

SUNSET BEACH 2040: CHARTING THE COURSE

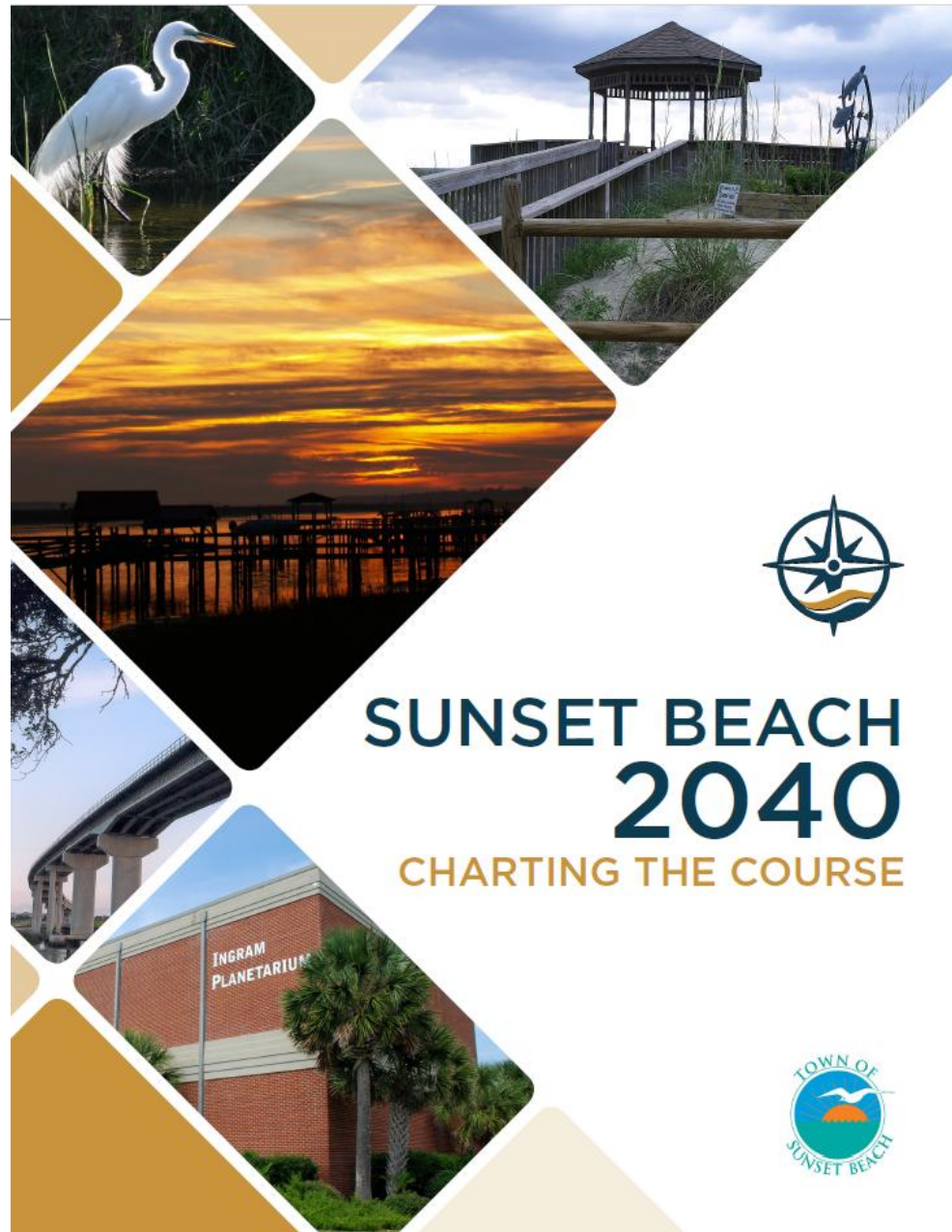
January 15, 2026

WES MACLEOD, AICP, ASLA
PRINCIPAL
ANCHORPOINT PLANNING



Outline

- Timeline
- Community Demographics
- Survey Update
- Distribute Chapter 1 & 2
- Questions?



SUNSET BEACH 2040 CHARTING THE COURSE



Why do a Comprehensive Plan?

- Provides an opportunity for community self-evaluation, particularly of its development regulatory programs and ordinances
- Allows for input from various departments, staff, and elected/appointed boards in short and long term needs. Helps guide future budgeting processes.
- § 160D-501. Plans.
- (a) Requirements for Zoning. - As a condition of adopting and applying zoning regulations under this Chapter, a local government ***shall adopt*** and ***reasonably maintain*** a comprehensive plan or land-use plan.

Town of Sunset Beach 2025 Comprehensive Land Use Plan Anticipated Timeline

Meeting Date	Agenda	Deliverables
November 24	Review Planning Process and Survey	Survey
January 15	Review Demographic Information and seek Planning Board input.	Chapter 1 &2
February 19	Review Chapter 1 Introduction & Chapter 2 Community Profile	Chapter 3
February/March	Public Engagement Session	N/A
March 19	Review Chapter 3 - Natural Systems	Chapter 4
May 21 (no April meeting)	Review Chapter 4 Community Facilities	Chapter 5 & 6
June 18	Review Chapter 5 - Land Use and Growth Management & Chapter 6 Tools for Managing Development	Revised Chapters
July 16	Review Final Draft & consider Recommendation for Approval	Final Draft with Revisions
July/August	Public Engagement Session -- Open House/Draft Plan	N/A
August 20	Planning Board Approval (if necessary)	None
August - September 2026	DCM Review	None
September to October 2026	Town Council Review/Approval	None
October to November 2026	CRC Certification/Approval	None

Community Profile

- Population
- Population Growth and Projections
- Age
- Housing Units and Growth
- Economy
- Tourism



Chapter 2: Community Profile

INTRODUCTION

This section of the comprehensive plan examines the community characteristics and related demographic and economic trends that should be considered when developing policies and long-term goals.

