



# ELLSWORTH 2035:

## City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan

Version 4

November 15, 2024





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Thank you to the Ellsworth community members who contributed to this planning effort, including residents, business owners, nonprofit organizations, institutional leaders, county and State agencies, and City board and committee members. Participation and thoughtful insight and feedback from the community is the foundation for this plan.*

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More than 20 years have passed since the City of Ellsworth (City) conducted its last comprehensive planning effort. While much has changed in the City and region since that time, the overarching values of the community have persisted, including a vibrant and walkable downtown, preserving the natural environment, balancing tourism and a strong year-round economy, celebrating the waterfront, respecting the City's history, a diversity of housing options, and sustainable and efficient growth. However, new challenges have emerged or become more critical in the past two decades. Ellsworth 2035 (the Plan) aims to proactively address the City's most significant challenges within the framework of community values.

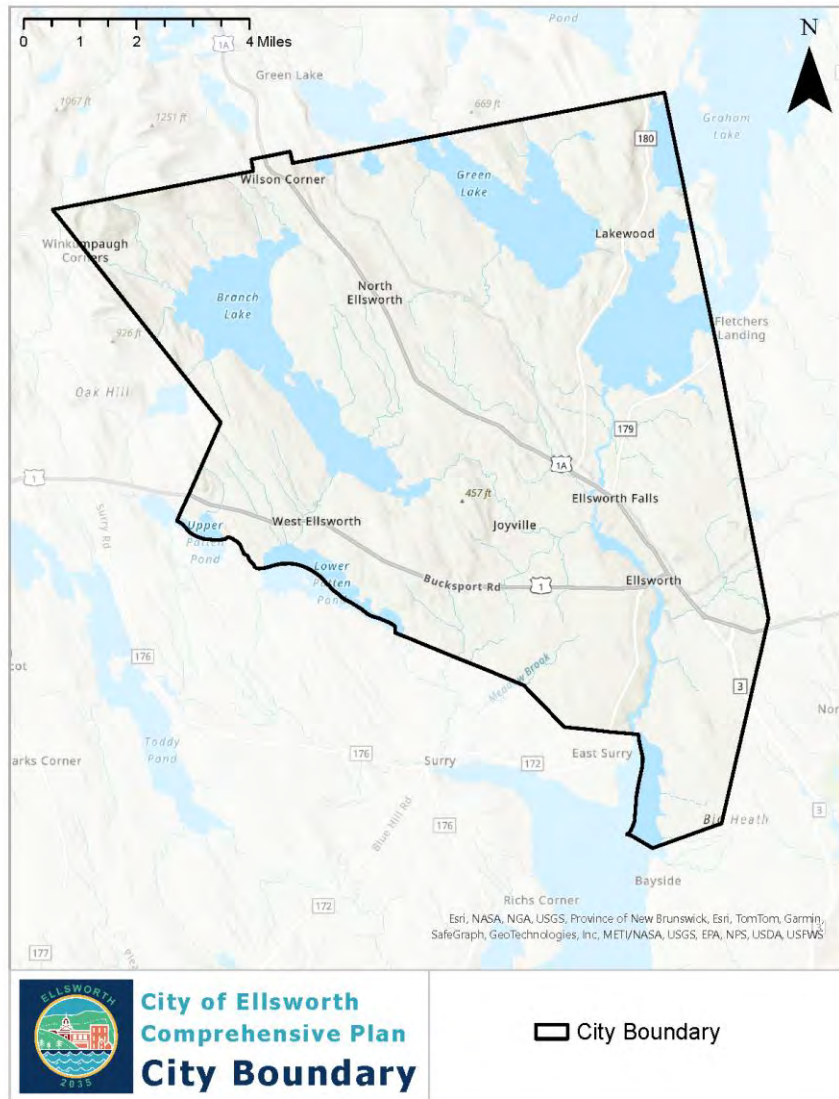
In 2023, Ellsworth retained BerryDunn to support the City through the process of developing its next comprehensive plan. The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and City staff worked with BerryDunn, subconsultant Woodard & Curran, and community members to understand current challenges and define a vision for the future of the City.

This document outlines the planning process and timeline, recent projects and initiatives, community input, vision statement and guiding principles, future land use plan, and policies and action items to implement the community's vision. The foundation for this plan is the vision statement and nine guiding principles, which reflect the values of the Ellsworth community. The Steering Committee considered community feedback and the City's vision for the future and ranked action items based on their anticipated impact. The highest priority actions related to each principle, as identified by the Steering Committee, are called out in the narrative, while the implementation matrix outlines all policies and action items. This matrix is organized based on the chapters outlined in the Maine Growth Management Act.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*





The Plan's vision centers around balance. Ellsworth is a small community but faces many of the challenges of a larger city. Ellsworth is the crossroad of Downeast Maine and serves as a commerce center for the region, which includes Mount Desert Island (MDI) and the Blue Hill Peninsula. Balance is essential in supporting sustainable growth while continuing to embody the enduring values that have shaped Ellsworth for decades. This plan outlines priority actions and provides recommendations in the implementation matrix to address key issues and implement the community's vision. The approach to implement the Plan also relies heavily on the strong community ties, leadership through community-based organizations, and the partnerships among these groups and the City to move Ellsworth forward.

With so many residents and community leaders who are dedicated to the future of Ellsworth and a variety of community assets that contribute to the community's character, the City is well-positioned for a strong and sustainable future.





# INTRODUCTION



## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

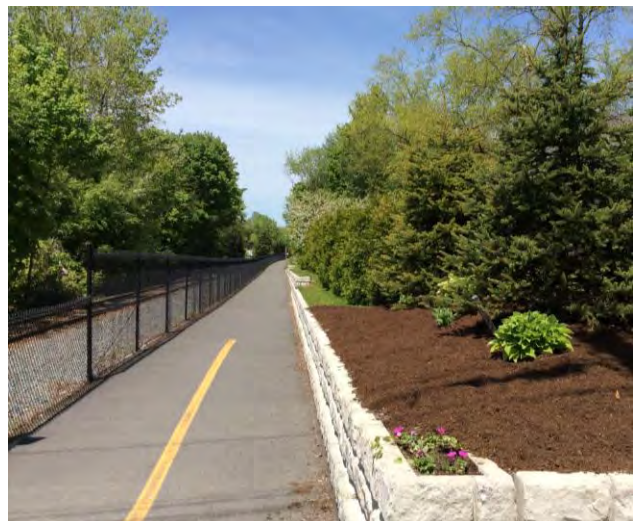
A comprehensive plan is a long-term vision and road map that will guide Ellsworth over the next 10 years. This Plan establishes a framework for land use planning and zoning policies and will guide decisions on growth, development, capital investments, and addressing community concerns. The State of Maine (State) requires municipalities to create comprehensive plans to plan for and manage growth and development. A municipality must have a plan in place that is consistent with State requirements to legally impose a zoning ordinance beyond the State's minimum shoreland zoning requirements.

The State specifies the minimum requirements necessary for comprehensive plans in accordance with the Growth Management Act (30-A M.R.S.A. §§ 4312 – 4350). Through this law, the State requires any future land use, zoning, and impact fee ordinances to follow the Comprehensive Plan. Having a comprehensive plan consistent with the Growth Management Act also qualifies municipalities for State grant funds and loan programs. Ellsworth's last Comprehensive Plan update was in 2004, and the State requires an update every 10 years to be consistent with the Growth Management Act.

## How to Use this Plan

The purpose of the Plan is to reflect and respond to the needs, values, and priorities of the community while safeguarding Ellsworth's sense of place, history, and natural resources. This Plan serves as a guide for future growth, development, and policy decisions in alignment with community values.

The vision statement and guiding principles were developed based on community input and priorities. To implement the community's vision and address the top issues identified in Ellsworth, this Plan outlines priority areas for action aligned with each of the guiding principles. The Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee has identified priorities based on community feedback and staff input, and takes into consideration the appropriate timeline for implementing actions and potential



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



community impact. While priority action items are called out in the body of the Plan, all policies and action items developed as part of this planning process can be found in the implementation table and are cross-referenced to the guiding principles. The implementation matrix is organized in alignment with the required chapters outlined in the State's Growth Management Act.

To support the City in implementing the Plan over the next decade, the implementation plan provides detailed guidance and outlines the City departments and partners responsible for implementing the Plan's action items. The implementation matrix outlines relative costs, ease of implementation, responsible department or agency, potential grant funding sources, and relevant examples that the City can use to support implementation.

This Plan outlines community engagement activities conducted as part of the planning process. The community's concerns and priorities were collected through the engagement process and used to develop the vision statement and guiding principles. Priority actions developed as part of this Plan were informed by the guiding principles and community engagement. A full outline of community engagement activities and responses can be found in Appendix C.

The inventory and analysis, found in Appendix D, establishes where Ellsworth is today. Data collection began as the first step in the comprehensive planning process. This appendix includes background information and data analysis which provides context to help inform community priorities and identify challenges.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## The Planning Process

The planning process began in April 2023 with the establishment of the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee to guide plan development with the assistance of City staff and the consultant team. The City's last Comprehensive Plan was updated in 2004. An inventory and analysis was developed in September 2023 to help ground the planning process in the work that the City and partners had done since the last plan, understand structural, economic, and land use changes that have occurred, and identify emerging issues. The full inventory and analysis document can be found in Appendix D. The inventory and analysis provides an assessment of current conditions in the following areas (as required by the State's Growth Management Act):

- Historic and archaeological resources
- Water resources
- Natural resources
- Agricultural and forest resources
- Marine resources
- Population and demographics
- Economy
- Housing
- Recreation
- Transportation
- Public facilities and services
- Fiscal capacity and capital investment plan
- Existing land use

The community visioning effort began in June 2023 to identify community priorities, strengths, and challenges. The Steering Committee used the community feedback to develop a vision statement and guiding

principles. The community's input also informed the creation of policies and actions and the future land use map. Additional engagement was conducted from January through August 2024 to collect feedback on the policies and actions and the future land use map. Policies, actions, and the future land use map were developed and refined with guidance from the Steering Committee.

An implementation plan was created to support the final policies and action items by providing a road map for the City to implement the community's vision over the next 10 years. Priority action items related to each guiding principle were identified by the Steering Committee and are outlined in the body of this Plan.

## Planning Phases



**Phase 1**  
Inventory and Analysis  
April – October 2023



**Phase 2**  
Visioning  
May 2023 – January 2024



**Phase 3**  
Policy and Strategy  
Recommendations  
February – August 2024



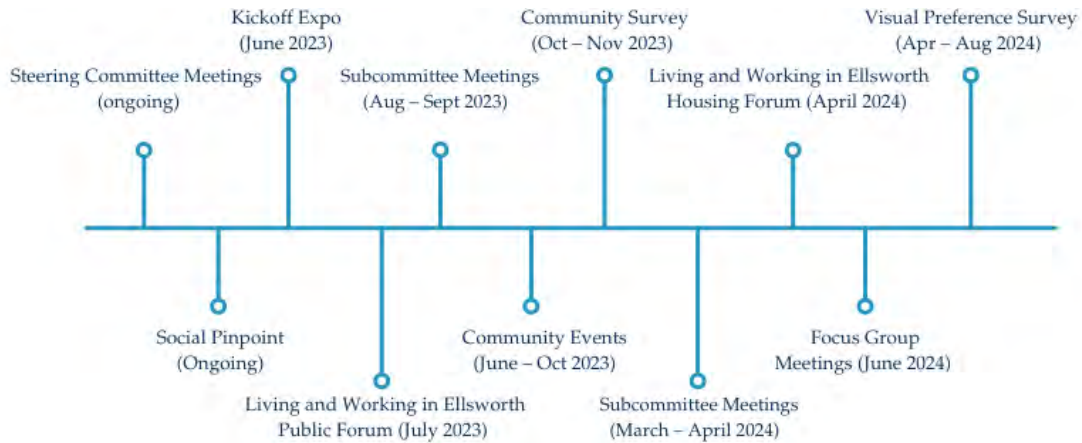
**Phase 4**  
Implementation Plan  
August – September 2024



**Phase 5**  
Final Plan  
October – December 2024



## Engagement Process



The community engagement process began in May 2023 and ran through August 2024. The effort included ongoing engagement activities used to inform the creation of the vision statement, provide input on policies and action items, and provide input on the future land use plan.

The City sought community input in an inclusive, transparent process designed to identify issues most important to the community members and give all community members an equal voice on these issues. This included a broad range of online and in-person activities shared with the community through a mailing, updates in the local newspaper (Ellsworth American), social media posts, meetings with different committees and boards, and the City website. Throughout the process, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, made up of volunteer residents, guided the engagement process, reviewed community feedback to develop the City's vision statement, and guided policy development and the development of the future land use map.

On June 16, 2023, the City hosted a Comprehensive Plan Kickoff Expo in the Franklin Street Parklet, where community members who were walking around the downtown could stop by, learn about the project, provide initial feedback, and learn how to be involved in the planning effort. Roughly 25 community members participated. Participants provided ideas, feedback, and challenges around key components of the Comprehensive Plan, including natural, water, and marine resources, housing, agriculture and forestry, economic development, transportation, historic resources, and public facilities and infrastructure.

In July 2023, the City hosted its first set of focus groups. Focus groups included downtown businesses and organizations, large employers in the City, social service providers, and nonprofit organizations. Focus group participants shared challenges that their organizations are facing, recent work and projects, and opportunities for improvement in the future.



# ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The City engaged subcommittees at two points in the engagement process. Subcommittees provided input into the community visioning process in July and August 2023 and provided feedback on draft policies and actions in April 2024. Subcommittees were open to any community member and represented each section of the Plan. Members discussed challenges, strengths, and ideas for Ellsworth's future. Attendance varied, but 2 to 10 community members were present at each meeting.

Throughout summer and fall 2023, City staff and Steering Committee members promoted the comprehensive planning project and collected feedback at local events. Comments from community events were submitted to the Social Pinpoint project website.

Ellsworth City staff and BerryDunn facilitated two Living and Working in Ellsworth public forums to collect feedback and input from individuals who live and/or work in Ellsworth. The first public forum, hosted in July 2023, was held in coordination with the City's Business Attraction Plan project and focused on transportation, child care, economic development, and housing. The second public forum, hosted in April 2024, was an event held in coordination with Hancock County Planning Commission and GrowSmart Maine (a policy and advocacy organization focused on advancing smart growth principles) to focus on housing and land use, informing both the Comprehensive Plan and Ellsworth Housing Study.

In June 2024, the City hosted a second set of focus groups with arts, culture, and recreation organizations, service providers, and employers in Ellsworth. These conversations focused on policy and strategy recommendations, and participants were



*Photo credit: BerryDunn*

able to share their feedback and guide updates to the policies and strategies.

From April through August 2024, Ellsworth community members were invited to take a visual preference survey to help inform the future land use map and policies. A visual preference survey is a survey designed to gather public input on different scenarios for the built environment. The survey contained a series of images of different building types, scales, and densities for each land use category in the future land use map. There were 42 respondents.

Throughout the project, an online engagement website was used to provide a platform for the community to provide ongoing feedback and host the project survey. The survey was designed to gather community input on an overall vision for the City, high-level values and priorities, and feedback on current services. A total of 475 people responded to the survey. Community members could also provide ongoing feedback to the ideas wall and interactive map. Feedback collected from pop-up events were also added to the ideas wall, an online engagement tool where community members could leave suggestions, ideas, or challenges, and respond to comments.



## Community Input

During the early stages of the planning effort, engagement activities focused on understanding the City's current strengths, community challenges, and priorities for the future. The input from these early stages was used to develop the Plan's vision statement.

Community feedback indicated that the river and lake access, people and culture, restaurants and entertainment, and access to Acadia National Park (Acadia) and the Downeast region were Ellsworth's most valued amenities. Community members noted a desire for more community events, recreation opportunities, and education amenities.

Feedback also indicated that the City should be investing more in road maintenance, sidewalk and pedestrian connectivity, and affordable housing. Survey respondents noted that the City needs the most improvement in addressing housing affordability. Respondents also acknowledged that the City was doing the best at preserving the historic character of the downtown, supporting local businesses, and preserving open space.

Focus group discussions with small and large businesses, non-profits, and service providers centered on the need for affordable housing, diverse housing types, child care, transportation, and healthcare.

As Ellsworth continues to grow and change, the community is most concerned about the cost of living, accommodating population growth, maintaining and enhancing public infrastructure, housing affordability, and creating a variety of housing options for all stages of life.

Following the visioning phase of the planning effort, engagement activities were designed to investigate challenges and priority areas further and discuss potential solutions to challenges. This included feedback from two in-person events, virtual focus groups, and virtual subcommittee meetings.



Photo credit: BerryDunn

### What is your vision for Ellsworth?

- *Public transport, parking and traffic flow are key.*
- *High quality of life, lots of amenities while maintaining the rural Maine feel...*
- *More pedestrian accessibility, increased and varied housing options, more city events.*
- *A safe beautiful place to raise my kids.*
- *Becomes a bit more lively and thriving, while maintaining its small-town feel.*
- *Fiscal responsibility.*
- *More affordable options for housing, transportation and recreational activities*
- *That we become a destination.*

- Visioning survey respondents



Feedback included the need for more affordable housing and a variety of housing types in the City's Urban Core to allow for improved active and public transportation options, homes near amenities, and further preservation of the City's natural resources. Input also centered around the need to further improve the health of the City's water resources, further protect drinking water sources, and improve forest health.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*

## Key Themes

Based on data collected throughout the engagement process, the following key themes emerged:

- Expanding **recreation** and **education** opportunities
- Creating diverse and affordable **housing** options to help attract a **stable workforce**
- Supporting a **year-round economy** and balanced **tourism**
- Supporting the **arts** and promoting the City's cultural **history**
- **Managing growth**
- Minimizing the **tax burden** on property owners
- Protecting **natural resources** and **open spaces** for long-term community benefit
- Improving **public infrastructure**, services, and facilities
- Expanding **transportation** options and walkability and addressing **traffic** congestion
- Enhancing **downtown** as a year-round destination and improving **waterfront** access
- Supporting **health**, wellness, and **community** involvement



## A Brief History

The Wabanaki Peoples' ancestral homelands stretch across much of the State, including the Union River watershed and what is now the City of Ellsworth. Wabanaki tribes, mainly the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy, called Downeast Maine home for thousands of years. The Union River and Union River watershed provided a source of food, medicine, connection, and spirituality for the Wabanaki People. By the 1830s, Wabanaki tribes were forced out of most of their ancestral territory.

Much of Maine's history following European contact is similarly intertwined with the State's rivers. Lumbermen began to reengineer rivers to support the State's booming lumber industry. Rivers would be dammed upstream to hold water and flush logs downstream as snow melted in the spring. In Ellsworth, the Union River was a commercial center where large ships were loaded with goods and materials, including lumber, and shipped throughout the Americas.

Evidence of this once dominating industry is still apparent in Ellsworth today. The City's downtown, situated along the river, echoes the importance of the river as a food and economic source. Today, the river still carries a sense of prominence and importance in Ellsworth. The Ellsworth community has been working to revive the river's once abundant fish and shellfish population, improve river health, and improve access to the river.



*Union River flooding, 1923. Photo credit: Ellsworth Historical Society*



*Hancock County Sheriff's Home and Jail shortly after completion in 1886. Photo credit: Ellsworth Historical Society*



Much of Ellsworth's early development was situated along the river, where the downtown and adjacent neighborhoods are today. Development in the 1800s also followed the Maine Central Railroad, along what is now Bangor Road (US Route 1A). Like much of the State, mills began to close throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, impacting the State's and Ellsworth's economy. Around the same time, tourism in Maine began to grow. Wealthy residents of cities like Boston and New York began traveling to Maine to escape the bustle of urban life to a more natural, serene environment. Downeast and MDI saw a significant increase in tourism that has continued to the present day.

By the mid-20th century, the automobile was more affordable and popular, and cultural shifts made living outside of cities more desirable. Ellsworth experienced growth outside of the downtown, and auto-oriented development patterns, including strip-malls and subdivisions, became more prominent along Ellsworth's major roads, including Bangor Road, High Street, Main Street,

Union Street, Bucksport Road, and Surry Road.

Commercial development sprawling along Ellsworth's major transportation arteries and residential development in rural areas have continued to be community concerns and were highlighted in Ellsworth's 1991 and 2004 comprehensive plans. Exacerbated by the pandemic, the demand for housing across the State has increased, and there has been development pressure in Ellsworth leading to new development across the City. As community feedback has indicated, there is a continued desire to preserve Ellsworth's natural areas, water resources, and rural character across most of the City. Concerns have been raised about development into rural areas.

Despite changing demand, the core values of the Ellsworth community have largely remained consistent over the past several decades. Residents and visitors alike value the downtown, abundant open spaces, access to the river and lakes, the City's history, and sense of community.



*High Street, August 2024. Photo credit: Google Maps*



## Recent Planning Initiatives

### *Senior Housing Study*

In 2015, the City commissioned a study on the housing opportunities for those age 55 and older in Ellsworth. The primary goal of this study was to research the housing needs of senior households in Ellsworth and the surrounding area.

This study analyzed regional housing data, conducted an inventory of housing resources, analyzed demographic data and projections, reviewed national data on senior housing preferences, and conducted a survey of households aged 55 or older in Ellsworth. Data collected through the study indicated a need for various housing types that were not currently available in Ellsworth, including new single-family homes designed for older adults (e.g., universal design, one-floor homes), active adult ownership units with maintenance services provided, quality market rate rental apartments, and independent living apartments with meals, housekeeping, transportation, or other services.

### *Business Attraction Plan*

In 2023, the City partnered with ConsultEcon and Harpswell Strategies to develop a new Economic Development Business Attraction Plan for the City. This plan included a market analysis, a case study review of comparable communities, and identified a vision and target business clusters for the City.

The market analysis noted strong growth in Ellsworth following the pandemic, including growth of professional and business services, leisure and hospitality, and

construction industries, though there has been a significant decline in the manufacturing sector. As tourism in the region increased during the pandemic, the analysis also noted a growing tourism industry; however, Ellsworth's position as a service center and desire to maintain a strong year-round economy indicates that the City should not be entirely dependent on tourism.

The analysis noted critical concerns around employee recruitment and retention, noting that the cost of housing, lack of transportation options, and lack of child care have made it difficult for businesses in Ellsworth to attract and retain employees. With the City's population aging, attracting and retaining younger workers will be essential for businesses to survive or expand.

Ellsworth is the primary economic center in Hancock County. Ellsworth is home to many of the County's largest businesses but also supports a variety of small businesses. Outside of Ellsworth, the regional economy is primarily driven by small business activity.

Target business clusters identified in the plan include specialty food and beverage; design, construction, and maintenance; healthcare services, medical manufacturing, and life sciences; and tourism and hospitality. Recommendations in the plan are largely related to quality of life to support the recruitment and retention of employees, including housing, recreation, trails, downtown improvements, and child care.



## Recent Planning Initiatives

### *Ellsworth Green Plan*

The Ellsworth Green Plan was developed in 2021 as a citizens' initiative with the goal of creating and preserving a thriving, sustainable community through the conservation of natural and historic resources and other assets in Ellsworth. Green Ellsworth, the group that oversaw the planning process, began engaging the community in 2017.

The Ellsworth Green Plan focuses on four primary chapters, including water, land, food and farming, and infrastructure. The plan details a 10-year timeline to implement actions and outlines coordination between the City, non-profits, business owners, and other organizations and groups in Ellsworth.



*Photo credit: BerryDunn*

### *Frenchman Bay Conservancy Build-Out Analysis*

As part of the Ellsworth Green Plan, the Frenchman Bay Conservancy hired FB Environmental (FBE) to conduct a build-out analysis for the City. A build-out analysis is a planning tool that identifies areas with development potential and projects future development based on zoning regulations, environmental constraints, and demographic data and projections. The analysis estimated that roughly 52% (25,167 acres) of the City's land is buildable under current zoning with most developable land being in the rural zone (14,307 acres).

The analysis estimates the timeline for when 'full build-out,' a theoretical time when all suitable land has been developed, based on the rate of development over the past 10, 20, and 30 years. It is estimated that under current zoning, all available parcels are estimated to be developed by 2115 at the 10-year growth rate, 2153 at the 20-year growth rate, and 2148 at the 30-year growth rate.

FBE developed an alternative scenario using alternative zoning regulations and additional conserved land opportunities that emphasize stronger natural resource protection and conservation. The alternative build-out analysis showed that 34% (16,430 acres) of the City would be buildable under the hypothetical changes.



## Recent Planning Initiatives

### *Ellsworth Asset Mapping*

The Heart of Ellsworth, in partnership with the City of Ellsworth and HUB Collective, conducted a comprehensive study of Ellsworth's downtown assets. In addition to documenting the downtown's key services and resources, the report outlines downtown districts, movement patterns, and potential growth opportunities.

In April 2022, Heart of Ellsworth, the City, local businesses, and community members worked to develop a community asset map to gain a greater understanding of downtown assets, define the downtown's competitive position, identify opportunities to enhance offerings, and outline strategies to bring the downtown vision to life. Key themes in the report center around establishing strong districts throughout the downtown, diversifying current goods, services, and experiences, connecting different areas of the downtown, preserving local heritage, and connecting people in the community. The report outlines recommended initiatives and steps to support the implementation of the key themes and goals.

The report also outlines four additional initiatives for the downtown, including becoming a Main Street America community. The Heart of Ellsworth and the City were named a Main Street America Community in September 2024.



*Photo credits: City of Ellsworth*





*Three core themes of community connection, environmental protection and sustainability, and economic vitality have been prevalent in discussions about the City's challenges and its future. These three pillars of sustainability (social, economic, and environmental) are reflected in the City's vision and throughout the plan.*

## A Connected Community

Ellsworth has experienced substantial changes since its last Comprehensive Plan in 2004. While communities throughout the region and around the world were all impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, Maine, and the Ellsworth region in



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*

particular, experienced an influx of in-migration (including people from larger cities, many of whom work remotely) and increased tourism. The pandemic also exacerbated existing concerns about social isolation, mental health, and physical well-being. These social and health challenges are especially concerning in Maine, which is the oldest State in the nation (by average age) with a growing older adult population and many residents who live in more isolated, rural areas.

Building and strengthening social connections, and a strong sense of community is more important than ever, as many physical interactions have been replaced by digital tools and the nation is amid a loneliness epidemic.<sup>1</sup> In addition to the individual physical and mental health benefits of social connections, strong social connections are also important for building and supporting a strong community. Municipalities rely on engaged community members to serve on boards and committees, be involved with nonprofit organizations, coach youth sports, and participate in a myriad of other community initiatives. Communities with active and involved residents also create a sense of community that many people desire. In this way, a connected community supports economic growth by helping to attract and retain a workforce and by being a place that young people desire to stay or return to into adulthood.

Ellsworth has a robust network of community leaders, public and community spaces, and organizations to bring people together, including arts and educational institutions, parks, trails, a walkable downtown, and a variety of nonprofit groups. Leveraging these existing assets to maintain existing social connections and opportunities is a priority for the community. In addition, growing and shifting efforts and planning for the changing needs of residents will be important. For example, supporting the unhoused and housing insecure is a growing challenge as more community members struggle to afford housing. Lack of transportation for those who do not or cannot drive is another issue that has impacted social isolation. Coordination of existing community groups, agencies, and the City will help to address these and other community challenges. The City will lead the way in continuing to expand and improve communication to the community and encouraging meaningful engagement.

<sup>1</sup> Office of the U.S. Surgeon General, *Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community*. 2023.



## Economic Vitality

Ellsworth's economy has benefited from recent in-migration to Maine and renewed tourism following the pandemic. As the trend of remote work accelerated during 2020, smaller communities with access to nature and a good quality of life attracted new residents and long-term visitors from larger cities. Like other national parks, Acadia experienced a surge in tourism after pandemic travel restrictions were lifted. Related to this surge, Ellsworth was listed as one of the best places for short-term rental investments in 2024.<sup>2</sup>

This dramatic increase in housing demand and growth in tourism provide opportunities and challenges for the regional economy. In its recently completed Business Attraction Plan, the City recognizes new challenges to economic growth and opportunities to leverage existing assets. The plan prioritizes addressing quality of life issues including housing, transportation, and child care and focusing on growing tourism-related industries, including hospitality and the food and beverage industry.

A community-based approach to economic development focuses on strengthening the local economy through inclusive policies and initiatives that improve the well-being of communities. Increasing housing options and affordability, improving transportation networks and accessibility of amenities and

services, and supporting expansion of child care options are all priorities for residents, employees, and employers. Community members noted that the cost of living (especially housing, transportation, and child care) has made it increasingly difficult to live and work in the region. Employers expressed challenges in hiring and retaining workers due to the surge in housing costs.

Recommended actions in this plan align with the goals of the Business Attraction Plan. Initiatives like improving pedestrian infrastructure, enhancing downtown public spaces, encouraging a variety of housing types, and expanding alternative transportation options will all improve quality of life. These types of community-based policies support the year-round economy and livability for residents while helping to accommodate growth of the tourism industry.

Ellsworth is home to natural attractions, cultural amenities, a downtown, and regional position that make it a great place to live and visit. However, amenities and a significant increase in tourism can burden local communities, leading to a shrinking workforce to support year-round residents, increased housing prices, and overburdened infrastructure. Adequate planning is required to balance year-round and seasonal economies.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Latu, Dan. *The 24 best places for Airbnb investments in 2024*. February 7, 2024. Business Insider India. Accessed September 10, 2024. <https://www.businessinsider.in/investment/news/the-24-best-places-for-airbnb-investments-in-2024/slidelist/107495215.cms>

<sup>3</sup> Lawson, Megan; Smith, Kris. *Amenity Trap: How high-amenity communities can avoid being loved to death*. May 2023. Headwaters Economics. Accessed September 18, 2024. <https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023HE-Amenity-Report-R3b-LOWRES.pdf>



The City has prioritized understanding and leveraging existing assets to foster community-based economic growth and strengthen the sense of place within the downtown. The 2022 Asset Mapping initiative identified a broad range of community assets, including the physical form of the downtown (e.g., density, walkability), variety of retail shops and restaurants, cultural institutions, historic structures, service businesses, government facilities, parks, production facilities, and established residential neighborhoods.

The downtown is an important feature that defines Ellsworth. The Downtown zoning district includes the area east of the Union River to Spring Street and the rail line and as far north as the area around Knowlton Park and south past Deane Street including Harbor Park and the area east of Water Street; however, what is typically considered downtown Ellsworth is characterized by the concentration of shops and restaurants on Main Street and the walkability of the adjacent areas. The City and local partners have invested in initiatives to make the downtown a destination. Parks and parklets, the river walk, local shops and restaurants, and cultural amenities and historic



**72% increase in visits to Acadia National Park from 2013 to 2023**



**77% of people employed in Ellsworth commute from outside of the City**



**79% of households were unable to afford the median home price of \$345,000 in 2023**

architecture create a strong sense of place that should be celebrated. Further initiatives to enhance the downtown, including pedestrian infrastructure, additional housing options, and support for new business, the arts, and recreation are outlined in this Plan. These initiatives could serve to expand what is traditionally considered downtown by extending the reach of commercial vitality, housing density, and walkability to areas beyond Main Street.

To support the local economy and contribute to the vibrancy and liveliness of the downtown, the City will look to proactively address housing needs and support a variety of housing types to meet the needs of Ellsworth's current and future residents. Addressing housing needs requires a multi-faceted approach. The types of housing that are desirable to young adults may not be the same as what families or older adults may need. Supporting a variety of housing types in and around the downtown will support all of Ellsworth's residents in finding housing that meets their current and future needs. Zoning and ordinance changes, strategic partnerships, and regional cooperation will be needed to support these initiatives.

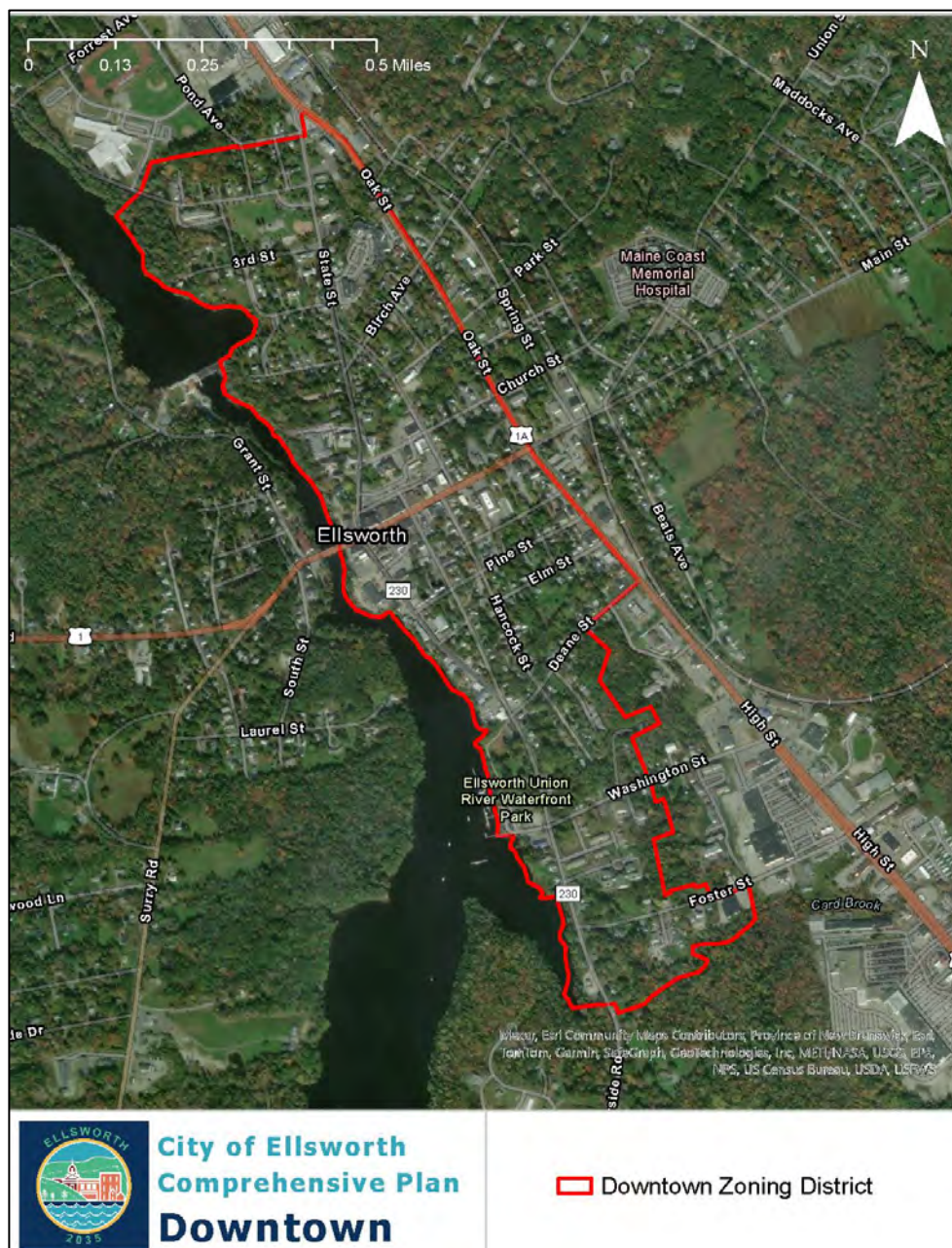


*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## LOOKING FORWARD

To support the local economy and contribute to the vibrancy and liveliness of the downtown, the City will look to proactively address housing needs and support a variety of housing types to meet the needs of Ellsworth's current and future residents. Addressing housing needs requires a multi-faceted approach. The types of housing that are desirable to young adults may not be the same as what families or older adults may need. Supporting a variety of housing types in and around the downtown will support all of Ellsworth's residents in finding housing that meets their current and future needs. Zoning and ordinance changes, strategic partnerships, and regional cooperation will be needed to support these initiatives.





## Sustainable Growth

Protection of open space and natural resources has long been a priority for Ellsworth residents. The City has collaborated with the State and conservation organizations in the region to protect and maintain 4,752 acres of conservation land within the City, over 9% of the City's total land area. Recent trends including increased development pressure on undeveloped land and growing concerns about the impacts of climate change have brought issues of environmental sustainability to the forefront of long-range planning discussions. In addition, preserving surface water and drinking water quality continue to be priorities for Ellsworth residents.

At 94 square miles (79 square miles of land area), Ellsworth is large in geographic area with a relatively small Urban Core and most of the City's land area being rural and undeveloped. The City's Urban Core is defined as the population and economic center of Ellsworth, covering approximately 3.1 square miles, radiating out from the heart of downtown along the City's major corridors. As demand for housing has surged and the City and region have become more popular for visitors and real estate investors, more of this rural land is vulnerable to future development.

This planning process has provided Ellsworth with an opportunity to reconsider land use in the context of the current environment and development pressures and to consider how to encourage more sustainable patterns of growth. Enhancing downtown and the Urban Core, protecting rural areas, supporting more robust housing,

transportation, and social opportunities are all priorities supported in the Plan. Additionally, prioritizing sound fiscal policy decisions and strategically planning for long-term infrastructure investments are crucial to the City's fiscal stability and ability to maintain a high quality of life.

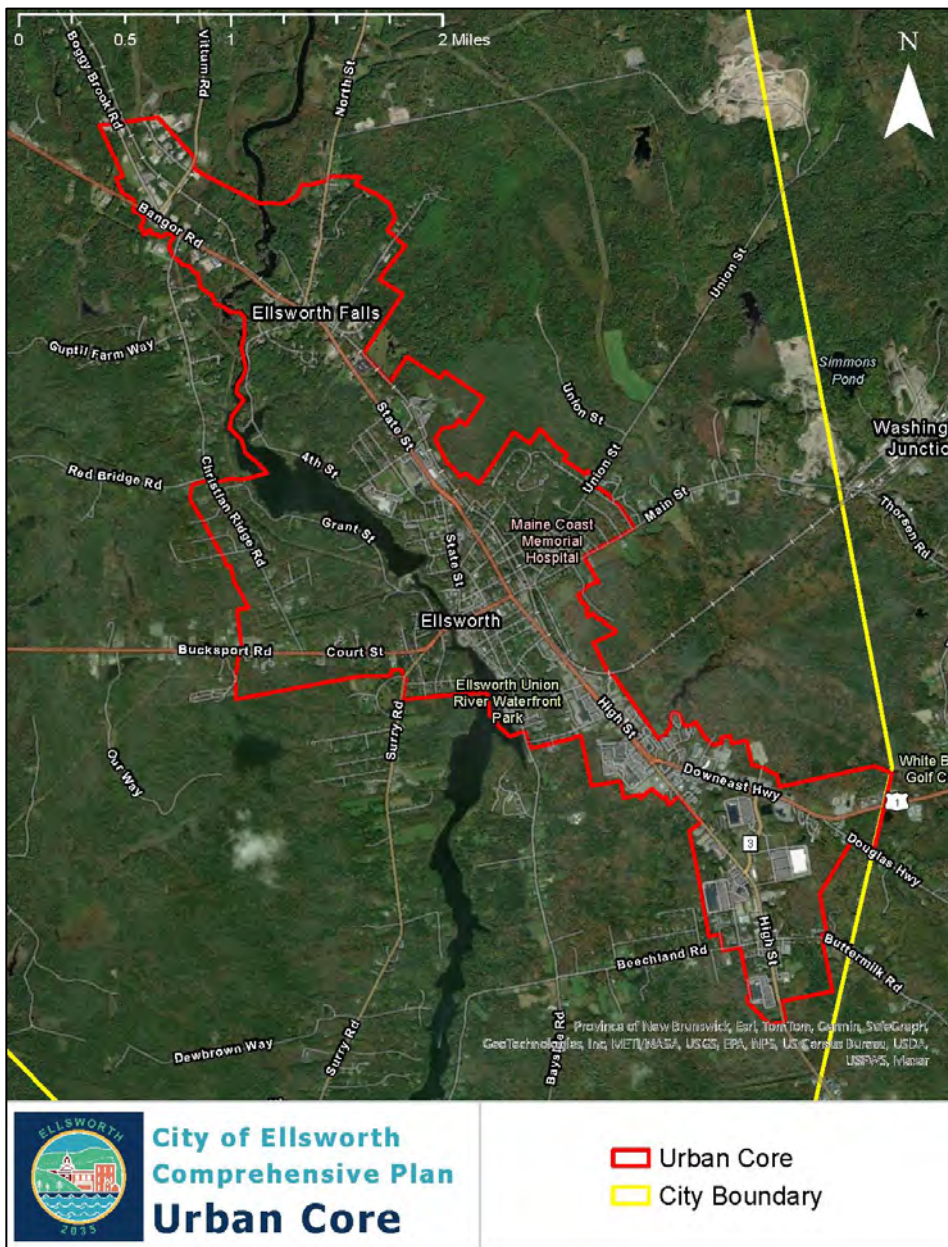
Significant work has been done at the State level to support housing development, economic development, and transportation initiatives across Maine to encourage more stable and sustainable communities. Investing in innovative transportation strategies, supporting the region's workforce, meeting the demand for housing, and protecting natural resources requires regional collaboration. The City will look to leverage opportunities to work with State and regional agencies to benefit from ongoing and future initiatives, whether that is technical or financial support, and lead the region in implementing creative solutions to address challenges.

In addition, the City could leverage State and federal support to strategically invest in infrastructure to improve resiliency. Increased storm intensity and frequency has strained community resources across the State. Investing in infrastructure that is resilient to intense storms will support long-term financial goal and protect residents' safety during extreme weather events. Infrastructure investments could include improved stormwater management, increased capacity for water and wastewater treatment, road maintenance and culvert improvements, and improved health of water bodies, forests, and wetlands.



Infrastructure that is resilient typically requires less maintenance and needs to be replaced less often, which would reduce the burden on the City to continue to allocate funds to address emergency repairs instead of supporting long-term maintenance.

Ellsworth has a history of environmental stewardship. Building upon this core value, this Plan addresses sustainability more broadly including environmental, social, and economic sustainability that all contribute to a healthy community. This Plan identifies policies and actions that guide growth and development that will support a thriving economy, build community connection, and protect the natural environment.







# COMMUNITY VISION AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES





# A VISION FOR ELLSWORTH

## *Purpose*

The following vision statement and guiding principles represents the values and desires of the community as expressed through the community engagement process. This is an aspirational vision that focuses on shared community values, illustrates the City's sense of identity, and sets an overall direction for goals, policies, and actions outlined in this Plan.

## *Vision*

*Ellsworth is a city rooted in tradition that recognizes and honors the people and places of its past while also supporting future growth and innovation for a livable community for all. Ellsworth flourishes by finding balance between urban and rural, preservation and growth, and a year-round economy and seasonal tourism. Similarly, the City balances meeting the needs of community members to enhance livability with fiscal responsibility for long-term success.*





# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## *Connected community*

## *Sustainable growth*

## *Economic vitality*



Cultivate a community rich in the arts and promote the cultural history of Downeast Maine



Protect and preserve the natural environment and rural lifestyle and encourage sustainable, resilient growth.



Prioritize affordable and attainable housing to meet the needs of a diverse population.



Support a vibrant and safe downtown that renews the connection to the waterfront and enhances the City as a regional destination.



Address infrastructure and facility needs by proactively developing safe, reliable, and sustainable solutions.



Support educational assets and increase access to learning opportunities for community members at all stages of life.



Support health and wellness and foster community connections through all phases of life.



Create and maintain a balance between a resilient year-round economy and robust tourism economy.



Expand active and vehicular transportation options and develop local traffic management solutions.



## What are Guiding Principles?

The following pages provide context for each of the nine guiding principles. These principles are aspirational ideals that are aligned with the values and priorities of community members. While these principles are broad in their themes, they relate to the specific challenges Ellsworth is facing while acknowledging the City's geographic location, natural and cultural resources, and other community assets. These principles provide a structure for achieving the City's vision as explained in the following pages. Priority action items have been identified by the Steering Committee, with guidance from staff, the consultant team, and community feedback. While all the policies and action items in this Plan are important, identified priorities reflect those actions that will likely have a significant impact, can be completed or initiated in the near-term, and most closely align with the community's values.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Principle 1: Cultivate a community rich in the arts and promote the cultural history of Downeast Maine.

### *Background and Context*

Ellsworth's historic resources help to create an identity and tell a story about the City's past while giving shape to its future. Historic buildings and places provide tangible connections to Ellsworth's past and ground the community in its history and identity. These physical representations of the City's past are important in sharing Ellsworth's history as the City grows and changes. Protecting and promoting the City's history creates a sense of community for long-time residents and newcomers who are looking to establish roots in Ellsworth.

Additionally, arts, culture, and entertainment opportunities help infuse vibrancy into the City and can serve as a powerful economic driver to attract visitors, improve residents' quality of life, and support community connection and expression. Ellsworth has a small arts and culture scene, anchored by the Grand Theater, local art galleries, and locally sponsored and produced events. Community members expressed the desire for additional events, opportunity for social connection, and expanded arts and entertainment opportunities, especially for children, teens, and young adults. Leveraging the expertise of existing organizations like the Heart of Ellsworth, Ellsworth Public Library (EPL), and the Grand, and supporting opportunities for additional events and cultural amenities can help residents feel more connected to each other and the Ellsworth community.

Arts, culture, and entertainment are essential components of economic development, helping to draw people to the City's downtown and corridors. With millions of visitors passing through Ellsworth each year, the City has an opportunity to leverage existing tourist activity to draw people to downtown businesses. Improved signage and marketing materials can increase awareness of City's historic, cultural, and entertainment assets. In addition to drawing visitors, these assets contribute to creating a sense of place and enhancing the quality of life for Ellsworth residents.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Principle 1: Cultivate a community rich in the arts and promote the cultural history of Downeast Maine.

### Community Values

- *Preserve historic Ellsworth.*
- *Support the small businesses and the arts.*
- *Better more attractive community spaces, events and activities.*

- Visioning survey respondents

### Priority Action Items

**AC.1-d:** Continue to pursue grant funding to support the maintenance and revitalization of historic structures.

**AC.2-b:** Support and partner with organizations and businesses to host and promote events that foster connection, encourage entrepreneurship, and highlight the City's art and cultural assets.

**ED.3-c:** Evaluate wayfinding signage options to help visitors navigate downtown and to promote Ellsworth's amenities and cultural and historic resources.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Principle 2: Protect and preserve the natural environment and rural lifestyle and encourage sustainable and resilient growth.

### *Background and Context*

Ellsworth's history is intimately tied to its water bodies. The Passamaquoddy and Penobscot tribes relied on the Union River for hunting, fishing, and trade. As European settlers arrived, the waterfront area saw development, with shipbuilding, cargo transport, and the establishment of wharfs and lumber mills. This transformation shaped what is now downtown Ellsworth. Today, the various lakes, streams, and rivers across the City continue to exist at the core of the community. These water resources are a part of Ellsworth's identity, and their health is tied to the City's long-term sustainability. Additionally, Ellsworth's lakes are important for providing clean drinking water, supporting wildlife and fish habitats, and providing opportunities for recreation.

While Ellsworth has a long history with the sea, marine resources are limited to where the City meets the Union River Bay and Union River estuary. Union River Bay leads to Blue Hill Bay and the Atlantic Ocean and has been a historic migration path for Atlantic salmon and other anadromous fish. Pollution has limited shellfishing in Ellsworth, but, through access to the Union River, the City provides an access point for commercial and local fishing and harvesting in the larger Union River watershed. Ellsworth is committed to improving the health of the Union River and being a



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*

regional partner and advocate to protect water quality and health.

In addition to waterbodies, the City's open spaces, forests, agricultural lands, wetlands, wildlife habitats, and other natural ecosystems are critical to Ellsworth identity and way of life. People continue to live and visit the community because of the abundance of natural features and recreation opportunities. The City was awarded a grant to almost triple the size the Branch Lake Public Forest, adding an additional 280 acres to the forest, connecting two existing areas of protected forest along the lake.

Ellsworth's relationship and commitment to the natural environment are essential drivers for making land use decisions and ensuring



## Principle 2: Protect and preserve the natural environment and rural lifestyle and encourage sustainable and resilient growth.

that land use regulations continue to protect these assets is a top priority for the City. The community has identified the need to further protect and preserve Ellsworth's natural resources, including taking further action to limit stormwater runoff, reduce pollution in water bodies, build resilient infrastructure, and improve the health of the Union River. Both enforcement of land use regulations and encouraging voluntary compliance with guidelines and best practices through education and outreach will play a role in community efforts to protect natural resources.

To further protect water quality and the health of natural resources, the City is engaged in long-term planning for maintenance and upgrades to public utilities, including upgrades to stormwater infrastructure to limit erosion and runoff and mitigate the impacts of serious flooding or weather events.

### *Priority Action Items*

**WR.3-c:** *Plan for ongoing maintenance costs of existing public sewer and water systems and wastewater treatment facilities.*

**NR.1-a:** *Ensure that land use ordinances are consistent with applicable State law regarding critical natural areas, as defined by the State of Maine.*

**LU.3-d:** *Provide the code enforcement officer with the tools, training, required certification and support necessary to efficiently and effectively enforce land use regulations.*

### Community Values

- *A place that values and protects the health and beauty of the land.*
- *Protect the water.*
- *A community that is more focused on the Union River and making it a more sustainable and desirable recreational asset.*
- *[A] sustainable community that can roll with the challenges that climate change is bringing.*

- Visioning survey respondents



## Principle 3: Prioritize affordable and attainable housing to meet the needs of a diverse population.

### *Background and Context*

While housing affordability has become a national issue, Ellsworth has seen distinct challenges due to the dramatic rise in housing costs and housing demand since 2019. Throughout much of the 2010s, Ellsworth was considered an affordable community, meaning households earning the median income could afford the median home price. Housing costs have risen sharply in recent years and home vacancies have remained low. In just four years, from 2019 to 2023, the median home price increased 86% from \$185,000 to \$345,000, a home price that is unaffordable to nearly 80% of Ellsworth residents.<sup>4</sup>

In Ellsworth, Hancock County, and the State, changing demographics are also impacting the type, size, location, and affordability of housing that is in demand. The population is growing and aging, the average household size is declining, and the number of available homes has not been able to meet current demand.

As a regional employment and service center, housing supply and housing availability is a regional issue that directly impacts economic growth and the ability to attract and retain workers and young families to the region. Both small and large employers have faced challenges attracting and retaining workers due to housing

challenges. Ellsworth is also the gateway to Acadia and sees significant tourist traffic, peaking in the summer months. Rising housing costs and limited availability of year-round and seasonal housing on MDI have pushed workers toward Ellsworth and beyond, further increasing pressure on the housing market. Availability and affordability of rental housing is a particular concern with seasonal employment and many workers in industries with lower-than-average weekly wages.

The City is in the process of developing a Housing Study to identify recommended actions to address the housing crisis. Implementing these recommendations to address housing supply and affordability will be a top priority for the City with support from regional partners.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*

<sup>4</sup> MaineHousing, 2023 Homeownership Housing Facts and Affordability Index for Maine. <https://www.mainehousing.org/data-research/housing-data/housing-affordability-indexes>. Accessed Sept. 9, 2024.



## Principle 3: Prioritize affordable and attainable housing to meet the needs of a diverse population.

### Community Values

- *Housing is a major issue for working class people.*
- *Population density near downtown to make it a thriving walkable city.*
- *I hope it will be affordable for people who want to stay and for those who want to come and contribute to our culture.*
- *More affordable adequate housing for young people.*
- *...restricting the number of dwelling units that are converted to short term rentals...*
- *A variety of housing development including affordable housing, senior housing and veteran housing and also more shelter beds for the unhoused.*
- *Senior housing and access to shopping and services.*

- Visioning survey respondents

### The Affordable Housing Tax Increment Financing (AHTIF) Program

The AHTIF Program offers municipalities a flexible financing tool to assist affordable housing projects and support related infrastructure by designating a specific area of the municipality as an affordable housing development district. AHTIF enables communities to use incremental tax revenues from the affordable housing district to help make the housing affordable and to pay for related costs. Communities using AHTIF also avoid the decreases in State revenue sharing and State education subsidy and increases in county taxes that otherwise would occur with increased property values from the AHTIF district.

### Priority Action Items

- H.1-b:** Implement the recommendations of the Ellsworth Housing Study to be completed in 2024.
- H.1-c:** Use affordable housing tax increment financing to assist affordable housing development in designated growth areas.
- H.1-d:** Identify and support the establishment of incentives for rental property owners to maintain, improve, and increase rental housing stock.



## Principle 4: Support a vibrant and safe downtown that renews the connection to the waterfront and enhances the City as a regional destination.

### *Background and Context*

Downtown Ellsworth is a hub of activity. As a service center, downtown includes a concentration of businesses, community resources, and services for residents of Ellsworth and surrounding communities; however, the downtown is also a center for arts, culture, and entertainment. The variety of shops, restaurants, galleries, and community events within the context of the historic downtown situated on the Union River attract visitors and contribute to the quality of life for residents.

Improving connections to the Union River waterfront has been a long-term goal for the City since the last comprehensive planning process. In addition to reconnecting and promoting awareness of the City's historic ties to the river, improving waterfront access can increase opportunities for recreation, support year-round activity and tourism, and help to gain support for water quality improvements.

Implementation of the future land use plan and related revisions to the land use ordinance will have an impact on downtown. Allowing for more infill development, improving connectivity and transportation access, and increased housing opportunities will all help to increase the vibrancy and accessibility of downtown.

Years of economic development initiatives have supported local businesses and arts.

### *Primary Strengths of Downtown*



*Source: Ellsworth Asset Mapping, 2023*

and cultural organizations and resulted in physical improvements to beautify downtown. Continuing these efforts and leveraging regional tourism will be important in supporting economic growth and helping to ensure a safe and vibrant downtown for residents year-round. Continued improvements to walkability and connectivity to the river will make downtown a desirable place to visit. Promoting the City's arts, culture, entertainment, and recreation amenities through a thoughtful marketing initiative will help Ellsworth leverage its unique assets and geography to benefit from the region's tourism and attract new visitors and residents to spend time in downtown.



## Principle 4: Support a vibrant and safe downtown that renews the connection to the waterfront and enhances the City as a regional destination.

### Community Values

- *I have a vision that Ellsworth will become a bustling small city, known for its scenic views along the Union River and access to recreational amenities, including parks and open space.*
- *Less vehicle traffic downtown, more foot traffic...*
- *A growing place with a small town charm. Keeping Main Street quaint.*
- *Beautification of the waterfront area would help immensely.*
- *A focus on the arts throughout the city...*
- *Make Ellsworth a destination.*
- *That the downtown area is a fun, creative destination that supports artists, local farmers, and hip new restaurants.*

- Visioning survey respondents

### Priority Action Items

**ED.3-d:** Explore ways in which downtown can be more visitor-friendly in support of the efforts of the Village Partnership Initiative; these could include installation of year-round public restrooms, information kiosks and signage, an arts trail, trash receptacles, beautification, or other amenities.

**ED.4-b:** Create a marketing plan, including a series of action steps, based on the findings of the Business Attraction Plan, the Heart of Ellsworth Asset Mapping, and representative examples from similar communities in the area, such as Bucksport.

**PR.4-c:** Plan for ways to redevelop Water Street.

**LU.3-a:** Update local ordinances as appropriate to align with the goals and intent of the future land use plan, including clearly defining desired scale, intensity, and location of future development, and clearly defining protective measures for any existing or proposed critical natural resources, rural areas, or waterfront areas.



## Principle 5: Address infrastructure and facility needs by proactively developing safe, reliable, and sustainable solutions.

### *Background and Context*

Maintaining and investing in public facilities and services in an efficient and cost-effective manner is important to the well-being and safety of the community. Ellsworth residents desire reliable infrastructure, efficient and responsive municipal services, and a safe community. Investing in the maintenance and, where needed, upgrading of public infrastructure and facilities will help ensure that current and future services meet the needs of Ellsworth residents and visitors. Infrastructure expansions and upgrades to improve accessibility should be considered with a long-term perspective, weighing short-term and ongoing costs against anticipated benefits like increased revenue, reduce vehicle miles traveled, or improved safety, equity, and quality of life of residents.

To support efforts outlined in this Plan, the City will look at areas to expand water and sewer infrastructure to better support growth in the City's Urban Core. Sufficient capital planning will be important to help ensure that infrastructure is properly maintained, and infrastructure upgrades or replacements are adequately planned and budgeted for.

The City is in the process of designing and constructing a new water treatment facility to replace the Branch Lake facility. The City is leveraging State-level financial support to help construct the project. The Branch Lake

Dam is concurrently being examined for improved fish passage and repairs. The City is also procuring electric vehicle (EV) charging stations for the City Hall parking lot—increasing EV infrastructure and supporting clean energy initiatives. Capital planning and leveraging available grant funding can continue to support the City in upgrading critical infrastructure to provide safe and reliable services to residents. Updating current infrastructure with more resilient solutions can help reduce long-term costs due to damage, reduce energy costs, and support residents during emergencies. There is currently a variety of grant and funding opportunities to support the City in implementing resilient infrastructure solutions.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Principle 5: Address infrastructure and facility needs by proactively developing safe, reliable, and sustainable solutions.

With ongoing staffing challenges, an aging workforce, and shifting demographics, the City will also need to evaluate services and staffing. An aging population and declining youth population will have different service needs. An increase in the older adult population often results in an increase in emergency medical services (EMS) calls. Older adults may also have a greater need for transportation and healthcare services and different housing needs. Planning for these changes will allow the City to more easily shift resources to meet the needs of the community.

### Community Values

- *We must address the road, water and sewer demands as the population increases.*
- *Planned growth that services the needs of the public demographic.*
- *More beautification with improved infrastructure advancements.*
- *Fiscal responsibility. Self reliant.*
- *Bottom up leadership from city...*
- *We invest in maintaining city services, improving infrastructure (including public transportation and walkability)...*
- *That Ellsworth becomes a beacon of climate resilience.*
- *Expanding of fire and ambulance services.*

- Visioning survey respondents

### Priority Action Items

**WR.3-a:** *Prioritize and seek funding for the construction of a new water treatment plant to increase capacity to support growth.*

**T.1-a:** *Develop or continue to update a prioritized improvement, maintenance, and repair plan for the City's roads and other transportation infrastructure.*

**PF.1-g:** *Update the Fire and EMS Strategic Plan to evaluate existing EMS operations, staffing, and equipment, and determine how best to use a third party for EMS services.*



## Principle 6: Support educational assets and increase access to learning opportunities for community members at all stages of life.

### *Background and Context*

Ellsworth is home to several public, private, and nonprofit educational institutions and organizations that offer learning opportunities. As a regional service center, the City provides access to more than simply shopping and personal services, with educational institutions and programs that serve residents throughout the region.

The Ellsworth School Department comprises the Ellsworth Elementary/Middle School, Ellsworth High School, Hancock County Technical Center, and Ellsworth Adult & Community Education (ACE). The district serves students of all ages and from the region. ACE provides critical career and college readiness, technology training, targeted job training, and enrichment programs. In addition, other City and community organizations, such as the Downeast YMCA, the EPL, and various private and nonprofit groups offer learning

opportunities for the community. EPL is an important community resource and gathering place for residents of the City and region and provides access to resources and education, especially for underserved groups.

These educational assets are essential to the City's economic growth. They provide important resources for young people and prepare students to enter the workforce. Career growth and job training programs help to build and strengthen the workforce and can shift to meet current industry labor demands. Strong K-12 schools also help companies attract employees to live and work in Ellsworth. Additionally, employers, employees, and residents have all noted the challenge of accessing affordable child care options as a barrier to economic growth and workforce attraction.



*Photo credit: Ellsworth School District*



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Principle 6: Support educational assets and increase access to learning opportunities for community members at all stages of life.

Educational programs also offer opportunities for social connection. Recreation and enrichment programs can be a lifeline for youth, especially those in more rural areas. They also provide a structure for creating community among older adults who are no longer in the workforce. Establishing a municipal recreation department will help to support organization, funding, and coordination of programs offered to the community.

The City has worked to improve broadband access in and around the downtown to improve digital connectivity and access to learning opportunities. Looking ahead, the City is planning for additional broadband expansion into rural areas to support residents throughout the City in accessing tools to support their quality of life and access to digital mediums. In addition, the City and its partners are looking to explore digital equity throughout the City and plan for ways to improve digital access for residents. This also includes expanding the capacity of key community hubs to provide places for residents to go during emergencies, provide digital literacy and education access, and meet the diverse needs of residents.

### Community Values

- *A place that is inviting, that has a top notch school system, a thriving downtown and is business friendly.*
- *Encourage kids to go into trade professions!*
- *Better access to housing and childcare...*
- *Ellsworth's schools continue to provide a quality education to our youth.*
- *Schools and Library that are funded consistently and given what they need to grow and thrive.*

- Visioning survey respondents

### Priority Action Items

**ED.7-b:** Remove barriers to opening and running in-home day care operations by developing technical guidance for new business development and working with the Child Care Business Lab to support local child care entrepreneurs.

**PF.7-e:** Continue to support the Ellsworth Public Library in expanding learning opportunities to meet the needs of the community and help to build community partnerships to support EPL goals.



## Principle 7: Support health and wellness and foster community connections through all phases of life.

### *Background and Context*

The dedication and enthusiasm of so many community members and groups to civic and community engagement has been a consistent theme during this planning process. From mission-driven volunteers with established nonprofit organizations, to residents serving on boards and committees, to ad hoc initiatives to support those in need, Ellsworth community members have created a strong sense of belonging in their devotion to the community and representing what it truly means to “be Ellsworth.”

As the City has continued to grow and change, like other communities, it has struggled to maintain the same level of volunteerism and civic engagement. An increase in remote work, an aging population, a generational shift, and the housing affordability crisis forcing some community members further from the City could all be contributing to this decline in engagement. The importance of social interaction and strong community connections are becoming increasingly a part of conversations about planning as the serious health impacts of social isolation and loneliness have become more apparent. In recent years, the City has made improvements in communication with the addition of a Communications Specialist and creation of a City newsletter. Additional improvements to expand digital access and outreach will help to improve equity in access to information and services.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



*Photo credit: Heart of Ellsworth*



## Principle 7: Support health and wellness and foster community connections through all phases of life.

Land use and the built environment have an enormous impact on social and physical health of a community. A walkable environment with public spaces and parks offers more opportunities for interaction and encourages a more active lifestyle. Lack of transportation options is also a contributing factor to social isolation and limits access to activities, specifically impacting older adults, children, and people with disabilities. Improving walkability and overall pedestrian connectivity is a top priority for the community. Residents value the abundant parks, trails, and public spaces in Ellsworth and would like to see these maintained and improved for better access, especially along the Union River. In addition to the health benefits of outdoor recreation, access to public spaces allows for social interaction and connection to the City's history and culture.

### Community Values

- *To continue to grow but to keep that small town feel of friendship.*
- *Cohesive community of people that care for each other and their region.*
- *Public spaces, recreational areas, walking trails and bike paths...*
- *Walkability, bikeability, and public transportation make small cities thrive.*
- *Easily accessible public areas.*
- *To enhance the quality of life for residents with careful consideration of the growth process.*
- *All types of community members working towards bridging the political/health divide that has come about over the past few years.*

- Visioning survey respondents

### Priority Action Items

**PR.4-a:** *Develop a waterfront plan to strengthen Ellsworth's connection to the River and guide change that will enhance public access and activity along the River.*

**PR.4-f:** *Improve pedestrian connectivity of existing trail networks.*

**PF.2-c:** *Update the City website and improve online services available to the community, including making online payments.*

**PF.6-d:** *Improve Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility of public facilities in coordination with planned upgrades.*



## Principle 8: Create and maintain a balance between a resilient year-round economy and robust tourism economy.

### *Background and Context*

Ellsworth holds a unique role as the crossroads of Downeast Maine and last commercial center for visitors traveling to MDI and Acadia. The City benefits from this proximity and aims to establish itself as a destination as well; however, the growing needs of its year-round population often clash with the impacts of a seasonal influx of tourists. Balancing these competing demands calls for thoughtful policies and investments that protect the long-term well-being of residents and businesses.

Large capital and maintenance projects, such as the water treatment plant and dredging of the Union River, have regional impacts on economic growth. Long-term planning for funding of municipal capital projects and ongoing efforts in collaboration on State and federally funded projects is essential.

At the same time, supporting year-round residents through small-scale initiatives and improvements is critical to sustaining a resilient economy. Businesses that serve locals are the backbone of the community, while many others depend on the seasonal boost provided by tourists. Investments and initiatives must address the varied needs of residents and visitors, including affordable housing, varied lodging options, access to healthcare, quality municipal services, and child care, to ensure the local workforce and businesses can thrive. Rising housing costs, for instance, threaten to push residents out of the area, undermining the labor force and complicating efforts to attract and retain workers.

The City has been committed to investing in downtown to support a thriving economy and sense of community. Streetscape improvements, events, preservation of historic structures, and cultural institutions



*Photo credits: City of Ellsworth*



## Principle 8: Create and maintain a balance between a resilient year-round economy and robust tourism economy.

have all contributed to the vibrancy of downtown. Creating additional opportunities for housing and small businesses through infill and adaptive reuse and improving walkability will continue to strengthen downtown and attract visitors.

Long-term workforce development initiatives, which typically take years to yield results, are vital for ensuring future economic stability. These programs must be maintained and expanded to support both immediate and future needs. By creating a balance between year-round economic resilience and robust tourism, Ellsworth can continue to flourish, helping to ensure a high quality of life for all community members while capitalizing on its strategic location near Acadia.

### Community Values

- *An attractive community for locals and tourists alike.*
- *Ellsworth is in a perfect position to be a sought out place to live, visit and have a business.*
- *Ellsworth needs to capitalize more on its year-round nature, build upon its role as a regional center, and revel in its position as a "gateway to Downeast and Acadia."*
- *Growth needs to be strategically managed.*
- *A destination city for recreation/vacation.*
- *Diverse tax base, balance of open spaces and recreation...*

- Visioning survey respondents

### Priority Action Items

**MR.2-b:** Partner with community organizations and regional entities to support the planned dredging of the Union River by the Army Corps of Engineers.

**ED.2-a:** Partner with the State and regional economic development organizations to support planning efforts that impact the City, including implementation of the 2021 – 2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.

**LU.2-f:** Create incentives for adaptive reuse of buildings to support small businesses and create housing opportunities in the designated growth area.



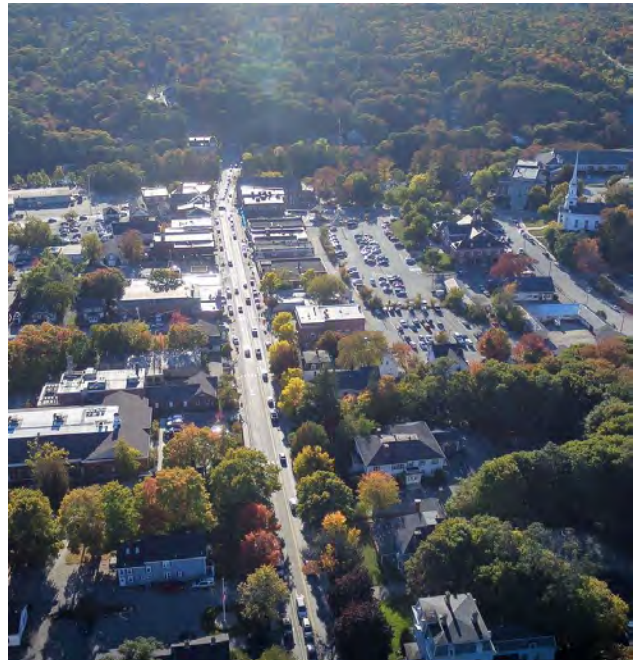
## Principle 9: Expand active and vehicular transportation options and develop local traffic management solutions.

### *Background and Context*

Ellsworth, as the crossroads of Downeast Maine, experiences significant traffic congestion, both from seasonal tourist activity and weekday commuter traffic. In this largely rural community, cars remain the dominant mode of transportation, creating ongoing challenges for traffic management. While improvements in road maintenance, signalization technology, and street design are crucial for easing congestion, the long-term solution lies in reducing dependence on vehicles. Expanding active transportation options, such as walking and biking, and improving public transit will be critical in mitigating traffic pressures over time and improving equity and accessibility of transportation options.

Enhancing walkability within downtown and mixed-use areas can shift transportation patterns, encouraging residents and visitors to leave their cars behind. The City was awarded a grant to support the planning phase of the Village Partnership Initiative, a collaborative effort between the City of Ellsworth and the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT), to improve the High Street corridor. The project will aim to increase active transportation options along the corridor and reduce vehicle miles traveled. Continuing to plan for improved sidewalks, bike paths, and recreational trails will enhance connectivity between residential neighborhoods and key destinations, allowing for safer and more

appealing non-motorized travel options. Expanding public transit systems and customizing transit service availability to specific users like commuters or older adults can mitigate traffic volumes while addressing acute community needs. Some residents noted a desire for expanding vehicle capacity with a new road; however, the transportation investments identified in this Plan provide more fiscally responsible options for mitigating traffic while also supporting Ellsworth's broader goal of fostering a livable community that prioritizes sustainability and quality of life.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Principle 9: Expand active and vehicular transportation options and develop local traffic management solutions.

Land use decisions also play a critical role in reducing overall vehicle miles traveled. Increasing density in built-out areas can promote walking and linking trips, while local-serving commercial and residential developments near rural neighborhoods can reduce the need for frequent visits into the Urban Core. Improving connectivity of the road network can also reduce traffic congestion by creating alternative routes rather than directing all traffic to main arterial road. By adopting a holistic approach to transportation planning, Ellsworth can effectively manage traffic while encouraging healthier, more sustainable forms of mobility that benefit both year-round residents and seasonal visitors.

### Community Values

- *Public transport, parking and traffic flow are key.*
- *Have ways for commuters to get through or around Ellsworth more easily so that the town can be enjoyed by residents and visitors.*
- *We need a bypass.*
- *A more walkable, publicly accessible City...*
- *Walkability, bikeability, and public transportation make small cities thrive.*
- *Wider sidewalks and safe crosswalks...*
- *Better traffic flow.*

- Visioning survey respondents

### Priority Action Items

**T.2-b:** *Develop a corridor plan for High Stret/Route 1/Route 1A corridors to guide redevelopment, support businesses, and improve safety and mobility for all users.*

**T.2-c:** *Improve through connections to relieve traffic volume on major corridors.*

**T.5-c:** *Conduct an inventory of existing sidewalks and develop priorities for expanding sidewalk infrastructure with a focus on improving connectivity and accessibility to key amenities and facilities and connecting adjacent residential neighborhoods to downtown.*





# FUTURE LAND USE



## Purpose

The purpose of the future land use plan is to establish a guide for how land will be developed or redeveloped in the future based on the City's vision and guiding principles. The priorities identified during engagement and represented in the vision and principles (including creating more housing options, supporting economic growth and a vibrant downtown, and preserving natural areas) all impact future land use and are addressed through the future land use plan. Careful and deliberate land use planning is critical for preserving the community's assets which make it unique while also encouraging the type of growth that is needed to help ensure economic stability and quality of life for the community.

## Future Growth Needs

The recent trend of in-migration to Maine and the region and the increased demand for housing are indicative of a growing pressure to develop undeveloped, forested, and open space land in the region. As a service center, Ellsworth's approach to land use planning has significant impacts for the broader region. As a hub for commerce and development, the land use policies and regulations enacted by the City will have implications for surrounding communities.

The City's Housing Needs Assessment estimates that additional housing for

approximately 900 households will be needed by 2030 because of population growth (approximately 362 additional households) and loss of housing units overtime due to obsolescence (552 units based on a HUD estimate of 1.8% annual loss rate for housing units).<sup>5</sup> Additional housing will likely be needed to accommodate the region's growing workforce, many of whom desire to live in Ellsworth but cannot find housing within their budget. In addition, more than 1,300 Ellsworth households are currently cost burdened, contributing to demand for more affordable housing units in the City.

Commercial growth is expected to continue as the local market area (most of the City) is expected to see continued population growth in the next decade. Professional and business services and tourism-related industries have experienced the most growth, with these businesses concentrated in the Urban Core. Continued infill commercial development is anticipated in downtown and along the commercial corridors, where businesses are most visible and accessible. Additionally, there is some undeveloped land within the Commercial, Industrial, and Neighborhood Mixed-Use areas where commercial development could be targeted.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Office of Policy Research. June 2020. American Housing Survey, Components of Inventory Change: 2015 – 2017, Washington, D.C.: HUD. Accessed May 17, 2024. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/cinch/cinch15/National-Report.pdf>.



## The Future Land Use Plan

Most of Ellsworth's 79 square miles of land area is undeveloped. With limited ability and resources to permanently protect vast areas of land, the future protection of open space and rural areas (as is desired by the community) is dependent upon designations of the future land use plan and associated revisions to land use regulations to limit growth outside of the Urban Core.

In addition, the City's ability to support necessary growth to accommodate the workforce and sustain a healthy economy will depend largely on how land use is regulated in the Urban Core. This includes what types and density of housing can be built, where industrial uses are allowed, and what types of waterfront activities are permitted. In turn, the location and concentration of commercial activity and density of residential development will impact traffic patterns, the viability of regional transit, infrastructure maintenance, opportunities for social interaction, and a myriad of other factors.

