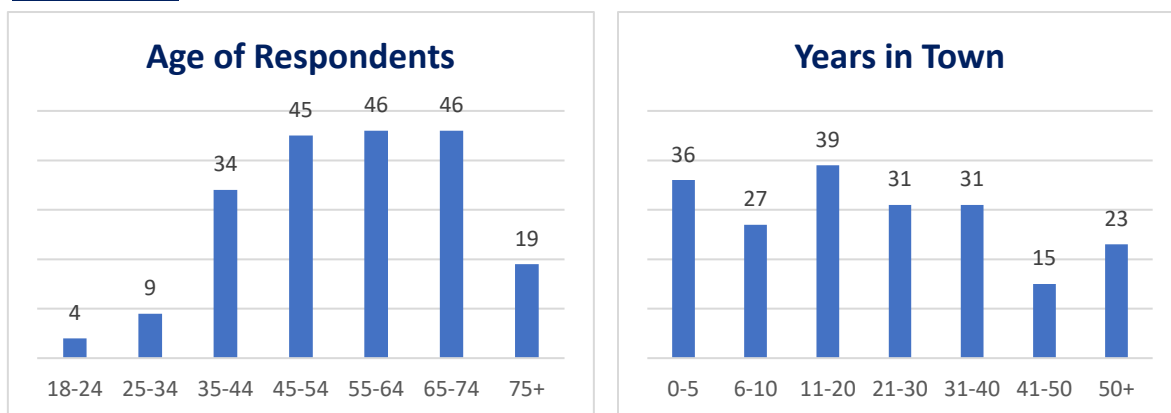


The 2023 Survey was made available to all residents, business owners and property owners in town. In the three months that the survey was conducted, 206 responses were received. In 2013 there were nearly 400 respondents. The questions were nearly identical to those in 2013 in order to see if views about the main topics of type and location of development and/or housing, infrastructure, level of services, priorities, agriculture and the preservation of open space have changed over the past 10 years. Two of the questions had to be thrown out as they appeared to be confusing to most and the responses therefore unreliable. This summary is organized by topic rather than a summary of each question. The written responses were categorized as a way to identify themes noting that some responses were split into different categories or were difficult to interpret given a lack of explanation for one-word responses. The summary of any of the written comments is only meant to serve as a loose summary of the most prominent themes.

It should be noted comparisons made between responses in 2013 to those in 2023 are not as reliable as they would have been if the overall response rates had been similar.

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 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 North Stonington. Supporting the schools, budget concerns and a lack of commercial development were all also 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. (The numbers represent the number of times the issue was raised- noting that some responses identified more than one important issue)

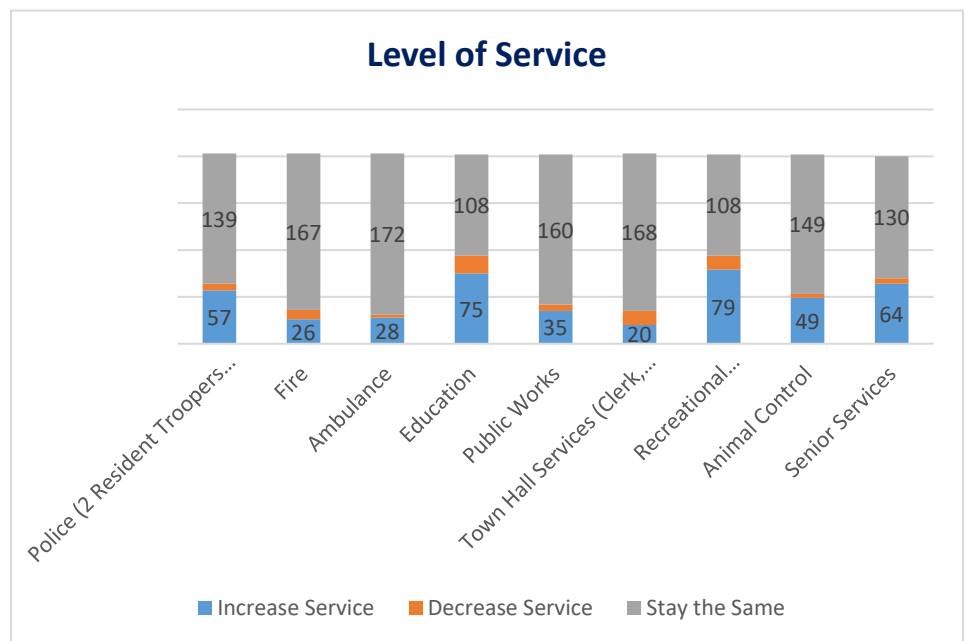
	2013	2023
High Taxes/Lack of revenue/Need for diversified Tax Base	87	67
Housing Concerns (mainly lack of housing for young people and seniors)	9	46
Preserving Rural Character/Farming/Appropriate Growth	24	30
Budget Concerns (cost of maintaining infrastructure (roads, buildings, etc.) and maintaining 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).

