

## ***Hardin County's 2010 Vision Project... Setting a Course for the Future***



**Submitted To:** The Honorable Harry L. Berry  
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## ***Hardin County's 2010 Vision Project... Setting a Course for the Future***



Hardin County, Kentucky is going through a major transformation which is unique to Kentucky. The ongoing base realignment at Fort Knox (commonly referred to as BRAC) is bringing big changes to the Post and to the entire County.



In order to capitalize on this once in a lifetime opportunity, Hardin County Government commissioned a visioning project for the purpose of building upon the positive momentum created by BRAC. The project was designed to build upon Hardin County's strengths and current growth opportunities, identify weaknesses, maximize efficiencies and establish strategic community goals.

Louisville-based consulting firm L.B. Schmidt & Associates, LLC was retained to conduct the project on behalf of Hardin County Government and in partnership with the Lincoln Trail Area Development District and the United States Department of Defense's Office of Economic Adjustment.

The project's methodology included a community strategic assessment (which included analysis of previously conducted studies and interviews with key groups and organizations). Also included in the community assessment was a 30 page confidential key stakeholder survey which was sent to 100 community leaders representing the agriculture, business, education, government, health care, industrial, military and tourism sectors, and, two community leadership forums.

The project also analyzed benchmark (or peer) counties that align with Hardin County demographically in order to determine how these counties approach various issues, such as community and economic development. The benchmark counties included:

- Daviess County, Kentucky (Owensboro area)
- Lee County, Mississippi (Tupelo area)
- Lowndes County, Mississippi (Columbus area)
- Montgomery County, Tennessee (Clarksville area)
- Warren County, Kentucky (Bowling Green area)

The key stakeholder surveys generated a 70% response rate which provided an accurate snapshot of attitudes and opinions on various key issues. The survey covered the following areas:

- Media
- Education
- Arts/Cultural Issues
- Quality of Life/Quality of Place
- Downtown Elizabethtown
- Economic Development
- Community Competitiveness with Other Communities
- Fort Knox
- Conference/Convention Facilities
- Health Care
- Transportation
- Community Position (Standing/Stature in Frankfort and Washington, D.C.)
- Government/The Big Picture

Community leaders participating in the vision process and through the key stakeholder surveys in Hardin County easily reached consensus on a number of broad areas, including:

- Strong support for education at all levels
- A desire to unify the community in order to leverage its size to improve the efficiency of the delivery of services
- A desire to speak with one community voice in order to improve the community's standing and stature in Frankfort and Washington, D.C., as has been successfully done with One Knox
- A desire to eliminate duplication when and where possible by combining groups and organizations in order to improve efficiency and more efficiently market and promote the community
- A desire to improve the existing quality of place/quality of life by improving the visual appearance in urban areas, develop new retail opportunities, and change existing alcoholic beverage laws in order to foster the development of new restaurants, pubs and other new dining experiences
- A desire to re-develop Downtown Elizabethtown to include new retail, entertainment and residential opportunities which will be unique to the County and will serve as a magnet for young professionals

### ***Benchmark Counties***

Each of the benchmark counties offered new insight as to how current issues can be approached in Hardin County. In Daviess County, the current spotlight is on downtown re-development in Owensboro. In addition to a \$40 million grant to rebuild the riverfront to eliminate erosion, a new park is being developed along with the city's aggressive Placemaking Initiative. Professionally planned by Gateway Planning (Fort Worth, Texas), downtown Owensboro is being transformed with a new hotel, events center, housing and retail opportunities.



Lee County's community development efforts continue to grow through the efforts of its Community Development Foundation (CDF). The CDF has been instrumental in creating growth opportunities in the Tupelo area, including a new Toyota auto assembly plant (the plant has been completed; however, the start-up date is uncertain due to the current downturn in the auto industry).



Lee County also transformed an old downtown mall into a 9,000 seat arena/convention center (Bancorp South Arena) which is next door to the First Class Bancorp South Conference Center which adjoins the new Hilton Garden Inn.



Lee County is also home to the largest hospital in rural America – the North Mississippi Medical Center, a 650 bed facility which was privatized in 1978 and now serves as the largest employer in the County (6,500 employees) and as the hub of a 38 facility network of small rural hospitals, clinics and urgent care centers in 24 surrounding counties.

Lowndes County's economy is similar to Hardin County in that it is also home to a large military base (Columbus Air Force Base). Recently, the county merged its chamber of commerce and local economic development entity and created Columbus Lowndes Development LINK. Since 2006, LINK has facilitated the development of 4,000 new jobs, investment of \$3.4 billion in industrial and retail development and the development of two TVA-certified megasites.



The GTR Global Aerospace Park is the County's newest megasite and is located next to the Golden Triangle Regional Airport. The park covers 3,000 acres and is geared towards companies that are part of the aerospace industry (taking full advantage of nearby Mississippi State University's aerospace research facility).