While ample development potential exists within the City's Urban Core, either on undeveloped or underdeveloped parcels, building single-family homes in undeveloped rural areas is often easier and less expensive for developers. This type of sprawling residential development has

numerous impacts beyond the loss of open space. Building housing further from the center of the City (as opposed to infill development in and around downtown) puts a greater burden on municipal services to expand infrastructure maintenance and provide services to a larger geographic area, including road maintenance, snow plowing, and emergency response. With the significant increase in costs to build and maintain infrastructure, building closer to the City's center can help to reduce the costs associated with new development and construction outside of areas served by water, sewer, and roads. Homes further from the Urban Core, require more driving for residents to access goods and services, creating more traffic. This type of development also does not address the needs of those who are seeking smaller, more affordable homes or who do not drive.

Additional growth and density within and near downtown will have numerous benefits, including minimizing infrastructure costs for new development, supporting downtown businesses, reducing traffic impacts and transportation costs for downtown residents, creating safer and more active streets, and creating more opportunities for social connection.



Directing growth to the Urban Core will also support the City's goals of preserving open space and significant natural areas. Most of the City is undeveloped and consists of privately owned, undeveloped land, much of which is covered by forests, wetlands, and other natural features that comprise wildlife habitats. Directing growth away from undeveloped areas through land use regulations can help to maintain open space areas and habitats that are not permanently conserved. Additionally, the future land use plan expands the current drinking water zone to include Branch and Green Lakes to minimize impacts of future development on water quality of the lakes.

In recent years, the City has seen an increase in development pressure outside of the Urban Core. Development has happened closer to the City's lakes, including the area between Green and Graham Lakes. Much of the City's land is rural, forested land and water bodies. The community has emphasized the desire to preserve the rural character of much of the City and protect water quality, natural resources, forests, and areas suitable for agriculture. The majority of the City's undeveloped habitat and critical natural resources (including wetlands, vernal pools, aquifers, and wildlife habitat) is in the rural and drinking water zones. The future land use plan has made some adjustments to existing zones to further protect natural resources. Limiting development in rural areas can further help to protect natural resources. Additionally, expansion of the drinking water zone to include land along Green and Graham Lake can help to further protect the City's water sources.

This future land use plan supports the Plan's vision and key principles in the following ways:

- *Guiding development toward the Urban Core where there is public infrastructure*
- *Allowing for diverse commercial growth in appropriate locations*
- *Encouraging infill development in growth areas to support a vibrant walkable community and efficient use of land*
- *Creating neighborhood villages to support rural residential areas*
- *Limiting suburban development to protect open space, natural resources, and the rural character*

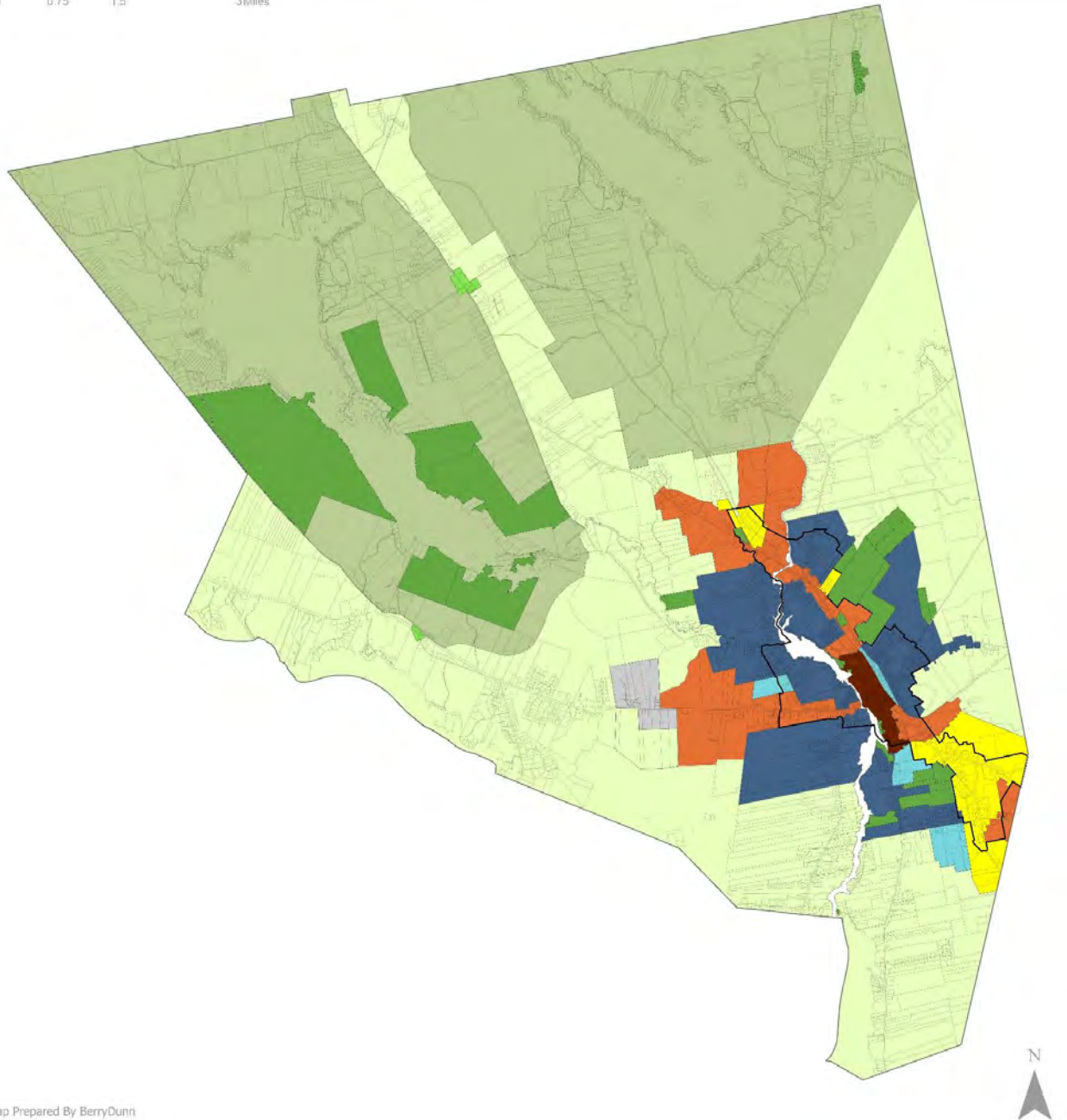


*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



# Future Land Use Map

0 0.75 1.5 3 Miles



Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced March 2024

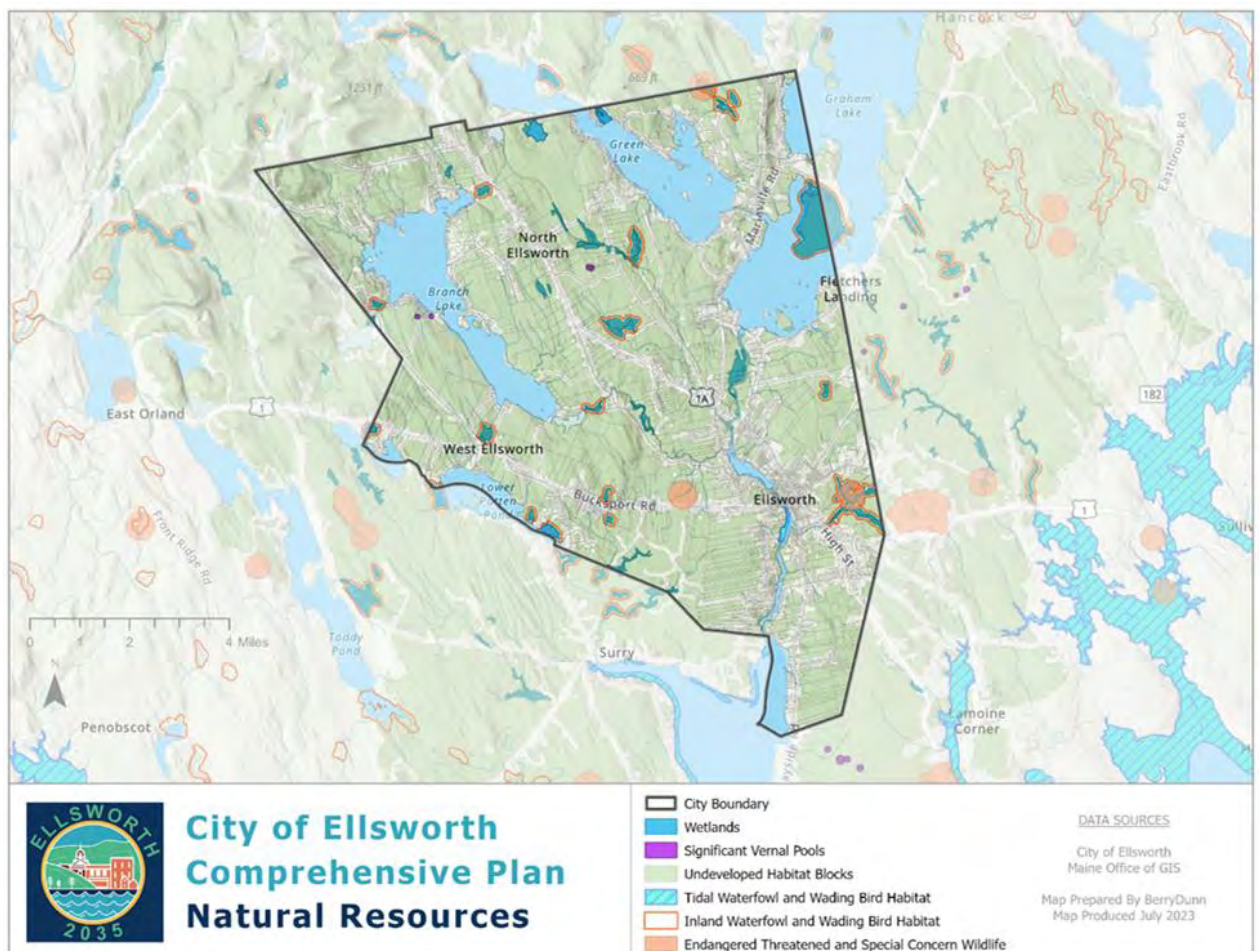
## City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use

- City Boundary
- Urban Core
- Future Land Use
  - (I) Industrial
  - (C) Commercial
  - (N) Neighborhood
  - Neighborhood Mixed Use
  - (U) Urban
  - (DT) Downtown
  - Rural Village
  - (R) Rural
  - (RC) Rural Conservation
  - Conservation Lands



## The Future Land Use Plan

This Plan outlines additional policies and actions to support more intense development in the Urban Core, while protecting natural resources in this area. The growth area defined in this Plan includes the non-rural districts (Industrial, Commercial, Neighborhood, Neighborhood Mixed Use, Urban, and Downtown). The growth area extends beyond the Urban Core boundary to include adjacent areas that are most practical to accommodate new growth based on existing configurations of transportation systems, utilities, infrastructure, and location of core services. This future land use plan addresses the reality of anticipated population and commercial growth with ample land area within the growth area for residential, commercial, industrial, and mixed-use development, while also establishing stricter regulatory protections in rural areas and near surface waters and other natural areas that are most vulnerable to the impacts of development. Policies and actions in the water, natural resources, and future land use sections look to further protect natural and water resources in all areas of the City. This includes actions to improve the health of Card Brook, which is an urban impaired stream, and more restrictive zoning near Green and Graham Lakes.





## Land Use Categories

The following land use categories have been established to provide a framework for future growth aligned with the City's vision. These categories serve as a guide for future land use regulations and policy. The descriptions below provide an overview of the typical land uses, building form, and character for each category. These descriptions are meant to be a guide, with the understanding that variations in the specific land use regulations and application of these regulations will be based on the unique characteristics of each neighborhood or area.

## Non-Growth Areas

### *Rural*

Much of the City's land area is considered rural, and the community's character is, in part, defined by rural landscapes and open spaces. Rural areas provide a place for low-density residential development, consisting of primarily single-family homes. These areas also accommodate traditional rural uses such as farming and forestry and offer areas of open space for conservation and recreation. The built environment is characterized by one- to two-story single-family homes on large lots with large areas of undeveloped land. Rural areas are predominantly accessed by automobile via arterial road corridors.

**Land use:** Single-family detached homes are the primary structure type, and many include accessory dwelling units on the same lot. Duplexes, single-family homes on smaller lots, and limited non-residential uses (including home-based businesses, recreation businesses, and agricultural uses) may also be found.

**Character:** Characterized by one- to two-story residential structures on large lots with significant areas of forested land, open space, and farmland.

### *Rural Conservation*

Rural Conservation areas include areas adjacent to Branch Lake, Green Lake, and Graham Lake. These areas are similar in land use and character to rural areas, with predominantly low-density single-family homes, but with additional limitations on development that would adversely impact water quality. Rural Conservation areas typically have larger lots with more undeveloped land and less impervious surface (i.e., driveways, buildings) than rural areas.

**Land use:** Single-family detached homes are the primary structure type, and many include accessory dwelling units on the same lot. Other non-residential uses (including home-based businesses, recreation businesses, and agricultural uses) may also be found.

**Character:** Rural conservation areas are largely characterized by significant areas of forested land, open space, and farmland. Development in these areas consists primarily of one- to two-story residential structures on large lots and agricultural structures.



## Non-Growth Areas

### *Rural Village*

The purpose of the Rural Village area is to create neighborhood centers for housing and retail to improve access to necessities for rural residents, reduce vehicle trips to the Urban Core from rural areas, and create neighborhood gathering places for rural areas. Rural Villages are small in land area and allow for a greater variety of uses, including neighborhood retail and some limited institutional and commercial uses, such as day care centers, churches, and public facilities. The built environment is characterized by small one- and two-story buildings on small lots with minimal setbacks. Some denser residential development, including single-family or two-family homes and townhouses may also be allowed. These areas are primarily accessed by automobile; however, land uses within Rural Villages provide for pedestrian connectivity.

**Land Use:** Typical uses include neighborhood retail, personal services, institutional uses, and residential. Residential uses are primarily single-family, two-family, or cluster development.

**Character:** Buildings are typically low-rise (one and two-story) commercial, residential, and mixed-use buildings with a small footprint on small lots. Building architecture is in keeping with the rural vernacular of the surrounding neighborhoods.



## Growth Areas

### *Downtown*

Downtown provides a walkable environment with a mix of uses that contribute to a vibrant downtown with year-round economic and social activity. The mix of housing types, services, retail, and entertainment businesses support livability. Downtown is the heart of the City, with density that creates an environment that is conducive to walking and creates a vibrant city center.

**Land Use:** Typical uses include retail, restaurants, personal services, offices, institutional, entertainment, and a mix of residential types. Downtown serves as a center for jobs, commerce, arts, and entertainment. This area is easily accessible by transit, walking, and biking.

**Character:** This area is characterized by medium- to high-density development of two-to-four stories with some taller structures along Main Street. Buildings are oriented toward the street with minimal-to-no setbacks, supporting walkability and active streets. The downtown area includes parks and public spaces within the urban fabric to support community interaction and create a desirable place to live, work, shop, and recreate.



### *Urban*

The Urban area provides a variety of residential and commercial uses within the Urban Core. Urban areas include mixed-use neighborhoods that offer a higher-density alternative to rural neighborhoods, with a variety of uses and accessibility to downtown amenities and services.

**Land Use:** Typical uses include stand-alone retail uses, personal services, restaurants, and professional offices as well as mixed-use structures. These areas also support a mix of housing types, including townhouses, multistory apartment buildings, single-family homes, and cottage court developments, and support access to multimodal transportation options.

**Character:** The built environment is characterized by low- to mid-rise commercial, mixed-use, and residential structures with some higher-density structures in certain locations within the Urban Core. These areas are primarily situated along main arterials. Site design balances active and vehicular transportation elements, providing for both automobile and pedestrian connectivity within and to the neighborhood.

*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Growth Areas

### *Neighborhood Mixed-Use*

The Neighborhood Mixed-Use areas serve as transition areas between more intense commercial and urban land use areas and primarily residential neighborhoods. This area allows for a mix of uses, including a mix of residential housing types, institutional uses, and limited neighborhood-serving retail and commercial uses. Non-residential uses are intended to serve residents of the surrounding neighborhood, while limiting additional traffic, noise, or other adverse impacts of commercial development.

**Land Use:** Typical uses include retail, restaurant, personal services, institutional uses, and offices. These areas also include a mix of housing types.

**Character:** Characterized by low-rise commercial, residential, and mixed-use structures and a more traditional neighborhood layout.

### *Neighborhood*

Neighborhood areas provide predominantly residential areas with low- to medium-density housing. Neighborhood areas offer a variety of housing types from single-family to multifamily structures. Buildings are typically one-to-three stories in height and are in keeping with the residential character of existing neighborhoods.

**Land Use:** Uses are primarily residential with some lower intensity commercial uses, including neighborhood retail, small or home offices, and institutional uses.

**Character:** Characterized by one-to-three story residential buildings. Residential uses include single-family, two-family, multifamily, and townhouses. Buildings are well-connected to the pedestrian environment and Downtown and Urban areas.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Growth Areas

### *Commercial*

Commercial areas offer a variety of non-residential uses that serve residents, visitors, and the region. Lots and buildings may be larger to accommodate a variety of commercial operations. Typical uses include retail, personal and professional services, restaurants, hotels, entertainment facilities, institutional uses, office, and some multifamily residential. Buildings are typically one-to-three stories and are primarily automobile-oriented with pedestrian connectivity to surrounding urban areas and accommodations for regional transit access.

**Land Use:** Typical uses are primarily commercial with some light industrial and institutional uses.

**Character:** Buildings are typically low-rise (one-to-two stories) commercial structures. Buildings may be larger in footprint to accommodate various commercial operations and are primarily auto-oriented related to vehicle access, circulation, and parking and signage.

### *Industrial*

The industrial area located along Bucksport Road, accommodates a variety of manufacturing, distribution, production, and other commercial uses. This area is characterized by larger lots with large, low-rise buildings, ample exterior storage and parking, and significant landscaping or open space buffer to adjacent uses. Industrial land uses are accessed from the main arterial road with minimal impact on neighborhoods.

**Land Use:** Typical uses are non-residential, including production, manufacturing, research, distribution, and other industrial and commercial uses.

**Character:** Buildings are typically low-to-mid-rise commercial and industrial facilities. Buildings may be larger in footprint to accommodate various industrial operations and are primarily auto-oriented related to vehicle access to the main arterial, site circulation, and parking and signage.



*Photo credit: Google Maps*





# PLANNING FOR GROWTH



## Introduction

Careful planning to support the City's fiscal health while also maintaining infrastructure and services is a critical concern for Ellsworth. As maintenance and operation costs continue to rise, finding creative and collaborative solutions and implementing long-term capital planning will be essential to supporting municipal operations while minimizing the tax burden on residents. This Plan identifies new programs, staff resources and infrastructure and facility improvements that will add to the City's expenses; however, additional revenue sources, cost and resource sharing opportunities, efficiency improvements, and regulatory changes to encourage economic growth are also important aspects of the Plan. While additional municipal spending should be considered carefully, limiting spending to the detriment of quality of life in the City, could adversely impact the long-term economic sustainability of Ellsworth.

## Funding Strategies

Maintaining, upgrading, and expanding existing facilities and services are major long-term and ongoing expenses, but are important to support continued economic growth and the community's health and well-being. Careful evaluation of costs and benefits of investments in infrastructure and services is necessary as costs rise, and the community needs to expand and change. Long-term maintenance and operation costs, impact on the tax base, and benefits to the community (related to health, equity, and quality of life) will need to be considered and balanced in planning for capital improvements.

The cost of living and increasing the tax burden for residential property owners is a top concern for residents. Significant increases in housing costs and rising costs of goods and services have an adverse impact on quality of life, health, and ability for residents to continue to live and work in Ellsworth and the region. With nearly 60% of all jobs in Ellsworth in industries that have an average weekly wage lower than the total average wage for the State, workers have limited capacity to adjust to rising costs.

Minimizing the tax burden while continuing to provide a high level of service to City residents is, and will continue to be, a priority for the City Council and staff. Maximizing efficiency of resources, strategic investment to support expansion of the tax base, identifying alternative revenue sources, partnerships, and seeking alternative funding sources, such as grants, will all be a part of the City's fiscal strategy for the next decade. While municipal bonds and local property tax revenue will continue to be an important source of funding for capital improvements, other alternative funding and resource allocation strategies will all help to minimize the burden on residents.

The City has successfully secured and won grant funding for numerous infrastructure and planning projects, as noted in this Plan. The City will continue to leverage various grant and State and federal funding opportunities, as they become available, and will look to expand capacity for grant writing and grant management.



## Funding Strategies

In addition, the City will consider alternative revenue sources including adding or adjusting municipal fees to better align with the cost of providing various services. For example, imposing impact fees and user fees or establishing cost sharing agreements with other municipalities can direct costs to those who will benefit most from a particular service or new infrastructure.

The City currently utilizes municipal tax increment financing (TIF) districts to provide financial assistance to applicable development projects and to direct incremental property tax revenue generated by the new investment to fund special projects, programs, and initiatives. Ellsworth has also implemented the State's affordable housing tax increment financing (AHTIF) program to support affordable housing development. The City should evaluate

districts as they reach their expiration date and consider opportunities to create new districts to encourage development or assist planned development in coordination with the future land use plan.

Building and strengthening private, public, and nonprofit partnerships is also a critical aspect of maximizing efficiency of City resources, while also supporting community relationships that can have a lasting impact. There are numerous organizations, regional and State agencies, and private companies that are engaged in important work to move the City and region forward on many of the goals identified in this Plan. Fostering relationships with these organizations will allow the City to leverage existing knowledge and resources and promote community engagement.

### *Priority Action Items*

**FC.2-a:** Review current shared services arrangements with neighboring municipalities and revise agreements as needed to meet current service demands and investigate other opportunities for shared services where an arrangement would be mutually beneficial.

**FC.2-b:** Evaluate the benefit of a grant writer or grant manager position to assist with accessing State, federal, and other grant funding, and with management and reporting for awarded funds.

**FC.2-d:** Research various fees levied by the City and potential additional fees (e.g., impact fees, usage fees) to align with revenue generation and business attraction goals and to leverage tourism.

**ED.6-d:** Promote tax increment financing in strategic locations to facilitate the infrastructure to support mixed-use (commercial and residential) development as desired by the community.



## Capital Planning

The City has a five-year capital improvement plan (CIP) dated 2018, which can be accessed through the City's Finance Department. The City is in the process of updating all its financial data and policies to improve its fiscal capacity and fiscal standing. This process includes the development of an updated 1-year, 5-year, and 10-year CIP to better support infrastructure planning, maintenance, and replacement. The development of an updated CIP is anticipated to be completed in 2025 and will be informed by this Plan, which includes action items for the planning and implementation of significant facility and infrastructure projects.

The City evaluates capital spending during the annual budget cycle. The City Manager and Finance Director review budget proposals from City staff and create a financial plan. During this process, the City evaluates costs of providing essential services, impact on tax rates, fund balance, and debt-service levels against capital needs. Due to emergencies, there are also unplanned capital expenses to repair or replace infrastructure that poses a risk to community or environmental health and safety.

### *Priority Action Items*

**FC.1-b:** Develop a short- and long-term financial plan, including a fiscal impact analysis and build-out analysis, to gauge the impacts of growth and development on the budget and tax rates.

**PF.6-a:** Conduct an assessment of City facility needs and develop a long-term capital improvement plan for necessary upgrades, expansions, and replacement of aging facilities, as service and staffing needs change.

The City Manager then submits a budget recommendation to the City Council. Budget workshops are held to get community feedback prior to City approval.

Based on the community's vision, future land use plan, and policies and actions, the City is planning for potential sewer and water upgrades and infrastructure expansion in the Urban Core to support additional residential and commercial growth. To help ensure that critical long-term projects are adequately funded in the future, the City will continue to maintain a 10-year CIP and update it annually in coordination with budgetary changes and the recommendations of this Plan. The implementation plan outlines relative costs, funding sources, and priority for capital related actions. This information will be used to inform the City's CIP update and plan funding mechanisms for all projects, including non-capital-related projects.



## Introduction

As a regional service center, Ellsworth plays an important role in addressing regional priorities. The City is an employment center for the region and provides access to good, services, education, and recreation for neighboring communities. As the crossroads of Downeast Maine, benefits from tourism and is also challenged to manage increased traffic congestion during peak tourism season. Situated along the Union River, at the head of Union River Bay, upstream changes to the river and lakes affects Ellsworth, and the development patterns and activities in the City have a significant impact on water quality in the River and bay and for surrounding coastal communities.

## Transportation

There are several regional transportation agencies that provide services in and around Ellsworth, including Downeast Transportation and the Island Explorer. Ellsworth will look to coordinate with Bar Harbor, Trenton, and other communities to improve service of the Island Explorer. Additionally, the City will coordinate with Downeast Transportation to improve service, signage, and information on bus routes and schedules.

In addition to public transportation, regional connection and expansion of trail networks will require coordination between municipalities, regional trail and conservation organizations, and State agencies. Maintaining and promoting trails can support connectivity between neighboring communities and provide additional opportunities for recreation.

### Related Policy:

**T.1:** Prioritize community and regional needs associated with safe and efficient use of transportation systems (e.g., roads, sidewalks, paths, bike lanes, bus, rail, rideshare).

## Water Quality Protection

The City will continue to partner with the State, conservation organizations, and municipal partners in monitoring and improving water quality. Understanding that land use activities have significant water quality impacts downstream and for the region, Ellsworth will communicate with municipalities in the region on best practices for land use and stormwater management. Ellsworth will look to Hancock County Planning Commission and the State for guidance and support in developing appropriate educational and outreach materials to promote responsible stormwater management and land care practices and the City will share resources and materials with other communities to encourage best practices throughout the region.

### Related Policy:

**WR.4:** Cooperate with neighboring communities and regional and local advocacy groups to protect water resources.



## Sustainability and Resiliency

Sustainability and resiliency planning requires a regional coordination and support. The City participates in the Maine Community Resilience Partnership, which provides Ellsworth the opportunity to seek funding for resilience investments, including the opportunity to partner with other communities to seek funding where appropriate.

Additionally, collaborating with surrounding communities to share resources related to climate planning, education and outreach materials, and resources can benefit the region and support municipalities and residents in implementing more sustainable practices.

Related to sustainability, conservation agencies and regional organizations throughout the region have supported conservation efforts to protect open space, protect the health of natural resources, and implement resiliency initiatives. The City will continue to work with Frenchman Bay Conservancy to plan for open space conservation and resource protection. Additionally, organizations like Green Ellsworth and other regional groups can support regional and local sustainability and resilience initiatives.

### Related Policies:

**NR.1:** Coordinate with neighboring communities and regional and State resource agencies to protect shared critical resources.

**PF.4:** Maintain, upgrade, and expand infrastructure and facilities with a focus on long-term resiliency.

**MR.3:** Strengthen resilience to storm flooding from the Union River.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Economic Growth

As a regional center, Ellsworth's economy has a significant impact on the overall region with many people traveling to the City each day for work and to access services, shopping, and entertainment. In addition, Ellsworth has and can continue to benefit from the increase in tourism to Acadia with most park visitors traveling through Ellsworth. First, working with municipalities in the region to address critical challenges to supporting and attracting a workforce is a top priority for the City. Ellsworth will collaborate with employers, community organizations, municipalities, and State and regional agencies to address the lack of affordable child care, the demand for diverse and affordable housing options, and increasing transportation options.

Efforts to support the workforce and business development initiatives will benefit

the region. Ellsworth is both an employment center and a center for education. The City will collaborate with educational institutions and organizations to provide job training and resources to meet the needs of employers and strengthen the region's workforce.

### Related Policies:

**ED.2:** Build and strengthen local and regional partnerships to support economic development and business attraction that aligns with target industry clusters.

**ED.5:** Continue to support public education and workforce development.

**ED.6:** Continue to support business development and entrepreneurship.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Housing

Housing affordability and availability is a regional and statewide issue. While Ellsworth is the largest municipality and economic center in the region, the City alone cannot address housing availability. A regional approach to housing offers opportunities to coordinate approaches to issues like seasonal housing, short-term rentals, and lodging demand, in addition to year-round housing availability.

Regionally, Hancock County Planning Commission (HCPC), the MDI and Ellsworth Housing Authorities, and the City of Ellsworth have been working to understand local and regional housing challenges and demands. State and regional organizations, like Maine Housing and HCPC, can help implement housing initiatives across municipalities and provide technical assistance. The City will continue to work with these State and regional organizations on updating land use regulations, accessing funding for housing development and programs, and identifying new solutions to the housing crisis.

To support housing and smart growth across the region, it will be important for municipalities to coordinate to align housing initiatives, transportation goals, and land use categories to help create vibrant and livable neighborhoods and downtowns while preserving open space, rural areas, and natural resources. Helping to ensure that housing initiatives and future development are connected regional transportation networks will be important to ensuring mobility and livability throughout the region.



*Photo credit: Mount Desert Island & Ellsworth Housing Authorities.*

### Related Policies:

**H.1:** Encourage and promote adequate workforce housing and coordinate with regional entities to support the community's and region's economic development and housing needs.

**H.2:** Coordinate with service providers to address the housing needs of the City's most vulnerable populations.





# IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

ELLSWORTH CITY HALL  
A.D. 1935



## Introduction

The implementation matrix on the following pages offers practical guidance for the City and responsible partners to determine priority for actions and direction on collaboration for various tasks. This matrix is structured in alignment with the chapters outlined in the Maine's Growth Management Act. Priority action items called out in the narrative of this Plan were identified by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee and are highlighted in the matrix. The matrix outlines responsible departments or agencies and potential partners for each action item, approximate timeline, estimated cost, ease of implementation, and potential funding sources. The implementation plan provides additional information and examples of best practices to support responsible departments and agencies in moving forward with implementation. Each of the action items is also cross-referenced to the nine guiding principles, demonstrating how each action will support the City's broader vision and goals.

The implementation matrix is designed to support City staff, City Council, and boards and committees in developing annual budgets and inform capital improvement planning. The matrix can be used to assign tasks for each fiscal year and allocate funding to each task.

## Priorities

The Steering Committee and City staff identified priority action items by evaluating community priorities, examining relative cost and ease of implementation, and identifying actions that should be completed before others begin. As the Plan is implemented, the priority and relative costs of action items will continue to be refined based on available State or federal funding, additional financial resources, availability of staff, support of local and regional partners, and input from the Ellsworth community.

This Plan was created with the input of the community, City staff, and the City's private and nonprofit partners. The successful implementation of this Plan is dependent on thoughtful and continued collaboration with partners in Ellsworth and across the region. The City has established relationships with community organizations, regional agencies, employers, and private institutions who have worked to support the community, create a vibrant downtown, protect and preserve natural resources, improve community health, and support local businesses. It will be important for the City to continue to foster existing relationships and look to build new relationships with organizations across Downeast to help implement this Plan.

Following the completion of the Plan, the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee will be transitioned into an implementation committee, supporting and monitoring plan implementation on a regular basis.



## The Matrix

The implementation matrix on the following pages is a guide for the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee (CPIC), City Council, City staff, and other responsible agencies to follow in implementing the Plan. The structure is intended to be a guide, with the understanding that external factors may influence some pivots or changes in community needs over the next 10 years. The CPIC will serve as the entity responsible for overseeing the implementation of this Plan. The CPIC will meet to review progress toward implementation, identifying annual priorities and partners to work with through the region. City staff will work with the CPIC, as well as City Council and other boards, committees and commissions, to prioritize actions annually based on available grant funding, budget priorities, and planned capital improvements. The anticipated timeline, cost/resources, and ease of implementation columns in the matrix can be used to identify items that should be tackled in the short, medium, and long term and anticipate needed resources to implement the Plan.

This matrix outlines potential community partners for the City to work with to implement the plan, though this does not constitute an obligation for the organizations listed. Additionally, structural or organizational changes impacting partners, local emergencies, or the availability of new funding opportunities could influence resources and priorities. The City will continue to update this matrix over time and use it to track implementation progress.

## Tracking Progress

It is recommended that City staff track key metrics to measure progress and track the implementation and success of actions in this Plan. Metrics could include the type and location of new development, new land conservation acreage and location, trail miles, transit ridership, or the location and type of new businesses opening in Ellsworth.

Future evaluation and reports should include an overview of zoning and policy changes, capital projects, and new development. Reporting should consider development trends and evaluate consistency with the Plan and goals for development in different areas of the City. In addition to understanding and measuring progress on implementation, annual evaluations will allow an opportunity to consider how well the Plan's policies reflect the current needs of the City. Ellsworth has experienced change since the last Comprehensive Plan update that have affected the City's policy priorities and immediate funding needs. These factors should be considered in each annual review to ensure that the City is addressing needs in an appropriate manner as new challenges or changes occur. The City may consider amendments to the Plan to address any major changes or respond to new challenges and trends.



## Tracking Progress

At a minimum, the City's evaluation of implementation should include:

- What land use and zoning measures have been implemented?
- What percent of municipal growth-related capital investments have occurred in growth areas (e.g., water and sewer expansion, road construction, new facilities)?
- How much and what type of new development has occurred in designated growth areas, rural areas, and transition areas?
- Have natural resources and open space been protected? How many acres of natural resources, rural areas, waterfront areas, or open space have been preserved or protected through acquisition, easements, or other measures?
- Has there been affordable housing development? If so, how many units have been created and where are they located?
- Have new businesses opened and are existing businesses thriving?
- How will upcoming capital investments or budgeted items impact property tax rates?
- Have there been any changes (e.g., social, economic, environmental, or public health) that may warrant changes in priority or updates to the Plan?

The City should consider conducting a broader evaluation of the Plan and implementation progress every three-to-five years to evaluate progress over time, in addition to annual planning, budgeting, and progress monitoring.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*



## Responsible Agencies

### *City Departments, Boards, Commissions, and Committees*

|   |       |
|---|-------|
| Ellsworth City Council                        | ECC   |
| Ellsworth City Manager's Office               | CMO   |
| Ellsworth Code Enforcement Department         | CED   |
| Ellsworth Economic Development Department     | EDD   |
| Ellsworth Facilities Department               | FAC   |
| Ellsworth Finance Department                  | FD    |
| Ellsworth Fire Department                     | EFD   |
| Ellsworth Planning Department                 | PLN   |
| Ellsworth Police Department                   | EPD   |
| Ellsworth Public Library                      | EPL   |
| Ellsworth Public Works Department             | PWD   |
| Ellsworth School Department                   | ESD   |
| Ellsworth Technology Department               | ETD   |
| Ellsworth Wastewater Department               | WWD   |
| Ellsworth Water Department                    | EWD   |
| Arbor Commission                              | AC    |
| Frenchman Bay Regional Shellfish Conservation | FBRSC |
| Harbor Commission                             | HC    |
| Historic Preservation Commission              | HPC   |
| Planning Board                                | PB    |
| Recreation Commission                         | RC    |
| School Board                                  | SB    |
| Ellsworth Housing Authority                   | EHA   |

|                           |     |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Ellsworth Library Trustee | ELT |
| Finance Committee         | FC  |
| Frenchman Bay Partners    | FBP |
| Human Resources Committee | HRC |
| Local Roads Committee     | LRC |
| Solid Waste Committee     | SWC |
| Street Lights Committee   | SLC |
| Communications Committee  | CC  |

### *External Organizations*

|  |        |
|--|--------|
| Downeast Community Partners                  | DECP   |
| Downeast Transportation                      | DET    |
| Downeast YMCA                                | DEYMCA |
| Ellsworth Business Development Corporation   | EBDC   |
| Ellsworth Historical Society                 | EHS    |
| Frenchman Bay Conservancy                    | FBC    |
| Friends in Action                            | FIA    |
| Green Ellsworth                              | GE     |
| Hancock County Planning Commission           | HCPC   |
| Healthy Acadia                               | HA     |
| Heart of Ellsworth                           | HE     |
| Maine Arts Commission                        | MAC    |
| Maine Department of Environmental Protection | MDEP   |
| Ellsworth Chamber of Commerce                | ECOC   |
| Hancock County Soil and Water District       | SWD    |



## Action Type

Plan  
Regulation  
Guideline  
Program/Policy  
Capital Projects  
Partnership/Coordination  
Communication/Engagement  
Resource Allocation

## Ease of Implementation

**Easy** Relatively low level of funding, inter-departmental or cross-organizational coordination, approvals, and time required for implementation

**Medium** Some coordination of partners, funding sources, and approval will be required.

**Hard** A high level of coordination among multiple partners to secure funding, approvals, and staff resources will be required.

## Related Plan/Study

Ellsworth Business Attraction Plan, 2023 (**Business Attraction Plan**)

Ellsworth Green Plan, 2021 (**Green Plan**)

Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action, 2020 (**Maine Won't Wait**)

Maine Economic Development Strategy, 2020 – 2029 (**Maine ED Strategy**)

Eastern Maine Development Corporation Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, 2021 – 2025 (**EMDC CEDS**)

## Cost/Resources

\$ Can be achieved substantially with current operating and/or capital budgets.

\$\$ Some new or increased funding/staffing required for implementation.

\$\$\$ Substantial new funding or grant support needed for implementation.

## Anticipated Timeline

**Short** 0 to 2 years

**Medium** 3 to 5 years

**Long** 6 to 10 years

**Ongoing** Efforts to continue throughout the duration of the implementation period

*NOTE: Action items highlighted in dark gray denote priorities identified and noted in the Plan text.*






# ARTS, CULTURE, AND HISTORY

| #           | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|-------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| <b>AC.1</b> | <b>Provide continued support for the protection of historic resources in Ellsworth.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| AC.1-a*     | Continue to support the Ellsworth Historic Preservation Commission and consider updates to the Historic Preservation Ordinance to improve preservation of existing historic structures and ensure new structures in historic districts are compatible with existing buildings. | 1             | Regulation                | HPC, EHS                            | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| AC.1-b      | Consider expanding or creating a new local historic district and/or consider applying for historic district designation with the National Register of Historic Places to include downtown and historic neighborhoods in Ellsworth.   | 1             | Regulation                | HPC                                 | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| AC.1-c      | Work with local partners to create educational materials to share the benefits of historic preservation and adaptive reuse, including information on the state's historic tax credit program and additional funding sources to improve historic structures.                    | 1             | Communication/ Engagement | HPC, PB, PLN, EDD, EHS              | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| AC.1-d      | Continue to pursue grant funding to support the maintenance and revitalization of historic structures.   | 1             | Resource Allocation       | HPC                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |    |   |
| AC.1-e      | Begin the process to obtain a Certified Local Government designation in order to access additional grant funding and technical assistance to benefit local property owners and City committees.  | 1             | Program/Policy            | HPC                                 | \$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |    |
| AC.1-f      | Research and inventory needed upgrades to historic City facilities.  | 1             | Plan                      | HPC, FAC                            | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| AC.1-g      | Consider opportunities to create a Cemetery Committee or expand the responsibility of the Historic Preservation Commission to ensure that historic cemeteries (ancient burial grounds) are maintained.   | 1             | Program/Policy            | HPC                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| <b>AC.2</b> | <b>Provide support for arts and cultural organizations in Ellsworth.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| AC.2-a      | Identify opportunities for public art and partner with local artists and arts organizations to implement public art projects.  | 1             | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD, PLN, HE                        | \$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |  |  |
| AC.2-b      | Support and partner with organizations and businesses to host and promote events that foster connection, encourage entrepreneurship, and highlight the City's art and culture assets.  | 1, 4          | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD, HE, MAC, HE                    | \$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |   |



# ARTS, CULTURE, AND HISTORY

| #           | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|-------------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| AC.2-c      | Consider establishing an Arts and Culture Committee.  | 1             | Program/Policy            | EDD, ECC                            | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |  |
| AC.2-d      | Expand opportunities to share arts and culture resources online.  | 1, 6          | Communication/ Engagement | EDD                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| AC.2-e      | Consider establishing a downtown arts district and/or arts and culture hub.   | 1, 4          | Program/Policy            | EDD, PLN                            | \$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |  |
| <b>AC.3</b> | <b>Promote the City's historic resources and cultural assets to increase awareness and support economic development initiatives.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| AC.3-a      | Continue to support and expand signage that promotes the City's history, including the Museum in the Streets or similar initiatives.  | 1, 6          | Program/Policy            | EDD, PLN, HPC, EHS                  | \$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| AC.3-b      | Partner with local organizations to promote public awareness and appreciation of historic and cultural resources through development of print materials, online content, and signage, educational programs, and events. | 1, 6          | Communication/ Engagement | EDD, PLN, HPC, EHS                  | \$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| AC.3-c*     | Conduct a historic preservation inventory and analysis of the City's pre-historic and historic archaeological, marine, and built historic resources.  | 1             | Plan                      | HPC, EHS                            | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |  |   |














# WATER RESOURCES





| #            | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan                                | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|---|---|---|
| <b>WR.1*</b> | <b>Protect current and potential drinking water sources.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |   |   |   |
| WR.1-a*      | Adopt or amend local land use ordinances as applicable to incorporate stormwater runoff performance standards consistent with the Maine Stormwater Management Law and Maine Stormwater regulations, Maine DEP's allocations for allowable levels of phosphorus in lake/pond watersheds, and Maine Pollution Discharge Elimination System Stormwater Program. | 2             | Regulation                | PLN, PB, MDEP                       | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |   |   |   |
| WR.1-b*      | Maintain, enact, or amend public wellhead and aquifer recharge area protection mechanisms, as necessary.   | 2             | Regulation                | PLN, PB, MDEP                       | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |   |   |   |
| WR.1-c       | Collaborate with the Towns of Orland and Dedham, landowners, nonprofits, and state agencies to implement the action items in the Branch Lake Watershed Based Protection Plan.  | 2             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, PWD                            | \$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  | Branch Lake Watershed Based Protection Plan |    |   |
| WR.1-d*      | Continue to evaluate impacts of recreational uses and restrict access or prohibit uses, as appropriate, to help protect water quality.   | 2             | Program/Policy            | PLN, EWD, RC                        | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |   |   |   |
| WR.1-e       | Conduct a study to assess the ability of Simmons Pond to serve as a secondary water supply.  | 2             | Plan                      | EWD                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |   |   |   |
| WR.1-f       | Research options for changing the location of temporary snow storage to minimize salt runoff near waterways.   | 2, 5          | Program/Policy            | PWD                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |   |   |   |
| WR.1-g       | Conduct an analysis of projected drinking water demands, including potential impacts on water supply from climate change and extreme weather events.   | 2             | Plan                      | EWD                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |   |   |   |
| WR.1-h       | Explore options for establishing maximum impervious surface coverage limits for new development in sensitive areas.  | 2             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |   |   |  |
| WR.1-i       | Educate property owners in sensitive areas about options for limiting runoff.  | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | PLN, PWD, EWD, CMO                  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |   |   |  |
| <b>WR.2*</b> | <b>Protect water resources and habitats and improve water quality where needed, including in growth areas.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |   |   |   |
| WR.2-a*      | Amend local land use ordinances to incorporate more specific low impact development (LID) standards, offering alternative designs and approaches and research possible incentives that encourage LID without constraining development.   | 2             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |   |   |  |
| WR.2-b*      | Develop a watershed management or mitigation plan for Card Brook that will promote continued development or redevelopment without further stream degradation.  | 2             | Plan                      | EWD                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |   |  |  |



# WATER RESOURCES



| #            | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type                        | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan                                 | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------------|---|---------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--|---|---|
| WR.2-c*      | Adopt water quality protection practices and standards for construction and maintenance of public and private roads and public properties and require their implementation by contractors, owners, and community officials and employees. | 2,5           | Regulation                         | PLN, PB                             | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |  |   |    |
| WR.2-d*      | Explore options for reinstating the City's Smart Growth Coordinator position.   | 2             | Resource Allocation                | CMO                                 | \$\$   | Easy                   | Medium   |  |   |   |
| WR.2-e       | Implement the findings of the City Council Water Resource Management study.   | 2             | Resource Allocation                | EWD, ECC                            | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    | City Council Water Resource Management Study |    |   |
| WR.2-f       | Conduct a study of the impacts of current operation of dams on fish passage and wildlife habitat and take action to improve water quality and support well-being of native species.   | 2,5           | Plan                               | PWD, EWD, MDEP                      | \$\$\$ | Hard                   | Medium   |  |   |   |
| WR.2-g       | Coordinate with DEP and neighboring communities to ensure dams are inspected and monitored to be in compliance with dam operation standards, and consider other measures to help ensure safe operations.                                  | 2,5           | Partnership/ Coordination          | PWD, EWD, MDEP                      | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |  |   |    |
| WR.2-h       | Pursue options for maintaining upstream and downstream fish passage on all dams and preventing fish from entering the turbines.   | 2,5           | Capital Projects                   | PWD, EWD, MDEP                      | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |  |    |    |
| <b>WR.3*</b> | <b>Minimize pollution discharges through the maintenance and upgrade of existing public sewer and water systems and wastewater treatment facilities.</b>  |               |                                    |                                     |        |                        |          |  |   |   |
| WR.3-a       | Prioritize and seek funding for the construction of a new water treatment plant to increase capacity to support growth.   | 2,5           | Capital Projects                   | WWD, ECC                            | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |  |  |  |
| WR.3-b       | Examine opportunities to upgrade the City's dewatering plant in order to increase capacity.   | 2,5           | Capital Projects, Capital Projects | EWD                                 | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Long     |  |  |   |
| WR.3-c*      | Plan for ongoing maintenance costs of existing public sewer and water systems and wastewater treatment facilities   | 2,5           | Capital Projects                   | WWD, EWD, PWD                       | \$\$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |  |  |  |
| WR.3-d*      | Provide educational and technical support to homeowners in lakefront areas on proper maintenance of septic systems and continue to seek funding to help address failing systems.  | 2             | Communication/ Engagement          | PLN, WWD, CMO                       | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |  |  |   |
| WR.3-e*      | Improve enforcement mechanisms and mitigation requirements for illegal activities such as septic discharge and vegetation removal on private properties adjacent to water bodies.   | 2             | Regulation                         | CED, PLN                            | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |  |   |   |



| #       | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| WR.4*   | Cooperate with neighboring communities and regional and local advocacy groups to protect water resources.   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| WR.4-a* | Encourage landowners to protect water quality and provide educational resources for water quality best management practices from resources such as the Branch Lake Association, Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Hancock County Soil and Water Conservation District, Maine Forest Service, and/or Small Woodlot Association of Maine. | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | PLN, CMO, SWD                       | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |  |
| WR.4-b* | Participate in local and regional efforts to monitor, protect, and, where warranted, improve water quality.   | 2             | Partnership/Coordination  | EWD                                 | \$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |  |  |
| WR.4-c  | Improve water protection ordinances for all water bodies.   | 2             | Regulation                | EWD, PLN, PB                        | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| WR.4-d* | Provide educational materials to lakefront property owners to help limit erosion, divert runoff, identify and prevent the spread of invasive species, and limit pollution in Ellsworth's lakes; partner with Hancock County Soil & Water Conservation District in this effort.  | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | EWD, CMO                            | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |  |



# NATURAL RESOURCES

| #       | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators  | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|---|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------------|---|
| NR.1*   | <b>Conserve critical natural resources, as defined by Maine's Beginning with Habitat program, and other important natural areas in the community.</b>   |               |                           |                                      |      |                        |          |              |                 |   |
| NR.1-a* | Ensure that land use ordinances are consistent with applicable state law regarding critical natural areas, as defined by the State of Maine.  | 2             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                              | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |                 |   |
| NR.1-b* | Designate critical natural resources as Critical Resource Areas in the Future Land Use Plan.  | 2             | Guideline                 | PLN                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |                 |   |
| NR.1-c* | Require review and identification of critical natural resources during the site plan review process and require mitigation or protection measures (e.g., modification of the proposed site design, construction timing, extent of excavation) as appropriate. | 2             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                              | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |                 |   |
| NR.2*   | <b>Coordinate with neighboring communities and regional and state resource agencies to protect shared critical resources.</b>   |               |                           |                                      |      |                        |          |              |                 |   |
| NR.2-a* | Initiate and/or participate in interlocal and/or regional planning, management, and/or regulatory efforts around shared critical and important natural resources, including management of the City's lakes and watersheds.                                    | 2             | Plan                      | PLN, FBRSC, HC, FBP, FBC, MDEP, HCPC | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |                 |   |
| NR.2-b* | Continue to partner with local conservation agencies and private land-owners to protect critical natural resources through acquisition of land or easements.  | 2             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, ECC, FBC, FBP                   | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |                 |    |
| NR.2-c* | Distribute or make available information to those living in or near critical or important natural resources about current use tax programs and applicable local, state, or federal regulations.   | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | PLN                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |  |



# AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

| #       | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan                       | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|---|---|
| AF.1*   | <b>Improve stewardship of forests and tree canopy, open spaces, and public rights of way.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |                                    |   |   |
| AF.1-a* | Establish forest management plans for City-owned forests and open spaces and consult with the Maine Forest Service district forester when developing or updating any land use regulations pertaining to forest management practices.                         | 2             | Plan                      | AC, PLN, PB                         | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |                                    |    |   |
| AF.1-b  | Develop a budget and allocate financial resources toward forestry initiatives to create healthy forests, plan for roadside tree maintenance, and plan for the removal and replanting of trees in public rights-of-way, aligned with forest management plans. | 2             | Resource Allocation       | AC, PWD                             | \$\$ | Easy                   | Short    |                                    |    |   |
| AF.1-c  | Support the development of programming to encourage the planting of native trees on private property, educate volunteers to support maintenance efforts, and mitigate the impacts of forest fires.   | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | AC                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                                    |   |    |
| AF.1-d  | Research the implications of developing an ordinance to require organic tree and garden care on City trees and landscaping.  | 2             | Guideline                 | AC                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                                    |   |    |
| AF.1-e  | Review and revise Chapter 56 of the City's Unified Development Ordinance with a focus on protecting existing trees and forested areas and ensuring that new developments have adequate landscaping and tree plantings.                                       | 2             | Regulation                | PLN, AC, PB                         | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |                                    |   |    |
| AF.1-f  | Identify key invasive species in Ellsworth's forests, develop strategies for stopping their spread and/or removing them, and work with regional partners to address invasive species across municipal borders.   | 2             | Program/Policy            | AC, FBP, FBC, GE                    | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    | Ellsworth Business Attraction Plan |   |  |
| AF.1-g  | Review, and revise as appropriate, street design standards to ensure adequate landscaping and tree cover to be provided with new development and redevelopment.  | 2, 7          | Regulation                | PLN, AC, PB                         | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |                                    |   |   |
| AF.2*   | <b>Protect farmlands and forests and encourage the economic viability of agricultural and forestry activities.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |                                    |   |   |
| AF.2-a* | Identify opportunities to expand the local food system including community gardens and urban farms and assess the feasibility of establishing a food hub.  | 7             | Program/Policy            | EDD, PLN, PB, GE                    | \$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |                                    |  |  |
| AF.2-b* | Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices.  | 2             | Program/Policy            | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                                    |   |   |



| #       | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| AF.2-c  | Coordinate with USDA to share resources with local farmers and foresters and promote responsible stewardship.  | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | EDD, AC, FBP, FBC                   | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| AF.2-d* | Support local agricultural operations through events, programs, and initiatives to promote farms and involve farmers in economic development initiatives and support local partners in finding a permanent location for the Ellsworth Farmers' Market. | 2, 8          | Partnership/Coordination  | EDD                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |  |  |
| AF.2-e* | Encourage owners of farm and forest land to enroll in the State's farm and tree current use tax programs.  | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | AC                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |  |  |
| AF.2-f* | Encourage natural resource-based businesses and services, nature tourism/outdoor recreation businesses, farmers' markets, and home occupations.  | 2, 8          | Program/Policy            | EDD                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |



# MARINE RESOURCES

| #            | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan              | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|---------------------------|---|---|
| <b>MR.1*</b> | <b>Foster water-dependent land uses and balance them with other complementary land uses.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |                           |   |   |
| MR.1-a*      | Provide information about the Working Waterfront Access Pilot Program and current use taxation program to owners of waterfront land used to provide access to or support the conduct of commercial fishing activities.                                  | 4, 8          | Communication/ Engagement | HC                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                           |    |    |
| MR.1-b*      | Support the implementation of local and regional harbor and bay management plans.   | 2, 5          | Resource Allocation       | HC, FBRSC                           | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |                           |    |   |
| MR.1-c       | Identify opportunities to implement the recommendations of the Strategic Waterfront Plan.   | 2             | Resource Allocation       | HC, PLN, PWD                        | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    | Strategic Waterfront Plan |   |   |
| <b>MR.2*</b> | <b>Maintain and, where warranted, improve harbor management, facilities, and marine habitat.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |                           |   |   |
| MR.2-a       | Partner with community organizations to support the management of Ellsworth Harbor and Harbor Park and implement the initiatives of the Harbor Master Plan (e.g., bath house and office space upgrade.)   | 4, 5          | Partnership/ Coordination | HC, PWD                             | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   | Harbor Master Plan        |    |   |
| MR.2-b       | Partner with community organizations and regional entities to support the planned dredging of the Union River by the Army Corps of Engineers.   | 8             | Partnership/ Coordination | ECC, HC, PWD                        | \$\$ | Hard                   | Medium   |                           |   |   |
| MR.2-c*      | Work with local property owners, land trusts, and others to protect, maintain, and, where warranted, improve physical and visual public access to the community's marine resources for all appropriate uses including fishing, recreation, and tourism. | 2, 4, 7, 8    | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD, PLN, HC, PB                    | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |                           |    |   |
| MR.2-d       | Support the Harbor Commission in assessing the feasibility and development of a commercial fishing dock.  | 5, 8          | Program/Policy            | HC, ECC                             | \$\$ | Easy                   | Medium   |                           |  |   |
| MR.2-e       | Encourage owners of marine businesses and industries to participate in clean harbor initiatives.  | 2, 7          | Communication/ Engagement | HC, PWD, FBRSC, FBC                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                           |   |  |
| <b>MR.3</b>  | <b>Strengthen resilience to storm flooding from the Union River.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |                           |   |   |
| MR.3-a       | Continue participation in the Climate Resilience Partnership.   | 2, 5          | Program/Policy            | PLN                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                           |   |  |
| MR.3-b       | Assess the need for infrastructure modifications or upgrades to mitigate impacts of flooding on critical infrastructure and facilities (e.g., raising structures or setbacks).  | 5             | Plan                      | PWD, HC                             | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |                           |  |   |
| MR.3-c       | Create educational materials to help educate water-front property owners on floodplains and the types of insurances they should carry.  | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | PLN, PWD                            | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                           |   |  |







| #      | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| ED.1*  | Continue to invest in economic development initiatives to support Ellsworth's residents and workers, as well as the region.   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| ED.1-a | Continue to support efforts to expand the City's broadband network and work with regional partners and service providers, as necessary, to increase broadband access, including extending service across gaps and to 'last-mile' users.   | 6, 5          | Partnership/ Coordination | ETD, EDD                            | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   | EMDC CEDS    |    |    |
| ED.1-b | Conduct a consumer market study to identify unmet demand in consumer goods and services.  | 8             | Plan                      | EDD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Medium   |              |    |    |
| ED.2*  | Build and strengthen local and regional partnerships to support economic development and business attraction that aligns with identified target industry clusters.  |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| ED.2-a | Partner with the State and regional economic development organizations to support planning efforts that impact the City, including implementation of the 2021-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.   | 8             | Plan                      | PLN, EDD                            | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  | EMDC CEDS    |    |    |
| ED.2-b | Research ways to expand the City's recreation and tourism economy in coordination with the State's outdoor recreation economy goals, including investigating new trends in outdoor recreation, marketing Ellsworth as a year-round recreation destination, and focusing on access to and stewardship of recreational amenities.           | 7, 8          | Program/Policy            | RC, EDD                             | \$     | Easy                   | Medium   |              |    |    |
| ED.2-c | Support the growth of the healthcare industry and related services.   | 8             | Program/Policy            | EDD                                 | \$     | Hard                   | Long     |              |    |    |
| ED.2-d | Continue to support the Union River Center for Innovation and examine options to develop facilities that support existing and start-up businesses, including small-scale manufacturing space, temporary retail space, or commercial kitchen.  | 8             | Resource Allocation       | EDD, ECoC                           | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |  |  |
| ED.2-e | Develop a consortium of businesses and entrepreneurs connected to target industry clusters, establishing a regular meeting schedule for discussion of what is needed to build local ecosystems. Candidate industry clusters include Life Sciences, Arts & Culture, Outdoor Recreation, Food & Agriculture, and Small-Scale Manufacturing. | 8             | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD                                 | \$     | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |  |
| ED.2-f | Partner with local businesses to promote and support events that highlight the City and region's specialty food, beverage, and agricultural products and food establishments.   | 8             | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD, ECoC, HE                       | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |  |
| ED.2-g | Maintain an inventory of available commercial spaces to be promoted through the economic development website and collaborate with Maine DECD to represent Ellsworth properties through the State's site selection tool.   | 8             | Program/Policy            | EDD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |  |  |






| #       | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| ED.3    | Continue to invest in downtown Ellsworth through infrastructure improvements, amenities, and encouraging development that will support a strong business community and quality of life.  |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| ED.3-a  | Commission a Downtown Plan with a robust community engagement strategy.  | 4, 8          | Plan                      | PLN, EDD, HE                        | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |    |    |
| ED.3-b* | Continue to invest in creating and enhancing public spaces in downtown, including the Franklin Street Parklet, Merrill Park, and Whiting Park.   | 4, 7, 8       | Capital Projects          | PWD                                 | \$\$\$ | Hard                   | Long     | EMDC CEDS    |    |    |
| ED.3-c  | Evaluate wayfinding signage option to help visitors navigate downtown and to promote Ellsworth's amenities and cultural and historic resources.  | 1, 4, 8, 9    | Resource Allocation       | PWD, EDD                            | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |    |
| ED.3-d  | Explore ways in which downtown can be more visitor-friendly in support of the efforts of the Village Partnership Initiative; these could include installation of year-round public restrooms, information kiosks and signage, an arts trail, trash receptacles, beautification or other amenities. | 4             | Resource Allocation       | EDD, PLN                            | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |    |
| ED.3-e  | Pursue funding sources for the implementation of the village improvement streetscaping plan developed through the Village Partnership Initiative.  | 4             | Capital Projects          | EDD                                 | \$     | Medium                 | Medium   |              |    |    |
| ED.4    | Accompany the current Business Attraction Plan with a marketing strategy.  |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| ED.4-a  | Continue to update and create economic development marketing materials. Highlight Ellsworth's Opportunity Zone as an incentive for investment.   | 4, 8          | Communication/ Engagement | EDD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| ED.4-b  | Create a marketing plan, including a series of action steps, based on the findings of the Business Attraction Plan, the Heart of Ellsworth Asset Mapping, and representative examples from similar communities in the area such as Bucksport.  | 4. 8          | Plan                      | EDD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |  |
| ED.4-c  | Market Ellsworth to young creatives and professionals through local and state agencies and non-profit organizations.   | 8             | Communication/ Engagement | EDD                                 | \$     | Medium                 | Short    | EMDC CEDS    |   |  |
| ED.4-d  | Implement a longitudinal study of local business owners and operators to collect feedback on business operations, needs and expansion plans.   | 8             | Plan                      | EDD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |  |  |
| ED.4-e  | Identify and compile resources to assist workers relocating to the region and to support businesses in attracting new hires.   | 8             | Communication/ Engagement | EDD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |  |  |








| #      | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| ED.5   | Continue to support public education and workforce development.   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| ED.5-a | Strengthen partnerships among educational institutions and the business and nonprofit community to support workforce development initiatives, increase awareness of available resources, align training opportunities with the needs of the business community, and encourage efforts to recruit other higher-education institutions to offer services locally. | 6, 8          | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD                                 | \$   | Medium                 | Medium   | EMDC CEDS    |    |    |
| ED.5-b | Support the expansion of programming through Ellsworth Adult & Community Education with a focus on job training, technical education, and digital literacy to address gaps in the workforce. Explore a partnership with Downeast at Woodlawn Senior College to offer workforce development education opportunities.   | 6, 8          | Partnership/ Coordination | EPL                                 | \$\$ | Hard                   | Long     | EMDC CEDS    |   |    |
| ED.5-c | Partner with the appropriate Career and Technical Districts to implement workforce development programs at the High School and Middle School levels.  | 6, 8          | Partnership/ Coordination | ESD                                 | \$\$ | Hard                   | Long     | EMDC CEDS    |   |    |
| ED.6   | Continue to support business development and entrepreneurship.  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| ED.6-a | Support existing and start-up businesses by compiling and promoting financial, educational, and technical resources, including resources for continuity and succession planning.  | 6, 8          | Communication/ Engagement | EDD                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |    |    |
| ED.6-b | Continue the creation of ecosystems/hubs to promote entrepreneurship, business development, and workforce development. Explore ways to engage with youth in the community to overcome barriers to starting a business.  | 6, 8          | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD, ECoC, ESD                      | \$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |   |
| ED.6-c | Evaluate development incentives compared to incentives of comparable communities.   | 8             | Program/Policy            | EDD, PLN                            | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| ED.6-d | Promote tax increment financing in strategic locations to facilitate the infrastructure to support mixed-use (commercial and residential) developments as desired by the community  | 3, 4, 8       | Program/Policy            | EDD, PLN                            | \$   | Hard                   | Medium   |              |   |  |
| ED.7   | Encourage the creation of quality, affordable child care options.   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| ED.7-a | Explore ways to expand access to quality, affordable child care, such as support for innovative child care models like cooperative services or a revolving loan fund supporting entrepreneurs who open child care operations.   | 6, 8          | Program/Policy            | EDD                                 | \$   | Medium                 | Short    | EMDC CEDS    |  |   |
| ED.7-b | Remove barriers to opening and running in-home day care operations by developing technical guidance for new business development and working with the Child Care Business Lab to support local child care entrepreneurs.  | 6, 8          | Program/Policy            | EDD                                 | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |  |  |



| #      | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| H.1*   | Encourage and promote adequate workforce housing and coordinate with regional entities to support the community’s and region’s economic development and housing needs.   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| H.1-a  | Identify suitable land for development and proactively coordinate with property owners and developers to efficiently move housing development projects forward to completion.  | 3             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, CED                            | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| H.1-b  | Implement the recommendations of the Ellsworth Housing Study to be completed in 2024.  | 3             | Resource Allocation       | EDD, PLN, PB                        |      | Hard                   | Ongoing  |              |  |   |
| H.1-c  | Use affordable housing tax increment financing to assist affordable housing development in designated growth areas.  | 3             | Program/Policy            | ECC, PLN, EDD                       | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |    |
| H.1-d  | Identify and support the establishment of incentives for rental property owners to maintain, improve, and increase rental housing stock.   | 3             | Program/Policy            |                                     | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| H.1-e* | Continue to support the initiatives of the housing authority and other housing organizations to maintain safe, quality affordable housing and to create housing options to address regional housing needs.   | 3             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, HA                             | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| H.1-f  | Pursue public/private partnerships and use of City assets, including excess property, to incentivize or facilitate workforce housing   |               | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, ECC                            | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |    |
| H.1-g  | Coordinate with regional and state organizations, developers, and property owners to build an ecosystem for small-scale developers and encourage incremental infill development and remove barriers to investment.   | 3, 8          | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, ECC, HCPC                      | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| H.2*   | Ensure that land use controls encourage the development and preservation of a variety of housing types including affordable housing and rental housing.  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| H.2-a* | Maintain, enact or amend growth area land use regulations to encourage the development of affordable and workforce housing, including accessory dwelling units (e.g., increase density, decrease lot size, setbacks and road widths, or provide incentives such as density bonuses). | 3             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| H.2-b* | Designate a location(s) in growth areas where mobile home parks are allowed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358(3)(M) and where manufactured housing is allowed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358(2).  | 3             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| H.2-c  | Develop a balanced approach to managing short-term rentals and evaluate options for limiting short-term rentals in favor of long-term housing options.   | 3, 8          | Program/Policy            | PLN, PB, ECC                        | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |  |







| #          | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| H.2-d      | Evaluate options for modifying cluster subdivision regulations and/or allowing for cottage community developments in residential zones to encourage the development of smaller homes in a concentrated area to minimize infrastructure costs and impacts to natural areas. | 3             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |  |
| H.2-e      | Develop guidelines and definitions for boarding houses/group homes and emergency housing facilities.   | 3, 7          | Guideline                 | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |  |
| H.2-f      | Identify areas appropriate for infill development and encourage development in these areas.  | 3             | Program/Policy            | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| H.2-g      | Seek to achieve a level of at least 10% of new residential development built or placed during the next decade be affordable.   | 3             | Program/Policy            | PLN, PB, EDD, EHA                   | \$\$ | Hard                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| <b>H.3</b> | <b>Increase housing opportunities in downtown.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| H.3-a      | Conduct an inventory of vacant space in existing buildings in downtown.  | 3, 4          | Plan                      | EDD, PLN                            | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |    |   |
| H.3-b      | Evaluate the feasibility and potential impacts (e.g., traffic, parking) of converting vacant and underused second-floor and third-floor spaces into housing units to increase downtown housing capacity and support affordability.   | 3, 4          | Plan                      | EDD, PLN                            | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |   |
| H.3-c      | Balance land use in commercial areas and transitional/mixed-use areas throughout the City's growth areas to support livable residential neighborhoods.   | 3, 4          | Regulation                | PLN                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| <b>H.4</b> | <b>Coordinate with service providers to address the housing needs of the City's most vulnerable populations.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |  |   |
| H.4-a      | Work with developers and community organizations to seek funding and support the development of housing for low- and very low-income households.   | 3, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | EHA, EDD, PLN, ECC                  | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| H.4-b      | Coordinate with service providers to increase shelter capacity.  | 3, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD, PLN                            | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |  |   |
| H.4-c      | Seek funding for rental assistance or other programs to support households at risk of homelessness.  | 3, 7          | Program/Policy            | PLN                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |



PARKS AND RECREATION

| #       | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| PR.1*   | Support the maintenance and upgrading of existing recreational facilities and expansion of recreational programming, as necessary.   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PR.1-a  | Establish a Parks and Recreation Department to manage programming and events, oversee maintenance of facilities, and coordinate resources of the City and partner agencies.  | 6, 7          | Resource Allocation       | RC, PLN, ECC                        | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| PR.1-b* | Develop a recreation plan to meet current and future needs and explore ways to address identified needs and support the growth of the recreation economy.  | 6, 7, 8       | Plan                      | RC, PLN                             | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |    |    |
| PR.1-c  | Improve ADA accessibility of parks and recreation facilities in coordination with planned facility upgrades.   | 7, 9          | Capital Projects          | RC, PLN                             | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |    |    |
| PR.1-d  | Improve indoor sports and commercial recreational facilities.  | 5, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | RC                                  | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |   |
| PR.1-e  | Conduct an assessment of the Moore Center including use, operations, management, and potential value to the community.   | 5, 7          | Plan                      | RC, PLN, DEYMCA                     | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| PR.2*   | Preserve, enhance, and expand open space for recreational use.   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PR.2-a* | Work with an existing local land trust or other conservation organizations to pursue opportunities to protect important open space or recreational land.   | 2, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | FBC, PLN, RC, ECC                   | \$\$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |    |   |
| PR.2-b  | Encourage qualifying land owners to enroll in the State's open space current tax use program.  | 2             | Communication/ Engagement | RC, PLN                             | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PR.3    | Support maintenance of existing trail assets and expansion of the trail network.   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PR.3-a* | Provide educational materials regarding the benefits and protections for landowners allowing public recreational access on their property, including information on Maine's landowner liability law regarding recreational or harvesting use, Title 14, M.R.S.A. §159-A. | 2, 7          | Communication/ Engagement | RC, PLN                             | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |  |
| PR.3-b  | Evaluate options for establishing an endowment fund to encourage public and private donations to support the maintenance of existing open spaces and acquisition of new conservation land.   | 2             | Program/Policy            | RC, PLN, ECC                        | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |  |
| PR.3-c* | Explore ways to expand trail access and connectivity and maintain existing trails, including the establishment of a Trail Fund. Explore opportunities to enhance wayfinding, in particular for Downeast Sunrise Trail.   | 2, 7, 9       | Capital Projects          | RC, PLN, ECC                        | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |  |  |



| #       | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| PR.4*   | Protect, maintain, and improve access to the Union River and lakes for a diversity of uses including fishing, recreation, tourism, and commercial activity.   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PR.4-a  | Develop a waterfront plan to strengthen Ellsworth's connection to the River and guide change that will enhance public access and activity along the River.  | 2, 4, 7       | Plan                      | RC, PLN                             | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |  |
| PR.4-b* | Work with local property owners, land trusts, and others to protect major points of physical and visual access to the Union River and lakes in Ellsworth.   | 2, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PR.4-c  | Plan for ways to redevelop Water Street.  | 4, 8          | Plan                      | PLN, EDD                            | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| PR.4-d  | Further leverage public access to the river, including expansion of the Riverwalk from Harbor Park to downtown and other pedestrian paths and patios.   | 4, 7          | Capital Projects          | RC, PLN, ECC                        | \$\$\$ | Hard                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PR.4-e  | Explore opportunities to expand aquatic recreation, including hand-carry boat launches or additional kayak and canoe storage, and support local organizations in providing aquatic-based programming. | 7, 8          | Capital Projects          | RC, PLN, PWD                        | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |  |
| PR.4-f  | Improve pedestrian connectivity of existing trail networks.   | 4, 7, 9       | Capital Projects          | RC, PLN                             | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |  |  |












| #      | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| T.1*   | <b>Prioritize community and regional needs associated with safe and efficient use of transportation systems (e.g., roads, sidewalks, paths, bike lanes, bus, rail, rideshare).</b>  |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| T.1-a* | Develop or continue to update a prioritized improvement, maintenance, and repair plan for the City's roads and other transportation infrastructure.   | 5, 9          | Plan                      | LRC                                 | \$\$\$ | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |    |   |
| T.1-b* | Work with Downeast Transportation, other transportation providers, surrounding municipalities, regional entities, Maine DOT, and employers to improve transit service to meet the needs of local residents, commuters, regional shoppers and seasonal visitors, providing access to transit centers, workplaces, regional destinations and other amenities.     | 4, 8, 9       | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD                                 | \$\$   | Hard                   | Long     |              |    |    |
| T.1-c  | Identify opportunities for enhanced connectivity between neighboring communities, including coordination with the other regional centers like Bangor, Bar Harbor, and Belfast.  | 9             | Plan                      | EDD                                 | \$\$   | Hard                   | Long     |              |   |    |
| T.1-d  | Support regional efforts to develop rail service on existing infrastructure to optimize intermodal transportation in the region for passengers and freight.   | 9             | Partnership/ Coordination | ECC                                 | \$     | Medium                 | Medium   | EMDC CEDS    |   |   |
| T.1-e  | Coordinate with regional partners and transportation companies to provide educational material on bus schedules, bus stops, and connected trails around Ellsworth to help residents better utilize transportation options and to increase ridership.  | 4, 9          | Partnership/ Coordination | FIA                                 | \$     | Medium                 | Short    |              |    |    |
| T.1-f  | Minimize increases in vehicle miles traveled by managing land use in ways that maximize the efficiency of the transportation system, including encouraging development in walkable areas and areas served by transit and limiting development in rural areas with limited access.   | 7, 9          | Regulation                | PLN                                 | \$     | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| T.2*   | <b>Maintain and improve the City's transportation system with a focus on safety and efficiency of travel.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| T.2-a* | Maintain, enact or amend local ordinances as appropriate to address or avoid conflicts with:<br>a. Policy objectives of the Sensible Transportation Policy Act (23 M.R.S.A. §73);<br>b. State access management regulations pursuant to 23 M.R.S.A. §704; and<br>c. State traffic permitting regulations for large developments pursuant to 23 M.R.S.A. §704-A. | 9             | Regulation                | PLN                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| T.2-b  | Develop a corridor plan for the High Street/Route 1/Route 1a corridors to guide redevelopment, support businesses, and improve safety and mobility for all users.   | 4, 9          | Plan                      | PLN                                 | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |  |  |



| #           | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type         | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan     | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|-------------|---|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|------------------|---|---|
| T.2-c       | Improve through connections to relieve traffic volume on major corridors.   | 9             | Capital Projects    | PWD                                 | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Long     |                  |   |   |
| T.2-d       | Promote "park once" initiatives and strategies to reduce in-town vehicle trips, including adequate public parking, signage, and safe pedestrian connections among commercial areas.   | 4, 9          | Program/Policy      | PLN                                 | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |                  |   |  |
| T.2-e       | Reassess parking requirements for downtown uses, specifying that conversions may require additional provision of parking spaces.  | 4, 9          | Regulation          | PLN                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |                  |   |   |
| T.2-f       | Continue to evaluate emerging technology (e.g., adaptive timing plan, cameras, centralized pre-emption for response vehicles, coordinated pedestrian signals) to improve traffic flow and safety and relieve traffic congestion at key intersections.               | 9             | Resource Allocation | ETD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                  |    |  |
| T.2-g       | Develop plans to improve circulation along Main Street and throughout downtown, including safe and efficient access to City and County Services.  | 4, 9          | Plan                | PWD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Medium   |                  |   |  |
| <b>T.3*</b> | <b>Leveraging state and federal funding and municipal financing tools to fund infrastructure improvements, transportation projects, operation, maintenance, and public facilities.</b>  |               |                     |                                     |        |                        |          |                  |   |   |
| T.3-a*      | Review and revise ordinance standards for subdivisions and for public and private roads as appropriate to foster transportation-efficient growth patterns, including encouraging cluster development and rural growth that is concentrated around nodes.            | 9             | Regulation          | PLN, PB                             | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |                  |    |  |
| T.3-b       | Evaluate options for establishing development impact fees for transportation to support the increased costs to maintain and provide infrastructure and services associated with growth.   | 5, 9          | Program/Policy      | PLN                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |                  |   |   |
| <b>T.4*</b> | <b>Continue to expand alternative transportation options to meet the diverse transportation needs of residents and visitors (including children, older adults, disabled and through travelers).</b>   |               |                     |                                     |        |                        |          |                  |   |   |
| T.4-a       | Evaluate the implications of mandates requiring new development or redevelopment within the growth area to be designed to accommodate transit use and a variety of transportation options, including bicycle racks, space for bus stops, EV charging stations, etc. | 9             | Regulation          | PLN                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    | Maine Won't Wait |   |   |
| T.4-b       | Investigate new trends in micromobility (lightweight personal vehicles such as bicycles, segways or scooters) and explore strategies and amenities to support its use, especially within downtown.  | 4, 9          | Plan                | PLN, PWD                            | \$     | Easy                   | Medium   |                  |  |   |



| #     | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|-------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| T.4-c | Support and expand comprehensive in-city transportation systems and coordinate with service providers and the school district to understand transportation needs of the community.  | 4, 8, 9       | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, ESD                            | \$\$ | Hard                   | Medium   | EMDC CEDS    |    |   |
| T.4-d | Continue to support regional transportation service from private residences to downtown sites or other key regional destinations such as medical centers, by partnering with Friends in Action and similar organizations.                                       | 7, 9          | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  | EMDC CEDS    |    |   |
| T.4-e | Investigate options for rural on-demand transportation programs.  | 7, 9          | Program/Policy            | PLN                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Medium   | EMDC CEDS    |    |  |
| T.5   | <b>Create a safer and more accessible environment for pedestrians and cyclists.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| T.5-a | Continue to collaborate with MaineDOT to complete the Ellsworth Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail Connector project to connect the existing City trail to the Downeast Sunrise Trail.  | 7, 9          | Capital Projects          | PWD                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |              |    |   |
| T.5-b | Improve bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure and amenities to support bicycling and walking (e.g., bike racks, street lighting, sidewalk improvements) in growth areas and identify maintenance resources and responsibilities.                                | 7, 9          | Capital Projects          | PWD                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |              |    |   |
| T.5-c | Conduct an inventory of existing sidewalks and develop priorities for expanding sidewalk infrastructure with a focus on improving connectivity and accessibility to key amenities and facilities and connecting adjacent residential neighborhoods to downtown. | 4, 9          | Plan                      | PWD                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |    |  |
| T.5-d | Plan to replace aging light poles and widen sidewalks.  | 4, 5          | Capital Projects          | PWD, SLC                            | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| T.5-e | Conduct an inventory of the City's downtown streetlights and explore taking ownership of streetlights. Create a maintenance plan, and upgrade fixtures to meet dark-sky standards.  | 5             | Plan                      | PWD, SLC                            | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |  |   |