In the following discussion, Sunset Beach is compared with North Carolina, Brunswick County, and other coastal communities to better interpret the information. These trends include the population, housing, and economic characteristics of Sunset Beach. This information will help inform town officials and allow them to make growth management decisions based on knowledge of the town's past, present, and future. Permanent and seasonal population estimates can be used to help estimate development pressures that may impact coastal resources. Pressures from growth in population and development can also impact community infrastructure such as roads, drinking water, stormwater, etc. This information may be used as a resource by town staff and officials to make informed growth management decisions.

Note: Data and statistics in the following section come from several sources. Figures from beyond 2024 are projections. Statistics are sourced from the US Census Bureau/ American Community Survey and the North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (NCOSBM). The NCOSBM provides annual population figures for each municipality in the state. This number can often differ from those identified from the American Community Survey. Other statistics, facts, and figures related to age, housing, income, and employment will be sourced from the US Census Bureau American Community Survey. Additional information will be sourced from the Town of Sunset Beach and Anchorpoint Planning where necessary.



Table 2.1: Population Trends 1990 - 2024

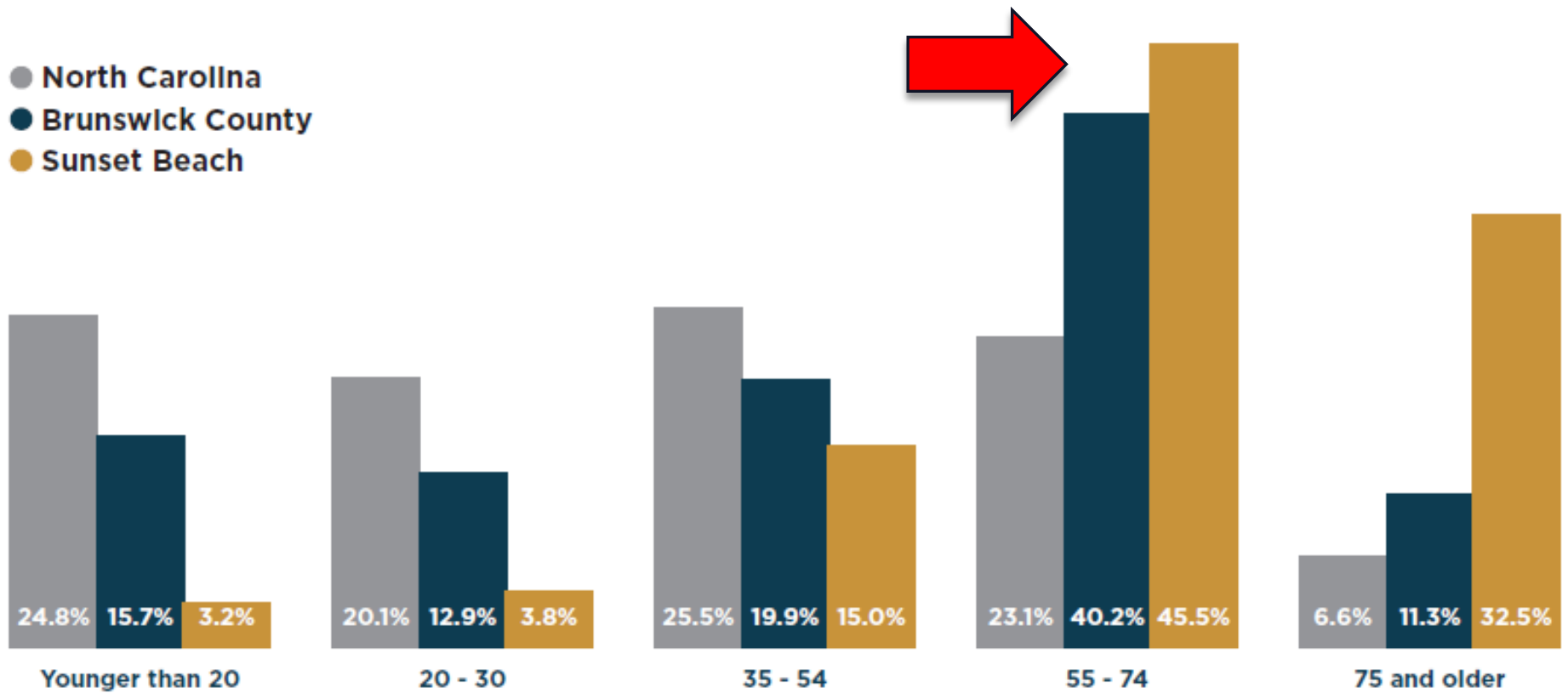
Source: 2023 American Community Survey; NC OSBM

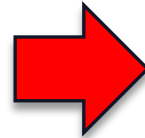
Year	Sunset Beach			Brunswick County		
	Total Pop.	Absolute Increase/Decrease	Percent Change	Total Pop.	Absolute Increase/Decrease	Percent Change
1990	311	-	-	50,985	-	-
2000	1,852	1,541	495.5%	73,143	22,158	43.5%
2010	3,572	1,720	92.9%	107,431	34,288	46.9%
2020	4,177	605	16.9%	136,608	29,177	27.2%
2024	4,768	591	14.1%	169,448	32,840	24.0%
1990-2024		4,457	1,433.1%		118,463	232.3%



Figure 2.2: Permanent Population by Age Group - Sunset Beach

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2023 American Community Survey





Peak Population and Day-Trip Visitors

Considering the peak over-night population estimates plus the day-trip visitor estimate, the Town of Sunset Beach is estimated to have **20,490** people in its jurisdiction on a peak day.

