WHAT IS PlanET?

PlanET is a partnership of local governments, businesses, non-profits and community organizations coming together to have a regional conversation about our future. This partnership will work to improve the prosperity of our five-county region—Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon and Union counties—over the next three decades. The project will develop a plan for action that lays out strategies to reach the region’s goals, as well as tools for implementation, including leadership and capacity-building programs. PlanET will focus on the region, but it will not lose sight of our individual communities. It will help us solve tough issues together so that we grow and innovate in ways that benefit the entire regional community.

www.planeasttn.org

REFERENCES


PHOTO CREDITS

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Page 5: Mechanicsville Commons, MPC Staff; Page 6: Lake Somo, Stephanie McIner; Downtown Knoxville, Melinda Fawver; Page 7: A Family Moving Into a New House, Bramante; Page 8: Tennessee River, Melinda Fawver; Page 9: University of Tennessee Hill, Steven Frame; Boy Washing: Getting on Bus, Sonya Dishoan; Page 10: Child on Playground, MPC Staff; Two Older People Sitting on a Bench, Paul Reid; Page 11: Young African American Woman shopping for Jewelry, Ron Chapple Studios; Page 12: A Family Talking, Joel Chapman Studios; Page 13: At The Lessons, Nikolao; Low Income Retirement Condom or Complex, Linda Johnsonbaugh; Page 15: Town of Clerk Preparing Food in Restaurant Kitchen, Monkey Business Images; Adjusting Solar Panels 2, Anthropic.

Page 17: School Bag, Denise Kagie; Page 18: Carl Cowan Park, MPC Staff; How To Get Over, Ponne Pfluegl; Page 19: Grandfather and Grandson on Bikes Outdoors Smiling, Monkey Business Images; 4th and GE, MPC Staff; Page 20: Sparkle, Atlas Bobrow; Environment Green Tree with Townsend Dog, Imagelandscape; Page 21: Get Drinking Water, Phoephotos; Two Young Friends Running Outdoor Smiling, Monkey Business Images.

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Plan East Tennessee (PlanET) is a partnership of local governments, businesses, non-profits and community organizations coming together to have a regional conversation about our future. This partnership will work to improve the prosperity of our five-county region over the next three decades. Between 2011 and 2013, PlanET developed a plan for action that lays out strategies and prioritizes investments to reach the region's goals, as well as tools for implementation, including leadership and capacity building programs. PlanET focuses on individual communities as part of the larger region. The process of crafting a PlanET Play Book, our 30-year plan, is building relationships and strategies that will help us solve tough issues together.

By 2040, the five-county PlanET region—Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon and Union counties—will have grown by 298,000 people and 240,000 new jobs. How do we grow this much, maintain what we love about our communities and become more economically competitive, improve our health, protect the environment and enhance our housing and transportation choices?

Everyone here has the opportunity to shape future policy and budget decisions that will affect what the Knoxville region will look like in 30 years. We want the region to be less segregated by choice, concentrated poverty dramatically decreased, and equity and access to opportunity considered when investments are made.

This report takes a root-cause approach and lays a foundation for describing our region in a way that can be tracked into the future to see how things change over the next few generations. Based on data compiled for this report and for the larger PlanET project, it is demonstrated that access to opportunity provides a foundation for the success of individuals—employment, good health, safe neighborhoods. And lack of access to opportunity not only holds individuals back from contributing the most to our region, it causes extra stress on our system resources.

We are charged with looking more deeply at the root of our region’s social and economic challenges. In education, our region has made significant strides with TN Achieves and The Great Schools Partnership, but we still lag behind the nation in attainment and outcomes.

Poverty is another challenge. It has shaped our region, creating places that offer profoundly unequal opportunities to our residents. In many ways, poverty remains our deepest divide. Why is it that we in the southeast, and particularly in East Tennessee, have a perceived low cost of living, but such a high rate of people who struggle monthly to survive financially?

We are responsible for our actions whether we recognize it or not. However, when personal choice is limited by systems infrastructure from generation to generation, poverty often begets poverty, and the cycle is challenging to break.

Our places of high opportunity—for example, where good schools and grocery stores are located—are separate from areas where poverty is greatest. We cannot be economically competitive long-term if we are unable to address issues of chronic poverty.

We also struggle with health issues. Obesity, diabetes and asthma have reached chronic and near epidemic status. It is well documented that where you live correlates to your life expectancy. Our health as individuals is impacted by more than our access to a doctor’s office. The less access people have to vibrant communities, the more likely they are to have negative health outcomes, such as increased heart disease and diabetes. Those who have the least are impacted the most by lack of access to care.

