

CHAPTER 3: Strategic Planning Goals

One of the primary purposes of this survey was to assess which strategic planning goals that citizens consider to be most important and should be given high budget priorities for Spotsylvania County. To assist in identifying services and programs that are considered a high priority by the citizens of Spotsylvania County, we asked,

“Over the next year, Spotsylvania County will be updating its comprehensive plan. We’d like your help in determining which goals should be most important for the plan, when deciding how to allocate limited budget dollars. Which of the following items should be given high budget priorities and which should be given low budget priority? Please imagine a scale from 1 to 10, where 10 represents the highest budget priority and 1 represents the lowest budget priority. How high is the priority for spending dollars on...”

Each respondent was asked to rate twelve of the following eighteen items that had been identified by the County staff and Board of Supervisors:

- *Providing quality education in our public schools*
- *Protecting water quality in reservoirs, streams and wells*
- *Making the area’s streets safer for walkers and bicyclists*
- *Preserving natural resources and open space*
- *Reducing traffic congestion*
- *Supporting recreational programs for youth*
- *Bringing more higher paying jobs to the area*
- *Supporting cultural and entertainment opportunities*
- *Providing parks and recreational facilities*
- *Providing public transportation*
- *Preserving historic buildings and places*
- *Providing law enforcement services*
- *Providing fire and rescue services*
- *Controlling the rate of growth in the area*
- *Promoting economic growth*
- *Providing for drainage and stormwater improvements*
- *Maintaining and repairing roads in your neighborhood*
- *Improving Spotsylvania County Museum*

In order to rank these items from most important to least, we computed a mean response for each one. The higher the mean score, the higher was the importance level assigned to the item by our respondents. A rating of 8 to 10 was considered a ‘high priority,’ 5 to 7 was a ‘medium priority,’ and 1 to 4 was considered a ‘low priority.’ Table 3.1 shows the goals ranked by mean, from most important to least important.

Table 3.1: Ranked List of Goals

Rank	Item	Mean
1	Providing quality education in our public schools	8.87
2	Reducing traffic congestion	8.59
3	Providing fire and rescue services	8.35
4	Providing law enforcement services	8.29
5	Protecting water quality in reservoirs, streams, and wells	8.11
6	Controlling the rate of growth in the area	7.75
7	Bringing more higher paying jobs to the area	7.55
8	Preserving natural resources and open space	7.44
9 (tie)	Supporting recreational programs for youth	7.38
9 (tie)	Maintaining and repairing roads in your neighborhood	7.38
11	Making the area’s streets safer for walkers and bicyclists	6.96
12	Preserving historic buildings and places	6.71
13	Providing parks and recreational facilities	6.68
14	Providing public transportation	6.58
15	Promoting economic growth	6.45
16	Providing for drainage and storm water improvements	6.24
17	Supporting cultural and entertainment opportunities	5.64
18	Improving Spotsylvania County museum	5.09

Education

Providing quality education in public schools was rated as the highest priority by Spotsylvania County citizens, with an average rating of 8.87. Eighty-five percent of the respondents rated it “8” or higher in terms of importance and 57.4 percent rated it a “10.” Only 2.9 percent of the respondents said that providing quality education in our public schools was a low priority. Table 3.2 provides details for this item.

There were significant differences of opinion as to the importance of education as a budgetary priority among some of the demographic subgroups. Not surprisingly, respondents with children aged 17 or younger in the home rated the importance of providing quality education significantly higher (mean rating: 9.26) than did those without children (mean rating: 8.53). Notably, households with children aged 5 to 12 gave education an even higher rating than those without children in this

age group. Furthermore, respondents who reported that someone in their household is currently attending a Spotsylvania public school also rated the importance of this goal higher than others. Finally and interestingly, the mean importance rating of the goal of providing quality education in our public schools was lower among homeowners than among those who rent or have some other living arrangement.

Table 3.2: Importance of Education Goal

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Providing quality education in our public schools	8.87	85.0	12.0	2.9

Transportation Issues

When asked to rate issues related to transportation, residents of Spotsylvania County are most interested in budget funds being directed toward reducing traffic congestion, (mean rating: 8.59), with almost 80 percent (79.9%) of those surveyed rating it as a high priority (see Table 3.3). Maintaining and repairing roads in their neighborhood was tied for 9th in the list of priorities, with an average rating of 7.38 and 53.9 percent giving this item a rating of 8 or higher. Making the area’s streets safer for walkers and bicyclists is less of a priority for Spotsylvania residents, with an average importance rating 6.96. Even fewer feel that providing public transportation should be a high priority for County dollars, with only 41 percent indicating it should be a high priority (mean rating: 6.58).

