

The Overall Vision of this Plan

As we look to the future, hopefully the best features of older development in the region will have been preserved and extended into new development.

Hamburg and Shoemakersville will continue to serve as active business hubs and support the higher density housing needs of the region.

Historic buildings should be preserved, and many restored in a sensitive manner, with appropriate new uses. Older neighborhoods will remain strong and stable, with a high percentage of homes being owner-occupied.

New business development should occur in ways that fit into the character of the community. This should include reuse of older buildings and sites and construction of newer commercial buildings only where it is appropriate.

Large areas will continue to be farmed and substantial areas of woodlands preserved, providing attractive visual relief between developments, recreational opportunities and further promoting the rural nature of the region that residents are used to.

The creek valleys will be preserved, some in public greenways and trails. Plentiful high-quality groundwater supplies will remain available, with large amounts of stormwater recharging into the ground. The creeks will also continue to have high water quality, with the benefit of careful erosion controls. Conservation easements will have ensured the permanent preservation of large areas of open land.

Most new development should be served with public water and sewage service that will minimize the total amount of land that is consumed. Substantial areas of open space will have been preserved within most new development. "Cookie-cutter" subdivisions sprawling across the rural landscape will have been avoided.

Unsightly and inefficient "strip" commercial development of new commercial businesses with individual driveways along long stretches of major roads will have been mitigated. Extensive landscaping will add to the attractiveness of new development.

Traffic will increase but should be carefully managed, with improvements to smooth traffic along major corridors and existing choke points. Coordinated driveways and interconnected parking lots will be provided between adjacent businesses. Wider shoulders should be provided on roads to increase safety and promote bicycling and walking.

Signs will be of modest size and height. Lighting will be controlled to avoid nuisances to neighbors and motorists.

A wide variety of recreation opportunities will continue to be available, and the Hamburg Area School District will continue to be known for high quality education.

Direction: The Major Goals of This Plan

The following goals provide overall direction for this Plan. The recommendations work to carry out these goals. More on these goals can be found in the corresponding chapter of the plan.

Overall Goal

Continually strive to make the region an even greater place in which to live, work, learn, visit, shop and play, with a strong sense of community, scenic preserved open spaces, an attractive historic character, a vibrant economy, and an excellent quality of life.

Natural Features and Agricultural Conservation

- Protect important natural features, with a special emphasis upon the Kittatinny Ridge, the Schuylkill River, Hassler, Leshner and Rattling Runs; the Maiden, Northkill, Little Northkill, Wolf, Mill, Little Swatara, Jackson, Mollhead, Birch, Spring, Stony, Pigeon, Furnace and Kaercher Creeks, other creek valleys, wetlands and steeply sloped woodlands.
- Continue to maintain and protect agricultural activities and structures within the region.
- Protect the steep slopes (greater than 15%) within the region.
- Protect watersheds and wellhead areas for the existing Hamburg reservoir and potential future community water supplies within the region.
- Identify scenic areas of the region and encourage the preservation of these areas for enjoyment by residents and visitors by limiting the encroachment of development.
- Protect natural resources and regional open space from utilities and development.

Community Facilities and Services

- Provide high-quality community facilities and services in the most cost-efficient manner, including addressing needs for future growth and seek to provide public facilities and services on a regional basis to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Municipalities should work with the Hamburg Area School District to adequately plan for increased demands on the district caused by future large-scale developments coming into the region.
- Provide central water and sewage services in the most cost-efficient manner, with regular investments to provide reliable services.
- Malfunctioning on-lot systems, areas with contaminated water supplies, and small privately owned sewer or water systems shall be encouraged to connect to existing sewer or water systems where economically and physically possible.
- The municipalities should maintain an up-to-date Sewage Facilities Plan (Act 537). This includes implementation of an On-Lot Disposal Ordinance that promotes the maintenance of on-lot septic systems, if this has not already been in effect.
- Continue to improve parks and playgrounds to meet a wide variety of recreational needs.
- Emphasize full coordination of municipal and emergency services across municipal borders.
- Complete a system of bicycle and pedestrian trails to provide vital links between existing recreation areas, commercial and residential developments, and school facilities.

Historic and Cultural Resources

- Identify, mark, preserve, enhance and protect the remaining historic, architectural and cultural resources of the Northern Berks region.
- Designate a regional Historic Commission or a unified advisory committee. Build effective partnerships among public and private partners.
- Coordinate planning efforts with PHMC, Berks County Historic Preservation Trust, Berks County Planning Commission, Schuylkill River Greenway Association, Our Town Foundation, Natural Lands Trust and other state, county or local groups who share similar visions for the protection and preservation of the resources within the region.
- Determine the role municipalities should play in historic preservation through land use ordinances, incentives, and regulations, and efforts to create historic districts and historic overlay zoning.

- Create and adopt an official policy statement for the protection and preservation of the historical resources within the Northern Berks region.
- Create an historic overlay district, historic overlay map, and zoning provisions to protect the Region from inappropriate development that would destroy the character of the historic neighborhoods within the Region, especially within the Boroughs and Villages.
- Encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures where appropriate and discourage inappropriate development in the historic areas of the Region.
- Require impact studies for development near historic resources and require mitigation of any potential adverse impacts on historic resources.
- In order to preserve the existing resources, require new development to consider and reflect the history, architecture, and development patterns of the municipalities in the Region.
- Identify, register, mark, and prioritize the significance of the remaining historic, architectural and cultural resources of the Northern Berks region. This should be done by a qualified consultant in the fields of historic preservation, architecture, and planning; however, citizen support shall be solicited.
- Develop an education outreach program to generate increased public awareness of the historical and cultural resources within the region, and on the impact these resources have had in Berks County and the surrounding counties. Support the existing individuals and groups that already undertake such activities.
- Support the integrity of identified districts within the Region.
- Consider the creation of trails to link historic sites.
- Erect informative markers and exhibits at historic and cultural resources.
- Designate an agency and sites to display and promote the resources location within the Region.
- Promote the resources of the Region to encourage Cultural Heritage Tourism.
- Promote Our Town Foundation and the historic walking tour of Hamburg and create other such tours in the Region.
- Foster appreciation of the role of the Schuylkill River in the history and culture of the area and foster an appreciation of the Pennsylvania Dutch heritage.
- Research financial sources and secure funding to implement potential projects identified in this plan.

