



**ROANOKE
COUNTY VA**

CITIZEN SURVEY

DECEMBER, 2017



CONDUCTED BY

The Institute for Policy and Opinion Research
Roanoke College
Dr. Harry L. Wilson, Director

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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 (IPOR) at Roanoke College with input received from several County employees and offices. The final questionnaire was approved by Dr. Wilson and by County officials. Most of the questions were repeated from the 2015 survey conducted by IPOR which allows for direct comparisons. 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 Economic Development and Education in 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 summarizes 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.

This report is very similar to the 2015 summary because the results from this survey suggest a great deal of continuity and little change from 2015. That is expected for

several reasons. First, absent truly significant events, public opinion is unlikely to change significantly in that period of time. Even though local government has a more direct impact on citizens, we know that most people respond more quickly to national events, which tend to dominate in the media. Also, many of the questions deal with general priorities, and those are typically stable. The most important priorities are usually economic issues, education, and public safety. Results for those topics are summarized in this section and in other sections as well.

Second, the tendency is for most citizens to be more satisfied with government and the community at a local level than at the state or national levels. For the most part, the intense, stark polarization that is so prevalent at the national level today does not trickle down to local politics. Local communities tend to be more homogenous and many local issues are seen as non-partisan. Obviously, that is not always the case in all issues, but it is a tendency.

Third, given that the 2015 report was generally positive with regard to citizen views of Roanoke County and Roanoke County government, we anticipated a similar outcome in 2017. That is, in fact, what is reflected in this report. Results from a large majority of the questions that were repeated on this survey are well within the margin of error of the two polls, most within a few percentage points. Any significant differences are noted in the report. Almost all of those differences were in the direction of residents being more positive toward the County and County government.

Economic Development

Citizens clearly place importance on economic development, rating it at a mean importance of 9.12 on a 10-point scale (tied for 7th most important on the list of 17 issues and services), while their satisfaction was lower at 7.67 (but reflects an increase from 7.05 in 2015). Respondents generally feel the County does a good job of attracting new businesses (42% agreed; 24% disagreed, compared to 36% and 32% in 2015). They were not quite as positive with regard to the County helping existing businesses expand (28% agreed; 18% disagreed) and encouraging young adults to live in the County (37% agreed; 28% disagreed), both of which are unchanged from 2015. A larger plurality think that good job training opportunities are available for adults (40% agreed; 18% disagreed). A majority of residents (59%) think that Roanoke County schools provide good career and job training opportunities for their students (13% disagreed).

A majority of respondents (51%) said they would be willing to pay higher taxes to increase County spending to attract and retain businesses (37% said they were not willing to pay higher taxes for that purpose). A large majority (84%) said the County should invest in infrastructure projects, while just over half (52%) support encouraging mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods. A plurality (46%) agreed that Roanoke County has formed sufficiently strong partnerships with other local governments in the region, and only 8 percent disagreed. The partnership and infrastructure questions were new in 2017, and the other had similar results in 2015.

Relatively few respondents referenced economic development issues as the best or worst thing about living in Roanoke County. One 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 cited a poor economy and jobs as the worst thing about living in the county, and 1 percent named the aging population and loss of younger people. Eight percent named economic development as the one area the County government most needs to improve, while 3 percent said it is the one thing that the County government does best. Perhaps most notable is that a strong plurality (21%, compared to 29% in 2015) named economic development as the most important issue Roanoke County will face in the next five years. Again, these results are very similar to 2015.

Education

Like residents in virtually every jurisdiction, Roanoke County citizens view education as a critical 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 9.51 for importance and 8.53 for satisfaction. Education led as the one thing that County government does best at 13 percent, while 5 percent said it is the area the County most needs to improve. Education was the second most often named issue (9%) that will be most important in the next five years. Nearly two-thirds (63%) 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 (76% agreed; 7% disagreed) and that the schools provide good college preparation for their students (65% agreed; 13% disagreed). Each of these measures tracks very closely to those obtained in 2015.

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 9.54 to 9.81 and satisfaction from 8.86 to 9.58). Majorities of respondents are willing to pay higher taxes for law enforcement/public safety (63%) and fire and rescue services (67%).