This report looks first at our history, what our foundation is, to remind of us how we came to be where we are today. Next we examine indicators that help determine areas of concern, where stressors add up to a challenging daily life that often impedes success and self-sufficiency. Then we look at areas of opportunity. These areas are mapped, and where opportunity is high, poverty is low; conversely, where poverty is high, access to opportunity is low. In the strategies section we describe what has come from this process and existing initiatives.
This Equity Profile was developed for the PlanET region to examine the historical background and current conditions of the region in the context of equity and access to opportunity for all of our residents. An inventory of indicators related to socio-economic stress and opportunity was completed to determine if certain geographic areas in the region have higher concentrations of stress or higher levels of opportunity than others.

Particular attention was given to determine if disparities in opportunity exist for vulnerable minority or ethnic groups and other vulnerable populations, such as children, the elderly, and those with disabilities, living in the region. A goal of this assessment is to establish a baseline of current conditions to gauge the effectiveness of current and future efforts to improve equitable access to opportunity in the region. This report will heighten public awareness of the importance of equity and access to opportunity for a healthy and prosperous economy.

The Region
The PlanET region is rich in history and culture that have been heavily influenced by location and availability of natural resources. The five-county region includes Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon and Union counties and is home to a diverse topography that includes a mountain range rich in minerals and ores, ribbons of rivers and lakes threading through the area and fertile agricultural fields dotting the landscape. Urban development across the region is also quite diverse. Knoxville, a more densely populated urban area, is the center of the region with the surrounding area made up of small cities, towns and rural lands. Patterns of development have been impacted by the unique history of the region.

Historical Background of the Region
The fertile lands, abundance of rivers and streams and protective mountains attracted the region’s earliest inhabitants. Native American trails zigzagged across the land, and settlements began to emerge along these trails and rivers to accommodate trading. As settlements grew and prospered, they developed unique characteristics and culture that laid the foundation for future development. Remnants of this culture – desire for independence and mistrust of government - remain in the region today.

Much of the area was split between abolitionists and confederates during the Civil War. Abolitionists had a strong presence in the region, often led by leaders in the Quaker communities and in the Presbyterian Church. The Underground Railroad was active in the region because of the support of these groups and because of the area’s geography that led to escape routes for enslaved people. The railroad was said to run through Loudon, Blount and Knox Counties, and the Warner Tabernacle on Fuller Street in Knoxville was reportedly a safe house for those who were seeking their freedom in the North.
Knoxville

Knoxville became the first capital of the State of Tennessee in 1796, and its population and size grew steadily during the early 19th century. It developed as a way station for westward-bound migrants and as a trading center for nearby mountain communities. The arrival of the railroad in the 1850s resulted in significant population increase. Because the soil in the region was not conducive to large plantations, the number of African American people was substantially lower in Knoxville and the surrounding region than in other parts of the South. By 1860, slaves comprised 22% of Knoxville’s population and approximately 10% of the surrounding area.

Knoxville continued to thrive in the years following the Civil War. A number of large mills, the Knoxville Iron Company, Knoxville Woolen Mills and Brookside Mills, were built between 1868 and 1885. With these additions and the merger of two major railroads to form the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railway, jobs were plentiful for low-skilled workers. These industries provided employment opportunities for much of the African American population in Knoxville. Because many African Americans were employed as mechanics, the community where they lived during that time became known as Mechanicsville. The community survives today and has a high percentage of African American residents.

Knoxville experienced economic downturn in the early 1900s which led to the deterioration of many urban neighborhoods and the downtown area. An alliance between the city’s economic elite, mountain people who had migrated to the urban area, and African American people was formed through a shared mistrust of government to fight attempts at reform. Residents in Knoxville repeatedly opposed efforts to increase property taxes which resulted in little public money for improvements. African Americans were especially hard-hit during the economic downturn because many jobs they traditionally held were filled by White workers.

The federal government allocated millions of dollars during the Great Depression for local housing authorities across the country. Knoxville received a portion of these funds to purchase 43 acres of land to build low-income or subsidized housing. Jim Crow laws that mandated segregation for racial groups were enforced during the allocation of funding for subsidized housing. Housing units for African Americans were built on 13 acres, and 30 acres were allocated for units to be rented to Whites. Approximately 600 houses located in the city’s slums were condemned and razed for the project. College Homes, a community of subsidized housing with 168 units in Mechanicsville, accepted its first tenants in 1940. Austin Homes, another subsidized housing community located in east center city Knoxville, was built soon after.

