The Community Survey

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THE COMMUNITY SURVEY

Round 2

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PREPARED FOR

PLAN EAST TENNESSEE

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Communities are frequently defined by the values of their residents and the resources available to sustain their populations. The influence of these values and resources often result in the development of a community identity. Public officials who serve these communities and other local stakeholders are tasked with providing an economic base and services desired by residents while retaining their communities’ identities. However, in a world that is increasingly interconnected, decisions made outside of individual communities can have major impacts on the well-being of communities and their residents as well as how they define themselves. Efforts to capitalize on the impact made by the decisions of neighboring communities have resulted in public officials and other decision-makers from different communities engaging in a dialogue with each other. The purpose of these discussions is to identify common goals and values so that communities might better plan for their future. This might best be achieved by developing a regional perspective while maintaining their local identities.

Plan East Tennessee (PlanET), a collaboration of local governments, private and non-profit organizations, and individuals from a five-county region in East Tennessee, is an example of how local officials and stakeholders are engaging in such discussions. Five areas have been chosen to help focus these conversations: Economic and Workforce Development; Environment; Healthy Communities; Housing and Neighborhoods; and Transportation and Infrastructure. The goal of this dialogue is to develop a regional plan that will improve the quality of life in the region and in each county.

As part of the PlanET initiative, residents in Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon and Union Counties were given opportunities to express their opinions about the importance of factors within these five focus areas as they relate to improving the future quality of life in their community. One such mechanism was a telephone survey that was conducted with residents in the five-county region to identify commonalities and differences in priorities between counties and other segments of the population. The survey was designed to give participants an opportunity to offer their opinions about the level of importance for a number of factors within the five focus areas. Additionally, the
survey was constructed so that participants could identify which factor within each of these five areas they felt was most important for improving the future quality of life.

Other opportunities for participation and input in the regional planning process are available as part of the Plan East Tennessee schedule of activities, and communication avenues on-line at www.planeasttn.org.
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

A telephone survey of residents in five East Tennessee counties was conducted between August 15, 2012 and October 9, 2012 to measure opinions about how to improve the future quality of life within five focus areas: Economic and Workforce Development; Environment; Healthy Communities; Housing and Neighborhoods; and Transportation and Infrastructure. Telephone interviews were completed with 400 residents from Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon, and Union Counties for a total of 2,000 interviews.

- Overall, residents in the five-county region feel positive about the quality of life in their community. Three of four residents in the region (78.5%) reported the quality of life as good or excellent.
- Improving the quality of education in public schools and creating more manufacturing jobs were identified as the two most important economic and workforce development factors for improving life in the future. Younger respondents assigned a higher level of importance for improving the quality of education than older respondents. More than half of those between the ages of 18 and 25 (54.1%) indicated the top priority for this focus area should be on improving education while approximately one in three (36.5%) of those respondents who are 65 and older reported education as the top priority.
- Reducing water pollution, protecting the region’s natural resources, and reducing air pollution were identified by respondents as the top three priorities for the region. However, the highest priority differed between counties, and protecting or preserving agricultural land emerged as one of the top three priorities in Union County displacing reducing air pollution as a high priority.
- Reducing drug abuse was consistently reported to be the highest priority for promoting healthy communities. Approximately one in three in the region (32.2%) identified reducing drug abuse as a top priority and this percentage increased to almost half of the respondents in Anderson County (40.1%) and Union County (47.3%). Reducing crime and increasing access to quality healthcare were identified as the next highest priorities.
• The top priorities in the region for improving housing and neighborhoods were increasing funding levels for police and firefighters and increasing housing options for seniors. Respondents over the age of 45 were more likely to indicate that increased housing options for seniors was the most important factor whereas those 45 years of age and younger were more likely to place a higher priority on increased funding for police and fire services.

• Priorities regarding transportation and infrastructure were related to the size of the community in which a person resides. Survey participants who lived in a city were more likely to state that increasing public transportation was the most important factor while those who lived in a rural area were more likely to indicate that improving local roads was most important.

