

Forward Amherst

2022 Strategic Plan Update



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
2016 Strategic Plan Accomplishments.....	4
2022 Strategic Plan Update	7
Implementation Guide.....	17
Appendix A: SWOT Analysis	18
Appendix B: Economic & Demographic Profile	23
Appendix C: Business Survey Results.....	34
Study Sponsor and Consultant	46

Executive Summary

Forward Amherst builds upon the vision established in 2016 during the **One Amherst** strategic planning process. The Amherst County Board of Supervisors invested in that vision by allocating one penny of the tax rate to implement the plan. After five years of diligent, focused hard work by the Economic Development Authority and its partners, significant advancements have been made in marketing Amherst County as a business location; developing sites for business expansions; preparing the workforce for local job opportunities; supporting small business; and developing leaders for the future.

The 2016 economic development strategic planning effort was precipitated by the announced closures of the Central Virginia Training Center (CVTC) and Sweet Briar College, although the latter successfully rebounded and abandoned closure plans. Together, these two institutions made up approximately 25% of employment in Amherst County. The county was at a critical juncture. When this update to the strategic plan was launched in 2020, Amherst County was in another type of crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic. The EDA led the county's effort to support small businesses during the pandemic by administering grant programs, totaling almost \$1.8 million, and being the go-to source for business information. The Amherst County economy has shown much resiliency over the last five years, enduring significant job losses and impacts to small businesses.

The update to the 2016 strategic plan included updating economic and demographic data, leadership engagement, updating the SWOT Analysis, revisiting target industry sectors, and reviewing the EDA's key initiatives. The economic profile of the county has improved. Amherst County is making progress in educational attainment, employment, and lower unemployment. Most of the changes to the SWOT analysis have been additions to strengths and opportunities and a reduction in weaknesses and threats. One example is the EDA's concerted effort to improve business friendliness, which addressed a key weakness identified in 2016.

In this update to the economic development plan, three of the five initiatives of the EDA were unchanged. The development of businesses, sites, and workforce is essential to a multi-pronged economic development strategy. The branding initiative was broadened to internal and external marketing and communications since the branding initiative was completed. Allied Initiatives encompasses a wide range of projects that the EDA supports, such as the redevelopment of CVTC.

2022 Initiatives

- ⦿ Space for Businesses to Grow
- ⦿ Business Start-up, Retention, and Expansion
- ⦿ Education and Workforce Development
- ⦿ Marketing and Communications
- ⦿ Allied Initiatives

As with the 2016 strategic plan, *Forward Amherst* is designed to be implemented over three to five years. We include timelines, cost, benefit, and measurements for action steps. Most tasks in economic development are dependent upon partner support and funding; thus, the timeline may stretch longer than expected. They are also dependent upon the capacity of the EDA, which has a small staff. It is recommended that EDA capacity be expanded to support implementation of the strategic plan.

We commend the Amherst County Board of Supervisors for increasing funding to the EDA in FY2017 to implement projects in the *One Amherst* plan, and for continuing that funding to support this strategic plan update. The supervisors also allocated federal pandemic relief funds to support broadband expansion and small businesses – two very important investments for economic development.

The EDA of Amherst County has proven its ability to make significant gains in economic development, accomplish a program of work, and lead the business community through the pandemic-induced recession. With continued support from the county and partners, the EDA is poised to continue its track record of success.

2016 Strategic Plan Accomplishments

One Amherst

The EDA accomplished all the 2016 strategic plan action steps that had a defined completion date and remained relevant. Substantial advances in marketing, product development, workforce development, small business support, and leadership development were made over the last five years. A few action steps were tabled or eliminated after early exploration did not advance the concept, such as the unavailability or cost of land for development. The EDA continues to work on ongoing projects such as developing a multi-tenant building to support small business growth. The investment Amherst County made in the 2016 strategic plan has led to more jobs, more taxable investment, enhanced business climate, and stronger business partnerships.

Initiative 1: Brand Amherst County

Goal: Create a brand that will connect people and companies to Amherst County.

✓*Strategy: Engage the community and stakeholders in a branding process that will result in a brand that can be used not only by the EDA but also by the county, town, and allies such as education and the arts*

The EDA engaged a marketing and branding firm to lead the development of a new Amherst County brand. The branding process was completed in 2018. Since that time, the EDA and partners (examples below) have implemented the brand “Perfect Slice of Virginia.” Banners exhibiting the brand are in key areas.



Initiative 2: Create Space for Businesses to Grow

Goal: Create first-class business sites and buildings to attract new and retain existing businesses.

✓*Strategy 1: Complete due diligence in Amelon Commerce Center and the Hermle Site (Zane Snead Industrial Park)*

✓*Strategy 2: Invest in telecommunications*

X *Strategy 3: Create a unique business park development that leverages Sweet Briar College.*

- *Strategy 4: Invest in Highway 210*
- *Strategy 6: Redevelopment of CVTC*
- *Strategy 7: Identify Future Development Properties*

The EDA completed due diligence in Amelon Commerce Center and Zane Snead Industrial Park and graded a pad-ready site in Amelon Commerce Center. The strategy to partner with Sweet Briar College on a business park was not advanced when the college sold property to the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. The Hwy 210 corridor remains a focus for development and is identified as such in the county's land use plan. The county has continued to explore ways to expand broadband service over the last five years. Broadband service was extended to all schools in the county. Through CARES and ARP funding, the county will ensure every citizen has access to broadband. In 2018, the EDA facilitated the redevelopment of Winton Country Club and was the driving force behind the Phelps School Road redevelopment project.

Initiative 3: Education and Workforce Development

Goal: Create a pipeline of talent.

- *Strategy: Develop a state-of-the-art workforce training system*

The workforce training initiative is being led by a regional workforce group that includes the EDA. The group reviewed best practices, including the West Alabama Works program. The entire initiative was impacted by the pandemic. The regional group is now seeking funding to establish a CTE (career and technical education) regional academy at Central Virginia Community College. The EDA and Amherst County Schools developed a partnership that laid the foundation for future internships, but the program was interrupted by the pandemic.

Initiative 4: Small Businesses and Entrepreneur Development

Goal 1: Develop the talent and culture of entrepreneurship needed for sustained economic growth.

- *Strategy: Develop an Incubator Facility*

Goal 2: Make Amherst County More Business Friendly

✓*Strategy 1: Recommend Policy Changes to the County*

✓*Strategy 2: Support Small Business Through Incentives*

The incubator concept has transitioned to the development of a multi-tenant facility that will house several small businesses. This project is pending approval, to include a \$3 million grant from the U.S.

Economic Development Administration. Goal 2, a two-year, intensive project, was added in 2018. The EDA completed a business friendliness assessment, reviewed business-related fees, analyzed small business incentives, and made recommendations to the county to improve the business climate. The results have been an improvement in how business friendly the county is viewed as evidenced in the survey conducted for the strategic plan update. Outside of strategic plan initiatives, the EDA led the county's effort to support small businesses during the pandemic by administering grant programs, totaling almost \$1.8 million, and being the go-to source for business information.

Initiative 5: Leadership Development

Goal 1: Develop new leadership talent that will impact the public and private sectors of Amherst County.

✓*Strategy: Launch Leadership Amherst - a leadership development program.*

Goal 2: Structure for Success

X *Strategy: Merge the economic development efforts of the town and county*

The EDA launched Leadership Amherst in 2017. The program got off to a successful start before being paused due to the pandemic. Exploration of merging the Town of Amherst IDA and Amherst County EDA did not result in steps to move forward as the IDA did not want to merge; therefore, Goal 2 was not advanced.

2022 Strategic Plan Update

The 2022 strategic plan update advances the EDA's work in business recruitment, retention and development, product development, marketing, and allied initiatives. The update aligns with the organization's mission "to promote economic development policies and practices that help retain the county's existing businesses and employment base; facilitate the growth of existing commercial and industrial enterprises; and attract new businesses and employment opportunities." As most of the 2016 action steps were completed, the updated plan provides a road map for next steps in initiatives and recommends new action steps.

2022 Initiatives

Space for Businesses to Grow

All companies, new, expanding, or start-up, need space. Product development is a critical function of economic development. Forward-thinking, planning, and previous investments in sites has resulted in new company locations and the retention of expanding businesses.

Business Start-up, Retention, and Expansion

Small business is the cornerstone of the Amherst County economy. Small businesses grow locally and reinvest in the community. The EDA facilitates business climate enhancements, space development, and resource partner connections to help small business.

Education and Workforce Development

All businesses need a pipeline of talent. Economic development organizations are an important partner of the education and workforce development system. The EDA plays the role of liaison, connecting business and education.

Marketing and Communications

Marketing is a core function of an economic development program. Organizations market externally to attract new business and internally to retain and grow existing businesses. The EDA invested in a new brand that can be further leverage and deployed.

Allied Initiatives

The EDA is a sought-after partner for many initiatives that support economic development because of its network and expertise. The redevelopment of the Central Virginia Training Center and development of Madison Heights are example partner initiatives that align with the EDA's mission and program of work.

Initiative 1: Space for Businesses to Grow

Goal: Create first-class business sites and buildings to attract new and retain existing businesses.

Strategy 1: Identify, research, and create development plans for a new business park development.

Action Steps:

- Engage a consultant to conduct a site identification study. The study should result in an inventory of potential industrial sites/parks, general assessments of developability, ranking of sites/parks, and recommendations for next steps.
 - Encourage the consultant to include a review of:
 - M-1 zoned land.
 - Land adjacent to existing industrial parks and areas. This maximizes infrastructure and transportation.
 - Infill development opportunities even if the site is small. This also maximizes infrastructure and transportation.
 - Existing industries with unused land. Some companies own more land than they will need for future expansion.
 - Vacant and under-utilized buildings that could be razed or redeveloped.
- Based on the site identification study, option or form a partnership with the landowner(s) to conduct due diligence assessments (phase 1, geotech, wetlands identification, etc.). If the property remains in private ownership, some communities structure the investment in due diligence as a loan repayable when the property is sold.
- If assessments are positive, move on to develop a conceptual site plan and development cost estimates.
- If site planning results in a positive development plan, enter into a long-term option agreement, a partnership with the landowner, or purchase the property.
- Seek to leverage Virginia's Business Ready Sites Program for qualification and grant funding.
- Develop a conceptual building, complete with an electronic rendering that can be used on the website.
- Seek a private partner to develop a spec building in the new business park development. A public-private partnership could include the EDA funding a feasibility study, grading, and organizing a bank consortium for financing.

Strategy 2: Identify and inventory smaller, stand-alone sites and buildings with redevelopment potential.

Action Steps:

- Contract with a third-party to engage area realtors in a process to create an inventory of smaller, stand-alone industrial sites. These sites can be marketed to small business and start-ups. The inventory should focus on infill and redevelopment opportunities where infrastructure already exists.
- Include in the inventory vacant and under-utilized buildings that can be repurposed.

Strategy 3: Support infrastructure investments aligned with product development goals.

Action Steps:

- Advocate for infrastructure in areas designated for industrial and commercial development in the land use plan to develop sites (water, sewer, roads, broadband).

- Continue to support broadband development across the county.
- Advocate for the county to invest in amenities, streetscape, recreation facilities, and community development that will support attracting new residents and businesses.

Strategy 4: Invest in Highway 210.

Action Steps:

- Make the Highway 210 corridor a priority development area in the comprehensive land use plan, connecting the bypass area and CVTC with mixed-used development.
- Continue to advocate for infrastructure investments in the corridor.
- Include this area in CVTC redevelopment planning.

Cost	Benefit	Measurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Site identification study = \$20,000 - \$40,000 •Option = unknown •Due diligence = \$35,000 for a 100 acre site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Sites and buildings to attract more businesses to Amherst County and retain existing businesses •Expanded infrastructure to encourage more development in areas designated by the county 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •RFIs, Prospect Visits, Projects •Business locations, expansions •Increased access to utilities and usage

Initiative 2: Business Startup, Retention, and Expansion

Goal 1: Retain and expand existing businesses.

Strategy: Continue a proactive business retention and expansion program.

Action Steps:

- Continue to regularly meet with Amherst County's largest employers, at-risk companies, gazelles (companies poised for fast growth), and target sectors to identify hurdles the EDA can help overcome.
- Conduct an annual survey of business needs and satisfaction to shape the BRE program.
- Continue to leverage the business intelligence the Regional Alliance and workforce development board gathers on skills in demand and share with education partners.
- Continue with existing business communications:
 - Companies appreciated the increase in communication during the pandemic to help them stay on top of the latest information. Continue with an as-needed e-newsletter on helpful topics. Guest writers could include the Lynchburg Regional Alliance and VEDP.
 - Expand website information for existing businesses. Add a list of resource partners that help expanding and small businesses (e.g., SBDC).
- Continue existing business roundtables for networking and information sharing.
- Communicate the results of the regional wage and benefits survey to help companies with recruiting and retaining talent.
- Repeat the work ethics survey every few years to have current data to promote the local workforce and to identify trends. This could be coupled every few years with the annual survey of needs and satisfaction mentioned above.

Goal 2: Grow small businesses and encourage entrepreneur development.

Strategy 1: Launch the Amelon Commerce Center Multi-Tenant Building.

Action Steps:

- Complete the grant process for funding.
- Launch marketing of the building both to attract tenants and to raise awareness of Amherst County as a business location.
 - Develop a one-page e-flyer.
 - Market through the Small Business Development Center, regional chambers, Central Virginia Community College, and other agencies connected to small business and entrepreneurs.
- Complete construction. Outsource construction management to a third-party.
- Engage tenants in the EDA's existing business retention and expansion program.

Strategy 2: Expand services and support to small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Action Steps:

- Promote the Business Starter Kit on the website, on social media, and with partners who engage with small business and entrepreneurs.
- Continue to support improving the business climate for small businesses.
- Advocate for a regional revolving loan program to aid Amherst County business with financing. Some grant programs have been seeded by a USDA Rural Development grant or through local investors. Check out this invest local program in Asheville, NC:
<http://www.mountainbizworks.org/local-investing-asheville-wnc/>.

- Continue to support and sponsor small business training events organized by partners such as the Small Business Development Center.
- Advocate for a county tourism position and county tourism development program that will foster tourism-related small business development and leverage Virginia Tourism. A tourism department could:
 - Develop a comprehensive marketing plan that can be leveraged by the EDA.
 - Lead coordination and collaboration with tourism assets.
 - Advocate for tourism destination development.
- Continue to support the development of a regional agriculture/training center (in partnership with Nelson County) which will provide support to ag-related businesses.
- Advocate for public investment in amenities that will support the development of recreation-related small businesses (boat launch, greenways, trails, camping, etc.).

Cost	Benefit	Measurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Marketing multi-tenant building = \$2,500 •Sponsor small business training events = \$100/event •Existing business roundtables = \$1,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •New business start-ups, growing small businesses •Retention of growing small businesses •Increased awareness of Amherst County as an entrepreneurial community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •New business starts •Small business growth •Training program participation

Initiative 3: Education and Workforce Development

Goal 1: Support the development of a pipeline of talent.

Strategy 1: Support the development of a state-of-the-art workforce training system.

Action Steps:

- Support the restarting of the IT internship program that is a partnership between Amherst County High School, area IT businesses, and the EDA. If successful with the IT industry as a pilot, expand the program to other business sectors.
- Investigate the Giles County summer work experience program as a best practice. Giles County pays a portion of the student's wages at approved businesses. The EDA could seek grant or sponsorship funding for the program.
- Co-sponsor with chamber/business partners marketing content that will promote local careers. The Lynchburg Regional Business Alliance is producing some videos that may be leveraged. Some best practices:
 - Career videos: Made in Henderson County <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYRHwDmpb4Q&t=32s>
 - Web tools to showcase careers: Edge Factor <https://edgefactor.com/V5/pages/Welcome.aspx>
 - Social media campaigns: Go Bold Careers <https://www.facebook.com/GoBoldNC/>
- Continue to support the development of a regional CTE academy at CVCC and a regional agriculture/training center in partnership with Nelson County.
- Continue to seek out best practices in business and education partnerships that can be facilitated by the EDA.

