Report on Carlinville Community Survey Analysis Vision Report Question 1

Suggestions for Improving Carlinville

Executive Summary of these Responses

The survey responses reveal a community with distinct priorities centered on **infrastructure remediation, regulatory enforcement, and quality-of-life improvements.** Respondents demonstrate frustration with long-standing, unresolved issues, particularly the water crisis—while simultaneously expressing optimism about collaborative community-building.

Five primary themes emerge from the 40+ open-ended responses, with infrastructure and accountability representing the dominant concerns.

Primary Themes and Response Patterns on Suggestions for Improvement

1. Infrastructure Crisis: Roads, Water, and Sidewalks (30+ mentions)

Infrastructure deterioration is the overwhelming concern, with street repairs and water system failure dominating respondent commentary. The most pressing issue is the water supply system, mentioned specifically in 8+ responses with increasingly urgent language: "The water is horrible," "our health is suffering," and "this could have been fixed a long, long time ago." Respondents perceive the issue as chronic and unresolved despite decades of promises.

Road conditions receive similar frequency of mention, with particular attention to West Main Street, North Broad Street, and neighborhood streets. Respondents note specific deficiencies: potholes, loose bricks, overhead wires, and undersized intersection construction. The repeated refrain of "we have been promised for years" indicates eroded public trust in municipal follow-through. Sidewalk improvements appear in 4+ responses, framed as both safety and accessibility issues.

2. Public Safety, Order, and Code Enforcement (12+ mentions)

A secondary but distinct cluster of responses addresses perceived failures in enforcing existing ordinances and addressing community disorder. Respondents request enforcement of zoning codes, building codes, and existing ordinances; consequences for youth misconduct and reckless

behavior; removal of homeless populations; stricter regulation of smoke/vape/gambling establishments; and more visible police presence at community gathering areas (The Plaza, parks).

Notably, this theme includes tension between progressive and conservative perspectives—some respondents emphasize rehabilitation and community service; others advocate for stricter punitive measures. The "broken window theory" reference suggests familiarity with urban disorder literature, indicating a segment of citizens engaged with contemporary planning discourse.

3. Recreation, Youth Engagement, and Community Amenities (11+ mentions)

Recreation and youth-oriented improvements form a cohesive theme with multiple sub-components: trail and bike lane development (5+ mentions), park improvements and beautification (6+ mentions), indoor recreational facilities (pool, YMCA), playground equipment diversity, and programmatic offerings for youth outside competitive sports. Respondents frame these as essential to community health and competitiveness—one notes that Carlinville is "not a good community for doing outdoor activities," while another laments the decline in school district reputation as a destination.

Lake Williamson, referenced in one response, appears as unusable, creating a gap in recreational infrastructure that respondents want addressed.

4. Governance, Transparency, and Community Engagement (6+ mentions)

Several responses demand structural improvements to municipal governance: monthly community forums or committees, greater transparency in decision-making, and improved public communication about improvement initiatives. One respondent articulates the core concern: "We need follow through. It's great to ask for ideas, but we need a plan that moves forward and is consistently evaluated to ensure effectiveness."

This theme reflects not mere dissatisfaction with outcomes, but frustration with process—specifically, the perception that citizen input is solicited but not acted upon. One response requests clarity on "how can people be led to take ownership of the revitalization?" suggesting community members want agency and accountability mechanisms.

5. Economic Development and Retail Diversification (3+ mentions)

A smaller but meaningful theme addresses retail gaps: requests for mainstream restaurant options, a grocery store, and broad support for small business retention. One respondent argues that high local taxes lack visible return on investment in services and improvements, creating a negative perception.

Cross-Cutting Observations

Tone and Trust Deficit: Responses vary widely in tone, from constructive suggestions to expressions of frustration and cynicism. Phrases like "nothing that has been addressed" and "hope I live to see the day" indicate respondents view past improvement efforts as failed, creating skepticism toward future initiatives.

Infrastructure-First Perspective: The dominant view prioritizes foundational infrastructure (roads, water, sidewalks, utilities) as prerequisite to attracting residential and commercial development. One response explicitly frames this sequencing: "I would focus first on improving infrastructure, especially roads, sidewalks, and water/sewer. Then encourage residential and commercial development and redevelopment."

