



**BUILD A BETTER
GRINNELL**

**2030 Visioning Project
Final Report**

VISIONING OVERVIEW

Build a Better Grinnell is a non-partisan, USDA-funded effort to assess Grinnell’s strengths, needs, and vision for people who live and work in the community, as well as those who rely on resources within Grinnell. Through a collaborative approach based on public input and engagement, this project identifies strong community qualities and prioritizes areas in need of improvement to enhance the quality of life found here. The project is guided by a diverse set of community members representing 20+ public and private organizations and a broad range of resources. For additional information on the project, next steps, and how to get involved, visit buildabettergrinnell.org.

VISIONING GOALS

- 01 COMMUNITY PRIDE**
Build community pride and facilitate positive branding by identifying community strengths.
- 02 COMMUNITY COHESION**
Enhance organizational connections and community cohesion and build a commitment to action around a set of priorities through a collaborative and broadly participatory process.
- 03 COMMUNITY GROWTH**
Facilitate community growth and development for the next decade by identifying and illuminating the local context of a prioritized set of needs, together with community assets and policy options, that are actionable, impactful, and easy to understand.



RESEARCH METHOD

Research was conducted through three primary phases, though some of the data collection (particularly gathering archival materials and key stakeholder interviews) has continued over the entire research period. Visit buildabettergrinnell.org to view survey information and data results for each phase.



STRENGTH ASSESSMENT

Assess existing community strengths and assets



NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Identify and prioritize community “needs” (gaps affecting the quality of life)



PRIORITIZED NEEDS RESEARCH

Assess needs further based on local context, assets, challenges/ constraints, experiences and re-view policy alternatives



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Organize workgroups and begin developing action plans centered around prioritized needs



PHASE 1: THE COMMUNITY VISIONING SURVEY

Total Survey Responses: 603

Phase 1 (December 2022 – March 2023) consisted of a community-wide survey which asked people 12 open-ended questions about needs, assets, and strengths for people who live and work in the community, as well as those who rely on resources within Grinnell. In addition to the survey data collected, Phase 1 also consisted of interviews with over 70 community experts involved in a broad range of community services and development. Tables showing all of the categorized responses can be found on buildabettergrinnell.org.

GOALS:

- ✓ Identify community perceptions of Grinnell’s strengths
- ✓ Gain a sense of the range of needs and concerns that exist and a rough measure of how common these are in the community
- ✓ Create a narrower list of needs/concerns for the community to prioritize



PHASE 2: PRIORITIZATION PHASE

Total Survey Responses: 1270

Phase 2 (June 2023 – September 2023) used the list of 46 top issues identified in Phase 1 in the follow-up *Needs Prioritization Survey* which asked individuals to select and rank up to seven issues and received 1,270 complete surveys from individuals. The data from this survey was used to generate the list of the top seven issues for Grinnell.

To see breakdowns of this data, the methodology of identifying the top seven, detailed demographic data on participation and ranking impact, please visit buildabettergrinnell.org.

TOP 7 ISSUES IDENTIFIED

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 More Variety of Restaurants | 5 Improve Roads and Road Maintenance |
| 2 Improve Quality of Drinking Water | 6 Reduce Racism |
| 3 Improve K-12 Buildings and Infrastructure | 7 Higher Wages or Lower Prices |
| 4 Improve or Expand Mental Health Care Services | |



PHASE 3: COMMUNITY SESSIONS (LISTENING SESSIONS, FOCUS GROUPS, AND COMMUNITY HOSTED DISCUSSIONS)

The final research phase focused on gaining more detailed information from the community to better understand the prioritized issue. This was done through 69 community sessions, including public listening sessions, focus groups, and community hosted discussions.

Listening sessions were held in Grinnell’s Drake Community Library and open to the public on a walk-in basis. Focus groups, also primarily scheduled for the library, were each limited to six participants and required signing up. Attendees at these were paid. Community hosted discussions were held by six individuals from lower-income households who were hired to conduct up to seven focus groups each (one on each issue) with their friends and family.

ADDITIONAL PHASE 3 METHODS

PEER COMMUNITY COMPARISONS

Collect and examine published data relevant to each issue for four peer communities (Decorah, Fairfield, Pella, and Waverly).

POLICY OPTIONS AND FUNDING

Online review of funding opportunities and policy options for each issue: What have other communities done?

