2022-2027 CEDS Regional Plan

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

East Tennessee Development District

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2022 Economic Development / CEDS Subcommittee Members

Andy Wallace, Chair	Anderson County EDA
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Beth Phillips	UT Institute for Public Service
Richard Briggs	State Senator
Bryan Hall	Tellico Reservoir Development Agency
Bob Freeman	Citizen Member
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Robert Campbell	Robert Campbell & Associates
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Mike Arms	ATVG / Tennessee Strategies
Bill Walker	East Tennessee Local Workforce Development Board
Bryan Daniels	Blount County Partnership
Cindy Light	TVA
Terrence Carter	Knox Area Urban League

The East Tennessee Development District (ETDD) is a voluntary association of municipal and county governments that are located in the Mideast region of Tennessee. Organized in 1966, the East Tennessee Development District continues to be a vital force in helping local governments plan for the future by coordinating the establishment of regional and local priorities within the fields of economic and community development.

- Community Development: Includes assisting communities with local planning, grant opportunities, historical preservation, housing, transportation, and solid waste.
- Economic Development: Includes industrial recruitment and expansions, strategic management, project financing, existing industry outreach, and small business lending.

As a development district, ETDD serves the largest number of counties in Tennessee. ETDD serves sixteen counties and fifty-six municipalities with community planning, development services, and targeted resources while also serving as a forum for local governments to solve common challenges associated with economic development and growth in both urban and rural communities.

ETDD service counties include: Anderson, Blount, Campbell, Claiborne, Cocke, Grainger, Hamblen, Jefferson, Knox, Loudon, Monroe, Morgan, Roane, Scott, Sevier, and Union.

Since the development district boundaries encompass multi-county areas, ETDD is able to focus on issues of regional importance – on issues that impact more than one municipality or county.

The 2022-2027 CEDS report is a strategic five-year plan that assesses current status and identifies resources and services that support regional economic and community stability and prosperity.

As presented on the previous page, the CEDS Subcommittee consists of duly appointed, local elected officials, as well as business and workforce development leaders. The CEDS committee is responsible for developing, reviewing, and editing the report prior to dissemination to the ETDD Executive Committee.

An extensive public review is conducted to allow the impacted communities input opportunity. Any public comments are recognized and addressed.

The final copy of the CEDS is transmitted to the State of Tennessee and the Appalachian Regional Commission for approval. The completed CEDS is submitted to the Economic Development Administration and accessible via the ETDD website: www.etdd.org.

This report is comprised of four main elements:
1) Summary of economic conditions of the area
2) Analysis of the regional Strengthens, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)
3) Strategic plan of goals aligned with the SWOT
4) Evaluation framework of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) attached to action items

Any conversations or questions concerning this report are welcomed. Please contact Mr. Richard Yakubic, ETDD Executive Director, at 865-273-6003.

Demographics

Per the 2020 Census information, the estimated population of the State of Tennessee (6.9 million) experienced a 9% growth from 2010. The sixteen-county ETDD area contains approximately 1.2 million people. Ten of these counties experienced positive population growth rates higher than the state average. Loudon (13.0%), Knox (10.8%), Blount (10.0%), and Sevier (9.4%) Counties experienced the largest population growth with Morgan (-4.3%), Campbell (-3.5%) and Scott (-1.7%) Counties experiencing the largest negative population trends.[1]

On average, the racial makeup of the entire district is, and has been, relatively consistent. The majority of the population is white (88%), followed by African Americans (5%) and Hispanic/Latino (4%). Scott (6.2%) and Hamblen (6.0%) Counties have the highest percentage of children under 5 years old with Loudon (26%) and Roane (23%) housing the highest percentage of persons 65 years old and older. Loudon and Hamblen Counties have the highest percentages of foreign-born residents and residents who speak a language other than English at home.[1]

Socioeconomic Data

The poverty rate for the State of Tennessee is 14.6%. Sixty percent of ETDD counties are at or above the state poverty rate. Claiborne (23%), Morgan (23%) and Scott (22%) Counties experience the highest rates of poverty in their communities with Loudon (12%) and Blount (10%) Counties at the lowest. Twelve ETDD counties (75% of the region) have median household income levels lower than the state average of $54,833. Knox County has the lowest percentage of owner-occupied housing units at 65% ($194,200 median value of housing) with Morgan County having the highest percentage of owner-occupied housing at 82% ($98,000 median value of housing).[1] Sevier County has the highest median housing price at $316,900 with Scott County at the lowest median housing price of $102,400.[2]

The state unemployment rate is 3.2%.[2] Knox (2.5%) and Loudon (2.8%) Counties have the lowest unemployment rates with Scott (4.4%) and Sevier (4.4%) Counties experiencing the highest unemployment rates.[3] Due to current industry expansions, Morgan County experienced the greatest degree of positive change in employment rates, moving from 5.7% unemployment in February 2021 to 3.2% unemployment in February 2022.[3] Among the 89 smaller counties in Tennessee—those with employment below 75,000—Roane ($1,403) reported an average weekly wage above the national average of $1,289. Scott ($605), Sevier ($640) and Campbell ($682) counties had the lowest average weekly wage reported for the first quarter of 2021.[5]

In Tennessee, 9.7% of the residents are without health insurance. Over 50% of the ETDD service counties have residents at or above this state rate. Sevier (14%) has the highest rate of residents without health coverage, with Scott, Cocke, Morgan and Hamblen (12%) following. Seventy-five percent of ETDD counties have a higher percentage of residents under the age of 65 who have a disability than the state average of 11%. Scott (22%), Campbell (21%), and Grainger (20%) have the highest rates of residents in this category. Knox (8%), Loudon (9%) and Blount (9%) have the lowest rates of reported disabilities.[1]
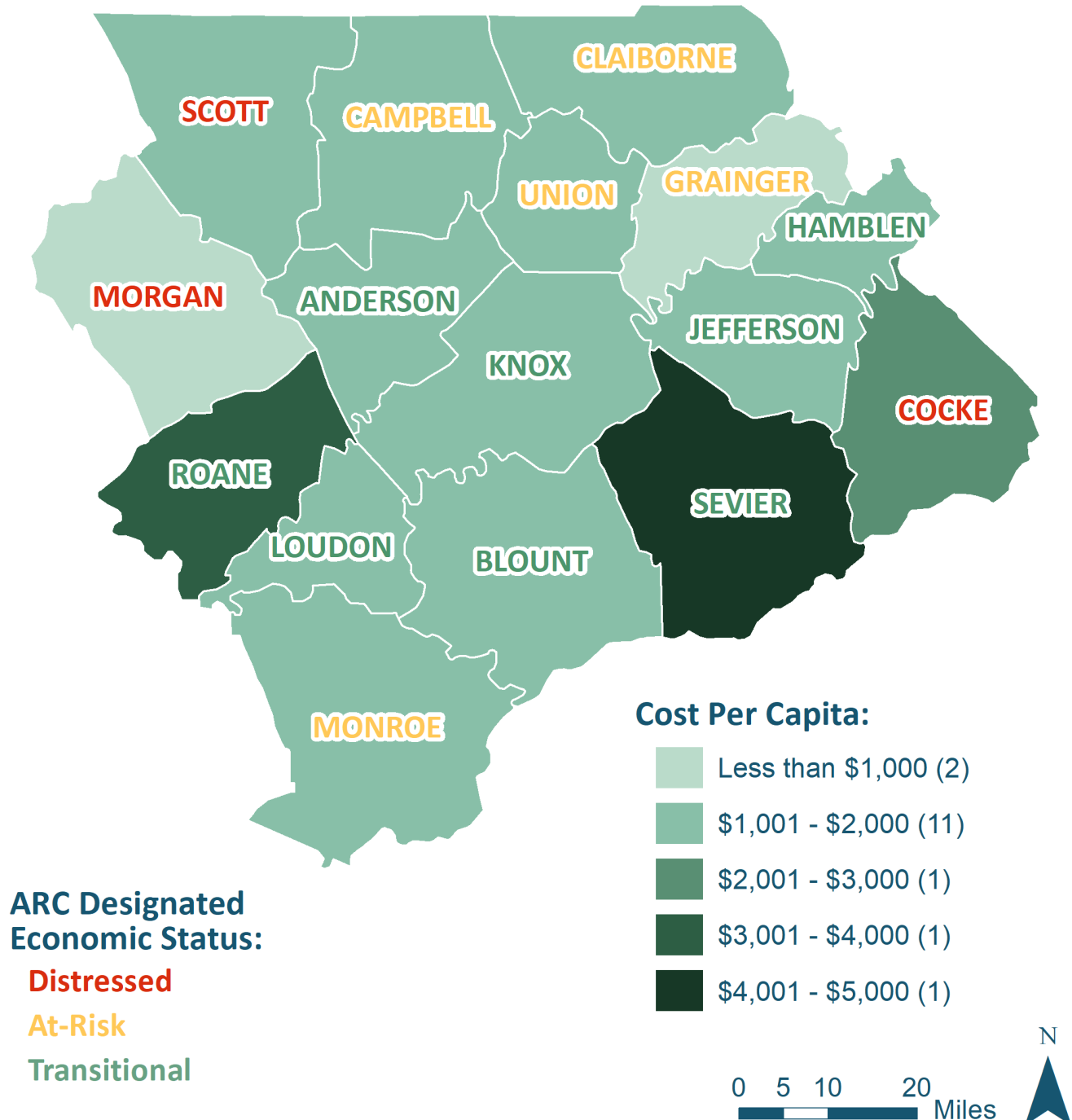
Infrastructure

