



## Hesperia Community Assessment Summary – August 2021

On August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021 a daylong community assessment was conducted where a cross-section of community leaders and residents shared their thoughts, feelings and aspirations about the Hesperia community. Julie Hales-Smith of North Coast Community Consultants conducted the assessment and produced a comprehensive report after collecting, summarizing and analyzing the community feedback. This document is a very brief summary of that report. The full report can be found on the Community Foundation for Oceana County website at [Impact - Community Foundation for Oceana County \(oceanafoundation.org\)](https://www.oceanafoundation.org/impact)

### **COMMUNITY FEEDBACK – Four focus groups and a town hall meeting were held throughout the day**

**Focus Group #1 – Business Owners, Economic Development Professionals, Chamber:** This group identified three challenges: lack of communication across the community, lack of planning and vision at the leadership level, and proliferation of illegal drugs/drug use. This group identified assets such as the wonderful, locally owned businesses that already exist AND the great potential for more. They want to attract more employers to the area and attract the young people back – but they acknowledged that without adequate housing, neither of these can be accomplished.

**Focus Group #2 – Nonprofits, Service Providers, Churches, Schools:** This group also identified drug use as a problem, as well as lack of attainable housing that would suit families and individuals throughout different stages of their lives and at different incomes. They complained of lack of highspeed internet and cell service, and the need for additional capacity in the Village staff. They want to get the next generation more involved, more invested in the community.

**Focus Group #3 – Government Officials:** This group bemoaned the general lack of services and things to do. They noted the many empty storefronts in the downtown and little to draw customers anymore. They wanted to build upon the natural assets by improving the dam walk area and developing outdoor events. They speculated that if we could build workforce housing using a public/private model, we could attract small manufacturing or other types of business to the area to bring in new residents and keep our kids from moving away for other opportunities.

**Focus Group #4 – Youth and Generational Residents:** When asked about challenges the youth chorused “nothing for young kids to do.” They wanted more activities for kids such as a pool or tennis courts and an ice rink or hockey area, and to see the dam area cleaned up. Drugs and drug activity were also discussed, along with generational poverty that creates a cycle that kids can’t break out of without help that you can’t find in Hesperia. They wanted mental health support for the youth and their families. They also wanted better communication – a trusted communication source to let folks know about the services and activities that do exist in the community.

**Town Hall:** Town Hall was VERY well attended with approximately 58 attendees of varied backgrounds and ages. However diverse, they share several very fundamental characteristics. They are pragmatic about what could and should be done, they are hopeful about the future, and they love and want to preserve their small, rural community.

### **PRIORITY AREAS OF FOCUS**

- **Downtown:** There are many vacant, dilapidated store fronts downtown. There is no organized effort or strategy to rehabilitate the buildings or attract new businesses to fill them. There is no plan for attracting customers/tourists to the businesses and other community assets in and/or near the downtown.
- **Communication:** Communication is hampered in the community in several ways. First there is no affordable, dependable high-speed internet, and the cell service is spotty or nonexistent; and second, there is no reliable, “go to” source for information about what is going on in the community.
- **Enhancements to natural spaces and expanding recreational opportunities:** There are no organized/convenient ways to market OR enjoy this beauty – no kayak or canoe launch; no trails system for hiking or cross-country skiing; no trails for biking or riding; no signage or marketing to attract tourists.
- **Attention to the needs of youth:** The problem of drug use and its impact on kids is perceived to be a problem. There was also a strong consensus that there is nothing for elementary age kids to do outside of school.
- **Varied Housing Types and Price Points:** The community wants many things that could be made possible by developing different housing types at varied price points. Community members want to attract some type of business/manufacturing that would pay a decent wage and offer career opportunities for their kids so they don’t leave town after graduation or can be attracted back after they have left. They want to keep their seniors comfortable and safe. They want to attract new young families to populate their schools.