

Results of the 2018 Community Survey for Bristol, New Hampshire

by Tyler Simonds

In 2018, the Bristol Planning Board developed a community survey. It was undertaken so Town officials and volunteers can better understand how people experience life here. The survey would provide folks with an opportunity to voice their preferences for change as well as share what they currently appreciate most about Bristol. In other words, what issues are frustrating our residents and what should we try to preserve? Do people want something new that isn't currently here?

Some questions were identical to those asked in 2013. A number were dropped this time around. (Like the ones related to expansion of Town buildings.) Our question about building code was worded differently in 2018, providing more clarity. We added some items related to Kelley Park and asked about home Internet connectivity.

The 2018 Community Survey “went live” mid-October. Clay Dingman was especially helpful in working with Town staff to make this happen. Property owners were thoroughly notified by way of the Postal Service through our Office. We also posted the survey at townofbristolnh.org. People could ask for a paper version of the questionnaire or respond through SurveyMonkey online. The survey stayed open for approximately five weeks—until November 19.

Results should be available on our website. Information can also be provided if someone reaches out to the Office. What follows is a coarse survey analysis.

Table of Contents

Respondent Data	2
Participation by Question.....	2
Demographics	2
The Questions We Ask Regularly.....	3
Highlighting What is Here	4
Addressing What is Wanted.....	4
Keeping What is Treasured.....	4
Community Facilities and Services	5
Residential Needs.....	5
Building Code	6
Historic and Natural Resources	6

Historic Bristol.....	6
The Natural World	7
Recreation and Active Transportation, Part 1	8
Business	8
Energy and Recycling	8
Parking for Automobiles.....	9
Recreation and Active Transportation, Part 2.....	10
Miscellaneous Items.....	10
Kelley Park.....	10
Internet	10
Sharing Knowledge.....	11
Conclusion	11

Respondent Data

Overall, 343 people filled out some portion of the survey. This is down from 2013—when 398 participated.

It may be worth looking at the past twenty years to see if there is an overall trend. (Surveys were also completed in 1999 and 2007.) Might we adjust how the survey is promoted? If public involvement with governance has gone down, what might be driving this?

A positive note this year is that more people offered open feedback (to Questions 1-3) than they have in the past.

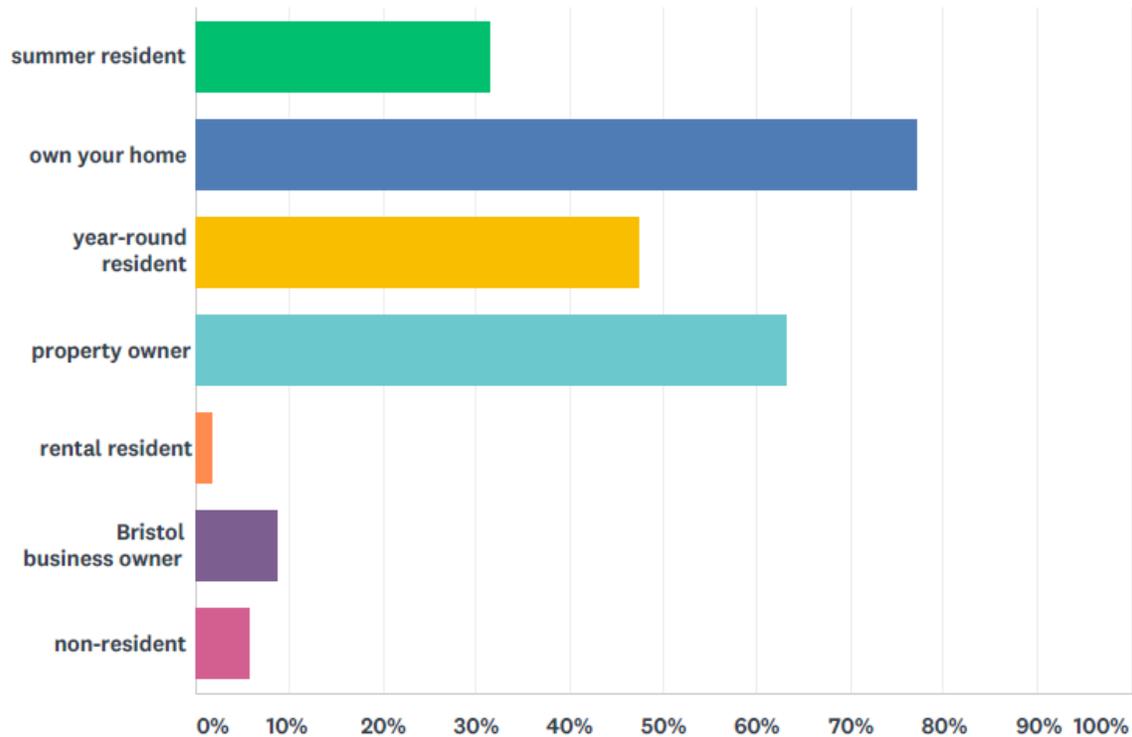
Participation by Question

Most questions involved at least 90 percent of total respondents. Interestingly, while Question 3 (*What is the one thing most important to you not to change about Bristol?*) still garnered many answers, it stands out with only 81% participation.