INFORMATION FROM EARLIER RESEARCH

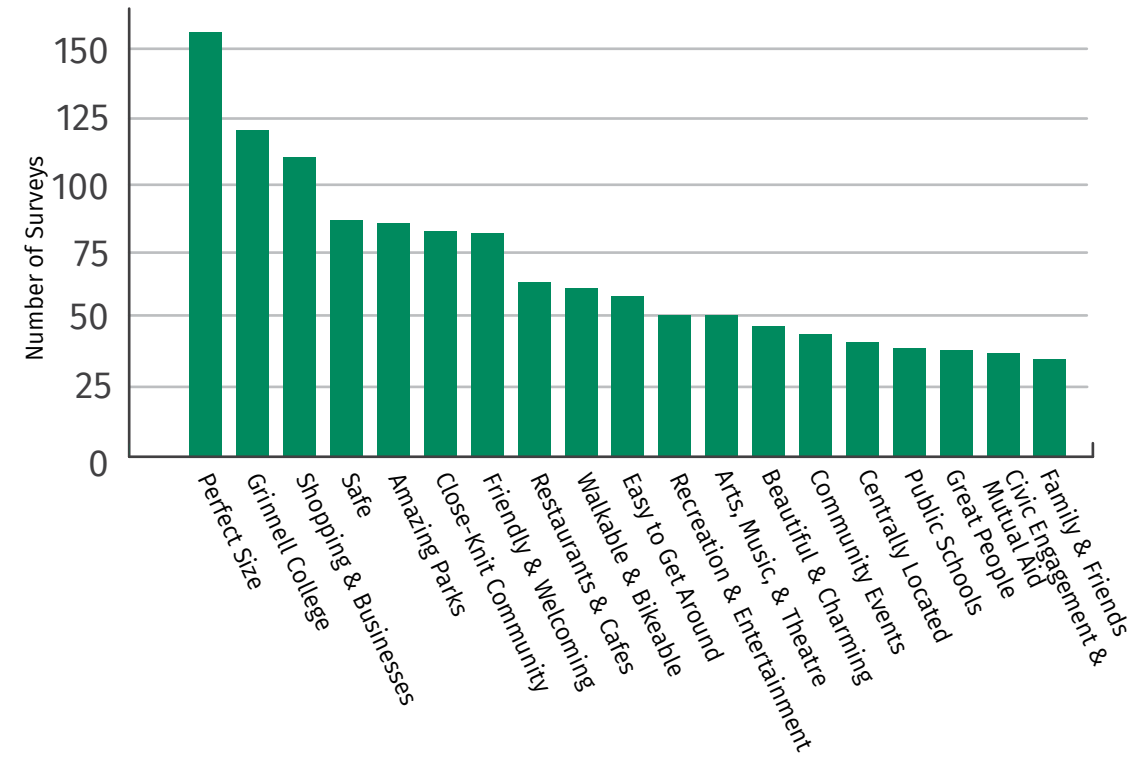
- ✓ Review archival documents on each issue
- ✓ Review community expert interviews for relevant input
- ✓ Pull all related comments from Community Visioning Survey (Phase 1)
- ✓ Pull ranking data for different demographic groups from Needs Prioritization Survey (Phase 2)



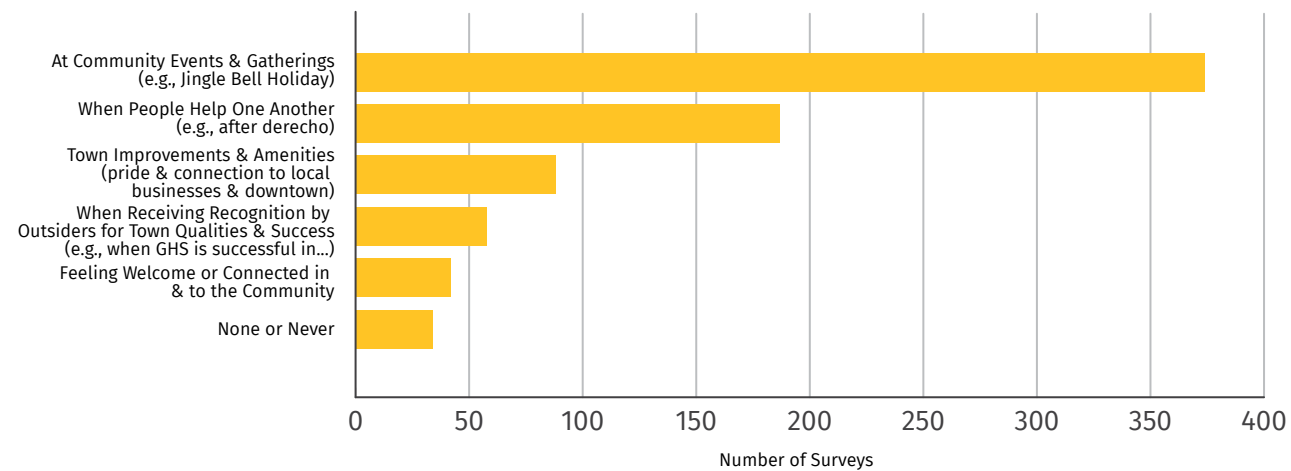
STRENGTHS, ASSETS & VALUES DATA

The tables below present data collected from the *Community Visioning Survey* questions related specifically to living in Grinnell and how it impacted participants' quality of life.

