Southeast Tennessee Valley | Driving into the Future

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents page ii
Summary page 1
Community Description page 2
Community Context page 5
Problem Statement and Issues Analysis page 8
Objective page 10
Scope of Issues page 11
Steering committee Members page 12
Budget and Funding Information page 15
Educational Partners page 16
Communication and Media Outreach page 17
SDAT Project Timeline page 19
Community Partnerships and Support page 20
Supplemental Documents and Attachments page 21
Southeast Tennessee Valley | Driving into the Future

SUMMARY

The wide Tennessee River valley dominates the southeastern region of Tennessee. The valley runs predominantly from southwest to northeast and is flanked to the east by the lower Appalachian Mountains and to the west by the Cumberland Plateau. Throughout the valley a series of ridges rise and fall following the flow of the valley.

The first inhabitants of the area were the Cherokee and Creek Indians who greeted the first recorded European explorers in 1540 when DeSoto passed through in search of gold. The first settlement in the area was a trading post established in 1761 at a place now known as Chattanooga. Timothy Meigs and John Ross, who later became chief of the Cherokee Nation, reestablished the trading post in about 1810. In 1851 the railroad arrived and has been a driving force in the local economy ever since.

For the past 200 years, development and growth of the region has been steady with no extraordinary increases or decreases in any period. Also, industrial growth has maintained a diversity, which has enabled the area to survive economic crises better than many other places. Today, Chattanooga is the center of the metropolitan region with over 450,000 people and a trading area of over a million people.

At this time the region endeavors to find a sustainable path to the future. In July of 2008, Volkswagen announced its plans to build a new $1 billion manufacturing facility here. Expectations are for significant growth within the next 10 years. Our intention is to create a sustainable and energy efficient model that will raise the quality of life for current and future residents.
COMMUNITY DESCRIPTION:

History
Founded as a trading post on the Tennessee River, Chattanooga enjoyed a strategic location as a transportation hub, first through river transport and later with the railroad. In the 1930's, the region began to be shaped by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) through the construction of dams, generation of electricity and emphasis on regional economic development. Manufacturing grew in the community, and at one time, Chattanooga was referred to as the “Dynamo of Dixie.”

Unfortunately, this heavy manufacturing took its toll on air quality and in the 1970s, Chattanooga became known as one of the dirtiest cities in the nation. But strong efforts to mitigate air quality cleared the skies and projected Chattanooga into the spotlight as a model for environmental corrective actions.

Since that time, the community has undertaken numerous initiatives to improve quality of life. Chattanooga’s riverfront has been transformed from an almost forgotten place with abandoned rail lines and vacant industrial buildings to a magnet of community activity, with over 25 miles of trails connecting regional parks, businesses and neighborhoods. A twenty-five year emphasis on downtown revitalization has resulted in a thriving destination with many restaurants, shops, hotels, movie theaters, tourist attractions, and new urban housing. Partnerships between Chattanooga’s Urban Design Studio, The RiverCity Company, local governments, and design and development professionals have resulted in a higher quality built environment and a downtown public realm that provides a solid framework for private development.

Planning efforts
The Downtown Plan, adopted in 2004, set the stage for the continuing revitalization of the urban area and focused on natural systems, transportation, public space and the built environment. A Comprehensive Plan, created in 2005 and adopted by both the City of Chattanooga and Hamilton County, provides some good models for compact, mixed use development patterns, but zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations do not yet match that vision. Other recent plans have focused on specific neighborhoods or districts that are experiencing either growth pressures or disinvestment.
Appointed by Mayor Littlefield, The Chattanooga Green Committee is currently developing recommendations to help the community meet the goals established by the U.S. Conference of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement. Those recommendations, to be presented by the end of 2008, will include a focus on sustainable development patterns, greater transportation choices for all citizens, energy efficient building practices, conservation of natural resources, and “green” government policies.

Geography and Topography
Chattanooga’s geography consists of a series of ridges, plateaus, and valleys interspersed with the Tennessee River and its numerous tributaries. Currently, floodplains and steep slopes are not protected from insensitive development.

