



Town of Chebeague Island Comprehensive Plan Community Survey – A report

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I. Overview

This survey is intended to provide an initial vehicle to collect input from the Chebeague Island community as we plan for the next 12+ years. The survey is informed by conversations with Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC), along with research into other town's comprehensive plan surveys, and will be followed by a series of public forums to go deeper into most frequently discussed topics. It has provided the CPAC with an opportunity to hear from a number of diverse perspectives and different stakeholders. We heard from 134 citizens in the survey. The continued quantity and quality of response from community outreach shows an impressive level of commitment to our future. In a small community like Chebeague Island, there are often voices who are louder and more consistently involved than others. This survey has provided an initial opportunity for voices to be heard both equally and anonymously.

Surveys are a great starting point for a comprehensive plan as it can consider the vast number of priorities that can be focused on within a plan and allow the community to begin narrowing down which priority is highest for them. It can allow for initial community conversations and presentations to have a solid foundation.

What we heard from the community was a resounding desire to preserve what makes the island so unique – the special place that attracted them or generations before them and keeps them staying and coming back. Importantly, this sentiment didn't always translate to 'we don't want there to be any change.' An overwhelming theme throughout the survey was that sustaining the rural character of the island folks' love will require us to seek ways to grow and engage in policy actions that preserve the character that people hold so dear. Survey participants were bold in their acknowledgement that the town government and residents have a considerable amount of work to do and often offered specific pathways for that work to be done. Sustaining the island's way of life into the future will take a tremendous commitment and will require some carefully managed and thoughtful change.

This survey report is organized to allow people to understand the creation, administration, and analysis of the Comprehensive Plan Community Survey. It begins by reviewing the methodology and then speaks to both quantitative and qualitative analysis. It ends with takeaways and next steps.

II. Methodology

a. Survey Design

Survey design was undertaken by Island Institute Fellow Lorren Ruscetta. Lorren spent time reviewing the survey report from Chebeague Island's previous comprehensive plan and reviewed comprehensive plan surveys from other Maine coastal and island communities – including Long Island, Swans Island, Frenchboro, and Stonington. She also connected with community planners at the Greater Portland Council of Governments, Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission, and Hancock County Regional Planning Commission. Connecting with these communities and representatives allowed Lorren to be informed by local and best practices.

The survey was designed to include both quantitative and qualitative data to ensure people had an opportunity to explore their perspectives and personal ideas in a manner that isn't possible when answering Likert scale questions (e.g., sharing level of agreement). Upon completion of an initial survey, a draft was sent to the CPAC for review and feedback. This feedback was integrated, and a finalized survey was completed and uploaded to the application of Survey Monkey for administration.

b. Survey Administration and Promotion

The survey was uploaded to Survey Monkey, and a link along with a QR code was created through the application. Lorren created multiple flyers using this QR code and hung them on the Chebeague Transportation Company boat, Casco Bay Lines boat, on the cork boards at the Chebeague Rec Center, Chebeague Island Library, and the Chebeague Island Post Office. The link was posted on a personal community website of www.chebeague.org, the Town of Chebeague Island's website, and a community Facebook page every week from the survey's opening until it's closing. The Town utilizes the text service Slick Text to send messages to community members who have registered for Town updates – as of May 2026 there are 423 registered users – and texts messages regarding the survey were sent out three separate times. Lorren, along with members of the CPAC, also connected with their social groups throughout the island to ensure word-of-mouth was utilized, and the survey reached the greatest number of people.

Making attempts to overcome the digital divide is essential when engaging in municipal decision-making processes, particularly when beginning with community engagement. The digital divide refers to the gap between demographics and regions that have full, meaningful access to modern information and communication technologies—like computers and high-speed internet—and those that have limited or no access, or those who prefer not to engage with these technologies. This phenomenon can affect everything from employment, education, and healthcare access. Understanding the high median age of Chebeague Island, along with the cultural norm of storytelling and analog communication, the CPAC and Island Institute Fellow wanted to ensure that paper copies of the survey were available to anyone that would prefer to or need to participate in that way. Paper copies of the survey were available at the Library, Rec

Center, and Town Office. Five people out of the full sample filled out the survey using these paper copies.

The survey response rate is difficult to measure, as the survey was open to all residents of Chebeague Island – seasonal and year-round. The total number of this population is challenging to identify. It is not fair to create a response rate based on the proportion of the year-round population that may have participated in the survey, because we know based on answers to the survey that not everyone who participated in the survey was a year-round resident. In the end, the survey had 134 responses. Typical response rates to municipal community surveys are anywhere from 10-30%. The residents of Chebeague Island are often asked to fill out surveys – from municipality committees and island non-profits alike. A lower-than-desired response rate for surveys can often be contributed to a phenomenon called survey fatigue – where there is a marked decline in response rates and data quality caused by respondents becoming overwhelmed by the volume, length, or complexity of survey requests – or perhaps the timing of survey administration being at a time when the busy season begins on the island, or perhaps a cynicism with municipal planning. The CPAC would have liked to see more participation but also understands the limitations of survey design, and this understanding is why the community survey is the start of a robust community engagement plan that has looked to connect with more people in informal and formal settings, including interviews and community meetings. Limitations of surveys are widely known, and thus the community survey was never intended to create a holistic picture of community priorities and is rather a steppingstone for more in depth conversations.

c. Survey Analysis

The survey closed on July 3rd, 2026, after being available for six weeks. Lorren led the analysis utilizing Survey Monkey, comparative statistical analysis with Excel, and thematic analysis for the open-ended, qualitative questions. Thematic analysis refers to a research method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning—or "themes"—within a dataset. People often use this approach to organize unstructured information (like survey responses) and translate it into a coherent narrative that looks to understand shared perspectives.

Preliminary findings were shared during a CPAC meeting July 9th and were finalized to be shared with the community for the purposes of a Community Visioning Session on Saturday, August 15th.

III. Quantitative Data Analysis

The survey began with questions regarding residency, demographics, employment, and transportation. Of the 134 total survey respondents, 132 answered the question of residency status on Chebeague. Fifty-four percent of those 132 participants consider their home on Chebeague Island their primary residence, and 46% consider their home on the island their seasonal home (Figure 1).

Do you consider Chebeague your full time residence?

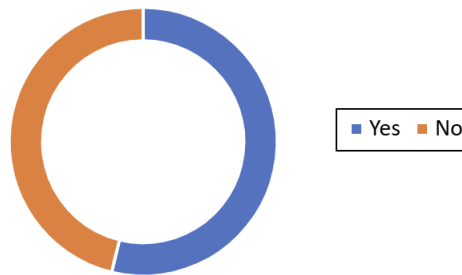


Figure 1. Year-round or seasonal residency

Of the 65 seasonal residents who answered the additional question regarding the average length of stay on the island, the majority (51%) spend 1-4 months per year on the island. Following that, 28% of seasonal residents spend 5-8 months per year on the island (Figure 2). An overwhelming majority (61%) of those with connections to Chebeague Island – both seasonal and year-round – have been visiting the island or have lived here for over 30 years (Figure 3).

What is your average length of stay on the island?

