

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SURVEY RESULTS

March 1, 2010

The public input process for the Comprehensive Plan enabled Macon County citizens to voice their concerns and aspirations for their County's future. The Macon County Planning Department in conjunction with the Public Input Committee, worked hard to make sure all voices in Macon County were heard. One avenue used in this extensive public input process was the survey.

The survey informed citizens of the projected 33% population increase Macon County would realize by 2029. The following questions included within the survey, gave us the opportunity to see how responding citizens felt this population growth should be addressed.

1. What are three things you like best about Macon County?
2. What are three things you like least about Macon County?
3. How important do you think issues such as maintaining rural Character, etc. will be over the next 20 yrs?
4. Where would you like to see Macon County 20 yrs. from now?
5. What should Macon County promote?
6. What is your number 1 concern regarding Macon County's future?
7. What possible solution could address this concern?
8. One place in Macon County you wish to remain the same.
9. One place appropriate for development.
10. What are Macon county's biggest Challenges?
11. What are Macon County's biggest Opportunities?
12. Do you own a home outside Macon County?

The input obtained from this survey will be used by committees working on the various elements within the comprehensive plan. This information will provide the foundation on which committees can base their recommendations.

The survey was widely distributed throughout Macon County. Hard Copies of the survey were available at the following locations:

1. Planning Department
2. Highlands Chamber
3. Library
4. SCC
5. Lakes End (Nantahala)
6. Senior Services Center
7. Franklin High
8. Media (referenced): Franklin Press, Macon County News, Radio 96.7, Smoky Mountain News.
9. Distributed at each community meeting/special interest group meetings attended by the public input committee (attached)

Surveys were also available on-line:

1. Macon county website
2. Link on SM net Homepage
3. Link on Fontana Regional library site

Mass Emails providing a link to the survey were distributed to 8 of Macon County's largest 25 Employers.

1. Public Schools (500-999)
2. Macon County (250-499)
3. Angel Medical (250-499)
4. Highlands Cashiers Hospital (250-499)
5. Macon Program for Progress (100-249)
6. SCC (50-99)
7. Tektone (50-99)
8. Town of Highlands (50-99)
9. Town of Franklin (50-99)

Assuming all employers are operating at the lower end of this range, we can infer that at least **1050** people were made aware of this survey via mass email.

Aside from the various points of distribution, members of the planning board, sub-committees and engaged citizens shared surveys with their families, friends and neighbors. Using this transparent outreach process re-assured citizens that planning for Macon County's future is not taking place behind closed doors. The thoughts and concerns of the citizens are the most important component in this planning process. The citizens were appreciative for the opportunity this survey provided, and glad to know, it will be their thoughts and concerns guiding the plan for Macon County's future.

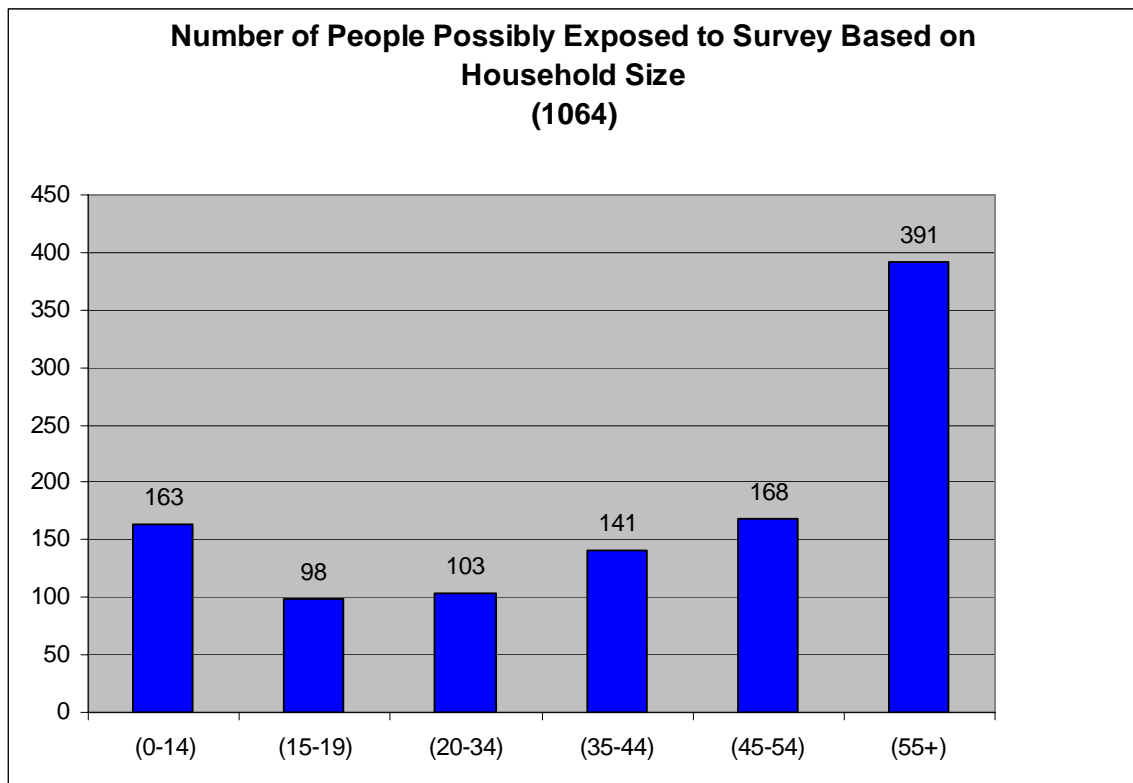
Survey Respondent Composition

Mean Age

On March 1, 2010 **423** surveys were submitted and processed in the Macon County Planning Department. The mean age of the survey respondents was **50.12**. This mean (or average age) is inclusive of ages ranging from 17 to 85. This escalated mean age could be attributable to the fact that the median age in Macon County as of 2009 was approximately 44.08. Having a median age of 44.08 means that half the people residing in Macon County are over that age, while the other half are under. Surveys were distributed to the Franklin High School, SCC and the Fontana Regional Library in attempts to reach all age segments of the local population.

