

Building a Better Future - Carroll County

2026 Community Forum Recap

Introduction

Community forums play a pivotal role in the fabric of local governance, serving as a bridge between residents and decision-makers. Conducted by the Northern Kentucky Area Development District (NKADD) in partnership with Carroll County leaders, the 2026 Carroll County Community Forum was designed as an inclusive, accessible space where citizens could share ideas, raise concerns, and articulate their hopes for the future. More than a listening exercise, the forum embodied participatory democracy at the grassroots level—ensuring that the voices of those who live, work, and invest in Carroll County are central to shaping its development.

Through open dialogue, the forum empowered residents to engage in local governance, enhance transparency and accountability, and directly influence priorities and the allocation of resources. They also foster community cohesion by bringing together diverse perspectives and encouraging collaboration across neighborhoods, sectors, and generations. The conversations that emerged were not only reflective but forward-looking and grounded in pride for Carroll County's rich history, natural assets, and people, while also confronting the challenges that limit opportunity and quality of life.

A defining feature of these discussions was the search for common ground. Participants consistently identified shared goals related to housing, education, workforce development, healthcare, public services, support for local businesses, recreation, infrastructure, and community pride. This collective reflection fostered a sense of shared mission, reminding residents that progress is most meaningful when built together.



Community members participating in countywide infrastructure mapping exercise.

Most importantly, the Carroll County forum was intended to lead to action. The topics and concerns expressed during the forum and addressed later are not abstract

observations - they are the foundation for future strategies, investments, and partnerships that will guide Carroll County over the next decade. By translating community voices into practical initiatives, Carroll County can move forward with clarity, unity, and purpose.

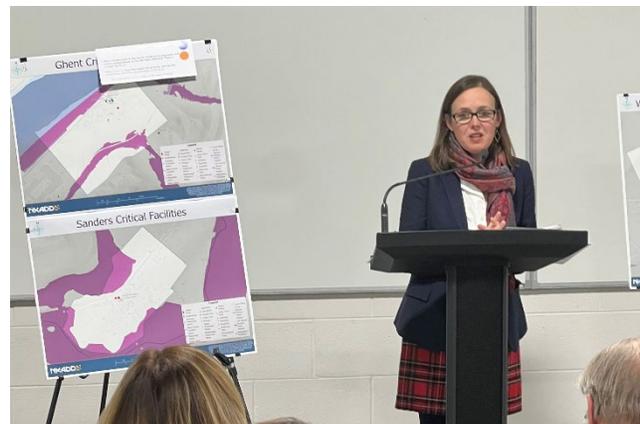
Executive Summary

The Carroll County Community Forum provided residents, local leaders, and community partners with a platform to reflect on what makes their community unique, identify barriers to quality of life, and shape a shared vision for the future. Participants expressed pride in the county's rich history, natural assets, strong sense of identity, and the central role of General Butler State Park, while also raising concerns about housing shortages, limited access to healthcare

and childcare, workforce gaps, transportation barriers, and the need for stronger local business support.

Through an interactive infrastructure mapping exercise and facilitated small-group dialogue, five core priorities emerged: housing and affordability; access to healthcare; support for local businesses; talent development; and transportation and infrastructure improvements. These priorities reflect both immediate community needs and

long-term development opportunities. The following detailed observations from the forum provide a foundation for continued dialogue, strategic planning, and coordinated action to strengthen quality of life, economic vitality, and long-term resilience across Carroll County.



NKADD Executive Director, Tara Johnson-Noem, is providing an overview of the forum.

