# PLANNING ISSUES IN BRANFORD

# 3

## Overview

Branford is updating the 2008 Plan of Conservation and Development for the community. A Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) is a document which lays out the long-term vision for the physical, economic, and social development of a community and recommends strategies to realize that vision. The POCD update, which will eventually be adopted by the Planning and Zoning Commission, is being prepared by a Committee comprised of people from many different parts of the community.

This booklet summarizes results from some introductory exercises which were conducted to set the stage for the POCD update. These exercises included:
- A public meeting devoted to hearing from Branford residents, and
- A discussion of issues with the POCD Update Committee,
- Responses to a survey of members of local boards and commissions,
- Responses to a survey of Town department heads, and
- Field trips around Branford.

Much of the discussion in this booklet is organized around the three main thematic elements of a Plan of Conservation and Development:
- What Branford may want to protect (conservation-related strategies),
- How Branford may want to guide future growth and change (development-related strategies),
- What Branford may want or need to support its overall vision (infrastructure-related strategies).

*"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."*

**Margaret Wheatley**
**Writer**

**Branford Green**

# Community Meeting (November 2017)

A community workshop meeting was held at Walsh Intermediate School on November 29 to get input from Branford residents.  At least 120 people attended the meeting and participated in the exercises described below.

1.  Place a blue dot on a map of Branford to show where you live.

2.  Think of things in Branford you are "proud" of and write them on a card and identify them by green dots on a map of Branford.

3.  Think of things in Branford you are "sorry" about and write them on a card and identify them by red dots on a map of Branford.

4.  Allocate planning points among boxes of topics that might be considered in the POCD to identify things you feel are priorities for the community to consider.

5.  Participate in an open discussion about the topics that received the most planning points

**Identifying "Sorrys"**



*Branford Eagle Photo*

**Allocating Planning Points**



*Branford Eagle Photo*

**Planning Points**



*Branford Eagle Photo*

**Community Discussion**



*Branford Eagle Photo*

# Where People Live

People attending the meeting were asked to place a "blue dot" on a map to illustrate where they live.

The distribution of dots seems to indicate that residents came from different parts of Branford and that there did not seem to be a *geographic* bias which might have skewed the results of the meeting.

**Where Attendees Lived**

# Prouds

People attending the meeting were asked to place a "green dot" on a map to identify things in Branford they were proud of. They were also asked to write these "prouds" on a card and submit it at the meeting.

The detailed compilation of comments based on the submitted cards is presented on the facing page.
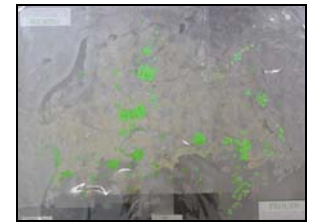
**Location of "Prouds"**

**Tabulation Of "Prouds"**

| Theme | Topic | | Representative Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Conservation-Related Issues** | **Natural Resources** | 8 | • Rivers / estuaries<br>• Water quality |
| | **Open Space** | 119 | • Open space in general<br>• Specific open space parcels<br>• Branford Land Trust<br>• Trails / linkages |
| | **Community Character** | 37 | • Scenic areas<br>• Historic resources<br>• People / organizations |
| | **Coastal Resources** | 31 | • Shoreline areas / waterfront<br>• Coastal views / access<br>• Thimble Islands |

| Theme | Topic | | Representative Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Development-Related Issues** | **Branford Center** | 69 | • Town Center<br>• Town Green<br>• Harbor / TOD area |
| | **Neighborhoods** | 29 | • Stony Creek<br>• Short Beach<br>• Indian Neck |
| | **Residential Development** | 0 | • (comments generally reflected neighborhoods) |
| | **Business / Economic Development** | 8 | • Local businesses<br>• Small businesses |

| Theme | Topic | | Representative Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Infrastructure-Related Issues** | **Community Facilities and Services** | 44 | • Libraries<br>• Schools<br>• Parks and recreation |
| | **Traffic and Circulation** | 2 | • Traffic control specifics |
| | **Walking / Biking / Transit / Rail** | 15 | • Train station<br>• Center walkability |
| | **Utilities** | 0 | • (none) |

**Comparison to 2008 POCD**

A similar exercise was conducted during the preparation of the 2008 POCD. The results from that meeting are summarized below:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Open Space** | 140 |
| **Comm. Facilities** | 90 |
| **Town Center / Green** | 81 |
| **Coastal Resources** | 72 |
| **Neighborhoods** | 28 |
| **Transportation** | 16 |
| **Community Character** | 12 |
| **Business Dev.** | 11 |
| **Natural Resources** | 7 |
| **Historic Resources** | 5 |
| **Residential Dev.** | 2 |
| **Utilities** | 1 |



As can be seen, the top three categories remained unchanged. This suggests these topics are "durable" and strongly resonate with Branford residents.

