

## August 2009 Survey Results Summary

The Comprehensive Plan Committee has finished analyzing and summarizing the results of the survey that it mailed out in August to 1350 Southwest Harbor addresses. The answers from the 156 (11.6%) returned surveys produced no great surprises, but the results and comments are nonetheless, interesting.

Demographics of respondents: *p.1+2, Q.1-11.*

- 69% called SWH their primary residence and have lived in SWH for 11 or more years
- 92% own their own home
- 70% are over 55 years old and only 21% are raising children
- 54% are employed and 42% of these are self-employed; more than 40% are retired
- 41% reported annual incomes from \$35-75K and 42% make more than \$75K
- only 25% attended Town Meeting last May; the most common reason for not attending being a scheduling conflict or absence from the Town at the time

Respondents were generally satisfied with or neutral on the Land Use Ordinance's effectiveness in protecting the harbor's appearance and public access. They wanted changes to be made cautiously and agreed (68%) that "the ordinance needs to remain flexible enough to allow changing commercial uses." *p.3+4, Q.1-5.*

On infrastructure improvements, there was strong agreement that the Town should invest more, particularly in roads, sidewalks and bicycle ways. *p.11, Q17+18.*

Opinion was divided on whether to build a by-pass to relieve traffic congestion, on the reconsideration of restrictions against built boat storage facilities around the harbor and whether to allow more marinas to be built. *p.6, Q.14; p.6, Q.13; p.7, Q.18.*

Respondents continue to favor mixed-use zoning but would consider some restrictions on commercial development in areas that are primarily residential. 49% did NOT seem to want more residential development in the Harbor Zones. *p.8, Q.1+2+4.*

47% did NOT want the standards in Zone C changed to allow more built density. *p.9, Q.5.* There were a number of comments expressing support for keeping undeveloped land as it is. *See Comments Q.10+11.* These sentiments might seem to conflict with the perennial wish to see more housing available for middle incomes. *p.9, Q.6.* Allowing smaller lot size is one important way of reducing the costs of housing and home ownership. A number of respondents suggested allowing more in-building and greater density in already developed areas. *See Comments Q. 12+13.*

It would seem that a number of people would like to keep the rural areas rural. This was one of the few issues where there was a significant difference between the answers received from part-time residents and those who live here most of the year. *p.9, Q.5; p.10, Q.10.* Part-time residents are generally more concerned about protecting rural areas and rural character and avoiding sprawl. It is worth remembering here that SWH has 8,884 acres within its town limits. 4,324 belong to the park and there are, in addition, 176 easements against development. Only about half of the Town's land, much of which is unsewered and has poor drainage, is in private hands and available for development. These facts limit residential development and with no large industry, SWH is heavily reliant on residential property taxes to pay for infrastructure and services. At the same time, the rural, scenic character of the Town is one of its greatest assets and contributes to its "livability" and its economy in terms of the tourist trade. Would expansion of public

roads and sewer and water “eat up” any gains from an expanded tax base? There are good arguments for wishing to expand the Town’s population and increase development, but the State Planning Office has projected SWH’s population to fall as it continues to age and without a clear goal and effort to encourage economic or residential development and expand the property tax base, the Town is likely to always struggle to pay for infrastructure and services.

Of the 99 respondents who expressed an interest in exploring alternative energy and reducing the Town’s carbon footprint, 46% would look into purchasing renewable energy from the grid; 71% would look into SWH’s purchase of its own windmill and almost 94% would look into installing solar panels on public structures in SWH. *p.12, Q.19+20.* Nearly everyone who answered the survey said they recycled. 52% who called SWH their primary residence said they would support a “pay-as-you-throw” system for their solid waste disposal while only 27% of the part time residents would. *p.16, Q.37.*

Top 10 issues in terms of support:

The harbor and its related businesses should continue to be an important aspect of the employment and economy of SWH. *94%*

Protect views of the harbor by restricting the size, height and density of building around the harbor. *86%*

Boaters should be able to walk safely to town from Town Docks, the marina and other landing sites; sidewalk improvements are badly needed. *83%*

The Town should keep the right of way to the beach from Lawler Lane open and accessible to residents. *74%*

“Explore innovative ways to share services with other island towns to economize on costs.” Which areas? Some form of school consolidation with Tremont. *79%*

Restrict strip development along Route 102. *78%*

Bicycle paths connecting the center of town with the Town docks, the marina and the Manset shore should be developed. *(no significant difference in response between workers/retired or year-rounders/ seasonal residents)76%*

Would support construction of a bicycle path on Route 102 from the downtown area to the Manset Corner. *75%*

The town is NOT investing enough in infrastructure. *74%* Of those respondents, 85% said *sidewalks* needed more investment.

Would favor placing restrictions on commercial development in areas that are primarily residential. *72%*

Copies of the survey and survey comments are available on line and at the Town Offices. The Comprehensive Planning Committee and the Board of Selectmen encourage your reactions and input. Over the course of the winter, the Comprehensive Planning Committee will be holding a series of public meetings to solicit input on the development of policies and strategies for the update of the Comprehensive Plan. It is the Committee’s goal to offer a draft of an updated Plan ready for voter approval in May of 2010.