

May 23, 2007

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE SURVEY

SUMMARY

The Recreation Committee and the Conservation Commission, utilizing Town staff and volunteer resources, have conducted an opinion survey of Harpswell taxpayers regarding their views on recreation facilities, water access and open space.

Although there was strong interest in a centrally located community center, Harpswell taxpayers appear to be inclined towards neighborhood/dispersed recreation, improved water access and open space features rather than facilities-based recreation.

BACKGROUND – What initiated the survey?

In 2005, the Recreation Committee was asked to provide specific recommendations concerning recreation ideas for Mitchell Field. Recreation committee members conducted an informal poll about recreational programs and facilities and what people would like to see in the future? (particularly, in reference to Mitchell field development). The taking of the poll made the committee realize that we needed objective questions and consistent answers as well as a representative cross-section of citizens (not just active recreation participants).

At the same time, the Conservation Commission was charged with updating the town's Open Space plan as envisioned under the Comprehensive Plan. The two committees joined together to undertake a survey on recreation and open space.

SURVEY DESIGN –

Fortunately, the towns of Topsham and Brunswick had just completed recreation and/or open space surveys. We borrowed questions from Brunswick's survey in particular because we felt they were objective and unbiased. The questions had been used in many communities across the country for similar surveys by a national consultant, so we felt that they had been well vetted.

We asked two individuals in Harpswell with professional experience in conducting opinion surveys, to review the survey instrument and determine the sample size to ensure accuracy. These two 'experts' also advised on how best to undertake a random selection to ensure a representative sample, as well as to make the survey 'user-friendly' to address 'survey-reluctant' people.

The Recreation and Open Space survey was distributed to 517 randomly-selected property owners. The one-page, yellow sheet survey was designed to take only two minutes to complete and a SASE was provided for the recipient's convenience.

SURVEY RESPONSE & PROCESS

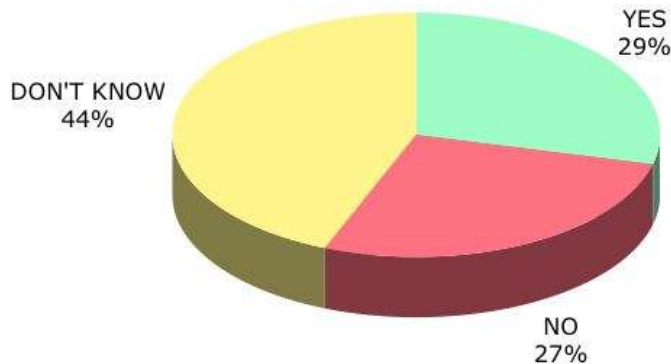
Are the results accurate & representative of Harpswell taxpayers? Yes, we think the results are representative for the following reasons: The high return rate of return--60%, the close match of part-time & full-time residents (59% full-time in the survey vs. 57% full-time for the entire town) and the relatively close match in age profile, indicate the survey respondents are a representative cross-section of taxpayers in Harpswell. See Attachment 1 for a summary of the survey responses, the process and its costs.

SURVEY RESULTS & HIGHLIGHTS

See Attachment 2 for survey results on an actual survey form.

Question 1:

Does the Town have sufficient Recreation Facilities and Programs?



The high “don’t know” is significant and suggests that it may not be possible to draw a conclusion from these responses. It may also reflect that our current recreation offerings are primarily for children and thus adults without children have no frame of reference for responding.

With one slight difference in Question 5, the responses of full-time and part-time residents were very similar throughout the survey. Part-time respondents had a higher proportion “don’t know” & “not sure” answers but the split between yes/no, agree/disagree and support/do not support were the same (given the confidence level of the survey).

Take this Question 1 for example; the full-time residents responded 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 for ‘don’t know’, ‘yes’ and ‘no’. The part-time residents responded 1/2, 1/4, 1/4 for