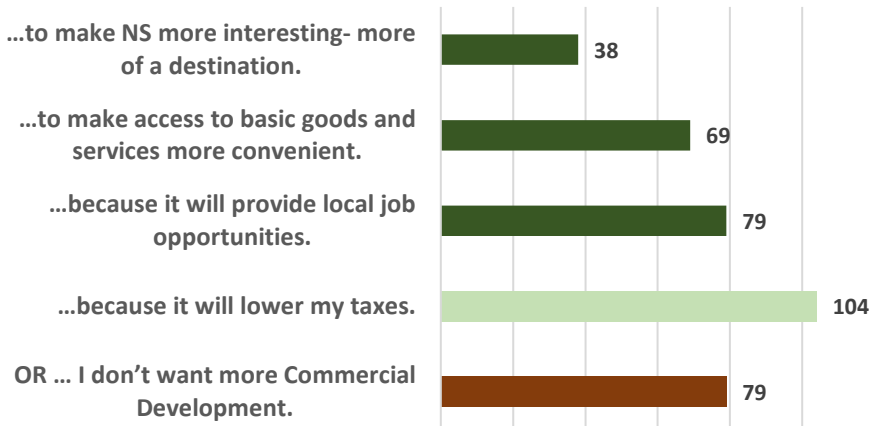


When compared to ten years ago the results for police and educational services were nearly identical. Those who indicated that they wanted **an increase in Recreational Services increased from 23% to 39%**. The 2013 Survey did not include a question about Senior Services.

Development Type, Purpose and Location

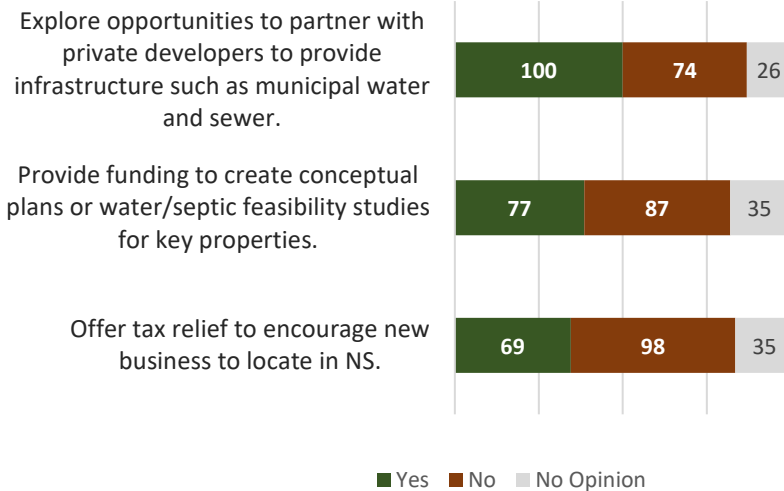
While most respondents believe that the inconvenience of having to drive long distances to work or for services is worth it if it means preserving the high quality of life they enjoy, they also feel development should be encouraged in the non-residential districts even if it means introducing water and sewer to the area. The town is essentially split on the encouragement of alternative energy.

I want more commercial development....



Similar to the responses in 2013, the hope is more development will ease the tax burden on homeowners. 21% of respondents to this question did not want any more commercial development compared to 38% in 2013.

With the exception of looking for ways to partner with private developers to provide water and sewer infrastructure, there was no overwhelming support for facilitating development by creating speculative master plans or providing incentives/tax relief for businesses.

