



Town of Wellfleet Open Space and Recreation Survey

Executive Summary

April 2023

**Survey Conducted January-February 2023
By the Town Open Space Committee**



Town of
WELFLEET
Massachusetts

Town of Wellfleet
Open Space and Recreation Survey
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Executive Summary

OVERVIEW

The Town of Wellfleet Open Space Committee launched an on-line survey between January and February 2023 with the object of obtaining a better understanding of the community in terms of:

- What the respondents know about Wellfleet’s Open Space & Recreation resources
- What priority they place on the acquisition and protection of Open Space
- What suggestions they have for improving access to and enjoyment of these Town resources.

Results of the survey will help inform the 5-Year Open Space and Recreation Plan currently under development.

The goal of the survey was to gather feedback from a wide spectrum of the community. The sampling methodology employed was “simple random sampling,” where everyone in the population has an equal chance of participating in the survey.

Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to a variety of constituents, including Town employees, board, and committee members; Wellfleet Elementary School families, faculty, and staff; the Wellfleet Chamber of Commerce; the Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association; and the Wellfleet Conservation Trust. Links to the survey were also placed in *The Provincetown Independent* and on the Town of Wellfleet website to ensure a high participation rate. The survey was created, deployed, and analyzed using the Survey Monkey platform.

A total of 466 responses were received from people who live, vacation, work, or own businesses in Wellfleet.

This Executive Summary is designed to give an overview of the survey results. A full report of findings is also available, upon request.

KEY FINDINGS

- Respondents overwhelmingly support acquisition and protection of Open Space. 95% say it’s “very important” or “important” to preserve Open Space.
- The most frequently cited reasons for the Town to purchase Open Space are to protect fresh water, the Harbor, wetlands, and drinking water supplies.
- In order to preserve Open Space, almost half of respondents are willing to pay higher property taxes, and over two-thirds would vote to acquire land utilizing Community Preservation Act-allocated funds.

- Two-thirds or more of respondents say that preserving public access to trails and water is important.
- Over three-quarters of respondents give “Adequate” or “Excellent” ratings to the Town for protection of our natural resources.
- Large majorities of respondents rate all listed categories of Open Space (e.g., the Harbor, ocean beaches, ponds) “accessible to the general public.”
- Three-quarters or more of respondents with mobility issues (or who have family members with mobility issues) rate only two Open Space locations as “accessible”: Wellfleet Harbor and Baker’s Field.
- To improve access to beaches and ponds, respondents support the installation of mats, stairs, or ramps.
- Fewer than half of respondents are satisfied with existing Town recreation resources, with one-third to one-half suggesting improvement or expansion of existing recreation resources.
- Assuming that funds could be secured, 40% or more of respondents favor extending sidewalks and walking paths, providing better bicycle access to beaches, and improving mobility access to selected beaches and ponds.

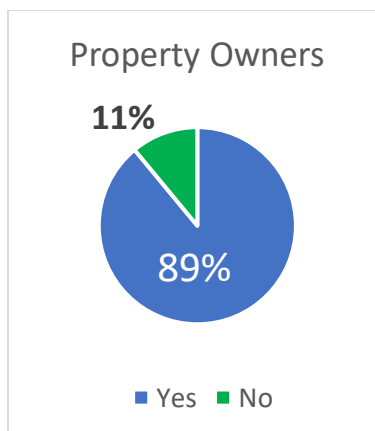
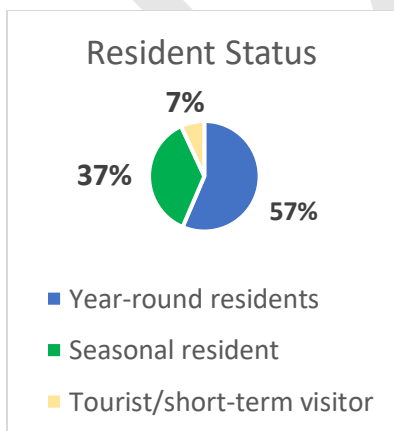
In terms of how key stakeholder groups responded:

- There are no significant differences between responses of Wellfleet property owners and survey respondents as a whole.
- Similarly, there are no significant differences between responses of those who are registered to vote in Wellfleet and survey respondents as a whole.

