

# Roanoke County Citizen Survey

January, 2016

Conducted by:

**The Institute for Policy and Opinion Research at Roanoke College**

*Dr. Harry L. Wilson, Director*



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*Institute for Policy and Opinion Research*

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## **Introduction**

The purposes of this survey are to ascertain the opinion of Roanoke County residents regarding various issues within the County, help inform the County's strategic plan, and assess citizens' satisfaction with governmental and other services. The questions were written by Dr. Harry Wilson of The Institute for Policy and Opinion Research at Roanoke College with input received from several County employees and offices. The final questionnaire was approved by Dr. Wilson and by County officials. The answers and the order of some questions were rotated to prevent the establishment of any pattern of responses. A full explanation of the methodology employed may be found at the conclusion of the report, prior to the Appendix.

This report is divided into the following sections: this Introduction; an Executive Summary which examines three issue areas in more detail; Overall View of Roanoke County; Best and Worst?, which lists the aspects of living in Roanoke County they think are the best and the worst; Perceptions of Roanoke County; Importance of and Satisfaction with Services; Taxes and Services; Sources of Information about Roanoke County; Summary; Items for Possible Consideration; and an Appendix, which includes the questionnaire and responses to each question.

Although it may be tempting to focus on responses to one or two questions, particularly if the results comport with one's beliefs, the data in this report should be viewed in their totality. To look at those select questions can easily lead to a misinterpretation of the overall results. Of course, it is expected that different readers will emphasize specific sections according to their interests. Still, it is important to put all findings into context and perspective.

At the same time, although the issues are often discussed in isolation, no policy decisions are made in a vacuum, and issues should not be viewed in that light. Readers are also encouraged to make connections between issues when appropriate. For example, perceptions regarding the quality of life depend on a variety of factors that may include (in no particular order) public safety, education, economic development, transportation, etc. In addition, many of those issues overlap with one another.

## **Executive Summary**

This section will summarize the survey results in three different issue areas. Several issues were mentioned in more than one section of the survey, either explicitly in the questions or in citizen responses. Other sections of this report examine them in the context with other issues, but they are broken out in isolation here.

### ***Economic Development***

Citizens clearly place importance on economic development, rating it at a mean importance of 9.07 on a 10-point scale (7<sup>th</sup> most important on the list of 17 issues and

services), while their satisfaction was lower at 7.05. Respondents were nearly evenly split when asked if the County does a good job of attracting new businesses (36% agreed; 32% disagreed). They were slightly more positive with regard to the County helping existing businesses expand (28% agreed; 21% disagreed) and encouraging young adults to live in the County (36% agreed; 29% disagreed). A larger plurality think that good job training opportunities are available for adults (41% agreed; 16% disagreed). A majority of residents (59%) think that Roanoke County schools provide good vocational and job training opportunities for their students (7% disagreed).

A majority of respondents (51%) said they would be willing to pay higher taxes to increase County spending to attract and retain businesses (41% said they were not willing to pay higher taxes for that purpose). Strong majorities said the County should encourage both commercial (75%) and industrial (66%) development, which was a larger number than supported multifamily residences or mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods.

Relatively few respondents referenced economic development issues as the best or worst thing about living in Roanoke County. Two percent said a strong economy and jobs were the best thing, and another 2 percent mentioned the low cost of living. On the other side of the ledger, 2 percent said a poor economy and jobs were the worst thing about living in the county, and 1 percent said the aging population and loss of younger people was the worst thing. Nine percent named economic development as the one area the County government most needs to improve while only 1 percent said it is the one thing that the County government does best. Perhaps most notable is that a strong plurality (29%) of respondents named economic development as the most important issue Roanoke County will face in the next five years.

### ***Education***

Like residents in virtually every jurisdiction, Roanoke County citizens view education as a very important function of government, and are generally quite happy with their local schools. Public education ranked fifth on the importance scale with a mean score of 9.41 for importance and 8.37 for satisfaction. Education tied with overall services as the one thing that County government does best at 16 percent, while 6 percent said it is the area the County most needs to improve. Education was the second most often named issue (10%) that will be most important in the next five years. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of the citizens said they would be willing to pay higher taxes for increased education spending.

Large majorities think that Roanoke County has high quality public schools (77% agreed; 7% disagreed), that the schools provide good college preparation for their students (67% agreed; 9% disagreed), and that the County has forged strong partnerships with local and regional colleges and universities (62% agreed; 5% disagreed).

## ***Public Safety***

Public safety is typically the greatest concern for citizens, and in the majority of suburban and rural areas, citizens tend to be pleased with those services. Roanoke County residents are no exception to this pattern. Those services were viewed as the most important (Emergency services/rescue, 9-1-1 services, fire services and police were the top four most important issues, ranging from 9.41 to 9.65 and satisfaction from 8.81 to 9.67). Majorities of respondents are willing to pay higher taxes for law enforcement/public safety (63%) and fire and rescue services (67%). Those four combine to account for 18 percent of responses to what County government does best and only 4 percent of what it most needs to improve (all 4% named police). Four percent named crime and drugs as the most important issue facing the County in the next five years, and another 2 percent named immigration as most important. Strong majorities think Roanoke County is a safe community (92% agreed; 4% disagreed) and that is safe to walk around the respondent's neighborhood (93% agreed; 6 disagreed).

## **Overall View of Roanoke County**

Several questions were asked throughout the survey that requested an overall assessment of Roanoke County from the respondents. Some of these questions will be discussed in other sections, but they are included here to help provide an overall snapshot of the County. (See Table 1)

First, the respondents overwhelmingly are positive toward the quality of life in Roanoke County. Over 90 percent of those surveyed rated the overall quality of life as excellent (40%) or good (51%). Only 8 percent rated the quality of life as either fair (7%) or poor (1%).

