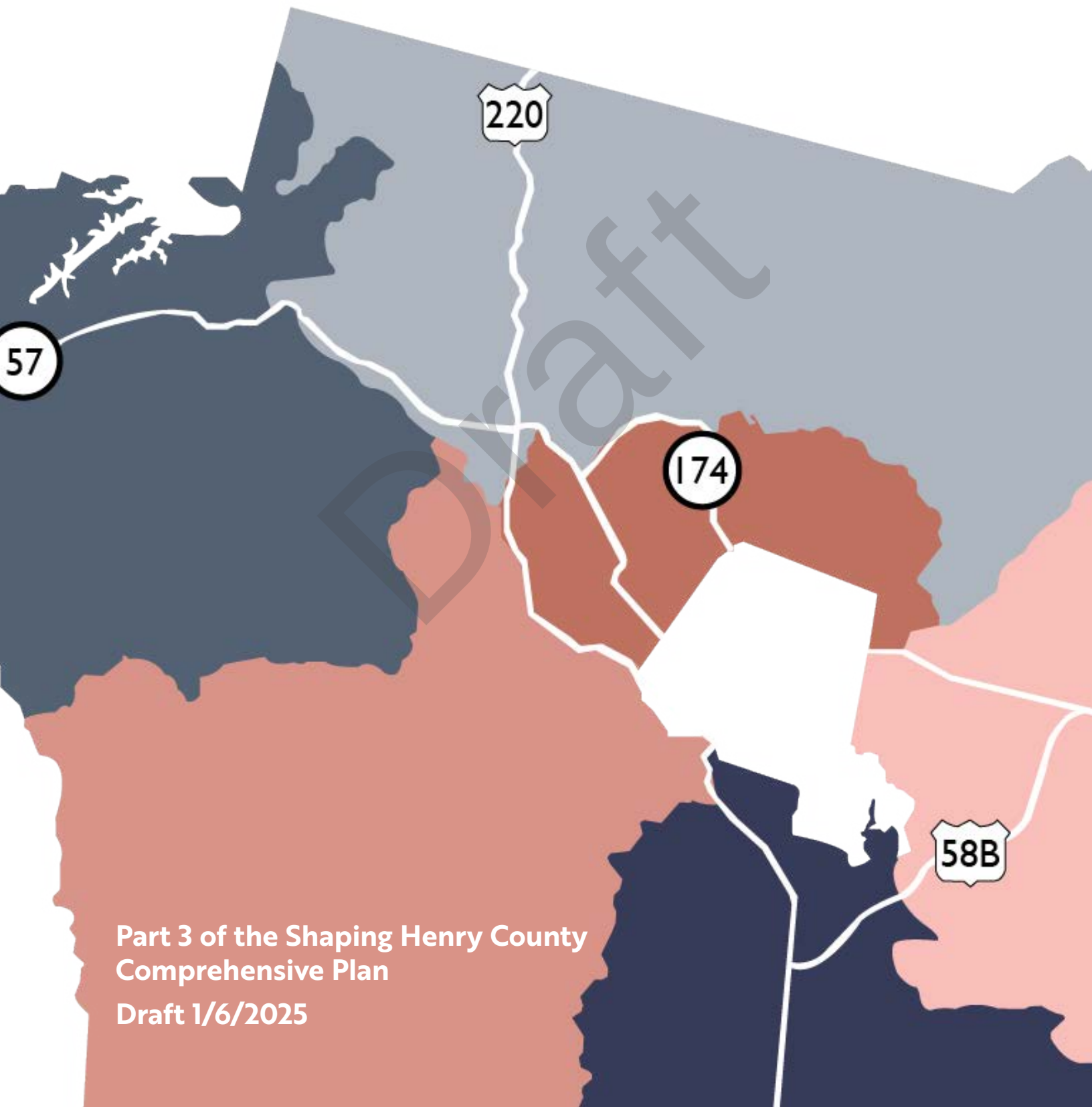


OUR VOICE

SHAPING HENRY COUNTY ★ PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY



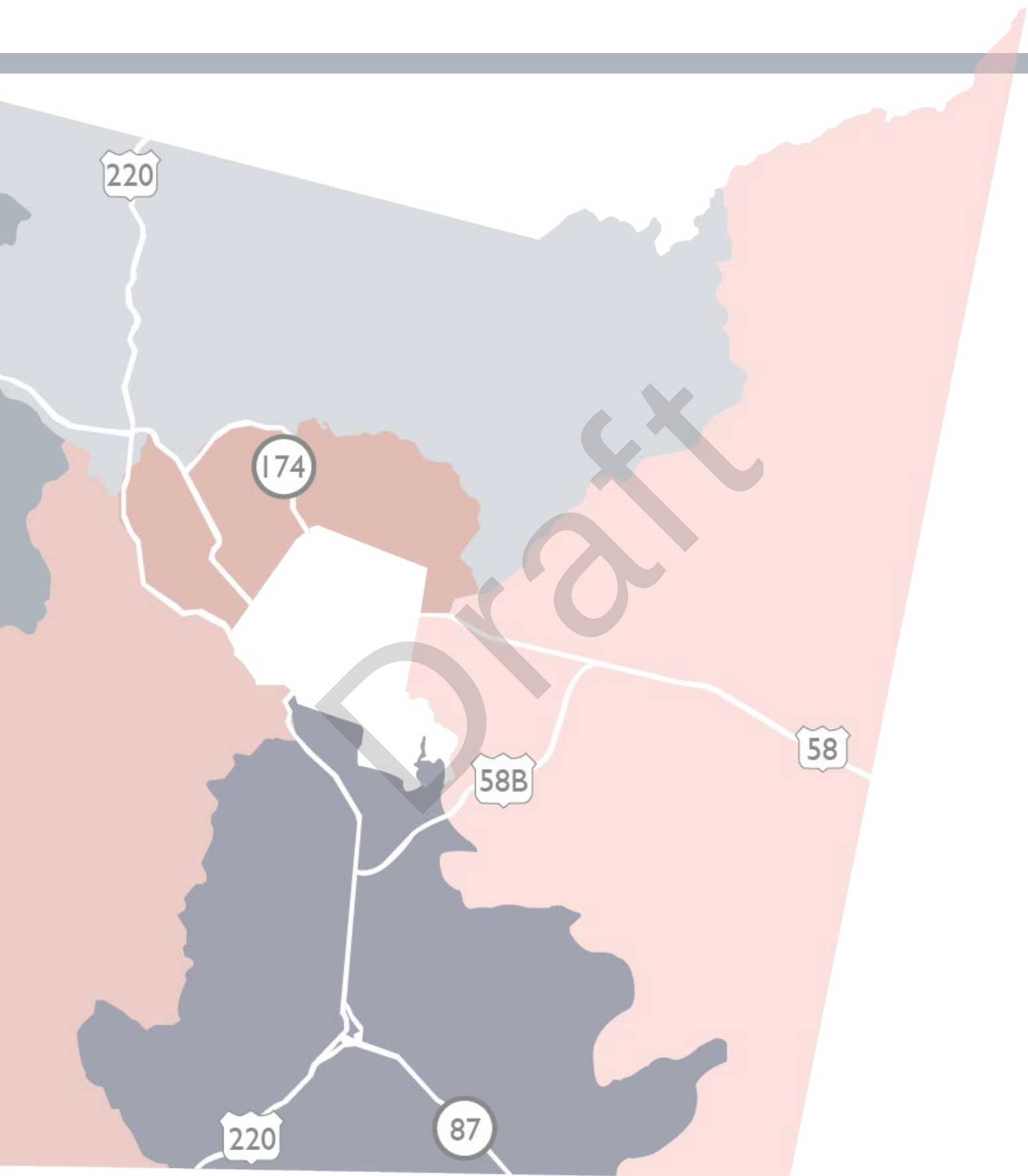
Part 3 of the Shaping Henry County
Comprehensive Plan
Draft 1/6/2025

