

Building a Better Future - Grant 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 Grant County, these forums, conducted by the Northern Kentucky Area Development District (NKADD) in partnership with Grant 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.

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 Grant 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 strong emphasis on balancing growth with preservation. Participants consistently identified shared goals related to improving transportation and infrastructure, expanding workforce and education pathways, strengthening local businesses and downtown areas, increasing housing availability, and ensuring long-term water and utility capacity. While perspectives varied on the pace and type of growth desired, there was broad agreement that intentional planning, clear communication, and coordinated action are essential. This collective reflection reinforced a shared understanding that Grant County's future success depends on proactive leadership



Community members participating in countywide infrastructure mapping exercise.

and a continued commitment to working together to guide growth in a way that protects its rural character and strong sense of community.

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 Grant County over the next decade. By translating community voices into practical initiatives, Grant County can move forward with clarity, unity, and purpose.

Executive Summary

The Grant 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 Grant County's rural character, outdoor recreation assets, proximity to regional job centers, and the deep sense of community and neighborly support that defines the area. At the same time, residents raised concerns about transportation and mobility challenges, water and wastewater capacity, housing availability, workforce and higher education access, traffic congestion, and the need for more coordinated long-term planning to guide growth intentionally rather than reactively.



Mayor of Williamstown, David Henson, welcoming everyone to the forum.

Through an interactive infrastructure mapping exercise and facilitated small-group discussions, five core priorities emerged: transportation and mobility improvements; water capacity and core infrastructure; workforce and higher education access; support for local business and downtown vitality; and housing availability and strategic growth planning. These priorities reflect both immediate infrastructure and service needs and longer-term opportunities to strengthen economic resilience, preserve rural character, and improve connectivity across the county. The insights gathered during the forum provide a foundation for continued dialogue, comprehensive planning, and coordinated action to ensure Grant County grows in a way that enhances quality of life while maintaining the strong community identity residents value.