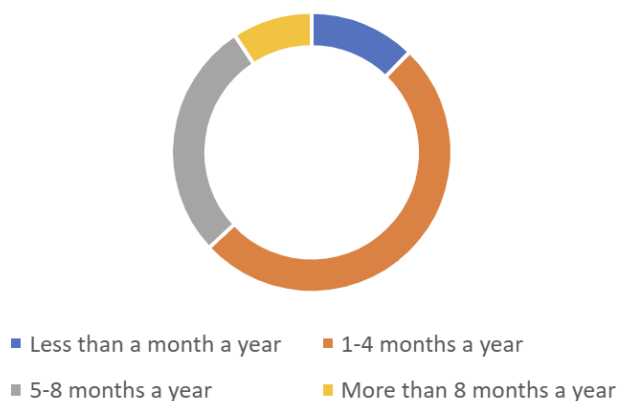


Figure 2. Average length on island

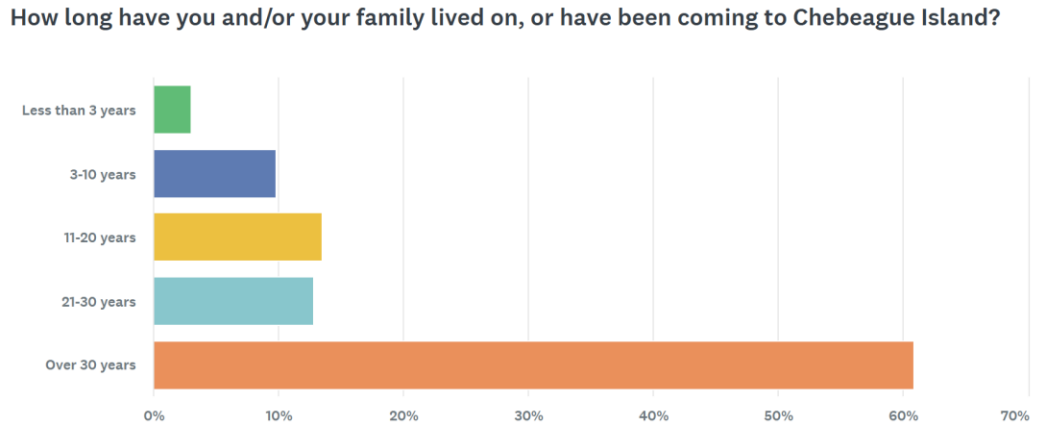


Figure 3. Time connected to Chebeague Island

Public participation is mandatory in municipal planning decision-making processes. However, there continues to be barriers for all members of communities to have the access to meaningfully participate in meetings, focus groups, and ultimately, the planning process. For both municipal planning and research, surveys tend to skew older and female (Conrad et al., 2011). This norm is shown in the Chebeague Island Comprehensive Plan Community Survey (CICPCS), where the demographics of those who took the survey skew older and female (Figures 4 & 5). However, these demographics mirror the high median age both in Cumberland County and on Chebeague Island. Generally, unlike other surveys, the CICPCS participant's demographics represent the demographics of the island. Fifty-seven percent of the CICPCS participants were over the age of 65, 21% between the ages of 55-64 years old, 10% between 45 and 54, 9% between 35 and 44, and 4% and 1% were between the ages of 25 and 34, and 18 to 24, respectively.

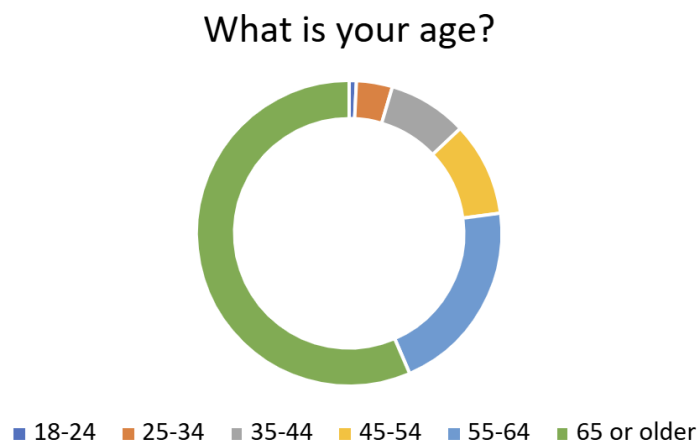


Figure 4. Age of survey participants

What is your gender?

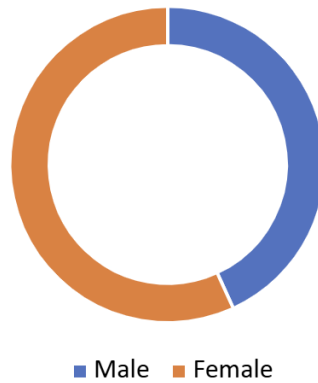


Figure 5. Gender of survey participants

Given the age demographics of Chebeague Island, it is unsurprising that the majority (45%) of those living on the island are retired. Following retirement, the second highest represented proportion of the population is employed full time (20%), then folks who are self-employed or a business owner (13%) (Figure 6). The Chebeague Island community has a robust history of volunteerism – both for municipal committees and island non-profits – and this was evident in the survey, where 62% of participants shared that they are currently involved with a municipal committee or island non-profit (Figure 7).

What is your employment status while you're on Chebeague Island?

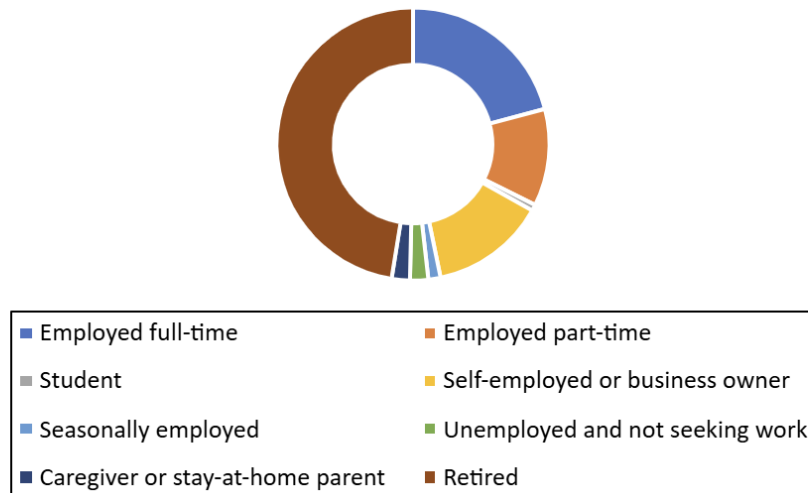


Figure 6. Employment status of those on Chebeague Island

Do you volunteer your time with a municipal committee or an island non-profit?

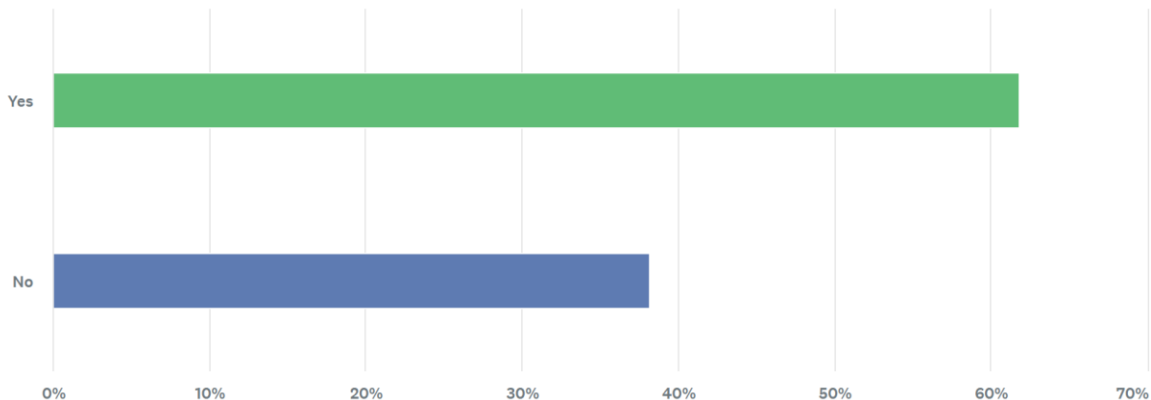


Figure 7. Participation in municipal committees & island non-profits

Transportation is an everyday consideration for Chebeaguers – the ability to get to the mainland safely and reliably as a community living on an unbridged island is critical for healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. Sayings like, “your life is run by the ferry schedule,” and “the boat waits for no one” are common statements that allow newcomers and visitors alike to understand acutely how important ferry services are to and from Chebeague Island. The questions regarding transportation to the mainland were divided into questions regarding transportation in the context of employment and otherwise (e.g., medical appointments, recreation, etc.) and then inquired about the method of transportation to the mainland.

