



5-2012

# The Cumberland Avenue Corridor and the University of Tennessee: The Relationship between a University and its Neighborhood

William Harris  
wharri11@utk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: [http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_chanhonoproj](http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj)

 Part of the [Growth and Development Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Harris, William, "The Cumberland Avenue Corridor and the University of Tennessee: The Relationship between a University and its Neighborhood" (2012). *University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects*.  
[http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk\\_chanhonoproj/1531](http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/1531)

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Tennessee Honors Program at Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in University of Tennessee Honors Thesis Projects by an authorized administrator of Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact [trace@utk.edu](mailto:trace@utk.edu).

The Cumberland Avenue Corridor and the University of Tennessee:  
The Relationship between a University and its Neighborhood

**Senior Thesis**  
May 2012

William Harris

## Introduction

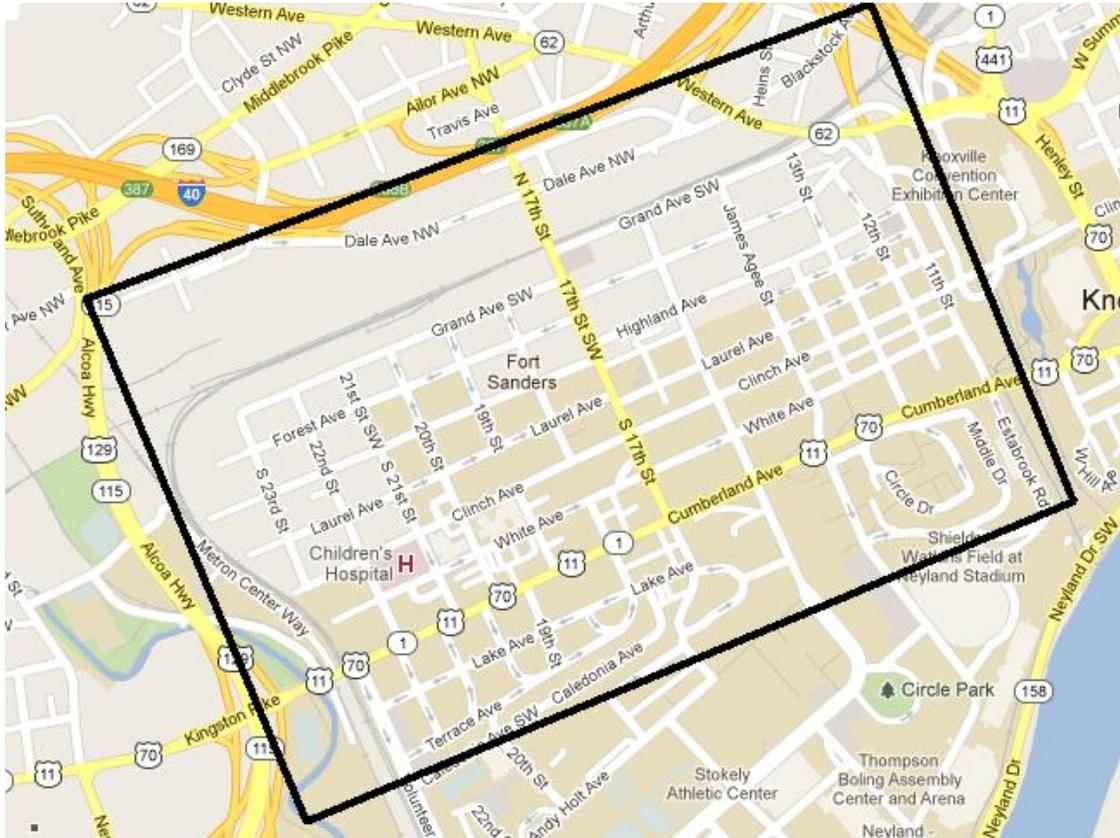
*“While many university cities can point to an attractive corridor that integrates the best of town and gown, Cumberland Avenue in some ways does the opposite, displaying a vista of crisscrossing power lines, towering roadside signs and a parade of vehicles searching for a parking spot.” (Knoxville News Sentinel 12/17/2011)*

This excerpt from a recent article in the News Sentinel sums up the reality of the relationship between UTK and its surrounding neighborhood, which will be referred to as the Cumberland Avenue Corridor, made up of the Cumberland Strip and Fort Sanders. The relationship is unquestionably fractured and splintered in many ways. From speaking with students on the University of Tennessee campus, the general consensus is that the area has significant shortcomings that are very real to those who frequent the area. The problems range from homelessness to bumper-to-bumper traffic, and many of these problems detract from the college experience for University of Tennessee students. These issues are deep, difficult ones that may only be fixed through cooperative measures on the part of all parties.

The following paper will begin by looking at the history of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor and then addressing how this area has developed into its current, objectionable state. Attention will be directed toward a number of the problems that the neighborhood faces today, relying on insights from those who live, work, and play in this neighborhood on a daily basis. Then, the focus of the paper will shift to the relationship between the corridor and the university, surveying students on campus to understand how this area just off campus affects their quality of life. Furthermore, the paper will look at the effect that the neighborhood has on attracting prospective students. Once this area’s significance for the university and its role in the student experience at the University of Tennessee is established, the plans to improve the Cumberland Avenue Corridor, such as the Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project, will be examined to uncover what the future of this area could be. Ultimately, the hope is to determine the nature of the

relationship between the university and its surrounding area and to determine to what extent improvements to the Cumberland Strip and Fort Sanders can help elevate the university.