Demographics

Roughly 90% of respondents offered demographic feedback. By far, most were older folks. 73% of those who provided their age bracket had more than 55 years under their belts. A clear majority claimed a four-year college degree or more formal education. Compared to the other demographic questions, less people shared about their duration of living or owning property in town. Many respondents have been here more than 20 years. Roughly a quarter have been here 11-20 years, and another quarter have been here 1-10 years.

The following chart shows how people reside in Bristol and if they own property:



Interestingly, just 2% of respondents identify as rental residents.

The Questions We Ask Regularly

Three questions have persisted over the course of recent history in Bristol. One deals with what people value most about living here or owning property. The second asks what we should change. Finally, our third enquiry seeks feedback on what people want us to preserve. Many respondents chose to answer all the open-ended questions.

Given the high response rate and lack of Town resources devoted to Master Plan work, the Land Use department has not been able to perform an exhaustive analysis. It is difficult to go through hundreds of free-form answers without more time or special software. We hope to keep in mind the unique ideas that people chose to share.

Those interested should reach out for the full survey results. More may be gleaned by taking another look.

Highlighting What is Here

What is the best thing about living and/or owning property in Bristol?

Newfound Lake continues to matter very much. (Half of respondents mention it.) Rural qualities like “small town feel”, natural beauty, quietness, and limited development are also important.

Roughly 48 responses touch on community. This includes “friendly,” “supportive” people.

Respondents mention locale quite a bit (e.g. access to various natural features for enjoyment and getting around).

Addressing What is Wanted

What do you think is the one most important change that needs to happen to improve Bristol?

In no particular order, the following were common themes among survey respondents:

- lower taxes
- bring back recycling
- provide cell coverage, Internet
- give taxpayers more representation—esp. seasonal folks, who tend to pay a lot
- address drug use and dealing
- encourage more gym/exercise/fitness options
- make road improvements
- continue work on downtown
- enforce speed limits

Keeping What is Treasured

What is the one thing most important to you not to change about Bristol?

Dominant among the responses here is small town feel—that we still have a “quaint” atmosphere to share with those who live here and visit.

Bristol residents appear to proudly cherish our lack of franchise establishments. (In other words, Dollar General, Rite Aid, and Dunkin’ Donuts are more than plenty. These are specifically mentioned.) Local business ownership matters very much to the people of Bristol, as folks say emphatically that they do not want more chains. Low density was mentioned numerous times. New projects should probably go where development already exists.

A Word About Word Clouds

You may see word clouds prominently featured in a document. Until technology improves, the word cloud is very limited as a tool. For instance, “the” and “is” are common. To include them would alter the scale and minimize words of actual substance. Another issue with word clouds is that not all things have commonly-used synonyms.

Example: Assume that soda and water are equally consumed in the U.S. Soda also goes by pop and coke. A simple word cloud would suggest that among *water*, *pop*, *soda*, and *coke*, water is most popular because the other (sweet, bubbly) drink has numerous means of reference.

Community Facilities and Services

Once again, we asked about several town facilities and services. Many people had no opinion regarding health services and cemeteries. More than one respondent point out that town cemeteries aren't always maintained.

The library has strong support—receiving top ratings.

Police, condition of roads, recreation areas, fire, emergency/rescue, and water/sewer are doing quite well. So are the town offices. It may be worth noting that a good number of respondents (about 25-29%) had no opinion regarding emergency/rescue and water/sewer.

Apparently, people are frustrated with regards to trash/recycling. 43% of those sharing an opinion say it is poor to fair.

For the next survey, we should consider separating facilities and services.

Residential Needs

When asked if there is enough housing in Bristol (based on type), respondents had similar answers compared to 2013. Many expressed “No opinion,” which suggests an opportunity for outreach and education. Each type of housing we included was thought to be sufficient in quantity—except for senior citizen spaces. Roughly half of those who shared an opinion on this say that we need more housing for older folks. Half say there is enough.

Respondents generally do not want the Town to encourage multi-family housing. They are most amenable to buildings with 2-4 units. (Only 50% said No to this particular idea.) Larger-capacity buildings found 70-80% of respondents against them.