Interestingly, most of those who reported that they are working have no need to commute to the mainland for work because they are working remotely (34%). This is certainly a shift from historical patterns of employment on the island and is likely a direct result of the Town’s investment in broadband services, a goal that was identified in the 2011 Comprehensive Plan. After working remotely, those who do not commute because they work on the island and those who commute off the island for the purposes of work 2-4 days per week are tied at representing 23% of the participants who are working (Figure 8). Regardless of employment status, most people find themselves commuting off island for purposes outside of work 0-1 day per week (54%), with 32% of participants commuting off island 2-4 days per week (Figure 9). The overwhelming majority of commuters find themselves using the Chebeague Transportation (CTC) ferry at 82%. Chebeague Island received the least amount of stops on the Casco Bay Lines (CBL) ferry transportation service, and this is shown in the fact that after the CTC ferry, the second most utilized method of transportation is personal boats (10%) (Figure 10). CBL is aware of these low ridership numbers, and this is reflected in their most recent CBL Freight Lines Analysis, where they share the numbers: “Chebeague generates \$523K of freight, second-most of any island, despite carrying only 1.4% of CBL passengers. CBL serves Chebeague more as a freight route than a passenger route.”

How often are you commuting off island for the purposes of work?

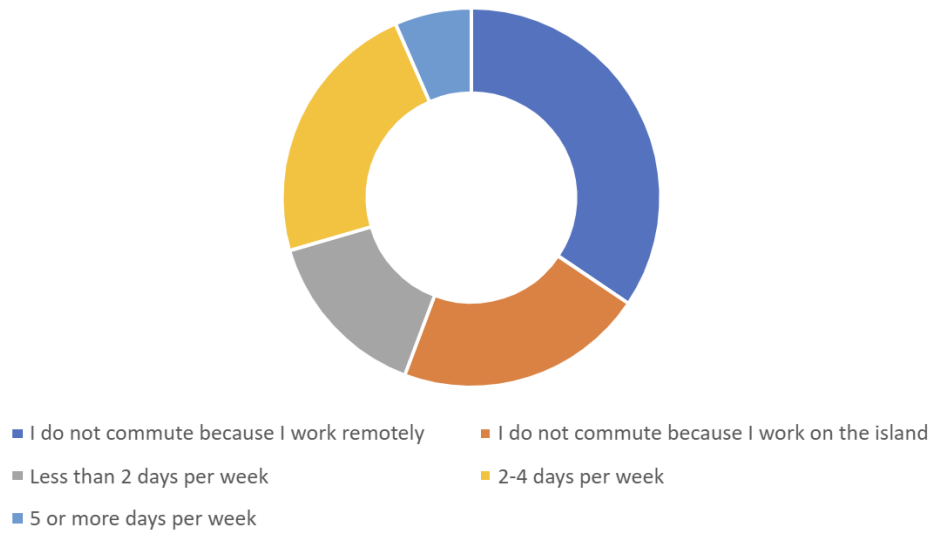


Figure 8. Commuting off island for work

How often are you commuting off the island for purposes outside of work (e.g., for recreation, appointments, family, etc.)

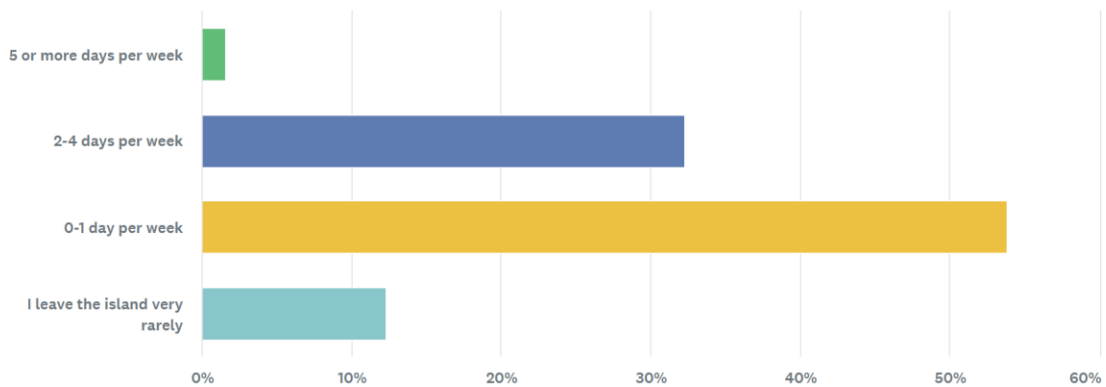


Figure 9. Commuting off island for purposes outside of work

How do you typically get to the mainland when you do go?

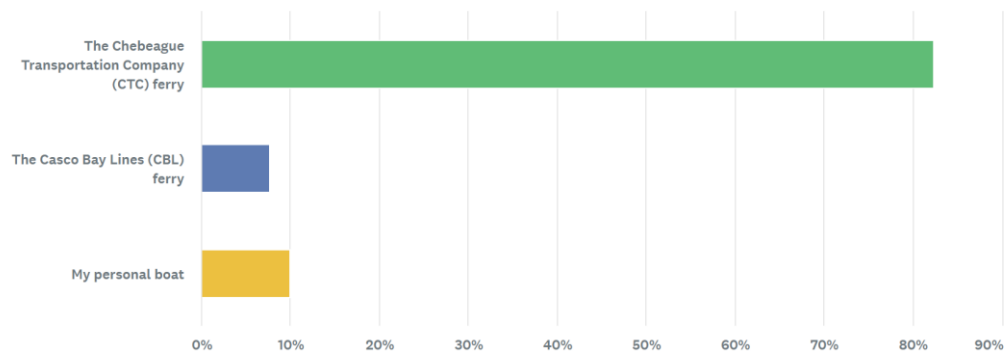


Figure 10. Method of transportation to the mainland

The next section of questions asked participants to consider their quality of life on Chebeague Island, along with identifying priorities for the Town to consider as it plans for the future, and how responsive they feel the Town of Chebeague Island is to their needs. Those who participated in the survey overwhelmingly reported that the satisfaction with their quality of life on the island is somewhere between somewhat satisfied to very satisfied (Figure 11).

How satisfied are you with your quality of life on Chebeague Island?