County Profile

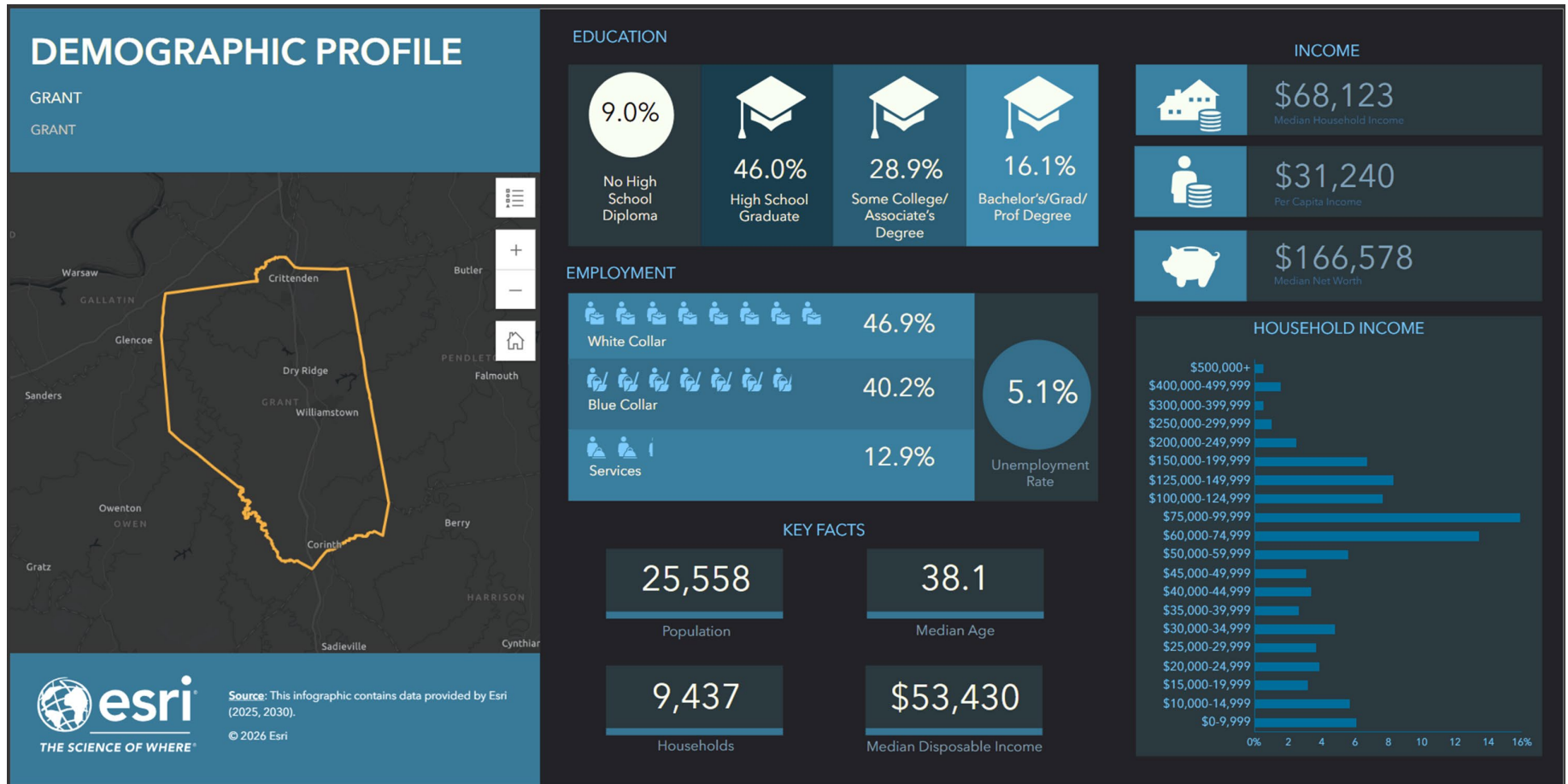
