

Union County Comprehensive Plan

Stakeholder Interviews Summary

July 10, 2020

Over the course of two days, the project team conducted a series of stakeholder interviews. Because of the social distancing and stay-at-home state orders, these interviews were held over the phone. Each interview lasted 30 – 60 minutes. Participants represented various backgrounds ranging from elected and appointed officials, local business owners and residents, and members of the economic development corporation board. The discussion for each interview was slightly different based on the participant’s background. The following section outlines the key takeaways from stakeholder outreach.

1. As a representative of _____, what do you value most about Union County?

- Union County is a small community with friendly people but it can be a double edged sword.
- Safety – quiet and everyone knows each other
- Small, safe place to live, send children to school with close proximity to bigger cities.
- For the most part, people of Union County recognize that we need to focus on what we are good at but it needs to pay the bills.
- Small town, community pride, and a good school system
- Hometown roots

2. What do you think the County as a whole value? What should they value in the future?

- The community values consistency, they don’t want it to change.
- There are two “groups” of people in Union County. The people who were born and raised here and then the outsiders that moved in. The born and raised aren’t always welcoming to the outsiders. This needs to change.
- There is a value perception. An example was a hair dress tried to raise her prices by \$5, the customer said they wouldn’t pay that in Union County but drove to Richmond to pay the same price instead.
- Today the community values old-fashioned family values. In the future, we should value housing development, and trail connectivity (specifically mentioned a trail to Whitewater State Park).
- The community should be looking at how to diversify the tax base and we should be planning for more residential development.
- The community should recognize that we can’t always stay small, we need to collect more revenue.
- Union County should value arts and culture, parks and recreation, and work to promote the county more in the future.

3. What is the one thing that gets residents worked up about? What are they passionate about? What gets the community excited?

- The residents don't really get worked up about anything but they are passionate about helping others in times of need.
- Some residents get worked up about the idea of a new jail and how we would pay for it.
- The community feels the State Park facilities should contribute to taxes. Most of the public safety services are overwhelmed by runs to the parks and campgrounds in the summer.
- Union County is passionate about family values and very patriotic.
- Union County residents can get worked up about all the low income housing in the county.
- The community gets excited for local sports, patriotism, Christianity, hunting, and their family.

4. A comprehensive plan is a guidance document for growth and development for the next 10-20 years. What is your big idea for the future of Union County?

- Don't overburden the tax payers, and prioritize what we need in regards to the budget.
- Accurately plan for improvements based on "real" accounting versus the political game of accounting.
- Utilities are the key to getting more residential development.
- The new jail / fire department facility could be located on the edge of town, along US 27.
- 27 acres near the high school is prime location for residential development if the county can get utilities extended.
- Housing development
- Sustainable population
- Update fire, police, and jail facilities
- Community gathering space such as a convention center or reception hall
- Broadband connectivity is needed for businesses to thrive

5. As you look ahead over the next 10-20 years, what are 3 important challenges and opportunities you anticipate for Union County? Do you have advice or suggestions on how to address them?

- **Challenges**
 - i. Workforce isn't available to pass down family businesses
 - ii. Broadband Connectivity
 - iii. Lack of modernized, digital property tax records.
 - iv. Lack of payment options online, residents have to pay in-person
 - v. Tax deficiencies
 - vi. Insurance rates for employees
 - vii. Need younger people in government but the jobs don't pay enough

- viii. Major erosion problems are causing issues with roadways and agricultural land
- ix. Job opportunities

- **Opportunities**

- i. Federal Reserve rates are low making borrowing money more affordable.
- ii. Alternative energy sources- solar farms
- iii. Recreational land could provide a good location for a convention center / community gathering place.
- iv. Development surrounding lake
- v. Industrial area outside of Liberty for small business employment

6. Where should development and/or redevelopment efforts be focused?

- The 27 acres east of Liberty for housing
- The 30 acres southeast of Liberty that the redevelopment commission owns for small business development

7. What types of development do you think Union County needs more of?

- Union County is already a bedroom community so more residential is needed.
- Small business that employ 20-30 workers
- Dining destinations
- New 4-H fairgrounds- current location is too small (County owns land south of Liberty along the highway that could work.)
- Community gathering space / reception hall
- Retail in the downtown- something other than the insurance companies
- Nice single-family homes
- Industrial development for jobs

8. What are the transportation and utility issues in Union County?

- We've done 54 miles of road in 4 years so our roads are pretty good.
- A good portion of the roads that are left to fix are owned by the state.
- There is a subdivision to the north of Liberty that has water issues.
- From a utility provider perspective, Union County's process for getting permit is quick and easy but we (the business) is looking to relocate within Union County for more space for their equipment and can't find it.

9. What is the single most important thing Union County could do to improve economic development and/or workforce development?

- The county needs a grant writer and education of what's available.
- Promoting what we have and updating our county website.
- Attracting businesses that have a decent starting wage.

10. How would residential best be engaged during this planning process?

- Community events
- The challenge is that the people that want to be involved are already burnt out for taking on too much and get seeing progress
- Using the Community Foundation and local church to promote
- Free food as an incentive to attend events
- Don't know- it's very hard to reach uninterested residents
- Social media and flyers
- The saying about promoting is "7 times, 7 different ways" is true for our community.