Housing conditions continued to decline in Knoxville’s downtown area in the 1950s and 1960s. Substandard housing was pervasive in the downtown and east center city areas and was among the nation’s worst. During a visit in the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson said residents in Knoxville’s Mountain View neighborhood were as poverty-ridden as he had seen in any part of the United States. Urban renewal initiatives razed homes in the area where much of the African American community lived, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development shortly after this visit. As a result, African Americans moved from the downtown area into east Knoxville. Many White residents were unhappy with the influx, which led to “White flight” to west Knoxville.
Suburbs were being built in west Knoxville at this time to support the migration of White residents who had the financial means to purchase homes in the area. The existing suburban zoning scheme promoted single use development. This created low density housing isolated from retail or business districts. It also created more expensive housing that was not accessible to families with low incomes.

During the period of urban renewal and “White flight” in the 1960s, protests and sit-ins were held to eliminate segregation of schools and businesses. Violence experienced in other parts of the South was not seen in Knoxville. Schools and businesses slowly desegregated during the decade. Schools were desegregated due to a lawsuit filed in 1959 and the first African American undergraduate student was admitted to the University of Tennessee in 1961. Public housing was also desegregated during this time.

Interestingly, our region is home to the first public school to be integrated in the South. Oak Ridge first explored integration in 1954 but chose not to proceed until 1955. In 1956, despite protest, 12 African American students entered Clinton High School. These students became known as the Clinton 12. This integration is significant because it occurred before Little Rock’s integration in 1957.

By the 1970s, several generations of families had resided in subsidized housing, and many expressed little desire to improve their living conditions. The Knoxville Housing Authority, responsible for subsidized housing in Knoxville, expanded its mission and changed its name to Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation (KCDC) in 1973. In 1986, KCDC and Knoxville’s City Council approved a concept for 26 units of “Scattered Site Housing” for Mechanicsville. In 1998, KCDC received a HUD grant to build a new Hope VI Project. The goal of this project was “to end the social and economic isolation of College Homes” by building a mixed-income community in Mechanicsville. The project was completed in 2006 with a total of 255 homes constructed on the old College Homes site and throughout Mechanicsville. The neighborhood now has a new grocery store, gas station, convenience store and major job-training center.

**Company Towns**
Several cities in the PlanET region were created solely for housing employees of local industry. The city of Alcoa, the first planned community in Tennessee, was incorporated in 1919. Located north of Maryville in Blount County, the city was designed to provide employees of the ALCOA Aluminum plant with housing. Construction of homes began in 1915. Cultural norms of the era and Jim Crow laws that prevented integrated housing resulted in segregated housing for African American workers in the Hall and Oldham communities within the city limits of Alcoa. Schools were also segregated at this time, and Charles M. Hall High School served the African American community until school desegregation in the mid 1960s. Population in the Hall community today remains primarily African American.

Norris, a small community in Anderson County, was created to house employees of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). TVA was established by Congress in 1933 to address a wide range of environmental, economic and technological issues, including the delivery of low-cost electricity and the management of natural resources in the Tennessee Valley. Norris was based on TVA’s vision of a “model community.” The vision included cooperative, self-sustaining businesses that would provide all of the needs of the community. Despite protests by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), African Americans were excluded from the city. The overwhelming majority of the town’s population today remains White, with only 2.3% of the population classified as non-White.

East Tennessee was chosen by the federal government to house facilities dedicated to its nuclear weapons program during World War II. The Manhattan Project was established here because of the area’s isolation...
and proximity to a larger city that provided workers. The city of Oak Ridge, located in Anderson County, was created to support the influx of workers and their families who were employed to build the weapons. Homes were provided to employees. Different sized homes were assigned to families based on family size and worker status. The city was developed as a segregated community with separate areas for African Americans and Whites. Scarboro was originally designated as the African American community and continues to be predominantly so today.

Segregated housing patterns that were established during the creation of “company towns” are still prevalent today. Home ownership has frequently been passed from generation to generation in these areas and has resulted in the perpetuation of self-imposed segregation.

**Demographic Trends: 1990-2010**

While the PlanET region remains overwhelmingly White, the percentage of ethnic and racial groups in the total population is increasing. In 1990, 91.8% of the region’s population was classified as non-Hispanic White.

In 2010 the percentage of the non-Hispanic White population dropped to 86.9%, with the fastest growing ethnic group Hispanic. Growth of Hispanic population is consistent with changes experienced in other parts of the state. Recently released statistics show the Hispanic population in Tennessee growing at the third fastest rate in the U.S.

Knoxville historically has been more racially and ethnically diverse than the rest of the region, and the percentage of ethnic and racial groups living in the city is growing more rapidly than the rest of the region. In 1990, about one of five Knoxville residents (17.5%) were non-White. In 2010 the share has grown to one of four residents (25.8%). Percentages of African Americans and Asians in Knoxville’s population have remained relatively stable over the past 20 years while the Hispanic population and those who identify themselves as “Other” have increased.

