

## **Chapter 7**

### **Urban Governance in the Chattanooga Region**

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Local governments, both big and small, have an impact on the communities they serve. Urban governance is frequently defined by a political process and bound by local financial constraints. In Hamilton County, urban governance is complicated by multiple levels of authority and the presence of different types of municipal and special-purpose governments.

Hamilton County is operated through a county executive form of government. Tennessee is one of three states mandating that counties in the state be headed by an elected official.<sup>1</sup> Although there is an elected executive, multiple elected officials make decisions affecting how the county is run. The Hamilton County Mayor, “the chief fiscal officer of the County, is elected at large to a four-year term as are the Sheriff, Criminal Court Clerk, Juvenile Court Clerk, Register of Deeds, Clerk of Circuit Court, County Clerk, Juvenile Court Judge, Assessor of Property and Trustee. The District Attorney General, District Public Defender and all Hamilton County judges are elected at large for eight-year terms. The County’s nine-member Board of Commissioners is elected by districts to four-year terms.”<sup>2</sup>

Another component of Hamilton County government is the Department of Education. Although “the Hamilton County Board of Education is a separate entity from Hamilton County, it constitutes a major portion of the funding requirement for the County...The Board of Education... is comprised of a nine-member board that is elected by districts to four-year terms that are staggered so no more than five are elected in an election year.”<sup>3</sup> In 2005, it was one of the largest employers in the region with 6,623 employees and a student population of 39,443.

Each of the municipalities within Hamilton County operates under a different form of government. The City of Chattanooga, the largest municipality, is managed by a Mayor-Council form of government, with an executive branch led by a popularly elected mayor and a nine member City Council. Unlike the County, the only other elected officials are two City Court Judges. The City of Ridgeside is governed by a Mayor-Commission form of government in which the mayor is the executive officer with a two-person commission. The Town of Walden operates under a Mayor-Alderman structure with a Town Mayor and two Aldermen.

The other seven municipalities, Collegedale, East Ridge, Lakesite, Lookout Mountain, Red Bank, Signal Mountain and Soddy Daisy, have a Council-

Manager form of government. The City Manager form of government “is similar to private businesses in that voters, council, and the city manager play the roles of stockholders, board of directors, and chief executive officer, respectively. [City Manager] cities also maintain relatively small councils which hire and fire the city manager who is professionally trained and has direct authority over other city employees. The mayor in [City Manager] cities is selected either by the council or directly by voters to serve only as a ceremonial officer.”<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1: Municipalities in Hamilton County, 2006**

Municipality	Form of Government	Number of Legislators
City of Chattanooga	Mayor-Council	9
City of Collegedale	City Manager	3
City of East Ridge	City Manager	5
City of Lakesite	City Manager	5
Town of Lookout Mountain	City Manager	5
City of Red Bank	City Manager	5
Town of Ridgeside	Mayor-Commission	3
Town of Signal Mountain	City Manager	5
City of Soddy Daisy	City Manager	5
Town of Walden	Mayor-Aldermen	3

Nationwide, the fastest growing form of government is the special-purpose government. Special-purpose governments, or special districts, “are autonomous local governments that provide single or limited services.”<sup>5</sup> These governments exclude school boards. In 2002, there were 35,052 special-purpose governments in the United States, “an increase of about 369, or 1.1 percent, since the 1997 Census of Governments.” Of those 35,052 special-purpose governments, 91% perform a single function. This increase “reflects the increased public demand for the provision of specialized services either not offered or not performed by existing governments.”<sup>6</sup> The State of Tennessee had 475 special-purpose governments in 2002. Some examples in Hamilton County include:

- Chattanooga Metropolitan Airport Authority
- Chattanooga Area Regional Transportation Authority
- Chattanooga Housing Authority

The most controversial form of special district government is the public authority. Public authorities are allowed to sell bonds, creating their own debt.<sup>7</sup>

### *Importance of Effective Local Government*

Chattanooga residents feel that effective local government that is free of corruption is important to the region. When asked about factors important in creating a good environment for creating jobs in Hamilton County, 19% of survey respondents felt that an effective local government that is free of corruption was one of the most important factors in attracting and creating jobs in Hamilton County, and 67% of respondents felt that it was very important.

To examine issues related to urban governance, this report will look at a series of indicators related to the political process—like voter registration and participation, as well as perceptions about government waste and consolidation.

