

# Town of Bristol Comprehensive Plan 2023



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## Preface

Bristol is at a crossroads as it faces the continued, and intensifying, challenges of the 2020s. The Town is experiencing rapid growth and development as more and more people discover a place that has historically been overshadowed by the draw of surrounding more “touristy” communities. As a result, the population continues to trend toward older, retired, and more affluent individuals and young families cannot afford to purchase homes in the Town. Bristol’s tradition of access to natural resources is increasingly threatened as more land becomes private. Jobs based on marine resources are threatened by climate change. Community organizations are disbanding due to a lack of volunteers. Local people are finding it much harder to make a living and are forced to seek homes and jobs elsewhere. These changes fly in the face of what most people want - to keep Bristol “the way it is.” At no time, therefore, has it been more essential for the Town to work together to create a plan for the future.

Bristol has not had a fully approved Comprehensive Plan for 35 years. In 1987, both the Town and the State approved a Plan. Twenty one years ago, in 2002, the Town approved an update to the prior Plan, but the State did not. The 2002 Plan was deemed ‘inconsistent’ with the Maine Growth Management Act in several important areas. The Comprehensive Planning Committee hopes that this Plan (2023) will be both approved by the residents and found consistent by the State of Maine in order to support the Town’s efforts to effectively guide growth and development in the face of increasing and rapid changes.

Very little medium and long term planning has taken place in Bristol since 2002. The residents have not been offered a comprehensive opportunity to fully understand what currently exists and express what they want for the future. Understanding the present, and envisioning the future, is a task we need to undertake together. To accomplish this collaboration, we must write the plan (Comprehensive Plan Committee), approve the plan (voters and State Planning Office), and execute the plan (Select Board and the town’s committees and staff).

The plan represents a first, tentative, step. Approving and executing are the next.

Bristol's 2023 Comprehensive Plan offers a vision for Bristol that is based on what the Committee has heard from residents, who are 'the heart and soul' of the community, and the data collected and analyzed. The Committee used this information to think strategically about what Bristol needs in the next ten years and present the conclusions in the document that follows.

We found that Bristol wants to stay, as much as possible, "the way it is now", keeping its rural character and caring for nature and the sea. However, change is inevitable and we need to actively understand the best ways to keep what we have, and plan for our future. We know that we need affordable housing and that older people want to continue to live in a community that they love. We know that we value our natural and historical resources and want to maintain public access to these resources for future generations. We know we will be affected by a changing climate and want to find ways to make the town resilient in the event of storms and hurricanes. We know we need to plan carefully in order to move forward with these priorities in mind.

We must help to monitor both the Town's Plan and the ways in which it is implemented. We recommend that the Town create a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to work with the Town and help guide the Town's decisions over the next 10 years (when the Comprehensive Plan is due to be updated).

We urge you to remember that a comprehensive plan for a town is not mandated by the state, but almost every town in Maine makes one. A plan offers advice and suggests strategies but does not implement them. The voters decide if the plan should be adopted and the Select Board and the Town staff execute the decisions. A plan can, if adopted, empower the community to control what happens by making a blueprint for growth. A plan confirms what the community loves about their Town and wants to preserve. All the parts of the plan are interconnected and each one will contribute to its success. Consulting each other, planning and implementing our actions is a way to understand, and meet these challenges. We must all be partners in the effort to preserve the best parts of Bristol and to shepherd our Town through the challenges of the future.

# How to Use This Plan

## *The organization of the Plan, how to use it, and what to read*

Bristol's 2023 Comprehensive Plan is organized to make it easy for the Town's residents to find the information they need to understand, think about, and decide the future direction of Bristol. There are two sections. The first section (pages 1-42):

- Describes how the Plan was developed and will guide the Town's future;
- Explains the Town's Vision;
- Lays out the Plan's most important strategies;
- Describes the public participation process and planning process;
- Presents a Future Land Use Plan.

Most importantly, the first section explains the process of the Plan's adoption and implementation.

The second section is an inventory of information currently known about the Town as presented in eleven chapters of data, goals and strategies and a summary of our regional cooperation. These chapters provide a detailed overview of each topic and are important for long range planning decisions. Each chapter concludes with proposed goals and strategies that suggest how the Plan can be implemented. A matrix of the goals and strategies from the Inventory chapters is in Appendix C.

This section also contains Appendices that provide background data, analysis, and maps that support the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the Plan. It also provides summaries of the Public Participation and some of the documents used in preparing the Plan.



Depending on your time and interests, considering using it in the following ways:

Purpose	Suggested Reading	Estimated Time	Pages
I want key takeaways and have limited time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preface</li> <li>• Summary</li> </ul>	4 MIN	
I want to understand the recommended goals, policies, and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Goals, Policies, Strategies Matrix</li> </ul>	10 MIN	
I want to understand the comprehensive plan process and strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section 1</li> <li>• Goals, Policies, Strategies Matrix</li> </ul>	20 MIN	
I am interested in the data collected and how it has been used to make the plan.	<p>Read Appendices as desired:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A - Inventory Chapters</li> <li>• B - Fiscal Capacity and Capital Investment Plan</li> <li>• C - Goals, Policies, Strategies Implementation matrix</li> <li>• D - State Planning Criteria Reference Checklist</li> <li>• E - Survey results</li> </ul>	Variable	



Photo by Gross



# Plan Summary

## *Overview*

A Comprehensive Plan collects, analyzes and presents detailed information to support goals and strategies that are recommendations to the Town to take action. This combination of data and strategic proposals can be overwhelming and we offer a brief summary here to help explain key information.

## *A Comprehensive Plan*

A Comprehensive Plan is a planning document intended to be a guide for communities when making policy and land use decisions over a 10 to 15 year period. The whole planning process is an opportunity for the community to come together, look at where they are, and plan for where they would like to be. It prepares the ground for future growth that would still maintain the rural atmosphere that its citizens and many visitors have come to appreciate and cherish. The Comprehensive Plan is an important planning document because it guides policy decisions, land use decisions, and municipal investments.