Strategy 2: Integrate talent attraction and development opportunities in the marketing strategy.

Action Steps:

- Promote apprenticeship and internship opportunities on social media and the website.
- Add video success stories to the website that highlight career opportunities in Amherst County and entrepreneurs.
- Add "Live Here, Play Here" information to the website (referenced above).
- On social media, profile people who have moved to Amherst County to work, retire, telework, start a business, etc.
- Develop a social media "Come Home Campaign" for Amherst County high school graduates and graduates of Sweet Briar College. The campaign can focus on career opportunities and entrepreneurship. Profile people who came home to Amherst County.

Goal 2: Develop leaders for the future.

Strategy 1: Continue leadership development support.

Action Steps:

- Continue Leadership Amherst program to develop future leaders for public service and business.
- Increase marketing and promotion of the program to ensure robust attendance. Encourage partners to promote the program.
- Make alumni aware of volunteer leadership opportunities with the EDA, Amherst County, and partners. This could be through social media or e-communications.

- Encourage alumni to start a network that will bring the group together for events and community projects. This could be in-person as well as online groups (e.g., LinkedIn discussion group).
- Tap Sweet Briar College professors to assist with programming/special programs for Leadership Amherst.

Cost	Benefit	Measurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summer work experience program = Example: fund up to \$1,000 of student wages for 25 students = \$25,000 • Co-sponsored careers marketing = \$2,500+ • Additional videos for website = \$2,500 • Leadership Amherst = \$11,000 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased awareness of local careers to encourage more people to work local • Awareness of training opportunities leading to career pathways • Former Amherst County residents returning to the county 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student participation • Views, likes, shares of videos

Initiative 4: Marketing and Communications

Goal: Develop and implement internal and external marketing strategies.

Strategy 1: Enhanced external business recruitment marketing strategy.

Action Steps:

- Website enhancements:
 - Add existing business testimonials and video testimonials to the website.
 - Continue to add business profiles and business/entrepreneur stories to the website. See the Humans of Blacksburg social media campaign. <https://stepintoblacksburg.org/our-community/humans-of-blacksburg/#:~:text=Humans%20of%20Blacksburg%20is%20a,make%20Blacksburg%20feel%20like%20home>.
 - Transition content to infographics to provide a focus on key competitive advantages.
 - Talent is the number one concern of all new and expanding companies. Currently, workforce information is on the last tab under Grow Your Business. Consider spotlighting talent by making it a major menu choice. About the EDA and Contact Us could be moved to the top as smaller menu options. See the Lynchburg Alliance website as an example of small menu buttons at the top. <https://www.lynchburgregion.org/>
 - Since most companies choose Amherst County because of a personal connection, consider adding a “Live Here, Play Here” menu and subsequent page that showcases quality of life information such as recreation, health care, cost of living, education assets, etc.
- Invest in a photography library for Amherst County. Every community needs quality photography for websites, marketing materials, public relations, and events.
- Explore a cooperative advertising program with local businesses.
 - This is an example from Danville, VA, during the pandemic. <https://www.discoverdanville.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/MEMG-Description.pdf>
- When a new business park is in the planning phase, or the new multi-tenant building is under construction, host a visit of VEDP staff. Other counties have reported an increase in positive perceptions after VEDP staff have visited the economic development assets of the community.
- Participate in VEDP marketing and recruitment events in Amherst County’s target sectors.
- Social media is used for both internal communications and external marketing. Platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter are good for external marketing. Create an EDA company page on LinkedIn. Some content developed for Facebook can be shared on the LinkedIn company page.

Strategy 2: Internal marketing and communications strategy targeted to existing businesses and stakeholders.

Action Steps:

- Continue to seek agreements with allies to use the brand.
- Share the strategic plan with partners such as Amherst County, Town of Amherst, Amherst IDA, Amherst County Chamber of Commerce, and others.
- Publish an annual report of the EDA’s accomplishments and program of work. Use the annual report to communicate with stakeholders on the EDA’s progress toward accomplishing goals.
- Expand social media presence.
 - Leverage the youth representative to the EDA to publish a few TikToks a year.
- Make regular update presentations to the County and annual updates to partners such as the Town of Amherst, chamber, etc.

Cost	Benefit	Measurement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Website updates = \$5,000 initial updates and \$2,000 a year •Co-op advertising program = \$1,000 a year •VEDP Amherst County event = \$1,500 •VEDP marketing events = \$5,000+ a year •Increased social media = \$5,000-\$10,000 if contracted •Annual report = \$4,000+ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •More businesses locating to and expanding in Amherst County •Increased awareness of Amherst County as a choice business location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •RFIs, Prospect Visits, Projects •Web activity •Social media likes/shares

Initiative 5: Allied Initiatives

Goal: Increase Support for Projects Aligned with the Strategic Plan.

Strategy 1: Support Madison Heights development initiatives.

Action Steps:

- Work with Madison Heights Business 29 Beautification Committee to jointly support Hwy 29 Business beautification programs such as wayfinding and streetscape and the master plan.
- Support public investment in Madison Heights to provide more government services, community amenities, and recreation facilities. These could be concentrated in a “town center” type of development. Harrisburg, NC, developed a town center similar to this concept.
- Support river development for tourism, residential, and commercial development.

Strategy 2: Support ally economic development initiatives (CVTC, recreation/tourism destinations, etc.).

Action Steps:

- Continue to support the redevelopment of CVTC and take on local leadership roles in related projects that align with the EDA’s mission and strategic plan.
- Advocate for Amherst County to create a tourism department with a robust tourism development plan and funding to implement.
- Support agriculture and ag-related businesses through regional efforts such as the current one to develop an ag-related training center.

Cost	Benefit	Measurement
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More public servant leaders• Increase in business development in Madison Heights• Advances in CVTC redevelopment• Increase in tourism economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leadership Amherst participants• New development in Madison Heights• Advancements in CVTC redevelopment• Increase in tourism

Implementation Guide

Forward Amherst is designed to be implemented over three to five years. Some tasks, such as website enhancements, can be completed in year one; however, most action steps, such as business park development, take years. The Amherst EDA worked diligently over the last five years to accomplish the 2016 strategic plan. The organization has the expertise and leadership to successfully accomplish the goals in this strategic plan. We acknowledge the support the EDA has from the Amherst County Board of Supervisors through their financial and general support. Without the Supervisors and wider county leadership working together, the EDA would not be able to fulfill its mission.

2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025+
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Website updates•Increase social media•Annual report (each year)•Site identification study•IT internship program•Pre-development of multi-tenant building, if funded•Launch annual business survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Due diligence of new business park•Video stories•Market multi-tenant building (ongoing)•Small site/building inventory•Photo library•Reactivate Leadership Amherst	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Co-op advertising program•Begin developing new business park•VEDP visit•Summer work experience program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Come Home campaign•Career marketing support•Spec building (private)

Staff Resources Needed for Implementation

The most important resource for implementation is people power. Much of economic development is the time-consuming task of forming partnerships and facilitating projects. Since the 2016 strategic plan was launched, the EDA added one staff person but lost a part-time contractor. We recommend the EDA expand staff capacity. This could be accomplished by adding another part-time person or contractors (e.g., a contractor for social media). We recommend a portion of the EDA's budget be devoted to expanding staff capacity. Without adequate staff, meeting the timelines for the strategic plan is unrealistic.

Appendix A: SWOT Analysis

Amherst County's core strengths to attract business, hurdles for economic growth, opportunities for future development, and threats identified in the 2016 strategic plan remain valid in 2021. Even though a lot feels different in 2021 due to the global pandemic, the foundations of the economic development strategy are solid.

Most of the changes to the SWOT have been additions to strengths and opportunities and fewer weaknesses and threats. The EDA's concerted effort to improve business friendliness addressed a key weakness identified in 2016. Leaders across the county built consensus around economic development priorities and the need for sustainable growth; thereby reducing the weakness of a low level of leadership support. New leadership in the public school system is addressing many of the education weaknesses. Items that remain at the forefront are workforce training and education, quality job creation, youth retention, amenities, developing tourism, and long-term strategic investments in areas of the county positioned for growth like Madison Heights.

The SWOT was validated in a work session with the EDA board, during interviews with leaders and stakeholders, and through research.

Summary

Strengths

- Quality of Life
- Natural Resources
- Sweet Briar College
- Business-land, industry, low cost
- New development projects
- Location
- Workforce
- Education
- Transportation
- Government-EDA
- Virginia Center for the Creative Arts
- Infrastructure-low cost

Weaknesses

- County Government-business climate
- Business-well-paying jobs, cost of water and sewer utilities
- Education-low attainment
- Quality of Life-amenities, appearance
- Telecommunications-broadband
- Workforce-skills, youth retention
- Community Development in Madison Heights
- Marketing-brand implementation
- Tourism destinations
- Recreation facilities
- Transportation-interstate
- Location-rural, access

Opportunities

- Business-multi-tenant building, recruitment, corridor development
- Tourism-lodging
- Education-workforce/CTE training
- Small Businesses-start-ups
- Central Virginia Training Center redevelopment
- Telecommunications
- Sweet Briar College engagement
- Quality of Life-housing, health care
- Downtown Development
- Cultural Arts
- Recreation destinations
- Infrastructure
- Leadership-champions

Threats

- Lack of resources
- Business stagnation
- Education-low attainment
- Quality of Life-loss of population
- Government-service authority
- Workforce-skilled labor
- Tourism-lack of destinations, lodging
- Perception-internal and external
- Potential impact on natural resources

Strengths

- Quality of Life
 - Friendliness of the people
 - Low cost of living
 - Arts
 - Festivals
 - Safe community
 - Housing prices
- Natural Resources
 - James River
 - Agriculture
 - Blue Ridge Mountains
 - Outdoor recreation
 - National Forest
- Sweet Briar College
- Business
 - Low cost of doing business
 - Amelon Commerce Center
 - Land available for business development
 - Independent business owners
 - Large industry like Glad and Grief
 - Small business base
- Development projects
 - Madison Heights town center
 - Waukeshaw development
 - Winton Country Club development
 - Phelps School Road development
 - Mill redevelopment
- Location
 - Near Lynchburg and Charlottesville
 - Proximity to D.C. and Richmond
 - Proximity to Nelson County tourism destinations
- Workforce
 - Available workers
 - Strong work ethic
- Education
 - Public schools, proactive superintendent
 - Training opportunities at Central Virginia Community College
- Transportation
 - Hwy 29 Bypass
 - Intersection of Highways 60 and 29
 - Intersection of Highways 130 and 210
- Government
 - Economic Development Authority is a guiding presence
 - Stable tax base
- Virginia Center for the Creative Arts
- Infrastructure
 - Low ongoing cost of utilities
- Monacan Tribe recognition

Weaknesses

- Government
 - Improving business climate, but barriers remain
 - Town, county politics
- Business
 - Well-paying jobs
 - Cost of utilities, hook-up fees
 - Lack of incentives supporting existing and small businesses
 - Local and state regulations – DEQ, VDOT
 - Loss of Central Virginia Training Center, redevelopment uncertainty
- Education
 - Lack of investment
 - 19% with less than high school diploma
- Quality of Life
 - Lack of retail, entertainment, and cultural amenities
 - Appearance
 - Housing options
 - Aging community
- Telecommunications
 - High-speed internet
 - Cell phone coverage
- Workforce
 - Lack of education and skills
 - Youth retention
- Community Development
 - Investments in Madison Heights as a transition town from Lynchburg
- Marketing
 - Lack of promotion of recreation and tourism destinations
 - Lack of full brand implementation by schools and town
- Tourism
 - Recreation and hospitality destinations
- Recreation
 - Lack of public parks and recreation venues where population is most dense
- Transportation
 - Lack of interstate and airport
- Location

Opportunities

- Business
 - Recruit large companies that pay well
 - Retail, dining options
 - Development and redevelopment along Bus 29 and Hwy 29 Bypass
 - Develop Hwy 210 corridor
 - Invest in Madison Heights and Madison Heights development group
 - Connections to downtown Lynchburg
 - Availability of business development land
 - Leveraging railroad to attract businesses
 - Explore CPACE financing model
 - Business growth center
- Tourism
 - Lodging-cabins, rentals, RV parks, camping
 - Destination attractions
 - Capitalize on natural resources, James River
 - Agri-tourism, farm-to-table tourism
- Education
 - Investment in public schools, specifically specialized programs
 - Continued expansion of Career Technical Education
 - Regional training facility
 - Central Virginia Community College satellite campus expansion
- Small Businesses
 - Expanding markets beyond Amherst County
 - Help small business start-ups
- Central Virginia Training Center
 - Redevelopment including the Hwy 210 corridor and Opportunity Zone
- Telecommunications
 - Investments in broadband
- Sweet Briar College
 - Increased collaboration in arts, business, and student engagement
- Quality of Life
 - Youth activities
 - Housing developments
 - Upscale dining, craft breweries, wineries
 - More special events and festivals
 - Long-term care facility
 - Acute health care
- Downtown Development
 - Focus on downtown Amherst as a destination
- Cultural Arts
 - Second Stage impact on cultural arts
- Recreation
 - Sportsplex development, facility investments
- Infrastructure
- Leadership
 - Leadership development program
 - Identify, recruit, and deploy idea champions

Threats

- Resources
 - Lack of resources to invest for the future: schools, infrastructure, transportation
- Business
 - Economic stagnation
 - Taxes and utility fees
 - Improving business climate
 - Financing alternatives
 - Development of Madison Heights area, 210 Connector and Bus 29
 - Few job opportunities
 - Small population for retail business market
- Education
 - Low educational attainment
 - Lack of funding for schools
- Quality of Life
 - People relocating out of Amherst County
 - Lack of cultural amenities
 - Decline in population
 - Not growing the downtown area
 - Desire to maintain rural area
- Government
 - Restrictions of zoning and public service authority
- Workforce
 - Lack of skilled labor
- Tourism
 - Lack of destinations, lodging
- Perception
 - Internal perception
 - External perception of businesses, events, tourism destinations

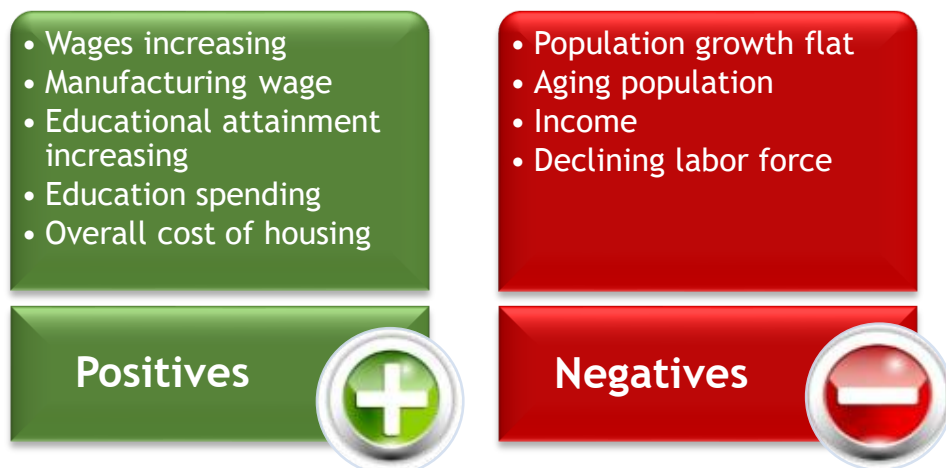
Appendix B: Economic & Demographic Profile

Amherst County is making progress in education attainment and employment at a time when population growth is almost flat. Comparatively, there is substantial growth in the regional and commonwealth population. In addition to stagnate population growth, Amherst County is losing young people. The county mirrors the region and commonwealth in growth in 25–34-year-olds but shows declines in 35–44 and 45–54-year-olds.

With flat population growth and the loss of working aged people, Amherst County is losing its labor force. The pandemic exacerbated the loss of labor as people stopped looking for work. After flat labor force growth 2016 to 2018, the region saw positive growth in 2019, only to be eliminated by the pandemic in 2020.

The unemployment rate in Amherst County had dropped significantly since 2015 to a low of 3.2% in 2019. The most recent figure of 5.5%, after spikes earlier in 2020, is well below the national average. Many economists predict that 2019 employment levels will return in late 2021 or early 2022.

