



# Public Safety Survey 2026

**Overview:** The 2026 Public Safety Survey gathered responses from 213 participants representing a range of industries and locations throughout Asheville and Buncombe County.

The findings indicate that public safety concerns are affecting business operations, employee experiences, customer confidence and perceptions of the community.

The findings demonstrate strong support for greater public safety officer presence, improved conditions in public spaces and more consistent responses to criminal activity. They also highlight calls for mental health care, substance use treatment, housing support and other services that address underlying challenges.

While respondents differ on the best approaches, a consistent message emerges: businesses want safe, welcoming places for employees, customers, residents and visitors, and they want coordinated action that produces measurable results.

# How crime/public safety are impacting businesses:



**Reputation of lawlessness is damaging business or property value (47%)**



**Fear is driving away customers (44%)**



**Crime or safety incident at their business (42%)**



**Employees experienced a public safety/crime incident (40%)**

# Top Safety Concerns

- 1** Concentration of homeless creating environment for crime/fear/discomfort
- 2** Spread of homelessness throughout the county
- 3** Public use of illegal drugs and drug paraphernalia that is left behind

# Customers Most Affected By:



**Perception of not being  
safe (70%)**



**Fear of Family's exposure  
to perceived unsafe  
conditions (44%)**



**Actually not being safe  
(31%)**

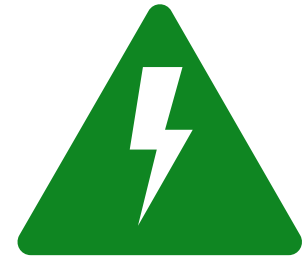
# Employees Most Affected By:



**Perception of not being  
safe (58%)**



**Intimidation/Fear/Discomfort  
(51%)**



**Actually not being safe (34%)**

# Changes that would have greatest positive impact:



**More Public Safety Officer  
Presence (70%)**



**More activation of areas  
that have seen frequent  
problems (56%)**



**Prosecution of criminal  
activity (50%)**

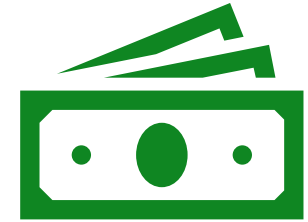
# What's working well:



**Creation of Downtown  
Improvement District  
(52%)**



**Recruitment of Public  
Safety Officers (34%)**



**Funding for Public Safety  
(26%)**

# **What Businesses Want Government to Hear:**

**Public Safety is a core service of local government and  
should be highest funding priority.**

# What we heard: Everyday business impacts

## Customer confidence

Reports of visitors avoiding areas, shortening visits or questioning whether to return. Concerns include: harassment, aggressive panhandling, visible drug use, trash and feces.

## Employee well-being

Concerns about harassment, personal safety when traveling to and from work, managing disruptive incidents and responding to individuals in crisis.

## Operational burden

Businesses describe needing lock doors, extra security precautions, theft, vandalism, cleanup of needles and other hazards.

## Beyond downtown

Comments identify Tunnel Road, West Asheville, the River Arts District and other corridors.

## Economic impact concerns

Businesses describe lost customers, reduced sales, additional costs and cleanup responsibilities and concern about long-term impact on commercial districts. Need to protect the local economy.

**TOGETHER, WE ARE MORE.**

# What we heard: Priorities for action

## Visible, responsive safety

Foot and bike patrols, officer relationships with businesses and quick, reliable response to calls.

## Services and prevention

Mental health care, addiction treatment, housing support and crisis intervention.

## Clean, active places

Lighting, sanitation, vegetation management, sharps disposal and activation of underutilized spaces to bring positive activity.

## Coordination and accountability

Transparent progress updates and action across government, nonprofits and businesses. Homelessness, addiction and mental health are interconnected challenges that require coordination.

# Takeaways for the conversation

## Perception matters

70% cite perceived lack of customer safety; 44% say fear drives customers away. Some advocate promoting positive stories alongside improvements to conditions on the ground.