Nationally, by 2040, the majority of the population will be people of color. In this region, however, the population is not predicted to change dramatically from a race perspective.

The region also has a large population who live in poverty. White people (12% of almost 600,000 or 70,000 people) and people of color (29% of almost 87,000 or 25,000 people) have lived in poverty for generations.

The composition of households in the PlanET region also changed from 2000 to 2010:

- The number of households with children under 18 declined in Knoxville and the region.
- The number of households with persons 65 years and older has grown.

(Additional high-level snapshot data and a series of maps depicting demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics of the region are available in Appendix A on the PlanET website: www.planeasttn.org.)
Segregation
Despite the presence of neighborhoods in Knoxville with high concentrations of racial and ethnic households, the city as a whole is less segregated than other large cities in Tennessee. Compared to Chattanooga, Memphis and Nashville, Knoxville is more integrated for both African American and Hispanic populations. Hispanics are more integrated than the African American population in Knoxville. The Hispanic population does not have historical and cultural connection with certain neighborhoods and have settled in areas near job opportunities. The Asian population is the smallest racial group in Knoxville but is the least integrated.

Disparities
There are disparities between racial/ethnic groups living in the PlanET region in their access to neighborhood opportunity. With the exception of access to jobs, White residents consistently have higher access to essential resources than do African American or Hispanic residents. However, having access to jobs does not necessarily equate to greater employment. The downtown area in Knoxville hosts many of the largest employers in the PlanET region—city, county and state government, the University of Tennessee and TVA—but it is also surrounded by low-income residential areas. Residents in these areas live close to job opportunities, but many do not have the necessary education or skills needed for gainful employment. As a result, residents experience higher rates of unemployment than Whites.

Table 1. Households by Type, 2000-2010

| Year | Characteristic                      | PlanET Region | | | Knoxville city |
|------|-------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|      |                                     | Estimate      | Share (%)     | Estimate      | Share (%)     |
| 2000 | Total households                    | 253,005       |               | 76,650        |               |
|      | Households with children under 18  | 80,376        | 31.8          | 19,626        | 25.6          |
|      | Households with persons 65 years + | 59,136        | 23.4          | 17,815        | 23.2          |
| 2010 | Total households                    | 284,984       |               | 78,048        |               |
|      | Households with children under 18  | 85,381        | 30.0          | 19,051        | 24.4          |
|      | Households with persons 65 years + | 73,432        | 25.8          | 16,884        | 21.6          |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
Areas of Concentrated Stressors

For the purposes of this assessment, areas of stressors and areas of opportunity are examined. The PlanET Equity Team, a group of stakeholders from the region, engaged in an exercise to identify and define socio-economic stressors and opportunities. (The methodology for this exercise is shown in Appendix C, available online at www.planeasttn.org.) Drawing from their personal and professional experience and data available for all five counties, the team identified nine indicators that are often used to predict economic stress. The nine indicators are: education attainment, poverty, race, disability, senior population, rent burden, single family households, vehicle availability and limited English proficiency. In this report, the focus is on education attainment, poverty and race.

Implications
A higher than average concentration of any one of these indicators may predict community stress, but the presence of several concentrated stressors will almost certainly correlate with lower overall quality of life for the individuals living in those areas. Areas of concern, geographic areas where residents were exposed to multiple concentrated predictors, emerged in all five counties in the region.

Existing Conditions
The health and vitality of a region extends beyond the physical health of its residents. A healthy community offers quality education and training, work for all who want to work, affordable housing, an accessible transportation system and a healthy and safe environment. A healthy community provides access to opportunities necessary for achieving a high quality of life for all residents, regardless of race, income or age.

Many residents in the PlanET region lack the necessary resources to achieve a desirable quality of life. This impacts the region by placing demands on government and non-profit agencies to provide needed services. Research suggests that communities whose residents are experiencing multiple conditions of stress are more at risk of not attaining a high quality of life and self-sufficiency. This in turn may prevent the community from reaching its full potential.

Map 3. Areas of Concentrated Stressors
**Predictors of Community Stress**

**Education Attainment**
Improving the quality of education and increasing the number of people who continue their education beyond high school is a major focus for local and state officials. Educating and training the workforce to compete in the current job market is essential for their employability. In the present economic market, holding a high school diploma or less severely restricts eligibility for jobs that offer a “living wage.”

The PlanET region, home to a major university and a number of other colleges, community colleges, and vocational training institutions, continues to experience a high number of individuals who have either not chosen or not been able to pursue educational opportunities past high school.