# PUBLIC FACILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

| #            | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan                       | Funding Sources | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|------------------------------------|-----------------|---|
| <b>PF.1*</b> | <b>Improve efficiency of public facilities and services and provide services in a manner that promotes and supports growth and development in identified growth areas.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.1-a*      | Locate new public facilities and growth-related capital investments predominantly in designated growth areas.  | 5             | Capital Projects          | PLN, PWD                            | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.1-b*      | Conduct a feasibility study to identify and prioritize areas to extend water and sewer.  | 5             | Plan                      | PWD, WWD, EWD                       | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.1-c       | Periodically conduct a needs assessment to establish benchmarks for level of service and to determine if staffing levels are appropriate to meet the needs of the community, and, if necessary, fund additional positions in the municipal budget. | 5             | Plan                      | CMO                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.1-d       | Efficiently meet identified public facility and service needs and plan for facilities and services to accommodate future growth within the growth area.  | 5             | Capital Projects          | PWD, PLN                            | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.1-e*      | Explore options for regional delivery of local services and shared capital investments opportunities (e.g., staffing, recreation programs, waste management, equipment sharing, transportation investments).                                       | 7, 8          | Capital Projects          | PWD, PLN                            | \$\$   | Hard                   | Ongoing  |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.1-f       | Identify opportunities to collaborate with the school's IT Department and examine the feasibility of a joint IT department.  | 5             | Partnership/ Coordination | ESD, ETD                            | \$     | Easy                   | Medium   |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.1-g       | Update the Fire and EMS Strategic Plan to evaluate existing EMS operations, staffing, and equipment, and determine how to best use a third-party for EMS services.   | 5, 7          | Plan                      | EFD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |                                    |                 |   |
| <b>PF.2</b>  | <b>Continue to explore opportunities to improve communication between the City and residents, with a focus on accessibility and transparency.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.2-a       | Establish a full-time communications position in the City Manager's Office.  | 7             | Resource Allocation       | CMO                                 | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |                                    |                 |   |
| PF.2-b       | Create a communication plan to improve accessibility of City-wide information and identify opportunities to expand outreach to the community (e.g., text-alerts to residents).   | 7             | Plan                      | CMO                                 | \$\$   | Medium                 | Short    |                                    |                 |  |
| PF.2-c       | Update the City website and improve online services available to the community, including making online payments.  | 7             | Communication/ Engagement | CMO, ETD                            | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |                                    |                 |  |
| PF.2-d       | Reevaluate City-wide branding identity and marketing strategies related to public services.  | 7             | Communication/ Engagement | CMO, EDD                            | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   | Ellsworth Business Attraction Plan |                 |  |
| PF.2-e       | Evaluate internal communication practices to improve collaboration among departments.  | 7             | Communication/ Engagement | CMO                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |                                    |                 |   |





# PUBLIC FACILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

| #           | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|-------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| PF.2-f      | Provide guidance and support to educate users on accessing information and services digitally.   | 7             | Communication/ Engagement | CMO                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PF.2-g      | Explore options for a City staff member to serve as a point person for public/private coordination and coordinate with local organizations to reduce duplication of efforts City-wide.                           |               | Capital Projects          | CMO                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| <b>PF.3</b> | <b>Continue to collaborate with local and regional service providers and the school district to meet the needs of the City's most vulnerable residents.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PF.3-a      | Implement a system for tracking resources, requests for service, and spending to assist in planning and budgeting for future needs for support services.   | 5             | Plan                      | CMO, FD                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |    |
| PF.3-b      | Provide support to local and regional organizations offering community services and shelter and assist in seeking funding to support these efforts.  | 7             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, DECP, HA                       | \$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PF.3-c      | Formalize a quarterly meeting of social services providers to discuss trends, challenges, and new services to improve allocation of resources to local needs.  | 7             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, DECP, HA, CMO                  | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PF.3-d      | Track housing assistance requests related to evictions or foreclosures and work with partners to provide financial assistance for homelessness prevention.   | 3, 7          | Program/Policy            | CMO                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PF.3-e      | Support coordination between schools and community organizations to encourage volunteerism and connect students to resources.  |               | Partnership/ Coordination | ESD, CMO                            | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PF.3-f      | Establish a digital resource center in the library or other public facility that offers community spaces and access to devices, equipment, and high-speed Internet.  | 6             | Program/Policy            | EPL                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| <b>PF.4</b> | <b>Maintain, upgrade, and expand infrastructure and facilities with a focus on long-term resiliency.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PF.4-a      | Coordinate with regional partners to implement the Hancock County Hazard Mitigation Plan and assist in updating the plan as needed.  | 2             | Partnership/ Coordination | EPD                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |  |   |
| PF.4-b      | Collaborate with regional coordinators and service providers through the Community Resilience Partnership to support efforts to improve resiliency and mitigate potential climate impacts.                       | 2,5           | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PF.4-c      | Conduct a vulnerability assessment to coordinate and assess infrastructure resiliency needs and seek funding to make needed upgrades or expansions to mitigate flood risk (e.g., culvert upgrades, dam repairs). | 2,5           | Plan                      | PWD                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   | EMDC CEDS    |  |  |
| PF.4-d      | Provide public information through a variety of platforms to inform the community of potential hazards and mitigation efforts.   | 2,5,7         | Communication/ Engagement | CMO                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |   |




# PUBLIC FACILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

| #            | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type         | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example  |
|--------------|--|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|---|
| PF.4-e       | Develop an emergency operations plan to establish protocols for response in the event of an emergency, including public health and safety emergencies and natural disasters.                                 | 5,7           | Plan                | EFD, EPD, PWD                       | \$     | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |    |
| PF.4-f       | Conduct a resiliency audit on the City communication tower.  | 2             | Plan                | PWD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| PF.4-g       | Evaluate options for improving winter storm road maintenance to limit environmental impact and preserve the integrity of roads.  | 2,5           | Program/Policy      | PWD                                 | \$     | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| <b>PF.5</b>  | <b>Improve the City's management of solid waste.</b>   |               |                     |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PF.5-a       | Explore options to expand recycling services at the transfer station, including e-waste processing as a potential revenue source.  | 5             | Program/Policy      | PWD, SWC                            | \$     | Medium                 | Medium   |              |  |   |
| PF.5-b       | Research options for brush removal, large waste pick-up, and bio-solid waste disposal.   | 5             | Program/Policy      | PWD, SWC                            | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| PF.5-c       | Research waste disposal practices in comparable communities and explore the potential for shifting to curb-side trash pickup and evaluate payment and rate options. Seek funding for necessary upgrades.     | 5             | Program/Policy      | PWD, SWC                            | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |   |
| <b>PF.6*</b> | <b>Identify any capital improvements needed to maintain or upgrade public facilities to accommodate the community's anticipated growth and changing demographics.</b>  |               |                     |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |   |
| PF.6-a       | Conduct an assessment of City facility needs and develop a long-term capital improvement plan for necessary upgrades, expansions, and replacement of aging facilities, as service and staffing needs change. | 5             | Plan                | FAC, PWD, WWD, EWD                  | \$     | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |   |
| PF.6-b       | Continue to make energy efficiency improvements to City facilities and operations, including exploring opportunities for solar installations on public buildings to offset electricity costs.                | 5             | Capital Projects    | FAC                                 | \$\$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |   |  |
| PF.6-c       | Research options for a long-term agreement for solar energy generation on City facilities with current or alternative provider.  | 5             | Program/Policy      | FAC, PWD                            | \$     | Medium                 | Short    |              |   |   |
| PF.6-d       | Improve ADA accessibility of public facilities in coordination with planned upgrades.  | 5,7           | Capital Projects    | FAC, PWD                            | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Long     |              |   |  |
| PF.6-e       | Explore the feasibility of satellite Fire and EMS stations throughout the City to decrease response time to more rural residents.  | 5, 7          | Plan                | EFD                                 | \$\$   | Easy                   | Medium   |              |   |   |
| PF.6-f       | Reassess use of the Union River Center for Innovation.   | 5             | Resource Allocation | EDD                                 | \$     | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |   |
| PF.6-g       | Develop a plan for the future use of pump station point.   | 5             | Plan                | PWD, WWD, EWD                       | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |   |   |




# PUBLIC FACILITIES AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

| #           | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost   | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources   | Best Practice/ Example |
|-------------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------|------------------------|----------|--------------|---|------------------------|
| <b>PF.7</b> | <b>Support improvements to facilities and services needed to help ensure high-quality educational opportunities at all stages of life.</b>   |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |                        |
| PF.7-a      | Continue to support the Ellsworth School District in the municipal budget and in long-term capital planning with a focus on facility planning and facility needs.                      | 5,6           | Plan                      | ESD, ECC, SB                        | \$\$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |                        |
| PF.7-b      | Commission a study of projected school facility needs, including vocational-education, and develop plans to build, expand or renovate as indicated.                                    | 5, 6          | Plan                      | ESD, ECC, SB                        | \$\$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |   |                        |
| PF.7-c      | Continue to build partnerships with all educational institutions in the City and support partnerships between the schools and organizations to encourage community engagement.         | 6, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | ECC, ESD, EPL                       | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |                        |
| PF.7-d      | Coordinate with educational institutions and service providers to provide programming to meet the needs of the community (e.g., digital literacy, job readiness).                      | 6, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | ECC, ESD, EPL                       | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  | EMDC CEDS    |   |                        |
| PF.7-e      | Continue to support the Ellsworth Public Library in expanding learning opportunities to meet the needs of the community and help to build community partnerships to support EPL goals. | 6, 8          | Program/Policy            | ECC, EPL                            | \$     | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |   |                        |
| <b>PF.8</b> | <b>Continue to expand and upgrade utility infrastructure as needed to support a high level of service and minimize long-term costs.</b>  |               |                           |                                     |        |                        |          |              |   |                        |
| PF.8-a*     | Identify future sewer and water districts to coordinate planned service extensions with the Future Land Use Plan.  | 2, 5          | Plan                      | PWD, WWD, EWD                       | \$\$\$ | Medium                 | Long     |              |   |                        |
| PF.8-b      | Explore opportunities to improve water pressure in the high pressure zone (e.g., water tower).   | 5             | Capital Projects          | PWD, WWD, EWD                       | \$\$   | Medium                 | Medium   |              |  |                        |





| #       | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|---|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------------|---|
| FC.1*   | Finance existing and future facilities and services in a cost-effective manner.   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |                 |   |
| FC.1-a* | Explore grants and other funding sources available to assist in the funding of capital investments within the community.  | 5             | Resource Allocation       | EDD, PLN, PWD                       | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |              |                 |   |
| FC.1-b  | Develop a short- and long-term financial plan, including a fiscal impact analysis and build-out analysis, to gauge the impacts of growth and development on the budget and tax rates.   | 5             | Plan                      | EDD, PLN, PWD, FD, FC               | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.1-c  | Conduct an inventory and analysis of current City benefits and offerings to improve staff recruiting and retention.   | 5             | Plan                      | CMO                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.1-d  | Develop educational programs and materials for City Council members and candidates on taxes, budgeting and fiscal impacts.  | 5, 8          | Guideline                 | CMO, FD                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |    |
| FC.1-e  | Research a potential year-over-year cap on the City budget of a fixed number of percentage points above the cost of living index.   | 5             | Program/Policy            | FD                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.1-f  | Research debt ratios and other fiscal metrics of comparable communities as a gauge of City performance.   | 5             | Guideline                 | FD                                  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.2*   | Minimize the tax burden on City residents by continuing to seek alternative sources of funding.   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |              |                 |   |
| FC.2-a  | Review current shared services arrangements with neighboring municipalities and revise agreements as needed to meet current service demands, and investigate other opportunities for shared services where an arrangement would be mutually beneficial. | 5             | Partnership/ Coordination | EFD, EPD, PWD                       | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.2-b  | Evaluate the benefit of a grant writer or grant manager position to assist with accessing state, federal, and other grant funding and with management and reporting for awarded funds.  | 5             | Resource Allocation       | CMO                                 | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.2-c  | Conduct an analysis of potential revenue generation opportunities, including asset mapping for downtown and the rest of the City.   | 5             | Plan                      | FD, FC                              | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.2-d  | Research various fees levied by the City and potential additional fees (e.g., impact fees, usage fees) to align with revenue generation and business attraction goals and to leverage tourism.  | 5, 8          | Program/Policy            | FD, FC                              | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |  |



| #       | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators           | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan | Funding Sources | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|--|---------------|---------------------------|---|------|------------------------|----------|--------------|-----------------|---|
| FC.3    | Foster private and community partnerships through effective City leadership to support economic vitality and sustainable growth.   |               |                           |   |      |                        |          |              |                 |   |
| FC.3-a  | Maintain and enhance existing community partnerships to provide recreational programming, educational opportunities, community events, and cultural activities.                              | 6, 7          | Partnership/ Coordination | EDD, PLN, RC, EPL, ESD, DECP, DEYMCA, HE, EHS | \$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |              |                 |  |
| FC.3-b* | Research opportunities for public/private partnerships to support development that is aligned with the City's vision and guiding principles.   | 5             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN, PWD                                      | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |   |
| FC.3-c  | Evaluate the effectiveness of external programs funded by the City and the return on investment to the tax payer and use this evaluation in determining funding priorities for future years. | 7             | Resource Allocation       | FD  | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |              |                 |   |



| #       | Policy/Action  | Key Principle | Action Type               | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan     | Funding Sources | Best Practice/ Example  |
|---------|--|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------------|---|
| LU.1*   | Coordinate the community's land use strategies with other local and regional land use planning efforts.  |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |                  |                 |   |
| LU.1-a* | Meet with neighboring communities to coordinate land use designations and regulatory and non-regulatory strategies.  | 2             | Partnership/ Coordination | PLN                                 | \$   | Medium                 | Ongoing  |                  |                 |   |
| LU.1-b  | Encourage infill development in growth areas. Where feasible, concentrate commercial development to establish nodes or mixed-use neighborhoods to distribute commercial amenities and diversify transportation modes.  | 2,3,8,9       | Program/Policy            | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Medium                 | Short    | Maine Won't Wait |                 |   |
| LU.1-c* | Investigate techniques to preserve farmland, including conservation or cluster subdivisions, open space requirements, transfer of development rights, disincentives for conversion of agricultural land and updates to the Unified Development Ordinance to protect prime farmland from development. | 2             | Program/Policy            | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Medium                 | Short    |                  |                 |    |
| LU.2*   | Support a mix of uses and appropriate density of development within downtown and other growth areas to meet the housing and economic growth needs of the community as expressed in the vision statement.   |               |                           |                                     |      |                        |          |                  |                 |   |
| LU.2-a* | Track new development in the community by type and location to inform future land use decisions.   | 3,8           | Program/Policy            | CED                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                  |                 |   |
| LU.2-b  | Reevaluate the role of the business park and commerce park designations and revise zoning regulations for these districts, as appropriate, to support current development needs.   | 8             | Regulation                | EDD, PLN                            | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                  |                 |   |
| LU.2-c  | Create transition areas between zones without restrictions on uses into zones with more restricted uses. Evaluate the allowance of single-family or other housing in commercial-oriented buffer zones so as to not limit housing development potential.  | 3,8           | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                  |                 |   |
| LU.2-d  | Review, and revise as needed, definitions for land uses and land use categories in order to more accurately reflect current business and use operations and identify where permitted uses are appropriate.   | 8             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                  |                 |   |
| LU.2-e  | Coordinate with community partners to create a plan for future development of the 35-acre parcel adjacent to Whitney Community Forest.   | 2, 3, 8       | Plan                      | PLN, FBC                            | \$\$ | Medium                 | Medium   |                  |                 |  |
| LU.2-f  | Create incentives for adaptive re-use of buildings to support small businesses and create housing opportunities in the designated growth area.   | 8             | Program/Policy            | PLN, PB                             | \$\$ | Medium                 | Short    |                  |                 |   |
| LU.2-g  | Consider developing form-based requirements in the City's zoning code.   | 4             | Regulation                | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                  |                 |  |



| #       | Policy/Action   | Key Principle | Action Type         | Responsible Agencies/ Collaborators | Cost | Ease of Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan     | Funding Sources | Best Practice/ Example |
|---------|---|---------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------|------------------------|----------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| LU.3*   | Revise the City's development regulations to direct growth to designated growth areas and to support development that is fiscally and environmentally responsible.  |               |                     |                                     |      |                        |          |                  |                 |                        |
| LU.3-a* | Update local ordinances as appropriate to align with the goals and intent of the future land use plan, including clearly defining desired scale, intensity, and location of future development, and clearly defining protective measures for any existing or proposed critical natural resources, rural areas, or waterfront areas. | 2, 3, 4       | Regulation          | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    | Maine Won't Wait |                 |                        |
| LU.3-b* | Direct a minimum of 75% of new municipal growth-related capital investments into designated growth areas identified in the future land use plan.  | 2             | Program/Policy      | PLN, PWD                            | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                  |                 |                        |
| LU.3-c* | Limit unrestricted growth in rural areas by further restricting development in the Rural and Drinking Water districts.  | 2             | Regulation          | PLN, PB                             | \$   | Easy                   | Short    |                  |                 |                        |
| LU.3-d* | Provide the code enforcement officer with the tools, training, required certification, and support necessary to efficiently and effectively enforce land use regulations.   | 2, 5          | Resource Allocation | CED                                 | \$   | Easy                   | Ongoing  |                  |                 |                        |



## A Plan for the Future

This Plan was developed based on community priorities, values, and long-term vision for Ellsworth. Over the next ten years, the City will look to build on recent successes and current strengths while working to address challenges and implement actions to better meet community needs. The City will look to further protect open spaces and natural resources building upon recent acquisition of land around Branch Lake and partnerships with Frenchman Bay Conservancy and other conservation organizations. Infrastructure improvements like water and wastewater treatment facility upgrades, improving traffic and road conditions, and supporting the development of housing for residents and employees will all serve to enhance quality of life in Ellsworth and help ensure a thriving business community.

This Plan outlines a mix of ordinance changes, partnership opportunities, capital projects, programs, guidelines, and long-range planning initiatives to implement the community's vision. The City will exercise fiscal prudence in planning for long-range investments to support fiscal health and better position Ellsworth in the future. Implementation of this plan will require involvement and collaboration from City staff, City Council, boards and committees, community groups, and regional partners. This Plan is intended to be a guide for decision-making with the understanding that as needs change and new issues and opportunities arise, the City will adjust priorities to meet current challenges while staying true to the community's broader vision.



*Photo credit: City of Ellsworth*





# APPENDICES



**Accessibility:** The practice of making information, activities, and/or environments sensible, meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible.

**Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU):** A self-contained dwelling unit located within, attached, or detached from a single-family dwelling unit located on the same parcel of land as a primary dwelling unit.

**Active transportation:** Human-powered mobility, such as biking, walking, or rolling.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

**Accessible:** A site, facility, work environment, service, or program that is easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in, and/or use safely and with dignity by a person with a disability.

**Affordable housing:** Decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings, apartments or other living accommodations for households making at or below 80% of the median household income as determined by the U.S. Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD). HUD income limits are informed by U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey data.

**Aging in Place:** The ability to live in one's own home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level.

**Capital Improvement Plan (CIP):** A CIP lays out the financing, location, and timing for capital improvement projects over several years. A CIP typically consists of one or more capital improvement projects, which are financed through a capital budget. CIPs are important tools for local governments, allowing them to plan strategically for community growth and transformation.

**Cluster Subdivision:** A subdivision in which the lot sizes are reduced below those normally required in the zoning district in which the development is located in return for the provision of permanent open space owned in common by lot unit owners, the City, or a land conservation organization.

**Conservation easement:** A legally enforceable restriction on the future uses of a property granted in the form of a deed to a governmental entity or qualified conservation land trust. Conservation easements can be designed to keep a property in an essentially wild State or to allow limited residential uses, farming, and forestry. Some conservation easements grant public access on or over the private lands.

**Conservation land:** Land that is owned by, controlled by, or deeded to a nonprofit entity whose sole purpose is to conserve land. Conservation land also includes publicly owned land that is permanently conserved.

**Cottage court:** A group of small (one- to 1.5-story), detached structures arranged around a shared court visible from the street.

**Critical natural resources:** Any natural area documented by the Natural Areas Program that is conserved or protected in its natural condition through voluntary action.



**Critical rural area:** "Critical rural area" means a rural area that is specifically identified and designated by a municipality's or multi-municipal region's comprehensive plan as deserving maximum protection from development to preserve natural resources and related economic activities that may include, but are not limited to, significant farmland, forest land or mineral resources; high-value wildlife or fisheries habitat; scenic areas; public water supplies; scarce or especially vulnerable natural resources; flood buffer areas and flood-prone areas; and open lands functionally necessary to support a vibrant rural economy.

**Current use tax program:** The State of Maine has four current tax use programs that offer property owners a reduction in their properties' assessed value. Properties used for farmland, open space, tree growth, and working waterfront are eligible to enroll in one of the four current tax use programs.

**Duplex:** A structure containing two dwelling units, each of which has direct access to the outside.

**Dwelling unit:** A room or group of rooms designed and equipped exclusively for use as permanent, seasonal, or temporary living quarters for only one family at a time, and containing cooking, sleeping and toilet facilities. The term includes mobile homes and rental units that contain cooking, sleeping, and toilet facilities regardless of the period rented. Recreational vehicles are not residential dwelling units.

**Economic vitality:** The economic well-being of a community. Economic vitality can be measured in several ways including access

to jobs, income inequality, and job and wage growth.

**Growth area:** An area designated in a municipality's or multi-municipal region's comprehensive plan as suitable for orderly residential, commercial or industrial development, or any combinations of those types of development, and into which most development projected over 10 years is directed.

**Invasive species:** A plant or animal that is not indigenous, non-native, to an ecosystem that causes that causes harm to the environment, economy, or human, animal, and/or plant health.

**Low-impact development (LID):** LID begins at the design phase of a new development, incorporating planning techniques that minimize site clearing and impervious surfaces to reduce impact and stormwater runoff generated from the site. By reducing the volume of water leaving a site, the pollutant loading is also reduced. Other techniques that will reduce the volume and peak flow rates of runoff from the development are then incorporated throughout the site. LID is an effective tool that reduces pollutant loading, thermal impacts, stream flows, and minimizes stream channel erosion. More information is available in Volume I of this manual on LID measures.

**Low-rise apartment building:** A building or structure featuring one to four stories that contains three or more dwelling units used, intended, or designed to be built, used, rented, leased, let or hired out to be occupied, or that are occupied for living purposes.



**Micromobility:** Any small, low-speed, human- or electric-powered transportation device, including bicycles, scooters, electric-assist bicycles, electric scooters (e-scooters), and other small, lightweight, wheeled conveyances.

**Multifamily dwelling:** A building designed or intended to be used or used exclusively for residential occupancy by three or more families living independently of one another and containing three or more dwelling units.

**Multimodal:** Multimodal planning refers to planning that considers various modes of transportation (e.g., walking, cycling, automobile, public transit) and connections between those modes.

**Natural areas:** Any area of land or water, or both land and water, whether publicly or privately owned, that retains or has reestablished its natural character, though it need not be completely natural and undisturbed, and that supports, harbors, or otherwise contains endangered, threatened, or rare plants, animals and native ecological systems, or rare or unique geological, hydrological, natural historical, scenic, or other similar features of scientific and educational value.

**Open space:** Open space includes all unbuilt areas, whether publicly or privately owned, protected, or unprotected. Open space lands include forests and grasslands, farms and ranches, streams and rivers, and parks. Open space lands provide ecosystem services, support agricultural and forest production, and offer opportunities for recreation.

**Public-private collaboration:** A partnership between the public sector and the private sector for the purpose of delivering a project or a service.

**Resiliency:** The ability of a community, business, or the natural environment to prepare for, withstand, respond to, and recover from a hazardous event.

**Single-family detached dwelling:** A free-standing residential structure intended for use by one owner as a single-dwelling unit. It is a stand-alone, detached property with no common walls, land, entrance, exit, or utilities shared with any other dwelling.

**Surface water:** Any body of water above ground, including streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, reservoirs, and creeks. The ocean, despite being salt water, is also considered surface water.

**Tax increment financing:** Municipal TIF is a flexible finance tool used by municipalities, plantations, and unorganized territories to leverage new property taxes generated by a specific project or projects within a defined geographic district. Any portion of the new taxes may be used to finance public or private projects for a defined statutorily allowable period. The municipality or plantation defines the district size, determines the amount of new taxes to be captured, identifies allowable public and private projects along with the term, with the whole proposal requiring local political approval.

**Townhouse:** A one-family dwelling unit separated from neighboring units by a ground-to-roof wall and has a private entrance. Dwelling units are attached horizontally in a linear arrangement and having a totally exposed front and rear wall to be used for access, light, and ventilation. These units do not share heating and air-conditioning systems or utilities.



**Transfer of development rights (TDR):** The conveyance of development rights by deed, easement, or other legal instrument authorized by local law to another parcel of land and the recordation of that conveyance among the land records of the municipality.

**Vernal Pool:** A shallow, seasonal wetland that provides vital habitat for many species of plants and animals.

**Wetlands:** An area of land that is saturated or covered by water, either seasonally or permanently. Wetlands are a transition zone between land and water and are some of the most productive and biologically diverse ecosystems on Earth.

**Workforce housing:** Housing targeted at households that earn too much to qualify for traditional affordable housing subsidies, commonly aimed at those earning between 80% and 120% of the area median income.



## Appendix B: Referenced Plans and Studies

- Economic Development Business Attraction Plan, 2023 (ConsultEcon, Inc., Harpswell Strategies, City of Ellsworth)
- Ellsworth Asset Mapping, 2023 (Heart of Ellsworth, City of Ellsworth, Maine Community Foundation, Franklin Savings Bank)
- Branch Lake and Harriman Pond Watershed-Based Protection Plan, 2022 – 2032 (Ecological Instincts, Branch Lake Association)
- Municipal Broadband Roadmap, 2022 (Mission Broadband, Inc., City of Ellsworth)
- The Ellsworth Green Plan, 2021 (Green Ellsworth)
- Build-Out Analysis, City of Ellsworth, 2020 (FB Environmental, Frenchman Bay Conservancy)
- Trade Area Analysis of Retail Sales, 2012 (The University of Maine Cooperative Extension)
- Ellsworth Public Library Strategic Plan, 2023 – 2026 (Ellsworth Public Library, Deb Burwell – consultant)
- Housing Opportunities for the Age 55 & Older Markets, 2015 (BCM Planning, LLC)
- Workforce Housing Study and Action Plan, 2004 (Bruce C. Mayberry – Planning Consultant, Helen Hemminger – Affordable Housing Consultant, City of Ellsworth)





# Appendix C: City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Community Engagement Summary







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## 1. INTRODUCTION

As part of the Comprehensive Plan for the City of Ellsworth (City), BerryDunn, City staff, and Steering Committee members conducted a public engagement effort to obtain input from Ellsworth residents, workers, and visitors. The goal of this effort was to identify community values and priorities, provide information to inform the creation of the City's vision statement, and guide plan development and policy recommendations. The engagement strategy included the following events and activities:

- Comprehensive Plan Kickoff Expo
- Community events and communication facilitated by City staff and Steering Committee members
- Focus group meetings with community leaders
- Living and Working in Ellsworth Public Forums
- Subcommittee meetings
- An online virtual engagement Social Pinpoint site
- An online visioning survey, with paper copies available at strategic points in Ellsworth
- Visual Preference Survey

This high-level summary details each engagement component and what was learned about community desires for Ellsworth.

In addition to engagement efforts specifically intended to support the development of the Comprehensive Plan, public feedback from other City outreach initiatives—including the Business Attraction Plan—were reviewed and considered as part of the visioning process.





## 2. KEY THEMES FROM ENGAGEMENT

Information compiled in this summary was gathered from several months of engagement efforts. Feedback from the engagement process is summarized in subsequent sections and appendices.

In synthesizing the data, the following key themes emerged:

- Expanding recreation and educational opportunities
- Creating diverse and affordable housing options to help attract a stable workforce
- Supporting a year-round economy and balanced tourism
- Supporting the arts and promoting the City's cultural history
- Managing growth
- Minimizing the tax burden on property owners
- Protecting natural resources and open spaces for long-term community benefit
- Improving public infrastructure, services, and facilities
- Expanding transportation options and walkability and addressing traffic congestion
- Enhancing downtown as a year-round destination and improving waterfront access
- Supporting health, wellness, and community involvement





### 3. COMPREHENSIVE PLAN KICKOFF EXPO

On June 16, 2023, a Comprehensive Plan Kickoff Expo took place, and roughly 25 attendees participated. The purpose of the event was to provide an opportunity for the community to learn about the project, provide initial feedback, and learn how to be involved in the planning effort. Participants provided ideas, feedback, and challenges around the following nine topics: population and demographics; housing; open space and recreation; marine and water resources; economic development; natural resources agriculture and forestry; City facilities; historic and archaeological resources; and transportation. Below is a summary of comments received from each table:

#### Population and Demographics

- Consider school enrollment, pollution, traffic, and other quality of life impacts associated with population increase
- Design future developments in a way that would reduce traffic congestion
- Consider the needs of an aging population
- Consider ways to keep and attract young people
- Promote recreational assets to attract new residents
- Consider the potential for climate refugees to move to Ellsworth

#### Housing

- Provide affordable housing options for City employees, individuals, and families, including co-op developments for business owners, cooperative housing, apartments, efficiency apartments, and duplexes
- Manage the number of short-term rentals

#### Open Space and Recreation

- Improve biking and hiking trails
- Improve the City's river walk
- Add a dog park
- Improve other amenities including the track; provide more opportunities for skateboarding, an ice hockey rink, additional places to fish, a playground at Harbor Park, wayfinding signage, and updates to The Grand





## Marine and Water Resources

- Improve and add fish passages around the Union River dam
- Re-vision the waterfront to further utilize the river as a resource, potentially including active water sports, like Skowhegan's current river project
- Improve education to residents related to environmental impacts on marine and water resources
- Support cleanup and other volunteer activities to maintain swimming areas and other public spaces
- Improve side street access downtown and build pedestrian bridges over High Street to allow pedestrians easy access to downtown

## Economic Development

- Add wayfinding signage, traffic safety signage, and other branding for downtown
- Provide additional resources for businesses, including coaching, internship opportunities for high school students, guidance and support for young entrepreneurs, and creation of sustainable businesses
- Work with local community groups and regional groups, like the Stonington Opera House, to add additional social events
- Add public restrooms downtown

## Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Forestry

- Add street trees
- Protect and preserve large and old trees
- Protect agricultural and farmlands from sprawl
- Improve access to bike trails and connectivity to parks, downtown, and other amenities
- Market natural resources and open space to attract newcomers and leverage resources for economic development

## City Facilities

- Improve rail trail maintenance
- Add public restrooms





- Maintain current facilities, including schools, and plan for sustainable growth
- Improve access to more City services online
- Addressing concerns about cost of trash stickers and transfer station hours
- Invest in facade renovations and upkeep of Urban Core and historic properties
- Invest in more play areas, sports fields, and activities for children

### Historic and Archaeological Resources

- Pursue Certified Local Government status
- Pursue historic downtown designation from the National Park Service to help support business owners renovate their properties
- Sponsor lectures and educational events on historic and archaeological topics in Ellsworth
- Update Museum in the Streets information
- Improve signage to promote the historic downtown

### Transportation

- Improve the frequency and availability of buses around Ellsworth and provide more frequent regional buses to access Bangor or Mount Desert Island
- Improve bus stop signage
- Invest in connecting trails and adding additional sidewalks and paths to improve bike and pedestrian mobility





## 4. LIVING AND WORKING IN ELLSWORTH PUBLIC FORUMS

Ellsworth City staff and BerryDunn held two Living and Working in Ellsworth public forums to collect feedback and input from individuals who live and/or work in Ellsworth. The first public forum was combined with the City's Business Attraction Plan project and focused on transportation, child care, economic development, and housing. The second public forum was an event put on in coordination with Hancock County Planning Commission and GrowSmart Maine to focus more in-depth on housing and land use, informing both the Comprehensive Plan and Housing Study.

On July 18, 2023, City staff and BerryDunn held a public forum in coordination with the staff and consultant team working on the City's Business Attraction Plan. The purpose of the forum was to provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussions on key issues in Ellsworth, including housing, child care, transportation, and economic opportunity. Participants included employees and employers in Ellsworth. Following a presentation, participants joined breakout discussions centered around each of the four discussion topics and shared feedback on challenges and desires for Ellsworth's workforce related to these topics. A total of 32 people attended. Below is a summary of the discussions:

### Transportation

- Consider rural areas of Ellsworth in future transportation planning
- Improve High Street, Water Street, and Main Street, including adding one-way streets to improve traffic flow during peak times
- Add more frequent stops for the local bus service to improve ridership, including weekend availability
- Examine the Bangor Area Comprehensive Transportation System (BACTS) as an example for local and regional public transportation
- Explore ways to expand Downeast Transportation service
- Improve and add trails, bike paths, and sidewalks to improve pedestrian and bike access
- Explore ways to improve connectivity of trails, paths, and sidewalks
- Improve the City's electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure
- Support mixed-use development
- Address weather-related safety issues to improve residents' ability to walk and bike





- Provide educational materials on bus schedules, bus stops, and destinations
- Improve road conditions
- Concern about high school-aged children finding transportation to places of school, internships, or places of employment

### Child care

- Support an increase in affordable child care options
- Address child care-related concerns, including long waitlists and provider shortages
- Explore the possibility of co-op day cares
- Address challenges to providing child care in the summer for older children who cannot drive (ages 10 – 15)
- Consider establishing additional places for children to go after school (e.g., parks, sports fields)
- Concern about the limited services available for children with special needs

### Economic Development

- Housing availability and lack of affordable housing options are impacting economic opportunity
- Staffing shortages are making it challenging for businesses to stay open
- Community resiliency and ability to pull together is an asset
- Child care availability is impacting economic opportunity
- Challenges recruiting and retaining younger staff members; there is a lack of night life and amenities to attract young people
- Challenges with a large portion of staff approaching retirement age
- Increase transportation options for employees to commute to work
- Explore additional apprenticeships and certificate programs to attract trade workers
- Support efforts to highlight nonprofits and increase donations

### Housing

- Provide a variety of housing types, including older adult housing, apartments, starter homes, small single-family homes, and co-op housing
- Manage or restrict the number of short-term rentals





- Concern that people working for Ellsworth businesses, like Jackson Labs (JAX) or the hospital, are commuting from Bangor; workers are having to move farther from Ellsworth to find housing
- Address concerns about the City's increased unhoused population
- Support housing development near downtown to reduce sprawl and utilize existing utilities
- Identify regional approaches to support housing initiatives
- Explore funding opportunities through Maine Housing and other organizations
- Explore feasibility for the City to acquire land for housing
- Encourage the construction of safe, quality housing
- Address concerns about the ability to downsize and stay in Ellsworth

On April 10, 2024, City staff and BerryDunn held a public forum related to the Comprehensive Plan and Housing Study. The purpose of the forum was to provide an opportunity for more in-depth discussion on housing and land use. Participants included employees, employers, developers, and property owners in Ellsworth. Following a presentation, participants shared feedback in a digital MentiMeter polling activity. Following the MentiMeter activity, participants joined breakout discussions centered around housing challenges and future land use. Below is a summary of these discussions:

- Support a variety of housing types in and around the downtown, including homes above first floor retail shops downtown, tiny homes, multi-family homes, and single-family homes.
- Allow for day care uses in all areas of the City.
- Align future infrastructure upgrades, including sewer, water, and utilities, with the future land use plan to increase opportunities for commercial and residential development.
- Consider how new projects or infrastructure would impact property taxes.
- Preserve the City's historic character and encourage new developments to follow the existing and historic architecture in neighborhoods and downtown.
- Further leverage the summer season and benefit from tourism in Ellsworth while providing year-round services and job opportunities.





## 5. SUBCOMMITTEE MEETINGS

The City engaged subcommittees at two points in the engagement process. As part of the engagement process, subcommittees provided input into the community visioning process. Subcommittees were open to any community member and represent each chapter of the comprehensive plan. Members discussed challenges, strengths, and ideas for Ellsworth's future. Attendance varied, but two to ten community members were present at each meeting. Below is a summary of discussion topics, challenges, and ideas from the first subcommittee meeting:

### Recreation

- Consider creating a recreation department with a director to oversee a variety of programming for different age groups, City sports leagues, and facility use
- Consider a public pool
- Expand recreational opportunities, like kayaking or paddleboarding at Harbor Park, additional biking paths, or cross-country ski trails
- Expand current marketing to share recreational opportunities to attract people to Ellsworth

### Housing

- Challenge for seniors to find affordable, accessible housing near transportation options
- Challenge finding housing for Housing Choice Vouchers recipients
- Challenge for the workforce to find affordable housing
- Concern about the portion of the housing stock that are short-term rentals
- Concern with the rising cost of housing development
- Consider ways to create new, affordable housing as well as ways to rehabilitate the City's existing housing stock
- Consider ways to change the negative connotation of "affordable" and "workforce" housing
- Consider reducing regulatory challenges associated with the building process
- Consider avoiding sprawl when examining opportunities for future development

### Population and Demographics





- Concern that existing infrastructure cannot accommodate additional growth
- Concern that young people are moving to other communities with more amenities
- Explore ways to attract and retain residents, including amenities, healthcare services, housing, and jobs

## Economy

- Consider ways to support both seasonal and year-round businesses
- Consider ways to accommodate workers with multiple jobs
- Concern that the “Gateway to Acadia” label can discourage the City from becoming a year-round destination
- Concern about the cost of living and local businesses’ ability to pay increased wages
- Continue to support and promote local and downtown businesses
- Consider ways to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles in the plan
- Explore ways to fill available jobs in the City

## Marine Resources

- Develop the Riverwalk and riverfront in a way that will connect and support the community

## Public Facilities

- Consider proactive, long-term maintenance plans for facilities
- Increase recycling options
- Improve communication with the community
- Consider public restrooms on Main Street
- Concern about the growing unhoused population in Ellsworth
- Explore EV charging stations downtown
- Consider ways to use existing facilities more effectively
- Consider development fees to pay for maintenance and facility improvements
- Explore feasibility of receiving additional revenue from neighboring municipalities that rely on Ellsworth’s services, including the library, fire department, and EMS





- Consider a local sales tax to support City revenues

### Agriculture and Forest Resources

- Explore opportunities to expand local food production, including local farms, community gardens, community kitchens, and educational materials
- Preserve prime farmland
- Expand the farmers' market
- Explore ordinances to allow for "living" or green roofs
- Engage in forest management methods to preserve trees, forest health, and habitat
- Provide educational materials to landowners to manage their trees
- Require tree planting in new developments
- Promote Ellsworth as an environmentally friendly place
- Explore ways to add additional tree canopy in the City

### Transportation

- Explore expanded bus service, including services in the City and to Bangor and Bar Harbor
- Consider rural areas of Ellsworth in future transportation planning
- Consider additional sidewalk and bike paths to enable mobility through the City's Urban Core
- Consider regional collaboration on transportation initiatives
- Consider staffing needs to maintain services as the population grows

### Water Resources

- Consider community solar and solar to help offset municipal energy use
- Improve dam maintenance and management
- Ensure native plant species are supported
- Explore opportunities for regional collaboration on water quality and water protection initiatives
- Provide educational materials on erosion control and runoff to property owners in the shoreland zone





- Explore alternatives to gravel and salt when treating roads in the winter to protect water quality
- Explore policies to protect water quality
- Consider the capacity of water resources when looking to grow and develop

### Historic and Archaeological Resources

- Develop an award to recognize historic properties
- Consider requiring a historical survey as part of the development review process
- Market historic sites as an attraction
- Expand protections for indigenous sites
- Protect historic sites along the Union River
- Create a downtown historic district
- Consider surveying additional sites
- Designate the Union River shoreline as a heritage corridor
- Expand educational resources about indigenous peoples who lived in Ellsworth
- Consider tax rebates and other incentives to repair historic properties

### Natural Resources

The natural resources subcommittee meeting was canceled due to inclement weather. The meeting was not rescheduled.

The second set of subcommittee meetings provided community members the opportunity to review policies and action items, identify what might be missing, and provide feedback. These meetings were held in April 2024. A summary of feedback from all meetings is summarized below:

- Continue to support public access to open spaces and work with property owners to establish conservation easements to alleviate concerns about public access to private land being restricted.
- Look for ways to connect habitat blocks and natural resources.
- Work with local partners, like FBC, who is looking at better ways to incorporate indigenous perspectives and land management practices into their work.





## Public Facilities and Community Services

- Broaden policies to include the full City instead of downtown.
- Consider reestablishing curbside trash pickup.
- Stormwater system study found that the system needs repairs and maintenance.
- Further address staffing challenges and EMS challenges.
- Developing a capital improvement plan is critical.

## Economy

- The City is currently exploring grant programs to implement the Business Attraction Plan.
- Digital literacy and equity is important to consider looking forward. The City has been working with the School Department to develop an approach.
- The plan should consider additional options for workforce readiness programs, technical education, and adult education opportunities.
- The City is working with the Village Partnership Initiative to implement improvements in and around the downtown including wayfinding signage, Water Street streetscape planning, and traffic flow.
- The City should continue to highlight central and prominent business that are anchors in the community.
- The City should review tax increment financing (TIF) districts to see if the City is seeing the most benefit from current districts.
- The City is working with the Thriving Communities Partnership to develop a master plan for High Street.
- The City should continue to support access to education for people of all ages.
- The City should continue to support existing economic development projects and opportunities.

## Water Resources

- Bring back the former Smart Growth Coordinator who was focused on ensuring low-impact development standards.
- Protect water resources and habitats in all areas, including growth areas.





- Add Hancock County Soil and Water Conservation District reference in these actions.
- Add additional actions about dam maintenance for the City's dams.
- Improve water quality of the Union River.
- Explore options to work with Maine DEP to establish fish passages for dams.
- Work to remove invasive species in water bodies and allow native species to thrive.

## Transportation

- There is potential to expand commuter options and public transportation options.
- Friends in Action brings people from rural Ellsworth into the downtown.
- Downeast once had regional routes from surrounding towns into Ellsworth during the week, but ridership and demand declined.
- Support regional mobility from residences to downtown services or other key destinations through support from volunteer and non-profit organizations.
- Define micromobility.
- Add next steps for the City.
- Address traffic impacts and high traffic.
- There may be a need for more bus drivers.

## Historic Resources

- Consider changes to the Historic Preservation Ordinance to better preserve and improve historic structures.
- Consider additional enforcement mechanisms in the ordinance.
- Discuss expansions to the current historic district to better protect historic resources outside of the immediate downtown.
- Require ordinance changes to meet Certified Local Government status conditions.
- Re-implement the Cemetery Committee.
- Consider the native Penobscot heritage on the Union River.
- Support the arts and culture in the downtown but also consider options outside of the downtown.
- Prioritize funding for these initiatives.





- Extend historic signage, including Museum in the Streets or other educational plaques.

## Agriculture and Forestry

- Consider softening the language around requiring organic tree care on all trees. Limit this to public trees.
- Work to coordinate land use between municipalities to help ensure larger blocks of forest are preserved.
- Update the Unified Development Ordinance to better outline landscaping requirements and the planting and preservation of trees.
- Limit all development in rural and critical areas, not just commercial development.
- Include more reference to open spaces.

## Housing

- Examine cottage court or cluster subdivision housing options.
- Provide incentives for landlords to maintain and improve their properties.
- Develop an approach to limiting short-term rentals.
- Engage the Mount Desert Island (MDI) Ellsworth Housing Authorities to support projects.
- Partner with developers to increase housing production.
- Challenges with wanting to support walkability in the downtown and promote housing in this area, but people still use cars as their primary mode of transportation.
- Preserve existing neighborhoods.

## Recreation

- Update title to include parks as well as recreation. Parks maintenance is important to address.
- Prioritize creating a Parks and Recreation Department in City Hall and hire a director.
- Look at grants to improve Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility in parks.
- Support efforts for wayfinding signage.





- Connect the sunrise trail and extend the trail.
- Consider ways to get people off MDI in the summer and attract them to Ellsworth.
- Continue to work with partners like the Moore Center and Downeast YMCA.

### Population and Demographics

- School populations are declining.
- Employers are having challenges attracting employees without more affordable housing options.
- The City should steer people toward businesses during summer months.
- The plan should anticipate additional demand for housing in this region with remote work and overall desirability of Maine as a place to live.
- The City should improve accessibility in the transit system, including ADA improvements to sidewalks and trails.





## 6. COMMUNITY EVENTS

Throughout summer and fall 2023, City staff and Steering Committee members promoted the comprehensive planning project and collected feedback at local events.

Feedback from community events were submitted to the Social Pinpoint project website. A summary of responses is available in Section 3 of this report.





## 7. FOCUS GROUPS

In June 2024, the City hosted three focus group meetings with recreation, arts, and culture organizations, service providers, and local businesses to further refine policies and action items. At this point, the policies and actions had been reviewed by subcommittees, the Steering Committee, and City staff. The focus groups served as an opportunity for subject matter experts in Ellsworth to provide input on overall policy direction. A summary input from each focus group is below:

### Recreation, arts, and culture

- Support the tourism economy while still providing a strong year-round community.
- Wayfinding signage is important to help people find downtown and other institutions in Ellsworth.
- Emphasize partnerships in the plan.
- Address challenges surrounding the City's dams.
- High Street does not provide a welcoming image of Ellsworth.
- Create promotional materials for the City's recreation and arts locations.
- Address challenges surrounding short-term rentals in the City.
- Accessibility should continue to be a top priority.
- Follow the recommendations of the Village Partnership Initiative.
- Work with regional agencies to implement the plan.
- Improve pedestrian connectivity, including connections to key points in Ellsworth like Harbor and Knowlton Parks.

### Service Providers

- Work to build a partnership between the City and School Department, including student involvement with the City.
- People cannot afford the cost of living in the City, including housing, transportation, and child care.
- Downtown is not designed for local residents. Consider ways to improve livability in and around the downtown.
- Support digital literacy programs.





- Support more affordable housing options for low- and very low-income families.
- Recent housing development has not been affordable.
- There are fewer rental options in the summer due to short-term rentals.
- More people are living in substandard housing.
- Loaves and Fishes, a food pantry in Ellsworth, has seen a 500% increase in visits.
- Many cannot drive or cannot afford a vehicle. Additionally, Friends in Action lost many volunteer drivers.
- Ubers and cabs are largely non-existent in the City.
- Challenges with Downeast transportation not aligning schedules around the work and school days.
- People who live in rural areas should be able to access the downtown.
- There is a need for a City-run shelter. Existing shelters are full or people do not feel comfortable going.
- Support emergency services and provide trainings and staffing to help with mental health related challenges.
- There is not an agency or organization doing outreach to the unhoused population in Ellsworth. Support regional coordination on this.

## Employers

- A lack of child care has been challenging to attract and retain workers. There are long wait lists and large expenses. The YMCA is often de-facto child care.
- Local businesses like JAX have built facilities on-site for child care.
- Overall cost of living, including housing and transportation, have made it difficult to attract and retain workers.
- It has been difficult to find seasonal workers to support summer camps or other activities due to housing challenges.
- Support affordable housing in walking distance to employment centers and services.
- Support efforts to re-develop water street. Many businesses along the water are not water dependent.





## 8. VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

From April through August 2024, Ellsworth community members were encouraged to take a visual preference survey to help inform the Future Land Use Map and policies. A visual preference survey is a survey designed to gather public input on different scenarios for the built environment. The survey contained a series of images of different building types, scales, and densities for each land use category in the Future Land Use Map. There were 42 respondents. A summary of feedback can be found below:

- Keep rural areas rural with low-density, single-family homes.
- Respondents were open to mixed-use and denser single-family development in rural village areas.
- Open to a variety of residential types, two-to-three-story mixed-use and multi-family buildings in the neighborhood mixed-use areas.
- Respondents were divided on the issue of allowing mixed-use development in neighborhood areas.
- Respondents were supportive of downtown building heights of up to four stories.





## 9. SOCIAL PINPOINT SUMMARY

Social Pinpoint is an online engagement platform used to gather community feedback and share project information. The Ellsworth 2035 Comprehensive Plan project site offered three ways for community members to provide input on the comprehensive planning effort:

- Survey (available online and via paper)
- Ideas Wall with options to post comments regarding the City's strengths, challenges, and suggestions for improvement
- Interactive City map with options to post comments regarding the City's strengths, challenges, and suggestions for improvement

In total, the site attracted 464 unique community members.

### Survey

The survey was designed to gather feedback on various topic areas, an overall vision for the City, and high-level values and priorities. A total of 475 people responded to this survey, with 77% of respondents indicating they live in Ellsworth full time. Some key statistics from the survey include:

- Of respondents, 72% (334) own a home in Ellsworth. Roughly 13% (60) rent in Ellsworth, and roughly 14% (64) live outside Ellsworth.
- Over 22% (103) of respondents work at or own a business in Ellsworth. Of those who commute to Ellsworth for work, 32% (13) travel more than 20 miles, and roughly 45% (18) travel fewer than 10 miles.
- Of the options provided, the most valued amenities in Ellsworth are riverfront and lake access (43%, 186), people and culture (34%, 148), restaurants and entertainment (34%, 148), and access to the region (33%, 143).
- Respondents indicated that the City should invest more in roads (73%, 340), sidewalk and pedestrian connectivity (59%, 274), and affordable housing (46%, 217).
- Roughly 56% (256) of respondents indicated that the City needs the most improvement in addressing housing affordability (rated "needs improvement" on a scale from "excellent" to "needs improvement").
- Respondents indicated the City is doing its best at preserving the historic character of downtown, supporting local businesses, and preserving natural areas and open space.





- Respondents had the most favorable opinion of the library (188 “excellent” and 177 “good” responses).
- As Ellsworth continues to grow and change, respondents were most concerned about the cost of living, accommodating population growth, maintaining and enhancing public infrastructure, housing affordability, and creating a variety of housing options for all stages of life.
- When asked how well Ellsworth meets their expectations as a great place to live, 63% (305) of respondents rated Ellsworth a 6 or higher on a scale from 1 to 10.
- When asked how well Ellsworth meets their expectations as a great place to visit, 62% (275) of respondents rated Ellsworth a 6 or higher on a scale from 1 to 10.

Respondents were asked what their vision is for Ellsworth over the next 10 years. Answers varied, but many responses indicated a desire for Ellsworth to be an affordable, connected city with access to jobs, education, and a variety of amenities.

## Ideas Wall and Map

### Strengths

Strengths noted by commentors include:

- The small, walkable downtown
- Diversity of businesses
- The City’s work with local partners to preserve large amounts of tree cover

### Challenges

Challenges noted by respondents included:

- Addressing housing affordability and increasing housing availability for people of all ages
- Expanding public transportation and pedestrian infrastructure
- Addressing traffic concerns
- Addressing concerns regarding an increase in short-term rentals
- Maintaining and improving water quality and watershed protection

The most “liked” challenges were related to an increase in short-term rentals (11 likes) and focusing on alternatives to car transportation (10 likes).





## Suggestions

Respondent suggestions included:

- Improving pedestrian infrastructure, public restrooms, Union River access and river walk expansion
- Creating more public events, and expanding arts and entertainment amenities
- Creating a variety of housing options to meet the needs of all residents
- Building a dog park
- Establishing more natural resource protections
- Improving infrastructure and roads
- Expanding access to open space, parks, and water resources.

The most “liked” comments were related to having a public river walk along the Union River (one river-walk-related comment received 9 likes and another received 8 likes) and incentivizing renewable energy without clear-cutting for solar (6 likes).





# City of Ellsworth Inventory and Analysis

Prepared for the City of Ellsworth  
Prepared by BerryDunn and Woodard & Curran  
Revised: December 18, 2024







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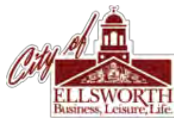
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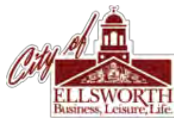
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## INTRODUCTION

Mainers and visitors alike have different perspectives on what it means to live “the way life should be”. To those who visit and live in Ellsworth (City), the City’s lush rural areas, picturesque lakefronts, and historic downtown capture the essence of Maine. Both longtime residents and one-time visitors enjoy Ellsworth’s variety of professional, recreational, and cultural opportunities, its friendly atmosphere, and its commitment to “Business, Leisure, Life.”

Ellsworth is both a gateway and a destination. It sits at the junction of Downeast, Midcoast, Mount Desert Island (MDI), and Bangor regions, providing residents and visitors access throughout Eastern Maine. The City also serves as a gateway to Acadia National Park (Acadia), one of the most visited national parks in the U.S. As a service center for Hancock County, Ellsworth offers a variety of cultural, retail, recreational, and employment opportunities to residents and those in neighboring communities.

Since the City’s 2004 Comprehensive Plan, several challenges, including the 2008 recession and COVID-19 pandemic, have impacted Ellsworth and its residents.

As a result of the pandemic, Maine saw high levels of in-migration, with people drawn to amenities in the state. In 2021, Maine saw the highest percentage of inbound moves in the United States, and the second highest in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Ellsworth’s population is estimated to have grown 4% from 2020 (8,399) to 2022 (8,732).

Following the pandemic-related decline in tourism in 2020, Ellsworth and the region quickly rebounded, seeing record numbers of visitors. In 2022, Acadia had just under four million visits—an increase of over half a million from 2019.<sup>2</sup> In 2023, Acadia had under 3.9 million visits, which is a decrease from 2021 and 2022, but is still higher than pre-pandemic

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<sup>1</sup> Valigra, Lori. Bangor Daily News. January 3, 2023. *Maine among the most popular states to move to in 2022*. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/01/03/business/maine-inbound-moving-2022>

<sup>2</sup> National Park Service. *Visitor Use Statistics*. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/>





levels.<sup>3</sup> Visitors have also been coming outside of the typical May to September tourist season. Most visitors travel through Ellsworth to reach MDI, and the City has not only seen increased in traffic, but also an uptick in the number of short-term rental properties.

The rate of housing development has not kept pace with the City's population increase. Ellsworth, along with the rest of Maine and the United States, has seen an increase in median housing prices. Prior to the pandemic, those earning the City's median income were largely able to afford the median home price. Today, the income needed is much higher than the City's median income, resulting in a widening affordability gap.

As the City looks to navigate various social, economic, and environmental changes and chart a path for the future, an understanding of current conditions, challenges, and opportunities is important to consider. This document provides a snapshot of existing conditions in Ellsworth in 2023. This analysis will serve as the basis for the development of a vision statement, policies, and actions of the City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Update (the Plan). The purpose of the Plan is to guide future growth and development in the City for the next decade. Recommendations in the Plan will provide direction for the City Council, staff, boards, committees, and other responsible agencies in updating land use ordinances and regulations, directing capital investments, and making policy decisions.

This inventory and analysis includes an assessment of current conditions, provides an overview of recent trends, and identifies key issues to further explore in the next phase of the planning process. An understanding of the City's current state as it relates to the concerns of residents and other community members will inform the direction of the Plan. Understanding current conditions and how the City has developed and evolved is critical to creating an actionable plan that will support the City in achieving its vision.

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<sup>3</sup> Trotter, Bill. Bangor Daily News. December 28, 2023. *Acadia again surpassed its pre-pandemic visits*. Accessed December 30, 2023. <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/12/28/news/hancock/acadia-surpassed-pre-pandemic-visits-joam40zk0w/>





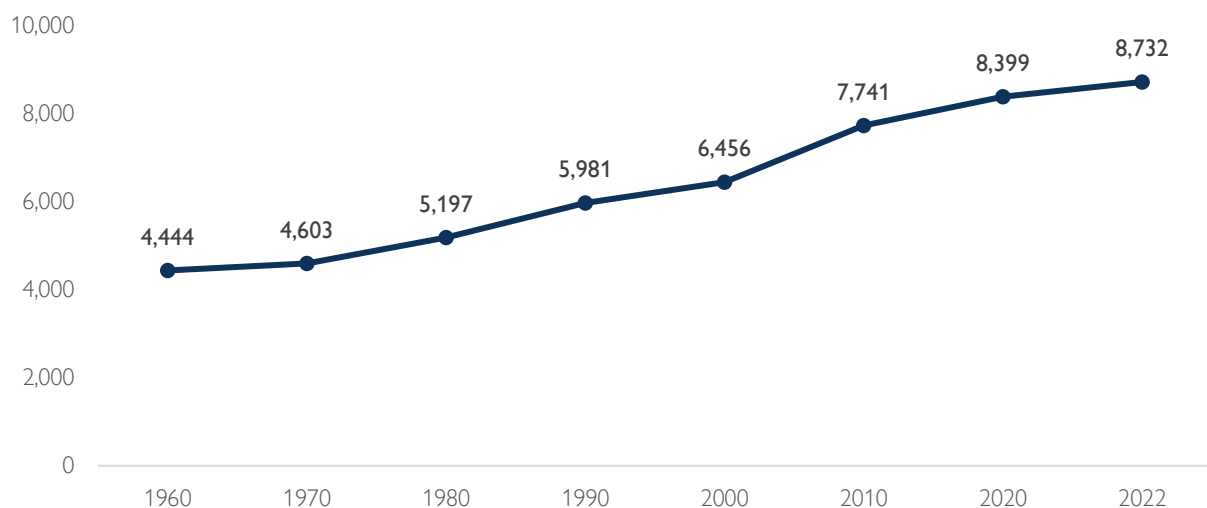
# 1. DEMOGRAPHICS

## Introduction

Understanding past and projected demographic changes is essential to planning for the community’s growth. Analysis of population and demographics in this section primarily uses data from the 2018 – 2022 American Community Survey (ACS). This section considers past trends within the context of more recent regional, national, and global impacts on demographic changes since 2020 that are not fully reflected in the data. It is important to recognize the limitations of the 2018-2022 ACS data, as there have been significant changes to the community and region in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a sharp increase in remote work, unanticipated domestic migration to Maine, a temporary decline in tourism and other industries, and other social and economic impacts. These changes are not fully captured in data from 2018 to 2022 and post-pandemic trends are not fully understood at this time.

## Population Change

Figure 1.1: Ellsworth Population Change 1960-2020



Source: U.S. Census, U.S. Census Population Estimates (2022)

Ellsworth is the gateway to Acadia and the greater Downeast region. The City is the Hancock County seat and covers 93.8 square miles. Ellsworth is bordered by the towns of Dedham, Otis, and Mariaville to the north; Hancock and Lamoine to the east; Verona Island, Orland, and Surry to the west, and Trenton to the South. Ellsworth is the largest



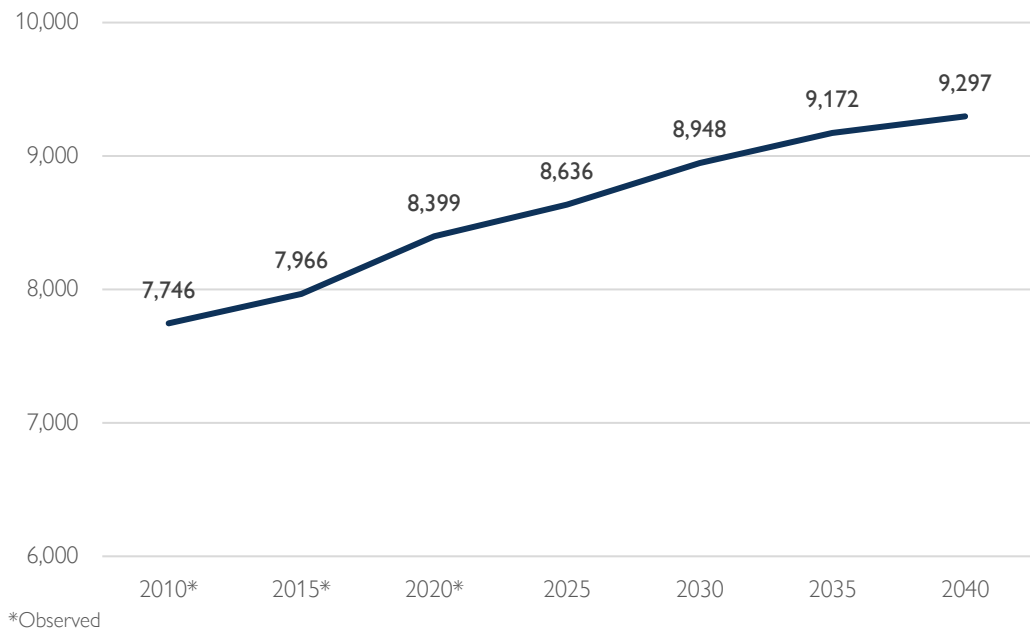


municipality in Hancock County with a population of 8,399 people in 2020. The City’s population grew by 8.5% from 2010 to 2020. Ellsworth had the fifth fastest growth rate in Hancock County behind the unorganized territory of Central Hancock (117 to 132) and towns of Cranberry Isles (141 to 160), Deer Isle (1,975 to 2,194), and Surry (1,466 to 1,632).

For the past 70 years, Ellsworth’s population has steadily increased, with some decades experiencing more significant growth than others. The City’s population increased by roughly 45% between 1960 and 2000 from 4,444 residents to 6,496 residents. The City experienced its highest growth rate between 2000 and 2010, growing nearly 20% from 6,456 residents to 7,741 residents.

Population projections from the State of Maine indicate continued growth for the City. The population is expected to continue to grow steadily through 2040. The City could expect an additional 549 residents from 2020 to 2030 and an additional 898 residents from 2020 to 2040—a 10.7% population growth rate. Based on 2022 U.S. Census population estimates, the City’s 2022 population of 8,732 residents has already surpassed the expected population growth from 2020 to 2025 (projected population of 8,636 in 2025). Hancock County’s population is also expected to increase slightly from 2020 to 2040, with the most significant period of growth expected to happen now, from 2020 to 2025.

Figure 1.2: Ellsworth Projected Population Growth



Source: Maine State Economist, Maine City and Town Population Projections



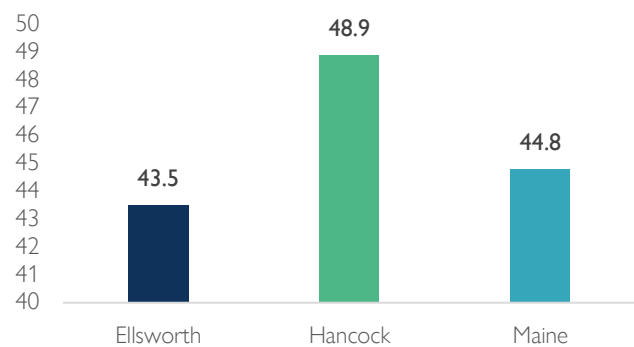


Maine saw a large jump in domestic and international immigration during the pandemic. From April 2020 to July 1, 2022, an estimated 34,237 people moved to Maine. Of these, 30,642 people moved from other states, while 3,595 people came from other countries. An estimated 1,961 people moved to Hancock County from April 2020 to July 2022 (roughly 1,863 people from other states and 98 from other countries). As a result of in-migration, Maine's population has outpaced natural population changes. From 2020 to 2022, deaths in Maine outpaced births, but in-migration to the State caused a net increase in population. In Hancock County, there were more deaths (1,612) than births (913). However, an increase in in-migration resulted in a net increase of 1,262 people in the County.

## Age

By age, Maine is the oldest state in the nation with a median age of 43.5. Ellsworth's median age is lower than both Hancock County (48.9) and the State (44.8). Ellsworth has a lower median age and a greater percentage of younger residents compared to more rural towns in Hancock County. Ellsworth's median age is supported by the age distribution analysis in Figure 1.2. The largest 5-year age cohort is adults aged 30 - 34, and the second largest cohort is adults aged 60 - 64. The 60 - 64 and 30 - 34 age cohorts experienced a significant increase from 2010 to 2022. While much of the growth in the 60 to 74-year age cohorts is due to aging of the existing population, as shown in the decline in the 45 to 59-year age cohorts, the increase in the number of residents over age 60 indicates additional growth through in-migration. More people may be moving to Ellsworth to retire, or seasonal residents may be staying in Ellsworth full-time in retirement.

Figure 1.3: Median Age Comparison



Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates





Table 1.1: Age Cohort Changes

| Age Cohort        | 2018 - 2022 | Percent of Residents<br>(2018 – 2022) | Percent Change<br>2008-2012 to 2018-2022 |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Under 5 years     | 355         | 4.2%                                  | -28.1%                                   |
| 5 to 9 years      | 440         | 5.2%                                  | 67.9%                                    |
| 10 to 14 years    | 493         | 5.8%                                  | 18.2%                                    |
| 15 to 19 years    | 414         | 4.9%                                  | 9.5%                                     |
| 20 to 24 years    | 380         | 4.5%                                  | 0.5%                                     |
| 25 to 29 years    | 413         | 4.9%                                  | 3.0%                                     |
| 30 to 34 years    | 765         | 9.0%                                  | 80.4%                                    |
| 35 to 39 years    | 683         | 8.1%                                  | 24.6%                                    |
| 40 to 44 years    | 473         | 5.6%                                  | 22.5%                                    |
| 45 to 49 years    | 437         | 5.2%                                  | -27.4%                                   |
| 50 to 54 years    | 507         | 6.0%                                  | -32.9%                                   |
| 55 to 59 years    | 542         | 6.4%                                  | -31.1%                                   |
| 60 to 64 years    | 755         | 8.9%                                  | 215.9%                                   |
| 65 to 69 years    | 692         | 8.2%                                  | 22.9%                                    |
| 70 to 74 years    | 374         | 4.4%                                  | 38.5%                                    |
| 75 to 79 years    | 272         | 3.2%                                  | 47.0%                                    |
| 80 to 84 years    | 227         | 2.7%                                  | -31.6%                                   |
| 85 years and over | 256         | 3.0%                                  | -12.6%                                   |

Source: ACS 2008-2012 5-year estimates; ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

Youth under the age of 20 are another significant age cohort in Ellsworth. The population of children under five years old declined by 28% (355 in 2022; 494 in 2012). The population of children aged 15 – 19 increased by 9.5% (414 in 2022; 378 in 2012). The cohort of children aged 5 – 14 also grew from 2012 to 2022.

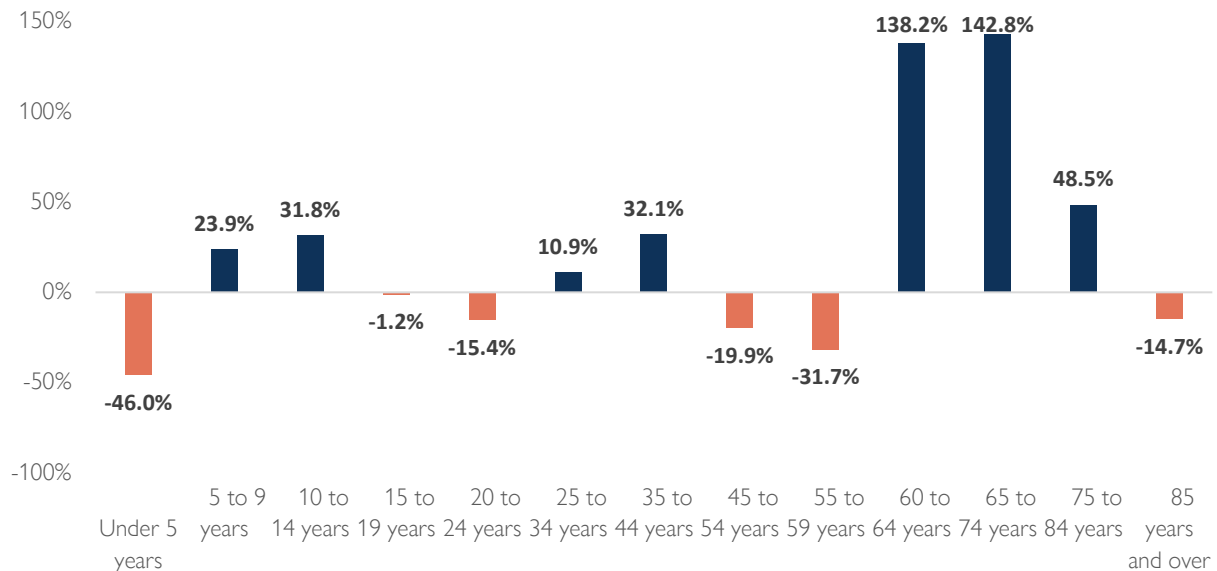


Figure 1.4: Age Distribution Comparison



Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

Figure 1.5: Population Change by Age Group 2010 – 2018-2022



Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates





## Diversity

As Ellsworth continues to grow, the population has diversified. The City and region are still predominantly white; however, the City experienced a greater shift in racial and ethnic diversity from 2010 to 2020 compared to the County. The City's Asian and American Indian and Alaskan Native populations and those identifying as two or more races increased from 2010 to 2020.

