A9

Extrapolated data? Not when talking of Mama's work

We used to say, "Boy! You're full of it," but nowadays I think a more polite way is used to express our opinion that the person is telling a big 'un.

The expression "extrapolated data" is not in my vocabulary, but my grandson uses it often in telling some event he has read of. It's his way of saying someone may be telling the truth or may not be because they are basing their belief of the results on previous actions and they do not know the results for sure.

So far, he has not told me I'm doing that after I tell him one of my stories of the good ole days but I am keeping a sharp eye out for it.

Movin' on, I'd like to tell you some more about living in the summer down on West Broadway back around 75 years ago. You've noticed I can tell you a lot of stuff about the kids up and down the street but there is not much I've told about the grown-ups. That's because I knew the kids but most of the adults' actions were hearsay.

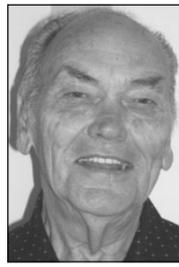
They were all nearly exactly like my Daddy and Mama. The men got up every morning during the week and went to work. They brought home their payday money and paid their bills with it.

"Buying on the credit" was not a sign

of being poor, even though we kinda were. Every family bought on the credit. And every family paid their bill on payday or made a payment on the big bills. Now there are bound to be a few exceptions to this but I did not know one single family that didn't follow that way of living. Stove wood, coal, furniture and groceries were the big items gotten by using your credit.

Saturdays found most all the men in town. They went early and stayed until at least mid-afternoon. They enjoyed talking on the street corners and sometimes entertainment came along in the back of a wagon. And there was always the jockey lot. Sundays were a day of church, a big home-cooked dinner and sitting on the front porch talking to everyone that walked by.

Mama worked seven days a week. She cleaned the house, did our laundry and cooked our meals. The house cleaning was with a mop and a broom — no vacuum cleaner for these ladies. The windows were cleaned using soap and water and old newspapers to dry them streak free. The laundry was done using galvanized



HERB LINGINFELTER

Columnist

tubs and a washboard with water heated on the cook stove in "boilers" or other big containers. A touch of "bluing" was added to make the white clothes look even. Brighter and laundry soap was used along with the washboard. Then, she had to run everything through again to rinse out the soap and loose dirt. Wringing everything by hand wasn't easy.

Then Mama had to carry all the damp, rinsed pieces out into the backyard along with her clothes pins and hang them on the clothes lines. I can just see her now holding a clothes pin in her mouth while using both hands to get a shirt on the wire line just exactly the way she wanted it — the shoulder seams were where she pinned the shirts to the line.

Not everything went on the clothes line to dry. Her curtains had to be pinned on their "stretchers" and trousers had to have pants stretchers put down into the legs and waistband and tightened to make them free of wrinkles.

Still yet, a big part of her laundry day was having to iron most of what she had washed. The old Kalamazoo wood burn-

ing cook stove was still hot so she placed her flat iron on top of it to get it hot. Then, while still with the proper amount of moisture in the clothes, she ironed each piece slick as a ribbon.

Yep, laundry day was an entire day and sometimes even over until tomorrow. And still yet, she had to somehow cook our meals even during laundry day.

I've told you about her cooking Daddy breakfast about 2 a.m. every work day and then packing another complete meal into a market basket for me to take to him at the carshops about 6:30. You can tell from this her cooking went on all day long. We are still talking about the summer while school was out.

Virginia and I had lunch on the table every day and then about 4 o'clock, Mama had supper on the table for all of us. But this routine went right on even when school started because Mama packed our lunches and we went off to school for the day.

Like I've said, Mama worked the hardest of all us. And that ain't extrapolated data.

Herb Linginfelter is a Lenoir City native who sometimes writes of his years growing up here. His articles appear in the News-Herald weekly. Contact him at 865-986-7248.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Retired teacher presents

Doris Jones, left, gave a presentation earlier this month at Trinity United Methodist Church in Lenoir City during the Lenoir City-Loudon County Retired Teachers meeting. Pictured with Jones are Mary Ann Ritchey and Sally Ritchey. The retired educators shared stories and literature on Nancy Ward, the last beloved woman of the Cherokee. Jones is a former elementary teacher who retired from Alcoa City Schools and currently lives in Etowah. The next meeting of the Lenoir City-Loudon County Retired Teachers will include a brown bag lunch and program at noon Nov. 10 in the Loudon County Visitors Bureau Community Room on Highway 321. All retired teachers in the area are invited.



LUB considering policies, procedures

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Loudon Utilities Board discussed at length Sept. 23 the policies and procedures in place for gas customers whose service is temporarily discontinued for repairs.

