

RICHLAND COUNTY

May 2025

Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy



RICHLAND COUNTY
ECONOMIC
STRATEGY

GROWTH. OUR WAY.

richland
redc.
economic development corp

Table of Contents

MISSION	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
SUCSESSES.....	4
ABOUT RICHLAND COUNTY, MONTANA	5
Geography	5
Demographics and Socioeconomic Background.....	6
Economy and Workforce	7
SUMMARY OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT	10
STRATEGIC DIRECTION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES.....	14
Workforce/Resident Retention & Community Development.....	15
Growth in Agriculture and Food Production	21
Transportation and Community Infrastructure.....	24
Community Collaborations & Access to Financial Resources	25
ECONOMIC RESILIENCE	26
Steady State Initiatives	27
Responsive Initiatives	28
Appendices	29

MISSION

Richland Economic Development Corporation (REDC) is a non-profit organization established in 1987. There are twenty-one committed volunteers who serve on the Board of Directors from Crane, Fairview, Lambert, Savage, and Sidney. REDC's mission is to act or to encourage action by others that will assist potential new and existing businesses in improving their chances of survival and contribution to economic growth in Richland County, Montana. REDC is focused on long-term expansion and strengthening the Richland County economic base.

21

Volunteers serving
on the Board
of Directors

REDC's MISSION

To act or to encourage action by others that will
assist potential new and existing businesses
in improving their chances of survival and contribution
to economic growth in Richland County, Montana.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

REDC utilizes a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to prioritize county development strategies that meet identified community needs. These documents are required to be updated every five (5) years to qualify for Economic Development Administration (EDA) grant assistance. This Richland County CEDS is the first that follows specific EDA guidance and utilizes outside consultants for its completion.

While the CEDS process will often illuminate new ideas and strategies, these reports contain strategies, programs, and partnerships that already exist or have been implemented and exhibit success. The CEDS recognizes what is working and continues to build on those efforts. The inclusion of these in the CEDS allows REDC and their partners to broaden opportunities for recognition of the success of these efforts and for duplication or expansion of these programs and services to other communities within the county. The CEDS is also a tool for seeking additional funding resources to support the outlined goals/objectives.

In September of 2024, REDC published a Request for Proposals for outside assistance in the CEDS process and for concurrent work on an Economic Diversification Strategy (EDS). REDC selected KLJ in October of 2024, and held a kick-off meeting outlining the process, including a community engagement strategy, in November of 2024.

Public Engagement Tactics

Community Survey

Pop Up Events


Stakeholder Meetings

Public outreach began in December of 2024.

Engagement activities included distribution of a community survey, a series of “pop-up” meetings (in which REDC and KLJ staff “popped up” at various locations in the county to meet with citizens and requested survey participation), and multiple scheduled meetings for high-level stakeholders and elected officials. In addition to public input, KLJ completed a review of county, regional, and state background information and current economic trends using Census and publicly available data. KLJ also assessed existing development plans from the County, individual communities, and other agencies to identify problems and goals. This assessment ensured the CEDS is collaborative and supports any concurrent community and regional efforts.

Like so much of the country, public input, and a review of strengths and challenges revealed significant concern for workforce and, to a lesser degree, housing. Community members and business owners expressed challenges related to recruiting and retention of good workers, exacerbated by a lack of affordable housing stock that specifically meets the needs of young families.

Although northeastern Montana did not experience as many of the debilitating economic impacts of COVID as many urban areas, there have been impacts, nonetheless. These repercussions resulted in the continued need to evaluate ongoing economic strategies and, in conjunction with economic diversification, to identify ways in which communities, especially very rural and isolated ones, can be more economically resilient.



Sidney

Lambert

Fairview

The communities in Richland County have adequate public infrastructure, but each one expressed desire for improved infrastructure that would allow for sustainability and growth.

These desires include paved roads, walking paths, sidewalks, trails, and wayfinding to support non-motorized transportation, tourism, and community development. These sentiments became prevalent in discussions about downtown and Main Street rejuvenation in the communities of Sidney, Fairview, and Lambert.

In response to this public input in conjunction with current and future economic data, the REDC CEDS outlines goals and strategies that focus on building economic resilience, and retention, development, and recruitment of a strong workforce. Goals and objectives outline the housing supply and its condition to support infrastructure enhancements and expansion.

Economic Diversification Strategy

The corresponding Economic Diversification Strategy outlines plans specific to diversification that complement goals and objectives outlined in the CEDS. These plans provide a comprehensive approach to economic development throughout Richland County. Together, these plans can assist Richland County, their partners, and the communities within the county in addressing needs in their downtown, Main streets, community centers, and neighborhoods and will allow them to thrive and grow in meaningful ways.

SUCCESSES

REDC focuses on supporting existing businesses while seeking ways to attract new business. Efforts include activities that support talent acquisition and retention of employees, increasing the tax base through recruitment of new business, expansion of existing business, and assisting businesses in staying open and thriving.

REDC accomplishes their mission through:

- **Providing a resource base** for business information;
- **Assisting businesses in accessing non-conventional financing** (grants, government loans, and capital resources, etc.)
- **Acting as a liaison** to government and political entities, influencing business success
- **Monitoring the County's economy**, identifying deficient areas
- Providing short/long range **planning services**
- The **REDC Revolving Loan Fund**

REDC REVOLVING LOAN FUND SINCE INCEPTION

Reinvested over
\$6.4 M
into the Richland County
economy

REDC wrote and
was awarded
\$426,000
in grants in 2024.

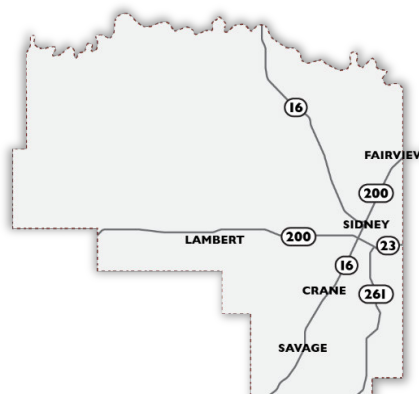
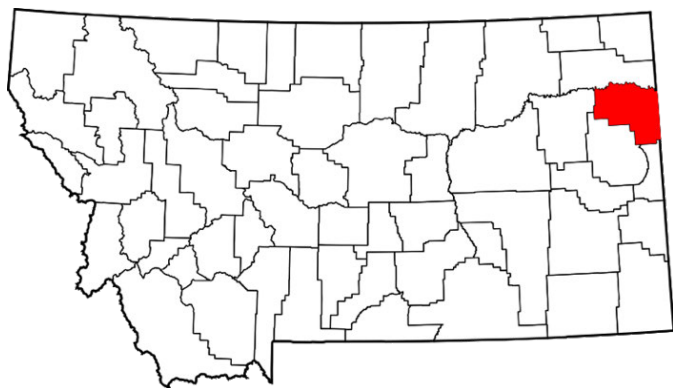
REDC REVOLVING LOAN FUND IN 2024

3
Loans Awarded in 2024

Assisted in creating
13
new jobs

Since its inception, the REDC Revolving Loan Fund has provided over \$1 million in low interest business loans to 22 different projects, creating 164 jobs and reinvesting over \$6.4 million into the Richland County economy. In 2024, REDC wrote and was awarded \$426,000 in grants, conducted 17 small business consultations, and assisted in the creation of 13 new jobs. In addition, REDC Director Leslie Messer received a formal letter of appreciation and recognition from the Montana Department of Commerce acknowledging her 25 years of service in Economic Development.

ABOUT RICHLAND COUNTY, MONTANA



Geography

Richland County is in northeast Montana, along the North Dakota state line, in the western Great Plains region. At 2,103 square miles, the county is about the size of Delaware. It is rural and removed from any large urban areas. The nearest larger city is Williston, North Dakota (pop. 25,000), about 56 miles over the state border northeast of Sidney. The nearest cities of over 100,000 people are Regina, Saskatchewan and Billings, Montana, about 3 1/2- and 4-hour driving distances respectively. In addition to road travel, residents utilize Cape Air, a regional air carrier, to access Billings. Cape Air provides up to five round-trip flights daily via the Sidney-Richland Municipal Airport.



Richland County's climate is considered cold and semi-arid, with considerable temperature variation throughout the year. Summers are hot and humid, with an average July high of 86.6°F. Winters can be long, cold, and dry, with an average January low of 6.5°F. The County is primarily within plant hardiness zone 4a (a USDA designation) indicating minimum temperatures of between -30 and -25°F. The County's natural scenery consists primarily of rolling hills characteristic of the western Great Plains and localized badland topography. The most significant topographic feature is the Yellowstone River, which flows across the southeastern portion of the County.

The river valley is the most fertile part of the County, thanks in no small part to the Lower Yellowstone Irrigation Project, a necessary piece of infrastructure given the area's dry climate. As a result, the Yellowstone River Valley is home to much of its agricultural land. Equally important to Richland County's economy is the Elm Coulee Oil Field, a portion of the Bakken Formation. This oil-producing strata is located underground throughout the county and is one of the largest oil fields in the United States. As a result, Richland County is not only dotted with farms and ranches, but oil wells are also commonplace.

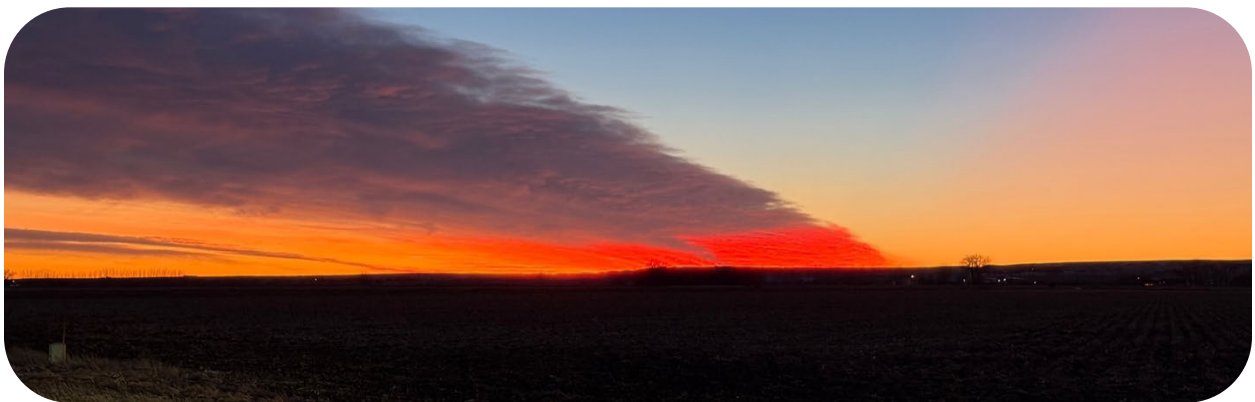
Demographics and Socioeconomic Background

Richland County's demographics have been subject to the boom-and-bust cycles characteristic of an energy-based economy. The County grew rapidly between 2010-2020, going from a population of 9,746 in 2010 to 11,491 in 2020 – a gain of almost 18%. But by 2023, the population had declined to 11,329. (2020 Census Data) This trend holds true looking both at the county as a whole and at the City of Sidney, where a slight majority of the County population resides.

The median age in Richland County is 38 years. This is slightly younger than the median ages of both Montana (40.2) and the United States as a whole (38.7). Over a quarter of the county's population is under the age of 18. At the same time, over 17% of the county's population is over the age of 65. The county has a slight male majority, with 101.1 males for every 100 females. However, this does not hold true across all parts of the county. In Sidney, there is a considerable female majority, with only 90.7 males for every 100 females. This difference implies that the population in the county's unincorporated areas and smaller towns is heavily male.