Table 1.2: Race and Ethnic Origin

|  | 2010         |                |                  | 2020         |                |                  |
|--|--------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|
|  | Ellsworth    | Hancock County | Maine            | Ellsworth    | Hancock County | Maine            |
| White alone, not Hispanic or Latino              | 95.7%        | 96.2%          | 94.4%            | 90.3%        | 94.6%          | 90.2%            |
| Asian alone                                      | 1.1%         | 0.8%           | 1.0%             | 1.4%         | 1.0%           | 1.2%             |
| Hispanic or Latino                               | 1.4%         | 1.1%           | 1.3%             | 2.2%         | 1.7%           | 2.0%             |
| American Indian and Alaska Native alone          | 0.4%         | 0.4%           | 0.6%             | 0.5%         | 0.4%           | 0.5%             |
| Black or African American alone                  | 0.6%         | 0.4%           | 1.1%             | 1.1%         | 0.6%           | 1.8%             |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone | 0.1%         | 0.0%           | 0.0%             | 0.0%         | 0.0%           | 0.0%             |
| Some other race (alone)                          | 0.1%         | 0.1%           | 0.1%             | 0.2%         | 0.4%           | 0.3%             |
| Two or more races                                | 0.7%         | 1.0%           | 1.4%             | 4.3%         | 3.7%           | 3.9%             |
| <b>Total Population</b>                          | <b>7,741</b> | <b>54,418</b>  | <b>1,328,361</b> | <b>8,399</b> | <b>55,478</b>  | <b>1,362,359</b> |

Source: U.S. Census

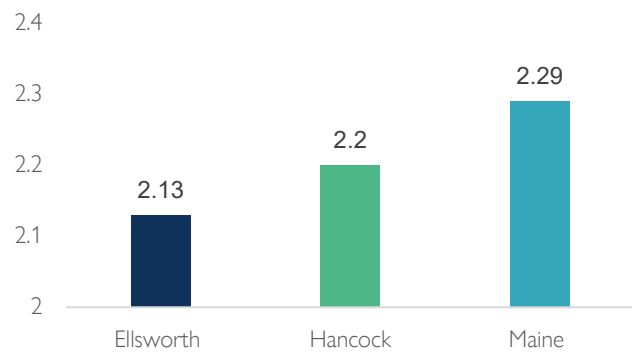




## Household Size

Ellsworth has 3,734 households and an average household size of 2.13. This is a lower average household size than the State and County. The City's average household size has declined since 2010 (2.36), which is representative of shifts in age cohorts. Both the decline in the youth population (0 to 19 years) and the increase in residents over age 60 have led to smaller household sizes. Similarly, roughly 22% of Ellsworth residents live alone.

Figure 1.7: Average Household Size



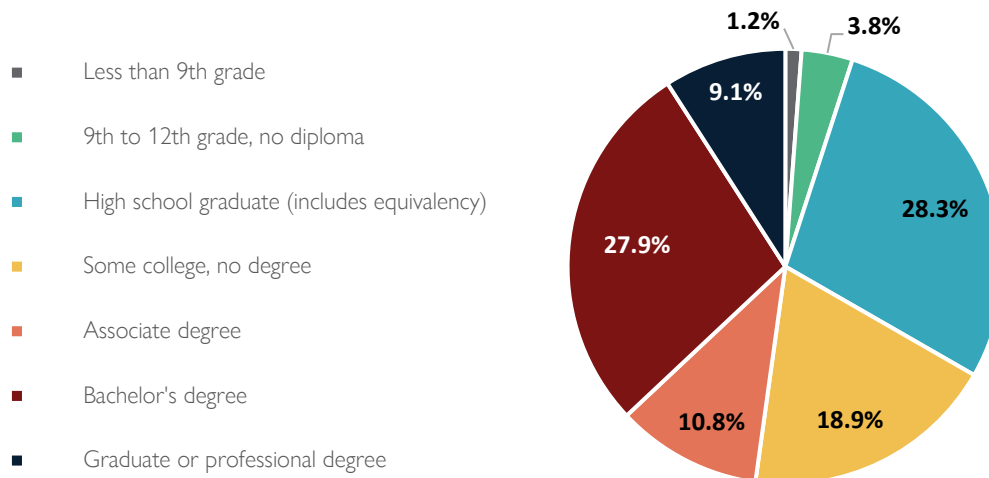
Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

## Educational Attainment

Approximately 37% of Ellsworth residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Roughly the same share (33.3%) of the population did not continue education past high school. About 30% of the population has an associate degree or some college experience. Additionally, educational attainment in Ellsworth has increased. Today, 95% of Ellsworth residents are high school graduates or higher, compared to 88.3% in 2012. Additionally, 37% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30.4% in 2012, with more residents holding associate or bachelor's degrees in 2022 than in 2012 and fewer residents who did not complete high school or hold a high school diploma only. Typically, communities with higher levels of educational attainment see lower levels of unemployment and higher wages.



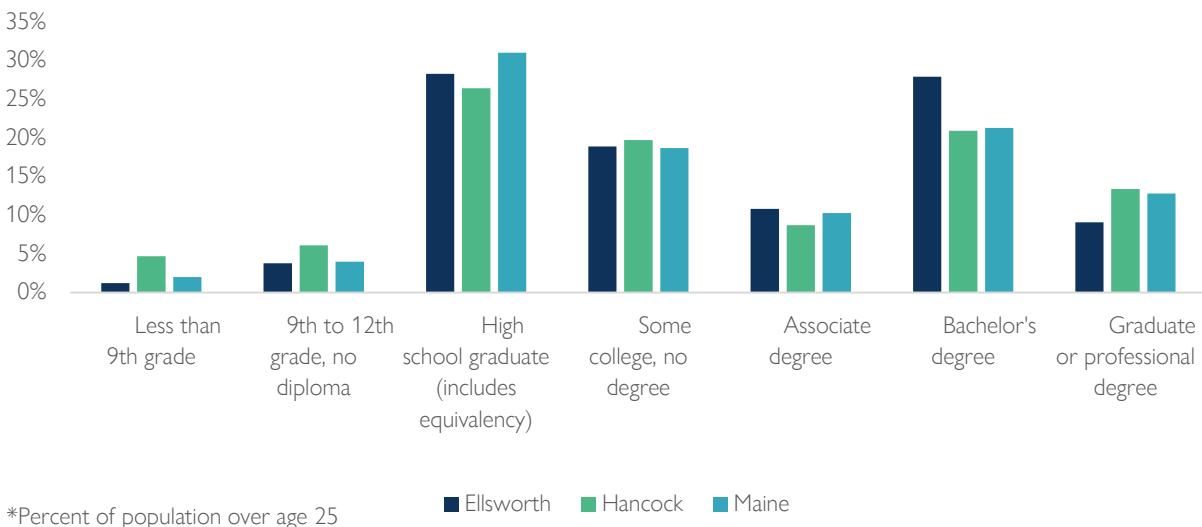
Figure 1.8: Educational Attainment



Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

A larger share of Ellsworth's population attended some college or obtained an associate or bachelor's degree than residents in the County or State; however, there are fewer residents with graduate or professional degrees than the County or State.

Figure 1.9: Educational Attainment by Region\*



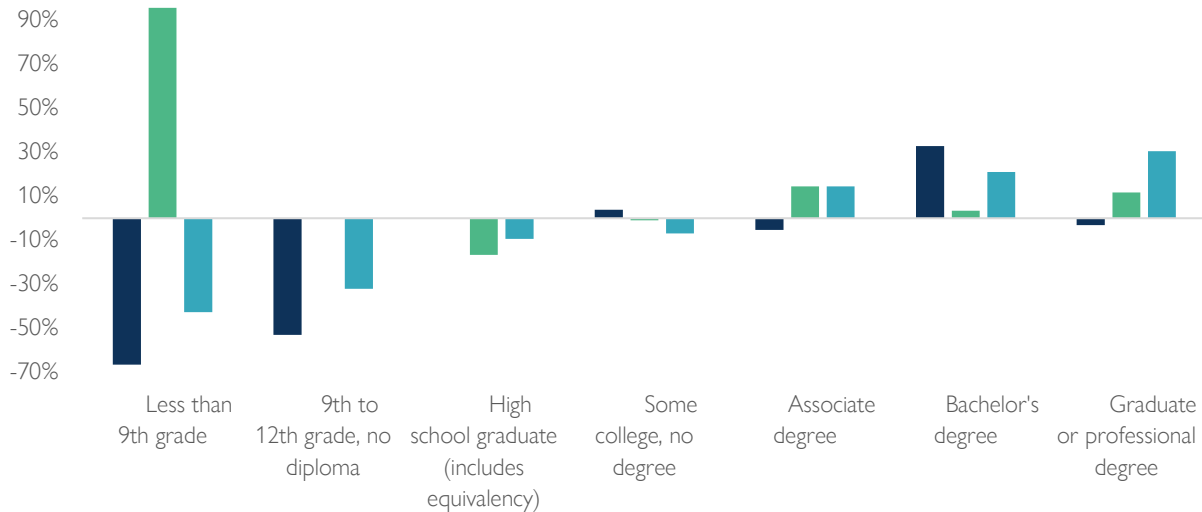
Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates





Figure 1.10: Educational Attainment by Region Change Over Time\*

(Percent change from 2012 to 2022)



\*Percent of population over age 25

■ Ellsworth ■ Hancock County ■ Maine

Source: ACS 2008-2012 5-year estimates; ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

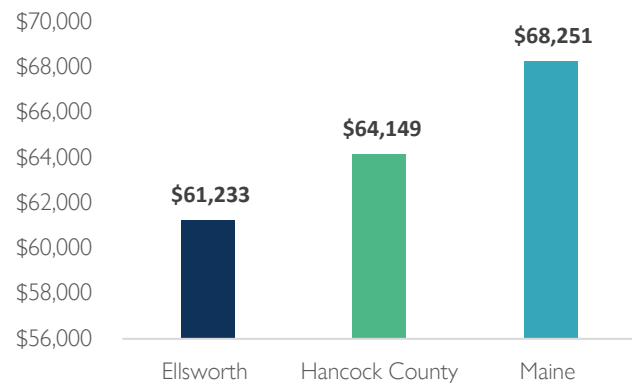
## Income and Poverty

Ellsworth has a lower median household income than both the County and the State. Ellsworth's median income is \$61,233, which is 4.7% lower than the County (\$64,149) and 11.5% lower than the State (\$68,251).

In terms of wealth distribution, Ellsworth has a higher percentage of households with an annual household income under \$35,000 compared to the County and

State. Roughly 30% of Ellsworth residents make less than \$35,000 per year. Ellsworth has a smaller percentage (27.5%) of households earning over \$100,000 than the County (29%) and State (32.5%).

Figure 1.11: Median Household Income

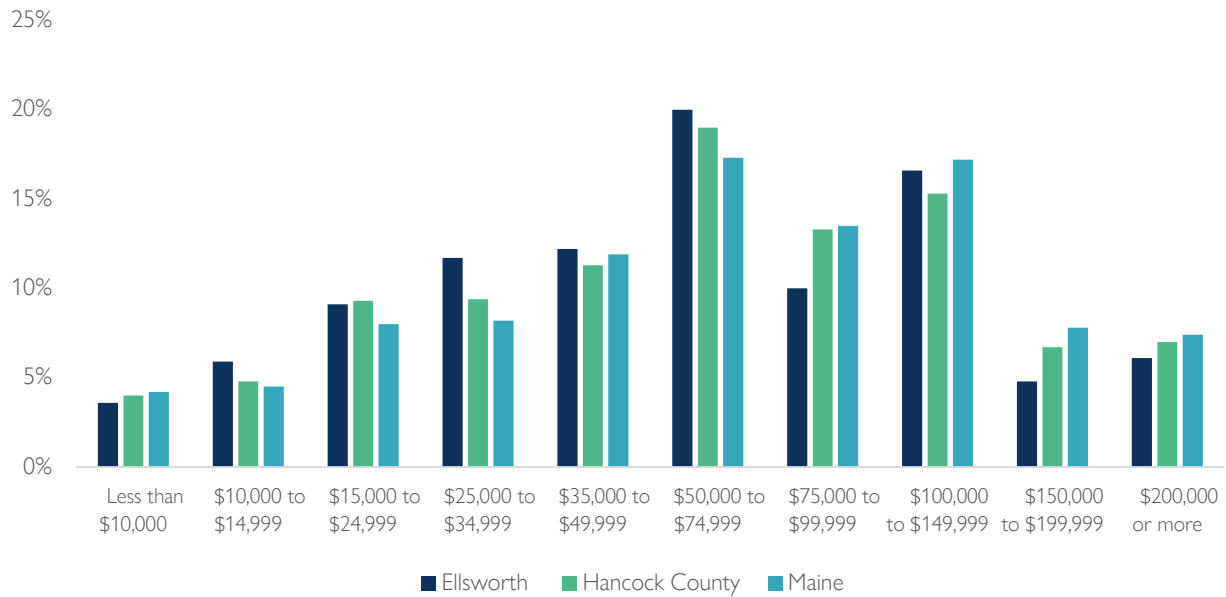


Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates





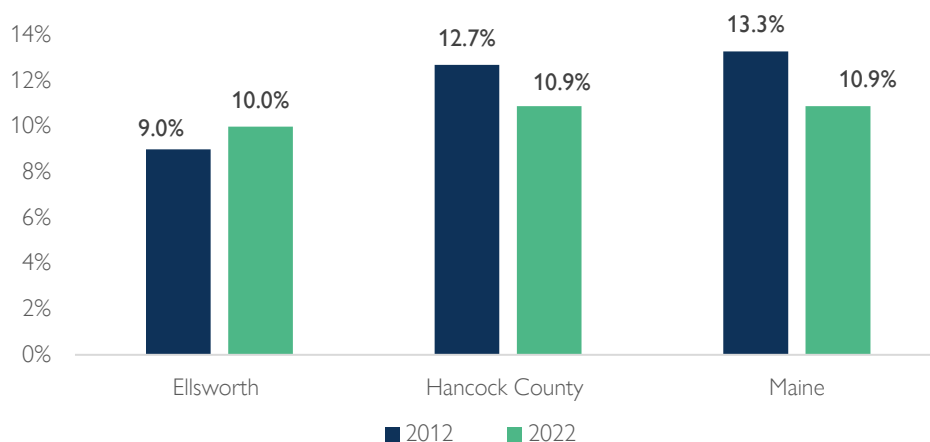
Figure 1.12: Income Breakdown by Region



Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

Roughly 10% of the City’s population lives below the federal poverty line—a lower percentage of the population when compared to the County (11%) and the State (11%), but an increase. Median household income has increased in Ellsworth since 2010. In 2010, the median income was \$50,099, which has increased approximately 22% from 2010 to 2022.

Figure 1.13: Poverty Rate



Source: ACS 2008-2012 5-year estimates; ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

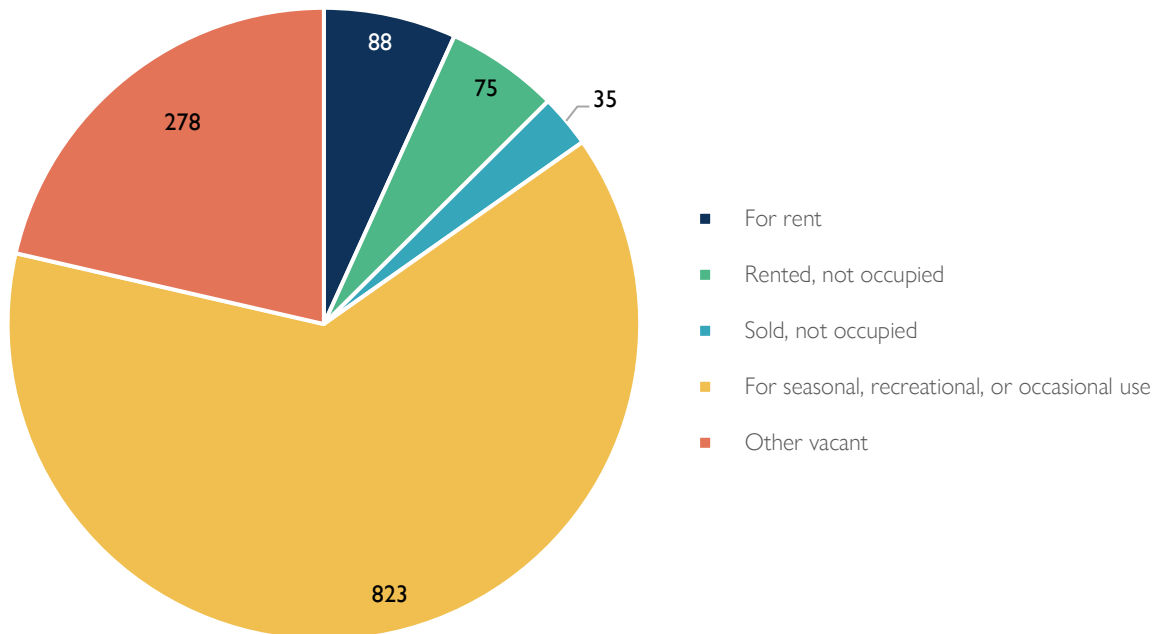




## Seasonal Population

In addition to the City’s year-round population, Ellsworth’s population experiences an increase during the summer tourism season. The U.S. Census does not count seasonal residents and visitors in the City’s total population count, and the total number of visitors to Ellsworth can be difficult to track. The U.S. Census does provide information on vacant housing, which includes seasonally occupied housing. The total number of seasonally vacant units has increased slightly over the past 10 years. The 2018 – 2022 ACS 5-year estimates project 823 seasonal vacant units in Ellsworth. The number of seasonal units has increased slightly in the past decade (714 units per the 2011 ACS 5-year estimates) and more significantly since 2000 (543 units per the 2000 U.S. Census). These estimates do not account for short-term visits like hotels, motels, RV parks, campgrounds, and short-term rental properties. Based on the number of seasonally vacant housing units, the City likely experiences an increase in population of 2,000 or more during the peak summer season, not including short- and long-term visitors staying in other lodging within the City.

Figure 1.14: Breakdown of Vacant Housing Units in Ellsworth

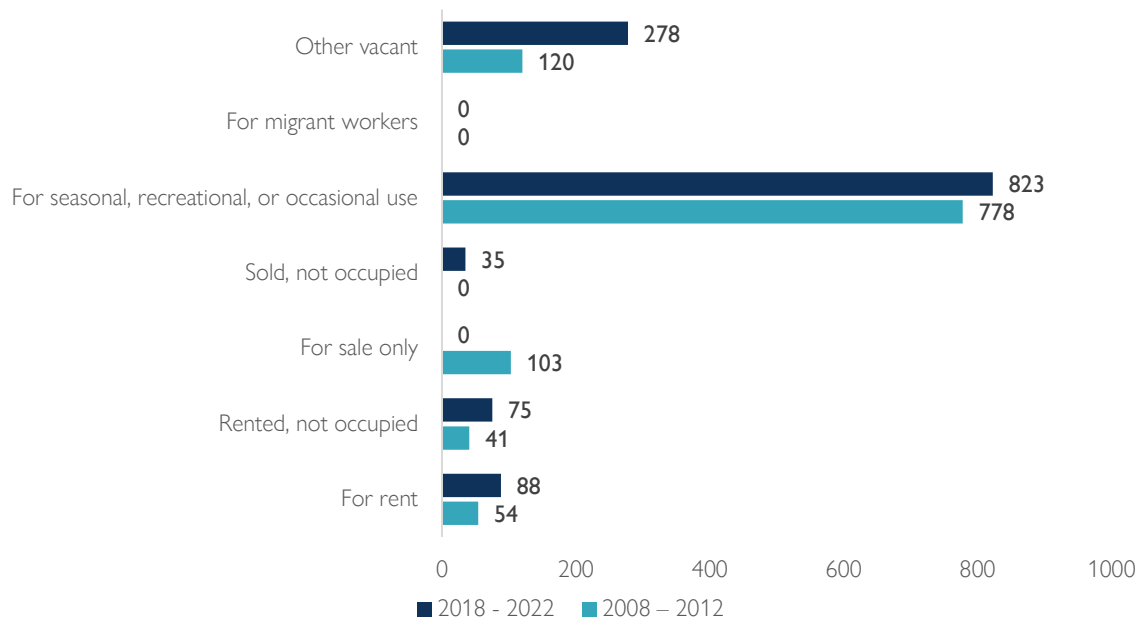


Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates





Figure 1.15: Vacant Housing Units in Ellsworth Change Over Time



Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates, ACS 2008-2012 5-year estimates

## Impact on Services

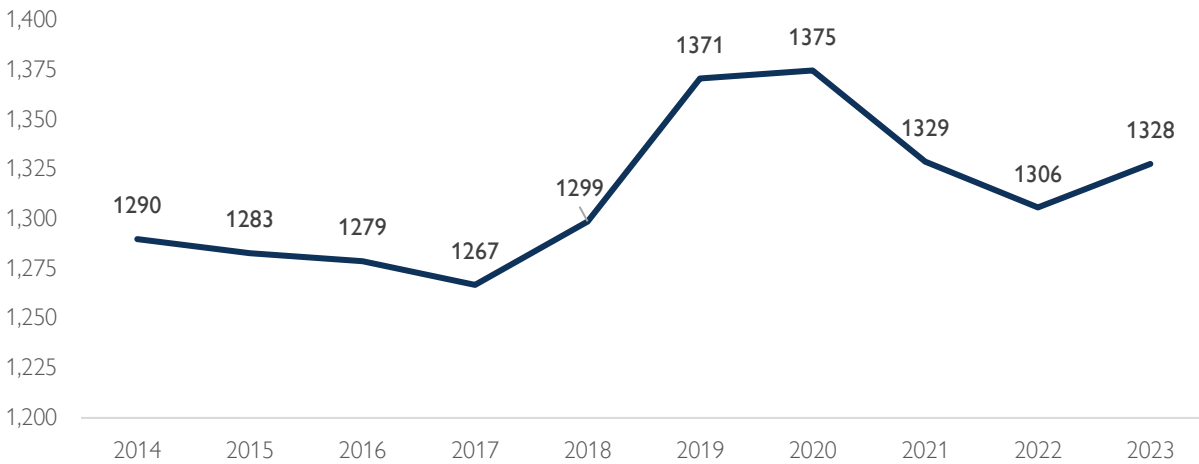
The City's population has seen steady growth, and it is expected that this trend will continue. In addition to in-migration to Ellsworth and the state, the City has seen its 60+ population increase faster than other age demographics.

Enrollment in Ellsworth Public Schools has declined since the COVID-19 pandemic, decreasing roughly 6% from 2020 to 2022. There was a slight enrollment increase during the 2022 – 2023 school year. From 2020 to 2021, the number of homeschooled students increased from 50 to 85. The number of homeschooled students declined to 81 in 2022 and to 70 in 2023. The population of children under five years old has decreased more than 50%, which will likely impact school enrollment in the future. Declining school enrollment adversely impacts funding for the school district.

As a result of the pandemic and online instruction, the number of students withdrawn from Ellsworth Public Schools in 2020 – 2021 and 2021 – 2022 school years increased significantly. Since 2020, there have been several students re-enrolled in the system, though not at the rate they were withdrawn. The 2023 – 2024 school year is the first year since the pandemic where more students were re-enrolled in Ellsworth school at a higher rate than they were withdrawn.

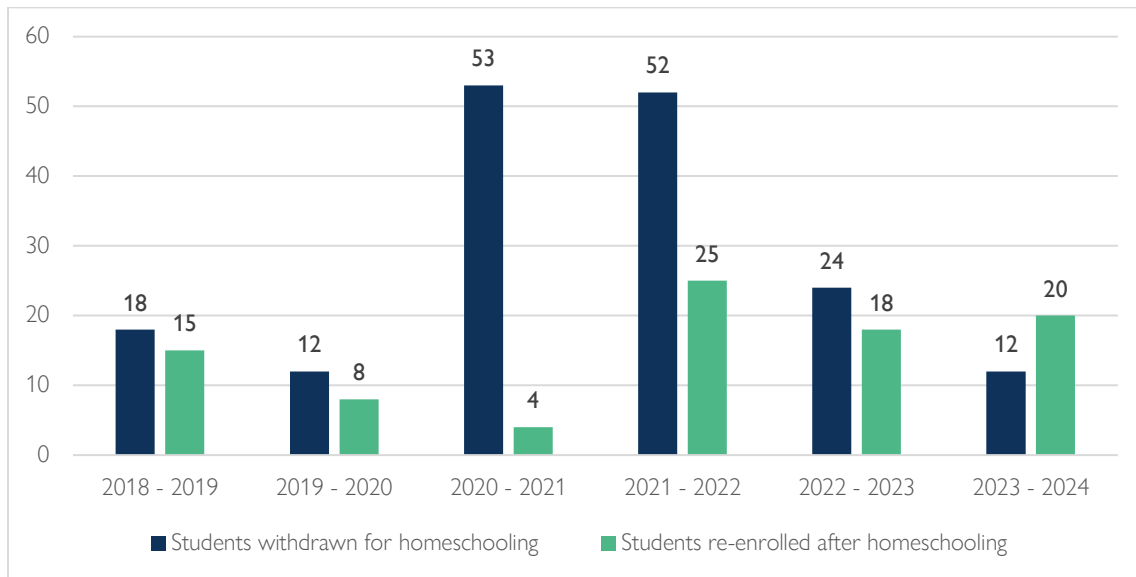


Figure 1.16: Ellsworth Public School Enrollment Overtime



Source: Maine Department of Education

Figure 1.17: Home Schooling Trends



Source: City of Ellsworth School Department

Shifting demographics are also changing the type of housing that is needed. With a decrease in average household size and a growing senior population, there is a need for smaller housing units with access to transit, recreation, and other public and social services. Future resource planning should consider building capacity to provide support services for the aging population, including fire and emergency medical services (EMS) as the need for these support services is anticipated to grow as the population ages.





In addition, an aging population—combined with a growing unhoused population—has increased demand for the City’s to provide services for residents, on top of an already growing population. Overall, Maine’s population is also aging, but Ellsworth remains younger than the State’s and County’s median age.

Ellsworth has smaller portions of young to middle-aged adults. Adults 20 – 34 years old remains one of the smallest age groups in Ellsworth. Providing diverse housing types and options may help support younger adults to live in Ellsworth which will allow growth of the labor force. More diverse housing types would also help to provide the aging population with housing options to meet their changing needs as well as help to address housing for the City’s economically diverse workforce, including City staff, police, fire, and EMS staff, and school employees.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Providing housing to support a growing and changing population and to continue supporting economic growth in the City and region is the greatest challenge related to demographic changes. An aging population, smaller household size, and fewer households with children all have an impact on the type of housing and services that residents need and desire. Providing services to meet the changing needs of the community will continue to be a priority, including helping to ensure that schools are well funded, providing and coordinating access to social services, offering recreational and educational programs and opportunities for all residents, and continuing to improve transportation options within the City and regionally.

## Sources

Ellsworth City Health Dashboard

Maine Department of Education

Maine State Economist, Maine City and Town Population Projections, 2040

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

U.S. Census

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

U.S. Census Bureau, County population totals and components of change: 2020 – 2022





## 2. NATURAL AND WATER RESOURCES

### Introduction

Ellsworth has a long history and commitment to its water and natural setting. Historically, Passamaquoddy and Penobscot tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy used the Union River to hunt, fish, and trade. Over time, the area around the water was developed, focusing on ship building and cargo transport. Wharfs and lumber mills dotted the banks of the Union River and became the central area now known as downtown Ellsworth. People continued to move to the region because of the abundance of land and fishing. Today, the water and natural resources are a driving factor that draw residents and visitors to Ellsworth. As the gateway to Acadia National Park, Ellsworth experiences a high volume of visitors passing through the City which puts additional stresses on natural and water resources. A thorough understanding of Ellsworth's natural environment and its relationships with the built environment are essential for making land use decisions and meeting community goals. Ellsworth has a rich diversity of natural and water resources and is committed to protecting the quality and managing the quantity of these resources. Ellsworth's natural and water resources include marine habitats, freshwater and saltwater wetlands, rivers, lakes, aquifers, ponds, and estuaries. Protecting Ellsworth's natural and water resources continues to be a priority while the City balances growth and transient populations.

### Geology

The Maine Geological Survey describes the geology of Ellsworth consisting generally of till and small wetland clusters around Branch Lake, Green Lake, Graham Lake, and the Union River. The till is light-to-dark non-sorted to poorly sorted mixture of clay, silt, sand, pebbles, cobbles, and boulders. There are Presumpscot formations where the Union River meets the Union River Bay as well as by Graham Lake. This is a glaciomarine silt, clay, and sand deposited on the late-glacial sea floor. In places, mineral may be reworked as sea level regressed, by wave and current action, yielding small areas of thin, unmappable deposits of sand and gravel coating the surface. This is a veneer over bedrock that is generally called blue clay and tends to be a muddy layer.

These surficial deposits are the unconsolidated earth materials that overlie bedrock. They cover a large percentage of the State and include sediments deposited by wind, water, and glacial ice. Glacial deposits are by far the most abundant surficial materials in Maine.





Consideration of surficial materials is important for land use planning. This layer impacts well drilling and the properties of these materials affect their values as aquifers, landfills, or sewage disposal sites, construction sites, and sources of gravel and other resources. The area around Green Lake has glaciomarine undifferentiated deposits surrounding the coastline. These are massive to stratified and cross-stratified sand, silt, clay, and minor gravel, which are late-glacial seafloor sediments formed in relatively shallow water.

Ellsworth also has many bedrock exposure outcrops that are evidence of receding glaciers that scraped and formed the landscape. The Agassiz Rock Formation is located in Ellsworth, which is a famous rock formation that, when studied in 1864, provided evidence of glacial action and proved North America was once covered by ice sheets.

## Critical and Important Natural Resources

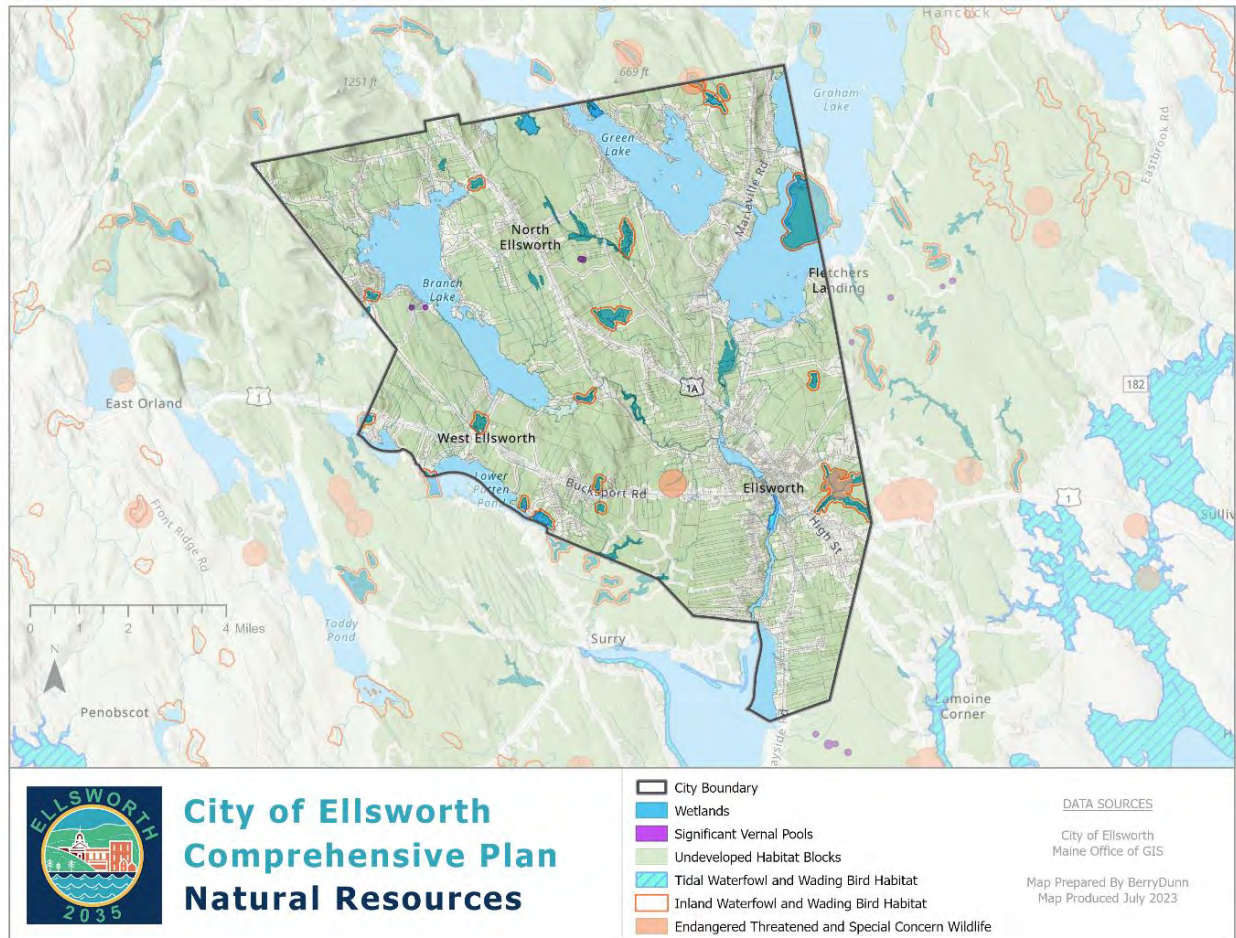
The availability of high-quality habitats for plants, animals, and fish is essential to maintaining abundant and diverse populations for ecological, economic, and recreational purposes. Ellsworth is home to multiple Significant Wildlife Habitat types, rare plant and animal species, and vulnerable Natural Communities. Within the Ellsworth boundary there is one known rare, threatened, or endangered species occurrences based on sightings, the Great Blue Heron. The Great Blue Heron is a Species of Special Concern, which despite not meeting the criteria for an endangered species, is particularly vulnerable and could easily become an endangered, threatened, or extirpated species due to restricted distribution, low or declining numbers, specialized habitat needs or limits, or other factors. The Upland Sandpiper, a threatened species is also located just outside Ellsworth's boundary in Lamoine and Surry. The Federal Endangered Species Act requires actions authorized, funded, or carried out by federal agencies be reviewed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) has classified and distinguished 104 different natural community types that collectively cover the state's landscape. In Ellsworth, Nantucket Shadblow is a Threatened Species along Gilpatrick Brook. Species of Special Concern include Bog Bedstraw, close to Sand Beach in Branch Lake, and Mudwort and Estuary Bur-marigold along Union River close to downtown. These are species that are rare in Maine, but not sufficiently rare to be considered Threatened or Endangered. There is also a Raised Level Bog Ecosystem at the island in Graham Lake at the Ellsworth/Mariaville border. Raised Level Bogs are flats with mostly closed drainage. There are various Wildlife Wetlands, Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitats and Tidal Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitats along the various rivers, streams, and brooks. There are also numerous



Candidate Deer Wintering Areas that are forested areas possibly used by deer for shelter during snow and cold areas. These critical and important natural resources need to be effectively protected from future development impacts.

Figure 2.1: Natural Resources



Source: City of Ellsworth, Maine Office of GIS

## Landforms and Watersheds

All land is in a watershed, which is a defined land area that directs and channels water, both rain and snowmelt, to creeks, streams, and rivers and eventually to discharges, like the ocean or a bay. As the water flows, it impacts people, land, and wildlife and is critical to the overall health and well-being of communities. Rain and snowmelt that runs off the land can pick up pollutants, which have adverse effects on the ecology of the watershed and, ultimately, on their receiving waterbody. The more developed and impermeable surfaces





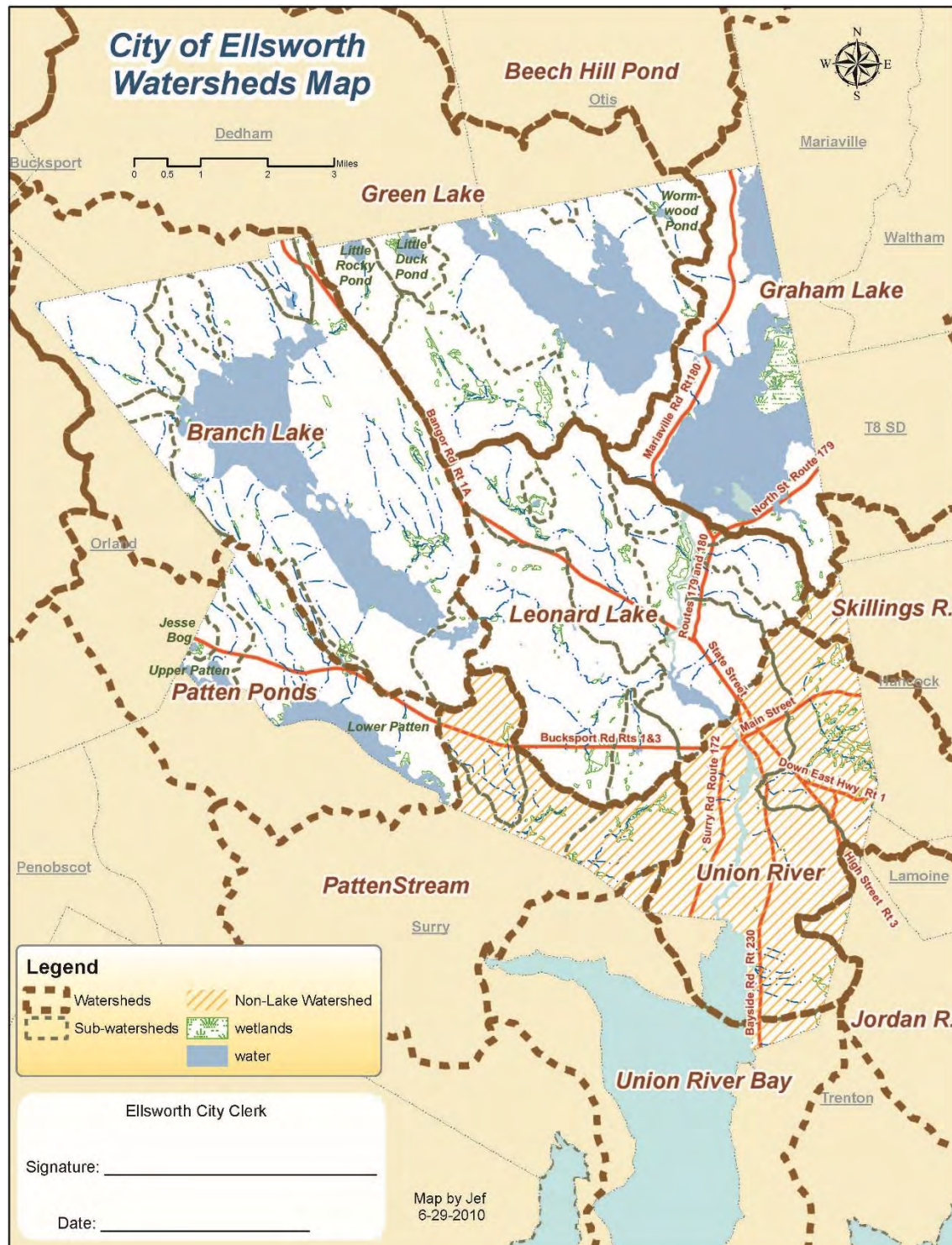
that are created, the more natural landscapes and hydrology are changed. Watershed management is challenging, as watersheds tend to cross municipal boundaries and require intergovernmental coordination and partnerships.

Land use, municipal operations, infrastructure, and individual users greatly impact the quality of water within a watershed. The Clean Water Act requires the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to identify waters that fail to meet State and federal water quality standards. Ellsworth has one DEP 303(d) listed Urban Impaired Stream. Card Brook has been identified as not meeting DEP standards in dissolved oxygen and macroinvertebrate bioassessments. While only Card Brook is listed with this designation, the City's Green Plan notes inadequate water quality data, as well as difficulty in assessing the overall health of Ellsworth's lakes and ponds. The Green Plan was released in 2021 and was developed by volunteers with a steering committee that included the City of Ellsworth. The Green Plan presumes that other water bodies are impaired, and highlights Card Brook and Graham Lake as priority areas where more data and intervention are needed. The plan emphasizes Ellsworth's commitment to healthy waters within the City and the bay.





Figure 2.2: City of Ellsworth Watersheds Map



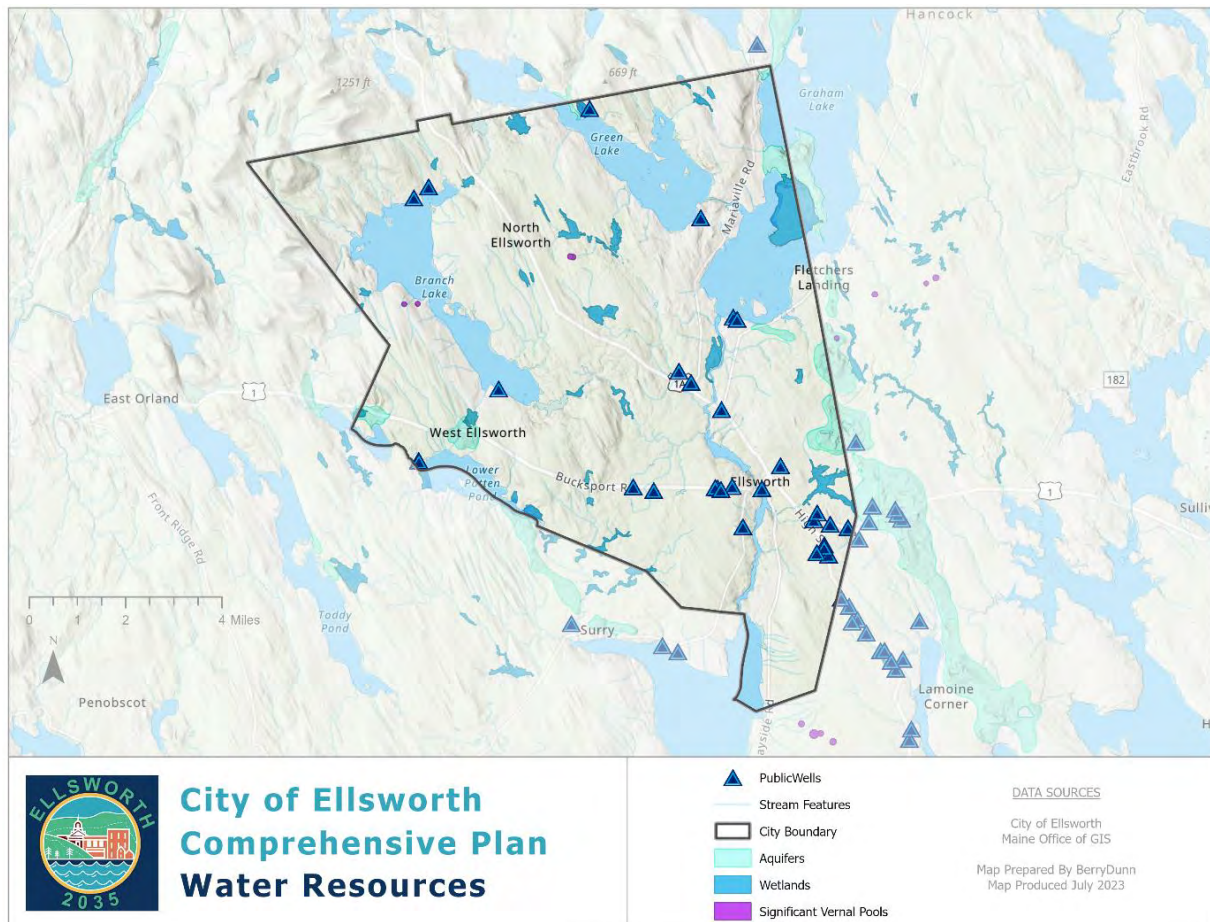
Source: City of Ellsworth





Ellsworth falls almost entirely in the Union River watershed, which covers most of Hancock County. Its headwaters are at the north end of Graham Lake where the east and west branches converge. DEP reported that water quality in the Union River estuary meets standards for dissolved oxygen and did not show signs of excessive nutrient concentrations.

Figure 2.3: Water Resources



Source: City of Ellsworth, Maine Office of GIS

There is a small portion of the southeast corner of Ellsworth that falls in the Eastern Coastal watershed that drains directly into the bay. Due to good water quality, no large-scale watershed management plan has been undertaken for the Union River watershed. The Green Plan has identified the need for a watershed survey and management plan to help ensure water quality standards are sustained and other goals are addressed. In March 2022, the Branch Lake Association completed a Branch Lake watershed-based protection plan. In 2023, the City, in partnership with the Hancock County Soil & Water District and the





Branch Lake Association, began a project to reduce erosion and mitigate stormwater runoff into the lake by providing technical assistance to property owners. The project is funded, in part, by a federal grant and will including assistance with site planning and implementation of recommended stormwater management practices.<sup>4</sup>

## Union River

The Union River is the spine of Ellsworth and a significant natural and water resource in the region. The Union River watershed originates north of Ellsworth in an undeveloped area of Hancock County at the north end of Graham Lake. The Union River watershed is designated as a Focus Area of State Ecological Significance because of its excellent water quality and support for several endangered species.<sup>5</sup> The 21.9-mile river forms north of Graham Lake, travels 13 miles through Graham Lake to the dam at the lake's outlet, continues south through Ellsworth, and flows through Leonard Lake to another dam just above downtown Ellsworth. At downtown, the river reaches tidewater and flows south as an estuary for five miles to its mouth at Union River Bay, out to Blue Hill Bay and, eventually, to the Atlantic Ocean. The dams have limited or inadequate fish migration measures and have greatly impacted the sea-run fish that once swam freely.

## Branch Lake

Branch Lake is a 2,702-acre lake located entirely within the City of Ellsworth. The 30.7-square mile watershed includes land in Ellsworth, Orland, and Dedham. Branch Lake is fed by several tributaries that include Tannery Brook, Dean Brook, John Gray Brook, Winkumpaugh Brook, Rocky Pond Brook, Howard Brook, and several smaller unnamed tributaries. Water leaving Branch Lake flows through Mill Pond at the south end of the lake, over the Branch Lake Dam and through Branch Lake Stream to Leonard Lake, flowing into Union River, into the Union River Bay and eventually, into the Mount Desert Narrows in the Atlantic Ocean. The Branch Lake watershed contains 3,220 acres of lakes and ponds, 44 miles of streams, 601 acres of freshwater wetlands, and 2,371 acres of riparian habitat. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) reports 21 species of fish in Branch Lake, including salmon, brown trout, and smallmouth bass. Branch Lake is

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<sup>4</sup> Mount Desert Islander. May 31, 2023. *Branch lake watershed project underway*. Accessed August 29, 2023. [https://www.mdislander.com/news/maritime/branch-lake-watershed-project-underway/article\\_2213cb1e-ff06-11ed-bffe-5f7696b344d7.html](https://www.mdislander.com/news/maritime/branch-lake-watershed-project-underway/article_2213cb1e-ff06-11ed-bffe-5f7696b344d7.html)

<sup>5</sup> Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry, *Beginning with Habitat Focus Area Map*





considered a critical habitat for Atlantic salmon and a potential habitat for alewives. Fish passage is currently blocked by the dam.

In 2010 The City purchased 447 acres of land surrounding Branch Lake and placed the property into a conservation easement under Frenchman Bay Conservancy to protect lake water quality from potential impacts of development. Branch Lake serves as the public water supply managed by the City, serving roughly 3,300 residents and commercial and institutional users. Despite being the City's drinking water source, the lake is still used for recreational boating. Boats must pass an inspection before boating on the lake and diesel boats are not allowed. Branch Lake State Park is located on the west shore and has a boat launch and beach area. The land cover in the watershed is forest, rural housing, farmland, a commercial campground, and a YMCA camp.

### Card Brook

Card Brook is a Class B freshwater stream that is a small tributary to the Union River. The Card Brook watershed covers 4,217 acres in the City of Ellsworth and the towns of Hancock and Lamoine. The brook begins in a wetland area west of Macquinn Road in Hancock and flows across Route 1 and past a golf course before entering a large wetland across the Ellsworth municipal boundary. The small streams that flow into Card Brook meet in the wetland, and an impaired segment begins downstream at this point.

A 1.2-mile section of Card Brook has been designated an Urban Impaired Stream by Maine DEP for not meeting water quality standards for bacteria, dissolved oxygen, and aquatic life use. Card Brook continues under High Street and travels through heavily developed areas before flowing into the Union River estuary near the Ellsworth Marina. The Clean Water Act requires that all 303 (d)-listed waters undergo a total maximum daily load (TMDL) assessment that describes the impairments and establishes a target to guide the measures needed to restore water quality. In 2010, a TMDL assessment was completed for Card Brook and found that stormwater runoff from impervious cover is the largest source of pollution and stream channel alterations. It also found that exposed tree roots along the banks of Card Brook, an unstable streambank, and an over-widened stream channel were clear signs of degraded habitat. The TMDL assessment also identifies the next step to develop a watershed management plan.

### Graham Lake

Graham Lake is a large artificial lake on the lower Union River that was created by the construction of a series of dams in 1922. The first hydroelectric dam failed and was rebuilt





in 1999. The dam has since been acquired by PPL Corporation to generate electricity. Graham Lake has a surface area of approximately 9,383 acres and an average depth of 17 feet. The catchment area of the lake is approximately 500 square miles and is surrounded by forest land and rural residential areas. Smallmouth bass, white perch, chain pickerel, landlocked salmon, and brook trout call the lake home.

Maine DEP listed Graham Lake as an impaired waterway due to water-level fluctuations caused by the dams and low water clarity. Further data is required to properly identify and address water quality. Friends of Graham Lake (FOGL) has petitioned Maine DEP to develop turbidity standards to protect Maine waters. The Green Lake National Fish Hatchery sits between Green Lake and Graham Lake and is a federally run large-scale cold-water hatchery. Green Lake National Fish Hatchery works with partners for the conservation recovery of Atlantic salmon in the Gulf of Maine Distinct Population Segment. The hatchery is open to the public for self-guided tours, and there are surrounding trails and public use areas.

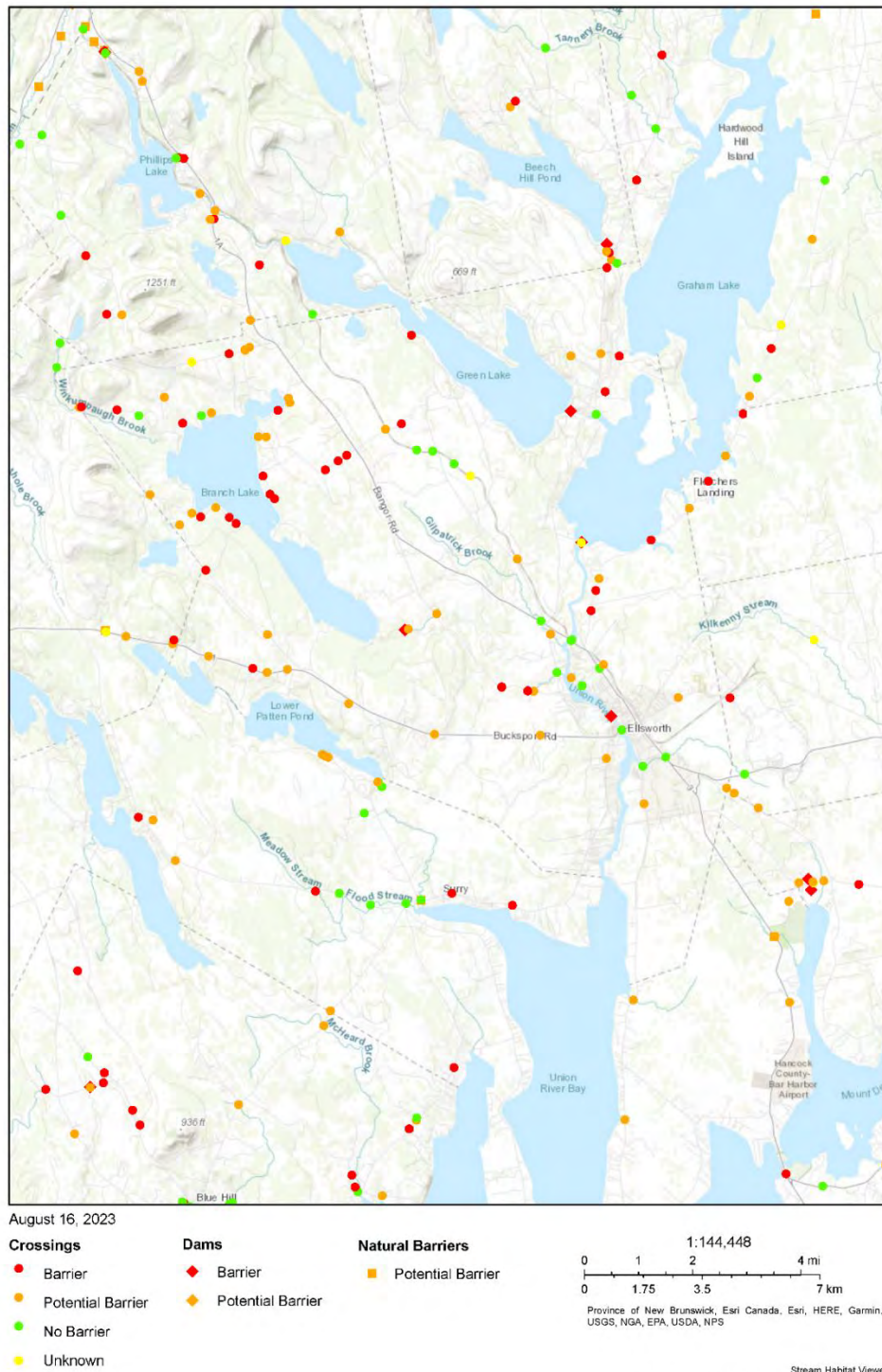
## Stream Crossings

Stream crossings maintain the continuity of streams to ensure volume control, accommodate wildlife, and protect stream health. Stream continuity is critical to stream health and the protection of wildlife, including invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. Typical stream crossing problems include undersized crossings, shallow crossings, or perched crossings that are easily blocked by debris; create scouring, erosion, and high flow velocities; and limit habitat and migration.

There are currently 80 culverts that convey streams across roads and other structures in Ellsworth, as shown on the Maine Stream Habitat Viewer. These culverts and their conditions have been mapped by the Maine Coastal Program's Stream Connectivity Work Group, which is a partnership among state, federal, industry, and non-government organizations working cooperatively to improve Maine's stream restoration efforts. Currently, Ellsworth has a variety of road stream crossings that have barriers, potential barriers, and no barriers. There are also three dams in Ellsworth disrupting stream continuity and affecting habitat and fish migration. Ellsworth is committed to improving crossings, as the need arises, to benefit fish and wildlife. The Department of Public Works addresses stormwater and infrastructure maintenance.



Figure 2.4: Stream Habitat Map



Source: Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, Stream Habitat Viewer





Maine DEP's Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program provides grants that match local funding for upgrading culverts at stream crossings on municipal roads. Projects funded through the program benefit public infrastructure and safety by replacing failing culverts at risk of washout or collapse. They also reduce flooding and increase resiliency with the installation of larger, higher capacity, and more long-lasting crossings and benefit fish and wildlife by opening and reconnecting stream habitats fragmented by undersized and impassable culverts. Ellsworth has taken advantage of this program and was awarded a 2022 Municipal Stream Crossing Grant for Red Bridge Road.

## Surface Waters

Ellsworth has abundant surface waters (lakes, rivers, wetlands, reservoirs, creeks, estuaries, and ocean). Healthy surface waters are a crucial resource because of the ecological, social, scenic, and recreational uses and benefits. The State has developed a classification system for lakes, rivers, and salt waters. These systems are based on standards for uses such as drinking water supply, fishery habitat, and recreational uses. The Union River, Branch Lake, Green Lake, Graham Lake, Lower Patten Pond, Leonard Lake, and various wetlands are the primary features in Ellsworth's surface water network.

### Public Access

The prominence of private residential waterfront land limits public access. Ellsworth is committed to connecting the community to the waterfront and actively seeks opportunities to increase physical and visual access. There are several key parks, open spaces and trailways that provide public access to the water. Waterfront access has been expanded and enhanced over the years. Waterfront parcels are considered for conservation and resiliency strategies as well.

### Ellsworth Harbor Park and Marina

The Ellsworth Harbor Park and Marina are located on the previous wastewater treatment facility site and became the City's predominant waterfront park after the wastewater treatment facility relocated in 2012. Harbor Park is approximately 4 acres and features a large grass area with shade trees, grills, and picnic tables. There are also big and small gazebos for shade and events that can be reserved through the Harbormaster. There are roughly 50 parking spaces, restrooms, seasonal events, and the Harbormaster's building. The park has rotating food truck offerings and is a popular spot for locals and visitors. Ellsworth and The Grand (the City's local theater and nonprofit cultural organization)





sponsor free Friday night concerts in the summer where regional bands play in the gazebo. The marina has a launching ramp, docks, fueling station, power supply, pump-out infrastructure, trash, and free Wi-Fi. There are 40 moorings, two of which are transient.

### Ellsworth Riverwalk

The Ellsworth Riverwalk is a 0.2 mile out and back waterfront trail located behind the Ellsworth Library. It had historically been a short, makeshift path that was formalized through a partnership with Frenchman Bay Conservancy, Heart of Ellsworth, Ellsworth Garden Club, Green Ellsworth, and the City of Ellsworth. The first 165 feet of the trail are Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible and ends in an overlook. Occasionally, the Ellsworth Riverwalk will incorporate a story walk—sponsored by the Stephen and Tabitha King Foundation in partnership with the Ellsworth Library—to provide a literary and art display along the trail. The trail offers water access and sweeping views of Union River and the Ellsworth Power House and Dam.

### Jordan Homestead

The Jordan family previously owned the Jordan Homestead Preserve for more than 200 years before it was acquired by Frenchman Bay Conservancy in 2017. The 31-acre waterfront property, with 3,000 feet of frontage on Union River, has a 1-mile lollipop trail, mature forestland, Whittaker Brook, historic family cemetery, heritage garden, and views of the Union River. This is one of the few waterfront parcels in the City with public waterfront access and frontage. There is a small unstriped gravel parking lot that can accommodate six to eight cars. There is a community tree nursey for education programs with local schools and community workshops run in partnership by the Ellsworth Garden Club and Frenchman Bay Conservancy.

### Indian Point Preserve and Trail

This 12.7-acre preserve was acquired by the Frenchman Bay Conservancy and has a 0.75-mile one way trail with scenic views of Union River and downtown Ellsworth. The trail winds through woods, bog bridges, and overlooks. Card Brook goes through the preserve and discharges into Union River. Picnic tables are available at the end of the trail. There is a small informal parking pull-off at the trailhead. The trail leads to the shoreline with waterfront access and views.





### State Branch Lake Ramp

Branch Lake is the City's drinking water source. Branch Lake boat launch has strict regulations and requires a boat inspection before a craft can enter the water. No diesel boats are allowed. The launch is a year-round double wide concrete free launch. There is parking, a picnic area and restrooms located at the ramp. The Branch Lake boat launch is maintained by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry (DACF).

### Sand Beach at Branch Lake

Within the Maine DACF land, and just past State Branch Lake Ramp, is Sand Beach at Branch Lake. This park includes trails, a picnic area, and a beach with water access. The park is open from sunrise to sunset daily. Pets are allowed with leashes. Camping is not allowed, and alcoholic beverages are prohibited. It is considered a carry-in, carry-out park for waste and strictly no fires are permitted.

### Branch Forest Trail and Canoe Landing

Branch Lake Forest is a public forest with 3 miles of trails and a carry-in canoe landing. The trail goes through various forest types, along a stream, through a large marsh, and to the shore of Branch Lake. The path surface varies from dirt, forest floor, and grass to boardwalk and bog bridging. At the end of the trail a scenic overlook provides sweeping views of Branch Lake. The trail is open year-round and provides snow shoeing opportunities in the winter. Pets are permitted on a leash.

### Green Lake National Fish Hatchery

This fish hatchery is one of two U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) genetic conservation hatcheries located in Maine. The Green Lake National Fish Hatchery is nestled between Graham Lake and Green Lake. The hatchery's primary mission is to produce juvenile life stages of Atlantic salmon as part of recovery efforts for the Gulf of Maine Distinct Population Segment of Atlantic salmon. The facilities and grounds are open to the public. There are self-guided tours of the facilities, and the grounds are open for hiking and picnicking. The hatchery hiking trail is 1.9 miles and passes glacial erratics and old cellar holes. The trail surface is dirt, forest floor, rock and ledges, boardwalk, and bog bridging. There is an overlook at Green Lake with benches.

### Private Access

Ellsworth has a few private access points along the water for recreational waterfront use, including private recreational areas and waterfront businesses.





## Branch Lake Camping Area

Located on the northern shore of Branch Lake, this private campground offers 50 campsites through wooded areas and is adjacent to the lake. The campsite offers restrooms with showers, a camp store, picnic areas, a boat ramp, dumping station, a playground, and a beach with lake access. Campsites have utility hookups, a picnic table, and a barbecue pit.

## YMCA Camp Jordan

The Bangor YMCA Wilderness Center at Camp Jordan is located on the north bank of Branch Lake. The area is a 200-acre campus that provides sleep away camp and other organized retreats and workshops to youth groups. It sits on 0.25-mile of lakefront and is the only summer camp on the entire lake. The facilities include the 5,000-square foot, 230-person King Dining Hall, camp cabins, Triangle Lodge, historic meeting hall, modern infirmary, two bathhouses with showers, and an apartment for seasonal use. Typical cabins include electricity and sleep up to 16 people. The campus has hiking trails, campsites, sports fields, an outdoor chapel, state of the art rope course, 30 boats, and water access.

## Union River Lobster Pot

The Union River Lobster Pot is the only waterfront restaurant in Ellsworth. Opened in 1996 on the banks of the Union River, the restaurant features scenic views and a grassy hillside with chairs, benches, firepit, and small private dock. While there is no outdoor dining, patrons can sit and drink on the grass hillside and look out to the Union River. The restaurant owners have expressed a deep commitment to the history of Ellsworth and celebrating the Union River by bringing people and awareness to the water.

# Wetlands

Wetlands are located throughout the rural areas of Ellsworth as well as a large wetland area in the middle of Graham Lake. Wetlands are identified by the presence of hydraulic soils, hydrophilic (i.e., water loving) plants, and a high-water table for a portion of the year. Wetlands are important for cleansing water, providing flood control, protecting shorelines from erosion, maintaining stream flows, and supporting wildlife habitat.

The FWS is the principal federal agency tasked with providing information on the extent and status of the nation's wetland and deepwater habitats and changes to these habitats over time. As part of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, the FWS maps America's wetlands and conducts decadal national wetlands status and trends studies. Wetlands are located and mapped throughout Ellsworth. While most wetlands are in





proximity to lakes and ponds there are many types of wetlands in Ellsworth. These include estuarine and marine deepwater, estuarine and marine wetland, freshwater emergent wetland, freshwater forested/shrub wetland, freshwater pond, riverine, and lake.

Vernal pools are a specific type of naturally occurring temporary wetland; they are seasonal depressional inland bodies of water that occur in glaciated areas and usually occur from winter to spring. They are particularly important because they provide critical breeding habitat for several native amphibian species that, in turn, sustain many other forms of woodland wildlife. As summer comes and pools dry up, baby frogs, salamanders, turtles, and other wildlife are ready to move to nearby dry land to their fall and winter homes. Vernal pools are an important water feature and can be found throughout Ellsworth.

Most of the vernal pools in Ellsworth have been mapped around Branch Lake, Boggy Brook, and Graham Lake. Designated Significant Vernal Pools are protected under the Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA) and prohibit development in the pool itself and limit development around the pool; however, the regulations do not protect the full suite of habitats that vernal pool wildlife use, including breeding, summering, and wintering habitats. Significant vernal pools must be identified on development plan reviews.

According to MDIFW, there are four mapped Significant Vernal Pools in Ellsworth, and it is likely that additional unmapped occurrences are present. Many others pools that harbor wildlife do not receive any protection under the NRPA, and recent changes to federal wetland regulations leaves most vernal pools unprotected. It is likely many vernal pools located within Ellsworth have not been mapped yet. Urbanization and new development continue to threaten these areas.

Wetlands are resources of great value to Maine communities, the state, and the nation. All three levels of government have a stake in their continued health and availability. Congress established federal regulatory power concerning wetlands under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. In Maine, the NRPA established State regulatory authority over wetlands in 1988. Ellsworth regulates lands within 250 feet of wetlands, salt marshes and salt meadows, as well as wetlands associated with great ponds and rivers, which are rated "moderate" or "high" value waterfowl and wading bird habitat, including nesting and feeding areas through the Shoreland Zoning statute.





## Water Quality and Stormwater Management

The Maine DEP's Biological Monitoring Program assesses the health of rivers, streams, and wetlands by evaluating the composition of resident aquatic benthic macroinvertebrate and algal communities. The program assesses the health of a waterbody based on the amount and types of aquatic macroinvertebrates and algae living in them. The amount and types of macroinvertebrates and algae change when waterbodies are polluted or disturbed. For example, a polluted stream will often lack pollution-sensitive organisms like mayflies and stoneflies and will have more pollution-tolerant organisms like snails and leeches. City staff and partners conduct water quality testing as part of watershed management plans.

There are also local and regional plans to identify and eliminate pollution sources in Ellsworth. The Ellsworth Wastewater Treatment Facility includes a headworks facility with influent screening, aeration tanks, clarifiers, and a disinfection system that physically, biologically, and chemically removes contamination before the treated water is discharged to the Union River estuary and Union River Bay.

As part of federal Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) regulations, Ellsworth prepares and implements a permit and plan to protect stormwater from becoming polluted. As required by the City's MS4 General Permit, the City's Stormwater Management Plan includes an Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Plan, which describes how the City will implement best management practices to meet the six minimum control measures (MCMs). The six MCMs are:

- Education/Outreach Program
- Public Involvement and Participation
- Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination Program
- Construction Site Stormwater Runoff Control
- Post-Construction Stormwater Management in New Development and Redevelopment
- Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping for Municipal Operators

Previous combined sewers along Routes 1 and 1A were separated with Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) upgrades while the capacity and regional connectivity enhancements were being completed.

Ellsworth adopted Stormwater Management Design and Construction Standards as part of its Chapter 56 Unified Development Ordinance and establishes stormwater quality control





standards. The objective is to limit degradation of water quality in lakes and streams through treating runoff from Shoreland Zone Areas, high-pollutant users, and impervious surfaces exceeding 10% of the area of each watershed. There are two water control locations identified in the ordinance: Union River/Leonard Lake Water Control and Lake and Stream Water Control. The Union River/Leonard Lake Water Control states that projects located outside the watershed of a great pond or within the watershed of Leonard Lake must comply with the most recent version of Maine DEP Stormwater Management Rules General Standards and the Ellsworth Flooding Control Standards, where applicable. The Lake and Stream Water Quality Control states that projects within the watershed of a great pond and outside the watershed of Leonard Lake shall comply with the most recent version of the Maine DEP Stormwater Management Rules Phosphorus Standards in addition to Basic Standards and Ellsworth Flooding Control Standards where applicable. The Planning Board is prohibited from exempting the phosphorus loading regulations and no phosphorus mitigation credits or compensation are allowed unless the project triggers the Stormwater Law or Site Law.

Maine DEP's Nonpoint Source (NPS) Management Program Plan was issued in 2020. NPS pollution significantly impacts Maine's lakes, rivers, streams, and marine waters. Unlike pollution from point sources, such as industrial and sewage treatment plants, NPS pollution comes from many diffuse sources. It is caused by rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground and picking up natural and human-made pollutants, such as fertilizer, road salt, sediment, oil, and bacteria. Eventually, these contaminants end up in waterbodies, where they can threaten drinking water supplies, cause nuisance algal blooms, diminish recreational activities, and endanger aquatic habitats. The NPS Management Program Plan outlines goals and approaches for protecting and restoring water quality statewide and at the watershed level.

## Floodplains

Floodplains are low, mostly flat areas adjacent to rivers, streams, ponds, and the ocean and are periodically covered by rising water during major periods of rain or snowmelt. The mapped 100-year floodplain has a 1% chance of being flooded during any year. Ellsworth participates in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to help manage floor risks. Through this program, Ellsworth adopted and enforces floodplain management ordinances that define building standards for new and existing development in zones with high flood risks. Through participation in the program, Ellsworth property owners are eligible to purchase NFIP flood insurance and





to receive disaster assistance for flood-related damage. Hancock County's Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) were updated in 2016. Ellsworth adopted a floodplain management ordinance that requires the recognition and evaluation of flood hazards in all official land use actions in special flood hazard areas. This ordinance also establishes a flood hazard development permit system and review procedures for development activities in the designated flood hazard areas of the City.

## Resilience

Ellsworth is relatively protected from rising waters and storm events because of high banks along Union River; however, more investigation and planning is needed to understand the implications of increasing extreme storms, sea level rise and urban heat island formation. Currently, Ellsworth has no resiliency plan, no resiliency positions in staff, and no defined goals or action items to address climate change impacts. Community-based organizations like Green Ellsworth have expressed commitment to positioning the community to be more climate resilient.

Hancock County Emergency Management Agency updated the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2023. The plan identifies four primary hazards for the County, including severe winter storms, severe summer storms, flooding, and wildfires. The City's four dams were noted as vulnerable sites due to the potential for dam failure and flooding. The City has adopted the plan as required by FEMA, to maintain participation in the NFIP.

Ellsworth recently received a Stormwater Management and Adaptation Planning Grant to investigate flooding and resiliency concerns and is beginning to do more to address climate resiliency concerns.

Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action (the State's climate action plan adopted in 2020) identified four climate action plan goals

- Reduce Maine's greenhouse gas emissions
- Make Maine more resilient to the impacts of climate change
- Foster economic opportunity and prosperity
- Advance equity through Maine's response

In May 2023, Hancock County—along with the Bureau of Resource Information and Land Use Planning (BRILUP) and Maine DACF shared priorities and funding opportunities related to resiliency. Ellsworth was identified as being well positioned for funding for





flooding, coastal resilience, wildfire, drinking water protection, infrastructure hardening, urban forestry, and heat island effect.

## Groundwater

Groundwater is water found underground in the spaces between pieces of rock, like sand and gravel, and in the cracks that form in huge layers of solid rocks. Groundwater accumulates from rain and snowmelt that soaks into the ground, where it seeps through soil and other rock materials before landing in an aquifer. An aquifer is a porous layer, such as gravel, sand, or rock where all the cracks and spaces are filled with water and contained by an impervious surface below. The type of soil and structure of impervious layers above the aquifer greatly impacts an aquifer's ability to recharge. There are significant aquifers in West Ellsworth under Bucksport Road and on the eastside of the City along the Hancock border. In addition, there is a significant aquifer under the large wetland area around Graham Lake. All wells depend on healthy aquifers and healthy stormwater runoff, and land use decisions impact the aquifer and may impact the community's drinking water network. Aquifers have largely been protected due to a lack of development and shoreland zoning and land use ordinances. Additional protections may be needed as development pressure has increased in rural areas in recent years. Improving the quality of stormwater runoff and encouraging land uses that most adequately allow for groundwater recharge can support healthy aquifers.

## Scenic Resources

Scenic resources help define a community and celebrate significant landscape features. They are attributes that give a community identity, make a place appealing to live, and attract visitors. These resources include natural views and vistas as well as cultural assets and are identified and mapped by the State of Maine Scenic Landscape Assessment. The only key scenic resources mapped is the Ellsworth waterfront. Despite only having one identified key scenic resource, the many lakes and rural landscapes are beautiful and part of the defining appeal that attracts people to Ellsworth.

## Shoreland Zoning

The City established an overlay district 250 feet from the normal high-water line of any designated great pond, river, saltwater body or upland edge of a coastal wetland, non-forested, freshwater wetland of 10 or more acres. It is also mapped within 75 feet of the





normal high-water line of any designated stream or brook. Chapter 56, Article 4, of the City's Unified Development Ordinance outlines the rules and regulations of the zone and requires special review and permitting for development within the zone. The purpose of the ordinance, among other priorities, is to further the maintenance of safe and healthful conditions to help prevent and control water pollution; protect fish spawning grounds, aquatic life, bird, and other habitats; conserve visual and actual points of access to inland and coastal waters; and anticipate and respond to the impacts of development in shoreland areas. The Shoreland Zoning includes specific permit requirements and bulk and use regulations within each of the following districts of the overlay:

- Resource Protection: Areas in which development would adversely affect water quality, productive habitat, biological ecosystems, or scenic and natural views.
- Drinking Water Protection (DP): Areas within the Shoreland Zone of the watershed of Branch Lake that are not zoned Resource Protection. The DP zoning district has lot size, frontage and other environmental standards designed to protect Ellsworth's public drinking water supply.
- Stream Protection (SP): Areas that lie within the Shoreland Zone of the watershed of Branch Lake that are not zoned Resource Protection. The SP zoning district has lot size, frontage and other environmental standards designed to protect Ellsworth's surface waters. For regulation of surface water activities on Branch Lake, refer to the Ellsworth Code of Ordinances Chapter 55 Public Water Supply Protection Ordinance.
- Limited Residential (LR): Areas suitable for residential and recreational development. It includes areas other than those in the Resource Protection District, or SP District, and areas which are used less intensively than those in the General Development (GD) District and Limited Commercial (LC) District.
- Limited Commercial (LC): Areas of mixed, light commercial and residential uses exclusive of the SP District, which should not be developed as intensely as the GD District. This district includes areas of two or more contiguous acres in size devoted to a mix of residential and low intensity business and commercial uses.
- General Development (GD): Areas of two or more contiguous acres devoted to commercial, industrial, or intensive recreational activities or a mix of such activities. Or areas otherwise discernible as having patterns of intensive commercial industrial or recreational uses.





