

## Blountly Conservative

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This is a tale as old as time across the state. Cities and localities want the tax revenue that local businesses and tourism ventures generate for their local communities, but they don't want to recognize the property rights of those businesses or tourist ventures to freely operate and attract the commercial transactions that give the city its boost in local tax revenues. It's a classic municipal planning "Catch-22," and it's neither new nor unique to Townsend, nor is it going to magically resolve itself anytime soon.

If the City of Townsend wants to continue enjoying a sales tax-only revenue model for its city budget (meaning its local citizens don't have to pay yearly property taxes to fund their city services), then it's going to have to work cooperatively with its local businesses and tourism generators to allow them to freely operate (within reason and adherent to applicable state/local land use and zoning laws, of course) and keep the sales tax revenues from visitors and guests flowing. Otherwise, it is free to clamp down on tourism events and turn away all of that revenue from temporary visitors, but local residents should be prepared to start coughing up property taxes each year to meet the demands of growth in the community. But they can't have it both ways forever.

Moreover, while local residents surely have a right to be frustrated with the strains that intermittent influxes of tourists can place on the local community (nobody is a particular fan of the autumn "leafers," to be sure), it should be noted that even if Townsend permanently nixed every tourism event in the city, it still wouldn't stop waves of visitors from traveling to and through the area. The city sits at the gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (which draws over 13 MILLION visitors per year), and it's already a well-traveled thoroughfare to connect motorists to the tourism hubs of neighboring Sevier County (Pigeon Forge, Gatlinburg, etc.). So like it or not, the tourists are coming to Townsend one way or another—the real question is whether city leaders want to capture some of that lost sales tax revenue and repurpose it to help serve local residents who live there throughout the year.

While balancing the revenue opportunities of tourism business against the investment costs and infrastructure burdens on local residents is an easy issue for some cranky folks to demagogue and sensationalize with cheap shots and simplistic hisses-and-boos towards the tourists (who, again, nobody is a particular fan of), it's actually a much more complicated choice for all of us to make. We can't stop the tourists from coming, nor would most of us actually want to (unless you're eager to pay tens of thousands of dollars in new city property taxes each year—and likely added county property taxes, too). But we also all recognize it can't be a free-for-all without any proper local planning to preserve the scenic and natural attributes that make Townsend the sought-after destination that it is. It's a balance, and it deserves serious minds and thoughtful discussion among local government leaders, residents, and the business community.

But a balanced process requires compromise from the city, too, and it means allowing local businesses and tourism ventures to put their investments to use in order to attract the visitor spending that generates local revenue and gives the city its tax base. That's just good local planning 101, and it's the same kind of free market, free enterprise economics that we all enjoy to earn a living for ourselves and our families.