# Sorrys

People attending the meeting were then asked to place a "red dot" on a map to identify things in Branford they were sorry about. They were also asked to write these "sorrys" on a card and submit it at the meeting.

The detailed compilation of comments based on the submitted cards is presented on the facing page.

**Location of "Sorrys"**

## Tabulation Of "Sorrys"

| Theme | Topic | | Representative Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Conservation-Related Issues** | **Natural Resources** | 11 | • Development on riverfront<br>• Water pollution<br>• IWC restructuring |
| | **Open Space** | 4 | • Beach / park conditions |
| | **Community Character** | 21 | • Blight / derelict properties<br>• Lack of design review<br>• Unattractive "gateways" |
| | **Coastal Resources** | 10 | • Sea level rise / flooding<br>• Lack of easy access to water |

| Theme | Topic | | Representative Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Development-Related Issues** | **Branford Center** | 4 | • TOD redevelopment<br>• Vacancies |
| | **Neighborhoods** | 0 | • (none) |
| | **Residential Development** | 24 | • High density development<br>• Number of apartments / condos<br>• Lack of certain housing types |
| | **Business / Economic Development** | 90 | • Route 1 development patterns<br>• Costco / not Costco<br>• Appearance at "pretzel" area<br>• Empty storefronts |

| Theme | Topic | | Representative Comments |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Infrastructure-Related Issues** | **Community Facilities and Services** | 26 | • Senior Center<br>• Walsh School |
| | **Traffic and Circulation** | 40 | • Exit 53 configuration<br>• Traffic congestion / speeding |
| | **Walking / Biking / Transit / Rail** | 19 | • Lack of sidewalks / walkability<br>• Lack of bike lanes |
| | **Utilities** | 0 | • (none) |

### Comparison to 2008 POCD

A similar exercise was conducted during the preparation of the 2008 POCD. The results from that meeting are summarized below:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Transportation** | 128 |
| **Business Dev.** | 104 |
| **Residential Dev.** | 71 |
| **Community Facilities** | 28 |
| **Community Character** | 14 |
| **Coastal Resources** | 12 |
| **Open Space** | 3 |
| **Town Center / Green** | 3 |
| **Neighborhoods** | 1 |
| **Natural Resources** | 4 |
| **Historic Resources** | 4 |
| **Utilities** | 1 |



In a change from 10 years ago, business development has now risen to the top of the list of sorrys. Community facility issues have replaced residential development on the list.

The planning point totals were audited after the meeting. People who attended the meeting may note a slight discrepancy between the planning point totals reported at that meeting and the totals reported here.

During the tabulation at the meeting, it appears that some counts of the *number* of bills were tabulated as the *value* of the bills.

Given time constraints at the meeting, it is understandable how this could occur and so the audit was recounted twice to confirm the amounts reported herein.

# Planning Points

People attending the meeting were given 50 "planning points" to allocate among 12 boxes representing topics typically addressed as part of a Plan of Conservation and Development. Residents were asked to allocate the planning points (one @ 20 points, two @ 10 points each, and two @ 5 points each) in the boxes to reflect what they felt was important for Branford to address as part of the planning process.

At least 115 people participated in the planning points exercise. The results are presented below. These results were presented at the meeting and the remainder of the meeting was devoted to discussing the topics that got the most points.

| | 20s | 10s | 5s | Points | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Conservation-Related Issues** | | | | | **3,425** |
| **Open Space** | 440 | 400 | 180 | **1,020** | |
| **Coastal Resources** | 400 | 430 | 145 | **975** | |
| **Natural Resources** | 340 | 280 | 160 | **780** | |
| **Community Character** | 320 | 240 | 90 | **650** | |

| | 20s | 10s | 5s | Points | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Development-Related Issues** | | | | | **1,030** |
| **Business Development** | 140 | 110 | 75 | **325** | |
| **Housing Diversity** | 100 | 100 | 55 | **255** | |
| **Residential Development** | 120 | 60 | 50 | **230** | |
| **Branford Center / Villages** | 60 | 120 | 40 | **220** | |