## Wastewater and Water Resource Protection

The Ellsworth Wastewater Department is responsible for the operation of the City's Wastewater Treatment Facility, the public sanitary sewer infrastructure, and ultimately protecting and improving local water resources, including the various ponds, stream, lakes, the Union River, and Union River Bay. In 2012, the City built a new 1.3 million gallons per day (MGD) peak capacity wastewater treatment facility. The previous 0.87-MGD facility was demolished, and the site was cleaned up to create Harbor Park and Marina. The new facility treats municipal wastewater and local septic and discharges clean water into the Union River. This reduced the amount of pollution entering the river, improving overall river health and water quality. The collection system is concentrated in the Urban Core, extending along Route 1A past the Union River down through High Street at Buttermilk Road. Much of the rural residential areas are on private septic systems. There are several pump stations throughout the City.

In 2019, the City received funds from the Northern Borders Regional Development Commission (NBRC) for upgrades to the Water Street Wastewater Pump Station. These upgrades increased capacity and resiliency of the pump station to support growth in the community and minimize unpermitted discharges. In January 2023, Ellsworth received congressionally directed spending for upgrades to the High Street Wastewater Pump Station. The High Street Pump Station handles wastewater sewer flows from much of High Street and the growing Route 1 and Route 3 commercial corridors, receiving sanitary sewer flow from several of the City's largest businesses, lodging facilities, housing complexes, medical offices, research and development, and financial institutions. This upgrade will address capacity needs, make the pump station more resilient, and support additional economic growth and development in the City. Facilitating growth, mitigating climate change impacts, and responding to regulatory drivers are the department's greatest challenges.

The City's Water Department routinely tests for water quality and invasive species along the shoreline around the water treatment plant. The City also partnered with the Branch Lake Association to expand testing and surveying to monitor water quality. Branch Lake to date has remained free of invasive species. Non-point source pollution largely comes from erosion and sediment runoff from stormwater. Areas around many waterbodies are gravel roads, which can increase the sediment runoff into waterbodies. Volunteer groups, like Green Ellsworth and the Branch Lake Association, and the City's Public Works Department are working to improve stormwater infrastructure and limit erosion and sediment runoff from roads and properties through education and outreach.





## Septic Waste Disposal

All subsurface sewage discharge systems must be installed in conformance with the State of Maine Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules. Clearing or removing woody vegetation necessary to site a new system and any associated fill extensions shall not extend closer than 75 feet, horizontal distance, from the normal high-water line of a water body or the upland edge of a wetland. A holding tank is not allowed for a first-time residential use in the Shoreland Zone. The Ellsworth wastewater treatment facility treats septic for Ellsworth residents for a fee but is limited by the City's DEP permit. The City's wastewater treatment facility does not treat septic from any other communities.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The City has taken significant measures to protect the City's natural resources, including coordinating with Frenchman Bay Conservancy and the Forest Society of Maine to protect 700 acres of land adjacent to Branch Lake to help preserve the lake and the City's drinking water quality. Continuing to work to ensure the quality of surface and ground water as Ellsworth continues to grow will be critical. Consideration should be given to regulations and incentives for more robust stormwater management, open space protection, and pollution prevention measures. In addition, Ellsworth should be deliberate in planning for long-term maintenance and capital improvements for the City's water and wastewater infrastructure to help ensure that these systems continue to operate efficiently and sustainably.

As the City looks toward its future resilience, regional collaboration and the efforts of community groups and initiatives, like Green Ellsworth, will be essential in making long-term progress. Green Ellsworth is a community initiative of business owners, residents, organizations, and other community members working together with the City to make Ellsworth a model green community. When considering resources and issues that reach beyond the boundaries of the City, such as watershed management and climate resilience, a regional approach is important in understanding the issue from a broader perspective and leveraging and coordinating resources to address these challenges.





## Sources

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 33 Floodplain Management Ordinance

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 4, Shoreland Zoning

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 10, Stormwater Management Design and Construction Standards

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 410.9 Septic Waste Disposal

Ellsworth Green Plan, 2021

Hancock County Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2023 Update

Maine DACF, Beginning with Habitat Focus Area Map

Maine DACF, Maine Geological Survey

Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Urban Impaired Stream Watershed GIS Map

Maine DEP, *Maine Impervious Cover Total Maximum Daily Load Assessment for Impaired Streams (2012), Appendix 7: Card Brook*

Maine DEP, *Proposals for Changes to Maine Water Quality Standards Under Triennial Review*

Maine Stream Habitat Viewer

Maine DEP, Municipal Stream Crossing Upgrade Grant Program

Maine DEP, Natural Resources Protection Act

Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action

Maine Scenic Landscape Assessment

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Wetland Inventory





## 3. MARINE RESOURCES

### Introduction

While there are many lakes and rivers in the City, Ellsworth has minimal marine coastline, and marine resources are limited to where the City meets the Union River Bay and Union River estuary. Ellsworth has a long history with the sea. The City developed around fishing and transportation of lumber and goods. Union River Bay leads to Blue Hill Bay and the Atlantic Ocean and has been a historic migration path for Atlantic salmon and other anadromous fish. Pollution has limited shellfishing in Ellsworth, and the City acts more as a jumping off point for commercial and local fishing and harvesting. Beyond some street edges and cemeteries, the majority of the approximate 3.25 miles of coastline at the estuary is completely privatized with no public access. Boat access to the bay is up the Union River and is limited by size and travel distance.

### Maine Department of Marine Resources

The Maine Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) was established to conserve and develop marine and estuarine resources for communities and facilitate and enforce commercial and non-commercial marine licensing. MDMR's Growing Area Program monitors the water quality at marine shellfish flash and conducts shoreline surveys to identify sources of pollution and limit exposure to unsafe shellfish that could be a public health risk. Ellsworth's Union River Bay shoreline falls within the MDMR Growing Area EG-P1 and, because of pollution, it is unlawful to dig, take, or possess any clams, quahogs, oysters, mussels, or whole or roe-on scallops taken from the shores, flats, and waters of these prohibited areas. The Ellsworth Wastewater Treatment Plant discharges into the Union River just north of this growing area.<sup>6</sup>

### Frenchman Bay Regional Shellfish Conservation Ordinance

The City of Ellsworth adopted the Frenchman Bay Regional Shellfish Conservation Ordinance in 2010 and repealed and replaced the ordinance in 2017. The intent of this

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<sup>6</sup> State of Maine Department of Marine Resources. August 4, 2023. *Shellfish Harvesting Area Classification — Notification of Changes*.





ordinance is to collaborate regionally to preserve, protect, manage, and enhance shellfish resources and ecological well-being of the Greater Frenchman Bay region and to ensure a sustainable harvest of shellfish and opportunity for those who make their living on the tide. To establish a shellfish conservation program this ordinance provides regulations for licensing, the number of shellfish harvesters, the time and area where digging is permitted, size of clams taken, the number of shellfish taken daily by a harvester, and intertidal management. While MDMR limits shellfishing in the City boundaries, these regulations affect Ellsworth residents and commercial harvesters in the region. Regionally, Ellsworth, and the Towns of Franklin, Hancock, Lamoine, Sorrento, Sullivan, and Trenton are the communities that have adopted and committed to the goals of the Frenchman Bay Regional Shellfish Conservation Ordinance.

## Marine Water Quality

The Union River Bay, as part of Blue Hill Bay, has been monitored for a range of water quality metrics for the past three decades by the Shaw Institute. The Shaw Institute is a nonprofit scientific research organization focused on discovering and exposing the realities of toxic exposure and its effect on people and wildlife. The Shaw Institute oversees more than 30 water quality monitoring sites in Blue Hill Bay, tracks changes, and aids in identifying opportunities for improvement. Blue Hill Bay is one of the primary seal pupping areas on the East Coast. In 2001, there were approximately 13,000 harbor seals and 600 gray seals in the area during the pupping season. A 2008 habitat survey found the area to contain 43,000 acres of shellfish beds, 23 eagle nests, 1,604 acres of shorebird nesting habitat, 27 major seal haul-outs and 480 acres of eelgrass beds. As part of the Blue Hill Bay Watershed, Ellsworth's land use and urban fabric directly impact Blue Hill Bay through untreated stormwater runoff. The City is currently in the process of planning stormwater infrastructure improvements to increase climate resiliency and limit stormwater runoff into the Union River. The wastewater treatment plant ensures municipal wastewater and local septic is treated and clean water is discharged to limit water quality impacts in the Union River and Blue Hill Bay.

## Commercial and Non-Commercial Fishing and Harvesting

Despite Ellsworth's limited access to the sea, water quality concerns, and position on the bay, there are numerous fishing and harvesting licenses distributed annually. In 2021, there





were 15 commercial harvesting licenses compared to 10 licenses in Boothbay Harbor and 73 in Brunswick.<sup>7</sup>

There were 27 commercial fishing licenses administered in 2021 compared to 14 in Boothbay Harbor and 25 in Brunswick. The coast is predominantly residential and therefore, there is little infrastructure to support large-scale commercial and non-commercial fishing and harvesting; however, the community acts as a jumping off point for larger activities in Blue Hill Bay. There are a large number of wholesale distributor licenses issued to Ellsworth, which suggests businesses like Maine Shellfish Company use the City’s strategic location for regional distribution and operations.

There are minimal marine resource habitats to support fishing and harvesting in Ellsworth. Eelgrass beds form underwater habitat, serve as an important food source, and provide protection and coastal resilience, but there are no mapped resources within the Ellsworth boundaries. Similarly, there are no mapped significant wildlife habitats around Union River Bay within City limits, only isolated tidal waterfowl and wading bird habitats farther up the Union River.

Table 3.1: Commercial and Non-Commercial Licenses

| License Type                                      | Number of Licenses |
|---|--------------------|
| <b>Commercial</b>                                 |                    |
| Lobster/Crab                                      | 44                 |
| Scallop/Sea Urchin                                | 9                  |
| Shellfish   | 15                 |
| Other Fish  | 27                 |
| Eels/Elvers                                       | 19                 |
| Other   | 17                 |
| <b>Total Commercial License</b>                   | 131                |
| <b>Non-Commercial/Recreational</b>                |                    |
| Lobster/Crab                                      | 23                 |
| Other   | 15                 |
| <b>Total Non-Commercial/Recreational Licenses</b> | 38                 |
| <b>Total Licenses to Ellsworth Residents</b>      | 169                |

Source: Maine Department of Marine Resources, March 2021

<sup>7</sup> Maine Department of Marine Resources Data Request Form





## Harbor Management

The Ellsworth Harbor Commission manages Ellsworth's navigable waters below the Union River Power House and Dam. The commission consists of seven full members and three alternate members and serves as an advisory board to the Harbormaster and City Council. The commission establishes operational policy and procedures, budgets, and capital improvement priorities for the Harbor and Harbor Park and manages the mooring, dock, and slip space at Ellsworth Harbor Marina and facilitates the reservation of Harbor Park for events. The City's current Harbor Ordinance was adopted in 2013 and most recently amended in April 2020. The Harbormaster is recommended by the Ellsworth Harbor Commission and appointed by the City Manager to administer and enforce the provisions of the ordinance. The Harbormaster's building is located at Ellsworth Harbor Park.

The Harbor Master Plan, recently completed in 2022, identified recommended improvements to Harbor Park for economic development and recreational purposes, including reconstructing the Harbormaster's building, adding sidewalks, adding a designated commercial dock, reconfiguring and reconstructing the parking area, reinforcing the existing crib, and providing additional floats. In addition to these improvements, the plan also noted the need to dredge the federal channel to allow the safe passage of boats, which is currently limited due to low clearance at low tide. This is critical to supporting commercial marine activity and recreational boating in Ellsworth. While the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers has set aside FY2023 funds for this project, there is no timeline for when the dredging will be completed.<sup>8</sup>

## Waterfront Land Uses

Ellsworth's coastline below the Union River Power House and Dam is predominantly residential uses with nearly 75% of the 11.5 miles of coastline being occupied by private housing with no public access. In addition to housing there is also the Downtown (DT), General Development, and Industrial (I) zoning that allow some commercial and light industrial uses along the waterfront such as Maine Shellfish, R.F. Jordan & Sons Construction, and numerous restaurants. The Ellsworth Public Library is located on the

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<sup>8</sup> Genter, Ethan. Bangor Daily News. August 9, 2022. *Planned dredging will make tides easier to navigate in Ellsworth's harbor*. Accessed August 30, 2023.





water with access to the Ellsworth Riverwalk. The riverwalk opened in 2022 as part of the City's collaboration with the Frenchman Bay Conservancy to revitalize Union River's shoreline, ecosystem, and public access for the benefit of all who live, work, and play in Ellsworth. The Ellsworth Harbor Park and Marina is the City's main public waterfront access point and waterfront open space. The park and marina are in the southern part of downtown on the Union River. Members of the public can rent spaces to store kayaks and canoes. During Autumn Gold, organized by the Chamber of Commerce, the public can take boat rides along the Union River.

The Working Waterfront Access Protection Program (WWAPP) is an initiative through the MDMR that provides matching funds to help fishing and aquaculture businesses, co-ops, municipalities, and other groups protect working waterfront properties for commercial and aquaculture use. The program protects commercial working waterfront properties by restricting future development so the properties cannot be developed in ways that are incompatible with commercial fishing or aquaculture activities. This program helps to maintain accessible and affordable waterfronts. Properties with waterfront wharves, piers, small boat access, or walk-in access are eligible. These properties can be fully commercial or have mixed uses. Priority is given to projects that focus on protecting and securing existing facilities and access sites, rather than those with speculative plans for new developments. Upon acceptance of an application and completion of program requirements, the property becomes a Working Waterfront Covenant. This designation grants the MDMR the authority to maintain the property as a working waterfront while property owners retain their legal ownership rights. Additionally, the covenant includes a Right of First Refusal, allowing MDMR to review any future sales of the property and restrict its resale value to its worth as a working waterfront.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Maintaining marine water quality and improving marine access to Ellsworth are important to the City's future with the renewed focus on the waterfront and waterfront activities. As development continues in the Urban Core, the City will look to strengthen and implement best management practices for stormwater management. The City has demonstrated a commitment to improving waterfront access and usage for residents and visitors and supporting commercial waterfront opportunities. The City recognizes the community's unique geographical location as an important asset for both recreational opportunities and economic growth.





## Sources

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 57, Frenchman Bay Regional Shellfish Conservation Ordinance

City of Ellsworth, Harbor Commission

City of Ellsworth, Land Use Map

Shaw Institute, Maine Coast Monitoring

Maine Department of Marine Resources

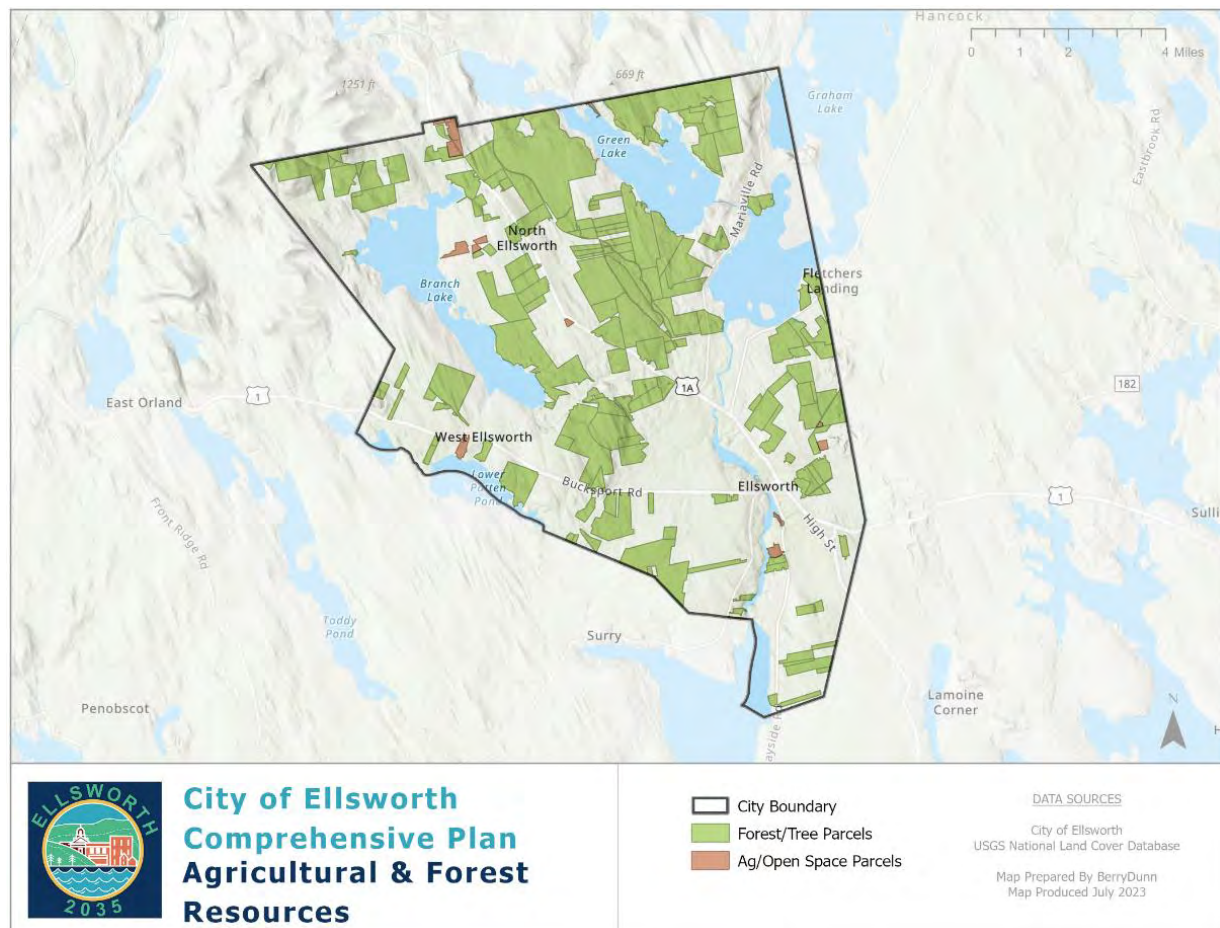


## 4. AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY

### Introduction

Agricultural and forest resources are valuable assets for communities. They provide habitat for wildlife, contribute local produce to the community, and play an important ecological role in preserving Ellsworth's natural resources. Farmland provides food for both the community and wildlife, helps control flooding, protects wetlands and watersheds, and maintains air quality. Farmlands can filter and absorb wastewater and provide groundwater recharge, where surface water is able to move downward in the water table.

Figure 4.1: Agriculture and Forest Resources



Source: City of Ellsworth; USGS National Land Cover Database





Historically, the forestry industry has been one of Maine’s largest industries and has contributed heavily to the State’s economy and culture. Healthy and managed forests provide wildlife habitat, clean air and water, and stabilize the soil. Forests also provide communities with recreational opportunities, and the forest industry provides jobs for people across Maine. In 2022, 2.4% of the State’s total employment was in the agriculture forestry sector, and the industry had about \$5.1 billion in sales. The industry has seen a decline nationwide and is looking to adapt to new changes and demands. In Maine, the sector lost 4% of its jobs from 2016 – 2021, with a decline in logging, paper manufacturing, and wood product manufacturing subsectors. While there has been a decline in traditional forest products, emerging industries like biofuels, mass timber, biochar, and biomass combined heat and power could provide new opportunities for the industry.

Since 2010, Ellsworth and Hancock County have seen an increase in employment in the agriculture and forestry sectors. According to ACS 2021 employment data, 2% of Ellsworth’s population is employed in the agriculture and forestry sector, which increased from 1.6% in 2010. In Hancock County 6.5% of residents are employed in the agriculture and forestry industry, which increased from 4.8% in 2010.

## Agriculture

Ellsworth has historically sustained a large agricultural economy. Today, however, Ellsworth has only a small percentage of land that is actively farmed. Major crops grown in Ellsworth include blueberries, potatoes, corn, apples, clover/wildflowers, barley, rye, oats, and alfalfa. The City also has grassland and pasture for raising livestock.

Ellsworth has 320 acres of farmland across 25 parcels. The State of Maine has current use programs that offer property owners a reduction in their property’s assessed value. Properties used for farmland, open space, tree growth, and working waterfront are eligible. To qualify for the farmland program, property owners must use their land for farming, agriculture, or horticulture and the parcel must contribute at least \$2,000 gross income from farming activities each year. A tract of farmland must be used for farming activities, but the tract can also contain woodlands and wasteland. Woodlands can be assessed under the Tree Growth Tax Law, and wasteland is assessed at market value. The total number of acres and parcels enrolled in the program has increased since 2009 when the State started publishing this data.





Table 4.1: Current Farmland Tax Use Program Data

| Year | Parcels | Farmland/Cropland |
|------|---------|-------------------|
| 2022 | 25      | 320 acres         |
| 2009 | 18      | 44 acres          |

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census, Hancock County saw an increase in total farmland and number of farms between 2012 and 2017. The same data showed that there was a significant decline in agriculture statewide, but an increase in the number of small farms. Despite a decline in overall land dedicated for agricultural use, the State is experiencing a resurgence in farming, as more than 100 new organic farms were added from 2008 to 2014. Ellsworth and Hancock County have likely seen small scale growth, as opposed to large commercial farming operations.

There are several areas around Ellsworth identified as prime farmland. Prime farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing agricultural products like food, fiber, or feed. Prime farmland produces consistently high yields of crops when managed and farmed. A significant amount of prime farmland in Ellsworth is located along Route 1A, Route 3, Christian Ridge Road, Red Bridge Road, and Winkumpaugh Road.

As the City looks to grow, it will have to consider how to balance future development and the protection of prime farmland.

## Farmers Market

Founded in 1978, the Ellsworth Farmers Market is one of the longest operating farmers markets in Maine. The market takes place on Saturdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Main Street. Farmers markets serve important roles in communities across the country, providing access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and other locally sourced items. The Ellsworth Farmers Market features vendors from the City and throughout the region. In 2023, the market had 12 vendors. The market is supported by regional partners, including the Heart of Ellsworth, Chamber of Commerce, Healthy Acadia, and the Maine Federation of Farmers Markets.





## Community Gardens

The Ellsworth Garden Club was founded in 1932 and is supported through volunteers and donations. The club has a history of engaging the community to support civic projects, educational programs, and member's knowledge and passion for gardening. Donald Little Park, a half-acre plot of land adjacent to downtown Ellsworth, is owned and maintained by the club. The land was acquired by the club in 1949 and developed into a community park in 1953. Other projects initiated by the club include planting flowers and other greenery at the Old Burial Ground and Blue State Memorial Marker and supporting the Food for Life and Learning: School Gardens at Ellsworth High School and Ellsworth Elementary and Middle School. The group has also done pop-up gardens and receives requests for landscaping and planting projects.

The Ellsworth Garden Club also initiated the process to create the Green Ellsworth Plan. Chapter 3 of the plan focuses on food and farming and outlines the need to preserve and increase the abundance of locally sourced food. The plan lays out several objectives, including strengthening the food system and enhancing municipal support for agricultural activities. The plan recommends initiatives that would support more sustainable farming and agricultural practices, provide educational resources to the community, and address socioeconomic challenges related to food security.

Urban agriculture initiatives have gained popularity in recent years. Urban agriculture supports local and regional food systems, and can have a variety of environmental, economic, and social benefits to communities. Urban farming can take a variety of forms, including community food gardens, roof-top farms, and vertical farming. According to USDA, urban farming can reduce transportation costs to transport and purchase food, runoff associated with heavy rain fall, and improve air quality. Urban farming can take place on both private and public land. The City could consider future policies that support the creation of urban farms and community gardens. The City could continue to work with groups like the Ellsworth Garden Club and Green Ellsworth to identify locations for urban farming, support farming activities, and engage the community in farming and gardening initiatives.





## Forest Resources

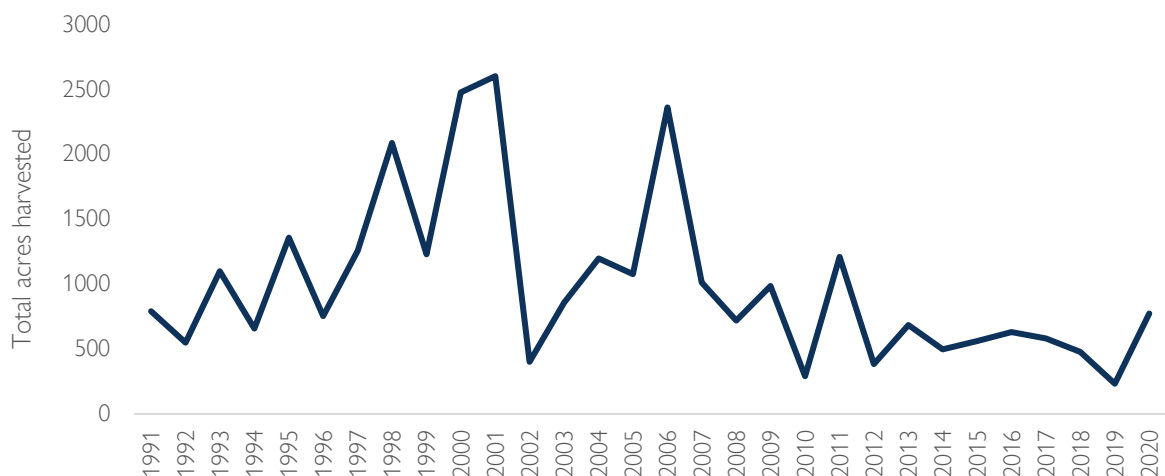
Most of Ellsworth’s land area is forested, and a small percentage of land is actively managed and harvested. The State incentivizes the active management and utilization of land through its Tree Growth Current Use Tax Program. This program is similar to the Current Tax Use Program for agriculture. Properties in the program are restricted from development and landowners can receive favorable property tax assessment reductions. Today, Ellsworth has 257 tree growth parcels. The City has 3,332 acres of softwood, 4055 acres of hardwood, and 10,976 acres of mixed wood.

Table 4.2: Current Tree Growth Tax Use Program Data

| Year | Parcels | Softwood    | Hardwood    | Mixed Wood   | Total Acres  |
|------|---------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 2022 | 257     | 3,332 acres | 4,055 acres | 10,976 acres | 18,363 acres |
| 2009 | 242     | 4,287 acres | 4,996 acres | 10,268 acres | 19,550 acres |

Since 2009, the number of parcels enrolled in the program has increased; however, the total number of acres has declined. This could be due to the subdivision of larger forest parcels and the withdraw of larger parcels. The total number of acres harvested per year has also declined over time. According to data from the City’s year-end landowner reports to the State, there has been a decline in lumber harvested since 2000, with peaks occurring in 2006 and 2011.

Figure 4.2: Total Acres Harvested Per Year



Source: Year End Landowner Reports to the Maine Forest Service





There are several factors that could contribute to significant spikes or drops in total acres harvested per year (Figure 4.2). There were likely significant harvests in years with larger increases in acres harvested. In the following year, harvests were likely smaller due to harvest size in the previous year. The City has also seen less acres clear-cut in the 2010s than in the 1990s and 2000s, which could contribute to the overall decline in acres harvested. Market prices for wood products could also dictate the amount harvested per year. When prices for wood products are high, landowners are more likely to cut larger quantities of trees. When prices are lower, landowners are less likely to carry out significant harvests. Additionally, warmer, wetter winters may also contribute to the decline, as there are regulations limiting the use of heavy machinery on wet ground.

## Tree Canopy

Ellsworth received a Tree City USA designation from the Arbor Day Foundation. The program is designed to recognize communities that effectively manage public resources and encourage community tree management based on Tree City USA standards. There are 20 Tree City USA Communities in Maine. To qualify for this designation, a municipality must have a tree board or department, a community tree ordinance, a community forestry program, and an Arbor Day observance and proclamation. Protecting the City's tree canopy, especially in urban areas, can help provide shade and alleviate urban heat island effect. In downtown and neighboring areas, it will be important for Ellsworth to continue to protect its downtown tree canopy and include tree planting considerations in future development.

## Arbor Commission

In August 2023, the Ellsworth City Council approved appointments to a newly-formed Arbor Commission. The Commission is governed by Chapter 43 in the City's Unified Development Ordinance. Through this ordinance, the Commission has the authority to develop a Master Tree Plan to specify the species of trees to be planted on each street or other public properties. The Commission is also authorized to approve the removal of public trees and review cases where public trees were abused or removed without permission.

The Arbor Commission and Green Ellsworth have expressed desire to further protect farm and forest land through an update to the unified development ordinance.





## Farm and Forest Conservation

The City has worked with Frenchman Bay Conservancy to protect and conserve forested lands, including Whitney Park and Branch Lake Community Forest. The City is working to take ownership over additional forested land to expand Branch Lake Community Forest to further protect forested land and water quality.

The City has experienced development pressures in rural areas. This pressure has led to the removal of productive forests. Most of Ellsworth's developable land is in forested and rural areas. Continued development pressure in rural areas could lead to further removal and degradation of the City's forest resources and rural character. Since much of Ellsworth is rural and forested, there are many properties enrolled in the State's current use tax program. This program requires management plans and harvests to be carried out regularly, supporting the local forestry and logging industry.

Much of the City's farmland of statewide importance has been developed, as it sits in and around the downtown. However, development pressure could lead to further development of land suitable for farming if development were to continue outside of the City's Urban Core in rural areas.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Ellsworth has taken measures to preserve its forest and agricultural resources. As the City continues to grow, it will have to determine how best to preserve forests and improve tree canopies and green space in future development plans. As small-scale agriculture and gardening becomes more popular, the City should also consider how best to support and encourage local agriculture. The City should work to limit development in rural areas to better preserve natural resources, like prime farmland, open space, and wetlands. The City should also identify opportunities to partner with organizations like the Ellsworth Garden Club and others who could support urban farming and increase the abundance of locally grown food.

As the City looks toward its future resilience, regional collaboration and the efforts of community groups and initiatives like Green Ellsworth and Frenchman Bay Conservancy will be essential in making long-term progress. When considering resources and issues that reach beyond the boundaries of the City, such as wildlife habitat management, a regional approach is important in understanding the issue from a broader perspective and leveraging and coordinating resources to address these challenges.





## Sources

Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summary  
Maine Forest Service Silvicultural Activities Reports  
Maine Forest Service, Year End Landowners Reports  
Maine Tax Use Programs  
Ellsworth Farmers Market  
Hancock County profile, USDA Census of Agriculture  
Maine State Profile, USDA Census of Agriculture  
Ellsworth Garden Club  
Sustainable Farming: Why Save Farmland  
Forestry and Forest Products: Industry Profile  
Maine's TREE CITY USA designations  
Maine's Healthy Forest Program  
Maine's Prime Farmland Determination Guidelines  
USDA Urban Agriculture  
Grow Smart Maine Planning For Agriculture  
American Community Survey





## 5. PARKS, RECREATION, AND OPEN SPACE

### Introduction

Parks and open spaces are vital to the quality of life in Ellsworth. The City has great diversity of parks, open spaces, and trails, and its location enables easy access to Acadia, nearby recreation spots, and aquatic recreation sites including the Union River, Branch Lake, Graham Lake, and Green Lake. Ellsworth is also the western terminus of the Down East Sunrise Trail, which is a multi-use trail that extends as far east as Calais.

### Municipal Parks

Ellsworth's parks and open spaces offer the community a variety of ways to engage in physical activity, enjoy time outdoors, and connect with the community. The City maintains the municipal facilities listed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: City of Ellsworth Recreation Facilities

| Name                      | Facility Type | Athletic Fields | Basketball Court | Gazebo/Amphitheater | Passive recreation | Playground | Fitness Equipment | Track | Skating Rink | Splash Pad | Water access | Tennis Court | Indoor Recreation | Trails/Paths |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------------|-------|--------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Branch Lake Public Forest | Natural Area  |                 |                  |                     | X                  |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   | X            |
| Ellsworth Rail Trail      | Trail         |                 |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   | X            |
| Downeast Sunrise Trail    | Trail         |                 |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   | X            |
| Branch Lake               | Natural Area  |                 |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            | X            |              |                   |              |
| Green Lake                | Natural Area  |                 |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            | X            |              |                   |              |
| Leonard Lake              | Natural Area  |                 |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            | X            |              |                   |              |





| Name                                   | Facility Type     | Athletic Fields | Basketball Court | Gazebo/Amphitheater | Passive recreation | Playground | Fitness Equipment | Track | Skating Rink | Splash Pad | Water access | Tennis Court | Indoor Recreation | Trails/Paths |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|------------|-------------------|-------|--------------|------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Union River Trail                      | Trail             |                 |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   | X            |
| Knowlton Park                          | Park              |                 |                  | X                   | X                  | X          | X                 |       | X            | X          |              |              |                   | X            |
| Harbor Park                            | Park              |                 |                  | X                   | X                  |            |                   |       |              |            | X            |              |                   |              |
| Franklin Street Parklet                | Park              |                 |                  |                     | X                  |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| S.K. Whiting Park                      | Park              |                 |                  |                     | X                  |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| Donald A. Little Park                  | Park              |                 |                  |                     |                    | X          |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| Merrill Park                           | Park              |                 |                  |                     |                    | X          |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| Ellsworth Public Basketball Courts     | Basketball Courts |                 | X                |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| Wilson Field                           | Park              | X               |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| Demeyer Field                          | Park              | X               |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| Ellsworth High School                  | School            | X               | X                |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              | X            |                   |              |
| Ellsworth Elementary and Middle School | School            | X               | X                |                     |                    |            |                   | X     |              |            |              |              |                   |              |
| Moore Community Center                 | Activity Center   |                 |                  |                     |                    |            |                   |       |              |            |              |              | X                 |              |

Source: City of Ellsworth





## Branch Lake Public Forest

Branch Lake Public Forest is designated as conservation land and was recently acquired by the City. It has five trails, totaling close to 3 miles and has a hand-carry boat launch, providing access for paddleboards, canoes, and kayaks on Branch Lake.

The City provides access to aquatic recreation at Branch, Green, and Leonard Lakes. At Branch Lake, the City maintains the public boat launch and swimming areas. The City also maintains the motorized boat launch and swimming area on Happytown Road and a small hand-carry boat launch on Mill Dam Road for non-motorized boats. Branch Lake covers 2,942 acres. Green Lake totals 3,132 acres of land and has a public boat launch and swimming area on Nicolin Road. Leonard Lake is 118 acres and has a small, hand-carry boat launch at the entrance to Pump Station Point.

## Trails and Multi-use Paths

The Ellsworth Rail Trail is a paved multi-use path that enables bicycle and pedestrian trail access extending from Birch Avenue to Lakes Lane. The City is in the design phase of a project to connect the existing City Rail Trail with the Down East Sunrise Trail, an 87-mile multi-use gravel corridor extending from Ellsworth to Calais. The Union River Trail (riverwalk) extends along the Union River behind the Ellsworth Public Library. The riverwalk opened in 2022 and is part of a larger concept to construct a trail that will extend farther north and south along the Union River.

## Knowlton Park

Knowlton Park is located on State Street and has a playground, splash pad, amphitheater, and seasonal ice-skating rink. Community members can reserve the amphitheater for events and gatherings. The splash pad is open from May to October, weather permitting. Other large community events that occur at Knowlton Park include The Grand's Movies in the Park, Ellsworth Pride, and more.

## Harbor Park

Harbor Park is located on the Union River and was expanded in 2014 when the former wastewater treatment plant was demolished. The park has tables, a gazebo, restrooms, and a picnic area. The City holds outdoor events at the park, including live music concerts. The Park sits in front of the marina and community members can reserve a mooring or dock space for their boats. Locally, the community has expressed a desire for increased access to





aquatic recreation opportunities and improved access to the Union River, including expansion of the River Walk.

## Downtown Parks

S.K. Whiting Park, Donald A. Little Park, and Merrill Park are all small urban parks maintained by the City, volunteers, and nonprofit organizations. These parks are all within the downtown area and provide opportunities for community gathering and passive recreation. S.K. Whiting Park is located at the corner of Main Street and High Street and provides an aesthetically pleasing welcome to Ellsworth's main corridors. The Donald A. Little Park was established in the 1950s by the Ellsworth Garden Club. The club continues to maintain the park. Merrill Park is a small pocket park on Franklin Street. In the last few years, a revitalization of this underused space was initiated by downtown residents in partnership with the Heart of Ellsworth and with support from the City and other community organizations.<sup>9</sup> In addition to these three urban parks, the City also maintains the Franklin Street Parklet (The Parklet). The Parklet was first opened in 2021 and is a seasonal installation of planters, tables, and barriers that serves as a community gathering space and area for outdoor dining.

## Municipal Courts and Recreation Fields

The City also operates the Forrest Avenue basketball courts. In conjunction with the Down East Family YMCA (DEFYMCA), the City coordinates use of Wilson Field and Demeyer Field. Ellsworth High School and Ellsworth Elementary/Middle School maintain school playgrounds and athletic fields, including Del Luce Track at Ellsworth Elementary/Middle School and the tennis courts at Ellsworth High School. The City also maintains the Moore Community and Conference Center and supports programming from the DEFYMCA.

## Non-Municipal Facilities and Programming

The City works with regional and local partners to provide and maintain additional recreation opportunities in Ellsworth. Several community organizations also provide programming to people of all ages in Ellsworth and surrounding communities.

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<sup>9</sup> Heart of Ellsworth. Meet Me At Merrill Park. Accessed August 30, 2023.  
<https://www.heartofellsworth.org/blog/2022/5/31/meet-me-at-merrill-park>





Frenchman Bay Conservancy preserves and maintains access to Indian Trail, Jordan Homestead Preserve, and Whitney Property. Each property provides access to trail networks and offers additional passive recreation opportunities. In February 2024, Frenchman Bay Conservancy purchased Whitney Community Forest, a 405-acre parcel adjacent to Ellsworth High School. Frenchman Bay Conservancy also purchased an adjoining 62-acre parcel. Of the 467 acres purchased, there are 35 acres adjacent to Lejok Street will be available for the City of Ellsworth to develop in the future.

The Blue Hill Heritage Trust maintains the Meadowbrook trails. Woodlawn is a 180-acre property that includes trails, a museum, and a barn. Woodlawn preserves trail access and allows events on the property. Stanwood Wildlife Sanctuary is a trail network and wildlife sanctuary that offers several educational programs. Ellsworth also has several privately-owned and operated campgrounds.

DEFYMCA works with the City to provide a variety of programs to Ellsworth residents and surrounding communities. The James Russell Wiggins Center DEFYMCA location offers access to youth sports, fitness classes, and a pool. This location also has outdoor pickleball courts. DEFYMCA Early Learning Center is in the Moore Community Center and provides multi-generational educational and developmental programming. DEFYMCA provides child care, preschool, before- and after-school programs, and summer camps for children. The Blue Lobster program provides social inclusion in physical fitness for all. Several local organizations, including Friends in Action and the Ellsworth Community Music Institute, provide additional programming for people of all ages and abilities.

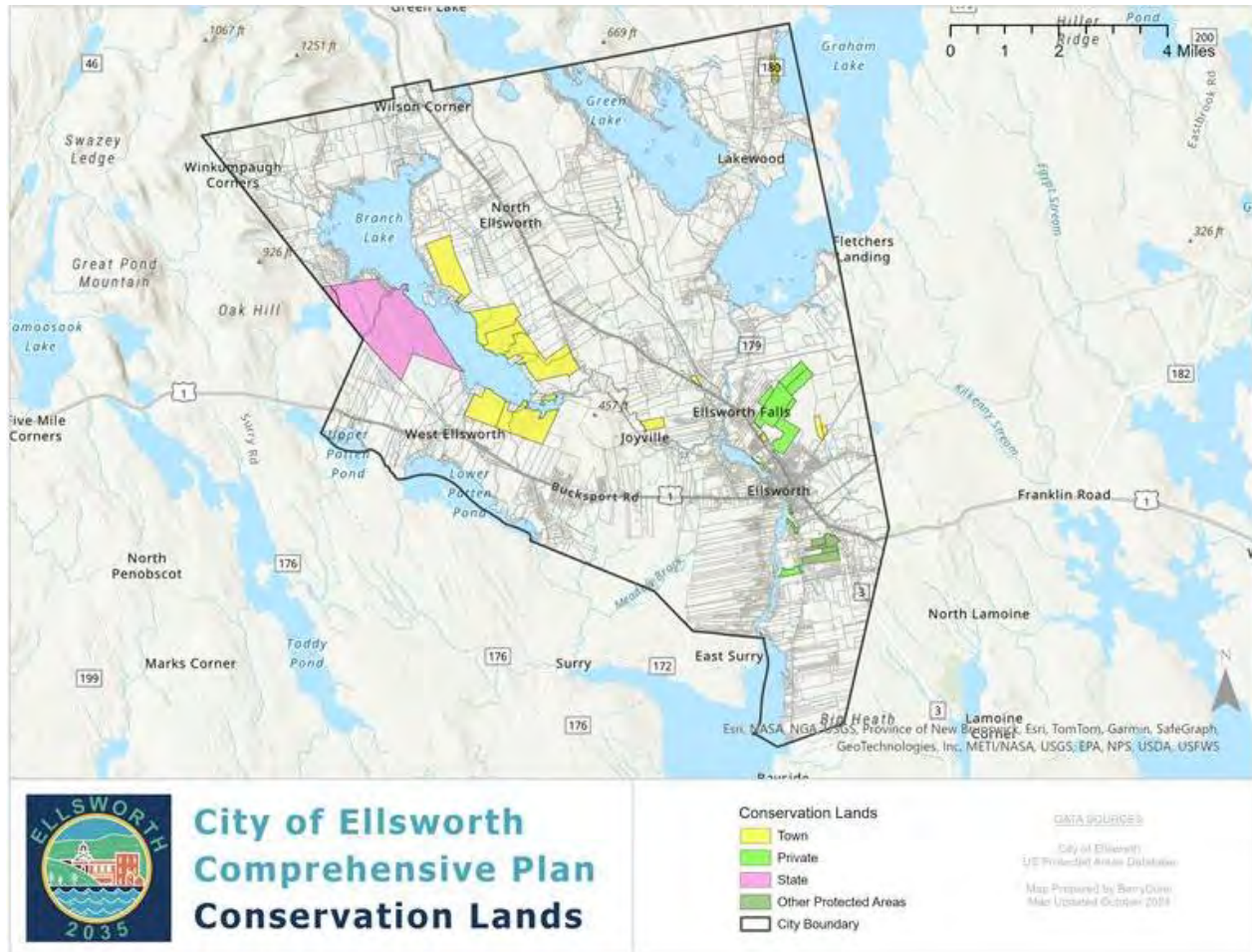
Across the state, roughly 94% of forest land is privately owned. More than half of this area is open to the public, as private landowners voluntarily provide access to land for a variety of uses including hunting, fishing, and hiking. Large lot owners in Ellsworth provide access to their properties for recreational uses, while some choose to keep their land private by posting 'no trespassing' signage. Much of Hancock County is rural, providing additional regional access to recreation opportunities outside of Ellsworth.

## Open Space and Conservation Land

Open spaces, like parks, forests, trails, and fields, are important assets for communities to support community health and wellness and environmental health. Open spaces also define much of the City's rural land area. In Ellsworth, open space has been conserved by the State, City, and local nonprofits and land trusts. Figure 5.1 below shows land that is permanently conserved.



Figure 5.1: City of Ellsworth Conserved Land



The City of Ellsworth has worked with local conservation organizations, including Frenchman Bay Conservancy, Blue Hill Heritage Trust, and community members to purchase land and establish conservation easements on key parcels throughout the City. The City has worked to preserve a significant amount of land around Branch Lake to protect the City’s drinking water source and allow for recreation opportunities. The City was awarded a grant through the Land for Maine’s Future Program to pay for half of the cost of acquiring an additional 280 wooded acres on the eastern side of Branch Lake. This land would connect the two existing wooded lots on the eastern side of the lake, including Branch Lake Public Forest. This acreage is not reflected in Table 5.2 below.





Table 5.2: Conserved Land

| Land  | Ownership Type | Acreage     |
|---|----------------|-------------|
| Branch Lake Conservation Project (Includes Branch Lake Public Forest) | City           | 942 acres*  |
| Indian Point Preserve   | Private        | 13 acres    |
| Woodlawn Museum   | Private        | 180 acres   |
| Jordan Homestead  | Private        | 30 acres    |
| Birdsacre   | Private        | 157 acres   |
| Meadowbrook Forest  | Private        | 2,114 acres |
| State-owned land  | State          | 1,316 acres |
| Total acreage: <b>4,752 acres</b>                                     |                |             |

Source: City of Ellsworth, U.S. Geological Survey Protected Areas Data

Open space serves an important role in resident’s quality of life; however, it is expensive to purchase land for conservation. The City plans to continue its work with local land trusts and conservation organizations to further protect land. The City has limited resources to continue to purchase land. In addition to regional collaboration, establishing additional land use regulations to further protect open space in Ellsworth can help preserve additional open spaces.

## Ellsworth Green Plan

The Ellsworth Green Plan—created through a citizen-led initiative—aims to make Ellsworth a model green community that prioritizes sustainability and natural resource protection. Volunteers collected input from a variety of stakeholders and developed the following goals:

1. Clean water for drinking and recreation
2. Green spaces, parks, and trees for the protection of water, wildlife, habitat, and livable neighborhoods
3. Farms and a vibrant local food system
4. Infrastructure that facilitates ease of mobility
5. Affordable alternative energy sources
6. Responsible waste and stormwater management





The plan outlined recommendations and a timeline for implementation, with the goal of creating a cohesive, proactive approach to sustainability and resource protection.

The plan specifically references several parks and recreation recommendations. The plan recommends the City hire a full-time Director of Parks and Recreation and one part-time or seasonal assistant to support future parks planning and maintenance and work with volunteers. It is also recommended that the City hire an outdoor classroom coordinator to provide gardening and other outdoor classroom activities to Ellsworth Public School students. The plan suggests establishing an Ellsworth Parks Foundation or similar nonprofit organization to support the care, acquisition, and long-range planning of City parks and open spaces. The plan also recommends the City enhance the range and distribution of parks facilities, including more rural neighborhood parks, a downtown greenspace in front of City Hall, and a dog park. It is also recommended that the Recreation Commission title is revised to the Parks and Recreation Commission, and the terms of the Commission should include a focus on parks, green space, and recreation.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Today, 4.2% of residents live within a 10-minute walk of a park, according to the Ellsworth City Health Dashboard. Several parks are located near downtown. Downtown residents and visitors access to active and passive recreation opportunities. Outside of downtown, residents cannot easily walk or bike to parks or open spaces. As the City continues to grow, and looks for new development opportunities, it should consider how parks and green spaces will be included in future development. Additionally, as the City's population grows older, there should be additional considerations for accessible parks and programming for older adults.

The City does not have paid parks and recreation staff members to provide programming and, instead, works with community partners to offer programming. The City's Recreation Commission promotes recreational activities and sponsors activities. It is a priority of the Commission to hire a paid staff member to support recreation services. Hiring a full-time staff person could support additional programming and oversee parks maintenance.

Currently, Public Works staff maintains all City parks facilities. Public Works staff have discussed the need for specific parks maintenance workers to support current maintenance staff. The City also works with partners like the Frenchman Bay Conservancy and Blue Hill Heritage Trust to maintain trails and open spaces.





## Sources

Stanwood Wildlife Sanctuary

Blue Hill Heritage Trust

City Health Dashboard, Current Park Access

Down East Family YMCA

Ellsworth Community Music Institute

The Ellsworth Green Plan, 2021

Ellsworth Public Schools

Ellsworth Recreation Commission

Frenchman Bay Conservancy

Friends in Action

Heart of Ellsworth

Woodlawn





## 6. ECONOMY

### Introduction

Ellsworth's past economic development initiatives and planning has largely centered around traditional economic growth strategies of business attraction and retention through identifying and targeting certain industries and creating a business-friendly environment. Shifting economic growth strategies are now prioritizing livability and quality-of-place as a means to attract people and businesses. Growing the labor force and expanding the job market by creating a desirable place to live, work, and play has become a more widespread approach to economic growth, especially with a greater shift toward remote work, a more mobile workforce, and increasing concerns around quality-of-life issues such as housing, child care, and transportation.

Ellsworth continues to support economic growth and cultivate opportunities for new businesses with a focus on enhancing and addressing quality-of-life concerns for residents, business owners, employees, and other community members. In recent years, Ellsworth has taken steps to become more business-friendly, including participation in the Maine Certified Business-Friendly Community Program and developing an innovation center. While the City is not predominantly dependent on tourism to support the local economy, increased visitors to Acadia and growth in the tourism industry in the Downeast region beyond Acadia presents an opportunity for Ellsworth to benefit from the many visitors who pass through the City each year.

### Past and Current Economic Initiatives

Recommendations of the 2011 business attraction plan, focused on identifying export industries and provided an analysis of Ellsworth's market compared to other metro areas. The plan recommended strategies for attracting businesses in the following target growth industries: creative economy, financial services, food production, healthcare, small-scale manufacturing and production, green economy, and retail. At the time this plan was completed, the City and region were not experiencing the same housing, workforce, and cost of living challenges as today. The current business attraction plan acknowledges the need to revisit certain business growth assumptions from the 2011 plan. Feedback gathered from outreach regarding the current business attraction plan identified the need for growth





from within and supporting growth of the labor force by addressing critical issues such as housing, child care, and transportation.

Since the 2004 plan, the City has established an Economic Development Director position to support business development and economic growth initiatives for the City. More recent initiatives by the Economic Development Department have focused on investments in the community to drive economic growth and build upon existing assets. In 2022, the City partnered with Heart of Ellsworth, the nonprofit downtown association, and the local business community to conduct a community asset mapping initiative. The purpose of this initiative was to understand, visualize, and contextualize the strengths of downtown Ellsworth to build upon these assets in addressing the needs of the community. The asset mapping initiative analyzed the physical attributes that define downtown (e.g., building density, sidewalks, trees), commercial uses that contribute to the vitality of the City and serve the residents and visitors, and the civic and social institutions that support the community. Goals identified through asset mapping include creating places for people to stay downtown, reinvigorating community space between Main Street and City Hall, providing greater clarity and incentive for visitors to stop downtown, improving public connection to the water and industry, and enhancing the prominence of the working and craft history of Ellsworth.

In 2015, the City, in partnership with the Ellsworth Business Development Corporation, established the Union River Center for Innovation. The center aims to foster growth of the region's business community and create a strong economic climate for the Downeast region. The center has supported and housed a variety of businesses, including entrepreneurs in their planning stages and established small businesses. Some of the programs and services offered include an incubator program, workshops, business coaching, a remote business affiliate program, office and co-working space, conference room rentals, testing lab, and printing and mailing services. The center is managed by the Economic Development Department and maintained by the City Facilities Department.

The City's Business Attraction Plan, completed in October 2023, noted the labor shortage, impacted by housing availability and access to child care and transportation, as a critical issue to be addressed. The plan recommends a focus on economic growth from within, leveraging the City's strategic location, amenities, and livability to attract and grow small-scale businesses and strengthen the workforce. The plan identifies four targeted business clusters for the City to focus business attraction activities by building on current trends and recent economic growth in the region:





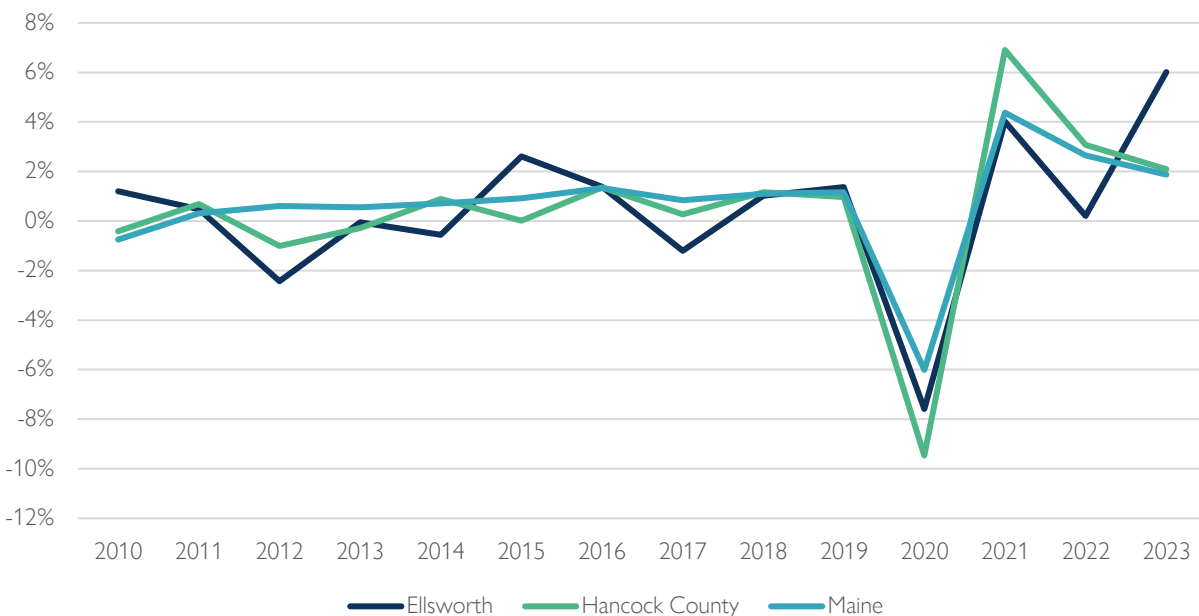
1. Specialty food and beverage manufacturing and sales
2. Design, construction, and maintenance
3. Healthcare services/medical manufacturing/life sciences
4. Visitor economy and hospitality

The plan’s recommendations include investments in the City’s infrastructure and services to support the growth of these sectors, including activating the downtown and waterfront and addressing housing and transportation needs.

## Economic Conditions

Ellsworth is a service and employment center for surrounding rural communities. Residents of other communities travel to Ellsworth to access jobs, health services, schools, the Ellsworth Public Library, recreation programs, shopping, restaurants, entertainment, and other amenities.

Figure 6.1: Annual Percent Change in Job Growth, 2010 - 2023



Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research, and Information (CWRI)

Employment trends indicate changes in the strength of the local economy over time. The average total employment in Ellsworth in 2023 was 6,594 jobs. Employment has continued to grow in Ellsworth since 2020, after a significant decline related to the pandemic. Figure





6.1 shows how job levels have fluctuated in the City compared to Hancock County and Maine.

Employment in Ellsworth declined from 2011 to 2014. Jobs largely recovered by 2018, with steady growth up until 2020. In 2018, Jackson Laboratory, a biomedical research institution, opened a new facility in Ellsworth, bringing roughly 500 jobs to Ellsworth and becoming one of the City's and County's largest employers. All three geographies endured pandemic-related employment decline in 2020 but experienced job growth from 2020 to 2023 to exceed pre-pandemic employment. Employment in Ellsworth and Hancock County were more severely impacted by the pandemic in 2020 compared to the State, but the City has experienced stronger job growth from 2022 to 2023. Currently, the largest industries in Ellsworth by number of jobs include:

- Health care and social assistance (1,367)
- Retail trade (1,912)
- Accommodation and food services (820)

Current employment trends highlight the decline of manufacturing in the region since 2014. Additionally, logistics industries like trade, transportation, and utilities as well as education and health services have declined significantly in the past three years.

Table 6.1: Hancock County Employment Trends by Major Sector (through Q3 2022)

| Sector                               | 10-year change | 3-year change |
|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Construction and mining              | 11.7%          | 9.3%          |
| Manufacturing                        | -46.6%         | -9.1%         |
| Trade, transportation, and utilities | -0.7%          | -2.9%         |
| Education and health services        | -4.9%          | -4.3%         |
| Leisure and hospitality              | 7.7%           | 1.2%          |
| Financial activities                 | 6.3%           | -5.8%         |
| Professional and business services   | 26.7%          | 2.3%          |
| Other private industry               | 10.9%          | -4.1%         |
| Public administration                | 7.2%           | 9.7%          |
| <b>Total, All Industries</b>         | <b>1.5%</b>    | <b>-0.8%</b>  |

Source: Maine Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics; Harpswell Strategies, LLC





Table 6.2: Ellsworth Average Employment by Industry, 2023

| Industry                          | Employees | Percentage |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Retail Trade                      | 1,912     | 32.3%      |
| Health Care/Social Assistance     | 1,367     | 23.1%      |
| Accommodation/Food Services       | 820       | 13.9%      |
| Other Services (Excluding Public) | 368       | 6.2%       |
| Construction                      | 273       | 4.1%       |
| Public Administration             | 247       | 3.7%       |
| Finance/Insurance                 | 179       | 3.0%       |
| Professional/Scientific/Tech      | 173       | 2.9%       |
| Admin/Support/Waste Management    | 151       | 2.6%       |
| Transportation/Warehousing        | 115       | 1.7%       |
| Information                       | 104       | 1.6%       |
| Real Estate/Rental/Leasing        | 101       | 1.7%       |
| Wholesale Trade                   | 93        | 1.6%       |
| Management of Companies           | 66        | 1.1%       |
| Transportation/Warehousing        | 115       | 1.7%       |
| Arts/Entertainment/Recreation     | 37        | 0.5%       |
| Educational Services              | 30        | 0.5%       |
| Manufacturing                     | 28        | 0.4%       |

Source: Maine Labor Department, CWRI, Quarterly and Annual Industry Employment and Wages

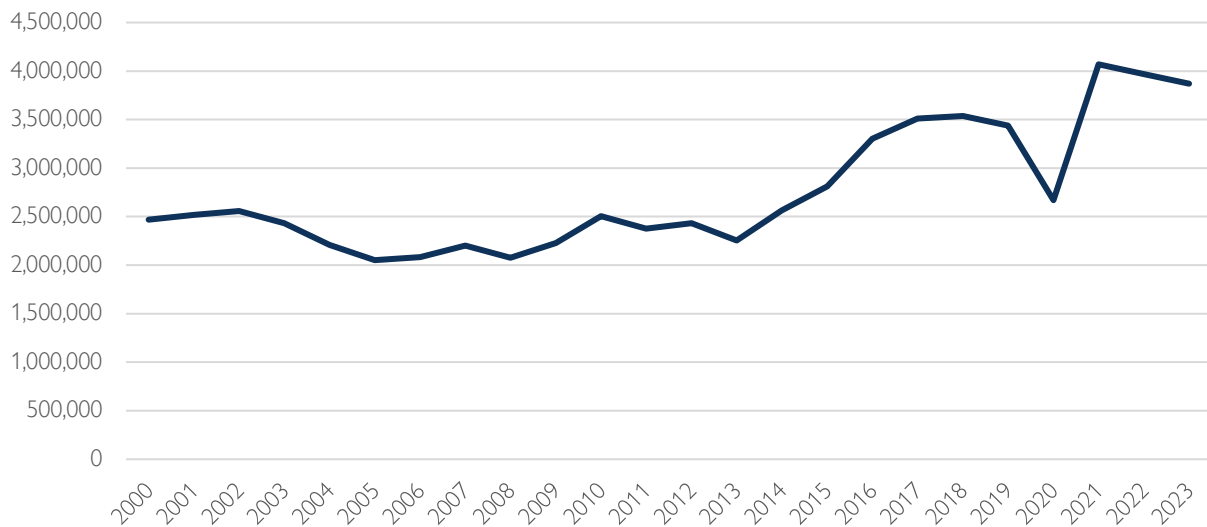
## Tourism

For decades, Ellsworth has been a gateway community, as it is the last major commercial center that visitors pass through before reaching MDI. The growth in the tourism industry and the increase in Park visitors in the past two years has largely benefitted the City's retail and hospitality businesses, but it has also been a cause for concern. The increase in visitors passing through Ellsworth has resulted in a greater impact on City roads and traffic and increased demand for local businesses. Visitor spending is concentrated on lodging and dining, and these businesses are particularly impacted by seasonal changes.



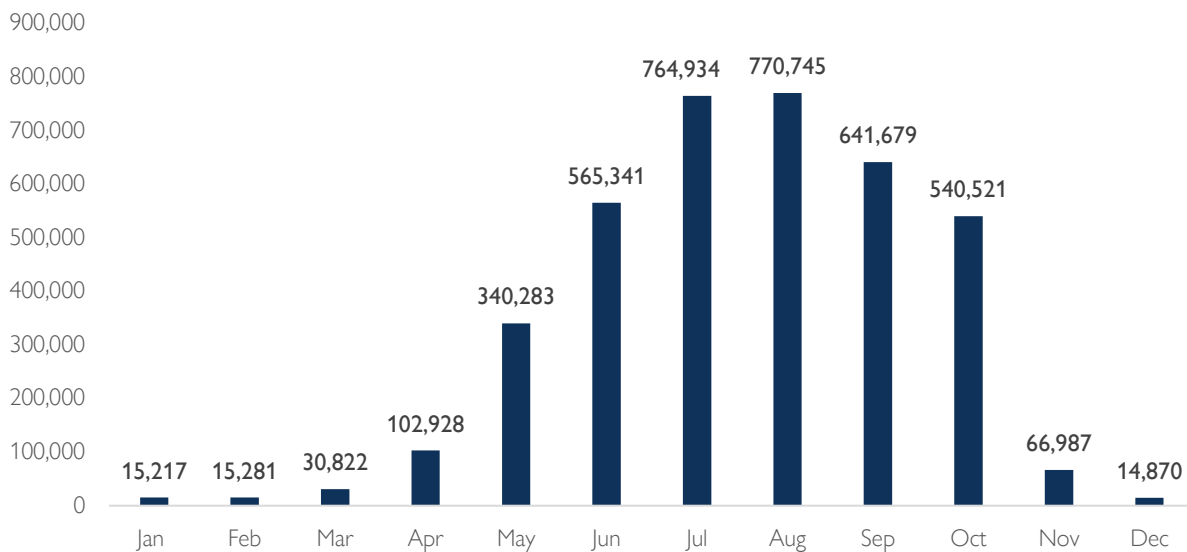


Figure 6.3: Acadia National Park, Annual Recreation Visits



Source: National Park Service

Figure 6.4: Acadia National Park, Monthly Recreation Visits 2023



Source: National Park Service

Some cultural heritage and natural attractions draw visitors to Ellsworth, such as the Woodlawn Museum and Stanwood Wildlife Sanctuary; however, the vast majority of the City's tourist traffic and spending is from national park visitors. The City's recent Ellsworth





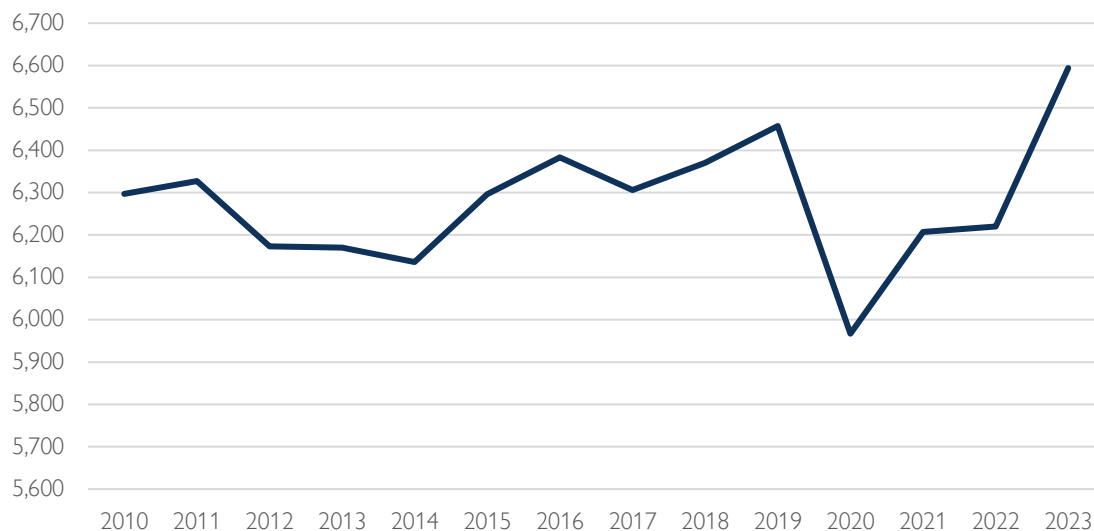
Asset Mapping study identifies strategies to enhance the City’s existing assets to support the community and to elevate Ellsworth as a destination. The asset mapping initiative identified numerous assets that make Ellsworth a desirable place to visit on its own, including a walkable downtown with a variety of shops and restaurants, waterfront access, historic resources, and public gathering spaces.

While residents and business owners recognize the role that tourism plays in the local and regional economy, community members also have an interest in keeping Ellsworth a year-round community and ensuring that community needs (e.g., housing, shopping, services, infrastructure) are prioritized.

## Employment and Wages

### Employment

Figure 6.5: Ellsworth Total Employment, 2012 – 2023



Source: Maine Department of Labor, CWRI

Of the 5,638 employees who worked in Ellsworth in 2021, approximately 77% lived outside of the City and commuted to Ellsworth. Similarly, of the 3,688 employed Ellsworth residents, 65% worked outside of the City. These commuting patterns indicate Ellsworth’s role as a regional employment center. The City experienced a decline in employment (and thus a decline in workers commuting into the City) due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment has rebounded, but not reaching pre-pandemic (2019) levels. It is difficult to estimate current commuter numbers, since employment is down from early 2020, but,





anecdotally, some employers have noted more employees commuting from further outside of the City due to the cost of housing in Ellsworth and the region.

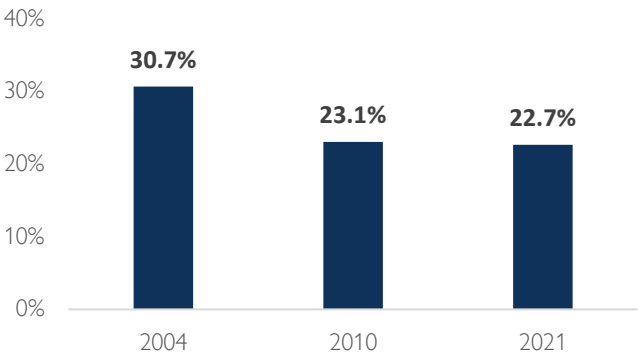
Employment in Ellsworth peaked in 2019 before declining in 2020, related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, employment has increased, and in 2023, total employment surpassed 2019 totals. In 2023, there were 6,594 people employed in Ellsworth.

The top private employers in Hancock County include the Jackson Laboratory, the region’s three hospitals, major retailers, a boat building company, residential care facility, and the College of the Atlantic. Maine Coast Hospital, Wal-Mart, Hannaford (one of several locations), and Kidspeace are all based in Ellsworth.<sup>10</sup>

Labor Force

In 2021, approximately 77% of people employed in Ellsworth were living outside of the City and commuting to Ellsworth for work. Approximately 21% of workers traveled more than 50 miles to work, and roughly 65% traveled more than 10 miles (both within Ellsworth and from outside of the City). Over time, the percentage of employees both living and working in Ellsworth has declined from more than

Figure 6.6: Employed and Living in Ellsworth (% of employees)



Source: U.S. Census, On The Map

30% of all workers in 2004 to 23% in 2021. This is likely due to changes in the housing market. Anecdotal evidence from the City’s major employers indicates that more workers would live in Ellsworth if appropriate housing were available in their price range.

There are several contributing factors to the tight labor market, including an aging population and housing affordability, both of which are pressuring employers to increase wages. As more residents reach retirement age, there is a need for younger working age residents to fill jobs vacated by retirements. The pandemic precipitated a significant decline in labor force participation nationwide, with many people leaving the workforce either

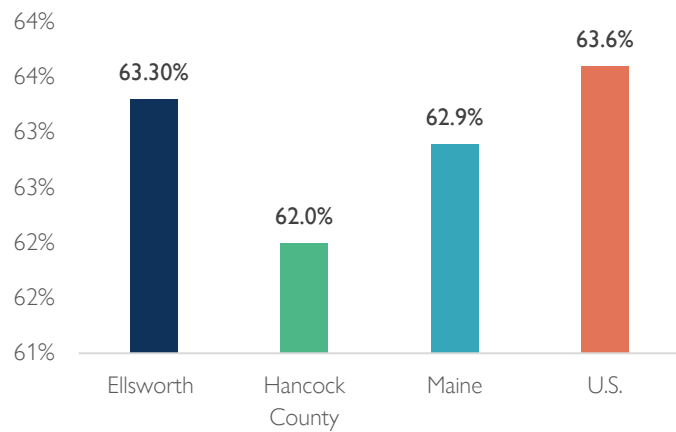
<sup>10</sup> Maine Department of Labor. *Top Private Employers in Maine by Average Monthly Employment – 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2023*.





temporarily or permanently in response to economic impacts, business closures, changing working conditions, and child care challenges. Since 2020, Maine’s labor force participation rate has remained persistently lower than the national average, largely due to aging and retirement. While Ellsworth has a higher labor force participation rate (63.3% based on 2018 – 2022 ACS 5-year estimates) than the State and nation, the City’s population is also getting older, and its workforce is likely to continue to be impacted by aging and retirement.

Figure 6.7: Labor Force Participation Rate

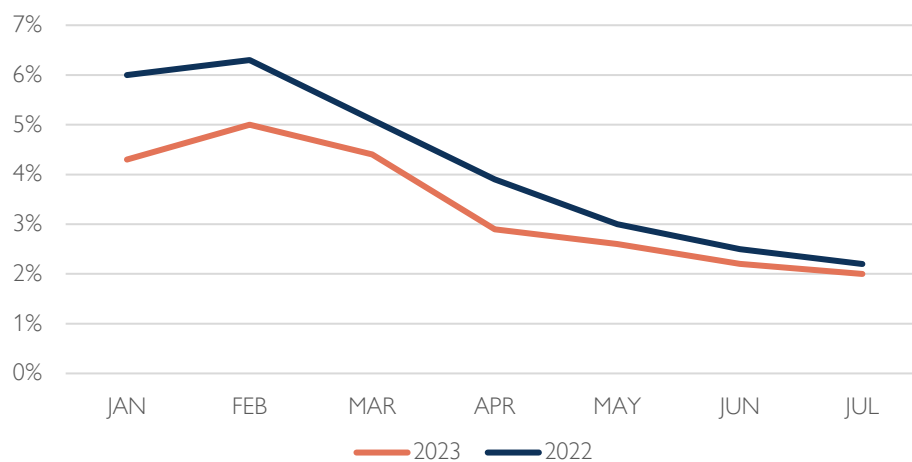


Source: ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

## Unemployment

While Ellsworth is a year-round community, there are many seasonal businesses and employment in the County (which includes MDI). Hancock County typically has lower unemployment in the summer months during tourist season and higher unemployment in winter months. Still, the County’s unemployment rate has fallen since 2020, and each month of 2023 so far (as of July 2023) has seen a lower unemployment rate than the same month one year prior.

Figure 6.8: Hancock County Unemployment Rate, 2022 - 2023



Source: Maine Department of Labor, CWRI



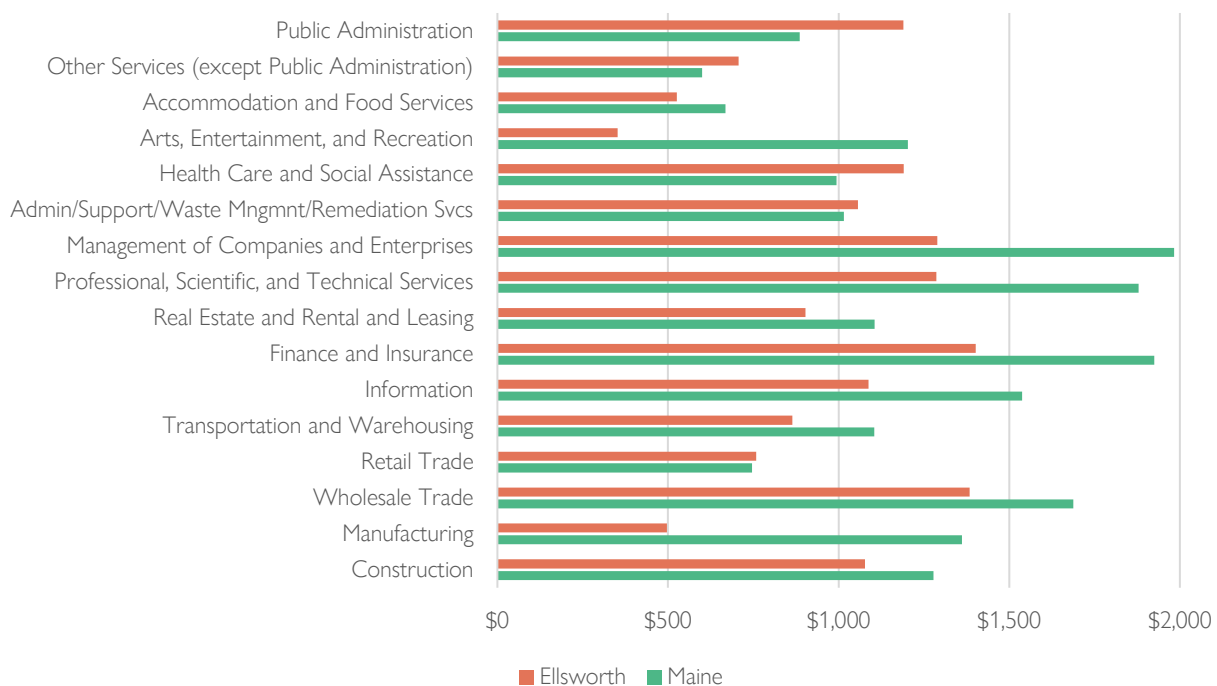


Similarly, unemployment rates across the country have been declining since peaking in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, Maine’s unemployment rates have been somewhat lower than the national average in recent years. Some Maine businesses and industries were more insulated from the economic impacts of the pandemic compared to other states, and Maine’s aging population has resulted in a declining labor force.

