



NRV Livability Initiative – Community Priorities Survey December 2012 - January 2013

Outreach and Citizen Feedback Update:

In December, The New River Valley Livability Initiative conducted a Community Priorities Survey. The survey sought citizen feedback on the proposed goals developed from public input during earlier phases of outreach and a set of topic area goals resulting from a year's worth research and discussion on the part of the Livability Initiative's 7 working groups. The purpose of this survey was to better understand how citizens in the New River Valley Region would prioritize the draft goals identified to date. The results of this survey will be used to better focus scenario and strategy development over the next six months.

We received 465 completed surveys and 192 partial responses. We worked to obtain a proportional sample of responses based on the region's total population, using respondent zip codes as the mechanism for ensuring proportional representation. By doing so, we were also able to get a better understanding of which priorities are common across the region and which ones differ by locality.

In the survey, respondents were asked to indicate how much emphasis they would place on the 6-8 goals developed by the working groups for each topic area: arts & culture, community health, economic development, energy, housing, natural resources, and transportation. For each topic area, two questions were posed:

- First, respondents were given a list of the goals developed by the topic area working group, with accompanying descriptive language. They were asked to rank each one either as: "not a priority", "low priority", "medium priority", "high priority", or "essential priority", with a score of 1-5 assigned to each, respectively. *For this portion, respondents were also given an option to write in a separate goal – a full listing of these write-in goals can be found in an electronic copy of this report, which is available on the Livability Initiative website: www.nrvlivability.org*
- Respondents were then asked to select their top three goals for each topic area, although these top three were not ranked differently.

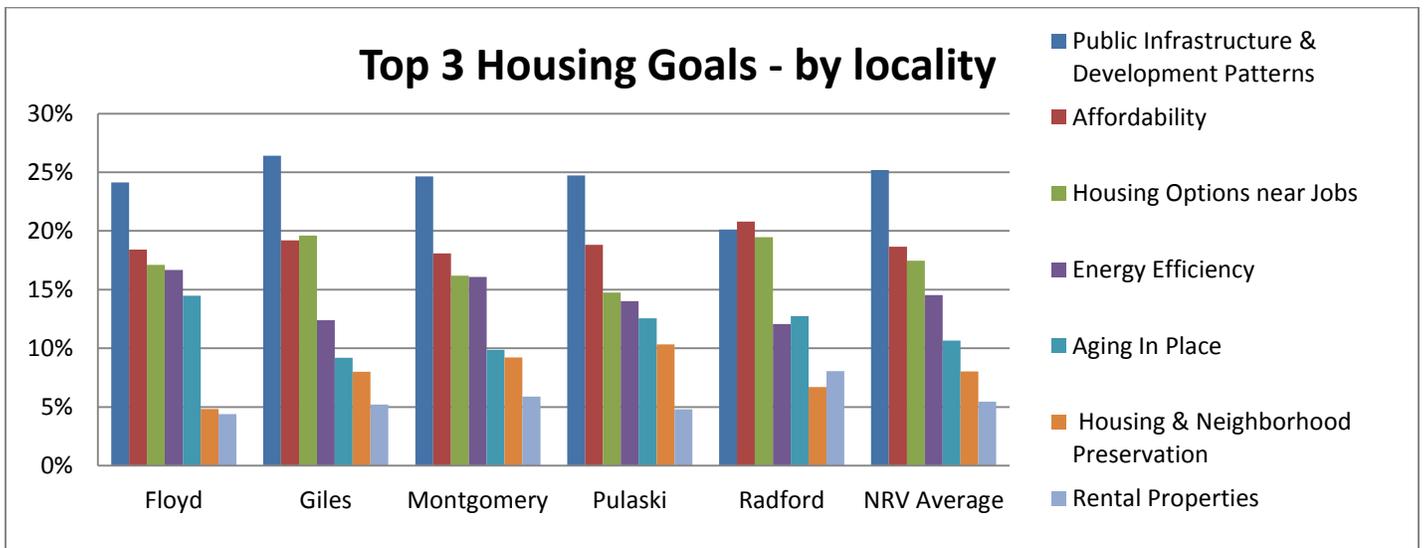
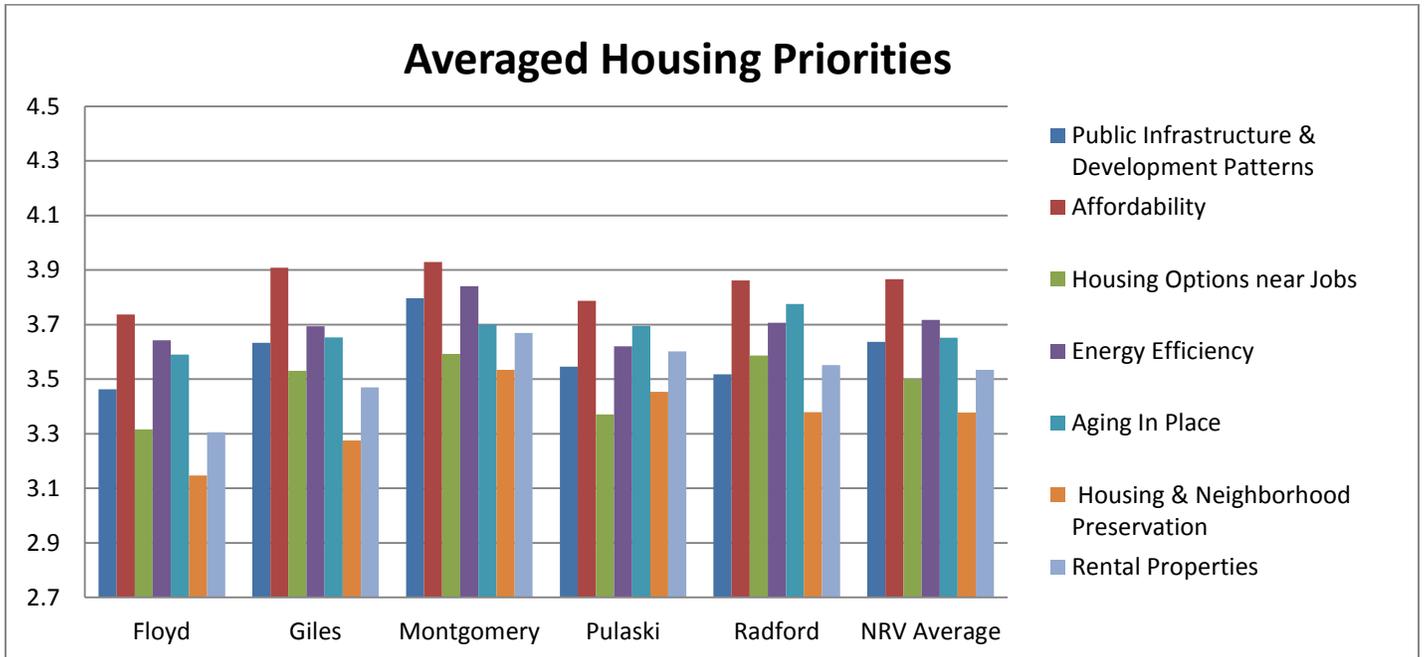
Although these questions appear quite similar, they yielded surprisingly different results. Because respondents were not limited on the first question, i.e. they could theoretically select "essential priority" for each goal listed, responses showed a relatively high degree of support for all the goals listed. In most cases, citizen support for the goals showed an average score of 3 or higher, indicating that respondents felt these goals were either a medium, high, or essential priority; only a handful of goals fell below this score.

For the second question, respondents were forced to narrow their choices down to their top three priority goals. As a result, we see a larger spread in how these are ranked, and in several instances, the order of the goals' ranking is different than what was reflected in the first question.

An analysis of results, broken out by locality and compared to the NRV average, is shown on the pages that follow.