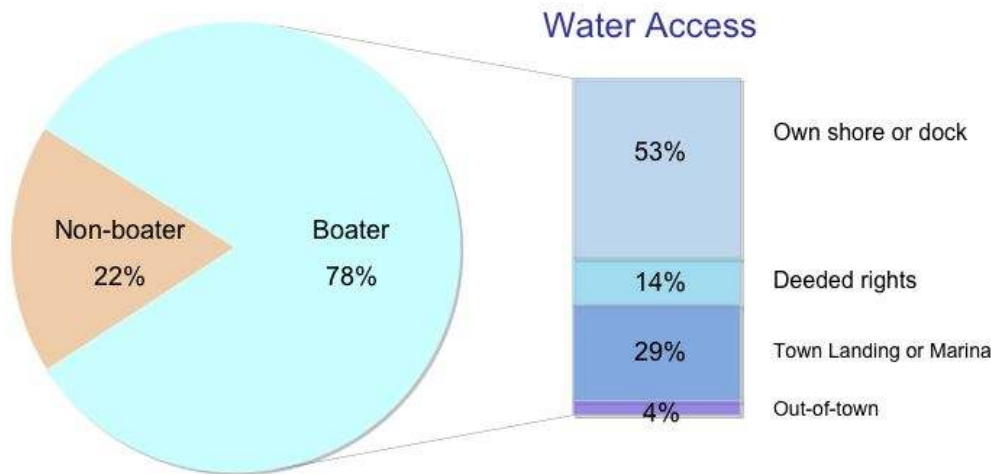
the three answers but still evenly split between the 'yes' and 'no' responses. This pattern is similar for the other questions with part-time residents selecting 'don't know' or 'not sure' more often.

Question 2: If you are a boater, what is your primary boating access to the water or mooring?

This is a demographic rather than an opinion question, useful when correlated with Question 5 (G) dealing with the priority of town action to improve water access. It is revealing that four out of five households in town include boaters (slightly lower for full-time residents -- 75%) and half the boaters own their own shore access or dock (whether full-time or part-time). It is also important to note that because about 1,000 Harpswell parcels are unimproved some respondents do not have a dwelling in town, but may be Harpswell boaters.

Question 2

Boating and Water Access



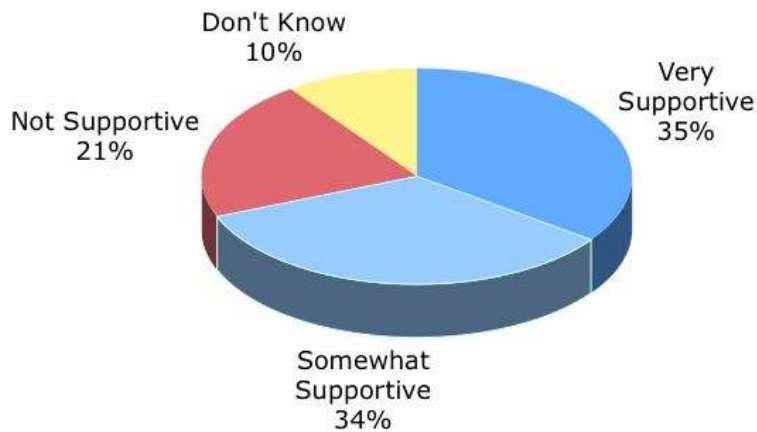
NOTE: 52% (149 out of 285) of all surveys and 50% of all boaters (110 out of 222) put no priority (zero points) on Improved Water Access. Those 136 who did, placed an average of 3.6 points on Improved Water Access.

Approx. 40% of boaters who owned their own water access placed priority points on Improved Water Access. Approx. 60% of boaters who don't have their own access placed priority points on Improved Water Access. Of the 40% of non-boaters who gave priority points to Improved Water Access -- almost all were full-time residents, i.e. people in town who don't boat but feel that providing water access is important for the town.

Question 3:

Question 3

Would you support a central community center in Harpswell available for recreation classes, group gatherings and general community use?



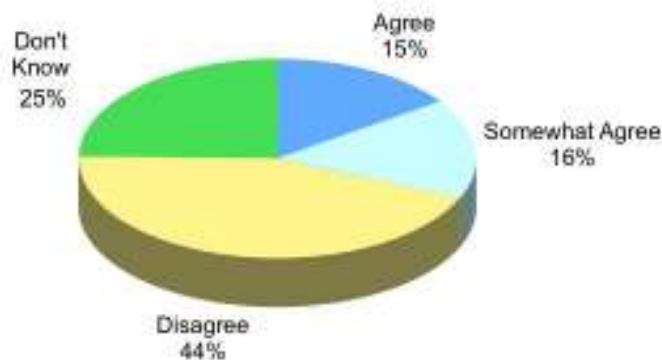
About 70% were very supportive or somewhat supportive. The responses suggest support for a centrally located community center, but do not provide sufficient information on which to base a decision, because of the percentage of those “somewhat supportive.” Presumably, they would need more information to become supportive but are inclined to be supportive.

