

Building a Better Future – Pendleton 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 Pendleton County, these forums, conducted by the Northern Kentucky Area Development District (NKADD) in partnership with Pendleton 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 also forward-looking and grounded in pride in Pendleton County's rich history, natural assets, and people, while also confronting the challenges that limit opportunity and quality of life.



Community members participating in a countywide infrastructure mapping exercise.

Throughout the discussions, several recurring priorities emerged that reflect both the opportunities and challenges facing Pendleton County. Participants consistently identified the need to strengthen infrastructure, utility systems, and flood resiliency; expand access to healthcare and community wellness resources; support economic development and downtown revitalization efforts; enhance tourism, recreation, and quality-of-place amenities; and create housing and workforce opportunities that allow residents and families to remain and thrive in the community. While perspectives varied on the pace and location of future development, there was broad agreement that strategic planning, strong partnerships, and coordinated investment will be

essential to maintaining the county's rural character while expanding opportunities for residents and businesses alike.

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

Executive Summary



Tara Johnson-Noem, NKADD Executive Director, welcoming individuals to the forum.

The Pendleton County Community Forum brought together residents, local leaders, and community partners to discuss the county's strengths, challenges, and opportunities for the future. Participants expressed strong pride in Pendleton County's rural character, agricultural heritage, natural beauty, and strong sense of community. At the same time, residents identified concerns related to infrastructure and utility capacity, flood resiliency, healthcare access, housing availability, workforce retention, and the

need to create greater economic and recreational opportunities within the county. Through both infrastructure mapping exercises and facilitated discussions, residents emphasized the importance of preserving the qualities that make Pendleton County unique while preparing for future growth and investment.

Through an interactive infrastructure mapping exercise and facilitated small-group discussions, five core priorities emerged: Infrastructure, Utilities, & Flood Resiliency; Healthcare Access & Community Wellness; Economic Development & Downtown Vitality; Tourism, Recreation, & Quality of Place; and Housing & Workforce Retention. Together, these priorities reflect a shared vision for a county that is resilient, connected, economically vibrant, and positioned to retain residents while attracting new opportunities. The findings presented in this report provide a foundation for future planning, investment, and partnership efforts that enhance quality of life, strengthen community assets, and support long-term success throughout Pendleton County.