The median Richland County household has an income of \$69,578, a number roughly equivalent to the statewide average and lower than the national average of \$78,538. Nevertheless, Richland County's poverty rate of 7.1% is significantly lower than 12% for the State of Montana or the United States as a whole. Only 3.8% of children in the county live below the poverty line. However, the poverty rate for seniors is considerably higher, at about 17.2%. Approximately 4% of households in the county receive SNAP benefits (i.e., food stamps), including 7.6% of households with children under the age of 18. Households with a Hispanic or Latino householder are more than three times more likely than other households to receive SNAP benefits.

Unemployment in Richland County can vary due to the cyclical nature of the oil and gas industry. The unemployment rate in October 2024 sat at just 2.3%, which is among the lowest levels seen in the past thirty-five years since the data has been collected. Generally, since 2022, unemployment has hovered around 3%. However, these numbers sit in contrast to a COVID-era spike in 2020-2021, when up to 10% of the county's workforce was unemployed. Over 96% of Richland County residents over the age of 25 hold at least a high school diploma, and 19.4% have a bachelor's degree.



Economy and Workforce



Employment in Richland County is relatively dispersed across industries. In 2020, there were 5,625 civilian workers aged 16 and older in Richland County. The United States Census Bureau classified these workers into 13 categories of industry. The largest of these industrial categories in the County was Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining, which employed 975 people, or 17.3% of the workforce. The second largest was Education, Healthcare, and Social Assistance, at 943 workers, followed by Retail Trade at 575. Together, these three industrial categories made up over 44% of all employment within Richland County.



Employment in these industries was not evenly dispersed throughout the County. For example, the category of Education, Healthcare, and Social Assistance was the largest employer in both Sidney (13.6%) and in Fairview, the only other incorporated community in Richland County (30.5%), while Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining made up 29.3% of employment in the county's unincorporated areas.



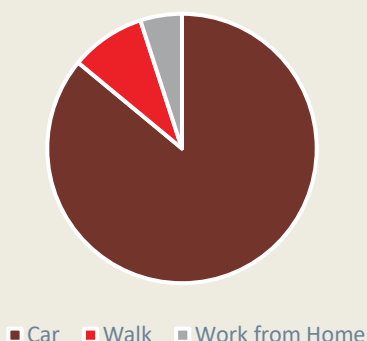
Between 2010 and 2020, the size of the workforce in Richland County grew by 8.8%, about half the rate of the county's population growth. This growth occurred unevenly between industries. Employment in Wholesale Trade, for example, dropped by more than 50%, from 157 jobs to just 72. However, this reduction in employment in one sector was more than outweighed by growth in Construction (55.7% growth); Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate (64.3%); and Information (73.2%). While each of these categories still makes up less than 10% of the employment in the county, they signal ongoing changes to Richland County's economy.

In terms of raw numbers, Construction added 200 workers, the most of any industry, while Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining lost 101 workers. It should be noted that this data only applies to Richland County residents, regardless of where they work, and disregards outside residents who work in Richland County. It also disregards the total economic impact of each industrial category in terms of GDP. Importantly, it does not include the transient workers typical of the oil and gas industry whose official residence is elsewhere.



Richland County's economy often follows the contours of the price of oil. Global troughs in the price of oil in 2016 and 2020 were accompanied by increases in unemployment in the county. Prices are currently relatively high, between \$70 and \$80 per barrel, and expected to remain so until at least 2026. However, the county nonetheless has an interest in diversifying its economy even further to mitigate against the volatility of its most lucrative industry.

Mode of Commuting



One important aspect of Richland County's workforce is how it gets to work. Most workers (85.7%) in the county commute via car, with 77.9% driving alone and 7.8% carpooling. About 9% walk to work and 5% work from home. This percentage is more than double the state of Montana's rate of walking (4%) but less than half its rate of working from home (11.6%). Almost 95% of households have access to a vehicle, over two-thirds have at least two vehicles, and one-third have at least three.

Mean Commute Time WOMEN

12.5
Minutes

Mean Commute Time MEN

26.9
Minutes

Commuting times in Richland County can vary significantly. The mean commute time for Richland County workers is just over 20 minutes, but there is a significant difference between the sexes. Women in Richland County have a mean commute time of just 12.5 minutes, and over half commute less than 10 minutes. Men, on the other hand, have more than double the mean commute time (26.9 minutes) and almost 10% of men commute more than an hour. A little over 10% of workers in the county commute across state lines – in most cases likely to North Dakota – while 2% commute to other counties in Montana. Most workers who live in Richland County also work in Richland County.

Housing is another key factor for growing and maintaining the county's workforce. Over two-thirds of housing units in the county are single-family detached housing, and another 16.1% are mobile homes. Less than 20% of housing units therefore, are apartments or attached single-family homes (i.e., townhomes). Almost 70% of housing units are owner-occupied, and owner-occupied housing in the county contains larger households on average (2.67 people) than renter-occupied housing (2.13 people). The county has a relatively new housing stock due to the explosive population growth in the 2010s, with over one-fifth of units having been constructed in that decade.

Richland County's rental market is affordable. The median monthly rent in the county is \$866 and \$890 in Sidney. Nationwide, almost half of renting households are considered rent-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on rent. In Richland County, however, only slightly more than 30% of renting households are rent-burdened. The rental vacancy rate of 11.2% is surely a factor in keeping prices relatively low.



The housing market in Richland County is somewhat less affordable for owners. Only 3.1% of owner-occupied units are vacant, making the for-sale housing market much tighter than the rental market. The county's median home value is \$259,000, and slightly lower in Sidney at \$249,100. Median monthly owner costs for mortgaged units are more than twice as high as rents, at \$1,867 per month. However, they exhibit a similar rate of housing cost burden as owner households in Richland County have higher incomes on average than renting households. About 28% of households in owner-occupied housing spend more than 30% of their income on their mortgage and other owner costs.



SUMMARY OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT



Public outreach began in December of 2024 and included a community survey, a series of “pop-up” meetings (in which REDC and KLJ staff “popped up” at various locations in the region to meet with citizens and to request survey participation), and multiple scheduled meetings for high-level stakeholders and elected officials.



Public Engagement Promotion: Flyer and Social Media Posts



279 survey responses were submitted between December 10, 2024, and January 10, 2025. REDC and KLJ staff held pop-up meetings at 4 locations throughout the County (Sidney, Lambert, Fairview, and Savage) and 1 additional scheduled stakeholder meeting (in Sidney).

A copy of the survey tool, a full summary of survey results, and stakeholder meeting comments can be found in the Appendix.

Strengths and assets identified in the survey responses included a powerful sense of community, a quality of life, a sense of safety in communities (low crime rates), a strong agricultural base, good schools, reasonable access to healthcare, and continued opportunities for small businesses to develop.

The most frequently identified challenges included retaining and expanding existing and new businesses, revitalizing downtown and Main Street areas, providing more entertainment options for all ages (including more parks and recreational opportunities) and providing better housing options.

STRENGTHS

Sense of community
Quality of Life
Sense of Safety
Strong Agricultural Base
Good Schools
Healthcare Access
Small Business Opportunities

CHALLENGES

Retaining and Expanding
Existing and New Businesses
Revitalize Main Street Areas
Entertainment
for All Ages
Better Housing Options

Businesses Need:

Ongoing/Increased
Strategic Planning
Better Identification of Local
Resources and Networking
Opportunities
Leadership and
Workforce Training
Marketing and
Social Media Assistance.

When asked what economic development services might be most useful in helping businesses to be successful, survey respondents indicated a need for ongoing/increased strategic planning, better identification of local resources and networking opportunities, leadership and workforce training, and marketing and social media assistance.

The survey included a question about obstacles for opening new businesses in Richland County. Respondents overwhelmingly noted workforce challenges, many of which they believed to be related to the lack of population, the rural location, and the lack of community support for local business. Additionally, start-up capital, local, state, and federal regulations, not knowing where to go for support; lack of commercial real estate; and lack of local infrastructure to support business growth were also mentioned.

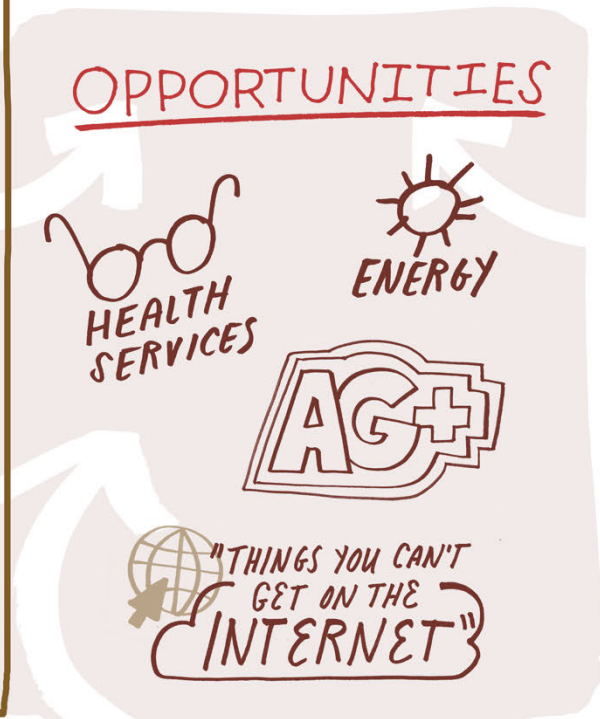
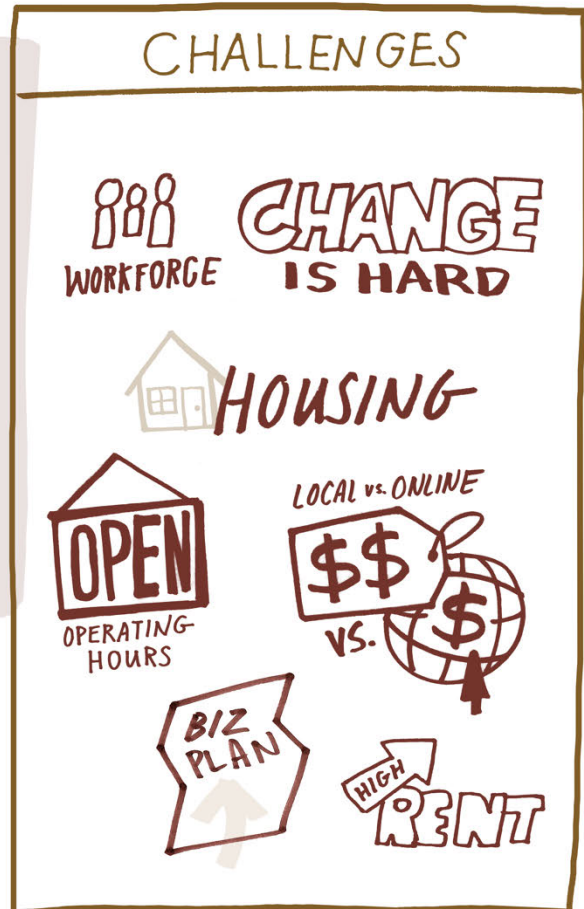
**Retail is desired by
survey respondents,
but difficult to
start and sustain**

In terms of targeting industries or business for development in the region, survey respondents and meeting attendees indicated they believed the industries with the most growth potential in the County were retail, value-added agricultural industries, and recreation-based businesses. The respondents, however, acknowledged that retail is difficult to start and sustain. These industries were followed by energy development, manufacturing, and service industries, specifically dental, physical therapy, and mental health services.