Question 4: Statements and Potential Actions regarding Open Space

Almost half believe there is not enough conserved open space, but in and of itself, this is rather inconclusive as people have different concepts of open space.

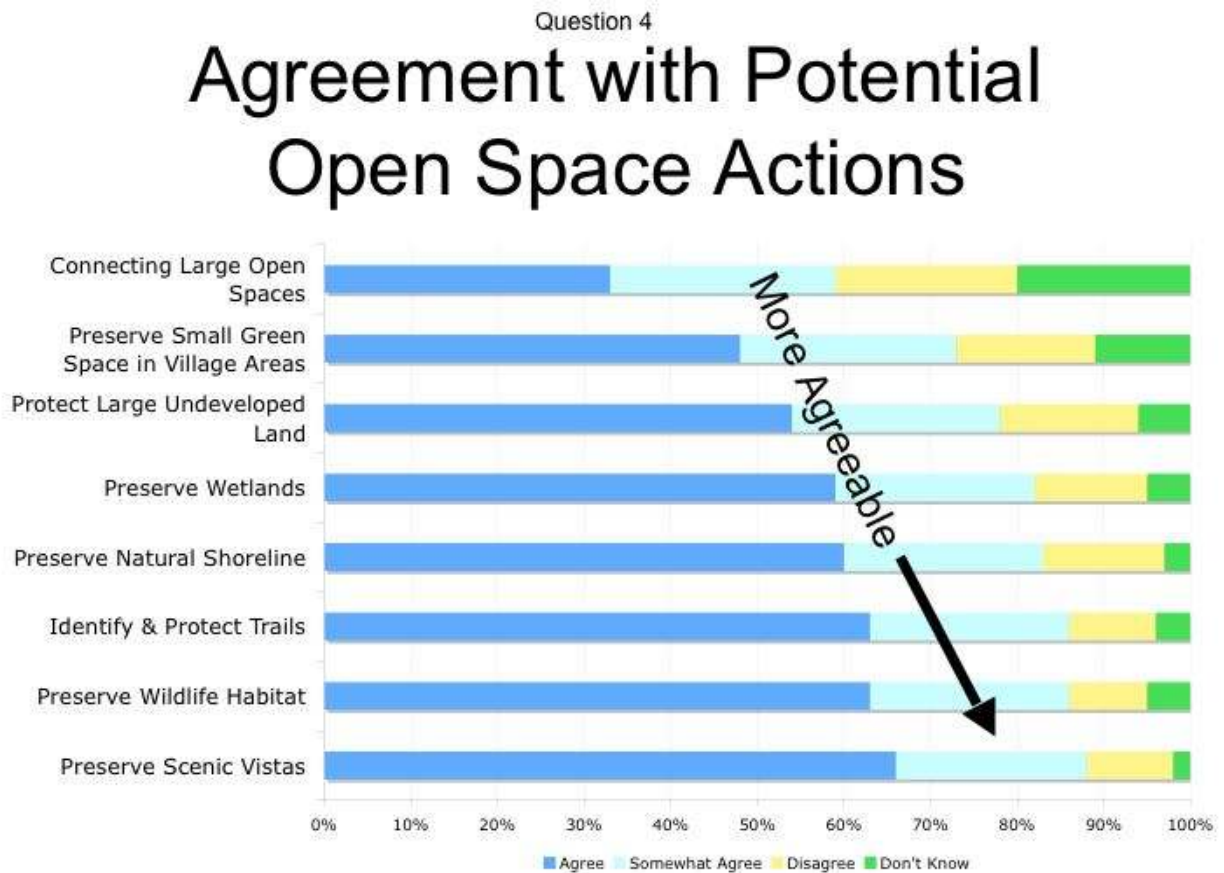
Question 4 - 1

There is enough conserved open space in Harpswell



Looking at specific potential Open Space actions provides more conclusive results. Actions which imply zoning or town purchases have less agreement. For instance, for “Connecting Large Open Spaces” less than 50% ‘agree’. The more intrinsic actions had wide agreement – 90% agreed or somewhat agreed with “Preserve Scenic Views”.

These results are detailed in the following graph.