Montgomery County is also like Hardin County as it (along with adjacent Christian County, Kentucky) serves as the home of Fort Campbell. As recently as 1980, Hardin County had a larger population than Montgomery County. However, the community's leaders realized that they needed to diversify the local economy and lessen the dependence on the Post in order to even out the economic peaks and valleys when 20,000 troops at a time would deploy from Fort Campbell.

A new focus was put into place to develop new industry and to leverage the community's assets (including 10,000 student Austin Peay State University).



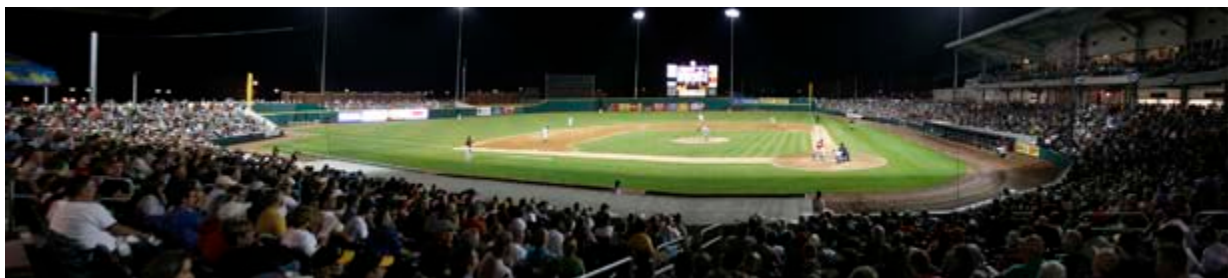
Today, Clarksville is the fifth largest city in Tennessee and the ninth fastest growing city in the United States. The community was successful in recruiting Hemlock Semiconductor Corporation to the megasite located in Clarksville. A total of 900 new jobs are coming with this plant, with planned expansion to follow (and lots of new supplier related jobs expected). Montgomery County now has a population of 154,000 people.

One thing that Lee County, Lowndes County and Montgomery County all have in common is that they have in effect merged their respective chambers of commerce, economic and industrial development entities into one “powerhouse” entity which focuses significantly on community development. In addition to their normal operating budgets, each group also runs a four year capital campaign (funds raised within each community) to provide additional funds which are used to formally support community development efforts. The campaigns are goal oriented and annual reports are issued each year to provide an update on results. Fund raising summaries follow:



• Lee County Community Development Foundation Focus 2010	\$2,600,000
• Columbus Lowndes Development LINK (The Trust Campaign)	\$2,025,000
• Clarksville/Montgomery County ASPIRE	\$2,400,000

Finally, in Warren County (which recently passed Hardin County in population), the focus is on downtown re-development. A new minor league baseball stadium was opened last year. The Bowling Green Ballpark is home to the Bowling Green Hot Rods, the Class A affiliate team of the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. The 4,500 seat stadium averaged 3,700 fans per game in its first season (which was ahead of plan).



The intent is to create a new corridor from the stadium, through downtown, to the foot of the hill and the campus of Western Kentucky University. The new development will include a new hotel, parking garage, new loft style housing and new retail opportunities. By 2014, the community expects private investment in the public/private project to total \$150 million.

The Gateway plan also intends to draw more people downtown to concerts on the Square (three of the Friday night baseball games this past season coincided with downtown concerts, which combined to bring 13,000 people to downtown Bowling Green on three different nights).

The Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce coordinates all aspects of community and economic development. The Chamber, which is nationally recognized, is about to launch a new \$55,000 Web site. The Chamber has management contracts with and operates the following entities:



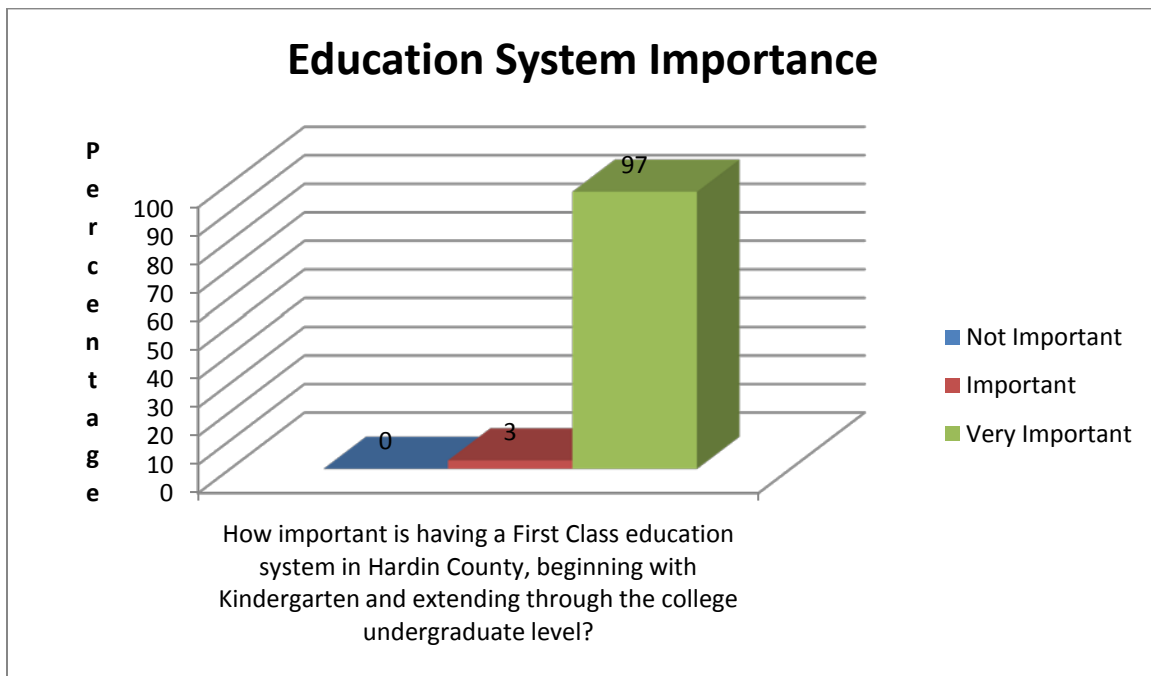
- Bowling Green Area Economic Development Authority
- Bowling Green Regional Development Authority
- Kentucky Transpark

