



# Engagement Summary

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PILOT

## SURVEY RESULTS

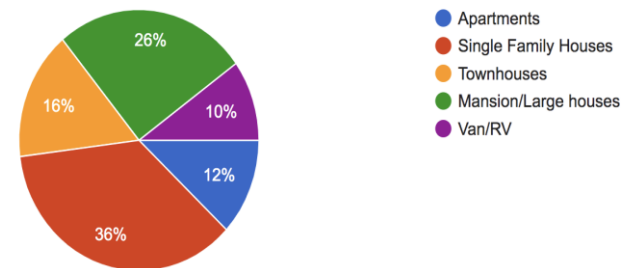
New Jersey Highlands Economic Sustainability Plan



In the Summer of 2021, the Highlands Council sought to include the voice of young adults in the process of developing the region's Economic Sustainability Plan. 16 students ranging in ages 14 to 18 were recruited from throughout the region to spearhead the youth engagement effort. Those students worked collaboratively to identify the areas of interest to their future and developed a set of questions to gather information from their peers around what types of housing, recreation, transportation, jobs, and environments they want to live and work in in the future. The students launched a pilot survey in August 2021 and received 67 responses through social media and other digital platforms. The responses were gathered from different towns throughout the Highlands to garner the most diverse and authentic responses from fellow students. Another distribution of the survey will be launched in early September to schools throughout the region. An analysis of the pilot student responses can be found below.

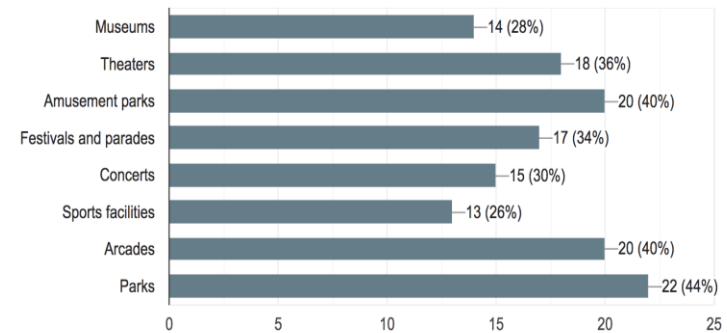
### HOUSING

Most respondents would prefer to live in single family larger homes. Over 60% stated that they would want to reside in a mansion or a single-family home that is close to a downtown area. While very few young people want to see public housing in their neighborhoods, an overwhelming majority (61%) would like to see foster homes and homeless shelters serving members of their community. There was an even split between students that want to live close to their neighbors and those that didn't, however, 100% of students want to have neighbors close enough to walk to.



## RECREATION

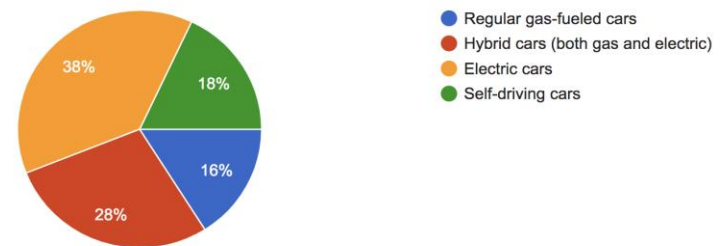
Students expressed interest in a variety of activities, but over 70% indicated they would rather be outside for their leisure activities, even in the winter months. A lot of students enjoy participating in sports and water activities (boating, swimming etc). Other activities that students enjoy include: outdoor movies and concerts, hanging out with friends in downtown areas, farming, fishing, and biking. On the weekends or other extended periods of time, students like to go to the New Jersey Shore and New York City to “see things that they don't have in the Highlands like skyscrapers and street art”.



Students also enjoy going to neighboring towns and events (like Skylands Stadium) for activities such as fairs and festivals. When asked what type of recreation activities students would like to see in their hometown in the future, the majority agreed on parks and arcades. Students also indicated that they would like to see theaters, amusement parks, and festivals on a regular basis. While some students from more rural Highlands towns stated that there was “nothing to do” in their hometown, they said that what might bring people to their area would be activities such as hiking, boating, water activities and video game competitions. Students also felt that natural elements such as hiking trails and lakes would be a good tourist attraction for the region.

## TRANSPORTATION

41% of respondents indicated that they would like to travel to and from work on a train. Most others would like to use a car or bike. Most students stated they would prefer an electric or hybrid car (70%) and would like to see more bikes on the road, both manual and electric. 88% of students in the Highlands believe that there should be more trains in their communities connecting them to New York City and other major regions of New Jersey. Over 75% of students surveyed believe that more environmentally friendly modes of transportation should be in place in the Highlands Region because of the environmental significance and importance of the area. Most would be excited about innovative modes of



transportation such as scooters, hoverboards, and motorized unicycles. 88% of respondents felt that there needed to be more trains and buses connecting the Highlands to other parts of the tri-state area.