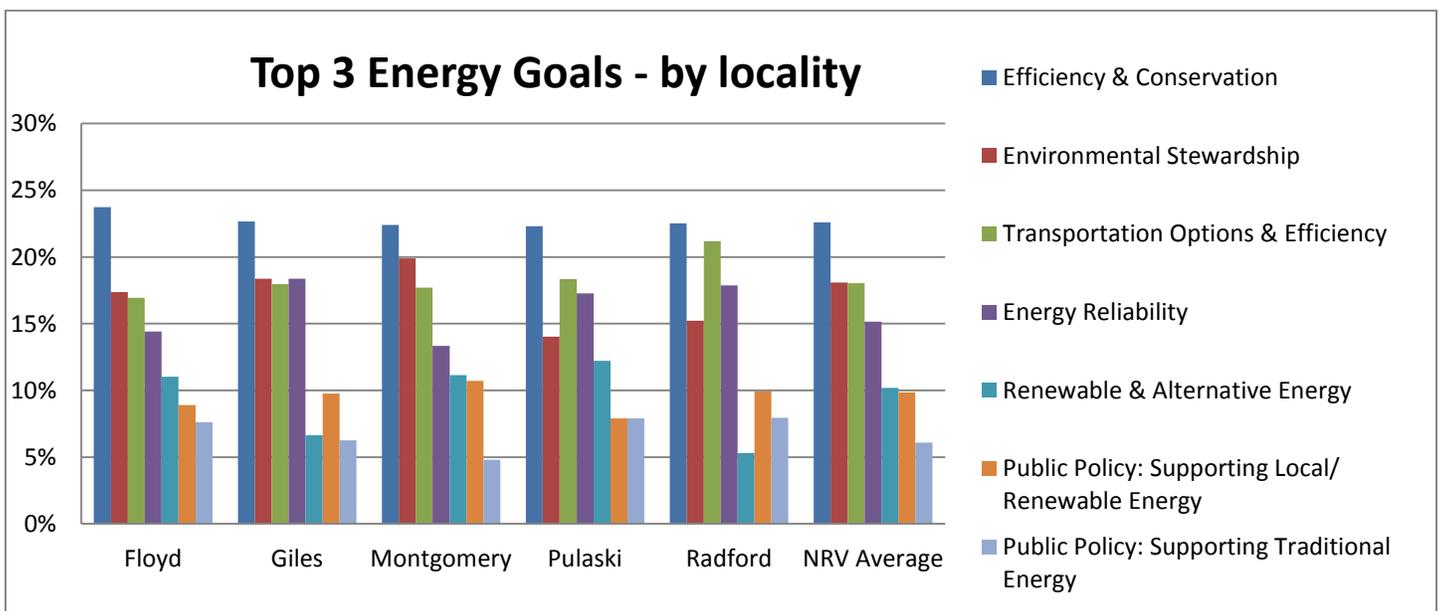
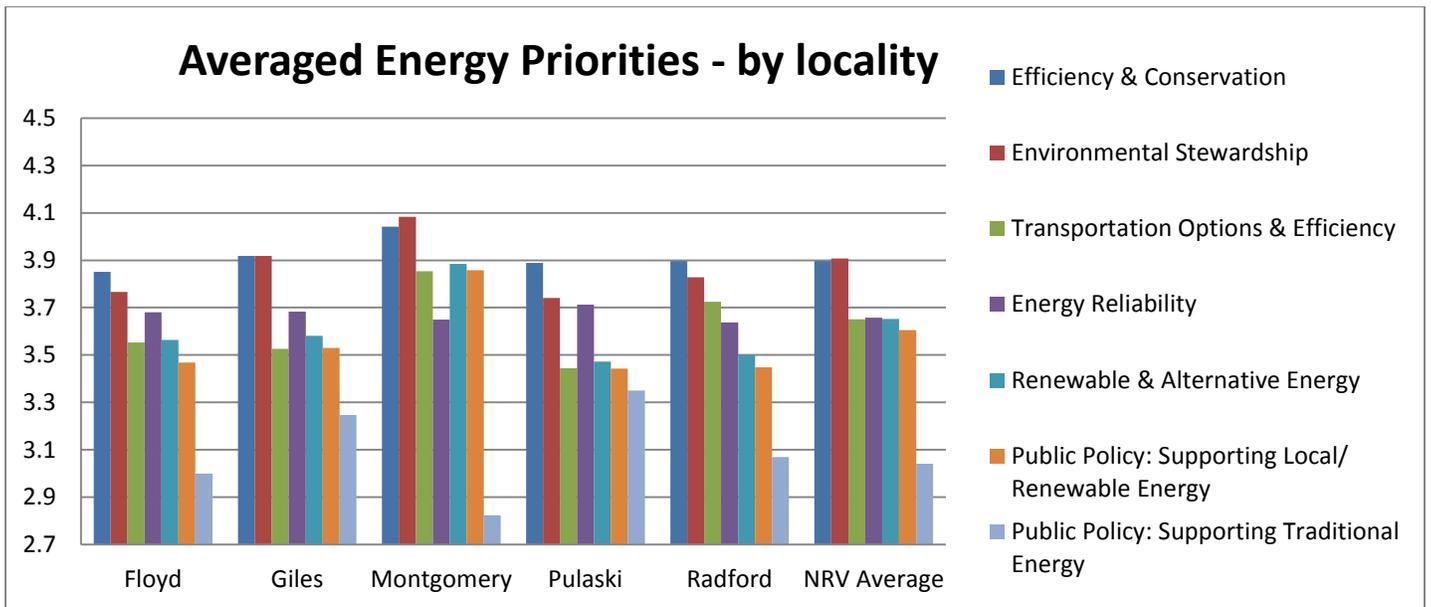
Proposed Housing Goals:

- **Housing Options near Jobs:** People can afford housing options closer to where they work.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Housing is more energy efficient.
- **Public Infrastructure & Development Patterns:** Infrastructure development (e.g. roads, public water & sewer) happens primarily around existing town and job centers to conserve rural landscapes.
- **Affordability:** People of all income groups have access to good housing options.
- **Aging in Place:** Residents can age with more independence and security in their homes and communities.
- **Housing & Neighborhood Preservation:** Existing homes are better maintained in order to preserve property values and housing options.
- **Rental Properties:** Renters and landlords take more responsibility for proper upkeep and maintenance of rental properties.



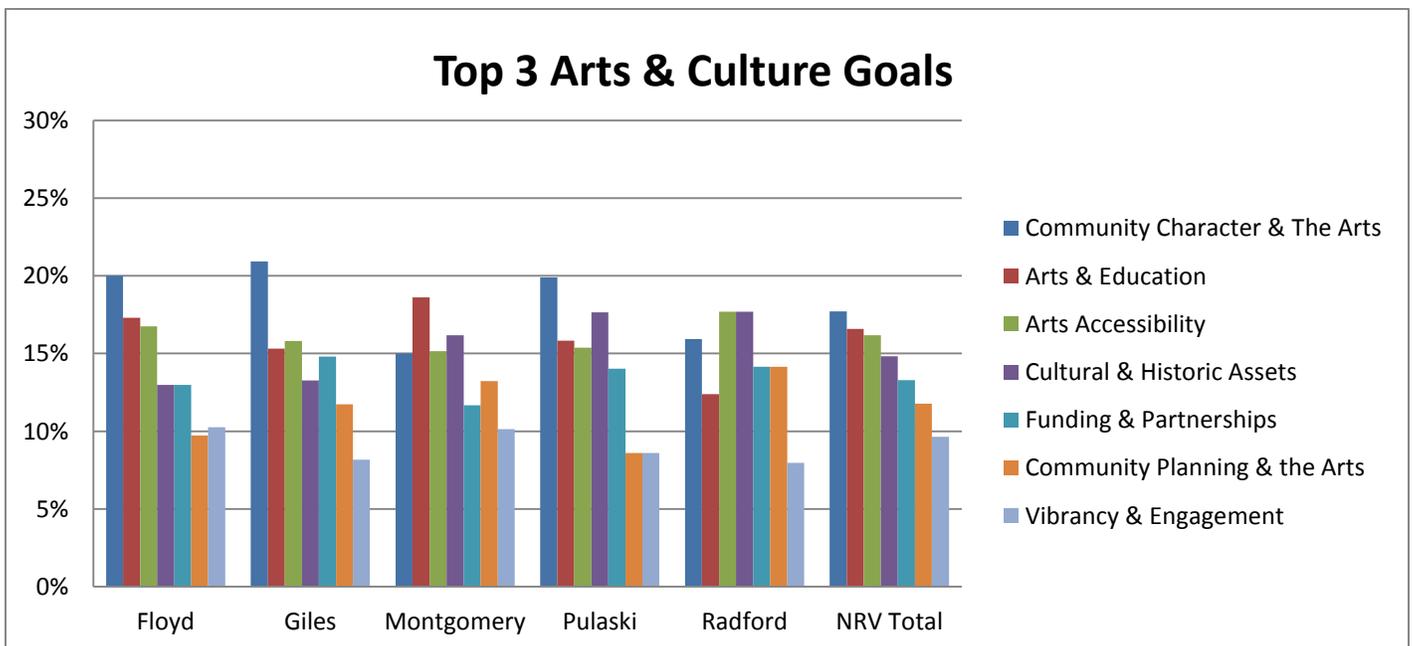
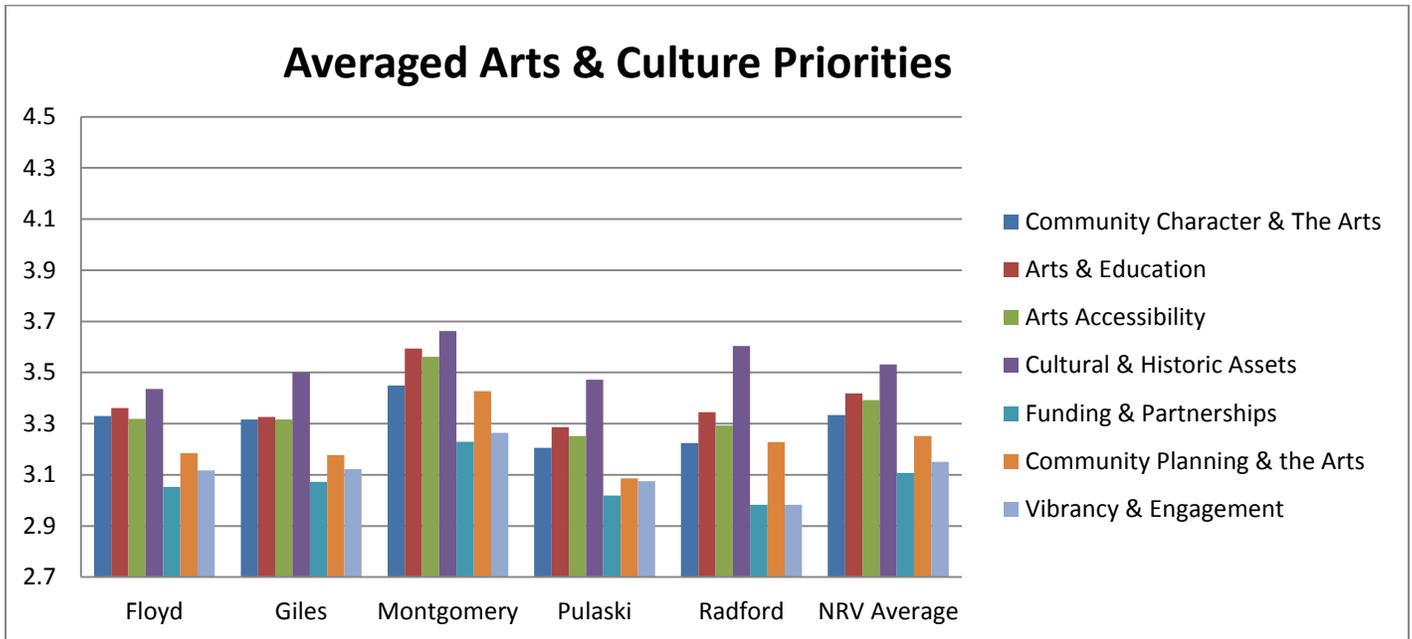
Proposed Energy Goals:

- **Energy Reliability:** Power outages and other energy disruptions are minimized.
- **Efficiency & Conservation:** Energy use (and therefore cost) is reduced in households, businesses, institutions and municipalities through efficiency and conservation.
- **Environmental Stewardship:** Negative impacts of energy production and consumption (air and water pollution, transportation costs, land consumption, etc.) are reduced.
- **Transportation Options & Efficiency:** Expanded and/or improved transportation choices reduce household expenses and improve air quality.
- **Renewable & Alternative Energy:** Renewable and alternative energy use continues to expand in the New River Valley.
- **Public Policy – Local/Renewable Energy:** State, regional and local leaders are working together to create policies that support renewable energy, such as solar, wind, geothermal and biomass.
- **Public Policy – Traditional Energy:** State, regional and local leaders are working together to create policies that support traditional energy sources, such as coal and natural gas.



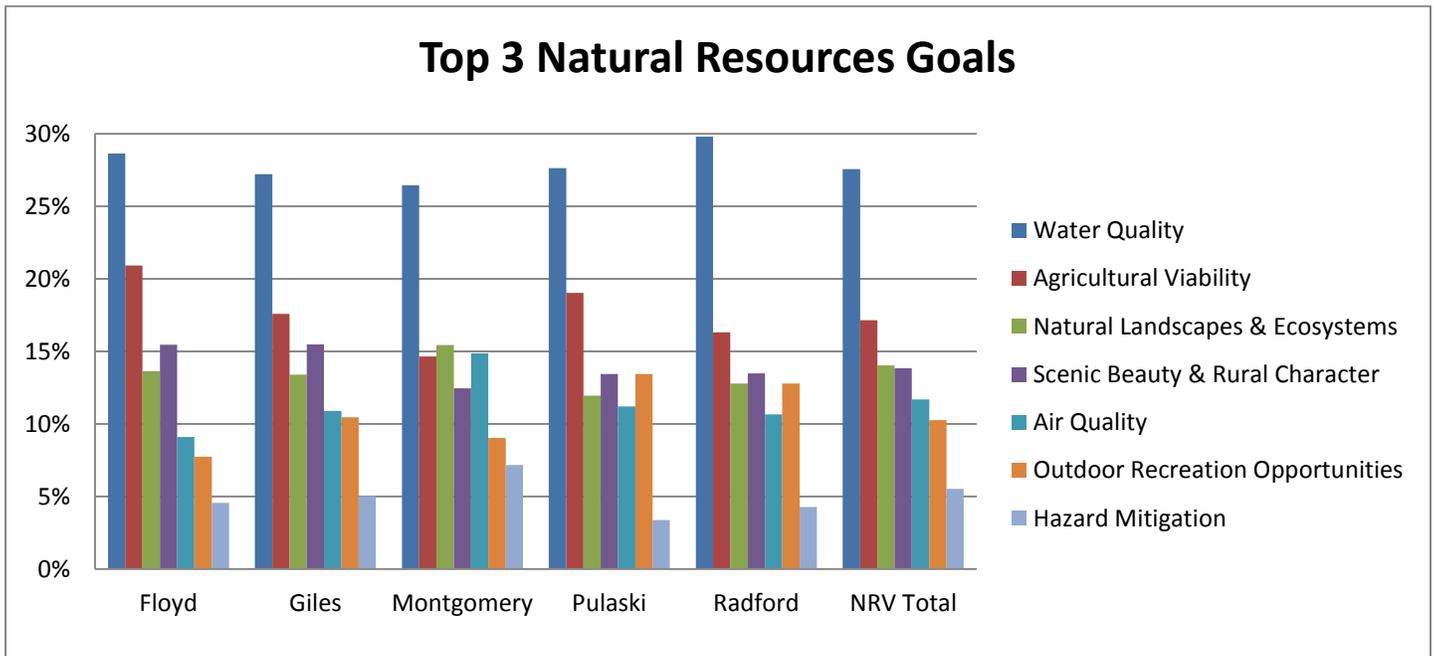
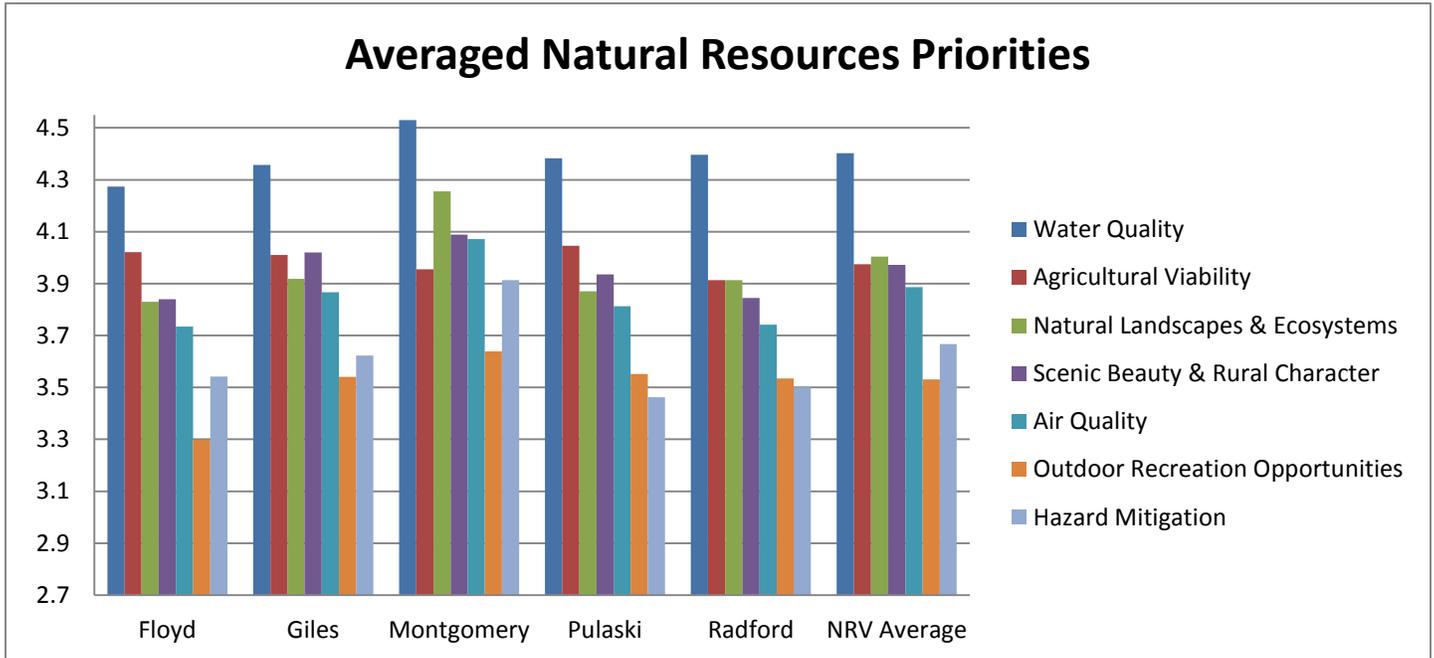
Proposed Arts & Culture Goals:

- **Community Character:** Residents recognize that the arts, culture and history are central to defining and building community character and pride.
- **Vibrancy & Engagement:** Artists and communities work together to increase the public's awareness and engagement in the arts.
- **Funding & Partnerships:** Stable funding sources and lasting partnerships support existing and new arts based efforts and organizations.
- **Arts & Education:** History, culture and artistic expression are integrated into the fabric of all levels of education.
- **Arts Accessibility:** The arts and culture activities are accessible and affordable for all people in the NRV.
- **Cultural & Historic Assets:** Cultural landmarks, historic sites and related assets in the New River Valley are preserved and supported.
- **Community Planning & the Arts:** Ensure that the arts are considered in community planning efforts.