What became abundantly clear through public engagement and resident survey responses is that most residents love where they live for the same reasons that the workforce can be a significant issue. The County and the communities within the County are rural, safe, and full of opportunities for genuine community relationships. There is, however, an almost universal request for increased retail, amenities, and recreational opportunities. Specifically, survey respondents consistently indicated their hope for an indoor recreational facility for entertainment and programming options particularly for families and children. Especially in the winter, when outdoor activities can be extremely limited, citizens saw this idea as an enormous need and opportunity. The facility idea was also seen as a potential economic driver. Its presence would support recruitment and retention of the workforce, the potential for additional new businesses and growth for existing businesses, increased opportunities for networking and community-building, and increased opportunities to attract visitors to the County from the surrounding area.

Survey respondents
desired opportunities
for indoor recreation,
especially in the winter
months when outdoor
activities are limited.





STRATEGIC DIRECTION, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

The 2025-2030 goals and objectives seek to balance continued growth and development that reflects the unique culture and historic economy of Richland County and rural Montana. In establishing goals and objectives, regional background information and current economic trends, coordination with existing community plans, and public input are embedded.

Development of the 2025-2030 CEDS, in conjunction with the 2025-2030 Economic Diversification Plan, helps ensure community members are invested in the process and outcomes. This work assures that REDC can better access EDA grant and technical assistance resources, investing both capital and human resources in meeting the needs of their communities.

Goals and objectives intentionally:

- **Foster economic development** and opportunity
- **Increase the size and quality of the workforce** through housing development, training opportunities, and sense of community
- **Create welcoming communities** that support small business and encourage an entrepreneurial environment
- **Provide entertainment, amenities, and family support** for current residents and recruitment and retention of a younger workforce
- Create inviting, prosperous, and thriving hubs in the **Main Street and Downtown community areas** that both support business and appeal to visitors.

As previously noted in the Executive Summary, some of the identified goals and objectives are programs that are already implemented by REDC or by their partners. Of note, the Sidney Chamber of Commerce is succeeding with their work in Sidney. Several of the goals and objectives are being addressed and/or are under consideration by that organization. This includes working with high schools to develop college credits and trade courses, hosting community socials, facilitating family friendly activities, and supporting businesses in the Sidney downtown. In those instances, REDC is excited to partner with the Sidney Chamber and continue supporting those activities in Sidney. REDC wants to lead these programs outside of Sidney in the other communities within the county.

Workforce/Resident Retention & Community Development

Public comments and survey responses indicate that quality of life is a strength, and a primary reason people move to and stay in Richland County. There is a small-town atmosphere that permeates the County, even in its largest community, Sidney. The feeling creates a sense of safety, and an ability to make a real difference, creating a draw for residents and non-residents alike interested in relocating to the County.

The rural setting does not mean that people do not still seek quality of life services and amenities more common to urban areas. Issues such as workforce, housing, and access to amenities such as restaurants, and family activities, especially during the winter months, were high on the list of challenges. People ranked the bolstering and reinvigoration of the downtown and Main Street hubs as high for the community.

The following goals seek to address resident and workforce recruitment and retention.

**Quality of life
is a strength of
Richland County**



**Challenges include
workforce, amenities,
and family activities.**

GOAL 1

Continued business support, development, and financial assistance for workforce, customer service, growth, and business succession planning

This goal requires concurrent and continued community engagement work and discussion with existing and potential businesses. Collaboration with area educational institutions, extension offices, and other community partners identifies specific workforce needs and matches those to opportunities to achieve the following objectives:



OBJECTIVES

Ongoing facilitation of trainings, meetings and seminars designed to increase skills and resources for workforce development

Building improved partnerships with higher educational programs for specific workforce needs

Pursue identification, accessing, and expansion of state and federal resources to develop the local workforce and support existing and new businesses in recruitment, retention, and training of workforce

Partner with local companies and community partners to create specific “on the job” training programs to develop workforce talent and connect County residents to jobs

Development and facilitation of a “succession planning” training for small and family-owned businesses at risk of closing should the original proprietor retire or pass away

Promote technical assistance and revolving loan funds to local business owners to foster local business startups and growth

Advance and advocate tax incentives for businesses including tax abatements, and development of Tax Increment Finance (TIF) Districts and Targeted Economic Development Districts (TEDDs).

GOAL 2

Increase community engagement, pride, and understanding of the connections between economic development, Government, and community goals



Like most communities, especially rural communities in which the residents wear many hats, keeping people engaged and interested in the day-to-day work of government and economic development can be difficult. There is a sense that the same handful of people are doing all the work. They are “in the know,” making it difficult to move larger initiatives and projects forward.

Even with these barriers, community member engagement provides significant benefits and impact on economic development and on community growth and culture. When done well, and communities are actively involved in the decisions that impact their lives, community engagement fosters a sense of inclusion, social equity, a more comprehensive understanding of community needs and challenges, and a sense of ownership.

While REDC cannot and should not lead all public engagement efforts, the agency is in a unique position compared to Government and other non-profits to be a community builder, by increasing transparency and collaboration within the County. While there are other agencies doing this work in Sidney, such as the Sidney Chamber of Commerce, REDC is positioned to lead these efforts outside Sidney, where there are fewer community agencies and partners doing this work. Efforts include these undertakings:

Host quarterly socials that are centered around a specific topic, activity, or business type at a variety of venues to provide a variety of connections and a greater understanding of the community.

Create a page on the REDC website that specifically outlines progress of the goals and activities outlined in the CEDS and Economic Diversification Strategy

Develop a simple, inexpensive, electronic countywide newsletter to highlight community successes, upcoming events, local businesses, grant opportunities, or other “positive” messaging

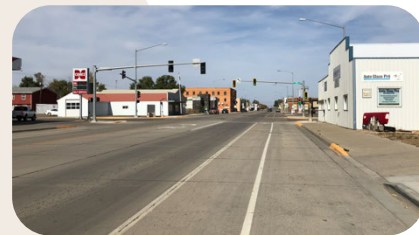
Celebrate local achievements in a similar way to the Sidney Chamber’s “community spotlight” program, recognizing individuals and groups outside Sidney that are contributing positively to community economic development

Continue “pop-up” meetings (monthly or quarterly) that focus on a specific task, issue, or community question and share the outcomes of those meetings in the newsletters.

Continue to promote and support community events that bring generations of families and neighbors together and support local businesses.

GOAL 3

Address Main Street and Downtown barriers that are negatively impacting business growth, positivity, and visitor impressions



Public feedback referenced vacant main buildings and lots, particularly downtown and Main Street. The community expressed a desire to make these areas more vibrant and appealing for visitors and prospective new businesses. These improvements sometimes include development of primary infrastructure, but more often is resolved through placemaking strategies focused on visual appeal and increasing community pride. The Sidney Chamber of Commerce is implementing strategies. There is room for additional partnerships and to grow these efforts outside Sidney. The following objectives support ongoing efforts with suggestions for low-cost activities that address building pride and economic development:



OBJECTIVES

Improving building facades to ensure a consistent, clean, and safe downtown business hub

This includes repair and replacement for empty buildings to appear more utilized and partnerships with artists or other businesses to place art or commerce items in the windows of empty buildings to advertise open businesses, community activities, or recreational opportunities

Hosting a community clean-up day

Residents and business owners take an afternoon to clean up areas and empty buildings (with the Sidney Chamber of Commerce leading efforts in Sidney and REDC leading efforts outside Sidney within the county)

Utilize state and federal dollars to repair, construct, or improve non-motorized transportation infrastructure to encourage “walkability” in the primary business arena

Promote existing transportation infrastructure grant programs including Transportation Alternatives and Safe Streets and Roads for All

Install new streetlights, building lighting, flower planters, sidewalk seating, and other aesthetics to promote community engagement and reduce crime

Host “Main Street” activities that bring residents together in the core of the community to make friends and foster local business

Target infrastructure investments (i.e. water, sewer, and roads) to boost existing businesses and create frameworks for business expansion and future business locations

Participation in the Montana Main Street Program to support these efforts with financial and technical assistance (Sidney is currently participating)

Accessing the EPA’s Brownfields Program to assess, clean up, and rejuvenate previously contaminated areas for redevelopment

GOAL 4

Increase available housing with emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing



OBJECTIVES

Establish and fortify affordable housing programs with the USDA Rural Development, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Montana Community Reinvestment Initiative, and other state and federal organizations to establish and fund sufficient financial incentives to promote and implement affordable housing projects

Advocate for regulatory and financial incentives for affordable and workforce housing development

Aid community leadership in implementation of workforce housing zoning in the larger communities (Sidney and Fairview) that could also include subdivision standards for the appropriate location, size, and design standards

Target infrastructure investments (water, sewer, and roads) that support the development of housing

Continue to consider how multifamily housing might be developed to meet specific needs (workforce, senior, young families).

Multifamily housing, or investments in “vertical builds” and mixed-use housing is often less expensive to develop both in terms of infrastructure and construction



GOAL 5

Develop a Community Center/ Family Recreational Center

While this is much harder than it sounds, Richland County citizens made it clear that one of their desires is for the construction of an indoor facility for all ages with various recreational activities. Such a facility would bolster an already vital sense of community. It would also serve as a tool for workforce recruitment and retention and an opportunity to attract additional visitors to the area.

An indoor facility of this type would be a substantial project that would require support at the local, county, regional, and state level.

The following steps could be taken to continue moving forward with develop



OBJECTIVES

Facilitate additional public input to learn more specifics about a facility location, what the facility might look like, what activities are important to community members, and garner additional understanding and support from residents and leadership

Seek funding for completion of a Preliminary Architectural Report, market analysis, proforma, and business plan for development of the facility. These steps will provide draft building renderings, construction cost estimates, and a facility plan for ongoing operations

Work with local and state leadership, including private donors to garner support for the project

Consider prioritizing public and private funding to support the planning and construction of the facility and subsequent operating expenses when the facility opens

Growth in Agriculture and Food Production

Agriculture is a primary economic driver in Montana and continues to be key in both maintaining the economic health of the communities in Richland County and providing opportunities for growth.

Agriculture is unpredictable and often influenced by factors outside of human control such as weather and drought. Agricultural goals and objectives are rooted in ways in which agricultural technology, land use, and value-added tools might be implemented to ensure continued strength and consistency in agricultural pursuits.



GOAL 1

Protect Agricultural Land

The protection of agricultural land is becoming more difficult, and complex given both environmental and human factors. These factors include fewer young family members wanting to take on the family farm, land use issues, deterioration of agricultural land due to weather concerns, and lucrative offers for other land development purposes.

The following strategies are identified as ways in which REDC, and their partners can support the protection of valuable agricultural land:

STRATEGIES

Identification and partnership with Extension and Montana Ag and Food Development Network resources to continue education to farmers and ranchers on control of noxious weeds, the importance of crop rotation, tillage practices, soil erosion, preservation of native vegetation, ditching practices, water conservation, and protection of water quality.

Conduct research and foster partnerships that address and draw on changes in commodity markets that could add value to the agricultural region, including discussions regarding indoor climate-controlled agriculture (USDA).



