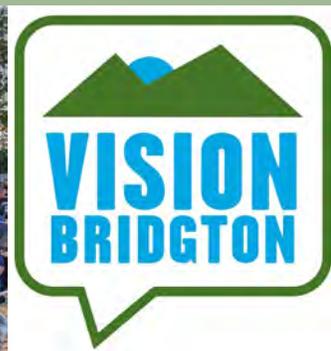


*Love always,*  
**BRIDGTON  
MAINE**



# Town of Bridgton 2025 Comprehensive Plan

Draft 3: April 10, 2025



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# Executive Summary

The Town of Bridgton (Town) is tucked away on the western edge of Cumberland County where the greater Portland area melts away into the Lakes Region. Lakes and great ponds are surrounded by rolling hills and small mountains at the edge of the White Mountain range. Bridgton's culture and natural resources are inextricably linked to its way of life. Since the beginning, people have been drawn to Bridgton's open spaces, natural beauty, economic opportunity, and sense of community.

The Town's last comprehensive plan update was completed in 2014. Many of the core values identified by the 2014 plan are still evident today; community members want to protect the Town's open spaces and natural resources and preserve Bridgton's character.

Since 2014, Bridgton has experienced some growth (approximately 7% increase from 2014 to 2022, with a total population of 5,643 in 2022). Other changes impacting the Town, region, and country, include economic shifts and a public health crisis, require careful planning to continue to uphold core community values while meeting the needs of the Town today.

The State of Maine (State) has the oldest median age in the country and is expected to continue to age. Bridgton is experiencing similar trends, and median age has increased in past decades. Additionally, the Town has seen a consistent population increase since 2020 and has experienced challenges due to high home prices, workforce and labor shortages, increased costs of goods, services, and materials, and development pressure.

This Comprehensive Plan (Plan) provided the Town the opportunity to assess current conditions and trends and address new challenges. The Town has identified several key priorities which are represented in the vision statements, goals, future land use map, and action items. The following priorities are focused on land use and were identified by the Comprehensive Plan Task Force as being critical to achieving the community's vision:

- Designating areas for adequate commercial and residential growth that will be in keeping with the character of Bridgton
- Supporting the healthcare and recreation industries by allowing for related uses in specific areas
- Protecting the environment and supporting the goals and efforts of the Open Space Committee and Open Space Plan
- Creating residential neighborhood development opportunities near downtown
- Working to ensure the Town has adequate resources to enforce and manage land use ordinances

This Plan outlines a road map for the Town to continue to preserve what makes Bridgton special while addressing challenges, such as housing affordability and community engagement, and planning for a more resilient Bridgton. Over the next decade, the Town will look to further leverage its existing assets, including its abundant natural resources, recreation opportunities, charming downtown, and community partners to help Bridgton thrive. At the same time, the Town will consider new and innovative approaches to manage Town operations and resources and support fiscal sustainability for years to come effectively and efficiently. While this Plan outlines a road map, successful implementation of actions and goals through coordination of Town departments, regional agencies, and community partners will help to make Bridgton a thriving community.

## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a long-term document outlining the community's vision and goals for the next 10 years. It establishes a framework for land use planning and zoning policy to guide decisions on development, preservation, infrastructure investments, and other community priorities, such as economic growth, recreation, and public safety.

A comprehensive plan is not an ordinance or legislation with enforcement authority. It is a guiding document that provides a broad vision for the future and outlines actions to achieve that vision. Through the action items and future land use plan, a comprehensive plan creates a road map to address community needs and identify opportunities for collaboration, funding and revenue growth strategies, capital investment priorities, ordinance and zoning changes, and new programs, policies, and initiatives.

### A Comprehensive Plan

#### What It Is:

- A broad statement of the Town's vision, goals, and policy
- A guide to decision making
- A framework for more specific planning
- A way to provide a long-range perspective
- A road map to achieve Town goals

#### What It Is Not:

- A zoning ordinance
- A land development code
- A rigid or static document
- A town budget
- A specific development plan for a project



*Main Street by Shorey Park, looking east*

## Why Plan?

The State requires municipalities to create comprehensive plans to manage growth and development. Communities must have a plan consistent with State requirements to legally impose zoning ordinances (beyond the State's minimum shoreland zoning) and receive preferred status on certain grant applications. Through the Growth Management Act (30-A M.R.S.A. § § 4312 – 4350), the State requires future zoning and land use changes, impact fee ordinances, and growth-related capital investments to be consistent with the plan.

### Maine Growth Management Act (GMA)

The GMA was created to establish and support comprehensive planning and land use management in municipalities.

Criteria used to review comprehensive plans for consistency with the goals and guidelines of the Growth Management Act can be accessed through the [Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/municipal_planning/comp_plans/).

[https://www.maine.gov/dacf/municipal\\_planning/comp\\_plans/](https://www.maine.gov/dacf/municipal_planning/comp_plans/)

changes, and infrastructure and capital investments are made in line with the community's vision and desire for the future. The Plan also helps to ensure that the Town's vision and goals are adhered to even as elected officials, Town administrators, and community leaders change.

## The Planning Process

Prior to beginning the comprehensive planning process, the Town partnered with Community Heart and Soul to engage in a visioning effort. The Vision Bridgton initiative began in 2022 when the Town was awarded a grant from Community Heart and Soul to conduct an inclusive, community-wide effort to understand what matters most to Bridgton residents. Through this process, a resident-led committee worked with Town staff and Community Heart and Soul to understand community values and priorities and develop vision statements around these areas. These vision statements were developed based on feedback from the community and were intended to serve as the foundation for the Plan. Following the development of these vision statements in the summer of 2023, the Town began the comprehensive planning process.

Beyond State requirements, having an updated comprehensive plan allows for the community to provide input to help ensure their priorities are considered. A comprehensive plan also provides guidance to the Select Board, Town boards and committees, Town staff, local organizations, regional agencies, and the community on land use and planning decisions. Implementing the Plan can help ensure that future development, land use and zoning



## The Planning Process

This process began with an inventory and analysis of existing conditions to better understand current and emerging issues. The inventory and analysis and Vision Bridgton data laid the groundwork for additional community engagement and served as the foundation for developing action items.

Community engagement, including community conversations, surveys, online vision board and forum questions, Comprehensive Plan Task Force meetings, and a future land use workshop, was conducted to dig deeper into areas identified in the inventory and analysis and Vision Bridgton data. The community was engaged on different topic areas related to housing and transportation needs, quality-of-life improvements, current services provided by the Town, and facility or service needs. Public input from recent planning initiatives like the Open Space Plan and Economic Market Analysis were also considered during this process. Community input was used to further refine the vision statements and identify goals to support the vision statements.

Community input and vision statements were used to develop a future land use plan and action items. The future land use plan identifies broad land use categories and defines the intended feel and use of these areas. The map is used to guide future land use policy and serve as a basis for zoning regulations. Community input was collected to understand the desired scale, density, and uses in each land use category. The action items are designed to address current and emerging issues and provide actionable steps the Town can take to achieve its goals. The implementation section of this plan establishes a structure for approaching plan implementation. This includes guidance on overall responsibility for implementing the plan, identifying

priorities, funding sources, and approaches for implementing action items. The implementation matrix includes each action item and additional information on responsible agencies, relative cost, timeline, ease of implementation, and examples to support plan implementation.

## How to Use this Plan

This document is intended to be used by the community to implement the plan and serve as a guide for future policy making. The Plan's structure builds from big picture vision statements to specific action items to help achieve that vision.

This Plan is organized by topic area, with a summary of current conditions in Bridgton, how the topic relates to the Town's big picture goals, and action items to address these goals. Each topic area addresses several of the Plan's goals, as noted in each section. Action items include guidance for implementation. While these action items have been broken down into topic areas for organizational purposes, many of these actions impact a variety of topic areas and each goal has multiple action items to support its implementation.

The future land use map provides a land use framework to help achieve the Town's vision and goals and provides a visual for how the Town's land use can change or be modified from current zoning to achieve these goals.

Appendices in this plan provide additional detail and background on information included in this plan. Appendices include an inventory and analysis of existing conditions, summary of community input, and a glossary of terms.

## Understanding Bridgton's Past

Prior to colonial settlement, the Abenaki (and specifically the Pequawket band of the Eastern Abenaki), a member tribe of the Wabanaki Confederacy, inhabited what is now known as the Town of Bridgton and the surrounding region. Abenaki homelands exist between the Kennebec River in Maine and Lake Champlain in Vermont and include the headwaters of the Androscoggin and Saco Rivers. After European colonization, Wabanaki people experienced large-scale population loss due to warfare, disease, land dispossession and forced removal. Today, federally recognized Wabanaki tribal nations and their members exist in eastern Maine, Quebec, the Maritimes and in the diaspora.



*Pondicherry Square looking down towards what is now the Main Street Gateway.  
Image courtesy of Bridgton Historical Society.*

European settlement in Bridgton also concentrated around the Town's waterways.<sup>1</sup> While settlement eventually expanded to North and South Bridgton, development primarily focused on what is now Main Street, between Long and Highland Lakes. Some of the first permanent homes in Bridgton were built along North High Street and in the Main Street area.

Development of residences and commercial buildings concentrated in this area. In the early 1800s, sawmills and gristmills were established along Stevens Brook at the outlet of Highland Lake, the primary industries contributing to the Town's economy. Other businesses, such as tanneries, woodworking mills, and door and sash manufacturers, also flourished. The woolen industry became the most significant driver of the Town's economy, creating a demand for housing, commercial expansion, and railroad connections. The resort industry has been a part of the Town's economy since 1860, with the Cumberland and Bridgton House catering to summer vacationers. In 1897, a total of 15 inns and boarding houses served summer vacationers.<sup>2</sup> As the natural beauty and recreation opportunities of the lakes and surrounding areas attracted visitors, youth summer camps also became prevalent in Bridgton and the region, with as many as 16 camps in operation in the Town at one time (five exist today). Attending summer camp in Bridgton as a child is a connection that some seasonal residents have noted as having drawn them back to the area later in life.

<sup>1</sup> Coolidge, Austin Jacobs and John Brainard Mansfield. 1859. *A History and Description of New England, General and Local*. Cambridge: H. O. Houghton and Company. [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_OcoMAAAAYAAJ/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_OcoMAAAAYAAJ/mode/2up)

<sup>2</sup> Bridgton, Maine. 2014. *Bridgton Maine Comprehensive Plan*. Bridgton: Bridgton, Maine. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/towndocs/6481/>

## Understanding Bridgton's Past

Transportation networks provided enhanced access to the Town, including the railroad, which provided passenger transportation to Bridgton, and allowed freight and commercial goods to easily flow in and out of the Town, serving the concentration of mills and other local businesses. Beginning in the 1832, Bridgton was also accessible by water from Portland, through the Cumberland and Oxford Canal and a series of locks connecting the lakes to the Fore River. With rail and automobile expansion, water transportation declined in the early 20th century and many of the locks were converted to dams.

Early development in the downtown was a mix of housing types and businesses which were typically two to three stories. Mill buildings sometimes reached four stories. Main Street had mixed-use buildings, which provided jobs, access to services, and housing in a concentrated area. Areas surrounding Main Street and the mills were filled with a variety of housing types to support these businesses, including single-family homes, duplexes, and tenement-style housing (like small apartments today).<sup>3</sup>



*Pondicherry Mill, Bridgton, Maine. Image courtesy of Bridgton Historical Society.*



*The Cumberland House, after expansion in 1888. Image courtesy of Bridgton Historical Society.*

Mills in Bridgton flourished until the turn of the 20th century. By the mid-1900s, technology had improved, and mills across Bridgton closed. The decline in manufacturing combined with the expansion of the highway network led to the end of rail and steamboat service to Bridgton by the 1940s, as more visitors traveled to Bridgton by automobile. Manufacturing saw a slight resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s, but the resurgence dwindled, and most manufacturing businesses closed permanently by 1990. Throughout this time, Bridgton's downtown provided retail opportunities and services to the community. As the mills began to close, and competition from retail locations in Conway, NH, Windham, and the Maine Mall grew, several of Bridgton's downtown businesses closed. With the loss of year-round manufacturing jobs, Bridgton's economy became increasingly dependent on tourism.

<sup>3</sup>Bridgton Historical Society. Bridgton Historical Society Collections. <https://www.bridgtonhistory.org/collections>

## Understanding Bridgton's Past

Original development patterns are still evident today. Most of the Town's development remains concentrated in and around the downtown area and major road corridors. Bridgton is a service center for the Lakes Region, providing access to medical care, retail opportunities, entertainment, and other services. Bridgton's location along several major regional road networks makes it easy for the community to access services and to connect people from neighboring communities to the Town. New businesses and housing opportunities have been built in and around the downtown area, providing residents with access to a variety of small, local businesses and services in a walkable downtown. Bridgton also has a significant seasonal population, and additional housing development has occurred around the Town's waterbodies and shoreland areas.

## Recent Planning Initiatives

Bridgton's Economic and Market Analysis, prepared by the Maine Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Southern Maine in 2019, outlines potential markets and strategic opportunities to strengthen the Town's economy, reduce the overall tax burden on residential property owners, and provide local jobs.<sup>4</sup> This includes catalyzing development along Route 302 to promote target industries like small-scale precision and components manufacturing, food and beverage manufacturing, and medical office space. The analysis recommends promoting and enhancing the vibrancy of the downtown, expanding recreational opportunities and cultural offerings to enhance the quality of Bridgton for all, leveraging grant funding for investments, improving broadband access, and improving Bridgton's competitiveness in attracting workers.

To better plan for recreation and open space protection in Bridgton, the Town developed the 2023 Bridgton Open Space Plan. This plan outlines a vision for the Town's open space resource, with a focus on protection, connectivity, and activation. Following the adoption of the Open Space Plan, the Town established the Open Space Committee as an advisory committee to support the implementation of the plan's goals and strategies for which efforts are ongoing. This plan, paired with the Ham Complex Master Plan, provide strategic direction for recreation and open space in Bridgton.

Bridgton's last comprehensive plan update was completed in 2014. The plan outlined land use and the economy as top priority areas for implementation. Most notably, the Town developed its first land use ordinance to encourage attractive, well-placed, and high-functioning commercial development to help balance the tax burden and allow for residential development at varying densities throughout Bridgton. The 2014 Comprehensive Plan Committee also outlined the need to better market and develop Bridgton's economy and expand the Town's wastewater system. A new wastewater treatment facility came online in 2024, and connections to the system were expanded through the downtown area. Looking ahead, the Town will continue to build a more resilient, connected, and vibrant Bridgton for all.

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<sup>4</sup> Maine Center for Business and Economic Research. December 2019. Bridgton Economic and Market Analysis. University of Southern Maine.

# Planning for a Stronger Future

## Challenges and Opportunities

Several enduring community values are central to the Town's identity. These include protecting the region's lakes, rivers, and open spaces and maintaining the small-town character and sense of community. Environmental protection and preserving the Town's character remain top priorities. At the same time, Bridgton is facing some new and growing challenges, including rising housing costs, an aging population, increased social isolation, high costs for goods and services, and increasingly severe weather events. In addition, opportunities like in-migration to Maine, growth of the recreation tourism industry, and improvements in technology and communications can benefit Bridgton. In addition to its physical assets and natural beauty, Bridgton benefits from a strong network of engaged residents, community leaders, small business owners, and nonprofit groups with whom collaboration will be essential in realizing the vision for the Town.



*Bridgton Public Library*

# Planning for a Stronger Future

## A Vision for Tomorrow

The Vision Bridgton initiative was completed in 2023 with support from Community Heart and Soul to understand community priorities leading into the development of the new Comprehensive Plan. Community Heart and Soul is a nonprofit organization that supports municipalities in a resident-driven engagement process to identify what matters most to the community. Through a visioning survey, community events, and direct outreach to stakeholders, values and priorities were identified and compiled into vision statements addressing four key areas. Collectively, the following statements form the Town's vision for the future and serve as the foundation for this Plan:

### **Bridgton's Vision**

#### **Open Space**

Bridgton is a charming, rural community with abundant open space resources that are protected and managed to sustain residents, visitors, and ecological health. The goals of this plan enable the vision by protecting, connecting, and utilizing the open space system of Bridgton.

#### **Downtown**

Bridgton honors the historic quaintness of Main Street, with small businesses, local shops, walkable streets, ample parking, and opportunities to view art and experience local culture. These assets contribute to the small-town feel and help position Bridgton as a destination.

#### **Economy**

Bridgton strives to be a community that creates opportunities for people to live, work, and play locally by increasing access to diversified housing, education, recreation, and jobs that provide people the ability to thrive in place.

#### **Healthy Community**

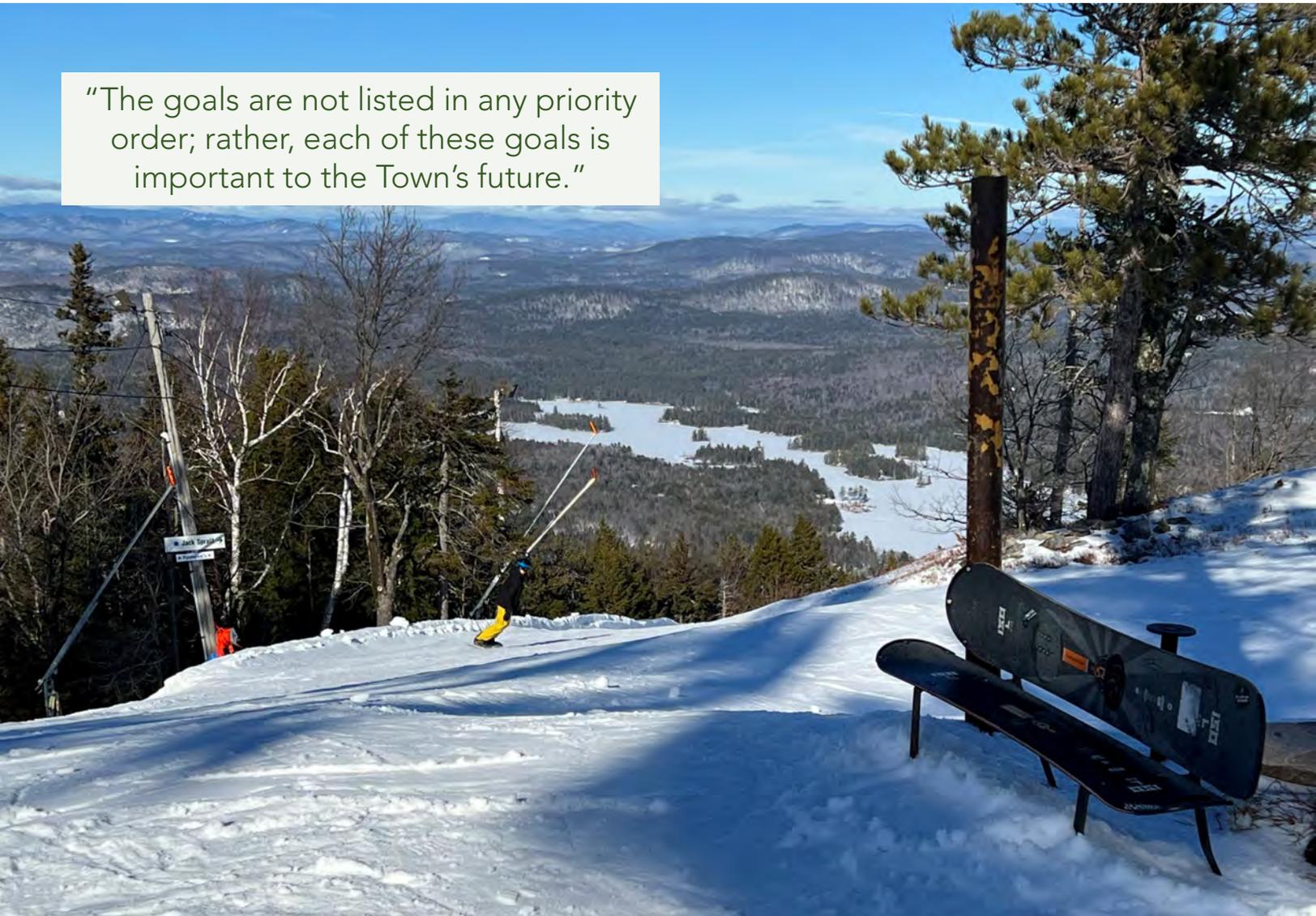
Bridgton supports a healthy community with access to a variety of recreational, educational, and social opportunities in order to create a supportive environment that contributes to social, emotional, and physical well-being.

# Planning for a Stronger Future

## Goals

The ideas in this vision were verified through additional outreach and engagement during the planning process and have been expanded upon to establish the following goals for action. These goals provide more direction to achieve the Town's vision and serve as a guide for plan actions. The goals are not listed in any priority order; rather, each of these goals is important to the Town's future. All of the goals are interrelated, requiring coordinated action across Town departments and agencies, community groups, and private sector stakeholders. For example, access to housing, arts and culture amenities, and recreation opportunities will all have an impact on economic growth. Similarly, development patterns and transportation options are important factors in community health and well-being.

"The goals are not listed in any priority order; rather, each of these goals is important to the Town's future."



*Pleasant Mountain*



Guide development in a manner to respect the small-town and rural character and to minimize traffic impacts.



Protect and manage water resources to maintain ecological health and support continued use for recreation.



Protect natural resources from potential negative impacts of economic activity and development.



Promote the development of a variety of housing options to meet the needs of the community.



Create an economic climate that supports year-round economic activity and tourism while also benefiting residents.



Strengthen fiscal capacity to maintain a high level of municipal services while minimizing the tax burden.



Leverage community assets that contribute to a high quality of life for residents and benefit workforce retention and tourism.

# BRIDGTON GOALS



Address health and well-being needs of residents including access to recreation amenities, services for older adults, and a strong educational system.



Encourage civic participation and create opportunities to build social connections through access, education, and transparency.



Build a safe, efficient, and affordable transportation network that expands opportunities for non-motorized transportation and transit use.



Maintain and expand municipal infrastructure and facilities to support the community's changing needs and economic growth.



Leverage agricultural and forest resources for health and well-being, food production, economic activity, and educational opportunities.



Enhance social, economic, and physical resiliency and ability to adapt to impacts of climate change.



Create a vibrant, walkable downtown to support mobility, economic activity, and social connectivity.



Foster connections to the past through protection of significant historic and archaeological resources and support for arts and cultural events and organizations.



Leverage and expand open spaces and trails to improve connectivity and increase opportunities for active recreation.



Strengthen and support community-oriented businesses, organizations, and institutions through partnerships.

# Planning for a Stronger Future

## Priorities for Action

In considering the vision and goals, the Comprehensive Plan Task Force has identified several actions that should be prioritized to achieve the Town's vision. These action items are noted and highlighted in this plan and relate to broader themes from community input.

Creating more housing opportunities and a vibrant downtown while also maintaining Bridgton's smalltown and rural character is central to this Plan. Specifically, allowing for the development of housing that is attainable for households making the median income will help to address housing needs of existing and potential new residents, including families, and will contribute to creating a livelier downtown. Allowing for denser development in some areas adjacent to the Downtown Village area (in the Outer Neighborhood area) will direct growth in a way that will have a lesser impact on infrastructure, services, and open space compared to traditional residential development in rural areas. Similarly, encouraging and allowing different configurations of cluster or pocket neighborhood developments will create smaller and more affordable housing options while using less open space.

"more affordable housing options"

The addition of new housing units in Town, especially in proximity to the downtown, has and will continue to increase vibrancy of the downtown and support local businesses year-round. The recent streetscape upgrades, wastewater infrastructure, Pondicherry Park, and new development on Main Street have been noted by community members as overwhelmingly positive changes that are bringing more people to the downtown. The Town will

continue to build on this trend by enhancing the community feel and experience of being in the downtown through improvements to public spaces. Open spaces, pocket parks, landscaped buffers, and tree-lined streets with sidewalks all contribute to creating a desirable and walkable environment, enhance safety, and support public health.

"preserve open space"

Continuing to support and grow the recreation economy is another top priority. The Town's recreation amenities are valuable economic assets, with Pleasant Mountain Ski Area being a major contributor to the recreation economy. To fully leverage existing recreation amenities, the Plan recommends developing an overlay zone to allow and encourage recreation activities and related uses, such as lodging, restaurants, and retail. The Town has partnered with Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) and Lakes Environmental Association (LEA) to preserve open space and increase access to parks and recreation opportunities, like Pondicherry Park and the Stevens Brook Trail. The Town will look to build on these relationships to increase access to trails, parks, and open space and to support maintenance of these important resources.

"grow the recreation economy"

Another growth industry the Town would like to target is healthcare and health-related uses to reverse the trend of declining healthcare resources in the region. Creating a hospital or healthcare overlay zone that encompasses Bridgton Hospital and includes surrounding land could provide opportunities for medical offices, medical equipment retailers, and assisted living or similar care facilities.

# Planning for a Stronger Future

## Priorities for Action

Encouraging these types of uses could bring much needed amenities and housing types to Bridgton to support existing residents. Collectively, a cluster of healthcare-related uses would help to diversify the Town's commercial base and support the viability of Bridgton Hospital, a critical resource for the community.

“healthcare resources”

Protecting Bridgton's environment, habitats, and open spaces has been an enduring priority. The vision, goals, and actions of this Plan build upon the considerable work that has already been done by the Town, regional conservation and environmental organizations, and local recreation groups in protecting and planning for the Town's environmental future. Continuing to implement recommendations of the 2023 Open Space Plan and supporting the goals of the Open Space Committee are a priority for this Plan. Specific actions, including identifying and mapping wetlands and critical environmental areas and guiding development to growth areas and away from rural open spaces, are especially urgent tasks to address environmental protection. The Town will continue to implement the open space plan, assess progress, and update goals of that plan as needed.



Image courtesy of Loon Echo Land Trust

The above priorities include approaches to support residential and commercial growth. Identifying growth areas and defining what each of those areas should look and feel like is fundamental to realizing the Town's vision. The future land use plan within this document outlines land use categories and growth areas where residential and non-residential growth should be encouraged. The future land use plan also describes the character and scale of development in each of these land use areas. Residents noted a desire for controlled growth—understanding that growth benefits the community by providing housing opportunities, jobs, economic growth, and community connections—but with a focus on compatibility with the existing character and landscape of Bridgton.

“compatibility with the existing character and landscape”

Finally, as the Town looks to update land use regulations to support the goals and vision of this Plan, enforcement will be critical to help ensure changes are applied to development and land use as intended. Continuing to support and provide the necessary resources for code enforcement is a priority for the success of this Plan.

### Land management:

“Identifying growth areas and defining what each of those areas should look and feel like is fundamental to realizing the Town's vision”

# Planning for a Stronger Future

## Plan Implementation

Following adoption of this plan, the Community Development Advisory Committee (CDAC) will be responsible for overseeing implementation. The CDAC will work in collaboration with the Select Board and Town staff, other Town boards and committees, local businesses, and other community partners to support the implementation of this plan. Community engagement conducted through the comprehensive planning process, visioning process, and other planning work, like the open space plan, provide community sentiment on a variety of issues. Through the development of the vision statements and goals, the Town has a framework to address future challenges and events based on community priorities and values.

Annually, the CDAC will consider the action item matrix to identify priorities for that year based on community input, changes in legislation, potential grant opportunities, and staff capacity. This matrix is intended to be a guide, with flexibility to address external factors that may change priorities or community needs over the next 10 years.

The action item matrix provides guidance for the CDAC, Select Board, and Town staff to determine priorities for actions and potential collaborations to support implementation. The CDAC will review this matrix, consider available funding, grant opportunities, and staff capacity, and consider shifts in community needs or priorities to determine if actions should be added, modified, or are not relevant at the time. Additionally, the CDAC will work with Town staff and the Select Board to consider how potential changes in legislation should be addressed. To provide implementation support, the matrix also outlines examples where other communities have successfully implemented a similar action item. These can serve as a starting point for action implementation. Additional funding mechanisms and grants are also listed in the matrix to support Town staff in applying for grants or the CDAC in prioritizing actions based on funding availability. See the Implementation Key on pages 83-85 for explanations of terms and abbreviations in the implementation matrix.



*Image courtesy of Loon Echo Land Trust*

# Planning for a Stronger Future

## Plan Implementation

The action item matrix outlines responsible agencies and potential collaborators to support the implementation of action items. As noted in the Regional Coordination section of this Plan, support from and collaboration with neighboring municipalities, regional agencies, community organizations, and the private sector will be essential to successfully implement the Plan. The Town has strong relationships with business owners, service providers, community organizations, and resident groups. It will be important for the Town to build on these relationships and look to reach out to new organizations in Bridgton and throughout the region to help implement action items. Town departments will play an important role in coordinating external organizations and maintaining and building relationships with partners. The CDAC and staff should regularly reach out to partners to coordinate tasks and review progress toward implementation.

Transparency is important, and the CDAC, Select Board, and Town staff should regularly report on work that has been completed on the plan. This should be done through an annual progress report to publicly share what was prioritized, what action items have started, are ongoing, or were completed during the year. The Town should regularly communicate with the community to share opportunities for involvement and input, as well as ongoing implementation activities outside of the annual report.

Future annual reports should also include, at a minimum, an overview of any zoning or policy changes that are proposed for Town Meeting, ongoing capital projects, data on residential and commercial development, where development is occurring and if it is consistent with the future land

use map and growth areas, and preservation of open space or natural resources. Changes or modifications to the plan should be communicated clearly with the public.

The full plan should be reviewed by the CDAC, Select Board, and Town staff every three years to confirm that action items are still relevant, will meet community needs, and work toward implementing community priorities outlined in this plan. This review should include some opportunity for public input to understand if priorities have shifted. The review should also consider updated demographic information to help ensure actions are relevant to the Town's population. For example, an increase in the number of young families may indicate different needs or priorities than the current trend of aging adults, or a decrease in median incomes compared to increasing housing costs may indicate additional actions to address housing affordability.

### Plan Implementation

#### Things to Consider:

- Emphasize the importance of the Comprehensive Plan in decision-making
- Annually, identify priorities based on funding, capacity, and other resources
- Provide clear guidance to responsible agencies and collaborators and establish accountability
- Develop an annual report of plan implementation progress
- Assess changes in conditions that could impact plan implementation or priorities
- Involve the community—share priorities for each year and celebrate accomplishments

## What is Future Land Use?

A future land use plan is an essential part of the Plan. The future land use map is a visual tool that designates where different uses (residential, commercial, industrial) should be located. Narrative descriptions of the size, scale, and density of development and types of uses in each land use area support the map and provide the basis for future changes to Bridgton's Land Use Code and policy decisions. Future land use areas are not the same as zoning districts, but in some cases may align with existing zoning districts in name and geographic boundaries. The future land use categories identified and described in this Plan are intended to broadly describe the character and land use desired by the community. The future land use map is not a regulatory document but provides guidance for future revisions to the Town's Land Use Code and specific changes to zoning districts or the creation of new zones or overlays to address the goals of this Plan.

### Future Land Use Plan and Map

#### What It Is:

- A guide for updates to the Town's Land Use Code
- A guide for how zoning should align with community needs
- Visual representation of Bridgton's vision for where different types of land uses should be located
- Visual representation and explanation of where growth will be directed

#### What It Is Not:

- A zoning ordinance
- A land development code



Future Land Use Workshop

## Future Land Use Map

The future land use map was developed based on values identified from community feedback and in alignment with the Town's vision. The following values and priorities were used to guide the creation of the future land use map and land use categories:

### Community Priorities

- Preserve Bridgton's natural resources, including waterbodies, wetlands, and forests
- Preserve Bridgton's character
- Limit new corridor development and big box stores
- Continue to support and develop a lively downtown
- Maintain public infrastructure (roads, sewer, water, etc.)
- Support changes in housing needs including the increasing need to downsize and more affordable housing options
- Support businesses and services that support year-round residents, including events and activities, healthcare, child care, small businesses, and recreation opportunities
- Improve ability to walk and bike around the downtown and support alternative transportation options to help residents who do not drive access services and amenities

A draft map was shared at a future land use workshop. At the workshop, community members were able to review proposed land uses and character of each land use category. Participants also provided input on a visual preference survey to indicate the size, scale, density, and design of buildings that they would prefer to see in each land use category. The visual preference survey was also shared online so community members who were not able to attend in person could provide input on the map. Following these workshops, the Task Force, Town staff, and Town boards and committees provided additional guidance to refine the future land use map and proposed land use categories.

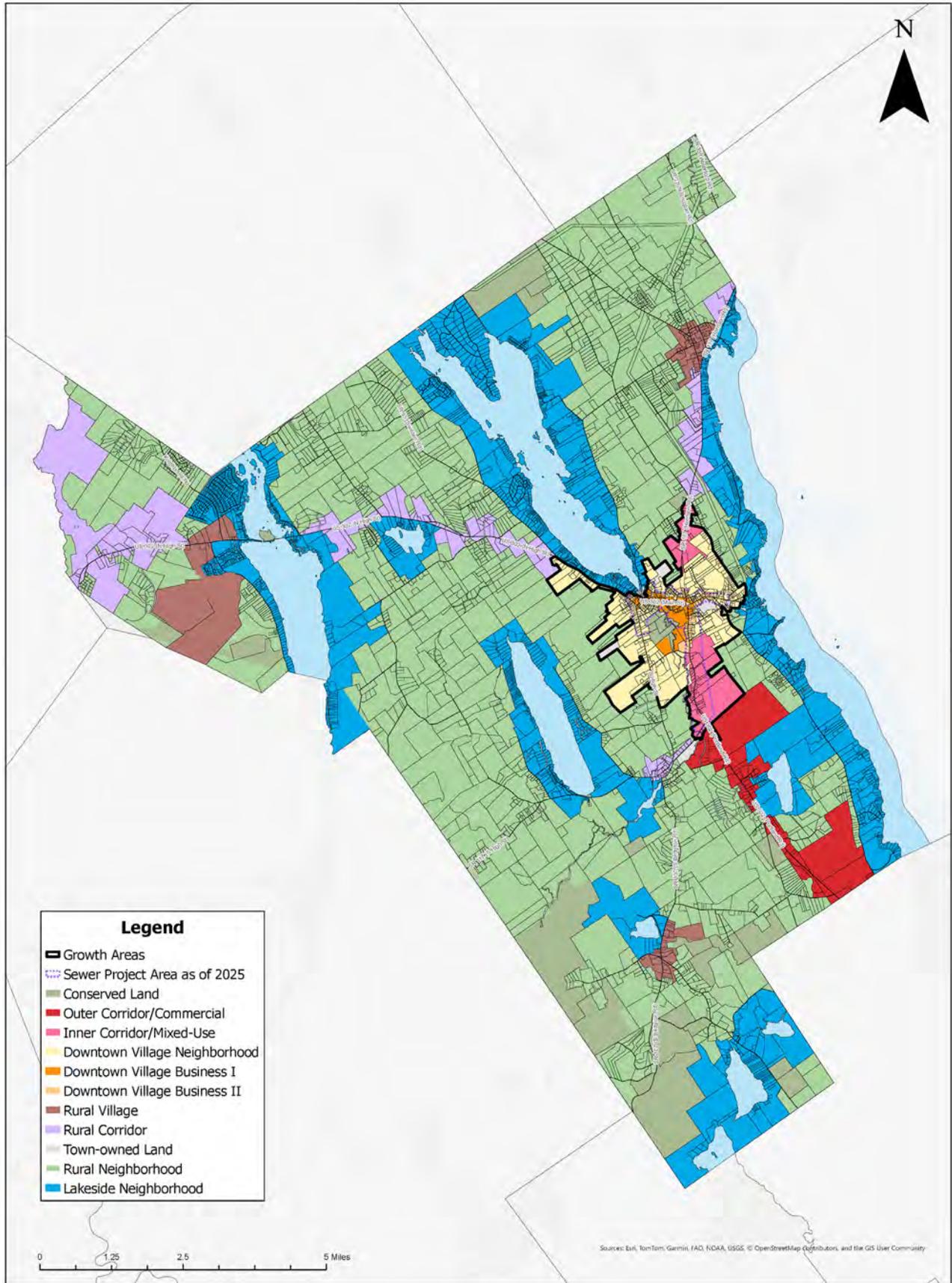


*Main Street looking west.  
Image courtesy of Bridgton Historical Society.*

“The future land use map is used to guide future land use policy and serve as a basis for zoning regulations. Community input was collected to understand the desired scale, density, and uses in each land use category.”

# Future Land Use

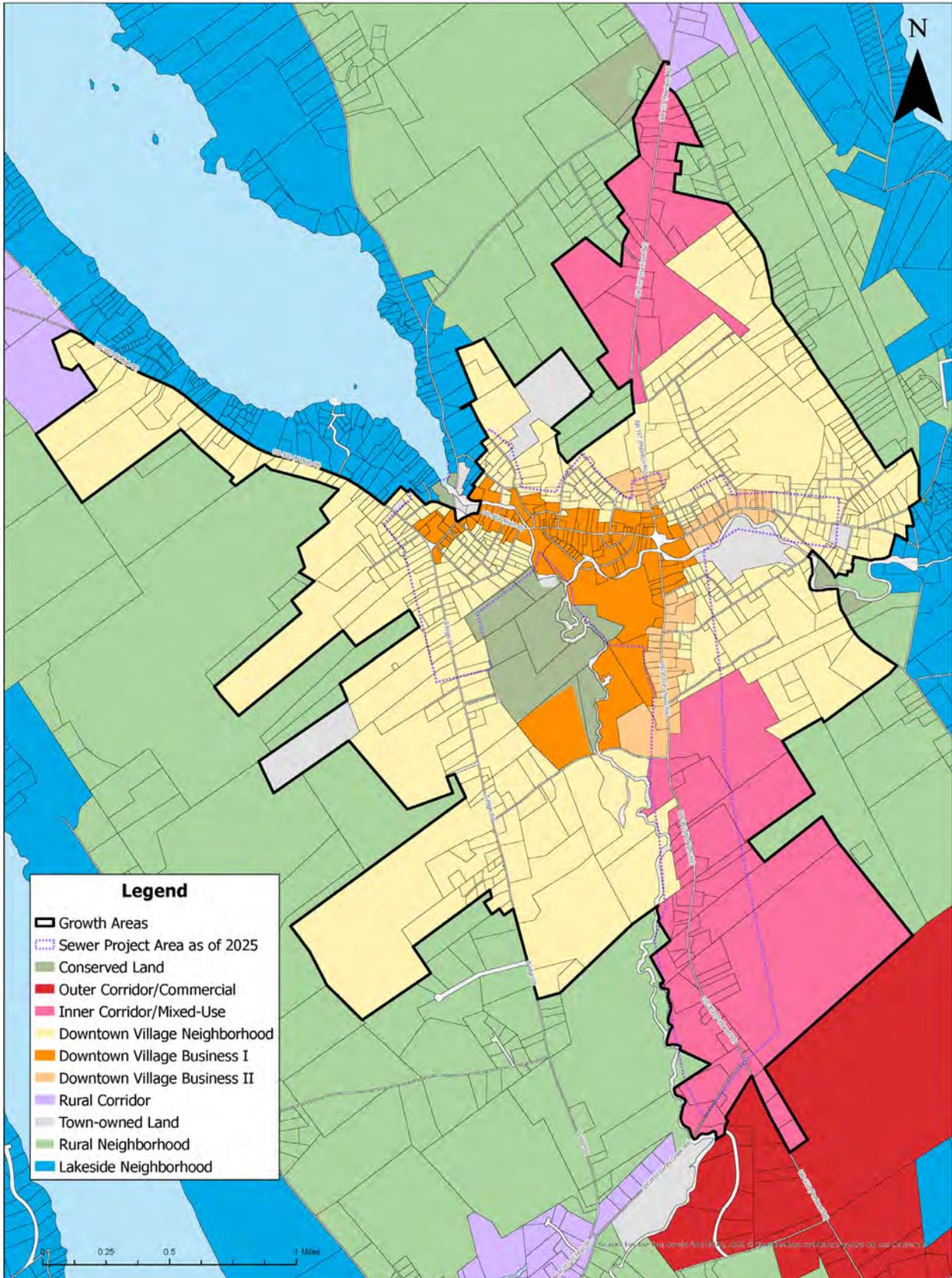
## Future Land Use Map



# Future Land Use

## Future Land Use Map

### Downtown Area



## Future Land Use Categories

The future land use plan and related action items designate land use categories and broadly divide the Town into areas where growth should be encouraged and areas where growth should be limited. Bridgton residents largely agree that limiting growth in rural areas and directing new growth to downtown and adjacent neighborhoods is important to protect natural areas and open space and minimize adverse impacts to water quality.

Many community members expressed concern about impacts to the small-town character of Bridgton from new development, especially new commercial development along the Route 302 corridor. Bridgton's walkable Main Street, small businesses, and traditional architecture create a desirable downtown that attracts residents and visitors. Growth is not necessarily antithetical to small-town character; however, the size, scale, and design of buildings has a significant impact on character and sense of place. Action items in this Plan provide guidance on how to allow growth that is compatible with community character and can help to preserve and revive the Town's history.

Effective implementation of land use, zoning, and design and preservation standards will be critical to maintaining Bridgton's small-town charm and appeal.

During the Town's peak industrial period, development was more concentrated in the downtown, with greater density in many areas and more residences within walking distance of

downtown businesses.<sup>5 6</sup> Since the mid-20th century and as the mills began to close, downtown Bridgton has lost some of its vibrancy and historic character, including the loss of some historic structures and small businesses. In some instances, historic mixed-use buildings were torn down and replaced with one-story structures and parking lots, creating gaps in the downtown streetscape. While much of the Town's historic form still exists, there are opportunities for redevelopment and reinvestment to return downtown Bridgton to be a livelier village center with a diversity of residences and businesses consistent with its industrial past.

In addition to respecting and honoring the Town's architectural history, reinvestment in and around the downtown can serve to support the sense of community that is a vital aspect to the small-town character community members referenced. Research shows there is a strong connection between neighborhood walkability and sense of community and social connectedness.<sup>7</sup> Increasing housing opportunities that are walkable to the downtown will help to support downtown businesses, create opportunities for social interaction, reduce dependency on cars, and benefit public health.

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<sup>5</sup> Bridgton, Maine. 2014. Bridgton Maine Comprehensive Plan. Bridgton: Bridgton, Maine. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/towndocs/6481/>

<sup>6</sup> Burleigh Litho. (1888) Bridgton, Maine, U.S.A. [Troy, N.Y.: Burleigh Lith. Est] [Map] Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/83694327/>

<sup>7</sup> Galindo, Yadira. June 20, 2023. "Walkable Neighborhoods Help Adults Socialize, Increase Community." UC San Diego Today. Accessed January 2, 2025. <https://today.ucsd.edu/story/walkable-neighborhoods-help-adults-socializeincrease-community>

## Future Land Use Categories

### Growth Areas

Maine's Growth Management Act requires municipalities to define growth areas in the future land use plan. The Town's growth area has identified appropriate areas to direct growth, development, and infrastructure investment. Given the proximity to existing businesses and services, infrastructure, and recreation opportunities, directing growth to these areas will support additional residential development for people at all stages of life and will support commercial development that fits within the size and scale of the community. While these are not the only areas where growth may occur, most new development and infrastructure investment is anticipated to occur in growth areas.

### Growth Area

#### What It Is:

A growth area is an area designated as suitable for orderly residential, commercial, or industrial development or any combination of those types of development.

#### Where It Is:

Bridgton's designated growth area includes the following land use categories:

- *Downtown Village Business District I*
- *Downtown Village Business District II*
- *Downtown Village Neighborhood*
- *Inner Corridor*

### *Downtown Village Business District I (DVB-I)*

The DVB-I serves as a center for commercial and social activity. This area includes a concentration of shopping, services, and civic institutions. There is an

extensive sidewalk and trail network to support walking and biking to the downtown from nearby neighborhoods.

Allowing for continued development and redevelopment in DVB-I in keeping with historic patterns of development will support continued vitality of Main Street. Historically, the downtown contained two and three-story buildings, including mills, residences for mill workers, shops, and other businesses to serve the community. Having a variety of uses in the downtown, including residences, results in more active streets throughout the day and can help to support local businesses.

### *Downtown Village Business District II (DVB-II)*

The DVB-II is a mixed-use transition area between the downtown commercial center and downtown residential areas. This area is walkable with good pedestrian connectivity to the heart of downtown. The DVB-II consists of one- and two-story structures, including one-family, two-family, and multifamily dwellings and a variety of retail, service, and other non-residential uses. Structures in the DVB-I and DVB-II districts tend to be smaller in footprint to support the village character of downtown.



*Main Street*

## Future Land Use Categories

### *Downtown Village Neighborhood (DVN)*

The DVN land use area provides places that have a concentration of residential activity and diverse housing types in a well-connected, walkable neighborhood accessible to businesses, services, and recreational areas. These areas also serve as a transitional area for residential uses between the commercial and mixed uses areas of the downtown and the low-density rural residential neighborhoods. These areas allow for additional higher density development than rural areas while maintaining a residential character.

### *Inner Corridor (IC)*

The IC land use area provides a place for businesses like grocery stores, hardware stores, light manufacturing, personal and medical services and some residential uses along the Town's primary commercial corridors and nearby downtown. These areas allow for some larger scale commercial uses than the downtown but still provide pedestrian connectivity to the downtown, with a well-connected sidewalk network.



*Harmon Field*

### **Other Areas**

Bridgton's rural character is defined by open spaces and forested lands. Other land use categories identified in the future land use map contribute to the rural character and feel of Bridgton. The intent of these categories are to preserve the Town's rural areas, open spaces, natural resources, and rural feel of major corridors. These areas are defined by forested buffering, landscaping, and low-density development patterns and are places that the community would like to preserve and protect from the impacts of more dense development patterns. Other land use categories defined in the future land use map include the Outer Corridor, Rural Residential, Rural Village, and Rural Corridor land use categories.

### *Outer Corridor*

The outer corridor area provides a place for commercial and some industrial uses, including some larger and higher intensity uses. These uses have significant landscaping and buffering to maintain the Town's rural feel while allowing for a diversity of businesses offering job opportunities and support the tax base. Increasing requirements for buffer areas and revising other site design standards will help to minimize future development impacts on community character.

### *Rural Neighborhood*

The rural neighborhood area provides places for low-density housing, open space, and agricultural and forestry uses. New development in this area should be limited to housing and agricultural uses on large lots to maintain the rural character of the Town and to protect natural resources from

## Future Land Use Categories

development impact. Cluster subdivisions may be appropriate in some locations to allow for preservation of open space and critical natural resources.

### *Lakeside Neighborhood*

The lakeside neighborhood area includes areas that surround the lakes. These areas are primarily low-density residential while also allowing for seasonal businesses, including lodging, campgrounds, and summer camps. The lakeside neighborhood area is intended to protect the rural character of the area, protect the lakes from excess development, while also supporting seasonal businesses that are oriented toward the lakes.

### *Rural Village*

Rural village areas are designated for some limited, non-residential uses in areas at crossroads or intersections. These areas provide a place for uses that support residents of the surrounding rural neighborhoods, including convenience businesses, residences, and community spaces. Rural Village areas are intended to serve as neighborhood centers.

### *Rural Corridor*

Rural corridors include areas along primary corridors that are further from the commercial center of Town and in predominantly rural areas. Rural Corridor areas allow for a mix of lower density residences, agricultural uses, and some commercial uses. Commercial development is limited in type and size to minimize impacts on rural areas, including traffic, noise, and impacts to the physical character of rural neighborhoods.



*Five Fields Farm, South Bridgton*



*Bridgton Academy*

# Future Land Use

## Key Findings



of the Town's land area is conserved



of the Town's land area is forested

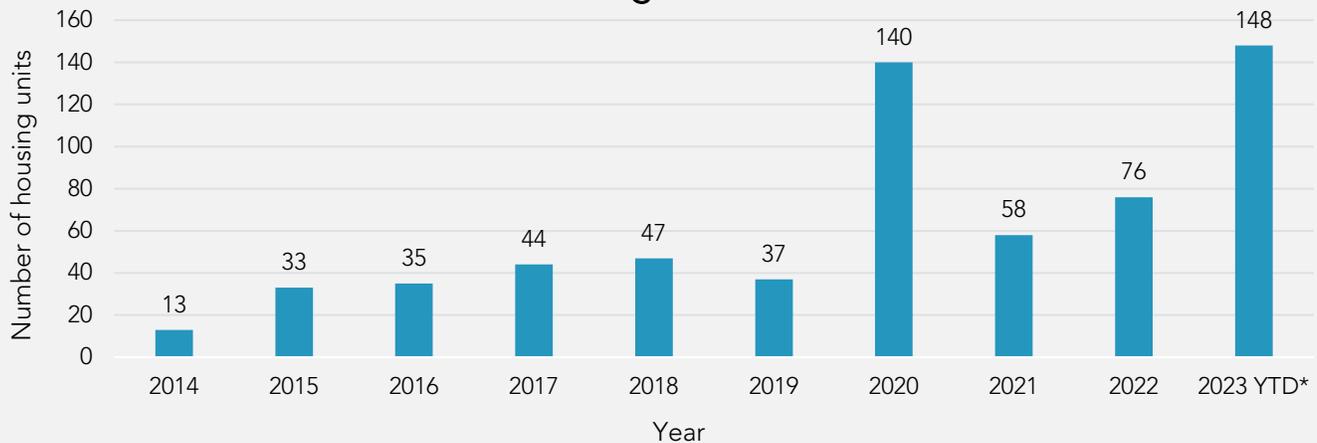


Bridgton has significant habitat areas including endangered or threatened species habitats.



Approximately **20%** of the Town's land area is enrolled in the Tree Growth Current Land use Program

### New Housing Units Permitted



### Recent changes to land use:

- In 2019, Bridgton adopted its first zoning ordinance since 1977.
- Expansion of the Town's wastewater treatment facility in 2023 increased capacity for development in the downtown.

### Land Area by Zoning District

| Zoning                                | Area (Acres) |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Downtown Village Business District I  | 133.0        |
| Downtown Village Business District II | 50.4         |
| Downtown Village Neighborhood         | 710.0        |
| Inner Corridor                        | 335.8        |
| Lakeside Neighborhood                 | 7,869.1      |
| Mixed Use Corridor                    | 2,226.1      |
| Outer Corridor                        | 1,076.8      |
| Rural Neighborhood                    | 23,577.3     |
| Outer Village                         | 311.0        |
| Town Owned Land                       | 116.2        |

Sources: Town of Bridgton

Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

## Challenges and Opportunities

Recommended changes to land use regulations are focused on making incremental development in the Downtown Village land use areas substantially easier and more feasible while simultaneously limiting the potential for large-scale growth outside of growth areas. The future land use categories, as described above, should guide changes to the Land Use Code to allow for or limit development in accordance with the desired character and land uses.

Changes from existing land use and zoning regulations include greater protections for open space and natural resources, targeted locations for non-residential growth, and increased opportunities for housing development and a diversity of housing types. In addition, the growth area includes three Town-owned parcels that are potential opportunities for housing development. The Town will continue to investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of development in these areas based on the findings of the Housing Opportunities Analysis developed by the Greater Portland Council of Governments to assess development potential of these three properties.

The community has identified several opportunities for further protection of open space and limiting impacts of growth on the natural environment. Identifying and mapping wetlands and critical rural areas will allow the Town to increase regulatory protection of natural resources. It will also help in targeting potential areas for conservation. In addition, putting further limits on development potential in rural residential areas will discourage growth in areas of undisturbed open space in rural areas.



*Main Street, looking west*



*Lakewood Apartments*

## Challenges and Opportunities

While residents would like to see the Town's continued economic growth, not all commercial development has been well-received by the community. This Plan identifies targeted growth industries and areas for non-residential development that will support existing residents and the type of economic growth desired by the community. In addition to targeting specific industries through overlay zones, the community would like to see improvements to the character and scale of new non-residential development. Proposed actions include consideration for buffer areas and other site design requirements that would minimize the visual impact of commercial development along corridors; limiting the size, scale, type, and design of new development along rural corridors; refining form-based codes for non-residential districts; and refining sign regulations to limit the impact of commercial signage on the Town's historic character.

To support continued growth and a changing population, more housing and a diversity of housing types are needed in Bridgton. Community members noted a desire for housing in and close to the downtown, ideally in walkable neighborhoods that connect to the Town's commercial center. Actions related to housing development include expanding the Downtown Village Neighborhood areas to allow for the development of smaller homes on smaller lots, encouraging accessory dwelling units (ADUs), allowing for cluster cottage court developments, and considering public-private partnerships for development opportunities. Implementation of these changes will balance recent new multifamily development with other housing types and styles that the community needs.

## Related Goals



## Community Feedback

New development and improvements to the downtown was the most common positive change noted by survey respondents (255). Development was also the most commonly noted negative change, including corridor development (90), downtown development (33), and growth in general (53). When asked what types of development, land uses, and amenities respondents would like to see, the top responses selected were “parks/community spaces” (387), “small retail stores” (378), and “restaurants” (326). More than 50% of respondents anticipate their housing needs changing in the next 10 years, with 116 respondents indicating a future need to downsize to a smaller home. Regarding transportation choices, 220 respondents would like the ability to walk or bike to services and amenities, 193 respondents would like increased public transportation options, and 119 respondents would like increased rideshare or other shared mobility options.

### POSTIVE CHANGES

“New businesses, more social activities”

“Bridgton has grown well. There are new restaurants, businesses, it has become a thriving and vibrant community”

“We are so excited to see the new hotel for visitors to our town. ”

“I love the small, independent shops in the downtown [...] The downtown has a good mix of essential services”

“More housing”

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

“too many new high-occupancy buildings and now it seems more congested. Losing the small town feel.”

“We need to be mindful of the natural spaces we have as that is much of the draw to the area”

“Too many new houses going up on land outside of center of town”

“Too many chain stores and sprawl along 302. Bridgton is losing its quaint feeling and is slowly becoming very commercialized”

- Community survey respondents



Food City mural, Main Street

## Implementation Actions: Land Use

| No.  | Goal(s)   | Action Type            | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study | Best Practice/ Examples                                |
|------|-----------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|--|
| 1.1* | 12        | Strategic Partnership  | Consult with the Maine Forest Service district forester when developing any land use regulations pertaining to forest management practices as required by 12 M.R.S.A. §8869.  | PB, CDD                              | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                     |  |
| 1.2* | 12        | Strategic Partnership  | Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices.   | PB, CDD                              | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                     |  |
| 1.3* | 1,2,3     | Regulatory Change      | Consider designating critical rural areas to further protect natural resources and limit non-residential development in critical rural areas to natural resource-based businesses and services, nature tourism/outdoor recreation businesses, farmers' markets, and home occupations.   | BSB, PB, CDD                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |
| 1.4* | 12        | Regulatory Change      | Permit land use activities that support productive agriculture and forestry operations, such as roadside stands, greenhouses, firewood operations, sawmills, log buying yards, and pick-your-own operations.  | PB, CDD                              | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                     |  |
| 1.5  | 2,3,12,16 | Regulatory Change      | Explore the feasibility of open space requirements for new developments to conserve natural resources, prime farmland, and forest where possible, or require a payment in lieu to fund the Town's open space conservation goals.  | PB, CDD                              | \$              | Medium                    | Short    | Open Space Plan     | <a href="#">Town of Williston, VT</a>                  |
| 1.6* | 1,2,3     | Other Town Initiatives | Coordinate Bridgton's land use strategies with other local and regional land use planning efforts and meet with neighboring communities to coordinate land use and growth-related decisions.  | PB, CDD                              | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                     |  |
| 1.7  | 1,4,14    | Regulatory Change      | Review and enhance, as appropriate, form-based code requirements to support the locations, types, scales, and intensities of land uses supported by the community and defined in the Future Land Use Map, including a diversity of housing types and small-scale commercial and mixed-use development in the growth area.   | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   | Economic Analysis   | <a href="#">Form Based Code Info (auburnmaine.gov)</a> |
| 1.8  | 1         | Public Investment      | Consider retaining a consultant to conduct a comprehensive review and revision to the Land Use Ordinance to address the goals of this Plan.   | BSB, PB, CDD                         | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                     |  |
| 1.9  | 4,5,6     | Other Town Initiatives | Evaluate and refine permitting procedures to be as efficient as possible, especially in growth areas, and provide guidance on development processes.  | CDD, CE, TM, PB                      | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                     |  |
| 1.10 | 1,2,3,4   | Regulatory Change      | Update local ordinances and review procedures, as appropriate, to align with the goals and intent of the future land use plan, including clearly defining desired scale, intensity, character and location of future development, and clearly defining protective measures for any existing or proposed critical natural resources, rural areas, or waterfront areas. | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                     |  |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

## Implementation Actions: Land Use

| No.  | Goal(s)  | Action Type       | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study | Best Practice/ Examples                                  |
|------|----------|-------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|--|
| 1.11 | 1,2,3    | Regulatory Change | Limit unrestricted growth in rural areas, including by incorporating increased open space requirements and encouraging cluster housing development.   | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |
| 1.12 | 1,2,3    | Regulatory Change | Direct future development to growth in areas where utilities and services are available or may be available through expansion.  | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |
| 1.13 | 1,15     | Regulatory Change | Limit the type of uses and size and scale of structures along rural corridors and revise site design standards to maintain the historic and scenic rural character along Route 302 toward West Bridgton and along Route 117 to North Bridgton.  | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     | <a href="#">Lisbon, ME - Route 196 Design Guidelines</a> |
| 1.14 | 1        | Regulatory Change | Consider amending sign regulations, including size, material, type, and illumination, to encourage signage that is in keeping with the Town's historic character.   | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |
| 1.15 | 4.14     | Regulatory Change | Create a residential neighborhood zone with the goal of creating a vibrant residential area that connects to the downtown and fosters the development of more affordable housing options by encouraging cluster developments instead of traditional subdivisions where possible, and prioritizing open space, pocket parks, landscaped buffers, and treelined streets with sidewalks. | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |
| 1.16 | 5,7,8,16 | Regulatory Change | Develop a four-season recreation overlay in the West Bridgton Rural Village area to promote year-round recreation around Pleasant Mountain. Allow for large inns, motels, restaurants, and shops to support seasonal recreation and limit other commercial uses like manufacturing, solar farms, and mineral extraction.  | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |
| 1.17 | 5,8      | Regulatory Change | Create an overlay district that encompasses Bridgton Hospital and adjacent parcels to permit health-related uses, including medical offices, medical equipment shops, senior living, memory care, and assisted living.  | PB, CDD, BSB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |

# History, Art, and Culture

## Key Findings

### National Register of Historic Places

#### Listed Properties

Lt. Robert Andrew's House  
Benjamin Cleaves House  
Dalton Holmes Davis Memorial Library  
Farnsworth House  
Peabody-Fitch Farm  
William F. Perry House  
South Bridgton Congregational Church  
Stone House  
Wales and Hamblen Store  
Walker Memorial Hall  
John and Maria Webb House

#### Eligible Properties

Hazen-Kimball-Holden Farmstead Property  
Brigham-Sanborn-Linscott Property  
Bridgton Memorial U.S. Army Reserve Center  
Grand Army of the Republic Hall  
Sandy Creek Bridge #3966  
Sumner Foster House  
Moose Pond Causeway  
Moose Pond Bridge

### Bridgton Historical Society

The Bridgton Historical Society (BHS) collects and preserves significant historical artifacts from throughout Bridgton's History. BHS operates and maintains museums, historical properties, and research facilities. BHS also advocates for historic preservation and works with interested parties to preserve the Town's identity and sense of place.

#### Museums and Galleries

Gallery 302  
Rufus Porter Museum  
Narramissic Farm  
Bridgton Historical Society Museum

### Other Historic Resources



7 Historic Graveyards



9 Historic Archaeological Sites



10 Open Lands with Historic Significance

# History, Art, and Culture

## Challenges and Opportunities

Physical evidence of the Town's history, first as a mill town and later as a summer resort destination, are visible throughout Bridgton, with many remaining historic commercial and mixed-use buildings in the downtown, mill remnants in Shorey Park, and historic homes and agricultural buildings in the downtown and the outer villages. The Bridgton Historical Society, located in the downtown, preserves and maintains artifacts connected to Bridgton's past.

The Town does not have any local historic preservation regulations in place to protect existing historic structures or landmarks. Residents have expressed concern about the loss of some historic buildings and the impact on the Town's character. While many original structures remain, the Town has experienced some redevelopment with more vacant parcels, parking lots, and auto-oriented development replacing the original mixed-use structures along Main Street. Additionally, creating a historic district for the downtown will help protect the character of existing buildings while working to ensure new development is compatible in design, size, and scale to existing structures. Creating a historic district and designating historic structures can provide access to additional funding that property owners can use to repair their historic buildings and encourage the preservation of existing buildings instead of demolishing them. Adaptive reuse is the practice of repurposing an existing building for a new purpose other than its intended use. Encouraging the adaptive reuse of historic buildings, like churches, can help protect existing buildings while providing for additional housing, businesses, and gathering spaces.

Relating to the Town's history through the built environment is one way that people feel connected to their community. Another is through social interaction at community events, programs, and the day-to-day activities within the Town. Many residents noted the additional community events and local businesses as a positive change in the last few years. Music on Main, Art in the Park, Recreation Department events, and local restaurants have all been notable improvements to community life in Bridgton and contribute to the Town's culture. Murals and public art throughout the downtown help to create a sense of place, share the Town's history, and anchor the community to specific points in Bridgton.



*South Bridgton Congregational Church*



*Rufus Porter Museum*

*Image courtesy of the Rufus Porter Museum*

# History, Art, and Culture

## Related Goals



## Community Feedback

More than half (255) of survey respondents who answered the question of what positive changes they have noticed in the past 10 years indicated that recent downtown development has been an overall improvement for the community. This includes revitalization of older buildings, small businesses, community events, and improved walkability. Some survey respondents noted that new construction is not in keeping with the Town's historic character and specifically that downtown development has had a negative impact on the community (33 respondents) and that growth in general has been detrimental to the small-town character of Bridgton (53 respondents).

### POSTIVE CHANGES

"I have noticed more community events that help foster connection among our town members."

"It's nice to see more cultural events- music, theater and restaurant variety"

"pride in the 'Love always, Bridgton' campaign"

"The sense of community is getting stronger!"

"Younger people investing to create community, and getting support from older generations. There is a good buzz here."

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

"I just worry that as Bridgton becomes more appealing, it will be flooded with outsiders that want to change the features of Maine towns that Mainers actually like."

"Historical houses being neglected. Downtown historical character not being preserved but instead knocked down and replaced."

"Sprawl along main corridors, poorly planned cluster development on historical farmland of small homes on small lots."