County Profile

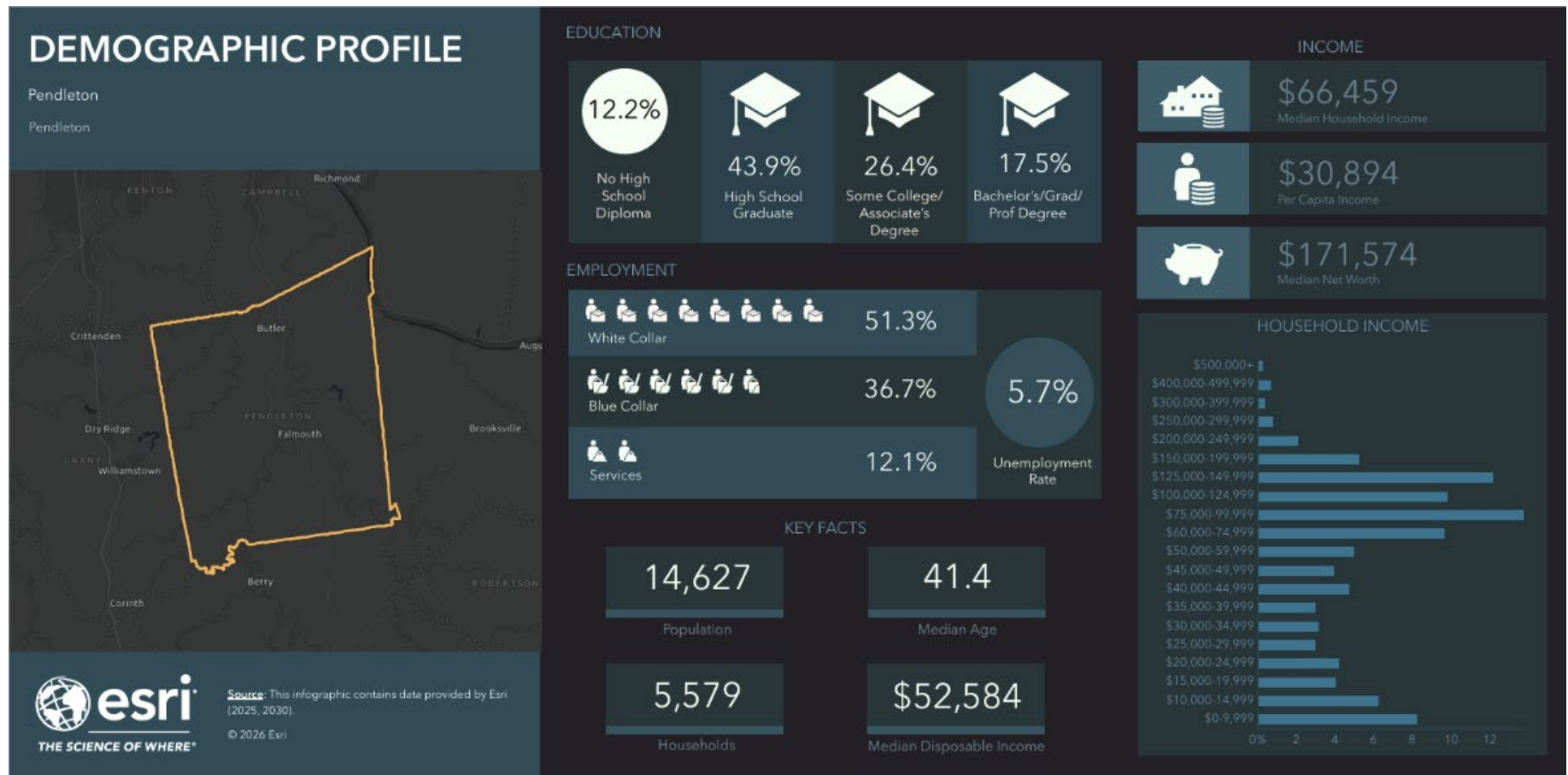


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of Pendleton County



Figure 2: At Risk Population in Pendleton County

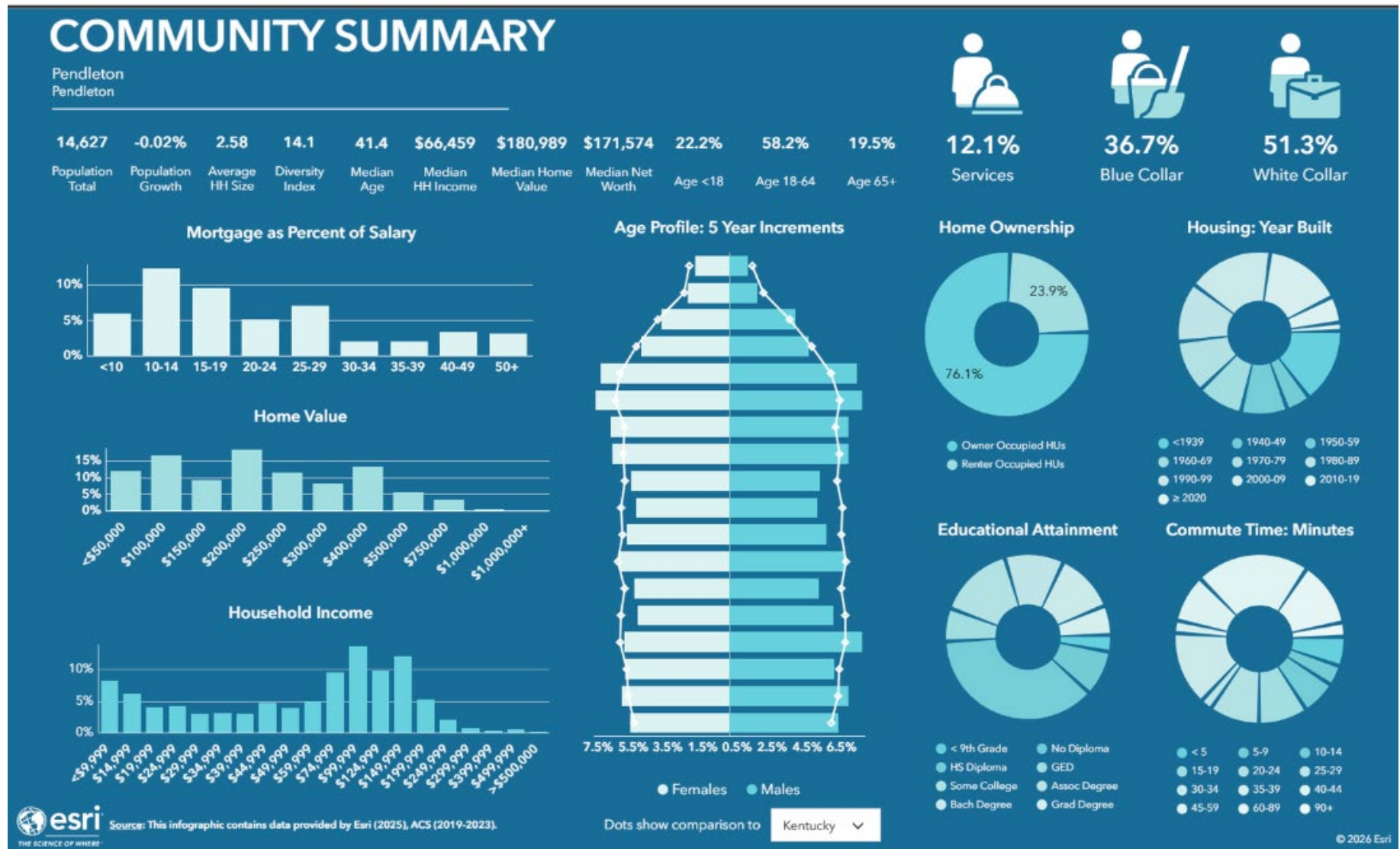


Figure 3: Pendleton County Community Housing Summary

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.



Community members participating in the mapping exercise.

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

Following the mapping exercise, attendees broke into small groups for guided conversations focused on the future of Pendleton 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 35 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.

Infrastructure Insights from Mapping

As part of the forum process, participants engaged in a countywide infrastructure mapping exercise to identify key assets, infrastructure deficiencies, and priority projects throughout Pendleton County, including the communities of Butler and Falmouth. The exercise provided valuable insight into facilities, transportation corridors, utilities, and community resources that residents believe contribute to the county's quality of life, as well as areas requiring investment or improvement.

Countywide, residents identified several important infrastructure assets that support community services, transportation, recreation, and economic development. Notable strengths included the Pendleton County Public Library, Gene Snyder Airport, Pendleton County Country Club, River Valley Nursing Home, the AA Highway, and bridges located throughout northeastern Pendleton County. These facilities and

transportation assets were recognized for their role in connecting residents to services, supporting economic activity, and enhancing overall community well-being.



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

In Butler, participants highlighted the Butler Wastewater Treatment Plant, East Mill Street, and properties along East Mill Street as community assets that contribute to local infrastructure and development. In Falmouth, residents identified the Pendleton County Public Library, Pendleton County Athletic Park, Pendleton County Fairgrounds, and the Pendleton County Cooperative Extension Office as valued community resources that support recreation, education, public services, and community events.