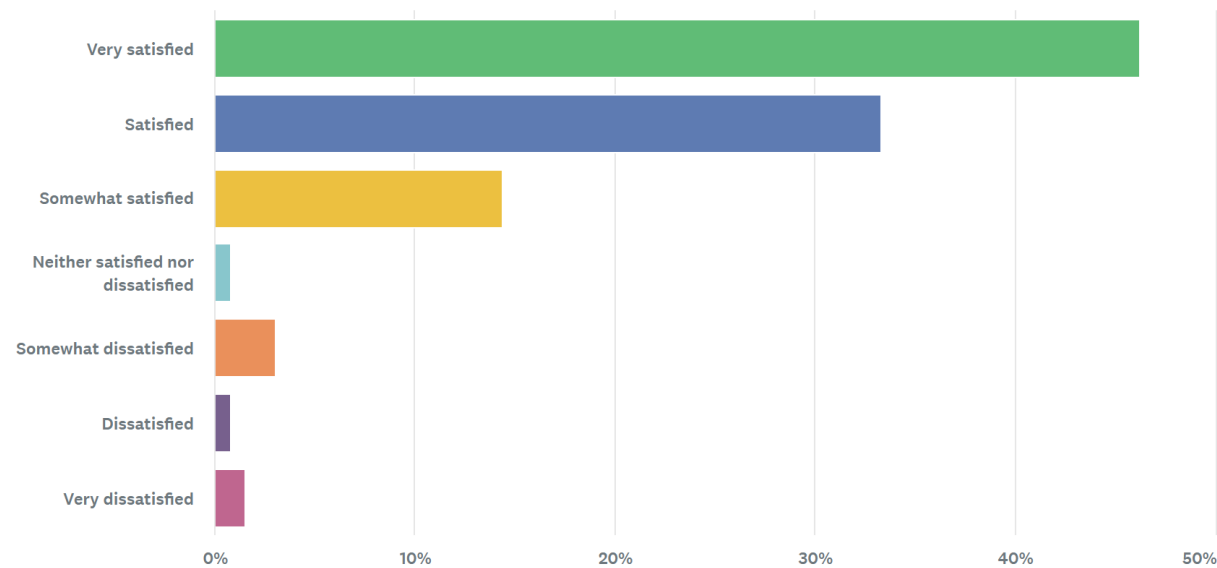


Figure 11. Quality of life satisfaction of survey participants

Similarly, participants overwhelmingly shared that they feel as though Town government is responsive to their needs (Figure 12).

How responsive is the town government to your needs?

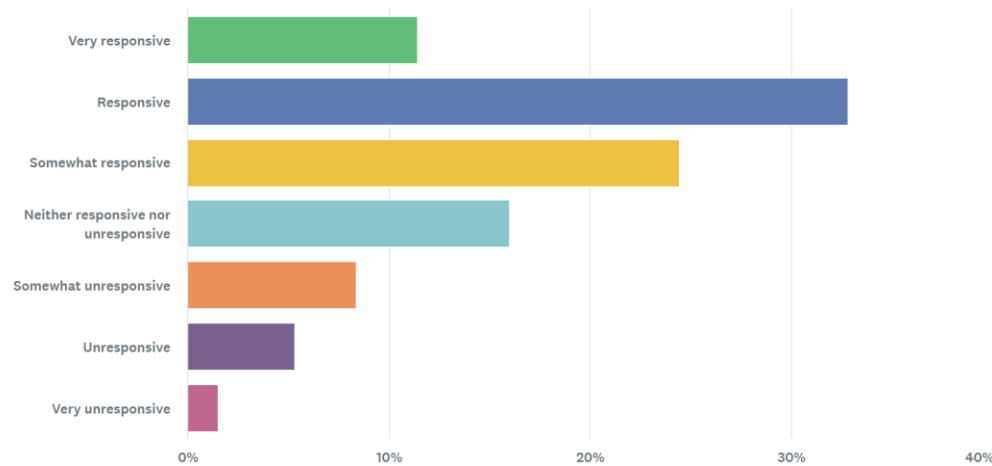


Figure 12. Town responsiveness to participant’s needs

The CPAC and Island Institute Fellow felt that representing the most possible priorities that the Town could consider and allowing survey participants to choose from those priorities accordingly was the best way to allow people to identify multiple priorities but to also ensure that this data would be straightforward to analyze, as participants were using the same language to describe priorities. The list of priorities included 25 possible choices, and the question was designed as a “check all that apply.” The top 10 priorities along with the proportion of survey participants that selected that priority are:

- 1) Planning to protect and conserve water supply from the aquifer – **68%**
- 2) Financial planning to ensure a stable tax rate – **64%**
- 3) Protecting and managing open space and natural resources – **63%**
- 4) Promoting land-use decision-making processes that protect the rural character of the island – **61%**
- 5) Preserving access to the working waterfront – **60%**
- 6) Supporting the Chebeague Island School in maintaining sustainable enrollment numbers – **56%**
- 7) Building resiliency in our capacity to cope with climate change impacts – **50%**
- 8) Developing a long-term strategic approach for managing Town assets – **49%**
- 9) Ensuring sustainable development of affordable year-round housing on the island – **48%**
- 10) Protecting and ensuring affordability for island legacy families (e.g., through tax relief programs, etc.) – **48%**

Many of the priorities that were highlighted in the 2026 Chebeague Island Comprehensive Plan Community Survey mirrored the priorities identified in the 2011 Chebeague Island Comprehensive Plan Survey. This emphasizes the enduring nature of the sociocultural visions for the future – one that centers around balancing preservation with development and looks to ensure the rural character of the island thrives for generations to come. It is clear from continuing to review the survey’s open-ended question responses that these priorities informed the perspectives of survey participants. The qualitative analysis section will review qualitative data from these open-ended questions.

Notably, when adjusting the Survey Monkey data to only include seasonal or year-round resident participant responses, the results of the survey do not markedly change. Differences include a slight shift in priorities, where seasonal residents prioritize “ensuring that much of life on Chebeague Island remains the same” and “financial planning to ensure a stable tax rate” higher than year-round residents. Additional divergence can be seen in the question of whether seasonal residents participate in municipal committees or island non-profits, where a slight majority of 51% do not participate (Figure 13). This can also be attributed to the fact that seasonal residents are unable to participate on most of the municipal committees.

Do you volunteer your time with a municipal committee or an island non-profit?

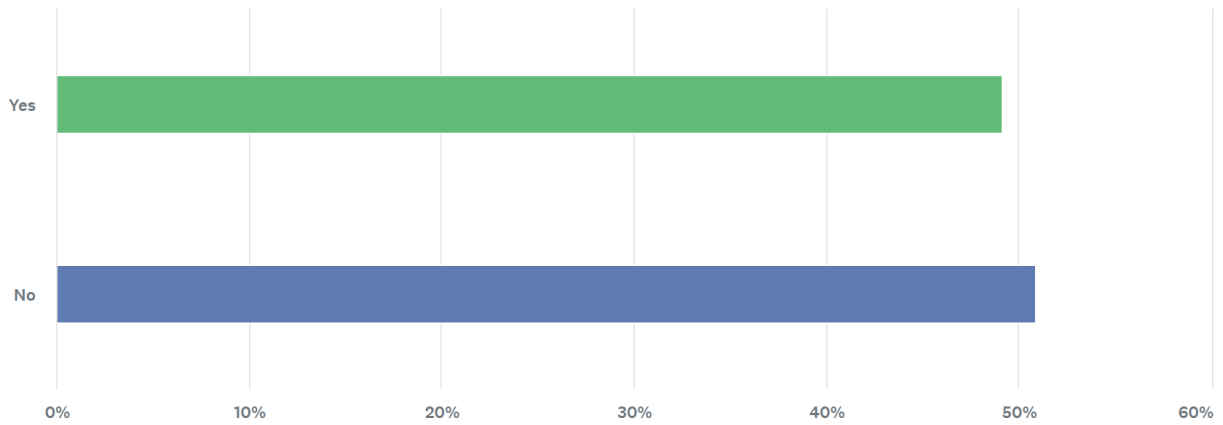


Figure 13. Seasonal residents' participation in municipal committees & island non-profits

IV. Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative analysis for the Chebeague Island Comprehensive Plan Community Survey utilized thematic analysis to identify key themes across data points to create a cohesive shared narrative to inform goals and recommendations in policy and planning (Lochmiller, 2021). In the context of comprehensive planning, thematic analysis translates unstructured, qualitative data, such as community surveys, stakeholder interviews, and public hearing transcripts into actionable, strategic priorities. This kind of data can support towns in identifying, organizing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning to build data-driven policies that reflect actual community needs.