County Profile

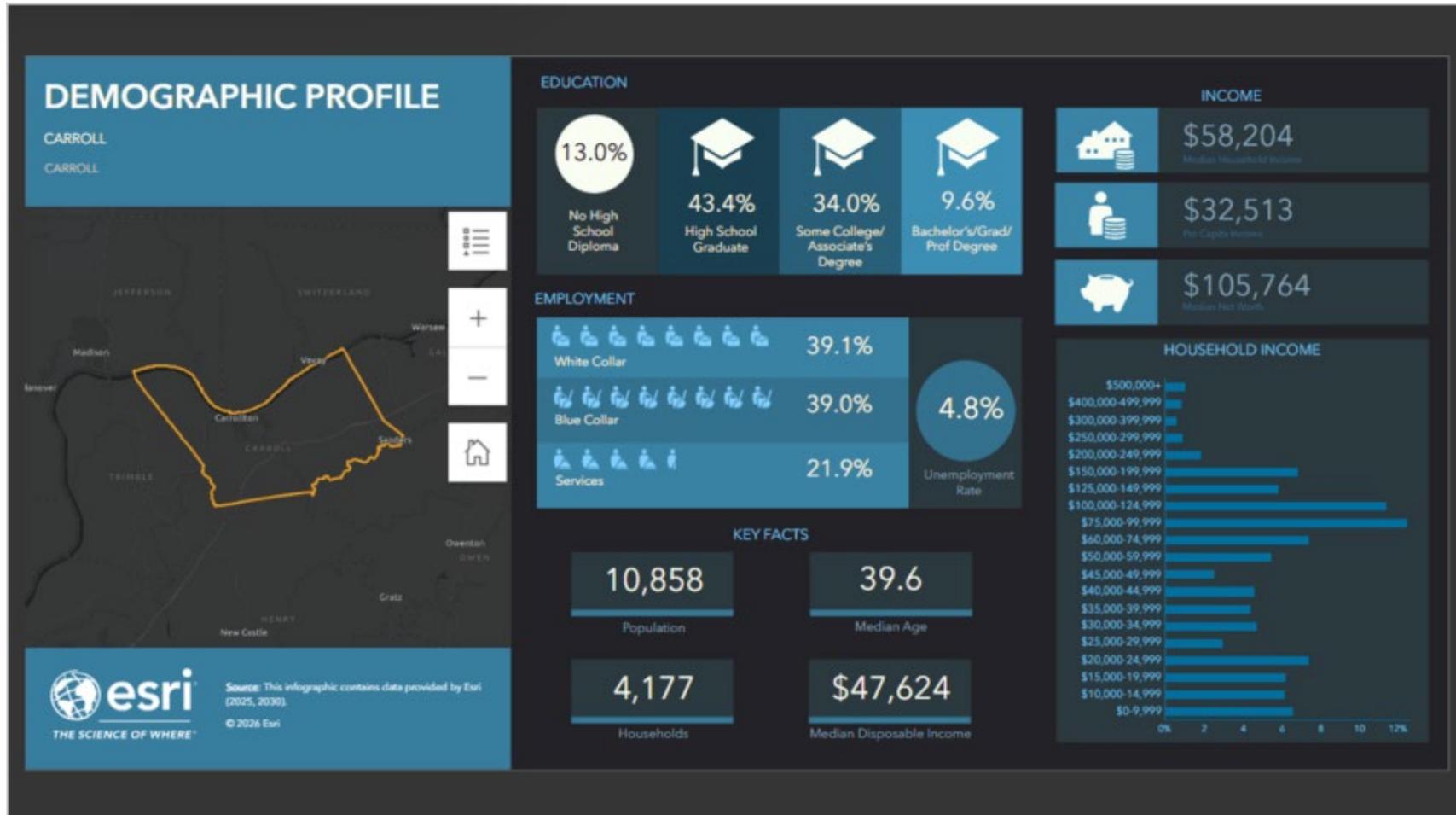


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Carroll County



Figure 2: At Risk Population in Carroll County

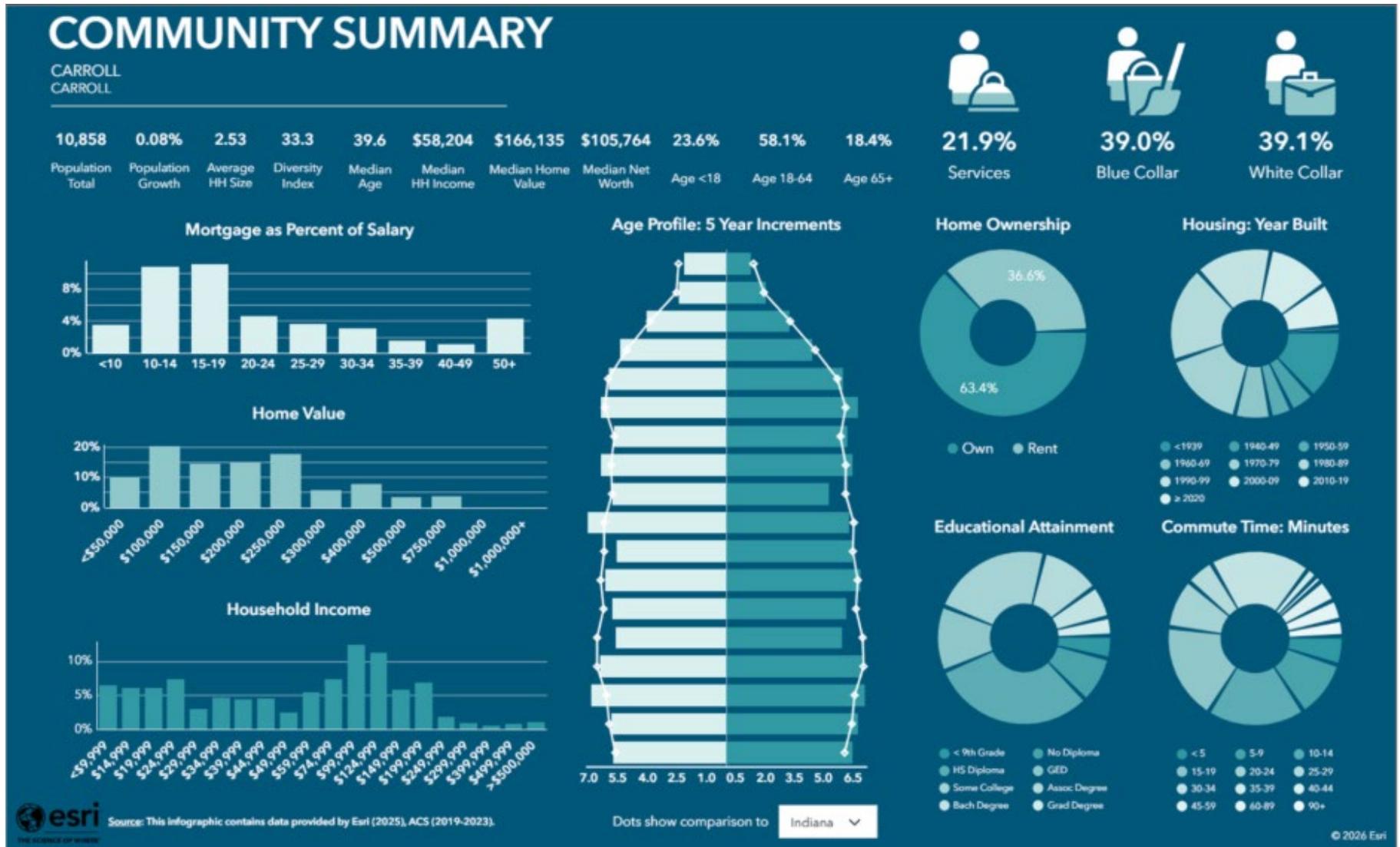


Figure 3: Carroll County Community Housing Summary

Community Forum Process

Community forums are designed to move beyond conversation and toward collective action. Each forum provides residents, partners, and local leaders with a structured yet welcoming environment to share perspectives, identify priorities, and work together toward a shared vision for the county's future.

Gathering Community Input

Before the forum started, community members were invited to review infrastructure maps of the county and cities that highlighted roads, utilities, sidewalks, internet access, and other critical assets. Community members are asked to identify:

- The county's most crucial infrastructure assets and areas of opportunity.
- Infrastructure that is underutilized or presents the greatest challenges.
- What may be missing from the maps?
- Which infrastructure investments should be prioritized in the coming year?