- Community survey respondents

# History, Art, and Culture

## Implementation Actions: History, Art, and Culture

| No.  | Goal(s)       | Action type            | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/Study | Best Practice/ Examples  |
|------|---------------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| 2.1* | 15            | Strategic Partnership  | Work with the Bridgton Historical Society and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission to assess the need for, and if necessary, plan for, a comprehensive community survey of Bridgton's historic and archaeological resources.  | PB, BHS, MHPC, CDD                   | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                    | <a href="#">Historic Preservation Grants for Surveys</a>   |
| 2.2  | 1,15          | Regulatory Change      | Establish an historic preservation program to help preserve the historic character of Main Street and protect the downtown character from insensitive development and to identify and protect specific buildings that have historic and cultural value to the history of Bridgton.  | PB, BHS, MHPC, CDD                   | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    | Open Space Plan    | <a href="#">Town of South Berwick</a>  |
| 2.3  | 15            | Program                | Consider opportunities to join the Maine Certified Local Government Program to support preservation efforts and become eligible for grants once a historic preservation program has been established.   | PB, BHS, MHPC, CDD                   | \$\$            | Hard                      | Long     |                    | <a href="#">Maine Certified Local Government Program</a>   |
| 2.4  | 15,17         | Strategic Partnership  | Work with local partners to create educational materials to share the benefits of historic preservation, including information on the state's historic tax credit program and additional funding sources to improve historic structures.  | CDD, PB, MHPC                        | \$              | Easy                      | Medium   |                    | <a href="#">Maine Historic Tax Credit Program</a>  |
| 2.5  | 7,9,14,15, 17 | Other Town Initiatives | Continue to promote and expand a program of Town events and events hosted by community partners, including live music, cultural events, festivals, and heritage tourism initiatives to showcase local traditions, art, historical sites, and to create opportunities for community members to gather and build connections. | CDD                                  | \$\$            | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    | <a href="#">Festivals &amp; Events Annual Calendar for Coastal Washington County, Maine &amp; Charlotte County, NB</a> |
| 2.6  | 7,15          | Other Town Initiatives | Continue to support the Arts and Culture Subcommittee to identify and plan for opportunities for workshops, art education activities, exhibitions, performances, and artistic collaborations.   | CDD, CDAC                            | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                    | <a href="#">Small Town/Big Arts</a>  |
| 2.7  | 5,15          | Strategic Partnership  | Identify additional opportunities for public art and partner with local organizations and artists to implement public art projects.   | CDD                                  | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    | <a href="#">Lewiston-Auburn Public Art</a>   |
| 2.8  | 5,15          | Program                | Continue to partner with the Bridgton Historical Society to develop materials for a self-guided walking tour of downtown Bridgton to promote the Town's history and culture.  | CDD, BHS                             | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                    | <a href="#">Duxbury Rural and Historical Society</a>   |
| 2.9  | 5,15,17       | Program                | Support local artisans, craftsmen, and creative entrepreneurs through artisan markets, temporary retail installations, or other opportunities to showcase local arts.   | CDD                                  | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   | Economic Analysis  | <a href="#">How Farmer's Markets Boost the Local Economy</a>   |

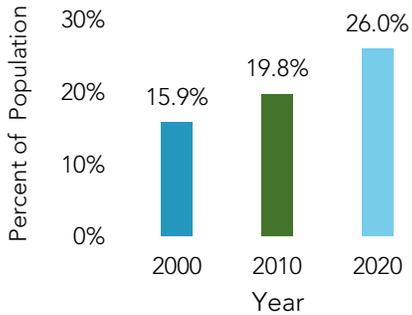
\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

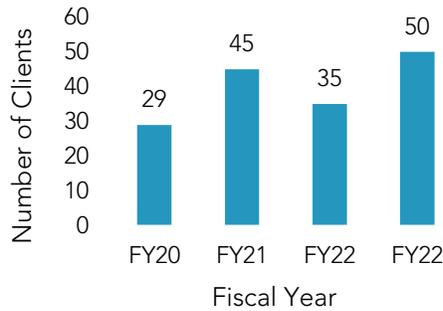
# Health and Community

## Key Findings

### Bridgton Population 65+



### General Assistance Clients



### Bridgton Community Center

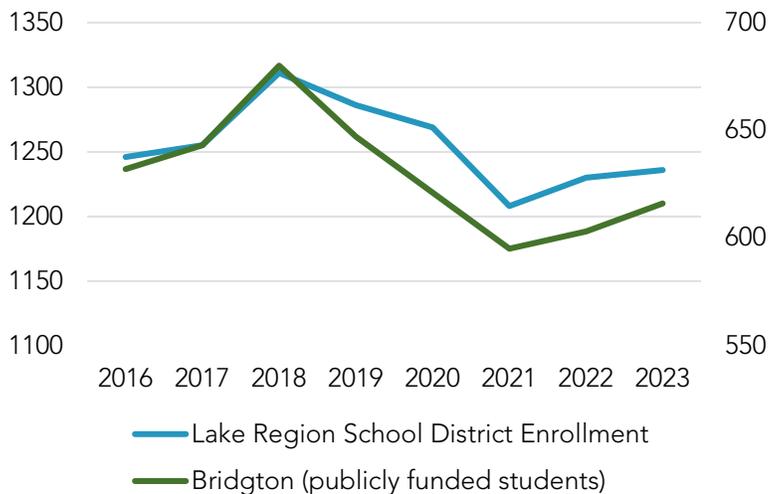


4,700 meals served annually

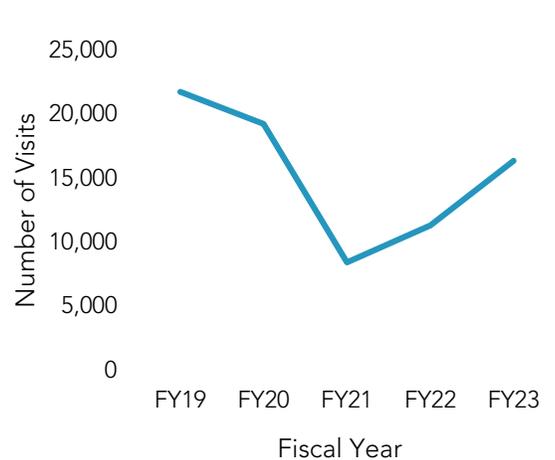


Over 50 volunteers

### Public School Enrollment



### Bridgton Public Library Visits



### Community Events

- Festival of Lights
- July 3rd Fireworks
- Four on the Fourth
- Kids in the Park
- Music on Main
- Halloween Haunted House
- Brewfest
- Winter Carnival
- Community Center Senior Lunches

### Health-Related Organizations

- Bridgton Hospital
- Through These Doors
- Opportunity Alliance
- Bridgton Food Pantry
- Tri-County Mental Health Services
- Bridgton Public Library
- Bridgton Community Center
- Lakes Region Recovery Center
- Tucker's House

Sources: Town of Bridgton, ACS 2018-2022 Estimates, Bridgton Public Library, Bridgton Community Center, Lake Region School District

Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

## Challenges and Opportunities

As the Town continues to grow and change, reinforcing the social framework that brings people together is critical to the sense of community. Many residents noted the importance of maintaining the small-town feel of Bridgton, which is central to the Town's identity. This relates to both the physical character of the Town's small-scale architecture and historic Main Street and the people and social connections that represent small-town life.

The prevalence of loneliness and social isolation and their impact on physical, mental, and societal health have been well-documented and declared as a public health epidemic in 2023.<sup>9</sup> While there are several broader societal issues, such as technology and cultural shifts, that have contributed to social isolation, many solutions can be applied at the local government level. Revitalizing institutions like recreation and community centers, schools, libraries, and parks, provides a social framework to support community connections. Helping to ensure these facilities and programming meets the needs of all groups, including low-income residents, older adults, youth, and people living with disabilities, can address impacts of social isolation for residents who are most vulnerable to these challenges. Investments in community programs, facilities, and public spaces is as important as any other public health investment.

As a town with an aging population that is looking to attract a younger workforce, access to healthcare facilities is an important concern. With many hospitals and healthcare services closing in rural areas, support for Bridgton Hospital and expanding opportunities for healthcare and healthcare-related industry growth around the hospital will help in enhancing the livability of Bridgton.

Many towns have experienced adverse impacts of growth, including loss of historic community character or impacts to small businesses, if it happens in a way that is not compatible with residents' values; however, limiting growth can also be detrimental to community health in the long-term. Restricting growth can impact a municipality's finances and increase the tax burden on existing residents to provide the same services. If a municipality can no longer afford to invest in the facilities and services needed to support residents, the community will not be resilient in the face of various health, economic, and environmental challenges. This Plan intends to encourage growth and investment that will strengthen the community. Creating opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs, attracting healthcare-related services, encouraging industries that will create good-paying jobs, and increasing housing options will all contribute to building a sense of community and collaboration. Guiding growth to areas with existing infrastructure and services will reduce the cost burden on the Town while increasing its tax base.

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "New Surgeon General Advisory Raises Alarm about the Devastating Impact of the Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation in the United States." Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health. Accessed December 23, 2024. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>

# Health and Community

## Related Goals



## Community Feedback

Several survey respondents (26) noted the decline in the availability of health care services in Bridgton as a negative change. While many respondents (94) identified improvements in recreation facilities and programs as a positive change, when asked what changes would have the greatest impact on quality of life, 208 selected “more and improved recreation facilities and programs” and 236 selected “more opportunities for community and social interaction”. Responses to how the community should address the needs of vulnerable populations varied, with the most popular response (333) being to “expand community outreach and education initiatives to keep residents informed of Town services and programs”. In rating community facilities, 338 respondents rated the Town’s health care facilities as either “Fair” or “Needs Improvement”, while 360 respondents ranked the community center and community programs as “Good” or “Excellent”.

### POSTIVE CHANGES

- “Expanded community center services”
- “Love the community programs and the focus on the children in the community.”
- “More town events that gather local business that support the community”
- “increase in community involvement and volunteerism”
- “it's been a plus to see an elder-care facility go up -- I'm not sure how that's working out for the residents, but it is a level of care very much needed in the area.”

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

- “Neighbors have a tendency to withdraw from the community activities as they age. Need to work to keep them involved!”
- “Loss of some medical services at the hospital, loss of some primary care options, increased need for food pantry”
- “Not enough opportunities for seniors. Not enough recreation for all.”
- “Drug activity although I believe the BPD is doing the best job possible with challenging circumstances.”

- Community survey respondents

# Health and Community

## Implementation Actions: Health and Community

| No. | Goal(s)   | Action type            | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators          | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/Study | Best Practice/ Examples                                       |
|-----|-----------|------------------------|--|---|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------|---|
| 3.1 | 8         | Program                | Consider joining the AARP Age-Friendly Network and develop an action plan in coordination with neighboring communities to ensure livability for people of all ages in the Lakes Region.  | TM, CDD, BSB, CDAC                            | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                    | <a href="#">MaineHealth</a>                                   |
| 3.2 | 8         | Strategic Partnership  | Engage with Bridgton Hospital, Lakes Region Collective Action Network (LRCAN), and local and regional organizations, and educational institutions to support programs that meet the needs of Bridgton's aging population (e.g., senior companion programs, mobile health clinics, ride-share programs).      | TM, CDD, CDAC, REC, BCC, LRSD, BPL, BH, LRCAN | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    | <a href="#">Maine Mobile</a>                                  |
| 3.3 | 8,9       | Other Town Initiatives | Encourage and support community members to take on leadership roles in organizing programs by providing guidance and assistance to new leaders and celebrating the contributions of current and past volunteers, participants, and partners.   | TM, BSB                                       | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                    | <a href="#">Home - Leadership Seacoast</a>                    |
| 3.4 | 8,9       | Strategic Partnership  | Collaborate with community members, local organizations, businesses, schools, and non-profits to leverage resources, expertise, and networks to enhance program offerings in Bridgton, including for the youth population.   | REC, BCC, BPL                                 | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    |   |
| 3.5 | 6,9,17    | Strategic Partnership  | Facilitate coordination and communication among community organizations to share resources, information, and volunteer capacity.   | CDD   | \$              | Hard                      | Medium   |                    |   |
| 3.6 | 8,17      | Strategic Partnership  | Continue to collaborate with Cumberland County, neighboring towns, local and regional service providers, and the school district to meet the needs of the Town's most vulnerable residents, and to implement the recommendations of the Lakes Region Homelessness Service Center Study.                      | BSB, BCC, LRCAN, LRSD                         | \$\$            | Hard                      | Ongoing  | Homeless Study     | <a href="#">City of Bangor, Maine - Homelessness Response</a> |
| 3.7 | 8,11,17   | Strategic Partnership  | Collaborate with the Lake Region School District (LRSD) and the Towns of Casco and Naples to promote a shared understanding and support for educational programs between LRSD and the towns, facilitate community partnerships, and advocate for additional school funding from the State and other sources. | LRSD, BSB, REC, CDAC                          | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    |   |
| 3.8 | 6,9       | Other Town Initiatives | Use the Town's communication channels and partners to promote Town initiatives and the work of other organizations, including promoting events, educational resources, and volunteer opportunities.  | TM, CDD                                       | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                    |   |
| 3.9 | 5,7,11,17 | Strategic Partnership  | Establish partnerships with community organizations and business owners to implement initiatives to create and improve public spaces for community use (e.g., flexible seating, landscaping, public art, game/equipment kiosk).  | CDD, PSD                                      | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   | Open Space Plan    | <a href="#">Home — Project for Public Spaces (pps.org)</a>    |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

## Implementation Actions: Health and Community

| No.  | Goal(s) | Action type            | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/Study | Best Practice/ Examples  |
|------|---------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| 3.10 | 8,9,11  | Other Town Initiatives | Promote digital equity and work with the Bridgton Library to develop a digital equity plan to guide decision-making in implementing improvements to digital communication, access, resources, and literacy. | TM, BPL, BSB                         | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                    | <a href="#">Sandwich, MA-Draft Digital Equity Plan</a>                           |
| 3.11 | 8,9,11  | Other Town Initiatives | Work with local partners, like the Bridgton Community Center, Library, and 4H Learning Center, to promote and support opportunities for multi-generational learning opportunities and community events.     | BCC, BPL, CDD                        | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  | Economic Analysis  | <a href="#">Generations United: America's Best Intergenerational Communities</a> |
| 3.12 | 5,8,17  | Other Town Initiatives | Support the Bridgton Hospital and growth of the healthcare industry and related services including allowing for healthcare and related uses in appropriate areas around the hospital.                       | BSB, CDAC                            | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    |  |
| 3.13 | 5,8,17  | Other Town Initiatives | Support development of a plan to use the Memorial School property and work with local and regional partners to plan for redevelopment of the site.  | BMS, BSB, CDAC, CDD                  | \$\$            | Medium                    | Long     |                    |  |

# The Natural Environment

## Key Findings

### Significant Surface Waters

|                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| Adams Pond     | Long Lake*   |
| Beaver Pond*   | Moose Pond*  |
| Foster Pond    | Otter Pond*  |
| Highland Lake* | Peabody Pond |
| Holt Pond      | Woods Pond*  |

\* considered "threatened" due to impacts from development, agricultural runoff, or other significant threat to water quality.

### Rare and Threatened Species

|                            |                     |
|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Comet Darner               | Northern Brownsnake |
| Eastern Ribbon Snake       | Blanding's turtle   |
| Great Blue Heron           | Spotted turtle      |
| New England Bluet          |                     |
| Birch-oak rocky woodland   |                     |
| Pitch pine woodland        |                     |
| Red pine                   |                     |
| Canada mountain rice-grass |                     |



**15%**  
(5,000+ acres)  
of land is conserved



**430**  
acres of land  
owned by the Town



**10,201**  
acres of land enrolled in  
current use tax  
programs

### Bridgton Open Space Plan Goals

1. **Protect** natural resources, habitat areas, and wildlife corridors.
2. **Connect** Bridgton's open space network and improve access.
3. **Activate** opportunities for year-round recreation.

Sources: Bridgton Open Space Plan, State of Maine Current Use Tax Program Statistical Valuation Return Summary, Maine Department of Environmental Protection

Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

# The Natural Environment

## Challenges and Opportunities

For decades, residents and visitors have been drawn to Bridgton's pristine lakes and mountains for recreation and opportunities to connect with nature. As the Town has continued to grow and experience additional development pressure, protecting natural resources and preserving the natural beauty of the region is a top priority for residents.

The water quality of Bridgton's lakes and rivers generally meets or exceeds the State's minimum water quality standards, and the Town's aquifers and groundwater are protected by the Bear River and Willet Brook Aquifer Protection Ordinances. While both surface and groundwaters meet current water quality and health standards, there is growing pressure from development, climate impacts, and an increased interest in recreation in the Lakes Region which could threaten these resources if not adequately managed and protected. In addition to protecting surface and groundwaters, the Town has been committed to conserving open space through long-term open space planning and partnerships with conservation organizations. The Town's Open Space Plan, adopted in 2023, outlines a vision and specific actions to further protect, connect, and activate open spaces. Bridgton's Open Space Committee is responsible for implementing the goals and strategies outlined in the plan.

There are several aspects to natural resource protection that are priorities for the Bridgton community. Residents and visitors value a healthy environment and resilient ecosystems and recognize the importance of sustaining natural systems and habitats for future generations. By encouraging growth and development in downtown areas as outlined in the future land use plan, the Town can limit rural development that causes habitat fragmentation and disrupts ecological functions.

The Town's vast open spaces, trails, and lakes offer a variety of recreation opportunities. These amenities also contribute to the tourism economy, attracting visitors to hike, ski, fish, and just enjoy nature. In addition to the environmental, economic, and recreation benefits of the natural environment, Bridgton's natural features

contribute to the Town's character and sense of place. The Town will continue to partner with

conservation organizations for both land conservation efforts as well as public education initiatives. While the Town has limited funds available for land acquisition, the Town has successfully partnered with local organizations such as Loon Echo Land Trust and Lakes Environmental Association to preserve land and maintain trails. In addition, coordinating with these organizations to leverage their technical expertise for informational and educational campaigns on issues like invasive species management and stormwater runoff can help with voluntary cooperation of property owners in protecting natural resources.



*Bald Pate Preserve*

# The Natural Environment

## Related Goals

|   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <br>RESPECT<br>SMALL-TOWN<br>CHARACTER         | <br>PROTECT WATER<br>RESOURCES   | <br>PROTECT<br>NATURAL<br>RESOURCES | <br>ENHANCE<br>QUALITY-OF-LIFE | <br>ADDRESS HEALTH<br>AND WELL-BEING |
| <br>EXPAND<br>INFRASTRUCTURE<br>AND FACILITIES | <br>SUPPORT FARMS<br>AND FORESTS | <br>ENHANCE<br>RESILIENCY           | <br>EXPAND OPEN<br>SPACES      | <br>BUILD<br>PARTNERSHIPS            |

## Community Feedback

Approximately 74% of survey respondents (473) selected “preserving natural areas” as a top priority for Bridgton. Similarly, when asked what types of development, land uses, and amenities Bridgton should focus on, the top response selected was “parks/community spaces”.

### POSTIVE CHANGES

“More protected land, more trails”

“The work that LEIT is doing to improve access to outdoor health and recreation. This will have a tremendously positive impact on the mental and physical health of Bridgton residents. It also pulls positive commerce into the community from surrounding areas.”

“Continued care in keeping lakes clean with regular monitoring.”

“Greater public knowledge about the importance of keeping invasive species out of our lakes.”

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

“Loss of open space due to development”

“Half-hearted and inconsistent shoreland zoning regulation that allows harmful development to occur on lakeshores.”

“Overdevelopment. We need to be mindful of the natural spaces we have as that is much of the draw to the area (skiing, hiking, the lakes).”

“Too many boats and building on the lake threatening the ecosystem.”

- Community survey respondents

# The Natural Environment

## Implementation Actions: The Natural Environment

| No.  | Goal(s)   | Action Type            | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study | Best Practice/ Examples                                     |
|------|-----------|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| 4.1  | 2,3,11    | Public Investment      | Continue to prioritize the maintenance of the Town's sewer system to minimize pollution discharges and coordinate necessary upgrades and extensions of the sewer system based on the Town's wastewater expansion plan and future land use map.   | BSB, PSD                             | \$\$\$          | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                     | <a href="#">State Municipal Wastewater Grant Program</a>    |
| 4.2* | 2,3       | Regulatory Change      | Continue to review to enforce low impact development standards and encourage the use of best management practices to limit stormwater runoff into Bridgton's waterbodies.  | CDD, BSB, PB                         | \$              | Easy                      | Short    | ME Won't Wait       | <a href="#">Low Impact Development Practices</a>            |
| 4.3* | 2,3       | Other Town Initiatives | Continue to maintain public wellhead and aquifer recharge area protection mechanisms, including the Bear River Aquifer Protection Ordinance and Willett Brook Aquifer Protection Ordinance, and update as necessary.   | BSB, PSD, BWD                        | \$\$            | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                     |   |
| 4.4* | 2,3,12    | Strategic Partnership  | Partner with regional organizations to develop educational materials for private land owners to implement water quality best management practices from resources such as Loon Echo Land Trust, Lakes Environmental Association, Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Maine Forest Service, and/or Small Woodlot Association of Maine. | PSD, LELE, LEA                       | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">Stormwater Management (stormwaterguide.org)</a> |
| 4.5* | 2         | Strategic Partnership  | Continue to support Lakes Environmental Association in efforts to monitor, protect, and, where warranted, improve water quality, and consider including Stevens Brook in routine water quality monitoring.   | BSB, PSD, LEA                        | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                     |   |
| 4.6  | 1,2,3,16  | Regulatory Change      | Review local ordinances and evaluate opportunities to improve protections beyond minimum State requirements for Bridgton's forests, prime farmlands, lakes, and other natural resources, including more stringent construction standards, wetland and vernal pool protections, and open space requirements.  | PB, ORC, BSB, CDD                    | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                     |   |
| 4.7* | 2,3       | Other Town Initiatives | Provide educational materials at appropriate locations regarding aquatic invasive species to prevent the spread of invasive species in Bridgton's lakes and water bodies.  | PSD, LELE, LEA                       | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">Falmouth, ME Invasive Plants</a>                |
| 4.8* | 1,2,3,13  | Regulatory Change      | Continue to update land use ordinances to ensure consistency with applicable state law regarding critical natural resources, including the Natural Resource Protection Act.  | PB, CDD                              | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                     |   |
| 4.9* | 3,7,12,16 | Strategic Partnership  | Coordinate with LELE and other conservation organizations to conduct targeted outreach to land owners to encourage the protection of land through conservation easements or land transfers with a focus on areas with natural resources, wildlife habitat corridors, and opportunities for open space connectivity including various types of trails.  | CDD, PB, LELE                        | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   | ME Won't Wait       | <a href="#">Maine Land Trust Network</a>                    |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

# The Natural Environment

## Implementation Actions: The Natural Environment

| No.   | Goal(s)  | Action Type            | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study | Best Practice/ Examples  |
|-------|----------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|--|
| 4.10* | 3, 12    | Program                | Encourage owners of productive farm and forest land and land near important natural resources to enroll in the current use taxation programs to support the economic viability of farming and forestry operations and ensure ongoing management of land with important natural resources.   | CDD                                  | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                     | <a href="#">Maine Current Use Tax Programs</a>                       |
| 4.11  | 3,12     | Other Town Initiatives | Encourage the protection of prime farmland through agricultural conservation easements and work with conservation and "farm-friendly" organizations to educate landowners about easements, provide technical assistance, and provide financial incentives to farmers for land conservation and soil health improvement.                                 | CDD, LELE                            | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">GrowSmart Maine: Agricultural Conservation Easements</a> |
| 4.12  | 12,13,16 | Other Town Initiatives | Work with local partners to identify key invasive species that threaten Bridgton's lakes, forests, and open spaces and develop strategies for stopping their spread and/or removing them.   | CDD, LELE, LEA                       | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">Kittery, ME - Invasive Species Management Plan</a>       |
| 4.13  | 12       | Other Town Initiatives | Identify opportunities to expand the local food system, including amending restrictions on commercial farming, support for local farms, additional community gardens, urban farms, and homesteading.  | CDD, PB                              | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">Appalachian Sustainable Development</a>                  |
| 4.14  | 3,13     | Program                | Encourage natural vegetation, LakeSmart certification, and planning in the Shoreland Zone.  | CDD, PB                              | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">Maine Lakes – LakeSmart Program</a>                      |
| 4.15  | 12       | Program                | Work with local partners to provide technical assistance and incentives for land conservation, soil health improvement, and market development to enhance small-scale farming and agribusiness enterprises.   | CDD, LELE, LEA                       | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     | -  |
| 4.16  | 2,17     | Strategic Partnership  | Continue to collaborate with state, regional, and private sector partners on monitoring and evaluating lake levels and water quality.   | PSD                                  | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  | Economic Analysis   |  |
| 4.17  | 2,17     | Strategic Partnership  | Continue the Town's status as a direct partner community in the Maine Community Resilience Partnership and continue to apply for grant funding through the partnership.   | CDD, BSB, TM                         | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  | ME Won't Wait       | <a href="#">Community Resilience Partnership</a>                     |
| 4.18  | 2,13,17  | Strategic Partnership  | Work with state and regional partners to improve Bridgton's resilience to severe weather events, ensuring that infrastructure, buildings and homes, and natural resources are able to respond and adapt to severe events. Conduct resilience efforts in coordination with Maine's Climate Action Plan to support access to grant funding and resources. | CDD, PB, TM, EMA                     | \$\$\$          | Hard                      | Ongoing  | ME Won't Wait       | <a href="#">Maine Climate Council</a>                                |
| 4.19  | 2,3,7,17 | Strategic Partnership  | Coordinate with nearby towns and agencies on watershed management and other initiatives to preserve open space, preserve wildlife corridors, and protect water quality.   | CDD, LELE, LEA, TM, BSB              | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    | Open Space Plan     | <a href="#">Long Creek Watershed</a>                                 |
| 4.20  | 2,3      | Other Town Initiatives | Advocate for creating accurate maps of Bridgton's wetlands and floodplains.   | CDD, PB, TM                          | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |                     |  |

## Key Findings

**4,785**



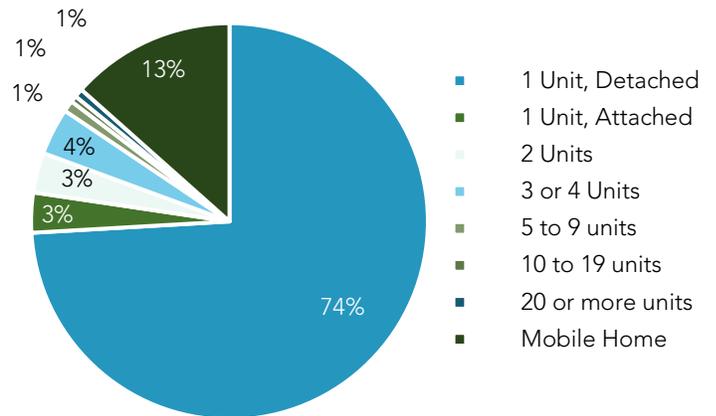
Total housing units



**50%**

of housing units are vacant\*

### Percent of Housing Units by Type



Less than

**6%**

of units are in multifamily structures

**74%**

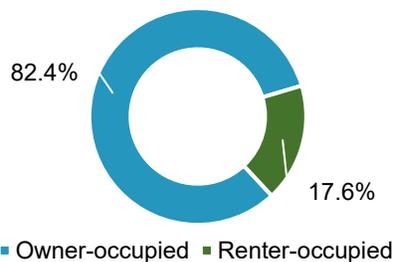
of housing units are detached single-family homes

**30%**



of households are single-person households

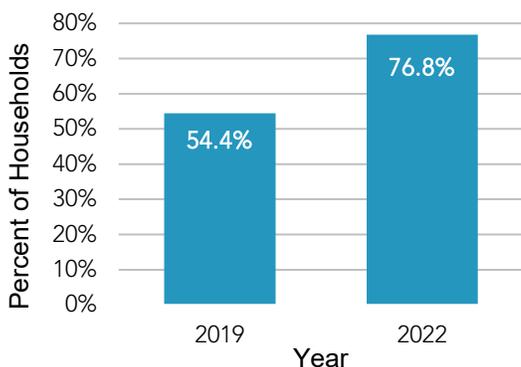
### Owner-Occupied vs. Renter-Occupied Housing Units



**36%**

of households have one or more people 65 years and over

### Percent of Households Unable to Afford the Median Home Price



Median home value increased

**49%**

from 2019 to 2022



**422**

new housing units were permitted from 2020 to 2023

**27%**

of survey respondents expect to downsize or transition to assisted living in the next 10 years

Sources: American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates, MaineHousing, Town of Bridgton

Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

\*Includes housing units for seasonal use, new units not yet occupied, and units that are vacant for other reasons.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Like other communities in the region, Bridgton has seen housing costs climb sharply since 2020. The years during and following the COVID-19 pandemic saw an influx of residents and seasonal homeowners to Maine, attracted to the State's natural beauty and access to open space and recreation. Rising housing costs in Portland and surrounding communities have driven people further from the City to seek more affordable housing, including Bridgton.

In addition to changes in external housing demand, the demographics of the Town's population are shifting, resulting in changing housing needs for existing residents. More than one-third of survey respondents indicated that they expect to transition to a smaller home or require an assisted living or ADA accessible home. This change in housing needs is representative of the shift towards an older population and smaller households.

There is also demand for more affordable home ownership opportunities for younger families. Housing options are needed to continue to attract a stable workforce, especially as many older adults enter retirement age. Creating opportunities for younger people to find long-term housing allows for a greater sense of belonging and commitment to the community. Along with housing options, amenities such as recreation facilities, healthcare services, and entertainment are also critical in building a strong community.

The trend of decreasing household size and challenge of high housing costs mean that new housing, specifically smaller and more affordable units, will continue to be needed to support the Town's current residents, even if the population does not increase. If growth continues as it has in recent years, even more housing units will be needed to support this growth as well as to provide housing options for current residents.

Bridgton has led the region in new housing development, issuing permits for 422 new housing units between 2020 and 2023. Bridgton has built the most housing units per capita in Cumberland County in 2023.<sup>10</sup> Recent housing development in Bridgton has included rental apartments in multifamily structures, senior housing, and larger single-family homes. While the Town has seen new housing development, some new homes are intended for seasonal use. In addition, the growth of short-term rentals (STRs) is also impacting availability of housing units for year-round occupancy. The exact number of STRs fluctuates and is not easy to determine. Tracking the types of location of STRs in Bridgton would help the Town in understanding their impact on the housing market and the community.

Residents value the rural landscapes and historic character of Bridgton's downtown and would like to see development that is respectful of the existing community and that serves year-round housing needs. Looking to the past and Bridgton's historic downtown (including the mills, worker housing, and commercial structures on Main Street) could help inform future development patterns that allow for growth in the downtown, while also respecting the Town's history and character and limiting sprawling development in rural areas.

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<sup>10</sup> Norman, Zara. March 29, 2024. "A Town 1 Hour from Portland is Leading its Region on Housing." Bangor Daily News. Accessed January 21, 2025. <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2024/03/29/business/business-housing/bridgton-maine-leading-portland-region-housing-joam40zk0w/>

## Related Goals



## Community Feedback

Within the Bridgton community, there are differing opinions about housing and development. While many survey respondents (150) noted that creating more housing options is a top priority, many more would like to prioritize about limiting sprawl along corridors (231) and limit new development in general (176). Several respondents (55) noted the lack of affordable housing and variety of housing options as a negative change in Bridgton and, similarly, some have indicated that growth (30) and new housing development (22) have been positive changes. Still, more respondents identified growth as a negative change (53). When asked what types of housing are needed in Bridgton, the top response was energy efficient housing options (289).

### POSTIVE CHANGES

"More housing"

"Downtown revitalization, public infrastructure and workforce housing"

"The town certainly suffered with the closing of the mills and providing spaces for new folks to live and recreate in Bridgton has certainly made it feel more like the vibrant year round town it once was."

"The combination of new housing and more retail is what we need to sustain vibrancy year round. "

"It's been expanding! I love the downtown area and affordable apartments"

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

"Development is a good thing, but so much housing is going in. We need to keep a small town feel and keep downtown quaint, cute, affordable."

"Increased housing prices"

"Bridgton is growing too fast - these is too much traffic, a lack of regard for the full time residents versus the second home residents and vacationers."

"Bridgton needs more affordable housing"

- Community survey respondents

| Implementation Actions: Housing |            |                       |  |                                      |                 |                           |          |                     |   |
|---------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| No.                             | Goal(s)    | Action Type           | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study | Best Practice/ Examples   |
| 5.1*                            | 1,4        | Regulatory Change     | Evaluate growth area land use regulations and amend as appropriate to allow and encourage housing development on vacant and underdeveloped lots in the growth area and to create a variety of housing types, including consideration of lot size, frontage, setback, and parking requirements.   | CDD, CE, PB                          | \$\$            | Easy                      | Short    | Economic Analysis   | <a href="#">Homes for All: A 'Design &amp; Do' Toolkit for Small-scale Home Builders, Investors &amp; Community Leaders</a> |
| 5.2                             | 1,4        | Regulatory Change     | Consider relaxing the size limitation for accessory dwelling units, relative to the size of primary structures.  | CDD, CE, PB                          | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                     | <a href="#">ADU Guide - Yarmouth ME</a>   |
| 5.3*                            | 4          | Program               | Consider establishing a subcommittee of the Community Development Advisory Committee to focus on housing policy.   | CDD, CDAC                            | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                     |   |
| 5.4*                            | 4,6        | Strategic Partnership | Continue to support and leverage resources of GPCOG and other regional organizations and coordinate with other municipalities to address housing needs of the region.  | BSB, CDD                             | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  | CEDS                |   |
| 5.5*                            | 4          | Regulatory Change     | Designate a location(s) in suitable areas where mobile home parks are allowed pursuant to 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358(3)(M).   | CDD, CE, PB                          | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                     |   |
| 5.6                             | 4          | Program               | Evaluate the feasibility of a housing trust to establish sources of funding for affordable housing initiatives.  | BSB, CDD, CDAC                       | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     | <a href="#">Home - Champlain Housing Trust</a>  |
| 5.7                             | 4          | Strategic Partnership | Evaluate options for public/private partnerships to support affordable housing opportunities including using vacant and underused public land for affordable housing development.  | BSB, TM                              | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     | <a href="#">55 WESTON AVE</a>   |
| 5.8*                            | 4          | Regulatory Change     | Consider revisions to the Town's Land Use Ordinances to implement a requirement and/or provide incentives for the development of affordable housing with a goal of at least 1 of every 10 units constructed be affordable (e.g., density bonus, inclusionary zoning).  | CDD, CDAC, PB                        | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">Newcastle Affordable Housing Project</a>  |
| 5.9                             | 1,4,14, 15 | Strategic Partnership | In partnerships with local groups and organizations, explore opportunities and incentives for adaptive reuse and redevelopment of properties into affordable housing (e.g., churches, old hotels or lodges, municipal buildings, etc.), including zoning code relief, financial incentives, and educational materials on the benefits of adaptive reuse and historic preservation. | CDD, CDAC, PB                        | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                     |   |
| 5.10                            | 4,5        | Regulatory Change     | Develop a balanced approach to managing short-term rentals, including a system to track and monitor STRs, and consider ways to support the maintenance and development of long-term housing options while allowing for short-term rentals.   | CDAC, PB, CDD, BSB                   | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">South Portland, ME</a>  |
| 5.11                            | 4          | Strategic Partnership | Coordinate with design professionals and lending institutions to develop education, training, and resources to support small-scale developers.   | CDD, CDAC                            | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                     | <a href="#">IncDev Alliance</a>   |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

## Implementation Actions: Housing

| No.  | Goal(s) | Action Type            | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study | Best Practice/ Examples                               |
|------|---------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|---|
| 5.12 | 4       | Other Town Initiatives | Develop a guide and resources to support property owners in constructing an ADU.  | CDD, CE, PB                          | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                     | <a href="#">ADU Guide - Yarmouth ME</a>               |
| 5.13 | 1,4     | Regulatory Change      | Consider revising land use regulations to allow for cottage court or pocket neighborhood style development in growth areas, to support small-scale housing development. | CDD, CE, PB                          | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     | <a href="#">Cottage Court Overlay   City of Keene</a> |

# Recreation and Open Space

## Key Findings

### Recreation Facilities

-  Harmon Field
-  Ham Complex
-  Public Ice Rink
-  Town Hall Gym
-  Bridgton Skate Park

### Town Parks

-  Pondicherry Park
- Shorey Park
- Town Common
- Farragut Memorial Park

### Open Space Preserves

-  Bald Pate Preserve
- Pleasant Mountain Preserve
- Holt Pond Preserve

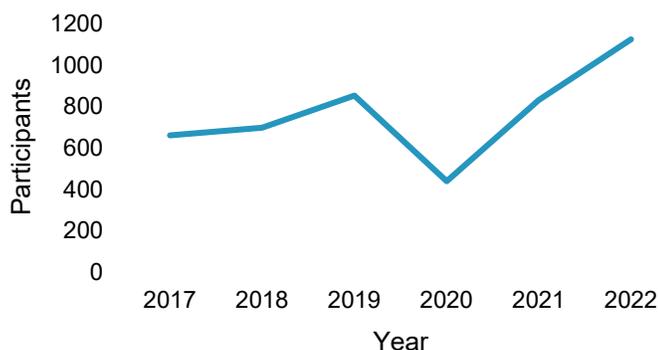
### Bridgton Recreation Department

-  Enrichment Programs
-  Community Programs
-  Events
-  Facilities
-  Athletics
-  Administration

### Aquatic Recreation and Water Access

- Salmon Point Beach and Campground
- Woods Pond Beach and Boat Launch
- Highland Lake Beach and Boat Launch
- Sabatis Island Day Use Area

### Recreation Department Program Participation



Includes soccer, basketball, swimming, enrichment programs, baseball/softball, lacrosse, adult/family trips, and after school programs



More than 90 miles of trails



70 – 80 Rec Dept. volunteers per year



30 miles of cross-country ski trails



40 miles of snow mobile trails

Sources: Bridgton Recreation Department, Bridgton Open Space Plan Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

# Recreation and Open Space

## Challenges and Opportunities

Bridgton has been committed to supporting outdoor recreation opportunities and helping to ensure that residents and visitors have access to parks, trails, and open space. In 2023, the Town developed an open space plan to assess progress on open space initiatives and guide future efforts to improve access to open space. The Town's 2023 Open Space Plan identified three primary goals:

1. Protect and preserve open spaces to safeguard critical habitat areas and wildlife movement corridors
2. Connect open spaces and trail network for multi-modal use
3. Activate open space resources to allow for a diversity of uses and users to access recreation opportunities

The goals of this Plan cover a broader range of community challenges but still align with the Town's Open Space Plan's goals. This Plan recognizes the ecological importance of open space and natural areas and their value in supporting health and well-being and contributing to a sustainable economy. Balancing these interests while continuing to be proactive in preventing long-term harm or irreversible damage to open spaces, lakes and rivers, and habitat areas is a top priority for the Bridgton community.

Bridgton residents and community members value the access to outdoor recreation in Town. Bridgton's lakes, mountains, and open spaces offer recreation opportunities for every season, including skiing, snowmobiling, hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, camping, and swimming. Maintaining and enhancing open space for recreational use is a priority, including maintaining and expanding the trail system and creating ADA accessible facilities, such as the trail in Pondicherry Park. Partnerships with conservation organizations, recreation clubs, and the private sector, including Pleasant Mountain Ski Area and the Town's summer camps, are also a key component to supporting recreation access. The quality and diversity of recreational amenities help to make Bridgton a desirable place to live and visit and are central to the Town's economy and the well-being of residents.

While outdoor recreation is central to the Town's tourism economy, the Town's Recreation Department provides critical services, programs, and events for residents of Bridgton and surrounding communities. Sports programs and child care provide a vital service for families. Year-round events and activities also foster a sense of community. Since 2020, the Department has seen an increase in participation in programs and activities, indicating a need for expanded facilities and additional resources to support this growing demand.

Efforts to support and sustain recreation amenities and open spaces span multiple organizations, government entities, community groups, and the private sector. Continued communication and coordination on maintenance, programming, and expanding and connecting facilities will support a thriving recreation economy and high quality of life for residents.



*Town of Bridgton Public Ice Rink*

# Recreation and Open Space

## Related Goals



## Community Feedback

The top response for what type of development and amenities Bridgton should focus on was “parks/community spaces”. For positive changes, respondents noted improvements in recreation facilities and programming (94 responses) as well as improved walkability (47), and access to natural areas and open space (25). While respondents noted these improvements, some also indicated a desire for continued improvement in these areas. For community facilities or services to be expanded Recreation was also by far the top comment with 137 respondents wanting to see expanded programming and/or facilities. When asked what changes would have the greatest positive impact on quality of life, 248 respondents selected “better infrastructure for walking and biking” and 208 selected “more and improved recreation facilities and programs”.

### POSTIVE CHANGES

- “Maintenance and increase of accessibility to trails in Pondicherry Park.”
- “Improvement of open spaces, walking trails close to town”
- “Continued focus on outdoor recreation - trails, open spaces, outdoor activities.”
- “Improvements to Pleasant Mountain ski resort.”
- “tremendous improvements and enhancements with the recreation program! It has been a huge benefit to our community, especially the programs for children!”

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

- “Way too much building homes (and losing open spaces) and too much commercial development”
- “Some trails neglected (Stevens Brook).”
- “I am concerned this area [State designated significant natural habitat area] will continue to be exploited for natural resources affecting wildlife and habitat.”
- “The lack of publicly maintained biking/walking/jogging trails is a missed opportunity.”
- “less access to lake and snowmobile trails”

- Community survey respondents

# Recreation and Open Space

## Implementation Actions: Recreation and Open Space

| No.  | Goal(s)      | Action Type            | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study                  | Best Practice/ Examples   |
|------|--------------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------|---|
| 6.1* | 7,8,11       | Other Town Initiatives | Continue to maintain and increase public access to the lakes for boating, fishing, and swimming while continuing to protect water quality, including creating new water access points and facilities for different types of recreational users, and working with nearby property owners to address concerns.            | PSD, BSB                             | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   | Open Space Plan                      |   |
| 6.2  | 8,10,16, 17  | Strategic Partnership  | Work with relevant boards, committees, neighboring communities, and private partners to plan for future regional recreation needs, including trail network expansion and maintenance, parks maintenance, accessibility upgrades, and shared recreation resources between communities.                                   | PSD, REC, CDD, BSB                   | \$              | Hard                      | Ongoing  | Open Space Plan                      | <a href="#">Portland Trails Trail Resilience Fund</a>             |
| 6.3* | 2,3,16,17    | Strategic Partnership  | Work with Loon Echo Land Trust, Lakes Environmental Association, and other conservation organizations to pursue opportunities to protect important open space or recreational land and improve trail connectivity through easements and land acquisition.   | PSD, REC, CDD, BSB, LELE, LEA        | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  | Open Space Plan                      | <a href="#">Ellsworth Bicycle/Pedestrian Connectivity Project</a> |
| 6.4* | 16           | Other Town Initiatives | Work with landowners to allow public recreational access on their property, including educational materials like the Maine's landowner liability law regarding recreational or harvesting use.  | CDD, LELE, LEA, BSB, TM              | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                                      | <a href="#">State of Maine Current Tax Use Programs</a>           |
| 6.5  | 2,3,8,11, 16 | Public Investment      | Support the goals and vision of the Open Space Committee including implementation of the 2023 Bridgton Open Space Plan.   | PSD, REC, CDD, BSB, TM, LELE, LEA    | \$\$\$          | Hard                      | Long     | Open Space Plan                      |   |
| 6.6  | 8,11         | Public Investment      | Support maintenance, improvements, and expansion of the Ham Recreation Complex.   | PSD, REC, CDD, BSB, TM               | \$\$\$          | Hard                      | Long     | Open Space Plan                      |   |
| 6.7  | 8,11         | Program                | Continue to support youth access to recreation and continue to provide programming for community members of all ages.   | REC, BCC                             | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                                      |   |
| 6.8  | 8,10,16      | Public Investment      | As the Town plans for parks and trails improvements and renovations, ensure that trails and parks structures are accessible to all members of the community in accordance with the goals of the 2023 Bridgton Open Space Plan.  | PSD, REC, BSB                        | \$\$            | Easy                      | Ongoing  | Open Space Plan                      | <a href="#">Building Accessible Trails</a>                        |
| 6.9  | 7,8,17       | Strategic Partnership  | Partner with local organizations to promote opportunities for year-round recreation and opportunities to connect residents and visitors to existing clubs and groups in Bridgton. Work with Pleasant Mountain and Bridgton Academy to support additional recreation opportunities and facilities use for the community. | REC, BCC, BA, PM                     | \$              | Medium                    | Short    | Open Space Plan<br>Economic Analysis |   |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

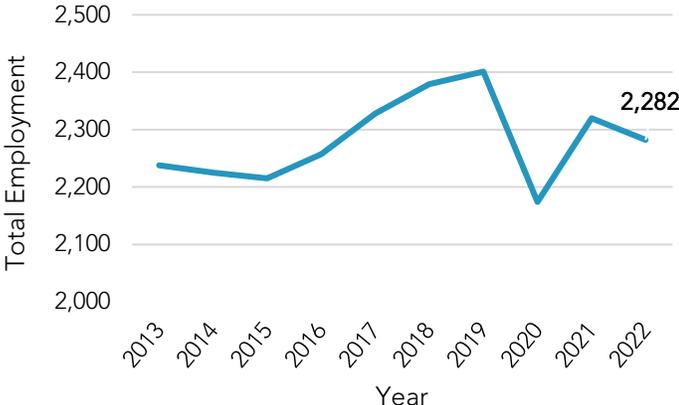
# Recreation and Open Space

## Implementation Actions: Recreation and Open Space

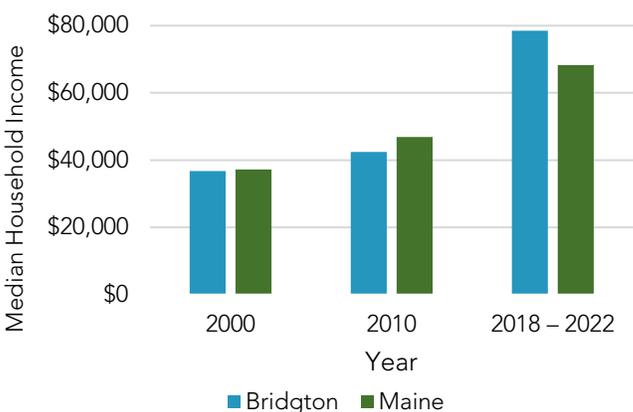
| No.  | Goal(s)  | Action Type            | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study | Best Practice/ Examples  |
|------|----------|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------|--|
| 6.10 | 2,16     | Public Investment      | Coordinate park and open space planning with stormwater quantity and quality management planning.  | REC, PSD, PB                         | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                     |  |
| 6.11 | 8,11     | Public Investment      | Maintain and upgrade existing recreational facilities to meet current needs and plan for anticipated future needs including conducting a feasibility study for the development of a recreation center and community center.  | SB, REC, CDAC, CDD                   | \$\$\$          | Medium                    | Ongoing  | Economic Analysis   | <a href="#">Scarborough Parks and Facilities Master Plan</a>                         |
| 6.12 | 5,7,8,16 | Other Town Initiatives | Consider ways to expand the Town's recreation and tourism economy in coordination with the State's outdoor recreation economy goals, including investigating new trends in outdoor recreation and focusing on access to and preservation of recreational amenities, including Town parks and trails. | CDD, REC, PSD, PM                    | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                     | <a href="#">Recreation Economy for Rural Communities</a><br><a href="#">  US EPA</a> |

## Key Findings

### Bridgton Total Employment



### Median Household Income



### Labor Force Top Growth Sectors

(percent change from 2013 to 2023)



Real Estate and Rental Leasing: 127%



Wholesale trade: 73%

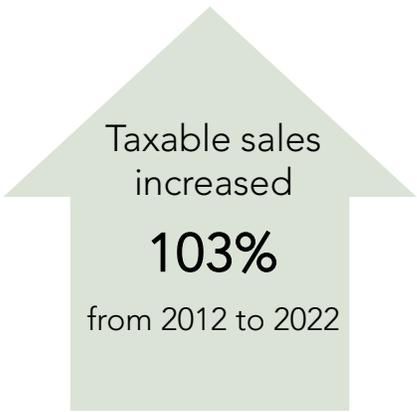
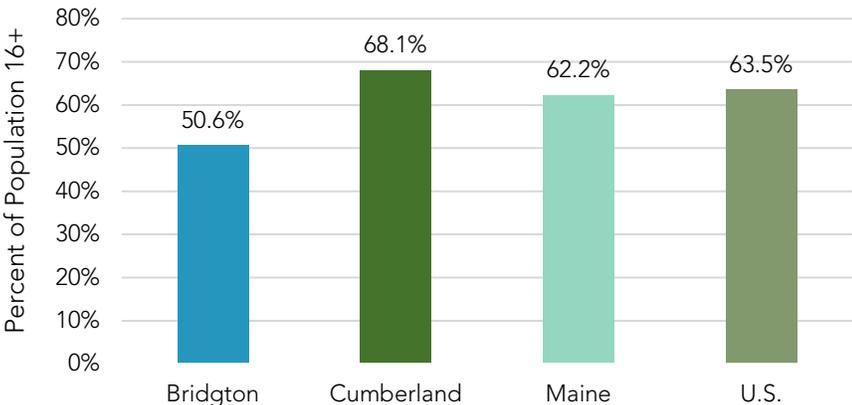


Construction: 55%

### Bridgton's Top Employment Sectors

1. Healthcare and Social Assistance (543)
2. Retail Trade (413)
3. Accommodation and Food Services (291)

### Labor Force Participation Rate\*



Sources: ACS 5-year estimates, Maine Revenue Service, Maine Department of Labor

Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

\*Labor force participation rate is the percentage of the population (age 16+) that is employed or seeking employment.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Most issues addressed in this Plan have a direct impact on the health and resiliency of the Town's economy, including protection of the lakes and open spaces, the availability and affordability of housing, and access to recreational and cultural amenities. Bridgton's quaint downtown, recreation amenities, and natural beauty have continued to draw visitors and new residents. Bridgton's natural beauty, outdoor recreation opportunities, and distinction as a tourist destination have, to some extent, insulated the Town from the economic downturn that other mill towns have experienced as manufacturing industries declined since the mid-20th century. In 2023, Maine had one of the strongest outdoor recreation economies, as a percentage of the State's gross domestic product.<sup>11</sup> Continuing to support year-round tourism, while also benefiting year-round residents, will be important to maintaining a sustainable economy. In addition, providing amenities and resources for residents, such as housing, recreation facilities, and public services will continue to attract new residents and grow the workforce.

Current economic development trends, which focus on quality-of-life improvements, rather than large-scale business attraction, are especially appropriate for Bridgton, which prides itself on the small-town character and walkability of the downtown. Recent infrastructure improvements including a new wastewater treatment system and streetscape improvements will expand growth opportunities in the downtown and have also helped to make downtown Bridgton a more desirable place to visit.

Many residents have expressed concern about the type and scale of commercial development along Route 302. At the same time, many community members have been pleased to see the downtown development bringing a greater variety of businesses and would like to see this downtown revitalization continue. This concentration of businesses in the downtown provides dining, entertainment, and retail options in a walkable environment that attracts visitors and encourages residents to stay in Bridgton rather than traveling to another community for these amenities and services. A vibrant downtown with more housing options and a broad array of businesses will help increase economic activity outside of seasonal peaks.

Commercial growth is necessary to leverage economic opportunity from tourism and address the needs of residents. It also contributes to the tax base, relieving the burden on residential property owners. By continuing to encourage the type of small-scale business development in the downtown and targeted industry development in designated areas (e.g., healthcare services adjacent to Bridgton Hospital), the Town can build a strong and diverse tax base while enhancing the small-town character and sense of community that is a top priority for residents.

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. "Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account, U.S. and States, 2023." U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Accessed January 20, 2025. <https://www.bea.gov/news/2024/outdoor-recreation-satellite-account-us-and-states-2023>

## Related Goals

|   |   |   |  |   |
|---|---|---|--|---|
| <br>RESPECT<br>SMALL-TOWN<br>CHARACTER | <br>PROMOTE<br>HOUSING                         | <br>SUPPORT THE<br>ECONOMY       | <br>STRENGTHEN<br>FISCAL CAPACITY   | <br>ENHANCE<br>QUALITY-OF-LIFE |
| <br>ADDRESS HEALTH<br>AND WELL-BEING   | <br>EXPAND<br>INFRASTRUCTURE<br>AND FACILITIES | <br>SUPPORT FARMS<br>AND FORESTS | <br>CREATE A<br>VIBRANT<br>DOWNTOWN | <br>BUILD<br>PARTNERSHIPS      |

## Community Feedback

More than half of those who provided a response noted that development and revitalization of downtown as a positive change. Similarly, 104 respondents noted the positive impact of the addition of new small businesses. Others have noted that growth (53) and corridor development (90) as having an adverse impact on the community, with some noting the potential economic impact of the loss of Bridgton’s small-town character as a result of growth. When asked what changes would have the greatest positive impact on quality of life, the top response was “more restaurants, shops, and entertainment amenities in downtown” with 267 respondents, and “lower cost of living” was the fourth most popular response (226).

### POSTIVE CHANGES

- “There are many more businesses and reasons to come into the town.”
- “The lakes, downtown and ski area make it an incredible location. Encouraging continued, but quaint development provides an opportunity to create a destination location rivaling few areas in New England.”
- “Bridgton's downtown is thriving compared to 10 years ago.”
- “Good balance of commercial and retail to provide for year-round/seasonal residents.”

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

- “Too much growth too fast. Bridgton is slowly losing its small town Maine appeal”
- “Too many chain stores and sprawl along 302.”
- “Too many closed storefronts.”
- “Too many marijuana stores.”

- Community survey respondents

## Implementation Actions: Economy

| No.  | Goal(s) | Action Type            | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study             | Best Practice/ Examples  |
|------|---------|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|--|
| 7.1* | 5,6     | Other Town Initiatives | Provide financial support and resources to the Community Development Department and Community Development Advisory Committee, and support partnerships with community and regional organizations, such as the Bridgton Chamber of Commerce and GPCOG, to advance economic development initiatives.     | BSB                                  | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                                 | <a href="#">Central Maine Growth Council</a>                                 |
| 7.2* | 5,6     | Strategic Partnership  | Continue work with GPCOG and surrounding communities and participate in regional economic development planning efforts.  | CDD, GPCOG                           | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  | CEDS                            | <a href="#">Resilient Region</a>   |
| 7.3  | 5,14,15 | Other Town Initiatives | Support the redevelopment and occupancy of existing structures and vacant storefronts in the downtown through tax increment financing, Community Development Block Grant funds, or other redevelopment incentives.   | CDD, GPCOG                           | \$\$            | Hard                      | Medium   |                                 | <a href="#">Funding Opportunity: Planning and Local Technical Assistance</a> |
| 7.4  | 6       | Public Investment      | Consider opportunities for innovative use of tax acquired properties to support community needs.   | CDAC                                 | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                                 | <a href="#">Dexter revising town-owned property ordinance</a>                |
| 7.5  | 5,6     | Other Town Initiatives | Consider incentives to encourage redevelopment and upkeep of existing structures and vacant properties.  | CE                                   | \$\$            | Hard                      | Medium   |                                 | <a href="#">Available Properties (sacomaine.org)</a>                         |
| 7.6* | 5,12    | Other Town Initiatives | Include agriculture, commercial forestry operations, and land conservation in local or regional economic development plans.  | CDD                                  | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                                 | <a href="#">Voluntary TDR Program – Scarborough, Maine</a>                   |
| 7.7  | 5,7     | Strategic Partnership  | Partner with major employers and Live + Work in Maine to develop resources and materials to market the Town to prospective employees and provide support for those relocating to the region for employment.  | GBCC                                 | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    | ME ED Strategy                  | <a href="#">Live Here. Work Here. Thrive Here. - Discover Mansfield</a>      |
| 7.8  | 5,7     | Other Town Initiatives | Explore ways to expand access to quality, affordable child care, such as support for innovative childcare models like cooperative services, a revolving loan fund supporting local childcare operations, and technical guidance for new business development to support local childcare entrepreneurs. | PSD, CDD                             | \$\$            | Hard                      | Medium   | ME ED Strategy                  | <a href="#">Pre-K Expansion Grants (2021-2024)   Department of Education</a> |
| 7.9  | 5,8,17  | Strategic Partnership  | Continue to strengthen partnerships between the educational institutions and the business and nonprofit community to support educational and workforce development initiatives and align training and certification opportunities with the needs of the business community.                            | GBCC, CDD                            | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  | ME Won't Wait<br>ME ED Strategy | <a href="#">Northeastern Workforce Development Board</a>                     |
| 7.10 | 5,7,8   | Strategic Partnership  | Continue to support efforts to expand the Town's broadband network and work with regional partners and service providers, as necessary, to increase broadband access.  | PSD, CDD                             | \$\$\$          | Hard                      | Ongoing  | Maine Won't Wait; CEDS          | <a href="#">Town of Islesboro: Islesboro Municipal Broadband</a>             |
| 7.11 | 5       | Other Town Initiative  | Identify and define appropriate industrial uses and promote the availability of properties zoned for industrial use to attract and support expansion of businesses in appropriate locations and at a scale that is appropriate for the Town.   | GBCC, CDD                            | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   | CEDS                            | <a href="#">Waldoboro Business Park</a>                                      |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

## Implementation Actions: Economy

| No.  | Goal(s)   | Action Type           | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study     | Best Practice/ Examples   |
|------|-----------|-----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------------|---|
| 7.12 | 5         | Other Town Initiative | Research the potential for development of a flex-space business park on a larger industrially-zoned parcel with utilities.   | CDD, PSD                             | \$\$            | Hard                      | Long     | Economic Analysis       | <a href="#">FirstPark - The premier business park in Maine</a>            |
| 7.13 | 5,17      | Strategic Partnership | Work with Maine DECD, Greater Bridgton Chamber of Commerce, and GPCOG to provide support to existing businesses including technical assistance and financial resources.  | CDAC, CDD, GPCOG, GBCC               | \$\$            | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                         | <a href="#">Northern Maine   SCORE</a>                                    |
| 7.14 | 5,7,12    | Strategic Partnership | Connect to the craft food and beverage economy in the region and promote food economy opportunities, including supporting market access for local agricultural products and allowing and encouraging small-scale food and beverage manufacturing and food production uses in growth areas.   | GBCC, CDD                            | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    | Economic Analysis       | <a href="#">Portland Food Map</a>   |
| 7.15 | 5,6       | Other Town Initiative | Facilitate access to capital, financing, technical assistance, and incentives for small-scale development projects and business startups or expansions to promote entrepreneurship and business ownership.   | CDD, GBCC                            | \$              | Hard                      | Short    |                         | <a href="#">Maine Small Business Advising &amp; Training   Maine SBDC</a> |
| 7.16 | 5,6       | Program               | Encourage local procurement policies and buy-local campaigns to support the resilience of the local economy, reduce dependency on external markets, and strengthen supply chains.  | GBCC, CDAC                           | \$              | Hard                      | Medium   |                         | <a href="#">Portland Buy Local - Our Organization</a>                     |
| 7.17 | 5,7,14,17 | Other Town Initiative | Develop a comprehensive marketing campaign to promote Bridgton as a destination for shopping, dining, recreation, and entertainment to attract visitors year-round. A marketing campaign should include: (1) print materials to promote businesses and recreational assets; (2) promotional video(s); (3) targeted marketing initiatives; (4) special events; (5) promotional initiatives in coordination with businesses and organizations; and (6) enhanced and updated online and social media content. | CDD, GBCC                            | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    | Economic Analysis; CEDS | <a href="#">Town of Bucksport, Maine</a>                                  |
| 7.18 | 5,7,14    | Strategic Partnership | Work with the Maine Development Foundation and Main Street Maine program to receive national accreditation from Main Street America to support historic preservation and economic development initiatives in Bridgton to enhance downtown as a destination.  | CDD, CDAC                            | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    | Economic Analysis       | <a href="#">Design   Main Street America</a>                              |

# Transportation and Mobility

## Key Findings

In Bridgton there are...

111

miles of roads  
(State and Town-owned)

76

miles of Town-  
owned roads

18

bridges

90+

miles of trails

### Recent sidewalk projects:

- Oak Street (2022)
- Highland Beach (2023)
- Elm Street (2023)
- Church Street (expected 2025)



\$500,000

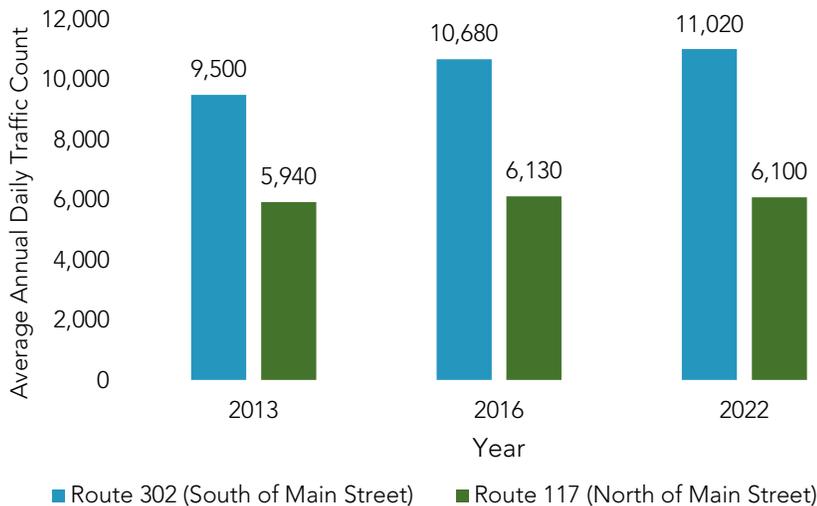
FY23 Town Budget for  
Road Repaving

6



Lakes Region Explorer Stops  
from Bridgton to Portland

### Traffic Volume Over Time



Automobile Crashes  
increased from  
**127** in 2021 to  
**157** in 2022.

Sources: Maine Department of Transportation, Lake Region Explorer, Town of Bridgton  
Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

# Transportation and Mobility

## Challenges and Opportunities

As a small town, Bridgton’s transportation options are limited. Still, improving walkability and access to public transit or other forms of transportation besides private vehicles is important to community members. While most residents, and approximately 93% of community survey respondents, noted they mostly or exclusively drive for transportation, many community members have indicated a desire to have more transportation options including improved walkability in and around the downtown.

Road maintenance and traffic along the Route 302 corridor are both concerns for Bridgton residents. The actions in this Plan focus on guiding development in a way that is transportation-efficient, to minimize infrastructure maintenance costs, improve connectivity, and facilitate movement within, to, and from Bridgton.

While alternative transportation options are limited, incremental changes to improve the Town and region’s transportation network will help to move the community in the direction of greater equity, access, and connectivity. While most residents drive for transportation, some are unable to drive or do not have access to a vehicle. Creating housing options in walkable areas, improving pedestrian connections and safety, and supporting transportation provides like the Lakes Region Explorer will all contribute to improving equity for non-drivers. There is also a strong connection between public health and neighborhood walkability.

Patterns of development have a major impact on transportation and access. In addition to improving walkability, denser development in the downtown and surrounding areas can also increase the feasibility of other transportation initiatives, including creating bicycle infrastructure, investing in regional transportation, and reducing vehicle trips by encouraging a “park once” initiative. Recent infrastructure investments have improved walkability of downtown Bridgton. Additional improvements such as traffic calming measures, wayfinding signage, crosswalks, and connections to open space can improve pedestrian safety and make areas more desirable places to walk.



*Intersection of Main Street and Route 117, looking south*

# Transportation and Mobility

## Related Goals



## Community Feedback

Forty-seven survey respondents noted increased walkability as a positive change. While 357 (55%) of respondents exclusively drive to get around the community, 248 respondents mostly drive but also walk, bike, or use public transit. Regarding changing transportation needs, 220 respondents indicated that they would like the ability to walk or bike to services and amenities in Bridgton, 90 indicated that they will likely need to walk, take transit, or use a ride share service to access parts of the Town, 119 respondents would like increased public transportation options, and 154 would like increased ride share or other shared mobility options.

### POSTIVE CHANGES

"increased access to walking trails and outdoor spaces"

"Improvements in walking trails to accommodate people with mobility issues."

"Sidewalks improved, lighting improved, downtown's upgrade is appropriate and pleasant."

"having the Lakes Region Explorer bus is amazing"

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

"Dangerous and constant traffic flow of large trucks such as tankers and logging through the center of town day and night."

"Deteriorating roads along with more traffic"

"Increase in traffic, and not having walking area, it is unsafe for pedestrians to walk up/down Willet Rd. Many on south high have no options but to walk up/down just to pic up groceries."

"The lack of publicly maintained biking/walking/jogging trails is a missed opportunity."

- Community survey respondents

# Transportation and Mobility

## Implementation Actions: Transportation and Mobility

| No.  | Goal(s)          | Action Type            | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study             | Best Practice/ Examples  |
|------|------------------|------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------------------------|--|
| 8.1* | 1,6,11           | Other Town Initiatives | Promote fiscal prudence by maximizing the efficiency of the Town's state or state-aid highway networks.   | BSB, PSD                             | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                                 |  |
| 8.2* | 1,6,11           | Public Investment      | Continue to update a prioritized improvement, maintenance, and repair plan for the Town's transportation network to improve safety and efficiency for all users.  | BSB, PSD                             | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                                 | <a href="#">LPA Homepage   MaineDOT</a>  |
| 8.3* | 1,10             | Regulatory Change      | Maintain and 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. | ORC, PB, BSB, CDD, PSD               | \$              | Easy                      | Ongoing  |                                 |  |
| 8.4* | 1                | Regulatory Change      | Review and amend standards for subdivisions and for public and private roads as appropriate to foster transportation-efficient growth patterns, minimize new public infrastructure to be maintained, and provide for future street and transit connections.   | PB, CDD                              | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                                 | <a href="#">Resources for Your Community - GrowSmart Maine</a>                             |
| 8.5* | 1,10,11,14<br>17 | Strategic Partnership  | Work with the Lakes Region Explorer, other transportation providers, surrounding municipalities, regional groups, Maine DOT, and employers to improve and expand transit options (including bus service, ride sharing, and on-demand transit) to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors.  | TM, BSB, CDD                         | \$\$            | Hard                      | Medium   | ME Won't Wait<br>ME ED Strategy | <a href="#">An Active Roadmap: Best Practices in Rural Mobility - Smart Growth America</a> |
| 8.6  | 1,10,11,14       | Strategic Partnership  | Identify opportunities for enhanced connectivity between neighboring communities and regional centers like Portland, Windham, Norway, and Fryeburg.   | TM, BSB, CDD                         | \$\$            | Hard                      | Long     |                                 | <a href="#">Lewiston / Auburn Region Metropolitan Transportation Plan</a>                  |
| 8.7  | 1,8,10,11,<br>14 | Other Town Initiatives | Promote "park once" initiatives and strategies to reduce in-town vehicle trips, including adequate public parking, signage, safe pedestrian connections among commercial areas, and creating a public parking map.  | CDD, CDAC                            | \$\$            | Easy                      | Short    | ME Won't Wait                   | <a href="#">Creating a "Park Once" District - MAPC</a>                                     |
| 8.8  | 1,8,10,11,<br>14 | Public Investment      | Ensure that residential areas and new developments adjacent to downtown and commercial areas have appropriate bicycle and pedestrian connections.   | PB, CDD, PSD                         | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                                 | <a href="#">IMAGINE Main Street   Nashua, NH</a>   |
| 8.9  | 1,8,10,11,<br>14 | Regulatory Change      | Consider 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.  | PB, CDD, CDAC                        | \$              | Easy                      | Short    | ME Won't Wait                   | <a href="#">Biddeford Saco Transit Oriented Development Plan   GPCOG, ME</a>               |
| 8.10 | 1,8,10,11,<br>14 | Public Investment      | Work with local, regional, and state partners to conduct a Route 302 corridor study for the inner and outer 302 corridor to create a multi-modal corridor that would improve accessibility, improve vehicular and pedestrian safety and circulation, and enhance aesthetics of the corridor.  | BSB, TM, CDD, PSD, GPCOG, MDOT       | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   | Economic Analysis               | <a href="#">Route 1 Corridor Study   Wells, ME</a>   |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

# Transportation and Mobility

## Implementation Actions: Transportation and Mobility

| No.  | Goal(s)             | Action Type          | Action Items  | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/ Study                     | Best Practice/ Examples   |
|------|---------------------|----------------------|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|---|---|
| 8.11 | 1,8,10,11,<br>14,16 | Public<br>Investment | Evaluate safety and continuity of pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure (e.g., sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes, shared-use paths) and expand and improve infrastructure to promote active transportation, create safer walkable areas, and connect open spaces and amenities. | PB, CDD, PSD                         | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |   | <a href="#">Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan – Kittery, ME</a>                                    |
| 8.12 | 1,8,10,11,<br>14    | Public<br>Investment | Implement traffic calming measures, speed reduction strategies, and intersection improvements to enhance road safety, reduce congestion, and improve traffic flow.  | PSD, CDD, PB                         | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |   | <a href="#">Yarmouth Adopts Traffic Calming Toolbox</a>   |
| 8.13 | 1,8,10,11,<br>14    | Public<br>Investment | Invest in wayfinding signage, bike racks, and bike lanes to support active transportation and promote downtown as a bike-friendly and walkable destination for residents and visitors.  | BSB, TM, CDD                         | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    | Open Space Plan<br>Economic<br>Analysis | <a href="#">Millinocket Invests in Visitor Experience with New Signage - Northern Forest Center</a> |

# Public Services and Fiscal Capacity

## Key Findings



27 Town-owned facilities



30,500 feet of sewer lines and sewer pipes



Water provided through Bridgton and Harrison Water Districts



6,500 annual calls for police services\*



1,000 annual calls for fire services\*



2,061.2 tons of hauled waste from Transfer Station

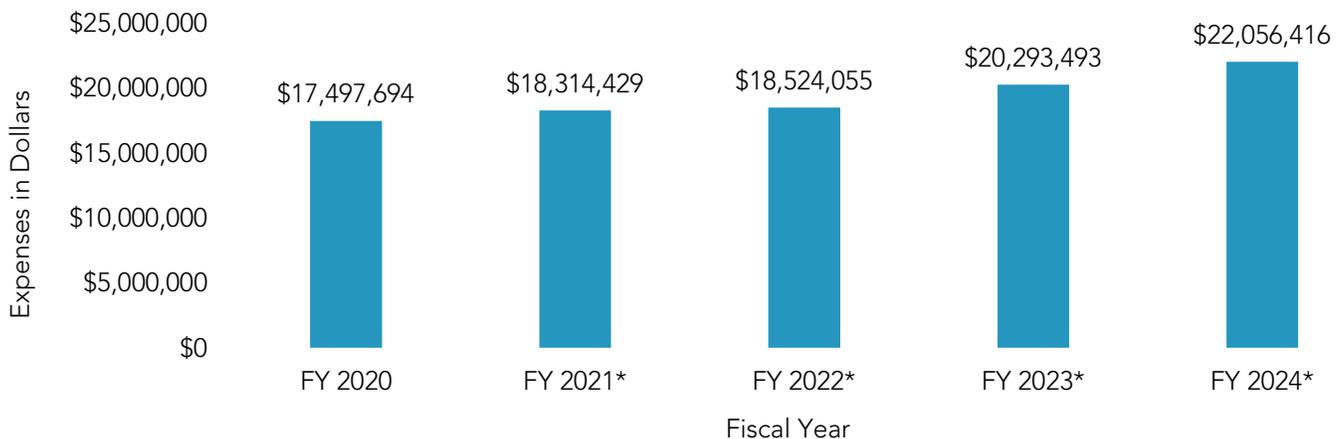
## Major Revenue Sources

1. Property Taxes
2. Excise Taxes
3. Grants
4. Charges for Services
5. Operation/Capital Grants

5  
Municipal and  
Non-Municipal  
Boards

9  
Committees

## Annual Expenses



Sources: Town of Bridgton

\*Estimated annual values

Note: For more detailed information, see Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis

# Public Services and Fiscal Capacity

## Challenges and Opportunities

As costs to provide public services continue to rise, smaller communities are especially challenged to maintain the level of service without increasing the tax burden for property owners. Like many small towns in Maine, Bridgton has aging facilities in need of repair or replacement. Planning for future capital needs is an important component to comprehensive planning. Identifying funding for larger capital projects and routine maintenance is an ongoing challenge that will require creative solutions. Implementing technology to improve efficiency of Town operations and increasing or creating new revenue streams from fees for services could incrementally improve funding. Still, broader initiatives like cost-sharing with other municipalities and considerations of how economic growth will impact the Town's financial position will be critical for long-term fiscal sustainability of the Town.