The jobs of today require more education than jobs of even a decade ago. The future workforce will need to be skilled and prepared for lifelong learning. On this front, Amherst County is making progress. Overall educational attainment has improved since 2015, even though it lags behind benchmarks in the region and the commonwealth. The greatest gap is in bachelor's degrees and higher, where Amherst County's percentage (6.9%) is almost one-third of the commonwealth (17.4%). The variance can be attributed to a less educated aging population and the inability to retain more highly educated youth. Lower educational attainment leads to lower per capita and median household income, which negatively impacts quality of life.



In 2015, the research reported that Amherst County spent the second highest per capita on education compared to surrounding counties; however, the 2019 figures show that the county fell to third place. Spending is not always correlated to academic achievement, but investments are needed.

A positive sign in the economy is the high percentage of jobs that are in Manufacturing, the third largest employment sector. These jobs have higher multiplier rates than most service jobs, creating additional wealth in the county and surrounding area. The top employment category is Education and Health Services, employing approximately 1,468 people.

Top employment
category is
Education and
Health Services

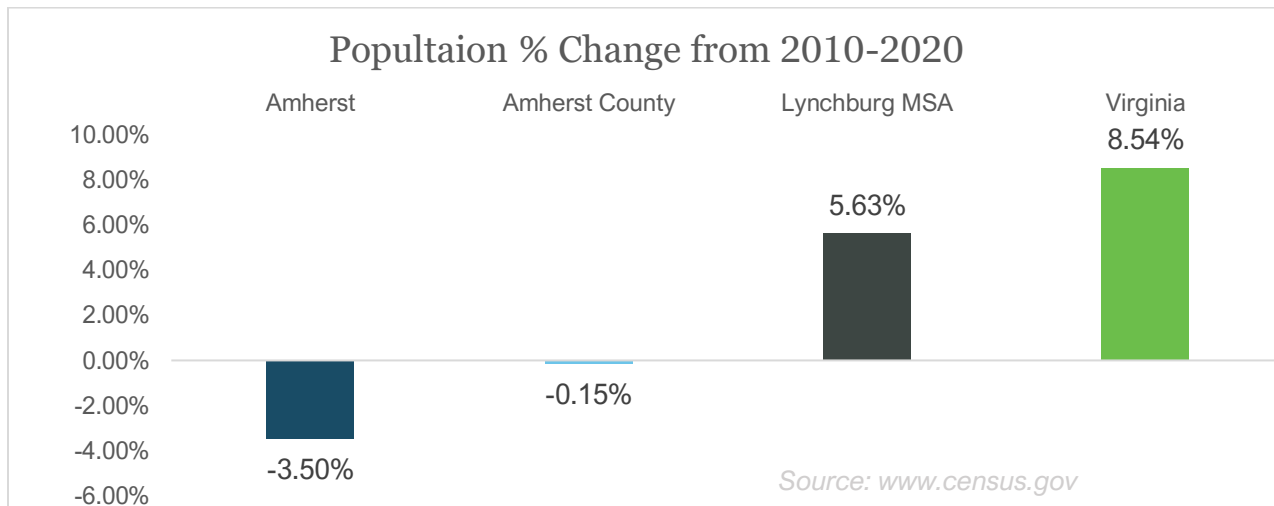
Small firms with 1 – 9 employees, which make up approximately 82% of all businesses in the county, employ almost 29% of workers.

The average weekly wage has grown since 2015 from \$632 to \$737, a sign of higher quality jobs.

It is less expensive to own a home in Amherst County than in Bedford and Lynchburg. Amherst County homes values are about 10% below those in the Lynchburg MSA, an important consideration in a state that has an overall higher cost of housing.

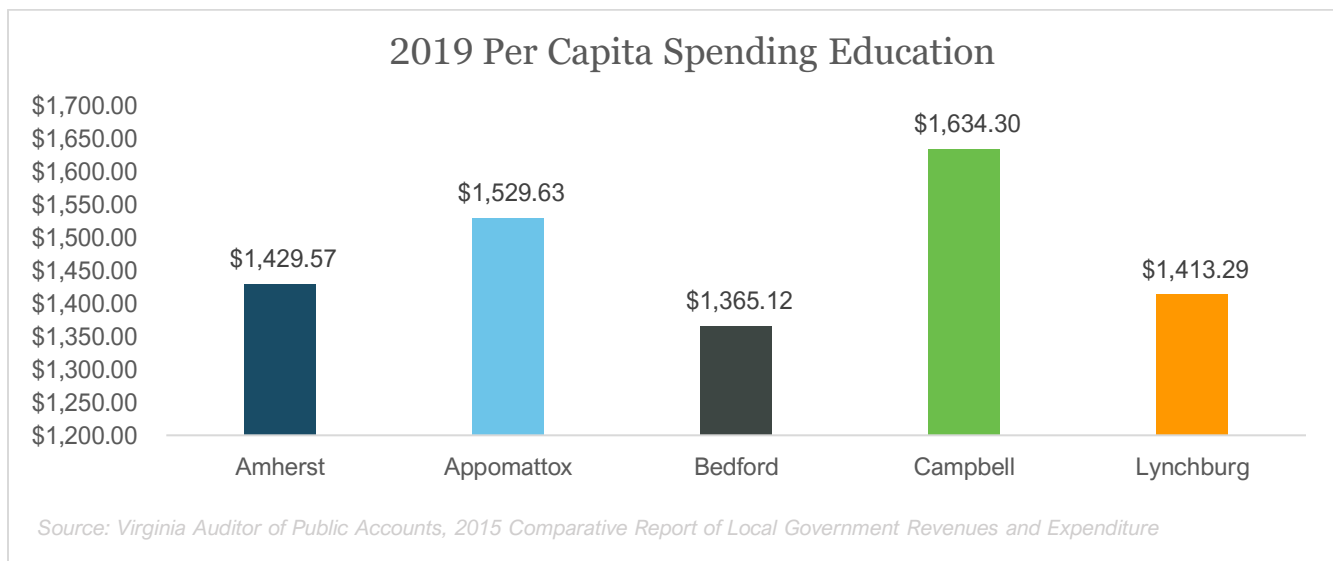
Another important quality of life factor, commute time, is positive in Amherst County. More than half of workers travel less than 25 minutes for work.

Population				
	2010	2020	% Change from 2010-2020	2025 Projection
Amherst	2,231	2153	-3.50%	2120
Amherst County	32,353	32,304	-0.15%	31,959
Lynchburg MSA	252,634	266,851	5.63%	272,612
Virginia	8,001,024	8,684,166	8.54%	9,008,218
Source: www.census.gov 2000 MSA for 2020 and 2025 Data ESRI				



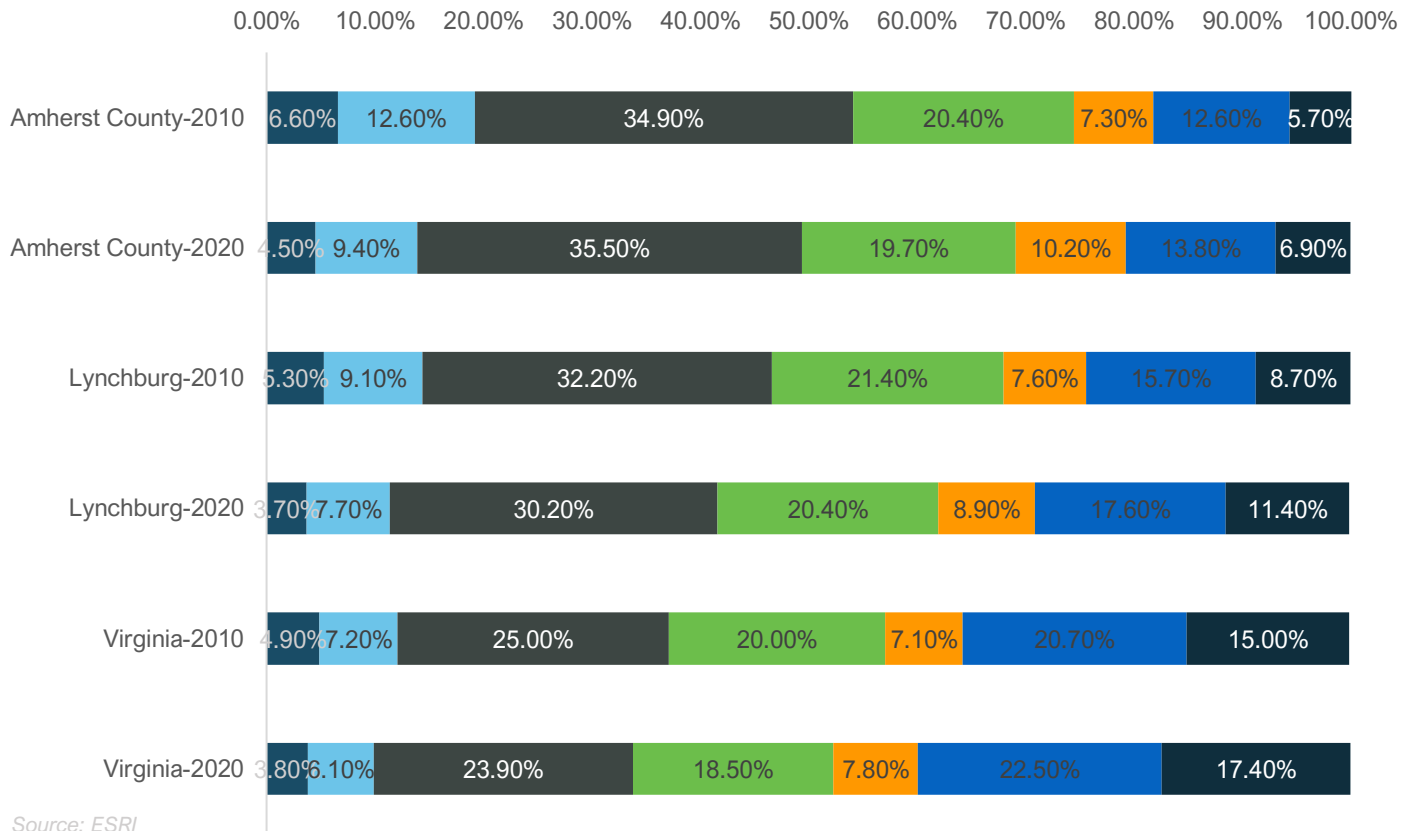
Population by Age						
	Amherst County-2010	Amherst County-2020	Lynchburg MSA-2010	Lynchburg MSA -2020	Virginia-2010	Virginia-2020
Total population	32,353	32,304	252,634	266,851	8,001,024	8,684,166
Under 5 years	5.4%	4.8%	5.5%	5.0%	6.4%	5.7%
5 to 9 years	5.4%	5.3%	5.7%	5.3%	6.4%	6.0%
10 to 14 years	6.4%	5.5%	6.1%	5.4%	6.4%	6.3%
15 to 24 years	14.3%	12.0%	16.6%	14.2%	14.0%	12.9%
25 to 34 years	10.0%	12.4%	10.7%	13.2%	13.6%	13.9%
35 to 44 years	12.5%	10.8%	12.0%	10.9%	13.9%	13.0%
45 to 54 years	15.7%	13.0%	14.8%	12.1%	15.2%	12.9%
55 to 64 years	13.8%	15.2%	13.0%	14.1%	11.9%	13.3%
65 to 74 years	9.4%	12.0%	8.6%	11.5%	6.9%	9.7%
75 to 84 years	5.3%	6.4%	5.1%	5.9%	3.8%	4.6%
85 years and over	1.8%	2.3%	2.0%	2.4%	1.5%	1.8%
Median Age		44.1				
Source: census.gov & ESRI						

Population by Race						
	Amherst County - 2010	Amherst County - 2020	Lynchburg MSA - 2010	Lynchbur g MSA - 2020	Virginia - 2010	Virginia - 2020
White Alone	76.7%	76.0%	78.2%	77.2%	68.6%	65.3%
Black Alone	19.0%	18.9%	17.5%	17.2%	19.4%	19.4%
American Indian Alone	0.9%	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%	4.0%	4.0%
Asian Alone	0.5%	0.5%	1.3%	1.5%	5.5%	7.0%
Pacific Islander Alone	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Some Other Race Alone	0.7%	1.1%	8.0%	1.2%	3.2%	4.0%
Two or More Races	2.1%	2.6%	1.8%	2.4%	2.9%	3.8%
Hispanic Origin	1.9%	2.8%	2.1%	3.4%	7.9%	10.1%
Diversity Index		39.9		41.5		61.7
<i>Source: census.gov & ESRI</i>						

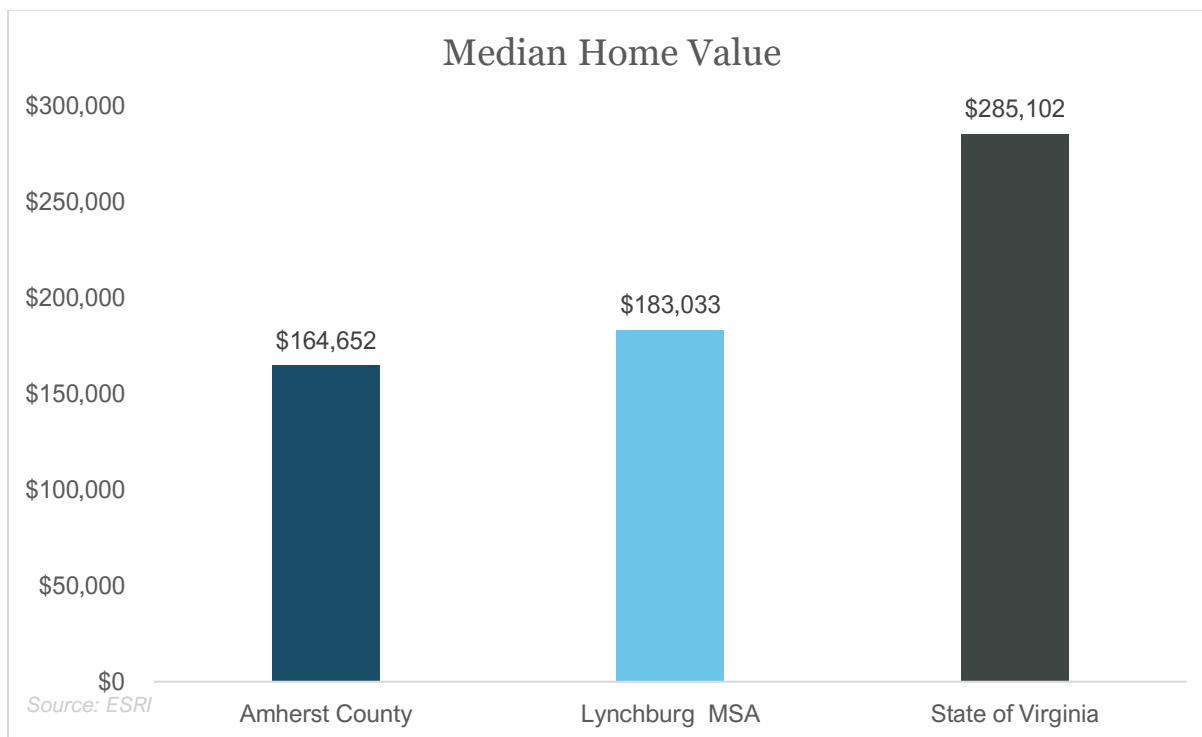
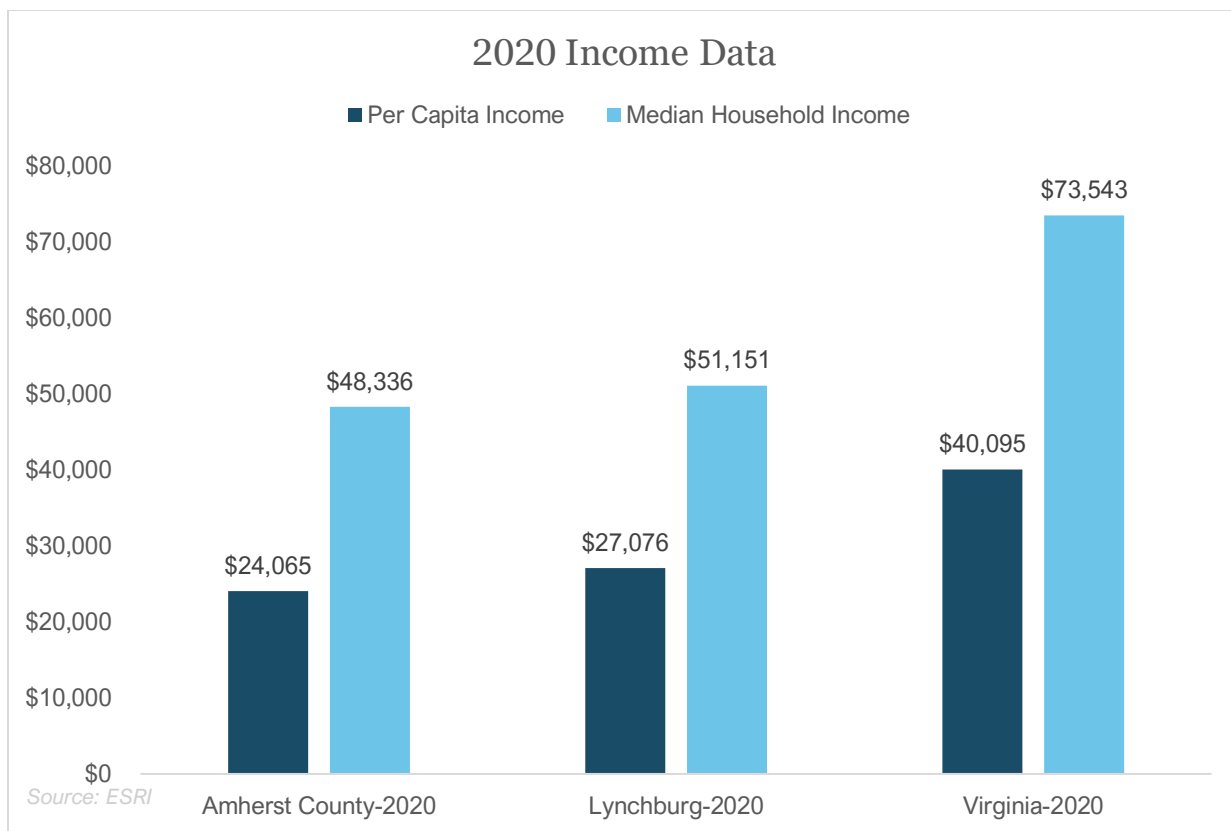