The sub-group analysis provided some interesting findings. The importance of budgeting funds to improve street safety for walkers and bicyclists and providing public transportation was rated higher by the following demographic groups: females, races other than Caucasian, those who rent their homes, and those with household incomes of \$50,000 or less. Those not currently employed also feel more strongly that street safety should be a priority. When asked to rate the importance of road maintenance, females and older respondents felt more strongly that the issue should be a priority, compared to males and younger respondents respectively.

Table 3.3: Importance of Transportation Goals

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Reducing traffic congestion	8.59	79.9	13.9	6.2
Maintaining and repairing roads in your neighborhood	7.38	53.9	37.1	9.0
Making the area’s streets safer for walkers and bicyclists	6.96	47.0	37.3	15.6
Providing public transportation	6.58	41.0	39.3	19.7

Safety Services

Safety-related services are also seen as very important to citizens of Spotsylvania County. Providing fire and rescue services was the third most important priority with a mean rating of 8.35, followed closely by providing police services, with a

mean importance rating of 8.29. Almost three-fourths of respondents gave each goal a high priority rating (see Table 3.4). There was no significant variations in support for these safety service items between demographic subgroups.

Table 3.4: Importance of Safety Services Goals

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Providing fire and rescue services	8.35	73.4	24.3	2.3
Providing law enforcement services	8.29	73.3	22.4	4.2

Water Quality and Drainage

Protecting water quality in reservoirs, streams, and wells was ranked among the top five issues Spotsylvania citizens consider a high budget priority. On average, the rating for this item was 8.11, with 69.5 percent of respondents rating its importance as 8 or higher. On the other hand, when asked how important it was for the County to budget for providing drainage and stormwater improvements, the average rating was 6.24, with less than a third (31.1%) giving this item a high priority rating of 8 or better. Table 3.5 illustrates these findings.

Regarding subgroups, the perceived importance of designating County tax dollars for protecting the water quality in local reservoirs, streams and wells among Spotsylvania citizens is inversely related to household income. More specifically, those in the lowest income category (less than \$35,000) were significantly more likely than those with incomes of \$75,000 or more to rate protecting water quality as very important.

In addition to a similar inverse relationship to income, females and non-Caucasians were also significantly more likely to rate drainage and stormwater improvements as a higher priority as well.

Table 3.5: Importance of Protection of Water and Natural Resources Goals

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Protecting water quality in reservoirs, streams, and wells	8.11	69.5	26.1	4.4
Providing for drainage and stormwater improvements	6.24	31.1	49.8	19.1

Development and Economic Growth

For many Spotsylvania residents, controlling the rate of growth in the area is an important issue (see Table 3.6). Close to two-thirds (62.9%) of those interviewed rated the level of importance of this issue as an 8 or higher (mean rating: 7.75). Related to controlling growth is the preservation of natural resources and open space, which was ranked 8th in importance with a mean rating of 7.44. There were no demographic differences for either of these items.

Given the attitudes toward the need to control the area's growth rate, it may not be surprising that Spotsylvania citizens did not rate activities to promote economic growth as very important, with an average rating of 6.45 and only 36.6 percent rating this a high priority. Interestingly, parents of children who attend Spotsylvania public schools are much more supportive of using County tax dollars to control growth but at the same time want increased economic development in the area compared to those whose children attend private schools.

Table 3.6: Importance of Growth and Development Goals

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Controlling the rate of growth in the area	7.75	62.9	25.7	11.4
Preserving natural resources and open space	7.44	53.5	36.9	9.6
Promoting economic growth	6.45	36.6	44.0	19.5

Bringing Higher Paying Jobs to the Area

Regardless of how individuals feel about controlling growth or economic development, efforts to bring higher paying jobs to the area were considered relatively important, with an average rating of

7.55 (see Table 3.7). Four demographic subgroups felt more strongly than others on this issue. These groups include renters, those living in something other than a single-family dwelling, females, and those whose educational level is a high school degree or less.

Table 3.7: Importance of Employment Opportunities Goal

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Bringing more higher paying jobs to the area	7.55	58.3	31.2	10.5

Recreational Programs for Youth

Support for recreational programs for youth in Spotsylvania was tied for 9th in the list of important goals with a mean rating of 7.38 and 54.8 percent giving it a high priority (see Table 3.8). Not surprisingly, respondents with children aged 17 or younger in the home rated the importance of sup-

porting recreational programs for youth significantly higher (mean rating: 7.76) than did those without children (mean rating: 7.01). Respondents who reported that they did not own their own home, were of a race other than Caucasian, or who fell in the lower household income categories also more strongly supported this goal.

Table 3.8: Importance of Youth Program Goals

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Supporting recreational programs for youth	7.38	54.8	36.6	8.6

Providing Parks and Recreation Facilities

The importance of financial support for providing parks and recreation facilities ranked 13th and received a mean rating of 6.68, with less than 40 percent (38.4%) indicating this was a high priority

for them (see Table 3.9). Not surprisingly, those with children aged 17 or younger were more likely to rate support for parks and recreation facilities higher as well, compared to those who do not have children in their home.

