



# 2023 *Comprehensive Plan*

*Draft May 2023*

# Town of Fenwick Island

2023 Comprehensive Plan

Adopted by the Mayor and Council on XXXX XX, 2023; Ordinance XXX-XX-XX  
Certified by the Governor on XXXX XX, 2023

**Prepared by**

Fenwick Island Planning Commission

**With Assistance from:**

Institute for Public Administration

Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy & Administration

University of Delaware



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### Town of Fenwick Island Council

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| Jacqueline Napolitano | Secretary      |
| Bill Rymer            | Treasurer      |
| Janice Bortner        | Council Member |
| Paul Breger           | Council Member |
| Richard Benn          | Council Member |
| Ed Bishop             | Council Member |

### Town of Fenwick Island Planning Commission

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| Susan Brennan (Chair) | Patricia Schuchman, Town Manager |
| Julie Lee             | Lois Twilley                     |
| Natalie Magdeburger   | Winnie Lewis (Emeritus)          |
| Ann Riley             | Amy Kyle (Former)                |
| Rich Robinson         |                                  |

### Sussex County

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|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| County Administrator            | Todd F. Lawson              |
| Department of Planning Services | Jamie Whitehouse - Director |

### State of Delaware

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|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Governor                              | John C. Carney, Jr.           |
| Senate                                | Gerald Hocker                 |
| House of Representatives              | Ronald E. Gray                |
| Office of State Planning Coordination | David Edgell, AICP - Director |







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**List of abbreviations**

- AADT – Average Annual Daily Traffic
- ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act
- BBVFC – Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company
- CIB – Delaware Center for the Inland Bays
- CRS – Community Rating System
- CTP – Capital Transportation Program
- DeIDOT – Delaware Department of Transportation
- DEMA – Delaware Emergency Management Agency
- DNREC – Delaware Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Control
- DPC – Delaware Population Consortium
- DTC – Delaware Transit Corporation
- EOC – Emergency Operations Center
- EPA – Environmental Protection Agency
- FEMA – Federal Emergency Management Agency
- FY – Fiscal Year
- MGD – Million Gallons per Day
- NFIP – National Flood Insurance Program
- NOAA – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- SFHA – Special Flood Hazard Area
- SLR – Sea Level Rise
- SR – State Route
- USACE – United States Army Corps of Engineers



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## Glossary

**Ad-hoc** - A Latin term translated from “for this”, where something is created when necessary as needed for a specific purpose.

**Annexation** - The process of bringing outside properties, lots, etc. into city limits. Also defined in this case as when a local or state group attempts to gather territory outside of its technical domain.

**Biodiversity** - Refers to all of the life in a given area ranging from microorganisms, plants, animals and their interactions with the ecosystems to maintain and support life, retaining natural balance.

**Canopy** - Measurement which encompasses the amount of shade a tree produces based on an aerial view and is composed of a tree's stems, branches, and leaves.

**Commercial** - Typically refers to buildings that have the potential to generate profit through gain or income, thus housing businesses.

**Corridor** - A specific part of a road or highway that has been focused on for data analysis, but also known as a long, narrow way of passage.

**Dredging** - Excavation of settled materials from a water-based environment, where sediments are removed. Can occur in lakes, streams, banks and bottom of rivers, etc.

**Floodplain** - A relatively flat area of land that lies next to a body of water such as a stream or a river. FEMA defines it as any land area susceptible to flooding from any source.

**Freeboard** - A factor of safety which is expressed in feet above a flood level for purposes of floodplain management. It is an additional height above the estimated Base Flood Elevation used to determine where the lowest level a floor can lie to meet local or state floodplain standards.

**Grandfather** - Also known as a grandfather clause, it can be described as a rule to allow operation under an old set of expectations when rules and regulations are updated. While newer policy affects newer circumstances, grandfathering typically exempts from more stringent regulations.

**Infill** - The development of scattered vacant sites within a largely built up area with existing infrastructure.

**Inundation** - An amount of water that occurs as a result of saturated land and flooding, acting above the normally dry ground level. Simply defined as being flooded with water.

**Impervious** - Referring to a surface, where water is not absorbed into the ground or greatly increases the runoff of water while allowing very little infiltration.

**Mitigation** - The result or process of making something less severe, reducing risk of loss, harm, and adverse impacts. Mitigation can be said to reduce the force or intensity of something that poses a threat or is considered unpleasant.



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**Nor'easter** - A storm that forms and occurs along the East Coast of North America.

**Ordinance** - An authoritative decree or piece of legislation enacted by a municipal authority. A law passed by government.

**Redevelopment** - The process or action of developing something differently or again. An initiative to construct new land uses or structures which were previously used in another fashion.

**Resilience** - The ability or capacity to recover quickly, to withstand, or to spring back into standard form from difficult or challenging circumstances. Being able to adapt to experiences that affect infrastructure, physical and mental health, and require that new circumstances are addressed in order to maintain characteristic shape.

**Runoff** - Refers to water flowing as a result of saturated soil. When gravity acts on water, it travels along a surface to replenish the soil, groundwater, and surface water as it percolates to a body of water. Also referred to as surface runoff or overland flow.

**Sea Level Rise** - An increase in global oceans water levels due to the effects of climate change.

**Stormwater Management** - Features designed to designate rainwater and runoff to flow into systems while also improving water quality to provide cleaner discharge from storm sewer systems into water bodies.

**Thermal Expansion** - Water's tendency to change in volume due to fluctuations in temperature. Typically correlated with an increase in volume, density, area, in response to rising temperatures.

**Topography** - The study of physical features of an area, or a descriptive map which defines both natural and artificial features of an area through marked elevation-based benchmarks.

**Traffic Calming** - Measures combined that reduce negative motor vehicle use, positively alter driver behaviors, and improve overall conditions for those not in vehicles. Through reduction of speed, pedestrian and cyclist safety is targeted for improvement.

**Watershed** - An area of land that channels rainfall in any form to outflow points or drains water into a specific waterbody. Also defined as a drainage basin.







# Chapter 1. Introduction and History

## 1.1 Introduction

A comprehensive plan guides future development or redevelopment of a community in order to create and maintain a desirable environment and promote health, safety, and welfare. The plan provides a community with a framework of policies and actions on which to rely when responding to evolving challenges and opportunities. It guides growth to areas that are most prepared to accept it in terms of infrastructure and thoughtful planning. Planning enables a community to understand and articulate its future.

The 2023 Town of Fenwick Island Comprehensive Plan is intended to cover a 10-year planning window and be reviewed at least every five years in accordance with state law. It provides the framework for planning, design and development decision making.

Fenwick Island faces many challenges that are regional in nature and originate outside its borders or direct control. This Comprehensive Plan is intended to encourage vigilance to our town's history and heritage and ensure the continuation of the vision and existing character of the town, even as increased development occurs in and around the town.

## 1.2 History of Fenwick Island is Reflected in this Plan

On March 23, 1680, Lord Baltimore granted an area of land known as "Fishing Harbor" to Col. William Stevens, who later conveyed the land to Thomas Fenwick in 1692. Though Thomas Fenwick lived in Sussex County for quite some time, he never resided on the island. It is believed that Fenwick Island's name hails from William Fasset, the husband of Thomas Fenwick's daughter, Mary, who claimed Fenwick Island for himself.

Between 1750 and 1751, the Trans-Peninsular line was laid out by surveyors to denote the boundary between land claimed by the Penn family to the north and land claimed by the Calvert family of Maryland to the south. The first survey stone was set on a tract of land later purchased for the Fenwick Island Lighthouse and is considered the "oldest standing man-made object on the coast between the Indian River and Ocean City."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Grimes, Kimberly McCabe "Barefoot in Fenwick Island" (2018)

With the exception of tales of pirates patrolling the waters of Little Assawoman Bay throughout the late 1600s into the mid-1700s, human habitation on Fenwick Island was quite limited. By the mid-1800s, increasing numbers of shipwrecks near the shoals to the east of Fenwick Island garnered the attention of the United States Lighthouse Board. The United States Congress authorized the construction of a new lighthouse on Fenwick Island in 1856, and in 1858, the government purchased a ten-acre tract of high land to build an 87-foot-tall lighthouse and a two-story keeper's dwelling. Two families lived in the keeper's house in relative isolation throughout the late 1800s.

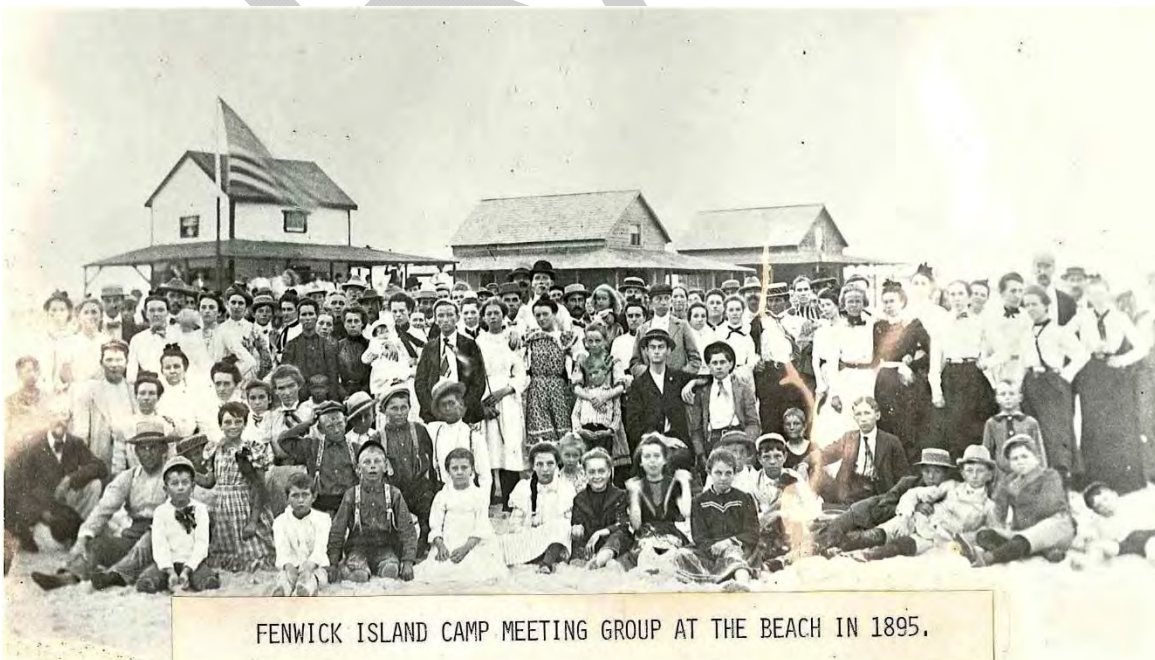


*Fenwick Lighthouse, 1891*

Improvements on the island were mostly limited to a bridge to the mainland constructed in 1880 and new Keeper's house in 1881. The first bridge to Fenwick was destroyed by the strong ocean currents and a second wooden drawbridge to the mainland was built in 1892.



Local Methodist faith-based families began to have camp meetings in Fenwick Island in the 1890's. The first cottages began to dot Fenwick Island in the early 1930s. They were simple wood-frame structures with no running water, electricity or bathrooms. The land where the homes were built was owned by the State of Delaware.



FENWICK ISLAND CAMP MEETING GROUP AT THE BEACH IN 1895.

Three areas of homes within what was known generally as Fenwick were called Maryland Beach (south of the Maryland-Delaware line), Delaware Beach (from the state line to Atlantic Street) and Pittsburgh Beach (north of Atlantic Beach).

The 1933 storm washed out the wooden drawbridge from the mainland and a new two-lane bridge was built in 1934. In addition, a road connecting Fenwick to Rehoboth Beach was built between 1934 and 1942. In addition, Senator Clayton Bunting, who never lived in Fenwick, obtained funding to build Bunting Avenue so that cars could be parked at people's homes rather than along the side of the highway.



In 1940, the residents who had “squatted” on state-owned land were ordered to vacate by the State of Delaware. In response, the residents formed the Pittsburgh Beach Association and asked the state to allow them to keep their homes in Fenwick. In 1941 the state offered cottage owners the opportunity to buy lots at a price of \$200 for beachfront lots, \$100 for interior lots and \$250 for corner lots,

resulting in the purchase of 175 lots.

The Chesapeake Bay Bridge was opened in 1952, making it easier for travelers from the Baltimore Washington corridor to get to the coastal communities, including Fenwick. While there were very few year-round residents at that time, during the summer season the population would expand and with it, the demand for services such as police, fire and lifeguards.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Ocean City, Maryland, Fenwick's southern neighbor, began to develop rapidly with both residential and commercial development. As Mary Pat Kyle wrote “concerns about creeping commercialism” and becoming “another Ocean City” led to Fenwick Island's organization as an incorporated town.<sup>3</sup>

In 1953, the Fenwick Island Beach Association presented to the State of Delaware “The Act to Incorporate the Town”. The property owners seeking incorporation had homes located predominantly in what had been known as the “Pittsburg Beach” section of Fenwick (north of Atlantic Street) with the “Delaware Beach” section (south of Atlantic to Maryland line) rejecting inclusion.

Included in the incorporation documents was a zoning ordinance that was reported to have been only one of two zoning ordinances in the State of Delaware at the time. Specific to the zoning ordinance was a town plan that delineated distinct residential and commercial

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<sup>2</sup> Kyle, Mary Pat “Fenwick Island Delaware: A Brief History” (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



zones. It also established the authority to govern the height of buildings and types of usages permitted within and allowed the town to obtain and controls services, such as water and sewer service, and lifeguards. As Ms. Kyle noted in her book, the language in the Town Charter was “carefully calculated to preserve Fenwick's residential quality”, including a provision that specifically precluded the town from establishing a boardwalk. The Town of Fenwick Island was formally accepted and recognized by the State of Delaware in July 1953.

In the 1950's, Col. George Schultz bought the marsh land that was on the west side of Coastal Highway, from Bayard Street to Indian Street, dug canals and created 300 building lots. A decade later, Madison Gray purchased land south of Bayard Street along the bay and also built canals using the fill to create an additional 300 lots. With annexation to the incorporated town, the bayside of Fenwick was created.<sup>4</sup>

The zoning ordinance put in place in 1953 proved to be a vital tool in maintaining Fenwick's identity. In the late 1960's with the prevalence of high-rise communities developing in the coastal communities to the north and south, Fenwick passed an ordinance limiting the height of buildings to 30 feet.<sup>5</sup>

By the early 1960's to the early 1970's the commercial zone began to develop with the addition of several shopping plazas. In an effort to “make future plans for parking so that the town can prevent parking problems in the years ahead”, Fenwick unanimously adopted an Off-Street Parking ordinance that mandated required parking spaces whenever there was a new or substantial improvement to an existing residential or commercial building.



As Fenwick entered the 2000's, larger residential homes replaced many of the original cottages and resulted in the passage of ordinances designed to limit the floor area ratios and number of bathrooms to maintain the historical character and charm of Fenwick Island.<sup>6</sup>

Today, Fenwick Island has modern infrastructure, utility upgrades and a larger year-round population. Despite being almost completely developed in both the residential and commercial zones, Fenwick Island has retained its character as a family friendly town that benefits from both the beach and the bay environments while remaining quieter and less dense than many other coastal communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Grimes, Kimberly McCabe “Barefoot in Fenwick Island” (2018)

<sup>5</sup> Minutes of Regular Meeting of Fenwick Island Town Council, September 29, 1973, October 27, 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Town of Fenwick Island Code.

## 1.3 Comprehensive Planning in Delaware

The Comprehensive Plan reflects the requirements of state law (22 Del. C. § 702). The law provides that every municipality prepare a comprehensive plan. This plan complies with the requirements of a municipal strategy as described in the Delaware Code for towns with a population of 2,000 or fewer.

In the state of Delaware, the comprehensive plan for small communities such as Fenwick Island is to be a "document in text and maps, containing at a minimum, a municipal development strategy setting forth the jurisdiction's position on population and housing growth within the jurisdiction, expansion of its boundaries, development of adjacent areas, redevelopment potential, community character, the general uses of land within the community, critical community development and infrastructure issues." The town's comprehensive planning process is also to demonstrate coordination with other towns, Sussex County, and the state during the plan's creation. (22 Del. C. 1953, subsection 702: 49 Del Laws, c. 415, subsection 1)

The plan has been completed in keeping with the State of Delaware's Code for the purpose of encouraging the most appropriate uses of the physical and fiscal resources of the municipality and the coordination of municipal growth, development, and infrastructure investment actions with those of other towns, Sussex County and the state. This plan is the Town of Fenwick Island's Comprehensive Plan as required by state law. Delaware law also states that planning be an ongoing process and that towns identify future planning activities.

## 1.4 Comprehensive Planning Process and Public Engagement

A community-based process was used in preparing the Comprehensive Plan. The process involved many steps, culminating in the preparation of this plan document. Many of the statements, issues, goals and recommendations from the 2017 plan were determined to be valid today and were retained.

The Planning Commission felt it was important to keep residents, business owners and all those interested informed and involved. Community engagement included the following:

- Three listening sessions in late Summer 2022
- A mini symposium on pedestrian and bicycle safety in October 2022
- A written survey was distributed in February 2023
- A Community Workshop held in May 2023

These events were advertised using the town website and social media, the local media and direct electronic and regular mailings. In addition, all Planning Commission meetings discussing the plan were open to the public, allowing the residents to ask questions and

provide feedback. The Planning Commission provided monthly updates on the plan review process at every Town Council meeting.

Through these meetings and events, the town was able to reach a broad cross-section of interested parties including:

- Full-time residents
- Part-time or seasonal residents
- Visitors
- Employees
- Business owners
- Town officials and staff
- County staff
- State staff

The Planning Commission used this public feedback along with the data and other relevant information affecting land use, housing, transportation, natural resources, historic references, and community facilities to develop draft issues, goals, and recommendations. These actions were developed by the Planning Commission to meet the challenges and opportunities identified through the process and shared with the public for endorsement.



*Comprehensive Plan Open House on May 20, 2023*

## Community Survey Input

The Planning Commission conducted a town-wide survey this year, from January 28<sup>th</sup> to February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023. There were 861 email invitations sent of which 343 responded via email, 127 responses were via the town web link and 48 responded via paper submission for a total of 518 responses. Residents, business owners/employees and visitors responded to the survey via multiple methods:

- Email access via Survey Monkey link
- Online access via town website link
- Paper forms mailed/delivered to Town Hall



The results of the survey are found in Appendix B. One survey question asked how residents would prioritize a number of topics for the comprehensive plan. In general, participants responded that the following issues were of importance to them:

- Maintain character of being a quiet, family-oriented community
- Objection to Industrial Wind Turbines
- Bay Flooding
- Maintain maximum building height in the residential zone
- Maintain environmental health of the bay
- Maintain building height in the commercial zone

## 1.5 Vision Statement

The process to create the plan was guided by a vision statement, written to reflect and affirm the 1953 Town Charter and to maintain the fundamental character of the town:

*“To be a quiet, family-oriented and walkable community which protects its natural beach and bay environment while including a desirable and sustainable primary residential area as well as a vibrant commercial area.”*



Source: 2023 Fenwick Island Town Survey, Question 5: What three words would you use to describe Fenwick Island?