The first open-ended question that was asked in the survey was: *What do you like most about life on Chebeague Island?*

Key themes that emerged from this question's data are outlined in the table below:

Theme	Theme meaning/definition	Example [not real quotes]
A sense of place	A sense of place refers to the connection to the people, land, and sea surrounding Chebeague Island. It may include references to a sense of community, friends, and neighborly connections, but may also include the importance of accessing the water, trails, and the peace and quiet that comes with island living.	"I feel a sense of community when I'm here and get to see my friends and family that I've been part of for generations."
Access to the mainland	Access to the mainland refers to the ability to feel 'rural' while also being near reliable transit to the mainland through the CTC or CBL ferry services	"Having access to the ferry at many times during the day is great."
Access to services & activities	Access to services refers to the ability for folks on Chebeague to maintain the 'rural' nature of island living while also being able to access things like the town office, Commons, rec center, and other services that are important to them	"Going to the Rec Center, the Commons get together, and the golf course makes living here special."

Those who filled out the survey overwhelmingly reported that the thing they liked the most about living on Chebeague Island is having a sense of place. Essentially every single survey participant

reported this as their answer, or at least part of their answer. Below you can find just some quotes from participants:

“It’s a community of individuals who are willing to listen & work together.”

“I have lived on Chebeague for many years. Community is what I value most. Chatting on the ferry, having a friend drop by when I am sick, going to suppers and concerts and knowing everyone. Knowing that people care.”

“The ocean, the opportunity to walk and cycle most anywhere, the protected areas/ trails (e.g. Deer Point, Little Chebeague), extended family time, friendliness of everyone.”

“Quiet and sense of belonging”

“Connections with friends and community. Natural beauty. Sense of place for family.”

“At its best, this island preserves a slower, more humane way of life. I love the ways that my children are allowed to roam and explore; the intergenerational care shown to my family, the spaciousness for spontaneous social connections, and the opportunities to engage with the natural world.”

“The quiet, the beauty, the people, open space, friendships, caring & helpful community - both the people and the services, not over-developed.”

“Being a part of community in a beautiful ocean setting with a working waterfront.”

“Sense of community. People are very open and supportive of one another.”

“The sense of community - hands down.”

“Small town character, close-knit community, semi-rural feel.”

“I love being able to walk the trails and relax on the beaches, how well-connected the community feels to each other (always catching up with someone in the boat, everyone is good-natured and willing to help, etc.), the remoteness and rurality of this place, and the friends and community I have made here since moving in 2024. Makes me feel grateful!”

“The feeling of a small community concerned about its people and environment. Also, the endless beauty of the surroundings.”

Below you can see a word cloud associated with this first question. A word cloud is a visual representation of text data where the size and prominence of each word indicate how often it appears in a source text. Larger, bolder words represent higher frequencies, allowing someone to instantly identify the most common themes, keywords, or sentiments in a piece of data.



The two other themes, albeit less cited in the survey responses, were access to the mainland and access to goods, services, and activities. Quotes related to accessing the mainland included things like:

"Access to the mainland is important!"

"Dependable safe transport with CTC..."

And quotes related to the accessibility of goods, services, and activities on the island included:

"The fire and rescue team are amazing, mostly volunteers. Annual events like the 4th of July races, parade and picnic, the polar plunge and chowder cook-off, the Commons parties – these mean so much."

"Rec center, tennis, golf, hotel."

We also asked those who are filling out the survey to share what they did not like about living on Chebeague Island. This question was: *What do you like the least about life on Chebeague Island? For example, are there changes you have seen on Chebeague Island over the past 10–20 years that concern you?*

Key themes that emerged from the data are outlined in the table below. You will notice that there are more themes regarding what survey participants do not like about living on Chebeague Island versus what they like about living on Chebeague Island. This is not because people dislike living on Chebeague Island more than they like living on the island, but rather because people tend to like the same thing (e.g., sense of place) about living on Chebeague Island, but dislike different things about living on the island.

Theme	Theme definition/meaning	Example [not real quotes]
Governance frustrations	This refers to governance frustrations related to the way that Town and non-profit governance is structured and how it currently behaves - whether through volunteers, or the efficiency of governance decision-making processes.	"I don't like how slow municipal government moves and wish that it would make decisions and take action faster on urgent matters like the Stone Wharf."
Land use regulations & enforcement	Land use regulations and enforcement refer to how things like code enforcement and zoning and other land use policies are enacted and enforced.	"It seems like there are too many large houses being built on the island and I don't think it is very Chebeague-y."
Community shifts	Community shifts and changes refer to how people are perceiving change within the Chebeague community, and include changes to affordability, housing structures, changes related to new people migrating into Chebeague, among other things.	"Too many new people are moving here who want to change the spirit of the island. We are becoming Nantucket"
Seasonality	Seasonality refers to specific perspectives related to the way in which seasonality impacts daily life on Chebeague and can include perceptions related to ability to impact decisions when you are seasonal resident.	"As a seasonal resident it isn't fair to be expected to pay a large proportion of real estate taxes and not have a voice in voting on local issues."
Goods and services	Goods and services refer to perspectives about accessing goods and services while living on Chebeague Island and can include access to	"It is really challenging to get any kind of home services to come to the island. I wish I knew of a carpenter on the island."

	grocery stores or food/beverage establishments, and things like general contracting and plumbing services.	
Safety	Safety refers to perspectives about safety on Chebeague Island and can include issues related to driving and/or pedestrian safety	"I have noticed a significant increase in speeding cars, and it makes me worried about people walking and riding bicycles on the island."

The two most frequently cited themes that survey participants dislike were around governance frustrations and land use regulations and enforcement. Some examples of what people had to say in the context of governance frustrations are below.

"The constant struggle to find volunteers for the overload of non-profits and the staffing/committee/board needs of governance is indicative of major structural problem."

"Would like to see more movement at greater speed on issues. Ladder and learning implementation. Don't wait for the 'perfect.'"

"The move to be independent has been positive but more negative as the community is challenged with problems that cost money. Lack of strong, consistent municipal leadership has created issues that are not getting addressed. Tax increases have not kept up with the cost of living, and the needs of the community now well exceeded the purse..."

"The constant rotation of persons on the current Selectboard leads to slow decision making and large learning curves every time the group changes. It is also affected by personalities who have their own agendas --not an ideal way to govern in what is a complex world."

Frustrations related to governance decision-making processes were not always consistent – some people expressed frustration about something specific, such as barging. Others shared a general worry about dynamics such as volunteerism or the current Selectboard model – wondering whether this model continues to be the most well suited for the island's current dynamics. Quotes from survey participants regarding land use regulations and enforcement can be seen below.