Those four combined to account for 17 percent of responses to what County government does best and only 3 percent of what it most needs to improve. Three percent named crime and drugs as the most important issue facing the County in the next five years. A large majority thinks that Roanoke County is a safe community (90% agreed; 3% disagreed).

Overall View of Roanoke County

Several questions throughout the survey solicited an overall assessment of Roanoke County from 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, 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 (38%) or good (55%), while six percent rated the quality of life as fair, and only one respondent (0%) evaluated it as poor.

Those who have lived in other jurisdictions were asked to compare Roanoke with their former residence(s). Three-in-five (60%) said that Roanoke is a better place to live, while only five percent said it is worse. About one-third (29%) said it was about the same. Respondents were more than seven times as likely to say that Roanoke County has become a better place to live in the past five years (34%) than to say that it is now a worse place to live (4%), while the majority (60%) rated it about the same.

A majority of respondents agreed that Roanoke County is well managed (8% strongly agree; 63% agree; 7% disagree) and that the County provides an appropriate level of services (11% strongly agree; 67% agree; 10% 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 (14% strongly agree; 56% agree; 13% disagree).

Majorities also feel that the County keeps citizens well-informed about services (75%) and provides appropriate services using newer technologies (75%). Residents also agree that housing is reasonably priced (69%), there is an appropriate mix of housing options (69%), there is a good mix of transportation options (52%), that the County is a safe community (90%) and that it is easy for them to walk around their neighborhood (83%). A plurality of residents (46%) are neutral or don't know if the County has formed sufficiently strong partnerships with other local governments in the region, but they are more than twice as likely to say it has (46%) than it has not (22%). The latter question was new for 2017.

Respondents were also positive regarding their level of knowledge of County events and issues with 16% saying they are very well informed and 61% 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 (23% said they did not have adequate opportunities).

Differences from the results of 2015 are general not significant, but they are largely positive in the sense that the percentages holding negative views are unchanged but the

percentage of those holding positive views have increased slightly. The proportion of those saying the county is well-managed increased from 61 percent to 71 percent.

Table 1
Overall View of Roanoke County

Item	Percent	
Quality of Life Excellent and Good/Fair and Poor	93%	6%
Quality of Life Better/Worse in Last 5 Years	34%	4%
Quality of Life Compared to Other Residences Better/Worse	60%	5%
County is well-managed Agree/disagree	71%	7%
County provides appropriate level of services Agree/disagree	78%	10%
Services are good value for taxes paid Agree/disagree	70%	13%
Residents well-informed re: services Agree/disagree	75%	12%
County has appropriate high-tech services Agree/disagree	75%	4%
Housing is reasonably priced Agree/disagree	69%	14%
Appropriate mix of housing options Agree/disagree	69%	13%
Appropriate mix of transportation options Agree/disagree	52%	32%
Roanoke County is a safe community	90%	3%
Easy to walk around neighborhood Agree/disagree	83%	13%
County has formed strong partnerships w/ other local governments	46%	8%
Information level of Respondent Very + Somewhat informed/Not very + not at all	77%	24%
Adequate Opportunity to Express Views Yes/No	57%	23%

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 (21%), schools/education (9%), traffic (7%), population growth (6%), and taxes/budget (6%). Economic development concerns declined slightly while traffic concerns increased slightly since 2015, but the results are essentially unchanged.

Table 2
Most Important Issue Facing County in Next Five Years

Issue	Percent
Attract/Retain Businesses/Jobs	21%
School/Education	9%
Transportation/Roads	7%
Population growth	6%
Taxes/Budget	6%
Crime/drugs	3%
Transportation Mix	3%
Mountain Valley Pipeline	2%
Fire and Rescue	2%
Government debt	1%
Other	16%
Don't know/No answer	24%

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 (34%-4%), while a majority of residents (60%) thinks 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 close proximity to many amenities but not being an urban area (23%). Natural beauty was next with 18 percent, followed by the quality of public schools (10%), and the overall quality of life (9%). Other reasons included living in a safe community (8%) and the attractiveness of the respondent's neighborhood and neighbors (6%).

Topping the list of items most often noted as being the worst part about living in Roanoke County was traffic/roads (20%).¹ Other common topics were high taxes (10%) and limited social activities (8%). One in five (20%) respondents could not think of a "worst thing" about living in Roanoke County, while only 5 percent could not think of a "best thing."