# 1.6. Plan Organization

This Comprehensive Plan is organized into the following sections:

- Introduction and History (Chapters 1-2)
- Issues, Goals and Recommendations (Chapters 3-8)
- Implementation (Chapter 9)

The Introduction and History section present the broad context and history of the town, while providing an overview of the existing physical character and demographics.



The Issues Chapters (3-8) delve into the critical opportunities and challenges the town faces and that will be the town’s primary focus over the next ten years. These chapters build on the background information, discuss issues, state the goal and objectives, and provide an overall direction for the town. The priority chapters focus on:

- Community Character
- Safe Streets for All
- Ocean, Beach and Dunes
- The Bays and other Natural Resources
- Resiliency: Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding
- Community Development

The Implementation Chapter provides a table with next steps the Town Council will use to guide the progress and fulfillment of this plan. The continuity of goals, communication, and action is vital to moving the needle forward and achieving the goals set out herein.



# Chapter 2. Community Profile

## 2.1 Introduction

The Town of Fenwick Island is an incorporated municipality, located at the southeastern tip of Sussex County, Delaware. The town is situated on a narrow peninsula between the Atlantic Ocean to the east, and the Little Assawoman Bay to the west. The land to the north and south are both within Sussex County, Delaware. At its closest, the Maryland border is approximately 0.1 mile to the south. The area within the town's borders is approximately 0.5 square miles, of which nearly 30% is water. The Fenwick Island Base Map can be found in Appendix A.

This chapter provides an overview of the demographics of the town and existing conditions pertaining to town administration, services and facilities.

## 2.2 Community Services and Facilities

Fenwick Island furnishes its property owners with many essential community services and facilities including 24/7 public safety services, public works support and major utilities.

Residents benefit from proximity to Bethany Beach and Selbyville for services not available within our town. The town continues to address the needs of our community including accommodating our seasonal and year-round residents, vibrant businesses and a community which is primarily aged 55 years and older.

### Town Administration

Fenwick Island is an incorporated municipality chartered by the State of Delaware. The Town Charter states that all powers are vested in an elected body consisting of a seven-member council with one member serving as President and Mayor. All elected officials, committees and board members serve in a volunteer capacity providing support for the many priorities of the Town Council and members of the town. Typically, the Town Council holds a monthly meeting on the fourth Friday of each month in the Town Hall. The meetings are available via a hybrid method of in-person or Zoom. Notices of meetings and agendas are posted to the town website and electronic message board.

The Town Council is supported through the employment of town personnel to facilitate the following: administrative, beach patrol, finance, public works, police, and town

management. Most employees have been with the town for many years. The town benefits greatly from a dedicated staff. This institutional knowledge and commitment is invaluable to a small organization.

The town currently retains fifteen committees and three boards: the Board of Adjustment, Board of Elections, and Planning Commission. These public service committees include:

- Ad-hoc Parking Committee
- Audit committee
- Beach/Parks and Recreation Committee
- Budget and Finance Committee
- Building Review Committee
- Business Concerns Committee
- Charter and Ordinance Committee
- Dredging Committee
- Emergency Management Committee
- Environmental Committee
- Information Technology Committee
- Infrastructure Committee
- Residential Concerns Committee
- Pedestrian Safety Committee
- Town Enhancement Committee

## Public Safety



The Fenwick Island Police Department is located adjacent to Town Hall. The Fenwick Island Police Department provides full-service protection to the community on a 24/7 basis. The department is comprised of six sworn officers, a Chief of Police and one police clerk. All officers have completed advanced training and are prepared to respond to any emergency.

A Town of Fenwick Island Police Department House Registry Form is available for property owners and businesses to provide emergency contact information.

Emergency services for the town are provided through the Sussex County Emergency Operations Center located in Georgetown, DE. Given Fenwick Island is bisected by SR 1, The Delaware State Police and the town have an agreement of shared responses.

CodeRED-Emergency Notification System is an emergency notification service by which public safety can notify residents and businesses by telephone call, text message or email about emergency situations. The service is free of charge for residents and businesses; however, they must sign up to activate this benefit.

## Emergency Management Committee

The town has an Emergency Management Committee which consists of the Mayor, Vice-Mayor, Town Manager, Building Official, Public Works Manager, Police Chief, Beach Patrol



Captain, and Fire Company Liaison. Fenwick Island is dependent on the cooperation and support of Sussex County Emergency Operations Center (EOC), Delaware Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). DEMA is part of the State Department of Safety and Homeland Security, which also includes Delaware State Police and Division of Communications and has the authority to request through the Governor's office the assistance of the National Guard. FEMA is part of the Federal Department of Homeland Security, which has the authority to request through the President, assistance from a wide range of federal agencies including the military. The town has an extensive support system; however, the responsibility of preparing for an emergency, and managing the response and recovery is that of the Mayor, or designate, and the Emergency Management Team.

There are no hospital services available in Fenwick Island. There are several hospitals within a 40-mile radius of town, including Atlantic General Hospital in Berlin, Maryland, Tidal Health in Salisbury, Maryland, and Beebe Medical Center in Lewes, Delaware which also has an emergency room in Frankford, Delaware and an urgent care facility in Millville, Delaware.

### Fire, Rescue and Beach Patrol



The town is served by the Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company located at 215 Hollywood Street, Bethany Beach DE 19930. The BBVFC is an all-volunteer force that includes both volunteer and live-in firefighters stationed at Station 70 in Bethany Beach. Property and business owners pay a \$60.00 fee for ambulance services.

Fenwick Island employs and manages a 27-person coed beach patrol consisting of 23 lifeguards, three first lieutenants, and a captain. Lifeguard coverage is provided to both the Fenwick Island beach located in the incorporated town limits as well as the state beach south of Atlantic Street extending to the Maryland state line.

The Marine Education, Research & Rehabilitation Institute (MERR), a non-profit stranding response and rehabilitation organization based in Lewes, Delaware responds to the conservation of marine mammals and sea turtles in Fenwick Island and throughout the state. Other animal control services are provided by the state.

### Department of Public Works

Fenwick Island operates its own Public Works Department from the Town Hall building on SR 1. The department has a full-time staff which includes a Public Works Manager and three

full-time employees. Their responsibilities include promoting and overseeing the construction and maintenance of the town's property and sanitation, landscape and street maintenance, Mobi-mat installation, removal and maintenance, stormwater infrastructure inventory and a multitude of general support tasks. With the substantial influx of seasonal visitors, the Public Works Department performs and supports the large-scale task of ensuring the beach-end parking lots are free of debris and trash receptacles maintained.

## Utilities

### Electric

Delmarva Power and Light provides electrical service to Fenwick Island residents and businesses.

### Telecommunication

Comcast is the only cable provider for the town.

### Trash, Recycling and Bulk Waste

Solid waste pick-up was previously handled by the Public Works Department but the town now contracts with Waste Industries for solid waste disposal and recycle pick-up for residential pick-up apart from Fenwick Town Village and commercial properties. These are all privately contracted.

The town provides a bulk trash event twice each year for all residential property owners. This has historically been implemented the week following Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends.

## Town Hall

Fenwick Island's Town Hall is located at 800 Coastal Highway and includes the administrative offices and formal meeting space for the Town. Access to all Town Hall public meetings can also be obtained via Zoom technology. The town hosts a website to share and communicate information with residents, businesses, and visitors. It is currently developing a website upgrade. The town is also planning the implementation of a document management system, upgrade for communication capabilities and centralized town processing program over the next few years. This infrastructure upgrade will safe-guard historical records as well as drive administrative efficiencies to improve communication with our residents and businesses.

## Fenwick Island Police Department

Located on the same property, adjacent to Town Hall is the Fenwick Island Police Department and the Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company Station. Fenwick Island has a 24-hour police service.



## Town Parks

At Town Hall, located at 800 Coastal Highway, the town's first park, Community Park, was created in 2002. This beautifully landscaped park includes a playground, shuffleboard decks, covered gazebo, tables and benches. At 4 W. Cannon Street, the town developed a second park, Cannon Street Park which includes a half-basketball court, beautiful brick walkway, grassy open space, picnic areas and an ADA accessible canoe/kayak launch. In addition, a new park, a town monarch and pollinator garden, is currently under development in the northern end of town.

## Postal Service

There is no US Post Office in Fenwick Island. The Post Office located at 23 W. Church Street, Selbyville, DE provides services to the Town of Fenwick Island.

## Libraries

The South Coastal Library, located at 43 Kent Avenue, Bethany Beach, DE 19930 is 5.8 miles from Town Hall. There are two additional public libraries located in Frankford, DE and Selbyville, DE

## Education

Fenwick Island has no educational institutions within its municipal boundaries. The town is located within the Indian River Public School District.

## Senior Services

CHEER senior center located at 30637 Cedar Neck Road, Ocean View DE is one of the closest facilities.

## 2.3 Demographics

Understanding the demographics of the town helps provide insight into how the town is changing over time. Population estimates and projections, and growth of housing units describe the physical nature of the town, while income, age, education, and other aspects render a better picture of its social and economic characteristics. A summary of Fenwick's demographics are found below. The full demographic profile can be found in Appendix C.

### Key Demographic Takeaways

- Fenwick's population stayed about the same over thirty years, with the vast majority of residents identifying as white and over the age of 60.

- The Delaware Population Consortium (DPC) projects that the town will grow a significant amount over the next 3 decades, partially due to the transition from seasonal residences to permanent.
- Fenwick’s household income is significantly higher than Sussex County, the State of Delaware, and the United States overall.
- Only 34.0% of the town’s residents are employed and just 1.4% are unemployed, signaling that the majority of the town’s residents are likely retired.
- 91.9% of Fenwick’s housing are 1-unit detached single family homes, but just 27.9% of all housing units are occupied year-round.
- The average home in Fenwick is more than three times more valuable than homes in Sussex County and the State of Delaware.

### Population: Estimate, Projection, and Seasonality

As a beach destination, most demographics portray an incomplete picture of the town. Though the official population estimate for 2020 stands at less than 400 people (Table #1), the summer population is estimated to swell to nearly 3,000 people - nearly 8 times the population the remainder of the year. (See Table 3)

**Table 1. Fenwick Island Population, 1960-2020**

|             | Fenwick | Sussex County | Delaware |
|-------------|---------|---------------|----------|
| <b>1960</b> | 48      | 73,195        | 446,292  |
| <b>1970</b> | 56      | 80,356        | 548,104  |
| <b>1980</b> | 114     | 98,004        | 594,338  |
| <b>1990</b> | 186     | 113,229       | 666,168  |
| <b>2000</b> | 342     | 156,638       | 783,600  |
| <b>2010</b> | 379     | 197,145       | 897,934  |
| <b>2020</b> | 343     | 237,378       | 989,948  |

Source: U.S. Census

**Table 2. Population Trend 1990–2010, Projection to 2050**

|                  | Fenwick | Sussex County | Delaware  |
|------------------|---------|---------------|-----------|
| 1990 (actual)    | 186     | 113,229       | 666,168   |
| 2000 (actual)    | 342     | 156,638       | 783,600   |
| 2010 (actual)    | 379     | 197,145       | 897,948   |
| 2020 (actual)    | 343     | 237,378       | 989,920   |
| 2030 (projected) | 508     | 272,266       | 1,042,869 |
| 2040 (projected) | 554     | 295,311       | 1,085,592 |
| 2050 (projected) | 592     | 307,544       | 1,115,712 |

Sources: Actual population data- U.S. Census; Population Projections- Delaware Population Consortium

**Table 3. Estimated Peak Season Population<sup>1</sup>**

|                                 | Units | People/Unit | Fenwick |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------------|---------|
| Base Population                 | NA    | NA          | 343     |
| Seasonal Units                  | 547   | 3.3         | 1,805   |
| Hotel Units                     | 187   | 2.64        | 494     |
| Campground units                | 0     |             | 0       |
| Total Estimated Peak Population | --    | --          | 2,642   |

1. Formula provided by Wilmapco

Source: Base Population: US Census; People/Unit: Delaware Population Consortium

**Table 4. Household Annual Income, 2020**

|               | Fenwick  | Sussex County | Delaware | United States |
|---------------|----------|---------------|----------|---------------|
| Median Income | \$85,000 | \$64,905      | \$69,110 | \$64,994      |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03

**Table 5. Selected 2020 Income Distribution and Poverty Data**

|   | <b>Fenwick</b> | <b>Sussex County</b> | <b>Delaware</b> | <b>United States</b> |
|---|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| <b>Households with Annual Income under \$25,000</b>       | 7.9%           | 15.7%                | 15.5%           | 18.4%                |
| <b>Households with Annual Income of \$100,000 or More</b> | 44.2%          | 32.8%                | 32.3%           | 31.0%                |
| <b>Individuals below Poverty Line</b>                     | 2.2%           | 11.7%                | 11.4%           | 12.8%                |
| <b>Individuals 65 Years and Over below Poverty Level</b>  | 1.6%           | 5.5%                 | 6.5%            | 9.3%                 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

**Table 6. Employment Status, 2020**

| <b>Employment Status</b> | <b>Fenwick</b> | <b>Sussex County</b> | <b>Delaware</b> | <b>United States</b> |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| <b>Employed</b>          | 34.0%          | 52.5%                | 58.0%           | 59.6%                |
| <b>Unemployed</b>        | 1.4%           | 4.8%                 | 5.8%            | 5.4%                 |

Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2016–2020.



## Chapter 3. Community Character

### 3.1 Introduction

A major consideration in community planning is to define and maintain the character of a community. The character of a town gives it a unique identity. It is created from both physical characteristics, such as buildings and roads and the actions of the people who live and work there. The ocean, beach, and bay bordering the town also contribute to its character. Defining and maintaining community character is an essential goal of this comprehensive plan. This chapter describes the community character of Fenwick.

### 3.2 Fenwick Is a Community First



The town was established as, and remains, a quiet, family-oriented, primarily residential community with a well-defined business district. Historical records reflect a consistent effort by the town to emphasize lower density, with low rise residential and commercial development, in a well-established and harmonious pattern in a relatively natural landscape. Details of this history are included in Chapter One. The importance of maintaining the small-town character of the community was noted in the original Comprehensive Plan developed in 2007 and in all revisions since.

From the time that Fenwick was incorporated in 1953, the town had distinctive small-town features that distinguished it from other coastal communities, even those in close proximity, including Ocean City, Maryland, which has greater density, greater height of buildings, less separation between commercial businesses and residential uses, and more extensive paving. Ocean City's summer population exceeds 320,000, which is greater than the population of Sussex County, Delaware.

The town was designed to be a community rather than a commercial resort. Many residents and visitors view it as a cherished respite that provides a safe place for family and friends to gather.

The commercial component of the community was originally developed with the intent to serve residents and visitors rather than to create large commercial tourism facilities that attract visitors from the wider region. This is a significant reason for the distinct character of Fenwick.

Support for this character remains strong today. As part of the development of the Comprehensive Plan, the Planning Commission conducted a survey of the community to elicit key values and priorities. The survey was distributed through email and US mail to residents, property owners, businesses, and others and available on-line and in paper format. Over 500 responses were received by the deadline in February 2023. One of the top priorities was to maintain the character of the community.

## Nature is Integral to Our Community Character



Protecting natural habitat is important to many in Fenwick Island. This natural habitat includes the bays, beaches, natural landscaping, and even the night skies. The tree canopy and native landscaping are an integral part of the natural habitat, and the character of Fenwick Island.

As redevelopment occurs in Fenwick Island, the tree canopy and native landscaping are increasingly removed. The loss of trees and naturalistic landscape should be addressed through a variety of tools, including resident education programs and volunteer opportunities, an ordinance review that assesses protection standards, the planting of trees on existing public lands, and seeking grants to assist in all of these efforts.

In regards to the night skies, the Planning Commission recommends the town consider a campaign to educate our residents and business owners about “Dark Skies”. The Dark Skies movement simply means reconsidering the use of artificial light and reduction of light at night.

Curtailing over illumination has many benefits for humans, animals, and the environment. Dark skies help regulate our circadian clock, which affects our sleep patterns and other physical reactions. Seasonal changes such as length of nighttime darkness help plants prepare for spring and fall. Natural dark nights provide important signals to various animals that trigger events like amphibian breeding and bird migration.

Dark Skies practices prevent the wasted energy of light shining where it is not needed or wanted. Light can be invasive. Things as simple as using exterior motion sensors rather than



steady all-night lighting, curtailing the use of landscape and porch lights and operating dock lights at night, can make a difference to the fish, birds, crabs and animals that share our town.

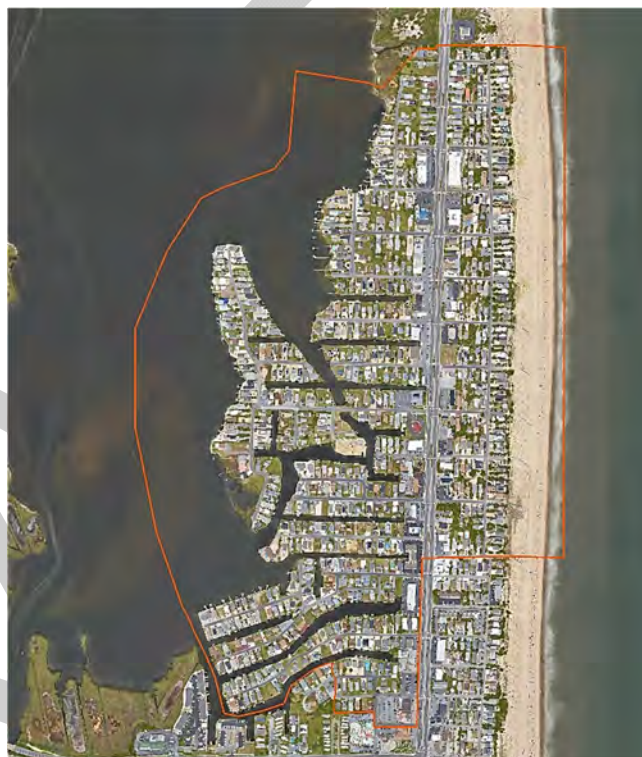
There is much more about our natural environment in the Beach and Bay chapters.

### 3.3 Small Lots and Grid Layout of the Town Design Promote Community

Several features of Fenwick promote community. Both residential and commercial areas are organized in a compact and clearly identifiable traditional town pattern. Two key elements that contribute are:

- a hierarchy of gridded streets and a system of blocks and lots; and
- relatively narrow dimension of the municipal streets, and the small scale of the blocks that encourages walking.

The primary use of single-family homes that reflect the block and lot pattern reinforces a traditional town design. Houses have a consistent setback from the street that established a rhythm of structures along the streetscape that echoes the rhythm established in the block and lot layout.



