

Pedestrian Bridge

Mini-Lesson



Town Hall: Local Tradeoffs

Building a Bridge in Local Politics



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE

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Background Information

In recent years, Knoxville, TN has seen large amounts of population growth, mainly due to the rise in students attending the University of Tennessee. This growth has been followed by an increased need for housing developments and other student support services. The geographic standpoint of the University of Tennessee does not allow for continued growth on the other ends of campus, leading people to turn to the riverfront. Building a large-scale pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the Tennessee River would allow for development to continue to match the growth of the student population. While this plan has been proposed multiple times in the last decade, it may finally be set in motion with increased support from all parties involved. However, as plans for the bridge move forward there may be contention throughout the community on whether this is the best solution to Knoxville's growing pains. Citizens, university leadership, and government officials alike will have to weigh the benefits of growth alongside potential deterrents such as increased traffic and a shift in the flow of students from downtown toward South Knoxville. These major factors will all play a part in the planning process as we move closer to the bridge becoming a reality.

Mini-Lesson Student Materials

Did you know that public projects such as bridges often have to be approved by locally elected officials, community leaders, state regulatory boards, and in some cases several federal agencies?

Objectives

Students will be able to identify the ways in which economic concerns affect policy decisions in local government.

Students will be able to understand the benefits of participating in community events such as town halls and identify the process of making complex decisions for a community.

Key Terms and People

Opportunity Costs, Tradeoff, Town Hall, City Revenue, Employment, Business Interests

Handout A | City of Knoxville Position Paperⁱ



Connecting the South Knoxville Waterfront with UT Campus and Downtown

What is the Bridge About?

Development of a pedestrian-bicycle bridge will connect the University of Tennessee Campus with the South Knoxville Waterfront Redevelopment Area. The Redevelopment and Vision Plan calls for a mixture of development and multimodal connections to facilitate the South Waterfront as an active place for people to live, work, exercise, and seek entertainment.

The bridge was identified as a key investment through the extensive community driven process to support greater connectivity to UT and downtown. The pedestrian-bicycle bridge will provide efficient, sustainable access to jobs, services, work, and school while maximizing pedestrian and bicycle safety across the river. It will expand the pedestrian-bicycle network connecting 18 miles of greenways, more than 50 miles of Urban Wilderness, Volunteer Landing, and the South Knoxville Riverwalk.

The bridge will be an iconic design element that also complements UT Campus, the city's skyline as a river city, and nearby buildings.

Who is involved?

The City of Knoxville, Knoxville’s Community Development Corporation, and The University of Tennessee are working collaboratively with the community. Essential partnerships and support from the State of Tennessee and the Tennessee Department of Transportation will assist in the bridge becoming a reality for Knoxville.

Where?

The bridge would span the river from Clancy Avenue on the south side to the pedestrian concourse on the north located between Thompson-Boling Arena and Pratt Pavilion.

Plans include meeting required vertical clearance for the river’s barge channel, Gulf & Ohio Railroad, and Neyland Drive. The bridge will be on air rights over the Tennessee River and no piers are proposed in the river. The north landing is owned by UT. The acquisition of minimal properties on the south bank are under discussion.



Summary of Benefits

The University of Tennessee’s strategic plan includes expanding the number of students and faculty significantly over the next several years and access to housing is, and will be, a growing need. With the connectivity of the pedestrian-bicycle bridge, South Knoxville can help support this growth.

In March of 2022, UT’s Board of Trustees agreed to expand the official campus boundaries by adding a small bit of land on the south bank of the Tennessee River. While that boundary extension does not mean the plan will become a reality, it allows discussions to continue. The South Knoxville Waterfront Redevelopment Area has seen transformative change through significant public and private investment in recent years,

with more on the horizon. Bringing to life a key element of the South Waterfront Vision Plan will further accelerate private investments. This is an opportunity to redevelop historically industrial property while providing sustainable and economic development linkage between the South Waterfront, UT, downtown Knoxville, and the expanding greenway system. Details on the progress of the South Waterfront can be found [here](#).

Increase the region's economic development potential by attracting increased private development and grow the economy from the bottom up and middle out.