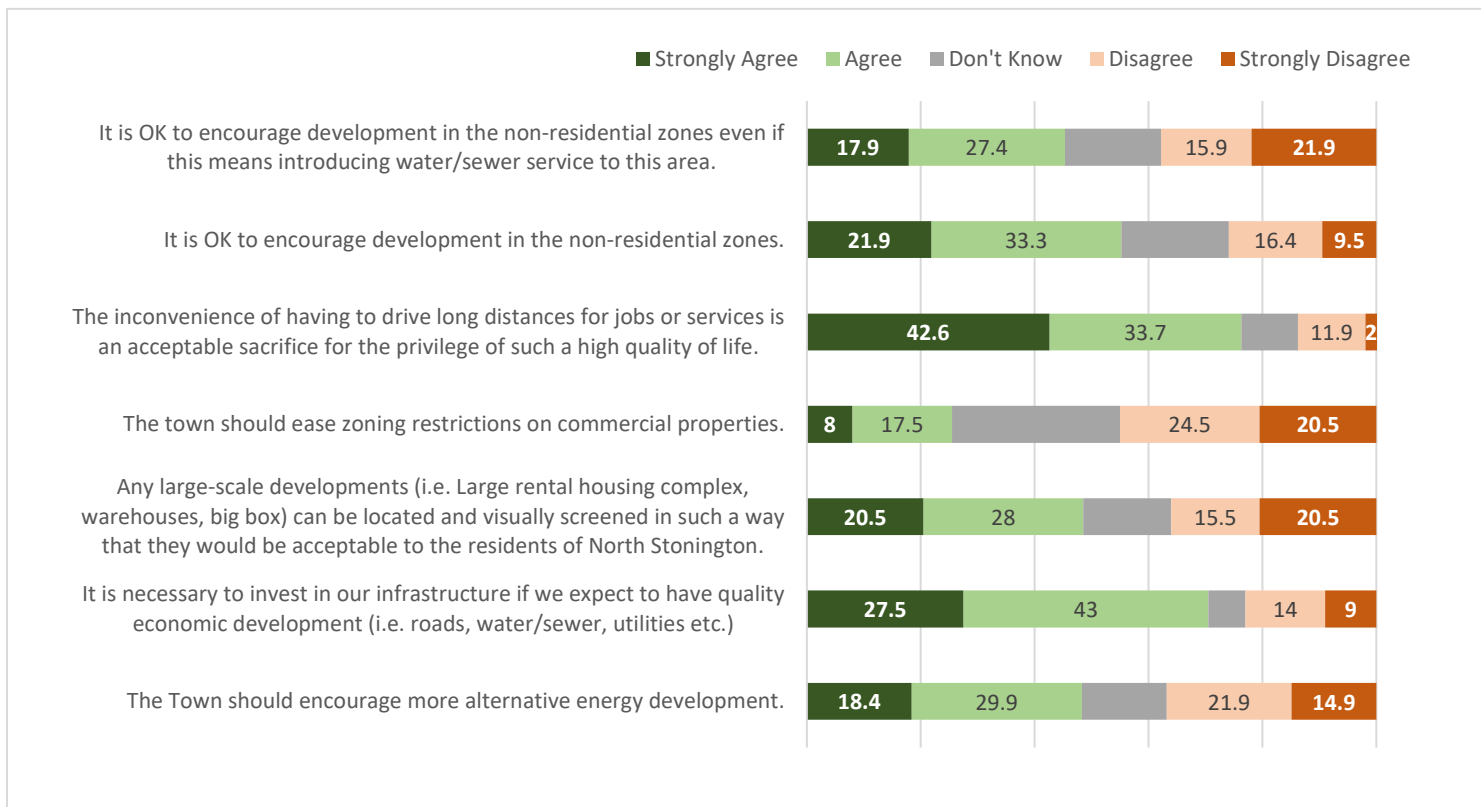


General Comments regarding Development

“The Town needs to define and maintain its "brand" before embarking on any further development. Examine the successes and failures of the 2013-2023 plan and, using the current survey inputs, decide how we want to be viewed by others in attracting new development.” As was the case in 2013 there is still concern that certain types of development would “ruin the character” of town and impact valuable natural

amenities that residents cherish. Not all respondents were against development or facilitating development, but the general sentiment was one of caution. No one wants to see Route 2 look like Route 12 in Groton. Some felt that growth in strategic areas would allow access to more amenities without affecting the charm of North Stonington and that smaller lot neighborhoods could be a really nice addition to town. The theme of “balanced growth” was again present in the new survey: the need to balance building affordable houses, bringing in business while protecting the natural habitats and not negatively impacting the tax impact to residents or burdening the schools.

The cost of infrastructure was a concern and not many were in support of any additional studies with respect to providing water and sewer infrastructure in select areas. Most felt that businesses should want to locate in town and that they would find a way without public water and sewer; that no “short-term” tax incentives should be offered simply to attract businesses, but we should instead focus our attention on expanding our tax base for the long term.



In 2013 there was more support for encouraging alternative energy, investing in infrastructure, easing restrictions on commercial properties, and visually screened, large-scale development. There was also slightly more support in 2013 for development in non-residential zones especially even if it meant bringing sewers to the area to support the development.

Over the past 10 years, the Zoning Regulations were revised to reflect the vision and goals of the 2013 Plan, and many of the actions that corresponded with those goals were implemented. There has been a lot of activity and re-development/re-purposing of vacant and underutilized buildings – which was well-supported as many of those properties were seriously blighted. The responses to the current survey indicate that respondents are more cautious now. It is one thing to reactivate a blighted or vacant commercial building, and another to see raw land get developed. Growth has been steady over the past 10 years, but still in keeping with the surrounding properties. The desire to preserve existing characteristics and way of life is stronger than the desire to see more development.

	Mixed-use Commercial/ Residential	Mixed-use Commercial/ Industrial	Large-scale Commercial	Small-scale Commercial
AREA 1 (Exit 92 EDD and I Zone East)	95	106	71	87
AREA 2 (Exit 93 HC Zone)	80	98	67	84
AREA 3 (West end Rte. 2 RCCD)	55	54	34	57
AREA 4 (Village Area Incl. VC Zone)	29	4	2	27
AREA 5 or 6 (Small Comm. Districts)	51	20	6	50
Any Non-residential and some Residential Districts by SPP	37	12	5	29
Anywhere in Town!!!!	15	9	6	26
Total	362	303	191	360
Nowhere in Town!!!!	34	37	93	24
	Recreational Facilities	Campground	Cannabis Retail	Alternative Energy Facility
AREA 1 (Exit 92 EDD and I Zone East)	42	47	35	62
AREA 2 (Exit 93 HC Zone)	33	45	35	56
AREA 3 (West end Rte. 2 RCCD)	25	42	31	25
AREA 4 (Village Area Incl. VC Zone)	32	1	6	2
AREA 5 or 6 (Small Comm. Districts)	30	13	20	7
Any Non-residential and some Residential Districts by SPP	29	26	7	17
Anywhere in Town!!!!	61	43	20	19
Total	252	217	154	188
Nowhere in Town!!!!	26	42	105	77