### **Cumberland Avenue Corridor Defined**



For purposes of clarity, the Cumberland Avenue Corridor will refer to the highlighted area on this map. Confined by Alcoa Highway to the west, World's Fair Park to the east, Lake Avenue to the South, and Interstate 40 to the north, the corridor is an area of strategic importance for a number of parties. Situated just to the North of the University of Tennessee's main campus, and just to the west of downtown, the corridor contains both the Cumberland Avenue Strip and Fort Sanders neighborhood. These two areas will be the focus of this study.

### **History of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor**

The Cumberland Avenue Corridor is in many ways an area steeped in history, but its present state differs greatly from its past. A brief review of the development of Knoxville and

the Cumberland Avenue Corridor is necessary to frame the forthcoming discussion of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor today.

Knoxville was first settled in 1786 by James White. White's Fort, which still stands in downtown Knoxville, and the surrounding downtown area served as the epicenter of Knoxville for its early years. A few years after White's settlement, the city was formally founded in 1791 and later incorporated in 1815 (Deaderick 3, 7, 69). In the interim, Cumberland Avenue, or Kingston Pike as the entire street was known as at the time, quickly became an important thoroughfare into the city, serving as a corridor for trade and commerce throughout Knoxville's early life (Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project: Introduction 6). As the city expanded west from downtown, Cumberland Avenue grew linearly from the East to the West, in a fashion reminiscent of Hotelling's Linear City model. Of course, Cumberland Avenue was much different than it is today, and the avenue was still decades away from commercial development into anything resembling a "strip."

Just to the north of Cumberland Avenue, the Fort Sanders neighborhood grew significantly following the Knoxville's settlement, developing in its own unique way. Fort Sander's most historically significant role relates to its function in the Civil War as not surprisingly, a fort. The Battle of Fort Sanders in 1863 was a pivotal battle in the Civil War in which the Union maintained control of Knoxville, and Fort Sanders became truly hallowed ground to many (Lakin). Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the war, the Fort Sanders landscape transformed from a battlefield into a residential neighborhood. Following the Civil War, two landmark events for Fort Sanders include its incorporation as West Knoxville in 1888 and annexation by Knoxville in 1898 (Aiken 151).

Around the turn of the nineteenth century, the Fort Sanders neighborhood was bound by factories to the north and east, such as the Appalachian Textile Mill, the HO Nelson Iron Works, and the Ty-Sa-Man Machine Company. Of course, to the south was the University of Tennessee campus, which at the time was “only a small school that added a veneer of culture to the neighborhood without threat of physical encroachment” (Aiken 153). The neighborhood itself was far from uniform even in its early years. Not only could nonresidential buildings, such as the Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center and the East Tennessee Children’s Medical Center, be found throughout the neighborhood, but the area was also economically differentiated. The less affluent northern end of Fort Sanders, Ramsey’s addition, was noticeably different than the more affluent southern half, White’s addition. More specifically, Laurel Avenue was the most prosperous street in Fort Sanders, lined with “large Victorian dwellings lived some owners of factories or principal businesses of Knoxville” (Aiken 153). Contrastingly Grand Avenue was “a street of blue-collar workers where carpenters, railroad brakemen, and factory foremen resided in small bungalows and shotgun houses” (Aiken 153-154). One of the area’s greatest assets was its accessibility to the streetcar that led to downtown and allowed for easy travel to and from the central business district of Knoxville. The presence of this streetcar made the neighborhood a viable place to live for many different people (Deaderick 215). The neighborhood’s role as a community for both upper and middle class Knoxvilleians led some to describe it as a “microcosm of an early twentieth century urban community” (Aiken 153).

In the coming years, Fort Sanders would change in many ways as the entire Knoxville landscape evolved. The neighborhood shifted from a family neighborhood that was considered suburban to an inner-city neighborhood with the further westward growth of Knoxville. The emergence and increasing popularity of the automobile was largely responsible for this westward

movement and the resulting changing dynamic in Fort Sanders. With its new place as a more inner city area, the neighborhood began to have more “inner-city” problems. James Agee once described the area as one of security and safety, but with its new place in the city, the area began to experience some crime issues in the mid twentieth century (Aiken 163). The character of the old neighborhood was in many ways lost and has not since remerged.

The most visibly apparent shift that occurred in the neighborhood was a transition from primarily single-family homes to apartments. In the 1960’s, the significant growth of the university led to an increasing need for student housing, and the void left by families relocating out west was filled by students. At this time, residences were converted into multi-unit apartment buildings, and entire apartment complexes were constructed. The growing student population provided a pool of student renters that would allow the neighborhood to survive the family exodus. The first high-rise building was built as well with the construction of the Laurel apartments for married students, further solidifying the area as a student neighborhood. The area was no longer made up of “neat, single-family dwellings but . . . decaying shells occupied by a transient population” (Aiken 158). The entire neighborhood began to cater to these transient students with limited incomes, and as a result, apartments were developed as budget housing. At the rates offered, tenants had little incentive to invest in upkeep, and the student population, with few other off-campus options, was apparently content with the status quo. Furthermore, more on-campus housing became available over the following decades, and the resulting decrease in student demand for Fort Sanders housing further lowered rents and attracted all kinds of lower-income individuals looking for cheap rents. Despite its lower-income status, the “neighborhood never became a true slum or an ethnic or racial ghetto, [but it was filled with] inhabitants with low incomes and social standing” (Aiken 157).

