

Envision Black Brook



Laberge
ENGINEERING
ARCHITECTURE



Group
SURVEYING
PLANNING

 **Department
of State**

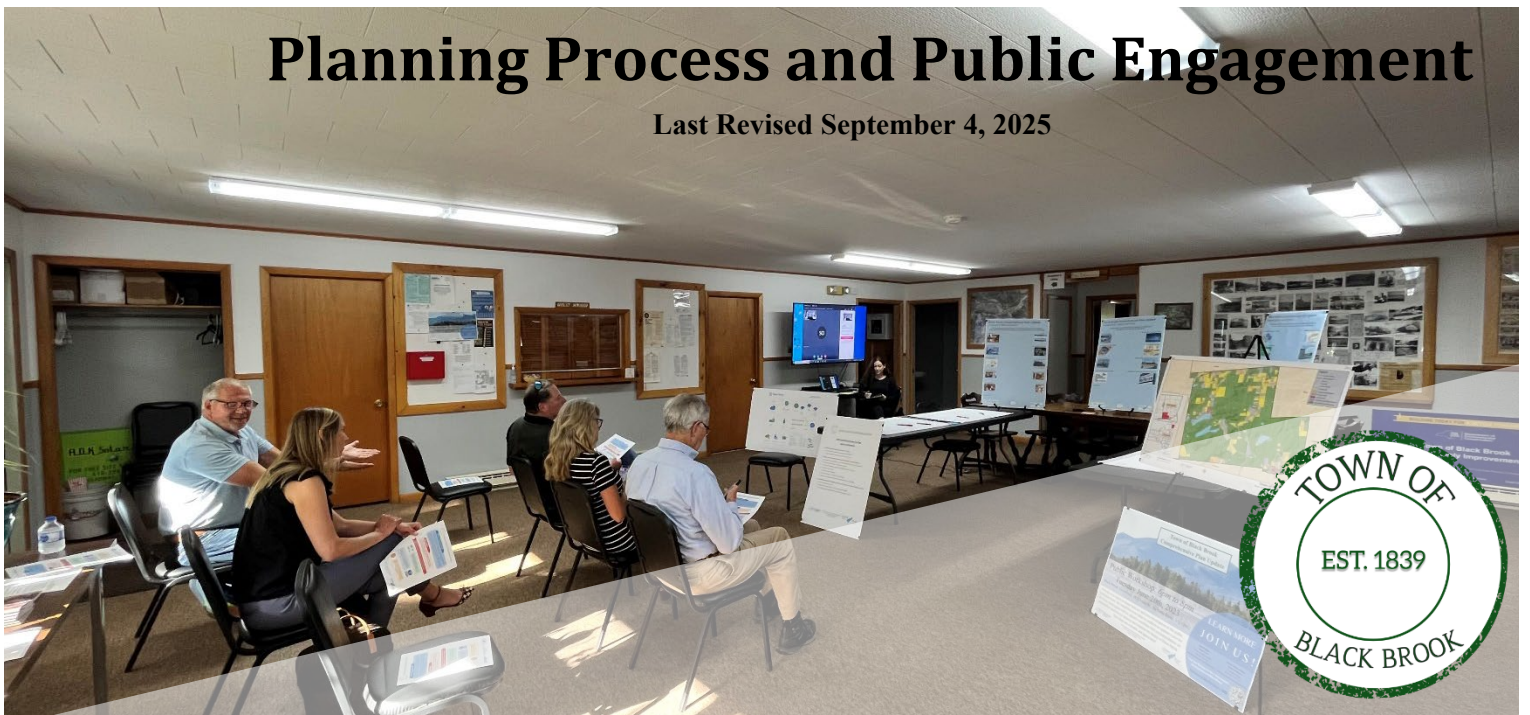
NEW YORK
STATE OF
OPPORTUNITY.

This document was prepared with funding
provided by the New York State Department of
State Smart Growth Program. Contract C1002053



Planning Process and Public Engagement

Last Revised September 4, 2025





Envision Black Brook

© 2025 LABERGE GROUP
4 Computer Drive West
Albany, New York 12205
#2022109



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Town of Black Brook would like to thank the Comprehensive Plan Committee for their work in creating an updated Comprehensive Plan that reflects the current values of the Town of Black Brook.