Economic Development

- Focus on providing high quality, fundamental public services.
- Prioritize infrastructure improvements.
- Encourage regulatory alignment/consistency in all municipalities.
- Boost the diversification of the local economy.
- Support the creation and growth of local businesses.
- Attract and cultivate a skilled workforce.
- Consider developing and sponsoring a summer jobs program for high school students in the Hamburg Area School District.
- Ensure ordinances address industry trends and the needs of retail businesses and retail development.

Transportation

- Continued efforts should be made to vote or petition legislators for the benefit of transportation issues within the region and communicate unified requests for improvements to the Reading Area Transportation Study (RATS) through the Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).
- Pursue preliminary technical evaluation of transportation priorities and share recommendations with the appropriate municipalities and agencies.
- Collaborate on a regular basis to focus limited funding on the most effective solutions and to maximize the potential for cost sharing and savings.
- Review municipal ordinances, especially in the Boroughs, for parking standards and amend as necessary to ensure parking requirements are both appropriate and flexible.
- Encourage areas of truck parking to reduce trucks parking in non-designated or unsafe areas. Consideration should be given to encourage developers to include an area of safe truck parking within the property they are developing for drivers that are servicing that location.
- Each municipality should implement low-cost safety improvements where such measures provide an immediate impact on safety.
- The municipalities should ensure future development does not create detrimental access issues, increase congestion, or create safety problems.
- Communicate with the operators of commercial and industrial facilities regarding issues with regular truck movements and designated routes.
- Consider the development of a regional trail/pedestrian/bicycle plan that provides guidance for an interconnected system of pedestrian improvements between the municipalities.
- Ensure municipal subdivision and land development ordinances contain requirements for sidewalks in appropriate locations. Going forward, new land developments and subdivisions, especially ones served by public sewer and water utilities, should be encouraged to have sidewalks on one side of all streets when within two (2) miles of school, or half (0.5) of a mile of a greenway, park, shopping center, business complex, transit stop, or when there is an existing sidewalk network adjacent to the proposed development.
- Encourage the addition of sidewalks within the planning area especially where there are missing links or where sidewalks would facilitate appropriate connections to existing or future neighborhoods and destinations (such as schools, parks, recreation facilities, major job generators, or shopping centers).
- Communicate with SCTA\BARTA regarding future bus routes, shuttles, and other transit opportunities. Municipal officials and developers should work with SCTA/BARTA early in the design process of a new project, rather than placing stops at later stages in construction, with considerations for pedestrian access, existing bus operations, and potential stop facilities.

Land Use and Housing

- Provide for orderly patterns of development that provide compatibility between land uses, particularly to protect the livability of existing residential areas.
- Seek to extend the best features of older development into newer development.
- Maintain an attractive rural character in the region. Use the “Open Space Development” process to cluster development on the most suitable portions of a tract, in order to permanently preserve important natural features and open spaces.
- Direct most development to locations that can be efficiently served by public water and sewage services, in order to minimize the total amount of land that is consumed by development and to direct most housing away from agricultural areas.
- Direct new commercial uses to selected locations that allow for safe and efficient traffic access, as opposed to long strip commercial development along major corridors with individual driveways.
- Strengthen older commercial areas, particularly in Hamburg and Shoemakersville, and continue to reuse or redevelop older industrial sites.
- Promote pedestrian-friendly “human scale” development that is not overly dense and that includes substantial landscaping.
- Strengthen residential neighborhoods, with an emphasis on encouraging home-ownership, rehabilitating older buildings, and avoiding incompatible development.
- Continue to further improve the visual attractiveness of the region, with an emphasis upon the most highly visible corridors, and with an emphasis upon street trees, landscaping and preserved creek valleys.
- Stress a strong diversified economy that generates stability, sufficient tax revenues and wide employment opportunities.
- Emphasize tourism that is built upon the area’s heritage, arts and culture, and recreational assets.
- Encourage appropriate reuse and historic rehabilitation of older buildings, as well as encouraging new construction that is consistent with historic surroundings, especially in the Boroughs and Villages.
- Make sure that obligations are met under State law to provide opportunities for all types of housing and all legitimate types of land uses.

PUTTING THIS PLAN INTO ACTION

Update municipal development regulations to carry out this Plan, and periodically update the Plan and regulations as needed.

Continually work to put this Plan into action - through a program of updated planning and many short-term actions within a long-range perspective.

Promote substantial citizen input, including making sure residents are well-informed about community issues and encouraging volunteer efforts to improve the community.

Maximize communications, coordination and cooperative efforts between the municipalities, the school district, adjacent municipalities, the County and other agencies and organizations.

The Survey

As part of the process of updating this joint comprehensive plan a digital community survey was prepared to gauge the public's perception of the planning region and to inquire about possible future planning initiatives in the municipalities. Distribution of the survey link was the responsibility of the planning committee members, the municipalities, the Berks County Planning Commission and various other partners involved in the plan development process. Due to the open access nature of this survey, the sample is not considered to be randomly selected; consequently, results are considered to be representative only of those who chose to participate.