Why does the State need to approve the Plan and agree that it is consistent with the State Growth Management Act? A plan that is approved by the State makes that municipality eligible for the grants and loans, and allows the municipality to legally impose land use, impact fee, rate of growth and shoreland zoning ordinances that can stand up in a court of law. The top priorities for the Town are represented by groups of individual goals stated within each of the inventory chapters - some of which are requirements of the State Growth Management Act of 2008.

## *The Benefits of a Comprehensive Plan*

A Comprehensive Plan **benefits** a community like Bristol because it allows the Town:

- To control what happens in its community;
- To establish a blueprint for growth for the next ten years;

- To preserve the things the community loves about the Town; and
- To apply for a portion of \$80 million in available State grant and loan funds.

Bristol's 2023 Comprehensive Plan **looks forward** and **asks for action**. It is based on an extensive analysis of data, strategic thinking, and listening to the residents, 'the heart and soul of the community'. They are passionate about Bristol's small town atmosphere, its people, and its natural beauty. They like the low property taxes. They are concerned about development, lack of conservation, a lack of affordable housing, and climate change. They want to "keep Bristol the way it is", but understand that change is unavoidable.

The plan has two sections, the first with the vision, priorities, a land use plan and an action plan, the second with all the detailed data and reports on Plan outreach.

The first section of the Plan looks forward. It begins with the **Vision Statement** and **Priorities**, which, together, present what we see as the Town's ambitions and hopes for the next decade.

### ***Vision Statement***

The Committee, guided by research and residents' feedback, envisioned Bristol in ten years and summarized it in the following Vision Statement:

We believe that Bristol should **maintain its rural character** as an unpretentious and welcoming coastal town. **Its natural beauty**, especially the coast and the sea, its undisturbed rural areas and conserved lands, **is vital to its future**. Careful planning for the **use of our land** is important in preserving the town's character.

**Every generation is important**, from its children to its older residents, (that form the majority of the population). They all need to have access to **affordable housing** in order to be able to live here at all ages. Education for our children is vital and **work of all kinds** should be encouraged and supported.

While residents appreciate and value Bristol's consistently **low tax rate**, they believe that supporting all these aforementioned priorities is most important.

Bristol believes that **climate change is of grave concern**, and that future Town practices and policies should be developed to help mitigate its effects.

In order to achieve the community's vision for Bristol, **we must act together** to put these recommendations into action.

### ***Priorities***

The **Priorities** were developed from the Vision Statement: they form the core of the Plan and guided the goals and suggested strategies. Adopting them is the first step to defining the actions that are needed to implement the Plan.

#### **In order to preserve Bristol, we must:**

- Protect the Town's rural character;
- Protect and maintain our natural and marine resources;
- Provide access to affordable housing;
- Understand the impacts of climate change on the Town;
- Use the Comprehensive Plan as a roadmap for the future.

The priorities are the basis for the goals and strategies that accompany each of the eleven chapters in the second section of the plan. They consist of a simple set of instructions to make the priorities work for everyone. They assign responsibilities and a timeline.

### ***Future Land Use Plan***

Bristol's land is one of its most valuable resources. The Future Land Use Plan is the most important proposal in the plan and is drawn from the Vision Statement and Priorities.

A Future Land Use Plan is essential to maintaining Bristol's rural character and its small town feel. In order to develop this Plan, four proposals were examined including growth in and around the villages, along the major roads, allowing development all over the town but keeping a quiet rural feel and emphasizing conservation and natural resources. A second proposal which combined growth in the villages with the conservation of natural resources received approval.

Based on the research, including data collection and public feedback, the Comprehensive Plan Committee recommends a Future Land Use Plan that accomplishes the vision of Bristol as a rural, intergenerational community that values its natural resources and preserves its small town village structure. The extensive corridor of “Critical Rural Areas” ensures the protection of the natural resources that are critical to the vision and the future of the Town.

The **Future Land Use Plan** is a summary of what we want Bristol to look like in the next 10 years. It proposes a road map for how we will get there, and is a call for the Town to make an **Action Plan**. An Action Plan is imperative. Without it, the Town’s vision will not become a reality. This Comprehensive Plan proposes goals, policies, and specific implementation strategies that will embody the characteristics of the Future Land Use Plan and address issues identified in the Inventory Chapters.

## ***Conclusion***

Bristol’s Comprehensive Plan is ambitious and assertive; it suggests ways for the Town to change and develop over the next ten years that match the Committee’s research and the opinions of the residents. The dialogue that began with the surveys and the Future Land Use Workshop should be the first of many conversations about the Town. This is the most important thing that we learned - that the Town wants to make the changes necessary to protect the things we love about Bristol, and that many people want to be involved in the process. Only through the future determination and efforts of many will Bristol continue to embody the values of its residents.



New Harbor by Kate Burch



## Introduction

Bristol was first settled by the Abenaki Indians, who are estimated to have lived in the area for more than 7,000 years. In 1605, English merchant adventurers, some of the first Europeans to voyage to the United States, landed in Pemaquid (Pemaquid in Abenaki means “situated far out”), no doubt attracted by the area’s harbors and abundant natural resources. Organized settlement began in 1625, and the Town was eventually incorporated in 1765. Bristol’s rich history and early development continue to have an impact on the character of the Town and its people.

Bristol is a peninsula, more than twelve miles from its northern edge at the Damariscotta line to the tip at Pemaquid Point, bounded to the west by the Damariscotta River and St. John’s Bay and to the east by the Gulf of Maine and the Atlantic Ocean. The Town is bisected in its length, north to south, by State Route 130 which passes through three of its villages, Bristol Mills, Pemaquid and New Harbor. State Route 32, which begins in New Harbor and follows the eastern ocean edge of the town, passes through Round Pond and Chamberlain. Bristol lacks a central main street or downtown; instead, it is composed of distinct villages, each with its own unique history.

Bristol’s residents want to preserve its natural beauty and historical New England rural character. These qualities make Bristol attractive for year-round inhabitants, seasonal residents, and visitors alike, setting Bristol apart from its more tourist-centered neighboring towns. Despite the seasonal population nearly tripling the year-round population of 3,000, Bristol’s unassuming nature and reserved demeanor remain uncompromised. In many ways, residents want Bristol to be ‘life as it used to be’, and while this is no longer possible, and development has taken place, they would like to limit any further large-scale changes.

