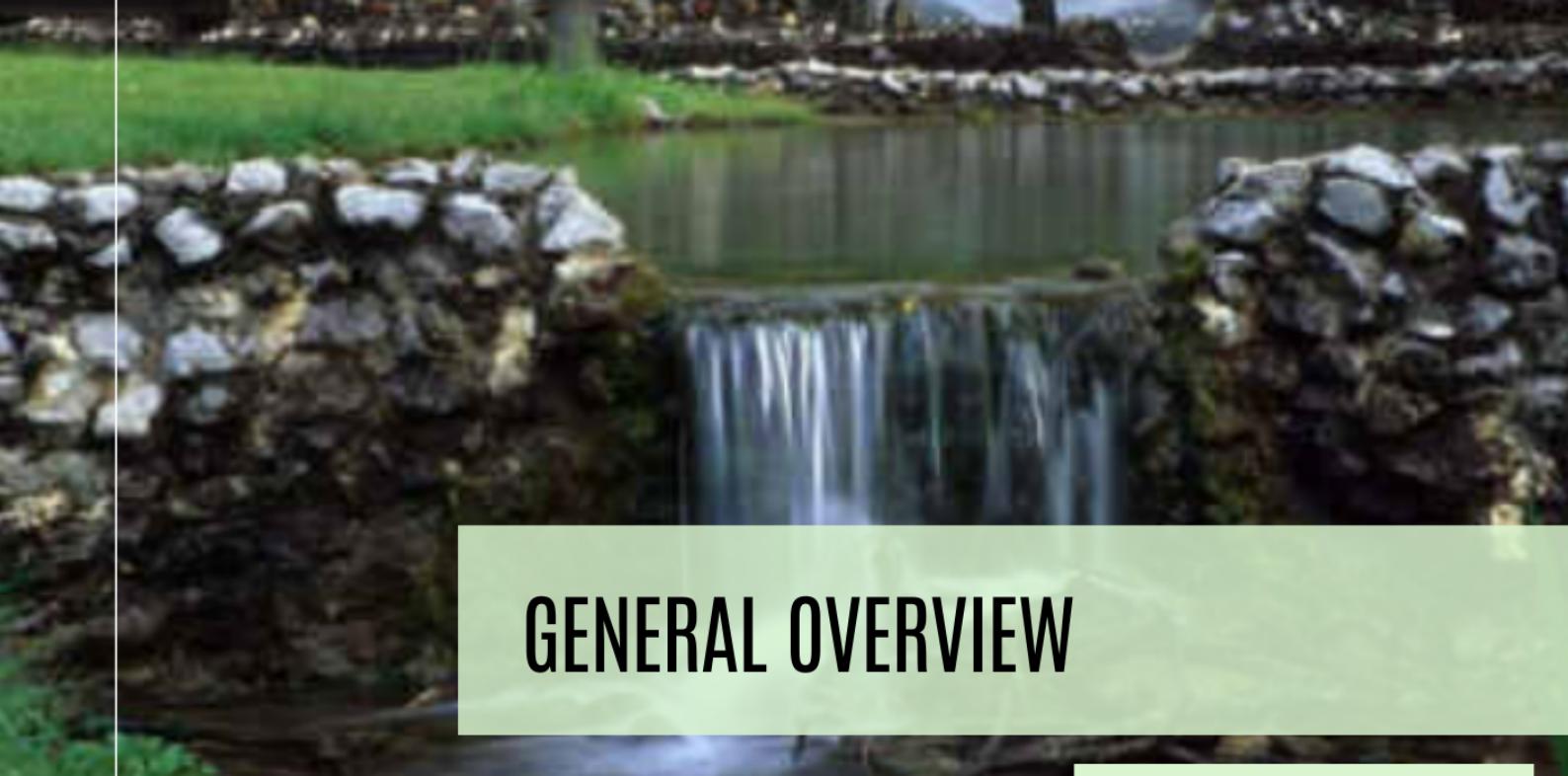


IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

ALCOA COMMUNITY REPORT

WRITTEN BY NAOMI MAUSS

Sociology 3100



GENERAL OVERVIEW

IN THE BEGINNING

In 1907, the city of North Maryville had a population of less than 3,300. Upon selecting the area as the site for their hydroelectric power plant, the Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA) started operations in the area in 1910.¹ When the city was incorporated in 1919, the city was named Alcoa, after the company. For the purposes of this report, the city will be referred to as Alcoa and the company as ALCOA. The first mayor was C.L. Babcock, founder and owner of Babcock lumber, the second largest enterprise in the city. The city manager, Victor Hultquist, was ALCOA's superintendent of construction.² Every subsequent city manager was also employed by ALCOA until 1956. The city was the quintessential company town. Alcoa's population increased in the 1930s, when World War II caused an increased need for aluminum production.