## JOBS

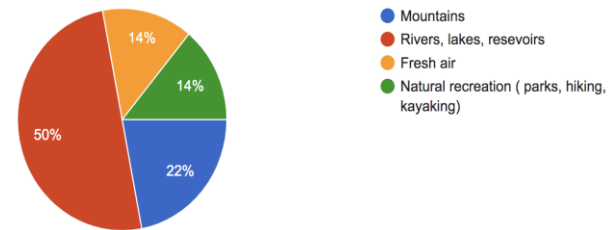
50% of surveyed students plan to attend college after high school. Only 6% want to pursue trade school and 41% would like to take time off to get a job or travel with friends. 25% of students expressed interest in a career in law or government. Careers in technology and education were also prevalent answers, at 25% and 20% respectively. Students that were interested in technical careers expressed that they did not know where those types of jobs existed in the Highlands Region and felt that they would need to seek employment outside the region. 42% expressed interest in working for a larger company while 37% would like to be an entrepreneur. Some of the jobs and industries that students would like to see more of include recording studios, internships for young people and sports therapy. The types of jobs students would like to see available to them are counselors, coaches, professional job offerings that pay well, tutors and health related. Over 50% of students would be willing to travel 30 minutes to their job, and very few were willing to travel an hour. Decent pay rates were a concern for several students.

## ENVIRONMENT

An overwhelming majority of students (82%) believe that protecting the environment in the Highlands is more important than attracting new businesses. They believe that the water in the Highlands is the most important environmental resource to protect as it is a favorite resource for most (49%). 90% feel that there should be information available and courses available for students to learn about the environment in the Highlands and why the resources there are so important.

What part of the environment do you love best in the Highlands?

50 responses



## PROGRAMS

Almost 100% of students agree that students from other parts of the state should come to the Highlands to learn about its rich nature and history. While students expressed a desire to participate in several different types of programs, the majority would like to see an increase in sports and camps throughout the region. Some programs that students would like to see added to their communities are boating programs, internships, and early college programs, financial literacy programs and environmental programs for young people.

## **RETAIL**

Students want to see new businesses in their communities. Many stated that they don't have access to certain types of industries in their towns, namely technological businesses, and electronics. 21% said they want to see more diverse and better restaurants. Almost 90% of students surveyed said they wanted a mall close by and currently don't have any other way to get to one other than getting a ride. They would like to not only have a mall nearby but would like transportation available to get there so they didn't have to rely on a ride. 60% of respondents said that they would like to have their food sourced from local farms and 55% said supermarkets. Only 14% said they would like to get their food from fast food restaurants.

Names and Towns of the City planning Institute Highlands Survey Development Team:

- Audrey Kuo, Morris Hills High School, Morris Hills, NJ
- Sonali Shastri, Morris Hills High School, Rockaway, NJ
- Toyeebat Ojifini, University High School, Newark, NJ
- Vincent Vicuna, Mahwah High School, Mahwah, NJ
- Jordan Amani, Marion P Thomas High School, Newark, NJ
- Johana Cruz, Vernon High School, Vernon, NJ
- Terrell Sahndon, Hunterdon Regional High School, Stockton, NJ
- Selena Ramsey, Lakeland Regional High School, Ringwood, NJ
- Tysean Johnson, Franklin High School, Franklin, NJ
- Rudy Almeida, Hopatcong High School, Lake Hopatcong
- Sarah Conveselli, Hopatcong High School, Lake Hopatcong
- Samuel Digesta, Mahwah High School, Mahwah, NJ
- Ernesto Billago, Mahwah High School, Mahwah, NJ

# ABOUT THE BUSINESS SURVEY

Camoin conducted a business survey to better understand the opportunities and challenges for businesses within the region. 91 businesses responded to the survey.

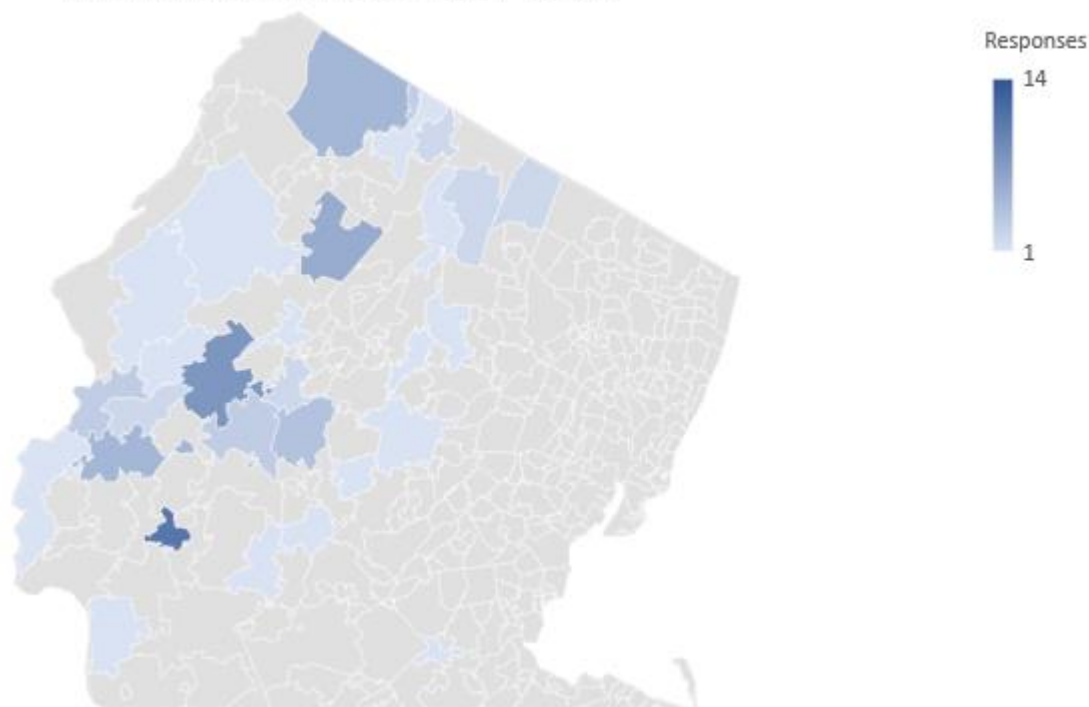
Respondents spanned across industries, broken down by proportion of total responses here:

- 20% of responses were from businesses in the retail industry;
- 14% from agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting;
- 11% from professional services; and
- 10% from financial, insurance, or real estate.