OUR VOICE

SHAPING HENRY COUNTY★PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Overview & Key Themes	4
Community Survey	6
Focus Groups	8
Public Workshops	14
Interactive Activities	20
Attachment A. Detailed Survey Results	





Overview and Key Themes

■ During the Henry County Comprehensive Plan update process, the County pursued a variety of public and stakeholder input. The Public Engagement portion of the Comprehensive Plan was held in the Autumn of 2024 and consisted of 3 public workshops, 9 focus groups, a public survey which was available both online and in written form, and interactive activities available on the project website.

Overall, 576 respondents participated in the public survey, a statistically significant number. Meanwhile, over 50 people participated in the focus groups, providing valuable, detailed input on a number of important topics. In addition, the public workshops, while not well attended, provide an important look into residents' ideas and concerns about the County, as well as information from consensus-building community policy exercises.

The purpose of this document is to summarize the findings from Public Engagement, as well as to provide detailed documentation of the community's input. In accordance with Planning Best Practices, this information will be used to draft the Comprehensive Plan chapters, helping to shape Henry County's future based on input from its residents.

Draft

Overall Themes from Public Engagement



Economic Growth and Development:

- » Create well-paying jobs, attract diverse businesses, and revitalize legacy industrial properties.
- » Increase housing supply and improve housing affordability.
- » Support workforce training to retain residents and attract newcomers.



Infrastructure and Public Services:

- » Invest in aging roads, water and sewer systems, broadband, and public transit.
- » Improve emergency services and traffic management in underserved areas.



Healthcare and Education:

- » Expand access to healthcare, including OB/GYN, mental health, drug treatment, and specialty services.
- » Improve the quality of public schools, enhance teacher retention, and increase the number of youth-focused programs.



Community Amenities and Quality of Life:

- » Develop additional parks, enhance trails and recreational facilities, and expand events and gathering spaces.
- » Enhance tourism through better accommodations, dining, and promotion of natural and historic assets.
- » Improve walkability, especially in historic “downtown” areas including Bassett, Fieldale, and Stanleytown.



Governance and Community Image:

- » Encourage improved property maintenance.
- » Address litter and beautification to improve aesthetics and

Community Survey

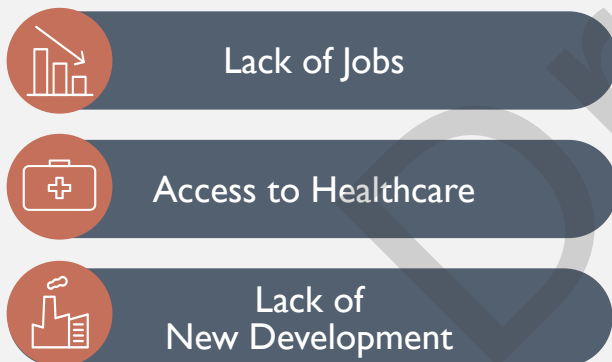
- A public survey was conducted as part of the public input process for the Henry County Comprehensive Plan. The survey was open from October 7, 2024 to December 15, 2024, and available to the community both in digital and paper format. The survey was composed of 14 questions. 8 of these were questions on specific topics, 1 was open ended, and 5 were optional demographic questions for analysis purposes. The Community Survey revealed that respondents value Henry County's affordability, rural character, and sense of community, but that they also have concerns about economic challenges and future development. This suggests a desire to build a sustainable future that balances economic opportunity and quality of life with the preservation of Henry County's unique character.

Themes of economic resilience and quality of life run throughout the feedback that was received, with residents highlighting the need for job creation. Concerns about housing affordability, healthcare access, and the preservation of rural and natural spaces underscore the need for balanced growth.

Quality of life enhancements such as better infrastructure, bike trails, sidewalks, and public transportation were emphasized as priorities, indicating a desire to focus on improving everyday life for residents. Public facilities and services were rated as average to above average, but residents see room for improvement in some areas as well. While many expressed satisfaction with outdoor recreation, safety, and the County's suitability for families, they were dissatisfied with job and shopping opportunities..



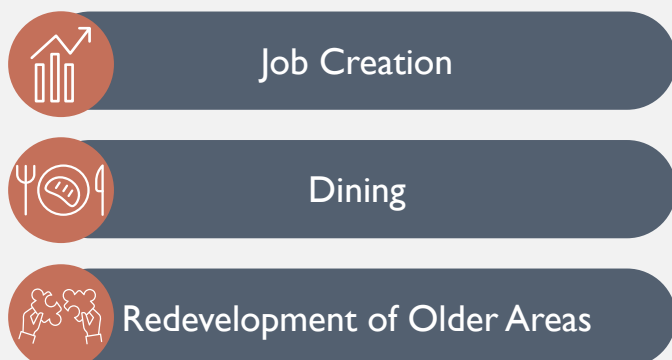
What concerns you most
about Henry County's future?



