



Long Range Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC+)

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Falmouth Comprehensive Plan Survey Conclusions

What does the survey data mean for the Comprehensive Plan?

September 23, 2011

Introduction

The Long Range Planning Advisory Committee (LPAC+) reviewed the 2011 survey report prepared by Market Decisions. This report contains all data, key findings, and verbatim comments. The report is available at: http://www.town.falmouth.me.us/Pages/FalmouthME_BComm/LPAC/2011Survey/2011SurveyResults.

In the text below the committee has interpreted this survey data and developed some conclusions from it to help guide its next steps in developing a Comprehensive Plan. Each set of conclusions is followed by some back-up data.

The committee plans to incorporate any Council feedback in its work, share survey results with the public, and seek additional public input at later stages of this project.

Section A. Would You Recommend Falmouth?

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that:

1. There is a high degree of resident satisfaction with the Town.
2. The Town continue to prudently manage taxes and spending for infrastructure and schools.
3. The Town manage economic growth so as to preserve the small town feel that residents enjoy.

Back-up

- The survey results fall almost in line with the results from the 2010 web based survey. In 2010, approximately 76% gave Falmouth at least a 7 out of 10 as a place that could be recommended to a friend or colleague. In 2011 it was 81%. A small percentage rated Falmouth very low.
- Among those who would not recommend Falmouth, factors that increase their score would be decreased taxes and decreased school spending as well as increasing a sense of community.
- Among those who would recommend Falmouth, factors that would decrease the score would be increasing taxes, more big box stores, and unchecked commercial and residential development.

Section B. Driving, Bicycling, and Walking

Conclusions:

Respondents suggest that the Town:

1. Plan, in coordination with appropriate state agencies, for road construction and maintenance for the next ten years in accordance with the 2010 consultant study. The plan should include a projection of costs and methods of funding, e.g. funds from the state and from the Town.
2. Develop a plan to provide more sidewalks and shoulders for biking and walking. The Plan should include a requirement that bike lanes be created as each road received repairs.
3. Facilitate coordination of the current system of trails with the PACTS Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.

Back-up

Driving

- Speeding and traffic congestion are not major issues among the respondents.
- A majority of respondents want their roads maintained and are willing to have the Town assuming responsibility for maintaining good roads even where it should be the State's responsibility.
- Respondents were split on the importance of connectivity between residential neighborhoods and were also split about the use of Town funds or coercion of property developers to fund connectivity.
- There is modest interest in usage of the Falmouth Flyer both currently and in the future.

Bicycling

- The majority of respondents believe that it is important to have bike paths across Town and support installing paved shoulders, sidewalks, and improving trails to do so even if it means spending Town money.

Walking

- The majority of respondents want to be able to walk more on Town streets and trails for recreation and shopping, even if it means widening roads and spending Town money to do so, although there is a greater percentage of respondents who want to walk or hike along Town trails as opposed to walking on Town streets.
- The majority of respondents do not have access to sidewalks in their neighborhood but would use them if they existed.

Section C. Town Services

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that:

1. Overall, they are quite satisfied with Town services. As noted in the Verbatim Comments report, there is room for specific improvements.
 - a. This feedback should serve the Town Manager well in dealing with day-to-day operational issues and does not need further attention from a policy perspective in the long range plan.
2. Based on dissatisfaction with roads and economic development, the long range plan pay particular attention to the economy and transportation chapters of the plan to make sure proposed actions meet resident needs.
 - a. For the economy chapter that may mean working closely with the new Economic Improvement Committee to tap into its ideas for improvement. There is an opportunity to clearly define the Town's role in economic development and to communicate that to the public.
 - b. For the transportation chapter it may mean getting a good understanding how capital road projects are funded and which projects may be forthcoming in next 10 years. (The new Pavement Management Plan and VueWorks software are two key tools for the Town.) There is no Town committee overseeing transportation as this responsibility falls to largely to staff. There is no suggestion in the comments that changing that would improve the road conditions or satisfaction of them by residents.
3. The interest in expanded services appears outweighed by those who are not interested in that.
 - a. Greatest support for expansion appears to be for Community/Recreational Programming and Facilities, Open Space Acquisition, and Swimming pool. However, this support should be treated carefully and tested further with the results of the Open Space and Town Center sections of the survey. The swimming pool continues to be an issue where people have different opinions. A large number of people explicitly stating they did not want this service added. If there are any expansion recommendations, these can be incorporated in the CIP section of the long range plan.
4. While supportive of the idea of shared services in concept, the realistic potential for further regional coordination/consolidation of services appears to be limited as none of the four specific ideas got much support.
 - a. Better communication of current successful regional efforts may help to built support for more shared services in future. The Regional Coordination chapter may benefit from a direct conversation with the Town Manager on this topic.

