

PART I.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC INPUT FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

Between March 6, 2023 and April 24, 2023, the Town held six Neighborhood Meetings. A total of 106 residents attended, and nearly every Board and Commission was represented at one or more of the meetings. Meetings were hosted by Emily Lewis (EDC), Bing Bartick (former EDC), Bill Ricker (CC), Dave McCord (BOE), Nicole Porter (BOS) and Bob Carlson (1st Selectman) and attended by Planning Consultant, Juliet Hodge.

Pendleton Hill & Boombridge Neighborhood	1st Baptist Church, 793 Pendleton Hill Rd.	Pendleton Hill, Tom Wheeler, Denison Hill, Putker, Clarks Falls, Pinewoods, Boombridge, Loin Hill, , Stillman, Cranberry Bog, Anthony, and Ella Wheeler Roads; Princess In., and Providence NL Tpke. (Rte. 184) from Rte 49y to RI border
Wyassup Road Neighborhood	North Stonington Grange, 21 Wyassup Road	Wyassup Rd., Chester Main, Hangman Hill, Grindstone Hill, Ryder, Yawbux Valley, Reutemann, Fowler, Sleepy Hollow, Bergius Lane, Babcock, and
Three Lakes Neighborhood	Camp Wightman, 207 Coal Pit Hill Rd	Billings Lake , Blue Lake and Wyassup Lake Areas -Billings Lake Roads: Ledgeswood, Cedars, Mountain Ave, Billings; Blue Lake Roads: Patricia, Lakeside, Nina, Hugo, Polly, Alvina, Loretta, Cathy, Cheryl (Blue and Billings Lakes, also, see “3 Lakes”);
Cossaduck Hill/ NW Corner Rd. Neighborhood	Maple Lane Farms, 57 Northwest Corner Rd.	Cossaduck Hill, Milltown, Swantown Hill, Button, Northwest Corner, Hollowell Rd. Anna Farm East & West, Miller, Lake of Isles; Rte 2 from Ledyard line to Rte. 201
Mystic Road/Kingswood & Meadow Wood & Cedar Ridge Neighborhood	North Stonington Recreation Center, 32 Rocky Hollow Rd	Mystic Road (Rte 201 to Rte. 2 to Stonington Border), Norwich-Providence (Rte. 184 from Stonington border to Rte. 49), Holly Lane, Mill Village; <u>Kingswood Meadow Wood Community</u> : Wintechog Hill, Mains Crossing, Wrights Road (incl. Reservation), Lantern Hill along Long Pond, Hyde Mill Ptwy, Jeremy Hill, North Anguilla, Farm Ponds, <u>Cedar Ridge Community</u> : Rocky Hollow, Stony Brook Rd., Miner Ptwy, and Surrey Lane
The Village Neighborhood	Media Center, 298 Norwich Westerly Rd.	All of The Historic District, Main Street, Hewitt Rd., Avery Lane, Wyassup Rd. near village, and Old Trolley Rd.; and Rte. 2 near Village.

[The following are the individual summaries of comments for each meeting.](#)

SUMMARY OF NEIGHBORHOOD MEETINGS

I. PENDLETON HILL/BOOMBRIDGE RD. NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

The first Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 6, 2023 in the First Baptist Church on Pendleton Hill Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 9 people in attendance. Emily Lewis facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge attended as well. Two members of the Planning and Zoning Commission and one member of the Economic Development Commission were among the attendees.

What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?

- Feel like I live in Vermont!
- Quiet... no streetlights or traffic.
- Good services – particularly the road crews. Streets are plowed quickly- fallen trees removed quickly etc. The Transfer Station staff are great!
- Schools are good – Small, but offer plenty of opportunities to participate in activities such as sports (in other school facilities). Happy that Wheeler was adding Shop to the curriculum. Feel like the school administrators and teachers really have the well-being of North Stonington students in mind as evidenced by all the effort to provide programs, classes and activities that the students seek.
 - Opportunity for new uses in the space where the former school was demolished
- Everyone is open and welcoming in town. Elected officials are very accessible.
- Can easily go to nearby towns for goods and services and other activities and then get to come home and enjoy living in the country.

How can we protect what we love?

- Residents need to participate whenever they can – sign up to receive meeting notifications and agendas and attend the meetings that interest them. The Zoom option gives people more opportunity to participate or at least listen in to stay informed. The town has great volunteers that chair the meetings and allow people to actively participate. Town form of Government has potential that we don't take advantage of.
- Ed and Belinda Learned – who own a farm off East Clarks Falls Rd. feel preserving the secondary road classification for certain roads is important given the frequent use by farmers and the potential for accidents should there be more traffic.
(Group discussed traffic concerns on back roads and along Rte 184 – both used by farmers. Concerned about the traffic impact from the proposed Great Wolf Lodge at the Casino as signs on the highway direct southbound traffic from RI to Exit 93 for travelers going to the Casino.)
- Farmland can be protected through the sale of development rights to the State so that the farms will always remain farms. Mentioned Ann Renehan – former resident in Clarks falls – she was a

pioneer in getting people to sell their development rights and a great example of how an individual can accomplish something so important.

- There are younger farmers now - more diverse type of farms and farming. There are also more farmstands as well throughout town.
- Farmers market is an excellent addition to the town and has brought attention to the Hewitt farm property. Many did not know it was there and/or open to the public.
- Need to get young people more involved. Discussed the possibility of a Government Studies class at the school that requires students to attend some of the municipal meetings as an assignment. When asked why more people don't participate....
 - Most agreed that most young people are not interested in attending meetings- this interest does not develop until they are older and have "skin in the game" so-to-speak (i.e. kids in school – own a home and pay taxes etc.) In general, people whether young or older, are busy and cannot easily participate – or are involved in so many activities that they don't have the time or energy to attend a meeting in the evening.
 - Being on a Commission or attending meetings means you may have to take on responsibilities. This scares some people.
 - Bigger issues have been taken care of – like building the new EMS building and renovating the schools, demolishing the old school etc. Some smaller tasks remain like building an Animal Shelter or addressing some of the zoning issues concerning the lake properties, so maybe the lack of participation is a sign that people are simply happy with what is going on in town and don't have any concerns to air at a meeting.
- Protecting water resources is important. What can be done?
 - Consider developing a town water system.
 - Wild and Scenic River Designation discussed. This designation is special – North Stonington is fortunate to have 2 of its rivers included in this Wild and Scenic River System. The designation opens up opportunities for funding for initiatives to protect the rivers.
 - Consider creating a "no-build" zone adjacent to rivers, lakes and streams – or a 100ft no clear zone.
- Consider hosting joint meetings with Planning and Zoning, Conservation Commission and Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commissions to improve relations between the 3 commissions... Need to be on the same page.

Discussed the need for "affordable housing" and the availability of housing that is affordable. Suggestion made to offer a tax break to lower-income families/individuals who currently live in town so that they can afford to still own their homes and remain in town (rather than move to senior housing in another town).

- A lot of empty houses – but not for sale. People's second homes or investment properties? Contributes to the difficulty young people have in finding homes.
- Accessory Apartments are a great way for families to earn extra income while providing much needed rental housing in the community.

The Town's history is very much a part of what we need to protect. This includes our scenic roads, barns and abundant historic housing – all of which need greater recognition. **Small narrow roads** worth

protecting as they contribute to the rural feel of the town. *(Add to list of rural characteristics)*. Barn tour a great way to see some of the hidden gems in town.

- Happy that the Gristmill was bought and is being preserved, but now there is no longer any public access to fishing on Clarks falls pond by the Dam.

Threats:

- The availability of large tracts of undeveloped land increase the threat of 8-30g housing developments or large developments like amusement parks; and as farmers get older, the reality of some selling their land to developers for residential subdivisions becomes greater.
- Mashantucket Pequot tribal Nation trying to diversify their assets. They own large tracts of t=land in key commercial areas in town. There is a Bill currently under consideration that would give tax exemption on all properties owned by the Tribe regardless if they are located on the Reservation. The impact to the Town's Grand List would be significant if this occurred.

Closing thoughts:

Will likely feel the ripple effect of the Pandemic for years to come – not sure how it has fully impacted the town, but the last 10 years of growth has been small and incremental and very much in keeping with the “character” of town. Definitely need to highlight the successes and our assets in this new POCD.

II. WYASSUP RD. NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

The second Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 13, 2023 at the Grange on Wyassup Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 21 people in attendance. Bing Bartick facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge attended as well. Many of the residents that attended currently or formerly served on a Town board or Commission or Committee. (Conservation Commission, Planning and Zoning, Juvenile Review board, Hewitt farm Committee, Historical Society, Board of Finance, Affordable housing Committee and the Tax relief Committee. Keeping North Stonington Affordable was also represented.)

What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?

- The People – Sense of Community even though everyone is spread apart. Everyone knows each other and many are well versed in the history of town. Strong family lineages.
- Schools are great – students well supported by staff.
- Love the sound of the forest and close to the ocean. Great blend of ecology.
- Enjoy the “ruralness” and the convenient location between several other larger urban areas like Providence, Boston, Hartford, new haven and New York.
- Variety of wildlife; rural setting and the privacy it brings; stonewalls and abundant trails.
- Farms and open farmland.
- Character and topography make it feel like we are in Vermont.
- The quiet!

- Like having areas where they can fish and hunt.
- Neighbors don't bother each other – but are always willing to lend a hand if needed- supportive and engaged community.
- Lack of traffic.
- The great library and the fact that it draws people of all ages.