For those who have lived in other jurisdictions, we asked them to compare Roanoke with their former residence(s). Three-in-five (60%) said that Roanoke is a better place to live, while only 4 percent said it is a worse place to live. About one-fourth (27%) said it was about the same. Respondents were more than three times as likely to say that Roanoke County has become a better place to live in the past five years (29%) than to say that it is now a worse place to live (9%), while the majority (57%) rated it about the same.

A majority of respondents agreed that the Roanoke County government provides strong leadership to the community (6% strongly agree; 47% agree; 17% disagree), that the County is well managed (6% strongly agree; 54% agree; 11% disagree), and that the County provides an appropriate level of services (9% strongly agree; 69% agree; 11% disagree). In what is an important summary measure, a majority of residents agree that the services provided by the County are a good value for taxes paid (9% strongly agree; 54% agree; 16% disagree).

It is noteworthy that for questions of County leadership and management quality a large percentage of respondents were either neutral, did not know, or did not respond. For the

leadership question, 30% were either neutral or did not know and for the management question 29% were either neutral or did not know. This finding will be revisited in the “Items for Possible Consideration” section at the conclusion of the report.

Majorities also feel that the County keeps citizens well-informed about services (66%) and provides appropriate services using newer technologies (72%). Residents also agree that housing is reasonably priced (69%), there is an appropriate mix of housing options (68%), there is a good mix of transportation options (59%), and that it is easy for them to walk around their neighborhood (83%).

Respondents were also positive regarding their level of knowledge of County events and issues with 16% saying they are very well informed and 62% claiming to be somewhat well informed. (This is not too surprising because those who feel they aren’t well informed are more likely to decline to participate in surveys.) A majority (57%) also felt that they have an adequate opportunity to express their views before decisions are made within Roanoke County (24% said they did not have adequate opportunities).

**Table 1**  
***Overall View of Roanoke County***

Item	Percent	
Quality of Life Excellent and Good/Fair and Poor	91%	8%
Quality of Life Better/Worse in Last 5 Years	29%	9%
Quality of Life Compared to Other Residences Better/Worse	60%	4%
County Govt. Provides Strong Leadership Agree/disagree	53%	17%
County is well-managed Agree/disagree	60%	11%
County provides appropriate level of services Agree/disagree	78%	11%
Services are good value for taxes paid Agree/disagree	63%	16%
Residents well-informed re: services Agree/disagree	66%	14%
County has appropriate high tech services Agree/disagree	72%	5%
Housing is reasonably priced Agree/disagree	69%	14%
Appropriate mix of housing options Agree/disagree	68%	13%
Appropriate mix of transportation options Agree/disagree	59%	29%
Easy to walk around neighborhood Agree/disagree	83%	13%
Information level of Respondent Very + Somewhat informed/Not very + not at all	78%	22%
Adequate Opportunity to Express Views Yes/No	57%	24%

An open-ended question asked respondents to name what they thought would be the most important issue facing Roanoke County in the next five years (Table 2). Those mentioned by more than 5% of the respondents were economic development (29%), schools/education (10%), population growth (8%), and taxes/budget (7%).

**Table 2**  
***Most Important Issue Facing County in Next Five Years***

Issue	Percent
Attract/Retain Businesses/Jobs	29%
School/Education	10%
Population growth	8%
Taxes/Budget	7%
Crime/drugs	4%
Transportation/Roads	3%
Mountain Valley Pipeline	3%
Transportation mix	2%
Immigration	2%
Zoning/land usage	1%
Recycling	1%
Government debt	1%
Water/sewer	1%
Other	8%
Don't know/No answer	20%

## Best and Worst?

As mentioned above, respondents are much more likely to say that Roanoke County is a better place to live than it was five years ago than to say it is worse (29%-9%), while a majority of the respondents (57%) think things are about the same. Respondents were asked to identify the best and worst aspects of living in Roanoke County. The following is a summary of their comments from the open-ended questions. (See Tables 3 and 4)

The most frequent response to the best thing about living in the County was its location as being close to many amenities but not being an urban area (25%). Tied for second were the quality of public schools (15%) and the natural beauty of the County (15%). Other reasons included the overall quality of life (8%), living in a safe community (7%), and the attractiveness of the respondent's neighborhood.

Topping the list of items most often noted as being the worst part about living in Roanoke County was traffic/roads (20%).<sup>1</sup> Other common topics were high taxes (11%), limited recreational opportunities (6%), the lack of recycling (6%), and issues related to the Board of Supervisors (5%). It should be noted that nearly a quarter (24%) of respondents could not think of a "worst thing" about living in Roanoke County, while only 3 percent could not think of a "best thing."

Respondents were also asked open-ended questions to identify the one thing that the Roanoke County government does best and what it most needs to improve. (See Tables 5 and 6) Tied at the top of the list of what government does best were public schools (16%) and overall services (16%). The next most frequent responses were police services/safety (8%), emergency services/rescue squad (5%), libraries (4%), 9-1-1 services (3%), trash collection (3%), recreation programs (3%), and greenways (3%). Nearly one-fifth (19%) did not identify what the County does best.

At the top of list of what most needs improvement were traffic and roads (16%), overall services (15%), and recycling (14%). Other commonly referenced items included economic development (9%), schools (6%), police (4%), and real estate assessment (3%). As with the previous category, one-fifth (19%) of those surveyed did not identify what the County most needs to improve.

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<sup>1</sup> Included in the roads/traffic category throughout this report are responses related to snow removal and sidewalk/shoulder/ditch maintenance. There were a significant number of responses throughout related to snow removal. While not a county-level responsibility, we thought they should be included.

