

## CHAPTER 6: PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Extensive public involvement was conducted throughout the development of this plan and the suggestions, opinions, and input gathered from Paulding County residents were utilized throughout this document. Public participation is based on the principle that people whose lives are affected by planning and investment decisions have a right to be involved in the decision-making process and influence choices that are made. Directly engaging residents in the planning process yields diverse voices and new ideas, promotes successful problem solving, and allows the public to have ownership of the proposed solutions. Engaging Paulding County citizens to help develop this plan generated invaluable input that guided this document and the solutions and strategies established herein. The following chapter provides a summary of the public participation activities that were undertaken during the planning process. Additional information and documents relating to public involvement conducted for this plan are located in Appendix B.

### 6.1 OVERVIEW

In order to gather as much feedback from the residents of Paulding County as possible, multiple opportunities to provide input were provided during the year the plan was developed. The following chart (Figure 6.1) illustrates the major milestones and public input opportunities that occurred during the planning process. Opportunities for input consisted of a public survey, two series of public meetings, a survey of high school students, and a public comment period.

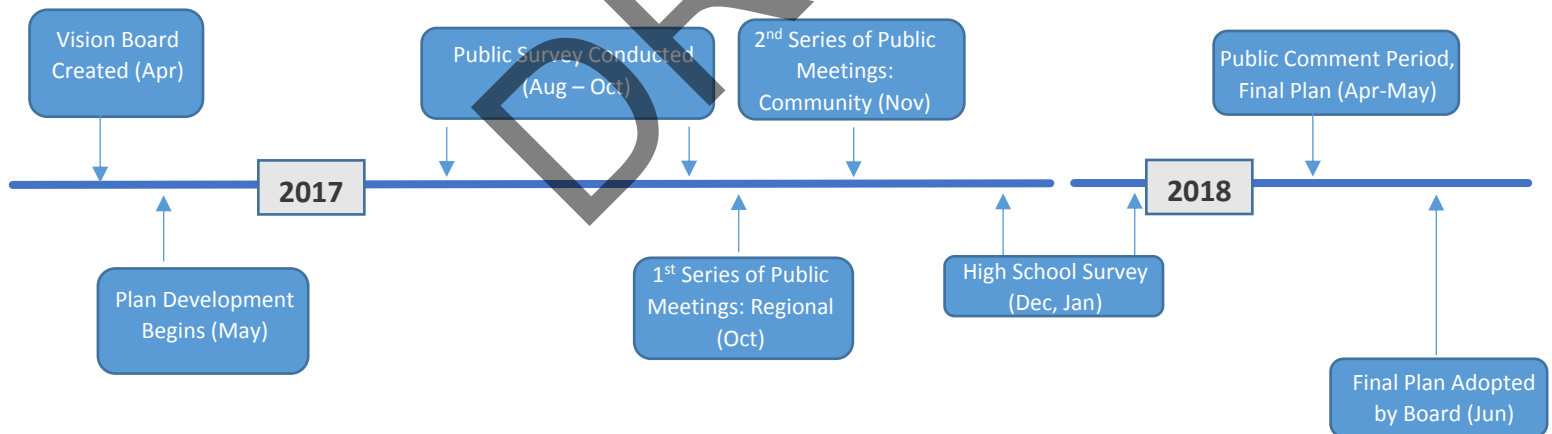


Figure 6.1 Public Involvement Milestones

## 6.2 PUBLIC SURVEY

After the Vision Board was created and plan development began in May 2017, a public survey was formalized with input from Vision Board members and Maumee Valley Planning Organization. The public survey was the first public participation sought for the plan and asked residents about quality of life issues as part of this initial assessment. The survey was available in print and online via SurveyMonkey. In order to get the word out and encourage participation, several distribution points were determined to post flyers (Figure 6.2) advertising the survey and development of the plan. Vision Board volunteers covered each Village and distributed flyers to libraries, Village offices, post offices, grocery stores, township halls, churches, gas stations, and other relevant public places. Paper surveys were also distributed to several of these locations. Links to the online survey were posted on various Village websites, County pages, and social media. In addition, an email blast with the SurveyMonkey link was sent to Vision Board members and others to forward on and snowball the amount of participants. The survey was initially open from August to September 2017, but the deadline was extended to October in order to allow for additional responses. 378 total responses were received, 13 through paper surveys and 365 online, and the feedback was extremely valuable to kick off the planning process. The following provides a brief summary of the survey results. The full survey analysis can be found in Appendix B.