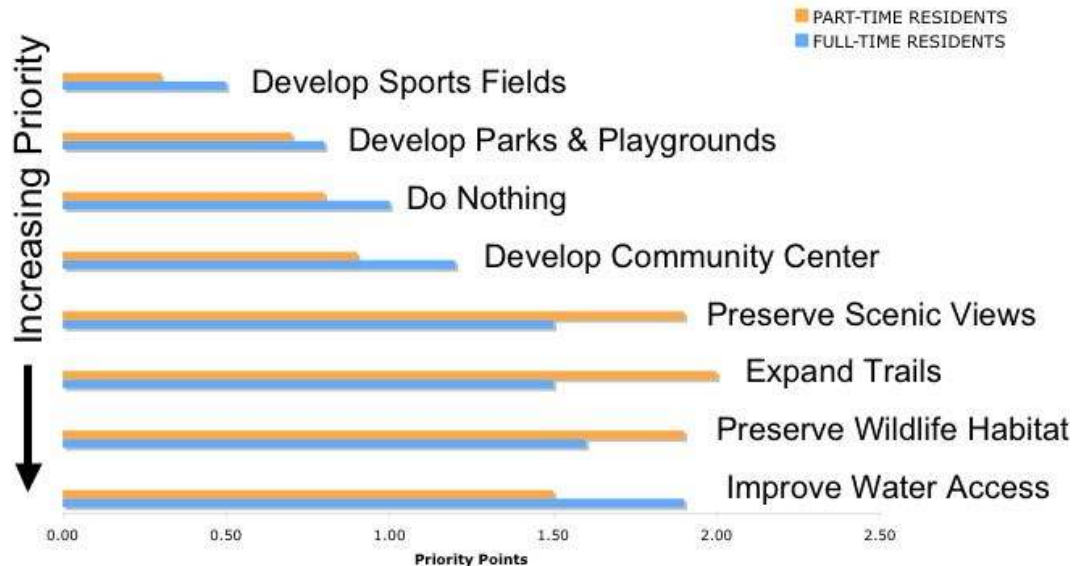
Question 5: Set Priorities

Survey respondents were given 10 points to place all 10 on one category or split them among 8 different categories for town investment. Most significant in these results is that they are spread over several items, when it would have been possible for respondents to allocate as many as 10 points to a single item. (7% placed all 10 of their points on the “Do Nothing” category indicating their desire not to spend any tax money in these areas.) Thus, specific priorities are difficult to discern but general trends come out in the following graph.

Question 5

Priorities for Town Investment

Part-time vs. Full-time residents



It is worth noting that there is more interest in neighborhood/passive recreation than in more sports and athletic fields. The community center, which received support in Question 3, appears to be a lower priority than some of these other options. ‘Improve Water Access’ is the highest ranking priority overall due to the 60% of full-time residents making this a high priority. This is the one action where seasonal residents would have placed a lower priority (still one of the top four) than full-time residents. Also as noted above, only half of the respondents placed any priority points on this category, but those that did, placed a larger number of points – presumably because they felt strongly about this issue. The other top three issues all received points from a majority of respondents.

SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

- **The Majority want to preserve scenic views & wildlife habitat and expand trails.**
- **Improved Access to the Water is the highest priority recreation & open space issue but only a priority for half the town taxpayers.**
- **Higher rankings for ‘passive’ recreation and intrinsic open space than building more facilities.**
- **People are supportive of a of a community center conceptually, but place it as a lower priority.**

Our thanks to town staff: Linda Strickland, Pat Frank, Jay Chace, Liz Bouve & Debbie Turner; the members of the Conservation Commission and Recreation Committee; the following individuals: Gordon Weil, Ed Harris, Marguerite Kelly, Wayne Gagne & Doug Orput; and all the Harpswell taxpayers who took the time to complete the survey.

Conservation Commission
Recreation Committee

- Attachment 1: Survey Process and Costs**
- Attachment 2: Survey Results on actual survey form**
- Attachment 3: Selected unsolicited written comments**

April 2007

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE SURVEY PROCESS RESULTS

Total Surveys sent to randomly-selected tax parcels	517	
Returned 'undeliverable' or sent to Banks/Trustees/duplicates	<u>~40</u>	
Potential number of Surveys to be completed	477	
Number of Surveys returned from initial mailing	223	47% Initial Yield
Approximately 175 follow-up phone calls and letters sent. Number of Surveys returned from follow-up mailing	62	35% Incr. Yield
Total Surveys Completed	285	60% Total Yield

Phone follow-up Feedback

<i>Did not want to participate</i>	5%
<i>No phone # found or out-of-service</i>	14%
<i>Left message & sent reminder letter</i>	33%
<i>Talked to a person & sent letter</i>	48%