As this change was occurring in the 1960's, a number of stakeholders in the neighborhood began to exert their respective influence. Colloquially known as the "Defenders," the Fort Sanders Home Owners and Property Owners League sought to stave off urban renewal projects and keep the university out of the neighborhood. On the other hand, the Historic Fort Sanders Neighborhood Association, made up of apartment residents and mostly young people who had bought and renovated houses in the area, supported revitalization efforts for the neighborhood. Lastly, a group of influential entrepreneurs who owned many of apartment buildings in the neighborhood lobbied for their own interests (Aiken 159).

One particularly important event involving these stakeholders that shaped the development of the area involved the classification of the Fort on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. This event was a significant achievement for the area; however, the Fort Sanders Home Owners and Property Owners League was opposed to this designation as were many developers, so the Knoxville City Council did not pass zoning restrictions to maintain the neighborhood as a historic district (Aiken 160). An incredible opportunity to preserve the area and restore it to its deserved state was lost with this action by the city council. The neighborhood likely would look very different today if Fort Sanders were zoned as an historic district. Instead, what has resulted is an area that has not developed according to any plan, and this lack of planning has certainly not been kind to the area.

As all of this was occurring in Fort Sanders, at the southern edge of the neighborhood, what is now the Cumberland Strip was not much to speak of apart from its functionality as a physical road. Downtown contained most of the nearby merchants, and Cumberland Avenue's primary role was one of transportation. In fact, Fort Sanders homes bordered the Strip, and it was not until families began to move out of the neighborhood and students in, that the

Cumberland Strip became more commercialized. The history of how Cumberland Avenue developed is a bit less dramatic as compared to Fort Sanders.

As mentioned previously, Cumberland Avenue was an essential part of the transportation infrastructure in early Knoxville. Cumberland was one of the original Knoxville Streets “surveyed and platted by Charles McClung in 1791” (Tennessee Traditions), and in the late 1860’s, Cumberland was paved and began to operate as a toll road (Deaderick 36). The avenue serviced downtown and extended out to the west, and the street was almost exclusively residential until the 1920s, when the commercialization of “the Strip” began. Businesses opened along the strip as many homeowners moved west, and since the 1920’s, Cumberland Avenue has been home to “filling stations, grocery stores, clothiers, restaurants, clubs, drugstores, an automobile dealership, and other neighborhood enterprises” (Tennessee Traditions). The Strip has had somewhat of a revolving door of merchants operating its storefronts over the years, with most merchants targeting the local student population.

### **The Cumberland Avenue Corridor Today**

Today, the Cumberland Avenue Corridor is most easily classified as a highly congested, mixed-use student ghetto. Fort Sanders is the most densely populated area in city, with a population of over 15,000 packed into approximately 3,100 residential units, all in a 474 acre area of 50 blocks (Fort Sanders safety Overview). Bordered by Interstate 40 to the north, World’s Fair Park to the east, the railroad to the west, and Cumberland Avenue to the south, Fort Sanders is struggling for an identity and is still home to a number of different types of establishments.

The Cumberland Strip is filled with merchants, mostly restaurants, bars, fast food joints, and gas stations, attempting to target the neighboring students and maintain the viability of their

businesses. Still a vital, and often congested, thoroughfare for transportation in the city, the entire Cumberland Avenue Corridor is struggling to balance its role as a place to “go to” as well as a “go through,” and its more specific roles as “a gateway, a place to live, a place to do business, a place of entertainment, an extension of downtown, a location for redevelopment, etc.” (Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project: Introduction 6). Currently, efforts are underway to improve the Cumberland Avenue Corridor, and these efforts are targeting a number of the major problems that the area faces.

### **Problems and Challenges**

The major problems that currently plague the Cumberland Avenue Corridor have been well-documented. The first problem that is abundantly clear upon a visit to the area is a traffic problem on Cumberland Avenue itself. The four-lane road is devoid of a turn lane, and traffic congestion is the norm throughout any given day. Parking is another, related issue for the entire neighborhood that has a negative effect on the every major stakeholder. Businesses and customers alike suffer from this parking deficiency, and as a result, a simple trip to a merchant on Cumberland can be quite the chore during peak hours. Furthermore, in addition to being unfriendly to motorists, the area is also not pedestrian friendly, and this is particularly problematic with the student foot traffic in the area. Homelessness and panhandling also plague the area and create an environment that is unpleasant for visitors. Cumberland Avenue Merchant Association meetings have recently identified panhandling as a particularly frustrating problem for local businesses (Cumberland Connection).

