



CLIFTON FORGE

COMMUNITY AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

STRATEGIC PLAN

MAY 2026



Prepared by the

REGIONALcommission



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With Special Thanks to

Town Council
Planning Commission
Town of Clifton Forge Staff
Town Stakeholders

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INTRODUCTION

The Clifton Forge Community and Economic Development Strategic Plan is a five-year, implementation-focused roadmap that advances the vision of the Town’s Comprehensive Plan (adopted December 2024) and organizes priority actions into five goal areas:

- Community Infrastructure
- Quality of Life
- Business Attraction and Retention
- Downtown Investments
- Strong Governance

The plan is designed to move from “what we want to be” to “what we will do,” with clear direction on near-term priorities and practical steps to support measurable progress.

This plan builds directly on the Town’s 2024 Comprehensive Plan update which determined that Clifton Forge would benefit from a stand-alone document that is action-oriented and operational—pairing community priorities with defined actions, responsible parties, and realistic timing. Development of the Strategic Plan began in 2025 and was informed through multiple engagement steps, including: a downtown business owner focus group held September 3, 2025; a community survey conducted September 23–October 31, 2025; and a joint Town Council/Planning Commission work session held December 9, 2025.

The plan is organized by topic to help the Town connect conditions and priorities to implementation. It includes: (1) a summary of the plan’s purpose and public input; (2) key community assets and challenges shaping reinvestment and livability; (3) strategies and actions grouped under the five goal areas listed above; (4) an implementation framework that identifies timing and accountability; and (5) supporting analyses that inform where market gaps and opportunities exist.

Across topics, the highest-level takeaways are consistent: Clifton Forge residents and stakeholders want to build on signature assets—the historic downtown and railroad heritage, arts and cultural identity, and access to

outdoor recreation—while directly addressing barriers that limit reinvestment and day-to-day livability. Public input emphasized redevelopment of underutilized buildings, housing conditions and code enforcement, water/sewer and walkability needs, expanded business and job opportunities, and improved public communication and transparency. To remain achievable within the five-year window, the document prioritizes actions that are both feasible and high-impact and ties them to ongoing monitoring and periodic updates.



How To Use This Plan

This Strategic Plan is intended to function as a working document for Town Council, the Planning Commission, the Economic Development Authority (EDA), Town staff, and key partners. It can be used in the following practical ways:

1. **Annual Work Program and Staff Priorities**

Use the Action Plan tables to identify a yearly priority implementation program (what gets done this year vs. next), including underway items and near-term deliverables.

2. **Budget Development and the Capital Improvements Program (CIP)**

Align capital-related strategies—particularly infrastructure, streetscape, sidewalks, lighting, and water/sewer needs—with annual budget decisions and the Town’s CIP development process.

3. **Grant Readiness and State/Federal Funding Alignment**

Use the goals/strategies as a consistent “grant narrative backbone” to support applications, demonstrate need, and show community support—especially for infrastructure, downtown reinvestment, housing rehabilitation, and capacity-building efforts. The Action Plan’s structure (with responsible parties and time horizons) supports typical Virginia program expectations for readiness and implementation clarity.

4. **Accountability, Coordination, and Partner Alignment**

Use the “Responsible Agencies/Parties” assignments to coordinate implementation across Town staff, boards/commissions (including the EDA), regional partners, and state agencies (e.g., transportation and community development partners) so projects do not stall due to unclear ownership.

5. **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Amendments**

Treat the plan as a living document: review progress at least annually, and adjust as conditions, funding, and capacity change—particularly during budget and CIP development cycles.

DEVELOPING THE PLAN

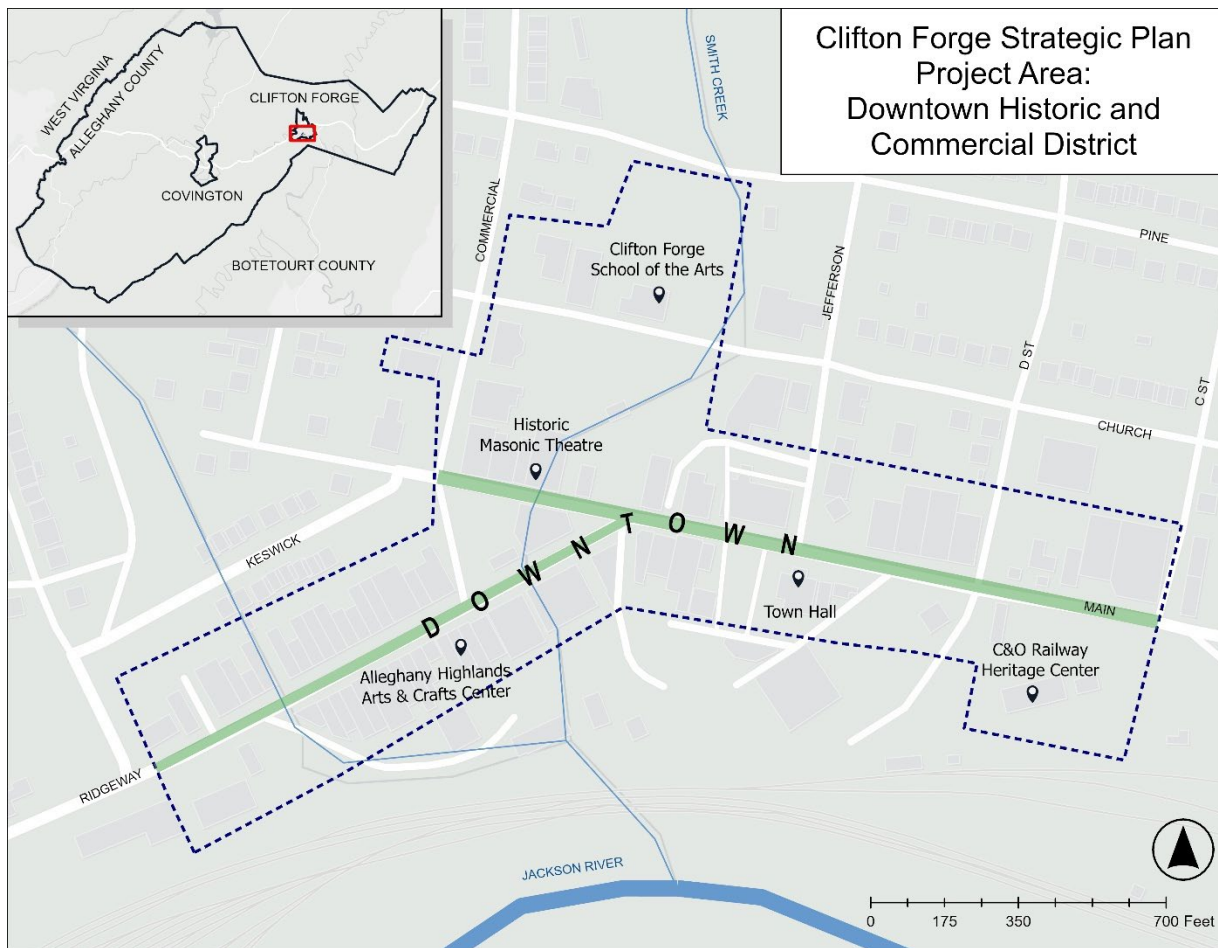
Development of the plan took place from July 2025 through May of 2026 and involved robust public and stakeholder engagement, including focus group outreach, a public survey, a presentation to Town Council, a joint work session with Town Council and Planning Commission, and numerous meetings with Town staff.



Project Area

The Town of Clifton Forge is located in and economically connected to Alleghany County. The Town works with the county for infrastructure service provision, including water, sewer, and solid waste management.

While some recommendations captured in this plan will benefit the entire Town, many are focused on the Downtown Historic and Commercial District. This area captures numerous historic and architecturally significant buildings and local businesses; it also includes blighted properties in need of redevelopment.



Public and Stakeholder Engagement

Downtown Business Owner Focus Group

On September 3, 2025 in the Underground at the Historic Masonic Theatre, Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Regional Commission staff, in cooperation with Clifton Forge planning staff, conducted a focus group of seven downtown business owners. The group was asked a series of 28 questions related to:

- Community Needs and Perceptions
- Economic Development
- Downtown
- Infrastructure and Facilities
- Housing and Land Use
- Collaboration and Engagement
- Vision for the Future
- Feedback and Concerns



A full summary of responses is included in **Appendix 1**. However, some major takeaways include:

- The current perception by business owners was that Clifton Forge lacks needed amenities that will retain and attract residents and customers. Rundown storefronts and vacant buildings were consistently mentioned.
- However, business owners saw opportunities around Clifton Forge’s historic character, small town charm, arts community, and location in the broader region. Outdoor recreation and local parks facilities were noted as a major regional attraction.
- Housing was considered a barrier, with the need for better housing, improved rental controls, and varied housing options mentioned.

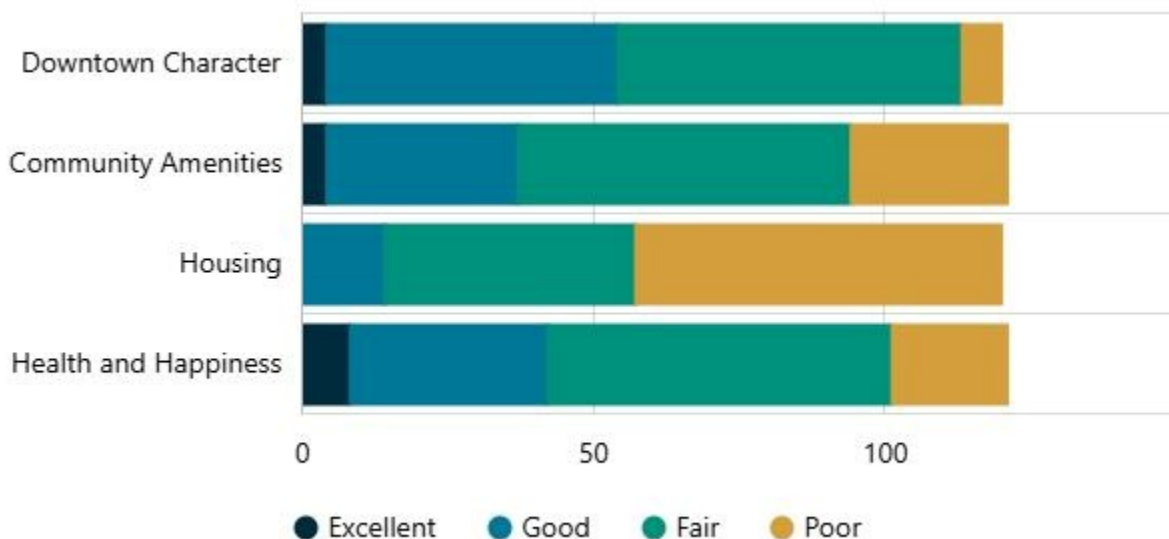
The common themes across responses highlight a shared vision that values cultural identity, economic revitalization, and inclusivity.

Community Survey

A community survey was open to the public from September 23rd to October 31st. Flyers advertising the survey were posted online and throughout the community to encourage residents to participate. During the survey period, on October 16, 2025, RVARC staff distributed surveys and presented an overview of the Strategic Plan during one of the Community Gathering meetings held at the Historic Masonic Theatre in Clifton Forge. The survey received 122 responses. Most of the survey respondents (over 40 percent) had lived in Clifton Forge for more than ten years and were 65 and over. A full summary of responses is included in **Appendix 2**.

Figure 1: Survey Response, Question 6.

How would you rate your feelings on the following topics?

