*CHAPTER II*

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



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## Introduction

Identifying the needs and values of the community is a key aspect of the Comprehensive Plan update process. Community engagement efforts ensure that the final updated plan reflects what is truly important to residents, visitors, businesses, and other community members. This feedback helps establish a shared understanding of existing conditions, as well as the vision for the Town's future, which directly informs the goals, objectives, and policies of the Comprehensive Plan.

## Engagement Process

Engagement efforts were carried out in a multi-pronged approach to ensure multiple methods of input were available to the community. To reach community members where they already were, the Town created spaces at events such as the Food Truck Rodeo, Rockin' Main Street, and the Christmas Parade. While enjoying these events, participants ranked their priorities for the Town and shared feedback through an interactive mapping activity.

Digital opportunities for engagement included a dedicated online website platform and social media outreach. The project website, hosted on EngageNRV (engagenrv.org/christiansburg-comp-plan), provided an overview of the purpose and process of updating the Comprehensive Plan, including the process's timeline and contact information for key staff. The website included a variety of interactive input tools, such as the digital version of the survey, quick polls, interactive mapping, and spaces for participants to openly share their thoughts on a public "idea board".







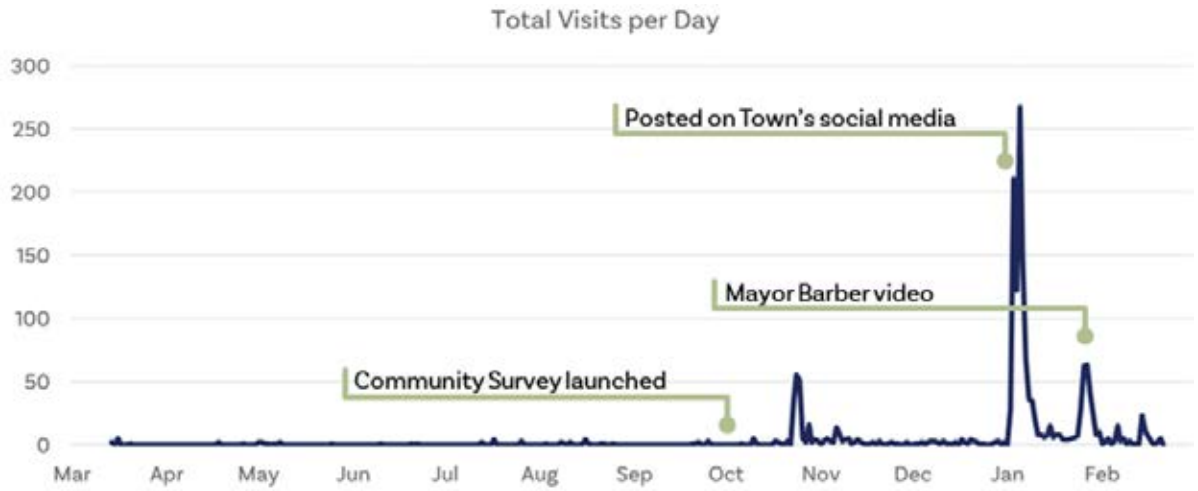

**2,000+**
Total visits to the Project Page

**1,000+**
Total survey submissions

**970+**
Total contributions to all Project Tools

The Town promoted the online engagement platform by posting on their social media channels. A video from the mayor, speaking on the Comprehensive Plan process, encouraged high participation with the online tools. By the end of the engagement phase, the website had received over **2,000 page visits** and around **970 individual** contributions across all the interactive tools.

**Focus groups** were held with subject-matter experts to facilitate in-depth conversations around specific thematic areas. These topics included economic development, housing, transportation, infrastructure, public safety, and recreation. For each focus group, the attendees included Town staff, representatives from local partners, business owners, residents, and other stakeholders.






**The following summarizes some of the key takeaways highlighted during these focus groups:**

## ECONOMIC

1. Destination development
2. Downtown revitalization
3. Small business support
4. Technology sector
5. Adaptive reuse
6. Workforce skills and advancement
7. Recreation as economic driver

## HOUSING:

1. Need for diverse housing types
2. Balancing new development with maintaining current housing stock
3. Strategies for affordable housing options for workforce

## TRANSPORTATION

1. Connections to Passenger Rail Station
2. Intersection and pedestrian safety improvements throughout Town

## PUBLIC SAFETY:

1. Challenging to maintain law enforcement staffing levels
2. Law enforcement participation in outreach and education
3. Maintaining and upgrading water system where needed to support fire protection
4. Ongoing efforts in training volunteer fire and rescue positions
5. Plans for new public safety facilities

## INFRASTRUCTURE:

1. Efforts to expand water coverage and maintain equipment
2. Improvements to sewer infrastructure and maintaining capacity
3. Continue curb collection for solid waste and recycling
4. Improvements to stormwater management

## PARKS AND RECREATION:

1. Services and programs for all age groups
2. Balancing programs as a service for residents and as support for economic development

**One-on-one interviews** were conducted with department heads and key staff across multiple Town departments as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process. The primary purpose of these interviews was to gather department-specific information, identify current conditions, understand operational needs and challenges, and discuss future opportunities and priorities relevant to each service area.

