

TOWN OF WELLS 2022 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE PUBLIC OUTREACH SUMMARY REPORT

MARCH 14, 2022



The town of Wells is updating its 2005 Comprehensive Plan, which serves as a long-term planning document that guides future growth, development activity, infrastructure investments, and land use change in the community. It includes a vision for the future of the community, and include ways for the town to guide land use to meet that vision. It also provides guidance to local officials making decisions on budgets, ordinances, capital improvements, land use regulations, and identifies non-regularly initiatives that achieve the town's future vision.

As part of the comprehensive planning process, the town of Wells is completing public outreach activities to identify community issues that matter to residents and community members, and glean opportunities, challenges, and potential solutions from the public on important local issues. The summary of results obtained through these outreach efforts thus far are included on the following pages. Outreach mechanisms have included:

- Community Forum Event #1 - focusing on land use change since 2005 and future visioning
- Community Forum Event #2 - focusing on existing conditions and community issues
- Alternative Survey Option - for those unable to attend second community forum
- Focus Groups - focusing on policies, strategies, and actions

As other outreach mechanisms are completed, this report will be updated to serve as a complete summary of public feedback collected during the 2005 Comprehensive Plan update project.

Community Forum #1

July 13, 2021

On July 13, 2021, the town of Wells held its first community forum for the Comprehensive Plan update initiative. This event was interactive and included small group opportunities to discuss guiding questions about changes in Wells since 2005, and what important qualities pertaining to the character of Wells community members saw as being important. A total of 64 participants attended this event.

What Changes Has Wells Seen Since 2005?

Summary of Public Comments

- Significant population growth and development, perceived as uncontrolled
- Loss of rural character and “small-town feel”
- A growing seasonal population and an increase in households shifting from seasonal visitors to year-round residents of Wells
- Increased housing costs and reduction in affordable homes for local population
- Increase in short term rental properties (Air B&B, VRBO, etc.)
- Increased traffic volume, congestion, and associated safety issues
- Improved Town facilities (police, fire, etc.)
- An increase of conserved land, but also loss of open space as well
- Less opportunities for younger population, increase in residents working out of town
- Increase in broadband services used (cell phone use higher, seasonal variations in service, etc.)
- Development has increased along commercial corridors which threatens dark skies and natural resources

Raw Comments

- Deforestation -> loss of wildlife habitat -> decreased air quality ->more noise (highway)
- Aggressive uncontrolled development
 - Existing rules not being followed
 - 3-season communities
- Increased use and runoff of toxic lawn and garden care and use of rodent poison
- Lack of affordable housing
- Infrastructure strain
 - Internet
 - Cell service
 - Police/fire
- Well water quality decreased
 - Water table decrease
 - Lack of accountability
 - Permitting, no liability, no follow up
- A population explosion
 - More full-time residents
 - More kids
 - More traffic (route 1)

- Better fire and police and EMS
- Better schools
- Maintained low taxes compared to other towns and cities
- Great community park
- Construction
- Growth – population – seasonal and year-round – seasonal staying longer
- Housing costs – beyond what a family can afford
- Local kids cannot afford to live here
- More people are working out of town (percentage wise)
- Size of houses at beach have grown bigger and bigger
- Traffic is worse than ever
- Unlimited growth and developments (Hobbs Farm Road)
- Loss of rural character (ex is route 1)
- Loss of small-town feel
- Lots more traffic
- Loss of natural habitat
- Many more private roads
- More protected green space
- Improved fire/police station/library
- Population growth
- Expensive housing
- Increased traffic
- Cluster zoning
- Prior to 2005, certain land was not buildable (wetlands)
- Too many condos – rules have changed?
- Density
- Air B and B
- Cell phones use
- Limit building permits
- Too much development
- Traffic
- Effect on water table – wells
- Speed limit should be increased
- Be proactive rather than reactive
- Drones, ordinances, restrictions
- Significant growth
- Lack of opportunity for young people
- Increased traffic flow
- New fire department building (police)
- More conserved land
- Loss of small-town character
- Cell phone capacity
- The rural area has been changed due to a large amount of subdivision development
- Affordable housing to younger population is disappearing.
- Uncontrolled growth
- Increased traffic on route 1
- Seen a lot of growth, too much too fast in my opinion. But I never hear anything about sustainability.

How do we sustain the larger community that wasn't designed for it?

- Great increase in three season and four-season homes. Great improvements in the schools. Improvements to the police and fire services. Improvement of the highway garage. More businesses on Route 9 – N. Berwick. Lots of traffic and traffic violations.
- Development in rural areas, new high school, some intersections have become more dangerous with increased traffic (9a and 109)
- Growth and lack of opportunity for young people
- Significant growth, congestion and negative traffic flow impacts
- Less opportunity for young people
- More conserved land
- Seasonal owners are staying longer and building bigger homes, housing costs are going up and beyond capability of local residents to afford
- More people working out of town
- Demand for school services has not grown – older population represents seasonal population
- Too many condos and subdivisions have been built
- Wetlands are more developable now
- Air bnb, VRBO, etc. – changing dynamics of community
- Cell phone use has risen – capacity and cell service still an issue
- Broadband service is bad in summer
- Town roads not designed to accommodate high volume of traffic
- Increased traffic violations
- Lot size for a new home – keep it bigger to preserve rural character
- Well water not as good of quality
- Stormwater runoff – no current regulations

How Do These Changes Inform Our Land Use Planning In The Future?

Summary of Public Comments

- Protect and preserve the natural environment through ordinances and conservation (dark sky, water, air, habitat, etc.).
- Enforce traffic and infrastructure/service assessment prior to building/development approvals.
- Increase enforcement and accountability of land use regulations in Wells.
- Evaluate the cluster subdivision provision. Public perception of this subdivision is mixed, and many do not think its intent matches the reality.
- Limit how much more development and building can occur in Wells.
- Consider architectural guidelines to preserve aesthetic and character of Wells.
- Invest in town-wide traffic studies and improvements at key locations to alleviate congestion and safety issues
- Consider land use tools that will help Wells control growth, such as transfer of development rights, real estate user fees, and lot size restrictions.
- Create more bike friendly streets and expand sidewalk network.
- Limit new housing able to be built annually and consider affordable housing mandates.

Raw Comments

- Adopt laws/regulations about lawn care/property care such as toxic chemicals, herbicides/insecticides/pesticides (bugs, rodents which kills wildlife and pollutes)

- Protect and preserve environment – TREES!
- Noise ordinance enforcement
- Protect wetlands – review building, rules, etc.
- Review permitting and make accountable
- Keep vision of small-town quality
- Traffic and infrastructure assessment prior to building approval
- Consider quality of life for all – clean air and water
- Protect dark sky
- Protect water table/marsh/ocean – not golf course!
- Cluster subdivision – benefits: recreation, walking trails, wildlife, more conservation
- Growth ordinance – limit how much building can be done
- Increase actual lot size in cluster zoning areas
- Development to development – need to coordinate one development to next – cluster to cluster
- Architectural styles could be set
- Commercial ownership of seasonal homes
- Limit – non-owner-occupied single-family homes
- Is there a limit on building permits? Need limit, planned growth
- Are there regulations on chemicals for lawns?
- Continue to conserve land
- Traffic – lower speed limits – enforce it
- If we want to look like a small town (or something else) our ordinance should reflect this – eliminate cluster development
- Let's try and keep tourism – family friendly, clean, Maine like
- Limit condos or end condo development – make rules to keep condos seasonal
- Moratorium on how many new housing can be built each year
- Comprehensive examination of subdivision rather than piecemeal approach
- User fees to control growth (Nantucket)
- Real estate transfer fee
- Affordable housing mandates
- Transfer of development rights – town center
- Stop building on wetlands
- Restrictions in lot sizes – zoning restrictions, including conservation
- Traffic study
- Restrictions on investment properties
- Look for comparisons with other areas – cities, towns, that went through/are going through these changes
- A study regarding democratic changes
- A release of current ordinances to all residents
- Bike lane on route 1 unless It intersects route 109 – if you have ever biked route 1 south and tried to get across that intersection, you'll understand!
- Chapel road extension review
- Leave the sewer and water east of I-95
- Add incinerator to transfer station for wells use only
- Add to the existing sidewalks
- Continue to conserve property
- Would like to see energy efficiency in future housing required