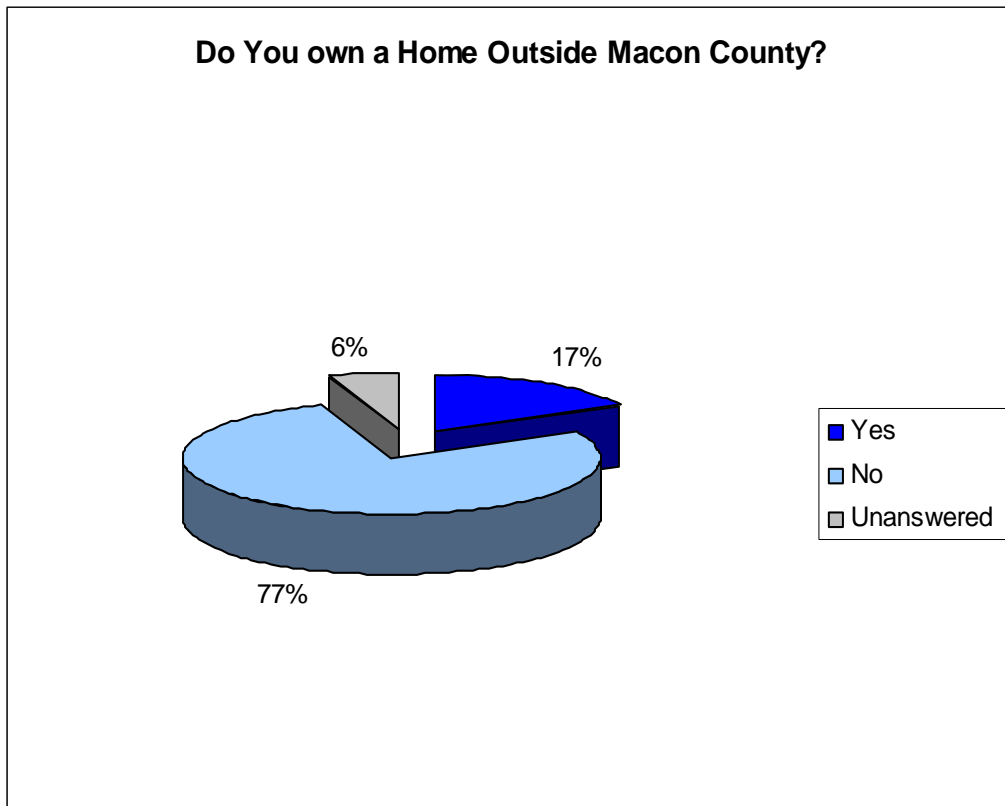
Possible # of people reached by survey (Households Alone)

Respondents were asked to fill out how many people within selected age ranges made up their home. The selected age ranges were as follows: 0-14, 15-19, 20-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+. By assuming the 423 respondents to the survey shared the survey with people residing in their home, we can infer that **1064** people from the following age groups were aware the survey was taking place.



Owning a home outside Macon County

It is a historically known fact that Macon County is a retirement or second home community. According to the tax office 55%-60% of all properties within Macon County are owned by non-resident property owners. Concerning improved properties, it is estimated that 35% of those tax bills leave Macon County. When surveyed, 74 out of 423 respondents acknowledged owning a home outside of Macon County. This equates to approximately 17%. 6% of respondents chose not to answer this question, while 77% said they did not own a home outside Macon County.



What do people like best about Macon County?

By taking the time and initiative to respond to this survey, 423 people have shown that they care about Macon County. Respondents to this survey can be grouped into three categories. Some were born and raised in Macon County, this is their home and their heritage dates back, in some cases, for centuries. Others while not originally from Macon County have decided to make it their home. Whether it be the natural beauty, friendly people, or laid back lifestyle, Macon County has appealed to them in a way which they could not resist. A small portion of respondents came to Macon County only to work, but still cared about the future of this great county enough to complete a survey.

In the survey, respondents were given 3 opportunities to share what they liked best about Macon County (Like Best 1, Like Best 2, Like Best 3). With 423 people taking the survey, this leaves 1269 total possibilities of comments regarding what citizens “liked” about Macon County (**423 respondents x 3 comments each = 1269**). For purposes of uniformity, all comments could be grouped into 6 different categories. 1) “Small Town Feel” 2) Environmental, 3) people, 4) Location, 5) Quality of Life, 6) Unanswered.

“Small Town Feel” comments were those centered on the rural, small town atmosphere in Macon County. This atmosphere, unique to our county, accounted for 21% of all comments in this survey question. The following are examples of comments that were grouped into this category: “Downtown areas and events”, “volunteer spirit”, “my hometown”, “friends and family”, “community atmosphere”, “downtown character”, “history”, “heritage”, “laid back”, etc.

270 comments representative of “small town feel” /1269 total Comments= 21%

31% or 393 out of 1269 comments focused on the environment. This category received the highest number of comments. Examples of comments grouped into this category are as follows: “Farms”, “natural beauty, rural character, views, weather/climate, scenery, USFS, wildlife, streams etc.

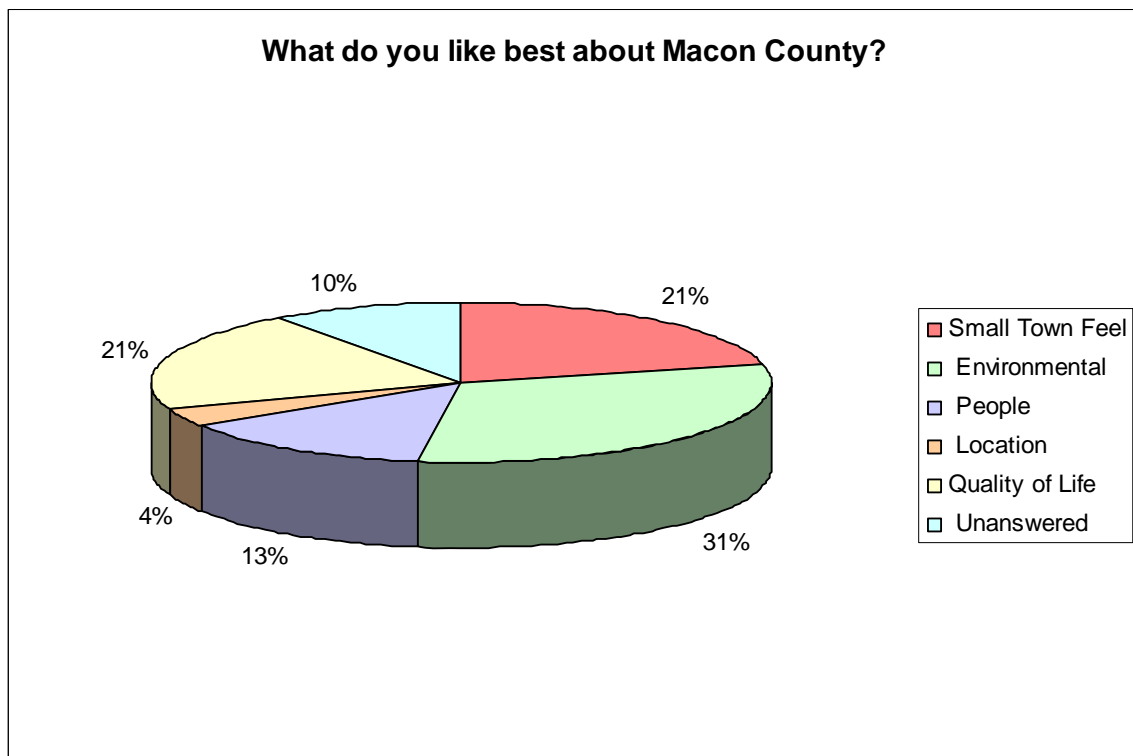
The people of Macon County are an asset that cannot be replaced. Their Generosity, friendliness, kindness, and willingness to co-operate are all qualities used to describe them by respondents. 13% of respondent comments (171 out of 1269) reflected that the people of Macon County were one of its best qualities.