Each interview focused on topics associated with the department's roles and responsibilities. For example, the Engineering Director provided information related to water, sewer, stormwater infrastructure, and long-term utility planning; the Public Works Director discussed staffing, infrastructure maintenance, equipment, and operational needs; the Public Relations Director provided insight into community engagement, public information sharing, business relations, and interagency and intra-agency communication efforts; and the Finance Director discussed the Town's budgeting process, utility billing, capital planning, and long-term financial considerations.




Interviews were also conducted with the Police Chief, Fire Chief, and EMS leadership to discuss public safety services, staffing, facilities, equipment, emergency response needs, and future service demands.

These interviews provided valuable insight into existing conditions, departmental goals, service challenges, infrastructure needs, and opportunities for future improvements. The information gathered helped identify key issues, priorities, and recommendations that informed the development of the Comprehensive Plan's goals, objectives, and policies across multiple planning elements.

The information gathered across these community engagement efforts was analyzed and incorporated into the draft of the updated Comprehensive Plan. The Town held two open houses for citizens to view the drafted goals, objectives, and policies, and gather any additional feedback. The open houses were conducted in a drop-in format that allowed residents, business owners, stakeholders, and visitors to attend at their convenience to review the documents, ask questions, and engage directly with Town staff. The open houses served as an opportunity to test the draft recommendations with the community and confirm that the goals, objectives, and policies incorporated the feedback, concerns, and ideas shared throughout the public engagement process before finalizing the draft plan.

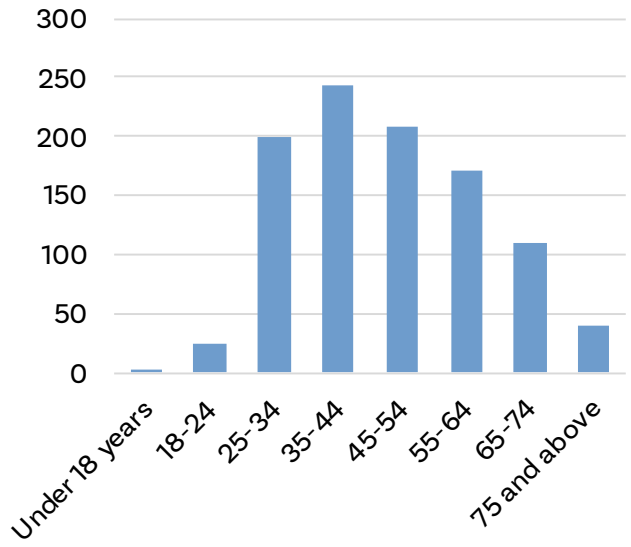
The final draft of the updated Comprehensive Plan then proceeded through a formal process of approval. The Comprehensive Plan Committee, including Planning Commission members, Town staff, and community stakeholders, first reviewed the updated plan and approved the draft. The draft was brought before the Planning Commission, which held a public hearing before recommending the plan to Town Council. Final adoption of the updated Comprehensive Plan was passed by Town Council on [date].

# Data Collection and Analysis

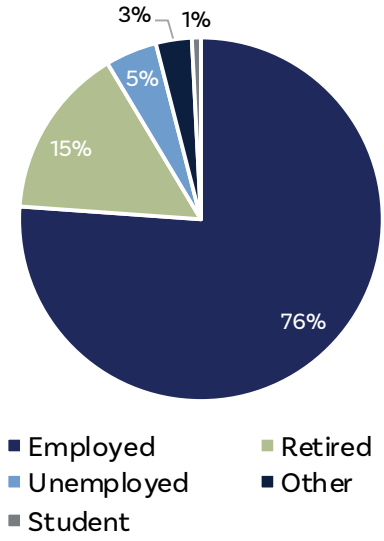
The Town distributed a community survey, both online and on paper, to gather quantitative and qualitative data. The survey covered subjects including quality of life, business attraction, housing development, and recreational preferences, among others. By the end of the community engagement phase, over 1,000 survey submissions were received.

The survey was designed to reach a wide audience of Christiansburg community members. Over half of the respondents indicated their age was between 25 and 54 years old. 76% of respondents reported that they were employed, 15% were retired, and 5% were unemployed. For those who reported that they are employed, the top industry fields were educational services, health care, and social assistance.