Another problem that is painfully obvious is just is the general, aesthetic deficiencies of both Fort Sanders and the Strip. On the Strip, almost no two buildings are alike, and many are dilapidated and run-down. Part of the problem on Cumberland is the fact that many businesses

seem to struggle to last for any significant length of time on the Strip. For example, Magic Sushi, Banditos, Great Wraps, Cilantros, McDougal's, and Three Spoons all opened on Cumberland Avenue in the past several years, and none lasted for more than a year. These short-term tenants lead to high turnover and often vacant storefronts. With few long-standing businesses on the strip, many of the buildings are left to decay and become eyesores.

Furthermore, essentially no green-space exists surrounding the avenue, which makes for an unwelcoming atmosphere. Similarly, the Fort Sanders neighborhood is full of run-down homes and apartments, surrounded by outdated infrastructure including substandard sidewalks, lighting, and streets. Other issues in the neighborhood include noise, poor housing, and trash, and all of these problems stem from an overall lack of pride in the upkeep of the area (Fort Sanders Quality of Life Committee).

Crime is another issue, more so in Fort Sanders than on the actual Strip, and the topic of crime is worthy of more in-depth discussion. Knoxville and University of Tennessee police patrol the area, with the KPD, staffed by over 300 officers, serving as the primary arm of jurisdiction, and the UTPD, with 52 officers, responding to in-progress incidents (Fort Sanders Safety Overview). Despite their efforts to patrol the area and develop a safe neighborhood with campaigns such as the "See Something, Say Something" initiative, the current perception is that the area is dangerous (O'Daniel). Statistics actually show that crime is decreasing in the neighborhood, but people still feel unsafe (Estep). One particularly unfortunate incident occurred this past year when a murder took place at the Grand Forest Apartments, and these types of occurrences are hard to forget and contribute to the negative reputation (Warrants Issued). With these types of violent crimes, Fort Sanders is developing a reputation as an actual ghetto as opposed to just a student ghetto.

One final fundamental challenge is the presence of so many different varying interests in one relatively small area. The residential, industrial, retail, and medical interests all have differing objectives and visions for what the area should be. These different groups represent factions that have clashed historically and have the potential to stand in the way of progress. This clash can be seen by looking at just one cross section of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor. In roughly one square mile, one can find a gas station, numerous restaurants, two hospitals, historic homes, the large Crowne apartment complex, and just to the north, the Dow Chemical facility. Having all of these different interests so close to one another makes pleasing everyone nearly impossible which complicates the dynamic in the neighborhood.

### **Perspectives from Various Stakeholders**

Of course, it is one thing to describe these problems from a distance, but understanding these issues from the viewpoints of the primary stakeholders in the Cumberland Avenue Corridor provides a true perspective on the situation. In addition to the masses that drive through the corridor, a number of key stakeholders exist. The primary stakeholders include residents of the area, property owners, business owners, the hospitals, students and the university. The first three of these stakeholders will be addressed briefly, and then the final two will be examined in more detail.

In speaking with Debbie Billings, a representative of the Cumberland Avenue Merchants Association which represents Cumberland Avenue businesses, she pointed out a few issues that make business on the Strip a difficult proposition. She noted that many of the merchants on the Strip agree that a lack of consistent, reliable parking, “unwarranted” high taxes, and poor infrastructure including sidewalks, lighting, and landscaping make the Strip a

difficult place to operate a business. None of these insights were particularly surprising; however, another of her insights was rather unexpected (Debbie Billings Interview).

Debbie expressed that many in the CAMA, including bar and restaurant owners on the strip, believe that one of the biggest challenges of operating on Cumberland is the fact that the university is not a good neighbor for business. She expressed that merchants on Cumberland feel at a competitive disadvantage when having to compete with the university, which has the benefits of subsidized labor, tax relief, the VolCard payment system, and more. She noted that some restaurants will open without even knowing that the university has an I-hop, Chick-fil-A, Pizza Hut and more in its facilities just steps away from the Strip. The idea that the university can be a competitor for some of these merchants is certainly understandable and provides some insight into the unique challenges of business on Cumberland Avenue (Debbie Billings Interview).

The hospitals are another major stakeholder, and their position is very unique as service providers for the entire region. The Fort Sanders Regional Medical and the East Tennessee Children's Hospital are important for the community as a whole, but in many ways, their efforts clash with the residential interests in Fort Sanders neighborhood. As the hospitals have grown, tensions have increased within the neighborhood. Within the past several years, the Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center has razed many historic homes in the area to accommodate their growth, citing "safety and potential liability, including broken glass, vagrant inhabitancy and deteriorating structural conditions" (Chung) as reasons for their action. The hospital has faced significant backlash for their infringement upon the neighborhood, and this tension demonstrates the challenges of balancing the differing interests in the neighborhood (Chung).

The Fort Sanders community organizations also play a role in this discussion as representatives of any number of interested parties including residents and property owners. In the hospital issue mentioned above, Knox Heritage protested the hospital's demolishing old homes and proposed that "the hospital restore the Highland Avenue houses and encourage its employees to live in the neighborhood" (Chung). The Fort Sanders Long Range Planning Process and its Quality of Life Subcommittee also have expressed concerns about the neighborhood. The top concerns for this group are safety, substandard housing, absentee landlords, the presence of the homeless and abject poor in the neighborhood, traffic, and crime. This group has also identified a problem relating to the balance between landlord and tenant responsibilities and has expressed concern with landlords who do not reinvest in their properties (Fort Sanders Quality of Life Committee).