Participants were encouraged to add items not originally included and to vote on assets and liabilities using color-coded dots. After reviewing the collective input, attendees were given a second opportunity to adjust their votes, ensuring that the final results reflect thoughtful reflection and shared priorities.

Small Group Discussions

Following the mapping exercise, attendees broke into small groups for guided conversations focused on the future of Carroll County. These discussions provided a space for deeper dialogue around topics such as housing, workforce development, public services, community identity, and quality of life. Each group worked through a set of structured questions designed to uncover common themes, challenges, and opportunities.

After approximately 30 minutes, groups reconvened to share key takeaways with the full audience, ensuring that every voice contributed to the broader narrative.



NKADD team members lead community members in small group discussions.

Turning Dialogue into Action

The strength of a community forum lies in its ability to transform individual ideas into a cohesive, countywide vision. NKADD staff compile all feedback into a comprehensive document that outlines:

- Priority initiatives.
- Outcomes proposed by community members.
- Opportunities for collaboration,
- Recommended next steps from the community to sustain momentum.

Once completed, the document was presented to the county and each city through direct communications with local elected officials, ensuring transparency, accountability, and alignment across jurisdictions.

Sustaining Momentum



NKADD team members lead community members in small group discussions.

Community forums are an important step in an ongoing conversation, not a one-time exercise. The forum findings will serve as a reference point for continued discussions with local elected officials, community partners, and stakeholders as priorities, policies, and investments are considered over time. By documenting community input and sharing it across jurisdictions, the identified priorities help maintain continuity, transparency, and a shared understanding of resident perspectives. This approach supports informed decision-making and keeps community voices present in future planning efforts, while allowing flexibility as needs, opportunities, and resources evolve.

Infrastructure Insights from Mapping

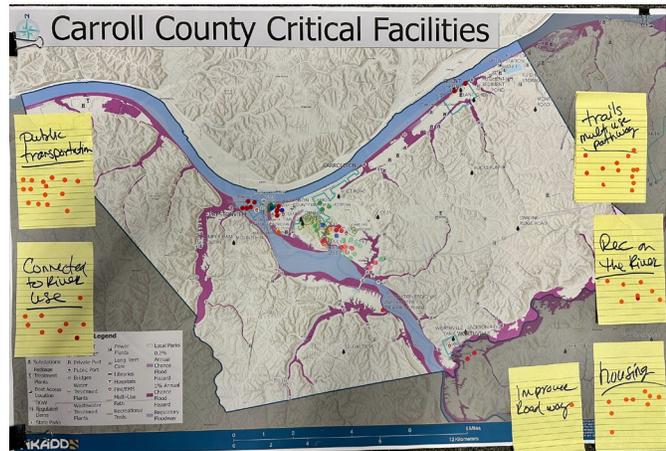
As part of the forum process, participants engaged in a countywide infrastructure mapping exercise to identify both critical assets and areas of concern across Carrollton, Ghent, Sanders, Worthville, and unincorporated areas of the county.

Community members identified several facilities and systems as strong assets, including the Carroll County Public Library, Carroll County Memorial Hospital, General Butler State Park, local fire departments, water treatment plants, and the Carrollton

Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant. These facilities were widely recognized as foundational to public safety, education, recreation, and overall quality of life.

At the same time, residents raised concerns regarding roadway conditions (including Highway 227, Highway 36, and Jackson Ridge Road), sidewalks in certain communities such as Ghent, public transportation availability, housing conditions, and river access and recreation connectivity. Some facilities were described as needing evaluation or reinvestment, while others were noted as having mixed results depending on service capacity or condition.

These location-specific insights complement the broader priority of transportation and infrastructure improvements and provide valuable context for future planning discussions and capital improvement considerations.



City of Carrollton's completed infrastructure map.

Priority Observations

During breakout group discussions, Carroll County residents identified several key concerns and areas for action. Five priorities emerged consistently across conversations: increasing housing affordability, expanding access to healthcare, strengthening support for local businesses, advancing talent development, and improving transportation and infrastructure. Participants also discussed potential partnerships and next steps to address these priorities. These opportunities are outlined in the table below.

