

Somerset County Comprehensive Plan

Community Survey

Somerset County Community Survey – January 2003

As one component of public participation in the comprehensive planning process, a community survey was utilized to gather public input on the impacts of recent development, the anticipated impacts of future development, and the prioritization of various planning initiatives, as well as to understand the public's use of resources and services in the County and the region.

Approximately 750 surveys were sent to members of the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce in January 2003, and 184 surveys were returned for a return rate of 25 percent. Gannett Fleming, Inc. tabulated the survey responses and provided the following analysis.

Questions 1-3 asked survey respondents about quality of life and County government operations. Responses to questions 1-3, regarding indicated that

- 81.7% feel that the quality of life in Somerset County is good or excellent
- 72.5% feel that the quality of life in their local community is good or excellent
- 60.0% feel that the Somerset County government operates good (well) or excellent.

Question 4 asked about overall priorities for Somerset County. Responses indicated that residents support

- Completion of Route 219 to Maryland should be the highest County priority – 71.9% High Priority
- Targeted local/highway improvement strategies should be the third priority – 47.0% High Priority (+ 40.5% Moderate Priority)
- Reinvestment in boroughs and villages should be the second County priority – 31.9% High Priority (+ 51.4% Moderate Priority)

Moderate priorities include:

- Natural resource protection - 53.0%
- Expansion of recreation facilities and programs - 51.9% Moderate Priority
- Tourism and recreation expansion and promotion - 45.4% Moderate Priority

New housing, development of an Amtrak station, and centralization of utilities are low priorities

Question 5 asked respondents to prioritize economic development initiatives. Results indicated that residents would like to see the County

- Help local businesses expand and remain in the County – 88.6% High Priority
- Attract new business from outside the County – 70.3% High Priority
- Promote and improve local workforce education/retraining to bring in high-tech, information age businesses – 51.4% High Priority
- Establishing entrepreneurial training – 50.8% Moderate Priority
- Promotion and development of tourism attractions and services – 45.9% Moderate Priority

Question 6 asked if respondents had other ideas for economic development in Somerset County. Most respondents (37.3%) indicated they did not have additional economic development ideas, though many (43.8%) did not respond at all.

Question 7 asked respondents what they think the County should do to retain young adults in the County. Respondents feel that the County's priorities in this area should be to

- Create more jobs - 81.6% High Priority
- Expand higher educational opportunities (colleges and technical schools) - 43.2% High Priority

Creating more affordable housing (45.5%) and expanding recreational and leisure opportunities (42.7%) were listed as moderate priorities.

Question 8 asked respondents to prioritize enhancements to educational opportunities. Responses indicated that educational enhancements should only be a moderate priority for Somerset County. Promotion of local college programs (54.1%) and promotion and enhancement of

internship opportunities (52.4%) received the most “moderate priority” responses.

Question 9 asked about resident support for good development codes at the local/municipal, regional/multi-municipal, and countywide levels. Most respondents indicated that they agreed somewhat with the use of development codes at any of these levels. Of those who agreed strongly with the use of codes, most (30.8%) felt that the local/municipal level was most appropriate. Of those who disagreed, most (30.8%) felt that the countywide approach was the least appropriate.

Question 10 asked residents how they feel about land use planning. Results indicated

- Strong to moderate support for regulations that promote consistency between development and community infrastructure – 50.3% Agree Strongly, 40.5% Agree Somewhat.
- Slightly less support for business development that is consistent with available infrastructure – 41.1% Agree Strongly, 35.1% Agree Somewhat
- Strong to moderate support for regulations that protect the agricultural industry – 48.1% Agree Strongly, 41.6% Agree Somewhat
- Moderate support for reasonable zoning and/or other land use controls – 38.4% Agree Strongly, 47.6% Agree Somewhat

However, when the question was reworded to address the restriction of uses on private land for personal or business uses, there was not clear support or opposition.

Question 11 asked how recent development along the roadways of Somerset County had negatively impacted the visual character of the County. Responses indicated that development had not impacted the visual character (50.8%).

Question 12 asked residents what the County's transportation priorities should be. Responses indicated that the County should

- Complete Route 219 to Maryland I-68 – 73.0% High Priority
- Improve traffic flow along the Route 601 North corridor – 50.3% High Priority
- Improved roadway linkages between Routes 31, 219 and 601 and the Turnpike - 44.9% High Priority

In addition, moderate priority transportation initiatives should include

- Improved circulation at the Turnpike Interchange area – 38.8%
Moderate Priority

Question 13 asked what impact residents expect from the completion of Route 219. Responses indicated that residents expect

- Better business access to Washington, DC, to Baltimore, and to/from southeast Somerset County - 29.2%, 23.8%, and 18.9%, respectively.