GOAL 2

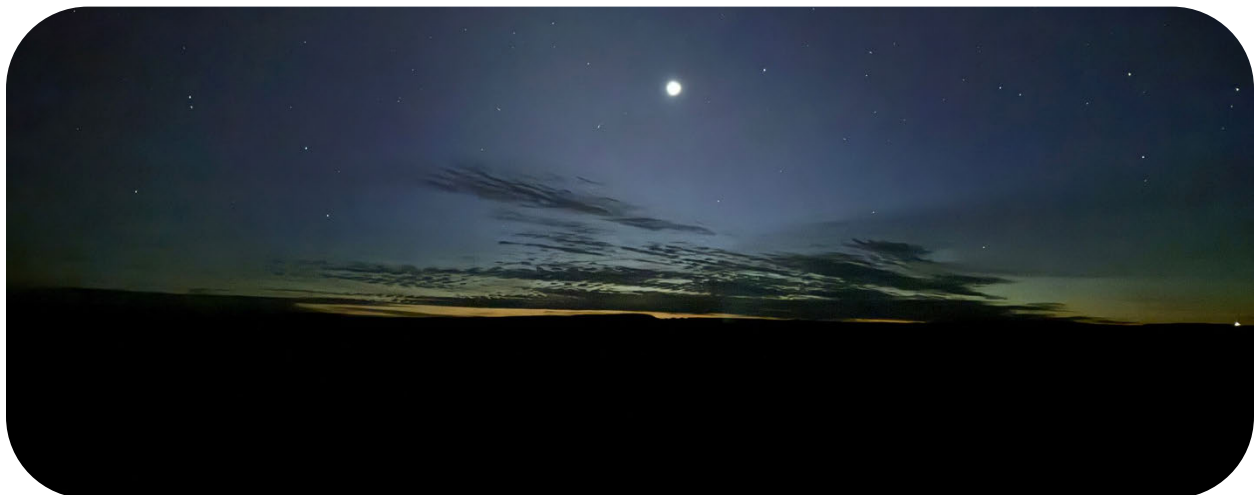
Increase opportunities for access for first-time farmers and ranchers

National and statewide trends indicate the number of farms and ranches throughout Montana is decreasing, while the acreage utilized remains stable. This change indicates the dominance of larger farming operations with fewer employees over an exceptionally large geographic area. From an economic perspective, the larger the operation the more capital is needed to be viable and competitive. The fact creates financial obstacles to access these industries for first-time farmers, ranchers, and entrepreneurs.



STRATEGIES

Work with regional entities and government entities to create incentive programs for beginning farmers/ranchers that provide improved opportunities and financial incentives for landowners to rent or sell assets (land, machinery, etc....) to a beginning farmer.



Transportation and Community Infrastructure

Transportation infrastructure is essential throughout the country, but perhaps no more essential than in rural areas in which access is often limited, impassable, or unsafe roadways can lead to a complete halt in commerce and significant safety risks for citizens. Identification of transportation infrastructure needs, including non-motorized infrastructure that supports connectivity and equity in access, areas for growth or enhancement, and comprehensive planning for addressing road and bridge infrastructure is essential to economic sustainability and growth.

GOAL 1

Develop a Countywide Comprehensive Transportation Safety Action Plan

The first step to addressing transportation infrastructure is the creation of a comprehensive plan that identifies critical infrastructure, prioritizes needs, and outlines both the strategies and the funding resources available to address those needs, ensuring the transportation network is maintained, funded, and improved where necessary.



It is more cost effective to consider a countywide plan in addition to the local efforts within Sidney already being done. A Comprehensive Countywide Transportation Action Plan (Plan) is a key step in being able to access state and federal funding resources for construction of identified projects. In addition to funding, the Plan assists in ascertaining critical infrastructure needs. And, the Plan gives community leaders a roadmap for the allocation of limited funding. This Plan should include attendance at transportation meetings engaging Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) in ongoing discussion and collaboration to improve MDT transportation routes within the County. These conversations should also include collaboration with individual communities, especially as it pertains to non-motorized transportation that support walkability, neighborhood building, and access to essential services. In preliminary discussions with County transportation staff, there is a willingness to partner with REDC to accomplish this task.

Community Collaborations & Access to Financial Resources

We can achieve more together than on our own. This mindset is true nowhere more so than in rural areas with limited human and financial capital. To ensure maximum return on investment, it must be acknowledged that individual communities in the County cannot achieve their goals in a bubble. While the Sidney Chamber of Commerce is leading the way in some efforts within Sidney, there is significant opportunity to expand collaborations in County communities outside of Sidney and provide various financial resources. The state legislature also can and should serve a role in collaboration and community development. The following goal addresses the need to collaborate as fully as possible:

GOAL 1

Continue conversations between communities' leaderships, county leadership, state, and federal legislators, and local community non-profit organizations.



STRATEGIES

Support local and Countywide leadership programs that increase the skills of citizens to participate in their communities and to step into leadership positions as those become available.

Work with elected city, county, and state level leadership to continue authorization and appropriations to assist in the funding of economic development activities

Maintain communication with the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) to support and follow programs, funding, and legislation at the national level.

ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

It is becoming increasingly apparent that economic prosperity is linked to the ability to prevent, withstand, and quickly recover from major disruptions to the local and global economy. Many definitions of economic resilience limit focus on the ability to quickly recover from disruption. In the context of economic development, economic resilience becomes inclusive of three primary attributes: 1) the ability to recover quickly from the disruption or shock, 2) the ability to withstand the disruption or shock, and 3) the ability to avoid the disruption or shock altogether. Establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how the risk can and will impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity (EDA, Economic Resilience, 2020).

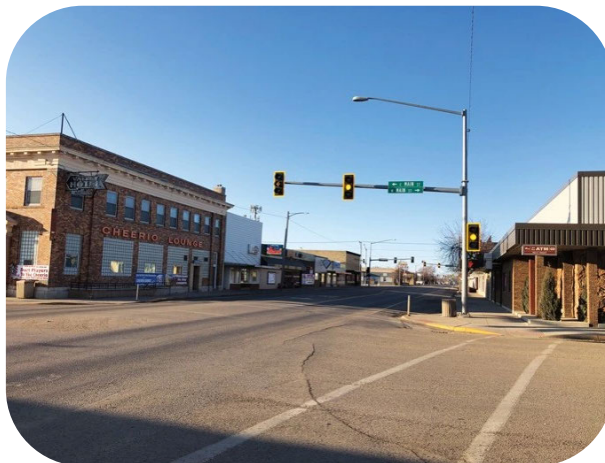
Every year, people and communities experience disasters and other major disruptions that impact the economy. These can be the result of damaging weather events, the decline of a significant industry, or the closure of a major employer. The financial, social, and environmental costs of these disruptions continue to rise and represent substantial drains on governments, businesses, communities, and the nation.

REDC intends to integrate resilience in two ways:

STRATEGIES

Establishing and enhancing information networks among regional stakeholders that encourage active and regular communications between the public, private, educational, and non-profit sectors, promoting collaboration that allows for faster and more effective responses to potential future challenges (responsive initiatives).

Planning for and implementing resilience through specific goals and actions that increase the long-term economic durability of the region (steady state initiatives)



Steady State Initiatives

STRATEGIES	
1.	Community leaders will be aware of county-level and regional county planning efforts and can participate in resiliency and hazard mitigation planning processes.
2.	In addressing workforce and resident retention, REDC will consider programs that encourage a resilient workforce that can better shift between jobs and industries. These programs will bolster business support, development, and financial assistance for workforce, customer service, growth, and business succession planning
3.	More workers are moving to a remote work environment. Given the importance of a strong and reliable telecommunications network in recruiting these workers, ensuring redundancy in telecommunications and broadband networks to protect commerce and public safety will be a resilience priority. REDC will partner with the County , and at the state and federal levels to advocate for, and support, telecommunications and broadband development that support both remote work opportunities and a resilient workforce.



Responsive Initiatives

The REDC CEDS and Economic Diversification Strategies serve as roadmaps to empower the County to develop and implement a plan of action, utilize resources efficiently, and embed resilience and economic diversity into identified goals and objectives. There is no silver bullet. Resilience and diversification are a series of long-haul strategies to secure success through multiple community initiatives coming together to give support and balance to one another.

Moving forward, continued community engagement at the local, regional, state, and national levels will be critical. This area is established and sustains itself due to a legacy of families that have created homes in a sometimes-brutal natural environment and with few traditionally urban resources. There is a need to balance steady growth and development that also reflects the unique culture and historic economy of the region.

STRATEGIES

REDC will continue to plan and implement goals and objectives that embed resilience in workforce, communications, and collaborative goals that seek to bolster the long-term economic durability of this region

Agriculture continues to be a key economic driver in this region. Resilience planning considers ways in which agricultural technology, land use, and value-added agricultural tools might be implemented to ensure continued strength and consistency in agricultural pursuits

Natural disasters, such as drought, flooding, hazardous materials spills, severe winter storms, strong wind events and wildfires have and could potentially heavily impact these small communities. Resilience planning will consider improvements that keep communities and related Emergency Services connected to minimize negative impacts

Infrastructure, especially transportation infrastructure, has been identified as an essential piece of community and business recruitment and growth. Strong community infrastructure should be addressed for both access and emergency response resiliency in addition to addressing the health of businesses and the quality of life

As part of the discussion related to disaster preparedness and resilience, climate resilience that addresses hotter temperatures, drier conditions, and extreme weather patterns is important to address. This is particularly relevant when discussing infrastructure resilience and the agricultural industry and should be considered in community conversations and planning



Appendices

Appendix A

Action Plan Workbook

ACTION PLAN WORKBOOK

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (CEDs)

Richland Economic Development Corporation (REDC)

Companion Action Plan Worksheet and Task Organization/Assignments

Workforce/Resident Retention and Community Development

Task	Assigned To	Completion Yr	Status
Goal 1: Continue business support, development, and financial assistance for workforce, customer service, growth, and business succession planning			
Objective 1: Ongoing facilitation of trainings, meetings and seminars designed to increase skills and resources for workforce development			
Objective 2: Building improved partnerships with higher education programs for specific workforce needs			
Objective 3: Pursue identification, accessing, and expansion of state and federal resources to develop workforce and support existing and new businesses in recruitment, retention, and training of workforce			
Objective 4: Partner with local companies and community partners to create specific “on the job” training programs to develop workforce talent and connect County residents to jobs			
Objective 5: Development and facilitation of “succession planning” training for small and family-owned businesses at risk of closing should the original proprietor retire or pass away			
Objective 6: Promote technical assistance and revolving loan funds to local business owners to foster local business startups and growth			
Objective 7: Advance and advocate tax incentives for businesses including tax abatements, and development of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts and Targeted Economic Development Districts (TEDDs)			
Goal 2: Increase community engagement, pride, and understanding of the connections between economic development, Government, and community goals			
Objective 1: Host quarterly socials that are centered around a specific topic, activity, or business type at a variety of venues to provide a variety of connections and a greater understanding of the communities			
Objective 2: Create a page on the REDC website that specifically outlines progress of the goals and activities outlined in the CEDs and Economic Diversification Strategy			
Objective 3: Develop a simple, inexpensive, electronic countywide newsletter to highlight community successes, upcoming events, local businesses, grant opportunities, and other “positive” messaging			
Objective 4: Celebrate local achievements in a similar way to the Sidney Chamber’s “community spotlight” program, recognizing individuals and groups outside Sidney that are contributing positively to community economic development			
Objective 5: Continue “pop-up” meetings (monthly or quarterly) that focus on a specific task, issue, or community questions and share the outcomes of those meetings in the newsletters			

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (CEDS)

Richland Economic Development Corporation (REDC)

Companion Action Plan Worksheet and Task Organization/Assignments

Workforce/Resident Retention and Community Development (Continued)