Form of Government / Population
Chattanooga, with a population of 169,884, is the 4th largest city in the state and the largest of 10 municipalities in Hamilton County. Both Chattanooga and Hamilton County have Mayors elected at large with City Council and County Commission members elected by district. The Chattanooga MSA consists of 3 counties in Tennessee (Hamilton, Marion, Sequatchie) and 3 counties in Georgia (Catoosa, Dade, Walker) with an overall population of 501,199. The numerous jurisdictions within Hamilton County and the typical complications of working across state lines have made regional planning difficult, and so far unattainable.

Demographics and Economic information
While much of Chattanooga’s economy has shifted to service industries, as in many former industrial cities, the region has maintained a fairly diverse industrial base. With the addition of the Volkswagen manufacturing plant, more industrial growth is expected. The largest employers in the Chattanooga area, and their respective number of employees, are as follows.

- BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee: 4,502
- Hamilton County Department of Education: 4,360
- Tennessee Valley Authority: 3,869
- Erlanger Health System: 3,410
- McKee Foods Corporation: 3,200
- Unum: 2,800
- Maytag Cleveland Cooking Products: 2,500
Opportunities and Constraints

The presence of the TVA and the community’s growing recognition of the importance of its water source and other natural resources, should lend itself to regional cooperation and planning. Chattanooga’s strong history of community participation also provides a real opportunity to establish shared goals for growth and preservation. On the other hand, competition between local governments and neighboring states for tax revenues have thwarted past efforts at regional planning. Strong resistance to additional development regulations or growth management tools, such as impact fees, from property rights advocates and the development community also create significant constraints to effective regional planning. Combined with outdated zoning and subdivision regulations, the result has been sprawling development patterns.
COMMUNITY CONTEXT:

The revitalization of downtown Chattanooga and its waterfront is a well known national story. One of the many acknowledgements regarding Chattanooga’s urban revitalization came from the AIA when it featured Chattanooga in its highly acclaimed 1996 video, *Back from the Brink*. The video documents how the city transformed itself from being declared by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1969 as the nation’s most polluted city to become a model mid-size city which other cities attempt to emulate. Through broad based citizen involvement and strong public/private partnerships, the city has continued to make significant strides in its downtown and first ring neighborhoods. Regretfully the visionary, participatory and sustainability initiatives that have found success in the city have not found their way into the development patterns that surround the city. How to bring the equivalent success to the region, particularly in regards to sustainability that the city has proudly experienced will be the challenge to the SDAT team.

As the SDAT team addresses the sustainability needs and aspirations of the region, it will have much to work with including a world class mid-size city that can serve as a guide and heart of a regional plan. The following bullets provide some context for the SDAT initiative and should give confidence to its members that there is a track record of ongoing success in Chattanooga that can be built upon for future regional success.

- “The Chattanooga Way”- a visioning and broad based community participatory process that has been utilized extensively for over 20 years in reshaping the city’s built environment. Citizens are very familiar with the charrette process and understand its important contributions in shaping the public realm.
- The recently completed 21st Century Waterfront Plan was conceived to be the region’s “living room”. The downtown is animated with well over 200 public events annually.
- Recent large downtown corporate commitments to sustainability include the completion of the $300 million Blue Cross Blue Shield campus that will meet at least Silver LEED certification; Alstom is investing $200 in its downtown manufacturing facility and greening its campus in the process; a sustainable high density, low rise master plan was recently completed on the 140 acre brownfield US Pipe/Wheland site.
- Major Chattanooga employers that have sustainability as a core corporate value include Blue Cross Blue Shield, Koch Industries, Volkswagen AG, TVA, and Unum.
Commitment to sustainability includes some of Chattanooga’s major institutions including the Benwood and Lyndhurst Foundations and the University of Tennessee Chattanooga.

Civic commitment to sustainability has over a 30 year history. Current initiatives include Mayor’s Chattanooga Green Committee, signatory to the U.S. Mayor’s Climate Protection Agreement, and a comprehensive urban forestry initiative.

Chattanooga’s Jefferson Heights neighborhood was chosen as a pilot neighborhood for the new national LEED ND program. It is one of the few pilot neighborhoods that has consistently met the LEED ND criteria.

