City of Ellsworth Visioning Project

Summary of Survey Results

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING
DECEMBER 4, 2015
9:00 – 10:30 AM
Respondents

- 218 respondents total
- Most live in Ellsworth (61%)
  - The vast majority of these are year-round home owners who have lived here 5 years or more (88% own, 81% have been here 5 years+, only 2% seasonal)
- Strong majority work or own a business in Ellsworth (68%) and have done so for 5 years or more (80%)
  - 46% work in Ellsworth (but do not own a business)
  - 22% own a business
  - 32% do not work or own a business in Ellsworth
Respondents – range of ages – half are 45-64
Respondents — predominantly female and married
Respondents - household composition and community involvement

- Strong majority are two-adult households (73%)
- Majority have no children (55%)
  - One child (22%)
  - Two children (15%)
  - Three or more (8%)
- Most likely to be involved in*:
  - Service organizations (55%)
  - Business, trade or professional groups (46%)
  - Arts or cultural groups (41%)

*More than one response permitted.
General Questions –
top three . . .

➢ Reasons you choose to live, work, own a business and/or own property in Ellsworth*:
  ▪ Small town feel (40%)
  ▪ Year round community (39%)
  ▪ Central location in the region (39%)

➢ Most important attributes of Ellsworth for you 10 years from now*:
  ▪ Vibrant, authentic Maine downtown (46%)
  ▪ Safe community (40%)
  ▪ Friendly to small businesses and entrepreneurs (37%)

*Respondents required to pick top three responses.
Jobs and Economic Development

- Ellsworth’s economic role/identity in 10 years -- respondents asked to order preferences (1 to 5)
  - Year round regional service hub where people can live, work and buy most goods and services easy winner -- ranked 1 or 2 by 84%
    - Place where it’s easy for businesses to do business runner up with 42%
    - Source of innovation/entrepreneurial activity in region runner up with 37%

- Top 3 priorities for improving business districts (Main St., High St., etc.)
  - Fill empty storefronts, malls and industrial park before further expansion/sprawl (73%)
  - Redevelop Water St. emphasizing river access, visibility, public uses (55%)
  - Support a diversity of retail shopping and businesses (46%)
Jobs and Economic Development
write-ins . . . over 100 answers to each!

What types of new businesses or services would you like to see in Ellsworth 10 years from now?

- **Themes**
  - Social spaces and community gathering spots, especially on river/waterfronts
  - Employers who offer decent pay and benefits
  - More retail and restaurants – but great diversity in the detail!
  - New/more entertainment options

- **Specific requests**
  - Social/Community
    - Convention Center
    - Riverfront restaurants, boardwalks/park space, creative spaces, kayak/boat rentals
  - Employers
    - Light manufacturing
    - STEM based -- Biotech/Biomed
    - Services
Jobs and Economic Development
write-ins . . . over 100 answers to each!

What types of new businesses or services would you like to see in Ellsworth 10 years from now?

- **Specific requests**
  - **Retail**
    - No chain! Small – Upscale – Clothing – Office supply – Bookstore – [except Target!]
    - Yes chain! National Brands – Outlets – Club stores -- Maybe not Big Box – [except Target!]
  - **Restaurants**
  - **Entertainment/recreation**
    - Using waterfront – “Vibrant, cultural waterfront,” music, kayak races and rentals
    - Movie theater
    - Aimed at kids and teens
    - Winter indoor
  - **Other**
    - Higher Ed
    - Public Transportation
Jobs and Economic Development
write-ins . . . over 100 answers to each!

- If you had to choose one area of Ellsworth to encourage business development, where would this be and why?

  **Themes**
  - **No sprawl/infill**: empty storefronts, malls, space surrounding Walmart, etc.; avoid using open spaces beyond current development
  - **Prioritize downtown and adjacent waterfront**: expand from downtown core into surrounding blocks and along Water St. “coastal Maine vibe”

  **Specific Ideas**
  - Keep business development where it already is -- clear mandate, though strong minority could see building out along Bangor Rd.
  - Move existing Water St. business to more appropriate area – allow to repurpose waterfront + reduce truck traffic
  - Grasshopper Shop and Maine Coast Mall are high profile, weighing on people’s minds
Jobs and Economic Development
write-ins . . . over 100 answers to each!

- If you had to choose one area of Ellsworth to encourage **housing** development, where would this be and why?

- **Themes**
  - **No sprawl** – higher density, planned/zoning, incentives to rehab existing
  - **Walking distance to downtown** – healthier, reduces traffic
  - **Waterfront** – river and lakes
  - **Along major arteries** – voices for this in contrast to above, especially North Ellsworth/Route 1A, access to Bangor jobs
  - **Affordable** – for young adults and seniors; not low-income; walkable; rentals
Housing/Neighborhoods –
three most desirable aspects of a great neighborhood

- Caring and connected… 52%
- Small town feeling 35%
- Good sidewalks/parks and open spaces 43%
- Plentiful parks and open spaces 36%
- Residents represent a diverse community 33%
- Diversity of backgrounds 10%
- Character of the buildings 21%
- Ability to walk or bike 54%
- Proximity to schools 7%
- Other (please specify) 8%
Housing/neighborhoods – three types city should encourage in coming 10 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Townhouses and condominiums</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-family homes</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-family units</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior living communities</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affordable rental housing</td>
<td>41%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subsidized housing</td>
<td>2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preserve historic</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redevelop blighted...</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservation subdivisions...</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>All types walk to town</td>
<td>45%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Recreation, Arts and Culture, Entertainment

top three . . .

