

City of Carlinville Community Vision Survey Report 2025-2026

Executive Summary

The City of Carlinville conducted a comprehensive community survey to gather resident input on the city's future direction, quality of life, municipal services, and development priorities for the City to consider.

With 282 respondents across multiple demographic categories, the survey reveals a community that values its small-town character while expressing significant concerns about infrastructure, economic opportunities, and public service improvements.

Key findings indicate strong support for infrastructure investment, downtown revitalization, and targeted economic development initiatives.

Note that with a total of 282 respondents from a community of 5,500, we have estimated a 95% confidence level that these results provide a representation of the community's vision with a 5% margin of error.

Survey Methodology and Respondent Profile

Respondent Demographics

The survey attracted a diverse cross-section of Carlinville residents, though with notable representation skews that should inform interpretation of results.

Survey Respondent Age Distribution

Age Distribution: The respondent pool was heavily weighted toward senior residents, with individuals aged 65 and older comprising 36.17% of respondents. The 45-54 age cohort represented the second-largest group at 16.31%, while younger residents (18-24) were notably underrepresented at only 5.32% of responses.

Residency Duration: An overwhelming majority (65.92%) of respondents had lived in Carlinville for more than 20 years, indicating that survey input came primarily from long-term, established residents with deep community knowledge and investment. Only 3.75% had lived in the city for less than one year.

Household Composition: Families with children represented the largest household type at 35.29%, followed by senior households at 28.63% and couples without children at 19.61%. This distribution reflects the community's significant family and retiree populations.

Employment Status: Half of respondents (49.40%) were employed full-time, while 33.73% were retired—consistent with the age demographics. Self-employed residents comprised 8.84% of responses.

Local Residency: The survey included responses from 90.24% Carlinville residents, with 9.76% of respondents living outside the city, likely representing stakeholders invested in the community's development.

Community Assets and Strengths

What Residents Love About Carlinville

When asked to identify the top three things they love about Carlinville, respondents highlighted qualities that define the city's identity and appeal:

Small-Town Feel emerged as the dominant characteristic, cited by 29.83% of respondents (139 mentions). This reflects the community's deep appreciation for its intimate scale, interconnected social fabric, and quality of life that distinguishes it from larger urban centers.

Quality Schools ranked second with 19.74% of mentions, indicating that educational excellence remains a significant community asset and attraction factor for families.

Downtown Carlinville received 17.60% of mentions, suggesting substantial resident appreciation for the historic downtown district, despite acknowledgment of needed improvements in other survey sections.

Safety was cited by 13.73% of respondents, while 6.44% highlighted social services and healthcare availability.

Strategic Strengths Identified

When respondents were asked to select all applicable greatest strengths (allowing multiple selections), the community identified the following assets:

- Small-Town Feel again dominated 31.67% of selections, reinforcing this as Carlinville's most distinctive characteristic.
- Schools ranked second at 23.30%.
- A third was the Healthcare System at 13.80% and Safety at 12.22%.

Together, these findings indicate that Carlinville's competitive advantages center on quality of life, educational institutions, and essential services rather than economic or commercial appeal.

Key Challenges and Improvement Priorities

Primary Areas for Improvement

Respondents identified significant infrastructure and economic development challenges:

Improved Infrastructure emerged as the top improvement priority, selected by 23.98% of respondents (118 mentions). This included water systems, sewer infrastructure, streets, and sidewalks—critical physical plant concerns addressed throughout the survey.

More Jobs & Economic Opportunities ranked closely behind at 21.14% (104 mentions), indicating that economic stagnation and limited employment options represent a significant concern for residents seeking growth and career advancement.

Traffic & Roads received 20.12% of mentions, suggesting that traffic congestion, road conditions, and traffic management constitute important quality-of-life concerns.

Shopping Options were cited by 10.77%, reflecting a perceived gap in retail and consumer services, while More Parks & Recreation garnered 9.35% of mentions.

Identified Weaknesses

When selecting Carlinville's greatest weaknesses, respondents prioritized infrastructure and economic concerns:

Poor Infrastructure Like Water & Sewer was identified by 28.28% of respondents (140 selections), making it the most critical weakness. This concern appears consistently across multiple survey questions addressing water systems, wastewater treatment, and utility infrastructure.