- Regional approach with other towns regarding growth
- Transfer of development rights in rural areas to restrict future growth
- Affordable housing to attract younger population
- Real estate transfer fee
- User fees to control growth
- Comprehensive examinations of subdivisions
- We need to slow down and look at the big picture. We live in a rural community – it's important to preserve and protect that way of life.
- Limit building permits (we did this before) - too many developments
- Phone signal weak in Wells
- Make walkable shops in town center
- Address dangerous intersections – 109 and 9a needs a light
- Reduce speeding on rural roads
- What to do about abandoned properties?
- Most important what I want to see is to protect the environment – these are highly desirable, and we need to protect these resources – dark sky, wildlife habitat, clean water
- Route 1 and 109 and Harbor Road – horrendous combination! Re-work lanes so Route 1 south is not the same lane as a left-hand turn onto Harbor Road. Add a foot bridge at the intersection of Route 1 and 109 so pedestrians can safely get to the library, schools, and strip mall with the IGA.
- Minimum lot sizes – sounds good for new developments and higher oversight on these to avoid issues and create a more thoughtful development process
- Understand how the ordinances are written now and what's not compatible with vision
- My biggest concern is with “open space”, an animal created by the code, being removed from the tax rolls. Any benefits to the town can be accomplished using easements. As both Reggie Chase and Peter Moody have said “the town should not be in the land business”. – Dennis Hardy
- Since this process will take 3-4 years, what can be done in the meantime to control growth? In another 3-4 years, thing might be really out of control!
- When is enough enough?

Does The 2005 Vision Still Reflect Where Wells Is Headed?

Summary of Public Comments

- While there were a mix of answers to this question, the majority were “no”.
- Many wished Wells retained these qualities but see the small-town character having disappeared in town. Noted a few times, an increase in commercial and housing development and increased population growth has already changed the character of the town.
- Some noted that there were aspects of the vision they thought resonated for the 2022 vision, especially the protection of open space and ecological services.
- Some said that the 2005 vision is still worth working towards, but the implementation needs to have actions that achieve this vision.

Raw Comments

- I see the beach area and seacoast and adjacent marine estuary areas not being preserved
- It would be nice to have bicycle paths
- Glad to see the transportation center
- Village center may not work - It may not fit now. BUT – regulate what can be built on Route 1 or have

a standard color palette so there can be continuity on route 1 (i.e., historic districts require use of a color palette)

- Not really – small town goal has been lost, rural area has been lost – progress on some, slipped on others
- Not really – the village or small-town feel is lost. If we can stay with a vision on “village center” we could develop a downtown which I think is missing.
- I don’t see Wells in the way that is show in the vision statement from 2005. I have to think hard to find historic buildings in Wells.
- Wells is increasingly less “small town” and “community” in feel. Wells, like much of coastal Maine, is moving toward greater commercialization.
- Overall no – yes in reference to conserved land and wildlife habitat
- Yes in reference to “beach areas with neighborhoods and village centers” and “open space and natural ecologically critical areas” – transportation center is a good start –central area is still ugly and needs more work – protect dark skies
- No
- Neon signs on Route 1 are awful and not in line with small-town character – they are ugly and blinding for drivers. Wildlife is losing out. Can we cohabit so it is a win-win environment? Yards to include wildlife habitat, native plants, no toxins?
- Too late for small town vision – no
- I wish the 2005 vision still held true
- No. So much new construction that looks nothing like a small town, New England colonial style place. Aggressive growth/construction is quickly making Wells a medium sized town.
- What happened to all our wetlands? Used to be preserved
- No - current development practices are not supportive or consistent with this vision.
- What have we preserved? Are there corridors of green space created by cluster development?
- No. It’s where we should be headed, but we’re not.
- No. We need changes in growth and seasonal uses.
- No. It still fits but has not been acted upon. Improved central area – still a good idea, but no action.
- Largely, yes.
- It does not appear that the 6 points outlined below the vision statement were enacted upon.
- Apparently not.
- No but I would like it to.
- No. Great loss of historic buildings, farmland, and the cottagey feel at the beaches is lost. Massive overbuilt homes are wrecking the aesthetic feel of the town.
- No
- I’m not so sure of this
- It does not

If Not, What Is Missing From The 2005 Vision Statement Or No Longer Fits?

Summary of Public Comments

- Housing crisis and housing affordability
- Sustainability of Wells' population growth compared to demand and capacity of services and infrastructure
- A re-framing of Wells character into the future that is attainable – some think that
- Wells is not a traditional rural seacoast community anymore.
- Limits to development and growth.
- More environmental protection.
- Improvement of what was referred to in the 2005 vision as the “central area” (many resonated with village center more).
- Climate change
- More strategic and doable associated implementation actions to achieve the vision

Raw Comments

- Call central area town center instead
- Need to manage growth a bit better, manage building permits a bit better, enhance commercial areas and continue to expand infrastructure with control
- We are not a traditional rural seacoast community. Certainly not small-town character except perhaps in February and March.
- Consideration for general housing crisis and housing affordability
- Less development and more protection for environment
- The “central area” needs to include mature trees, not pavement exclusively. More of a nature park – I’m thinking of the new “park” at the corner of Mile Road and Route 1 by Irving Station – has been clear cut.
- Too many trailer parks have been allowed
- Let’s get back to retaining small-town character. Wells is sacrificing quality of life with over building, not using existing buildings, and loss of New England character.
- It’s a good question – I think we need to address at what point does population growth/demand for resources exceed over infrastructure/traffic flow capacity/natural resources, etc.?
- When is enough, enough? There needs to be a hold on development to see where we are.
- Sidewalks?
- Vision statement is good – associated implementation supports are missing.
- Too many condos and houses being built. Limit how many can be built each year.
- Limits to growth.
- Rural – still a good idea, again, actions have not supported it.
- Still fits. Town has done a reasonably good job with this. Little to no action though.
- The “small town” concept may no longer apply as a realistic image or vision. Needs some other “image”.
- The vision does not include aggressive climate change measures by enacting policies and practices to reduce our carbon emissions and to build out resilience to deal with the coming changes.
- An overall comprehensive oversight of future development.
- Our infrastructure has outgrown its capacity in the summer months.
- Disregard for quality of life for full time residents – traffic congestion, overload on public services

- Population growth/issues
- More bike friendly roads, bike paths, and hiking trails
- Limit population growth
- Address more street lighting and prioritize dark sky and limit exterior lighting

How Should The 2022 Vision Statement Change?

Summary of Public Comments

- Reference tangible tools, policies, and regulations that should be considered to control growth in Wells.
- Focus on traffic flow, patterns, and issues.
- Improve the central area/village center, as many have issues with this area including traffic pattern, development pattern, overall aesthetic, signs, and others.
- Analyze impacts on infrastructure, services, etc. more thoroughly before approving development proposals.
- Conserve more land and make Wells more walk/bike friendly.
- Upgrade infrastructure to accommodate influx of residents.
- A broad plan to balance new development with increased land protection.