*Aerial highlighting Fenwick Island block and lot layout*

#### Bunting Avenue

The construction of Bunting Avenue west of the first line of cottages served to create a public space that has been used as a key walking, biking, and visiting space for the people of the town. Though Bunting Avenue carries vehicular traffic, it is at low speed. Groups of families and friends ride their bikes together and often walk together up and down the street. Many times, people stop to chat and exchange information. While there can be some conflict between motorized vehicles, bikes, and walkers, overall, the people of the town value the community gathering space created on this road.

## Residential Areas Support Community Connection

Residential areas generally surround the central commercial core fronting SR 1 between Lewes Street to the north, Delaware Avenue to the southwest and Atlantic Avenue to the Southeast.

Single-family detached residential uses stretch east and west of the commercial area before reaching Little Assawoman Bay to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east.

## Residential Architectural Character

The residential areas are characterized by a mix of architectural styles. Small beach cottages built during the early years have often been modified over time to reflect changing use patterns and style trends. Later homes— one- to one and one half-stories with simple rectangular forms, were constructed between 1950 and 1980. The 1980s and 1990s saw the construction of many two- to three-story custom homes with articulated forms reflecting the post-modern and neo-traditional architectural styles.



*Traditional beach cottage*

Many residential buildings are elevated on pilings to address flooding potential. The town has adopted designations related to the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). These currently require that the lowest floor of a building be elevated above the base elevation of the 100-year flood. The extensive use of pilings contributes to the town's architectural character.



*Redevelopment of older cottage*

Two strategies have been used to manage the size and scale of buildings – height limits and maximum size. The height restriction and gross floor area are the main parameters that regulate the design of bulk and scale of residential homes.



The height of residential buildings had been set at 30 feet for many years, as measured from the crown of the fronting street. In 2018, an ordinance amendment was made to allow two feet of additional height to be added to homes if the construction incorporated “freeboard.” Freeboard is additional height above base flood elevation that the lowest level of a house or structure is encouraged to be built above in order to further reduce the potential impacts of flooding. However, an

unanticipated result of this ordinance change was that many property owners used the additional height allowance to raise the roofline instead of using fill to elevate the overall grade of the lot, as the town had hoped. This unanticipated result will have to be reviewed when addressing resiliency issues and sea level rise, particularly on the west side of town.

The size of buildings, both commercial and residential, has been a concern to some within town. The size of homes has steadily increased over the last several decades. One step taken by the town was to limit the size of new homes through the zoning ordinance by metrics related to the total allowable floor area and amount of a lot that can be covered by a house. The current code limits the maximum house size either to 7,500 square feet or to the percentage of a lot that can be covered by a house to 70% which is also described as a floor area ratio of 0.70, whichever is less.

A strong concern of residents is the loss of the older structures as properties are redeveloped. To address this concern the town altered code provisions that will allow the older structures to be redeveloped within the footprint of their current configuration.

The architectural character of the town is shifting as more homes are elevated onto pilings, older homes are redeveloped into larger modern homes. Zoning ordinance provisions that maintain the size and height of residential buildings should be maintained to ensure the historic character of the town.

### 3.4 The Commercial and Business District in Fenwick

The commercial district in Fenwick is centered around SR 1. The properties fronting SR 1 are zoned for both residential and commercial use. All of the business district in Fenwick is found along the SR 1 corridor. Today, six commercial zoned lots fronting SR 1 remain vacant and available for development.

Some properties fronting SR 1 have been developed for residential uses. These lots are desirable for residential builds because they are less than two blocks from the beach. Seven commercially zoned properties have been developed as residential homes.

#### Commercial Architectural Character

The commercial area of town generally consists of one- to two- story masonry structures. The earliest buildings were constructed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Several buildings of architectural significance are iconic and contribute to the town's diverse architectural character. Examples include Warren's Station (located between Indian and Houston Streets), Seaside Country Store (located between Georgetown and Farmington Streets), and the Fenwick Village (located between West Virginia Ave and Maryland Ave).





- Warren’s Station has been a family restaurant in Fenwick Island, since 1960. The building was re-designed in 1983 to replicate a historic Lifesaving Station that existed along the Delaware coast after the formation of the United States Life-Saving Service in 1871.

- Seaside Country Store or “The Big Red Barn” has a design that seeks to reproduce an old time New England store. This design element is in keeping with the agricultural heritage of Sussex County. The “antique” candy store and cheese counter offer a glimpse of such shops, in small towns during the era of Fenwick’s incorporation.



- The Village of Fenwick has been home to many retail shops and eateries over the years. The design concept of small, intimate structures encourages a pedestrian quest to find the perfect accoutrement, refreshment, or experience. Its design concept is similar to the Country Store and represents a small scale, family-oriented character.



- The Bank of Ocean City is a newer addition to the Fenwick townscape; however, in the design, the building retains the charm of a small-town coastal cottage including a red roof. The bank provides year-round services to the town which were lost after two other banking institutions left the area.



## Vibrant Business District

Fenwick seeks to maintain and enhance a vibrant business district. In the past, most businesses in Fenwick were primarily oriented toward serving visitors and residents in the summer season, generally from May to September.

Today, Fenwick’s businesses realize a relatively strong off-season market as the full-year population in town has increased, and part-time residents and tourists visit more frequently

during the non-summer season. As a result of the new off-season draw, many of the town's businesses remain open for much, if not all, of the year and draw patrons from the larger Sussex County region. The work from home and shorter work-week trends also add to the frequency of visitors during the traditional off-season. Even more significantly, the entire coastal community around Fenwick has experienced tremendous new housing growth, particularly with retirees. Businesses in town stand to benefit from these changes.

As Fenwick transitions into a more year-round business community, serving more and more patrons who reside outside of the corporate limits, the town will be challenged by increased traffic on the roadways which, in turn, will lead to greater pedestrian safety issues as well as business patron parking demands. Balancing the need to provide infrastructure and services that support a more permanent year-round community without losing Fenwick's desired small-town identity and charm will be an important part of the next decade of the town's growth. As with the residential zone, ordinances should be maintained that place limits on the size, height, density and parking requirements in the commercial zone as necessary to maintain the unique character of the town.

## Restaurants and Eateries

The town takes pride in the fact that Fenwick boasts several excellent restaurants. As part of the "culinary coast" we have become a dining destination. Upscale restaurants and more casual "grab and go" establishments draw from the local population as well as the coastal region.

Like the residential zone, there are gross size and parking limits to existing strip mall structures and free-standing commercial buildings. In February 2023, the town changed building codes for new commercial development to ensure on-site delivery areas and to provide for more adequate patron parking. These code changes will not affect existing businesses as they are grandfathered. This code change was designed to respond to the shifting paradigm of a need for parking from those who travel into Fenwick to benefit from the offerings of the commercial district.

## Retail

There are local, regional, and nationally owned retail stores. Several shops offer a wonderful array of maritime artifacts and coastal inspired goods. Specialty stores include apparel, salons, surf and swimwear, pottery, home entertaining and decorative, beach equipment, children's clothing and a convenience store. A growing component of the retail mix is home furnishings and improvements, including furniture, mattress, paint, window coverings, and flooring stores. The presence of this retail segment corresponds with the growth of residential construction and a shift for businesses in the town's commercial district that remains open all year.

## Professional Services

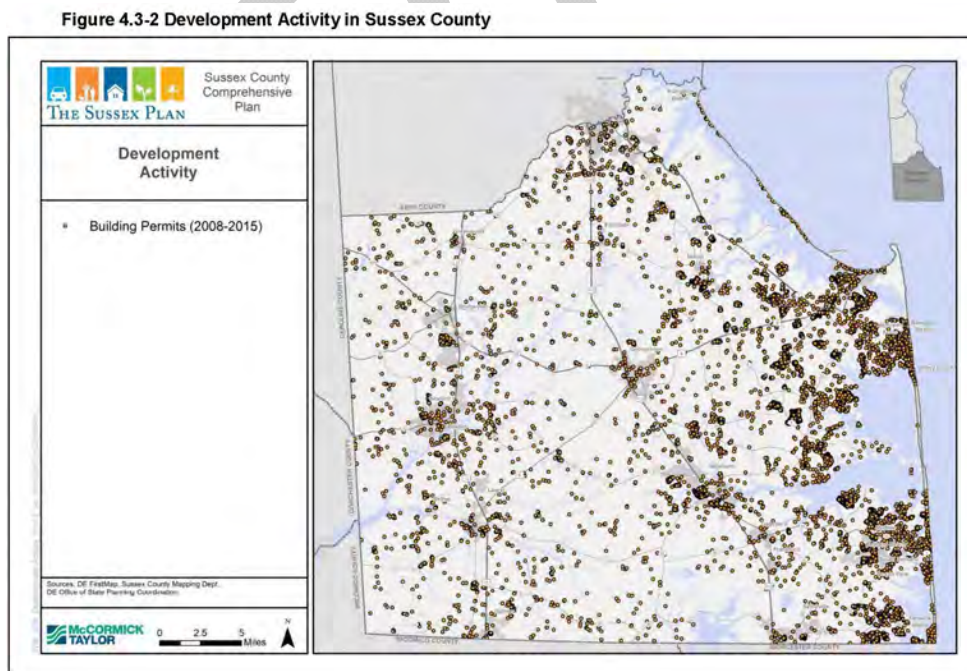
Communities with many professional services tend to have growing or stable year-round economies, depending on the service focus. Fenwick has a small number of professional services geared to real estate and construction and to personal care, such as hair and nail salons. There is one primary care physician office and a bank.

The town lacks a post office and other professional services that are typically found in mature communities. As the year-round population increases these services may find the demand to locate in town. The high real estate prices and lease rates may discourage the development of these community amenities.

## 3.5 Development Pressures Intensify

The town is affected by strong development pressures that exist along the entire southeastern region of Sussex County. In particular, extensive rezoning of agricultural properties for residential and commercial uses in Sussex County is leading to development of many thousands of new housing units, many of them along the SR 54 Corridor that links Fenwick and Ocean City to Route 113. Although still relatively “affordable” by east coast beach town standards, as of 2022, Sussex County was one of the fastest growing areas in the Mid-Atlantic for residential pricing, with a year over year price increase of 21.2%.

### Figure 1. Development Activity in Sussex County



Source: Sussex County Comprehensive Plan, 2018

Areas immediately adjacent to Fenwick along SR 54 are affected as well. As of 2022, according to the Delaware Office of State Planning, in the area west of incorporated Fenwick Island, more than three-million square feet of commercial space has been approved for development. This is coupled with the approval of 9,000+ residential units to the west.

The town is almost fully built out, both on properties zoned for residential uses and those zoned for commercial uses. The demand for redevelopment is strong. There is interest in expanding the capacity of buildings when redeveloped in both residential and commercial uses; however, resources available to respond to such demand is finite whether the intended purpose is residential or commercial. Responsible and responsive community development reflects constraints and applies due diligence to achieve effective stewardship of natural resources and community character.

Maintaining appropriate constraints on the scale and scope of new residential and commercial development and redevelopment is essential to sustaining the character of the town. Limiting activities and development that might harm or degrade the environment is vital to preserving a healthy family-oriented community and is important to town stakeholders, residential owners, commercial property owners/developers, and commercial tenants. Consistent enforcement of existing code regulations is essential. In some areas, code provisions may need to be strengthened.

These growth issues pose major challenges to the town to maintain its desired character and vitality for future generations.

## 3.6 Community Character Goal

**Protect and maintain the quiet, low-scale, and primarily residential character of the town for future generations while maintaining a well-defined and vibrant business district along SR 1.**

## 3.7 Recommended Direction for the Town

- Maintain and enhance zoning provisions that protect the town's character, particularly in regard to building height, lot coverage, floor area ratio, and parking ratios.
- Consider a campaign to educate Fenwick residents and business owners about "Dark Skies".
- Consider a variety of strategies to protect and increase tree canopy and native landscaping in Fenwick Island, including resident education programs and volunteer opportunities, an ordinance review of protection standards, the planting of trees on existing public lands, and seeking grants to assist in all of these efforts.





# Chapter 4. Safe Streets for All

## 4.1 Introduction

Fenwick Island should be a natural sanctuary for pedestrians and bicyclists due to the compact form of Fenwick’s narrow streets and blocks, as well as the surrounding flat terrain. Bunting Avenue has evolved into Fenwick’s unofficial “boardwalk”, becoming a key destination for pedestrians and bicyclists on any given weather permitting day. SR 1, which connects the town to its coastal neighbors to the north and south, is a heavily traveled highway that many must navigate to reach either the beach or bay amenities. Improving access and safe passage along these corridors is a critical and long-standing priority for the town discussed in this chapter. The Transportation Features Map can be found in Appendix A.



*Bike riding on Bunting Avenue*

## 4.2 Bike and Pedestrian Issues

### State Route 1

In traditional towns a primary transportation corridor serves an important civic purpose as a main street. Such streets accommodate traffic while still providing spaces for people to shop, dine, stroll, and congregate.

The original design of SR 1, which runs directly through the heart of town, was consistent with the small-town character of Fenwick Island. However, over time, the corridor was widened with little to no accommodation for other users, specifically pedestrians and bicyclists. The current design caters explicitly to the movement of high volume, high-speed traffic and conflicts with the town character and creates significant risks to public safety.

The introduction of a four-lane highway after the town was laid out compromised Fenwick's design. The high-volume corridor creates a physical and visual barrier between the east and west portions of the town. However, the corridor lacks measures to protect pedestrians and bikes. The highway does not have uniform sidewalks nor safe crossings. The speed limit of 35 mph is higher than appropriate for a main street area. Without a complete uninterrupted sidewalk network throughout the town on both sides of SR 1, the commercial district along SR 1 is not pedestrian friendly and conflicts with the small-town atmosphere the town seeks to maintain.

In addition, SR 1 is part of a statewide bicycle route and connects to SR 54, which is considered a regional bicycle route. The shoulders in both travel directions double as bike lanes and are marked as such.



**Figure 3. Statewide Bicycling Routes (excerpt)**



Source: DelDOT Sussex County Bicycle Map (excerpt)

Issues of particular concern to the town include:

- The corridor lacks a complete sidewalk network that would allow pedestrians to safely access key destinations along SR 1, despite longtime efforts by the town to advance such efforts.
- To the limited extent that sidewalks do exist along SR 1, many are no longer uniformly level, have narrow widths that do not accommodate pedestrians walking side-by-side or in passing directions and some are located within the walking lane with numerous parking lot curb cuts which create potentially dangerous conflicts.
- Crossing SR 1 for pedestrians at unsignalized crosswalks is a safety concern, particularly for the elderly, children

or those with mobility issues. Current state law requires pedestrians to step into the intersection before a vehicle is required to stop at the crosswalk. Oftentimes, pedestrians waiting to use these uncontrolled crosswalks are not being recognized by vehicles.

- Speeding on SR 1, particularly during the summer season, creates safety concerns, particularly for those crossing the street and for bike riders, including those in the bike lanes.

## 4.3 Vehicular Issues on SR 1

### Seasonal Traffic Volumes and Related Issues

Traffic volumes through Fenwick Island on SR 1 were little changed from the last comprehensive plan. According to DelDOT counts of average annual daily traffic (AADT). Counts from the Maryland state line to the Fenwick Island border averaged 11,777 vehicles as of 2021, up slightly from 11,068 in 2005. Similarly, traffic through town, in 2021, was reported as 11,621 average trips, just above the 2005 figure of 11,360.

While existing traffic volumes were not a priority topic during this plan's development, the conflicts between the steady traffic volumes through town and pedestrians and cyclists remains a priority, particularly given the heavy seasonal demands on the town's transportation infrastructure that may not be fully captured by annualized data.

For example, DelDOT has had three automatic traffic recorders (ATRs) along SR 1 and SR 54 in and very near Fenwick Island. Unfortunately, all three have either been recently retired or are temporarily out of service. Even so, Table 7 below clearly illustrates the extreme seasonality of vehicular volumes. Though the figure of 11,621 average trips is accurate, it is less than half of the recorded volume the town sees on a typical day in July or August. Because the latest data is several years old, it's not possible to determine if overall volumes are up, or if the degree of traffic volume seasonality has changed. Both would be useful to know.

The town would like to explore acquiring traffic volume data from the state's ever-growing suite of sensors, detectors, and "smart" traffic signals. Though the data they collect are typically used for traffic operations (congestion mitigation, incident response, and signal timing), the town is hopeful that it might be formatted and analyzed in a way that gives a much clearer picture of seasonal traffic demands and conflicts than the annualized AADT counts.

Issues related to the seasonal volume include:

- Conflicts between pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles on town streets, particularly Bunting Avenue, occur when traffic congestion increases significantly, particularly in the summer months.
- Vehicular traffic "cutting through" the town's streets to avoid traffic congestion on SR 1 has created safety concerns for cyclists and pedestrians, particularly along Bunting Avenue and Indian Street.
- Standstills on SR 1 and use of shoulder for lining up vehicles entering the parking lot at Fenwick Island State Beach Park creates safety concerns for use of the shoulder of SR 1.
- Traffic control measures (orange cones) utilized at the Fenwick Island State Beach Park to prohibit left hand turns into the park forces vehicles to make U-turns in Fenwick Island town limits and creates a safety hazard.



**Table 7. Average Monthly Traffic Counts, 2012 and 2019**

| <b>ATR 8077 (SR 1 Near State Line)</b> |                 |                 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Month                                  | 2012<br>Average | 2019<br>Average |
| January                                | 5,628           | 5,756           |
| February                               | 6,269           | 6,437           |
| March                                  | 7,655           | 7,560           |
| April                                  | 9,749           | 9,457           |
| May                                    | 13,975          | 14,011          |
| June                                   | 19,920          | 16,169          |
| July                                   | 25,698          | 24,171          |
| August                                 | 23,572          | na              |
| September                              | 15,944          | na              |
| October                                | 8,870           | na              |
| November                               | 7,052           | na              |
| December                               | 6,287           | na              |

| <b>ATR 8078 (3.5 miles West on SR 54)</b> |                 |                 |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| Month                                     | 2012<br>Average | 2019<br>Average |
| January                                   | 4,441           | 5,684           |
| February                                  | 4,534           | 5,956           |
| March                                     | 5,030           | 6,482           |
| April                                     | 5,370           | 6,733           |
| May                                       | 6,533           | 7,879           |
| June                                      | 7,514           | 9,157           |
| July                                      | 8,263           | 10,013          |
| August                                    | 8,158           | 9,856           |
| September                                 | 6,580           | 8,340           |
| October                                   | 5,700           | 7,237           |
| November                                  | 5,152           | na              |
| December                                  | 4,865           | na              |

| <b>ATR 8099 (Near northern Town Limit)</b> |                 |                 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Month                                      | 2012<br>Average | 2021<br>Average |
| January                                    | 5,604           | 7,002           |
| February                                   | 6,087           | 4,712           |
| March                                      | 7,282           | 9,249           |
| April                                      | 9,361           | 10,835          |
| May  | 12,962          | 15,001          |
| June                                       | 18,093          | 19,232          |
| July                                       | 23,246          | 22,523          |
| August                                     | 21,981          | na              |
| September                                  | 14,018          | na              |
| October                                    | 8,844           | na              |
| November                                   | 7,103           | na              |
| December                                   | 6,258           | na              |

Source: DelDOT, 2023



*Lack of sidewalks along SR 1 in Fenwick Island*

## Long-term Resilience of SR 1

The viability of SR 1 in the long term and in the face of climate change is of vital importance to Fenwick Island. The roadway is not only Fenwick’s “main street” and the core of its economic activity, but also a primary evacuation route, along with SR 54 in the case of an extreme event. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 on Resilience and Sea Level Rise, the entire coast of Delaware is at risk of inundation over the next few decades.

