

Building a Better Future - Gallatin 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. In Gallatin County, these forums, conducted by the Northern Kentucky Area Development District (NKADD) in partnership with Gallatin County leaders, were designed as inclusive, accessible spaces where citizens could share ideas, raise concerns, and articulate their hopes for the future. More than a listening exercise, the forums embody participatory democracy at the grassroots level - ensuring that the voices of those who live, work, and invest in the county are central to shaping its development.



Community members participating in countywide infrastructure mapping exercise.

Through open dialogue, these forums empower 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 Gallatin 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, public services, recreation, and community pride. This collective reflection created a sense of shared mission, reminding residents that progress is most meaningful when it is built together.

Most importantly, these forums were intended to lead to action. The insights documented here are not abstract observations - they are the foundation for future

strategies, investments, and partnerships that will guide Gallatin County over the next decade. By translating community voices into practical initiatives, Gallatin County can move forward with clarity, unity, and purpose.

Executive Summary

The Gallatin County Community Forum provided residents, local leaders, and community partners with an opportunity to reflect on what makes their community distinctive, identify barriers to quality of life, and articulate a shared vision for the county's future. Participants expressed strong pride in Gallatin County's river heritage, agricultural roots, small-town character, multigenerational family ties, and strategic location along I-71, while also raising concerns about limited access to healthcare and essential amenities, housing availability and affordability, aging infrastructure, workforce gaps, and the need to better support and promote local businesses.



Judge/Executive Jon "Ryan" Morris welcoming everyone to the forum.

Through an interactive infrastructure mapping exercise and facilitated small-group discussions, five core priorities emerged: housing and affordability; expanded access to essential amenities and healthcare services; support for local business growth and development; workforce and talent development; and roadway and infrastructure improvements. These priorities reflect both immediate service and infrastructure needs and longer-term opportunities for strategic growth and economic diversification. The insights provide a foundation for continued dialogue, comprehensive planning, and coordinated action to strengthen quality of life, preserve community character, and support sustainable development across Gallatin County over the next decade.