The five sections of the public survey were demographics, transportation, economic development, housing and quality of life. The demographics section asked respondents to provide information about themselves so the Vision Board could ensure that a wide cross section of the population was reached through the survey. Responses were received from residents in almost every entity of the County and the age of respondents ranged from under 18 years old to 75 years or older. The majority of respondents have lived in Paulding County for over 20 years and are employed full time.

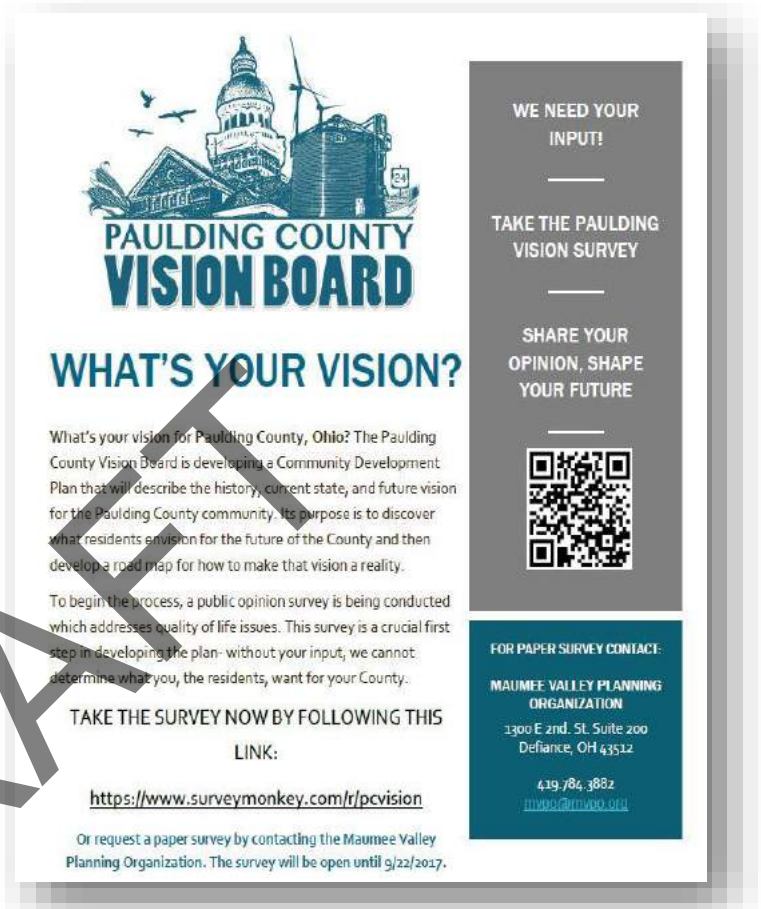


Figure 6.2 Public Survey Flyer

When asked about the importance of transportation issues to address in the County, the majority said that supporting the county’s economy through the transportation system and keeping the system in a state of good repair were most important.

Respondents also commented that more sidewalks, trails and pathways are needed as well as safety improvements and more transportation options (Figure 6.3).

