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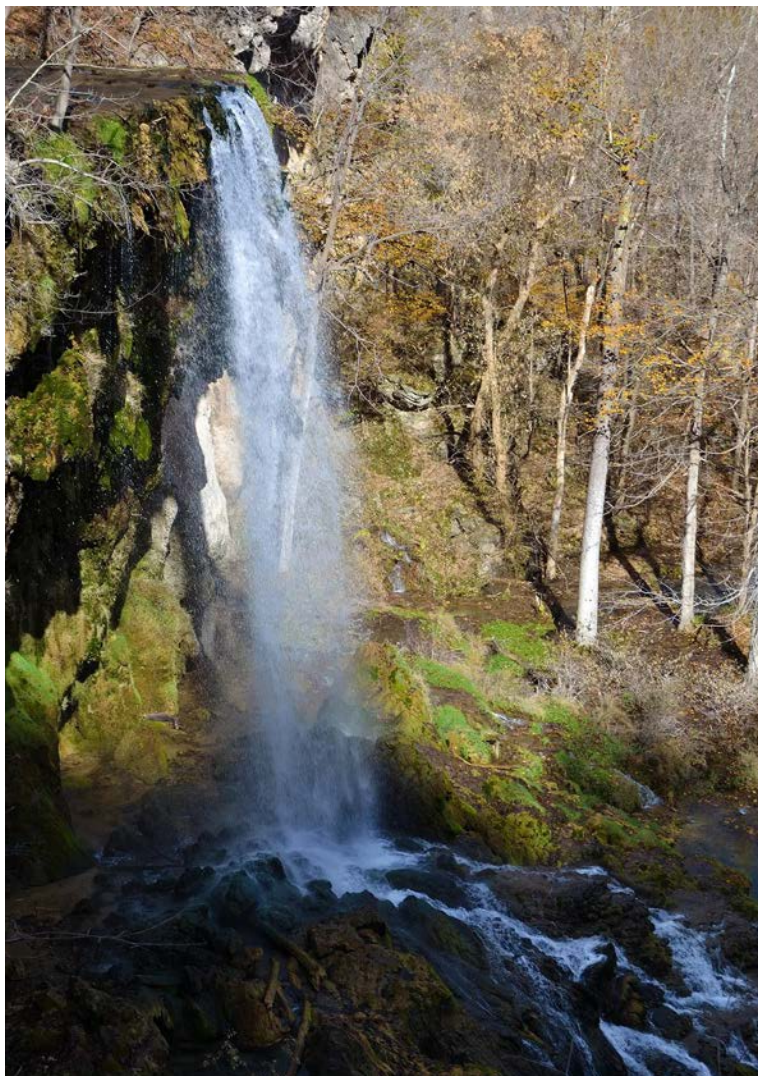
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Alleghany/Covington 2023 Situation Analysis Report

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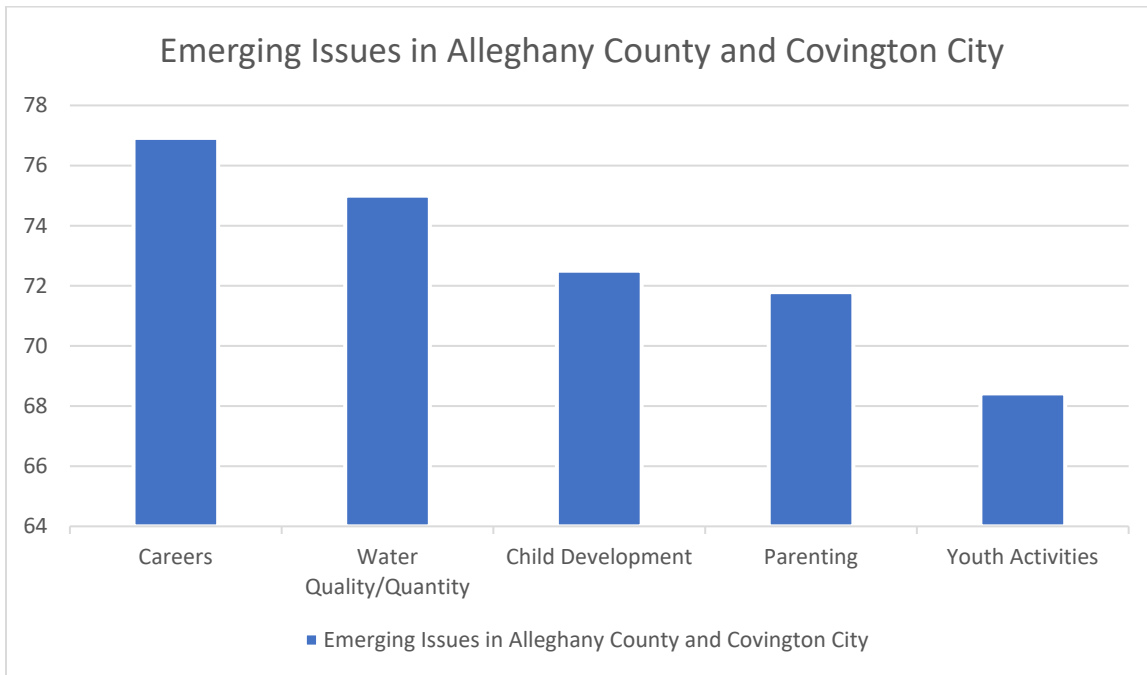