ESTIMATED SURVEY COSTS

Direct Costs

1500 envelopes @ \$0.05	\$ 75
1500 sheets of paper @ \$0.02	\$ 30
Postage: 1500 @ \$0.39	\$585
Copying: 1500 @\$0.05	\$ 75
Staff time: 25hrs @ \$11/hr	<u>\$275</u>
TOTAL	\$1,040

Volunteer Time

Committee	55 hours
Consultant Review of Survey Form	5 hours
Telephone follow-up	15 hours
Tabulation & Summary	<u>25 hours</u>
TOTAL	100 hours

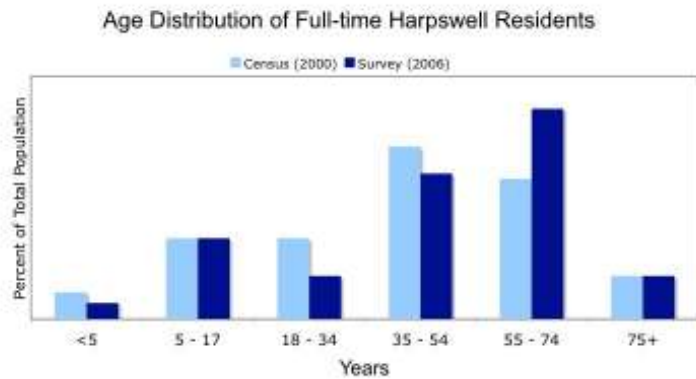
Survey data was entered into a relational database that allows different 'slices' of results to be examined based on demographics or other data groupings. This MSEXCEL file is available at the town office.

The random selection of 517 tax parcels ensures that a proportionate number of surveys went to each part of town – Bailey Island, Harpswell Neck, Cundy's Harbor, etc. – and to full-time as well as part-time residents and to older taxpayers as well as younger taxpayers.

The high response rate -- 60% -- is indicative of good representation.

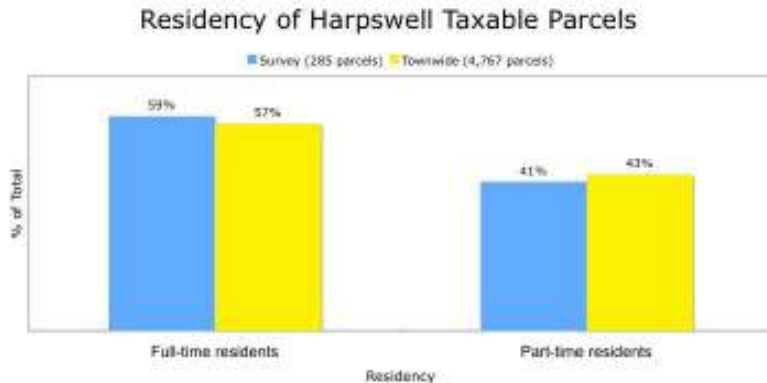
The age profile of survey respondents was compared to the year 2000 census data for town. There is about a 10% shift toward older ages amongst survey respondents versus the census data. Part of the explanation is that the census data is 6-years old and the town has aged since 2000 but most likely reflects the willingness of certain age groups to respond to surveys. We checked the responses of 55 year olds vs. 35 year olds and there was no major difference, so we conclude that this slightly older mix in the survey does not significantly bias the results.

Question 6
Survey respondents slightly older



The split between full-time and part-time residents is almost exactly the same for the survey respondents as for the town as a whole.

Question 7
% of Survey full-time residents almost an exact match to Town-wide distribution



TOTAL - ALL RESIDENTS
RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE SURVEY

The Town of Harpswell requests your views on recreation needs and open space priorities. This survey will take about 2 minutes to complete. It should be completed by an adult member of your household. Your response is important. Please return the survey in the enclosed postage-paid envelope. Thank you.

1. Does the town have sufficient recreation facilities and recreation programs?
29% Yes 27% No 44% Don't Know
2. If you are a boater, what is your primary boating access to the water or mooring?
53% your own shore access or dock 14% deeded rights to shore or dock
29% town landing or marina or use friend's 4% out-of-town facilities
NOT A BOATER → 22%
BOATER → 78%
3. Would you support a central community center in Harpswell available for recreation classes (art, music, exercise, etc.), group gatherings (pre-school, teen, seniors, etc.) and general community use?
35% (1) very supportive 34% (2) somewhat supportive 21% (3) not supportive 10% (4) not sure
4. Please indicate your level of support for each of the following actions the Town of Harpswell could take by checking only one column for each statement.