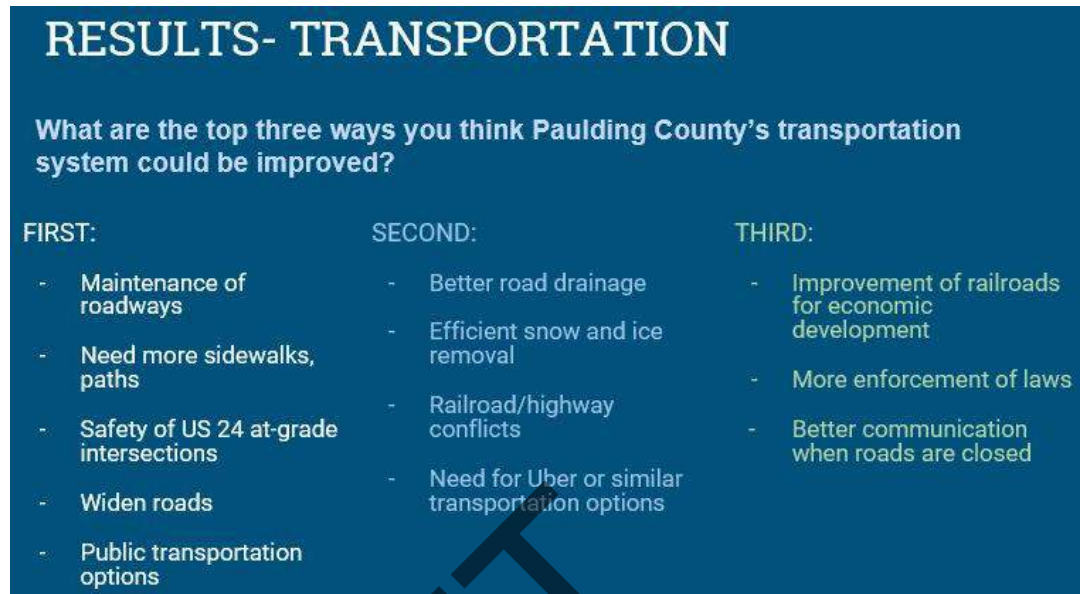


Figure 6.3 Survey Results: Top Three Transportation Improvements

Survey respondents indicated that retaining existing businesses, attracting new businesses and encouraging growth of small businesses were the most important strategies to help advance economic development in Paulding County. When asked what they feel should be the County’s top priority, the majority of respondents said attracting new businesses to the County, as shown in Figure 6.4.

The majority of individuals stated that the rural character and small town charm is Paulding County’s greatest asset and employment options are its greatest challenge to economic development. When asked for comments on ways economic development could be improved, individuals also commented that internet connectivity and options should be improved, more incentives need to be offered to

businesses and the downtown areas need to be revitalized.



Figure 6.4 Survey Results: County’s Highest Priority for Economic Development

When asked about top priorities for housing in the County, the majority of individuals stated that mixed use development, workforce housing, and planning for walkable/bikeable communities were most important. Preferences for housing among respondents were first for 1-3 bedroom single family homes followed by more than 4 bedroom single family homes and half of the respondents feel that it is currently likely to find their preferred housing type in their price range in the County. The majority of respondents said that affordable, desirable housing to buy and rent are the services most needed in the County, as shown in Figure 6.5. Respondents also indicated that rehabilitation of existing properties is needed in the County as well as development of quality housing for middle-income individuals.