How can we protect what we love?

- All identify with the “character” of town and want to preserve it by keeping it clean, balancing economic development for the sake of broadening the tax base, with conservation of all the things that residents cherish.
- Need to know your neighbors and build relationships and networks of supportive friends.
- Need things to happen at the local level. Fair, NoSto Fest, Historical Society events and library events are all great ways to interact with people and get to know other residents in town. The more events, the more people will talk and get to know each other.
- Manage growth to protect “ruralness.” Need good planning and members of boards and commissions with some degree of expertise to protect rural setting.
- Make the town more affordable for young adults and seniors.

Moderator asked how we could facilitate the growth of affordable housing?

- When thinking about creating “qualified affordable housing” or even “housing that is naturally affordable” Still struggle with where to put it and whether we want it at all. Only 31 towns in CT have the required 10% qualified affordable housing. These are mostly the urban towns that have public utilities. North Stonington does have some qualified affordable homes and many homes that are considered “affordable” but that do not count toward the 10% requirement. North Stonington is vulnerable to predatory development which is not the way to diversify the housing and get to the 10% threshold.
- The desire is to create housing suitable for seniors, young adults just starting out and/or general renters etc. in more walkable areas with access to goods and services. There are a few issues with achieving this though:
 - North Stonington does not have the density to attract a grocery store or pharmacy or other similar stores. Also lack public transportation (think transit-oriented development)
 - The lack of public water and sewer infrastructure is a limiting factor. Limited areas for a package plant to support denser residential development. Limited options to tie into neighboring systems.
- Discussed the need to identify specific areas in town where affordable housing and/or multi-family housing would be acceptable and actually possible to build. Land must be available and inexpensive (or free) if it is to be a qualified affordable housing development. What town-owned land is available? Would like to have some control over the appearance of the housing.
- Some felt the best way to make something affordable is to increase the wealth in the community. Need to find ways for folks to earn enough or maintain wealth in order to be able to stay in town vs. focusing our attention on creating affordable housing. Discussed other programs such as rental

assistance or tax breaks (or capped tax rate for those on a fixed income) to help people afford their homes. Also thought we should figure out how much “housing that is affordable” we have before building any more. Another concern expressed was that there was no guarantee that local families would be the ones to move into affordable houses if they were built.

- Like many other towns North Stonington is ageing and needs the vitality that young people bring! Affordable housing for younger residents is therefore important – and it can easily blend in with existing housing.

What would make your neighborhood better? What is missing?

- Need regulations on the use of guns (target practice etc.) in residential areas. AR15’s are not being used for “hunting.”
- Speeding and littering were identified as issues that would benefit from more policing and signage, though there was not a lot of confidence in the effectiveness of no littering signs, nor a lot of support for speed humps. Ideas were suggested such as installing trash barrels along certain roads (though difficult to keep clean); hosting a trash pick-up day; install cameras to monitor speeding (but can’t write a ticket from a camera in CT); encourage walkers/cyclists to be more visible and aware of their surroundings – often walk on the wrong side with headphones in – or wear dark clothing.

What Plans do you envision for the Wyassup Rd. neighborhood?

- Some felt it was fine the way it was.
- Most of Wyassup has been developed, but if the economy improves, some of the larger tracts of land might be further subdivided.
- Concern expressed over the fact that the State land was not necessarily protected in perpetuity. There are no constraints on their selling the land.
- Ensure that the Zoning regulations make it as easy as possible for farmers to continue to farm.

What do you want to create or preserve?

- Farms and all the other assets and attributes mentioned so far. Preserve agriculture and find like-minded people to move to town. To be a good neighbor you need good people.
- Need to control development if you want to keep the existing character. ½ acre lot subdivisions could work in the right setting as long as it is designed to be a cohesive neighborhood. Some concerns over adequate water and sewer to do this though. Consider open space or cluster developments. Also need to keep treed buffers along streets and neighborhoods to preserve the rural character.
- Keep the land fill (transfer station) open. Stop people from dumping garbage in the woods.
- Promote the value of preserving the historic architecture/heritage – especially the pre-colonial history. Could capitalize on that and draw people in.
- Preserve the aquifer. Get the state to recognize that 8-30g development (i.e. greater density) may not be appropriate everywhere – especially in environmentally sensitive areas. Concern expressed

about an alleged state plan to use north Stonington water in an emergency. Maybe North Stonington should develop their own water company or water authority to safeguard the aquifer from state confiscation and/or to limit how much is used.

- Consider developing a park like Wilcox Park in Westerly – possibly on the school property?
- Some of the vacant town-owned land should be put back on the tax rolls by being developed into something that serves the residents.
- Get entrepreneurs and farmers together to produce a unique local product like “north Stonington cheese” that would get us recognized.
- Find seed money for farmers to be able to grow specific food to be used in the school cafeteria.
- Find ways to increase the cohesiveness between local businesses to make each more prosperous. Maybe resurrect the Business Directory and highlight all the available locally sourced goods and local services.
- Improve road safety and walkability.
- Standardize signage for house numbers (i.e. blue signs from fire department).

III. THREE LAKES NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

The third Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 20, 2023 at Camp Wightman off Coal Pit Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 23 people in attendance, including 2 members of the PZC who attended other neighborhood meetings. Bill Ricker facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge and the Director and Assistant Director of the Camp attended as well.

What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?

- Dark night skies
- Being at the end of a dead-end street near the forest
- The quiet
- The lake; tree canopy and all the wildlife
- Stone walls and abundant trails
- Good neighbors and being in a town where there are multiple generations of families – where everyone knows each other.

How can we protect what we love?

- Climate Change and COVID are just some of the things that have pointed to the need for towns to be more sustainable – self-sufficient and better stewards of the environment.
- Conservation of the lakes is very important. Need to preserve the vegetated buffer near the shoreline. Suggested a non-infringement area or no-build buffer area – but need to look at the science before determining what that buffer should be.
- Preserving the water quality is a priority. There was a lot of discussion about the mill foil issue and the need to continue to secure funding to treat – but also about wanting to skip a year of treatment every once and a while. Is there a better way to handle the issue? Funding could come

from grants as well as the budget. The 3 lake Association Presidents should get together to discuss this and other issues.

- People need to VOTE!!! Always the same few people that attend town meetings.

What would make your neighborhood a better place to live?

- Reducing the use of outdoor lights at night- requiring dimmer, full cut-off lights.
- There was discussion about the proposal to allow certain seasonal residents to become year-round residents. There were some in favor provided the water and septic met health code and the property was accessible for emergency vehicles. Others felt that this would not be a good idea due to the potential impact to the lake from the increase in year-round residents.
- There have been issues at the boat launch and other spots along the lakes – especially during COVID- including trespassing, fighting, drinking and theft. These are all particular safety concerns for Camp Wightman given the presence of children. It was noted that some of the trespassers live in the neighborhood – they are not all outsiders. There was consensus that more policing was necessary and that DEEP had some responsibility too.
- There are many groups that also use the lake like Parks and Rec, Boy Scouts and the Lions Club.
- **What Plans do you envision for the neighborhood?**
- There is limited lakefront property, but there seem to be new houses being built and new people moving in. Discussion continued about the possible conversion of seasonal properties to year-round use. Some properties are well suited for this – others are not. Finding an area sufficient for a new septic system without having to clearcut the lot is difficult. Technology needs to advance in this respect (or catch up with RI). Some felt that the lakes were a fragile ecosystem, and the reason the seasonal use restrictions were put into place was to protect this ecosystem from over development. Increased development means greater impervious surface, less tree cover, more pesticides and fertilizer use, more septic system effluent seeping into the ground etc.
- There is no enforcement in the area for speeding boats, lights, noise, pesticide application etc. It is up to the residents to get others to comply. If there is no enforcement available to stop the ongoing issues, then maybe we must limit the density. Need to think about the lakes as something to protect, not just a play thing or something to exploit. All we do has an impact- need to abide by the “leave no trace” motto.
- Need longer-lasting weed control.
- Want all roads to be treated equally. Currently some of the private roads are maintained by the town and others are not.
- The lake neighborhood used to be more vibrant. There are a lot of properties in disrepair and people do not want to invest in the old cottages – especially if they can only be used seasonally. Need to approach the year-round use issue more creatively and come up with smart limitations.

What things do you want to create for the town in general?

- Preserve farms and open space by providing incentives to preserve both and by promoting the sale of development rights to the State. Ensure employees have housing and that farms remain affordable for new farmers to farm. Consider using town-owned land to create new smaller or

“boutique” farms with or without associated housing....but do need to create more affordable houses or promote building smaller houses.

- Create more places like Hewitt farm for the public to enjoy and gather.
- Create more elderly and/or ADA accessible trails.
- Continue to fund the schools.
- Lobby the state and local government to enact ordinances to better protect natural resources.
- Consider a Short-term Rental ordinance.

IV. COSSADUCK HILL/NW CORNER ROAD NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

The fourth Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, March 27, 2023 at the Barn at Maple Lane Farms on Northwest Corner Rd. at 6:30pm. There were 30 people in attendance, including the three Selectmen and 2 members of the PZC who have attended several other neighborhood meetings and members of the Board of Ed and Finance Commission. Dave McCord facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge and Allyn Brown (owner of Maple Lane Farms) attended as well.

What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?