Table 2.3: Peak Seasonal Overnight Population Estimate (2024)

Source: 2023 American Community Survey and Anchorpoint Planning

Housing Units	Persons per Unit	Total
Permanently Occupied Housing (2,377)	2 + 1 guest per Unit	7,165**
Seasonal/Vacant Housing (2,118)	6	12,073
Total		18,990

* Assumptions include one guest per permanently occupied unit on average and a 95% occupancy rate for seasonal/vacant housing.

** Permanent population and seasonal increase are based on the NCOSBM 2024 permanent population estimate of 4,788, plus one additional visiting person per permanently occupied housing unit..

Table 2.6: Housing Tenure

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2000 Decennial Census and 2023 American Community Survey

Housing Units	Sunset Beach			Brunswick County		
	2000	2023	Percent Change	2000	2023	Percent Change
Total Housing Units	3,072	5,220	70%	51,431	93,977	83%
Occupied	968	2,377	146%	30,438	64,436	112%
Seasonal/Vacant	2,104	2,843	35%	20,993	29,541	41%

Figure 2.4: New Residential Construction Permits (2018-2025)

Source: Town of Sunset Beach

- Single-Family
- Duplex
- Townhome

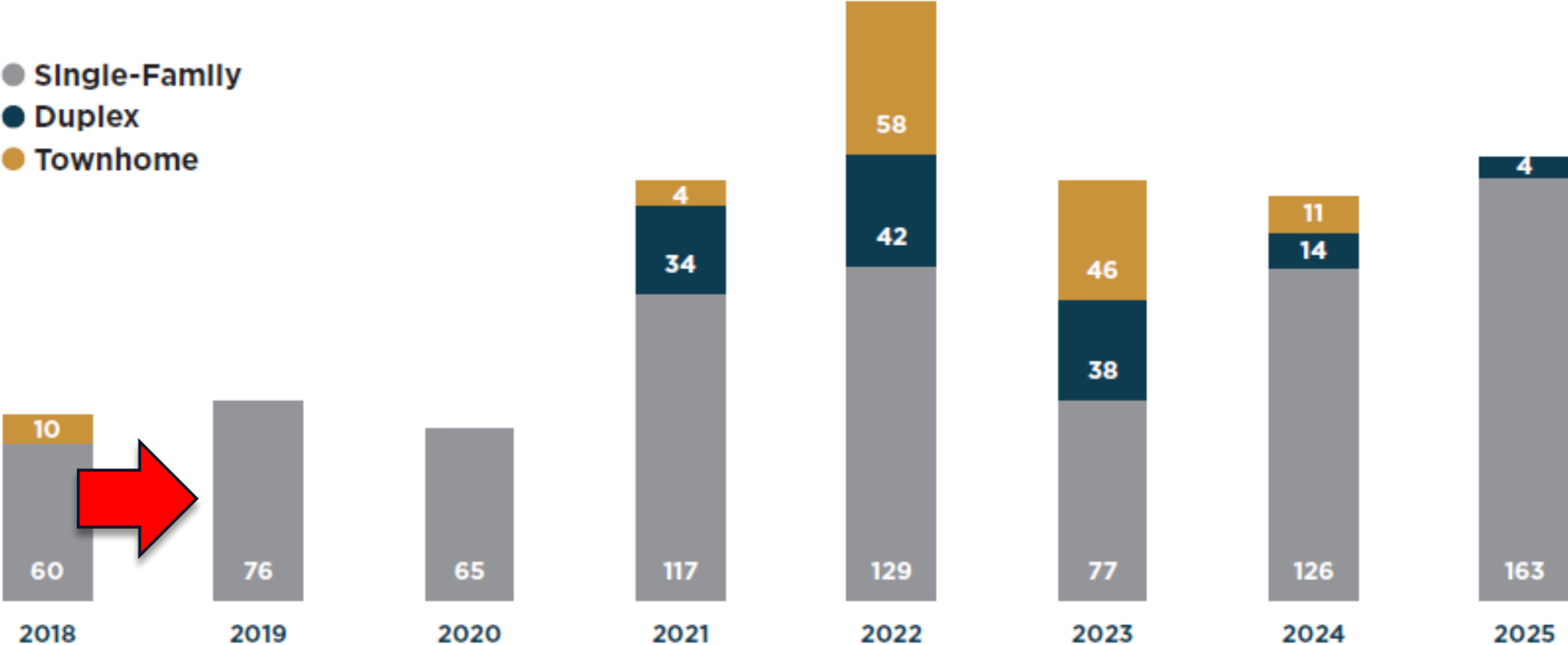


Figure 2.7: Labor Force Participation Rate

Source: 2023 American Community Survey

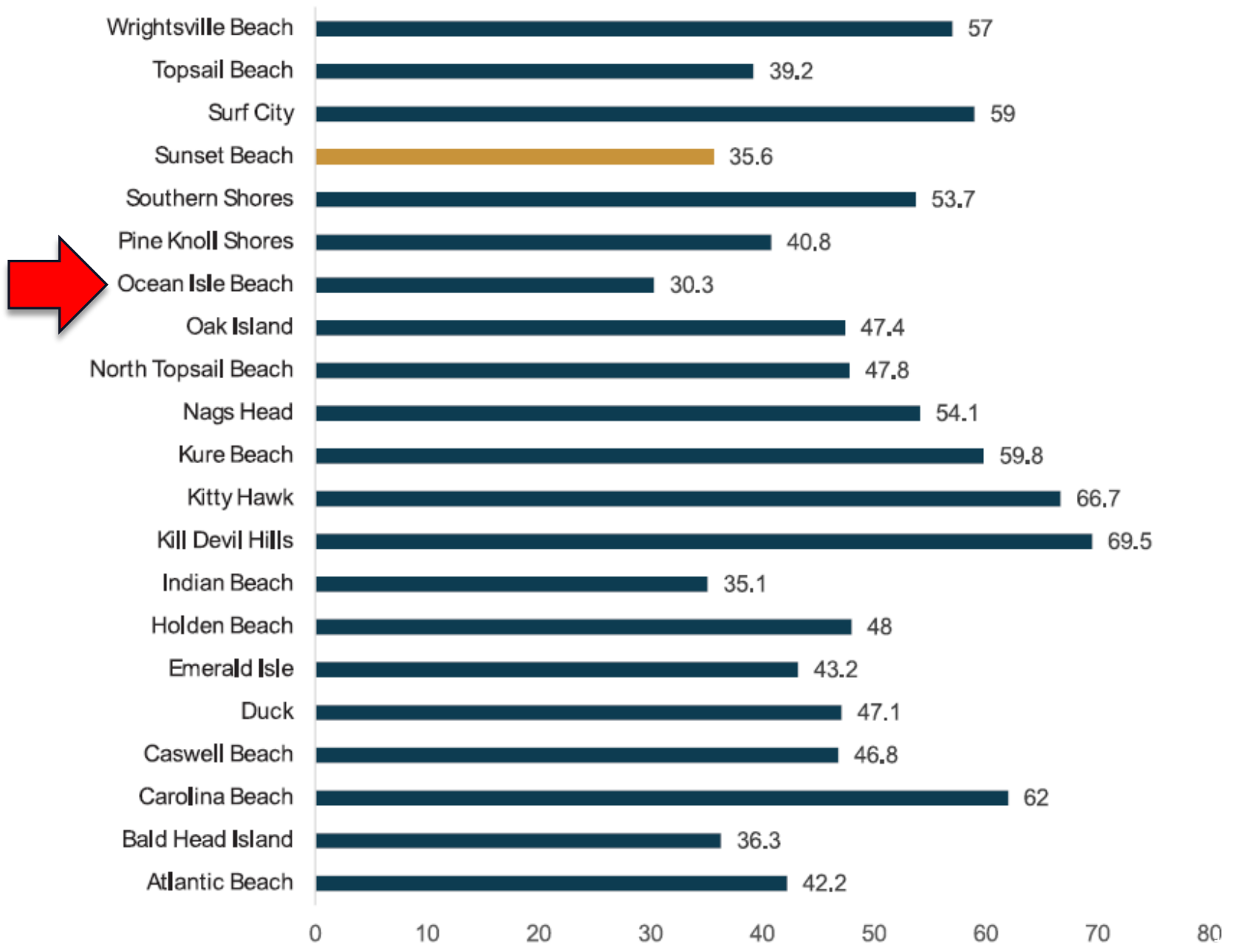


Figure 2.9: Visitor Spending 2024 (Millions)