¹ 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. This is interesting in that last year was a very "easy" winter in terms of snow. Yet the issue remains important to residents.

Table 3
Best Thing about Living in Roanoke County

Issue	Percent Best
Convenience/close to amenities	23%
Scenic beauty/environment	18%
Schools/Education	10%
Quality of life overall	9%
Safe community	8%
Like the neighborhood	6%
Recreational choices	5%
Family nearby	2%
Cost of living	2%
Transportation/Roads	2%
Good government	2%
Economy/Econ. Dev./Jobs	1%
Other	7%
Don't know/No answer	5%

Table 4
Worst Thing about Living in Roanoke County

Issue	Percent Worst
Transportation/Roads	20%
Taxes/Budget	10%
Not enough amenities	8%
Recycling	3%
Board of Supervisors	3%
Safety/crime/drugs	3%
Recreational choices limited	3%
Economy/Econ. Dev./Jobs	2%
Loss of rural character	2%
Schools/Education	2%
Lack of public transportation	2%
Insufficient government services	2%
Cost of living	1%
Aging population/losing youth	1%
Population growth	1%
Airline service	1%
Other	16%
Don't know/No answer	20%

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). Public schools topped the list (13%) of what government does best. The next most frequent responses were police services/safety (8%), overall services (6%), recreation programs (4%), emergency services/rescue squad (4%), 9-1-1 services (3%), economic development (3%), and greenways (3%). Nearly one-fifth (17%) did not identify what the County does best.

At the top of list of what most needs improvement were traffic and roads (14%) and recycling (10%). Other commonly referenced items included economic development (8%), schools (5%), overall services (4%), social services (3%), and taxes (3%). Like the “best” category, one-fourth (24%) of those surveyed did not identify what the County most needs to improve.

Comparisons in this section to 2015 again suggest much more continuity than change. The only interesting difference is that governmental services constitutes a lower percentage of responses in both the best and most needs to improve categories. It is not immediately evident if that change is important and, if so, what it means.

Table 5
One Thing Roanoke County Government Does Best

Issue	Percent Best
Schools/Education	13%
Police	8%
Government/overall services	6%
Emergency squad/rescue	4%
Recreational programs	4%
9-1-1 services	3%
Trash collection regular + bulk	3%
Greenways	3%
Attract and retain businesses	3%
Libraries	2%
Parks	2%
Fire services	2%
Traffic/roads/transportation	2%
Communication/respond to citizens	2%
Social services	1%
Planning and zoning	1%
Other	24%
Don't know/No answer	17%

Table 6
One Thing Roanoke County Government Needs to Improve

Issue	Percent Best
Traffic/roads/transportation	14%
Recycling	10%
Attract and retain businesses	8%
Schools/education	5%
Government/overall services	4%
Taxes	3%
Social services	3%
Police	2%
Planning and zoning	2%
Real estate assessment	1%
Trash collection	1%
Parks	1%
9-1-1 services	1%
Storm water management	1%
Recreation programs	1%
Greenways	1%
Other	18%
Don't know/No answer	24%

Perceptions of Important Issues in Roanoke County

Respondents were asked to rate Roanoke County with regard to economic development issues and education on a likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The results can be seen in Tables 7(a) to 7(c).

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 (42% agree; 24% disagree), helping existing businesses to expand (28% agree; 18% disagree), encouraging young professional to live here (37% agree; 28% disagree), and offering good job training for adults (40% agree; 18% disagree). Compared to 2015, residents were more positive about County efforts to attract new businesses while other results were similar to two years ago.

Respondents also agreed the County manages growth and development well (47% said yes), should encourage mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods (52% said yes), and should invest in various infrastructure projects (84% said yes). Responses for the first two questions are similar to 2015 while the last question was an addition for 2017.

Table 7(a)
Economic Development in Roanoke County

Issue	Strongly agree +agree	Strongly disagree +disagree
Attract new businesses	42%	24%
Help businesses expand	28%	18%
Encourage young to live in RC	37%	28%
Job training available for adults	40%	18%

Table 7(b)
Economic Development in Roanoke County

Issue	Yes	No
County manages growth and development well	47%	21%
County should encourage residential/commercial neighborhoods	52%	32%
County should invest in public infrastructure	84%	9%

Education

Responses were also positive with regard to education in the County. Majorities agreed that Roanoke County has high quality public schools (76% agree; 7% disagree), provides good college preparation for its students (65% agree; 13% disagree) and provides good career preparation for students (59% agree; 13% disagree). These results are essentially the same as those in 2015.