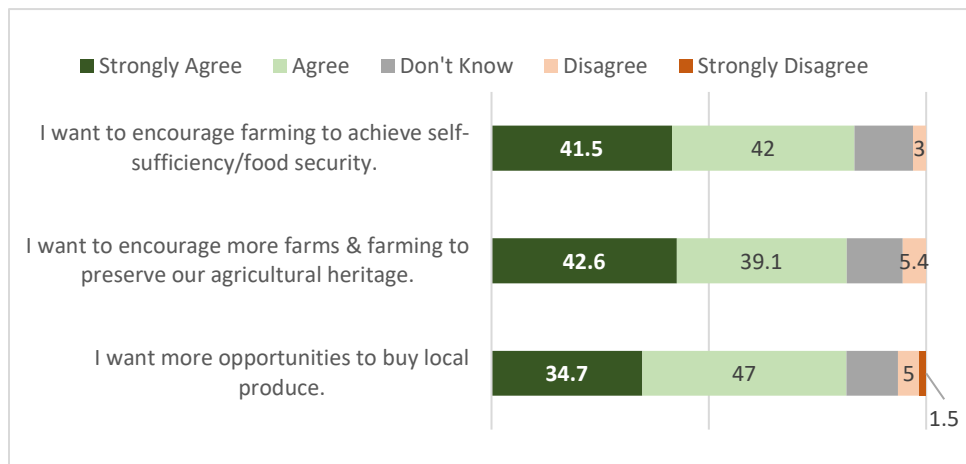
	Warehouse Distribution	Manufacturing Facility	Retail Chain (hotel, grocery, restaurant)
AREA 1 (Exit 92 EDD and I Zone East)	80	91	83
AREA 2 (Exit 93 HC Zone)	75	79	82
AREA 3 (West end Rte. 2 RCCD)	28	36	69
AREA 4 (Village Area Incl. VC Zone)	3	2	17
AREA 5 or 6 (Small Comm. Districts)	11	12	39
Any Non-residential and some Residential Districts by SPP	10	10	15
Anywhere in Town!!!!	5	6	14
Total	212	236	319
Nowhere in Town!!!!	77	67	53

Not surprisingly respondents favored the Exit 92 and Exit 93 Areas for larger-scale development, except for Recreational Facilities which were favored anywhere in town. Many respondents did not want to see Cannabis Retail establishments. Also, on the list of “unwanted businesses” were gaming facilities; bars and lounges; Adult Book Stores; and additional gas stations or pizza restaurants. One reason given for not wanting additional development was that the tax burden of the development would out-pace the growth. Several respondents felt location was a deciding factor in whether they would support the addition of any of the businesses on the suggested list.

The desire for a pharmacy and a grocery store like Aldi’s, Whole Foods or Trader Joe’s was expressed in the comments – similar to 2013 responses. One suggested that the Senior center be available to residents for rental for activities. i.e. birthday parties, etc. and that schools and businesses should create programs to fast track students to jobs. **Other suggested businesses included:**

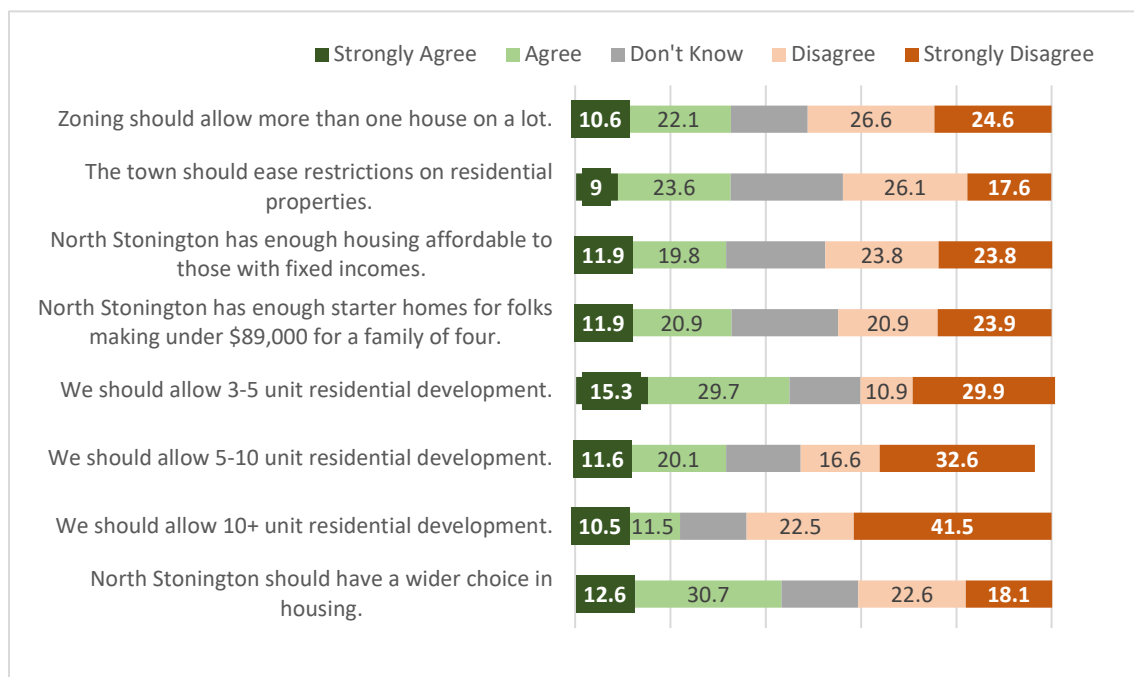
Incubator Space for Start-up Companies	Hardware Store	Businesses that promote STEM and related activities (e.g. blacksmith shops, small machine shops, ham radio stations and towers, etc. (All OK on residential properties))
Laundromat	Honey, Cheese, Bakers, etc. to support out schools, and to sell commercially	
Car Wash	Unique/Interesting/Independent Coffee Shops and Restaurants	Green tourism - farm B&Bs
Mini Golf/Driving Range	Distribution Center	Café or pub with delivery services
Bicycle Shop	Inn	Gym
Water Company	Music Store	A hidden big box like Target with groceries and pharmacy