Natural and marine resources are essential to Bristol since they help to both maintain a rural environment and serve as a source of financial support to the Town by attracting visitors and employing fishermen. They also provide access to trails and to the water, and contribute significantly to the character of the Town.

Bristol has a small grocery store, convenience stores, and gas stations, a beloved candy and gift store, various antique shops, a coffee bar, and

restaurants, almost all seasonal. Route 130 serves as the primary route in and out of Town, and leads to the regional service center of Damariscotta, which has an historic main street, as well as a hospital, health care providers, pharmacies, other professional resources, and grocery and hardware stores.

Bristol is in the enviable position of having the lowest tax rate in the State for a town of its size due, in part, to the high valuations of many of its coastal properties and to the Select Board's careful management of its revenues and resources. The voters are keen for this to continue, but a majority of residents are willing to accept a higher rate in exchange for agreed improvements in services.

Bristol is, however, currently facing challenges that are reflected in trends across the state, including tensions between seasonal and local residents, lack of affordable housing options, population increases due to the pandemic, threats from sea level rise and our changing climate, and an aging population. The Comprehensive Plan, at the behest of the residents, strives to address these issues.

- Covid-19 accelerated changes in remote work, early retirement, and internal migration patterns. On a local level, Maine became an attractive place during the pandemic, offering a low population and ample outdoor space, and Bristol saw an influx of new residents and a demand for building permits. There was an average 14% percent increase in the number of permits issued from 2016 to 2021 and an average 32% increase in the number of building permits for new homes in the same period. While it is difficult to predict if this trend will continue, it is important to plan for changing trends.
- Bristol's current housing stock is almost entirely single-family homes with an average occupancy of just over two persons. However, 30% of the total households in Bristol consist of individuals living alone. National and statewide trends indicate that this number will increase over the next decade. This suggests that Bristol's housing stock does not meet current or future demands. Difficulties in finding affordable housing negatively impact the local economy; younger people, seasonal workers, and those looking to age in place have minimal affordable housing options and often cannot afford the median housing price.
- Bristol's residents are concerned with the impacts of sea level rise and climate change, and expressed concern about issues such as saltwater

intrusion and wells running dry, rising water temperature impacting the lobster and fishing industries, invasive species, and an increase in ticks and tick-borne illnesses.

- An aging population poses unique challenges for rural towns, which need to facilitate access to affordable housing, adequate healthcare and medical facilities and services, public transportation, and social opportunities. The supports necessary to ensure intergenerational equity are currently lacking in the Town.
- The reliability and availability of potable water is concerning to Bristol's residents and has implications for future growth and infrastructure needs. One in seven survey respondents or (91 of 641 responses) reported that their private wells ran dry at least once in the past 10 years (Source: July, 2023 Vision Survey Results).



Round Pond by Kate Burch

Residents want to ensure, as emphasized throughout the Committee's work and feedback sessions, that Bristol maintains a stable population with a slow, steady growth rate while preserving its small-town character. Encouraging limited development in rural areas and preserving critical habitats, while fostering growth near village centers will help the Town thrive while staying true to its roots.

## Plan Purpose

Bristol's needs and desires drove the creation of a Comprehensive Plan that is both in alignment with the Townspeople's values and priorities and consistent with the goals and guidelines of Maine's Growth Management Act (Appendix D). There are legal and financial benefits to having the State's "finding of consistency" for the plan, including legitimacy for enacting zoning, impact fees, and rate of growth ordinances, qualification for many state and local competitive grant programs, and benefits for growth areas.

In general, a Comprehensive Plan is a long-range planning document that provides guidance for future public decision-making based on a shared community vision. It provides the factual basis and policy framework for future planning, regulatory, and decision-making in the public and private sectors over a span of 10-15 years. The Plan can also serve as a valuable tool for guiding local elected officials, community leaders, local organizations, and Town staff in their implementation of strategies to manage the future growth and development of Bristol. Lastly, the comprehensive planning process is an opportunity for residents, leaders, and other community stakeholders to come together and take inventory of current trends and plan for future needs, challenges, and opportunities.

Bristol's previous Comprehensive Plan was approved by the Town in 2002; however, it was not approved by the State, primarily due to underdeveloped sections pertaining to Town history, affording housing, natural resources, and land use. In 2021, the Town decided that a new Comprehensive Plan, with goals and strategies, was needed to guide Bristol forward during a time of rapid change. At the Annual Town Meeting, voters authorized the Select Board to appoint a Comprehensive Plan Committee which was tasked with:

- Conducting a review of the 2002 Comp Plan and delivering a report on the progress made and objectives of the 2002 Plan;
- Participating in the inventory and analysis of existing Town conditions;
- Developing, in collaboration with the public, a Town vision, goals, and strategies.

However, in 2021, faced with significant, and possibly irrevocable changes, resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, voters directed the Select Board

to appoint a Comprehensive Plan Committee to review and update the 2002 Plan. Work began in the summer of 2021 and the Comprehensive Plan Committee (CPC) met monthly (with subcommittees for individual topics meeting more regularly) over the course of their efforts to collect and analyze data, and to draft the Plan's inventory chapters. Although the COVID-19 Pandemic created challenges for outreach and data gathering, the CPC assembled extensive background information and used online tools to gather and distill public input.

In the spring of 2022, the CPC began the public process, starting with a mini survey and outreach campaign. Importantly, at the March 2022 Town Meeting, voters authorized the appropriation of \$60,000 to the CPC for consulting services to aid in the Plan's construction and development. As a result of this fund allocation, in the fall of 2022, North Star Planning began collaborating with the Committee to help guide a more extensive public outreach process, to assist with drafting the final Plan document, and to support the CPC through the local and state adoption processes

In July 2023, the first draft of the Plan was provided to Committee members for editing and suggestions. Subsequently, the draft was provided to leaders of Town Boards, Commissions, and Committees, as well as Town staff, regional and local organizations, and community members, for input and feedback. A second draft was finalized in September 2023. Throughout this process, the Committee remained committed to ensuring the Plan embodied the Town's vision and hope for the future.

