

McBride Dale Clarion Henrico County Plan Update:
2005 Citizens Survey

Summary of Results

Prepared for McBride Dale Clarion, Inc.

by

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Organization of the Documents

This document provides an executive summary of notable results from the 2005 Henrico Citizens Survey, a component of the Henrico County Vision 2026 process designed to update the county's comprehensive plan for the next 20 years. The document was delivered in electronic PDF format. There are four Appendices to this document that were delivered separately as electronic PDF files. (The Methodology section of Appendix A is also a part of this executive summary document.) The page numbering is sequential starting from page one in all of the five PDF files. The files were delivered separately to facilitate use and distribution.

Summary of the Methodology for the Survey

The Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University (SERL) contracted with McBride Dale Clarion of Cincinnati, Ohio (MDC), to execute and summarize a sample survey by mail of the citizens of Henrico County, Virginia, regarding their opinions about land use and planning issues. The questionnaire was constructed from a larger draft of topic areas and suggested questions. SERL and MDC staff worked closely with staff at Henrico County on the survey.

The sample was selected from the county's existing list of residential addresses that is used for the Triennial School Census (2005 is a Triennial School Census year). This list was provided to SERL and had magisterial districts coded in by the county's geographic information systems (GIS) team. The sampling plan was designed to represent the views of citizens in the five magisterial districts of Henrico County: Brookland, Fairfield, Three Chopt, Tuckahoe and Varina. Within each of the five magisterial districts, 620 addresses were selected at random to receive a survey invitation.

Overall, 725 responses were received. After accounting for undeliverable addresses, the response rate for the survey was 25%. Given the relatively low levels of familiarity with the county's plan and the length of the survey, this response rate should be taken as neither overly disappointing nor overly positive. Those who did respond, however, contributed some strongly held opinions.

The survey data file was weighted to adjust for those different probabilities of selection and racial/ethnic classifications. The weighting scheme moves the survey data more in line with the known distribution of magisterial districts in the sampling frame, and race/ethnicity in the county as a whole.

The sampling error for questions answered by all 725 respondents is approximately +/- 3.6% at the 95% level of confidence. Sampling error is only one source of errors in surveys. Although every effort was made to eliminate processing errors as well as more subtle errors – for example, those related to the wording or order of questions or answer categories – many errors in surveys are difficult or impossible to measure or detect.

Readers are reminded to be aware of the limitations inherent in survey research. For more detail on the methodology of the survey, please see Appendix A.

Summary of Results

Overview. This summary of results is based on a review of univariate and bivariate data tables and is a guide to the more notable findings from the simple data tables executed for this report. The data file has a large number of variables, and there are more extensive analyses that might be done with these data in the future. The electronic data file and documentation allowing independent use are also being delivered as part of this project.

The need for balancing development priorities comes out in several aspects of the survey responses. Black respondents, and in some cases other non-white respondents, place greater emphasis on creating and funding employment opportunities as part of the development plan. Black respondents also tend to indicate a desire for more growth than do other respondents. Black and other non-white respondents are somewhat more supportive of multi-family housing, apartment development, and condominium development. At the same time, there is strong support across the board for environmentally sensitive planning, and for funding in support of education.

The verbatim comments contributed by the respondents cover a range of concerns and suggestions for improving and innovating in the county, but also include worries about too much growth and unraveling of the social fabric. It is worth the time to peruse the appendix with these comments. The survey questions cover a wide range of development strategies for the future. The status quo (continuation of the current residential development pattern of cul-de-sacs and detached single-family homes) garners a small plurality, but there is no clear consensus among the respondents on this issue.

The different patterns of responses by magisterial district and race, where they exist, indicate that local conditions and personal experiences shape perceptions about the county as a whole. This summary cannot hope to address these complexities in depth. The summary is designed to highlight the issues that seem to be clearly expressed in the survey data. The electronic data file and the data tables are available for further exploration.

We are grateful to the respondents. They took the time to provide their opinions even though the county's Comprehensive Plan was not familiar to many of them, and the survey may have represented a different perspective or vocabulary regarding development and quality of life in the county.

Major findings. The following issues appear to stand out strongly in the survey results.