A heatmap of respondent ZIP codes is included to the right.

Results and findings from the survey are described in the following pages.

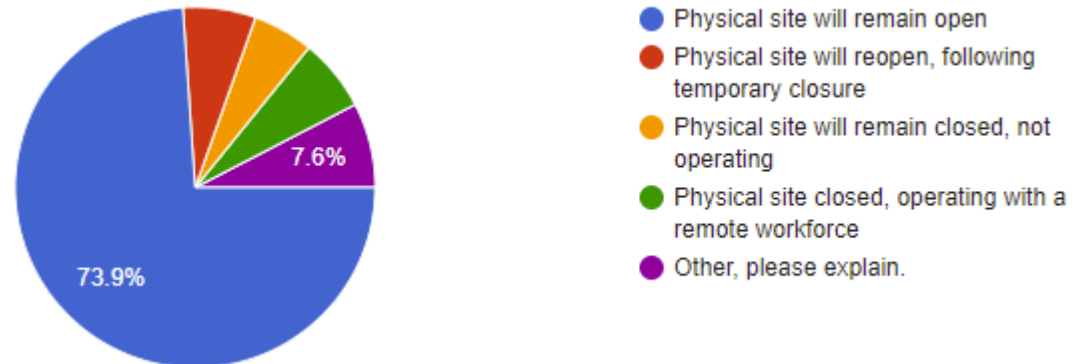
Business Survey Response ZIP Codes



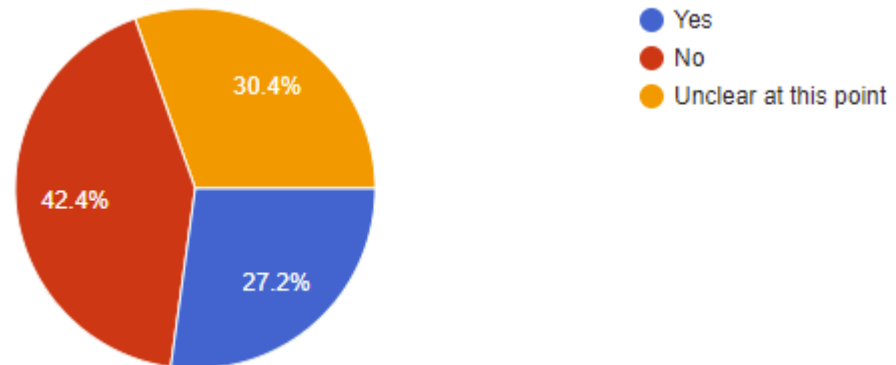
## HIRING AND OPERATIONS

- ◆ Nearly three quarters of respondents anticipate that their physical site will remain open.
- ◆ 12% of respondents anticipate that their physical site will remain closed, either because their business is not operating, or they are working remotely.
- ◆ 42.4% of respondents do not anticipate hiring in the next six months while 27.2% of respondents do anticipate hiring.
- ◆ Entry level and technical/credentialed workers are the most difficult for companies to find. 31% of respondents faced a shortage of entry level employees and 26.4% faced a shortage of technical/credentialed workers in the last three years.

What is your anticipated operating status for the next six months?



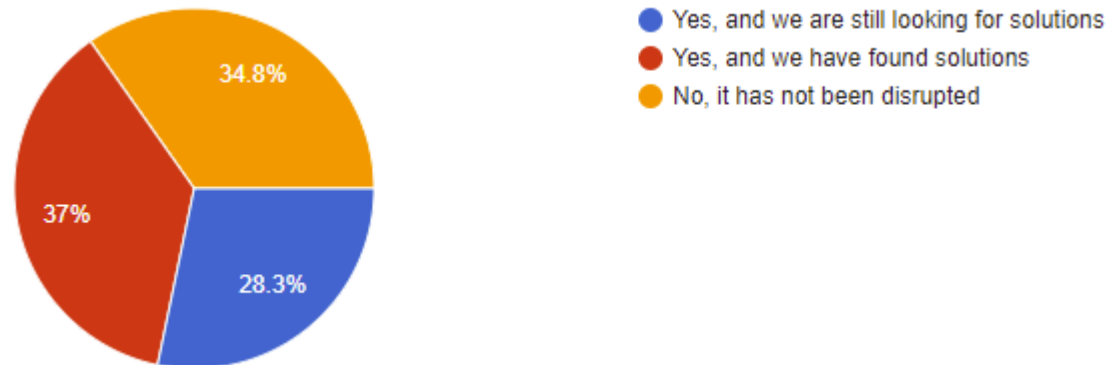
Do you anticipate hiring in the next six months?



## SUPPLY CHAIN

- ◆ Nearly two thirds of businesses experienced supply chain interruptions as a result of COVID-19.
- ◆ 37% of businesses experienced disruptions but have since found solutions while 28.1% have been disrupted and are still seeking solutions.
- ◆ 24% of businesses that experienced disruptions were in retail and 19% were in agriculture.

Has your ability to get resources into your supply chain to produce goods and services been impacted by COVID-19?