METHODS

The University of Tennessee’s College of Social Work Center for Applied Research and Evaluation (CARE) conducted a telephone survey of residents in Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon, and Union Counties to measure their attitudes and preferences for improving the future quality of life in their counties. Telephone interviews were completed with 400 residents in each county for a total of 2,000 East Tennessee residents from the five-county region. Interviews were conducted between August 15, 2012 and October 9, 2012 utilizing a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. The sample size for this survey results in a +/- 2.19 margin of error at the 95% confidence interval for regional results and +/- 4.9 margin of error at the 95% confidence interval for results reported at the county level.

A stratified sampling frame was used for this survey so that results could be generalized to each of the five counties as well as to the region as a whole. The sampling methodology included the use of both telephone landlines and cell phones to reduce sampling bias and to increase participation from younger residents. Independent random samples of telephone landlines and cell phones were drawn for each county. Telephone exchanges for landlines were selected based upon population distribution and the remaining digits were randomly generated based upon blocks of telephone numbers in use. An address match was conducted to identify addresses associated with the telephone number. The cell phone sample was randomly selected from those numbers that
had been identified as belonging to residents within each county based upon billing address information. The landline telephone sample and cell phone sample was purchased from Survey Sampling, Inc. An advance letter was mailed to households for which an address match could be made. The purpose of the letter was to introduce the study prior to the telephone invitation to participate in the telephone interview in an effort to improve response rate and reduce non-response bias. A copy of the advance letter may be found in the Appendix to this report.

Telephone interviewing was conducted during day and evening shifts, conducted seven days a week, as a further effort to reduce non-response bias. Each telephone number was attempted up to five times until a final disposition could be assigned to the number. Strategies were somewhat different for calling landline telephone numbers and cell phone numbers. The strategy for landline numbers included efforts to include younger residents by implementing a script that inquired if anyone under the age of 25 and at least 18 years of age lived in the household. If a young adult lived in the household but was not available to complete the interview at that time, a callback was scheduled. Additional efforts were also made to include male participants by asking to speak to the youngest male in the household. If no male was available, the youngest female in the household was interviewed. The cell phone strategy was adapted to be sensitive to safety issues and included initial determination that the person answering was in a safe place to continue the telephone call. If it was determined that the person was not in a safe place, the call was terminated immediately without collecting additional information. If the person reported being in a safe place to continue, the interview continued.

The survey instrument contained sections of questions that concentrated on each of Plan East Tennessee’s five focus areas. Each section contained a series of questions utilizing the same format and the same response categories for each question within the series. In an effort to reduce any bias that might be introduced by question ordering, randomization of the five sections as well as the questions within each series was implemented. All questions within each series were asked in each interview but the order of the questions varied with each survey respondent.

A weight was calculated for each record to adjust for selection bias and non-response bias. A post-stratification weight was assigned to match sample characteristics to population characteristics provided by the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2006-2010 American Community Survey. Sample
characteristics used for calculations of these weights were age and gender. An additional weight was calculated for each record to reflect the current distribution of population within the region. Results reported and discussed in this report are based upon weighted data. Responses to all survey questions, reported at the regional and county levels, may be found in the Appendix of this report.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

QUALITY OF LIFE

The overall opinion about the quality of life in East Tennessee is quite positive. Almost eight in ten survey respondents (78.5%) rated the quality of life in their county as either good or excellent. However, discernible differences were found when looking at different segments of the population. For instance,

- 88.1% of residents who held a graduate degree reported the quality of life as good or excellent compared to 61.0% of those who did not further their education beyond high school.

- Additionally, ratings for the quality of life steadily improved as the respondent’s age increased. About two in three respondents (68.2%) between the ages of 18 and 25 reported the quality as good or excellent whereas more than three in four (79.6%) of those over the age of 65 assigned a similar rating.