The implementation of other sections of this Plan will have a significant impact on the Town's fiscal capacity. Recent investments in downtown infrastructure have created capacity for new development. Land use actions will encourage the type and location of growth that will expand the tax base without drastically increasing costs for Town services and infrastructure maintenance. Investments in recreation facilities, arts and cultural amenities, housing, community services, and transportation will all contribute to making Bridgton a desirable place to live and visit, supporting the Town's economy and workforce.

In addition to the typical costs of maintaining assets, providing administrative services, and providing programming, the Town has newer challenges and priorities to be addressed through this Plan, including infrastructure resiliency, ADA accessibility, and leveraging technology. Resiliency measures and emergency planning have initial costs but could save the Town and property owners significantly in the long run and protect the lives and property of community members in the event of a natural disaster. Accessibility improvements include physical access to facilities and access to Town services, online resources, and other programs, such as enrichment and recreation opportunities. In addition to improving equity, addressing accessibility for all residents and visitors will be increasingly important as the community continues to age.

Technology can assist with access to services and participation in community meetings and events, and it can also help to increase efficiency in operations and improve transparency.

In implementing this plan, it is important to consider the cost of actions; however, the Town should consider the long-term return on investment for each initiative as well as the collective benefit of actions that will all contribute to a stronger future for Bridgton. This Plan identifies areas to invest in Town services, facilities, and programs to enhance the quality of life in Bridgton to support sustainable growth and address the needs of residents.



*Bridgton Town Hall*

# Public Services and Fiscal Capacity

## Related Goals



## Community Feedback

Regarding Town services, several respondents (94) noted recreation improvements as a positive change, and 32 respondents referenced the wastewater system improvements. Road maintenance (35 respondents) and traffic congestion (26 respondents) were cited as negative changes in the last 10 years; however, 352 respondents rated the Town's maintenance of roads, sidewalks and other infrastructure as "Excellent" or "Good". In rating other Town services, 515 respondents rated the Bridgton Public Library services as "Excellent" or "Good", 494 rated public safety as "Excellent" or "Good".

### POSTIVE CHANGES

"The expansion of the town wastewater/sewage system."

"The expansion of our Rec Dept. The access to our Community Center and Public Library."

"Town efforts to control spending"

"Investment in infrastructure. Investment in downtown. Greater sense of community. Good leadership."

"Road work and additional tree plantings. Town looks fabulous."

"We are very fortunate to have a professional police force."

- Community survey respondents

### CONCERNS

"Back roads, both private and public, seem to be deteriorating."

"Have seen decline with infrastructure i.e. roads, buildings, community services, and accessibility and Salmon Point access/space"

"Dump hours don't work for our visitors who come for weekends."

"The K-12 Lake Region School System is a problem and seems to be a barrier to people choosing to move here."

"Increased taxes"

"increase in crime"

- Community survey respondents

# Public Services and Fiscal Capacity

## Implementation Actions: Public Services and Fiscal Capacity

| No.  | Goal(s)    | Action Type            | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators   | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/Study | Best Practice/ Examples  |
|------|------------|------------------------|--|--|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| 9.1* | 1,11,14    | Public Investment      | Continue to evaluate capital improvements needed to maintain or expand Town services and infrastructure in existing areas and growth areas, directing at least 75% of municipal growth-related capital investments and public facilities in growth areas. Include needed capital investments in the Town's Capital Improvement Plan and finance existing facility maintenance and future facilities and services in a cost-effective manner, applying for grants where possible. | BSB, CDAC, PSD, TM, CDD, BFD, BPD, FIN | \$\$\$          | Hard                      | Ongoing  |                    |  |
| 9.2* | 11         | Public Investment      | Work with the Bridgton Water District to conduct an evaluation of the Town's current drinking water services and identify areas for water expansion or needed water protections. Develop a formal extension plan for both water and wastewater services. Continue to support the coordination between the Bridgton and Harrison Water District to provide clean water to Bridgton residents.   | BSB, BWD, TM, PSD                      | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |                    | <a href="#">Barnstable, MA Wastewater Management Plan</a>        |
| 9.3* | 6,11,17    | Strategic Partnership  | Explore options for regional delivery of local services and identify opportunities to work with neighboring communities to plan for and finance shared capital investments to increase cost savings and efficiencies.  | BSB, TM, FIN                           | \$              | Hard                      | Long     |                    |  |
| 9.4* | 1,11       | Other Town Initiatives | Track new development in the community by type and location. Consider tracking additional development data, including vacant buildings, to identify areas appropriate for redevelopment and investment.  | CE, CDD, PB                            | \$              | Medium                    | Short    |                    |  |
| 9.5  | 8,11       | Public Investment      | Evaluate public safety needs to support anticipated growth, including the need for a full-time staffed fire department and feasibility of a new public safety building, and consider regional opportunities to provide full-time Fire and EMS services.  | BSB, TM, BFD, BPD                      | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |                    | <a href="#">Falmouth, ME - Fire/EMS</a>                          |
| 9.6  | 8,11       | Program                | Continue to maintain an emergency management plan, establish an emergency shelter plan to support residents during emergencies, and coordinate with neighboring towns on emergency response planning.  | BFD, BPD, TM                           | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    | <a href="#">Maine Emergency Management Agency</a>                |
| 9.7  | 11         | Other Town Initiatives | Evaluate the organization and staffing of the Public Services and Recreation Departments and consider restructuring and adjusting staffing as appropriate to most efficiently address maintenance and programming needs for parks and public facilities.   | PSD, REC, BSB, TM                      | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |                    |  |
| 9.8  | 2,11       | Other Town Initiatives | Increase the capacity for the Code Enforcement Office to enforce land use regulations and further protect natural resources, and consider additional staffing needs to support code enforcement efforts.   | TM, BSB, CE                            | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |                    |  |
| 9.9  | 1,10,11,14 | Public Investment      | In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), create an ADA Transition Plan to assess the accessibility of the Town's services, including transportation infrastructure, Town facilities, programs, and other services; propose methods of increasing accessibility Town-wide; and develop an implementation plan to implement the proposed methods.   | BSB, TM, PSD                           | \$\$            | Easy                      | Medium   |                    | <a href="#">Biddeford, ME ADA Evaluation and Transition Plan</a> |

\*Indicates State requirement

Note: Items in blue indicate priority action items

# Public Services and Fiscal Capacity

## Implementation Actions: Public Services and Fiscal Capacity

| No.  | Goal(s)    | Action Type            | Action Items   | Responsible Agency/<br>Collaborators | Cost/ Resources | Ease of<br>Implementation | Timeline | Related Plan/Study | Best Practice/ Examples                                      |
|------|------------|------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|----------|--------------------|--|
| 9.10 | 11         | Public Investment      | Consider developing an analysis of the transfer station to improve efficiency and operation of the facility.   | BSB                                  | \$\$            | Easy                      | Medium   |                    |  |
| 9.11 | 9,13       | Program                | Develop an educational campaign and encourage initiatives to expand recycling and composting and reduce solid waste.   | BSB, RAC                             | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                    | <a href="#">Maine DEP: Solid Waste Management</a> ,          |
| 9.12 | 9,11       | Other Town Initiatives | Develop a communications plan to streamline municipal communications and use of technology and improve effectiveness and consistency of outreach to increase community engagement and transparency.                | TM, BSB, CDD                         | \$              | Easy                      | Short    |                    | <a href="#">Auburn, ME Communications Plan</a>               |
| 9.13 | 9,11       | Other Town Initiatives | Consider opportunities for implementing new technology to improve efficiency and transparency of municipal operations.   | TM                                   | \$\$            | Medium                    | Long     |                    |  |
| 9.14 | 11         | Public Investment      | Consider regional opportunities to provide full-time Fire and EMS services and other cost sharing opportunities including shared equipment and coordinated training.   | BPD, BFD, TM                         | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |                    |  |
| 9.15 | 11         | Public Investment      | Evaluate the structure of the relationship between the Town and Bridgton Water District and consider opportunities for increased collaboration.  | BSB, BWD, PSD                        | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                    |  |
| 9.16 | 1,10,11,14 | Regulatory Change      | Consider establishing development impact fees to support the increased costs to maintain and provide infrastructure and services associated with growth.   | BSB, CDD, CE, CDAC, PB               | \$              | Medium                    | Medium   |                    | <a href="#">Portland, ME Impact Fee Study</a>                |
| 9.17 | 11,13      | Other Town Initiatives | Consider opportunities and seek funding for energy efficiency upgrades to public facilities.   | BSB, PSD, TM                         | \$\$            | Medium                    | Medium   |                    |  |
| 9.18 | 8,11       | Other Town Initiatives | Continue to evaluate and adjust Town staffing and provide adequate training to all staff to meeting the changing needs of the community and to maintain a high level of public services, programs, and facilities. | BSB, TM                              | \$\$            | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    |  |
| 9.19 | 11,13      | Public Investment      | Implement improvements to increase resiliency of public facilities and infrastructure in coordination with planned improvements.   | BSB, TM, PSD                         | \$\$            | Medium                    | Ongoing  | ME Won't Wait      | <a href="#">Infrastructure Resilience Planning Framework</a> |
| 9.20 | 11,13,17   | Strategic Partnership  | Partner with neighboring towns and other organizations to seek funding for resiliency improvements and share information on resiliency initiatives, programs, and incentives for property owners.                  | BSB, TM                              | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    |  |
| 9.21 | 6          | Other Town Initiatives | Continue to leverage grant funding and explore opportunities to increase revenue to support Town goals.  | BSB, TM                              | \$              | Medium                    | Ongoing  |                    |  |
| 9.22 | 6          | Other Town Initiatives | Consider expanding grant writing and grant management capacity through the addition of grant writer or through partnership with other communities to share grant writing resources.                                | BSB, TM                              | \$\$            | Medium                    | Short    |                    |  |

# Regional Coordination

## The Importance of Collaboration

Bridgton is a small service center that provides residents and nearby communities with access to grocery stores, healthcare, retail and restaurants, recreation opportunities, jobs, and social services. Bridgton plays an important role in addressing regional priorities, including housing affordability, economic development, recreation, environmental and natural resource protection, health and safety, and transportation.

However, Bridgton alone cannot solve these challenges. It takes support and contributions from the Town, neighboring communities, local and regional agencies and service providers, and the State. There is significant opportunity to rethink how Bridgton approaches and addresses initiatives with a regional framework to support more financially sustainable outcomes and supplement staff capacity.

Working collaboratively with State and regional partners can help provide additional funding and technical support to meet the Town's needs and plan for larger investments. Topics like water quality and natural resource protection, public services and public health, recreation, housing, land use, and transportation can transcend municipal boundaries. Communities throughout the Lakes Region and along Bridgton's borders may have similar needs and priorities that could benefit Bridgton and other municipalities to approach together. Towns can also coordinate on larger, shared capital investments and public services, including the potential need for community and recreation space, environmental protection, fire and emergency services, and resiliency initiatives can support Bridgton and neighboring communities in reaching their goals while sharing the cost burden of significant capital projects.

Rethinking government systems at the regional level and supporting cooperation and coordination in regional planning and priorities can support a more financially sustainable future for Bridgton.



*Harmon Field*

## Natural Resource Protection

Natural resources are vital to the health and character of Bridgton and the Lakes Region. Preserving and protecting natural resources is one of the community's highest priorities. Looking ahead, Bridgton will continue to partner with the State, local environmental and conservation organizations, and neighboring communities to monitor, protect, and improve water quality and stabilize lake levels. This includes coordinating land use activities and zoning with neighboring communities, coordinating stormwater management and implementing best practices, and working with residents to promote sustainable land care practices to reduce erosion and runoff.

The Town has worked with Loon Echo Land Trust to preserve open space from development. Partnering with neighboring communities and regional land trusts to plan for conservation across municipal borders can further promote land conservation, reduce costs, and allow for habitat connectivity and recreation opportunities. Loon Echo Land Trust, the Town, and other community organizations have strong relationships with landowners. Working with targeted landowners to encourage the protection of land through conservation easements or land transfers can help facilitate the conservation of wildlife corridors, wetlands, open space, trails, and forests.

Partnering with regional organizations and State agencies to develop and share educational materials and trainings can also support landowners in protecting the natural environment and meeting local and regional water quality and natural resource protection goals. Providing resources and materials from Loon Echo Land Trust, Lakes Environmental Association, University of Maine Cooperative

Extension, State agencies, and local advocacy groups can further support landowners in making informed decisions about their property, become better advocates for environmental protection, and create a healthy environment for all.

### Related Action Items

**4.4:** Partner with regional organizations to develop educational materials for private land owners to implement water quality best management practices from resources such as Loon Echo Land Trust, Lakes Environmental Association, Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Maine Forest Service, and/or Small Woodlot Association of Maine.

**4.9:** Coordinate with LELT and other conservation organizations to conduct targeted outreach to land owners to encourage the protection of land through conservation easements or land transfers with a focus on areas with natural resources, wildlife habitat corridors, and opportunities for open space connectivity including various types of trails.

**4.16:** Continue to collaborate with state, regional, and private sector partners on monitoring and evaluating lake levels and water quality.

**4.19:** Coordinate with nearby towns and agencies on watershed management and other initiatives to preserve open space, preserve wildlife corridors, and protect water quality.

## Climate Resilience

The impacts of climate change cross municipal boundaries, and resiliency planning requires regional coordination. Improving resiliency and mitigating climate impacts is a priority of the State. Maine's climate action plan, *Maine Won't Wait*, was created in 2020 and updated in 2024. The State's climate action goals focus on reducing emissions through transportation and land use changes, improving resiliency related to natural events, educating community members on climate issues and solutions, and supporting industries that will advance climate solutions.<sup>12</sup> Many of the actions in this Plan align with the State's priorities for climate resiliency. The Town can continue to benefit from the expertise at the State level and funding for initiatives that will support the State's climate action goals.

Increased storm intensity and warmer temperatures are impacting the Lakes Region and the State. Bridgton participates in the Maine Community Resiliency Partnership, which provides grant opportunities for resilience investments. Municipalities can prepare joint applications to support neighboring communities in accessing funding that benefits multiple municipalities and helps share costs between towns. Coordinating on infrastructure improvements, like culvert widenings, can help maintain transportation networks and infrastructure throughout the region, helping ensure public safety and reduce costs related to storm damage.

Additionally, the Town can collaborate with neighboring communities and local partners like Loon Echo Land Trust and Lakes Environmental Association to prepare educational materials and resources related to resilience planning, infrastructure improvements, land management practices, and how to be involved in regional planning efforts. This coordination and information sharing can support municipalities in developing grass roots approaches to implementing sustainable practices by leveraging the expertise of community partners.

### Related Action Items

**4.17:** Continue the Town's status as a direct partner community in the Maine Community Resilience Partnership and continue to apply for grant funding through the partnership.

**4.18:** Work with state and regional partners to improve Bridgton's resilience to severe weather events, ensuring that infrastructure, buildings and homes, and natural resources are able to respond and adapt to severe events. Conduct resilience efforts in coordination with Maine's Climate Action Plan to support access to grant funding and resources.

**9.20:** Partner with neighboring towns and other organizations to seek funding for resiliency improvements and share information on resiliency initiatives, programs, and incentives for property owners.

<sup>12</sup> State of Maine Climate Council. November 2024. *Maine Won't Wait – A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action*. [https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MWWW\\_2024\\_Book\\_112124.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/2024-11/MWWW_2024_Book_112124.pdf)

## Economic Development

Regionally, Bridgton provides residents and neighboring communities with access to healthcare, grocery stores, local businesses, services, and recreation and entertainment amenities. As a result, Bridgton's economy has a significant impact on the region. Bridgton can continue to benefit from visitors throughout the region. Continuing to work with local and regional partners on marketing initiatives and cross promoting events in Bridgton and region-wide can help encourage people to visit Bridgton and raise awareness of the Town's assets. Additionally, collaborating on events and activities can draw people to the Lakes Region and Bridgton. Additional demand for businesses in Bridgton can foster an environment for small businesses and entrepreneurs to grow and serve the community and region. To best support the business community and support future business growth, the Town will work with regional partners to expand broadband access, support workforce development initiatives, and provide technical assistance and education opportunities.

### Related Action Items

- 6.12:** Consider ways to expand the Town's recreation and tourism economy in coordination with the State's outdoor recreation economy goals, including investigating new trends in outdoor recreation and focusing on access to and preservation of recreational amenities, including Town parks and trails.
- 7.2:** Continue work with GPCOG and surrounding communities and participate in regional economic development planning efforts.
- 7.7:** Partner with major employers and Live + Work in Maine to develop resources and materials to market the Town to prospective employees and provide support for those relocating to the region for employment.
- 7.10:** Continue to support efforts to expand the Town's broadband network and work with regional partners and service providers, as necessary, to increase broadband access.



*Highland Lake*

## Transportation

Bridgton will continue to work with GPCOG and Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) on ongoing transportation planning and connectivity projects. Bridgton will look to enhance Route 302 to improve ability to walk and bike, and safety for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians. Coordination with the Lakes Region Explorer, other municipalities, and transportation providers will help to improve and expand transit options for Bridgton residents and visitors. In addition to road networks, expansion of trail networks will require coordination between communities and local partners. Working with nearby municipalities to expand, connect, and maintain paths, greenways, and trails will be mutually beneficial and improve the quality of life for Bridgton residents. Bridgton's goals of expanding connectivity include improving connectivity to surrounding communities like Fryeburg, Windham, and greater Portland. Regional connectivity improvements will require significant coordination among municipalities and other agencies.

### Related Action Items

**8.5:** Work with the Lakes Region Explorer, other transportation providers, surrounding municipalities, regional groups, Maine DOT, and employers to improve and expand transit options (including bus service, ride sharing, and on-demand transit) to meet the needs of residents, workers, and visitors.

**8.6:** Identify opportunities for enhanced connectivity between neighboring communities and regional centers like Portland, Windham, Norway, and Fryeburg.

**8.10:** Work with local, regional, and state partners to conduct a Route 302 corridor study for the inner and outer 302 corridor to create a multi-modal corridor that would improve accessibility, improve vehicular and pedestrian safety and circulation, and enhance aesthetics of the corridor.



*Lakes Region Explorer bus at Bridgton Community Center.  
Photo courtesy of: Lakes Region Explorer*

## Public Health

Efforts to improve public health and create a sense of community and support for Bridgton residents can be enhanced by regional coordination of services. Residents of rural communities like Bridgton have limited access to social services. Improved communication and coordination among service providers is essential for meeting the needs of vulnerable populations and making people are aware of and connected to available services. Working to improve recreation opportunities and programs for people of all ages and abilities can help improve physical health as well as social connection. Additionally, working with the Lake Region Schools, local and regional service providers, and local community organizations can help provide a variety of opportunities for residents to meet their neighbors, be active in the community, and feel a sense of connection.

The Bridgton Hospital is an important institution for supporting long-term health in the region. Partnering with the hospital and other local healthcare providers will be important to achieve local public health goals and support growth of the healthcare industry in Bridgton.



*Bridgton Community Center garden.  
Image courtesy of the Bridgton Community Center*

### Related Action Items

**3.1:** Consider joining the AARP Age-Friendly Network and develop an action plan in coordination with neighboring communities to ensure livability for people of all ages in the Lakes Region.

**3.2:** Engage with Bridgton Hospital, Lakes Region Collective Action Network (LRCAN), and local and regional organizations, and educational institutions to support programs that meet the needs of Bridgton's aging population (e.g., senior companion programs, mobile health clinics, ride-share programs).

**3.4:** Collaborate with community members, local organizations, businesses, schools, and non-profits to leverage resources, expertise, and networks to enhance program offerings in Bridgton, including for the youth population.

**3.5:** Facilitate coordination and communication among community organizations to share resources, information, and volunteer capacity.

**3.6:** Continue to collaborate with Cumberland County, neighboring towns, local and regional service providers, and the school district to meet the needs of the Town's most vulnerable residents, and to implement the recommendations of the Lakes Region Homeless Service Center Study.

# Regional Coordination

## Recreation

Growth of the recreation economy in Bridgton is a benefit to the region. There is a strong desire for year-round recreation opportunities throughout the Lakes Region. Coordinating with neighboring communities for additional programs, parks, trails, and open space can help meet the needs of aging residents, adults, and children. Additionally, the population in the region is expected to decline. Coordinating programs, resources, facilities, and staffing with neighboring communities will support the fiscal capacity of each community, reducing the tax burden for enhanced services, while providing improved access to the region's residents. Infrastructure investments, like a community or recreation center, could also be shared between communities, which would provide access to indoor recreation and programming while minimizing the tax burden on residents in an individual town.

Recreation is also a major driver of tourism in the region. Coordination in marketing and promoting the Lakes Region as a tourist destination can benefit all communities in the region.

### Related Action Items

**6.2:** Work with relevant boards, committees, neighboring communities, and private partners to plan for future regional recreation needs, including trail network expansion and maintenance, parks maintenance, accessibility upgrades, and shared recreation resources between communities.

**6.3:** Work with Loon Echo Land Trust, Lakes Environmental Association, and other conservation organizations to pursue opportunities to protect important open space or recreational land and improve trail connectivity through easements and land acquisition.



*Pondicherry Park*

# Regional Coordination

## Public Facilities and Services

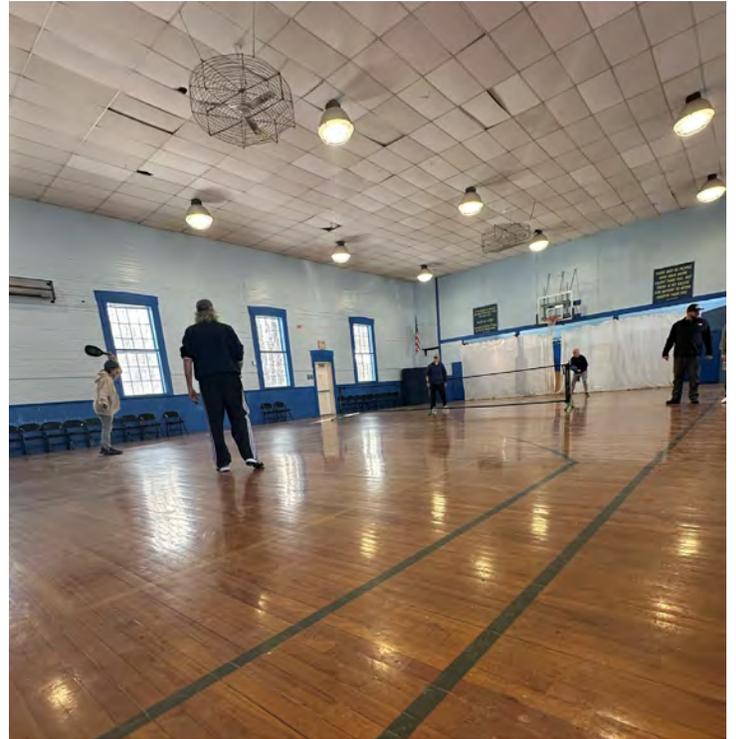
As many small towns struggle to meet infrastructure and constituent needs amid rising costs, there is an opportunity explore creative approaches to providing public services. Similar to shared recreation facilities, there is an opportunity to share facilities and services among towns. Shared facilities and services could include improving broadband and technology access, events and programs, community and recreation centers, education opportunities, fire and emergency services, water quality and natural resource protection, economic development, and resilient infrastructure.

### Related Action Items

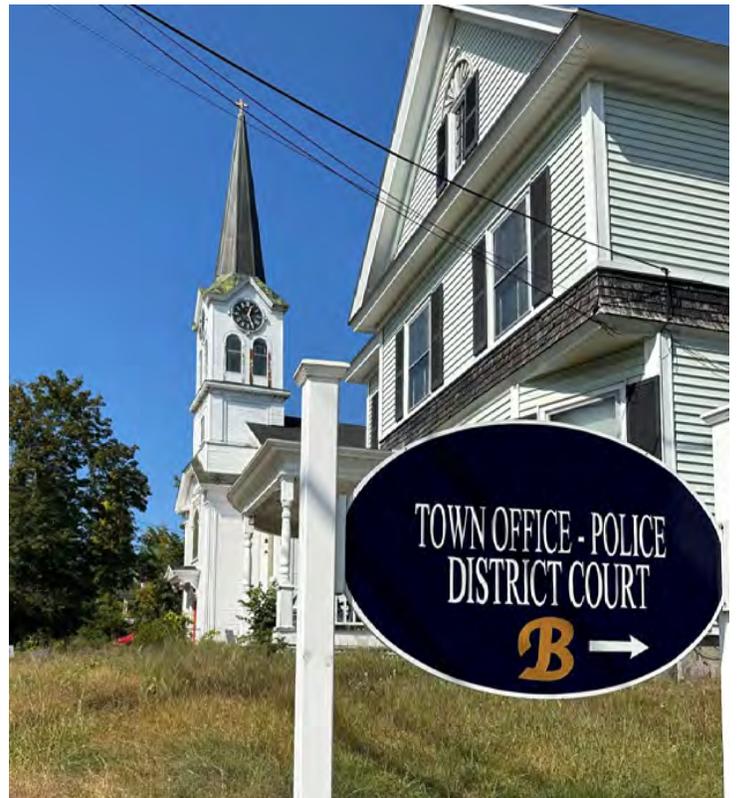
**9.3:** Explore options for regional delivery of local services and identify opportunities to work with neighboring communities to plan for and finance shared capital investments to increase cost savings and efficiencies.

**9.14:** Consider regional opportunities to provide full-time Fire and EMS services and other cost sharing opportunities including shared equipment and coordinated training.

**9.20:** Partner with neighboring towns and other organizations to seek funding for resiliency improvements and share information on resiliency initiatives, programs, and incentives for property owners.



*Bridgton Town Hall gymnasium*



*Town Office sign from Main Street*

# Regional Coordination

## Public Safety and Emergency Management

Police, fire, and emergency services are essential services to help keep a community safe and healthy. As the population of Bridgton and the region ages, there will likely be an increased need for emergency medical services, like paramedics and ambulances. At the same time, municipalities across the State are having more difficulty in recruiting and staffing fire and EMS departments.<sup>13</sup> There is an opportunity to share facilities, apparatus, equipment, call centers and dispatch, and training between communities to improve efficiency and address staffing shortages. In the future, Bridgton and municipalities in the Lakes Region will likely need to transition to a full time or hybrid department. Bridgton will consider how to best coordinate this transition and work with neighboring communities to recruit staff, maintain operations and equipment, reduce operating costs, provide essential services, and adapt to the needs of a changing population.

### Related Action Items

**9.5:** Evaluate public safety needs to support anticipated growth, including the need for a full-time staffed fire department and feasibility of a new public safety building, and consider regional opportunities to provide full-time Fire and EMS services.

**9.6:** Continue to maintain an emergency management plan, establish an emergency shelter plan to support residents during emergencies, and coordinate with neighboring towns on emergency response planning.



*Main Street looking east*

<sup>13</sup> Maine Office of Policy and Legal Analysis. December 2022. "Report of the Blue Ribbon Commission to Study Emergency Medical Services in the State." Blue Ribbon Commission to Study Emergency Medical Services in the State. Augusta, ME: Office of Policy and Legal Analysis.

# Capital Improvement Plan

The capital investments in the Capital Projects table on the following page have been identified as investments necessary to implement the Plan. The cost estimates include a cost range, which may vary depending on the scope of the project (e.g., length of new sidewalk, amount of new equipment) which should be determined based on need, availability of alternative funding, and capacity within the Town's existing budget and resources. Projects noted as having an "ongoing" timeline, represent initiatives that require incremental investment (e.g., recreation improvements) with annual investment dependent on need and availability of resources. Funding for these projects should be incorporated into the Town's budget review process and capital planning. Some projects provide opportunities for the Town to work with neighboring municipalities or community partners to access funding or share resources.

Many of these initiatives have a high cost. The table provides some suggestions for funding sources; however, the Town should evaluate the benefits of each of these projects within the context of the Town's fiscal capacity and the economic climate at the time of implementation. While this Plan does not commit the Town to funding these capital projects, the Town recognizes that investment is critical to moving forward to realize the community's vision.

This Plan has been developed during and following a time of greater investment by the State and federal governments to support community building, including funding for housing, economic development, and infrastructure resiliency. The future availability of external funding is uncertain and should be considered in prioritizing these capital investments. In addition, municipal staffing issues across the State have created challenges in completing projects. This Plan identifies several opportunities for regional coordination and potential areas for cost and resource sharing. Continuing to leverage the leadership of community organizations and openness to partnerships with neighboring municipalities will be important to the fiscal stability of Bridgton and towns throughout the region.



# Capital Improvement Plan

## Capital Projects Table

| Related Action | Capital Project   | Estimated Cost        | Timeline    | Potential Alternative Funding Sources   |
|----------------|---|-----------------------|-------------|---|
| 3.18           | Resiliency upgrades for public infrastructure   | \$200,000 - \$500,000 | Ongoing     | Maine Community Resilience Partnership  |
| 2.10           | Digital Equity Plan   | \$20,000 - \$30,000   | Years 1 - 2 |   |
| 2.13           | Memorial School redevelopment plan  | \$20,000 - \$40,000   | Years 2 - 3 |   |
| 5.5, 5.8       | Recreation improvements (water access improvements, Stevens Brook Trail, dog park, public spaces in downtown, accessibility upgrades) | \$100,000 - \$800,000 | Ongoing     | Maine Recreational Trails Program (DACF*)<br>Land and Water Conservation Fund (DACF)<br>Maine Trails Bond - new grant program for 2025 (DACF) |
| 5.6            | Maintenance, improvements, and expansion of the Ham Recreation Complex  | \$300,000 - \$800,000 | Ongoing     | Municipal bond<br>Municipal partnerships  |
| 5.11           | Recreation/community center feasibility study   | \$20,000 - \$40,000   | Years 1 - 2 |   |
| 7.10           | Route 302 corridor study for the inner and outer 302 corridor   | \$30,000 - \$50,000   | Years 4 - 5 | TIF funds   |
| 7.11           | Expand pedestrian infrastructure  | \$50,000 - \$200,000  | Ongoing     | Public Infrastructure Grant Program (DECD**)  |
| 7.11, 7.13     | Invest in wayfinding signage, bike racks, and bike lanes  | \$25,000 - \$50,000   | Years 3 - 4 | Downtown Revitalization Grant (DECD)<br>TIF funds   |
| 1.8            | Comprehensive review and revision to the Land Use Ordinance   | \$20,000 - \$30,000   | Years 1 - 2 | Housing Opportunity Program (DECD)  |
| 6.17           | Comprehensive marketing campaign  | \$10,000 - \$25,000   | Years 2 - 3 | Municipal partnerships  |
| 6.10           | Expand the Town's broadband network   | \$100,000 - \$200,000 | Years 3 - 4 | Municipal partnerships  |
| 3.1, 9.2       | Upgrades and extension plan for water and wastewater services   | \$200,000 - \$500,000 | Ongoing     | Public Infrastructure Grant Program (DECD)  |
| 9.5            | Full-time staffed fire department   | \$250,000 - \$350,000 | Years 3 - 4 |   |
| 9.5            | Feasibility study for public safety building  | \$20,000 - \$40,000   | Years 1 - 2 |   |
| 9.9            | ADA Transition Plan   | \$20,000 - \$30,000   | Years 3 - 4 |   |
| 9.10           | Analysis of the transfer station  | \$20,000 - \$30,000   | Years 2 - 3 |   |
| 9.17           | Energy efficiency upgrades to public facilities   | \$50,000 - \$200,000  | Ongoing     | State/federal grant funds   |
| 9.22           | Expand grant writing and grant management capacity  | \$20,000 - \$60,000   | Years 1 - 2 |   |

\*Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry

\*\*Maine Department of Economic and Community Development

# Implementation Key

## Implementation Key

The Implementation Key should be used to interpret the action item matrix for each section, beginning on page 31. The action item matrices link each action to the Plan's goals (see below and page 14) and provide an assessment of each action item to consider in prioritizing and assigning tasks for plan implementation.

### *Plan Goals*

1. Guide development to respect the small-town and rural character of the Town and to minimize traffic impacts.
2. Protect and manage water resources to maintain ecological health and support continued use for recreation.
3. Protect natural resources from potential negative impacts of economic activity and development.
4. Promote the development of a variety of housing options to meet the current and future needs of the community.
5. Create an economic climate that supports year-round economic activity and tourism while also benefiting residents.
6. Strengthen fiscal capacity to maintain a high level of municipal services while minimizing the tax burden on residents.
7. Leverage community assets that contribute to a high quality of life for residents and benefit workforce retention and tourism.
8. Address the health and well-being needs of residents, including access to recreation amenities, services for older adults, and a strong educational system.
9. Encourage civic participation and create opportunities to build social connections through access, education, and transparency.
10. Build a safe, efficient, and affordable transportation network that expands opportunities for non-motorized transportation and transit use.
11. Maintain and expand municipal infrastructure and facilities to support the community's changing needs and economic growth.
12. Leverage agricultural and forest resources for health and well-being, including food production, economic activity, and educational opportunities.
13. Enhance social, economic, and physical resiliency and ability to adapt to impacts of climate change.
14. Create a vibrant walkable downtown to support mobility, economic activity, and social connectivity.
15. Foster connections to the Town's past through protection of significant historic and archaeological resources and support for arts and cultural events and organizations.
16. Leverage and expand open spaces and trails to improve connectivity and increase opportunities for active recreation.
17. Strengthen and support community-oriented businesses, organizations, and institutions through partnerships.

# Implementation Key

## Implementation Key

### Action Type

- Regulatory Change
- Public Investment
- Strategic Partnership
- Program
- Other Town Initiative

### Responsible Agencies

#### Town Departments/Boards/Committees

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Code Enforcement Department                       | CE   |
| Community Development Department                  | CDD  |
| Emergency Management Agency                       | EMA  |
| Finance Department                                | FIN  |
| Fire Department                                   | BFD  |
| Town Manager's Office                             | TM   |
| Planning Board                                    | PB   |
| Police Department                                 | BPD  |
| Public Services Department                        | PSD  |
| Recreation Department                             | REC  |
| Select Board                                      | BSB  |
| Bridgton Memorial School Ad Hoc Committee         | BMS  |
| Community Development Advisory Committee          | CDAC |
| Investment Advisory Committee                     | IAC  |
| Ordinance Review Committee                        | ORC  |
| Recycling Advisory Committee                      | RAC  |
| <b>External Agencies</b>                          |      |
| Bridgton Water District                           | BWD  |
| Greater Bridgton Lakes Region Chamber of Commerce | COC  |
| Bridgton Community Center                         | BCC  |
| Lakes Environmental Association                   | LEA  |

### External Agencies

|  |       |
|--|-------|
| Loon Echo Land Trust                         | LELT  |
| Bridgton Historical Society                  | BHS   |
| Lakes Region School District                 | LRSD  |
| Bridgton Public Library                      | BPL   |
| Bridgton Hospital                            | BH    |
| Maine Historic Preservation Commission       | MHPC  |
| Maine Department of Environmental Protection | MDEP  |
| Maine Department of Transportation           | MDOT  |
| Lakes Region Collective Action Network       | LRCAN |
| Bridgton Academy                             | BA    |
| Pleasant Mountain                            | PM    |
| Greater Portland Council of Governments      | GPCOG |
| Greater Bridgton Chamber of Commerce         | GBCC  |

### 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

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

# Implementation Key

## Implementation Key

### *Timeline*

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Short   | 0 to 2 years  |
| Medium  | 3 to 5 years  |
| Long    | 6 to 10 years   |
| Ongoing | Efforts will continue throughout the implementation period. |

### *Related Plans and Studies*

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Maine Won't Wait  | Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action, 2020 |
| ME ED Strategy    | Maine Economic Development Strategy, 2020 – 2029            |
| Open Space Plan   | Bridgton Open Space Plan, 2023                              |
| Economic Analysis | Bridgton Economic and Market Analysis, 2019                 |
| CEDS              | 2018 GPCOG Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy      |
| Homeless Study    | Lakes Region Homeless Service Center Study, 2024            |

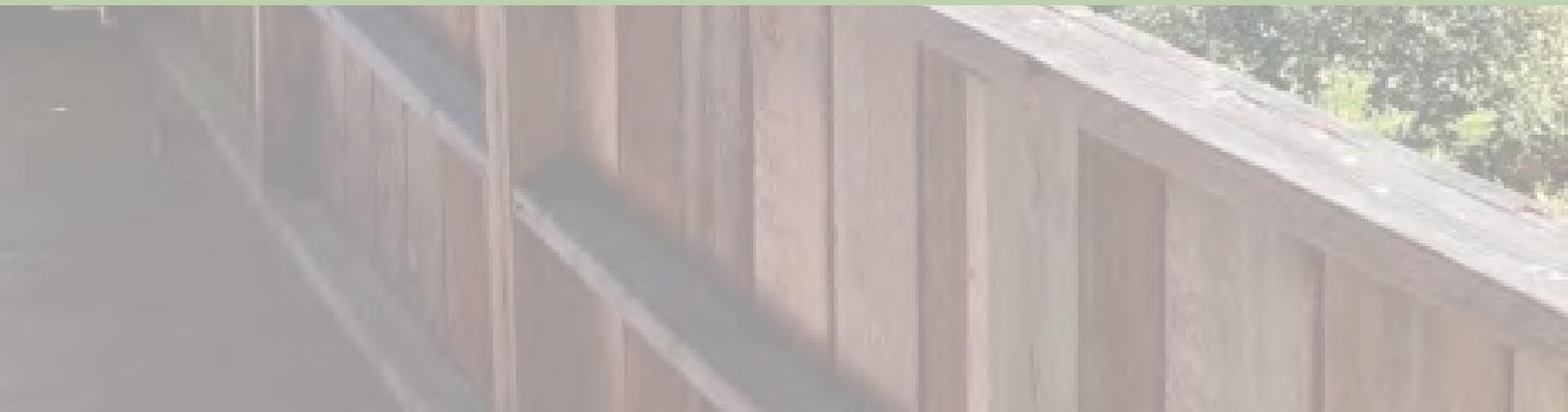


*Image courtesy of Loon Echo Land Trust*



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# **Appendix A: Glossary**



## Glossary

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

**Accessory dwelling unit:** 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.

**ADA accessible:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Standards for Accessible Design—along with the Title II and Title III regulations—say what is required for a building or facility to be physically accessible to people with disabilities.

**Adaptive reuse:** The renovation and reuse of pre-existing structures for new purposes.

**Affordable housing development:** The Town of Bridgton’s Land Use Ordinance defines affordable housing development as development composed of single-family dwellings, two-family dwellings, or multi-family dwellings (1) for rental housing, in which a household whose income does not exceed 80% of the area median income can afford 51% or more of the units in the development without spending more than 30% of the household’s monthly income on housing costs; and, (2) for owned housing, in which a household whose income does not exceed 120% of the area median income can afford 51% or more of the units in the development without spending more than 30% of the household’s monthly income on housing costs. For purposes of this definition, “housing costs” means: (a) for a rental unit, the cost of rent and any utilities (electric, heat, water, sewer, and/or trash) that the household pays separately from the rent; and (b) for an ownership unit, the cost of mortgage principal and interest, real estate taxes (including assessments), private mortgage

insurance, homeowner’s insurance, condominium fees, and homeowners’ association fees.

**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. Aging in place refers to the ability to remain in your home and community as you get older.

**Agriculture:** The production, breeding, keeping, or maintenance, for sale or lease, of plants or animals, including forages and sod crops; grains and seed crops; dairy animals and dairy products; poultry and poultry products; livestock; fruits and vegetables; and ornamental and green house products.

**Amenity:** An amenity is a feature or service within a town that contributes to enhanced comfort, convenience, or enjoyment. Amenities could include natural features, such as trails or lakes; community services such as recreation facilities or nonprofit organizations; or businesses, such as restaurants or entertainment venues.

**Capital improvement plan (CIP):** A CIP lays out the financing, location, and timing for capital improvement projects over several years. A capital improvement plan 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.

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

## Glossary

**Cluster neighborhoods:** Cluster neighborhoods allow for a reduction in the minimum lot size and building footprint requirements (without an increase in the overall number of units in a development) to conserve a portion of the property as common open space for recreation and/or the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas. These neighborhoods essentially “cluster” homes into smaller lots on a smaller overall portion of a lot to preserve open space or natural resources.

**Community vitality:** A community’s collective capacity to respond to change with an enhanced level of participation (a process) with aspirations for a healthy and productive community (an outcome or vision of success).

**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 private lands.

**Cottage court:** A group of small (typically 1 to 1.5-story), detached dwellings arranged around a shared common space visible from the street.

**Current tax use program:** The State of Maine has four current tax 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 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 shall include mobile homes and rental units that contain cooking, sleeping, and toilet facilities regardless of the time-period rented. Recreational vehicles are not residential dwelling units.

**Form-based codes:** Form-based codes regulate the built environment with a focus on the character of the built environment rather than the use of the land. Form-based codes tend to focus on the size and design of a building instead of how the building is used.

**Growth area:** In the State of Maine, a "growth area" is defined as an area that is designated in a municipality's comprehensive plan as suitable for orderly residential, commercial, or industrial development, or any combinations of those types of development. This designation is intended for areas where most development is projected to occur over the next ten years.

**Impact fee:** Impact fee means a charge or assessment imposed by a municipality against a new development to fund or recoup a portion of the cost of new, expanded or replacement infrastructure facilities necessitated by and attributable at least in part to the new development.

**Incremental development:** Incremental development is the process of gradually improving and evolving a property or neighborhood over time

## Glossary

in response to local needs and market conditions. This could involve converting a single-family home into a two-family home, adding an accessory dwelling unit to a property, or redeveloping a vacant lot.

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

**Labor force participation rate:** The percentage of the population that is 16 years and older who are currently employed or unemployed and seeking work. This percentage represents the relative amount of labor resources available in the Town, as well as the percentage of the population that is not actively seeking employment.

**LakeSmart Program:** LakeSmart is an education and outreach program that rewards lakefront homeowners who manage their land to protect water quality. The program is free, non-regulatory, and voluntary. Participating homeowners receive individualized suggestions for keeping pollutants from stormwater out of lake waters.

**Livability:** The sum of various elements that add up to a community's quality of life – including the built and natural environments, social stability and equity, economic prosperity, educational and cultural opportunity.

**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.

**Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Shoreland Zoning Act:** Maine DEP's Shoreland Zoning Act requires municipalities to adopt and enforce local ordinances that regulate land use activities in the shoreland zone. Shoreland zones include any land area within 250 feet of the normal high-water line of a pond or river, upland edge of a coastal wetland, upland edge of defined freshwater wetlands, and all areas within 75 feet of the normal high-water line of certain streams.

**Mixed-use development:** Developments that provide more than one use or purpose within a shared building or development area. Mixed-use projects may include any combination of housing, office, retail, medical, recreational, commercial, or industrial components.

**Multifamily development:** 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.

**Multi-generational:** Consisting of, relating to, or involving more than one generation.

## Glossary

**Natural resources/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 benefiting the community.

**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. They 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.

**Redevelopment:** The action or process of developing something again or differently.

**Rural area:** A rural area is a geographic area that is identified and designated as an area that is deserving of some level of regulatory protection from unrestricted development.

**Services:** Services encompass a wide range of activities, businesses, and industries found within a community. These could include healthcare, financial or professional services, educational institutions, restaurants, transportation, personal services like hair salons and massage therapists, or household services such as lawn care or electricians.

**Service center:** The Maine State Legislature identifies service centers as the communities where people work, shop, obtain medical care, or enjoy cultural experiences. Service centers are defined as areas with all or some of the following characteristics: over 500 jobs, high retail sales per capita, high percentage of service sector jobs, and/or high percentage of federally assisted housing units.

**Short-term rental (STR):** A residential dwelling that is rented on a temporary basis, typically for a period of less than 30 consecutive days. Unlike long-term rentals, which typically involve lease agreements of six months or more, STRs cater to vacationers, business travelers, and temporary residents seeking flexible lodging options.

**Single-family home:** A building designed or intended to be used exclusively for residential occupancy by one family only and containing only one dwelling unit, or one dwelling unit with an accessory apartment, including a manufactured housing unit with no horizontal dimension smaller than twenty-four feet.

**Sustainability:** Sustainability refers to the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability can refer to fiscal, economic, development, and environmental actions.

## Glossary

**Tax increment financing (TIF):** Municipal tax increment financing (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.

**Vacant housing unit:** a unit is vacant if no one is living in it at the time of the Census survey, unless its occupants are only temporarily absent. A vacant unit may be one which is entirely occupied by persons who have a usual residence elsewhere, including seasonal and vacation homes. New units not yet occupied are classified as vacant housing units if construction has reached a point where all exterior windows and doors are installed and final floors are in place.

**Zoning overlay district:** A zoning overlay district superimposes an additional set of regulations over an existing zoning district, or multiple zoning districts.

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# Appendix B: Referenced Plans and Studies

*Long Lake*

## Related Plans and Studies

- Maine Won't Wait: A Four-Year Plan for Climate Action, 2020
- Maine Economic Development Strategy, 2020 – 2029
- Bridgton Open Space Plan, 2023
- Bridgton Economic and Market Analysis, 2019
- 2018 GPCOG Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy
- Lakes Region Homeless Service Center Study, 2024

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# **Appendix C: Engagement Summary**



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# Introduction

As part of the Comprehensive Plan process, the Town of Bridgton (Town), Comprehensive Plan Task Force, and consultant team (BerryDunn) conducted a public engagement effort building on the Community Heart and Soul engagement initiative (Vision Bridgton). The purpose of the Vision Bridgton initiative was to engage the community in a discussion about values and priorities for the future and, from community feedback, to develop a vision statement to serve as the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan engagement effort was conducted to confirm community vision and values and understand priorities, goals, and policy direction. The engagement strategy included outreach to residents, visitors, employees, community leaders and other stakeholders. The Recreation Department targeted outreach to children in Bridgton to include them in the planning process. The engagement strategy involved the following events and activities:

- Comprehensive Plan Kickoff Meeting
- Community Survey (hosted online with hard copies available at the Town Offices and Library)
- Focus Group Discussions with specific industries and community leaders
- Community Conversations on specific topics
- Meeting-in-a-Box
- Future Land Use Workshop
- Visual Preference Survey
- An online engagement site via Social Pinpoint

A project website was created using the community engagement platform, Social Pinpoint. In addition to being a tool for gathering community feedback, this website has served as the homebase for the project, to provide updates on progress, post event information, and share project documents.

This high-level summary outlines each engagement component and key themes related to community needs or desires for Bridgton's future. In addition to engagement efforts specifically intended to support the development of the Comprehensive Plan, public feedback from other Town outreach initiatives—including the Open Space Plan—were reviewed and considered as part of the process.

## Key Themes from Engagement

The 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:

- Preserve Bridgton's natural resources, including waterbodies, wetlands, and forests
- Preserve Bridgton's character
- Limit new corridor development and big box stores
- Continue to support and develop a lively downtown
- Maintain public infrastructure (roads, sewer, water, etc.)
- Address changing housing needs including the need for smaller homes and more affordable housing options
- Support businesses and programs that provide services and amenities for year-round residents, including events and activities, healthcare, child care, small businesses, and recreation opportunities
- Improve ability to walk and bike around the downtown and support alternative transportation options to help residents who do not drive access services and amenities

# Comprehensive Plan Kickoff Meeting

On November 1, 2023, a Comprehensive Plan Kickoff Meeting was hosted at the Town Hall gymnasium. Roughly 30 attendees participated. The purpose of this event was to share information about the project, including timeline and how the community could be involved, receive input on the vision statements, and understand initial priorities and concerns for the Town's future. BerryDunn shared a presentation to discuss project goals, timeline, and opportunities for input. Following the presentation, participants shared responses to three questions via MentiMeter, an online polling tool. Following the presentation and polling questions, participants were able to ask questions about the project and provide written feedback on the draft vision statements in an open house-style format. A summary of feedback from MentiMeter and written comments is below:

## MentiMeter Questions

### What is your favorite place in Bridgton?

- Downtown and Main Street
- Highland Lake, Long Lake, Peabody Pond, Adams Pond, Moose Pond
- Local businesses, including Renys, Beth's Café, Elevation Sushi, Sundown Lounge, Campfire Grill, and the Hayloft
- Pleasant Mountain and Bald Pate Mountain
- Shorey Park and Pondicherry Park
- Salmon Point
- Bridgton Historical Society
- Bridgton Community Center

### What is your greatest concern for Bridgton?

- Over development and loss of character
- Conserving open space and protecting natural resources
- Tax increases
- Housing and housing affordability
- Cost of living
- Climate change
- Economic health
- Preservation of historic buildings
- Inadequate zoning controls or unclear zoning regulations

### What is your top priority for Bridgton?

- Preservation of rural character and character of the downtown
- Smart growth and intentional development of residential and commercial spaces

- Maintaining Bridgton’s sense of place and community spirit
- Affordable housing
- Support for local businesses
- Zoning reform
- Lower taxes
- Protecting natural areas
- Balancing the need for additional services with the need for cost-effective solutions
- Revitalizing historic buildings
- Limiting over development
- Attracting and retaining young people and families

## Vision Statement Feedback

### History and Culture

Bridgton honors the historic quaintness of Main Street, with small businesses, local shops, walkable streets, ample parking, and opportunities to view art and experience local culture. These assets contribute to the small-town feel and help position Bridgton as a hub for surrounding communities.

#### Feedback

- Green dot (I like this): 9
- Yellow dot (I am unsure): 9
- Red dot (I do not like this): 9

### Open Space

Bridgton is a vibrant, rural community with abundant open space resources that are protected and stewarded to sustain residents, visitors, and ecological health. The goals of this plan enable the vision by protecting, connecting, and activating the open space system of Bridgton.

#### Feedback

- Green dot (I like this): 14
- Yellow dot (I am unsure): 13
- Red dot (I do not like this): 0

### Live, Work, and Play

Bridgton strives to be a community that creates ways for people to live, work, and play locally, by increasing access to diversified housing, educational opportunities, access to recreation and jobs that provide people the ability to thrive in place.

#### Feedback

- Green dot (I like this): 9
- Yellow dot (I am unsure): 9
- Red dot (I do not like this): 4

## Healthy Community

Bridgton supports a healthy community for everyone to have access to a variety of recreational, educational, and social opportunities in our town. We strive to create opportunities to connect to one another in a supportive environment that contributes to social, emotional, and physical well-being.

### Feedback

- Green dot (I like this): 20
- Yellow dot (I am unsure): 0
- Red dot (I do not like this): 0

# Community Survey

The Community Survey was released in December 2023 and closed in February 2024. A postcard with a QR code to the survey was mailed to all residences in Bridgton. Survey information was also shared on the Town website and social media platforms. Hard copies were shared at the Town Offices and Bridgton Public Library. The survey was designed to dig deeper into topic areas in the vision statements, understand positive and negative changes over the past decade, and receive input on priorities for the future. A total of 653 people responded to the survey. A summary of survey responses is below:

## Demographics

- The survey received 653 responses
- 73% of respondents live in Bridgton full time
- 18% of respondents live in Bridgton part-time
- 14% of respondents work in Bridgton or own a business in Bridgton
- 8.5% of respondents are renters in Bridgton
- 81.7% of respondents own their home in Bridgton
- 9.8% of respondents live outside of Bridgton
- 49% of respondents were age 60 or older
- 5% of respondents were under 30 years old

## Positive changes over the last 10 years (477 responses)

- Downtown infrastructure improvements and new development (54%)
- Small businesses (22%)
- Recreation (20%)

## Negative changes over the last 10 years (461 responses)

- Corridor development (20%)
- Lack of affordable housing and variety of housing types (12%)
- Growth (12%)

## Top priorities (640 responses)

- Preserving natural areas (74%)
- Developing a vibrant downtown (45%)
- Maintaining public infrastructure (43%)

## Community facilities or services that should be added or improved

- Recreation (e.g., mountain bike trails, pool, rec center, pickle ball courts) (39%)
- Other: community services (12%), Transfer Station (11%), art/entertainment (10%), healthcare (9%)

## **Community facilities or services that should be reduced or eliminated**

- None (51%)
- Public services (11%)

## **Key Statistics**

- 27% of respondents indicated the need to downsize or move into an assisted living facility
- 49% of respondents would like improved public transit or shared transportation options (e.g., ride share)
- 44% of respondents would like the ability to walk or bike throughout the Town
- 61% of respondents would like to see investment in parks and community spaces
- 42% of respondents would like to see more restaurants, shops, and entertainment venues

## **Key Themes**

- Concern about recent development and desire to limit sprawl and preserve the small-town/rural character
- Protection of natural areas and open space
- Access to recreation facilities and programs
- Changing housing needs
- Support for alternative transportation options
- Desire for more amenity businesses
- Concern about maintenance of public infrastructure
- Concern about cost of living

## Focus Groups

The Town of Bridgton held three targeted focus group meetings in December 2023 to discuss priorities for next Comprehensive Plan with community stakeholders. These meetings were held via Zoom and were intended to reach leaders in the community who can speak to the needs of typically underrepresented groups and provide different perspectives on key issues. The three meetings focused on community service providers, industry leaders, and small businesses. Participants were also offered the opportunity to provide feedback to general questions about challenges and priorities for Bridgton to Town staff. The following is a summary of key themes heard from stakeholders at each meeting and from feedback provided in writing.

### Community Service Providers

Community service providers include organizations and agencies that serve the public in a variety of ways including providing services to low-income residents, enrichment and recreation programs, and health services. Ten stakeholders attended this meeting, and one provided written responses.

#### Key Themes

- Service providers have seen an increase in requests for services by people experiencing homelessness, including individuals and families with children.
- Service providers have not been able to keep pace with the increased demand for services, and there is a gap between community needs and what services providers are able to offer.
- There is a lack of space for services and programs and a need for more facility space for a community center, recreation center, food pantry, and other community programs.
- Service providers should continue to meet and coordinate to provide services, share resources, and prevent duplication of efforts.
- There is opportunity to create a recreation center to serve a variety of community needs, including enhanced programming and recreation amenities.
- The number of volunteers who support community service providers has decreased.
- Lack of transportation options can limit people from accessing services or volunteering.
- A lack of affordable housing in the region has hindered employers' ability to hire staff and can deter young families from living in Bridgton.
- The high cost of living limits residents' ability to volunteer or engage in local events because they are often working multiple jobs.
- Service providers would like to see more investment in the hospital system.
- The Town should consider ways to provide more equitable access to services and housing.

- Many residents are unaware of the scope of the challenges that service providers are addressing, and data on homelessness, food insecurity, and other issues could help to frame these challenges for local leaders.

## Industry Leaders

Industry leaders include large businesses and employers in Bridgton. Four stakeholders attended this meeting.

### Key Themes

- Economic development and housing initiatives should be encouraged to help Bridgton thrive as a year-round community.
- The school district and outside perception of the school system is a barrier to growth. The Town should focus on supporting the school district to enhance educational opportunities for students and attract new families to Bridgton.
- More people who work in Bridgton are living outside of the Town, in part related to the increasing cost of housing.
- Participants agreed that business involvement in the community is important and, while the Chamber of Commerce is doing a great job, business leaders would like to see more communication to increase awareness of events, programs, and Town initiatives.
- There is a need for more businesses and jobs, other than in hospitality, to attract people to Town, including support for start-up businesses and relocation efforts to encourage more business development in Bridgton.
- Bridgton has lower wages than other regional employment centers.
- There has been an increased need for mental health resources to support community members, including students.
- Participants are currently involved in supporting community events and initiatives of the Chamber of Commerce.
- There is a need for more job training and an opportunity to partner with the school system to support vocational training.
- There is a need to connect the Town, businesses, service providers, and other nonprofit organizations to identify additional ways to support the community.

## Small Business Leaders

Small business leaders represented small businesses in Bridgton across a variety of sectors, including hospitality, retail, real estate, and nonprofits. Nine stakeholders attended this meeting, and one provided written responses.

### Key Themes

- The increase in short-term rentals and purchasing of homes as investment properties has impacted local hospitality businesses and the housing market in Bridgton.
- There are challenges hiring workers in Bridgton due to a lack of affordable housing. Access to healthcare and the school system are also concerns for attracting employees.
- Development in West Bridgton will be important to consider as Boyne Resorts (which purchased Pleasant Mountain Ski Area in 2021) is looking to turn the mountain into a year-round destination.
- Providers would like to see more investment in the hospital system. The hospital is a draw for a lot of people to live in Bridgton, and the decline in services, including obstetric services, can deter young people from starting families in Bridgton.
- There is a need to create and incentivize diverse jobs to serve a year-round economy.
- People who work for businesses in Bridgton would like to live in the Town.
- There is a desire for increased communication and marketing for events and businesses in Town.
- There is concern about parking in the downtown as Bridgton grows and develops.
- There is a desire for additional events and spaces for people to meet and connect.
- Business owners are interested being more involved in community events and programs and would like to have a central hub or portal for sharing information and to support coordination of the Town, nonprofits, and business community.
- An enhanced recreation center or YMCA could support the Town in providing child care and other amenities.
- The Town should consider ways to scale the development of big box stores to that of the downtown.
- The impacts of climate change will likely push a significant number of people to Maine, and the Town should prepare for additional housing and workforce needs.
- A business incubator or classes for new entrepreneurs could help draw new people and businesses to Bridgton.
- The Town should consider ways to make the Planning Board process easier for residents and businesses.
- The Town should consider ways to retain high school and college graduates from Bridgton.
- Bridgton should consider ways to modernize to meet the needs of residents and businesses while preserving historic assets and the historic feel of the Town.
- There is an opportunity to revitalize the Old Memorial School site.
- The Town should consider a variety of options to improve connectivity and transportation within Bridgton and in the region, including rail.

# Community Conversations

The Town of Bridgton held four community conversations in July 2024 to discuss how the Comprehensive Plan should address the Town's most pressing issues and provide input on direction for action items in the plan. Community Conversations were structured around the four vision statements for the Comprehensive Plan. These meetings were held via Zoom and were intended to reach leaders in the community with different perspectives. Stakeholders were also offered the opportunity to provide their thoughts on policy actions and respond to questions relating to each of the four vision statements. Community conversations were advertised on the Town website and Instagram account. The following is a summary of key themes heard from stakeholders at each meeting and from feedback provided in writing.

## Open Space

The Open Space Conversation examined policy areas related to open space, including natural resources, recreation, economy, land use, and public facilities and services. Eight community members attended the meeting. The following are key themes from each topic area discussed:

### Natural Resources

- Have clear direction from the Open Space Plan on prioritizing open space protection and use.
- Consider the impacts of development outside of the shoreland zone, including wetlands.
- Fragmentation of existing undeveloped land and sprawl can further impact the rural character in the Town and impact environmental health.
- The Town could play a greater role in supporting open space protection and conservation and natural resource protection in its partnerships with Loon Echo Land Trust and Lakes Environmental Association.
- Consider the role of nonprofit partners and the Open Space Committee in implementing elements of the Comprehensive Plan.
- Coordinate on a regional scale to protect open space and natural resources.
- Spending on natural resource protection is good for the Town's economy. The economic study conducted by the University of Southern Maine stated that natural resources are the Town's largest economic booster.
- There is a significant increase in tax return from new property taxes. This could be used to increase trails and preserve land.
- Align the Comprehensive Plan with the Maine Climate Action Plan and other state and regional plans efforts.
- Support succession planning or incentives for forestry. The Town has many working forests.

### Economy

- Money spent on recreation has a return on investment in the community.
- The Recreation Department provides services to a significant amount of people, including providing day care access for working parents and providing summer programming for 250 children.
- Bio forest products impact the broader state and regional economy. The Town should look to align goals with the state and regional goals and plans for growth of this industry.
- The Town needs lodging for people to stay and support the economy. The Town has vacation rentals, but few hotels. This could support the Town in hosting larger tournaments and events.
- The Town should work to cultivate a relationship with Pleasant Mountain.
- Water resources encompass several towns, but towns do not cooperate on a local level for things like harbor management. The Town should consider more opportunities to collaborate with neighboring communities and expand on the work that planning boards and ordinance review committees in the area have done.

### **Land Use and Facilities**

- Enforcement is not as rigorous as it could be. The Town should look to improve buffer requirements, as these are not consistently installed the way they were intended.
- Decrease minimum lot sizes and incentivize cluster developments. Allow for higher-density and infill development in downtown area.
- Identify locations for greater protection of natural resources and areas for greater density.
- Consider appropriate areas for affordable housing development and various housing types.
- There are many residents who came to Bridgton for a rural setting not an urban one.
- Vacation rentals seem to have taken a higher priority over long-term rental housing.

## **Live, Work, and Play**

The Live, Work, and Play Conversation examined areas of the plan related to housing, economy, recreation and facilities, and transportation. 15 community members attended the meeting. The following are key themes from each topic area discussed:

### **Housing**

- Norway has had an affordable housing policy since 1991. Bridgton does not have any affordable housing development requirements.
- Low to moderate income housing is needed for families.
- There should be relief from some development requirements for affordable housing and smaller homes.
- Consider partnerships for development on Town-owned land.

- Consider transfer of development rights (TDR) to support housing development and protection of open space.
- The Planning Board has talked to an agency about tracking short-term rentals.
- Regulate short-term rentals, especially in the downtown area.
- Protect wetlands and vernal pools. These are being filled in for new construction. Need more stringent restrictions.

### **Economy**

- The Town should look to incentivize entertainment offerings, in particular, year-round activities that do not exist yet.
- Staffing is a challenge for businesses.
- Workforce development is important. Local businesses are sending employees to other cities for training and workforce development opportunities. The Town should look for ways to support training locally.
- Employees struggle to find affordable child care.
- Most employees do not live in Bridgton due to the cost of living and rental costs.
- It is difficult to attract larger professional businesses that pay higher wages.
- Howell Lab does not have public water access. If businesses are to expand, access to public water could support expansion and lower insurance costs. Potential for other business development in this area could be considered.

### **Recreation and Facilities**

- There are no campgrounds for tent camping; they are for recreation vehicles (RVs) only.
- The boat ramp on Moose Pond needs repair or replacement.
- Pleasant Mountain could offer more summer activities. They are updating their ski lifts.
- Consider constructing a recreation center to have activities for residents year-round.

### **Transportation and Land Use**

- Invest in alternative transportation options, including sidewalks and trails that can provide connectivity and access to neighborhoods, services, schools, and Town facilities.
- Invest in public communications. The Town of Casco is a good example.
- The Town needs a continuous care retirement facility.
- There is a need for form-based codes.
- There is a desire for fewer big box stores. Other towns limit the size of businesses.

