

# Town of Hardwick

## 2026 Municipal Plan Update Survey Summary

Prepared for the Hardwick Planning Commission

### Introduction

The 2026 Municipal Plan Survey was conducted to gather public input regarding community priorities, challenges, opportunities, and future directions for the Town of Hardwick. The survey was available in both paper and electronic formats and remained open for approximately five months. A total of 238 responses were received.

Responses were collected from residents, business owners, workers, and others connected to the community. The results provide valuable insight into community values, concerns, and aspirations and will help inform development of the next Municipal Plan.

### Survey Participation

A total of 238 responses were received.

Among respondents:

- 204 identified as year-round Hardwick residents (89.5%)
- 28 identified as business owners or operators
- 18 indicated they work in Hardwick
- 7 identified as part-time or seasonal residents
- 6 identified as regular visitors

More than half of respondents reported being connected to Hardwick for more than twenty years.

Respondents also demonstrated a high level of engagement with the community. Nearly 88 percent reported visiting downtown daily or several times per week.

Transportation responses indicate that most residents rely on personal vehicles, although walking remains common and bicycle use is also present.

### What Residents Value About Hardwick

When asked what they value most about Hardwick, respondents most frequently selected:

1. Sense of community and neighborliness
2. Local businesses, artisans, and food economy
3. Natural beauty and outdoor access
4. Historic and small-town character
5. Walkability, trails, and bicycle routes

These responses suggest that residents value both Hardwick's physical setting and its social character. Community relationships, local businesses, and quality-of-life amenities emerged as defining features of the town.

## Community Priorities for the Next Ten Years

When asked what Hardwick should focus on over the next decade, respondents identified the following as their highest priorities:

1. Affordable, diverse housing near village centers
2. Flood resilience and infrastructure upgrades
3. Supporting small businesses and local jobs
4. Strengthening downtown
5. Safe walking, biking, and parking improvements

Secondary priorities included:

- Farmland and local food systems
- Recreation, trails, and parks
- Municipal services and utilities
- Environmental conservation and river protection
- Emergency preparedness and community support

These results suggest a desire to balance economic opportunity, housing needs, infrastructure investment, and community character.

## Housing

Housing emerged as one of the strongest themes throughout the survey.

The housing types receiving the strongest support included:

- Affordable homes
- Housing near village centers
- Accessory dwelling units
- Senior housing
- Mixed-use buildings

- Apartments and rental housing

Only a small number of respondents selected “No More Housing.”

Open-ended responses reinforced concerns regarding:

- Housing affordability
- Availability of housing units
- Housing for young families
- Housing for seniors
- Housing quality and condition
- Vacant and deteriorating properties

Many respondents connected housing directly to economic opportunity, population retention, school enrollment, and affordability.

## **Flood Resilience and Infrastructure**

Flood resilience was consistently identified as a major community concern.

Respondents frequently referenced:

- Repeated flooding
- Infrastructure vulnerabilities
- River management
- Floodplain issues
- Stormwater management
- Long-term resilience investments

A separate question regarding preparedness for future floods and storms produced additional insights.

The most common preparedness themes included:

- Emergency communication systems
- Advance warning and alerts
- Community warning sirens
- Evacuation information
- Reliable power and generators
- Emergency shelters
- Infrastructure improvements
- Neighborhood support networks

Residents frequently discussed both long-term mitigation efforts and emergency response needs.

## Economic Development and Downtown Vitality

Supporting local businesses and jobs ranked among the highest priorities identified by respondents.

Common themes included:

- Business development
- Job creation
- Economic opportunity
- Downtown revitalization
- Filling vacant storefronts
- Reuse of vacant buildings
- Support for existing businesses

When asked specifically about downtown improvements, respondents most frequently selected:

- More local businesses and restaurants
- Safer parking and pedestrian areas
- Streetscape improvements
- Small business support
- Trail and recreation connections
- Housing near downtown

Downtown vitality appeared consistently throughout both the quantitative and qualitative responses.

## Health, Wellness, and Community Services

One of the strongest findings in the survey was concern regarding healthcare access.

The highest-ranked wellness priority was:

### Local Pharmacy

The pharmacy issue appeared repeatedly throughout the survey, including discussions regarding:

- Community challenges
- Health and wellness
- Food access
- Resilience
- Additional comments

Other health and wellness priorities included:

- Affordable healthcare services
- Urgent care access
- Mental health services
- Recreation and fitness opportunities
- Social connection
- Senior services

Many respondents also highlighted community assets such as:

- Hardwick Area Food Pantry
- Farmers Market
- Crop Cash
- Community meals
- Hardwick Health
- Volunteers and mutual aid networks

## **Food Systems**

Food access responses indicate that residents rely heavily on local grocery stores while also making substantial use of grocery stores outside the community.

