

## Comprehensive Plan Citizen Survey

One of the first elements of preparation for the Comprehensive Plan update was to compose a survey where citizens could express their opinions. Surveys are a very common method for data collecting among localities. They give the opportunity to provide a valuable means of determining public views and concerns. There are many different types of surveys. Scientifically controlled surveys can be very expensive and will often give similar data. Open surveys are typically published in newspapers, on-line, or added to utility bills.

Staff chose to administer an open survey. This is a very common type for localities to select and all of the work for it was completed "in house." The questions for the survey were written by Planning staff and reviewed by members of the Planning Commission prior to being finalized. It was determined that the survey would be published in the community paper known as the *BeeHive*, with the help of the Community Education Department. This publication is mailed to each residence in the County and our survey was part of the December 2006 mailing. The survey was also made available on the internet on both the main webpage for Gloucester, as well as the Planning Department webpage by the Department of Information Technology (DIT).

The survey had an original deadline to either be mailed in or submitted online by January 31, 2007. However, the decision was made to extend the deadline until the end of February as an opportunity to collect more responses. A total of 368 responses were received; 224 online and 144 mailed in. Mailed in responses were manually entered into a database that was set up by the County's DIT to automatically receive the online responses.

The following pages contain a summary of all of the responses received. Not every question was answered by everyone. The questions at the end of the survey gave citizens the opportunity to write in their responses. Not all respondents chose to do this but many did. A general summary of those responses is provided at the end of this summary.

Any survey is a "snapshot" in time of citizen views and while they can be a valuable tool for a planning body as they prepare the Comprehensive Plan, the job of preparing the plan is ultimately that of the planning body. "Whether the survey is scientific or not, representative or not, the planning body must weigh it against facts, analysis, trends, and its own knowledge of the local situation in developing a proposed plan".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Community Planning: An Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan by Eric Kelley and Barbara Becker ©2000. Island Press.

## Citizen Survey 2006 Summary

1. How long have you lived in Gloucester County?

<b>13</b>	A. Less than one year
<b>94</b>	B. 1-5 years
<b>60</b>	C. 5-10 years
<b>147</b>	D. More than 10 years
<b>39</b>	E. All my life

2. In what District of Gloucester County do you live?

<b>81</b>	A. Petsworth
<b>73</b>	B. Ware
<b>20</b>	C. York
<b>95</b>	D. Abingdon
<b>70</b>	E. Gloucester Point

3. In your District, do you think the residential growth is:

<b>176</b>	A. Too fast
<b>12</b>	B. Too slow
<b>155</b>	C. About right

4. How long do you expect to continue living in Gloucester County?

<b>9</b>	A. Less than one year
<b>34</b>	B. 1-5 years
<b>47</b>	C. 5-10 years
<b>259</b>	D. More than 10 years

5. Are you generally satisfied with the location of your home relative to places that you frequent, such as place of work, grocery, etc.?

<b>323</b>	A. Yes
<b>26</b>	B. No

6. Do you own or rent your home?

<b>301</b>	A. Own (See Data →)
<b>46</b>	B. Rent

<b>Years of Ownership</b>	
<b>1-5</b>	115
<b>6-10</b>	46
<b>11-15</b>	34
<b>16-20</b>	27
<b>21-25</b>	20
<b>26-30</b>	19
<b>30 Plus</b>	26

7. Do you intend to purchase a home within the next 5 years?

<b>47</b>	A. Yes
<b>255</b>	B. No
<b>65</b>	C. Maybe

**With respect to the future growth and development of Gloucester County, how important to you are the following issues?**