- Rural Character – lots of open space. Lots of protected open space as well.
- Caring neighbors. Despite low residential density, it is a close-knit community.
- Natural beauty/abundant natural resources
- Accessible local government
- Great schools
- Location along I-95 Corridor which provides opportunity for development/revenue generation.
- Despite the development over the past 50 years, it still “feels good” – town feels like the right size.
- Wild and Scenic River status
- Scenic areas and farms
- Have beauty and rural character but access to all necessities within a 20 minutes’ drive.
- Like the new businesses like the brewery and the wineries. They bring visitors and revenue without impacting the rural character.

How can we protect what we love?

- Need to continue to encourage farmers and farming even if it means dealing with the occasional nuisance that sometimes accompanies living near a farm.
- Need to find an appropriate location for affordable housing so that we can house the local workforce.
- In order to maintain or protect the existing character of town, could create an architectural review process and pass regulations to increase setback requirements and control other elements such

as height and scale. Consider design guidelines. (J. Hodge explained the statutory limitations on what could be regulated and how).

- There was a lot of discussion about recent logging operations and the activity on the MPTN property on Swantown Rd. and the potential impact it will have on the neighborhood – i.e traffic. The proposed use of their property is not known. Residents want the dirt roads to remain unpaved. Do not want Swantown Rd. to become a paved through road to NW Corner Rd.
- Discussed the potential impact to the grand list of the MPTN were successful in their attempt to be given tax-exempt status on non-reservation property they own in town.

What would make your road or neighborhood a better place to live and work? Is there something that could be eliminated or reworked?

- Keep it the way it is!
- Address the issue of trees growing in front of the stone walls that line many roads - visibility and safety issue.
- Stripe the roads that are unstriped. B. Carlson stated that this is being done in the fall hopefully with LOTCIP funding.
- Reduce the speed limit on Button Rd. to 25 to control the speeding. Residents generally agreed that it is typically the local residents who speed in their own neighborhoods!
- The roads are all very dark – hard to see at night. Very dangerous for walkers and joggers in particular. Would be good to develop more bike and pedestrian paths to connect various areas of town and get people off the roads. Discussion about developing a pathway along the Old Trolley route and more trails like the Tri-town trail.
- Trash on the side of the road is an issue. Would like to find ways to reduce this such as having clean-up days or providing residents with trash cans that have lids that stay closed so that trash does not fly out of the truck on the way to the transfer station.

What plans can you see this neighborhood making for its future? What do you envision?

- Would like to see more little shops like the old mom and pop shops and farm stands.
- Pharmacy and Supermarket would be great along Rte. 2 closer to the Cossaduck hill and NW Corner Rd. neighborhood.
- Infrastructure needed to have any significant development along rte. 2. Plan where you want pockets of development or greater density and focus infrastructure development in those areas only. Infrastructure in targeted areas would be ok. Discussed limitations of development or locating infrastructure in the commercial and industrial zones due to the underlying aquifer.

What things do you want to create or preserve for the town as a whole?

- Develop infrastructure to facilitate revenue generating development.
- Develop a trail to connect both ends of town. Discussed keeping sight lines clear along roads and opening up some of the narrow roads a bit.

- Develop more rural-style businesses to attract more tourists (but not too many) like trillium's farm brewery. Attract businesses that feel like they belong in town.
- Keep the farms as farms help protect them from being subdivided.
- Hewitt Farm is a great asset to town and getting a lot of use. Farmers Market was also a great addition. The library is also a great asset – great staff and great programming for all ages.
- Discussion about the possibilities for developing other public spaces for community gatherings and recreation. The schools need more gym space and playing fields. Suggested a town-wide meeting to decide what to do with the space created by the demolition of the old school. Some suggestions included gardens and walking paths.
- Preserve and protect the schools. They are unique and add great value to the town.
- Discussed the need for a plan to handle bulky waste- need to come up with a better way to manage the waste stream in general – get away from the land fill approach.

V. MYSTIC ROAD/KINGSWOOD MEADOW WOOD/CEDAR RIDGE NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

The fifth Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, April 3, 2023, at the Recreation Center on Norwich Westerly Road at 6:30pm. There were 9 people in attendance, including two Selectmen and the Chairman of PZC who have attended several other neighborhood meetings. Nicole Porter facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge attended as well.

What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?

- Great schools and neighborhoods and playground for kids.
- Private school feel in a public school system.
- Peace and tranquility but close to I-95 and other bigger towns and shopping areas.
- Lack of traffic.
- Cows, farms, woods which all contribute to the cherished "rural character" everyone loves.
- Love living in a neighborhood with a mix of young and old residents and in a town with a lot of history and hardworking people. Caring neighbors. Despite low residential density, it is a close-knit community.
- Like that there is not a lot of traffic in Kingswood/meadow Wood so the kids can play safely.
- Steady neighbors (not a lot of turnover) who keep to themselves – but willing to help when needed.

How can we protect what we love?

- Rural character attracts people who respect boundaries, are hardworking and who respect one another. Need to protect the rural character in order to keep attracting these kind of people.
- Need to develop

- Encourage “smart development” not just “any development.” Need to get all the details and facts before approving proposed developments. Figure out what would be a good fit for the town and identify parcels to market in an effort to attract that particular development. One obstacle identified was the fact that the property owner’s vision for his/her property may differ that that of the town. Property rights remain strong and you cannot just tell someone how to develop their property. Some suggested offering an incentive to a developer who was willing to build something in line with the Town’s vision.
- Encourage “decent” cluster (residential) development – “not ugly” development.
- Identify areas suitable for commercial development or for the development of affordable housing.
- More enforcement of things like speeding and drunk driving. Attendees were divided on whether the speed humps were a good thing or not. Some thought they should only be used in areas with known speeding problems rather than using them everywhere.... But as there are so few troopers, that data would be hard to come by. Others suggested more “Drive like your kids live here” type of signage.

What would make your road or neighborhood a better place to live and work? Is there something that could be eliminated or reworked?

- Increase safety on the roads: allow mirrors to help with visibility, install better guard rails (not the metal ones) and consider turning lanes in some areas (i.e. North Anguilla).
- Town should be more involved in the upkeep and landscaping of the median area in Kingswood/Meadow Wood. They should give the same attention to other neighborhoods in town, not just the Village.
- Keep Zoning Districts where they are to keep residential and commercial separate. Don’t allow commercial areas to “sprawl further.”
- There was a lot of discussion on what type of development would be “reasonable” or appropriate for town. Suggestions included: an affordable mom and pop store; grocery store or pharmacy; Agrotourism; more home occupations; campgrounds and/or RV parks; mini-golf with Ice cream stand and other similar family-friendly development; a large indoor sports facility; and a YMCA or similar type facility but not just geared towards young kids.
- Great Wolf Lodge will attract more families so there may be an opportunity to develop athletic fields or other sports facilities for tournaments etc. Foxwoods is considered a double-edged sword. Lots of people come through, but most do not stop in town.
- Young adults need to have a place to go after school. Terra Firma was described as the perfect business for town.
- “Need to develop our own vernacular.”
- It was noted though that development is difficult in areas that do not have public water and sewer. This is a hot topic in town – folks pretty divided. Suggestion to adopt a zoning code for economic development area that allows mixed-use (JH noted that this already exists)
- There are opportunities to enhance certain areas such as Holly Green and areas along the Rte. 2 corridor. There is an opportunity to do something in the area where the school once was.

- The group discussed the Hewitt farm property, and all felt it was an asset to town, though some felt the Gallup House should be used for something like an Artist Cooperative or gallery rather than a residence. Should be a public space or living museum. Most agreed that having a tenant who pays rent is better than having no income come in. Suggested that the tenant could offer interpretive services or actually farm the property (recreate historic farm use for visitors to come see and interact with.) This type of thing could work elsewhere in town too.
- Discussed the Grange and disappointment that it is not used more – i.e. for hometown dinners or community events. It was noted that the Grange needs more (younger) board members.
- There was discussion about balance and areas where we might have to compromise to keep everyone happy. There are always those who feel things should stay the way they are, and that North Stonington should not strive to be a tourist destination. The farmers do not want to see more traffic on the roads. Instead, the townspeople should support the existing businesses and encourage development that makes sense for the residents. Others feel there are real opportunities for appropriate development and that attracting more people can be a good thing – adds vibrancy and potential tax revenue.
- Discussed improving the connectivity between certain areas – to make areas in town more “walkable.” There are few pedestrian pathways that safely connect areas – like Kingswood/Meadow Wood and the school. Discussed the concept of complete streets and the plan (at one point) to develop a multi-use path along Route 2 to increase walkability and bring more foot traffic into commercial areas. Need to create the missing “connective tissue” between the Village and surrounding residential neighborhoods. Rte.2 effectively divides the town.
- Need recreational areas for all ages to enjoy. Suggested a pickleball court. Suggested that many of the programs offered for kids in the recreational center could be moved to the schools.
- One resident noted that the town has taken on more facilities (overhead and maintenance) which impacts taxpayers.
- Attendees expressed a desire for more Community Conversations.

VI. THE VILLAGE NEIGHBORHOOD MEETING

The final Neighborhood meeting was held on Monday, April 24, 2023 at the Media Center at 6:30pm. There were 21 people in attendance, not including the three Selectmen and 2 members of the PZC who have attended several other neighborhood meetings. Bob Carlson and Nicole Porter facilitated the meeting. Planning consultant, Juliet Hodge attended as well.

What do you like and love about North Stonington and your neighborhood?