Should the Town encourage multi-family housing, we provided survey takers with several options:

- constructing new rental apartment buildings
- converting large houses
- building new condos
- developing new mobile home parks
- developing long-term camping parks

Most of these ideas were soundly rejected. However, people are somewhat open to converting large houses that already exist.

Our final question related to where residential housing might be encouraged—single-family or otherwise. Respondents somewhat favor new housing in or near the village, distributed over less-populated parts of town, and clustered in new villages or new neighborhoods. They are unsure about strips along existing roads. They are strongly against new housing near Newfound Lake and probably do not want it distributed over more-populated parts of town.

Building Code

Both surveys (2013 and 2018) addressed building code in Bristol. Given the drastic difference in language between the years, a direct comparison of responses is discouraged. This is not the same question. However, looking at the results together may be helpful.

In 2013, the Town presented folks with a short question: *Do you favor the enforcement of a building code?* 80% of respondents were in favor of building code enforcement in 2013, while 14% were against it and 6% had no opinion.

In 2018, we said the following:

The Town of Bristol has no town building code and instead is governed by the New Hampshire State Building Code. Would you favor adoption of a building code in Bristol consisting of a set of minimum requirements for building design and construction?

Also known as Q9, this question garnered 53% Yes responses and 37% No responses, with 11% of respondents providing no opinion.

The question in 2013 dealt with enforcement of a building code. The question in 2018 was more informative and asked specifically whether or not Bristol should adopt its own building code. Respondents strongly supported enforcement in 2013. Given more information about the State and facing a slightly different question in 2018, respondents were on the fence.

Historic and Natural Resources

According to this survey, Bristol recognizes the value of maintaining what it has. People want to protect features that are considered historic. Natural resources are even more important. What follows is a rough summary of what we have learned between 2013 and 2018, focusing on the most recent survey.

Historic Bristol

A set of questions related to the preservation of historic resources was repeated in 2018. It asked if we should:

- encourage the preservation of historic buildings
- add demo. review to the Historic District Ordinance to protect buildings in the district
- expand the Historic District
- provide tax abatements for improving or preserving historic properties
- preserve farmland/encouraging working farms
- purchase preservation land or easements
- preserve open space lands

Not much changed between 2013 and 2018. Respondents continue to hesitate over expanding the Historic District. They support other ideas—most emphatically the preservation of buildings and

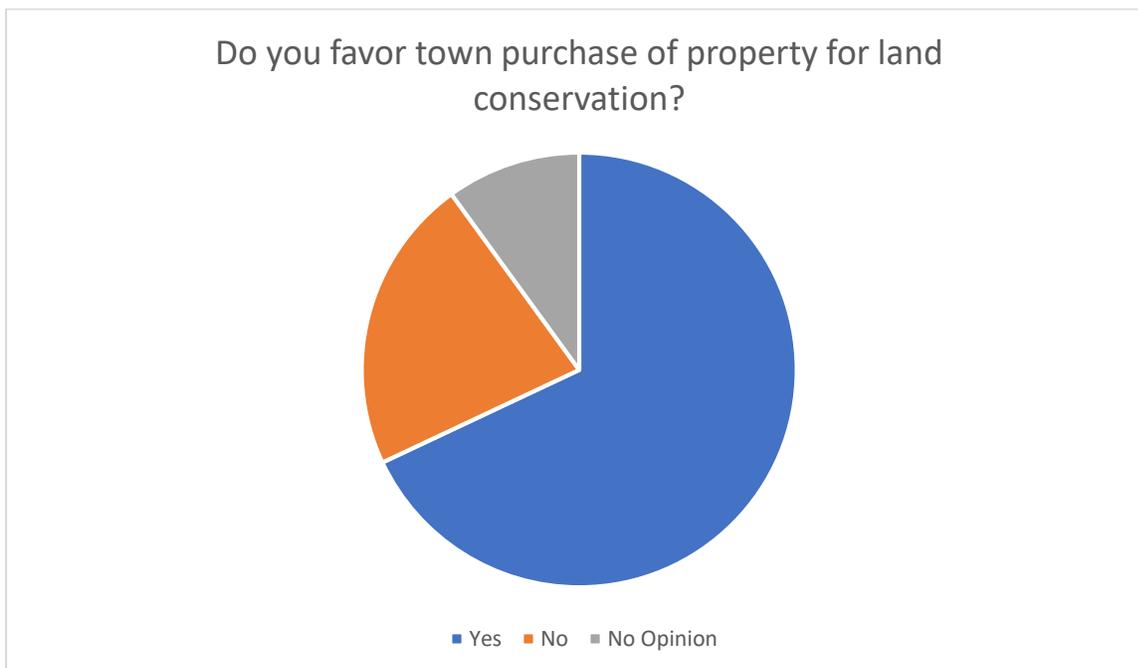
farmland, encouragement of working farms, and preservation of open space lands. A notable change is that respondents are even more interested in the purchase of preservation land or easements than they were in 2013.