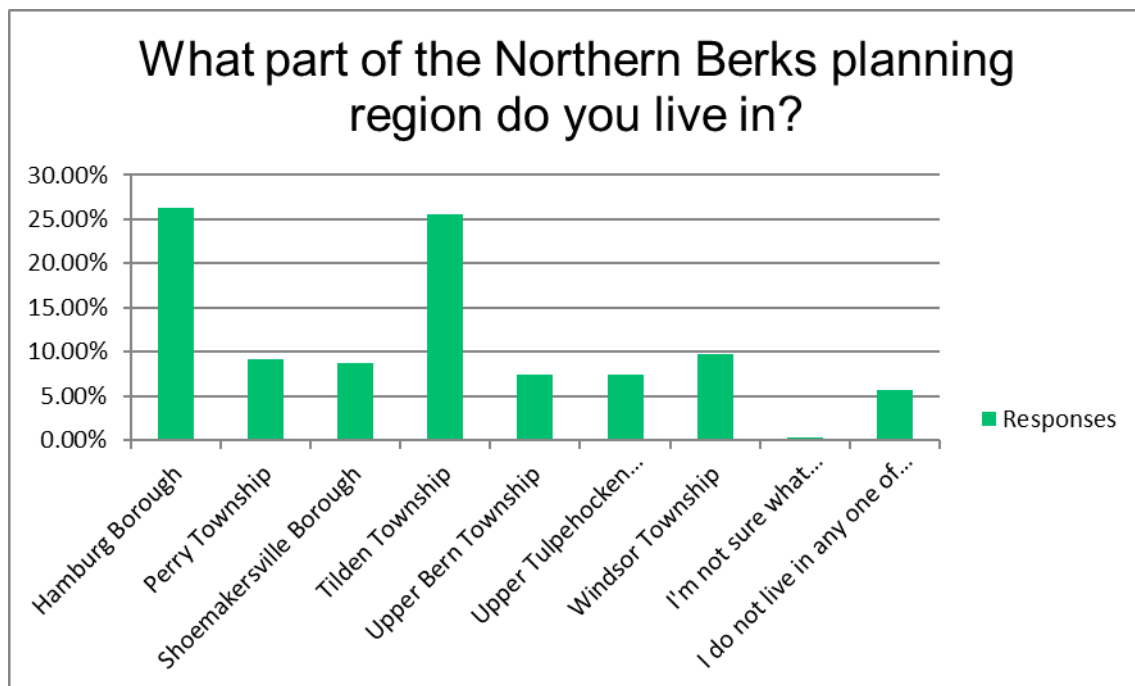
Survey Response

Due to the open access nature of the survey, the total number of invited respondents is unknown. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate a response rate for this survey. However, based on the population of the region (18,003 – 2018 Estimate) and the number of responses that were received it can be reasonably surmised that roughly 2% of the region's population responded to the survey.

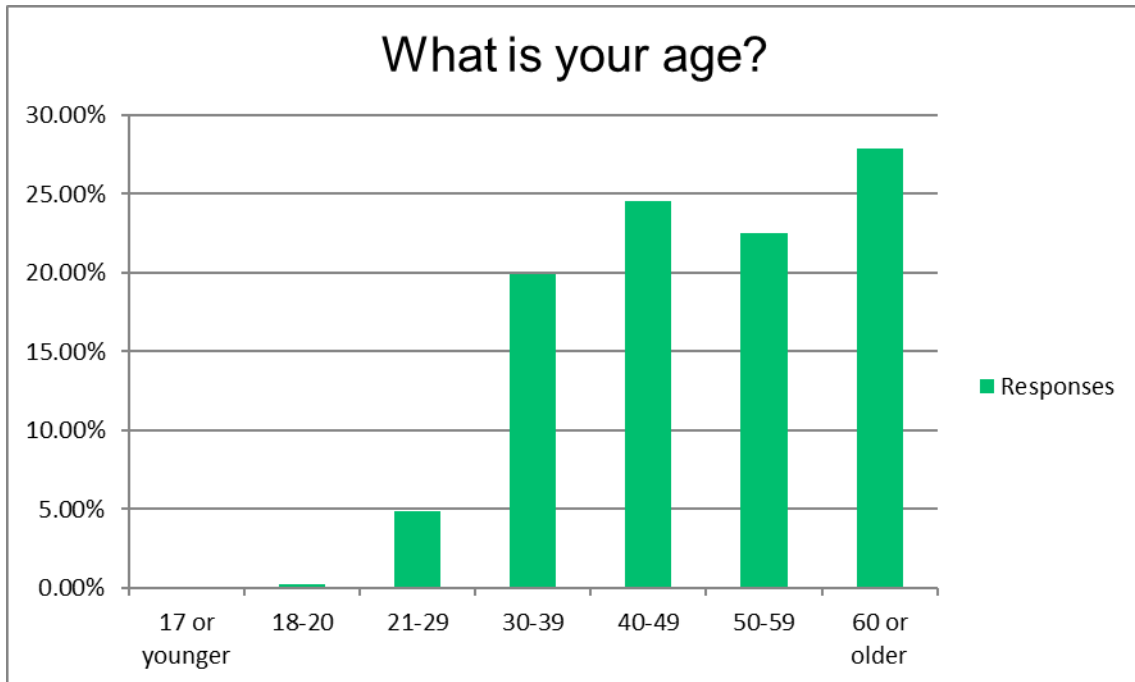
Respondent Profile

In total, 392 respondents provided data to at least some questions in the survey. A few questions were asked to develop a profile by what part of the region they live in, their age and whether they own or rent a home in the planning area.