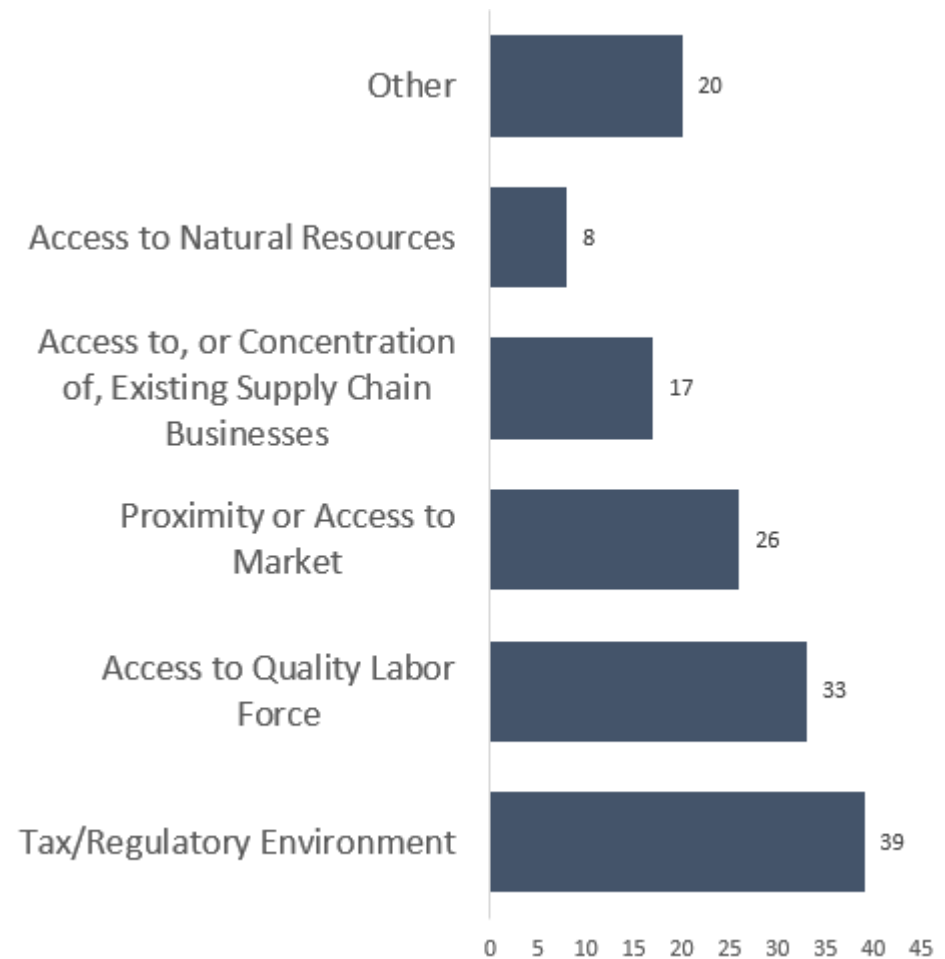




## GROWTH AND COMPETITIVENESS

- ◆ Respondents identified the tax/regulatory environment, access to quality labor force, and proximity or access to market as the factors that are most important to their competitiveness.
- ◆ Expanding the consumer base, local land use and business regulations, and unexpected changes in economic conditions or industry demand were identified as the most severe challenges to company growth.
- ◆ Climate change and environmental disruptions; and infrastructure availability were identified as the least severe challenges to company growth.

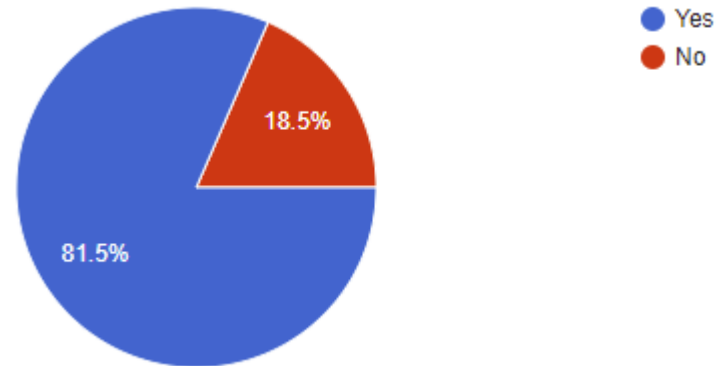
Which of the following factors are most important to your industry's competitiveness?



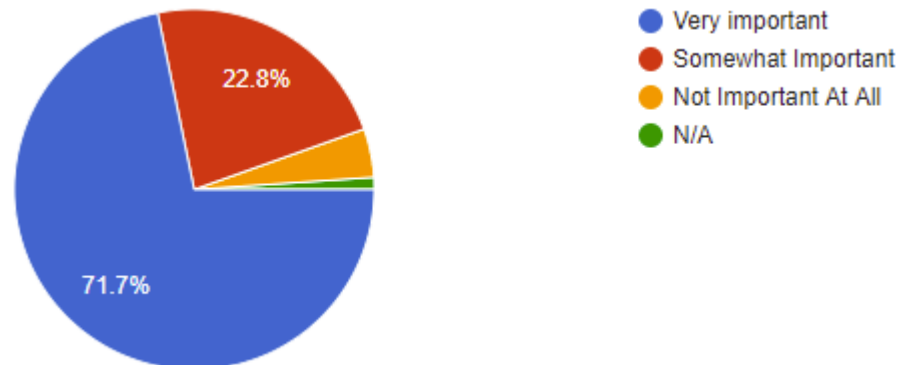
## BROADBAND

- ◆ Reliable broadband is important to most businesses.
- ◆ Most respondents have access to reliable broadband that meets their needs (81.5%).

