



## **ECONOMIC & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP Meeting #1**

Wednesday, February 22, 2012

7:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.

Knoxville Chamber of Commerce

17 Market Square, Knoxville, TN 37902

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### **Welcome and Introductory Presentation**

Doug Lawyer, Vice President of Economic Development at the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce, provided opening remarks and introduced Ken Poole, CEO of the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC) and member of the PlanET consultant team, as the facilitator working with PlanET to support the working group.

### **Large Group**

Ken Poole asked working group participants to introduce themselves and followed with a presentation of the PlanET process, an overview of working group expectations, and summary findings from the economic/workforce section of the draft Existing Conditions Memo. The economic and workforce analysis showed the region's economy is still in recovery but has bounced back at a faster pace than the rest of the state. In order to capture current and future growth, the region needs to prepare its workforce to meet growing opportunities in "middle-skill" careers.

Leo Knight, President of Entrepreneurs of Knoxville (EOK), was introduced as a co-chair of the Working Group. He talked about his work with EOK. Mr. Knight and his organization provide networking opportunities for small business owners and independent contractors and help them turn innovative ideas into real businesses. He also identified some of the key issues he thought this process might highlight.

### **PARTIES PRESENT:**

1. John Lamb (Blount County Planning Department)
2. Vaughn Smith (CAC Workforce Connections)
3. Rogers Doughty (City of Knoxville Community Development)
4. Anne Wallace (City of Knoxville--South Cumberland)

5. Susanna Sutherland (City of Knoxville Sustainability)
6. Jim Wallace (Coldwell Banker Realtor)
7. Phil Layman (East Tennessee Development District)
8. Leo Knight (Entrepreneurs of Knoxville)
9. Lance McCold (Jobs With Justice ET)
10. Lynne Musick (Joseph Construction)
11. Kim Henry (KH Consulting)
12. Todd Napier (Knox Development Corporation)
13. Doug Lawyer (Knoxville Chamber of Commerce)
14. Ahnna Estes (Knoxville Chamber of Commerce)
15. Mary Miltenberger (Knoxville Tourism & Sports)
16. Clayton Pangle (Loudon County Visitors Bureau)
17. Larry Stephens (MBI Architecture)
18. Matt Chambers (Messer Construction)
19. Michael Kane (MPC Commissioner)
20. Maribel Koella (NAI Knoxville)
21. Debi Bolton (Pellissippi State Community College)
22. David Barclay (SunTrust Bank)
23. Todd Fisher (Tech 20/20)
24. Ray Abbas (Tennessee Career Center)
25. Aaron Stewart (TVA)
26. Julie Graham (Union County Chamber of Commerce)
27. Matt Murray (UT – CBER)
28. Randy Gustafson (UT – CBER)
29. Nancy Brown (Walter State Community College)
30. Windie Wilson (Workforce Connections)

**STAFF:** Mark Donaldson (MPC), Buzz Johnson (MPC), Terry Gilhula (MPC), Bryan Berry (MPC), Amy Brooks, (TPO), Wen Sun (CREC)

**PARTIES MISSING FROM THE DISCUSSION:**

The group was asked if there were local interests/experts missing from the group that needed to be engaged. Responses included the need for additional representation from:

- Small entrepreneurs
- UT
- Healthcare

- K-12 schools
- Industry clusters identified in the white paper
- Creative sector
- Labor (workers)
- Young professionals

## **Small Group Discussion**

Attendees were divided into six small groups and were asked to identify major challenges to a stronger regional economy and workforce. The small groups discussed numerous issues and challenges facing the PlanET region. Group discussion items have been consolidated below. Many of these items may ultimately be included among the priorities for regional action.

### **CHALLENGES:**

#### **Workforce-related challenges:**

- Lack of skilled labor
- Need to improve workers' foundational skills (e.g., reading skills) to meet industries' needs. The effort should focus on K-12 and community colleges.
- Need to increase education level and align workers' skill sets with industry needs
- High school graduates who are not ready for the workforce or college
- Not ready for Baby Boomer retirement
- Need to retain and recruit young professionals to the region
- Limited racial diversity: need to engage diversity champions, black contractors, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- Uncertainty of the economy and limited flexibility with education and training to respond to uncertain job/training needs
- Transition in skill sets needed for manufacturing
- High concentration of low-skill jobs in the region. Need to attract higher-skill jobs to the region.
- Need to improve technical school training
- Need to improve rural-area workers' skill sets
- Lack of willingness to offer high wages for skilled workers
- Need to improve investment strategies in education
  - *What does this look like at the sub-county level?*
- Improve outlook and economic condition for low-skilled workers

#### **Regional infrastructure and quality of life challenges:**

- Limited mass transportation in the region (*i.e.*, airport and busing) and expensive airfare to/from the airport
- The MSA is not inclusive enough due to long commuting distances and challenges in getting participation
- Limited accessibility of working locations
- Lack of strong infrastructure (technology/broadband)
- Rising utility rates

**Development and land use management challenges:**

- Lack of large tracts of land
- Need to take advantage of natural resources and work on lake/riverfront development
- Existing political boundaries make it challenging to understand the economy at a regional level and keep balanced in funding and land use

**Small business and entrepreneurship challenges:**

- Not enough support for small businesses

**Economic and workforce development governance:**

- Need regional perspective on economic/workforce development. There is limited outside influence.
- Need to improve communication/vision within the region: streamlining governmental process, connecting business needs with resources, leadership, and self-limiting attitude

**Comments and questions for consideration in the economic/workforce white paper:**

- Subregional analysis is better to understand issues
- How do trends in this report differ from other metro areas around county?
- Include Sevier County for analysis?
- Better integration of DOE into area
- Triangle: UT-ORNL-Blount County
- Unique facts of each county for age, employment, and other indicators. (Concerns are different but goals could be the same.)

**PRIORITIES:**

Each group was asked to select what it views as the two most important issues related to economic and workforce development. The groups then reported these back to the whole group. Priority issues raised during this session included:

**Education and Training**

- Improve workers' foundational skills through better K-12 and postsecondary education.
- Align education with job opportunities.

- Prepare students to meet current and future needs of industries.
- Provide quality technical training to change people's perspective on technical school students

### **Regional Collaboration**

- Need to engage neighbor communities to support development of the greater Knoxville region
- Communication issue: recognize and connect networks within the region
- Regionalism perspective to economic development

### **Infrastructure and Transportation**

- Need to improve affordability of commuting within the region and accessibility of work locations
- Infrastructure (e.g., broadband)

### **Other**

- Businesses unwilling to pay enough for skilled workers
- Unique characteristics of subregions within the region (e.g., low-skilled workers)

### **Closing**

Ken Poole concluded with reference to the upcoming Regional Forum Series 2 meeting and the next round of Economic and Workforce Development Working Group meetings planned in May or early June 2012.