### *Governing in the Chattanooga Region*

Voting is one of the most fundamental rights and the foundation of democracy. Decisions at the local level, perhaps even more than at the state or national level, are driven by voter attitudes.

Data from the 2004 elections shows a growing interest in American politics. Nationally, voter turnout among registered voters in 2004 was 70.4%. It was the highest national turnout since 1968.<sup>8</sup>

Hamilton County experienced a larger increase compared to national data. In 2000, 63.84% of registered voters in Hamilton County voted in the general election. In 2004, 77.70% of registered voters turned out—an increase of 13.86% in Hamilton County.

As of 2006, there were 176,671 registered voters in Hamilton County, compared to a 2000 census adult population of 261,596. Voter registration increases significantly during presidential election years. Based on data from the Hamilton County Election Commission, the voter registration rate for the period of July 2004 to December 2004 was nearly four times that of the same time period in 2005.

**Table 2: Voter Registration from July 2004 to December 2005, 2006 Hamilton County Election Commission**

	New Registered Voters
Jan-Jun (2004)	7,395
July-Dec. (2004)	16,256
Jan-Jun (2005)	848
July-Dec. (2005)	3,756

More women in Hamilton County are registered to vote than men and are registered at a rate slightly higher than their percentage of the overall adult county population.

**Table 3: Voter Registration by Gender, 2006 HCEC, 2000 Census**

	Registered Voters	Adult Population
Female	55.3%	53.2%
Male	44.7%	46.8%

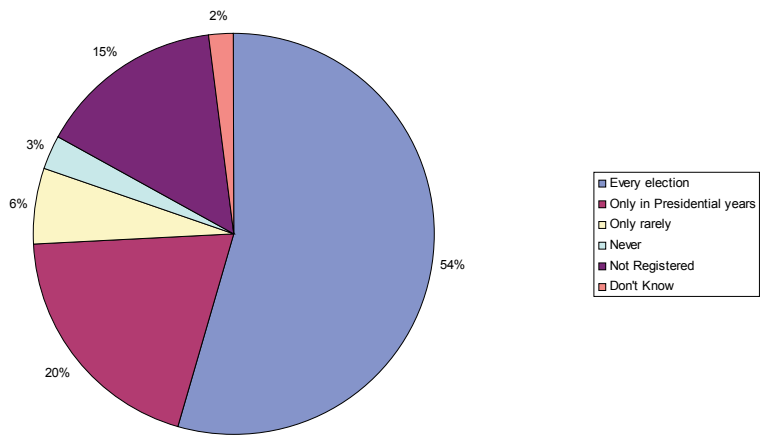
Similarly, registration by age generally tracks overall population share—although those 60 and older make up a greater percentage of registered voters than the adult population overall.

**Table 4: Voter Registration by Age, 2006 HCEC, 2000 Census**

Age	Registered Voters	Adult Population
18-29 years	19.3%	19.3%
30-39 years	18.1%	16.8%
40-49 years	19.8%	18.3%
50-59 years	18.4%	24.2%
60 and over	24.3%	21.3%

In addition to actual registration data, voting patterns can be analyzed through data from the 2006 countywide survey. Out of all survey respondents, 55% say they are registered to vote, and they vote in every election. 20% say they only vote in the presidential election years, and 9% vote rarely or never.