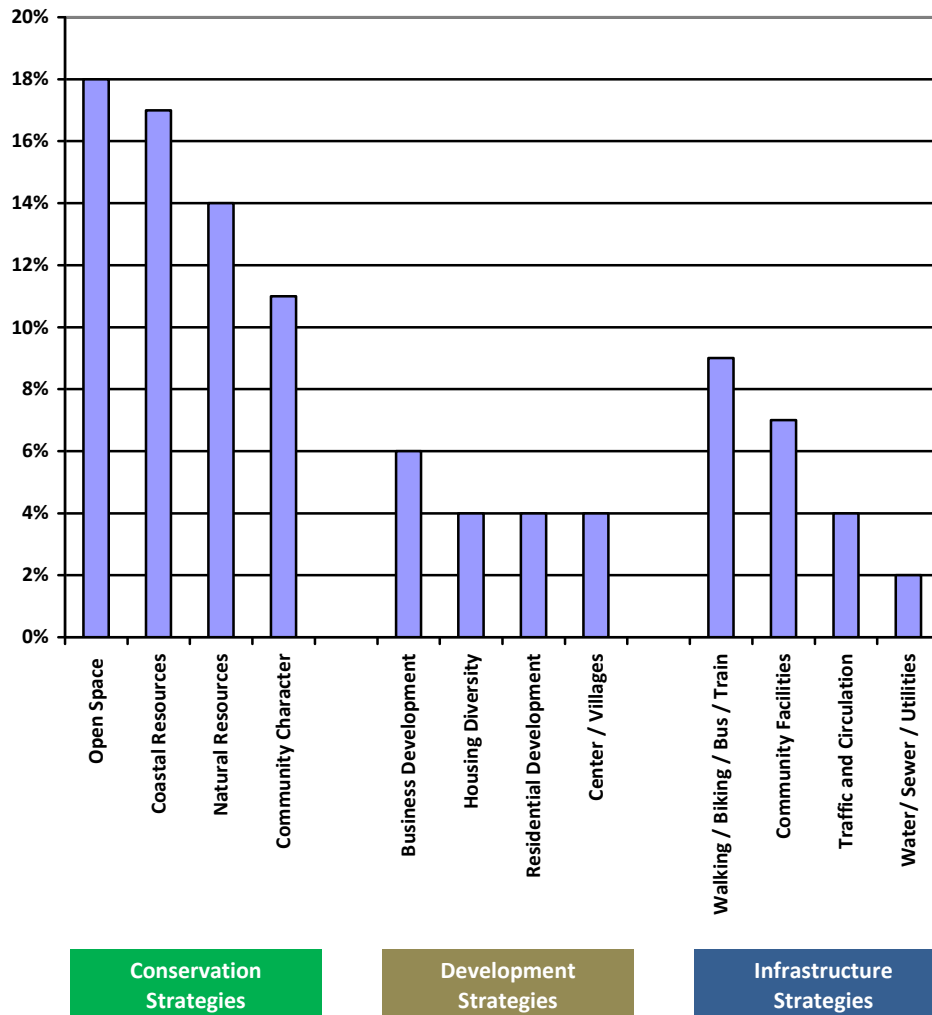| | 20s | 10s | 5s | Points | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Infrastructure-Related Issues** | | | | | **1,315** |
| **Walking / Biking / Bus** | 180 | 180 | 175 | **535** | |
| **Community Facilities** | 100 | 220 | 95 | **415** | |
| **Traffic and Circulation** | 60 | 130 | 40 | **230** | |
| **Water/ Sewer / Utilities** | 40 | 60 | 35 | **135** | |

| | | | | | **5,770** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Conservation-Related Issues Most Important Theme**

On a thematic basis, conservation issues received 59 percent of all planning points allocated (3,425 of 5,770 points). The infrastructure theme received 23 percent of all planning points allocated (1,315 of 5,770 points) and the development theme received about 18 percent of all planning points allocated (1,030 of 5,770 points).

**Open Space And Coastal Resources Most Important Topic**

On a topical basis, open space (1,020 points) received about 18 percent of all planning points allocated. This was closely followed by coastal resources (975 points) with about 17 percent of all planning points allocated. The chart below shows the distribution of planning points among all topics.