Town Board

Jon Douglass, *Supervisor*
James Martineau, *Councilman*
James Seguin, *Councilman*
Ronald Wilkins, *Councilman*
William Rhino, *Councilman*

Comprehensive Plan Committee

Jon Douglass, *Supervisor*
Howard Aubin, *Town Justice and Resident*
Dennis Bushey, *Town Clerk and Resident*
Jennifer Ketchell, *Business Owner*
William Rhino, *Councilman*



This document was prepared with funding provided by the
New York State Department of State Smart Growth
Program. Contract C1002053





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Planning Process &Public Engagement	3
Comprehensive Planning Committee	3
Community Survey.....	3
Stakeholder Meeting	12
Public Workshop 1	13
Pop Up Event	13
Public Workshop 2	14

TABLES

Table 1: Survey Residential Status	4
Table 2: Length of Residency in Black Brook.....	5
Table 3: Preferred Development in Black Brook.....	6
Table 4: Preferred Recreational Choices	7
Table 5: Improvements needed in Recreational Areas.....	8
Table 6: Internet Service.....	9
Table 7: Cellular Service.....	9
Table 8: Services in need of Most Improvement.....	10
Table 9: Planning Initiatives that are Needed Most	11



PLANNING PROCESS & PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

The Public Engagement Process included an online public survey, a stakeholder meeting with businesses in Black Brook, and two Public Workshops. This section provides a summary of the results of these activities.



COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Town of Black Brook selected several members of the community to participate in the planning process on the Comprehensive Planning Committee (CPC). The CPC is made up of residents and business owners with a variety of interests and expertise derived from their roles as community volunteers, professionals, and interested citizens. The committee convened throughout the planning process to guide the development of the plan and to respond to a wide range of interests.

The CPC's role throughout the planning process was to be:

- The “Eyes & Ears” of the community and representatives of specific issues & constituencies (i.e. youth, seniors, business, Planning Board, Zoning Board, etc.) in the Village.
- “Local Sounding Board” to build consensus and generate ideas.
- To review and provide constructive input to build a plan reflective of the community's needs.
- Demystify the process & foster recommendations developed through cooperation.
- Set the stage for active implementation & cooperation.

COMMUNITY SURVEY

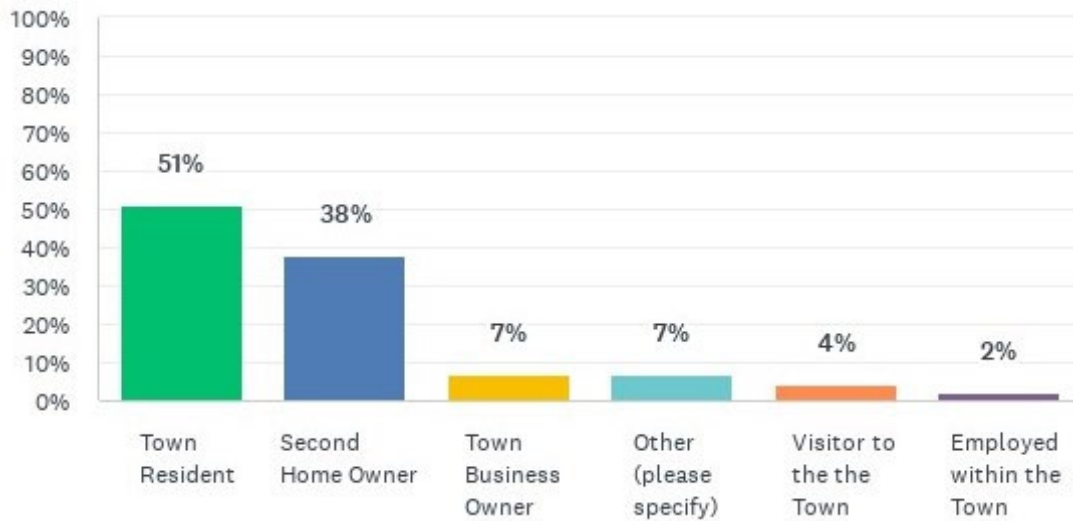
A Community Survey was developed by the Comprehensive Plan Committee. The Survey consisted of fifteen (15) multiple-choice and short-response questions (See Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to gain a better understanding of the community's priorities to help inform the Vision Report. All responses were kept anonymous for confidentiality, and to help cultivate more honest results. The survey was advertised for three (3) months, and attracted a total of 91 respondents. All responses aided in the formation of Black Brook's Vision and Goals through respondents' common needs, desires, and concerns.

The first few questions characterized the respondents and their relationship with the community. Question 1 addressed resident status. The majority of the respondents were permanent residents (51%) or second home



owners (38%) The rest of the respondents indicated that they were business owners (7%), or visitors (4%). 2 people indicated that they were Town Employees and a few indicated that they lived near AuSable Forks.