Table 7(c)
Education in Roanoke County

Issue	Strongly agree +agree	Strongly disagree +disagree
RC has high quality public schools	76%	7%
Provides good college prep	65%	13%
Provides good career prep	59%	13%

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. The largest discrepancies are in recycling, attracting and retaining businesses, and schools. That said, satisfaction in each of those areas as well as animal control is up significantly from 2015. Importance ratings for social services and real estate assessment increased significantly in two years. No other changes in these ratings were significant.

Table 8
Importance of and Satisfaction with County Services

Service	Mean Importance	Mean Satisfaction
9-1-1 services	9.81	9.58
Emergency squad/rescue	9.66	9.51
Fire services	9.65	9.57
Police	9.54	8.86
Public schools	9.51	8.53
Trash collection	9.36	8.91
Attracting and retaining businesses	9.12	7.67
Social Services	9.12	8.54
Libraries	8.94	9.20
Parks and recreation	8.85	8.65
Building permits and inspections	8.82	8.51
Storm water management	8.76	8.06
Real estate assessment	8.71	7.92
Planning and zoning	8.70	8.21
Recycling	8.59	6.46
Greenways	8.51	8.71
Animal control	8.21	8.46

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. More than 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 residents expressed a willingness to pay higher taxes for increased spending on fire and rescue services (67%), public education (63%), law enforcement (63%), and economic development (51%). Support for increased taxes for curbside recycling (44%) and recreational opportunities (39%) was lower. A list of most frequently mentioned other services may be found in the questionnaire results at the end of this report. The largest deviation from 2015 in this section was a six-point increase for recreational opportunities. The order was the same, and other percentages were the same or within a point or two.

Table 9
Willing to Pay Higher Taxes for Specific Services

Service	Percent
Fire and Rescue Services	67%
Public Education	63%
Law Enforcement	63%
Attract/Retain Businesses/Jobs	51%
Curbside Recycling	44%
Recreational Opportunities	39%
Other (Independently mentioned)	15%

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) Television news was the most commonly used source (74%), and several other sources were cited by a majority of residents, including friends and neighbors (62%), the County website (60%), local radio (54%), print newspapers (50%) and printed communications from the County (50%). For a list of other sources, see the questionnaire. The single significant change in this section is the decline in use of print newspapers from 74 percent in 2015 to 50 percent in 2017.

New for 2017 were questions related to the County website. Overall, 60 percent of the respondents said they use the website as a source of information. Of those who use the site, 84 percent were very or somewhat satisfied with the website. Reasons for using the site may be found in Table 11. The 3 percent who volunteered that they use the site for GIS/real estate information may seem low, but keep in mind that this question followed a somewhat lengthy list of possible uses and toward the end of a lengthy survey. In short, volunteering that response took some effort and almost certainly underrepresents those who use the site for that reason. The most common suggestion for improving the website was to make it more user-friendly.

Table 10
Sources of Information about Roanoke County

Source	Percent
Local TV Stations	74%
Friends/neighbors	62%
County Web Site	60%
Local Radio Stations	54%
Print newspapers	50%
County Mailings	50%
Online news services	46%
Social media	45%
County Employees	30%
Emails/electronic newsletters	28%
RoCo Alert	27%
Government access TV	23%
Public Meetings	21%
Other	8%

Table 11
Uses of the Roanoke County Webpage

Use for information about	Percent
Trash collection	78%
Recreation programs	60%
Libraries	59%
Current events/news	58%
Online payments	38%
Employment opportunities	32%
Reporting a problem	30%
Notices re: meetings	25%
Budget	16%
GIS (volunteered)	3%
Other	21%

Changes from 2015-2017

As mentioned throughout this report, the results of 2017 reflect much more continuity than change as compared to 2015. Results from both surveys are generally positive, and most of the changes over two years were also positive. While it would be “over interpretive” to celebrate small changes, it is quite natural to be pleased with even insignificant changes that are positive.

For example, the percentage of those saying Roanoke County is a better place to live compared to five years ago went up by 5 percentage points, and there was a corresponding drop in those who said it was worse. Those results are within the margin of error of the two polls, but one would prefer that outcome to the opposite.