**PUBLIC MEETING - Planning Point Results By Topic**



| Conservation Strategies | Development Strategies | Infrastructure Strategies |

In the planning points discussion, people were asked:

- Why did you put your planning points in that box?

- Why is this important for Branford?

- Why is this an important topic to consider as part of the POCD?

# Planning Points Discussion

While the audit reflected a slight variation in the ranking of some of the topics, the discussion points are presented in the order of discussion.

## COASTAL RESOURCES (975 points)

**Possible Verbs**
- **Preserve**
- **Protect**
- **Plan**

- We need to look at rising seas and climate change
- How ill Branford address a possible sea level rise scenario of two feet or more?
- We need to look at pollution / health of the water
- Property values / tax base will be affected by what happens in the coastal area

- Accessibility to the water is important

- Coastal areas enhance our attractiveness and support tourism as well

- We need to figure out how to be resilient
- Look at how to address resiliency in a variety of ways
    - o Public lands versus private lands
    - o Access to property
    - o Providing / protecting infrastructure

**Possible Verbs**
- **Increase**
- **Protect**
- **Maintain**
- **Link**

## OPEN SPACE (1,020 points)

- We need to preserve it – once it's gone, it's gone

- Open space enhances the quality of life, enhances community character, provides animal habitat, protects the land, protects water quality, allows children and adults to experience nature

- Open space also acts as a balance to development and reduces population pressures

- It will be important to define in the POCD what is meant by the term "open space"
- Is it public? Private? Protected? Managed? What is it?

## NATURAL RESOURCES (780 points)

- We need to take care of natural resources
- There are some major pollution / water quality issues
    - Short Beach
    - Branford Point
- Development threatens natural resources

- Air quality is a concern
- Use of pesticides is also a concern
- Biodiversity and invasive species need to be addressed
- Wildlife habitats in general (and pollinators specifically)

- We also need to be looking at permeable surfaces ("green infrastructure")
- Perhaps we need a watershed-based plan

- We also need to consider sustainability in terms of renewable energy and similar things
- This could include solar farms, wind farms, tidal generation, electric charging stations, etc.

**Possible Verbs**
- **Preserve**
- **Protect**
- **Enhance**
- **Prioritize**
- **Manage**

## COMMUNITY CHARACTER (650 points)

- Community character reflects a lot of things
    - Coastal character
    - Historic buildings and sites
    - Volunteer organizations
    - New England village and buildings
    - Neighborhoods
    - Community traditions
    - Community facilities and services
    - Sidewalks and porches
    - Accomplished professionals / volunteers
    - Arts community
    - Compassionate, caring residents
    - Restaurants / brewery
    - Community events / activities

- Mature trees are being cut down in some places and this is affecting character
- If we are going to take them down, we need a tree replacement strategy

- Light pollution is a concern

- POCD should recognize the importance and value of preserving, protecting, and maintaining the historic aspects of Branford (historic sites, structures, and landscapes)

**Possible Verbs**
- **Preserve**
- **Enhance**
- **Promote**
- **Celebrate**

## WALKING / BIKING / TRANSIT (535 points)

**Possible Verbs**
- **Plan**
- **Facilitate**
- **Improve**
- **Promote**

- Walking and biking enhances the community for an aging population, for families, for almost everyone
- This feeds into the concept of sustainability
- Also enhances access to resources in the community
- Allows a healthy lifestyle

- Some places are unsafe at present for walkers, bikers, etc.
- This can be due to the location (speed, width, volume, visibility, etc.)
- Can also be due to behavior (need to educate walkers / bikers / drivers)
  - Walkers should face traffic
  - Bicyclists should go with traffic

- We need a more complete approach (a "complete streets" approach?)
- Need to make a system
- There are many places with no sidewalks
- A bike path on Route 146 would be great
- Hopes the Shoreline Greenway will make this better
- Need to consider flooding and flooding potential in any walking / biking routes

- Wish there was a more complete Shoreline East schedule

- It would be great if there was a town shuttle, especially in the summertime
- Maybe we could access some of the "VW settlement funds" to support a shuttle

- The POCD should identify safe pedestrian routes in the Town Center
- The POCD should identify safe bike routes in the community

## TRAFFIC / CIRCULATION (230 points)

**Possible Verbs**
- **Manage**
- **Improve**
- **Optimize**
- **Calm**

- Traffic is a mess
- Lack of full interchange at Exit 53 is amess and this creates bottlenecks at exit 54 – we need to get this fixed

- Traffic speed is an issue in residential neighborhoods
- Reduce speed limits in school zones
- Same with heavy trucks / commercial vehicles
- Look at traffic calming strategies?

