

Vision Statement

The Town of Kennebunk completed its first major Comprehensive Plan in 1991 in accordance with the State of *Maine Growth Management Act*. The vision for the Town at that time was to maintain the small-town character, support the three villages, preserve the Town’s rural character and agricultural uses, preserve open space, protect natural resources, support the local business community and manage the Town’s growth so it was concentrated in designated growth areas where public services and infrastructure were available.

Kennebunk Today

The creation of this Plan is a snapshot in time. The Town pattern of growth has (mostly) aligned with the 1991 vision. The population in 1991 was about 8,300, with approximately 3,200 households. According to 2020 census numbers, the population has increased to 11,536, living in approximately 5,300 households. Residential growth has, in general, followed a pattern that clusters housing in designated growth areas near services and infrastructure and preserves open space, and Kennebunk Land Trust works closely with developers and donors to increase the number of parcels available for public enjoyment and maintenance of wildlife habitat, resulting in an increase of total open space acreage from 20% in 2003 to 24.7% in 2020.



The Kennebunks are frequently listed as a superior vacation and beach destination and coastal living spot in popular travel and coastal magazines, evidence that historic properties, attractive shops and restaurants, and the natural draw of the ocean and natural environment are considered positive attributes for visitors and residents alike.

Residents value the “small-town charm” that is embodied in neighborhoods of older homes (*Summer Street pictured to the left*), small-scale subdivisions, sidewalks and shade trees, the relative absence of national-chain merchants, the clustered (and convenient) nature of commercial offerings, the village structure of Upper Square, Downtown, Lower Village, and West Kennebunk Village, locally-owned businesses, views of salt marshes, and significant outdoor recreational activities provided by Town beaches, walking trails, bicycle paths, kayaking, surfing, and commercial boat trips.

Kennebunk has, for several years, been rated as the “one of the safest towns in Maine.” It prides itself on responsive municipal services, with many working Boards and committees involved with research and informed decision-making. The RSU-21 school system offers a highly-rated scholastic and athletic program, making Kennebunk a great place for kids to grow up. People are friendly, caring, and involved in community life – they know their neighbors and look out for them. There is an active artists’ community, a well-stocked library, an ever-growing museum, service clubs, and many churches.

One of Kennebunk’s strengths is the close relationship it maintains with other nearby towns, particularly Kennebunkport and Arundel. These towns “play well together,” offering complementary services and

attractions, and cooperating to regionalize functions when possible. Because they present such a united front, visitors are often surprised to learn that the towns are not all one entity, and that when standing in Kennebunk, they are not in Kennebunkport, which still, perhaps due to long-time association with the Bush family, has greater name recognition.



Wednesday night concert at Lafayette Park

In the past 30 years, economic development has expanded north and south along Route 1 beyond the Downtown (the Town’s primary “village”), making it easy for residents to satisfy many of their everyday needs within Town borders, and providing jobs. As measured during 2019, the average work commute for Kennebunk workers is 24 minutes. Lower Village has seen an increase and expansion of excellent quality privately-owned restaurants, shops and service businesses that attract both tourists and full-time residents. The Town’s embrace of the Complete Streets program has visually enhanced both business districts

and provided increased safety for pedestrians and bicyclists. Selective use of Contract Zones has enabled hyper-local zoning changes that added commercial growth adjacent to Kennebunk’s Maine Turnpike interchange and enabled redevelopment of old schools into affordable housing.

Transportation is still mostly by automobile, although some visitors arrive by train or bus, landing at the Wells Transportation Depot, the nearest Amtrak stop and bus station, and some local and seasonal inter-town service exists.

There are more houses here now than in 1991, the Downtown has been revitalized, and the schools remodeled. Another change, however, is the acceleration of sea level rise and climate change, a process that has impacted the Town’s coastline with more frequent “splash-over” onto Beach Avenue and into the yards of oceanfront homes, with damage to the seawall. The Town is now part of a multi-municipality group working on ways to plan for future sea level rise.