Respondents also identified:

- Farmers markets
- Home gardens
- Restaurants and take-out
- Community meals
- Local farms and CSAs
- Food pantry services

Many comments emphasized appreciation for existing local food resources and programs.

## **Transportation, Walkability, and Connectivity**

Transportation-related themes appeared throughout the survey.

Residents identified priorities including:

- Safe walking and biking routes
- Sidewalk improvements
- Pedestrian safety
- Bicycle infrastructure
- Parking

- Public transportation options
- Trail connections

Reliable broadband and internet access also ranked highly among community development priorities.

## **Communication and Public Engagement**

Most respondents reported feeling moderately informed regarding Town projects and decisions.

Current sources of information most frequently cited included:

- Front Porch Forum
- Local newspapers
- Word of mouth

Preferred methods for future communication included:

- Front Porch Forum
- Town email
- Town website

Respondents generally favored direct communication methods over social media.

## **Additional Themes**

Several additional topics appeared throughout the survey, including:

- Protection of farmland and forestland
- Recreation and outdoor access
- Renewable energy and energy efficiency
- Historic preservation
- East Hardwick and rural area representation
- Community appearance and property maintenance
- School enrollment and retention of young families
- Senior housing and aging in place

## **Key Findings and Observations**

### **Consistency Between Quantitative and Qualitative Responses**

One of the most notable findings is the consistency between the multiple-choice responses and the open-ended comments.

The same themes appeared repeatedly across both question formats. Housing, flood resilience, economic opportunity, downtown vitality, transportation, healthcare access, and community connection emerged consistently regardless of how the questions were asked.

The survey appears to be telling a consistent story regardless of question format.

### **Affordability Is Not One Conversation**

Affordability emerged as one of the strongest themes throughout the survey. However, residents were often discussing different aspects of affordability.

Three related but distinct conversations appeared repeatedly:

- Housing affordability and housing availability
- Property taxes and overall cost of living
- Economic opportunity, wages, and employment

Many respondents viewed these issues as interconnected. Housing costs, tax burdens, and local economic opportunities were often discussed as parts of the same challenge facing residents and families.

### **Resilience and Preparedness Are Different Topics**

The survey revealed an important distinction between resilience and emergency preparedness.

When discussing long-term priorities, respondents most frequently referenced:

- Housing
- Infrastructure
- Flood resilience
- Economic development
- Downtown vitality

When discussing flood and storm preparedness, respondents focused on:

- Communication systems
- Emergency alerts
- Sirens
- Generators and backup power
- Shelters
- Evacuation information
- Knowing what actions to take during an event

These responses suggest that residents view resilience and preparedness as related but separate issues.

## **Healthcare Access and the Pharmacy Issue**

The loss of a local pharmacy emerged as perhaps the strongest single issue identified in the survey.

The pharmacy issue appeared repeatedly across multiple sections of the survey and generated a level of consistency rarely seen in community engagement efforts.

## **Demographic Concerns**

Many respondents appear to view Hardwick's future through a demographic lens.

Recurring themes included:

- Retaining young families
- Supporting school enrollment
- Providing housing opportunities for seniors
- Attracting workers and employers
- Avoiding a future dominated by seasonal or second-home ownership

These concerns appeared across multiple sections of the survey, even when questions were not specifically focused on demographics.

## **Community Identity Remains a Strength**

Perhaps the strongest positive finding is the continued importance of community identity.

Residents consistently identified:

- Sense of community and neighborliness
- Local businesses and food economy
- Natural beauty and outdoor access
- Walkability and recreation opportunities
- Community events and gathering spaces
- Social connection

as some of Hardwick's greatest strengths.

Even many responses that expressed concern regarding taxes, housing, or other challenges concluded with positive comments regarding Hardwick's future, community character, or appreciation for local efforts.

Several respondents specifically thanked Town staff, expressed optimism about the future, or described Hardwick as a place worth investing in and protecting.

## Conclusion

The survey results demonstrate a high level of consistency across both multiple-choice and open-ended responses.

Residents repeatedly identified housing, affordability, flood resilience, infrastructure, economic opportunity, healthcare access, and community connection as important issues facing Hardwick.

Several themes emerged consistently throughout the survey:

- Housing and affordability
- Flood resilience and infrastructure
- Economic development and downtown vitality
- Transportation and walkability
- Community health and wellness
- Natural resources and recreation

The survey also revealed several broader concerns that appeared across multiple topics, including affordability, resilience, walkability and connectivity, healthcare access, and demographic change.

Taken together, the survey suggests that residents see Hardwick's future as balancing four broad priorities:

1. Maintaining affordability.
2. Expanding housing and economic opportunity.
3. Continuing investments in flood resilience and infrastructure.
4. Preserving the sense of community that residents value most.

These findings provide a useful summary of community priorities, concerns, and aspirations at the time the survey was conducted.