Back-up

Town services

- Among those using Town services, a majority are satisfied or very satisfied with the services provided.
- Most commonly used services by respondents are the Town Clerk's office, Town website, Falmouth Memorial Library, and the Transfer Station.
- Services that scored lowest in satisfaction were Economic Development, Road Maintenance, and Land Use Planning. The verbatim comments did not offer much insight into the reasons for rating economic development and land use planning.
- The current economic malaise and retail vacancies may have affected resident perceptions.
- Road issues are near and dear to people's hearts and the Transportation section provides ample feedback on that. It is noted that the timing of the survey preceded the completion of some major road projects currently underway. Continued and possible expanded fiscal limitations will play an increased role in how roads will be maintained in the future. This limitation may be somewhat offset by a more efficient use of resources.

Expanded services

- The raw survey data will need to indicate how many people wanted some type of added service.
- In terms of number of people supporting added services, their level of support, and willingness to pay for the services through taxes and/or user fees was strongest for:
 - o Community/Recreational Programming and Facilities
 - o Open Space Acquisition
 - o Swimming pool.
- The pool had strongest opposition as well.
- There are some strong pockets of support for Library and community/town center expansion.
- Relatively new younger residents with children most supportive of expanded services.
- The survey did not test the level of support for taxes vs. user fees.

Shared services

- Respondents had strong support for shared services with other communities and/or Cumberland County if there were cost savings, and still supported this concept even if services moved out of Falmouth (but much less so).
- However, when presented with specific examples that support eroded and turned into opposition. The greatest opposition was to sharing library and Town Hall services outside Falmouth. This was somewhat less so for transfer station and community programs.
- Survey phrasing concern: The specific examples mentioned "expansion" in these questions, and not "sharing services." This could have caused an added negative response.

Section D. Town Center

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that the Town:

1. Consider a “Town Center” definition beyond a building or a location. Its goal should primarily create a stronger sense of community and neighborhood, and secondarily offer more facilities and resources as these are less popular, according to respondents.
2. Consider conservative budgets and leverage existing priorities to try to meet the goals above and incorporate. Examples are the needs around good roads and driving conditions, walk-ability of the Town, and other existing infrastructure projects that add minor costs to the concept.
3. Consider all neighborhoods as good locations for parks or other recreational facilities. The area around Route 1 and particularly the zone including the current library, Family Ice, baseball fields and surroundings offer “town center” attractiveness to (a) enable walking, sitting and recreational facilities, (b) access to businesses, and (c) potential further infrastructure at low cost.
4. Leverage opportunities also geared to families and adults under 50 – this may also help define ways of raising funds or even getting the projects completed (e.g. special individual contributions for more playgrounds, sitting benches, and other minor recreational facilities).

Back-up

- The concept of the Town Center as a major initiative ranked at the bottom three of overall Town priorities with 47% support- but with more than one in three respondents claiming “not important.”
- When asked about the Town Center attributes the top three rankings were for Memorial Library, recreational activities, and community activities with about 60% support.
- More structured activities - programs, culture, enrichment, and services received support by about half the population.
- Residents likely without children in the household, recent arrivals (<5 years), and from Falmouth Corners were most interested in community activities.

Section E. Public Water and Sewer

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that the Town:

1. Pro-actively plan for sewer, water, and other utility extensions.
2. Establish a policy that identifies when Town funds will be used for infrastructure costs.
3. Establish a policy that identifies when a developer can recoup utility infrastructure costs.

Back-up

- 63% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Town should proactively plan for sewer, water, and other utility extensions where appropriate while 13% disagree or strongly disagree.
- 74% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Town should establish a policy that identifies if and when Town funds will be used for utility infrastructure costs while 5% disagree or strongly disagree.
- 65% of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Town should establish a policy that identifies if and when a developer can recoup any utility infrastructure costs while 11% disagree or strongly disagree.

Section F. Residential Development

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that “compact housing” seems to have various meanings and connotations to them. However, the data from the survey is insufficient to draw conclusions about compact housing preferences.

Respondents also suggest that the Town:

1. Conduct more research to formulate residential housing policy recommendations pertaining to various housing types, including compact housing.
2. Develop smaller zoning districts that more closely relate to the character of existing neighborhoods as Falmouth residents have substantial variations in preferences for housing types, but seem to prefer some neighborhood consistency in type, density and size.
3. Adopt policies that permit appropriate small-scale commercial development such as corner stores in residential zoning districts.
4. Evaluate whether to engage in a master planning process in order to develop the policies and the zoning that support the desired variations in housing and uses.

Back-up

- While the results of questions about compact development show little strong town-wide support or opposition on any of the questions, a substantial segment of the population (from a little over a third to just under a half of the respondents depending on whether the compact housing would be in existing neighborhoods or new neighborhoods) support compact residential housing as an option and a smaller but still substantial portion of residents (about a quarter) expressed interest in living in compact development.
- Preference, while not strong, was for single-family compact housing (as opposed to multi-family), in new neighborhoods (as opposed to infill in existing neighborhoods), and as an option for developers (as opposed to a requirement). Multifamily compact housing is opposed by about half of respondents.
- A substantial segment (a little over a quarter) of the respondents opposes compact development but the number is less than those that support it. On the other end of the density spectrum, 20% of respondents support the development of large residential lots instead of compact housing while 50% oppose such development.