## Wages

As noted in Figure 6.9, average wages in Ellsworth are significantly lower than the State for nearly all industries. Two exceptions are retail trade, which has seen a slightly higher average weekly wage compared to the State in recent years (\$758 compared to \$746 in 2023), and public administration (\$1,190 compared to \$886 in 2023). Still, the average weekly wage for retail jobs tends to be lower than the average weekly wage for all industries for the City and the State. Overall, the average weekly wage for Ellsworth employees is nearly 30% lower (at \$871 per week) than the State average wage of \$1,123. While average weekly wages have increased in Ellsworth consistent with wage growth in the region and State, the cost of living and, especially, housing have increased as well.

Figure 6.9: Average Weekly Wages by Industry, 2023  
(for top industries in Ellsworth by number of employees)



Source: Maine Department of Labor





## Current Economic Trends

Housing, transportation, and child care have become the most critical economic development issues in recent years. The dramatic increase in housing costs and the severely limited availability of housing that is affordable to the average employee in Ellsworth have become a major challenge for current residents as well as employers looking to attract employees from outside of the region. Home occupations are allowed throughout the City, with some restrictions outlined in the zoning ordinances. Home occupations could be an opportunity for additional small child care operations to support the City's workforce. They also allow for a variety of small businesses, including professional services, personal services, and art studios.

As the broader region, the State, and communities across the country struggle with housing affordability, the desirability of Maine, and especially Ellsworth, and the increase in tourism post-pandemic have exacerbated the housing crisis in the region. The City and region have experienced an increase in demand due to unexpected rates of in-migration and a loss of year-round housing units as more are converted for seasonal or short-term rental use. The recent growth in remote work has drawn people to Maine who are no longer office bound. Ellsworth's amenities, culture, relative affordability, and access to the region has been a draw for many people from outside the region and State.

In relation to the strength of the tourism industry and record number of visitors to Acadia, the City's retail, restaurant, and lodging sales are also at record high levels. While the seasonality of sales exists, the peak has gotten higher, and the shoulder season is extending.

## Commercial Development and Growth Areas

### Commercial Corridors

The 2004 Future Land Use Plan identified growth areas primarily within the Urban Core. Commercial growth areas are designated along High Street and Route 1 South, and commercial light industrial areas are designated along Route 1A and Bucksport Road. Route 1 is a highly trafficked commercial corridor that serves as the primary route to MDI and has experienced significant growth and redevelopment. As these commercial corridors continue to experience new development, the City will look to support development that will enhance the City's tax base while minimizing adverse impacts on traffic and the environment.





## Downtown

In addition, the City has focused on investments to enhance downtown and support downtown businesses. The City has invested in waterfront revitalization efforts, downtown beautification, and community events. The Heart of Ellsworth has developed a range of programs and initiatives to support downtown businesses including a downtown grant program, business and technical training programs, marketing support, and events. The Heart of Ellsworth's arts programs, events, and marketing resources have also helped elevate downtown Ellsworth as a destination for residents and visitors. The recently completed downtown asset mapping study identified several opportunities for the City to enhance downtown and the downtown experience.

## Challenges and Opportunities

With housing becoming increasingly unaffordable for most Ellsworth residents and limited housing inventory for sale and rent, it is difficult for companies to attract potential employees to the region. The rising cost of housing is also pushing people out of the region, making it more difficult or impractical to commute to Ellsworth from farther away.

The combined impact of the lack of affordable housing and an aging population have directly impacted the labor force and placed pressure on employers. While increased tourist activity is an economic opportunity, many local businesses have struggled with labor force availability to keep up with increased seasonal demand. Addressing housing needs is one of, if not the most, urgent concern for employers.

Ellsworth plays an important role in supporting the broader community and benefits from being a regional commerce center; however, the City will look to be more intentional in funding services and infrastructure improvements to help ensure fiscal stability. The City will continue encouraging economic growth and investing in infrastructure and services to support the broader region but will look to do so in a way that is fiscally responsible and focused on supporting a high quality of place for residents, workers, and visitors.

Maintaining a balance between strengthening the year-round economy and encouraging growth of seasonal tourism is both a challenge and opportunity for Ellsworth. The City has numerous assets that make it a desirable and livable community—a walkable downtown, access to recreation, and a variety of retail options and services—and will look to enhance these assets in a way that is beneficial to both residents and visitors.





## Sources

City of Ellsworth, Economic Development Business Attraction Plan – Demographic, Market, and Economic Overview

City of Ellsworth, Economic Development Business Attraction Plan, Market Analysis, and Action Plan Matrix, October 2023

City of Ellsworth, Economic Development & Business Attraction Planning Final Report October 3, 2011

City of Ellsworth, Trade Area Analysis of Retail Sales (2012)

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 8 Performance Standards

National Park Service, Visitor Use Statistics

Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research, and Information

U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

U.S. Census, American Community Survey





## 7. HOUSING

### Introduction

In a recent University of New Hampshire poll (released in August 2023), Maine residents identified housing as the most important problem facing the State.<sup>11</sup> This is especially true in Ellsworth, which was once a relatively affordable place to live, compared to other coastal communities in Maine. Since the 2004 Comprehensive Plan, the state of housing in Ellsworth has changed dramatically. While the City has continued to experience steady population growth and an increase in new housing units, several regional and national trends have impacted the housing market in Ellsworth and the region. In recent years, the City has experienced a dramatic increase in housing costs, very limited inventory of homes for rent and for sale, and an increase in in-migration to the State and region, driving up demand for housing.

In Ellsworth, economic and demographic changes have impacted the shift in housing demand (including the type, size, and location of housing units) and residents' ability to access housing. Approximately 10% of the City's residents are living below the poverty line (a slight increase in the past decade). While incomes have increased, this rise has not kept pace with the rise in housing costs for owners, buyers, and renters. At the same time, household size is shrinking as the population ages and the birth rate declines, and new residents moving to the region tend to have higher incomes and different housing needs.

### Housing Stock

Ellsworth experienced periods of more rapid growth and development during the 1980s and 2000s. In the 1980s, housing growth outpaced population growth, with an additional 687 housing units added (27% increase), while the City's population grew by 784 residents, a 15% increase in population growth. Since 1990, the City's housing and population growth have been roughly comparable.

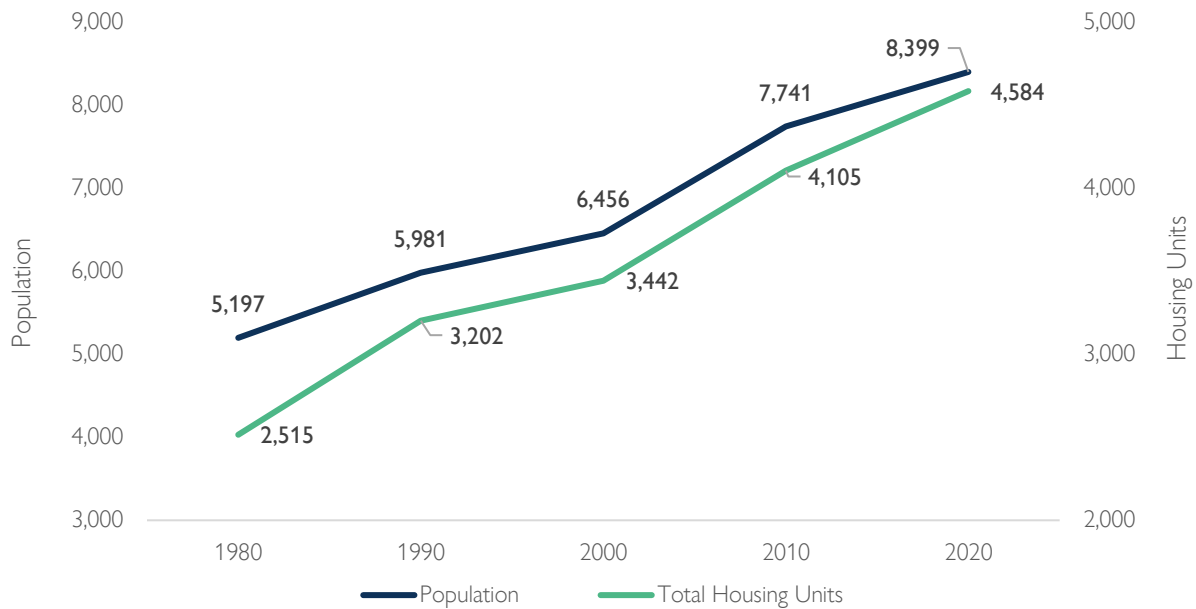
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<sup>11</sup> Overton, Penelope. Portland Press Herald. August 28, 2023. *Housing, cost of living top of mind for Mainers in UNH poll*. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://www.pressherald.com/2023/08/28/housing-cost-of-living-top-of-mind-for-mainers-in-unh-poll>





Figure 7.1: Housing and Population Growth over Time

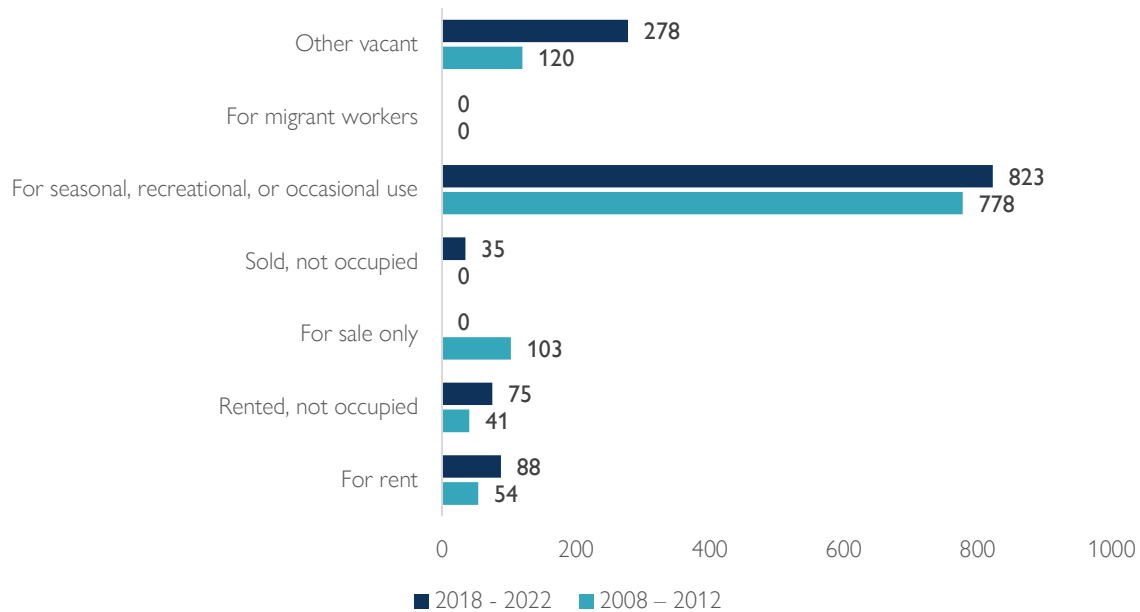


Source: U.S. Census

Despite continued housing development, changing demographics have resulted in increased pressure on Ellsworth’s housing market. In addition, a significant portion of the City’s housing stock is comprised of vacant homes for seasonal use. Table 8.1 shows the breakdown of occupied and vacant housing units. A housing unit is considered vacant if no one is living in it at the time of the Census, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent, or if the occupants have a usual residence elsewhere (typically seasonal residents). Vacant units include units that are used seasonally or part-time, that are currently for sale or rent, and new units not currently occupied. Seasonal homes have continued to be approximately 15% – 17% of the City’s total housing units over the past several decades. Of the 4,584 dwelling units in 2020, roughly 20% were vacant, including 11.8% of units that are occupied only seasonally.



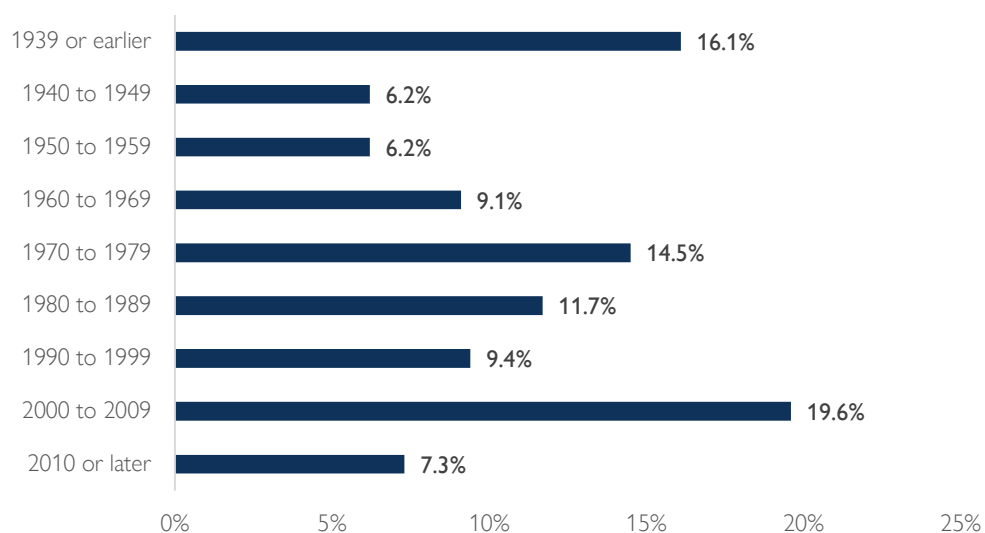
Figure 7.2: Ellsworth Change In Vacant Housing Units, 2012 to 2022



Source: ACS 2008-2012 5-year estimates, ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

The age of housing stock is a particular concern in the northeast United States, with additional challenges related to maintenance, repair, and compliance with code requirements. With consistent growth in the City since the 1920s, there is variety in the age of Ellsworth's housing stock, and housing within the City is generally in decent condition.

Figure 7.3: Percent of Ellsworth Housing Units by Year Built



Source: 2018 – 2022 ACS 5-year estimates

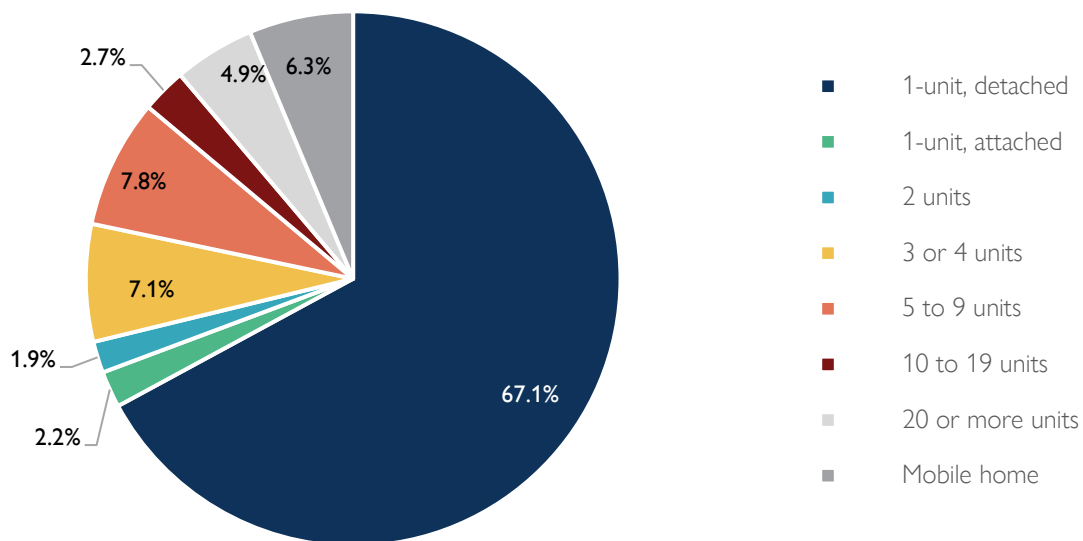




Approximately 17% of the City’s housing units were constructed prior to 1940; 20% were constructed from 1940 to 1969; 40% were constructed from 1970 to 1999; and 24% were constructed after 2000. In addition, the City has seen significant new housing development proposals in recent years, with more than 300 units either in the approval process or under construction. In addition, the Planning Board is reviewing and has approved several subdivisions for additional single-family home development.

The majority (67.1%) of housing units are single-unit detached structures (single-family homes). This has not changed significantly since 2000 when single-family homes accounted for 69.9% of all dwelling units. There continues to be a lack of diversity in housing types, with a particular lack of missing middle housing, which refers to attached townhouses, duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and other housing types that fall between single-family detached homes and mid-rise apartment buildings.<sup>12</sup> A smaller percentage of the City’s housing units are one-unit attached (e.g., townhouse) structures or two-unit (duplex) structures compared to the State’s overall housing stock. New residential developments under construction and under review by the City will add to the diversity of housing types in the City, including townhouses and multi-family apartment buildings.

Figure 7.4: Percent of Housing Units by Structure Type



Source: 2018 – 2022 ACS 5-year estimates

<sup>12</sup> Missing Middle Housing. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://missingmiddlehousing.com/>





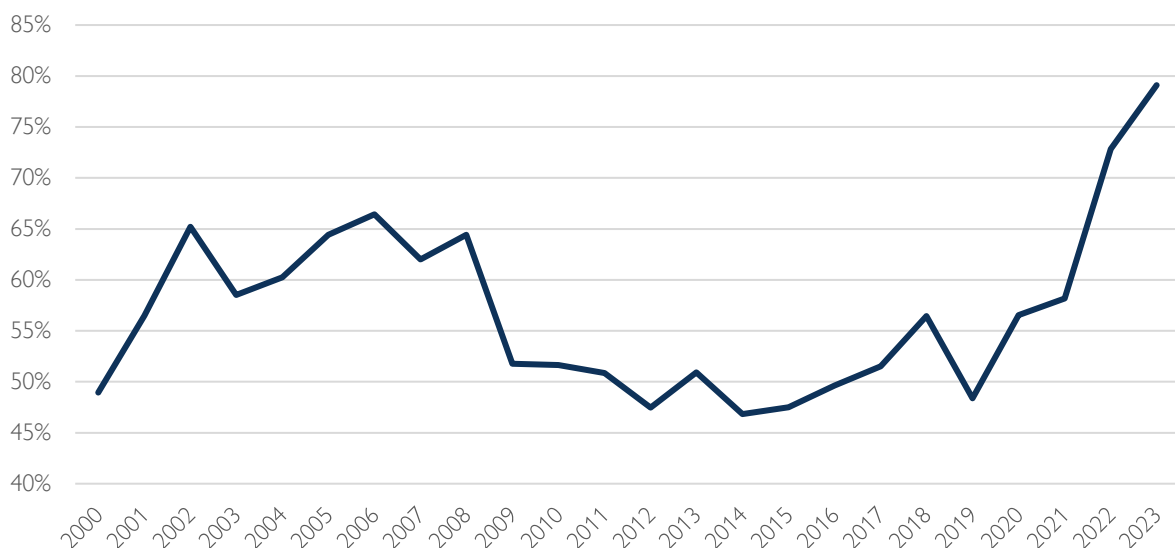
## Affordability

The City, like other communities in the State and region, has experienced a significant rise in housing costs in recent years. While the City's median home price remains slightly lower than the State's, the community has seen an increase of more than 100% in the median home price from 2012 to 2022. Median income has increased over the same period, but not as drastically, and there is a significant and growing gap between the median income and the income needed to afford the median home price. Housing affordability has been further challenged by a confluence of broader regional and national issues that have stalled supply and increased demand for housing in the region.

### Home Ownership Affordability

Since 2000, the median home price has increased 296%. During that same period, median income increased only 79%. Recent increases in housing costs have been more dramatic with the greatest percent increase in median home price occurring from 2019 to 2020: A 33% increase from \$185,000 to \$246,000. Income, however, has not kept pace. In 2023, approximately 79% of households were unable to afford the median home price, up from 48% in 2019, as shown in Figure 7.5. Figures 7.6 and 7.7 show the difference in actual median household income from 2013 to 2023.

Figure 7.5: Ellsworth Households Unable to Afford Median Home Price (%)



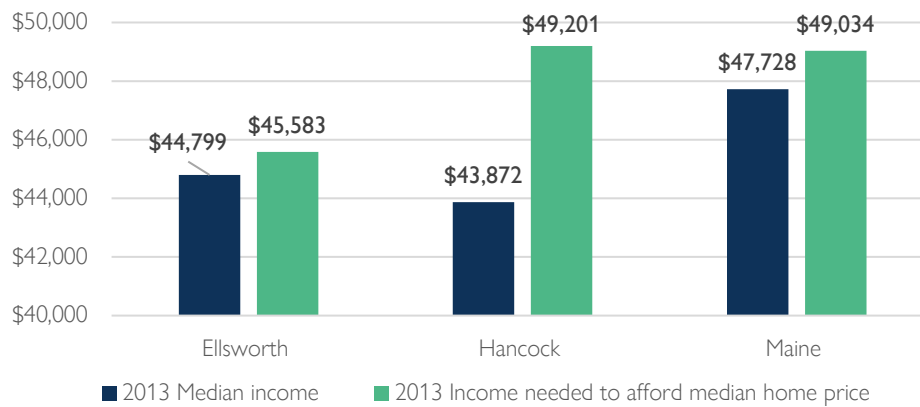
Source: MaineHousing





Historically, Ellsworth has been a more affordable community than many other coastal regions in Maine. While the City’s median home price has continued to be lower than the State and County, Ellsworth has experienced a greater change in housing affordability, in recent years, relative to the median income of the population.

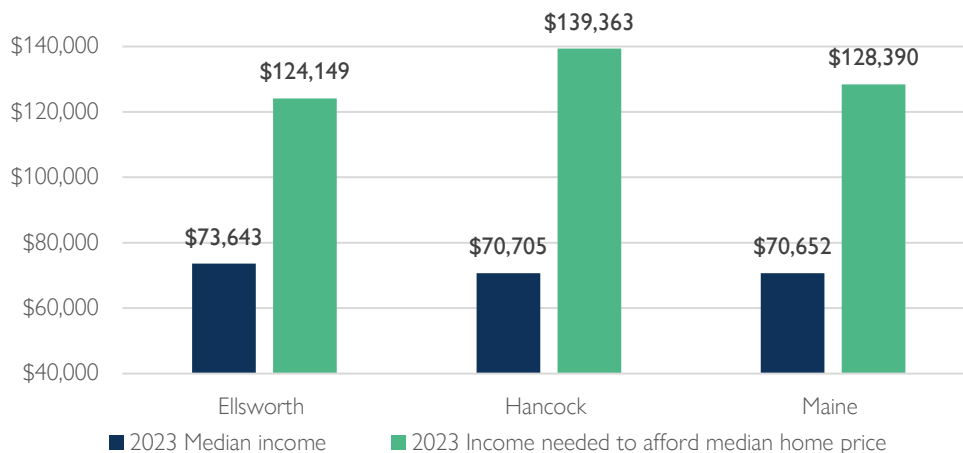
Figure 7.6: Housing Affordability, 2013



Source: *MaineHousing*

Figure 7.6 shows the relative affordability of Ellsworth in 2013, when the median income was higher than the income needed to afford the median home price. At the same time, overall median housing costs for Hancock County and Maine were higher than median incomes, resulting in an affordability gap that has grown from 2013 to 2023. The current (2023) gap between the income needed to afford the median home price in Ellsworth and the median income is now similar to the affordability gap in the region and state.

Figure 7.7: Housing Affordability, 2023

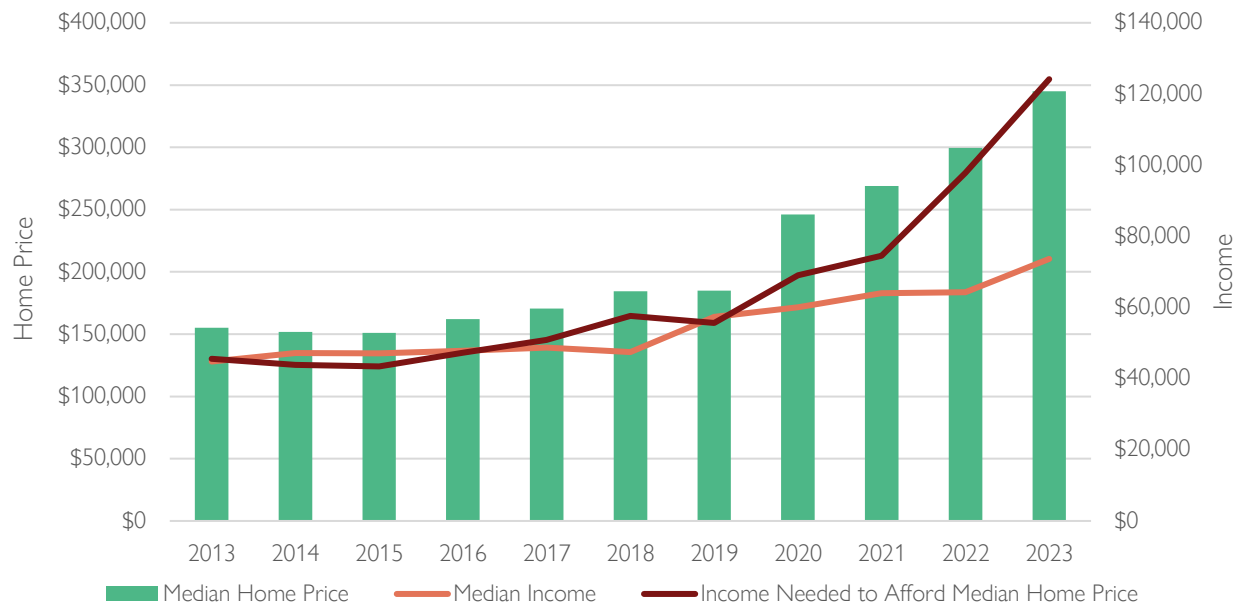


Source: *MaineHousing*





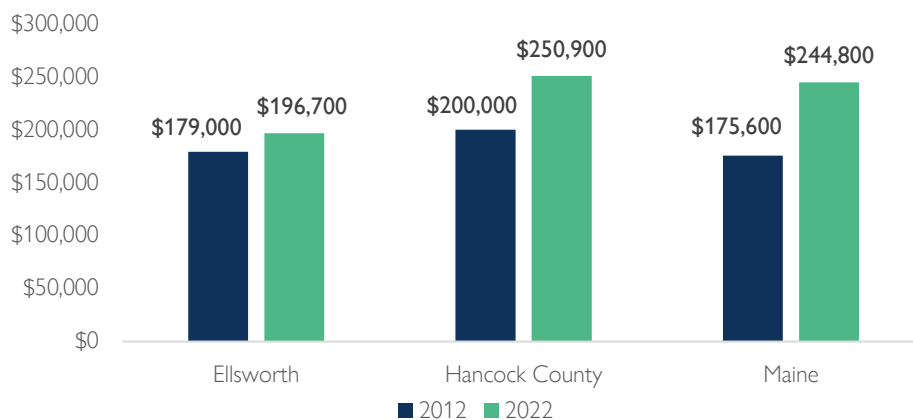
Figure 7.8: Ellsworth Median Home Price Compared to Median Income



Source: MaineHousing

Figure 7.8 shows the change in median home price compared to the change in median income and the significant increase since 2019. Median home values have increased in Ellsworth, but to a lesser degree than home prices and less substantially than in other parts of the state. From 2012 to 2022, the median home value in Ellsworth increased approximately 10% from \$179,000 to \$196,700. The increase in median home price from 2019 to 2023 (shown in Figure 7.8) indicates that median home value is also significantly higher than \$196,700, which is based on data from 2018 to 2022.

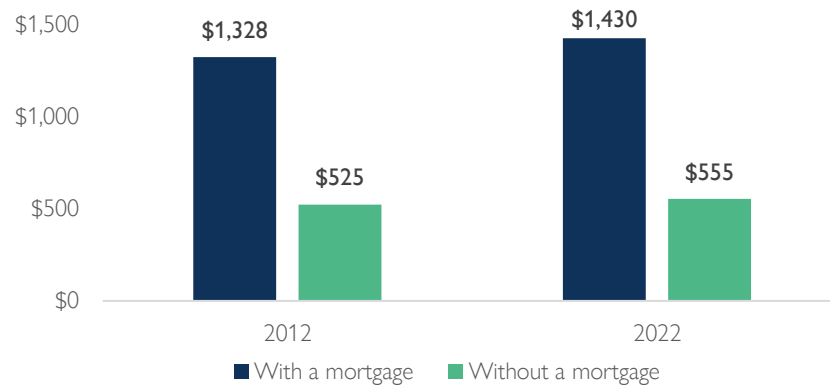
Figure: 7.9: Median Home Value



Source: ACS 2008-2012 5-year estimates; ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates



Figure 7.10: Ellsworth Median Owner Monthly Costs

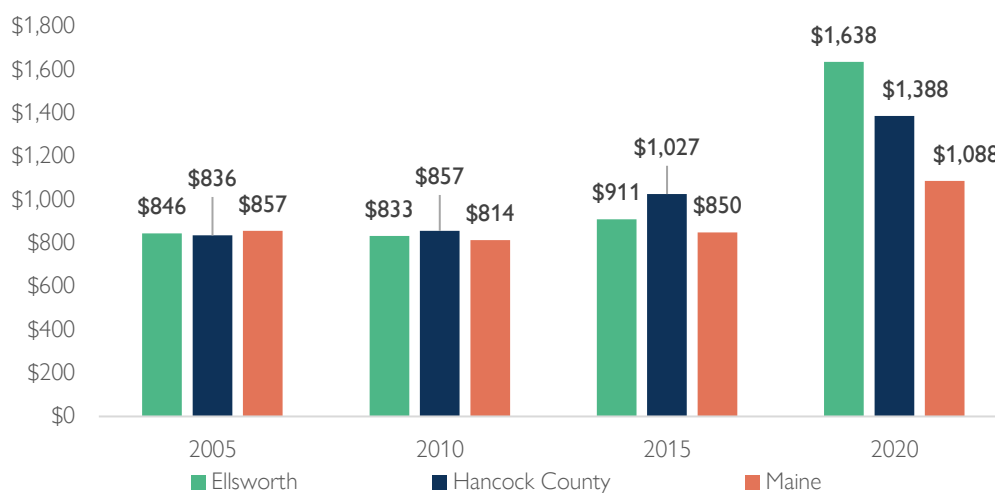


Source: ACS 2008-2012 5-year estimates; ACS 2018-2022 5-year estimates

## Rental Housing Affordability

Approximately 31% of all households in Ellsworth rent their home. Median rent in Ellsworth remained relatively steady from 2005 to 2015. After 2015, rents began to rise, with a nearly 80% increase in median rent for a two-bedroom apartment from 2015 (\$911) to 2020 (\$1,638). While rents increased throughout the region and state, rents in Ellsworth experienced a much steeper increase, likely influenced in part due to the growing pressure on the housing market on MDI and lack of affordable housing for seasonal employees on the island. Rental affordability data include figures up to 2020, and do not reflect the increased pressure on the rental housing market since, during, and after the pandemic.

Figure 7.11: Median Rent (Two-Bedroom Unit With Utilities)



Source: MaineHousing

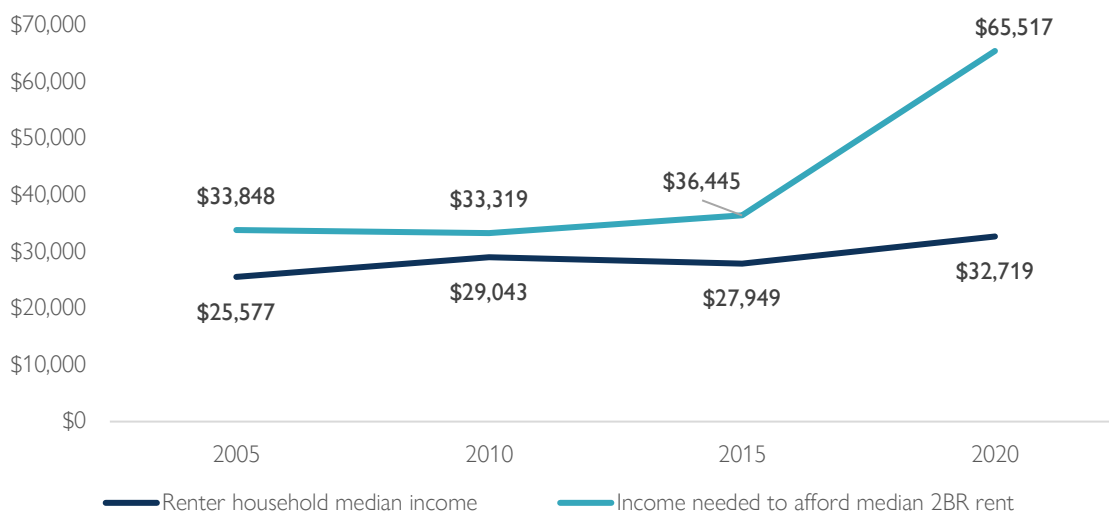




Compared to Hancock County and the State, Ellsworth has experienced the most dramatic increase in rent. This is likely due to the growing desirability of the area as well as the increasingly tight housing market in Bar Harbor and other MDI communities, compelling people to find housing in Ellsworth.

Following a broader regional and national trend, the rise of rental housing costs has outpaced wage growth in recent years. In Ellsworth, the median renter household income increased 17% from 2015 to 2020, while the income needed to afford the median rent increased nearly 80%.

Figure 7.12: Median Renter Household Income and Income Needed to Afford Median Rent



Source: MaineHousing

### Affordable Housing Development

Ellsworth has eight income-restricted housing developments with a total of 326 units. Most of those units (247) also have age restrictions for older adults (either 55 and over or 62 and over). Income-restricted affordable housing developments have been developed and are managed by various entities including private developers, the MDI and Ellsworth Housing Authorities, and nonprofit organizations, such as Penquis.

More than 40% of the City’s income-restricted housing units were constructed within the last decade, including Leonard Lake Senior Housing (26 units), Straw Way Family Housing (29 units), Oriole Way Apartments (50 units), and Oriole Way Senior Apartments (29 units). These projects have responded to the growing demand for affordable housing in Ellsworth





and the aging population of the region and State; however, development has not kept pace with demand.

To support affordable housing development, the City has performance standards for density bonuses to allow for greater development of affordable units in the City. The City is examining additional opportunities to remove barriers and encourage additional affordable housing development.

## Housing Demand

### Changing Demographics

There are several factors impacting the high demand for housing in Ellsworth. The changing demographics, as described in Chapter 1, show what has been noted as a national and global trend of shifting household composition. The past decade has seen a decline in the percentage of households with children (20% per the 2018 – 2022 ACS 5-year estimates, down from 30% a decade prior) and an increase in the population of retirement age (60 years and over). As a result of an aging population, the same population would require more housing units and different housing types, as children leave their family home, and older adults look to downsize.

### Migration

In addition, Maine's population growth since 2020 surpassed pre-pandemic population growth estimates, largely due to unanticipated domestic and international migration to the State. In response to impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of remote work, Maine became one of the top destinations for domestic migration as people began to flee more dense urban areas for rural areas and smaller communities such as Ellsworth.

### Workforce Housing

As noted earlier, Ellsworth has historically been a more affordable community, with median incomes generally aligned with median housing costs, until recently. Since 2020, the gap between median income and median home price has widened dramatically. This trend began even earlier (around 2015) for renter households. As the economy and job growth have rebounded from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unemployment rate remains near all-time lows, there is a growing demand for workforce housing. Workforce housing typically refers to moderate to middle income housing (usually up to 120% of the





area median income) and targeted to households who earn more than the income limits for income-restricted affordable housing.

In addition to demand generated by jobs in Ellsworth, rising housing costs in Bar Harbor and other MDI communities have prompted employees to seek more affordable housing opportunities in Ellsworth.

### Regional Housing Demand

Economic growth and housing shortages in other communities in the region also impact housing needs in Ellsworth. The 2022 Bar Harbor Housing Analysis notes that for employees who work in Bar Harbor, but live outside of the Town, the highest percentage are commuting from Ellsworth. The City's access to MDI, amenities and services, and relative affordability has made it a desirable place for tourism industry workers who cannot afford to live on MDI. Ellsworth has experienced a growing demand for housing as Bar Harbor and other MDI communities have struggled with the lack of affordable housing to meet the needs of seasonal and other employees.

Employers in the region are now struggling to find and retain workers, as employees seeking affordable housing are pushed further from Bar Harbor and Ellsworth, making commuting to these areas financially challenging.

### Homelessness

The City has seen an increase in the unhoused population including a growing number of people living outside in Ellsworth. Experts estimate up to two dozen residents are living outside; however, this is difficult to estimate and could be higher.<sup>13</sup> The dramatic rise in housing costs has contributed to the increase in homelessness, like other urban communities in Maine. Higher rents (median rent for a two-bedroom apartment was \$1,638 in 2020) and lack of inventory make it more difficult for households to find and remain in permanent housing.

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<sup>13</sup> Trotter, Bill. October 7, 2023. "Ellsworth Leaders Grapple With Growing Homelessness". *Bangor Daily News*. Accessed December 5, 2023.  
<https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/10/07/news/hancock/ellsworth-leaders-grapple-homelessness-joam40zk0w/>





Emmaus Homeless Shelter is a 25-bed facility, which includes a food pantry and other services for the community. This is the only shelter of its kind in Hancock County. The unhoused population and those living in temporary encampments are largely hidden, with temporary campsites typically in wooded areas out of public view and spread around the City. Still, the City's emergency responders and service providers have noted the growing unhoused population and the varying housing and service needs of those impacted. Related to this increase in homelessness, the City's requests for General Assistance have increased dramatically from 2022 to 2023.

## Housing Supply

### Housing Construction

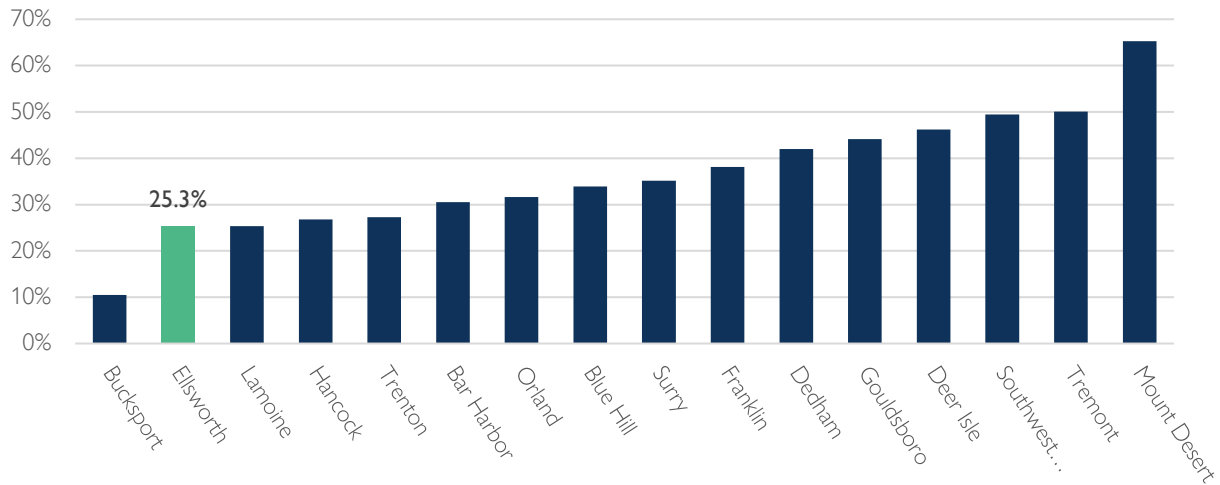
After a significant stall in residential construction following the Great Recession, many communities across the country, especially in the northeast, are struggling to catch up with developing housing to meet the needs of a growing population and changing demographics. Recent increases in construction costs have delayed construction and impacted financial feasibility of projects and affordability of newly developed housing.

### Short-Term Rentals and Seasonal Housing

A significant percentage (approximately 25%) of Ellsworth's housing stock is vacant, which is similar to other communities in the region that have large seasonal populations. This includes typical vacancies due to units being for rent or sale. The largest category of vacant housing units includes those units for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use, which makes up 12% of the City's housing stock. These units include homes that are occupied part-time and whose owners have a separate primary residence. Homes used as short-term rentals are typically included in this category as well. The second largest share of vacant units falls in the "other vacant" category, which includes units that are vacant due to renovation, held by a caretaker, or are vacant for some other reason. The total number of vacant units and percentage of total vacant units have increased from 2011 to 2022. Still, these data do not account for recent shifts in the housing market, which anecdotally point to a possible increase in short-term rentals and seasonal homes.

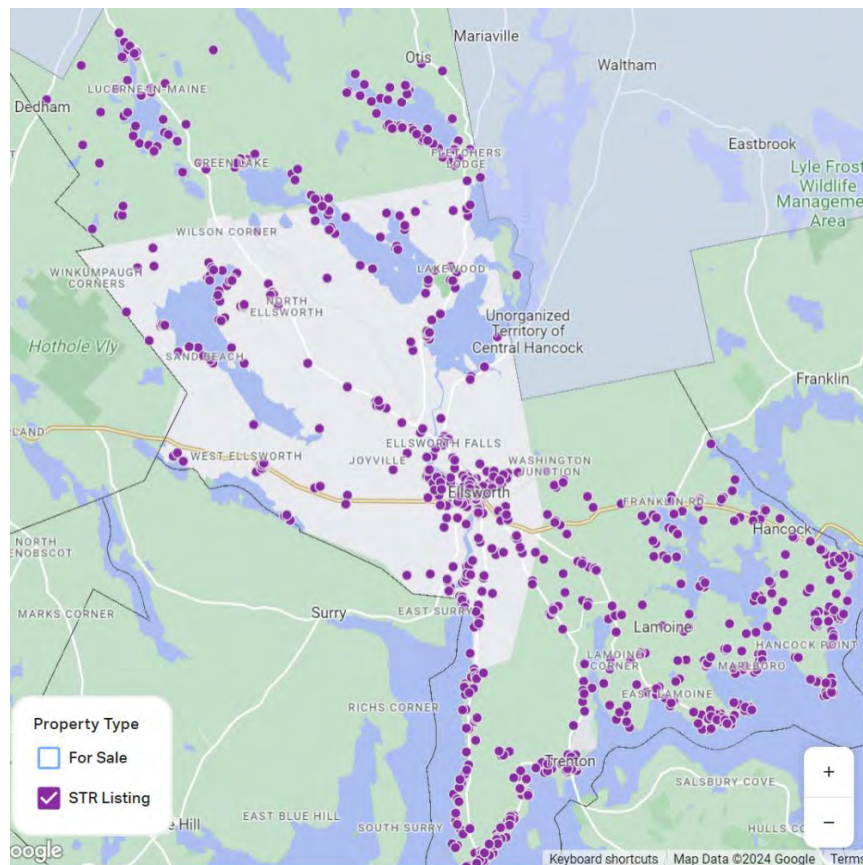


Figure 7.13: Vacant Housing Units (Percent of Total Housing Units)



Source: 2018 – 2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Figure 7.14: Location of Ellsworth Short-Term Rental Properties



Source: AirDNA





The change and growth of the short-term rental market in Ellsworth has not been documented over the long-term due to limited data. AirDNA, a vacation rental data analytics website, compiles data from multiple vacation rental websites and indicates 776 total active listings in the Ellsworth region (which includes Ellsworth, Trenton, Lamoine, Hancock, and some communities north of Ellsworth) in June 2024, up 24% from 2023. A total of 982 listings have been identified in this region. Within the City limits, it is estimated that there are between 350 and 400 active short-term rental listings.

The City does not currently have an ordinance regulating the use or number of short-term rentals. As other Maine communities have experienced a growing number of short-term rentals and the resulting impact on local housing markets, many have established regulations to limit the expansion of short-term rentals, help ensure the safety and compliance of units, and to be able to track their growth in communities.

# Housing Need

The City’s Housing Needs Assessment found that, approximately 2,500 households will need housing by 2030. This estimate does not imply that all new housing units will need to be constructed to accommodate these households. The estimate includes natural population growth, workforce growth, loss of housing units due to obsolescence and those existing Ellsworth households that are cost-burdened (over 1,300) who may need alternate housing options to meet their needs and budgets. These numbers are based on conditions in Ellsworth today and available data to project future conditions.

Table 7.1: Breakdown of Estimated Housing Needs

|                                    | All Households | Owner Households | Renter Households |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Cost-Burdened Households*          | 1,305          | 539              | 766               |
| Obsolete Housing**                 | 553            | 383              | 169               |
| Population Growth**                | 362            | 278              | 84                |
| Workforce Growth – High Estimate** | 337            | 236              | 101               |
| Workforce Growth – Low Estimate**  | 266            | 158              | 68                |
| High Estimate by 2030              | 2,557          | 1,436            | 1,120             |
| Low Estimate by 2030               | 2,486          | 1,358            | 1,087             |

\*Current cost-burdened households

\*\* Based on 2030 estimates

Source : ACS 2022 5-year estimates, Esri, Maine Housing Data Portal, Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), U.S. Census Bureau Components of Inventory Change: 2015 – 2017, HUD





## Challenges and Opportunities

Shifting demographics and lifestyle needs have changed housing demand, including size, location, type, and amenities. Continuing to fund and develop housing in the same patterns as decades prior will not meet the needs of the community today. There is a need for new housing interventions in Ellsworth to accommodate the City's projected population and workforce growth, alleviate housing cost burden, and replace obsolete housing units. This includes an overall need for new, improved, or alternative housing options.

The City will continue to work collaboratively to address the needs of Ellsworth's most vulnerable populations, including the unhoused and those at risk of homelessness. Housing solutions should also consider social service needs, transportation and access needs, and the importance of housing stability for individuals and the community.

The City will also seek opportunities to address housing needs at a regional level through increased communication and collaboration with the County, State, other municipalities, and organizations. The economy and housing market are not limited by municipal boundaries. A coordinated approach will be important in realizing efficiencies and finding regional solutions.

## Sources

AirDNA

American Community Survey

Bar Harbor Housing Analysis, 2022

City of Ellsworth 2004 Comprehensive Plan

City of Ellsworth, Code of Ordinances

MaineHousing, Affordability Indexes

Maine State Economist, 2040 Demographic Projections

U.S. Census





## 8. TRANSPORTATION

### Introduction

Ellsworth is located approximately 30 miles southeast of Bangor. Ellsworth is known as the gateway to Acadia National Park, and Downeast Maine. However, much of the modern-day transportation infrastructure was not designed to support the volume of people traveling Downeast. As Acadia has experienced an increase in visitors over the years, Ellsworth has had to update transportation infrastructure to attempt to accommodate additional cars and businesses looking to support and take advantage of the proximity to Acadia.

With nearly all visitors to MDI passing through Ellsworth, the City has been challenged to maintain transportation infrastructure to support the increasing traffic levels and for both visitors and local community members.

### Roads and Traffic

As the gateway to Acadia National Park, Ellsworth's seasonal crowds create added traffic and stresses to the local infrastructure. The City and its partners, MaineDOT, and the business community, have worked to improve High Street traffic on Routes 1, 1A, and 3 by closing curb cuts, adding travel lanes and turning lanes, reconfiguring intersections, installing new traffic signals, and creating connectivity between streets and businesses. While some of these activities (under construction as of August 2023) will improve capacity, mobility and safety on the Ellsworth's primary transportation corridor, these improvements are a catch-up operation. The Average Daily Traffic (AADT) counts leveled off or even dipped in 2020 but MaineDOT traffic counts are limited after 2020 in the new post-covid landscape[1]. As population increases, people continue to move to more rural areas from urban areas, and tourism increases to pre-pandemic levels, these already stressed roads will continue to be a major issue for the City of Ellsworth.

Table 8.1 MaineDOT Average Daily Traffic Volume Over Time

| Road Location            | 2014 | 2017  | 2020  |
|--------------------------|------|-------|-------|
| U.S. Route 1             |      |       |       |
| E. of North Bend Rd.     | N/D  | 6,840 | 6,380 |
| W. of Christian Rdg. Rd. | 7270 | 8,170 | 7,980 |





| Road Location                   | 2014   | 2017   | 2020   |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| E. of State St.                 | 8,720  | 8,280  | 8,270  |
| W. SR 184                       | 12,470 | 11,900 | 11,880 |
| U.S. Route 1A                   |        |        |        |
| SE of IR 1177                   | 9,820  | 11,360 | N/R    |
| NW of SR 180 (Mariaville)       | 11,990 | 11,980 | N/R    |
| NW of SR 179 (North St.)        | 13,760 | 15,360 | 16,290 |
| NW of U.S. 1 (Main St.)         | 17,290 | 17,030 | 14,950 |
| High Street                     |        |        |        |
| SE of Main St.                  | 23,060 | 21,450 | 20,720 |
| S. of Deane St.                 | N/D    | 23,710 | 22,230 |
| NW. of Foster St.               | 12,430 | 12,530 | 12,000 |
| SE. of Foster St.               | 31,330 | 27,600 | 12,520 |
| NW. of U.S. 1 CUT               | 13,640 | 12,910 | 12,010 |
| Bar Harbor Rd                   |        |        |        |
| N. of Buttermilk Rd.            | 13,650 | N/D    | N/D    |
| S. of Buttermilk Rd.            | 12,700 | 13,440 | N/D    |
| S. of Mardens Ent @ Trenton Tl. | 11,770 | 12,280 | 11,090 |

Source: MaineDOT, Traffic Division

The City's challenge and its responsibility toward the local and regional communities is to determine the appropriate balance development and, consequently, traffic on the City's main transportation corridors. While the general flow of traffic to MDI is consistent along Route 1/High Street, many cars attempt to cut through Route 230, and local residential routes to get around traffic, further impacting residents. While the City does see some benefit from being the access point, and many visitors stop in Ellsworth before or after traveling to MDI to shop, get gas, and dine, it is minimal. The residents and business owners of Ellsworth disproportionately take on the burden through taxation and impacts on daily lives to maintain critical regional infrastructure for visitors passing through.

Most of the transportation infrastructure runs east to west, and many road users are also traveling from the west heading east toward MDI along the regional connectors of Route 1. Route 1A is largely a north south road and connects downtown with the rural Ellsworth neighborhoods to the north. These roads converge in the heart of downtown Ellsworth and become High Street, the City's main commercial corridor. High Street is a concentration of regional services and big-box retail stores serving both regional residents and visitors





passing through. High Street has also where most of the hotels are in Ellsworth. Route 3 splits down to the south and becomes the primary access point to MDI. These roads see significant traffic, which peaks in the summer, with rush hour traffic on and off the island being bad all year. This is, in part, due to the lack of housing on MDI resulting in the neighboring communities to provide housing for staff working in MDI. Because of the elevated traffic, some motorists look to bypass the congestion by cutting through local residential roads, impacting the neighborhoods around downtown. Outside of downtown and the regional connectors, the rest of Ellsworth is very rural. This introduces challenges to maintaining these roads and servicing them in the winter in a timely manner. There are approximately 90 miles of roads that have led to the manifestation of the current land use and development patterns. Within City limits there are also 39 bridges that cross streams, the Union River, and the dam at Graham Lake.

MaineDOT requires a traffic movement permit application for projects that generate 100 or more passenger car equivalents during peak traffic hours. As defined in the Unified Development Ordinance these projects will also be subject to a major use site development plan review. Those projects not requiring a traffic movement permit require a minor use site development plan review and have criteria that must be identified and met.

Accessways, traffic impacts, and access are all part of the local project assessment.

The City's street design standards define street types and general design guidelines to reinforce desired land use patterns. For example, defined road types include transit roads, rural roads, and retail streets. Each road type includes design standards such as minimal right-of-way, maximum design speed, maximum grade, etc.

Geography is a factor in improving circulation and traffic flow, with only one route from Ellsworth to MDI; however, intra-city traffic could be improved with additional through connections. Recent developments in the Urban Core, including Oriole Way and The Jackson Laboratory, have added or improved road connections to minimize traffic impacts on main arterial roads.

## Parking

There is sufficient onsite parking for most land uses in Ellsworth, including most of downtown. It is noted that the area designated as Downtown A in the City's Parking Standards (Article 11 of the Unified Development Ordinance), including a portion of Main Street and abutting area, experiences some parking constraints due to the historic patterns of development. It is noted that most of downtown has sufficient onsite parking. The





parking standards for all downtown sectors allow for some flexibility in requirements to support redevelopment and new development in downtown. The standards allow for shared parking, off-site parking within a reasonable walking distance, and changes of use without requiring nonconforming uses to comply with current parking minimums.

The City maintains public parking lots at City Hall Plaza, School Street, Printinghouse Square (Water Street), and at public facilities. In addition, free street parking is available in much of downtown. City staff have noted a need for improved signage to direct visitors to public parking lots, especially during the peak tourism season.

## Department of Public Works

The Ellsworth Public Works Department is responsible for general maintenance of city-wide public infrastructure including managing the City's Pavement Management Plan which includes street repaving, sidewalk and street repairs and the City's emergency maintenance. As part of Public Works, the Highway division maintains and constructs all public roads and has 14 full-time staff. The division also takes care of sidewalk maintenance and construction, mowing and landscaping of City properties, emptying trash receptacles on City properties, snow plowing and sanding, road striping and sign installations, and spring sweeping and grading of roads. Currently there is no City parks department, so maintenance and any additional support falls on the Public Works Department. The Highway division systematically works through a paving schedule to ensure roads are properly upgraded and repaired. There is also an emergency response system that attends to unplanned incidences and issues like potholes, weather-related problems, and traffic light malfunctions. The 2025 fiscal year budget for road maintenance and improvements is \$320,000; however, the City will be going to bond for additional funds to support necessary road maintenance.

Ellsworth was designated an Urban Compact Area by MaineDOT in 2012.<sup>14</sup> Maine's Urban Compact municipalities are those in which the population exceeds 7,500 inhabitants. As an Urban Compact Area, municipalities have general road and storm drain maintenance as well as winter maintenance responsibilities on state roads. The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) addresses capital planning and investment for capital projects on

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<sup>14</sup> City of Ellsworth Ordinances & Codes, Chapter 56 Unified Development Ordinance, Article 9 Street Design and Construction Standards





state roads. This has put an added burden on the Department of Public Works to cover additional roads such as Route 1, US Route 1A, State Route 3 and Route 230 that would normally be covered by the state.

In the winter, the department clears snow from streets, public parking lots, and sidewalks. The City constructed a new salt shed since the last comprehensive plan to better serve the community. The Department of Public Works also constructs parking lots for parks and other public facilities, installs small furniture and street amenities, and replaces storm drains. Currently, there is no cross-department asset management software, and projects and planning are coordinated by individual departments. A new asset management system is currently being explored and expected to be implemented in the near term.

## Crash Data

In 2022, there were 392 vehicle crashes city-wide on Maine public roads including local and state roads. This is up from 337 crashes in 2021. Most accidents happened year-round with 9 of 12 months seeing 30 or more accidents. April was the lowest with only 14 accidents and December was the highest with 48 accidents. Accident time of day peaked at the AM and PM rush hour when more vehicles were on the road. 99 accidents (25%) happened during the 7am to 10am rush hour and 122 accidents (31%) happened during the 2-5pm rush hour. Of the 392 crashes in 2022, 85 involved deer and reflect the rural nature of some parts of Ellsworth. There were no fatal car crashes in 2022,<sup>15</sup> which suggests conflicts are typically due to congestion and road/intersection configurations instead of high-speed conflicts. Six high-crash locations were identified in 2022: The intersection of Bangor Road and Mariaville Road, the intersection of Bucksport Road and Main Street, the intersection of High Street and Main Street, the intersection of Foster Street and High Street, the intersection of High Street and Short Street, and the intersection of the entrance to Wal-Mart at Kingsland Road and Myrick Street. Each had eight or more crashes in 2022. The intersection of High Street and Main Street had the most incidents at 34 total crashes in 2022.

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<sup>15</sup> MaineDOT. n.d. "Public Crash Query Tool." *Maine Department of Transportation*. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://mdotapps.maine.gov/mainecrashpublic/>





## Regional Transportation

Ellsworth is a car-oriented community and, as a service center, is looking for ways to provide broader transportation options to support local and regional residents in accessing services and amenities in the City as well as accessing tourist destinations with mass transit options.

The Hancock County Planning Commission (HCPC) provides an array of transportation services to communities in Hancock County. The HCPC is focused on finding effective solutions to local and regional transportation problems and assisting with applications for state and federal funding. HCPC works collaboratively with municipalities, MaineDOT, and community members in efforts to address a wide range of transportation issues, including coordinating improvements to major transportation corridors and developing alternative modes such as bus transportation. In 2012, HCPC produced the Multi-Modal Corridor Management Plan for the Acadia Express: Holden to Bar Harbor. This is a regional plan looking at transportation, land use, and economic conditions on the primary arterial for Hancock County, which carries millions of visitors to Acadia National Park, a rising number of commuters, truck freight, and local traffic. This plan acts as a road map for sequencing projects and aligning funding sources. Ellsworth continues to work through recommendations and collaborate with regional partners to achieve plan goals. For Ellsworth, the plan focused on minimizing congestion, creating new opportunities for cyclists and pedestrians, and reinforcing economic impact for local businesses. Since the plan was created the HCPC has worked to help coordinate with MaineDOT to prioritize infrastructure projects, secure funding, and implement new sidewalks, bike and pedestrian trails throughout Ellsworth, and launch the Heart-Healthy Walking Initiative.

Downeast Transportation is a private nonprofit agency providing public transit bus and shuttle services in Hancock County. Downeast Transportation operates commuter buses to Bar Harbor from Bangor, Brewer, Franklin, Milbridge, Bucksport, and Ellsworth and eliminates more than 1 million vehicle miles a year from local roadways. Similarly, Downeast Transportation offers shopping trips to Bar Harbor and Ellsworth, five-day-a-week bus service between Bar Harbor and Bangor, commuter service to the Jackson Laboratory, and midday shuttles in Bucksport, Bar Harbor, and Ellsworth. Downeast Transportation also operates the seasonal Island Explorer, which serves Acadia National Park, MDI towns, and the Schoodic Peninsula. Downeast Transportation is funded through Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds and by public and private partners, including MaineDOT, Friends of Acadia, L.L. Bean, Jackson Laboratories, the City of Ellsworth, and





other municipalities in Hancock County. While this regional transportation system is important in providing options and equitable access, it has done little to reduce the congestion on roads in Ellsworth.

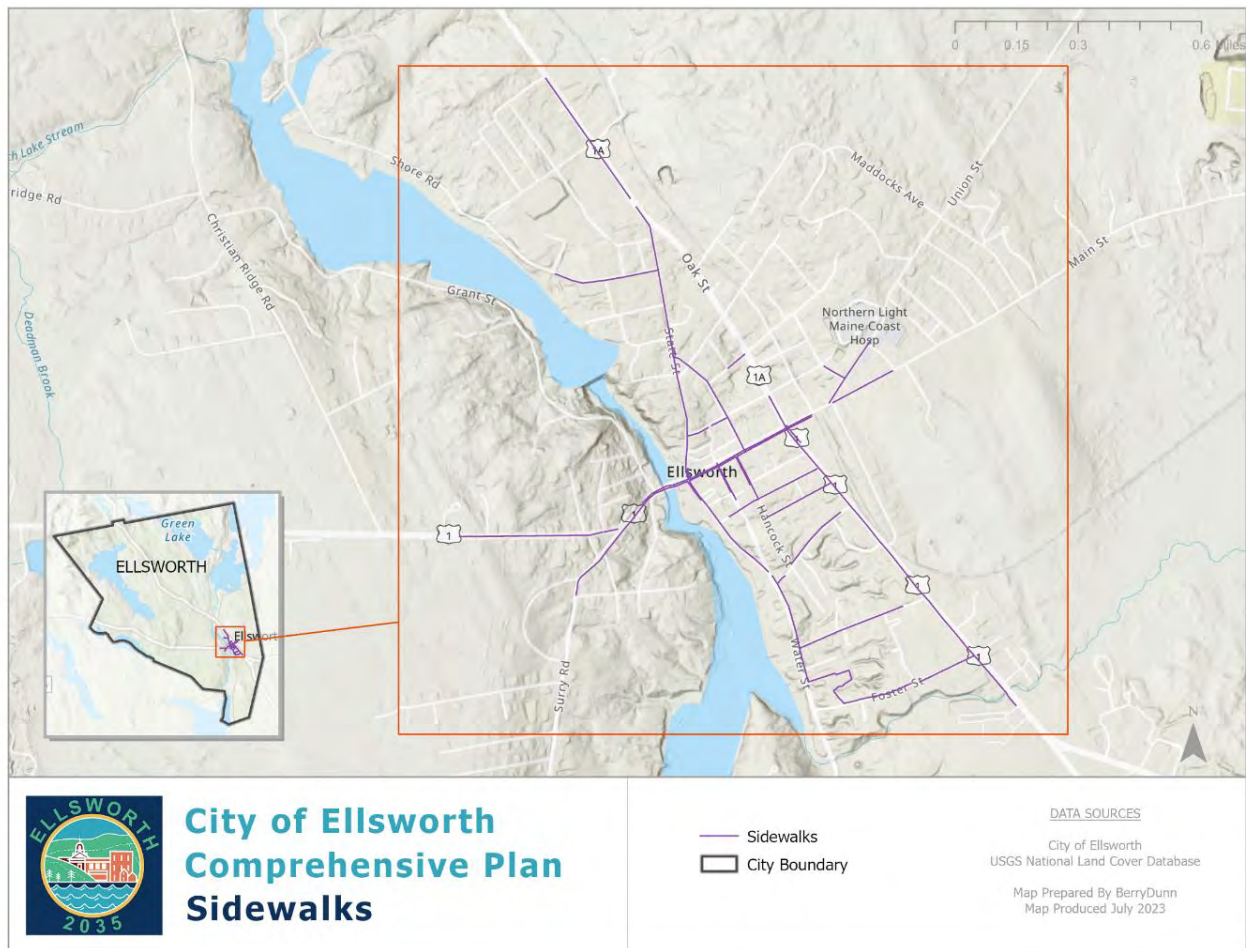
## Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities

Walkability is a critical aspect of any community. It is not only about transportation choices, but it also relates to safety for people of all ages and the ability to engage and experience the community outside of a vehicle. There is limited pedestrian access in Ellsworth outside of downtown. Sidewalks are concentrated around Main Street and Route 1 and do not consistently provide continuous paths between destinations. There are several points where sidewalks end without creating a complete walkable network. As noted by Green Ellsworth, the City has made great improvements to walkability in some neighborhoods, such as the addition of the multi-use trail from downtown neighborhoods to Ellsworth Falls and the continuation of municipal sidewalks to Ellsworth Falls. Other neighborhoods such as those in the areas of High Street, Water Street, and Bridge Hill are lacking sidewalks and crosswalks in critical locations, creating safety and accessibility concerns.

In the review of new development, sidewalks and bikeways are encouraged, when appropriate, for some defined street types within the City's Street Design and Construction Standards. In addition, for developments requiring Planning Board Approval, reasonable and safe provisions shall be made to create pedestrian and/or bicycle connections between points intended for and suitable for such uses. A series of provisions are defined in the municipal code that define things such as sidewalk requirements, curb ramps, pedestrian crossings, and bikeway guidelines.



Figure 8.1: Ellsworth Sidewalks



Source: City of Ellsworth; USGS National Land Cover Database

A bicycle-pedestrian plan was completed in 2007. The plan calls for improved sidewalks and more pedestrian crossings. Some elements are being constructed through the Safe Routes to Schools program, a USDOT initiative, while others are funded locally. These include the opening of Ellsworth Trail that diverts bicycle and pedestrian traffic from Oak Street and State Street extending from Birch Avenue to Route 179. This trail connects with the sidewalk improvements on Davis Street and a pedestrian crosswalk on Oak Street. New sidewalks were also installed along Forrest Avenue, Shore Road, and Pond Avenue in the area around Ellsworth Elementary/Middle School (serving grades K – 8). Traffic patterns have shifted with the closing of the two schools that previously housed K – 8 students. Overall, dedicated bicycling infrastructure continues to expand to provide opportunities for casual cyclists, commuters, and regional bike visitors. Route 1A, between Bangor and





Ellsworth, has one of the highest volumes of traffic in the region, yet is a very narrow, two-lane road with deteriorated sand and gravel shoulders. While dedicated bikeways are limited, recreation trails and roads see ample bike traffic. The City continues to look for opportunities to provide dedicated bicycle infrastructure and options for cyclists in the downtown core and more rural areas.

The Ellsworth Trail, a bicycle-pedestrian rail-with-trail project next to the Calais Branch rail alignment, opened in 2011. The Ellsworth Bicycle-Pedestrian Plan calls for extending the Ellsworth Trail to the Boggy Brook Educational Center. The trail moves onto Spring Street at Birch Avenue. Spring Street has functioned as an informal bypass around the intersection of Main Street and High Street. Currently, Spring Street lacks sufficient width and pavement quality to carry two-way automobile traffic safely and efficiently. Crossing Main Street, the trail confronts an additional challenge of passing by the building currently occupied by the Maine Community Foundation.

In 2021, a Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail Connectivity Feasibility Study was completed, and the City of Ellsworth and Maine DOT agreed to work together through Maine DOT's Planning Partnership Initiative to evaluate and analyze connectivity alternatives between the Ellsworth Trail and the Sunrise Trail. The Ellsworth Trail runs just over 1 mile from Birch Avenue to North Street (Route 179) in Ellsworth. The Sunrise Trail is less than 1 mile away and extends 87 miles northeast to Pennamaquan Lake, creating a substantial walking and biking recreation opportunity from Ellsworth. Through the award of federal and state funding, the City is moving forward with the engineering and design phase of this project. It will include a shared-use path, new signage, enhanced pedestrian ramps, crosswalks, and improved safety and mobility for all users.

The community group Green Ellsworth has established a Walkability, Bikeability, & Transportation Committee to collaborate with the public to advocate, evaluate, and research constraints and opportunities and make recommendations to promote positive change in Ellsworth.

## Rail Transportation

There is no rail transportation in Ellsworth. There has been no freight or passenger rail service on the Calais Branch rail line since 1985. Beyond Ellsworth to the east, an 84-mile portion of the rail bed has been converted into a multipurpose trail known as the Sunrise Trail. State-owned railroad tracks linking Hancock to Dennysville were removed. The only remaining tracks, running parallel to Route 1A, are remnants of the historic Calais Branch,



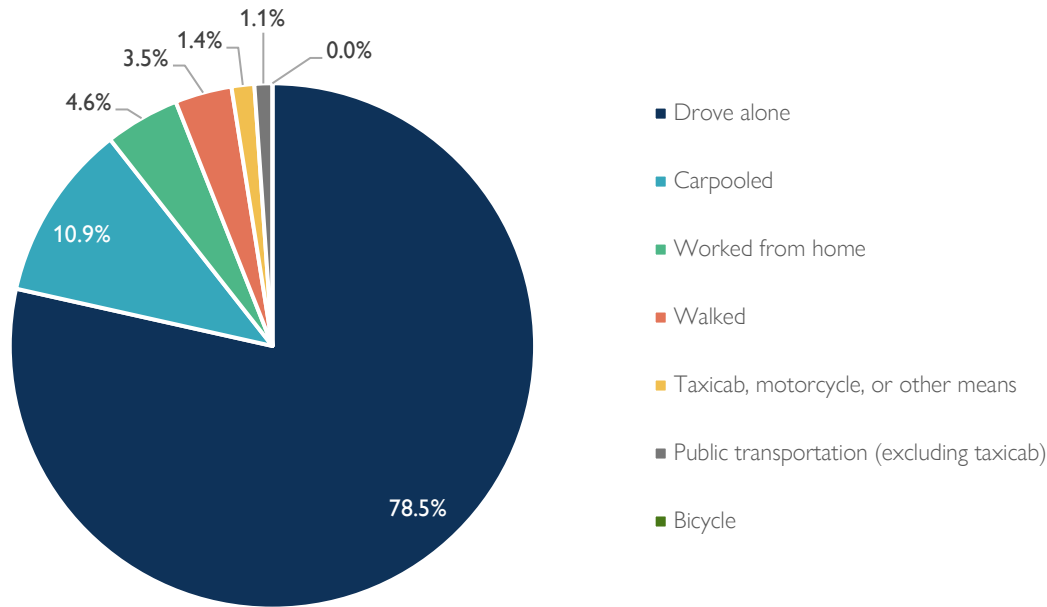


which was once part of the Maine Central Railroad. A train line runs along these tracks on which the Downeast Scenic Railway offers tours. The tourist attraction travels approximately 12 miles of well-maintained tracks that takes an hour and 45 minutes on a there-and-back route. The ride begins in Hancock and travels through forests, rural landscapes, adjacent to downtown Ellsworth, and across the Union River on the recently restored Union River Bridge where it stops and reverses direction to head back to Hancock. The lack of rail for passengers or freight means all movement of goods goes by car and truck and adds to the congestion on the roads.

## Commuting Trends

Since the City’s last comprehensive plan, the percentage of employees who live and work in Ellsworth has declined. In 2004, it was estimated that 30.7% of workers in Ellsworth lived in the City. That percentage declined in 2010 to 23.1%, and, in 2020, to 21.8%. The number of workers who live in Ellsworth but are employed elsewhere has increased. In 2004, 54% of Ellsworth’s population was working outside of the City. In 2020, that number increased to 66.7%. Additionally, the number of workers who are employed in Ellsworth but live outside it has increased. In 2020, 78.2% of Ellsworth’s workforce lived outside of the City. That number increased from 69.3% in 2004.

Figure 8.2: Means of Transportation to Work



Source: 2018 - 2022 ACS 5-year estimates





According to Census data, the majority (78.5%) of workers drove alone and used a car, truck, or van to get to work. An additional 10.9% carpooled to work in a car, truck, or van. An increase in both the percentage of workers commuting into the City and commuting to other areas may cause an increase in the number of vehicles on roads and traffic during peak rush hours. An increase in commuters can add to the number of vehicles on the road in Ellsworth in addition to summer traffic increases and through traffic to MDI.

As housing has become more expensive, more workers are looking to neighboring communities, as well as Bangor and Brewer, for more affordable housing options. As people who work in Ellsworth are moving farther away to find housing, commute times will increase, and the number of vehicles traveling into and through Ellsworth will likely increase.

## Challenges and Opportunities

The cost of maintaining roads has increased in recent years. Since 2020, MaineDOT and other municipalities have been canceling projects due to costs more than doubling. Based on the City's FY2020 paving bid results, the cost to fully reconstruct a road is between \$750,000 and \$1.25 million per mile, not including utilities like water or sewer lines. Overlay is estimated to cost \$115,000 per mile; milling and paving is estimated to cost \$215,000 per mile; and reclaiming and paving is estimated to cost \$235,000 per mile. As the City grows, it should consider how to minimize the need for future road and utility construction. More dense development along existing roads and water and sewer lines can reduce the costs associated with development.

Ellsworth sees a significant amount of through traffic from visitors traveling to Acadia as well as commuter traffic. As the City grows, it should continue to invest in bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. The City should consider how future development could impact existing traffic-related challenges. The City should also consider how trail connectivity, bike lane improvements, and improved public transportation options could reduce traffic in high-volume areas and allow residents to move more easily through the City. Additionally, examining how different development types, like mixed-use development, could eliminate the need for residents in mixed-use areas to use a car to for accessing amenities like restaurants, markets, and smaller retail stores.





## Sources

American Community Survey

City of Ellsworth, *Bicycle/Pedestrian Trail Connectivity Feasibility Study*, 2021

City of Ellsworth, *Bicycle Pedestrian Plan*, 2007

City of Ellsworth, Public Works Department

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 9, Street Design and Construction Standards

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 11, Parking Standards

Downeast Transportation

Downeast Scenic Railroad

Federal Transit Administration

Green Ellsworth

*Hancock County Planning Commission and Eastern Maine Development Corporation, Multi-Modal Corridor Management Plan for the Acadia Express: Holden to Bar Harbor*, 2012

U.S. Census OnTheMap

U.S. Census





## 9. HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

### Introduction

Prior to European settlement, the land that is now the City of Ellsworth was inhabited by the Wabanaki people who hunted, fished, and traded across the region. The Wabanaki called the region Ckuwaponahkik or “The Land of the Dawn,” where the sun first rises. Europeans arrived in the Penobscot Bay region in the 1600s, and the area was disputed between the French and British through the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Union River area and much of modern-day Ellsworth were settled by the British in 1763. The City was officially incorporated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1787 and by the State of Maine in 1869.