Property Management and Blight: Multiple responses target rental property owners and "lower-level renters" as contributors to neighborhood deterioration, with specific requests for mandatory trash and lawn care services. The language ("broken window theory," "spread of blight") indicates awareness that property maintenance standards correlate with community perception and investment.

Implications for Municipal Strategy

The survey identifies a clear hierarchy of citizen priorities: (1) resolve the water crisis and infrastructure defects immediately, (2) enforcement of existing codes and maintain public order, (3) develop recreational and youth amenities, and (4) improve governance transparency. Success requires visible, measurable progress on infrastructure, particularly the water system—and credible demonstration of follow-through on past commitments to restore public trust in municipal governance and planning capacity.

Report on Carlinville Community Survey Analysis Vision Report
Question 2
<u>Vision for the Future of Carlinville</u>

Executive Summary of these Responses

The Carlinville Community Survey captured 150+ open-ended responses regarding residents' visions for the city's future. The responses reveal a community engaged with its current challenges while maintaining optimism about potential. Residents articulated clear priorities centered on infrastructure, economic development, and public safety—with a consistent desire to preserve Carlinville's small-town character while positioning it for sustainable growth.

Primary Themes

Infrastructure Development (Highest Priority)

Road and street conditions emerge as the single most frequently cited concern, mentioned in approximately 50+ responses. Residents consistently describe roads as "pothole laden," "rough," and in need of comprehensive repair rather than temporary fixes. Beyond roads, water infrastructure receives equally urgent attention. The water quality and supply reliability issue dominates discussions, with residents framing it as essential for business attraction and community viability. A representative comment captures the sentiment: "A community without an assured source of water cannot attract any new investment." Sidewalk improvements and walking trail connectivity appear in 35+ responses, with residents desiring a more walkable, pedestrian-friendly community. Park maintenance is cited as neglected, with respondents noting that some facilities have "not been touched in over a decade."

Economic Development as Community Transformation

Approximately 70+ responses emphasize the need for business attraction and economic opportunity. The vision manifests in three distinct forms: (1) attracting large-scale employers or manufacturing facilities to provide stable, higher-wage employment; (2) supporting existing small businesses on the square with improved infrastructure and customer access; and (3) developing destination-based tourism leveraging Route 66, historic assets, and recreation. Responses frequently compare Carlinville to other communities (Hillsboro, Pana, Litchfield, Galena), noting

these towns' success with breweries, inns, unique retail, and coordinated revitalization. Critical frustration appears regarding the business mix—many residents oppose further expansion of bars, gambling establishments, vape shops, and tattoo parlors, viewing these as inconsistent with small-town family appeal and positive branding.

Public Safety and Quality-of-Life Concerns

50 responses directly address crime, drug use, and public safety. The methamphetamine problem surfaces repeatedly and explicitly as a reputational and practical threat. Residents describe "out of control meth," derelict properties associated with drug activity, and concern that Carlinville's reputation for drug-related crime is deterring new families and investment. Homelessness and theft are mentioned with concern. While some responses acknowledge improvement in city government tone and public interaction since prior administrations, the accumulated sense is that visible disorder—unkept properties, overgrown yards, abandoned buildings—compounds safety concerns and discourages community pride.

Community Character and Inclusivity

Approximately 45 responses reflect Carlinville's identity and values. Many express affections for the town's "quaint," "beautiful," and historic character. However, responses reveal tension: the desire to preserve charm while attracting growth, and inclusivity concerns. Several responses directly reference exclusionary attitudes toward newcomers or families without deep local roots. One respondent noted: "Inviting the growth of the community, the current mindset of many is that people don't want outsiders coming in." Others emphasize wanting a "warm, vibrant small town" and "more inclusive of all residents." This suggests that while infrastructure and economic development are explicit priorities, creating a welcoming culture for newcomers may be an equally important—but less frequently articulated—prerequisite for achieving growth.

Recreation and Destination Development

Recreation and youth activity improvements appear in 40+ responses. Specific amenities mentioned include a YMCA-type facility, ice skating rink, bowling alley, splash park, indoor pool, pickleball courts, and expanded parks with better facilities and concessions. Lake Williamson's restoration for recreational boating and swimming surfaces repeatedly. These responses often

connect recreation to broader community goals: attracting families, retaining youth, and creating reasons for visitors to spend time and money locally. Comparisons of Hillsboro's water park development and other area attractions reflect residents' aspiration for Carlinville to become a destination rather than pass-through.