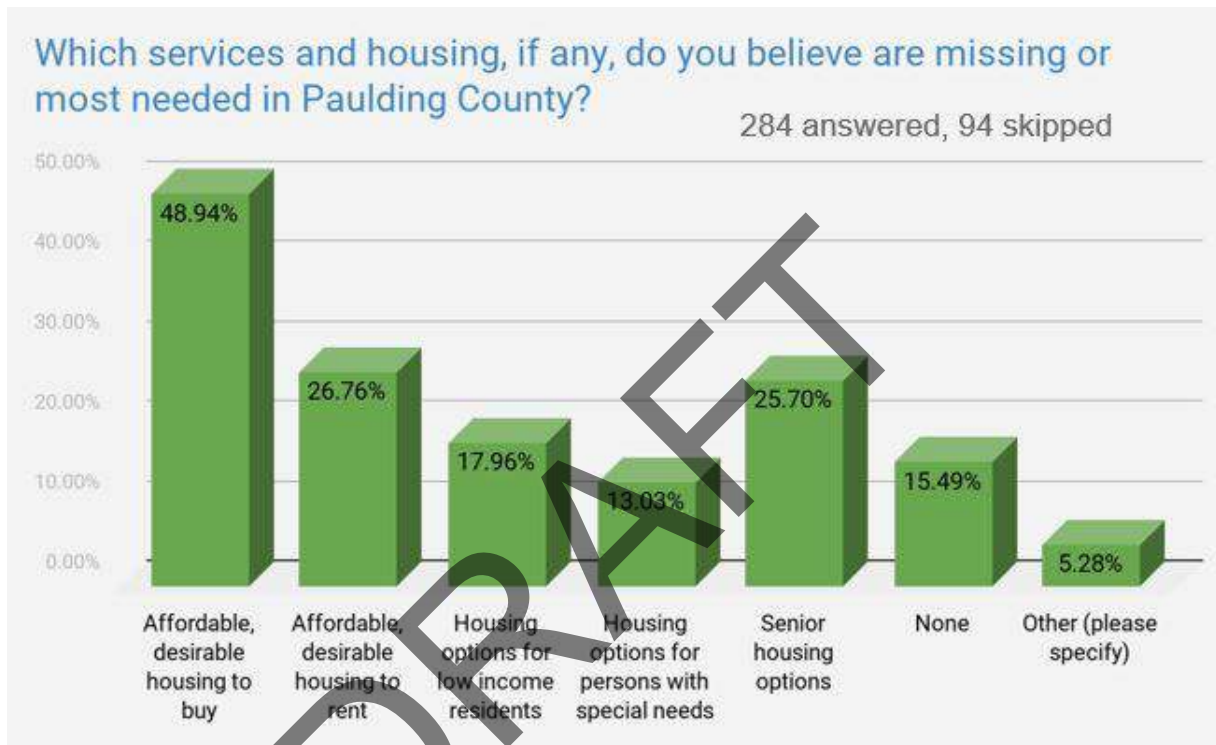


Figure 6.5 Survey Results: Missing Services and Housing in Paulding County

For the quality of life section, respondents indicated that their community as a place to live and raise children is excellent while their community as a place to work, overall quality of services in the area, and overall appearance of their community are average to poor. Job opportunities and shopping/entertainment/restaurant options in the County were rated as poor and very poor. The overwhelming majority of respondents are not satisfied with the amount of shops, restaurants, offices, etc. currently in the County. When asked why the respondents chose to live in their community, many individuals indicated that the presence of family and friends, low housing costs, and the fact that they grew up here influenced their decision. Proximity to other areas and the rural character were also chosen as being somewhat important to very important to their decision. Finally, the majority of respondents agree that drug abuse is a problem in Paulding County.

Respondents were given an opportunity to provide any additional comments they had at the end of the survey and this section yielded some of the most valuable feedback. 103 people left comments on a variety of topics. Repeated themes from comments included that there is a need for more community pride and sense of community, that blighted structures need to be addressed, more restaurants, businesses, retail and grocery stores are needed, that there needs to be strategies developed to keep the younger generations from leaving, and others as shown in Figure 6.6.

In order to visualize the feedback received from the additional comments section, a word cloud was developed. A word cloud is an image in which words appear larger the more they are mentioned. As shown in the word cloud in Figure 6.7, community and community pride were mentioned frequently, as well as youth, restaurants, activities, businesses and jobs.



Figure 6.6 Survey Results: Final Comments Summary



Figure 6.7 Survey Results: Word Cloud

### 6.3 PUBLIC MEETINGS

The public survey was analyzed after the deadline was reached. With survey results in tow, the first public meetings were set in three strategic locations: the Villages of Paulding, Antwerp, and Haviland. These locations were chosen due to their location within the three school districts that make up the County. They are also some of the larger and more centrally located Villages within the County and it was ascertained that these locations would be the most convenient for residents. The three meetings were held in order to educate Paulding County residents on the development of the Plan and to also present the results of the public opinion survey. The meetings took place within the same week at the end of October 2017. They were advertised in a multitude of ways through news releases, letters to organizations, and flyers posted within public places throughout the County. During these first three meetings, the second set of public meetings was advertised.



Figure 6.8 Public Meeting Photo- Paulding *Photo courtesy of the Crescent News*

The second public meetings were established to gather feedback on Village-specific needs as well as to gather greater public input. Meetings were scheduled in each of the participating Villages during the month of November 2017. These meetings were also advertised via

flyers and news releases, much like the first set of public meetings. During these meetings, the participants were asked to complete a SWOT analysis, describing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in the Village and/or the County as a whole. After this exercise, a visioning session was held to determine goals to address some of the issues discussed during the SWOT analysis. The second set of public meetings provided great opportunities for discussion between participants and facilitators, which led to a wealth of information and strategies for each municipality. Some common themes between the various villages in Paulding County emerged at these meetings. Figure 6.10 on the following page illustrates the common strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and goals the Villages identified. As shown, many Villages stated that being a small community and having a low cost of living were strengths as well as the school systems and fire and/or EMS services if they exist. Common weaknesses included job opportunities, the aging of the