Do you have access to reliable broadband that meets your business' needs?



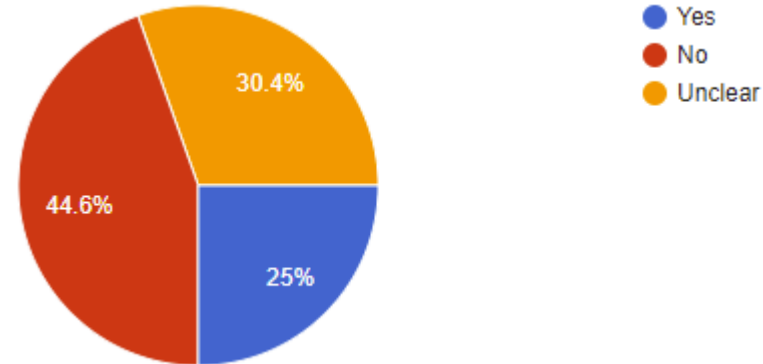
How important is reliable broadband to your business model?



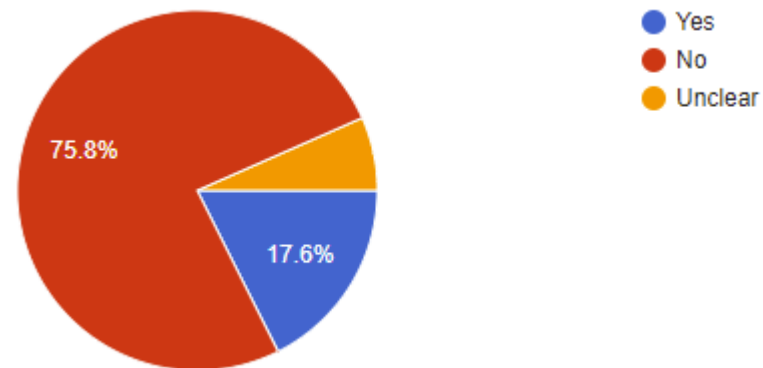
## CLIMATE CHANGE AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY

- ◆ A quarter of respondents anticipate climate change will have an impact on their operations.
- ◆ 17.6% of respondents' businesses are directly involved in some form of clean technology.
- ◆ 36% of respondents indicated that they were interested in learning more about clean technologies and how they may be applicable to their sector.

Do you anticipate climate change having an impact on your business operations?



Is your business directly involved in research and development or manufacturing of clean technologies, environmentally sustainable practices, or other "green tech?"



# BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE ENGAGEMENT

In February 2021, Camoin 310's engagement professionals identified a list of businesses in the target industries. Note that based on the availability of business contacts and the type of information that we hoped to collect, calls were focused primarily on Advanced Manufacturing, Food Production, Insurance, and Life Sciences/Pharmaceuticals businesses. The following questionnaire was used as a guide to collect business intelligence from these companies. The summary of findings from these calls continues on the following page. Major themes were categorized, and it is noted how many times a theme or subject was mentioned.

<b>General Company Detail</b>
Company Name:
Contact Name/Title:
Company Location:
Other Locations:
Company Size/Number of Employees:
Geographic Markets Served:
<b>General Industry Detail</b>
Company Description (what they do, who their customers are, etc):
Key Industries in Supply Chain:

<b>Industry Opportunities</b>
What is currently driving growth/expansion in the industry, if applicable?
Are there any emerging opportunities within their industry with high potential?
Are there specific products/services with growing demand?
<b>Occupation Detail</b>
Skill sets needed:
What occupations are most in demand?
What occupations are difficult to fill?
<b>Facility/Infrastructure Requirements</b>
General Site & Building Size?
Utility Requirements?
Does their business take into consideration environmental/sustainability development practices?
Anything else on general infrastructure and utility needs?
<b>Location Considerations:</b>
Are you satisfied with your current location in New Jersey?
Is your location in the New Jersey Highlands a benefit or hinderance to your business?
What are the key factors businesses in the industry are looking for when deciding where to locate additional facilities?
Are there expansion opportunities at this current site or elsewhere in New Jersey?