Lack of Economic Opportunities followed at 20.81% (103 selections), reinforcing the economic development theme as a primary community concern.

High Taxes were cited by 11.31% (56 selections), while Storm Water Management was identified by 14.14% (70 selections)—a specialized infrastructure concern requiring targeted drainage and environmental management solutions.

Infrastructure and Utilities Assessment

Water and Wastewater Systems

Community satisfaction with utility infrastructure revealed significant dissatisfaction:

Water Treatment: A striking 75.97% of respondents rated Carlinville's water treatment and services as "Poor," with only 1.95% rating services as "Good." This widespread concern demands attention to system capacity, quality, or public perception.

Wastewater Treatment: Similarly, 59.09% rated the wastewater treatment system as "Poor," while 26.62% rated it "Fair." Only 3.25% considered the system "Good."

Investment Willingness: Despite concerns about current conditions, 45.45% of respondents indicated willingness to finance improvements through increased bills/grants/loans, though 30.52% opposed such measures.

Broadband and Connectivity

In contrast to utility infrastructure concerns, broadband services received more positive assessments. 51.95% of respondents rated their broadband quality as "Good," while 31.17% rated it "Fair." Only 14.29% reported "Poor" internet access, suggesting adequate modern connectivity in most areas.

Housing and Residential Development

Housing Needs Assessment

Respondents identified diverse housing needs across the community:

Affordable Housing was the most frequently selected need at 28.92% (94 selections), indicating strong demand for housing accessible to lower and middle-income residents.

Single-Family Homes or Duplexes tied closely at 28.00% (91 selections), reflecting traditional housing preferences and family-oriented development.

Senior Housing received 21.85% (71 selections), consistent with the survey's high proportion of older respondents and the community's growing senior population.

Apartments or Condos were identified by 17.23% (56 selections), suggesting modest demand for diverse housing types and urban style living arrangements.

Affordable Housing Policy Preferences

Respondents favored a moderate municipal role in affordable housing: 54.66% believed that Carlinville should support affordable housing but not spend municipal tax dollars, while 23.60% supported direct municipal investment using tax dollars. Only 21.74% believed the city should have no role in this area.

Code Enforcement and Building Standards

Strong Support for Building Codes: Notably, 77.02% of respondents supported implementation of basic building codes to promote life safety and property standards, with only 8.07% opposed.

Housing Inspection Programs: 61.49% supported residential housing inspection programs, while 22.36% opposed such measures.

Code Enforcement Activity: A notable 67.08% of respondents felt that a more active code enforcement role was needed, compared to only 16.77% who felt current enforcement efforts were "just right."

Sears Standard Addition Homes

The survey revealed strong interest in preserving and revitalizing the historic Sears Standard Addition homes, with 49.07% expressing support for increased focus on these properties.

This represents significant community interest in historic preservation as part of neighborhood revitalization strategy.

Economic Development and Business Growth

Desired Business Types and Industries

When asked what types of businesses or industries should be attracted to Carlinville, respondents identified:

Retail and Restaurants tied at 15.33% each (92 selections each), reflecting desires for expanded shopping and dining options.

Small Businesses followed closely at 15.83% (95 selections), indicating preference for locally owned enterprises over large corporate operations.

Manufacturing received 13.50% (81 selections), suggesting openness to industrial development as an economic driver.

Technology firms were identified by 11.17% (67 selections), indicating interest in knowledge economy development.

Hotels were selected by 11.83% (71 selections), potentially reflecting interest in tourism or business travel infrastructure.

Strategies for Attracting New Businesses

Respondents identified multiple strategies for business recruitment:

Provide Infrastructure Support for New Businesses was selected by 22.30% (97 selections), emphasizing the importance of physical plant and utilities as business attraction factors—particularly relevant given infrastructure concerns noted elsewhere.

Promote Small Business Development received 22.99% (100 selections), reflecting preference for community-oriented business growth.

Provide Tax Breaks for New Businesses was selected by 20.46% (89 selections), indicating openness to tax incentive mechanisms.

Encourage Large-Scale Business/Manufacturing Development received 17.01% (74 selections), while 16.55% selected developing special business zones.

