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# Town of Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update

## Compendium of 2020-2021 Public Outreach to Identify Issues and Opportunities

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February 2022



**Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update:  
Community Outreach Summary Report – February 16, 2022**

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**INTRODUCTION**

As part of the Riverhead Comprehensive Plan Update a multi-phased outreach program was performed over two years that included in-person and online meetings, a public survey, and other opportunities for public participation in the planning process. The objective of the outreach process was to gather community, stakeholder, and agency input into the goals, issues, and opportunities related to long-range comprehensive planning in the Town of Riverhead. Provided below is a summary of this extensive outreach process, which was completed in January 2022. As summarized below, the principal components of the outreach program included:

- A) Interviews with Town and County officials and other stakeholders;
- B) Four hamlet and five technical subject public meetings;
- C) a Public Survey;
- D) a Social Pinpoint Interactive Map; and
- E) Written/mailed comments and Comment Forms submitted to the Town’s project website.

Provided below is a summary of each of these outreach tasks and Attachments A through E provide the supporting documentation. All of the work performed as part of this outreach was also available through a link on the project website at:

[TownofRiverheadComprehensivePlanUpdate.com](http://TownofRiverheadComprehensivePlanUpdate.com)

**A. INTERVIEWS WITH PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND STAKEHOLDERS**

Beginning in 2020, as one of the first steps in the comprehensive plan update process, the consultant team interviewed 12 Town of Riverhead Departments and 10 other stakeholders (e.g., Suffolk County Planning Department, Suffolk County Water Authority) to identify and frame the technical issues and opportunities facing the Town over the next 10-20 years. Topics for each meeting were prepared with the input of the Town and the interviews were then held to gather information critical to the Comprehensive Plan Update. These interviews, which are summarized in Attachment A, included topics such as zoning, farmland preservation, agriculture, economic development, parks and recreation, water resources, housing and community services, and transportation and infrastructure.

**B. COMMUNITY OUTREACH MEETINGS**

*PLANNING AREA/HAMLET OUTREACH MEETINGS*

To provide the opportunity for community participation in the plan’s development, four in-person and online meetings were held in September 2021 to discuss the key issues within each of the planning areas/hamlets and also town-wide. These meetings were held at the Town of Riverhead Senior Center and public participation was also provided by the Town via Zoom. The meetings were as follows:

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1. September 13, 2021-Aquebogue, Northville, Laurel, Jamesport, and South Jamesport
2. September 27, 2021-Wading River and Manorville
3. September 28, 2021-Calverton and Baiting Hollow
4. September 29, 2021-Riverhead and Downtown

The comments and input covered a range of issues and opportunities, but there were some shared comments/issues that were focused on hamlet boundaries, drinking water quality, retaining rural character, zoning updates (e.g., to include agritainment uses, tighten special permit and solar requirements, small lot ordinance, and protection of scenic corridors), a need for a variety of housing options (e.g., assisted living, veteran housing, and short-term rentals), overcrowding in schools, needs for Downtown (e.g., historic and safety concerns), flooding, and climate change. A summary description of the key issues raised at these meetings is provided in Attachment B.1.

### *TOPIC OUTREACH MEETINGS*

Five additional public meetings were held to provide the opportunity for input to the plan organized around five topics areas that were identified as key to long-term planning, which were led by subcommittees with the opportunity for general public comment as well. These five topic-oriented meetings were held in late Fall 2021 via Microsoft Teams and also in-person at Town Hall or the Senior Center. The topics for discussion were as follows:

1. November 29, 2021-Transportation
2. November 30, 2021-Environmental Protection and Sustainability
3. December 1, 2021-Downtown/Route 58/Economic Redevelopment
4. December 6, 2021-Housing and Community Services
5. December 13, 2021-Agriculture and Farmland Preservation

For each topic area key participants and technical experts were invited (e.g., Long Island Farm Bureau, Riverhead Water District, Suffolk County Department of Public Works, to name a few) to provide technical input on these topics. Some of the issues and opportunities identified were solar farms, climate change, wetlands, Downtown revitalization, Route 58 retail reuse, recreational cannabis sales, affordable home ownership needs, transfer of development rights, and zoning updates. A summary of the key issues raised, a list of the participating agencies, and talking points at each of the topic meetings is provided in Attachment B.2.

