



# Public Workshop Meeting Summary

Meeting Date: August 24, 2023

## Introduction

---

The Town of Shelter Island is updating its Comprehensive Plan to address demographic and economic changes, new development trends, to control overdevelopment, and address the ongoing impacts of climate change. The prior plan was adopted in 1994. While New York State does not have a mandate for how often a plan should be developed, it is good practice to update the document every 10 years to reflect current community-established principles for the orderly and balanced future economic, social, physical, environmental, and fiscal development. In essence, the document serves as a roadmap to help Shelter Island to become a more sustainable, equitable, and livable community.

This plan was developed in three distinct stages, which are described below. All three stages incorporated public engagement meetings, events, and other activities to ensure that goals and recommendations are consistent with community priorities. The first stage, which occurred largely in 2021 involved a series of community workshops, forums, and other activities, culminating in the development of two interim documents: a SWOTCI Synthesis Report and Shelter Island 2020 (Existing Conditions). This stage also included a public survey with 1,013 responses.

In the second stage (2022), members of the Comprehensive Plan Task Force (CPTF) compiled previously completed work into 12 draft chapters, which were posted to the Town's website. This planning process included numerous meetings with stakeholders and the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) to confirm goals and objectives. Several public meetings were held to discuss various topics covered in the plan. 118 written comments were submitted by members of the community and received by the CPAC.

In the third stage, a consultant team was hired by the Town to compile all materials and present the Town Board a revised draft for consideration. The Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) met regularly to review drafts, provide feedback, and contribute ideas to ensure that the plan reflects the values and aspirations of the community. This stage also includes two public workshops. The first workshop was

held on August 24<sup>th</sup> over Zoom to gather feedback from the public on the draft goals and strategies. A second in-person workshop will be held on September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 11AM.

## Project Team

---

This workshop was led by BFJ Planning with assistance from the Comprehensive Plan Task Force.

### **BFJ Planning**

- Noah Levine, Principal-in-Charge
- Susan Favate, Resource Principal, Land Use and Zoning
- Christine Jimenez, Project Planner
- Emily Junker, Project Planner

### **Comprehensive Plan Task Force**

- Margaret Larsen, Councilwoman
- BJ Ianfolla, Councilwoman
- Julia Weisenberg, Planning Board

## Presentation and Breakout Room Discussions

---

Approximately 90 people joined the public workshop, not including the consultant team. The meeting consisted of a presentation, breakout group discussions, and a 'report back' session where moderators shared what was discussed in each breakout group. Noah Levine of BFJ Planning introduced the BFJ team, gave an overview of the night's agenda, and reviewed the functions of a Comprehensive Plan. Mr. Levine then discussed the planning process, community engagement, and the plan's chapters.

Noah Levine and Susan Favate then both gave an overview of goals and preliminary recommendations across the various plan topic areas such as: Housing, Economy, Transportation, Natural Resources and Water Quality, Parks, Cultural Resources, Sustainability, and Resilience. Workshop attendees were asked to answer an informal poll for each of the discussion categories to get them to think about issues and their relative importance before the breakout group discussions. These surveys were informal, and not scientific. They were helpful to get an informal understanding of participant perspectives to gauge the general sentiment surrounding certain issues or proposals.

After the conclusion of the presentation, the attendees were split into six breakout groups that were moderated by members of the consultant team and the CPTF. The moderators started discussions by asking participants to introduce themselves and to highlight their top priority for the Town. The conversation then moved into a discussion about specific action items to address in the near- and long-term. After 45 minutes of discussion, participants rejoined the larger group. Each of the moderators provided a short synopsis of what was discussed for everyone to hear. A summary of the discussions is provided later in this report.

## Meeting Recording

---

The recorded meeting can be watched on YouTube, accessed via the project page:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ueah0x9fF1o&t=2959s>

## Informal Poll Responses

---

### Top Priorities

What are your top 3 priorities to address in the Comprehensive Plan?  
(68 responses. Respondents could select multiple choices.)

Priority	Count	% of Respondents
<b>Protect aquifer and water quality</b>	59	87%
<b>Regulate the scale and design of new development</b>	39	57%
<b>Provide housing for a year-round economy</b>	31	46%
<b>Preserve open space and environmental assets</b>	31	46%
<b>Pursue sustainability and resiliency initiatives</b>	18	26%
<b>Enhance transportation options and reduce impacts from seasonal traffic</b>	9	13%
<b>Provide services for a year-round economy</b>	7	10%
<b>Ensure waterways are safe and usable for all stakeholders</b>	5	7%
<b>Other</b>	5	7%