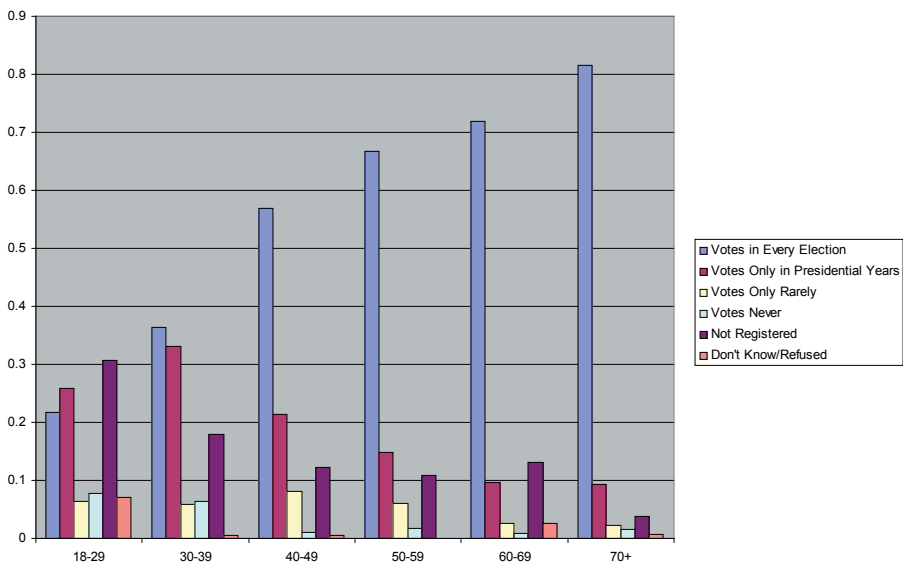
# Voting Habits in Hamilton County



Source: 2006 SOCRR Survey

While 22% of 18-29 year olds indicated that they are registered to vote and vote in every election, 77% of residents ages 60 and older indicate they are registered to vote and vote in every election. Over 30% of 18-29 year olds in Hamilton County are not registered to vote. In fact, more 18-29 year olds say they are not registered to vote than those who say they vote in every election. In comparison, only 14% of residents 60 and older say they are not registered to vote.

# Voting Habits by Age



Source: 2006 SOCRR Survey

Only 47% African Americans say they are registered to vote and vote in every presidential election, compared to 57% of whites. On the other hand, there is little difference between voting participation by gender.

Table 5: Voting Habits by Race, 2006 Countywide Survey

Are you registered to vote, if so, how frequently would you say you vote?	White	African American
Votes in Every Election	57%	47%
Votes Only in Presidential Years	19%	23%
Votes Only Rarely	5%	9%
Votes Never	3%	5%
Not Registered	15%	15%
Don't Know/Refused	2%	1%

**Table 6: Voting Habits by Gender, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Are you registered to vote, if so, how frequently would you say you vote?</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Votes in Every Election	56%	54%
Votes Only in Presidential Years	19%	21%
Votes Only Rarely	5%	7%
Votes Never	3%	3%
Not Registered	16%	14%
Don't Know/Refused	2%	1%

Of survey respondents, more Chattanooga residents say they are registered to vote and vote in every election (59%) than those who live outside the Chattanooga city limits (52%).

**Table 7: Voting Habits within the County, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Are you registered to vote, if so, how frequently would you say you vote?</b>	<b>Chattanooga</b>	<b>Non-Chattanooga</b>
Votes in Every Election	59%	52%
Votes Only in Presidential Years	18%	20%
Votes Only Rarely	6%	6%
Votes Never	4%	2%
Not Registered	13%	17%
Don't Know/Refused	2%	2%

Survey respondents with household income of more than \$50,000 said that they were registered to vote and vote more frequently than those respondents with household income of \$50,000 or less. Residents with an income of \$50,000 or less were also more likely to say that they were not registered to vote. Respondents with higher levels of educational attainment, on average, also said that they were registered to vote and vote more frequently. Survey respondents with a high school education or less were two times more likely to say that they were not registered than those with some college education and four times more likely than those who were college graduates.

**Table 8: Voting Habits by Income, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Which of the following reasons best describes why you don't vote in certain elections?</b>	<b>Less than \$50,000</b>	<b>More than \$50,000</b>
Votes in Every Election	46%	64%
Votes Only in Presidential Years	20%	20%
Votes Only Rarely	7%	5%
Votes Never	4%	2%
Not Registered	21%	8%
Don't Know/Refused	2%	1%

