WHAT MAKES UP THE PLACE?

The vital first step in the vision planning process was to delve into an understanding of the place. Through extensive stakeholder interviews, archival research, and first-hand exploration, the characteristics of the South Waterfront were described and documented. This body of knowledge included site systems and programming analyses, a review of infrastructural conditions and functions, and a record of historic development and contemporary regulatory tools.
2.0 WHAT MAKES UP THE PLACE?

Sunrise Over The Tennessee River At The South Knoxville Waterfront

Aerial Snapshots Of The South Waterfront And Development Patterns In Greater Knoxville
At over 650 acres of land and an elevation change of 330 feet, the study area of the Knoxville South Waterfront cannot be described as a single environment. While primarily a residential neighborhood, it is a place divided by topography, infrastructure and a wide range of uses. Ironically, the area’s greatest asset and the element that spans its length - the river itself - is also the amenity that is most inaccessible. Due to the nearly uninterrupted presence of heavy industry along the river’s edge, there is virtually no tangible relationship between the residential community and its riverfront. At the same time, it is many of these uses that provide stability and employment for the area. As with so many cities that are now turning their attention to their riverfronts as places to live and play, industries that are less dependant on water-borne transportation are giving way to higher and better uses that improve the quality of life for all. There is a general sentiment that the time has come for South Knoxville to begin its transformation and rebirth.

It is perhaps the natural and cultural inheritance of the place that is most treasured by those who call the neighborhood home. While building uses and economies have changed over time, much of South Knoxville as a residential neighborhood has remained constant, and the neighborhoods history can be read in its housing stock. There is great pride in the “quiet, small-town” atmosphere that exists in a dynamic landscape that is privy to some of the best views in the city. While modern conveniences and places to shop and eat have been siphoned off to major transportation arterials outside the area, the site’s proximity to downtown represents an unparalleled opportunity to build a new future upon.

2.1 CURRENT LAND USES

Existing Industry Along The South Waterfront - Tanks And Barge Terminals

Historic Communities Of Homes, New Condo Development, And Baptist Hospital, The Area’s Biggest Business And Employer
LIVING PLACES
With the exception of the industrial uses directly adjacent to the river, South Knoxville is primarily a series of residential neighborhoods. These neighborhoods are influenced by their relationship to topography, with properties higher in elevation capturing expansive views of the waterfront. Most residences are of modest footprint and there is no particular style that dominates the area. However, new residential development is of a higher density than the existing scale of single family homes. Residents treasure the “feel of a small town”, and most have lived in the area their whole life.

COMMUNITY PLACES
Although the bulk of residential development spreads out to the west towards Scottish Pike and to the east in the Old Sevier neighborhood, the bulk of community and institutional uses are concentrated near the center of the site. The Baptist Hospital has by far the largest presence. The Shriner’s Lodge, First Baptist Church and South Knoxville Elementary line Sevier Avenue. In addition, a few community uses are nested within the residential areas.
WORKING PLACES
Heavy industrial uses consume much of the land at the water's edge. There are 46 industrial establishments with over 900 employees in the manufacturing and wholesale trades in the study area. Baptist Hospital has approximately 1,600 employees. Service and retail uses line Chapman Highway to the south. In total, there are approximately 2,700 jobs in the area. Sevier Avenue - the historic commercial spine of the neighborhood - has become more suburban over time with recent development set back from the street edge.

SHOPPING & EATING PLACES
There are currently few places to shop or eat in the study area. Shopping centers within a five-minute driving range were identified to determine the immediate retail environment, particularly to the south along Chapman Highway.
2.1 CURRENT LAND USES

Open Space: 85 Acres
Greenway: 33 Miles
Boomsday
300,000 Spectators
Vol Navy: 200
Train Tour: 225 Passengers
Riverboat: 325
Rowing Course

PLAYING PLACES

Fort Dickerson and the Quarry are the major centralized open spaces of Knoxville South Waterfront, with historical and interpretive elements, but currently have no opportunities for large gatherings or activities. There is also a small pocket of passive recreational green at Scottish Pike Park.

River access and activities are treasured, with an important boat ramp at Scottish Pike, but nothing at the South Waterfront’s eastern end (McWherter Park on the north shore is the closest public ramp). And with Boomsday, the Vol Navy, marinas, and the rowing course, the water is definitely the place to be.

Linear open space and activity lines the north shore with the green way and volunteer landing, and there’s a real opportunity to build on this with plans to connect through the South Waterfront to regional greenways to the east.
CURRENT LAND USES

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Planned New Development
First Development Pressure
Second Development Pressure

CURRENT INTEREST

Current trends in growth and development are opportunistic, popping up on sites which take advantage of the project area’s main asset - the River. Whether capitalizing on the growing availability of post-industrial sites, or resulting from the canny amalgamation of individual residential parcels, large private developments, mainly housing, are already appearing on the South Waterfront. While connections to major routes and planned road improvements are beneficial, one can determine from the RiverTowne project that even the most inaccessible sites will yield a high market value based on their proximity to water access and views.