DelDOT is currently studying potential impacts and mitigation strategies for the SR 1 coastal corridor from Dewey Beach to the Maryland state line. The Fenwick Island community will continue to participate in this study and the ongoing public conversations that will ensue.

## 4.4 Regional Studies and Planned Improvements

### SR 54 Corridor Study

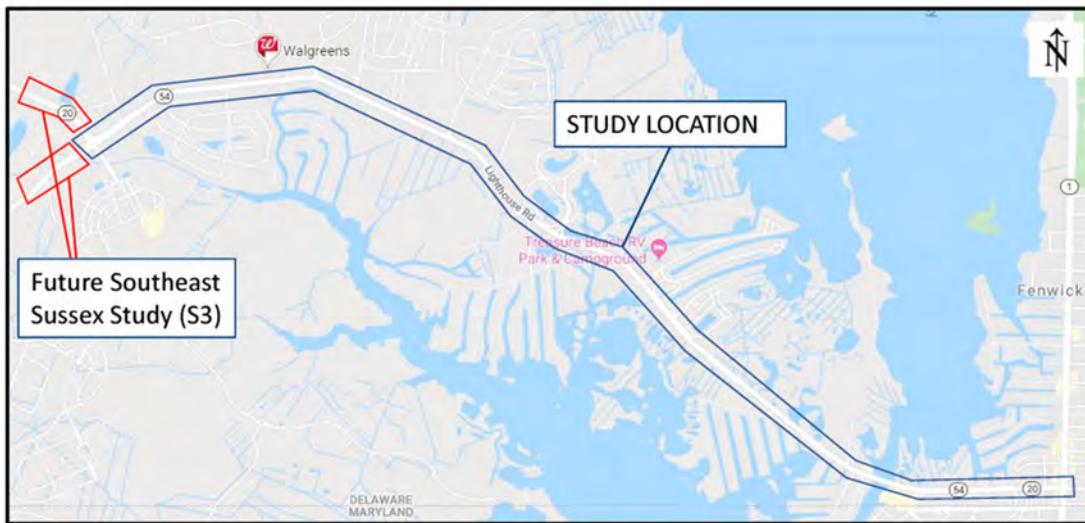
The SR 54 Corridor Study focuses on the SR 54 corridor from SR 1 to SR 20/Americana Parkway in Sussex County. The study which was finalized in May 2021, analyzed pedestrian, bike, and traffic data along the corridor in order to develop short- and long-term alternatives. Relevant recommendations focus on the SR 54 and SR 1 intersection, including improvements for bike/pedestrian safety.



## Southeast Sussex Study

DeIDOT is aware of the growing concern of local area residents and public/elected officials regarding increased traffic levels and safety west of Fenwick Island, along corridors such as SR 54, SR 20 and Bayard Road. These concerns are especially poignant during the summer months. In order to evaluate existing conditions and traffic circulation patterns in the area west of Fenwick Island (generally comprising Roxana, Bayard and Bunting), DeIDOT is undertaking the Southeast Sussex Study. The study will focus on identifying existing circulation issues, future growth potential and opportunities for operational, safety and infrastructure improvements for the study area.

**Figure 4. Southeast Sussex Study Area**



Source: DeIDOT, 2023

## Capital Transportation Program

At the time of this document's printing, the Fenwick Island Sidewalk project is listed on the FY2023-2028 DeIDOT Capital Transportation Program as 21-20007. The program lists the project as having authorization and funding in FY 2024-2027. This project is based on a 2019 Concept report and is aimed at filling in sidewalk gaps and make safety improvements.

Another bike and pedestrian improvement project (21-20008) listed on the CTP is outside of Fenwick Island, but relevant to the area. This project is slated for S.R. 54 between Bluebeard Trail and Monroe Avenue in Sussex County, just west of the Lighthouse Cove Bridge crossing.

Based on the locations of these two projects, it would seem that a study of the bike and pedestrian connection between Monroe Avenue and SR 1 along SR 54 would also be needed in the near future.

## 4.5 Public Transportation

Access to public transit is inexorably linked to bike and pedestrian mobility. Fenwick Island has seven DART stops, all along SR 1. The northernmost stops sit on either side of the highway at Lewes Street. North Bound at SR 1 and Essex Street and South Bound at the Methodist Church each host a stop. In the vicinity of Bayard Street there are both northbound and southbound stops. The southernmost stop is at the corner of West South Carolina Avenue and SR 1. All are served by DART Route 208. This route, the “Blue Line,” runs between the Rehoboth Park and Ride and Ocean City, Maryland. Service begins shortly before 8AM and ceases in the early morning hours, as of Summer 2022. Visit [dartfirststate.com](http://dartfirststate.com) for details.

## 4.6 DeIDOT Collaboration

During this plan’s development a senior DeIDOT planner attended planning session(s), provided relevant data for the document, and discussed a wide range of issues with the town, including those discussed above. In response, DeIDOT provided several contacts with email addresses and explanations of how they may be of assistance with each of the concerns the commission brought to the meeting on March 15th. In addition, DeIDOT provided data regarding traffic counts in the Fenwick Island area.

As part of this plan process, the town has designated a liaison from the Planning Commission and Infrastructure committee to act as the town’s point of contact and liaison with state agencies, including DeIDOT. Additionally, the town will invite the DeIDOT circuit rider planner to attend Planning Commission meetings on an annual, if not semi-annual basis. The town is hopeful that a better flow of information and communication between it and DeIDOT can be developed to advance and address the issues raised within this plan document.

## 4.7 Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Goals

1. **Create safe and inviting spaces for pedestrians and bicyclists between and along priority destinations in and around the town by:**

- Improving the pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure, with particular emphasis on crosswalk safety measures.
- Improving amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists.



- Increasing safety for pedestrians and bicyclists by promoting traffic calming measures and speed limit enforcement.
  - Supporting extensions of pedestrian and bicyclist infrastructure beyond the area of the existing network to allow for more residents and visitors to access key destinations.
  - Following and implementing Delaware’s Complete Streets policies by identifying the chief roadways for pedestrians and bicyclists and locating opportunities for traffic calming to enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety.
  - Coordinating with DNREC and DeIDOT regarding the traffic control measures and standstills created at the Fenwick Island State Beach Park.
2. **Work with DeIDOT to reimagine SR 1 as a safe, resilient, and cohesive Complete Street throughout the Fenwick Island region.**

## 4.8 Recommended Direction for the Town

A. Work with DeIDOT, Sussex County and others to improve the function, resilience and safety of SR 1 for all users from the Maryland state border to Fenwick Island State Beach Park to include:

- The installation of a complete and continuous ADA compliant sidewalk network along the east and west sides of SR 1.
- Improvements to crosswalks at key intersections that enhance safe passage for pedestrians and bicyclists across SR 1. Investigate raised bricks, imbedded lighting, painting of crosswalks or other measures designed to alert vehicular traffic of pedestrian and bicycle passage particularly at intersections not controlled by a traffic device.
- Traffic calming measures including speed enforcement on SR 1 that improve pedestrian and bicyclist safety and mobility.
- Median enhancements such as natural plantings with trees and other landscaping to provide pedestrian refuge, incorporate green infrastructure opportunities, and create a neighborhood environment complimentary to Fenwick’s unique character.

**Figure 5. Inspiration for a Reimagined SR 1**



Source:

- Decorative Street lighting to improve the visibility, comfort and security of pedestrians at intersections, pedestrian crossing areas and areas of high pedestrian activity.
  - Measures along SR 1 that enhance safety for bicyclists including, but not limited to, reducing curb cuts and placement of signage that does not interfere with visualization of the roadway for vehicle and bicycle traffic.
  - Attractive gateways into town that denote the transition to a more main street environment and the need for slower speeds.
  - Coordinate such improvements along SR 1 with DeIDOT and Sussex County so that there is a cohesive design and connections from the Maryland state line into incorporated Fenwick Island.
- B. Work to improve proactive communication and coordination with DeIDOT.
- Designate a town liaison from the Infrastructure committee to communicate, advocate, and coordinate with DeIDOT and other state agencies.
  - Invite the DeIDOT circuit rider planner to attend a Planning Commission or Council meeting on an annual or bi-annual basis.
  - Maintain the Town Pedestrian Safety Committee.
- C. Advocate that DeIDOT gather, analyze, present, and share traffic data with municipalities in a manner that provides them a clearer picture of seasonal traffic demands and conflicts.
- D. Implement and maintain traffic calming measures on Bunting Avenue as well as other streets maintained by the town.



- Engage the community on suggestions for traffic calming measures in order to maintain the character and usage of Bunting Avenue and other town streets, particularly in the summer months.
- Identify, implement, and monitor traffic calming measures in areas with usage conflicts between pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicular traffic on town streets.

E. Advance policies that support pedestrian and bicyclist mobility.

- Advocate for and support change in law in Delaware that requires vehicles to stop at all crosswalks prior to pedestrians entering the crosswalk.
- Review and evaluate standards for access management along SR 1 and the design of pedestrian amenities that cross curb cuts.
- Support placement of bicycle amenities along the SR 1 corridor including, but not limited to, bicycle racks at commercial sites and benches. Consider including in town ordinances.
- Prioritize law enforcement practices that promote pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Encourage the development of bicycle riding groups and other bicycle centered events.
- Support measures, including ordinance regulations, to maintain open and clear bicycle lanes along SR 1.
- Support signage that promotes pedestrian and bicycle safety awareness.
- Support use of sidewalks for pedestrian usage only and consider including this as a town policy.
- Support new and maintain existing town ordinance provisions that require the construction of ADA compliant sidewalks with any new build or substantial renovation of properties that border SR 1 (both commercial and residential).

F. Work to address general traffic concerns along SR 1 as part of an overall reimagining of the corridor.

- Coordinate with DeIDOT and DNREC regarding the traffic control measures and standstills created at the Fenwick Island State Beach Park.
- Coordinate with DeIDOT to formalize a path forward from study, planning, and consensus building to advance the town's priority projects in the state's transportation improvement plan.
- Coordinate with DTC regarding the adequacy of transit service and stops (pads, benches, shelters.)
- Incorporate resiliency and flood mitigation strategies as part of future road improvements.



# Chapter 5. Ocean, Beach and Dunes

## 5.1 Introduction

Fenwick Island has always been shaped by the ocean waters to the east. The ocean, beach, and dunes are essential and irreplaceable recreational, aesthetic, environmental, economic, and spiritual resources. They are also a premier attraction of the area. The Fenwick Island beach is highly desirable, with white sand, a gradual slope to the ocean, and no rocks or jetties with which to contend. Ocean beaches support a significant visitor industry and attract homebuyers to the area. Construction has been an economic driver of Sussex County over the last 20 years partly due to proximity to beaches. However, management of these vital resources is not without challenges. This chapter discusses these challenges and the town's goals and objectives for the future.





## 5.2 Existing Conditions and Issues

The beach and dunes provide an essential barrier to flooding from the ocean and absorb the energy of waves. The beach and dunes have protected the town from high seas and big surf since the 1962 storm that brought catastrophic flooding throughout coastal Sussex County. Preservation of the beach and dunes to mitigate flooding from the ocean is a critical priority. The beach and dunes are vulnerable to erosion and loss of sand during storms that have high wind, sustained pounding from surf, or adverse currents. These can be nor'easters, hurricanes, tropical storms, or storm remnants, as occurred with Ian in October 2022.



*Aerial of damage and flooding from the Storm of 1962*

Though the ocean, beach, and dunes are generally regarded as being under federal and state management, decisions about these resources materially and significantly affect neighboring towns. Moreover, the localities also play an important role in management of key assets particularly related to public safety and health.

## Integrity of the Beach



The State of Delaware formally recognized the value and vulnerability of its beaches and dunes in 1972 by establishing protections for them in state law. The state's Beach Preservation Act (last amended in 2016) delineated an eastern boundary for construction activities in order to protect the beaches and dunes from encroachment. Construction on the east side of this line is largely prohibited. The state has principal jurisdiction over beaches and dunes, through DNREC.

Analyses by the State of Delaware indicate that periodic nourishment of sand is needed to maintain ocean beaches in Delaware. DNREC measures the profiles and volumes of sand on beaches to determine when nourishment is needed. The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) carries out the work by pumping sand from the seafloor onto the beach. Since 2004, Fenwick Island has been one of five communities along the Delaware coastline slated for periodic replenishment, roughly every 3 to 5 years. Though beach uses and ecosystems are disrupted during nourishment, both the duration and extent of disruptions have been greatly reduced over time. At the time of this writing, May 2023, the town is benefitting from the beach nourishment program.

The end result of these efforts is that the beach has remained desirable for residents and visitors and protective for homes and businesses. The town is largely satisfied with the scheduling of these projects and appreciative of the contribution of the state and federal governments.

## Integrity of the Dunes



To the west of the beach are sand dunes that have been built up in recent years to a significant height and width. The dunes protect the town and roads from flooding by creating a physical barrier to rising waters and absorbing energy from breaking waves.

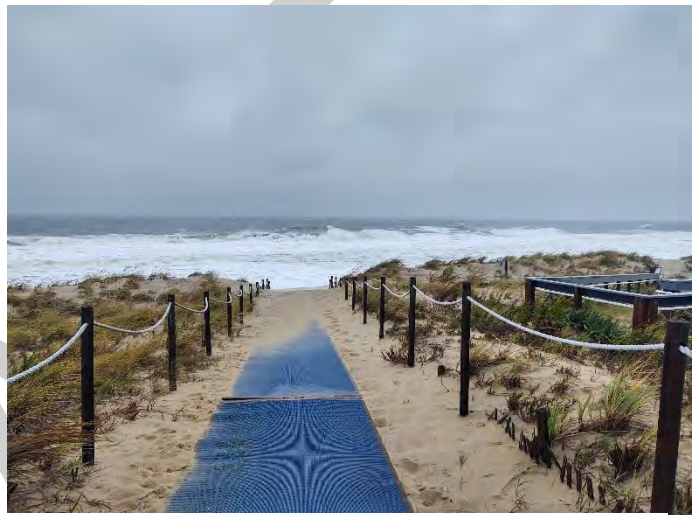
Dunes are formed through natural forces and supplemented by management by DNREC. Management efforts include moving sand up onto the dunes, installing fences to control access and collect blowing sand, and planting grass and protecting other vegetation to hold dunes in place and allow further accretion. After the storm of 1962 there were no dunes in Fenwick. The work since then has succeeded, and dunes have grown taller and wider over the years.

Dunes are sensitive to foot traffic, because feet damage the growing tips of the native vegetation best adapted to the dunes. Public access to dunes is prohibited except at specified crossings, and enforcement is by both the state and the town.

## Accessibility of Dune Crossings

Access to the beach is primarily through pedestrian crossings located at the east end of most streets. The crossings are defined by fencing to the north and south. Access to the beach for private vehicles is not permitted in Fenwick. While the larger dunes increase flood protection, they are more difficult for pedestrians.

Accessibility for beach users was improved when the town placed “Mobi” mats on the surface of dune crossovers to make the walking surface firmer. The mats have helped most people, but the crossings remain difficult for some. To enhance access to the beach, the lifeguard team also provides vehicle transport over the dune for individuals with mobility limitations, during certain hours. This service is highly valued. Overall, access to the beaches continues to be an issue that the town tackles and considers a priority.



*Dunes are vital in protecting the town*

## Integrity of the Ocean Environment

The health of the ocean is a concern to the people of Fenwick Island, though obviously beyond their immediate control. Generally, the town has supported efforts to keep trash and pollutants out of the ocean and to protect both marine creatures and those that use the beach, such as turtles and birds. The Environmental Committee has continued to host Earth Day and the Bay to Beach Clean Up, with an increase in participation each year. The town has discussed ways to improve biodiversity and to tangibly improve support for native and endangered species of plants and animals, including the installation of a monarch and pollinator garden. Additional discussion should continue, and such issues should be considered further in development proposals.

## Offshore Wind Energy

Widespread deployment of industrial wind turbines in the ocean is also a concern to the town.

Electricity generated from wind is a non-combustion technology that has been promoted to reduce pollution and release of greenhouse gases. A significant deployment of such turbines off the eastern seaboard is being planned and carried out by the federal Bureau of



Ocean Energy Management. Many areas have already been leased, including two that are quite close to Fenwick. The town adopted a resolution in March 2022 to support the federal adoption of an exclusion zone for Offshore Wind of at least 30 miles off the coast of Delaware and Fenwick Island. (See Appendix D for a copy of the resolution.) The town sponsored a symposium in May 2022 to inform the community and will continue to provide input into the proposal as the opportunity arises.

The town is concerned that construction and deployment are proceeding far ahead of capacity for scientific assessment and management of impacts, including those on coastal industries, local communities, marine mammals, migratory and resident birds, and fish and shellfish. The State of Delaware and Fenwick Island depend on the coastal economy, and large-scale industrial development offshore is proceeding with little or no assurance that impacts can be managed, and some evidence that they cannot.

### Ensuring Safety for Users of the Beach and Ocean Waters

The town contributes significantly to the safety of beach users. This is an important example of the cooperative interagency management needed to maintain the resources and economies along the coast.

The town funds and manages Beach Patrol including lifeguard services along its beach. This began in the 1960s with one lifeguard but has evolved into a large squad trained in rescue and first aid and provided with equipment to transport and resuscitate individuals. The town support for beach patrol represents almost 20% of its operating budget for FY 2023. Beach Patrol is on duty on weekends starting around Memorial Day, followed by daily coverage from mid-June through Labor Day.

The town also provides beach patrol services for the state beach located south of the town, with funds provided by DNREC.

### Parking and Sanitation

The town currently provides significant parking resources for the beach for both residents and visitors. Residents especially on the bayside want to be able to drive to the beach and have seasonal permits.

Visitors seek parking as well, and the town provides more than 100 spaces for this purpose within two blocks of the beach. Significant improvements that the town has made for visitor parking include clearer signs and simpler processes for payment of fees. The town hired a parking enforcement officer in 2022 and plans to continue this practice for 2023, increasing turnover of spaces.

The town provides trash receptacles and pickup at street ends where people cross over the dunes to the beach. Capacity was increased in the last two years to meet visitor demand and eliminate sanitation problems.