### **UTK Student Perspective**

As important as all of the groups mentioned above are, the stakeholders that are most relevant for this paper are current and prospective University of Tennessee students. These are the people that live, work, and play in the area in the greatest numbers, and in many cases, they have very little choice in the matter. The convenience of the area is undoubtedly its greatest asset for students and the reason for its popularity. The Fort, as mentioned, is the only viable, large-scale option for student housing within easy walking distance of campus. Furthermore, the Strip offers convenience, dining, and entertainment options in one central location within walking distance of campus and the Fort. Additionally, the Cumberland Avenue Corridor is the first impression for most visitors to the campus, and its effect on their perception of the city and university is significant. The effect that the Cumberland Avenue Corridor has on both current and prospective students is arguably more meaningful than its effect on any other group and

must be taken into account in planning for the future of the corridor. To determine what the specific effect of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor is on current and prospective students, a survey of current University of Tennessee students and recent graduates has been conducted.

### **Survey Results**

The survey, found in Appendix I, was emailed out to 93 students and recent graduates, and 51 responses were collected. The ten-question survey honed in on the quality of life offered by the Cumberland Avenue Corridor. The results provide some revealing insights into the relationship between students and the Cumberland Avenue Corridor.

Firstly, of the students surveyed, 74.5% had lived in Fort Sanders at some point during their college career. This fact alone firmly establishes the importance of the Cumberland Corridor to students. The survey continued to delve into the nature of the effect that both Fort Sanders and the Cumberland Strip have on students.

When asked how satisfied they were with the quality of life offered by the Fort Sanders neighborhood, 64.7% of students expressed that they were either somewhat or very dissatisfied. Furthermore, the students surveyed conveyed in large numbers that Fort Sanders did not compare favorably to other college student neighborhoods at other universities. 76.5% of the students felt that Fort Sanders was either somewhat or vastly inferior to the college student neighborhoods at other universities.

The survey also addressed the Strip specifically, and the responses were generally negative as well. 62.8 % of students expressed that the Cumberland Strip was either somewhat or vastly inferior to other college “strips” that they had visited.

One should also note that current students claimed that the area surrounding campus did have an effect on their college decision-making process. 60.8% of students claimed that the area

surrounding campus was a somewhat or very important factor in their college search process.

This response provides insight into the mentality of prospective students and the importance of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor as a recruiting tool for the university.

Students were also asked about their thoughts on improvements to the Cumberland Avenue Corridor. When asked what effect wholesale improvements to the Cumberland Strip and Fort Sanders would have on their quality of life as students, students responded overwhelmingly. 88.3% of students believed that improvements would have a somewhat or very significant effect on their quality of life (Harris Survey).

Speaking with students in a more informal survey of their thoughts about the Cumberland Avenue Corridor revealed further insights. Many students echoed the thoughts of 2011 graduate Steven Thompson. Steven expressed his thoughts very frankly, stating that “in terms of the quality of the eating establishments, the aesthetic beauty, the tradition, and the accessibility of the area, the Cumberland Strip is really substandard when compared to similar universities” (Thompson Interview). Thompson could not understand “how any out of state student could arrive on campus through Cumberland Avenue and be impressed with what he saw” (Thompson Interview).

Current senior, Jeremy Wilson, expressed his thoughts on the neighborhood as well. Jeremy lived in the area for two years and described his biggest complaints about the neighborhood. Chief among those issues was the annoyance of homeless individuals panhandling outside of his apartment and rummaging through his apartment complex’s dumpster as well. Jeremy expressed that oftentimes, he would travel out to west Knoxville in the evenings simply to get away from the Fort and the Strip in search of a more pleasant environment. Jeremy

even revealed that he moved away from the Fort this past year, to a more inconvenient location, because he was so frustrated up with the low quality of life in Fort Sanders (Wilson Interview).

Another senior at the university, Haynes Vaughn, also spoke about his frustrations with the Cumberland Corridor. His biggest complaints were about the traffic which he described as “impossibly bad” (Vaughn Interview). He discussed his frustration with the dining options on the strip as well, noting that, in his opinion, very few quality restaurants operate on the Strip (Vaughn Interview).

The takeaway from this survey and the interviews with students is that the corridor is a quality of life concern for current students and an issue in recruiting prospective students. The overwhelming consensus indicates that the college experience for students at the university is less than what it could be because of the condition of the corridor. As both the front door to the university and a functional place for students to live and enjoy, the Cumberland Avenue Corridor is deficient and a very real problem for students.

### **University Perspective**

As demonstrated, current and prospective students appear to be negatively affected by the Cumberland Avenue Corridor, and this presents an obvious problem for the university itself. As the University of Tennessee aims to elevate itself, every component of the university must be viewed as either an asset or a liability for the university. Based on the results of the survey above and the interviews conducted on campus, the Cumberland Avenue Corridor’s current condition is a liability for the university, as both a problem for attracting prospective students and a quality of life problem for current students.

