

SUMMARY FROM DOWNTOWN PARKSLEY SURVEY CONDUCTED BY PARKSLEY TOURISM BOARD

The Town of Parksley Tourism Board conducted a SurveyMonkey online survey in November 2021 to obtain feedback on current Parksley impressions and visions for the future. There were sixty one responses to the survey, which was promoted on social media. Some observations from the survey results are as follows:

One of the questions asked whether Parksley has changed in the past five years. This would indicate whether the **plan for move of the library** and the construction of it in the last two years has **had an actual impact** on visitors' and residents' impression of the Downtown. Most felt that the Downtown had remained the same or improved. The consensus is that the Town seems stuck in a rut when blight continues and renters or owners neglect to maintain property appearance, particularly trash and lawn maintenance. It is known that while the Town has worked to update its codes manual, law enforcement staffing responsible for enforcement has declined with no plans to replace position vacancies.

Responses to the question concerning **desired businesses** are typical of small town interests, however, some comments highlight the lack of basic essential businesses such as a bank, pharmacy, and grocery store. Ironically, the library is moving into the vacant grocery store building. Two banks have left town in recent years, most recently a small NMA Credit Union branch. The lack of the bank affects the local businesses leaving them without easy access to night deposits and cash denomination exchange. An ATM is available at the Club Car Café restaurant. This will not affect library operations as the library handles very little cash and the current location in Accomac does not have a bank either.

Other shops include those that provide destinations when people want to gather, such as coffee houses, bakeries, cafes, and ice cream shops. Interestingly, alcohol related venues was seldom mentioned. While the library does not plan to have a coffee shop within, it will serve as a **gathering space** with its new spaces for programs and meeting rooms. Refreshments can be served at library programs and visitors can bring in beverages with lids.

Of particular interest to library planning was the question on the **types of events** preferred. Most of the responses involved "festivals." This likely harkens back to a popular Harvest Festival the Town used to host. Traditional types of festivals seemed to be preferred. The festivals would revolve around food, music, and be family friendly. The library held several large events at the Parksley site prior to construction start, namely its multicultural fair, which interestingly was not mentioned by the respondents. The events described in the survey would require a large volunteer team and sponsorship, which may fall outside the primary goals of the library. ESPL could, however, participate in a town festival and hold smaller events that included music, which was a popular recommendation. The library parking lot will lend itself as a staging for outdoor music activities. If a festival had several stages around town, the library's large meeting room or outdoor parking lot could serve as a venue.

The library can support or implement many of the Downtown improvements, such as:

- **Additional seating.** There will be several benches outside, already sponsored.
- **Public art displays.** The library already does this with Art League exhibits, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts Artmobile, and other traveling exhibits.
- While murals of Parksley history are not planned by ESPL, the Library can provide content and support for **digital and physical interpretive signage.** The library's Parksley History Walking Trail brochure demonstrates this commitment to Town history storytelling.
- An **information station** is planned, which will be a lockable outdoor bulletin board kiosk for event flyers. Inside will be a large Community Information Wall, which will be slatwall with acrylic holders for nonprofit brochures.
- **Parksley Concierge Service** which welcomes visitors is a role of the library's public service desk. Staff should be trained to provide more directional information for town visitors. A cadre of volunteers could man a concierge station at peak visitor times. An outdoor cart, stocked with brochures and maps, would lend itself for this purpose.
- Downtown "**First-Friday**" style events can be supported with library programming being scheduled on those evenings, particularly music programs that would be an additional reason to draw visitors to town.

The question concerning preferred **hours of operation** strongly support (60%) the library being open 10 am to 5 pm on Saturdays. Weekday hours until 7 pm was also popular and noon to 5 pm on Sunday was of interest for 20% of the respondents.

Sources of community information preferred support the library's chosen media used to promote its news: Facebook, WESR, local newspapers, email, and flyers. Interestingly, the library was entered as another source for getting community information.

Finally, the last two questions that asked about wishes for Downtown improvement had several responses that wanted **the new library to be completed.** The survey results leave an impression that the Downtown is in a holding pattern with the completion of the library being a key element in tipping the town toward better days. The library is bringing hope to a faltering small town. A new, additional attraction will be the **RailTrail.** Each of these infrastructure investments can have an impact on the Downtown, but **both** of them together will truly have a big impact to lift Parksley from its economic stalemate.