Respondents certainly continue to support farming and want more opportunities to buy local produce. This was very evident during the pandemic!



Residential Development

The topic of housing remains controversial, but the responses throughout the survey related to housing clearly indicate that more respondents believe that there is a need for more housing for first-time home buyer, those on fixed incomes and those making less than the area median income, than those who do not. There is still

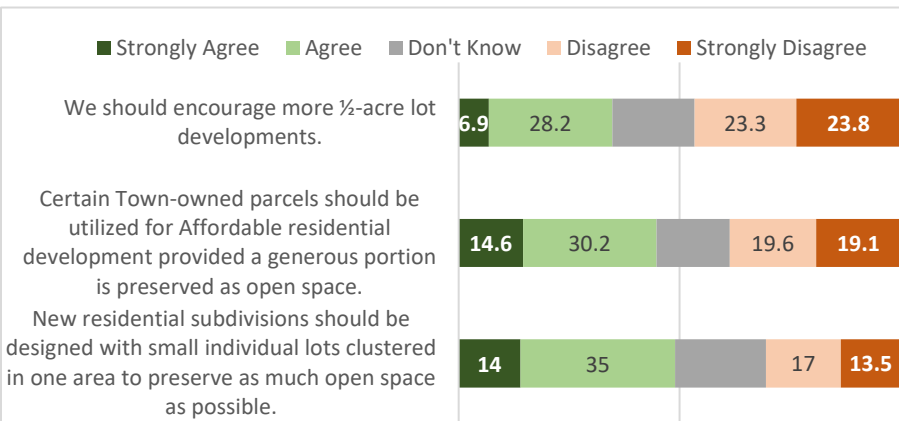
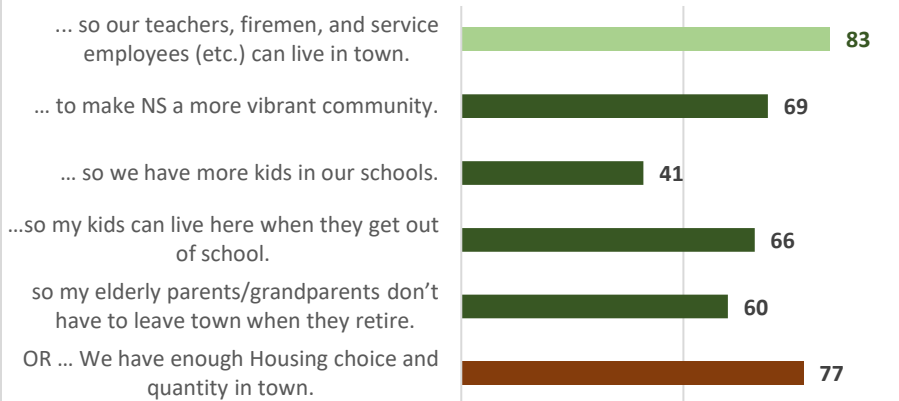


little support for apartment buildings with greater than 5 units, but there is support for 3-5 unit developments. General comments provided indicate a need for affordable housing for seniors, perhaps in the form of assisted living. There was not a lot of support for easing restrictions on residential properties, but there was much

more support than 10 years ago for allowing more than one house on a lot which may be a result of the pandemic and wanting to keep one's relatives close. Those who opposed more than one house on a lot still, however, outnumbered those in favor.

When compared to 2013, the primary reason for wanting housing is still so firemen, teachers and service workers can live in town. The percentage of respondents who felt that there was enough housing choice and

I want to see an increase in the amount and type of housing....



quantity was essentially the same: 38% in 2023 vs. 39% in 2013. The remaining responses were nearly identical to those in 2013.

The responses related to cluster subdivisions and lot sizes for new residential development indicated a support for smaller lots and greater preserved open space – unless the project was an affordable housing cluster subdivision, in which case the support dropped slightly. Despite the obvious support for cluster developments with the preservation of open space, there were more opponents to allowing more ½ acre lot developments (such as Kingswood/Meadow Wood or Cedar Ridge) than supporters. When compared to the 2013 responses though, there is more support now for this type of development than 10 years ago.

Multi-family and workforce housing is supported in the larger versus smaller commercial areas closer to larger employment areas and close to major

highways. 19% of respondents did not want to see either type of housing at all versus the 81% who did identify acceptable zones.

