

# Knox County's Center of Population, 2000

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For more  
information:

**Publications:**

- *2000 Census of Population and Housing*
- *1990 Census of Population and Housing, Census Tract Profiles*

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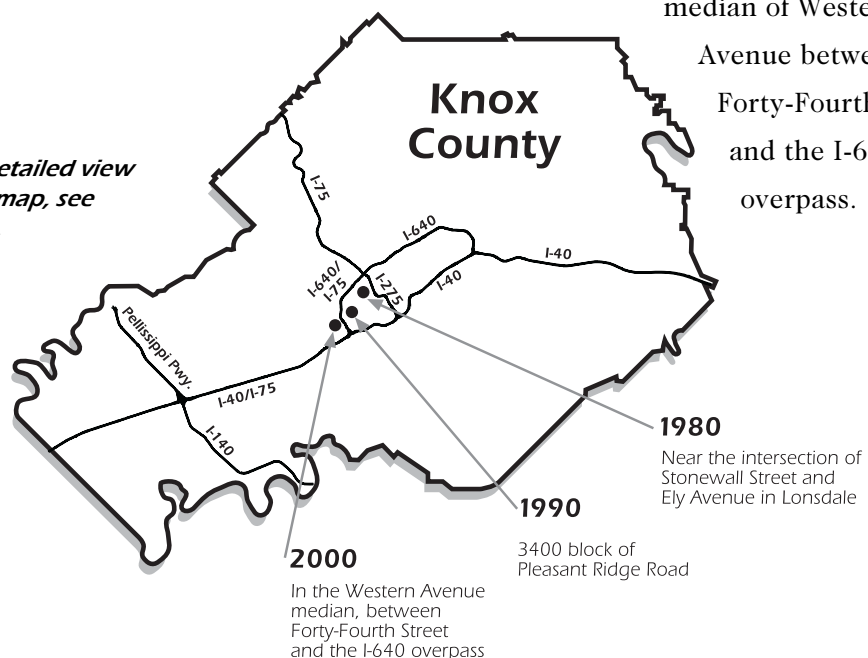
**This report discusses  
the weighted mean  
center of population  
in Knoxville and  
Knox County.**

Consider building an enormous map of Knox County, large enough that all local residents can stand on it. The map should be flat and rigid, and it should be able to support the weight of each person (by the way, everyone weighs the same in this scenario). People are asked to place themselves on the map where their homes lie, then, one skilled researcher must try to find the point at which the entire surface, people and all, balances perfectly on the head of a pin. That point marks the center of Knox County's population.

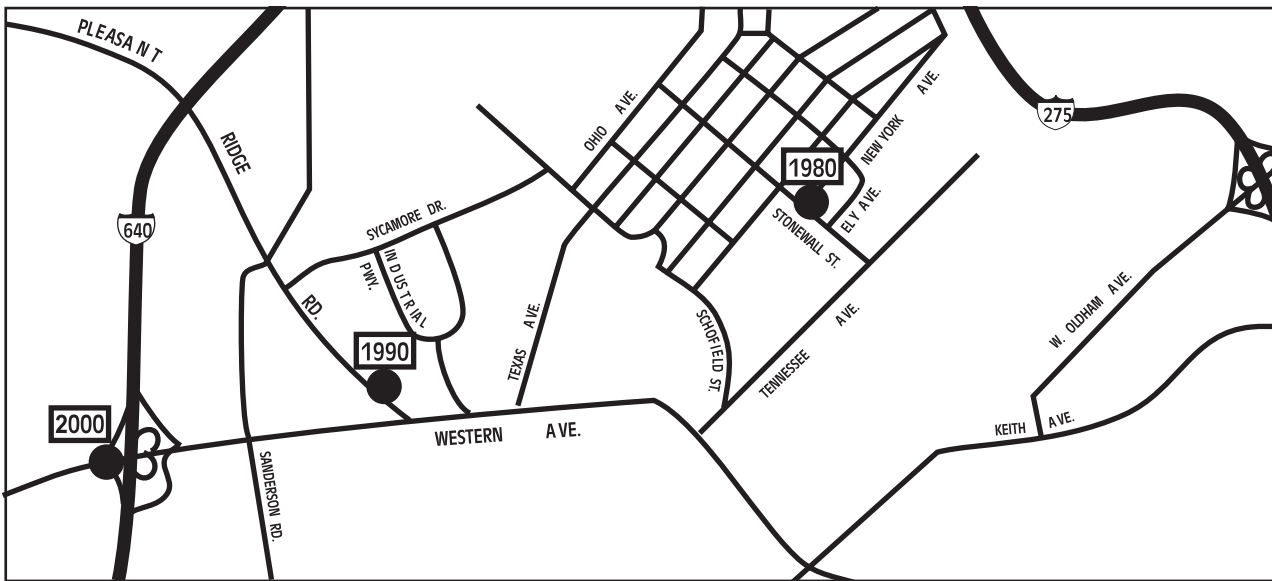
Where might the geographic center of the 382,032 Knox County residents be found? Using figures from the U.S. Census Bureau's *Census 2000* and the hypothetical map, precisely balanced on one sturdy pin, the center of local population is a point in the