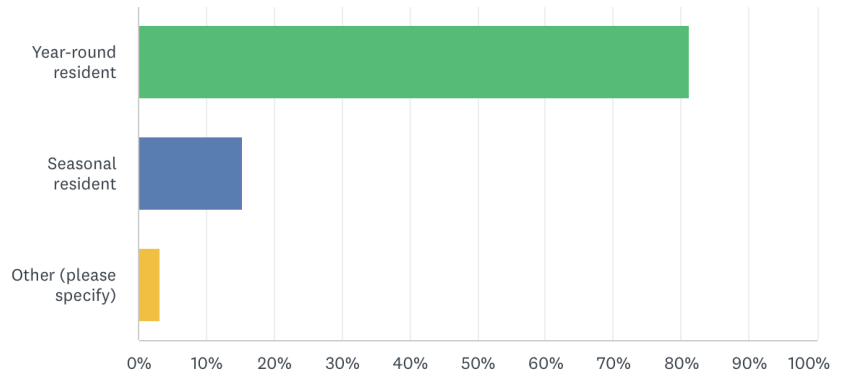
Raw Comments

- Did well on town center – more to do – well on transport center. Missed mark on small town character, village centers, and rural areas not protected
- Add inclusive to vision statement
- Utilize sound zoning changes to control growth, need affordable housing for working families, forcing folks out, think about accessory dwelling units to help with affordable housing
- It would be nice to be what the 2005 vision statement refers to but we are not.
- More protection for environment and less development
- We need native plants, dark sky preservation, and making sure golf courses consider wildlife habitat, avoiding chemicals and toxic substances, and using native plants to landscape
- Dark sky enhancement and protection – lighting can be used/altered to protect the sky
- Focus on traffic and ease travel.
- Analyze impacts more thoroughly before allowing building population growth (infrastructure, environment, economic)
- There really is no “improved central area”
- Supporting ordinances are not in line with this vision
- Limit new housing. No more cluster zoning. I don’t believe the developer who spoke. I believe cluster zoning benefits him. What about people who want 2 or 3 acres? Do they not count?
- Conserve more land, alternative energy sources, prevent climate change
- Global warming issues must inform every concept and ordinance. See WEAC proposal.
- Wider roads with bike paths and walking lanes.
- A broad plan for growth that reflects the wishes of the Wells community. Enact some form of real estate transfer fees that could be used to fund more conservation land and affordable housing.
- Plan to upgrade infrastructure to accommodate increased year-round and summer population.
- Restrict number of new homes per year – restrict new condos
- Restrict campgrounds, trailer parks, more signs. Control height limits.
- I think the plan is good but needs to be followed.

Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

November 10, 2021

On November 10, 2021, the Town of Wells held their second community forum for the Comprehensive Plan update project. The purpose of the forum was to share current information and data on Wells with the public, and to learn more about community member's perspectives, thoughts, and feedback are on the future growth of Wells over the next ten to twenty years.



After a brief presentation on the background of the project, participants visited stations by topic to provide feedback that will inform the creation of the 2022 Comprehensive Plan. These topics included:

- Demographics and Economy
- Transportation
- Critical Natural Resources
- Freshwater Resources
- Marine Resources
- Housing
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Public Facilities and Services
- Land Use

Additionally, an alternative online survey tool was presented to the wider community to increase participation and provide an option to those who were unable to attend the Community Forum. Approximately 345 responses were submitted through the online tool and 100 people were recorded as attending the the forum. The graph above indicates the breakout of residents by year-round vs. seasonal who participated.

The summary of results from both the survey and the forum are included in this document. They are broken out by topic and include highlights and main takeaways for each of the questions the public was asked to consider.

Demographics and Economy

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What do you feel is the most significant need of Wells community members or economic opportunity in the community?

- Increased affordable housing options, especially for low-income individuals/families, workers, and seniors.
- Planning for population growth and increased development. Comments referenced reducing development, slowing the rate of housing being built in town, enhanced control on growth, and increasing open space and natural resource protection.
- Diversifying the local economy, increasing year-round job opportunities, and expanding job opportunities that pay higher wages.
- Better traffic control and management (especially on Route 1), more walkable streets with safer bicycle facilities, public transit options, and better parking (such as at the beaches). Investing in road repair and improvements to maintain transportation infrastructure. A few comments noted they'd like to see less private roads in town due to the aging condition of these roads.
- Keep local taxes low.
- More recreational activities and spaces (such as a mountain biking pump track, skate park, etc.).
- Increasing small businesses and creating a "Downtown" environment. Exploring programs like first year business incentives and start up services for entrepreneurs. Ensuring business growth and character of development is compatible with Wells' New England community aesthetic and character.
- Planning for climate change and maintaining Wells' waterfront.

Are there policies or initiatives that Wells could pursue to increase the number of young families in Town?

- Responses were mixed as to whether a growth of young families is desired in Wells - some respondents noted that there is already too much population growth in Wells and that an increase of families will increase costs related to education, infrastructure, housing, etc.
- Increasing affordable housing and addressing the town's high living costs, was the most common answer.
- Increasing high quality, year-round and non-tourism based job opportunities and creating a Downtown with small businesses and spaces for people to gather, socialize, and meet.
- Improve options for childcare, offer more recreation programming, and create more opportunities for intergenerational activities and events.
- Promote an inclusive environment, tight knit neighborhoods, and the quality of Wells' school system.
- Improve public infrastructure - broadband, solar, utilities, roads, etc.

Are there policies or initiatives that Wells could pursue to support older residents?

- Weekly food drops, meals on wheels, etc.
- More delivery services - library, food and pharmacy, friendly visitors
- More volunteers to help provide senior services. Have volunteers check in on seniors, ask their needs, offer companion time. Recruit elders to check in on other elders, provide Q&A services to other elders,
- Transportation/rides for seniors who don't drive to access essential services like pharmacy and grocery stores, senior center, train station, etc.
- Planned senior activities that are free, classes, etc.

- More affordable housing seniors.
- Help older residents repair their houses so they can safely live in them. Increase access to home care services for seniors, allowing them to age in place.
- Tailor property taxes to reduce burden on seniors. Consider tax control/property tax relief for 65+ residents
- Continue to support urgent care, emergency services, and other healthcare services.
- Create more walkable community.
- Offer seniors free beach passes
- Create safer roads.
- More communication materials/website listing current resources available to the older population

If you moved to Wells in the last 10 years, what are the top three reasons?

- Common reasons stated by respondents include:
 - Beach town/lifestyle, small town feel, coastal character, friendly atmosphere, quiet community (however some said that this small town feel is changing with the increasing development)
 - Location, by ocean and major highways, major cities and airports, etc.
 - Proximity to coast, beaches, and outdoor activities, scenic beauty, natural resources
 - Low taxes, quality of life, good schools, shopping/restaurants, social services, community activities

What ideas do you have for supporting the existing businesses in Wells and/or recruiting new businesses?

- Promote Wells' local businesses with programs such as:
 - Highlighting a business weekly on the town's social media pages to promote local entrepreneurs, services they offer, etc.
 - More "shop local/stay local" events and campaigns to encourage Wells residents to buy and consume local goods (such as a week long festival celebrating local restaurants, artisans, and shops).
 - Offering resident discounts to drive more locals supporting locals.
 - Enhanced connection with the chamber of commerce.
- Support economic diversity and diverse businesses in Wells that are compatible with the town's character.
 - Explore and promote grant programs to help new businesses with start up costs.
 - A Master Plan for the Route One corridor to demonstrate a long-term vision for the commercial center of the town.
 - Develop a cohesive downtown/town center that has sidewalks, small businesses/shops.
 - Improve the aesthetics of the town's commercial areas with expanded sidewalks, bike connections through town, nicer street lights, more landscaping, less digital signage.
 - Provide opportunities for year-round business development and growth.
- Support existing businesses by attracting more workers. Reach out to local high school and community college to help with staffing shortages and give students incentives for advancement, good paying jobs, etc. Initiate a youth job program. Provide training and career building services to students to fill local jobs.
- Improve traffic flow and congestion. Expand trolley use.

Transportation

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What specific improvements to US Route 1 in Wells do you feel are needed most?

