

Swan's Island Comprehensive Planning Committee

Executive Summary of the 2019 Initial Survey Results

A comprehensive plan is an all-encompassing document which outlines the vision, values, and expectations of the future for a community. The document defines policies or goals which act to guide physical, social, and economic development. The document also provides legal protection of ordinances and enables a town to qualify for certain state grant and loan programs.

Comprehensive planning is necessary to sustain the spirit of the community, preserve a healthy landscape, balance economic prosperity, protect working waterfronts, as well as develop a basis for sound decisions in town management.

In 2017, the Swan's Island Municipal Advisory Council, with support from the Board of Selectmen, had formed the Comprehensive Planning Committee in order to develop a new comprehensive plan, proceeding the previous Swan's Island Comprehensive Plan published in January of 1994.

The Comprehensive Planning Committee has held (2) initial public meetings—one at the Town Hall, and the other at the school—as well as created an informal survey in an effort to gather input from year-round and summer residents on what they would like for the future of the island. The online and paper survey were released in January and closed to responses in March of 2019. The committee received 258 completed surveys, and respondents were split almost evenly in representing year-round and seasonal residents. The general response was overwhelmingly positive and very informative.

More than 90% of respondents (excluding those of no opinion) believed services such as ambulance, fire protection, library, and solid waste facilities were adequate. More than 75% of respondents (excluding no opinion) were satisfied with code enforcement, electric service, harbor master, historic preservation, law enforcement, phone service, public access to shore, school, snow removal and sanding, and town office. Services that respondents were less satisfied with included elderly services, health services, high speed internet, public docking facilities, recreational facilities and programs, road maintenance, and youth services. High speed internet was most notably highlighted out of those services, with 72% of respondents (excluding no opinion) marking it as needing improvement.

When asked which topics are or should be a concern on the island, over 75% of respondents answered ferry service, Lyme disease, property taxes, affordable housing, chemical dependency, and job opportunities. While housing was voiced as a concern on numerous occasions, a large majority of respondents were undecided on how to approach the issue or did not want the town government to be directly involved in development efforts. Similarly, job opportunities on the island were also voiced as a concern, though over half of the respondents would only like to see additional commercial or industrial businesses in specifically designated areas or not at all. Apprehension was expressed towards new "heavy industrial" development with the concerns of compromising natural resources and the island's landscape; and regardless of the type of development, many expressed that any development should be well informed, done with very careful planning, and with long-term intention.

Over 80% of respondents (excluding those undecided) were in support of ordinances or other measures to protect aquifers, shellfish areas, wetlands, and the harbor. More than 70% of respondents also supported protecting wildlife habitat, scenic views, forest land, agricultural land, and banning pesticides. With regard to policies that promote the development or growth on shoreland, 80% of respondents supported aquaculture, commercial fishing, and marine support services; 70% supported recreational boating (excluding those undecided).

In question of supporting ordinances or other actions to encourage the growth and diversification of various industries on the island, over 80% of respondents (excluding those undecided) were in favor of supporting aquaculture, farmers' markets, high speed internet, lobster hatcheries, and organic farming. Between 60-70% were in support of B&B's, restaurants, and stores, but only if limited to a "small-scale." The least supported out of the industries that were listed on the survey was tourism. In addition, whether the island should continue to be "dry" remains undecided with a 50/50 split among respondents.

When given the opportunity for any additional comments, the overlying theme was what a wonderful place Swan's Island is to live and vacation, and how no one wants it to change fundamentally. Most respondents recognized that growth is necessary for the island to survive, but comments suggested that it should be slow, steady, and well-thought out. Any addition of policies or codes should be minimal and non-prohibitive.

Other significant concerns included a lack of transparency within town government, the possibility of hiring a town manager, and high property tax rates. With the goal of keeping and attracting young families on the island, job opportunities and reasonably priced housing must be priorities. Many people recognized the divide between year-round residents and "summer people" and hope that gap can be bridged. Attention was also brought to the viability of the lobster industry, and what we should be doing to encourage diversification within the local economy. Tourism was suggested frequently as an alternative solution, with the reasoning that it requires the least amount of infrastructure or financial investment.