GreenSpaces is a recently formed community organization that provides incentive funding for commercial projects to be built green, be a resource center for commercial and residential projects, and showcase eco-friendly materials and methods of construction. Currently GreenSpaces is supporting 17 LEED projects that are planned or under construction in the city.

Outdoor living is an important aspect our community’s quality of life. Both the downtown and its surrounding neighborhoods have easy access to first class parks and wilderness experiences. The 11 mile Riverwalk connects downtown to Chickamauga Dam. Current plans connect the Riverwalk to the city’s two contiguous national parks, Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park and Moccasin Bend National Park. Stringer’s Ridge, located in the heart of the Northshore, and is scheduled to gain a permanent conservation easement through the good work of the Trust for Public Land and the Land Trust for Tennessee.

In addition to the above, there are several other proposals and areas of interest that can affect this SDAT initiative. There have been considerable planning monies spent to assess the feasibility of establishing a high speed rail link from Atlanta to Chattanooga and eventually to Nashville. The current proposal has the mag lev terminating at the airport and includes rail connections to downtown Chattanooga. The airport is very close to the VW plant site. Given recent national interest in repairing and extending the nation’s infrastructure, the rail initiatives are closer to being realized than at any time in recent history.

It is expected that a number of automotive manufacturing companies will locate in the region to supply the VW plant adding as many as 4,000 additional jobs. The suppliers are tiered into three categories, with first tier suppliers needing to be less than hour away from the plant to support its lean manufacturing process. Fines up to $2,000/minute are levied on suppliers for failure to deliver needed parts to the plant in a timely fashion. The above has broad infrastructure and planning implications for the region.

Finally, the city and its region have begun to assemble mapping defining its food shed, water shed and important ecological corridors. The city has established base
information regarding its past and present carbon footprint. This and other GIS mapping data will be invaluable to the SDAT team and provides a base of information not always found in the U.S.

In its past, Chattanooga and its surrounding communities have experienced the significant benefits large scale planning can bring to the region. The Tennessee Valley Authority with its early conservation and economic and community development programs brought significant change to the area and increased the area’s standard of living significantly. The SDAT initiative can be part of this history. There is little doubt that the new economic opportunities which Volkswagen represents will affect the region and it is clear the city of Chattanooga and its surrounding region need each other if they are to create a sustainable future for themselves. Three significant reasons Volkswagen of America chose to locate in Chattanooga was due to the urbanity of its downtown, the natural beauty of the area’s ridge and valley landscape, and the community leadership’s commitment to sustainability. The SDAT initiative is intended to keep and strengthen our assets in order to continue to keep the area economically competitive and assure that future generations can count on these assets as well for their well being.
PROBLEM STATEMENT and ISSUES ANALYSIS

The metropolitan area around Chattanooga is in a unique situation. We perceive two major challenges that can dramatically transform the landscape, the functionality, and the people of the region over the next decade. Our hope is that the SDAT team can provide valuable guidance and sensible direction through the coming transformation.

The first of these changes is the previously mentioned construction and operation of a new Volkswagen manufacturing facility. In July of 2008, VW announced its intention to build a new $1 billion manufacturing facility with plans to open in 2011. The factory will be located on a site that began its history as the Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant in 1941. It served as a storage facility for the US Army until 1977 at which time it became inactive. The property sat vacant for 20 years after the Army closed it in 1977. In 2000, The City of Chattanooga and Hamilton County began to make plans to develop the site for a major manufacturer. Construction has already begun at the TVA certified industrial mega-site now known as Enterprise South. Once it is complete it will employ about 2,000 workers along with an estimated 9,000 additional jobs associated with automotive suppliers. As a result of the additional residential, commercial and industrial needs associated with such a large manufacturing facility, there will be many challenges to address in order to maintain a sustainable community structure.

The second challenge is to meet the U.S. Council of Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, which was signed in 2006 by Chattanooga Mayor Ron Littlefield. Since then the City has organized a special task force of community leaders to address the objectives in the agreement to achieve a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and our collective carbon footprint. Ongoing activities toward this goal are bringing about a second “environmental renaissance” in Chattanooga.