**Table 3**  
*Best Thing about Living in Roanoke County*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Percent Best</b>
Convenience/close to amenities	25%
Schools/Education	15%
Scenic beauty/environment	15%
Quality of life overall	8%
Safe community	7%
Like the neighborhood	7%
Recreational choices	3%
Family nearby	3%
Economy/Econ. Dev./Jobs	2%
Cost of living	2%
Transportation/Roads	2%
Other	7%
Don't know/No answer	3%

**Table 4**  
*Worst Thing about Living in Roanoke County*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Percent Worst</b>
Transportation/Roads	20%
Taxes/Budget	11%
Recreational choices limited	6%
Recycling	6%
Board of Supervisors	5%
Safety/crime/drugs	4%
Not enough amenities	3%
Economy/Econ. Dev./Jobs	2%
Schools/Education	1%
Cost of living	1%
Aging population/losing youth	1%
Other	15%
Don't know/No answer	24%

**Table 5**  
***One Thing Roanoke County Government Does Best***

Issue	Percent Best
Schools/Education	16%
Government/overall services	16%
Police	8%
Emergency squad/rescue	5%
Libraries	4%
9-1-1	3%
Recreational programs	3%
Trash collection	3%
Greenways	3%
Parks	2%
Fire services	2%
Traffic/roads/transportation	2%
Social services	1%
Attract and retain businesses	1%
Other	13%
Don't know/No answer	19%

**Table 6**  
*One Thing Roanoke County Government Needs to Improve*

Issue	Percent Best
Traffic/roads/transportation	16%
Government/overall services	15%
Recycling	14%
Attract and retain businesses	9%
Schools/education	6%
Police	4%
Real estate assessment	3%
Taxes	2%
Planning and zoning	2%
Trash collection	1%
Parks	1%
Building permits and inspections	1%
Storm water management	1%
Social services	1%
Recreation programs	1%
Other	7%
Don't know/No answer	16%

## Perceptions of Roanoke County

Respondents were asked to rate Roanoke County with regard to several different qualities or attributes on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Topics included economic development issues, public safety, education, and natural resources. The results can be seen in Tables 7(a) to 7(d).

### *Economic Development*

Responses were somewhat mixed with regard to economic development in the County. Pluralities agreed that Roanoke County does a good job attracting new businesses (36% agree; 32% disagree), helping existing businesses to expand (28% agree; 21% disagree), encouraging young professional to live here (36% agree; 29% disagree), and offering good job training for adults (41% agree; 16% disagree).

**Table 7(a)**  
*Economic Development in Roanoke County*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Strongly agree +agree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree + disagree</b>
Attract new businesses	36%	32%
Help businesses expand	28%	21%
Encourage young to live in RC	36%	29%
Job training available for adults	41%	26%

### *Public Safety*

Responses dealing with public safety in the County were very positive. Strong majorities agreed that the County is a safe community (92% agree; 4% disagree) and that is safe for respondents to walk around their neighborhood (93% agree; 6% disagree).

**Table 7(b)**  
*Public Safety in Roanoke County*

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Strongly agree +agree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree + disagree</b>
RC is safe community	92%	4%
Safe to walk in R's neighborhood	93%	6%

***Education***

Responses were also positive with regard to education in the County. Majorities agreed that Roanoke County has high quality public schools (77% agree; 7% disagree), provides good college preparation for its students (67% agree; 9% disagree), provides good vo-tech opportunities (59% agree; 7% disagree), and has formed strong partnerships with local and regional colleges and universities (62% agree; 5% disagree).

**Table 7(c)**  
***Education in Roanoke County***

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Strongly agree +agree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree + disagree</b>
RC has high quality public schools	77%	7%
Provides good college prep	67%	9%
Provides good vo-tech	59%	7%
Strong partner with higher ed	62%	5%

***Natural Resources***

The County generally does a good job with regard to protecting natural resources according to those surveyed. Majorities assessed the performance positively on three of the four measures. They agreed that Roanoke County does a good job of protecting the environment (66% agree; 7% disagree), protecting scenic views (75% agree; 5% disagree), and that there is good access to rivers and streams for recreation (81% agree; 6% disagree), while a plurality thinks that the County manages growth and development well (48% agree; 18% disagree).

**Table 7(d)**  
***Natural Resources in Roanoke County***

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Strongly agree +agree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree + disagree</b>
RC protects the environment	66%	7%
RC protects scenic views	75%	5%
RC manages growth/development well	48%	18%
Good access to rivers/streams	81%	6%

*Types of Development*

Respondents were asked to state if they think the County should encourage specific types of development. They most strongly favored single-family residential development (85% yes, 10% no), followed by commercial development (75% yes, 17% no), industrial development (66% yes, 26% no), multi-family residential (61% yes, 31% no), and mixed residential/commercial development (49% yes, 42% no).

**Table 7(e)**  
*Development Preferences for Roanoke County*

Type of Development	Percent yes
Single-family residential	85%
Commercial	75%
Industrial	66%
Multi-family residential	61%
Residential/commercial mix	49%

## Importance of and Satisfaction with Services

Citizens were asked to state their perceived importance and their level of satisfaction with a variety of services provided by Roanoke County. Services were rated on a 1-10 scale in which 1 was not important or not satisfied and 10 was extremely important or extremely satisfied. (See Table 8)

Not surprisingly, citizens perceive most services to be very important. At the same time, they are also relatively pleased with the services they receive. Importance tends to run slightly higher than satisfaction, which is not unusual. Items in which satisfaction is higher than importance are: 9-1-1 operators, greenways, and libraries. The largest discrepancies are in recycling, attracting and retaining businesses, and schools.

**Table 8**  
*Importance of and Satisfaction with County Services*

Service	Mean Importance	Mean Satisfaction
Emergency squad/rescue	9.65	9.55
9-1-1 operator	9.62	9.67
Fire services	9.58	9.50
Police	9.45	8.81
Public schools	9.41	8.37
Trash collection	9.31	8.91
Attracting and retaining businesses	9.07	7.05
Libraries	8.90	9.06
Social Services	8.88	8.48
Parks and recreation	8.78	8.60
Building permits and inspections	8.75	8.49
Planning and zoning	8.69	8.06
Storm water management	8.60	7.96
Recycling	8.48	5.87
Greenways	8.42	8.50
Real estate assessment	8.38	7.83
Animal control	8.34	8.29

## Taxes and Services

Every governmental unit (national, state, and local) must make tradeoffs between taxes collected and services provided. Many surveys ask if citizens would like to have a particular service provided by the government, but the results can be misleading if that question is not accompanied by some mention of taxes. Similarly, it is not particularly useful to ask if citizens would like their tax burden reduced without mentioning that this might impact services.