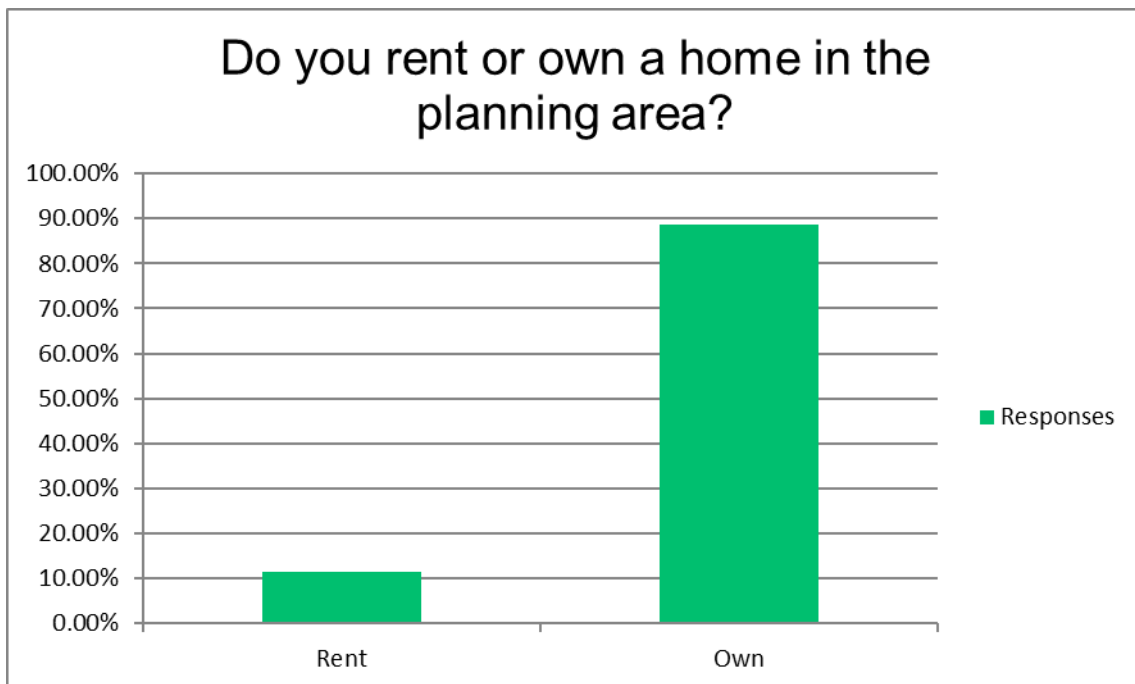
An overwhelming majority of respondents lived in Hamburg Borough (26.3%) and Tilden Township (25.5%). 5.6% of respondents did not live in the region.



The age of respondents was evenly distributed among the different age groups with the majority of respondents between the ages of 60 years old or older (27.9%).

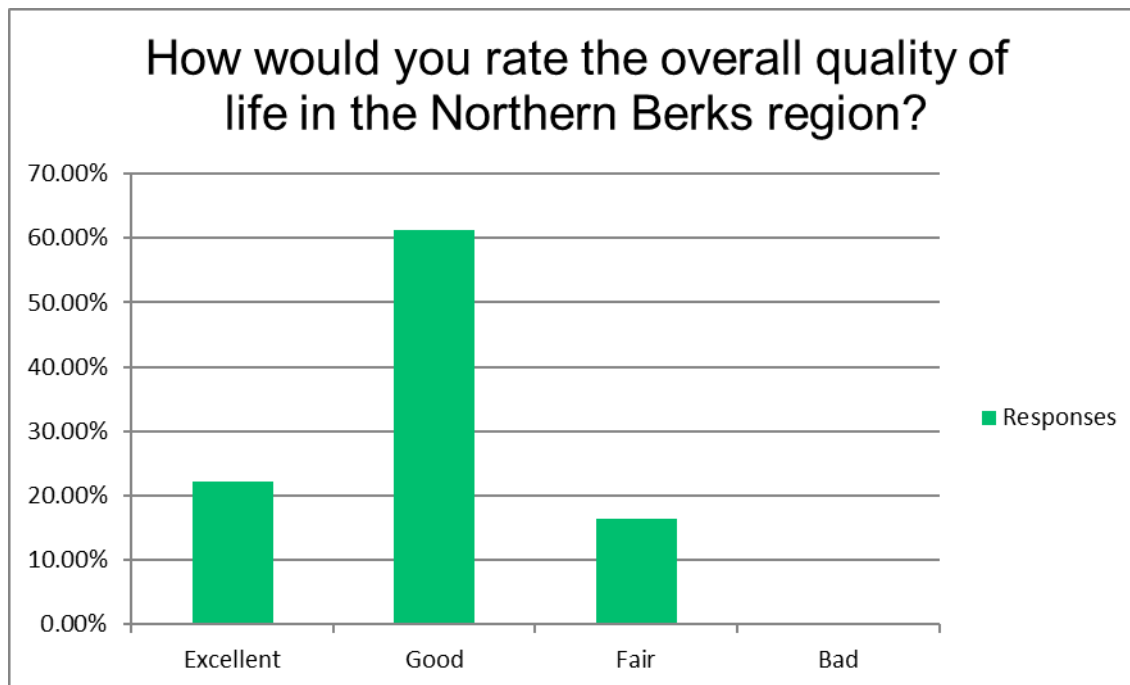


A majority (88.5%) of respondents indicated they own a home in the planning area.



