



Planning

KNOXVILLE | KNOX COUNTY

KNOX COUNTY'S

Center of Population

2022

TECHNICAL REPORT

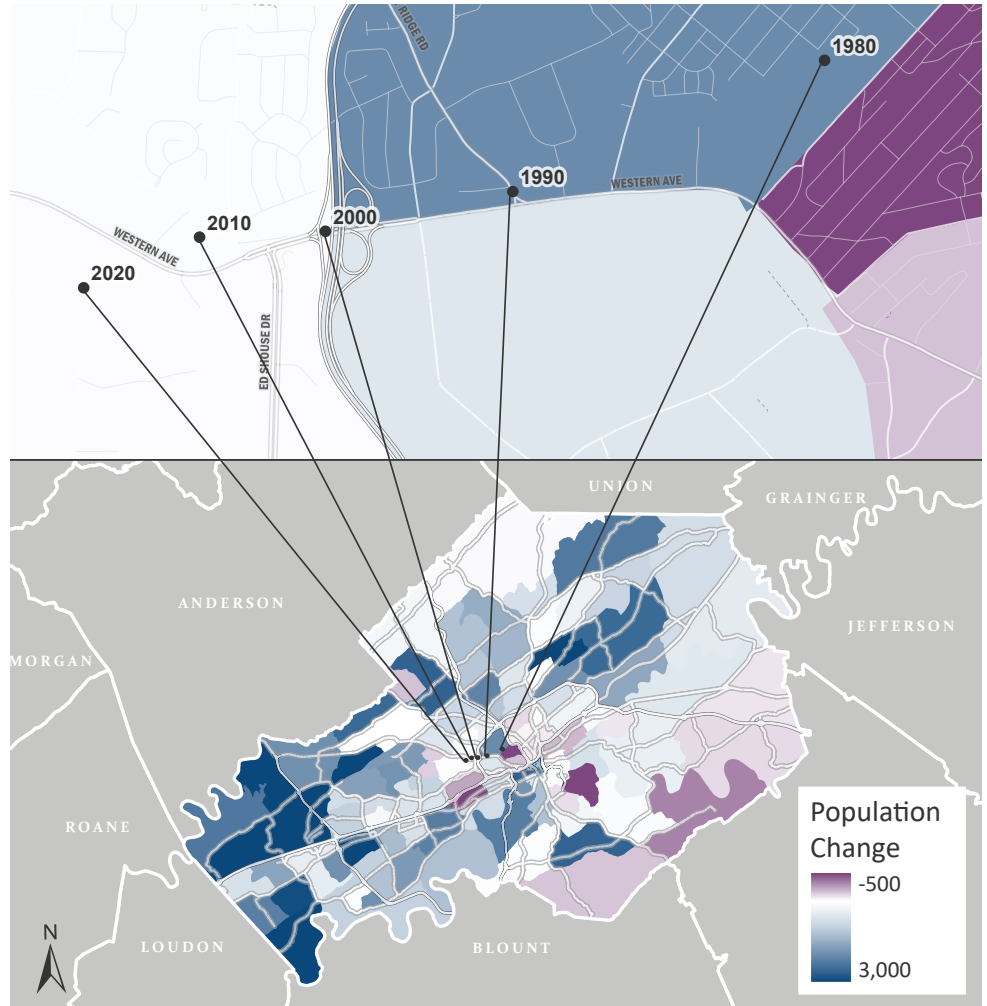
Knox County's Center of Population, 2020

Every 10 years, following the release of its Census of Population and Housing, the U.S. Census Bureau reports the geographic center of population. The Bureau defines the population center as the point at which an imaginary map would balance perfectly if all residents weighed the same and were put on the map where they live.