What do you value most
about Henry County?



What should the County
prioritize as it plans for the future?



Focus Groups

- Nine focus groups were held as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process. The topics of the groups were Agriculture, Economic Development, Education, Housing, Public Health, Public Safety, Tourism and Parks, Transportation, and Utilities and Public Infrastructure. Each group ranged from approximately 8 to 12 participants and included in-person facilitation by Berkley Group staff. All Focus Groups were held at the Henry County Administration Building.

Overall, the Focus Groups revealed both the diverse strengths of the County, as well as its shared challenges, highlighting strategic opportunities for improvement. Each group provided unique insights, yet common themes emerged amongst all of the groups. There was a shared sense that Henry County is in a unique position to grow, thanks to competitive advantages such as low real estate taxes, great outdoor amenities, an affordable cost of living, and its location between major economic hubs. Strengths included a can-do attitude, and a spirit of cooperation among County departments and local institutions which was forged by the struggles the community went through after the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s, as well as the acknowledgement of shared involvement in recreating the County's economic base.

That said, there are challenges to overcome. Infrastructure needs significant investment in terms of utilities and transportation. Healthcare options are limited, forcing many residents to travel for care. There is a lack of lodging options in the County, which deters visitors from staying locally. To attract tourists and to retain younger residents, there is a need to provide exciting activities, and to repurpose old industrial sites for retail or housing. While the existing roadway network is mostly adequate for the County's needs, improvements such as access to Commonwealth Crossing, spot safety improvements, and expanding alternative transportation facilities such as the Dick & Willie Passage are important. Many participants felt these challenges should best be addressed through strategic partnerships, but that they would require the County's political will and financial commitment to achieve.

Key Themes

Strengths:

- » Collaboration among agencies and stakeholders
- » Partnerships between schools, Patrick & Henry Community College, and local businesses for workforce development programs
- » Public safety agencies maintaining effective response times and community safety despite resource constraints
- » Excellent Tourism and Park facilities
- » Natural beauty
- » Dick & Willie Passage provides a backbone to build on
- » Existing highway infrastructure, and access to important north-south and east-west highways

Challenges:

- » Aging facilities
- » Declining volunteerism for Fire and EMS services
- » Public health shortages of providers and facilities, particularly for pediatrics and obstetrics
- » Growing mental health and substance abuse needs
- » Limited lodging and dining options
- » Lack of affordable housing
- » Property Maintenance
- » Lack of activities for youth and younger families
- » Lack of Active Transportation options
- » Need to expand transit service
- » Access improvements to Commonwealth Crossing

Focus Group Topics



Agriculture



**Economic
Development**



Education



Housing



Public Health



Public Safety



**Tourism and
Parks**



Transportation



**Utilities and Public
Infrastructure**

Agriculture Focus Group

Despite its Industrial heritage, Henry County also has a long history of Agriculture that makes up an important part of its identity. Participants noted the County's strengths, including its fertile land, agricultural heritage, and a strong sense of community among farmers. However, they also expressed concerns about the aging farming workforce, the lack of young people entering the profession, and the rising costs of continuing farming operations, which threatens the viability of agriculture as a livelihood. Limited access to markets for selling local products and competition from larger agricultural enterprises were also seen as significant threats. Additionally, participants emphasized the risk of losing farmland to development and the need to preserve the County's rural character and agricultural resources.

To address these challenges, the group proposed several solutions to support local agriculture and ensure its sustainability which included increasing local marketing opportunities, such as Farmers Markets or cooperative selling arrangements to help farmers reach more consumers. They also emphasized the importance of partnerships with the education sector and mentorship programs to attract younger generations to farming and to teach them sustainable practices. Participants recommended the County implement policies to protect farmland from development and increasing incentives for small-scale farmers to discourage them from selling to developers. Enhancing access to funding, grants, and technical assistance for modernizing equipment and diversifying crops to take advantage of new markets such as organic produce was also suggested.

Key Themes:

- » Land Preservation
- » Youth Participation and Mentorships
- » Organic Farming
- » Development Threats
- » Entrepreneurship

Economic Development Focus Group

Henry County's economic conditions reflect both strengths and challenges. The County benefits from low real estate taxes, a central location, and a low cost of living, which support its appeal for businesses and residents. However, workforce gaps, aging infrastructure, and limited utilities hinder development. There are concerns about the quality of education and healthcare systems, including a lack of medical specialists, and the quality of public schools. Community cohesion remains a challenge, as does retaining young, skilled workers amid rising automation and a cultural divide between urban and rural residents. Aging water and sewer systems and insufficient broadband further complicate economic growth efforts.

Opportunities for economic growth center on leveraging Henry County's strengths, such as its strategic location, existing shell buildings, and outdoor recreation assets. Expanding broadband and improving utilities are seen as foundational steps. Revitalization of older industrial spaces into retail, residential, or mixed-use developments could enhance community appeal. Investments in workforce training, particularly in skilled trades, would address labor shortages while supporting emerging industries like data centers and advanced manufacturing. Beautification projects and enhanced marketing of the County's brand are additional ways to attract businesses and residents. A focus on long-term planning, including funding for new parks and strategic industrial investments, is essential to future growth.

Key Themes:

- » Competitive Advantages
- » Quality of Life Improvements
- » Housing
- » Improving Public Schools
- » Youth Attraction and Retention
- » Business/Industrial Park Development
- » Industrial Rehabilitation and Reuse

Education Focus Group

Henry County benefits from strong collaboration among educational providers like Henry County Public Schools (HCPS), Patrick & Henry Community College (P&HCC), and New College Institute (NCI). Programs such as internships with local industries (e.g., Eastman, Press Glass), dual enrollment opportunities, the Career Academy, and initiatives like the Harvest SEED Plan provide robust pathways for workforce development. Libraries play a key role as community hubs, offering diverse programming, online resources, and technological support for job seekers. P&HCC and NCI provide specialized workforce development programs and training in fields like advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and renewable energy. The County has a high penetration rate for community college enrollment and maintains strong partnerships with employers to develop relevant training programs.