At the same time, participants identified several infrastructure systems and locations requiring attention or reinvestment. Countywide concerns included the Falmouth Water Treatment Plant, Falmouth Tank No. 2, Reservoirs No. 1 and No. 2,

Pendleton County LFGTE facilities, Griffin Industries, U.S. Route 27 and KY Route 17 connection over the Licking River, the Butler Wastewater Treatment Plant, healthcare access and hospital availability, the bridge in Morgan, and the water tank in Bethel. In Butler, residents expressed concerns regarding flood-prone areas east of South Street and conditions associated with Butler Coal and Lumber. In Falmouth, the New Pastime Theater, farmland at the end of Pribble Drive, the Griffin Center Amphitheater, Chapel Street, and the Falmouth Substation were identified as areas needing evaluation or improvement.

Several locations generated mixed opinions among participants. Countywide, Kincaid State Park was viewed as both an asset and an area with opportunities for enhancement. In Falmouth, the property located between U.S. Route 27 and the South Fork Licking River near Main Street was similarly identified as having both strengths and redevelopment potential. The Three Rivers Health Department was also noted as an important facility with ongoing needs and opportunities for future investment.

Participants also identified a series of infrastructure projects and priorities that could address existing challenges and support future growth. These included expanding access to fire hydrants for firefighting purposes; improving safety and mobility along U.S. Route 27 and key intersections with KY Route 22; reconstructing segments of KY Routes 17 and 177; upgrading the Butler Wastewater Treatment Plant; replacing and repairing lagoon liners; constructing a Pendleton County Regional Water Treatment Plant; and extending water service along Ivor Lane, Mark Haley Road, Lightfoot Fork Road, McNay Road, and Ed Monroe Road. Additional priorities included extending sewer service from U.S. Route 27 to Sharp Middle School and completing the Butler Water and Sewer Rehabilitation Project.