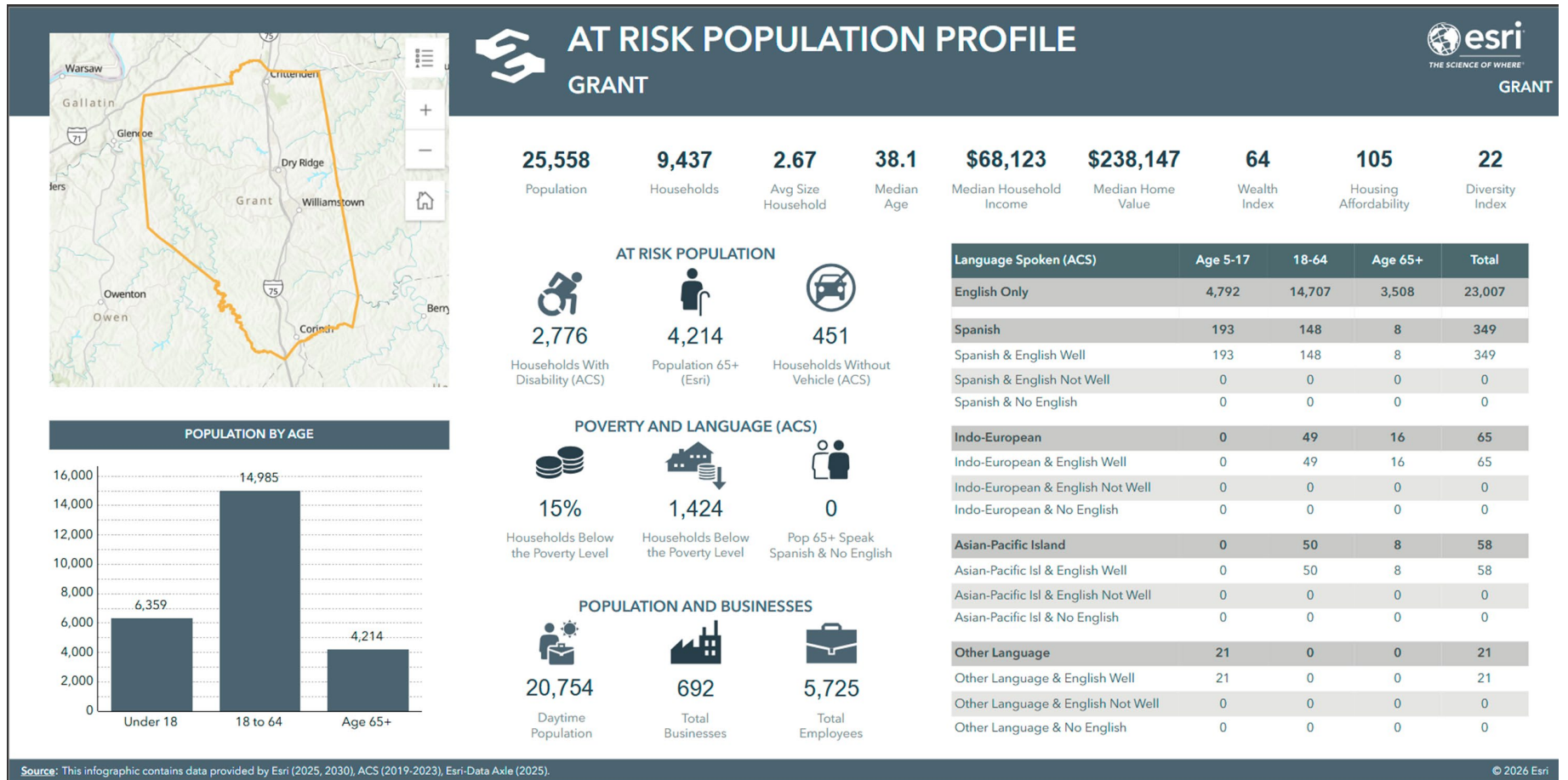