	Multi-family Residential	Workforce Housing
AREA 1 (Exit 92 EDD and I Zone East)	51	48
AREA 2 (Exit 93 HC Zone)	42	35
AREA 3 (West end Rte. 2 RCCD)	44	44
AREA 4 (Village Area Incl. VC Zone)	13	9
AREA 5 or 6 (Small Comm. Districts)	29	18
Any Non-residential and some Residential Districts by SPP	22	24
Anywhere in Town!!!!	34	39
Total	235	217
Nowhere in Town!!!!	54	52

Answers to question 51 further demonstrates the differing opinions about what type of housing is needed or supported. Those wanting to see smaller or rental units slightly outnumbered those who do not.

Community and Character

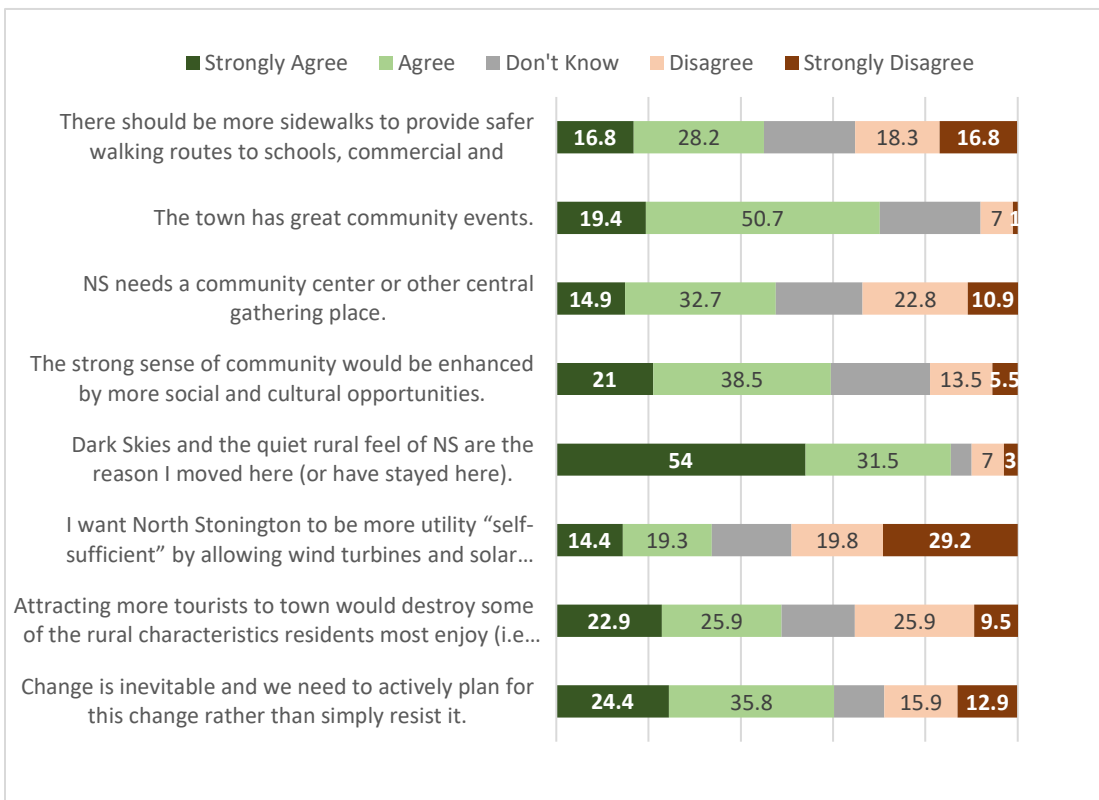
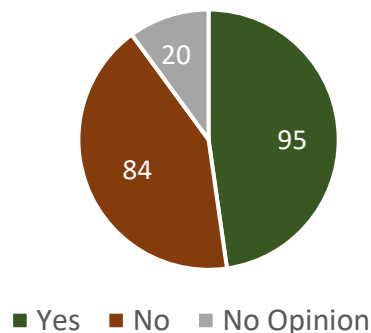
Respondents enjoy North Stonington's community events and value the rural feel and quiet of the small town but understand that change is inevitable and must be managed. Solar Energy Facilities and too many tourists are seen as a potential threat to the rural characteristics that contribute to the high quality of life. The 2023 Survey indicated more support for expanding recreational facilities and programming to be inclusive of all ages. More than one respondent identified the need to improve athletic fields.

Respondents still want to support the schools and the library as important services in a strong community.

Similar to 2013, respondents highlighted walkability, the value of an active community and the desire for a central gathering place.

A new issue surfaced in the 2023 Survey regarding divisiveness, inequality and inclusion that was not voiced during the public input gathering in 2013. This is likely a result of many factors that

Have more housing options including smaller homes and rental units.