### Residential Areas

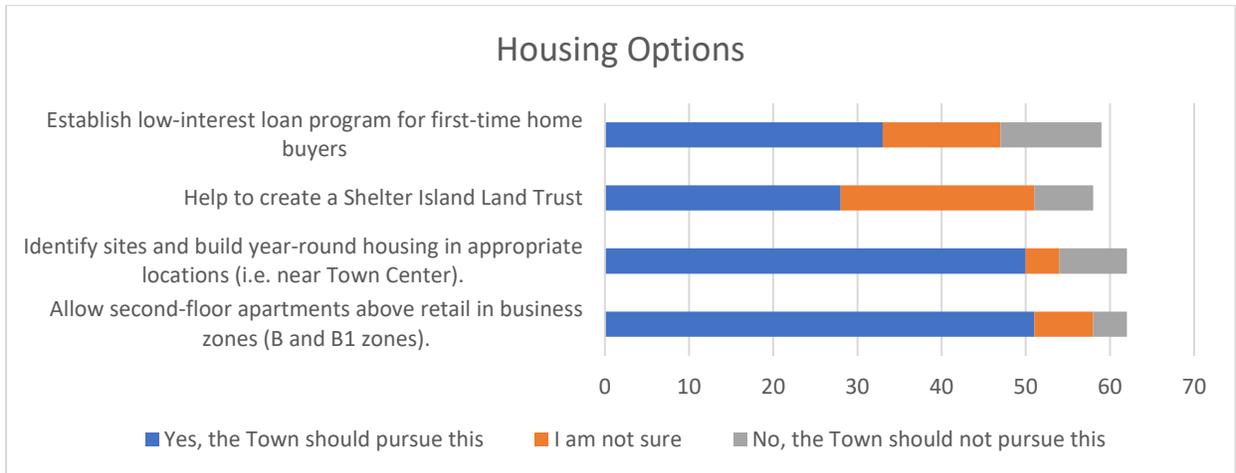
What are your top 2 priorities for residentially zoned areas?  
(66 responses. Respondents could select multiple choices.)

Priority	Count	% of Respondents
<b>Establish a limit on sizes of knock-down houses.</b>	40	61%
<b>Strengthen limits on density in residentially zoned areas.</b>	32	48%
<b>Strengthen subdivision ordinance to require land for open space.</b>	23	35%
<b>Monitor effectiveness of the short-term rental law.</b>	21	32%
<b>Adopt a Tree Preservation Local Law.</b>	14	21%
<b>Address issue of illegal conversions.</b>	12	18%
<b>Other (please discuss in breakout groups)</b>	4	6%
<b>I am not concerned with any of these strategies which limit potential development</b>	3	5%

### Housing Options

Which of these strategies for broadening housing options would you support (provided high quality of design and infrastructure)? (65 responses. Respondents could respond to all four or some of the options.)

Shelter Island Comprehensive Plan Update  
Public Workshop Summary



### Design Guidelines

Do you think it would be appropriate to develop design guidance for the following business districts?  
(70 responses. Respondents could select multiple choices.)

Area	Count	%
<b>In the Town Center area</b>	55	79%
<b>Other business districts along Routes 114/37</b>	49	70%
<b>Bridge Street</b>	43	61%
<b>Shelter Island Heights</b>	38	54%
<b>I am not sure</b>	9	13%

## Breakout Group Key Takeaways

---

Following the presentation, participants were moved into six different breakout groups to have an in-depth discussion about issues and priorities. Breakout groups were moderated by members of the consultant team and the CPTF. Most members of the CPAC were in attendance and contributed their knowledge to the discussions. In each group, moderators asked each participant to introduce themselves and share their top priorities. This was followed by an open discussion of issues and opportunities.

The summaries below reflect discussion topics that happened in each breakout room. The discussions from each group are compiled by topic area. Many of the comments were made in multiple groups, so comments were grouped into topic areas. Topics where there seemed to be a consensus and topics where there was discussion but no apparent consensus are represented as such.

### Discussion

#### Vision

- Several participants expressed a vision of preserving a sense of community, making the Island a welcoming place for all, maintaining the blend of year-round and seasonal populations, and preserving the unique character and environment of the Island.

#### Preserving Residential Neighborhoods

- **Density and Pace of Development** – Overall, there were concerns about density and the pace of development.
- **Gentrification** – Some participants felt that people moved to Island because it is secluded and are concerned that it is rapidly gentrifying and moving towards “a version of the Hamptons.”
- **McMansions and Knock Downs** – Consensus that zoning should prevent large houses and McMansions and should disincentivize and prevent knock downs.
  - o Some participants suggested that the Town consider using floor area ratio (FAR) or percentage of lot size to limit the size of structures on residential lots (including accessory structures).
- **Commercial Development** – Some participants expressed the desire to limit commercial development in residential neighborhoods.
- **Historic Preservation** – There was agreement that historic preservation is important. Participants mentioned codifying the preservation of Victorian cottages, and historic districts in areas with pre-existing nonconforming lots and small parcels.