The current state of affairs is a problem for the university in attracting top students, because, as indicated by the survey results, relative to other schools and their neighborhoods, the

Cumberland Corridor does not compare favorably (Harris Survey). Furthermore, prospective students these days often have to make difficult decisions concerning where to attend college, and the area surrounding campus is indeed a factor in the college selection process. Given the negative perception of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor, it is reasonable to assume that some number of students choose not to attend the University of Tennessee at least in part because of the deficiencies of the area. Clearly, for many prospective students, college is about the total experience, and improving the area where most of these students live, work, and play is vital for the success of the university. This reality does not appear to be lost on the university's leadership. Jan Simek has been quoted as saying that "as the university attracts more of the best and brightest students, its surroundings need to become more upscale" (Future of the Strip). His observation is spot on, and the university does need to help to address the problems with the corridor. As the university tries to compete with the likes of UGA and UNC, which are known for their idyllic college town environments, the Cumberland Avenue Corridor must be improved.

Quality of life for current students is the other big issue at hand indicated by the survey. Crime, trash, noise, traffic, inadequate parking, lack of green space, etc. all contribute negatively to quality of life, and these are the very problems that plague the corridor. Students have expressed their displeasure with the quality of life offered by the corridor, and the university obviously has an interest in improving the quality of life of its students for a multitude of reasons (Harris Survey). Students who are satisfied with the totality of their college experience are more likely to be engaged with the university. Improving student quality of life could directly address one of the university's biggest challenges, which is retention and graduation (Vol Vision). Happier students will also serve as advocates for the university, recommending it to others because of the pride they have in everything that the university experience has to offer.

Furthermore, the university has a financial interest in the wellbeing of its students as alumni giving is tied largely to the satisfaction of students. In fact, this is one area in which the University of Tennessee compares very unfavorably to peer institutions, and the lack of generosity by Tennessee alumni is a big issue as the university tries to grow and improve (“One Gift . . .”). Furthermore, alumni “support impacts UT’s national ranking and the value of your degree,” and “the *U.S. News and World Report* ranking of colleges and universities actually considers alumni participation rates when determining these rankings” (Senior Gift). As the university is trying to climb these rankings, improving the quality of life of students could be extremely valuable for all of these reasons.

One final reason that the corridor is so important for the university relates to the university’s trend of expanding its footprint further into the Cumberland Corridor. The Fort Sanders neighborhood is quickly becoming a part of campus with buildings such as the Baker Center, Volunteer Hall, and Laurel Hall, and this expansion looks to only continue as the university is constrained in virtually every other direction. As a result, the Cumberland Avenue Corridor will only become more important for the university in the coming decades. Hopefully, the university’s growth will necessitate the accelerated improvement of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor.

### **Future of the Cumberland Avenue Corridor**

Fortunately, promising plans exist for the improvement of the Strip and Fort Sanders. Former Mayor and current Tennessee Governor Bill Haslam has stated that “a vital, thriving and well-designed Cumberland Avenue is important to the health of the City of Knoxville,” continuing on to say that the area is “an important corridor linking downtown not only to the University of Tennessee but also to our neighborhoods in West Knoxville.” Haslam

also expressed his desire for the area to be more than just a corridor to travel through but “a place where people want to stay to live and work and shop” (Cumberland Public Meeting).

This sentiment is shared by many and is manifesting itself in the flagship plan to transform the Cumberland Avenue Corridor, the city’s Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project. This project aims to “work with property and business owners, the University of Tennessee and the two hospitals in Fort Sanders to transform Cumberland into a more attractive, thriving and pedestrian-friendly corridor featuring a good mix of retail, residential and business establishments” (City Revises . . .).

Key components of this plan include plans to reconfigure Cumberland Avenue into three lanes, widen sidewalks, plant trees, and bury utilities. These efforts will make the corridor more bicycle and pedestrian friendly and better able to accommodate merchants’ needs. There is also an urban development component of the plan to create mixed-use redevelopment along the avenue. These developments would consist of ground floor commercial use and upper levels of residential use. New codes and regulations are also a part of the plan to help facilitate the redevelopment, and Mountcastle Park is also to be reconfigured as an open space and a connection between the university, Cumberland Avenue, the hospitals, and Fort Sanders. Lastly, the plan calls for some sort of public parking resource to be developed to reduce the parking strain that currently exists in the area (Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project: Introduction). Studies indicate that this plan could result in over \$280 million in private investment over thirty years, which would be a major asset for the city and the university (Gibson).

The Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project has considered other university towns as models for this plan. Revitalization efforts in places like Tuscaloosa, Ala., Greenville, S.C., and Chapel Hill, N.C. are blueprints for the Corridor Project, and according to Anne Wallace, project

manager in the office of redevelopment, the city is adapting the concepts involved in these similar redesigns to the Cumberland Avenue Corridor (Gibson). These cities are home to the very universities that the University of Tennessee is competing with, and progress is clearly needed to develop the Cumberland Avenue Corridor into something comparable to what is found at peer universities.