State of Tennessee: One of the greatest fiscal challenges facing our elected officials is dealing with aging infrastructure. The estimated cost of all needed public infrastructure improvements in Tennessee is $61.94 billion. The top three infrastructure needs for the state as reported in the 2022 Report of the Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) are Transportation ($34.13 billion), Post-secondary Education ($6.60 billion), and School Renovations ($5.29 billion). Information about funding for public infrastructure needs reported by officials indicates that 67.4% of the funds required to meet those needs was not available at the time the inventory was conducted.[6]

ETDD Counties: ETDD is attentive that an effective public infrastructure is dependent upon a skilled labor force, advanced technological resources, strong workforce development facilities with reliable water supply, wastewater treatment capacities, and a communication structure that supports the needs of current and future industries. For the upcoming five-year period (2022-2027), Knox County ($4,641,521,067) has the highest total estimated cost for infrastructure improvements, followed by Blount ($921,580,737) and Sevier ($678,313,340). Relative to their populations, counties with small populations need just as much or more infrastructure than counties with large populations. Of the sixteen counties served by the ETDD, only two, Cocke and Grainger Counties, have per capita infrastructure needs less than $1,000.[6] Figure 1 below shows the per capita costs of infrastructure for the counties of the ETDD region.

Estimated Cost of Needed Local Infrastructure Improvements Per Capita

Cost Per Capita:

- Less than $1,000 (2)
- $1,001 - $2,000 (11)
- $2,001 - $3,000 (1)
- $3,001 - $4,000 (1)
- $4,001 - $5,000 (1)

ARC Designated Economic Status:

Distressed

At-Risk

Transitional

0 5 10   20 Miles

N

As reflected in the table below with data from the 2022 TACIR report, transportation, school, and water/wastewater are consistently ranked as the top needs in the ETDD region.

Table 1: Top Three (3) Infrastructure Needs of ETDD Counties

County	Top 3 Infrastructure Needs
Anderson	Transportation
	Water and Wastewater
	Recreation
Blount	Transportation
	New Public Schools and Additions
	Recreation
Campbell	Transportation
	Recreation
	Water and Wastewater
Claiborne	Transportation
	Water and Wastewater
	New Public Schools and Additions
Cocke	Transportation
	Water and Wastewater
	School Renovations

Grainger	Transportation
	Water and Wastewater
	School Renovations
Hamblen	Transportation
	Law Enforcement
	Community Development
Jefferson	Transportation
	New Public Schools and Additions
	School Renovations
Knox	Post-secondary Education
	Transportation
	Water and Wastewater
Loudon	Transportation
	Water and Wastewater
	Law Enforcement
Monroe	Transportation
	New Public Schools and Additions
	School Renovations

Morgan	Transportation
	Law Enforcement
	Recreation
Roane	Transportation
	Law Enforcement
	Recreation
Scott	Transportation
	New Public Schools and Additions
	School Renovations
Sevier	Transportation
	Water and Wastewater
	Other Utilities
Union	Transportation
	New Public Schools and Additions
	Recreation

Transportation and Utilities

State of Tennessee: Transportation and Utilities is and always has been the largest category of infrastructure in the inventory and totals $29.6 billion this year—54.1% of the inventory. Transportation alone, at $29.0 billion, accounts for nearly all of this category and is larger than all other categories in the inventory. In 2017, the Improve Act raised taxes on gasoline and diesel fuel by 6 cents and 10 cents respectively, over a three-year period. Increases in the state's gasoline and diesel tax revenues will help pay for Tennessee's highly publicized $10.6 billion transportation backlog, which includes only projects that have been approved by the General Assembly and are either in the planning and design or construction stage.[4] Tennessee has also created an initiative to develop a statewide plan for future water availability. This plan, TN H2O, will assess current water resources and recommendations to ensure support for economic growth.[6] Roughly a quarter of Tennessee's rural families are without any kind of broadband access, while 23% of the total population reports that they lack a high-speed internet subscription.[5]

ETDD Counties: For the five-year period (2022-2027), transportation and water/wastewater will be consistently in the top infrastructure needs of the majority of ETDD counties. In this year's (State) inventory, the estimated cost of needed water and wastewater infrastructure increased $103 million (2.2%) and now totals $4.7 billion. This increase is mainly caused by the addition of large projects in Montgomery County and Knox County.[4] The 2021 Utility Rate Survey shows that there was a 4.8% increase in water rates, a 1.81% increase in wastewater rates, a 1.28% increase in gas rates. Tap fees range between $952 and $1,380 water and wastewater respectively.[7] Needs reported for other utilities increased by $133 million (27.1%) in this year's inventory and now total $622 million.[7]

Table 2: 2021 Secondary Education Graduation Rates

2021 Graduation Rates	
System	**Graduation Rate**
Anderson County	94.9
Blount County	93.8
Campbell County	90.2
Claiborne County	94
Cocke County	92.9
Grainger County	95.2
Hamblen County	90.6
Jefferson County	96
Knox County	90
Loudon County	93.4
Monroe County	86.2
Morgan County	97.7
Roane County	90.3
Scott County	93.5
Sevier County	91.7
Union County	85.8
Average	87.8
State of Tennessee*	89.6

Secondary Education

The State of Tennessee's graduation rate for the 2020-2021 school year dropped to 88.7% compared to last year's 89.6%. Of the 16 counties within the East Tennessee Development District, only three improved their graduation rates and 14 surpassed the state graduation average.