- Respondents identified the eastern and southern areas of town as the most suitable for compact development. These areas are generally the more densely developed locations and those closest to existing infrastructure, services, and town facilities.
- Three-quarters of respondents indicate the Town should develop smaller zoning districts that more closely relate to the character of existing development.
- While a small majority of respondents appear to support some form of master planning, a substantial number indicated little knowledge of past master planning efforts or low satisfaction with the results.

Section G. Commercial Development

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that:

1. Overall, they would not strongly recommend Falmouth as a place to do business.
2. They support an increased business presence to:
 - a. increase town revenues,
 - b. provide more opportunities for local shopping, entertainment, and dining, and
 - c. increase employment opportunities.
3. A majority of them would support future business being located:
 - a. along Route 1 from Route 88 to the Turnpike spur,
 - b. along Route 1 from the Turnpike spur to Cumberland Town line, and
 - c. along Route 100 from Portland City line to Mountain Road.

Back-up

- Only 43% would recommend Falmouth as a place to do business, 39% would neither recommend nor not recommend, and 18% would not recommend Falmouth as a place to do business.
- Respondents would recommend Falmouth as a place to do business because of the demographics of the community, the range of businesses already doing business in town, and the space available.
- Respondents would not recommend Falmouth as a place to do business because the Town makes it difficult to start or keep a business in town, it is too costly to start and operate a business in Falmouth, and residents prefer to keep Falmouth as a residential community.

Section H. Alternative Energy

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that the Town:

1. Prepare for increased installation of alternative energy sources of all kinds in homes and businesses.
2. Create policies for green building practices.

Back-up

- A majority of respondents (75%) want policies that encourage green building practices in Town buildings.
- A majority of respondents (60%) approve requiring green building practices in Town buildings.
- A majority of respondents want the town to establish regulations to allow the development of alternative energy sources.
- Half of the respondents support the use of wind, solar, natural gas, wood, geothermal, and tidal energy sources in homes and businesses.
- Just under half of the respondents (49%) predicted that they would install alternative energy systems in their residences in the next 10 years.
- Just under half of the respondents (49%) want the Town to develop the infrastructure for electric cars.

Section I. Open Space Preservation

Conclusions

Respondents suggest that the Town:

1. Acquire more open space with funds that have previously been set aside for this purpose.
2. Continue to preserve the open space it has already acquired.
3. Leverage alternative funds to buy more open space.
4. Continue to set aside open space in new residential developments.

Back-up

- Respondents continue to support past decisions to acquire open space and want current space to continue to be preserved for a variety of uses.
- Respondents want the town to maximize the use of alternative funds to acquire space mixed with spending the rest of the \$ 5 million set aside for open space to assure open space is distributed within current and future development.

Section J. Conclusion

Conclusions

The Conclusions section is a good tool to prioritize initiatives across Town resources. It reflects what matters in the respondents mind given the current circumstances. It should be used in conjunction with how circumstances change over the next ten years.

Respondents suggest that the Town:

1. Develop a plan that puts primary priorities and resources on (1) the quality of education, (2) public safety, and (3) and the roads and driving conditions.
2. Secondarily pay attention, as resources become available, to its (1) walk-ability, (2) alternative sources of energy, (3) the Town services, (4) open space preservation, (5) public water, (6) commercial development, and (7) a project for a Town center as commonly known (see more on the Town Center section). Given its novelty, the Town will be required to further understand what residents meant by the alternative energy expectations and the role the Town can play into this.
3. Allocate the least Town resources to the concept of Residential Development.

Back-up

- The answers in the survey were very consistent for the top priorities scores with little controversy among high or low scores. Education scored an 84% of positives and only 4% of negatives. Public safety scored 75% of positives and 7% of negatives; and roads 69% of positives with 5% of negatives.
- The secondary priorities still scored well with a bit more controversy – walking having 66% of positives with 13% of negatives; alternative energy 65% of positives with 17% of negatives; Town services with 62% of positives with 9% of negatives; open space preservation 61% of positives with 18% of negatives; public water 54% of positives and 13% of negatives; commercial development 55% of positives and 20% of negatives; and a project for a Town Center, as commonly known 47% of positives and 14% of negatives.
- The bottom priority, Residential Development, had divided support: 35% of positives and 26% of negatives.

More Information

Please contact Theo Holtwijk, Director of Long-range Planning at 781-5253 ext. 5340 or tholtwijk@town.falmouth.me.us if you would like more information on the survey or the comprehensive plan, or would like to be added to the committee's distribution list.