Looking ahead, residents emphasized the importance of improving regional connectivity through the straightening of KY Route 22 toward Grant County to enhance access to Interstate 75. Participants also expressed a desire for a countywide development strategy that encourages economic growth while preserving and enhancing the unique character, natural resources, and community identity of Pendleton County. These findings reinforce broader themes related to infrastructure investment, transportation improvements, utility expansion, public safety, and long-term growth management, providing valuable guidance for future planning and capital improvement efforts.

Priority Observations

During breakout group discussions, Pendleton County residents identified five key priorities for coordinated action: strengthening infrastructure, utility systems, and flood resiliency; expanding access to healthcare and community wellness resources; supporting economic development and downtown revitalization efforts; enhancing tourism, recreation, and quality-of-place amenities; and creating housing and workforce opportunities that allow residents and families to remain and thrive in the community. Residents emphasized that while Pendleton County offers many assets and opportunities, continued investment and collaboration will be necessary to address long-standing challenges, improve quality of life, and support sustainable growth in the years ahead.

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

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
Infrastructure, Utilities, & Flood Resiliency	Improved transportation connectivity; safer roads and intersections; expanded water and sewer capacity; more reliable utility infrastructure; reduced flood risk; greater readiness for residential and commercial development	Pendleton County Fiscal Court, KYTC District 6, NKADD, Kentucky Infrastructure Authority (KIA), utility providers, Butler City Council, Falmouth City Council, Kentucky Division of Water, FEMA, Pendleton County Economic and Tourism Development, engineers, emergency management agencies	• Conduct a countywide infrastructure and utility capacity assessment. • Develop a comprehensive flood mitigation and resiliency strategy. • Prioritize roadway, bridge, and intersection improvements. • Identify long-term water and sewer expansion needs. • Pursue state and federal infrastructure funding opportunities.
Healthcare Access and Community Wellness	Improved access to healthcare services; reduced travel burdens for residents; expanded preventative care and wellness resources; improved quality of life; stronger community health outcomes	Three Rivers District Health Department, healthcare providers, NKADD, senior service organizations, community nonprofits, local governments	• Assess healthcare service gaps and provider shortages. • Explore opportunities for urgent care and expanded healthcare services. • Improve transportation access to healthcare providers. • Support community health and wellness initiatives. • Identify strategies to attract additional healthcare professionals to the county.
Economic Development & Downtown Vitality	Increased local spending; stronger entrepreneurship ecosystem; revitalized downtown Falmouth; greater business retention and expansion; expanded employment opportunities; improved community attractiveness	Pendleton County Chamber of Commerce, Pendleton County Economic and Tourism Development, Kentucky SBDC, NKADD, City of Falmouth, City of Butler, local businesses, financial institutions, property owners, employers	• Develop a downtown revitalization and redevelopment strategy. • Support façade improvements and building rehabilitation efforts. • Explore entrepreneurship and small business incubator programs. • Implement a business retention and expansion program. • Strengthen local business promotion and buy-local initiatives.

Priorities	Potential Outcomes	Potential Partners	Next Steps
Tourism, Recreation, & Quality of Place	Expanded tourism activity; enhanced recreational opportunities; stronger community identity; increased visitor spending; improved quality of life for residents	Kentucky Department of Tourism, Pendleton County Economic and Tourism Development, Kincaid Lake State Park, tourism organizations, arts groups, event organizers, local governments, nonprofits	• Expand tourism marketing and branding efforts. • Improve river access and recreational amenities. • Invest in trails, sidewalks, parks, and community gathering spaces. • Support cultural programming, festivals, and arts initiatives. • Coordinate and promote existing recreational assets.
Housing & Workforce Retention	Expanded affordable, workforce, and senior housing options; increased retention of young residents and families; stronger local workforce pipeline; improved alignment between education and employment; balanced growth that preserves rural character	Pendleton County Schools, Area Technology Centers, employers, Planning & Zoning, developers, Pendleton County Economic and Tourism Development, housing agencies, NKADD, workforce boards (NKBIB), higher education institutions, realtors, financial institutions	• Conduct a housing needs and affordability assessment. • Explore workforce and senior housing opportunities. • Expand trade, technical, and adult education programs. • Strengthen partnerships between employers and educational institutions. • Develop strategies to attract and retain young professionals and families. • Align future housing growth with infrastructure and utility capacity.