Macon County’s close proximity to surrounding states and cities such as Asheville, Knoxville Tn., and Atlanta Ga., while still remaining in the mountains of Western NC, is an amenity only Macon County can provide. 4% of respondents acknowledged this in their comments. These comments are reflected in the “Location” category.

Quality of life is determined by how well you live your life. It is not the amount of money you have it is your quality of life. Do you live in clean, safe housing? Do you have access to the things you need such as transportation, doctors, etc? Quality of life

comments accounted for 21% of the total comments in this section. Examples of comments included in this category are as follows: Outdoor Rec., school system, low traffic congestion, healthcare, privacy, amenities, safe, services, low cost of living, churches, Christian values, local business, etc.

78 comments out of 900 were left blank, bringing the “unanswered” category total to 9%.



What do People like Least about Macon County?

No county in the United States of America is perfect. Macon County is no different. In the survey, respondents were given 3 opportunities to share what they liked least about Macon County (Like least 1, Like least 2, Like least 3). With 423 people taking the survey, this leaves 1269 total possibilities of comments regarding what citizens “liked least” about Macon County (**423 respondents x 3 comments each = 1269**). For purposes of uniformity, all comments were grouped into 10 different categories. 1) Compromising Environment. / Character, 2) Cost of Living, 3) Lack of Employment opportunities, 4) Lack of shopping/ Entertainment. 5) Local Government, 6) Lack of human services, 7) people, 8) unanswered, 9) infrastructure, 10) aesthetic issues.

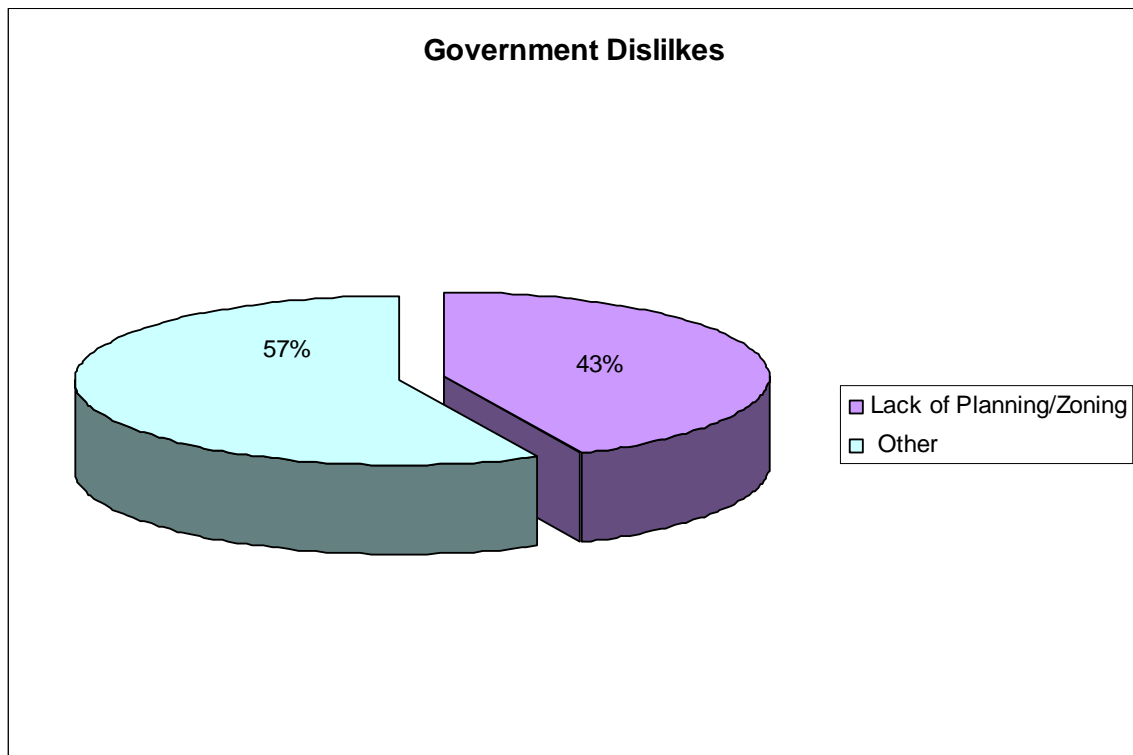
10% or 130 out of 1269 comments came from citizens who felt the environment and rural character of Macon County was being compromised. Sprawl development, destruction of mountains, irresponsible development, losing small town feel, overcrowding, and excessive cutting of trees are all examples of comments included in this category.

The cost of living in Macon County is often viewed as an attractant by newcomers moving in to the area. 3% of comments in the survey however, reflect that some citizens feel the cost of living is becoming too high. Comments such as: Earnings not supporting property values, bloated property taxes, out of control evaluations, land values, cost of real estate, high gas prices and high cost of groceries, were all areas that 34 out of 1269 comments centered on. People must understand that many of these things are beyond our control, as they are controlled by the free market.