Several challenges need addressing to maximize the impact of existing resources. Space limitations affect libraries, schools, and workforce training facilities, hindering the addition of new programs like tourism, hospitality, and technical trades. Declining school enrollment, exacerbated by population loss and attendance issues, requires targeted interventions. Competitive wages and a lack of local housing discourage retention of young professionals and out-of-area trainees. To enhance participation in upskilling programs, more flexible scheduling and financial incentives from employers are recommended. Facility upgrades, especially for older school buildings, libraries, and training centers, are critical. Expanding public safety programs, transportation options, and affordable childcare were also identified as barriers to growth. A focus on housing and quality-of-life improvements for young adults could further support the County's goals.

Key Themes:

- » Partnerships
- » Jobs Training
- » Advanced Manufacturing
- » Public School Renovations
- » Space Limitations
- » Libraries
- » Upskilling
- » Childcare

Housing Focus Group

Henry County faces critical housing challenges, including a low inventory of affordable, move-in-ready homes and rising construction costs. Many local buyers lack down payment assistance, and younger workers show limited interest in the trades necessary for new housing developments. Dilapidated housing across the County negatively impacts appearance and safety, while stricter subdivision rules requiring state-maintained roads have limited development on private roads. Although the County has seen some success in market-rate rental housing converted from historic properties, most housing types remain in short supply, particularly single-family homes and affordable options.

To address these challenges, the County must prioritize diverse housing development, including affordable single-family homes, townhouses, and rental units. Public-private partnerships and incentives, such as historic tax credits, can encourage adaptive reuse of properties for workforce housing. Strategic investments in utilities and roads are necessary to enable new subdivisions. Revitalization efforts could include stricter property maintenance laws and targeted redevelopment of dilapidated housing. The County could also explore offering public land to developers to create workforce housing aimed at younger professionals, like teachers and first responders. These initiatives would help attract and retain a more diverse population while addressing housing shortages.

Key Themes:

- » Older Housing Stock
- » Property Maintenance
- » Housing Obsolescence
- » Down payments
- » Affordability
- » Homelessness
- » Multi-Family Housing
- » Apartments
- » Public Roads
- » Workforce Housing

Public Health Focus Group

Henry County's public health ecosystem has notable strengths, including the presence of the Martinsville-Henry County Health Department and Piedmont Community Services (PCS), both of which play vital roles in addressing community health. The health department provides comprehensive services, including clinics for immunizations, STI treatment, and family planning, alongside outbreak prevention and environmental health oversight. PCS offers mental health and substance abuse support, partnering effectively with local governments and organizations like Sovah Health to provide recovery programs, housing, and employment opportunities. The County benefits from interconnected services, a strong epidemiological team, and specialized nursing programs, which contribute to overall community well-being. Initiatives such as Narcan education and free Medicaid-supported clinics help address immediate healthcare needs, while partnerships between agencies and local schools enable early identification of health and behavioral challenges among children.

Despite these strengths, significant challenges remain. Recruiting qualified healthcare professionals and meeting stringent state requirements is difficult, particularly for clinicians and case managers. Facility shortages and outdated infrastructure hinder service delivery, and exacerbate the already limited availability of pediatric and obstetric care. Transportation barriers prevent residents from accessing appointments, and systemic inefficiencies in Medicaid transport further complicate access to care. Mental health and substance abuse needs are growing, especially among youth, with limited outpatient counseling and crisis intervention services available. Addressing these gaps requires expanded recruitment efforts, targeted incentives for healthcare providers, improved transportation systems, and enhanced community outreach to bolster preventative care and sustain vital programs.

Key Themes:

- » Obstetrics
- » Mental Health
- » Drug Abuse Prevention and Rehabilitation
- » Death's of Despair
- » Children's Medical Care
- » Nutrition and Access to Healthy Food
- » Barriers to Access to Healthcare
- » Transit
- » Professional Recruitment
- » Workforce Housing

Public Safety Focus Group

Henry County's public safety ecosystem is characterized by strong collaboration among law enforcement, EMS, and fire services, resulting in improved community safety. Police now accompany EMS teams to potentially hazardous calls, and law enforcement personnel are equipped with Narcan to enhance emergency response outcomes. The County's volunteer fire departments are well-regarded for their equipment and dedication, and Fire Marshals actively conduct inspections and provide free smoke and carbon monoxide alarms to residents. Response times are commendable for a rural area, aided by innovations in the 911 dispatch system. Despite limited funding, public safety agencies have adapted to resource constraints, maintaining high service levels.

Challenges include declining volunteerism, rising equipment costs, and increasing service demands from population growth and socioeconomic issues. Additionally, resources are not always optimally distributed throughout the County, which can exacerbate challenges. Staffing shortages affect all public safety sectors, with difficulties recruiting for both paid and volunteer positions. Aging facilities, such as Fieldale's fire station, and outdated equipment, like defibrillators, further strain operations. The County faces growing issues related to drug use, mental health, and homelessness, which complicate emergency responses and community safety. To ensure sustainability, stakeholders recommend increasing public safety funding, addressing volunteer shortages, replacing obsolete equipment, and expanding facilities in underserved areas like Laurel Park.

- » Cooperation Between Agencies
- » Declining Volunteerism
- » Drug Abuse
- » Staffing Challenges
- » Aging Facilities
- » Homelessness
- » Need for New Equipment

Tourism and Parks Focus Group

Henry County has made significant progress in developing its tourism and parks infrastructure, making it a compelling destination for outdoor recreation and cultural activities. The County boasts 29 park facilities, including the Philpott Marina with a 20-year waitlist for boat slips, the Smith River Sports Complex attracting 30,000 visitors annually, and an 11-mile greenway. Popular attractions include fishing, kayaking, and fly fishing on the Smith River, as well as camping, museums like the Virginia Museum of Natural History, and events at Hamlet Vineyards. Recreation programming, such as fairs, festivals, and youth sports, complements these amenities. Collaborative efforts between local agencies, the Economic Development Corporation, and private stakeholders have further bolstered the County's tourism appeal. The development of Riverview Park, with plans for ziplines and disc golf, highlights future potential for expanding recreational offerings.