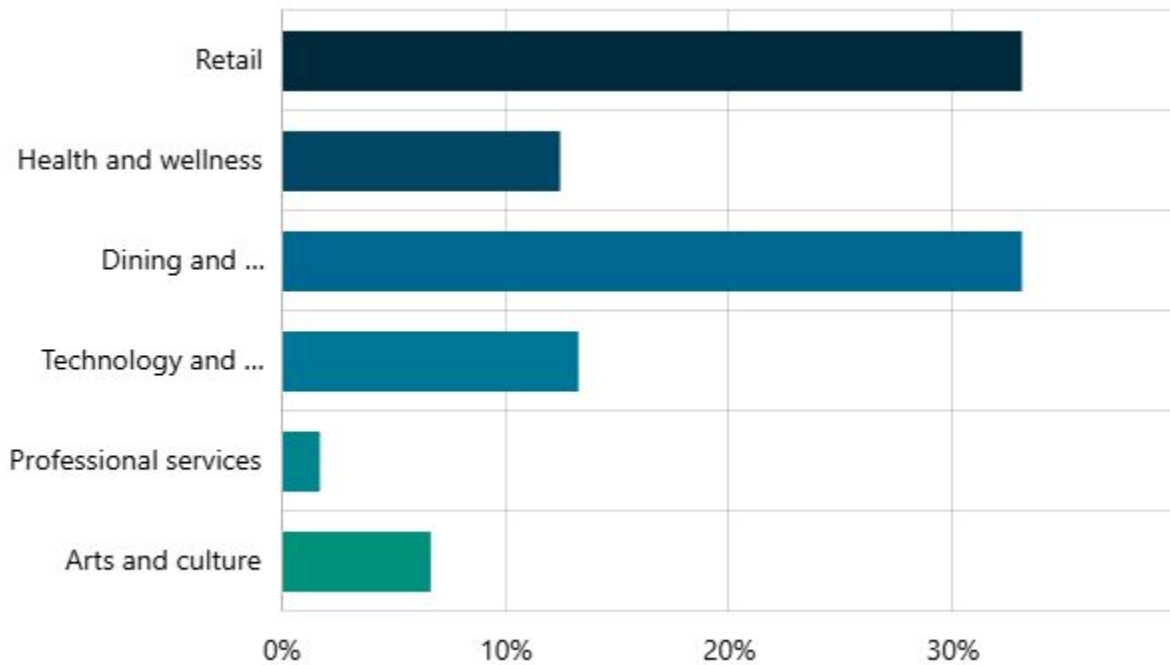


Respondents described Clifton Forge as a town with historic charm and natural beauty, but also one that is struggling economically and grappling with aging infrastructure. While many express concern over blight, limited job opportunities, and a declining population, there is a shared sense of hope and potential for revitalization through arts, tourism, and community engagement.

Attracting new businesses was seen as of prime importance to survey respondents. Interest focused primarily on retail and dining opportunities. Grocery stores were mentioned often, as well as shopping and entertainment venues. Family-friendly businesses were seen as important opportunities to retain younger populations.

Figure 2: Survey Response, Question 9.

What types of new businesses or services would you like to see in Clifton Forge?



Housing availability in Clifton Forge was seen as poor overall. Many participants felt that the Town could better engage citizens in planning and decision-making processes.

Top Community Concerns

1. Blighted Properties & Infrastructure

- Abandoned homes and deteriorating buildings dominate concerns.
- Roads, sidewalks, and water/sewer systems need urgent repair.

2. Economic Development

- Desire for more diverse, sustainable businesses and job opportunities.
- Frustration with double taxation and high utility costs.

3. Housing & Affordability

- Need for affordable, senior, and workforce housing.
- Calls for better property maintenance and code enforcement.

4. Youth & Community Engagement

- Lack of activities and spaces for youth and families.
- Interest in community centers, events, and inclusive programming.

5. Leadership & Vision

- Criticism of current leadership and calls for more dynamic, transparent governance.
- Desire for a unified vision that balances tourism with resident needs.



A Vision for Clifton Forge

Responses to the survey echoed the vision for the community identified in the Comprehensive Plan. Residents envision a vibrant, walkable downtown, a thriving arts and tourism economy, and a welcoming, inclusive community. There's strong support for preserving the town's heritage while embracing modern amenities and economic innovation.



Thriving arts and
tourism town



Clean, vibrant
downtown



More businesses and
jobs



Affordable living and
senior services



Youth retention and
engagement



Preservation of
history with modern
amenities

Joint Work Session

On December 9, 2025, RVARC staff held a Joint Work Session with Clifton Forge Town Council and the Planning Commission. At this Work Session, a workshop was conducted to develop goals and strategies for the Strategic Plan.

Full outcomes of this work session can be found in **Appendix 3**. This input was incorporated directly in the Goals and Strategies section of this document.



Monitoring and Evaluation

As indicated in the Introduction, staff should review the plan annually for opportunities for implementation in annual CIPs and other programs of work, and report on implementation to Town Council as needed.

This plan incorporates a 5-year planning horizon. After each update of the Comprehensive Plan, this plan should be reviewed, and major updates or changes to the Town’s Vision Statement be incorporated.

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC PROFILE

Clifton Forge is a small, incorporated town in the Alleghany Highlands with a population of just under 3,500, a historic downtown, strong arts and cultural assets, and a housing stock that is older and more affordable than the state average. Economic indicators show low income, high poverty, and low labor force participation, but the town benefits from gig-speed broadband, tourism, and ongoing revitalization

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis in community and economic development is a strategic planning tool used to identify and evaluate a community's internal Strengths and Weaknesses, as well as external Opportunities and Threats. This framework helps planners develop strategies by aligning community assets with external conditions to achieve long-term economic and social goals.

Strength - An internal attribute or resource that gives a community or organization a competitive advantage.

Weakness - An internal limitation or deficiency that hinders current performance or growth.

Opportunity - An external factor or trend that a community can capitalize on to advance its objectives.

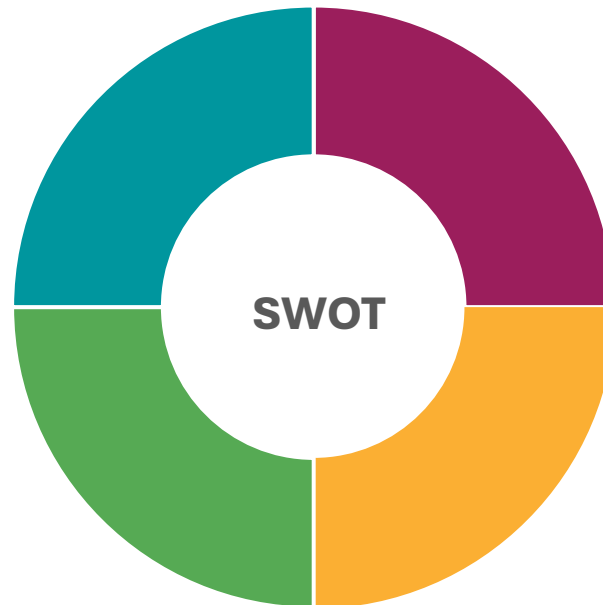
Threat - An external challenge or risk that could undermine a community's success or stability.

STRENGTHS

- Historic railroad/vibrant arts community
- Notable historic buildings with significant architectural integrity
- Supportive and collaborative community spirit
- Proximity to Douthat State Park and other outdoor activities
- Established volunteer support network

OPPORTUNITIES

- Potential for tourism centered around arts, history, and natural attractions
- Redevelopment of vacant or underutilized properties
- Potential growth of small retail, travel, and lodging businesses
- Enhance local events to increase visitor attraction
- Encourage arts and boutique industries similar to those in neighboring towns



WEAKNESSES

- Aging and narrow infrastructure, lacking in modern amenities
- Doubled County and Town tax burden with limited economic incentives
- Significant absentee property ownership contributing to neglect
- Few commercial pillars resulting in limited variety of businesses
- Lack of a diverse range of dining and accommodation options

THREATS

- Dependence on external funding and grants for redevelopment
- Resistance to change among long-term residents
- Competitiveness with nearby towns for businesses and residents
- Persistent absentee ownership could hinder progress
- Limited town budget leading to potential failure in infrastructure improvements

Population and Demographics

Clifton Forge remains a small, aging town with modest diversity and household size. Its demographic profile reflects a stable but older population, with implications for healthcare, housing, and workforce planning.

Clifton Forge has experienced long-term population decline since the 1980s, with recent stabilization due to tourism, arts, and small town in-migration. In 1980, the population was 4,500. Between 1990 and 2000, there was a decline due to economic restructuring. From 2020–2024, the population declined again to 3,447. The population trend is that of an aging population with low birth rates and modest in-migration.

Table 1: Population

Population	Town of Clifton Forge	Virginia
Total population	3,447	8,705,170
Median age	45.2	39
Population density	1,141.1 people/square mile	220.5 people/square mile

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP05.

Table 2: Race & Ethnicity

Race & Ethnicity	Town of Clifton Forge	Virginia
White	82.1%	60.2%
Black	15.3%	18.6%
Two or more races	1.7%	9.5%
Hispanic (any race)	2.1%	11%

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP05.

Table 3: Households

Households	Town of Clifton Forge	Virginia
Total households	1,418	3,365,732
Average household size	2.32	2.52
Married-couple households	35.7%	48.7%

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP02.

Table 4: Educational Attainment - Clifton Forge

Educational Level	Town of Clifton Forge		City of Covington		Virginia	
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	Total	Percent
Total Population 18 Years and Over	2,681	77.8%	4,371	77%	6,814,337	78.3%
High school graduate or higher	2,338	87.2%	3,802	87.0%	6,233,026	91.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher	537	20.0%	364	8.3%	2,655,549	39.0%

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1501.



Photo credit: Town of Clifton Forge

Economic Characteristics

Clifton Forge faces significant economic challenges, with low-income levels and high poverty rates. Employment is limited, and most residents commute by car to jobs outside the town. The town’s employment rate for workers 16 and over is the lowest in the Roanoke Valley-Alleghany Region.

Table 5: Income

Income	Town of Clifton Forge	Virginia
Median household income	\$40,000	\$93,170
Per capita income	\$26,572	\$50,666

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03.

Table 6: Poverty

Poverty	Town of Clifton Forge	Virginia
Below poverty level	15.1%	9.9%

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S1701.

Table 7: Employment

Employment	Town of Clifton Forge	Virginia
Employment rate (16+)	39%	60.8%

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03.

Table 8: Commuting

Commuting	Town of Clifton Forge	Virginia
Mean travel time to work	22.8 minutes	27.3 minutes
Drive alone	91.4%	67.6%
Carpool	2.8%	8%
Public transit	0%	2.3%
Walk	0%	2.1%
Work from home	5.7%	18.3%

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03.

Industry and Occupation

The town's employment base is concentrated in service and support sectors, with healthcare, retail, and manufacturing leading. Professional and technical occupations are underrepresented.

Table 9: Clifton Forge Top Industries and Occupational Mix

Top Industries	Employment (16+)
Educational Services	16.6%
Health Care & Social Assistance	14%
Manufacturing	13.5%
Transportation & Warehousing	11.3%
Accommodation & Food Services	8.1%
Other Services (Not Including Public Administration)	8.1%

Occupational Mix	Employment (16+)
Management, Business, Science, and Arts	43.1%
Service Occupations	20.8%
Production & Transportation	16.6%
Natural Resources & Construction	11.1%
Sales & Office	8.4%

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table S2401.

Housing Characteristics

Clifton Forge’s housing stock is older and relatively affordable, but vacancy rates and aging infrastructure present challenges for revitalization and workforce attraction. Around half of the housing units in the Town were built prior to 1939.

Concurrent with development of this plan, the Town pursued a [Comprehensive Housing Analysis](#) by S. Patz & Associates, Inc. The report highlighted several conclusions, including the constraining factor that housing plays in sustained economic development initiatives. The report emphasizes Clifton Forge’s interdependence with Allegheny County; the tight labor market regionally, which requires recruiting workers from outside the region; and a lack of new residential construction creating pressures which inhibit both renters and prospective home-buyers. In the words of the writers: “The region’s affordable rental housing stock is small, mature, fully occupied, and characterized by long waitlists” and “New construction in the for-sale market has been minimal in recent years.” In short, housing is a major limiting factor for economic development in the Town.

Table 10: Housing Stock

Housing Stock
Total housing units: 1,854
Occupied units: 76.5%
Owner-Occupied: 63.5%
Median Home Value: \$109,500
Median Gross Rent: \$592
Structure Type: 74.4%, single-family detached units

Source: 2020-2024 American Community Survey, 4-Year Estimates, Table DP04.

Community and Infrastructure

Clifton Forge Public Works is a key partner for maintaining infrastructure in the Town. The Town maintains its own water service systems and provides water to surrounding portions of Alleghany County. Sewer service provision is provided by Alleghany County, who maintains the wastewater treatment station; however, Clifton Forge maintains the Town's wastewater pump stations via a contract with NEWCO Enterprises. Disposal of solid waste is managed by Alleghany County under a collective planning and permitting process which includes the City of Covington and Town of Iron Gate.

Public Works is also responsible for snow removal and general street maintenance, including street sweeping, pothole patching, and signage, signals, and striping. VDOT is a key partner for larger improvement projects, including bridge repair and replacement. Clifton Forge is located within the Staunton District.