Question 14 asked what type of development along the completed Route 219 corridor would most benefit County residents. Light industrial (67.6 %) received the majority of responses.

Question 15 asked how regulations should manage commercial development along the completed Route 219 corridor. Responses indicated that new development should

- Minimize driveways/access points – 33.0%
- Regulate signs – 29.7%
- Increase landscape requirements – 24.9%

Question 16 asked how regulations should manage commercial development along the completed Route 30 corridor.

Responses indicated that new development should

- Require visual character that is consistent with the Lincoln Highway Heritage corridor – 41.6%
- Regulate signs – 22.7%
- Minimize driveways/access points – 20.0%

Question 17 asked respondents to rank the potential of various resources to attract more tourism. The following were rated as having the highest tourism potential.

- Resorts – 68.6%
- Fall foliage – 59.5%
- Surface water (lakes, streams, and rivers) – 50.8%

Question 18 asked residents about the frequency of their use of various recreation resources/activities. Most respondents indicated that they use the recreational resources/activities listed seasonally.

- Fall foliage – 62.7%

- Festivals – 56.2%
- Surface water (lakes, streams, and rivers) - 52.4%

The following were rated as the most heavily utilized resources listed in the survey.

- ATV trails – 78.9%
- Train spotting – 76.8%
- Farmsteads – 56.2%

Infrequently used resources/activities:

Question 19 asked about priorities for recreation in Somerset County. Recreation was generally rated as a moderate to high priority for the County.

- Development of recreational programs for teens – 45.9% High Priority
- Development of recreational programs for children – 41.6% High Priority
- Development of teen centers – 37.8% High Priority

These were ranked as high recreation priorities for the County.

- Development/Improvement of local community parks – 53.5% Moderate Priority
- Development of community centers – 47.6% Moderate Priority
- Development of regional parks – 46.5% Moderate Priority

These were ranked as moderate priorities for County recreation.

Question 20 asked residents about their support for countywide utility authorities. Responses indicated that there is no clear support or opposition to countywide utility authorities. Many respondents indicated that they were not sure (13.5%, for countywide water authority) how they felt about countywide utility authorities.

Question 21 followed by asking what concerns residents have about countywide authorities. Respondents indicated that the following was their greatest concern:

- Loss of control of rates/fees - 64.9%

Question 22 asked what residents think an affordable average housing cost is in Somerset County. Most respondents indicated that \$50,000 to \$100,000 is an affordable housing cost.

- \$50,000 - \$75,000 – 43.8%
- \$75,000 - \$100,000 – 35.1%

Question 23 asked what residents think an affordable monthly rent for a two-bedroom apartment is in Somerset County. Most respondents (63.2%) indicated that \$200 - \$400 per month is affordable.

Question 24 asked residents to prioritize housing needs over the next five years. Results indicated that housing is moderate priority for Somerset County. Respondents feel that

- Housing for senior citizens – 53.5%
- Upgrading the quality of rental housing – 45.4%
- Promoting the development of new, affordable single family homes – 41.6%
- Providing assistance to low income homeowners to rehabilitate their homes – 41.1%

Should be moderate priorities for the County.

Question 25 asked residents about their satisfaction with senior services. Generally, residents indicated that they are satisfied with current services, though many responded “no opinion.”

Question 26 asked residents where they shop for various products and services. Responses indicated that most residents shop for

- Groceries, automobiles/trucks, and gifts/novelties within Somerset County
- Clothing and major appliances/furniture outside Somerset County

Questions 27-43 asked for demographic statistics of survey respondents. The following points highlight the demographics of the respondents and reflect the distribution of the survey to the Chamber membership.

The most common reasons to live in Somerset County are “hometown” and “local family,” both 40.0%.

Most respondents have lived in Somerset County for more than 20 years – 80.0 %.

More than 15 percent of respondents have school-age children at home.

Most respondents were

- age 30 – 64 – 89.2%
- Male - 62.7%
- own their home (do not rent) – 90.8%
- employed full-time – 56.2%
- own a County business – 60.5%

Most respondents are

- Not interested in owning (another) business – 56.8%
- Not interested in a County-coordinated business assistance program – 55.1%
- Not interested in working in the tourism industry – 71.9%
- Not interested in owning a tourism related business in the County – 74.9%

Question 44 provided an opportunity for survey respondent to write additional comments that would help make Somerset County a better place to live. 44 percent offered additional comments.