- Beautification of Route 1:
 - Enhance the highway commercial corridor aesthetic of Route 1.
 - Create an intentional and attractive village center on Route 1 (or another appropriate place).
 - Define architectural styles and standards. Require landscaped areas.
- Reduce traffic congestion and improve traffic safety and flow. Some desired improvements noted by individuals include:
 - Create a plan for better traffic flow and easier access on Route 1 from adjoining roads.
 - Better coordination of the timing of traffic lights on Route 1.
 - Widen Route 1 to add turning lanes or create alternative routes for residents.
 - Add traffic lights at high crash locations (such as at Chapel Rd exit onto Route 1 and at the intersection of Routes 1 and 9 in northeast Wells.).
 - Redesign or improve unsafe or inefficient intersections (such as Cumberland Farms and Police Station intersection, Route 109, Rte 1, Harbor Rd intersection, and the Hannaford intersection).
 - Add more directional signage on roads like Route 1 explaining to drivers turning lanes, etc.
 - Add a bypass and exit off the Turnpike to Ogunquit.
- Create more opportunities for safe, efficient bicycle and pedestrian travel on Route 1.
 - Create bike lanes or widen shoulders to allow for safer bicycle travel.
 - Add sidewalks or pedestrian walkways on Route 1, but ideally both, sides of Route 1.
- Limit growth and development on Route 1.
 - Population growth and perceived uncontrolled development on Route 1 has resulted in an increase of traffic issues and frustration of the public, especially local residents.

How would you like your local trips within Wells to be different in the future? This may include roadway changes and/or changes in transportation mode.

- Improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety and increase pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
 - Construct a dedicated bike path to the beach. Add bike lanes to all high traffic roads.
 - Calm traffic by controlling speeding.
 - Add sidewalks on major roadways and on highly used arterial roadways (Tatnic Road, Old County Road, etc.).
- Create more public transportation.
 - Expand trolley service and improve communication materials on services.
 - Consider electric buses/vehicles.
- Improve traffic flow and safety.
 - Adjust traffic lights on Route 1 and other key roadways.
 - Develop an overall traffic management plan for the town.
 - Reduce traffic on Route 1.
 - More passing lanes on rt 1 with better signage for turning lanes

Are there any areas of Wells that are especially underserved by transportation infrastructure (roads, public transit, sidewalks, bicycle facilities, etc.) that need to be addressed in the near future?

Pedestrians and bicyclists are underserved in most of Wells.

- There is a need for more bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout town.
- Sidewalk needs were referenced on a number of roads including Chapel, Eldredge, Bourne, Furbish, Drakes Island road, Coles hill road, and Tatnic Rd..
- Many people feel dangerous walking or biking on high speed roads with limited facilities, such as 9B, Route 109, Route 1, Atlantic, and Webhannet. Traffic speed and flow need control and management.
- Consider widening shoulders where sidewalks are not feasible.
- Consider other supporting transportation infrastructure including:
 - Bike racks
 - Electric Vehicle charging stations
- The town's public transportation could be expanded to better serve all areas of town.
 - Expand trolley service or create a public bus system.
 - Consider recruiting private transportation services to supplement resident needs such as enhanced Lyft/Uber services and private taxi services.

What transportation improvements would better connect the Transportation Center to other areas of the community?

- Many respondents noted that Wells should create a shuttle/bus service to the Transportation Center that connects Wells plaza, Wells harbor, the beaches, etc.
- Create a bike route and walking route on route 1 to the Transportation Center.

The roadway network is under threat from sea-level rise and flooding. How should the community work to address this?

- Limit over-development and restrict building in areas that are most at risk along major roadways. Restrict new construction on abutting marsh land.
- Construct, reinforce, and raise seawalls to protect roadways. Raise roadways like Mile Road, Furnish, and Bourne. Create an improved dike system to direct ocean over flow into marsh and not into puddles.
- Make improvements to most vulnerable, highly traveled roads first.
- Increase green stormwater infrastructure along major roads that are vulnerable to sea level rise. Increase planting of native vegetation. Apply for state and federal funding for infrastructure improvements to roadways (ex. seawalls).
- Encourage low carbon emission transportation modes including bicycling, public transit, etc.
- Advise homeowners to raise their homes.
- Conduct a comprehensive study and long-range climate action plan that includes identifying roads that could be cost effectively raised and roads that should be abandoned.

What are other issues and opportunities related to transportation are you aware of?

- Expand public transportation options and systems in Wells.
- Actively plan and create solutions for traffic issues in Wells. Conduct coordinated traffic studies and create corresponding traffic management plans to address traffic flow, congestion, speeding, addition of traffic lights, pedestrian and bicycle travel, public transit, traffic calming, etc. on key roadways in the community.

Critical Natural Resources

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What natural resources need further protection in Wells?

- Many respondents noted that all natural resources in town needed more conservation and natural resource protection.
- Specific natural resources mentioned include:
 - Beaches, marsh, and coastline
 - Rivers and wetlands including freshwater wetlands, saltwater wetlands, and vernal pools
 - Forested areas
 - Wildlife habitat, endangered species, and more common wildlife like migrating water birds, bears, coyote, deer, etc.
 - Dark skies
 - Groundwater, wells/aquifers, drinking water
 - Farmland/open fields
- Some threats respondents noted that influence the need for further resource protection include:
 - Population growth - increasing population is fueling more development and impacting recreation areas by increasing public usage of resources
 - Over-development - increasing development throughout town causing fragmentation of open space, haphazard tree removal, threatening drinking water quality, building on wetland habitat/land with hydric soils, etc.
 - Climate change and sea level rise - coastal development, removal of wetlands

What geographic areas need further protection or conservation in Wells (i.e., coast, inland, etc.)?

- Many respondents noted that all areas of town needed more conservation and natural resource protection. Some noted that the remaining undeveloped open space should be preserved.
- Some specific areas noted include:
 - Coastal (harbor, marsh, seawalls, fisheries) and inland areas (forests, fields, rivers)
 - Upland forested areas
 - West of Route 1
 - Important habitat
 - Areas vulnerable to climate change and unrestricted development

Are there any recreation opportunities or infrastructure that can be created within or adjacent to Well's natural resource areas?

- Create a well-connected walking, hiking, and bicycling network that connects key areas in Wells, the Eastern Trail, etc. Create more trails for cross country skiing and other winter activities. Consider constructing more paved bike paths.
- Create more areas for kayaking and water-based activities.
- Consider new recreation facilities such as an ice skating rink, dog parks, multi-use parks, and pickleball courts.
- Limit public and recreational access in environmentally sensitive areas.
- Publicize existing outdoor recreation opportunities.

- Encourage volunteer stewardship including clean up days, etc.

Given the predictions for sea level rise, storm surges, and groundwater rise, how should Wells protect its natural resources?

- Limiting building and clearing of natural areas. Conserve more land.
- Restrict new coastal development. Some say restrict redevelopment of the coastline. Protect beach property. Address jetty damage and beach erosion. Protect seawalls.
- Advise professionals and develop partnerships with natural resource and conservation groups.
- Encourage smart design of parking lots (minimize pavement, add stormwater infiltration, etc.). Raise roads to protect infrastructure from sea level rise and flooding.
- Encourage open space protection in subdivision design and when approving new developments. There are mixed opinions on the use of conservation subdivisions as an open space protection mechanism (some think its changing the character of the town, others think its a way to preserve larger open space areas).
- Develop a long range comprehensive plan to address and mitigate the effects of climate change.
- Reduce the use of toxic lawn chemicals.
- Develop more public education campaigns to communicate climate change and associated local impacts to the community.

How can the Town best preserve the characteristics it values related to beach and coastal access while also protecting residents and visitors from flooding?

- Retain New England charm and preserve family beach atmosphere. Limit coastal development including high rise buildings, hotels, condos, etc. Limit the size of new and redeveloped buildings by requiring same footprint as previous structure. Require stilts for all new construction.
- Address traffic speed, volume, and traffic flow on Webhannet and Atlantic. Reduce vehicle use and increase bicycle and pedestrian access. Increase green space along roads.
- Public education on impacts of pollution and over-development.
- Protect development and roads from flooding through sea walls and other infrastructure, limiting new development, and preserving wetland buffers.
- Some respondents questioned what the Town of Wells truly values - tourism? growth? Many want to see natural resource protection included in its list of values.