## History and Culture

The History and Culture Conversation examined areas of the plan related to historic resources, arts and culture, economy, natural resources, and land use. Nine stakeholders attended the meeting. The following are key themes from each topic area discussed:

### Historic Resources

- The 2014 Comprehensive Plan listed historic properties in Bridgton.
- There is a divide between building type and use between Route 302 and the downtown. Big box stores are prevalent along 302 and there are more small businesses downtown. There is concern about how the Town should balance these two areas.
- There is some concern about enforcement of development requirements and overall transparency in the Planning Board and zoning processes.

### Arts and Culture

- The 302 corridor does not draw people downtown for arts and culture.
- The Memorial School site is an opportunity for a community space.
- There are a lot of groups in Bridgton related to the arts and history, all of whom put on events. The Town or Chamber of Commerce could help with coordination and marketing of these events. It can be hard for the Town to know about all the events throughout the year.
- Historic walks could be included along trails and rail line.
- Bridgton is part of the Main Street America organization via Downtown Maine.

### Economy

- Look into what other communities are doing to prevent certain types of businesses.
- The Town should work to retain existing businesses and attract businesses that enhance the small-town feel.
- Refer to the University of Southern Maine Economic Analysis.
- High traffic volumes on Route 302 represent potential customers for businesses in Bridgton if the Town became more of a destination.

### Natural Resources and Land Use

- The Town cannot do everything. The Town should work with local partners on arts, history, conservation, and economic development initiatives.
- Reconsider zoning on the outer corridor in West Bridgton toward Fryeburg.
- Increasing focus in conservation efforts on access to lands. Ensuring that there is public access to open spaces and lands is a Maine tradition and being eroded as land transfers.
- People like a sense of belonging and community.

- The Stevens Brook Trail needs some support to reopen. Maintenance of this trail is a high priority in the Open Space Plan.

## Healthy Community

The Healthy Community Conversation examined policy areas related to community health, including healthcare and services, recreation, transportation, and public facilities and services. Thirteen stakeholders attended the meeting. The following are key themes from each topic area discussed:

### Health and Community

- There is a need for more mental health, dentistry, and maternity support services.
- There is a need for healthcare services that meet people at their homes.

### Recreation

- There is a need for a recreation center.
- There are staffing needs in the Recreation Department to address programming and facility maintenance as well as training for staff to support programming.
- The Town needs more indoor spaces for adults, expanded programming that is inclusive of working adults, and more informal gathering spaces for adults.
- The Town should continue partnership with community organizations. Partnering with Bridgton Academy could result in improved access to their recreational facilities by residents.
- Installation of public restrooms, and possibly shower facilities, at trail heads or popular recreational sites would enhance usability.

### Transportation

- Residents face challenges accessing healthcare services without adequate transportation services.
- There are not consistent transportation options for students to access facilities and programs after school or return to school for activities later in the evening.
- Examine ways for more consistent transportation in the Lakes Region in addition to the Lake Region Explorer. An activity bus is needed to support access to the Community Center, Town Hall, Bridgton Library, or other locations.
- Lakes Region Basic Needs Fund focuses on transportation including drivers' education, car repairs, and taxi service.
- The Recreation Department cannot host middle school or high school programs unless students are able to walk.
- There are no bike lanes and biking can feel unsafe. There may be a need for a bike share program, but it may not be safe for all residents to use.

- Keeping sidewalks free of ice and snow in the winter is critical to safe use, in particular by those who have mobility issues.

### **Facilities and Services**

- The Town needs more spaces for teens and young adults. The Hiram Library has a designated area for teens.
- CDC-funded community healthcare workers were an important asset during the pandemic and this role could be continued by the Town's EMS providers or local service providers.
- The Town should develop an emergency shelter plan to provide residents with a place to go during emergency events.
- The Community Center is the only place that could offer emergency shelter, as they have a shower, kitchen, and generator.
- Town facilities are aging quickly, and maintenance should be prioritized. This should also include ADA accessibility considerations at Town buildings.
- Culverts may need replacing if they cannot accommodate flood levels seen in more recent storms. Flooding over roadways can obstruct access to shelters or evacuation routes.
- Consider upgrading playgrounds to be ADA compliant.

## Meeting-in-a-Box

Meeting-in-a-Box is a community engagement tool designed for community groups or friends to gather and share their ideas for the future of Bridgton. Participants were able to have discussions at a time and place convenient for and where they felt comfortable sharing thoughts on the future of Bridgton. Using the Meeting-in-a-Box materials, meeting hosts facilitated a group discussion with participants to discuss and respond to four questions about the Town's future. These questions were designed to dig deeper into responses from the Community Survey.

Ten groups, including the Comprehensive Plan Task Force, high school and middle school students in the Bridgton Recreation Department Afterschool Program, Community Development Advisory Committee, Rotary Club, local neighborhood organizations, and book groups, participated in a Meeting-in-a-Box discussion. A total of 68 individuals participated in these discussions. The Recreation Department led two Meeting-in-a-Box discussions to engage Bridgton youth in the planning process. Meeting-in-a-Box information was shared on the Town website and Instagram account, as well as through direct outreach to community groups. Responses to the four questions from all submissions are summarized below:

- 1. Bridgton provides access to healthcare, jobs, recreational amenities, grocery stores, and other services to residents and nearby communities like Naples, Sweden, and Harrison, and, as a result, is considered a service center by the state. How do you think the Town should balance its role as a service center with maintaining its small-town feel and preserving the Town's rural character?**
  - Prioritize local, small businesses over big box stores
  - Preserve the small-town character and incorporate landscaping and design requirements for new buildings to fit into the existing character
  - Limit large commercial developments along Route 302
  - Preserve natural resources and forested areas
  - Invest in recreation amenities and expand and maintain parks, trails, and programming for all
  - Work to attract healthcare facilities like eye care and dentists and promote Bridgton Hospital
  - Maintain the variety of craft fairs, events, and farmers markets
  - Improve signage for parking
  - Improve ability to walk and bike into downtown and improve public transportation options
  - Improve traffic conditions
- 2. How do you think that the Town should balance its year-round and seasonal economies? What type of growth (development, infrastructure, amenities) should**

**the Town encourage (and where) to support the needs of residents (housing, jobs, services, recreation) and the Town's position as a service center?**

- Improve recreation and social opportunities, including kayaking, biking, cross country skiing, parks, and recreation center
- Add more individual and unique housing opportunities that are affordable and central to the downtown
- Limit the development of big box stores
- Invest in creating jobs like small-scale manufacturing to support those who want to live and work in Bridgton
- Support local businesses and work with local entrepreneurs to create more entertainment options and businesses that cater to year-round residents
- Reduce traffic and speeding throughout Bridgton

**3. What actions or initiatives should the Town prioritize to protect and maintain natural resources and open space?**

- Support Lakes Environmental Association to protect lakes and ponds
- Work with Loon Echo Land Trust to conserve additional land
- Enforce shoreland zones and improve enforcement for all codes
- Increase parks maintenance and recreation staff to support parks maintenance and expansion of programs
- Invest in a recreation fund to support infrastructure and recreation amenities
- Ban clear-cutting of forests and require buffers along roadways
- Improve the Community Center
- Improve recreation activities and opportunities for children
- Consider tax incentives for keeping land undeveloped
- Consider short-term rental ordinances

**4. How does the built and natural environment and Town programs and policies support community connection and well-being and how could this be improved (e.g., parks and public spaces, walkability, recreation programs)?**

- Maintain a good balance of both developed and natural resources
- Enhance Recreation Department accessibility and accessibility of Town-owned buildings
- Bridge the school curriculums with recreation and natural resource organizations to provide more education on natural resource protection
- Prioritize municipal staffing in the Recreation and Public Works Departments
- Develop better trail access throughout Town and improve ability to bike to destinations

- Prioritize inclusive development with universal design principles and allow for alternative housing types
- Improve the offering of culturally diverse events in Bridgton
- Diversity recreation opportunities (e.g., add disc golf course, Jumping Janes, recreation center)
- Create a local bus or trolley loop to improve accessibility of the downtown
- Re-route truck traffic away from the downtown
- Limit big box store development
- Improve child care access

# Future Land Use Workshop and Visual Preference Survey

On August 28, 2024, an in-person Future Land Use Workshop was held at the Town Offices. Participants were able to learn about project activities to date, hear an overview of proposed land use categories developed based on community and Task Force feedback, provide input on proposed land use categories, and provide feedback on the size, scale, density, and design of development that they would like to see in each category. Roughly 30 people attended the event.

Following the presentation, participants could place dots on photos that they liked and provide comments on their preferred vision for each land use category. A post card advertising the event was mailed to each address in Bridgton. The event was also shared on the Town website and social media platforms.

The same activity was provided digitally via an online visual preference survey. Survey participants were able to provide feedback on the same visuals and provide input on their preferred vision for each category. A total of 21 people responded to the survey. A summary of responses is below:

## **Downtown Village Business (DVB) Districts**

- Preserving historic buildings and encouraging use of original materials like wood clapboard siding and wood window framing is a priority for respondents.
- Respondents suggested implementing design standards for new construction that fit the size, design, and scale of the downtown.
- Respondents would like to see the Town encourage small business to move into vacant storefronts.
- Respondents were most in favor of preserving existing buildings and scale in the downtown.
- Respondents were in favor of allowing for mixed-use, multi-family, and single-family developments that fit the context and character of existing buildings.

## **Downtown Village Neighborhood and Residential Neighborhood**

- Respondents would like to see smaller homes instead of large apartment buildings, to provide more options to single residents, first-time homeowners, and new families.
- Maintaining the small-town feel of the neighborhoods surrounding the downtown is a priority.
- The Town should consider how new development will impact narrow side streets and pedestrian safety in and around the Downtown Village Neighborhood.
- Respondents would like to see historic homes preserved.
- Respondents were most in favor of small-scale residential development.

### **Inner Corridor**

- The Town should consider requirements for tree buffers to hide development from the road.
- The Town should consider the impacts of additional traffic on major roads.
- Respondents were most in favor of small-scale commercial development that is more similar to the development patterns in the DVB Districts as well as smaller, single-story commercial businesses like grocery stores.

### **Outer Corridor**

- The Town should consider buffering so buildings cannot be seen from the road.
- Respondents would like to see warehouse and industrial buildings that are more attractive if they can be seen from the road.
- Respondents were most in favor of commercial buildings that were hidden by heavy buffering.

### **Rural Village and Rural Corridor**

- Respondents would like sprawl to be limited along rural corridors.
- The Town should allow for additional expansion of commercial businesses near Pleasant Mountain.
- Respondents were most in favor of neighborhood-oriented businesses and services like cafes and post offices, and small single-family homes.
- Along the Rural Corridor, respondents were most in favor of agricultural uses and heavy buffering of development.

### **Rural Residential**

- A top priority for respondents is the protection of open space and natural resources.
- Respondents would like the Town to allow for smaller housing on smaller lots (e.g., cluster developments) to preserve more open space.
- Respondents were in favor of small, cluster developments, homes on large (over 20 acre lots), agricultural uses, and open space and trails.

## Social Pinpoint Summary

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

- Surveys – Survey feedback is captured in the Community Survey section of this summary.
- The Ideas Wall included options to post comments regarding the Town’s strengths, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.
- The Interactive Town map provided options to post comments regarding the Town’s strengths, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.
- Question of the Month

In total, 788 individuals visited the website. A summary of feedback from the site is below:

### Ideas Wall and Map

#### What I love about Bridgton

Responses to ‘what I love about Bridgton’ noted by commentors include:

- The gardens around downtown
- The natural beauty of the region and the rural nature of the outer corridor

#### Ideas and suggestions

Respondents’ ideas and suggestions include:

- Invest further in public safety, including a Public Safety Building, and a fully-staffed Fire and EMS department
- Improve the safety, walkability, and bikeability of Portland Road, including bike lanes, improved trail networks, roundabouts, medians to reduce speed, and channelized right-turn lanes
- Improve infrastructure at stream crossings to mitigate impacts of intense storms
- Invest in maintaining clean lakes in Bridgton
- Invest in a recreation center or attract a recreation-based organization to offer indoor recreation access for year-round residents
- Work with Boyne Resorts and Pleasant Mountain to reduce roadblocks to development and address environmental concerns
- Expand services within the Downtown and encourage denser development near the Town center to reduce sprawl

#### Challenges

Respondents' challenges include:

- Rapid housing growth resulting in the loss of woodlands and forested areas
- Undersized and damaged culverts that lead to increased damage when severe storms occur
- Lakes associations are limited and need additional support to provide boat inspections, surveys, watershed studies, and erosion-reduction initiatives
- Lack of protection for historic buildings
- Increase in short-term rentals and lack of affordable, year-round housing
- Concern that needs of residents throughout all parts of Bridgton are not being met
- The siting and location of potential social service buildings

## Question of the Month

From December 2023 to October 2024, a Question of the Month was posted on the Social Pinpoint site to get feedback on specific topics. The question each month was chosen by the Task Force. Questions were posted to the Town's Instagram account and shared on the project website. A summary of feedback for each month is below:

### **What would you like to see changed or stay the same?**

Keep the historic, small-town, rural feel and improve healthcare services, schools, recreation, and community facilities, walkability

### **Where do you take out of town visitors?**

Pondicherry Park, downtown (restaurants, shops, galleries), Pleasant Mountain, Highland Lake, Salmon Point

### **What do you love most about Bridgton?**

Access to lakes, history of Bridgton, downtown, access to services, recreation, small-town feel

### **What, if lost, would fundamentally change the character of Bridgton?**

Access to lakes, good water quality, local businesses (Bridgton News, Drive-In, downtown businesses), natural resources, historic buildings, downtown, small-town feel, affordability

### **What brought you to Bridgton, and why do you stay?**

Grew up visiting Bridgton, retired to Bridgton, access to lakes and recreation, walkable downtown, friends and family, sense of community, small-town feel

### **What types of businesses and services do you feel are missing in Bridgton? What products or services you feel you need to leave Bridgton for?**

None or necessary services are available in nearby communities, hospital services, trash pickup, small grocery stores, lunch options and cafes, additional restaurants, UPS, thrift stores and clothing stores, recreation center or YMCA

**What is your greatest concern for the future of Bridgton?**

Affordable housing, over development, big box stores, unregulated and unplanned growth, health of natural resources, losing the small-town feel, traffic

**How should Bridgton balance preserving its lakes, forests, and other natural areas with the growth of businesses and housing?**

Cluster housing developments, restore historic and old buildings, limit development, conserve additional open space, encourage infill development and density in the Town center to preserve open space, and use buffers to maintain rural feel

**What investments do you think are most important for the Town to make to support a strong community for Bridgton's youth?**

Support jobs and learning opportunities, work with the school to support students in accessing skill-building and leadership opportunities, partner with Loon Echo Land Trust to provide recreation opportunities, invest in better head start programs, create more civic opportunities, encourage accessible recreation opportunities for people of all abilities, enforce speeding regulations to make the downtown safer to walk, and recreation center

**What types of landscaping or buffers do you think should be required for new developments along Bridgton's corridors?**

Keep natural tree buffers, limit sprawl down the corridors, create substantial setback requirements

**What special place or characteristic captures the spirit of our town?**

Downtown parks and neighborhoods, Pondicherry Park, Moose Pond, Main Street, Bridgton Public Ice Rink, and other events throughout the year

## Other Opportunities for Public Comment

In addition to the in-person, at home, and online opportunities for public involvement described in this summary, community members were welcome to provide feedback to the Task Force and Town staff throughout the project via phone, email, or in-person. The project website (via Social Pinpoint) was available through the duration of the project for community members to learn about the project and progress made and to provide feedback. In addition to sharing updates on the project website, Town staff shared project updates through the Town's website and social media platforms. Comprehensive Plan Task Force meetings and agendas were posted to the Town's website and all Task Force meetings were open to the public. Over the course of the project from November 2023 to May 2025, the Task Force held more than 20 meetings at which the public was welcome to attend (virtually or in-person) and provide comments.

*Love always,*  
**BRIDGTON**  
**MAINE**



# Appendix D: Inventory and Analysis



*Shorey Park*



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## Introduction

Tucked away near the eastern edge of the White Mountains, the Town of Bridgton (the Town) is situated among lakes and scenic forests. Bridgton’s cultural and natural resources have been inextricably linked to its way of life. Events like Music on Main, cultural assets like the Bridgton Historical Society, and the Town’s many lakes, trails, and parks provide opportunities for the community to gather and create a shared sense of place. Bridgton offers year-round opportunities for visitors and residents to be outdoors—whether they are looking to see golden and red leaves speckled through the pine at peak fall foliage, jump into the cool water on a warm summer day, or ski into downtown to have coffee at a local shop.

Bridgton is located in the Lakes Region along Route 302; it is 40 miles from Portland, 45 miles from Lewiston and Auburn, and 25 miles from Conway, New Hampshire. The Lakes Region stretches from the Sebago Lake area in the east to the White Mountains in New Hampshire in the west. The Town’s location is an asset, providing easy access for visitors and enabling access for residents to other regions of Maine and New Hampshire. Bridgton also serves as a service center for those in neighboring communities who rely on assets like the Bridgton Hospital and a variety of retail and grocery stores.

Mill closures through the late 1800s and 1900s along Stevens Brook severely impacted the Town’s economy and year-round population. By the 1950s most mills had closed, and the Town’s economy shifted more heavily toward retail and service industries; however, there are opportunities for year-round residents to live, work, and play.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Maine saw high levels of in-migration, with people drawn to various state amenities. In 2021, Maine saw the highest percentage of inbound moves in the United States and the second highest in 2022.<sup>1</sup> Bridgton’s population grew an estimated 4.2% from 2020 to 2022.

Bridgton has seen recent housing development, which has likely contributed to its population growth. However, there continues to be a high demand for housing of all types, and housing costs have increased in the past few years. Prior to the pandemic, those earning the Town’s median income could largely afford the Town’s median home price. Today, the income needed to afford the median home price is much higher than the Town’s median income, resulting in a widening affordability gap.

As Bridgton seeks 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 Bridgton in 2023. This analysis will

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<sup>1</sup> Valigra, Lori. January 3, 2023. “Maine Among the Most Popular States to Move to in 2022.” *Bangor Daily News*. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/01/03/business/maine-inboundmoving-2022>



serve as the basis for refining the Town’s vision statements and developing recommendations and actions for the Town of Bridgton Comprehensive Plan Update. The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide future growth and development in the Town for the next decade. Recommendations in the plan will provide direction for the Select Board, staff, boards, committees, and other responsible agencies in updating land use ordinances and regulations, directing capital investments, and making policy decisions.

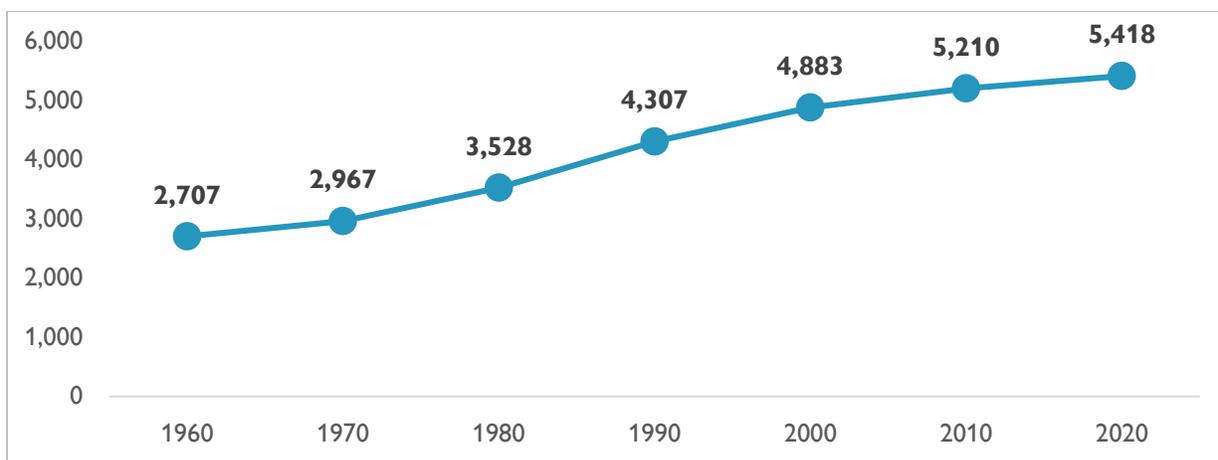
The inventory and analysis includes an assessment of current conditions, provides an overview of recent trends, and identifies key issues to further explore in the next phase of the planning process. An understanding of the Town’s current state as it relates to resident and community concerns will inform the direction of the plan. Understanding current conditions and how the Town has developed and evolved is essential to creating an actionable plan that will support the Town in achieving its vision. This inventory uses the most recent available data from sources like the U.S. Census, the American Community Survey (ACS), MaineHousing, and Maine State Economist; however, there are limitations to available data, including timeliness and accuracy. Although some data are from 2023, the most recent data from other sources is 2021. Larger surveys, like the U.S. Census and ACS, are limited by the accuracy of responses and have some standard error included. In some cases, data may not exist on certain topics. This analysis is based on available data as well as interviews with Town staff and stakeholders. In some instances, inferences are made about trends for recent years where data are not available. These cases are noted in the text as assumptions based on the best available information.

# 1 Population and Demographics

## Introduction

Bridgton has experienced steady growth since the 1960s, with the most significant growth occurring from the 1980s to 2000. While growth has continued in recent years, state population projections estimate a slight decline in population in the Town and region by 2040. Although many factors impact population change in the region, the aging population and declining workforce have been statewide concerns for several years.

**Figure 1.1: Population Growth**



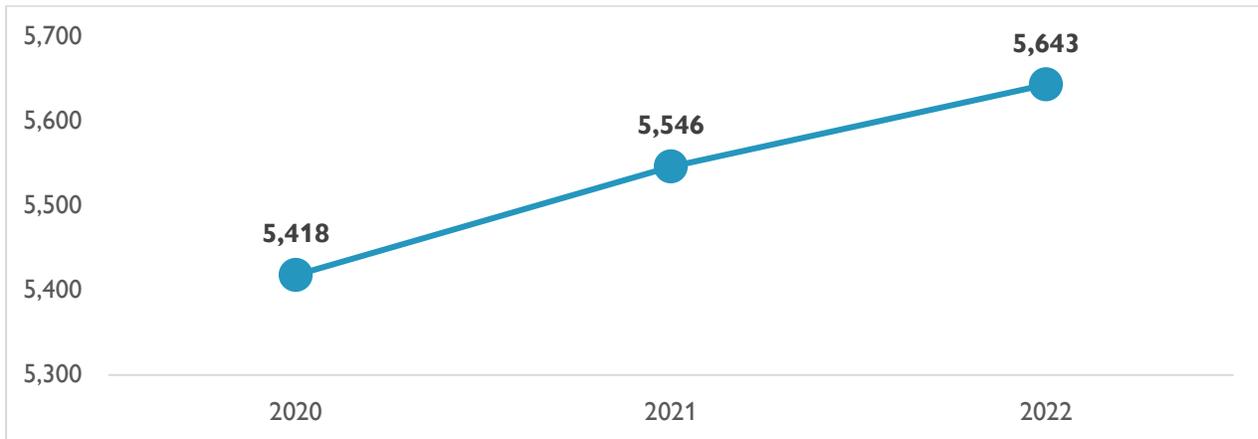
Source: U.S. Census

Shifts in the Town’s seasonal population have been difficult to track and significantly impact the region’s economy and demand for services and amenities. Approximately 43% of the Town’s housing units are for seasonal use. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many seasonal homeowners came to Bridgton to live year-round, according to Town officials. It is unclear exactly how many seasonal residents transitioned to temporary or permanent full-time residency. The Town’s population growth from 2020 to 2022 is likely due, in part, to this transition from seasonal to permanent. As more workers return to the office, this trend may be reversing, but it is difficult to predict. There are many factors to consider in assessing the Town’s growth potential, as discussed in this section.

## Population Change

The Town’s population has continued to grow through 2022, with significant growth since 2020. From 2010 to 2020, the Town’s population increased 4.0%. In just two years, from 2020 to 2022, the population grew another 4.2%—from 5,418 to 5,643 residents—according to U.S. Census and Census population estimates.

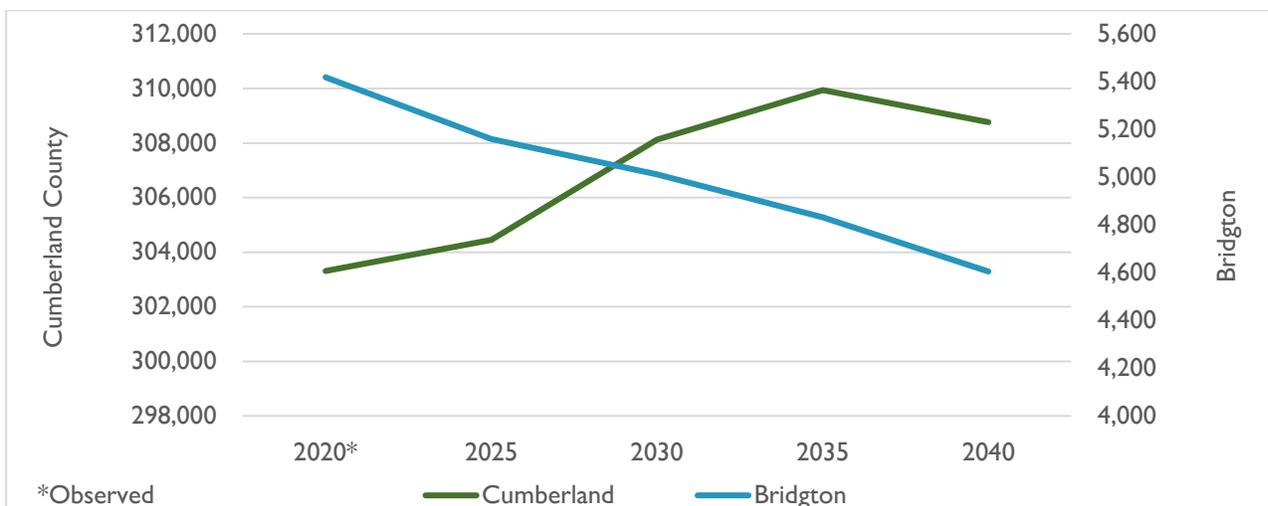
**Figure 1.2: Bridgton Population, 2020 – 2022**



Source: U.S. Census; U.S. Census Population Estimates

In 2023, the Maine State Economist released new population projections, which estimate a 4.7% population decline in Bridgton from 2020 to 2040. During the same time period, total population for Maine and Cumberland County are projected to grow. Recent population growth in Bridgton and ongoing housing development may indicate a divergence from these projections, which are based on historical population trends and birth/death rates. The Town’s significant population growth in recent years appears to be contrary to projections that anticipate continued population decline for each five-year time period from 2020 to 2040. Still, a relatively low birth rate and aging population will impact the Town’s growth.

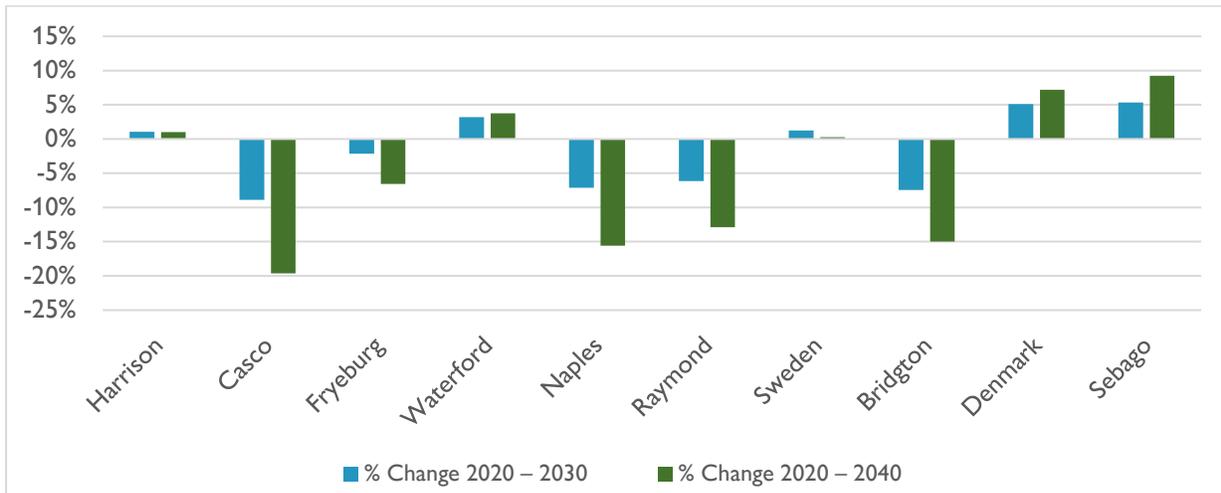
**Figure 1.3: Population Projections, 2020 – 2040**



Source: Maine State Economist

While Cumberland County (including Portland and other coastal communities) is expected to grow in the next two decades, a slight population decline is expected for Oxford County and the Lakes Region.

**Figure 1.4: Regional Population Projections by Municipality**



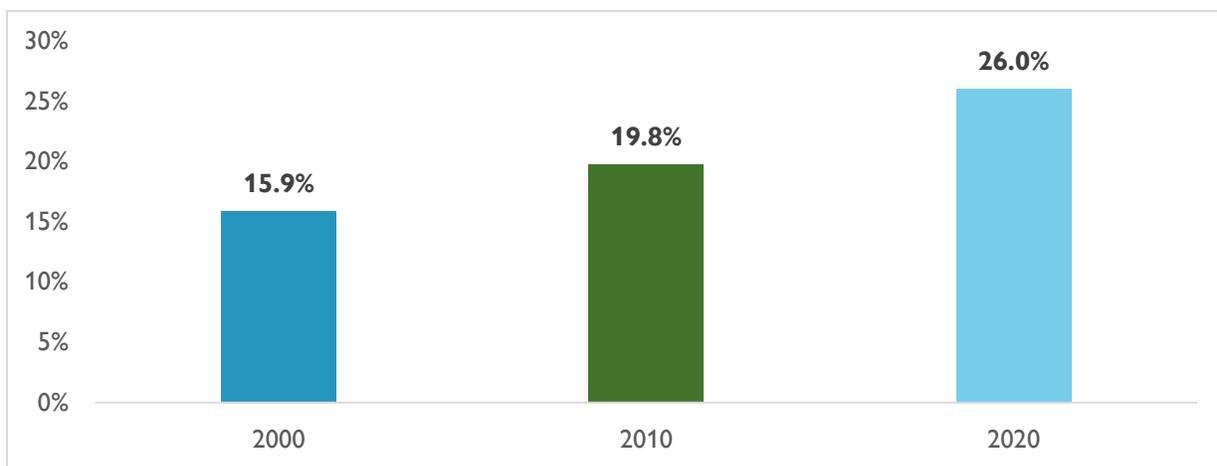
Source: Maine State Economist

### Age

Following state and national trends, Bridgton’s population is aging, and the Town has experienced natural population decline (more deaths than births). With the population continuing to age, attracting younger people to the region and state is critical to support the declining workforce.

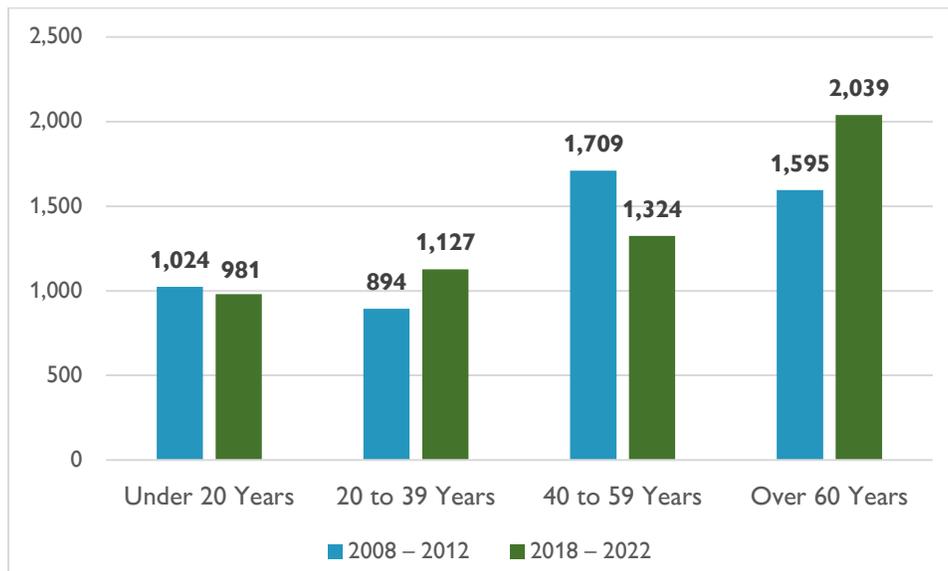
The Town’s population has continued to age in the past few decades. The median age increased from 45.6 in 2010 to 49.9 in 2020, but Census estimate data for 2018 to 2022 reflects a slight decline from 2020 (47.6), which may be indicative of a more recent influx of younger people. Similarly, the percentage of the population over age 65 has continued to grow to more than 25% of Bridgton’s total population (1,411 residents).

**Figure 1.5: Percentage of Bridgton Population 65 and Older**



Source: U.S. Census

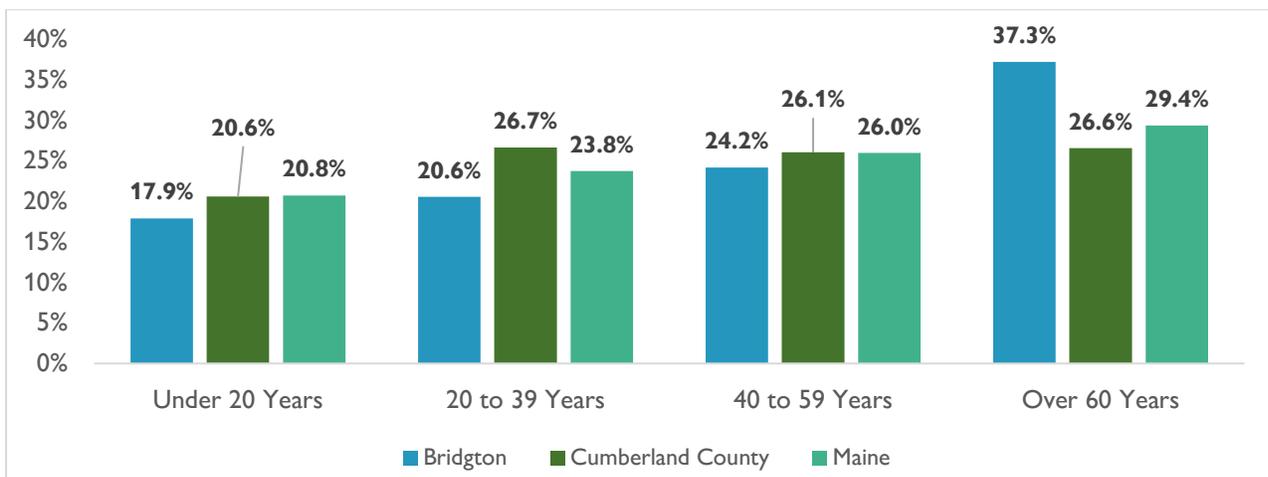
**Figure 1.6: Bridgton Population Change by Age Category**



Source: ACS 2012 and 2022 5-year estimates

While this trend is not unique to Bridgton, the Town is already older (based on median age) than both the county (42.4) and state (44.8), with Maine being the oldest state in the nation. This trend is expected to continue, with a projected 53.7% increase in Cumberland County’s population over age 65 from 2020 to 2040.

**Figure 1.7: Percentage of Population by Age Category (2018 – 2022)**



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

While the older adult population in Bridgton is growing, the youth population has decreased in recent years, with a 4.2% decrease in the population under 20 years from 2012 to 2022. The population of young children (under age 5) experienced an especially steep decline from 272 young children to 81 during that time period. Although smaller data sets, like the ACS, have a greater margin of error, the

trend of a shrinking youth population and an expanding retirement-age population is consistent across the region and state.

### Household Size

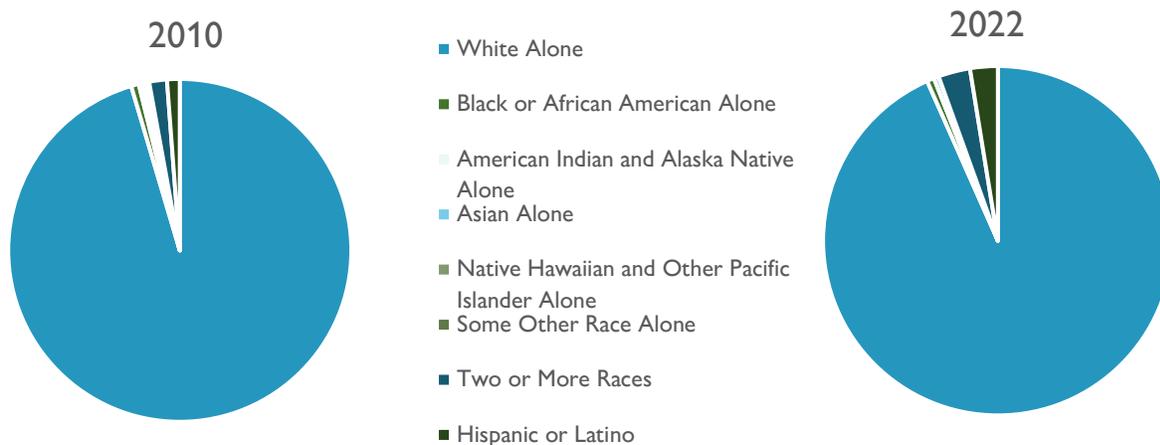
Bridgton’s average family size has declined since 2010, and average household size has declined slightly. This is indicative of the aging population and the shift to smaller households as children become adults and form their own families and households.

The percentage of households with children under 18 has also declined slightly from 20.5% (2008 – 2012 five-year estimates) to 15.6% (2018 – 2022 five-year estimates), or 375 households with children in 2022.

### Race and Ethnicity

While Bridgton, like the rest of the Lakes Region, is predominantly white, the Town has become slightly more racially and ethnically diverse in the last decade. The most notable change has been an 83% increase (from 88 to 161) in people who identify as two or more races. This could, in part, be due to more people now identifying as two or more races, as this was not an option on earlier versions of the Census form. Additionally, the number of residents who identify as Hispanic or Latino increased from 63 to 140.

**Figure 1.8: Race and Ethnicity in Bridgton, 2010 – 2022**



Source: 2010 U.S. Census, 2022 ACS 5-year estimates

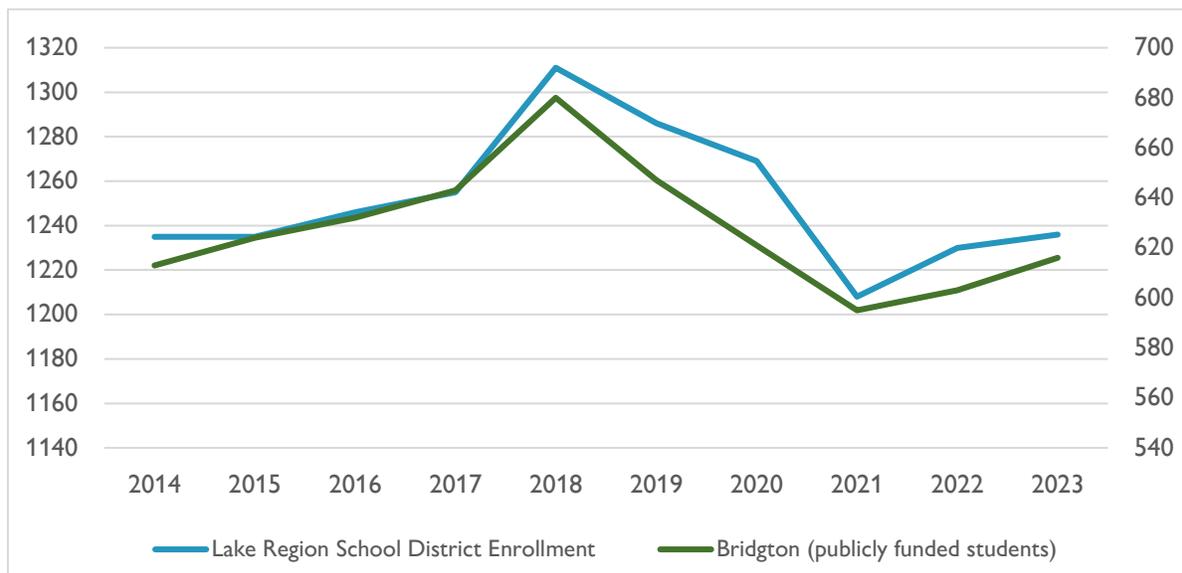


## Education

### School Enrollment

The Lake Region School District serves Bridgton, the Town of Casco, and the Town of Naples. Total school enrollment experienced a steeper decline in 2020 and 2021. Total school enrollment for the district and enrollment of Bridgton students had increased slightly since 2021 but has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

**Figure 1.9: Public School Enrollment Over Time**

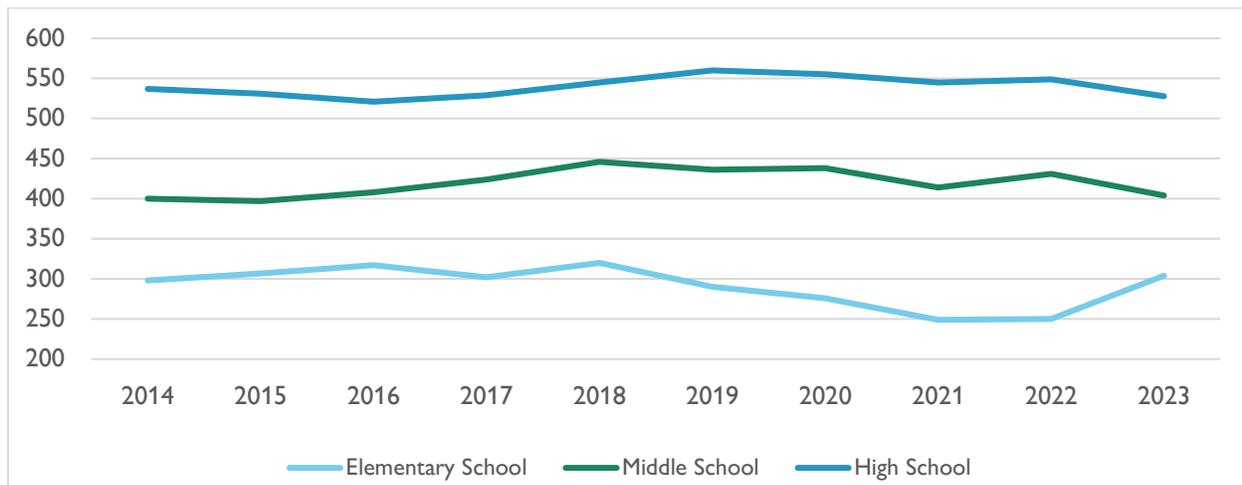


Source: Maine Department of Education

Total enrollment for the three Lake Region elementary schools for 2023 is higher than 2019 enrollment rates (304 compared to 290), while middle school and high school enrollment have not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Similarly, elementary school enrollment increased from 2022 to 2023, while middle and high school enrollment both declined. Additionally, the number of homeschooled students in the Lake Region School District area has increased. In 2020, there were 80 homeschooled students, which increased to 145 students in 2021 and 149 students in 2022. The total number of homeschooled students declined to 127 in 2023.



**Figure 1.10: Lake Region School District Enrollment Over Time by School**



Source: Maine Department of Education

### Educational Attainment

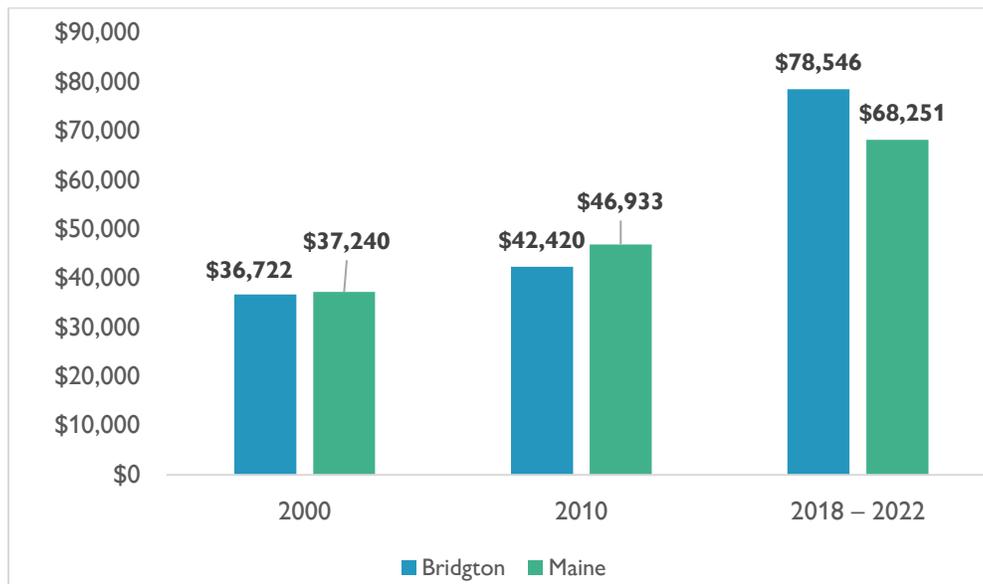
Bridgton has seen an increase in educational attainment, with over half (51.3%) of residents over age 25 with an associate degree or higher—up from 34.9% in 2010. Similarly, the percentage of adults over 25 with a bachelor’s degree or higher increased from 24.9% in 2010 to 35.8% in 2022. During that same time, there was a slight increase (6.4% to 8.9%) in the percentage of adults who did not complete high school or equivalency.

### Income and Poverty

Bridgton is economically diverse and seeing increasing affluence in recent years, which may be influenced by recent development in the Town as well as more affluent seasonal homeowners transitioning to live in Bridgton full-time.

Bridgton’s median income (\$78,546 based on 2018-2022 estimates) is higher than the state but lower than the county (which has the highest median household income of any county in the state). While median household income has increased across Maine, Bridgton’s median household income increased at a faster rate (85.2% increase) than the state (45.4% increase) since 2010. This is a shift from the previous decade (2000 to 2010), which saw slower income growth in Bridgton (16% increase in median income) when compared to the state’s income growth (26%).

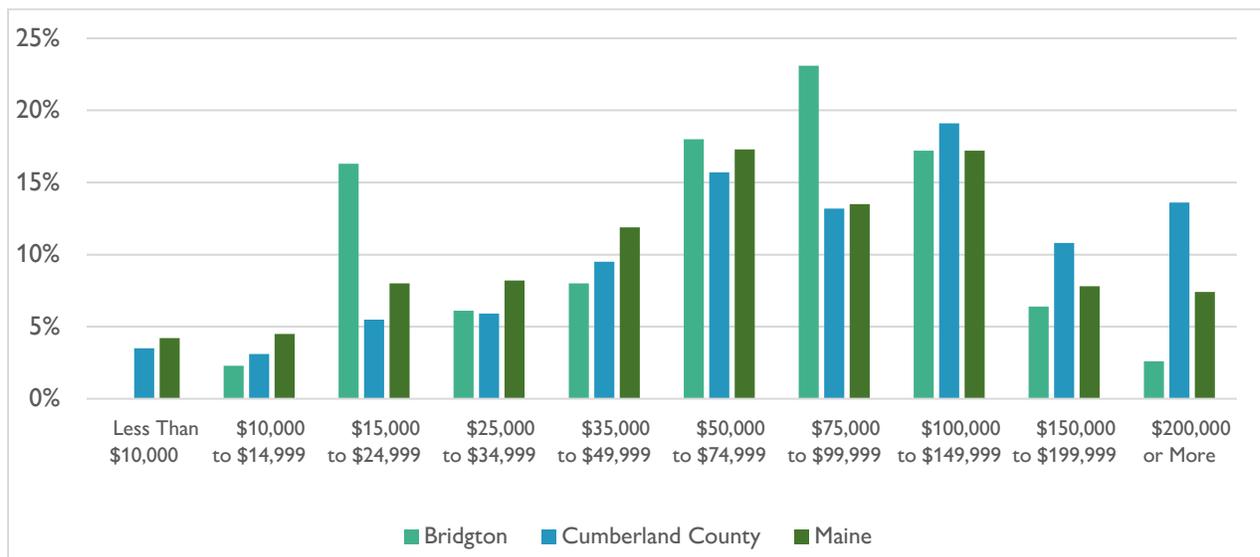
**Figure 1.11: Median Household Income**



Source: ACS 5-year estimates, U.S. Census

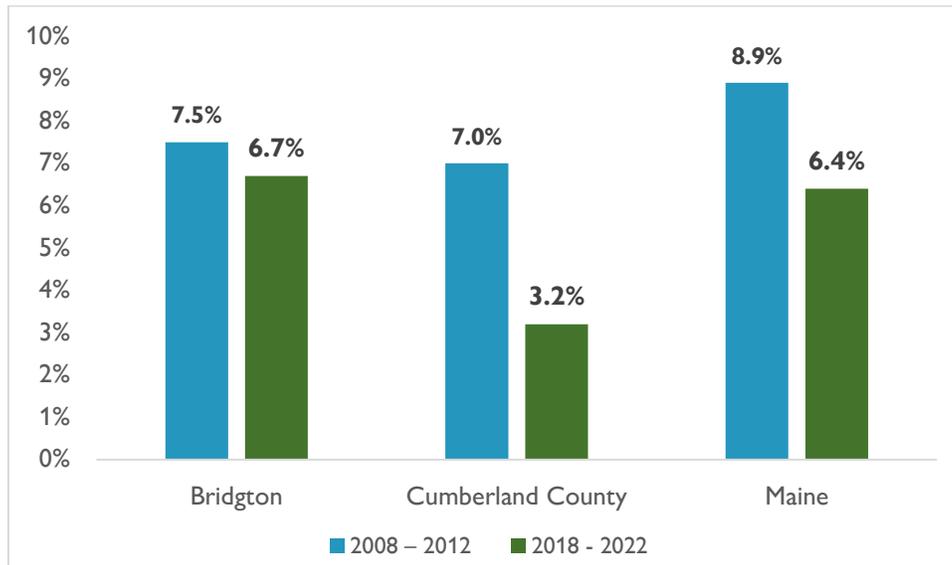
When considering the Town’s breakdown by income category, there is a significantly higher percentage of households earning \$15,000 to \$24,999 compared to the county and state, which may reflect the higher proportion of retirement-age people living in the Town.

**Figure 1.12: Income Breakdown by Region**



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

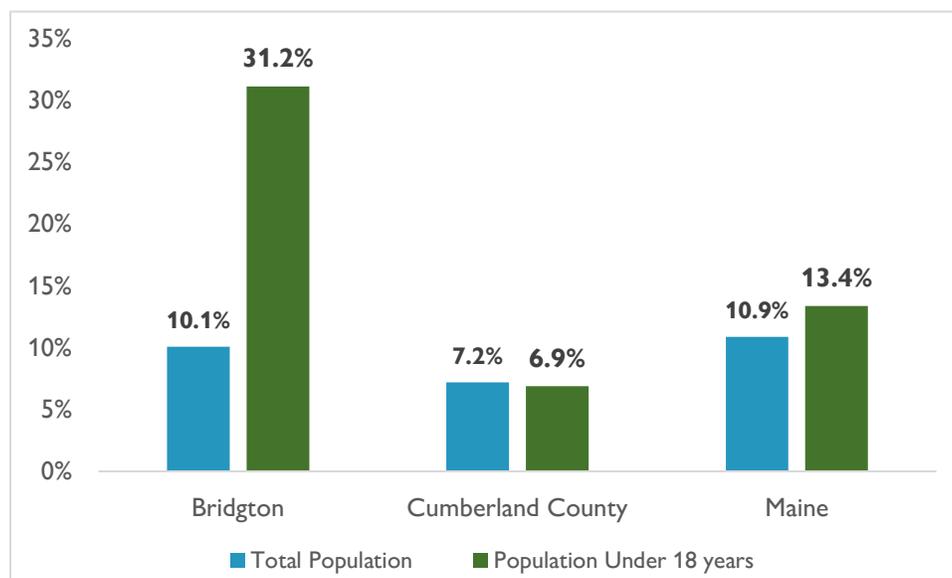
**Figure 1.13: Poverty Status by Families by Region, 2012 – 2022**



Source: ACS 2012 and 2022 5-year estimates

Similar to the income trends for the Town, the percentage of families living below the federal poverty line decreased from 7.5% to 6.7%. Overall, the Town’s 8101% poverty rate of the total population (for which poverty status is determined) is higher than the county (7.2%) and slightly below the state poverty rate of 10.9%. Of note is the higher rate of child poverty in Bridgton, with 31.2% of children under 18 years living below the poverty line.

**Figure 1.14: Poverty Status by Region**



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates



## Seasonal Population

The Lakes Region in western Maine is a popular tourist destination and location for seasonal homes. Similar to the rest of the region, Bridgton's population increases during the summer tourist season. The U.S. Census does not count seasonal residents and visitors in the Town's total population count, and the total number of visitors can be difficult to track. The U.S. Census does provide information on vacant housing, including seasonally occupied housing. There are approximately 2,382 vacant housing units in Bridgton for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. This is approximately 50% of the Town's total housing stock. Based on this number of seasonal residences, the Town's population could nearly double during peak tourist season.

Anecdotally, the Town has experienced seasonal population shifts in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of remote work. Town staff have noted more seasonal residents spending more time in Bridgton or transitioning to full-time residence. It is difficult to estimate how many seasonal residents have made this transition or the impact of these residents on Town services and infrastructure. Other factors and shifting trends, including the return to office-based work for many employees and the growing number of retirement-age people, are also influencing seasonal population changes in the Town.

## Impact on Services

The Town's recent downtown infrastructure improvements, including upgrading and expanding the wastewater system, will enable and encourage more growth within the downtown area. With these improvements, the Town is preparing to support a growing community and improve quality of life to attract new residents and visitors. With recent housing development attracting younger residents, the Town can anticipate a growing demand for recreational, social, and entertainment amenities.

As the population continues to age, the demand for services for older adults—including transportation assistance, healthcare, home repair, recreational activities, and housing—will increase. In addition, addressing the needs of the Town's youth population, especially those who are experiencing poverty, will continue to be a concern for Bridgton.

## Challenges and Opportunities

As noted in this chapter, recent changes and trends in the past few years, including the pandemic-related surge in domestic migration to Maine and the ongoing housing crisis, make it difficult to accurately predict demographic changes for the Town. Bridgton has seen new housing development under construction and recently permitted, which will help address housing needs, especially for older adults and those looking to rent in Bridgton. Still, the state and regional housing crisis will continue to impact housing demand in the Town.



Bridgton’s large seasonal population, for which there are limited data, is an added challenge in predicting the Town’s future service needs. While population projections estimate an overall population decline in the next decade, current trends in Bridgton—including significant housing development, commercial growth, steady tourism, and infrastructure improvements to accommodate development—indicate continued growth. The Town and region will need more working-age adults to support the declining labor force as the population ages. Providing services and amenities for residents and visitors of all ages will be critical to support the retirement-age population, attract workers, and continue to be a desirable place for young families.

There continues to be a high demand for housing of all types in Bridgton and the region, as housing costs have increased dramatically in recent years. Ongoing housing development since 2020 is likely contributing to recent population growth. Whether housing development continues and how and where the Town may encourage or restrict development in the future will also affect population growth and service needs as the state continues to experience in-migration and a high demand for housing.

## Sources

American Community Survey

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Lake Region School District

Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Maine State Economist

Maine Department of Education

U.S. Census



## 2 Natural and Water Resources

### Introduction

Bridgton's natural resources are important to the Town's character and identity. There has been an enduring history and commitment to the lakes and natural settings. Historically, the Wabanaki tribe inhabited the wooded areas and lands adjacent to lakes and streams to hunt, fish, and trade. The Town's rich natural resources have, and continue to be, a way to support the livelihood of the community. Over time, the lumber mills, farming, and industry developed within the Town. The Town eventually evolved into a tourism- and recreation-based economy. In the summer, visitors flock to the lakes and forest, and in the winter, to the mountains and ski slopes. An understanding of Bridgton's natural environment and its relationship to the built environment is essential for making land use decisions and meeting community goals. Bridgton has a rich diversity of natural and water resources and is committed to protecting their quality and managing their quantity. Bridgton's natural and water resources include freshwater wetlands, rivers, lakes, aquifers, ponds, and estuaries. Accommodating growth and transient populations with the preservation and protection of Bridgton's natural and water resources continues to be a priority.

### Geology and Soils

The Lakes Region was scoured by retreating glaciers. As the ice moved, meltwater filled the depressions, which were further supported by moraines, which acted like dams by holding in the water and creating the lakes of the region. The geology of Bridgton consists primarily of till, wetlands, and glaciofluvial and glaciolacustrine deposits, which are sand, gravel, silt, and mud mixtures deposited from glacial retreat. All this loose material overlies solid ledge. Throughout the Town, there are exposed bedrock outcroppings. These natural features add to the scenic character of Bridgton, impact water flows, and constrain development. Most of the surface areas are deposits formed by glacial and deglacial processes during the last stage of continental glaciation, which began 25,000 years ago. The remaining surficial deposits are the products of postglacial processes, such as river floodplains and human activity (fill and earthwork). Land use decisions and environmental issues are related to surficial geology. Construction projects that involve activities such as locating new roads, excavating foundations, or siting new homes are affected by the geology of the site.

### Landforms and Watersheds

A watershed is a land area that directs and channels water, both rain and snowmelt, to creeks, streams, rivers, and, eventually, to discharges, like the ocean or a bay. All land is in a watershed. As the water flows, it impacts people, land, and wildlife and is critical to the overall health and well-being of communities. Rain and snow that run off the land often pick up pollutants, which adversely affect the watershed's ecology and, ultimately, its 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 coordination and partnership.

Bridgton falls almost entirely within the Willett Brook and Brandy Pond watersheds.<sup>2</sup> The Willett Brook watershed stretches from the towns of Sweden and Waterford to Highland Lake and through downtown Bridgton; it crosses into the Town of Demark in Oxford County. The Willett Brook watershed is part of the Sebago Lake and Presumpscot watersheds. The Brandy Pond watershed stretches from the towns of Waterford and Sweden—encompassing much of Long Lake within Bridgton—and ultimately into the Town of Naples and Brandy Pond. The Brandy Pond watershed is part of the Sebago Lake and Presumpscot watersheds. Bridgton also contains parts of the Kezar Pond, Moose Pond, Muddy River, Baker Pond, Peabody Pond, Bear River, and Pleasant Pond watersheds.

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 state waters that fail to meet state and federal water quality standards. Bridgton has historically been known for having some of the healthiest, cleanest lakes and streams in Maine. There are no Maine DEP 303(d) listed urban impaired streams. These would be identified for failing to meet DEP standards for water quality and would require an in-depth evaluation and efforts to improve water quality. The lack of urban impaired streams in Bridgton reinforces Bridgton's commitment to healthy waters within the Town and downstream.

## Surface Waters

Bridgton has abundant surface waters (lakes, rivers, wetlands, reservoirs, creeks, and estuaries). Healthy surface waters are a crucial resource because of their ecological, social, scenic, and recreational uses. The State has developed classification systems for lakes, rivers, and saltwaters. These systems are based on standards for uses such as drinking water supply, fishery habitat, and recreation. Bridgton has significant streams, lakes, ponds, rivers, and wetlands that make up its surface water network. Highland Lake, Long Lake, Kezar Pond, Moose Pond, Peabody Pond, Woods Pond, Beaver Pond, Otter Pond, Adams Pond, Holt Pond, Ingalls/Foster Pond, Willets Brook, Stevens Brook, and various wetlands are the primary features comprising the diverse and complex surface water network in Bridgton.

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<sup>2</sup> Lakes Environmental Association Watershed Map [link](#)





## Rivers and Streams

All the rivers and streams in Bridgton have been classified as Class A except for Steven's Brook, which is Class B. Class A is the second highest classification and is defined as freshwaters suitable for drinking water after disinfection. These waters are also suitable for fishing, agriculture, recreation in and on the water, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life. Class B is the third highest classification and is suitable for drinking water supply after treatment. These waters are also suitable for fishing, agriculture, recreation in and on the water, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life. The habitat must be characterized as unimpaired. Stevens Brook has experienced water quality issues because of increased nutrient loads from surrounding land as well as Town wastewater discharges. The discharges of treated water into the stream were not meeting water quality requirements. In 2018, Bridgton was awarded significant funding to offset the costs for three major infrastructure improvements to replace the failing wastewater system, where recent tests were showing that the wastewater systems were contaminating parts of Stevens Brook.<sup>3</sup>

## Lakes and Ponds

As the area is known as the Lakes Region, it is no surprise that Bridgton has an abundant number of lakes and ponds: 11 lakes and ponds provide recreation, habitat, and scenic resources year-round. All lakes in Bridgton are classified as GPA, which is the State's sole classification for great ponds and natural lakes. Lakes not meeting this standard require municipalities to evaluate water quality impacts and implement best management practices to achieve a GPA level. Class GPA waters are suitable for the designation of drinking water after disinfection. They can also be used for recreation, fishing, agriculture, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life. The habitat must be characterized as natural. Recent development and an increase of impervious surfaces within lake watersheds have also increased phosphorus and other nutrients. Phosphorus is a natural element found in soil particles and organic matter (such as leaves) that are transported to lakes and streams through erosion and stormwater runoff. Sources include pet waste, lawn fertilizers, seeping septic systems, and decomposing organic matter. Phosphorus controls are considered and regulated in the shoreland zoning and plan review process. A holistic approach that addresses nonpoint source (NPS) contamination, soil and erosion control, and stormwater runoff needs to be considered. The Town does not currently have any point source (direct discharge) into water

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<sup>3</sup> Town of Bridgton. October 1, 2018. "Bridgton Awarded \$11.5M in Grants to Complete Three Critical Infrastructure Projects. *Town of Bridgton*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://bridgtonmaine.org/notices/bridgton-awarded-11-5m-in-grants-to-complete-three-critical-infrastructure-improvements/>



bodies. The new wastewater treatment facility replaces outdated septic systems and leach fields in Willet Brook and Stevens Brook, ultimately improving water quality and health.

**Highland Lake:** Highland Lake has a lake surface of 1,334 acres and a maximum depth of 50 feet. It stretches from downtown Bridgton to the town line at Sweden. Due to the proximity to downtown, it is often the center of municipal-focused activities during events and festivals. There are more than 16 miles of shoreline, and the lake offers a range of recreation opportunities, scenery, and habitat. In the summer, residents and visitors enjoy swimming, fishing, water skiing, rowing, wildlife, and Highland Lake Beach; in the winter, they enjoy cross-country skiing, ice fishing, and snowmobiling.

**Long Lake:** With a lake surface of 4,935 acres, Long Lake is the second largest body of water in southern Maine. It has a maximum depth of 59 feet and is a popular recreation destination in the region, which includes public beaches at Plummer's Landing and Salmon Point. It provides the ideal community destination for swimming, boating, and fishing. It connects Brandy Pond and Sebago Lake and creates a regional network for boat tours and excursions. Long Lake supports a substantial black bass fishery and is one of the most popular lakes in southern Maine for fishing tournaments. The lake has numerous public boat launches, including one in Bridgton along Power House Road.

**Kezar Pond:** Kezar Pond is located in Bridgton and Fryeburg. It has a lake surface area of 1,851 acres and a maximum depth of 12 feet. Access to Kezar Pond is provided via Hemlock Bridge Road for car-top boats, canoes, and kayaks. Visitors must first traverse Old Course Saco River waterway before arriving at the pond. The pond supports populations of chain pickerel, yellow perch, and white perch.

**Moose Pond:** Moose Pond is located in Bridgton, Sweden, and Denmark at the base of the Pleasant Mountain range. It has a lake surface of 1,617 acres and a maximum depth of 70 feet. Route 302 is the major route connecting regional visitors to the Pleasant Mountain Ski Area. Route 302 also connects to Sabatis Island and separates the pond into north and main basins. Moose Pond is a popular destination for fishing, boating, and swimming. The pond supports large populations of landlocked salmon, lake trout, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, and others. There is a public boat launch off of Route 302.

**Peabody Pond:** Peabody Pond has a surface of 740 acres and a maximum depth of 64 feet. It is located between Bridgton, Sebago, and Naples. There is a public boat launch off of Route 107; however, there is otherwise limited access to this pond via private residences and a camp (Camp Micah). The camp offers a variety of water sports on the pond, including kayaking, sailing, water skiing, tubing, and more. The pond also supports populations of landlocked salmon, smallmouth bass, white perch, yellow perch, and others.

**Woods Pond:** This smaller pond is roughly 462 acres with a maximum depth of 29 feet. It is a popular destination for swimming, fishing, and boating, as the Town maintains a municipal beach, Woods Pond Beach, and a municipal boat launch. The Woods Pond Water Quality Association, a nonprofit



organization whose purpose is to preserve, protect, and enhance the water quality of Woods Pond, recently supported a milfoil boat wash station to help mitigate the spread of invasive species.

**Beaver Pond:** Beaver Pond is a small pond of 69 acres with a maximum depth of 35 feet. The pond was historically used as source waters for milling at Sucker Brook. Today, the pond is the backdrop for residential lots with no public access. Local residents use the pond for recreation and fishing. Beaver Pond’s habitat is ideal for warmwater species, largemouth bass, chain pickerel, and white perch.

**Otter Pond:** This small pond has two outlets that both drain to Long Lake. Otter Pond has a lake surface area of 90 acres and a maximum depth of 21 feet. There is limited access to this pond via private residences and camps. The shallow pond makes it best suited for warmwater fish, and the lake tends to be a weedy habitat.

**Adams Pond:** Located in southern Bridgton, Adams Pond is a carry-in access pond with restrictions on motorboats over 10 horsepower. This small pond has a lake surface area of 43 acres and a maximum depth of 51 feet. Brook trout, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, and white perch provide fishing opportunities. Adams Pond is stocked annually with brook trout.