Emergency response and fire services are a large cost burden for the Town, with Clifton Forge maintaining fully paid Fire and EMS departments.

Clifton Forge benefits from strong planning institutions and gig-speed broadband, positioning it for redevelopment and remote work opportunities. The town actively pursues revitalization grants and maintains zoning and code enforcement. Tourism is a major economic driver for the town.

Table 11: Municipal Services and Utilities

Service Area: Public Safety (Continuity & Response)	Provider / Operator	Coverage
Police (law enforcement)	Town of Clifton Forge Police Department	24/7 coverage for town residents; after-hours dispatch via Alleghany County Sheriff Dispatch (Town notes administrative office closes at 4:30 PM, but officers are dispatched 24/7).
Fire protection	Clifton Forge Fire Department (Town)	Town FD (founded 1886); provides coverage in Town and mutual aid in Alleghany County; apparatus described on Town site (engines + aerial).
EMS / Emergency medical response	Division of Emergency Services (within Town Fire Dept.)	Town indicates 24/7 EMS, staffed with EMTs through paramedics; Town states capability to provide Advanced Life Support (ALS); operates two ALS ambulances; paid emergency services staff added July 1, 2022.
Service Area: Water Utility (Capacity & Readiness)	Provider / Operator	System / Capacity
Potable water treatment	Town of Clifton Forge Water Treatment Plant (WTP)	Conventional surface water plant designed for up to 3.0 MGD; Town estimates safe yield ~2.2 MGD; Town reports actual usage rarely exceeds ~1.1 MGD and states water is available for growth and industry. Raw water source: Smith Creek; multiple intakes/reservoirs.
Potable water distribution	Town of Clifton Forge Public Works / water system	Town reports ~35 miles of water distribution mains, ~200 hydrants, and 1700+ water meters (monthly readings; repairs/calibration).
Regional service reach (useful for utility service area narratives)	Town of Clifton Forge WTP	Town states it delivers potable water to over 8,000 people and serves Clifton Forge plus parts of Alleghany, Bath, and Botetourt counties (communities listed on Town site).
Service Area: Wastewater (Collection vs. Treatment Responsibility)	Provider / Operator	Clarification of Ownership

Sewer collection system maintenance	Town of Clifton Forge Public Works	Town reports ~25 miles of sewer lines, 705 manholes, and 3 sewer pump stations; maintenance includes stoppages/jetting/root & grease control.
Wastewater pump stations (maintenance)	Via contract through NEWCO	Town states pump station maintenance is accomplished via a contract through Alleghany County.
Wastewater treatment	Alleghany County (regional plant)	Town states the Regional Wastewater Treatment Plant is owned and operated by Alleghany County.
Service Area: Stormwater/Drainage (Operations & Maintenance)	Provider / Operator	Service Functions
Stormwater maintenance	Town of Clifton Forge Public Works	Town lists maintenance of catch basins and drainage ditches.
Service Area: Solid Waste (Basic Municipal Service)	Provider / Operator	Notes
Household solid waste collection	Alleghany County	Solid waste collection is provided by Alleghany County.
Function: Public Works Support Functions	Provider / Operator	Notes
Utility locating / coordination	Town of Clifton Forge Public Works	Town lists Virginia 811 utility locating, positive response system, and contractor liaison.
Service Area: Community Amenities	Provider / Operator	Notes
Library services	Town (Director of Library Services listed in Town contacts)	Town lists Library Services as a department contact/municipal function.
Planning & Community Development / Code enforcement	Town (department contact listed)	Town lists Planning & Community Development and Community Development/Code Enforcement as contactable functions.

BUSINESS NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This assessment identifies critical business needs and market gaps for the Town of Clifton Forge as of early 2026. It combines current economic indicators with the town’s strategic shift toward a Gateway and Heritage

economy. Clifton Forge is transitioning from a traditional rail town to a regional hub for the arts, education, and boutique tourism.

The following themes were identified in the business needs assessment:

Workforce & Entry-Level Housing

The Need: A lack of quality rental units and new construction of single-family homes is preventing major employers (Hospital, Community College) from recruiting new staff.

The Market Opportunity: Adaptive reuse of historic downtown buildings into Workforce Housing or "Live-Work" lofts. The town recently completed the 2026 Comprehensive Housing Feasibility Study and will be working to implement recommendations. Redevelopment or reconstruction of vacant homes is also a viable solution for attracting early household-forming populations.

Consumer Service Diversification

The Need: Retail and dining is an emerging sector in Clifton Forge which should be cultivated by attracting specialized retail and diverse dining.

The Market Opportunity: Two clear opportunities present themselves: *Health and Wellness*; and *Tech-Ready Spaces*. Identifying sites for fitness centers, specialty clinics, and mental health services could help attract consumers from within and outside of the Town. With broadband services fully available in the Town, there is an opportunity to attract remote professionals through co-working spaces or small-scale tech hubs.

Tourism Infrastructure

The Need: While Amtrak brings visitors, there is a shortage of "night-time economy" services (dining/entertainment) to keep tourists in town past 5:00 PM.

The Market Opportunity: The town should pursue boutique lodging (B&Bs, unique stays) and mid- to up-scale dining, such as a farm-to-table restaurant, to create a unique draw for visitors. Outdoor equipment rentals to leverage proximity to Douthat State Park may also present an opportunity.

Strategic Recommendations

Career and Technical Education (CTE) and "Amtrak-related tourism" are the recommended primary growth levers for the town. Investors should look toward adaptive reuse of historic structures for "Workforce Housing," as the region has identified a shortage of quality rental units for young professionals working in the nearby medical and educational sectors.

The most viable business model for Clifton Forge in 2026 is "Hybrid Local Tourism." Businesses that serve the essential needs of the aging local demographic (healthcare/services) while offering a "heritage aesthetic" for weekend Amtrak and outdoor tourists will be the most resilient.

Further analysis of the needs and opportunities identified above is included in this section. Opportunities for expansion of this work include creation of a retail master plan, further outlined in the **ACTION PLAN** section of this document.

Workforce and Industry Analysis

The labor market is heavily dependent on institutional employers and service-based roles.

Current Value

Total Working Residents: 1,015

Dominant Sector: Healthcare & Social Assistance, 20.5%

Secondary Sector: Educational Services, 16.9%

Tertiary Sector: Manufacturing/Production, 14.3%

Key Employers

Alleghany Highlands Public Schools: The area's public school system.

LewisGale Hospital Alleghany: The primary regional healthcare provider.

Mountain Gateway Community College: A major educational and workforce training hub.

CSX Transportation: Clifton Forge remains a vital locomotive fueling and service point.

Amtrak: The Cardinal route connects the town to D.C. and Chicago, supporting a small but vital tourism niche.



Real Estate and Housing Market Analysis

The housing market in Clifton Forge is a buyer's market, characterized by high affordability but limited new inventory. Clifton Forge remains a highly affordable market by price point, with 2024 ACS-based median property value around \$106,900 and a Zillow typical home value of about \$136,000 (Dec. 2025). At the same time, the Town shows limited new inventory, with only 29–31 active for-sale listings reported in late 2025 and a development pipeline that is largely project-based, such as the Jefferson School redevelopment adding up to 28 units. (datausa.io).

Median Sale Price: \$149,000 to \$209,000 (highly variable based on monthly inventory).

Median Value Change: Prices have seen a recent 13.9% year-over-year increase due to regional demand shifts, though overall values remain roughly 60% lower than the state average.

Tenure: High owner-occupancy rate (65%), though rental demand is spiking, with some indications of significant year-over-year rental price growth.

Housing Stock: 45% of homes are valued under \$100,000, making it one of the most accessible markets for first-time buyers in the region.

Market Opportunity Analysis

Strengths

Heritage Tourism: The C&O Railway Heritage Center and the Masonic Amphitheatre draw visitors, creating a "boutique" retail opportunity in the historic downtown.

Connectivity: Strategic location on I-64 and the Amtrak Cardinal line.

Outdoor Recreation: Proximity to Douthat State Park and the Jackson River provides a "gateway" status for the outdoor economy.

Challenges

Workforce Participation: While the regional unemployment rate is low (3.8%), Clifton Forge has a low labor participation rate (42%). This indicates a large population of retirees and unidentified labor potential.

Infrastructure: Aging housing stock and need for utility investments.

Economic Indicators

Cost of Living Advantage: Living costs in Clifton Forge are 4% lower than the national average and significantly lower than Virginia's state average. This makes it a prime recruitment destination for remote workers and entrepreneurs.

Real Estate Activity: As of late 2025, median home prices rose to \$209,000 (a 13.9% year-over-year increase). Despite this growth, it remains a buyer's market with high inventory-to-demand ratios.

Sector Dominance

Healthcare: 21% Stable anchor (LewisGale Hospital Alleghany).

Education: 17% Growth driver (Mountain Gateway Community College).

Retail/Dining: 14% Emerging sector; driven by Amtrak tourism and heritage arts.

Analysis of Incentives and Barriers

Strategic Incentives (The "Pull")

Tourism Zone Incentives: Qualifying new businesses can receive a three-year reduction in business license, real estate, and utility taxes (tiered at 70%, 40%, and 20% over three years).

Enterprise Zone Grants: The Virginia Job Creation Grant offers \$500–\$800 per new position (excluding certain retail/service roles).

Real Property Investment Grant: Up to \$100,000 for building improvements under \$5M. This program is facilitated by the Allegheny Highlands Economic Development Corporation.

Tax Abatement Opportunity: Up to a 5-year tax abatement on improvements to buildings if they increase the building's value by 50% or more. This program is facilitated by the Allegheny Highlands Economic Development Corporation.

Critical Barriers (The "Push")

Aging Infrastructure: Many available commercial properties require significant capital expenditure for modernization.

Population Stagnation: The town faces a slight annual population decline (0.6%), meaning new businesses must target regional visitors rather than relying solely on local town residents.

Marketing: There is limited marketing to business/property owners about available incentives.

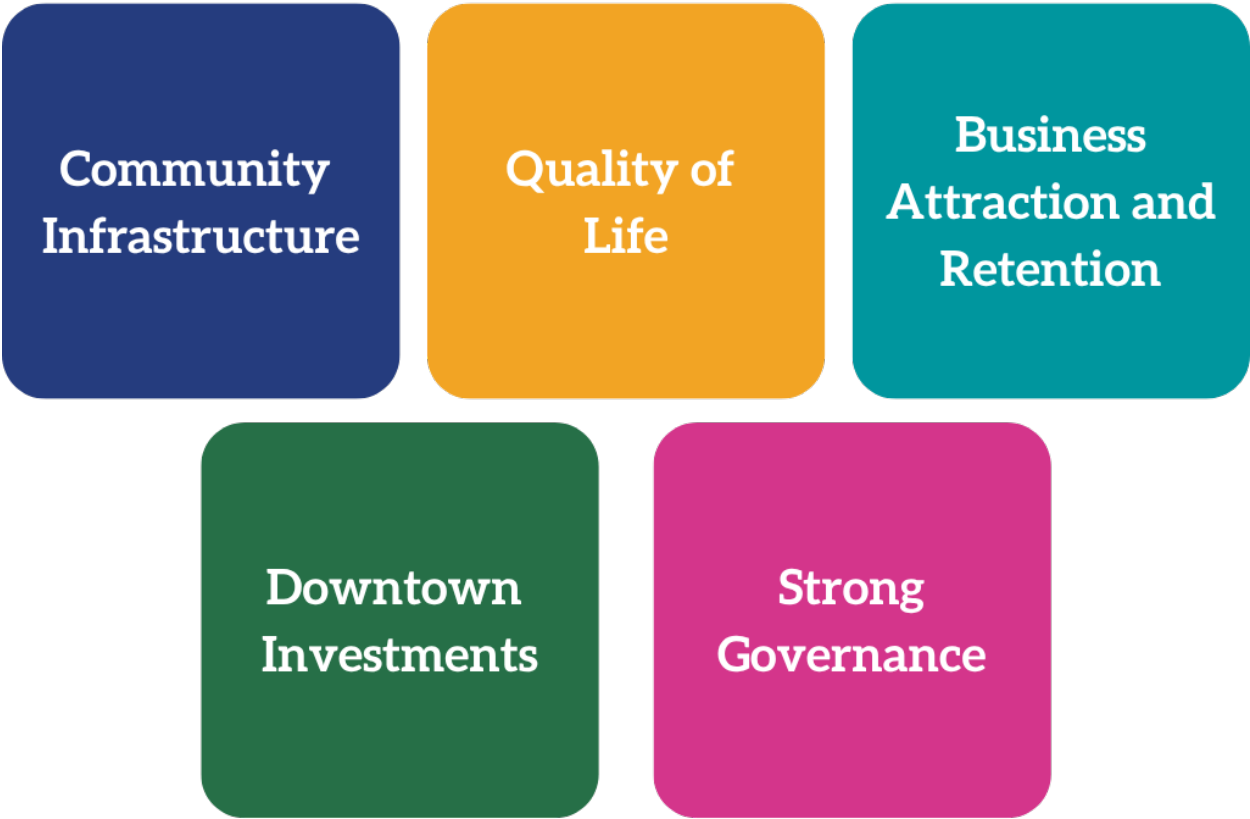
VISION, GOALS, AND STRATEGIES

The Clifton Forge Comprehensive Plan establishes the following vision for the Town.