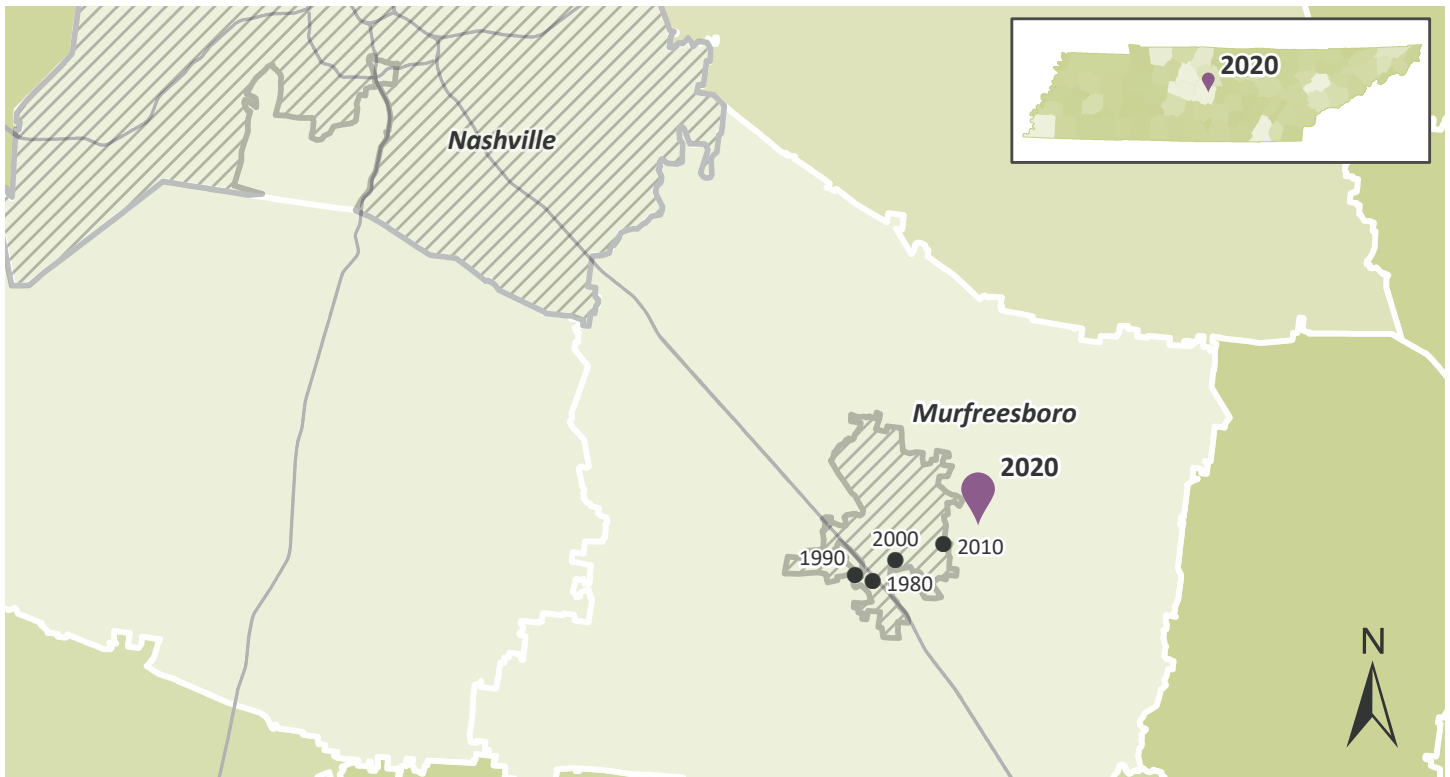
With the latest release of decennial census data in 2021, Knox County's population of 478,971 found its center near the intersection of Hinton Drive and Third Creek Road in Northwest Knoxville.

Knox County's center of population has followed a westward shift for the past several decades.

Communities like Hardin Valley, Solway, Concord, and Choto, at the county's west end, had especially high growth while south and east areas of the county, such as Strawberry Plains, Carter, Neubert Springs, and Kimberlin Heights, recorded population loss.



Tennessee's 2020 center was between Bradyville Pike and John Bragg Highway on the edge of Murfreesboro city limits. The state center has remained near this area, trending slightly northeast, for several decades.



The center of the U.S. population has moved west every decade since the first census in 1790 and, since the early 1900s, the center has been trending more towards the southwest. In 2020, the center of population was in Wright County, Missouri – about 470 miles from Knoxville.