County Profile

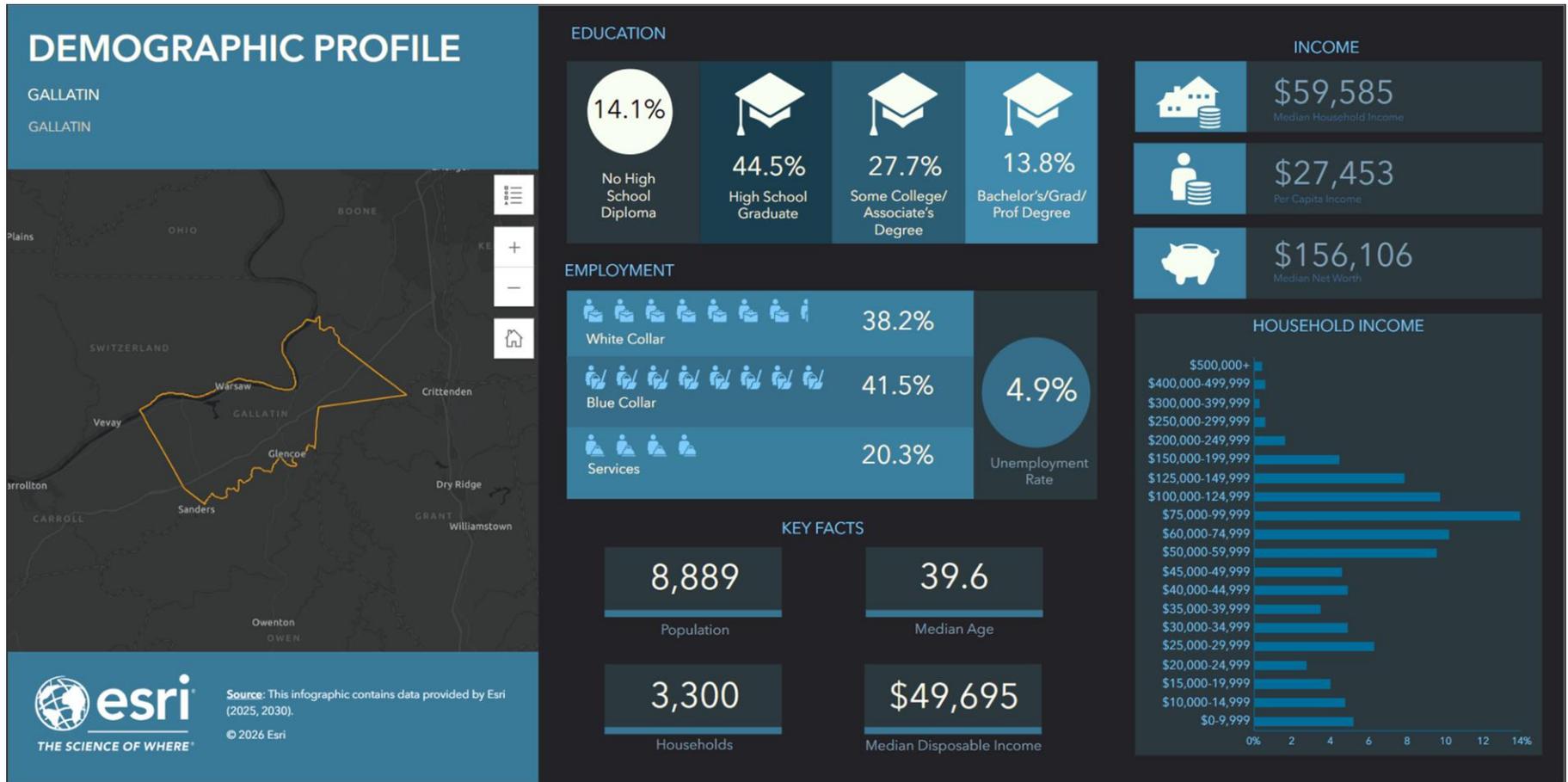


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Gallatin County



Source: This infographic contains data provided by Esri (2025, 2030), ACS (2019-2023), Esri-Data Axle (2025). © 2026 Esri