- Friendly and helpful neighbors – familiarity between residents and elected officials. Close-knit community. Strong sense of community.
- The beautiful historic homes Natural beauty/abundant natural resources- places to explore nature. “It’s like going back in time.”

- Love that despite the turnover in the village and increased vibrancy resulting from new people and new energy – the Village remains the same.
- Farmer’s market is great.
- Limited, well-managed commercial development that is well-balanced with rural character. (It was noted that the Village used to be much more “commercial” than it is now. There were 8 Taverns, a grocery store, garage, hardware store and post office (Law Office)).
- Trails are an amazing asset that adds to the great QOL. Other assets identified were the Volunteer Fire Department (despite the piercing alarm) and the School Principal who was recognized by the State as “Principal of the Year.”
- Close to amenities – but get to live in a nice quiet area.
- Low crime rate.

How can we protect what we love?

- Do not build sidewalks!
- Do not develop the 3 town-owned parcels at the entrance of the Village. Need to preserve the areas that buffer the Village from Rte. 2. The village is protected on many sides by the Hewitt Farm property, Avalonia property and NSCLA properties.
- Preserve the open/green spaces within the Village as they help with things like flood control and help keep the rural feel. The village is in a flood plain which makes this even more important.
- Do not restrict the number of livestock the residents in the Village can have.

What would make your road or neighborhood a better place to live and work? Is there something that could be eliminated or reworked?

- Increase the walkability. Need safe places to walk. Suggested creating a walkway along the south side of main St. in the east end of the Village. Village used to have a pathway – consider putting it back.
- Some suggested putting in the rest of the speed humps that were originally planned as they have helped to reduce speeding through town. One person also suggested considering a one-way traffic pattern through the Village.
- Stop the development of the large-scale solar projects! We have too many already.
- Prevent large-scale development that would require the installation of water and sewer or a new fire truck- unless these are funded by the developer only.
- Retain the rural Character by supporting existing farms (i.e farmers’ market, farm tours, allow CSAs to advertise on town website, etc.); maintain lower density of housing; and preserving historic homes (architecture, density, patterns etc.)
- Overhead wires are unsightly.
- Encourage “Green Tourism” (Eco-tourism? Agro-tourism)
- Maintain the light presence of government – i.e. no police station, and no one looking over your shoulder.
- Taxes pay for a way of life (great schools and low crime).

- Need to maintain your property – invest in your property on your own. Do not need “architectural rules” for the historic district.
- Parking in the Village is constrained. Need to find a solution.
- Yellow-lines in the roads have faded causing safety concerns. (plans underway to re-stripe)

What plans can you see this neighborhood making for its future? What do you envision?

- Suggested finding another way to control speeding such as more patrols or use of cameras (when legal). Speed humps are not “historic.”
- Need to work to attract more businesses like the Shunnock River Brewery which is very lively (a “real gem”) but has minimal impact on the town (closes early). Consider a café to compliment the pub. Consider turning the Law Office into an art gallery or small market or farm store.
- The Town is more than just the Village. There are many “villages” throughout town. Consider “Gateway signs” for all the “villages” in town.
- Discussed the importance of maintaining the night skies. Noted some light fixture issue at the corner of Main Street. Important that lighting fixtures blend with the historic character and that they all at least be full cut-off lights. RI/CT Border is “dark”... need to keep it that way.
- The group discussed issues with affordable housing developments. This is another hot topic on which residents have differing opinions! Many think the state statute is flawed and that “affordable housing” is not appropriate in some towns given the typical density of the developments. These folks feel that rising tax rate needs to be “controlled” so that residents can afford to live in their homes. Others feel that there needs to be enough workforce housing to support the businesses in town (need workers closeby) and feel there are appropriate areas for this type of housing such as at the bottom of Pendleton Hill; or across from Buon Appetito or close to the Casino. One noted that multi-family housing is being built all around us. The lack of water and sewer certainly impacts the town’s ability to build multi-family housing. Discussed tying into the MPTN system to supply water and sewer for a development along the west end of Rte.2.

PART II.

THE COMMENTS ABOUT WHAT RESIDENTS LIKE ABOUT NORTH STONINGTON WERE COMBINED AND CATEGORIZED UNDER THREE BROAD CATEGORIES: PEOPLE AND COMMUNITY; QUALITY OF LIFE; AND NATURAL BEAUTY AND ABUNDANT NATURAL RESOURCES.

PEOPLE/COMMUNITY

- Engaged, caring, community despite low residential density
- Friendly, helpful neighbors; residential longevity
- Strong family lineages; multiple generations in town
- Vibrant communities; great community events; Strong sense of community
- Accessible elected officials/local government; good town services
- Beautiful historic homes; history of town well known
- Limited, well-managed commercial development that is well-balanced with rural character
- Town feels like the right size

QUALITY OF LIFE

- Quiet
- Privacy
- Little traffic and no streetlights
- Great neighborhoods and places for kids to play
- Great Library and Farmer's Market; All ages can enjoy
- Great schools; public school system that feels like a private school
- Peace and tranquility but close to I-95 and other bigger towns and shopping areas; Rural setting but close to many larger urban centers
- New businesses that fit well in town (brewery and wineries)
- Low crime rate
- opportunities to hunt and fish

NATURAL BEAUTY/ABUNDANT NATURAL RESOURCES

- Blend of ecology; forest and nearby ocean
- Farms and open farmland
- Wild and Scenic River status
- Character and topography like Vermont
- Abundant trails
- Variety and abundance of wildlife
- Dark skies
- Scenic views
- The lakes
- The trees/forest
- Rural character and abundance of open space
- Protected open space

PART III.

ONCE THE ASSETS WORTH PRESERVING WERE IDENTIFIED, THE NEXT TASK WAS TO IDENTIFY WAYS TO PROTECT THEM. THESE RESPONSES WERE GROUPED UNDER GENERAL TOPICS AS FOLLOWS:

1. Stay informed; Build Relationships; Get involved.

- Find ways to increase voter turnout. *People need to VOTE!!! Always the same few people that attend town meetings.*
- Get to know your neighbors and build relationships and networks of supportive friends.
- Plan and/or attend local events: *Fair, NoSto Fest, Historical Society events and library events are all great ways to interact with people and get to know other residents in town. The more events, the more people will talk and get to know each other.*
- Encourage and facilitate greater resident participation in local government and events. Encourage residents to sign up to receive meeting notifications and agendas and attend the meetings that interest them. *The Zoom option gives people more opportunity to participate or at least listen in to stay informed. The town has great volunteers that chair the meetings and allow people to actively participate. Town form of Government has potential that we don't take advantage of.*
- Find ways to get young people more involved. Consider developing and offering a Government Studies class at the school that requires students to attend some of the municipal meetings as an assignment.
- Evaluate and try to address some of the reasons why more people don't participate....
 - young people are not interested in attending meetings- this interest does not develop until they are older and have "skin in the game" so-to-speak (i.e. kids in school – own a home and pay taxes etc.)
 - In general, people whether young or older, are busy and cannot easily participate – or are involved in so many activities that they don't have the time or energy to attend a meeting in the evening.
 - Being on a Commission or attending meetings means you may have to take on responsibilities. This scares some people.
 - Bigger issues have been taken care of – like building the new EMS building and renovating the schools, demolishing the old school etc. Some smaller tasks remain like building an Animal Shelter or addressing some of the zoning issues concerning the lake properties, so maybe the lack of participation is a sign that people are simply happy with what is going on in town and don't have any concerns to air at a meeting.
- Consider hosting joint meetings with Planning and Zoning, Conservation Commission and Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commissions to improve relations between the 3 commissions and get them on the same page.

- Find ways to increase the cohesiveness between local businesses to make each more prosperous. Maybe resurrect the Business Directory and highlight all the available locally sourced goods and local services.

2. Create opportunities for social engagement and recreation for all ages.

- Create more places like Hewitt farm for the public to enjoy and gather.
- Create more elderly and/or ADA accessible trails.
- Consider developing a park like Wilcox Park in Westerly – possibly on the school property?
- Develop a trail to connect both ends of town.
- Hewitt Farm is a great asset to the town and getting a lot of use. Farmers Market was also a great addition. The library is also a great asset – great staff and great programming for all ages.
- Discussion about the possibilities for developing other public spaces for community gatherings and recreation. The schools need more gym space and playing fields. Suggested a town-wide meeting to decide what to do with the space created by the demolition of the old school. Some suggestions included gardens and walking paths.

3. Preserve the “character” of town by making intentional investments and facilitating good planning to control the look and location of development:

Control development by:

- Not building sidewalks
- Not developing the 3 town-owned parcels at the entrance of the Village and preserving other areas that buffer the Village from Rte. 2. *The village is protected on many sides by the Hewitt Farm property, Avalonia property and NSCLA properties.*
- Controlling blight and littering
- Balancing economic development for the sake of broadening the tax base, with conservation of all the things that residents cherish.
- Encouraging “smart development” not just “any development” and getting all the details and facts before approving proposed developments.
- Encouraging “decent” cluster (residential) development – “not ugly” development.
- Figuring out what would be a good fit for the town and identifying parcels to market in an effort to attract that particular development. *One obstacle identified was the fact that the property owner’s vision for his/her property may differ that that of the town. Property rights remain strong, and you cannot just tell someone how to develop their property.*
- Considering offering incentives to developers who are willing to build something in line with the Town’s vision.
- Considering ½ acre lot subdivisions in the right setting and designed to be a cohesive neighborhood. *Some concerns over adequate water and sewer to do this though.*
- Developing more rural-style businesses to attract more tourists (but not too many) like trillium’s farm brewery. Attract businesses that feel like they belong in town.