Source: NC Association of County Commissioners

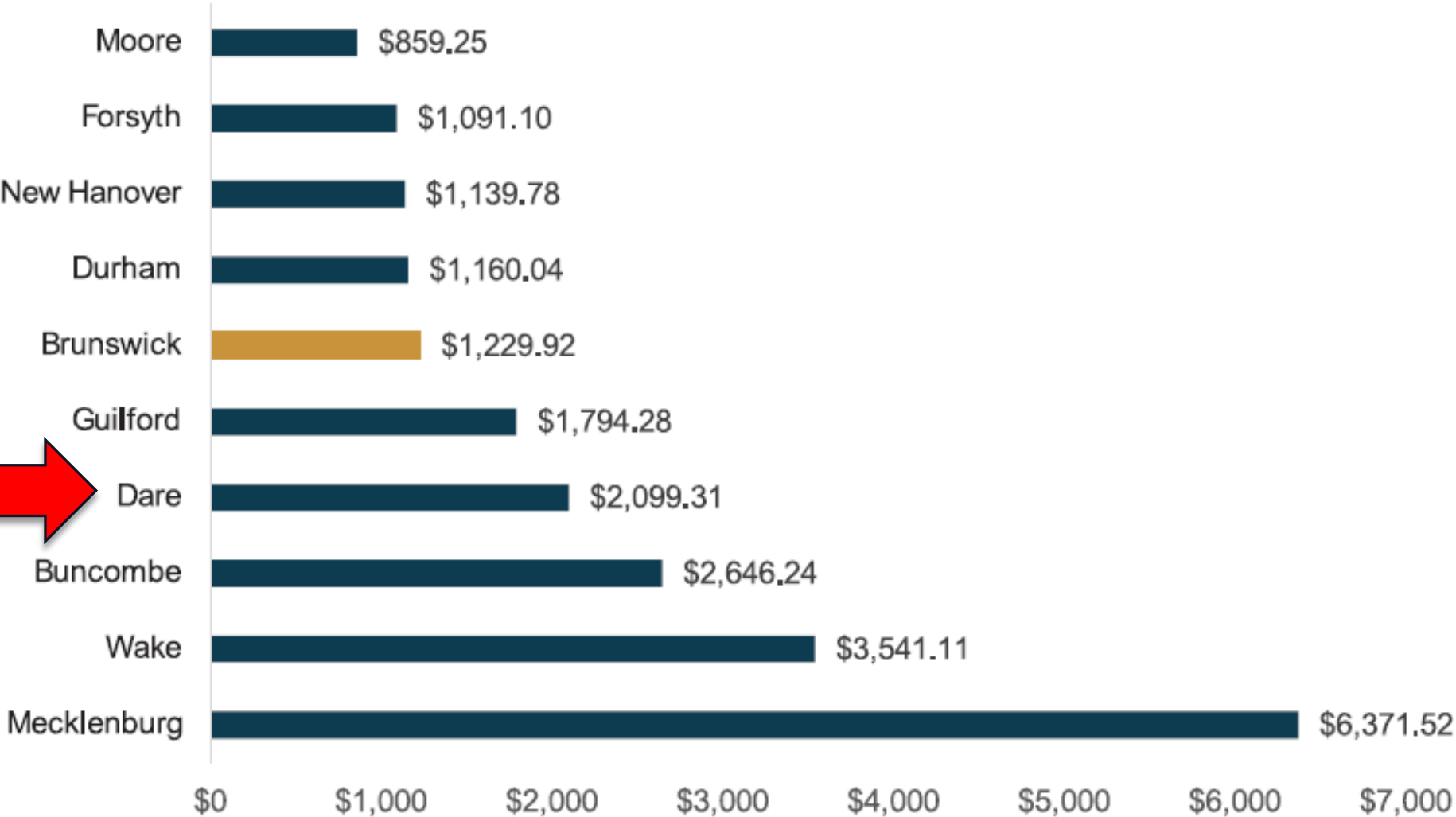
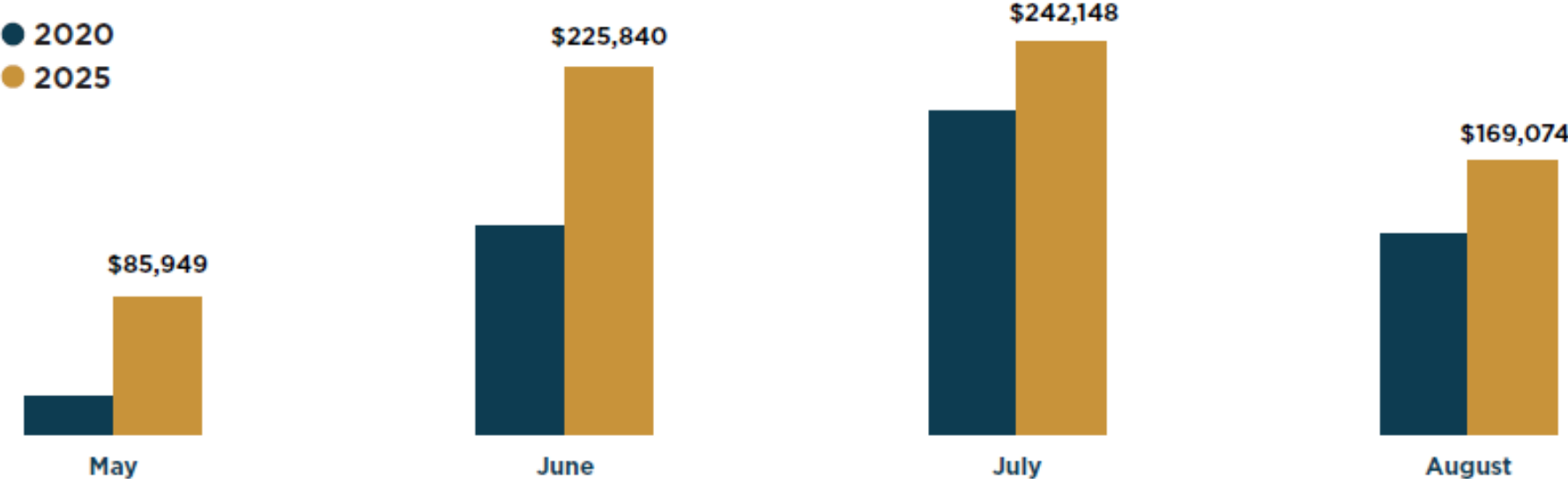


Figure 2.10: Accommodations Tax Revenue: May to August (2020 and 2025)