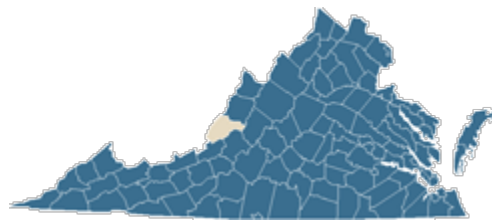
Figure 1. Percentage of respondents selecting a high effort is needed in addressing these top five issues in Alleghany County and Covington City.

Introduction

Alleghany County and Covington City conducted a comprehensive analysis of the issues facing its citizens during 2023. Using the 2019 VCE Situation Analysis, agriculture and population census data as a baseline, the process for updating this report involved many potential stakeholders including Master Naturalists; Alleghany Highlands County Public Schools; Alleghany Board of Supervisors and County Administrator; Covington City Council Members, Mayor and City Manager; Alleghany and Covington School Teachers; 4-H Volunteers and Youth Members; Alleghany Foundation; Alleghany Highlands Chamber of Commerce; Farm Bureau Representatives; YMCA; and Local Business Owners and non-profit organizations. A Qualtrics state level survey was shared on paper with Alleghany and Covington residents. Once surveys were completed the results were compiled.

Unit Profile

The Alleghany Highlands, including the county of Alleghany and city of Covington is in the western portion of Virginia and has a land area of 445.66 square miles. Adjoining the state of West Virginia, the area is 60 miles north of Roanoke, 176 miles west of Richmond, and 227 miles southwest of Washington, DC. on the I-64 corridor. The Alleghany Highlands is called “Virginia’s Western Gateway” and named after the great chain of mountains on its western border. The area was first settled in 1746, and on January 5, 1822, Alleghany County was formed from parts of Bath, Botetourt, and Monroe Counties by an act of the Virginia Legislature.



Alleghany County has an estimated population of 15,266 and Covington City has an estimated population of 5,531. The population breakdown for Alleghany/Covington is; 21% of residents are below the age of 19 years old; 55% of residents are between 19 and 64 years of age, and 24% of the population are 65 years and older. The racial composition of Alleghany County is 91% White, 6% Black or African American, 2% Asian and two or more races, 2% Hispanic. In Alleghany County, the population age 25+ that have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher is 15%. The median household income is \$49,705 in Alleghany County compared to \$80,963 in Virginia. **The percentage of Alleghany County households (family of 4) living below the poverty level as defined by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in the 2015 Poverty Guidelines of \$24, 250 was 27%. 22% of children are living in poverty and there is a 5% unemployment rate.**

Community and Resident Perspectives

A Qualtrics survey was created by Virginia Cooperative Extension to be used as a template for units to capture valuable data associated with their service areas. This survey was reformatted and distributed to citizens that well-represent the Alleghany County and Covington City through an on-line survey. Once the data was collected, Extension Staff analyzed the key findings based on mean figures and rated issues by priority. The top 11 issues that were rated very important and need to be addressed include: careers, child development, water quality/quantity, parenting, youth activities, teen community involvement, health, life skills/decision making, leadership, before and after-school issues, and youth volunteers.