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
Housing and Affordability	Addressing the lack of homes in the \$200,000-\$250,000 range and concerns about poorly maintained properties.	HUD, NKADD, Community Foundations, Developers, Realtors, Home Builders, Local Employers, Planning and Zoning, Local Financial Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further assess local housing supply and affordability trends. • Explore opportunities that support workforce and “missing middle” housing. • Consider partnerships that encourage quality housing development and reinvestment.
Access to Healthcare	Improving access to primary care, pediatrics, OB-GYN, urgent care, and pharmacy; stronger healthcare coordination in rural areas.	St. Elizabeth Healthcare, University of Louisville Hospitals, Local Hospitals, OCPT, Carroll County Wellness Transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue conversations with regional healthcare providers regarding service availability. • Evaluate potential strategies to improve healthcare access and connectivity. • Coordinate discussions around transportation and rural access barriers.
Support for Local Businesses	Fostering community pride in local businesses through promotion, lowering commercial rents; creating a strategic plan for each community.	Local chambers of commerce, KIEDA, NKADD, financial institutions, local governments, SBDCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore strategies to strengthen small business support and visibility. • Consider collaborative promotion efforts across the county. • Assess opportunities to align local business development with regional economic goals.
Talent Development	Focusing on workforce gaps, particularly in service trades; promoting vocational and entrepreneurial programs to retain young residents.	Local chambers of commerce, KIEDA, NKADD, NKWIB, schools, Area Technology Center, JCTC, Carroll County Training Consortium, Future 42 Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue evaluating workforce gaps in high-demand sectors. • Encourage alignment between education providers and employer needs. • Explore ways to support entrepreneurship and career pathway awareness.

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
Transportation and Infrastructure Improvements	Enhancing transportation options, hospital access, and addressing infrastructure issues like damaged roads and lack of utilities in certain areas.	Public transit agencies (OCPT, TARC, TANK, etc.); KYTC District 6, NKADD, Carrollton Utilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify infrastructure concerns raised during the forums for further review. Coordinate with regional partners on mobility and connectivity discussions. Consider long-term planning efforts that support transportation and utility improvements.

Listening to Our Residents and Shaping Our Future

In addition to the top five priorities identified above, comments and statements made during the small group discussions reflect the voices, concerns, and visions shared by community members across Carroll County. Their insights highlight what makes the county special, where challenges exist, and what residents want to see over the next decade.

1. Community Identity - What Makes Carroll County Unique

Residents describe Carroll County as a place of deep history, strong people, and unmatched natural assets. The county’s two rivers, agricultural heritage, and General Butler State Park at the heart of the community are defining features. Participants spoke proudly about historic homes, landmarks like the Masterson House, community parades, festivals, and charm.

At the same time, geography is both a blessing and a barrier. While parks and scenic topography are valued, travel within the county is difficult, limiting access to jobs, healthcare, and retail. The community benefits from major industries located here, yet many workers commute in and leave at the end of the day, weakening local investment.

Residents value educational opportunities such as JCTC and the Future 42 Program, tourism potential, and the county’s strategic location between two metro areas, but acknowledge this also makes it hard for small businesses to compete.

2. Quality of Life - What Needs to Improve

Housing is the most pressing concern. Participants noted a lack of homes in the \$200,000-\$250,000 range (“missing middle” housing), a market dominated by rentals (estimated at 70%), and concerns about unregulated or poorly maintained properties. Many expressed frustration that despite having an industrial base, there is not enough housing for families who want to stay or move in.

Other quality-of-life challenges include:

- Limited access to comprehensive medical care, especially pediatrics and OB-GYN services.
- Lack of quality childcare (only three licensed providers countywide).
- Need for more “third spaces” - safe, social gathering places.
- Desire for more families, better employer environments, and stronger physical health initiatives.
- Barriers to shopping locally due to limited amenities and long travel times.