The 11 percentage-point increase (60%-71%) in agreeing that County is well-managed is probably the most notable difference. The 9 percentage-point increase (66%-75%) in agreement that the County keeps citizens well informed is also noteworthy.

The percentage agreeing that County does a good job attracting new businesses increased from 36% to 42%, and those agreeing that services received are a good value for taxes paid increased from 63% to 70%. Overall satisfaction with economic development on the 10-point scale increased from an average of 7.05 to 7.67. Satisfaction with recycling moved from 5.87 to 6.46. On the negative side, the percentage agreeing that Roanoke County has an appropriate mix of transportation declined from 59% to 52%.

Important information sources changed as well, with newspapers declining from 74% to 50% while social media increased from 38% to 45% and RoCo alert declined from 35% to 27%.

New for 2017

Most of the survey was repeated from 2105 which allows for comparison. The majority of the new items for 2017 related the County webpage and its usage. Those results are summarized just above and in Table 11.

The other major additions were the questions concerning partnerships with other local governments (46% agreed that Roanoke County had formed strong partnerships, but an equal number were neutral or did not know) and with investment in infrastructure projects to encourage economic development (84% agreed).

Summary

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 seven times as likely to feel that the quality of life is improving than to feel it is declining; and they are 12 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 three-fourths 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 County government is doing from a variety of sources, and official communications are clearly 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-fifth 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 more mixed, evaluations in that area improved from 2015 more than any other area. Still, residents of any community want more and better jobs, and it is common to think that government needs to do more in those areas.

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, but evaluation in each of those areas improved over two years.

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 continues 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. Given that last winter was virtually devoid of snow, memories are long when it comes to this issue. 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. To be clear, these issues were raised by a small minority of those surveyed, but they 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 government, in particular, continue 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. It is also good to see that the few changes in opinion from 2015 tend to be in the positive direction.

Items for Possible Consideration

The following are noted as survey results that might be considered as part of the policy-making process. Numerous 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, 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 remains a priority for Roanoke County residents. The economy and jobs are always a concern for citizens expressed in poll after poll and at all levels of government. However, we see evidence of the importance in several areas in this survey. This appears to be the one survey topic where we see changes over two years, and they tend to be positive in the sense that citizens perceive that the County is performing better in this area. There is strong support for infrastructure spending. While a plurality, rather than majority, think the County has formed strong partnerships with other local governments, this may be a function of “historical memory” rather than an assessment of current conditions. One can argue that local governmental cooperation in the Valley is less than optimal, but cooperation has undoubtedly improved among all local entities in past 10-20 years.
- The following is verbatim from the 2015 report, but we see no reason to change it as the views of citizens have not changed: 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.
- This is also verbatim from 2015, but, again, opinion is largely static: 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.
- Two issues from 2015 have diminished importance in the public’s view. Government services in general and the Board of Supervisors were mentioned less frequently in the open-ended questions in 2017. To be sure, there were comments about services—both quality and quantity—but they were reduced by about half. And there were comments about poor decisions and wasted funds, but

those are inevitable. That is not to say they should be disregarded, but, simply put, some people will disagree with any given decision. It is impossible to make everyone happy.

- 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.
- We referenced communication with citizens in 2015, and that remains an important and changing area. We were surprised that the percentage of citizens using the County website did not increase, but we noted a decrease in use of traditional print new media. In addition, we can see that residents use the website for many different reasons. The internet is slowly supplanting other primary means of communication, so websites must be as user-friendly as possible.
- Recycling and snow removal are still on the minds of those who live in Roanoke County. Residents noted improvement in recycling services, but many would like to see more improvement. Snowstorms appear to be nightmares for some residents—the kind that one cannot get out of their head for years.
- Folks are always concerned about transportation. Much of this is obviously beyond the control of the Board or the County Administration, but we all deal with these issues on a daily (or five-day-a-week) basis, so they are likely to appear on these lists. We also noted more people in this survey mentioned the lack of public transportation in the County, and transportation mix received the lowest ratings in the section of questions dealing with an overall assessment of the County (Questions 10 a-k). Stating the obvious: public transit is an almost insoluble problem in suburban/rural areas.