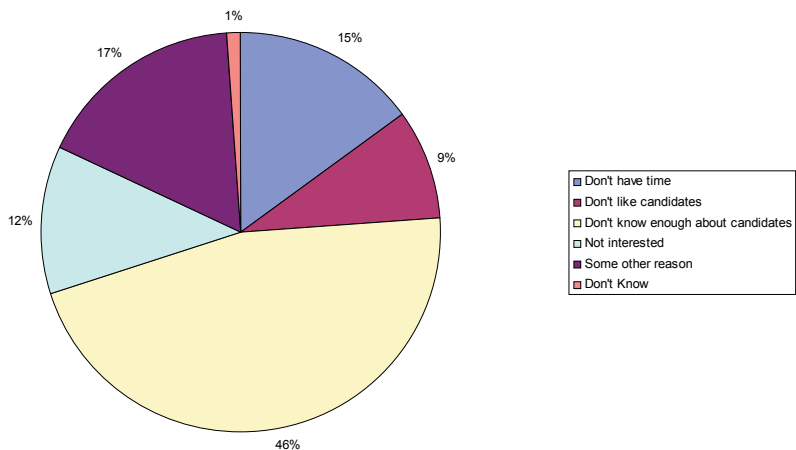
**Table 9: Voting Habits by Education, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Which of the following reasons best describes why you don't vote in certain elections?</b>	<b>High School or Less</b>	<b>Some College</b>	<b>Total College Grad &amp; Post Grad</b>
Votes in Every Election	42%	58%	67%
Votes Only in Presidential Years	17%	22%	21%
Votes Only Rarely	10%	4%	3%
Votes Never	5%	3%	1%
Not Registered	25%	12%	6%
Don't Know/Refused	2%	1%	2%

Among respondents who indicated that they did not vote in every election, 46% indicated that they did not have enough information about the candidates, 15% said they don't have the time, and 9% responded that they don't like the candidates: 12% said that they were simply not interested and 17% cited some other reason.



# Nonvoting in Hamilton County



Source: 2006 SOCRR Survey

## Perceptions of Government Waste in the Chattanooga Region

American National Election Studies at the University of Michigan has been tracking voter perspectives on government waste for almost fifty years. In 2004, a national survey found that 61% of Americans believed that government wastes a lot of money: this represented the largest two year increase for this indicator since the survey was first administered in 1958.<sup>9</sup>

Most residents of the Hamilton County believe that all levels of government are wasteful. When asked what percentage of government budgets are wasted, area residents believed that – on average – 50% of the federal budget, 41% of the State budget, 39% of school spending and 38% of both local and county government goes to waste.

Survey results indicate that African Americans felt a higher percentage of State and local and County government spending is wasted, while there were no statistically significant differences in perceived percentage of waste based on race for public schools or the federal government.

**Table 10: Perceptions of Waste by Race, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Local Government</b>	<b>County</b>
White	49%	40%	38%	36%	36%
African American	53%	46%	40%	45%	42%

The survey also suggests that women generally believe that waste exists at higher percentages at all levels of government than men do, especially in local government. There were virtually no statistically significant differences based on age – the exception was that younger people believe that public schools waste more than older residents.

**Table 11: Perceptions of Waste by Gender, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Local Government</b>	<b>County</b>
Female	53%	45%	43%	43%	42%
Male	47%	37%	35%	34%	33%

Survey respondents with household incomes of more than \$50,000, on average, believed that government wasted a smaller percentage of its budget than those respondents with household income of \$50,000 or less. Respondents with higher levels of educational attainment also, on average, believed that government wasted a smaller percentage of the budget. For every level of government – with the exception of public schools – there was at least a ten percentage point gap in percentage of perceived waste between individuals with a high school education or less and those with a college degree.

**Table 12: Perceptions of Waste by Income, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Income</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Local Government</b>	<b>County</b>
Less than \$50,000	53%	43%	42%	42%	40%
\$50,000 or more	45%	35%	35%	31%	33%

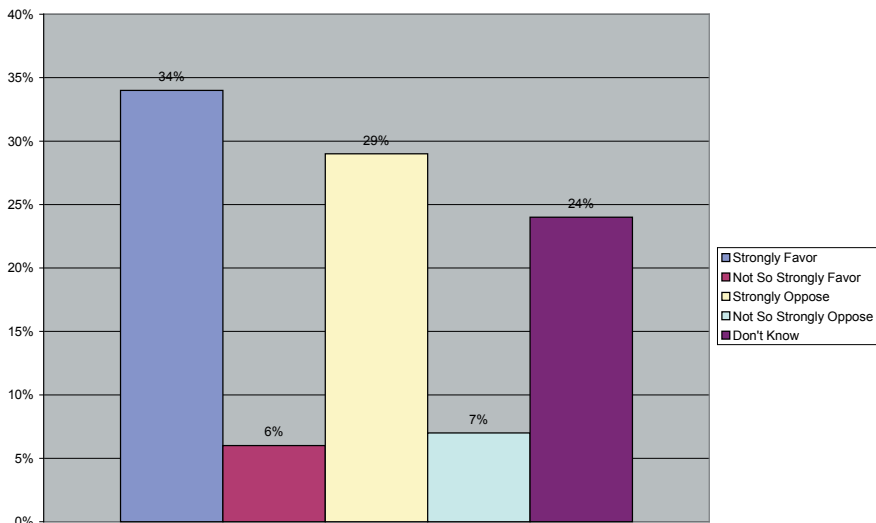
**Table 13: Perceptions of Waste by Education, 2006 Countywide Survey**