Task	Assigned To	Completion Yr	Status
Goal 2 (Continued): Increase community engagement, community pride, and understanding of the connections between economic development, government, and community goals			
Objective 6: Continue to promote and support community events that bring generations and communities together and support local businesses			
Goal 3: Address Main Street and downtown barriers that are negatively impacting business growth, community positivity, and visitor impressions			
Objective 1: Improve building facades to ensure a consistent, clean, and safe downtown business hub			
Objective 2: Host a community clean-up day			
Objective 3: Utilize state/federal dollars to repair, construct, or improve non-motorized transportation infrastructure to encourage “walkability” in the primary business			
Objective 4: Install new streetlights, building lighting, flower planters, sidewalk seating, and other aesthetics that encourage community engagement and reduce crime			
Objective 5: Host “Main Street” activities that bring residents together in the core of the community to make friends and foster local business			
Objective 6: Target infrastructure investments (i.e. water, sewer, roads) to boost existing businesses and create frameworks for business expansion and future business locations			
Objective 7: Participation in the Montana Main Street Program to support these efforts with financial and technical assistance (Sidney is currently participating)			
Objective 8: Access the EPA’s Brownfields Program to assess, clean up, and rejuvenate previously contaminated areas for redevelopment			
Goal 4: Increase available housing with emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing			
Objective 1: Establish and fortify affordable housing programs with USDA Rural Development, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Montana Community Reinvestment Initiative, and other state and federal organizations to establish and fund sufficient financial incentives to promote and implement affordable housing projects			
Objective 2: Advocate for regulatory and financial incentives for affordable and workforce housing development			
Objective 3: Aid community leadership in implementation of workforce housing zoning in the larger communities (Sidney and Fairview) that could also include subdivision standards for the appropriate, location, size and design standards			

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (CEDs)

Richland Economic Development Corporation (REDC)

Companion Action Plan Worksheet and Task Organization/Assignments

Workforce/Resident Retention and Community Development (Continued)

Task	Assigned To	Completion Yr	Status
Goal 4: (Continued) Increase available housing with emphasis on increasing the supply of affordable and workforce housing			
Objective 4: Target infrastructure investments (water, sewer, roads) that support the development of housing			
Objective 5: Continue to consider how multifamily housing might be developed to meet specific needs (workforce, senior, young families)			
Goal 5: Develop a Community Center/Family Recreational Center			
Objective 1: Facilitate additional public input to learn more specifics about a facility location, what the facility might look like, what activities are important to community members, and garner additional understanding and support from residents and leadership			
Objective 2: Seek funding for completion of a Preliminary Architectural Report (PAR), market analysis, proforma, and/or business plan for development of the facility. These steps will provide draft building renderings, construction cost estimates, and a facility plan for ongoing operations			
Objective 3: Work with local and state leadership, including private donors to garner support for the project			
Objective 4: Target infrastructure investments, such as water, power, telecommunications, and roads to support the development of such a facility			
Growth in Agriculture and Food Production			
Goal 1: Protect Agricultural Land			
Objective 1: Identification and partnership with Extension and Montana Ag and Food Development Network resources to continue education to farmers and ranchers on control of noxious weeds, the importance of crop rotation, tillage practices, soil erosion, preservation of native vegetation, ditching practices, water conservation, and protection of water quality			
Objective 2: Conduct research and foster partnerships that address and draw on changes in commodity markets that could add value to the agricultural region, including discussions regarding indoor climate-controlled agriculture (USDA)			
Goal 2: Increase opportunities for access for first-time farmers and ranchers			
Objective 1: Work with regional and government entities to create incentive programs for beginning farmer and ranchers to provide improved opportunity and financial incentives for landowners to rent or sell assets (land, machinery, etc.) to a beginning farmer or rancher			

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES (CEDs)
Richland Economic Development Corporation (REDC)
Companion Action Plan Worksheet and Task Organization/Assignments

Task	Assigned To	Completion Yr	Status
Transportation and Community Infrastructure			
Goal 1: Develop a Countywide Comprehensive Transportation Safety Action Plan			
Community Collaborations and Access to Financial Resources			
Goal 1: Continue to facilitate communications between community leadership, county leadership, state, and federal legislators, and community non-profit organizations			
Objective 1: Support local leadership programs that increase the skills of community citizens to participate in their communities and to step into leadership positions as those become available			
Objective 2: Work with city, county & state level elected leadership to continue authorization and appropriations that assist in the funding of economic development activities			
Objective 3: Maintain communication with the National Association of Development Organizations (NADA) to support and follow programs, funding, and legislation at the national level			
Integration of Economic Resilience			
Goal 1: Steady State Initiatives			
Objective 1: Be aware of county-level and regional county planning efforts and participate in resiliency and hazard mitigation planning processes			
Objective 2: Consider programs that encourage a resilient workforce that can better shift between jobs and industries			
Objective 3: Partner with the County, and at state, and federal levels to advocate for, and support, telecommunications and broadband development			
Goal 2: Responsive Initiatives			
Objective 1: Continue to plan and implement goals and objectives that embed resilience in workforce, communications, and collaborative goals			
Objective 2: Consider ways in which agricultural technology, land use, and value-added agricultural tools might be implemented			
Objective 3: Consider improvements that keep communities and related Emergency Services connected to minimize negative impacts			
Objective 4: Advocate for strong community infrastructure,			
Objective 5: Continue community conversations related to disaster preparedness and resilience, including resilience activities that address hotter temperatures, drier conditions, and extreme weather patterns.			

Appendix B

Public Engagement Survey

Richland County Economic Diversification & CEDS Survey

1. How long have you resided in Richland County?

☐ 0-5 years

☐ 20+ years

☐ 6-10 years

☐ Seasonal Resident

☐ 11-20 years

☐ Visitor

2. What do you see as Richland County's greatest assets, or what makes it stand out? List your top 3.

☐ Sense of community / quality of life

☐ Opportunities for small businesses

☐ Affordable housing

☐ Safe communities

☐ Parks and recreational opportunities

☐ Restaurants and entertainment

☐ Access to healthcare

☐ Employment opportunities

☐ Schools / education

☐ Tourism opportunities

☐ Strong local economy

☐ Agriculture

☐ Other (please specify)

3. What areas do you see as Richland County's biggest needs or areas that Richland County can improve? Pick your top 3.

- ☐ Enhancing telecommunications and broadband
- ☐ Help retain and expand new and existing businesses
- ☐ Provide better local infrastructure (including transportation, water/sewer, garbage services, etc.)
- ☐ Better access to healthcare services
- ☐ Provide better or more educational opportunities
- ☐ Provide better housing options
- ☐ Provide more programs and services for senior citizens
- ☐ Provide more programs / activities for kids
- ☐ Provide more entertainment for all ages
- ☐ Have more job opportunities
- ☐ Revitalize downtown areas (storefronts, signage)
- ☐ Provide more parks and recreational opportunities
- ☐ Provide public transportation access / options
- ☐ Better public safety
- ☐ Tourism business opportunities

4. Which business industries have the most “growth potential” in Richland County?

Pick your top 3.

☐ Value added Agriculture

☐ Tourism businesses

☐ Manufacturing

☐ Health care services

☐ Retail

☐ Technology

☐ Financial services

☐ Service industries

☐ Energy

☐ Recreation

☐ Other (please specify)

5. Based on your top choices from question (#4) above, what TYPES of business would you like to see in Richland County? Pick your top 3.

- ☐ Traditional Ag (farming and ranching)
- ☐ Value added Ag (meat, grain, alfalfa, corn soybean processing, distilling, brewing, etc.)
- ☐ Ag equipment and supplies (retail)
- ☐ Specific health care providers (dental, eye, therapies, etc.)
- ☐ Small manufacturing (components, welding, metal works, etc.)
- ☐ Retail / service (cosmetology, clothing, pet grooming, home improvement)
- ☐ Entertainment / Activities (movies, indoor recreation, music, theater)
- ☐ Legal, CPA, engineering, architectural
- ☐ Construction, plumbing, electrical, concrete
- ☐ Restaurants / Bars / Coffee shops
- ☐ Energy businesses (wind, solar, natural gas, oil, business support)
- ☐ Remote workspace / coworking opportunities
- ☐ Other (please specify)

6. What do you see as some of the obstacles for new businesses to open in Richland County?

- ☐ Lack of local infrastructure or utilities
- ☐ Local/state/federal regulations (red tape)
- ☐ Lack of community support
- ☐ Population and/or location
- ☐ Local taxes
- ☐ Lack of commercial real estate
- ☐ Workforce challenges
- ☐ Startup capital
- ☐ Not knowing where to go and who to contact
- ☐ Other (please specify)

7. What changes would you like to see in Richland County?

8. What type of economic development services do you believe would help businesses be more successful? Pick your top 3

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rethinking my business model | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial & credit analysis |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing & Social media assistance | <input type="checkbox"/> Identifying local resources & networking opportunities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Technical & licensing assistance | <input type="checkbox"/> Website development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic planning & business growth | <input type="checkbox"/> E-Commerce platform & digital presence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership & workforce training | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

9. In order to achieve long-term economic stability and increase economic resilience, please rate the importance of the following challenges:

	Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Of Little Importance	Unimportant
Aging and inadequate infrastructure/services (broadband, water, sewer, roads)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Not enough land and buildings ready for job-creating businesses to locate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of housing, homelessness, workforce housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Wildfires, winds, drought, and other natural disasters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worker and skill shortage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Improve visitor amenities (restaurants, lodging, signage)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ease government regulations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support for entrepreneurs and small businesses	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fill downtown vacancies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grow and diversify the existing visitor market	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Loss of business, industry and tax base	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Environmental issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Please provide any additional comments regarding growth / development in Richland County / your community.