median of Western Avenue between Forty-Fourth Street and the I-640 overpass.

*For a detailed view  
of this map, see  
page 2.*



## Centers of Population 1980, 1990, and 2000, Detail View



SOURCE: Calculated by MPC from 1980, 1990, and 2000 census data.

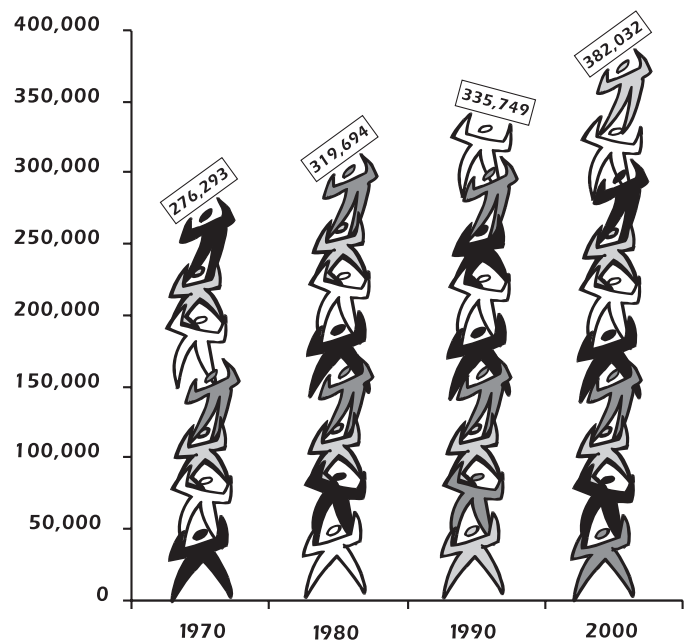
While this location certainly is worthy of a bronze monument, the resultant traffic distractions might not warrant it. Instead, be satisfied with an explanation of why this simple piece of information is important to us: the center of population represents some significant events in Knox County's development and demographic trends over the past few decades.

In 1980, the total population of Knox County was 319,694, centered near the intersection of Stonewall Street and Ely Avenue in the Lonsdale community. By 1990, the county population grew 5 percent to 335,749, and its center was in the 3400 block of Pleasant Ridge Road, less than a mile west of the 1980 mark. This year's Census showed considerably more growth than in the previous decade, with a 13.8 percent increase, and continued westward migration of the population.