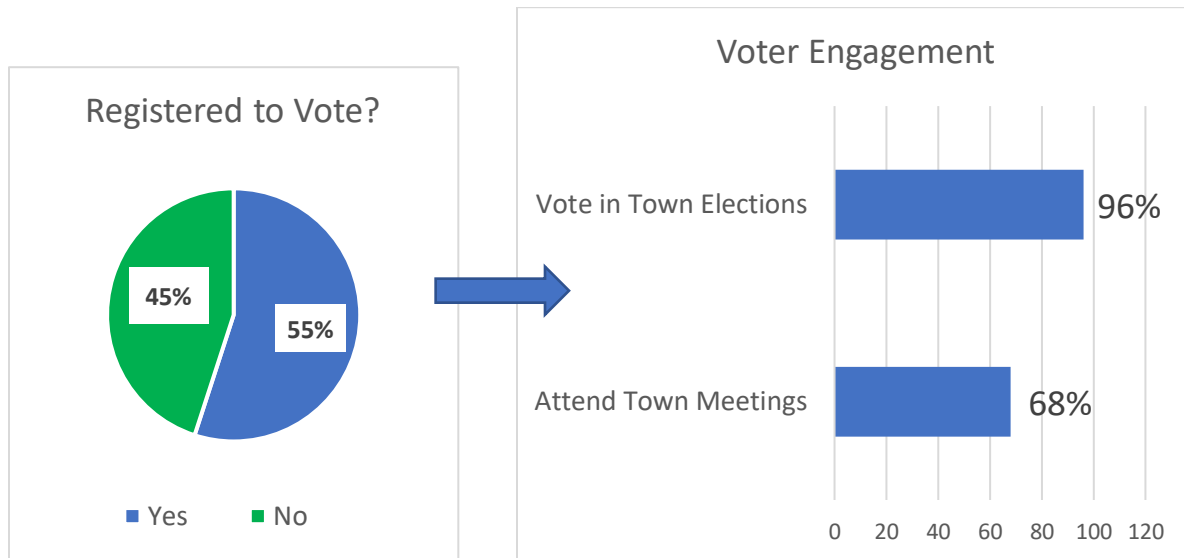
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Profile of Respondents (Questions 19-25)

Survey respondents represent the Wellfleet community and demonstrate a high level of engagement in Town affairs. The majority of respondents are year-round residents (57%) and own property in Wellfleet (89%).

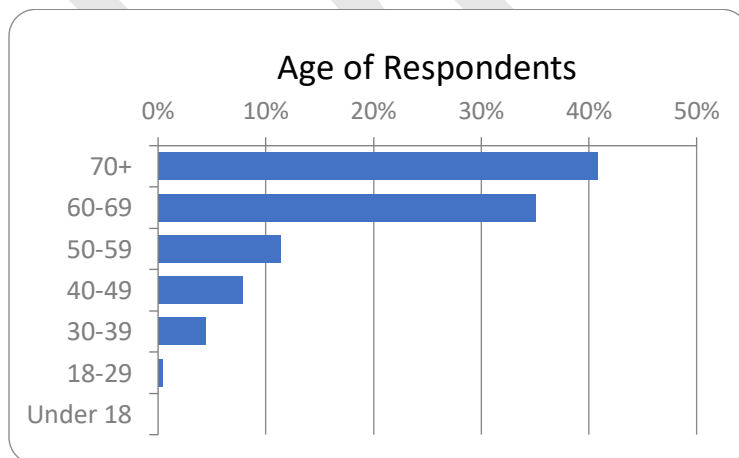


Over half of survey respondents are registered to vote here (55%), and significant majorities vote regularly in Town elections or on ballot issues (96%) and attend Town Meetings regularly (68%).



The number of respondents who are registered to vote (242) exceeds the quorum required for Town Meetings, indicating community interest in the issue of Open Space preservation.

