



# Executive Summary

York is a community of over 13,000 year-round residents on the coast of Maine. Beautiful beaches, historic villages and buildings, large areas of forest, and some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the state offer an excellent quality of life to its residents. York's natural and historic features also attract part-time residents and short-term visitors who return on an annual basis, often choosing to make York their permanent home.

Here are some important things to know about our population now, and what we can expect in the future:<sup>1</sup>

- York has experienced a slow overall year-round population growth over the past decade, growing from 12,720 residents in 2010 to 13,070 in 2019, a 2.8% increase. The number of households grew by 7.9% during that time, with average household size decreasing from 2.37 to 2.27 over the same time period (due in particular to a decline in household sizes among renters).

- York's seasonal population and households have grown rapidly over the past decade, by 46% and 38%, respectively.
- The median age in York rose from 46.5 years old to 52.2 years old between 2010 and 2019; the median ages for York County and Maine in 2019 were 45.2 years old and 44.7 years old, respectively.
- School enrollment has slowly declined, along with the number of young families who live in York.
- Poverty rates are highest for residents 65 years and older.
- Despite having a much higher median income compared to the county and state, a surprising number of York households are housing cost burdened (44.9% of renters and 22.9% of homeowners), which means they spend more than 30% of their income on housing-related expenses.

<sup>1</sup>Data from 2010 and 2019 Five-Year American Community Survey, U.S. Census

## BACKGROUND ON THE PLAN

This Comprehensive Plan (Plan) was developed under the purview of York's Planning Board through a public process led by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee over a period of one year. The 14-member Steering Committee, led by the Planning Board Chair and comprised of a broad and diverse range of community members representing different components of the community, oversaw the planning process, including the consultant team's work. The Steering Committee's charge was to deliver a Plan that is understandable to the public, provides metrics for success, and meets requirements to be certified by the State of Maine for consistency with the goals and guidelines of Maine's Growth Management Act.

## PLAN PURPOSE

The Comprehensive Plan is a road map, setting a vision and goals that will guide future land use decisions and Town investments. The goals and recommended strategies in the Plan provide a policy guide for the Town for the next ten to fifteen years and address three key questions for the town:

- 1. What type of town do we wish to live in?**
- 2. What are the goals to help us maintain what we love and successfully shape a resilient future?**
- 3. What are the specific strategies and actions that can help us achieve our goals?**

## ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The Steering Committee's primary objective was to create a Plan that represents what community members believe to be most important in the coming decade. The COVID-19 pandemic shaped the form of public participation, and feedback

opportunities included in-person and outdoor socially distanced events, online interactions, and a community survey to ensure that citizens could participate in ways most comfortable to them with the greatest convenience and safety in mind.



## OUR VISION

The vision for the Town of York can be expressed through the passionate words spoken by the community. From the spectacular forests and views of Mount Agamenticus to the brilliance of the sea, York is a beautiful and unique land that is a critical piece of Maine's coastline. Our vision demands we maintain our quality of life for all York residents in the face of climate and other global changes. We strive to balance the many needs of the community by continuously improving the quality and diversity of York's economy, community, housing, recreation, and transportation, while at the same time preserving all our precious natural resources and the rich history of York. It is vital that we work together to achieve the community's view of the future.

nature less protection recreational  
family sustainable inclusive  
preserve climate historic change open  
quaint sidewalks  
character growth town history  
resources diverse keep natural small housing development  
keep safety beach schools protect  
maintain clean affordable peaceful conservation  
recreation beautiful diversity  
preservation environment beauty  
beaches york welcoming business

Source: 50 most frequently used words submitted as part of the visioning exercise in the Fall 2021 Community Survey



## COMPREHENSIVE PLAN ELEMENTS, GOALS AND STRATEGIES

Everything from public outreach events, the community survey and online communication postings, to the plan elements shown in the graphic below, were scrutinized and evaluated by the Steering Committee, who then reached a consensus on the important goals for this Plan.

### Elements of the Comprehensive Plan



## PLAN GOALS TO ACHIEVE THE VISION

### 01 | Foster a socially and economically diverse population in the town.

York is home to residents of all ages and seeks to be a welcoming community. Providing support and housing choices for those who work in York, are starting families and careers, and older residents wanting to age in community are important to maintaining the vibrancy of our neighborhoods and schools.