Methodology

Interviewing was conducted by The Institute for Policy and Opinion Research at Roanoke College and Siena Research Institute at Siena College in New York between December 2 and December 13, 2017.² The sample consisted of 603 randomly selected residents of Roanoke County.

The random digit dial sample was obtained from Marketing Systems Group (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 30 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 603 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 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.

² We experienced major technical problems at IPOR. As a result, we conducted all cell phone interviews at Roanoke College, and we contracted with Siena Research Institute (SRI) to conduct the landline interviews. SRI is the most respected pollster on statewide issues in New York, and they have worked with *The New York Times* and many other media outlets as well as numerous private contractors. They use the same survey software as IPOR so transfer of files was not difficult, and we are certain that their results are no different than what we would have obtained at IPOR. We thank them for their professional courtesy in helping us out on very short notice to complete this project in a timely and accurate manner.

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	9%
No.....	91%

3. What is your zip code?

24012.....	7%
24014.....	5%
24015.....	1%
24018.....	33%
24019.....	18%
24020.....	0%
24059.....	1%
24065.....	1%
24070.....	0%
24087.....	0%
24153.....	16%
24170.....	0%
24175.....	0%
24179.....	14%

4. How long have you lived in Roanoke County?

Less than one year.....	2%
1-2 years.....	7%
3-5 years.....	10%
6-10 years.....	12%
11-20 years.....	25%
21 or more years.....	30%
All my life	14%

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	16%
The property values were more favorable in Roanoke	12%
It is more convenient to commute to work	4%
The area is generally more beautiful than where I lived before ..	5%
I wanted to move to a more rural atmosphere.....	9%
I wanted to move to a more urban atmosphere	1%
Family in area	21%
Schools.....	12%
Born here/moved back	1%
Other	19%
No answer	0%

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	38%
Good.....	55%
Fair	6%
Poor.....	0%
No answer	0%

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	5%
About the same	29%
Better than some; worse than others	4%
No answer	2%

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.....	34%
Worse	4%
About the same	60%
Unsure/Refused/Not lived here that long.....	2%

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	23%
Schools.....	10%
Roads/transportation—easy to get around	2%
Safe community	8%
Like my neighborhood.....	6%
Close to family.....	2%
Good government.....	2%
Recreational choices	5%
Quality of life	9%
Scenic beauty/environment.....	18%
Strong economy/jobs	1%
Low cost of living.....	2%
Other	7%
No answer	5%

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

Too many people/population growth	1%
Traffic/roads.....	20%
Taxes too high.....	10%
No public transportation	2%
Not enough/poor government services	2%
Schools.....	2%
Crime/drugs.....	3%
Not enough shopping/restaurants/too rural.....	8%
Recreation options limited	3%
Cost of living high	1%
Poor economy/not enough jobs.....	2%
Aging population/losing young people	1%
Appearance/loss of rural character.....	2%
Recycling	3%
Board of Supervisors/government	3%
Airline service.....	1%
Other	16%
No answer	20%

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 is well managed

Strongly agree	8%
Agree.....	63%
Neutral.....	15%
Disagree	6%
Strongly disagree	1%
Don't know/No answer	6%

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

Strongly agree	11%
Agree.....	67%
Neutral.....	9%
Disagree	9%
Strongly disagree	1%
Don't know/No answer	3%

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

Strongly agree	14%
Agree.....	56%
Neutral.....	11%
Disagree	10%
Strongly disagree	3%
Don't know/No answer	7%

d. The County keeps its citizens well informed about services

Strongly agree	13%
Agree.....	62%
Neutral.....	9%
Disagree	11%
Strongly disagree	1%
Don't know/No answer	5%

e. Housing in Roanoke County is reasonably priced

Strongly agree	8%
Agree.....	61%
Neutral.....	11%
Disagree	12%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/No answer	6%

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

Strongly agree	12%
Agree.....	57%
Neutral.....	7%
Disagree	12%
Strongly disagree	1%
Don't know/No answer	11%

g. Roanoke County is a safe community.

Strongly agree	25%
Agree.....	65%
Neutral.....	7%
Disagree	3%
Strongly disagree	0%
Don't know/No answer.....	1%

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

Strongly agree	29%
Agree.....	54%
Neutral.....	2%
Disagree	11%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/No answer	2%

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

Strongly agree	9%
Agree.....	43%
Neutral.....	11%
Disagree	26%
Strongly disagree	6%
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	16%
Agree.....	59%
Neutral.....	8%
Disagree	4%
Strongly disagree	0%
Don't know/No answer	13%

k. Roanoke County has formed sufficiently strong partnerships with other local governments in the region.