Appendix C

Public Engagement Survey: Results Summary

SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION & CEDS SURVEY

Survey Conducted

December 2024 – January 2025

279 Responses

RICHLAND COUNTY
ECONOMIC
STRATEGY

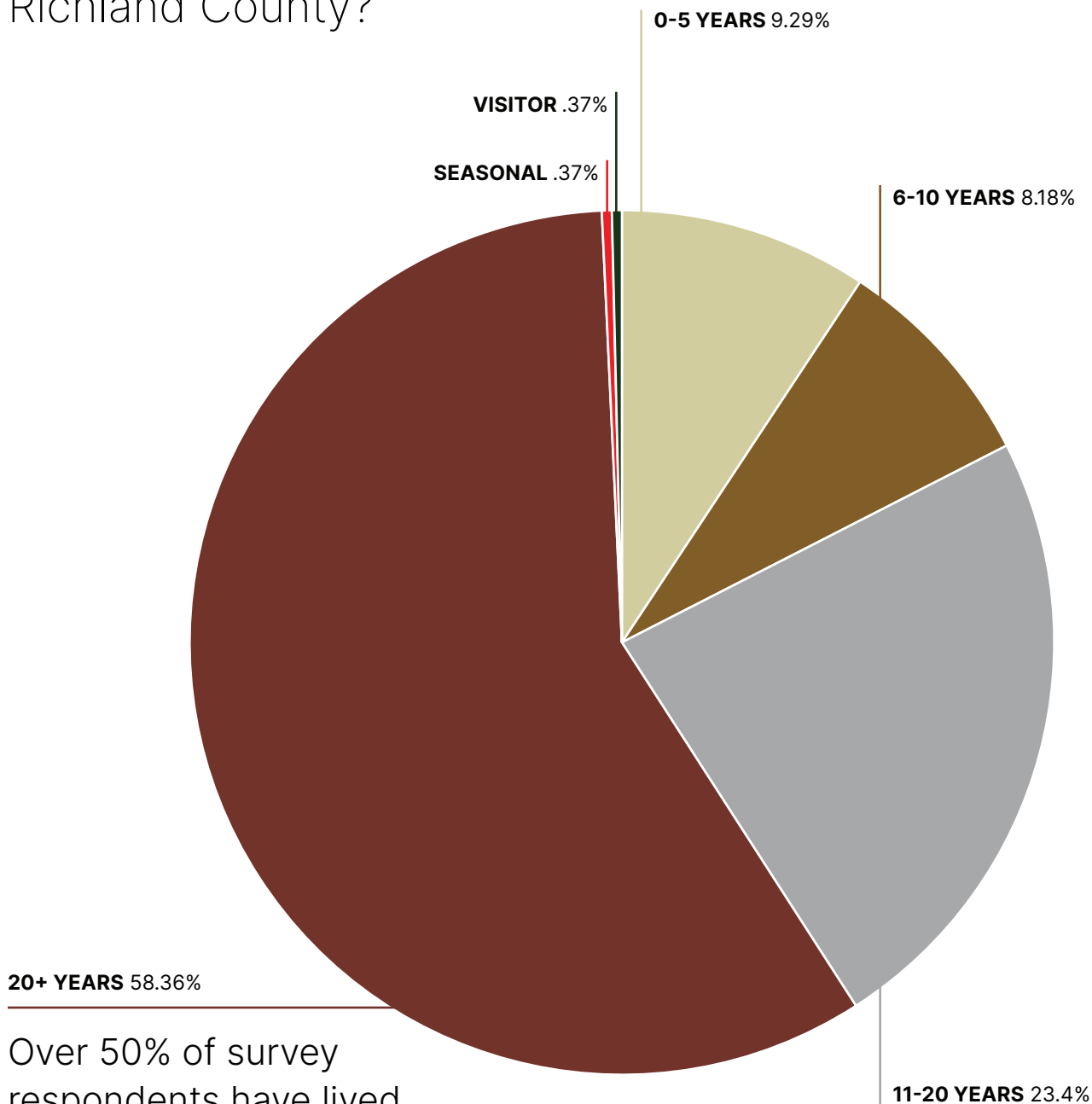


GROWTH. OUR WAY.

richland
redc.
economic development corp

QUESTION 1

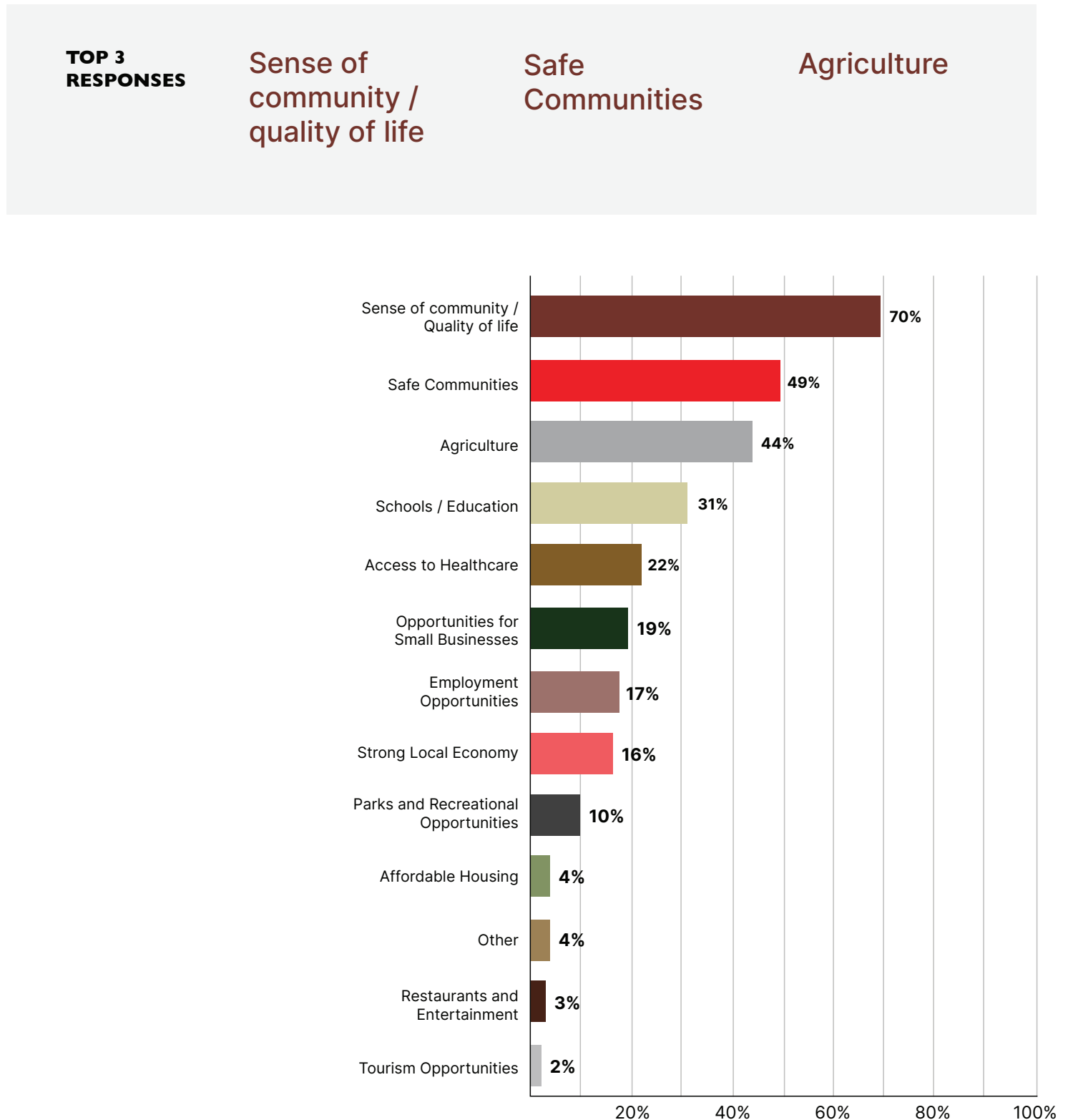
How long have
you resided in
Richland County?



Over 50% of survey
respondents have lived
in Richland County for
20+ years.

QUESTION 2

What do you see as Richland County's **greatest assets**, or what makes it stand out? List your top 3.



QUESTION 3

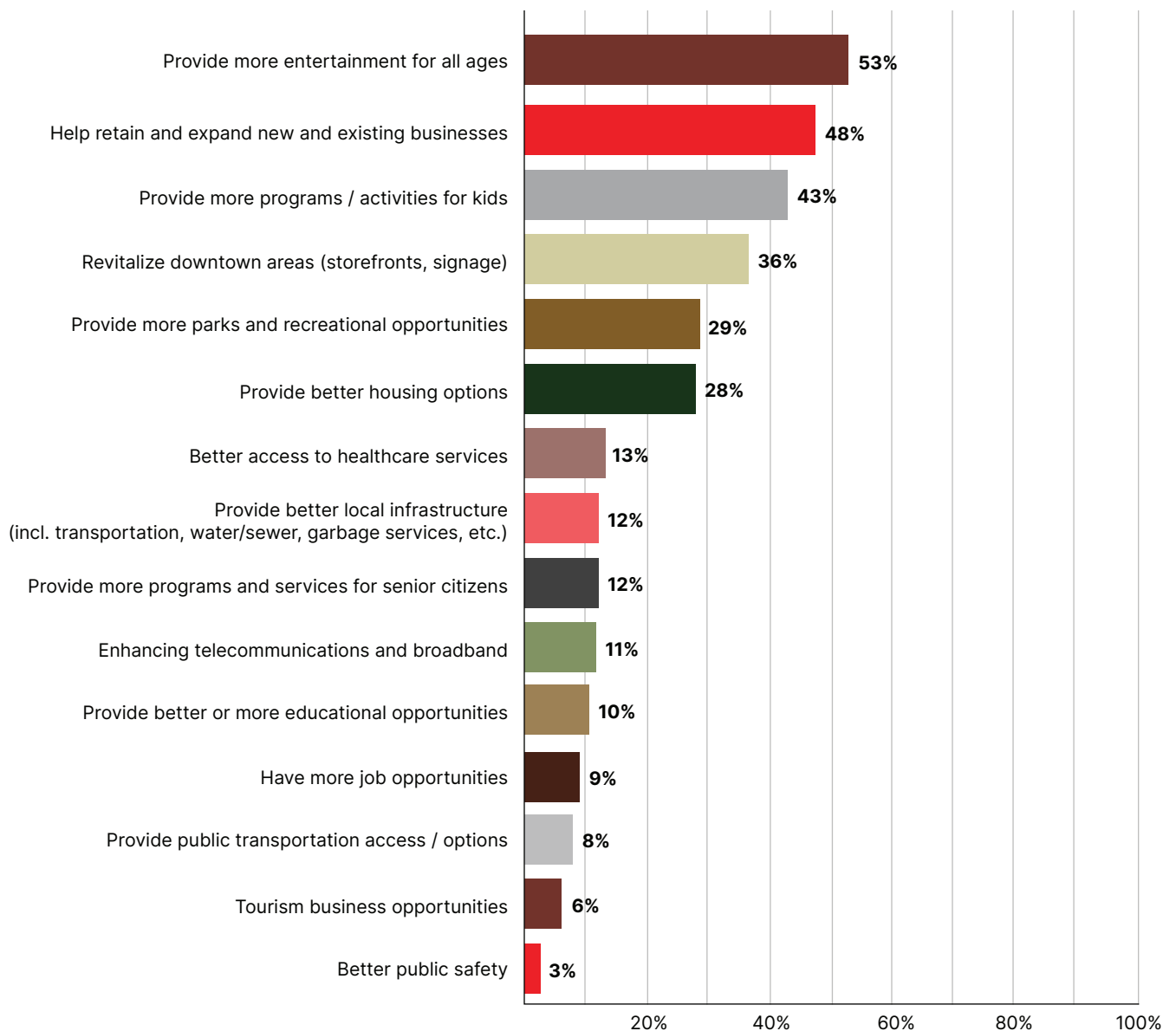
What areas do you see as Richland County's **biggest needs** or areas that Richland County can improve? Pick your top 3.

Over half of respondents see a need for **more entertainment for all ages**.

Programming for kids is specifically requested.

Respondents also identified a need to **support businesses** and downtown areas.

Tourism and public safety are seen as needing the **least improvement**.



QUESTION 4

Which business industries have the most **“growth potential”** in Richland County? Pick your top 3.