"Seems to be a lot of houses being built or have been built. Worry about overbuilding. Also, why are there trailers in various yards - I thought they were not allowed unless you are building a house and that is limited."

"The number and pace of new homes being built is a concern for me. What is the Island's actual carrying capacity, i.e., our aquifer."

“What I find least appealing is the number of new houses that are being built on a grand scale. How will these new homes affect the water supply upon which we all depend? How will these new homes new homes affect disposal systems on the island?”

“Residents not following zoning and building without permits.”

“The weakness of code enforcement on construction projects and miss-use of temporary dwelling structures like portable trailers / mobile homes, allowing dilapidated buildings to go unattended.”

“Too much renting out of AirBnB properties, leading to increased strain on the waste-disposal system, CTC parking and ferry capacity, and way more stress. The boom in short-term stay renters has made life hell for residents, except for those making money off the system. The town should create a special tax category for this type of facility, as there is for shoreland property, so that these property owners pay more toward to reflect their renters' increased use of facilities.”

The theme of community shifts often discussed affordability and how Chebeague Island has changed over the course of generations to a place that has become less affordable for people, and how that shifts the sociocultural realities of the island itself. Affordability was framed predominately in the context of housing and ferry costs. Quotes related to this theme are below.

“As a young person renting on Chebeague, affordable housing is such a struggle to come by. If I were to ever want to “settle down” on Chebeague, that would be close to impossible...”

“This island has become increasingly inaccessible to people without significant wealth (who are most seasonal residents.) If we had not bought our house when we did, I have no doubt that we would have moved off. This is compounded by the almost-crushing expense of the ferry - where tickets and parking have both gone up considerably. (If we are willing to offer our seniors discounted parking because of their importance to the island, then why not our families?)”

“It's getting too expensive for “every day” people to live here. Concerned it will become a Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard, and only very well-off people can afford to be here.”

“I don't like the fact that it's becoming another Martha's Vineyard. A playground for the rich.”

“It concerns me - and should concern us all - that it is hard for young people, especially young families, to afford to live here. We need affordable housing.”

Out of the themes expressed throughout the survey, the seasonality theme within this question is one that sticks out regarding the demographics of those who cited the theme. People who consider themselves to be seasonal residents were the majority of those who shared frustrations within the theme of seasonality, but it wasn't solely seasonal residents. Below are some quotes from survey participants who expressed frustrations related to seasonality.

“From my perspective as long-term seasonal resident, the myriad non-profit asks for financial support and the substantial tax burden, when balanced against the year-round resident disdain for seasonal residents, is classic formula for community dysfunction.”

“Continued we-they re: summer folk”

“The ‘them and us’ things that have been put in place. Stickers on cars for year-round residents, for example.”

“There is an element of tension between year-round and seasonal people that, while nothing new, is detrimental to the community’s health.”

“Policies that favor full-time over part-time residents. For example, parking on the Stone Pier. I think it would have made sense to prioritize parking for older residents or people with very young children or even everyday commuters, but not the current policy based on length of stay on island. I think it is a bad precedent to set.”

While people reported that goods and services were part of what they loved about living on Chebeague Island, they also reported that the lack of access to goods and services can be frustrating too. An important contextual lens of this theme is that the survey administration timeline fell after Doughty’s Island Market announced its closure, but before Eagle Mart was able to open. It is possible that this specific temporal context colored the perspectives of survey responses and should be considered as a ‘moment in time.’ Below are some quotes from survey respondents within this theme.

“The lack of a food store, restaurants, and shops is a problem.”

“Lack of affordable groceries.”

“The loss of the market and restaurant/cafe options. It is essential to have informal places for crossing paths and gathering in order to maintain community connectivity and harmony...”

“Concerned about not having enough local businesses to support the island economically”

“Gradual loss of our island stores (although that’s over the past 40 years)”

“Difficulty getting groceries. Lack of services (mechanics, HVAC, builders, etc.)”

“We need to be able to order groceries or have a food cooperative. The library needs to be open more hours...”

Issues related to safety were also often discussed as part of this question, and sometimes in the context of community shifts as well, particularly people noticing changes to the number of cars, golf carts, or reckless driving on the island. Below are some quotes from participants regarding perspectives of safety on the island.

“No speed limits which have allowed for a lot of dangerous driving.”

“The growing golf cart population and the drunk driving will lead to death and tragedy.”

“Increase of traffic - cars, golf carts and mopeds - in the summer months.”

“No speed limits which have allowed for a lot of dangerous driving.”

“Speeding cars!”

“Traffic & resulting speed & size of vehicles & the resultant stress to infra structure & safety”

Below you can see a word cloud associated with this question – an interesting one particularly given the diversity of responses.



After asking survey participants about what they like most and least about living on Chebeague Island, we asked them to consider what Town government could do to improve their quality of life in the context of what they like the least about living on the island. Unsurprisingly, the themes that emerged here mirrored some of the themes that were seen in the previous *question*. See the table below for the themes from the question: *What, if anything, could Town government do to improve what you like the least about life on Chebeague Island?*

Theme	Theme definition/meaning	Example [not a real quote]
Governance structure	Governance structure refers to perspectives about what Town or non-profit organizations could do to adjust their structures to be more effective in some way.	“It would be nice to see the Selectboard change hands less to ensure consistency within projects.”
Affordability	Affordability refers to perspectives about what the Town could do to increase the affordability for its residents.	“I wish the Town would look into ways that taxes could be subsidized for long-term year-round residents.”
Planning decision-making & enforcement processes	Decision making processes refers to the perspectives about what the town currently does or could do in the context of things like land use decisions, including ordinance creation or enforcement, or decisions around infrastructure development or enhancement.	“Create a 5-year moratorium on home development to curb over-development.”
Sustainability for the future	Sustainability for the future refers to things that the town could encourage or prohibit to ensure that Chebeague Island remains a sustainable year-round community.	“We need to incentivize new year-round families to move to the island.”
Safety	Safety refers to the perspective about what the town could do to improve safety within Chebeague Island	“There needs to be more of an effort to curb drunk and reckless driving.”
Seasonal resident’s ability to impact	Ability to impact refers to ideas around what the Town could to ensure seasonal residents have an opportunity to influence and impact decision-making processes.	“Seasonal residents should be able to serve on more municipal committees to make sure our voices are heard.”

No single theme stuck out as a contender for the most cited theme when participants were describing what Town government could do to improve their quality of life. Additionally, there was no marked divergence between seasonal and year-round residents, except for the theme discussing seasonal residents’ ability to impact decision-making processes. There were additionally slightly more seasonal residents who expressed a desire to change the governance structure; however, both year-round and seasonal participants alike spoke to this theme.

The theme related to governance structure makes sense when you consider that one of the themes of the thing people liked the least about living on Chebeague Island was the way governance currently occurs – particularly around efficiency and decision-making processes. Governance structure can refer to the specific roles within government (e.g., Town Administrator and Selectboard) but can also refer to the way in which governance on Chebeague Island is structured (e.g., relying on volunteer committees). Below are some quotes from survey participants expressing their thoughts on governance structure:

“Town government in its current configuration is slow-moving and too dependent on good volunteer residents. The situation would be helped by a professional town manager, rather than an administrator. The manager would need some mandated independent authority.”

“Join a larger town OR raise taxes to hire professional staff, such as a town manager and trained land use professional both of whom should work full time.”

“I would like the town to be prepared to take on the roles which have been served by volunteers; to have less reliance upon boards and committees and more of those responsibilities done by town employees. For example: a town planner, a staff person who can help with climate resiliency, a full-time fire and rescue chief. The town can't keep relying on volunteers.”

