



Town of Bristol Comprehensive Plan Survey Summary

During September and October of 2023, the Town conducted an online survey to ask residents what they felt was important to consider for the on-going update of the Comprehensive Plan. The survey asked residents what factors in Bristol were important to them for shaping the community's growth and development trajectory in the coming decades. The survey was advertised online, by word of mouth, and on posters at Town Hall. Mid-way through the survey period, a postcard was mailed to all residences in the Town. **In total, 287 residents filled out the survey, a bit more than 10 percent of the adult population.** The demographic make-up of respondents in the survey sample was similar to the population. In other words, the views expressed by survey respondents are likely to be representative of Bristol as a whole.

The core issues expressed through written comment and in answer selections were very similar to the tone of the current comprehensive plan. The following are topics that received strong support and were mentioned frequently in written responses. These will serve as the basis for a set of goals and objectives for the next 20 years.

1. Keep taxes low and maintain a commensurate level of service.

Existing services and facilities appear to be adequate for many residents. Half of the survey participants commented on at least one service or facility. But with no more than two dozen comments at most, none of those issues (trash/recycling, road maintenance, etc.) rose to the level of community-wide concern. This is not to say that the Town should not address these issues, only that there is not a need to make one or more of these issues cornerstones of a new plan covering 20 years of the future. The issues raised can be better addressed through short-term planning, community meetings, and budget writing.

Three out of five respondents (170 total) were opposed to property tax increases funding additional or improved services or facilities. When asked which existing comprehensive plan goals needed update/review (i.e. included in one form or another in the new plan), 66% selected "Keep real estate taxes as low as practicable." **Roughly one third (34%) respondents indicated a willingness for a small tax increase.** However, there was no consensus that the overall level of services and facilities currently provided by the Town was inadequate. As many respondents indicated that they were comfortable with current services and facilities as respondents indicated a deficiency in a particular issue.

2. Protect natural resources while allowing recreational access.

Survey respondents identified protection/preservation of natural resources and other aspects of rural life among their top concerns. Multiple related goals from the existing plan received strong support from the community:

- Recognize the value of the community's groundwater. (50%)
- Maintain and improve the Town's park and open space areas. (44%)
- Recognize the many natural resources in the area. (41%)

A simple majority of respondents listed atmosphere, natural areas, and recreation as concerns of theirs. **Respondents also frequently listed issues related to natural resources and recreation in their top three most important issues facing the Town:**

- Provision of recreational trails, including bicycling, walking, and equestrian (40%)
- The rural atmosphere and vistas/views of agricultural life (29%)
- Environmental pollutants such as nitrates (23%)
- Light pollution and/or maintaining dark skies (23%)

3. Support farming and preserve farmland.

Agriculture-related topics were repeatedly selected from among the list of fourteen topics of concern as well as goals needing review in the old comprehensive plan. **Nearly 30% of respondents listed "the rural atmosphere and vistas/views of agricultural life" in their top three concerns.**

Not only did respondents respond with strong support for maintaining farmland for its scenic value, but they also emphasized the importance of agriculture as a vital economic base and cultural cornerstone of the community.

- **Over half (55%) of respondents selected protecting the agricultural base of the town,**
- **Just over half (52%) selected limiting non-farm land uses, AND**
- **Nearly half (47%) selected controlling the location of those uses** as goals from the current plan needing review.

Respondent concerns also emphasize the importance of farming to the community. Maintaining large, contiguous tracts of farmland and protecting high-quality soils were both

4. Manage growth in Bristol in cooperation with neighboring communities, keeping a similar (or slightly slower) rate of development as compared to the past several decades.

Anticipating growth inside and outside the current Town of Bristol borders and being able to control that to the greatest extent possible was very much implicit in the key topics mentioned in items one through three above. It was explicit in the goals and concerns that respondents expressed, for example resolving boundary and annexation issues (47%) and having a complete strategy for Town improvement and growth management (38%).

Intergovernmental planning was heavily favored based on the section of the survey devoted to actions the Town could take to address current challenges. Four of those actions suggesting collaboration with neighboring communities received between 39 and 49 percent support:

- Enhancing Token Creek as an environmental resource,
- Crafting boundary agreements,
- Planning appropriate transitions from neighboring municipalities' development into Town development, AND
- Planning connections between recreational and non-motorized transportation networks.

A plurality of respondents (44%) felt that the pace of growth in Bristol had “been about right” over the past few decades. **An additional forty-five percent (45%) of respondents felt the pace of development had been either too fast or much too fast.**

Next Steps

1. CARPC and Town staff will be available at an open house on January 30th from 5:00 until 8:00pm (February 12th in the event of a major snow event.) We invite the public to stop in and have a chat about the takeaways from the survey and to discuss a set of draft goals for the new comprehensive plan. We would like to hear more about what objectives you think would support those goals and what steps should be taken to achieve them.
2. Joint Town Board and Plan Commission meetings will be held on Tuesday February 12th and Tuesday March 11th and will review progress on the draft document. Residents are encouraged to attend and offer their feedback.
3. A 30-day period for public review of the final draft document, public hearing(s), and adoption by the Town Board will occur in the spring.