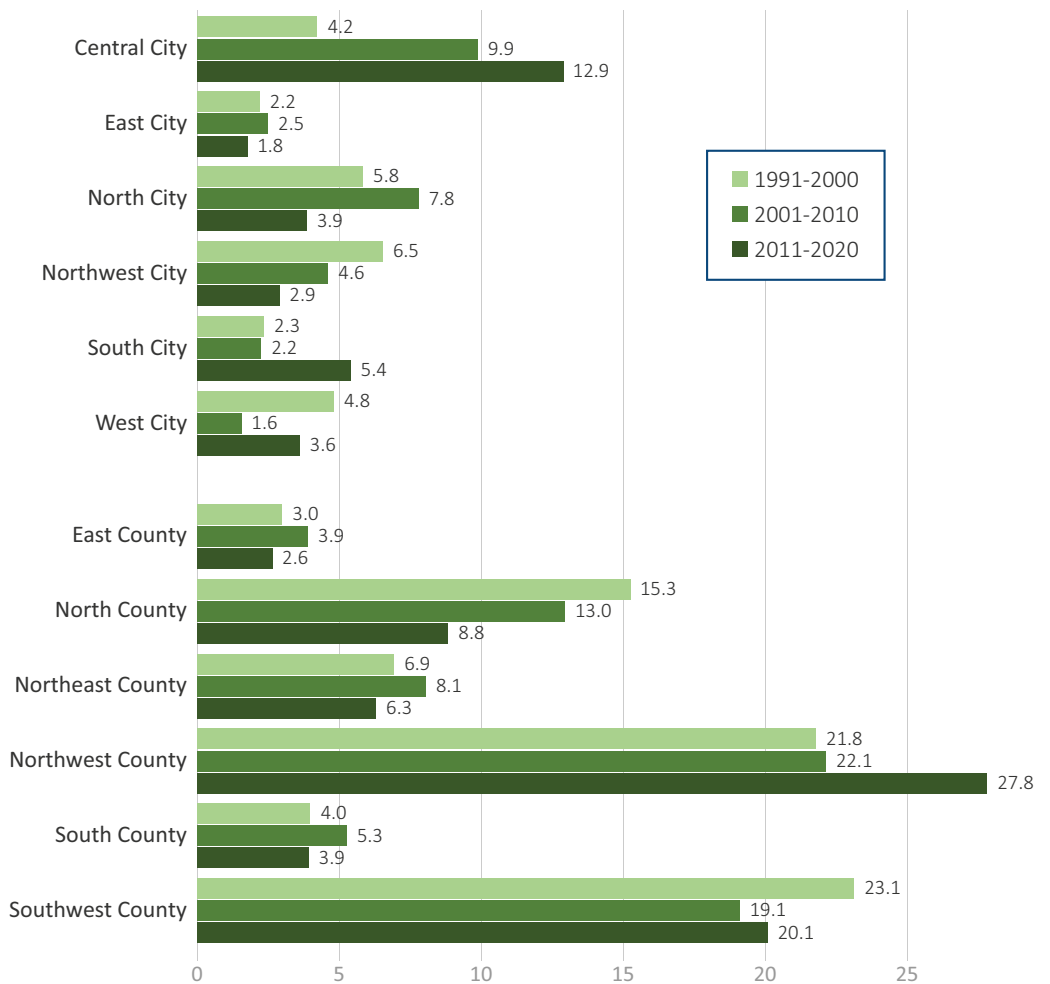
Moving to the Suburbs

The center of population in Knox County and its direction of movement are important because they illustrate significant residential investment and economic shifts over the past several decades.

Since the 1980s, the center of population has reflected outward movement from the urban center to new, single-family homes in the suburbs. Housing development has been concentrated in greenfields, formerly agricultural or undeveloped areas, as Knox County residents have moved further out into the county to follow the supply of new housing.

This type of development is not easy to accommodate, however. Expensive infrastructure expansion, including roads and utilities, to areas previously unserved requires massive investment from local government. The services provided to residents (like schools and emergency services) can become strained by the increase in population, often requiring costly expansions that sometimes cannot keep pace. In addition, the shifting population center can lead businesses to move towards new suburban markets, taking employment opportunities and the goods and services offered with them. Disinvestment in shrinking communities can leave behind vacant storefronts and food deserts as less-populated areas become less profitable than the booming neighborhoods out in the suburbs.

Sector Share (%) of Knox County Building Permits (Residential & Non-Residential), 1991-2020



Patterns of Growth

From 1990 through 2020, the Northwest, Southwest, and North County sectors were consistently the leaders in development within Knox County.

Northwest County was the fastest-growing sector of the past 10 years and consistently top two in the past 30 years, which is not surprising to locals as development in this sector often grabs headlines. Southwest County has also led with considerable growth in the past 30 years, contributing to the westward path that the Knox County center of population has taken.

In contrast, all of Knox County’s eastern sectors (East City, East County, and Northeast County) experienced less development in the past 10 years than in previous decades, further tilting the scales for a western shift in local population.



Population gains from 1990 to 2020 show far more growth in county sectors than city sectors, with Southwest County more than doubling in the same time period that Central City, East City, and South City each grew less than 4%.

While growth in city sectors has been consistently slower than in the county, the Central City sector has joined the suburban sectors as a development hotspot as businesses and residents have returned to the city over the past decade. Knoxville’s center-city recovered population losses from the 1980s and ‘90s through substantial residential reinvestment downtown as well as sizeable new residential projects near The University of Tennessee campus. This change in development patterns, dependent on infill and redevelopment, has occurred in tandem with the community’s growing desire for urban or affordable housing options, walk-ability and bike-ability, proximity to resources and services, and quick access to entertainment.