The level of satisfaction with both the quality and number of services provided by Roanoke County is reported in Table 1. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed agree that the services provided by the County are a good value for taxes paid. We also asked if respondents would be willing to pay higher taxes in exchange for increased County spending on specific services. The results can be found in Table 9.

A majority of respondents expressed a willingness to pay higher taxes for increased spending on fire and rescue services (67%), public education (64%), law enforcement (63%), and economic development (51%). Support for increased taxes for curbside recycling (47%) and recreational opportunities (33%) was lower. A list of most frequently mentioned other services may be found in the questionnaire results at the end of this report. (Results vary over time, but both education and law enforcement usually rank at the top of any list of services for which citizens are willing to pay additional taxes. It is not surprising that fire and rescue services also rank quite high.)

**Table 9**  
***Willing to Pay Higher Taxes for Specific Services***

Service	Percent
Fire and Rescue Services	67%
Public Education	64%
Law Enforcement	63%
Attract/Retain Businesses/Jobs	51%
Curbside Recycling	47%
Recreational Opportunities	33%
Other (Independently mentioned)	13%

## Sources of Information about Roanoke County

Respondents were asked to identify any source(s) they use to obtain information regarding issues and events in Roanoke County. (See Table 10) While television news was the most commonly used source (77%) and *The Roanoke Times*/roanoke.com was a close second (74%), several other sources were cited by a majority of residents, including friends and neighbors (66%), the County web site (61%), local radio (60%), and printed communications from the County (50%). For a list of other sources, see the questionnaire.

**Table 10**  
*Sources of Information about Roanoke County*

Source	Percent
Local TV Stations	77%
Roanoke Times/roanoke.com	74%
Friends/neighbors	66%
County Web Site	61%
Local Radio Stations	60%
County Mailings	50%
Social media	38%
RoCo Alert	35%
County Employees	34%
Government access TV	24%
Public Meetings	20%
Other	7%

## Summary

The results of this survey provide Roanoke County with a current overview of the opinions of County residents. Overall, the results are quite positive.

Residents have very positive feelings regarding the quality of life in the County (over 90% rate it as excellent or good); they are more than three times as likely to feel that the quality of life is improving than to feel it is declining; and they are more than 15 times as likely to prefer life in Roanoke County compared to other places they have lived. While it is true that most individuals have a bias in favor of where they currently live, these results clearly indicate that most of Roanoke County's residents are quite happy living in the County.

Residents are also generally satisfied with the quality and varieties of services provided by the County, and most are satisfied with the services they receive for the taxes they pay. Nearly two-thirds of the residents agree that the County is well-managed, and most feel that they have adequate opportunity to provide input into important decisions within the County. Residents learn about what the County government is doing from a variety of sources, and official communications are clearly among those important sources.

There were no real surprises in responses to the best and worst things about living in Roanoke County. Its location near the City of Roanoke and its more suburban/rural nature were almost certain to top the best list. Highways, even outside of major urban areas, would be expected on the worst list as are complaints about taxes. Perhaps most noteworthy is that one-fourth of the respondents could not think of a worst thing. Likewise, schools and public safety generally top the lists of things localities do well, and roads again lead the most in need of improvement category. The presence of recycling on the need to improve list is noteworthy.

Perceptions of public safety, education, and natural resources are all very positive. While attitudes toward economic development are much more mixed, that is not uncommon. Residents of any community want more and better jobs, and it is common to think that government needs to do more in those areas. It is interesting that residents prefer both commercial and industrial development to multi-family residential development. It is not clear if that is simply a preference for more jobs or a vote less in favor of multi-family housing (due to concern over a possible negative impact on home values?).

As mentioned above, respondents think that most services are important, with education and public safety leading the rest. Satisfaction is also generally high, though it was notably lower with regard to recycling, economic development, and public schools. The first two are easily explained, but the presence of education on that list is a little confusing in so far as three-fourths of respondents agree that the County has high quality public schools.

The willingness of residents to pay higher taxes for specific services is also relatively common. The particular services—education, public safety, economic development—

would also be expected. Even though residents tend to think that recreational opportunities and recycling are important, they are less willing to pay additional taxes for those services. With regard to recycling, it is plausible that a segment of the population cares deeply about the issue and is willing to pay for it, but support is not nearly as deep as it is for other services.

As for the future, economic development seems to be a primary concern among Roanoke County residents. Education is always viewed as an important issue/priority, and growth and taxes are likewise perennial issues.

Several issues were raised independent of the choices offered to respondents. These included highways, and specifically, snow removal. While not a County responsibility, many residents seem to think that it is, and they were not happy with what they perceived to be the slowness of snow removal. Another issue mentioned was recycling. There is clearly a segment of the population that is concerned about the issue and would like to see it addressed. Finally, several of those surveyed referred to perceived “squabbling” among the Board of Supervisors. To be clear, none of these issues were raised by anything more than a small minority of those surveyed, but snow removal and the Board of Supervisors were not mentioned in any of the questions, so those issues were clearly on the minds of *some* residents.

Overall, the results of this survey are positive, and they are generally in line with what we would expect to see. Most citizens are happy with their local government even as confidence in state and national governments continues to decline. While Roanoke County is not unique in that regard, it is significantly more preferable to be on the positive side of that ledger.

## **Items for Possible Consideration**

The following are noted as survey results that might be considered as part of the policy-making process. Caveats apply—all conclusions must be considered bearing in mind the margin of error of survey results, so everyone should be careful not to draw any conclusions from small differences. In addition, one must bear in mind there is often a distinction between statistical significance and substantive significance. The former can be verified empirically, while the latter is based more on “common sense.” It is also true that those closest to any issue have a better understanding of the issue, but they can also be “too close” to be objective. Two more caveats should be noted: first, as mentioned in the introduction, many of these issues are interrelated. Second, none of the items suggest that anything is “broken” and needs to be fixed. While the message from County residents is generally positive, that does not preclude the possibility of improvement.