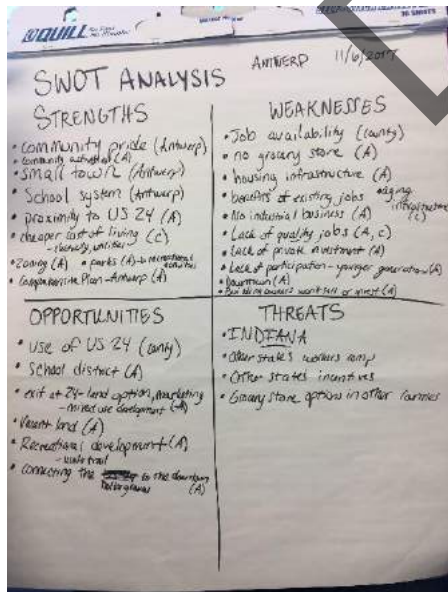


Figure 6.9 Public Meeting Photo- SWOT Analysis: Antwerp

### PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

infrastructure, slum and blight, and poor internet and cellular connectivity. Many villages stated that US Route 24 is a great opportunity for the County as well as developing recreational assets such as trails. The drug problem was consistently listed as a threat to the community as well as the younger generations leaving the County. Common goals included the following: to maintain and address aging infrastructure, bring more business and industry to the County, cleanup slum and blight, etc. Chapter 6 provides detailed information from each of the Village meetings.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS	GOALS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Small community</li> <li>•School system</li> <li>•Low cost of living</li> <li>•Transportation infrastructure</li> <li>•Fire and/or EMS services</li> <li>•Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Job opportunities</li> <li>•Aging infrastructure</li> <li>•Lack of pride in properties/slum and blight</li> <li>•Internet and cellular connectivity</li> <li>•Lack of businesses and private investment</li> <li>•Lack of funding</li> <li>•Flood and drainage issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•USR 24</li> <li>•Development of recreational opportunities (such as trails)</li> <li>•Paulding Vision Board</li> <li>•Bring more businesses and industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Other states</li> <li>•Drug problems</li> <li>•Younger generations leaving</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Maintain/address aging infrastructure</li> <li>•More businesses and industry</li> <li>•Address drug problem</li> <li>•Clean up slum and blight</li> <li>•More entertainment/retail options</li> <li>•More biking and walking infrastructure</li> <li>•Obtain more funding for necessary improvements</li> </ul>

Figure 6.10 Common Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats and Goals Identified during Public Meetings

### 6.4 HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS SURVEY

The opinions of the youth are often missed during public participation efforts. Since the younger residents are an integral part of sustaining a population and workforce for the future of the County, it was essential to involve high school students in the planning process. Those students about to graduate (grades 11 and 12) were targeted for this final survey, which was comprised of twelve questions. The survey was distributed during school hours and several questions were asked regarding perceptions within the County and quality of life aspects. Juniors and seniors from 4 schools in the County; Paulding, Wayne Trace, Antwerp and Vantage, were surveyed with 303 total responses. These responses yielded many insights into the needs of young people in the County and reinforced strategies within the plan to retain the younger population. The full student survey analysis can be found in Appendix B. The following provides a brief summary of those results.

The majority of students surveyed indicated that they do plan to go to college after high school, as shown in the chart in Figure 6.11. When asked which college they plan to go to, a variety of responses were received. The most repeated choice of schools was the University of Northwestern Ohio, followed by Bowling Green State University and Ohio State University. When asked about the students' plans for getting a job after high school graduation, about 57% said they plan on getting a job, 24% were unsure and 19% said they do not plan to. As retention of existing residents is important to the strength and growth of a community, the students were asked if they plan to leave Paulding County after graduation, and if so, why they would leave. 53% of students said they do plan to leave the County after graduation, while 14% said they do not plan to and 33% are unsure. The top reason for students planning to leave was due to the lack of jobs in the County for the student's chosen field, as shown in Figure 6.12. The second most indicated