What other issues and opportunities related to natural resources are you aware of?

- Among respondents, there is a focus in many of the comments on the negative impacts of growth and increasing development in the community on natural resource quality (both on the coast and inland). Many would like to see development plans have a stronger consideration for habitat, endangered species, level of tree removal, impact on wetlands, etc. Some respondents noted that they'd like to see more developers held accountable for negative environmental impacts associated with building. Some respondents noted that overbuilding is adversely impacting wildlife habitat and plant communities.
- Some respondents emphasized include climate change, and sustainability goals across the updated comprehensive plan.
- Others noted the importance of enhanced stewardship and public education on the importance of the town's natural resources.
- Others would like to see Wells partner and promote organizations like Laudholm Farm, Great Works Land trust, Rachel Carson Refuge, etc.

Freshwater Resources

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What freshwater resources need further protection in Wells?

- Many respondents noted that all freshwater resources in town needed further protection. Some respondents think that state agencies are doing a sufficient enough job at protecting water resources.
- Specific freshwater resources mentioned include:
 - Freshwater wetlands including vernal pools, bogs, etc.
 - Streams and rivers including Branch Brook, Ogunquit River, and Webhannet River
 - Ponds and lakes
 - Threatened areas identified on map
 - Watershed

Does the public have sufficient access to surface water resources in Wells for recreation such as boating, fishing, and swimming?

- This question had mixed responses. Issues that arose in comments included:
 - Many think Wells has sufficient access to surface waters for recreation and some note that there is too much access.
 - Some said no, improvements are needed such as:
 - Evaluating and lifting Moody Beach restrictions
 - Improved kayak access and public boat launches
 - Enhanced parking at beaches, especially for residents
 - Some said that public recreation should be limited in key areas due to pollution, littering, etc.

Are there any recreation opportunities or infrastructure that can be created within or adjacent to Well's natural resource areas?

- Some respondents said no, that they would like to see access limited and water resources/water quality preserved. Some said there are already many recreation resources in Wells.
- Some respondents noted recreation opportunities/infrastructure such as:
 - Bike and walking trails.
 - Consider a town swimming/recreation center, golf course, pickleball courts.
 - Improve access for fishing.
 - Boating house for kayaks and canoes.
 - Enhanced handicap accessibility of beaches.
 - Better parking.
 - Increase water-based recreational businesses.

Could the Town of Wells do anything differently to manage the town's ground and surface water resources?

- Limit development and construction around water resources. Protect Wells' water resources.
- Some respondents noted that they'd like to see less cluster subdivision developments and larger lot sizes.
- Specific management activities referenced include:

- Repair harbor jetties.
- Reduce toxic chemical use on lawns.
- Restrict dumping.
- Encourage well testing.
- Keep the beaches clean.
- Ensure comprehensive plan considers water and wastewater impacts of population growth and development.
- Public education on water resources and water quality.

What other issues and opportunities related to water resources are you aware of?

- Consider planting for wildlife and increasing native vegetation in town. Town land can be a model for this.
- Promote inland water based recreation activities to tourists as an alternative to the beach.
- Monitor new subdivisions in regards to well water quality.
- Consider expanding town water services and infrastructure.
- Restrict development occurring in wetland areas.
- Evaluate how the town can keep up with future demand for fresh water.

Marine Resources

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What marine resources in Wells need further protection?

- Many respondents noted that all marine resources in town needed further protection.
- Specific marine resources mentioned include:
 - Marshes, estuaries, coastal inlets
 - Beaches (especially from flooding, storms, erosion)
 - Harbor
 - Dunes
 - Coastal residences
 - Fishing areas
 - Ocean wildlife

Could the Town of Wells do anything to improve public access to the Town's beaches?

- Many respondents said no, highlighting that public access should be limited due to overcrowding, treatment of natural resources, etc. Some said there are simply enough public access points already.
- Some respondents said yes and noted improvements such as:
 - Making the stairs safer at Wells Beach
 - Regular cleaning of ramps
 - Transportation for seniors to access beaches
 - More beach shuttling options
 - More inviting and handicap accessible access points
 - Sidewalks along Mile Road
 - Better bike access to beaches
 - Traffic control on Atlantic and Webhannet
 - More parking close to beaches, especially for residents
 - Overturn Moody Beach restrictions
 - More trash collection, beach clean up, etc.

Are there any recreation opportunities or infrastructure that can be created within or adjacent to Well's marine resources areas??

- Many respondents said no, that they would like to see public access and new recreation infrastructure limited.
- Some respondents noted desired recreation opportunities/infrastructure such as:
 - Non-motor activities
 - Activities at the harbor
 - Hiking and biking
 - Boardwalks
 - Children's programs focusing on clamming, fishing, sailing, etc.
 - More amenities including restrooms, parking, and bike racks

Given the predictions for climate change impacts (sea level rise, storm surges, and groundwater rise), how should Wells protect its marine resources?

- Reduce pollution impacting marine resources.
- Consult professionals, scientists, etc.
- Limit coastal development and building.
- Control erosion.
- Improve seawalls.
- Reduce carbon footprint in Wells.
- Develop a climate change plan.

How should Wells plan to protect and adapt the town's recreation and tourism industries that rely on the town's beaches and coast that will likely be impacted by future sea level rise?

- Limit coastal development and building.
- Establish "dos and don't" for tourists visiting beach and promote/enforce rules.
- Prioritize main roads and buildings.
- Higher boardwalks and piers.
- Erosion control.
- Encourage public transportation.
- Public education.
- Expand outdoor recreation.
- Diversify economy.
- Preserve the harbor.
- Monitor the beaches.

Housing

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What type of housing unit do you live in currently?

- Most respondents indicated they lived in a single family home. A few mentioned condo, cottage, and multi-family.

How feasible do you think it is for first time home buyers to find an affordable home to purchase in Wells?

- Many respondents said that it was either NOT feasible or incredibly challenging, with housing costs being so high in the current market and the impact that out-of-staters moving to Wells had on the housing market.
- Some respondents said west of Route 1 was more affordable than other parts of town.
- Some said that it depends on your income. Others say it's more feasible if you're an out of stater looking to relocate.

How feasible will it be for seniors to remain in Wells as they age?

- Answers were mixed to this question. Some noted that it is feasible, while some noted that it's challenging.
- Some respondents thought it was LESS feasible unless:
 - Public transportation were expanded
 - Taxes were kept low and seniors were provided tax relief
 - Their level of income allowed for retirement savings
 - Their house was already paid off
 - How close they are to family or a support network
 - Their health was overall, good
- Other issues noted included a need for more senior services, at home health care services, housing assistance, more medical care options, and more walkable areas.

What housing issues related to the larger seasonal population need further attention?

- Impacts of Air BnBs on residential neighborhoods.
- Traffic volume and speeds on Route 1, Atlantic, and Webhannet Road, especially during summer months.
- Impacts on town services, including police and fire.
- Limited year-round rentals and limited housing for seasonal employees. Balance housing development more evenly between seasonal vs. year round units. Slow/limit new seasonal housing development such as campgrounds, RV parks, seasonal condos, etc.
- Limited affordable housing for workers, seniors, and low income individuals/families.
- Town's ability to provide infrastructure at high rate of housing development and growth that is happening.
- Seasonal residents and population bring in tax revenue.

- Build high quality, durable, long-lasting units that are energy efficient.

What other issues and opportunities related to housing are you aware of?

- Create a diverse array of housing stock in town ranging from affordable rentals, starter homes, senior housing, assisted living, temporary housing for seasonal employees, etc.
- There is a general impression of too many seasonal units being built.
- There are concerns related to infrastructure investment (roads, traffic control, water/sewer, town services, etc.) needs increasing with increased building and housing development in town.
- Consider sustainability improvements including enhanced walkability, a community solar project, a community garden, etc.
- There are mixed opinions on cluster development and whether respondents want to see more or less of it in town.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What are your top three favorite historic or culturally significant places in Wells?

