plan ET

Working Groups

PlanET Economic & Workforce Development Working Group Meeting #1

Wednesday, February 22, 2012, 7:30 am – 9:30 am
Knoxville Chamber, Market House Room

KEY FINDINGS

With approximately 30 participants, the discussion focused on challenges facing the region in developing and sustaining a stronger economy and workforce. During a series of breakout discussions, the groups identified issues that could be categorized into several broad categories related to: workforce preparation, regional infrastructure capacity, and land use behaviors, as well as economic and workforce development governance. The attendees also asked for more sub-regional economic analysis to identify any unique issues that might be masked by aggregating the data at a regional level.

Workforce preparation challenges

Education and training was identified by the group as the biggest workforce related challenge the region is facing. Below are the most urgent education and training gaps the region needs:

❖ Workers' foundational skills are inadequate.
❖ Education curriculum is not well aligned with job opportunities.
❖ Students do not fully understand current and future needs of industries.

A corollary to these issues is that some businesses appear to be unwilling (or to not recognize the need) to adjust their wages to reflect the demand for more skilled workers.

Regional infrastructure and land use challenges

Almost every break-out group brought up the infrastructure and transportation shortage issue in the region. Below are some of the key issues identified:

❖ Need to improve affordability of commuting within the region and accessibility of work locations.
❖ The inadequacy of broadband infrastructure in many parts of the region.

Economic and workforce development governance

The participants widely agreed that the region needs better regional collaboration in order to achieve common regional economic and workforce development goals.

❖ Lack of true regional perspective to economic development.
❖ Need to engage neighbor counties to support development of greater Knoxville region.
❖ Need to enhance communication to better connect partner networks across the region.

Sub-regional Analysis

The participants identified the need to understand the unique characteristics of sub regions within the region. However, the consultants advise that this sub-regional analysis should avoid traditional political boundaries (i.e., counties) and instead examine non-traditional economic functions (innovation valley core area, recreation and retirement clusters, and rural area) to illustrate commonality across county boundaries