Quality of Life in the Region

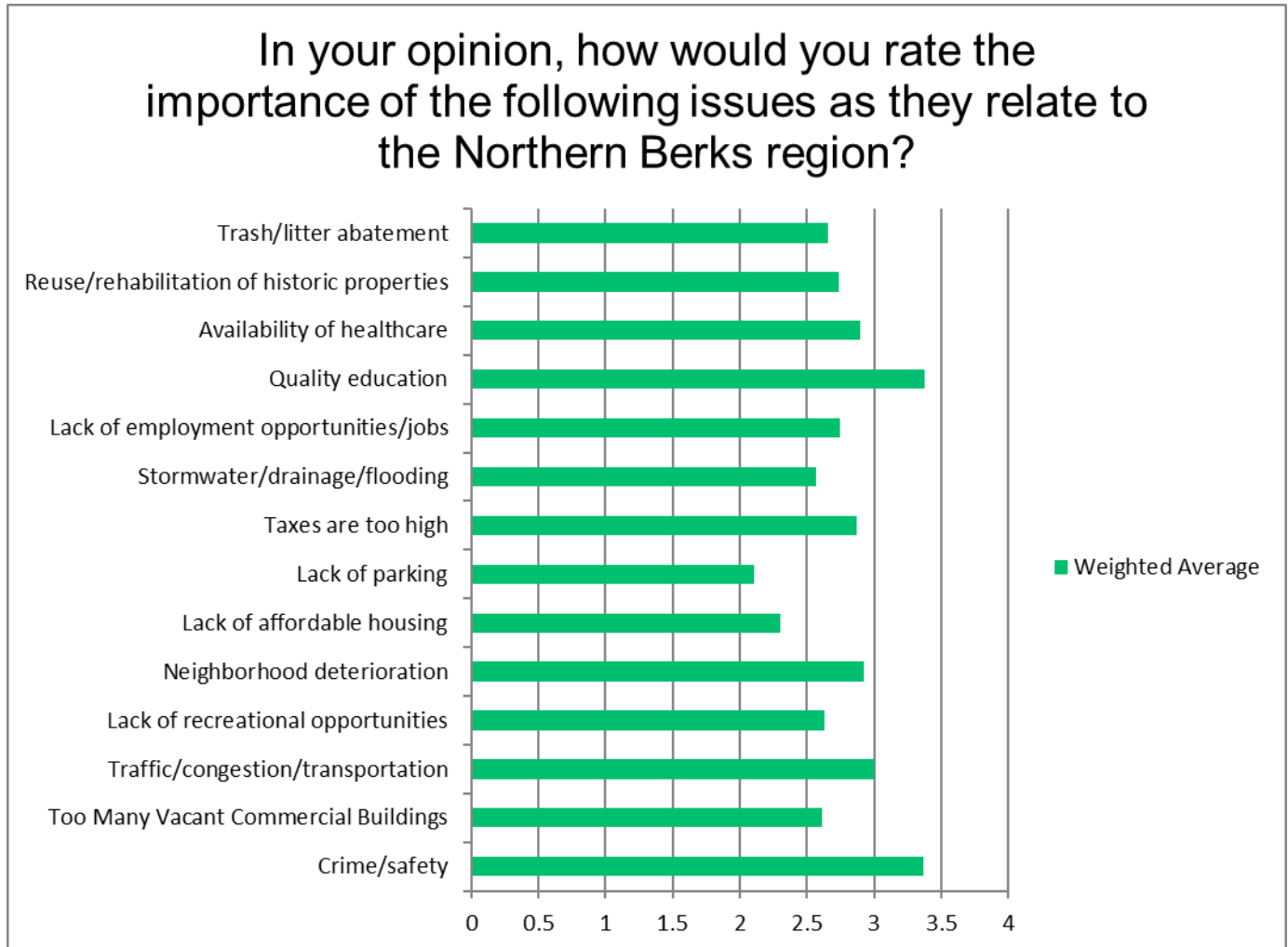
Respondents were asked how they would rate the overall quality of life in the Region. A little more than 22% of respondents indicated the quality of life is excellent. More than half (61%) of respondents indicated that the quality of life was good. Only 16% indicated that the quality of life was fair. One respondent answered that the quality of life was bad.



In addition, respondents were asked to provide comment on why they feel the way they do about the quality of life in the region. Out of the total of 392 persons who responded to the survey question, 197 provided additional input. Consistent with the overall excellent/good rating as described above the responses mostly centered on positive aspects of why the Northern Berks region is a great place to reside and spend time. For the most part respondents enjoyed the rural nature of the region and the close proximity to major shopping and commercial destinations but the area still has a country type feel. There were also many respondents who were pleased with the amount of recreational opportunities available to them throughout the region. Conversely, some respondents were concerned with traffic, road conditions, and the proliferation of warehouse development in the area.

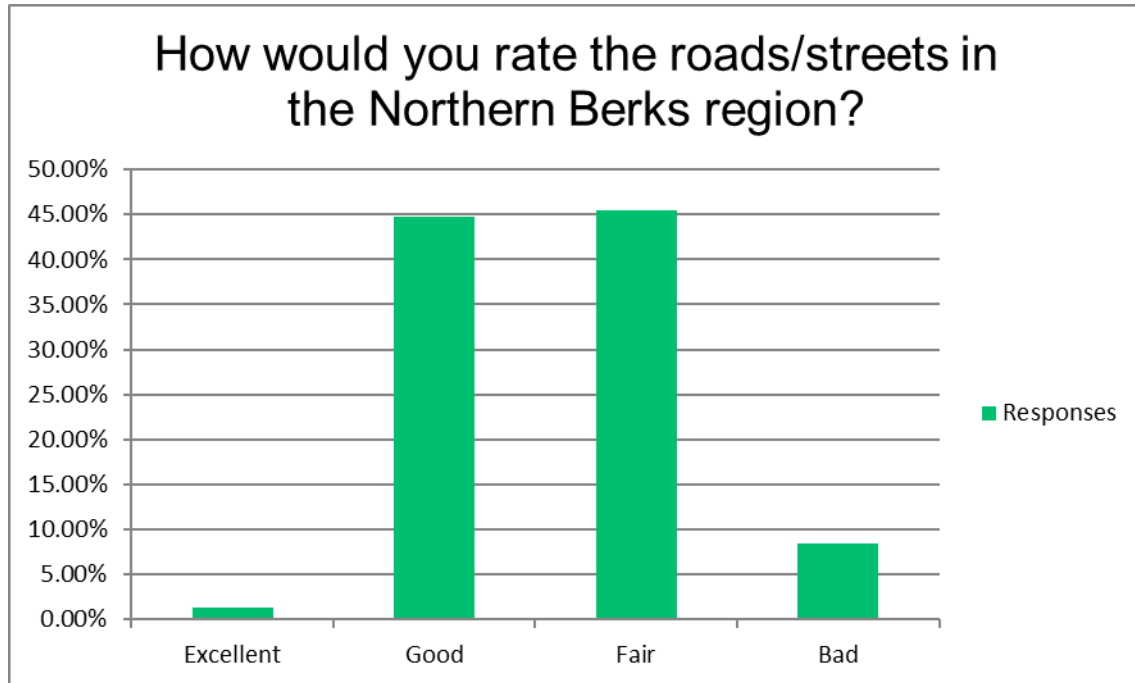
Important Issues in the Region

Respondents were asked, based on their own opinion, to rate the importance of a number of issues as they pertain to the planning region. The rating was based on a scale of what was most important, important, somewhat important, least important and not applicable to each respondent. Based on the rating scale described above respondents identified three issues that are most important to the region. These include crime/safety, quality education and traffic/congestion/transportation as issues of importance for future consideration in planning efforts.