In addition, through its “menu of services” program, the Chamber also offers economic development services for smaller surrounding counties which cannot afford the services of a full time economic development specialist.

### **Community Strategic Assessment**

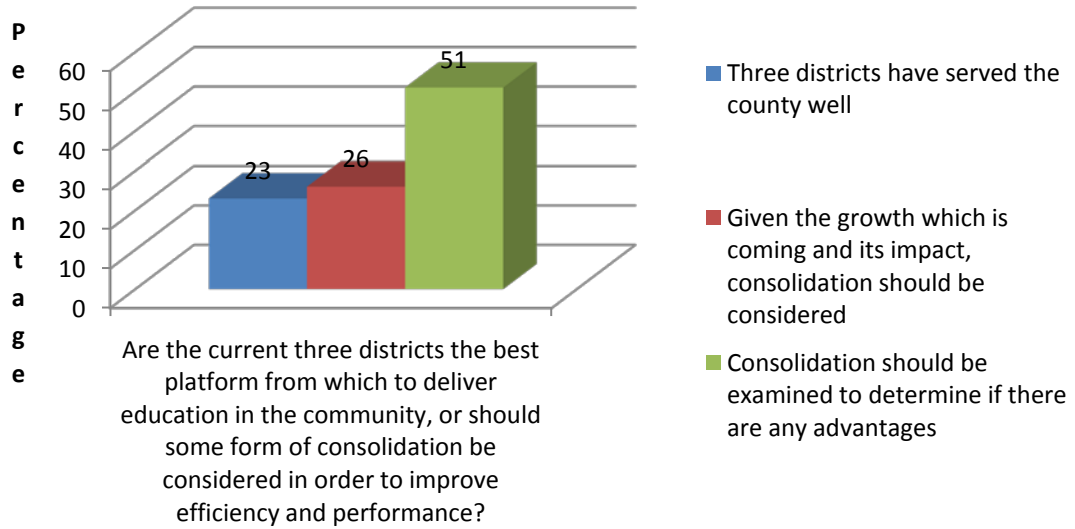
The key stakeholder survey provided the following key conclusions:

- Community leaders strongly value education and believe that the three local school districts perform better than most districts in Kentucky



- By a slim majority, survey participants believe that two of the three local school districts are adequately funded
- Given the growth which is coming with BRAC, a strong majority of participants believe that the time has come to consolidate or consider consolidating the three school districts