The issue arose after a contractor inspected a gas line at a Loudon restaurant on a recent Sunday afternoon, then cut a lock and reconnected the service without calling the city.

John Davis, city engineer, said the business owner had been told she must contact the city before service was restored. The policy had been in place for years, Davis said, emphasizing that lines are disconnected when somebody smells gas and suspects a leak.

"It is a pretty standard procedure, but people don't like it when we cut their gas off," Davis said.

John Hutton, LUB chairman, said each department must get policies and procedures together for review and adoption by the board. Without that, the city could be liable if an explosion occurred, he said.

LUB member Michael Cartwright said the city should oversee all utility reconnections.

Loudon electric customers will be paying a bit less for electricity in the coming month thanks to a Tennessee Valley Authority fuel cost adjustment. The reduction will cut residential customers' bills by 28 cents per kilowatt hour, Lynn Mills, LUB general manager, said.

But the reduction will last only a few days, Mills said. A rate increase of 1.5 percent will take effect Oct. 1, but will be offset by lower usage, he said.

"The rates will be higher in December, January, February and March, when seasonal rates kick in," Mills said. Traditionally, customers see a decrease in usage in fall,

before heating costs elevate cost again in winter, he said. "The winter costs are not as high as in summer, but they are higher than October and November."

The cost of natural gas for September rose to \$3.9601 per dekatherm, which converts to a price of \$1.06 per cubic feet of gas billed after Oct. 1. Mills said the price of natural gas is rising and may be expected to continue rising next month.

LUB voted to authorize a contract with East Tennessee Development District for the administration of a grant for electrical system improvements in Sugarlimb Industrial Park. The ETDD will ensure that all rules and regulations pertaining to the \$1.5 million federal economic development grant are followed.

"This is what we did in 2005-2006 when we received the grant for Blair Bend," Mills said. "They have built in all kinds of procedures we have to follow for a federal grant and we don't want to jeopardize that \$1.5 million." The administration fee of \$25,000 will be paid from grant funds.

The board approved proceeding with the third phase of sewer rehabilitation, at an estimated cost of \$109,762. Action was not taken on the schedule of sewer rate increases needed to fund the project. Mills said LUB is working with several banks to determine the best bond program, and the rate structure will hinge on some issues not yet determined.

Rick Kirby, project engineer, asked the board to allow work to proceed with examining pipes with closed circuit television, a project contracted with SanTek. "We were hoping to get this done before the weather gets bad," Kirby said.

Hutton asked for a motion, which passed unanimously. "It looks like this is something we have to do," Hutton said.

The city hired Ty Thearp for the position of water department plant operator, Mills said.

HISTORY: Loudon tries to preserve past

From Page A6

narrower streets calm traffic and encourage living in downtown areas. Off-street parking lots are needed.

Dover noted that large tracts of land are not available in urban settings, so it is more reasonable to renovate existing buildings.

"You get a charming atmosphere and style from old buildings," he said. "Plus, it is environmentally responsible because so much energy has already been expended to make the materials. To throw all that away in landfills is unconscionable."

Older buildings are more expressive of the personality of the owner/builders, Dover said.

"They have personality and people are drawn to that," Dover said. "The history is built into the environment — the story of our ancestors and our civilization. It's part of who we are. There's a certain element of art and style.

We put part of ourselves into our buildings. Today, so many buildings are cold, the cheapest, fastest things built. ... It is the antithesis of what I want. There's a lot more interest in old buildings. You can create anything you want if you can afford it, but most people can't afford to build beautiful buildings new."



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The tiles embellishing the old house and many architectural details make the property worth saving for generations to come. The street frontage today is commercially zoned.

People must be first

The building at 405 Grove St., was a commercial space and housed the original Loudon Post Office, Dover said. A shoe store was upstairs and a motel. Later, there were office spaces. Today, a spacious residential apartment, The Loft, is located above commercial shops.

"That goes to make the point that the demands of the market change," Dover said. "The location will tell you if it is attractive for residential urban uses."

Urban residential uses also drive the need for commercial spaces, he said.

"First you get the people to come," Dover said. "To do that, you protect pedestrians and calm traffic. You give them sidewalks and protected parking. Don't let traffic engineers determine your neighborhoods. People want to park, walk and linger."

After people come, the businesses will come, he said.

Rebecca Willis, a representative on the Loudon Historic Zoning Commission, said she personally loves the architecture of earlier periods.

"I live in an 1895 house in the historical zone," Willis said. "The older buildings have so much personality, charm and character. To me, it is important to maintain that character. We have such a beautiful little town and I hate to see businesses build new buildings down the road and leave older ones vacant for years and years. They don't build them like they used to. A lot of people are going back to the original and finding beautiful things."



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