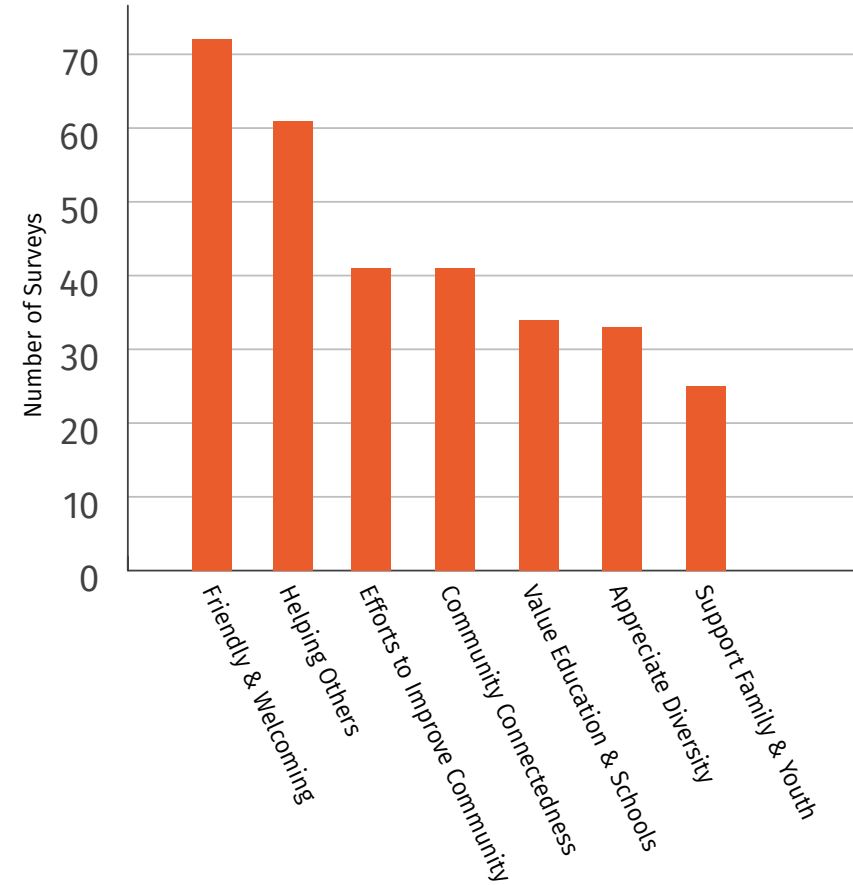
WHAT MAKES YOU GLAD TO LIVE IN GRINNELL?



THINK ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU FELT PARTICULARLY CONNECTED TO THE COMMUNITY.



DO YOU THINK GRINNELL HAS A SET OF CORE VALUES? WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY ARE?



OPEN-ENDED SURVEY NEEDS RESULTS

The table below presents data collected from the five survey questions related specifically to community needs and reflects over 3,000 distinct responses. Research teams sorted responses into general categories (e.g., health care, or things to do) and then identified and organized data into sub-categories (e.g., more mental health care services, more community events). The issues identified below, excluding those noted as “general” or “misc.,” represent the 46 presented to the community for prioritization.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED	SURVEY MENTIONS
Restaurants General & Misc.	250
Things to Do General & Misc.	225
More Housing Options	169
Reduce Divisions in the Community	145
Increase Options for Shopping (Retail) & Services	141
Improve Roads & Road Maintenance	132
More Welcoming & Less Isolating Environment	125
Increase Public Transportation	114
Less Racism	110
More Variety of Restaurants	106
K-12 Buildings & Infrastructure	106
Increase Attractiveness of City Entrances & Downtown	104
More Indoor Recreation Spaces or Activities	96
Improve Sidewalks & Lighting	94
More Community Events	91
Parks & Recreation General & Misc.	89
More Job Opportunities	83
Higher Wages or Lower Prices	78
Invest in or Expand Grinnell Businesses	78
Schools & Education General & Misc.	77
Enhance Safety & Security for Residents	77
More Outdoor Recreation Spaces or Activities	73
Improve Communication on Events & Services	69
Improve or Expand Healthcare Services	62
K-12 Educational Programming	58
Infrastructure Misc.	57
More Chain Brand Stores (such as Target or CVS)	56
More Bike Paths, Lanes, or Infrastructure	56
Indoor Spaces for Community Events & Gatherings	55
More Activities for Families or Kids	53
Improve Quality of Drinking Water	53
Increase Options for Groceries & Produce	51
More Community Diversity	50
Reduce Grinnell College Influence in Community	49
Improve or Expand Mental Health Care	48
More Fast-Food Options	45
More Bike Paths, Lanes, or Infrastructure	56