Arts and cultural activities you would like to see more of in Ellsworth in 10 years*:
- Community events (e.g., Autumn Gold) (64%)
- Movies (61%)
- Music (54%)

Parks & Rec amenities that are most important to maintain or improve over the next 10 years*:
- Trail systems for walking and biking (71%)
- Riverfront access and public usage (55%)
- Public parks (e.g. Knowlton Park) (44%)
Natural Environment and Open Space

When it comes to protecting natural assets, vast majority rated it very important or important for the City to protect:

- the drinking water supply (96%) and
- the quality of surface waters (e.g., lakes and ponds) (89%)

If the City could purchase one area for permanent protection, respondents would very strongly prefer riverfront, particularly where it passes through downtown.*

Differing ideas:

- Extension of the downtown, with small art shops, take-away food stands, restaurants, bars, public art, a great place to hang out year round
- Park-like setting . . . Bird and seal watching, boating, etc.
- Other suggestions included: Branch Lake area, Ellsworth Falls area, open farm spaces
- A number of respondents don’t think the City should spend money/purchase any properties

*Write-in question, 79 responses.
Natural Environment and Open Space

- When it comes to expanding access to the outdoors, strong majority rated it very important or important for the City to:
  - improve and connect trail systems (83%) and
  - improve access to trails through parking at trailheads and signage (73%)

- If the City could expand or improve one area for outdoor recreation, respondents would very strongly prefer to upgrade and connect existing trails.*

- Ideas:
  - walking and biking
  - “cohesive, collaborative, and publicized system of trails”
  - corridors (Water St./Shore Rd./Grant Rd./Lake) and loops

- Other suggestions included: Branch Lake area, Ellsworth Falls area, open farm spaces

- A number of respondents don’t think the City should spend money/purchase any properties

*Write-in question, 74 responses.
Natural Environment and Open Space – redeveloping riverfront

Why?

- Heart of the City; will bring community together
- Would bring together everything that makes Ellsworth special – history, business and recreation
- Golden asset – osprey, seals, fish, natural beauty
- Investment for locals who will use it + attractive to visitors
- Antidote to image as a busy road on the way to somewhere else
- “single most important thing City can do to positively impact all objectives, including economic growth”
Public Safety and Community Health –
important factors contributing to feeling of safety

- Police and Fire Department visible in community
- Well-lit, maintained sidewalks and walking paths
- Police and Fire Department response times
- Capable and well-trained Police and Fire personnel
- Low crime rate

What else will contribute to your feeling of safety?

- Keeping sense of community strong
- Strong response to drug activity/help for substance abuse
- Getting to know police officers – Facebook page is great!
- Traffic – enforce laws and improve management
- People looking out for each other, as they already do in Ellsworth
## Public Safety and Community Health

Factors that will most improve community health over next 10 years*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More opportunities to walk and bike rather than drive</td>
<td>53%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthy and safe activities for children</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>More public facilities for exercise/recreation</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<td>Access to local healthcare that addresses our highest needs</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help seniors age in place with safety and dignity</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drug abuse prevention programs</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<td>Better access to local, fresh produce</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<td>Weight reduction programs</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cooking/nutrition education</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve accessibility for people with disabilities</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Respondents required to select top three.
Summary Questions

**best** thing about Ellsworth

- Small town feel
- Downtown
- Sense of community
- Vibrant, year-round community
- Location
- Big town amenities
- Access to nature/riverfront
- “It has energy and pride. It is willing to look towards the future.”
- “Us! The people!”
Summary Questions

worst thing about Ellsworth

- Traffic congestion
- Trucks, heavy traffic bisecting town
- Not pedestrian friendly
- High St.
- Drugs
- Empty storefronts
- Run-down, empty, or unattractive lots and buildings
- Current state of riverfront
- Lack of high-quality job opportunities
- Not enough reasons for young adults to stay
- Not enough entertainment/activities
Summary Questions
what would make Ellsworth even better than it is today

- **Revitalized riverfront** [could be development, park, riverwalk, many ideas]
- Bustling downtown fully linked to riverfront
- Get heavy traffic out of downtown
- Bypass/efforts to reduce traffic congestion
- Be able to safely walk or bike almost everywhere
- Engaged community – citizens staying connected and involved*
- Business/economic development – year round jobs that pay a decent wage
- Community events
- Invest in education
- Invest in cultural opportunities

* 22 people submitted names to be contacted about volunteer opportunities at the City!