

Plymouth Master Plan Topic Survey Summary: Natural Resources, Open Space & Recreation, and Climate Resilience

OVERVIEW

The survey included questions similar to those asked at the December 5, 2024 public workshop on natural resources, open space and recreation, and climate resilience. Questions focus on balancing natural resource protection with development, improving and expanding Plymouth's open space and recreation resources, key climate concerns, and what climate adaptation strategies the Town should prioritize. The survey ran from early December 2024 to late February 2025 and received 109 responses.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Interest in keeping key habitats intact while providing public access to nature
- Desire that growth should not come at the expense of the natural environment that makes Plymouth special.
- More consideration for climate change and resilience and adaptation strategies throughout government decisions-making and policies.

KEY THEMES BY SURVEY QUESTION

NATURAL RESOURCES

WHAT NATURAL RESOURCES DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

- Inland water resources including the aquifer, ponds, lakes, rivers, and streams
 - Key concerns: Water quality and pollution (threat from septic systems and stormwater runoff), ensuring integrity of aquifer recharge areas
- Coastal resources including beaches and coastal waterways
 - Key concerns: Pollution (from septic systems, fertilizer, cesspools), maintaining water quality, coastal erosion, and health of wildlife
- Forests
- Wildlife
- Open Space

HOW DO YOU INTERACT WITH PLYMOUTH'S NATURAL ENVIRONMENT?

- Hiking, Walking, Biking: Frequent use of trails in state forests, conservation areas, and parks.
- Beaches and Water Activities: Swimming, kayaking, paddleboarding, boating and fishing in ponds and coastal waters.
- Wildlife Observation: Bird watching, nature photography, and enjoying the natural scenery.
- Community Engagement: Participating in local conservation efforts, clean-up activities, and other educational programs.

- Multi-Generational Outdoor Activities: Dog walking, visiting parks, and picnicking in waterfront areas. Kid's involvement in local recreation programs also encourages interaction with the local natural environment.

HOW SHOULD PLYMOUTH BALANCE NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION WITH GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT?

- Redevelopment: Focus on redeveloping vacant buildings and underutilized areas rather than expanding into undeveloped land.
- Conservation: Prioritize the protection of environmentally sensitive areas, such as wetlands, forests, and coastal zones.
- Sustainable Development: Encourage cluster and mixed-use development to preserve open space and integrate more green infrastructure.
- Community Involvement: Engage residents in planning processes to ensure development aligns with community values and existing plans.
- Incremental Development: Slow the pace of development and make sure it is planned and in alignment with the town's vision

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

WHAT RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE RESOURCES AND FACILITIES DO YOU USE THE MOST?

- Beaches: Multiple mentions of Long Beach, White Horse Beach, Plymouth Beach, Ellisville Harbor Beach, and beaches at Nelson Park and Hedges Pond.
- Parks: Popular parks mentioned include Morton Park, Forges Field, and Stevens Field
- Waterfront Areas: Plymouth Harbor, Town Brook, and other waterfront locations are used for activities like walking, boating, and enjoying scenic views.
- Trails: Hiking and biking trails are commonly used throughout Plymouth, with many mentioning trails and walking paths at Morton Park, Myles Standish State Forest, the Pinehills, the Tidmarsh, the Grace Trail, and the Seaside Trail.
- Conservation Areas & Preservation Lands: These areas provide meaningful outdoor spaces for recreation and wildlife observation. Those cited include Myles Standish State Forest and several areas managed by the Trustees of Reservations, Wildlands Trust, and other local conservation organizations.
- Other Facilities: A few respondents also mentioned specific facilities like pickleball courts, tennis courts, boat ramps, and playgrounds as part of their recreational use.

HOW COULD EXISTING OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES BE IMPROVED?

- Infrastructure improvements:
 - Restrooms, especially at beaches (Long Beach, White Horse Beach), parks (Nelson Park, Morton Park), and hiking trailheads.
 - More trash receptacles
 - Improved and more parking at beaches (Long Beach and White Horse Beach parking fills up quickly), parks, and near to popular trailheads
 - Pathway & Trail Maintenance: Repaving or leveling trails and paths (e.g., at Forges Field) to ensure better accessibility for all visitors.

- Access & Safety improvements:
 - Expand bike paths to create safer routes across town and to recreation and open space destinations
 - Increase lighting at recreational facilities like pickleball courts and tennis courts for evening use, as well as installing better lighting and security features (e.g., cameras, police patrols) in high-traffic areas to ensure safety and reduce property damage.
 - Create safer pedestrian crossings where walking trails intersect with roads, especially for families and children.
- Expand recreational facilities and programming for multi-generational use and engagement
- Increase visibility and Town's communication about open space and recreational resources to grow awareness and use

WHERE COULD NEW OPEN SPACE, RECREATIONAL SPACES, AND PROGRAMMING BE ACCOMMODATED AND WHAT OPPORTUNITIES SHOULD THEY PROMOTE? WHAT'S MISSING?

- Additional hiking/walking/running and biking trails
- Community gardens
- Dog parks and dog-friendly spaces
- More amenities for active recreation
- Community centers and gathering places and accompanying programming
- Greater beach and waterfront access
- Outdoor event spaces or venues
- Environmental educational programming for a variety of ages including outdoor experiences
- Holtec site and Cordage Park mentioned as specific locations that could accommodate new opportunities

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

HOW HAVE YOU OBSERVED OR EXPERIENCED CLIMATE CHANGE OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS?

- Changes in weather patterns
- Increased erosion at beaches and on trails
- Higher tides
- More frequent extreme weather events
- Decline in some wildlife species
- Changes in tree health
- Higher costs including cooling and food costs

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE LARGEST CLIMATE AND RESILIENCE ISSUES FACING PLYMOUTH TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE?

- Today: Worsening storms and impacts to coastal areas, beach erosion, water quality and aquifer protection, overdevelopment,
- Future Concerns: Rising sea levels, water shortages, impacts to water quality and supply, more severe weather events, changing shorelines, and climate change impacts on natural resources.

WHAT CLIMATE ADAPTION STRATEGIES SHOULD BE PRIORITIZED?

- Coastal protection and erosion control
- Protecting the aquifer and preserving forests and wetland resources
- Limiting development in flood-prone areas
- Incorporating stormwater management
- Incorporating energy efficient and less carbon-intensive development
- Forestry and fire management planning
- Preserving and expanding tree canopy
- Planning for sea level rise and updating impacted infrastructure
- Increasing community awareness and knowledge about climate change, sustainable practices, and involving residents in resilience planning.
- Integrating greater climate-knowledge in local government to inform science-based policy and action

HOW CAN/SHOULD THE MASTER PLAN SUPPORT CLIMATE RESILIENCE/ADAPTATION STRATEGIES?

- Prioritize conservation
- Prioritize sustainable development that incorporates climate adaptation strategies
- Support investments in renewable energy
- Expand multi-modal and more sustainable transportation options
- Identify funding to support implementation of climate adaptation actions
- Include enforceable regulations that hold residents, developers, and municipal decisions makers accountable
- Incorporate land use and zoning changes that can facilitate greater community resilience through the management and development of land and that also require nature-based solutions

SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

- 109 people completed the survey. Most had not attended the workshop in-person (92%).
- Most respondents live in Plymouth year-round (97%), and 9 also own a local business (8%).
- 23% of respondents were between 20 and 49 years old.
- 19% of respondents have lived in Plymouth 1-5 years, and another 17% for 6-10 years. 49% have lived in Plymouth for more than 20 years.