CURRENT STATUS

Now, the city is further from a company town and offers a wealth of natural resources in their beautiful parks and landscape. In 2016, Alcoa's manufacturing side split off and divested into the privately controlled Arconic, marking the end of ALCOA's influence on Alcoa.³ The city now looks to future commercial investments to continue growing and improving.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

The Little Tennessee River was important economically for Alcoa, as its powers a hydroelectric power plant, which was first developed by ALCOA.⁴ The power plant is now owned by the TVA and next to the city of Tellico. The area in which Alcoa falls has the greatest annual rainfall in America “outside the Puget Sound area.”⁵ ALCOA had riparian rights for much of the waterways around Alcoa, which they began purchasing in 1910.

A brief look at social media shows that much of the content tagged as “Alcoa” which features the natural landscape is actually from the Smoky Mountains National Park, which is at least a half an hour drive from Alcoa. There are seven city parks within Alcoa, and eleven more parks within a 15 minute drive.⁶

The city code mandates that a minimum of 5% of the city must be open space, but much of the city has even more tree coverage.⁷ While the city has above average water quality and average air quality, the air quality is lower than average for the region.⁸ This is likely due to its proximity to Knoxville. The nearby airport also generates noise pollution, which could be combated by planting more trees to create a sound barrier.⁹

Alcoa's main city-specific festival is FreedomFest, which is on June 28. It is similar to the 4th of July, in that it was created, "to show foreign students how we celebrated freedom in America." The city funded the festival until 2009, when the effects of the 2008 economic crash meant that they could not afford the festival. However, starting in 2013, ALCOA helped fund the festival, 100 years since ALCOA had started operating in the area. The festival was shut down in 2020 due to concerns about the city's health and infrastructure, but was restarted again in 2023.¹⁰



CULTURAL CAPITALS

There is no farmer's market in the city, with residents encouraged to drive either to the nearby cities of Maryville (which has a population of around 32,000) or Knoxville (with a population of almost 200,000).¹¹ The outdoor parks are an important part of the city's infrastructure, and people are encouraged to go there. The city also has a golf course, while the three theatres closest to Alcoa are in the nearby city of Maryville. Aside from FreedomFest and the aluminum manufacturing facility, there do not appear to be any cultural markers for Alcoa. This is a potential area for growth.

HUMAN CAPITAL

CULTURAL VALUES

There are four Churches in Alcoa, three of which were started with loans from ALCOA.¹² There do not appear to be any non-Christian religious institutions in the city.

Alcoa has a greater percentage of black people than 84% of other cities in Tennessee.¹⁴ This is likely due, at least in part, to ALCOA's history of offering jobs to black employees who could be paid less.¹⁵ At least five people who lived in Alcoa or attended Alcoa High School went on to play from the NFL. Tennessee Valley Technical Programs, which trains people to become HVAC technicians, has a branch in Alcoa.

Alcoa has a population of approximately 11,635.¹⁶ There is a teen pregnancy rate of 2.23% in Blount county, compared to the national average of 1.5%.¹⁷ The total birth rate in Alcoa, which is 7.1%, is higher than the total birth rate in both Tennessee, which is 6.6%, and the United States, which is 5.4.¹⁸ The suicide mortality rate is higher than the state average, as are the rates of overdose and smoking.^{19, 20}

Education Level	Percent of Alcoa
High School	31.7%
Some College	18.9%
Associate's	9.0%
Bachelor's	21.0%
Graduate or Professional	10.0%