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Improve Quality of Drinking Water	53
Increase Options for Groceries & Produce	51
More Community Diversity	50
Reduce Grinnell College Influence in Community	49
Improve or Expand Mental Health Care	48
More Fast-Food Options	45
More or Improved Parks & Green Spaces	44
Values & Social Environment Misc.	44
More in Evenings & Nighttime	43
Create a Dog Park	42
Clean Up or Improve Homes, Yards & Landscaping	42
Improve GC Academic Programs	38
Resources for Those in Need	38
Community Spaces Misc.	37
More Childcare or Preschool Options	37
More Recycling Services	37
Improve GC Dining Hall	35
Improve GC Dorms	34
More for Teens	31
Reduce Taxes/Fees	30
More Music Events	29
More Responsive Leadership	28
More Coffee Shops or Cafes	25
Improve Work-Life Balance	24



NEEDS PRIORITIZATION RESULTS

Survey respondents were asked to select and rank up to seven needs from a list of 46. Seven issues were then selected to move through to the next stages of the project (a deeper exploration of each issue with significant community input and an action planning stage) based on a prioritization process developed prior to the distribution of the survey and advertised to the community through the project website and information sessions.

The following table shows the ranking of each demographic group. Yellow indicates the #1 issue identified in each demographic. To see breakdowns of this data and more details on ranking methodology, please visit buildabettergrinnell.org.

Issues Identified (top 25 of all responses)	All Responses ¹	Lower Income ²	Racial & Ethnic Minorities ³	Under Age 25 ⁴	Age 26-45 ⁵	Age 46-65 ⁶	Age 66 & Over ⁷	Female ⁸	Male ⁹	Commute to Grinnell ¹⁰	Rural Grinnell ¹¹	Grinnell College Students ¹²
More variety of restaurants	1	2	2	2	3	1	1	2	1	3	1	12
Improve quality of drinking water	2	1	1	1	1	2	3	1	4	9	14	3
Improve K-12 buildings & infrastructure	3	11	27	3	2	3	5	3	2	6	3	36
Improved or expand mental health care services	4	4	13	12	6	5	2	4	6	1	7	4
Improve roads & road maintenance	5	5	7	6	4	4	7	5	3	8	6	45
Reduce racism	6	22	3	10	14	18	17	15	16	13	18	1
Higher wages or lower prices	7	3	22	4	9	7	34	6	19	4	16	2
Reduce taxes & fees	8	7	24	17	10	6	8	7	8	22	10	46
Improve K-12 education programming	9	24	8	8	7	16	15	13	7	20	4	29
More recycling services	10	17	11	43	13	10	6	8	18	37	25	18
More housing options	11	8	5	24	8	8	19	11	10	2	17	27
Improve or expanded healthcare services	12	13	6	26	24	14	4	10	15	12	13	13
Reduce divisions in the community	13	34	23	28	21	9	11	14	22	25	21	9
Reduce GC influence in the community	14	19	15	5	11	11	23	16	9	17	2	42
More childcare or preschool options	15	25	30	29	5	19	12	9	17	10	5	41
Invest in or expand Grinnell businesses	16	27	17	18	17	12	13	19	5	21	9	28
Increase options for shopping (retail) & services	17	15	26	22	27	13	9	12	27	15	8	23
More things to do in the evenings & nighttime	18	14	25	9	19	20	37	23	12	39	12	8
Improve sidewalks & lighting	19	12	4	19	15	26	14	20	13	24	43	22
More Job opportunities	20	9	28	15	23	15	29	24	11	5	19	21
Increase public transportation options	21	10	10	38	32	22	16	18	34	16	37	7
More chain brand stores (such as Target or CVS)	22	16	31	14	18	23	27	17	33	14	11	16
More fast-food options	23	6	29	7	20	24	26	21	20	7	22	33
Build a more welcoming & less isolating social environment	24	33	14	21	33	27	22	28	21	19	36	6
More bike paths, lanes & infrastructure	25	30	19	42	25	17	30	32	14	26	30	17