- The area where respondents live also influenced these ratings. This was demonstrated by those who live in or near a city ranking the quality of life higher than those living in a rural area. Furthermore, respondents living in Blount County were most likely to rate the quality of life as good or excellent (84.9%) while those in Union County the least likely (54.0%).
ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Economic and workforce development is one focus area for PlanET and continues to be reported by survey respondents as the highest priority for improving the future quality of life in the area. Respondents were presented with six factors dealing with economic and workforce development and were asked to indicate the importance of each of these factors. They were also asked to express their opinion about which of these factors was the most important for the future of their county. Improving the quality of education in public schools and creating manufacturing jobs were consistently reported to be the most important factors for improving the future quality of life in the area. Furthermore, creating jobs and improving education were the comments most frequently given by respondents when asked to state one thing that would improve the quality of life in their county.
While all agreed that improving the quality of education and expanding manufacturing jobs were most important, there were noteworthy differences between groups in the degree to which these opinions were reported.

- Residents of Union County were significantly more likely to indicate that expanding or creating manufacturing jobs was most important for improving the economy than were those in the other four counties. Almost one in three respondents in Union County (30.4%) indicated this factor was their top priority while less than one in five in Blount County (18.1%) reported the same view.

- Those who had resided in their county for more than 20 years were also more likely to indicate that expanding manufacturing jobs was the most important factor for promoting economic and workforce development than those who had lived in the area less time.

- Younger residents were less likely than older residents to indicate that expanding manufacturing jobs was the top priority and further expressed that attracting high quality educators was of equal importance to creating manufacturing jobs. Respondents between
Results and Discussion

ages 18 and 25 chose “attracting high quality educators” as frequently as “expanding manufacturing jobs” as the most important factor in this focus area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Important Factor</th>
<th>18 – 25</th>
<th>26 – 45</th>
<th>46 – 65</th>
<th>Older than 65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving education in public schools</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding manufacturing jobs</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attracting high quality educators</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Impact of Respondent on Most Important Economic and Workforce Development Factor

ENVIRONMENT

The east Tennessee region is well known for the natural beauty of its mountains, lakes, and rivers. Preserving and protecting these resources is reportedly a high priority for its residents. Survey respondents were provided with five environmental issues that commonly face communities and were asked to indicate the importance of each of these for improving the quality of life in their county. Three issues were equally identified as being the most important: protecting natural resources; reducing air pollution; and reducing water pollution.

![Figure 3: Most Important Environmental Factor](image-url)

Reducing water pollution (24.8%)
Reducing air pollution (23.2%)
Protecting natural resources (24.4%)
Protecting agricultural land (18.0%)
Encouraging energy efficient development (9.6%)
The most important environmental factor for improving the quality of life in the future varied by county and by different segments of respondents.

- Those in Anderson, Loudon and Union Counties indicated that reducing water pollution in lakes, streams and rivers was the top priority. However, respondents from Knox County reported that reducing air pollution was the top priority while respondents from Blount County reported that protecting their natural resources was the most important.

- Attitudes about protecting or preserving agricultural land also differed between counties demonstrated by respondents from Union County being more likely than others to identify protecting or preserving agricultural land as the most important environmental factor. Almost one in four (22.7%) from Union County indicated this was the most important environmental factor while only 14.8% in Anderson County chose this factor as the most important.

- Older respondents were also more likely to say that protecting agricultural land was most important with 16.1% of those over 65 indicating it was a top priority while only 6.6% of those between 18 and 25 stating a similar opinion.