	Very Important (5)	Moderately Important (4)	Important (3)	Minimally Important (2)	Unimportant (1)	No opinion (0)
A. Working in the community in which you live	100	47	65	66	37	21
B. Broadening the county's tax base	71	44	95	60	41	18
C. Encouraging industrial growth	47	45	43	107	91	3
D. Attracting new business	74	67	78	60	53	.3
E. Improving housing availability, affordability & cost	87	56	80	51	55	6
F. Improving roads & highways	136	66	86	37	11	3
G. Managing growth in the county	259	36	32	5	7	1
H. Encouraging planned mixed- use development	81	66	92	42	42	9
I. Concentrating growth where utilities are provided	93	65	86	53	30	7
J. Preserving agriculture	196	65	60	11	5	5
K. Preserving forest land	244	53	33	7	2	2
L. Protecting water quality & water resources	287	37	15	1	1	27
M. Preserving the county's rural character	222	61	38	13	4	2
N. Preserving historic sites and structures	245	53	27	11	2	2
O. Preserving natural resources and open space	255	53	25	4	2	1
P. Preserving wildlife habitat	254	45	31	8	2	2
Q. Preserving archeological sites <sup>2</sup>	196	51	40	13	3	3
R. Protecting scenic views and vistas	223	58	45	8	1	3
S. Improving the appearance of Route 17	154	78	65	23	16	1
T. Providing public access to the water	115	67	76	46	26	4
U. Sidewalks in certain areas	78	56	84	73	38	8
V. Bike trails and/or walking trails	129	62	71	49	20	8

<sup>2</sup> The survey printed in the *BeeHive* did not include numbers for respondents to circle, however, it did provide the row and most respondents indicated an answer within the row. The online survey did not contain the same error.

8. Which do you feel is more important?

<b>192</b>	A. Preserving rural areas such as farms and forest land
<b>14</b>	B. Encouraging development in our County
<b>142</b>	C. Both are equally important

9. Do you feel there is an adequate amount of affordable housing in Gloucester County?

<b>158</b>	A. Yes
<b>131</b>	B. No
<b>60</b>	C. No opinion

10. What types of new housing do you think are needed in Gloucester County?

<b>131</b>	A. Single-family homes
<b>42</b>	B. Townhouses/Condominiums
<b>37</b>	C. Apartments
<b>107</b>	D. A mix of single-family, townhouses/condominiums & apartments
<b>107</b>	E. Senior living
<b>91</b>	F. None

11. If you think multi-family housing is needed in the County, where in the County should it be located?

<b>70</b>	A. Gloucester Courthouse
<b>78</b>	B. Gloucester Point
<b>55</b>	C. Hayes
<b>57</b>	D. White Marsh
<b>69</b>	E. Northern Gloucester
<b>39</b>	G. Other* (See data below)

\*Responses that received more than 5 references: Nowhere, 18; Spread throughout, 8

12. What types of growth are needed in Gloucester County?

<b>155</b>	A. Commercial (retail/businesses)
<b>106</b>	B. Manufacturing, Processing, Distributing
<b>74</b>	C. Residential
<b>23</b>	D. No preference
<b>115</b>	E. None

13. Do you think residential and business growth in Gloucester County should be directed to certain areas of the county so that other areas of the county can remain rural?

<b>294</b>	A. Yes
<b>30</b>	B. No
<b>20</b>	C. No opinion

14. Are you concerned about Route 17 access and safety?

<b>274</b>	A. Yes
<b>60</b>	B. No
<b>11</b>	C. No opinion

15. Would you prefer growth on Route 17 to develop as:

<b>78</b>	A. A commercial strip corridor
<b>43</b>	B. A residential area with buffers
<b>196</b>	C. Some of A & B

16. If there was an alternative route to Route 17 between the Courthouse and the Point would you foresee using it?

<b>234</b>	A. Yes
<b>101</b>	B. No

17. Do you work in Gloucester County?

<b>132</b>	A. Yes
<b>130</b>	B. No
<b>86</b>	C. Retired

18. If no, how far do you travel to work one way?

<b>86</b>	A. Less than 25 miles
<b>69</b>	B. 25-50 miles
<b>12</b>	C. 50-75 miles
<b>7</b>	D. Over 75 miles

19. What city/town/county is your place of work?

Newport News	47
Hampton	22
Williamsburg	15
York County	14
Norfolk	7
James City County	4
Middlesex	4
Mathews	3
Richmond	3
Poquoson	2
Saluda	2

20. What is the main reason you work outside of Gloucester County?

Responses with more than 10 references:

Lack of opportunities here/ comparable work not available	48
More money	34
Already had job when moved here	14

21. What type of employment opportunities would you like to see created in Gloucester County?

<b>130</b>	A. Commercial/Retail/Wholesale
<b>114</b>	B. Manufacturing, Processing, Distributing
<b>109</b>	C. Farm related/ Agri-business
<b>39</b>	D. Construction
<b>182</b>	E. Technical
<b>44</b>	F. Other*
<b>48</b>	G. None

\*No response held more than 10 references. The following are the recommendations with more than 3 references: Tourism, 8; Mixture, 4; Environmental Consulting/Production 4; Professional, 4.