Source: Town of Sunset Beach

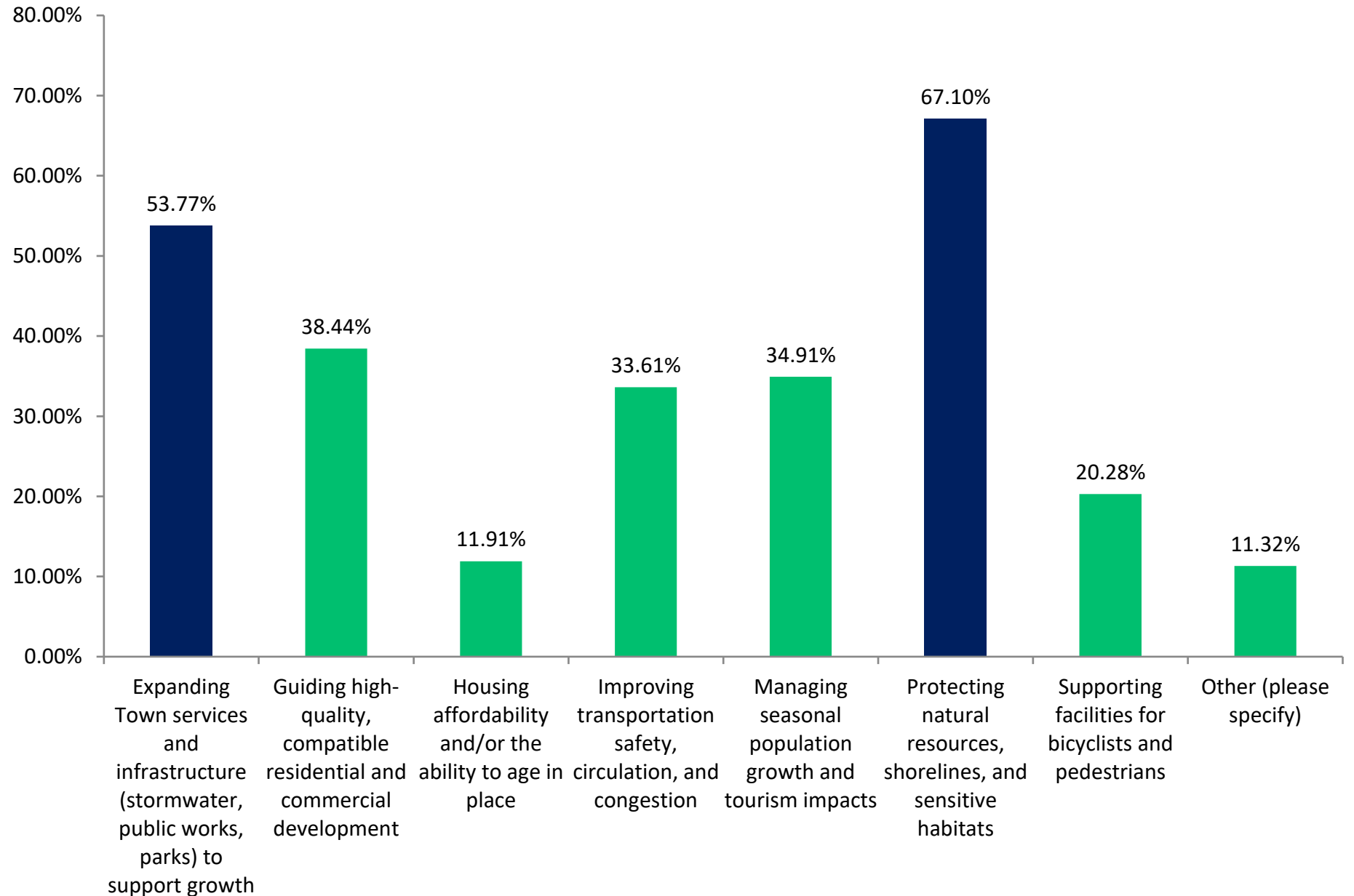


Community Survey Update

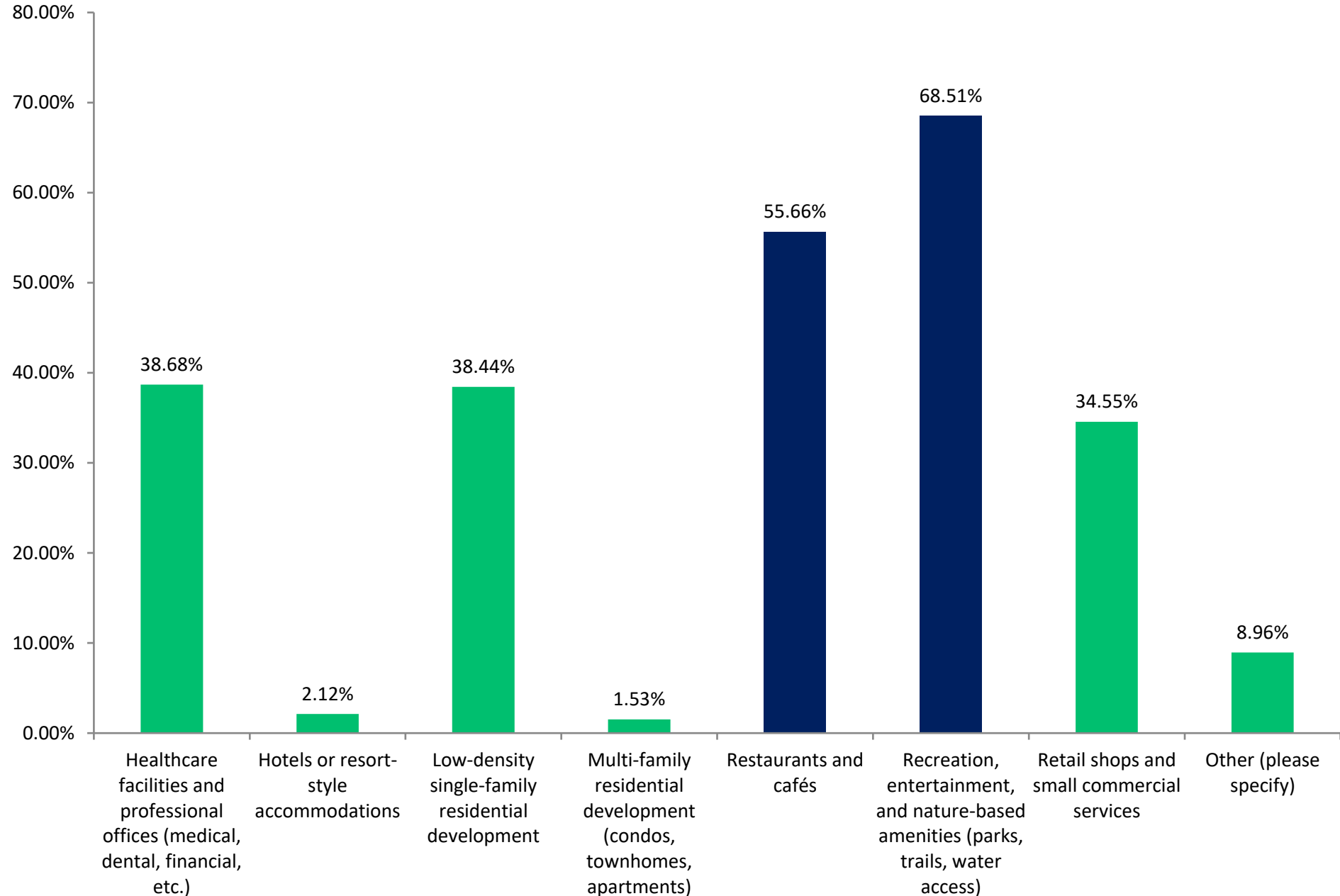
- ❑ 848 total responses to date as of 1/14
- ❑ Approximately 95% of respondents full-time residents or property owners