<b>Education</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Local Government</b>	<b>County</b>
High School or Less	53%	45%	43%	44%	43%
Some College	54%	41%	39%	40%	38%
College Graduate	43%	35%	35%	31%	32%

### Attitudes towards Metro Government in the Chattanooga Region

Some have suggested that one way to reduce waste and increase government efficiency would be through a consolidation of government services or through the creation of a metropolitan government, replacing the current city-county structure. Nashville-Davidson County has a metropolitan government and, in 2003, Louisville-Jefferson County became the most recent large metropolitan government.

Among all respondents to the survey, 40% backed creation of a metro government, 36% were opposed with 24% undecided. Support for metro government increases slightly among those respondents who indicated that they were registered voters – with 42% supporting metro government and 36% in opposition.



Source: 2006 SOCRR Survey

Support for metro government is split geographically – with City of Chattanooga residents backing metro government and County residents outside of the city opposed: County residents are almost two times more likely to strongly oppose metro government.

**Table 14: Attitudes Towards Metro Government by Residence, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Some people have suggested that instead of having both a city government for Chattanooga and a county government for all of Hamilton County, there should be a single metro government that combines both	Chattanooga Residents	Non-Chattanooga Residents
Strongly Favor	41%	28%
Not so Strongly Favor	6%	6%
Strongly Oppose	21%	37%
Not so Strongly Oppose	7%	7%
Don't Know	25%	22%

African Americans back metro government by almost a two to one margin, while white residents are evenly split: almost one-third of African Americans are undecided.

**Table 15: Attitudes Towards Metro Government by Race, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Some people have suggested that instead of having both a city government for Chattanooga and a county government for all of Hamilton County, there should be a single metro government that combines both	White	African American
Strongly Favor	32%	43%
Not so Strongly Favor	7%	2%
Strongly Oppose	31%	20%
Not so Strongly Oppose	8%	4%
Don't Know	22%	31%

Men are somewhat more likely to support metro government than women—almost two thirds of survey respondents who were undecided were women.

**Table 16: Attitudes Towards Metro Government by Gender, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Some people have suggested that instead of having both a city government for Chattanooga and a county government for all of Hamilton County, there should be a single metro government that combines both	Female	Male
Strongly Favor	32%	37%
Not so Strongly Favor	5%	7%
Strongly Oppose	27%	31%
Not so Strongly Oppose	7%	8%
Don't Know	29%	18%

There are few differences in level of support and opposition by age and household income. Individuals with some college and college graduates, however, are more likely to support metro government than individuals with a high school diploma or less.

**Table 17: Attitudes Towards Metro Government by Age, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Some people have suggested that instead of having both a city government for Chattanooga and a county government for all of Hamilton County, there should be a single metro government that combines both	18 – 44	45 – 59	59 +
Strongly Favor	30%	39%	36%
Not so Strongly Favor	7%	6%	5%
Strongly Oppose	29%	29%	27%
Not so Strongly Oppose	8%	8%	6%
Don't Know	26%	20%	25%

**Table 18: Attitudes Towards Metro Government by Income, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Some people have suggested that instead of having both a city government for Chattanooga and a county government for all of Hamilton County, there should be a single metro government that combines both	Less than \$50,000	\$50,000 or more
Strongly Favor	34%	37%
Not so Strongly Favor	5%	8%
Strongly Oppose	27%	28%
Not so Strongly Oppose	8%	7%
Don't Know	26%	21%

**Table 19: Attitudes Towards Metro Government by Education, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Some people have suggested that instead of having both a city government for Chattanooga and a county government for all of Hamilton County, there should be a single metro government that combines both	High School or Less	Some College	College Graduate
Strongly Favor	30%	38%	35%
Not so Strongly Favor	4%	7%	9%
Strongly Oppose	32%	26%	28%
Not so Strongly Oppose	4%	8%	10%
Don't Know	30%	21%	18%

When asked what could happen as a result of metro government, a majority of all respondents -- 56% -- indicated that it was almost certain or very likely that taxes will increase. Even among supporters of metro government, 36% believe it is almost certain or very likely that taxes will increase. Among metro government supporters, however, higher percentages believe that the region will be able to attract more jobs, growth management and planning will improve, local government will save money and local government will be more efficient and responsive.