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Grant County



POPULATION BY AGE

Age Group	Population
Under 18	6,359
18 to 64	14,985
Age 65+	4,214

Figure 2: At Risk Population in Grant County

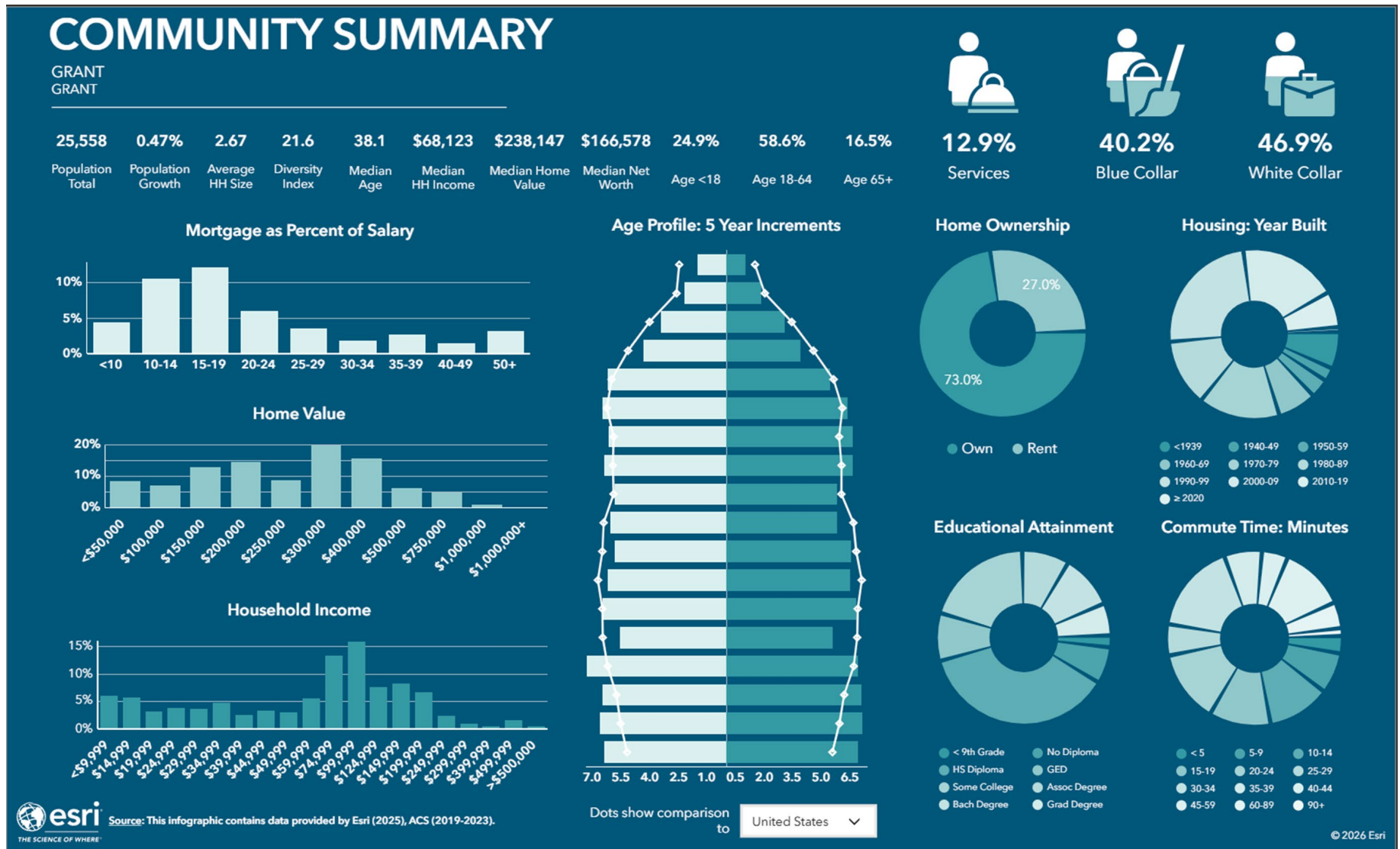


Figure 3: Grant County Community Housing Summary

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 Grant 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



Judge/executive Chuck Dills welcoming everyone to the forum.

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.

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 Crittenden, Corinth, Dry Ridge, Williamstown, and unincorporated areas of Grant County. Community members identified numerous facilities and locations as important strengths that contribute to public safety, recreation, healthcare access, and overall quality of life.

In Williamstown, residents highlighted the Grant County Public Library, the Williamstown Reservoir Dam, St. Elizabeth Hospital - Grant, the Depot elevated water tank, and Grant County Drugs pharmacy as valued institutions that serve essential community needs. In Crittenden, Grant County Park and the Crittenden Fire Department were recognized as important local anchors. In Dry Ridge, the Dry Ridge Fire Department and the downtown area were identified as strong assets supporting both public safety and economic activity. Countywide, participants pointed to Eagle Creek Country Club; Waterworks Road and Williamstown Lake, including surrounding boat access; Boltz Lake Dam; the park in Corinth; Piddle Park in Dry Ridge; and the Ark Encounter as key recreational and tourism assets that enhance Grant County's identity and appeal.



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

At the same time, residents identified several infrastructure systems and locations requiring attention or reinvestment. In Williamstown, concerns were raised about the Wastewater Treatment Plant, Grant County Healthcare and Rehabilitation, Humes Ridge, and Dump Road. In Crittenden, the Crittenden water tank and the intersection of Spears Lane and Violet Road were flagged as areas needing improvement. In Dry Ridge, Meeks Road, Taft Highway, Highway 22, and Business Boulevard

were cited for traffic and roadway concerns. In Corinth, both the Corinth Fire Department and the Corinth Wastewater Treatment Plant were mentioned as facilities that may require evaluation or upgrades. Across the county, additional concerns included the Sherman water tank, the Bullock Pen Treatment Plant, limited

transportation options for residents who cannot drive, shortages of assisted living facilities, and housing availability.

Some facilities, including the Williamstown Fire Department, were described as both valued assets and systems that will require continued investment to keep pace with projected growth. These location-specific insights reinforce the broader themes that emerged throughout the forum—particularly the need for transportation improvements, expanded water and wastewater capacity, housing availability, and proactive infrastructure planning—and provide meaningful context for future capital investment and long-term development strategies in Grant County.

Priority Observations

During breakout group discussions, Grant County residents identified five key priorities for coordinated action: transportation and mobility improvements; water and infrastructure capacity; workforce and higher education access; support for local business and downtown vitality; and housing availability aligned with long-term planning. Residents emphasized that growth is already underway and must be guided intentionally to protect quality of life while expanding opportunity.

Potential partnerships, strategies, and next steps are outlined below.

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
Transportation & Mobility Improvements	Safer roads and intersections; expanded sidewalks and trails; improved senior and low-income transportation access; reduced congestion; better connectivity between parks, downtowns, and services..	NKADD, KYTC District 6, local cities, Grant County Fiscal Court, senior centers, healthcare providers, regional mobility providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a mobility and sidewalk gap analysis. • Identify congestion and safety improvement areas. • Explore mobility-on-demand and senior transportation options. • Integrate trail and pedestrian planning into long-term infrastructure planning.
Water Capacity & Core Infrastructure	Sustainable water supply; expanded sewer capacity to support growth;	Water districts, sewer districts, NKADD, Planning & Zoning, Kentucky Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess current and projected water capacity. • Develop a long-range infrastructure expansion plan.