One of the reasons Volkswagen chose to locate in Chattanooga was the City’s commitment to a sustainable future. Along with VW, AIA Chattanooga members and other regional community leaders are concerned about how this manufacturing facility will affect the development of the region. Over the next few years, as Volkswagen builds its assembly plant and begins manufacturing automobiles here, the region will undergo a transformation that will include nearly every sector of the economy. Of most concern is the development of new residential and commercial areas within the area of study and the associated civic structures and facilities that will follow. These forces will strain efforts to preserve the natural environment. Without guidelines for sustainable growth and expansion of neighborhoods and
commercial areas, our community will continue to grow outwards. This type of sprawl will make it difficult to reduce our collective carbon footprint.

Our concerns for the future include long range growth issues as they relate to the future Volkswagen opportunity and community economic development. The study should focus on creating and maintaining quality of life and sustainable growth in the region with an emphasis on refocusing the local zoning ordinances and subdivision rules and regulations. The region to be studied includes seven counties in two states. To us, sustainable growth would address community issues as they relate to quality of life and quality of growth for the region including:

- continuing to allow food to be grown locally,
- cleaning surface water and recharge storm water runoff,
- water conservation due to recent regional drought conditions,
- providing for multiple mass transportation options,
- reducing air pollutants,
- creating convenient and cost effective recycling solutions,
- defining appropriate building zones,
- planning for open space and parkland,
- and promoting energy efficiency.
OBJECTIVE

Geographic Area of Study

The area for this study includes a physical area bounded by both a 45 minute drive from and a 15 mile radius from the Volkswagen site. This includes Bradley, Hamilton, and Marion counties in Tennessee; and Catoosa, Walker and Whitfield counties in Georgia.
**Scope of Issues**

Assistance by the SDAT team should include specific action items, both short-term and long-term, for the sustainable development and re-development of the built environment in the region. Action items should encompass the commercial, industrial, residential and agricultural sectors with a strong sustainable maintenance plan for the natural environment. Preservation, protection and enhancement of; tree canopy, surface and groundwater sources, air quality, and other natural elements is a priority as is agricultural diversity and protection.

The Sustainable Design Assessment Team should consider the region’s development of green strategies and recommend community growth policies and possible incentives to help achieve a sustainable, high quality future for the region. The Team should focus suggestions on improving current zoning regulations and subdivision rules and regulations to create a more sustainable model for the region. Consideration could be given to the AIA’s 10 principals for livable communities and the Smart Code approach to zoning to serve as a guide to improve the built environment. Recommendations may include the expanded use of incentives to re-use and re-develop existing structures and vacant lots. It is our belief that quality infill projects have positive economic effects on their neighborhoods and should result in a decrease of greenhouse gas emissions for the region.

Current regional consumer recycling is low. Landfill space concerns community leaders and Landfill placement always concerns area residents. In order to reduce landfill volume, suggestions should be made to help us implement a cost effective recycling program that works on both a neighborhood and a regional level.

Public transit is also an important factor that will contribute to the overall success of a sustainable future. Unfortunately, we do not currently have the density to support a comprehensive regional public transportation system. The SDAT team should recommend changes that could help make multiple public transportation options viable for the study area.

Recommendations made should help implement renewable and energy efficient strategies for residents and businesses throughout the region. Also important to the plan’s success are team suggestions for general public education of the plan and effective economic implementation. All recommendations should strive to address community issues as they relate to quality of life and quality of growth for the region.
### Budget and Funding Information:

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**Educational Partners:**

We are fortunate to have a local University with strong community ties. The City of Chattanooga and the local River City Company also has strong ties to the three regional schools of architecture; Tennessee, Auburn, and Georgia Tech. Of these we have letters of support from both the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga and the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
Communication and Media Outreach:

We expect to use the City Mayor’s office to distribute planning dates and general project information. Once the SDAT is complete we hope to use the ideas of Create Here to divide the information into logical and concise educational pieces.