**Holt Pond:** This 41-acre pond has a maximum depth of 10 feet and is part of a larger conservation area called the Holt Pond Preserve. The preserve has more than 700 acres of wetlands, forests, fields, and streams with the goal of protecting habitat and providing a place for visitors to learn about the importance of watershed conservation. The preserve has an extensive network of boardwalks and trails. The shallow waters and floating vegetation provide the ideal habitat for largemouth bass and chain pickerel.

**Ingalls/Foster Pond:** Located in the southern portion of Bridgton, this pond has a lake surface area of 149 acres and a maximum depth of 29 feet. Located in a rural area with limited access, this pond is a habitat for smallmouth bass, yellow perch, and chain pickerel. The pond is stocked annually with brook trout, but the warm waters make it poorly suited for cold-water species.

**Table 2.1: Lakes Environmental Association 2022 Water Testing**

|               | Average Deep Water Phosphorus (ppb) | Water Color (SPU) | Clarity Trend             | Phosphorus Trend            | Chlorophyll-a Trend         |
|---------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Highland Lake | 12.5                                | 26.8              | Increasing – High Clarity | Decreasing – Moderate Range | Decreasing – Low Range      |
| Long Lake     | 8.8                                 | 21.8              | Stable – Moderately Clear | Decreasing – Moderate Range | Decreasing – Moderate Range |



|                     | Average Deep Water Phosphorus (ppb) | Water Color (SPU) | Clarity Trend                 | Phosphorus Trend            | Chlorophyll-a Trend         |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Kezar Pond          | 40.0                                | 40.0              | *Low Clarity                  | Stable – High Range         | Stable – Low Range          |
| Moose Pond          | 7.5                                 | 26.9              | Stable – High Clarity         | Stable – Moderate Range     | Decreasing – Moderate Range |
| Peabody Pond        | 7.8                                 | 26.6              | Increasing – High Clarity     | Stable – Low Range          | Stable – Low Range          |
| Woods Pond          | N/A                                 | 34.4              | Stable – Moderately Clear     | Stable – Moderate Range     | Stable – Moderate Range     |
| Beaver Pond         | 25.5                                | 27.0              | Increasing – Moderately Clear | Decreasing – Moderate Range | Stable – Moderate Range     |
| Otter Pond          | 27.0                                | 41.0              | Increasing – Moderately Clear | Stable – Moderate Range     | Decreasing – Moderate Range |
| Adams Pond          | 34.0                                | 18.9              | Increasing – High Clarity     | Stable – Low Range          | Stable – Low Range          |
| Holt Pond           | 20.0                                | 100               | Stable – Low Clarity          | Stable – High Range         | Stable – Moderate Range     |
| Ingalls/Foster Pond | N/A                                 | 17.9              | Decreasing – Moderately Clear | Stable – Moderate Range     | Increasing – Moderate Range |

Source: Lakes Environmental Association, Water Testing Data

Note: \*Indicates that the Secchi disk touched the pond bottom but was still visible during sampling. When the Secchi disk touches the bottom but is still visible, the resulting reading does not represent an accurate water clarity measurement. Clarity trends are not reported when the Secchi disk hits the bottom.

## Water Quality

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 also assesses the health of a waterbody based on the number and types of aquatic macroinvertebrates and algae living in it, which changes 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.<sup>4</sup> Town staff and partners do water

<sup>4</sup> Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources Protection Act



quality testing as part of watershed management plans. Maine DEP has biological monitoring wetland stations at Otter Pond and Holt Pond.

There are also local and regional plans and efforts to identify and eliminate pollution sources in Bridgton. The Town's Wastewater Division manages wastewater treatment facilities and monitors the treated effluent. These systems are regulated under a Maine DEP waste Discharge License. The current system is 30 years old, at capacity, and will soon require significant investment to maintain. The Town has undertaken the construction of a new treatment plant and system upgrades that will triple the capacity of the current system. Slated to be completed in 2024, the new system will improve water quality and help ensure effluent discharges meet the highest water quality standards.

The Lakes Environmental Association (LEA) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to protect the waters and watersheds of western Maine. LEA is headquartered in Bridgton and focuses on action, advocacy, and analysis in order to protect natural resources and improve water quality. The organization conducts year-round water monitoring and shares trends and data with other organizations and agencies. LEA also works to address nutrient control and invasive species across the Lakes Region. LEA's monitoring results combined with the Maine Stormwater Management Design Manual have been used to determine phosphorus allocations for each lake and drive policy considerations in Bridgton's Land Use Ordinance around shoreland zoning, erosion and sedimentation control standards, water quality, and subdivision review.

Bridgton does not participate in the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit. In general, the water quality of the Town's streams, rivers and lakes is good, and aggressive stormwater management changes are not necessary; however, as more development continues to occur, and more impervious surfaces are created, continued monitoring and good stewardship of water quality and nutrient control will be important. Stormwater management is addressed in the water quality section of the Land Use Ordinance. Specific regulations are outlined in the shoreland zoning, general plan review, large-scale water extraction, and mineral extraction sections. In addition, Maine's Stormwater Management Law regulates stormwater volume and quality from new construction in watersheds at risk. These are evaluated on current water quality, potential for internal recycling of phosphorus, potential as a cold-water fishery, volume and flushing rate, or projected growth rate in the watershed. Maine DEP does not permit discharge of treated wastewater to any of the Town's waterbodies, and therefore, a pressurized drip dispersal (PDD) is providing a subsurface disposal system that returns treated water to the soil by way of perforated tubes installed in the ground.

Maine DEP's Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan was issued in 2020. NPS pollution has a major impact on 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, along the way. 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.

## Stream Crossings

Stream crossings intend to maintain the continuity of streams to control stream volume, accommodate wildlife, and protect stream health. Stream continuity is critical to stream health and the wildlife that depend on streams, including invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. Typical stream crossing problems include undersized crossings; shallow or perched crossings easily blocked by debris; scouring, erosion, and high-flow velocities; and habitat and migration limitations. Currently, 40 culverts convey streams across roads and other structures in Bridgton.<sup>5</sup> These culverts and their conditions have been mapped by the Department of Marine Resources' Maine Coastal Program. The Stream Connectivity Work Group was convened by the Maine Coastal Program in 2009 and is a partnership of state, federal, industry, and non-governmental organizations working cooperatively to improve Maine's stream restoration efforts. Currently, Bridgton has a variety of road stream crossings that have barriers, potential barriers, and no barriers. Bridgton is committed to improving these crossings as the need arises to support fish and wildlife. There are also seven dams in Bridgton disrupting stream continuity and affecting habitat and fish migration. The Bridgton Public Services Department (PSD) addresses stormwater- and infrastructure-related maintenance, including dams.

Maine DEP's Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program provides grants that match local funding for the upgrade of culverts at stream crossings on municipal roads. Program-funded projects benefit public infrastructure and safety by replacing failing culverts at risk of complete washout or collapse. They also reduce flooding and increase resiliency with the installation of larger, higher capacity and longer-lived crossings, benefitting fish and wildlife by opening and reconnecting stream habitat fragmented by undersized and impassable culverts. Bridgton has taken advantage of this program in the past and was awarded a 2023 Municipal Stream Crossing Grant for Wildwood Road.<sup>6</sup>

## Wetlands

Significant wetlands are located throughout Bridgton, including a large wetland area around Willet Brook and Otter Pond. 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,

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<sup>5</sup> Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. n.d. "Maine Stream Habitat Viewer." *Maine Coastal Program*. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://webapps2.cgis-solutions.com/MaineStreamViewer/>

<sup>6</sup> Maine DEP. March 3, 2023. "Maine DEP Has Announced New Grant Awards for Municipal Stream Crossings." *Maine DEP*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://www.maine.gov/dep/news/news.html?id=10544549>



and supporting wildlife habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the principal federal agency tasked with providing information on the extent and status of the nation's wetland and deepwater habitats as well as changes to these habitats over time.<sup>7</sup> As part of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, FWS maps wetlands in the U.S., conducts decadal national wetlands status and trends studies, and reports the findings to Congress. Wetlands are located and mapped throughout Bridgton. While the majority of wetlands are located in proximity to lakes and ponds, there are many types of wetlands in Bridgton. These include freshwater emergent wetland, freshwater forested/shrub wetland, freshwater pond, riverine, and lake.

Vernal pools are naturally occurring, temporary wetlands that are seasonal depressional inland bodies of water 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 the summer heat dries up the pools, young frogs, salamanders, turtles, and fairy shrimp crawl onto nearby dry land to their fall and winter homes. Vernal pools also provide food and water for upland forest animals such as deer, moose, and ermine.

Vernal pools are an important water feature and can be found throughout Bridgton. The majority of significant vernal pools have been mapped around Highland Lake, Stevens Brook, and Long Lake. Significant vernal pools are defined under the Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA) and, as such, cannot undergo development. Limited development is allowed around the pool; however, 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. Many other pools that harbor wildlife do not receive any protection under the NRPA, and recent changes to federal wetland rules leave most vernal pools unprotected. It is likely that many vernal pools located within Bridgton have not been mapped yet. Urbanization and new development continue to threaten these areas.

Maine's wetlands are resources of great value to 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. Bridgton regulates lands within 250 feet of wetlands, salt marshes and salt meadows, and 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 ordinance.

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. n.d. "National Wetlands Inventory." *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services*. Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://fwsprimary.wim.usgs.gov/wetlands/apps/wetlands-mapper/>



## 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. As Bridgton is in the Lakes Region, it is unsurprising that the Town is susceptible to flooding around bodies of water and impervious infrastructure. Many of the Town's lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands create areas prone to flooding, and snowmelt compounds these concerns with additional runoff. Bridgton participates in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to help manage flood risks. Through this program, Bridgton adopted and enforces floodplain management ordinances that define building standards for new and existing development in high-risk flood zones. This allows residents to be eligible to purchase NFIP flood insurance and to receive disaster assistance for flood-related damage. Cumberland County's Preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) were issued in 2018. Bridgton adopted a floodplain management ordinance that requires the recognition and evaluation of flood hazards in all official actions relating to land use in floodplain areas with special flood hazards. This ordinance also establishes a flood hazard development permit system and review procedures for development activities in the designated flood hazard areas of the Town.

## Groundwater

Large aquifers exist under the earth's surface in Bridgton. Groundwater is water found underground in the spaces between pieces of rock, like sand and gravel, and in the cracks that form large layers of solid rocks. Groundwater accumulates from rain and snowmelt that soak 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. The type of soil greatly impacts an aquifer's ability to recharge as does the development and creation of impervious surfaces. Sand and gravel deposits beneath the Town have created large volumes of groundwater. The Sawyer Brook Aquifer in the northwest, Willett Brook Aquifer in the center of the Town, and the Bear River Aquifer in the north are significant aquifers that provide drinking water for the Town through private and publicly owned wells. These aquifers are not only critical to Bridgton water supply, but also impact the community's drinking water network through stormwater runoff and land use decisions. The Bridgton Water District pumps from the Willett Brook Aquifer in the southwest corner of the Town as Bridgton's primary source of drinking water.

## Scenic Resources

Scenic resources help define a community and celebrate significant landscape features. They are attributes that give a community identity and make a place appealing to live and attract visitors. These resources include natural views and vistas as well as cultural assets identified by the State of Maine and the community as defining parts of the Town's character. The natural beauty of the region is abundant,



including many peaks and views of lakes, mountains, and forests. Many of the Town's trail networks provide access to points of high elevation.

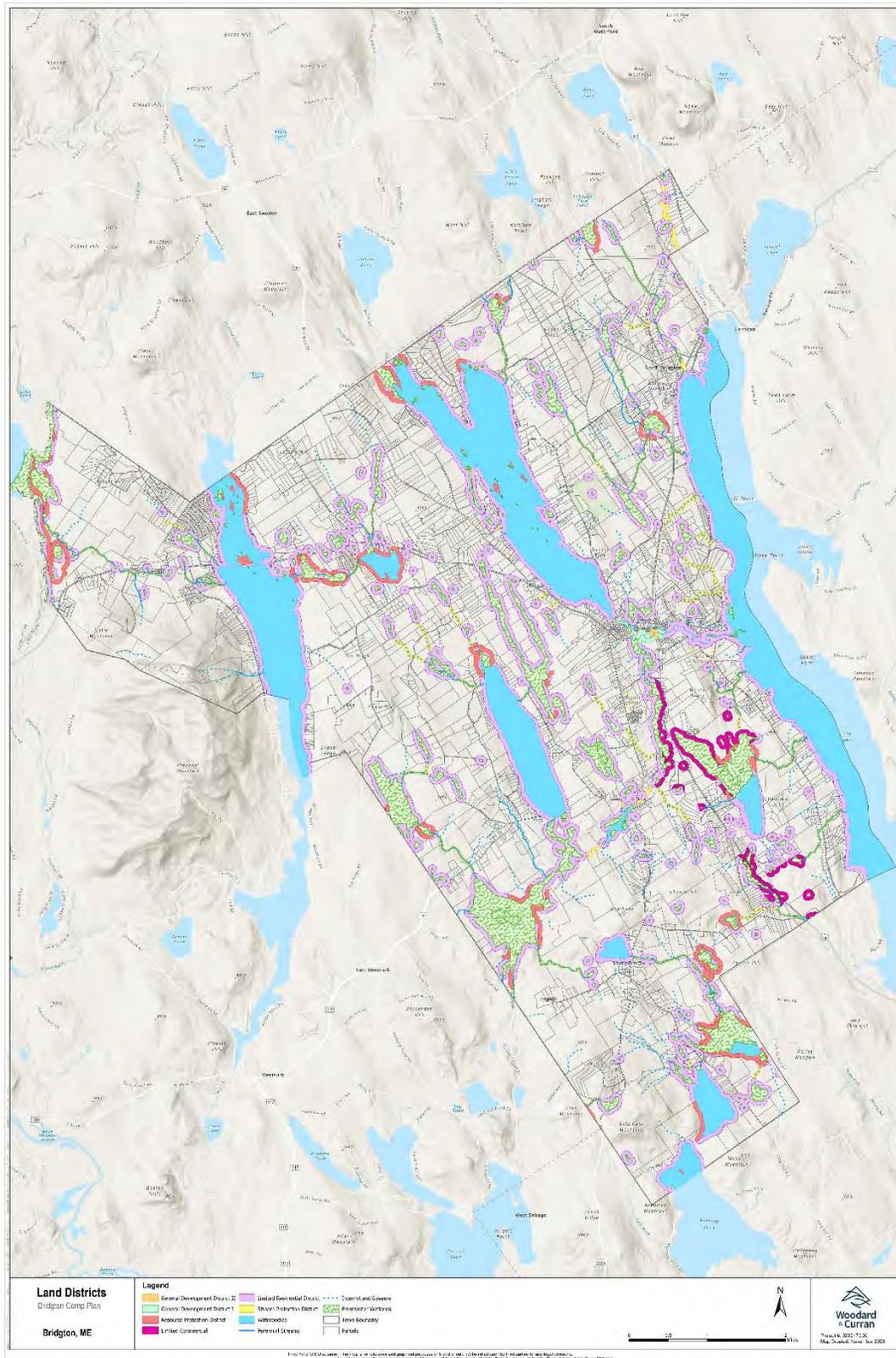
## Shoreland Zoning

The Town established a shoreland zoning overlay district in 2005, last modified in 2016, to regulate development in shoreland areas for the protection of natural resources. Bridgton's ordinance overlays a shoreland zone 250 feet from the normal high-water line of any designated great pond, river, and freshwater wetland of 10 or more acres. It also includes land area within 75 feet of the normal high-water line of streams and all tributary streams. Bridgton's Land Use Code outlines the rules and regulations of the shoreland zone and requires special review and permitting for development within the zone. The purpose of the ordinance is to further maintain safe, healthful conditions; help prevent and control water pollution; protect fish spawning grounds, aquatic life, birds, and other habitats; conserve visual and actual points of access to inland waters; and anticipate and respond to the impacts of development in shoreland areas. The shoreland zone is divided into the following six districts:

1. **Resource Protection (RP) District:** Areas in which development would adversely affect water quality, productive habitat, biological ecosystems, or scenic and natural values. These districts include floodplains, steep slopes, wetlands greater than two acres, and land area along rivers subject to bank erosion, undercutting, or riverbed movement.
2. **Limited Residential (LR) District:** Areas suitable for residential and recreational development.
3. **General Development I (GD-I) District:** Areas of two or more contiguous acres devoted to commercial, industrial, or intensive recreational activities, or a mix.
4. **General Development II (GD-II) District:** Areas of two or more contiguous acres devoted to commercial, industrial, or intensive recreational activities, or a mix. Similar to GD-I but with no allowable private sewage disposal systems.
5. **Stream Protection (SP) District:** Includes all land areas within 75 feet of the normal high-water line of a stream, exclusive of those areas within 250 feet of the normal high-water line of a great pond or river or within 250 feet of the upland edge of a freshwater wetland, which are regulated under the shoreland zoning district associated with that water body or wetland.
6. **Limited Commercial (LC) District:** Includes areas of mixed, light commercial and residential uses, exclusive of the SP district, which should not be developed as intensively as GD-I or GD-II districts. This district includes areas of two or more contiguous acres devoted to a mix of residential and low-intensity business and commercial uses. Industrial use is prohibited.

The shoreland zoning outlines permit requirements as well as the bulk and use regulations within each district of the overlay.

**Figure 2.2: Shoreland Zoning Districts**





## 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. Bridgton is home to multiple Significant Wildlife Habitat types, rare plant and animal species, and vulnerable Natural Communities. Within Bridgton there are seven identified rare, threatened, or endangered species occurrences based on sightings: the Blanding's Turtle, and Spotted Turtle, Comet Darner, Eastern Ribbon Snake, Great Blue Heron, New England Bluet, and Northern Brown Snake. The Blanding's Turtle is a listed Endangered Species under Maine's Endangered Species Act, meaning it is rare and at risk of being lost in the near future. The Spotted Turtle is listed as Threatened which refers to a rare species that could become endangered if it continues to decline. 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 for impacts on endangered and threatened species. The Comet Darner, Eastern Ribbon Snake, Great Blue Heron, New England Bluet, Northern Brown Snake are 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 Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP) classifies and distinguishes 104 different natural community types that collectively cover the State's landscape and support a wide array of habitats. Each type is assigned a rarity rank of 1 (rare) through 5 (common). In Bridgton, there are 3 identified natural communities, Birch-Oak Rocky Woodlands, Pitch Pine-Woodlands, and Red Pine Woodlands. The Birch-Oak Rocky Woodlands are found on the western side of Moose Pond and have a rarity ranking of 3. These communities are partial canopy deciduous woodlands or patches of woodland among talus areas with mostly paper birch, red oaks, and yellow birch. Pitch Pine-Woodlands are located in southern Bridgton near the Bridgton Sebago border. With a rarity rating of 3 these communities are dominated by pitch pine and are very open to semi open woodlands which allow substantial amount of light to reach the understory. The Red Pine Woodlands are found on the western side of Moose Pond near the Denmark boundary and have a rarity ranking of 3. These open canopy woodlands are dominated by red pine and usually occur on or around bedrock. In addition to these natural communities, the Canada Mountain-ricegrass is a Species of Special Concern in Bridgton. These are species that are rare in Maine, but not sufficiently rare to be considered Threatened or Endangered. Canada Mountain-ricegrass is a rare plant that occurs in dry, sandy, rocky wooded areas and blueberry barrens. These critical natural resources and important natural resources need to be effectively protected from future development impacts.

High-value plant and animal habitats have also been mapped as part of the Beginning with Habitat Program. These include deer wintering areas, wildlife wetlands, significant vernal pools, inland waterfowl and wading bird habitat, and rare plant locations. Deer wintering areas are protected by the state and part of Bridgton's plan review and subdivision process. According to Maine Department of Inland



Fisheries & Wildlife there are three mapped Significant Vernal Pools in Bridgton, and it is likely that additional unmapped occurrences are present. See Figure 2.3: Critical Habitat Areas.





## Upper Saco River Focus Area

Maine's Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife program, Beginning with Habitat, has identified 140 Focus Areas of statewide ecological significance that contain unusually rich concentrations of at-risk species and habitats. The Upper Saco River Focus Area is located in portions of northwest Bridgton as well as parts of the surrounding communities of Fryeburg, Sweden, Denmark, Brownfield and Hiram. The Upper Saco River Focus Area stands out as one of Maine's most biodiverse regions. It hosts a variety of rare species and natural communities, including one of the largest populations of the globally rare Long's bulrush (*Scirpus longii*), three globally rare dragonfly species, the globally rare riverwash barrens community, exceptional examples of floodplain forests, and at least ten other plant species that are rare in Maine. The rare animals in this Focus Area span diverse taxonomic groups, such as birds, reptiles, odonates, and lepidopterans. This stretch of the Saco River supports a rich mosaic of diverse wetland communities. These wetland communities form one of the most extensive and best-preserved floodplain ecosystems in both New Hampshire and Maine. The ecosystem features floodplain forests, vernal pools, oxbow ponds, backwater sloughs, acidic fens, grassy swales, outwash plain pond shores, several large lakes, and the meandering river itself. Adjacent to the floodplain are upland communities, including mixed hardwood forests, low acidic summits, and globally rare pitch-pine/scrub oak forests. There are conservation efforts and partnerships to protect remaining underdeveloped areas, educate users and limit adverse effects of development and land use.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Protection of natural resources is important to the Town's character and critical for the long-term health of the region's environment and habitat areas. State and federal regulations, Town initiatives, and support from community organizations have all helped protect natural areas and maintain a healthy environment.

As noted throughout this chapter, existing and future development patterns have the greatest impact on water quality and overall environmental health. As the Town continues to experience development pressure, consideration for where, how, and how much development is allowed and encouraged in the Town will have long-term impacts on the region's natural resources. Land use and zoning decisions should consider potential development impacts, including stormwater runoff, disruption of wildlife corridors and habitat areas, vulnerability to flooding, and other impacts to natural areas and systems.

The Town's valuable natural resources are not bound by the Town border but are regional assets that require regional coordination to preserve and protect. Lakes, streams, open spaces, habitat areas, and other natural systems are also assets that contribute to the desirability of the region that all impacted municipalities have an interest in protecting. Coordination with neighboring municipalities and regional organizations will be essential in implementing broad environmental initiatives.



Maine continues to experience more high heat days, warmer winters, and more extreme weather related to broader climate shifts. These climate hazards can severely impact natural resources, including the loss or degradation of wetlands, changes in species and populations of ecosystems, and warming of lakes and ponds that result in changes to lake ecology. Protection of natural resources and systems will need to include efforts to mitigate climate impacts and consideration for the potential long-term changes to the Town's surface waters, open spaces, and habitats.

## Sources

Lakes Environmental Association

Maine Department of Conservation, Maine Geological Survey

Maine DEP, Maine Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan 2020-2024

Maine DEP, Maine Statutory Water Classification

Maine DEP, Natural Resources Protection Act

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Town of Bridgton Land Use Code, 2022, Shoreland Zoning

Town of Bridgton Floodplain Management Ordinance



### 3 Agriculture and Forestry

Agricultural and forest resources are valuable assets for communities. Forest and agricultural lands provide habitat for wildlife, contribute to the local food economy, and play an important role in preserving natural resources. Farmland provides food for both the community and wildlife, helps control flooding, protects wetlands and watersheds, and maintains air quality. Farmlands also filter and absorb wastewater and provide groundwater recharge, where surface water can move downward into the water table.

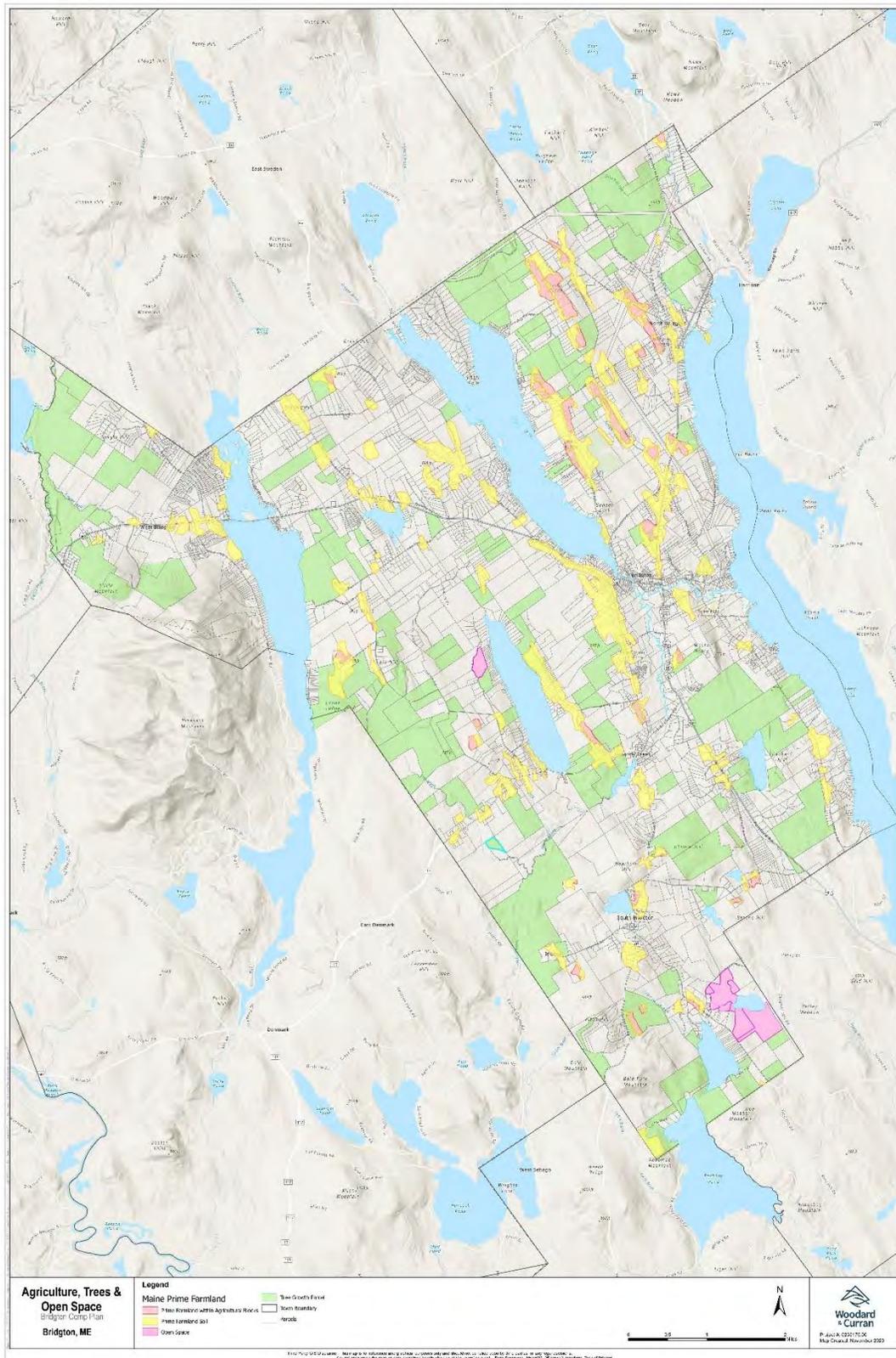
Healthy and managed forests provide wildlife habitat, clean air and water, stabilize the soil, and provide recreational opportunities. Despite continued growth in undeveloped areas, forests are the predominant land cover in Bridgton. The woodlands and forest closed canopy are a defining character of the region and part of the rural draw that attracts people to live in and visit the Lakes Region. Historically, the forestry industry has been one of Maine's largest industries and has contributed heavily to the state's economy and culture. Today, the forestry industry still provides jobs for people across the state. In 2021, roughly 2% of Maine's total employment was in the forestry sector, and the industry had about \$5.1 billion in sales. Today, roughly 1.2% of Bridgton's population is employed in the agriculture, forestry, and wildlife sectors. The industry has seen a decline nationwide and is looking to adapt to new challenges and demands. The Town supports community forestry and agriculture, including small woodlot management, community forests and parks, community gardens, and farmers markets. These activities are allowed through the Town's Land Use Ordinances and are supported by local businesses, non-profits, and volunteer organizations throughout Bridgton.

#### Agriculture

Today, Bridgton has a small percentage of actively farmed land. The State of Maine has four 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 enroll in one of the four current land use programs. 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 in gross income from farming activities each year.

As of 2022, Bridgton had 56 acres of farmland and 86 acres of woodland across three parcels enrolled in the program. Land enrolled in the farmland Current Land Use Program accounts for less than 1% of Bridgton's total land area. The total number of acres and parcels enrolled in the program has decreased since 2009 when the State started publishing these data online. The total number declined from 77 acres of farmland and 106 acres of woodlands across seven parcels. This follows a greater trend across Cumberland County. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture, the number of farms in Cumberland County has declined by 7%, the total acres of farms has declined 20%, and the average farm size has declined 14%.

**Figure 3.1: Agriculture, Open Space, and Tree Growth**





**Table 3.1: Farmland Current Land Use Program Data**

| Year | Number of Parcels | Farmland Acres | Woodland Acres | Total Farmland Valuation | Total Woodland Valuation |
|------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 2009 | 7                 | 77             | 106            | \$26,950                 | \$25,719                 |
| 2022 | 3                 | 56             | 86             | \$15,470                 | \$30,896                 |

*Maine Valuation Return Statistical Summary*

The same data show 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.

There are several areas in Bridgton 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. There is a significant amount of prime farmland in Bridgton, including the following locations:

- Between South High Street, Route 302, and Woods Pond
- Along Highland Road, Chadbourne Hill Road, and Sanborns Grove Road
- Along Middle Ridge Road, Upper Ridge Road, and Del Chadbourne Road
- Between Chadbourne Hill Road and Kimball Road
- Along Sweden Road, Hio Ridge Road, and Sam Ingalls Road
- Along South Bridgton Road

As Bridgton looks to determine growth areas, it will have to consider how to balance future development and the protection of prime farmland.

### Farmers Markets

The Bridgton Farmers Market was founded in 1996. The summer market is held every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the lot behind Reny’s on Depot Street from May to October. The winter market is held from November to April from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Oriental Lodge on Harrison Road. Farmers markets serve important roles in communities across the country, providing access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and other locally sourced items. The Bridgton Farmers Market features vendors from the Town and throughout the Lakes Region. The farmers market also provides residents with low incomes access to fresh and locally sourced food by accepting Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Some vendors accept Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program benefits.



## Community Gardens

In 2011, the Bridgton-Lake Region Rotary Club built an initial set of community garden beds at the Bridgton Community Center. In 2023, the Rotary Club and Extension Master Gardeners Program added additional garden beds. The master gardeners manage the 30 beds at the Community Center.<sup>8</sup>

The Bridgton Community Center operates a seasonal community garden program for new and experienced gardeners. Community members can purchase a garden bed in the spring and garden through the fall. The center now has 30 beds for the community to use. Master Gardeners manage the current beds and help provide food for the Bridgton Food Pantry.

## Forest Resources

Maine has the largest contiguous block of undeveloped forestland in the eastern United States. Despite more than 200 years of harvests, Maine has the highest percentage of forested land in the United States, with about 90% of the state being forested.

Forests provide key habitats for plants and animals and are important to the overall health of watersheds. Bridgton's forests are a mix of softwoods like balsam fir, white pine, spruce, hemlock, and hardwoods, including maples, beech, birches, and red oak. These resources provide economic and employment opportunities to the region. The harvesting of timber is an important component of Bridgton's local economy. The Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAFC) regulates timber harvesting activities to minimize adverse impacts on forest resources, including improper harvesting leading to erosion, phosphorus pollution in lakes and streams, and increased runoff. Bridgton is committed to sustainable harvesting. The Maine Tree Growth Tax Law helps landowners maintain their properties as productive woodlands through well-planned harvesting. In addition, timber harvesting is regulated in Bridgton's shoreland zoning regulations.

Over half of Bridgton's land area is forested, and 8,225 acres (roughly 20% of Bridgton's land area) are enrolled in Maine's Tree Growth Tax Program. The State incentivizes the active management and utilization of land through the program. This program is similar to the Current Use Tax Program for agriculture. When enrolled in the program, landowners can receive favorable property tax assessment reductions. Landowners must have an approved forest management plan in order to participate, and forests can be managed to meet a variety of landowner goals, including recreation, wildlife habitat, and lake and fishery protection. The program requires some commercial harvest in line with the property's approved forest management plan.

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<sup>8</sup> The Sun Journal. May 19, 2023. "Bridgton Club Builds Garden Beds at Community Center." *The Sun Journal*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://www.sunjournal.com/2023/05/19/bridgton-club-builds-garden-beds-at-community-center/>



In 2022, Bridgton had 132 tree growth parcels. The Town has 1,759 acres of softwood, 4,829 acres of mixed wood, and 1,637 acres of hardwood. In 2022, the total value of timber harvested was \$3,005,720. Since 2009, the number of parcels enrolled in the program has increased; however, the total number of enrolled acres has declined. Despite the decline, in 2022, Bridgton had the second highest total acres in tree growth in Cumberland County behind Standish (9,202 acres).

**Table 3.2: Tree Growth Current Land Use Program Data**

| Year | Number of Parcels | Softwood Acres | Hardwood Acres | Mixed Wood Acres | Total Acres | Total Value |
|------|-------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2009 | 131               | 2,153          | 1,127          | 4,827            | 9,532       | \$2,923,418 |
| 2022 | 132               | 1,759          | 1,637          | 4,122            | 8,225       | \$3,005,720 |

*Maine Valuation Return Statistical Summary*

According to data from the Town’s year-end landowner reports to the State, there has been a decline in lumber harvested since 1991, with peaks occurring in 1994 and 2002. From 1991 to 1999, 319 acres were clear-cut. Since 2000, 19 acres have been clear-cut.

Forests also provide various recreational benefits for local residents and visitors. Publicly accessible land offers scenic benefits and recreational opportunities, including hiking, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. Bridgton and conservation partners continue to seek protection opportunities as well as ways to connect trail and recreation networks.

The Highland Research Forest is a 420-acre preserve in Bridgton and part of the headwaters for Highland Lake. In 2016, the Hancock family donated 340 acres of land to the LEA, and in 2018, the Hatch family donated another 80 acres. In 2019, trails were installed with a small parking lot and information kiosk. The goal of the preserve is to establish a research forest that offers visitors educational opportunities around sustainable harvesting, the importance of a forested watershed, and a space for long-term research projects related to woods, wildlife, soil, and water. The forest features a network of nine trails that connect to a larger network of regional and cross-country ski trails.

The State of Maine and Bridgton have a long history of managing multiple-use forests. Forests in Bridgton are actively managed alongside recreation and ecological conservation. Forests are managed to preserve land, protect water supply, provide wildlife habitat, and drive sustainable tourism and recreation. Public and private landowners manage forested areas and provide access to recreation.

Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) manages the conservation of more than 8,500 acres of land across Bridgton and the Lakes Region. LELT owns permanent land acquisitions, manages land, provides access to recreation and open space, and hosts educational events. LELT works closely with the Town of Bridgton to maintain and preserve access to forests and open spaces.



Bridgton's Public Services Department is responsible for planting and maintaining trees in public rights of way. The Town does not have a formal street tree program or designation.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Emerging challenges can impact the health of forests and cropland in Bridgton. Tree disease and insects—beech leaf disease, wood borers, insects, and defoliators—are becoming more common and are impacting tree health across Maine. Native trees are also being displaced by invasive species. Invasive plants out-compete native plants and can lead to a reduction in the diversity of species in a forest, and invasive plants can make it difficult for property owners to achieve objectives for their property. Additionally, warmer, wetter weather can cause trees stress, which can lead to poorer tree health and wood products.

Warmer winters and heavy rains, which the state has been experiencing and will likely continue experiencing, can impact the ability of foresters and loggers to conduct harvests and actively manage forests because heavy equipment and machinery cannot travel across wet or flooded grounds. This can lead to less healthy forests, decreased amounts of timber that can be harvested on a property, and less valuable timber.

Additionally, heavier rains can cause farmers to delay their planting season, which can delay harvesting. Excessive rain can also damage soil and deplete soils of nutrients, potentially impacting local farming production and disincentivizing new community members from getting involved in local agriculture.

Bridgton has taken several measures to preserve its agricultural and forest resources. As the Town examines areas for development, it will have to determine how to best preserve forests, tree canopy, and green space in the future. The Town will also have to consider how to best preserve prime farmland and support and encourage local agriculture. The Town should look to limit development in rural areas of Bridgton to better preserve natural resources, like prime farmland, open space, and woodlands. The Town should also continue collaborating with partner organizations, like the Bridgton Community Center, Rotary Club, and others, to support local farming and increase the abundance of locally grown food. Additionally, the Town could consider ways to support farmers in mitigating the impacts of heavy rains and floods on their crops.

As the Town looks toward its future resilience, regional collaboration and the efforts of groups like LETT will be essential for long-term progress. When considering resources and issues that extend beyond the Town, such as habitat management, a regional approach is important in understanding the issue from a broader perspective and leveraging and coordinating resources to address these challenges. As Bridgton is located on the edge of Cumberland County, it will likely have to work with neighboring municipalities in Oxford County to coordinate resources and address these challenges.

Currently, the proximity of homes and other uses have not affected normal logging and farming operations; however, recent development along the Route 302 corridor has impacted the rural feel of



the Town. Large woodlots in commercially zoned areas have seen an increase in development in recent years. While not industrial forest land or farms, these areas contribute to the forested, rural feel throughout much of Bridgton. Additional development along these corridors could impact wildlife habitat connectivity, forest connectivity, and the aesthetics of Bridgton's corridors.

## Sources

Lakes Environmental Association

Loon Echo Land Trust

Cumberland County Census of Agriculture Profile

State of Maine Census of Agriculture Profile

Maine Prime Farmland Determination Guidelines

American Farmland Trust – Farmland Information Center

Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summary

Bridgton Community Center – Community Gardens

Bridgton Farmers Market

USDA Urban Agriculture

National Association of State Foresters

Impact of Climate Change on Maine Forests

American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, How does Weather Affect Farming?



## 4 Land Use

### History of Development in Bridgton

Initial development of Bridgton was concentrated around the numerous mills constructed along Stevens Brook beginning in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in what is now downtown Bridgton. Additional early settlements in North Bridgton and South Bridgton developed around the same time period to support the growing mill town, but commercial activity remained predominantly along Main Street and North High Street. Over time, commercial development extended south along Route 302, which connects Bridgton to Portland, and, to a lesser extent, Route 117 north of Main Street.<sup>9</sup>

The Town has maintained its historic Main Street and preserved several historic structures downtown. Initiatives to preserve the Town's history and village character contribute to Bridgton's desirability as a tourist destination and place to live.

### Growth Management

In 1971, the Town approved its first zoning ordinance, creating residential, commercial, and industrial zones. After several amendments to the ordinance and substantial disagreement among residents around allowing business uses and home occupations, the Town voted to repeal the zoning ordinance in 1977.<sup>10</sup> The Town remained without any zoning regulations until 2019, with development controlled primarily by state-mandated shoreland zoning.

Land use recommendations in Bridgton's 2004 Comprehensive Plan focused on maintaining the "old New England" town character and preserving rural areas and natural resources. The plan encouraged medium-density housing development (low-rise apartments, duplexes) and light commercial activities in downtown that would maintain and complement the architectural character of the Town. The plan also discusses techniques to further preserve open space and rural areas, including a building permit cap, purchasing development rights, tax incentives for farmland and forests, and purchasing land for conservation and recreation.

Bridgton's 2014 Comprehensive Plan established an approach to reintroduce zoning and greater land use regulation. The 2014 plan recognized the need to control and intentionally guide growth and development to preserve the Town's critical natural assets and rural areas and to encourage development and economic growth in a way that supports the Town's values. The future land use section of the 2014 plan recommended seven separate land use designations. The designation of these

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<sup>9</sup> Geraghty, Gail. September 5, 2023. "When Bridgton Was a Mill Town." *The Bridgton News*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <http://www.bridgton.com/when-bridgton-was-a-mill-town/>

<sup>10</sup> Geraghty, Gail. October 16, 2014. "A Short History of Zoning in Bridgton." *The Bridgton News*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <http://www.bridgton.com/a-short-history-of-zoning-in-bridgton/>



areas was based on several factors: The Town's natural resource systems, historic development patterns, a desire to preserve the village and countryside character, efficient use of public services and utilities, desire to create opportunities for housing and commercial growth, and input from the community.

As stated in the 2014 plan, the recommended approach to development standards would focus on building form and relation to the public realm (e.g., structure dimensions and setbacks), allow for flexibility, and support a mix of uses and structures. This focus on design and functionality was in response to public input and past concern about the limitations of inflexible standards for separating uses, as was done with the Town's first zoning ordinance.

## Land Use Districts

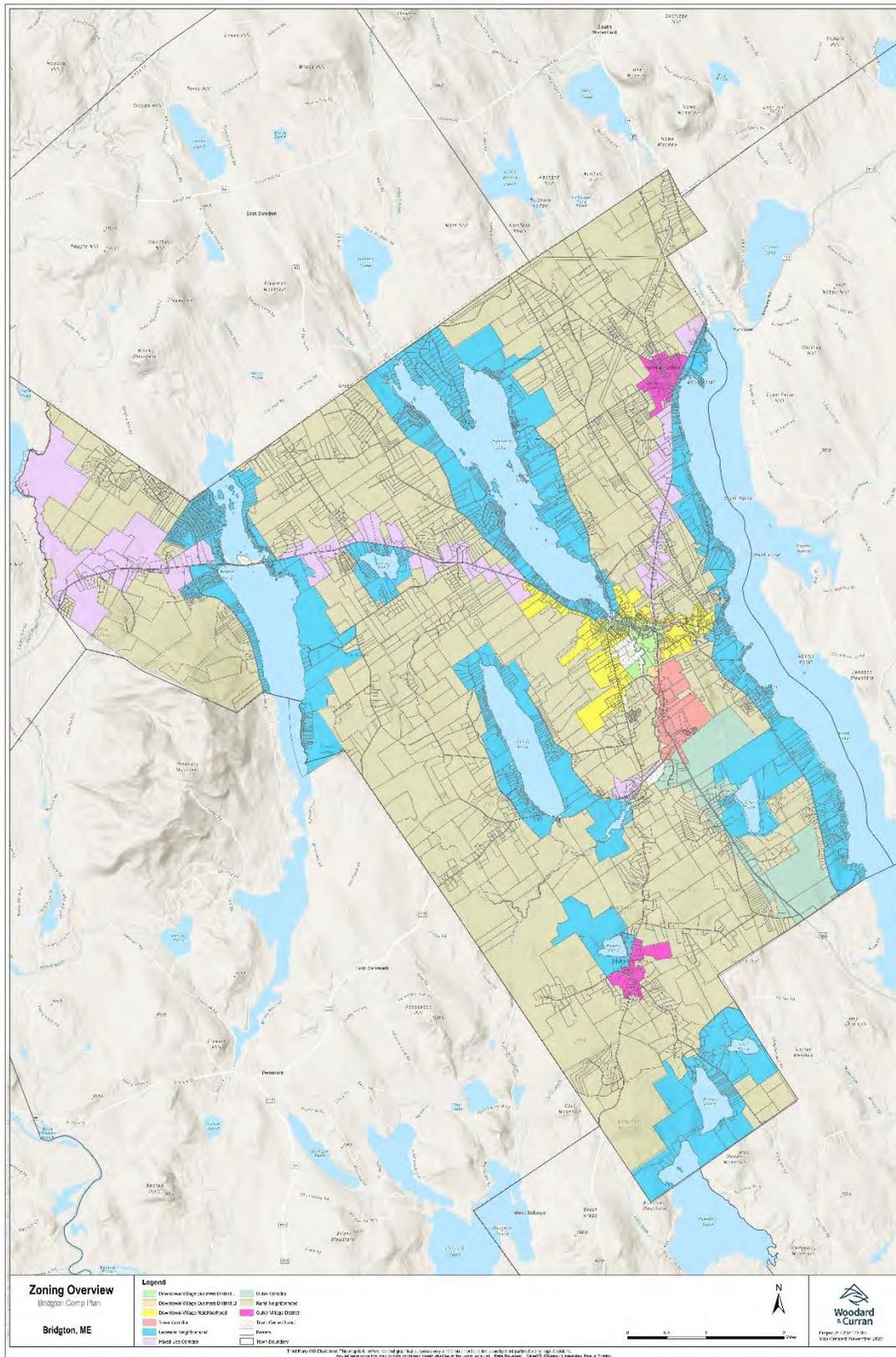
The recommended districts can broadly be grouped into three categories: downtown village districts, corridor districts, and residential districts. When the Town officially established land use districts into ordinance in 2019, these three categories were adhered to, with additional breakdown of the downtown village and corridor categories to accommodate transition areas. Per the 2019 ordinance, the Town is divided into the following nine land use districts:

- **Downtown Village Business I (DVB-I) District:** The DVB-I district includes Depot Street and Main Street from North High Street to Portland Road (Routes 302/117). The district also extends south to include the Stevens Brook Elementary School campus and Town facilities off Willett Road. This district is intended as a higher density growth area to support business, retail, and entertainment uses in the village center. Development should be pedestrian-oriented and respect the historic character of the district. The minimum lot size in the DVB-I district is 2,500 square feet.
- **Downtown Village Business II (DVB-II) District:** The DVB-II district extends just north (along Route 117), east (along Main Street), and south (along Route 302) from the DVB-I district. The DVB-II district serves as a transitional growth area from residential neighborhoods to higher density development of DVB-I. The district is characterized by low-density, mixed-use development. The minimum lot size in the DVB-II district is 20,000 square feet.
- **Downtown Village Neighborhood (DVN) District:** The DVN district extends out from the DVB districts, including areas to the west along Main Street and Smith Avenue, areas directly north of the DVB-I district between Harrison Road (Route 117) and Wayside Avenue, and areas to the west along North High Street, South High Street, and north of Pondicherry Park. The DVN district is a designated residential growth area and is characterized by its walkability and historic structures. The minimum lot size in the DVN district is 20,000 square feet.



- **Inner Corridor (IC) District:** The IC district extends south of the DVB-II district along Route 302. This district is a designated growth area for higher density, mixed-use development. The minimum lot size in the IC district is 40,000 square feet.
- **Outer Corridor (OC) District:** The OC district extends south of the IC district along Route 302 from Sandy Creek Road to the Naples town line. The OC district serves as a transitional area, supporting a variety of medium- and low-density uses, including multifamily housing. The minimum lot size in the OC district is 80,000 square feet.
- **Mixed-Use Corridor (MUC) District:** The MUC district includes areas along Harrison Road (Route 117) and Route 302 northwest of downtown. This district is characterized by low-density, mixed-use development, including commercial and recreational uses along the rural highway corridor. The minimum lot size in the MUC district is 80,000 square feet.
- **Lakeside Neighborhood (LN) District:** The LN district includes areas surrounding the Town's 10 ponds and lakes and Willett Brook. The LN district is primarily a low-density, single-family residential development. The district includes areas around the Town's lakes and is intended to protect existing vegetation and critical watershed areas. The minimum lot size in the LN district is 50,000 square feet.
- **Outer Village (OV) District:** The OV district includes villages nodes in North Bridgton and South Bridgton. The OV district includes historic village nodes that provide a transition from the node to rural areas and include some small neighborhood-oriented businesses and residential development. The minimum lot size in the OV district is 20,000 square feet.
- **Rural Neighborhood (RN) District:** The RN district is the largest district by area and includes the rural and residential areas outside of downtown and commercial/mixed-use corridors. The RN district is primarily a low-density, single-family residential development. It is intended to preserve the rural character and open space of the district and enable low-density residential development and low-intensity, rural-serving non-residential uses. The minimum lot size in the RN district is 40,000 square feet for retail business uses and 80,000 square feet for all other uses.

**Figure 4.1: Zoning Map**





## Shoreland Zoning

The Town maintains shoreland zoning regulations, in accordance with Maine’s Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act, to regulate land use activities within 250 feet of the normal high-water line of great ponds, rivers, and tidal water; within 250 feet of the upland edge of wetlands; and within 75 feet of streams. Bridgton has established six shoreland zoning districts, which are overlay districts, meaning the restrictions of the underlying land use district also apply to areas within shoreland zoning districts. The shoreland zoning districts are described in greater detail in Chapter 2 (Natural and Water Resources).

## Revision to Land Use Ordinance

In 2021, the Select Board approved a consolidation of the Town’s ordinances regulating land use and development into one consolidated Land Use Code. This consolidation included review and reconciliation of requirements in the Land Use Ordinance, Site Plan Review Ordinance, Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, Building/Plumbing/Razing Ordinance, and Subdivision Regulations. The purpose of this change was to create a more user-friendly document, remove redundancies and conflicts between ordinances, update sections to comply with state law and case law, and address any gaps in development regulation. Several other amendments to the Town’s land use and zoning regulations were proposed as a part of the consolidation but were not approved due to the substantive nature of these items and the need for additional review and guidance from an updated comprehensive plan. Discussion of these proposed amendments should be revisited as part of this planning process.

In 2022, the Land Use Code was updated to specifically include provisions for solar energy facilities to be allowed in certain areas with site plan approval and for accessory solar energy systems to be allowed by permit in certain locations with restrictions.

## Existing Land Use

Bridgton is characterized by its rural landscapes, with the majority of the Town’s land being undeveloped forested areas. Developed areas are predominantly low-density, single-family homes. There are almost 5,000 acres of conservation areas in Bridgton (approximately 14% of the Town’s total land area) and several publicly and privately owned recreational areas with multipurpose trails and other recreational facilities. With 11 lakes and ponds within or partially within the Town, much of the Town’s residential development is oriented toward the lakes and ponds. The lakes and Pleasant Mountain Ski Area are the main drivers of tourism in the Town, along with other recreational and incidental hospitality uses, including campgrounds and other lodging. The Town has worked to balance development that supports Bridgton’s tourism and recreation economy while also preserving the character of natural areas that initially attracted visitors.



While the Town is predominantly rural, Bridgton has a compact and historic downtown area where most commercial and institutional development exists. Within downtown, there are numerous retail shops, personal and professional services, restaurants, arts and cultural institutions, community organizations, government offices, Bridgton Hospital, and Stevens Brook Elementary School. Many of these uses serve the broader region, with people regularly traveling from neighboring communities to access goods and services in downtown Bridgton. There has been steady commercial, multifamily, and mixed-use development along primary corridors leading to downtown, especially Portland Road (Route 302) toward Naples. This development has predominantly been suburban and automobile oriented.

**Table 4.1: Land Area by Zoning District**

| Zoning                                | Area (Acres) |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Downtown Village Business District I  | 133.0        |
| Downtown Village Business District II | 50.4         |
| Downtown Village Neighborhood         | 710.0        |
| Inner Corridor                        | 335.8        |
| Lakeside Neighborhood                 | 7,869.1      |
| Mixed Use Corridor                    | 2,226.1      |
| Outer Corridor                        | 1,076.8      |
| Rural Neighborhood                    | 23,577.3     |
| Outer Village                         | 311.0        |
| Town Owned Land                       | 116.2        |

Source: Town of Bridgton

## Recent Development

Bridgton has experienced new commercial and residential growth in the last decade. Commercial development has largely been located along Route 302, south of the downtown and within the downtown. Some new commercial growth has been welcomed by the community and noted as a positive change, including the redevelopment of many dilapidated buildings. New uses, including small retail businesses, restaurants, services, and residences have added to the vibrancy of the downtown; however, many community members indicated that new development along the Route 302 corridor has been detrimental to the Town’s character. Corridor development has included larger commercial establishments including chain stores.

The pace of residential growth has increase since 2020, along with an increase in in-migration to Maine and growing demand for housing that is affordable for middle-income residents. While some residential development has occurred on a lot-by-lot basis, the majority of new residential units have been built within planned developments and subdivisions, the largest being the Lakewood Commons development



along Route 302, which includes more than 200 new residential units in multifamily and two-family structures. Some new development has addressed the need for housing for older adults, including the Cottages at Willet Brook, which added 60 homes for seniors from 2014 to 2020, and Harrison Ridge, a 48-unit affordable housing development for adults ages 55 and over. In addition, some redevelopment mixed-use projects in the downtown included residential apartments.

Other new residential development includes some small subdivisions in Rural Neighborhood areas as well as redevelopment and lot-by-lot development of new single-family homes.

## Future Growth

Bridgton has significant areas of undeveloped land and sufficient land area to accommodate projected new growth. Population growth is expected to slow or decline in the next decade; however, housing demand and the need for a variety of housing types remains strong as demographics shift and new residents are attracted to the Town. The Town's thriving tourism industry and changing needs of residents will continue to drive commercial development, especially in the downtown and along the Route 302 corridor.

While there is significant developable land in the Rural Neighborhood areas, the necessary residential and commercial growth could be accommodated within the Town's existing growth areas through redevelopment and new development within the Downtown Village districts and Inner and Outer Corridors, to preserve open space in rural areas of Bridgton. Revisions to the Land Use Code to allow for higher density development and facilitate redevelopment of existing structures could help to direct growth to these areas and away from the Town's open spaces and natural resources.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Recent and current infrastructure improvements, including expansion of the Town's wastewater treatment facility, have increased capacity for development in downtown where property owners were previously limited in the type and size of development that could be accommodated by Town wastewater services. Beautification efforts and streetscape improvements have also added to the desirability of downtown as a place to live, work, and visit.

The Town's Community Development Department, Code Enforcement Office, and Planning Board have accommodated the uptick in development applications in recent years; however, continued support for these functions and to help ensure adequate capacity for enforcement will be important as the Town continues to experience growth.

With increasing development pressure related to the state's housing crisis and households being priced out of the Portland area housing market, Bridgton will likely continue to experience growth and development. Protecting rural areas and corridors from sprawling development will continue to be a



concern for the Town for environmental reasons and to maintain Bridgton's small-town aesthetic and scenic views.

Revisiting the proposed substantive changes to the Land Use Code will be done in accordance with this plan, once completed, to help ensure the Town's land use and development regulations will allow and encourage the type of development the community desires while limiting development that does not support the Town's vision.

## Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Bridgton 2004 Comprehensive Plan

Town of Bridgton Land Use Code, amended November 8, 2022



## 5 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

### Introduction

Parks, recreation, and open space are vital to the culture, economy, and quality of life in Bridgton. Whether its skiing, snowmobiling, boating, hiking, camping, or relaxing on the beach, Bridgton's lakes, mountains, and woods offer a variety of opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy year-round recreation. The Town has abundant parks and open spaces, access to trails and sports fields, and a variety of recreational programming, including adult and youth classes and Town events.

### Municipal Parks and Programming

The Town of Bridgton owns 430 acres of land, including roughly 150 acres of parkland. These properties include beaches, parks, nature preserves, and over 90 miles of multiuse trails. The Town also owns and maintains the Ham Recreation Complex (Ham Complex), Harmon Field, a seasonal ice rink, and skate park. The Town also maintains 16 cemeteries across 35 acres of land. There are 11 lakes and ponds in Bridgton used for recreation throughout the year, though most use is in the summer months.

The Ham Complex includes several athletic fields that serve the local community and also attract sports teams from across New England. The complex was completed in 2022 by a group of local community members who formed the Bridgton Recreation Advancement Group (BRAG). BRAG coordinated the development of the Ham Complex with the intention of turning the property over to the Town to operate and maintain once completed. The Town acquired the property in July 2022 and is currently working on a master plan for the complex.

The Town's largest park is Pondicherry Park, offering visitors access to low-impact, accessible trails. In 2012, the Town purchased Pondicherry Park from LETL with a perpetual conservation easement. Through a collaborative effort with LEA, 66 acres of woodlands and 3,200 feet of stream shore were preserved in downtown Bridgton. LETL holds a conservation easement on the land to help ensure protection of natural resources. The park is overseen by the Pondicherry Park Committee, which comprises Town representatives, LETL and LEA representatives, and a Town Select Board member.

The Recreation Department has three full-time staff members and hires seasonal employees. The Recreation Department also works with several volunteers to support programs and events. The PSD supports the Recreation Department in maintaining parks, fields, and cemeteries.



The Town offers a significant amount of programming for people of all ages and abilities, from young children to older adults. Programming varies seasonally and can include pickleball, exercise classes, before- and after-school enrichment, and sports and theater camps, among others. Bridgton’s Recreation Department currently operates out of the Old Town Hall. Activities like pickleball, before- and after-school care, and community fitness classes are hosted at the Old Town Hall. The Recreation Department provides transportation to a variety of family and adult trips, including regional fairs and cultural events throughout southern and western Maine. The department also supports the production of a variety of fairs and events in Bridgton.

**Table 5.1: Bridgton Recreation Amenities**

| Name/Address        | Facility Type   | Miles of Trails | Athletic Fields | Water Access | Playground | Trails/Walking Paths | Passive Recreation | Memorial | Gazebo/Amphitheater | Indoor Recreation |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------------|-------------------|
| Pondicherry Park    | Park            | 2.3             |                 |              |            | X                    | X                  |          | X                   |                   |
| Town Common         | Park            |                 |                 |              | X          |                      | X                  |          |                     |                   |
| Shorey Park         | Park            |                 |                 |              |            | X                    | X                  |          |                     |                   |
| Farragut Memorial   | Park            |                 |                 |              |            |                      | X                  | X        |                     |                   |
| Salmon Point Beach  | Beach           |                 |                 | X            |            |                      |                    |          |                     |                   |
| Salmon Point        | Campground      |                 |                 | X            |            | X                    |                    |          |                     |                   |
| Woods Pond Beach    | Beach           |                 |                 | X            |            |                      |                    |          |                     |                   |
| Highland Lake Beach | Beach           |                 |                 | X            |            |                      |                    |          |                     |                   |
| HAM Complex         | Athletic Fields |                 | X               |              |            |                      |                    |          |                     |                   |
| Harmon Field        | Athletic Fields |                 | X               |              |            |                      |                    |          |                     |                   |
| Old Town Hall       | Activity        |                 |                 |              |            |                      |                    |          |                     | X                 |
| Peabody-Fitch       | Natural         | 2.5             |                 |              |            | X                    | X                  |          |                     |                   |
| Bald Pate Preserve  | Natural         | 6.7             |                 |              |            | X                    | X                  |          |                     |                   |
| Pleasant Mountain   | Natural         | 10.5            |                 |              |            | X                    | X                  |          |                     |                   |
| Holt Pond Preserve  | Natural         | 4.5             |                 |              |            | X                    | X                  |          |                     |                   |
| Woods Pond Boat     | Boat Launch     |                 |                 | X            |            |                      |                    |          |                     |                   |
| Highland Lake Boat  | Boat Launch     |                 |                 | X            |            |                      |                    |          |                     |                   |

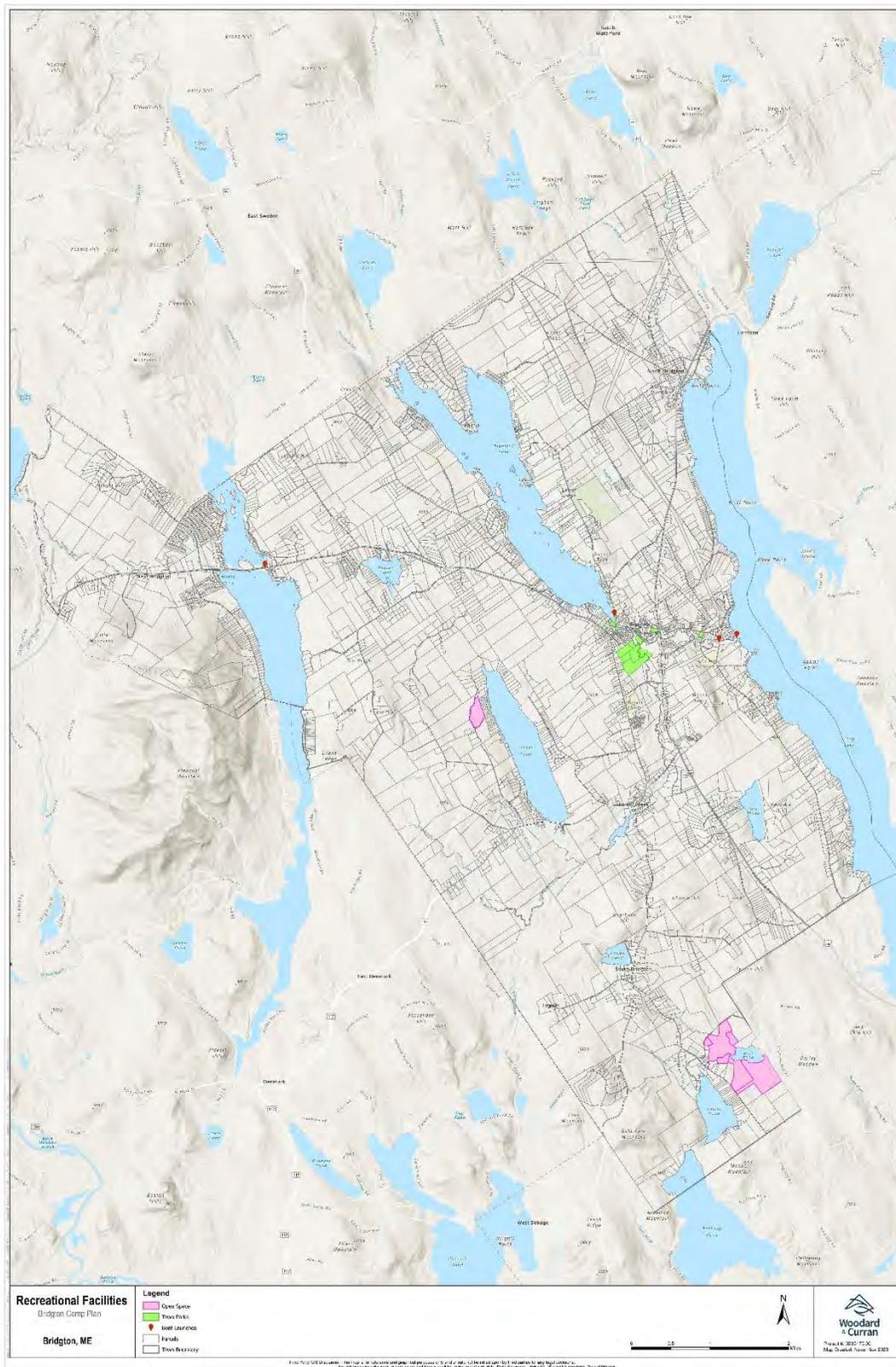


## Non-Municipal Facilities and Programming

Non-municipal and private facilities in Bridgton also provide recreation opportunities and programming to supplement those offered by the Town. The Bridgton Community Center offers a variety of programming and community events, including senior lunches, community kettle dinners, table games, support groups, community gardens, and other specialized programs.

Pleasant Mountain Ski Area offers skiers diverse skiing opportunities, including uphill and downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, and night skiing. Pleasant Mountain brings visitors from across the Lakes Region and beyond. The Lakes Region ATV club maintains trails and hosts monthly events from April to November for local community members to access trails and volunteer. The Bridgton Easy Riders snowmobile club also maintains trails throughout the Lakes Region and hosts events for members. The Bridgton Highlands Country Club offers access to golf courses and tennis courts, and the Country Club has event spaces open to rent. LELT and LEA also provide the community with access to trails and open space throughout Bridgton. Additionally, private landowners in Bridgton allow some access to lands for recreation. Private property owners often allow access to their land with permission for activities like hiking, hunting, or fishing. Property owners can post their land to prohibit access if desired.

**Figure 5.1: Parks and Open Space**





## Open Space

### Conservation

Approximately 15% of Bridgton’s land area is in conservation. This means that the land is protected for the purposes of protecting natural, scenic, or open spaces; ensuring its availability for agricultural, forest, recreational, or open space use; and protecting natural resources and enhancing water and air quality.

In addition to farm and forestlands, the State has a Current Land Use Program for open space. To meet the requirements, a parcel must be preserved or restricted in use to provide public benefit, which includes public recreation, scenic resources, game management, and wildlife habitat. The market value of an open space parcel receives a reduction on its valuation based on requirements from the State, and the property owner’s property taxes are based on the reduced valuation.

Bridgton has 1,920 acres across 24 parcels conserved in the open space program. Bridgton has the most open space conserved in the program in Cumberland County. Brunswick and Sebago each also have over 1,000 acres conserved. The total number of parcels and acreage enrolled in the open space Current Land Use Tax Program has increased since 2009. In 2009, Bridgton had 348 acres across six parcels enrolled in the program.