The shift in the population center is the result of several factors. Among them are phenomena recorded in Knoxville's central areas, where demographic events over the past 20 or more years

have been characterized by shrinking household sizes, declining birth rates, more non-family households, and outward migration of residents and businesses to west and north county locations. Added to that, the County's suburbs gained many new residents, through births and by pulling people

### Knox County Population, 1970-2000 (includes City of Knoxville and Town of Farragut)



from other locations outside of the area, many opting for West Knox subdivisions. Building permit records from the past 20 years show that the Southwest and Northwest County sectors received about 47 percent of Knox County's 58,000 new residential and non-residential development projects. The net effect of these demographic events was a westward shift of the county's population center.

The decades-old trend of suburbanization may have slowed as new investment has returned to older parts of the city. In

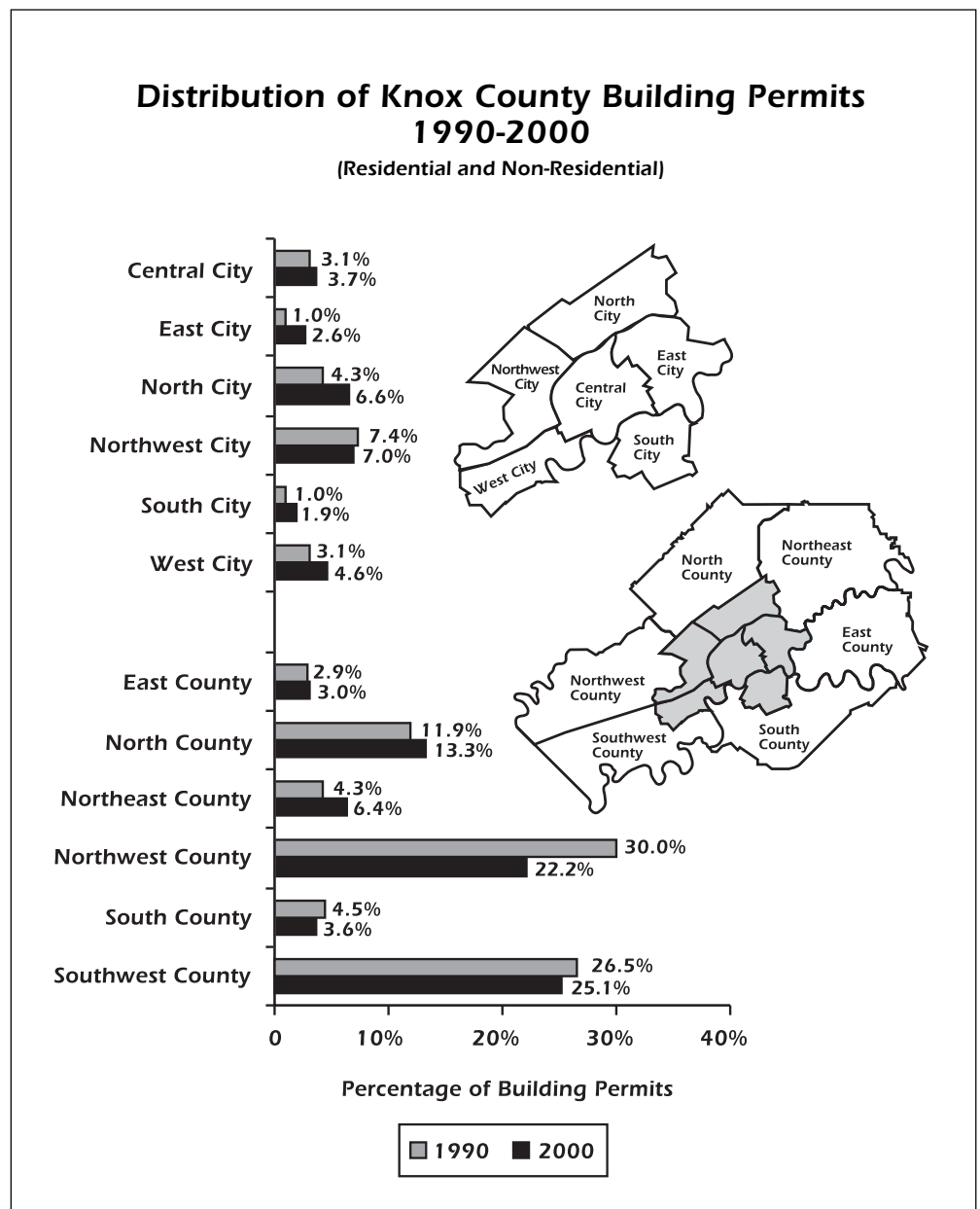
Knoxville, several major initiatives are underway that both encourage and facilitate a return-to-city movement of people and investment.