- Economic development is a concern for Roanoke county residents. The economy and jobs are virtually always a concern for citizens, but we see evidence of the importance in several areas in this survey. Of particular note is that 29 percent said that economic development would be the County’s most pressing issue for

the next five years. The perennial issue of education was second at 10 percent. These results do not provide support for any one approach over another (we did not ask any such question), but jobs are clearly a concern.

- Education is another issue that is viewed as important in virtually any survey of residents in any jurisdiction. Respondents were generally impressed with the quality of schools in the County, so there is no cause for alarm. While a majority expressed a willingness to pay higher taxes for more spending on education, that is a common sentiment when this question is asked. We view it as a strong endorsement of public education and a desire to fund good schools. We do not see it as a public request that taxes be raised. Many citizens everywhere are not aware of the percentage of the local governmental budget that is allocated to education.
- Public safety issues are viewed in a similar fashion to education. Virtually everyone sees them as important services and wish to have the best they can afford (or even more than they can afford). Nothing in the survey results suggests that there is a perceived problem with those services in Roanoke County. Police score slightly lower than others, but that is to be expected. By definition, encounters with police are more likely to be seen as negative because of the surrounding circumstances.
- Several issues were raised by survey participants in relation to open-ended questions and a couple of direct questions: First, while respondents were generally positive in their general assessments of local government, a significant minority thought that services should be improved. To be fair, an almost equal number said that providing services was what the County government does best. On a related note, the 5 percent who said the Board of Supervisors was the worst part about living in Roanoke County is a small, but, we think, relatively high number for a survey such as this. Open-ended comments reinforced that view among some residents. Again, that issue should not assume greater importance than it deserves.
- An increased need for citizen awareness may be inferred from the survey results. As noted earlier, a significant minority of respondents either do not know or have neutral opinions regarding the quality of leadership and management of the County government. Also, a significant minority responded that they did not have an adequate opportunity to express their views. Finally, a majority of citizens see the quality of life as static. While none of these findings are inherently bad (clearly, County residents have more positive than negative views of the County itself and County government), they suggest that the County can improve in the areas of citizen communication and citizen involvement.
- With regard to communicating with citizens, traditional media (TV and print) are still most important, but the 61 percent who utilize the County web site is likely to grow and provides a very low-cost way to communicate with residents. The primary means of communication are changing. Citizens see Roanoke County as responding to those changes, and the County should ensure that continues.

- Areas such as zoning, building permits, real estate assessment, storm water management, and the totally unrelated social services, are typically noticed only when there is a perceived problem. Recognized as important functions, they are often taken for granted. The same can perhaps be said for libraries, parks and greenways.
- Other issues raised by residents were recycling and snow removal. With regard to recycling, there is a significant proportion of residents, but probably less than a majority, that sees this as an important issue that deserves more attention. With regard to snow removal, which is not controlled by the County, improving the liaison function between the state and citizens might be considered.
- Finally, traffic and roads were rated as the worst thing about living in Roanoke County by many respondents. Furthermore, there seems to be a significant misunderstanding among respondents regarding the roles that the State and County play in providing transportation related services. As transportation is a significant factor in the quality of life and local economy, this area could merit further consideration by County leaders.

## Methodology

Interviewing was conducted by The Institute for Policy and Opinion Research at Roanoke College between November 16 and November 21, 2015. The sample consisted of 604 randomly selected residents of Roanoke County.

The random digit dial sample was obtained from asde Survey Sampler (a company that provides random phone numbers) and includes both land line and cell phone exchanges so that all cell phone and residential land line telephone numbers, including unlisted numbers from Roanoke County exchanges, had a known chance of inclusion. Cell phones constituted 25 percent of the completed interviews. Cell phone numbers were drawn from prefixes associated with numbers assigned from Roanoke and from Salem. All respondents were initially screened to exclude those who do not live in Roanoke County.

Questions answered by the entire sample of 604 residents are subject to a sampling error of plus or minus approximately 4 percent at the 95 percent level of confidence. This means that in 95 out of 100 samples like the one used here, the results obtained should be no more than 4 percentage points above or below the figure that would be obtained by interviewing all Roanoke County residents who have a home telephone or a cell phone. Where the results of subgroups are reported, the sampling error is higher.

The data were statistically weighted for gender, race, and age to match the U.S. Census data for Roanoke County. The margin of error was not adjusted for design effects due to weighting.

A copy of the questionnaire and all toplines follows this section.

This report was written by Dr. Harry Wilson, director of the Institute for Policy and Opinion Research. He also wrote the questions and analyzed the data. More information about this survey or IPOR may be obtained by contacting Dr. Harry Wilson at [wilson@roanoke.edu](mailto:wilson@roanoke.edu) or (540) 375-2415

In the case of open-ended questions, all responses were typed verbatim by the interviewers and coded by Dr. Wilson. Because not all responses are easily categorized, there is an additional error associated with these questions, but that error should be relatively small. Other coders might use slightly different criteria and obtain slightly different results.

## Appendix

Hi, I'm calling on behalf of Roanoke County. The County is conducting a survey of residents to help determine citizen views of the County and the quality of life here and obtain input for the County's comprehensive plan. Your household was randomly selected to participate, and your opinions are important to us. May I please speak to someone 18 or older?

1. First, are you a resident of Roanoke County?
  - Yes ..... 100%
  - No [TERMINATE]
  
2. Are you or is anyone in your household employed by Roanoke County?
  - Yes [TERMINATE]
  - No..... 100%
  
- 2.a. Do you live in the town of Vinton?
  - Yes ..... 11%
  - No..... 89%
  
3. What is your zip code?
  - 24012..... 5%
  - 24014..... 5%
  - 24015..... 0%
  - 24018..... 39%
  - 24019..... 21%
  - 24020..... 0%
  - 24059..... 1%
  - 24065..... 1%
  - 24070..... 1%
  - 24087..... 1%
  - 24153..... 8%
  - 24170..... 1%
  - 24175..... 0%
  - 24179..... 16%
  
4. How long have you lived in Roanoke County?
  - Less than one year..... 4%
  - 1-2 years ..... 7%
  - 3-5 years ..... 9%
  - 6-10 years ..... 17%
  - 11-20 years ..... 23%
  - 21 or more years..... 32%
  - All my life ..... 9%

4 (a) [If answer to 4 is 10 years or less] Which of the following best describes why you moved to Roanoke County?

