



Saco Comprehensive Plan Draft Plan Public Input Summary

Public Open House: November 17, 2021 at City Hall

Virtual Open House: November 22 – December 12, 2021



City staff and the planning team from Stantec kicked off a public review period for the draft comprehensive plan with an in-person open house at City Hall. More than 40 community members participated, of which about two-thirds were attending their first comprehensive plan event. Attendees included long-time residents, people who just moved to Saco within the last year and want to learn about their new home, young people passionate about addressing climate change and resiliency, and elected officials. Attendees browsed a poster gallery of draft plan recommendations, talked with planning team members to share comments and ask questions, and recorded their opinions with written comments and dot sticker voting.

A virtual open house complemented this in-person event to allow more people to participate on their own time and comfort level. Information about the virtual open house was posted on social media, included in the City's December e-newsletter, shared with families by Saco Schools, and



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available on post cards at the City Clerk's office. The interactive project website included the posters from the in-person event with a survey and interactive map to collect feedback. More than 230 unique people visited the website over three weeks. While survey participants were fewer, almost half were new to the comprehensive planning process.

Policy prioritization: The nine goals of the comprehensive plan are derived from the guiding principles and are each supported by a series of policies. Open house attendees reviewed posters with information on each goal and its draft policy recommendations. Comments were generally supportive of the policies and suggested further enhancements or more specific ideas. Virtual open house participants selected their top priority for each goal:

Downtown

1. Create an outdoor community gathering space suitable for both larger events and daily interactions among residents. Study opportunities for larger spaces at Pepperell Square, Pepperell Park, Saco Island, and Jubilee Park. (33%)
2. Recruit and retain local businesses to activate ground floor spaces along Main Street - especially food and beverage options, daily needs, and arts/culture. (29%)

Economic Development

1. Focus business attraction efforts on industry sectors with local and regional strength; that provide jobs that meet the needs, skills, and aspirations of Saco's workforce. (32%)
2. Encourage new development that supports the quality of life and amenities that attract workers and residents. (27%)

Housing

1. Protect natural settings and rural areas without existing public water and sewer from encroaching development by encouraging new housing development at greater densities in areas with existing public infrastructure. (45%)
2. Allow for and encourage a variety of housing options to meet the budgets and needs of the full spectrum of Saco residents including aging Baby Boomers, young people, low-to-moderate income residents, first-time homebuyers, and new residents. (23%)

Transportation/Mobility

1. Upgrade walkability around key locations such as grocery stores, schools, transit nodes, health centers, senior centers, and destinations like parks and beaches. (38%)
2. Enhance and support safe vehicle flows. (24%)

Environmental Stewardship



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1. Conserve critical natural resources such as watersheds, prime farmland, and wetlands. (43%)
2. Develop and/or maintain cooperative relationships with neighboring communities, regional and state partners, and advocacy groups to protect natural resources. (29%)

Recreation/Active Living

1. Promote more housing, commercial development, and public facilities such as schools and services in walkable mixed-use neighborhoods that are served by sidewalks, transit, and bicycle facilities to support a variety of active transportation modes. (38%)
2. Promote and maintain existing parks, trails, and open spaces. (29%)

Resiliency/Sustainability

1. Develop capacity to adapt and respond to various climate change impacts. (20%)
- T-2. Promote sustainable construction techniques in new development. (15%)
- T-2. Increase economic resiliency through diversification of the local job base. (15%)

Public Infrastructure/Services

1. Invest in Saco Schools to modernize facilities by maximizing State funding opportunities and working within local funding constraints. (43%)
2. Align public infrastructure investment with identified growth, economic development, environmental, transportation, and other City goals. (24%)

Fiscal Capacity

1. Conduct fiscal cost/benefit analyses for proposed developments over a threshold value to be determined - including both housing and commercial developments - to identify the full scope of direct and indirect costs and benefits to City finances. (32%)
2. Link the annual Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process to Comprehensive Plan goals, policies, and strategies to demonstrate alignment. (26%)

First Five/Next Five: In-person and virtual open house participants identified their top three priorities for implementing the comprehensive plan. The top five were consistent across both groups of people although the relative order was different for each.