The “Old Town Hall” and “Old Fire Station” were combined in this survey, but respondents could show what they thought about preservation of each separately. Both buildings garnered more support than they had in 2013. Old Town Hall went from about 60% Yes to 70% Yes. The Old Fire Station went from only 42% Yes in 2013 to 60% Yes in 2018. Roughly 15-20% of respondents had no opinion. In 2018, people could share more of their thought process. Data range from (a) one person suggesting a historic museum to (b) folks who don’t want us to spend any money on preservation. Multiple respondents pointed out a need to pick and choose the things that will be funded.

The Natural World

Natural features are critical to Bristol residents and property owners. This proved consistent over the past five years. The vast majority of respondents supports preservation. Most respondents strongly agree that Bristol should preserve these items specifically: areas of scenic or natural beauty, recreational trails, wetlands, forested land, ridgelines, area rivers, areas of important wildlife habitat, the Newfound Lake shoreland, the watersheds, and Plankey Spring on Lake Street. An educational opportunity for the spring—as 11 percent of respondents had no opinion.

People were asked if they favor the Town purchase of property for land conservation. Surprisingly, results were identical between the years. 68 percent of respondents continue to say Yes, while 22 percent disapprove, and 10 percent have no opinion.



The ratio of responses to whether people support town-purchase of property for land conservation was consistent between 2013 and 2018.

Recreation and Active Transportation, Part 1

In 2013, we asked, “Should the town provide/improve the following recreational opportunities? [Consider] boat trailer access to Newfound Lake, cartop access (canoe/kayak) to Newfound Lake, community recreation building, hunting areas, fishing areas.”

We added to the survey in 2018. This time around, we asked people about several recreation-related features. Roughly 55% of respondents said they do not want more boat trailer access to Newfound Lake. (Only 33% said Yes.) They are no longer against the addition (/improvement) of hunting areas, with only 50% saying No. It was 58% No in 2013.

Strong support came through for hiking and biking trails. Roughly 80% want more access to these types of transportation. A clear majority of respondents hope to see a Pemi River kayaking ramp as well. And they want things to do in the winter.

Business

One aim of this survey was to gauge where folks are at with their business preferences and see if anything has changed. For the most part, opinions remained where they were five years ago. One notable difference between 2013 and 2018 is that respondents are no longer against supermarkets and bars/taverns. Roughly the same number said Yes that said No this year.

Farmers markets and small inns (/bed and breakfasts) continue to have strong support. Next up are outdoor sporting goods shops, restaurants, professional services, independent/assisted living facilities, and home occupations. People favor antique/gift shops to some extent. They are fairly open to manufacturing businesses as well.

Energy and Recycling

One question we repeated this year has to do with sustainability. There are two different issues. Strong support continues (80% Yes) for adopting incentives to encourage recycling. Property tax credits for use of renewable energy sources have gained popularity, moving from 62% Yes in 2013 to 68% Yes in 2018. A few more people have “no opinion” compared to five years ago, but that only amounts to 8-9% of respondents who didn’t say Yes or No.

When it comes to energy-saving upgrades to government facilities, the vast majority of respondents (94%) is in favor, but people disagree when it comes to the appropriate payback period. Roughly thirty percent say that energy improvements are always worth it. The same number want improvements to pay for themselves within 5 years. Another third of supporters say that a 10-year payback period is ideal.

It may be worth noting that the ratio of people who want energy upgrades no matter the time it takes to regain that cost has gone from 24% to 30% since 2013.

We asked a question about using “green/renewable” energy sources to heat municipal buildings and the response was similar.

When it comes to solar panels for electricity—again with local government buildings—confidence in this technology has increased. 13% of respondents were concerned about reliability in 2013, but 8% have this hesitation today. Most supporters ask that any photovoltaic system pay for itself within 5-10 years.

Very little support exists for adding energy standards to new single-family homes in Bristol. State energy code is enough. However, we might encourage energy efficiency without making it mandatory. Respondents are fairly interested in regulating multi-family structures and commercial buildings. 40% say that higher standards of some sort should apply. Only 29% are happy with the state energy code.

When it comes to new municipal buildings, 50% say that higher standards should apply. Another 19% would be happy with encouraging the responsible parties to be more energy efficient.