Table 1: Survey Residential Status



Most people who said that they were residents had lived in Black Brook over 20 years (41%). 9% of the respondents said they had lived in Black Brook between 5-10 years, 10% indicated that they had lived in Black Brook for 1-5 years, and 2 people indicated that they had lived in Black Brook for less than a year. 23 people or 25% claimed to be non-residents. Based on the survey results it was not clear whether part-time seasonal residents also viewed Black Brook as their residence.



A horizontal bar chart with a white background and light gray vertical grid lines at 10% intervals. The y-axis lists six categories: 'Less Than 1 Year', '1 - 5 Years', '5 - 10 Years', '10 - 20 Years', 'Greater Than 20 Years', and 'Non-Resident'. The x-axis is labeled from 0% to 100% in 10% increments. Each category has a corresponding colored bar with its percentage value labeled to the right of the bar end.

Category	Percentage
Less Than 1 Year	2%
1 - 5 Years	10%
5 - 10 Years	9%
10 - 20 Years	13%
Greater Than 20 Years	41%
Non-Resident	25%

[illegible]

pg. 5

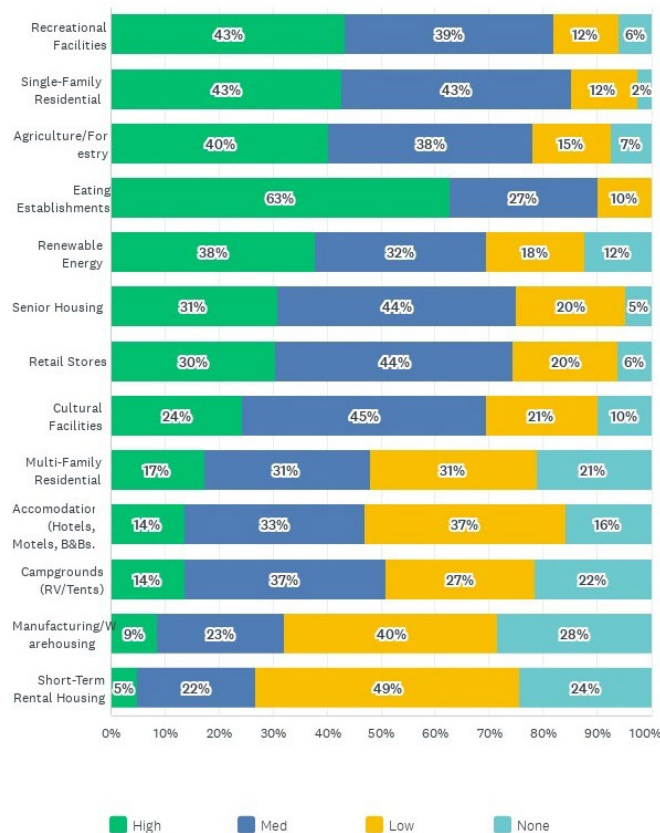


indicated that they would like to see more business development. Most respondents preferred small boutique businesses or restaurants that could serve residents, attract tourists, and provide local jobs. There was a preference for maintaining the small-town feeling, controlling part-year residential properties, providing more opportunity for families, and supporting senior services and activities.

“Smart Growth” was mentioned as a concept that was preferred, in order to create more efficient use of available services and encourage the maintenance of the current small-town charm of the community centers within Black Brook. Respondents expressed a desire to continue to protect the beauty and take advantage of the recreational opportunities that are available to residents. One person mentioned that trails that are part of the NY State Easement Lands in Black Book should be developed to encourage biking, foot trails, and climbing opportunities.

Question 6 asked a multiple-choice question about the type of development that the respondents would support in Black Brook, rating from High to No Support. Eating Establishments (63% High), Recreational Facilities (43% High), and Single-Family Residential (43% High) rated the highest. Lowest ratings were for Short-Term Rental Housing, Campgrounds, and Manufacturing/Warehousing. Many people commented that they thought Air BNB (or similar rentals) were not well controlled and took away from availability of year-round rentals. Agricultural/Forestry, Cultural Facilities, Renewable Energy, Retail Stores, and Senior Housing also received significant support as shown in the table below:

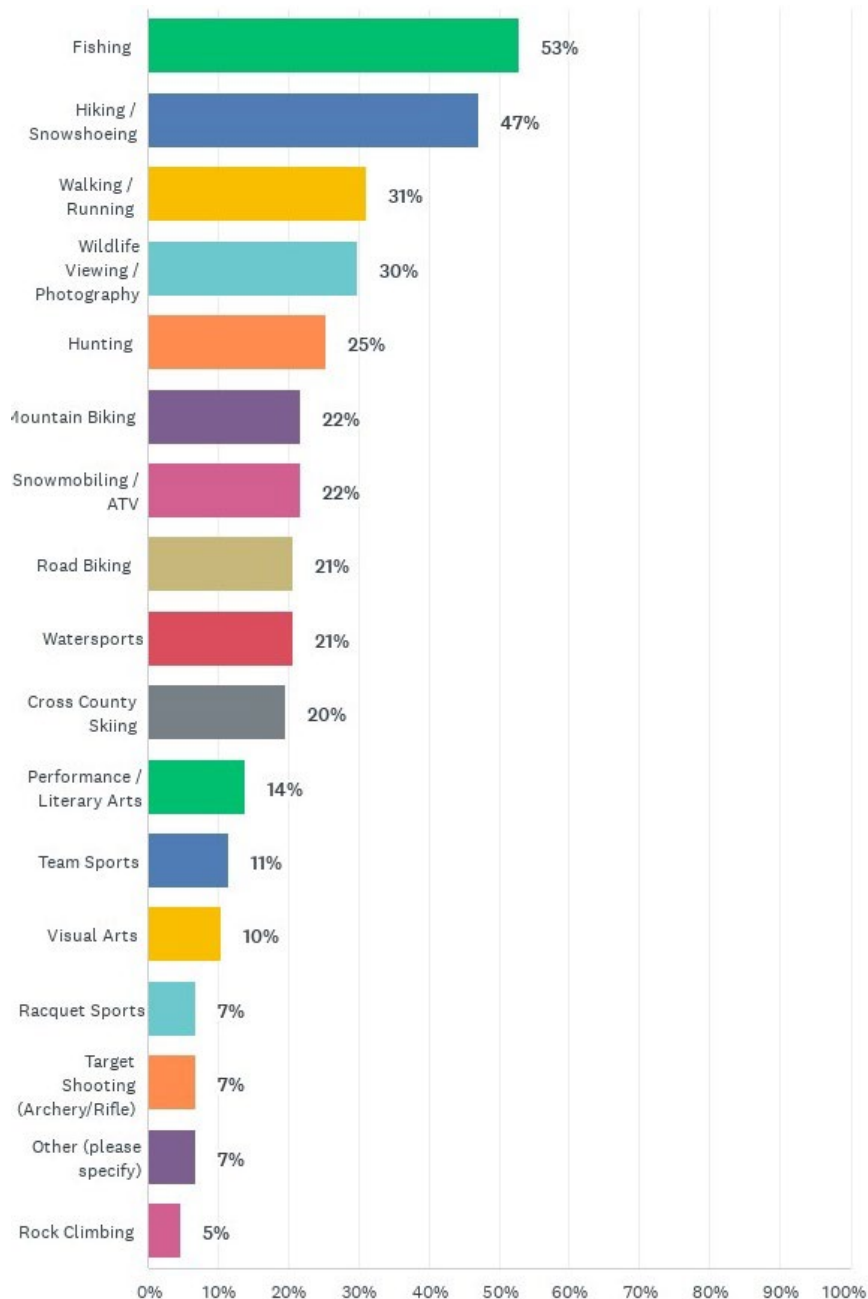
Table 3: Preferred Development in Black Brook





Question 7 asked about preferred recreational uses. Most respondents indicated a preference for preferred Fishing (52%) as one of the top choices for recreational uses. Other uses that could occur on trails that were also strongly supported are Hiking/Snowshoeing(47%), Walking/and Running (31%) and Wildlife Viewing/Photography (30%). Second choices included Water Sports (25%), Road Biking (23%) and Hunting (21%), and Mountain Biking (19%).