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 Pendleton 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 Pendleton County Unique

Residents consistently described Pendleton County as a rural community with deep agricultural roots, abundant natural resources, and a strong connection to the land. A recurring theme was the county's location between Cincinnati and Lexington, providing access to larger markets and amenities while preserving the small-town atmosphere and rural lifestyle that residents value.

Participants highlighted key assets including:

- The Licking River and other waterways
- Wool Fest and Balloons and Tunes
- The Kincaid Regional Theater
- Agricultural lands and farming heritage
- Wildlife, forests, and natural resources
- Access to U.S. Route 27 and the AA Highway
- Scenic landscapes and open space

Many residents described Pendleton County as a place where people come to enjoy recreation, natural beauty, and a slower pace of life. Others emphasized the county's agricultural identity and the importance of preserving farmland and open space for future generations. While residents expressed pride in the county's character and quality of life, some voiced concerns about population decline, the loss of younger residents, and increasing ownership of farmland by individuals living outside the county.

2. Quality of Life – What Needs to Improve

Residents identified several quality-of-life improvements that they believe are essential to supporting future growth while maintaining the county's rural character. Healthcare access emerged as one of the most frequently discussed concerns, with many residents noting the absence of urgent care services and limited healthcare options within the county.

Key priorities included:

- Affordable housing and a greater variety of housing options

- Additional trails, sidewalks, and green spaces
- Improved access to healthcare services and urgent care
- Expanded water and sewer capacity
- Modernization of aging infrastructure and utilities
- Improved access to healthy food and grocery options
- Public transportation services
- More activities and recreational opportunities for youth
- Preservation of farmland and natural landscapes

Residents also stressed the importance of balancing development with environmental stewardship. Many emphasized that investments in trails, recreation, and flood mitigation should occur alongside future growth to preserve the qualities that make Pendleton County attractive.

3. Community Engagement – Supporting Local Businesses

Participants expressed a strong desire to strengthen local businesses and create an environment where entrepreneurs can succeed. Residents acknowledged that many people travel outside the county for shopping, dining, and services, resulting in economic activity leaving the community.

Suggested strategies included:

- Encouraging residents to buy local wherever possible
- Supporting entrepreneurship and small business development
- Establishing small business incubator programs
- Revitalizing downtown Falmouth and commercial districts
- Rehabilitating vacant and underutilized buildings
- Expanding sewer infrastructure to support business growth
- Strengthening communication between local governments and economic development organizations
- Creating a focused business retention strategy for major employers and manufacturers
- Expanding tourism promotion and visitor attractions

Many participants emphasized that local businesses need both community support and a business environment that encourages investment. Residents frequently referenced downtown revitalization, stronger tourism initiatives, and creating reasons for visitors and residents alike to spend more time and money within Pendleton County.

4. Talent Development – Building the Local Workforce

Residents identified workforce development as a critical component of the county's long-term success. Discussions focused on creating local employment opportunities that allow residents to build careers without leaving the county.

Priority sectors included:

- Tourism and hospitality
- Outdoor recreation
- Restaurants and food services
- Farm-to-table agriculture and food production
- Manufacturing and industrial development
- Skilled trades and technical careers
- Retail and grocery stores
- Entrepreneurship and small business development

Participants emphasized expanding trade education, vocational training, and adult education opportunities. Many noted that young people often leave the county for education and employment opportunities elsewhere and expressed a desire to create career pathways that encourage them to stay or return.

Residents also identified flood mitigation, infrastructure investment, and development-ready sites along major transportation corridors as important components of attracting future employers.

5. Public Safety – Preparedness & Capacity

Residents generally expressed confidence in Pendleton County's emergency responders and emergency management personnel. Many pointed to the county's response to recent flooding events as evidence that local agencies are experienced, prepared, and committed to protecting residents.

Key strengths identified included:

- Experienced emergency responders
- Strong community support during disasters
- Effective emergency management leadership
- Improved preparedness compared to previous flood events
- Reliable EMS and fire services

At the same time, residents identified several areas for improvement:

- Modernization of emergency communication and radio systems
- Enhanced dispatch coordination and local control
- Additional tornado warning and siren coverage
- Emergency service facilities located outside of flood-prone areas

- Continued investment in emergency response infrastructure

While confidence in emergency personnel remains high, residents emphasized the importance of continuing to invest in communication systems and emergency preparedness as the county grows.