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
	improved development readiness; reduced strain on existing systems.	Authority (KIA), engineers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify funding sources for upgrades. Align infrastructure investments with future land use planning.
Workforce & Higher Education Access	Expanded skilled trades pipeline; stronger healthcare workforce; improved kindergarten readiness; increased retention of young residents; diversified job base.	School districts, Area Technology Centers, chambers of commerce, employers, NKADD, workforce boards, higher education institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify workforce gaps in trades, healthcare, IT, and tourism. Strengthen career and technical education partnerships. Explore expanded postsecondary and certification pathways locally. Promote employer-education alignment initiatives.
Support for Local Business & Downtown Vitality	Increased local spending; stronger small business sustainability; revitalized downtown areas; balanced retail mix; expanded tourism and hospitality opportunities.	Chambers of commerce, SBDC, NKADD, city governments, tourism entities, developers, local financial institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct or update a local market study. Explore incentives or grant tools for small businesses. Activate vacant storefronts and underutilized spaces. Improve cross-city coordination and marketing efforts.
Housing Availability & Strategic Growth Planning	Expanded housing options across price points; increased starter and senior housing; coordinated growth that preserves rural character; measurable long-term goals.	HUD, NKADD, developers, realtors, Planning & Zoning, financial institutions, employers, Grant County Fiscal Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess housing inventory and affordability gaps. Explore workforce and mixed-income housing opportunities. Update or initiate a comprehensive plan with measurable benchmarks. Improve communication and transparency around development decisions.

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 Grant 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 Grant County Unique

Residents consistently described Grant County as a rural, welcoming community with strong civic pride and deep roots. A recurring theme was the blend of rural character with proximity to opportunity – “close enough but far enough away” from larger cities like Cincinnati and Lexington.

Participants highlighted key assets including:

- The Ark Encounter
- Lake Williamstown
- Patriots Landing
- Veterans Cemetery
- Lloyd Wildlife Management Area
- The county park system and outdoor recreation opportunities
- Access to I-75 and regional connectivity

Many residents emphasized that “people care here.” There is a strong culture of volunteerism, neighborly support, and acceptance of newcomers. While some noted a growing and more transient population, pride in the county’s beauty, history, and affordability remains strong.

2. Quality of Life - What Needs to Improve

As growth continues, residents expressed concern about infrastructure and services keeping pace. Several foundational quality-of-life improvements were identified:

- Wider roads with sidewalks, curbs, and pedestrian safety improvements
- Expanded public transit and mobility options, particularly for seniors and low-income residents
- Increased water and sewer capacity to support development
- Improved traffic flow and congestion management
- Greater awareness of available community resources

Housing was a frequent topic, including:

- More affordable housing options
- A mix of starter homes and workforce housing
- Concerns about rising lot rents for mobile homes

Residents also identified the need for more youth-focused amenities, such as mini-golf, bowling, movie theaters, and indoor recreation facilities. As tourism

grows, many emphasized the importance of planning intentionally so that infrastructure and services are not overwhelmed.

3. Community Engagement - Supporting Local Businesses

Participants expressed interest in strengthening the local business environment while maintaining community character. A key tension identified was the balance between chain retailers and locally owned “mom and pop” businesses.

Suggested strategies included:

- Tax incentives or support for locally owned businesses
- Market studies to better understand demand and opportunity
- Encouraging unique and experience-based businesses
- Better coordination and communication between cities
- Utilizing vacant strip malls and empty buildings
- Extending store hours and improving consistency

Residents noted that business activity is currently concentrated in pockets, leading to congestion in some areas (particularly Dry Ridge), while other areas lack vitality. There was a strong desire to “give people a reason to come to town” and to strengthen downtown attractiveness, especially in Williamstown.

4. Talent Development - Building the Local Workforce

Residents identified both opportunity and concern in workforce development. The closing of the Northern Kentucky University Grant County campus was widely viewed as a setback, with calls to reinvest in higher education and training pathways locally.