Other positive developments are occurring today as the Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project remains in the planning stages. One additional project that must be mentioned is the separate University Commons Project. This project will bring a Wal-Mart and a Publix to the area just between Alcoa and Neyland Drive, and these merchants will undoubtedly serve an unmet need in the campus area, though some concerns about this project exist. This project will bring more traffic into the area, which is a valid fear, but the plans call for a relatively pedestrian-friendly development that will hopefully blend in with the Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project (Neely). Another significant project is the conversion of the old, vacant Days Inn into a Hilton Garden Inn, which will provide a more upscale development in the heart of the corridor. This project is slated to begin being constructed this summer and hopefully will provide some momentum for the redevelopment of the area (Dreher).

For the Fort Sanders neighborhood more specifically, university expansion into Fort Sanders is bringing and will continue to bring increased police force, lighting, and other improvements to the area. The university likely will have no choice but to continue to invest in the area as the university grows northward. However, hopefully, university leaders will be proactive in their efforts to invest in the neighborhood as opposed to waiting until they have no choice but to act. The Fort Sanders Long Range Planning Committee and its Quality of Life Subcommittee are lobbying for improvements to the area as well (Fort Sanders Safety

Overview). The Fort Sanders Quality of Life committee argues that “because trash and infrastructure are integral to the way residents and visitors treat Fort Sanders, we urge the City to improve sidewalks, pave alleys, add additional lighting, and place trash cans in high-volume trash areas” (Fort Sanders Quality of Life Committee). The city has recently heeded some of these recommendations, recently stepping up in its enforcement of codes in the neighborhood (Witt) and also beginning to repave streets (City Crews).

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, all of the research and studies conducted indicate that the futures of both the Cumberland Avenue Corridor and the University of Tennessee are inexorably linked. Developing the area around the University of Tennessee into a more enjoyable place to live, work, and play will be invaluable for the university and will lead to a number of positive outcomes. As the university strives to become a top 25 university with its “Journey to the Top 25,” the corridor’s improvement will be essential for that goal to be achieved (Vol Vision). Thankfully, a vision for an improved Cumberland Avenue Corridor already exists, and now is the time for the plans to be executed. Ideally, the next decades will see the conversion of an eyesore into something that everyone in Knoxville and at the University of Tennessee can be proud of.

## Works Cited

- Aiken, Charles S. "The Transformation of James Agee's Knoxville." *Geographical Review*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), pp. 150-165. Web. 15 March 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/214641>
- Billings, Debbie. Personal Interview. 26 April 2012.
- Brooks, Scott. "Panel to Focus on Fort Sanders' future." *Knoxville News Sentinel*. 16 August 2009. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2009/aug/16/panel-to-focus-on-fort-sanders-future/>
- Chung, Hyun. "Demolition of Houses Riles Fort Sanders neighbors." *Knoxville News Sentinel*. 9 July 2010. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2010/jul/09/demolition-of-houses-riles-fort-sanders/>
- "City Crews to Pave Fort Sanders Streets." *Knoxville News Sentinel*. 13 April 2012. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2012/apr/13/city-crews-to-pave-fort-sanders-streets/>
- City of Knoxville. "City Revises Utility Plans on Cumberland Ave." 25 January 2011. [http://www.cityofknoxville.org/Press\\_Releases/Content/2011/0125c.asp](http://www.cityofknoxville.org/Press_Releases/Content/2011/0125c.asp)
- City of Knoxville. "Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project: Introduction." 12 April 2007. <http://www.cityofknoxville.org/policy/cumberland/plan/sect1.pdf>
- Cumberland Avenue Corridor Project. Cumberland Avenue Public Meeting. 22 February 2007. <http://www.cityofknoxville.org/policy/cumberland/meetings/022207.asp>
- Deaderick, Lucile. *Heart of the Valley: A History of Knoxville, Tennessee.* Knoxville: The East Tennessee Historical Society, 1976.
- Dreher, Sean. "Hotel Renovation Planned Near Cumberland Strip." WBIR.com. 27 March 2012. <http://www.wbir.com/rss/article/213287/2/Hotel-renovation-planned-near-Cumberland-strip>
- Estep, Erica. "Crime Down so Far this Year in Knoxville's Fort Sanders Neighborhood." WATE.com. 23 September 2011. <http://www.wate.com/story/15536541/crime-down-so-far-this-year-in-knoxvilles-fort-sanders-neighborhood?clienttype=printable>
- Fort Sanders Quality of Life Committee. Meeting of Fort Sanders Quality of Life