1. All survey participants. Grinnell College students vote modified by .31 to offset disproportionate participation. (N=1270)
 2. Individuals from households with annual incomes under \$25,000, combined with individuals from households of two or more persons with household incomes of \$25,000-\$50,000, combined with individuals from households of 6 or more with incomes of \$50,000-\$75,000. This corresponds to Iowa's definition of low income for use with Medicaid

eligibility. We excluded individuals under 19 years of age and all Grinnell College students from the low-income group. (N=102)
 3. Respondents identifying with one or more race/ethnic category other than White, as well as those identifying as being of Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino origin. Excludes Grinnell College students. (N=61)
 4. Age 25 and under, excluding Grinnell College students. (N=76)

5. All respondents aged 26-45. (N=301)
 6. All respondents aged 46-65. (N=346)
 7. All respondents age 66 and over. (N=153)
 8. Female any age, excluding Grinnell College students (N=573)
 9. Male any age, excluding Grinnell College students. (N=281)

10. Respondents identifying as commuters, excluding those living in Grinnell's rural outskirts. (N=72)
 11. All respondents identifying as living in Grinnell's rural outskirts. (N=121)
 12. All Grinnell College students. (N=388)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES: 7 ISSUES

The following are the executive summaries for each of the seven issues identified and ranked by the community respondents in the Needs Prioritization Survey.

MORE VARIETY OF RESTAURANTS

- ✓ More variety of restaurants was ranked as the #1 priority to increasing quality of life in Grinnell's Build a Better Grinnell prioritization survey.
- ✓ Grinnell has seen a significant decrease in the number of restaurants over recent years, dropping from 34 in 2019 to 26 in June of 2024.
- ✓ While the number per capita is still high relative to Iowa, it is low relative to Grinnell's selected peer communities, and community members have a strong sense of loss with recent closures.
- ✓ In community sessions, participants also shared concerns for limits in the hours restaurants are open and rising prices.
- ✓ The recent closures and the perceived lack of variety exacerbate a sense that there is not enough to do in town. Research participants reported that they more often stay home or leave town to dine, which can negatively impact the Grinnell economy. The lack of restaurants is also felt to impact Grinnell's ability to recruit and retain labor and college students, as well as to host events in town.
- ✓ Participants believe that the impacts affect everyone and the community collectively. Particular challenges were seen as being faced by workers looking to grab a quick lunch, people wanting to eat later in the evening (such as late shift workers), and businesses looking to recruit and retain staff (or students).
- ✓ The core obstacles perceived to increasing the number of restaurants include the limits of demand that come with a small town, the challenges of starting and running a restaurant (particularly financing and staffing), and the lack of business support available.
- ✓ Participants suggested a range of ways to enhance restaurant options, as well as a handful of alternatives to new restaurants that might fill the perceived gap in food-based entertainment and dining options. The former included diversifying existing restaurant menus and expanding services on the weekend, Mondays, and evenings, while the latter included more food events or events with food and increasing the presence of food trucks.
- ✓ Most believe getting more variety requires increasing demand by attracting more visitors from surrounding areas and off I-80, as well as getting more community members and college students to frequent restaurants. Marketing is seen as critical, and more community events would help as well.
- ✓ Most also felt that attracting and sustaining additional restaurants, in addition to supporting what is already present, would require a range of supports including help with available space, clear information on the process to start a restaurant, business services/knowledge, funding, and a generally welcoming and supportive environment.

- ✓ There was little consensus on a specific type of restaurant that was most desirable, though the range of suggestions cluster around three areas: 1) ethnic foods that will bring diversity to the community, 2) more fast foods or quick lunch options, 3) and a casual sit-down restaurant nice enough for a range of occasions, but not too pricey.
- ✓ The most requested spaces for a new restaurant were something in the Depot (which has since been filled by El Cascabel), and something by the interstate to support workers in the commercial strip, attract traffic from the interstate, and provide an additional option for the community.
- ✓ Most participants felt that some organization was necessary to help support this process. The Chamber of Commerce and City were obvious contenders for many. Others felt that some other economic development group such as Pow I-80 or a community-based group of knowledgeable and invested businesspersons might be more appropriate.
- ✓ Many believe that the community has good restaurant options, and everyone seems to be thankful for the restaurants that have sustained a footprint in Grinnell.