- Creating an architectural review process and passing regulations to increase setback requirements and control other elements such as height and scale.
- Considering design guidelines.
- Preserving the secondary road classification for certain roads given the frequent use by farmers and the potential for accidents should there be more traffic. (*traffic concerns on back roads and along Rte. 184 – both used by farmers.*)
- Keeping existing dirt roads unpaved and not allowing Swantown Rd. to become a paved through road to NW Corner Rd.

Protect the rural character in order to keep attracting people who respect boundaries, are hardworking and who respect one another.

4. Protect rural character and natural assets through good planning and raised awareness.

- Respect and incorporate elements of historic past as a means to preserve what we love but allow growth that is appropriately scaled and located.
- Promote the value of preserving the historic architecture/heritage – especially the pre-colonial history. Capitalize on the rich history and draw people in.
- Protect the Town’s history which includes our scenic roads, barns and abundant historic housing – all of which need greater recognition.
- Protect the Small narrow roads as they contribute to the rural feel of the town.
- Develop/provide barn tours as a way to see some of the hidden gems in town.
 - *Happy that the Gristmill was bought and is being preserved but now there is no longer any public access to fishing on Clarks falls pond by the Dam.*
- Preserve the open/green spaces within the Village as they help with things like flood control and help keep the rural feel. The village is in a flood plain which makes this even more important.
- Consider open space or cluster developments. Also need to keep treed buffers along streets and neighborhoods to preserve the rural character.
- Manage growth to protect “ruralness.” Need good planning and members of boards and commissions with some degree of expertise to protect rural setting.
- Lobby the state and local government to enact ordinances to better protect natural resources.

5. Protect water resources and water quality.

- Preserve the aquifer. Get the state to recognize that 8-30g development (i.e. greater density) may not be appropriate everywhere – especially in environmentally sensitive areas. Concern expressed about an alleged state plan to use north Stonington water in an emergency.
- Address the mill foil issue and the need to continue to secure funding to treat – but also about wanting to skip a year of treatment every once and a while. Is there a better way to handle the issue? Funding could come from grants as well as the budget. The 3 lake Association Presidents should get together to discuss this and other issues.

- Consider developing our own water company or water authority to safeguard the aquifer from state confiscation and/or to limit how much is used.
- Wild and Scenic River Designation discussed. This designation is special – North Stonington is fortunate to have 2 of its rivers included in this Wild and Scenic River System. The designation opens up opportunities for funding for initiatives to protect the rivers.
- Conservation of the lakes is very important. Preserve the vegetated buffer near the shoreline. Consider creating a “no-build” zone adjacent to rivers, lakes and streams – or a 100ft no clear zone, after looking at the science on what that buffer should be.

6. Support farming and preserve agricultural heritage.

- Preserve agriculture and find like-minded people to move to town. Encourage farmers and farming even if it means dealing with the occasional nuisance that sometimes accompanies living near a farm.
 - Keep the farms as farms help protect them from being subdivided.
- Get entrepreneurs and farmers together to produce a unique local product like “north Stonington cheese” that would get us recognized.
- Find seed money for farmers to be able to grow specific food to be used in the school cafeteria.
- Do not restrict the number of livestock the residents in the Village can have.
- Provide incentives to preserve both and by promoting the sale of development rights to the State. Ensure employees have housing and that farms remain affordable for new farmers to farm. Consider using town-owned land to create new smaller or “boutique” farms with or without associated housing.
- Promote the sale of development rights to the State so that the farms will always remain farms.
 - *Ann Rennehan – former resident in Clarks falls – was a pioneer in getting people to sell their development rights and a great example of how an individual can accomplish something so important.*
 - *There are younger farmers now - more diverse types of farms and farming. There are more farmstands throughout town as well.*
 - *Farmers market is an excellent addition to the town and has brought attention to the Hewitt farm property. Many did not know it was there and/or open to the public.*

7. Enforcement of existing rules and laws: Mitigate External Influences and negative externalities.

- Climate Change and COVID are just some of the things that have pointed to the need for towns to be more sustainable – self-sufficient and better stewards of the environment.
- Increase enforcement of things like speeding and drunk driving. Agree on the use and appropriate location of traffic calming devices such as speed humps or more “Drive like your kids live here” type of signage.

- Address concerns about recent logging operations and the activity on the MPTN property on Swantown Rd. and the potential impact it will have on the neighborhood – i.e traffic. The proposed use of their property is not known.
- Address concerns about the traffic impact from the proposed Great Wolf Lodge at the Casino as signs on the highway direct southbound traffic from RI to Exit 93 for travelers going to the Casino.
- Address concerns about the potential impact on the grand list of the MPTN were successful in their attempt to be given tax-exempt status on non-reservation property they own in town.

8. Focus on increasing personal wealth and finding other ways for the town to remain affordable for residents.

- Find appropriate locations for affordable housing so that we can house the local workforce.
- Increase amount of Qualified Affordable Housing and availability of housing that is affordable.
 - Promote the building of smaller houses.
 - Promote Accessory Apartments as a great way for families to earn extra income while providing much needed rental housing in the community.
- Make the town more **affordable** for young adults and seniors.
- Identify areas suitable for commercial development.
- Consider a Short-term Rental ordinance.
- Some of the vacant town-owned land should be put back on the tax rolls by being developed into something that serves the residents.
- Offer a tax break to lower-income families/individuals who currently live in town so that they can afford to still own their homes and remain in town (rather than move to senior housing in another town).

9. Continue to provide appropriate level of services; Invest in infrastructure and town assets.

- Preserve and protect the schools; continue funding. They are unique and add great value to the town.
- Keep the land fill (transfer station) open. Stop people from dumping garbage in the woods.
- Develop infrastructure to facilitate revenue generating development.
- Develop a plan to better manage bulky waste disposal and the waste stream in general – get away from the land fill approach.
- Improve road safety and walkability. Keep sight lines clear along roads and open up some of the narrow roads a bit.
- Standardize signage for house numbers (i.e. blue signs from the fire department).

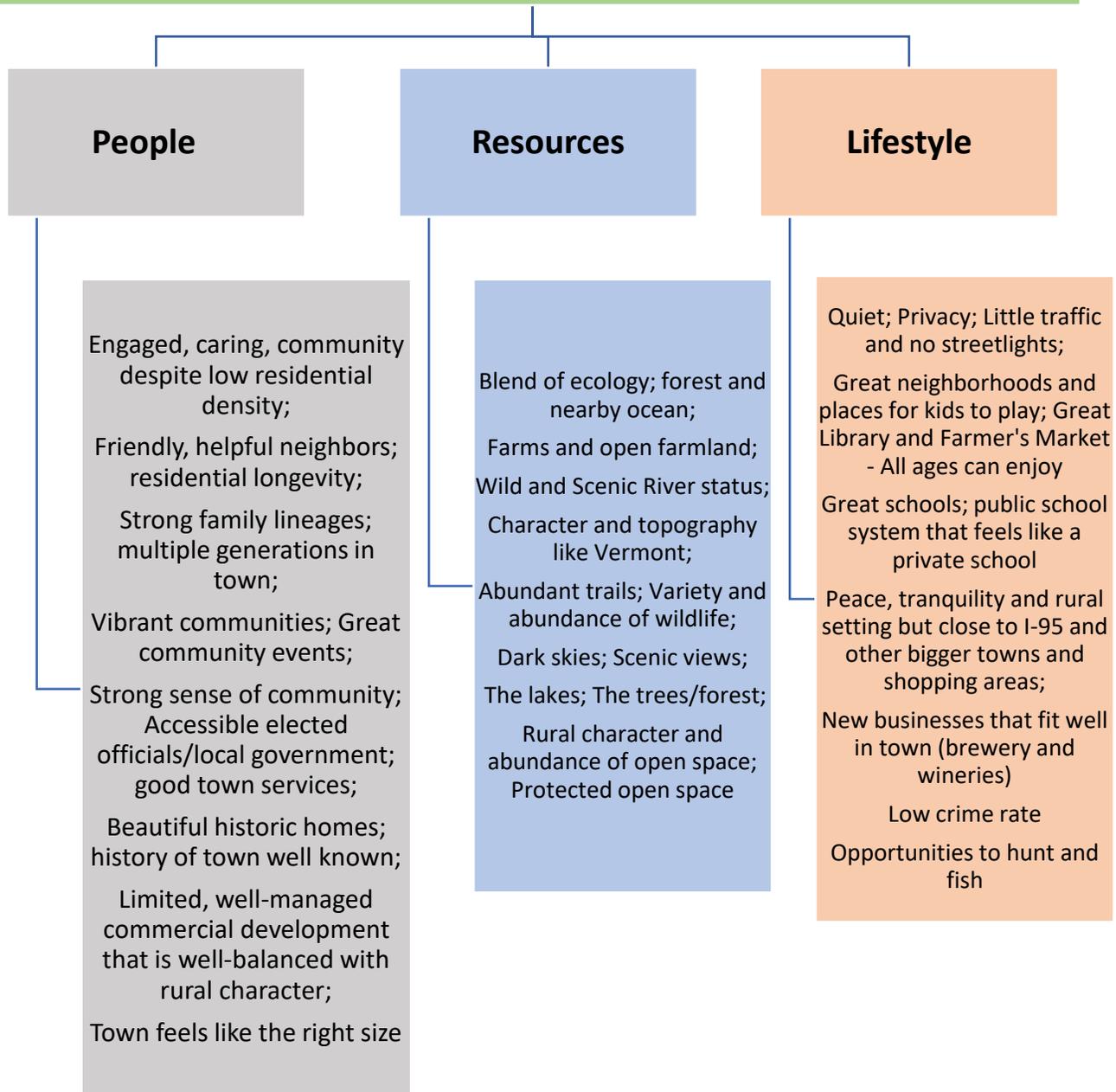
PART IV.