## Use and Management of Beaches and Impacts from Adjacent State Parks



The beaches north and south of the town limits are part of the Fenwick Island Beach Park managed by DNREC. The northern park is larger by far and includes the area from the ocean to the bay. One section of the park includes parking, bathing and restroom facilities for visitors, and crossover to the beach for pedestrians. This park has remained as a relatively pristine beach park. Other areas are designated for drive-on surf fishing as authorized by state-issued passes or other means. The number of vehicles is limited, and individuals must maintain active fishing. There are no large commercial or amusement facilities. Residents of the local area as well as visitors use these areas. The park to the south of town is much smaller, has no facilities, and abuts mixed residential/commercial areas outside the boundaries of the town.

Both parks generate concerns and impacts for the town. The park to the south is used as a drop-off zone for commercial vehicles bringing individuals from inland communities. Demand for designated drop-off locations is expected to increase as more homes are built in already-permitted subdivisions, as well as those that will likely be authorized in the future. These roads are under state or county jurisdiction. However, blockage of roads by drop-off vehicles and those looking for parking is a public safety concern for all.

The park to the north, like many beach parks, is over-subscribed at peak times, primarily on summer weekends. Traffic backs up onto SR 1 north bound lanes and their shoulder, sometimes reaching south as far as the town and creating safety hazards. Moreover, access to the park for traffic traveling southward from Bethany is cut off by closure of the left turn lane, leading to all such vehicles proceeding into Fenwick Island for U-turns that pose safety hazards.

### Preserving the beaches for non-commercialized enjoyment

The beach and ocean waters are highly significant for open space and recreation, with a consistent and strong commitment to non-commercialized recreation experiences. It is not clear what the state's current plans and policies are in regard to this issue. Past proposals to establish a more "Coney Island" style of park experience are of great concern to the townspeople and not consistent with the views of residents of the area.



As both population and visitation to the Delaware beaches continues to increase, there is a clear need to develop mechanisms to proactively manage their use and respect both the capacity of these resources and the supporting infrastructure. Such mechanisms might include permits or reservations for access to drive-on beach fishing. The town would like to

develop and maintain an open dialogue with the Delaware Division of Parks and Recreation on these issues and others.

## 5.3 Goal

**Protect and enhance the environmental integrity, quality, safety, and access to the ocean, beach, and dunes.**

## 5.4 Recommended Direction for the Town

**Protect and Enhance the Physical and Biological Integrity of the Ocean, Beach, and Dunes**



- Support on-going periodic nourishment for the beach by working constructively with the state and federal government and supporting funding solutions for nourishment projects.
- Maintain or enhance capacity to provide on-going grooming of the beach contours and dune crossings to meet needs.
- Take steps to direct pedestrians to established dune crossings to access the beach and to prevent pedestrian access to the dunes.
- Inform residents and visitors about the importance of the dunes and how to protect them through town communications.
- Encourage residents and visitors to participate in state-sponsored projects to plant new vegetation on dunes.

### **Ensure Safety for the Beach and Ocean Waters**

- Continue to provide and enhance essential public safety services for beach users for public safety, largely through a well-trained and organized beach patrol unit, assisted by the Fenwick Island Police Department, Coast Guard, and other entities.

### **Provide Universal Accessibility for Dunes Crossings to the Beach**

- Continue to provide surface mats to ease pedestrian crossings to the beach. Work with DNREC as needed to quickly remedy deficiencies in the placement of the Mobi mats when access is reduced.
- Supplement state efforts to maintain integrity and access via dune crossings as needed.



- Continue to provide vehicle support of crossings for those with mobility limitations by Beach Patrol.
- Review existing access arrangements with stakeholders to see whether they are adequate to meet demand and can be improved, in consultation with DNREC.

## Address Offshore Energy Development

- The town should continue to follow the process of offshore energy development, including both wind and oil, and continue to identify concerns for the ocean environment and coastal communities, educate local residents and visitors, and engage key policy makers.

## Continue to Manage Parking and Sanitation

- Monitor availability of parking for town residents by permit and for visitors by daily fees. Identify ways to improve access for residents and for visitors as feasible and consistent with other needs for the town.
- Continue to improve systems for visitors to obtain parking passes for daily use.
- Continue to provide refuse collection services adequate to the need for beach users through facilities at the parking areas near the pedestrian crossings.
- Review the adequacy of capacity annually and revise as needed.

## Coordinated Management of Beaches and Adjacent Parks

- Meet with DNREC Division of Parks to request the establishment of periodic check ins between the town and DNREC to discuss concerns and opportunities for collaboration
- Work with DNREC and other coastal partners to identify ways to manage the demand for beach access in light of the continued population growth in Southeast Sussex County.
- Participate in planning processes by DNREC's Division of Parks and other relevant agencies to promote preservation of the beaches as non-commercialized open space and recreation.



## Chapter 6. The Bays and Other Natural Resources

### 6.1 Introduction

Though Fenwick Island is known for its beautiful beaches, the role of the Little Assawoman Bay in the town's character and allure cannot be overlooked; Fenwick Island is as much a boat town as it is a beach town. Little Assawoman Bay is a shallow inland waterway that is part of the inland bays ecosystem and forms the town's western boundary. The unique bay environment is comprised of a mix of fresh and salt water and offers a wide array of habitats that support many species of animals, birds, shellfish and marine life. It is a centerpiece of recreational activities for the town, as residents and visitors fish, crab, boat or simply enjoy the sunsets.

Like the ocean and beaches, the inland bays have significant economic value. A recent study reported that they generate over \$4.5 billion in annual economic activity and support over 35,000 jobs as well as tax revenue of \$458 million from businesses related to boating and visitor accommodations for example. It also reported that in 2019, 7.5 million visitors came to Sussex County and that tourism is now the fourth largest employer in the state.

However, the challenges to living along this bayside home are numerous as the bay itself faces enormous pressure and degradation from human and natural forces. Natural siltation of the channels has impaired navigability of the waters for boaters, while the absence of markers reduces boater safety. Fenwick's proximity to the bay and the fact that many homes are essentially at sea level also poses significant risks from flooding that are expected to increase over time. This chapter discusses these issues and the town's preferred direction.

### 6.2 Existing Conditions and Issues

#### Little Assawoman Bay

Little Assawoman Bay provides access to the Assawoman Canal, the Indian River Bay, Indian River inlet and ultimately to the Atlantic Ocean to the north. To the south, Little Assawoman Bay connects through "The Ditch" to Assawoman Bay, Isle of Wight Bay, Ocean City Bay, Ocean City inlet and the Atlantic Ocean.



Sixty years ago, the bay was thought to be generally healthy with clear waters, abundant sea grass and oxygen levels that maintained a vibrant and assorted marine and shellfish population. However, over time agricultural run-off and specifically identifiable sources of pollution introduced increasing levels of nitrogen and phosphorus nutrients into the bay which, in turn, increased algae growth, reduced water clarity and resulted in poor oxygen levels that were no longer healthy for fish and shellfish. In 1995, recognizing the critical threat poor water quality was creating in all of the inland bays, the Center for Inland Bays (CIB) adopted the Inland Bays Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, focusing significant resources to remediate the sources of pollution that were affecting the health of the inland bays.

While progress of the health of the bays was made with the 1995 Conservation Plan and its 2012 Addendum, the threat to the inland bays' ecosystems shifted to a different source: urban development. As reported by the CIB<sup>7</sup>:

*The population of the Inland Bays watershed is growing, and the landscape is rapidly changing from farms and forests to residential and commercial development. Much of the development is concentrated around waterways where its potential impact on water quality is greatest. Since the last report, development increased another 7.8 square miles (11%), replacing agricultural lands, upland forests, and wetlands. With development comes more roads, parking lots and rooftops that generate polluted runoff to the bays. The watershed as a whole has now exceeded 10% coverage by these impervious surfaces—a tipping point at which water quality has been found to degrade in estuaries.... What is certain as population growth and urbanization continues is that the most effective technology for controlling storm water runoff and treating wastewater will be needed to protect the bays.*

Population growth in Sussex County, particularly around the inland bays has accelerated and shows no sign of slowing down. From 1990 to 2020, the population of the communities around the inland bays more than doubled (210%). The population around the watershed grew by 250% in that same time period. Full time residents grew by 13% since 2010.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of the last report in 2016, the Center for Inland Bays reported that the water quality of Little Assawoman Bay was rated as fair to poor. The recent 2021 report also grades the overall the waters of the inland bays as “Poor” or “D” rating, as they did in 2016; however, there was some “modest” improvement in water quality in the Little Assawoman Bay, likely

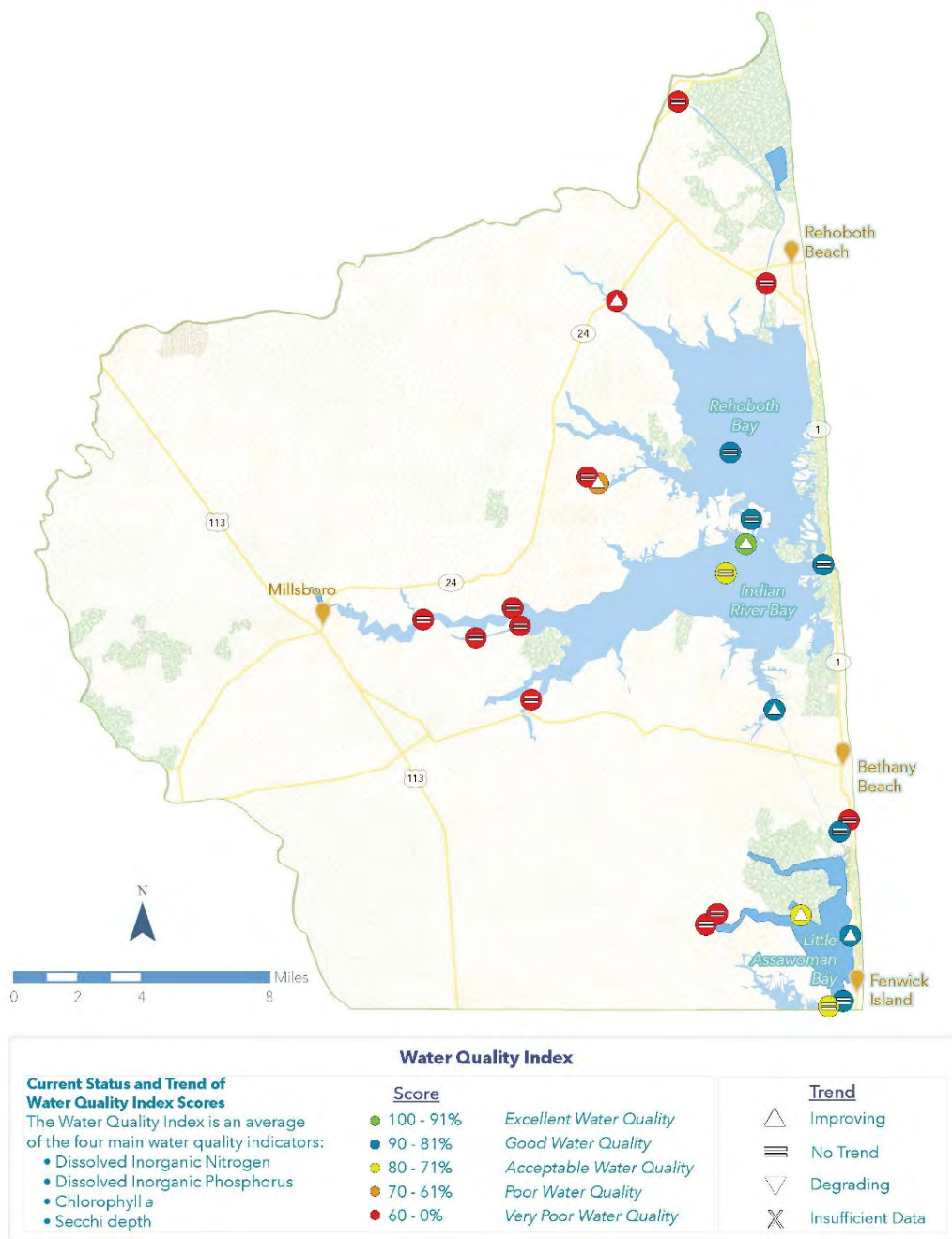
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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.inlandbays.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-CIB-State-of-the-Bays-2016-low-res.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.inlandbays.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-2021-SOTB>

due to lower nutrient concentrations and clearer water. Protecting the health of the inland bays, particularly Little Assawoman Bay, will be paramount to maintaining a healthy environment for our bayside community.

**Figure 6. CIB: Status and Trend of Water Quality Index Scores**



Source: Center for Inland Bays, 2021 Report on the State of the Bays



## Wetlands

Wetlands serve as a valuable force within Fenwick Island. Wetlands are necessary for protecting and improving water quality, storing floodwaters, maintaining surface flow for water during dry periods, and providing habitat for fish and wildlife. They function as natural sponges that reduce the speed of surface water runoff and overall volume. Often referred to as “earth’s kidneys”, they act as a filter to runoff-bound pollutants. As wetlands are regularly inundated by surface water or groundwater, they also act as important habitats for natural fauna. Their sponge-like characteristics also allow wetlands to act as natural tubs, being able to hold flood waters, storing from sources such as surface water and river overflows.

In the State of Delaware, wetlands are a valuable resource that have been largely lost to time. Protecting what wetlands remain is a goal for the public, private landowners, and state agencies such as DNREC.

## Other Natural Resources

### Tree cover

Tree cover, also known as tree canopy, has several benefits. Tree cover can help improve air quality, conserve energy, filter water, and provide natural habitat. Trees naturally absorb carbon, which is a greenhouse gas that contributes to global warming. They also produce shade, which can be valuable in maintaining lower temperatures during the Spring and Summer. In the winter, trees can act as a windbreak, reducing heating costs and saving homeowners money. Tree cover also helps reduce runoff, slowing the speed at which water travels that can reduce erosion and promote infiltration to soil. Trees also support biodiversity, where they are used by a large host of species as a means for food, shelter, and other means of foraging.

## Tidal Flooding of Fenwick Island

Bayside flooding is a chronic concern for Fenwick Island properties west of SR 1. Properties with the least elevation above sea level are located in this area. Tidal flooding from the bay has become common and is often widespread.

Flooding that covers a significant portion of the bay side seems to occur at least annually. The “moderate” flood stage as reported by the National Weather Service affects some houses and garages at ground level, many yards, and most streets. Frequency and severity of the tidal flooding are both increasing. Because the inland bays are





connected to the ocean, sea level rise will increase the height of tidal flooding. Data from a NOAA tide gauge in Sussex County shows increasing flooding in recent years.

Government agencies and organizations of all kinds are working on ways to respond to flooding and other effects of sea level rise and changing weather patterns. The Town of Fenwick Island, like other towns along the coast, is working with consultants to assess the likelihood and extent of flooding over the coming decades. Such studies identify susceptible areas and suggest steps to make towns and roadways more resilient to flooding. This can mean measures to prevent flooding as well as those that reduce the impact of flooding that does occur. These efforts are generally referred to as “resiliency.”

## Floodplains

Fenwick Island is entirely within a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) zone, also known as being “within the floodplain”, which mandates that residents purchase flood insurance under the NFIP enforced by FEMA, omitting unique circumstances such as grandfathering. The Fenwick Island FEMA Floodplain map is in Appendix A.

Floodplains are defined in several ways. Floodplains can be considered areas which are near or adjacent to a body of water, or as any land susceptible to inundation from any sort of floodwaters. Floodplains provide benefits through runoff reduction and slowing storm and floodwaters. They also act as a host for wildlife habitat and allow for groundwater recharge through conveyance. The primary disadvantage of living within a floodplain is the risk of flooding which can be dependent on natural factors such as tides, storm surges, and the elevation of water.

Fenwick Island is also part of the Community Rating System (CRS), which is an incentive program that encourages floodplain management activities that go beyond NFIP requirements. Discounts are based on designated CRS classes, and the Town of Fenwick Island is currently in a Class 9 Rating, providing a 5% discount on flood insurance premiums.

## Safe Recreational Enjoyment of the Bay

Recreational boating is a popular and intrinsic part of life in Fenwick Island. However, safe, convenient, and practical access to the bay is limited by degraded channels and lack of navigation markers.

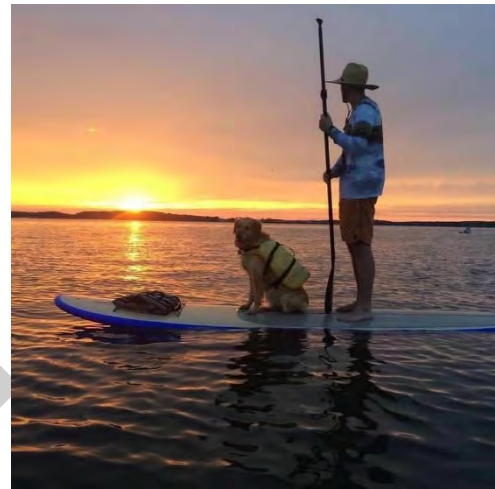
## Boating and Impacts of Shallow Water

A wide variety of craft use the bay, from paddle boards and kayaks to small sailboats, skiffs, and larger vessels capable of going out on ocean waters. Many vessels are housed within the town, either on land or at docks located in close proximity to people’s homes. Canals constructed in the 1960s provide access



between many lots and the bay. The Fenwick Island Yacht Club sponsors races during the summer.

Boating on Little Assawoman Bay depends to a great extent on the depth of the water. The bay overall is shallow and subject to shifting shoals and sandbars. The CIB estimates that the average depth of all inland bays runs from about three to eight feet deep. Little Assawoman Bay is at the low end of this range, with few areas exceeding three feet in depth. This is a major concern for boaters, who currently believe the bay has become too shallow to allow consistent access. This is because most motorized boats can proceed only in channels and require a certain depth before reaching a speed that allows them to get up “on plane.” Therefore, there is broad support within the town for improvements to navigability for the bay.



Like many waterways, Little Assawoman Bay needs to have channels maintained to support boating and recreational uses, especially for motorized craft. Channels tend to fill in over time and become shallower. Disturbance of land for development can increase the entry of silt into waterways unless continued enforceable best practices to prevent this are adopted. Widespread development in the watershed of Little Assawoman Bay may be one reason for loss of depth. The remaining channels are located at the north end of the point from N Schulz Road and around the point east of land into the cove and on the south side of Fenwick Island from the ditch.

The town has been working for several years to improve channels for boaters. One priority is to improve the channel that would allow boaters from Little Assawoman Bay to reach the main channel through the Fenwick Ditch. From there, boaters can reach the much larger Assawoman Bay and continue to the Ocean City Inlet for access to Atlantic waters.

The Town Dredging Committee leads the study of these efforts. The committee has identified two specific areas for channel maintenance through dredging of accumulated material, shown in Figure 7. Since around 2017, the town has funded and conducted geotechnical, environmental, and archaeological studies. These have determined that the material in the proposed areas is mostly sand suitable for use as construction fill or for restoration of shorelines. The Dredging Committee is pursuing permission from state and federal officials to dredge these areas. Dredging can be performed only in the winter period between October and March to accommodate fish reproduction.

