



RURAL MATTERS

Five counties. Five conversations. One region *working together.*



Between December 2019 and January 2020, the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council worked with numerous local partners to extend the **Big Table Greater Peoria** initiative throughout the five-county region. Neighbors joined together to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing rural and small town communities in Greater Peoria. Each meeting was open to the public as a place to openly discuss issues and propose strategies that support community and economic development.

5 Events
HAVANA
METAMORA
BRIMFIELD
DELAN
LINCOLN



240
Participants

from

47
Zip codes





Survey Results

Response rate **38.33%** | Male **51.09%** | Female **48.91%**
97% white | **2%** African American or Black | **1%** Latinx or Hispanic

Survey participants rated **rural development** on the following factors using a five-point scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree.”

There is a **significant need to improve rural communities** and development for the future success of the Greater Peoria Region.

4.7

There are opportunities for improving rural communities in the Greater Peoria region.

4.4

Demands have changed significantly for rural communities and economic development in the last decade.

4.4

A Variety of Topics

The event participants identified the discussion topics important to their communities. After creating a list of topics, table were designated for each discussion and participants chose which table(s) to join. Over the five events, a range of issues were discussed and many were **recurring topics**:

- Natural Resources
- **Local Assets & Tourism**
- Job Retention & Creation
- **Small Business Development**
- **Education**
- Industrial Hemp
- **Infrastructure & Broadband**
- **Quality of Life**
- **Focusing Business Attraction**
- Childcare
- **Grocery Stores**
- **Entrepreneurship**
- Senior Housing
- **Local Foods Infrastructure**
- **Improving Quality of Life**
- **Historic Preservation**
- **Agriculture & Agtech**
- **Youth Engagement & Mentorship**
- Senior Food Security
- Bike and pedestrian transportation
- Improving Communication with Government

Strengths

Affordable places to live and do business
 Many exceptional school districts
 Premium agricultural assets
 Tourism assets (natural resources and historic places)
 Community spirit and close relationships

Opportunities

Business attraction: agriculture and logistics
 Retain and attract retirees
 Remote workers and entrepreneurs; live here work anywhere
 Grow and attract agriculture innovation businesses
 Leverage natural resources and historic places for tourism

Weaknesses

Broadband still lacking in certain areas
 Closures of grocery stores and other local businesses
 Lack of startup and small business support and resources
 Small town economic development capacity
 Pockets of persistent poverty

Threats

Outmigration of residents, especially youth
 Aging population and workforce
 Real and perceived Illinois business climate challenges
 Shrinkage of dominant/historic employers
 Continued shifts in the retail industry (online and box stores)

What's next?

The Greater Peoria EDC is incorporating all the input gathered at at Big Table Greater Peoria events into the **2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**. The CEDS provides our region with a road map to improving the regional economy. It also serves as a line of communication to resource partners and funding bodies. Learn more about the CEDS process and document at www.cedscentral.com. Additional outreach will continue with all participants and regional community and economic development partners to build on the momentum created through the Big Table Greater Peoria initiative.

Stay in the loop with the Big Table Greater Peoria at www.bigtablegp.com