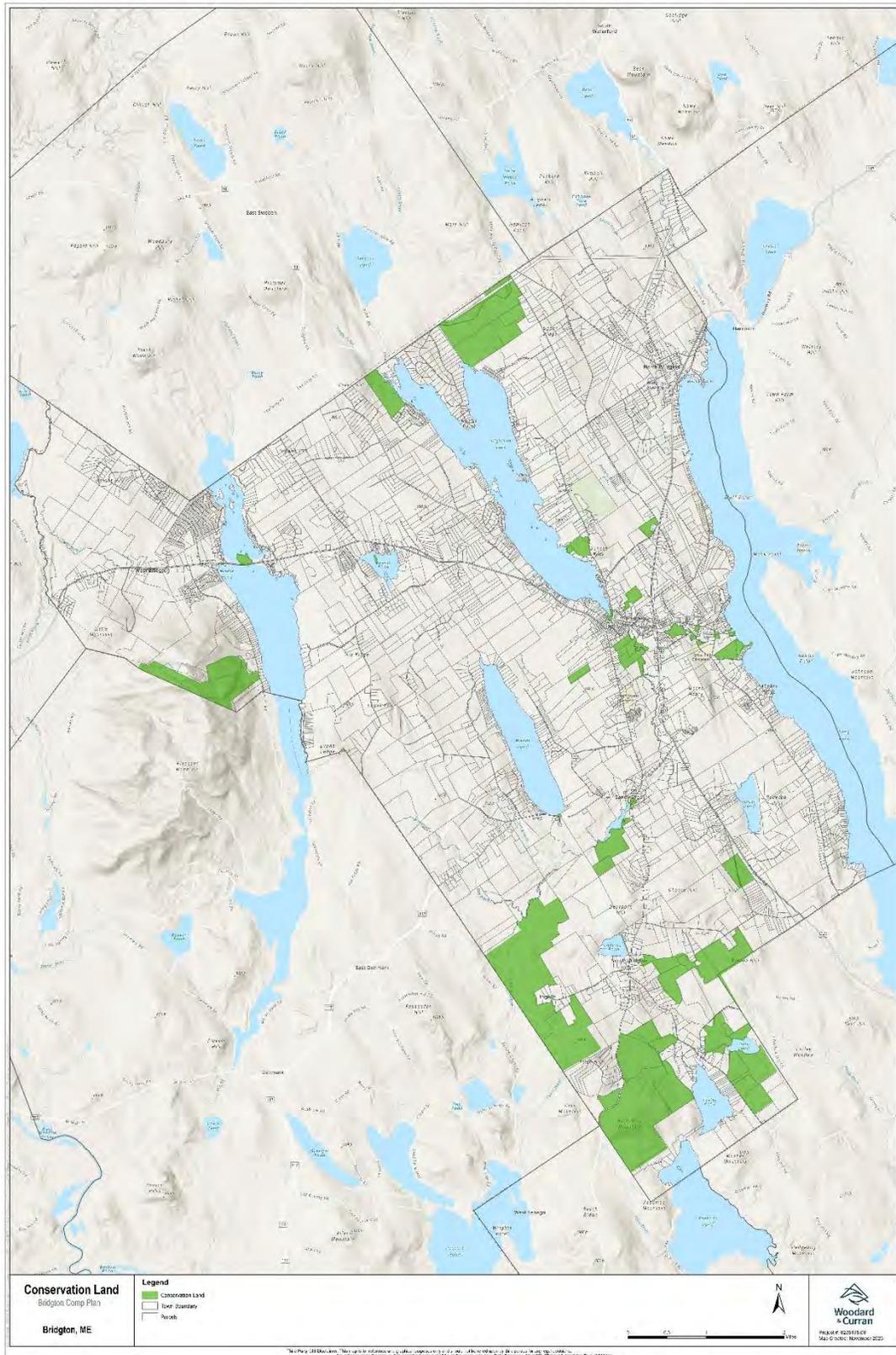
**Table 5.2: Open Space Current Land Use Program Data**

| Year | Number of Parcels | Total Acres | Total Value |
|------|-------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2009 | 6                 | 348         | \$118,560   |
| 2022 | 24                | 1,920       | \$787,013   |

*Maine Valuation Return Statistical Summary*

LELT is a nonprofit organization established in 1987 by community members who sought to preserve open space and natural resources throughout the Lakes Region. LELT owns permanent land acquisitions and conservation easements to keep lands open and preserved in perpetuity. LELT is supported by volunteers who help monitor and maintain land and trails. In Bridgton, LELT lands include Peabody-Fitch Woods, Pondicherry Park, Pleasant Mountain, and Bald Pate Mountain. Other important blocks of conservation lands include the Holt Pond Preserve owned by LEA; the northwest corner of Highland Lake owned by the Hancock Foundation; and smaller parcels of land preserved by private property owners.

**Figure 5.2: Conservation Land**





## Open Space Plan

In 2023, the Town of Bridgton adopted the Open Space Plan to set a vision and goals for the Town's open space resources. The development of the plan was funded by the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation, and the Future (GOPIF) Community Resilience Partnership Program. The plan includes background on previous open space initiatives and the history of open space protection and recreation in Bridgton.

To inform the plan, the Town underwent an extensive public engagement process, which included feedback and input from LELT, the Community Development Advisory Committee, and community members. The plan had three overarching goals: protect, connect, and activate. The first goal, protect, aims to create and interconnect a network of large, protected areas and linear green spaces. The second goal, connect, reinforces Bridgton's downtown core as a desirable destination for trail users, and the goal aims to extend new and existing trail systems to downtown and provide amenities for trail users to enhance and extend their recreational use. The third goal, activate, aims to increase the level of use and diversity of activities in Bridgton's open space system, including physical improvements, programming, and strategic partnerships to increase winter recreation, develop multiuse parks, and facilitate regional solutions to challenges.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Open space and access to recreation opportunities are important to the Town, and there are significant opportunities to engage in recreation year-round. Recreation-based tourism contributes significantly to the Town's economy, and it is important to consider ways to continue to preserve Bridgton's open space and recreational resources.

As demand for more recreation and open spaces increases, consideration should be made to help ensure appropriate staffing and funding levels to maintain quality services. Currently, two full-time staff members are responsible for the Town's recreation programming. The Town has struggled to attract seasonal workers to support summer camps and additional programming, which may impact the Town's ability to provide programming at current levels. Additionally, as demand for programming increases, the Town will have to consider whether the Old Town Hall can continue to meet the community's needs. The Old Town Hall has been updated to accommodate recreational uses, but the facility is aging. There has been some support for a new community or recreation center in Bridgton to provide additional opportunities for residents to engage in physical activity and other programming. Furthermore, the Open Space Plan identifies several sources for funding open space maintenance and acquisition projects. Funding is often the largest barrier to implementing open space and recreation goals.

Climate change is likely to continue generating warmer temperatures. As a result, climate projections anticipate shorter winters with less snow, placing stress on winter recreation throughout Maine.



Additional challenges, like an increase in vector-borne illnesses and warmer summer temperatures, may impact summer recreation as well.

## Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Bridgton Open Space Plan

Bridgton Recreation Department

Climate Change Resource Center – Recreation

Lakes Environmental Association

Loon Echo Land Trust

Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summary

Pondicherry Park Committee



## 6 Economy

### Introduction

From the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, Bridgton's economy thrived. Manufacturing firms located along Stevens Brook provided substantial employment and wages to workers in the area. By the mid-1900s, technology had improved to replace mill operations, and mills across Bridgton closed. Manufacturing saw a slight resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s, but the resurgence dwindled, and most manufacturing businesses closed permanently by 1990. Throughout this time, Bridgton's downtown provided retail opportunities and services to the community. As the mills began to close, and competition from retail locations in Conway, NH, Windham, and the Maine Mall grew, several of Bridgton's downtown businesses closed. With the loss of year-round manufacturing jobs, Bridgton's economy became increasingly dependent on tourism.

Since the 1800s, people have been drawn to Bridgton's lakes and mountains for recreation. From the 1800s to mid-1900s, visitors would rent cottages for a week or two at a time, creating constant turnover of new tourists who used services and shopped in Bridgton. Beginning in the 1960s, more families began to buy cottages to use as vacation homes, reducing the consistent turnover of tourists that the Town had previously had.

Today, Bridgton is often described as the service center for the Lakes Region, providing access to medical care, retail opportunities, entertainment, and other services. Bridgton's location along several major regional road networks makes it easy for the community to access Bridgton's services and to connect people from neighboring communities to the Town.

### Past and Current Economic Initiatives

The Town's 2014 Comprehensive Plan outlines a strategic plan for Bridgton's economic future, current available workforce, and technologies. The economic goals included providing stable employment at a living wage, providing a downtown with ample goods and services for residents and visitors, and creating a sustainable tax base to provide efficient municipal services to support the community. The plan focused on Bridgton's geographic location as an asset to build upon the tourism sector and enhance future growth. The plan identified construction, healthcare, senior support services, schools, and other businesses as sectors for additional growth. The plan also noted that Bridgton's New England character attracts people to Bridgton.

Expanding upon the 2014 Comprehensive Plan, the Town and the Maine Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Southern Maine created an economic and market analysis in 2019. The analysis examined the Town's economic base, workforce and employment trends, real estate market conditions, and demographic profile. The analysis also includes peer benchmarking, which provided a comparison of Bridgton's economic profile with communities of similar size, population, or



economic makeup. The analysis was not an economic development strategy nor a business attraction plan, but it does provide data to inform a strategy.

## Economic Conditions

Throughout the 2010s, the average total number of people employed in Bridgton was fairly stagnant across all industries, with a slight peak in 2019. Pandemic-related closures resulted in a significant decline since 2020, though total jobs have grown since the pandemic. Some Maine businesses and industries were more insulated from the economic impacts of the pandemic compared to other states. During the pandemic, Maine experienced significant in-migration of people leaving larger urban areas for smaller communities with more open space and recreational opportunities. Additionally, with air travel limited, many tourists from nearby states were still traveling to Maine, where COVID-19 rates were relatively low and outdoor recreation opportunities were abundant. These new residents (some temporary) and visitors helped to support many Maine businesses during the pandemic.

**Table 6.1: Bridgton Change in Labor Force by Sector**

| Sector   | 10-Year Change<br>(2013 – 2023) | 4-Year Change<br>(2019 – 2023) |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Construction   | 55%                             | 13%                            |
| Manufacturing  | 9%                              | -14%                           |
| Wholesale Trade  | 73%                             | 138%                           |
| Retail Trade   | 11%                             | 2%                             |
| Information  | -61%                            | -54%                           |
| Finance and Insurance  | 24%                             | 9%                             |
| Real Estate and Rental and Leasing                                   | 127%                            | 47%                            |
| Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services                     | -8%                             | -30%                           |
| Management of Companies and Enterprises                              | -47%                            | -50%                           |
| Administrative Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services | -82%                            | -81%                           |
| Healthcare and Social Assistance                                     | -11%                            | -1%                            |
| Accommodation and Food Service                                       | 9%                              | -23%                           |
| Other Services (Except Public Administration)                        | -14%                            | 0%                             |

Source: Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information

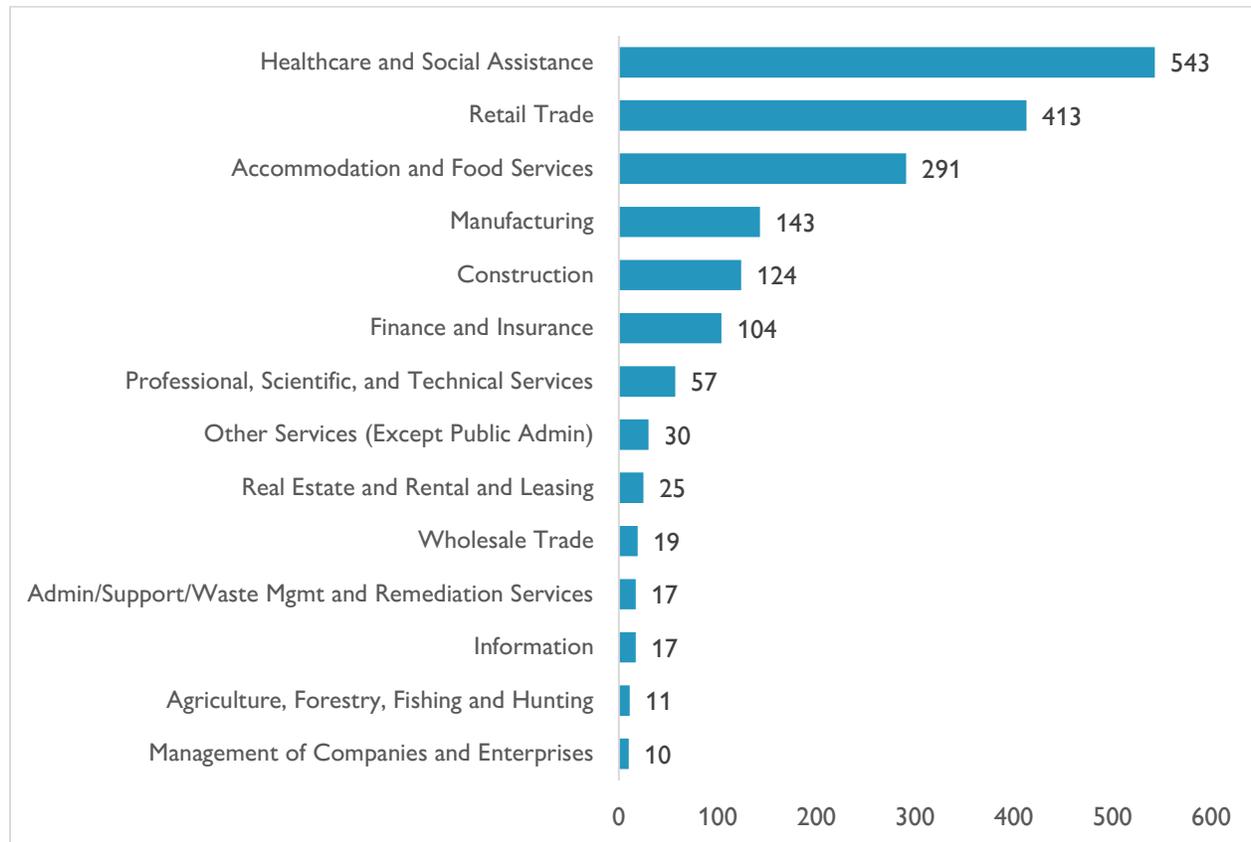
Bridgton has seen consistent residential and commercial development in the last 50 years. The retail industry has grown over the past decade. The real estate and rental and leasing, wholesale trade, finance and insurance, and construction industries have also seen consistent job growth. While still the largest employment industry, the healthcare and social assistance industry has declined slightly over the last decade. The manufacturing industry saw growth from 2013 to 2019 but has declined since the



pandemic. The information, professional and technical services, management, and administrative and support industries have also declined over the past decade.

In 2023, the healthcare and social assistance industry employs an estimated 543 people. The retail trade (413 people) and accommodation and food service (291 people) are the second and third largest industries in Bridgton.

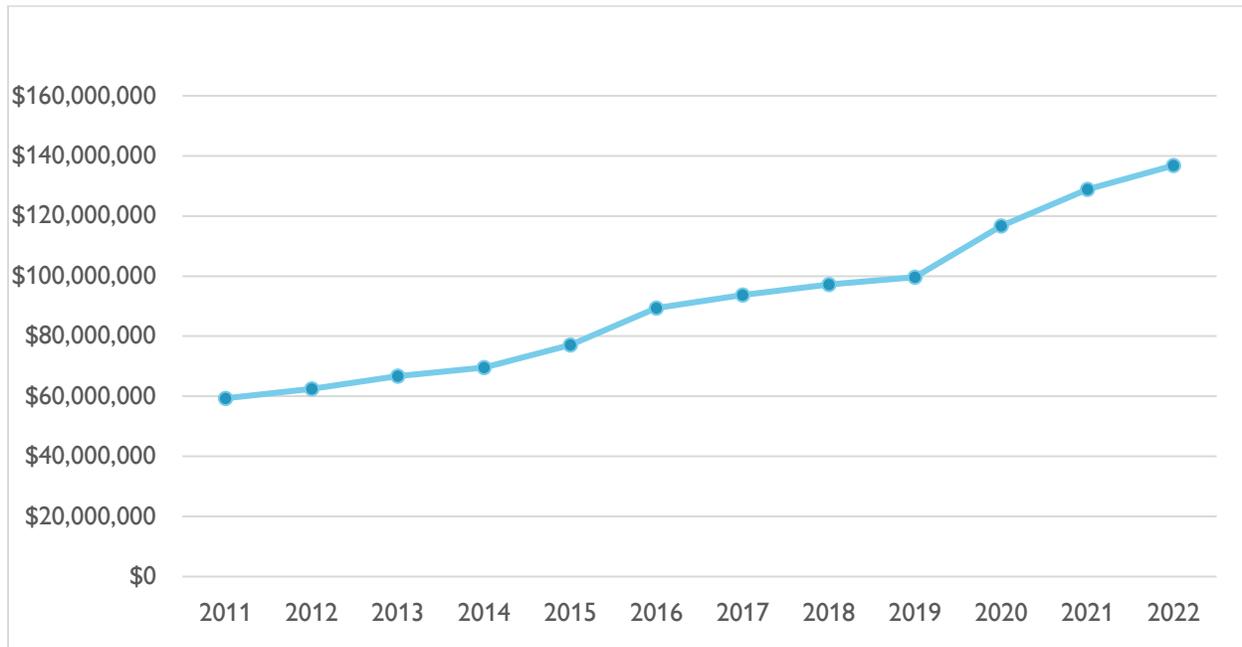
**Figure 6.1: Total Employment by Sector (Q1 2023)**



Source: Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information

Taxable sales in Bridgton have increased consistently over the last decade, with continued growth during the pandemic. Taxable sales in Bridgton have increased 105% since 2013 (\$66,714,808 in 2013 to \$136,807,472 in 2022), and 37% since the start of the pandemic (\$99,653,768 in 2019 to \$136,807,472 in 2022).

**Figure 6.2: Bridgton Annual Taxable Sales**



Source: Maine Revenue Services, Sales Tax Report

Bridgton is a regional hub for nearby communities. Its central position between larger service areas, like Portland or the Conways and amenities make it attractive for those in neighboring communities to seek services in Bridgton. In addition, arts and cultural events and amenities, community programs, restaurants, and recreational opportunities all attract visitors from neighboring communities year-round.

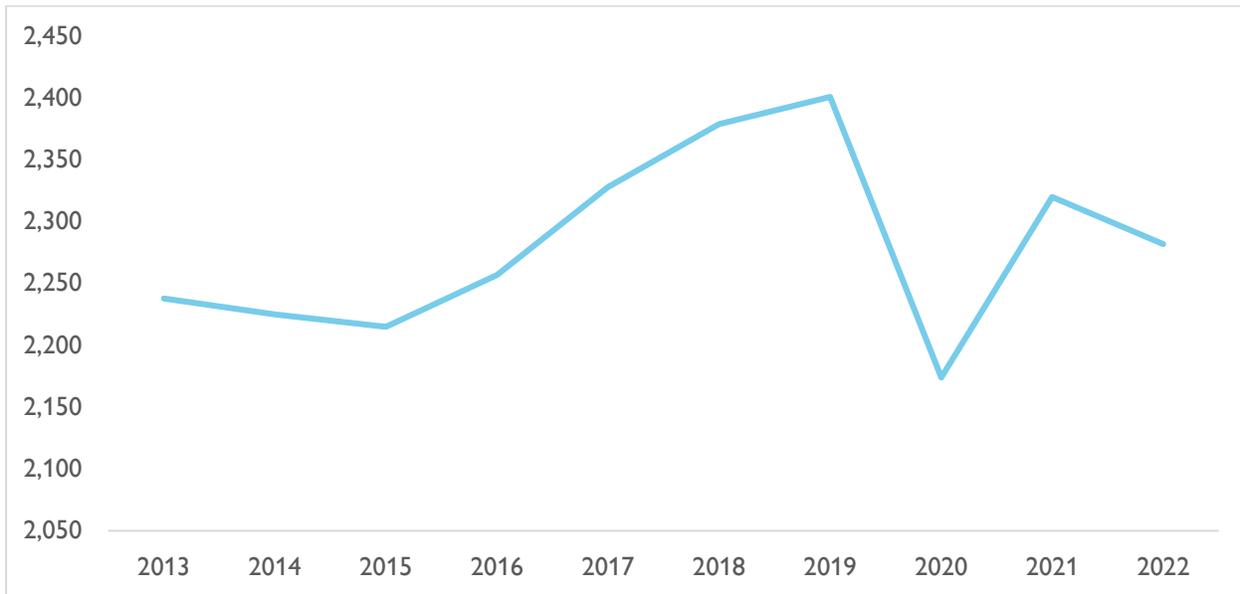
Neighboring communities, like Sebago and Naples, also have significant population increases in the summer months, and their economies tend to focus on tourism. The lakes and access to recreation throughout the Lakes Region make it desirable for visitors and recreators. The region as a whole has seen a decline in the manufacturing sector, shifting more toward retail and professional services.

## Employment and Wages

### Employment

Employment in Bridgton peaked in 2019 before declining in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bridgton saw an increase in employment from 2020 to 2021 but declined in 2022. Data from Q1 (January – March) 2023 show another increase in employment, though average annual data for the full year is not yet available. In Q1 2023, Pleasant Mountain Ski Resort was the 24<sup>th</sup> largest employer in Cumberland County; however, its employment in the summer and fall months is likely not as high. Other major employers in Bridgton include Bridgton Hospital, Bridgton Academy, and Hannaford. In 2022, there were an average of 2,282 people employed in Bridgton.

**Figure 6.3: Bridgton Total Employment, 2013 – 2022**



Source: Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information

Healthcare and social assistance is the largest employment sector in the Town and comprises roughly 20% (413) of all jobs in Bridgton. The number of jobs in the retail sector increased from 372 in 2013. Retail and accommodations and food services were the second and third largest employment sectors, respectively, in 2022. Combined, the two sectors make up 35% of all jobs in Bridgton. Though these sectors comprise a significant portion of Bridgton’s economy, they also have lower weekly wages than most economic sectors in Bridgton.

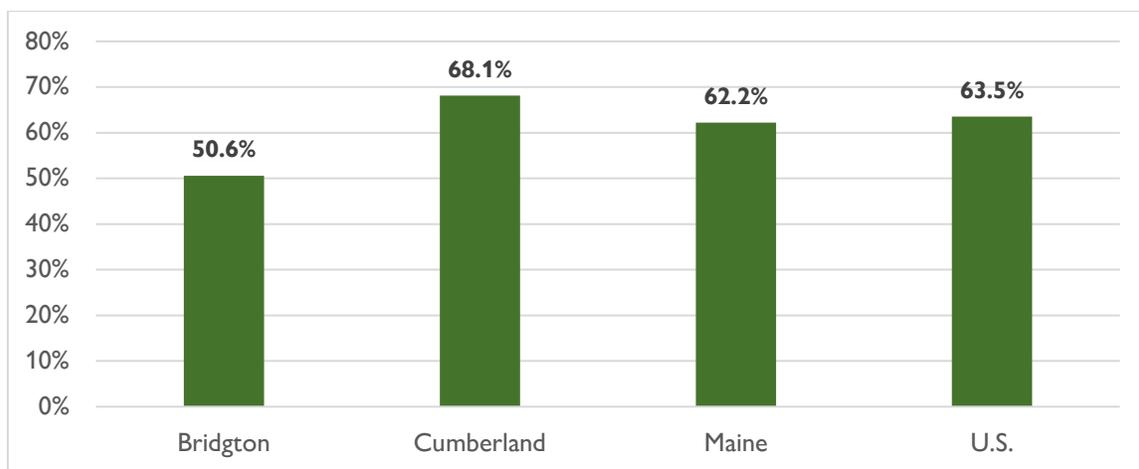
### Labor Force

As a service center, Bridgton has a large number of workers that commute into the town. In 2021, approximately 72% of people working in Bridgton were living outside of the Town and commuting for work. The number of workers commuting into the Town is smaller than total number of residents commuting outside of Bridgton for work (1,316 commuting into Bridgton versus 1,543 residents commuting out of Bridgton). Approximately 77% of Bridgton’s employed residents commuted outside of the Town for work. Most workers commuting outside of Bridgton for work were traveling to communities east of Bridgton (Portland metro area). In 2020, 401 people lived and worked in Bridgton. Since 2018, the number of people both living and working in Bridgton has declined. This could be due, in part, to rising housing costs and relatively low wages across major economic sectors, like retail and food service. The most recent Census OnTheMap data are from 2021. There have likely been changes to commuter trends since 2021 related to the COVID-19 pandemic and housing crisis, including a rise in remote work and longer commutes for some as people struggle to find housing near employment centers. According to ACS five-year estimates, in 2022, roughly 30% of Bridgton residents commuted

60 or more minutes to work, up from 15% in 2012. There may be more people moving from the Portland metro area to Bridgton due to housing affordability, and more people living in Bridgton may be commuting to the Portland metro area for work.

Since 2020, Maine’s labor force participation rate has remained lower than the national average, largely due to aging and retirement. Labor force is defined as all people aged 16 and older who are either employed or unemployed and seeking employment. Those who are retired or those who are not actively looking for work are not considered to be part of the labor force. Bridgton has a lower labor force participation rate (50.6%) than the county, state, and nation. Bridgton’s population is older, and its workforce is likely to continue to be impacted by aging and retirement. Bridgton’s labor force declined from 2013 to 2018; however, labor force participation peaked at 61% in 2019.

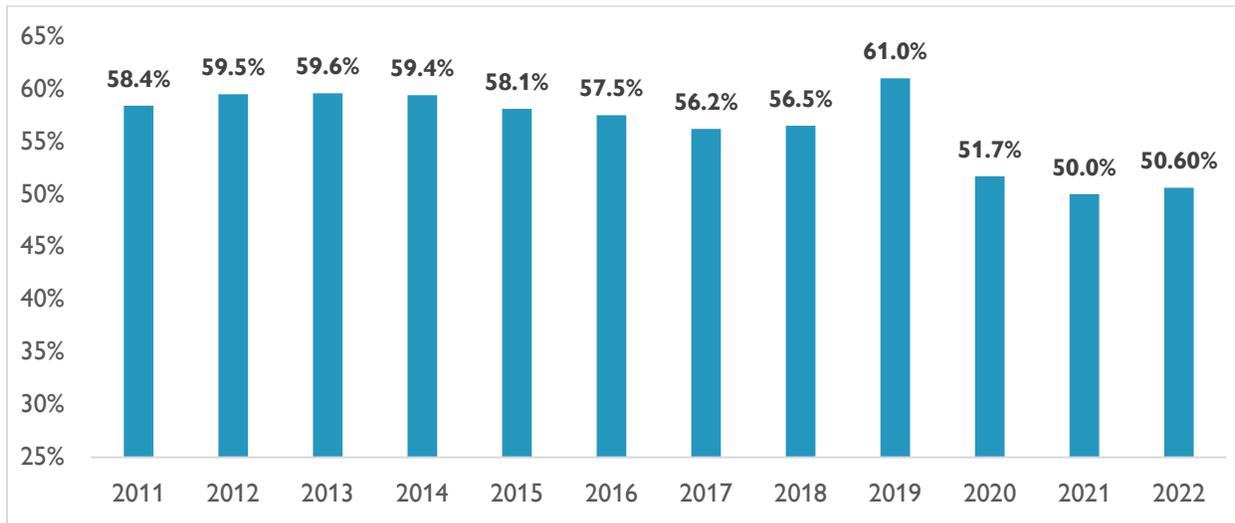
**Figure 6.4: Labor Force Participation Rate**



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Similar to a broader state and national trend, labor force participation in Bridgton has declined since the pandemic in 2020. In addition to aging and retirement, the lack of affordable child care and older adult care opportunities has resulted in workers leaving the labor force to care for family. A slight increase from 2021 to 2022 reflects the increase in working-age people in Bridgton in recent years.

**Figure 6.5: Bridgton Labor Force Participation Rate, 2011 – 2022**

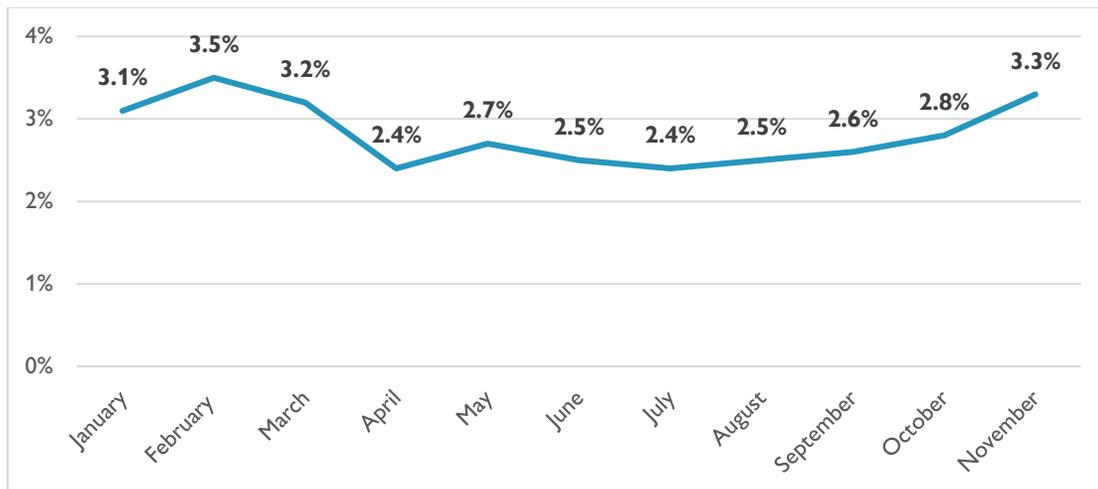


Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

## Unemployment

While Bridgton is a year-round community, there are several seasonal businesses and residents. Bridgton typically has lower unemployment in the summer months during tourist season and higher unemployment in winter months; however, in 2023, unemployment has been similar month to month.

**Figure 6.6: Bridgton Unemployment Rate by Month, 2023**

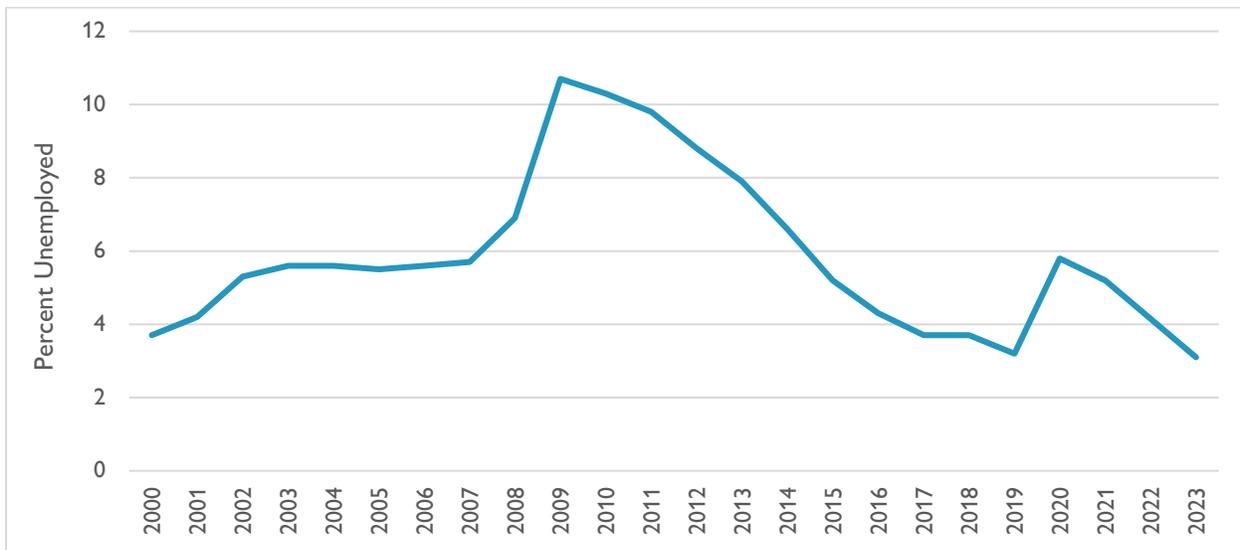


Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information

The average annual unemployment rate for the Bridgton-Paris labor market area (LMA) declined between 2009 and 2019, from roughly 10.7% unemployment in 2009 to 3.2% in 2019. The Bridgton-Paris LMA includes the towns of Bridgton and Harrison in Cumberland County and several towns in Oxford County. In 2020, unemployment rose to 5.8% in the LMA as a result of the pandemic.

Unemployment has declined overall since 2020, and unemployment for the Town of Bridgton has been slightly lower than the average annual unemployment for the LMA. Similarly, unemployment rates across the country have been declining since peaking in 2020. Maine’s unemployment rates have been somewhat lower than the national averages in recent years. This is largely due to Maine’s growth during and following the pandemic with significant in-migration, the quick rebound of the tourism industry, and the decline of the labor force due to aging.

**Figure: 6.7: Average Annual Unemployment, Bridgton-Paris LMA**

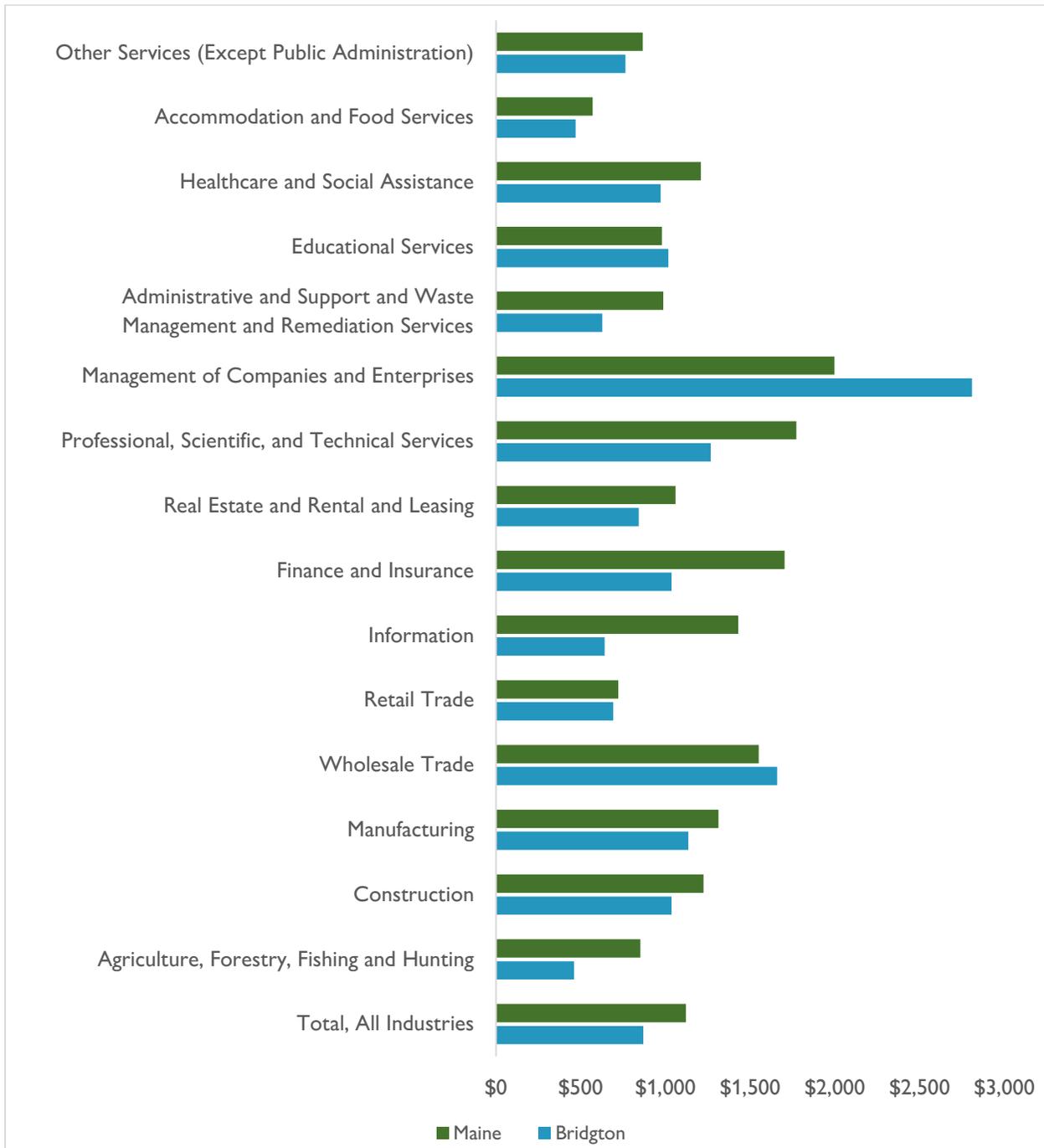


Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information

## Wages

Average wages for people working in Bridgton are lower than the state for nearly all industries. One exception is management of companies and enterprises, which has a much higher average weekly wage compared to the state. Still, the average weekly wage for Bridgton employees is 22% lower (\$869 per week for the second quarter of 2023) than the state’s average wage of \$1,121 per week. While average weekly wages have increased in Bridgton since the pandemic—consistent with growth in the state—the cost of living and, especially, housing have increased as well. Many people who live in Bridgton commute to neighboring cities and towns for work, which likely have higher wages, contributing to a median income higher than that of the state.

**Figure 6.8: Weekly Wages, Q2 2023**



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

## Current Economic Trends

Maine communities have struggled in recent years with a dramatic increase in housing costs and the limited availability of affordable housing. Affordable and available housing in Bridgton has become a



critical economic development issue. The desirability of Maine and the increase in tourism after the pandemic have exacerbated housing challenges across the state. Based on experiences in other Maine communities, businesses may have challenges attracting workers who can afford current housing prices.

The recent growth in remote work has drawn people to Maine who are no longer office bound. Bridgton's amenities, culture, and recreation opportunities have been a draw for many people from outside the Lakes Region and Maine.

## Commercial Development and Growth Areas

The 2014 Future Land Use Plan identified several commercial and residential growth areas. Growth areas included a Downtown Village Business District, Downtown Village Neighborhood, and Inner Corridor. The Downtown Village Business District is located along Route 302 and Route 117, where Bridgton's downtown is located. The area extends south to Willett Road and east to Willett Brook. The Downtown Village Business District is at the junction of major roadways in Bridgton, and visitors and residents alike travel through the area. This area has traditionally accommodated a higher population density, and this designation was intended to encourage revitalization and expansion. This area has seen growth and redevelopment since 2014, and the Town has had an increase in small businesses. Recent murals and public art projects, events like Music on Main, and a blend of local businesses have helped elevate downtown Bridgton as a destination for residents and visitors.

Downtown Village Neighborhood areas are primarily located along North High Street, Harrison Road, Main Street, and Highland Road, adjacent to Bridgton's downtown. These areas were intended to allow for infill development and greater density than rural and lakeside areas of Town. Outer village corridors were designated as areas that were expected to see some residential growth, but not to the scale of Downtown Village Neighborhood areas.

The Town is completing infrastructure improvements in the downtown growth area, including a major upgrade to enhance and expand capacity of the Town's wastewater system as well as improvements to sidewalks and the streetscape along Main Street. These improvements will help enable and encourage commercial growth in downtown.

Additional commercial and industrial development has taken place along the Inner Corridor and Outer Corridor. Additional standards for buffering and total building footprint are desired by the community to protect the rural feel of Bridgton along these corridors.

As the Town continues to experience population growth and a strong tourism economy, new commercial growth to support new residents and visitors is anticipated to continue, primarily in the downtown and along major corridors. As a service center, growth in the region will also impact commercial growth in Bridgton, as residents and visitors of other Lakes Region communities seek services and amenities in the Town. Continued investment in the downtown and along the Route 302 corridor is expected with additional opportunities for recreation businesses in West Bridgton.



## Challenges and Opportunities

Tourism-based industries will likely continue to comprise a significant portion of Bridgton's economic base. The Town has an opportunity to continue marketing and supporting recreation, retail, and cultural assets. There are currently a significant number of summer visitors, and Pleasant Mountain Ski Area attracts visitors in the winter. Both the 2019 Economic and Market Analysis and 2023 Open Space Plan discuss expanding Bridgton's recreational opportunities to include more year-round offerings for visitors and residents, which could establish Bridgton as a year-round destination.

The Town has a long history of manufacturing and industry with numerous mills centered around Stevens Brook that formed the foundation for the Town's economy through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. While this type of manufacturing has faded, there are opportunities for the Town to encourage new industrial development that would help to diversify the Town's tax base and provide high paying jobs.

Bridgton has the opportunity to attract more remote workers. The 2019 Economic and Market Analysis states that almost half of seasonal and part-time residents reported working remotely at least part of the time while staying in Bridgton. After the pandemic, remote work opportunities have expanded. The analysis explains that workers are more likely to move to places with recreational and cultural amenities and offer a lower cost of living. Bridgton could continue to pursue strategies to target remote workers.

Bridgton's aging population will likely impact the Town's labor force. Bridgton Hospital, medical offices, Bridgton Community Center, and other social services that serve the Town and region will be important to continue to support the health and well-being of the community as well as serve as an important employment sector. Bridgton will need to continue attracting a labor force to support medical and social services in Town and help support an aging population. Housing and transportation will be other considerations that the Town will need to examine to support an aging population while also attracting and maintaining its labor force.

Bridgton plays an important role in supporting the broader community and benefits from being a regional commerce center; however, the Town could look to be more intentional in funding services and infrastructure improvements to help ensure fiscal stability. Projects like the new wastewater treatment facility and streetscape improvements have begun addressing challenges and strain on existing infrastructure to cultivate additional economic opportunities. The Town will continue encouraging economic growth and investing in infrastructure and services to support the broader region in a way that is fiscally responsible and focused on supporting a high-quality of place for residents, workers, and visitors. Additionally, home-based occupations, including childcare, will likely be necessary to support workforce growth and attract families to Bridgton. Home occupations are allowed in all zoning districts in Bridgton with approval from the Code Enforcement Officer.



## Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Bridgton Economic and Market Analysis 2019

Bridgton Open Space Plan

Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information

Maine State Economist

U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



## 7 Housing

Housing needs and affordability in the state and region have changed dramatically since the 2014 Comprehensive Plan. The 2014 plan addresses housing, primarily related to the countywide housing need and requirements of the Maine Growth Management Act, which calls for communities to set a goal of having at least 10% of new residential development be affordable.

Although housing costs in Bridgton have remained lower than the county average and slightly lower or comparable to state averages, significant shifts in the housing market and the widespread rising costs of housing have created a statewide housing crisis. The state has now documented the need for 38,500 more housing units to make up for historic underproduction and more than 84,000 total units to meet the state's growing housing needs by 2030.<sup>11</sup>

The impacts of this housing crisis on the Town are nuanced, and the current housing challenges were not anticipated in 2014. The 2014 plan notes that “Bridgton does have an adequate balance of [housing] types, including affordable housing for full and part-time residents.” The Town and region are now experiencing an increase in demand for affordable homes and different housing types, including rental apartments and senior housing. The percentage of households in Bridgton that could not afford the median home price in the Town increased from 55.8% in 2014 to 76.8% in 2022.

While Bridgton is experiencing continued residential construction, changing demographics and the growing desirability of Bridgton as both a place to live permanently and as an ideal place for a vacation home have impacted the demand for housing in the Town.

### Housing Stock

Bridgton experienced significant housing development in the 1980s and 2000s, with growth slowing in the 2010s. This was consistent with a nationwide trend of slowed growth and a decline in housing development following the Great Recession (from late 2007 to 2009).

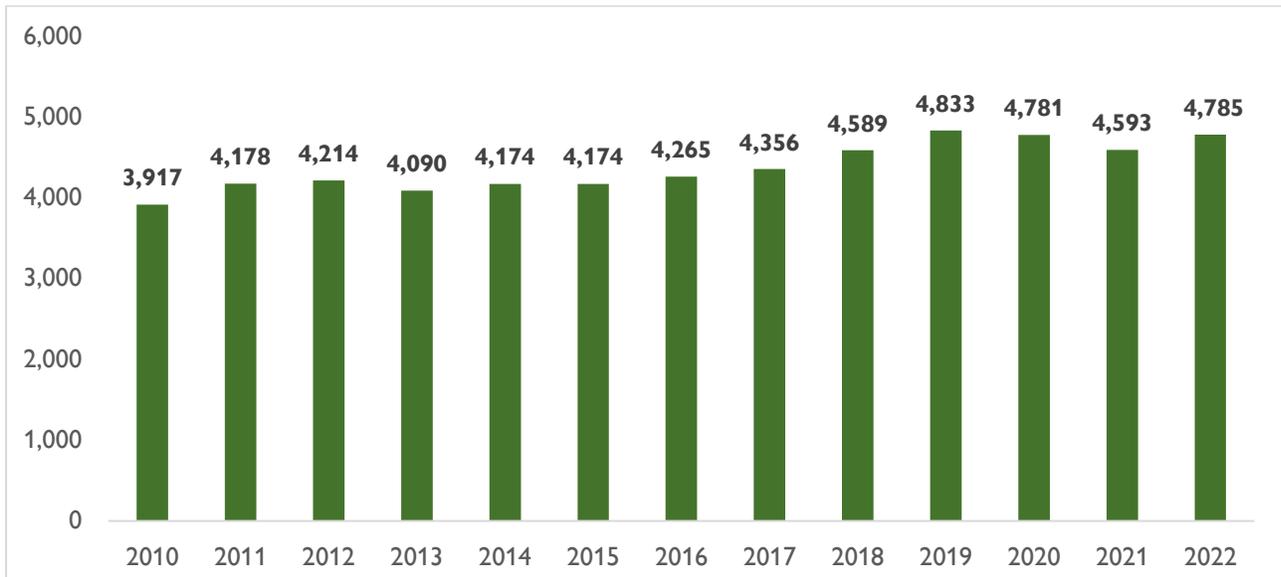
Bridgton had approximately 2,785 housing units in 2022 (2018 – 2022 five-year estimate), which was a slight decline from 2019. Since 2021, there has been significant construction of new housing developments in the Town, which likely has increased total housing units. The net loss of housing units from 2019 to 2022 could be due to the demolition of blighted properties, the removal of structures on lots where new housing is proposed but not yet built, combining housing units, or conversion of housing to another use.

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<sup>11</sup> MaineHousing. October 2023. *State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study*. Accessed October 23, 2023. [https://mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/state-of-maine-housing-production-needs-study\\_full\\_final-v2.pdf](https://mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/state-of-maine-housing-production-needs-study_full_final-v2.pdf)



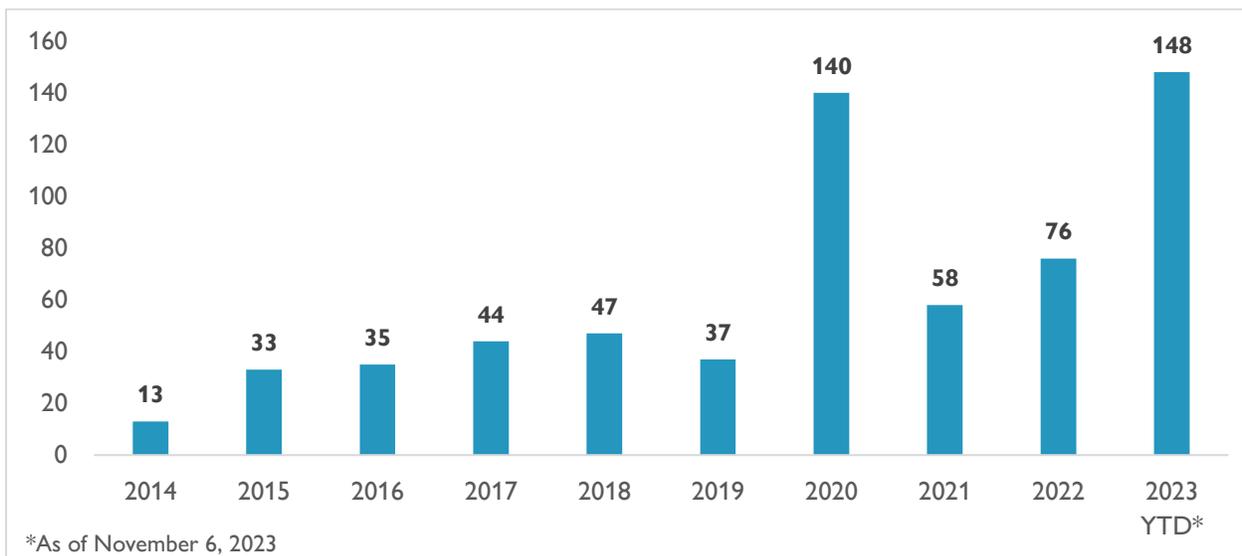
**Figure 7.1: Bridgton Total Housing Units**



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

From 2020 to October 2023, 422 housing units were permitted by the Town, including more than 200 apartments. Once all units are completed, this will be an 8.8% increase in total housing units from 2020. The addition of multifamily housing is also shifting the breakdown of housing types in Town.

**Figure 7.2: New Housing Units Permitted**



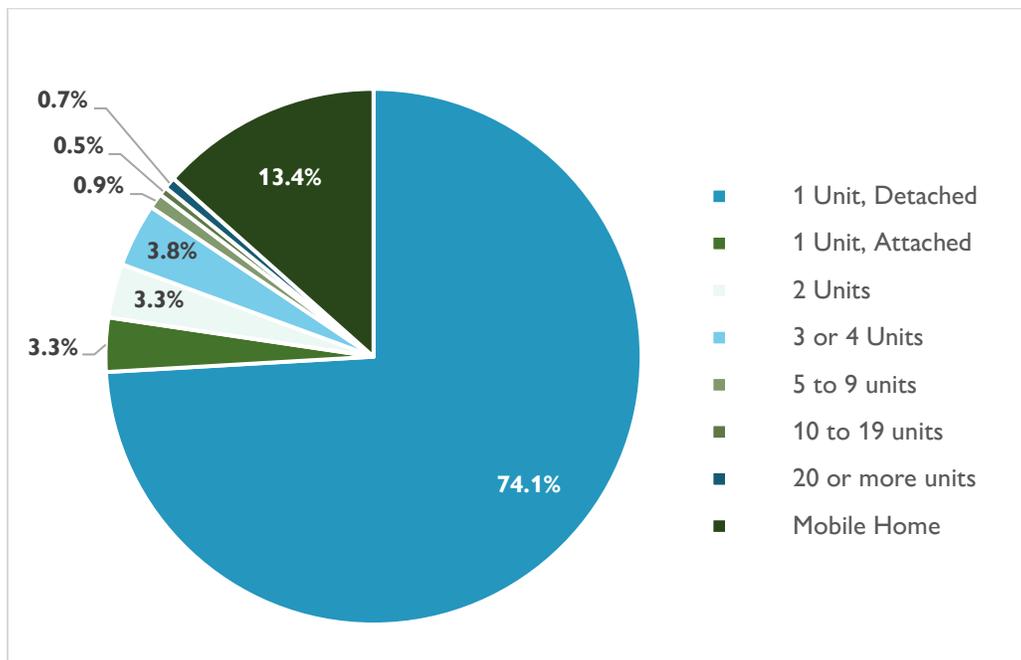
\*As of November 6, 2023

Source: Town of Bridgton

Nearly 94% of Bridgton’s housing units are single-family units, including single-family detached units (74%), single-family attached units (3.3%), and mobile homes (13.4%). Since the latest housing data was

published (2022 five-year estimates), there has been a significant increase in the number of multifamily housing units, adding to the diversity of available housing types and an increase in rental housing. In 2022, approximately 17.6% of housing units were renter-occupied, and roughly one-fourth (23.7%) of occupied housing units were newly occupied since 2018, indicating shifts in Town population and demographics.

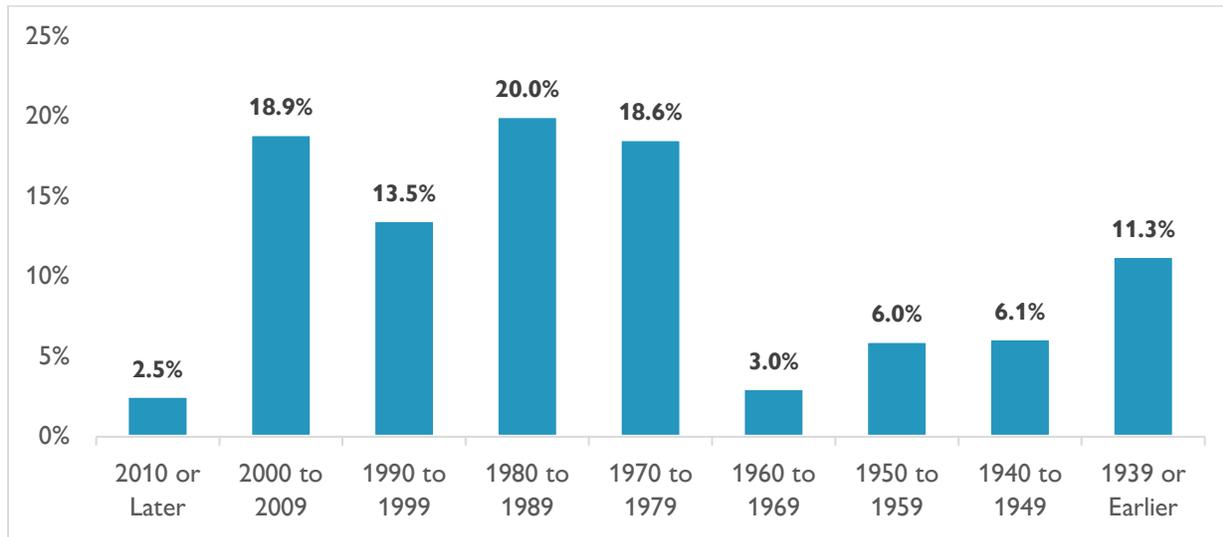
**Figure 7.3: Percentage of Housing Units by Type**



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

There is a variety in the age of the Town’s housing stock, with about 20% of housing units constructed since 2000, 35% built between 1980 and 1999, 19% built from 1960 to 1979, and 26% constructed prior to 1960. These data do not include recently completed housing or housing units currently under construction which will significantly increase the percentage of units built since 2010.

**Figure 7.4: Housing Units – Year Built**



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

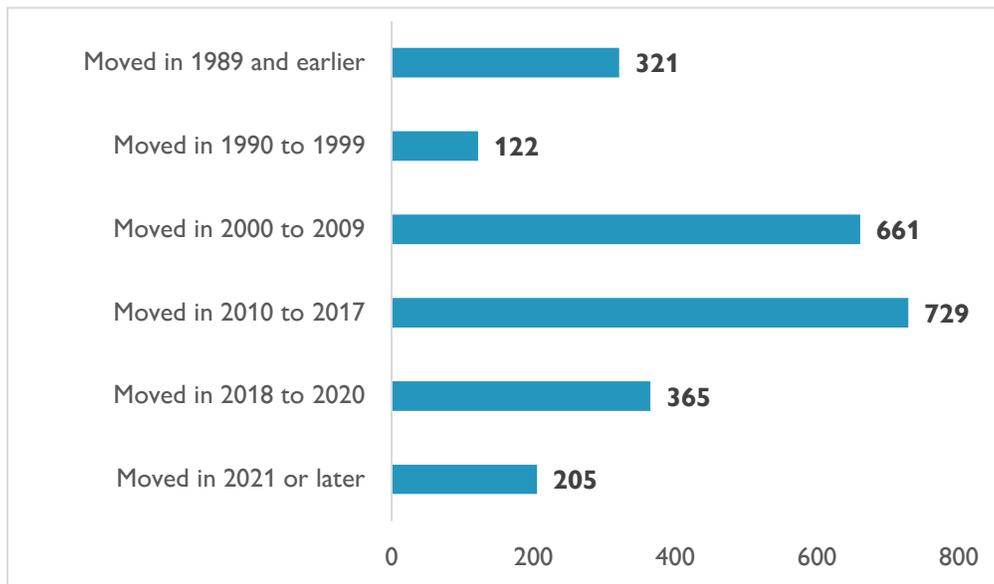
## Housing Tenure and Longevity

Occupied housing units are divided into two categories regarding tenure. Approximately 82% (2,403) of occupied housing units in Bridgton are owner-occupied and 17% (424) are renter-occupied. The addition of Lakewood Apartments and other rental housing projects that were recently completed or are under construction in Bridgton (not accounted for in the 2018 – 2022 ACS data) will likely shift this number to include a higher percentage of renter-occupied homes.

Recently developed rental units will also impact other demographic indicators. Because only 5.9% of the Town’s housing units are in multifamily structures (3 or more units in a structure), the majority of Bridgton’s rental housing inventory is single- or two-family homes. Related to this, the average household size for renter-occupied units in Bridgton is 2.99, while the average household size for owner-occupied units is only 2.08. Typically, apartments are smaller in size and, therefore, have smaller households.

Approximately one-fourth (23.7%) of occupied housing units were newly occupied since 2018, with that percentage likely to increase with the previously noted new housing construction.

**Figure 7.5: Tenure in Housing Unit (for Occupied Housing Units in Bridgton)**

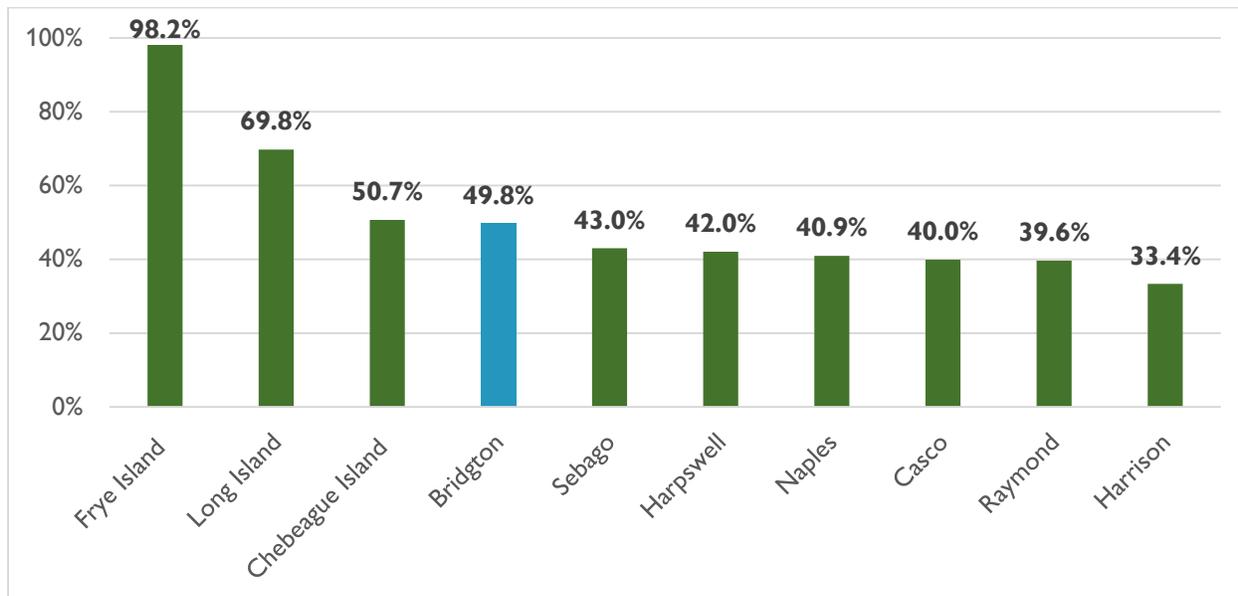


Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

## Vacant Housing

Data from 2018 to 2022 indicate that roughly half (49.8%) of housing units in Bridgton are vacant. This includes housing units vacant for sale, new units not yet occupied, units for seasonal or temporary use where the owner has a primary residence elsewhere, and units otherwise vacant (not including condemned housing) or used for non-residential purposes. This is an increase in the percent of vacant units from 45.0% of all housing units in 2012 (1,898 units) to 49.8% (2,382) in 2022.

**Figure 7.6: Percentage of Vacant Housing Units (Top 10 Municipalities in Cumberland County)**



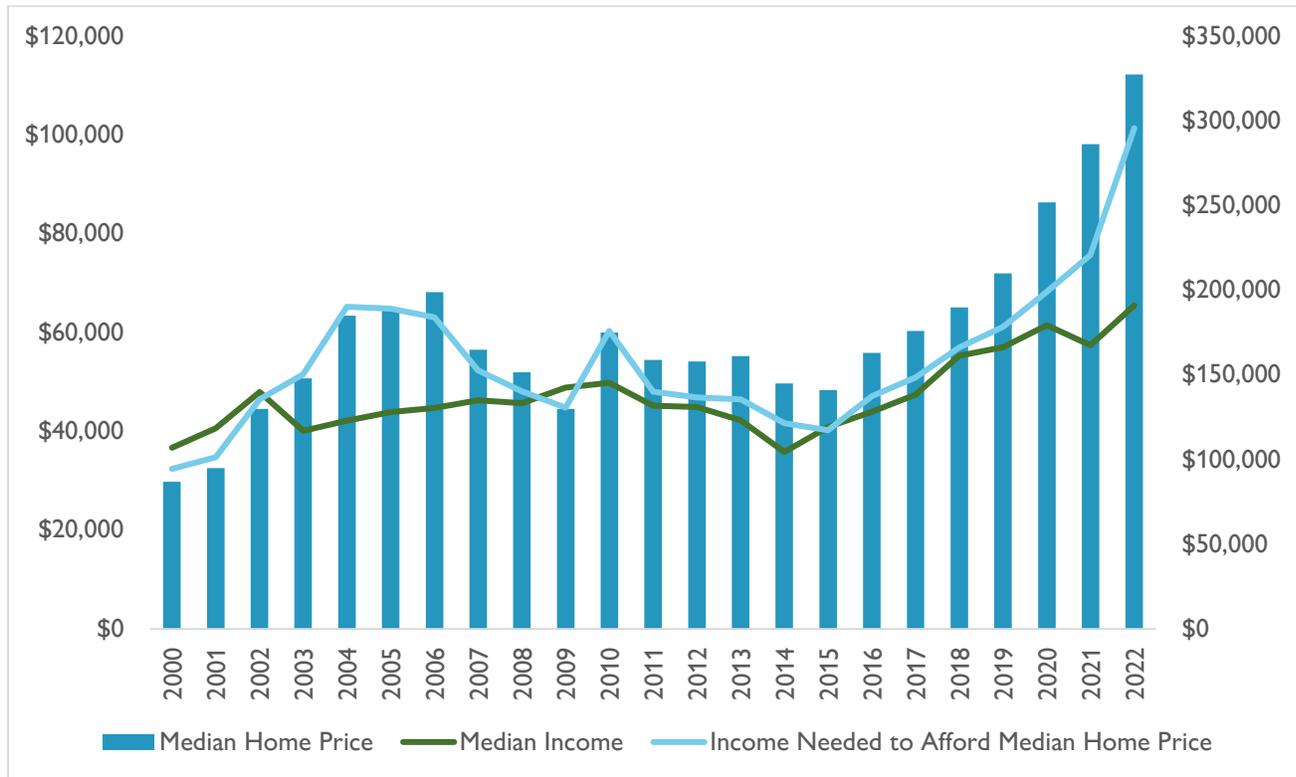
Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Lack of data and shifts in the status of part-time to full-time residents make it difficult to accurately estimate the number of seasonal residents in Bridgton. Anecdotal data from Town staff indicate that many seasonal residents transitioned to full-time residency during the pandemic, resulting in fewer seasonally vacant units. It is difficult to estimate how many people have made this transition and if the transition was permanent or temporary (with the recent trend of returning to in-person office work).

## Affordability

Prior to 2020, homeownership in Bridgton was relatively affordable, with the median income roughly within a reasonable range to afford the median home price. In 2012, the gap between the median income and income needed to afford the median home price was 4.3%. This gap widened dramatically to 54.8% in 2022, resulting in many more households priced out of the current housing market.

**Figure 7.7: Home Ownership Affordability**



Source: *MaineHousing*

This increase in housing price relative to income is consistent with changes in home prices in Cumberland County and Maine. Similarly, rental housing costs have increased as well. While the most current U.S. Census data indicate a median rent of \$1,002 (2018 – 2022 ACS five-year estimates), more recent evaluation of the rental market, including several commercial real estate websites, indicates an average monthly rental price anywhere from \$1,250 (for a two-bedroom apartment) to over \$2,000 (median for all property types).<sup>12</sup>

## Supply

The State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study (October 2023) determined that Maine needs approximately 38,500 housing units to make up for historic underproduction of housing and will need an additional 37,900 to 45,800 new homes to meet future demand through 2030. Bridgton experienced an

<sup>12</sup> Zillow. n.d. “Bridgton, ME Rental Market.” *Zillow*. Accessed October 16, 2023. <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/bridgton-me/>; Best Places. n.d. “Cost of Living in Bridgton, Maine.” *Bestplaces.net*. Accessed October 16, 2023. [https://www.bestplaces.net/cost\\_of\\_living/city/maine/bridgton](https://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/city/maine/bridgton); Dwellics. n.d. “Cost of Living Bridgton, Maine.” *Dwellics*. Accessed October 16, 2023. <https://dwellics.com/state/maine/cost-of-living-in-bridgton>



overall loss of housing units from 2019 to 2021 despite population growth during that time. Factors impacting housing supply in Bridgton include an aging housing stock and a shifting seasonal home market.

Maine has an older housing stock, and with recent underproduction of housing, the housing market is especially vulnerable to loss of housing units due to disrepair. More recent shifts in seasonal residency (as mentioned above) and growth of the short-term rental market make it challenging to understand the true year-round housing supply within the Town. Because of Bridgton's significant seasonal population and attractiveness as a tourist destination, it is challenging to differentiate the seasonal and vacation rental housing market from the year-round housing needs of the community. According to AirDNA, there were 278 short-term rental listings in Bridgton in October 2023. There is also the potential for loss of year-round housing units to conversion to seasonal homes and/or use as short-term rental housing.

Recent housing development, including multifamily apartments and age-restricted (55+) housing developments, has contributed to an increase in housing supply and diversity of housing types in Bridgton.

## Demand

While state population projections anticipate a population decline in Bridgton and the region, it is difficult to predict based on recent trends. Changes in the seasonal population (some residents transitioning from seasonal to permanent) and in-migration from larger, more expensive cities have resulted in an increase in population, contrary to population estimates, which are partially based on the existing population and the anticipated natural population decline (more deaths than births). The state's housing crisis and lack of housing inventory is pushing people to move to where housing is being built, resulting in supply driving demand at a local level. Bridgton has significant potential for growth with recent downtown investments in infrastructure and as a service center and outdoor recreation destination.

Changing demographics, including the type and size of households, has influenced the type of housing needed by current and future Bridgton residents. An aging population has resulted in a smaller average household size, with many older adults looking to downsize and/or find housing that supports aging in place. With this trend of aging households with grown children leaving home to form their own household(s), the demand for housing will continue to grow even if the total population does not; however, the current housing stock, which is largely single-family homes, will not meet the needs of the population which will include more retirees and fewer households with young children.

Household income also impacts the demand for type and price point of homes. As home prices have increased, fewer residents can afford the median single-family home price, resulting in an increased demand for smaller, more affordable units and multifamily housing types. While in-migration has broadly brought new residents with higher incomes and greater ability to afford housing, there has also been a



rise in homelessness in Maine and the region. In addition to the increased demand for social services, there is also a need for transitional and supportive housing and housing for very low-income households.

## Recent and Proposed Housing Development

Bridgton has been experiencing significant new housing growth in recent years. Since 2020, the Town has permitted 422 new housing units, including 208 apartments. Once construction is complete, this will be an 8.8% increase in the Town's housing stock since 2020. Pending developments will also result in a shift in housing type to have a greater percentage of the Town's housing within multifamily units and as rental units.