- (1) **Senior citizen complexes** were the only type of development that a majority of respondents thought was in short supply. Support for more senior citizen

- complexes is fairly strong across the board. Overall, 54% of respondents said there was less than the right amount of this type of development. The comparable numbers regarding mixed use developments and developments that offer a variety of housing options were 34% and 33%, respectively. No other type of development was thought to be in short supply by more than 21% of the respondents. The support for more senior citizen complexes remains above or very near majority levels across all categories regarding race/ethnicity, length of residence in the county, age groups, and magisterial districts.
- (2) **Sidewalks and public transportation** are sources of strong dissatisfaction for large proportions of respondents. Overall, 65% of respondents are less than “somewhat satisfied” with the number of sidewalks in the county (37% are “not at all satisfied”) and 64% are less than “somewhat satisfied” with public transportation (bus service) in the county (39% are “not at all satisfied”). Regarding the quality of sidewalks in the county, 44% are less than “somewhat satisfied” (22% are “not at all satisfied”). Newer residents of the county were more likely to express dissatisfaction with sidewalks and public transportation.
- (3) Overall, 82% of the **respondents support further restricting or managing new development in rural areas not served by county sewer**. Not surprisingly given such a large percentage, support was strong across all categories of respondents that were analyzed for this summary. Overall, a slim majority (52%) thought that the **minimum lot size in areas not served by county sewer** should be one acre (the current requirement), while 25% said it should be two acres and 17% said it should be five acres.
- (4) **Respondents support adopting fees or charges that developers or “new growth” would pay to offset infrastructure costs** associated with the new development. Overall, 60% said it was “very important” that developers pay for infrastructure and services for the new development, and 62% indicated they would support the county in adopting development fees or charges that would make new growth pay more fully for costs associated with it (such as school expansion, road improvements, fire service expansion, etc.). Black respondents agree that it is “very important” that developers pay for infrastructure and services for the new development (60% say so), but are less supportive of the county adopting development fees or charges. Forty-eight percent of black respondents indicate support, compared to 65% or higher among whites and other races/ethnicities.
- (5) **Land use and transportation were rated as being the most important issues to be covered by the Comprehensive Plan**. Overall, 72% rated land use and 66% rated transportation as “very important” to the Comprehensive Plan. Utilities (61%) and public facilities (60%) also received attention as being “very important.” Environmental issues (53%) and economic development issues (51%) were rated as “very important” by slim majorities. Park and recreation facilities (37%) were least likely to be rated as “very important” to the Comprehensive

Plan. When asked to rank their top issue, 40% named land use and 20% named transportation. Black respondents were somewhat more likely to rate nearly all issues as “very important” than were white respondents or respondents of other race/ethnicity. More notably, even given this overall tendency, a higher percentage of black respondents (77%) rated economic development issues as “very important” to the Comprehensive Plan than did white respondents (44%) or respondents of other race/ethnicity (50%). Transportation was more likely to be rated as “very important” in Three Chopt, Tuckahoe, and Fairfield than in Brookland and Varina. Respondents in Fairfield rated utilities, public facilities, park and recreation facilities and economic development more highly than did respondents in other districts.

- (6) **Traffic and street/exterior lighting lead the ratings of the design features that most influence opinion about all four main types of development; buffers are also rated highly for residential development.** Overall, 54% rated traffic circulation and access as “very important” to their opinions of **single-family residential development**, while 53% said street lighting and 52% said buffering or screening from adjacent major roads were “very important.” When asked to rank their top issue influencing their opinions of single-family residential development, 33% said traffic circulation and access was the most important issue. Overall, 55% said street lighting was “very important” to their opinions of **multi-family residential development**, while 52% said traffic circulation and access, 50% said parking, and 47% said buffering or screening from adjacent major roads were “very important.” When asked to rank their top issue influencing their opinions of multi-family residential development, 31% said traffic circulation and access was the most important issue. Overall, 72% rated traffic circulation and access as “very important” to their opinions of **commercial development**, while 68% said parking and 65% said exterior lighting were “very important.” When asked to rank their top issue influencing their opinions of commercial development, 43% said traffic circulation and access was the most important issue. Overall, 64% rated traffic circulation and access as “very important” to their opinions of **industrial/employment centers**, while 58% said parking and 53% said exterior lighting were “very important.” When asked to rank their top issue influencing their opinions of industrial/employment centers, 49% said traffic circulation and access was the most important issue. In general, white respondents were less likely to rate any factors as “very important” than were blacks or respondents of other race/ethnicity. Black respondents were more likely than were other respondents to rate street/exterior lighting as “very important” and to rank it as a top influence on their opinions of all types of development. Black respondents were also more likely to rate recreational amenities as “very important” to their opinions of multi-family development.
- (7) **County funding for school or education facilities receives strong support.** Overall, 66% said it was “very important” for the county to fund school/education facilities. This was the only item out of seven in this question to receive a majority rating of “very important.” When asked to rank their highest priority for