Educational Attainment

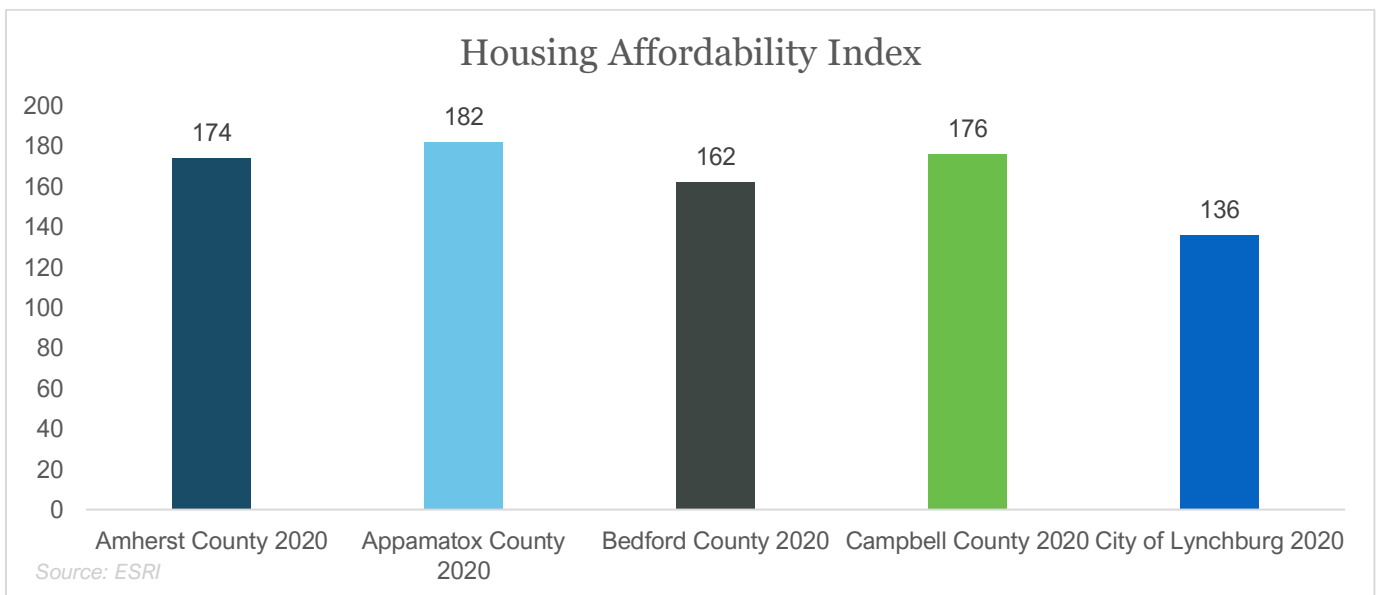
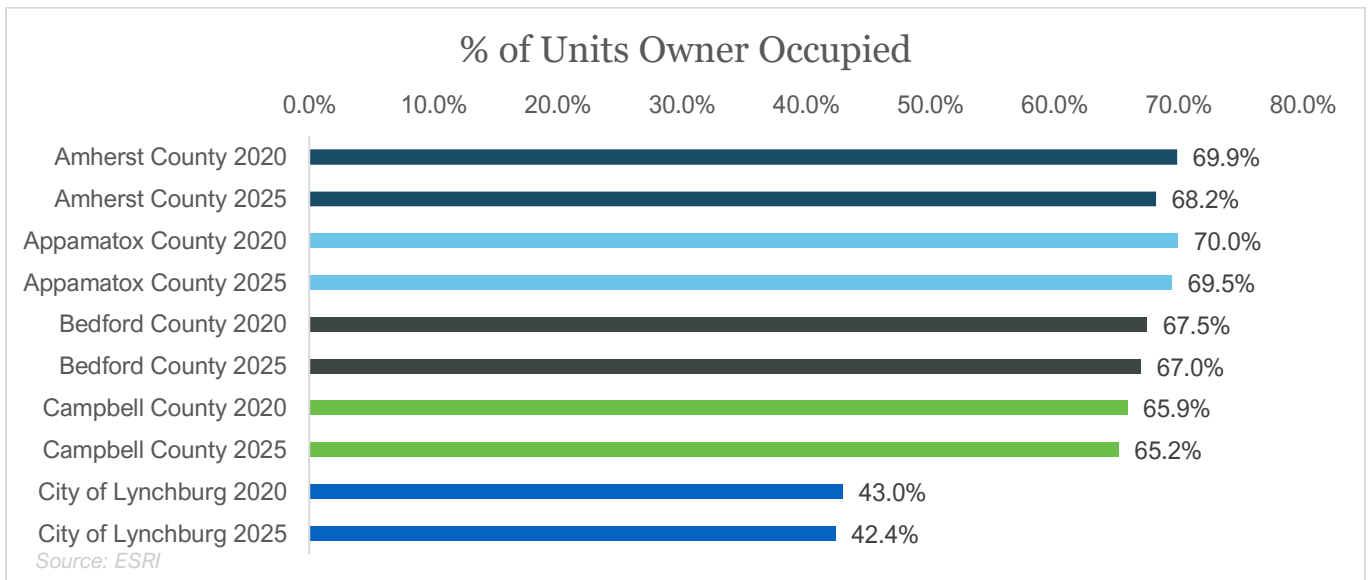
- Less than 9th grade
- High school graduate (includes equivalency)
- Associate's degree
- Graduate or professional degree
- 9th to 12th grade, no diploma
- Some college, no degree
- Bachelor's degree

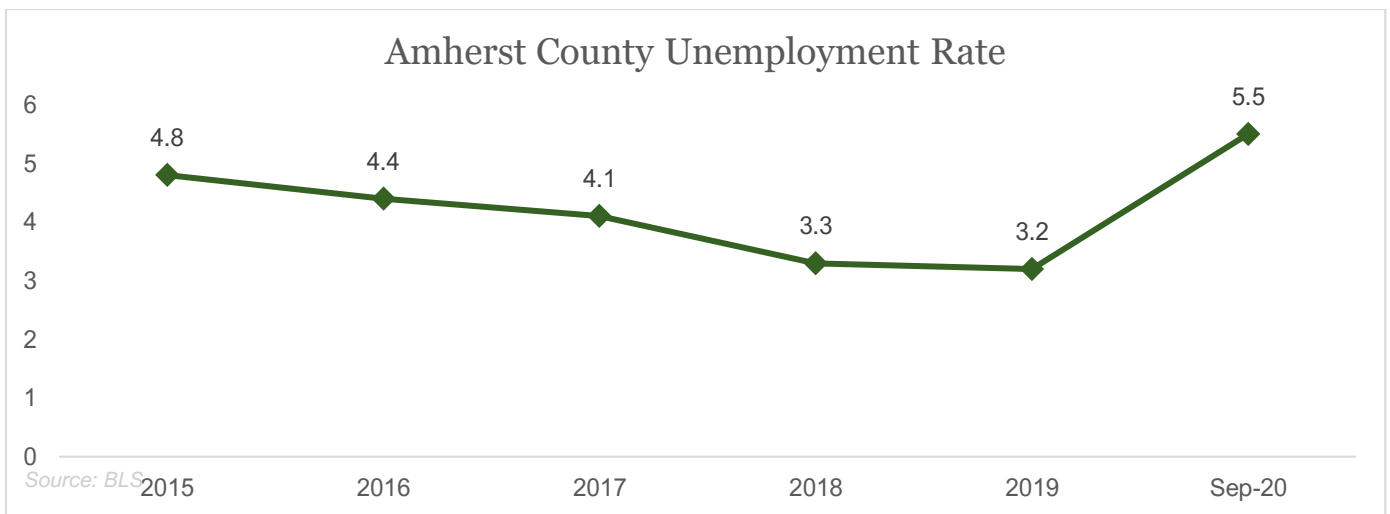
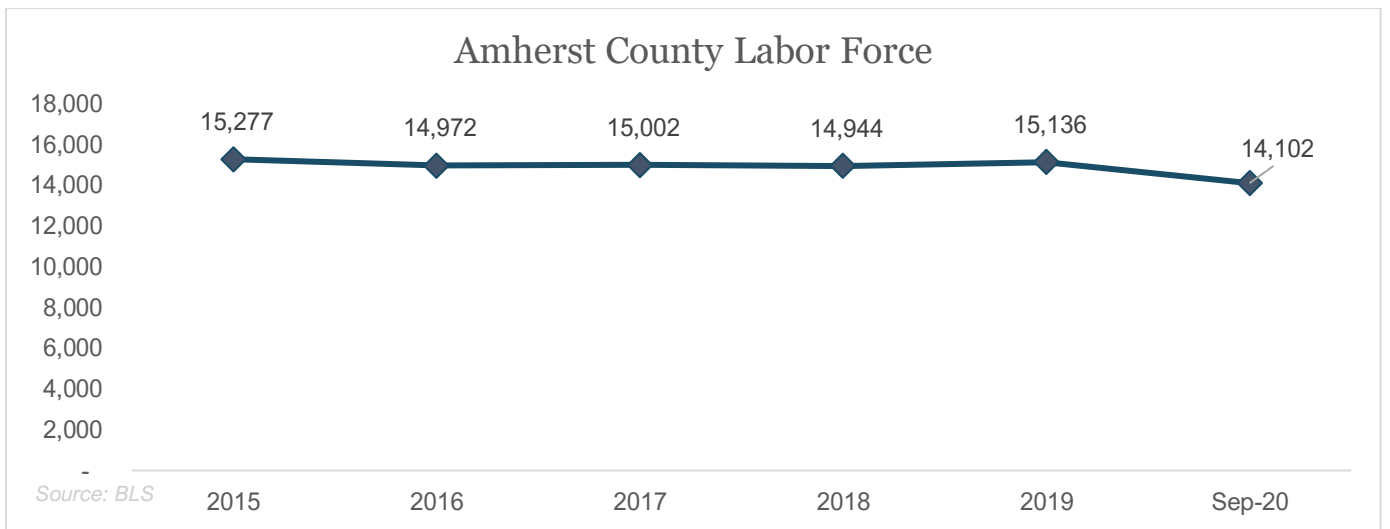


Source: ESRI

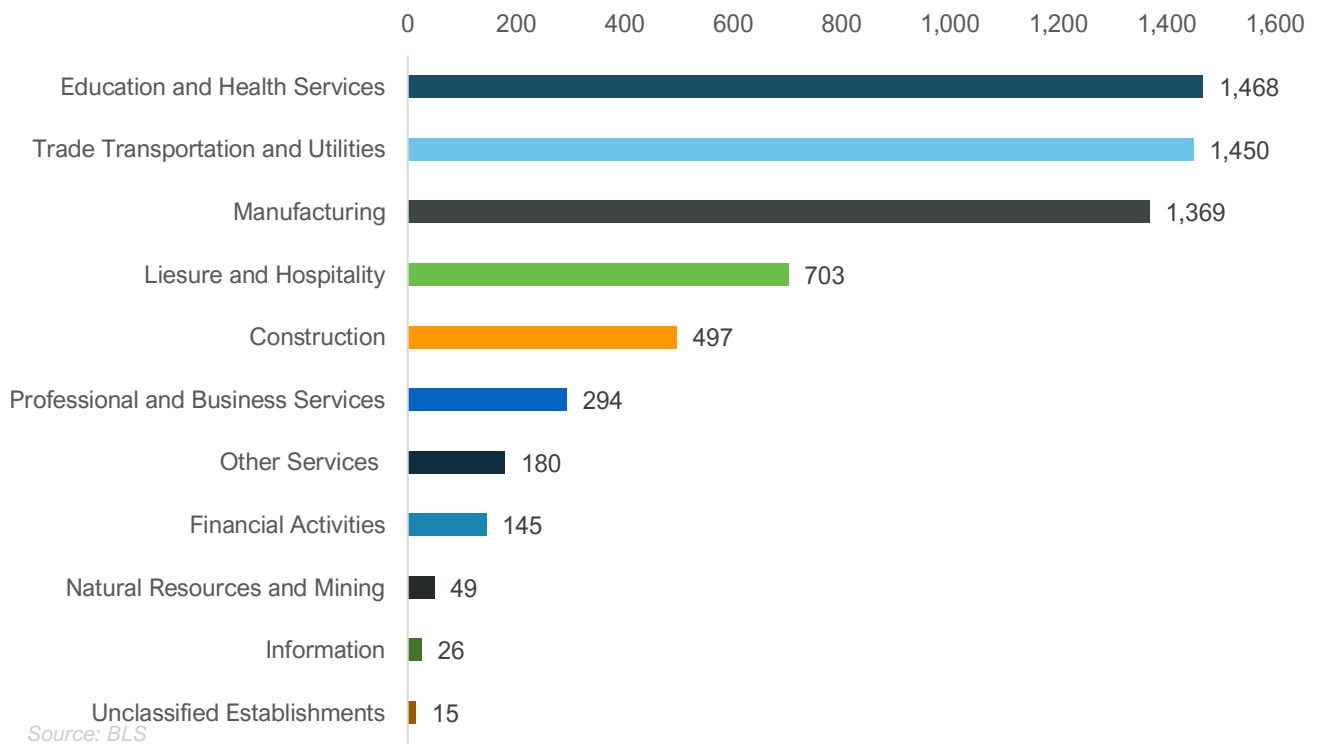


Housing Summary		Amherst County	
	2020	2025	% Change
% of Units Owner Occupied	69.9%	68.2%	-2.4%
% of Units Renter Occupied	17.6%	17.0%	-3.4%
% of Units Vacant	12.5%	14.7%	2.2%
Median Value Owner Occupied	\$164,652	\$178,318	8.30%
Housing Affordability Index	174		
% of Income for Mortgages	14.2%		
Median Contract Rent	\$543		
Median year structure built	1978		
<i>Source: ESRI</i>			