Many of the housing units have been completed in the last year. Anecdotally, property managers for new apartment units have noted that tenants tend to be younger (compared to the Town's average age of 49+), and many residents are coming from outside of Bridgton and Maine.

## Affordable Housing

Bridgton has 128 income-restricted rental housing units in five developments. Three of these developments (totaling 84 housing units) are also age-restricted for older adults (ages 55 and over or ages 62 and over) or adults with disabilities.

- **Wayside Pines:** Wayside Pines is located north of Main Street on Wayside Avenue and includes 12 one- and two-bedroom units for residents 62 and older and adults with disabilities.
- **Deerfield Village Apartments:** Deerfield Village is located just east of downtown and includes 24 one- and two-bedroom units for residents 62 and older and adults with disabilities. Rehabilitation of the property for use as affordable housing was partially funded by Section 515 (Rural Rental Housing) and Section 521 (USDA Rental Assistance Program).
- **Pike's Farm:** Pike's Farm is located on South High Street across from Bridgton Hospital and close to other services and amenities in the region. The development includes 24 one- and two-bedroom units for residents of all ages.
- **Sandy Creek Apartments:** Sandy Creek Apartments were developed by Avesta Housing off of Swamp Road and include 20 one-, two-, and three-bedroom units for residents of all ages.
- **Harrison Ridge:** Harrison Ridge will be the newest affordable development in Bridgton, located just north of Main Street on Harrison Road (Route 117). The development includes 48 one-bedroom units for adults 55 and over. This is the first new development in Bridgton to use the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program administered by MaineHousing.



Some Bridgton residents also access housing subsidies through the federal Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) or Section 8 program, with some housing vouchers being used at the properties listed above. The HCV program is administered by MaineHousing for the Town of Bridgton. Demand for housing assistance exceeds the limited resources available, and there is often a waitlist for assistance.

The Town’s Land Use Ordinance outlines guidance for affordable housing development. This includes an affordable housing density bonus and long-term affordability requirements. Affordability requirements outline that more than half of the units in an affordable housing development must be designated as affordable through a restrictive covenant tied to the land. The Town has also amended its land use code to comply with LD2003. These ordinances are designed to support the development of additional affordable housing units for rent or ownership in Bridgton.

## Future Housing Needs

Recent population growth in Bridgton has been contrary to the State’s population projections. While natural population change (births and deaths) indicates a decline, State and regional migration trends and continued development in Bridgton indicate continued population growth in the Town. In addition to anticipated growth, demographic shifts and the trend toward smaller household size and the typical loss of housing units due to obsolescence should also be factored into estimated housing needs. The following table shows the estimated number of housing units needed based on three different growth scenarios from 2022 to 2030.

**Table 7.1: Housing Needs Estimates**

|  | No Growth<br>(2020 - 2030) | 4% Growth<br>(2020 - 2030) | 10% Growth<br>(2020 - 2030) |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Estimated population   | 5,418                      | 5,635                      | 5,959                       |
| Replacement housing needed*  | 430                        | 430                        | 430                         |
| Estimated new housing needed to accommodate population growth (average household size of 2.21) | 0                          | 147                        | 293                         |
| Estimated new housing needed to accommodate population growth (average household size of 2.00) | 306                        | 415                        | 577                         |
| Total housing units needed (range)   | 430 – 736                  | 577 – 845                  | 723 - 1007                  |

*\*Based on obsolescence rate of 1.8% annually, in accordance with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s American Housing Survey, Components of Inventory Change: 2015 – 2017.*

## Challenges and Opportunities

Affordability is a primary concern for both renters and homebuyers. Housing that is affordable to young families is essential for growing the workforce. There is also a growing demand for affordable senior



housing for residents seeking a smaller, more affordable home with access to services, amenities, and transportation. While there is new housing development in Bridgton, some new housing is built and purchased for seasonal use and, therefore, not contributing to increasing the year-round housing supply.

Only a small percentage (approximately 2.8%) of housing units are income-restricted affordable rental housing units. The Town will consider the need for more income-restricted affordable housing and look to ways to maintain the current affordable housing stock. Additionally, the need for housing for very low-income and unhoused families and individuals has increased in recent years. This need is most visible in larger urban areas but is also a challenge in rural areas as noted by service providers in Bridgton and the region. Consideration for access to services and transportation when identifying housing solutions is critical for the most vulnerable populations.

With the addition of more than 200 multifamily apartment units, Bridgton is seeing a greater diversity of housing types and sizes. Based on demographic trends of smaller household sizes, an increase in the population over age 60, and fewer households with children, there will be a growing need for smaller housing units and a greater diversity of housing types. The Town will look to identify where different housing types are most appropriate and to create development opportunities for a variety of housing types to meet the range of needs of the community.

The seasonal housing market and popularity of short-term rentals are both impacting the Town and region's housing market in ways that are difficult to quantify due to limited data. As Bridgton continues to be a popular seasonal destination, the Town will need to understand the impact of short-term rentals and trends in seasonal population shifts to address housing needs.

## Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

U.S. Census, ACS

U.S. Census

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Research

MaineHousing

Maine Housing Production Needs Study, 2023

Avesta Housing

Realty Resources Management

Pike's Farm Apartments

Town of Bridgton, Code Enforcement Office



## 8 Transportation

### Introduction

Located approximately 40 miles northwest of Portland in the heart of Maine's Lakes Region, Bridgton is considered a commuter town to Portland as well as a visitor destination that creates an increase in the summer population. Within Bridgton, the Pleasant Mountain Ski Area and the various lakes attract regional visitors, which contributes to local traffic.

The majority of the transportation infrastructure runs southeast to northwest, and downtown Bridgton is a nexus point where the two major corridors split—Portland Road/U.S. Route 117 and Main Street/U.S. Route 302. Main Street is a vibrant small-town, mixed-use destination with restaurants, shops, housing, pocket parks, municipal buildings, event spaces, and a movie theater. There are miles of local roads, state routes, and U.S. routes throughout Bridgton; beyond the downtown, these roads are primarily in wooded areas with limited sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure. Maintaining transportation infrastructure for residents and visitors and developing infrastructure and transportation options in a way that cost effective and resilient are critical to the Town's ability to support growth.

### Public Services Department

The Bridgton PSD is responsible for general maintenance of Town-wide public infrastructure, including pavement management under its Highway Division. As part of PSD, the Highway Division maintains and repairs all public roads and has seven full-time staff members. PSD also maintains and repairs sidewalks; maintains ditches; empties trash receptacles on Town properties; conducts snow plowing and sanding, road striping and sign installations; and, in the spring, sweeps and grades roads. The Highway Division has a paving schedule; however, the Division performs an annual paving assessment to reprioritize and address replacement and maintenance, as needed. The division also has an emergency response system that attends to unplanned incidents and issues like potholes, weather-related problems, and traffic light malfunctions. This group maintains approximately 75 miles of Town roads, and in the winter, the division manages snow removal for 220 miles of combined local and regional roads. The Town has 18 bridges across the community: 5 are owned by the Town, and the remaining 13 are owned by Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT).

In the winter, the Highway Division clears snow from streets, public parking lots, and sidewalks. The Town updated its salt shed since the last comprehensive plan to better serve the community and has identified that the sand shed needs concrete rehab, which is slated to take place in 2024. PSD also constructs parking lots for parks and other public facilities, installs small furniture and street amenities, and replaces storm drains. The division hangs decorations from street infrastructure during events and holidays, supports set up and clean up for events, manages road closures, and cleans public restrooms. Currently, there is no cross-department asset management software. Individual departments coordinate



projects and planning. According to staff, a new asset management system is currently being explored and expected to be implemented in the near future. Crews and contractors use best management practices to protect water resources in their daily operations, including salt/sand storage, culvert replacement, street sweeping, and facility operations.

The Town’s Land Use Ordinance outlines requirements for the maintenance of private roads. The Ordinance states that the applicant must provide evidence that infrastructure will be maintained by the lot owner or homeowner’s association. This includes information in a recorded deed for the property that specifies how costs associated with maintenance will be apportioned among lot owners. A property owner or homeowner’s association must submit a long-term maintenance plan to the Town and is a legally binding document for road and infrastructure maintenance. The Public Services Director is responsible for reviewing nonconforming roads. Applicants must submit a road maintenance plan that shows road ownership and maintenance plan for roads.

## Traffic Counts

U.S. Route 302, U.S. Route 117, and North High Street (U.S. Route 302) experience the highest traffic volumes in Bridgton. Although average daily traffic counts leveled off or even dipped in 2016, traffic is once again growing as population increases and people continue to move to more rural areas from urban areas.

**Table 8.1: Traffic Volume Over Time (Average Annual Daily Traffic Count)**

| Road Location                             | 2013  | 2016   | 2022          |
|---|-------|--------|---------------|
| <b>U.S. Route 302</b>                     |       |        |               |
| South of Main Street                      | 9,500 | 10,680 | 11,020        |
| South of Willett Road                     | 9,980 | 8,570  | No data (N/D) |
| East of Elm Street                        | 7,590 | 6,790  | 7,170         |
| East of Highland Drive                    | 6,450 | N/D    | 6,280         |
| Northeast of Gage Street                  | 6,280 | 6,600  | 5,900         |
| Northwest of S High Street                | 5,930 | 6,000  | N/D           |
| <b>U.S. Route 117</b>                     |       |        |               |
| North of Main Street                      | 5,940 | 6,130  | 6,100         |
| South of Pond Road                        | 5,160 | 5,180  | 5,730         |
| South of Route 37                         | 5,100 | 4,850  | 5,790         |
| <b>North High Street (U.S. Route 302)</b> |       |        |               |



|                           |       |       |       |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Southeast of Lake Drive   | 5,640 | 5,390 | N/D   |
| West of Hio Ridge Road    | 4,450 | N/D   | 4,400 |
| East of Knights Hill Road | 4,090 | N/D   | 3,910 |
| East of Mountain Road     | N/D   | N/D   | 3,310 |
| West of Jim Douglas Road  | 3,530 | N/D   | 3,650 |

Source: MaineDOT, Traffic Division

## Traffic Management

The Town's Land Use Ordinance outlines dimensional standards for driveways and roads in each zoning district. Roadway design standards and requirements for development inside and outside of the shoreland zone which outline traffic circulation and safety requirements to promote pedestrian and vehicular safety. Shared driveways, reduced curb cuts, and dimensional requirements promote safety for cars and pedestrians. Bridgton has not seen a significant development in new subdivisions. New development has happened largely in single-lot developments, along the corridors, and near the downtown. These developments have created new roads that often dead-end. There is some opportunity to allow for expansion to adjacent land and encourage the creation of a network of local streets. Most new roads have created shorter dead-ends, which has resulted in compact and efficient subdivision development.

The Land Use Ordinance also The Ordinance also outlines traffic management measures for new subdivisions, stating: " The proposed subdivision will not cause unreasonable highway or public road congestion or unsafe conditions with respect to the use of highways or public roads existing or proposed and, if the proposed subdivision requires driveways or entrances onto a state or state aid highway located outside of the urban compact area of an urban compact municipality as defined by 23 M.R.S.A. § 754, DOT has provided documentation indicating that the driveways or entrances comply with the requirements of 23 M.R.S.A. § 704 and any rules adopted under that section." The Town does not have additional local access management requirements or traffic permitting requirements.

The Town adopted a traffic ordinance in 2024 to regulate traffic and parking on public streets. This ordinance outlines requirements for ADA Accessible parking, parking bans, enforcement of no parking zones, and penalties for violation of the ordinance.



## Crash Data

In 2022, there were 157 car crashes on public roads in Bridgton. This was an increase from 127 crashes in 2021.<sup>13</sup> Most accidents in 2022 occurred from October to March between 2 and 4 p.m.; this was likely due to winter weather conditions and peak travel times. Of the 157 crashes, 41 were caused by the vehicle going off the road, and 48 were caused by deer, suggesting the rural character of the roads is contributing to crashes. Other types of crashes (e.g., rear end/sideswipe, intersection movement) are more common in more developed areas. There were no fatal car crashes in 2022, which suggests traffic conflicts are due to congestion and road/intersection configurations instead of high-speed conflicts. Only four crashes in 2022 were due to exceeding the posted speed limit and eight crashes were for driving too fast for conditions. Only two sections of road have been identified as high crash locations by MaineDOT from 2020 to 2022:

- North High Street from Hio Ridge Road to Sam Ingalls Road (17 crashes, seven injuries)
- North High Street from Stack'Em Inn Road to Kendal Ham Drive (10 crashes, four injuries)

## Regional Transportation

The Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) is a regional agency formed and sustained by 25 communities in Cumberland County. GPCOG is a Regional Planning Organization that provides technical assistance to municipalities. Within GPCOG, the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) is responsible for conducting a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive regional transportation planning process. PACTS focuses on finding effective solutions to local and regional transportation problems and assisting with applications for state and federal funding. It works collaboratively with municipalities, MaineDOT, and community members to address a wide range of transportation issues.

In 2017, PACTS and GPCOG partnered with regional communities to complete the Moving Southern Maine Forward: Regional Transit Development Plan for 2018 – 2023. The plan identified that the community and area experience significant regional transportation challenges. The proximity to Portland and regional seasonal recreation creates a regional transportation need. In 2013, the Regional Transportation Program (RTP) began operating the Lakes Region Explorer (LRX), a bus providing service between downtown Portland and Bridgton along Route 302. Since 2013, LRX ridership has more than doubled and is busiest during the morning inbound trip with commuters and riders traveling for healthcare purposes. Despite declines in ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in August 2023, RTP announced the LRX would be expanding to include year-round Saturday service. The LRX runs a commuter schedule Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 5:20 p.m. and a Saturday schedule from 8:30

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<sup>13</sup> Maine Department of Transportation. Maine Public Crash Query Tool. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://mdotapps.maine.gov/MaineCrashPublic/>



a.m. to 6 p.m. There is no Sunday service. Stops include the Bridgton Community Center, Naples American Legion, South Casco Fire Station, North Windham Shopping Center, and Prides Corner. The LRX stops at the downtown transit hub METRO PULSE at 21 Elm Street in Portland.

## Airport

Known as the Runway to the White Mountains, the Eastern Slope Airport (IZG) is located in the Mount Washington Valley in Fryeburg 10 miles from the Bridgton border. This public airport serves general aviation, business, and charter flights and provides critical infrastructure for life flights, search and rescue, animal rescue, forest fire control, Civil Air Patrol, and support for military aviation operations. There are no regularly scheduled air services, but Air New England and Reliant Air offer on-demand air charter service throughout the Northeast. Airport services include a passenger terminal and 24/7 pilot lounge, full-service fueling, ramp parking and tie downs, hanger leasing, Wi-Fi, restrooms, refreshment center, and rental cars.

## Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Pedestrian sidewalks and crosswalks are concentrated along U.S. Route 302, Main Street, and North and South High Street. U.S. Route 117 has limited sidewalks and is rural in nature. Given the car-oriented character of the Town, the majority of the pedestrian-focused infrastructure happens downtown to support a mixed-use core and help create a vibrant public experience with connections to downtown parks. There are currently no separate bike lanes in the Town, and cyclists tend to use roadways and shoulders. There is an abundance of trails where people bike throughout the Town. The 2023 Open Space Plan identified improvement opportunities to increase the number of safe bike lanes and links between downtown and parks/conservation lands.

## Parking

Downtown Bridgton has on-street and off-street parking options. Parking is adequate for daily operations and use. It was reported that parking can be challenging during large events, like Music on Main. However, improved wayfinding signage and parking signage could support downtown visitors in finding parking. On-street parking exists along Main Street. Off-street parking is located at the Perry Park Lot on Highland Avenue, Highland Lake Beach, Bacon/Main Street Lot behind Beth's Café, Nulty/Park Street Lot behind Bridgton Books, Depot Street Parking Lot, Gibbs Avenue Parking Lot, and Municipal Complex Lot.

Bridgton does not have parking standards that discourage development. The Town's Land Use Ordinance encouraged shared driveways and parking lots for businesses in the Inner and Outer Corridors and Downtown Village Business District II whenever possible. This works to reduce the number of curb cuts along major roadways, can reduce the expense for a new business to build a driveway and additional parking, makes land development more efficient, and preserves more



impervious surfaces on a lot. The Land Use Ordinance establishes minimum setbacks for parking lots. In the Shoreland Zone, parking areas must comply with minimum frontage and setback requirements.

## Rail Transportation

Historically, the Bridgton and Saco Railroad was a narrow-gauge railway that connected Bridgton with Hiram. The line was an important link for the Bridgton-Lakes Region area, connecting the Town to nearby communities for both freight and passengers, especially in the summer tourist months. Today, there are no passenger or freight rails operating in Bridgton. The lack of rail for passengers or freight means all movement of goods is by car or truck, which contributes to road congestion. A planned mixed-use development at Main Street and Depot Street will honor the Town's historic train station.

## 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. Bridgton's budgeted road and sidewalk maintenance costs have increased since 2021. In FY23, the PSD budget for paving was \$500,000. As of Q2, the Town had spent \$231,915 on paving projects—an increase from \$157,205 spent in FY22 and \$188,693 spent in FY21. Some paving projects, like the Church Street project, have costs offset by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. Working with PACTS to find additional funding opportunities from the state and federal government would alleviate Bridgton's cost burden for maintaining roads. There may also be state and federal funding to reinforce roads (i.e., retaining walls, rip rap, plantings to stabilize soil, etc.) so that maintenance costs can be curbed.

There are opportunities for roadway and streetscape improvements when completing necessary subsurface infrastructure upgrades such as those recently completed for the wastewater collection system project. Funding was secured from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development for the recently completed wastewater collection system upgrades, which allowed the Town to also install drainage infrastructure. The Town also coordinated with the Water District during the Downtown Bridgton Main Street Improvement Project to simultaneously install water service pipes and implement streetscape improvements in the downtown area. This approach to infrastructure upgrades, especially in locations of more dense development, can yield cost efficiencies for the Town, providing opportunities for new development and the expansion of existing businesses to share roadway infrastructure such as parking, sidewalks, lighting, and signage. The Town is currently looking to expand this work, in coordination with MaineDOT, along state-owned Route 304 through the Inner Corridor District.

With the number of crashes along North High Street between Hio Ridge Road and Sam Ingalls Road and Stack'em Inn Road to Kendal Ham Drive, an opportunity exists to enhance safety in these locations.



## Sources

Bridgton Public Services Department

Maine Department of Transportation

Maine DOT Crash Records

Greater Portland Council of Governments

Moving Southern Maine Forward: Regional Transit Development Plan 2018-2023

Lakes Region Explorer

Bridgton Open Space Plan 2023



## 9 Historic and Cultural Resources

### Bridgton History

Members of the Abnaki tribe originally inhabited the Town of Bridgton and the region, living between the Kennebec River in Maine and Lake Champlain in Vermont. The tribe occupied the headwaters of the Kennebec, Androscoggin, and Saco Rivers.<sup>14</sup> It is suggested that there were many tribes of Abnaki people living in Maine, though few remain in New England today. Once European settlement began, settlers created an assortment of neighborhoods, and communities dispersed over 40,000 acres in the region.<sup>15</sup>

The Town of Bridgton was formed by a grant from the Massachusetts Legislature on February 24, 1763. The grant formed Pondicherry Township; however, the township was eventually named Bridgton after Moody Bridges who was influential in securing the grant. Captain Benjamin Kimball, the region's first settler, settled along the shores of Long Lake in North Bridgton in 1768. Several years later, settlers from the Andover-Boxford area of Massachusetts moved into South Bridgton to develop farms and homesteads.

Over time, the Town developed settlements in South Bridgton and North Bridgton. Jacob Stevens set up a sawmill and gristmill at an outlet of Highland Lake. These mills contributed to the Town's economy and provided hydropower. Other businesses, such as tanneries, woodworking mills, and door and sash manufacturers flourished in the Town. The woolen industry proved to be the most significant industry to expand the Town's economy. Rufus Gibbs developed the Cumberland Mill, and, subsequently, the Pondicherry Mill was developed, and the Forest Mills Company entered into the fabric production industry. These three mills employed more than 400 people. Mill employment created a demand for housing, commercial expansion, and railroad connections. The Bridgton and Saco Railroad was built for freight transport and coal deliveries to power the various mills in the Town.<sup>16</sup>

The commercial and residential areas of the Town began in the vicinity of Main Hill and eventually crept southward. Homes on North High Street and in the Main Street periphery were some of the first permanent homes in the Town. The area south and east of Pondicherry Square was developed as a residential area by Frederick J. Littlefield to serve workers employed in the mills.

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<sup>14</sup> Vetromile, Rev. Eugene. 1866. *Abnakis and Their History*. New York: James B, Kirker. Accessed November 21, 2023. [https://library.umaine.edu/content/Wabanaki/The\\_Abnakis.pdf](https://library.umaine.edu/content/Wabanaki/The_Abnakis.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Coolidge, Austin Jacobs and John Brainard Mansfield. 1859. *A History and Description of New England, General and Local*. Cambridge: H. O. Houghton and Company. [https://archive.org/details/bub\\_gb\\_OcoMAAAAYAAJ/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_OcoMAAAAYAAJ/mode/2up)

<sup>16</sup> Bridgton, Maine. 2014. *Bridgton Maine Comprehensive Plan*. Bridgton: Bridgton, Maine. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/towndocs/6481/>



Following the Civil War, the Town was regarded as the trading center of western Maine until the proliferation of automobiles and the development of paved roads in the 1920s. Following World War I, the woolen industry began to decline. The Forest and Cumberland Mills closed, and as a result of the Great Depression, the Pondicherry Mill also closed. The mill operated partially until the early 1950s.<sup>16</sup>

The resort industry has been a part of the Town’s economy since 1860, with the Cumberland and Bridgton House catering to summer vacationers. In 1897, a total of 15 inns and boarding houses served summer vacationers. Following the Great Depression, many of the inns and hotels closed and were replaced with summer cottage communities and motels. Rental cottages and vacation homes, either developed or owned by nonresidents, have sprung up in the Town and reduced the number of accommodations available. Campsites, a more recent development, also cater to the Town’s vacationers.

The Town experienced a steep decline in its manufacturing base between 1994 and 2010, with Malden Mills closing its Bridgton Knitting Mills operation, Sebago, Inc. closing its Pleasant Mountain Moc division, and Dielectric Communications and Acorn Manufacturing closing operations. These closures have sharply reduced the number of manufacturing jobs available in the Town.

Original development patterns are still evident today. Most of the Town’s development remains concentrated in and around the downtown area and major road corridors. Bridgton is often described as the service center for the Lakes Region, providing access to medical care, retail opportunities, entertainment, and other services. Bridgton’s location along several major regional road networks makes it easy for the community to access services and to connect people from neighboring communities to the Town. New businesses and housing opportunities have been built in and around the downtown area, providing residents with access to a variety of small, local businesses and services in a walkable downtown. Bridgton also has a significant seasonal population, and additional housing development has occurred around the Town’s waterbodies and shoreland areas.

## Historic Resources

The Town of Bridgton has a rich history that is evident through its preservation of historic buildings. The Town has 11 historical buildings designated by the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP):

**Table 9.1: NRHP Listings in Bridgton**

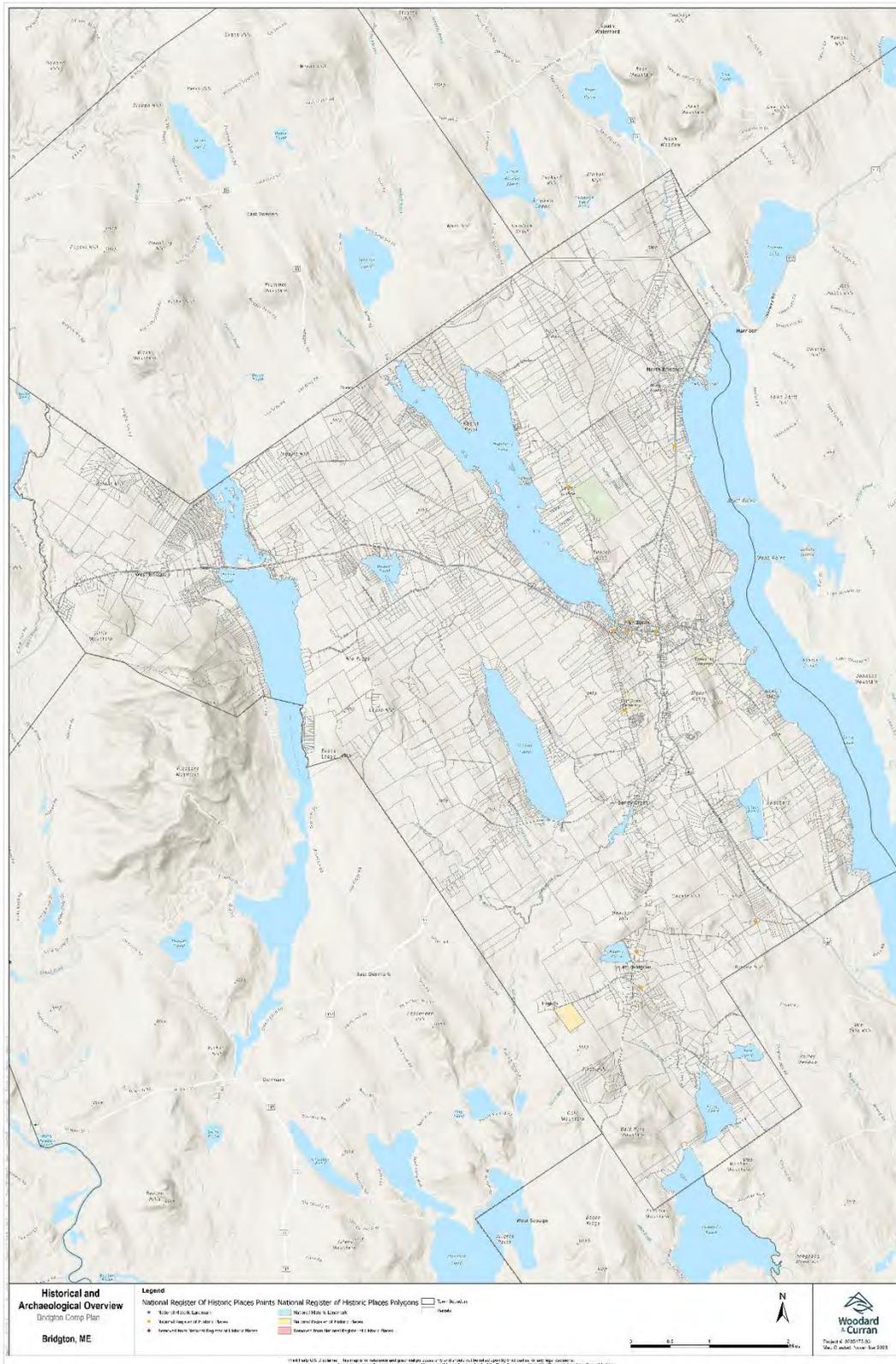
| No. | Listing   | Date Built | Location                          |
|-----|---|------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1   | Lt. Robert Andrews House: A home built by John Kilborn Jr. for Lt. Robert Andrews, a veteran of the Battle of Bunker Hill who served in the Continental Army. | 1805       | 428 South Bridgton Road, Bridgton |
| 2   | Benjamin Cleaves House: A two-story home known for its two well-preserved interior murals painted by Rufus Porter.  | 1828       | South High Street, Bridgton       |



| No. | Listing  | Date Built | Location                         |
|-----|--|------------|----------------------------------|
| 3   | Dalton Holmes Davis Memorial Library: Designed by Lewiston architect Harry S. Coombs, this library has been a component of the Town and is an architecturally distinguished Classical Revival building. The building is now the Bridgton Public Library. | 1913       | Main Street, Bridgton            |
| 4   | Farnsworth House: A house built by Dr. Samuel Farnsworth Jr. and known for its Federalist architecture. The house has a well-designed interior with mantels, moldings, paneling, and a staircase.  | 1825       | Route 17, North Bridgton         |
| 5   | Peabody-Fitch Farm (Narramissic); An early Federalist-style home and farm that was occupied by William Peabody and exemplifies 19 <sup>th</sup> -century farm and field systems.   | 1790       | Off Ingalls Road, South Bridgton |
| 6   | William F. Perry House: This house was originally built by William W. Cross and later occupied by William F. Perry, a textile mill owner. The house blends Italianate and Second Empire elements.  | 1874       | 6 Main Hill, Bridgton            |
| 7   | South Bridgton Congregational Church: The church was designed by Francis Henry Fassett and blends Italianate and Gothic architecture.  | 1870       | Fosterville Road, South Bridgton |
| 8   | Stone House: A granite house built by John Mead, Sr. following the destruction of his previous home. It is a rare example of a house fully built in stone in western Maine.  | 1830       | Burnham Road, Bridgton           |
| 9   | Wales and Hamblen Store: Built by Samuel Cook and eventually operated by Joseph Wales and John Hamblen, the store exemplifies Italianate architecture with its facade. The building is now used as an antique store.                                     | 1882       | 134 Main Street, Bridgton        |
| 10  | Walker Memorial Hall: Designed by Frederick Tompson, the building is a rare example of a Queen Anne-style public building. Historically, the hall was used for community events and Sunday services.   | 1892       | Highland Road, Bridgton          |
| 11  | John and Maria Webb House: A residence on Main St. that is well preserved and exemplifies Federal and Greek Revival architectural styles.  | 1842       | 121 Main Street, Bridgton        |

Source: *The National Park Service, NRHP*

**Figure 9.1: Historic Resources**



The majority of Bridgton’s historic structures and landmarks are residences or former residences constructed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to the Bridgton Historical Society, the Town is also home to seven historic graveyards, which allow residents to trace family histories:

**Table 9.2: Historic Graveyards in Bridgton**

| No. | Listing           |
|-----|-------------------|
| 1   | South Bridgton    |
| 2   | Sandy Creek       |
| 3   | South High Street |
| 4   | Forest Hills      |
| 5   | Four Corners      |
| 6   | North Bridgton    |
| 7   | Glines Graveyard  |

*Source: Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan*

Bridgton’s rural landscape is a key feature of the Town’s historic significance and character. The Town’s rolling terrain, farmland, lakes, and mountains offer scenic views and insight into the community as it was in past centuries. According to the Bridgton Historical Society, there are 10 designated open lands with historic significance:

**Table 9.3: Open Lands With Historic Significance in Bridgton**

| No. | Listing   |
|-----|---|
| 1   | Upper Ridge Road (Linscott Farm): An open field with an intact farmhouse from 1830.   |
| 2   | Del Chadbourne Road: A 19 <sup>th</sup> -century gravel road with an intact 1830s farmhouse at the end of the road.   |
| 3   | Chadbourne Hill Road: A road overarched with trees that turns into Del Chadbourne Road and Upper Ridge Road.  |
| 4   | Highland Ridge Road: A scenic road with views of open fields and historic buildings from the late 18 <sup>th</sup> and 19 <sup>th</sup> centuries. Transitions into Ingall’s Grove.                             |
| 5   | South Bridgton Village: A nearly intact 19 <sup>th</sup> -century agrarian village and the site of the Peabody home and the first church of Bridgton. Located a parcel north of South Bridgton along Route 107. |
| 6   | Bear Trap Mountain: A large stone cavern previously used to trap bears. Located a parcel north of South Bridgton Village along Route 107.   |
| 7   | Base of Pleasant Mountain: An open field at the corner of Route 302 and Mountain Road. The field provides a scenic view and entrance to the mountain. This area has been under development pressure.            |



| No. | Listing   |
|-----|---|
| 8   | Sabatis Island (Winona's Island): Located in Moose Pond, this island provides a scenic view of Pleasant Mountain. The island is owned by the State of Maine and is leased to the Town.  |
| 9   | Route 302 south of Bridgton: An area north of the Naples line along Route 302. The highway is wooded and separates Bridgton and Naples. The highway also provides a view of Pleasant Mountain.  |
| 10  | Peabody-Fitch Farm (Narramissic): A farm owned and operated by the Bridgton Historical Society. The property includes a house built in 1797, an 1830's barn, and a functioning blacksmith shop. The land is 25 acres of open fields and provides scenic views and access to nearby hiking trails. |

Source: Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

The historic and aesthetic significance of these open lands provide a visual connection to the Town's history and contribute to the rural character of the region that attracts residents and visitors to Bridgton.

## Archaeological Sites

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) recommends considering two types of archaeological sites in preparing municipal growth management plans: prehistoric 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.

According to the MHPC, Bridgton is home to seven prehistoric archaeological sites and four historic archaeological sites. These sites are listed by the MHPC as numbers 22.5, 22.9, 22.11, 22.12, 22.15, 22.16, and 22.63. These areas either lie along the Peabody Pond shoreline or along Stevens Brook. The location of 22.5 is confidential to maintain the condition of the land. Sites that need additional surveying, inventorying, and analysis include Bear River, the shorelines of Moose Pond, Highland Lake, Long Lake, and other smaller bodies of water.

There are nine historic archaeological sites in Bridgton. These sites are from periods of significance following European arrival. The Town has not conducted professional surveys for historic archaeological sites. The MHPC recommends any future archaeological survey focus on the identification of potentially significant resources associated with the town's agricultural, residential, and industrial heritage, particularly those associated with the earliest Euro-American settlement of the town in the 18th and 19th centuries.



**Table 9.4: Historic Archaeological Sites**

| No. | Listing                                   | Period of Significance |
|-----|---|------------------------|
| 1   | Kittson Pottery                           | 1815 – 1890            |
| 2   | Keene Machine Shop                        | 1927 - 1956            |
| 3   | American Legion Hall, Post 67             | 1900 - 1956            |
| 4   | Peabody-Fitch Farm Grounds                | 1797 – present         |
| 5   | B.M. Fernald Farmstead                    | 1850 – 1969            |
| 6   | Glines Farmstead and Beaver River Sawmill | 1871                   |
| 7   | Elden Martin Blacksmith Shop              | Undetermined           |
| 8   | Martin Blacksmith Shop                    | 1871                   |
| 9   | Blacksmith Shop (location unknown)        | Undetermined           |

## History of Preservation in Bridgton

In 1953, the Bridgton Historical Society (BHS) was established to preserve the Town’s local history, traditions, and customs. The BHS operates a museum and research center in downtown, and also maintains historical artifacts of buildings and residences as a photo catalog. BHS operates and maintains museums, historical properties, and research facilities, advocates for preservation, and consults with town officials and other interested parties on matters that affect the town’s identity and sense of place.<sup>17</sup>

The Statewide Historic Preservation Plan (SHPP) noted five goals for increasing historic preservation:

- Supporting and expanding Maine’s preservation network
- Protecting historic properties and revitalizing communities
- Recognizing, documenting, and promoting historic places
- Safeguarding historic and archaeological resources
- Resiliency and the effects of climate change<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Bridgton Historical Society. n.d. “Welcome—Bridgton Historical Society.” *Bridgton Historical Society*. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://www.bridgtonhistory.org/>

<sup>18</sup> Muzzey, Elizabeth, Kirk F. Mahoney, Christi Chapman-Mitchell, Megan M. Rideout. October 2021. *Heritage for The Future: Maine’s Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, 2021 – 2026*. Maine State Historic Preservation Office, Historic Preservation Commission. Accessed November 21, 2023.



The MHPC Cultural and Architectural Resource Management Archive (CARMA) viewer also identifies several properties that are currently not on the NRHP but are eligible for designation, potentially allowing for the expansion of historic preservation in the Town in line with the SHPP.

The Town's Land Use Ordinance outlines requirements any application for a proposed land use activity involving structural development or soil disturbance on or adjacent to sites listed on, or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places to be submitted by the applicant to the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, for review and comment, at least 20 days prior to action being taken by the Town's reviewing authority.

### Incentives for Rehabilitation

The Maine Historic Tax Credit (HTC) incentivizes business and real estate owners and developers to rehabilitate and reuse income-producing historic buildings in Maine. The HTC provides a building owner or developer with a state tax credit of 25% (or 35% for affordable housing) of historic improvement costs for the rehabilitation and reuse of a building that is a certified historic structure (structures that are on the National Register and within a National Register District).<sup>19</sup> Outside of State-level incentives there are not local incentives for property owners to preserve their historic structures.

## Cultural Resources

Bridgton has a wide variety of arts and cultural offerings, including concerts, movies, plays, and museums. Events and facilities range from venues such as the Magic Lantern Theatre to the Bridgton Drive-In Theatre. The Town is in proximity to several other venues, including the Lake Region Community Theatre in Casco and the Stone Mountains Art Center in Brownfield. The Town also hosts many events, such as Music on Main, Haunted Nightmare Walks, and a Festival of Lights Celebration.<sup>20</sup>

## Challenges and Opportunities

Bridgton's historic landmarks and cultural resources are valuable assets to the community, providing an important connection to the Town's rich history and contributing to the unique sense of place and quality of life in Bridgton.

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[https://www.maine.gov/mhpc/sites/maine.gov/mhpc/files/inline-files/Approved%20State%20Plan%2010\\_2021.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/mhpc/sites/maine.gov/mhpc/files/inline-files/Approved%20State%20Plan%2010_2021.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Maine State Legislature's Office of Program Evaluation & Government Accountability. November 2021. *Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC)*. <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/7476>

<sup>20</sup>Town of Bridgton. n.d. "Home." *Town of Bridgton*. Accessed October 30, 2023. <https://bridgtonmaine.org/>



## Adaptive Reuse

Many historic homes are limited in how they can be restored for reuse based on building code requirements and the Town’s current zoning regulations.<sup>21</sup> Revising zoning regulations could be considered with regard to flexibility to allow for productive uses, reuses, and preservation and restoration of historic properties.

Several of the Town’s historic landmarks, such as the John and Maria Webb House and the William F. Perry House, have been repurposed for additional uses. The John and Maria Webb House is home to the Rufus Porter Museum, which commemorates Rufus Porter, a painter, writer, inventor, teacher, and founding publisher and editor of the *Scientific American* magazine.

Due to the increasing cost of construction and additional costs associated with historic renovations, additional incentives could be considered to provide and encourage preservation and reuse. For example, the HTC program, which was substantially expanded in 2008, could provide opportunities for the Town to leverage for the reuse and revitalization of historic buildings.

## Preservation

Bridgton does not currently have any formalized efforts focused on the preservation of historic structures at the local level. Bridgton has several structures listed on the NRHP; however, there are many other historic structures within the Town that may be eligible for listing or could be protected in some way. Bridgton’s preservation efforts have been largely initiated by private property owners who recognize the value of protecting historic assets. The MHPC identified additional sites for preservation, which could open opportunities for preserving additional infrastructure and assets:

**Table 9.5: National Registry-Eligible Properties in Bridgton**

| No. | Listing   |
|-----|---|
| 1   | Structures on the Hazen-Kimball-Holden Farmstead Property |
| 2   | Structures on the Brigham-Sanborn-Linscott Farm Property  |
| 3   | Bridgton Memorial U.S. Army Reserve Center                |
| 4   | Grand Army of the Republic Hall                           |
| 5   | Sandy Creek Bridge #3966                                  |
| 6   | 240 Fosterville Road                                      |

<sup>21</sup> Town of Bridgton. November 2, 2021. *Town of Bridgton Land Use Code*. Bridgton: Town of Bridgton. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://bridgtonmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Bridgton-Land-Use-Code-effective-2021-11-02-with-Subdiv-Regs-and-Maps-reduced.pdf>



| No. | Listing             |
|-----|---------------------|
| 7   | Sumner Foster House |
| 8   | Moose Pond Causeway |
| 9   | Moose Pond Bridge   |

Source: MHPC CARMA Map View

As the Town continues to grow, opportunities to explore the expansion of historic preservation should be considered. Properties, such as those with eligibility to be designated under the NRHP, could potentially be incorporated into the Town’s preservation efforts. The Town may also want to consider bolstering its current preservation commitments via the establishment of historic districts or via the establishment of a Historic Preservation Commission to assist property owners in applying for NRHP designation.

## Sources

The Abnakis and Their History

A History and Description of New England, General and Local

Bridgton Comprehensive Plan, 2014

Bridgton Historical Society

Heritage for The Future: Maine’s Statewide Historic Preservation Plan

Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Cultural and Architectural Resource Management Archive

Maine State Legislature’s Office of Program Evaluation & Government Accountability

Maine State Museum

National Register of Historic Places

Town of Bridgton Land Use Code, amended November 8, 2022



## 10 Town Facilities and Public Services

### Police

As of January 2024, the Bridgton Police Department has one chief, one public safety administrative officer, one sergeant, five patrol officers, and one reserve patrol officer. The department also has two animal control officers and a seasonal park ranger from June to August. Over the next five to ten years, the department will look to hire additional staff to expand capacity and double patrol coverage; currently, only one patrol officer is on duty overnight.

Emergency call volume has increased from roughly 5,000 calls per year before the COVID-19 pandemic to roughly 6,500 calls per year in 2022. The Town has also seen an increase in mental health-related calls—a similar trend to other Maine communities. Staff reported that mental health calls increased from 50 to 60 per year before the COVID-19 pandemic to approximately 150 in 2022. The Town has also seen an increase in substance use calls, deaths by suicide, and domestic violence calls in recent years. The department collaborates with community partners and other Town departments to support mental health-related calls and provide service to unhoused residents.

The department regularly collaborates with both the Bridgton Fire Department and Emergency Management Agency (EMA). Additionally, the Opportunity Alliance has a 40-hour mental health liaison to support the department with mental health-related calls. The department also works with Through These Doors on public education initiatives and grant opportunities, and the Stanton Foundation funds the department's K-9 program.

The department is currently housed in the Town Office Building but has expressed the need for additional space. As the Town grows, the department expects to increase patrol coverage, grow the fleet, and support administrative functions.

The department is in the process of working toward Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation. To receive accreditation, agencies follow a voluntary process to show their compliance with Maine law enforcement's best practices and standards. The accreditation requires robust records management, and the department will need additional administrative support.

In 2011, the Town disbanded its dispatch center, and all calls for service are dispatched through Cumberland County Regional Communications Center in Windham. The Town's dispatch center previously maintained police and fire records and created reports. Today, one full-time position is shared with the fire department to maintain records. In the future, the department anticipates needing two full-time staff to cover administrative operations.

Like many police departments in Maine and throughout the U.S., the Bridgton Police Department has struggled with hiring to fill vacancies. There are currently 10 sworn staff members, though staff reported



that they would like to hire additional staff to double patrol coverage. In addition to declining interest in public safety professions, the shift to addressing social service issues through policing has been a deterrent to some.

## Fire

The Bridgton Fire Department is a paid call department, except for a full-time fire chief and a part-time fire prevention staff member who began in August 2023. There are four deputies who are paid a stipend, and approximately 30 volunteer staff are paid hourly for calls and training.

The department responds to fires and conducts technical rescues like auto extraction, water and ice rescue, wilderness search and rescue, and hazardous material response. The department also responds to carbon monoxide calls, conducts inspections for sprinklers and alarms for commercial structures and non-single-family homes, and provides educational trainings and resources. United Ambulance manages 911 medical emergency calls, and the department supports as needed. Population growth and new housing have added to the department's workload, including plan review, inspections, and increased alarm calls.

The department has successfully retained volunteer staff and added 10 volunteers since 2021. Staff reported that most calls come between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., and in the future, volunteer staff may struggle to continue to respond to calls during work hours. Staff reported there may be a point at which they need to bring on additional full-time staff to respond to calls during the day or transition from a call department to full-time staff.

In 2012, the State created a mutual aid agreement that the Bridgton Fire Department opted in to. Approximately 13 to 14 departments from surrounding towns are part of a mutual aid agreement for training and response. There are some joint equipment purchases, which could potentially be expanded, and departments are looking to conduct more regional trainings. Departments meet once per month. The Bridgton fire chief attends meetings with chiefs from across Cumberland County. The department is a part of the Cumberland County dispatch, which is based in Windham.

There are four fire stations in Bridgton: Central Station, North Station, South Station, and West Station. Stations are located throughout the Town to enable faster response times across the Town's land area. Staff reported they will likely need to replace or substantially upgrade the Central Station. In 2017, the department conducted a feasibility study and needs assessment for a new facility.

## Emergency Management Agency

Bridgton's EMA is responsible for creating, reviewing, and updating emergency operation plans for extreme events, including weather events, evacuations, transportation, and pandemics. EMA also follows federal requirements to involve coordinating responses to emergencies by police, fire, and highway staff. The agency is required to submit paperwork to FEMA for reimbursement for disaster-related expenses.



In recent years, the agency has focused on installing generators in municipal facilities. All four fire stations and the Community Center have generators. Last year, the school budget included funds to add a generator at the school. Staff reported that the transfer station is the next facility that will receive a generator, followed by pump stations and the new wastewater treatment plant once construction is completed.

Additionally, the agency started a drone program to support police and fire during emergencies or search and rescue calls.

Staff reported it has been a challenge not having a dispatch center in the Town, and Bridgton will eventually have dispatch staff in the future. As Bridgton continues to grow, staff reported that their capacity to support residents during emergency events will diminish if department capacity is not increased. Staff also expressed the need for future large-scale residential buildings to have generators or emergency services to provide residents with additional shelter or services during an emergency.

## Library

The Bridgton Public Library was founded in 1895 and remains an important community resource. The library provides programming, online and digital resources, and access to print resources.

The library had 16,361 visits in FY23, up from 11,323 in FY22 and 8,429 in FY21. Though the library is slowly gaining visitors following the COVID-19 pandemic, total annual visits is less than what it was prior to the pandemic. In FY19, the library had 21,757 visits, and in FY18, the library had 25,051 visits.

In addition to programming and collections resources, the library also provides access to meeting rooms and work cubicles. Program and workshop attendance increased from 3,478 in FY22 to 4,349 in FY23. Public computer and wireless use increased as well, from 9,285 in FY22 to 21,631 in FY23. The library also saw increases in total patron cards; new books, DVDs, and audio books; and circulation of books, DVDs, and audio books.

The library is a nonprofit corporation operated by a board of trustees. The library receives roughly 40% of its funding from the Town. The remaining funds are raised through annual donations, gifts, proceeds from the 4 on the Fourth Race, and fundraising support from the Friends of Bridgton Library.

## Schools

The Lake Region School District serves students throughout Casco, Naples, and Bridgton. The Stevens Brook School is located in Bridgton and serves children from pre-K to fifth grade. The school has 65 staff members. Middle school-aged children in Bridgton attend Lake Region Middle School in Naples. Lake Region High School is also located in Naples and serves students in grades 9 – 12. Center Lake Region Vocational school is also located in Naples, and the school has nine programs for students to participate in: computer technologies, culinary arts, health occupations, automotive technology,



construction technology, diversified occupations, early childhood occupations, law enforcement, and cooperative education. The school is a member of Maine’s network of career and technical education (CTE) schools. The Lake Region and Fryeburg Area Adult Education program offers the community accessible education and training opportunities, including business and skills training, English language learner (ELL) courses, GED courses, college prep courses, digital literacy, and other personal enrichment courses. The adult education program is located in Naples.

Bridgton Academy is an all-male preparatory school that provides a one-year postgraduate environment for students following high school. Students are 18 to 19 years old. The school was founded in 1808 and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

Total public school enrollment declined in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Total school enrollment for the district and enrollment of Bridgton students have increased slightly since 2021 but has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Total enrollment for the three Lake Region elementary schools for 2023 is higher than 2019 enrollment (304 compared to 290), while middle school and high school enrollment have not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Similarly, elementary school enrollment increased from 2022 to 2023, while middle and high school enrollment both declined.

The school district is funded by each of the three towns and state contributions in accordance with state law. Demographic changes and fiscal capacity of Naples and Casco will continue to impact funding for public education for Bridgton students. The 2023 – 2024 school year is the final year in which the district will have federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support staffing, programs, and services for the school district. ESSER funds were made available during the COVID-19 pandemic to support pandemic response by public school districts. The final tier of these funds will expire on September 30, 2024.<sup>22</sup>

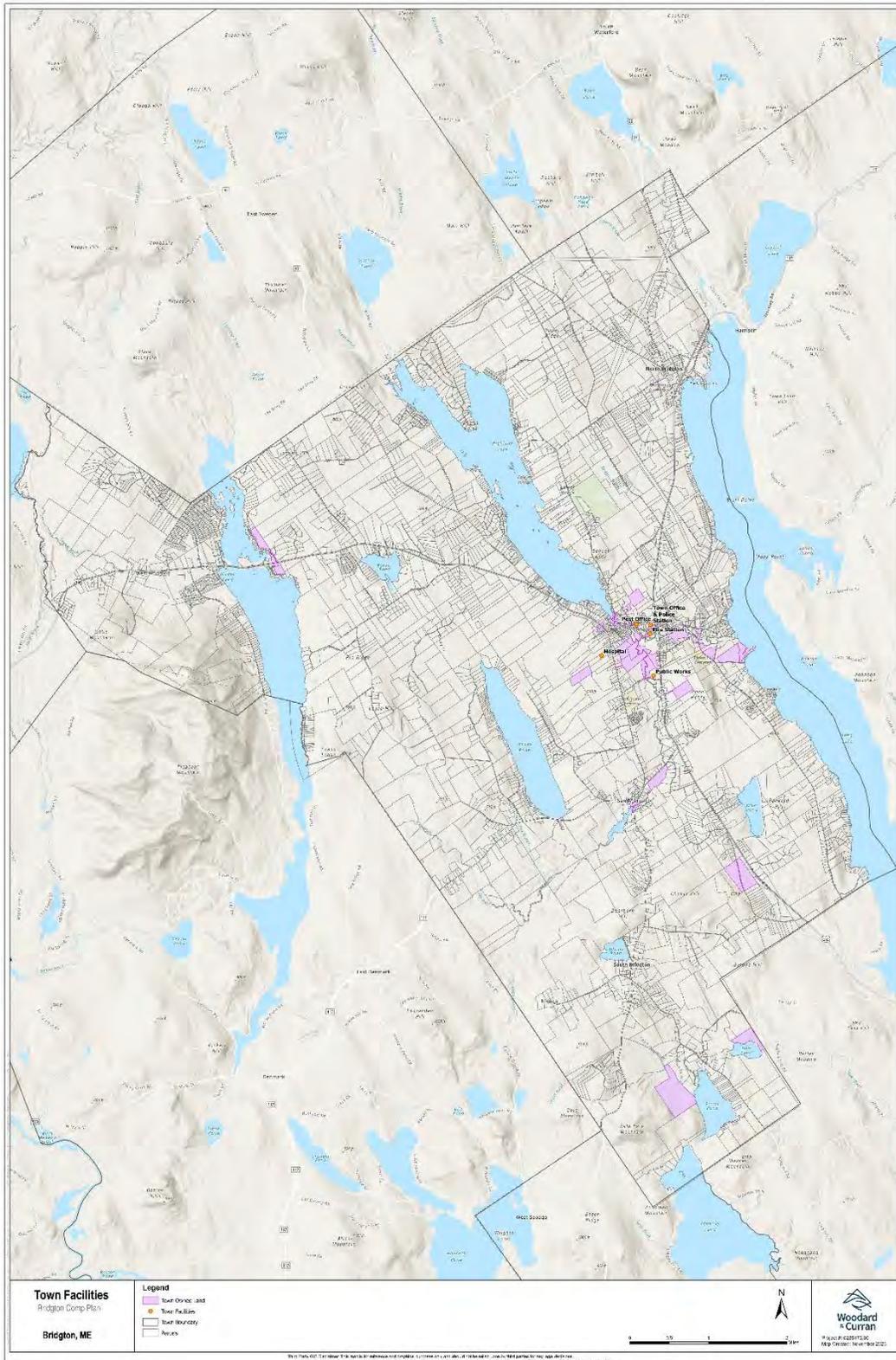
## Town-Owned Facilities

The Town is responsible for the maintenance and operations for facilities across Bridgton. A full listing of facilities is provided in Table 10.1 and can be viewed on the map in Figure 10.1.

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<sup>22</sup> Lake Region School District. March 20, 2023, and May 9, 2023. “MSAD #61 2023-24 Budget Public Hearing.” Presentation. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/17co\\_jbaeVcf-SHrb0\\_BYGy3aEo9\\_mhCQ/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/17co_jbaeVcf-SHrb0_BYGy3aEo9_mhCQ/view)

**Figure 10.1: Town-Owned Land and Facilities**





**Table 10.1: Town-Owned Facilities**

| Facility  | Location                       |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Municipal Building  | 3 Chase Street                 |
| Garage, Sand Shed, Salt Shed                                    | 31 Willet Road                 |
| Town Hall, Skating Rink Building, Boy Scout Building            | 26 North High Street           |
| Fire Station  | 7 Gibbs Avenue                 |
| Community Center, Garage/Storage                                | 15 Deport Street               |
| Recycling Building and Compactor, Transfer Station, Scale House | 118 Sandy Creek Road           |
| Fire Station  | 305 South Bridgton Road        |
| Fire Station  | 1116 North Bridgton Road       |
| Fire Station  | 923 North High Street          |
| Wastewater Treatment Facility                                   | 78 McKegey Road                |
| Pump Station  | Depot Street                   |
| Pump Station  | Meadow Street                  |
| Pump Station  | 293 Portland Road              |
| Pump Station  | Park Street                    |
| Pump Station  | Frances Bell Drive             |
| Pump Station  | Portland Road and Willet Road  |
| Pump Station  | Oak and Main Streets           |
| Pump Station  | Maine Alternative Caring Plaza |
| Adams Pond Dam  | South Bridgton Road            |
| Woods Pond Dam  | 676 South High Street          |
| Concession/Bathroom, Building, Equipment Shed                   | 40 Brag Way                    |
| Salmon Point Campground Buildings                               | Salmon Point Road              |
| Salmon Point Beach Public Restroom                              | Salmon Point Road              |
| Highland Lake Beach Public Restroom and Boat Launch             | Highland Road                  |
| Woods Pond Beach Public Restroom and Boat Launch                | South High Street              |
| Peabody Pond Boat Launch  | 503 Peabody Pond Road          |
| Moose Pond Boat Launch  | 972 North High Street          |

Source: Town of Bridgton Insurance Facilities Inventory



In addition to the facilities listed above, the Town maintains structures and facilities at municipal parks, beaches, fields, and campgrounds. Five of Bridgton's 18 bridges are also under the Town's purview. The Town is in the process of expanding its wastewater treatment capacity and will be bringing new facilities online in the coming years.

## Public Health and Community Services

Through the State's General Assistance (GA) program, the Town serves families and individuals who need support for basic needs like utility bills, food, prescriptions, medical expenses, and housing. The program provides a specific amount and type of aid for defined needs for eligible residents.

Municipalities are required to administer a GA program to serve all eligible residents in accordance with state law. The State allocates funding to communities and reimburses municipalities for a portion of the cost of the program. In recent years, the Town has seen an increase in the number of clients requesting assistance from the Town through the GA program. In FY20, (July 2019 through June 2020), the Town had 29 GA clients. The number of clients increased to 45 in FY21, decreased slightly to 35 in FY22, and increased to 50 in FY23. From June to December 2023, the Town had 22 GA clients.

The Town partners closely with local nonprofit organizations to support community services and public health initiatives. The Bridgton Community Center is a nonprofit organization that serves as a multigenerational space for community members to gather or receive services in Bridgton. The Community Center hosts several programs and events, including senior lunches, table games like bridge and cribbage, a community kettle dinner, and support groups. The center has offered more specialized programming, including income tax preparation courses and driver safety courses. It also has community garden beds available for community members to rent seasonally.

Outside of programming, the Community Center provides a variety of services. It operates a warming and cooling center, fuel assistance program, and transportation. The center also operates a Community Navigator Program, where community members can meet with staff for a variety of needs, including help applying for services from federal, state and local agencies, such as food stamps, Section 8, Social Security, and unemployment insurance; help with budgeting; assistance with job searches; help with landlord/tenant issues and homelessness; and GED information and assistance. The Community Center is supported by volunteers who help with meal programs, annual events, office and technical support, and maintenance. The Community Center is run by an executive director and supported by a board of directors.

Through These Doors provides safe, accessible services to people affected by domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking in Cumberland County. Through These Doors operates a 24-hour hotline to support victims of violence. The organization also hosts support groups, provides violence intervention services, and offers emergency shelter and services. Through These Doors – Lakes Region is located on Main Street in Bridgton.



The Opportunity Alliance provides a network of 55 connected programs to serve Cumberland County. The Opportunity Alliance is a nonprofit organization that provides mental health and substance use services, homelessness prevention, early care and education, and other services to the community. The Bridgton Police Department works closely with both the Opportunity Alliance and Through These Doors to support its own response to emergencies and support residents in accessing services.

Bridgton Hospital was built in 2002 and has 25 beds. The hospital provides essential healthcare services to Bridgton residents and to communities across the Lakes Region. In addition to traditional hospital-based services, Bridgton Hospital provides primary care, specialty care, and urgent care services. The hospital also participates in a variety of health promotion and education initiatives throughout the community. The hospital is part of the Central Maine Healthcare system, which includes the Central Maine Medical Center, Rumford Hospital, Topsham Care Center, and physician practices throughout the region.

The Bridgton Food Pantry was created in 1987 as an outreach mission of the Bridgton United Methodist Church, and it originally served seven to ten families. Today, the Food Pantry provides roughly 750 meals to more than 250 families per week. The pantry has nonperishable items, frozen meat and seafood, fresh produce, and household and pet items. Individuals and families can shop like they are at a grocery store and select items that work best for them. Community members are also able to volunteer and donate to support the pantry.

## Infrastructure

### Public Sewer System

On January 2, 2024, the Town's new wastewater treatment system came online. The system includes significant sewer expansion beyond the immediate downtown area to serve not only existing businesses and residences that currently rely on septic, but also new development and areas zoned to provide future economic development opportunities. In total, the sewer user base will be expanded by a factor of three.

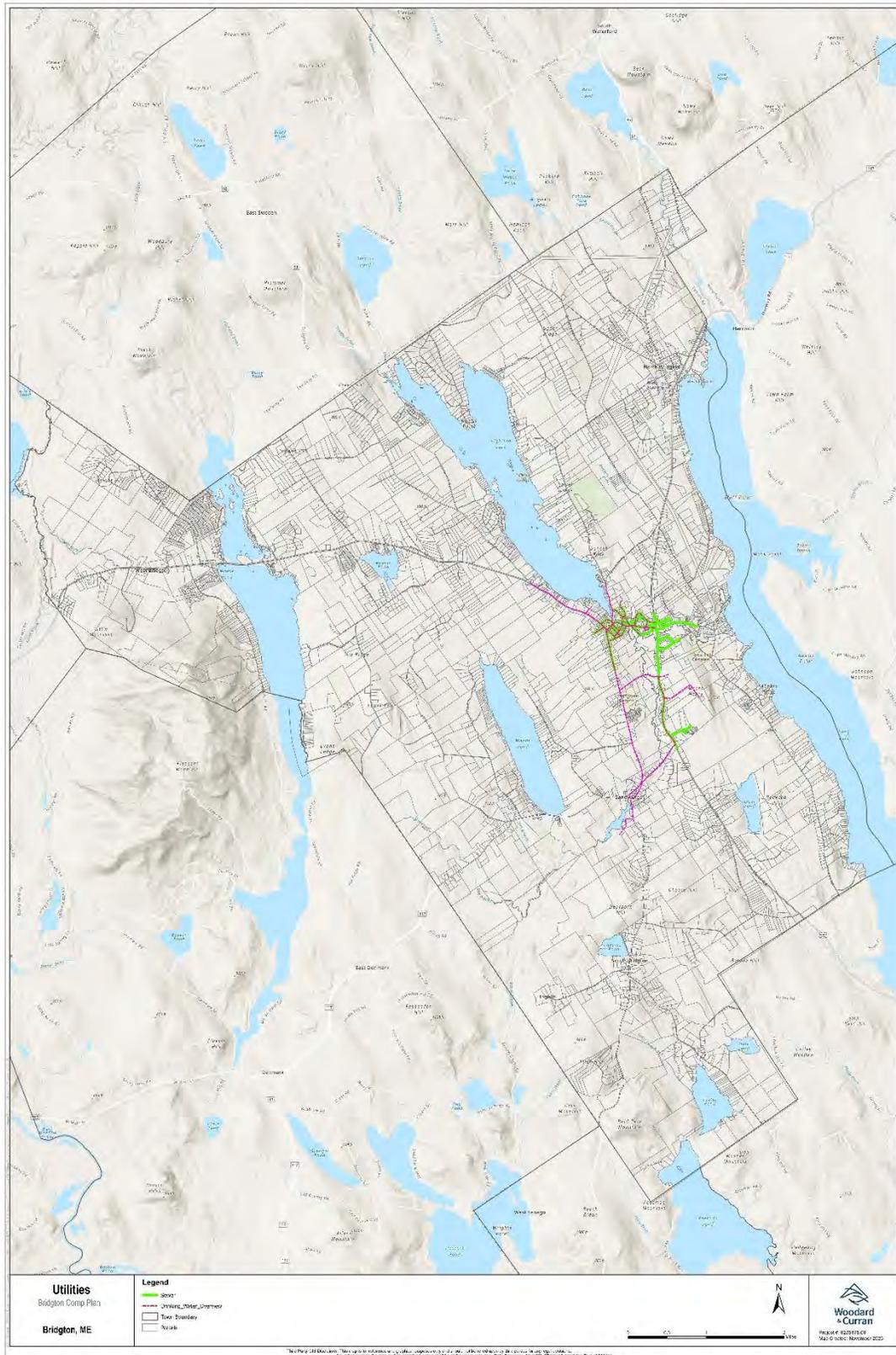
Upgrades to the existing collection infrastructure comprised the first phase of construction and included sidewalk, lighting, and road upgrades along Upper and Lower Main Street. The collection system expansion project followed, during which approximately 23,000 linear feet of gravity sewer and 7,500 linear feet of force main piping were installed. The proposed sewer will encompass the downtown area along Main Street and the connected side streets from approximately the ball field on the eastern side of downtown to the Civil War Monument on the western side. The sewer will also extend south along South High Street to Bridgton Hospital and along Route 302 to Meadow Road/Route 117. This extension aligns with growth areas identified in the 2014 Comprehensive Plan.



During the final phase of construction, existing pump stations were upgraded, and four new pump stations were constructed to convey flow to the new wastewater treatment facility. The new facility is a package plant in a single location with a pressure dispersal system that will release the treated wastewater into the ground. The Bridgton PSD will continue to support the operations and maintenance of the wastewater facilities and infrastructure. The PSD has hired a wastewater foreman with an operator's license.

The Town will require all serviceable customers to be connected to the new system within 10 years of the treatment plant going online to protect future water quality. The Town is providing stem lines from the sanitary sewer main to the property line, and property owners are responsible for sewer laterals. The existing treatment system at the lower ball fields is being converted to a pump station and will redirect sewer flow to the new facility. The existing disposal fields will be decommissioned and available for other uses once the new system goes online.

**Figure 10.2: Utilities**





## Public Drinking Water

Primarily, the Bridgton Water District provides drinking water to the Town. It is a quasi-governmental agency governed by three trustees and staffed with operators. It consists of intake wells as well as conveyance pipes and treatment. The Bridgton Water District pumps from the Willet Brook Aquifer in the southwest corner of the Town. As part of the sewer upgrades, several water mains are being addressed and upgraded. In addition to the Bridgton Water District, the Harrison Water District serves roughly 200 customers in northern Bridgton with a main along Route 117. This water is pumped from the Bear River Aquifer. Water quality and capacity are adequate for Bridgton’s existing population and for planned growth. The Bridgton Land Use Code provides regulations to protect drinking water quality and public safety.

Table xx includes a list of all public water systems in Bridgton. This includes publicly and privately owned systems that have at least 15 service connections or that serve at least 25 individuals daily at least 60 days out of the year. There are 30 public water systems in Bridgton, including 24 non-community (NC) water systems, four community (C) water system, and two non-transient, non-community (NTNC) water systems. NC water systems include systems that serve transient populations (of 25 or more people per day) and include the Town’s campgrounds, lodging facilities, and camps. Community water systems serve year-round residential communities and include the Bridgton Water District and water systems serving three year-round housing developments. The Town’s two NTNC water systems serve year-round non-resident populations and include Howell Laboratories and the School District.

**Table 10.1: Bridgton Public Water Systems**

| Water System No. | Public Water System Name                         | Type | Source Type |
|------------------|--|------|-------------|
| ME0000734        | Camp Micah                                       | NC   | GW          |
| ME0000735        | Camp Kingswood                                   | NC   | GW          |
| ME0000737        | Camp Pondicherry #1 - Site Well                  | NC   | GW          |
| ME0000739        | Winona Camp for Boys - North                     | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002014        | Salmon Point Campground                          | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002026        | Lakeside Pines Campgrounds                       | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002028        | Pleasant Mountain Inn                            | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002041        | Tarry-A-While Resort/Highland Supply             | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002056        | Bridgton Highlands Country Club                  | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002059        | Shawnee Peak #1 Main Lodge                       | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002069        | Bridgton Drive-In Theatre                        | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002075        | Vicki-Lin Camping Area                           | NC   | GW          |
| ME0002079        | Campfire Grille                                  | NC   | GW          |
| ME0090225        | Lakeside Condo Association and Pleasant Mountain | NC   | GW          |
| ME0090230        | Bridgton Water District                          | C    | GW          |
| ME0090800        | Knights Hill Association                         | C    | GW          |



|           |                                    |      |    |
|-----------|------------------------------------|------|----|
| ME0092200 | Muirfield Village                  | NC   | GW |
| ME0092339 | Sandy Creek Housing                | C    | GW |
| ME0092444 | Nouria Energy-Bridgton             | NC   | GW |
| ME0092689 | Ala Mexicana II                    | NC   | GW |
| ME0094216 | Howell Laboratories                | NTNC | GW |
| ME0094485 | Alpine Village Water Works         | NC   | GW |
| ME0094717 | MSAD 61 Lake Region High - ESB     | NTNC | GW |
| ME0094832 | East Slope Condos and Shawnee Peak | NC   | GW |
| ME0098233 | White Tail Ridge Association       | C    | GW |
| ME0100737 | Camp Pondicherry #3 - Chalet       | NC   | GW |
| ME0100739 | Winona Camp for Boys - South       | NC   | GW |
| ME0102059 | Shawnee Peak #2 East Lodge         | NC   | GW |
| ME0200737 | Camp Pondicherry #2 - Farmhouse    | NC   | GW |
| ME0202059 | Shawnee Peak #3 Peak House         | NC   | GW |

Source: Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Environmental and Community Health

## Public Services Department

Bridgton PSD is responsible for maintaining and repairing public infrastructure, including roads and public rights-of-way. The department also oversees the Town transfer station, parks, cemeteries, wastewater infrastructure, highways, and lake-level management at two Town dams. Overall, PSD has 20 staff. Of the 20, 4 are at the transfer station, six work in the wastewater division, and seven work in the Highway Division. The department owns and maintains 50 vehicles. PSD has one enclosed garage and one cold storage garage for vehicles. It also has a salt shed, which was upgraded in 2022, and a sand storage shed, which needs concrete rehabilitation. Currently, the facilities are aging, and there are limited facilities for staff. The department has identified a new garage; 10 vehicle bays and underground fuel storage are a priority in a new facility. Currently, the department is exploring an asset management platform to help track Town-wide infrastructure and manage workflow and requests.