Strongly agree	7%
Agree.....	39%
Neutral.....	15%
Disagree	7%
Strongly disagree	1%
Don't know/No answer	31%

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.....	9.54	8.86
b. 9-1-1 service.....	9.81	9.58
c. Fire services	9.65	9.57
d. Emergency squad/rescue.....	9.66	9.51
e. Animal control	8.21	8.46
f. Public schools	9.51	8.53
g. Parks and recreation	8.85	8.65
h. Greenways.....	8.51	8.71
i. Libraries	8.94	9.20
j. Trash collection.....	9.36	8.91
k. Recycling	8.59	6.46
l. Planning and zoning.....	8.70	8.21
m. Building permits and inspections.....	8.82	8.51
n. Storm water management	8.76	8.06
o. Real estate assessment	8.71	7.92
p. Social services.....	9.12	8.54
q. Attracting and retaining businesses	9.12	7.67

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 service.....	3%
Fire services	2%
Emergency squad/rescue.....	4%
Public schools	13%
Parks.....	2%
Recreation programs	4%
Greenways.....	3%
Libraries	2%
Regular trash collection	2%
Bulk and brush trash collection.....	1%
Planning and zoning.....	1%
Social services.....	1%
Attracting and retaining businesses	3%
Government/overall services	6%
Traffic/roads/transportation	2%
Communication with/response to citizens	2%
Other.....	24%
Don't know/No answer	17%

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

Police.....	2%
9-1-1 service.....	1%
Public schools	5%
Parks.....	1%
Recreation programs	1%
Greenways.....	1%
Regular trash collection	1%
Recycling	10%
Planning and zoning.....	2%
Storm water management	1%
Real estate assessment	1%
Social services.....	3%
Attracting and retaining businesses	8%
Government/overall services	4%
Traffic/roads/transportation/snow	14%
Taxes	3%
Other.....	18%
Don't know/No answer	24%

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

a. Public education

Yes	63%
No.....	28%
Unsure.....	6%
Don't know/No answer	2%

b. Law enforcement/public safety

Yes	63%
No.....	28%
Unsure.....	7%
Don't know/No answer	2%

c. Fire and Rescue Services

Yes	67%
No.....	26%
Unsure.....	6%
Don't know/No answer	1%

d. Recreational opportunities

Yes	39%
No.....	52%
Unsure.....	7%
Don't know/No answer	2%

e. Attracting and retaining businesses and jobs

Yes	51%
No.....	37%
Unsure.....	10%
Don't know/No answer	3%

f. Curbside recycling

Yes	44%
No.....	45%
Unsure.....	9%
Don't know/No answer	3%

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

No..... 85%

Yes

Roads.....	1%
Sidewalks.....	1%
Public health/mental health/social services....	2%
Public transportation.....	2%
Recycling.....	2%
Broadband/internet.....	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	3%
Agree.....	39%
Neutral.....	18%
Disagree	21%
Strongly disagree	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	16%

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

Strongly agree	1%
Agree.....	27%
Neutral.....	19%
Disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/No answer.....	36%

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

Strongly agree	4%
Agree.....	36%
Neutral.....	16%
Disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/No answer.....	25%

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

Strongly agree	3%
Agree.....	34%
Neutral.....	14%
Disagree	25%
Strongly disagree	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	21%

16. The next several questions deal with the question of economic development.

a. Do you think that Roanoke County manages growth and development well?

Yes	47%
No.....	21%
Unsure	29%
Refused	2%

b. Should the County encourage the development of mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods?

Yes	52%
No.....	32%
Unsure	16%
Refused	1%

c. Should Roanoke County invest in public infrastructure such as roads, sidewalks and broadband to encourage economic development?