Village Residential District and Lake District: Respondents were fairly consistent between the surveys but have grown more supportive of small-scale wind turbines. Should we allow people to collect their own energy? Folks still want roof-mounted solar panels and geothermal most emphatically, followed by free-standing solar and outdoor wood-fired boilers. Support for small-scale wind went from 21% to 27% but those who want us to keep it off the list make up 66% of respondents.

Rural District: People still want us to add free-standing solar panels to the list of allowed uses here. Roof-mounted solar, geothermal, and outdoor wood-fired boilers continue to garner strong support. Notably, the ratio of people for small-scale wind has gone up from 43 percent to nearly 50 percent. Not so many respondents disagree anymore.

Parking for Automobiles

In 2013, we asked people to share their perceptions or experience with parking at town beaches. This year we added other destinations: Downtown, Kelley Park, and the Library. It appears that the beaches are slightly busier than they were five years ago. 20% of respondents say that parking at Avery-Crouse Beach is not adequate at all. Another 27% only consider it somewhat adequate. Cummings Beach is in better shape from a parking perspective. Results for Question 26 suggest that most people are not in favor of the Town purchasing land (or leasing it) to add parking.

Downtown could use some attention. 54% of respondents say that parking there is only somewhat adequate or not adequate at all—37% and 17%, respectively.

Recreation and Active Transportation, Part 2

In 2018 we provided the community with a similar list compared to 2013. However, a few things changed. Mostly it had to do with references to Kelley Park.

Miscellaneous Items

Strong support continues for establishing a multi-use path that would connect Downtown and Profile Falls, and making a Downtown Riverwalk along Newfound River. Respondents also want a picnic area Downtown that abuts the river. They are confident about these projects. (Only 4-6% had no opinion.)

Respondents still have little interest in the Town acquiring land for building and maintaining a skate park. Most respondents say No to this idea. The same goes for providing a dog park.

Kelley Park

Respondents said that they are unsure about whether the Town should acquire more land to reconfigure Kelley Park. 33% indicate support, 50% say No, and 18% have no opinion.

Other ideas for consideration were similar, with numbers flipped. We asked residents and property owners if the Town should:

- reconfigure Kelley Park to make it more user-friendly for all ages
- install a multi-use walking path through Kelley Park
- create facilities and signage to connect Kelley Park with the downtown and other recreational areas

To the above scenarios, roughly 56% say Yes, 29% say No, and 15% have no opinion.

Internet

We asked multiple questions about home Internet connectivity. To summarize the results: Fast, reliable Internet is clearly important to our respondents.

Each of the numbers in this section of the report should be taken with a grain of salt. Confusion over the types of Internet connection may be significant. What is Internet? Does the usage of cell phone data count? Respondents may or may not have included their cell phone plan in their answer to how much they pay for Internet.

78% of those who answered our first question say they cannot accomplish their day-to-day home activities without Internet access. Only 3% had no opinion. When asked about a possible fiber optic Internet network in Town (for increased, high-speed bandwidth), most people think that it would help them carry out daily functions at home.

Two questions on the survey sought to help us understand the current infrastructure and how much people are paying for it. First, how do folks connect to the Internet at home? 70% of

respondents go through cable. Half as many uses mobile wireless, followed again by fixed wireless. 7% chose Other (please specify) and Consolidated Communications was one name that came up. Metrocast serves our town as well. One person mentioned using a Verizon booster.

When it comes to cost, half of respondents estimate that they pay \$50-99 per month. A fifth pay \$100-199 per month and roughly the same number of people pay less than \$50.

Sharing Knowledge

We have a several opportunities for education and outreach. One is housing need. What types of housing would benefit the Bristol community in years to come? What do we need? Another opportunity for gaining knowledge is with building code. We don't (yet) have a building code specific to Bristol, but it could benefit our residents and property owners. As for services/facilities, multiple items had a "no opinion" rating. This includes health services, emergency/rescue, and water/sewer. Cemeteries will be addressed this year as the Office guides a consultant to do surface-level research and offer a half-day workshop on their findings.

Conclusion

Roughly 10 percent of residents and property owners participated in this survey. In the past we have seen higher response rates—approaching 15 percent and beyond—but this is a crude comparison. Most respondents had a bachelor's degree or a greater amount of formal education. On average, they were older property owners. Very few respondents (about 2%) represent the people who rent in Bristol.

Our understanding of what people think about Bristol (and how they experience this community) is more current thanks to the 2018 Survey. Staff and volunteers can prioritize project ideas and incorporate respondent feedback as we develop a new land use chapter for our Master Plan in 2019.