Early morning in Downtown during the holidays

Kennebunk Tomorrow

Kennebunk’s 43.87 square miles are comprised of 35.05 square miles of land, and 8.82 square miles of water. By 2031, the population of Kennebunk is estimated to be approximately 12,500, a ten year increase of 7.8%, and another 260+ housing units will exist. Commercial growth, which comprised just 4.8% of properties in 2017, will likely only increase that use to 5%. The 81.3% of land currently being used for residential will increase, to perhaps 84%, reducing the 8.3% of vacant/undeveloped land to under 6%. More than half of this growth will be clustered in the York Street Mixed Residential and Commercial District, the Village Residential District, and areas near Route 1 and other main roads radiating out from Downtown, which will help limit the tax burden of providing necessary Town services such as snow plowing of roads and sidewalks, and Emergency services, to new streets in further-out neighborhoods, and will protect wetlands, watercourses and groundwater in the more rural Districts. The West Kennebunk Village Residential District will see growth as well, due to the relative

availability of larger undeveloped parcels and its location near two schools and the entrance to the Maine Turnpike.



The Memorial Day Parade

Downtown Kennebunk will continue to be the town center for a variety of businesses and services, including restaurants, specialty shops, banking, Town Hall, the Kennebunk Free Library, historical buildings, and the Brick Store Museum.

Residents and visitors will come for Downtown events that have been traditions for many years: the weekly Farmer’s Market, free concerts at Lafayette Park, the holiday Tree Lighting and Carol Sing, the Waterhouse Center and its seasonal ice skating,

pickleball league, and weekly vendors’ market. Residents will continue to spend weekend afternoons watching a live band perform in Tibbitts Square, ice cream in hand, and couples will continue to get married in the gazebo at Rotary Park, overlooking the Mousam River. The Memorial Day parade will come through. Parking will continue to be available both on-street and in Town lots tucked behind businesses, bordered by long-established residential neighborhoods, where Halloween draws thousands of trick-or-treaters each year. The Summer Street Historic District, including the beloved Wedding Cake House, will continue to receive Historic Preservation Commission oversight to maintain its integrity, with praise from tour guides bringing groups of visitors through.

Lower Village will continue to evolve as a mixed use neighborhood of homes and businesses, some of which cater seasonally to visitors and others that serve residents year-round. This includes boat cruises, kayak, bike and scooter rentals, gift and clothing shops, working marinas, restaurants, lunch spots and bars, gyms and wellness specialists, real estate agencies, narrated tours, and hospitality offerings. It will continue to be a venue for seasonal events such as the Chamber of Commerce’s annual LAUNCH festival celebrating the area’s maritime history, and Christmas Prelude, which draws thousands of visitors each December to engage with Santa, lobster rolls, shopping and craft fairs.

In Lower Village, parking will continue to be made available on-street and in (mostly) paid lots, with shuttle service available from Downtown or Sea Road School at peak times, as the population grows.

West Kennebunk Village, host to an elementary school, middle school, community center, the Animal Welfare Society, playground and businesses clustered near the Maine Turnpike interchange and rest stop, will see more homes. Zoning ordinances will continue to position such growth to protect the agrarian look and feel along the roadways that connect West Kennebunk to Downtown and to the adjacent towns of Wells, Sanford and Biddeford. The Blueberry Plains will continue to be a protected destination for walkers, anglers and berry picking.

The beaches and walking trails scattered around town will continue to be a magnet for visitors and residents alike, with Town commitment to maintaining beach access at its current level. Gooch’s Beach will continue to be the place where dogs go to see, and be seen, as the “Pooches on Gooch’s” popularity continues. Surfing lessons will continue, and every storm will bring out dozens of wetsuit-clad souls to take advantage of the big waves. At Mother’s Beach, kids will continue to run between the tidal pools and the KBIA playground. Testing of the water for bacteria will continue, and because of mitigation efforts by Kennebunk and its upstream neighbors, water quality will be better than it is in 2021.



Gooch’s Pooches

Route 1 North will further evolve from a condensed and convenient mix of business, shopping and age-friendly residential uses to selectively add smaller scale residential units suitable for multigenerational and workforce housing, to leverage the existing network of sidewalks and designated bike lanes.



Route 1 South will see continued small scale mixed residential and business growth that can mesh well with existing wetlands constraints. “Home Improvement Mile” branding will expand to include signage to provide identity and attract like businesses. When travelers enter Kennebunk from Wells, enhanced “welcome” wayfinding signs will

provide directions to town attractions.