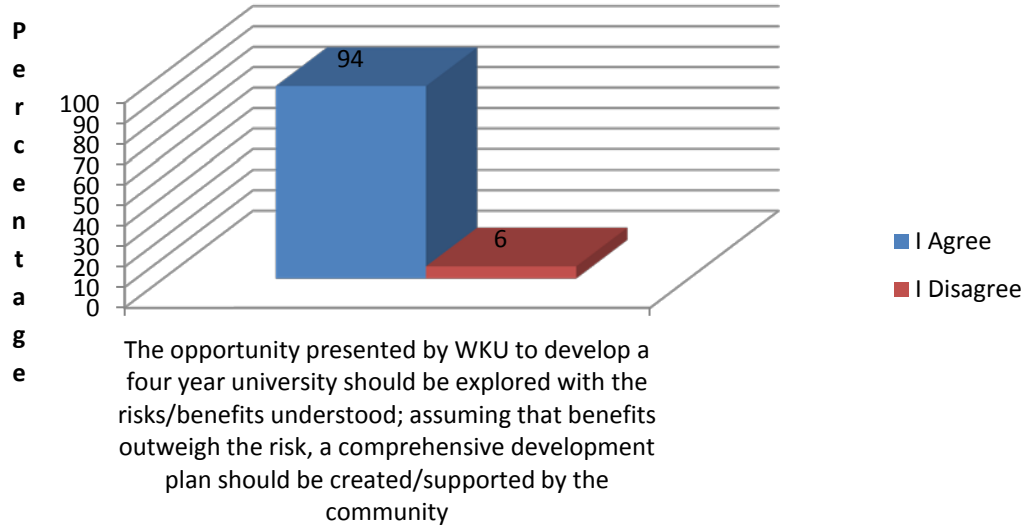
## Education delivery platform



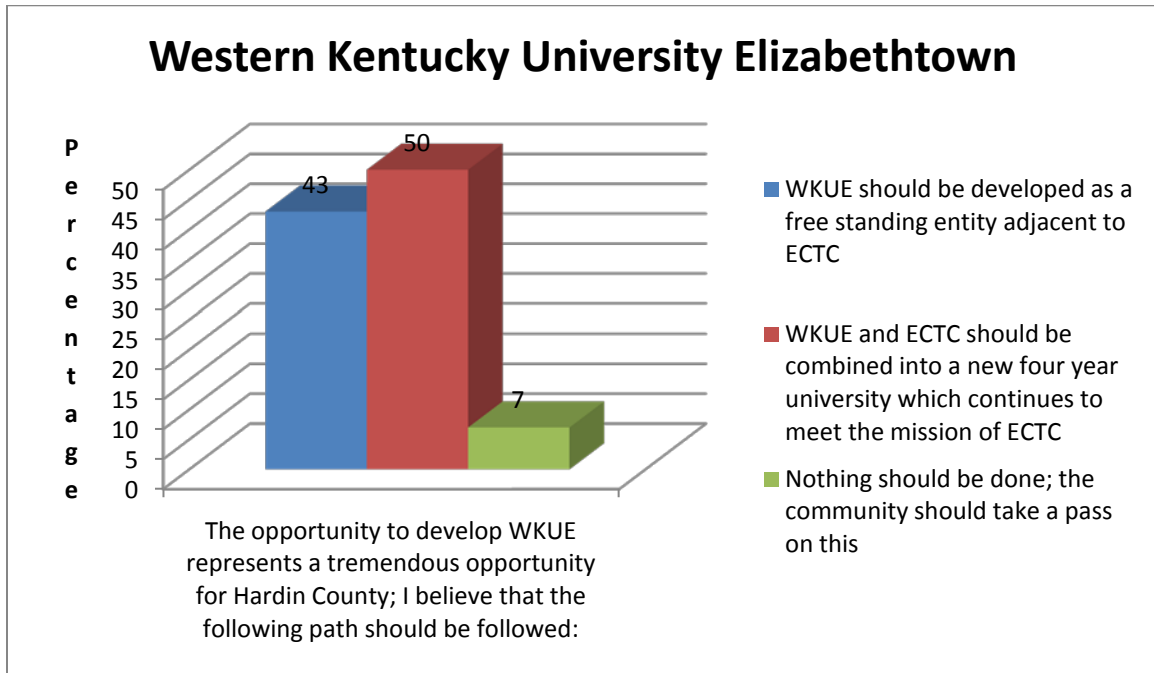
- Participants believe that an Area Technology Center is needed to round out local secondary education offerings

The demand for four year degrees which can be earned locally appears to be increasing. Recognizing the growth coming with BRAC (and the needs of the Human Resources Command), Western Kentucky University expressed interest (at the time that BRAC was announced) in developing a full four year university in Elizabethtown.

## Western Kentucky University Elizabethtown

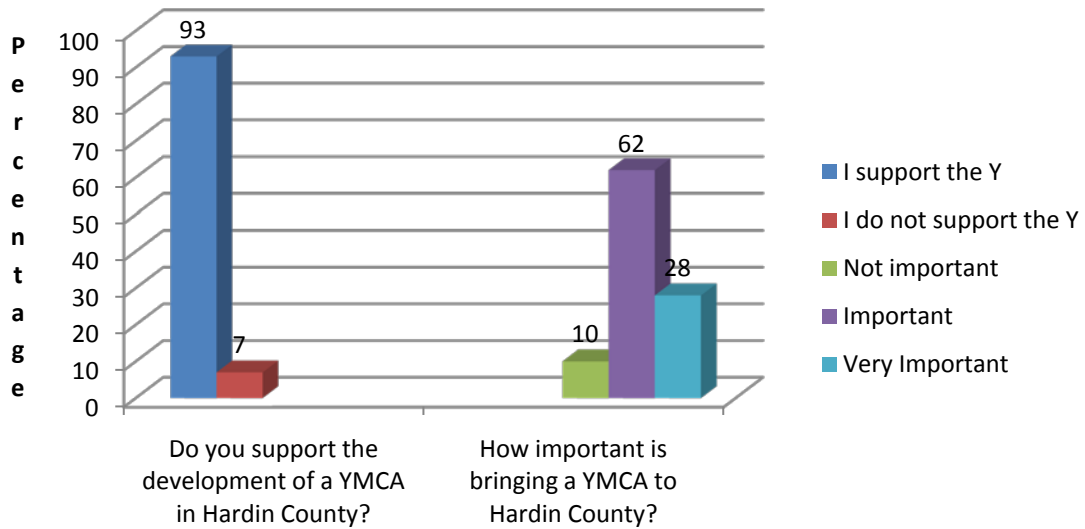


- Participants strongly believe that a four year college is needed in Hardin County