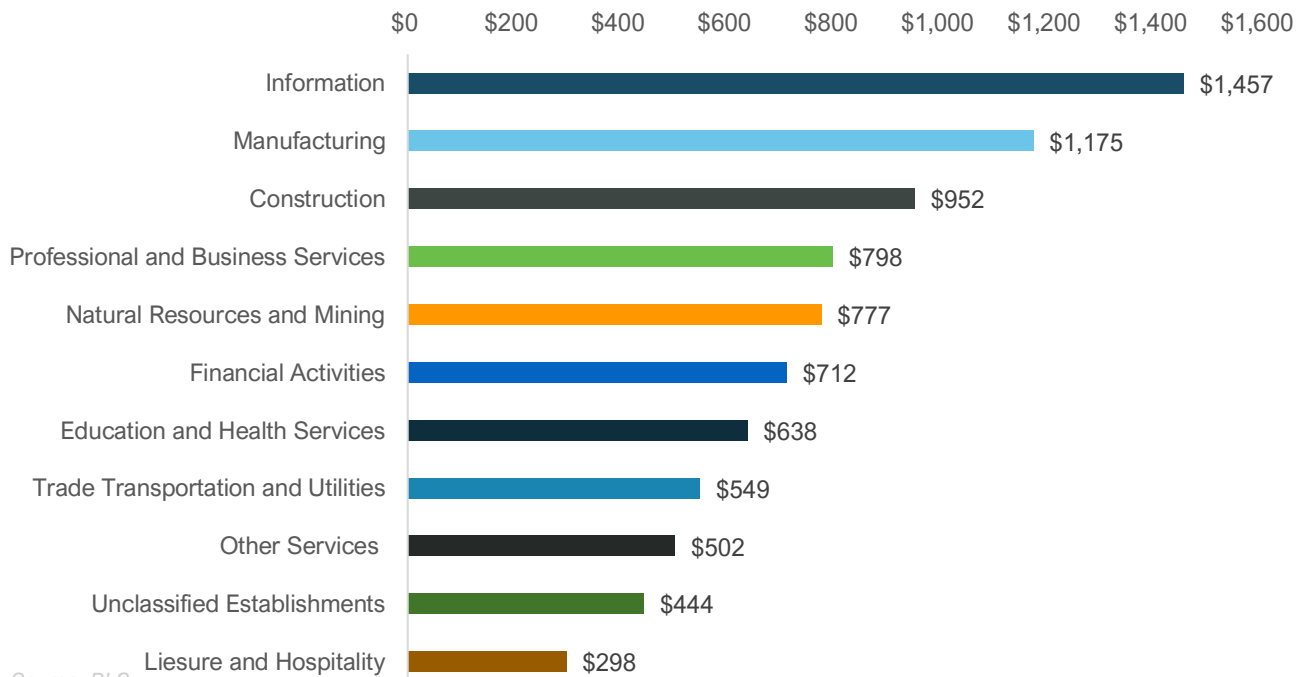




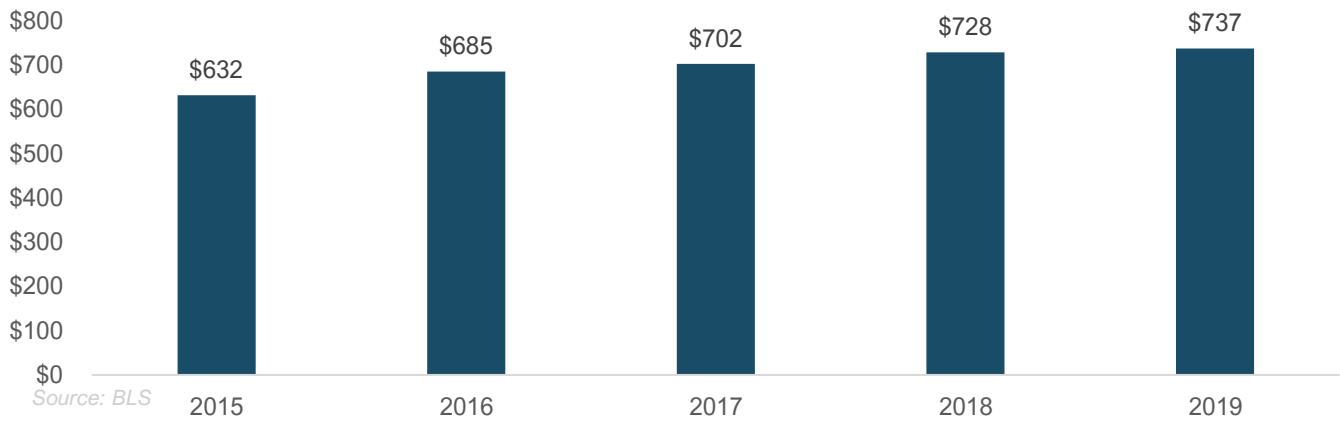
2019 Employment By Industry



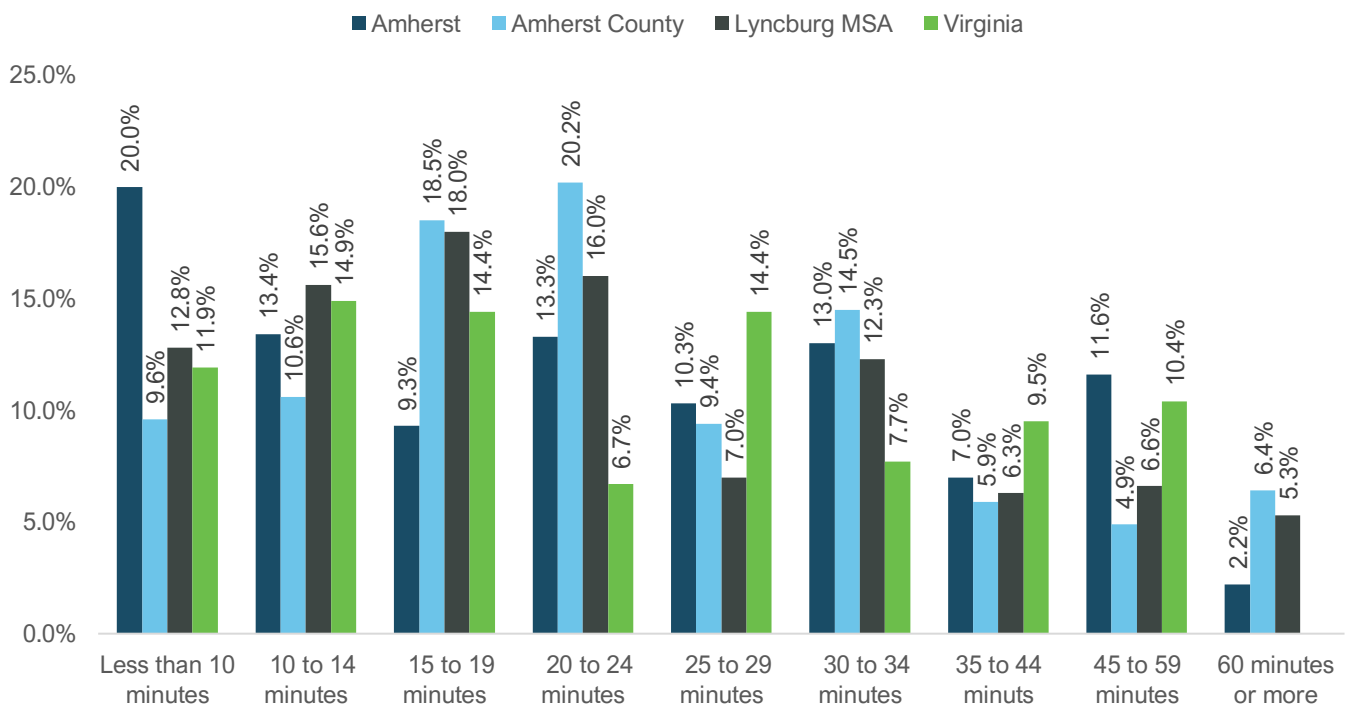
2019 Average Weekly Wage by Industry



Amherst County Average Weekly Wages



Commute



Source: census.gov

Amherst County Top Manufacturing Employers

Name	Business Type	# of Employees
Clorox / Glad Plant	Plastic Bags	364
Greif	Paper Mill, Containerboard	300
England's Stove Works	Wood Burning Stoves	175
Buffalo Air Handling	Industrial/Commercial Air Handling Equipment	101
S&S / TruBall	Metal Fabrication, Archery Equipment	95
Shibuya Hoppman	Packaging Machinery	75
Cooper Steel	Structural Steel Fabricator	40
Quality Archery Design	Archery Equipment	40
Hermle North America	Clocks, Furniture	30

Source: www.amherstvabusiness.com

Amherst County Top Non-Manufacturing Employers

Name	Business Type	# of Employees
Sweet Briar College	Higher Education	186
Centra Health	Medical	8,405
CSE, Inc.	Heavy duty cranes, Construction Metal Fabricators, Industrial Maintenance	230-250
Old Dominion Job Corps	Residential Training Program	130
Cowan Systems	Transportation	125
H.T. Hackney	Wholesale Food Distributor	72
Tyto Athene (formerly Black Box Govt. Solutions)	Communication/Technology Services	40
Integrated Technology Group (ITG)	Technology Services	22

Source: www.amherstvabusiness.com

Amherst County, VA 2015-2019 Employment Stages

Establishments	% of Total Establishments	% of Total Jobs
Self-Employed (1)	12.20%	1.20%
Stage 1 (2-9)	70.20%	27.20%
Stage 2 (10-99)	16.40%	35.90%
Stage 3 (100-499)	1.00%	22.10%
Stage 4 (500+)	0.10%	13.50%

Source: Your Economy Data (www.youreconomy.org)

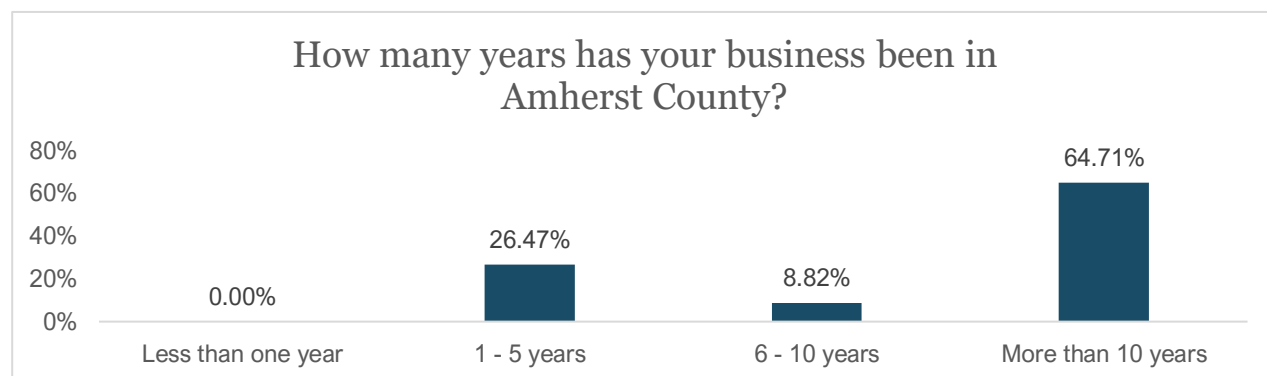
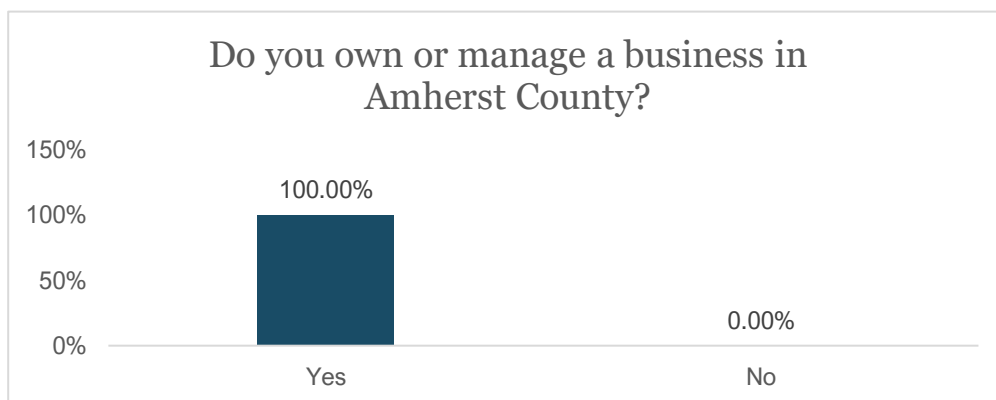
Appendix C: Business Survey Results

The survey was completed by 34 Amherst County businesses. The typical respondent profile is a small manufacturing or services business with 1-10 employees who has been in business more than 10 years. Most located in Amherst County because they had a “personal and/or hometown connection,” the same number one answer as in 2016.

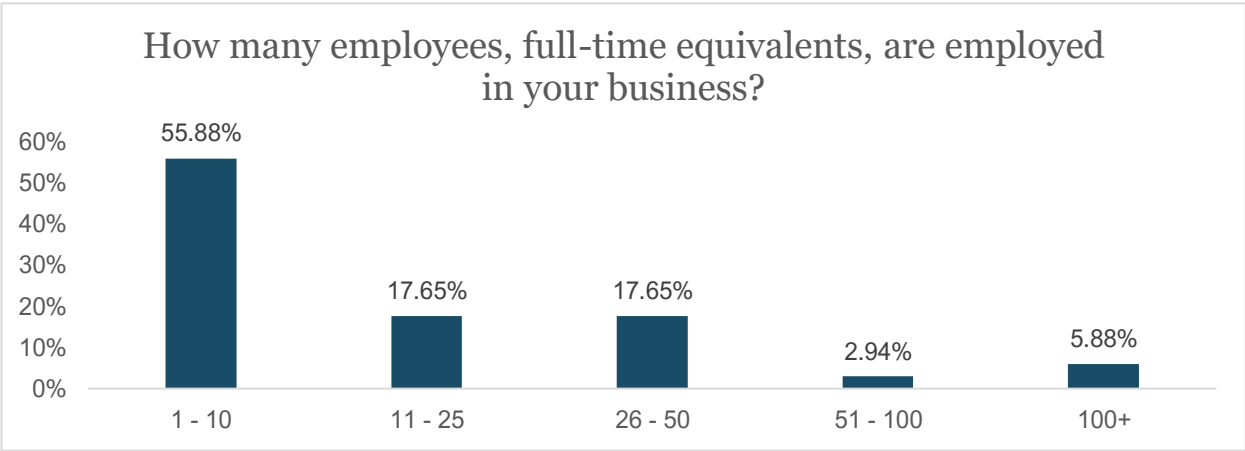
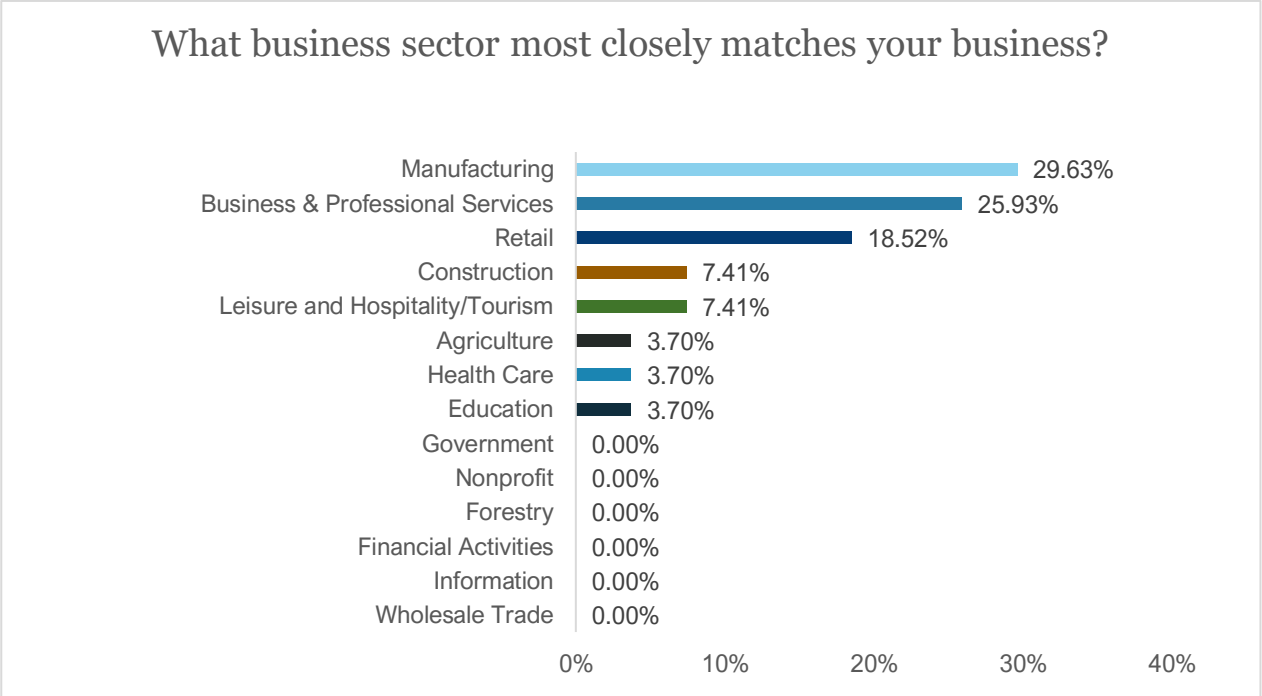
Approximately 42% plan to expand, with 27% indicating they intend to expand at their current location. The business plans are very similar to the 2016 business survey, with 27% saying at that time they intended to expand at their current location. Businesses face challenges with workforce, the pandemic, and federal and state regulations. The assistance they need to grow includes tax breaks/grants/incentives, marketing, and workforce training. The latter, workforce training, is a new top three answer compared to 2016, when top answers included business planning and local regulatory assistance.