THESE "TOPICS" CAN NOW BEGIN TO FORM THE BASIS OF POSSIBLE GOALS AND ACTIONS. FOR EXAMPLE: ACTIVELY PROTECT THE ASSETS THAT MAKE NORTH STONINGTON, NORTH STONINGTON, BY: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS; BEING RESPONSIBLE; AND FINDING WAYS TO INCORPORATE OUR "PAST" INTO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE. THE DROP DOWN BOXES UNDER THE SECOND DIAGRAM CAN SERVE AS POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS.

THE FOLLOWING DIAGRAM SHOWS HOW THE COMMENTS RECEIVED FIT INTO THE CREATION OF THIS PARTICULAR BROAD GOAL. THIS COULD ALSO BE WORKED INTO A VISION STATEMENT.

SEE NEXT PAGE...

Actively protect the assets that make North Stonington, North Stonington *(people, resources, lifestyle)*



By:

Building Relationships;

Engage in the community (events, local government, VOTE, Volunteer); Be a good neighbor

Work with each other to protect what we cherish

Ensure that community leaders/volunteers stay informed and are accessible to residents

Create a Government Studies Class to allow young people to engage

Create and facilitate opportunities for growth / investment (personal or financial)

Create new places to gather and explore and new opportunities for social engagement

Being Responsible; and

Target Strategic Investments (in people, properties, services and infrastructure); Identify areas suitable for development and housing AND for conservation

Agree on what "responsible growth" looks like

Seek out new revenue sources to minimize tax burden

Protect residents and resources through responsive and responsible governing; stay informed and be inclusive

Promote and protect historic resources in creative new ways

Be good stewards of the natural environment and personal property

Protect health and safety of all residents through better enforcement

Finding ways to incorporate our "past" into a sustainable future

Support the continuance and expansion of Agriculture

Preserve Farmland by incentivising the sale of development rights

Reactivate historic places (i.e the Grange, Gallup House; Historical Society)

Identify suitable areas for different types of housing that would be affordable to local workforce and those with limited or fixed incomes

Consider providing tax breaks to lower-income families

Control location and "look" of new development; encourage smart development; preserve buffers

Continue to invest in current assets and infrastructure (roads, schools, water quality, open spaces, farms etc.)

PART V.

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUPS

In addition to the Neighborhood meetings there were a series of Focus group discussions on the topics of Economic Development, Housing and Open Space/Conservation. These were held in person and on Zoom. A total of 42 residents participated including members from several Boards and Commissions. Planning Consultant, Juliet Hodge, Bill Ricker (CC) and Bob Carlson (1st Selectman) moderated. The following is a summary of notes taken.

I. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The two Economic Development Focus Groups were held on Saturday 2/11/2023 at 10am via Zoom and on Monday 2/27/23 at 6:30pm in person in the Media Center. There was a total of nine participants, six of whom are involved in farming and/or connected to the agricultural community. Several of the participants currently serve on a board or commission in town.

POCD Consultant Juliet Hodge facilitated the meetings.

SUMMARIZATION OF NOTES TAKEN:

Strengths - Things the town is doing well...

- Shunnock Brewery is a great addition to town. It provides a much desired “gathering place” for locals.
- Jonathan Edwards a “gem” – great events and music.
- Trillium – Held successful events at the farm in Clarks Falls with no negative impact on neighbors and is beginning to develop a more positive relationship with the palmer Farm – creating opportunity/circular economy.
- The town has maintained its character well over the years by resisting big box stores or chain establishments and preserving the farms. The small unique collection of businesses is preferred.
- The recent solar projects have generated needed tax revenue for the town without impacting services. (Though the visual impact of the solar farms still seen as a negative)
- Farmer’s market and local farm sales got a boost from the pandemic-fueled demand for local food.
- Engaged community – great community events. Great lifestyle.
- Relatively low tax rate compared to other towns and high-quality places in town that support the high quality of life... worth the taxes paid.

Weaknesses:

- The town is limited by what residents don't want in town (NIMBY) and by what we can actually support (Lacking density and infrastructure).
- Lacking the desired variety of businesses and restaurants.
- Grocery stores and some typical services you find in larger towns are not successful in north Stonington – not enough people to support them. Price point too high.
- There are no local job opportunities for teens in the community – or things for them to do.
- High cost of utilities and CT tax rate for businesses a detriment to businesses coming to CT. Lack of water/sewer infrastructure in town is a further deterrent.
- Fear of unknown impact of a new business or initiative brings immediate resistance. People want to know what's in it for them and how they will be impacted. In the absence of this knowledge, they simply resist or oppose the project. Misguided negative response to projects has driven investment out of town.
- Adamant opposition to raising taxes but equal opposition to the type and scale of economic development that would be needed to stabilize or lower the mill rate and the infrastructure investment that would be required to attract and support it. Small incremental growth of mom-and-pop shops and restaurants will not lower the taxes in town.
- Lack of understanding about the land use process in general may fuel negativity.

Pandemic Impact:

- Changed the need for physical space. Don't want to end up with a lot of empty storefronts or office buildings.
- Could lead to an increase in Home Occupations
- Did provide opportunities and challenges for local farmers. Could not keep up with the demand!

Opportunities:

- Event space in rural setting – Agrotourism
- Build on the current food-related businesses – North Stonington has several businesses already such as Farm true, Jovial Foods, Kingdom of the hawk and Jonathan Edwards Wineries; Shunnock river brewery; Several farm stands and stores and the Farmer's Market.
- Investing in existing underutilized or older farms in need of new life. Diversify product to include food crops – not just focus on dairy farming. Develop new partnerships – Circular economy.
- Hescock law Office still vacant – could have a second gathering place. Desire for a pharmacy as well.
- Opportunities for larger developments in the Exit 92, 93 areas and the RCCD near the Casino.
- The new Great Wolf Lodge being built at Foxwoods may provide job opportunities for residents.
- Mill rate could decrease after all recent investments (School, EMS building etc.) are paid off.

Action to consider:

- Create a “Lessons Learned” template.
- Do a build-out analysis to demonstrate what impact new development would have on the tax rate. Determine how much development we would need to actually “lower our taxes”.
- Need to come together as a town when a great opportunity presents itself and get in front of what we think are the barriers. In the absence of information, people fear the worst. Need to get people comfortable with the project before it gets to the Planning and Zoning Commission.
 - Develop a multi-specialty task force/Outreach Committee (associated with the EDC) to be a first point of contact with a prospective new business or the owners of an existing business looking to expand or start a new initiative. The group would provide feedback, identify possible barriers to success, and help get any plan or project to a place where it can be successful and supported by residents and commissioners alike.
 - Work through the concerns; discuss the possible impacts and the possible benefits too. Prospective business owner needs to educate and explain the initiative fully and allow the group to tour the facility or project location or otherwise become familiar with every aspect so they can better identify barriers and understand the potential impacts and find solutions.

Current Initiatives to highlight and explore further:

- Piece by Piece Production
- Northeast Grain Alliance

Other Comments:

- PZC Chair: Would rather act on a project that is proposed than proactively seek certain development. Focused on supporting the businesses that are already in town.
- Discussed the LLHD issue regarding unrealistic flowrates used in formulas in rural towns to determine maximum number of seats in a restaurant etc. – hindering business growth.
- People move here for a reason – for the lifestyle.

II. HOUSING

The Housing Focus Groups were held on Monday, 2/13/23 at 6:30pm via Zoom, and on Saturday, 2/18/23 at 10am in person in the media Center.

A total of 16 residents attended the sessions. Eight of the 16 were members of a NS Board, Commission or Committee and two attendees are members of the non-profit Keeping North Stonington Affordable. Three of the 8 are also members of the POCD Steering Committee.

Juliet Hodge, POCD Planning Consultant facilitated the meeting.

SUMMARIZATION OF NOTES TAKEN:

The whole issue of “housing” and “housing choice” is a hot topic in North Stonington with those who advocate for or speak against housing equally passionate. The topic of housing is intertwined with many other planning issues such as economic development, open space preservation, overall vibrancy and QOL in town.

The Affordable Housing Committee adopted the required housing Plan in 2021. North Stonington currently has less than 2% of its housing units counted as qualified affordable housing towards the required State minimum of 10%. This is one of the lowest in the region. There is still a great need to educate the public about what “affordable housing” actually is and what some of the different strategies are to achieve the goal of providing more housing choice for all our residents while still preserving the characteristics of town that its residents keenly want to protect.

Demographic Trends. What type of housing is missing?

90% of the housing in town is detached, 3-bedroom, single-family homes. There is an extreme shortage of rental housing. Regional Housing Studies predict that the current percentage of renters vs home owners in the region is going to flip from 34% vs 64% to 54% vs 46% and that 59% of the rental units will need to be affordable to low-income residents. Rental housing is needed to house the projected increase in EB workers over the next several years, younger residents living on their own, and for the aging Boomers wanting to downsize but remain in town.

