PlanET Hears from 2,000 Residents in Recent Community Survey

We hear you. For several months, PlanET has been asking residents across the five-county region to weigh in on the issues that matter most to them, those affecting their daily lives and those that will have an impact on the future for their children and grandchildren.

Through Community Forums, Working Group sessions with area experts, the Meeting In A Box program that brings planning activities directly to community groups, and with our online town-hall meeting, MindMixer, we’ve gathered a lot of input from area residents. Perhaps the widest reach across the region, though, was achieved by “The Community Survey.”

A telephone poll conducted by the University of Tennessee this spring, The Community Survey gathered input from 2,000 residents across all five counties, each asked for their opinions on problems facing the region and their priorities for future growth. The statistically-valid survey revealed several key findings.

Residents expressed positive sentiments about life in their communities, with more than 75 percent reporting quality of life as good or excellent. However, there was region-wide consensus that a lack of good-paying jobs is a major problem, one that should be tackled, according to respondents, by providing educational programs for new career opportunities, with special effort made to attract manufacturing or science and technology jobs to the region.

Survey respondents noted other regional challenges, including low achieving schools, pollution in the region's rivers and lakes, traffic congestion, and highways in need of repair.

The UT survey gave equal time to identification of the region's assets, and participants stated their top-five: mountains and natural beauty, people and sense of community, quiet of small towns, climate and seasons, and family.

Cohesiveness across the region was clearly demonstrated in the results of the community amenities question. When responses were compiled separately for each county, survey respondents in four of the five counties selected the same five factors in the same order of importance. While our region enjoys considerable diversity, at the end of the day, we still value many of the same things when it comes to how we want our communities built.
So it's clear where PlanET needs to focus its efforts. You've spoken, and we've listened. Phase one of the PlanET process set out to gather community input on current challenges and strengths. Next in the process, we will ask residents about their vision for the region, 20 to 30 years out. Look for many opportunities to tell us your ideas about a desired future as we continue to move the planning effort forward in the coming weeks.

**Why Do We Live Where We Live?**

*If you were to move from your present home to a new home, what might influence your decision about where to live? Would you choose the same neighborhood or community? Or would you prefer an area that offers something different than your current neighborhood?*

The University of Tennessee's "Community Survey," a telephone poll of 2,000 residents conducted this spring, sheds some light onto the factors that drive our decisions about where we would like to live.

Throughout the region, high-quality public schools was the top priority among people if they were to consider a new place to live, with 68 percent of survey respondents rating the factor extremely important.

Second among location preferences, 62 percent of persons polled stated that being within a 30-minute drive to work was an important decision factor.

Over half of the survey participants (53 percent) placed a very high value on having sidewalks and places to take walks, while easy access to major highways and walking distance to other things in the community rounded out the top five location preferences.

A similar question was posed in a recent survey by the National Association of Realtors. It asked people across the country the same question about the things they find important when choosing a place to live.

Among 16 location factors offered, four of the top-five selections matched those reported in our region in the UT preference survey: 44 percent of respondents nationwide selected high-quality public schools as a very important location requirement, 36 percent said short commutes were important, 31 percent rated places to take walks as very important, and pedestrian access to places was listed as important by 24 percent of survey takers.

The results of both surveys provide considerable insight into residential location preferences of people, valuable information to realtors looking to assist buyers and sellers of property. At a larger scale, though, the survey findings offer community and regional planners important information about what citizens want to see in their communities today and in the future, as planning efforts advance a strategy to ensure high quality of life for our children and grandchildren.

To view the full survey results, visit [www.planeasttn.org](http://www.planeasttn.org).