Business is much more positive on the workforce than in 2016. The “positive” percent for work ethic, wage expectation, ability to retain, training, skill set, and overall quality exceed the 2016 responses. The only area where positivity rates fell was in availability.

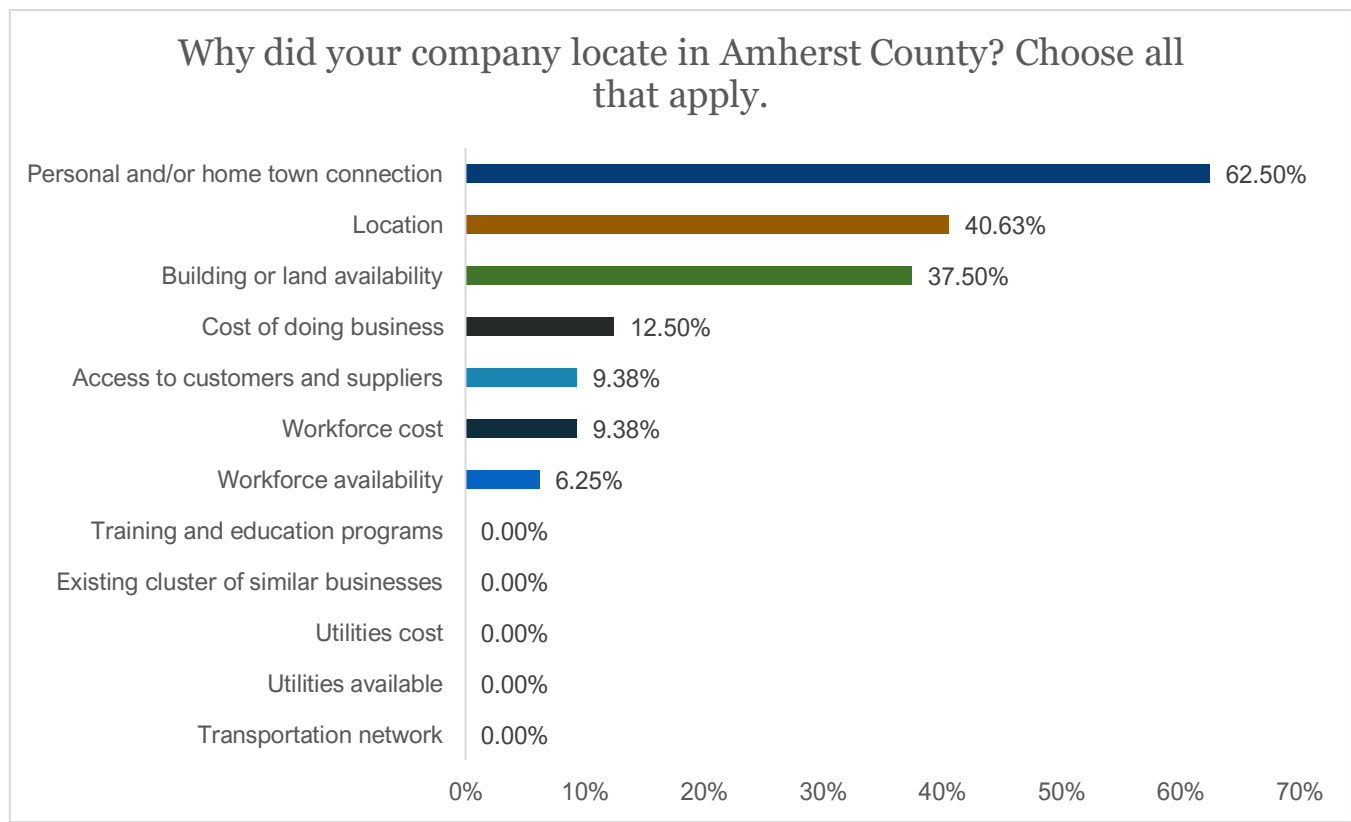
Even during the pandemic, businesses feel good about the business climate. Overall ratings of the business climate improved since 2016. Almost 80% of businesses rate the business climate a three or higher on a scale of one to five.



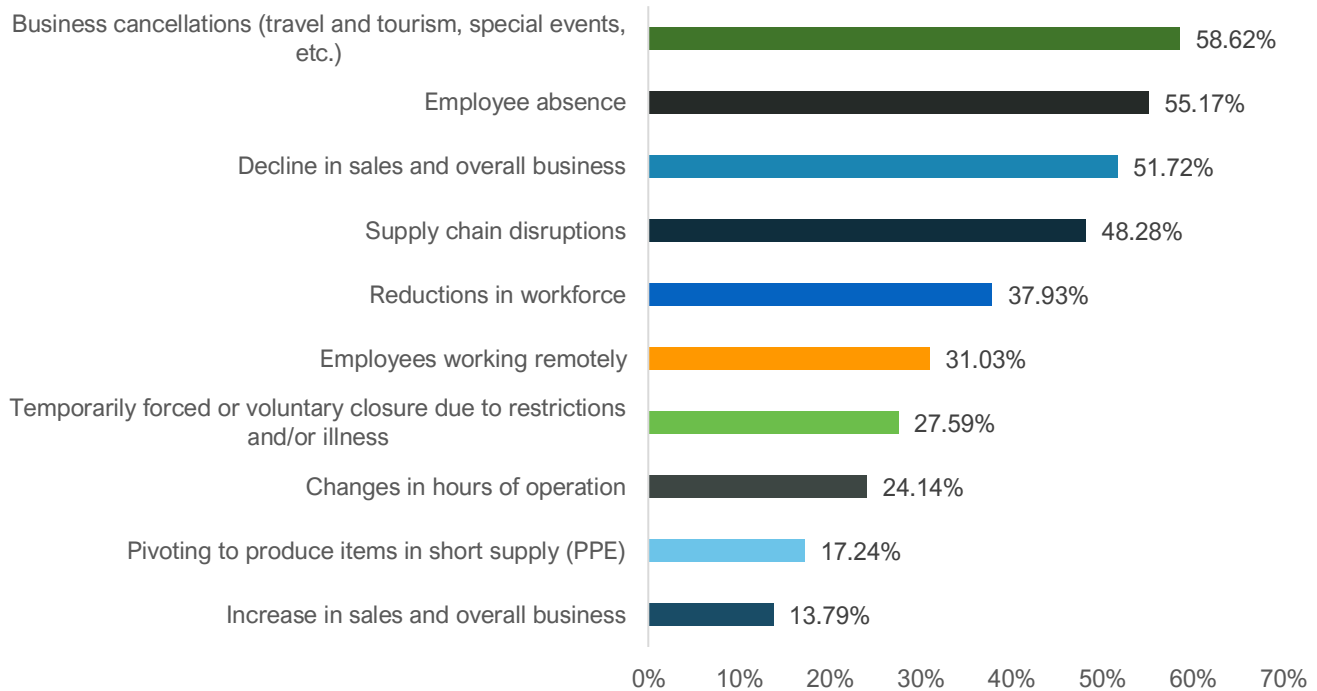
There were more manufacturing, professional services, and retail responses to the survey than in 2016. The biggest drop in response industry was education.



The top three answers as to why the company located in Amherst County remained the same as in 2016.

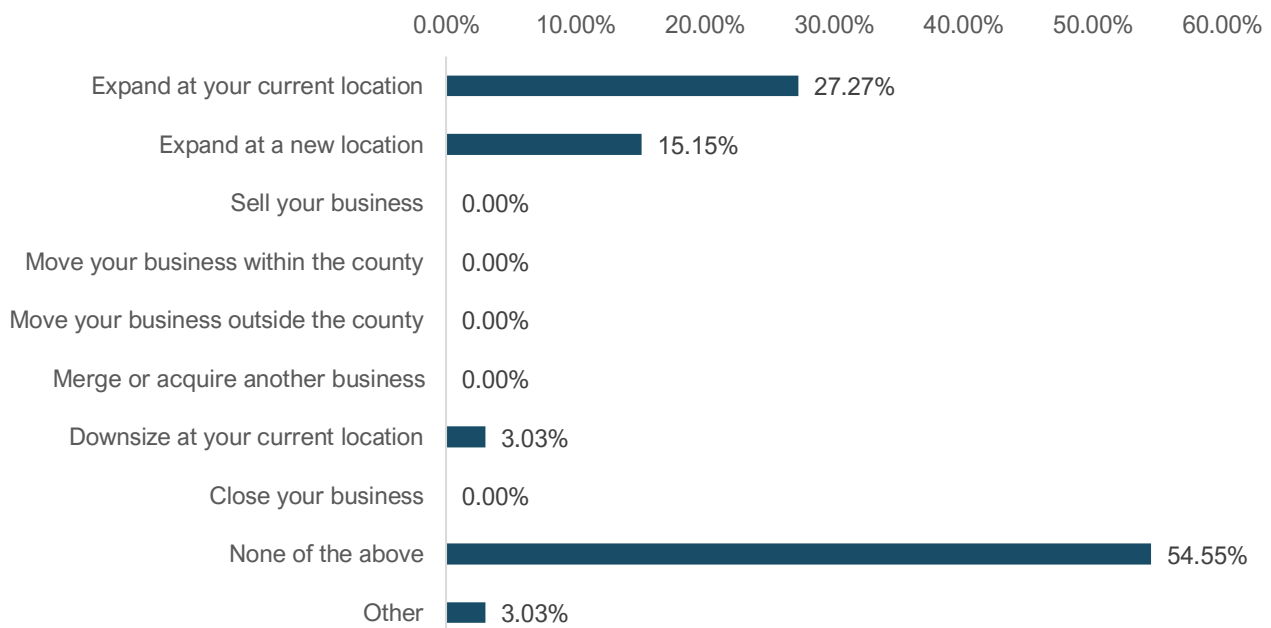


If your business has been affected by COVID-19, let us know how. Choose all that apply.

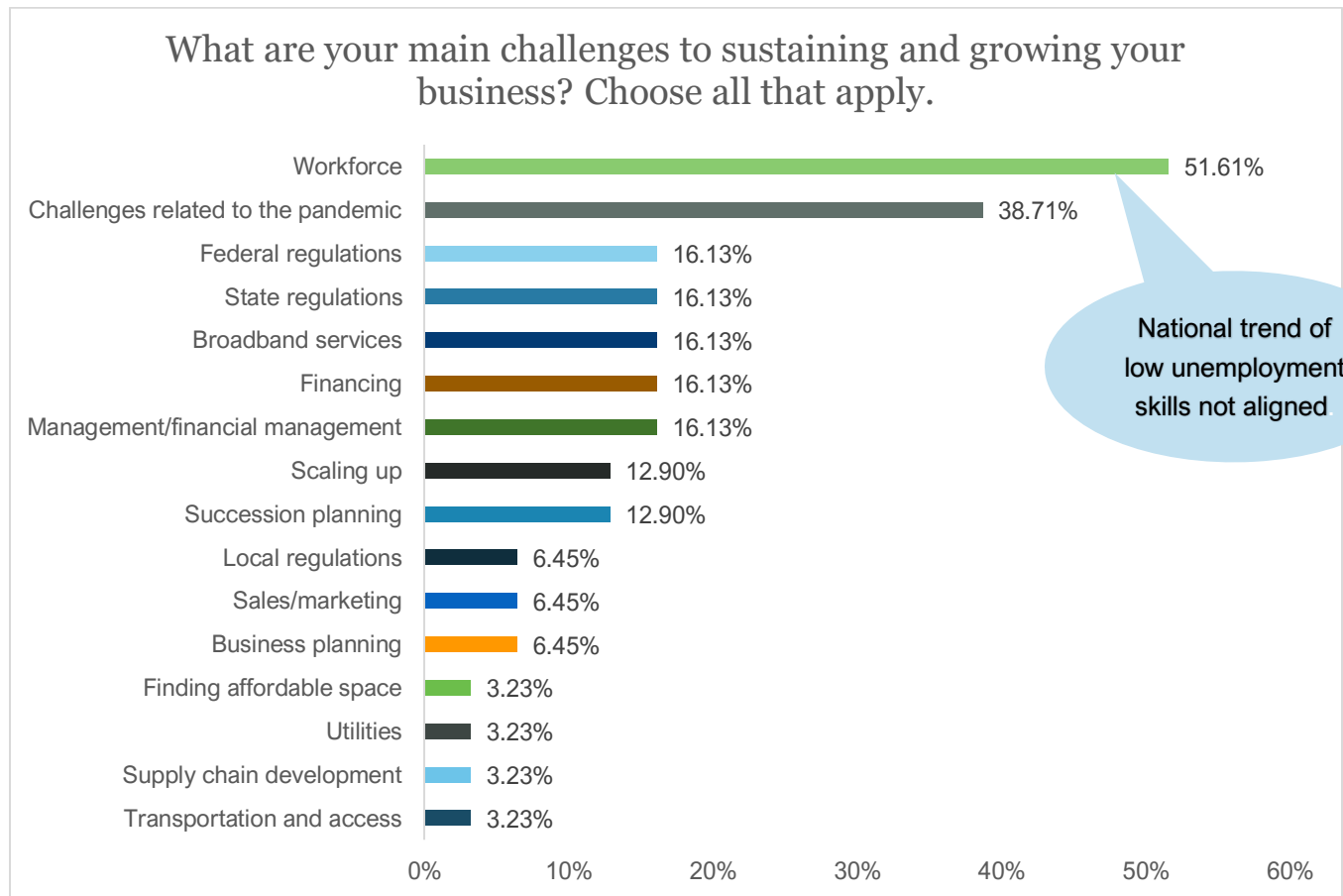


Companies planning to expand are on par with the 2016 survey results. The None of the Above answer was higher, likely indicating business uncertainty in 2020.