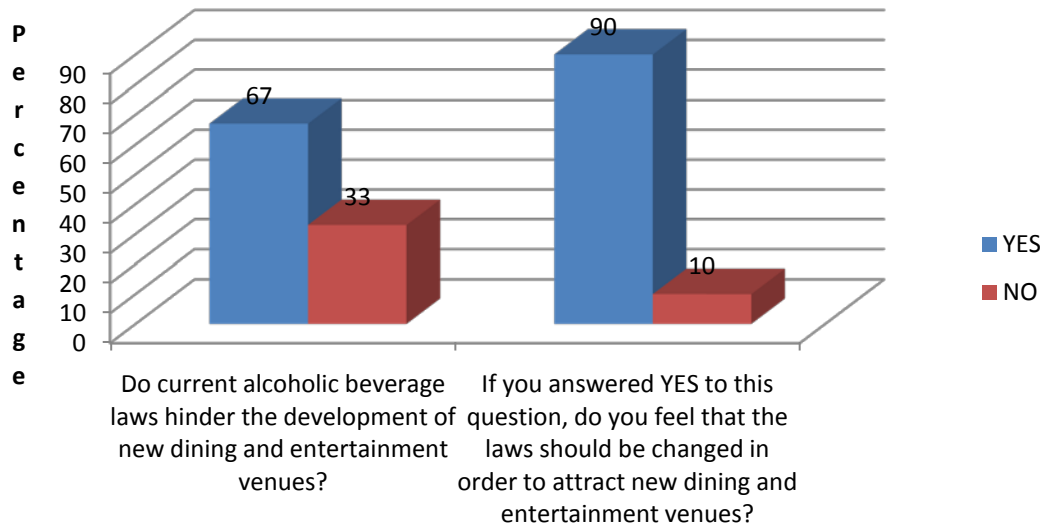
- Turning to arts and cultural issues, only 5% believe that the County has a vibrant arts scene
- Yet, a strong majority believes that expansion of the County's art scene will make the community more attractive for business/industrial expansion
- Participants like living in Hardin County and its overall quality of life; however, they have also offered numerous suggestions as to how to improve it
- Participants strongly favor the development of a YMCA

## Hardin County YMCA Support

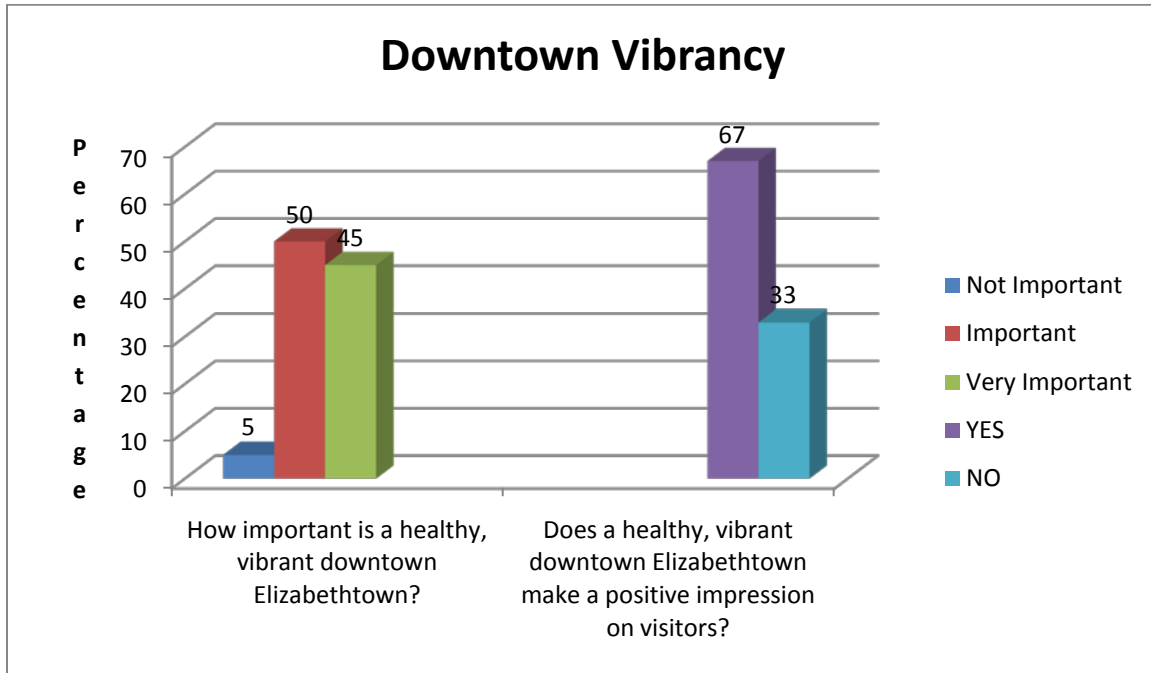


- Participants believe that more public parks and recreation facilities are needed
- The dining/entertainment scene in Hardin County has been found to be "less than robust"
- Coupled with this, participants, by a wide a majority, favor changing existing alcoholic beverage laws, believing that such change will enhance the development of new restaurants, a convention/conference business and overall economic expansion