Road Conditions

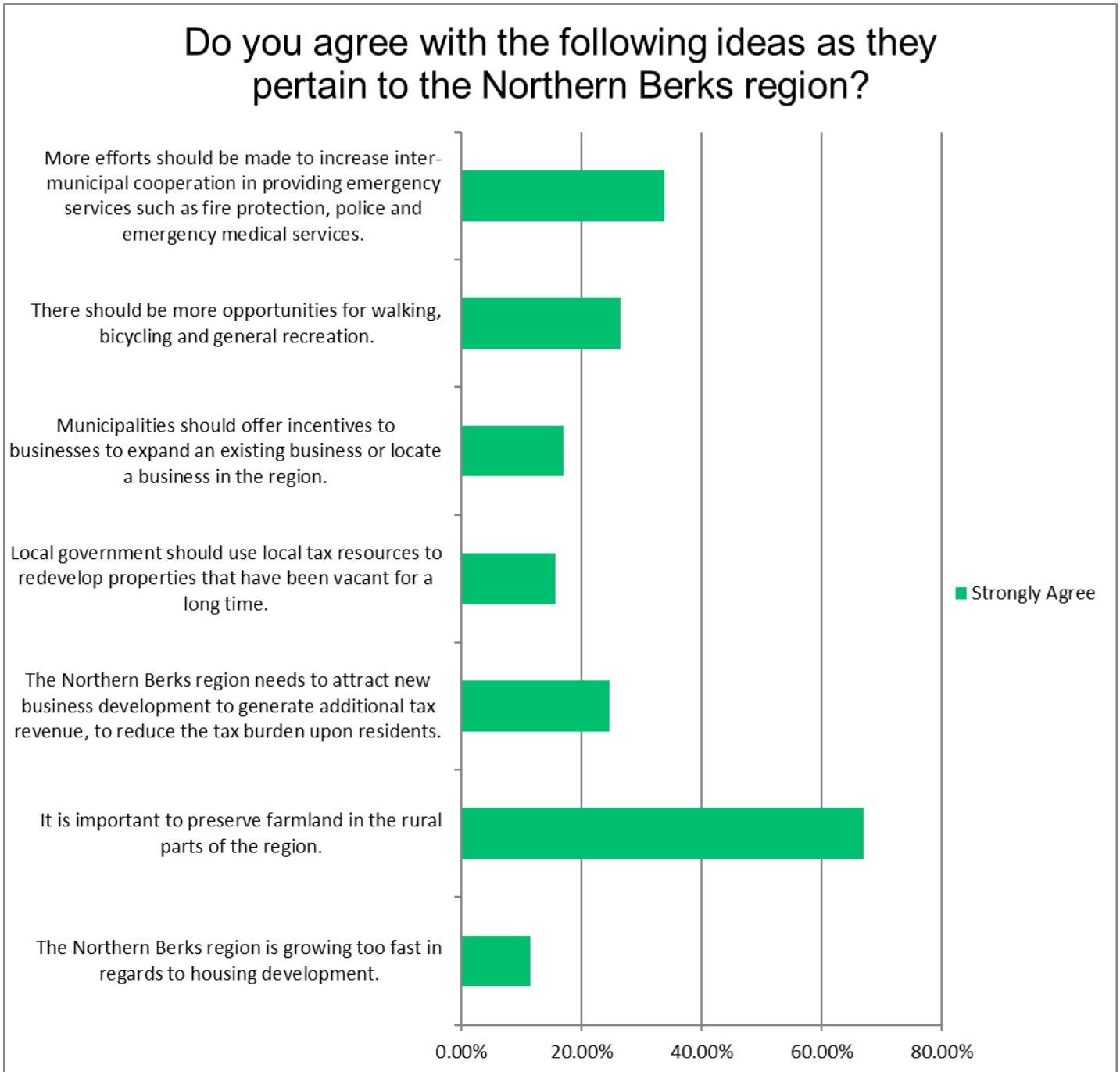
Respondents were asked how they would rate the condition of the roads and streets in the Northern Berks region. They were asked to answer whether the condition of the roads in the region were excellent, good, fair or bad. Slightly more than 1% of the respondents indicated that they thought the roads in the region were in excellent condition. Almost 45% of respondents indicated that the roads were in good condition. Practically the same percentage of respondents (45.5%) indicated that the roads were in fair condition and 8.4% indicated that they were in bad condition.



Additionally, respondents were asked if there were specific areas of concern in the transportation network that municipalities should address. The input given ranged from creating better pedestrian circulation and implementing safety improvements to alleviation of traffic congestion along the major corridors and in Hamburg Borough. Continued regular maintenance on the existing system was also a common theme of the respondent input comments.

