



"I truly believe the root of healthy communities is to address poverty at the core and to build strong economic systems. Together is better"

-Survey Response

FY2021 Rural Issues Survey

The Rural Maryland Council annually conducts a Rural Issues Survey to help the Council identify the concerns and challenges faced in Rural Maryland. The information collected helps recognize trends and target certain planning priorities for the coming year. The electronic survey was released in August 2020 to RMC members and stakeholders in the quarterly online newsletter, RMC website, and through email marketing. The survey contained six questions—the first 3 questions focused on demographics and the remaining 3 questions focused on rural issues. The survey received 252 responses.

Survey responders were asked to choose their top three priorities out of a response list containing 15 concerns that best indicated the most important issues facing their community or field of interest. The top three priorities were Broadband, Workforce/Economic Development, and Poverty. These priorities are highlighted below, including two additional priorities related to Youth and Agriculture as they had a similar number of responders as priority #3.

Priority Results

- 1) 43% Encouraging providers to install last mile broadband (109 responders)**
- 2) 40% Maintaining existing businesses and recruiting new employers with good paying jobs (101 responders)**
- 3) 23% Dealing with the effects of poverty and providing assistance to low income families (60 responders)**
- 4) 22% Providing more opportunities for youth (57 responders)**
- 5) 22% Keeping and making farming profitable (56 responders)**

Additionally, responders were asked the following two open-ended questions-1) Identify potential legislative and/or policy discussions that are important to them and 2) Do they have any other issues of concerns that are not mentioned in the survey. Approximately 230 responders (out of 252) answered both questions. RMC staff collated the answers to these two questions and organized them into 10 categories. The following information contains an overview of the survey responses in each category.

Categories

Agriculture— 49 responders stated that agriculture is a high concern for them and issues raised include but are not limited to the use of farmland for solar utilities; lack of agricultural education and opportunities for students in K-12 schools; developing regionally based sustainable food systems; food security for all Marylanders; conflict resolution between farmers and non-farming neighbors; finding new markets for corn, wheat, and soybeans; the preservation of Farms and Waterman's Way of Life; urban agriculture; processing of value-added products; financial incentives for young farmers across the state; land preservation; and, increased priority and investment in agritech/aquatech as an industry sector.

Community Development— 27 responders stated concerns related to community development are important to them. Concerns include but are not limited to the need for a network for nonprofits in rural areas to support community services; affordable housing; youth programming and summer job opportunities; information dissemination; closing the language barrier among populations; lack of child care; regional wage equity; resources for seniors; walkable communities; programs to help rural poor pay utility bills; healthy civic communities; veteran related issues.

Broadband– 37 responders stated that Broadband is a concern for them and issues raised include but are limited to the need for rural broadband connectivity across the state; defining broadband as a basic essential utility; competitive internet providers; small cell technology; change in legislation to allow for broadband services to be part of franchise fees collected for use of the right-of-way; broadband access to support telework and learning during COVID pandemic.

Disparity– 16 responders stated concerns related to disparity is a high concern to them. Concerns include but are not limited to wealth inequality; closing the language barrier among populations; support for immigrant populations; racial equality; cultural competency; minority business support; minority and LGBT representation, Black Lives Matter; the need for life skill training/jobs for youth offenders; systematic racism; and, fair housing for all.

Economic Development– 43 responders stated concerns related to economic development is important to them. Concerns include but are not limited to lack of delivery services in rural areas; lack of regional plan to harness market forces; financial support for business start ups; workforce development and better public transportation; more funding for infrastructure; assisting tourism related business needs; expansion of heritage tourism; small towns matter; economic recovery for small businesses due to COVID pandemic; broadening economic development opportunities; lack of jobs; tools to support telework; funding for infrastructure

Education– 18 responders stated that concerns related to education are important to them. Concerns related to include but are not limited to lack of funding; K-12 education system and exposing children to opportunities, college readiness; Kirwan Commission; affordable post-secondary education; education equity; financial literacy in schools; and, COVID pandemic impact on children.

Environment– 42 responders stated concerns related to the environment are important to them. Concerns include but are not limited to land preservation; development of renewable energy-offshore wind; smart growth; no fracking; transfer of development rights between counties; ecosystem protection; promote solar energy without using farmland; greater eligibility for woody biomass in thermal renewable energy credit; forest industry revitalization; addressing climate change and impact on infrastructure and water resources; assistance to guide broader renewable energy deployment; and, saving and sustaining the Chesapeake Bay.

Health Care– 28 responders stated concerns related to health care. Concerns include but are not limited to attracting health care professionals to rural areas; affordable health care; substance abuse; COVID funding to assist nursing homes and assisted living communities; mental health for youth; behavioral health; telemedicine.

Transportation– 10 responders stated that transportation is a concern for them. Concerns include but are not limited to expanding public transportation in rural areas; alternative transportation (e.g. biking); impact of lack of transportation and access to health care; accessibility; affordability; infrastructure improvements for safety and mobility.

Workforce Development– 6 responders stated that workforce development is a concern for them. Concerns include but are not limited to the need to increase the number of jobs in rural areas; availability of work force housing; education of youth to have qualifications for better paying jobs; providing more funding for workforce development training through community colleges; and, redistribution of workforce/wealth to rural areas through remote work alternatives-a COVID initiative could disperse populations and benefit rural communities.

General– 10 responders stated other concerns that did not fall within a specific categories. These concerns include but are not limited to mail safety for the upcoming election; the second amendment; law enforcement accountability; and, the need to down-size government.

For more information about RMC, please visit us at rural.maryland.gov or contact us at 410.841.5772