Clifton Forge, nestled in the mountains of the Alleghany Highlands, is a small town with a high quality of life featuring affordable historic homes in safe neighborhoods, a welcoming approach to small business development and growth, a rich railroad heritage, and a long-lasting and sustained history of support of the arts. All these features, when combined with the natural beauty and abundant recreation in the area provide an ideal location for business success, a destination for travel, an unusual quality of family life, a wide variety of opportunities in retirement, artistic endeavors and in general, a highly desirable place to live.



Five goal areas were identified in the Community and Economic Development Strategic Plan process as key to meeting the vision expressed in the Comprehensive Plan. Each of these goals plays an important role in the future of the Town. While many strategies and action items were discussed in the development of this document, the items included in this section are priorities for implementation in the 5-year planning window.



Community Infrastructure

Goal

Support community connectivity and safety by providing robust infrastructure that facilitates active transportation and sustainable development.

Strategies

A. Water and Sewer Service Provision

A.1 Implement strategic water and sewer investments to reduce financial vulnerabilities of aging systems.

A.2 Expand staff expertise through targeted engagement with environmental engineering firms and contractors to understand opportunities for system modernization.

A.3 Study and implement rate structures to ensure sustainable funding for maintenance and upgrades.

A.4 Work collaboratively with regional sewer service partners to seek opportunities for service improvement.

A.5 Prioritize grants from state and federal programs over loan programs to fund infrastructure improvements, leveraging regional partnerships.

B. Alternative Transportation Implementation

B.1 Implement projects identified in existing planning documents, such as the Clifton Forge Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan (2017), and update those plans as appropriate.

B.2 Integrate planning efforts with the annual CIP process.

B.3 Continue pursuit of avenues for long-term development of an improved train station.

B.4 Explore opportunities and barriers around transit (train/bus), through transportation studies which focus on regional microtransit solutions.

C. Alleyway Inventory and Opportunity Identification

C.1 Identify opportunities to leverage alley rights-of-way for other strategic initiatives, such as downtown parking or alternative transportation initiatives.

C.2 Explore opportunities for alleyway beautification and functional enhancements to elevate the appearance of Town.

C.3 Integrate alleys into broader urban planning and zoning efforts where appropriate.

D. Roadways and Streetscaping

D.1 Identify opportunities for improved streetscaping, including both aesthetic and functional improvements.

D.2 Partner with extension agencies and community groups for tree planting initiatives to beautify road corridors and address stormwater reductions.

D.3 Upgrade street lighting to enhance safety and reduce energy consumption using LED technology.

D.4 Implement priority repair projects identified in roadway and bridge assessments.

D.5 Work with VDOT and RVARC to maximize planning and implementation efforts for the Town.



Quality of Life

Goal

Elevate the community’s living standards by addressing housing needs, promoting inclusive engagement, and preserving environmental and recreational spaces for enhanced wellness and community involvement.

Strategies

E. Redevelopment of Residential and Commercial Property

E.1 Work to identify and redevelop underutilized properties, including vacant parcels and structures.

E.2 Encourage mixed-use developments to increase housing variety.

E.3 Implement affordable housing incentives, including tax credits and zoning adjustments.

E.4 Collaborate with non-profit organizations to provide housing education and support.

E.5 Improve code enforcement of rental properties and review existing codes and ordinances where appropriate.

E.6 Pursue housing rehabilitation grants for neighborhoods in the greatest need.

F. Property Acquisition

F.1 Identify key properties for acquisition and redevelopment through public-private partnerships.

F.2 Develop financing options to support strategic property purchases.

F.3 Enhance developer relationships by creating and maintaining a network of local and regional developers.

G. Population Retention (Youth Engagement and Senior Services)

G.1 Develop programs aimed at retaining youth, such as mentorship and apprenticeship opportunities.

G.2 Expand senior services to include health care access, community centers, and transportation solutions.

G.3 Establish programs to bridge connections between youth and seniors.

G.4 Create more amenities that are attractive to youth, young families, and young adults.

H. Outdoor Recreation

H.1 Capitalize on existing parks and recreation infrastructure through improved programming and marketing.

H.2 Develop partnerships with outdoor groups to promote and develop recreational activities.

H.3 Explore funding opportunities to maintain and develop trails and recreational areas identified in existing planning documents.

Business Attraction and Retention

Goal

Elevate the community’s living standards by addressing housing needs, promoting inclusive engagement, and preserving environmental and recreational spaces for enhanced wellness and community involvement.

Strategies

I. Business Incentives and Application Streamlining

I.1 Identify barriers and incentives for new businesses, including permitting, taxing, and other administrative processes to identify opportunities for improvement.

I.2 Prioritize businesses that can function as destinations or experiences to attract and increase customer base.

I.3 Establish, promote, and maintain public-private partnerships, public involvement and support, thereby improving communication.

I.4 Create mechanisms which go beyond initial business setup and support to provide long-term support for businesses with regular touchpoints.

I.5 Streamline communication with potential and current business owners.

I.6 Capitalize on new town-wide brand in communications with prospective business partners.



J. Zoning Review and Ordinance Tools

J.1 Ensure current zoning ordinances align with growth objectives.

J.2 Establish flexible zoning practices to accommodate various business needs.

J.3 Provide training and resources to local officials on modern zoning practices.

Downtown Investments

Goal

Strengthen the downtown core as a focal point for community activities and business growth, ensuring it remains an attractive, accessible, and lively hub for residents and visitors.

Strategies

K. Design Guidelines

K.1 Preserve the heritage and character of the town while encouraging high-quality reinvestment.

K.2 Steer downtown design standards and capital improvements toward a defined market for the town.

K.3 Utilize parking as an economic development tool, not a supply issue.

K.4 Work with Clifton Forge Main Street, business owners, and other agencies to create inviting spaces downtown to create destinations and a sense of place.

L. Partnerships

L.1 Collaborate with Main Street organizations to support downtown events and initiatives that drive economic activity and community engagement.

L.2 Work with existing cornerstone businesses (e.g. the Masonic Theatre) to improve connectivity to downtown.

M. Redevelopment of Residential and Commercial Properties

M.1 Establish “gateways” to downtown and work with partners to implement redevelopment at those locations.

M.2 Prioritize downtown projects identified in other goal areas where appropriate.



Strong Governance

Goal

Develop a robust governance framework that prioritizes accountability, efficiency, and public confidence to guide sustainable community development.

Strategies

N. Economic Development Authority (EDA) Capacity Improvement

N.1 Continue to improve the financial capacity and assets of the EDA in order to meet the Town's economic development goals.

N.2 Explore opportunities for continuing education or other resources for EDA board members and supporting staff.

P. Staff Capacity

P.1 Critically assess staff capacity in departments critical to the execution of this plan, including administration, planning, and public works, both in terms of technical ability and time.

P.2 Capitalize on volunteer partnerships to accomplish goals without overloading staff when appropriate.

P.3 Look for opportunities to improve processing of projects, including project and file management efficiencies, standard operating procedures, and, where appropriate, software improvements.

Q. Public Engagement and Transparency

Q.1 Enhance transparency in government processes by increasing communication channels and involving residents in decision-making through regular public consultations and feedback mechanisms.

Q.2 Engage in periodic review of internal boards and mechanisms for alignment with Town needs and functions.

ACTION PLAN

This section of the document assesses the Town's current efforts and creates an actionable list of projects for implementation.

Capturing Progress

The Town has already pursued many key projects which will have beneficial impacts in the coming years. Capturing this progress is important to set a baseline for what is already in progress and to help shed light on factors which may inhibit staff capacity. Clifton Forge is a small town with limited staff positions. Implementation must be strategic and measured.



Table 12: Completed Projects (April 2025 - February 2026)

Community Branding Project (funded by a DHCD Community Vitality Grant): Town-wide brand system unveiled and adopted.

Town-wide Housing Needs Assessment (funded by Virginia Housing Community Impact Grant): Consultant S. Patz & Associates prepared a town-wide housing study.

Staff was on the planning committee for a regional housing summit, held in August.

Secured a congressionally directed spending (CDS) grant for an All-Abilities Park.

Secured a DHCD Planning Grant to do a downtown master plan.

Secured a grant from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for a restroom facility at the Smith Creek/Sensory Trailhead near the community gardens.

608 Main Street Stabilization: Finalized concept plan via Opportunity Appalachia grant, secured funding for stabilization work (funding from the Rural Investment Collaborative, Virginia Housing, and Virginia Economic Development Partnership).

Jefferson School Redevelopment: Signed the Performance Agreement with the Jefferson School Partners, secured a grant from Virginia Housing's Workforce Housing Investment Program

Green Pastures: Managed grant to create an interpretive historic trail, make improvements to historic picnic shelter and surrounding site, have a children's book about Green Pastures written and published, and held at 85th anniversary event at Green Pastures. Closed out the grant provided by Monuments Across Appalachian Virginia.

Launched the "Visit Clifton Forge" tourism site.

Integrated the "Visit Clifton Forge" site into the Town's official website.

Delivered a free community rain barrel workshop at the Armory in partnership with RVARC.

Worked with regional partners to plan and sponsor the first ever Alleghany Highlands Restaurant Week.

Secured funding from the Virginia Walkability Action Institute to do a pedestrian demonstration project between Mountain View/Clifton Woods Apartments and Kroger. Staff participated in a 2-day institute workshop.

Table 13: In Progress Projects – April 2026

Downtown Master Plan (DHCD planning grant): issuing an RFP in April 2026 for work, project expected to be approximate 12-months.

Business Spotlight Program: Staff is leading a Business Spotlight program to highlight local brick-and-mortar businesses. Town is sponsoring advertising efforts.

All-Abilities Park: Awaiting HUD coordination, followed by grant onboarding and initial steps.

Housing Supply Accelerator “Housing Adopters” program (NLC/APA): The Town is leading a multi-jurisdictional team participating in the 18-month initiative with ongoing engagement and coaching.

Jefferson School Redevelopment: Actively pursuing grant opportunities, collaborating with Jefferson School Partners team, construction expected to begin Summer of 2026.

608 Main Street Stabilization: Working on Purchase Agreement with local business looking to expand.

CSX Yard Office Building Acquisition/Redevelopment: In due-diligence period; awaiting required Amtrak paperwork prior to closing.

BAD Buildings Inventory: Community Prioritization Session being held mid-April, followed by next steps.

Smith Creek/Sensory Trailhead Restroom: Environmental and historical reviews underway as part of grant compliance, construction expected mid-2026.

Virginia Walkability Action Institute: Participating in Institute on a team with local stakeholders to assess possible demonstration projects to improvement pedestrian safety between Mountain View/Clifton Woods Apartments and Kroger. Also pursuing additional funding to support permanent installation.

Regional Micro-transit: Leading a regional effort to assess the feasibility of micro-transit opportunities in the Alleghany Highlands.

Urban Forest/Riparian Buffer Plantings (multiple town sites): Maintenance work to be completed in May, possibility for future plantings.

Looking Forward

The below Action Plan includes an Implementation Period which is defined as follows:

- **In Progress:** Items designated as “in progress” may be duplicative of items listed in Table 13.
- **Short Term:** These projects will be undertaken in the next 1-2 years and have a reasonable chance of concluding in that timeframe.
- **Medium Term:** These projects will be undertaken in the next 3-4 years and have a reasonable chance of concluding in that timeframe.
- **Long Term:** These projects have been captured in the planning process for implementation 5 years or beyond. They are important projects to list in case opportunities arise – however, it is reasonably likely that they will be included in a future iteration of this plan.