Industries	Industry Opp.	Occupations	Facility/Infrastructure Requirements	Location Considerations
Adv. Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little growth/business closures as a result of COVID x2</li> <li>• Economy drives expansion</li> <li>• Industry contraction due to offshore manufacturing x2</li> <li>• 5G technology</li> <li>• Milliwave technology</li> <li>• Smart technology/IoT</li> <li>• Homeland security/law enforcement/military market</li> <li>• Sustainable energy</li> <li>• No aerospace growth opportunities right now-grounding of Boeing 737 and COVID</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills needed: environmental remediation, electronic engineering, engineers x3, technical, fabrication, auto cad, programming</li> <li>• In-demand occupations: quality assurance, plumbers, electricians, skilled laborers, programmers</li> <li>• Cost of labor for skill sets is not competitive against other areas</li> <li>• Less people are interested in the work</li> <li>• Would like more assistance from colleges in filling occupations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilities: propane, gas, oxygen, electric power (for robotics/machines), water</li> <li>• Remote work causing some to consider smaller facilities</li> <li>• Need better infrastructure</li> <li>• Need better internet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlands challenges: High cost of doing business in NJ-property/other taxes (x5), labor cost (x2), inbound transportation, utility costs</li> <li>• Highlands benefits: Proximity to raw materials, highway access (x2), metro area market, supply chain access, quality of life, good labor pool</li> <li>• Square footage</li> <li>• Industrial zone</li> <li>• Parking</li> <li>• Workforce</li> <li>• Shipping access</li> <li>• NJ is price prohibitive, no in-state expansion opportunities</li> <li>• Regional demand is important- no need to ship products long distance</li> <li>• Quality of life a big plus</li> </ul>
Food Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People always need food products</li> <li>• Higher demand during COVID</li> <li>• Delivery services</li> <li>• Demand for hand made product</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills needed: cooks, people with a good palette, people who are willing to work hard on their feet (x2), management, sales managers.</li> <li>• Difficult to fill: food production, chefs, finance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilities: plumbing, electric, gas</li> <li>• Sustainability: "to go" ordering has been a challenge – use plastic more often now</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rent</li> <li>• Foot traffic</li> <li>• Parking</li> <li>• Opportunities to expand in other suburbs (specific to bakeries)</li> <li>• Modern/upgraded facilities</li> <li>• NJ is price prohibitive for some production and distribution</li> </ul>
Insurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business doing well, expansion opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills needed: clerks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilities: electricity, high speed internet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mention of the discontinuation of bonds in</li> </ul>

				the state being a hinderance and leading to relocation
Life Science /Pharmaceuticals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental (x2)</li> <li>• COVID demand (cleaning products, hand sanitizer)</li> <li>• Renewable energy- solar panels consulting and testing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills needed: environmental science (x3), machine operators, degrees in science and engineering</li> <li>• Difficult to fill: upper level staff in environmental science and geology</li> <li>• Hard time keeping younger generations employed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cloud/internet security</li> <li>• Multi-use buildings for manufacturing, labs, office, and distribution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-business zoning</li> <li>• Good workforce/labor pool</li> <li>• Remote work making office space/location less important (x2)</li> <li>• Highway access (x2), airport access</li> <li>• High taxes are outweighed by quality of life</li> <li>• Expansion would require leaving the region- unable to build up in the Highlands region</li> <li>• Location near demand markets</li> <li>• Consider PA as an alternative location due to lower taxes</li> </ul>

# Introduction

This document reflects interview findings from conversations conducted as part of the New Jersey Highlands Economic Sustainability Plan. Interviewees have included economic development professionals, municipal officials, business leaders, real estate agents, as well as a Technical Advisory Committee group meeting. The perspectives of interviewees help to solidify initial data findings, begin to uncover economic opportunities, and assess partnerships among economic development stakeholders. The following is a summary of the findings grouped into major themes.

Interviews occurred with the following individuals:

- Monique Purcell, *NJ Department of Agriculture*
- Gary Large, *North Central Jersey Association of Realtors*
- Autumn Sylvester, *Sussex County Division of Planning and Economic Development*
- Donna Rendeiro, *Office of Planning Advocacy*
- Matthew Blake, *Office of Planning Advocacy*
- Matthew Polsky, *Highlands resident*
- Julia Somers, *NJ Highlands Coalition*
- Mary K. Murphy, *The Port Authority of NY & NJ (Additional staff participated in the interview)*
- Richard Lawton, *NJ Sustainable Business Council*
- Jeffrey Vasser, *Division of Travel and Tourism*
- James Kern, *Warren County Freeholder*

# Opportunities

## **Locational advantages:**

- There are significant tourism assets across the entire region (recreation, cultural, heritage, agriculture/food-based, and more) and a diverse range of other visitation resources.
- The Region is in proximity to one of the country's largest transportation systems (both regional and international).
- The Region is in proximity to one of the largest employment centers in the country.
- NYC-ers relocating from COVID-19 could be a great economic opportunity for the future.

## **Development:**

- Brownfields across the region have an initial barrier to redevelopment due to clean-up and related environmental concerns, but they could be an attractive scenario for redevelopers with the incentives associated with brownfield cleanups.
- Redevelopment/infill in planning centers present an opportunity for sustainable growth.

## Industry:

- Microfarms – specialty items, hydroponics, these types of ventures typically only require small acreages.
- Organic farming – this transition will need to be supported by education, training, and technical assistance.
- A USDA certified processing center would add real value to the Region’s agriculture productions.
- Hemp growth – easy to grow and it has lots of downstream uses.
- Green/cleantech research across all industries.
- Beverage industry – wine, beer, cider production, and creating a stronger connection with the tourism and agriculture industries.
- Visitation - arts and culture, historical tourism, outdoor recreation.

## New Jersey Highlands Council Operations

- Is there an opportunity to compensate woodland management areas in addition to farms?
- There was a general desire for the Highlands Council to have a stronger presence and voice that communicates the goals and opportunities for the Region. Solidifying the Council’s voice would help other organizations spread the message across the Region.

## Themes

### Housing /Lifestyle

- Telecommunication infrastructure is lacking throughout the region, this will be a challenge to keep businesses/residents in the region.
- People leaving NYC are looking for more suburban lifestyle- pool, BBQ in their back yard.
- Rural setting not desired by some.
- Not enough rental supply to meet demand at present.
- Schools aren’t as big of a driver for younger buyers (30-ish) now.
- Not a lot of “entry level” housing product to rent or own.
- There are interesting ways to create more affordable housing options. For example, Accessory Dwelling Units, in-law apartments, and other housing adaptations.
- There needs to be an increase in the education of municipal planning and zoning boards about housing alternatives and the connection with economic development.
- The affordability of homes also relies on access to transportation and employment centers.
- Housing is needed to attract density and to grow commercial ratables→ no density = no retail.
- There’s a need to demonstrate that density and different types of housing product won’t lead to crowded schools.
- Overall, there needs to be communication that there is value in denser development.