- county funding, 47% said school/education facilities. Development of industrial areas was rated as the lowest priority for county funding among the items listed in the question. Support for funding education wanes as the length of residence in the county increases (from 70% among those living in the county for eight or fewer years to 58% among those living in the county for 40 or more years).
- (8) **Quality of life** in the county was generally rated as good and getting better over the last 10 years, but respondents were less favorable when rating the **sense of community** over the last 10 years. Overall, 59% of the respondents rated the quality of life in the county as above average (19% rated it as excellent), and 49% said it had improved in the last 10 years compared to 24% who said it had decreased (27% said it had stayed the same). But 36% of the respondents said the sense of community had decreased on the last 10 years, compared to 22% who said it had improved (42% said it had stayed the same). Black respondents are more likely to rate the current quality of life as “average,” but are also more likely to say that quality of life and sense of community have improved over the last 10 years. Residents in Fairfield and Varina were much less likely to rate quality of life as “excellent.”
- (9) Respondents seemed to think **the rates of residential and commercial/retail growth have been enough or too much, but not so for the rate of industrial or employment center growth**. Overall, 7% said the rate of residential growth over the last few years in the county was less than “just right” and 59% said it was more than “just right.” (The remaining 34% said it was “just right.”) Similarly, 10% said the rate of commercial or retail growth over the last few years in the county was less than “just right” and 56% said it was more than “just right.” But 29% said the rate of industrial or employment center growth over the last few years in the county was less than “just right” and 29% also said it was more than “just right.” Black respondents were more likely to say that rates of growth for residential and commercial/retail development have been “just about right,” and are more likely to say there has not been enough industrial/employment center growth. Newer residents were somewhat more likely to say that rates of growth for residential and commercial/retail development have been “just about right.” Respondents in Fairfield and Varina were more likely to say that rates of growth for residential, commercial/retail and industrial/employment center development have been too little or “just right.”
- (10) **There was some support for creating a storm water utility that could be integrated into a larger Greenbelt/Greenway system of open spaces, parks and naturally preserved areas**. Overall, 60% of the respondents supported doing so. Support was somewhat stronger among newer residents of the county, those living in the Brookland magisterial district, and black respondents.

Additional Findings. The following issues are also noteworthy.

- (11) There was **no strong consensus on ratings of how well the county has managed growth over the last few years.** Overall, 49% said it varied depending on the development in question, 24% tended toward positive ratings, and 26% toward negative ratings.
- (12) There was **differential participation in the survey by magisterial district.** Equal numbers of surveys were mailed to households in each magisterial district. Unequal numbers are in the data file. Twenty percent of the survey respondents should be in each of the five magisterial districts, but Tuckahoe has 26%, Three Chopt has 25%, Brookland has 21%, Fairfield has 15% and Varina has 13% lag. Weighting by magisterial district and race adjusts for much of these discrepancies.
- (13) **Black respondents** are generally more satisfied with how growth has been managed so far. In addition, as noted above in separate items, compared to white and other respondents, larger proportions of black respondents think that there is too little development of various types in the county. It should be noted that Fairfield and Varina have the largest proportions of black residents in the county, and these districts on the eastern end of the county appear to have experienced much less development than have the more central and western districts of the county.
- (14) **Citizen knowledge of the Henrico County 2010 Land Use Plan was somewhat low.** Overall, 71% of the respondents said they were not familiar with it or had never heard of it, 27% said they were somewhat familiar with it, and 3% said they were very familiar with or well informed about it. Given this relative lack of familiarity with the plan, it is heartening that so many citizens were willing to take the time to express their opinions about these issues.
- (15) After sidewalks and public transportation (bullet 2, above), additional items of some concern are: **streetscape appearance, how well the county's roads handle traffic, drainage and storm water runoff, preservation of open space and environmentally sensitive areas, the number of parks and playing fields, affordability of housing, the quality of employment opportunities, and the quantity of employment opportunities.** For all of these issues, between 20% and 38% of respondents said they were less than "somewhat satisfied."
- (16) **Items that do not appear to be of great concern are:** sanitary sewer facilities, drinking water quality, environmental quality (air, water, etc.), community landscaping, the design of new development, park landscaping, the quality of parks and playing fields, variety or availability of housing, variety of shopping, and the quality of information available via the county's various communication channels. For all of these issues, fewer than 20% of respondents said they were less than "somewhat satisfied."