In the recent economic downturn, unemployment is a problem not only in Macon County, but nation wide. The survey results reflect this fact. Not enough jobs, too dependant on tourism, lack of industrial development, nothing to keep citizens here and franchises taking local jobs were all concerns voiced in the lack of employment category. 101 out of 1269 comments focused on lack of employment as a problem in Macon County. This accounted for 8% of the total comments in this section

15% or 184 out of 1269 comments came from people expressing disdain for the lack of shopping and entertainment in Macon County. Comments within this category came from three major areas 1) shopping, 2) dining, 3) Recreation. Lack of diversity in supermarkets, dead Main Street, too many fast food restaurants, not enough healthy restaurants, lack of restaurants like Olive Garden and Cracker Barrel were all comments coming from categories 1) & 2). Comments regarding recreation were centered mainly on the lack of new facilities and overcrowding of the existing ones. From a new Swimming pool for the Franklin High School to the overcrowding of existing ball fields, citizens felt that young people and adults alike had “nothing to do”.

13% or 159 out of 1269 comments is representative of respondents' frustration with County Government. Good ol' boy system, small town politics, no noise ordinance, too conservative, disconnect from people in Nantahala and Highlands, poor coordination between offices and the fact that we are not bringing in jobs were all comments that fell into this category. It is important to note however, that within this 13%, 43% of the comments centered on the fact that Macon County has historically neglected to plan for the future, and at this time has no zoning regulations in place. This is illustrated below.



The Lack of Human Services section exposes areas of service where respondents feel Macon County is falling short. Comments from this category can be broken down into 5 main sub-sections, based on frequency: 1) Healthcare, 2) Affordable Housing, 3) Education, 4) Crime/Law Enforcement, 5) Other. Below are examples of comments that came from within each of these sub-sections. (In no particular order)

- 1) Healthcare- high cancer rate, poor care in nursing homes, lack of good doctors, lack of quality mental health care.
- 2) Affordable Housing- Lack of affordable housing
- 3) Education- consolidation of schools, childcare, existing schools inadequate, high school drop out rate, more \$ for teachers, not enough \$ spent on education.
- 4) Crime/Law Enforcement- Drugs, influx of methamphetamines, increasing crime rate, Highlands Police Department in need of improvement.
- 5) Other- public transportation, inadequate humane society, recycling not easy enough.

The Lack of Human Services section accounted for approximately 9 % or 110 out of 1269 total comments.

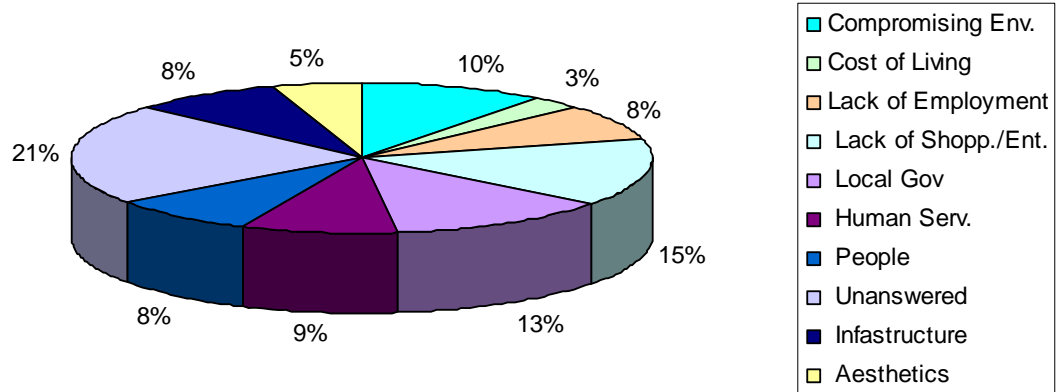
103 out of 1269 or 8% of comments were centered on people. It is no surprise that when people live, work and interact together in society, problems will occur, especially in a small town. These comments are largely on an individual basis and are often reflective of personal feelings. Comments from this section include the following: immigrants getting help when others can't, over abundance of non-English speaking people, Hispanics, newcomers feeling unwelcome, grouchy locals, small town gossip, too conservative, bashing of elected officials, newcomers changing things, etc. Some of these problems cannot be corrected by a comprehensive plan, but need to be attended to on an individual basis.

274 out of 1269 or 21% of the total comments were left blank. The unanswered section was largest for the "What do you like least about Macon County" category. This could have occurred for a number of reasons. One possible reason however, is that survey respondents could not find enough fault with Macon County, to fill out all three comment boxes.

Infrastructure is defined as the fundamental facilities and systems serving a country, city, or area such as; transportation, communication systems and power plants. 105 out of 1269 or 8% of people felt the infrastructure in Macon County was inadequate or in need of repair. Comments from this section include the following: Roads need Maintenance, sewer not keeping up with growth, roads can't handle traffic in peak seasons, parking issues on Main Street, public facilities aging (schools, courthouse), sidewalks need repair/extension, landfill, streets need facelift, cell service, high speed internet.