## Dining/Entertainment

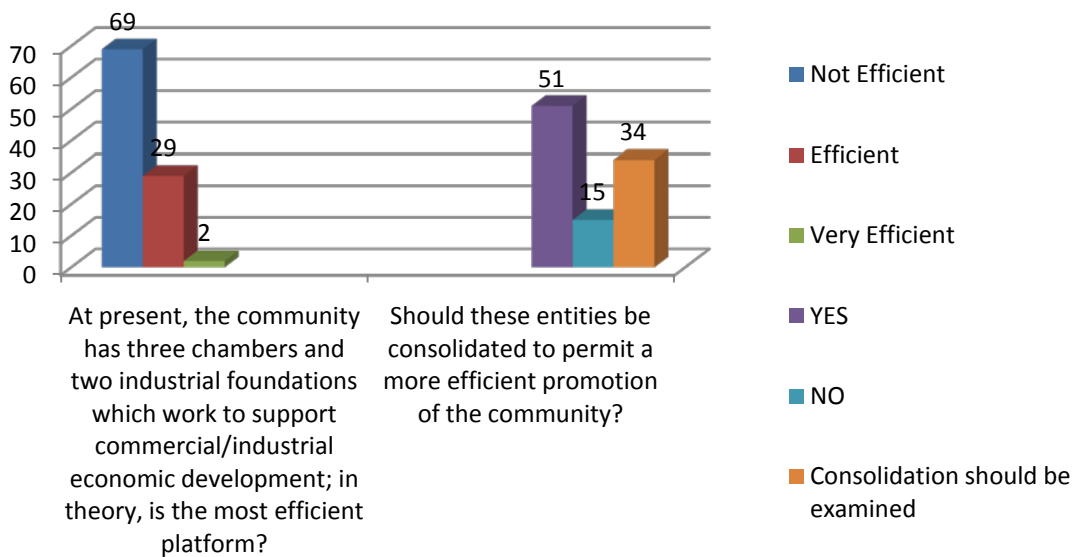


- Participants believe that a vibrant downtown Elizabethtown is important and that efforts should be made to develop and attract new businesses, shops and restaurants to the downtown area



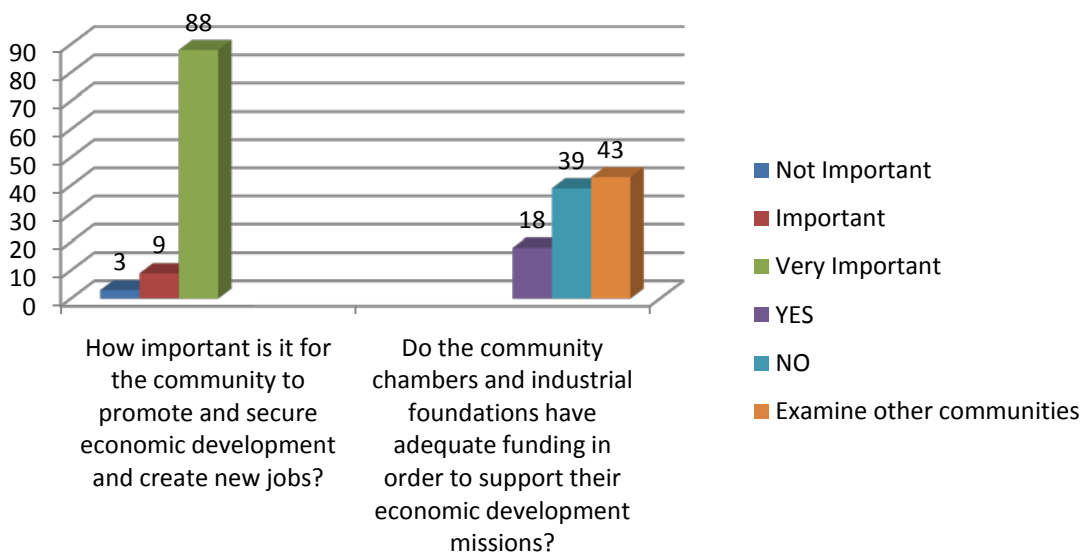
- A majority of participants believe that it is not easy to develop a commercial project in Hardin County and that impact fees should be implemented (or at least studied) in order to mitigate the cost of infrastructure development in high growth areas
- A strong majority of participants believe that the three existing chambers and two industrial foundations should be consolidated in some fashion (or, the issue should be studied) in order to provide a more efficient platform for community economic development and promotion

### Community Economic Development/Promotion



- A strong majority of participants believe that it is vitally important for the community to promote and secure economic development and to create new jobs