## Businesses want visible, timely action

70% favor more officer presence; 56% support activating problem areas. Government should communication program accomplishments and demonstrate results more clearly.

## Progress is recognized—but uneven

52% cite ADID as working well; open comments question reach and effectiveness of other initiatives or in other areas of the county.

## A balanced response is needed

Respondents call for enforcement of exiting laws (with action on illegal drug activity, trespassing, harassment, theft and other criminal behavior) alongside services and prevention.

## Prioritize and invest in public safety

Safe spaces are essential. Respondents call for investment in public safety through improved compensation, recruitment, consistent staffing and regular patrols.

**TOGETHER, WE ARE MORE.**

# About the Survey

The Public Safety Survey collected 213 responses during September and early October 2026.

The survey includes representatives of professional services, hospitality, nonprofits, food and beverage, retail, arts and entertainment, and other industries.

The largest industry groups were professional services (19%), hotels and accommodations (16%), nonprofits (10%), food and beverage (10%) and retail (9%).

Nearly 60% of respondents identified Downtown Asheville as an area where their business operates. West Asheville (24%), other Buncombe County municipalities (23%), South Asheville (21%), North Asheville (16%) and East Asheville (13%) were also represented.

Respondents could select multiple business locations. The survey is a snapshot of participating respondents, not a statistically representative measure of all Buncombe County businesses.

Percentages have been rounded for readability. Several questions permitted multiple selections, so percentages do not necessarily total 100%.

Open-ended themes are qualitative summaries, not individually coded frequency counts. Terms such as many, several and some describe recurring themes without implying a precise share of respondents.

The survey captures the experiences, opinions and perceptions of participating respondents. It does not independently verify reported incidents, establish crime trends or demonstrate that particular policies caused reported conditions.

| Crime Rates by Select Counties                                                                   |       |                                            |                                             |                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| County                                                                                           | State | Violent Crime<br><i>(per 1,000 people)</i> | Property Crime<br><i>(per 1,000 people)</i> | Key City in this County |
| Buncombe County                                                                                  | NC    | 3.41                                       | 18.95                                       | Asheville, NC           |
| New Hanover County                                                                               | NC    | 3.16                                       | 24.05                                       | Wilmington, NC          |
| Forsyth County                                                                                   | NC    | 6.07                                       | 24.11                                       | Winston-Salem, NC       |
| Greenville County                                                                                | SC    | 3.98                                       | 20.93                                       | Greenville, SC          |
| Charleston County                                                                                | SC    | 4.34                                       | 23.80                                       | Charleston, SC          |
| Hamilton County                                                                                  | TN    | 5.30                                       | 23.26                                       | Chattanooga, TN         |
| Knox County                                                                                      | TN    | 4.04                                       | 15.22                                       | Knoxville, TN           |
| Fayette County                                                                                   | KY    | 2.76                                       | 23.93                                       | Lexington, KY           |
| Madison County                                                                                   | AL    | 3.65                                       | 18.34                                       | Huntsville, AL          |
| Mobile County                                                                                    | AL    | 5.47                                       | 14.36                                       | Mobile, AL              |
|                                                                                                  |       |                                            |                                             |                         |
| Additional Comparisons:                                                                          |       |                                            |                                             |                         |
| North Carolina                                                                                   | -     | 3.55                                       | 18.64                                       | -                       |
| United States                                                                                    | -     | 3.38                                       | 16.44                                       | -                       |
| Henderson County                                                                                 | NC    | 1.13                                       | 10.77                                       | Hendersonville, NC      |
| Wake County                                                                                      | NC    | 2.64                                       | 18.45                                       | Raleigh, NC             |
| Mecklenburg County                                                                               | NC    | 6.34                                       | 33.76                                       | Charlotte, NC           |
| Source: Lightcast 2026.1 datarun (FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program), 2024 calendar year data. |       |                                            |                                             |                         |