Today, Ellsworth’s Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) seeks to preserve the architectural, historic, prehistoric, and environmental heritage of the City and to develop and promote the cultural, educational, and economic benefit of these resources. The City’s Historic Preservation Ordinance designates locally historic sites, landmarks, cultural resources, and an historic district and establishes requirements for HPC review for designated properties. Historical or archaeological sites must be identified during the site plan review process and should be adequately protected in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.

Local organizations, including the Ellsworth Historical Society, Woodlawn, and Ellsworth Public Library, also work to preserve and share Ellsworth’s history. Regionally, Downeast Maine is a National Heritage Area. This means that Downeast is considered a nationally significant landscape. National Historic Areas are distinctive landscapes where human activity and natural features have evolved and influenced each other over time. There are 55 National Heritage Areas in the U.S., and Downeast is the first in Maine.<sup>16</sup>

### Prehistoric Resources

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) recommends considering two types of archaeological sites in preparing municipal growth management plans: prehistoric

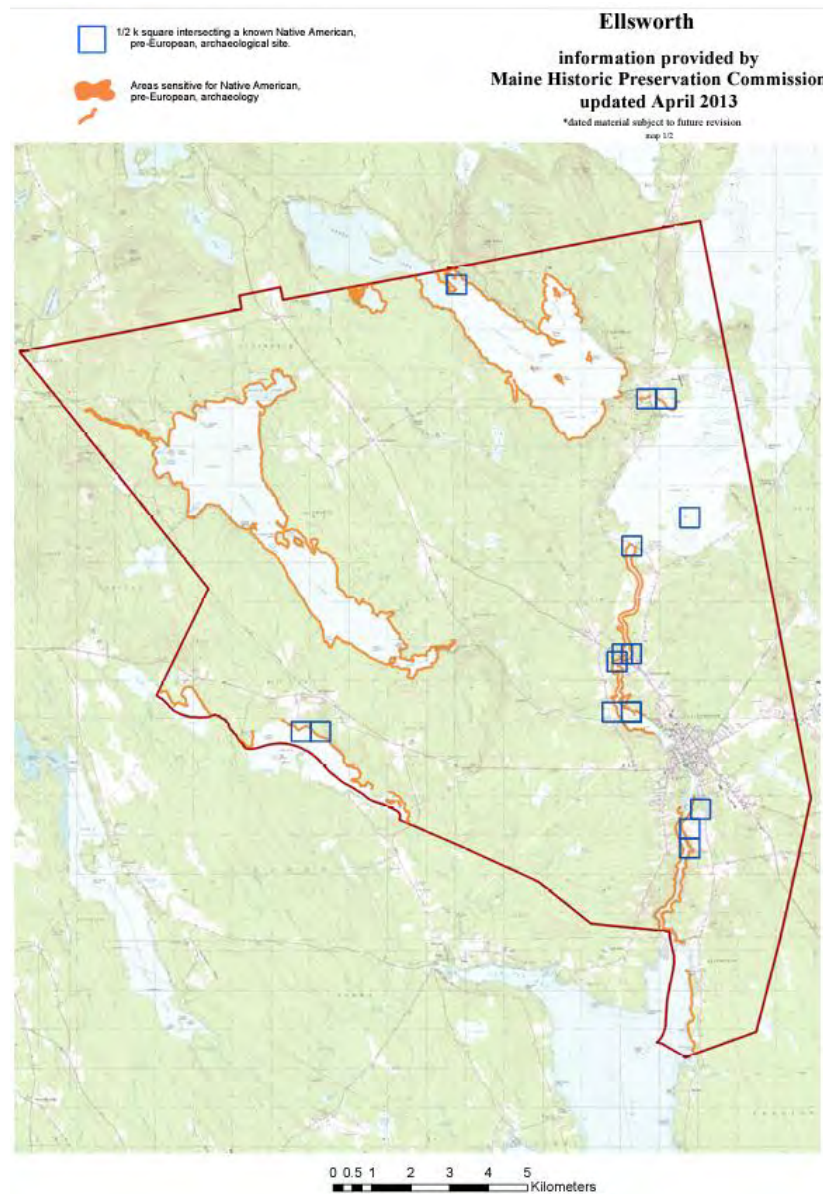
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<sup>16</sup> Sunrise County Economic Council. *Downeast Maine National Heritage Area*. Accessed December 30, 2023. <https://sunrisecounty.org/nha/>



archaeological sites and historic archaeological sites. Prehistoric sites are Native American sites that come from the period before European arrival. Historic sites are post-European arrival era. Prehistoric sites are commonly located within 50 meters of canoe-navigable waterways, on well-drained, level land. Ancient sites dating back to more than 10,000 years ago may be located on sandy soils within 200 meters of small streams.

Figure 9.1: Prehistoric Archaeological Sites



Source: Maine Historic Preservation Commission





Ellsworth has 15 prehistoric archaeological sites. They are found on the shores of lakes and along the Union River. Some sites are known to be underwater in the Graham Lake reservoir at full pond. Various professional archaeological surveys have been completed, but MHPC recommends further survey, inventory, and analysis, including along major lakes and localized areas around Graham Lake and the Union River. The map below shows where prehistoric archaeological sites are located in a 2013 archaeological survey that is still current.

## Historic Resources

Historic archaeological resources began with the arrival of European settlements in Ellsworth. Historic archaeological sites are often found around transportation corridors, first rivers, and then roads as they were built. As of October 2022, 16 historic archaeological sites have been documented. Sites include boat wrecks, farmsteads, homesteads, and a mill. Below is the list of historic archaeological sites that the MHPC has documented in the City.

Table 9.1: List of Historic Archaeological Sites

| Site Name                | Type of Site     | Period of Significance  | Location         |
|--------------------------|------------------|---|------------------|
| Refuge                   | Wreck, yawl      | May 1933  | Location unknown |
| Morris and Cliff         | Wreck, vessel    | 1922  | Location known   |
| Alert                    | Wreck, gas yacht | 1913 – 1933   | Location unknown |
| Carola                   | Wreck, gas yacht | 1910 – 1933   | Location unknown |
| Kwasind                  | Wreck, gas yacht | 1900 – 1933   | Location unknown |
| Miss Priscilla           | Wreck, gas yacht | 1926 – 1933   | Location unknown |
| Monataka                 | Wreck, gas yacht | 1901 – 1933   | Location unknown |
| Paprika                  | Wreck, gas yacht | 1923 – 1933   | Location unknown |
| Portland                 | Wreck, schooner  | Stranded near Ellsworth on July 21, 1896, and was a total loss. | Location unknown |
| Phillips Way             | Domestic         | 19th century  | Location known   |
| Unidentified Cellar Hole | Domestic         | 1750 – 1865   | Location known   |
| Learoyd Hill Farmstead   | Farmstead        | About 1850 – before 1957  | Location known   |
| John Brimmer Farmstead   | Farmstead        | 1794 – 1920   | Location known   |





| Site Name             | Type of Site | Period of Significance | Location         |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------------------|------------------|
| Surry Road Homestead  | Homestead    |                        | Location unknown |
| Surry Road Metal Mill | Mill         |                        | Location unknown |

Source: Maine Historic Preservation Commission

There have been no professional city-wide surveys for historic archaeological sites to date. The MHPC recommends that future archaeological survey focus on the identification of potentially significant resources associated with the City's agricultural, residential, and industrial heritage, particularly those associated with the earliest Euro-American settlement of the City in the 18th and 19th centuries.

## Historic Buildings

Ellsworth has 12 historic sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places, 38 locally designated historic sites and landmarks, and the Union River Historic District. The MHPC recommends a comprehensive survey and inventory of Ellsworth's historic above-ground resources to identify other properties that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Table 9.2: Properties on the National Register of Historic Places

| Property Name                              | Location             |
|--|----------------------|
| Col. Black Mansion                         | 19 Black House Drive |
| Ellsworth Congregational Church            | 2 Church Street      |
| Stanwood Wildlife Sanctuary)               | 289 High Street      |
| Col. Meltiah Jordan House                  | 24 High Street       |
| Old Hancock Company Buildings              | 6 Court Street       |
| Samuel Kidder Whiting House                | 214 Main Street      |
| Ellsworth Powerhouse and Dam               | Union River          |
| Ellsworth City Hall                        | 1 City Hall Plaza    |
| Agassiz Bedrock Outcrop                    | 406 State Street     |
| Col. Charles and Mary Ann Jarvis Homestead | 10 Surry Road        |
| Hancock County Jail                        | 40 State Street      |
| The Grand                                  | 163-173 Main Street  |

Source: City of Ellsworth

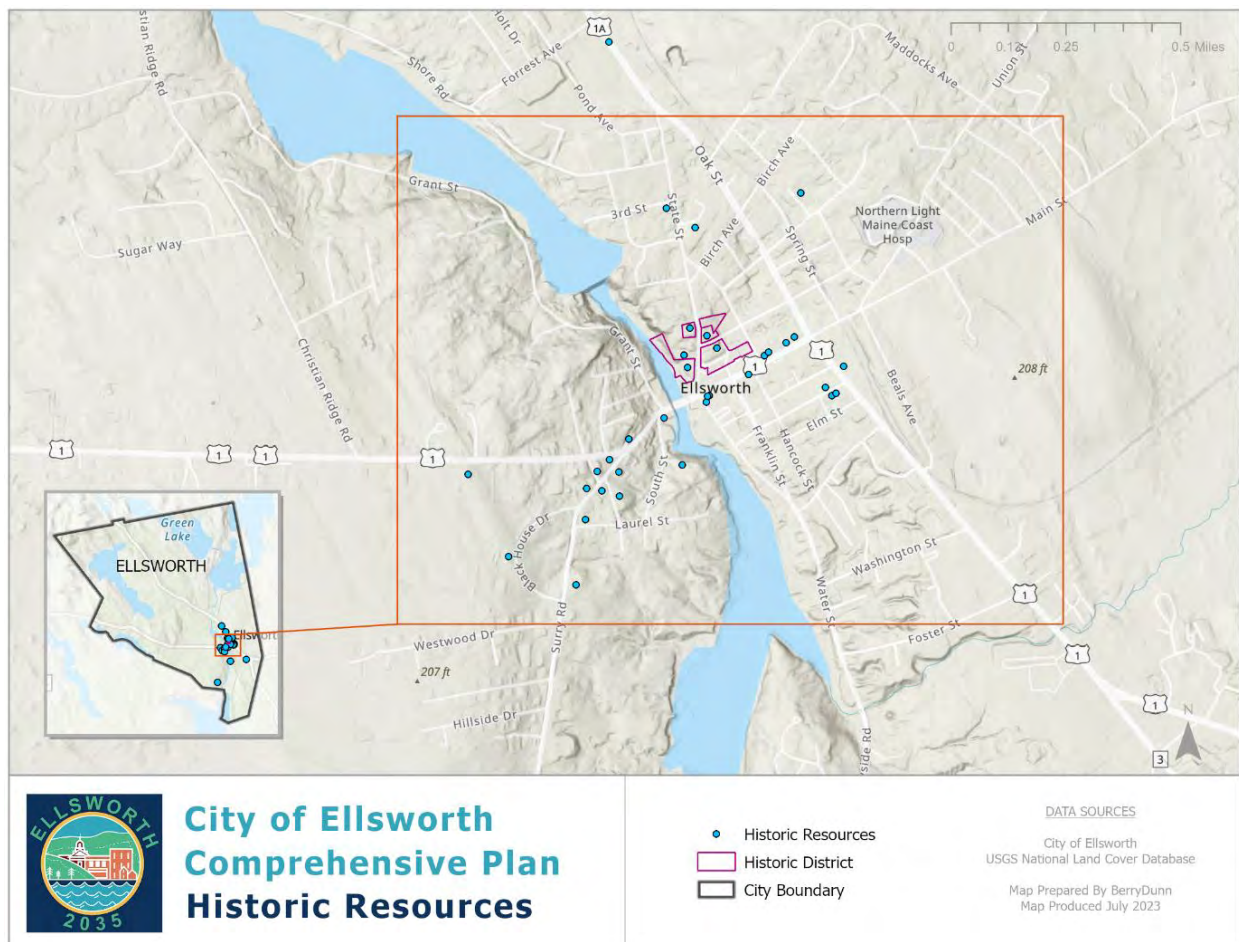




Ellsworth's list of historic sites and landmarks includes burial grounds, monuments, homesteads and homes, halls, and the Moore Community Center. The Union River Historic District is located on State Street and includes Ellsworth City Hall, First Congregational Church, Old City Burying Ground, Ellsworth Public Library, Andrew Peters House, and Old Hancock County Jail.

In addition to historic structures, Ellsworth also has several historic cemeteries, with graves dating back to the late 1700s and early 1800s. The Old Burial Ground and Jordan Burial Ground, which are the final resting place of the Jordan family, who's house is still preserved and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Figure 9.2: Historic Resources



Source: City of Ellsworth

## Ellsworth Historical Society





The Ellsworth Historical Society is a significant historic resource for the City. Established in 1978, the Historical Society is a volunteer, self-funded, nonprofit organization. Members promote the interest in Ellsworth's history through research and historic collections, digitization and preservation of materials, and educational programs. The society collects and preserves documents, books, photographs, maps, oral history, clothing, household items, farming and industrial equipment, and other items from throughout the City's history. The Historical Society also maintains the City's Museum in the Streets, which includes panels throughout downtown with anecdotes from Ellsworth's history.

Additional organizations in Ellsworth provide historic resources and educational opportunities for community members, including the Ellsworth Public Library and Woodlawn Museum.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Ellsworth's historic and archaeological resources are valuable community assets, which help create a sense of place and identity. Ellsworth should continue to support and maintain its historic resources, which provide residents with opportunities to pursue educational endeavors, enjoyment, and social interaction. These resources help strengthen the cultural and historic fabric and create a common sense of place among residents.

Ellsworth should consider additional opportunities to expand its historic resource inventory. Recommendations from the MHPC to evaluate and identify resources available for historic protection and nominate additional places to the National Register of Historic Places can strengthen the City's network of historic assets. In addition to already identified sites for potential National Register-eligible properties, identifying other sites to the National Register can give awareness to historic assets and elevate their significance to the City's identity.

Historic resources often come under threat as development opportunities can result in demolition and loss of historic assets. Ellsworth's Historic Preservation Ordinance was adopted in 1979 and amended most recently in 2012. The ordinance was adopted to preserve, protect, and enhance historic buildings and locations within the City and promote the educational, cultural, and economic welfare of the community. The ordinance is used to help prevent inappropriate alterations or the destruction of historic properties and help ensure new construction is compatible with the character of historic properties. Alterations to historic structures and new construction on historic properties or in historic districts require approval by the City's Historic Preservation Commission. Historic resources often





come under threat as development opportunities can result in demolition and loss of historic assets.

Historic resources can also provide an opportunity for a community to become more sustainable. The preservation of historic buildings through adaptive reuse and rehabilitation can have more energy and environmental savings than demolition and new construction. Currently, there are over 650 buildings in Ellsworth that were built over 100 years ago. Additionally, roughly 100 of these buildings have not been renovated in over 100 years. Ensuring maintenance and upkeep of these buildings could be important in helping preserve structures that contribute to the character of the City and help meet Ellsworth's housing goals. The MHPC offers tax credits for a variety of project types to enhance and upgrade the exterior of historic structures. Expanding the City's inventory of historic resources can support residents and developers in accessing additional funding to preserve these resources.

As with other City properties, historic resources, particularly those along waterways, can be susceptible to erosion, flooding, and sea level rise and require planning for the effects of climate change. The MHPC has mapped threats to Maine's historic and cultural resources to better help municipalities plan for changing climate, erosion, and natural disasters. Historic properties may require specialized planning to determine how to preserve and protect historic resources.

## Sources

Ellsworth Historic Preservation Commission

Ellsworth Historic Preservation Ordinance

Ellsworth Historical Society

Maine Historic Preservation Commission

MHPC Weathering Maine: Mapping Threats to Maine's Historic and Cultural Resources

MHPC, Cultural & Architectural Resource Management Archive (CARMA) Map Viewer





## 10. CITY FACILITIES AND SERVICES

### Police

The Ellsworth Police Department currently has 20 sworn staff members and four civilian dispatchers. The department is led by the Chief of Police who oversees current operations and provides direction for the department. The department currently has one school resource officer.

Emergency call volume has increased in recent years. In 2019, the Ellsworth Police Department received 12,181 calls. Call volume decreased to 8,614 in 2020. Call volume increased from 9,531 in 2021 to 9,991 in 2022, and in 2023, the department received 11,636 calls. The number of emergency response personnel needed to respond to calls varies based on the type and severity of the call.

The City has seen an increase in mental health-related calls—a similar trend to other Maine communities. Calls coded for mental illness totaled 66 calls in 2019; this declined to 38 calls in 2020. In 2023, the department received 77 calls coded for mental illness.

The department has an outsourced position to support mental health-related calls. The department is currently examining the feasibility of a full-time behavioral health professional dedicated to the City to better respond to these calls. The department collaborates with several organizations, including Healthy Acadia, Project Hope, Inspire Center, Downeast Community Partners, Next Step, and Northern Light Hospital, to supplement the department's current capacity to respond to mental health, substance use, and domestic violence calls.

The department reported challenges with filling existing vacancies due to retirement. The department will look to hire additional staff members as the City continues to grow. While the department reported that existing equipment is mostly up to date, potential hires in the future will require additional equipment and vehicles. The department is looking to procure body cameras and have all officers wear them in the future.

The department, currently housed in City Hall, is in the final stages of relocating staff to a new police station. The new station is roughly 5,000 square feet and will house all department operations.

The Ellsworth Police Department became accredited through the Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation Program. To receive accreditation, agencies follow a voluntary process to





show their compliance with Maine law enforcement's best practices and standards. The department must continue to show best practice and standards compliance to maintain the accreditation.

Like many police departments in Maine and throughout the United States, the Ellsworth Police Department has struggled with hiring to backfill retirements. There are currently 20 sworn staff members, though staff reported that they would like to have 24 to meet increasing call volume. In addition to the general decline in interest in public safety professions, the shift to addressing social service issues through policing has been a deterrent to some. The department also reported housing affordability has been a challenge when trying to recruit officers to Ellsworth.

## Fire and EMS

The Ellsworth Fire and EMS Department has 16 personnel, one life safety inspector, four administrative personnel, and three volunteer staff. The department is considered an all-hazards department, meaning it responds to fire, EMS, hazardous material, and rescue calls. The department responds to 1,800 – 2,100 calls per year. Staff reported that their call volume has increased in recent years. Currently, EMS calls make up roughly 80% of the departments call volume. The department's EMS program is three years old and is looking to expand services to provide better transportation and ambulatory services. The department has mutual aid agreements to provide services in unincorporated areas of Hancock County. The department recently acquired an ambulance to support transportation services. This service supplements Northern Light Hospital's current services.

Currently, the department is based out of City Hall and provides services to the entire City out of the central location. The department has expressed the need for additional satellite stations to better respond to emergencies in areas of the City that are farther from City Hall.

The department was recently awarded an EMS Safer Grant to help recruit and train volunteer members. Over the next four years, the department hopes to recruit 80 volunteers.

As call volume increases and the community continues to grow, the department will have to consider station, equipment, and vehicle needs to provide quality services to the community. Supply chain issues and the increasing cost of equipment have delayed the purchase of a new fire engine and necessary life safety equipment for staff. Delays have also made budget planning more difficult.





Like the Ellsworth Police Department, the Fire and EMS Department has also struggled with hiring to backfill retirements. The department also reported that housing affordability has been a challenge when trying to recruit employees to Ellsworth. A lack of affordable housing in the City has meant that fire and EMS staff are living farther away, making it challenging to call in additional resources if there is a significant emergency.

## Library

The Ellsworth Public Library is an important community resource, with over 66,000 visits annually and 4,000 card holders (FY 2024). The library has six full-time staff and additional part-time staff to manage all operations. The library oversees collections, including acquisition, processing, maintenance, and preservation of collections. The library also manages programming and is responsible for the planning, marketing, and execution of events. The library is valued for its early literacy programs and also hosts community events, like the Maine Climate Council Meeting in October 2024. The library provides access to free tax assistance through AARP, free technology support, and works with local farmers to provide a pickup location for locally grown food.

Roughly 85% of the library's funding comes from the municipal budget, and the remaining funding comes from donations and support from 10 neighboring communities, including Surry, Lamoine, and Hancock.

The library collaborates with several local agencies, including Ellsworth Public Schools, the Ellsworth Historical Society, Heart of Ellsworth, Loaves and Fishes, Healthy Acadia, and Frenchman Bay Conservancy. The library is looking to collaborate with additional organizations to provide services to a broader audience.

As Ellsworth continues to grow, the library has had more requests to expand services. Through the library's strategic planning survey, patrons expressed the desire for new and expanded programming, including more local speaker events, teen programs, book clubs, and more activities for young children. As staff have capacity and funding, they would like to increase their Library of Things collection, improve marketing efforts, and increase book storage space. The library is embarking on a remodel focusing on critical building infrastructure issues and accessibility.





## Schools

The Ellsworth School Department oversees Ellsworth Elementary/Middle School, Ellsworth High School, and Hancock County Technical Center (HCTC). The Elementary/Middle School is a K – 8 school with close to 800 total students. The school is one of the largest K – 8 schools in the State. Ellsworth High School serves grades 9 – 12 and has roughly 500 students enrolled. About half of these students live in nearby communities and choose to attend Ellsworth High School, citing sports programs and quality of education as the main reasons. In recent years, Ellsworth High School has won multiple regional and state Class B championships.

HCTC provides technical courses and offers high school students the opportunity to learn professional skills and earn college credit. HCTC is operated by the City of Ellsworth but serves students throughout Hancock County. HCTC is funded through state subsidies and by municipalities in Hancock County. Students have had challenges getting transportation from nearby communities to HCTC, and students have also had challenges getting transportation from HCTC or their high school to possible internships in the City, which would further their workforce development.

The Ellsworth School Department also operates the Adult Learning Center located in the Mill Mall. This center offers GED and high school completion services and workforce development training. Courses are reactive to workforce demands and change with emerging community workforce needs.

Enrollment in Ellsworth Public Schools has declined since the COVID-19 pandemic by roughly 6% from 2020 to 2022. There was a slight enrollment increase during the 2022 – 2023 school year. The population of children under five years old has decreased by over 50%, which may impact school enrollment in the future. The School Department has also seen an increase in families who choose to homeschool their children.

Since the pandemic, schools have seen behavioral and social changes in students, which have required schools and teachers to adapt. Teacher recruitment and retention have been challenging, particularly with special education positions. Ellsworth schools have also had an increase in English Language Learning (ELL) students, who may require additional support and coursework.





## City-Owned Facilities

The City is responsible for maintenance and operations for the following buildings and facilities:

- City Hall – City Hall Plaza
- City-Owned Broadband Infrastructure
- Ellsworth Fire Training Center and Police Firing Range (located in Hancock, ME)
- Moore Community Center – State Street
- Public Works garage – Main Street
- Telecommunications Tower – Bangor Road
- Transfer Station/Recycling Center – Industrial Road
- Union River Center for Innovation – Water Street
- Wastewater Treatment Facility – Bayside Road
- Water Department offices – Maine Coast Mall (temporary)
- Water Treatment Plant – Branch Lake



Figure 10.1: City-Owned Parcels



Source: City of Ellsworth; USGS National Land Cover Database

In addition to the facilities listed above, the City maintains structures and facilities at municipal parks, beaches, fields, and the marina. As the City continues to grow and as infrastructure ages, there is a need to develop long-term plans for facilities maintenance and upgrades, including additional space for City staff, expanded facilities for City services, and upgrades to utility infrastructure (such as a new water treatment plant).

## Public Health and Community Services

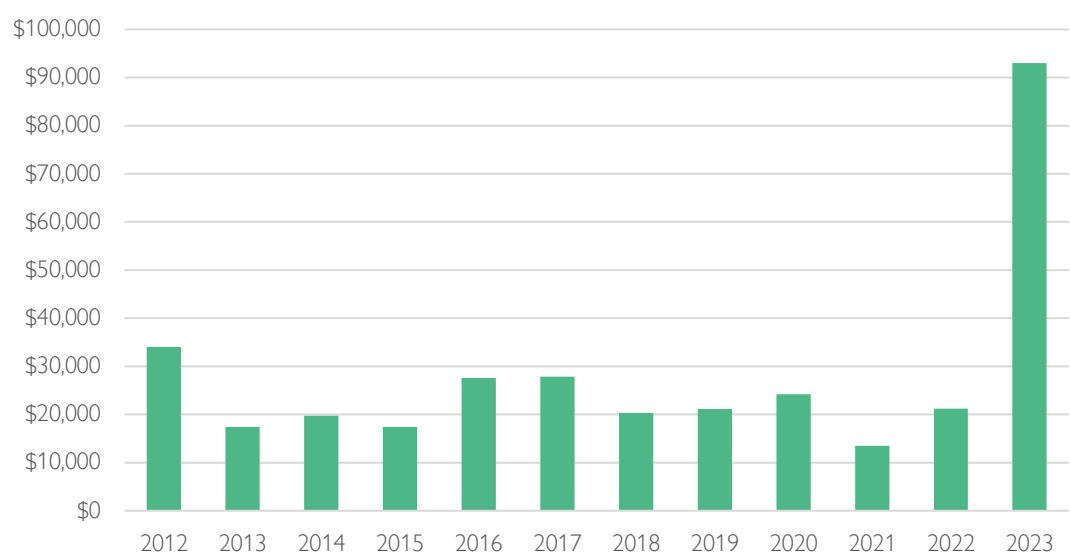
Roughly 10% of the City's population lives below the federal poverty line—a lower percentage of the population when compared to the County (11%) and the State (11%). According to ACS 2018 - 2022 estimates, roughly 66% of renters in Ellsworth are rent burdened, meaning over 30% of household income goes toward rent. In 2020, the median income for renters in Ellsworth was \$32,445, and the income needed to afford the median





two-bedroom rent was \$65,517. Roughly 75% of renter households were unable to afford the median two-bedroom rent. Through the State’s General Assistance program, the City provides services to families and individuals who need support for basic needs like utility bills, food, prescriptions, and housing. General Assistance provides a specific amount and type of aid for defined needs for eligible residents. The State allocates funding to communities and reimburses municipalities. The State reimburses 70% of Ellsworth’s General Assistance funds. The City provided General Assistance to 127 people in 2023 – an increase from 24 people in 2022. In addition, total spending on General Assistance increased approximately 340% from 2022 to 2023. Roughly 90% of General Assistance funds spent in 2023 went toward housing assistance.

Figure 10.2: Ellsworth General Assistance Spending



Source: City of Ellsworth

The City partners closely with other nonprofit organizations to support community services and public health initiatives. The City recently made its General Assistance program director position a full-time position. Regionally, Ellsworth works with several social service organizations to provide residents with additional support. Healthy Acadia is a nonprofit organization that supports community health initiatives in Washington and Hancock Counties. Healthy Acadia operates a community center and recovery center in Ellsworth. The organization supports Ellsworth in operating warming shelters in the winter and other health initiatives. This winter was the first winter the warming shelter was operated. The shelter had a capacity of 20 people. Healthy Acadia received grants to support affordable housing initiatives in the area and has looked to offer supportive





housing in Ellsworth but has experienced challenges in moving forward with these initiatives. Community Health and Counseling Services (CHCS) provides community-based mental health services, foster care support, and outreach services for those who are unhoused, among others. The organization partners with Ellsworth on General Assistance initiatives.

Police and EMS services also partner with local organizations, including Healthy Acadia, Project Hope, Inspire Center, WHCA, Next Step, and Northern Light Hospital, as well as other municipal organizations to support their operations.

Northern Light Maine Coast Hospital provides health and emergency services to Ellsworth residents and is the largest hospital in the County. The hospital provides some ambulance support in Ellsworth, though the Fire and EMS Department is looking to grow in this area.

Since the pandemic, Ellsworth has seen a growing need for mental health, substance use, and specialized medical care, a similar trend in other communities in Maine. Issues of mental health, substance use, and poverty, while statewide concerns, are especially critical challenges in Ellsworth. As the service center for the County, Ellsworth has drawn people from surrounding areas in need of available social services looking for access to shelter, transportation, services, and other amenities.

## Infrastructure

### Public Sewer System

There are approximately 15 miles of sewer pipes throughout the Urban Core. The majority of the Urban Core is on public sewer, and much of the rural residential areas are on private septic. The Ellsworth Wastewater Department is responsible for the operation of the City's Wastewater Treatment Facility and, the public sewer infrastructure. Proper wastewater treatment aids in the, and, ultimately, protecting and improving local water resources, including the various ponds, stream, lakes, the Union River, and Union River Bay. The department works in close collaboration with the Public Works Department to coordinate the installation and maintenance of sewer infrastructure. The new facility treats municipal wastewater and local septic and discharges clean water into the Union River. The collection system is concentrated in the Urban Core, extending along Route 1A past the Union River down through High Street at Buttermilk Road to the south. Responsible maintenance remains a priority of the City. Ellsworth is working to camera their existing collection system so future improvements can be prioritized. The City has made several improvements to the public sewer system. In 2012, the City built a new Wastewater Treatment Facility on





Bayside Road which increased capacity and resiliency. Within the collection system, the City has replaced sewer main and manholes in conjunction with MaineDOT and local road improvements and upgraded several pump stations. The completed upgrades to the Water Street Wastewater Pump Station and the planned upgrades to the High Street Wastewater Pump Station will help address capacity concerns for the City's primary commercial corridor. Facilitating growth, mitigating climate change impacts, and meeting appropriate regulatory standards are the department's greatest challenges.

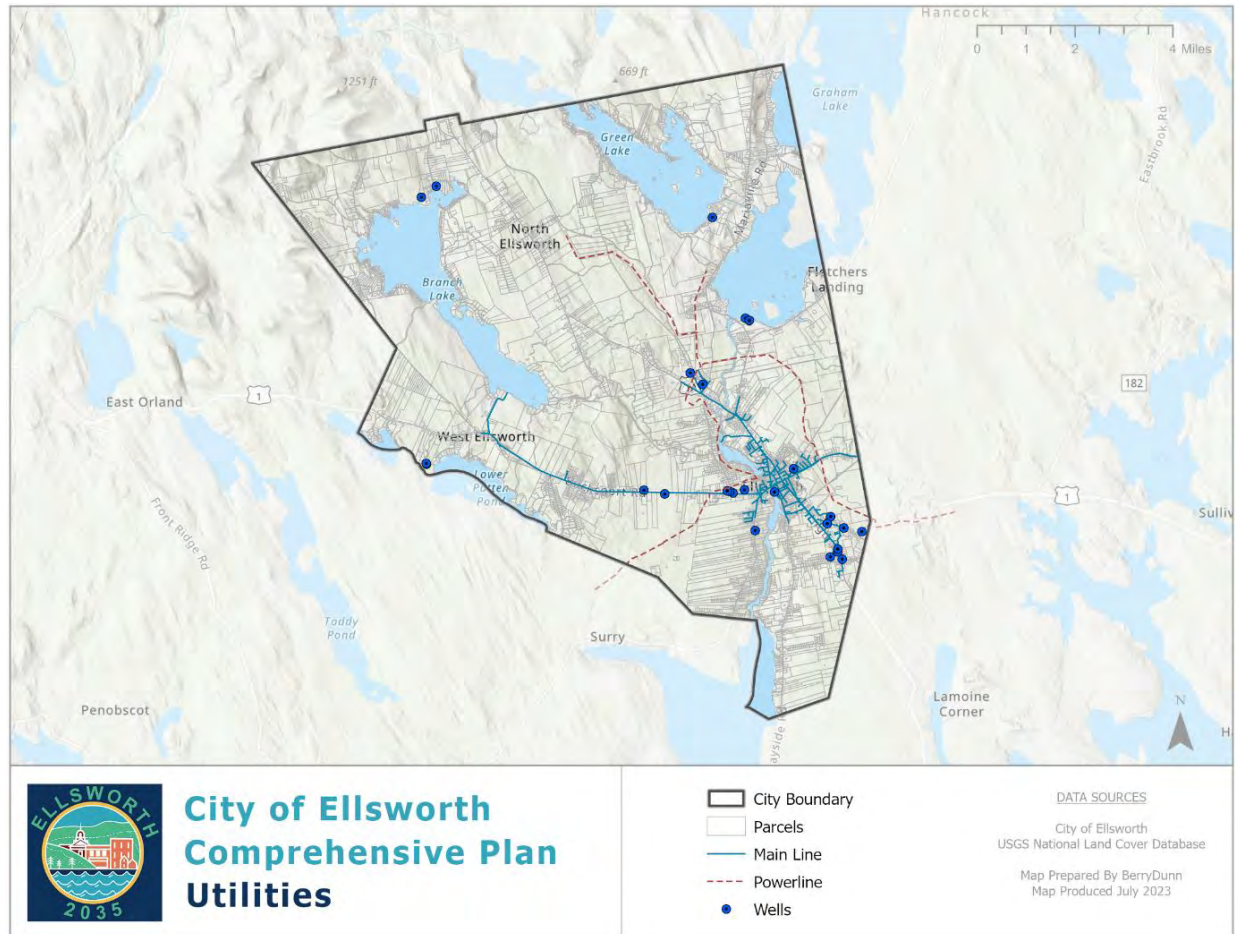
### Public Drinking Water

The 2942-acre Branch Lake, located wholly within the City of Ellsworth, is the City's drinking water source and is a protected resource. The Drinking Water Protection Ordinance is intended to protect the drinking water supply and its sources from pollution, development, recreational use, and invasive aquatic species. This includes regulations of boats that use the lake as well as regulation of development and land use that occur in the zoned protection area. The City has a hydraulic model that was updated in 2019 and a Master Plan that was updated in 2022.

The Maine Drinking Water Program has evaluated the Branch Lake supply as part of the Source Water Assessment Program. The program assessed the geology, hydrology, land use, water test results, and the extent of land protection by local ordinance to see how likely it is that the drinking water source will become contaminated by human activities. The findings show there is a low to moderate risk of contamination. This coupled with periodic water quality data collected by the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program and Maine DEP help ensure a safe drinking water supply. The intake location is on the southeastern portion of the lake. From the intake, drinking water travels to the Water Treatment Plant on Clearwater Way. Here the water is treated with UV, rapid filtration, and chemical addition before entering the distribution system. Upgrades were completed at the Water Treatment Plant in 2016 with the installation of UV to meet regulatory requirements but the plant has exceeded its useful life and needs replacement. The City has received funding from the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund to complete a conceptual design of a new treatment plant.

Figure 10.3: City of Ellsworth Utilities





Source: City of Ellsworth; USGS National Land Cover Database

The distribution system consists of approximately 36 miles of main, three tanks, and one booster station. The City continues to replace water main in conjunction with MaineDOT projects and in other areas. Design is currently in progress for replacement of water main and appurtenances on Surry Road to address frequent water main breaks. In 2019 the City completed improvements at the High Street Tank and the State Street Tank that included new coatings and rechlorination systems to extend the life of existing infrastructure and improve regulatory compliance. In addition to the public water supply many residences are on private wells.

## Stormwater Management

Ellsworth adopted Stormwater Management Design and Construction Standards and establishes stormwater quality control standards. The objective is to limit degradation of water quality in lakes and streams through treating runoff from Shoreland Zone Areas, high-pollutant users and impervious surfaces exceeding 10% of the area of each watershed.





Impervious surfaces are developed or paved areas that water cannot pass through. The downtown core has an abundance of impervious surfaces and, therefore, relies on gray infrastructure to divert stormwater to outlets. This network of pipes, culverts, inlets, and catch basins move water toward various rivers and brooks.

There are 80 culverts that convey streams across roads and other structures in Ellsworth. These culverts and their conditions have been mapped by the Maine Coastal Program. The Maine Stream Connectivity Work Group is a partnership of state, federal, industry and non-government organizations working cooperatively to improve Maine's stream restoration efforts. Currently, Ellsworth has a variety of road stream crossings that have barriers, potential barriers, and no barriers. Ellsworth is committed to improving these crossings as the need arises to better benefit fish and wildlife. Much of the stormwater infrastructure is integrated into the roads and rights-of-way. The Department of Public Works maintains stormwater infrastructure and identifies needs and capital planning. In 2022 the City began an effort to map and inspect all culverts and storm drains in the system with the goal of completing a comprehensive capital plan. Currently the City is investigating a cross-department asset management program that will help tracking and forecasting stormwater capital planning.

The City is in the process of planning for updates to its stormwater management infrastructure to be more resilient to extreme weather events and limit runoff into Ellsworth's water bodies.

### Solid Waste Management

Ellsworth contracts with an outside vendor for curbside trash pickup. This is done through a pay-per-bag system with residents and commercial properties purchasing stickers that must be put on the trash bags. There is a 50-pound weight limit for trash bags. There is a trash pickup schedule, and some rural residents are required to coordinate a designated pickup area where private roads meet the public road. Residents can bring their tagged bags to the station or residents also have the option of bringing their trash to the Ellsworth Transfer Station and pay per pound. The Recycling Center is located at the Ellsworth Transfer Station and accepts newspaper and magazines, cardboard, #1 and #2 plastics, and grocery metals, like clean soup and vegetable cans. Batteries are not accepted, but there are private companies like Wal-Mart and Home Depot in Ellsworth that do take them. Recycling is free at the Recycling Center and is currently a minimal operation. Energy Infrastructure





Versant Power provides most of the energy infrastructure to Ellsworth. Versant provides power to the downtown core as well as to the rural areas. Transmission lines run throughout Ellsworth and under road infrastructure. In addition, a hydroelectric dam, which forms Leonard Lake, provides additional energy that works in tandem with the Graham Lake Dam. The Ellsworth Power House Dam is licensed to supply about 30,000 megawatt-hours per year. In 2020, the City partnered with SunRaise Investments to install two solar arrays. The two sites are approximately 17 acres and include nearly 12,000 solar panels. These solar arrays are sufficient to cover the electrical needs of City facilities, including schools and the wastewater system. It is anticipated that the City will save \$3.6 million in electrical costs over the next 20 years.<sup>17</sup>

## Broadband

The City has recently installed a fully integrated fiber network system downtown. The system runs down High Street from Buttermilk Road to Church Street, down Church Street and connecting to Water Street down to Washington Street. Fiber optics are considered the fastest communications technology and also the easiest to upgrade. Fiber optics are cables made of thin glass strands that carry pulses of light that transfer information. Fiber allows users to achieve internet speeds that are faster than traditional connections, which likely use copper wires to carry data. The Ellsworth network is open access, dark fiber network. Open access means any internet provider can lease capacity on the network to provide internet services. Dark fiber means the City only owns the physical network infrastructure but does not directly provide service on the network. The City currently has an agreement with Maine-based Great Works Internet (GWI) as an initial provider. The Ellsworth network connects to the statewide Three Ring Binder fiber optic network, which, in turn, connects to the internet. Outside of downtown, rural residents are limited to local cellular tower and satellite options. The service can be unreliable and less accessible to all residents

Not all residential customers downtown have access to fiber along these corridors, though they do have access to broadband through providers such as Spectrum. Leases are available on a per-strand bases throughout the length of the fiber optic network. In general, strands may only be leased to provide telecommunications services and may not be subleased.

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<sup>17</sup> Bangor Daily News. October 20, 2020. *Ellsworth will buy all its electricity through local 11,000-panel solar project*. Accessed August 30, 2023.





Service providers, like Spectrum, can use the core leased network to build lateral extensions and connections to customers.

Outside of downtown, rural residents are limited to local cellular tower and satellite options. There are multiple individual service providers (ISPs) providing services in Ellsworth, including copper cable, coaxial cable, cell phone hot spot, fixed wireless, and satellite. The service can be unreliable and less accessible to all residents.

From 2021 to 2022, the City and Mission Broadband, Inc. developed a Broadband Roadmap designed to improve community-wide access to a robust and affordable broadband network. The roadmap outlines options for a municipal owned and operated network, a public/private partnership, and a blended municipal network where the City owns regions of the network and service providers provide their own coverage areas in the City. To support this process, a Broadband Committee was developed to oversee the project.

The Broadband Roadmap also stated that the lack of ubiquitous broadband access can impact the City's economic development, healthcare, public safety, education, and government services and initiatives.

## Challenges and Opportunities

As Ellsworth continues to grow, the City will have to consider how growth will impact the ability to maintain and provide services. Ellsworth covers a large geographic area, and expanding development beyond designated growth areas has a long-term financial impact on the City. Service providers, like fire and EMS, would have to travel farther distances to provide services more often, which could put additional strain on services. In the future, the Fire and EMS Department should look at future development projections and examine the feasibility of establishing additional fire houses outside of City Hall to provide faster response times. In addition, challenges around water, wastewater, and stormwater will be addressing aging infrastructure and evolving regulations. Planning for future needs and identifying opportunities to increase efficiency in operations will be critical for the City to provide a high level of service in all areas while minimizing the impact to taxpayers.

As Ellsworth's population continues to age, the City will have to consider how to best provide services to older residents. The City should consider how different housing types, transportation, and community services ensure that older residents can continue to participate in the community. Ellsworth should also consider the impact of an aging community on its fire and EMS services. The City and its partners will also continue work





to support residents in need of mental health and substance use support and support residents experiencing homelessness.

Housing affordability has been stated as a challenge by multiple City departments, including police, fire and EMS, and schools. The City has seen challenges in filling vacant positions, and departments have staff who travel far distances to work, which can create challenges if a significant emergency were to happen. Staffing challenges can limit the City's ability to continue to provide a high level of service and provide support to residents. This includes the code enforcement office's ability to conduct plan reviews and enforce the City's codes. The code enforcement office has experienced recent retirements and filling new positions while providing the same level of service has been challenging. As the City receives more development applications, staffing levels could be examined to support the plan review and permitting process.

## Sources

City of Ellsworth Police Department

City of Ellsworth Fire and EMS Department

City of Ellsworth Facilities Department

City of Ellsworth Technology Department

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 55, Water Supply Protection Ordinance

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 4, Shoreland Zoning

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance, Article 10, Stormwater Management Design and Construction Standards

City of Ellsworth Broadband Roadmap 2022

Ellsworth Public Library Strategic Plan 2019 – 2021

Ellsworth Public Library – Budget Briefing Report

Ellsworth Public Schools

Maine Coastal Program

Maine Coastal Program, Maine Stream Habitat Viewer

Versant Power





## 11. FISCAL CAPACITY

As Ellsworth looks to evaluate the potential for future land use projects, understanding the current and future fiscal environments is important to determine what will be feasible. By evaluating core revenue and expenses and the projected impact of capital investments, the City can plan for anticipated growth and demands while continuing to ensure a thriving economy and appropriate level of service to support innovation and strategic investment. This section does not provide a comprehensive financial forecast; it identifies core economic development trends related to municipal revenue generation, expected expenses, and strategic capital investments. This section also outlines City service delivery, current revenue capacity levels, and strategies that may support additional revenue generation in the future.

### Fiscal Capacity in the Planning Context

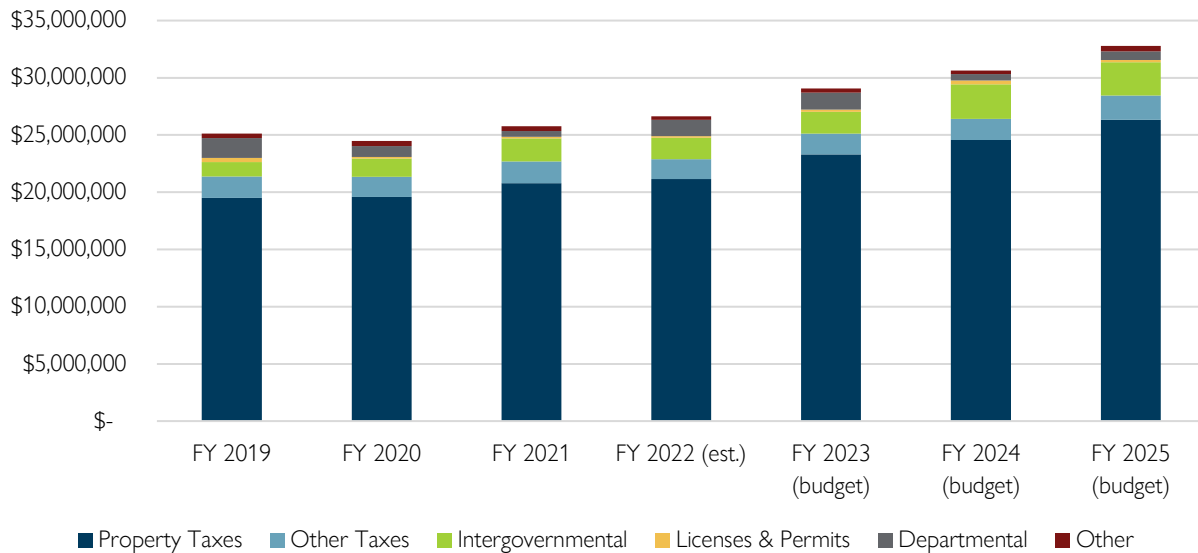
The City's fiscal capacity and ability to provide adequate levels of high-quality services is largely dependent on creating and maintaining a diverse economic environment supported by residents, the local business community, employment centers, and visitors. Therefore, fiscal capacity, land use, economic development, and capital investment are inevitably intertwined. The City can help cultivate interdependence between commercial enterprises and residential needs through land use policies, infrastructure investment policies, and fiscal policies that support the City's neighborhoods, built environment, and natural environment in the future.

To establish a baseline to measure fiscal capacity growth, it is necessary to understand the City's core revenue generating capacity. Figure 11.1 depicts major general fund revenue sources between FY 2019 and FY 2023.





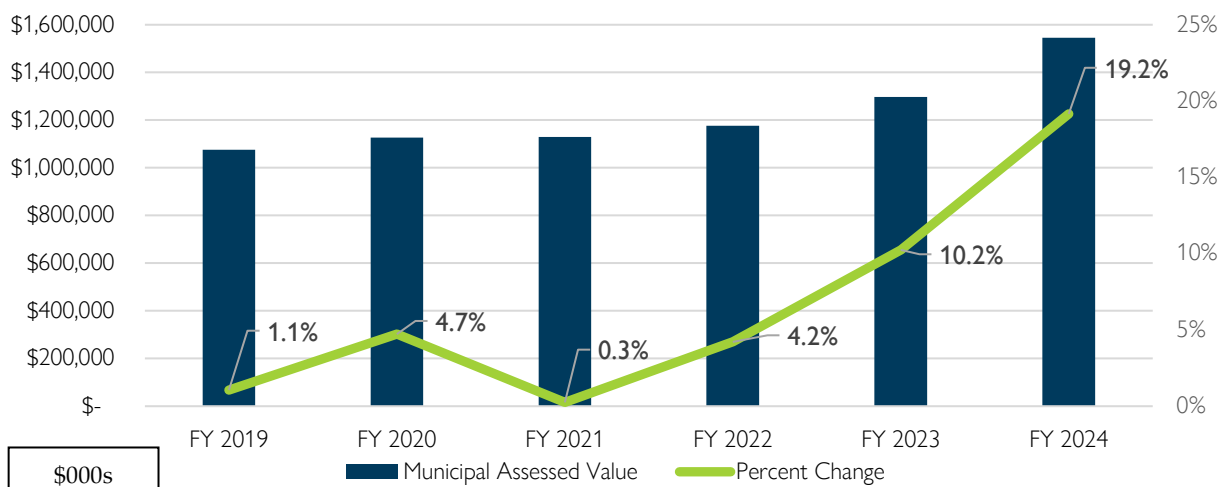
Figure 11.1: Major General Fund Revenue Sources FY 2019 – FY 2025



Source: City of Ellsworth FY 2023 Adopted Operating Budget; FY 2024 and FY 2025 Final Budget Resolutions

As is evident from Figure 11.1, most of the annual general fund revenue is raised via property taxes. As a result, it is important for the City to continue to foster overall municipal valuation growth through comprehensive policy to guide development that will best support revenue growth and through strategic investment. Figure 11.2 outlines the growth in overall municipal valuation between FY 2019 and FY 2024.

Figure 11.2: Overall Municipal Valuation Growth FY 2019 – FY 2023



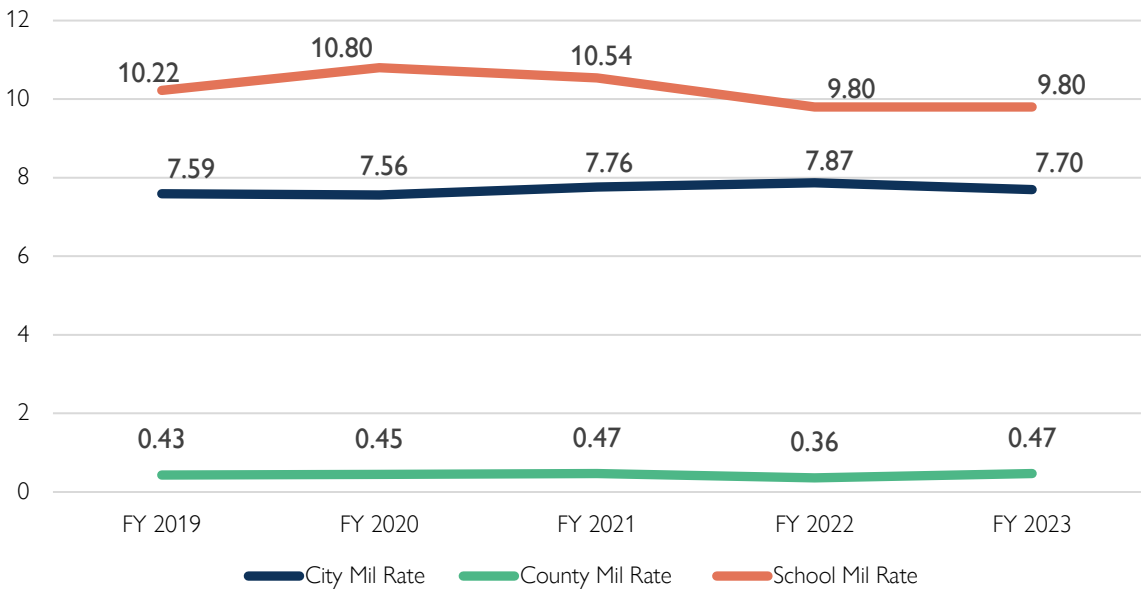
Source: Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Maine Revenue Services, State Valuation History 2007 – 2024





State data show that the municipal valuation between FY 2010 and FY 2018 remained mostly flat. Most recently, overall municipal valuation between FY 2019 and FY 2023 increased on average 4.1% per year, with the largest increase of 6% projected to be realized in FY 2023. This data provides the City with a snapshot of estimated revenue to be raised from property taxes based on adopted millage rates. Furthermore, as outlined in Figure 12.1, the City’s reliance on revenue derived from property taxes is significant. Between FY 2019 and FY 2023 (estimated), an average of 80% of total annual general fund revenue was derived from property taxes. If year over year municipal valuation increases are not realized, the impact may be significant; however, those impacts may be somewhat mitigated through millage rate adjustments. Figure 12.3 outlines adopted millage rates between FY 2019 and FY 2023.

Figure 11.3: Millage Rates FY 2019 – 2023



Source: City of Ellsworth, FY 2023 Adopted Operating Budget

Whether the millage (tax) rate for the City will increase or decrease from the prior year will be largely dependent on whether property values appreciate, depreciate, or remain steady and what the estimated revenue requirements are for a fiscal year. As seen in Figure 11.3, combined millage rates have trended slightly downward since FY 2019, presumably in large part due to the increases in overall assessed values over the same period.





## Debt Capacity

In addition to overall municipal valuation, and various County and educational commitments, the property tax rate for the City also depends on short-term revenue requirements and projected funding for current and future investments. Increases (or, in less common instances, decreases) to annual property tax rates can be permanent due to increased spending needs or temporary due to debt issuance or capital investments.

State statutes limit the amount of general obligation debt a municipality may issue to 15% of its total state-assessed valuation. The debt limitation in FY 2020 for the City of Ellsworth was \$164,987,000—far exceeding the City’s outstanding general obligation debt.

To better understand the City’s capacity to finance capital investments and economic investments in the future through the issuance of debt, it is useful to understand that the City currently has outstanding debt equating to roughly 3% of its total assessed valuation, but current debt service levels equate to roughly 5% of annual general fund revenue.

## Planning for Capital and Strategic Economic Development Investments

It will be critical for the City to consider all available information to make sound fiscal policy and investment decisions. This will help ensure continuity of municipal operations and the ability to maintain high-quality service delivery. It will be vital to continue to promote strategic economic development and attract quality investment. The City will maintain fiscal resiliency by developing and adopting land use, capital investment, and economic development strategies that support, sustain, and grow a diversified tax base to derive sufficient revenue. Fiscal health requires that the City have the necessary financial resources to effectively govern, provide services at a level consistent with community expectations, and advance programs and initiatives that further strategic growth. The City should be persistent in pursuing new or enhanced revenue resources and continue to explore more efficient use of existing resources in order to be effective and fiscally sustainable. The City must continuously refine its governance best practices to maintain and improve upon its services, and it must have adequate financial resources to fund them.

To increase revenue generation, many cities look to property taxes first. This is often a logical starting point since property tax revenue typically accounts for the largest portion of total revenues generated locally; however, this may also be the least popular option for the





business community and residents to consider. Exploring revenue enhancement through property taxes does not always have to mean increases to the tax rates. Strategic growth and economic development approaches can help the increase the tax base without raising the tax rate, as has been demonstrated throughout the City between 2019 and 2023. Furthermore, the same strategic growth and economic development strategies that support expansion of the property tax base often have the same effect in increasing other tax revenues as well.

### Capital Outlay and Infrastructure

Between FY 2019 and FY 2023, an average of 8.2% of total governmental expenditures (excluding school appropriations and business-type activities) were, or planned to be, related to capital outlays. Although capital outlays are a relatively small percentage of total expenditures for the City, the long-term maintenance costs and eventual replacement costs need to be carefully considered before making any capital investment decisions. For these reasons, capital investment policy should support a capital investment strategy related to the ability to generate revenues above and beyond the cost to maintain and replace. In doing so, the City may realize revenue in excess of the capital investment costs, ongoing maintenance costs, and eventual replacement costs over life of the capital asset.

Similarly, strategic investments in business-type capital infrastructure, such as water and sewer infrastructure, should be considered for the potential to generate revenues and to increase the level of service to the rate payers who pay to utilize and maintain the services. A specific example, which the City is initially planning for, is the design and construction of a water treatment facility.

To that end, when considering investments to promote economic development, the City should first focus on areas where existing infrastructure (e.g., sewer and water lines, transportation infrastructure, public safety services, other City services) are located or can be accessed with minimal investment.

### Capital Outlay and Facilities

Addressing deferred maintenance and capital replacement needs throughout the City requires a strategic approach. Much like maintenance, updating and constructing new transportation and utility infrastructure and facility investments need to be strategic with a focus on a return on investment. Planning for the maintenance of existing buildings and facilities and the construction of new facilities can be targeted to support and encourage new investment and development. Strategic capital improvement investments may provide





the foundation for growth and may provide the City with additional opportunities to generate revenues above and beyond the capital construction and maintenance costs for facilities over the course of their useful life.

## Tax Increment Financing Districts

The City currently utilizes municipal tax increment financing (TIF) districts to provide financial assistance to applicable development projects and to direct incremental property tax revenue generated by the new investment to fund special projects, programs, and initiatives. Between FY 2019 and FY 2023, the City invested over \$490,000 in TIF districts. While the actual amount of growth and, therefore, the actual amount of revenue capture from TIF districts varies from year to year, special care should be taken to utilize all available information to estimate growth and revenue capture accurately on an annual basis.

Furthermore, special care should also be taken to identify exactly the types of expenditures annual TIF revenue will be used for and confirm that it is an allowable expenditure, as not all municipal expenditures can be funded with TIF-generated revenue. The City should continue to assess opportunities related to current and future TIF districts to promote reinvestment and redevelopment and to support municipal projects aligned with the recommendations of this plan.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Recommendations and strategies laid out in this section provide guidance for the City to build upon opportunities for growth that align with the City's vision for the future. Consideration should be given to the City's current fiscal capacity and expected impacts to its finances related to infrastructure and capital investment needs. In identifying additional opportunities for funding, the City should consider the current climate for state and federal funding to take advantage of new, applicable opportunities as they become available while also preparing for a possible decline in government funding for certain types of projects. Overall, prudent short-term and long-term planning for City's fiscal health will be critical for ensuring stability and achieving the City's goals and priorities outlined in this plan.

The City does not currently have a city-wide capital improvement program (CIP) to serve as the major financial planning tool for expenditures allocated for capital infrastructure, facilities, and equipment. A CIP generally helps guide development funding and budgetary priorities for large City infrastructure projects or economic development investments that





exceed funding amounts in the operating budget. A CIP can help ensure major projects are within fiscal reach for the City and helps prioritize the most vital capital projects to sustain overall economic growth. Future consideration should be given to the development of a CIP annually in conjunction with the operating budget development cycle.

## Sources

City of Ellsworth, Annual Financial Report 2020

City of Ellsworth, Annual Financial Report 2021

City of Ellsworth, Fiscal Year 2023 Adopted Operating Budget

City of Ellsworth, Final Budget Resolution, FY 2024

City of Ellsworth, Final Budget Resolution, FY 2025

State of Maine, Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Maine Revenue Services, State Valuation





## 12. LAND USE

### Introduction

Ellsworth is the largest city in Maine, by area, with a total area of approximately 94 square miles (79.3 square miles of land area and 14.6 square miles covered by water). Most of the City's land area is undeveloped, including open space conservation areas, forests, agricultural land, vacant land, and undeveloped or underdeveloped rural residential areas. As the service, employment, and cultural center for Hancock County and gateway to Acadia, the City of Ellsworth must carefully decide how its land will be developed, as there are far-reaching implications for both the community and visitors. Land development patterns and regulations directly impact economic opportunity, housing availability and affordability, water quality, open space, wildlife habitats, transportation, and social connections. This section will provide an analysis of historic development patterns and land use regulations and will consider future needs for growth and protection of natural resources.

### Existing Land Use and Land Cover

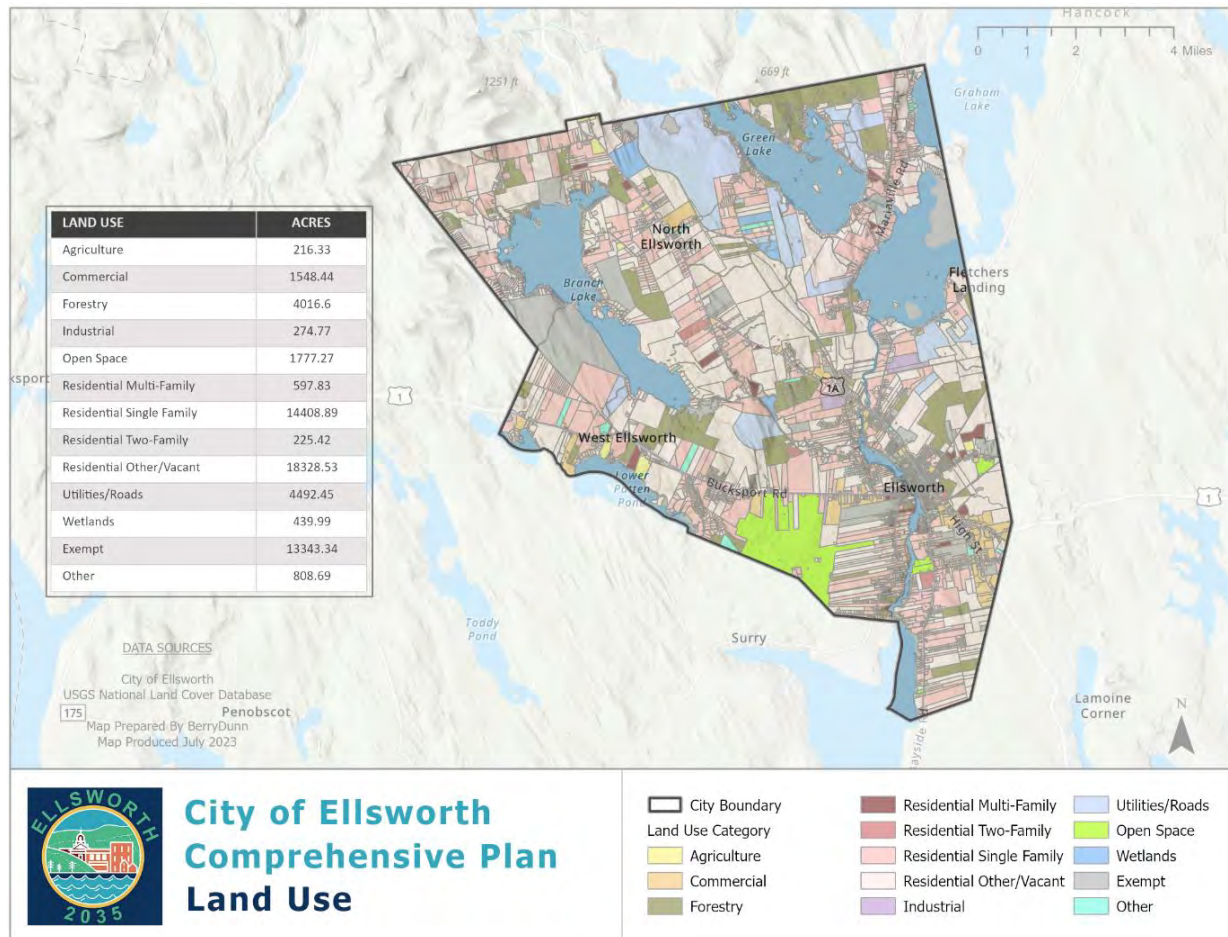
Development in Ellsworth is concentrated in the Urban Core, which includes downtown, the area adjacent to downtown just west of the Union River, and the commercial corridors extending south along High Street and north along State Street. Outside of the Urban Core, development is largely rural, including low-density single-family homes and some limited commercial uses along major corridors.

Uses within the Urban Core are primarily commercial (including retail, office, services, and other business uses) and single-family residential. The Urban Core also includes tax exempt uses such as City school campuses, City Hall, and other governmental uses, and some two-family and multi-family residential uses. In addition, there are a few industrial uses in and around the City's industrial park (off Mariaville Road).

Outside of downtown, most of the City's commercial development is along the High Street/Route 1/Route 3 corridor, which is the primary route to MDI. Additional commercial uses extend north along Route 1A and west along Route 1. There are a few areas of industrial uses within the City, including within the industrial park off Route 180 and in a few locations along Route 1A and Route 179.



Figure 12.1: Existing Land Use



Source: City of Ellsworth

While developed parcels cover slightly less than half of the City's land area, a much smaller percentage of total land area is covered by structures or impervious surface areas. Most of the City's land area is forested, with most new development occurring in the Urban Core. Outside of the Urban Core, much of the City's developed parcels include single-family homes on large, forested lots. Single-family residential parcels account for approximately 30% of the City's total land area.

In 2021, approximately 320 acres of land in Ellsworth were classified for agricultural use as cropland, orchard, or pasture, and 602 acres were classified as farm woodland. While farmland or forested land for commercial harvesting makes up less than 2% of the City's total land area, this number has increase significantly since 2009 when the City estimated only 44 acres of farmland and 349 acres of farm woodland.





Ellsworth is the primary commercial hub for surrounding communities. Adjacent land use in surrounding communities to the north, east, and west is primarily low-density residential. Commercial uses in the gateway/commercial district extend south on Route 3 through Trenton toward MDI.

## Land Use and Development Changes

### Recommendations of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan

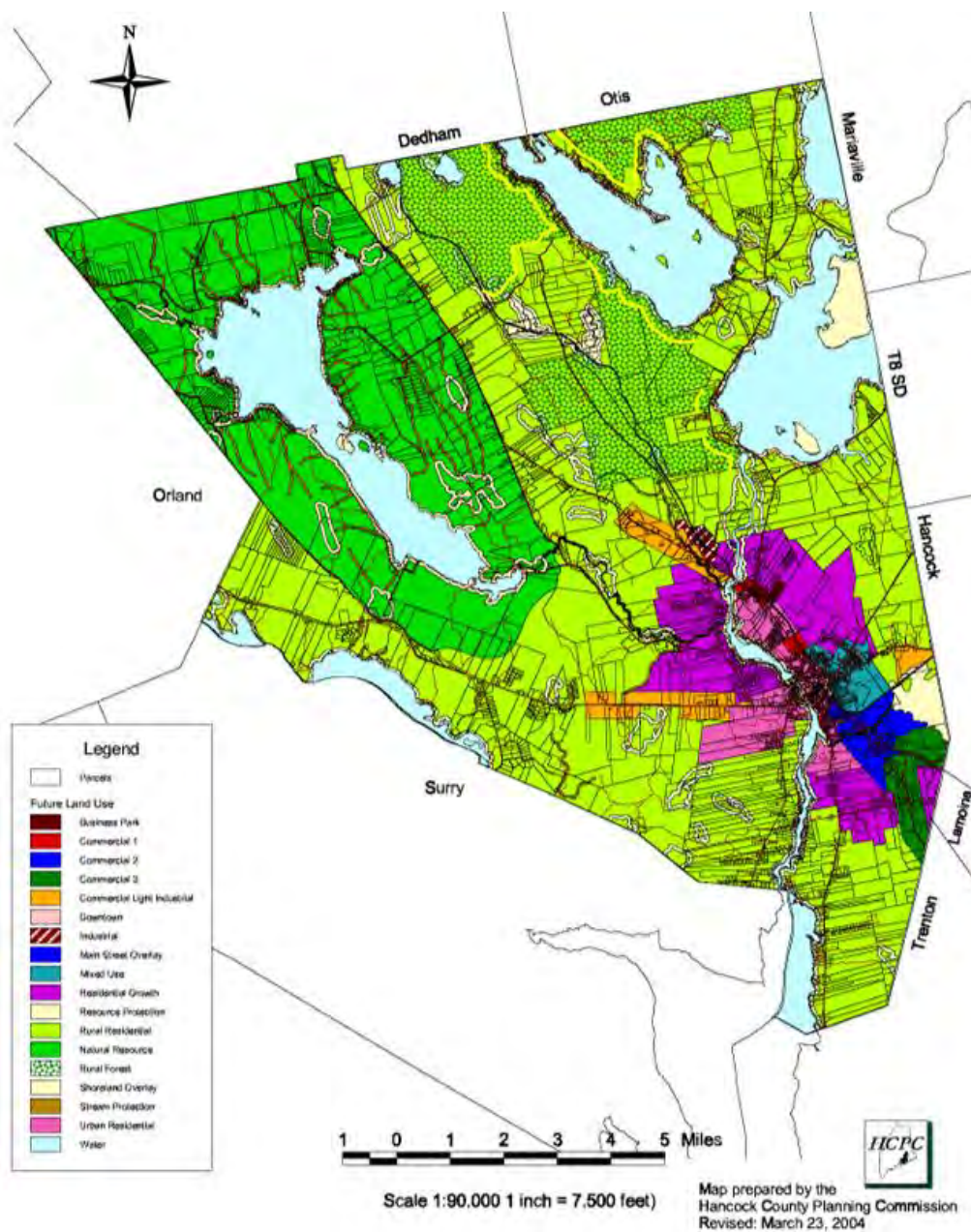
The land use chapter of the 2004 Comprehensive Plan notes a concern about sprawling residential development into rural areas of the City, including impacts on natural resources and cost to the City to provide and maintain infrastructure and resources to new areas. The plan also references the City's desire to protect natural open space areas and water resources and to ensure there is sufficient land area for commercial development.

Land use policy recommendations in the 2004 plan focus on:

- Protecting rural and natural areas by limiting non-residential and multi-family residential uses, implementing and enforcing resource protection measures, promoting the reuse of brownfield sites, promoting cluster development, implementing an open space acquisition fee, and establishing a land conservation fund
- Ensuring adequate area for new business by revising the zoning ordinance to allow for adequate land for commercial development and limiting one- and two-family residential uses in certain commercial zones
- Encouraging residential development in growth areas by incentivizing multi-family development in growth areas with access to public water and sewer, allowing conversion to multi-family uses in residential zones in growth areas, and ensuring that downtown and waterfront revitalization plans make provisions for multi-family housing



Figure 12.2: 2004 Future Land Use Map



Source: City of Ellsworth 2004 Comprehensive Plan

## Recent Land Use Changes

The City has experienced significant residential and commercial development since the last comprehensive plan. Since 2000, an additional 1,635 acres have been developed for residential use and an additional 561 acres have been developed for commercial use, an





increase of 56%. Commercial development and redevelopment have been focused along High Street, the City's main commercial corridor, and extending along Routes 1 and 3 toward the Trenton and Hancock borders. The 2000s brought large-scale commercial development on Myrick Street, including Home Depot in 2001 and Wal-Mart in 2009, and numerous smaller commercial developments and redevelopments along the corridor.

In an effort to attract new business to Ellsworth, the City established a business (industrial) park off Route 180 and commerce park off Lakes Lane. Both zoning districts are intended to provide a desirable environment for commercial development that will not impact existing residential development. The business park (BP) zone allows for a mix of uses, including industrial, manufacturing, and public facilities (transfer station). The commerce park (CP) zone allows for service and light manufacturing businesses including current uses such as healthcare and a fitness center.

Since 2004, the City has also experienced some new residential development, predominantly single-family homes in new subdivisions, including on Maddocks Avenue, Fieldstone Way, Wilder Way, and Sugar Way. Much of this development occurred prior to 2008, with new residential growth slowing due to the 2008 financial crisis.

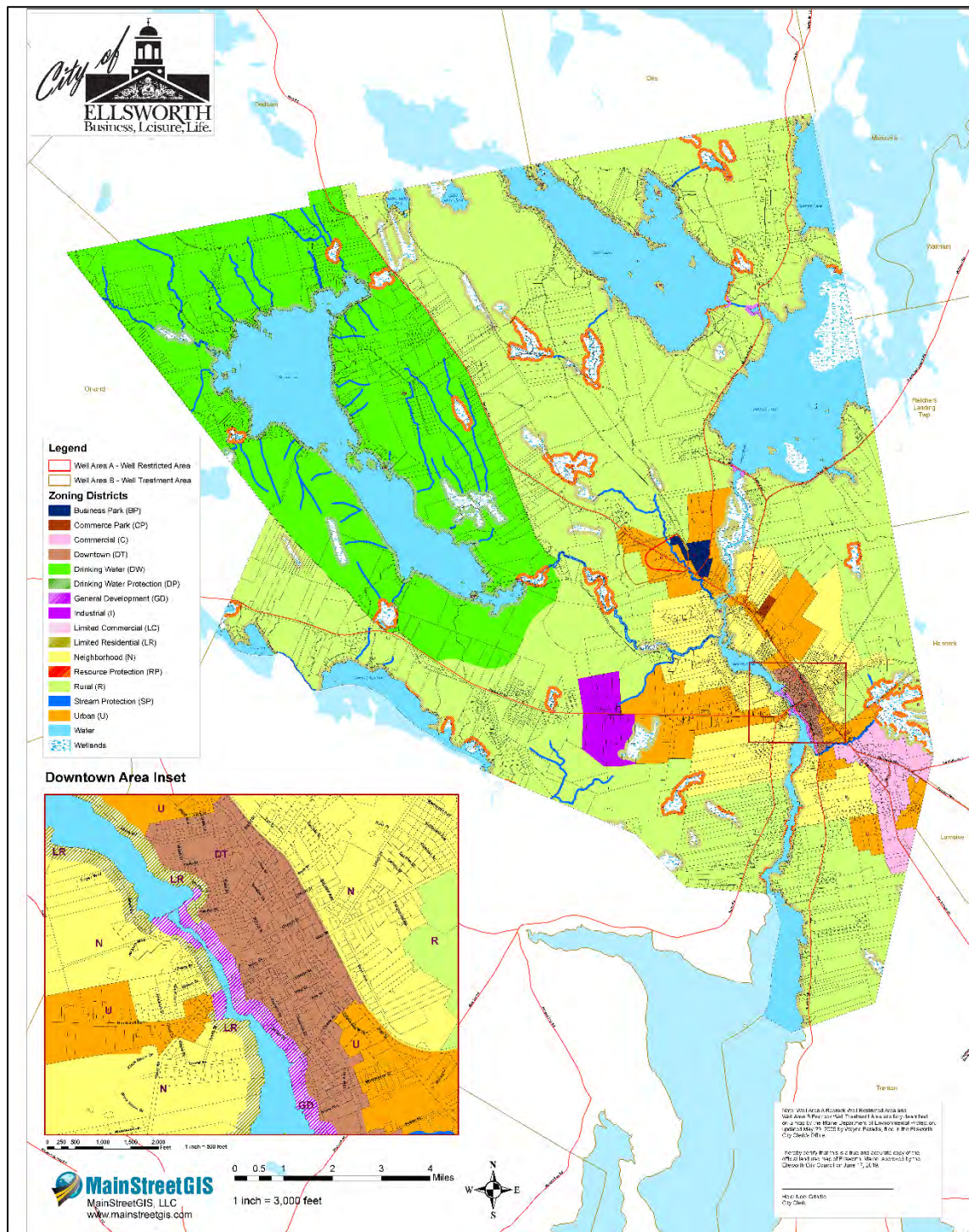
## Zoning and Land Use Regulations

The 2004 Comprehensive Plan recommended several changes to the City's zoning districts and regulations to support the 2004 future land use plan goal of encouraging development in the Urban Core and limiting new development in rural areas. The Downtown (DT), Urban (U) and Neighborhood (N) zones were established to allow for a greater mix of uses in and around downtown. These new districts were established to allow for development that is walkable and in keeping with past development patterns and the scale of downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.