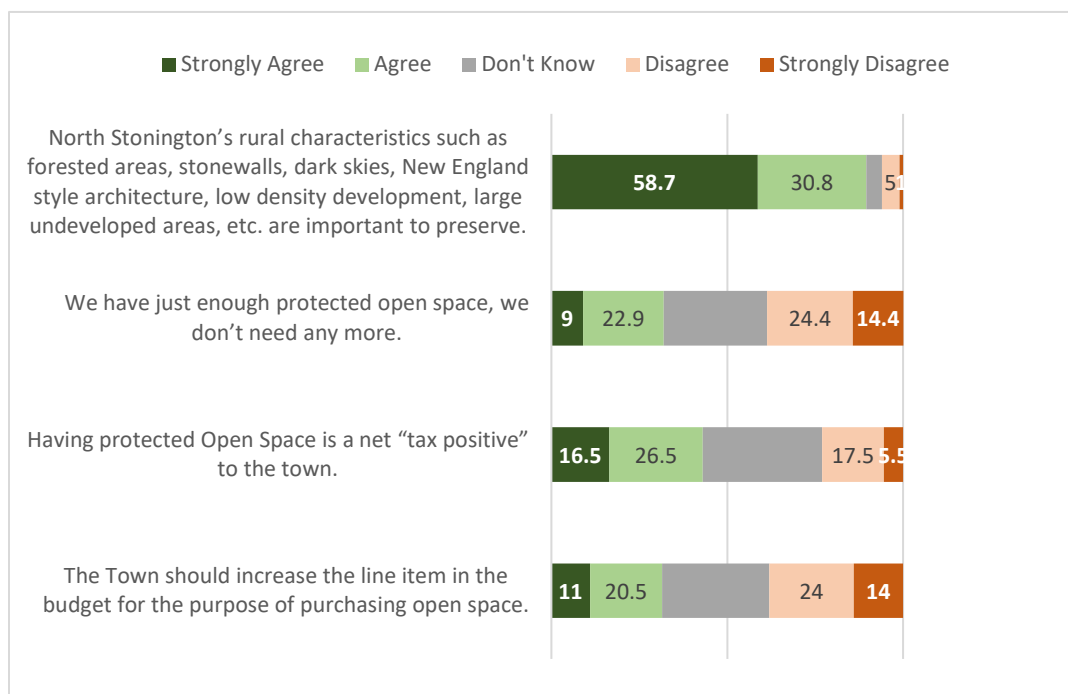
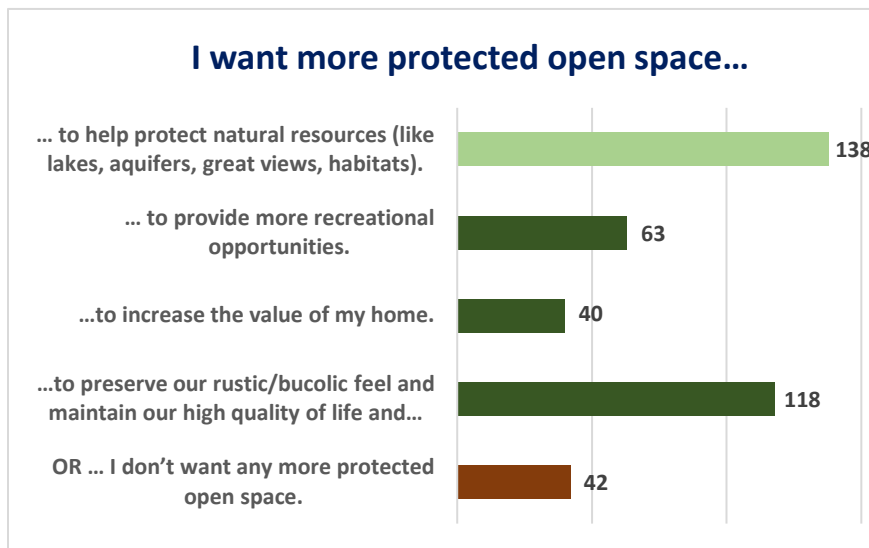
had profound impacts on many people's lives in the past 5 years or so such as the inequalities revealed during the pandemic, anxiety about the health of loved ones and the economy, the Black Lives Matter movement, and general political unrest. The country in general has been more divided. Respondents indicated a need to "heal the divide" and one suggested we provide "funding to help shine a light on inequality and help minorities in

our community to have a stronger voice” [and] “Educate those who have unconscious racism or bias to understand and make changes.”

Open Space

Nearly all respondents to the survey, as well as participants in the focus groups and neighborhood meetings would agree that North Stonington’s rural characteristics as defined through the whole public input process, are important to preserve. They are the reason that many moved here and why many remain. The majority of comments about development typically come back to the need to balance conservation of open space, natural resources, dark skies, low density development with the need for economic development to stabilize the tax base and reduce the burden on homeowners (in particular). There continues to be great concern about maintaining the health of the lakes, forests, farmland, etc. as a way to maintain the rustic feel of the town and maintain the quality of life.