22. Where do you think industrial and/or manufacturing type uses should be located in the County?

Responses with more than 10 references:

<b>76</b>	Northern County
<b>59</b>	Current/Designated Business Park
<b>33</b>	Nowhere
<b>29</b>	Along Route 17

23. Should the County offer incentives to attract industry?

<b>107</b>	A. Yes
<b>177</b>	B. No
<b>52</b>	C. No opinion

24. Do you think the County should start designating certain roads as Greenways to protect the scenic views and rural character of the area through increased setbacks and/or buffers?

<b>287</b>	A. Yes
<b>31</b>	B. No
<b>27</b>	C. No opinion

25. Would you like to see marina facilities expanded to incorporate mixed-use development with commercial, retail, and residential areas where public utilities exist?

<b>152</b>	A. Yes
<b>103</b>	B. No
<b>82</b>	C. No opinion

26. Should the County strive to limit/protect development in flood-prone areas through zoning and land use regulations?

<b>297</b>	A. Yes
<b>26</b>	B. No
<b>18</b>	C. No opinion

27. If public sewer was available at your home, would you be interested in that service?

<b>180</b>	A. Yes
<b>130</b>	B. No
<b>30</b>	C. No opinion

28. If public water was available at your home, would you be interested in that service?

<b>176</b>	A. Yes
<b>120</b>	B. No
<b>37</b>	C. No opinion

29. Do you think sidewalks should be provided or required in more urban areas of the County?

<b>186</b>	A. Yes
<b>111</b>	B. No
<b>45</b>	C. No opinion

30. Would you use sidewalks if they were available in your area of the County?

<b>176</b>	A. Yes
<b>12</b>	B. No
<b>155</b>	C. Too rural of an area

31. Should Gloucester County regulate the commercial development in the Courthouse area in order to protect the architectural and historic character?

<b>291</b>	A. Yes
<b>27</b>	B. No
<b>25</b>	C. No opinion

32. Do you think the County should create special tax districts for schools, water/sewer services, sidewalks, transportation, etc. where needed?

<b>135</b>	A. Yes
<b>94</b>	B. No
<b>105</b>	C. No opinion

33. Would you like to see bike routes incorporated into existing public roads in the County?

<b>210</b>	A. Yes
<b>83</b>	B. No
<b>49</b>	C. No opinion

34. Would you like to see off-road trails provided as recreational amenities in the County?

<b>225</b>	A. Yes
<b>61</b>	B. No
<b>54</b>	C. No opinion

35. Please check all of the uses you would like to see incorporated in future trails in the county.

<b>249</b>	Biking
<b>127</b>	Horses
<b>279</b>	Pedestrian
<b>147</b>	Strollers

36. Would you like to see these trails link commercial and residential areas, such as Gloucester Courthouse and/or Gloucester Point, where available?

<b>215</b>	A. Yes
<b>52</b>	B. No
<b>72</b>	C. No opinion

37. Would you like to see Gloucester Point developed in a village environment that takes advantage of the existing physical and natural environment to encourage tourism and improve quality of life?

<b>224</b>	A. Yes
<b>67</b>	B. No
<b>48</b>	C. No opinion

Questions 38-40 gave citizens responding to the survey the opportunity to write in responses. Not everyone that completed the survey chose to fill in any or all of these. Below, each question is given with the number of people that responded to it and a summary of the main points of each.