The Plan incorporates several types of strategies. Some are regulatory (as in, required by the State), but the majority are based on direct feedback from Bristol's community. Many of the recommendations will require further action, study, and examination, either by the Select Board or Town Committees or by town-wide votes to develop new ordinances, modify policies, or allocate funding.

Ultimately, therefore, the purpose of this Plan is to ensure the Town can use an informed, collective vision to guide future actions in order to serve the best interests of all community members.



## Elements of the Comprehensive Plan

This comprehensive plan follows the established framework set forth by the State of Maine in the Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule (07 105 Chapter 208) checklist. It consists of a Vision Statement, the priority Goals, Policies and Strategies, and the Future Land Use Plan, as well as inventory chapters that detail existing conditions in the Town.

The forward-looking part of this Plan integrates public input with the data gathered from the inventories to craft a vision statement, future land use plan, and document the priority goals, policies, and strategies. The goals and recommendations in this plan will guide policy-making, future land use decisions, and Town investments over the next 10 to 15 years.

The purpose of the Inventory Chapters is to document existing conditions, identify how the town has changed over time, and understand future opportunities and challenges. The information in the Inventory Chapters is based on the best available local, state, and federal data. Each Chapter includes a list of associated goals, strategies, and policies that provide recommendations on how to implement Bristol's vision.

The Inventory Chapters provide data on the following subjects:

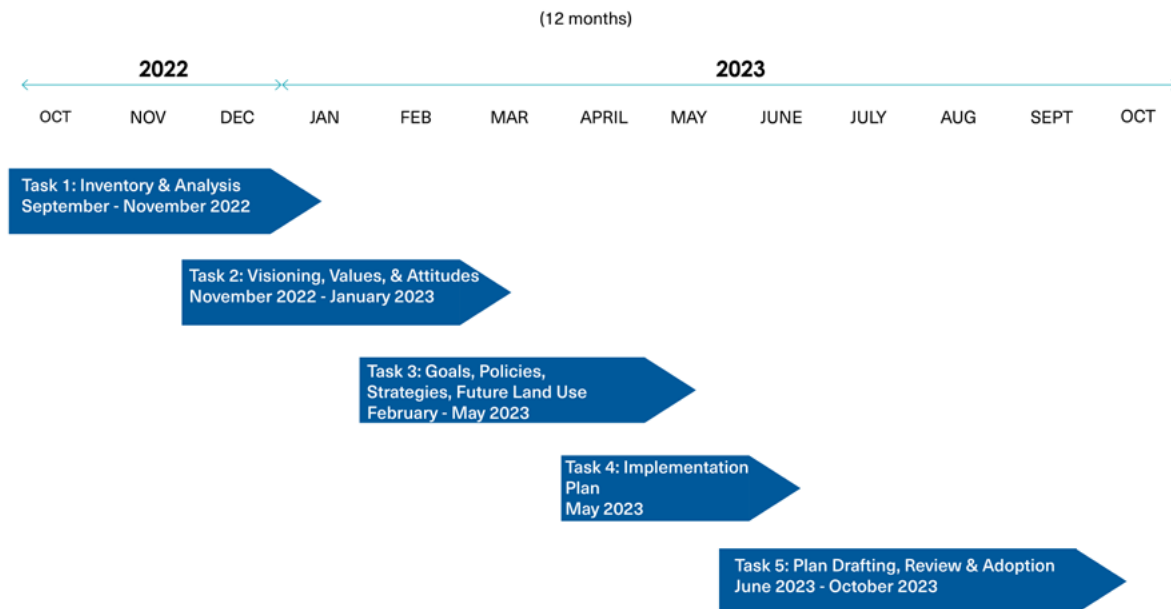
- Historic and Archaeological Resources
- Water Resources
- Natural Resources
- Agriculture and Forestry
- Marine Resources
- Population & Demographics
- Economy
- Housing
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Public Facilities & Services
- Fiscal Capacity & Capital Investment Plan
- Existing Land Use



Photo by Smith

While the Plan lays the foundation for land use, policies, and implementation strategies, it does not dictate specific investments or enact changes in Town ordinances. It suggests future actions Bristol may take to amend or create new land use ordinances, conduct further planning or feasibility studies, and collaborate with stakeholders to achieve the Town's desired goals. Implementation of this Plan requires coordination among the Town staff, Select Board, Planning Board, other Town boards and committees, and voter approval.

## Process and Timeline



The timeline above outlines the general project phases for how the CPC approached the planning process. An explanation of the specific tasks is below:

- **Task 1 Inventory & Analysis** (*2021-November 2022*): The CPC gathered existing conditions information and drafted Inventory Chapters, which the consultant team eventually helped to audit and finalize. During this phase, initial public outreach was conducted to develop the public's awareness of the comprehensive plan process, including a mini-survey, pop-ups at local events, postcard, and a photo contest.
- **Task 2 Visioning, Values, Attitudes** (*November 2022-March 2023*): The CPC launched a community survey, with the goal of gathering community input and reaching as many community members as possible, to serve as the foundation for the next phases of work.

- **Task 3: Goals, Policies, Strategies, and Future Land Use** (*February 2023 - May 2023*): Based on the information gathered from the Committee's research and the survey, the CPC began drafting the goals, policies, and strategies for the final plan. The Future Land Use Workshop was held to gather public input on the draft land use scenarios.
- **Task 4: Implementation Plan** (*May 2023 - June 2023*): The CPC worked to prioritize the goals, policies, and strategies, and develop an implementation plan and performance measures.
- **Task 5: Drafting, Review & Adoption** (*June 2023 - October 2023*): The consultants collaborated with the CPC to develop a draft plan for public review and to guide the plan through local and state adoption processes.