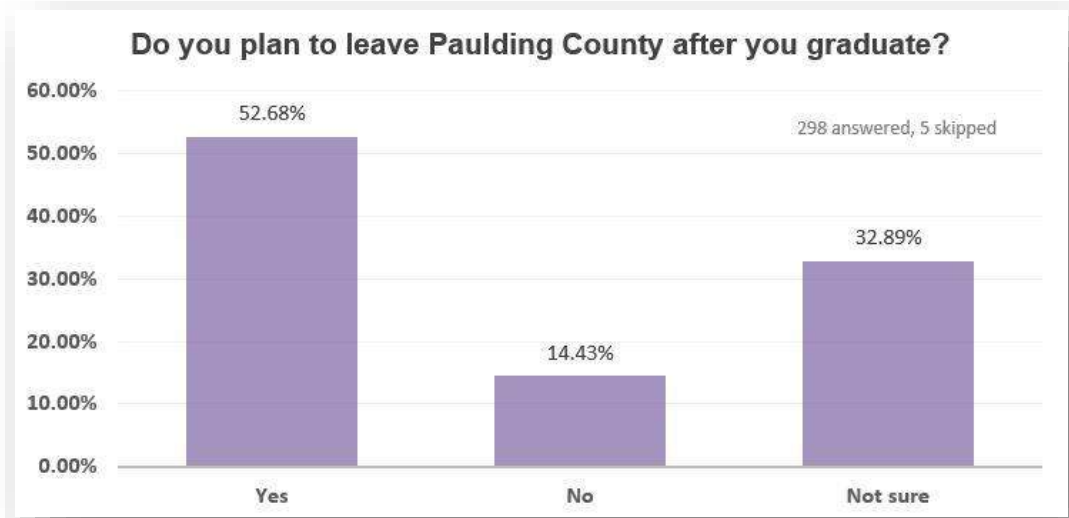


Figure 6.11 Survey Results: Students Planning to Leave after Graduation

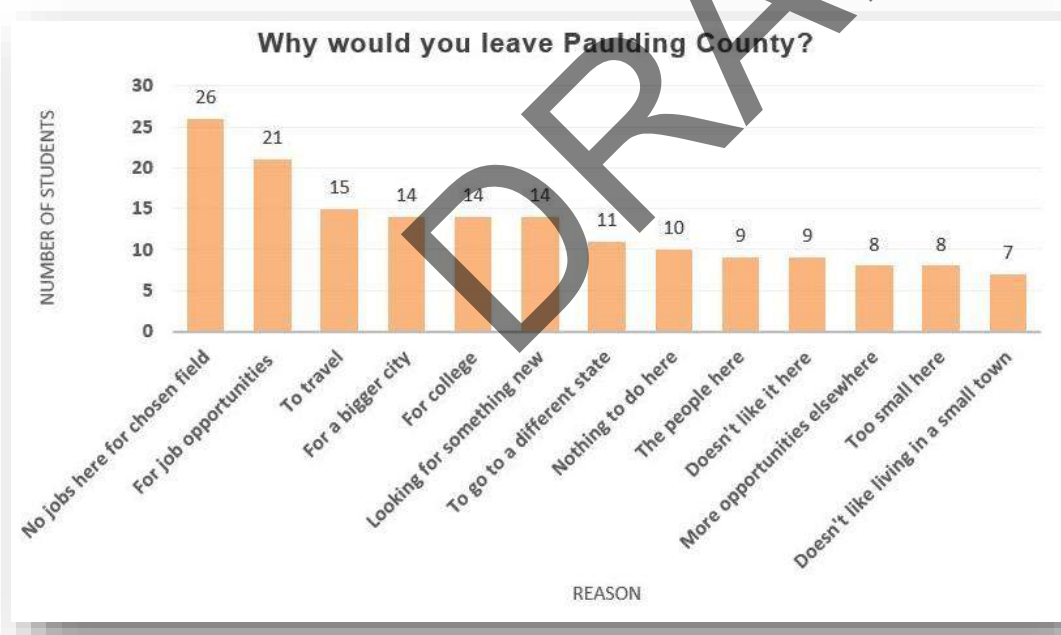


Figure 6.12 Survey Results: Reason Leaving Paulding County

reason was to leave

for other job opportunities followed by to travel, for a bigger city, and for college. As a follow up to that question, the students were asked 'what would make you come back?' which resulted in a top response of 'family' followed by 'jobs.' The majority of students indicated that the small community and being



close to family and friends are the two top elements they like most about where they live, followed by the area's quiet and peaceful nature.

When asked what they would like to see most improved in their community, 36 students indicated that there needs to be more activities and things to do, followed by better roads as shown in Figure 6.13.