Without consensus-driven community- and stakeholder-led planning and regulation, these trends suggest that development in the near term will focus on the accumulation of high-value waterfront property and the creation of high-density private residential projects on these sites. It is unclear what benefits will be seen in the urban fabric beyond these water’s edge areas. In addition, these sporadic developments will continue to occur in isolation and in the absence of an integrated framework.
PEOPLE, DEMOGRAPHICS, MARKETS

Knoxville’s South Waterfront is far from homogenous. There are at least four distinct neighborhood communities within the project area.

To the west, the Scottish Pike and Blount Avenue districts form a distinctive mixed live-work environment with industry located in the low shelf along the river, and housing ranging behind it and beyond a limiting rail underpass at Cherokee Trail. Housing in this area is of mixed condition, but is over 50% owner-occupied. Close to 15% of jobs in this area are held by neighborhood residents.

Extending south in the bluff area between the Henley and Gay Street Bridges is the South Waterfront’s core commercial and institutional district. Anchored by the Baptist Hospital complex at the River, commercial and retail businesses line the Chapman Highway corridor.

The center of the South Waterfront, the Old Sevier neighborhood boasts a mix of housing and commercial uses. Heavy industry still lines the water’s edge with other commercial enterprises mixing into the Sevier Avenue district. This area provides housing for over 400 residents at a 50% owner-occupancy rate.

Finally, at the far east of the project site, a thin wedge of industrial uses lines Island Home Avenue leading up to the gates of Island Home itself.
2.3 TOPOGRAPHY

I. Neyland Stadium
   Highway 158 and Railroad
   UT Boathouse
   Tennessee River
   Norfolk & Southern Railroad
   West Blount Avenue

II. City-County Building
    Highway 158 and Railroad
    Pedestrian Bridge
    Gay Street
    Tennessee River
    Baptist Hospital
    Sevier Avenue

III. James White Parkway
     Houses
     Railroad
     Marina
     Tennessee River
     James White Parkway
     Sevier Avenue
I. SECTION DOWN RIVER: NEYLAND STADIUM - SCOTTISH PIKE
A site section taken at the western portion of the area reveals a number of features:
1.) Neyland Stadium dwarfs much of the landscape;
2.) Properties along West Blount Avenue have a very fine grain and small scale; and
3.) The river reaches some of its widest spans. Fort Dickerson at this location provides a sweeping vista to downtown.

II. SECTION MID RIVER: CITY HALL - BAPTIST HOSPITAL
At mid river, The City County Building and Baptist Hospital are institutional bookends to the center of the site. Linked together by the Henley and Gay Street bridges, the elevation change between these anchors and the river below are some of the most dramatic.

III. SECTION UPPER RIVER: MARINA - PHILLIPS AVENUE
A site section taken at the eastern portion of the site, in the Old Sevier neighborhood, demonstrates the extent of the flood zone on the Knoxville South Waterfront. Much of the property along the river’s edge is relatively flat until a ridge appears at Phillips Avenue at which time the elevation descends down again to Sevier Avenue. This condition creates a pocket along Sevier Avenue, essentially cutting the street off from a view of the river for much of its length. Properties to the south (right hand portion of the section) gain in elevation up Chapman Ridge.
Three north-south framework streets cross the river: Chapman Highway, a major regional highway; Gay Street, bringing Knoxville’s historic main street to Sevier Avenue; and James White Parkway, a four-lane regional freeway with a Sevier Avenue interchange. The sole east-west spine, Blount/Sevier Avenue, continues beyond James White Parkway as a local road. Blocks formed by small local streets cover much of the flat ground in the South Waterfront, as well as much of the slope above Sevier Avenue.

Existing tight grids of small streets, once considered obsolete, are now recognized as assets, well scaled for redevelopment, amenable to a wide variety of fronting reuses, and efficient for traffic distribution. The existing street and block pattern can be easily extended into designated redevelopment areas. Sevier Avenue, once the business center, has an alignment and cross section well suited to a revival of that role.

Character, not vehicular capacity, is the street system’s shortcoming. Local streets, while well spaced and sized, are frayed, often lacking sidewalks. Continuity of the Sevier/Blount spine is interrupted by a one-way segment and a single-lane railroad viaduct. The north-south arterials, while efficient traffic conduits, all lack a strong sense of place and aesthetic appeal: Chapman Highway is bordered by strip commercial; Gay Street terminates unceremoniously at what should be a focal point; and the James White Parkway is still an unhealed suburban road scar.
Currently there is mixed recreational and commercial water use on the waterfront. Commercial barge traffic transports goods from industry to destinations downstream as well as within the project area (Marathon Asphalt). The Star of Knoxville runs riverboat tours from a location on the North shore. In addition to the boats docked at Volunteer Landing marina downtown, recreational power boaters cruise the waterway launching from the local boat ramps or other marinas sited in West and South Knoxville. On football game days, the Volunteer Navy is a prominent user of the waterfront. UT Rowing and the Knoxville Rowing Association crews practice as well as host regatta events. Canoers and kayakers paddle the waterway. The river serves as a transportation corridor for migrating birds and other wildlife.
As with other cities located in the Southeast, the utilities located within the project area were originally developed to serve large industrial and commercial businesses as well as the residential areas located throughout the project area; therefore there is a very extensive utility infrastructure already in place that should serve most expected growth in the project area.