TOP 5 RESPONSES

Retail

Value Added
Agriculture

Recreation

Energy

Services Industries

“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

“Grain and commodities storage and transport”

“Plumbing, Electrical, Construction jobs,
provide apprentice program for youth
training or retraining - Job Work center
or Job Corps center”

“Rental/event businesses”

“Mental health services and
counseling, **Education”**

“Big Box Retail”

“Daycare”

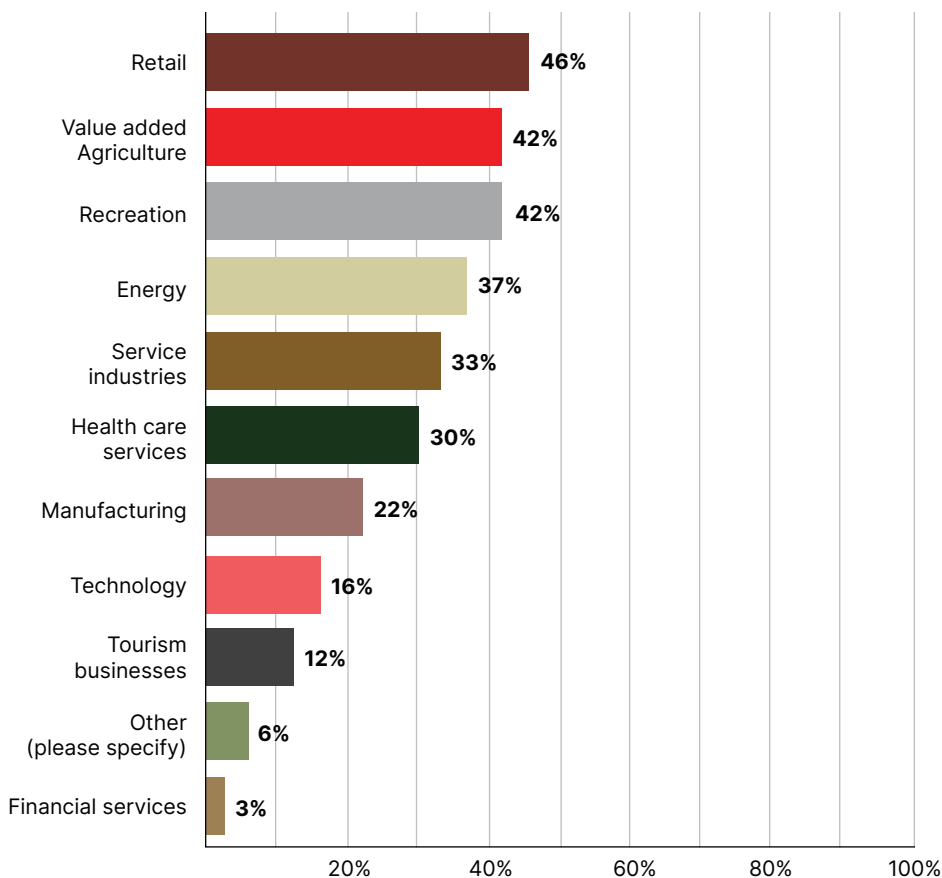
“businesses outside of the direct downtown area”



WHAT IS VALUE ADDED AGRICULTURE?

“Value-added agriculture opportunities... allow producers to capture more of the value they create.”

Montana Department
of Agriculture



QUESTION 5

Based on your top choices from question (#4) above, what **TYPES of business** would you like to see in Richland County? Pick your top 3.

The top three answers were consistent with the previous question, although in a different order.

Respondents would most like to see Entertainment and Activities businesses.

“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

Retail, including:

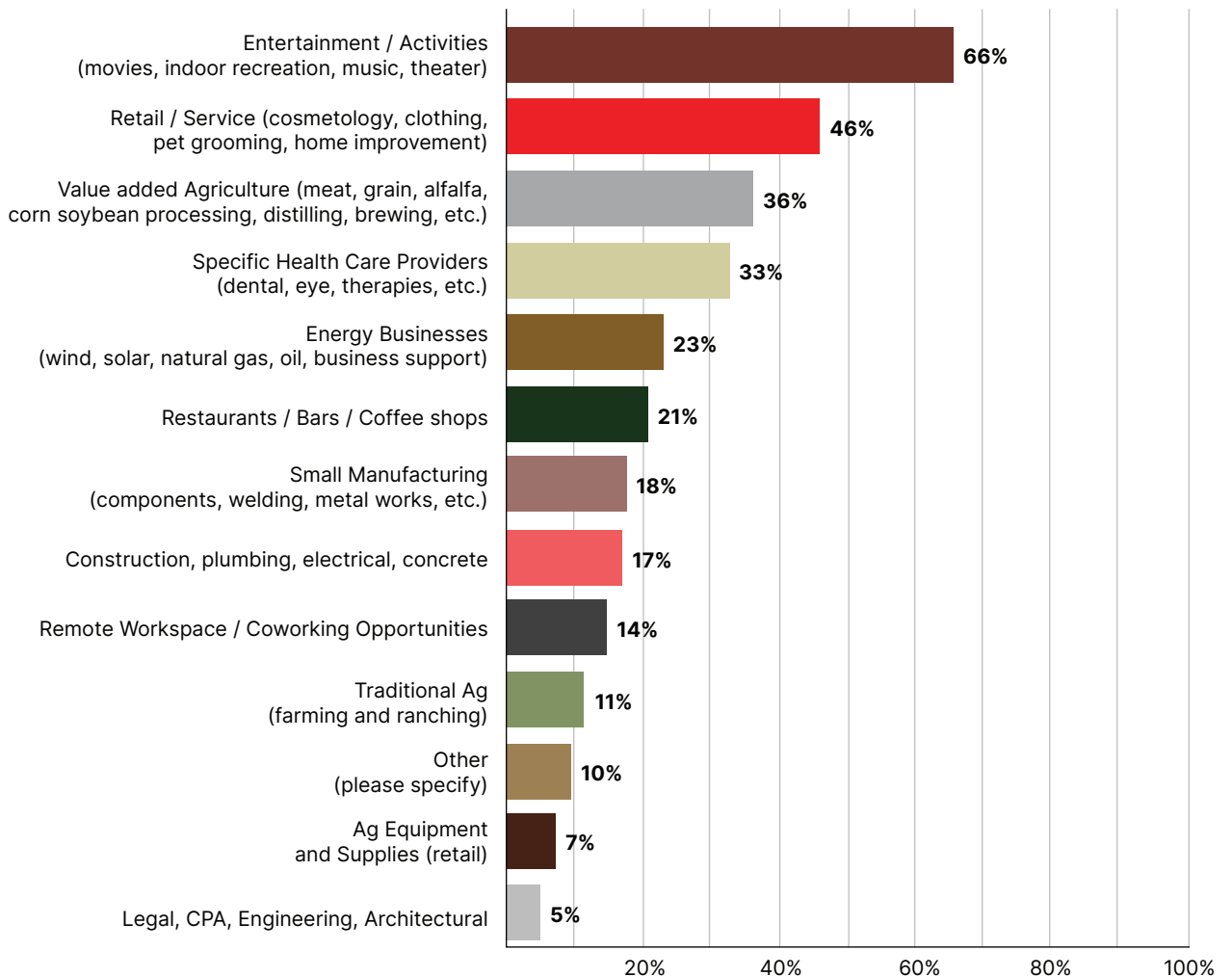
Affordable Clothing
Big Box or Chain Retailers
Everyday Items/Basics

Recreation, including:

Pickleball Courts
Indoor Basketball
Rec Center

“Jobs corps center in partnership with the High School”

“Restaurants with healthier options/ stores with healthy foods”



QUESTION 6

What do you see as some of the **obstacles for new businesses** to open in Richland County?

TOP 3 RESPONSES

Workforce Challenges

Population and/or Location

Lack of community support

"OTHER" RESPONSES INCLUDED

"Housing/Rental Cost"

"Affordable housing for potential employees"

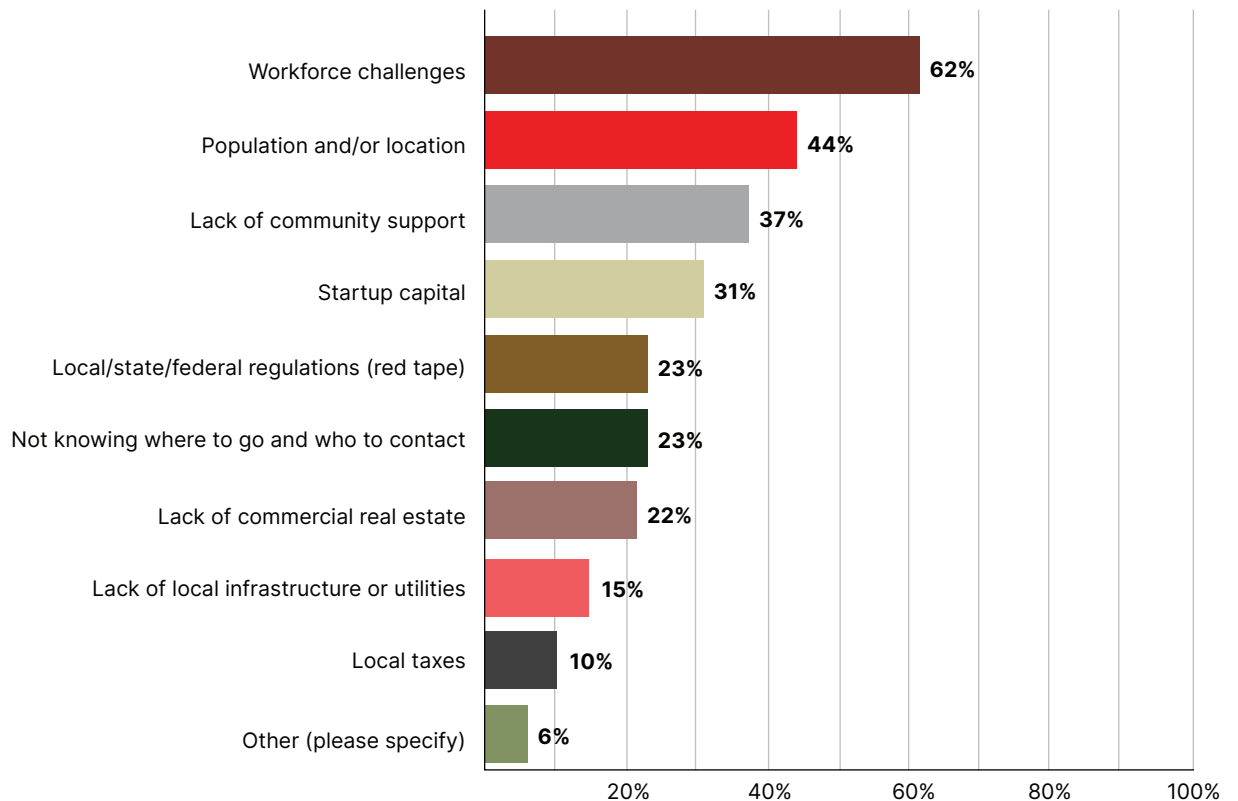
"Cost of overhead"

"Area "cliques" impede growth or obstruct other businesses"

"Lack of local governmental support. Lack of state governmental support."

"The Montana permitting process is difficult and slow."

"...employees want M-TH work schedule like their school kids which makes it difficult for businesses that are open M-Sunday"



QUESTION 7

What **changes** would you like to see in Richland County?

THEMES	SELECTED RESPONSES
Rec Center About 43 responses were specifically asking for a rec center. About 90 responses total mentioned more recreational opportunities of some kind, for people of all ages.	<p>"A community and agencies that work together for a common cause."</p> <p>"A local change in the focus of local government and businesses toward a more diverse economy rather than simply being focused on agriculture and oilfield services."</p> <p>"A full and vibrant downtown!"</p> <p>"More opportunities for youth to stay in their home town."</p> <p>"More activities for all but mostly children. An indoor recreational center would be amazing!"</p> <p>"Being able to attract young families with more quality in our community infrastructure(parks/recreation beyond our excellent hunting and fishing) because we will grow better with young families."</p> <p>"Broader communications about activities, services, events"</p> <p>"More engagement opportunities for young professionals moving to the area"</p> <p>"An organized Volunteer group ready to help the community when needed."</p> <p>"More arts/music culture. More opportunities for kids in areas other than sports (i.e. arts, music, outdoor activities)."</p> <p>"Provide the resources residents need. If we didn't have to go elsewhere for services,healthcare, shopping, etc. there might be more buy-in to our community, and together we can work towards adding value."</p>
Retail About 30 responses mentioned retail shopping. Respondents generally wanted local access to basics such as food and clothing. Some expressed interest in chain stores such as Walmart, while some expressed support for more local businesses, but understood challenges with pricing	<p>"I would love to have a community rec center, affordable groceries, and/or more opportunities to buy affordable clothing."</p> <p>"Another ag processing facility, like Wheat Montana, or some kind of regional food hub. More opportunities for entertainment that doesn't revolve around a bar. Someplace that isn't a dollar store."</p> <p>"Improved shopping for daily items and restaurants. Attractions to draw people in. Us locals ALL need to be more optimistic and welcoming to new possibilities."</p> <p>"More money spent on the overall population of Richland county instead of spending so much money on the fairgrounds for a 4 day event."</p>
Community About 10 respondents voiced the importance of needing community support for economic progress.	<p>"Tackling the challenge of traditional lifestyle of a small community while still showing progress."</p> <p>"Can we open the library on the weekends?"</p>
Commercial Spaces About 9 responses mentioned commercial spaces. Comments included beautifying downtown areas, concerns about high rent, and utilizing existing spaces creatively.	<p>"I would love to see an actual rec center for the kids to be used during all seasons."</p> <p>"A tech services store. Someplace I could take a computer or an iPad to help trouble shoot and get it working again."</p> <p>"More people supporting local stores so we have some. Less on line. With that being said it needs to be affordable so you don't have to go on line"</p>
We have enough of... Respondents mentioned the area has enough bars and coffee shops, and has invested enough in fairgrounds. Other investment areas are desired.	