IMPROVE QUALITY OF DRINKING WATER

- ✓ Improve water quality was ranked as the #2 priority in the needs prioritization survey. High concern for the issue cuts across all demographic groups living in the city.
- ✓ Parts of the city's drinking water infrastructure are in poor condition and outdated. In the spring of 2022, the city's water softener was taken off-line.
- ✓ The city plans to replace the water treatment facility with nanofiltration membrane technology, dig a new well, build a new water tower, and replace 11,500 feet of water main. The project is anticipated to be completed in 2026.
- ✓ Despite being hard, Grinnell's water has regularly passed EPA contaminant testing.
- ✓ Research participants expressed concern with the impacts of hard water in their homes, and many choose not to drink tap water directly due to concerns with taste and uncertainty about its potability. There was also concern that these issues are more impactful on low-income households and that they negatively impact the community as a whole.
- ✓ Many would like to see more communication or accessible information on the state of water. Many more demonstrated communication gaps through various misunderstandings.
- ✓ The planned water infrastructure improvements will address water hardness, influence the taste, and provide one of the most reliable systems available for maintaining water safety standards.
- ✓ Public education and making information easily accessible would likely help to alleviate much of the anxiety, frustration, and misunderstanding that currently exists.
- ✓ Many would like more information on what they can do (and who can help) to mitigate impacts of hard water while the new system is being put in place.

IMPROVE K-12 BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

- ✓ Improve K-12 Buildings and Infrastructure was selected as the #3 priority in the needs prioritization survey.
- ✓ Grinnell has three elementary schools (one PreK-G2, one K-G2, and one G3-G4), a middle school (G5-G8), and a high school (G9-G12).
- ✓ Most of Grinnell's schools are nearing or past a school's average lifespan. According to a 2021 contracted facilities assessment, all of the schools except the high school have significant issues with either their condition (exterior and interior, including mechanical, plumbing, electrical, and technology), the ability of the learning spaces to meet a modern curriculum, or the capacity relative to Grinnell's peers, particularly in terms of square footage required for a 21st century educational environment. Costs of renovations to the condition issues alone was estimated at the time to be around \$40 million.
- ✓ Efforts to pass two different bonds on three dates since 2015 for new schools and renovations have failed. The most recent bond proposals involved a consolidated K-5 school, and improvements to the middle and high schools.
- ✓ Many research participants feel that Grinnell is not keeping up with its peers. In addition to a range of specific concerns with the condition of the buildings, research participants are concerned that the dated schools were not designed for modern teaching methods, do not meet current safety standards, are expensive and ever more difficult to maintain, and make attracting teachers and a broader workforce to Grinnell more difficult. The middle school and elementary schools were identified as most problematic.
- ✓ Some also believe that there are too many schools, leading to cost inefficiencies, difficulty coordinating across schools, inequities for students, and too many transitions that harm learning, though this issue is more widely contested. Any effort to consolidate will require addressing the concerns of those who voted against the previous bonds.
- ✓ The support for improving K-12 buildings and infrastructure is broad and cuts across typical social divisions in the community.
- ✓ The causes of the problem were discussed primarily in terms of why the community has not been able to pass a bond measure. Participants believed that these include disagreements over whether or how much consolidation should be done, whether new buildings are necessary, and, if so, where they would be located in the community. People also feel connected to the current schools and see that students are currently getting a good education. The cost was also significant. Most importantly was the distrust and failures of communication between interest groups.
- ✓ Most participants believe that figuring out what can be done that addresses enough concerns to build a super majority of assenting voters is going to require communication and trust building. The entire community will need to be involved to identify a solution that is feasible.
- ✓ Though the efforts to pass a bond have been contentious for the community, many feel that there is reason to be hopeful and the community appears to be strongly in support of its schools and education.
- ✓ Research participants offered a range of suggestions for addressing concerns. An appendix of policies and best practices from other communities is included in the research.

IMPROVE OR EXPAND MENTAL HEALTH CARE SERVICES

- ✓ Improve or expand mental health care services was selected as the #4 priority in the needs prioritization survey.
- ✓ From a range of objective measures in the field of mental health, Iowa ranks low on available services, and Poweshiek County ranks low relative to Iowa.
- ✓ The need has grown in recent years, exacerbated by a lack of preventative treatment, a greater sense of social isolation, and stigma associated with seeking support, particularly in a small, rural town.
- ✓ Iowa's reimbursement rates for Medicaid and Medicare are low and state funding for public mental health is also low creating a disincentive for health care professionals to come to Iowa. Grinnell faces additional challenges of recruiting and retaining providers because of its small town and rural location.
- ✓ The services identified as most urgent include juvenile services, crisis care, inpatient care, and psychiatric care.
- ✓ Because reimbursement rates are low, many providers elect not to accept Medicaid and Medicare, leading to greater demand of those who do.
- ✓ Research participants noted that both the health care system and the insurance system can be confusing for patients and providers. Those in need, particularly low-income, lack awareness on available resources and how to navigate the complex system (both health and insurance).
- ✓ Participants shared that wait lists are long and providers get burnt out, sometimes leading to poor care, or leaving the system. These challenges cause potential users to have to go out of town, give up, or not get help or sufficient help.
- ✓ Participants noted that the lack of care adds stress to family and friends, interferes with work or school, and can lead to crises for untreated or undertreated individuals. All of this has impacts on the community.
- ✓ Those identified as most impacted are youth and low-income individuals and families.
- ✓ Grinnell has seen a growth in telehealth, local providers, and a Jail Diversion Director position. The community also benefits from strong community foundations and community collaboration.
- ✓ Focus areas for solutions were identified as:
 - Increase information on resources available and provide support to navigate the health care and insurance systems, particularly for the low-income individuals.
 - Pursue funding support to expand health care access to those in need.
 - Expand wellness and mental support alternatives outside the formal mental health care system.
 - Increase collaboration among service providers, the school, and the hospital (among others).
 - Increase telehealth and local providers.
 - Continue to build public awareness.
- ✓ A set of strategies pursued around the country and funding options are also provided.