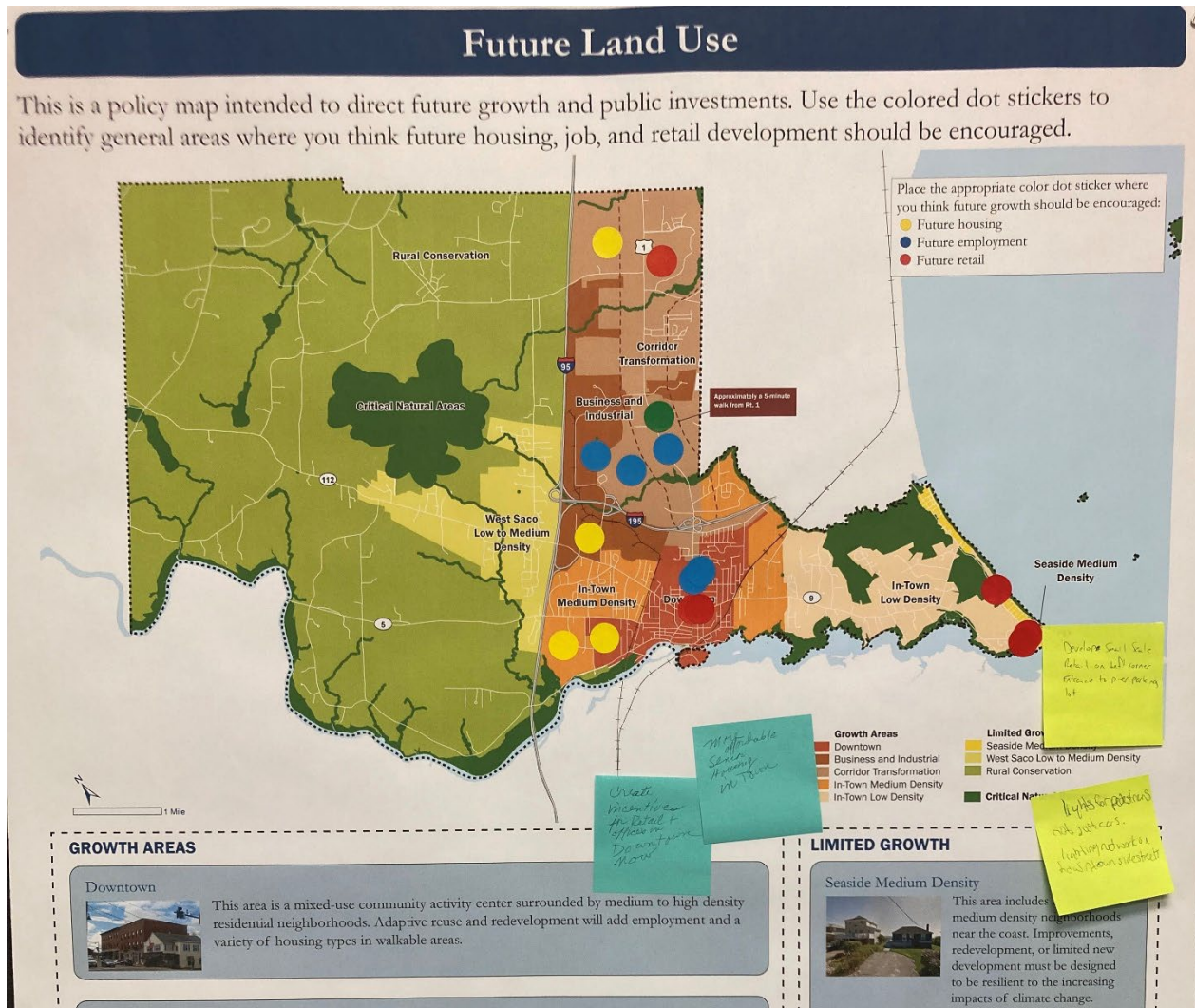
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	Open House		Online		TOTAL	
Develop Climate Adaptation Plan + Action Strategy	19	25%	6	11%	25	19%
Encourage walkable mixed-use neighborhood development with higher densities where public water and sewer exist (e.g. Saco Island, Portland Road, Ocean Park Road/Route 5)	11	15%	9	16%	20	15%
Attract new jobs and businesses near existing and planned transit service.	8	11%	10	18%	18	14%
Invest in new school construction and other school improvements.	10	13%	7	12%	17	13%
Invest in public infrastructure in fiscally responsible ways to support projected growth and increase environmental sustainability.	5	7%	10	18%	15	11%
Facilitate new housing in growth areas across a range of types and affordability.	8	11%	5	9%	13	10%
Develop places and programs that support a lively Downtown.	6	8%	5	9%	11	8%
Improve network of pedestrian and bicycle connections.	5	7%	1	2%	6	5%
Conduct property tax revaluation to appraise all real property to its full and fair value.	1	1%	3	5%	4	3%
Invest in public safety facilities to improve emergency operations and keep pace with growth.	2	3%	1	2%	3	2%
	75		57		132	

Future Land Use Character Areas: The future land use map is an important guiding policy tool to inform future decisions about places to encourage growth and places to encourage preservation. Character areas are classified as growth areas, where most future growth should be encouraged; limited growth areas, where some future growth may occur but which are not intended for significant growth; and critical natural areas, important ecological resources that should be protected from the impacts of development.