- Respondents noted a wide range of significant places to them including examples like:
 - Laudholm Farm and Wells Reserve
 - Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge
 - Drakes Island Beach
 - Cemeteries (such as Oceanview and Drakes Island)
 - Harbor Road
 - Webhannet Falls
 - Buildings and historic sites like the First Congregational Church, Austin Hennessey home, Division Nine School, Community Hall, Littlefield house, library, Founders Park, Spillers Farm, Gowen Park, Chase Farm, and the Historical Society
- Some respondents indicated that they were unaware of historically significant places in Wells.

To what degree do you think preservation of historically significant structures or land is important?

- Many respondents indicated that they thought preservation of historically significant structures or land is important. 74% indicated “very important” and 20% indicated “somewhat important”. The remaining percentage noted they were “unsure” of how important preservation of historic structures and land is or said it was not important.

Which of the following impacts does culture and history have in Wells?

- Respondents were provided answer choices for this questions and were asked to check all that applied to them. Community identity was noting as having the highest impact for the most individuals (73% of respondents checked this answer). Civic pride was the second highest selected answer, with 67% of respondents selecting it. The third highest selected answer was personal enrichment/education, with 63% of respondents selecting this. 47% of respondents noted that tourism was impacted by culture and history. 39% said the culture and history are fun and a source of enjoyment, and 39% say history and culture contribute to the economy.

What historic and cultural opportunities would you like to see more of in Wells?

- More town wide events, like local concerts, clam festival, town fair and more programming at the Historical Society, Harbor Park, etc.
- Enhanced preservation and education about historically significant Native American sites and indigenous peoples history in Wells. Consider meaningful partnerships with Native American communities.
- More preservation of old, historic homes
- Development of a historic site tour of Wells
- More parks and signage that explains history of forests, farms, etc.
- Consider creating a community playhouse, seashore museum, art history display, craft opportunities, etc.
- More plaques at existing historic sites

Public Facilities and Services

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

How satisfied are you with the current municipal facilities and services in Wells?

- Many respondents indicated they were satisfied with current municipal facilities and services. Examples of reasons include:
 - High regard for the Wells Public Library, Fire, Police,
 - Many appreciate the improvements that have been made to municipal facilities in last few years.
- Those that responded they were not satisfied indicated reasons such as:
 - Need for recycling improvements, expanded Transfer Station hours. Some expressed an interest in municipal trash pick up.
 - Need more town recreation programming at facilities and senior services. Updated playgrounds, ice skating rink/facility,
 - Need for infrastructure, such as fire and emergency response, to meet future population growth demands.
 - Concern with adequacy of facility sizes with the town's fast population growth.

Are there specific buildings or services that need further investment in the coming years? If so, what are they?

- Many respondents think that growth in Wells is putting a strain on our public services and infrastructure
- Many wonder what the impact of population growth and development will be on the facilities, infrastructure, and services required to meet demands of larger population. What will be the effects on the water/sewer system, police, fire, schools, etc.?
- Regular management and maintenance of infrastructure, including roadways, municipal buildings, etc.
- Specific facilities mentioned include:
 - Harbor Park
 - Transfer Station
 - Recreation programs and infrastructure
 - Town Hall
 - Middle School
 - Medical Services
 - Senior Center
 - Beach facilities

If you are connected to the water and/or sewer lines in Wells, how satisfied are you with these services? What other issues and opportunities are you aware of related to the water and/or sewer infrastructure in Wells?

- Many respondents indicated that they're satisfied with their water and sewer services. Some indicated there is a need to replace aging infrastructure, some desired to see it expanded. Other respondents noted that its costly to hook up.
- Some respondents noted that a plan for sewer and water expansion should be prepared for additional growth in those areas.
- Concerns were expressed about water quality impacts of expansion and continued high rates of development.

Land Use

Main Takeaways - Community Forum #2 and Alternative Survey

What aspects of Wells' character need to be retained as development continues?

- There were a number of respondents that said that Wells lacks a town character and that Wells lost its small town character as population and development pressures continued. Some say Wells is becoming a drive through town, others say there is a significant need to slow development to preserve what character remains.
- Aspects of Wells' character that were noted by some respondents as needing to be retained include examples like:
 - The beaches and the character they offer.
 - Charm and authenticity (not just promoting its tourism attributes, but also that its working class, etc.)
 - Considering needs of year round residents first. Balance year round population and tourists.
 - Family friendly atmosphere, close knit community, small town coastal feel (though some people feel this is disappearing), and rural beauty (also, some feel this is disappearing)
 - Open space including forests, wetlands, fields, streams, etc.
 - Historic buildings, natural environment, small businesses

How should the Town manage future growth over time?

- Limit new development. Slow construction of housing developments and subdivisions. Preserve open space as part of new development design and planning. Limit seasonal housing development. Restrict growth in critical natural resource areas. Focus development to specified growth areas.
- Create a downtown. Control traffic by beaches and on major roads. Create better walking paths.
- Conserve natural resources and undeveloped open space.
- Consider a building code/stricter building requirements along Route 1.
- There are mixed opinions regarding lot size and clustering houses. Some want to see minimum lot sizes increased to create more spaced out houses, some want to see density increased with protected open space around development.
- Design biking and walking infrastructure on new roads and connect to other areas of community.
- Consider a moratorium, annual building permit limit, or growth ordinance to manage growth if necessary.
- Look at other towns that have successfully managed and slowed growth for guidance.

How might the realities of sea-level rise change the land use pattern and infrastructure investment in Wells?

- Significant impacts to the development pattern on the coastline, such as less beach areas and more flooding, will require action including raising roads, etc. Coastal property owners will be impacted. Retreat from the coastline/inland migration will become a new reality.

Where should Wells focus its future economic development efforts? What types of businesses and job opportunities would be most appropriate in these locations?

- Fill empty storefronts and vacant, rundown buildings.
- Create opportunities for family based tourism and eco-tourism.
- Create more year round economic opportunities.
- Some think future commercial development should be steered away from Route 1, others say it should be directed to Route 1 but be significantly improved.
- Focus economic development near the Transportation Center and along Route 109
- Local businesses, limit commercial chains
- Renewable energy developments
- Light industrial uses
- Walkable town center
- Small business incubator or co working space

Where should future housing units be located? And what types of units should they be?

- West of 109, 9, and 95; further away from Route 1, near the center of town
- Types of housing units respondents said were needed varied quite a bit, and included example answers like:
 - All types of housing units, except seasonal
 - No new housing units are needed
 - Year round affordable living for seniors and first time home buyers should be prioritized
 - Single family homes on 2-3 acre lots
 - Cluster housing
 - Town houses or apartments

Youth Activity

In an effort to engage the younger populations in town about the future of Wells, feedback was obtained from Wells' youth by asking the question "I wish Wells had...". A summary of responses to this question are shown below:

- Teen Center
- Swimming pool
- Skate Park
- Ice Skating Rink
- Dog Park
- Japanese and Vietnamese restaurants
- More trash receptacles
- Downtown with shops
- An art club
- In town paint/craft nights

Focus Group Sessions

January and February 2022

As part of the outreach phase of the 2022 Comprehensive Plan update project, a series of focus groups were held in January and February of 2022 on a number of topics. These included:

- Coastal Issues and Natural Hazards
- Open Space and Conservation
- Economic Development
- Housing

The purpose of these focus groups was to solicit deeper feedback on potential solutions for the community issues that the Town is looking to plan for in its future. A mix of residents, business owners, and local officials were identified and invited to participate by Town staff and the Comprehensive Plan Update Committee based on their background, expertise, and role in the community. The following pages represent key findings from the focus group sessions and reflect the major points shared by the participants during the meetings. The focus group sessions were held on zoom and were 1-1.5 hours in length.