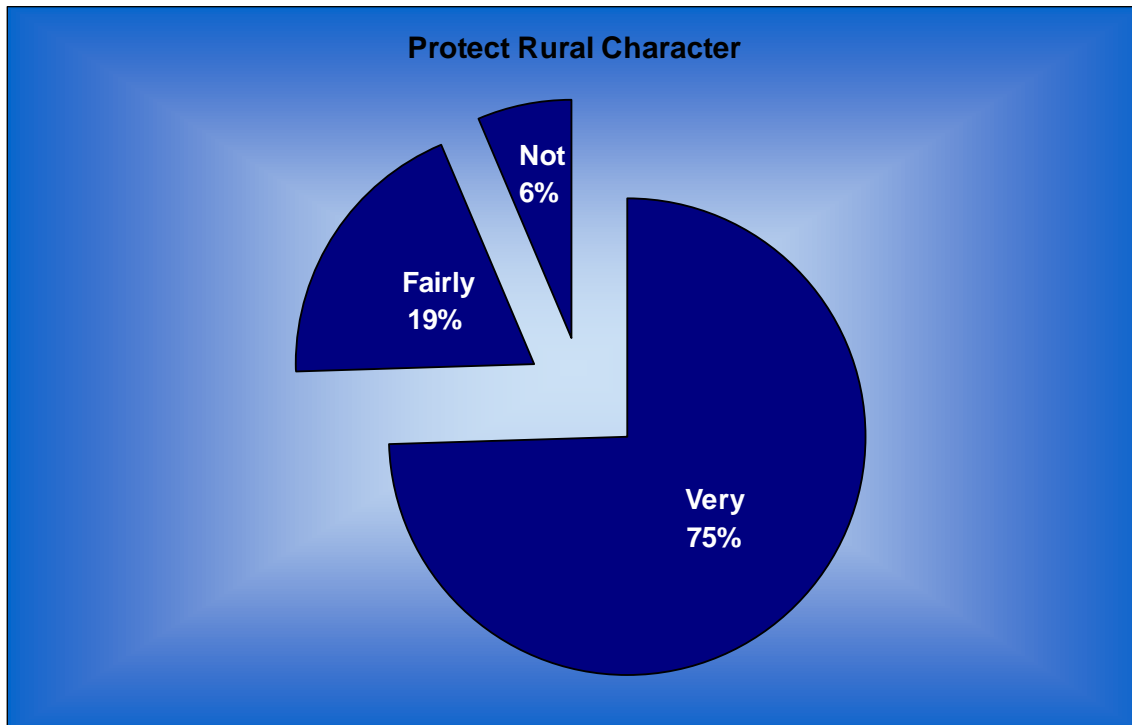
The remaining 5% of comments or 64 out of 1269 came from respondents who feel some areas of Macon County are becoming "aesthetically displeasing". Excessive signs, junk piles, commercial buildings in residential areas, litter, and roaming, barking dogs are a few of the comments from this section that highlight this concern.

What do you like least?

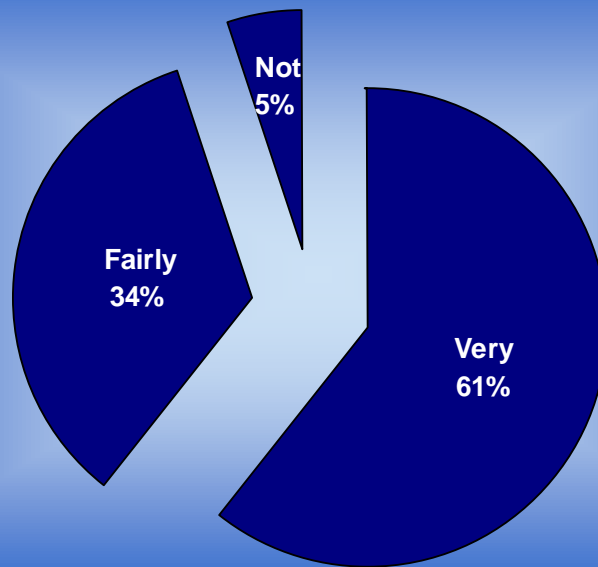


How important are the following issues over the next 20 years?

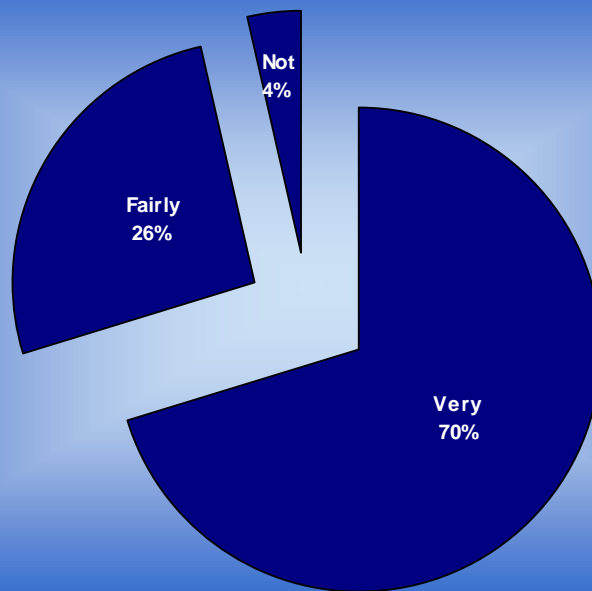
Question 3 asked respondents to indicate how important they felt 16 pre-determined issues would become in Macon County over the next 20 years. These issues ranged from Maintaining the Rural Character of the County to Healthcare. Respondents had the option of choosing very, fairly, or not for each of the 16 pre-determined issues. Below are the results for the 423 respondents to this survey.



