

Your Voice Counts!

Source Sneedville Shopper

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Since July, leaders of the Clinch-Powell Empowerment Zone effort have been holding public meetings and getting public input by meeting with groups, organizations, and governments to find out what is on the mind of citizens in the Clinch-Powell area. More than 1,300 citizen surveys have been tabulated and analyzed and the results are now available. The Clinch-Powell EZ includes areas in Claiborne, Grainger, Hancock, Hawkins and Union counties.

EZ Steering Committee members were amazed at just how similar the strengths and weaknesses are across the Zone from county to county. The public input process has been outstanding. The 1,300 surveys represent approximately 4.5 percent of the population of the Zone area. This is an excellent representation since only 1.5 percent is needed to be statistically valid.

Of those that participated, 71 percent have lived in the area for more than 15 years while only 40 percent are lifelong residents. 64 percent of those responding were female and 36 percent male.

When asked about the strengths of their community, Zone residents feel very strongly that the community and people are the biggest assets (100%) followed strongly by natural resources, beauty and the environment (69%) as major strengths.

When asked about the weaknesses of their community, more than 36% of Zone residents agree that infrastructure issues like water, roads and solid waste are the biggest weaknesses. Other very highly ranked weaknesses are education (23%) crime and drugs (22%), business and workforce (21%) better jobs (21%) and youth activities and support services (19%). Additionally, local government and leadership (16%) and litter (16%) were highly identified as weaknesses.

When asked what should be done to build on strengths, community activities were identified most by respondents (23%), followed by strengthening education (16%) anti-crime and drug programs (16%) and promoting tourism and recreation (16%).

When asked what should be done to improve the weaknesses in the community, attracting business and improving workforce was noted most often (24%), followed closely by improved education (21%) and improved infrastructure (21%). Other highly ranked activities were crime and drug programs (15%), educated leaders in government (12%) and increased tourism, recreation and youth programs (11%)

To determine the issues of most concern to citizens in the future, they were asked to name the three biggest concerns facing the community in the next ten years. In response, citizens are clearly most concerned about education (38%), followed by crime and drugs (33%), infrastructure (26%) and better jobs (25%). Planning and growth issues (16%) and environmental concerns (15%) also ranked highly.

The EZ Steering Committee continues to accept input surveys. The results of these surveys are being used as the basis for the Clinch-Powell Empowerment Zone Strategic Plan which will compete nationally for designation as a rural Empowerment Zone. If approved the region will receive up to \$40 million in grants to implement the plan as well as numerous other benefits including tax credits for employers.

If you have any questions, you can call Lindy Turner at 828-5927.