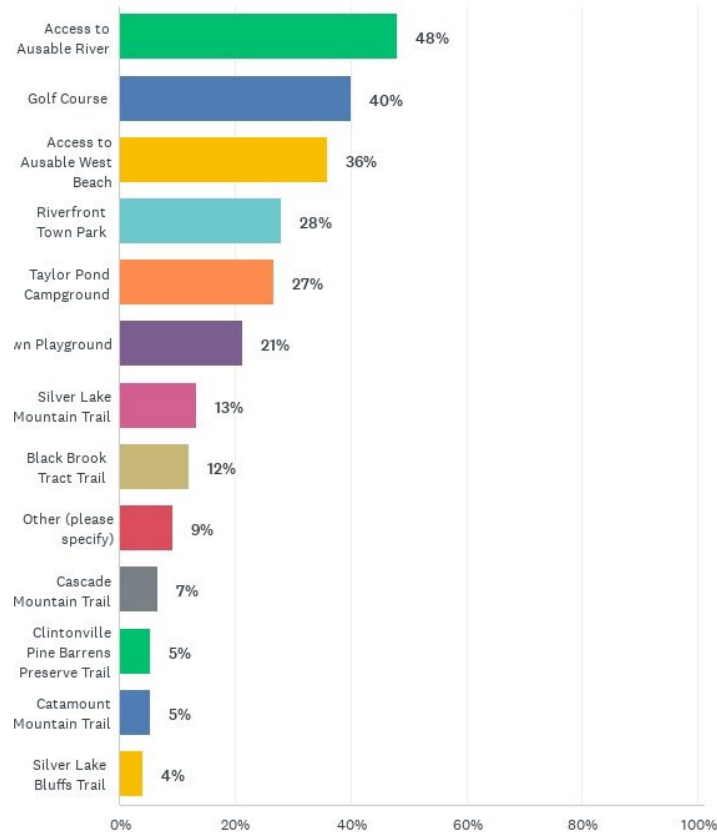
Table 4: Preferred Recreational Choices





Question 8 addressed improvements in current recreational uses. Overwhelmingly, the respondents felt that the recreational resource most in need of improvement was Access Points to AuSable River (48%), the Golf Course (40%), and AuSable West Branch (36%). Taylor Pond Campground was mentioned as, in need of improvement (24%). About 48% of the responses indicated that the Town Playground and Riverfront Town Park needed renovations (See table below).

Table 5: Improvements needed in Recreational Areas

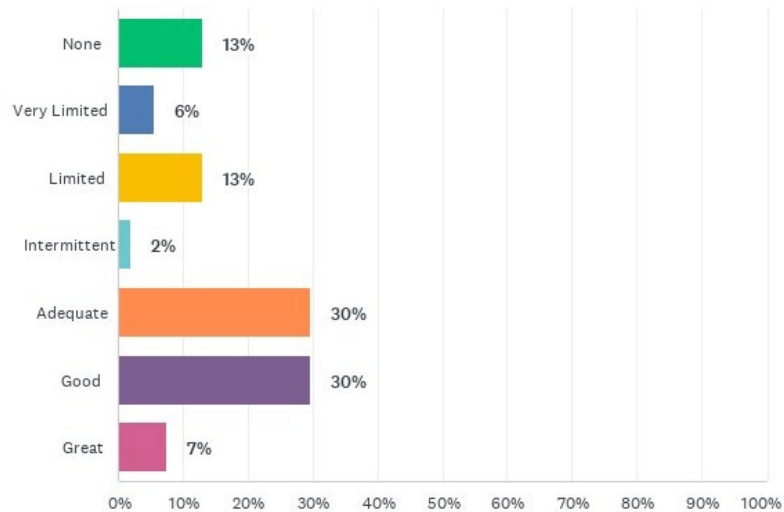


Question 9 asked: “If you have run into a land use issue within Black Brook, what measure(s) do you feel the Town should take to help alleviate the issue in the future?” Respondents felt that the biggest concern was the APA having too much control on land use situations, and that their power should be reduced, or that they should make it easier to work with them in a land use situation. Other responders feel that there have been no issues with land use.



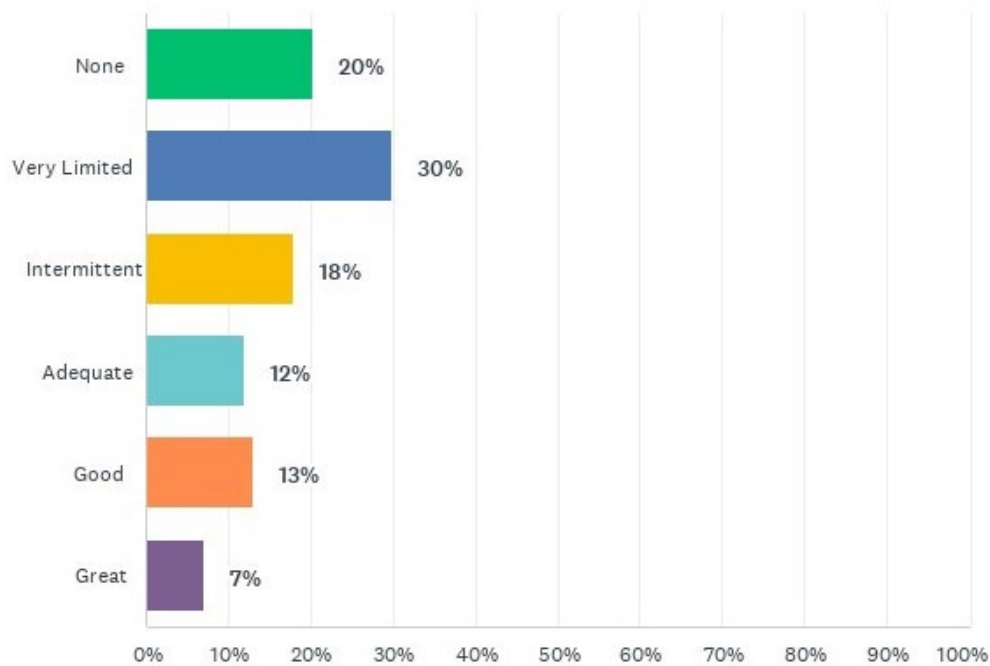
Question 10 addressed the adequacy of internet service at household, given the small population and remote location. Respondents indicated that approximately 30% of residents have limited or no access to the internet.