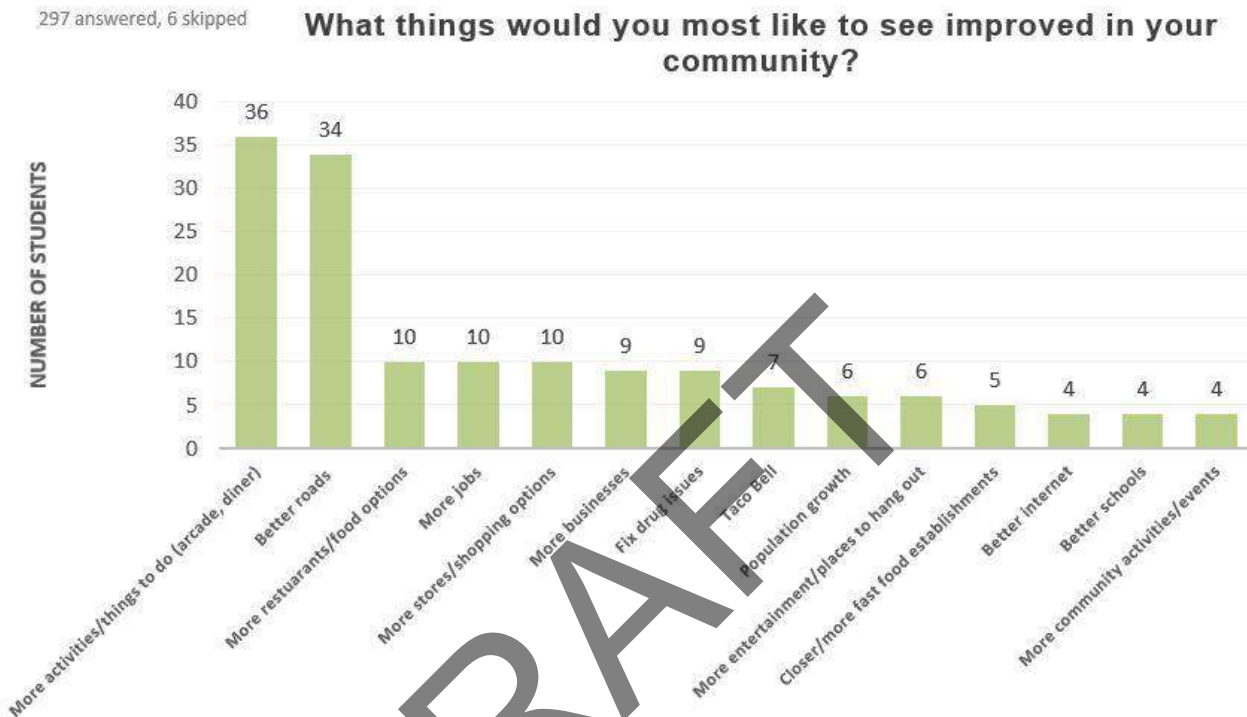


Figure 6.13 Survey Results: Things to Improve in the Community

Other responses included more restaurants and food options, more jobs, and more shopping options. When asked what the most important thing is that needs to be done to make Paulding County a better place to live, better roads and more activities/things to do were the most indicated, followed by more restaurants/things to do. As shown in the table on the following page, other top responses included beautification, more shopping, addressing drug issues, and more/better jobs.

The final question allowed the students to provide the surveyors with any additional comments they would like to submit. 36 students submitted an additional comment and responses varied from the need for additional fast food restaurants to the need for better jobs for what the students are interested in. Other students expressed that they feel Paulding County is a great place to live, but improvements such as cleaning slum and blight and updating would make it better.

In summary, the responses of the high school students aligned with the sentiments of the other survey responses received during public involvement activities. The students provided extremely valuable feedback which was incorporated into the needs and strategies established in this plan.



Table 6.1 Survey Results: Most Important thing needed to make Paulding County a Better Place to Live

What is the most important thing needed to make Paulding County a better place to live?	Number of Students
Better roads	34
More activities/things to do	34
More restaurants/places to eat	30
Beautification	16
More stores/shopping	15
Fix drug issue	14
More/better jobs	13
Better police force/enforcement	10
More businesses	10
Less crime	9
Sidewalks	7
Better education/schools	6
More attractions to bring people in	5

### 6.5 PUBLIC COMMENTS

The final plan was made available to the general public before its adoption by the Paulding County Vision Board. The public comment period on the final draft lasted approximately 30 days, during which time the public was able to review the plan and submit feedback. The input from the public was then incorporated into the plan before it was presented before the Board for adoption.