Age of Survey Participants




Employment Status of Participants





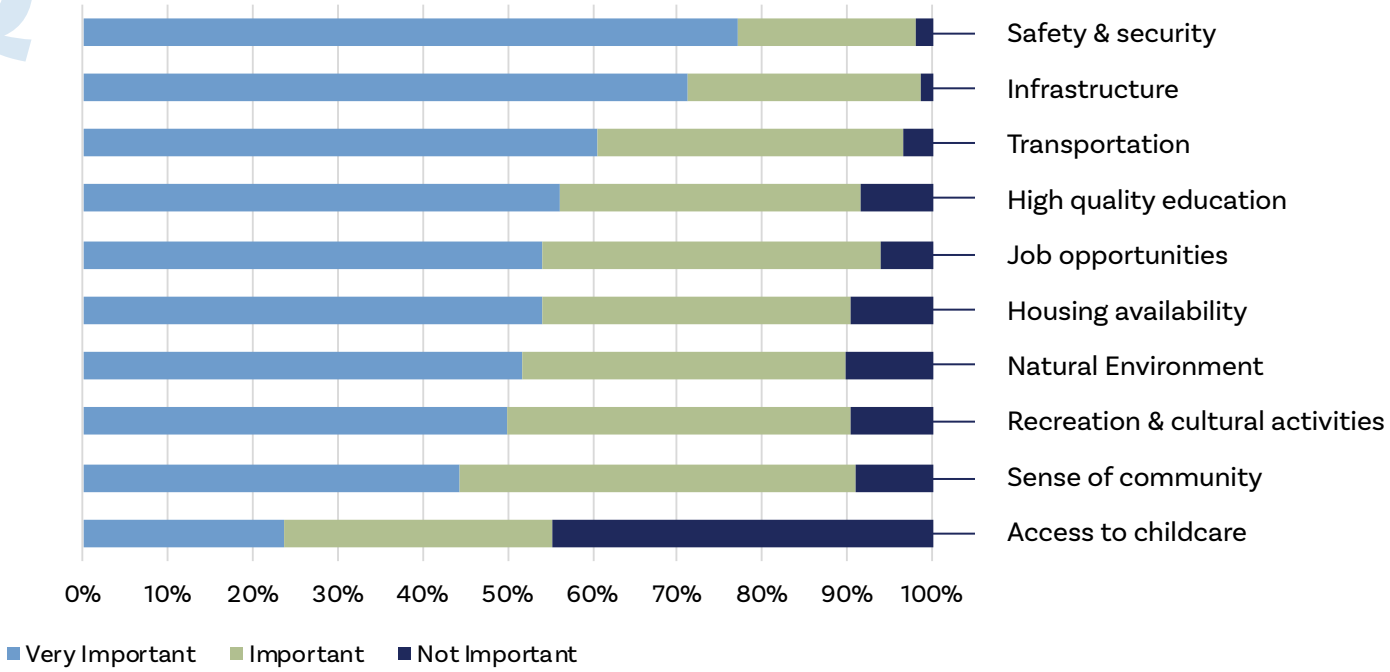

Of the submissions received, about 83% of participants indicated that they live within Town limits. Among those living outside the Town, 6% of all respondents live in the Christiansburg ZIP Code, 3% live in Blacksburg, and 2% live in Riner.

The remaining 6% reside in various other locations such as Montgomery County, Pulaski County, Giles County and other surrounding areas. 78% of respondents indicated that they live in a single-family detached home, with 16% reporting they live in a townhouse and the remaining 6% living in an apartment, mobile home, or other housing type. 80% indicated that they own their home, and 15% indicated that they rent their home.

When asked about which factors are most important to their quality of life, respondents answered that their highest priorities are safety and security, infrastructure, and transportation.

However, over 90% of responses indicated that most factors listed were important or very important.

**What factors are important to your quality of life?**




**Respondents ranked what they thought the Town's priorities for improvement should be.**

**Housing availability and affordability** received the highest rating, even though the majority of respondents indicated that they already own their home. This implies that the need for a larger variety of housing stock is apparent even to community members who are not currently searching for a home within Christiansburg.

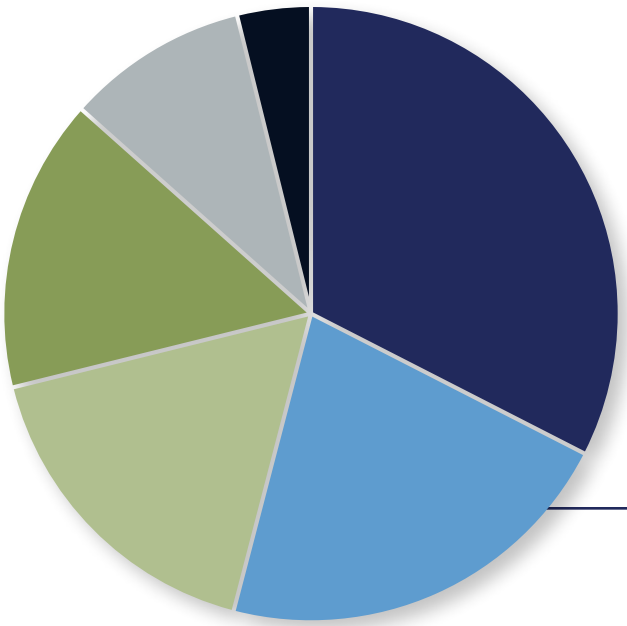
**Business attraction** was the next top priority, with residents desiring a larger variety of dining, hospitality, and entertainment establishments.