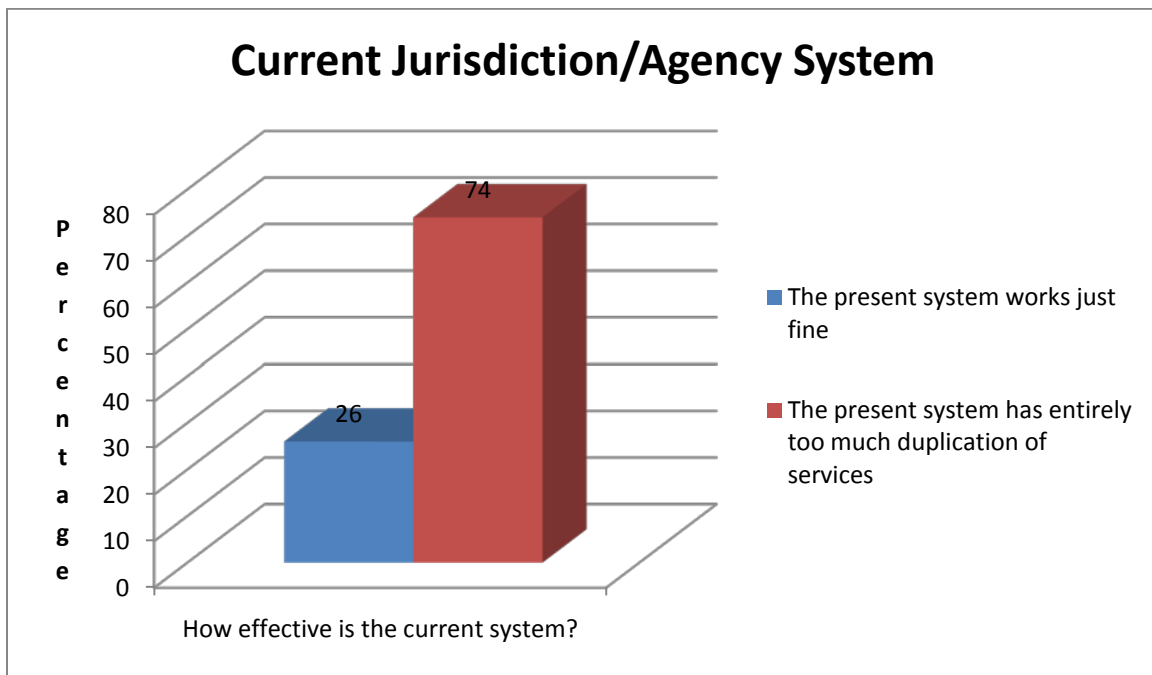
### Chambers/Industrial Foundations Mission & Support



- As expected, Fort Knox was found in the survey to be very important to the future of the community
- A strong majority favor the development of a new conference/convention business in the County

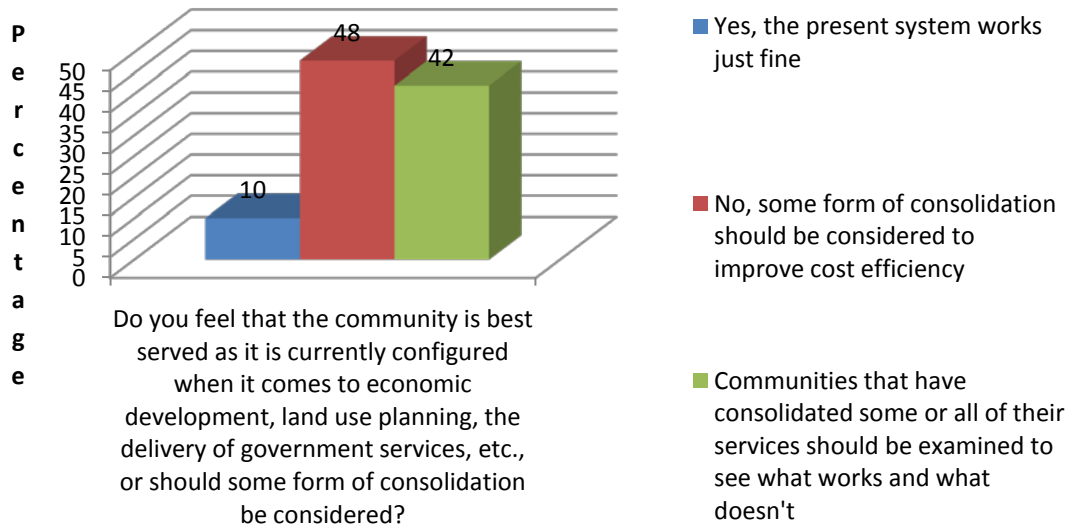
- Existing health care was found to have a high favorable ranking; however, more should be done in the area of community wellness initiatives
- Given the growth in the area and the County's central location, a majority of participants favor either expanding Hardin Memorial Hospital's emergency room to Trauma Center status, or agree that the issue should be studied
- A strong majority of participants favor studying the community's mass transit needs, or the actual development and implementation of a mass transit system
- Participants believe that the current configuration of government, public safety services, economic development entities, water districts, etc., has entirely too much duplication of services

At present, local government in Hardin County (not including Fort Knox) consists of both city and county governments which comprise the following jurisdictions and agencies: 15 fire departments six municipal governments, four municipal police departments, three municipal planning and zoning organizations, three water districts, three school districts, two industrial foundations, two visitor bureaus, one county government, one county sheriff's department and one county planning and zoning organization. All of this to serve a community of 100,000 people.