Every year, staff will review this Action Plan and work with Town Council and other leaders in the Town to identify the most actionable priority projects for implementation. A priority column is included below to facilitate this activity. While the planning windows described above are the best information that is available at this time, it is understood that a medium term project may be higher priority for implementation given a variety of factors such as funding, staff capacity, and citizen advocacy. Similarly barriers to a short term project may give rise to delays in implementation. An annual review and priority-setting process is the optimal way to continue implementation of this document.

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Participate in the RVARC-led update of the Upper James Water Supply Plan to evaluate water supply and usage as required by DEQ.	✓					A.1; A.5	RVARC, Town Staff, DEQ	Underway	
Complete the BAD Buildings Inventory to identify priorities for vacant and underutilized building improvements and redevelopment.		✓				E.1, F.1	Town Staff, DEQ	Underway	
Redevelop the 600 block on Main Street.		✓	✓	✓		E.1, F.1, F.2, M.1, M.2	Town Staff, Virginia Housing, Rural Investment Collaborative; Private partners	Underway	
Redevelop the Jefferson School property to increase workforce housing options and provide a new location for the Clifton Forge Area Food Pantry.		✓				E.1, E.2, F.1	Town Staff, Virginia Housing	Underway	
Build a restroom at the Smith Creek/Sensory Trailhead.		✓				H.1, H.3	Town Staff, DCR	Underway	
Conduct a Lodging Needs Assessment.			✓			I.2	Town Staff, SERCAP	Underway	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Acquire and redevelop the Yard Office building to provide improved lodging options.			✓	✓		E.1, F.1, M.1, M.2	Town Staff, EDA, VCDC Development Works	Underway	
Continue implementing town-wide brand for community at large and at events.				✓		I.6	Town Staff, DHCD	Underway	
Develop a downtown master plan that complies with DHCD planning grant scope and focuses heavily on community engagement.				✓		E.1, F.1, I.7, K.1, K.2, K.4, M.1	Town Staff, Master Plan Steering Committee, DHCD	Underway	
Assess potential microtransit options identified through the Allegheny County Microtransit Feasibility Study	✓	✓				B.4, G.2	Allegheny County, RVARC, Town Staff	Short Term	
Evaluate and update the Clifton Forge Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan (2017).	✓					B.1, B.2	Town staff, RVARC, VDOT	Short Term	
Initiate an alley inventory and opportunities study.	✓			✓		C. 1, C.2, C.3	Town Staff/ RVARC	Short Term	
Make improvements to the now EDA-owned Masonic Amphitheatre to create a stronger community gathering space.	✓	✓		✓		K.4, L.2	Town Staff, Historic Masonic Theatre, funders	Short Term	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Collaborate with Total Action for Progress (TAP) on possibility of participating in their Acquire, Renovate, Sell (ARS) program through DHCD.		✓				E.1, E.3, E.4, E.6, F.1, F.2	Town Staff, TAP, DHCD	Short Term	
Revise local building code to address lead-based paint.		✓				E.5	Town Staff, Town Attorney, Town Council	Short Term	
Enforce Vacant Registry Building Ordinance.		✓				E.1, E.5	Town Staff, Property Owners	Short Term	
Formulate a comprehensive incentive package and welcome packet for new businesses, including information regarding the underutilized five-year tax abatement program.			✓			I.1, I.4, I.5, I.6	Town Staff, EDA	Short Term	
Create a “business ambassador” program to assist with ongoing outreach to business owners, including education on new or developing business opportunities.			✓			I.3, I.4, I.5, I.6	Town Staff, CFMS, Allegheny Highlands Business Stakeholder Group, Allegheny Highlands Economic Development Corporation, EDA	Short Term	
Create an email listserv for local business owners to streamline communication between staff and businesses, and between businesses themselves			✓		✓	I.3, I.4, I.5, I.6	Town Staff	Short Term	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Create a one-stop portal for current and prospective business owners on the Town website.			✓		✓	I.3, I.4, I.5, I.6	Town Staff, EDA, CFMS	Short Term	
Begin tracking investments made in Clifton Forge's downtown and develop metrics to review for effectiveness and longevity.			✓	✓		I.4, P.3, Q.2	Town Staff, Downtown Property Owners, CFMS	Short Term	
Develop an inventory of potential investors to seek funding for future downtown projects.				✓		I.5	Town Staff	Short Term	
Pursue a CDBG downtown façade improvements grant from DHCD, upon completion of the Downtown Master Plan.				✓		E.1, F.1, I.7, K.1, K.2, K.4, M.1	Town Staff, DHCD	Medium Term	
Procure an architectural rendering to visualize possibilities for downtown and market them to the public, either during or following the development of the Downtown Master Plan.				✓	✓	K.1, K.2, K.4, Q.1	Town Staff, Procured architect	Short Term	
Conduct a prioritization exercise to identify immediate implementation priorities in this action plan which can be reviewed annually.					✓	P.1, P.3, Q.1	Town Staff, Various Boards and Commissions	Short Term	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Conduct a staff capacity audit by department for identified project implementation objectives and identify needed trainings and learning to accomplish those action items.					✓	P.1, P.2, P.3	Town Staff	Short Term	
Ensure all boards and commission bylaws are current and in compliance					✓	Q.2	Town Staff, Town Attorney, Various Boards & Commissions	Short Term	
Creation of an annual significant achievements newsletter (e-mail, paper copy options, included in utility bills).					✓	Q.1	Town Staff	Short Term	
Development of a volunteer committee to distribute the newsletter.					✓	P.2, Q.1	Town Staff	Short Term	
Complete the Ridgeway Street Bridge repair.	✓			✓		D.4; D.5	Town Staff, VDOT	Medium Term	
Identify needed wastewater line improvements and initiate funding applications	✓					A.1, A.4, A.5	Town Staff, Allegheny County Public Works, hired consultants and contractors	Medium Term	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Implement lighting improvements and sidewalk additions on Main Street between Kroger and Mountain View Apartments and in key downtown areas.	✓	✓		✓	✓	D.1, D.3	Town Staff	Medium Term	
Work with owners of vacant upper story building spaces downtown to develop apartments.		✓		✓	✓	E.1, E.2, F.1, M.2	Town Staff, Property Owners, Interested Developers	Medium Term	
Create engagement/volunteer opportunities with local youth.		✓			✓	G.1, G.2, G.4, P.2	Town Staff, CFMS, Mountain Gateway Community College, Allegheny Highlands Public Schools, Boys Home	Medium Term	
Build an All-Abilities Park in the Town of Clifton Forge.		✓			✓	H.3	Town Staff, Parks & Trails Committee	Medium Term	
Attract walkable medical facilities.		✓	✓		✓	G.4	Town Staff, healthcare partners, EDA	Medium Term	
Conduct detailed market assessment to understand business market trends/gaps/needs in Clifton Forge.		✓	✓	✓	✓	I.1, I.2	Town Staff, EDA, Hired Consultant	Medium Term	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Initiate a code review to identify amendments needed to support business development.			✓			J.1, J.2, J.3	Town Staff	Medium Term	
Work with owners of key properties identified in the Downtown Master Plan in developing two “downtown gateways” to create a sense of place in the downtown core.				✓		F.2, M.1, M.2	Town Staff, Private partners	Medium Term	
Use data gathered in the Downtown Master Plan to develop and implement comprehensive design guidelines to maintain architectural integrity and enhance aesthetic appeal.				✓		K.1, K.2, K.4	Town Staff, Private partners	Medium Term	
Use data gathered in the Downtown Master Planning process to develop a unified downtown parking and streetscaping plan to categorize short- and long-term improvements.				✓		D.1, D.2, D.3, K.1, K.2, K.3, M.2	Town Staff, Private partners	Medium Term	
Establish a community engagement co-op position or formal partnership with Mountain Gateway Community College to further community engagement efforts.					✓	G.1, P.2	Town Staff, Mountain Gateway Community College	Medium Term	
Engage in training activities with board and commission members on a regular schedule (e.g. every 3 years).					✓	Q.2	Town Staff, Various Boards and Commissions	Medium Term	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Complete identified upgrades to wastewater systems that are critical for downtown development.	✓			✓		A.1, A.4, B.2, M.2	Town Staff, Alleghany County	Long Term	
Develop a conceptual plan for train station improvements which includes accessibility improvements and downtown connections.	✓			✓		B.2, B.3, B.4, M.2	Town Staff, AMTRAK, DRPT, VPRA, CSX, RVARC	Long Term	
Complete implementation of streetscape and bicycle and pedestrian/active transportation plan high priority projects.	✓			✓		B.1, B.2, M.2	Town Staff, VDOT, RVARC	Long Term	
Redevelop the underutilized parking lot on Keswick Street.		✓		✓		B.2, K.3, M.2	Town Staff, interested developers	Long Term	
Establish a permanent location for the Farmer's Market.		✓	✓	✓		G.2, G.3, G.4, I.2, M.2	Town Staff, CFMS, downtown property owners	Long Term	
Increase access to fresh food in Clifton Forge by working to establish a local small grocery or community kitchen facility, preferably downtown.			✓	✓		G.2, M.2	Town Staff, Local businesses, regional partners (ex: LEAP)	Long Term	

Project	Goal Areas					Strategies	Responsible Agencies/Parties	Implementation Period	Priority
	Community Infrastructure	Quality of Life	Business Attraction & Retention	Downtown Investments	Strong Governance				
Create a targeted plan for encouraging businesses most needed (as identified in the market assessment) to open/expand in Clifton Forge.			✓	✓		I.2, I.6	Town Staff, EDA	Long Term	
Advance Clifton Forge Main Street to the 'Mobilizing' tier (requires hiring of a part time Executive Director).				✓	✓	I.4, I.5, M.2, P.1	CFMS, Town Staff	Long Term	



APPENDICES

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APPENDIX 1: FOCUS GROUP AND RESPONSE MATRIX

Attendees

Mike & Ann Foster – Jack Mason's

Keith & Celeste Bagley – C & Oh! Ice Cream Depot

Melissa Hundley – Bear Mountain Signs

Vance Overstreet – Ace Hardware

Kristen McConnell – Five Sides

Autumn & Kristy Morgan – Four Moons Design

Misty Gallahan – 42Deli

Jennifer Peters – Oh So Foxy Boutique & Florist

Christy Hodges – Michaels Pizza

Connie Baker – Alleghany Highlands Arts & Crafts Center

Jenny Oeltjen – Livy's Closet

Jane Greenwood – Lollie's Quilt Shop

Ashley Bennett – Mountain Field Market

Sameh Alhayek – Royal Vape

Kelly Madsen – Racey & Dean Inc

Betsy Rogers – The Depot on Main

Travis Russell – The Bee Hive

Jason Helmtoller – Clyde's (upcoming)

Wendy Hudler – Historic Masonic Theatre

Garland Humphries – Highlands Realty

Ricky Swoope – Swoope Plumbing and Heating

Shauna Dunovan – Property Owner

Survey Questions

Community Needs and Perceptions

1. How would you describe the current state of Clifton Forge in terms of livability and amenities?
2. What are the greatest strengths of Clifton Forge that should be built upon in our development efforts?
3. What challenges or issues do you feel the community faces that need to be addressed?

Economic Development

4. What types of businesses or industries do you believe would complement Clifton Forge's economic base?
5. How can the town better support existing local businesses and attract new ones?
6. What barriers do entrepreneurs face in starting or growing businesses within Clifton Forge?

Downtown

7. Are there specific businesses or amenities you currently travel outside of Clifton Forge to access that you would prefer to have downtown?
8. How can downtown better support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and start-ups (e.g., incubator spaces, pop-up shops, shared workspaces)?
9. What would encourage you to shop, dine, or spend more time in downtown Clifton Forge?
10. How can downtown become more pedestrian- and bike-friendly while still accommodating vehicles and parking needs?
11. Are there vacant or underutilized buildings downtown you believe should be prioritized for redevelopment?

Infrastructure and Facilities

12. Are there specific areas within downtown or other neighborhoods that require infrastructure improvement?
13. What improvements to downtown's appearance (streetscape, signage, storefronts, lighting, landscaping, public art, etc.) would make the biggest impact?
14. What kinds of recreational or cultural amenities would you like to see developed or enhanced?
15. How can transportation networks be improved to benefit both residents and businesses?

Housing and Land Use

16. What are your perceptions of the current housing situation in Clifton Forge?
17. Are there particular types of housing (e.g., affordable, senior, mixed-use) that should be prioritized?
18. How should unused or underutilized land be developed to best benefit the community?
19. How can downtown better highlight its historic character while supporting modern uses?