For a job .....	35%
The property values were more favorable in Roanoke .....	5%
It is more convenient to commute to work .....	1%
The area is generally more beautiful than where I lived before ..	9%
I wanted to move to a more rural atmosphere.....	3%
I wanted to move to a more urban atmosphere .....	1%
Family in area .....	19%
Schools.....	8%
Retirement.....	2%
Other .....	17%
No answer .....	1%

5. Now I'd like to get your overall impression of Roanoke County. How would you rate the overall quality of life in Roanoke? Would you say it is excellent, good, fair or poor?

Excellent .....	40%
Good.....	51%
Fair .....	7%
Poor .....	1%
No answer .....	1%

6. [SKIP IF ANSWER TO Q.4 IS LIVED IN COUNTY ALL MY LIFE] How would you rate the quality of life in comparison with other places you have lived? Would you say that Roanoke County is better, worse or about the same as other places you have lived?

Better.....	60%
Worse .....	4%
About the same .....	27%
Better than some; worse than others .....	7%
No answer .....	3%

7. In the past five years, do you think that Roanoke County has become a better place to live, worse, or is it about the same?

Better.....	29%
Worse .....	9%
About the same .....	57%
Unsure/Refused/Not lived here that long.....	6%

8. For you personally, what is the best thing about living in Roanoke County? **[DO NOT READ CHOICES]**

Convenience—close to amenities, but not living in city .....	25%
Schools .....	15%
Roads/transportation—easy to get around .....	2%
Safe community .....	7%
Like my neighborhood .....	7%
Good government.....	0%
Recreational choices .....	3%
Quality of life.....	8%
Scenic beauty/environment.....	15%
Strong economy/jobs .....	2%
Libraries .....	0%
Shopping/restaurants.....	0%
Low cost of living.....	2%
Family .....	3%
Other .....	7%
No answer .....	3%

9. And what is the worst thing about living in Roanoke County? **[DO NOT READ CHOICES]**

Too many people/population growth.....	0%
Traffic/roads.....	20%
Taxes too high.....	11%
Not enough government services.....	0%
Schools.....	1%
Crime/drugs.....	4%
Not enough shopping .....	3%
Recreation options limited .....	6%
Cost of living high .....	1%
Mountain Atlantic pipeline .....	0%
Poor economy/not enough jobs.....	2%
Aging population/losing young people.....	1%
Appearance/loss of rural character.....	0%
Recycling .....	6%
Board of Supervisors.....	5%
Other .....	15%
No answer .....	24%

10. For each of the following statements, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or if you are neutral or don't know enough to comment.

a. Roanoke County government provides strong leadership to the community.

Strongly agree .....	6%
Agree.....	47%
Neutral.....	19%
Disagree .....	14%
Strongly disagree .....	3%
Don't know/No answer .....	11%

b. Roanoke County is well managed

Strongly agree .....	6%
Agree.....	54%
Neutral.....	19%
Disagree .....	9%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don't know/No answer .....	10%

c. The County provides an appropriate level of services to its residents

Strongly agree .....	9%
Agree.....	69%
Neutral.....	9%
Disagree .....	10%
Strongly disagree .....	1%
Don't know/No answer .....	2%

d. The services provided by the County are a good value for the taxes paid

Strongly agree .....	9%
Agree.....	54%
Neutral.....	17%
Disagree .....	12%
Strongly disagree .....	4%
Don't know/No answer .....	5%

e. The County keeps its citizens well informed about services

Strongly agree .....	9%
Agree.....	57%
Neutral.....	17%
Disagree .....	12%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don't know/No answer .....	4%

f. Housing in Roanoke County is reasonably priced

Strongly agree .....	8%
Agree.....	61%
Neutral.....	11%
Disagree .....	11%
Strongly disagree .....	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	7%

g. There is an appropriate mix of housing choices in the County for people at different income levels

Strongly agree .....	11%
Agree.....	57%
Neutral.....	9%
Disagree .....	11%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don't know/No answer.....	10%

h. It is pretty easy to walk around in my neighborhood

Strongly agree .....	27%
Agree.....	56%
Neutral.....	4%
Disagree .....	9%
Strongly disagree .....	4%
Don't know/No answer.....	0%

i. There is a good mix of transportation in the County, such as bike lanes, sidewalks, buses, cars, Cortran/RADAR

Strongly agree .....	9%
Agree.....	50%
Neutral.....	8%
Disagree .....	21%
Strongly disagree .....	8%
Don't know/No answer.....	5%

j. The County provides appropriate services using newer technology such as the web site, online maps, and E-911

Strongly agree .....	15%
Agree.....	57%
Neutral.....	12%
Disagree .....	4%
Strongly disagree .....	1%
Don't know/No answer.....	12%

11. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not important at all and 10 is extremely important, please rate the importance of the following County services and then please tell me how satisfied you are with that service using the same 1-10 scale where 1 is not satisfied and 10 is extremely satisfied. [MEAN SCORE REPORTED FOR IMPORTANCE/SATISFACTION]

a. Police.....	9.45	8.81
b. 9-1-1 operator.....	9.62	9.67
c. Fire services .....	9.58	9.50
d. Emergency squad/rescue.....	9.65	9.55
e. Animal control .....	8.34	8.29
f. Public schools.....	9.41	8.37
g. Parks and recreation.....	8.78	8.60
h. Greenways.....	8.42	8.50
i. Libraries.....	8.90	9.06
j. Trash collection.....	9.31	8.91
k. Recycling .....	8.48	5.87
l. Planning and zoning.....	8.69	8.06
m. Building permits and inspections.....	8.75	8.49
n. Storm water management .....	8.60	7.96
o. Real estate assessment .....	8.38	7.83
p. Social services.....	8.88	8.48
q. Attracting and retaining businesses .....	9.07	7.05