- There is too much parking on some residential streets
- We should look to improve / maintain street lighting
- Snow management is an real issue in some areas
- Stony Creek has special issues for visitors (dead-end streets, etc.)

- We should identify / redo dangerous intersections
- Adding right turn lanes (and/or left turn lanes) would help in some areas
- Limit major traffic generators

**OPEN DISCUSSION / OTHER TOPICS**

- Feels the POCD process needs more opportunities for public input
- This should be discussed by the POCD Committee

- Concerned that the phone survey as part of the POCD may not be useful
- May not reach a lot of people in certain age groups
- Should it be printed / mailed or on-line?

- Maybe we should organize the POCD around "planning districts" (geographic areas rather than thematic issues
- Maybe the POCD needs a fourth theme to address environmental / climate issues

- Although it did not get a lot of points at this meeting, growing the tax base needs to be a major consideration
- Branford needs to provide more opportunities
- Branford needs the tax base and the tax revenue to provide for the things people are saying they want

- Development needs to be given strong consideration in the POCD since it can either help us meet our goals or hinder us from getting there
- We can't just stand still
- We need good strategies on how to guide development
- Maybe we need a "design plan" in each of the sorry areas in order to promote appropriate redevelopment and take some of the tax burden off residential properties
- Maybe we could redevelop these areas into a blend of appropriate development ./ redevelopment reflecting historic patterns and also preserve open space and important resources

- The 2008 POCD talked about Branford as a bio-tech / start-up hub and we need to continue this

- The "5-year assessment of POCD implementation" should be put on the Town website

- Implementation is a key issue
- Capital investments should be tied to the POCD so that residents can track how those investments implement the POCD

- How can the POCD be made more relevant to the PZC?
- Can there be a checklist that goes with certain applications so the applicant has to demonstrate consideration for the PZC recommendations?

- Maybe "sustainability" could be a common theme throughout the POCD
    - o Natural resource sustainability
    - o Economic sustainability

- Given we are a shoreline community, beaches are an important consideration

Responses were received from 38 people representing:
- Representative Town Meeting,
- Planning and Zoning Commission,
- Branford Center Review Board,
- Board of Finance,
- Economic Development Commission,
- Board of Education,
- Elderly Services Commission,
- Shellfish Commission,
- Public Building Commission,
- Willoughby Wallace Memorial Library,
- Water Pollution Control Authority,
- Parks and Recreation Commission,
- Branford Housing Authority, and
- Other boards and commissions.

# Board/Commission Member Survey

In the fall of 2017, a survey was circulated to members of different boards and commissions in Branford. Word clouds of the responses and some common comments are presented below.

**1. What do you *particularly like* about Branford and how it has developed?**

| Word Cloud | Downtown Area Upgrades Small Town Neighborhoods Branford Business Town Center Shoreline Open Space House Services Size Public Schools |
|---|---|
| Common Themes | • Downtown's character / ambience / unique businesses<br>• Distinctive villages and strong neighborhoods<br>• Coastal location and amenites<br>• Culture and personality fo the community<br>• Open space and overall character |

**2. Is there anything about how Branford has developed that you *do not care for*?**

| Word Cloud | Zoning Transportation Commercial Retail Center Apartments Development West Main Street Town Process Condos Short Route 1 Waterfront Condominiums Exit 56 |
|---|---|
| Common Themes | • Poor commercial areas / lack of coherent vision / lack of design review<br>• Too many condos<br>• Lack of adherence to POCD recommendations<br>• Excessive number of town buildings / Cost of town facility renovations<br>• Pace of economic development has slowed |

3. **What do you see as the _greatest challenge or need_ facing Branford in the next 10 to 20 years?**

| Word Cloud | Continuing Employers Affordable Housing Increasing Branford Beautiful Old Development Senior Town Businesses like Costco Tax Biggest Population Policies Attracting |
|---|---|
| Common Themes | • Addressing flooding / sea level rise<br>• Growing tax base / economy while maintaining community character<br>• Building the tax base / maintaining a vibrant local economy<br>• Changing age composition<br>• Mitigating traffic congestion |