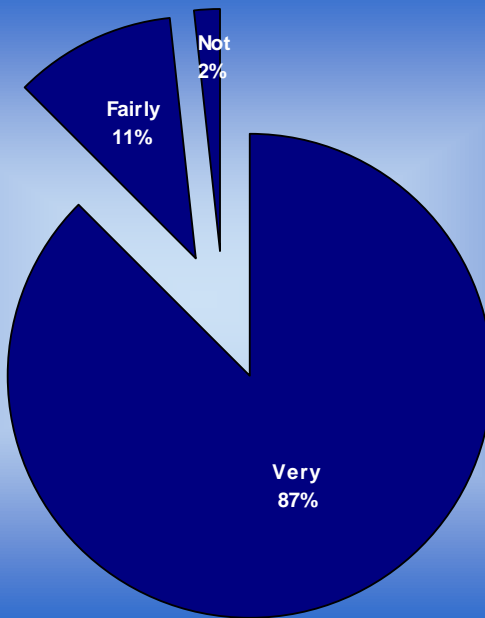
Control Development Rate



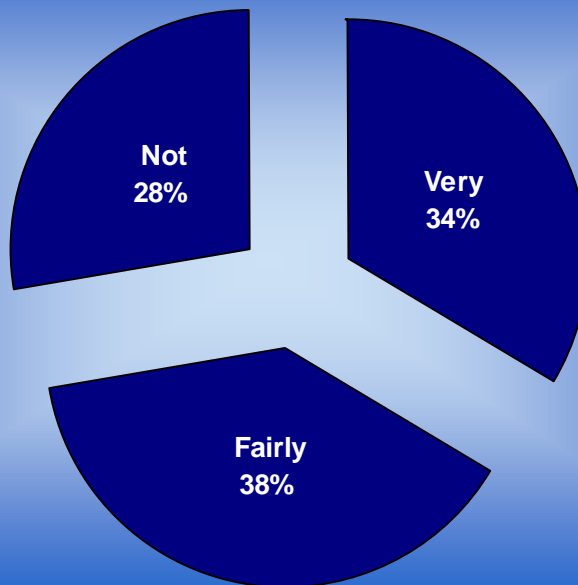
Preserve Farmland



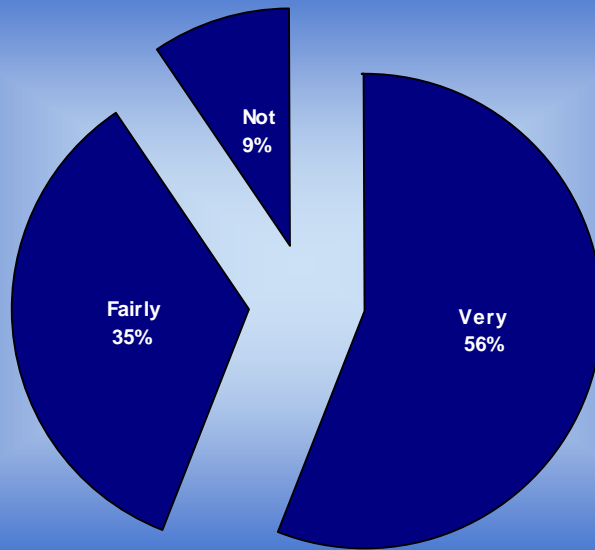
Protect Environment



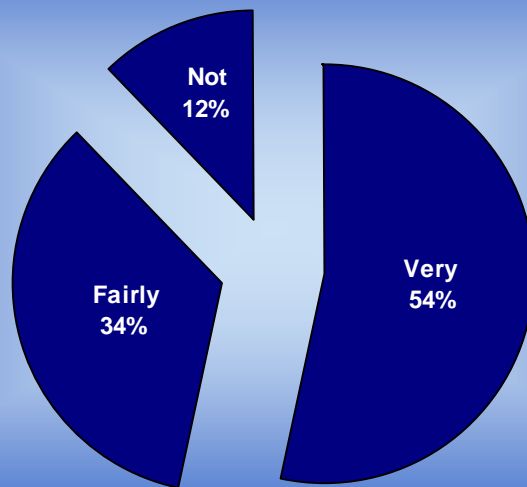
Attract New Shopping



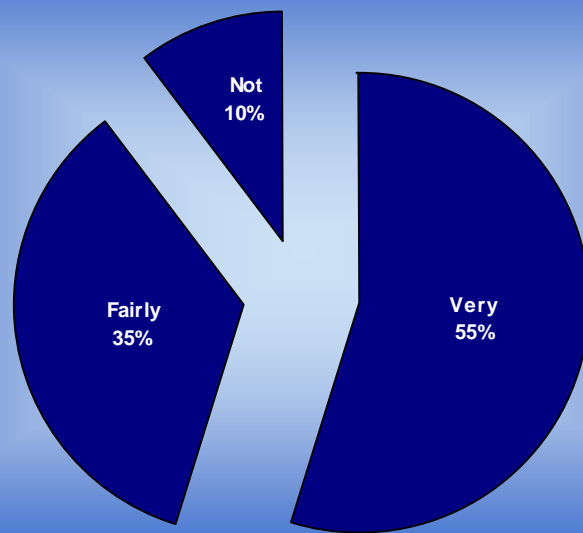
Attract Businesses



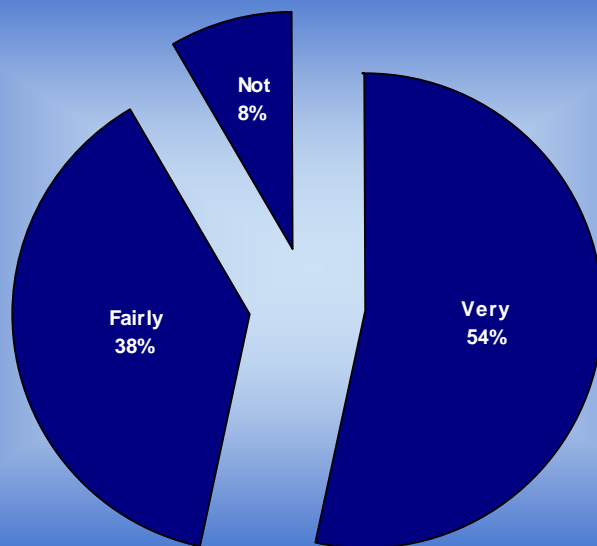
Affordable Housing



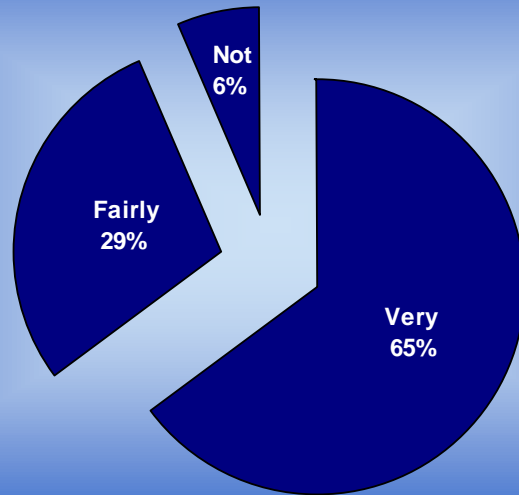
Improve traffic flow and safety



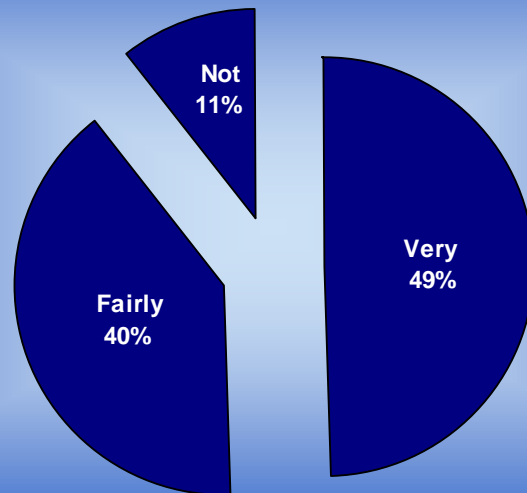
Improve local Roads



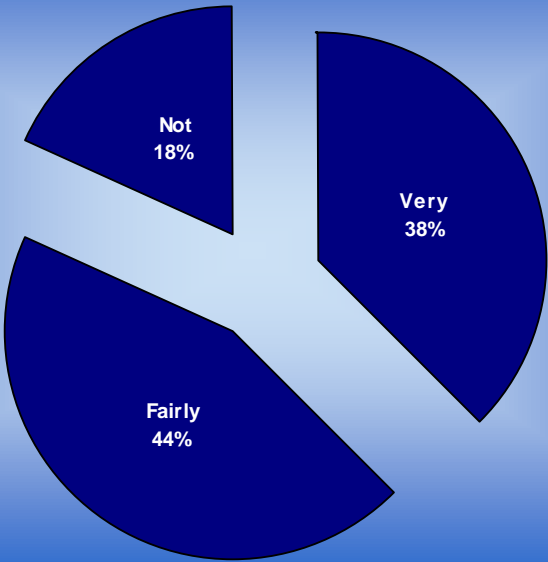
Protect Historic Structures



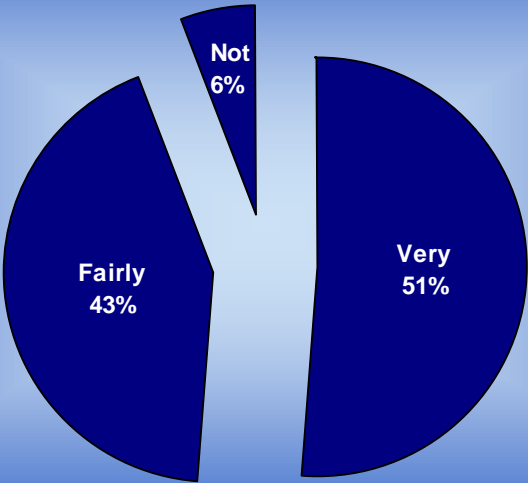
Develop Recreation Facilities



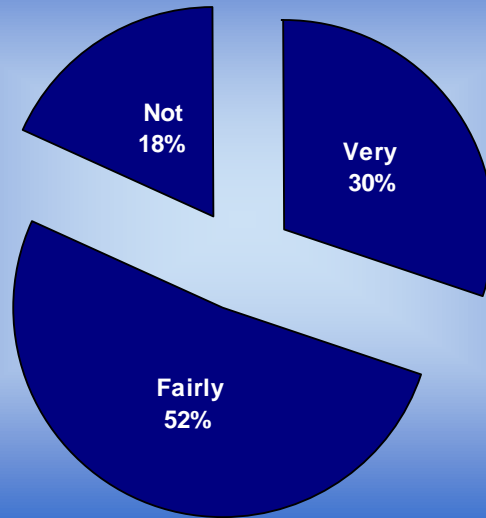
Public Transportation



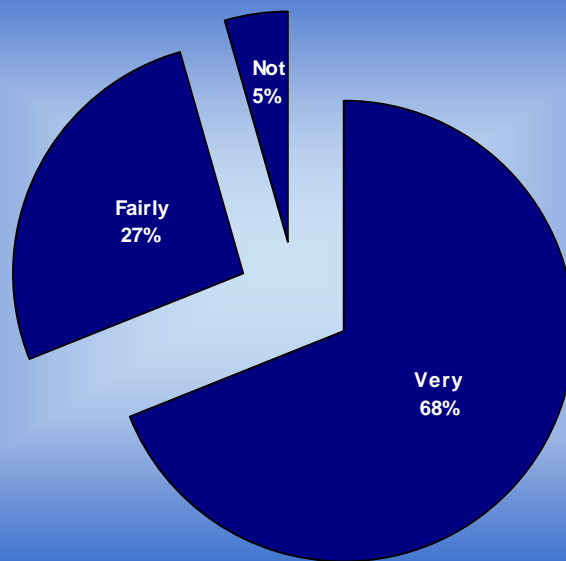
Cost of Services



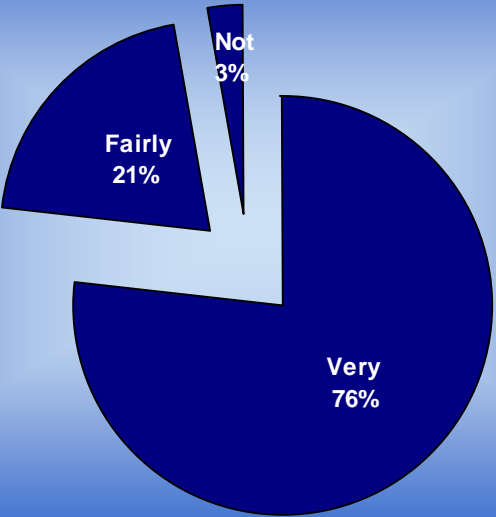
Arts



Improve Schools



Healthcare



Where would you like to see Macon County 20 years from now?

Question 4 asked respondents to indicate where they would like to see Macon County 20 years from now and what kind of county they want to pass on to the next generation. Responses to this question provided the foundation for the “Mission Statement” that will guide the Comprehensive Plan. The mission statement is as follows:

“Work together as “Maconians” to create a dynamic plan that will guide long-term growth and development within the county. Through taking the initiative to plan now, we ensure the integrity of our mountain heritage will be preserved, welfare of the citizens will be maximized, our natural environment will continue to flourish, and the economic vitality of Macon County will be sustained, all in ways that benefit the current population as well as generations to come.”