## Community Engagement



Future Land Use Workshop, May 8, 2023

Communication & outreach efforts included a wide variety of in-person and online options. Outreach included a landing page on the Town website, email bulletins, newspaper ads and articles, town social media, pop ups outside local businesses and at local events, Committee member conversations, and print materials including flyers and business cards. Email lists, which eventually totaled 1,462 addresses, included the Town's newsletter list of 1,103 addresses and a project-specific email list that grew to 359 email addresses. Specific events included:

- **Mini-Survey (January 2022 - September 2022)**  
This short survey contributed to early visioning work and raised awareness of the planning effort  
262 total responses
- **Vision Survey (January 2023 - March 2023)**  
This 74-question survey asked respondents to weigh in on a number of specific questions and priorities, including visioning and policy-related questions.  
634 total responses



- **Town Meeting (2022 & 2023)**

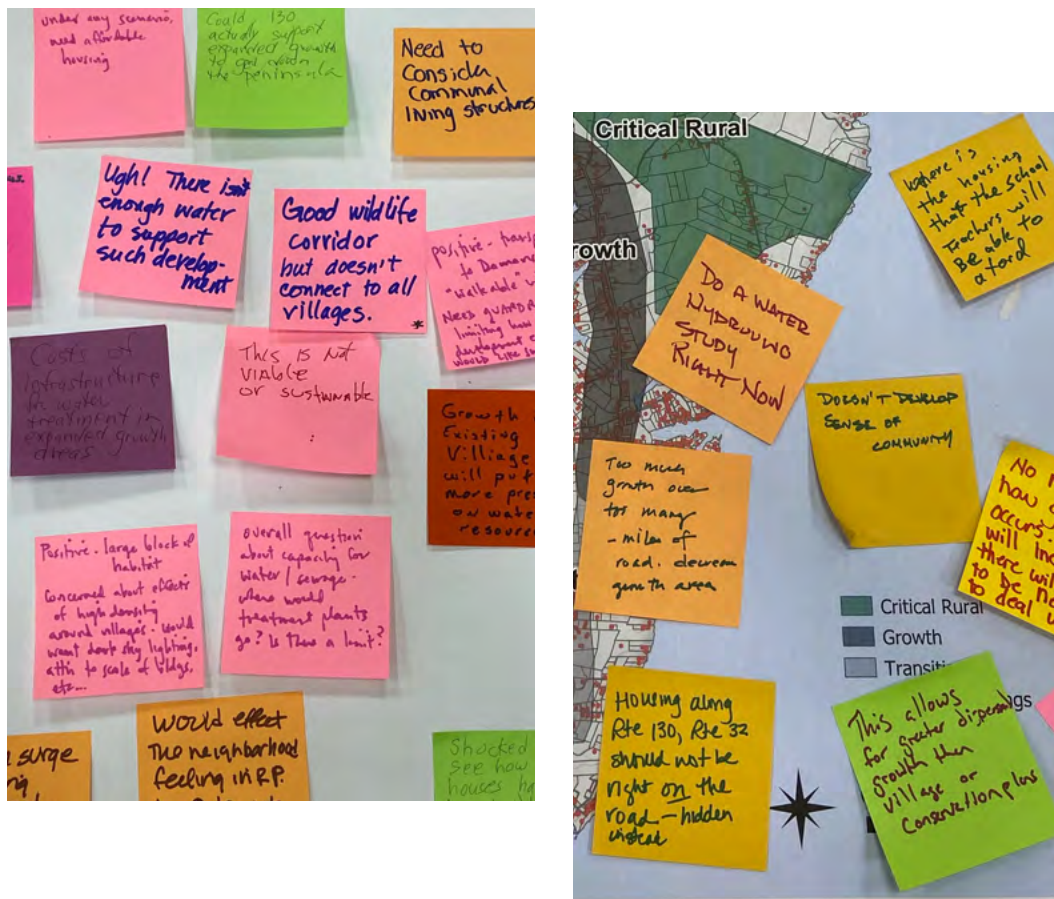
At the 2022 Town Meeting, voters authorized funds for consulting services to assist with the planning project.

At the 2023 Town Meeting, the CPC provided an update on planning activities to date, and promoted the scheduled Future Land Use Workshop.

- **Future Land Use Workshop (May 9, 2023)**

In addition to members of the BCPC, Town staff, and the consulting team, more than 70 residents attended.

Attendees reviewed results of the Vision Survey, and considered four future land use scenarios, comparing potential land use policies and implications. They provided input on the pros and cons of each scenario, which informed the development of the final Future Land Use Map and Plan.



Future Land Use Workshop public input, May 8, 2023

## Review of Past Planning Efforts

Recent local planning work includes the following:

- **Bristol Comprehensive Plan (1987)**

The Town drafted and adopted a Comprehensive Plan, which included the topics of history, population and economy, natural resources, land use, housing, and community services, and defined goals and policies.

This Plan was found to be consistent with the Growth Management Act by the State Planning Office (SPO).

- **Bristol Comprehensive Plan (2002)**

The Town adopted a Comprehensive Plan in 2002. This Plan was deemed inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the Growth Management Act by the State Planning Office (SPO) in five areas:

- ♦ The plan failed to provide sufficient information on natural resources inventory and analysis, including source water supply, groundwater, surface water, and floodplains.
- ♦ The Future Land Use section did not designate rural or growth areas. The Plan lacked a Capital Investment Plan.
- ♦ There was no analysis on affordable housing in Bristol.
- ♦ The Plan lacked recommendations for the protection of historical sites and archaeological resources.

The Town decided not to pursue the advice given in the State's letter and the Plan was not declared 'consistent' by the State.

- **Town of Bristol Ordinances:**

- ♦ *Land Use Standards ordinance:* Originally adopted in 1993, the ordinance has been updated 11 times at Annual Town Meetings since 2002. This ordinance establishes a minimum lot size of 1 acre throughout the Town, along with building setbacks and standards for Accessory Dwelling Units.
- ♦ *Shoreland zoning ordinance:* First enacted in 1971, this State mandated ordinance provides protections to coastal and freshwater shorelands.
- ♦ *Harbor ordinance:* Originally adopted in 1986 and most recently updated in 2019, this ordinance regulates moorings, abandoned

vessels, and harbor operations.

- ◆ *Subdivision ordinance*: Originally adopted in 2009 and most recently updated in 2023, this ordinance establishes baseline standards related to subdivision development in Bristol.