Why Now?

Substantial work has been accomplished since 2009 on the bridge location, initial structural plans, various approvals from state, federal, and environmental agencies, and an initial infrastructure needs analysis.

In particular, if funding can be acquired, leadership at the University of Tennessee, the City of Knoxville, and Knox County are all committed to this opportunity to meaningfully connect UT and downtown with South Knoxville.



Handout B | Dissenting Perspectivesⁱⁱ

Perspective 1

A resident of South Knoxville is worried about increased traffic. She notes that this bridge isn't just about pedestrians but is connecting the University's campus to an area where they are building housing primarily for students, an area she argues was not built to accommodate the influx of residents. "Those roads are one-way roads, and traffic is already bad," she says. "So now you have a thousand extra residents and those looking for parking to walk to campus. What is that going to do to the traffic flow on this side? More traffic isn't good for anybody."

Perspective 2

A business owner who owns a restaurant in Market Square and is opening a new shop in the Old City has raised concerns over connectivity from the bridge to these areas of town. "The bridge connects the southern waterfront to the University of Tennessee's campus," he said. "I see how it will benefit the university but what about businesses in Knoxville? How are people expected to get from the end of the bridge to Market Square?"

Figure A | City of Knoxville Mapⁱⁱⁱ



Skill Sheet | Prepare for the Town Hall

To prepare for the town hall, identify three issues based on your assigned area of concern and write them below. Be ready to explain your issue and how it will positively or negatively impact your area of concern. For each issue, explain what the opportunity costs of building the bridge are and be prepared to answer if the tradeoffs are worth it and why.

1. *Issue #1*

2. *Issue #2*

3. *Issue #3*

During the town hall, write down three issues raised by other groups, and if it affects your issues, explain how. (*i.e.*, *One group mentioned tax revenue, which will solve the issue we raised by . . .*) Use your issues and the ones you identify during the town hall to answer the closing argument questions

1. *Issue #1*

2. *Issue #2*

3. *Issue #3*

Closing Argument | After the town hall, answer the following questions to debrief and be prepared to discuss with the class.

- What did you learn from this activity?
- How did your ideas about the bridge project change during this activity, if at all? Explain what caused your ideas to change or why you think your ideas did not change.
- What are the opportunity costs of building the bridge? What are the responsibilities of local government when making decisions based on these tradeoffs?
- What role does local government play in business, housing, and employment?
- What does “perspective” mean? Where does our perspective come from? How does our perspective shape the way we see the world? Draw on examples from this activity when answering these questions.

KEY TERMS & PEOPLE*

Opportunity Costs - the value of the next best alternative that is forgone when making a decision.

Tradeoff - involving the balancing of between two or more options, recognizing that choosing one option means giving up the benefits of the others.

Town Hall - a meeting hosted by a politician or public official where they might provide information on a topic or answer questions from the constituents about a proposed policy or project.

City Revenue - money the city government expects to receive during the fiscal year.

Employment – A set of statistics, figures, and other considerations that affect public officials’ introduction and implementation of public policy.

Business interest- a goal that corporations or organizations want to achieve or maintain for the betterment of their service(s).

ⁱ Knoxville Community Development Corporation. "Pedestrian Bridge." Knoxville, TN. Accessed May 19, 2024.

https://www.knoxvilletn.gov/government/city_departments_offices/urban_design_and_development/strategic_projects_places/south_waterfront/other_materials/projects/pedestrian_bridge.

ⁱⁱ Nextar Media Group, "Knoxville hosts community meeting as pedestrian bridge project progresses," video, 02:40, *WATE News*, April 18, 2024, accessed May 19, 2024, <https://www.wate.com/video/knoxville-hosts-community-meeting-as-pedestrian-bridge-project-progresses/9618766/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ City of Knoxville, *Connectivity as a Catalyst: Knoxville Pedestrian + Bike Bridge Information Workshop, Spring 2024* (Knoxville, TN: City of Knoxville, 2024), 9, accessed June 12, 2024, https://cdns5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_109478/File/Redevelopment/SouthWaterfront/April2004-PedBridge-ConnectivityAsCatalyst.pdf.

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