

# Public Participation

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## Overview and Acknowledgements

The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee began its work in 2016, charged with evaluating demographic changes, population, and economic trends that have affected recent development, while addressing changes in transportation patterns and demands, adequacy of public facilities and services, fiscal capability and capital improvement plans, the effects of climate change on natural resources, and assessing the overall changes that have occurred in the community over the past decade. The purpose of creating the plan is to provide solid planning guidance to Town leaders for the coming decade, guidance that is based on the wants and needs of residents. To begin the creation of this plan, the Town solicited public input through community surveys, outreach to key town organizations, public open houses, an online commentary app, and workshop meetings with the Select Board and Planning Board.

The Comprehensive Plan Update Committee received assistance at different points from Town staff, the Southern Maine Planning & Development Commission and Kennebunkport-based consultant Carol Morris. Committee volunteers were appointed by the Select Board on the basis of diversity of experience. Members both past and present include:

- Robert Metcalf, Chair, *Planning Board Representative*
- Robert Georgitis, *Economic Development Committee Representative*
- Nick Branchina, *Conservation & Open Space Committee Representative*
- Elizabeth Smith, *Lower Village Committee Representative*
- Barbara Fleshman, *Historic Preservation Commission Representative*
- Janice Vance, *Community Representative*
- Edward Trainer, *Resident Representative*
- Jeffrey Bonney, *Community Representative*
- Keith Wallace, *Resident Representative*
- Joseph E. Bergeon, *Youth Representative*
- Philip K. Parker, Jr., *Site Plan Review Board Representative*
- Maureen Adams, *Historic Preservation Committee Representative*
- Daniel Lyons, *Community Representative*
- Thomas Cahoon, *West Kennebunk Village Committee Representative*
- Kyle Ryan, *Youth Representative*
- Chris Osterrieder, *Community Development Director*
- Judith Bernstein, John Stoll, and Brittany Howard, *Town Planner*
- Mathew Eddy and James Black, *Economic Development Director*
- Edward Karytko and Blake Baldwin, *Select Board Liaison*

## Community Survey

The first step in the public participation process was to send a survey to all Town taxpayers by mail that asked both specific yes/no questions as well as an open-ended “what are the biggest challenges for Kennebunk” query. Responses could be made either online and in hard copy format. A total of 505 responses were received, with 247 respondents providing answers to open ended questions.

A plurality of respondents:

- Lived in Kennebunk 20+ years;
- Wanted to neither encourage nor discourage residential growth, and new business/industrial development but direct it to appropriate areas;
- Felt Kennebunk's Land Use Regulations struck a good balance between the need for regulation and property owners' rights;
- Wanted to encourage new business and industrial development, but did not want to see more land set aside exclusively for these uses;
- Felt the Town could do more to encourage low and moderate priced housing options;
- Felt all new residential dwellings should be charged an impact fee to help defray the cost of public infrastructure improvements, such as schools, traffic and recreation;
- Felt user fees were a good way to cover the cost of additional services (i.e., Parks & Recreation trips, dump services, beach parking);
- A very slim majority did not want to expand the Historic Preservation Overlay District to include additional areas;
- By a very wide margin, wanted to support (through the use of a portion of tax dollars) the purchase of land or conservation easements as a means of protecting natural areas;
- Felt the Town was doing a good job protecting the Town's rivers, marshes and other areas of scenic beauty and environmental importance;
- Gave generally very good marks to the quality of service that is provided by Town of Kennebunk employees, Ambulance/Rescue services, Police protection, Fire protection, trash and recycling, education, public library, Town Hall, and public service resources for children;
- Were slightly less enamored with street maintenance and repair, recreation services, speed control, traffic management, parking and accessibility for voting, land use planning, code enforcement, and services for seniors and the disabled;
- Felt a proposal to construct more sidewalks and bike lanes along public streets was high priority.

The open-ended question "What is the biggest challenge for Kennebunk?" produced some unique responses, but also many versions of the same set of values, which could be summed up as:

- Keeping taxes at a level that residents can afford while still maintaining Town services;
- Creating housing that is affordable to younger families, seniors, and long-time residents;
- Making the downtown a viable destination;
- Building the commercial/industrial base to reduce reliance on residential taxes;
- Keeping and attracting local businesses and not chain businesses;
- Preserving the town's natural resources;
- Traffic, parking, bike lanes;
- Keeping small-town charm, limiting development.

*A complete breakdown of comments can be found in the Appendix.*

## **Outreach to Town Organizations**

In 2018 committee members went out to local organizations to explain the purpose and importance of the Comp Plan, solicit input, and invite individuals to view and comment on the draft Chapters that were posted to the Town website. Organizations visited included the Energy Efficiency Committee, Kennebunk Land Trust, Lower Village Committee, KHS Environmental Club, Parks & Rec Dept., Historic Preservation Committee, American Legion, Conservation and Open Space Planning Committee, West Kennebunk Committee, Committee

on Aging, River Committee, Bicentennial Committee, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, and Kennebunk Fish and Game.