	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Don't Know
A. The Town should take an active role in preserving scenic vistas.	66%	22%	10%	2%
B. The Town should take an active role in preserving wildlife habitat and travel corridors.	63%	23%	9%	5%
C. The Town should strive to connect existing large open-space parcels.	33%	26%	21%	20%
D. The Town should take an active role in preserving the natural appearance of the shoreline.	60%	23%	14%	3%
E. The Town should strive to preserve smaller lots and community green spaces in designated village areas.	48%	25%	16%	11%
F. The Town should take an active role in preserving wetlands, streams and vernal pools.	59%	23%	13%	5%
G. The Town should identify existing trails and protect them for future use.	63%	23%	10%	4%
H. The Town should strive to protect the existing large undeveloped tracts of fields, woodlands and other natural resources.	54%	24%	16%	6%
I. There is enough conserved open space in Harpswell	15%	16%	44%	25%

5. You have 10 points to split amongst various options. Allocate your 10 points to as many or as few categories as you wish. Indicate your choice for the Town to invest in parks, recreation facilities and open space by placing a number from 0 to 10 next to the categories of your choice. (please be sure that your allocations add up to 10 points?)

- 2 (A) Expand trails for walking, biking and linking recreation/open space. (1.7)
2 (B) Preserve important wildlife habitats, woodlands and wetlands. (1.7)
1 (C) Preserve scenic views and scenic areas. (1.6)
1 (D) Develop neighborhood parks and playgrounds. (0.8)
0 (E) Develop additional sports/athletic fields. (0.4)
1 (F) Develop or build a community center (1.6)
2 (G) Improve water access (for boaters, beach access, deepwater access) (1.7)
1 (H) Do nothing (0.9)
10 POINTS TOTAL

6. How many persons in your household (counting yourself) are?
Under 5 years 3% 5 - 18 years 13% 18 - 34 years 11% 35 - 54 years 27%
55 - 74 years 37% 75+ years 9% 749 TOTAL PEOPLE

7. Please check the ONE description below that describes your living situation in Harpswell.
59% Full-time resident 41% Part-time resident = 285 total surveys.

This concludes the survey. Thank you.

Selected Unsolicited Written Comments

About 10% of the returned surveys included unsolicited written comments, including two letters.

The comments run the gamut from condemning the survey as “frivolous” to “thanks for caring”. Some reflect ownership and cost concerns, while others criticize the survey instrument itself. These comments are not statistically representative of the town and are included only for background information. (Multiple similar comments are indicated by a number in parenthesis).

1. Comments about the Survey Itself

- Difficulty in allocating judgement points to Question 5
- Difficulty in determining level of support for open space in Question 4 in the absence of an enclosed map depicting existing town holdings.
- Questions 4C and 4H overlap.
- Validity of town involvement in open space acquisition questioned (2)
- The survey should have been mailed with the tax bill to save money.
- Such a questionnaire is deemed frivolous and a waste of taxpayers’ dollars in the face of high real estate taxes.
- Lack of definition of terms, namely “Village” and “Natural Shoreline.”
- Comment “Thanks for caring”.

2. Ownership Impact

- No trails on private land
- Question 4 implies the need for increased governmental controls
- No mandate should be given to the town in the absence of a “true planning process.”
- Any Town action would be an invasion of property rights and a potential conflict in the face of existing protection laws and the absence of enactment of enforced and workable building and zoning ordinances.
- Let the taxpayer decide the use of the land.

3. Cost Impact

- Choices have tax implications.
- Increased facilities lead to increased taxes.
- Where does the funding for recreational classes come from?
- How much and who pays for a Community Center?

4. Community Center

- More emphasis should be made in the area of preventative medicine

- Special emphasis on teen programs
- House Community Center in existing buildings – Town Hall, schools, or underutilized existing building (4)

5. Specific Comments for Recreational Improvement

- Need a playground on Bailey Island
- Build a sidewalk on Mountain Rd.
- Town needs a public beach/swimming area
- Town needs a safer, wider bike/walking path along Rte 123
- Provide twice daily trolley bus service along rtes 123 and 24 into Brunswick to reduce vehicular traffic
- Note: 2 negative comments: “Ballpark on Rte 24 always empty” and adding bike paths on rtes 123 and 24 only attracts outsiders.

6. Water Access

- Having no public Town landing is “scandalous”
- Improve water access (2)

Bear in mind that these comments are from only 10% of the survey respondents and are not representative of the town taxpayers as a whole.