It should also be said that there were some individuals who shared their belief that the Town is doing their best and that their efforts were noticed:

“The town government is overworked and underappreciated.”

“I think they are trying. Hard to solve without cooperation of individuals.”

“Well, I believe the town government is doing their best in keeping the residents safe and working hard on keeping property tax increases to a minimum...”

Affordability was often raised when participants answered this question. This could be in the context of taxes, housing, ferry costs, or the general ‘baked-in’ costs that come with living on an island, such as having two cars or the cost of building and/or servicing your house or car. Below are quotes from participants regarding affordability and what the Town could do to support affordability on Chebeague Island.

“Support affordable housing and the needs of the working-class year-round residents.”

“The town needs to be actively involved in ensuring that the supports necessary for a generationally and economically diverse year-round community remain in place - and needs to be do so to a degree that is meaningfully different than communities on the mainland. In particular, this means ensuring the sustainability of Kids' Place and CIS; working to provide affordable year-round housing, and finding ways to work with CTC to keep transportation costs down (especially for families.)”

“Help subsidize trips on the ferry for services - like medical appointments or when kids participate in mainland enrichment activities. Work with the CTC to offer discounted parking rates to commuters.”

“Increase affordable housing.”

Planning decision-making and enforcement processes were often discussed in the context of decision-making within planned development and avoiding over-development, but there were also discussions of making sure that the structures and spaces on Chebeague Island are well loved and cared for. Below are some quotes from survey participants related to planning:

“Limit development and get rid of trailers or mobile homes.”

“The town needs to perform their paid duties of enforcement of regulations that are in place to secure community harmony (zoning). Their failure to do so affects community morale, aesthetics, and real property values. Existing regulations need to be enforced fairly and consistently. The failure to do so is a dereliction of duty.”

“Create a moratorium on new construction and limit it to just 2-3 houses per year. Contribute to the preservation of Town Land and other parcels by working with the Land Trust.”

“Tax AirBnB properties more heavily than properties that do not rent out rooms or yurts or the like. Put a moratorium on building for two years, unless the units are for year-round residents or affordable housing.”

“Be consistent when enforcing the laws and standards, whether it is a newcomer or resident with generational history.”

Promoting sustainability to ensure Chebeague Island remains a robust year-round community has been a matter of discussion for generations. In fact, it was the worry that potentially closing the school would impact the sustainability of a year-round community that ultimately led Chebeague Island to secede from Cumberland in 2007. It should therefore be unsurprising that those who participated in the survey discussed their perspectives around protecting the island’s year-round community. Below are some quotes from those participants.

“We need to find ways to expand our year-round community and not become just a seasonal destination.”

“Encourage young people to settle and work on Chebeague.”

“Tax strategies that are progressive and aimed at maintaining the community (in combination with the same such work from the state).”

“Reduce seasonality possibilities, increase year-round options and families”

Ensuring that Chebeague Island remains a safe place to rest and live was an often-discussed priority in the survey. This was typically referenced in the context of pedestrian and driver safety, but also includes concerns related to wildfire and accessibility of emergency services due to lack of cell services, as you can see from the quotes below.

“Removal of falling down buildings that could fuel or start fires. Our fire department needs appropriate equipment, protective gear, and more fire ponds located in different areas around the island.”

“Speed limits, increase police presence...”

“The drunk driving is out of hand, wasn't there a taxi service once? When the roads get replaced, there should be a protected pedestrian/ bike lane.”

“The island needs to improve cell service. Given the lack of medical facilities, this is really important. Too many dead zones on the island and that creates safety issues.”

Finally, as mentioned above, seasonal residents shared their frustrations related to the perspective that they are unable to influence and impact decision-making processes, and how the Town could encourage procedural fairness in the governance process for seasonal residents. See below for quotes related to this:

“Property owners of summer residents have no say, no vote in any town election or referendum. We pay taxes but get no say in who expends them or what they do with them. This survey is not a vote; it's just an aggregate opinion of everyone. There should be some representation on the important boards by seasonal taxpayers of which I am one.”

“Change and avoid future policies that separate full time and part-time residents. It is divisive. Honestly, most of the non-profits and trades people/ businesses on Chebeague could not exist without the monetary influx from part-time residents.”

“Wrap the seasonal folks into governance. They're already putting substantial effort into the various non-profits.”

“Include all homeowners in more of the decision making, including those who just reside here seasonally.”

One requirement of all comprehensive plans in Maine is a vision statement. Each of the qualitative questions on the survey can support the CPAC in creating a vision statement, but the question of ‘What is your greatest hope for Chebeague Island’s future?’ may be the most supportive. The themes that emerged from this question are outlined below, along with a word cloud. Based on the survey, some potential vision statements are provided but will be finalized as a community at upcoming public meetings.

Theme	Theme definition/meaning	Quote from survey participant
Preserving the rural island character	Refers to ensuring that the unique qualities of Chebeague Island do not deteriorate through development or suburbanization	“That it remains feeling like ‘going back in time.’ Rural but with the modern amenities needed in this time.”
Avoid becoming a wealthy seasonal enclave	Refers to actions that promote affordability and accessibility	“Chebeague can maintain a semblance to the Island I have known for 80 years and not become just a wealthy summer vacation spot.”
Support the sustainability of the year-round community - and encourage young families to move and/or stay here	Refers to the hope that Chebeague Island sees an increase in young families emigrate to the island	“My hope is that Chebeague remains a year-round community and that generational younger families can afford to live here.”
Preserving the social and cultural/historical character	Refers to the hope that Chebeague Island’s special culture continues along with the traditional activities associated with it	“To maintain its small town, interdependent culture with care and respect for others.”
Balance change with preservation	Refers to the need for adaptation and growth while maintaining the culture of and preserving the resources of Chebeague	“That growth is controlled and the local resources are not overtaxed.”
Conservation and climate resilience	Refers to the hope that the Town and individuals will center climate resilience for future planning	“My hope is that the island continues working towards resiliency in the face of climate change impacts...”
Strengthen transportation and infrastructure	Refers to the ability to manage assets and envision a future where transportation is diversified on the island	“That the island will create thoughtful, long-term planning and structures to accommodate the community's infrastructure, affordability, and other requirements.”



Chebeaguers have immense hope for the future, and the community appears committed to taking bold action to achieve those hopes. Below are some possible vision statements that are informed by the entire survey but with a focus on these visions and hopes for the future of the island.

In 2040, Chebeague Island preserves its rural character, strong sense of community, and rich maritime heritage while fostering a sustainable future for year-round residents. A vibrant working waterfront, healthy natural resources, affordable housing opportunities, and resilient infrastructure will support a diverse population and local economy. Guided by a commitment to stewardship and shared responsibility, Chebeague will remain a place where people can live, work, raise families, and stay connected to the land and sea.

In 2040, Chebeague Island remains a thriving year-round community where people of all ages can live, work, learn, and participate in island life. Its working waterfront, natural resources, historic character, and rural landscape are carefully protected, while thoughtful investments in housing, transportation, infrastructure, and community services support a resilient and sustainable future. Decisions are guided by a shared commitment to preserving the island's unique identity and strengthening opportunities for generations to come.