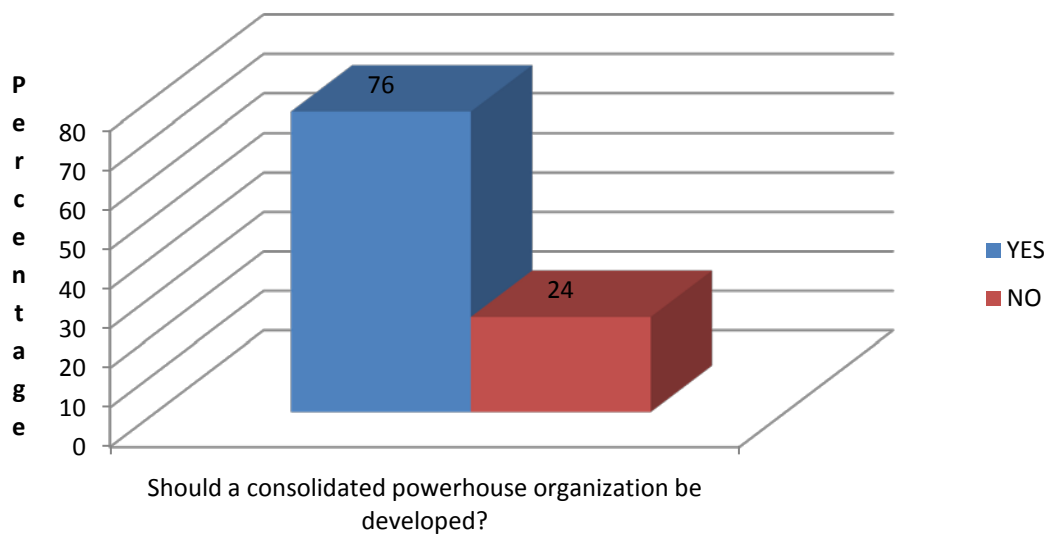
- Fully 90% of the participants favor studying communities which have consolidated government/services, or actually implementing consolidation

## Government Service/System Delivery



- Finally, a strong majority of participants favor consolidation of existing chambers of commerce and industrial foundations into a “powerhouse” economic development entity, and, they also favor the establishment of a visioning entity to assist the County in preparing for the future

## Consolidated Powerhouse Organization



Based upon these findings and discussion from the two community leadership forum, project participants agreed upon the following strategic goals for Hardin County:

### Proposed Hardin County Strategic Goals

Category	Goal	Short-Term Goals (1 – 7 Years)	Long-Term Goals (8 – 15 Years)
Education	Develop “leading edge” educational platform in the community, beginning with Kindergarten and extending through post-secondary education	X	
	Facilitate the development and implementation of the “leading edge” platform plan by North Central Education Foundation	X	
	Develop Area Technology Center	X	
	Merge Elizabethtown Independent Schools, West Point Independent Schools and Hardin County Schools into a single, unified district	X	
	Develop full four year university		X
Community Unification	Facilitate study of merged government structures in other communities and develop recommendations for Hardin County	X	
	Merge local governments	X	
Community Development	Create new “powerhouse” entity which will promote all facets of the community (business and retail development, business and retail advocacy, industrial development, education, work force training, and, tourism) for the combined purposes of representing businesses, promoting the community and creating new jobs	X	
	Facilitate study of similar entities in other communities which have adopted this approach and develop recommendations for Hardin County	X	
	Through this new entity, substantially increase funding to promote Greater Hardin County and create new jobs	X	
	Develop First Class hotel/conference center	X	
Quality of Place/ Quality of Life	Change existing alcoholic beverage laws to achieve full “wet” status for the community’s urban areas	X	
	Adopt strict sign ordinances in the community’s urban areas to eliminate visual clutter and improve streetscapes	X	
	Adopt strict property upkeep ordinances in the community’s urban areas to eliminate eyesores and improve streetscapes	X	
	Develop public landscaping plan in the community’s urban areas to improve streetscapes	X	
	Examine partnership opportunities between the Historic State Theater Complex and the Hardin County Performing Arts Center to aggressively market both facilities and enhance the offerings of both facilities to include a variety of programs of interest to the entire community	X	
	Develop new retail opportunities to mirror those commonly found in larger urban areas	X	
	Develop a public art set aside for public buildings/spaces	X	
	Develop community YMCA	X	
	Develop community symphony orchestra		X
Downtown Elizabethtown	Create new retail, entertainment and residential district in Downtown Elizabethtown	X	
	Identify new funding mechanisms, such as TIF districts, to assist in the redevelopment of Downtown Elizabethtown	X	
	Streamline the permitting process by identifying codes which need revision in order to encourage downtown redevelopment	X	
Health Care	Obtain Trauma Center certification at Hardin Memorial Hospital	X	