"Our state remains committed to swift and urgent action to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on our students," said Commissioner Penny Schwinn. "The department was prepared for the negative impacts of the pandemic on our statewide graduation rate, but we are confident that with the right investment and the partnership and dedication of our districts and schools, we can resume the upward trajectory in graduation rate and ensure we are preparing Tennessee students for success." (Tennessee Department of Education, 2021)

Table 3: 2020 Postsecondary Enrollment Rates

2020 Postsecondary Enrollment	
System	**Enrollment Rate**
Anderson County	55.4
Blount County	47.7
Campbell County	46
Claiborne County	45.2
Cocke County	41.5
Grainger County	52.5
Hamblen County	54.7
Jefferson County	52.1
Knox County	67
Loudon County	56.1
Monroe County	41.6
Morgan County	49.2
Roane County	62.2
Scott County	43.4
Sevier County	50.8
Union County	45.4
Average	48.6
State of Tennessee	58.3

Postsecondary Education and Training

Throughout academic year 2019-20, COVID-19 pushed Tennessee postsecondary education into uncharted territory. Overall, the total number of undergraduates and the total number of full-time students enrolled in public postsecondary education declined from fall 2019 to fall 2020, with the most prominent declines found in the community college sector. Graduate and professional enrollment, however, increased across the state. In terms of college access, Tennessee's college-going rate (the percentage of public high school graduates enrolling in postsecondary education in the summer or fall semester immediately after high school), declined nearly 5 percentage points compared to last year (from 61.8% to 56.9%).

Despite the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19, several institutions maintained fairly high retention rates (with retention defined as the number of students who remained enrolled at any public higher education institution). Overall, the fall-to-fall retention rate for first-time freshmen increased slightly from 69.5% to 69.9%. Graduation rates continue to improve, too. Motlow State Community College demonstrated the greatest improvement in six-year graduation rates among community colleges (amounting to an increase of nearly 8 percentage points, from 40.8% to 48.5%). For universities, the University of Tennessee at Martin increased their six-year graduation rate by more than 7 percentage points, from 55.3% to 62.6%.[11]

Established by the Tennessee General Assembly in 2014, the Tennessee Promise Scholarship gives recent high school graduates the opportunity to earn an associate degree or technical diploma free of tuition and mandatory fees. To date, seven cohorts of students have enrolled in college as part of the Promise program, beginning in fall 2015. Cohort 8 will enroll in college in fall 2022. This brief provides a program update and analysis of key metrics that measure the program's success in increasing college access and completion among recent high school graduates. Key conclusions include:

- Tennessee's college-going rate has been declining since 2017, reaching a 10-year low in 2020.
- Some Promise requirements were waived or adjusted due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including hosting the mandatory mentor meeting as a virtual webinar, waiving community service requirements, providing gap year eligibility to students who graduated from high school in 2020, and extending application deadlines.
- Cohort 6, which began college in fall 2020, was the largest Promise cohort to enroll in college since the program began in fall 2015. This may be partly due to waived or adjusted application requirements.
- Despite extended deadlines for some application requirements, cohort 7 applied for Promise and filed the FAFSA at lower rates than previous cohorts. According to preliminary data, cohort 7, which began college in fall 2021, appears to have enrolled in college at lower rates than previous cohorts.
- Promise student success rates declined slightly across the first three cohorts (2015-2017). The percentage of Promise students who earned a credential within three years declined from 35.4% to 34.1%. At the same time, the percentage of Promise students who dropped out of college before earning a credential increased slightly from cohort 1 to 3, from 48.8% to 50.7%.

- The state is currently on track to meet the Drive to 55 goal, but existing efforts may not be enough to keep the state on track to achieve the goal of having 55% of Tennesseans with a postsecondary credential by 2025. Based on the most recent data available, Tennessee's attainment rate is 46.8%.

The brief also provides an update on the Tennessee Promise endowment, which totaled $775 million at the end of fiscal year 2021, and the Tennessee Promise Completion Grant pilot program.[12]

Employment/Career Clusters

The 16 career clusters are all represented throughout the ETDD region. The most impactful employment pathways within those clusters include:

- Education/Training: Located in Knox County as the flagship state university and medical center, the University of Tennessee with five campuses across the state is the largest educational employer in Tennessee. Within the ETDD counties, there are approximately ten post-secondary institutions that not only provide career training for the residents, but also provide employment for numerous residents.
- Health Sciences: With approximately 23 hospitals, psychiatric and medical centers, as well as numerous research, pharmacology, primary and specialty care practices, the ETDD service area not only benefits from access to quality healthcare, but also has strong employment and career opportunities within this field.[16] The Bureau of Labor Statistics has stated that healthcare jobs are "expected to have the fastest employment growth and to add the most jobs between 2014 and 2024."
- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources: Farming dominates the State's landscape, with 77,300 farms covering 10.8 million acres, or 41% of the State's 26.4 million land acres. Tennessee ranks eighth in the number of farms. The number one commodity in terms of cash receipts is cattle and calves, followed by soybeans, broilers, nursery crops and corn. The mountainous East Tennessee region agriculture produces mainly cattle, hay, goats, vegetables (tomatoes), and tobacco.[13] The state is twelfth in the nation in beef cattle[14] and ranks in the top five states in production of tobacco, fresh market tomatoes, and snap beans.[13]
- Government/Public Sector and Science, Engineering Technology and Math: The Department of Energy added approximately $4.2 billion to the Tennessee economy in FY20. During the fiscal year, spending by DOE and its contractors increased the state gross domestic product by about $4.2 billion. DOE created 42,906 full-time jobs (including direct and indirect jobs) in Tennessee in 2020, which means that for every DOE job, another 1.9 jobs were created in the state.[16] The counties of Anderson, Roane, Knox and Loudon support the employment needs of the national laboratories, research facilities, and technology-based companies.

- Manufacturing: In the ETDD region, skilled production workers account for approximately 15.4% of the workforce.[17] Automotive Parts manufacturing, located in virtually all ETDD counties, and Boat Manufacturing, located in Loudon, Knox and Monroe counties provide extensive job opportunities to the region. 3M is investing about $470 million to expand their manufacturing facility in Anderson County by 2025 and will introduce 600 new jobs, making it one of the ten largest employers in the county.[18] Smith & Wesson broke ground on a new manufacturing facility in Blount County in late 2021 that will create 750 jobs.[19]
- Food Service, Restaurant Industry: The restaurant industry accounts for 10% of the employment in the state and approximately $12.2 billion in estimated sales in Tennessee. Approximately 4,000 eating/drinking establishments and over 80,000 East Tennesseans are employed in this industry.[20] ETDD is the corporate headquarters to many large food service corporations, including Ruby Tuesday, Sysco, The Copper Cellar, Aubrey's, and Buddy's Barbeque.
- Hospitality and Tourism: The Great Smoky Mountains, Dollywood, Ober Gatlinburg and numerous TVA lakes contribute to the profound effect this industry has on the economy of East Tennessee. The Tourism industry of Tennessee outperformed the COVID-caused industry employment decline of -34% by 10.9%.[21]

Unemployment, Opportunity Zone, Tax Credits

Workforce

Tennessee experienced an improvement in unemployment from 2020 (7.5%) to 2021 (4.3%).[3] Nonfarm employment in Tennessee, which contracted by 4.0 percent in 2020 due to the pandemic, grew by only 2.8 percent in 2021. For perspective, nonfarm jobs fell by over 125 thousand between 2019 and 2020, and the state is projected to add only 83.4 thousand jobs back to payrolls in 2021.[22] Tennessee is projected to see more job growth at a rate of 0.7% annually through the year 2028.[23]