#### Zoning

- **Zoning Loopholes** – Several participants expressed a concern about “loopholes” in the zoning code. Some of them said that people, or big businesses and developers, can negotiate or pressure the Town to get what they want. They suggested stronger regulations “with teeth” are needed to control development.
- **Code Enforcement** – There was general consensus that code enforcement is an issue and needs to be increased.

## Shelter Island Comprehensive Plan Update Public Workshop Summary

- **Design Guidelines** – People expressed support for design guidelines, but want to make sure uses are addressed as well.
  - o A participant expressed concern that design guidelines could be a back-door way to make non-conforming uses in the business zones conforming. The moderator clarified that design guidelines are only about aesthetics and do not affect use.
- **Spot Zoning and Downzoning** – Some participants said that there should not be spot zoning or downzoning (increased density) on the Island.
- **Town Center** – Someone said they do not want quarter-acre development in the Town Center.

### Water and Infrastructure

- **Water Quality** – Consensus that water quality is a major issue, the top issue for many participants, that needs to be addressed
- **Protect Surface Water and Aquifer** – Consensus that we need to protect surface waters (salt and fresh) and the aquifer.
- **Balance Housing and Water** – Several participants raised the concern of balancing housing development with the environmental impacts, particularly the impact on water and wastewater. One participant noted that on Bridge street and in the Center, there are uninhabitable apartments because water or wastewater is lacking.
- **Irrigation Regulations** – Several participants expressed the need to discuss and revise the irrigation regulations. One participant said that previously, the regulations required everyone to transition to cisterns within 10 years, but this was eliminated and wants to know why.
- **IA Systems** – Some participants expressed favor for IA systems everywhere instead of sewer systems in Shelter Island. They said that they are less costly and have other benefits.
- **Island-wide water district** – There was a recommendation for an island wide water district so that the town is in the driver's seat.
- **Water Chapter** – Participants expressed the desire to have a standalone Water Chapter in the Plan.

### Environment and sustainability

- **Preserve and Protect** – Participants expressed the desire to preserve open space, protect the natural environment, shorelines, wetlands, and trees.
- **Resiliency** – Participants expressed concerns about environmental resiliency in the long term, particularly related to Shelter Island's location surrounded by water. Concern about sea level rise, storms, and flooding.
- **Hazard Mitigation** – Jim Read, Chief of Police, said that Shelter Island has a hazard mitigation plan., and he is the emergency management coordinator for the town. He suggested a meeting with him to discuss further.
- **Wetlands Law** – Several people expressed concern about changes to the wetlands laws and change in jurisdiction and potential for new houses or docks in wetlands.
- **Bluff construction** – A participant expressed the need for a code that accounts for bluff construction so building on the sand Bluffs down to the water is restricted or regulated.
- **Noise** – Someone expressed the need for regulations to control noise.

### Economic Development

- **Economy for a year-round population** – Participants are concerned about the loss of economy to support year-round residents and guests. For example, the need for a pharmacy and grocery store on the island and concern about what would happen if those businesses were to close.
- **Town Center** –

Shelter Island Comprehensive Plan Update  
Public Workshop Summary

- Participants expressed support for mixed-use in Town Center and other improvements to walkability and vitality. There are very few restaurants and services and it feels very quiet, especially off-season.
- Desire for a diverse economic business center where the needs of the community are met, including entertainment, and services for daily life.
- **Attract and Retaining Businesses** – Some want to make sure that businesses are attracted to and retained on the Island.
- **Off-Island Businesses** – Some are worried about off-island businesses coming and buying up properties
- **Route 114 Corridor** – A participant expressed desire to improve the Route 114 corridor, which they said is currently an “eyesore.”
- **Cultural and Economic Diversity** – participants expressed a desire for cultural and economic diversity.