## **C. PUBLIC SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE**

Another key element in the outreach plan was the public survey questionnaire (see Attachment C). This survey was available online to the community through a link on the Town's Comprehensive Plan Update website ([TownofRiverheadComprehensivePlanUpdate.com](http://TownofRiverheadComprehensivePlanUpdate.com)) between August 6, 2021 and January 24, 2022 and paper copies were also available at Town Hall and distributed at the public outreach meetings. In total about 470 surveys were submitted and the results tabulated. This anonymous survey was an important element in data gathering for the Comprehensive Plan Update process where the Town sought opinions on the issues and opportunities that residents and other stakeholders felt important to planning the Town's future. All residents, business owners, and stakeholders were encouraged to participate in the survey and other public participation methods via a press release, the project website, email blasts, announcements at the community and topic-oriented meetings held in Fall 2021, and via the Central Advisory Committee (CAC).

Key characteristics of the survey respondents included:

- The majority were from Riverhead Hamlet, followed by Wading River, and Calverton.
- Respondents were primarily year-round homeowners (83 percent) and seasonal homeowners comprised 6 percent. No seasonal renters responded. Business owners made up about 9 percent of the respondents.
- Most respondents were ages 51-65 (39 percent), followed by ages 66-75 (26 percent). Only one respondent was under the age of 21.
- The vast majority of respondents lived in the Town of Riverhead for more than 10 years and approximately 8 percent did not live in the Town.

Key community planning issues that were identified by the survey included:

- The five most important issues identified for the Comprehensive Plan Update, in priority order, were:
  - 1) Farmland and open space preservation (70 percent);
  - 2) Reuse of vacant retail space on Route 58 (56 percent);
  - 3) Reduced traffic congestion (54 percent);
  - 4) Downtown revitalization (50 percent); and
  - 5) Natural resources and environmental protection (50 percent).
- The majority of the respondents (70 percent) also said that farmland/open space preservation was very important, followed by natural and water resources protection (68 percent), emergency services and police protection (57 percent), traffic congestion reduction (55 percent), and housing code enforcement (54 percent).
- Issues that were not identified as priorities included:
  - 1) Providing diverse housing types (12 percent);
  - 2) Riverfront flooding (13 percent); and
  - 3) Promoting use of renewable energy (19 percent). Most of the respondents said that renewable energy/solar farms was the least important priority/need.
- Most of the respondents frequent the Downtown business and along Route 58 about once a week (34 percent and 37 percent, respectively) although most did not shop Downtown, but along Route 58.
- Respondents thought that other uses that could complement active uses and reduce vacancies on Route 58 include:
  - 1) Entertainment (53 percent);
  - 2) Fee-based indoor/outdoor recreational facilities (42 percent);
  - 3) Professional offices (36 percent);
  - 4) Medical/health care (31 percent); and 5) Personal care services (e.g., salon, dry cleaning, fitness center) (27 percent). Entertainment and fee-based recreational facilities were suggested for reuse of big box stores on Route 58. Hotels and Micro apartments were the least favored options (8 percent and 11 percent, respectively).

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- With respect to travel patterns, the majority of respondents work more than 10 miles from home (35 percent), while 24 percent work 0 to 5 miles from home. Approximately 29 percent work from home.
- The vast majority of the respondents commute by car alone (68 percent). None of the respondents use a bike, bus, or taxi to get to and from work. Approximately 3 percent use the LIRR for commuting.
- Most of the respondents do not have school age children (68 percent). Of those that do or that go to school, the majority ride a school bus (13 percent) to get to school. Approximately 6 percent drive alone.
- Approximately 69 percent of the respondents drive alone to get to and from shopping areas on most days. Approximately 28 percent drive with a family member or friend.
- A majority of the respondents felt that improved seasonal/tourism traffic flow and traffic flow along on Route 25 and Route 58 in general were the most critical transportation goals. The greatest number of respondents said that improved bus service and bike/pedestrian improvements were not important.
- The five greatest needs that were identified with respect to community services and facilities were:
  - 1) Safety and security, crime prevention, and police protection;
  - 2) Traffic management and safety;
  - 3) Playgrounds, parks, and recreational programs;
  - 4) Emergency and fire services; and
  - 5) Increased access to job training and vocational resources.
- Additional housing types that respondents would like to see in the Town in priority order included:
  - 1) Assisted living;
  - 2) Increased opportunity for ownership; and
  - 3) Rental opportunities. Nearly half of the respondents felt that multifamily apartments are not needed.
- Uses and activities that were identified as supportive of the local agricultural economy, farmland preservation, and agribusiness included:
  - 1) Expanding farm to table and healthy food programs;
  - 2) Specialty crop businesses; and
  - 3) Improved product distribution. Approximately 27 percent of the respondents felt that expanding agri-tourism and agricultural events and programs is not needed.
- Top priorities for addressing the impacts of flooding and sea level rise/resiliency were coastal open space preservation. Coastal adaptations such as elevating structures in flood zones and other options were the least favored approaches.