QUESTION 8

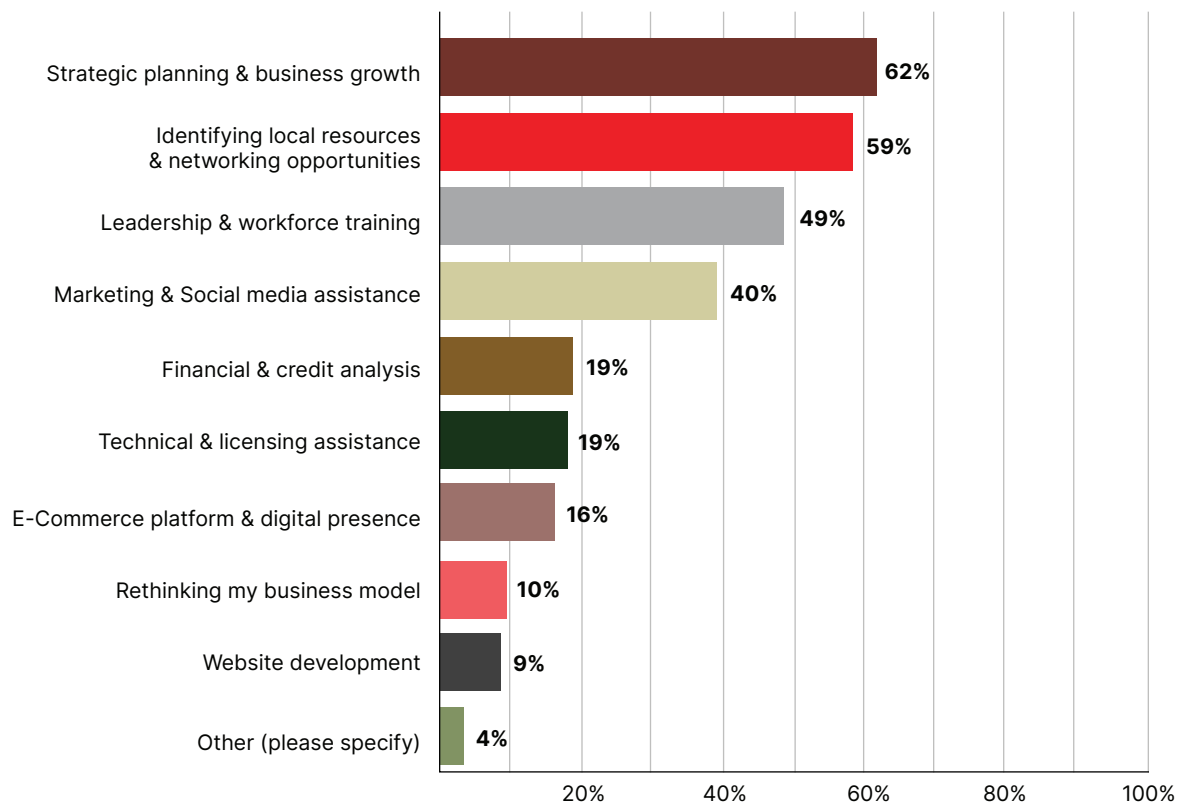
What type of economic **development services** do you believe would help businesses be more successful? Pick your top 3.

Marketing and Social Media assistance was ranked higher than other types of digital presence, such as e-commerce and website development.

“OTHER” RESPONSES INCLUDED

“Help for getting past the first year. Too many things open and close too fast without a financial plan.”

“How and where to find the knowledge regarding the paperwork side of business. Who can help and what do they need? What is a good strategy based on this region’s unique economy.”



QUESTION 9

In order to achieve long-term economic stability and increase economic resilience, please rate the importance of the following challenges:

TOP 3 CHALLENGES RANKED “VERY IMPORTANT” OR “IMPORTANT”

89%

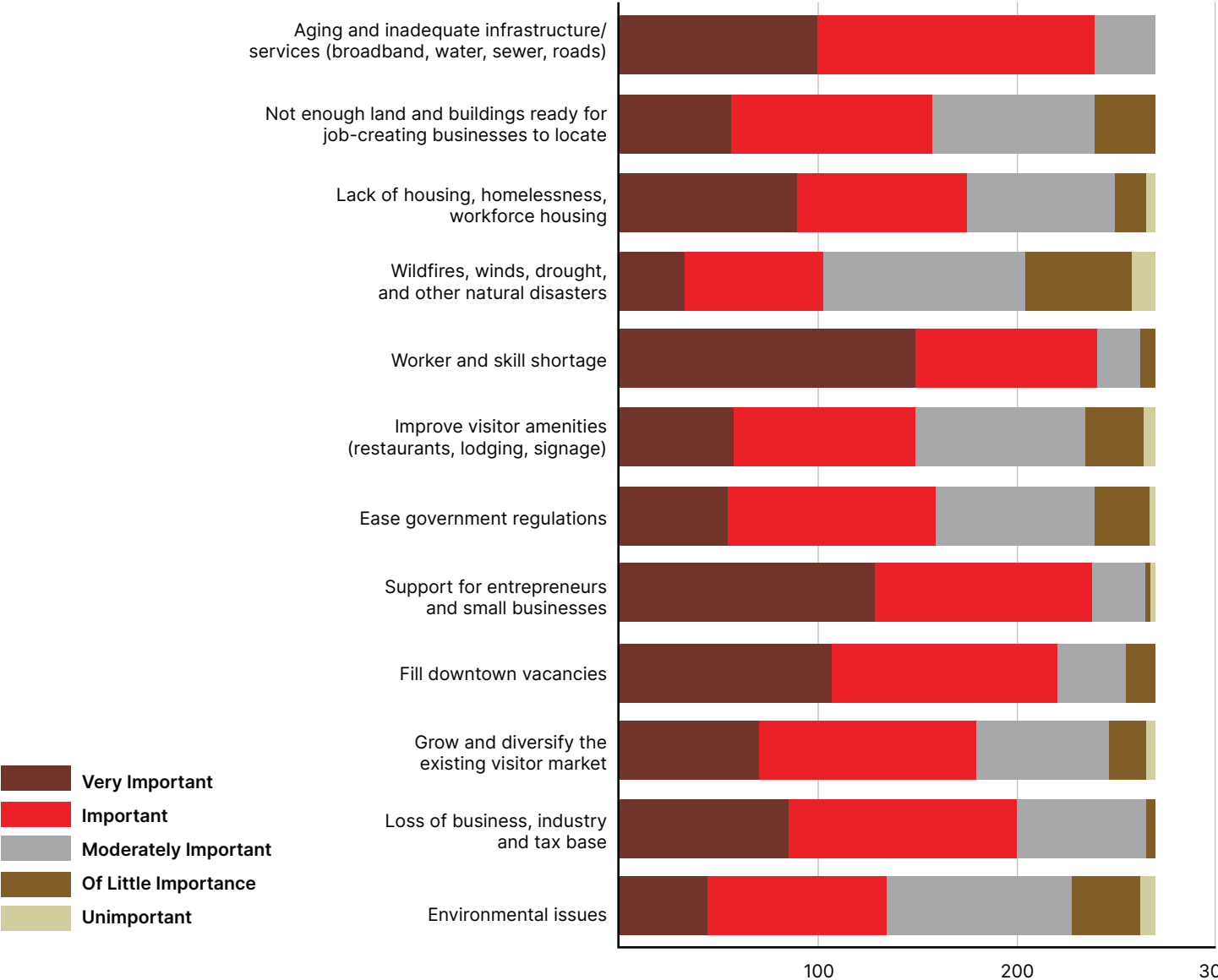
Worker and skill shortage

89%

Aging and inadequate infrastructure/services

89%

Support for entrepreneurs and small businesses



QUESTION 10

Please provide any additional comments regarding growth/development in Richland County/your community.

SELECTED RESPONSES

"The county needs a recreational center!" Being active and healthy is not going to go out of style. We are long, long over due. In the years I've lived here I've completed too many surveys....build and they will come."

"New businesses are struggling and need additional guidance before opening doors"

"Continued work to educate and reinforce the need to **transition businesses**, specifically agriculture operations to the next generation."

"Change is inevitable in a community. **Community resilience** needs to be supported with solid bases of infrastructure, economic development, supporting families/youth, housing and job opportunities. All of this leads to a better quality of life for people wanting to move and live here."

"A community center with an indoor pool would benefit everyone. Curbs and sidewalks need redone. Most are not accessible via wheelchair"

"We need any type of **AG processing plants** to utilize our irrigation farming to high value profitable crops. The loss of Sidney Sugars has extremely hurt our farming community."

"It seems there's an ever present cycle of small businesses, failing due to lack of community support, but this community can't support because **local businesses have to charge so much to be profitable**. Wish there was a way to balance that out."

"Workforce challenges are impacting growth and sustainability"

"Housing and shopping are comments/concerns that come up when people are considering a move to our community for a job opportunity. Typically, they want to know where the nearest super store is... such as WalMart."

"Just **more things for everyone to do. More affordable housing** and more housing options."

"A recreational center is necessary. It would bring jobs, growth, and boost tourism. A boon for the community."

"Attracting younger community members will be important for the future growth of the community. Additionally community participation and involvement from a larger sector of the community is also important."

"Update the downtown area!"

"I appreciate the Chambers recent movement to **plan and grow local events.**"

"Thank you to REDC for the survey. I believe this survey, getting feedback from the community, is a great step in the right direction!"

"We need to find a way to **bring in people to fill out the shortage in workers** in every single industry in our communities. Skilled and unskilled."

"Be more **welcoming and inviting** to outsiders trying to come in."

"We really need a rec center!"

Jobs! Keep youth out of trouble. Income from surrounding areas would pour in as people spend dollars everywhere else when they come to the rec center. Our youth would be more competitive in sports year-round. Senior citizens would also utilize this. Keep people home from Williston and Watford. High school kids would be great employees here too. Work study? Opportunities for all."

"I believe that our community would benefit having a **rec center** of some sort for the children in our community. It would benefit all ages from the kiddos going to play or hang out to adults working there or even older kids. We have nothing to really enjoy in our community right now during the winter (which is over half the year in our area)."

"The existing local companies are not highly projected at job service, it is word of mouth. In order to **increase employment**, all avenues such as social media, local job fairs, and a "social worker" type position needs to be in place. To sustain small businesses, we need employees, and it needs to be "blasted" when a position needs to be filled, not JUST job service or JUST Facebook."

"We in Fairview has seen most of Richland county money go to sidney..need to **bring it to more of outlining communities**"

"More affordable housing and more restaurants."