Table 6: Internet Service



Question 11 asked about the adequacy of cellular service in Black Brook. Survey results indicated that approximately 30% of respondents have adequate or better access to cellular networks. 50% of the respondents have very limited or zero access to cellular networks.

Table 7: Cellular Service

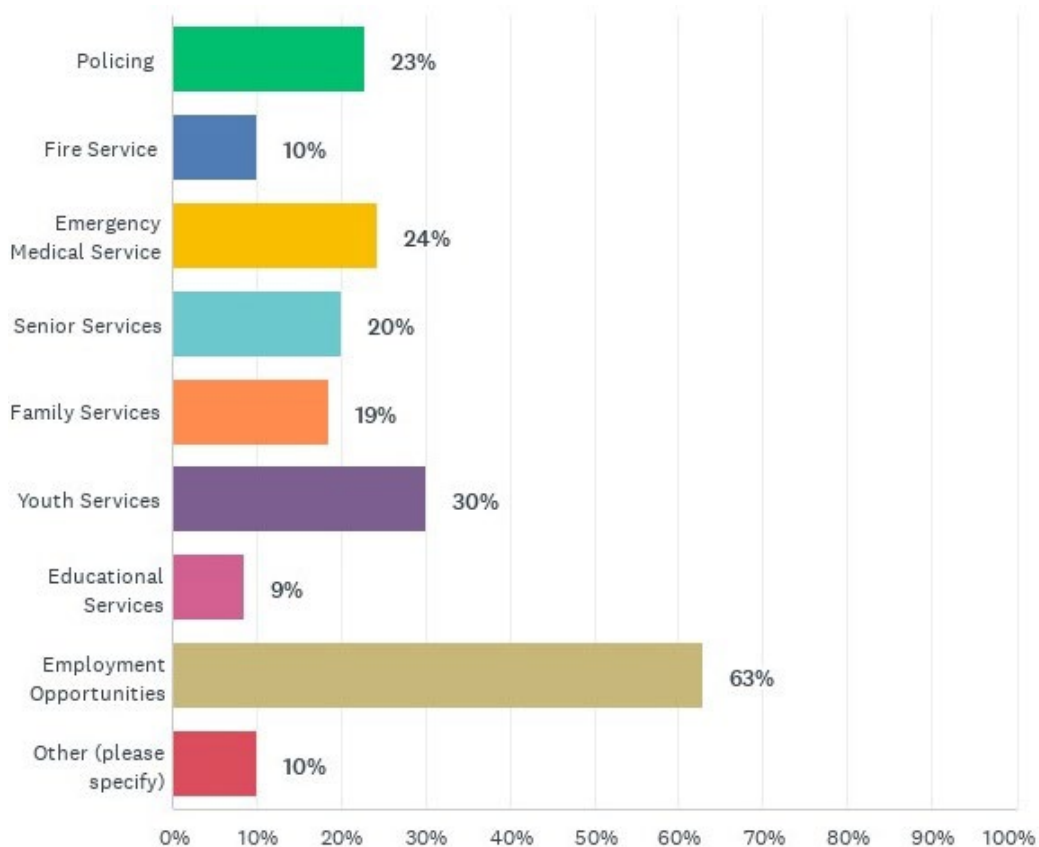




Question 12 asked respondents to provide their place of residence/business location (street, hamlet, etc.) in Black Brook. The majority of the respondents have placed Fern Lake as their place of residence or business. This was followed by Silver Lake and Narrows Road as the other top places.

Question 13 asked “Which services are most in need of improvement within the Town of Black Brook?” Community services ranged from social, government, public safety, or economic amenities. According to the survey, the service considered to be most in need of improvement was Employment Opportunities, with 63% of respondents selecting it. Employment opportunities were followed by the need to improve youth services and senior services, respectively. The services respondents feel are least in need of improvement include fire and education.