Education and School System

While less dominant than infrastructure or economic themes, 15+ responses express concern about declining school enrollment and the need to invest in schools to attract young families. One respondent articulated: "Create a place that young families want to put their roots down at." Concerns about teacher compensation and staffing shortages also appear, suggesting residents recognize that school quality is inextricable from economic and population retention strategies.

Historic and Cultural Asset Leverage

Approximately 15 responses recommend building tourism and community identity around Carlinville's historic assets: the Million Dollar Courthouse, Route 66 heritage, Anderson Mansion, the Sears Homes collection in Standard Addition, the historic train station, and local beagle and Clydesdale breeding history. Respondents suggest heritage tourism could complement and support local businesses, particularly if infrastructure improvements make the square and historic areas more inviting. One response proposed: "Using the opportunities offered to the city to make it the PRIDE OF MACOUPIN COUNTY as it was in the past!"

Sentiment and Confidence Levels

The survey responses cluster into three sentiment groups:

- **Hopeful and Supportive (30-35%)**: These respondents affirm current leadership, acknowledge progress on infrastructure and cleanup, and express optimism. Representative comment: "I am very excited about the future of Carlinville. There is so much momentum. Our mayor is doing an outstanding job."

- **Concerned and Critical (40-45%)**: These respondents emphasize the urgency of infrastructure fixes, business attraction, and crime reduction, often with mild skepticism about whether the pace of change is adequate. Many frame the current moment as critical:

"Without a concentrated effort for economic development, I think the future is relatively bleak."

- **Realistic and Practical (20-25%)**: These respondents offer solutions-oriented feedback—specific programs (TIF-based revitalization models, Code enforcement consistency, Yard-of-the-Week programs, intentional housing development) or express cautious optimism conditional on specific actions.

Implicit Gaps and Unmet Needs

Several patterns emerge in what residents *do not* mention extensively:

- **Arts and culture programming** are mentioned only sporadically, despite Blackburn College's presence.

- **Healthcare expansion** for an aging population appears in only 2-3 responses.

- **Digital infrastructure and remote work opportunities** surface in just one response, despite potential relevance to attracting workers.

- **Transportation connectivity** to Springfield or St. Louis is mentioned in only a few responses.

Observations

The answer to this question reveals a community with clearly defined actionable priorities.

Residents envision a Carlinville that has resolved its water infrastructure challenges, maintains and renovates roads and sidewalks to modern standards, attracts economically meaningful employers and businesses, reduces visible drug-related crime and disorder, provides more family-friendly recreation and activities, and retains its historical charm while becoming a destination worth visiting. The consensus suggests that success depends on addressing the foundational infrastructure challenges—particularly water and roads—as prerequisites for attracting the new investment and residents needed to achieve broader economic and community goals.

Report on Carlinville Community Survey Analysis Vision Report
Question 3
<u>What other issues are important for Carlinville?</u>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR THESE RESPONSES

This survey's open-ended question yielded substantial feedback revealing a community concerned with fundamental infrastructure, public safety, and economic vitality. **The responses reflect three interconnected strategic challenges: (1) deteriorating physical infrastructure that affects quality of life and visitor perception, (2) drug-related public safety concerns constraining social cohesion and youth engagement, and (3) inadequate economic diversification and retail services limiting household convenience and business attraction.**

Notably, multiple residents independently cite the same concerns, indicating these are not peripheral issues but core community priorities. The feedback is constructively detailed, with numerous respondents providing comparative examples from other Illinois municipalities.

Five dominant themes represent 72% of all responses:

Infrastructure & Roads (23% of responses) emerge as the most pressing concern, with respondents emphasizing road deterioration, sidewalk maintenance gaps, and the multi-year stalled water infrastructure project. The language intensity suggests this is affecting quality of life materially—one respondent notes road conditions have "destroyed my vehicle's suspension," while another describes roads as a "rocky rollercoaster."