Agreement with Ideas

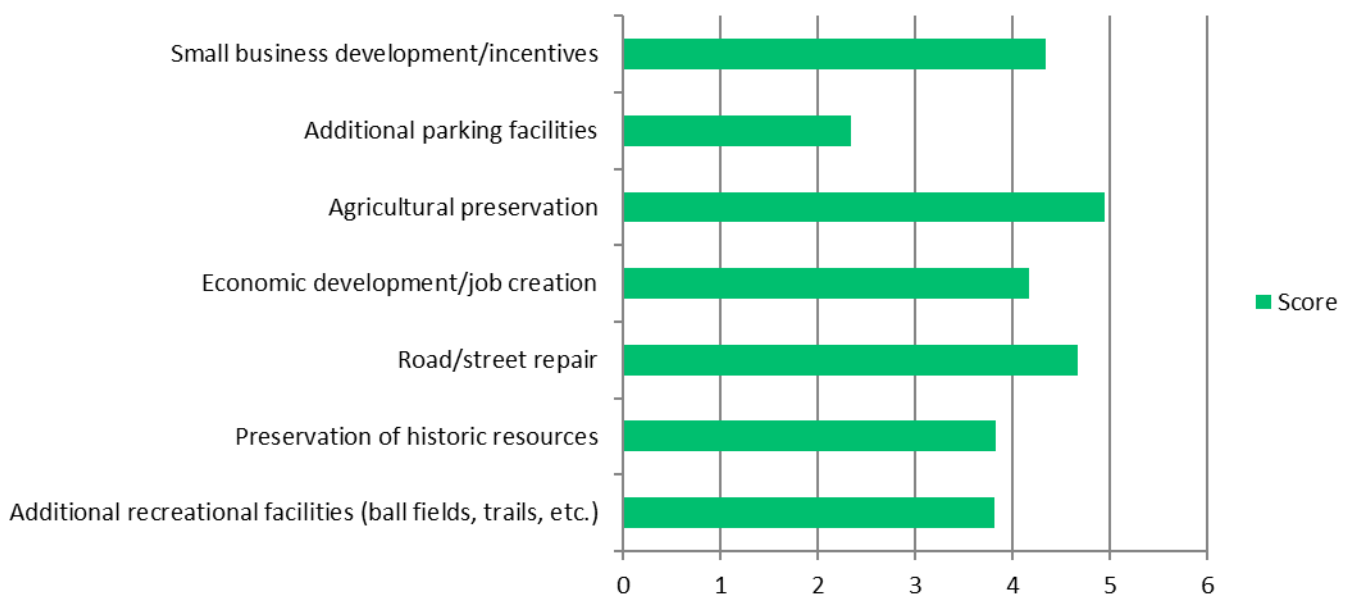
Respondents were asked if they strongly agree, agree or disagree with a number of ideas as they pertain to the Northern Berks planning region. Overwhelmingly, 67 percent of respondents indicated that it is important to preserve farmland in the rural parts of the region. Almost 34 percent of respondents also felt strongly that more efforts should be made to increase inter-municipal cooperation in providing emergency services such as fire protection, police and emergency medical services. Conversely, 42 percent of respondents disagreed with the statement that the Northern Berks region is growing too fast in regards to housing development.



Highest Priorities for Municipal Tax Expenditures

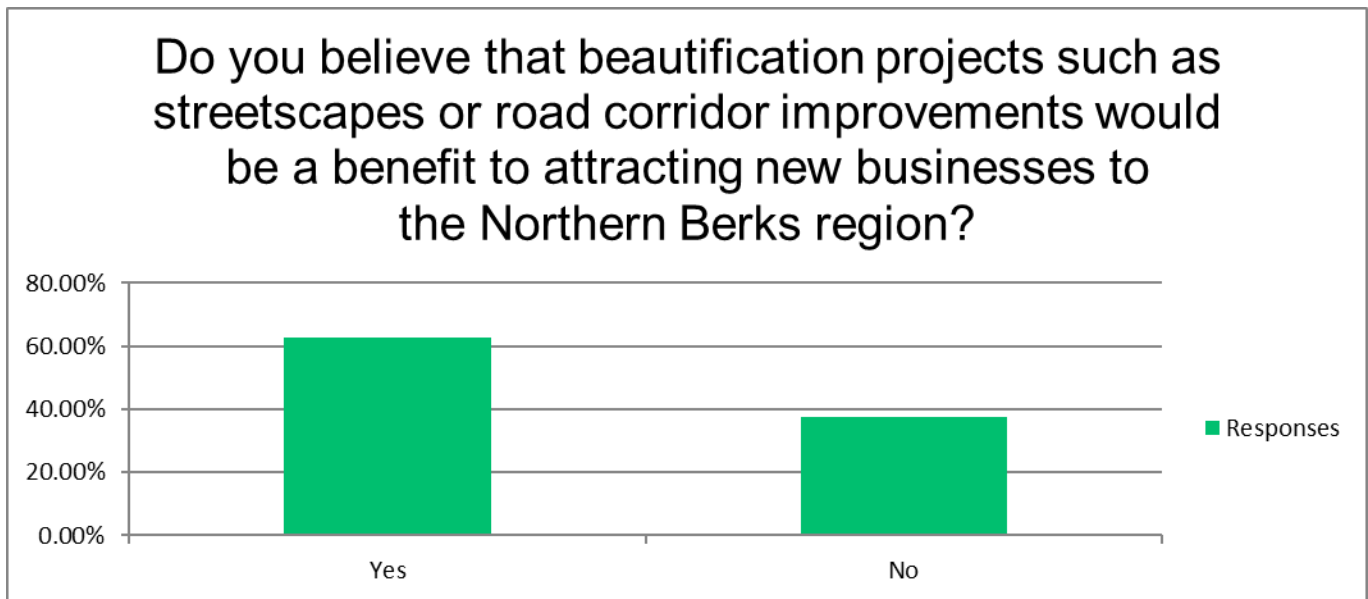
Based on a provided list of potential municipal expenditures respondents were asked to rate on a scale of one through seven, with one being the highest priority, what they would prefer to see more municipal tax dollars be utilized towards. Over 30% of respondents indicated that agricultural preservation is the most important priority for municipal spending. The second most important priority should be road/street repair. The third most important priority should be small business development/incentives.