The five occupational groups with the largest number of openings are forecast to be Office and Administrative Support (58,760 openings), Food Preparation and Serving Related (56,000 openings), Sales and Related (41,750 openings), Transportation and Material Moving (39,580 openings), and Production (31,880 openings).[23]

Tennessee's (61.2%) labor force participation rate typically runs on annual basis about 2% points lower than the U.S. (62.3%), yet the rural counties of the ETDD region such as Claiborne (50.0%), Cocke (50.2%), Morgan (50.9%), Scott (44.8%) and Union (49.1%) are significantly lower.[24]

Opportunity Zones

The Opportunity Zone Program is a community development tool established by the U.S. Congress in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017. This program is designed to drive long-term capital to low-income communities. The relatively new law provides a federal tax incentive for investors to re-invest their capital gains into Opportunity Funds, dedicated to revitalization in designated low-income areas. Each state could nominate up to 25% of its low-income census tracts to the Secretary of the Treasury. The Secretary of the Treasury certifies the nominations and designated tract(s) as a qualified opportunity zone. The Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development (TNECD) manages the program.[25]

As shown in Figure 2 below, within the ETDD service area, twelve counties were qualified with opportunity zone status. These counties and number of census tracks approved[25] include:

Roane, Claiborne, Scott, Union: 1 each

Anderson, Loudon, Monroe, Cocke, Blount, Hamblen, Sevier: 2 each

Knox: 9

Job Tax Credit Enhancements

The Tennessee Job Tax Credit Enhancement program provides incentives for companies expanding or relocating to the state and committed to creating new full-time positions. Incentives are available for counties that have been Tier 2, Tier 3 and Tier 4, progressively deemed those with greater economic distresses. ETDD has the highest number of counties statewide (6) that have been classified at the enhancement Tier 4 level.[26] These incentives are available for companies that create or relocate their headquarters, are in the manufacturing industry, data centers, warehouse and distribution and call centers.[27]

Opportunity Zones
East Tennessee Development District

Major Companies Headquartered in ETDD [28]

- Regal Cinemas- Knox County
- Ruby Tuesday- Maryville
- TeamHealth– Knox County
- Pilot Flying J - Knox County
- SSC Service Solutions– Knox County
- Janus Global Operations –Lenoir City
- Arconic, Inc.– Alcoa
- MasterCraft and SeaRay- Vonore
- Clayton Homes, Inc.-Maryville
- Weigel's - Knox County
- The H.T. Hackney Co.– Roane County

Largest Employers in ETDD [29]

- Covenant Health - Regional
- Knox County Schools - Knox County
- The University of Tennessee – Knox County
- Y-12 National Security Complex - Roane County
- Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. – Regional
- Oak Ridge National Laboratory – Roane County
- Clayton Homes, Inc.– Regional
- University of Tennessee Medical Center - Knox County
- DENSO Manufacturing Tennessee, Inc. - Blount County
- Dollywood Co./Dollywood Splash Country - Sevier County
- K-VA-T Food Stores (Food City) - Regional

Tourism, Environmental, Geographic, and Cultural Impacts

Tourism

Tourism topped $1 billion in state and local sales tax revenue at $1.4 billion. This marks a 30.4% decrease from 2019 due to COVID which slightly outperformed the national average of a 31% decrease. Tourism generated 149,800 jobs for Tennesseans, a 23.1% decrease from 2019. Two counties that exceeded $1 billion in travel expenditures are located in the ETDD service area: Sevier ($2.382 billion) and Knox ($1.166 billion). [28] Tourist attractions in the region like the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and Pigeon Forge, including Dollywood Co., together draw over 25 million tourists annually. [30]

Opioid Use

The opioid crisis has swept across the nation with catastrophic consequences. Tennessee has been one of the hardest hit states throughout the opioid epidemic, and despite conditions beginning to improve, the worst impacts of this ongoing crisis will linger for years to come. Throughout East Tennessee communities in particular, opioids were prescribed to residents at extremely high rates between 2016 and 2018, yet the influence of these years continues to reverberate throughout East Tennessee amidst ongoing opioid abuse.

Most discussions of this epidemic have appropriately focused on adverse health consequences including addiction, overdoses, and mortality. However, one facet of the problem that has received relatively scant attention is the potential consequences for the labor market. In a 2018 study from the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland, economists estimated that the opioid crisis has led to an over 4 percentage point decrease in labor market participation amongst men in hardest hit counties.[32] This reduction in labor force participation translates into a significant economic impact for East Tennessee counties already facing dire economic and public health distress.

Tennessee has had ample experience in dealing with the opioid crisis. The state ranked third in the nation in 2018 for opioid prescriptions dispensed per capita. Tennessee ranks 5th with the highest rates of drug overdose deaths with the majority of those deaths related to opioids.[33] A large share of individuals in Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services treatment facilities had opioid-related abuse problems with an estimated $422.5 million spent on hospitalizations associated with opioid abuse in 2018.[33] All opioid-related hospitalization costs have been estimated at $442.6 million per year, and TennCare costs at $76.9 million annually.[33]

ETDD has several counties that were ranked in the nation's top 50 for opioids prescribed per capita using morphine mg equivalents in 2015. These counties included Campbell (3rd), Claiborne (7th), Cocke (20th), Anderson (34th) and Hamblen (44th).[34] Knox County ranks third in the state for opioid-related deaths. The opioid problem is worse in East Tennessee than anywhere else in the state. East Tennessee's locale is the reason behind these staggering numbers. It is part of the Appalachian region, where socio-economic disparities put people more at risk for additions according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. It also is situated on the I-40/I-75 corridor, putting it at the end of the drug pipeline that begins in Michigan.[34]

It is possible to show that higher per capita opioid prescription rates lead to higher county unemployment rates, lower rates of labor force participation and diminished employment to-population ratios. Having 1% of the workforce out correlates to $1.29 billion in lost income.[34] A back of the envelope calculation indicates that a 10% reduction in per capita opioid prescriptions would lead to an additional $825 million in income for Tennesseans from enhanced labor market participation.[35]

Following the peak of opioid prescriptions and media reports in 2018, some metrics related to the opioid epidemic have not been updated or made publicly available. Especially following the onset of the pandemic, state health priorities necessarily shifted focus to address mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

Eliminating opioids entirely is not a realistic option. The question is how to find the right balance for a drug that produces benefits for some but high costs for others.[35] "Those addicted to opioids need treatment so they can return to the wholeness of life, including the workforce", Dr. Matt Harris, UT Knoxville, Assistant Professor of Economics.[33]

Rural communities in the aforementioned ETDD counties of Campbell, Claiborne, and Cocke experience lower rates of participation in the labor force than Tennessee and the United States overall, and also tend to experience higher rates of opioid addiction.[24]

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2) Analysis of the regional Strengthens, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)
3) Strategic plan of goals aligned with the SWOT
4) Evaluation framework of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) attached to action items

The 2022-2027 CEDS represents the largest undertaking for the development of this report in the history of the East Tennessee Development District. ETDD staff worked diligently to engage with the most comprehensive group of stakeholders possible to collect data for development of the SWOT and of goals, action items, and KPIs. Beginning with coordination meetings held with project partners from the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the University of Tennessee System (UT), the University of Tennessee Knoxville (UTK), and Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) representing the membership of the East Tennessee Transformation Network, ETDD staff partnered with Innovation and Research (I&R) and Strategic Operational Solutions (SOS) Consulting at TVA to develop a survey for data collection on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The survey went out to approximately 250 stakeholders who were also invited to attend in-person working sessions to further develop the SWOT analysis. After the working sessions, the ETDD CEDS Subcommittee met to craft a vision statement for the 2022-2027 report. After formulating the vision, ETDD staff finalized the SWOT and worked with TVA SOS to develop a survey for data collection on developing goals for achieving the vision. After input from the SWOT working sessions, the stakeholder list increased to over 300 potential respondents who provided feedback on potential goals for the region and who were invited to attend in-person working sessions to develop the goals. After two days of in-person sessions, ETDD staff and TVA SOS analyzed the results and finalized the goals before creating a survey to collect data on action items and KPIs. The survey respondents were invited to attend a final series of in-person working sessions to finalize action items and KPIs. After the final in-person sessions, ETDD staff crafted the action items and KPIs into realistic deliverables that will move the communities of the ETDD toward achieving the regional vision.