**Healthy Communities**

Identifying ways to improve the health of area residents and to create healthy communities is another focus area for Plan East Tennessee. A list of factors that might affect overall health was presented to survey participants, and they were asked to indicate the level of importance for each factor as it relates to improving the quality of life in their county. Reducing drug abuse was identified as extremely important for improving the quality of life by almost nine of ten respondents (87.9%) and was chosen as the most important factor for improving the future of the area. Additionally, when given the opportunity to offer a comment about one thing that would make life better in their community, almost one in ten respondents (8.8%) offered reducing drug abuse as their response. Reducing crime and increasing access to quality healthcare were identified as the next most important factor by an equal number of respondents.
Results and Discussion

Figure 4: Most Important Factor for Healthy Communities

Reducing drug abuse was universally recognized as the most important factor among the seven items offered to survey respondents; however, this factor was reported by some respondents to be a higher priority than others. Furthermore, the level of importance placed on other factors within the list provided varied by the age of the respondents and the amount of education they had completed.

- The desire to reduce drug abuse was reportedly highest in Union County with almost half of the respondents (47.3%) from this county stating this was the most important factor for improving the future of their county while less than one of three in Knox County (30.0%) identified this factor as the most important from the list.

- Respondents with higher levels of education were more likely than those with lower levels of education to choose increasing access to quality healthcare as the most important factor for creating healthy communities. Slightly more than one of four respondents with a Bachelor’s degree (28.4%) compared to 14.9% of those with less than a high school education indicated that increased availability of quality healthcare was a priority for improving quality of life.

- The importance assigned to increasing access to locally grown food was highest among those between the ages of 26 and 45. More than half of those in this age group (57.1%)
reported this to be extremely important while less than half of those in other age groups assigned the same level of importance.

- Providing community centers for exercising was reported to be more important by those with lower levels of education. More than half (52.9%) of those with less than a high school education said that this was extremely important whereas less than one in three (28.6%) of those with a graduate degree expressed a similar attitude.

**HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOODS**

Another focus area for Plan East Tennessee is promoting housing options and services that provide greater personal choice and desired amenities. Again, survey respondents were presented with a list of seven factors related to housing and neighborhoods and asked to indicate how important each of these factors was to improving the future quality of life. Additionally, they were given the opportunity to choose which of the seven factors was most important. Two factors emerged as being equally the most important. Funding increases for police and firefighters pay and increasing housing options for seniors were identified as the most important by almost an equal number of respondents.

**Figure 5: Most Important Factor for Housing and Neighborhoods**

![Bar chart showing the most important factors for housing and neighborhoods. Increased funding for police and fire is 26.8%, increased housing options for seniors is 24.0%, facilities for homeless is 14.4%, neighborhood sidewalks is 10.7%, increased single family housing is 8.6%, increased neighborhood retail is 6.5%, and increased multi-family housing is 4.9%.]
There was no consensus regarding which factor was most important for this focus area; and there were considerable differences among respondents about how important each of these seven factors were for improving the future quality of life.

- Respondents over the age of 45 were more likely to indicate that increased housing options for seniors was the most important factor whereas those 45 years of age and younger were more likely to place a higher priority on increased funding for police and fire services. Approximately one of three (32.2%) in the higher age bracket chose senior housing as the top priority, and about the same portion of those in the lower age bracket (31.4%) reported funding for police and fire services was most important.

- Concern for providing facilities for homeless was highest in Knox County and lowest in Union County. More than half of the respondents from Knox County (53.3%) indicated that provision of the service was extremely important while about one of three respondents in Union County (37.9%) stated that it was extremely important.

- Support for the installation of or improvement to existing sidewalks was highest among those who lived in Knox County, those who reported living in a city, and those between the ages of 18 and 25.

**TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

Maintaining and increasing access to high quality infrastructure and providing more transportation choices while reducing transportation costs is an area of interest to Plan East Tennessee. Survey respondents were asked to rate the level of importance for seven factors related to transportation and infrastructure. They were also asked to identify the factor they felt was most important for improving the quality of life in their county. Improving the quality of local roads and highways and increasing availability of public transportation emerged as the two most important factors for the region.
Opinions about which of these factors was most important differed significantly depending on where respondents lived and their level of education.

- Priorities regarding transportation and infrastructure were related to the size of the community in which a person resides. Survey participants who lived in a city were more likely to state that increasing public transportation was the most important factor while those who lived in a rural area were more likely to indicate that improving local roads was the most important.