Coastal Issues and Natural Hazards Focus Group

The following are major takeaways from the coastal impacts and natural hazards focus group session.

Challenges

- Larger storm/precipitation events have impacts that are seen locally (for example, flooding). Homeowners at Moody Beach are raising their houses, but some are afraid this is a short term solution.
- There are real financial implications for the Town related to climate change and property taxes on the coast. If coastal properties are lost Wells will also lose tax income. A large amount of Wells' tax revenue is provided by waterfront homes.
- There was an expressed desire to develop a local climate action plan to identify and address issues such as:
 - Ocean acidification and its impact on fisheries and tourism
 - Ground water changes
 - Sea-level rise
 - Heavy precipitation, flooding, and groundwater inundation
 - Energy, emissions, and renewables
 - The need to adapt and mitigate
- It was noted that climate change should be integrated change throughout the Comprehensive Plan, and municipal staff and boards should be charged/directed to address this issue. However, there was some questioning as to the level of receptiveness the Town has for integrating climate change and sea level rise in planning / policy at the town level.
- To increase awareness of flood hazard and sea-level rise impacts in Wells, focus group attendees noted the importance of engaging the whole community, beyond the coastal areas of the Town, in public education to promote stewardship of the barrier islands and the beaches.
- The Maine Climate Council has identified goals for climate change planning. It was articulated that the Town should consider reviewing and adopting these.

- The Southern Maine Climate Ready Coastal Project has a vulnerability assessment that should be a useful tool for the Town to help them make planning related decisions. A Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) study identified two thousand parcels that will be impacted by sea level rise. It was also noted that SMPDC also has a sustainability coordination that is shared between six communities, which adds capacity to planning for coastal hazard issues.
- There is some apprehension that community members are not ready to proactively take on the changes required to aggressively respond to climate change impacts (especially to take on more radical changes like coastal retreat). However, there are real costs related to town infrastructure that must be considered. The Town needs to gear up for these tough conversations related to funding and infrastructure planning. Some questions the group posed included: What will the town do if they encounter resistance to climate change planning efforts? How can the town prepare for this? What do these costs look like?
- It was noted that increasing the resilience of Wells' natural resources is an important climate change adaptation strategy. The Town should play a role in helping facilitate marsh and beach migration and should conserve open space adjacent to flood prone areas and adjacent to marsh areas. Consider buy outs and conversions when possible or needed.
- Look into examples of coastal communities that use a land bank. Nantucket, MA is one such example. Their Land Bank's revenue is derived from a two percent fee which is levied against most real estate transfers on the island. This funding is used to acquire and manage land for open space and recreational uses.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service own a significant amount of land in town. Encouraging cooperation and coordination with this agency would be a good action item for the Comprehensive Plan.
- The Town should coordinate their coastal planning with the Refuge and other agencies and organizations completing this work within Wells boundaries.

Different Sectors

- The immediate impacts of sea level rise are confined to the coastal areas, but access to coastal resources is something that impacts everyone in town. The loss of beaches, natural areas, and infrastructure that provides access (roads) are real impacts that will affect a broad spectrum of the community (including those whose livelihood depends on that access, such as the tourism industry).
- Public works, emergency responders, and public safety services will be stressed due to coastal flooding.
- Engaging homeowners to reduce carbon emissions will be needed to address climate change at the residential scale, but will impact lower income households differently. Low income homeowners need to be considered in terms of who gets the financial burden of these potential solutions and programs to climate issues.

Strategies and Town Role

- Update zoning and land use regulations with a view of 50 years out that are dynamic and flexible so they can be changed over time to address flood resilience. Use the Tides, Taxes, and New Tactics study of anticipated flooding/sea level rise impacts to inform action.
- Some coastal residents are only here for a couple of weeks and do not see the storms and impact being experienced already.
- The Town is not currently communicating the risk of storms to homeowners.
- Lack of a Sustainability Coordinator may be the reason for the lack of additional communication and coordination. Existing town staff are already too busy.
- Land use regulations the Town should consider including are: requiring homeowners to move utilities to higher ground to minimize flooding impacts, incorporating techniques that reduce nutrient loading in waterways and managing stormwater pollution on site to keep marsh ecosystems healthy, setting a maximum amount of impervious surfaces, and increasing setbacks from water resources.

- There is so much existing residential development already in the coastal areas. For these properties, how does the Town motivate a homeowner to voluntarily do these types of things?

Financial Impacts

- Grants, and state/federal funds may favor towns with a climate action plan (i.e. infrastructure bill). The Town needs to show it has “shovel ready” projects as it applies for the funds. Without planning and action now, the town will be forced to address these issues later and that will be more costly.
- Make sure realtors are communicating flood risk to buyers. Enact a local regulation to require that its included on the listing (may need attention at the state level). Such a requirement like this exists on Cape Cod.
- Consider requiring buildings in flood zones to have a maintenance plan that addresses flooding, and related health and safety hazards.
- If Wells works to migrate homes away from the coast will it be based on the % of damage or another metric? Are there examples of this elsewhere in Maine?
- Infrastructure maintenance and replacement should be informed by engineering and feasibility studies that consider all of these issues and guide decision making.
- Work on mutually beneficial sustainability and climate change actions (i.e. financially and environmentally beneficial). Emphasize creative thinking and problem solving.

Other tools/strategies

- Encourage homeowners to raise and adapt structures on the coast.
- Decide on future municipal infrastructure investments – when will access to coastal property no longer be feasible?
- Incorporate the recommendations from Tides, taxes, and new tactics study.
- Discourage movement to the coast by restricting the rebuilding of homes if property damages reach a certain value.
- Local education and outreach is needed. This could include:
 - Need a newsletter or weekly update vehicle sharing the impacts being experienced now. (ex: Durham, NH)
 - Use online story maps to visually show how sea level rise will impact Wells.
 - Send out communications with the tax bills.
 - Engage school children and their families.
 - Mount Desert Island – Climate to Thrive initiative is a good model
 - Biddeford Climate Task Force - has an active Facebook page that is a good example
 - Need additional staff and a committee to help with all of this:
 - Outreach and engagement
 - Resilience/Sustainability
 - Consider ways to connect with homeowners on the coast who are seasonal residents.

Open Space and Conservation

The following are major takeaways from the open space and conservation focus group session.

- Wells is unique among other Maine communities in that it utilizes a land bank to set aside funds for land protection. This mechanism should be highlighted in the critical natural resources inventory in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Wells is also unique in that it has a number of partners and organizations in and near Wells dedicated to conservation including the Conservation Commission, Great Works Land Trust, National Wildlife Refuge, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Estuarine Reserve. KKW is also a land protection partner. These partnerships should be maintained and accelerated.
- Focus group attendees thought that future conservation in Wells should prioritize waterways and watersheds (i.e. a “landscape” approach to conservation that includes connecting large undeveloped parcels with green ecological corridors). This has been the conceptual framework used to guide land conservation in Town. Continue to also prioritize parcels that have unique habitat or species of importance in future efforts as well. In order to do this the land bank should be highlighted and retained.
- “We can’t protect everything” - Merriland River, Branch Brook, and Ogunquit River have been and continue to be conservation priorities. The focus group recommended that the Town focus on building off the conserved land that already exists and creating continuity in open space.
- Conservation work has also been emphasizing passive, outdoor recreation in recent years as well. However, lands should still be pursued for pure ecological value as well.
- Focus group attendees noted that they would like to see an open space with passive recreation opportunities within every neighborhood in Wells that is only a bike ride away.
- Branch Brook Watershed Coalition is a multi-town effort and an entity made up of representatives of various conservation groups working to protect land on either side of the Branch Brook; significant land that protects groundwater supply. KK&W is also a conservation partner and member of the coalition.
- While 17% of the land is conserved in Wells, only 13.5% is left once the marsh is removed from this calculation. Clarifying this would help to compare Wells to other coastal communities as they are facing similar market forces.
- Consider an aquifer protection ordinance for Branch Brook in Wells (but keep in mind, Wells has historically been resistant to regulation in general). Use Kennebunk ordinance as an example.
- Investigate the purchase of easements along rivers rather than rely on setback/buffering requirements. This purchase of conservation easements can be based on the USDA’s Wetlands Reserve Program. These surface water buffers will be needed more than ever as climate change impacts are experienced.
- Bridges and other infrastructure in coastal areas will also need to be addressed over time. As this happens these facilities should be constructed to new standards that address changes in climate.