Supporting Existing Businesses and Job Creation

To support current business success, respondents prioritized:

Provide Incentives for Businesses to Expand at 30.21% (103 selections), representing the most popular strategy for existing business support.

Promote Small Business Development (20.53%, 70 selections) and Develop Job Training Programs (20.23%, 69 selections) ranked closely, emphasizing workforce development and small enterprise support.

Provide Tax Breaks for Existing Business received 20.53% (70 selections), while 14.08% selected providing utility and service assistance.

Downtown Revitalization and Redevelopment

Geographic Redevelopment Priorities

When identifying areas needing targeted redevelopment, respondents clearly prioritized:

The North End emerged as the top priority area, selected by 40.06% (143 selections), representing a substantial geographic focus for revitalization efforts.

Downtown Carlinville, despite being cited as a community strength, was identified for redevelopment by 18.21% (65 selections), suggesting residents view it as requiring targeted improvements despite existing appeal.

Western Edge (14.57%, 52 selections), South Side (13.73%, 49 selections), and East Side (13.45%, 48 selections) were identified as secondary priority areas.

Infill Development and Neighborhood Revitalization Strategies

Respondents selected multiple strategies for encouraging development in older neighborhoods:

Improve Infrastructure, Streets, Sidewalks, Water, & Sewer was overwhelmingly selected by 26.34% of respondents (147 selections), again emphasizing infrastructure as foundational to neighborhood improvement.

Increase of Code Enforcement received 16.49% (92 selections), reflecting the earlier finding that residents want more active code enforcement.

Providing Tax Incentives for Residential Redevelopment was chosen by 14.16% (79 selections), while 10.75% selected protecting historic homes and providing financial assistance.

Add More Curbs & Gutters received 10.57% (59 selections), indicating attention to streetscape improvements and stormwater management.

Downtown Improvement Initiatives

For specifically revitalizing the downtown area, respondents identified:

Develop Special Incentives to Promote Business Downtown was the top selection at 14.41% (65 selections), followed by Improve Infrastructure at 19.51% (88 selections).

Create Regulations to Encourage Certain Businesses Downtown (11.75%, 53 selections) and Creating an Expanded Façade Program (10.64%, 48 selections) represented architectural and business environment improvements.

Add More Parking (10.64%, 48 selections) and Create Regulations to Allow More Outdoor Services (10.20%, 46 selections) addressed operational and physical constraints.

Development Balance and Growth Strategy

Future Development Philosophy

When asked how to balance future development with preserving existing neighborhoods and open spaces, responses reflected competing priorities:

Grow Commercial Development was selected by 38.41% (63 respondents), representing the most popular growth orientation, indicating willingness to expand the commercial tax base.

Preserving Existing Neighborhoods received 35.98% (59 respondents), suggesting equivalent interest in maintaining existing community character.

Growing Existing Neighborhoods (17.07%, 28 respondents) and Prioritize Development Over Open Space (8.54%, 14 respondents) received lower support, indicating that while growth is desired, it should occur in balance with preservation.

Transportation and Mobility

Transportation Challenges

Respondents identified several transportation obstacles:

Road Conditions emerged as the primary concern, selected by 34.45% (123 selections), addressing pavement quality, maintenance, and overall street infrastructure.

Lack of Sidewalks/Bike Lanes was cited by 27.45% (98 selections), highlighting pedestrian and cycling infrastructure gaps.

Limited Public Transportation concerned 17.93% (64 selections), while Traffic Congestion affected 7.56% (27 selections), and Parking Options were cited by 8.12% (29 selections).

Walking and Biking Infrastructure

For improving pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, 72.50% (116 respondents) preferred working with partners to promote trail development, while 8.75% (14 respondents) favored requiring developers to provide trails.

A notable 18.75% (30 respondents) felt existing infrastructure was adequate.

Public Transportation

Regarding public transportation expansion, responses were divided: 41.25% (66 respondents) supported prioritizing public transportation, while 36.25% (58 respondents) were unsure, and 22.50% (36 respondents) opposed investment.

Among those supportive of public transportation, however, support waned for funding mechanisms: only 45.63% (73 respondents) would accept a small fee or tax to implement services, while 54.38% (87 respondents) opposed paying for such programs.