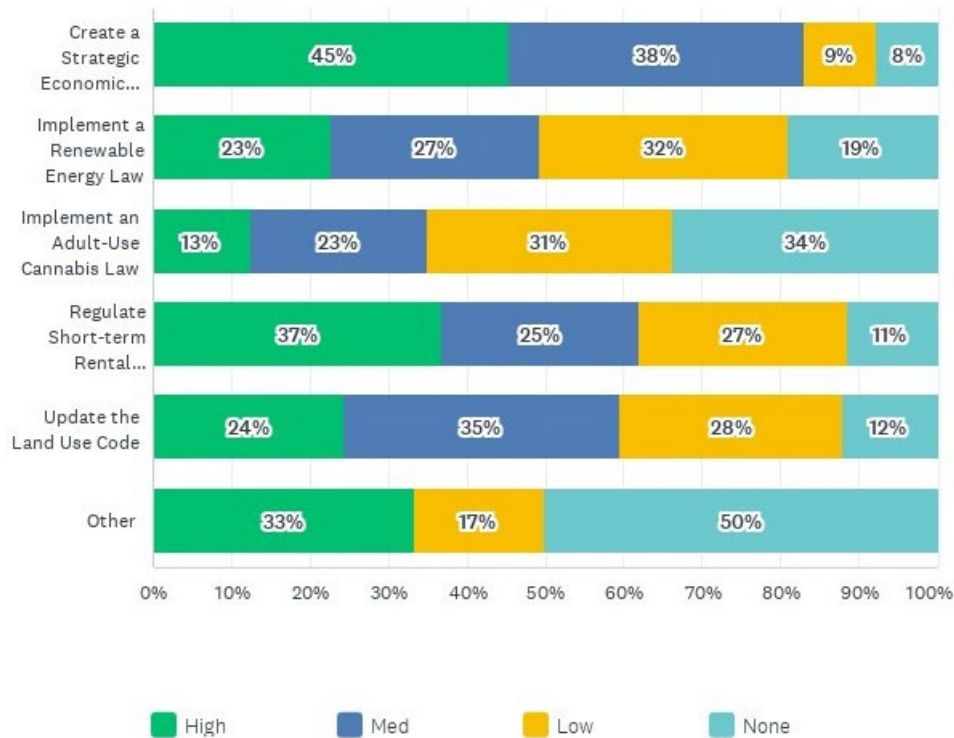
Table 8: Services in need of Most Improvement





Question 14 asked respondents to provide their level of support for various land uses in the town of Black Brook. “Create a Strategic Economic Development Plan” was the option with the most support from the respondents, followed by “Regulate Short-term Rental Properties.”

Table 9: Planning Initiatives that are Needed Most



Question 15 Ask respondents about the Town of Black Brook Black Fly Control Initiative. Most respondents were unaware of this initiative, otherwise, the initiative is mainly supported. When respondents asked if they would volunteer to help with Black Fly control, most said yes.



STAKEHOLDER MEETING

Local Business owners were invited to special meeting with the CPC members to better understand the successes, challenges and needs of the business community going forward. Businesses ranged from those that were very new (less than 5 years old) to those that have been in the community for more than 20 years.

The attendees indicated that the existing Black Brook business community is year-round and seasonal. Businesses that are open year-round are often very busy in the summer, and struggle to stay open during the winter months, especially since the majority of the residents that are year-round commute to work, or the population decreases because of seasonal housing. A couple of the business that attended this meeting indicated that they did not have a traditional storefront and conducted their business from a home office, accepting or meeting clients at various locations, or conducted their business remotely online.

Businesses that are seasonal are often vulnerable to closing. Reasons cited were the lack of ability to expand because of limits to available seasonal work force. Housing often needs to be provided by the business to be competitive for affordable workers, and one business (a horse farm) planned expansions of work force housing for her business. The hiring of full-time seasonal workers is often more than the business can afford, and leads to less revenue to carry the business over in the winter months if they are closed. Cell service and connectivity is low in the Town of Black Brook, and stakeholders cited this as a challenge to seasonal businesses, especially since phones are used to navigate and discover places and things to do in tourist areas.

The most prevalent type of housing built in the area is single family homes. Most attendees indicated that there is a small amount of apartment style housing within the Town, but they did not think that multiple family housing would be a popular choice. However, they were in favor of clustering of individual lots to conserve land and natural amenities.

The group also discussed their opinion of whether or not a “traditional downtown” approach would work in Ausable Forks, and if a hotel would improve business prospects. They cited Jay’s downtown revitalization efforts as example, which is located across the bridge from the Ausable Forks Business District. Stakeholders indicated that the Town of Jay established a historic district, and renovated buildings under the Main Street NY program, but has struggled and many of the building storefronts are vacant. The stakeholders indicated that new businesses should focus on the needs of the growing bedroom community population first, and this would help the business community grow. Needs for essentials (such as groceries) are expensive and are not fulfilled in Black Brook without traveling long distances. In addition, attendees said that Air BNB and other such services have taken the place of conventional hotels and did not think that a regular hotel would be successful in the Downtown.