### 02 | Ensure the needs of York's increasing older adult population are met.

York's population is older, on average, than the county's and the state's, and the proportion of older adults has been growing. Meeting the social, housing, transportation, and service needs of older adults is critical for allowing York residents to age in community.

### 03 | Protect the quality and quantity of water resources in order to ensure the safety and affordability of public and private supplies of fresh drinking water.

The supply of our drinking water depends on minimizing pollution discharges and stormwater runoff, improving water quality, educating landowners, and cooperating regionally to protect water resources.

### 04 | Preserve, protect, and enhance all natural resources, including wetlands, wildlife and fisheries habitat, sand dunes, shore lands, scenic vistas, and forests.

Our natural resources are a key characteristic of our town. Identifying and protecting high value natural resources and increasing public awareness of them and coordinating with local organizations and neighboring communities on conservation and protection efforts will help preserve our natural environment.

### 05 | Safeguard agricultural and forest resources from development that threatens those resources.

Protecting existing prime farmland and forests, supporting farming and forestry and encouraging their economic vitality, and ensuring that those who want to farm in York are able to do so are all actions that will preserve our unique resources.

### 06 | Preserve, protect, and enhance marine resources. Balance competing uses of waterways, lakes, ponds, rivers, and other natural areas in ways that are consistent with health and safety, economic sustainability, and conservation.

As a coastal community, York's marine resources, including its harbors, beaches, parks, estuaries, and coastline areas, are essential to life here. Protecting, maintaining, and improving marine habitat, water quality, harbor facilities, and public access, while balancing uses and limiting adverse impacts, are all integral to preparing for the future.

### 07 | Support the potential for responsible increased use of, and access to, recreational resources to meet the needs of users while maintaining protections of critical habitat and drinking water.

York is home to many recreational amenities, including its beaches, fishing and boating opportunities, parks and walking paths, large trail systems and nature preserves, and recreational programming for various age groups. Future enjoyment of these resources depends on balancing recreational access with protecting natural resources.

### 08 | Preserve York's historic and archaeological resources.

The town's history is a key characteristic of York. Buildings, stories, archaeological sites, and the Museums of Old York are major town assets and points of pride for residents. Actively working toward preserving and encouraging adaptive reuse of these resources, where appropriate, will be key to protecting our character and history.

### 09 | Minimize impacts of vehicular traffic and reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) in York.

Providing an efficient public transportation system, improving safety and opportunities for walking and biking, and planning for land use patterns that minimize total VMT can greatly improve quality of life for residents and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### 10 | Improve and expand York's physical, digital, and social connections.

Providing for more ways to travel in town, connecting to regional destinations, improving resident access to technology, and expanding opportunities to connect with neighbors strengthens our community connections in multiple ways.

**11 | Optimize and increase resources and capacity for recreation, social programming, and activities for the York community.**

Expanding access to existing spaces, supporting the development of new spaces, and increasing options for activities and programming supports our community and connects us to each other.

**12 | Manage impacts of tourism and ensure benefits to residents.**

The Town receives significant benefits from its tourist economy, including a robust tax base from second homes. Impacts of peak tourist season, including the high levels of vehicular congestion and demands on parking, restaurants, beaches and other natural areas, will need managing to maintain and improve residents' quality of life.

**13 | Support the retention, growth, and diversification of York's economic base, including expansion of year-round employment, living wage jobs, and growing industries.**

Promoting an economic climate that expands the types of local businesses will help to increase job opportunities, contribute to overall economic well-being, and provide year-round services and activities to residents.

**14 | Strengthen, expand, and support community-oriented business opportunities.**

Encouraging and enhancing the vitality of York's businesses will expand the supply of goods, services, and other benefits to residents. Community-oriented businesses include shops, healthcare, dining, social events, arts and music spaces and offerings, enrichment spaces, and recreation.

**15 | Encourage and promote a variety of types and prices of housing opportunities.**

The ability to attract a diverse spectrum of full-time residents who can live and work in York is hampered by limited housing choices and prices that are increasingly unaffordable for many. Adopting housing policies and actions that encourage a variety of sizes, types, prices, and ownership and rental opportunities will help residents to live in the community throughout their life span and allow people who work in York to live in York.

**16 | Prepare for impacts of climate change.**

The changing climate, with sea level rise, warmer air and water temperatures, and more severe precipitation and storm events, threatens our health and safety, quality of life, the natural environs of the town, the tourism economy, and our tax base. Ensuring that York can adapt and thrive in the midst of climate change will be key to preserving the vibrancy and economic resilience of our town.