4. **What types of things should Branford _encourage_ in the future?**

| Word Cloud | Open Space Restaurants Community Manufacturing Encourage Recreation Town Existing Development Facilities Public Quality Businesses Tax Services |
|---|---|
| Common Themes | • Placemaking / better design of developments<br>• Fixing the Exit 53 interchange<br>• Growing the tax base / more and better economic development<br>• Quality municiapl services and facilities (edication, recreation, etc.) |

5. **What types of things should Branford _discourage_ in the future?**

| Word Cloud | GREEN Government Parking Lots Community Housing Economic Development Big Box Stores Open Space Water Future Condominiums Town |
|---|---|
| Common Themes | • Poor commercial development<br>• Significant amounts of "big box" development<br>• Multi-family housing, especially if not transit-oriented<br>• Not keeping enough "green" areas |

**6. As you think about Town services and facilities in Branford, what do you feel should be the _major community focus_ during the next 10 years?**

| Word Cloud | Town Green Middle Educational Friendly School Aging Population Public Works Sea Level Rise Services Surrounding Towns Center Board Open Space Residents Maintaining |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Addressing needs of an aging population<br>• Coastal issues / sea level rise / climate change<br>• Improving / maintaining educational system and infrastructure<br>• Improving pedestrian accomodations<br>• Link the train stsation area to downtown<br>• Maintaing / enhancing community services<br>• Addressing / solving Exit 53 |

**7. What topics or issues do you feel should be considered for inclusion in the Plan?**

| Word Cloud | Parking Resiliency Public Municipal Development School Town Green Branford Existing Plan Recreation Open Space |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Make sure we follow through with implementation of recommendations<br>• More opportunities for public input<br>• Promotion of everything that makes Branford a desirable place to live<br>• Sustainability<br>• Resiliency<br>• Shared services with nearby communities<br>• Upgrading the school system<br>• Thoughtful development of riverfront areas<br>• Enhance tourism<br>• Make the POCD a living dicument subject to regular mainteance and updating<br>• Find ways to attract and keep younger people |

# Department Head Survey

In the fall of 2017, a survey was circulated to Town of Branford department heads. *Some of those responses* are summarized below:

1. **What do you see as the *greatest challenge* facing your department over the next five to ten years?**

| Word Cloud | Costs Services Town Development |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Meeting needs with resources available (staff / funds)<br>• Mainaining the facilities and infrastructure we have<br>• Addressing changing needs of a growing older population<br>• Coastal resiliency issues will take funds from existing programs |

2. **Are there any major needs for *your department* that should be considered for inclusion in the Plan?**

| Word Cloud | Facility Town Housing Improvement |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Staffing<br>• Funding<br>• Meeting growing need of an aging population<br>• Maintaining / enhancing what we have |

3. **As you think about *other municipal departments* in Branford, what do you feel is the major community facility need during the next ten years?**

| Word Cloud | School Town Public Works Facility |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Public works facility<br>• Sliney School<br>• Emergency shelter outside a floodplain<br>• Repurpose elementary schools for elderly housing and build state-of-the-art schools for the projected enrollment |

4. **Now thinking about all issues facing the community, what do you see as the *greatest challenge or need* facing Branford in the next ten to twenty years?**

| Word Cloud | Town Residential Increase Coastal Senior Population Sewer Quality of Life |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Economy<br>• Infrastructure<br>• Coastal resiliency / sea level rise / flooding<br>• Maintaining character<br>• Sidewalks and parking in the Town Center area<br>• Meeting growing need of an aging population |

5. **What types of things should Branford *encourage* in the future?**

| Word Cloud | Tax Strong Town Sidewalks Development Services |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Strong growth while preserving important resources<br>• Tax base growth<br>• Low impact development<br>• Maintaining our small town atmosphere<br>• Support the businesses we have<br>• Bike lanes and sidewalks<br>• Expansion of EMS to meet growing needs of an aging population |

6. **What types of things should Branford *discourage* in the future?**

| Word Cloud | Policies Town Housing |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • High density housing<br>• Intensive development that does not maintain / enhance character<br>• Big box retail |

**7. Are there other topics or issues that you feel should be considered for inclusion in the Plan?**

| Word Cloud | Town Outreach Community Development |
|---|---|
| **Common Themes** | • Outrach program to entice businesses<br>• Review location of all zoning districts (IG) and update the zoning map<br>• Restrict / limit the locations where PDD can be used<br>• More locations for community gatherings and events<br>• Use of Tabor property (recreation, events, etc.) |

# Notes & Comments

Planimetrics

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