Traffic Flow Improvements

Regarding traffic flow on major roads, responses were notably uncertain, with 47.78% (86 selections) expressing no opinion.

Among those opinions, 29.44% selected increased enforcement, while 10.56% favored increased speed limits and 7.78% advocated for more stop signs.

Parks, Recreation, and Community Events

Parks and Recreation Facility Improvements

Respondents identified multiple desired park improvements:

Develop More Walking Paths was the top selection at 26.71% (90 selections), aligning with earlier transportation and health priorities.

Provide More Teen Resources received 21.66% (73 selections), addressing youth programming needs.

Protect Wetlands and Wildlife Habitats was selected by 18.40% (62 selections), reflecting environmental conservation interests.

Develop Dog Park (14.24%, 48 selections) and Create Additional Park and Recreation Spaces (13.06%, 44 selections) represented specific facility requests.

New Parks and Recreational Facilities

For new facility development, respondents prioritized:

Development of a Community Center emerged as the leading choice at 27.50% (77 selections), indicating strong demand for a multipurpose gathering and activity space.

Develop an All-Abilities Playground received 21.07% (59 selections), representing inclusive recreation design.

Increased Playground Spaces were requested by 18.21% (51 selections), while 16.79% selected setting aside green space.

The addition of more Recreational Facilities Like Ball Fields received modest support at 7.50% (21 selections), while 8.93% indicated no new facilities were required.

Community Events and Outdoor Activities

To encourage outdoor activities and events, respondents selected:

Partner with Community Organizations for More Activities at 23.26% (80 selections), emphasizing collaborative programming approaches.

Partner with Schools and Blackburn College received 21.80% (75 selections), identifying educational institutions as important activity partners.

Develop More Community Events was selected by 19.48% (67 selections), while 15.12% requested more senior-focused programming.

Creating a Community Meeting Place (11.63%, 40 selections) complemented the earlier demand for a community center.

Environmental Sustainability and Natural Resources

Sustainability Initiatives

For becoming a more sustainable community, respondents identified:

Create Drop-Off Recycling Centers was the most selected option at 25.99% (92 selections), followed closely by Offer Recycling Programs at 24.01% (85 selections), together indicating strong recycling program demand.

Managed Stormwater Systems were selected by 22.60% (80 selections), addressing both sustainability and the infrastructure concerns identified throughout the survey.

Encourage Recycling Through Waste Providers (15.82%, 56 selections) and Set Aside Areas for Environmental Protection (11.58%, 41 selections) represented additional sustainability approaches.

Natural Resource Protection

Regarding protection of natural resources, respondents emphasized:

Strengthen Stormwater Management at 44.68% (105 selections)—the dominant concern—addressing drainage, flooding, and water quality issues.

Limit Water Runoff and Development was selected by 25.53% (60 selections), while 19.15% selected controlling septic tank use and requiring sewer connections.

A modest 10.64% (25 selections) believed natural resources were fine as-is.

Lake Management

For Carlinville's lakes, respondents identified multiple management priorities:

Lakes Should Be Managed (in general) received 22.81% (91 selections), while Manage and Regulate Development Around Lakes got 21.80% (87 selections), emphasizing some level of stewardship and growth control.

Promote Erosion Control Measures (20.80%, 83 selections) and Manage Water Runoff (14.54%, 58 selections) addressed environmental maintenance.

Promote Fishing received 18.05% (72 selections), reflecting recreational interests, while only 2.01% (8 selections) advocated leaving lakes unchanged.

Public Safety and Law Enforcement

Community Safety Perceptions

Overall safety perceptions were positive: 43.14% (66 respondents) felt "very safe" in Carlinville, while 52.29% (80 respondents) felt "somewhat safe." Only 4.58% (7 respondents) felt "very unsafe."

Improving Public Safety

Despite positive perceptions, respondents identified improvement strategies:

Increase Enforcement was the top selection at 39.68% (75 selections), while 32.28% (61 selections) believed public safety was adequate.

Add More Police Officers received 22.22% (42 selections), while Create Police Substations garnered modest support at 5.82% (11 selections).

Law Enforcement Role

Respondents favored an active law enforcement presence, with 57.24% (87 respondents) preferring a "strong" role for law enforcement.