The stakeholders discussed the challenges of being in the APA area. The Town can only control land within the “Hamlet Areas” and all other businesses need to apply for an additional permit to change or establish new businesses outside this area. Currently Ausable Forks is the only area that can be controlled by the Town. This can be challenging for new development. The Town can apply for an expansion of the “Hamlet Area” and the Stakeholders agreed that it might be necessary. Attendees were introduced to the idea of design guidelines in the Ausable Forks’ business district as a revitalization tool, as well as a more defined zoning code. This idea was received by the attendees as a way to add certainty to investments within the business area.



Many attendees were unaware of business assistance offered by the County and the NCREDC. Only one business had sought low-interest grants. The attendees thought that with better knowledge of programs that, provided assistance, grants, and low-interest loans for business starts, that Black Brook would be more competitive for tourist spending.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP 1

The purpose of Public Workshop 1 was to introduce profile information to the public and to conduct a visioning process that could help shape Vision, Goals and Strategies that would move the Town of Black Brook Forward. Preliminary Vision and Goals formed at the meeting included the following:

- Black Brook has achieved recognition as a friendly and desirable place to locate a business, purchase or build a home, visit, and vacation due to the Town's unspoiled wilderness, scenic vistas, and unique amenities.
- Black Brook continues to be an excellent steward of its natural environment, a community of hardworking people with strong family values, and an accommodating locality for outdoor recreation.
- Black Brook has focused on and improved the quality of life for its residents and business owners through the maintenance of high-quality services and the stabilization of taxes.
- Black Brook has generated renewed economic investment through sound planning and marketing practices while preserving its rural character and reasonably priced housing stock.
- Black Brook is thriving as a year-round and seasonal destination while it continues to accommodate intergenerational needs and desires.

POP UP EVENT

On Sunday, August 31, 2025, Laberge Group presented a pop-up outreach event at the Black Brook River Park in Black Brook, New York. The table was set up at the fair which took place after the annual Labor Day parade and prior to the fireworks display, and was attended by about 200 people, including children.

The pop-up provided information about the Comprehensive Plan process, smart growth themes, and encouraged people to participate in choosing the values they felt should guide Black Brook's future. In addition, the pop-up event allowed Laberge Group to promote the upcoming Public Workshop 2, scheduled for September 25, 2025.

The table included an interactive display with the concepts of Smart Growth from the NYS DOS website. This Board was designed as a conversation starter between Laberge Group and the public about the purpose of the Smart Growth and how it enhances the Planning Process. The display also included an interactive board that prompted participants to prioritize their top three choices for general areas of importance that align with Smart Growth Principals.



Envision Black Brook

At least 70 people viewed the display, including many families with children. Approximately 61 attendees participated in the interactive display, choosing the values for the “What values should guide Black Brook’s Future?” board. All participants were able to choose three of their top priorities out of five choices listed on the Board. This was done by placing a pom-pom in a jar in front of the priority that aligned most closely with their values. The number of pom-poms were tallied at the end of the event and resulted in the following ranking of available choices:



- 1) **Clean Environment:** Fifty-five (55) attendees chose this category. At the event, many people noted that they enjoyed living near and in the Adirondack Park, and could clearly express their connection to the Park and the importance of the Park in other initiatives, including expanding tourism business.
- 2) **Energy Self-Reliance:** Thirty-four (34) attendees chose this category. At the event many expressed concern over the rising costs of heating and cooling, and electrical rates.
- 3) **Affordability & Equity:** Forty (40) attendees chose this category. Comments centered around the accessibility of affordable housing, especially for young adults.
- 4) **Economic Opportunity:** Thirty-two (32) attendees chose this category. Many of the attendees expressed the need for more businesses in the hamlet to expand opportunities to make purchases, go to restaurants, and seek entertainment closer to home. A significant number of attendees also made a clear connection between the quality of the environment and economic growth within the Town.
- 5) **Connectivity:** Twenty-three (23) attendees chose this category. Many of the young families and singles that participated said that they would enjoy having more off-road trails for recreation and to go to destinations, but understood the challenges of obtaining property for this purpose. In addition, attendees said that having safer access for bicycles (i.e. dedicated bike lanes) from other community centers would enhance business prospects within the Town.

PUBLIC WORKSHOP 2

Upcoming Meeting September 25, 2025. See Flyer on following page.