The DT zone includes the densest Urban Core areas along Main Street, State Street, and along the east side of the Union River downtown. The purpose of this district is to maintain a highly walkable area with a broad mix of uses that contribute to the vibrancy of downtown.



Figure 12.3: City of Ellsworth Zoning Map



Source: City of Ellsworth





The U zone extends from downtown to the north along State Street and Route 1A, south along High Street and Water Street, and west along Bucksport Road. This zone allows for a mix of commercial uses and dense residential development.

The N zone provides for transitional areas that allow for a mix of uses and also support the existing residential and encourage infill residential development. This zone allows for commercial uses that support and are compatible with a residential neighborhood, including convenience stores and personal service and professional establishments.

Establishing the Urban and Neighborhood zones expanded the area for commercial and mixed-use development along Bucksport Road, Mariaville Road, north of High Street and select parcels between Route 3 and Route 230 (Bayside Road).

Additional changes to the City's zoning districts since the 2004 plan include the establishment of a Business Park district and Commerce Park district, each with specific zoning regulations to support industrial and commercial business development in these designated areas. A larger area along Bucksport Road was also designated as an Industrial district. The addition of land zoned for commercial, mixed-use, and industrial use was prompted by recommendations of the 2004 plan to ensure sufficient land for economic growth.

Most of the land within the City is zoned Rural (R), which allows for low-density single-family residential development, agriculture, forestry, and limited rural commercial and recreational uses. Land area surrounding Branch Lake is within the Drinking Water (DW) district, which allows similar uses as the R district, but with additional site development restrictions intended to provide greater protection of drinking water quality in proximity to Branch Lake. This zone requires a lot have two acres to be able to build a single-family home and has greater setback requirements than any other zone.

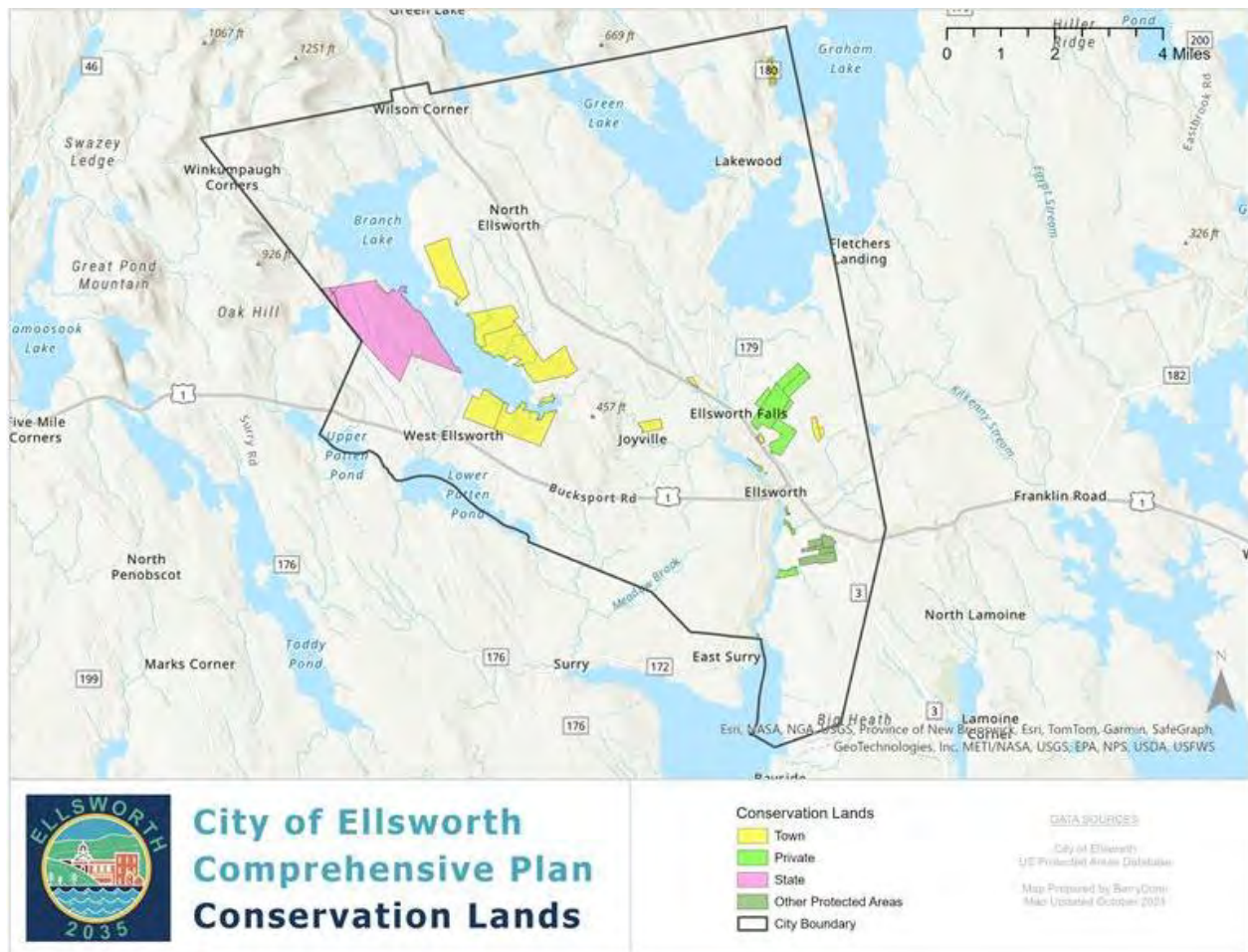
A portion of the City's undeveloped land is protected either as publicly or privately held conservation land or through the City's Shoreland, Stream Protection, and Resource Protection Districts. In addition to these state-mandated regulations, the City has established additional environmental standards within the DW District (including areas around Branch Lake within the Shoreland Zone) to continue to protect the City's water quality.



## Land Conservation

While most of the City's land area is forested, not all this forested area is protected open space. The City has roughly 6,000 acres of conserved open space. A variety of agencies own and maintain conservation land in Ellsworth, including the City, State, and other private conservation organizations, such as Frenchman Bay Conservancy, Stanwood Wildlife Sanctuary, and Blue Hill Heritage Trust. Much of the City's conserved land has been acquired and protected relatively recently, including Branch Lake Forest (700 acres adjacent to Branch Lake) and Meadowbrook Forest (acquired by Blue Hill Heritage Trust in 2019). These two parcels account for approximately one-third of the City's total conserved land area.

Figure 12.4: Ellsworth Conservation Land



Source: City of Ellsworth; US Protected Areas Database





## Undeveloped Land

Most of the land in Ellsworth is undeveloped, including vacant undeveloped land, conserved open space, undevelopable land (e.g., wetlands), and undeveloped portions of developed parcels. Ellsworth is largely rural outside of the Urban Core, and changes to development regulations continue to focus on protecting rural areas from development and encouraging infill development within the Urban Core. While some of this land is protected—either through conservation or zoning through the Resource Protection district—much of the City’s undeveloped, forested land is subject to development, largely within the R district, which allows for low-density single-family residential development. While there are many factors that have limited development in these areas (e.g., cost of infrastructure development, access to transportation and services), increased development pressure may make these areas more desirable for development in the future.

## Challenges and Opportunities

As the City looks to guide future growth, protecting natural resources and open spaces and strategically locating development to minimize future expenditures for infrastructure and services will be critical. Past planning efforts have aimed to guide growth to the Urban Core, in proximity to existing water and sewer infrastructure. The City will continue to look to increase protection of natural areas that may be vulnerable to development, including to protect ground water, surface water, and drinking water quality, to preserve prime farmland areas, and to protect open spaces areas for wild habitat and recreational use.

Future growth should continue to focus on infill development in the Urban Core but should do so in a way that will not adversely impact water quality of streams and the Union River, and to maximize opportunities for alternative transportation options, such as walking, bicycling, and increased transit service.

## Sources

Blue Hill Heritage Trust

City of Ellsworth 2004 Comprehensive Plan

City of Ellsworth Assessing Department

City of Ellsworth Codes and Ordinances, Chapter 56, Unified Development Ordinance

City of Ellsworth Planning Department





City of Ellsworth Zoning Map

Frenchman Bay Conservancy

Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry, Bureau of Parks and Land



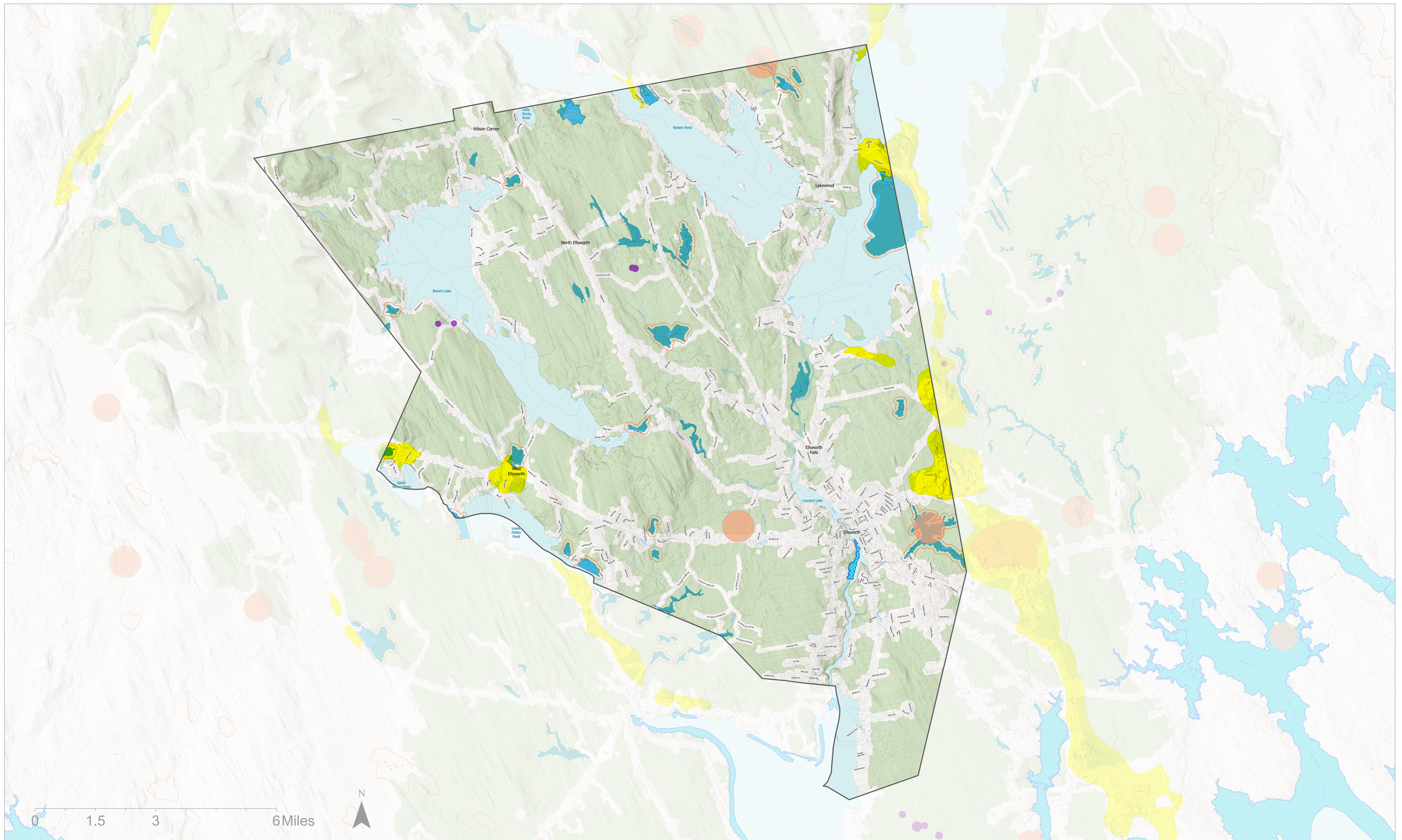


## APPENDIX A: MAPS

The following list of maps are included in large format PDF versions on the following pages:

1. Figure 2.1: Natural Resources
2. Figure 2.2: Watersheds
3. Figure 2.3: Water Resources
4. Figure 2.4: Stream Habitat Map
5. Figure 4.1: Agriculture and Forest Resources
6. Figure 8.1: Ellsworth Sidewalks
7. Figure 9.2: Historic Resources
8. Figure 10.1: City-Owned Parcels
9. Figure 10.3: Utilities
10. Utilities – Urban Core
11. Figure 12.1: Existing Land Use
12. Existing Land Use – Urban Core
13. Figure 12.2: 2004 Future Land Use Map
14. 2004 Future Land Use Map - Inset
15. Figure 12.3: Zoning Map
16. Figure 12.4: Conservation Land





# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Natural Resources

- City Boundary
- Parcels
- Aquifers
- Wetlands
- Significant Vernal Pools
- Undeveloped Habitat Blocks
- Tidal Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat
- Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat
- Endangered Threatened and Special Concern Wildlife

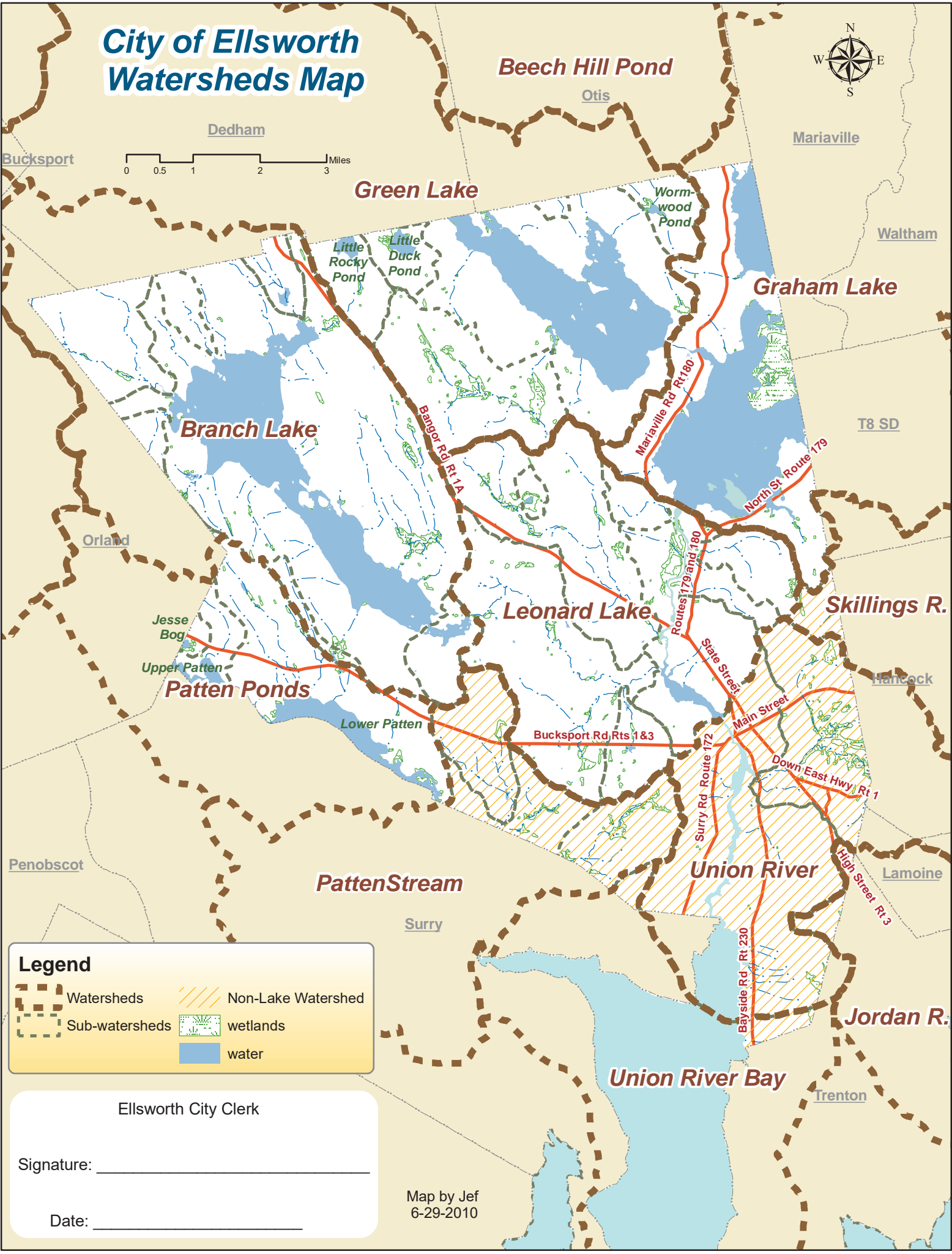
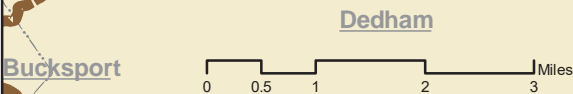
## DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
Maine Office of GIS

Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024



# City of Ellsworth Watersheds Map



## Legend

- Watersheds
- Non-Lake Watershed
- Sub-watersheds
- wetlands
- water

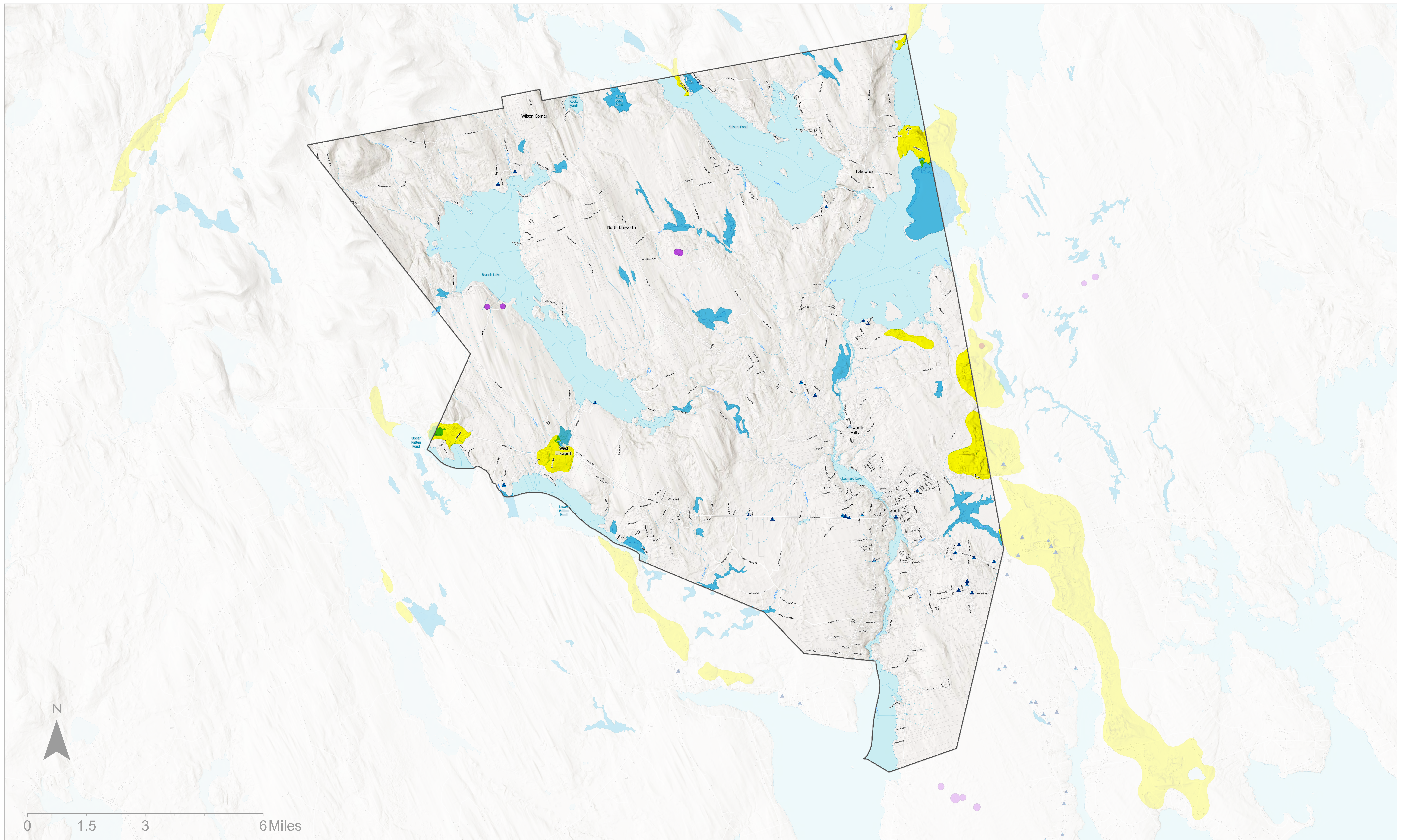
Ellsworth City Clerk

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Map by Jef  
6-29-2010





# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Water Resources

- ▲ Public Wells
- City Boundary
- ▭ Parcels
- Aquifers
- Wetlands
- Significant Vernal Pools

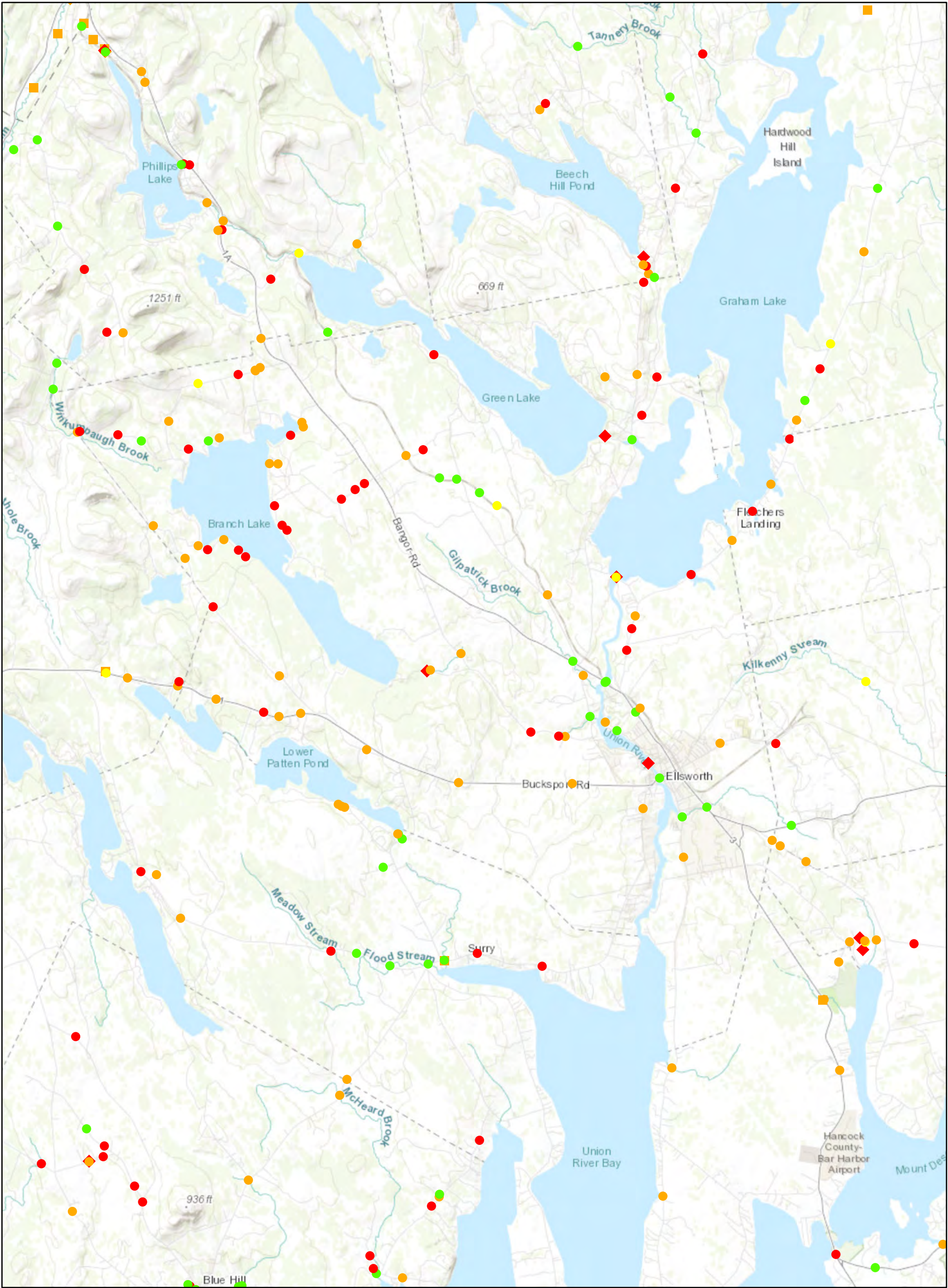
## DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
Maine Office of GIS

Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024



# Maine Stream Habitat Map



August 16, 2023

## Crossings

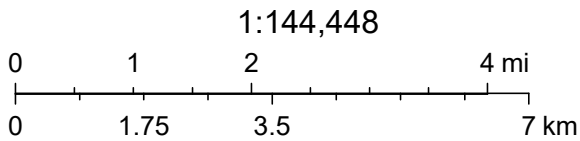
- Barrier
- Potential Barrier
- No Barrier
- Unknown

## Dams

- Barrier
- Potential Barrier

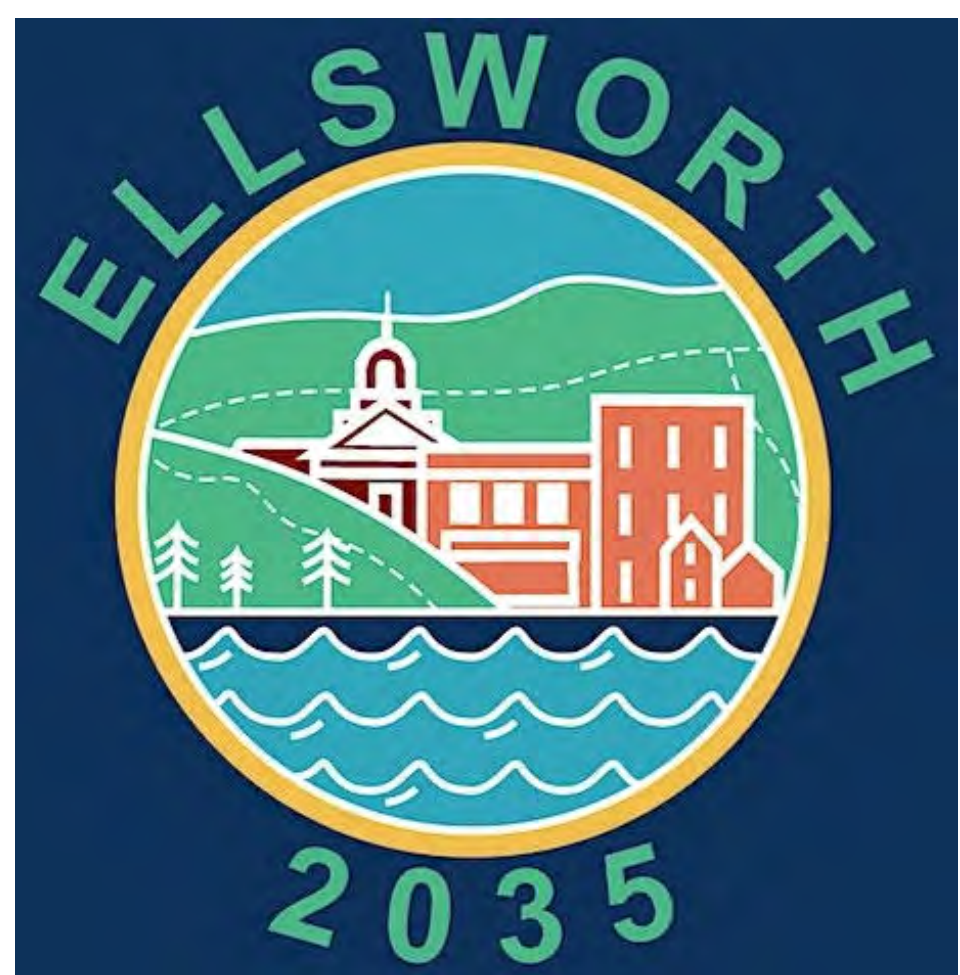
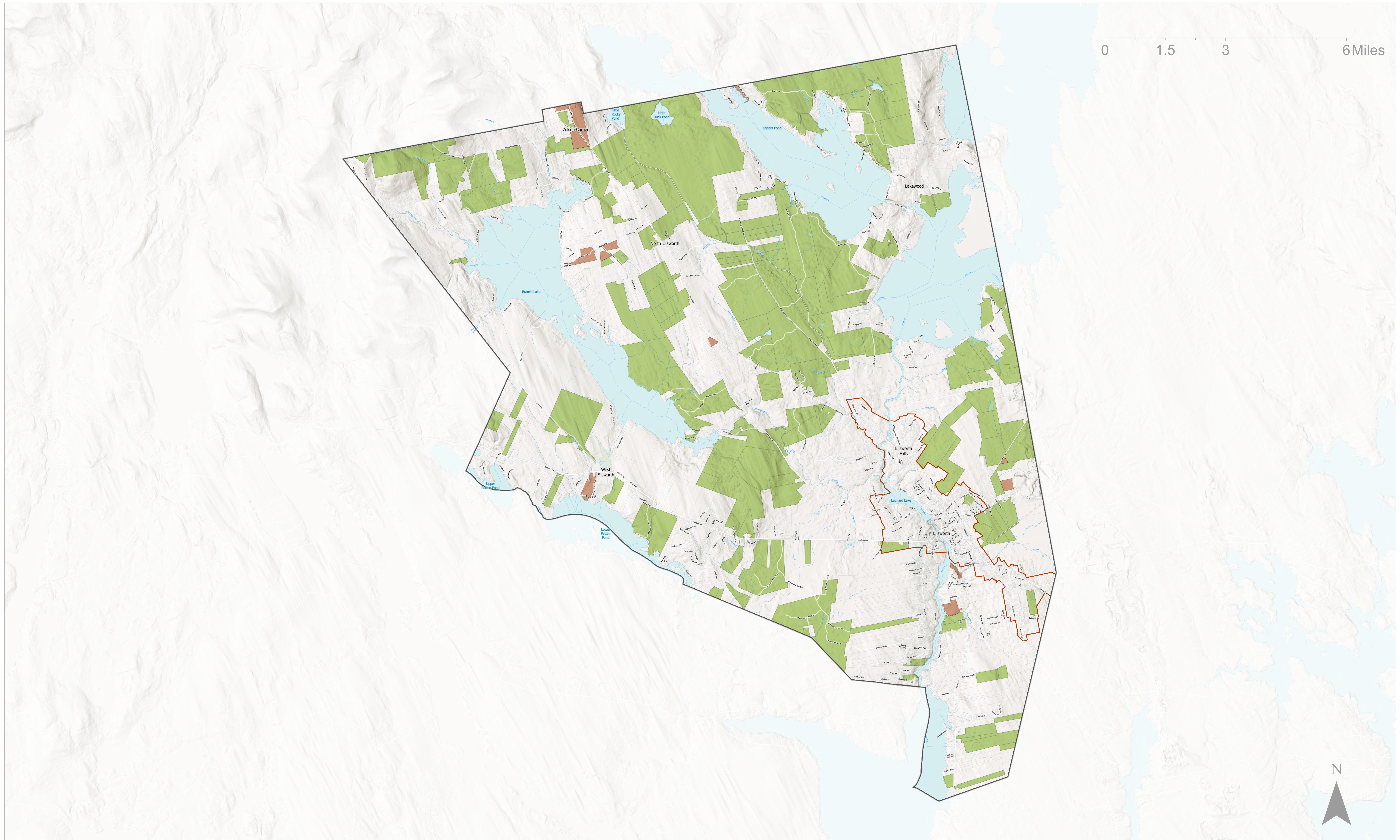
## Natural Barriers

- Potential Barrier








Province of New Brunswick, Esri Canada, Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, NGA, EPA, USDA, NPS





# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Agricultural & Forest Resources

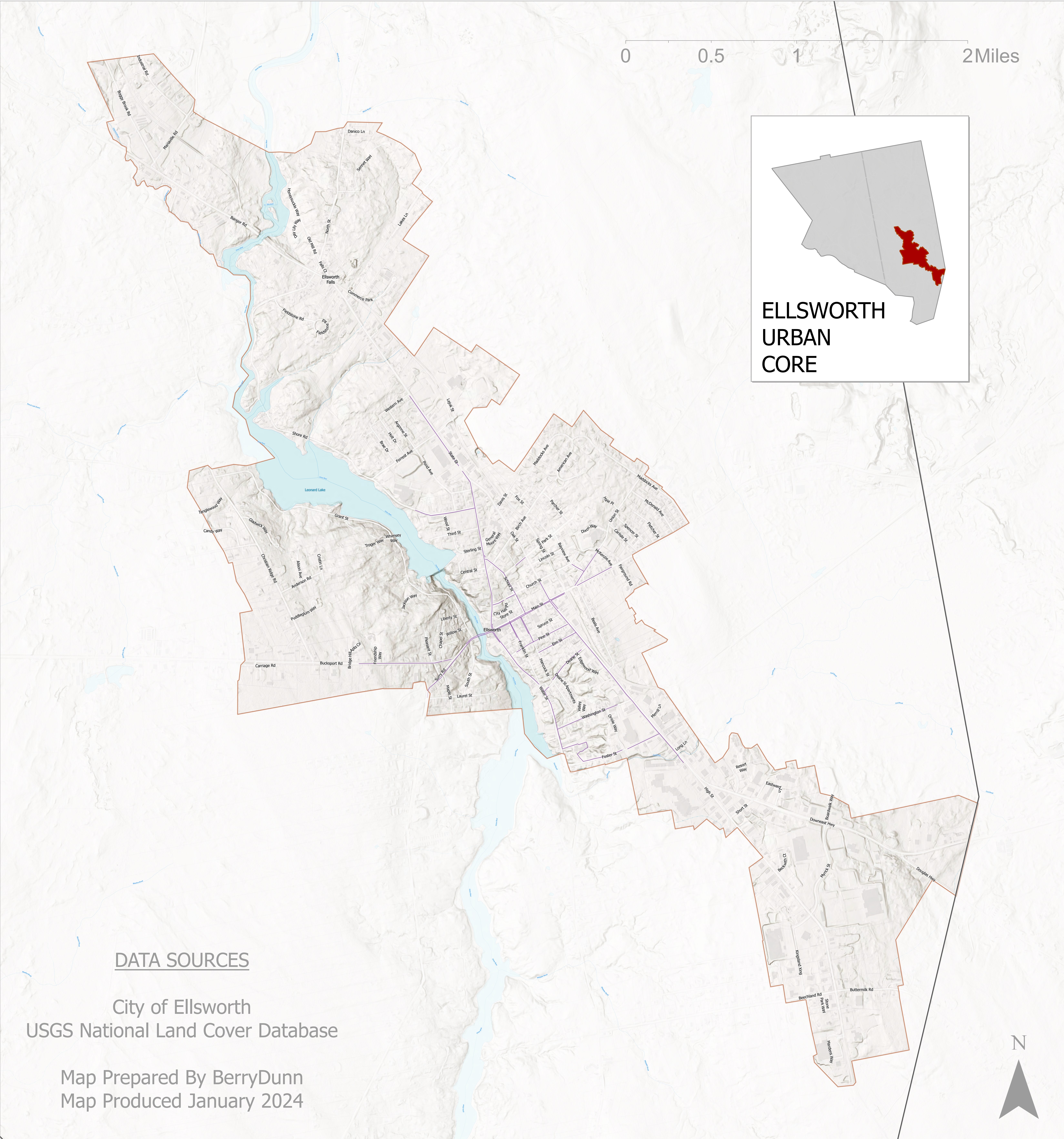
-  City Boundary
-  Urban Core
-  Parcels
-  Ag/Open Space Parcels
-  Forest/Tree Parcels

## DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover Database

Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024





DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover Database

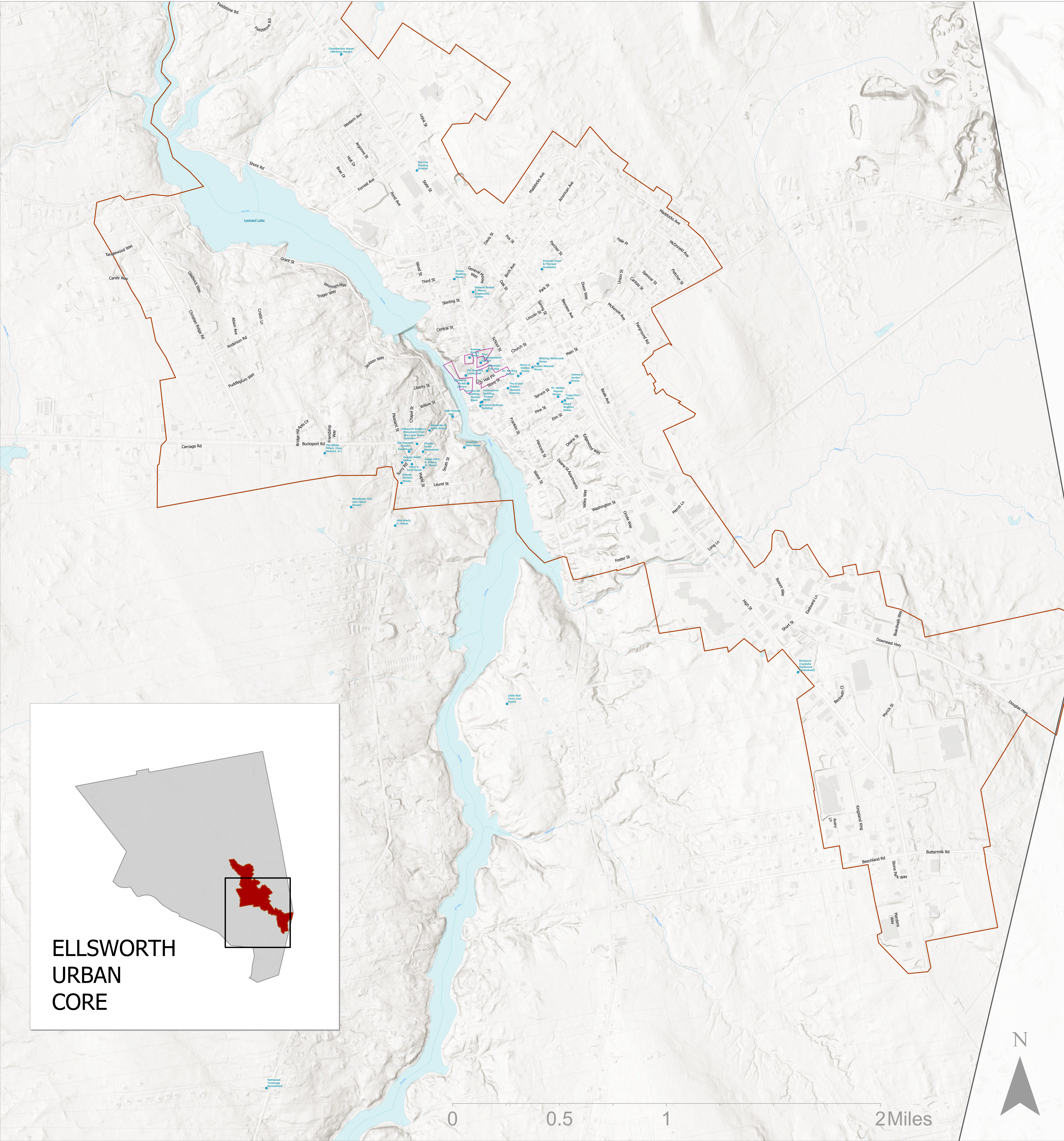
Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024



# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Sidewalks

- Sidewalks
- City Boundary
- Urban Core
- Parcels





City of Ellsworth  
Comprehensive  
Plan  
Historic  
Resources

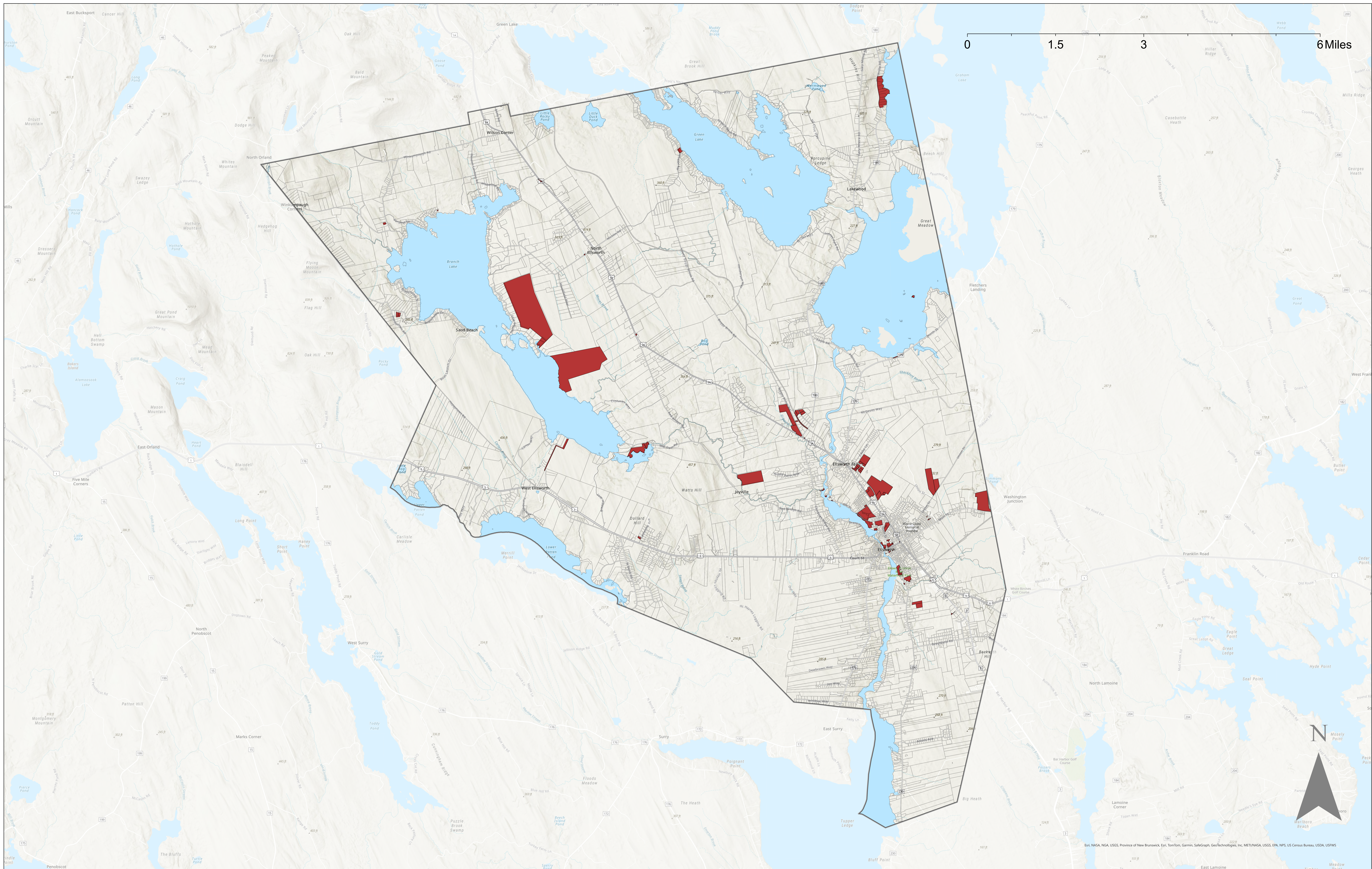
- Historic Resources
- Historic District
- City Boundary
- Urban Core
- Parcels

DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover  
Database

Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024



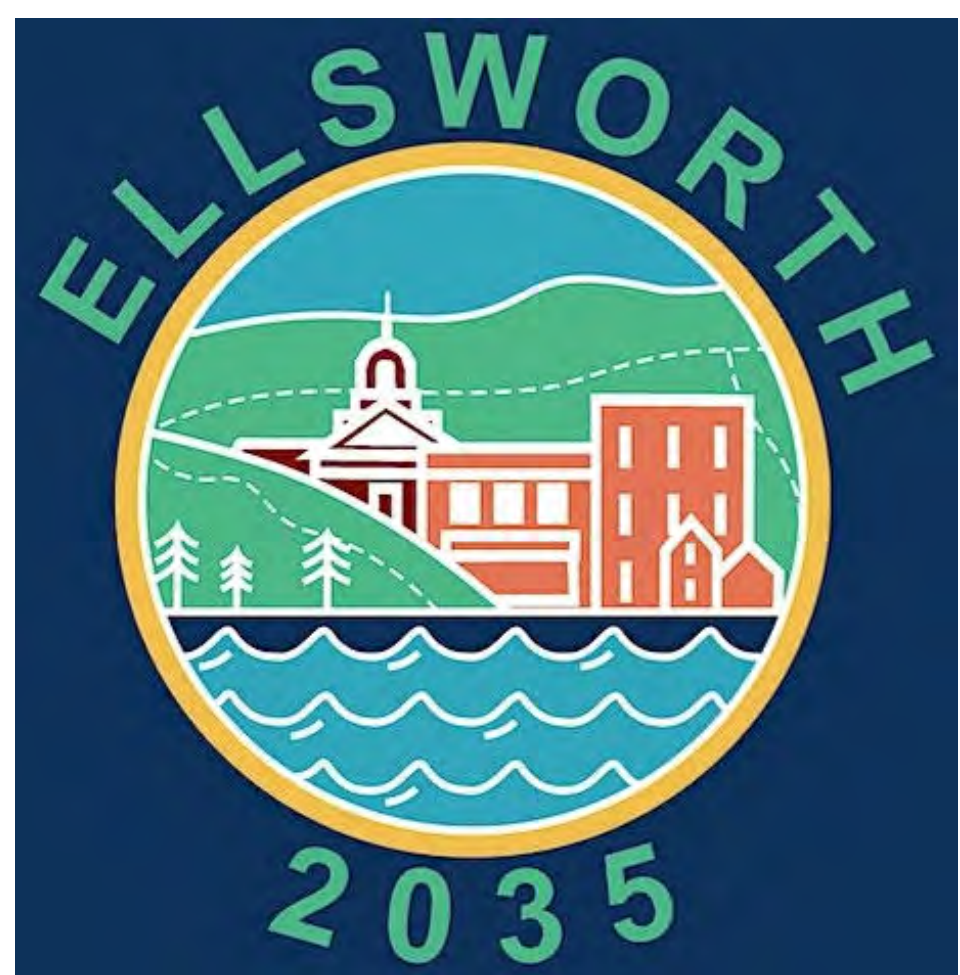
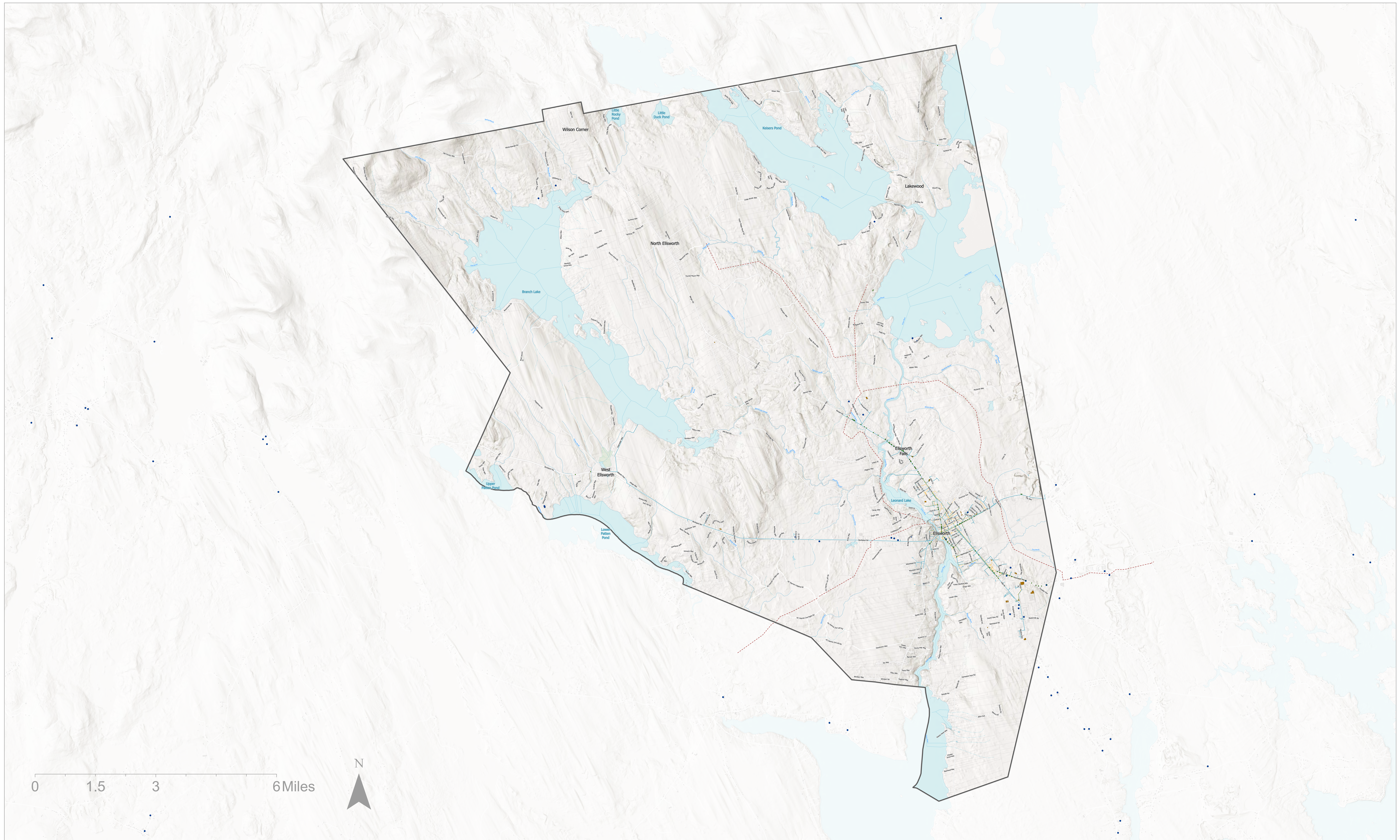


# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan City Owned Parcels

- City Boundary
- City Owned Parcels
- Parcels

**DATA SOURCES**  
City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover Database  
Map Prepared by BerryDunn  
Map Updated October 2024





# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Utilities

- |                  |             |
|------------------|-------------|
| City Boundary    | Main Line   |
| Parcels          | Storm Pipes |
| Stormwater Ponds | Wells       |
| Powerline        | Catch Basin |

## DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover Database

Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024



0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles



ELLSWORTH  
URBAN  
CORE

- City Boundary
- Urban Core
- Parcels
- Stormwater Ponds
- Powerline
- Valves
- Main Line
- Storm Pipes
- Wells
- Catch Basin

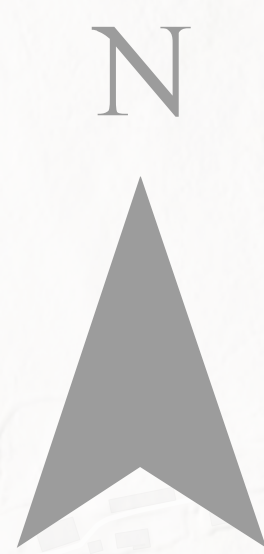
DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover  
Database

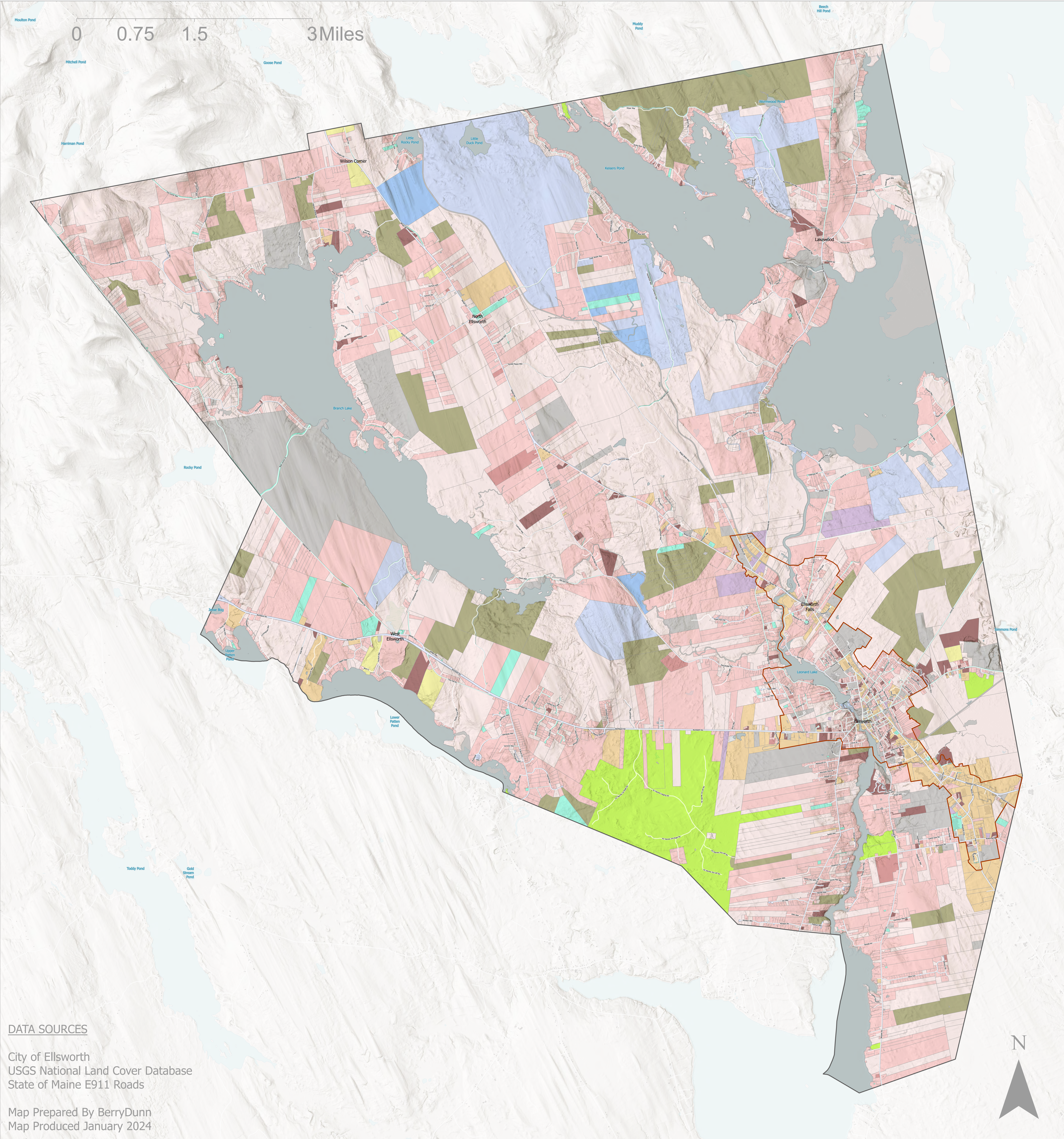
Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024



City of Ellsworth  
Comprehensive Plan  
Urban Core Utilities





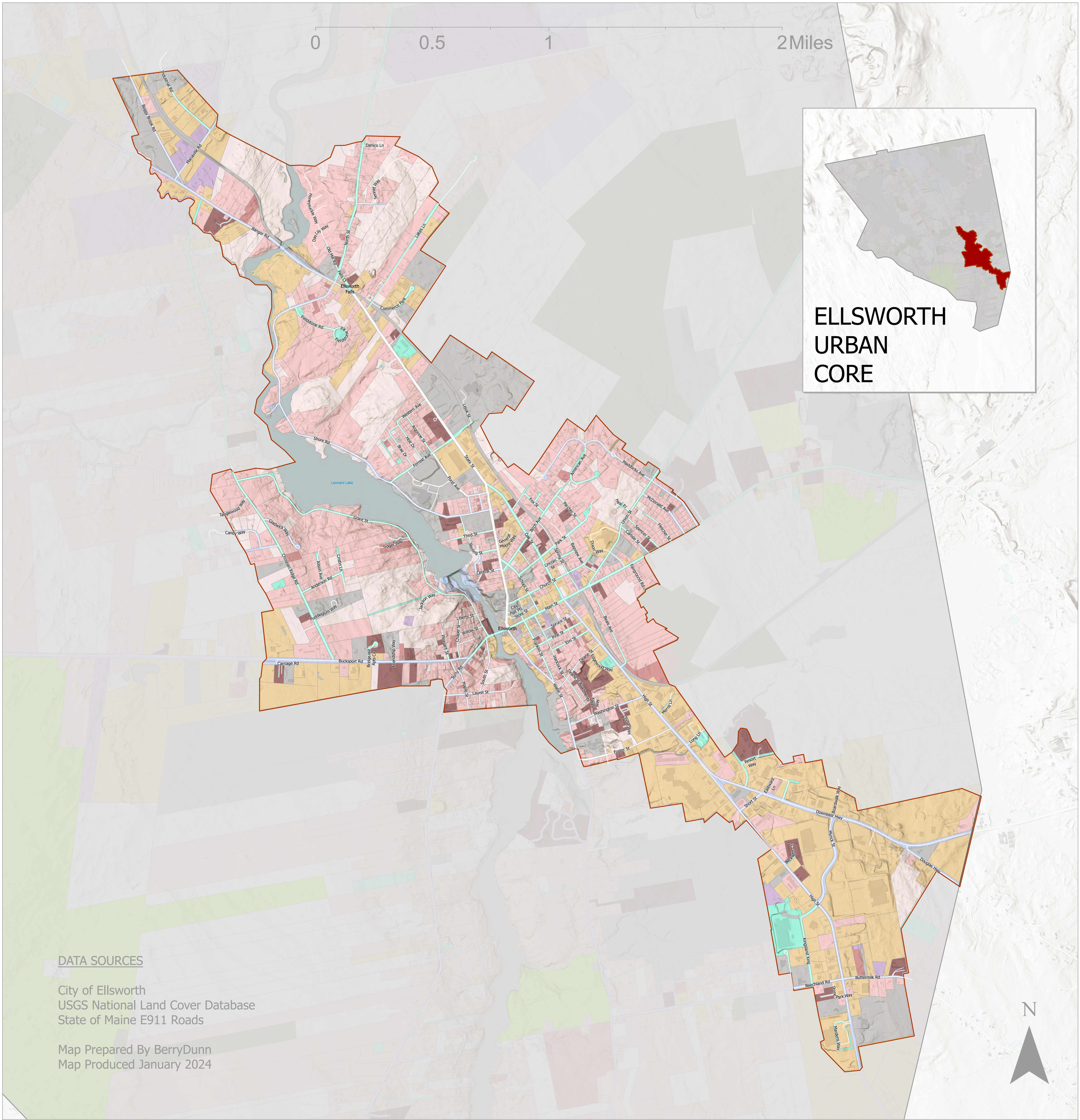


# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan

## Land Use

- |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| City Boundary            | Residential Single Family |
| Urban Core               | Residential Other/Vacant  |
| Building Footprints      | Industrial                |
| Land Use Category        | Utilities/Roads           |
| Agriculture              | Open Space                |
| Commercial               | Wetlands                  |
| Forestry                 | Exempt                    |
| Residential Multi-Family | Other                     |
| Residential Two-Family   |                           |





ELLSWORTH  
URBAN  
CORE

#### DATA SOURCES

City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover Database  
State of Maine E911 Roads

Map Prepared By BerryDunn  
Map Produced January 2024



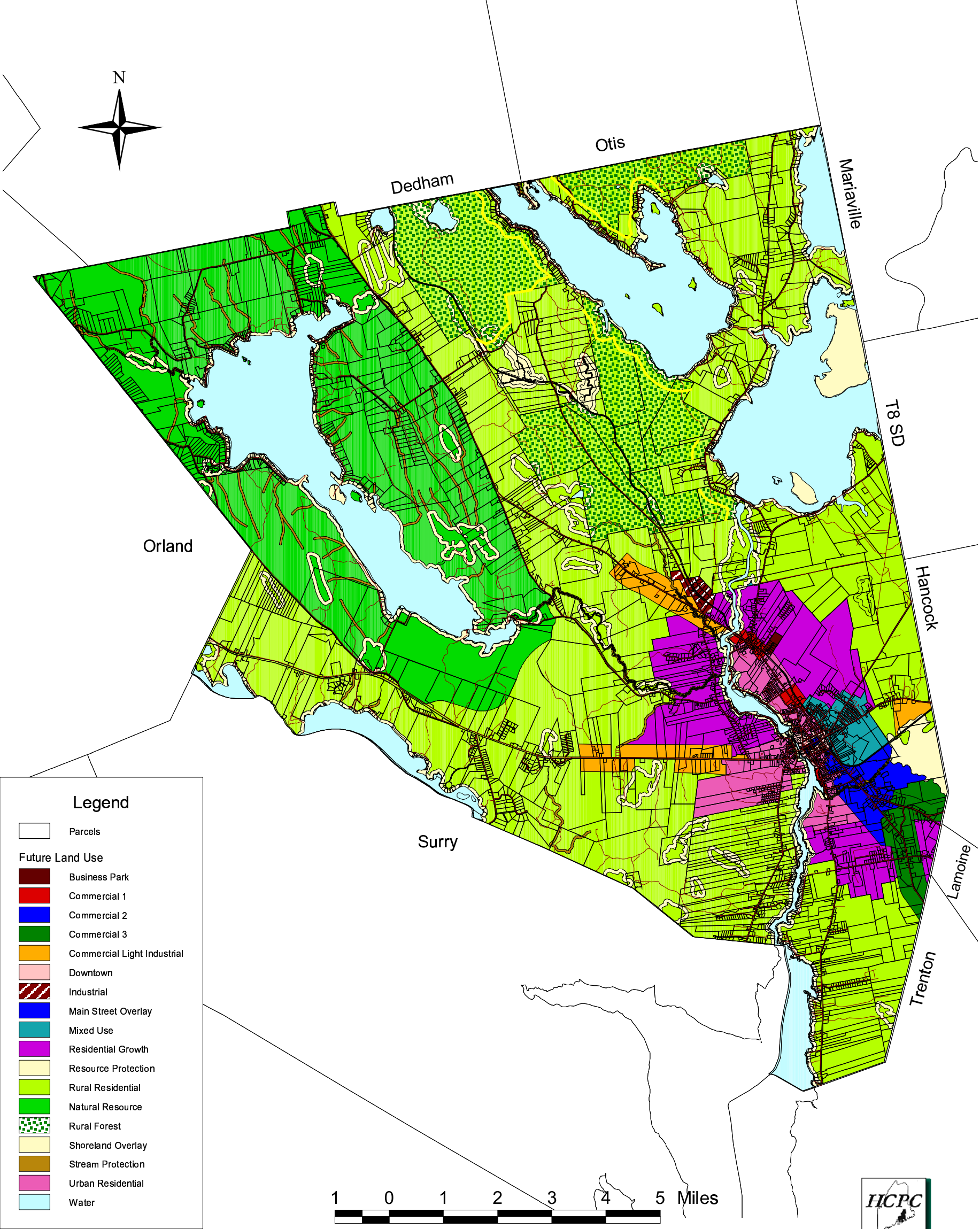
## City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Urban Core Land Use

- |                          |                           |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| City Boundary            | Residential Single Family |
| Urban Core               | Residential Other/Vacant  |
| <b>Land Use Category</b> |                           |
| Agriculture              | Industrial                |
| Commercial               | Utilities/Roads           |
| Forestry                 | Open Space                |
| Residential Multi-Family | Wetlands                  |
| Residential Two-Family   | Exempt                    |
|                          | Other                     |





# Ellsworth Future Land Use



1 0 1 2 3 4 5 Miles

Scale 1:90,000 1 inch = 7,500 feet)

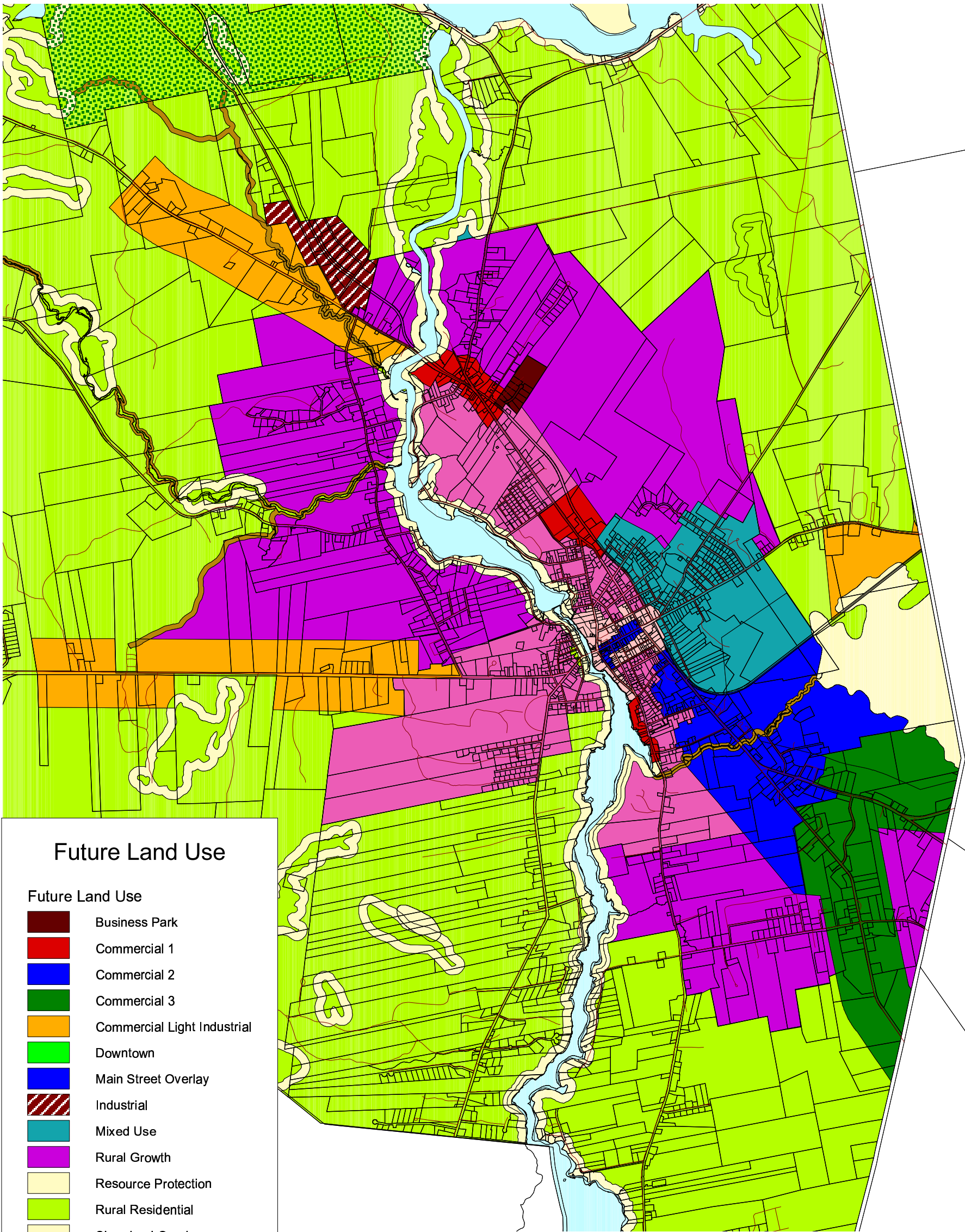


Map prepared by the  
Hancock County Planning Commission  
Revised: March 23, 2004





# City of Ellsworth Future Land Use - Central Area



## Future Land Use

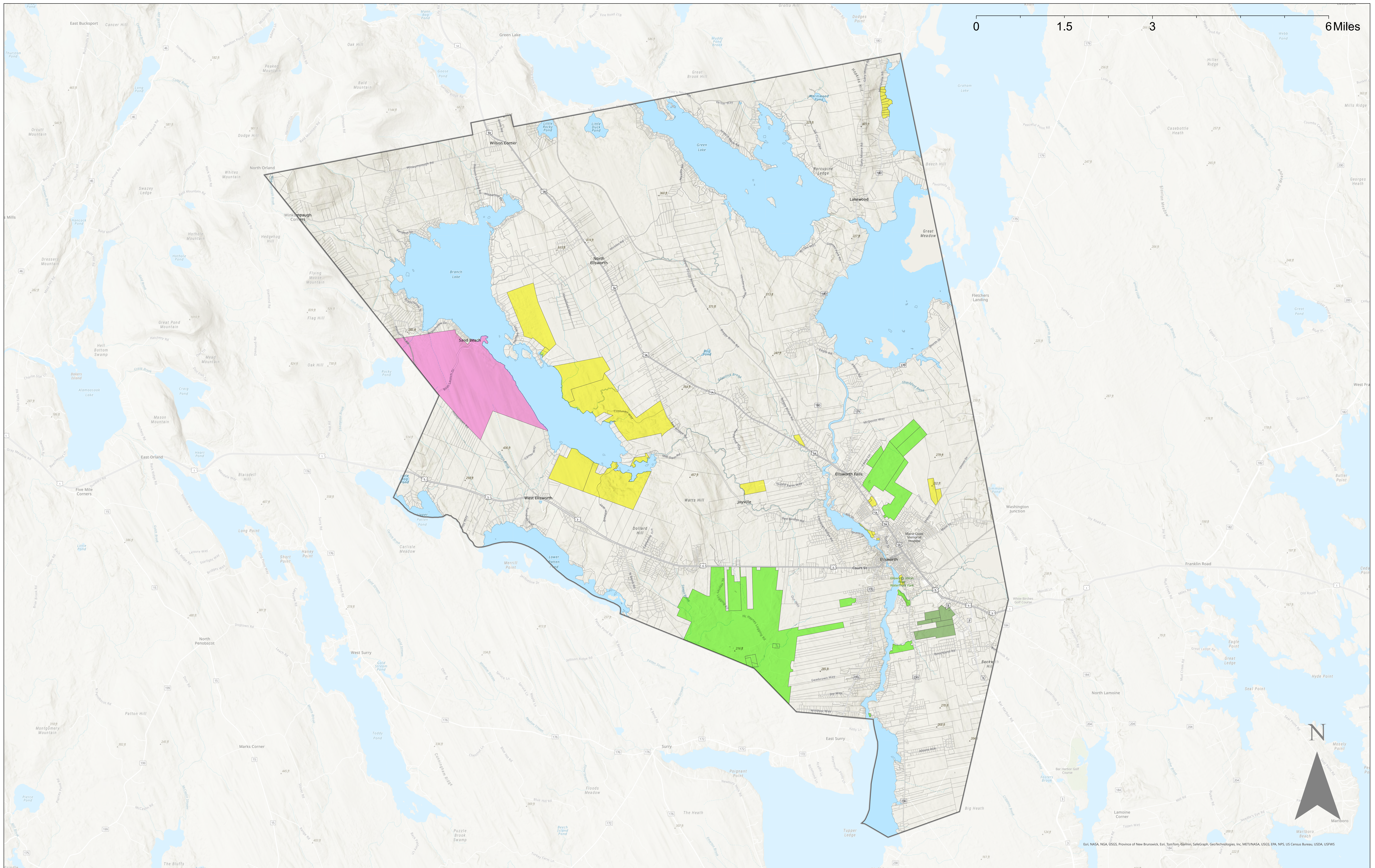
- Future Land Use
- Business Park
  - Commercial 1
  - Commercial 2
  - Commercial 3
  - Commercial Light Industrial
  - Downtown
  - Main Street Overlay
  - Industrial
  - Mixed Use
  - Rural Growth
  - Resource Protection
  - Rural Residential
  - Shoreland Overlay
  - Stream Protection
  - Urban Residential
  - Water
  - Natural Resource
  - Parcels

2000 0 2000 4000 6000 8000 10000 Feet



Map prepared by the  
Hancock County Planning Commission  
Revised: November 18, 2004 (jhf)





# City of Ellsworth Comprehensive Plan Conservation Lands

- Conservation Lands**
- Town
  - Private
  - State
  - Other Protected Areas
  - City Boundary

**DATA SOURCES**  
City of Ellsworth  
USGS National Land Cover Database  
Map Prepared by BerryDunn  
Map Updated October 2024