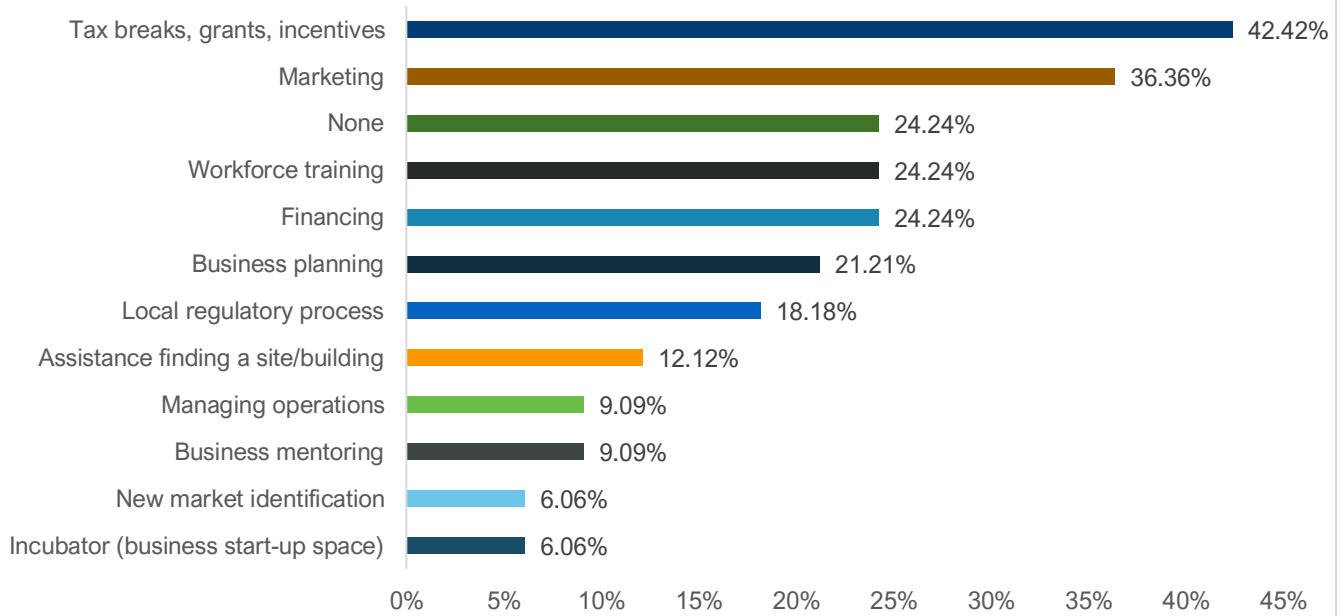
Are you currently planning to... Choose all that apply.



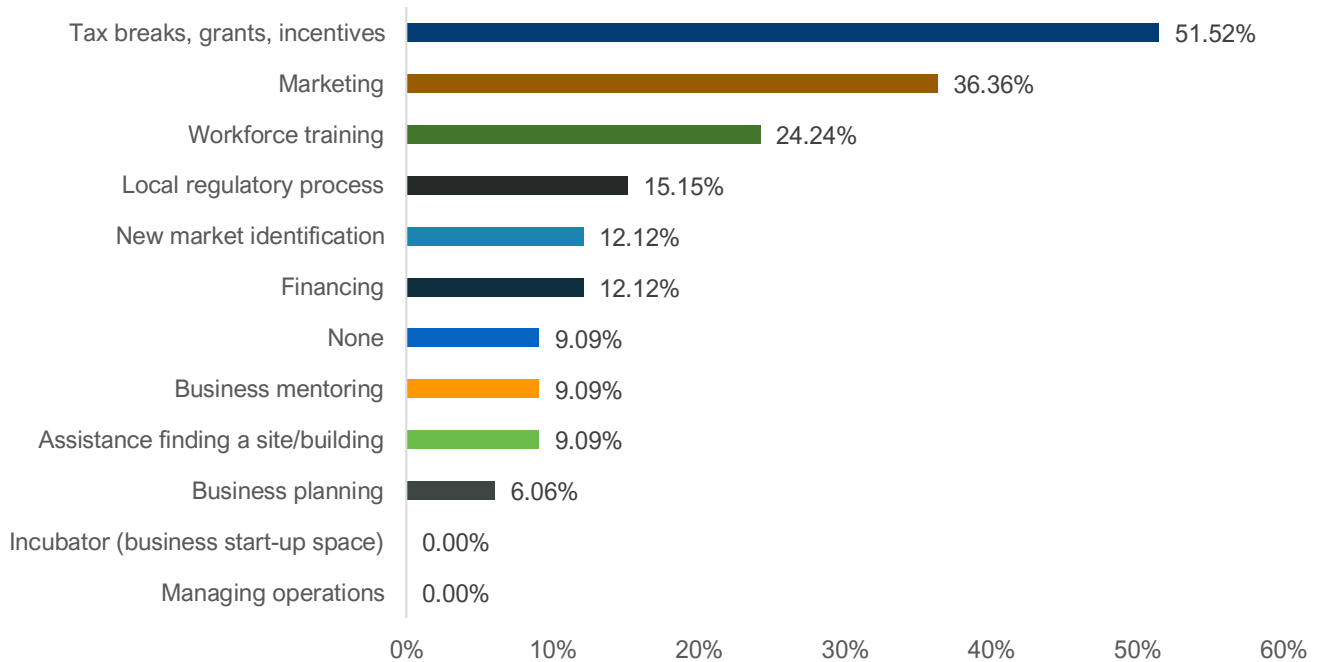
When combining the workforce answer choices from 2016, the 2020 survey reflects an increase in the impact finding, training, and retaining skilled workers is having on business. This issue is not limited to a local impact, as nationwide the unemployment rate, pre-pandemic, had been at historic lows for several years. Important to note: Local regulations fell in ranking from 23% to 6%, reflecting the impact of the EDA's work.



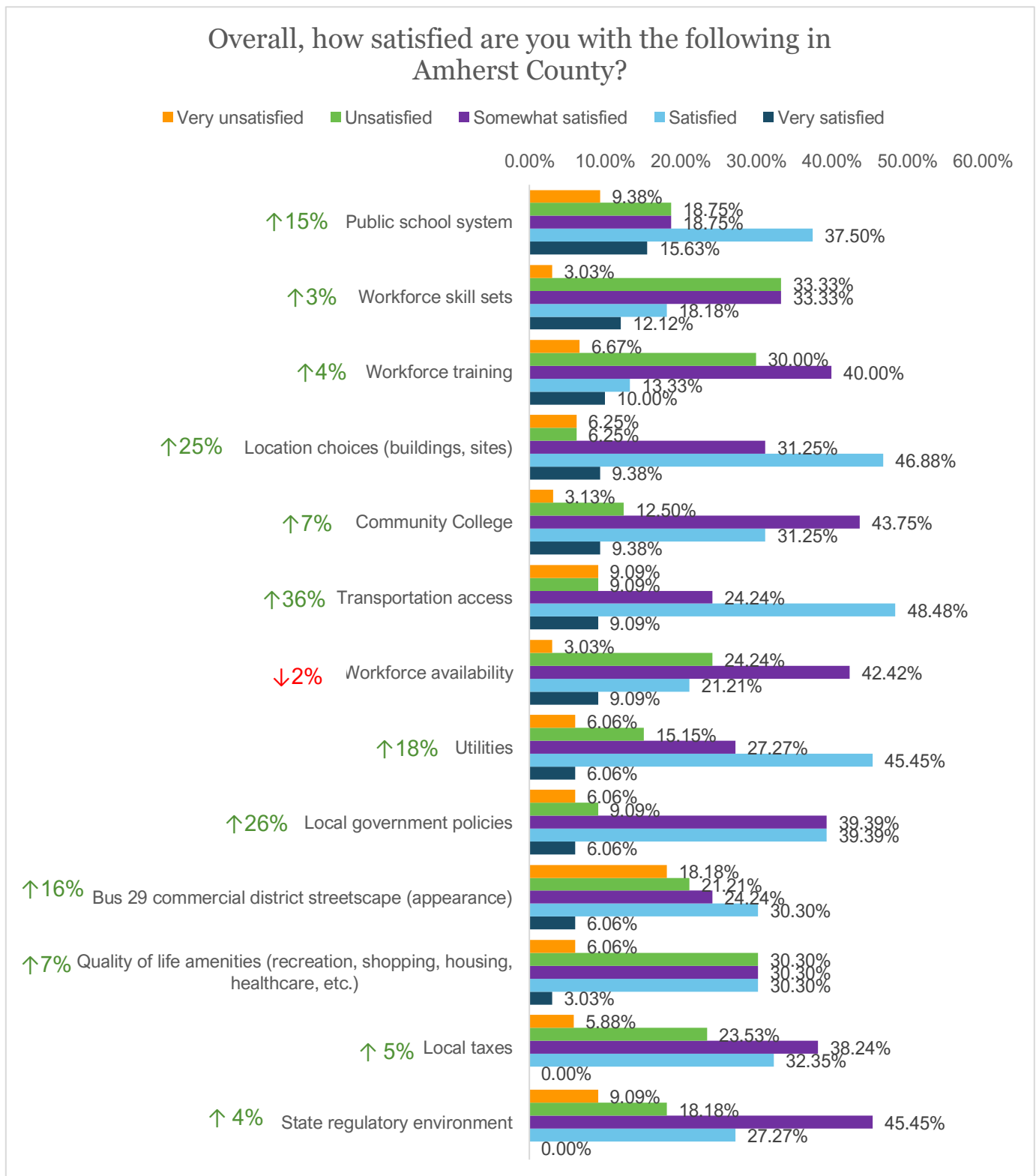
What business assistance would have been helpful when you started/expanded your business? Choose all that apply.



What business assistance would help you grow your business in Amherst County? Choose all that apply.



The **green** and **red** numbers indicate the change from 2016 in the Very Satisfied and Satisfied responses. Businesses are more satisfied in **every category** except for a small decline in Workforce Availability, which is a national trend.



Please comment on any of the above with which you are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.
We need nice hotels, restaurants, fast food chains, and other retailers. Broadband needed throughout the county. Encourage Air B&B's and short terms rentals.
Skills and motivation of available work force is lacking.
In 35 years, we have lifted hundreds of people out of poverty and given them skills and chances at life that they would not have had otherwise. We have trained countless people to be great individuals with a reliable work ethic before training them for specific positions. We feel a huge sense of community pride and accomplishment for the lives improved by this company.
We hope that we will not have to pay property taxes on machines that we bought 35 years ago that are barely used.
We are scared, now that Covid has caused public schools to be mostly online, that the average student will have huge gaps in their education, less ability to socially interact with people, and less ability to function normally once society gets back to normal. Local private schools have proven that school can be done effectively. Public schools need to follow suit!
We need a better way to get to I-81 or I-64! The entire southern half of Virginia could be improved in immeasurable ways with an interstate that goes from Roanoke through Lynchburg to Hampton Roads!
VTI is an incredible trade school in Altavista that has trained thousands to attain great jobs. But the reason it had to form was that Moore's Electric couldn't find any qualified workers. Our local kids don't need college English and History classes at CVCC. They need concentrated job programs that will get them properly trained for good-paying jobs. That's the biggest difference I see between machinists and welders trained in the north versus those trained in the south. Southern workers only get the bare necessities of trade school training to help them start at the bottom of a trade, while northern workers have intense training with levels (often provided at schools run by unions) that adequately prepare them for their jobs. Central Virginia could easily grow through companies like Moore's, Southern Air, and others to provide the state's infrastructure and trade jobs.
There is no place to eat. No place to have dinner in Madison Heights or get a decent sandwich for lunch.
Increasing meals' taxes in a small community such as Amherst discourages people from going out to eat as often. We are not Lynchburg!
We have had challenges for the last several years trying to locate a site/building to operate and expand our business. The commerce parks should be made more available for local businesses that are wanting to expand.
We need more places to shop, like for hair products. A health center, like what they have on ward road and the Jamerson Gym.
Local business taxes could be adjusted to benefit small business
Internet very lacking, should be #1 priority
Too many regulations are stunting our growth. Need new blood on our boards and town council. When you do the same thing the same on way year after year you get same results. I counted 12 vacant business locations empty from Ambrose to the Circle. What does that say? There is so much more concern about not raising taxes than growth. You have to spend money to make money.
Shortage of qualified IT professionals. The local school system has been more than willing to participate in filling the void, but CVCC and higher ed. institutions could/should do more.
The state regulatory climate is scary right now. They have poor leadership who only cares about what political waves they can make and not about taking care of the citizens of this state.

Please comment on any of the above with which you are unsatisfied or very unsatisfied.

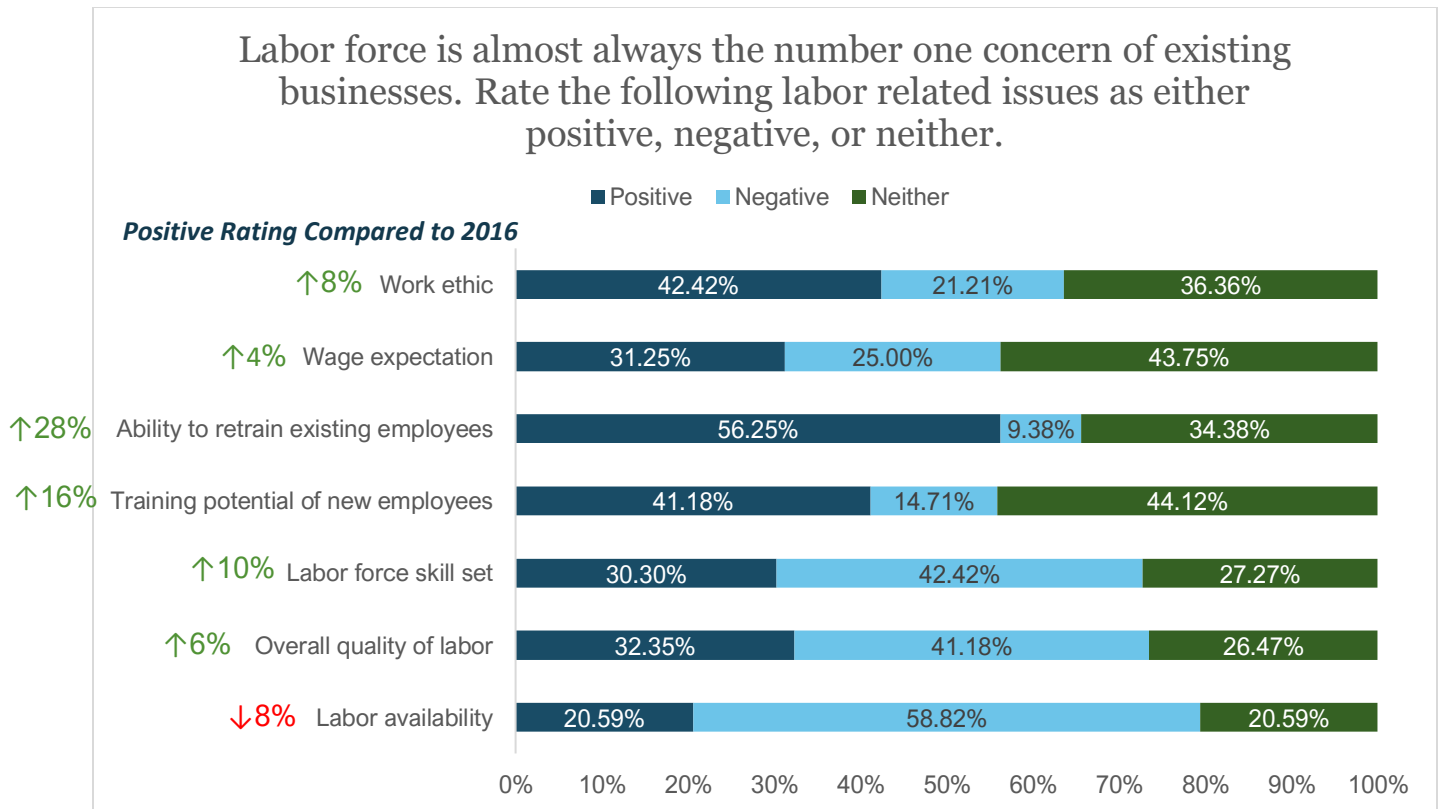
Bus 29 looks horrendous; efforts have been made but it is still an eye sore.