**Transportation** also ranked high, with many comments mentioning the need for pedestrian-friendly improvements as the most important need.

## TOP PRIORITIES:

1. Housing availability & affordability
2. Attracting a variety of businesses
3. Transportation (road maintenance, variety of alternative modes of transportation, etc.)
4. Parks & recreation
5. High speed internet access
6. Protection of natural resources
7. Youth programs
8. Availability of cultural activities
9. Services & activities for seniors
10. Protection of historical/ cultural assets

When asked about types of development in the Town of Christiansburg, 32% of respondents indicated that redevelopment of vacant buildings and properties for mixed-use development would be the most beneficial to Christiansburg. Many comments indicated a desire for new development to be considerate of the character and "feel" of the Town. 22% indicated that there is opportunity for more commercial development.

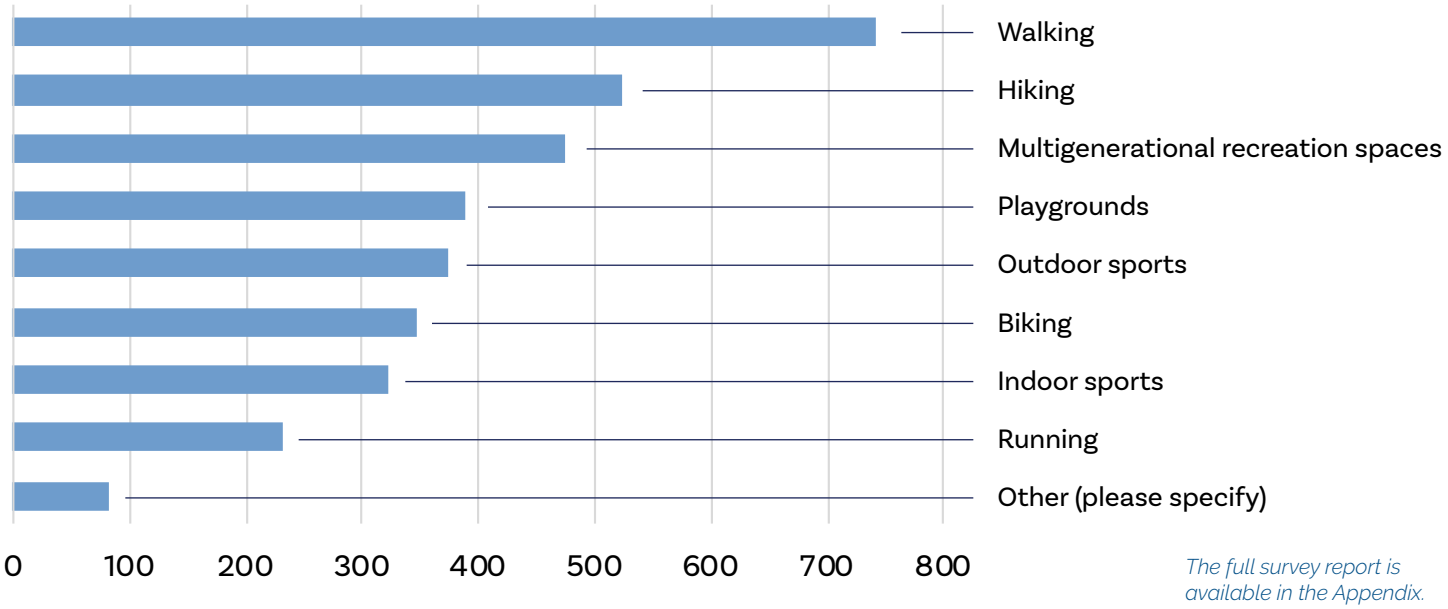


**What type of development do you feel the Town would benefit from?**

- 32% — Redevelopment of vacant buildings/properties for mixed use development
- 22% — Commercial development
- 17% — Single family residential
- 15% — Light industrial
- 10% — Multifamily residential
- 4% — Other

Survey respondents also regarded **recreation** as a high priority. Spaces for walking, hiking, and multigenerational recreation are highly valued and desired. Respondents were favorable of the expansion of recreational opportunities to residents of all ages and abilities.

**What recreational activities are most important to you?**




*The full survey report is available in the Appendix.*