As described, every effort was made to survey a wide sample of the community. However, as with any survey, respondents were self-selecting in terms of their choice of whether to respond. For example, older residents are overrepresented (relative to the 2020 census figures), with three-quarters of respondents in the age 60-and-over age bracket. (According to the 2020 census, approximately half of Wellfleet’s population falls into this age bracket.) Younger residents are underrepresented relative to the most recent census, with less than 1% under age 30 and only 4% under age 40. Only 16% of respondents have any children living in their household.

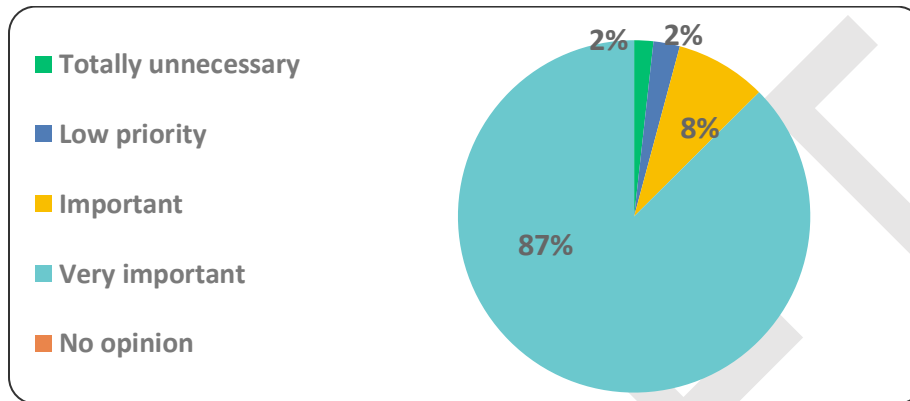


Support for Open Space Acquisition and Protection

(Questions 1-4)

Respondents overwhelmingly support acquisition and protection of Open Space.

- 95% say it's "very important" or "important" to preserve Open Space.
- Less than 5% say preserving Open Space is "totally unnecessary" or "low priority."



Virtually all of the respondents (98%) support the Town purchase of Open Space. Respondents were asked to choose 7 out of 14 reasons for supporting purchase of Open Space. Access to water and protection of the town's natural resources received the strongest support. Specific responses include:

- Three-quarters or more place a high priority on purchasing land in order to protect fresh water, the Harbor, wetlands, and drinking water supplies.
- Half to three-quarters support the Town purchase of Open Space in order to ensure public access to the water (Harbor, beaches, ponds, etc.); preserve endangered species and habitat; and/or to mitigate impacts of climate change.
- None of the respondents say that they do NOT support the Town purchase of Open Space. Two percent do not support the reasons listed.
- As an indication of the strength of their opinions about purchasing Open Space, 70 respondents added comments to clarify their responses.
 - Of these, 25 respondents wrote that they support Town purchase of Open Space for more than the allotted number of choices; about half of these said they support ALL the reasons listed.

In order to preserve Open Space, respondents expressed a willingness to pay higher property taxes (45%) and to vote for the Town to acquire land utilizing Community Preservation Act-allocated funds (78%). One-fifth are willing to place a permanent Conservation Restriction on their own property or a portion of it to limit future use.

In order to acquire and protect Open Space, a majority of respondents are in favor of the Town:

- Cooperating with public and charitable land trusts to conserve land (80%).
- Purchasing land (67%) or purchasing easement rights to preserve public access to trails (74%).
- Requiring developers to address open space in their project planning (71%) and establishing zoning laws to encourage open space conservation (65%).
- Establishing Town Landings to preserve public access to our waters (68%).

Only 2% of respondents are NOT in favor of the Town taking any of the listed actions to preserve open space.

Stewardship of Public Resources

(Question 5)

The majority of respondents rate the Town's protection of various natural resources as either "Adequate" or "Excellent."

- Three-quarters or more give "Adequate" or "Excellent" ratings for Town protection of: ponds, Wellfleet Harbor, wetlands/marshes, forests/wild lands, scenic vistas, beaches/dunes, access to open space, and access to coastal waters.
- Respondents identified the most concern about Town protection of groundwater and ponds, assigning "Poor" ratings of 20% and 16%, respectively.

