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Survey: Residents weigh in

The Citizens Engagement Survey discovered many issues of concern among the more than 2,200 residents who completed the survey and participated in various focus groups.

Noting that the rural nature of the county is significant both to old-timers and newcomers, the survey compiled "a list of industries that the citizens believe could promote employment, but not destroy the character of the region."

In order of the frequency with which they were highlighted in several focus groups: destination tourism/promote tourism; agricultural industries; technological industries; energy farming (solar); lumber and timber production; health care education - four-year; home-based businesses; recreational industries; farming and livestock - small scale/organic; medical technology and boutique medicine; research and development/call centers; rural restaurants; food processing; and bio fuels (waste wood and brush, forest slash).

The survey results also led to creation of a list of the 25 "top challenges" facing the county. The issue of growth and development outpaced the rest of the challenges by a significant margin with 637 responses. The next closest with 354 was roads and traffic followed by water/drought with 239, business development with 146 and jobs and employment with 119 responses.

Concern about drugs and corruption drew 89

and 32 responses, respectively.

Public safety, healthcare, climate change and the balance between the West Slope and East Slope as challenges only garnered a total of 36 responses. Public safety only accounted for 13 while climate change came in last with five.

The section of the survey that asks how well the county reflects the values of the citizens tells a tale of mixed perceptions.

For example: The issue of accountability, described by the county as "We take responsibility for what needs to be done," is heavily weighted toward those who disagree. Respondents gave 175 strongly disagree answers and 373 disagree. Neutral got 569 hits while agree showed 279 and strongly agree got only 25.

In the category of integrity, that is "We do the right thing whether anyone is watching or not," the negatives outweigh the positives even more. Strongly disagree, 247; disagree, 364; neutral, 521; agree, 242; strongly agree, 41.

With respect to "providing courteous and effective service" the county fares much better. Only 76 strongly disagree; 157 disagree; 507 are neutral; 569 agree and 105 strongly agree.

The entire survey and Laree Kiely's Jan. 26 presentation to the Board of Supervisors are available on the county's website, edcgov.us.