



COMMUNITY ISSUES & CONCERNS

Overview

This booklet has been prepared for Westbrook residents and other persons interested in the formulation of the 2021 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) for Westbrook, Connecticut.

In order to learn about community issues and concerns and set the stage for the POCD update, the POCD Update Committee and their consultant conducted several exercises:

- A discussion of issues at a joint meeting of the POCD Update Committee and the Planning Commission,
- An on-line survey of Westbrook residents,
- A review of the 2011 POCD strategies and implementation status, and
- Field trips around Westbrook.

This booklet is intended to summarize results from an on-line survey conducted from March to the beginning of May in 2020.

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Margaret Wheatley
Writer

A Healthy Environment



A Vibrant Community



A Strong Economy

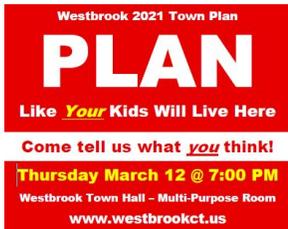


Community Meeting

Preparations had been made for a community meeting on March 12, 2020 but this meeting was cancelled due to emerging concerns about the COVID-19 virus.

The on-line survey (which was due to be fielded after the community meeting) was adjusted to replicate the meeting exercises.

While it is unlikely that the March 2020 meeting will be rescheduled, a community meeting has been tentatively scheduled for the summer of 2020.



Participants

In order to learn about issues important to Westbrook residents, an on-line survey was conducted from March to the beginning of May in 2020. The availability of the on-line survey was publicized a variety of ways:

- Press releases to local media outlets (newspaper, radio, etc.)
- Posting on the Town website / Town Hall signboard
- Requests to social media (Facebook / Twitter)
- Cable television screen saver slide

While there were mandates for social distancing and sheltering in place as a result of the COVID-19 event, many people did find out about the survey and 166 people participated.

In the tables that follow, please be aware that some tabulations may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

Participation / Awareness - About half the participants heard about the survey from an email or someone telling them about it. Some comments mentioned Beach Association newsletters.

Q1 - How Hear of Survey	
Someone told / emailed me about it	47%
I found it on the Town website	14%
I heard about it / read about it on-line	12%
I read about it in a newspaper	9%
Other (at a Town meeting, Facebook / Twitter, etc.)	4%
Did not disclose	14%

Type of Participant - Westbrook was the primary place of residence for about 2/3rds of the participants and most of the remainder were seasonal or occasional users who did not rent to others (listed by percent).

Q2 Type of Survey Participant	
I live in Westbrook as my primary place of residence	67%
I own residential property in Westbrook and use it seasonally or occasionally (DO NOT rent to others)	30%
I own residential property in Westbrook and use it seasonally or occasionally (ALSO rent to others)	1%
Own / operate a business in Westbrook or work in Westbrook	1%
I own residential property and ONLY rent it to others	0%
I keep a boat at a marina in Westbrook	0%
None of the above, I just like Westbrook	1%

About 2/3rds of survey participants live in Westbrook full-time ...

Length of Residency - About 2/3rds of participants have lived in Westbrook for more than 15 years (listed by percent).

Q3 - Length of Residence	
More than 15 years	62%
6 to 15 years	24%
1 to 5 years	10%
Less than one year	2%
Other (work here, just like Westbrook)	1%

Almost 2/3rds of survey participants have lived in Westbrook for more than 15 years ...

Neighborhood Location About ¾ of all participants lived south of Interstate 95 in the coastal neighborhoods (listed by north to south).

Q4 - Area of Residence	
North of Interstate 95	27%
South of Interstate 95	73%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Near the Town Center 	30%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the west side, towards Clinton 	24%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On the east side, towards Old Saybrook 	19%
Other (work here, just like Westbrook)	1%

About 3/4 of survey participants live in the neighborhoods south of Interstate 95...

Attraction / Satisfaction

Factors Influencing Peoples Decision To Come To Westbrook – Overall, the factors which most influenced people’s decision to come to Westbrook were the shore, ambience, and housing-related factors (listed by percent very important).

The most important factors in attracting people to Westbrook were amenities (shore and ambience) and housing considerations ...

Q5 – Attracting Factors	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not A Factor	No Opinion
To be near the shore	67%	23%	9%	1%
Community ambience (character, reputation, appearance, feeling, neighborhood, etc.)	64%	32%	3%	1%
Housing type, value, etc.	45%	36%	15%	4%
Housing affordability	38%	35%	22%	5%
Other Town amenities / services (recreational facilities, etc.)	36%	41%	21%	2%
With my parents, spouse, etc.	36%	14%	41%	9%
Education system	33%	17%	46%	3%
Close to family	27%	23%	45%	5%
I grew up here and stayed	17%	3%	64%	16%
Close to work	15%	24%	55%	5%
Grew up here / came back later in life	13%	5%	64%	18%

Overall Quality Of Life - Over 2/3rds of survey participants felt the quality of life in Westbrook was very good or excellent. Over the past 10 years or so, about 83% of participants felt the quality of life had stayed the same or gotten better (listed by category).