- (17) There was **clear-cut support for preserving sensitive environmental areas and moderate support for other recreational amenities**. Overall, 45% said it was “very important” that the county provide funding to secure and preserve sensitive environmental areas, while comparable ratings for other amenities such as parks, recreational facilities, bikeways and walkways ranged from 18% (bikeways) to 34% (pedestrian trails and walkways). When asked to rank their highest priority for county funding of amenities, 27% said securing and preserving sensitive environmental areas, while other amenities ranged from 6% (bikeways) to 20% (mid-sized community parks such as Deep Bottom Park).
- (18) There were **moderate estimates of future use of river trails and bicycle trails if they existed**. Overall, 23% said they would be very likely to use a James River or Chickahominy River trail, and 18% said they would be very likely to use bike trails, if either of these trail systems existed in the county.

Detailed Methodology for the Survey

The Survey and Evaluation Research Laboratory at Virginia Commonwealth University (SERL) contracted with McBride Dale Clarion of Cincinnati, Ohio (MDC), to execute and summarize a sample survey by mail of the citizens of Henrico County, Virginia, regarding their opinions about land use and planning issues.

The questionnaire was constructed from a larger draft of topic areas and suggested questions. SERL and MDC staff worked closely with staff at Henrico County on the survey. After extensive review and formatting work on the survey and related materials (cover letter, etc.), the survey was finalized. SERL submitted the survey plan and materials for review by VCU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and obtained IRB approval before executing the mailings.

Sample and respondent selection within households. An initial investigation into the use of voter registration records as the sampling list proved fruitless. Instead, a household-based approach was used, taking advantage of the county's existing list of residential addresses that is used for the Triennial School Census (2005 is a Triennial School Census year). This list was provided to SERL and had magisterial districts coded in by the county's geographic information systems (GIS) team.

The survey was designed to be filled out by one adult citizen of the county in each participating household. An adult was defined as someone 18 years of age or older. In households with more than one eligible adult, rather than burden potential respondents with a random selection mechanism to determine which adult in the household would respond to the survey, the selection of the respondent was left to the residents of the household to determine as they wished.

The budget allowed for a total of 3,100 households to be invited to participate. The sampling plan was designed to represent the views of citizens in the five magisterial districts of Henrico County: Brookland, Fairfield, Three Chopt, Tuckahoe and Varina. The plan was simplified by the fact that the magisterial districts must contain roughly equal populations. Because no direct information was available to address whether different levels of response could be expected from different magisterial districts, 620 addresses within each of the five magisterial districts were selected at random to receive a survey invitation.

Packet contents. Selected households received a survey packet sent by first class U.S. mail. The address label for the outgoing letter was personalized to the extent possible, given the data available in the address file. This was accomplished by obtaining name-matching services for the sampled addresses based on telephone directory listings. The packet contained a customized outgoing envelope designed to encourage the respondents to open the packet; a cover letter explaining the purpose and importance of the survey, with a reference map printed on the back; the survey itself; and a business reply envelope for returning the survey postage-paid. The completed surveys were processed, verified and tallied at SERL.

Response rate. Overall, 725 responses were received. After accounting for undeliverable addresses, the response rate for the survey was 25%. Given the relatively low levels of familiarity with the county's plan and the length of the survey, this response rate should be taken as neither overly disappointing nor overly positive. Those who did respond, however, contributed some strongly held opinions.