Despite these strengths, challenges remain. The lack of diverse restaurants, hotels, and shopping options hinders tourism growth, as visitors often stay in neighboring cities. Limited marketing and information dissemination about events and attractions reduce awareness both locally and externally. Roadside aesthetics and perceptions of the area's opioid crisis negatively impact the County's image. Infrastructure gaps, such as insufficient cell coverage at Philpott Lake and a lack of handicapped-accessible facilities, further limit the County's ability to host major events. Addressing these barriers through expanded lodging options, enhanced promotion, and strategic partnerships—such as collaborating with the US Army Corps of Engineers for park upgrades—will be critical. Additional focus on storytelling and branding, along with improved connectivity and amenities, could attract more visitors and support economic growth.

Key Themes:

- » Sports Tourism
- » Water Access
- » Camping
- » Music Festivals
- » Cooperation Between EDC and Other Agencies/Donors
- » Need for Hotels
- » NASCAR
- » Handicapped Fishing
- » Storytelling and Branding

Transportation Focus Group

The transportation network in Henry County has many strengths as well as several important opportunities for improvement. Participants noted that much of the road network, built largely between the 1970s and 1990s, provides strong connectivity through primary routes which connect major centers of population and industry within the County. These roads, along with major “Interstate-like” highways US 220 and 58, provide vehicular capacity which is mostly sufficient for the County’s current needs. This system represents an important asset for the County which can be built on, and roads with excess capacity can provide opportunities for reprogramming to accommodate alternate modes of transportation, or for aesthetic improvements.

While the current roadway network is mostly sufficient there are important needs such as safety improvements along US 220, and importantly along more rural roads where crash types such as run-off-road and high velocity collisions can occur, and which can be exacerbated by speed, narrow lanes, and lack of shoulders. A critical need for the County is improving the access to Commonwealth Crossing, which will require state funding and possibly cooperation from neighboring North Carolina, but which is a major driver of economic growth. This issue should be a regional priority for improvement.

Participants also noted the need for more active transportation options, such as sidewalks and greenways, and specifically for the extension of the Dick & Willie Passage to form a backbone for a non-motorized transportation network. Additionally, there was also support for expanding transit access within the County, particularly into the northwestern portion, and for connecting with different “village centers”, as well as adding park-and-ride facilities at strategic locations.

Key Themes:

- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| » Industrial Access | » Active Transportation | » Road Diets |
| » Transit | » Greenways | » Boulevards |
| » Safety | » Bike Lanes | » Park-and-Rides |

Utilities and Public Infrastructure Focus Group

Henry County’s utility and infrastructure network boasts several strengths, including reliable relationships with providers, adequate water and wastewater capacity, and extensive broadband coverage. However, extending utilities to underserved rural areas is costly and complicated by topography and regulatory hurdles. Gas service is particularly limited, and utility infrastructure expansions often require grant funding or low-interest loans to be feasible. While broadband covers 90% of the County, last-mile connectivity remains a challenge in less densely populated areas. Outdated water and sewer lines and a need for more resilient infrastructure further highlight the County’s vulnerabilities.

Opportunities lie in proactive utility planning and targeted investments to attract industries like advanced manufacturing and data centers. Prioritizing broadband expansion and integrating it into new developments as standard infrastructure would bolster connectivity and economic competitiveness. The County’s excess water and wastewater capacity could support industrial growth, particularly at sites like the Patriot Centre Industrial Park. Renewable energy initiatives, including community solar projects, represent emerging areas for development. Investments in shell buildings, grading rail-served industrial sites, and improving utility access to rural and industrial areas would create immediate and long-term economic opportunities.

Key Themes:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--|
| » Topography | » Capacity for Industry |
| » Limited Gas Service | » Renewable Energy and Energy Transmission |
| » Last-Mile Broadband Connectivity | » Improving Utility Access to Industry |
| » Old Water and Sewer Lines | |

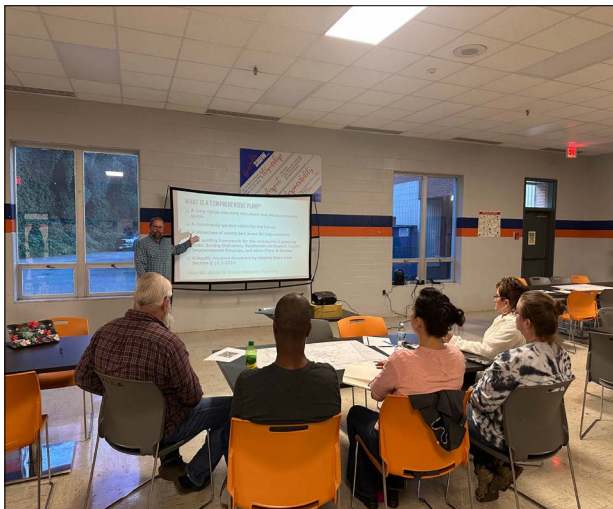
Public Workshops

■ Three public workshops were held on October 22, October 30th, and November 21st, each at a different evening location throughout the community. A total of 18 residents participated. The format for the workshops included a short presentation concerning the Comprehensive Plan Update process and several live-polling exercises, followed by group visioning exercises performed by participants at their table. Each table was provided with a question packet containing 3-4 exercises, a map of the County, and other materials for writing and making notes. At the end of the workshop, each group shared their answers to the questions in the packet with the whole room. A question on Active Transportation was included in all workshop materials for the purpose of gathering data for the County's Active Transportation Plan.

Overall, participants indicated general satisfaction with the County, and pride in their shared history. Opportunities identified included continuing the economic reinvention of the County and continued job growth and training, preservation and revitalization of the historic "Mill Towns", as well as increasing access to recreation amenities.

Participants also highlighted several challenges affecting the community: Property maintenance emerged as a significant concern, with neglected properties creating a poor impression and detracting from the progress the community has made. Safety issues were noted on several roads due to speeding and inadequate traffic management. Residents also had concerns about safety on the County's trails due to their remoteness and issues such as homelessness. Some areas of the County, such as Axton and Sandy River, lack sufficient fire and rescue services, and declining volunteerism was noted as an issue Countywide. Additional and more affordable housing options, along with better transit options were also identified as critical needs, along with concerns about insufficient high-speed internet access and amenities for youth.

