

## **Message from the Cape Comprehensive Plan survey: Public engagement and the Environment**

As part of the Town of Cape Elizabeth's 2 year effort to prepare a new comprehensive plan, an online public opinion survey was deployed. Major conclusions from the survey results are that the public is engaged in the comprehensive plan process and that environmental protection tops public priorities.

All residents were mailed a postcard with the information on how to take the survey. A survey link was also enabled on the town website. Almost 800 respondents took the survey and over one-half used the town website link (416 of 783 respondents). Both the number of respondents and the demographic distribution of those who took the survey indicate survey responses are representative of residents' opinions and goals.

Most residents (90%) choose to live in Cape Elizabeth for the quality of life, which includes proximity to the ocean (88%) and to the City of Portland (80%). Residents also highly value the public school system (69%) and the rural atmosphere (63%). Overall, residents (84%) are extremely or very satisfied with living in Cape Elizabeth. The biggest drawback are the cost of taxes and housing.

Public services ranked excellent to very good include parks and open spaces (90%), walking trails (86%), library services (81%), public schools (81%) and snow removal (74%).

Because the comprehensive plan is the basis for land use policy, attitudes about development are important. Supporters of new residential development slightly outnumber opponents. Supporters, not surprisingly, favor single family homes (52%), but there is also support for multi-family units or apartments (36%) and condominiums/townhouses (33%). A majority (56%) do not think there is an adequate supply of moderate income affordable housing. When asked who should get access to affordable housing, young families were favored with 33%, followed by "anyone" at 29% and seniors at 26%. When new development does occur, there is strong support (67%) for it to include permanently preserved open space and extension of sidewalks (52%). Only 8% prefer no new development.

There is stronger support for commercial development. Sixty-percent strongly or moderately support more commercial development, but only in existing commercial zoning districts. Desired new commercial development includes small retail stores, bakeries and coffee shops.

What priorities emerged from the survey? Almost all (97%) strongly or moderately want to protect environmental quality, followed by protection and preservation of wetlands, ponds and woods (96%), and preserving the town's rural character (92%).

There is also support for preserving historic structures (93% and sustaining and promoting agriculture (93%). Partnered with preservation of existing is strong support to move forward with expansion of cell phone coverage (81%) and expanding alternative energy (82%). Public schools also remain a priority (79%). Over one-half (53%) support utilizing Fort Williams to generate funds for the town.