Weighting the data. Surveys are generally adjusted, or weighted, to account for different probabilities of selection and to bring the respondents more in line with known demographics of the population they represent. This survey used a slightly disproportionate sample by magisterial district because 620 cases were sampled from each district regardless of the differences in populations across districts. Weighting was done to adjust for those different probabilities of selection, using the magisterial district variable supplied by the county in the original sampling frame. (This weighting variable is called DISTWT.) Even after those adjustments, this survey appeared to overrepresent white (Caucasian) respondents and underrepresent black (African-American) respondents, compared to U.S. Census 2000 data. The substantive answers for a number of items appeared to be different among whites, blacks and those reporting themselves to be some other race or ethnicity. Therefore, a second adjustment was made by racial/ethnic classifications. (This weighting variable is called RACWT.) The product of DISTWT and RACWT = STG2WT. To account for several cases missing on race, a final adjustment was made so that the sum of the final weights was equal to 725, the original unweighted sample size for the study. The final weighting variable is called FINWT. (DISTWT * RACWT * ADJUST = FINWT.) The weighting scheme moves the survey data more in line with the known distribution of magisterial districts in the sampling frame, and race/ethnicity in the county as a whole.

Sampling error and other error. The sampling error for questions answered by all 725 respondents is approximately +/- 3.6% at the 95% level of confidence. (The sampling error for questions answered by fewer respondents would be larger. For example, sampling errors at the magisterial district level are approximately +/- 7.4% to +/- 10.6%). This means that if the same survey were executed 100 times with 100 different samples drawn from this population, the results from the survey reported here would be within 3.6 percentage points of 95 out of the 100 other samples that were drawn. If sampling error were the only source of error in the survey, this would also mean that, 95% of the time, the results of this survey would be within 3.6 percentage points of the result if all members of the population responded to the survey (i.e., if a successful census were taken). But sampling error is only one source of errors in surveys. Although every effort was made to eliminate processing errors as well as more subtle errors – for example, those related to the wording or order of questions or answer categories – many errors in surveys are difficult or impossible to measure or detect. Readers are reminded to be aware of the limitations inherent in survey research.

Copies of the survey materials can be found in the full version of Appendix A in the separate PDF file.

About the Codebook (Appendix B)

The codebook for the study was created using Stata software. The codebook is useful for anyone who wants a detailed report of what is in the electronic data file, or who wants to use the electronic data file independently.

About the Data Tables (Appendix C)

The data tables show unweighted numbers of responses (labeled “uN”) and weighted percentages (labeled “w%”). Unweighted numbers are shown so that readers can make a judgment as to the stability of the survey estimates. Weighted percentages are shown so that the reader can compare unbiased data wherever the unweighted N indicates a sound basis for comparison. At least 25-30 cases should be present for any survey percentage to be considered at all useful, and some analysts would prefer to see 50-75 unweighted cases before using the survey data for any particular question or subgroup. There are six series of tables:

- (1) Frequency reports of survey responses overall (pp. 1-29).
- (2) Frequency reports of survey responses overall including don't know and no opinion responses (pp. 30-56).
- (3) Breakdown of survey responses by race in three categories (white, black, and other) (pp. 31-100).
- (4) Breakdown of survey responses by length of residence in the county by four categories (0-8 years, 9-20 years, 21-39 years, 40 or more years) (pp. 101-142).
- (5) Breakdown of survey responses by age in six categories (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65 or older) (pp. 143-173).
- (6) Breakdown of survey responses by magisterial district in five categories (Brookland, Fairfield, Three Chopt, Tuckahoe and Varina) (pp. 174-209).

About the Verbatim Responses to Open-Ended Items (Appendix D)

Write-in (verbatim) responses given by respondents were typed into an Access database and reported out for this appendix. Responses have been lightly edited for spelling and punctuation. Reviewing the open-ended responses is a very good way to get the full flavor of the opinions offered by the respondents. The verbatim responses are presented in this appendix for five questions:

- (1) Question 7 (tell us about your answer regarding changes in quality of life in the county over the last 10 years)
- (2) Question 9 (tell us about your answer regarding changes in the sense of community in the county over the last 10 years)
- (3) Question 11 (Other issues that should be addressed in the Comprehensive Plan)
- (4) Question 20 (Other issues related to the Comprehensive Plan for which the county should provide funding)
- (5) Question 29 (Comments on recreational amenities)