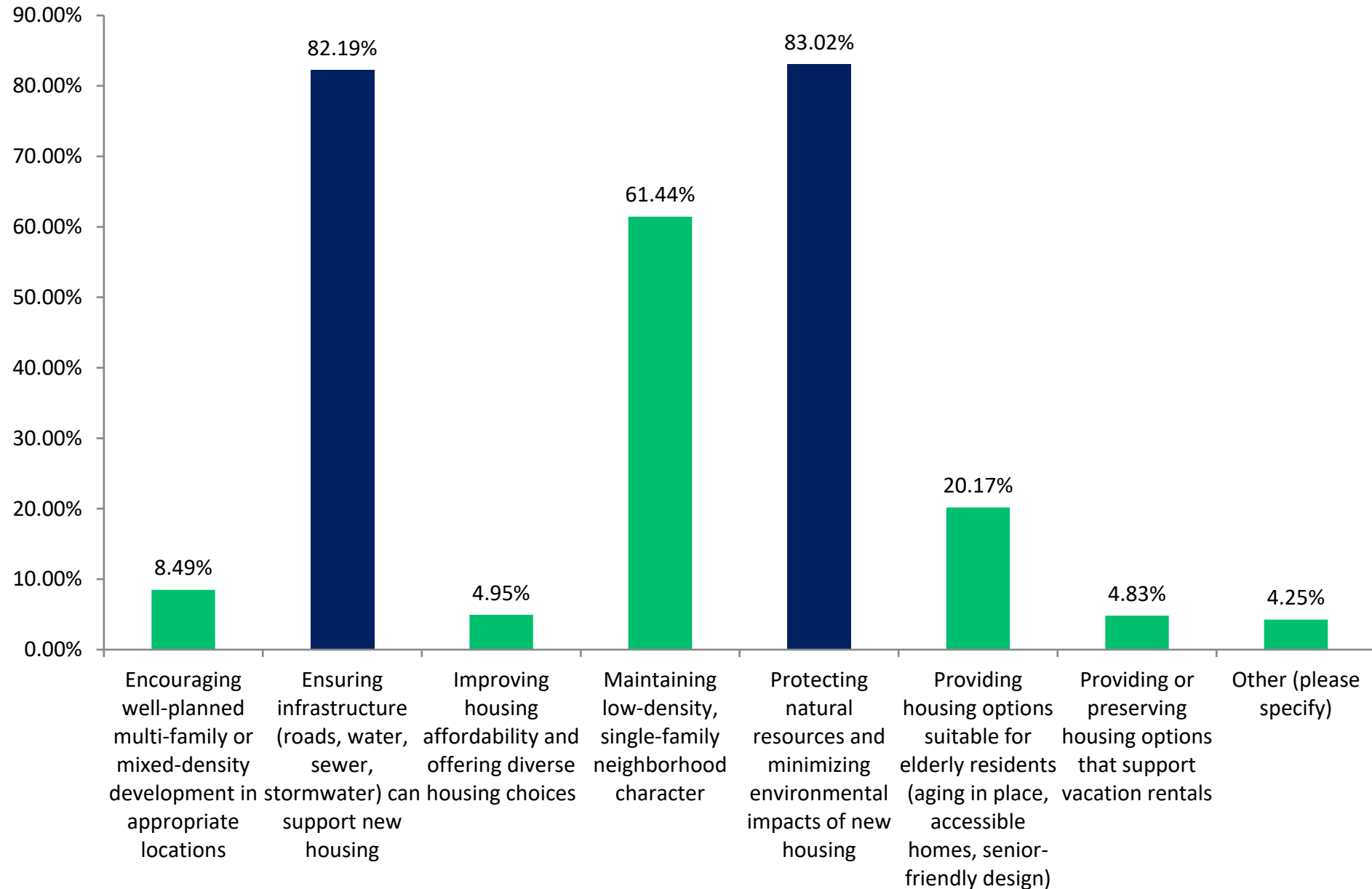
What do you think are the most important growth and development issues facing Sunset Beach?