Figure 2: At Risk Population in Gallatin County

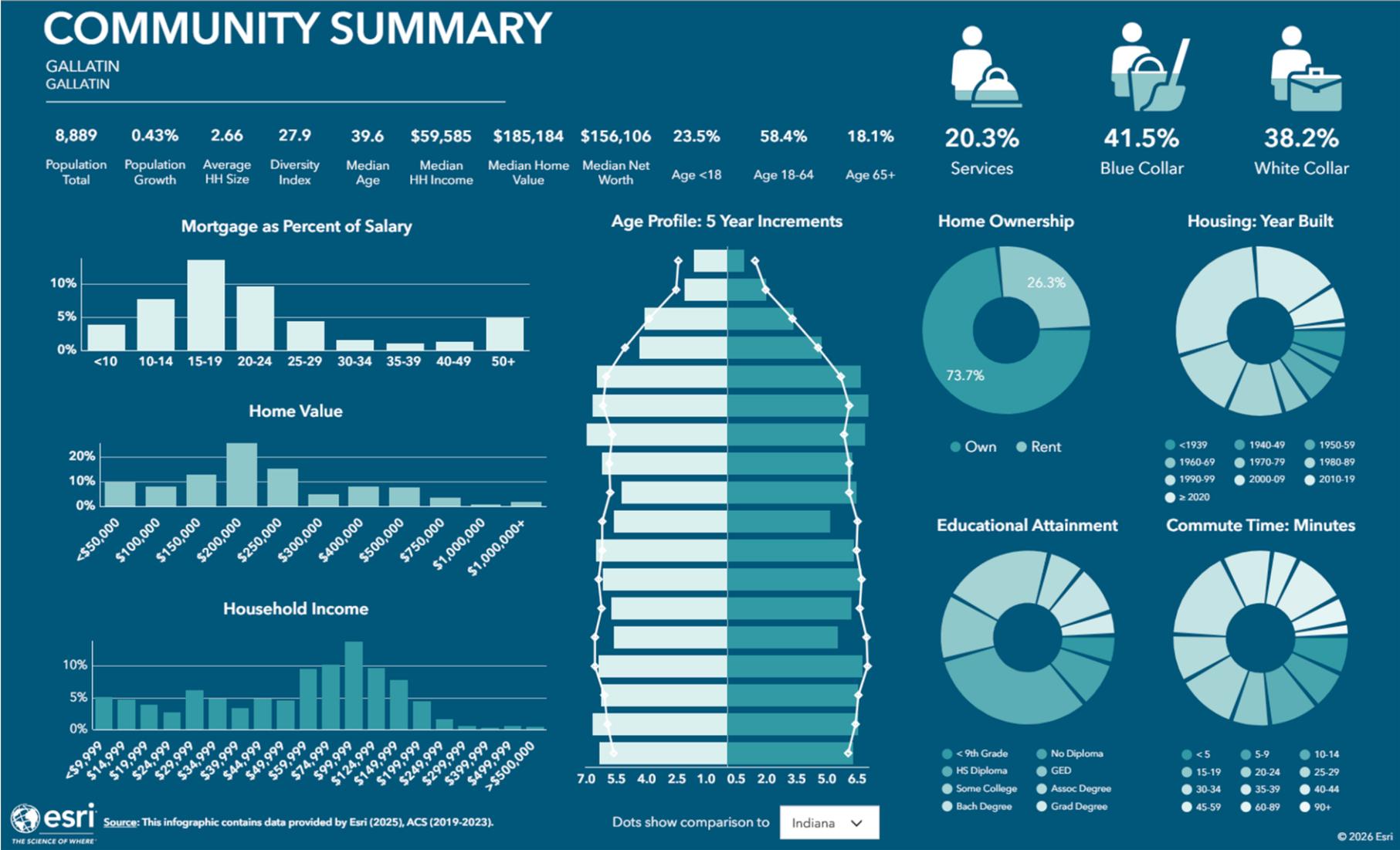


Figure 3: Gallatin County Community Housing Summary

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

Participants were first invited to engage with interactive infrastructure maps that highlight 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.

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

Small Group Discussions



NKADD team members lead community members in small group discussions.

Following the mapping exercise, attendees broke into small groups for guided conversations focused on the future of Gallatin 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 20 minutes, groups reconvened to share key takeaways with the full audience, ensuring that every voice contributes to the broader narrative.

Turning Dialogue into Action

The strength of this process 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

Community forums are an important step in an ongoing conversation, not a one-time exercise. The findings in this document 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 document helps 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.



Charlie French, Mayor of Warsaw, welcoming everyone to the forum and to Warsaw.

Infrastructure Insights from Mapping

As part of the forum process, participants engaged in a countywide infrastructure mapping exercise to identify both key assets and areas of concern across Glencoe, Sparta, Warsaw, and unincorporated areas of Gallatin County.

Community members identified several facilities and systems as strong assets, including the Sparta water tank; the Glencoe Volunteer Fire Department; Pop's Landing; I-71 Exit 62 (Glencoe); local parks and fairgrounds; the walking story trail; the boat dock in Warsaw; the Gallatin County Public Library; Gallatin County High School; the Warsaw Sewage Treatment Plant; Gallatin Water Treatment Plant Well A; Gallatin Nursing and Rehab; the bridge over Dry Creek; electrical substations; and additional boat dock access points throughout the county. These facilities were recognized as important to public safety, education, recreation, utilities, and overall community identity.



Community Forum Participants using the maps to identify key assets and areas of concern throughout the county.

At the same time, residents raised concerns regarding the Kentucky Speedway property and I-71 Exit 57 in Sparta; the condition of Railroad Street in Glencoe; Gallatin Water Treatment Plant Well B; areas surrounding Steele Creek; noise pollution from I-71 and Highway 1039; and the need for beautification and improvements at interstate exits. Some facilities, including the Warsaw Fire Department and the Gallatin County Airport, were described as both assets and areas requiring evaluation or reinvestment depending on capacity, condition, or future growth potential.

These location-specific insights reinforce the broader priority of roadway and infrastructure improvements and provide meaningful context for future planning efforts, capital investment discussions, and long-term community development strategies.

Priority Observations

During breakout group discussions, Gallatin County residents identified several key concerns and opportunities for action. Five priorities emerged consistently across conversations: housing and affordability, expanded access to essential amenities and healthcare services, support for local business growth and development, workforce and talent development, and roadway and infrastructure improvements. Participants also emphasized the need for a long-term plan to guide sustainable growth. Potential partnerships, strategies, and next steps to address these priorities are outlined in the table below.