Collaboration and Engagement

20. How can the town government and local organizations better engage with community members?
21. What role should local schools, colleges, or universities play in the town's development efforts?
22. How can the town collaborate with surrounding areas to strengthen regional development?
23. How can downtown businesses and organizations work together to create a more cohesive and vibrant business district?

Vision for the Future

24. What is your vision for Clifton Forge over the next 10-20 years?
25. What measures should be taken to ensure development efforts are sustainable and inclusive?
26. How can we ensure that development plans enhance the quality of life for all residents?

Feedback and Concerns

27. Do you have any concerns about the town's development plans or processes?
28. What additional support or resources do you think the community needs to achieve its development goals?

Response Matrix

Question	Analysis
1. How would you describe the current state of Clifton Forge in terms of livability and amenities?	Limited amenities and diverse opinions on livability. Calls for more shopping, dining, and improved grocery options are common.
2. What are the greatest strengths of Clifton Forge that should be built upon in our development efforts?	Historic character, small-town charm, and the arts community are often highlighted. There's support for outdoor activities and community collaboration.
3. What challenges or issues do you feel the community faces that need to be addressed?	Problems with rundown storefronts, absentee ownership, and affordable housing. Community engagement and increasing local support are also themes.
4. What types of businesses or industries do you believe would complement Clifton Forge's economic base?	Suggestions include more diverse restaurants, lodging, and retail, as well as new ventures like outdoor stores.
5. How can the town better support existing local businesses and attract new ones?	Emphasizes advertising, economic incentives, building revitalization, and reducing derelict properties.
6. What barriers do entrepreneurs face in starting or growing businesses within Clifton Forge?	High taxes, lack of support, and difficulties finding adequate premises are mentioned. The need for a more welcoming attitude to new ventures is noted.
7. Are there specific businesses or amenities you currently travel outside of Clifton Forge to access that you would prefer to have downtown?	Clothing stores, groceries, dining options, and professional services are desired in-town to reduce travel.

Question	Analysis
8. How can downtown better support small businesses, entrepreneurs, and start-ups (e.g., incubator spaces, pop-up shops, shared workspaces)?	Advocates for incubator spaces, enhanced support initiatives, and better welcoming attitudes.
9. What would encourage you to shop, dine, or spend more time in downtown Clifton Forge?	More restaurant options, extended store hours, and a mix of retail offerings were noted as factors.
10. How can downtown become more pedestrian- and bike-friendly while still accommodating vehicles and parking needs?	Suggestions include better crosswalks, bike lanes, and more parking solutions.
11. Are there vacant or underutilized buildings downtown you believe should be prioritized for redevelopment?	Vacant and underutilized downtown properties need addressing. Proposals include triaging and leveraging existing grants.
12. Are there specific areas within downtown or other neighborhoods that require infrastructure improvement?	Water, drainage, and streetscape enhancements are emphasized, alongside creative public art features.
13. What improvements to downtown's appearance (streetscape, signage, storefronts, lighting, landscaping, public art, etc.) would make the biggest impact?	Lighting, landscaping, and public seating top the list of desired streetscape improvements.

Question	Analysis
14. What kinds of recreational or cultural amenities would you like to see developed or enhanced?	Calls for more cultural events, parks, and activities that leverage the area's history and natural beauty.
15. How can transportation networks be improved to benefit both residents and businesses?	Suggestions include shuttle services to local parks, expanded signage, and taxi services.
16. What are your perceptions of the current housing situation in Clifton Forge?	Mixed views on housing conditions. Affordable and quality rental options are a priority.
17. Are there particular types of housing (e.g., affordable, senior, mixed-use) that should be prioritized?	Emphasis on affordable, senior, and mixed-use housing.
18. How should unused or underutilized land be developed to best benefit the community?	Proposals for building hotels, apartments, and developing social spaces.
19. How can downtown better highlight its historic character while supporting modern uses?	Suggestions include strategic signage and renovation efforts that respect historic values while accommodating modern uses.
20. How can the town government and local organizations better engage with community members?	Advocates for in-person meetings and embracing new ideas to improve civic participation.
21. What role should local schools, colleges, or universities play in the town's development efforts?	Schools and colleges should play active roles in development, attracting young demographics.

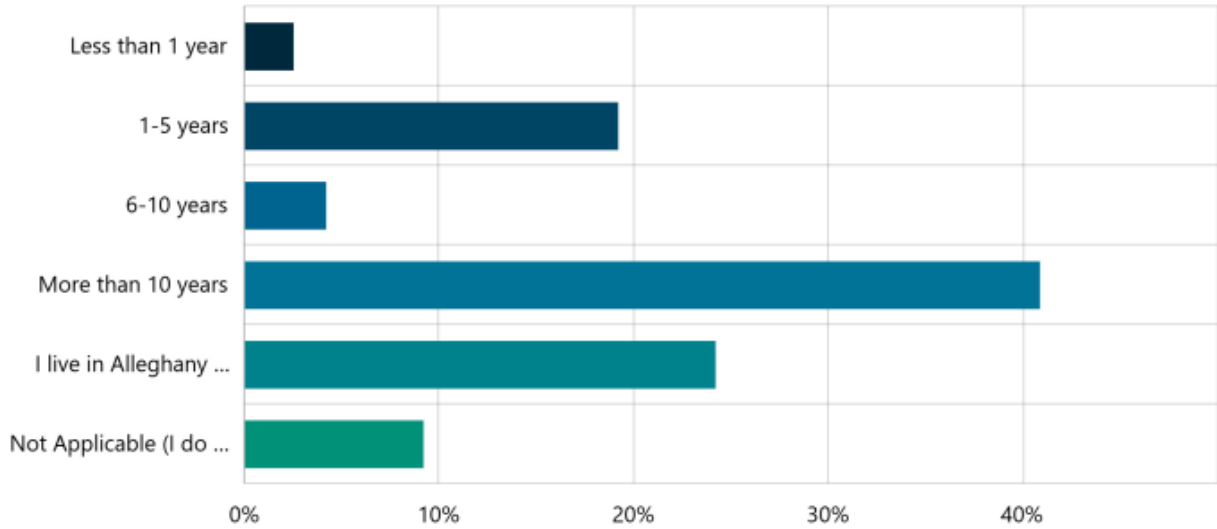
Question	Analysis
22. How can the town collaborate with surrounding areas to strengthen regional development?	Stronger regional ties suggested for tourism and event collaborations.
23. How can downtown businesses and organizations work together to create a more cohesive and vibrant business district?	Need for stakeholder meetings, collaboration, and alignment on operations.
24. What is your vision for Clifton Forge over the next 10-20 years?	<p>Hopes for a vibrant, arts-centered community with a thriving tourism economy. What measures should be taken to ensure development efforts are sustainable and inclusive.</p> <p>Calls for strong building codes, citizen input, and strategies that promote inclusivity.</p>
25. How can we ensure that development plans enhance the quality of life for all residents?	Involvement of diverse demographics in planning and strong community communication.
26. Do you have any concerns about the town's development plans or processes?	Concerns center on absentee ownership issues and a lack of cohesive effort.
27. What additional support or resources do you think the community needs to achieve its development goals?	Emphasis on grants, partnerships, and regulatory enforcement for development success.

APPENDIX 2: PUBLIC SURVEY AND RESPONSE MATRIX

Multiple Choice Question Results

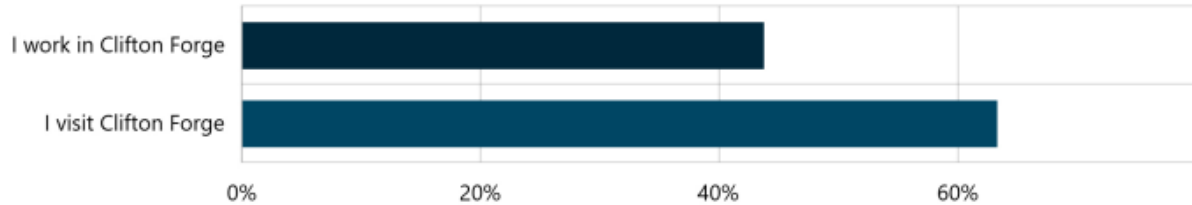
1. How long have you lived in Clifton Forge?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 120 (98.4%)



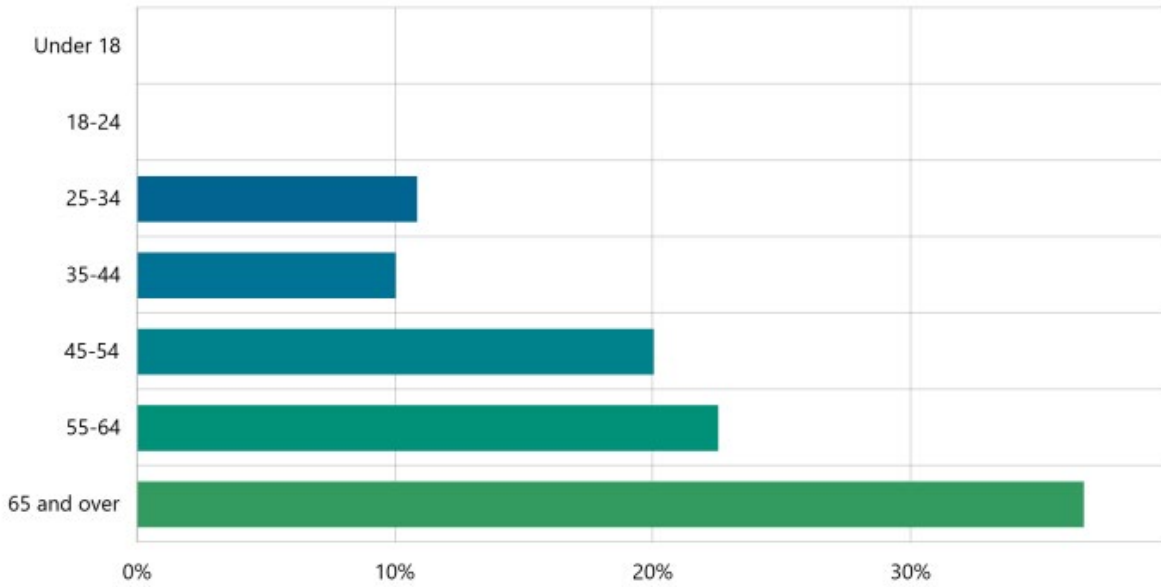
2. Which of the following applies to you? Please select all that apply.

Multi Choice | Skipped: 35 | Answered: 87 (71.3%)



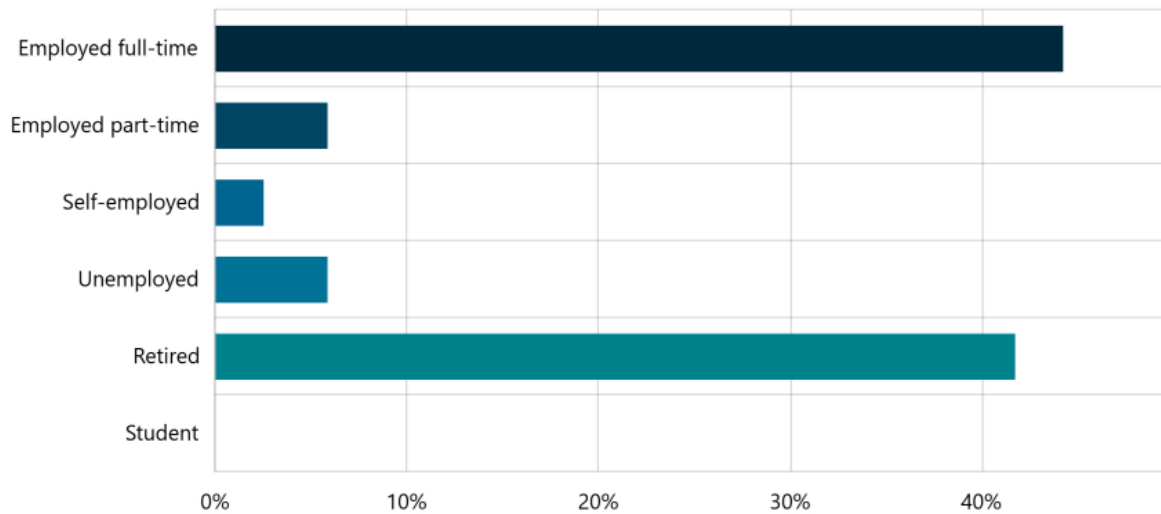
3. What is your age group?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 120 (98.4%)