Almost 45 percent of residents in the region over the age of 25 did not complete any training past high school. They live in areas characterized by higher numbers of Hispanics and African Americans. Rural areas, especially in Union County, also have a disproportionate number of residents with only a high school education or less, regardless of race.

Map 4. Concentration of Population with Low Education Attainment
Poverty
The effects of poverty are far reaching and particularly detrimental to children who grow up in poverty. Research is conclusive that poverty has a negative impact on children’s health, academic performance and overall well-being. Incidents of asthma, childhood obesity and other health risks are dramatically higher for children in families with household income below poverty level. Furthermore, there is evidence that children who are raised in communities with high concentrations of poverty are significantly less likely to experience upward mobility and ability to join the middle class. About one of five of the region’s children, 18.7%, currently live in poverty. This number jumps to one in three children living in poverty (33.0%) within the city limits of Knoxville.

Poverty is a pervasive problem in much of the PlanET region, with 15% of all residents reporting an annual income falling below the poverty line. Perhaps the more striking story for the region is the wide disparity in income between households. There are dozens of Census Block Groups where at least 25% of residents live below poverty and 16 Block Groups where more than 50% of residents have incomes below poverty level. All of the areas with 50% or more of residents living in poverty also have above average numbers of minority population.
Minority Population

The PlanET region as a whole is not racially diverse. An overwhelming majority, 86.9% of the region, is categorized as non-Hispanic White. However, the population within Knoxville is considerably more diverse than the remainder of the region, with 74.2% of the city’s population non-Hispanic White. One of six Knoxville residents (17.1%) consider themselves African American, and 4.6% consider themselves Hispanic. African American population in Knoxville exceeds the national average of 12.4%. Hispanic population is growing rapidly in the region but still falls below the national average of 16.1%.

The majority of African Americans in the region reside in east Knoxville and in a few neighborhoods embedded within larger towns. While evidence of racial and ethnic segregation remains, it appears that it is a result of self-selection and not red-lining or other institutional barriers. Findings from qualitative research conducted with residents throughout the region suggest that people choose to live close to family or in a community that feels like “home.” Therefore, many of the concentrated areas of minority population are closely aligned with historically African American neighborhoods. Several, for example, the Scarboro community in Oak Ridge and Hall and Oldham communities in Alcoa, were established during the 1940s and are considered to be historically African American neighborhoods.

The majority of Hispanic people in the region reside in Blount, Knox and Loudon Counties and tend to live in concentrated areas. They are found where housing costs are lower and rental properties are available. Again, Hispanic people stated during focus groups that they were more comfortable living in a neighborhood with other Hispanic people because businesses that cater to their cultural needs have been developed in these areas. Food and retail sources are evident in areas with high concentrations of Hispanic residents. Furthermore, Hispanic people generally are employed in lower-wage service industry or construction jobs and tend to live close to other Hispanics so transportation can be shared.
Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty and Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty

Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty and Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty (RCAPs/ECAPs) are parameters HUD required the region to review. We felt this did not fully capture the communities throughout our region that are confronted with various socio-economic challenges. Accordingly we developed the Areas of Concentrated Stressors method to supplement the RCAPs/ECAPs requirement, allowing our region to be better equipped to address issues of equity and access to opportunity.

Identifying geographic areas where high concentrations of minorities and high poverty rates intersect is essential for improving equity and overall community well-being. Research has found that non-White children are “doubly disadvantaged” because they are much more likely than White children to live in neighborhoods with a high concentration of poverty. This “double disadvantage” has a detrimental effect on academic achievement and ability to move out of poverty in adulthood, leading to generational poverty and equity issues for communities.

**RCAP/ECAP Demographics**

Five census tracts in the PlanET region were identified as Racially or Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty. All five are located within Knoxville’s corporate city limits—specifically in the historically African American neighborhoods in east Knoxville. Approximately one of 10 Knoxville residents and three of 100 residents in the PlanET region live in RCAPs/ECAPs. More than half of residents in these areas are non-White (59.1%); 47.9% are African Americans; and 6.4% are Hispanic.

There have been significant demographic shifts over the last several decades in the racial and ethnic makeup of the five census tracts identified as RCAPs/ECAPs. Census Tract 29, known as Christenberry Heights, has experienced the most significant transition. In 1970, less than one of six residents (16.0%) fell below the poverty line but one of three (34.1%) are considered poor today. Lonsdale, Census Tract 28, has experienced the largest increase in Hispanic residents than other RCAPs/ECAPs. The areas known as Mechanicsville and Morningside/Five Points, Census Tracts 70 and 68, have historically been the centers of African American culture since the Civil War and have remained predominantly African American through the years.