Concurrent to the surveys and working sessions, ETDD staff developed a plan for increasing equity in development of the CEDS by engaging with historically underserved populations. Working with partners at community organizations such as the Knoxville Area Urban League and Centro Hispano de East Tennessee, ETDD staff began the coordination of working sessions to gather data on SWOT and regional goals. Centro Hispano conducted a focus group in Spanish with Latina small business owners from the region. ETDD will continue partnering with community organizations to engage historically underserved populations and address issues of inequity in the 16-county region.

CEDS Stakeholder Engagement

Latina small business owners participate in a SWOT working group conducted by Centro Hispano de East Tennessee .

Community members collaborate and share ideas with ETDD Executive Director Rick Yakubic.

Stakeholders gather for a group photo following a working session with ETDD Deputy Director and Environmental Planner Tim Hendrick.

Jefferson County Mayor Mark Potts participates in a focus group to gain insight from stakeholder participants.
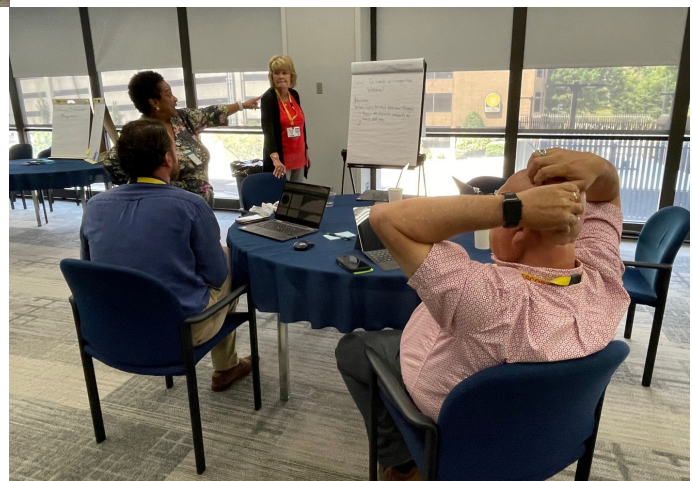
SWOT Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunity, and Threats

The ETDD SWOT analysis has been developed to identify the regional strategic plan, goals, objectives, and performance measures for the upcoming five years. ETDD reached out to TVA to provide survey tools and data collection services. The tool Alchemer was used to survey 266 stakeholders from various communities in the district with 62 responses (23% response rate). Additional information on the SWOT process and data can be accessed at https://www.etdd.org/resources/data-reports/.

The following presents each of the SWOT categories:

S
- Education
- Collaboration Opportunities
- Natural Resources
- Quality of Life/Cost of Living
- Industry

W
- Diversity
- Available Workforce
- Lack of Trained Workforce
- Collaboration and Leadership
- Poverty/Lack of Resources

O
- Branding
- Entrepreneurial
- Workforce
- Innovation and Technology
- Tourism

T
- Infrastructure
- Affordable Housing and Buildings
- Collaboration and Leadership
- Workforce
- Pollution/Environmental Conditions

Strengths (S): Assets and advantages

Weaknesses (W): Challenges, disadvantages, and shortcomings

Opportunities (O): Possibilities for improvements and progress

Threats (T): Internal and external factors that could compromise or contribute to regional decline

STRENGTHS

Education: Tennessee prides itself on providing access to all types of higher education institutions and programs. The state of Tennessee has 12 public universities, 13 community colleges, and 27 Colleges of Applied Technology that focus on technical skills.[36] For the 2020-2021 academic year, the East Tennessee Development District had 55,753 students enrolled in public higher education which includes the state's flagship public university, the University of Tennessee at Knoxville.[37] Additionally, the ETDD is home to four private universities as well as the Oak Ridge National Laboratory which works closely with many schools in the area to provide further education opportunities.

Collaboration Opportunities: The East Tennessee Development District boasts a 16-county region that strives to achieve an inclusive regional image reflective in the workforce, economic development, and grant awards received. This large region shares a vision for conscious economic development, while preserving the abundant natural resources. The central location and vision of ETDD creates a communication network between county, municipality, and regional leaders that would otherwise not exist. Comprehensive plans highlight what is working and what aspects of the region need to be further addressed via collaborative meetups and quarterly reports. Revisiting the region's vision will ensure goals are being met and ideally exceeded. Recent regional and development district re-branding will encourage collaborative projects and funding.

Natural Resources: East Tennessee is home to some of the most visited natural sights in the state of Tennessee. The Great Smoky Mountain National Park is the most visited national park in the United States and is located in Sevier County in the East Tennessee Development District. A large portion of East Tennessee's economy comes from tourists visiting from all over the country to see the many lakes and rivers and hike the Appalachian Mountain trails. In addition to the natural beauty of the landscape, East Tennessee also houses a strong agricultural industry with a large number of cattle farms located within the district.

Quality of Life/Cost of Living: The state of Tennessee is one of the few states in the country to have no state income tax. Therefore, the taxation rate of residents in Tennessee is relatively low compared to the rates in other states. According to Forbes, Tennessee is the state with the sixth lowest cost of living in the United States in 2022 with housing costs 20.7% lower than the national average.[38] The low cost of living combined with multitude of cheap recreational activities in East Tennessee provide for a high quality of life within the district.

Industry: The region has existing industry that is diverse and groundbreaking. The growing out-of-state population has the potential to include a more diverse workforce. The new and existing population continues to include innovative industry and organizations. Regional economic development is centered around attracting modern and employee focused industries and concepts. Production industries continue to make up the majority of employers in the region, but modern employment practices and benefits continue to be competitive for both the region and industry itself. Industry growth in the region signifies an increase in job opportunities and is reflective of workforce availability.

WEAKNESSES

Diversity: Tennessee is one of the least diverse states in the country with over 78% of its population being white.[38] This statistic is further exaggerated in rural counties many of which are located in the ETDD. The district could improve on ensuring that minority voices are amplified and not drowned out by the vast majority.

Available Work Force: With the Baby Boomer generation entering retirement age, Tennessee is wrestling with the issue of losing a large portion of their talented workforce. Additionally, many counties in the ETDD have a lower labor participation rate than the state average. The combination of these conditions has created a strain on many of the local businesses' ability to retain enough qualified employees. To compound the issue, many places do not have housing options to entice new workers into the area.