There are also regional and state-level planning efforts that are relevant to Bristol:

- **Maine Won't Wait Climate Action Plan (2020)**  
This plan establishes statewide goals and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve carbon neutrality by 2045. Implementation of the action plan includes grant funding for local and regional climate-resilience initiatives.
- **Lincoln County Regional Housing Needs Assessment (2023)**  
This study suggests that the County needs 879 units of affordable housing to come on the market between 2022-2032, with 55 of those units located in Bristol (a mix of affordable rate rentals, workforce housing, and affordable older adult rentals).

## Inventory Chapter Highlights

Certain data points collected during the Committee's research merit emphasis due to their ultimate impact on the Plan's goals and strategies. Highlights of the data contained in the Inventory Chapters include:

### *Population*

- The median age in Bristol is 59.8 years. The state median age is 44.8 years.
- The average household size in Bristol is 2.09 persons.
- Since the 1970s, Bristol's population has slowly increased.
- By 2030, the State of Maine's Economist data predicts that the population of Bristol is estimated to be 2,932 people (an increase of 100 people or ~50 new households). However, based on the Historical Growth Rate, Bristol's population is estimated to be 3,306 (an increase of 472 people or ~231 new households.)

### *Housing*

- 98% of the Town's housing stock consists of single-family homes.
- 30% of Bristol's households are householders living alone.
- Bristol saw a 94% increase in median home prices from 2010 to 2020.
- Permits for new construction and substantial renovations have continued to increase. The housing expansion is largely fueled by people who have acquired their wealth outside of Bristol, and more often than not, use these homes for seasonal housing.
- In 2021, only 30% of the households in the Town can afford a median-priced home. With the increase in mortgage rates since 2021, the percentage of existing households that will be able to afford a median home price will dramatically decrease.

### *Economic development & small businesses*

- Bristol has a primarily seasonal economy, made up of small businesses.
- There is a 46.9% labor force participation rate.
- 17.1% of Bristol residents worked from home in 2022.

## *Natural Resources*

- There has been a decrease in the number of acres enrolled in the Farmland Protection Program in a decade (1,601 acres in 2009 compared to 1,034 acres in 2019).
- There has been an increase in the number of acres enrolled in the Open Space program during the same time (271 acres in 2009 compared to 361 in 2019).



Photo by Pell

## *Land Use and Growth Management*

- Current zoning is extremely limited, and consists of shoreland zoning and land use standards.





Photo by Bisagni

## Vision Statement

We believe that Bristol should **maintain its rural character** as an unpretentious and welcoming coastal town. **Its natural beauty**, especially the coast and the sea, its undisturbed rural areas and conserved lands, **is vital to its future**. Careful planning for the **use of our land** is important in preserving the town's character.

**Every generation is important**, from its children to its older residents, (that form the majority of the population). They all need to have access to **affordable housing** in order to be able to live here at all ages. Education for our children is vital and **work of all kinds** should be encouraged and supported.

While residents appreciate and value Bristol's consistently **low tax rate**, they believe that supporting all these aforementioned priorities is most important.

Bristol believes that **climate change is of grave concern**, and that future Town practices and policies should be developed to help mitigate its effects.

In order to achieve the community's vision for Bristol, **we must act together** to put these recommendations into action.

## Priority Goals, Policies, and Strategies

Throughout its efforts to develop goals and strategies for the Comprehensive Plan, the Bristol Comprehensive Plan Committee identified a number of common themes. These themes embody the essence of not only the research and knowledge of the Committee members, but also the essence of the Townspeople's opinions as reflected in the two outreach surveys, the Plan's Vision Statement, and the well-attended Future Land Use Workshop. As such, the Committee selected a set of Top Five Priorities to help the Town set its course for the next ten years. We hope that these Priorities not only capture the intent of the Comprehensive Plan, but the concerns and desires of Bristol's citizens particularly in the areas of **natural resources and conservation, housing**, and maintenance of the **Town's character**.

### *Bristol's Priorities*

In order to preserve Bristol, we must:

- Protect the Town's rural character;
- Protect and maintain our natural and marine resources;
- Provide access to affordable housing;
- Understand the impacts of climate change on the Town;
- Use the Comprehensive Plan as a roadmap for the future.



Wetland by Tamar Francis

## ***Essential Goals and Strategies***

After identifying the Plan's Top Five Priorities, the Comprehensive Plan Committee proposed essential goals and strategies connected to successful pursuit and implementation of the Priorities.

### **1. Protect Bristol's rural character.**

Essential Goals:

- Prioritize conservation and protect undeveloped land by adopting more protections for farmland, forests, and scenic views. (13.1)
- Expand the Town's ability to support decision-making regarding development. (13.3)

Essential Strategy:

- Adopt the proposed Future Land Use Plan as a basis for land use regulation and management.

### **2. Protect and maintain Bristol's natural and marine resources.**

Essential Goals:

- Protect and maintain the Town's valuable natural resources including scenic areas/views, open spaces, preserves, habitats, wetlands and shore fronts. (3.1)
- Maintain, and where necessary, restore the quality of coastal waters, marine fisheries, and wildlife. (5.4)

Essential Strategies:

- Consider the impacts of climate change when developing and revising Town policies and ordinances. (3.4.3)
- Create a Town Conservation Committee to protect and maintain our valuable natural resources (3.1.2)

### **3. Provide access to affordable housing.**

#### **Essential Goals:**

- Explore ways to enable young people and families to stay in the Town, or to relocate to the Town. (6.2)
- Ensure all future development allows for equitable access to potable water supplies. (13.5)

#### **Essential Strategy:**

- Develop local land use ordinances that support the creation of quality affordable housing and create incentives for affordable housing options. (8.1)

### **4. Understand the impacts of climate change on Bristol.**

#### **Essential Goal:**

- Identify potential effects of climate change on the Town through a collaboration with regional and state entities.

#### **Essential Strategy:**

- Create a working group of experts to detail a plan to aid the Town in responding to the effects of climate change.

### **5. Use the Comprehensive Plan as a roadmap for Bristol's future.**

#### **Essential Goal:**

- Maintain the Town's established record of fiscal responsibility as evidenced, in part, by a stable mil rate. (12.1)
- Incorporate the Comprehensive Plan into all aspects of governance to guide the Town's future.