3. Community Engagement - Supporting Local Businesses

Residents want to see a cultural shift toward pride in local businesses. Many currently spend money in Madison, Indiana or NKY/Cincinnati.

Key ideas included:

- Actively promoting local businesses through social media, word-of-mouth, and events.
- Lowering commercial rents to make business ownership more feasible.
- Creating a countywide strategic plan where each community has a defined role.
- Improving walkability, parking (especially on Highland Avenue), and transportation to General Butler State Park.
- Establishing a covered farmers market and recreational transportation options.

There is a strong desire for people to choose Carroll County first.

4. Talent Development - Building the Local Workforce

Residents identified workforce gaps in the service trades - HVAC, plumbing, electrical, and general contracting - because many local industries outsource work to Northern Kentucky or Cincinnati. Participants emphasized the importance of vocational and entrepreneurial programs to keep young people in the county.

Additional themes:

- Use the Area Technology Center and Future 42 Program to promote entrepreneurship.
- Invest more in public sector careers such as healthcare, utilities, education, EMS, fire, and law enforcement.
- Address the "missing middle class" problem - local wages are not keeping residents from leaving.
- Improve teacher recruitment and educational adaptability.

5. Public Safety - Preparedness & Communication

Many residents feel unprepared for natural disasters and emergencies, despite acknowledging strong leadership during recent floods.

Suggestions included:

- Public drills and preparedness presentations with hospitals and first responders.
- Clearer public information systems and industry involvement in emergency planning.
- Updated warning sirens and infrastructure.
- Strengthening volunteer fire and emergency services.

While community-level preparedness is improving, residents feel personal preparedness remains low.

6. Public Services - Where Improvements Are Needed

Participants cited major needs in:

- Transportation - especially for individuals in wheelchairs and along Highway 227.
- Hospital transportation and access to care.

- Education - 65% of students are impoverished, 18% have special needs, and 27% are English Learners. Early literacy, preschool access, and ELL services were top priorities.
- Infrastructure - roads damaged by truck traffic and lack of natural gas in some areas.
- Communication & Transparency - more proactive outreach from local government.

7. Future Vision - Carroll County in 10 Years

Residents envision a county with a positive image, strong pride, and a shared sense of purpose.

They imagine:

- Improved housing, education, and health outcomes.
- A vibrant tourism economy supported by history, rivers, parks, and trails.
- A unified county working together rather than competing internally.
- A community where people live, work, and invest locally - not just commute in and out.

8. Cultural & Recreational Gaps

Residents identified missing amenities such as:

- Good local restaurants and entertainment districts.
- Expanded use of the rivers for kayaking and boating.
- Trails, sports fields, Point Park improvements, and non-school-based arts and sports activities.
- Tourism services like boat docks and river access points.

9. Community Initiatives Residents Want

Some initiatives included:

- Indoor recreation and parks programming.
- An event planner to activate public spaces.
- Murals and beautification projects.
- Better county-city collaboration.
- A large convening space or amphitheater.
- Recycling and community cleanup resources.

10. Measuring Success

Residents believe progress should be measured by:

- More locally owned commercial buildings.
- More families moving in rather than commuting out.
- Higher event attendance and volunteerism.
- Increased local business revenue and tax base.
- Better health, education, and quality-of-life statistics.
- Improved staff retention and higher community satisfaction.

Conclusion

The Carroll County community forum demonstrated a moment of shared reflection and honest dialogue among residents, local leaders, and partners. The themes outlined throughout this document highlight both the strengths that define Carroll County and the challenges that must be thoughtfully addressed to support long-term vitality. While perspectives varied, a consistent message emerged: residents care deeply about their community and want to see it grow in ways that honor its character, improve quality of life, and create opportunity for future generations.

This recap documents the input and priorities shared during the forums and is intended to serve as a resource for ongoing conversations, planning efforts, and decision-making. By capturing community voices in a clear and accessible format, it provides local elected officials and stakeholders with a common reference point as they consider policies, investments, and partnerships moving forward. Continued dialogue, collaboration, and responsiveness will be essential as Carroll County builds on the engagement and momentum generated through the forums.