Possible deposit sites for the extracted material include placement on a commercial property in west Fenwick, restoration site of Seal Island, and enhancement of an eroded shoreline north of the town. Differing sites have differing costs for movement and application of the material.

In general, all things being equal, the people of the town appear to favor restoration of Seal Island to enhance environmental and/or recreational values for the bay as well as potential benefit for resiliency; however, it is uncertain whether the state would authorize this.

**Figure 7. Draft Dredging Plan, June, 2023**



Source: Fenwick Island, 2023



## Navigation Aides and Markers Support Boating



Accurate marking of channels is essential to safe boating, reducing the risk of running aground unexpectedly. Even experienced boat owners can be hampered by shifts in shoals and channels. There seem to be no accurate markings of channels in Little Assawoman Bay.

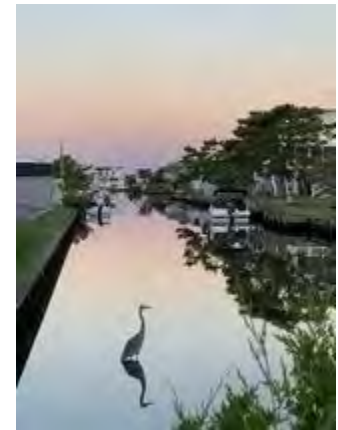
There are only a few corridors where motorized boats can travel in the bay and, to the extent the channels are marked, they are quite narrow and subject to shoaling at critical turns. The average boat captain would not be able to determine where these are located and running aground is quite common, creating additional boating and safety hazards. Depending on trial and error to find channels leads to personal safety hazards, property damage, and a great deal of inconvenience.

Most important to mark and dredge would be channels to access the Fenwick Ditch and to get from the canals and lagoons out into the main channels.

## Canals and Lagoons Conditions

Much of the bayside has canals that provide direct bay access. Many homes have docks adjacent to their property. The canals were dug into marsh areas in the 1960s. The extracted material was deposited to create relatively drier land later used to build houses. Most are bordered by wooden bulkheads. The bulkheads are in varying conditions, and some are lower than others.

The condition and depth of the canals is variable. The town discussed doing a depth survey in 2017 but it was never completed. Revisiting this issue in the next decade may be of some value if canals become too shallow for safe navigation.



At the present time, Fenwick's canals are passable, particularly by those familiar with the waterways. However, Fenwick Island may want to consider further study of the canal system for purposes of future dredging in the next decade.

## Loss of Shorelines

Like ocean beaches, bay shorelines are important features with vital environmental, recreational and ecological value. They may be developed with bulkheads and rip rap or they may retain natural features including wetlands, marshes, and beaches.

Though the shoreline of Little Assawoman Bay was largely undeveloped when Fenwick Island was founded in the 1950s, much of it has been altered since. Development of housing goes close to the high tide line in many areas including Fenwick. [See Aerial Photo 6-y.] For the bay, there are no required buffers from the shoreline nor elevation standards for buildings as there are along the eastern Atlantic shore.



Fenwick Island itself has one area of undeveloped shoreline west of Bay Street, toward the northwest edge of town.

Little Assawoman Bay has the benefit of an early designation of natural areas at Mulberry and Strawberry Landings. This has preserved wetlands and marine shorelines along a significant portion of the bay shore at the Assawoman Wildlife Area. Natural shorelines also remain along the eastern bay shore north of Fenwick Island.





The loss of natural shoreline tends to reduce the resiliency of the bay to flooding. A natural shoreline, especially adjacent to wetlands or grass beds, can absorb rising waters and dissipate wave energy. It is not known how much the alteration of shorelines and the filling of wetlands around Little Assawoman Bay has diminished its ability to absorb flood waters.

With the recommendations from Fenwick Island's Resiliency Plan, it will be important to coordinate with DNREC to develop strategies that both preserve natural wetlands as well as provide for sustainability of the town.

### Water Quality: Runoff and Discharges from Fenwick Island

Runoff and discharge from developed areas are a cause of poor water quality in the Inland Bays. Stormwater from precipitation picks up contaminants from the surface and then carries these contaminants into the bay. Ideally, direct discharge of stormwater to the bay would be avoided. Stormwater would be left to percolate into the sand and soil or be filtered through plants to remove contaminants before being released to the bay.

The contribution of the town to this is likely to be relatively minimal, as the town has only about one mile of shoreline. In Fenwick Island, like the surrounding coastal communities, stormwater from precipitation that accumulates on roads and pavement on the bay side is diverted into ditches and pipes to be conveyed and then discharged into the bay. This is important to getting the water off the roads, and the town has invested significant resources into improving these drainage elements, as well as valves that prevent bay waters from flowing back into the town.

Stormwater management will also be considered as part of the town's resiliency efforts and further collaboration with DNREC will be necessary to find solutions.



Another important practice to reduce runoff is to reduce or mitigate the extent of "impervious" surfaces. These are surfaces such as paving that do not allow any water to "permeate" and sink down into the ground. The town has adopted requirements to reduce or eliminate any new surfaces that are impervious to water. This means surfaces that do not allow the water to seep into the sand or soil. This is generally more effective in areas where soils drain.

There may be additional steps that could be taken to create mechanisms to increase seepage of rainwater into the ground rather than runoff, especially from the paved areas along the highway. Actions recommended by CIB to reduce input of pollutants to the bay waters

include planting of native species that require little or no fertilizer and pesticides, reduction in use of all chemicals applied outdoors, removal of invasive species such as the phragmites beginning to line Little Assawoman Bay and bans on sales or planting of highly invasive species.

## Water Quality: Impacts from the larger Watershed of Little Assawoman Bay

The health of the inland bays in Delaware has been degraded by many activities. Some of the areas of concern are poor water quality, loss of vegetation important to fish and birds, erosion of natural shorelines and wetlands, and increased import of salt water through the Indian River Inlet. Water quality information for the most part does not distinguish between Little Assawoman Bay and the other inland bays – Rehoboth Bay and Indian River Bay. For example, advisories to limit consumption of fish found to have contaminants are identical for all three.



Runoff from urbanized areas, particularly those with paved surfaces, has become an increasing concern for the inland bays. The CIB estimates that inland waterways are affected adversely when paved areas reach over 10% of the watershed. By 2016, the paved area for Little Assawoman Bay was already reaching this number. Strong development pressure in Sussex County is expected to continue. Though Sussex County adopted a buffer rule in 2022, it does not appear to be sufficient to prevent the runoff.

Little Assawoman Bay has some differences from the other inland bays. Its outlet to the ocean is in the opposite direction from Indian River Bay and Rehoboth Bay, as marine waters mostly flow in and out from the south rather than the north. Extensive mitigation measures adopted in the State Plan in 2008 seem to have been more effective in improving water quality in Little Assawoman Bay than they have in Indian River Bay and Rehoboth Bay.

## Sustainable Management for Little Assawoman Bay

The CIB has coordinated extensive work by agencies, scientists, and community members to measure and track key metrics and indicators. They adopted the first Inland Bays Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, focusing significant resources to remediate the sources of pollution that were affecting the health of the inland bays in 1995. The CIB released the 2021 State of the Bays report in March of 2023.

The State of Delaware assesses water bodies to determine whether water quality is too poor to maintain uses that could include fishing or recreational boating.

The inland bays, including Little Assawoman Bay, are receiving increased attention on multiple fronts. These include a state initiative to improve water quality, recognition of the need for the state to assume maintenance and dredging responsibilities formerly performed

by the federal government, and federal funding through infrastructure-related appropriations to rebuild and maintain resources important to local communities. There has also been a notable increase in attention to “resiliency.” The increased focus on these bay issues are due to the commitment and dedication of many organizations, political leaders, and individuals, including those from Fenwick Island. The potential for funding and support of actions that protect and enhance the waterways has increased. This is a key moment for the town to consider its needs and preferences.

Now that the dredging project is moving forward, it seems an appropriate time to consider a more integrated and sustainable approach to maintaining the navigability of the bay and to enhance its shorelines. While such projects can improve boating in the bay significantly, they could also complement existing CIB initiatives aimed at coordinating and enhancing water quality and ecological values.



It has been widely recognized that greater attention is needed to be paid maintenance and stewardship for all inland bays including but not limited to Little Assawoman Bay. From a longer-term perspective, most helpful would be long-term management for navigation of Little Assawoman Bay, in coordination with local communities and users. This has been established to a greater degree in other inland waterways including Indian River Bay and Rehoboth Bay.

Such a process would include surveying depth, accurate marking of channels, and planning and execution of dredging essential to navigation, in consultation with local communities and bay users, and in consideration of environmental values and concerns. Little Assawoman Bay should be included in the list of waterways that are routinely assessed for maintenance needs.

## 6.3 Goal

**Maintain the quality and physical traits of Little Assawoman Bay and surrounding areas to reduce flooding and increase resiliency, retain or improve navigability for recreational boating, and improve environmental quality.**

## 6.4 Recommended Direction for the Town

**Continue efforts to Mitigate Flooding from Little Assawoman Bay.**

Addressing flood mitigation strategies is a long-term challenge for the town. Measures to design and construct new infrastructure is discussed in Chapter 7, Resiliency.

## Provide Protection and Support for Recreational Boating.

- Support dredging of channels into and around Fenwick.
- Support and encourage DNREC to have navigation marker aids timely placed, repaired and monitored.
- Identify the navigation marks and aids that are needed to support boating in Little Assawoman Bay and waters near Fenwick Island with community input and determine their existing conditions. Make this information available for DNREC and other entities working on navigation. Work with boaters to update and report this information annually.
- Support programs that have planned activities for recreational boating.
- Identify resources to characterize depths of waters in Little Assawoman Bay or consider ways to obtain such data to better inform needs for boating. Seek community input.
- Advocate for including Little Assawoman Bay in state plans for improvements to boating and navigation including those that address shallow areas.
- Identify areas where existing channels are close to the shore and leasing of state submerged lands for docks should be discouraged. Share this information with the DNREC division responsible for leasing.

## Preserve the Natural Environment and Promote Resiliency

- Support environmentally friendly programs and encourage community involvement such as oyster gardening and use of rain barrels.
- Support the protection of natural shorelines as a priority for little Assawoman Bay.
- Identify and pursue actions that the town could take in conjunction with other partners to achieve preservation of natural shorelines that contribute to environmental values and resiliency.
- Advocate for policies and decisions that protect and restore natural shorelines that increase or maintain environmental quality, recreational opportunities, and resiliency.



## Promote and participate in Sustainable Management for Little Assawoman Bay

- Develop a vision for sustainable management of Little Assawoman Bay that would coordinate efforts for shoreline protection and restoration, habitat for fish and wildlife, navigation, water quality, and scenic resources and resiliency.
- Recommend actions toward such a vision be taken by state and county entities in cooperation with local communities.

## Protect the Canals and Lagoons in Fenwick

- Consider whether any step to further assess conditions in the Fenwick Island canals may be useful and cost-effective.
- Consider whether any remedial step might contribute to improved water quality.

## Assess Runoff and Stormwater Discharges from Fenwick Island

- Encourage improved methods of managing stormwater run-off in Fenwick.
- Limit impervious surface cover throughout Fenwick Island through enforcement of ordinances which limit impervious surfaces.
- Promote rain gardens and other innovative green infrastructure options.
- Consider participating in the citizen science water quality monitoring efforts for the inland bays with a monitoring point within the town.

## Protect Water Quality from the larger Watershed of Little Assawoman Bay

- Obtain and analyze more current information about water quality in the bay from the Center for Inland Bays and other entities as appropriate.
- Review recommended steps for improvement contained in the 2021 State of the Inland Bays report, with a particular focus on those that are pertinent to Little Assawoman Bay and identify and implement actions that may be appropriate for the town.
- Identify and advocate for actions that may be appropriate for the county or other entities.

## Collaborate with State Efforts

- Encourage regional development offices to seek bay friendly development.
- Support and monitor DNREC, Center for Inland Bay work and other regional efforts to improve and maintain bay health.





# Chapter 7. Resiliency: Sea Level Rise and Coastal Flooding

## 7.1 Introduction

The Town of Fenwick Island is the southernmost municipality in Sussex County, DE. The average sea level calculation for the town is 7 feet above sea level. Most properties, especially on the west side of SR 1 are no higher than 5 feet above sea level and the lowest level on the bayside is just 1.7 feet above sea level. In contrast, the beach end parking areas, located on the ocean side of town are between 7 to 9 feet above sea level. SR 1, which bisects the town and is roughly the midpoint, averaging 4 feet above sea level.



Fenwick Island's proximity to both bodies of water makes it highly susceptible to tidal inundation and surges during storm events including Nor'easters and sunny day flooding. The town's low-lying topography, bayside lagoons, and canals, and stormwater infrastructure system are further strained by the effects of sea level rise (SLR) on the community.

## 7.2 Understanding Sea Level

Sea level is a measure of the average height of the surface of the sea. Like land, the surface of the ocean is not flat or uniform. Although SLR is thought to be a more current topic of discussion, records indicate since the late 1800's sea levels have continuously risen. For nearly 150 years, the Center for Operational Oceanographic Products and Services has measured SLR by utilizing tide stations along all U.S. coasts. Today, the global sea level is 5-8 inches higher on average than it was in the year 1900.

The two primary factors leading to rising global sea levels are thermal expansion and melting of large land-based formations such as glaciers and ice sheets due to warming atmospheric and water temperatures.

Sea level data and tidal information establish marine boundaries, from private property lines to the borders of our nation's territorial sea. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) uses sea level data to produce nautical charts and promote safe navigation<sup>9</sup>.

Sea level information also informs how we develop safe building codes, restore coastal habitats and site infrastructure. Together with storm surge information, it could advise floodplain maps and safe evacuation routes. However, it is important to understand that current FEMA floodmaps are based on historical flood data, not sea level rise projections.

There is a certain level of unpredictability with understanding the full effects of sea level rise, however, advances in technology and further modeling resources will help vulnerable communities better prepare. With 40 percent of Americans living in densely populated coastal areas, including Fenwick Island, having a clear understanding of sea level trends is critical to our societal and economic wellbeing.<sup>10 11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [Tracking sea level rise ... and fall | National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(noaa.gov\)](https://www.noaa.gov/education/outreach-and-engagement/understanding-sea-level-rise)

<sup>10</sup> <https://sealevel.nasa.gov/understanding-sea-level>

<sup>11</sup> [Our Globally Changing Climate - Climate Science Special Report \(globalchange.gov\)](https://www.globalchange.gov/report)





## 7.3 Existing Conditions and Emerging Trends



Tidal flooding has become more common in Fenwick Island's bayside roadways, yards, and drainage ditches. The frequency and volume of floodwater has increased at a noticeable rate in the past two decades. Sunny day or nuisance flooding have become more prevalent and even mild storm surges are almost certain to produce at least moderate flooding throughout the low-lying areas of Fenwick Island west of SR 1.

It is important to note that flooding from rainfall events or "sunny day" tidally induced flooding occurrences must be considered within Fenwick Island's vulnerability analysis. As SLR continues to impact rainfall distribution in the mid-Atlantic, there is

potential for more frequent, shorter duration storms as well as greater intensity weather events contributing to increases in flooding. As sea level rises, frequent rainfall events causing flooding conditions and standing water will be considerably more notable in town because there will be less available "head" pressure in the drainage system to "push" runoff out through the pipes.

Another consideration of flooding conditions and increased standing water is the decrease in ground saturation. These conditions are physically evident during some high tides and with more frequent and severe coastal storms and Nor'easters in Fenwick Island.

Fenwick Island, with the State of Delaware and other coastal communities, began sustainability and resiliency studies over a decade ago and many are now beginning to discuss municipal resiliency options. Fenwick Island implemented the town's first SLR Vulnerability Study in 2015. The town has continued to support the need to recognize the severity of the effects of sea level rise represented by tidal flooding and the importance of communication with the property owners. Fenwick Island is utilizing numerous resources and coordinated efforts. Collaboration with the Town Council, Infrastructure Committee, Department of Public Works, civil engineers, Sussex County, DNREC, DelDOT, the State of Delaware, USACE, and other coastal municipalities to continue these supportive efforts as we address inundation issues as a community is imperative.

## 7.4 Current Planning for Sea Level Rise in Fenwick Island

In the Fall 2021, Fenwick Island's Infrastructure Committee initiated discussions addressing the need to conduct a current resiliency study with updated GIS (Geographic Information System) mapping. The town, in partnership with DNREC, contracted with an engineering firm to develop a current resiliency data bank to inform and discuss the data projections and options for SLR mitigation measures on Fenwick Island, thereby enhancing the community's overall resiliency.

The study focused on providing updated mapping and data which can serve as the basis for engaging residents and businesses to forge well-informed decisions, prioritize at-risk areas of the town and discuss suggested implementable action items as the town adapts to SLR.