Proposed Natural Resource Goals:

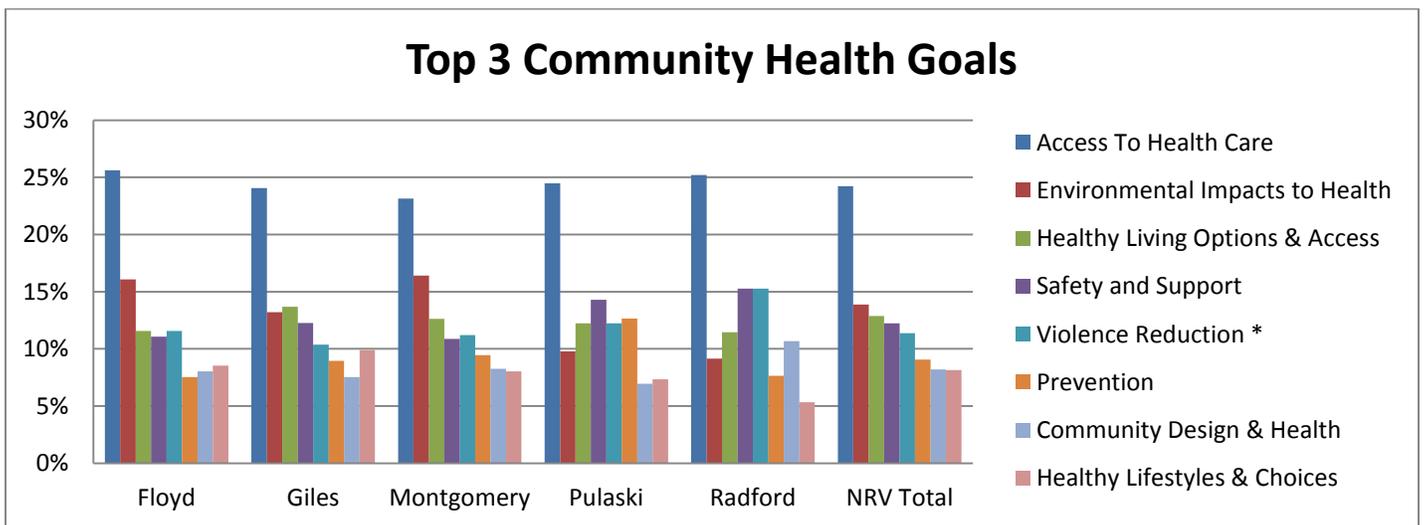
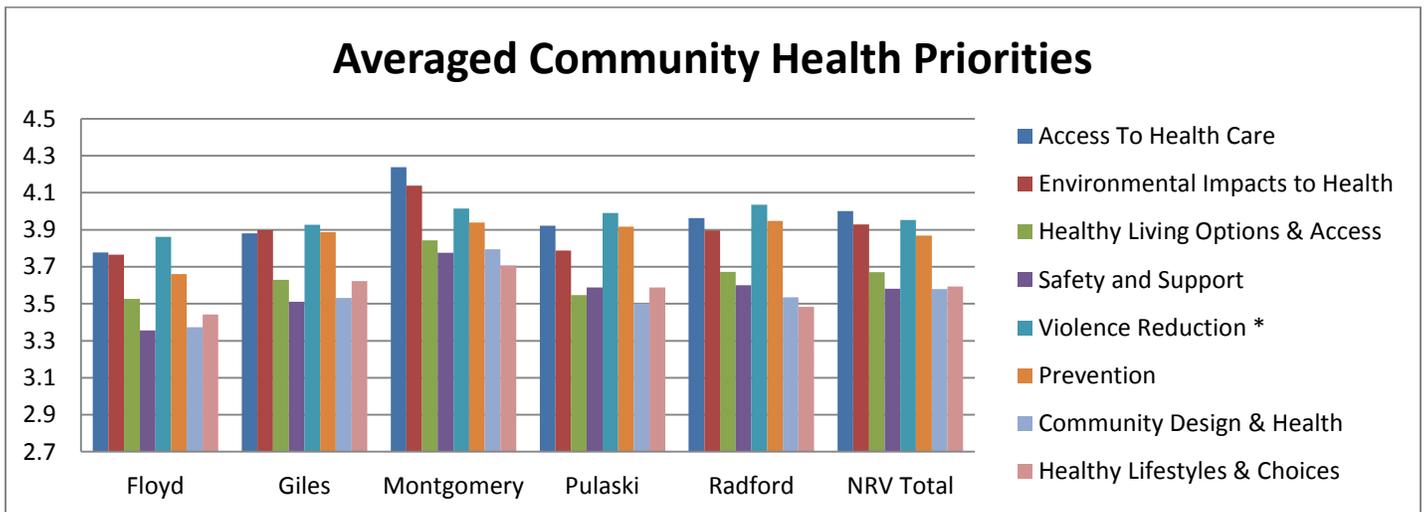
- **Agricultural Viability:** Agriculture in the New River Valley is economically viable.
- **Air Quality:** Air quality is being monitored and maintained.
- **Natural Landscapes:** Intact forests, waterways, and other important habitats and ecosystems are protected.
- **Hazard Mitigation:** No new development occurs in hazardous areas (e.g. flood plains).
- **Scenic Beauty & Rural Character:** Beautiful views are protected to preserve rural character, quality of life and enjoyment of nature.
- **Water Quality:** Water quality and supply is protected.
- **Outdoor Recreation:** More outdoor recreation areas are available to residents and visitors.



Proposed Community Health Goals:

- Access to Health Care:** All residents have access to healthcare services that they can afford.
- Environmental Impacts to Health:** The quality of the air, water and land is maintained or improved to protect public health.
- Healthy Living Options & Access:** More residents have access to healthy living options (such as healthy food, athletic facilities and outdoor recreation opportunities.)
- Prevention:** Preventable chronic conditions, diseases and substance abuse have been significantly reduced.
- Community Design & Health:** Health impacts and costs are considered in community planning and local government decisions.
- Healthy Lifestyles and Choices:** More residents are making healthy lifestyle choices that enhance their quality of life.
- Safety and Support:** More residents feel safe in their homes and communities and are getting the social and emotional support they need.
- Violence Reduction*:** More residents live in homes and communities free of violence.

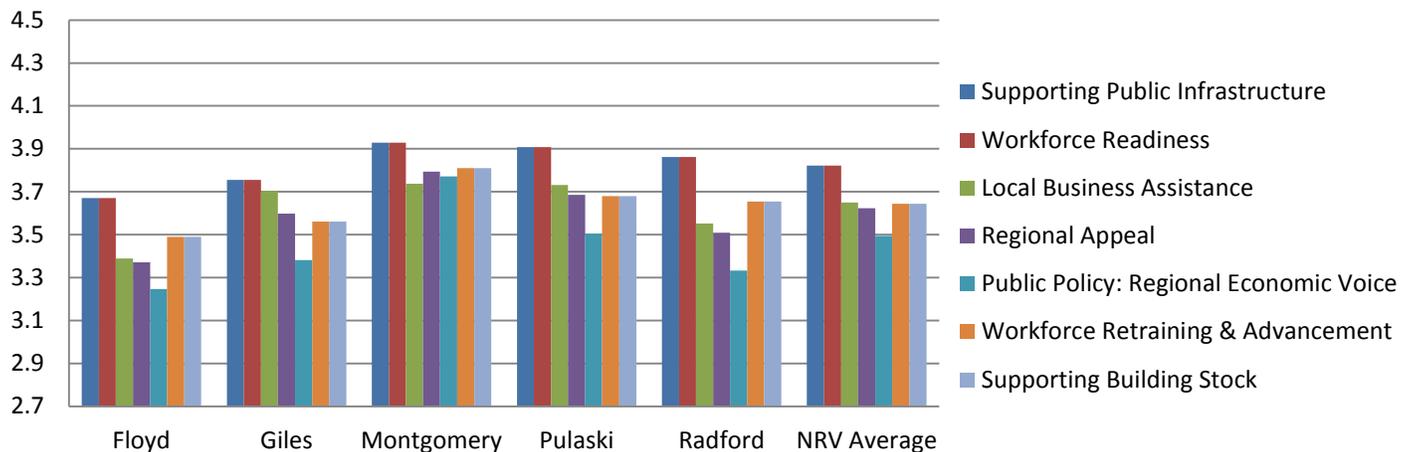
(Note: Prior to the results from this survey, concerns over violence and violent crime have been nearly absent from citizen feedback. Furthermore, according to the County Health Rankings, the NRV has a lower rate of violent crime than the Virginia average; only Radford has a higher rate per capita. The level of priority respondents put on violence reduction seems surprisingly high, therefore it is worth noting that just over 200 of the 465 survey were completed in the immediate aftermath of the school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut. Given our region’s direct experience with this type of tragedy, it is possible that respondents were particularly attuned to the issue of violence reduction in our communities when they answered this question.)



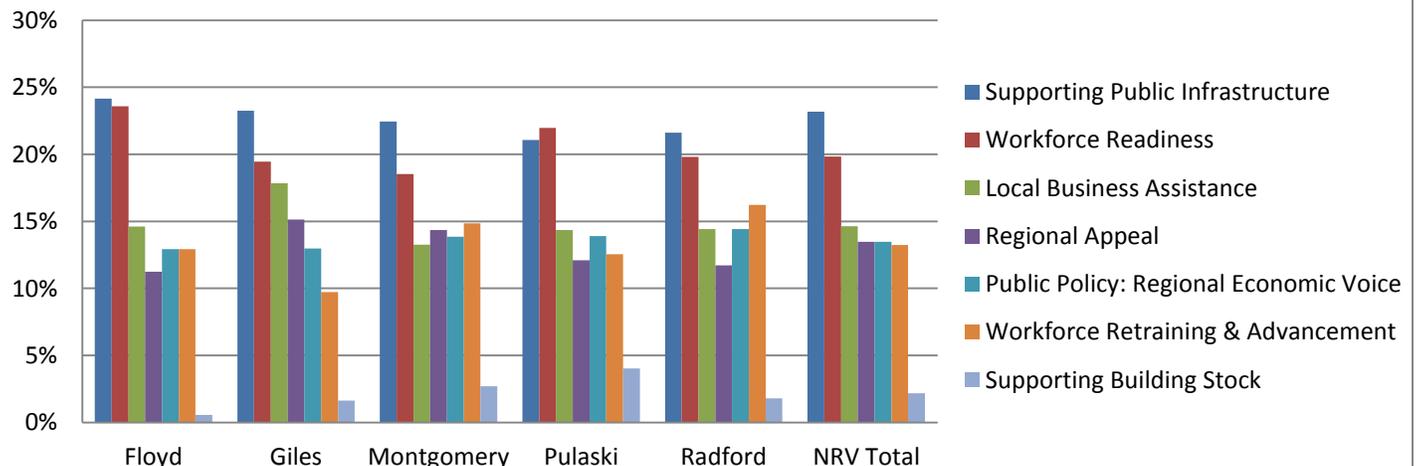
Proposed Economy & Employment Goals:

- **Local Business Assistance:** Business support services are in place to help new and existing businesses.
- **Workforce Readiness:** Residents have the education necessary to reach their full potential as citizens, workers and leaders.
- **Supporting Public Infrastructure:** Economic development goals are supported by sufficient infrastructure, including roads, utilities and high-speed broadband access.
- **Workforce Retraining & Advancement:** Workers in the New River Valley have opportunities to learn new skills and enhance existing ones in a changing economic landscape.
- **Supporting Building Stock:** The region has adequate commercial and industrial buildings (e.g. office space, warehouse space) to attract and retain businesses.
- **Regional Appeal:** The New River Valley has a regional identity supported by the arts, vibrant downtowns, outdoor recreation and scenic beauty in order to attract new businesses, workers and visitors.
- **Public Policy:** Governments and private partners work together, advancing regional economic priorities and presenting a united voice to state and federal partners.

Averaged Economy & Employment Priorities

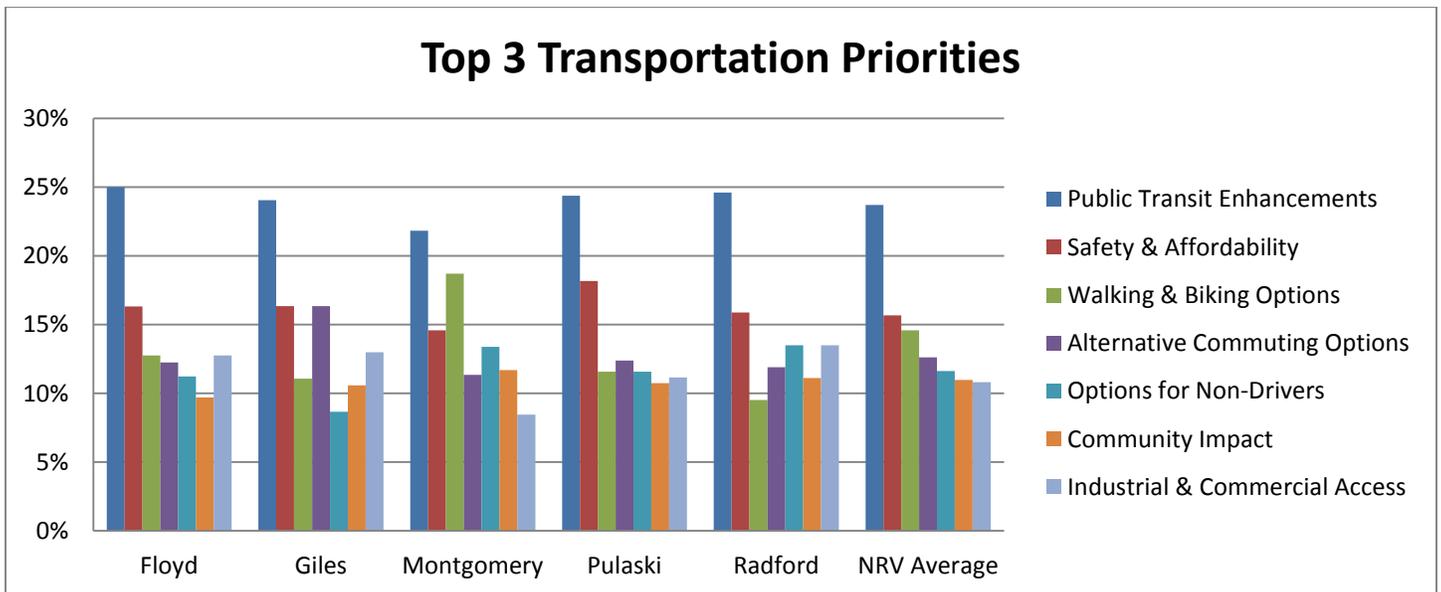
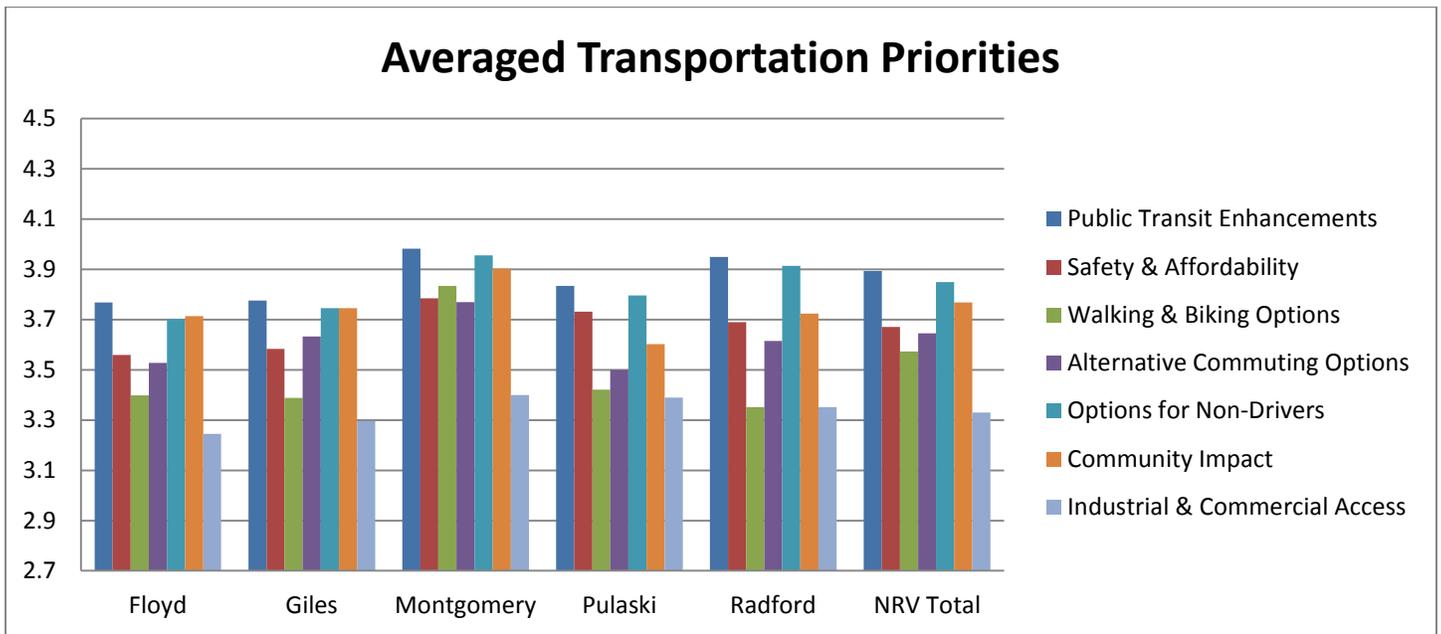