### Visitation / Recreation

- There are good amenities in the Region but they need to be promoted more.
- Visitation elements could be a real economic development focus.



- People don't think of the Highlands Region as a tourism destination → a stronger collaborative branding is needed.
- Wayfinding improvements are needed to help with branding.
- Lack of lodging (in certain areas of the Highlands Region) impacts the length of stay for visitors.
- Morristown or Hackettstown have the potential to become a destination for those taking Amtrak.
- The infrastructure for park systems has been cut at the State level – this maintenance needs to occur in order for spaces to be desirable, especially with increased usage this year.
- Morris Canal should be a big visitation center.

## Agriculture

- Farmers are not as well capitalized as they could be to get into organic farming or other types of specialty products.
- The region needs a processing plant, a slaughterhouse in particular. There are lots of regulations around it, but it would help farmers add value to their product and not have to send meat to PA. *(One is being proposed in Hackettstown)*
- Health department and Agriculture Department could work better to understand each other.
- Even if a young person wants to get into farming there is a high barrier to entry related to property cost.
- NJ has a strong program for acquiring open space.
- New Jersey Dept. of Agriculture has had round tables for farmers in the past, and it is consistently hard to determine what technical assistance would most help the farming community.

## Development

- To get an approval of wastewater plan through Highlands Council it ends up being a deterrent for a developer and ends up encouraging sprawl which is not the point of Highlands Act
- Economic growth needs to be in the right place at the right scale.
- Agricultural lands need to be prioritized and protected – some are not as productive as others and therefore could go towards needed development.
- There is a need for jobs to be centered around housing, transportation, and education.
- Addressing the digital divide is crucial to the recovery from COVID-19 – improved telecommunications infrastructure needed.
- One interviewee noted that developers don't necessarily know what is going into warehouses – *(Note from Alex: speculative has been way down since the recession, we'll want to see if we can verify this).*
- Warehousing uptick brings challenges to roadway infrastructure – there were questions about how to get this under control since zoning is led by municipalities.

## Highlands Council

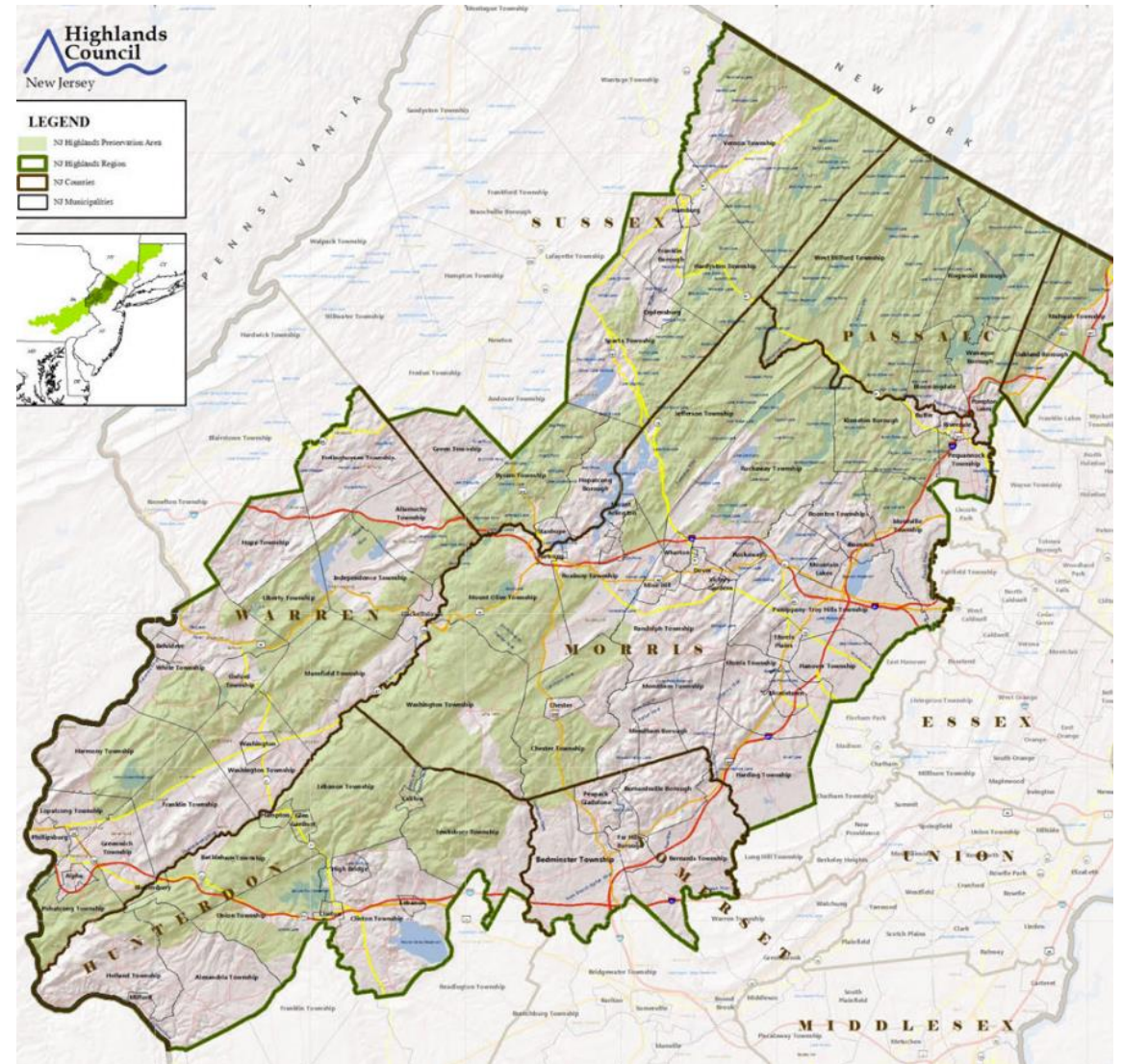
- Some interviewees had limited awareness of the role of the Highlands Council.
- The initial perception of the Highlands Region is restrictions and regulations – this needs to be actively countered.
- Many groups are working towards the same goals as the Highlands Council but there is a negative perception around the Council itself.
- There is a lack of receiving areas for Highlands Development Credits (also known as Transfer of Development Rights) hindering development opportunities.