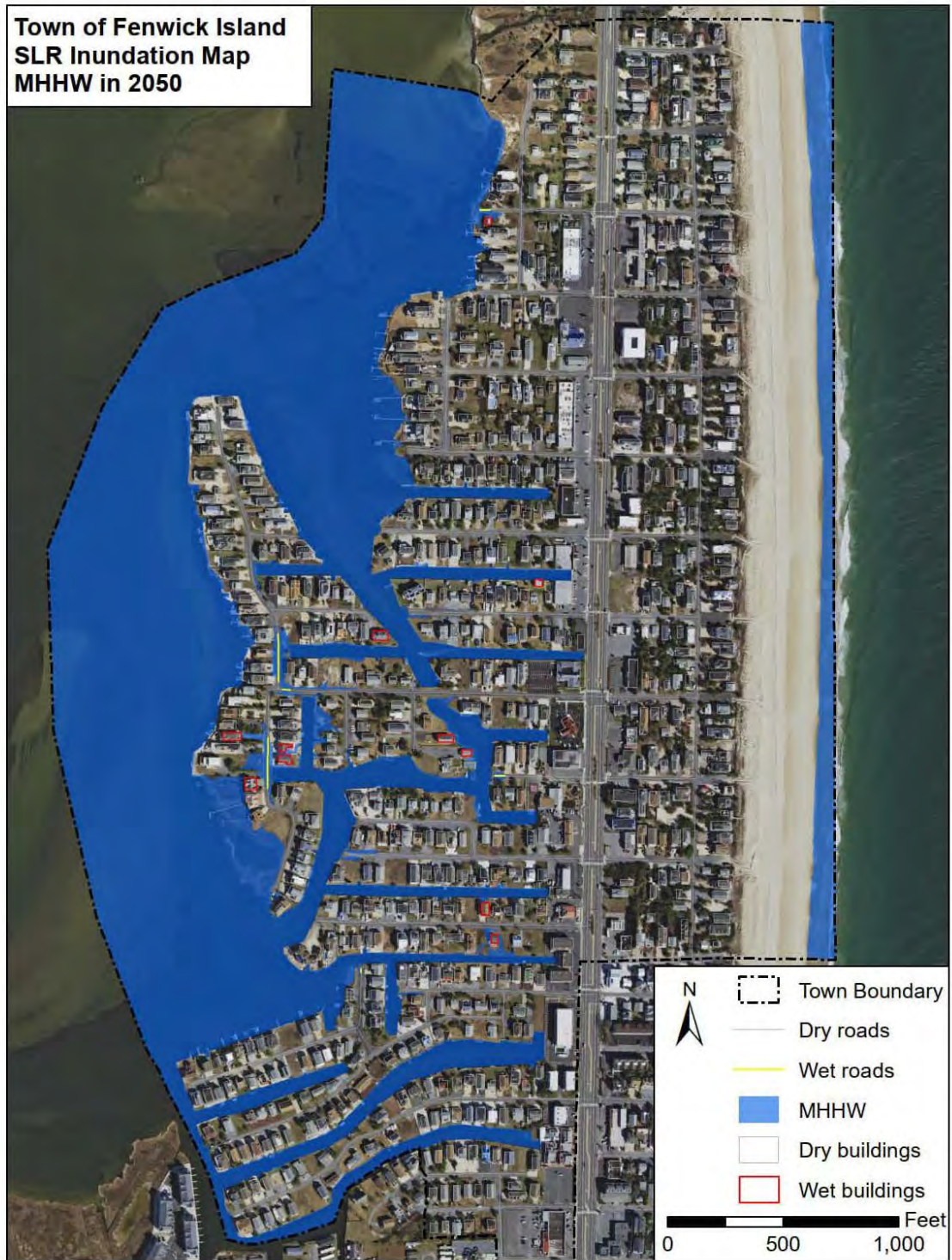
In March 2023, AECOM delivered the SLR Resiliency Study, updated SLR maps and presented recommendations to improve sustainability to the Infrastructure Committee. In summary the study defined the following steps:

1. Identify appropriate SLR projections
2. Identify potential impacts
3. Risk assessment and vulnerability
4. Development of suggested recommendations and adaptation measures
5. Implementation
6. Monitor and Evaluate

A total of 6 scenarios were mapped by AECOM, representing the timeframe of 2030 through 2080 at 10-year intervals. The map for 2050 is shown in Figure 9. Each map illustrates the extent of inundation and highlights buildings and roads that are projected to be affected. Inundation is expected to primarily affect buildings and roads west of SR 1 which is characterized by flat, low-lying topography.



Figure 9. Estimated SLR Inundation Map, 2050



Source: 2023 Fenwick Island Resiliency Plan, AECOM

Study recommendations are categorized into short, medium and long-term impacts:

- **Short term:** those areas expected to start to experience inundation impacts by 2050 and greatly expand by 2060.

The streets expected to experience inundation by 2050 include North and South Schulz Road, W. Dagsboro Street, McWilliams Street, Bora Bora Street, W. Houston Street, W. Georgetown Street, West Essex Street, Madison Avenue, Glenn Avenue, W. James Street, Cannon Street Park. The municipal buildings and facilities included in this list are mentioned earlier as Critical Facilities and infrastructure: Town Hall, Fenwick Island Police Department, Fire department building, town-owned bayside road ends, and municipal drainage infrastructure.

- **Mid-term:** Residential streets and municipal areas considered in the mid-term timeframe start to experience inundation in 2060.

Mid-term locations include W. Indian Street, W. Farmington Street, W. Cannon Street, W. Bayard Street, W. Atlantic Street, W. South Carolina Avenue, Mermaid Street, and the Town Hall Playground and Gazebo.

- **Long term:** By 2070, approximately 90% of streets on the bayside are expected to experience two daily cycles of inundation.

The streets included in the long-term assessment include Wright Street, Bay Street, Winward Way, Ebb Tide Cove, Bayard Street Extension, Bay Side Drive, Surf Avenue, Oyster Bay Drive, High Tide Lane, W. Maryland Avenue, Island Street, and the beachside road ends.

## 7.5 Resiliency Goal

**To study and make available best practice mitigation data, suggestions, recommendations, and procedures to reduce inundation and tidal flooding risks in coordination with all of Fenwick Island property owners**

## 7.6 Recommended Direction for the Town

- **Work with the Fenwick Island community to determine how to move forward with the recommendations from the 2023 resiliency study**

It is imperative that the property owners of Fenwick Island take a community-wide approach in the decision making and application of mitigation strategies for this issue. A parcel-by-parcel approach will produce “quick fixes” to solve immediate problems but will be less effective in the long-term. Success will come from the town and its property owners working together to implement a series of collective mitigation strategies.

Though the projections are sobering, there is time for proper planning, community education and implementation to mitigate flooding and to provide for a sustainable community.

- **b. Establish and maintain public engagement on SLR, climate change and the town's approach**

It is of the utmost importance to keep property owners involved in conversations regarding climate change and SLR as the town continues to study and make available, best practice mitigation data, suggestions, recommendations, and procedures to reduce inundation and tidal flooding risks.

- **Improve Drainage**

The town should continue evaluating and making improvements to the stormwater infrastructure. In 2013, the town conducted a stormwater infrastructure inventory which identified gaps in the existing system and needed improvements.

- **Continue to participate in future studies such as the Delaware Inland Bay, Delaware Bay Coast Coastal Storm Risk Management Feasibility Study**

The town participated in the initial charrette on April 13, 2023, and is participating in the newly initiated Inland Bays Sustainability Study being undertaken by the USACE and DNREC

- **Continue Beach Replenishment efforts**

Beach restoration and replenishment projects in collaboration with the State of Delaware and USACE will continue to be important to the long-term resiliency for the Town of Fenwick Island. This practice which has and continues to occur will assist in protecting the dunes that protect the oceanside of town.

- **Prepare for and seek out Grant Funding**

Being aware of available grants is a valuable tool in continuing municipal resiliency planning. It is important to emphasize that working closely with the Delaware Coastal Program on resiliency projects will unlock opportunities for future assistance from the state.

- **Consider Resiliency Funding**

Resiliency planning is becoming a priority for many towns, and some communities are considering establishing a resiliency fund to help pay for future projects and grant funding geared towards adaptation projects.

- **Assess potential Code updates**

For mitigation strategies to be successful, the town should consider codifying requirements such as elevated dwellings, incorporating greater use of permeable surfaces, and ensuring properties drain to streets and not to adjacent properties. Codifying requirements will ensure all property owners are following the same standards as part of the community-wide approach.

- **Sea Level Rise Design Guidelines or Standards**

Developing and adopting resilient design guidelines or standards would be an appropriate action for the town to consider pursuant to AECOM recommendations. Specific regulations tailored to address the impacts of SLR on both commercial and residential development would facilitate resiliency through adequate building and infrastructure design. Design measures to be considered for inclusion as part of the regulatory document could include elevation requirements, building materials, and landscaping requirements.

By requiring all future development and existing structures to be retrofitted to meet design requirements, buildings will be able to withstand the harsh impacts and challenges brought forth by rising sea levels. Buildings and infrastructure that are designed in a manner consistent with a changing environment will enable residents and tourists alike to ensure their continued enjoyment of the town.





# Chapter 8. Community Development

## 8.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the existing and future land uses in the Town of Fenwick Island, including housing. Since the town is, for all intents and purposes, built out, the main source of development activity is the redevelopment of existing properties. The issues discussed within this chapter were carefully considered from the perspective of growth trends, planning context, and environmental influences. Many concepts are carried forward from the 2017 and 2007 Comprehensive Plans, where the common thread is the continued and strong desire to retain the small, family-oriented character of the town.

## 8.2 Existing Land Use and Housing

The town's existing development pattern is depicted on the Existing Land Use Map in Appendix A. Over half of the acreage (53%) within the town's boundaries is actually water. As seen in Table 8, the 301 acres of land are primarily residential with the commercial uses located along the SR 1 corridor.

Most of the town's housing stock consists of single-family detached structures located on small lots typically measuring 50' feet wide and organized into distinct, compact blocks.

Although there are residential properties along the SR 1 corridor, commercial properties are the dominant use. Commercial uses include institutional, office, lodging, services, utility, restaurants, clothing, retail, and a few vacant lots. Most businesses are owner operated, or small hospitality groups. Few businesses are national or international chains.

Within the town, there are 37 vacant lots remaining. The last Comprehensive Plan documented that there were 56 vacant lots in 2017. This represents the development of one third of those lots in the last five years. The majority of the remaining lots are residentially zoned. However, there are a few lots located within the commercial zone that may be developed as either residential or commercial. Considering the strong residential market, it is difficult to predict if these remaining properties will be developed as residential, commercial,



or both. However, it is entirely feasible that upon the 5-year review of this plan in 2028, there will be no vacant lots remaining in town.

**Table 8. Existing Land Use, 2022**

| Land Use             | Description   | Acreage | Percent of land |
|----------------------|---|---------|-----------------|
| <b>Residential</b>   | Primarily single family detached residential              | 195.9   | 65.1%           |
| <b>Commercial</b>    | Neighborhood oriented commercial, hotels, and residential | 29.0    | 9.6%            |
| <b>Park/Beach</b>    | Town owned open space; beach strand                       | 53.5    | 17.8%           |
| <b>Institutional</b> | Town facilities   | 3.2     | 1.1%            |
| <b>Vacant</b>        | Undeveloped parcels                                       | 9.5     | 3.2%            |
| <b>Roads</b>         | Public rights of way                                      | 9.8     | 3.3%            |
| <b>Total</b>         |   | 301.0   | 100.0%          |

Source: First Map GIS data with confirmation by Town of Fenwick

## Housing

According to the U.S. Census data for 2020, there are 715 housing units in the town of Fenwick. Over ninety percent (90%) of these are single-family detached dwellings with a small portion of attached units and apartments. Nearly 72% were built before 2000.

The owner occupancy rate is very high at 95%, with an overall occupancy rate of 27%. This falls in line with the vision of Fenwick Island as a summer retreat town; fewer than one third of the houses are occupied by year-round residents. Sixty seven percent (67%) of these residents are 60 years and older.

**Table 9. Fenwick Island Housing Stock Composition, 2020**

|                              | Fenwick | Sussex County | Delaware |
|------------------------------|---------|---------------|----------|
| <b>1-Unit Detached</b>       | 91.9%   | 64.7%         | 58.5%    |
| <b>1-Unit Attached</b>       | 4.2%    | 9.8%          | 15.9%    |
| <b>2 or More Units</b>       | 3.9%    | 10.4%         | 17.8%    |
| <b>Mobile Home and Other</b> | 0.0%    | 15.0%         | 7.8%     |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Selected Housing Characteristics, Table DP04.

**Table 10. Fenwick Island Age of Occupied Housing Units, 2020**

|                      | Fenwick | Sussex County | Delaware |
|----------------------|---------|---------------|----------|
| <b>2014 or later</b> | 4.6%    | 9.5%          | 5.4%     |
| <b>2010 to 2013</b>  | 4.6%    | 6.4%          | 4.1%     |
| <b>2000 to 2009</b>  | 14.3%   | 27.1%         | 18.7%    |
| <b>1990 to 1999</b>  | 18.9%   | 16.9%         | 15.1%    |
| <b>1980 to 1989</b>  | 20.8%   | 13.8%         | 12.6%    |
| <b>1970 to 1979</b>  | 13.2%   | 10.1%         | 11.4%    |
| <b>1960 to 1969</b>  | 15.3%   | 4.8%          | 10.0%    |
| <b>1950 to 1959</b>  | 3.3%    | 4.7%          | 9.9%     |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Selected Housing Characteristics, Table DP04.

**Table 11. Fenwick Island Housing Occupancy, 2020**

|                          | Fenwick | Sussex County | Delaware |
|--------------------------|---------|---------------|----------|
| <b>Overall Occupancy</b> | 27.9%   | 66.8%         | 84.6%    |
| <b>Owner-Occupied</b>    | 95.2%   | 81.1%         | 71.4%    |
| <b>Renter-Occupied</b>   | 4.8%    | 18.9%         | 28.6%    |
| <b>Overall Vacancy</b>   | 72.1%   | 33.2%         | 15.4%    |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Selected Housing Characteristics, Table DP04.

In regard to housing value, Fenwick Island’s median value is significantly higher than that of Sussex County and the state. Considering the lack of available land and the demand for housing in the current real estate market, it is unlikely that affordability within the town can

improve in the near future. This is a significant issue across the state. For coastal towns, this challenge is most visible when local businesses seek housing options for the many seasonal employees needed to sustain the beach economy. However, this issue is not one the town can tackle independently. Fenwick Island supports collaborative efforts and ongoing discussions with state and regional partners to address this ongoing crisis.

**Table 12. Median Housing Value, Owner-Occupied Housing, 2020**

|                             | <b>Fenwick</b> | <b>Sussex County</b> | <b>Delaware</b> |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Median Housing Value</b> | \$899,500      | \$269,700            | \$258,300       |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2016–2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Selected Housing Characteristics, Table DP04.

### Building Permits

Since the last comprehensive plan in 2017, and with the exception of the year 2020, there has been a spike in residential building activity. The number of building permits shown in table 13 include both new construction as well as wholesale redevelopment of existing units. Both 2021 and 2022 were significantly higher than 2019, and 2023 is on track to exceed the activity seen in 2022. This spike could be a sign that more part time residents seek to become full-time residents and are thus upgrading their properties accordingly.

**Table 13 – Residential Building Permits, 2018-2023**

| <b>Year</b>          | <b>Residential building permits</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 2018                 | 5                                   |
| 2019                 | 10                                  |
| 2020                 | 5                                   |
| 2021                 | 18                                  |
| 2022                 | 14                                  |
| 2023 (January-April) | 7                                   |

Source: Town of Fenwick Island Department of Public Works, May 2023

## 8.3 Planning Context

### Delaware Strategies for State Policies and Spending

The Delaware Strategies for State Policies and Spending are used to coordinate state agency planning, resource management, and investments in order to support growth where it is appropriate and planned for and discourage growth in inappropriate locations. In

accordance with the 2020 State Strategies Map (included in Appendix A), Fenwick Island falls within the Level 2 and 3 investment areas. The Level 2 area is concentrated between SR 1 and the beach to the east.

**Table 14. DE Strategies for State Policies and Spending, Summary**

| Level          | Policies and Spending intended to:   |
|----------------|--|
| <b>Level 2</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support and encourage a wide range of uses and densities, promote other transportation options, foster efficient use of existing public and private investments, and enhance community identity and integrity.</li> <li>• Encourage departure from the typical single-family-dwelling developments and promote a broader mix of housing types and commercial sites encouraging compact, mixed-use development where applicable.</li> <li>• Promote well-designed development that provides for a variety of housing types, user-friendly transportation systems, essential open spaces and recreational facilities, other public facilities, and services to promote a sense of community.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Level 3</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applies to areas intermingled with fast-growing areas within counties that are otherwise categorized as Investment Levels 1 or 2, and are often impacted by environmentally sensitive features, agricultural preservation issues, or other infrastructure issues.</li> <li>• The State will consider investing in Level 3 Areas once the Investment Level 1 and 2 Areas are substantially built out, or when the infrastructure or facilities are logical extensions of existing systems and deemed appropriate to serve a particular area.</li> </ul>  |

### Sussex County (The Sussex Plan)

Sussex County’s current comprehensive plan was adopted in early 2019. County lands surrounding Fenwick Island fall into the county’s “coastal area”. While the coastal area is considered a growth area, it also acknowledges the areas environmental value and sensitivities. Growth is expected to be at an average density of 2 units per acres, unless public water and sewer services are provided, where density can go up to 4 to 6 units to the acre.

Sussex County has been the fastest growing county in Delaware for the last two decades. It experienced a 26% growth rate between 2000 and 2010, and 20% between 2010 and 2020. The Delaware Population Consortium projects another 20% growth by 2050. As discussed below, this regional growth has tremendous impacts on the coastal communities, more impact than the growth within their own boundaries.



## Population Projections and Housing Growth

As stated in the Existing Land Use, there is little room for new development within the town. Therefore, new population growth will most likely stem from the development of the remaining 37 lots in town and through a change of residency status, as more residents switch to permanently residing in town. Population projections established by the Delaware Population Consortium (and included in Chapter 2) project that Fenwick Island will grow from 454 people in 2020 to 592 people by 2050, an increase of 138 people. According to the 2020 Census, there are an average of 1.79 people per household in the town. The development of the remaining 37 lots as residential could result in 66 more people, or half of that projection.

### Seasonal Populations and Demands

As a beach and bay town, Fenwick Island has always existed with the ebbs and flows of a seasonal influx of tourists and residents. However, in recent years and especially since covid, the pattern and nature of this seasonality has evolved and grown. As discussed throughout this plan, more residents are opting for permanent year-round residency, while at the same time tourism has continued to grow. The town has little ability to account for and quantify these trends.

As addressed in Chapter 2, a basic estimate of the town's seasonal population growth estimates that the year-round population is approximately 343 residents, while the summertime population is estimated to be over 2,600 people- an estimate that represents a nearly 7-fold increase in population during the summer season. This number doesn't account for those staying outside of town but still utilizing the town's services, nor visiting the beaches.

A better understanding of these seasonal trends is vital to the town and region's ability to plan for and manage the current and future impacts on infrastructure and services, and on the ocean and bay themselves. The town would like to work with other coastal towns, the state, particularly DeIDOT and DNREC, as well as Sussex County to cultivate a methodology for quantifying these demands and impacts.

## 8.4 Future Land Use and Zoning

The future land use map sets the foundation for the town's zoning ordinance and map. With each update to the Future Land Use map, Section 702(c) of the Delaware Code requires that municipalities: "...within 18 months of the adoption of a comprehensive development plan or revision thereof, amend its official zoning map to rezone all lands within the municipality in accordance with the uses of land provided for in the comprehensive development plan."

The Future Land Use map is the same as the 2017 version, with one notable exception. The town is proud to be able to enhance a small vacant area that is to remain as open space and used as a monarch and pollinator way station. Otherwise, the residential, commercial, park, and institutional land use classifications are unchanged and the town is envisioned to

remain a predominantly low-scale, residential beach community with small town institutions and a mixed use main street corridor.

**Table 15. Future Land Use, 2023**

| Future Land Use | Description   | Acreage    | Percent of land |
|-----------------|---|------------|-----------------|
| Residential     | Primarily single-family detached residential                    | 205.4      | 68.2%           |
| Commercial      | Neighborhood oriented commercial, hotels, and mixed-residential | 29.0       | 9.6%            |
| Park/Beach      | Town owned open space; beach strand                             | 53.6       | 17.8%           |
| Institutional   | Town facilities   | 3.2        | 1.1%            |
| Roads           | Public rights of way  | 9.7        | 3.2%            |
| <b>Total</b>    |   | <b>301</b> | <b>100</b>      |

### Zoning classifications

Fenwick’s zoning designations are uncomplicated, and little changed in their intent since their original adoption. They are as follows:

**Residential Zone** - The residential district is the largest district in the town, representing all but the properties fronting the SR 1 corridor. The district permits single family detached dwellings on lots with a minimum of 5,000 square feet, or approximately 8 dwelling units to the acre. Customary accessory uses such as professional offices and home occupations are also permitted.