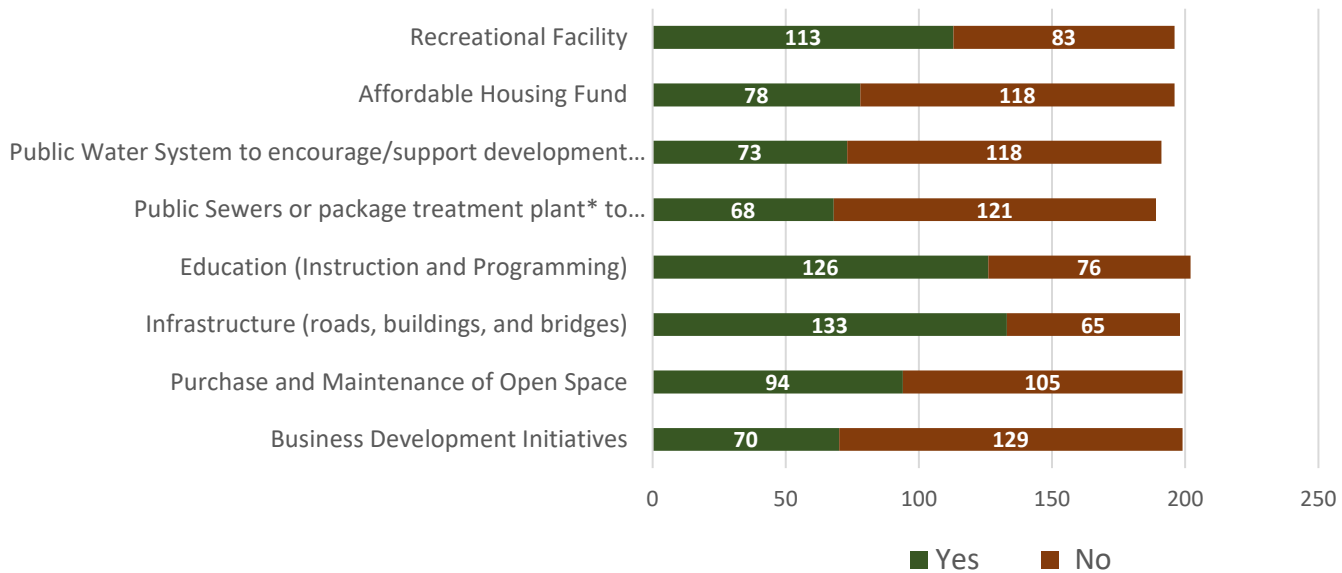
Responses to questions about Open Space also indicate that many understand that Open space is not a “tax burden” though this may need to be clarified given the number of “I don’t know” responses.



More people in 2023 felt that open space is a net “tax positive” than in 2013, and felt more needed to be preserved. When looking only at the current survey 38% versus 32% feel we need more Open Space, but when the question of how to acquire it, specifically purchase it, the support reverses with 38% of respondents NOT in favor of increasing the budget line item for the purchase of Open Space versus 32% in favor. This was the case in the 2013 Survey as well.

What are we willing to pay for?

Would you be willing to vote for an increase in taxes to provide for either the creation of, increase in, or the improvement of any the following?



Respondents showed a willingness to spend tax dollars on maintaining infrastructure, supporting education and creating or improving recreation facilities. The results of the 2013 Survey also supported Education and Infrastructure, as well as Emergency Services. The 2023 Survey inadvertently left out Emergency Services as one of the choices, but given the completion of the new EMS building, it is likely that another on the list would have taken its place.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/SUGGESTIONS: *(i.e. What do you like about NS and want to preserve? What changes would you like to see? What is working and what is not? What do you want NS to look like and/or to be like in 10 years and how do we get there? How can we better work together to achieve our goals?)*

Like:

- Quarterly Newsletter
- Small town community and country living feel; The beauty of its rural character and the gift of seeing the Milky Way; Vistas; Opportunities for Hiking and Fishing
- Quiet residential, peaceful lifestyle
- Open spaces; Farms; Water
- Library; Schools of distinction
- Grange fair
- Caring populous
- Good communication and efforts to bring community together.
- Beautiful historic downtown

Need:

- Develop a well-defined strategic plan to include goals and timelines that demonstrates the benefits to the residents of the Town.
- Take a proactive approach to issues and potential issues, rather than being reactive... learn from the experience of other towns.
- Water and sewers for business along exit 92 - 93 corridor within 10 years to attract businesses/Economic Development
- Utilize historic downtown and fairgrounds and Grange better: Add a riding arena for equestrians at the fairgrounds, open that space up for horse shows and events to bring in revenue.
- Petition to remove the deed restrictions on the old Wheeler School grounds to allow buildings to be repurposed as shops, galleries, studios and become a revenue source.
- Affordable Housing now for all ages to increase tax base and vitality; encourage building of smaller homes or allowing smaller lot subdivisions.
- Cultural center/expanded library; Invest in Education and maintain quality schools.
- Recreation center (pool with swim lessons, fitness center, community room) and expanded opportunities for school age education such as clubs; Activities for kids/young adults and other opportunities for safe, social interaction; more recreation fields
- Better salaries, better talent and retention for town non-elected positions; We need more positive and intelligent leadership.
- Focus on our agriculture; A local farms cooperative retail store with a brand "NoSto Grown."
- Incentives for more ecofriendly farming in town; Education around regenerative farming practices,
- Proactively prepare for climate change
- Need greater diversity among our population
- PRESERVE rural character and protect our waterways; preserve as much open spaces as community will allow,
- Protect the village from sound and lights from Rte. 2 caused by the demolition of the school building
- Animal rescue facility; Full-time animal control officer
- Town clean-up day
- Bike trails and more sidewalks for safe walking.
- 24/7 Police protection