Over 2/3rds of survey participants felt the overall quality of life in Westbrook was excellent or very good ...

Q6 – Overall Quality Of Life	
Excellent	21%
Very good	46%
Good	28%
Fair / Poor / Very Poor /	6%
Other (work here, just like Westbrook	1%

Q7 –Quality Of Life Trend Over Past Decade	
Gotten better	31%
Stayed the same	51%
Gotten worse	19%
Other (work here, just like Westbrook	1%

Like Most About Westbrook – Participants were asked to list up to four things in Westbrook they were “proud” of. These tend to be things that people might want to maintain and/or encourage in the future.

The top table illustrates the “word cloud” of the responses (see sidebar). The second table attempts to categorize them by the phraseology of the response (listed by total for category).

Q8 - Like Most	
Mentioned First	public library shore marinas community access town property Beaches open space shoreline taxes Schools Low taxes small town
Mentioned Second	open space businesses Shoreline Friendly Town government beach Access small town communities Restaurants Local Town beach School System Adopt spot people services
Mentioned Third	access good Library government community Shoreline Beach town hall Town shopping low taxes Small
Mentioned Fourth	Small town Community local library services shopping Open space feeling Town Access Schools care Beaches walkability

“PROUDS”	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Total
Town Services / Facilities (schools, beach, fire, library, recreation, staff)	37	32	30	18	117
Emotional Character / Ambience (sense of community, small town, quaintness, people, volunteers/projects)	24	33	22	22	101
Beaches, Shoreline	33	11	11	7	62
Physical Character (open space, overall appearance, upkeep)	14	11	8	9	42
Local Businesses	0	13	12	11	36
Fiscal / Economic	7	8	5	4	24
Special Facilities (train station, YMCA, Middlesex Health, etc.)	2	3	9	4	18
Marinas / Boating	3	4	2	1	10
Overall Location	2	0	3	2	7
Neighborhood	4	2	0	0	6
Walkability / Bikeability	0	0	0	3	3
Other	3	2	3	3	11

Word Clouds

In the top table, the responses received are represented by a “word cloud.” Word clouds identify the words used most often in the responses received and a larger font indicates the word was used more often. A listing of all responses and how they were categorized is available at Town Hall I.

The word cloud seems to indicate participants were proud of beaches, character, and local services

Categorizing each individual response by phraseology reveals the same categories but in a slightly different order

Word Clouds

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The word cloud seems to indicate participants were sorry about lack of a strong town center and other matters

Categorizing each individual response by phraseology reveals the Town Center is a major concern

Like Least About Westbrook – Participants were asked to list up to four things in Westbrook they were “sorry” about. These tend to be things that people might want to eliminate and/or discourage in the future.

Again, the top table illustrates the “word cloud” of the responses. The second table attempts to categorize them by the phraseology of the response (listed by total for category).

Q9 - Like Least	
Mentioned First (111 responses)	high sidewalks downtown School town center residents Lack Poor town roads business flooding need buildings Center Taxes
Mentioned Second (87 responses)	beach areas houses Lack sidewalks need business Town better Lack road town center sidewalks development green
Mentioned Third (67 responses)	property Center residents beach Lack good town Taxes businesses local zoning services Town Center
Mentioned Fourth (46 responses)	businesses limited town center trails lack police town

“SORRYS”	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	Total
Town Center / Downtown (condition, vacancy, etc.)	24	15	9	8	56
Local Businesses (lack of / desire for businesses, vacancy, etc.)	18	7	10	7	42
Physical Character (blight, unattractive development, etc.)	13	10	5	8	36
Town Services / Facilities / Government (services lacking, desired)	10	7	5	14	36
Social / Emotional Character (negativity, disagreements, etc..)	14	2	15	2	33
Fiscal / Economic	8	3	8	3	22
Walkability / Bikeability	9	3	2	7	21
Schools / Education	9	1	3	0	13
Traffic	1	5	4	0	10
Flooding	7	1	1	0	9
Housing	2	4	2	1	9
Land Use / Planning / Zoning	0	2	6	1	9
Beaches / Shoreline / Boating	2	3	3	0	8
Other	0	1	2	1	4

Town Goals

Support For Town Goals – Participants felt a number of Town Goals were very important and the goals supported most strongly included (listed by percent “very important”):

- Protecting Natural Resources
- Addressing Coastal Issues
- Invigorating / Enhancing Town Center
- Preserving Open Space