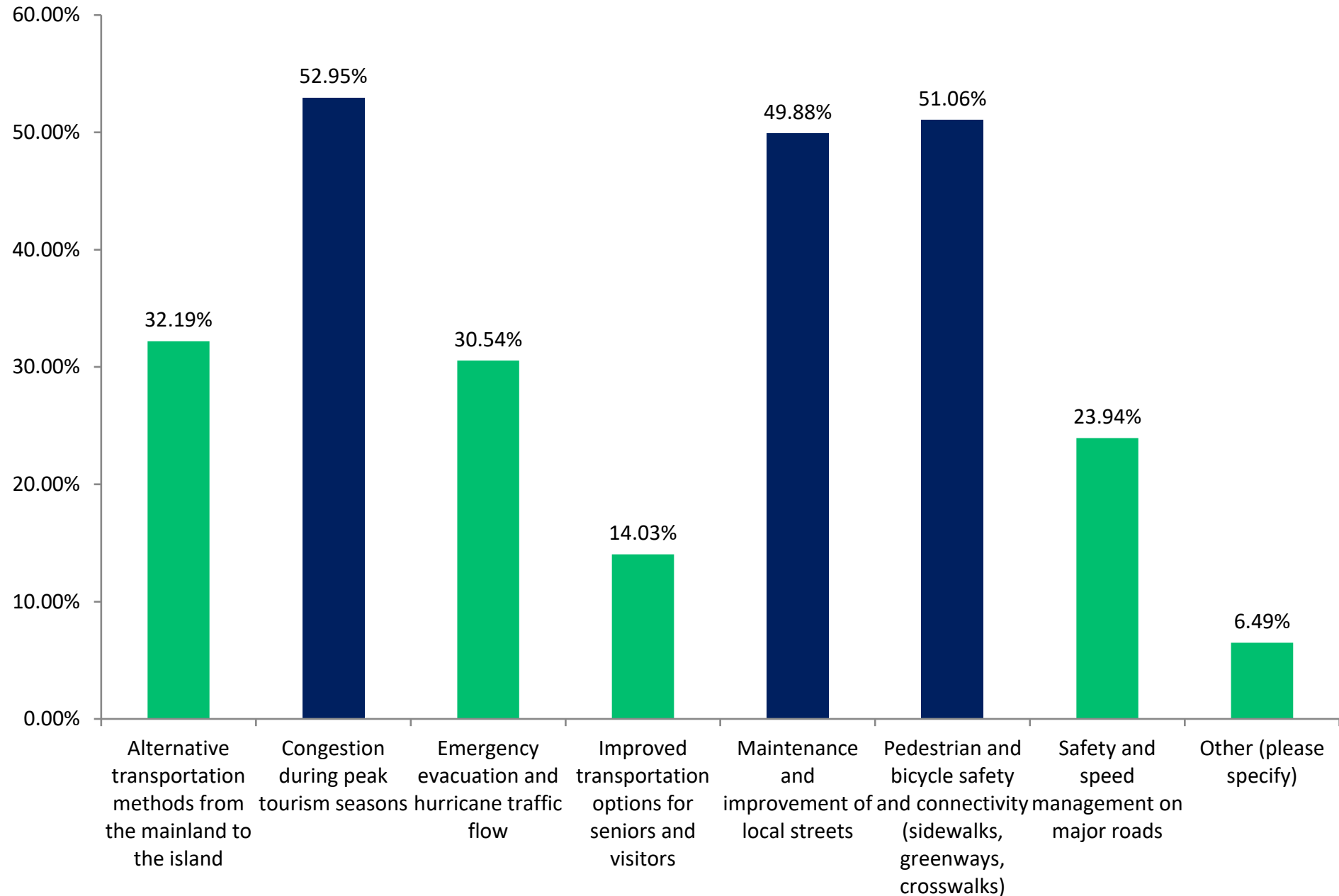
If privately-owned undeveloped land is to be built on, what kind of new development would you most like to see in Sunset Beach?



Which of the following housing characteristics are most important for the Town of Sunset Beach?



Which of the following transportation concerns and needs are most important for the Town of Sunset Beach?



Summary of Open Ended Responses

- ❑ **Slow Growth and Stop Overdevelopment**
- ❑ **Protect Natural Resources, Trees, and Water Quality**
- ❑ **Preserve Sunset Beach's Small-Town Coastal Character**
- ❑ **Fix Infrastructure and Traffic Before Allowing More Growth**

“Throttle the rampant growth in homes being built in the area. Growth must be slowed or infrastructure will never keep up. Growth at all cost is bad for everyone.”

“Every piece of land does not need to be built on.”

“We love that it is calm and quiet, family oriented, and underdeveloped... If over development is allowed, all of this will be destroyed.”

Key Community Themes

- Strong preference for protecting natural resources and sensitive habitats
- Broad concern that growth is outpacing infrastructure capacity
- Clear support for low-density residential development patterns
- Minimal support for high-density, resort, or hotel-style development
- Desire to preserve Sunset Beach's small-town identity
- Strong emphasis on water quality, tree protection, wetlands, dunes, and wildlife habitat
- Traffic congestion, evacuation safety, and pedestrian/bicycle safety are major concerns

Next Meeting: February 19, 2026

- Review Chapters 1 & 2
- Submit Chapter 3: Natural Systems Analysis

Thank you!



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Principal

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