Efforts in recent years to develop the downtown and waterfront areas in Knoxville have resulted in the addition of condominiums and higher priced residential units in Census Tract 68. The addition of higher priced housing units has resulted in a significant increase in the number of Whites who have moved into the area. Despite the influx of more affluent residents, the overall poverty rate has increased, suggesting wide disparities in household incomes.

*(In addition to the data above, a series of maps depicting demographic, social, economic and housing characteristics of RCAP/ECAP Census Tracts is available online in Appendix D, at www.planeasttn.org.)*
Racially Concentrated Areas of Poverty and Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty

Education Challenges in RCAPs/ECAPs
The quality of elementary schools that serve students who live in Racially or Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty is low. Of the 13 elementary schools serving these students, only five received above a “D” grade in math or reading on Tennessee’s Department of Education Report Card released in 2012. Only one school, Sequoyah Elementary, received a grade above a “C.” While serving the RCAPs, it is important to note that less than 10% of Sequoyah’s population is non-White. Also, the majority of students who attend this school live in an area that has the highest median value housing in Knox County.

Housing in RCAPs/ECAPs
Housing prices in the RCAPs/ECAPs are significantly lower in comparison to other areas in the region. The median price of homes in the PlanET region is $154,277, however, the median value in RCAPs is $75,191.

Public housing units currently are prevalent in the Racially and Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty. The relatively small geographic area hosts one complex with more than 304 units and nine complexes that have between 176 and 304 units. The majority of other public housing units in the region are in close proximity to the RCAPs/ECAPs.
Access to Opportunity

Defining Areas of Opportunity
According to the World Health Organization, a healthy community must offer safe neighborhoods, affordable housing and accessible transportation systems, jobs for all who want to work and a healthy and safe environment. Data were collected to determine how well the region fares on these measures.

Twenty-six indicators were compiled to define access to areas of opportunity and categorized into the five themes that have guided discussions and efforts for PlanET: Economy and Workforce Development; Environment; Healthy Communities; Housing and Neighborhoods; and Transportation and Infrastructure. Several indicators were recommended by HUD, and the PlanET Equity Team determined that an expansion of the indicators would prove more meaningful for our area.

The 26 indicators are described in detail in Appendix C, which is available online at www.planeasttn.org. They are listed here for reference: labor force participation rate, unemployment rate, job access index, job growth, living wage jobs, education attainment, high school accomplishment index, household income, health hazards exposure index, proximity to impaired streams, vacant land/parks/open space, access to activity centers, access to healthy food, poverty rate, public assistance, homeownership rate, vacant housing units, housing mix, home value, foreclosures, rent burden, elementary school accomplishment index, commuting alternatives, walkability, transit access and housing + transportation costs.

Implications
Access to opportunity in the PlanET region is not equal in all areas. High quality schools, healthy neighborhoods, job opportunities, transportation options and clean environment are not distributed evenly, and implications for these inequities are far reaching.

Access to Opportunity in Racially/Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty
Overall, residents living in Racially or Ethnically Concentrated Areas of Poverty do not have access to high levels of opportunity. Only one portion of Census Tract 67 has high opportunity.
Economy and Workforce Development

To maintain and attract diverse industries that will offer high quality jobs, the region must be able to provide a trained, experienced and available workforce. Not only is education and training necessary, but industry has to be located in proximity to the workforce or in an area that is accessible for workers. Two-thirds of the region is rated moderate to very low opportunity.

Location of High Opportunity

The majority of areas within the PlanET region with highest opportunity for economy and workforce development are located in west Knox County and south Anderson County. The area is crossed by Interstate 40 and stretches to Oak Ridge National Lab (ORNL) and a small portion of Loudon County. Another area that has very high opportunity is found where I-140 ends in Blount County.

Vulnerability to Loss of Industry

In the current economic environment, cities and counties are struggling to retain employers in their area. The Job Growth Index displays a striking picture of the current economic conditions for our region, measuring the number of job gains and losses. Of the 418 Census Block Groups comprising the region, more than half (55.3%) experienced a net increase in jobs. However, there is remarkable disparity in where the job gains were experienced. No job gains were seen in Union County, while the most significant gains were experienced in Knox, Anderson and Loudon counties. Job growth in Knox County was seen in the western portion that borders Anderson and Loudon counties. Inner city Knoxville and east Knoxville reported few opportunities for employment close to home.
Education Attainment of Labor Force
HUD evaluated local education opportunity with its School Proficiency Index. The quality of neighborhood schools ranges from very low to very high across the PlanET region. In Union County, concerns were voiced by residents that graduates from the local high school had not received adequate training to be competitive in today's job market. In Knox, there is wide disparity among schools in their graduation rates and overall ACT scores. Schools located in higher socio-economic areas generally had higher graduation rates and ACT scores. Schools with a majority of African American students—Austin East and Fulton High Schools—had the lowest ACT scores and second lowest graduation rates. Schools with more diversity in student enrollment—West High and Bearden High—fared better on both indicators.