Priority sectors included:

- Tourism and hospitality
- Aviation
- IT and engineering
- Skilled trades (welding, electrical, automotive, construction)
- Healthcare and mental health services
- Childcare and family services

Participants emphasized expanding career and technical education, improving kindergarten readiness, and ensuring access to workforce pathways that allow residents to work locally rather than commuting to Boone, Kenton, or Campbell counties.

Healthcare capacity – including pediatricians, hospitals, and mental health providers – was cited as insufficient for current and projected growth.

5. Public Safety - Preparedness & Capacity

Many residents reported feeling personally prepared for emergencies. However, there was strong consensus that countywide coordination and communication could improve.

Key concerns included:

- Limited tornado shelters accessible within five miles of homes
- The need for written, coordinated emergency plans
- More frequent public education and practice drills
- Better communication between agencies
- Supply and resource networks for emergencies

While confidence in emergency personnel remains high, residents acknowledged the need to scale planning and communication alongside population growth.

6. Public Services – Where Improvements Are Needed

Transportation emerged as the most frequently cited service needing improvement.

Residents called for:

- Sidewalks, trails, and pedestrian safety enhancements
- Mobility-on-demand or transit services
- Handicapped-accessible transportation for seniors
- Improved intersections and reduced congestion
- Addressing water supply capacity concerns

Education was another priority area, including:

- Increased teacher recruitment and retention
- Greater cooperation between school systems
- Expanded access to career and technical programs
- Inclusion of homeschool students in extracurricular activities

Participants expressed appreciation for local police, fire, and utilities (including Owen Electric), but emphasized that transportation and infrastructure improvements are critical for long-term growth.

7. Future Vision – Grant County in 10 Years

Residents envision a community that grows intentionally while preserving its rural identity.

Common themes included:

- Vibrant, walkable downtown areas
- A connected countywide trail system
- Light industrial development that aligns with community values
- Improved traffic flow and infrastructure
- Expanded senior housing
- Water security and long-term planning
- Continued strong sense of neighborly care

Participants were clear: growth is welcome – but it must be the “right kind” of growth. Many referenced a desire not to become overly commercialized, while still attracting industry that supports local employment.

8. Cultural & Recreational Gaps

While outdoor recreation is strong, residents identified several missing amenities:

- Indoor sports complexes
- Movie theaters, bowling alleys, and entertainment venues
- Teen-focused activities
- Expanded amphitheater programming and concert series
- A connected regional trail system
- Additional evening dining options

There was also interest in maximizing tourism potential while reducing travel burdens for local families and school teams.

9. Community Initiatives Residents Want

Participants proposed a range of actionable initiatives:

- A long-range comprehensive plan
- Expanded park improvements and beautification
- Enhanced downtown activation
- Food distribution programs to address food insecurity
- Expanded amphitheater and public gathering spaces
- Better cross-city coordination
- Increased communication about events and opportunities

There was a strong call for the ADD to assist with long-term planning and coordination efforts.

10. Measuring Success

Residents believe progress should be measured by:

- Visible completion of projects
- Expanded trail systems
- Increased job opportunities and workforce growth
- Higher employment rates
- Improved public infrastructure
- Greater event attendance and park usage
- Clear goals with measurable timelines

Above all, participants emphasized follow-through. For many, success means not just planning – but seeing tangible improvements that enhance daily life and preserve the strong sense of community that defines Grant County.

Conclusion

The Grant County Community Forum represents a meaningful opportunity for shared reflection and constructive dialogue among residents, local leaders, and community partners. The themes outlined throughout this report highlight both the strengths that define Grant County – including its rural character, strong sense of community, and strategic location – and the infrastructure, mobility, housing, and workforce challenges that must be addressed to support sustainable growth. While opinions varied on the pace and type of development desired, a clear and consistent message emerged: residents want growth to be intentional, well-planned, and aligned with the values that make Grant County unique.

This recap captures the priorities and insights shared during the forum and is intended to serve as a practical resource for ongoing planning and decision-making. By organizing community input in a clear and accessible format, it provides elected officials, community stakeholders, and regional partners with a common reference point as they evaluate policies, infrastructure investments, and partnership opportunities. Continued coordination, transparent communication, and measurable follow-through will be essential as Grant County builds on the momentum of this engagement process and works toward a future that strengthens opportunity while preserving its strong sense of place.