Lack of Trained Workforce: While Tennessee has invested heavily in technical schools, the enrollment numbers are very small. Potential college-goers in Tennessee are not convinced that technical schools are a viable option to increase earnings in the future. For years, the trend has been that bachelor's degrees are necessary for jumpstarting careers. This narrative has created an oversaturation in undergrad related markets while other technical and blue collar labor force markets are suffering from a lack of certified workers.

Collaboration and Leadership: Many economic development plans and programs in East Tennessee, and in particular small business programs, are enacted by municipal and county governments without consultation or collaboration with other local governments. This results in disconnected and often duplicative plans which limit the economic development potential for the entire region. The region lacks a single point of contact to spearhead collaboration on regional economic development plans.

Poverty/Lack of Resources: Tennessee has consistently had a higher poverty level than the national average. Anderson, Knox, and Sevier counties have some of the highest poverty rates in the state which are all located in the ETDD region. These high poverty levels are brought on by a lack of affordable housing and low wages. Many of these counties with high poverty rates are also experiencing a high homelessness rate.

OPPORTUNITIES

Branding: East Tennessee has the opportunity to decide exactly what it is known for. The brand of East Tennessee has constantly evolved over the years from coal to football, but there has yet to be an everlasting brand. Bold leadership could push the district to excel in one are that could be translated into a new brand for the region.

Entrepreneurial: Currently, East Tennessee is home to a relatively small number of startup companies and tech businesses. Introducing entrepreneurial and tech classes into college programs and local education could help encourage more residents to start their own businesses. Additionally, developing a network of innovation and makerspaces could attract tech savvy and entrepreneurial-minded people to the area. East Tennessee could benefit from incentives to prevent up-and-coming business leaders from leaving the area.

Workforce: Tennessee, like very few other states, faces a unique opportunity related to workforce. Tennessee is seeing a rapid population increase, especially of those out of state. COVID accelerated these numbers, and inflation within the housing market did not snuff it. Higher educated individuals are choosing to leave traditional tech and energy states and regions as remote work options continue to pop-up. Those active in the workforce are no longer tied down to the location of their office in order to have a high-paying position. Remote work has allowed a "rural migration" for individuals of working age. Those individuals usually include families who may work in positions locally, they may not have otherwise had access to.

Innovation and Technology: Several innovators in technology and energy call East Tennessee home. There is boundless access to innovative resources within ORNL, UTK, TVA, and Y-12. Research plays a major role in the districts workforce opportunities, with organizations in the field providing world class energy availability and sustainability studies. Advanced manufacturing and educational research opportunities had led to the rapid expansion of nuclear and broadband technologies and infrastructure.

Tourism: The East Tennessee Region thrives on tourism. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park solidified the East Tennessee region as a leader in outdoor recreation. The National Park boasts the most visitors per year of any national park. The park's success offers the region access to various funding, development, and agricultural opportunities. Outdoor recreation continues to emphasize the importance of "blueways." East Tennessee is home to a number of rivers, lakes, and aquatic recreation activities. There are several state and local parks complete with endless miles of hiking, biking, and running trails of various skill levels. Dollywood, the Knoxville Zoo, Fort Loudon, Historic Rugby, Museum of Appalachia, Smoky Mountain Speedway, and vibrant and growing downtowns provide unique access to East Tennessee both old and new. The region is also home to designated scenic byways including Norris Freeway, The Great Smoky Mountain Byway, Newfound Gap Scenic Byway, East Tennessee Crossing Byway, and the Cumberland Historic Byway.

THREATS

Infrastructure: Investments in infrastructure can be described as too little too late. Roads and bridge structures lack investment after initial installation. Roads continue to degrade as investment shifts to infrastructure related to connectivity and broadband. It is essential that both receive necessary and consistent funding in order to avoid issues and degradation. There is currently little to no investment in public transportation. Knoxville and the surrounding areas have the opportunity to begin investing in public transportation at the base level, but investment always falls to road expansion instead.

Affordable Housing and Buildings: As housing and building material costs continue to rise, the cost of housing and affordable housing continue to skyrocket. Development in the region has been rapid and under analyzed. For that reason, housing, especially affordable housing has not kept up with the growing workforce. Tourism and service industry job opportunities continue to pop up in the 16-county region, but the private housing developers and local landlords are raising prices reflective of national markets and not local minimum wages and industry. With any location that is primarily devoted to tourism and higher education, short-term housing is always a concern. Several parts of the region are plagued by temporary housing for students, that remain vacant during "off-seasons."
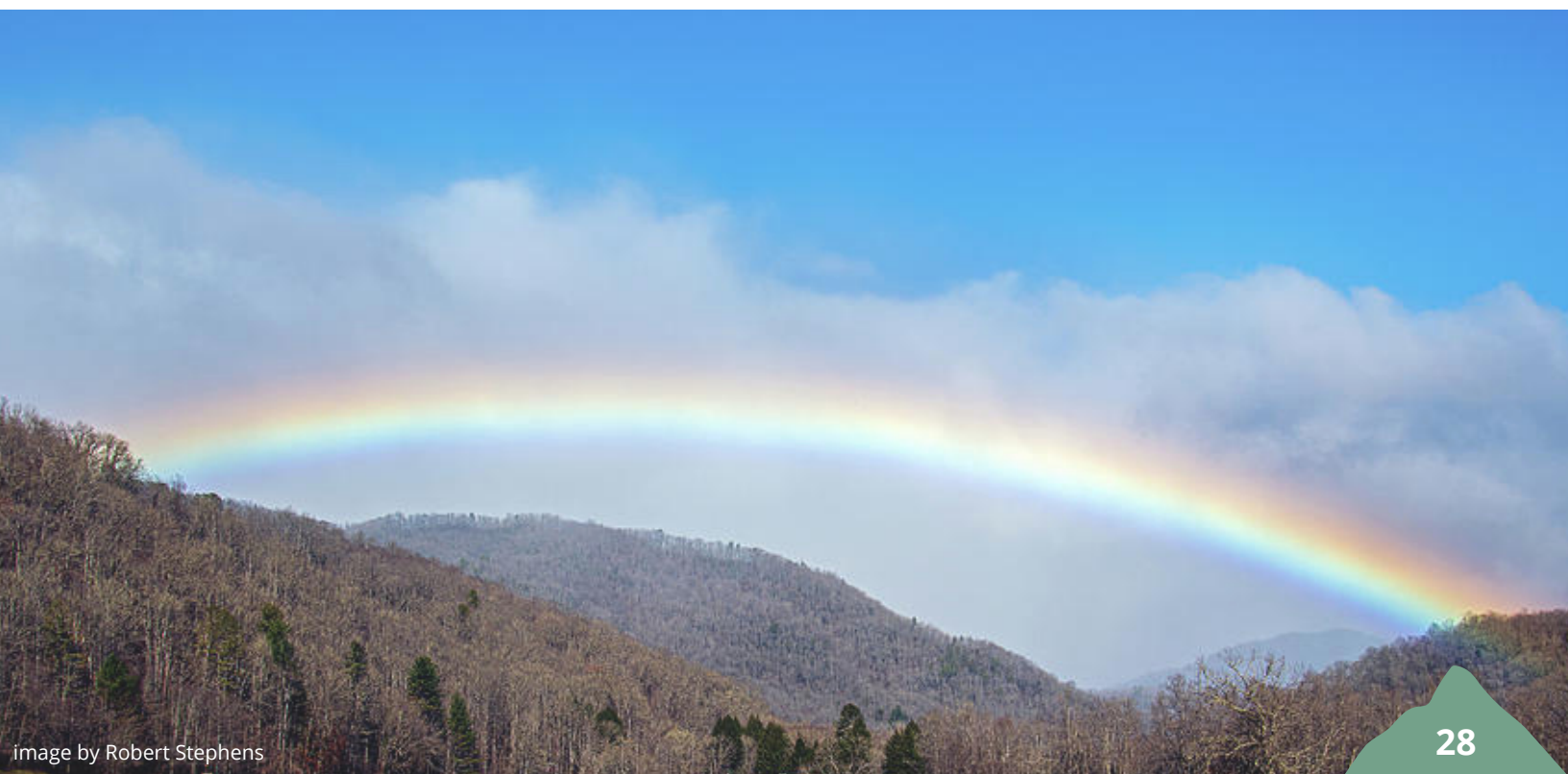
Collaboration and Leadership: Collaboration is stunted by regional territorialism. East Tennessee locals sometimes fight to maintain their image, while attempting to promote competitive economic development opportunities. Some communities in the ETDD region are more adverse to change and avoid collaborative opportunities. Leadership can also affect the potential for collaboration. Elected officials need to be willing to work together to inspire a spirit of collaboration for reaching common goals.