#### **Essential Strategy:**

- Create a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to support and monitor the execution of the Plan. (13.3.2)

## Future Land Use Plan

### *Why is a future land use plan important?*

The Comprehensive Plan Committee's consultant team clarifies that:

A future land use plan provides a roadmap for how the community wants to develop and grow over time. Maine is known for its natural beauty and rural landscapes, and a future land use plan helps identify and protect important open spaces, natural areas, and farmland from haphazard or sprawling development, preserving the state's rural character and promoting responsible growth.

Planning for future land use allows communities to anticipate the need for infrastructure, such as roads, schools, utilities, and public services. By understanding where development is likely to occur, municipalities can efficiently allocate resources and plan for infrastructure improvements.

Maine experiences varying rates of population growth in different regions. A future land use plan enables communities to manage growth effectively, ensuring that urban sprawl is minimized, and development is focused in areas with the necessary infrastructure and services.

Developing a future land use plan involves input from community members, businesses, and stakeholders. Engaging the public in the planning process fosters a sense of ownership and helps ensure that the plan reflects the values and aspirations of the residents. A future land use plan can be integrated into the regulatory framework of the community through zoning and land use ordinances. It provides a foundation for updating and improving existing regulations to align with the long-term vision for the area.

### *Bristol's Future Land Use Plan*

The Future Land Use Plan shows places where Bristol wants to encourage future activity and investment along with places that should remain relatively unchanged in the future. The Future Land Use Plan, consisting of the Future Land Use map and this narrative, is based on all of the public participation and input received through the course of this plan update. The

Future Land Use Map is a graphical extension of Bristol's Vision Statement and ties elements of the communities' values and vision to locations and places on the ground. It is a tool that policy makers and town staff can use to create and update rules for future development and guide public investment.

The purpose of the Future Land Use Plan is to guide Bristol's decisions on the location, scale, and character of development, land preservation, and public investments over the next ten years. Planning with these objectives in mind will steer Bristol toward considering development in certain places in town and not in others in order to move closer to the vision of Bristol in the future.

The Future Land Use Map shows three areas: *Growth Areas*, *Critical Rural Areas*, and *Rural Areas*. The definitions here, provided by the consultant team, are followed by paragraphs detailing their application to Bristol.

### **Growth Areas**

Growth Areas are places that are suitable for most of the future residential and business development. These are places where new development may be incentivized and encouraged. The context of growth and change within these areas should be right-sized for a town and relate to the size of the community.

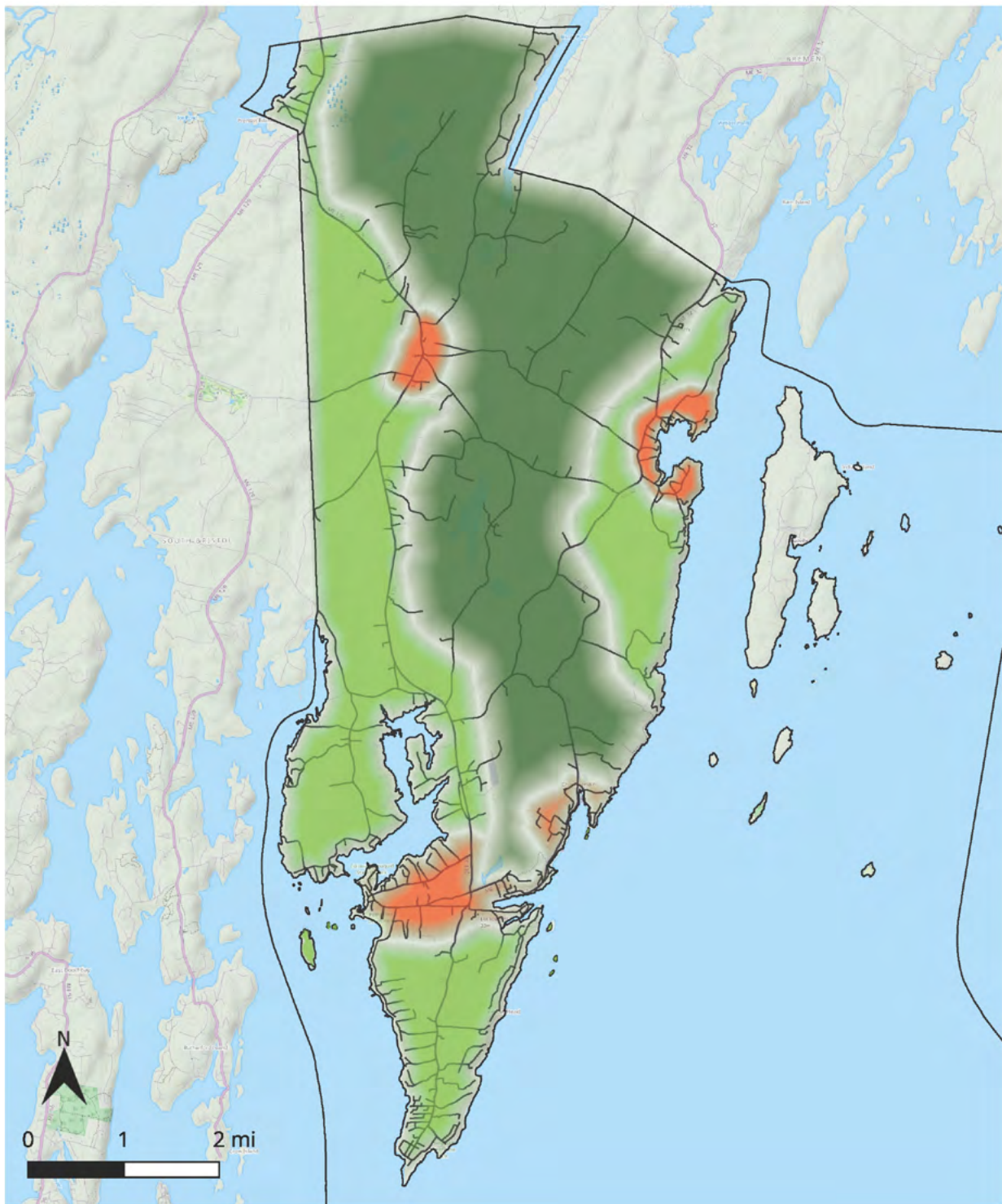
### **Rural Areas**

Rural Areas are places to be protected from the impacts of development. While new home building may still occur within Rural Areas, growth in these areas is limited in order to preserve rural character, scenic views, and natural resources. These are places where there is likely to be a limited amount of change over the next 10-15 years.