Community Issues

Priority issues were identified based on the respondents rating in the Qualtrics survey that was distributed. The top five very important issues are: careers, water quality/quantity, child development, parenting, and youth activities.

Future Programming to Address Community Issues

Water Quality/Quantity

This issue had the highest rating out of all questions asked on the survey. Many Alleghany County residents are on well systems and do not have the financial means to afford drinking water tests. Our mountainous area is heavily industrialized with the potential to impair these waters through daily operations and lifestyles. There should be more efforts on educating homeowners on the potential risks of toxins in their water systems and provide information on where they can receive these services.

Extension can address this issue by partnering with the county Agriculture Extension Agents to provide a drinking water quality clinic to citizens. To promote and make the class more affordable Extension should partner with local businesses, such as The Farm Bureau. Adult education classes will be offered through the Alleghany Highlands Master Naturalist Program. Youth education lessons will be offered through in-school programs for elementary, middle school, and high school classes.

Careers

With unemployment rates high in our area, we need to continue working with career development programs for county and city high school students. Schools should provide educational options to students to accomplish college level classes in high school. There needs to be collaboration with professionals and businesses to share with students what is required to have a job and the definition of working and what businesses look for when hiring employees. Students need exposure to different career paths and the schooling that may be required at an early age. There is also a lack of students entering into trade programs, so we must promote and teach trade skills such as welding, electrician, and plumbing work. The efforts of small and large businesses must continue to grow to increase career opportunities and help support the younger population in remaining in our communities. Instruction is needed in the schools on how to topics such as managing money, paying bills, saving for retirement, banking, and budgeting.

Extension will continue to serve on the Alleghany Highlands Career Council, which provides Reality Store (a simulation of the real world and managing money) and Career Tweets (an event where students get face-to-face interaction with professionals from the different Virginia Career Clusters). Many of the issues above will be discussed and addressed in the Career Council. Community partners that assist with the planning and serve as volunteers include Community Services Board, YMCA, Alleghany Highlands Public Schools, Mountain Gateway Community College, and Social Services.

Child Development

Currently the Alleghany Office does not have an FCS agent that serves the area. Alleghany will reach out to other FCS agents in neighboring counties in an attempt to address this issue. Child development involves the biological, psychological, and emotional changes that occur in human beings between birth and the conclusion of adolescence. The early years of a child's life are very important for their health and development. Healthy development means that children of all abilities, including those with special health care needs, are able to grow up where their social, emotional and educational needs are met. Having a safe and loving home and spending time with family playing, singing, reading, and talking are very important. Proper nutrition, exercise, and sleep also can make a big difference.

4-H will work with the local school system to offer cloverbud programming in their schools. Programs will consist of in-school lessons and after-school activities.

Parenting

Many parents lack the skills needed for “good parenting” and families are driven by the children rather than the adults. There is a lack of structure at home, a greater need for schedules, and more focus on school work. Too many grandparents are raising the children of the Alleghany Highlands. We need to encourage parents to be parents and provide programs that support teaching parents how to be parents. There needs to be a greater emphasis at home for developing good qualities such as respect for others, honesty, and pride in yourself. Many students entering middle and high school have little regard for education or a work ethic. Due to this lack of parenting, there has been an increase in youth violence and mental instability.

Currently the Alleghany Office does not have an FCS agent that serves the area. Alleghany will reach out to other FCS agents in neighboring counties to address this issue. Extension would like to offer free classes and resources to parents by partnering with community organizations that work closely with parents in need. Through 4-H programs such as Character Counts, youth will have the opportunity to learn the meaning of respect and being responsible for themselves and others.

Youth Activities

Survey participants suggest there needs to be greater focus on positive youth development, which includes providing more youth activities afterschool and in school; community involvement opportunities for youth; life skills and decision-making building; mentoring programs; and leadership experiences. Youth who become engaged in the community and involved in activities are less likely to make bad life decisions. It will allow them to feel a sense of community and purpose.

Extension can respond to this issue by offering 4-H afterschool programs; providing 4-H in school programs that correlate to the Standards of Learning; maintaining a focus and commitment on community and project clubs; making Junior 4-H Camp accessible to all youth in the area; and creating mentorship programs with teen counselors and young adults attending Dabney S. Lancaster Community College.

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