12. Overall, what is the one thing in your opinion that Roanoke County government does best? [DO NOT READ CHOICES]

Police.....	8%
9-1-1 operator.....	3%
Fire services .....	2%
Emergency squad/rescue.....	5%
Animal control .....	0%
Public schools .....	16%
Parks.....	2%
Recreation programs .....	3%
Greenways.....	3%
Libraries .....	4%
Regular trash collection .....	3%
Bulk and brush trash collection.....	0%
Recycling .....	0%
Planning and zoning.....	0%
Building permits and inspections.....	0%
Storm water management .....	0%
Real estate assessment .....	0%
Social services.....	1%
Attracting and retaining businesses .....	1%
Government/overall services .....	16%
Traffic/roads/transportation .....	2%

Other.....	13%
Don't know/No answer .....	19%

13. And what do you think is the one thing that Roanoke County government needs to most improve? [DO NOT READ CHOICES]

Police.....	4%
9-1-1 operator.....	0%
Fire services .....	0%
Emergency squad/rescue.....	0%
Animal control .....	0%
Public schools .....	6%
Parks.....	1%
Recreation programs .....	1%
Greenways.....	0%
Libraries .....	0%
Regular trash collection .....	0%
Bulk and brush trash collection.....	1%
Recycling .....	14%
Planning and zoning.....	2%
Building permits and inspections.....	1%
Storm water management .....	1%
Real estate assessment .....	3%
Social services.....	1%
Attracting and retaining businesses .....	9%
Government/overall services .....	15%
Traffic/roads/transportation .....	16%
Taxes.....	2%
Other.....	7%
Don't know/No answer .....	16%

14. Would you be willing to pay higher taxes to increase County spending in the following areas...

- a. Public education
  - Yes ..... 64%
  - No..... 30%
  - Unsure ..... 5%
  - Don't know/No answer ..... 2%
- b. Law enforcement/public safety
  - Yes ..... 63%
  - No..... 33%
  - Unsure ..... 3%
  - Don't know/No answer ..... 1%
- c. Fire and Rescue Services
  - Yes ..... 67%
  - No..... 29%
  - Unsure ..... 3%
  - Don't know/No answer ..... 2%
- d. Recreational opportunities
  - Yes ..... 33%
  - No..... 56%
  - Unsure ..... 9%
  - Don't know/No answer ..... 2%
- e. Attracting and retaining businesses and jobs
  - Yes ..... 51%
  - No..... 41%
  - Unsure ..... 7%
  - Don't know/No answer ..... 1%
- f. Curbside recycling
  - Yes ..... 47%
  - No..... 47%
  - Unsure ..... 5%
  - Don't know/No answer ..... 2%

14. a. Is there any other service for which you would be willing to pay higher taxes?

- No..... 87%
- Yes ..... 13%
  - Roads.....N=11
  - Sidewalks.....N=7
  - Public health/mental health/social services....N=7
  - Environment/renewable energy.....N=4
  - Public transportation.....N=3
  - Recycling.....N=3
  - Brush trash collection.....N=3
  - Libraries.....N=2
  - Broadband/internet.....N=2
  - Drainage/flood control.....N=1

15. The next several questions deal with the economy. For each of the following statements, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or if you are neutral or don't know enough to comment.

a. Roanoke County does a good job of attracting new businesses

Strongly agree .....	2%
Agree.....	34%
Neutral.....	18%
Disagree .....	25%
Strongly disagree .....	7%
Don't know/No answer.....	14%

b. The County does a good job helping existing businesses to expand

Strongly agree .....	3%
Agree.....	25%
Neutral.....	20%
Disagree .....	18%
Strongly disagree .....	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	32%

c. There are good job training opportunities available for adults in Roanoke County

Strongly agree .....	5%
Agree.....	36%
Neutral.....	18%
Disagree .....	13%
Strongly disagree .....	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	25%

d. The County does a good job of encouraging young professionals to live here

Strongly agree .....	5%
Agree.....	31%
Neutral.....	16%
Disagree .....	23%
Strongly disagree .....	6%
Don't know/No answer.....	19%

16. Please tell me if you think the County should encourage each of the following types of development. A yes or no answer is fine.

a. Single family residential

Yes .....	85%
No.....	10%
Unsure .....	5%
Don't know/No answer.....	0%

b. Multifamily residential	
Yes .....	61%
No.....	31%
Unsure .....	8%
Don't know/No answer .....	1%
c. Commercial	
Yes .....	75%
No.....	17%
Unsure .....	8%
Don't know/No answer .....	0%
d. Industrial	
Yes .....	66%
No.....	26%
Unsure .....	7%
Don't know/No answer .....	0%
e. Mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods	
Yes .....	49%
No.....	42%
Unsure .....	8%
Don't know/No answer .....	0%

17. The next two questions deal with public safety. Again, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or if you are neutral or don't know enough to comment.

a. Roanoke County is a safe community.	
Strongly agree .....	24%
Agree.....	68%
Neutral.....	3%
Disagree .....	4%
Strongly disagree .....	0%
Don't know/No answer .....	1%
b. I feel safe walking around in my neighborhood	
Strongly agree .....	36%
Agree.....	57%
Neutral.....	2%
Disagree .....	4%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don't know/No answer .....	0%

18. The next few questions deal with education. Again, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or if you are neutral or don't know enough to comment.

a. Roanoke County has high quality public schools

Strongly agree .....	16%
Agree.....	61%
Neutral.....	9%
Disagree .....	4%
Strongly disagree .....	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	7%

b. County schools provide good college preparation for students

Strongly agree .....	13%
Agree.....	54%
Neutral.....	11%
Disagree .....	6%
Strongly disagree .....	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	15%

c. County schools provide good vocational and job training opportunities

Strongly agree .....	9%
Agree.....	50%
Neutral.....	15%
Disagree .....	5%
Strongly disagree .....	2%
Don't know/No answer.....	19%

d. Roanoke County has formed strong partnerships with local and regional colleges and universities

Strongly agree .....	11%
Agree.....	51%
Neutral.....	10%
Disagree .....	4%
Strongly disagree .....	1%
Don't know/No answer.....	23%

19. The next few questions deal with natural resources. Again, please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or if you are neutral or don't know enough to comment.