The majority of the water and sanitary sewer pipelines were originally sized for industrial and commercial developments. Depending on the actual development, some specific, localized improvements may be required. Most water pipelines in the area were installed in the early 1900’s and replacement or rehabilitation of a limited number of pipelines may be needed to assure adequate capacity for new commercial or multi-story residential development.

A number of upgrades within the project area are already being planned by the Knoxville Utilities Board (KUB). KUB is also implementing an aggressive program of sewer improvements as part of its compliance with a Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) Order. A condition of the Order is that KUB must certify that there is sufficient sewer capacity before any new flows can be accepted. KUB has stated that this should not be a problem in the project area.

Gas and electric services owned by KUB are also more than adequate for future growth with only slight modifications and upgrades required. Under-grounding of electrical facilities would improve aesthetics and increase the reliability of service in the project area.

There is a robust telecommunications infrastructure located in the project area with services provided by Bellsouth, Comcast, AT&T, MCI and Knology. Many of these utilities already share overhead utility poles with KUB and all stated that they would be receptive to joint trench under-grounding of their respective utilities. KUB has offered to install conduits and rent space to other utilities once the Vision Plan is implemented.

Storm water infrastructure rehabilitation will be a significant component of any future development. Emphasis should be placed on reducing downstream flooding and improving the water quality, especially along the areas around Goose Creek.
The legacies of the South Waterfront’s long history as a living and working place are complex. Potential areas of archaeological significance include all existing and historical bridge and ferry structures. Equally rich is the water’s edge itself, home to many a sunken barge, paddle boat, or potential native American midden cache. Civil War era structures’ bones are still traced in the land at preserved sites like Fort Dickerson and also at remnant or lost spots like Fort Stanely and the old stockades.

Potentially polluted areas are numerous. Old mill and slaughterhouse sites leave chemical and organic traces in the soil layers and perhaps in the water table itself. Some oil and gas tank sites have already been remediated, others are just now being vacated and still others are active. Machining and autobody shops along Sevier’s main drag harbor unknown material traces - hydrocarbons? metals? And the one known polluter from an upstream Superfund site along Goose Creek has deposited pollutants now trapped in the creek’s and river’s sediments.

While all or none of these potentially significant or polluted sites may turn out to be barriers to development, it is important to keep a catalog of the potential overlaps in mind when thinking forward to future land uses and programming.
2.6 [B] FUNCTION: NATURAL INHERITANCE

Water Bodies: Normal Pool 812 Ft
100 Year Flood: Elevation 821.5
Area Inundates: 13.5 Acres
100 Year Flood: Elevation 827.5
Area Inundates: 49.5 Acres

The major natural systems of the South Waterfront run in east-west parallel sweeps. The Tennessee River itself, here Fort Loudon Lake, flows westerly with 100 year floods largely contained by the south waterfront's banks, and the 500 year flood line showing greater incursions especially in the Scottish Pike neighborhood and the wide river flats in the Old Sevier district. The steepness of the South Waterfronts' hills has not discouraged some degree of development but has protected slope tree-cover from wholesale clear-cutting.

Potential caves dot the limestone substrate landscape. Bounded by Goose Creek to the west and Baker Creek to the east, the area's other major water feature is the filled quarry pit. While water quality in Goose Creek and its sediments have been historically degraded by an upriver Superfund site, the quarry’s water is unusually clean.
The South Knoxville area along the waterfront is made up of more than half the zoning districts within the Knoxville Zoning Ordinance. This variety of zoning districts includes everything from single-family residential, low and high density residential, office and medical, CBD, to general commercial, highway and arterial commercial, retail, industrial, restricted manufacturing and warehousing.

This condition comes with different regulatory criteria for each zone in the way of setbacks, compatible adjacent uses, buildable area of the site allowed and height requirements for each property. These differences, along with the variety of agencies having jurisdiction over a particular site make it confusing for not only existing property owners but potential property owners/developers to understand and get through all the requirements and the permitting process smoothly.
CURRENT WATERFRONT APPROVAL PROCESS AND TIMING

The diagram above indicates the current process for permit approval from appropriate agencies such as TVA & Corp of Engineers. Obtaining a building permit can take anywhere from 1 to 14 months, causing confusion, frustration and delay to property owners or investors looking to improve and invest in the South Knoxville Waterfront.