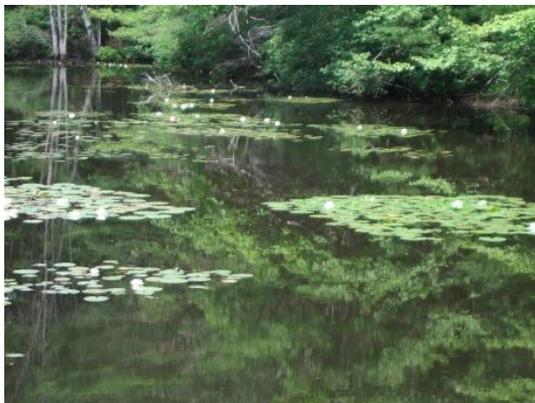
The Western Avenue corridor from the Wells border into Lower Village will be maintained in its current rural state, with much of the land conserved by Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge, so that visitors can continue to enjoy the views of salt marshes up and down the Mousam River from the bridge, where anglers try for striped bass and kayakers drop their boats into the river. As they approach Lower Village, the small-scale mixed residential/business look and feel will increase anticipation of what lies just ahead in Lower Village.



Entering Lower Village on a winter's day

Keeping what we value as we grow

As noted, the Town’s previous Comprehensive Plans and resulting changes to Zoning ordinances have, for the most part, directed growth to places where it is wanted, and that is expected to continue over the next ten years. The Planning Board and Site Plan Review Board receive ongoing guidance from many community members, which results in an ongoing dialogue around such things as improving the Town’s carbon footprint, creating and applying Design Standards for better commercial development, addressing the needs of elderly and financially-challenged residents, preserving historic structures and scenic views, preparing for climate change and sea level rise, and providing compelling recreational opportunities. The Select Board is a valuable player in these goals as well, providing guidance to help the Town grow gracefully.



A Lower Village pond along Bufflehead Cove Road

To preserve the “small town look and feel” desired by residents, massing, scale, height and placement of most new residential housing will necessarily mimic what exists in 2021 (and earlier periods). It is also possible to creatively combine residential units with commercial or industrial uses, with such units assuming the form, shape and aesthetics of primary use of those buildings. Redevelopment of existing properties should echo the “small town look and feel” mandate.

Residents clearly want to preserve open space as well as the existing marine and water resources, but do want middle- and lower-income families as well as seniors to have the financial ability to live here. There is concern about the ability of long-

time residents to continue to live in Kennebunk. Honoring both goals is a balancing act. Ordinance changes will expand opportunities to more efficiently utilize infill lots in the Village Residential and York Street Mixed Residential and Commercial Districts, and the concept of contract zones will enable the Town to incent the development of more small-scale units, including one-floor units, that are more affordable and functional for small families and seniors than some of the larger single family homes that currently exist. While there is room for residential expansion in the West Kennebunk Village Residential District - categorized as a growth area - the lack of sewers warrants discretion, as there are significant networks of wetlands and streams that flow into the already-impaired Kennebunk River. Lots there will necessarily be larger than those in neighborhoods that have access to sewers, and this has the potential to create neighborhoods that are not affordable, as well as more costly for the Town to provide plowing and emergency services.

In Kennebunk, wetlands are an omnipresent factor that impacts the size and design of subdivisions. Wetlands are also the unsung heroes of groundwater and surface water protection, and their integrity has a direct impact on water quality in the Kennebunk and Mousam Rivers, which affect the Town's economically important beaches. The recently-released Wells Reserve Kennebunk River Management Plan offers a guide for Kennebunk and its neighboring towns to take steps to reduce an ongoing problem with bacteria in the Kennebunk River. Although Kennebunk's wetlands regulations are stringent, there are opportunities to increase required setbacks and put into place nuanced mitigation techniques to replace functionality lost when wetlands are filled to enable driveway and road crossings. It will also be important for the Town to complete its project of stormwater system GIS mapping, to plan upgrades to improve the quality of water flowing into rivers, and to consider expanding aquifer protection regulations beyond the already-protected Branch Brook aquifer to encompass other aquifers within the Town borders.



Looking toward Lord's Point from Beach Avenue on a stormy day

Climate change will continue to be a focus for Kennebunk and its neighboring towns, which are working with Southern Maine Planning & Development to plan for projected sea level rise and its impact on the Town's beaches and coastal neighborhoods. This planning will necessarily involve some difficult decisions, and the possible need to move, replace or raise infrastructure prior to 2031.

By 2031, the Town will likely have a new Town Garage, and will be a few years into the execution of a multi-year project to evaluate and upgrade as necessary other Town facilities, including Town Hall, police, fire and emergency infrastructure, in order to provide enhanced services for residents and visitors into the future.

Kennebunk's popularity as a tourist destination will continue to impact traffic and parking on a seasonal basis, and the Town will assess ways to create a means to transport visitors to Lower Village and the beaches from more distant lots. Tourism will continue to be a dominant industry in Kennebunk and its neighboring oceanfront towns.