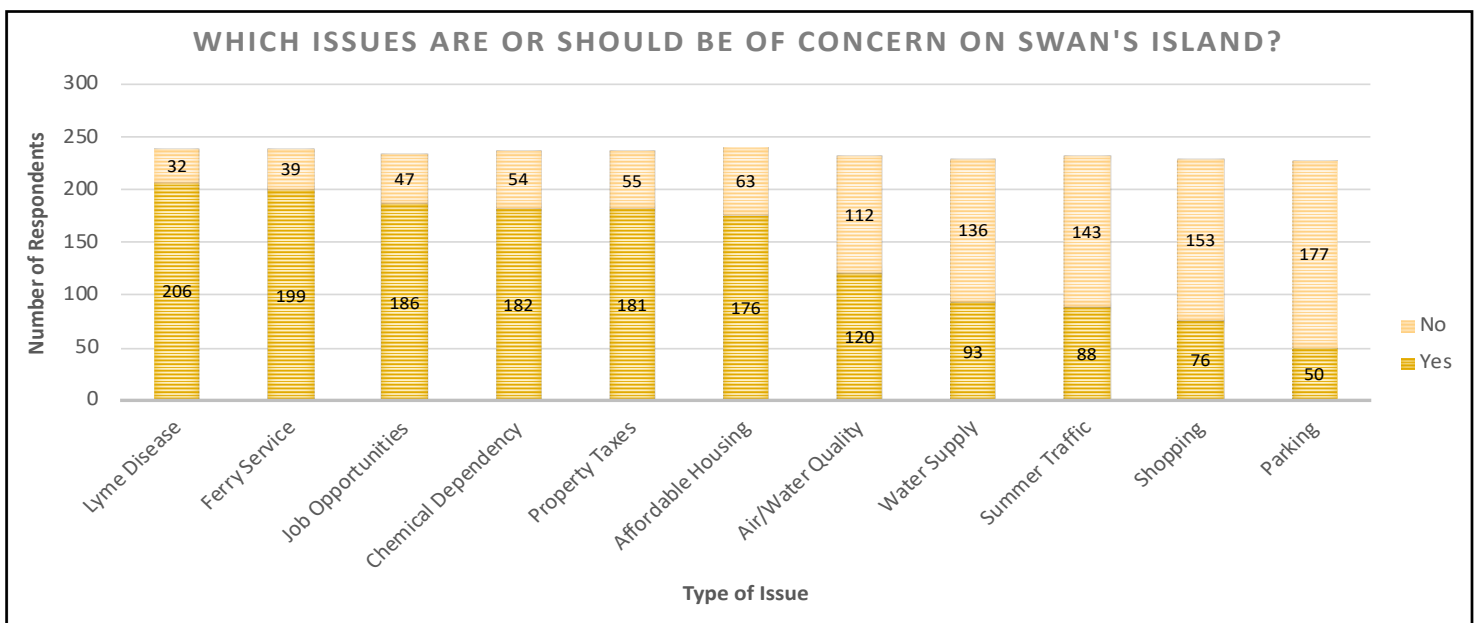
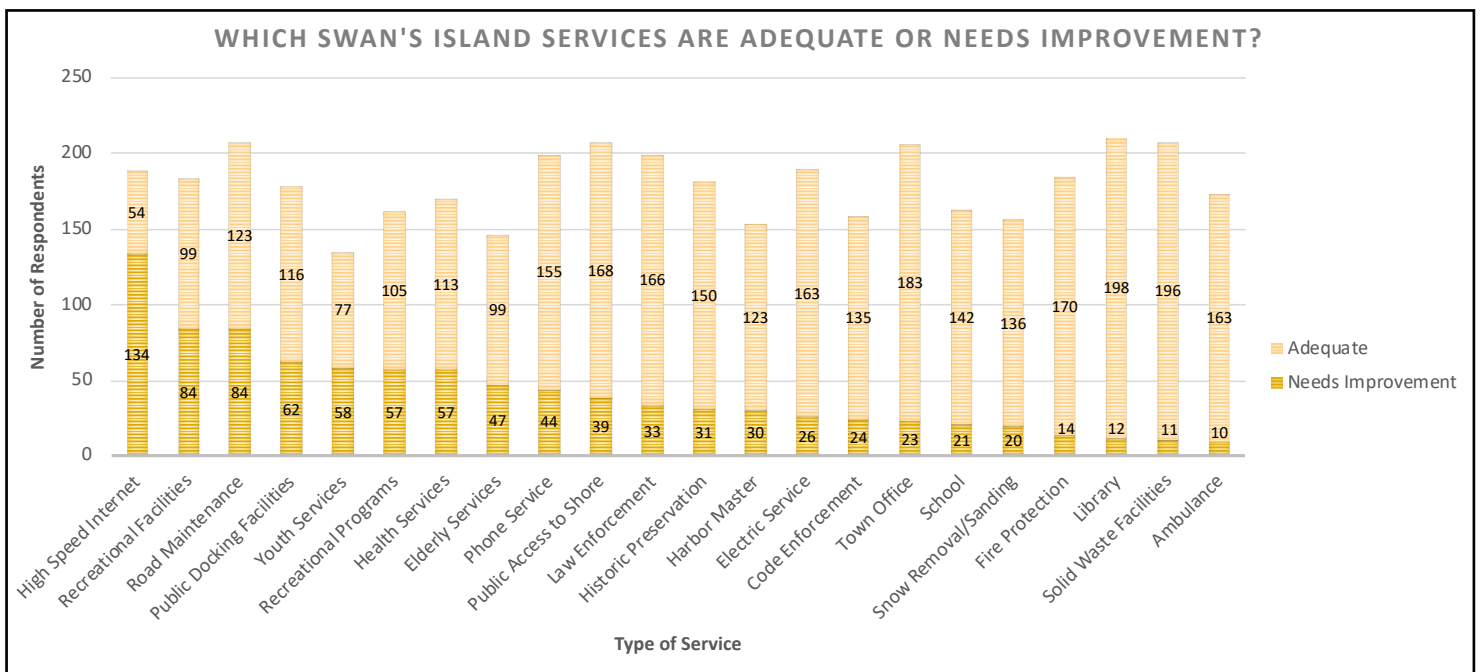
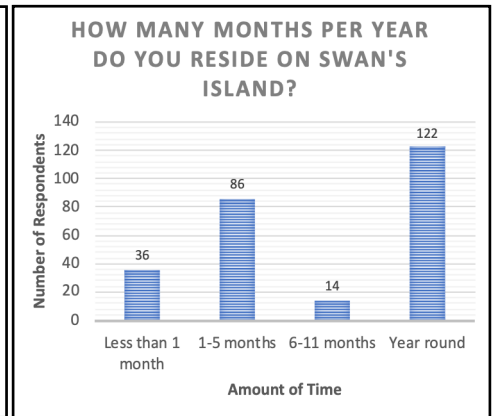
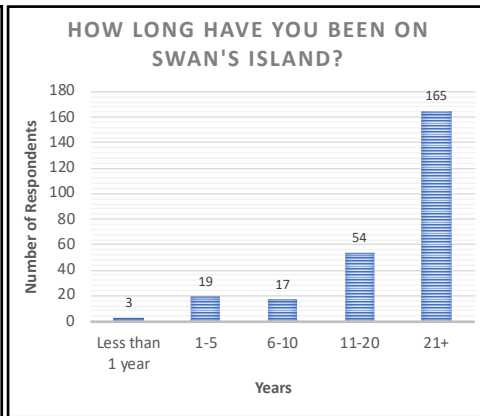
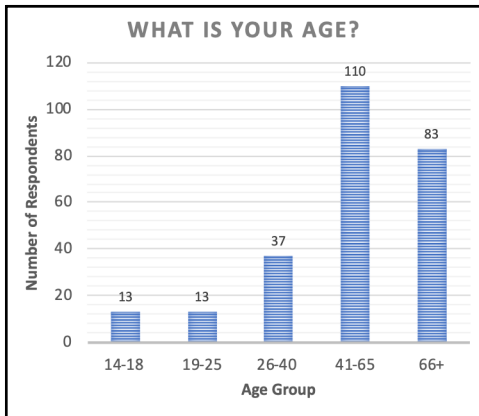
The Swan's Island Comprehensive Planning Committee would like to thank all individuals who set aside their time to answer the survey. The information that was received has been accounted for by all the committee's members, and the information will continue to be a very valuable reference in our process. We invite the public to access the complete results of the 82-page survey online from the town's website or in-person at the Town Office.