Colored dots on the poster map and pins on the virtual map demonstrate that people would like to see future growth in already developed “in-town” locations instead of the more rural, less developed areas of Saco. Comments included two with interest in retail or commercial development near Camp Ellis and several about the importance of protecting uplands and large habitat blocks in North Saco.

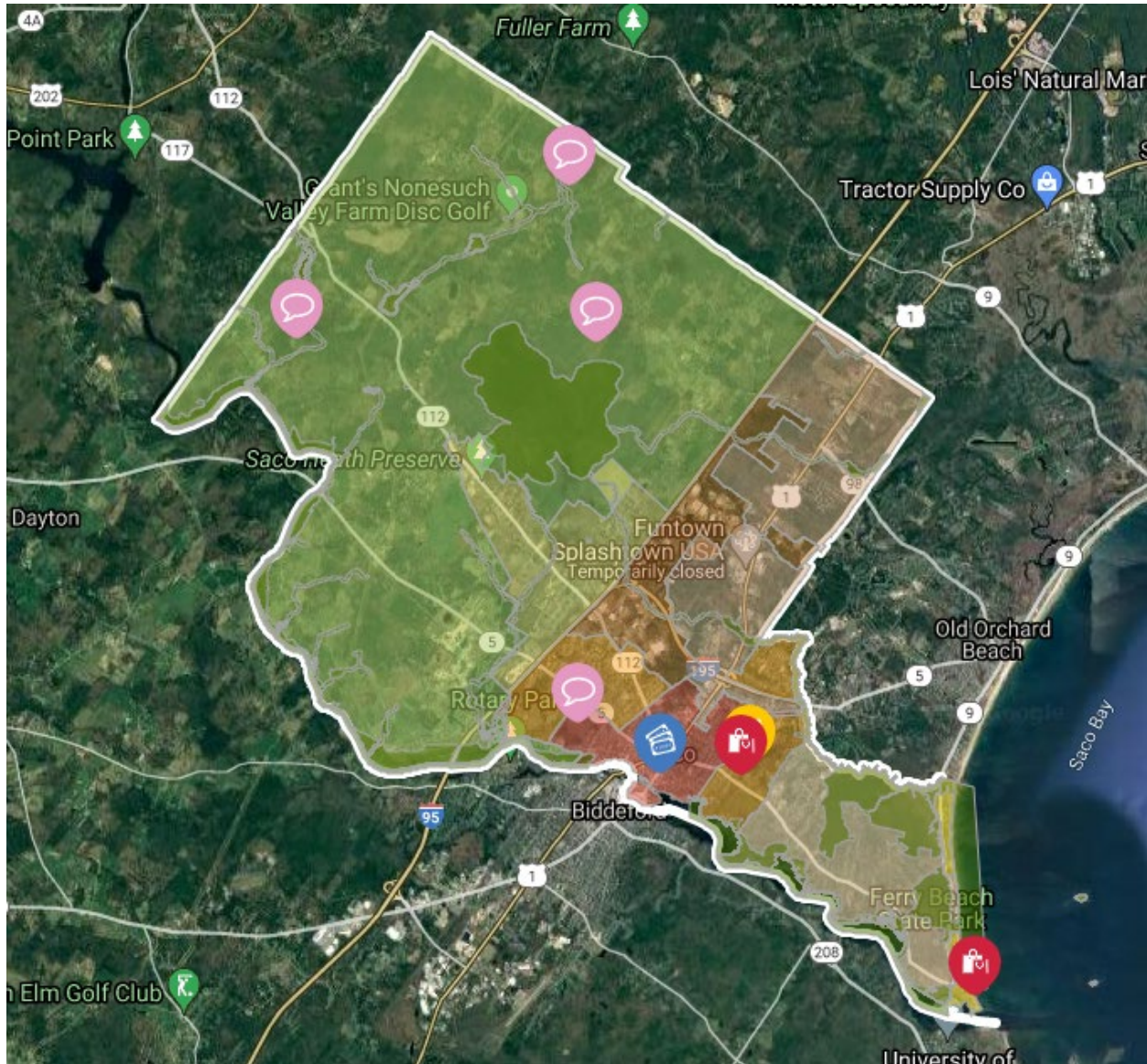
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People placed dot stickers where they think future growth should be encouraged: yellow for housing, blue for employment/jobs, and red for retail. Based on these participants, growth is preferred in already developed “in-town” locations instead of more rural, less developed areas.