Workforce: The East Tennessee region is privy to "brain drain." Many 18-22 year old students come to UT, LMU, Pellissippi State, and other local schools, but leave immediately after graduating creating a gap in the available and educated current and future workforce.

Environmental Conditions: Solid waste continues to be an issue in the 16-county region as a growing population produces an increasing waste stream just as aging landfills begin to approach end of life. Recycling infrastructure is a problem for many communities of the region, as maintenance costs of aging equipment equal or exceed the ever-increasing cost of new equipment. Regional markets for recyclable materials such as glass continue to cause issues in the recycled material streams of most communities of the region. Additionally, the ETDD region is home to many brownfield sites in need of environmental assessments and cleanup. Funding for brownfield grants through U.S. EPA and TN ECD is available and would be impactful for the region.

Through a collaborative effort with the participation of all communities of the ETDD region and maximum stakeholder engagement, East Tennessee can become the most successful region in the state and serve as a national model for participatory economic development. By embracing regionalism and a shared vision leading to common goals, every community of ETDD will reap the benefits of state and federal investments across the 16 counties. On the local level, infrastructure improvements will lead to the best roads in the state. Water and sewer lines will be improved and expanded to areas where service does not currently exist, leading to economic and residential development. Small communities will be protected from overdevelopment and embraced for their unique cultural charms. Broadband access will be enhanced and expanded to cover the entire region. Education will improve at the secondary and postsecondary levels, with unprecedented collaboration between industry and educational institutions to teach the job skills that are both currently needed and representative of future business needs. Businesses will open new operations in the region, increasing the number of jobs and leading to economic growth. The bountiful natural resources of the region—the mountains, rivers, lakes, and trails—will be preserved and enhanced for the continued usage and enjoyment of future generations. The future of East Tennessee can be bright and thriving, but it will require much hard work and dedication from the people of every community, collaborating and uniting behind a shared vision of regional prosperity.

The East Tennessee Development District will utilize its resources to act as a regional convener bringing together local partners and stakeholders to collaborate in developing a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous East Tennessee region through innovative job creation, new investments, modern infrastructure, and improvement of overall health and quality of life. Collectively, the District and its partners will help advance the region through the pursuit of the following goals:

image by Robert Stephens

Goal Statement

Enhance regional alignment, collaboration, and engagement through an annual regional conference.

Objective(s)

- Create a committee to plan a conference for the region that will address the importance of partnering with the ETDD and key stakeholders (April 2023)
- Ensure consensus regarding alignment and collaboration supporting the themes of the region (April 2023)
- Create initiatives surrounding inclusion with diversity in under-represented population districts (April 2023)
- Identify and deploy regional branding opportunities to unite the region as a unified front (April 2023)

Action	KPI
Meet with each county represented by CEDS report via a "roadshow"	Visit all 16 counties by the end of 2023
Engage ETRLA and/or county chambers in planning the conference	Engage 50% of participants that are in ETRLA to plan the conference; 16/16 counties represented.
Ensure Diversity and Inclusion at the conference	Request participation from at least 5 community organizations
Identify partners/sponsors to help fund conference	100% of capital funded by end of 2023
Collaborate with marketing firm on branding/marketing/digital ads for conference	All 16 counties committed to conference

Goal Statement
Expand and enhance infrastructure to improve quality of life in the region.

Objective(s)
- Make broadband available throughout the region via public access points. (2025)
- Increase collaboration/cooperation among utilities in order to develop utilities for un/underserved populations (2025)
- Utilities to be considered: Water, Power, Cell, Cable, Sewer, and Broadband

Action	KPI
Present city/council, board of aldermen, and county commission 1 pager TACIR to local leaders for awareness campaign of infrastructure needs in region leading to policy changes to accelerate infrastructure planning and implementation through outsourcing	Prepare district report of 16 county 1 pagers by end of Q3 2023
Meet with legislators to discuss linking TACIR completion with grant applications	Contact 3 legislators by end of Q1 2023
Map existing services area to identify needed areas and gaps in services	ETDD will reach out to local leaders; 3 counties per quarter, beginning in Q1 2023
Create committee to review laws surrounding broadband/water service areas; Establish regulatory team to develop list of risks/roadblocks and approvals required to proceed and develop mitigation plan.	Identify key stakeholders and convene 1st meeting by end of Q1 2023
Investigate renewables to see what will be best for this region	By end of 2023, identify key stakeholders and champions to provide regional studies and create regional plans
Structure meetings with utility companies (electric, water, sewer, gas, broadband, cellular)	Conduct at least one meeting by end of 2023

Goal Statement
Create a brand that all areas in our region will embrace.

Objective(s)
- Outline scope and identify required approvals (2023)
- Create a project plan that includes the identity of key stakeholders and required resources (2024)
- Implementation – Execute project plan identified in design (2025)
- Sustainability – Develop and maintain ongoing plan (2026+)

Action	KPI
Use regional meeting for steering committee to announce scope and identify stakeholders	Identify costs involved in marketing and branding campaign by end of 2023
Gather 16 county representatives to identify stakeholders to identify the key/core element to be included in our regional brand during quarterly meetings	Convene first meeting in Q1 2023
Hold quarterly action meetings with identified stakeholders to short term outcomes/and revision of mid longer-term outputs/outcomes	Convene first meeting in Q1 2023
Hire branding firm to help create a marketing image	Choose firm by end of 2024

Goal Statement

Create a competitive, highly skilled, trained, and employable workforce ensuring alignment with business needs.