# Group Work

What excites you and what concerns you about the future regional economy?

Think about:

- Economy
- Environment
- Equity
- Transportation
- Assets



# Excites

## THEMES

- Opportunities for innovation in agriculture
- Take advantage of COVID changes

- Production of food, geographic location of the region, 50-60 miles
  - Influence of tech
  - NJ well poised in Ag. industry
- Take the opportunity to look differently at agriculture
- Must have sustainable practices – challenging current perceptions (think about why, how there are other solutions, opportunities with environment and economy)
- Carbon sequestering & green efforts → ag
- How can companies grow without bricks and mortar, COVID has changed the field – how does this change how biz is done
- Embrace planning/economic vitality and environmental protections
  - Highlands Centers well planned out
- Avg. education and higher income range of Highlands region population
- Location of work become less place based
- Great place for a farm biz
- How to help farmers navigate through challenges
- Highlands communities well placed to take advantage of new trends – places where people want to be
- Parking areas for trailheads are full- How do we market these “vital signs”
- Center based development

## THEMES

- Viability of farming in the future re: costs and climate
- Affordability of housing, COL
- Missing cohort of 20-39 years

- Missing 20-39 year old cohort important for future economic growth
- Economic viability for farming
- Regulatory environment
  - Food production methods balance not always working towards price benefit for farmers
- Ability to attract young person to farming – today that person would be tied up in planning boards for years
- Proposed warehousing (Warren county)
  - Future demand will cause stress on transportation
- Affordability of housing – equity issue
- Catastrophic fire – affecting water quality of the issue
- \*\*look at climate projections

# Concerns

# Excites

## THEMES

- Natural beauty/downtowns
- Diversity of landscapes/attractions
- Accessible location
- Capture opportunities from COVID trends

- Natural beauty
- Historic downtowns
- Proximity to people
- Diversity of landscapes
- Diversity of attractions- that are all accessible
- Opportunities:
  - Leverage historical assets (revolutionary history)
  - Highlighting ecotourism in the area- showcase all assets we have
  - COVID- promote and capture travel locally- weekend trips; people want to be outside
  - COVID- remote work capabilities, invest in local towns; opportunity for shared workspaces in repurposing existing offices

## THEMES

- Sustainable development- remove barriers for people doing it correctly

- Existing office space- what happens to it given COVID trends?
- Job creation from manufacturing expansion- how to balance with sustainability? Tied to incentives/permitting- permitting is a barrier to expansion
- Need a mechanism to make it possible to do development correctly
- Climate change- change in rainfall patterns- uncertainty

# Concerns

# Excites

## THEMES

- Opportunity of tourism
- Building on downtown centers
- Ag entrepreneurship

- Link between downtown shopping, agritourism, cultural/heritage/historic/ recreation tourism. Day trip opportunities. Marketing opportunities. Region market as a whole, combine resources. More partnership opportunities with trans providers.
- Ag and entrepreneurs living farms.
- Opportunities for redevelopment within the existing centers – housing in an equitable way (spectrum of housing options). Look at Accessible Dwelling land use policy to support different ways of providing.
- **LOTS OF WORK ALREADY DONE, BUILD ON THAT!**
  - Tourism, transportation.
  - Counties all have existing research/planning.

# Concerns

## THEMES

- Transportation constraints
- Need for housing (diverse price points)

- A lot of warehouses being proposed – need to be attached to transportation - Current focus is Warren.
  - Warren County report about pinch points in transportation – Rt 519 expansion would be needed which is not ideal.
  - Impact on ag land – need to locate properly
- Lack of lodging. Marketing/supporting AirBnB owners. Boutique hotel, B&B – PA and NY (works with Amtrak) doing it well (way money is allocated in PA vs NJ)
- Recognize the housing demand that is generated by economic growth. Housing prices need to be reasonable. Impact of septic costs/historic buildings that cost a lot on housing prices and B&B. Prioritize key projects and focus on priority projects, get more funding towards those.
- Zoning: too many restrictions (local and state) that prohibits growth of downtown areas. Need assessment of how to redevelop.
- Transportation infrastructure – busting at the seams – concern about development and need for investment. Also need for alternatives.
  - Issue during week but weekend is great (good for tourism)