Map 12. Neighborhood School Proficiency

Table 2. School Performance Measures, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Graduation Rates (%)</th>
<th>ACT Scores (average)</th>
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<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blount</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcoa High</td>
<td>95.7</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heritage High</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryville High</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>23.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Blount High</td>
<td>90.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knox</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Knox County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Austin East High/Magnet</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bearden High</td>
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<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter High</td>
<td>82.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central High</td>
<td>80.2</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farragut High</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Fulton High</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gibbs High</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Halls High</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardin Valley Academy</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karns High</td>
<td>85.5</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powell High</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Doyle High</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West High</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>20.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loudon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loudon County</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lenoir City High</td>
<td>95.3</td>
<td>19.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Loudon County High</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>Union County</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union County High</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>17.9</td>
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</table>


16
**Housing and Neighborhoods**

Building strong communities begins at the neighborhood level. The presence of adequate housing and high performing schools contributes to overall well-being. Frequently, having a neighborhood school is the linchpin for sense of community and increased social capital in an area.

Neighborhood schools that are performing well enhance property values and often serve to stabilize older parts of a city. Furthermore, the quality of elementary schools has been found to be a basic criterion for housing decisions of families. Families are willing to pay more for houses in neighborhoods where standardized scores are higher.

There is considerable discrepancy regarding academic achievement scores in elementary schools throughout the region. A pattern exists where schools with lower performance outcomes tend to serve students who live in areas with lower home values.

Homeownership also creates a sense of engagement in a community. Racial minority population is less likely to own a home in the PlanET region—less than half of the minority population in Knoxville and in the region currently own a home.

**Table 3. Home Values, 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Median Home Value</th>
<th>Lowest Median Home Value</th>
<th>Highest Median Home Value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>$121,300</td>
<td>$18,300</td>
<td>$263,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blount</td>
<td>$162,300</td>
<td>$57,800</td>
<td>$402,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knox</td>
<td>$154,900</td>
<td>$48,000</td>
<td>$521,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loudon</td>
<td>$173,300</td>
<td>$80,500</td>
<td>$491,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>$92,200</td>
<td>$76,700</td>
<td>$110,700</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median Home Values are countywide figures. Lowest and Highest Median Values are derived from Block Group figures for each county. Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
Persons with a Disability

Persons with a disability are particularly vulnerable. There is considerable overlap between the presence of a disability and living in an area with low opportunity. An overwhelming number of people with a disability live in areas with moderate to very low opportunity.
Race
The majority of non-Whites live in areas that provide low access to opportunity.

Table 4. Housing Tenure, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>PlanET Region Estimate</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Knoxville city Estimate</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HOUSING TENURE</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupied housing units</td>
<td>286,362</td>
<td></td>
<td>82,829</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>199,165</td>
<td>69.6</td>
<td>42,204</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter occupied</td>
<td>87,197</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>40,625</td>
<td>49.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>HOUSING TENURE BY MINORITY STATUS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White non-Hispanic householder</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupied housing units</td>
<td>254,343</td>
<td></td>
<td>65,002</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>185,147</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>36,611</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renter occupied</td>
<td>69,196</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>28,391</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White householder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Occupied housing units</td>
<td>32,019</td>
<td></td>
<td>17,827</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>14,018</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>5,593</td>
<td>31.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Renter occupied</td>
<td>18,001</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>12,234</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
Environment

Heavily polluting industries negatively impact the quality of life of nearby residents. Exposure to pollutants frequently results in higher incidences of health problems such as asthma and cancer. Visual patterns suggest that many of the same areas that are experiencing an increase in jobs are also experiencing exposure to pollutants in the air, rivers and streams.

Areas with the highest opportunity for a healthy environment are generally less developed, rural areas. All of Union County and large sections in rural Anderson, Blount and Loudon counties offer high opportunity for healthy environment.

Map 17. Environment Opportunity
Healthy Communities
Healthy communities have access to safe activity centers, nutritious foods and medical care.

Safe Places to Be Active
Overall health of a community is frequently correlated with access and opportunities to engage in physical activity. Urban parks and green spaces can have a positive impact on overall health. Providing access to physical activities, like greenways and trails, encourages the population to become more active. Access to parks decreases overall obesity, a leading cause of many health disorders, such as diabetes and heart disease. Furthermore, providing young people with clean and safe places to play is especially important for establishing healthy habits. Fears were expressed by residents in the PlanET region during focus group meetings that a lack of safe parks and recreation centers for young people to participate in sports and outdoor activities will result in increased drug use and addiction.