**Commercial Zone** - At its heart, the commercial zone is a mix of uses, permitting both residential uses and commercial uses, including the institutional uses shown on the existing and future land use maps. In addition to single family detached residences, the commercial zone also permits townhouses at the same density (minimum of 5,000 square foot lot). In the past, most businesses in Fenwick Island were primarily oriented toward serving visitors and residents in the summer season. As the full-year population in town has increased, and part-time residents and tourists visit more frequently during the off-season, Fenwick’s businesses have experienced a growing year-round market. The permitted uses include: general retail sales and services, restaurants, offices, hotels/motels, and institutional and educational uses

Also not permitted and in keeping with the town's character are commercial recreation and bars.

**Park Zone** - This zone is intended for public recreational amenities such as playgrounds, athletic fields, and docks. The town's two public parks currently fall into this Zone.

**Unmapped Zone** - The town ordinance also includes a Commercial Mixed-Use Zone, which permits apartments and mixed-use buildings. However, this zone is not currently mapped within the town limits.

## Redevelopment and Infill

Fenwick Island has seen a significant amount of development and redevelopment over the past few decades. Its proximity to large metropolitan areas, the shift in technology to allow tele-work capabilities, relatively low taxes and increase in property values has contributed to this trend. With limited inventory, the options for building in Fenwick Island continue to be primarily the redevelopment of existing structures. Secondly is the option to build through the term referred to as infill on one of the few remaining vacant properties.

As discussed in Chapter 3 on Community Character, the character of the town is of utmost importance to its residents and leaders. Such provisions are provided for in the Town Ordinances, all of which are consistent with maintaining the quiet, family-oriented character. First and foremost, this translates into the strict adherence to the existing height limitations as expressed through zoning, and as applied to both residential and commercial properties. These also include providing adequate parking in keeping with the 2023 parking ordinance, height and area of parcel, and building setbacks along SR 1 designed to accommodate side and rear parking.

### Hotels/Motels

At the time of the writing of this plan, the town has an ongoing pause on the development of hotels and motels within its boundaries. There are currently three such facilities in the town limits: two in the northern portion and one in the southern portion, all located along SR 1 in the commercial zone. The town is concerned that such additional facilities will stretch the town's ability to maintain the quiet, residential character that it holds so dear.

Currently, the number of hotel rooms is equal to two-thirds of the number of year-round residents in town, and equal to one quarter of the total number of housing units. However, as the number of year-round residents increases, the number of rental opportunities can reasonably be expected to decrease, raising demand and development pressure for such accommodations. There is concern that any additional hotels and the accompanying amenities, parking, and traffic would be inconsistent with the goals of this plan and should be thoughtfully considered under the guidance of the town's existing codes and ordinances.

## 8.5 Annexation

The Comprehensive Planning process is the time for municipalities to consider the feasibility and desirability of annexation of adjoining lands into the town's boundaries. While there can be many benefits to annexation, most importantly, more direct control over land use impacts of adjoining properties, the town does not consider such a scenario to be likely. Following thoughtful discussion and consideration, the town, at this time, does not wish to designate any areas for potential annexation. Fenwick Island recognizes the importance of this tool and may choose to reconsider its use in the future.

## 8.6 Areas of Concern

The Comprehensive Plan may contain a discussion of the potential land uses, current zoning and development potential of adjacent areas within the county and / or in near-by municipalities, and how the development of these areas may impact the community in the future. These so-called "areas of concern" are ripe for the consideration of policies or guidelines for interacting and coordinating with the relevant county and / or municipal government as these lands develop.

In the 2017 Plan, Fenwick Island proposed an unmapped area of concern to encompass most of eastern Sussex County. However, little was done to advance any form of communication or coordination with the county in this regard. In revisiting this topic in 2023, the town has narrowed its area of concern to focus on the area to its immediate south-encompassing SR 1 to the Maryland border and to the west along SR 54 to the intersection with Bennett Road.

This area is critically important to the town for several reasons. First and foremost is the town's emphasis and prioritization, as demonstrated throughout this plan, of pedestrian safety, particularly along the SR 1 corridor. Within this Comprehensive Plan, the community has strongly encouraged much-needed support for pedestrian and bicycle safety along SR 1, as stated in Chapter 4. The holistic evaluation and desired redesign of SR 1 as a Complete Street cannot be confined to the limits of the town. DelDOT's recent study of the SR 1 and SR 54 intersection, as well as bike and pedestrian connections along the east-west corridor, would ideally continue north along SR 1. Additional concerns arise from the land uses and traffic management in this area of Sussex County and the southern portion of Fenwick Island State Beach Park, as discussed in Chapter 6.

It is recommended that the town work towards lines of communication with Sussex County and the State of Delaware, establishing opportunities for conversation and coordination.



## 8.7 Community Facilities

### Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Beyond the obvious recreational options of the beach and bay, Fenwick Island is fortunate to offer a number of municipal options for active and passive recreation:

#### Community Park

Located at 800 Coastal Highway, the northwest portion of the Town Hall property is the town's first open space/park. It was created in 2002. This beautifully landscaped park includes a playground, shuffleboard decks, covered gazebo, tables and benches.

#### Cannon Street Park

The town developed a second park at 4 W. Cannon Street, which includes a half-basketball court, a wheelchair accessible brick walkway, grassy open space, picnic areas and an ADA accessible canoe/kayak launch.

#### Proposed: Monarch and Pollinator Way Station

On the northeastern portion of town, at the intersection of Lewes Street and Bunting Avenue, the town is developing a new garden, designed as a Monarch and Pollinator Way Station. This space will primarily support native plants and shrubs, many of which are host plants for various pollinators including the recently endangered Monarch. The space will include seating, a pollinator hotel, birdhouses and a quiet opportunity for bird watching. It is the creation of the Environmental Committee and anticipated to be operational by the end of 2023.

As the town nears complete build-out, it should be vigilant in seeking out additional opportunities to obtain more open space, particularly in close proximity to sensitive environmental resources.

### Stormwater Management

Stormwater management throughout the Town of Fenwick Island's roads system is primarily a surface open watercourse drainage system. The town has also installed several underground pipes to facilitate road and driveway crossings and minimal piping within private easements. DPW has recently updated and added appropriate backflow preventers providing some additional stormwater management strategies. SR 1 which bisects the town is also managed by an open watercourse drainage system.

The town's low elevation and high-water table means that stormwater runoff is often a source of flooding in town. The town, working with its infrastructure committee and engineer, continually monitors and seeks to identify potential improvements. A recent resiliency study highlights many potential approaches. These are discussed as part of Chapters 5, Bays and Other Resources, and 7, Resiliency.

## Wastewater Services

Wastewater service is provided by Sussex County's South Coastal Regional Wastewater Facility in Frankford, DE. Fenwick Island, unincorporated Fenwick Island, and the area adjacent to SR 54 are included in the Sussex County Unified Sanitary Sewer District. The facility currently handles a capacity of 10 million gallons per day with a peak capacity of 20 MGD. In 2022, the monthly average facility inflow reached approximately 4.7 MGD. While the wastewater facility has adequate capacity for projected growth, several line upgrades were identified and completed within the past three (3) years. With the limited growth anticipated in Fenwick Island, this capacity is deemed to be sufficient.

## Drinking Water

Fenwick Island sources potable water from Artesian Water Company though there are a few remaining properties that source their water through the use of wells. Some of these properties are contracted with Artesian for their primary water use but maintain wells for secondary water uses such as gardens and the like.

The Delaware Wellhead Protection Plan, approved by the EPA in 1990, delineated wellhead protection areas around public water supply wells and set out steps needed to protect critical wellhead areas around them. Delaware code (7 Del. Laws, c. 6082(c)) requires municipalities with populations above 2,000 persons to develop and enforce source water protection regulations, protecting excellent groundwater recharge potential areas and wellhead protection areas. As depicted on the Environmental Features Map, Fenwick Island has four such wellheads. Three are clustered in the northwestern section of town, between Georgetown and Indian, while the fourth is at the southern tip.

Due to its size, Fenwick Island is not required to meet the state regulations for impervious coverage in these areas. In addition, these areas were developed with small residential lots long before the regulations were put in place. However, it is still important to increase awareness and provide information regarding the value of these areas. The town could consider notifying and educating property owners residing within the recharge area of the sensitive nature of their land and providing incentives for avoiding additional impervious surface or providing notice to the town when harmful substances are present.

## 8.8 Future Land Use Goal

**Support future growth through development of the remaining vacant parcels and redevelopment that upholds and enhances the town's traditional character, respects the region's environmental constraints – now and in the future, and keeps pace with the town's ability to provide and manage adequate support services.**

## 8.9 Recommended Direction for the Town

- Support collaborative efforts and ongoing discussions to address affordable workforce housing in Delaware, and specific efforts to address the housing needs of its seasonal workforce.
- Work towards a the refinement of communication with Sussex County and the State of Delaware, establishing opportunities for conversation and coordination particularly regarding:
  - a redesign of the SR 1 corridor,
  - better understanding and quantifying seasonal demand, and
  - managing the growing demand for the beach and bay facilities, as well as the associated support services.
- Continue to seek opportunities to support the health and cultural aesthetics of residents and visitors through parks, recreational opportunities, and open spaces.
- Inform and educate property owners residing within wellhead areas of the sensitive nature of their land and research opportunities to provide incentives for avoiding additional impervious surface or providing notice to the town when harmful substances are present.



# Chapter 9. Implementation

## 9.1 Making this plan a living document

Fenwick Island has invested significant time, effort, and reflection into the development of this comprehensive plan. The town is excited about the direction it is going, while remaining grounded in its values and realistic about the challenges it faces. There is much to do!

This chapter represents the roadmap of next steps. Whereas previous chapters have focused on issues and recommended direction for the town, this chapter hones in on specific tasks, potential partners, and short- and long-term implementation. While the town's priorities are expected to remain consistent, the ability to implement a priority is largely based on funding opportunities determined by others, cooperative agreements with regional and state partners, and advocacy.

The following Implementation Table is organized into several categories:

- Overarching tasks intended to guide the town for the foreseeable future
- Intergovernmental Coordination
- Transportation and Bike and Pedestrian Safety
- Planning for Seasonal Demands
- Beach, Bay and Natural Resources
- Flood mitigation and resiliency; and
- Community Development

All of the recommended actions summarized in the implementation table require time, funding, and people power to complete. Fenwick Island has a small administrative staff consisting of eight full time and one seasonal employee but is fortunate to have dedicated volunteers staffing its town council and 18 boards, commissions, and committees. Much of this work will fall to these volunteers and the townspeople who respond and recognize the significance. In that regard, this implementation table is not a mandate but a guideline for next steps. Tasks are designated as short term (ST), medium term (MT), long term (LT) or ongoing (OG). Short term is defined as a task that could likely be initiated within the next one to three years. Medium term tasks could fall within four to seven years, and long term is eight years and beyond.



Responsibility for overall direction for the implementation of this plan lies with the Fenwick Island Town Council. This may require the Council to consider additional committees or volunteer opportunities tailored to some of the recommendations in this plan and other needs of the town. However, the table below lists the potential town committee who could lead a particular task. Additionally, potential partners are listed. A matrix of potential grants and funding sources can be found in Appendix E.

The following abbreviations are employed:

Town Committees

- B&P - Beach & Parks Committee
- DC - Dredging Committee
- EC - Environmental Committee
- IC - Infrastructure Committee
- IT - Information Technology
- PSC - Pedestrian Safety Committee
- PC - Planning Commission
- TC - Town Council
- TABC - Various committees, boards, and commissions
- TS - Town Staff

Occurrence/Timeline

- AN - Annually
- 2A - Twice annually
- ST - Short term (1-3 years)
- MT - Medium term (4-6 years)
- LT - Long term (7+ years)
- OG - Ongoing

**Table 16. Implementation Matrix**

| Recommendations   | Occurrence or Priority | Potential Lead | Potential Partners                        |
|---|------------------------|----------------|---|
| <b>General</b>  |                        |                |   |
| Review the comprehensive plan a semi-annual basis and develop a workplan to implement priority tasks  | Semi-annual            | TC             | Planning Commission; Town Committees      |
| Report semi-annually to the Town Council on status updates to the Comprehensive Plan  | Semi-annual            | PC             | Town Committees                           |
| Pursue grants and partnerships that support town priorities.  | OG                     | TC; TS         | UD Grant Assistance Program; DNREC        |
| Enforce existing codes  | OG                     | TC             |   |
| Review town ordinances and consider changes in regard to:<br>The relationship between freeboard and fill in regard to the height allowance<br>Lighting and further prevention of light pollution<br>Enhanced landscaping and tree protection standards<br>Requiring bicycle parking as part of redevelopment in commercial areas<br>The use of sidewalks for pedestrian usage only  | ST                     | TC/<br>PC      | Private consultants;<br>UD IPA;<br>DeIDOT |
| Promote and inform residents, visitors, builders and developers (as applicable) of the value, benefits, and opportunities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dark skies initiative</li> <li>• Green infrastructure and native landscaping</li> <li>• Bike and pedestrian safety</li> <li>• Importance of the dunes</li> <li>• Wellhead protection areas</li> <li>• Volunteer and public service opportunities in the town</li> </ul> | OG                     | TABC           |   |

| <b>Intergovernmental Coordination</b>   |        |                 |                                       |
|---|--------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| Designate a town liaison to regularly communicate, coordinate and advocate with DeIDOT, DNREC, and other state agencies.  | ST     | TABC            |                                       |
| Invite the DeIDOT circuit rider planner to attend town meetings on an annual basis, more if needed.   | Annual | IC/PSC          | DeIDOT                                |
| Coordinate with Sussex County, DeIDOT, and local legislators to understand the path forward in advancing the town's priority projects in the state's transportation improvement plan. | OG     | TC              | DeIDOT; Sussex County                 |
| Invite DNREC Division of Parks to meet with the town and establish periodic check ins to discuss concerns and opportunities for collaboration   | Annual | TC/PC           | DNREC                                 |
| Participate in planning processes by DNREC's Division of Parks and other relevant agencies to promote preservation of the beaches as non-commercialized open space and recreation.    | OG     | TC/PC           | DNREC                                 |
| Participate in regional planning initiatives sponsored by nonprofit partners, federal and state partners, and others on topics of importance to the town.                             | OG     | Liaison         | Center for Inland Bays, RASCL, USACE, |
| <b>Transportation/Bike &amp; Pedestrian Safety</b>  |        |                 |                                       |
| Work with DeIDOT and Sussex County to convert SR 1 into a resilient, multi-modal, and cohesive "Complete Street" from SR 54 through Fenwick Island State Beach Park.                  | LT/OG  | Liaison         | DeIDOT; Sussex County                 |
| Explore traffic calming alternatives for SR 1 and Bunting Avenue with the Fenwick Island community  | ST     | TC/TCC          |                                       |
| Advance policies that support pedestrian and bicycle safety.  | OG     | TC/TCC          |                                       |
| <b>Planning for Seasonal Demands</b>  |        |                 |                                       |
| Advocate for DeIDOT to gather, analyze, present, and share timely and accessible  | ST     | PSC/<br>Liaison | DeIDOT; Sussex County; ACT;           |

|  |    |         |                |  |
|--|----|---------|----------------|--|
| traffic data with municipalities in order to provide a clearer picture of seasonal traffic demands and conflicts.  |    |         |                |  |
| Work with DNREC and other coastal partners to identify ways to manage the demand for beach access in light of the continued population growth and heightened tourist demand in Southeast Sussex County.  | OG | Liaison |                | ACT; DNREC                                   |
| <b>Beach, Bay and other Natural Resources</b>  |    |         |                |  |
| Continue to support ongoing, periodic beach replenishment  | OG |         | TC             | DNREC; State of DE; USACE                    |
| Continue to provide and enhance universal access to the beach, while enhancing protection and maintenance of the dunes   | ST |         | TC             |  |
| Advocate for Fenwick's position regarding Off-shore Wind Energy  | OG |         | EC             |  |
| Continue to provide and improve systems and services pertaining to beach patrol, parking and sanitation management during peak season  | OG |         | TM/DPW/<br>BPC |  |
| Provide support for safe recreational boating  | ST |         | TC/BPC         | DNREC  |
| Continue to pursue funding to improve navigation of the bay through the channel dredging project.  | ST |         | DC             | DNREC; UD<br>GAP                             |
| Continue monitoring health of the canals.  | MT |         | DC             |  |
| Promote and participate in sustainable management of Little Assawoman Bay  | OG |         | TC/TABC        | Center for Inland Bays; Sussex County, DNREC |
| Consider a variety of strategies to protect and increase tree canopy and native landscaping in Fenwick Island, including resident education programs and volunteer opportunities, the planting of trees on existing public lands, informing residents how to properly remove phragmites, and seeking grants to assist in all of these efforts. | ST |         | EC             |  |
| Review recommendations contained in the 2021 State of the Inland Bays report, with a particular focus on Little Assawoman Bay.   | ST |         | EC/IC          |  |



Identify actions that may be appropriate to implement in town.

**Flood Mitigation and Resiliency**

Continue to coordinate with DNREC and other state and federal partners on resiliency and flood mitigation efforts. OG IC DNREC;

Continue to engage and coordinate with DeIDOT regarding the long-term resiliency of SR 1. OG IC DeIDOT

Work with the Fenwick Island community to determine how to move forward with the recommendations from the 2023 resiliency study, including preparation for potential grant funding, establishing a resilience fund, code updates, and potential resiliency design guidelines and standards. ST IC

Establish and maintain public engagement on SLR, climate change and the town's approach. OG IC DNREC

Continue evaluating and making improvements to the town's stormwater infrastructure, including the promotion of rain gardens and other innovative green infrastructure. OG IC

Limit impervious surface cover throughout Fenwick Island through enforcement of ordinances and consideration of more porous systems. ST PC/IC

**Community Development: Future Growth, Community Facilities and Services**

Maintain existing zoning in regard to maximum heights, floor area ratio, impervious surfaces, and parking requirements. OG PC

Develop a pollinator way station on town owned property ST EC DNREC, Div of Parks

Support collaborative efforts and ongoing discussions to address affordable workforce housing in Delaware, and specific efforts to address the housing needs of its seasonal workforce. ST/OG PC DSHA

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Continue to seek opportunities to support the health and cultural aesthetics of residents and visitors through parks, recreational opportunities, and open spaces.

OG

EC

DNREC

---

Develop an electronic document management system to allow easier sharing of documents with the public.

ST

TS

---

DRAFT



## Appendices

Appendix A. Fenwick Island Maps

Appendix B. Excerpts from Community Survey Results

Appendix C. Demographic Profile

Appendix D. Resolution regarding Offshore Wind Development

Appendix E. Potential Funding Sources