**Table 20: Possible Results of Metro Government, 2006 Countywide Survey**

	Almost Certain	Very Likely	Somewhat Likely	Not too Likely	Not at all Likely	Don't Know
Taxes will increase	26%	30%	18%	12%	6%	7%
Region will be able to attract more jobs	7%	22%	28%	22%	10%	11%
Growth Management and Planning will Improve	8%	20%	30%	19%	12%	11%
Quality of local services will go down	8%	18%	22%	29%	11%	11%
Local government will save money	7%	18%	22%	26%	18%	9%
Local government will be more efficient and responsive	5%	19%	27%	25%	15%	9%

**Table 21: Possible Results of Metro Government by Attitude Towards Metro Government, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Almost Certain/Very Likely	Metro Government Supporters	Metro Government Opponents	Undecided
Taxes will increase		36%	78%
Region will be able to attract more jobs		47%	12%
Growth Management and Planning will Improve		48%	11%
Quality of local services will go down		10%	46%
Local government will save money		45%	9%
Local government will be more efficient and responsive		46%	7%
			12%

*Comparisons to Other Midsize Regions and Cities*

Of the 14 midsize regions and cities, 2004 voter turnout was the highest in Marion County, Oregon (89.63%) and Lane County, Oregon (90.79%). Cumberland County, North Carolina had the lowest voter turnout with only 55.08% of registered voters. Hamilton County had the third highest rate of voter turnout, below Marion and Lane Counties.

**Table 22: Voter Registration in Benchmark Cities, 2006 Election Commission**

County	Total Number Registered Voters	Number Ballots Cast	Turnout (Registered Voters who voted)
Cumberland Co., NC	177,548	97,792	55.08%
Allen Co., IN	225,967	131,987	58.41%
Winnebago Co., IL	194,530	122,459	62.95%
Ingham Co., MI	201,390	134,377	66.72%
Forsyth Co., NC	212,235	141,978	66.90%
Washoe Co., NV	233,811	159,511	68.22%
Washtenaw Co., MI	250,494	174,061	69.49%
Richland Co., SC	196,431	137,047	69.77%
Lehigh Co., PA	197,806	145,091	73.35%
Ada Co., ID	208,168	157,689	75.75%
Madison Co., AL	170,404	131,358	77.09%
Hamilton Co., TN	176,671	137,272	77.70%
Marion Co., OR	145,717	130,609	89.63%
Lane Co., OR	206,394	187,388	90.79%

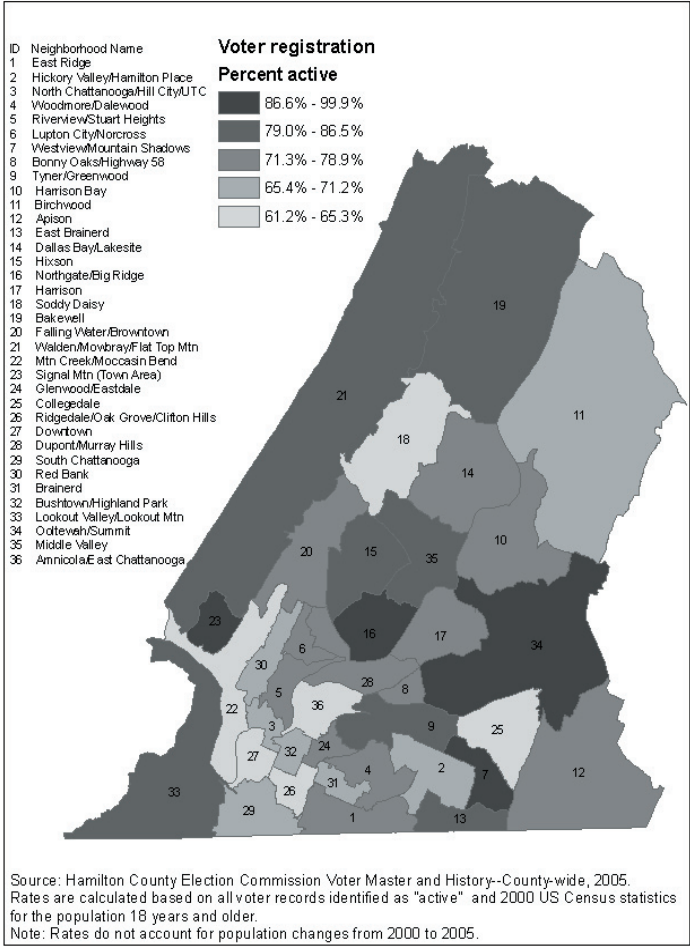
Urban Governance in the Chattanooga Region – Neighborhood by Neighborhood Analysis