On a scale of one to seven, with one being your highest priority, what would you prefer to see more of your municipal tax dollars go toward? (please rank the choices below 1 through 7 in your order of importance)



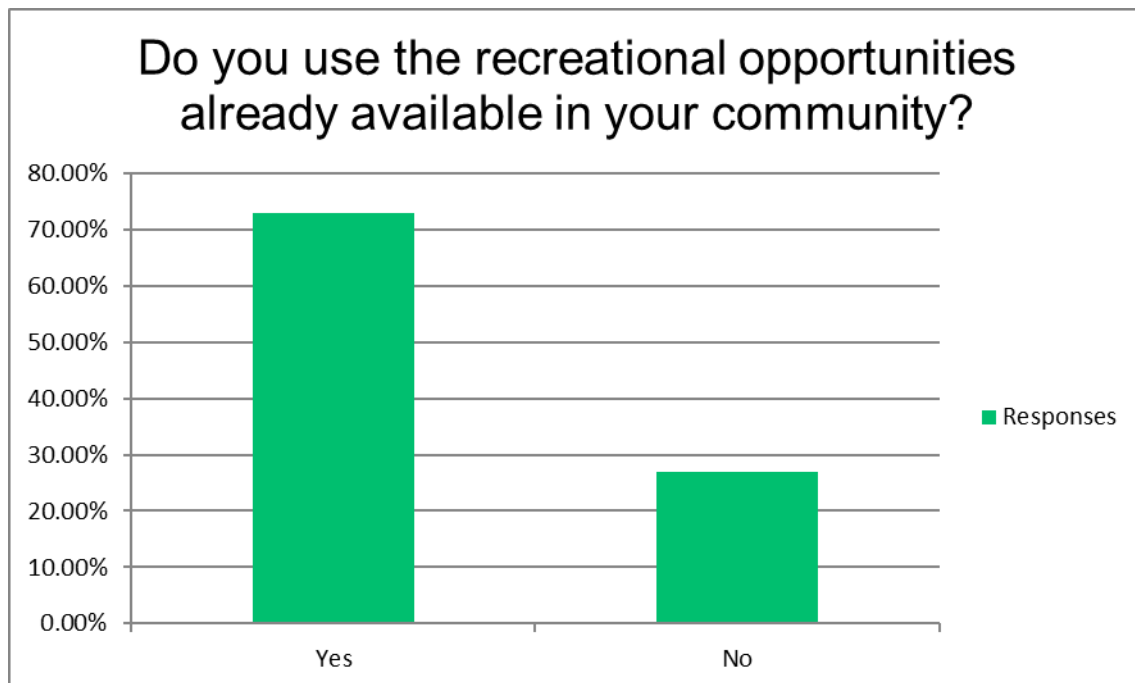
Attracting Business

Respondents were asked whether they believed beautification/streetscape projects were valuable in attracting new businesses to the Region. An overwhelming majority (nearly 63%) believed that projects such as these do contribute to attracting new businesses to the area.



Utilizing Existing Recreational Opportunities

Respondents were asked if they used the recreational opportunities already available to them in their community. 73% of respondents answered that they do.



If respondents answered “yes” to the above question they were asked to provide how often per month they utilized these facilities/opportunities. The answers varied greatly but the majority of respondents indicated that they utilize the passive walking trails in the region on average about three to six times per month. There were a number of respondents that utilized recreational opportunities in the region on a daily basis.

Regional Assets

In an open-ended type of question respondents were asked to indicate what they think are the assets or benefits of living in the Northern Berks region. As you would expect from an open-ended question the answers ranged greatly between respondents. Accordingly, there were many differing views about what the assets of the region are. Based on the feedback received some common themes develop. The following word cloud provides a visual summary of common responses. The larger the word, the more common that it appeared in responses. Based on the responses given and the visual interpretation provided in the word cloud respondents indicated that assets include the parks, open spaces and trail networks available to them, proximity to shopping and restaurant destinations, the quiet nature of the region, sense of community, and Hamburg borough.

Work slower pace life Convenient park pool Country walking distance Stores Kaercher Creek
Scenery local businesses Outdoor recreation easy access low crime travel people helps
Mountains kids enjoy feeling farmland near things state love groceries
Small town community feel recreation downtown Hamburg access love trails
opportunities friends small businesses quite nice Safety local
within restaurants activities close variety good nature
shopping recreational Parks well trails open spaces
area river quiet outdoor need location community Pool
live make Hamburg way great beauty restaurants shopping
rail trail rural Rural community small small town feel shopping restaurants
friendly town development safe rec everything play also improvement Good schools
asset road neighbors walk hiking trails recreation areas country living walking trails
Quiet Neighborhood retail Bartram trail businesses fast food Beautiful Low crime rates Lots
services

Additional Comments/Concerns

The last question on the survey respondents were asked to share any additional comments or concerns they have regarding the Northern Berks region. As stated above, the word cloud provides a visual summary of common responses. The larger the word, the more common that it appeared in responses. Respondents commented and were concerned with many aspects of living in the region. One item that seemed to rise to the top of the comments was the “need” to provide certain things that the respondents felt were lacking in the region/area.

Respondents indicated the need for a dog park in the region, authorities need to take responsibility for Kaercher Creek Park, the need to invest more into transportation, the need for more inclusivity in the region, need for more restaurants, the need to manage development more carefully, the need to limit warehouse development, the need for more fire, police and associated emergency services, the need for property owners to take better care of their properties, the need to preserve more farmland and maintain the rural character of the region, the need to generate more tax revenue, the need for additional opportunities for employment and the need for more parking, particularly in the borough of Hamburg.



Conclusion

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the quality of life in the region and enjoy living in the area for a number of reasons. These reasons include, but are not limited to, the proximity of the region to available amenities like shopping, restaurants, recreational opportunities, good schools, historic resources and large employment centers all while maintaining a rural feel that they enjoy and cherish. The municipalities should continue to strive for a balance between maintaining the rural nature of the Northern Berks region that residents are accustomed to and continuing to make the region a desirable place to live, work and play by offering exceptional community facilities and services to their residents.