### **Critical Rural Areas**

Critical Rural Areas are identified as those places deserving maximum protection from development. These places may include significant wildlife habitat, scenic areas, vulnerable natural resources, or farm and forest lands. Critical Rural Areas should be priority targets of conservation efforts and receive maximum protections from the town to minimize future development and habitat fragmentation.





Town of Bristol Future Land Use

-  Rural
-  Critical Rural
-  Village



# Bristol's Future Land Use Areas

## *Growth Areas*

There are several growth areas shown on the Future Land Use Map that correspond to traditional village areas within the Town of Bristol. These villages are the historic centers of economic and social life, and have historically been relatively self-reliant communities. Homes were built within walking distance of the harbors and mills that supported each village. This history is evident in the location of villages around important natural resources and harbors, and these village areas remain a relevant factor in how people identify where they live and relate to their neighbors. The continued existence of four post offices in these areas is a prime example of how village areas shape daily life. New development within these areas should respect historic building and development patterns. The amount of development in Bristol is impossible to predict with accuracy. For the 6 years 2015/2016-2020/2021, a total of 96 new homes have been permitted, an average of just over 13 new homes each 12-month period (Housing Inventory Chapter).

Development within and proximate to the villages should reflect the traditional pattern and the scale of the Town. The reasons for this are twofold. First, maintaining active village areas will help ensure that they remain relevant places and destinations within the community. Additionally, maintaining “friendly density” in the form of accessory dwelling units and small 2-3 unit buildings will allow more affordable year round housing options while recognizing the limitations of private water supply and private individual septic disposal systems within these areas.

## *Rural Areas*

The areas along the main roads like Bristol Road/Route 130 and Route 32 outside of the Growth Areas are designated Rural Areas. These parts of Bristol should see lower levels of new home development and commercial activity than the Growth Areas over the next 10-15 years. These areas will remain characterized by relatively open rural roads and views of fields, woods, and the ocean.

That said, these are not “no growth areas” and are likely good locations for

potentially larger affordable or senior housing projects that could not be accommodated within the existing villages. Such projects, either in a single multi-unit building or within a multi-building clustered housing campus or pocket neighborhood concept, would have good access to main roads for future transit options and water and wastewater impacts would be directed away from the villages.

### ***Critical Rural Areas***

The large rural areas generally between Routes 130 and 32, and extending from the northerly town line down to the conserved LaVerna Preserve and Rachel Carson Preserve lands near Chamberlain and New Harbor are important to the rural character of the community. This land is designated as a Critical Rural Area. There are many large unfragmented habitat blocks in this lightly developed portion of town, including some that cross town lines and measure over 2,000 acres in size. Most of the town's existing conservation lands are within this area. Future conservation efforts by the town or partner organizations should be prioritized within the Critical Rural area. Notably, community members' desire to conserve Bristol's natural resources and lands was prominent throughout both surveys, the Future Land Use Workshop, and Committee meetings.

## Plan Implementation

The success of a plan is measured by how well it is implemented. The Comprehensive Plan is meant to be a living document and tool for community decision-makers to establish policies, target investments, and develop programs that reflect the values and priorities of the Bristol community. Further planning studies, and future changes to the Town's zoning, land use, and policies will be required to carry out the vision for Bristol.

Subsequent to its approval by the Town, the Comprehensive Plan Committee recommends that the Select Board form a Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee to take action on Plan recommendations and track progress. The Implementation Committee should include at least two members from the CPC for continuity, as well as representation from relevant Boards and Committees, including the Select Board.

The Implementation Matrix provided in Appendix C offers the goals, policies, and strategies categorized by topic, an estimated timeframe, and identification of the responsible party. This matrix should be used as the framework for action steps for Town staff and other stakeholders to carry out the Comprehensive Plan. It is also an important tool to track progress as the goals, policies, and strategies are implemented over the next decade.



Photo by Keeton

## ***Performance Measures***

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of key metrics are important to keep the Town on track toward its goals and to identify course corrections along the way. The performance measures should track the Town's top priorities and be considered as suggestions for the Plan's Implementation Committee.

### **Baseline performance measures for evaluation at least every 5 years:**

- A. The degree to which future land use plan strategies have been implemented;
- B. Percent of municipal growth-related capital investments in growth areas;
- C. Location and amount of new development in relation to community's designated growth areas and rural areas.
- D. Amount of critical natural resource, critical rural, and critical waterfront areas protected through acquisition, easements, or other measures.

## ***Future Comprehensive Plan Updates***

It is recommended that the Plan be updated in 3-5 years by the Implementation Committee, in order to refresh the information in the Inventory Chapters and the Top Five Priorities.

These targeted tune-ups to the Plan will be manageable and responsive, and present to the Town opportunities to have follow-up conversations with the community regarding the evolution of the Town's vision and priorities.

## Conclusion

No comprehensive plan is complete, since such a project is too complex and detailed to fully capture every detail about a Town. However, this Plan strives to capture Bristol's current moment in order to establish the foundation for changes in the years to come. Part of it is retrospective and looks at how the Town has changed in the last twenty years. The Town is changing more quickly now, and our hopes and wishes will be modified as the decade unfolds.

The research and outreach associated with Bristol's Comprehensive Plan have led to one simple conclusion: that action to manage the change is essential and urgent.

The Comprehensive Plan is ambitious and assertive; it offers goals and strategies that will allow Bristol to grow in the way that the residents' desire. All of the proposed strategies are important. Admittedly, some may be accomplished more quickly than others, and not everyone will agree with all of them. They all deserve, however, more thought and discussion.

The dialogue that began with the surveys and the Future Land Use Workshop should be the first of many conversations about the Town. This is the most important thing that we learned - that the Town wants to make the changes necessary to protect the things we love about Bristol, and that many people want to be involved in the process. Only through the future determination and efforts of many will Bristol continue to embody the values of its residents.