To address these issues, participants recommended much stronger enforcement of property maintenance by the County, as well as the use of grants or incentives to encourage improvements. Professionalization of fire and rescue services in underserved areas was emphasized as a priority. Enhanced trail safety through lighting, increased patrols and emergency infrastructure was suggested. Improving the frequency of public transit was a frequent suggestion. Participants also called for investments in affordable housing, including options for seniors, single-family homes, and apartments near key areas like hospitals and community colleges. Specific recommendations included reopening and modernizing the Bassett Community Center, developing river access and handicap fishing docks, and introducing more youth-oriented activities and amenities to retain younger residents.

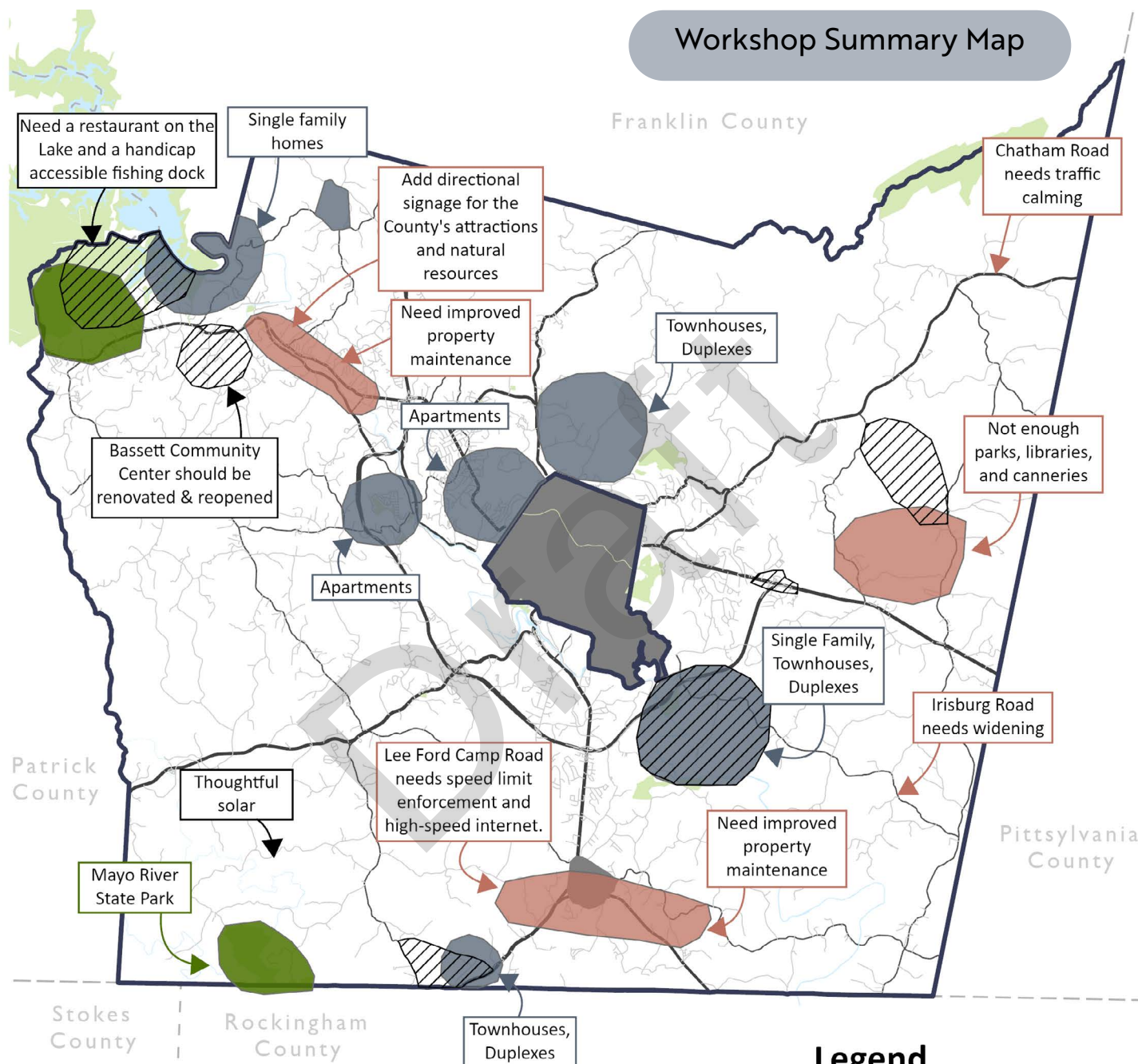


Public Workshop #1,
conducted at Bassett High School



Public Workshop #3,
conducted at Galilean House of Worship

Workshop Summary Map



This map is a diagrammatic representation of input received from the public workshops.

0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles

N

Legend

- County Boundary
- Water Features
- Conserved Lands
- City of Martinsville
- Ridgeway
- Residential Development
- Commercial Development
- Areas for Improvement
- Agriculture, Parks, and Open Space

The following is a summary of responses for each question asked at the Workshops, along with key themes that emerged:

Question 1: Land Use - In the future, how should land in Henry County be used?

Use the provided map to color, outline, or shade the areas of the County you think should be used for each purpose.

Summary:

Residents highlighted the need for more intentional land use planning than in the past, and to create balanced, thriving neighborhoods. Participants emphasized that growth should focus on integrating new, high-quality development into the landscape, rather than allowing development to sprawl without addressing community needs.

Suggestions included ensuring that future residential development better aligns with access to transportation options. Participants also expressed the desire for additional housing types, advocating for transit-oriented neighborhoods and senior-friendly housing near essential destinations. Improved landscaping and aesthetic enhancements were suggested to better utilize and elevate main thoroughfares. Additionally, participants stressed the importance of careful site selection and design for solar power facilities, ensuring that such projects fit cohesively within the County's broader land use goals, and protect residents from negative impacts.

Key Themes:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| » Greater Density | Variety | » Landscaping |
| » Transit Oriented Development | » Thriving Neighborhoods | » Cohesion |
| » Increase Housing Stock and | » Aesthetics | |

Question 2: Roads and Safety - Using the map, circle with blue pen road locations that you believe need improvement. Circle with red pen areas that you believe have safety concerns. If these areas are the same, circle with both colors. Use the space below to note each location and explain the issues you think are important.

