



County of Albemarle ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

As part of the Economic Development Strategic plan update process, Albemarle County residents were invited to provide feedback which could help the Economic Development Office project team understand the community's perception of the County's past economic development efforts and to identify future opportunities that should be considered in the strategic planning process. The County received 152 responses to an online questionnaire, which were analyzed by staff. [See Economic Development Strategic Plan Questionnaire Results.](#)

The Economic Development Office has hired Resonance Consultancy Inc. to lead an inclusive and data-driven approach to the Economic Development Strategic Plan update project. As an early project deliverable, Resonance collected and analyzed economic and demographic data and compared it to data from similar "benchmark" communities. Resonance's benchmarking exercise resulted in several takeaways. [See Competitive Benchmarking Takeaways.](#)

The feedback received via the questionnaire aligned with economic and demographic data gathered by Resonance. Below are common themes that emerged from analysis of community feedback and the data.

Housing and affordability

Concerns about the cost of living and housing affordability were the most common themes raised by community respondents. Respondents report concern that high costs make it difficult for middle and lower-income individuals and families to live and thrive in the area, with a particular concern over a lack of housing stock.

The data gathered by Resonance supports residents' perceptions. Albemarle County's population is growing at a faster rate than peer localities and the rest of Virginia, which contributes to pressure on housing: home values in Albemarle County are 30% higher than Virginia's average, and nearly 1 in 5 households spend more than 30% of their income on housing.

Workforce development and upward mobility

Respondents generally perceived the jobs market as strong, citing low unemployment, and expressed a desire to expand the types of job available. Demand was particularly strong for well-paying, career-ladder jobs outside of the government, nonprofit, and education sectors. Respondents see jobs in STEM, light manufacturing, and middle-skill professions as desirable.

Economic data show the strength of Albemarle County's jobs market, particularly in STEM job growth. However, the county has a relatively low workforce participation rate, suggesting that jobs may be inaccessible to some workers. Prime working-age talent (workers aged 25-44) is also underrepresented in the county, suggesting a lack of early- and mid-career job opportunities.

Economic diversification and small business support

The roles of the University of Virginia (UVA) and the federal government were frequently mentioned in responses to the questionnaire, with respondents highlighting both positive and problematic aspects of these institutions' impact on the local economy.

UVA and government jobs are generally seen as major economic drivers, providing stability and employment opportunities. Rivanna Futures –an Albemarle County-led economic development project to develop a defense and intelligence innovation hub adjacent to the national intelligence installation at Rivanna Station – is frequently mentioned as an opportunity to bring good jobs to the county.

However, many respondents are concerned that the economic dominance of large institutions comes at the expense of small businesses and overall economic diversity. The region's reliance on the federal government and defense spending is viewed by some respondents as an area of particular concern.

The county shares economic characteristics with peer localities such as Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Durham, North Carolina, which are both known for their university-driven innovation ecosystems. The county stands out for its highly educated workforce (over 60% of residents holding a bachelor's degree or higher), indicative of the role of UVA and national intelligence agencies, institutions that require highly educated workers.

Infrastructure and placemaking

Albemarle County's high quality of life and natural beauty are frequently mentioned as major assets by respondents, who highlight the importance of maintaining these assets amidst increasing development. Respondents cite the importance of adequate infrastructure (such as roads and schools), more flexible zoning regulations, multi-modal transportation, and walkable/bikeable paths. Placemaking is also a high priority for respondents interested in preserving the Albemarle's quality of life, with respondents supporting revitalization of commercial spaces and increased retail and dining amenities, while opposing growth of businesses perceived as undesirable.

Data gathered by Resonance echoes community insight on quality of life, showing that the county ranks highly among its peers for walkability, bikeability, and family-friendly amenities. The data also show that the county has strong retail and dining amenities. However, nightlife and cultural amenities are an area where the county lags behind peer localities.

Sustainability and smart growth

Many respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that growth was managed in a smart and sustainable way, balancing economic opportunity with ensuring that growth does not impact the environment of the county's rural character. Respondents highlighted a range of issues in this area, from limiting industries perceived as undesirable to reducing the risk of PFAS contamination.

The data show that Albemarle County is strongly placed to manage smart growth. The county already performs well on metrics such as walkability and bikeability, which limit sprawl and emissions.