### Affordable Housing

- **Workforce Housing** – There was consensus that there is a need for workforce housing, particularly for ferry operators, emergency responders, and essential workers.
- **Housing for Range of Incomes** – There was consensus that there is a need for housing at a broader range of income levels including those in poverty, and low- and middle-income brackets.
- **Balance Housing and Water** – There was consensus about the concern of balancing the need for housing, water, and wastewater infrastructure.
- **Number of affordable housing units needed** – A question was raised about the number of affordable housing units needed and whether the state can mandate a number of affordable units to be met.
  - The state provides incentives for funding. For example, Shelter Island received a grant of \$2 million to build ADUs. Shelter Island has a housing plan that is reviewed every five years and includes a needs assessment.
- **Incentives** – A participant raised the concern about whether developers have enough incentive to build affordable housing.
- **Community Land Trust** – A participant expressed excitement about the idea of a land trust, but wanted to know how we ensure that the land trust idea is specific to housing and doesn’t compete with the preservation of open space.
- **Group Homes** – In one of the breakout groups, there was a discussion about group homes. Some said that restaurants purchase homes and turn them into group homes. The group decided that while it can be a quality of life issue, it is also a needed source of housing for local businesses.
- **Young Families** – Someone suggested affordable housing could help to keep and attract younger families, which are in decline.
- **Apartments on 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor in Business Corridors:** some people supported the idea of mixed-use (apartments over ground floor commercial) while others expressed their concerns.
  - A participant noted that The Heights do a good job of this, every commercial building has an apartment over it.
  - Consensus that we must ensure water and wastewater infrastructure can handle before any new apartments.
  - Concern with mixed use has more to do with the design of buildings rather than the use itself. There needs to be an architectural review board or some other mechanism to affect the look and feel of a property.
  - Someone noted the existing zoning is a barrier.

## Shelter Island Comprehensive Plan Update Public Workshop Summary

- Others insisted that we need to make sure that any new apartments are reserved as affordable.
- Concern that mixed-use buildings would be filled with short-term rentals and need for a mechanism to make sure apartments are year-round rentals.

### Community Services

- **Schools** – Discussion of potential strategies for addressing school facilities. No consensus. It was explained that the School District is a separate entity to the town and is in control of its own facilities.
  - Some participants were concerned about decline in school enrollments.
- **Food Insecurity** – A participant expressed the need to fix food insecurity problems on the Island.
- **Recreation** – A participant said that it is a priority to preserve recreation on the island.
- **Senior Services** – A participant noted that with the rise in senior population on the Island, senior needs and services should be addressed, for example, educating seniors about how to apply for property tax exemptions.
- **Youth Services** – Desire for youth services and activities for families.

### Transportation

- **Safety** - Participants expressed concerns about safety regarding traffic and bicycling.
  - Suggestion for an island-wide speed limit of 30 mph to promote safety
- **Ferry congestion** – Participants are concerned about Ferry congestion. Ferries are increasingly congested by people who don't live on the Island but use them to avoid traffic and commute from North Fork to South Fork. "Trade Parade"
- **Traffic** – Participants are concerned about traffic.
- **Bike lanes** – There was General agreement that Bike lanes are something people would support for safety reasons road. 114 is the primary corridor for bicycles. If Route 114 were a little wider, it would make a difference for bikes, But, there is also concern that widening the road would change the rural character. Some participants did not support bike lanes on local roads.

### Process

- **Concerns about implementation:**
  - Several participants expressed the importance of outlining priorities and providing a structured Implementation Plan.
  - Several participants suggested that a town planner be hired to help implement the plan.
  - Someone expressed concerns about the towns resources to implement the plan.
- **Concerns about Public Participation:**
  - Concern that not everyone is being represented and more needs to be done to connect with people who are in the Center, the West Neck area, and are not represented by HOAs.
  - Some expressed desire for a town hall style open house forum with a facilitator with the focus on important chapters of the comp plan (zoning, water, and housing).
  - Suggestion for more conversations and discussions regarding zoning and making sure that the public understands what the terms mean, the vocabulary and definitions (e.g. when we say things like "mixed-use" what exactly does "mixed-use" mean?). We need to make sure that things are well defined for the public to eliminate speculation and confusion.
  - Make sure people's comments are heard in this process. The Town needs to have a response on why some groups of comments were not addressed.
  - Town Government should be more participatory and welcoming in nature.

Shelter Island Comprehensive Plan Update  
Public Workshop Summary

- **Environmental Review:** Several participants expressed desire to have an environmental impact assessment and GEIS.
- **Science and Research** – Some suggested that there needs to be more science and research backing the plan. Suggestion for Hydrogeologist report.
- **1994 Plan** – Some participants felt that the 1994 plan was good, things have not changed much, and we should start from that plan.
- **Timing and Pace** – Several participants were concerned about the timing and pace of the planning process and feel it is being rushed. There needs to be sufficient time for the public to review the document and recommendations before it is considered by the Town Board.
- **CPAC** – Some felt that the CPAC Members are being marginalized. Others disagreed.
- **Transparency** – Several participants expressed desire for more transparency. Suggestion for regular updates.
- **Draft Plan** – People want to see a draft of the plan and recommendations.
- **Near Shore Overlay District** – A participant asked why language about the near-shore overlay district was removed from a prior draft of the plan.
- Comment that use of term “non-Island taxpayer” is divisive.