Additional regional media contacts can be found on the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce website:  
http://www.chattanoogachamber.com/newsandvideo/medialist.asp#dailynewsarea

Television Stations:

WDEF TV News 12 (CBS)  
3300 Broad Street  
Chattanooga, TN 37408  
United States  
(423) 785-1200

WDSI-TV FOX61 (FOX)  
1101 East Main Street  
Chattanooga, TN 37408  
United States  
(423) 265-0061

WFLI-TV (CW)  
1101 East Main Street  
Chattanooga, TN 37408  
United States  
(423) 265-0061

WRCB TV-3 (NBC)  
900 Whitehall Road  
Chattanooga, TN 37405  
United States  
(423) 267-5412 ext. 145

WTCI TV (PBS)  
7540 Bonnyshire Drive  
Chattanooga, TN 37416  
United States  
(423) 702-7800

WTVC, NewsChannel 9 (ABC)  
4279 Benton Drive  
Chattanooga, TN 37406-1284  
United States  
(423) 756-5500

WYHB TV-39  
7445 Shallowford Road  
Chattanooga, TN 37421  
Gene Parrot - News Director  
Phone: 423 899-1939  
FAX: 423-855-7381
Daily News Papers:

Chattanooga Times Free Press
400 East 11th Street
PO Box 1447
Chattanooga, TN 37401
Robert Lutgen - Managing Editor
Phone: 423-756-6900

Cleveland Daily Banner
1505 25th Street NW
Cleveland, TN 38301-6126
Larry Bowers - Executive Editor
Phone: 423-472-5041

Weekly News Papers:

Chattanooga News Chronicle
611 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
Chattanooga, TN 37403
John Edwards - Publisher
Phone: 423-267-2313

The Chattanooga Pulse
1110 Market Street, Suite 209
Chattanooga, TN 37402
Zach Cooper - Publisher
Phone: 423-648-7857

Hamilton County Herald
633 Chestnut Street, Suite 600
Chattanooga, TN 37450
Don Bona - Publisher/Editor
Phone: 423-267-8323

Lookout Mountain Mirror
112 North Wautauga Avenue
Lookout Mountain, TN 37350
Jon Leboeuf - Editor
Phone: 423-822-NEWS

The Daily Citizen-News
308 South Thornton Avenue
Dalton, GA 30722-1167
Jim Espy - Managing Editor
Phone: 706-217-6397

Cleveland Daily Banner
1505 25th Street NW
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Lookout Mountain, TN 37350
Jon Leboeuf - Editor
Phone: 423-822-NEWS

Signal Mountain Mirror
112 North Wautauga Avenue
Lookout Mountain, TN 37350
Lucia Parker - Editor
Phone: 423-822-NEWS

Signal Mountain Post
PO Box 2070
Fort Oglethorpe, GA 30742
Nikki Wiram - Writer
Phone: 706-866-1020

North Georgia Busy Shopper
PO Box 2070
Fort Oglethorpe, GA 30742
Phone: 706-866-1020
**SDAT Project Timeline:**

Our proposed timetable for the Southeast Tennessee Valley SDAT is as follows:

- **Preliminary Visit:** February 2009
- **SDAT Visit:** April 2009
- **Final Report:** June-July 2009
- **Follow-up Conference Call:** November 2009
- **One Year Assessment:** June 2010
Community Partnerships and Support:

We have established a diverse community steering committee and have made attempts to recruit additional support throughout the community. We plan to continue to pursue the support and participation of regional municipalities since this will be key to the successful implementation of the SDAT recommendations.

Letters of support from the following community groups are included.

- AIA Chattanooga
- AIA Tennessee
- City of Chattanooga, Mayor
- Hamilton County, Mayor
- Chattanooga-Hamilton County Regional Planning Agency
- Chattanooga Green Committee
- Associated General Contractors of East Tennessee
- Home Builders Association of Southeast Tennessee
Supplemental Documents and Attachments:

The following additional documents are included in the Supplemental Documents Folder.

Hamilton County Zoning Ordinance

Chattanooga Green Committee, Interim Report

Regional Planning Association

Downtown Plan
Comprehensive Plan
North Shore Plan
Wolftever Plan
Shallowford Road / Lee Highway Plan
East Brainerd Plan
Soddy Daisy Plan
Highway 58 Plan