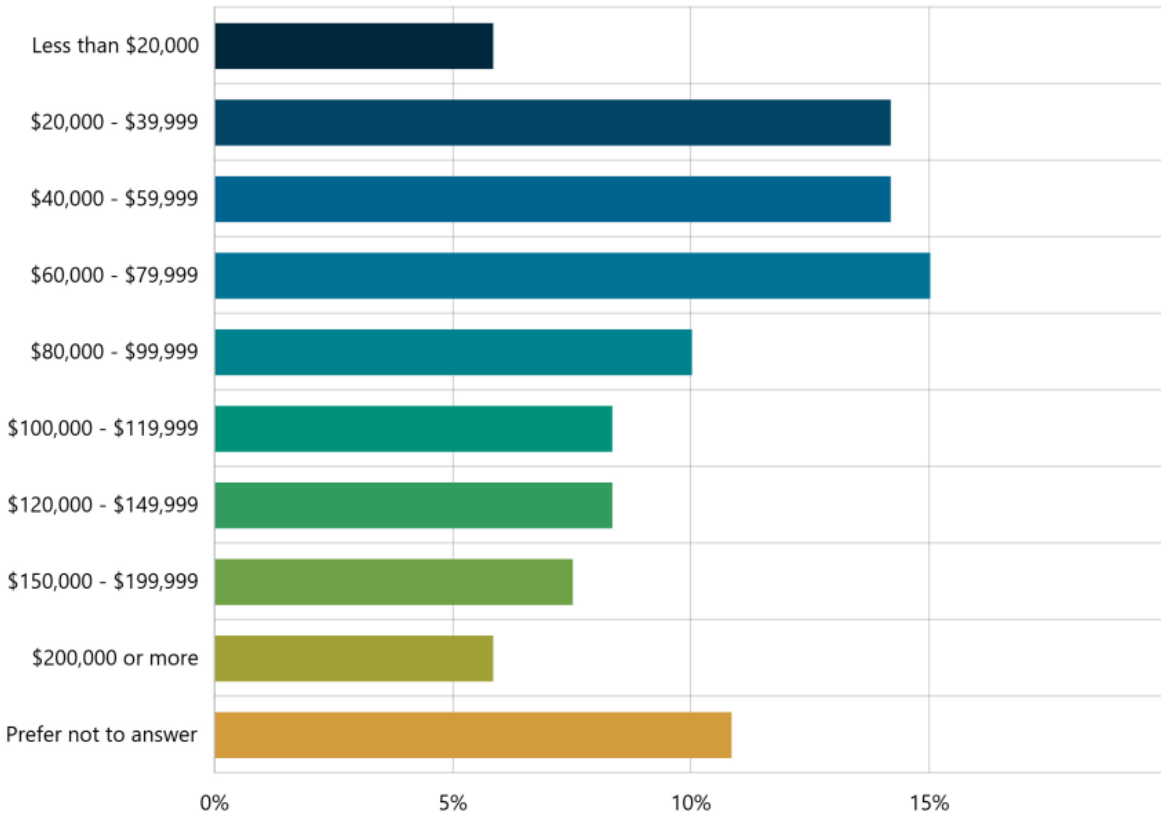
4. What is your current employment status?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 120 (98.4%)



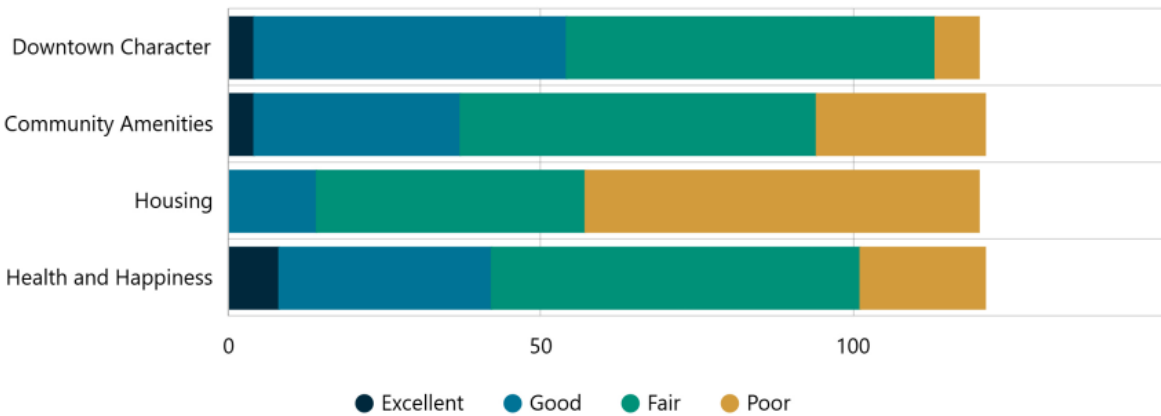
5. What is your current household income range? Please select one option that best describes your household's total annual income for the past year.

Multi Choice | Skipped: 2 | Answered: 120 (98.4%)



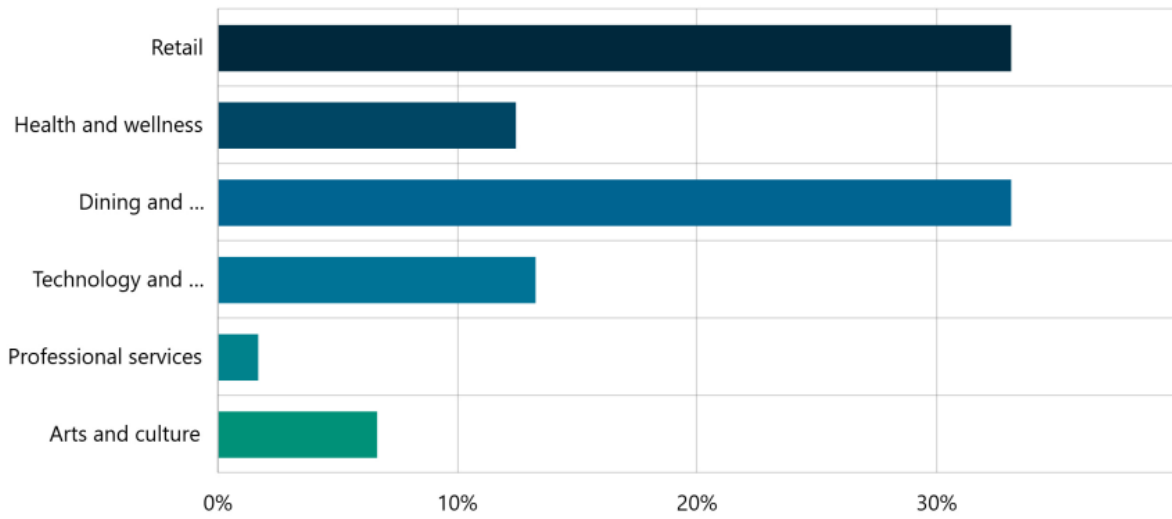
6. How would you rate your feelings on the following topics?

Matrix | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 121 (99.2%)



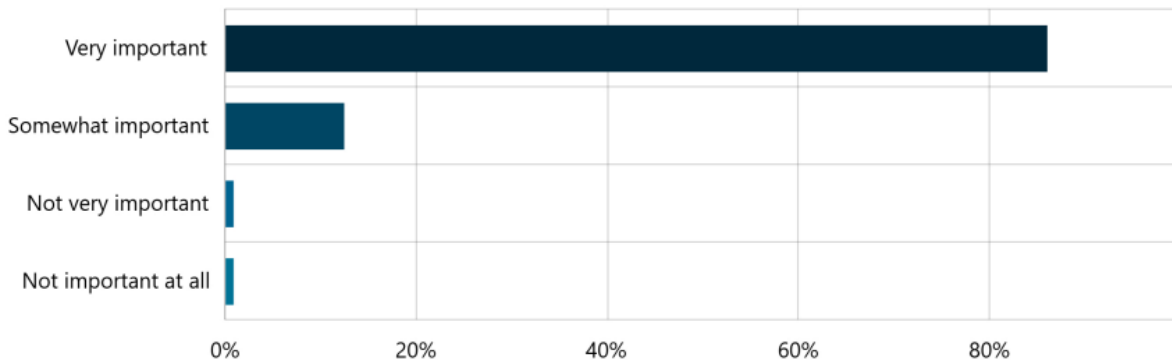
9. What types of new businesses or services would you like to see in Clifton Forge? (Select all that apply)

Multi Choice | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 121 (99.2%)



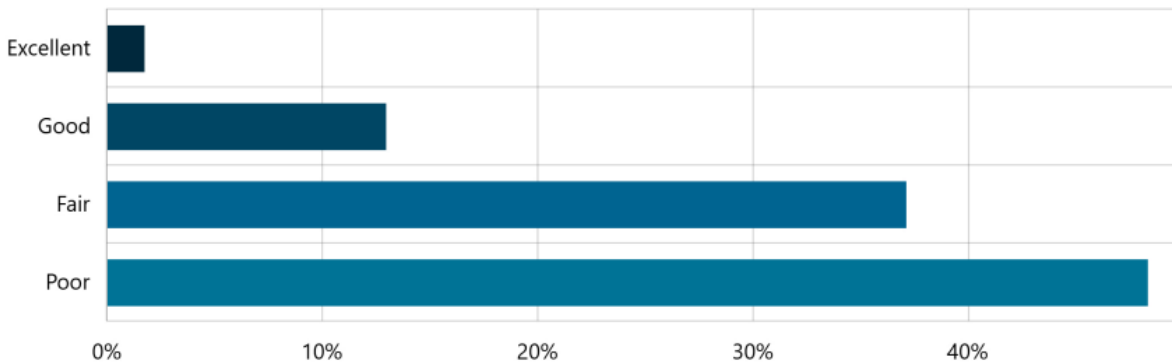
10. How important is it to you that Clifton Forge attracts new businesses?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 1 | Answered: 121 (99.2%)



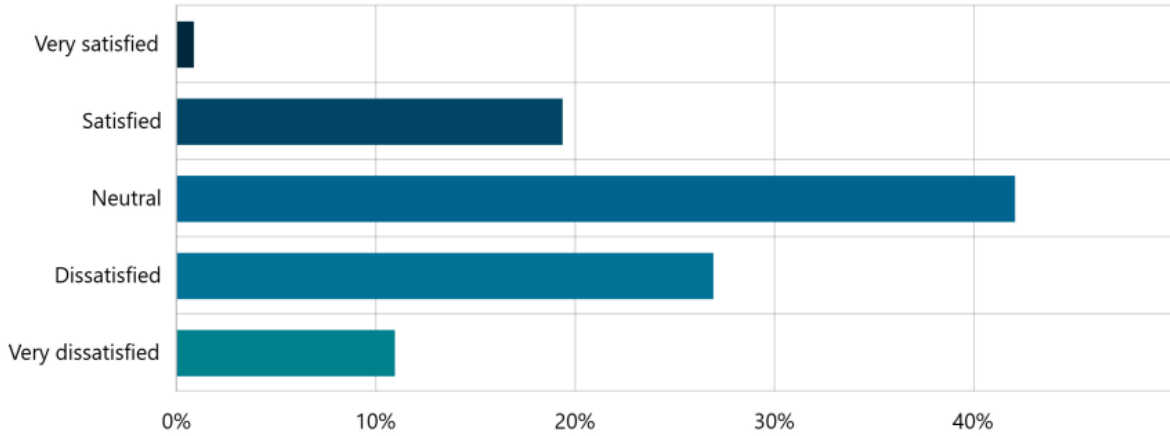
17. How would you rate the availability of housing in Clifton Forge?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 6 | Answered: 116 (95.1%)