Summary:

Participants identified concerns related to road safety and infrastructure in areas such as Chatham Road, Ward Road, and Irisburg Road, feeling that these areas suffer from excessive speeding and frequent accidents. School zones, particularly near Laurel Park Middle School and Magna Vista High School, were discussed for unsafe conditions due to narrow access points and heavy traffic during peak hours. Industrial road entrances were also noted as concerns that require better design and traffic management.

To address these issues, participants recommended traffic calming measures, such as roundabouts, to slow vehicles in high-risk areas and improve overall safety. Widening narrow rural roads and installing flashing warning signs or traffic lights at intersections like Oak Level and US 57 were also proposed. Participants also emphasized the need for better non-motorized connections between key locations, such as Collinsville and Bassett, and improved transit service to rural areas. These changes were seen as important not only for enhancing safety but also for supporting future growth and connectivity in the County.

Key Themes:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| » Improved Transit | » Safety |
| » Non-Motorized Transportation | » School Zones |
| » Traffic Calming | » Speed Enforcement |

Question 3: Mill Towns of Henry County - The County has many historic “Mill Towns” which grew up around the County’s legacy industries. These areas present an opportunity to acknowledge this history, while also helping them to be useful contributors to the County’s future. How can these areas be preserved, and what needs do they have that would help to enhance them? Circle any areas discussed on the attached map and note any improvements you think should be made.

Summary:

Participants identified key areas for revitalization such as Bassett, where property maintenance and building updates were highlighted as priorities. They also felt that stricter enforcement of maintenance codes, improved facades, and increased signage to promote local industries and natural resources is important. Participants suggested renovating the old school buildings for apartments or other community uses. Rocky Mount and Danville were cited as examples of successful revitalization that were similar to what Henry County could do. Examples included ideas to repurpose old industrial buildings for indoor hydroponics, AirBnB properties, restaurants, or venues for youth activities like trampoline parks or rock climbing.

Key Themes:

- » Property Maintenance
- » Streetscaping
- » Short Term Rentals
- » Walkability
- » Block Reprogramming
- » Industrial Redevelopment
- » Façade Improvements
- » Tourism

Question 4: Active Transportation - Which of the following are barriers to biking, walking, and other forms of active transportation in Henry County? This includes travelers who walk, bicycle, use strollers, or wheelchairs or other mobility devices.

Part I: Select all that apply:

- Gaps in the Network
- Lack of Accessibility
- Lack of Connectivity
- Safety Issues
- Level of Comfort
- Lack of Facilities
- Lack of Destinations
- Lack of Connecting Transit Options
- Other: _____

Part II: What are the top three barriers from the list above? List example locations below for each barrier and explain how you think this problem should be solved:

Summary:

Participants identified several barriers to biking, walking, and other forms of active transportation options. Trails, such as those near Patrick Henry College and the Dick & Willie Passage (D&W), were identified as having safety concerns related to drug activity, homelessness, and insufficient lighting. Connectivity gaps were frequently mentioned as well. Expanding transit to connect trails, housing, jobs, and shopping was suggested as a critical improvement. Expansion of transit service to additional locations was also a priority.

Key Themes:

- » Safety
- » Homelessness
- » Increased Connectivity
- » Transit

Question 5: Economic Priorities - Discuss as a group and respond to the following questions:

1. What should be the top three economic development priorities for the County?
2. What should be the top three economic development priorities for the County?
3. What makes the County appealing for visitors?
4. How much of Henry County should remain undeveloped, rural, or be reserved for Agriculture?

Summary:

Participants identified affordable housing and additional housing types as the top priority. They also stressed the importance of attracting large employers capable of providing quality jobs and expanding options for restaurants and hotels. When asked, "What makes Henry County appealing to visitors?" participants pointed to the Martinsville Speedway and the Smith River but noted that these assets need better promotion, and better options for accommodations in order for their benefits to be realized. Regarding land use, participants agreed that approximately two-thirds of the County should remain undeveloped, with reforestation efforts and stricter requirements for replanting after timber harvests.

Key Themes:

- » Additional Housing Types and Affordability
- » Job Creation
- » Accommodations and Services
- » Rural Preservation
- » Reforestation

Question 6: Housing Types - Identify areas that you believe need the following housing types. Mark where you believe they should be on the provided map and describe each here:

1. Single-Family Houses
2. Townhomes and Duplexes
3. Apartments, Condos, or other Multi-Family
4. Farms
5. Other

Summary:

Participants suggested single-family homes are needed near Philpott Lake, the Smith River Sports Complex, and in Irisburg. Townhouses and duplexes were recommended for areas like Commonwealth Crossing, the community college, and the Smith River Sports Complex. Apartments were identified as a need in Fieldale, Collinsville, and areas near hospitals to support professionals like traveling nurses. For farms, participants suggested Irisburg, Blackberry, and Horsepasture as suitable areas.

Key Themes:

- » Workforce Housing
- » Lakefront Living
- » Multifamily Housing in Denser Areas
- » Rural Land Preservation

Question 7: Neighborhood Issues - What do you believe are the top three issues facing neighborhoods in Henry County today? Discuss the issues and list any steps you believe the County should take to address them. Circle any areas you discuss on the provided map.

Summary:

Property maintenance was the most significant concern, especially in Bassett and Ridgeway, where participants suggested stronger code enforcement and grants to assist elderly or low-income residents with repairs. Improved communication about transportation and services was another priority, with calls for more frequent and accessible transit routes. Speeding in areas like Lee Ford Camp Road was flagged as a safety issue, particularly near schools. Other concerns included affordable housing and the need for incentives, such as façade grants, to encourage property improvements.

Key Themes:

- » Property Maintenance
- » Code Enforcement
- » Civic Services
- » Public Communication
- » Traffic Enforcement and Management
- » Affordable Housing

Question 8: Community Facilities - Identify and describe below up to three needed community facilities and mark where you think they are needed on the provided map.

Summary:

Participants identified a new fire department in the eastern part of the County as a needed facility. Reopening and remodeling the Bassett Community Center was also a priority, as was handicapped fishing access. Improving access to high-speed internet was also mentioned.

