

PlanET Economy & Workforce Working Group Meeting #2

Tuesday, June 12, 2012

Knoxville Chamber, Market House Room, 7:30am – 9:30am

KEY FINDINGS

The meeting of 25 participants was called to order by Chairperson Leo Knight, Entrepreneurs of Knoxville, followed by self-introductions. Mark Donaldson, Metropolitan Planning Commission, briefed the group on public and stakeholder input to date as well as the leadership dialogue priorities.

Regional Drivers

Facilitator Ken Poole presented findings from extensive community outreach as reported in the Livability Report. The presentation included information about eight key drivers influencing the region's biggest challenges today. In addition, he identified drivers explicitly generated from meetings with key business and institutional leaders in the region as well. Working group attendees were asked to rate the importance of each driver on the region's economy and workforce development. The higher the point value, the more important the driver is to the region's economy.

- Low education attainment, low wages, & limited job advancement opportunities (75 total points)
- Food, activity, & lifestyle (44 total points)
- Few transportation options (44)
- Rising energy costs (37)
- Demographic shifts (37)
- Location decisions (30)
- Dispersed development patterns & separation of land use types (25)
- Loss of agricultural land (16)

Attendees also identified additional important drivers missing from the list. These additional drivers covered several topics including:

- Domestic and global manufacturing opportunities, especially, the automotive supply chain in the region and emerging global manufacturing opportunities
- Transportation barriers related to the cost of airfare, the cost of commuting from outlying communities, and the lack of mass transportation options
- Community culture and character as an influence on the region's branding (i.e., self-identification) and the quality of development
- Education and talent in the form of public attitudes towards education, educational options, and the mismatch between talent and current tourism recruitment strategies.

Vision Themes Summary

While the group has not come to a complete consensus on vision, several themes have emerged in how leaders see the region emerging. Economic scenarios discussed include:

- Downtown Knoxville serving as the entertainment, education, and office employment center;

- An Oak Ridge-airport-UT development triangle focusing on tech, R&D-related employment
- Certain parts of the region (e.g., Loudon, Blount) counties serving as industrial centers;
- Smaller "satellite" communities across the region serving as the base for a rural lifestyle option that relies on entrepreneurship or commuting to work in regional employment centers
- Greater alignment of worker skills with available jobs, especially among positions in technical fields and the trades.

Attendees were encouraged to increase public attention on PlanET and the Economy and Workforce Working Group over the summer.