IMPROVE ROADS AND ROAD MAINTENANCE

- ✓ Improve roads and road maintenance was selected as the #5 priority in the needs prioritization survey.
- ✓ Grinnell contains approximately 60 miles of roads and 70 miles of sidewalks. City staff conduct some cement repairs and fill potholes as needed. Larger repairs are contracted out. A five-year plan identifies major anticipated projects. Sidewalk construction and maintenance is the responsibility of the homeowner, though the city has reconstructed or added sidewalks adjacent to road reconstruction projects over the past ten years and plans to expand sidewalks in several areas over the coming years.
- ✓ Research participants did not share a sense that there is widespread issue, but all had specific road concerns to share. In most sessions, participants noted that roads in town were overall in good shape, and that major problem areas are getting fixed.
- ✓ The bigger concern by participants was the timing of road repairs, particularly the delay between a problem appearing and getting fixed. If the time for repairs can be reduced, it is likely that many of the concerns over roads would not have time to build to high levels of frustration. The city has recently shifted repairs for utility cuts and other major patching from once to twice a year.
- ✓ There was also concern expressed over the lack of knowledge or information on timing of repairs (longer-term planning and length of specific projects), quality decisions, and end dates of projects. At the time of this report, the city was working with an engineering firm to create a standalone street maintenance and reconstruction plan through a more thorough process than the annual planning process that has been used to date.
- ✓ More general education for the community as well as easy access to information concerning upcoming and ongoing road repairs would likely help address both issues. Education on how to report road problems may also help concerns over road quality.
- ✓ Concerns were also expressed over “dangerous intersections.” Education on how to report these concerns and the conditions under which different options (e.g., crosswalks, stop signs) are possible could be helpful.
- ✓ Another issue raised in many sessions and surveys concerned the lack of sidewalks in some parts of town and degraded sidewalks. Both were viewed as safety issues.
- ✓ A number of strategies are offered by research participants, and a range of best practices are provided from other rural communities.

REDUCE RACISM

- ✓ Less racism was ranked as the #6 priority overall in the needs prioritization survey. Grinnell College students ranked the issue as #1, and non-college students who identified as a racial or ethnic category other than only White ranked it as #3.
- ✓ Grinnell is a predominantly White community. Nearly 88% of the population is White and neither Hispanic nor Latino, compared to 58.4% for the United States. Most of this diversity is likely composed of students at Grinnell College. While total ethnic and racial diversity in the public school system has remained relatively steady since 2017, the number of English language learners has risen significantly.
- ✓ A rise in racial tensions at the national level in 2020 and a series of local racist incidents in 2022 led to significant tension for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) students at the college and efforts to respond across the community.
- ✓ In addition to the macroaggressions of 2022, college students report occasional racial harassment and regular microaggressions both on and off campus. Racial harassment and racist incidents were also reported as occurring regularly in the public school system.