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
Housing and Affordability	Expand availability of quality housing options across price points; increased workforce housing; improved property conditions; sustainable residential growth aligned with infrastructure capacity.	HUD, NKADD, Community Foundations, Developers, Realtors, Home Builders, Local Industries/Employers, Planning and Zoning, Local Financial Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further assess local housing supply, affordability trends, and condition of existing stock. • Explore opportunities that support workforce and “missing middle” housing. • Consider partnerships that encourage quality housing development and reinvestment. • Align housing strategies with long-term comprehensive planning efforts.
Access to Essential Amenities and Healthcare Services	Improving access to primary care, pediatrics, OB-GYN, urgent care, and retail businesses like pharmacies, and grocery stores; reduced travel burdens for residents; stronger healthcare coordination in rural areas.	St. Elizabeth Healthcare, University Hospitals, regional health departments, local clinics, NKADD, transportation providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue conversations with regional healthcare providers regarding service availability and expansion opportunities. • Evaluate feasibility of urgent care or satellite clinic models. • Coordinate discussions around transportation, mobility, and rural access barriers.
Support Local Business Growth and Development	Increased local spending; improved small business sustainability; enhanced downtown vitality; stronger	Local chambers of commerce, KIEDA, NKADD, city and county governments, SBDC, local financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore small business support tools such as grants, tax incentives, and technical assistance. • Strengthen collaborative promotion and marketing efforts across communities.

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
	tourism and river-based economic activity.	institutions, tourism entities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess redevelopment opportunities. • Improve communication and transparency between businesses and local leadership.
Workforce and Talent Development	Expanded skilled trades pipeline; stronger alignment between employers and schools; increased retention of young residents; diversified local job base.	Local school districts, Area Technology Centers, chambers of commerce, KIEDA, NKADD, airport stakeholders, regional employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue evaluating workforce gaps in high-demand sectors. • Encourage alignment between education providers and employer needs. • Promote vocational training, entrepreneurship, and career pathway awareness. • Explore opportunities for trade school partnerships and technical certifications
Roadway and Infrastructure Improvements	Safer and better maintained roads; improved interstate access and signage; enhanced mobility options; upgraded utilities and emergency infrastructure; increased development readiness.	Public transit agencies (OCPT, TARC, TANK, etc); KYTC District 6, NKADD, Planning and Zoning, water and sewer districts, utility providers, emergency management agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify infrastructure concerns raised during the forums for further review. • Coordinate with state and regional partners on roadway and exit improvements. • Evaluate mobility enhancements, including sidewalks, trails, and senior transportation access. • Integrate infrastructure upgrades into long term comprehensive planning efforts.

Listening to Our Residents and Shaping Our Future

In addition to the top priorities identified during mapping and breakout discussions, comments and statements shared in small group conversations reflect the voices, concerns, and aspirations of Gallatin County residents. Their insights reveal what makes the county distinctive, where challenges persist, and what community members hope to see over the next decade.

1. Community Identity - What Makes Gallatin County Unique

Residents consistently described Gallatin County as a close-knit, river-centered community with deep generational roots. The Ohio River, lake access, rail, interstate connectivity, and agricultural heritage define the county's character. Many spoke of strong family ties spanning hundreds of years, familiar names across generations, and a shared sense of pride in being a small but resilient place.

Participants value the county's rural charm, small-town feel, good schools, strong volunteer culture, and its strategic location along I-71 with three exits. The blend of Northern Kentucky access while maintaining a quieter, country lifestyle was frequently cited as a major asset.

Tourism potential, historic sites, local shops and restaurants, and recreational amenities such as boating and kayaking were also highlighted as strengths – though many noted that these assets are under-promoted. Residents appreciate being “close enough to the city” while still preserving riverfront beauty and agricultural traditions.

2. Quality of Life - What Needs to Improve

Participants identified several foundational quality-of-life needs. Access to everyday amenities emerged as a top concern, including:

- A full-service grocery store
- Pharmacy and urgent care services
- Additional restaurants and casual dining
- Expanded childcare and healthcare access
- More diverse and affordable housing options

Housing affordability and design were discussed frequently, with interest in single-family homes, better neighborhood planning, and improved sewer infrastructure. Transportation barriers also surfaced, particularly the need for sidewalks, bike paths, and improved mobility options for seniors.

Infrastructure improvements were widely requested, including road repairs, expanded sewer systems, improved interstate signage, and safer access to parks. Many participants emphasized the importance of developing a clear five- or ten-year comprehensive plan to guide growth intentionally rather than reactively.

3. Community Engagement - Supporting Local Businesses

Residents expressed a desire for stronger coordination, communication, and transparency between local government, businesses, and the public. While small businesses exist, participants noted that many residents travel outside the county for daily needs.