Respectfully,

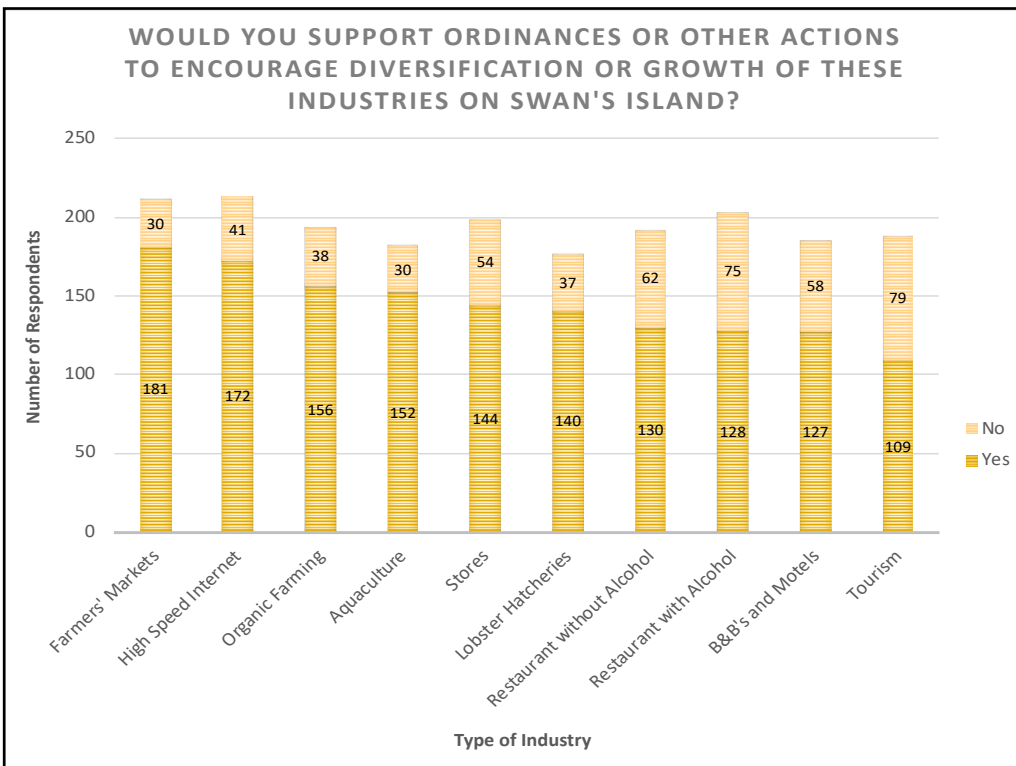
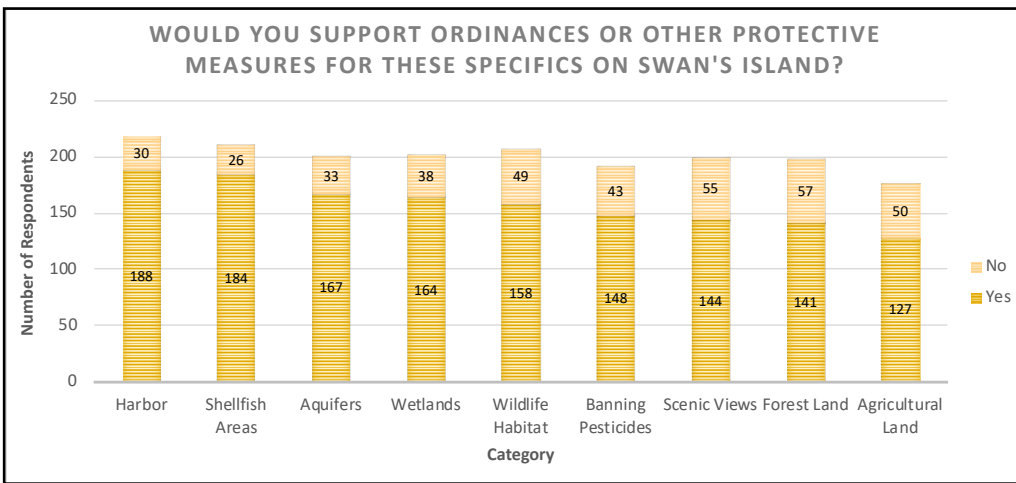
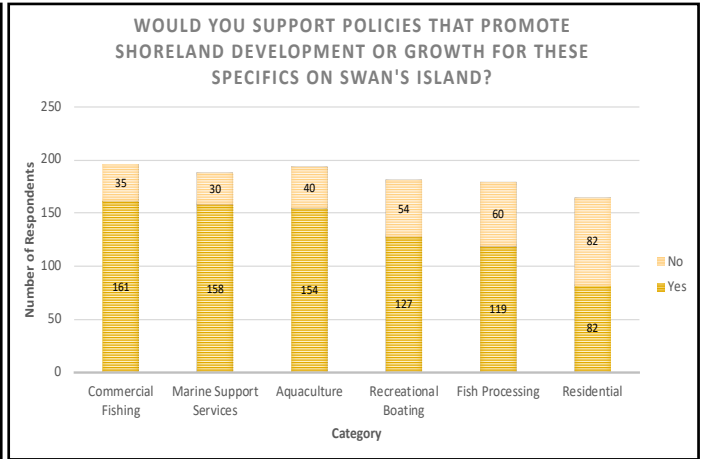
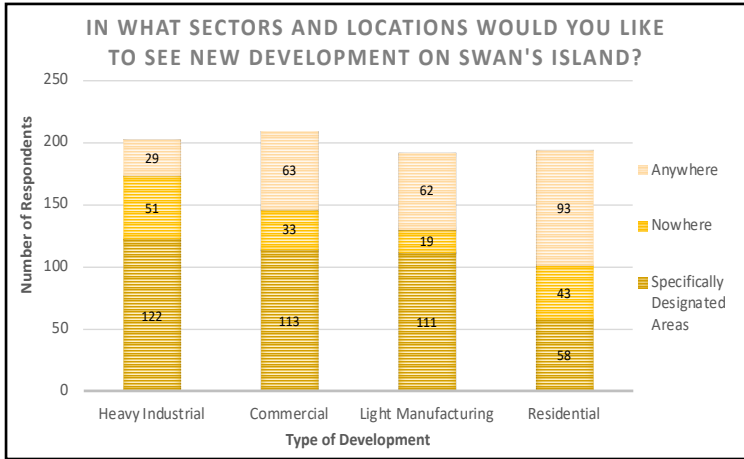
The Swan's Island Comprehensive Planning Committee

Belva Rae Staples, Christal Applin, Jennifer Hellman, Sonja Philbrook, Sue Estler (in memoriam), Sonny Sprague, Dexter Lee, Bob Pickup, Keith Harriton, Bill Banks, Russ Scholl, Wesley Staples, and Tom Macfie.

Swan's Island Comprehensive Plan – Highlights of the 2019 Initial Survey Results



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Want more information?

Visit the Town Office to access a hard copy of the 82-page document, which provides all the statistics and comments collected during the survey or view it online from the town's website.

The Swan's Island Comprehensive Planning Committee sincerely appreciates your time and input!