Top 3 Economy & Employment Goals



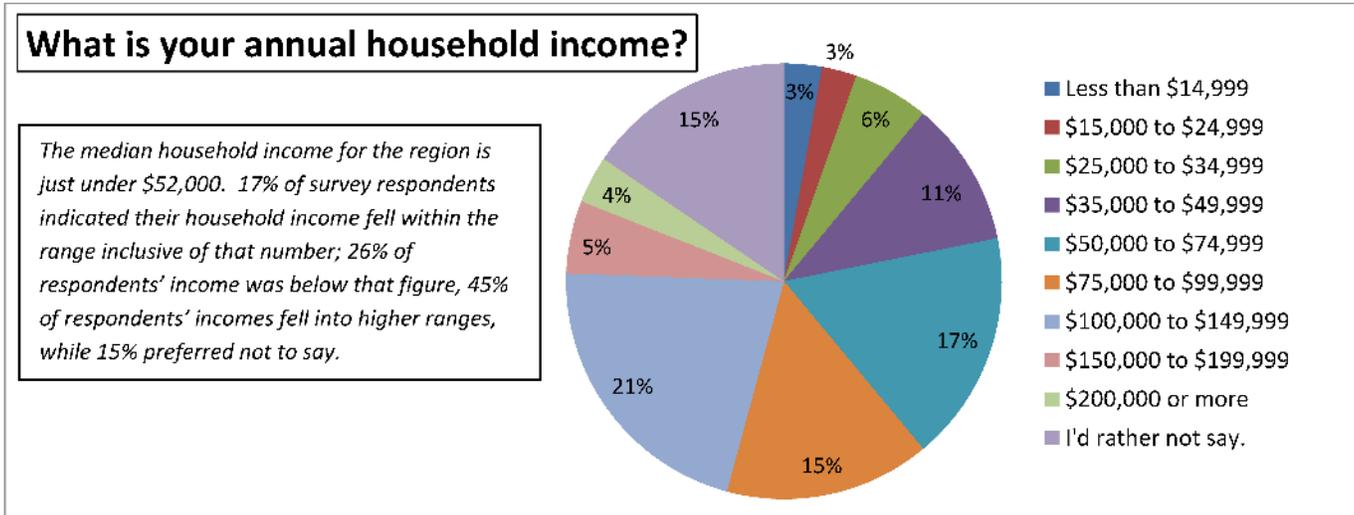
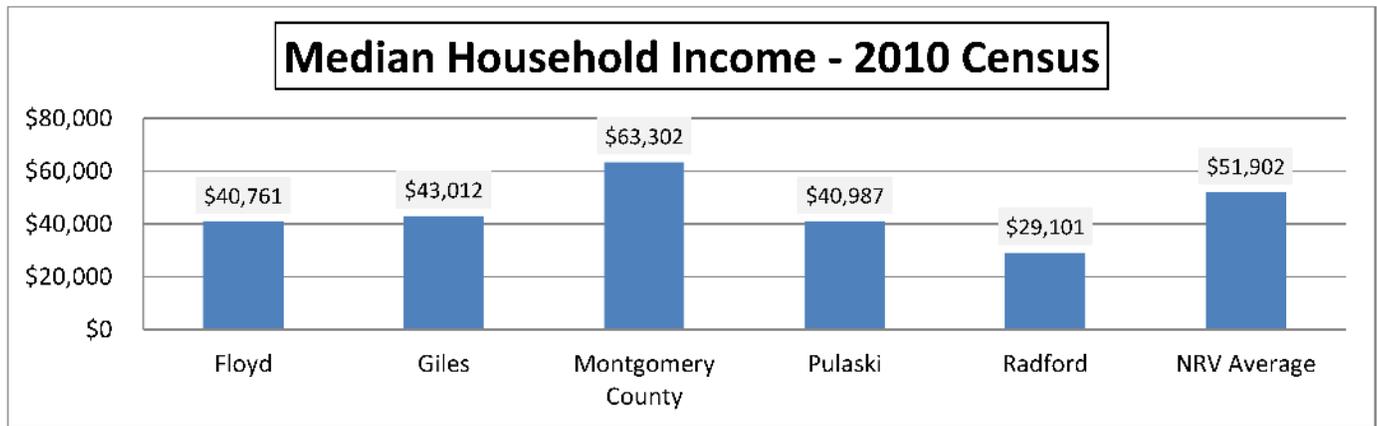
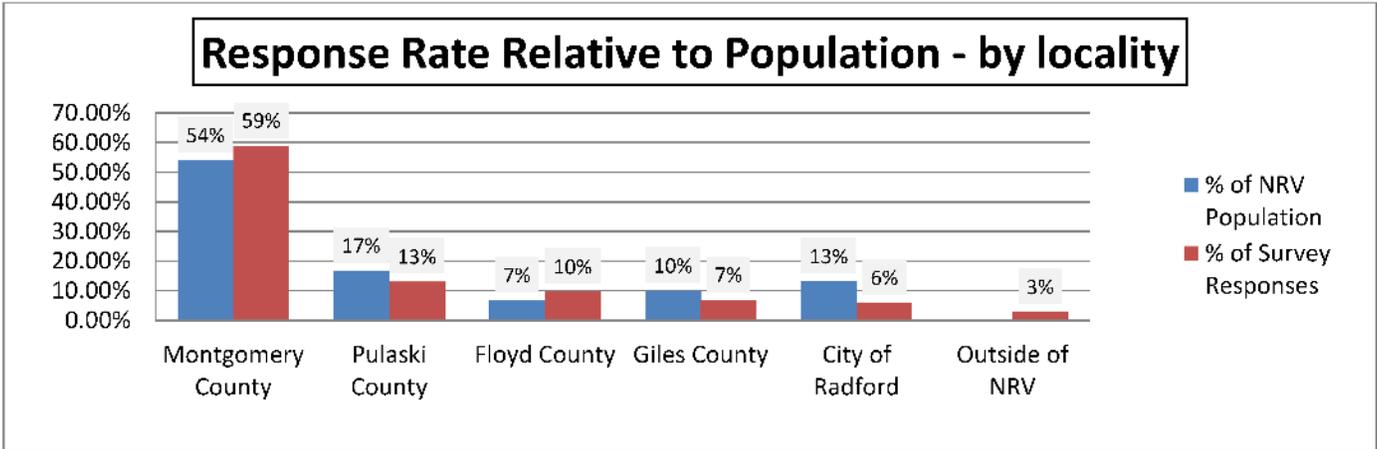
Proposed Transportation Goals:

- **Industrial & Commercial Access:** Transportation access to industrial and commercial areas within the region is improved.
- **Safety & Affordability:** The regional transportation system is safe, secure and affordable for all users.
- **Walking & Biking Options:** There are more options to walk or bike in each community.
- **Public Transit Enhancements:** The public transit system is more efficient (reduced travel times and more reliable connections).
- **Community Impact:** New transportation projects consider impacts to the natural environment, historic preservation and community needs.
- **Options for Non-Drivers:** Non-drivers (e.g. youth, elderly, those without a car) have the ability to get where they need to go with ease.
- **Alternative Commuting Options:** Transportation options (van pool, park-n-ride lots, etc.) have expanded to the more rural areas of the region.

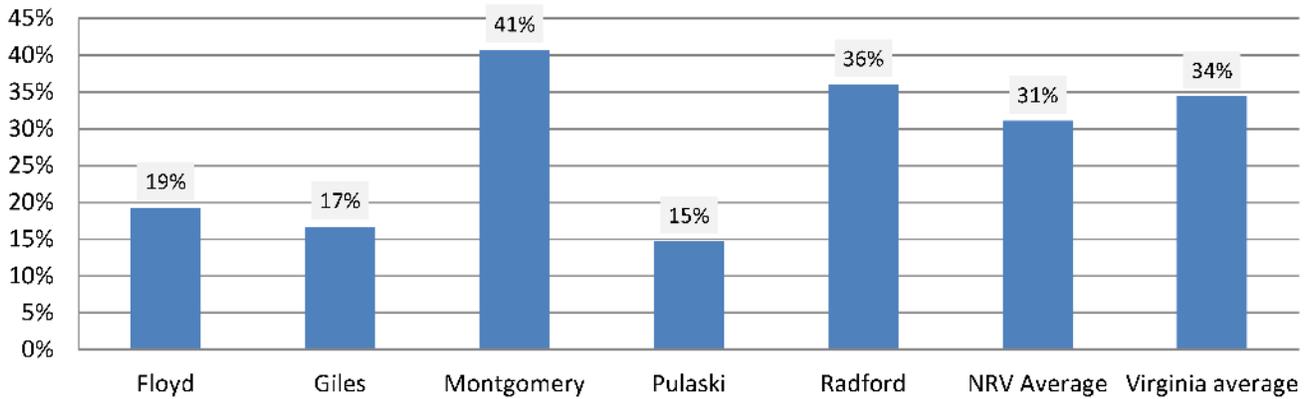


Results from Selected Demographic Questions:

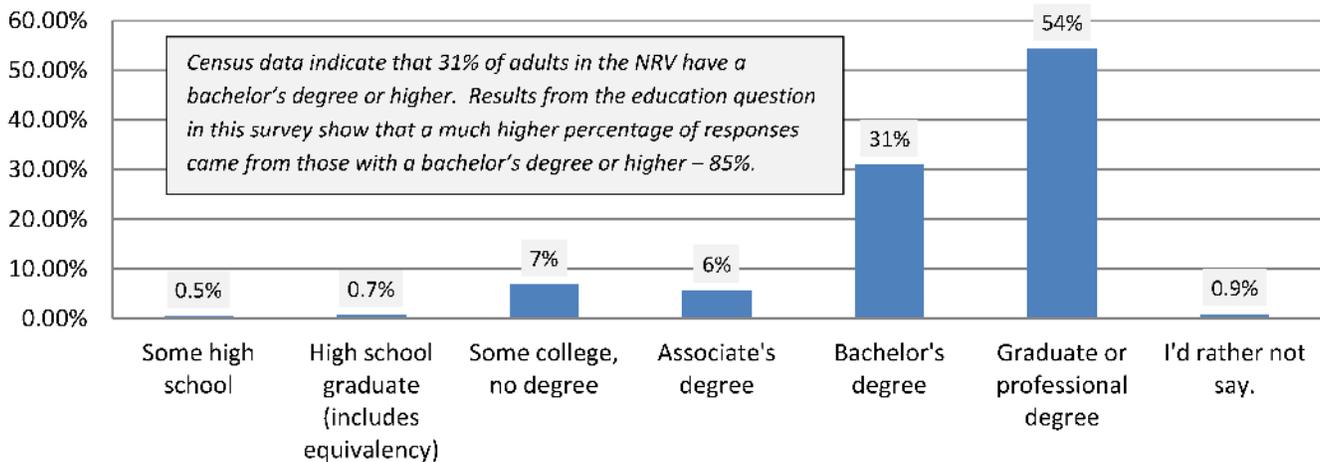
Selected demographic questions were asked of each respondent in order to gather feedback that was as close to representative as possible. Based on zip code responses, it appears that we gathered responses that were roughly proportional to locality populations. On other measures, however, it appears that those who chose to respond to this survey had, on average, a substantially higher level of educational attainment and income than the regional average.