Population Growth Rates (%) by Sector, 1990-2020



Good Connections

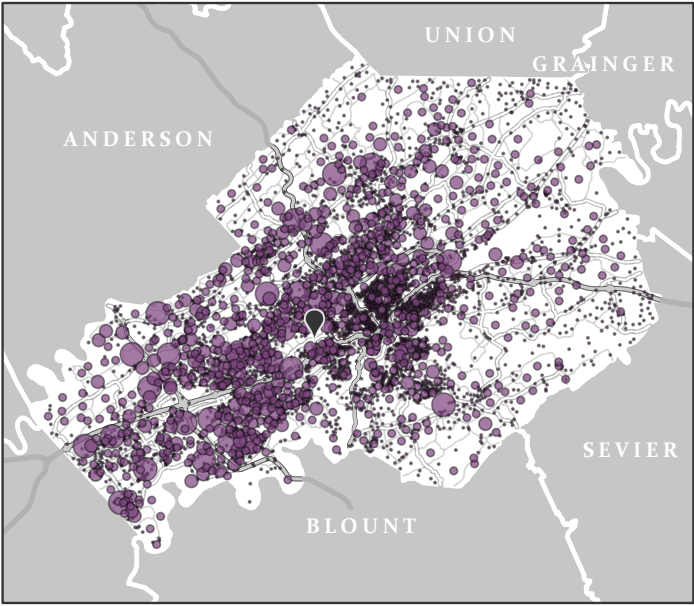
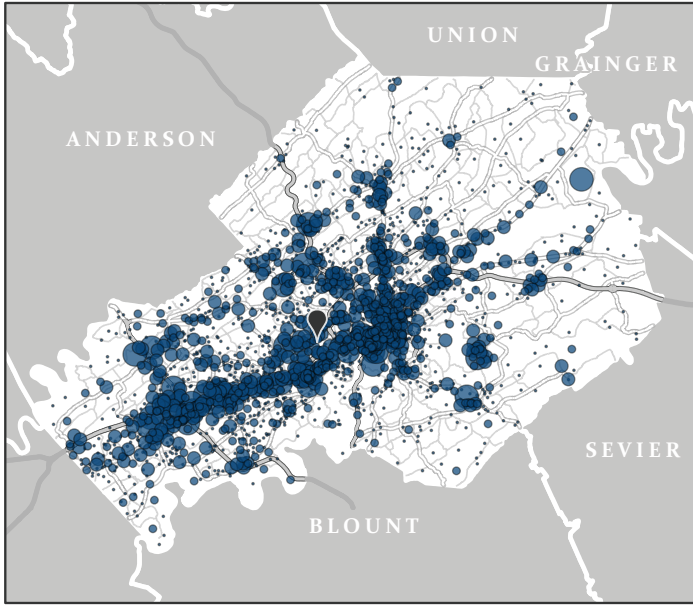
Knoxville's central location in the eastern U.S., and its access via three interstate highways serving the area, place it within 600 miles of about half of the nation's population – or within about one day's drive.

This centrality and accessibility to major urban markets make Knoxville an attractive location for economic investment from major national and global businesses, like Pilot Company, DENSO Corporation, and Brunswick Boat Group.

Workplaces in Knox County tend to be clustered around downtown Knoxville and throughout corridors formed by Interstate 40 and other major local thoroughfares extending out of the urban core, with a decided western and northern orientation. Many of the area's major employers – such as Covenant Health, University of Tennessee, and the University of Tennessee Medical Center – have locations within these workplace clusters.

Worker residences are also more concentrated in the central and western parts of the county. This pattern demonstrates the strong correlations between residence locations and proximity to workplace. According to the 2020 American Community Survey, approximately 74% of Knox County residents travel less than 30 minutes to work each day.





Places of Work

- 1 - 30 jobs
- 31 - 100 jobs
- 101- 1000 jobs
- 1001+ jobs
- 📍 2020 Center of Population

Worker Residences

- 0 - 50 workers
- 51 - 200 workers
- 201 - 500 workers
- 501 + workers
- 📍 2020 Center of Population

Because local residents have taken note of the strong growth in west Knox County over the past several decades, there is a common misperception that the center of population is closer to Cedar Bluff than downtown Knoxville. Instead, the center of the local population is still close to downtown Knoxville, indicating that critical local public resources (like medical care, transit, social services, and government offices), major employers, and a vibrant retail and entertainment core are still in a relevant location to best serve the residents of Knox County.

Knox County Major Employers
(Knoxville Chamber, November 2021)

- Covenant Health
- Knox County Schools
- University of Tennessee
- Walmart Stores
- University of Tennessee Medical Center
- K-VA-T Food Stores
- Roark Capital Group
- State of Tennessee
- Tennova Healthcare
- McDonald's Corporation





Planning

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