Knoxville's Empowerment Zone, downtown redevelopment plans, infill housing programs, and innovative zoning practices (such as Traditional Neighborhood Design, Town Center, and Historic Overlay categories) are contributing to new interest and development opportunities in Knoxville's urban core.

These efforts may be starting to have an impact. The 2000 Census showed four of Knoxville's six city planning sectors actually gained population during the late 1990s. Further, the extent of the last shift in Knox County's population center was shorter than that

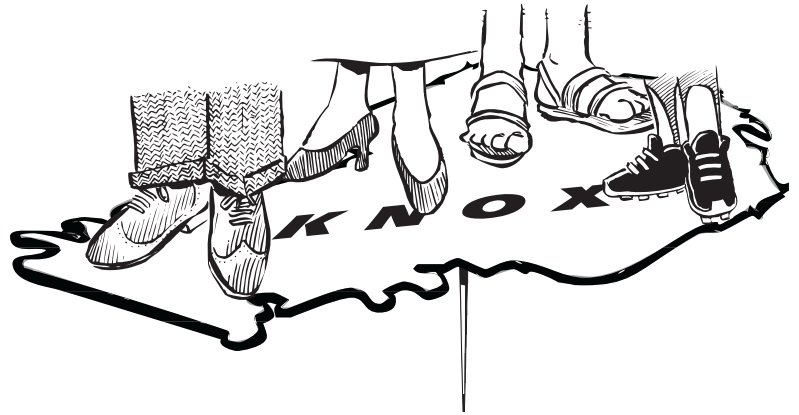
measured in the previous decade. The 1990 center on Pleasant Ridge Road represented a 4,650-foot westward movement in conjunction with a modest 5 percent population increase. In 2000, the shift was a noticeably shorter 3,000 feet, at the same time that total area population grew by almost 14 percent.

While part of the decline in westward migration of the population center is attributed to a return to the city by people and investment, it would be unfair to tie all explanation to that factor. The westward shift of the center slowed also because of new interest in



undeveloped portions of East and North Knox County, both of which have seen increasing shares of building activity in the past three or four years.

In light of growing investment in Knox County's newer suburban markets and the contributions of return migration to Knoxville's center city neighborhoods, don't be surprised if the 2010 Census and map-balancing exercise show a center of population back inside the I-640 loop.



Based on the *Census 2000* figures, the U.S. Census Bureau built a mathematical model to replicate the map-balancing exercise for the entire U.S., and they found that a small town in Phelps County, Missouri, roughly 110 miles southwest of St. Louis, claimed the

geographic center of the nation's 281,421,906 residents. In a similar exercise for Tennessee, the center was measured about three miles south of Murfreesboro in Rutherford County.

### National and State Centers of Population



The center of population in the United States is a small town in Phelps County, Missouri, roughly 110 miles southwest of St. Louis.

A location just south of Murfreesboro is Tennessee's center of population. It is about 320 miles from the national center and 175 miles from Knoxville.

The Knox County center of population is about 434 miles from the national center.

**Tennessee**

Tennessee's center of population is in Rutherford County, about 3.2 miles south of Murfreesboro.

**Did you know?**  
Half of the people in the United States live within one day's drive of Knoxville.

A small illustration of a vintage car with a driver and passengers, positioned at the bottom of the 'Did you know?' box.