- Respondents from Anderson County were particularly interested in increasing availability of public transportation while quality of roads was significantly more important to residents in Union County. Almost one of three from Anderson County (29.8%) reported that increasing the availability of public transportation was the most important factor for improving their quality of life, whereas almost half of those from Union County (43.2%) indicated that improving the quality of local roads and streets was the most important to them.
• Blount County residents were equally split on whether increasing availability public transportation, improving the quality of local roads, and reducing traffic congestion was the most important factor for improving the quality of life in their county. Each of these factors was identified as the most important by 20% of the respondents from that county.

• Opinions about the most important factor in this focus area also varied according to the amount of education the respondent had completed. Increasing the availability of public transportation was given the highest priority by those with the highest and the lowest levels of education. Furthermore, those with a Bachelor’s degree or higher were significantly more likely to report that increasing flight options at McGhee Tyson was their top priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Important Factor</th>
<th>Less than high school</th>
<th>High school</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>Bachelor degree</th>
<th>Graduate work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating bike lanes on local roads</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing air service at McGhee Tyson Airport</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>6.9%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving quality of local roads and streets</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving quality of major highways</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing availability of public transportation</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing number of greenways and walking trails</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing traffic congestion</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Impact of Respondent Level of Education on Most Important Transportation and Infrastructure Factor*
SUMMARY

Improvements to the quality of life can best be accomplished by having access to resources and services needed to provide the basic needs of life. This emerged as a common theme among survey respondents from a five-county region in east Tennessee. Factors related to providing these resources and services were assigned the highest level of importance for improving the quality of life in their county. Specifically, improving the quality of public education, creating job opportunities, providing housing options for seniors, having access to quality healthcare, and improving public safety were identified as the most important factors for achieving a higher quality of life. Improving the quality of education in public schools and creating more jobs were consistently cited as the most important factors for achieving this goal.

Overall marks given by respondents regarding the overall quality of life in east Tennessee were generally positive. The less positive marks were given by those who reside in areas that may not offer the level of opportunities and services that are desired by their respondents. Respondents who gave lower marks for the overall quality of life in their county and who placed a higher priority on improving education and expanding job opportunities reside in areas that have lower high school graduation rates$^1$ and higher unemployment rates$^2$. Union County, whose residents gave the lowest marks for the overall quality of life, has the lowest high school graduation rate of the five counties and the second highest unemployment rate. Anderson County, whose residents gave the second lowest marks, currently has the highest unemployment rate.

While there was general agreement about the priorities assigned to improving access to resources and services, there was less agreement about which factor was most important for addressing transportation needs and improvements to the infrastructure. With the exception of those in Union

$^1$ http://edu.reportcard.state.tn.us

County who clearly expressed that improving local roads was their highest priority, there was no clear indication by other respondents about which factor within this focus area was most important. The need to improve the quality of local roads and increase the availability of public transportation were reported to be of almost equal importance by respondents in Anderson, Knox, and Loudon Counties. Still those in Blount County reported reducing traffic congestion just as important to them as improving local roads and increasing public transportation availability.

Differences also surfaced between counties regarding the importance of factors related to the environment. Each county in the five-county region has unique resources that enhance the beauty of the region. The desire to protect these unique resources materialized in the priorities reported by respondents. Anderson, Loudon and Union Counties contain a plethora of lakes, streams and rivers and respondents from these counties identified protecting these resources as their top priority. Respondents from Blount County, a gateway to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, identified protecting natural resources as their top priority.

Identifying common values and priorities while recognizing differences in priorities will help to guide public officials and decision-makers in developing a regional plan for the five-county region involved in PlanET. Results of this survey suggest that there are more commonalities than differences in values and priorities expressed by residents of the region. Further, results suggest that efforts to improve education and job opportunities would be supported by the majority of the residents in the region.