Table 3.9: Importance of Parks and Recreation Programs and Facilities Goals

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Providing parks and recreational facilities	6.68	38.4	47.8	13.8

Support for Cultural Events and Historic Preservation

The preservation of historic buildings and places was ranked 12th overall with a mean rating of 6.71. Females were more likely than males to feel it is an important goal deserving budgetary priority.

As for interest in supporting cultural and entertainment opportunities, females, non-Caucasians, those who rent their home, and those with incomes of less than \$35,000 a year are more interested in the County subsidizing cultural and entertainment opportunities as compared to males, Caucasians, homeowners and those with higher household incomes, respectively.

Supporting cultural and entertainment opportunities and improving Spotsylvania County museums were rated as the last two priorities, with mean ratings of 5.64 and 5.09 respectively (see Table 3.10). Although these two items received the least support, there were some statistically significant differences of opinion by demographic subgroups.

Inverse relationships between support of using County dollars to improve Spotsylvania County museums and level of education and income were noted. More specifically, the higher a citizen's level of education and income, the lower the level of support indicated in terms of funding priority.

Table 3.10: Importance of Cultural Events and Historic Preservation Goals

Item	Mean	% High Priority	% Medium Priority	% Low Priority
Preserving historic buildings and places	6.71	40.5	44.5	15.0
Supporting cultural and entertainment opportunities	5.64	21.1	53.2	25.6
Improving Spotsylvania County Museum	5.09	16.1	47.9	36.1

Importance of Goals by Voting District

Overall, the rankings of strategic planning goals were similar across the seven voting districts of Spotsylvania, but there were some significant differences of opinion across districts on the impor-

tance of four goals: traffic congestion, controlling growth, preservation of natural resources, and making streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Table 3.11 provides a comparison of the overall ranking of the goals by Spotsylvania citizens by voting district.

Table 3.11: Ranked List of Goals By Voting District

Rank	Item	Battlefield	Berkeley	Chancellor	Courtland	Lee Hill	Livingston	Salem
1	Education	1	1	1	1	2	3	1
2	Traffic	2	4	2	3	1	6	2
3	Fire & Rescue	3	2	3	5	3	1	4
4	Law Enforcement	5	3	4	2	4	2	3
5	Water Quality	4	5	5	4	5	4	6
6	Controlling Growth	8	6 (tie)	6	6	6	5	10
7	Higher Paying Jobs	10	8	8	7	7	8	7
8	Natural Resources	6	10	10	10	8	7	8
9 (tie)	Programs for Youth	7	9	7	14	11	11	5
9 (tie)	Maintaining & repairing roads	9	6 (tie)	9	8	9	9	9
11	Safer Streets	11	11 (tie)	12	9	10	14	11
12	Preserving Historic Places	13	11 (tie)	11	16	15	10	13
13	Parks & Rec Facilities	12	13	13	12	14	12	12
14	Public Transportation	14	16	14	11	12	13	14
15	Economic Growth	15	15	15	13	13	15	15
16	Drainage improvements	16	14	16	15	16	16	16
17	Cultural and Entertainment	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
18	Improving Museum	18	18	18	18	18	18	18

In the overall ranking, reducing traffic congestion was considered the 2nd highest priority by Spotsylvania citizens, but those in the Berkeley and Livingston districts were less likely to feel as strongly about this goal and their rankings for this goal were 4th and 6th in level of importance, respectively. Controlling growth was ranked 6th by the entire sample, but those in the Battlefield and Salem voting districts felt these were significantly less important, with rankings of 8th and 10th, respectively. When it comes to spending tax dollars on the preservation of natural resources, those in the voting districts of Berkeley, Chancellor and Courtland ranked it as a lower priority than those

in other voting districts, as well as the County as a whole. Residents of the Livingston voting district were less concerned with making streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists in terms of a budget priority than were residents of other voting districts and the County as a whole. The ranking of preservation of historic places was lower for the voting districts of Courtland and Lee Hill, although the average rating (mean score) was not significantly different than other voting districts.

Summary

In summary, citizens of Spotsylvania feel that education, safety services, and efforts to control or reduce traffic congestion should be the top priorities for government officials when deciding which strategic planning goals to fund. Goals related to growth and development issues are also considered relatively important as well. County residents

view cultural and entertainment opportunities as well as preservation of historic places low in terms of budget priority. Finally, there is some variation in perception of importance of goals across voting districts, in particular the goals of reducing traffic congestion, controlling growth, preserving natural resources and open space, and making streets safer for pedestrians and cyclists.