Objective(s)

- Identify and conduct a needs analysis with key stakeholders (business and education) to inventory the business needs and skill gaps associated within the region (January 2023)
- Develop customized career paths at each of the educational institutions within the region and create a training plan to support the gaps associated from the needs analysis (June 2023)
- Establish an industry/manufacturing workforce alliance to support this initiative that would create a mindset/culture and create an "Employer of Choice" program (December 2023)
- Create and deploy a sustainable plan including any additional goals and objectives addressed during the 2023 year (June 2024)

Action	KPI
Identify development district staff member to foster the collaboration of the educational community with industry; identify chambers and ED groups	Track weekly until all 16 counties have been contacted
Establish awareness and training on federal and state workforce funding at regional conference.	Begin planning in Q1 2023
Task the ETTN with conducting the needs analysis and identifying key stakeholders- including workforce board	Begin identifying stakeholders in Q1 2023
Work with local workforce development board to determine, influence, needed policy changes to create a regional workforce development effort that will include transportation issues such as "park and ride" to address cross-county employment and housing issues	Conduct first meeting in Q1 2023
Gather CTE (Career Tech Education) and workforce training providers – both education and community- to create a workforce retainment placement plan.	Conduct first meeting in Q1 2023

Goal Statement

Through regional partnerships, increase innovative job creation within small businesses and entrepreneurships

Objective(s)

- Identify interested stakeholders that want to invest in regional businesses and entrepreneurships (December 2022)
- Collaborate among all the players in business development and entrepreneurs (January 2023)
- Develop relationships with those that can support small businesses and entrepreneurs with a goal to attract $100M within the ETDD (December 2027)
- Create and deliver Mentorship training (December 2028)
- Invest in space or incubation for small businesses (December 2029)

Action	KPI
Gather group of interested stakeholders to form regional committee; A list of organizations that are connected to small business and entrepreneurship.	Convene first meeting of KEC, CDFIs, Banks, CDCs, CDEs, Areawide Development Corporation, ET Foundation, TVA, UT, ORNL- Innovation Crossroads, Techstars, Innov865, Angel Investors, HNW Individuals, and Chambers of Commerce in Q1 2023
Investigate models of mentorship across the country and those that exist in the region	Local champion identified in Q1 2023 3 models identified that fit the 16-county region by end of 2023
Create a series of trainings to be made available that teach how to apply for grants, how to get a loan from a bank, teach supply and demand inventory management, etc	Local champion identified in Q1 2023
Develop classes at the middle and/or high school level to encourage and teach business development.	Local champion identified in Q1 2023
Identify and raise $100M through grants that enable training, incubator spaces, capacity building, etc.	Raise $10M by end of 2027

Goal Statement

Maintain and improve the region's competitive advantages by investing in the improvement of existing industrial parks and encourage the development of new, high quality industrial and business parks.

Objective(s)

- Provide adequate new industrial property for the expansion of existing clusters within the automotive, boat building, and technology industries
- Tie industrial recruitment and marketing efforts to target industries identified by strategic plans authored by the State of Tennessee, TA, ETEDA, and others.
- Support the development of cross county boundary sites that can accommodate the location of large production facilities, i.e. automotive manufacturing plants
- Resilience planning support for leadership across the ETDD region

Action	KPI
ETDD staff attend Joint Economic Community Development Board meetings in each of the 16 counties	Attend one meeting per county in 2023
Use ETDD website to identify grant funding for industrial development and disseminate information to communities	Add at least two new grant opportunities to ETDD site in 2023
ETDD will work with TVA staff and the State of Tennessee to identify suitable properties for industrial recruitment to the region	Identify at least 3 properties by 2024
ETDD staff will coordinate with Industrial Development Boards to identify industrial park needs for all 16 counties	Identify needs for all 16 counties by end of 2024

Goal Statement
Focus on technology driven economic development opportunities
Objective(s)
- Support commercialization of emerging technologies that are developed at the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of Tennessee
- Continue to develop and expand incubator space within each county
- Focus on business development within "green" technology areas
- Plan for the next phase of technology driven skills within the skilled labor force
- Support and promote Opportunity Zone development

Action	KPI
ETDD will coordinate with economic development staff in each county to determine feasibility/need for incubator space	Identify needs of all 16 counties by end of 2024
ETDD staff will coordinate with staff from Oak Ridge National Laboratory and University of Tennessee to inventory programs available for the communities of ETDD	Develop inventory of all programs by end of 2023 List programs on ETDD website by end of Q1 2024
ETDD will develop working group of representatives from Opportunity Zones in the region to emphasize funding opportunities	Hold at least 2 quarterly meetings in 2023.

Goal Statement

Promote economic resilience and enhance the region's capability to quickly recover from economic downturns and natural or man-made disasters

Objective(s)

- Support pre-disaster planning and preparedness efforts at the local level such as program funding for local governments to have equipment that interacts with the State's communication and radio system
- Develop plans to quickly respond to major economic contraction events
- Decrease reliance on the power grid by promoting energy efficiency programs in the residential sector
- Support resiliency planning for businesses to aid in natural disaster recovery
- Include cyber security in assessments of disaster preparedness

Action	KPI
ETDD will coordinate with each county to determine which communities need disaster plans	Identify needs for all 16 counties by end of 2023
ETDD will assist with aligning labor market with business automation development	Conduct 2 stakeholder meetings in 2023
ETDD will work with local governments to identify funding opportunities for energy efficiency improvements	Identify at least 2 potential funding opportunities by end of 2023
ETDD will coordinate with local industry to develop natural disaster recovery plans	Conduct at least 2 stakeholder meetings by the end of 2024

Economic Resilience

"Steady State Initiatives" Action Plan

- Work closely with counties, cities, chambers of commerce, industrial development boards, tourism organizations and other economic development entities to implement the goals and objectives established within the current CEDS document. Collaborate with the State of Tennessee, TVA, ETEDA, Innovation Valley and local economic development groups to actively recruit new investment within target industry groups such as automotive-manufacturing, boat manufacturing, distribution centers, call centers, carbon fiber industries, media production industries and tourism

- Create new small businesses by providing staff assistance to the Areawide Development Corporation (ADC) for loan packaging and servicing of SBA 504 Program loans. Administer ADC's Revolving Loan Fund (Rural Development Intermediary Relending Program) and ETDD's EDA Loan Fund to stimulate small business development and expansion throughout the region. Continue to administer funding from the Tennessee Department of the Treasury that capitalized a loan program that primarily benefits minority and women owned business enterprises

- Assist local governments with acquiring grant/loan funding for the expansion or improvement of public water/wastewater infrastructure. Provide grant application and grant administration assistance to communities wishing to apply for funding though the Economic Development Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the State of Tennessee CDBG Industrial Grant/Loan Funds, or the Tennessee FastTrack Infrastructure Development Program. Assistance provided by the District will include project design and review, prospect consultation, application packaging, project liaison functions, and project administration

- Enhance the asset base to create collaboration in the county with government, school, health, tourism, economic development leaders by identifying the assets in the county, prioritized needs and develop plans to improve those assets

- Participate with an education and workforce development coalition to administer an America's Promise Job Driven grant program. The coalition would include Pellissippi State, Chattanooga State, Cleveland State, Roane State, Walters State, Northeast State community colleges and the East Tennessee, First Tennessee, and Southeast Tennessee Development Districts

- Cooperate with Appalachian Voices to begin implementation of a "pay as you save" market based residential energy efficiency program. Program would be based on electric cooperatives providing low-cost loan funds to residential homeowners to purchase energy efficiency improvements. Amortization of the loan would be accomplished by applying the savings from the energy efficiency improvements to re-pay the utility

- Utilize ARC funding to prepare high-speed broadband infrastructure development plans

- Promote sustainable development practices at the local and regional level

- Monitor and implement the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the ETDD region on an annual basis through 2027

- Join the collective efforts to impact the opioid crisis in East Tennessee and the nation

"Responsive" Initiatives

The East Tennessee Development District serves as a network among various stakeholders in the region to support active and regular communications between the public, private, education and non-profit sections during economic challenges and post-disruption stages. Supports that have been identified to assist with continuing to enhance the ability for ETDD and regions response to any, anticipated or unanticipated, negative impacts include:

- Focus on the issue of economic resilience and acquire funding for a prototype recovery plan for one rural county in the District

- Assist one local government with the acquisition of pre-disaster grant funds

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