Other notable trends are shrinking household sizes and aging population – not unique to only North Stonington but occurring in the region as well – though there were some in the group who disagreed with that trend as evidenced by new families consistently moving into North Stonington.

Median income has dropped considerably in North Stonington, and for the 1st time, North Stonington finds itself on the “Top 25 Distressed Towns” list for CT. The drop in income will cause an increase in the already rising number of cost-burdened households (meaning households that spend more than 30% of their income on housing related expenses such as rent/mortgage, taxes, insurance and utilities).

Opportunities and Opposition:

Changes have been made to the Zoning Regulations since the 2013 POCD to address some of the housing issues. Detached Accessory Apartments are permitted. Limited multi-family is permitted in some zones, as are mixed-use developments. Micro-assisted living facilities are permitted as an option for a group of seniors to live together. The “cottages and motel” near the rotary that were recently refurbished provide an example of possible future model for small affordable housing developments.

The core issue for the group was whether we are trying to increase density to support local businesses and provide housing opportunities for new and existing residents, or are we just trying to provide for our own residents, particularly the parents and children of existing residents who are more likely to need housing they can afford?

Some felt that we need to take advantage of the fact the young EB workers are looking for housing- as young people add vibrancy. Others just want to provide for the people living in town – i.e. prioritize

housing for local seniors looking to downsize and children of residents who want to remain in town on their own. Some felt that if someone looking to relocate to North Stonington but could not find anything affordable, they should simply move elsewhere – where others felt that everyone, whether local or not, deserved to have an opportunity to live in a town like North Stonington and that No. Stonington should share in the burden of providing affordable housing rather than leaving that up to the urban towns in the region. This last issue is the subject of the proposed “Fair Share” law, under which the state Office of Policy and Management would assess the need for affordable housing in different parts of Connecticut. Then, towns would share the responsibility to meet that need. The goal of the law is to increase Connecticut’s affordable housing stock.

What are the consequences of not having enough qualified affordable housing?

Predatory Development (8-30g)

The State of CT currently has a law on its books that **requires** 10% of the existing housing in a municipality be “affordable” (meaning a household earning less than 60-80% of the state or area’s median income must spend no more than 30% of its income on total housing costs). If a municipality has less than the required 10%, a developer can propose a housing project without following the local zoning regulations such as dimensional requirements, setbacks, buffers, density or building character/design. Essentially, the law states that for the developer’s proposal to be rejected, the town zoning or planning commission must make a **very convincing** case that such a proposal would clearly be against public interests or somehow endanger the health or safety of the community. Towns are rarely successful in defeating this type of development. Currently, North Stonington has less than 2% of the required 10%.

There was discussion about the difference between “Affordable Housing” and “Housing that is affordable.” There are many naturally occurring affordable housing units throughout town, but they do not count in the eyes of the state unless there is a deed restriction on the unit; it was bought with a CHFA loan; or the unit was subsidized by the government (i.e. Section 8 housing). Because of our very low percentage, North Stonington is VERY vulnerable to 8-30g development (as are many rural towns). In 2007, a developer proposed to build 17, four-story apartment buildings off of Boombridge Rd. This development was rejected by PZC, but likely would have been approved if the developer had pursued the appeal. The downturn in the economy essentially saved the Town from the Garden Court development. Many feel that the whole character of town would have been changed if a development such as garden Court had been approved

There was discussion about the difference between “Affordable Housing” and “Housing that is affordable” and the consequences of not attaining the state mandated 10% threshold. Discussed the ways housing units count toward the 10% such as deed restriction and CHFA mortgages. Some felt that 40yrs was too short a time for the deed restriction and that relying on increasing the number of CHFA mortgaged homes to count was too unpredictable and fluid as the unit only counts while the CHFA borrowers own the house.

Discussed the consequence of predatory development in towns with less than the 10% Affordable units. These developments do not have to abide by the Zoning Regulations with respect to density, building height, lot coverage, setbacks, buffering etc. The Massive Garden Court 8-30 development proposed in

2007 would have changed the character of town, and there remains a fear of a similar type of development being proposed again. This fear, however, does not seem strong enough to overcome the strong opposition to affordable housing in town.

What kind of housing should we be building and where? Who should develop it?

Suggested Opportunities:

- Frank Zaino's property near the rotary could be converted to housing.
- Wintechog Hill property still an option for a town-designed development. Partnership between KNSA and a non-profit affordable housing developer could be explored.
- Not a lot of support for multi-family development despite the tax revenue they produce and the clear need for rental housing.
- Could consider a senior housing floating Zone.
- Conversion of lake houses into affordable homes.
- Anywhere near the highway would be appropriate for housing versus the residential zones or even along Route 2. Recent 8-30g development on Rte. 2 viewed as too dense. They want to see more tasteful housing. Need to identify other areas. A development with access directly off of Rte. 2 would not be ideal, but another neighborhood like Kingswood/Meadow Wood which is close to Rte. 2 would be OK.
- Cluster development with the preservation of open space is supported and permitted in the current regulations.
- Prefer small pockets of housing for each of the demographics in need- i.e., seniors, EB workers, young people/families starting out. Affordable Senior Housing is supported; however, it was pointed out that there is little funding for such developments.
- Mixed-age development affordable housing development like that proposed off Wintechog hill would be good.

What are the consequences of not having housing available for every age and/or income group seeking to live in North Stonington?

Local businesses suffer: Housing is essential for economic survival. Local businesses need a greater density of people to support their businesses and housing for their workers. There is a shortage of workers everywhere, not having available housing that is affordable to workers – particularly lower-income service workers - makes it even harder for businesses to attract staff. Cost of gas to commute is high, which cuts into money available for housing or supporting local businesses. Better to have workers in town.

Volunteers and Essential Services: Firemen, EMTs, public work crews, teachers, etc. are needed in the towns they live in – though some of the salaries for these jobs are low making it hard to afford a house in town (again – a problem in not just North Stonington).

Vitality: Losing people who don't have families who want to move here because of a lack of appropriate housing from a small household. Vitality is dependent on diversity of age and income. Need to decide what is important for the future of the town... Is attracting young families and potential volunteers and

workers important? Would we rather only provide housing for the aging seniors who live here rather than providing residences for a mix of people of all ages and incomes? Some agreed that we need to Re-vitalize town and keep tax rates low (though some felt that the tax rate will always go up – need to control spending).

What is the character of North Stonington that we are trying to protect?

Discussed the changes to the CT general Statutes regarding housing and the fact that affordable housing (and other projects) cannot be denied simply because they do not “fit in with the character of town.” Towns must clearly define what characteristics they wish to preserve. The group offered the following list of “characteristics” of town worth preserving.

- Preserving natural resources important
- Water features and abundant wildlife
- dark skies
- buffer areas
- trees and stone walls
- buildings fewer than 3 stories
- low-density development pattern
- Development should be pretty, symmetrical – look planned with open places to park. High rise units not supported. They do not fit with the pastoral aesthetic that characterizes North Stonington.
- Prefer a “New England colonial vibe” development with a town green.

III. OPEN SPACE/CONSERVATION

The Open Space Focus Groups was held immediately following the Housing Focus Group on Saturday, 2/18/23 at 10am in person in the Media Center. Twelve of the attendees of the Housing Session stayed and were joined by an additional 5 people for the Open Space discussion. Bill Ricker, Chairman of the Conservation Commission facilitated the discussion.

SUMMARIZATION OF NOTES TAKEN:

Juliet Hodge, planning consultant reviewed some data pertaining to the types of open space in town and Bill ricker continued the discussion by explaining the ways open space could, and is preserved as well as the difference between temporary and permanently preserved open space. These methods include:

- PA 490 Farm and Forest state program that provides a significant tax reduction if land is preserved for farming or forest for at least a 10-year period.
- Conservation Easements – restricts development on a parcel or portion of the parcel. Can allow public access or not.
- Sale of Development Rights to the State – preserves land for agricultural use in perpetuity.

- State parks/Forest: It was noted that Pachaug forest is not “permanently” preserved, though it would take 75% of the lawmakers to approve development on preserved land.

The 2013 Plan of Conservation and Recreation Lands map identified greenway corridors and key parcels to acquire should they become available. Working on protecting these important wildlife corridors including protecting the land within 100ft of the town’s waterways. Preserving the town’s water resources was supported by all.

Need to also pay attention to the historic resources throughout the entire town including the agricultural architecture – not just focus on the historic village. The history of the town is not just centered in the village, it extends to all the other former “villages” like Clarks Falls. It is important to preserve the setting within which the historic structures/resources are found.

More usable open space like Hewitt farm would be good. Preserved for public use, but with some control. Bill noted that the Hewitt Farm was purchased with money from the Open Space fund which was historically funded at \$20,000 a year. It was cut to \$5,000 and then even further. Currently have \$80,000 in the Open Space fund.

Continued thoughtful planning needed to identify parcels to preserve and those to develop. Need to maintain that balance between conservation and development. Keeping the Open Space Plan updated is important. Discussed the fact that not all open space is public – that it is often visually available, but not physically available. There is of course dedicated open space for public access. Some in the group value their privacy and have concerns about allowing public trails too close to private property.

Trails and Walkability:

Discussion continued about walkability in general and the subject of sidewalks along certain roads to allow resident to safely walk. Some favor promoting the health of the community by having public walking trails and sidewalks, however, despite the potential benefit, there was still opposition to the idea of having more sidewalks. It was pointed out that sidewalks come with other things like lights and crosswalks and future expansion. The dark skies have always been a valued asset. Discussed the fact that the walkers need to take some responsibility for their safety as well.