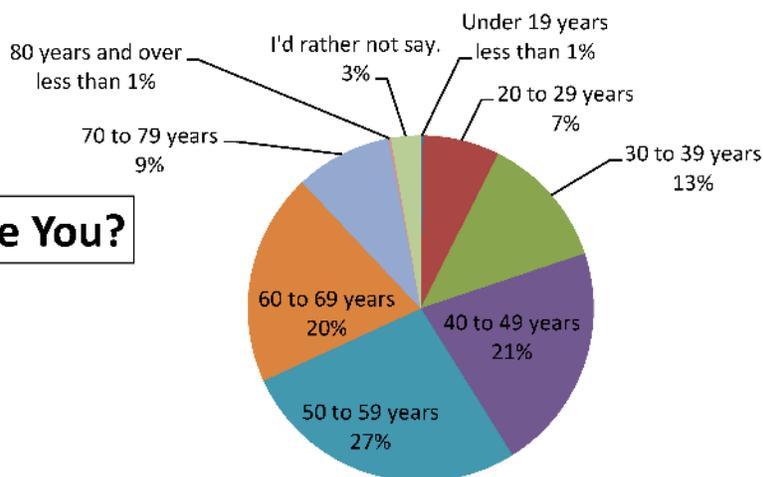
Percent of Adult Population with Bachelor's Degree or Higher - 2010 Census



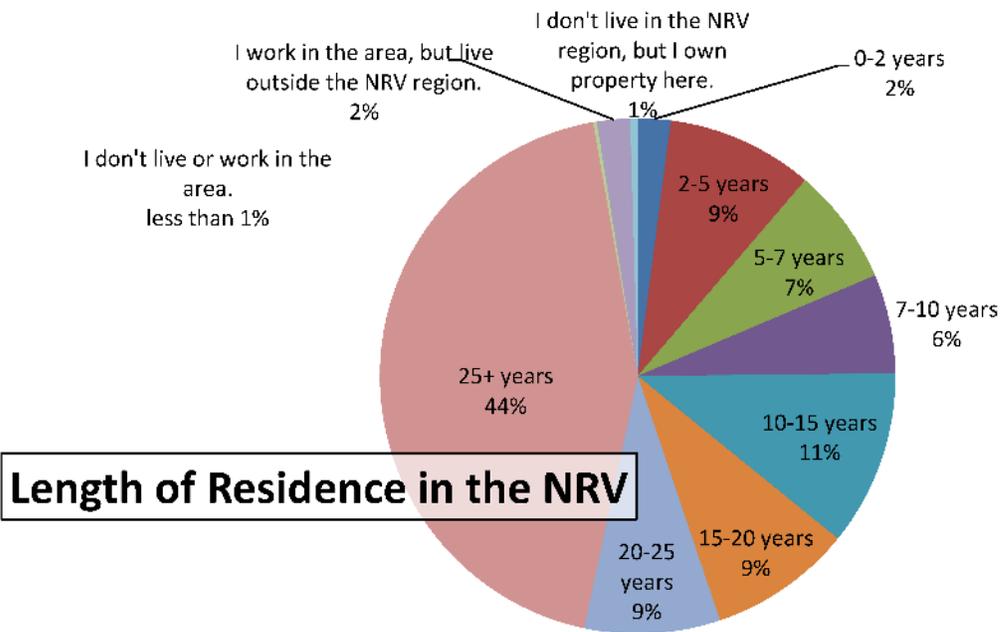
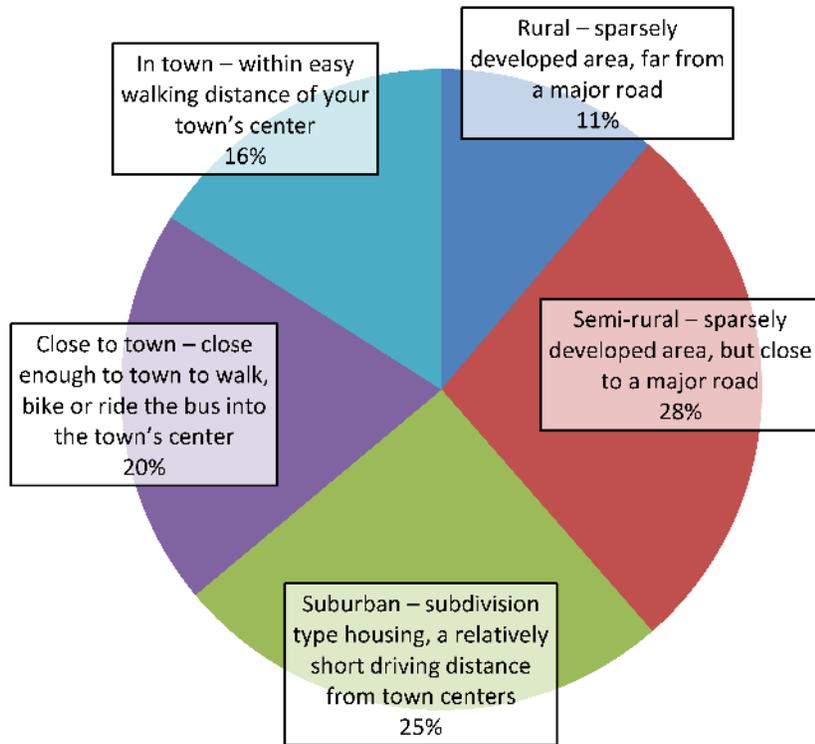
What is your highest level of education?



How Old Are You?



How would you characterize the area where you live?



For each topic area, respondents were also invited to write in a goal of their own, if they wished. On the following pages, a complete list of these additional comments is listed.

Write-In Housing Goals or Comments (47): (note: as housing was the first topic area on the survey, many responses here relate more directly to other topic areas such as energy or transportation)

1. Use of bicycles and walking for transportation from residence
2. Properties, including rental properties, need to get AWAY from electric heating. It is expensive and inefficient.
3. No Increase in Taxes
4. Local Food Systems
5. Make Downtowns livable again
6. Affordable public transportation for lower-income residents
7. Over occupancy code
8. I would have hoped that there was something on protection of water quality and food security (local) here.
9. Support for public institutions such as libraries
10. Building smaller homes
11. Individuals are free to determine where they will live based on their self-determined needs and wants and initiative to support themselves; our government currently provides assistance to those who are truly unable to provide for themselves.
12. Using existing housing stock to create energy efficient affordable housing.
13. Schools that are placed to encourage a feeling of community.
14. Additional recreational facilities for youth
15. Mixed age groups housing
16. A job
17. Retain landowner control of land
18. Cohousing opps
19. Publicly funded Fiber/Broadband to the home. It's critical to the economic development needed to increase the tax base and help us meet these other priorities. Surprisingly, you did not mention it as part of the "infrastructure" goal.
20. Publicly funded Fiber/Broadband to the home. It's critical to the economic development needed to increase the tax base and help us meet these other priorities. Surprisingly, you did not mention it as part of the
21. Work, Live, Play balance, with good quality local shops included
22. FOREST CONSERVATION AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION
23. Job Market in Pulaski County
24. Broaden public transportation
25. Housing near schools that are walkable
26. Keeping Farmland and Forest as Farmland and Forest and not destroying the beauty of this region.
27. Greenways and sidewalks connecting existing neighborhoods
28. Diverse and robust job opportunities
29. More jobs that are not related to VT
30. Shared county/regional services ie. tax collection inspections and other services which can be more cost efficient on a group basis
31. Expanded high-speed communications
32. Zoning restrictions: how much autonomy is allowed in design and maintenance of the property?
33. More recreational space for youth athletics
34. Higher commitment to environment and sustainability; more single stream recycling availability for counties
35. Providing a crime free residential area
36. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION!
37. Affordable and reliable broadband internet access in rural areas, not just in and around the towns.
38. Local government friendly towards home owners and renters
39. Get OUT of this
40. Personal Freedom

41. Sustainable energy
42. Adjusting building codes and zoning to allow for small/tiny houses
43. Keep property taxes low
44. Adaptive re-use of existing, historic buildings where possible
45. Preservation of farmland
46. Non-Union Job Creation
47. Development of infrastructure to promote local agriculture

Write-In Energy Goals or Comments (23)

1. Reduce gas-operated vehicle usage as much as possible through biking and walking infrastructure
2. As part of renewable energy options, educate people as to the role of passive home heating
3. Developing fracking policy
4. COAL
5. Food security, water quality and availability
6. Work with grassroots on finding energy solutions
7. Communication between energy providers
8. Less government control
9. Stop Government Interference
10. Individuals are free to determine their own energy use based on an understanding that they are responsible for themselves; our government currently provides assistance to those who are truly unable to provide for themselves.
11. Energy Affordability
12. Fracking
13. Support of clean traditional energy sources
14. Note that fiber to the premises provides the bandwidth needed for "smart premises" that monitor and optimize energy consumption in real time. You need public policy changes here, too.
15. Note that fiber to the premises provides the bandwidth needed for
16. No-energy transportation options (walking and biking) are supported and made a priority (more bike/walk paths)
17. Public education on the short and long term effects of human sourced pollution on the health of all living beings.
18. More public transportation options
19. Again, personal freedom essential
20. VA
21. Remove tax subsidies for alternative energy sources
22. Energy security should come first
23. Design

Write-In Arts & Culture Goals and Comments (18)

1. Still nothing on food, agriculture, forestry.
2. Crooked Road and Round the Mountain
3. These areas should be privately funded not tax dollars
4. Get government out of the Arts community
5. Educate children properly
6. Arts, culture, and history should continue to be a part of the public school program at the current level.
7. Use money for Arts else ware. This is not as important as feeding hungry people
8. Affordable transportation to and from art & culture activities
9. Jazz Events
10. Culture is present.
11. Keep arts programs in schools
12. Ensuring the opportunity for diverse cultural events to encourage a growing diverse community
13. Public information on arts, activities - get the word out

14. Regard for personal likes and dislikes.
15. Promote the arts as a means of enticing businesses to come to the area.
16. Dog Parks
17. Promotion of local cultural traditions and community heritages that may differ from professionals' such as hunting and shooting matches
18. Let the arts and culture develop (or not) organically.