*Voter Registration*

Signal Mountain has highest rate of registration per 100,000 residents. Ridgedale/Oak Grove/Clifton Hills has the lowest rate of registration.

Map 1

Hamilton County 2005 Voter Statistics by Neighborhood



## *Perceptions of Government Waste*

For each neighborhood, perception of waste decreases as government size decreases. Downtown/South Chattanooga residents perceive the most government waste. Downtown/South Chattanooga residents feel that Federal and Local government waste over 50% of their budgets. They also believe that nearly half of the public school system's budget is waste. City residents tend to believe there is more waste in government than residents in the rest of the county. The East Hamilton county region, with the exception of local government, feels there is less amount of waste in government than any other area.

**Table 23: Perception of Government Waste by Neighborhood, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Survey Area	Federal	State	Schools	Local	County
Hamilton County (Including Chattanooga)	50%	40%	38%	37%	37%
City of Chattanooga	50%	41%	40%	39%	38%
East Brainerd	47%	40%	39%	36%	37%
East Hamilton County	47%	39%	38%	36%	35%
North Hamilton County	49%	39%	42%	38%	40%
Hixson	47%	35%	37%	36%	34%
Red Bank/N. Chattanooga	50%	38%	36%	34%	38%
Downtown/South Chattanooga	58%	48%	47%	51%	45%
East Ridge/Brainerd	49%	40%	37%	35%	34%
E. Chattanooga	52%	42%	41%	43%	39%

## *Metro Government*

Of the nine survey regions, the Red Bank/North Chattanooga area was the most supportive of government consolidation with 57% in support of a metro government. North Hamilton residents were in the greatest opposition to a metro government with 62% giving a negative response to the question of government consolidation.

**Table 24: Attitude Towards Metro Government by Neighborhood, 2006 Countywide Survey**

Survey Area	Strongly/Not So Strongly Favor	Strongly/Not So Strongly Oppose	Don't Know/Refused
Hamilton County(Including Chattanooga)	34%	44%	22%
City of Chattanooga	48%	28%	25%
East Brainerd	48%	23%	29%
East Hamilton County	33%	53%	14%
North Hamilton County	23%	62%	15%
Hixson	39%	39%	22%
Red Bank/N. Chattanooga	57%	24%	19%
Downtown/South Chattanooga	46%	28%	26%
East Ridge/Brainerd	42%	32%	26%
E. Chattanooga	41%	32%	27%



### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>. See <http://www.naco.org>.
- <sup>2</sup>. Hamilton County, Tennessee Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (2005)
- <sup>3</sup>. Hamilton County, Tennessee Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (2005)
- <sup>4</sup>. Kathy Hayes and Semoon Chang, "The Relative Efficiency of City Manager and Mayor-Council Forms of Government," *Southern Economic Journal*; July 1990; 57, 1; pg. 167
- <sup>5</sup>. Kathryn A. Foster, *The Political Economy of Special-Purpose Government*, Georgetown (1999).
- <sup>6</sup>. *Finances of Special District Governments* (2002), See <http://www.census.gov>.
- <sup>7</sup>. Leigland, James, "Public Authorities and the Determinants of Their Use by State and Local Governments," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Oct., 1994), pp. 521-544.
- <sup>8</sup>. See: [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)
- <sup>9</sup>. In 2002, 48% responded "a lot" to the question, "do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it or don't waste very much of it?" See, [www.electionstudies.org](http://www.electionstudies.org).