Suggestion to combine senior housing with a trail system the residents could use and/or cluster housing around open space and trails. Some also expressed concern about the size of new houses and asked whether a more reasonable size could be encouraged in the POCD.

It was noted that ADA or even stroller access was lacking on the existing trails. Bill stated that the Conservation Commission was working on making a portion of the Assekongk trail ADA accessible.

Discussed the LOTCIP project to put a multi-use path from the Mobil Station to Little Man’s Diner.

There was concern about the impact the proposed Great Wolf Lodge will have on Route 2 with respect to traffic and safety.

Agriculture:

Supporting farming and honoring the town's agricultural history still important to residents. First Selectman, Bob Carlson mentioned the creation of the "Farm 5" group- an initiative he is working on with Voluntown, Griswold, Sterling and Preston to draw attention to agriculture and provide resources for farmers. Group also discussed opportunities for our schools to promote agriculture and farming. Vo-ag program?

Someone noted that there were more young women volunteering to work on farms than young men. Also noted that more Veterans were volunteering as well.

Pandemic Impact:

More people got out and explored the trails in town, used Hewitt Farm and the lakes, etc. Concern about misuse of lakes by outsiders. Partying at the lakes was an issue during the pandemic (It was suggested that North Stonington might need their own police department at some point if development gets to a certain point.)

Food security issues came to the surface during the pandemic. Local farmers could not keep up with demand!

Things to add to the "rural characteristics" worth preserving:

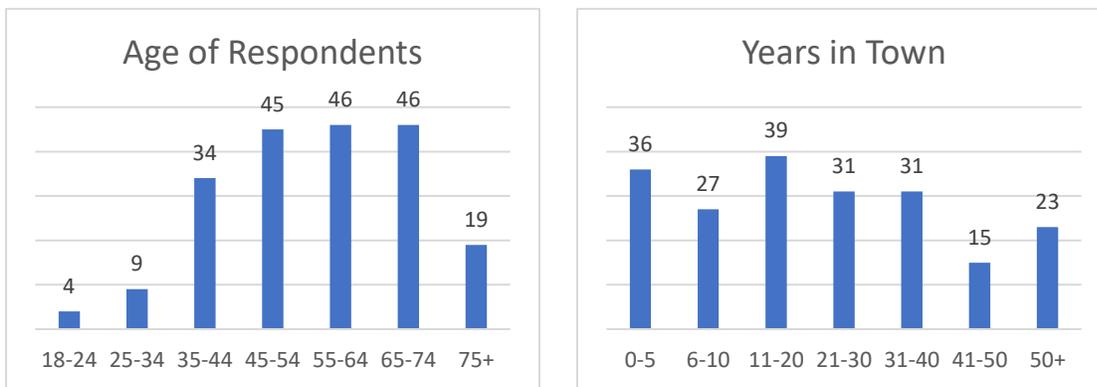
- Privacy
- Low traffic
- Unspoiled area
- Presence of stone walls

PART VI

2023 PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY SURVEY

The 2023 Survey was made available to all residents, business owners and property owners in town. In the three months that the survey was open, 203 responses were received. In 2013 there were nearly 400 respondents. The written responses were categorized as a way to identify themes and the results may not be precise as some responses were split into different categories or were difficult to interpret. The summary of any written comments are only meant to serve as a loose summary of the most prominent themes.

Respondents:



The majority of respondents were between 45 and 74 years old. There was a great response from people new to town and those who have been here between 11 and 40 years. Nearly all respondents were homeowners (194). Only 4 Renters and 2 Seasonal Residents responded.

For Question #1: *What are the most important issues currently facing North Stonington*, there were 184 responses. The following categories corresponded to the issues identified in the responses received:

- Affordability/Cost of Living
- Preservation of Rural Character/Resources
- Fiscal Responsibility/Control
- Planning and Sustainability
- Community/Capacity Building
- Economic Development
- Education
- Threat to Existing Character/Way of Life
- Public Safety and General Nuisance Concerns
- Services/Facilities/Regulations/Town Policies

In 2013, the categories were much more simplified, but similar enough to make comparisons.

- High Taxes/Lack of revenue/Need for diversified Tax Base
- Housing Concerns (mainly lack of housing for young people and seniors)
- Preserving Rural Character/Farming/Appropriate Growth
- Budget Concerns (cost of maintaining infrastructure (roads, buildings, etc) and maintaining critical services/ big budgets and few services
- Town Services (Lack of for amount paid in taxes)
- Smart growth/sustainable growth
- Lack of vision/ lack of aggressive or responsive leadership/ lack of ways to participate
- Lack of Commercial Development
- Education Related
- Fear of Development pressure
- Traffic /speeding
- Crime/Safety Concerns
- Perception Issues (not being open for business/ leadership not responsive to needs)

In 2013 the top three responses to this question were high taxes, lack of commercial development, and education (cost and need to maintain schools). The vast majority of those who responded identified high taxes and/or an overburden on homeowners due to a perceived lack of a commercial tax base as the most important issue facing NS. Supporting the schools, budget concerns and a lack of commercial development were all prominent themes identified in the 2013 Survey.

The results of the 2023 Survey indicate a shift in opinion. The top issues identified this time were issues of affordability and cost of living, the need for economic development and the strong desire to maintain the town’s rural character and preserve the town’s natural resources/assets. When directly compared to the most relevant 2013 category some interesting results present.

	2013	2023
High Taxes/Lack of revenue/Need for diversified Tax Base	87	67
Housing Concerns (mainly lack of housing for young people and seniors)	9	46
Preserving Rural Character/Farming/Appropriate Growth	24	30
Budget Concerns (cost of maintaining infrastructure (roads, buildings, etc) and maintaining critical services/ big budgets and few services	54	23
Fear of Development pressure	11	41
Traffic /speeding	11	4

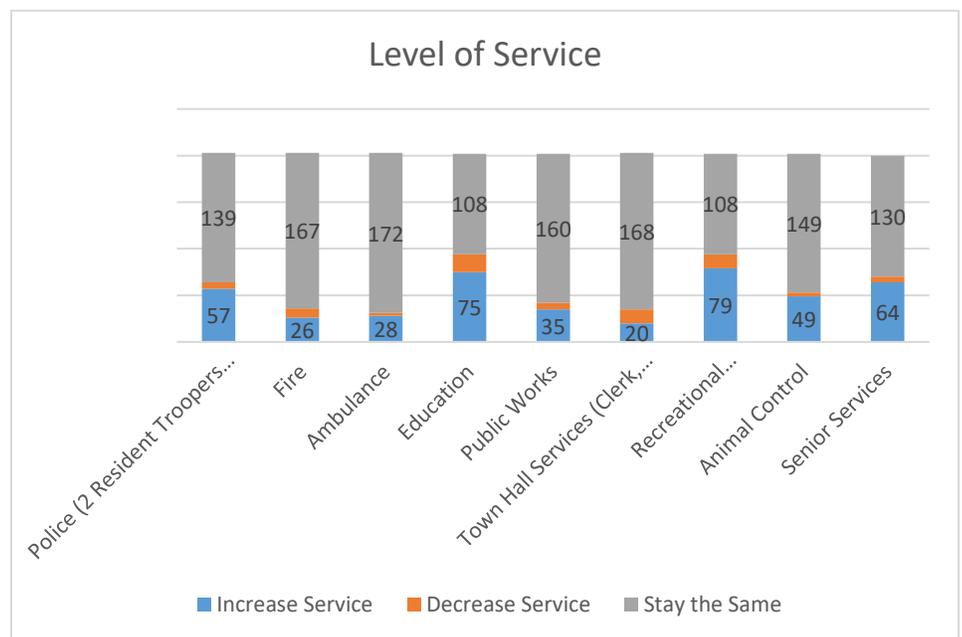
The need for affordable housing has jumped way up on the list with 22% of the 184 respondents identifying it as a pressing issue versus only 3% of the 272 respondents in 2013 who answered the question. Those respondents who fear undesired development will negatively impact the town have also risen from 15% of respondents in 2013 to 23% in 2023, but those who felt the town lacked economic development doubled; rising from 21% to 42%. The need to preserve rural character has increased from 9% to 16% and the concerns related to the budget and maintaining critical services has dropped from 20% to 13%. The concerns about traffic and speeding lessened as well moving from 4% to 2% on the list of important issues.

Those who identified high taxes associated still mostly identified lack of (appropriate) commercial development and lack of infrastructure to attract new businesses to broaden the tax base, but unlike 2013, the cost of the various town-funded projects factored in this year as contributing to the increased taxes. The reasons for the lack of commercial development not identified in this year's survey that were in 2013 were high commercial rents; a poor reputation as being business unfriendly; the threat of the high school closing; lack of leadership and confusing Zoning Regulations. This demonstrates some degree of progress with respect to addressing the issues raised ten years ago.

Levels of Service

The clear sentiment expressed by those who responded to the survey was to maintain the existing levels of service in each category, though there were a number of respondents who wanted to see an increase in Educational (75), Recreational (79) and Senior services (64).

When compared to ten years ago the results for police and educational services were nearly identical. Those who indicated that they wanted an increase in recreational Services increased from 23% to 39%. The 2013 Survey did not include a question about Senior Services.



WORK IN PROGRESS..... Stay tuned....