**17 | Implement policies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions according to the Town's commitments.**

In 2019, the Town Selectboard joined the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and made a commitment to reduce York's GHG emissions by 50% by 2030 and 100% by 2050 from 2010 levels. Reducing residential building and passenger vehicle emissions—our largest contributors to GHG emissions—will help us meet those commitments and improve our quality of life.

**18 | Ensure sufficient municipal facilities, infrastructure, and capacity to meet the changing needs of the community.**

Encouraging economic development and accommodating changing demographics requires planning, well-trained staff, financial capacity, and an effective system of public facilities and infrastructure. Together, these measures also support the Town in meeting goals of climate change adaptation, GHG emissions mitigation, implementation of the Comprehensive Plan, and other initiatives as approved by voters.

**19 | Improve coordination with local and regional entities and maintain, expand, and improve partnerships among public and private groups.**

York is fortunate to have many local non-profits, quasi-municipal agencies and regional partners working on common interests and goals, including the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC). Working regionally and collaboratively will ensure the Town reaps the benefits of available expertise, funding opportunities, and efficiencies of scale.

**20 | Strive for excellence in education and learning opportunities for York school students and residents of all ages.**

The community recognizes the importance of life-long learning. Maintaining a quality curriculum and school experience, as well as supporting learning opportunities for residents of all ages, will enhance quality of life in town.

## STRATEGIES AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Steering Committee developed 203 strategies to achieve the goals of this Plan (detailed in Chapter 5 and summarized in Appendix D, including the action timeline and implementers responsible for each one). The strategies are intended to be implemented over the course of the next ten years and have been assigned action timelines of immediate, near-term, medium-term, long-term, and on-going. While some are required regulatory mandates, the vast majority of strategies are based on direct feedback from the York community and will involve further study and input. While every one of the 203 strategies is important, listed here are eleven strategies the Steering Committee identified as immediate action items to build a firm foundation for implementing the full Comprehensive Plan and to address immediate needs:

- **Work with local and regional conservation organizations to identify high priority natural resources, open space, and recreational land to be conserved or protected. (2.1; pg 29)**
- **Evaluate the Town's existing Open Space Conservation Subdivision (OSCS) Zoning Development Ordinance to better serve preservation of natural resources. (2.6; pg 30)**
- **Plan for, develop, and manage opportunities for residents to access and enjoy the Town's limited marine resources. (3.1; pg 38)**
- **Establish an Economic Development Committee (EDC) to develop a vision for economic opportunities and a business recruitment plan. (4.1; pg 42)**
- **Conduct design charettes (workshops) for the area surrounding Short Sands Road to determine the appropriate mix of uses for this site, incorporating business, residential, and recreational opportunities. (4.4; pg 42)**

- **Create a Community Housing Committee to address the range of housing costs and types needed in York. (5.4; pg 48)**
- **Commission a comprehensive transportation, traffic, and parking study for the town. (7.1; pg 58)**
- **Perform a complete re-evaluation and re-writing of the existing Zoning Ordinance to ensure that York's zoning clearly matches the goals for each Future Land Use area and is easy to understand, streamlined, and modernized. (8.1; pg 64)**
- **Assign responsibility for implementing the Future Land Use Plan to the appropriate committee, board, or official. (8.8; pg 66)**
- **Consider conducting a needs assessment for Town staffing and volunteer boards to understand capacity and resources needed to address increasing resident needs and expectations for services. (8.50; pg 70)**
- **Explore hiring or sharing a regional Sustainability Coordinator to implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. (8.59; pg 71)**

Many of the recommendations in this document will require actions such as Selectboard policy decisions, collaboration with partners, or town vote to approve zoning amendments, modify policies, or allocate funding. The purpose of this Plan is to help ensure that all areas and staff of the Town are working efficiently together in a systems-based approach so that any future decision or action supports one or more Town goals. The Comprehensive Plan is the opposite of a siloed approach to decision-making and spending; it provides a set of overarching goals to guide decision-making across departments, thereby improving overall efficiency and reducing negative unintended impacts. This Plan, then, is about streamlining efforts and creating a cohesive approach to the decisions that affect policies, programs, spending, and the many day-to-day elements of life in York.