- ✓ Participants reported that racism takes a heavy emotional toll, including stress, feeling isolated and unwelcome, and being fearful for one’s safety. Some students reported being too afraid or uncomfortable to leave campus, and some BIPOC community members have moved their families out of town.
- ✓ Participants believe that the primary underlying causes to explain racism in the community include: 1) cultural differences and associated miscommunication, misunderstandings, stereotypes, and sometimes antagonism; 2) lack of interactions and communication between people of different racial and cultural groups, reinforced by a Grinnell College “bubble”; 3) lack of awareness in terms of what is offensive, when an offense has been given, and how common racism is in the community, driven in part by a lack of discussion of race or racism; 4) anger, fear, and resentment; and 5) insufficient efforts to address concerns over racism and racist incidents.
- ✓ Suggestions by research participants for addressing racism in the community included: 1) collecting and disseminating more data on racist incidents, representation, and actions; 2) having greater accountability of those who commit racist acts; 3) finding more ways to welcome and celebrate diversity in the community; 4) increasing and normalizing discussions about race within the community; 5) providing more education and training to raise awareness, prepare bystanders, teach Grinnell’s history, and prepare teachers, college faculty, and staff; 6) educating College students about Grinnell and its culture; 7) getting people from different racial and ethnic groups involved with one another and building understanding through greater interactions, including sitting down, having conversations, and asking questions; and 8) providing more systems of support for racial and ethnic minorities, including reporting systems, safety measures, and resources. Organization and leadership were suggested as key to achieving many of the suggested policies and actions.
- ✓ A range of organizations were identified as being potentially important to improving the situation, basically including the entire community, but particularly the city’s public institutions, the college, churches, businesses, service organizations, and foundations.
- ✓ One comment that was repeated multiple times across sessions was that the primary responsibility should not be on the BIPOC community.
- ✓ Many noted that the community has a strong history of mutual support in times of need, regardless of social and cultural divisions. The City and Police department responded clearly and firmly to the incidents of 2020 and 2022, and there have already been some efforts to organize and collaborate across multiple key institutions. There are many institutions and organizations poised to be involved.



HIGHER WAGES OR LOWER PRICES

- ✓ Higher wages or lower prices was selected as the #7 priority in the needs prioritization survey.
- ✓ While some in Grinnell see the town as very affordable, many others are struggling, particularly with recent price increases that have outpaced wages.
- ✓ Based on annual income, 16% of households in Grinnell are living below the poverty line, and another 28% are economically struggling, earning less than what it takes to make ends meet according to ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) measures. Thus, 44% of all households live below the ALICE threshold accounting for household size and composition.
- ✓ Research participants identify their top areas of concern as food/groceries, housing, daycare/childcare, gasoline, property taxes, and utilities.
- ✓ Families report having to cut back on expenses, search for additional work, and make greater use of the community's support systems, which is affecting family wellbeing, as well as physical and mental health. Research participants also believe the economy of the town is affected.
- ✓ While Grinnell is comparable to its peer communities on most cost-of-living features (food, utilities, transportation, housing), childcare is more expensive, meaning that families with children are particularly impacted. Many residents look to nearby Newton and Marshalltown for cost comparisons, perceiving them to be less expensive, though this is not clearly the case.
- ✓ Participants felt that those most affected by higher prices include families with children, particularly single parents, those on a fixed income (e.g., elderly), young people with starter jobs, and those who fall between the cracks of state and federal support systems and a living wage.
- ✓ Many pointed out that Grinnell has a strong set of social services, foundations, and support networks, and that there are many ongoing collaborative efforts, including housing and food security which involve key stakeholders in the city, the non-profit sector, the business community, churches, and the school district.
- ✓ Participants suggest that Grinnell should grow the economy by looking for ways to attract more well-paying jobs, as well as expand affordable housing and daycare.
- ✓ Those who are currently struggling could use more assistance, particularly ALICE families, who do not qualify for most state and federal programs. Participants suggested that this should include more education on available programs as well as on managing finances and stretching funds, and more resources to train the current workforce and prepare the future for better paying jobs.
- ✓ Strategies provided are suggestions formed through research and policies used in other rural communities. The information is intended to be helpful in reaching conclusions on what strategies make sense for Grinnell.

CLOSING SUMMARY

We want to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of our community in helping to shape a brighter future for Grinnell. Your engagement and active participation are the driving forces behind our progress, and together we are building a stronger, more vibrant community.

We encourage you to continue your involvement and take action based on the insights shared. Your contributions are invaluable as are your dedication and enthusiasm.






A special thank you to the steering committee for their exceptional work and commitment in guiding us toward our goals and making a positive impact.

Please use the information and insights gained to further enhance Grinnell and continue our journey to Build a Better Grinnell together. For more information, visit buildabetter-grinnell.org.

INITIATING PARTNERS

FUNDING PARTNERS

KEY PLAYERS

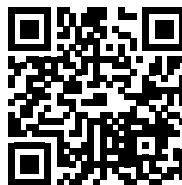
- ✓ Research Director & Primary Author: Monty Roper
- ✓ Community Members
- ✓ Steering Committee
- ✓ Research Team
- ✓ Backbone Support Team
- ✓ Interest Groups
- ✓ Local Experts & Key Stakeholders



BUILD A BETTER GRINNELL

VISIT OUR WEBSITE OR
SCAN THE QR CODE FOR
MORE INFORMATION

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