V. Discussion

Analyzing a community survey can be challenging even when survey participants are anonymous, because the people who are analyzing the survey often have their own lenses that they see the data through and therefore influence the results. In this way, having an ‘outsider’ (e.g., someone who did not grow up here and has lived here for less than a year) in the Island Institute Fellow conduct and analyze the survey can be beneficial. However, this person can also miss key cultural phenomena that inform the survey given the lack of historical lived experience. This is why it has been key for the survey production, administration, and analysis to go through the entire CPAC for feedback. It will always be possible for survey results to be perceived in a specific way – that is the nature of all research. This is why the survey is only one point of connection between the Town and the community in the context of updating the comprehensive plan. In this ‘discussion’ section of the survey report, we will provide insights into the results of the survey, continue to interpret the findings, explain their significance, and place them within the broader context of the island.

When reviewing the survey results, two key things stick out. The first is that there is a disconnect between what kinds of resources, ordinances, and services are available to Chebeaguers, and what awareness that Chebeaguers have about these resources, ordinances, and services. People often shared that they thought there should be a limit on how many structures could be built in a year unless those units were utilized for affordable housing. This desire has, in fact, been achieved; the Town’s Growth Management Ordinance has limited the number of dwelling units per year, with the language in Section 107:

“Unless and/or until this Ordinance is amended pursuant to Section 112, the maximum number of Growth Permits issued in a calendar year shall be four (4), plus two (2) additional Growth Permits that shall be for affordable housing constructed by a not-for-profit organization.”

Perhaps survey participants either do not know that this is part of the existing ordinance, or there is a desire to further limit growth permit applications. It is also possible that the perspective has been shaped by homes receiving their growth permits in different years but are nonetheless beginning construction in the same year, leading to an illusion of increased or rapid development.

Within comments and themes related to safety, people often shared frustrations related to a lack of speed limits on the island, and that they wished for an alternative method of transportation to avoid drunk driving (e.g., ‘didn’t there used to be a taxi service on the island?’). Upon stepping foot on the island, people are greeted by signage on the dock that the speed limit is 30 miles per hour throughout the entire island, and this signage is repeated along Stone Wharf Road. Most people obey this rule, however, there are people who speed. Signage has been a topic of discussion for years on the island – how to improve signage and decrease the likelihood of signage disappearing (into the water, into the woods...). There are indeed enforced speed limits on the island, however, the perception that there needs to be speed limits is important – it means

that there are members of the community that feel as though either they don't, or they see others that seem like they don't know that there are indeed speed limits. Similarly, for issues related to drunk driving or alternative modes of transportation besides driving your own vehicle, there is a year-round taxi service in Veteran Taxi.

These two examples are one of many different items brought up in the survey that would benefit from outreach and education for new and visiting community members. The communication of norms for Chebeague has always been decentralized – some people rely on the community Facebook group, others on chebeague.org, a personal website updated with submitted posts, and some on the Town website. No matter how you attempt to communicate with the community of Chebeague Island, it is likely that you will be chatting with someone on the boat that says, “I didn't see that anywhere.” This is not because people are not present or do not care, but because there is a pervasive disconnection within the decentralization of information that makes widespread knowledge challenging. There is an informal ‘Guide to Chebeague Island’ that is sometimes passed around to newcomers – one that discusses the social norm of waving, the Transfer Station, and the general right to roam that exists on the island. Chebeague Island's generational knowledge exchange that is often verbal has historically been effective, but as we are seeing, has its limitations in ensuring everyone is aware of certain cultural norms and available services. There were indeed a couple of survey respondents that mentioned the need for a guide of acceptable behavior on the island – and the disconnect of information may be a justification for a guide such as this.

One of the great parts of a comprehensive plan is that it covers almost everything that a person can think of regarding a municipality's planning for its future. That is also what makes it so challenging. A municipality is really a system – where distinct parts of it are both influenced by and influence each other. This means that sometimes the priorities or goals that are highlighted by the community feel at odds with each other, and creative pathways must be identified to meet both goals at the same time. There are two examples of this: 1) balancing affordability and a stable tax rate with more services, infrastructure updates, and hiring more people to serve the needs of the Town, and 2) limiting growth development or placing a moratorium on building while also incentivizing new families to move to the island.

Chebeague Island may be unique in many ways, but it is also facing many of the same problems that other island and coastal communities in Maine are facing. Maine is a home rule state, meaning that the delegation of power moves from a central or state government to a local municipality, allowing it a degree of self-government. It empowers cities, towns, or counties to manage their own local affairs, structure their own governments, and pass local ordinances without requiring state approval. Writer and longtime commercial fishermen advocate Monique Coombs writes about how home rule has benefited Maine but is now facing an impasse of effectiveness with the sociocultural changes and gentrification that has occurred specifically throughout coastal Maine. The issues related to procedural fairness and human capacity are one that she writes about extensively. In a 2026 article, she says,

“Maine’s tradition of home rule...recognizes that, while rural communities often have much in common with each other, they also differ in important ways that require locally tailored ordinances and zoning. Delegating authority to local communities requires those communities to have stable populations, deep local knowledge, and sufficient capacity to manage themselves. Yet today, many coastal municipalities are lacking the human capital that actually makes home rule function. This raises a difficult but necessary question: Can Maine’s home rule framework still function effectively under conditions of rapid demographic change? Are small towns up to the job?”

“As communities grow and governance becomes more complex, towns often respond by expanding boards, committees, and subcommittees—essentially bringing in more residents to help with management and planning. One result of this expansion is a civic imbalance, where those with flexible schedules or fewer caregiving responsibilities are overrepresented in decision-making, while fishermen, working-class residents, and young families often struggle to participate. Though young and working families have long been underrepresented in civic life, it was not long ago that local working people comprised much of Maine’s municipal governance structure. The outsized role that villages and towns have in controlling access to the waterfront makes the impact of this civic imbalance on the fishing and aquaculture industries especially prominent.”

“Maine’s coastal communities sit at the intersection of amenity and vulnerability, opportunity and upheaval. As gentrification reshapes who lives in these towns and who has the capacity to govern them, it is becoming increasingly clear that local governments must adapt. Without such adaptation, the voices of those who have sustained Maine’s coastal communities for generations risk being sidelined at the very moment they are needed most.”

Coombs's article does not offer a silver bullet solution – it probably doesn’t exist. The issues that Chebeague Island is facing are far too complex for a singular solution. The survey has allowed us to see that the community is aware of what is working well, what needs work, and some potential avenues to create efficiency. Boldness may be required, but this community has never strayed away from bold, risky yet powerful decisions.

VI. Conclusion and Next Steps

The input from this survey will allow the CPAC and Island Institute Fellow to move forward with designing Community Visioning Exercises and additional community engagement forums. With this survey, we can begin identifying what matters most to islanders and creates additional opportunities to dive deeper into these priorities to move from priorities, to goals, and then to actions that can get us closer to those goals. The survey also allowed us to realize that there are perspectives that are missing – proportions of our community that are often unable to meaningfully participate in governance – and the CPAC, as a group of islanders themselves, are going to leverage their connections to these populations and ensure that these perspectives are heard.

This data and feedback from the survey, along with subsequent community meetings, will be instrumental in the development of Chebeague Island's Comprehensive Plan. The community's response to this survey and all the valuable information included here will allow for the Plan to be a thorough and inclusive picture of the interests of the entire community. As we create the Plan, we will continue to integrate challenges and potential solutions suggested by community members along the way. The feedback from this survey along with this report and community meetings will provide the foundation for the Plan as we write it.

This survey report provides valuable information to our community right now and can be used to inform decisions and actions as we move forward. We are grateful for the time that community members spent with the survey along with their thoughtful responses and ideas that they shared. This report will be available to the public on the Town website, and copies can be made available to those who prefer a paper copy.

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