- Key objectives for the Peconic River watershed are land preservation, followed by reducing pollutant loads and improving the quality of stormwater discharges. Nitrogen reduction and wetland restoration were also identified as very important.
- Most respondents strongly agreed that the Town should reexamine and expand long-term planning initiatives related to extreme storm events (e.g., Nor'Easters, Super Storm Sandy) or other severe emergency conditions (e.g., electrical emergencies such as blackouts or brownouts).
- Priorities for renewable energy policies include allowing solar power facilities, if they provide direct benefits for Riverhead (e.g., lower electric rates, community benefits, etc.), and solar panels within industrial and commercial properties (but only on buildings and in parking areas).
- Most respondents were undecided as to whether the Town should reexamine and expand long-term planning initiatives related to health care, which may reflect a need for public education regarding how land use patterns affect health care.

#### **D. SOCIAL PINPOINT INTERACTIVE MAP**

Another key element in the public outreach and survey process to gather input for the Comprehensive Plan Update was the Social Pinpoint interactive map. Social Pinpoint is an online community engagement tool where projects are setup for geographic-based participation with unlimited opportunities for both qualitative comments (e.g., like, dislike, opportunity area) and where participants were also able to zoom in to place specific comments, recommendations, or questions that were geopositioned on a map of the Town. This map was open for public comment from August 6, 2021 through January 23, 2022. In total approximately 110 comments were made on the map and identifying assets, issues, and opportunities. Provided below is a summary of the key results by hamlet (see also Attachment D):

- Wading River – improvements are needed related to parks and parking areas (e.g., Bayberry Park, Duck Ponds); there are opportunities for land acquisition to preserve farmland; flooding/stormwater issues on Creek Road and other roadways; opportunities for signage in the historic district; concerns over short-term rentals, surface water quality; need for small lot ordinance
- Manorville – no comments
- Calverton – land maintenance and traffic safety issues at certain locations
- Baiting Hollow – concerns over beach parking/access; need for improved internet and cell phone service; need for traffic/roadway improvements/speeding enforcement; some parcels north of Sound Avenue were identified for land preservation
- Riverhead Hamlet – beach assets; traffic safety/speeding concerns
- Downtown – illegal dumping and traffic safety issues; identification of building vacancies; opportunities for mixed-use, home ownership, and zoning updates
- Northville – traffic/maintenance issues at certain business locations; identification of certain types of housing (i.e., townhomes) as not favorable; need to strengthen scenic corridor regulations; visual/lighting concerns
- Aquebogue – identification of small business assets; need to preserve rural corridor zoning east of Route 105; identification of historic resources

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- Jamesport – opportunity to create bike and pedestrian paths from Long Island Sound to bay; issue with traffic from tourism; hamlet boundary concerns
- South Jamesport – need for improvements related to parks and roadways and post office
- Laurel – there is an opportunity to include farmland here in the Town’s Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program

### **E. COMMENT FORMS AND WRITTEN/EMAILED COMMENTS**

In addition to the above, the opportunity was provided for the public to submit comments forms and written comments at both the outreach meetings and to the project website (see Attachment E). A number of comments were received through these venues and the general focus of the comments was farmland preservation, scenic corridors, hamlet boundaries, and the need for transportation improvements. More specifically, commenters expressed a need to limit commercial development east of Route 105; to prioritize the reuse of vacant buildings before building new retail buildings; to revisit the Jamesport hamlet boundary; to vet plans for roadway modifications with Suffolk County Department of Public Works; opportunity to make Route 58 more pedestrian-friendly; need for more varied middle-income housing options downtown; need for TDR improvements (e.g., additional sending areas north of Sound Avenue); and need to address signage requirements for retail farm sales.

### **F. NEXT STEPS**

Below is the schedule of next steps.

1. Meet with Central Advisory Committee (CAC) – March 2022
2. Community Topic Meetings – March/April 2022
3. Meet with Town’s Advisory Committee’s to review preliminary goals, policies and recommendations - April 2022
4. Presentation of goals to the public - May/June 2022
5. Present Draft CPU to the Town Board - August/September 2022
6. Prepare GEIS – Fall 2022

### **List of Attachments**

Attachment A: Interviews with Public Officials and Stakeholders

Attachment B.1: Hamlet Meeting Comments

Attachment B.2: Topic Meeting Comments

Attachment C: Public Survey Results

Attachment D: Social Pinpoint Comments

Attachment E: Comment Forms and Written/Email Correspondence