Key ideas included:

- Small business grants and tax incentives
- Improved marketing and promotion of local businesses
- Technology outreach and modernization support
- Stronger partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and SBDC
- Reuse or redevelopment of the Kentucky Speedway property
- More vendor events and community programming

There was a clear call for better communication, collaboration, and pride in place - including beautification efforts and consistent public engagement. Residents emphasized that supporting local businesses requires both leadership and resident participation.

4. Talent Development - Building the Local Workforce

Participants identified healthcare, tourism, recreation, retail, and skilled trades as priority sectors for investment. Many called for expanded trade education programs in HVAC, plumbing, and technical fields to create pathways for local youth.

The presence of I-71, the airport, and potential industrial sites (including the Kentucky Speedway property and US Highway 42 corridor) were viewed as economic development opportunities. Some supported industrial and warehousing growth, while others emphasized the importance of controlling development to preserve rural character and agriculture.

Residents repeatedly stressed the need for an overarching economic development strategy that balances growth with community values.

5. Public Safety – Preparedness & Capacity

Residents expressed strong appreciation for emergency personnel and volunteers, noting that the community “has each other’s backs.” However, concerns were raised about aging facilities, outdated equipment, and limited capacity.

Suggestions included:

- New or upgraded fire, EMS, and law enforcement facilities
- Improved dispatch systems and inter-county coordination
- Updated technology and communication systems
- Additional funding for equipment and personnel
- Infrastructure upgrades such as generators for water systems

While many feel personally prepared due to rural self-reliance, participants acknowledged the need to modernize facilities and scale services alongside population growth.

6. Public Services – Where Improvements Are Needed

Transportation and roadway maintenance were among the most frequently cited needs, including additional highway exits, safer state roads, and improved connectivity. Harding Park access and specific state routes were mentioned as concerns.

Education improvements were also discussed, particularly expanded vocational training, STEM opportunities, and support for special needs families.

Participants emphasized that public services should not be delayed and require consistent funding and attention.

Childcare access, mobility options, and expanded sober living and family support services were also identified as areas for improvement.

7. Future Vision – Gallatin County in 10 Years

Residents envision a county that grows strategically while preserving its identity. They described a future that includes:

- Revitalized Main Street and expanded tourism
- Thoughtful redevelopment of the Kentucky Speedway site
- Stronger housing stock and infrastructure improvements
- Higher wages and diversified job opportunities
- Clean, well-maintained public spaces
- Unity and collaboration across communities

Many expressed a desire for growth - but not unchecked expansion. Maintaining agricultural heritage, preventing noise and light pollution, and preserving small-town character were recurring themes. Residents want Gallatin County to be known for something positive and distinctive while remaining a place where people feel connected.

8. Cultural & Recreational Gaps

Participants identified missing amenities such as:

- Marinas and improved river access
- Walking trails and bike paths
- Community recreation centers or indoor sports complexes
- Music venues and entertainment options
- Splash pads, dog parks, and youth activities
- Expanded park access and road improvements to recreational areas

There was also interest in reviving cultural traditions and festivals that celebrate local heritage.

9. Community Initiatives Residents Want

Ideas for future initiatives included:

- Community beautification and cleanup efforts
- Annual engagement events and transparent communication from government
- Career counseling and introductory training programs
- Support groups and family resources
- Improved code enforcement
- Stronger county-city collaboration

Residents emphasized participation, follow-through, and unity as critical components of success.

10. Measuring Success

Residents believe progress should be measured by:

- Visible development and completed projects
- Increased participation and attendance at events
- Higher wages and improved economic indicators
- Lower unemployment and reduced poverty
- Stronger community pride and collaboration
- Consistent follow-through on strategic plans

Overall, Gallatin County residents expressed deep pride in their heritage and strong belief in their community's potential. They seek intentional planning, modernized infrastructure, expanded amenities, and economic opportunity - while preserving the rural character, river identity, and close-knit culture that define Gallatin County.

Conclusion

The Gallatin County Community Forum reflects a meaningful moment of shared reflection and open dialogue among residents, local leaders, and community partners. The themes outlined throughout this document highlight both the strengths that define Gallatin 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 preserve its character, improve quality of life, and expand opportunity for future generations.

This recap documents the input and priorities shared during the forums and is intended to serve as a resource for continued planning and informed decision-making. By presenting community voices in a clear and accessible format, it offers elected officials and stakeholders a shared reference point as they consider policies, investments, and partnerships. Sustained dialogue, collaboration, and responsiveness will be essential as Gallatin County builds on the engagement and momentum generated through this process.