- Committee. 2 July 2009.  
<http://www.cityofknoxville.org/cumberland/2009%20Ft%20Sanders%20QofL%20Mtg%20Notes.pdf>
- “Fort Sanders Safety Overview.” UTK.edu. Web. 20 April 2012.  
[http://utpolice.utk.edu/Fort\\_Sanders.html](http://utpolice.utk.edu/Fort_Sanders.html)
- “Future of the Strip.” *Torchbearer*. Winter 2007, Volume 46.  
<http://www.utk.edu/torchbearer/4601/thestrip/>
- Gibson, Mike. “Revamping the Strip.” *Metro Pulse*. 4 April 2012.  
<http://www.metropulse.com/news/2012/apr/04/revamping-strip/?print=1>
- Harris, William. Student Survey. 22 April 2012.
- Journey to the Top 25 Action Plan. UTK.edu. June 2011.  
<http://www.utk.edu/volvision-top25/resources/top-25-action-plan-June2011.pdf>
- “Knoxville History.” City Data. City-Data.com.  
<http://www.city-data.com/us-cities/The-South/Knoxville-History.html>
- Lakin, Matt. “Civil War History in East Tennessee’s Backyard.” *Knoxville News Sentinel*. 23 November 2008. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2008/nov/23/history-in-our-backyard/>
- Neely, Jack. “University Commons vs. Cumberland Corridor.” *Metro Pulse*. 11 January 2012.  
<http://www.metropulse.com/news/2012/jan/11/university-commons-vs-cumberland-corridor>
- O’Daniel, Robby. “UTPD Promotes Campaign to Keep Fort Safe.” *Daily Beacon*. 29 July 2011.  
<http://utdailybeacon.com/news/2011/jul/29/utpd-promotes-campaign-keep-fort-safe/>
- “One Gift, Any Size, Every Year.” *Torchbearer*. 9 April 2012.  
<http://www.utk.edu/torchbearer/2012/04/one-gift-any-size-every-year/>
- “Senior Gift.” UTK.edu. 20 April 2012. <http://web.utk.edu/~srgift/faq2012.html>
- “Tennessee Traditions.” UTK.edu. Web. 20 April 2012.  
<http://www.utk.edu/aboutut/traditions.shtml>
- The Cumberland Connection. “CAMA Update.” 7 October 2011.  
[http://cumberlandconnections.blogspot.com/2011\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://cumberlandconnections.blogspot.com/2011_10_01_archive.html)
- Thompson, Steven. Personal Interview. 20 April 2012.

Vaughn, Haynes. Personal Interview. 20 April 2012.

“Warrants Issued against Fort Sanders Murder Suspect.” *Knoxville News Sentinel*. 17 October 2011. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/oct/17/warrants-issued-against-fort-sanders-murder/?partner=RSS>

Wilson, Jeremy. Personal Interview. 20 April 2012.

Witt, Gerald. “Mayor Rogero takes Codes Enforcement Stroll through Fort Sanders.” *Knoxville News Sentinel*. 12 April 2012. <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2012/apr/12/mayor-rogero-takes-codes-enforcement-stroll-fort/>

## Appendix I

## Response Summary

Total Started Survey: 51  
Total Completed Survey: 51 (100%)

PAGE: 1

## 1. What is your academic standing at the University of Tennessee?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Freshman	0.0%	0
Sophomore	0.0%	0
Junior	19.6%	10
Senior	70.6%	36
Recent Graduate	9.8%	5
answered question		51
skipped question		0

## 2. Have you lived in Fort Sanders while a student at UTK?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	74.5%	38
No	25.5%	13
answered question		51
skipped question		0

## 3. How would you describe the overall quality of the housing options in Fort Sanders?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very Poor	7.8%	4
Poor	43.1%	22
Adequate	37.3%	19
Good	9.8%	5
Excellent	2.0%	1
answered question		51
skipped question		0

4. How satisfied are you with the quality of life offered by the Fort Sanders neighborhood?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Very Dissatisfied		17.6%	9
Somewhat Dissatisfied		47.1%	24
Neutral		15.7%	8
Somewhat Satisfied		15.7%	8
Very Satisfied		3.9%	2
		answered question	51
		skipped question	0

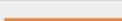
5. How would you describe Fort Sanders relative to primarily college student neighborhoods at other universities you have visited?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Vastly Inferior		11.8%	6
Somewhat Inferior		64.7%	33
Similar		21.6%	11
Somewhat Superior		2.0%	1
Vastly Superior		0.0%	0
		answered question	51
		skipped question	0

6. How would you describe the dining and nightlife options available on the Cumberland Strip?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Very Poor		7.8%	4
Poor		29.4%	15
Adequate		37.3%	19
Good		23.5%	12
Excellent		2.0%	1
		answered question	51
		skipped question	0

7. How would you describe your attitude towards the Cumberland Strip in terms of the quality of the area as a dining and nightlife destination?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Very Negative		15.7%	8
Somewhat Negative		29.4%	15
Neutral		15.7%	8
Somewhat Positive		39.2%	20
Very Positive		0.0%	0
		answered question	51
		skipped question	0

8. How would you describe the Cumberland Strip relative to other college "strips" that you have visited?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Vastly Inferior		21.6%	11
Somewhat Inferior		41.2%	21
Similar		33.3%	17
Somewhat Superior		3.9%	2
Vastly Superior		0.0%	0
		answered question	51
		skipped question	0

9. As you compared different universities during your college search process, how important to you was the quality of the area surrounding each campus?

[Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Not Important at All		17.6%	9
Somewhat Unimportant		21.6%	11
Somewhat Important		41.2%	21
Very Important		19.6%	10
		answered question	51
		skipped question	0

10. How much of an effect do you believe wholesale improvements to the Strip and Fort Sanders would have on your quality of life as a student at UTK? [Create Chart](#) [Download](#)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Very Insignificant		3.9%	2
Somewhat Insignificant		5.9%	3
Neutral		2.0%	1
Somewhat Significant		31.4%	16
Very Significant		56.9%	29
		answered question	51
		skipped question	0