6. Public Services – Where Improvements Are Needed

Transportation emerged as one of the most frequently cited public service challenges. Residents noted that limited transportation options create barriers for seniors, individuals without reliable vehicles, and those needing access to healthcare and employment opportunities.

Residents called for:

- Expanded transportation options for seniors and vulnerable populations
- Improved rural road infrastructure
- Additional east-west transportation connections
- Improved bridge access across the Licking River
- Intersection safety improvements throughout the county
- Enhanced coordination among public service providers

Healthcare services were also identified as a major need, including:

- A local hospital or expanded healthcare presence
- Urgent care services
- Improved access to specialty care
- Expanded emergency medical transportation options

Residents further emphasized the importance of adult education, trade training, and collaboration among educational institutions to support workforce needs.

7. Future Vision – Pendleton County in 10 Years

Residents envision a county that remains rural and community-oriented while providing greater opportunities for residents to live, work, and recreate locally. Participants frequently emphasized the importance of planning for growth without sacrificing the county's character and natural beauty.

Common themes included:

- A cohesive community with a shared vision for the future
- More local jobs and career opportunities
- Increased entrepreneurship and small business growth
- Expanded tourism and recreation amenities
- Affordable housing for families and seniors
- Preservation of farmland and open space

- Stronger infrastructure and utility systems
- Enhanced flood mitigation efforts
- Improved access to healthy food and healthcare services

Many residents also discussed the potential for creating a community hub, attracting educational opportunities such as a satellite college program, and developing Pendleton County as a destination for day trips and weekend visitors.

8. Cultural & Recreational Gaps

While residents value existing recreational assets, many identified opportunities to expand cultural and recreational amenities throughout the county.

Frequently mentioned needs included:

- Improved river access and water recreation opportunities
- Additional community gathering spaces and “third places”
- Fitness and wellness facilities
- Expanded support for Kincaid Regional Theatre
- Continued investment in Kincaid Lake amenities
- Additional festivals and cultural events
- Upgraded athletic facilities and tournament opportunities
- Expanded youth recreation programming

Participants noted that Pendleton County already possesses many recreational assets but would benefit from additional investment, programming, and promotion to maximize their impact on quality of life and tourism.

9. Community Initiatives Residents Want

Residents proposed a variety of initiatives aimed at improving community life, encouraging economic growth, and enhancing quality of place.

Suggested initiatives included:

- Expanded tourism development and marketing
- Additional sidewalks and walkability improvements
- Safe bicycle routes and trail systems
- Public art, murals, and beautification projects
- Stronger collaboration between county and city governments
- Community health and wellness initiatives
- School-based educational and leadership programs
- Strategic housing development
- Better coordination among existing attractions and amenities

- Utilizing the Licking River as a recreational and beautification asset
- Many residents emphasized that successful initiatives would require collaboration among local governments, schools, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and residents.

10. Measuring Success

Residents believe progress should be measured through both visible improvements and long-term community outcomes. Residents emphasized the importance of setting clear goals and demonstrating measurable progress over time.

Suggested indicators of success included:

- Attendance at community events and festivals
- Increased use of parks, trails, and recreational facilities
- New business openings and expansions
- Growth in tourism activity and visitor spending
- Population stabilization and growth
- Retention of young residents and families
- Increased remote workforce participation
- Expanded employment opportunities
- Completion of infrastructure and quality-of-life projects

Above all, residents emphasized that success means creating a community where people choose to live, work, raise families, and invest in the future. For many participants, progress is not simply about growth - it is about ensuring that growth strengthens Pendleton County's economy, preserves its rural character, and improves quality of life for future generations.

Conclusion

The Pendleton 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 Pendleton County - including its rural character, agricultural heritage, natural beauty, recreational assets, and strong sense of community - and the challenges that must be addressed to support long-term prosperity. Residents consistently identified the need for investments in infrastructure and flood resiliency, healthcare access, economic development, recreation and tourism amenities, and housing and workforce opportunities that allow people to live, work, and thrive within the county. While opinions varied on the pace and location of future development, a clear and consistent message emerged: residents want progress that is thoughtful, intentional, and aligned with the values that make Pendleton County unique.

This recap captures the priorities and perspectives shared throughout 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 collaboration, transparent communication, and measurable follow-through will be essential as Pendleton County builds upon the momentum generated through this engagement process and works toward a future that strengthens opportunity, enhances quality of life, and preserves the character and sense of place that residents value.