- Focus group attendees were very happy to see the climate change related content incorporated in this comprehensive plan update.
- Building on large lots does not bode well for future conservation work. Increasing density could help balance natural resource protection and development needs. Changes coming down from the legislature may also impact the development pattern and density of housing in the future.
- Prioritize conservation easements in watersheds, to include undeveloped parcels and wet areas, river corridors, and parcels that serve as stepping stones for large animals between large undeveloped blocks.
- Historically, the voters in Wells support funding land acquisition and conservation.
- Land protection in the future will require a mix of regulatory and non-regulatory mechanisms and should recognize that natural systems cross municipal boundaries.
- There is a perception that the cluster ordinance has loopholes, or density bonuses are too easy to acquire. Remove wetlands and unbuildable land from calculations in cluster ordinance.
- Improve advertising of open space in Wells (farmland, etc.) and recognize those landowners who have donated or protected land. Also recognize the fundraising and grants that have matched municipal dollars to conserve land.
- As additional sources of conservation funding are becoming available we must recognize there is a lack of project managers who can talk to landowners, do outreach, find these grants, etc. for conservation easement projects. This is one of the biggest challenges to land acquisition in the area. Need additional staff support to complete this outreach.

Economic Development

The following are major takeaways from the economic development focus group session.

Commercial Areas

- Wells Beach/Mile Road/Wells Harbor are very special parts of town that need to be preserved. One participant noted that there is very little opportunity to add commercial development to these areas and that the Town should focus on offering additional opportunities for fishing, tour boats, and town events to enhance the town.
- The Route 1 corridor has not been well controlled with a coordinated vision. Consider incentives to move businesses to the edge of the street and to move parking to the back, such as higher density, less parking requirements, etc. Scarborough and Freeport are example communities that have done this well. Connecting parking lots would help with traffic congestion and make the area more walkable. Consider sign ordinances to control image of town (i.e. not allowing neon signs).
- Some skepticism as to whether a conference center/hotel (which has been suggested several times) would have sufficient demand to make it a viable business.
- Some noted that the traffic on Route 1 is uncoordinated, but that this has not impacted or hindered growth, visitation, or summer population increases to Wells. Too much emphasis in general on dealing with the traffic issue.
- Route 1 development should better preserve the New England aesthetic. New development should have more stringent architectural standards (ex: 109 to Kennebunk - new rules have been imposed that require architectural integrity). The Planning Board did initiate an effort to create architectural standards a few years back.
- Discussions on where a town center should be have been ongoing for years. There is a desire to see an area of town where residents and visitors can park, walk around, and shop (i.e. downtown/village center). Sprawl deters this pattern of use. Is Wells content with being a sprawling summer place?
- If there were to be denser, walkable development in a certain area of town:
 - Consider regulations that allow for mixed use buildings higher than one story to accommodate multiple uses.
 - Example area: intersection of Route 1/109 - by school, urgent care, and bank
 - Creating a village could be part of the Town's strategies for guiding growth.
- There are not enough places to hangout in Wells as adolescents and young adults.
- Are there plans underway for wayfinding, signage, and other improvements to create a more welcoming atmosphere on Wells commercial corridors?

Local Businesses

- Lack of people and staff. J1/H2B visas and a lack of workers were able to come to Maine (COVID).
- Severe shortage of housing is impacting businesses and their ability to hire and retain employees. Affordable housing is needed for local employees. Many businesses need to purchase housing to house their staff.
- To retain/recruit businesses:
 - Some focus group participants did not have much concern about loss of businesses or efforts to attract businesses in general. Others thought the Town should actively recruit businesses, but that they should compliment Wells' existing successful businesses.
 - Invest in appearance and amenities
 - Landscaping and flower beds - paid for by business tax

- Create places for people to gather
- The beach is the biggest economic driver in town.
- Improve and staff Harbor Park. Increase activities to draw people in.
- Route 109 - recruit businesses like medical/lab facilities to bring in higher paying jobs
- Route 9 - recruit industrial type businesses

Town Role

- Wells has been making improvements to its public infrastructure and should continue to do this in the future. Consider adding and improving sidewalks and bike lanes. Add bump outs and benches to sidewalks. Several years ago, a raised walkway from the harbor to Mile Road was being explored, which would allow more biking and walking. Long term, the town should consider putting electrical wires underground.
- Some focus group attendees thought that there did not need to be as much focus on economic development in town right now. They feel that growth and development is already happening and that it does not necessarily need to be encouraged further.
- Really tough for families and workers in town to compete in the housing market. Rent is also high in town.
- The Town has done well with regularly purchasing conservation land but should continue to do more. There is some push back on these purchases, but in general, they are supported. There is a desire to connect conservation land to the Eastern Trail.
- Consider a 1 acre minimum lot for housing to retain a more rural appearance, and allow cluster development in business district areas.
- Potential open space to develop
 - Hannaford and Route 1 gap? (not north of 109)
 - What could happen there?
 - Zoning possibilities? Infill development? Higher density standards?
- Clustering of businesses
 - Would be desirable east of 95 and south of the 109/1 intersection
 - Decrease setbacks and increase density. Coordinate with the protection of sensitive natural resources.

Housing

The following are major takeaways from the housing focus group session.

- There is a need for a clear definition for what affordable housing means to Wells and what definition the town is using. In general, participants emphasized that affordability in housing is a major issue in Wells and that workforce housing development is challenging for developers to keep units at an affordable price without regulatory incentives. Affordable units are not monitored and over time are no longer affordable.
- The Town should consider creating a bylaw with incentives for workforce housing units. These incentives would result in reduced costs for the builder. Without this regulation, the Town may not get additional workforce housing development.
- The cluster ordinance is a good strategy for workforce housing development. It preserves open space and creates smaller lots to reduce infrastructure costs. Departing from cluster, which the new amendments to this ordinance would result in, would cause house prices to increase and affordable housing development to be less feasible for developers. The Planning Board is currently changing the conservation subdivision ordinance to expand the required lot size. The conservation subdivision ordinance was a well oiled machine - these changes would have negative costs associated with them. The proposed cluster changes that are being considered at the local level will increase cost per unit (30-40k per house). It was noted that most customers want a small lot in a subdivision.
- There are currently few restrictions on development in Wells.
- Wells does not take over roads, meaning homeowners maintain private roads and handle all maintenance costs. There is a desire for the Town to take over more of the private roads in town.
- Fire ponds and suppression are also being left to the Homeowners Associations. There are currently no regulations to inform and guide these improvements. The Town should consider taking over fire infrastructure responsibilities to have more control over their design and maintenance.
- More affordable multi-family housing units are needed. A potential location for multi-family housing units is along Route 1 and east of the highway.
- Limit road infrastructure and locate new housing development on water sewer when possible.
- West of highway - need regulations that minimize road and septic infrastructure. Allow multi family housing units if affordable.
- There is a concern that allowing accessory dwelling units by right (state proposal) could lead to more short term rentals.
- Design subdivisions off of town roads with vegetative buffer requirement (similar to Biddeford; 50 foot requirement). Any units on existing roads have to fit with the existing development pattern. This will

soften the visual impact to residents, decrease infrastructure costs for new homes, and increase open space protection.

- Knowledge is critical to keep using the cluster provision. Conduct public education to educate residents on the cluster ordinance.
- Cluster and support high density growth areas along Route 1.
- Pull together department heads, boards, developers, and homeowners associations. Review practices, realities, and changes needed related to the cluster ordinance.