Table 1¹³

RELEVANT STATISTICS

SOCIAL CAPITAL

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT

There are several civic groups in Alcoa. This includes Blount County Community Action Agency. There is a local chapter of the Kiwanis Club, whose mission is to help children. A recent project taken on by the Alcoa Kiwanis Club was purchasing tricycles for children with special needs.²¹ Manna Outreach Ministries Food and Clothes Pantry at Alcoa Maryville Church of God provides food and clothing to Blount County resident's. Within a short drive of Alcoa, Maryville has branches of Meals on Wheels, the VA, the Lions Club, and Habitat for Humanity. The labor organization United Steelworkers of America has a branch in Alcoa, which is helpful for people working at Arconic.²²

US News ranked the healthiest counties in the US. A table showing the difference between Sevier County and the US average is shown below.²³ It is generally a good thing that sevier county has less disparity in race, premature death, and segregation. It is generally a bad thing that there are lower rates of health and local food outlets. The high percent of vacant houses might reflect poor housing conditions due to aging infrastructure, as much of the current housing stock was built over 100 years ago by ALCOA and Babcock.²⁴

	Total Health Score	Racial Disparity	Premature Death Disparity	Segregation Index Score	Local Food Outlets per 100k people	Vacant Houses
Sevier County	37	0.11	0.070	0.37	1.0	32.7
US	48	0.18	0.238	0.39	5.9	16.76
Difference	-11	-0.9	-0.462	-0.2	-4.9	15.94

Table 2⁴⁶

POLITICAL CAPITAL

ALCOA AND ARCONIC

A major employer in the town has historically been ALCOA. It was known for making decisions which favored the company over the city, and there were several decades in which the city's government was filled almost exclusively with people who also held employment in ALCOA. The federal government and the government of North Carolina have both sued ALCOA.^{25,26}

Arconic is on the board of commerce for Blount county, and it employs 1,731 people. Potentially up to 16% of the city works for Arconic.²⁷ Additionally, ALCOA has been a significant employer in the city for over a century, so it would make sense that people who live and work there would vote to pass laws that helped grow the company they depended on. In 2016, Arconic employees in the company's Voluntary Political Action Committee donated \$344,359 to political organizations.²⁸

VOTING STATISTICS

Alcoa has voted majority Republican in the last 7 presidential elections. There is no clear indication that this trend of voting Republican will change, and the city has voted to be represented by Republicans in the Senate as well.²⁹

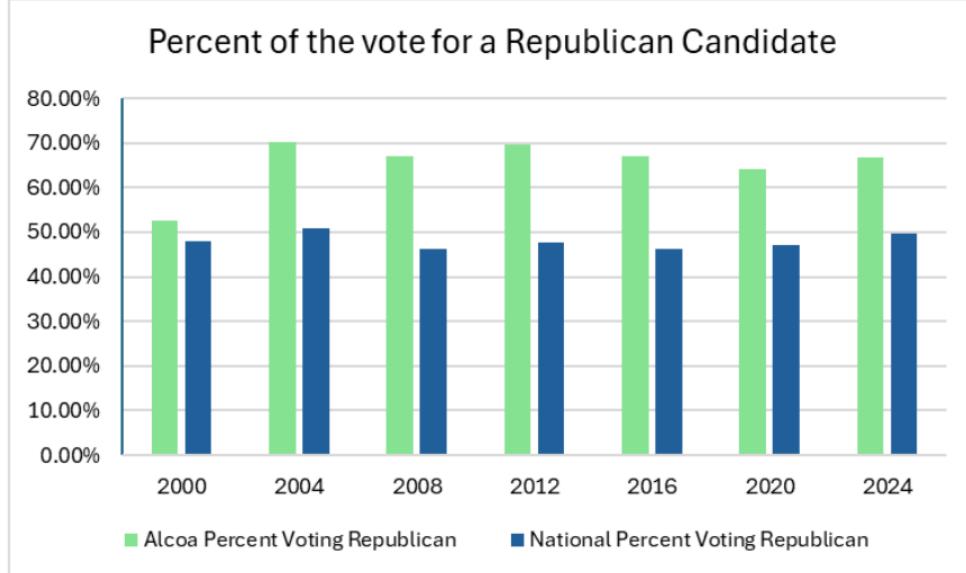


Table 3

UT HEALTH SYSTEM

The largest employer in the town is the University of Tennessee Health System, which employs 5,458 people.³⁰ The University of Tennessee (UT) is one of the largest employers in Tennessee. Both the people who work for UT and the businesses which depend on revenue from it and its employers are motivated for UT to do well. The next largest employer in the city has only 300 employees, which is a significant decrease from both Arconic and UT.