- a. Roanoke County does a good job of protecting the environment
  - Strongly agree ..... 6%
  - Agree..... 60%
  - Neutral..... 13%
  - Disagree ..... 5%
  - Strongly disagree ..... 2%
  - Don't know/No answer.....13%

- b. The County does a good job of protecting scenic views
  - Strongly agree ..... 9%
  - Agree..... 66%
  - Neutral..... 10%
  - Disagree ..... 4%
  - Strongly disagree ..... 1%
  - Don't know/No answer.....10%

- c. Roanoke County manages growth and development well
  - Strongly agree ..... 4%
  - Agree..... 44%
  - Neutral..... 20%
  - Disagree ..... 16%
  - Strongly disagree ..... 2%
  - Don't know/No answer.....15%

- d. There is good access to rivers and streams for recreation in Roanoke County
  - Strongly agree ..... 15%
  - Agree..... 66%
  - Neutral..... 5%
  - Disagree ..... 5%
  - Strongly disagree ..... 1%
  - Don't know/No answer.....8%

20. Now I am going to list several sources of information. For each please tell me if you have used any of the following in the last year to receive information about County government. [PERCENT SAYING YES REPORTED]

The Roanoke Times or roanoke.com .....	74%
Local television stations.....	77%
Local radio stations .....	60%
County employees.....	34%
The County web site on the Internet .....	61%
Printed flyers or newsletters from the County .....	50%
Emails or electronic newsletters from the County .....	30%
Public meetings .....	20%
Friends and neighbors .....	66%
RoCo Alert.....	35%
Government access television (RVTV) .....	24%
Social media such as Facebook or Twitter.....	38%
Other .....	7%
Calls to County.....	N=12
Internet search engine.....	N=4

21. Now, let me ask you to grade yourself. Regarding events and issues in Roanoke County, how well informed do you think you are? Are you very well informed, somewhat informed, not very well informed, or not informed at all?

Very well informed .....	16%
Somewhat informed .....	62%
Not very well informed.....	16%
Not informed at all .....	6%
No answer .....	0%

22. When decisions are made in Roanoke County, do you think that you have an adequate opportunity to express your views?

Yes .....	57%
No.....	24%
Mixed/Unsure .....	19%
No answer .....	1%

23. What do you think will be the most important issue facing Roanoke County in next five years? [CATEGORIES NOT READ]

Population growth.....	8%
Traffic congestion.....	3%
Schools/education.....	10%
Attract and retain businesses and jobs/economic development.....	29%
Taxes/budget.....	7%
Zoning/land usage.....	1%
Lack of recreation opportunities.....	0%
Mountain Valley Pipeline/gas pipeline/environment.....	3%
Crime/drugs.....	4%
Fire and rescue services.....	0%
Transportation mix—bikes buses, sidewalks.....	2%
Water/sewer.....	1%
Government transparency.....	0%
Government debt.....	1%
Recycling.....	1%
Immigration.....	2%
Don't know/Refused.....	20%
Other.....	8%

We're almost finished. Thanks for your patience. Now, I just have a few questions about you for statistical purposes.

24. Do you own or rent your current residence?

Own.....	78%
Rent.....	20%
No answer.....	2%

25. How much education have you completed?

Less than high school.....	2%
High School.....	18%
Some college/tech school.....	26%
Associate's degree.....	14%
Bachelor's degree.....	26%
Advanced degree.....	14%
No answer.....	1%

26. Code respondent's sex

Male.....	48%
Female.....	52%

27. And in what year were you born? [CODED INTO CATEGORIES]
- |                |     |
|----------------|-----|
| 18-29.....     | 18% |
| 30-44.....     | 24% |
| 45-64.....     | 36% |
| 65+.....       | 22% |
| No answer..... | 1%  |
28. What is your race? Are you White, African-American, Asian, or some other race?
- |                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| White/Hispanic.....     | 89% |
| African-American.....   | 5%  |
| Asian.....              | 3%  |
| Other/multi-racial..... | 2%  |
| No answer.....          | 2%  |
29. I'm going to read several income groups. When I come to the group that includes your annual family income, please stop me.
- |                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Less than \$20,000.....  | 6%  |
| \$20,001-\$35,000.....   | 15% |
| \$35,001-\$50,000.....   | 18% |
| \$50,001-\$75,000.....   | 17% |
| \$75,001-\$100,000.....  | 16% |
| More than \$100,000..... | 18% |
| No answer.....           | 11% |
30. Are there any children under the age of 18 living in your household?
- |          |     |
|----------|-----|
| Yes..... | 35% |
| No.....  | 65% |
31. That is all the questions I have. Do you have any additional comments?
- |                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| No.....                           | 87% |
| Yes.....                          | 13% |
| Roads/snow removal.....           | N=8 |
| Economic development/jobs.....    | N=7 |
| Recycling.....                    | N=7 |
| Taxes too high.....               | N=5 |
| Broadband/internet.....           | N=2 |
| Explain where taxes go.....       | N=1 |
| Repair greenway.....              | N=1 |
| Public transportation.....        | N=1 |
| Stronger ties with higher ed..... | N=1 |
| Fire hydrants needed.....         | N=1 |
| Need better management.....       | N=1 |
| More police on street.....        | N=1 |
| Improve Williamson Road area..... | N=1 |

On behalf of Roanoke County, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Have a nice day/evening.