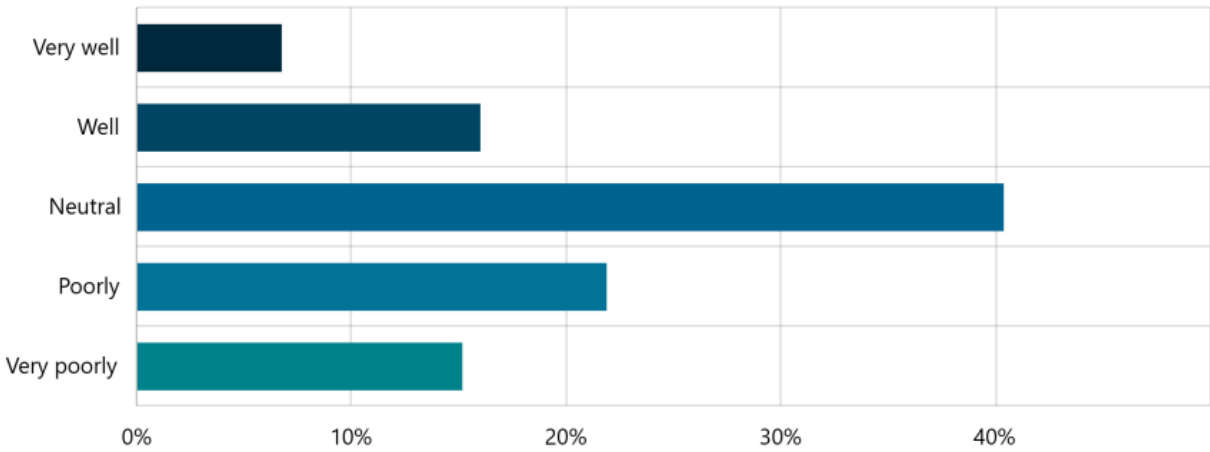
19. How satisfied are you with the recreational facilities available in Clifton Forge?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 3 | Answered: 119 (97.5%)



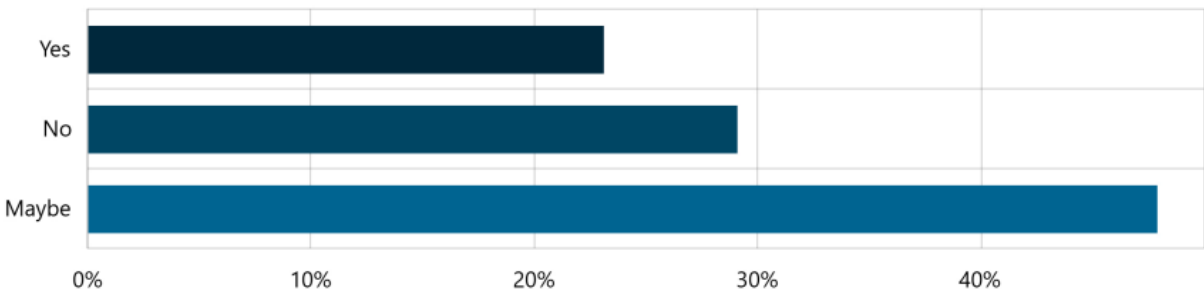
21. How well do you feel the town engages its citizens in planning and decision-making processes?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 3 | Answered: 119 (97.5%)



22. Would you be interested in participating in community meetings or workshops?

Multi Choice | Skipped: 5 | Answered: 117 (95.9%)



Open-Ended Question Results

Top Community Concerns

Categories	Concerns
Blighted Properties & Infrastructure	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Abandoned homes and deteriorating buildings dominate concerns. 2. Roads, sidewalks, and water/sewer systems need urgent repair.
Economic Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Desire for more diverse, sustainable businesses and job opportunities. 2. Frustration with double taxation and high utility costs.
Housing & Affordability	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Need for affordable, senior, and workforce housing. 2. Calls for better property maintenance and code enforcement.
Youth & Community Engagement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of activities and spaces for youth and families. 2. Interest in community centers, events, and inclusive programming.
Leadership & Vision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Criticism of current leadership and calls for more dynamic, transparent governance. 2. Desire for a unified vision that balances tourism with resident needs.

Desired Business & Industry Growth

Industry Type	Desired Growth
Retail & Grocery	More options beyond the existing Kroger.
Dining	Diverse, affordable restaurants (beyond pizza).
Outdoor & Tourism	Outfitters, lodging, and recreation-based businesses.
Tech & Light Manufacturing	To attract younger residents and provide stable employment.
Health & Wellness	Clinics, mental health services, and senior care.

Open-Ended Survey Question Summaries

<p>Question 7: In one sentence, what best describes Clifton Forge today?</p>	<p>Themes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Struggling but hopeful: Many described the town as “run down,” “dying,” or “a shadow of its former self,” yet others noted it’s “trying,” “emerging,” or “on the cusp of revival.” 2. Historic charm: Several praised its “railroad heritage,” “arts community,” and “beautiful mountain setting.” 3. Economic challenges: Comments highlighted “lack of jobs,” “empty storefronts,” and “drug issues.” 4. Identity conflict: Some saw it as “between identities,” “favoring tourism over residents,” or “charging big city prices.”
<p>Question 8: What are the top three issues you believe the town should address?</p>	<p>Most Common Concerns</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Blighted properties: Calls to tear down or renovate abandoned homes and storefronts. 2. Double taxation: Many residents cited frustration with town and county taxes. 3. Lack of businesses and jobs: A need for economic development and employment opportunities. 4. Housing: Affordable and senior housing were frequently mentioned. 5. Infrastructure: Poor roads, sidewalks, and sewer systems. 6. Youth engagement: Requests for activities and spaces for children and teens. 7. Leadership and vision: Criticism of town management and calls for more progressive leadership.
<p>Question 11: What types of businesses or industries do you believe would</p>	<p>Popular Suggestions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Retail and clothing stores 2. Restaurants (especially non-pizza options)

<p>complement Clifton Forge's economic base?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Grocery stores (ALDI, Trader Joe's, etc.) 4. Outdoor outfitters and tourism-based businesses 5. Tech and manufacturing industries 6. Entertainment venues (movie theater, bowling alley, arcade) 7. Health and wellness services 8. Family-friendly and youth-oriented businesses
<p><u>Question 12:</u> How can the town better support existing local businesses and attract new ones?</p>	<p>Key Ideas</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tax incentives and lower utility costs 2. Clean up and renovate vacant buildings 3. Better advertising and marketing 4. Flexible building codes and reduced red tape 5. Community engagement and support 6. Improved storefront aesthetics 7. Support for younger entrepreneurs and diverse ownership
<p><u>Question 13:</u> Are there specific businesses or amenities you currently travel outside of Clifton Forge to access that you would prefer to have downtown?</p>	<p>Most Cited Needs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grocery stores with better selection 2. Clothing and shoe stores 3. Restaurants (especially diverse cuisine) 4. Entertainment (movie theater, bowling, arcade) 5. Health care and pet services 6. Home improvement and garden supplies
<p><u>Question 14:</u> What would encourage you to shop, dine, or spend more time in downtown Clifton Forge?</p>	<p>Top Motivators</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More dining and shopping options 2. Affordable pricing 3. Later business hours 4. Cleaner, renovated buildings 5. Family-friendly and inclusive spaces 6. Events and entertainment 7. Improved accessibility and parking
<p><u>Question 15:</u> Making downtown more pedestrian- and bike-friendly</p>	<p>Suggestions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lower speed limits and better enforcement 2. Dedicated bike lanes and trails 3. Improved sidewalks and lighting 4. More benches and public restrooms 5. Preserve parking while enhancing walkability 6. Shuttle service during events

<p>Question 16: Vacant buildings to prioritize for redevelopment</p>	<p>Consensus</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Yes—many buildings need attention. 2. Specific mentions included: Ridgeway and Main Street, The Irish Inn, Former schools and flower shops 3. Calls for accountability from property owners 4. Suggestions for creative reuse (mini malls, retail hubs)
<p>Question 18: Areas needing infrastructure improvements</p>	<p>Frequent Mentions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keswick Street, Ridgeway, Church, Pine, Rose, Verge 2. Water and sewer systems 3. Sidewalks and bridges 4. Lighting and signage 5. Neighborhood cleanup and beautification 6. Secure Amtrak parking and better gateways
<p>Question 20: Desired community facilities or services</p>	<p>Popular Requests</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community center 2. Swimming pool or splash park 3. Youth recreation and sports facilities 4. Health care and mental health services 5. Senior-friendly programs 6. Dog park improvements 7. Indoor fitness and wellness spaces 8. Public transportation and restrooms
<p>Question 24: Vision for Clifton Forge in 5–10 years</p>	<p>Themes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thriving arts and tourism town 2. Clean, vibrant downtown 3. More businesses and jobs 4. Affordable living and senior services 5. Youth retention and engagement 6. Preservation of history with modern amenities 7. Concerns about stagnation or decline if leadership doesn't change
<p>Question 25: Initiatives to enhance quality of life</p>	<p>Key Priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Housing revitalization 2. Business incentives and grants 3. Youth and senior programs 4. Mental health and addiction services 5. Infrastructure upgrades

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">6. Community events and outreach7. Beautification and pride in appearance8. Inclusive leadership and better communication
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APPENDIX 3: JOINT WORK SESSION OUTCOMES

DOCUMENTATION

On December 9, 2025, RVARC staff held a Joint Work Session with Clifton Forge Town Council and the Planning Commission. At this Work Session, a workshop was conducted to develop goals and strategies for the Strategic Plan.

Attendees

Jeff Irvine – Mayor

Dale Burdette – Vice Mayor

Benjamin Nicely – Councilman

Carl Wolfe Jr. – Councilman

Debbie Laudermilk – Councilwoman

Chuck Unroe – Town Manager

Maria Saxton – Director of Planning & Community Development

Wendy Biggs – Finance Director

Michael Foster – Planning Commission Member

Dennis McHenry – Planning Commission Member

David Oeltjen – Planning Commission Member

Jo Ann Carter Henson – Planning Commission Member

Draft Goals and Strategies

Goal #1: Community Infrastructure

- Strategy: Continued support of strategic water/sewer investments (note: sewer/wastewater is a large financial threat—I&I—Alleghany Co. manages)
- Strategy: Road/bridge repair and replacement
- Strategy: Development of downtown alleyways
- Strategy: Continued construction of sidewalks/bike/ped infrastructure
- Strategy: Lighting and streetscaping improvements

Goal #2: Quality of Life

- Strategy: Redevelopment of blighted properties
- Strategy: Improved code enforcement of rental properties (projects to implement this strategy are in progress)
- Strategy: Addressing needs of residents across multiple age groups (note: attracting households and forming a demographic)
- Strategy: Capitalize on existing recreation infrastructure
- Strategy: Explore opportunities and barriers around transit (train/bus)
- Strategy: Work with business owners to develop downtown housing units
- Strategy: Increase the programming in existing parks

Goal #3: Business Attraction and Retention

- Strategy: Establish, promote, and maintain public-private partnerships, public involvement and support (note: improved communication)
- Strategy: Incentivize businesses as destinations/experiences to attract and increase customer base
- Strategy: Create mechanisms for sustained support of businesses (longer term communication)
- Strategy: Review of taxing incentive and structure options (including fees, utility connections, etc.)

Goal #4: Downtown Investments

- Strategy: Invest in and revitalize downtown housing assets
- Strategy: Provide parking improvements
- Strategy: Assess opportunities for alternative transportation modes (Including Uber, etc.) (Note: this is a local and regional issue)
- Strategy: Improve blighted structures and façades
- Strategy: Develop an improved market analysis and planned vision for downtown

Goal #5: Strong Governance

- Strategy: Improve public communication by being more proactive and innovative through alternative approaches and strategies
- Strategy: Capitalize on volunteer partnerships while assessing sustainability
- Strategy: Improve efficiency and capacity with processing projects
- Strategy: Review of internal boards, mechanisms (ARB, EDA, etc.) and ordinances for strength and clarity

Generated Project Ideas

Goal #1: Community Infrastructure

- Ridgeway Street Bridge repair
- Evaluate town's water supply and usage
- Wastewater line improvements
- Lighting improvements and sidewalk additions on Main Street between Kroger and Mountain View Apartments

Goal #2: Quality of Life

- Revisions to local building code to address lead-based paint
- Have a train stop into town (not: pursue Amtrak)
- Attract walkable medical facilities
- Work with owners of vacant upper story building spaces downtown to develop apartments
- Redevelopment of an underutilized parking lot on Keswick Street.

Goal #3: Business Attraction and Retention

- Familiarize town staff and businesses with state grant programs
- Creation of a business owner newsletter and other forms of communication
- Market the underutilized five-year tax abatement for greater visibility, and find other up-front funding sources
- Create a “welcome packet” for new business owners

Goal #4: Downtown Investments

- Develop an inventory of potential investors to seek funding for future downtown projects
- Explore microtransit opportunities and funding (Uber?)
- Visualization of downtown through procurement of an architectural rendering

Goal #5: Strong Governance

- Creation of an annual (?) significant achievements newsletter (e-mail, paper copy options, included in utility bills)
- Development of a volunteer committee to distribute the newsletter
- Establish a community engagement co-op position with Mountain Gateway Community College, or create a permanent position.



CLIFTON FORGE
VIRGINIA
Spark something new!



Prepared by the
REGIONALcommission