Q10 – Support For Town Goals	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not A Factor	No Opinion
TOP QUARTILE				
Protecting Natural Resources	78%	21%	1%	0%
Addressing Coastal Issues	74%	24%	1%	0%
Invigorating / Enhancing Town Center	69%	22%	8%	1%
Preserving Open Space	67%	28%	5%	1%
SECOND QUARTILE				
Enhancing Community Character	64%	30%	5%	1%
Having Adequate Utility Services	63%	31%	6%	1%
Providing Quality Education	63%	25%	9%	3%
Addressing Sustainability / Resiliency	61%	27%	7%	5%
THIRD QUARTILE				
Promoting Business/Economic Dev.	60%	35%	4%	1%
Promoting Pedestrian / Bike Options	54%	26%	17%	3%
Guiding Residential Development	44%	35%	15%	5%
Improving Community Services	38%	48%	13%	1%
BOTTOM QUARTILE				
Improving Community Facilities	37%	45%	16%	2%
Promoting Transit / Rail Options	31%	44%	24%	1%
Addressing Housing Needs	24%	47%	25%	4%
Addressing Vehicular Transportation	23%	48%	25%	4%

Participants generally felt the Town was doing a good job accomplishing Town goals but there were some areas for improvement and education

Accomplishing Town Goals – Participants generally felt the Town was doing a good job accomplishing local goals with the highest marks going to:

- Preserving Open Space
- Providing Quality Education
- Protecting Natural Resources
- Promoting Transit / Rail Options

However, it appears more felt *a better job could be done* with regard to (listed by percent “excellent”):

- Invigorating / Enhancing Town Center
- Promoting Business / Economic Development
- Addressing Vehicular Transportation
- Addressing Housing Needs

No Opinion Responses

There were quite a few people (at least 20 percent of participants) who had no opinion about the progress the Town was making in accomplishing certain goals:

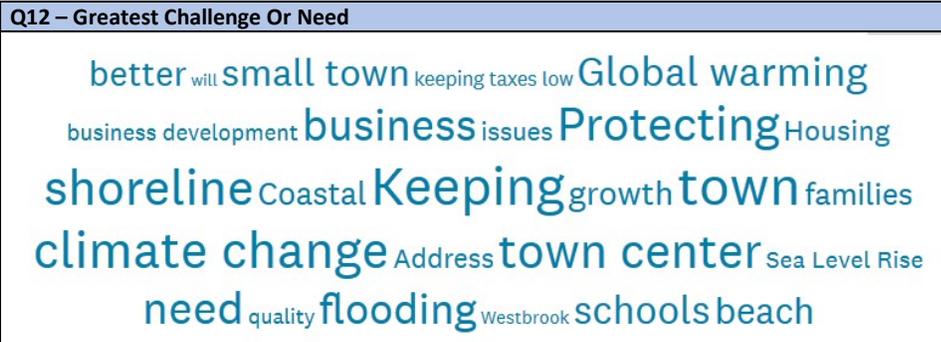
- Addressing Housing Needs
- Addressing Vehicular Transportation
- Guiding Residential Development
- Addressing Sustainability / Resiliency
- Providing Quality Education
- Promoting Transit / Rail Options

These topics might benefit from better education / awareness about progress.

Q11 – Accomplishing Town Goals	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	No Opinion
TOP QUARTILE					
Preserving Open Space	29%	49%	13%	3%	6%
Providing Quality Education	22%	40%	10%	7%	21%
Protecting Natural Resources	18%	53%	23%	0%	7%
Promoting Transit / Rail Options	11%	41%	22%	7%	19%
SECOND QUARTILE					
Having Adequate Utility Services	9%	48%	26%	4%	13%
Addressing Coastal Issues	9%	42%	28%	13%	8%
Improving Community Facilities	6%	39%	28%	11%	17%
Enhancing Community Character	6%	35%	34%	17%	8%
THIRD QUARTILE					
Improving Community Services	6%	47%	26%	5%	17%
Guiding Residential Development	5%	35%	30%	7%	23%
Addressing Sustainability / Resiliency	4%	32%	30%	12%	22%
Promoting Pedestrian / Bike Options	4%	15%	40%	24%	16%
BOTTOM QUARTILE					
Invigorating / Enhancing Town Center	4%	24%	31%	35%	7%
Promoting Business/Economic Dev.	4%	30%	31%	23%	13%
Addressing Vehicular Transportation	3%	31%	33%	6%	26%
Addressing Housing Needs	3%	26%	35%	9%	27%

Westbrook’s Greatest Challenge

Greatest Challenge Or Need – When asked to identify what they saw as the greatest challenge or need facing Westbrook in the next 10 to 20 years, responses from participants generated the following word cloud.



After categorizing the comments provided, participants perceive that Westbrook’s greatest challenge is addressing sea level rise, coastal flooding, and climate change issues. Secondary issues included schools, managing growth, fiscal concerns, and supporting local businesses (listed by response for the category).