State regulations during the pandemic have been abysmal - for months we have been held up over policies and now months later an attempt is being made to help out.

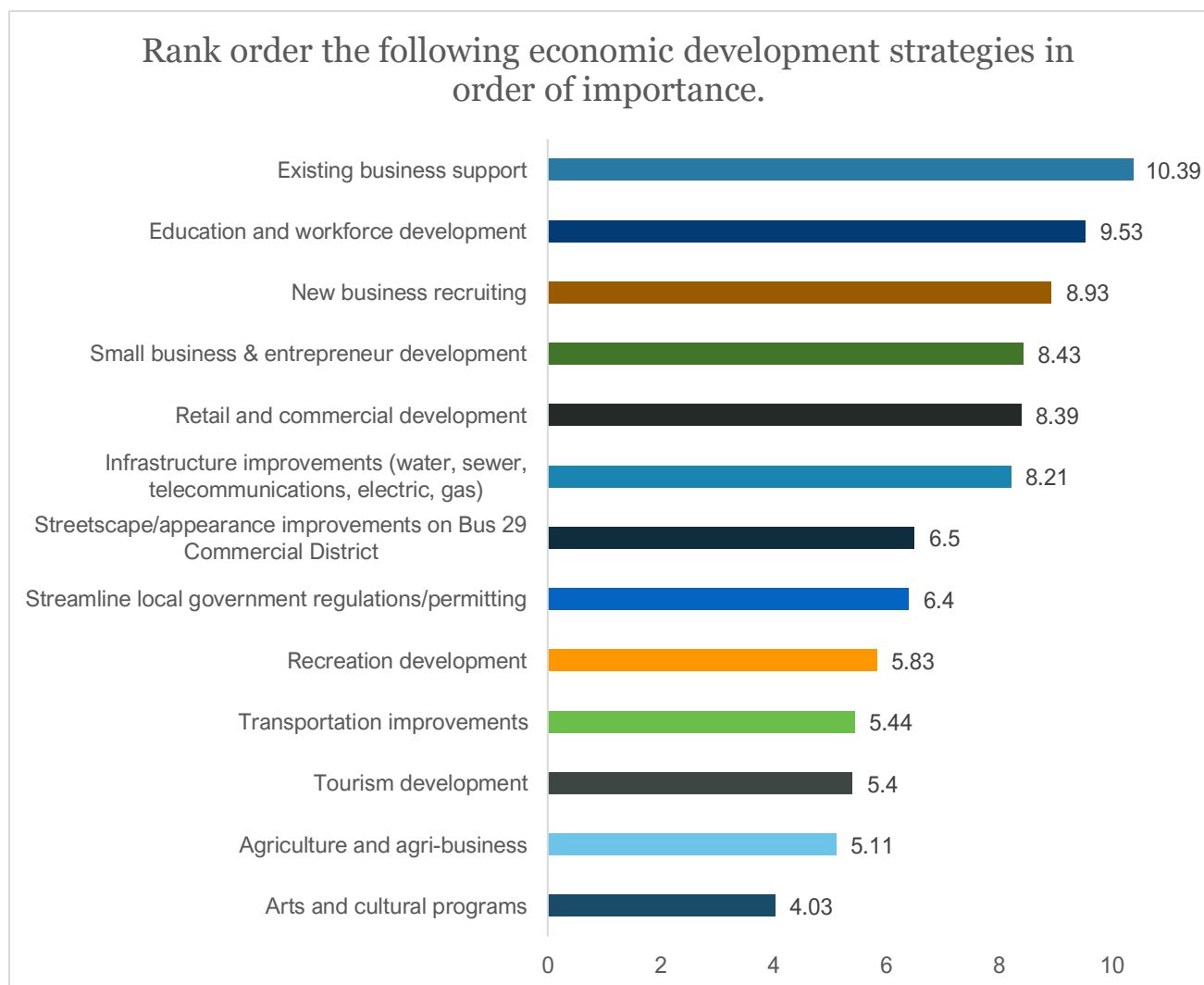
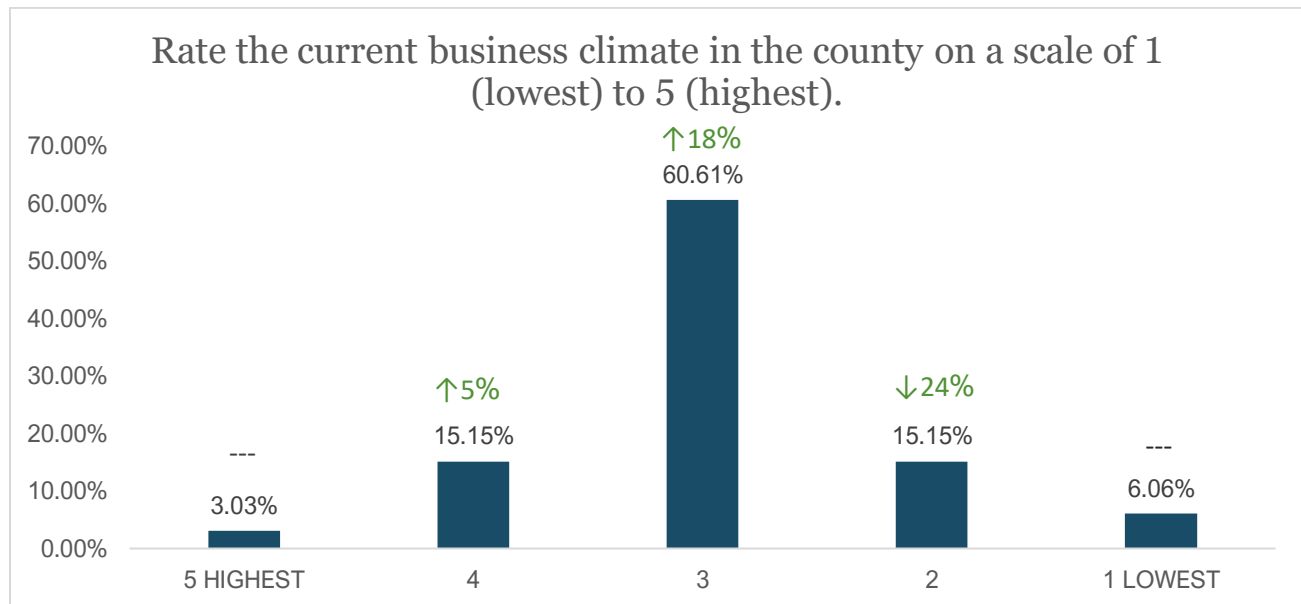
BoS talks about beautification and getting more things to do in the area, but they don't devote any funding to it; so, no money, no action, no results.

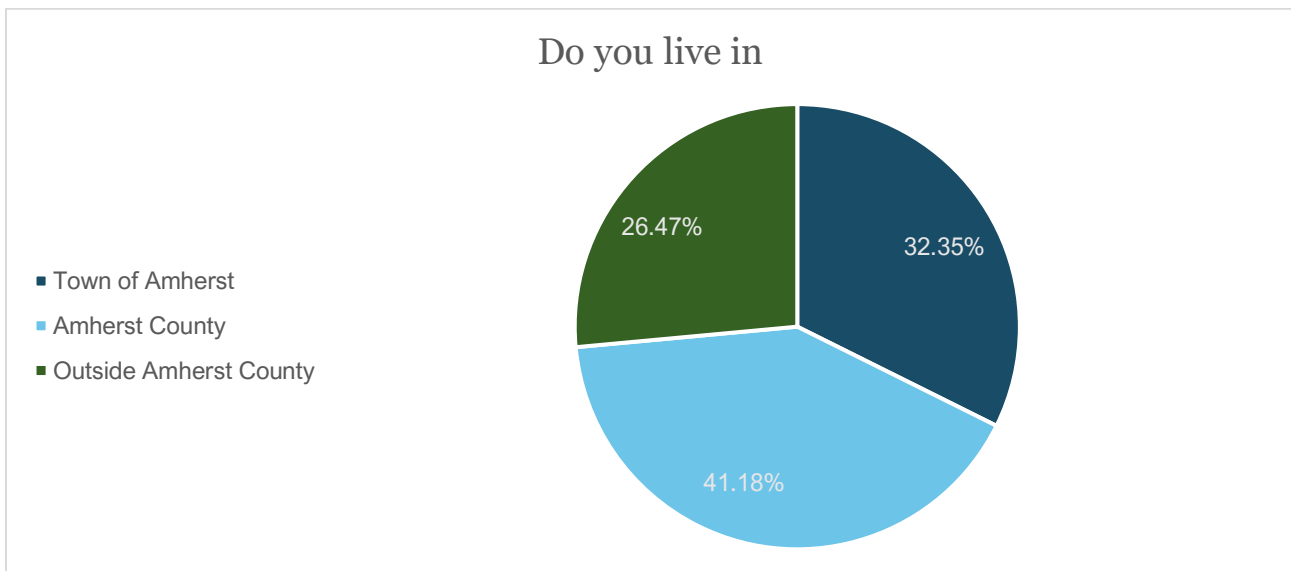
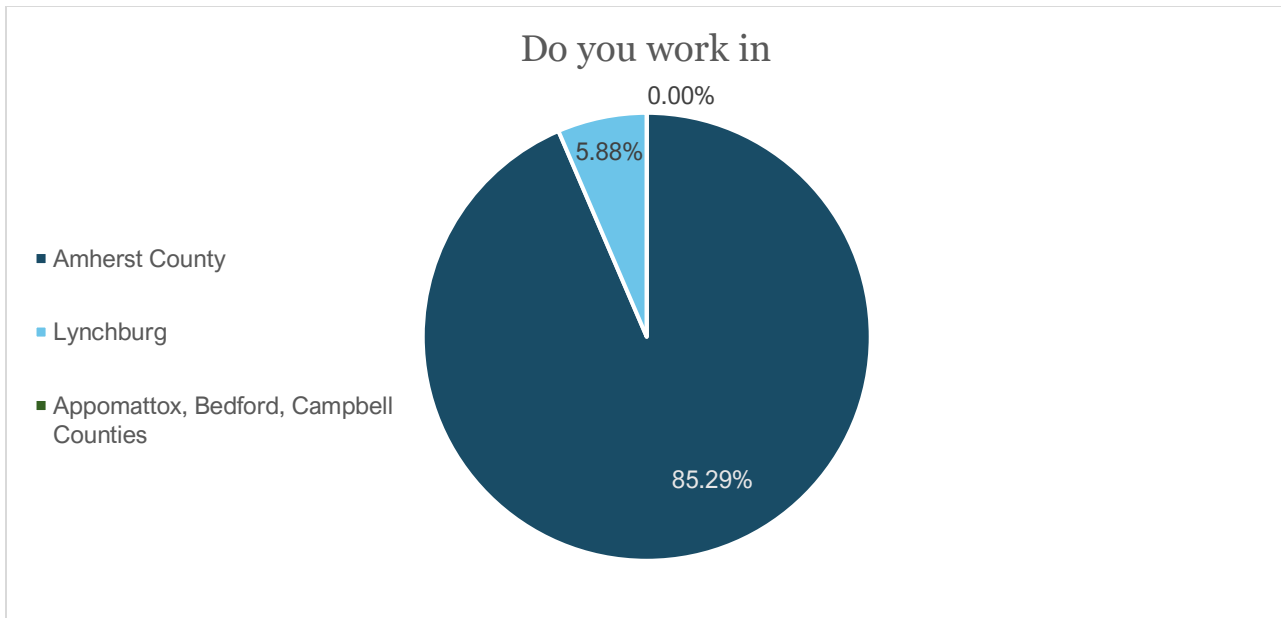
Town of Amherst is very pedestrian UN-friendly. Parking on the street and crossing the street is very dangerous. Traffic laws are not enforced.

The positive ratings were **significantly increased** from 2016 except in the category of Labor Availability, a national issue.



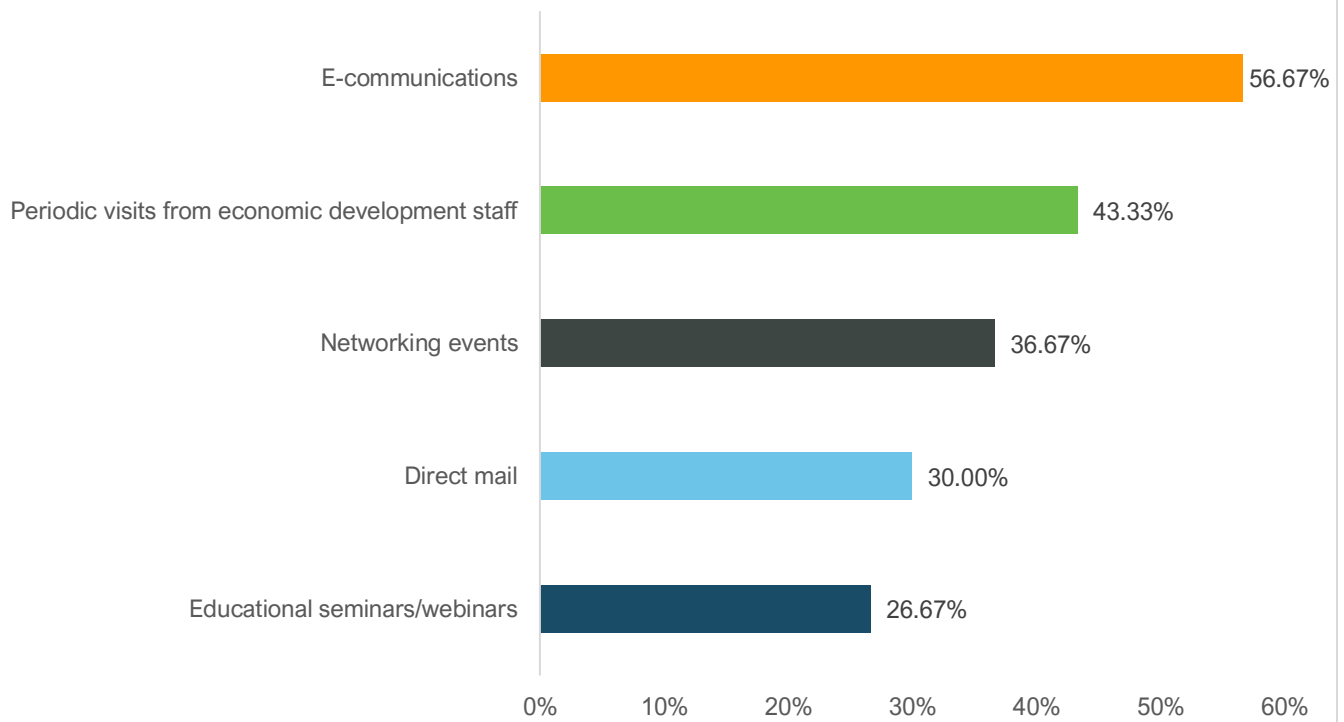
The rating of the business climate **significantly improved** with higher percentages ranking it at 3 and 4 and lower percentage ranking it at 2.





If you live outside Amherst County, would you consider moving here? Why or why not?
No. Too rural
Possibly
No. Better schools in Bedford County.
Yes, beautiful, laid back and friendly.
Yes -- very centrally located
Probably not because the lack of job options
Yes, once my son graduates from high school.
Inadequate amount of quality housing.
No

How would you like to be contacted with information that can help you grow your business? Choose all that apply.



Study Sponsor and Consultant



The mission of the Economic Development Authority (EDA) of Amherst County is to promote economic development policies and practices that help retain the county's existing businesses and employment base; facilitate the growth of existing commercial and industrial enterprises; and attract new businesses and employment opportunities. Success in this mission will result in high-quality jobs and a stable and diverse tax base that increases the quality of life of Amherst County residents.

<https://amherstvabusiness.com/>



Creative Economic Development Consulting, LLC, provides strategic planning, product development, organizational development, social media, and economic impact analysis services to communities and organizations.

Creative EDC is an innovative firm that owns four proprietary programs:

Certified Entrepreneurial Community®, CreativeSiteAssessment.com, Certified Industrial Buildings, and CBOSS-Creative Back Office Suite of Services. www.creativeedc.com