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The interactive future land use map allowed people to identify where they felt future housing, retail, and employment growth should be located, or to leave other comments for consideration.



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Next Steps:

Feedback from the in-person and virtual open houses is being reviewed by City staff and the planning team to inform policy prioritization and revisions to the draft plan.

The plan's formal review and adoption process will involve public hearings at the Planning Board and City Council in early 2022. The State will also review the plan for completeness and to issue a Finding of Consistency with its planning goals and policies which will be valid for 12 years.





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Open house participants reviewed the draft recommendations, spoke with planning team members, and talked with others about their thoughts for the future of Saco.

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Enhance our downtown as the lively core of our community
a place that invites everyone to live, work, play, shop, and gather together.

Headlines

- A strong, inviting Downtown Saco contributes to quality of life and community vitality. It:
- Helps attract businesses looking for a location where employees want to live.
- Provides a variety of housing types near daily services like food, schools, and parks.
- Supports environmental goals by encouraging people to walk and bike to nearby destinations.
- Embodies Saco's living history in the buildings that have been reused or repurposed for generations.

Draft Policies

- Create an outdoor community gathering space suitable for both larger events and daily interactions among residents. Study opportunities for larger spaces at Pepperell Square, Pepperell Park, Saco Island, and Jubilee Park.
- Recruit and retain local businesses to activate ground floor spaces along Main Street, especially food and beverage, daily necessities, and arts and culture.
- Focus residential and mixed-use development toward sites within a ten-minute (half-mile) walk of downtown to support shared amenities and local businesses/jobs.
- Facilitate historic preservation within the Downtown Saco Historic District.
- Study and improve walking, traffic, and access to downtown, including walking and biking routes.
- Develop a robust arts and culture program to enhance livability and support economic vitality.
- Enhance public access to and programming along the Saco River.

Downtown Saco Amenities

Public resources

	Downtown Saco	Saco (All of Municipality)
Population	6,425	25,135
Households	3,107	8,473
Median household income	\$41,205	\$63,609
Median age	39	44
Avg. household size	2.1	2.3
Employees	2,865	4,119

The Downtown area shown on the map has a population that is smaller than the City overall. It also has a lower share of the City's...

Draft Policies

- Protect water resources and improve water quality.
- Conserve critical natural resources such as watersheds, prime farmland, and wetlands.
- Support agriculture and forestry resources.
- Protect marine resources and support appropriate uses along the waterfront, particularly at Cape Elizabeth.
- Develop and/or maintain cooperative relationships with neighboring communities, regional and state partners, and advocacy groups to protect natural resources.
- Preserve and protect archaeological resources to the extent practicable.

Environmental Stewardship

Environmental and Forest Land

Comments on the downtown (top) and environmental stewardship (above) posters.

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First Five

The First 5/Next 5 list is a general prioritization of major initiatives. Take three dot stickers and place them on what you think are the top three most important efforts for the next 10 years.

Facilitate new housing in growth areas across a range of types and affordability.



ACCESSORY DWELLING UNITS (ADUs)



Attached Free Standing Above / Below

Attract new jobs and businesses near existing and planned transit service.



Invest in new school construction and other school improvements.



Conduct property tax revaluation to appraise all real property to its full and fair value.



Invest in public infrastructure in fiscally responsible ways to support projected growth and increase environmental sustainability.





Next Five

Develop Climate Adaptation Plan + Action Strategy.



Develop places and programs that support a lively Downtown.





Improve network of pedestrian and bicycle connections.



Encourage walkable mixed-use development at higher densities where public water and sewer exist. E.g.,

- Saco Island
- Portland Road
- Ocean Park Road/Route 5




Invest in public safety facilities to improve emergency operations and keep pace with growth.



People used dot stickers to identify what they think are the top three most important strategies for the future of Saco. Developing a Climate Action Plan, encouraging walkable mixed-use neighborhood development, and investing in schools were the top 3 identified.