Write-In Natural Resources Goals & Comments (12)

1. Enhance access to natural areas - Huckleberry Trail and bike trails in JNF are great examples
2. "Greenscape" tax credits
3. Public & private investments in agriculture and forestry
4. Should rely on private funding and fund raisers for those that support these areas and not tax dollars
5. Provide incentives to bring jobs
6. Private property rights must be respected and maintained.
7. Young people interests
8. Protect landowner's rights!
9. Removal of Barriers to Urban Agriculture
10. Support denser development in urban centers to protect viable agricultural areas.
11. Personal Freedom
12. Dog Parks

Write-In Community Health Goals & Comments (12)

1. Walking and biking to work are excellent ways to enhance life style quality
2. Should be supported with private dollars, fund raisers and no tax dollars
3. Get the government out of my healthcare
4. Individuals are free to make their own choices regarding healthy living options and are responsible for obtaining their own health insurance; our government currently provides assistance to those who are truly unable to pay for their health care.
5. Intergenerational daycare options
6. Hospice houses for compassionate & dignified end-of-life care
7. Allow citizens the freedom to make their own health choices
8. Health education.
9. Access to Affordable Mental Health Care
10. Self actualization: more residents enjoy the benefits they have earned that make them safe and the network of colleagues that make them feel supported in their own community
11. Personal Freedom
12. Keep government regulation to a minimum.

Write-In Economic Development Goals & Comments (9)

1. We don't support/emphasize active transportation life styles and outdoor recreation opportunities enough
2. Promote diversification of industries
3. Leverage some football \$ into something to benefit community
4. Reduce gov. regulations so businesses can thrive
5. Do not tax new businesses until they select other locations to operate in.
6. Businesses are given the autonomy to achieve their own goals without impeding the goals of others.
7. Individual freedom
8. Improve K-12 education priorities
9. More and better broadband options

Write-In Transportation Goals & Comments (5)

1. Airport/ Air Transportation into the region needs to be vastly improved: More direct flights, more options, more reliable service
2. Need to continue to develop walking and biking options along with public transportation
3. A free market system enables private business to provide transportation options.
4. We don't support/emphasize active transportation life styles and outdoor recreation opportunities enough
5. Promote diversification of industries

At the close of the survey, respondents were offered the chance to make any additional comments they would like:

Additional Comments: (59)

1. I think you are doing a great job to date on the Initiative!
2. If all of these "goodies" depend on government financing, then I am against them.
3. Keep it quiet! Please don't Charlottesville the NRV.
4. Like the questionnaire set up, allowing rating and then choice of top three.
5. Need to improved education by providing funding.
6. Parts of Craig county ARE in the New River Valley, believe it or not
7. Please help debunk the off-putting Agenda 21 arguments.
8. Public transit is desperately needed in the Town of Dublin !!!!!
9. Remove the hateful personal at the water department
10. Roughly half of my time is spent in the NRV and I have rented a small home there until recently.
11. Thank you for seeking our input!!
12. Thank you, Livability people, for the hard work you are doing here.
13. The New River Valley is a great place to live and work.
14. This is a fantastic place to live. Thank you for your work.
15. This is a wonderful project!
16. Virginia Tech student
17. Commute on I-81. Would be good to implement rail commute option
18. Have lived in Blacksburg all my life except during education in college and grad school
I hope this information is shared with the public school systems
19. Transportation and environment
20. I just wish we had developed this 20 years ago, before all the outsiders came to Floyd to save us from our wrongful ways. The sustainability movement in Floyd is driven purely by one person for his own profits. The same as his reshaping of the downtown of Floyd to match his vision of a quaint musical village.
21. I was born in Floyd County, moved to Montgomery County and graduated from Auburn High School, Radford College and VA Tech. I lived in Vinton, VA for 10 yrs., Florida for 20 yrs., and Harrisonburg, VA for 10 yrs. I retired and moved back to Christiansburg in December 2007.
22. Thank you for providing much needed leadership in the way our community is evolving and forming in an innovative, engaging bottom-up process!
23. The survey questions and priorities are too vague and generic to be meaningful. Many of them could mean almost anything.
24. I recommend NO NEW development of areas which are currently undeveloped. Preservation of nature is a priority. Also, mixed income neighborhoods and housing, where all classes can live together and have access to jobs. Would love a real community center for all. Would like animal rescue and TNR in the area to be funded and valued. VT could be strongly encouraged to provide living-wage, not outsourced jobs with benefits to their custodial and dining services workers. Affordable mental health services and substance abuse services for all.
25. Preserve the natural beauty of the area-keep us from becoming anywhere USA- green areas within town limits are important!
26. We are all doomed if we don't find other ways to transport ourselves other than gas-guzzlin', atmosphere polluting automobiles and trucks. Most trips in our area do not require such. We need to move ASAP to more active forms of transportation alternatives and emphasize the natural beauty of this area AND opportunities for outdoor recreation.

27. Giles County needs public transportation. I suggest something similar to Pulaski or Radford Transit. Also, it would be nice if the Blacksburg Transit ran a route from Newport to Blacksburg at least 2 x per day. There are many Giles County residents who work in Blacksburg.
28. I worry that you are getting a skewed "yuppy" perspective rather than a representative sample of local folk
29. We are way too car-dependent in the NRV. To some extent that is inevitable because we are rural. However, commuting to work is senseless travel that should be made as efficient as possible.
30. We are in a time of crisis regarding fossil fuels and our economy. If we cannot get off of fossil fuels and retrain our workers to compete in the world market very soon, I cannot imagine what will happen. The Hopi have prophesied WWII, and it looks like they are correct.
31. This survey was obviously carefully worded to elicit responses that indicate a desire for "sustainable development", a worthy goal as long as it is promoted through education and free enterprise. People who have lived in our locality for many years love this area and care for their property so our community will continue to be a desirable place to live and work. We care about our neighbors and help them when there is a need. We don't need a livability initiative to make us care for our environment and our neighbors. If voluntary community groups want to provide additional assistance, they are free to do so.
32. A healthy business climate with local governments, like the Blacksburg Town Council, more supportive of businesses, will achieve many of the other quality of life and conservation goals. Businesses that locate here do so because they love the environment and want to preserve it. Quite seeing businesses as evil and quit trying to block them. If people don't have jobs, the community dies.
33. I signed up at the Claytor Lake opening session but that came to naught. Thought the whole effort had withered
34. Adding sidewalks!!!! Adding lighting so it is safe to walk at night. Stop the bureaucracy w.r.t. using empty buildings like the old Blacksburg high school and let town expand recreational facilities there
35. Great place to live, but exclusionary and elitist. Many people in Blacksburg act like have low- to moderate-income families in the area would diminish the quality of the area.
36. Protecting quality of life in our downtown neighborhoods is one of the most important issues. Often the areas surrounding commercial areas decline .
37. Some of your survey does not work. To remind you again, I have been unable to choose "goals' at end of each section. Choices do not register.
38. Floyd County is a great place to live right now. Let's improve it, but not change its character. The old timers around here are very wary of change that makes things worse (and they are not incorrect in believing that self-interested politicians or developers can do damage.
39. I attend art events catered toward African Americans in different regions such as Roanoke Civic Center, Richmond Jazz Festival, Hampton Jazz Festival. It would be nice to have an event of this caliber locally. The NRV could collaborate with the Roanoke region to provide more cultural events besides bluegrass or country music, even though I love some country artists.
40. I live in Blacksburg. I love the scenic beauty of mountains and the close proximity of shopping, especially grocery stores.
41. due to my age I have been unsuccessful in obtaining employment. Looking for 3 years. A whole lot of work is needed to stop age discrimination. Companies and the government has many ways of getting around the law. There needs to be advocates to stand up to companies who abuse this locally in The New River Valley.
42. This survey was well organized and covered many inter-lated topics. Thanks to all who were a part of this effort.
43. Please consider those who live out in rural areas and enjoy living there. We need to make sure services, businesses, and opportunities continue to be good in rural areas so that people can live comfortably there. None of this preserving rural areas for "genuinely rural living". Property values must be preserved all over the area not just in developed areas.
44. Too many regulations coming down from Washington. Allow state & local governments to rule themselves.
45. I am frustrated by the lack of progress in attracting and retaining employers, developing our workforce, and dealing with the issues that prevent the above. I am concerned about our negative public reputation and the fact that "we" seem to perpetuate it, never focusing on our positive attributes. I am tired of being hesitant to admit where I live and where my child attends school - there is stigma attached to being "from here."

universities, it's time to change back to organic farming methods to help with water shortages, but also to begin to use hydroponic growing methods, as these use much less water, as does standard organic farming, only much more so, are able to produce year round and reduce the growing cycle. I've yet to met someone at university level who is involved with urban planning, or economic development that disagrees that the above items should not be begun with all due dispatch. As an urban planner by education, I am not offering opinion, but rather, I'm stating the facts as they are understood by scientists and planners all over the globe. No one who works or studies in these areas are in any disagreement, except for perhaps, how much time we have to make such changes before it's too late to make them. This is not doomsayer rhetoric, any more than if most of the Astronomers around the world suddenly discovered a large enough asteroid heading towards us on a collision course and raising the alarm. That type danger would be paid attention to in no uncertain terms and with a united front, everyone would be working to save the planet from such a collision and while what we're predicting isn't as apparent as a 5 mile wide rock heading our way, the consequences of taking no action or not enough action, may be just as world shattering as any large asteroid, but will take longer to accomplish the same result. Thank you if you read this and especially so, if you read this far. I hope it makes a difference to help affect positive change.