Accessibility of Open Space

(Questions 6-10)

Several questions in the survey focus on access to Open Space, including accessibility for the general public and for those with mobility issues.

All categories of Open Space are rated "accessible to the **general public**" by 70% or more of respondents. The least accessible Open Spaces – that is, those rated "not accessible" by the most respondents – are wetlands/marsh viewing (15%) and ocean beaches (14%).

Respondents who have **mobility issues** or a family member with mobility issues (18% of respondents) rated the same categories of Open Space.

- Only three destinations were rated "accessible" by more than half of respondents: Wellfleet Harbor (91%), Baker's Field (74%), and harbor and bay beaches (58%).
- The least accessible Open Spaces – that is, those rated "not accessible" by the most respondents – are ocean beaches (79%), forests/wildlands (57%), ponds (48%), wetlands/marsh viewing (47%). One-third of respondents rate harbor and bay beaches as "not accessible."

When asked for suggestions for making open space more accessible, 33 respondents entered their ideas. Over half of these suggested that the Town install mats, stairs, or ramps at beaches and ponds to improve access.

Another aspect of “access” the survey addresses is the extent to which public space can be accessed only through private lands. Respondents were asked which destinations, if any, the Town should try to secure legal rights of access for the general public. Because this was an “open-ended” question, the 160 answers provided vary across the board.

The most frequent responses include:

- Don’t know / not aware of these locations (46 respondents)
- Freshwater ponds (21 respondents)
- Bay beaches (19 respondents)
- None: private land should remain private (16 respondents)
- Access to ALL water (16 respondents)
- Ocean beaches (12 respondents)

Respondents’ Experience with Town Open Space Resources

(Questions 11-16)

Survey respondents are frequent users of Town open spaces, with over half visiting the following locations 11 times or more in the last 12 months: Wellfleet Harbor, bay beaches, ocean beaches, Cape Cod National Seashore, and ponds. Fewer than 8% of respondents say they “never” visit the open spaces listed.

Respondents were presented with a list of 14 recreation facilities and asked to evaluate them in terms of which they would like the Town to provide or, if they currently exist, to improve or expand.

- Between 40% and 50% of respondents are “satisfied” with these existing Town resources: athletic fields / courts, children’s playground, Town Landings, and beach facilities.
- Between 40% and 50% of respondents want the Town to “improve or expand” these existing resources: hiking / walking trails, sidewalks and walking paths, beach facilities, bike paths, and kayak storage at bayside beaches and ponds.
- Between 20% and 27% of respondents want the Town to “create or provide” these resources: community swimming pool, fitness course, and dog park.

Presented with seven options for increasing accessibility and public enjoyment of recreational facilities – assuming that funds could be secured -- 40% or more of respondents favor these actions: extend network of sidewalks and walking paths, provide better bicycle access to beaches, and improve mobility access to selected beaches and ponds. “Other” comments written in include improving facilities at beaches/public landings, providing shuttle bus service, expanding recreation facilities (e.g., pickleball).

Survey respondents enjoy a variety of recreational activities. Over 85% rank going to the beach or ponds and walking / hiking / jogging among their favorite activities. Between 40% and 45% rank birdwatching / nature appreciation, kayaking / canoeing, and biking among their favorites.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Survey respondents provided the Town with clear direction about their priorities.

1. The Town Open Space Committee should continue to look for opportunities for the Town to acquire property in order to protect high-priority natural resources -- especially our ponds, wetlands, and drinking water.
2. The Committee should continue to work with WCT and other conservation organizations to identify and acquire Open Space properties with high conservation values.
3. The Town should leverage conservation restrictions and CPA funds as effective tools for protecting Wellfleet's limited remaining open space.
4. Environmental concerns – such as the protection of natural resources and mitigation of climate change impacts – must be balanced with Wellfleet's need for affordable workforce housing.
5. Protecting public access to beaches and ponds is a community priority.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Questions about this Executive Summary are welcome and can be directed to: wellfleetopenspace@gmail.com. For a copy of the complete report of survey findings, including charts, graphs, and verbatim comments, contact the Open Space Committee at the same email address.