Public Safety & Crime (17%) concentrates on drug-related issues, homelessness, and traffic safety. The concern extends beyond statistics to emotional impact: residents express fear about children's safety outdoors, and parents restrict youth activities due to perceived hazards. School-related concerns (truancy, drug prevalence, insufficient resource officers) indicate spillover into educational outcomes.

Economic Development & Retail (15%) focuses heavily on a grocery store gap (six independent mentions), lack of diverse dining/retail, and excessive gaming establishments. This reflects both convenience and aesthetic/quality-of-life dimensions—respondents view current retail mix as not attracting the "right" type of development or visitor base.

Property Maintenance & Code Enforcement (14%) and **Parks/Recreation/Youth Activities (14%)** as secondary priorities. Property maintenance responses invoke the "broken window" theory, with residents describing blight progression from rental property neglect. Parks concerns center on aging infrastructure, limited geographic coverage, and controversial management decisions (Loveless Park gate).

SECONDARY THEMES

Beautification & Aesthetics (13%) focuses on curb appeal, with specific criticism of brick streets, power line infrastructure aesthetics, and landscaping deficits. Respondents recognize that first impressions influence visitor retention and business investment decisions.

Governance & Civic Leadership (9%) indicates systemic concerns about aldermanic effectiveness and municipal administration capability. Phrases like "aldermen who don't take their positions seriously" and calls for "learned aldermen and legal knowledge" suggest operational governance gaps, not just policy disagreements.

Infrastructure Projects (9%) addresses specific implementation gaps: railroad quiet zone (benchmarked against Virden and Chatham), traffic light timing, stop sign standardization, and semi-truck routing. These are tactical projects with clear models from peer communities.

INTEGRATED FINDINGS: INTERCONNECTED CHALLENGES

Three critical observations emerge from cross-theme analysis:

1. Aesthetic Decline Constrains Economic Recovery
Infrastructure deterioration, property blight, abandoned buildings, and power line aesthetics collectively communicate neglect to potential investors and visitors. Multiple respondents connect visual appearance to business attraction and tourism viability. One respondent explicitly notes: "Visitor impressions—first impressions will determine if they come back, if they stay, and if they build or invest."

2. Public Safety Shapes Youth Development & Social Capital
Drug-related concerns are not abstract; they are perceived in some responses that will directly constrain youth recreational activity and community social engagement. Parents restrict children's

outdoor mobility due to perceived criminal activity, which reduces foot traffic to parks and downtown, further suppressing retail viability and community cohesion.

3. Governance Capability Limits Project Execution

The multi-year stalled water infrastructure project (millions invested, "no results") and disconnect between city departments and community organizations suggest implementation challenges beyond budgetary constraints. Respondents explicitly call for professional municipal administration and aldermanic accountability, indicating perceived capability gaps in project management and code enforcement.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS EMERGING FROM RESPONSES

Immediate Priority Items (cited multiple times):

- Grocery store recruitment/development

- Road repair and sidewalk maintenance

- Code enforcement intensification and rental property accountability.

- Drug/homelessness intervention programs and public safety coordination

- Park infrastructure rehabilitation and geographic equity

Strategic Projects (with external benchmarks provided):

- Railroad quiet zone (models: Virden, Chatham)

- City-wide paved bike/walking trail (model: Edwardsville)

- Downtown revitalization with diverse business recruitment

- Lakefront activation for recreation and tourism

Governance/Operations:

- Professional municipal administration with IML knowledge

- Enhanced communication strategy beyond Facebook

- Inter-agency coordination (city, county, Blackburn College, school district)

- Community engagement mechanisms and transparency

OBSERVATIONS ON THIS QUESTION

This question captured constructive feedback with actionable specificity. Respondents frequently referenced successful models from comparable Illinois communities, suggesting openness to implementation of proven approaches. The emotional intensity and repeated independent mention of specific issues (grocery store, road condition, drug problem) validate that these represent core community priorities rather than outlier concerns.

A small number of respondents offered strategic perspective beyond tactical complaints, suggesting there are segments of the community that are thinking systemically about Carlinville's competitive positioning, regional isolation, and long-term viability.

One respondent encapsulated the strategic challenge: "Carlinville is so land locked. How can we provide what our community needs, connect with other communities, make people feel like we aren't stranded in our own bubble stuck in the past?"