PSD oversees all Town parks, mowing the lawns and managing foliage. It also maintains the playgrounds, plows the sidewalks, decorates for events, and conducts post-event cleanups. The Town also recently took over the Ham Complex in 2022, which is a multi-recreation destination including lacrosse, youth soccer, softball, baseball, and tee-ball. This new complex added additional responsibility for PSD.

The Town has 16 cemeteries that PSD manages. In the summer, staff focus on landscaping and grounds maintenance and transitions to snow removal in the winter. The group does routine maintenance and repairs roads as needed.

The Highway Division is responsible for the maintenance and repair of 75 miles of Town streets in the spring and summer months. The group maintains ditches and manages culvert maintenance and installation. Warm weather maintenance also includes roadside mowing, brush cutting, and catching up on planned projects. The department contracts tree trimming services and maintenance around power



lines. In the winter, the department is responsible for snow removal and winter maintenance on 220 miles of Town and state roads. The group also plows sidewalks and municipal parking lots.

### Solid Waste Management

PSD manages the Town transfer station. The facility is aging and needs significant upgrades, including a replacement of the scale. The facility manages recycling and bulk waste and is located at the former home of the Town's landfill. There are four staff who manage the transfer station and operate the thrift store, which sells various found items at discounted prices. The transfer station is open only on select days. Bridgton residents can purchase a transfer station sticker at the Town Office or at the transfer station for an annual ticket.

The transfer station accepts recyclable materials through a single-sort program through EcoMaine. Residents do not have to sort most recyclable materials; however, they are required to separate recyclables from trash items. Metal, TVs and electronics, tires, and batteries are recycled separately from the single-sort program. The transfer station also operates a bottle return program to benefit different nonprofit groups and organizations.

### Septic Waste Disposal

All subsurface sewage discharge systems must be installed in conformance with the State of Maine's Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules. Clearing or removing woody vegetation is necessary to site a new subsurface wastewater disposal system and any associated fill extensions must not extend closer than 100 feet from the normal high-water line of a water body or the upland edge of a wetland. A holding tank is not allowed for first-time residential use in the shoreland zone. Bridgton PSD does not currently treat septic for Bridgton residents.

### Energy Infrastructure

Central Maine Power provides energy infrastructure to Bridgton, is a subsidiary of AVANGRID, and is the primary electricity provider in central and southern Maine. Central Maine Power provides power to the downtown core as well as to rural areas. Transmission lines run throughout Bridgton and under road infrastructure. Given the increase of storms and the rural forested character of Bridgton, downed power lines continue to be a concern and reinforcing and created redundancy is a priority for the utility and the community.

### Broadband

Affordable and reliable broadband internet access is important to the quality of life of Bridgton residents and workers. Over the past few years, the Town has worked with individual service providers and local broadband groups to try to provide more access options. The Town is surveying residents in order to



incorporate local data into grant applications beginning in 2023. In April 2023, Spectrum applied for a grant through the Maine Connectivity Authority to reach unserved residents but did not win the grant.

The 2019 Market and Economic Analysis lists broadband infrastructure as a strategic opportunity for the Town to leverage. Increases in remote and hybrid work opportunities require reliable broadband access. In order to attract new residents and support businesses, the 2019 analysis suggests the Town prioritize broadband infrastructure updates and engage in state and county grant opportunities.

The state has a goal of making broadband service universally available; however, Maine's population is not dense enough for the private sector to cover all regions. Maine's Broadband Action Plan proposes that the State will contribute 25% of the total cost to expand broadband access to rural areas.

## Challenges and Opportunities

As Bridgton continues to grow, the Town will have to consider how growth will impact the ability to maintain facilities and provide services. Bridgton covers a large geographic area, which is broken up by several lakes. Expanding development beyond designated growth areas could have long-term financial impacts on the Town. Service providers, like police and fire, have been experiencing an increase in calls, and the Town will have to consider ways to help ensure Town staff can maintain service levels as Bridgton grows and the cost to provide services increases. Planning for future needs and identifying opportunities to increase efficiency in operations will be critical for the Town to provide a high level of service in all areas while minimizing the impact to taxpayers.

As Bridgton's population continues to age, the Town will have to consider how to best provide services to older residents. The diversity and affordability of housing types, availability of transportation options, and community services all impact how older residents can continue to participate in the community. Bridgton should also consider the impact of an aging community on its services.

The Town and its partners should also continue work to support residents in need of mental health and substance use support as well as those experiencing homelessness. Housing affordability has been stated as a challenge by Town staff. The Town has seen challenges in filling vacant positions, including in the Bridgton Police Department. Staffing challenges can limit the Town's ability to continue providing a high level of service and supporting residents. Additionally, the Bridgton Fire Department will have to consider if it should transition from an on-call department to a full-time department.

Climate hazards are the effects of climate change that can impact Bridgton's people, infrastructure, economy, and ecosystem. There are several climate hazards facing Bridgton and the region. Warmer temperatures have shortened Maine's winters and lengthened summers by roughly two weeks. Weather is also becoming more variable, and extreme winter cold snaps are becoming more frequent. Maine can expect an increase in high heat index days (over 90 degrees Fahrenheit) per year. Warmer annual temperatures throughout the year have increased the likelihood that ticks survive the winter and are



more active through the spring and summer. Maine has seen an increase in Lyme disease cases and, as of March 2023, babesiosis is endemic in the state.

Hazards, like increased weather intensity and extreme weather events, can damage properties and infrastructure. More extreme and more frequent weather events could impact Bridgton EMA's ability to continue to provide a high level of service and support residents in evacuating or responding to hazards.

## Sources

Bridgton Academy

Bridgton Community Center

Bridgton Community Development Report April 2023

Bridgton Economic and Market Analysis 2019

Bridgton EMA

Bridgton Fire Department

Bridgton Food Pantry

Bridgton General Assistance

Bridgton Hospital

Bridgton Land Use Code, Shoreland Zoning Ordinance

Bridgton Police Department

Bridgton Public Library

Bridgton Public Services Department

Bridgton Transfer Station

Bridgton Wastewater Department

Lakes Region Schools

Maine Broadband Action Plan

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Environmental and Community Health

Maine Won't Wait Climate Action Plan

Opportunity Alliance

Through These Doors



## 11 Fiscal Capacity and Capital Investment Plan

As Bridgton experiences continued residential and commercial development, understanding the Town's fiscal capacity for growth is critical. With the upcoming completion of the wastewater system upgrade and regional development pressure, Bridgton is poised to welcome more new development in the downtown area. Growth and changing demographics will impact the Town's fiscal capacity. Whether these changes have a net positive or net negative impact on the Town's overall financial position and ability to provide services at current/increased future levels will depend on a number of factors, including the location, type, and density of new development, as guided by this plan.

### Fiscal Capacity in the Planning Context

The Town's fiscal capacity and ability to provide adequate levels of high-quality services is largely dependent on creating and maintaining a diverse economic environment. As a regional service center, Bridgton is well positioned in the region to support business and employment growth, attract visitors, and support new and existing residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the economy and was especially challenging for the Town to continue to provide essential services to residents and commercial partners in a time of great uncertainty. Significant federal and state funding supported municipalities, businesses, and residents in economic recovery and allowed for significant capital investments to support long-term growth. Bridgton has benefited from broader shifts to remote work, migration to Maine and smaller communities, and an increased interest in outdoor recreation.

Though not a financial forecast in the traditional sense, through this comprehensive planning effort, the Town is looking to plan for future growth as a means to improve Bridgton's fiscal position. This could be by expanding the tax base with new commercial development; enhancing and marketing the Town to attract visitors and seasonal residents; supporting business growth and job creation; and/or maintaining current service levels, infrastructure investment, and amenities to continue to support the well-being and quality of life of existing residents. The outlining of core revenue and expense elements, and the projected impacts of economic development and strategic capital investment on those elements, may assist the Town with prioritizing goals and initiatives. Understanding the Town's fiscal capacity in greater detail may provide for additional information to consider when planning for anticipated growth and to help ensure a thriving economy and subsequent fiscal health of the Town.

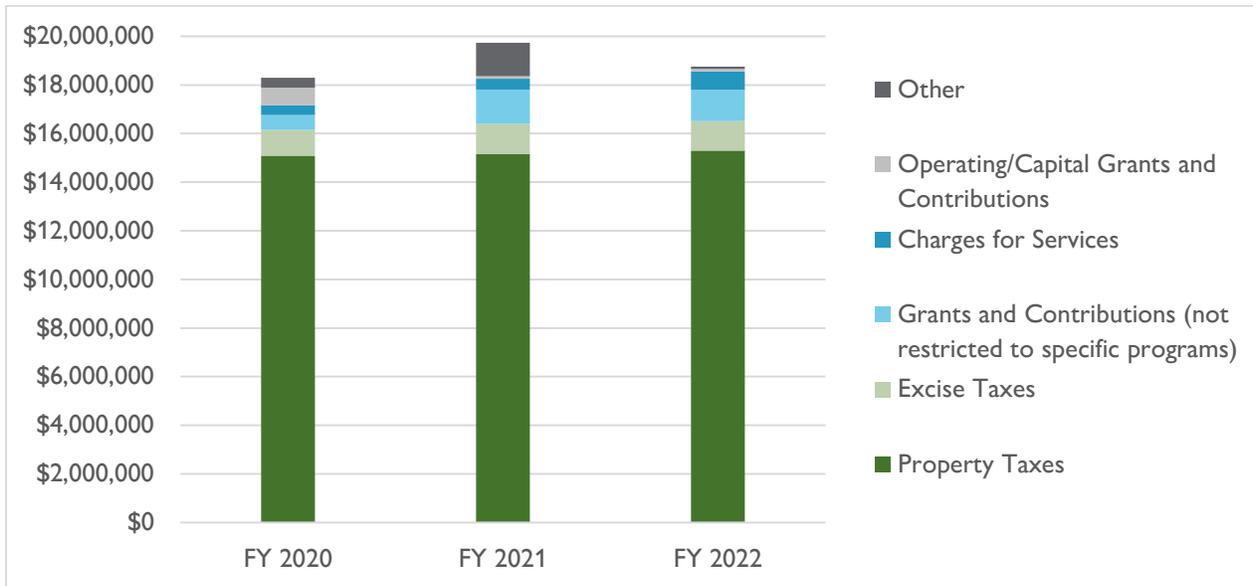
The Town can intentionally cultivate interdependence between economic needs and residential and commercial needs through land use regulation, infrastructure investment, and fiscal policies that complement and support the Town's neighborhoods, service delivery hubs and sectors, community partners, built environment, and natural environment. This, in turn, can help ensure expansion of the Town's fiscal capacity for the future.



## Revenue and Expenses

To establish a baseline for measuring fiscal capacity growth, it is necessary to understand the Town’s core revenue-generating capacity. Figure 11.1 shows major general fund revenue sources from FY 2020 to FY 2022. The majority of annual general fund revenue is raised via property taxes (82% in FY 2022).

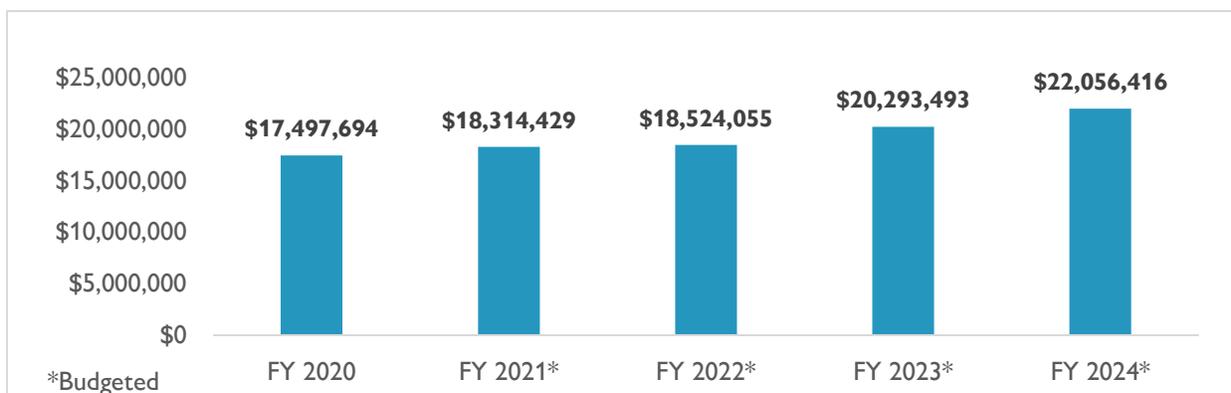
**Figure 11.1: Major Revenue Sources FY 2020 – FY 2022 (Dollars in \$1,000s)**



Source: Town of Bridgton

As the cost of materials, labor, and equipment have increased substantially in recent years, so have expenses for the Town. Bridgton’s operating expenses have continued to increase annually, with a 26% increase in budgeted expenses from FY 2020 to FY 2024.

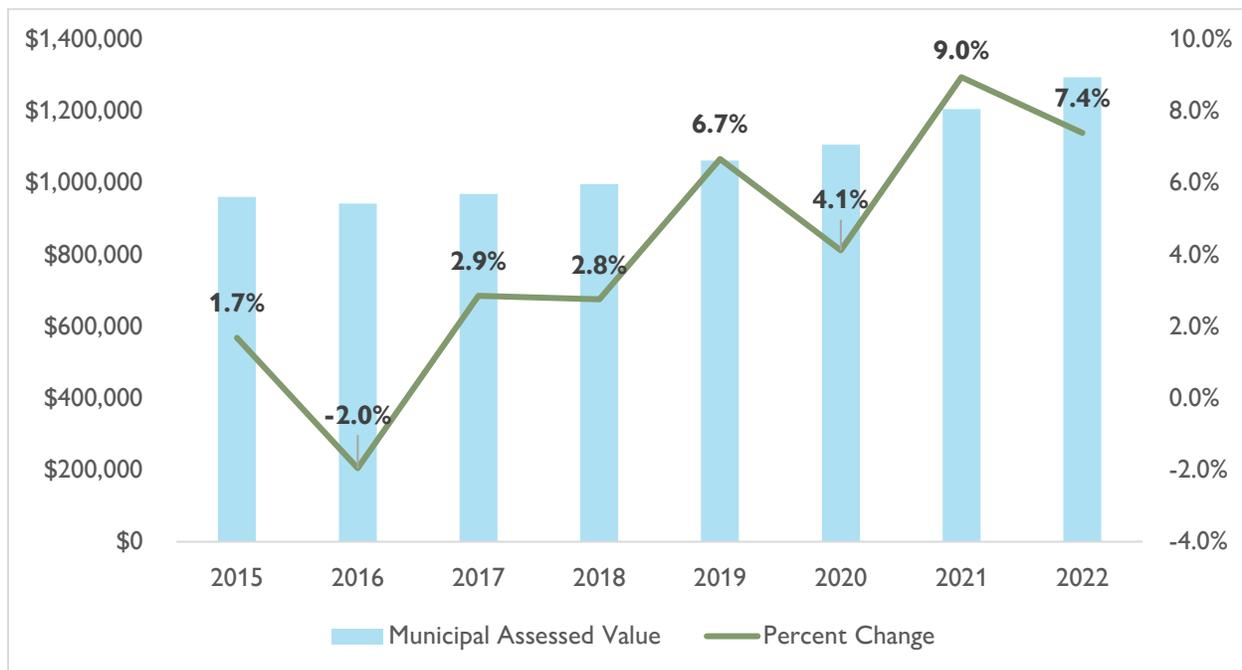
**Figure 11.2: Bridgton Annual Expenses**



Source: Town of Bridgton

As is evident from Figure 11.1, the majority of annual general fund revenue secured by the Town is raised via property taxes. As a result, it is important for the Town to continue to foster overall municipal valuation growth through policy and land use decisions. This will help guide development that will best support revenue growth and continued strategic investment in critical infrastructure and services. Figure 11.3 outlines the growth in overall municipal valuation from FY 2015 to FY 2022. The Town has experienced substantial assessed valuation growth since 2020, similar to other communities in the region. This is significant because it provides the Town with a snapshot of estimated revenue available to be raised via property taxes based on tax rates. Because the Town’s reliance on revenue derived from property taxes is substantial (at roughly 80% of total revenue), if overall municipal valuation year-over-year increases are not realized to historic levels, they may have a significant adverse impact to the Town’s ability to maintain current service levels. While impacts may be somewhat mitigated through tax rate adjustments, increasing rates would adversely impact property owners.

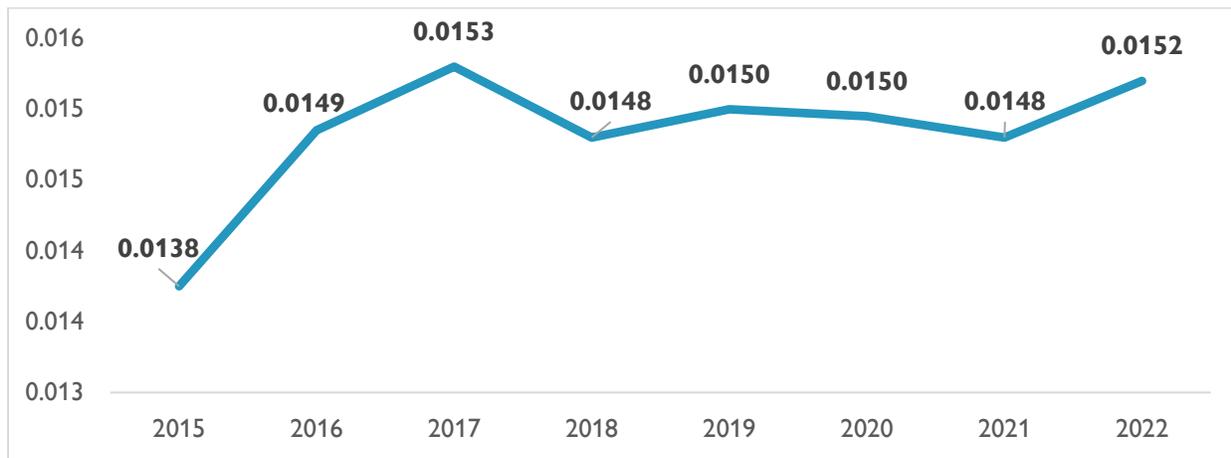
**Figure 11.3: Bridgton Municipal Valuation Growth, 2015 – 2022**



Source: DACF, Maine Revenue Services

Maintaining the municipal tax rate is important to help ensure long-term livability for full-time residents of Bridgton. While the 2023 property tax rate (\$15.20 per \$1,000 of assessed value) has remained relatively stable since 2016, property values in the Town and region have increased dramatically, resulting in higher tax bills for many residents. Whether the tax rate for the Town will increase or decrease from the prior year will largely depend on whether property values appreciate, depreciate, or remain steady. As can be seen in Figure 11.4, the residential tax rate has remained somewhat flat since FY 2016, presumably in large part due to the increases in assessed values over the same period.

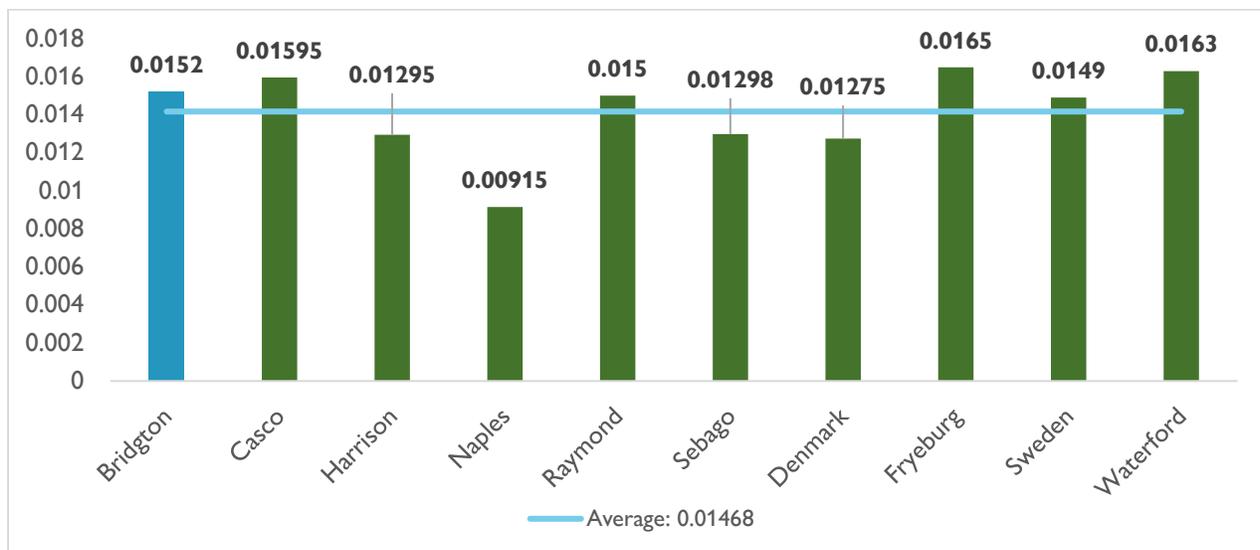
**Figure 11.4: Municipal Property Tax Rate, 2015 – 2022**



Source: DACF, Maine Revenue Services

Bridgton’s property tax rate is comparable to other communities in the region. While the Town has a higher tax rate than some other nearby towns, including Naples, Sebago, and Denmark, it provides a higher level of services to residents and visitors, including a full-time police department, paid call fire department, community development activities, and a range of recreation opportunities.

**Figure 11.5: Comparison of Municipal Tax Rates, 2022**



Source: DACF, Maine Revenue Services

## Debt Capacity

In addition to overall municipal valuation and various county and educational commitments, the property tax rate for the Town 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.

Bridgton relies on the sale of bonds for its most substantial financing needs, including the current wastewater system improvement project. State statutes limit the amount of general obligation debt a municipality may issue to 15% of its total state-assessed valuation. The Town's outstanding debt in 2022 was \$15,895,875, which is approximately 1.2% of the Town's total valuation and is far below the state-established limitation.

## Capital Planning

Between FY 2019 and FY 2022, an average of 5.6% of total government expenditures (excluding school appropriations and business-type activities) were related to capital outlays. This includes a sharp increase in capital outlays in FY 2021 related to the Lower Main Street Reconstruction project. Although capital outlays are a relatively small percentage of total expenditures for the Town, the long-term maintenance costs and eventual replacement costs need to be considered when making capital investment decisions. Capital investment policy should support a capital investment strategy related to the ability to generate revenues beyond the cost to maintain and replace infrastructure. As maintenance and replacement costs increase, this becomes more critical.

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 those who pay to use and maintain the services. For example, the design and construction of the Town's wastewater treatment system can be considered an investment, with the potential return on investment from planned and potential future development that the new system will accommodate. This may contribute to expansion of the Town's tax base and, thus, its capacity to generate revenue.

Addressing deferred maintenance and capital replacement needs throughout the Town requires a strategic approach. Updating and constructing new transportation and utility infrastructure and facility investments should 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 development. Strategic capital improvement investments may provide the foundation for growth and present the Town with additional opportunities to generate revenues beyond the capital construction and maintenance costs for facilities over the course of their useful life. The Town should also consider the long-term implications of investing in major infrastructure and facilities projects now versus waiting another five to ten years (or not completing the project at all), including limiting the level or range of services and the impact on the tourism economy and new business growth.



## Financing Tools

### Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts

The Town currently uses municipal 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.

TIF districts allow the Town to shelter the increased property valuation within the district from computation of its state subsidies (general purpose aid to education and municipal revenue sharing) and County tax assessments. TIF districts are used to encourage development by allowing some or all property tax revenue generated by new development to be used to supplement project costs and for targeted projects that support economic development for the community as a whole, such as road repairs or sidewalks. Bridgton has three active TIF districts:

- **The Portland Road TIF** is 537 acres and extends along Portland Road (Route 302) from the intersection of Sandy Creek Road to Main Street, including the east end of Main Street to Nulty Street. This district was designated in 2007 and is set to expire in 2033.
- **The Magic Lantern Municipal Development TIF** is 4 acres including the Magic Lantern Theater. The district was designated in 2005 and is set to expire in 2026.
- **The Woodlands Senior Living Municipal Development TIF** is 36 acres along North High Street and was designated in 2020 to promote the development of a senior memory care facility and support the Town's economic development initiatives.
- **Harrison Ridge Affordable Housing TIF** is 7 acres along Harrison Road and Route 117. The TIF was designated to promote the development of 48 low-income apartments for residents over age 55.

The total valuation of all municipal TIF districts is \$43,024,069. TIF funds have been used and plan to be used for projects such as sidewalk construction, streetlights, wastewater system upgrades, and playground improvements. The Town should continue to review TIF district revenue capture rates and assess the likelihood of using TIF revenues for specific purposes related to the design and construction of projects. Furthermore, the Town should review the real growth assumptions within current TIF districts and related impacts to valuation increase assumptions to allow for greater accuracy of estimates.

### Community Development Block Grant

Bridgton is one of two municipalities within Cumberland County that receives special set-aside allocations of the County's CDBG program funds. Bridgton and South Portland qualify for a set-aside allocation based on the low-/moderate-income population for which the program is intended to serve.



The Town's annual CDBG allocation is approximately \$200,000, which is used to fund infrastructure and community services projects. For the 2023 – 2024 allocation year, the projects selected for funding included the Church Street sidewalk, the Bridgton Community Center Navigator Program, and the Bridgton Food Pantry.

### Other Grant Funding

In addition to CDBG funds, the Town has actively pursued other grant funding opportunities. For the wastewater expansion project, the Town is set to receive \$1.4 million in congressional earmark grant funding awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and has designated \$450,000 of the Town's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the project.

The Town has also sought and been awarded additional funding for specific programs and projects from federal and state agencies, Cumberland County, and private organizations. Recently, the Town has been awarded funding from GOPIF, Community Heart and Soul, and GPCOG to support planning initiatives.

### Challenges and Opportunities

As the cost to provide services increases, Bridgton, like other communities, will need to find creative solutions to maintain current service levels. Determining where to encourage growth and what type of growth to allow in the Town will have a significant impact. The Town will look to balance fiscally responsible growth with the desire to preserve natural areas, open space, scenic views, and Bridgton's small-town character.

In addition, this plan will consider alternative funding sources, such as the continued or expanded use of TIF districts, fees for service, additional grant opportunities and grant management, and use of Town-owned land. The Town has successfully leveraged state and federal funding to make needed investments in infrastructure and services; however, the possibility of the Town losing its status as a CDBG entitlement community is a concern. As the demographics of the Town shift, this is a potential long-term concern. Planning for how the Town would fill the gap if the current CDBG funding were to disappear is a realistic and cautious approach to fiscal planning for the long-term to help ensure the continued quality of place in Bridgton.

### Sources

Federal Compliance Audit, Town of Bridgton, Maine, June 30, 2021

Federal Compliance Audit, Town of Bridgton, Maine, June 30, 2022

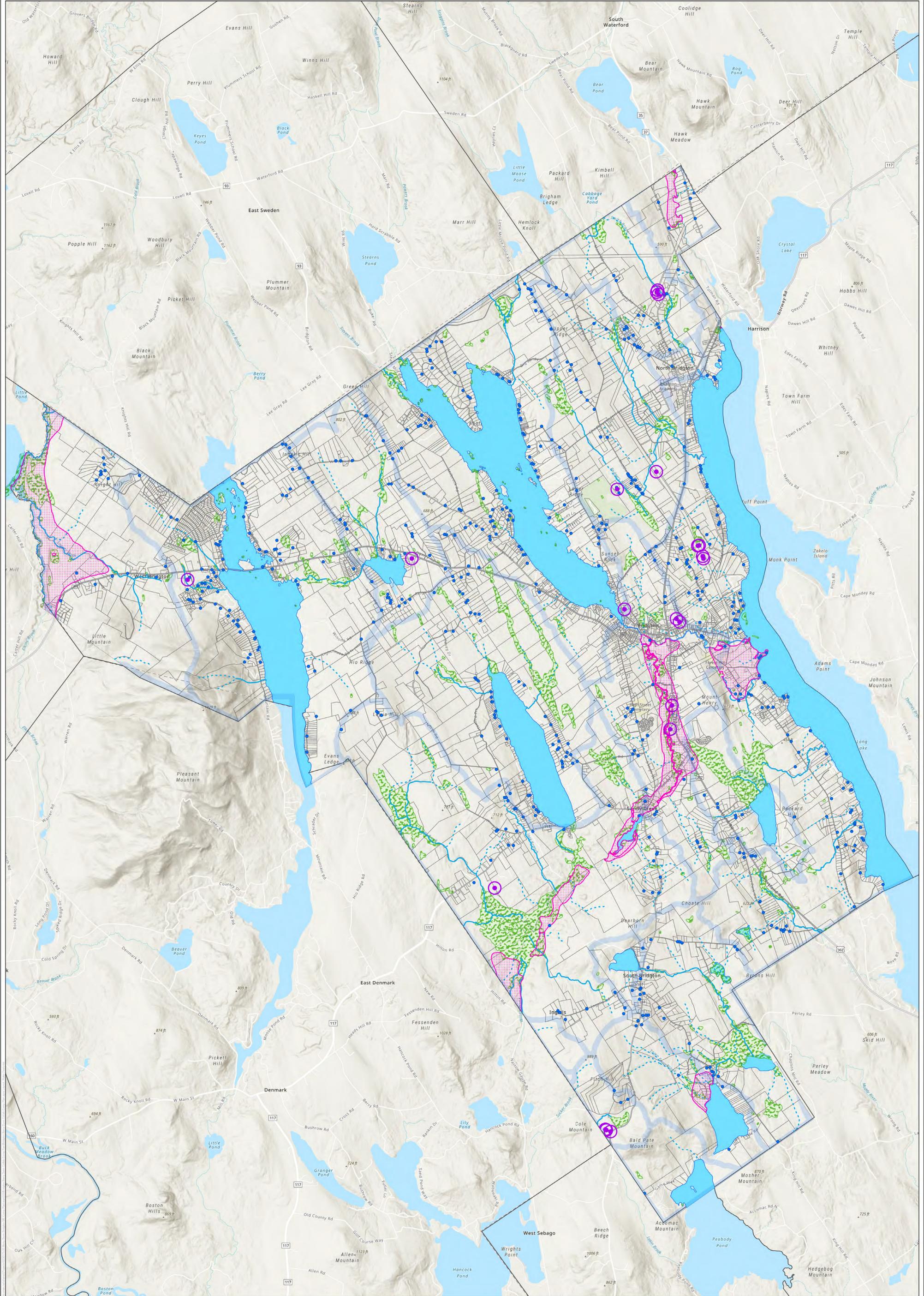
Maine Department of Economic and Community Development

Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Maine Revenue Services

Town of Bridgton, Town Budget FY 2024



## 12 Appendix A: Maps



**Water Resources**  
Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

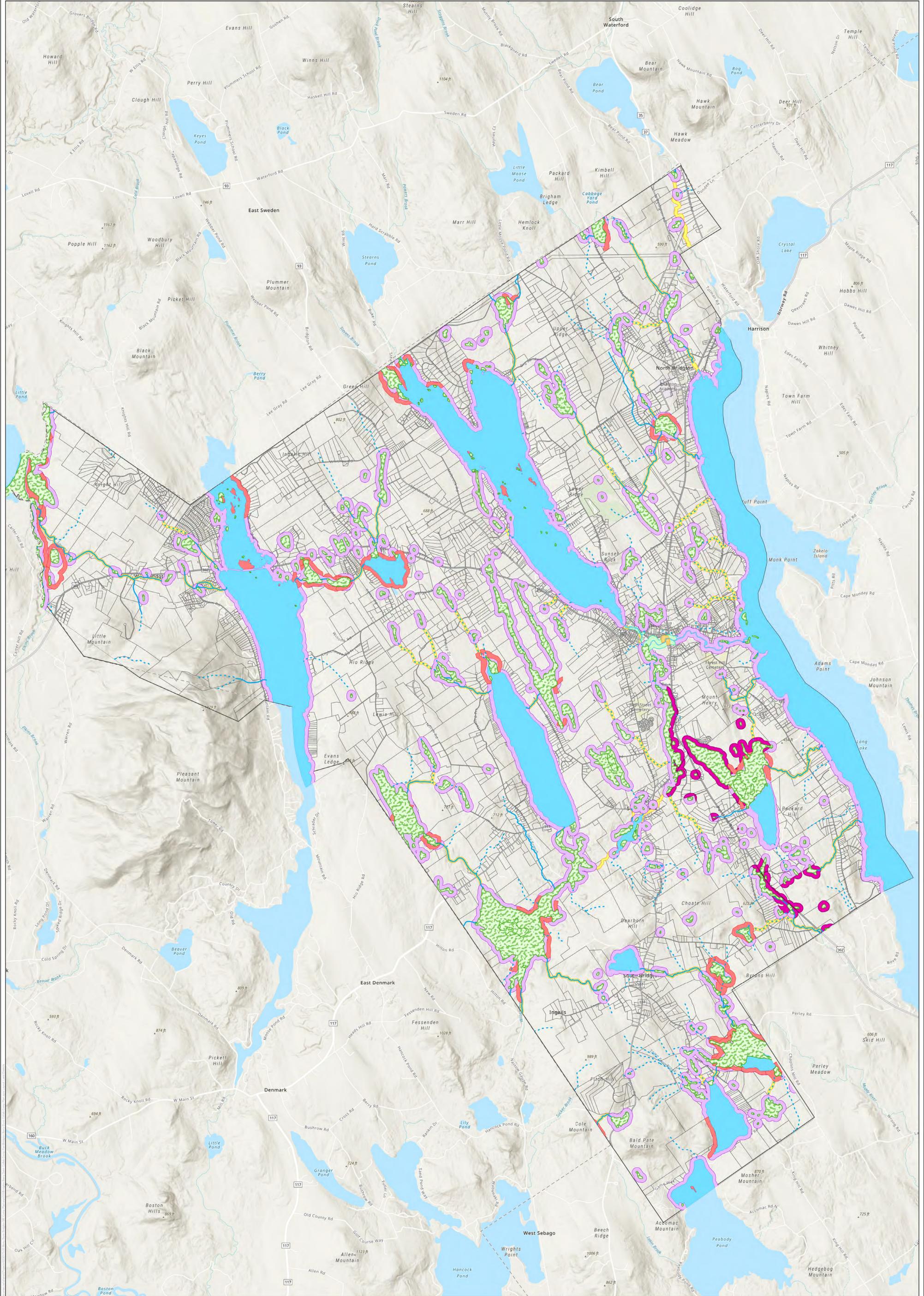
**Legend**

- Waterbodies
- Watershed Boundary
- Freshwater Wetlands
- Aquifers
- Town Boundary
- Parcels
- Perennial Streams
- Intermittent Streams
- Vernal Pool
- Well Locations



Project #: 0235175.00  
Map Created: November 2023

Third Party GIS Disclaimer: This map is for reference and graphical purposes only and should not be relied upon by third parties for any legal decisions. Any reliance upon the map or data contained herein shall be at the user's sole risk. Data Sources: MaineGIS, O'Donnell & Associates, Town of Bridgton



**Land Districts**  
Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

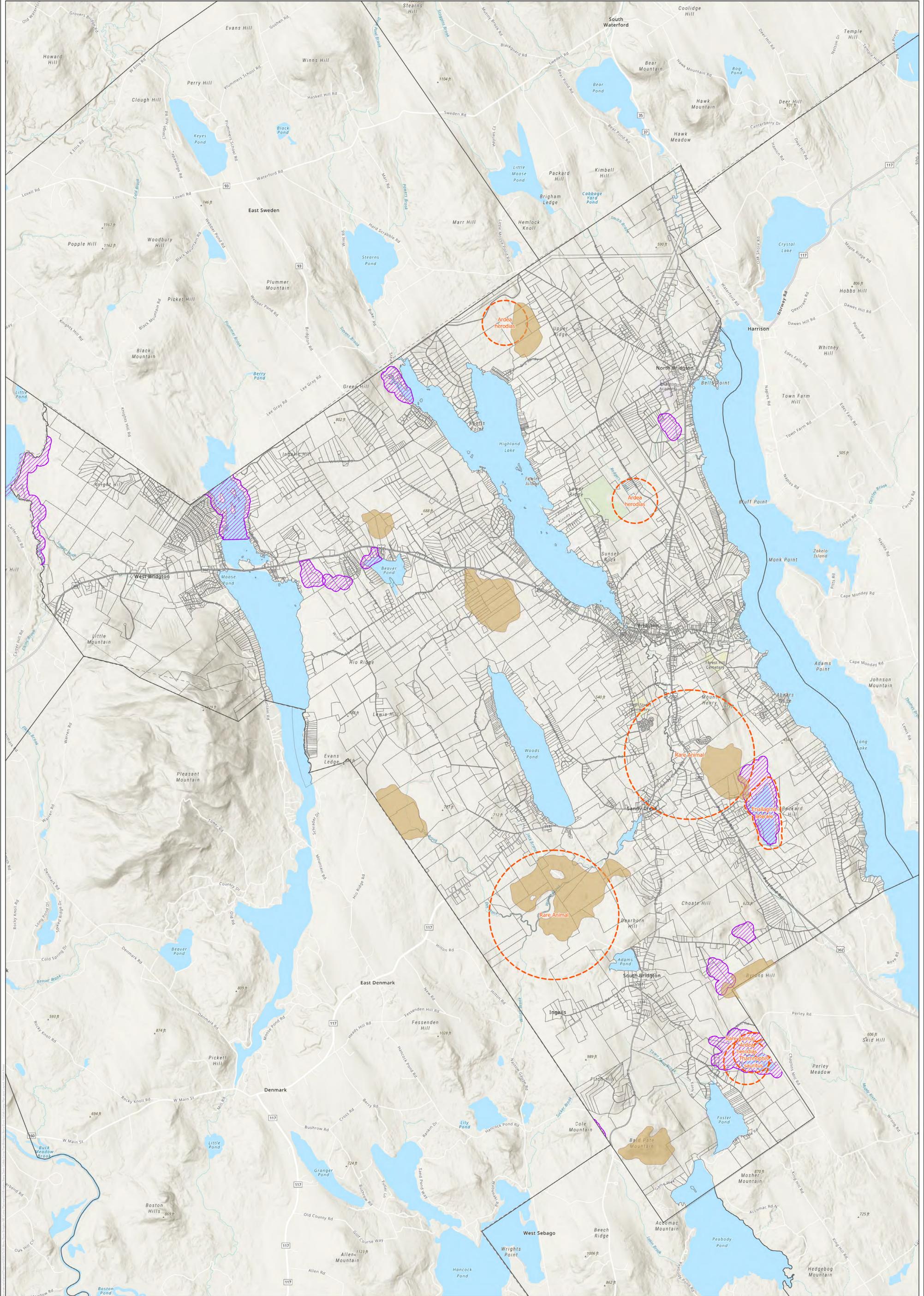
**Legend**

- General Development District II
- General Development District I
- Resource Protection District
- Limited Commercial
- Limited Residential District
- Stream Protection District
- Waterbodies
- Perennial Streams
- Intermittent Streams
- Freshwater Wetlands
- Town Boundary
- Parcels



Project #: 0235175.00  
Map Created: November 2023

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**Habitat Areas**  
Bridgton Comp Plan

**Bridgton, ME**

**Legend**

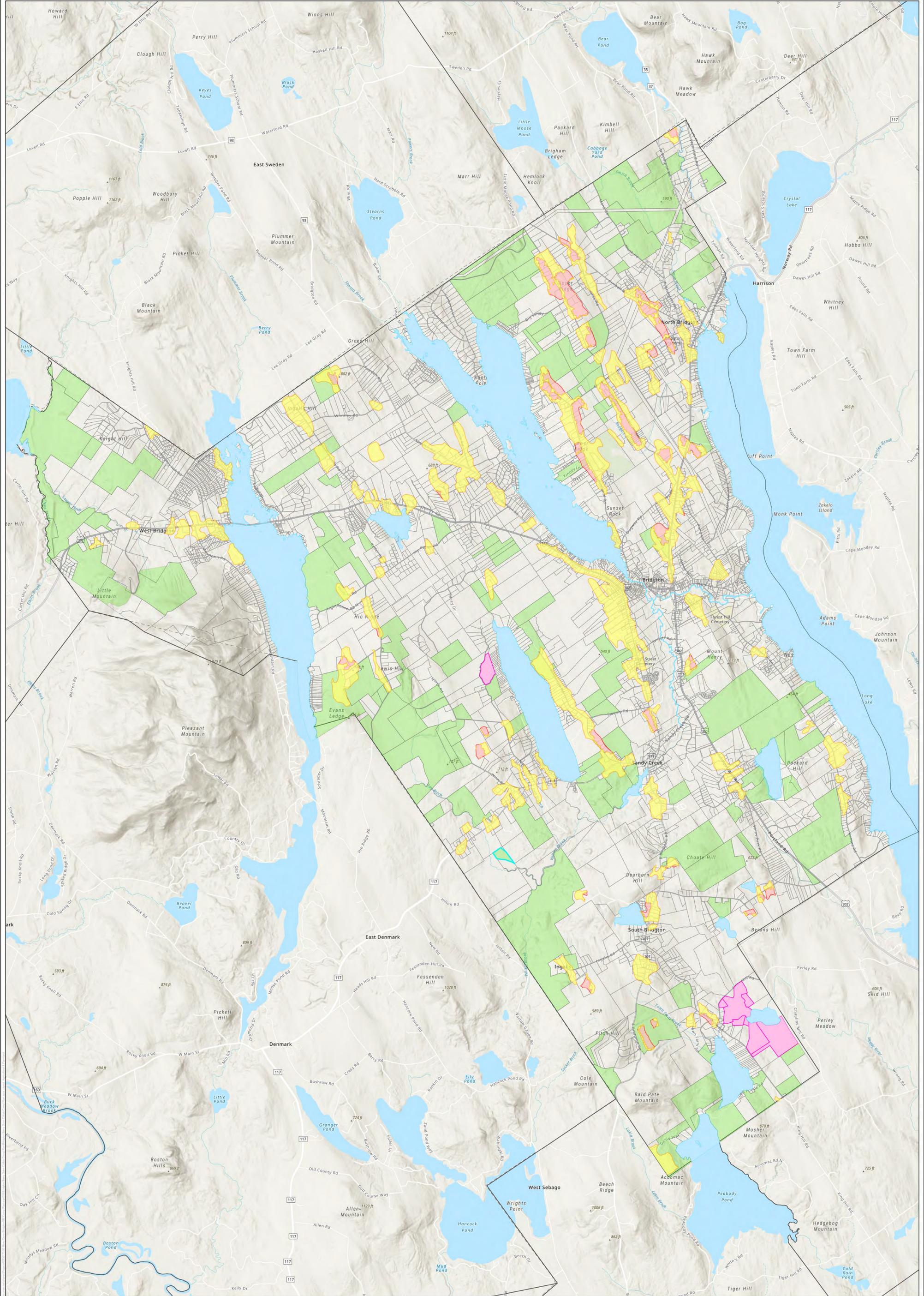
- Endangered Threatened and Special Concern Wildlife Habitat
- Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat
- Town Boundary
- Parcels
- Deer Wintering Areas

Wildlife Management Areas, Maine Heritage Fish Waters, Maine Endangered and Threatened Fish, and all ocean related layers evaluated do not have extents within town.



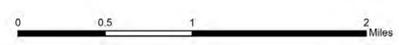
Project #: 0235175.00  
Map Created: November 2023

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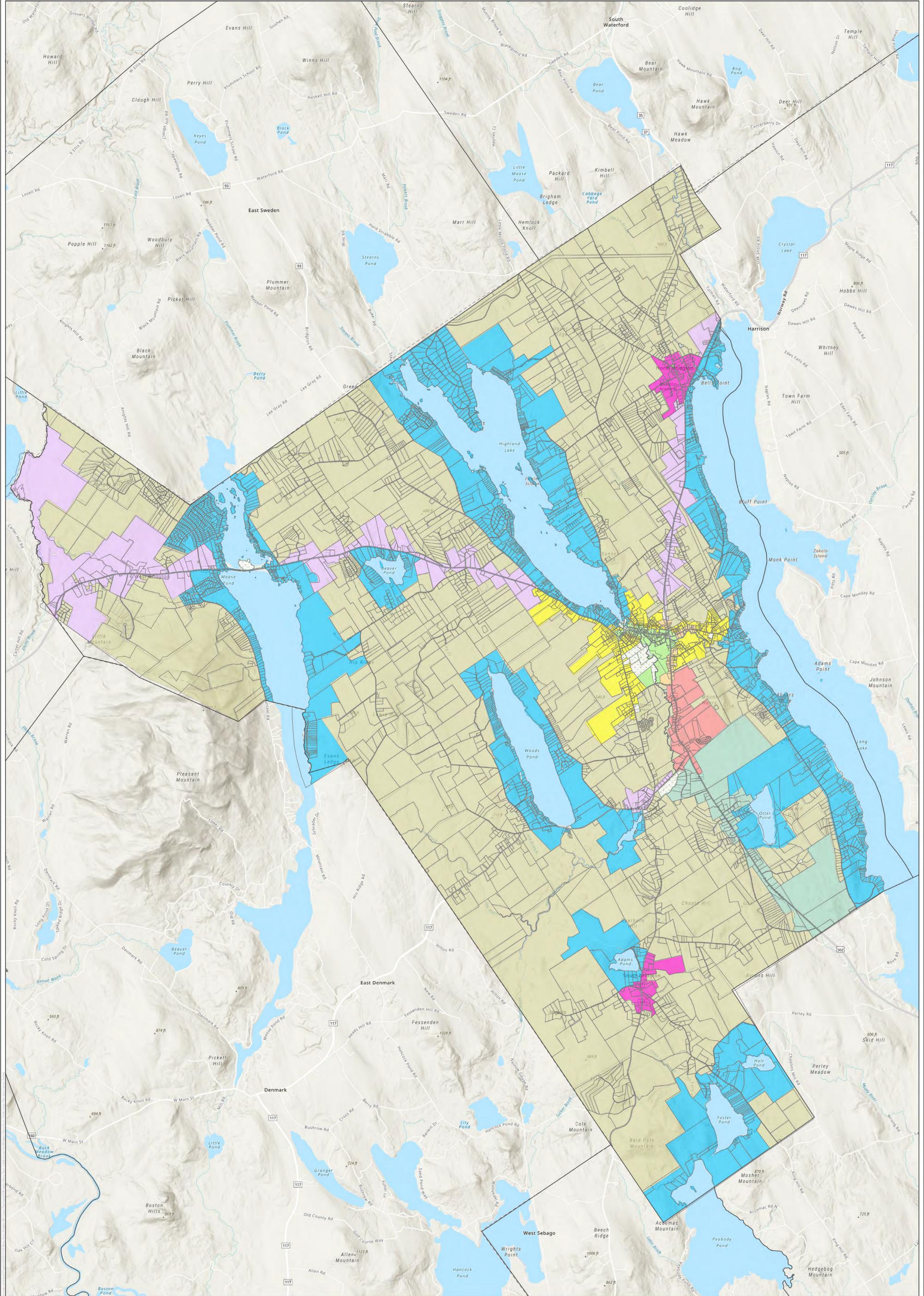
**Agriculture, Trees & Open Space**  
 Bridgton Comp Plan  
 Bridgton, ME

- Legend**
- Maine Prime Farmland
    - Prime Farmland within Agricultural Blocks
    - Prime Farmland Soil
    - Open Space
  - Tree Growth Parcel
  - Town Boundary
  - Parcels



Project #: 0235175.00  
 Map Created: November 2023

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**Zoning Overview**  
Bridgton Comp Plan

**Bridgton, ME**

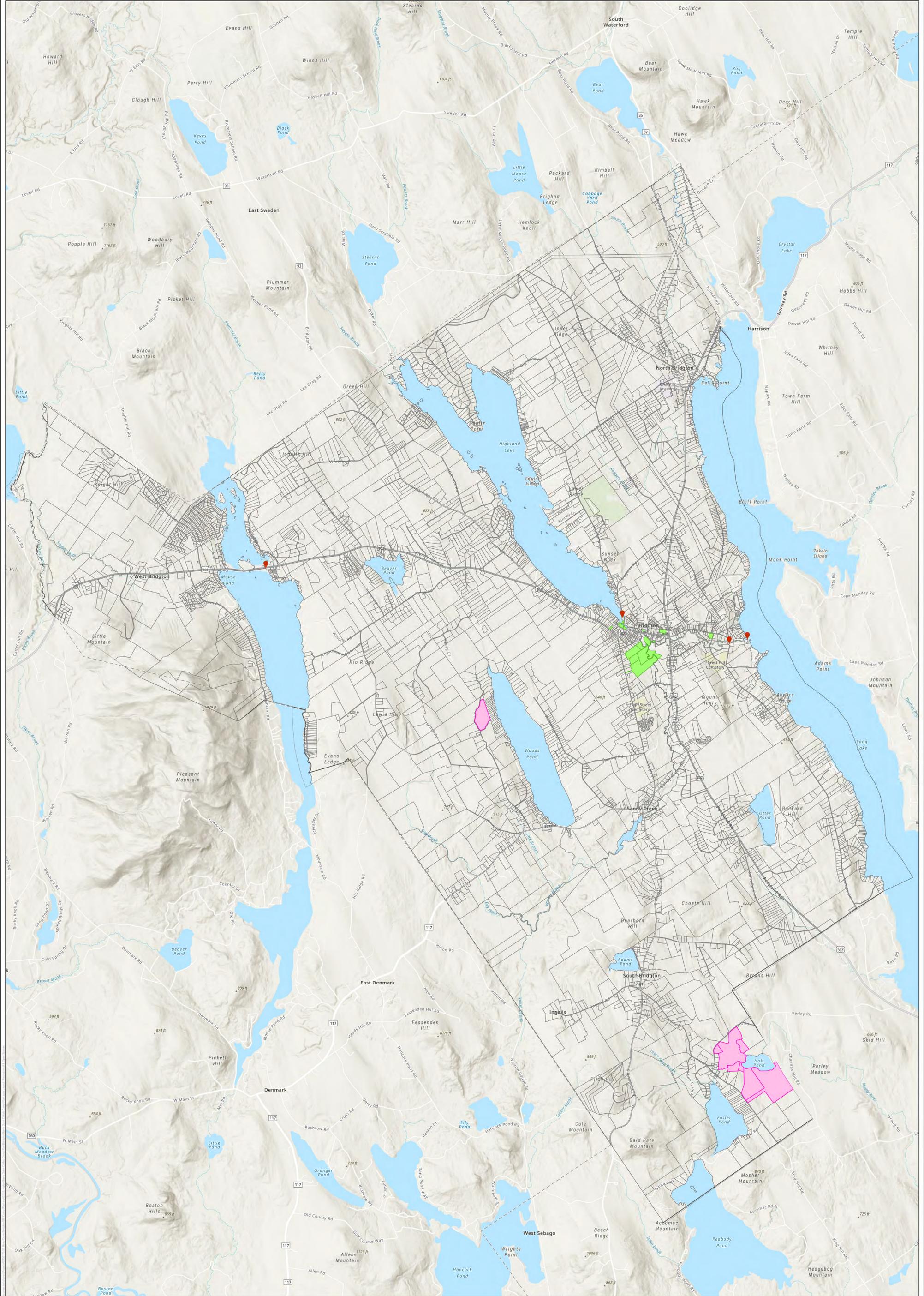
**Legend**

- Downtown Village Business District I
- Downtown Village Business District II
- Downtown Village Neighborhood
- Inner Corridor
- Lakeside Neighborhood
- Mixed Use Corridor
- Outer Corridor
- Rural Neighborhood
- Outer Village District
- Town Owned Land
- Parcels
- Town Boundary



Project #: 0235175.00  
Map Created: November 2023

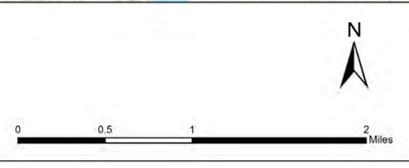
Third Party GIS Disclaimer: This map is for reference and graphical purposes only and should not be relied upon by third parties for any legal decisions. Any reliance upon the map or data contained herein shall be at the user's sole risk. Data Sources: PlanGIS, O'Donnell & Associates, Town of Bridgton



**Recreational Facilities**  
Bridgton Comp Plan

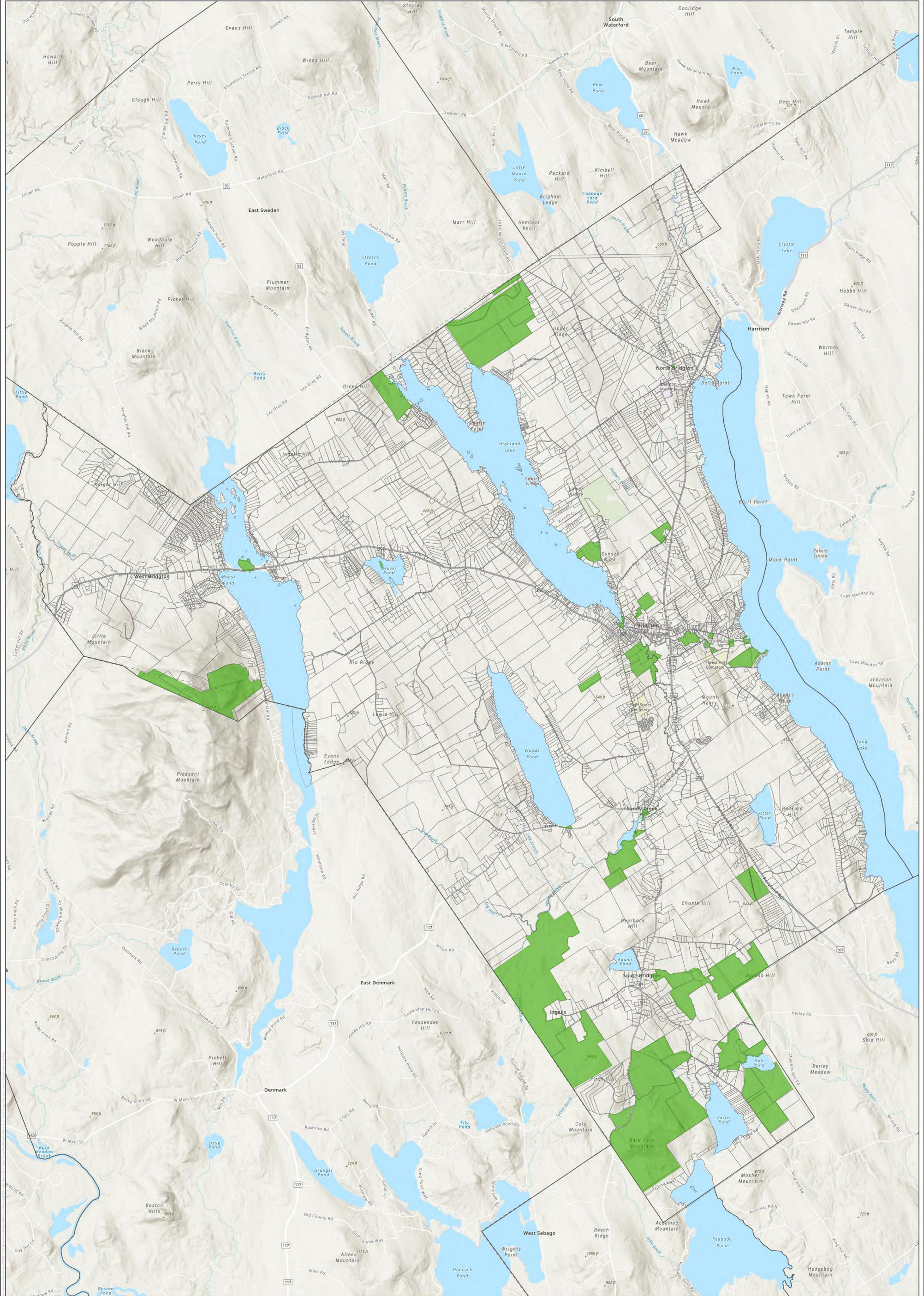
**Bridgton, ME**

- Legend**
- Open Space
  - Town Parks
  - Boat Launches
  - Parcels
  - Town Boundary



Project #: 0235175.00  
Map Created: November 2023

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**Conservation Land**  
Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

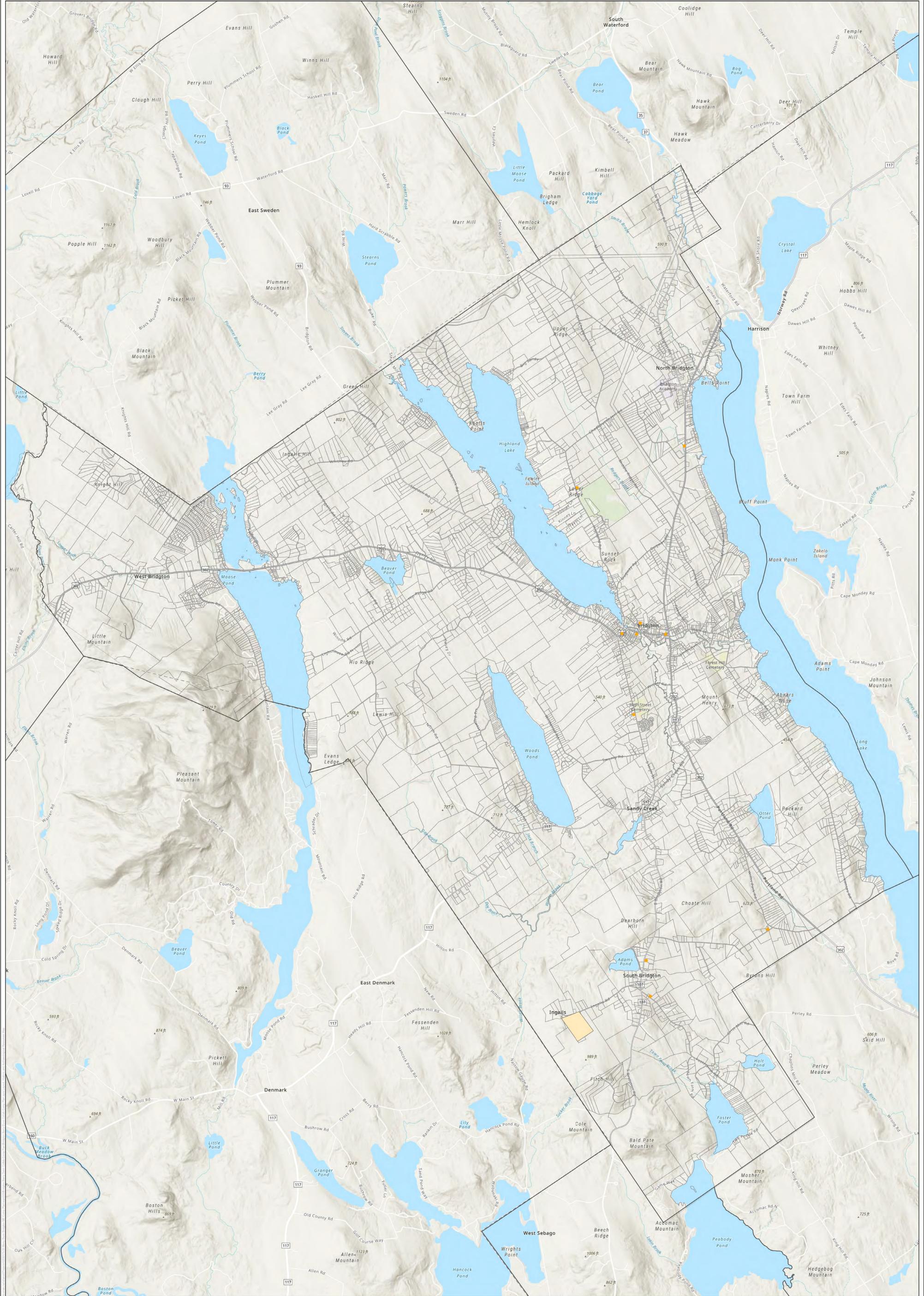
**Legend**

- Conservation Land
- Town Boundary
- Parcels



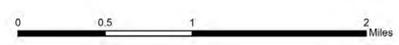
Project #: 0235175.00  
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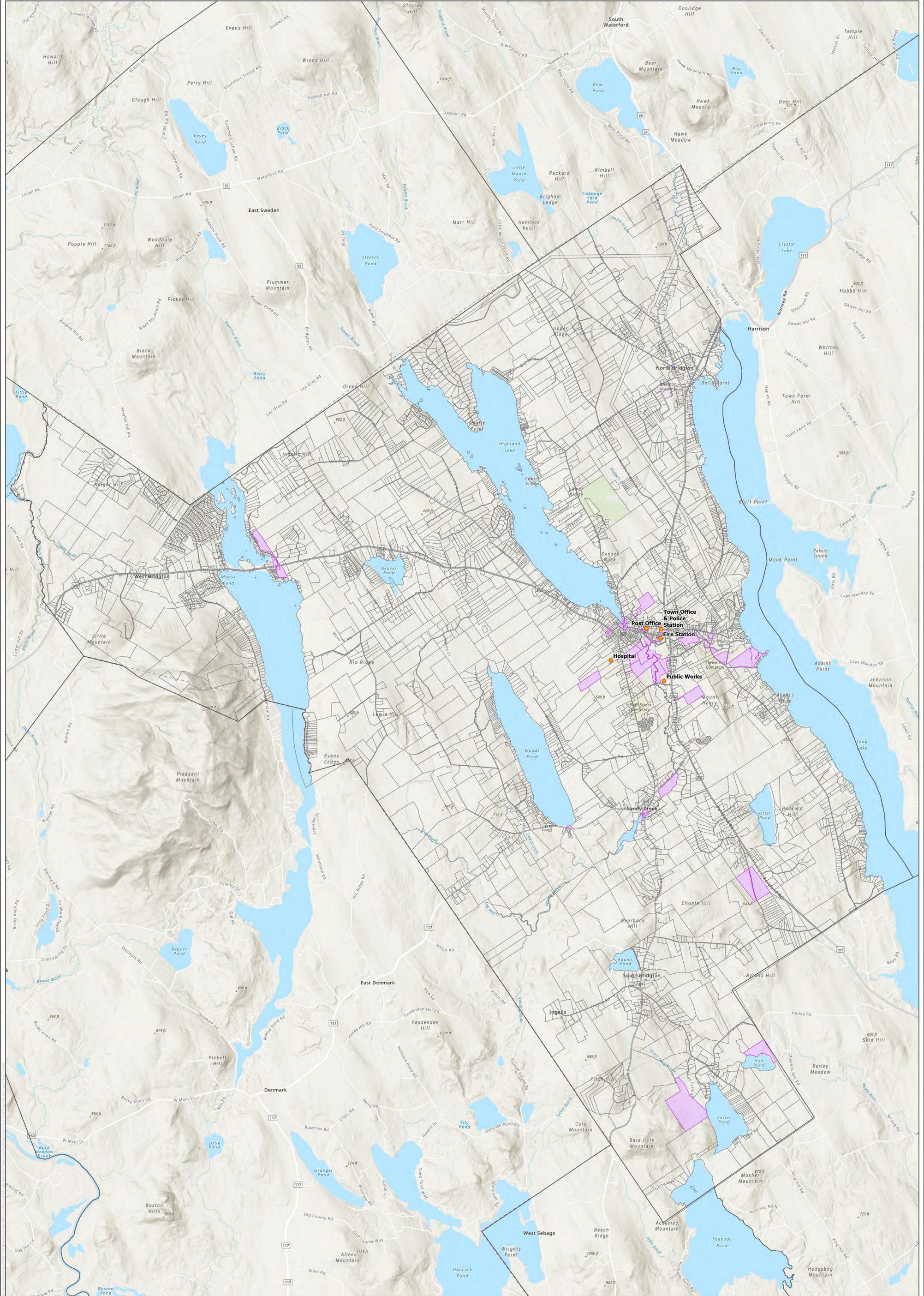
**Historical and Archaeological Overview**  
 Bridgton Comp Plan  
 Bridgton, ME

| Legend                                |   | National Register of Historic Places Polygons   |   | Town Boundary   |               |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---------------|
| <span style="color: blue;">●</span>   | National Historic Landmark                        | <span style="background-color: lightblue; border: 1px solid blue; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span>     | National Historic Landmark                        | <span style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> | Town Boundary |
| <span style="color: orange;">●</span> | National Register of Historic Places              | <span style="background-color: lightorange; border: 1px solid orange; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span> | National Register of Historic Places              | <span style="border: 1px solid gray; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span>  | Parcels       |
| <span style="color: red;">●</span>    | Removed from National Register of Historic Places | <span style="background-color: lightred; border: 1px solid red; width: 20px; height: 10px;"></span>       | Removed from National Register of Historic Places |   |               |



Project #: 0235175.00  
 Map Created: November 2023

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**Town Facilities**  
Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

**Legend**

- Town Owned Land
- Town Facilities
- Town Boundary
- Parcels



Project #: 0235175.00  
Map Created: November 2023

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