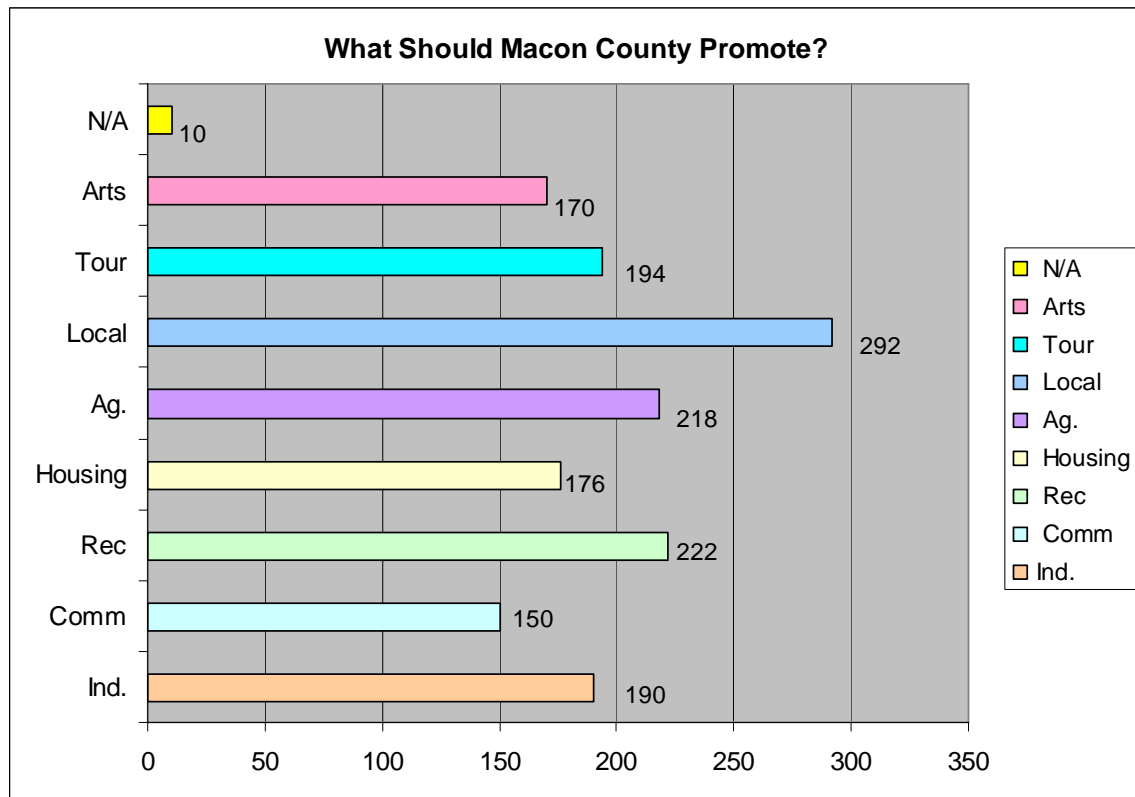
Within this mission statement lie the following guiding principles:

1. Preserve our Mountain Heritage
2. Maximize the Welfare of our citizens
3. Allow the natural environment to flourish
4. Sustain economic vitality and allow it to grow in a way that does not compromise the rural heritage, and pristine natural environment of Macon County.

Question 4 gives us excellent insight as to what the people of Macon County want over the next 20 years.

What should Macon County Promote?

Question 5 asked respondents to indicate what they thought Macon County should promote in the future. Industrial Development, Commercial Development, Recreational Facilities, Housing, Agricultural Production, Tourism, Arts, and Locally owned business were the choices provided. Respondents had the option of choosing more than one answer for this question. Below are the results as of March 1, 2010.



What is 1 place in Macon County you wish to see remain the same?

This question was unique. The pride held in the hearts of Macon County citizens is second to none. We are proud of our county but often times even more proud of the community we come from within the county. For natives, these communities are where grandfathers raised cattle, and mothers once played in the creek together as little girls. Roots run deep in these communities, years and years of families and friendships have been built in them. For new-comers something stood out in the community which they chose to live above all others. Native or new-comer, each of us has an abundance of pride for the community in which we reside or have connections to, and rightfully so. A significant amount of respondents expressed this pride by choosing their specific community as the area they wanted to see remain the same. With 423 respondents coming from many communities within the county, each choosing the community in which they reside to remain the same, we were seeing small percentages for a lot of communities. For this reason, all responses indicating individual communities to be preserved were grouped into the “Communities” category. This category provides an excellent example as to just how important the small rural communities of Macon County are to the citizens. Aside from the “Communities” category, the remaining responses were grouped into the following categories:

The city limits of Franklin and Highlands made up a category. Many times these comments related to specific areas in Franklin and Highlands city limits such as Main Street, or Town Square.

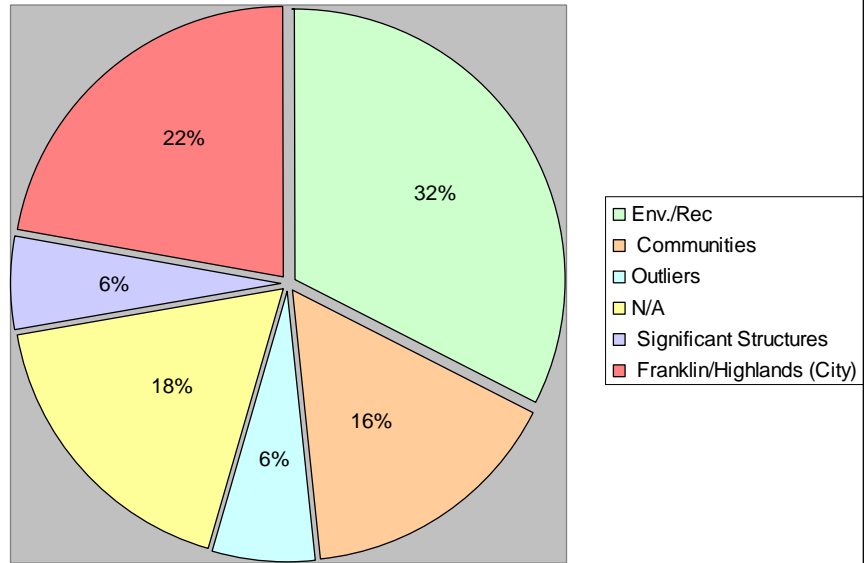
Environmental and Recreation areas were inclusive of the following: USFS, AT, mountains, rural areas, fairgrounds, Recreation Park, farmland, greenway, Little Tennessee River and Nantahala National Forest.

The Significant Structures category was comprised of the following responses: Historic structures, Old Jail, Indian Mound, Airport, Clock tower, Fun Factory etc. These were all specific areas that respondents wished to remain the same for years to come.

Outliers are inclusive of Comments such as: my house, whole county, etc. These responses were unclear and not feasible to document into any other category.

“Unanswered” made up the last category.

What would you like to see remain the same?



What is 1 place in Macon County that is appropriate for development?

This question asked respondents to name one place in Macon County they felt would be appropriate for development. After 423 surveys it is evident that citizens feel development should occur along the main thoroughfares, in and around our city limits and at the industrial park. It is important to note that a high percentage of respondents wanted areas within the city limits to remain the same. Location and infrastructure in and around these areas will undoubtedly foster future growth, making it impossible for them to remain as they are. As growth does come to these areas though, we can make sure that it upholds the rural character and “small town feel” of our county that so many of our citizens cherish.