1. Sea Level Rise / Flooding / Climate Change	37
2. Schools / Education	12
3. Managing Growth	11
4. Fiscal / Economic	11
5. Local Businesses	10
6. Town Center / Downtown	9
7. Character / Spirit	9
8. Housing	8
9. Environment / Conservation	6
10. Demographics	6
11. Infrastructure	6
12. Traffic / Transportation	2
13. Other	3

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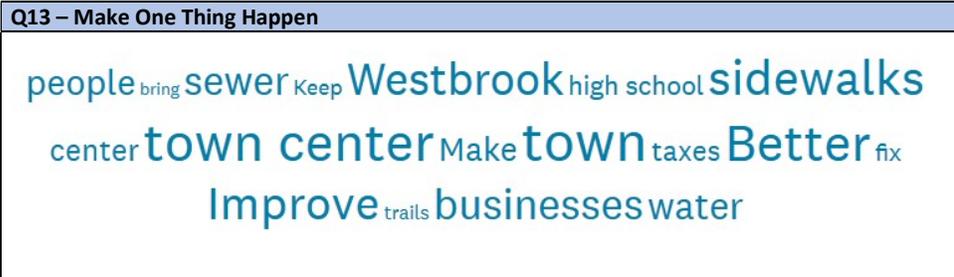
Participants generally felt that sea level rise, coastal flooding, and climate change is Westbrook’s greatest challenge in the next 10 to 20 years

Word Clouds

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If We Could Make One Thing Happen ...

Make One Thing Happen – When asked what they would do if they could make one thing happen in Westbrook to make it a better place, responses from participants generated the following word cloud.



After categorizing the comments provided, it was clear that there is strong interest in improving and enhancing the Town Center. Support was also expressed for business/economic development, improving walkability and Bikeability, and other things (listed by response for the category).

If Westbrook could make only one thing happen for the future, participants expressed interest in improving and enhancing the Town Center

1. Improve / Enhance Town Center	31
2. Improve / Enhance Local Business	13
3. Improve Walkability / Bikeability	13
4. Upgrade Infrastructure	10
5. Improve Town Services / Government	10
6. Maintain / Improve Physical Character	9
7. Improve Schools / Education	8
8. Address Sea Level / Flooding / Climate Change	8
9. Address Issues In Coastal Areas	6
10. Improve / Enhance Community Events / Spirit	5
11. Address Fiscal / Economic Issues	5
12. Address Seasonal / Year-Round Issues	2
13. Other (7)	7

Demographics

Q14 – Own Or Rent Residence (129 responses)	
Own	94%
Rent	3%
Other (work here, just like Westbrook)	3%

Q15 – Own Or Rent Business (14 responses)	
Own	93%
Rent	7%

Q16 – Age Group		Town-wide Estimate
Under 20 years old	0%	12%
Age 20 to 34	1%	13%
Age 35 to 54	20%	28%
Age 55 to 64	37%	22%
Age 65 or over	42%	25%

Q17 - Gender		Town-wide Estimate
Female	50%	53%
Male	43%	47%
Prefer not to answer	7%	-

Q18 - Children Living At Home		Town-wide Estimate
None	80%	n/a
1 child	8%	n/a
2 children	11%	n/a
3 or more children	1%	n/a

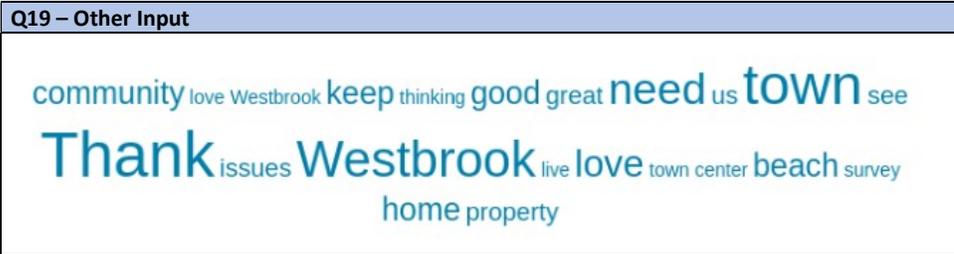
Word Clouds

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Participants that commented expressed thanks for the survey and the overall work of the Town

Other Input ...

Other Input – When asked if they had any other input to offer, responses from participants generated the following word cloud.



Participants were appreciative of the opportunity to participate in the survey and the work being done by the Town. A number participants reiterated or stressed responses made earlier in the survey (concerns or desires).

1. Thanks	17
2. Expressed / Reiterated Concerns	12
3. Expressed / Reiterated Desires	9
4. Town Adoration	5
5. Other	6

Notes & Comments