Key Themes:

- » ADA
- » Fire/EMS Services
- » Rural Broadband

Question 9: Parks & Recreation Priorities - Identify and describe below the top three priorities for future investment in parks, recreation, and natural resources.

Summary:

Participants emphasized the need for better river access in the northern part of the County and suggested adding a restaurant at Philpott Lake. Other ideas included reopening the Bassett Community Center, increasing the frequency of trash removal, creating a handicap-accessible fishing dock, improving wayfinding signage to facilities, and providing more activities for young people to help retain them in the area.

Key Themes:

- » ADA
- » Water Access
- » Tourism
- » Philpott Lake Amenities
- » Community Centers
- » County Services
- » Wayfinding
- » Youth Activities

Interactive Activities

- Berkley Group worked with County staff to build the Shaping Henry County project website (www.shapinghenrycounty.com), which serves as the Comprehensive Plan Update's "home base" for updates about the drafting, worksessions, community engagement opportunities, and relevant background information. The website has been regularly updated and will continue to be updated regularly throughout the drafting process until Plan adoption.

In addition to the in-person community engagement and community survey, the project website included two virtual engagement opportunities: an idea wall and an interactive map. Both opportunities have been routinely advertised to the community and will remain open through the public review period for the community to continue providing feedback. Submittals received for both opportunities through December 31, 2024 have been included in this document for review and consideration.

Idea Wall

The project website included an idea wall that allows community members to provide their vision and input for the Plan through the ability to post comments, in addition to posting responses for other comments.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The table on the following page includes posts submitted to the idea wall through December 31, 2024. The idea wall will remain open throughout the Plan update process and this document will be updated as necessary.

#	Commenter	Idea Wall Post
1	Demetria C.	Creating a Sustainable Future in Henry County, VA Henry County, Virginia, is a community with deep roots in agriculture, rich cultural traditions, and a spirit of resilience. As we look toward the future, we have the opportunity to build a sustainable, thriving county that not only preserves what we love but enhances our quality of life for generations to come. By focusing on sustainable practices in education, resource management, and community care, we can ensure long-term growth that benefits everyone, rather than courting short-term interests that deplete our resources. <u>Education: Cultivating a Knowledge-Based Future</u> The cornerstone of any sustainable community is education. Henry County can take pride in creating an education system that prepares our children for the challenges of tomorrow while remaining grounded in the values of today. By investing in local schools, vocational training, and agricultural education, we can empower the next generation to innovate and contribute to a sustainable economy. Key Initiatives: • Expand agricultural education programs to equip students with the skills to engage in sustainable farming and conservation. • Develop partnerships with local colleges and technical schools to provide training in renewable energy, environmental sciences, and green technologies. • Promote arts and culture education, ensuring that creativity remains a vital part of our community identity. <u>Supporting Local Resources: Sustainable Farming and Clean Water</u> Agriculture has always been the backbone of Henry County, and sustainable farming practices are key to ensuring long-term productivity. Embracing organic farming, permaculture, and regenerative agricultural techniques will protect our soil and waterways, allowing us to feed future generations without depleting our natural resources. Key Initiatives: • Provide resources and incentives for farmers to transition to sustainable farming methods, including soil health improvement and crop rotation. • Encourage the growth of local food systems by supporting farmers' markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) programs. • Implement clean water practices such as protecting natural waterways, reducing agricultural runoff, and promoting water conservation across industries and households.

#	Commenter	Idea Wall Post
1 (ctd.)	Demetria C.	<u>Health and Community Care: Nurturing a Stronger Henry County</u> A sustainable Henry County also means a health Henry County. By focusing on accessible healthcare, mental health resources, and holistic wellness, we can ensure that all residents thrive physically and mentally. Integrating preventive care and community support networks will help create a resilient population ready to face future challenges. Key Initiatives: • Invest in healthcare facilities and local clinics to ensure everyone has access to quality medical care. • Promote mental health awareness and provide support services for those in need, from children to seniors. • Foster community health programs that emphasize preventative care, including nutrition, physical activity, and stress management. <u>Embracing Arts and Culture: Enriching Our Community Spirit</u> Henry County's heritage is deeply connected to the arts, culture, and traditions that make us unique. By supporting local artists, musicians, and cultural events, we can preserve our rich history while fostering a vibrant creative economy that attracts both residents and visitors. Key Initiatives: • Create more public spaces for cultural events, such as art installations, outdoor concerts, and community festivals. • Support local artists through grants and showcase opportunities, helping them to grow their businesses and share their talents. • Foster partnerships between schools, libraries, and local organizations to integrate arts education and cultural preservation into community life. <u>A Future of Balance: Growth That Protects Our Legacy</u> As Henry County grows, we must remain committed to long-term planning that benefits both current and future generations. This means carefully considering which industries to welcome into our community and prioritizing those that align with our values of sustainability, environmental stewardship, and local empowerment. Rather than focusing on industries that extract resources and leave behind damage, we can focus on businesses that bring value to the community—renewable energy companies, sustainable manufacturing, and tourism that celebrates our natural beauty and heritage. This balanced growth will ensure that Henry County remains a beautiful place to live, work, and raise families for years to come.

#	Commenter	Idea Wall Post
1 (ctd.)	Demetria C.	Henry County has all the ingredients for a sustainable, prosperous future: fertile land, a rich cultural heritage, and a tight-knit community that cares deeply for its home. By investing in education, supporting local resources, nurturing health, and embracing the arts, we can create a county that flourishes for generations without sacrificing its soul. Together, we can leave a legacy of abundance, beauty, and balance—a true home for the future. Let's work hand-in-hand to build a Henry County that remains not only the best in the state but an inspiring model of sustainability for the nation.
2	Victoria C., in response to Demetria C.	I'm glad to see Henry County shifting the focus! Scott Vernon of the Sustainable Homestead Institute actually lives in Henry County! He is definitely the person to talk to and get on board for this!
3	Joyce J.	I am really worried about the doctor situation in our area. With Children's Medical Center closing, it's leaving over a thousand kids without a doctor. Young couples will not want to move here for that reason alone. I am concerned if this area doesn't have better healthcare options, it's going to block interest in our area.

Detailed Survey Results

NOTE: Any personal identifying information such as full names, email addresses, phone numbers, or addresses has been redacted from this report.

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