Map 18. Community Health Opportunity
Healthy Foods
Access to nutritious food can have a positive impact on the overall health of a community. Access can be limited by lack of transportation, absence of stores that stock fresh and healthy foods and the inability to pay for healthy foods because of low household income. Areas with high concentrations of low income households and are more than one mile from a large grocery store are defined as food deserts. Approximately one of 10 residents in Blount, Loudon and Knox counties live in food deserts.

Health Care
Access to health care is essential to a community’s overall well-being. The majority of the region’s medical facilities and specialists are concentrated in Knox County, leaving many areas within the region without adequate access to health care. Rural areas are particularly impacted, and many Census Tracts in the region have been designated Medically Underserved Areas by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. All of Loudon and Union counties, five tracts in Anderson County, seven in Blount County, and 25 in Knox County have been designated as underserved.

Overall, the PlanET region does not provide adequate access to healthy communities. Rural areas and Knoxville’s inner city have lower opportunities than other areas of the region.
Transportation and Infrastructure
The relatively low cost of housing and property taxes, compared to many areas of the country, make living seem very affordable in the PlanET region. However, when transportation costs are included, the area does not fare well. Large numbers of households face high commuting costs. An overwhelming majority, 86% of residents, spend more than 45% of their household income on housing and transportation costs, the result of reliance on personal vehicles for transportation.

Carpooling and walking are not viewed as viable options for most workers in the region. More than eight of 10 workers (84.8%) drive alone in their daily commute. And, less than 2% choose to walk to work each day. However, there are small areas located within five miles of a college or university within Knoxville and Knox County where more than 20% of the population walk to work or school.

Public Transportation
Public transportation or other alternate modes are not available to the majority of residents in the region. This is attributed to low population density that prevents these services from being economically viable. Access to public transportation stops within one mile of residences is unavailable in more than two-thirds (69.8%) of the region. This, coupled with the trend of businesses and industries not located in highly populated areas or near public transportation routes, reduces the viability of public transportation. This is especially problematic for people with physical disabilities affecting their mobility.

Residents in the center of Knoxville have more transportation options than residents in other parts of the region. The availability of regular bus service along major road corridors for Knoxville city residents provides a higher level of opportunity to be less dependent on a personal vehicle for daily travel.

Public Transit in RCAPs/ECAPs
Public transit is one area of opportunity that residents in RCAPs/ECAPs fare better than other areas. Routes offered by Knoxville Area Transit (KAT) are centrally located within each RCAP/ECAP in Knoxville. However, this advantage should not be overstated because these routes do not offer a viable option for employees who work outside Knoxville.
The map to the right overlays areas of opportunity with areas of concentrated stressors. It shows where we have been successful from the perspective of access to opportunity, as well as the areas where things could be much better.

The challenges identified in this Equity Profile did not occur overnight and will not be remedied soon. By having the information compiled in this report, we have a tool for making the PlanET region stronger, healthier and more competitive over time.

**Recommendations**

This Equity Profile provides an overview of where the PlanET region has been and where the region currently stands. The intent of this report is to help inform decision-makers throughout the region and also to serve as a benchmark for creating a stronger, more equitable East Tennessee in the years to come.

Specific actions community leaders can take to move towards a more equitable East Tennessee include:

- Support and promote mixed-use zoning to encourage housing located near commercial and retail development.
- Create incentives to preserve or establish affordable housing located near job centers.
- Incentivize rehabilitation of blighted property that is located near public transportation routes.
- Incentivize new businesses that offer “company” transportation or bus service to employees living in rural or less densely populated areas.
- Continue to track data over time and share data with other community partners.
- Support workforce development initiatives.
- Get involved in community organizations and efforts that promote equity and access to opportunity, such as Together! Healthy Knox, East TN PBS, TN Achieves, Great Schools Partnership, ICare Union County and East Tennessee Quality Growth.
WHAT IS PlanET?

PlanET is a partnership of local governments, businesses, non-profits and community organizations coming together to have a regional conversation about our future. This partnership will work to improve the prosperity of our five-county region—Anderson, Blount, Knox, Loudon and Union counties—over the next three decades. The project will develop a plan for action that lays out strategies to reach the region’s goals, as well as tools for implementation, including leadership and capacity-building programs. PlanET will focus on the region, but it will not lose sight of our individual communities. It will help us solve tough issues together so that we grow and innovate in ways that benefit the entire regional community.

www.planeasttn.org

REFERENCES


PHOTO CREDITS