FINANCIAL CAPITAL

AVAILABLE STATE FUNDING

The Tennessee Department of Economic Development has the TN Placemakers Entrepreneurship Fund, SmartStart™ Communities Program, and the State Small Business Credit Initiative in order to incentivize small businesses in rural Tennessee.³¹ The state has the 9th most growth in small business (businesses with fewer than 500 employees) in the nation. However, this does not necessarily reflect the overall small business growth in Alcoa.³²

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Google maps shows over a dozen agencies inside Alcoa's city limits which offer personal loans at high interest rates upon searching the term "loan agency." Upon searching "bank," there are only five results within Alcoa.³³

PRIVATE FINANCIAL SUPPORT

Arconic has a stock incentive program for their employees. The UT Health System, offers tuition discounts for employees of immediate family members of employees who want to attend college at UT.³⁴

AVAILABLE FEDERAL FUNDING

Alcoa is eligible for a Section 502 Direct Loan Program, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) economic assistance via their Business and Industry Loan Guarantees Program, their Intermediary Relending Program, and their Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program.^{35,36,37,38} These programs are all meant to encourage the development of locally-owned businesses in rural areas of the country.

MEDIAN INCOME

Median Household Income	Alcoa	Tennessee	United States
2020	\$48,351	\$54,833	\$64,999
2023	\$60,049	\$67,631	\$77,719

Table 4

BUILT CAPITAL

MEDIAN INCOME

Alcoa has beautiful and numerous natural resources, across the Little Tennessee River and the several public parks. Additionally, the nearby hydroelectric Tellico Dam, which was originally built by ALCOA, provides residents with clean and cheap drinking water.³⁹

PELLISSIPPI PLACE

Alcoa has recently taken steps to develop “Pellissippi Place,” a planned mixed-use research center.⁴³ This happened after the city decided to utilize a large section of land which has remained undeveloped since ALCOA stopped production on that land. This plan to develop the previously undeveloped 450-acre tract of land is a joint effort between various county and local governments in the area.⁴⁴ In the promotional materials, Pellissippi Place advertises its proximity to the Smoky Mountains National Park, the University of Tennessee, the headquarters of the TVA, and a regional airport as reasons that it will appeal to professionals and industry.

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Alcoa has an elementary, middle, and high school, a fire hall, a police station, and a city service center, which houses the public works department, amongst other organizations.^{40,41} While there are no hospitals inside Alcoa’s city limits, there are several clinics, and Maryville has a hospital just East of Alcoa. The same is true for their library, movie theatres, larger sports infrastructure, colleges, and legal buildings. Alcoa’s location right next to Maryville, the county seat, means it is next to all of the built infrastructure associated with that decision.⁴²



Artistic rendition of the planned Pellissippi Place⁴⁵

FUTURE PLANS

When that section of land East of the Tennessee river was determined to be the future location of the ALCOA plant, the company funded the development of homes, schools, churches, parks, and dozens of other useful initiatives that helped the city grow from an undeveloped piece of land into what it is today. At the same time, ALCOA conducted itself as a cutthroat business, creating a monopoly that worked so hard to defend its profit margins that people died on the picket line.

Eventually, ALCOA left Alcoa. As the demand for aluminum has decreased and a smaller percent of the population works in manufacturing, the city's identity is less clear. Now, there is a new plan to introduce jobs into the city, where a corporation is developing a large tract of planned land. People in charge of making policy decisions in Alcoa need to remember their history of how large businesses can both help and harm Alcoa when making policy decisions, to avoid the mistakes of the past.

As mentioned earlier, ALCOA has a large number of vacant houses, which may be due to deteriorating quality associated with the old age of those houses. Safe and quality houses are important if the population is to grow. Furthermore, the city should take advantage of the UT Health System and try to develop programs to combat the high rates of suicide, overdosing, and cigarette use. Finally, the city should work to create informational programs aimed towards increasing financial literacy. An understanding of the grants for which they are eligible may increase the number of locally owned businesses.

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