**38:** What do you see as Gloucester County’s greatest problem now or in the future?

Of the 329 responses to this question, three main problems stood out:

<b>Too much residential growth/development</b>	125
<b>Route 17</b>	88 total
Appearance	19
Traffic	62
Only route	7
<b>Overcrowded High School</b>	27

**Other answers with more than 5 responses:**

Empty buildings such as Wal-Mart and Winn-Dixie not being used, No affordable housing, growth without proper infrastructure, too many homes on septic systems, losing rural character

**39.** What do you see as three of the most desirable characteristics of Gloucester County?

Of the 315 responses to this question, the following characteristics stood out:

<b>Rural</b>	175
<b>Country-like/Small Town</b>	45
<b>Open/Green Space</b>	32
<b>Water (front, access, proximity)</b>	107
<b>Friendly People</b>	60
<b>Historic</b>	37
<b>Low crime/Safe</b>	36
<b>Schools</b>	27
<b>Parks and Recreation</b>	25
<b>Low Taxes/Cost of Living</b>	23
<b>Less Traffic/Congestion</b>	21

**Other answers with more than 5 responses:**

Beautiful, Scenic, Quiet, the Courthouse Area, Affordable Housing, Sense of Community

**40. What do you see as the three most undesirable characteristics of Gloucester County?**

Of the 318 responses, the following characteristics stood out:

<b>Route 17 (All mentioned)</b>	167
Specifically mentioned:	
<b>Traffic</b>	66
<b>Appearance</b>	47
<b>Only Route</b>	23
<b>Excessive Residential Growth and Development</b>	90
<b>Secondary Road Conditions</b>	41
<b>Overcrowded Schools</b>	37
<b>Too Much Retail/Chains</b>	30
<b>Lack of Shopping Choices</b>	29
<b>Abandoned Buildings</b>	27
(Wal-Mart and Winn-Dixie)	

**Other answers with more than 5 responses:**

Toll on Coleman Bridge, not enough job opportunities, taxes too high for services citizens receive, lack of infrastructure, lack of affordable housing, too many septic systems/issues

**Question 41 gave citizen responders the opportunity to provide any additional comments. Over 185 citizens chose to take advantage of this space. Below are a few of their comments:**

“Gloucester is a great place to live. I just wish they would spend more tax money improving the schools and roadways.”

“Thanks for the survey. This will be difficult with many wanting more services, yet unwilling to change and pay more in taxes. Let’s keep our small town appeal and not try and compete head to head with York County or James City County. That is why Gloucester is a special place to live, enjoy and grow! We love it here!”

“I do not support removing the toll from the Coleman Bridge. I like the idea of paying for what you use.”

“...Gloucester is a beautiful place with BEAUTIFUL trees and wild life, and I truly pray that we will choose to keep it that way.”

“I am concerned with the rapid uncontrolled growth. I am not alone when I say I moved to Gloucester b/c of the rural small town feel. I hate that it’s beginning to look like Newport News.”

“We need higher paying jobs so that citizens do not have to commute out of the county to work to be able to afford to live here.”

“Control the growth on Rt 17 before it’s too late. It may already be too late.”

“County income not keeping pace with the call for services.”

“Especially concerned over the fact that there is only one high school for the whole county.”

“Traffic congestion on the corner of Main Street and Rt. 14”

“We saw a huge increase in taxes, but no new services offered to us to account for that huge increase!”

“Rt 17 does not provide any support for Pedestrian traffic or Bicycle Traffic. It would be nice if a buffer, or sidewalk, or Bike Trail were provided for Public Use.”

“Although I am against growth, I do think we need another grocery store.”

“I have seen a lot of change in the past 30 years. Some change has been welcome and other things have not been so good. My family moved to Gloucester because of the schools and now I hear more families complain about the high school. I feel that it is a real problem and it needs to be addressed before more homes are built. Also there needs to be affordable housing for all people at all income levels. The price of housing is so high younger families and older people are being priced out of being able to afford a house. Something needs to be done so all can afford a place to live.”

“I would like to see more cultural activities such as concerts and plays brought to the county.”

“Curbside pick-up of debris/heavy objects (not all of us own trucks)”

“The addition of more buildings and development is ludicrous considering that the old Wal-Mart shopping center and many like it are still empty.”

“Please increase growth in recreation, develop parks faster, and build a rec center for the youth so that they will have a place to foster their growth and become good citizens.”

“Gloucester County could use a blue collar and/or trade school to teach welding, CDL driving, mechanics, etc.”