Yes	84%
No.....	9%
Unsure	8%
No.....	0%

17. 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	22%
Agree.....	54%
Neutral.....	10%
Disagree	5%
Strongly disagree	2%
Don't know/No answer.....	8%

b. County schools provide good college preparation for students

Strongly agree	16%
Agree.....	49%
Neutral.....	7%
Disagree	12%
Strongly disagree	1%
Don't know/No answer.....	15%

c. County schools provide good career and technical education

Strongly agree	12%
Agree.....	47%
Neutral.....	9%
Disagree	13%
Strongly disagree	0%
Don't know/No answer.....	19%

18. 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]

Print newspapers	50%
Local television stations.....	74%
Local radio stations	54%
County employees.....	30%
The County website, Roanokecountyva.gov	60%
Printed flyers or newsletters from the County	50%
Emails or electronic newsletters from the County	28%
Public meetings.....	21%
Friends and neighbors	62%
RoCo Alert.....	27%
Government access television (RVTV)	23%
Social media such as Facebook or Twitter.....	45%
Online news services	46%
Other	8%

19. [IF YES TO COUNTY WEBSITE IN Q. 18] (N=363)

19. a. Overall, how satisfied are you with the website?

Very satisfied	30%
Somewhat satisfied	54%
Neutral.....	7%
Not very satisfied	3%
Not satisfied at all	1%
Don't know/No answer.....	5%

19. b. Do you use the county website for the following information? [PERCENT SAYING YES REPORTED]

a. To report a problem or concern.....	30%
b. Trash collection information.....	78%
c. Notices about meetings	25%
d. Budget information	16%
e. Employment opportunities	32%
f. Recreation program information	60%
g. Libraries	59%
h. Current events and news	58%
i. Online payment of taxes and charges	38%
j. Other	21%
GIS/real estate.....	3%
School information.....	1%

20. Do you have any suggestions for how to improve the County's web presence?

No.....	82%
Yes	18%
Improve layout/make more user-friendly.....	5%
Improve GIS.....	1%
Better promotion.....	2%

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	61%
Not very well informed.....	19%
Not informed at all	5%
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.....	23%
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.....	6%
Traffic congestion	7%
Schools/education	9%
Attract and retain businesses and jobs/economic development .	21%
Taxes/budget	6%
Mountain Valley Pipeline/gas pipeline/environment.....	2%
Crime/drugs.....	3%
Fire and rescue services	2%
Transportation mix—bikes buses, sidewalks.....	3%
Government debt.....	1%
Don't know/Refused	24%
Other	16%

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.....	77%
Rent.....	21%
No answer.....	3%

25. Are you currently married, living with a partner, divorced, separated, widowed, or have you never been married?

Married.....	53%
Living with partner.....	5%
Divorced.....	10%
Separated.....	1%
Widowed.....	9%
Never married.....	20%
No answer.....	2%

26. How much education have you completed?

Less than high school.....	3%
High School.....	15%
Some college/tech school.....	33%
Associate's degree.....	13%
Bachelor's degree.....	23%
Advanced degree.....	13%
No answer.....	1%

27. Code respondent's sex

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

28. And in what year were you born? [CODED INTO CATEGORIES]

18-29.....	17%
30-44.....	21%
45-64.....	35%
65+.....	26%
No answer.....	1%

29. What is your race? Are you White, African-American, Asian, or some other race?

White/Hispanic.....	86%
African-American.....	6%
Other/multi-racial.....	4%
No answer.....	4%

30. 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.....	9%
\$20,001-\$35,000.....	11%
\$35,001-\$50,000.....	16%
\$50,001-\$75,000.....	20%
\$75,001-\$100,000.....	13%
More than \$100,000.....	18%
No answer.....	14%

31. Are there any children under the age of 18 living in your household?

Yes.....	35%
No.....	63%
No answer.....	1%

32. Do you have internet access at your home?

Yes.....	89%
No.....	9%
No answer.....	2%

32. a. [IF YES] Who is your internet provider?

Cox	71%
Comcast.....	12%
Verizon.....	10%
Other	4%
Don't know/No answer	2%

32. b. [IF YES] What type of internet access do you have? Broadband, fiber optic, DSL, Satellite, Dial-up or something else?

Broadband	59%
DSL.....	13%
Satellite	4%
Dial up.....	0%
Other	3%
Don't know/No answer.....	21%

33. That is all the questions I have. Do you have any additional comments?

No.....	88%
Yes.....	12%
Roads.....	1%
Snow.....	1%
Internet.....	1%
Recycling.....	1%
Taxes.....	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.