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Guest editorial: Region must work together on goals

By Stephanie R. McCullough

Other Views

The Metropolitan Policy Program at the Brookings Institution recently released a report on The State of Metropolitan America: On the Front Lines of Demographic Transformation, which describes demographic changes and how they affect our nation. It illustrates how we must shift our thinking so that we will be better prepared for the population changes of the next decade, referred to as the "decade of reckoning" by Bruce Katz, director of the Metropolitan Policy Program. Policy changes on the federal and local levels must be made so that we can remain competitive in the global market.

The report identifies five new realities for U.S. metropolitan areas: growth and outward expansion, population diversification, aging of the population, uneven higher educational attainment and income polarization. The demographic data is then used to group them into seven categories: Next Frontier, New Heartland, Diverse Giants, Border Growth, Mid Sized Magnet, Skilled Anchors and Industrial Cores. Nashville is identified as a New Heartland, with cities such as Colorado Springs, Salt Lake City and Madison, Wis., among others. We can no longer think of the U.S. as regions with historically industrial commonalities such as the Rust Belt or the Cotton Belt, but rather we should examine their demographic similarities.

New Heartland areas are those in which there is high growth in population with lower diversity in comparison to other areas, and high educational attainment. The demographics of these areas are not necessarily shifting on a massive scale, but we are definitely growing, and we need to be prepared. Luckily, Middle Tennessee has many organizations that are already working on plans that correlate with several of the new realities, especially related to the topic of growth and outward expansion.

Transit issues on list

Metropolitan Nashville, in partnership with business and civic groups and nonprofits, is leading the charge to manage growth in Middle Tennessee with numerous initiatives and collaborations established in the last several years. By thinking regionally, we can leverage resources to reach our goals faster and more efficiently.

The mayors of the region have been working together on issues of transportation as well as bringing jobs to Middle Tennessee. The Nashville Civic Design Center is working with the Metropolitan Planning Organization on updating the regional transportation plan, used to determine the amount of federal funding for transportation allocated to the region. The newly organized Transit Alliance of Middle Tennessee is working to increase support in the private sector for transit. Cumberland Region Tomorrow will host the upcoming Convening the Region Summit, where representatives from 10 counties in Middle Tennessee will come together to discuss growth.

Work also continues on implementation of the recommendations outlined by the Green Ribbon Committee in their report on the environment released last summer, as does the work of Nashville's Poverty Initiative, Livability Project and Open Space Plan and many other initiatives and groups, both public and private.

These groups will continue to work together to ensure that Middle Tennessee keeps up with the rapidly changing face of the U.S. population and remains competitive in the global market.