An additional 40.13% (61 respondents) selected a "medium level" approach, while only 2.63% (4 respondents) favored a "hands-off" stance.

Crime Prevention Strategies

To prevent crime and reduce fear of crime, respondents identified:

Street Patrol Increase as the top strategy at 34.72% (92 selections), followed by Increased Community Policing Programs at 29.43% (78 selections).

Increased Presence in Schools (19.25%, 51 selections) and Add Bike Patrols (16.60%, 44 selections) represented additional approaches.

Education and Healthcare Assessment

School Quality

Respondent assessments of Carlinville schools were positive: 47.83% (77 respondents) rated schools as "Great," while 29.19% (47 respondents) rated them "Fair." Only 4.97% (8 respondents) rated schools as "Poor," though 18.01% (29 respondents) offered no opinion.

Healthcare Services

General Healthcare Quality: Responses were split between positive assessments, with 42.76% rating healthcare quality as "Great" and 43.42% rating it "Fair." Only 5.92% rated healthcare "Poor."

Emergency Care Services: 44.08% (67 respondents) rated emergency care as "Great," while 30.92% (47 respondents) rated it "Fair."

Fire Protection: Fire protection received particularly strong approval, with 63.82% (97 respondents) rating services as "Great."

EMS Ambulance Services: 57.24% (87 respondents) rated EMS services as "Great," while 26.97% (41 respondents) rated them "Fair."

These positive healthcare and emergency services assessments contrast with infrastructure concerns, suggesting strong performance by emergency response and medical institutions despite broader municipal infrastructure challenges.

Key Findings and Strategic Implications

Primary Themes

The survey reveals several overarching themes that should guide strategic planning:

Infrastructure is Foundational: Water systems, wastewater treatment, roads, sidewalks, and stormwater management consistently emerged as priority concerns and improvement targets. Addressing infrastructure deficiencies should be positioned as enabling other development priorities.

Economic Development Requires Intentional Strategy: The gap between residents desiring jobs and economic opportunities and the city's current business development capacity represents a critical strategic opportunity. Coordinated efforts to attract target industries, support small businesses, and develop workforce training should be prioritized.

North End Revitalization: The clear identification of the North End as the primary redevelopment priority provides geographic focus for the potential development of a business park, more infill development, increased code enforcement, and infrastructure investment strategies.

Balance Growth With Character: While residents expressed openness to commercial development and economic growth, there was simultaneous emphasis on preserving the small-town feel and existing neighborhoods that define Carlinville's identity and appeal.

Leverage Community Assets: Quality schools, healthcare systems, safety, and small-town character represent genuine competitive advantages that should be featured in economic development and quality-of-life marketing.

Demographic Considerations

The survey's heavy weighting toward older, long-term residents (65+ at 36.17% and 20+ year residents at 65.92%) suggests that priorities reflect established resident preferences.

Strategies to engage younger families, young professionals, and newer residents would provide important counterbalance to ensure comprehensive representation in future planning.

Action Priorities

Based on survey feedback, the city should consider prioritizing:

- ✓ Immediate infrastructure assessment and investment planning for water, wastewater, and stormwater systems
- ✓ Economic development strategy refinement targeting small business support and key industries identified by residents.
- ✓ North End redevelopment framework incorporating code enforcement, infrastructure improvement, and incentive mechanisms.
- ✓ Downtown revitalization action plan with facade improvements, business recruitment, and parking/traffic solutions
- ✓ Community center feasibility study addressing demand for multipurpose recreational and gathering facilities.
- ✓ Historic preservation program for Sears Standard Addition homes and other historic structures
- ✓ Complete streets and transportation plan addressing sidewalk/trail development and public transportation options

Conclusion

The City of Carlinville Community Vision Survey provides a comprehensive snapshot of resident priorities, concerns, and aspirations for the community's future.

Respondents demonstrated strong attachment to the city's small-town character and existing assets while simultaneously identifying significant infrastructure needs and economic development opportunities.

Success in implementing community vision will require coordinated investment in foundational infrastructure, strategic economic development initiatives, and targeted neighborhood revitalization—all undertaken in ways that preserve the community character residents most value.