## Public Open Houses

Two open houses were held at Town Hall, one in on a Saturday morning in January 2019 and another on a weekday evening in February 2019. Notice of the open houses was provided in local newspapers, the RSU-21 newsletter, the Town website and Town Facebook page. Preliminary plan recommendations based on earlier public input were displayed on posters segmented by subject matter. Participants placed green dots on the recommendations they agreed with, and red dots on those they disagreed with. There was no limitation on the number of dots they could use. Each open house was attended by 30-40 people. Popular recommendations were:

- Create a Housing Committee to help find solutions to the lack of affordable and workforce housing;
- Build smaller and lower cost homes; limit development in general to protect rural areas; consider assessing impact fees to developers;
- Adopt stormwater best management practices (BMP) to protect river and ocean waters;
- Create a program for septic inspection and mandated pump-out schedules;
- More regionalization of services for cost savings and greater efficiency;
- Interest in looking at inter-town public transportation;
- Need to proactively address climate change and sea level rise by adopting zoning ordinances that increase wetlands setbacks and prohibit new development in vulnerable areas;
- Support for local fishermen; balance of commercial and recreational use of the harbor;
- Work more closely with Kennebunk Sewer District to ensure proposed growth areas can be properly supported;
- Expansion of sidewalks and bike paths on main roads;
- Look at existing ordinances to support historic preservation; work with the Brick Store Museum;
- Enhance public access to the Kennebunk and Mousam Rivers;
- Recognition that the Monastery property is a valuable open space along the Kennebunk River and if the current owner wishes to sell the property, the Town should consider an option to purchase all or part of it to ensure public access to the river.

*A complete breakdown of comments can be found in the Appendix.*

## Online Community Conversation

In 2018 the Town set up an online app that allowed members of the public to comment and interact with each other to provide more detail about Kennebunk's strengths and weaknesses. Town staff posted topical questions and monitored responses, allowing the public to easily provide input on Plan topics. This opportunity was promoted on the website and Town Facebook page.

*All comments are captured in the Appendix.*

## Select Board and Planning Board Workshops

In March and April of 2019 four joint workshops open to the public took place with the Select Board to discuss the project and the work that had been produced thus far. The Planning Board considered and commented on the work at a meeting in June 2019, and began discussions on ordinance changes to enable affordable housing and mitigate wetlands impacts. Another Select Board workshop took place in February 2021 to restart the

project after a lapse during Covid-19 restrictions. In May 2021, the Planning Board and Select Board provided final input to the Comprehensive Plan Committee. In September 2021, the Comprehensive Plan Committee voted the Plan to be complete.

## Final Public Hearings

The Draft 2021 Comprehensive Plan was posted to the Town website October 29, 2021, with notice to residents provided via Facebook, on the website itself, text messages and via a Kennebunk Post article on November 19. A public hearing was held December 1 via Zoom (due to pandemic restrictions). Over 500 fliers advertising the Plan’s availability for review, and the upcoming public hearing, were given out at Town Hall on Election Day. Out of approximately 40 attendees, 14 residents provided verbal comments, which included a request for the town to ban synthetic herbicides; acknowledged support for enhanced protection of wetlands and river quality; and posed questions about projected school enrollment, senior and affordable housing, and reasons behind the 2009 closing of town shellfish beds. The Town received separate written comments from Hope Woods Cemetery, Kennebunk Land Trust, Kennebunk Free Library, and the Energy Efficiency Advisory Committee. The Comprehensive Plan Committee met on December 6 to review all comments and outlined minor copy changes needed to address them, which are incorporated into this document.

*All comments are captured in the Appendix.*

## Incorporating Residents’ Wishes into the Plan

Since initial public comments were received and tabulated, a few desired projects came to fruition. New sidewalks and bike paths were added along the entire width of Summer Street to connect the Downtown with the Lower Village. Hope Cemetery added of a network of walking paths close to the Downtown, with one designated as a Universally Accessible Trail. Multi-town discussions have taken place with Southern Maine Planning to address the effects of climate change and sea level rise on the oceanfront. Part of the Beach Avenue seawall and adjacent sidewalk and roadway have been rebuilt and hardened. A discussion with Southern Maine Planning to address affordable housing is in the works. The Planning Board and Conservation Commission are working together on wetlands mitigation procedures.

Most of the action items shown in the Future Land Use Plan are designed to maintain and enhance Kennebunk’s natural and marine resources, local businesses, recreational activities, and small-town look and feel. Residents do not express a desire for wholesale changes to the quality of life offered in town, and have valid concerns about the escalating cost of government and housing as well as “too much development too quickly.” These concerns will be taken seriously by Town leaders.