Livability Report Card attractive to recruited businesses

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POSTED: 5:48 PM, Mar 6, 2015
UPDATED: 7:10 PM, Mar 6, 2015
TAG: business (/topic/business)

Just the fact that the region has something like the Livability Report Card — and is willing to give itself bad marks if called for — is attractive to businesses looking at locating in East Tennessee, a Knoxville Chamber executive said Friday.

The report, which was released Friday at the Knoxville Chamber, rates East Tennessee counties in eight key areas. It helps the community assess its strengths and weaknesses, said Doug Lawyer, vice president of economic development for the chamber.

“What this does is say a couple of things,” he said. “One is that this community — this region — is coming together to talk about these things. And companies know that they are potentially locating in a region that is asking itself these difficult questions.”

The Metropolitan Planning Commission, which produced the report, presented it to public officials, chamber members and others at the chamber’s headquarters on Market Square. Jeff Welch, MPC interim executive director, hit on a few highlights of the report.

The report covers nine counties, including Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Roane, Blount, Anderson, Union, Jefferson and Sevier, which was just added to the database, Welch said.

In general, air quality has improved, unemployment has declined and the education level of workers is increasing

On the other hand, except for a decrease in childhood obesity, East Tennesseans get poor marks for health, with high levels of obesity, smoking and physical inactivity.

Researchers found that commuting has a surprising level of impact in the region.

“Almost 50 percent of the population lives in one county but works in another county,” Welch said.

This costs time and money as people are caught between where they want to live and where the jobs are, he said.

“This leaves less money available for durable goods and for activities such as socializing,” Welch said.

The Livability Report Card is online at ETIndex.org. It deals with 21 indicators and was based on the ETIndex database, which deals with 87 indicators, Welch said. ETIndex is a storehouse of information useful to many groups, he said.

Karen Pershing, executive director of the Metropolitan Drug Commission, said ETIndex will be a boon to nonprofits such as her group.

Patrick Phillips, executive director of the Loudon County Economic Development Agency, said the data will be useful to businesses, but not directly but in helping the community improve itself.

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