



2025 Resiliency Planning Initiative

TOWN OF South Bethany

Sussex County, Delaware

Prepared by the
Institute for Public Administration
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UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
BIDEN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC
POLICY & ADMINISTRATION

2025 Resiliency Planning Initiative

TOWN OF South Bethany *Sussex County, Delaware*

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UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE
**BIDEN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC
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Introduction and Summary

Introduction

Early in 2025, the Town of South Bethany and the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) began scoping a collaboration on community resiliency. The town was mindful of its obligation to update its comprehensive plan in 2026. The town was aware of sustainability initiatives undertaken by other coastal communities and wanted to undertake a robust, policy-focused public engagement process. Moreover, it wanted to focus specifically on sustainability and adaptation, without becoming mired in the more routine matters of a comprehensive plan update. Even so, the public process, survey results, and notes produced in this undertaking are expected to be incorporated into the town's comprehensive plan. Likewise, the policy recommendations stemming from this activity (in tandem with the town's Community Planning Advisory Group (CPAG)) should be incorporated into the town's future efforts, after further vetting and deliberation by the council and planning commission.

The late winter and early spring were devoted to survey development. In May, the town hosted a sustainability workshop and kickoff meeting. By June, the survey had been tabulated, and the CPAG had been formed and met several times, fleshing out broad policy proposals introduced at the public workshop. Finally, in September, a second workshop and public input session were held. Key updates were 1) the final survey results and 2) a summary of proposed policy prescriptions to address sustainability.

Context and Previous Efforts

South Bethany has been pursuing sustainability efforts for quite some time. Most recently, the town retained GMB Architects/Engineers to complete a Resiliency Implementation Plan (March 2023). The GMB report compiled the outcomes of previous engineering studies and discussed recommendations for raising bulkheads, streets, and other hard infrastructure projects the town is considering. The town's Resiliency Committee continues to advance discussion and study of the complex issues surrounding raising bulkheads and streets and other flood mitigation efforts. Also, the report's primary author, Brent R. Jett, P.E., CFM, CC-P, remained involved in both public workshops associated with the present effort, presenting at each, and attended select CPAG meetings. In fact, the sustainability initiative described in this document could easily be seen as the implementation of several recommendations from the GMB plan, most notably, "Within the next year, a committee should be formed to deal with Resiliency, Sea Level Rise, Climate Change, and Hazard Mitigation within the Town of South Bethany" (2023, p. 21).

South Bethany's 2025 Resiliency Planning Initiative was conceived and designed to maximize community engagement and to begin to develop a broad and enduring consensus on a cross section of policy options for sustainability.

South Bethany residents were actively and enthusiastically engaged throughout the process. The survey response was well above what IPA typically encounters. All in-person and virtual deliberations were characterized as informed, constructive, honest, and focused. Residents were sober about the impending challenges and realistic about the impact that policies and activities from their tiny stretch of the Delmarva Peninsula would likely have.

In general, it is probably fair to say that participants:

- Recognized that this initiative did not encompass, consider, or explore every conceivable approach to municipal sustainability.
- Understood that the policies of much larger agencies and governments (not to mention the incredible forces of nature) would, ultimately, shape the future of the coastline.
- Felt an obligation and a responsibility to develop and implement practical and empirically supported solutions to the town’s most observed issues.
- The most common issue, put simply, was flooding.

A survey gathered over 400 responses in the spring and summer of 2025. The results were straightforward and consistent. Residents were concerned about flooding. Not everyone reported being affected, but solid majorities reported impacts on their properties or travel routes.

The survey also noted potential policy approaches. Some were adaptations of approaches considered by other coastal municipalities. Some were suggestions from the GMB study. Obviously, the list of potential approaches was not, and could not have been, inclusive of all possibilities. Still, the results gave the CPAG a starting point. All received considerable support, with the top three being limiting impervious surface, encouraging trees and vegetation, and creating a sustainability reserve fund. The full survey results are detailed in the next section.

Ultimately, the group reached a consensus on several draft recommendations.

Regarding Impervious Surfaces

- Strengthen the existing definitions of “impervious” and “permeable materials” to include a list of approved materials.
- Avoid the need for soil or infiltration testing on individual lots.
- Consider stricter impervious regulations for future new developments or major redevelopments.
- Amend existing codes to require a 55 percent permeable/pervious requirement for **each** setback, adjusted from the current wording of **total setback area**.
- Develop a list of best management practices regarding impervious surfaces and stormwater management that are considered most effective and palatable for South

Bethany residents. These could eventually serve as a baseline for a property-owner recognition program or future municipal ordinances.

- Consider requiring driveways to be permeable or at least prohibiting asphalt and concrete.
- Amend the nonconforming regulations to limit the grandfathering exception for non-compliant driveways—eventually seeing impervious parking replaced with more sustainable designs, but triggered by major renovations or disaster recovery, so as not to be overly burdensome to homeowners.
- Amend the ordinance to add a maximum driveway width measured at the right-of-way line.

Regarding a Sustainability Fund

- A recognition that South Bethany has reserve funds established for 1) capital needs, 2) asset replacement, and 3) four months of emergency operation.
- A desire to establish two funds: one specifically for short-term municipal needs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and one to fund future mitigation projects.
- A recommendation to formalize what constitutes a “disaster” severe enough to justify tapping the fund.
- A recommendation to define what each of the funds can and cannot be used for.
- A recommendation to task the budget and finance committee to determine potential revenue sources to establish and grow the funds.

The subsequent sections of this report review the results of the municipal survey in some detail. They also provide overviews of the presentations given at the spring and fall 2025 public engagement sessions, as well as characterizing the group discussions at each. Likewise, the deliberative presentations to the CPAG and summary characterizations of those deliberations are provided. In all instances, audio or video links to the meetings are included.

South Bethany Community Response Survey Summary

Background

Throughout the spring and early summer of 2025, the Town of South Bethany administered a survey to its residents. The survey aimed to understand what the South Bethany community would like to accomplish through a new coastal resiliency plan.

The survey was undertaken as part of a broad public engagement effort, with the support of its consultant, the Institute for Public Administration at the University of Delaware. The survey was the first component of the outreach effort, which ultimately included two public workshops, five virtual working group meetings, three sessions with the Community Planning Advisory Group (CPAG), and a handful of smaller staff sessions.

The survey asked respondents:

1. To self-classify as full-time, part-time, summer only, rental owner, etc.
2. How long have they lived/owned in South Bethany
3. What street do they live on
4. What coastal or bay issues may affect them
5. Their opinion on how much the town is impacted by these issues
6. How frequently they felt impacted by flooding
7. Their preferred source of information for flooding and emergency preparedness information
8. What they like most about the town
9. Their familiarity with “coastal resilience” as a concept
10. Their level of support for a variety of potential policy options
 - a. Impervious surface and stormwater considerations
 - b. The creation of a resilience fund
 - c. Freeboard/elevation requirements
 - d. Allowing homeowners to raise bulkheads
 - e. Incentives for tree preservation, native plants, and salt-tolerant plants
 - f. Raising the height of vulnerable roadways
11. Other issues/suggestions

Survey Responses

The survey received just over 420 responses. Anecdotally, this is a remarkable response. The town’s full-time population was listed as 451 at the last full-count census in 2020. Obviously, as a resort community, the municipality’s population surges in the summertime, but no matter how one looks at it, it was an impressive response, given that the total number of residences in town stands at

1,335. The total of 422 does not hold for all queries, however. Fields were sometimes left blank. In some instances, valid responses drop as low as the 380s.

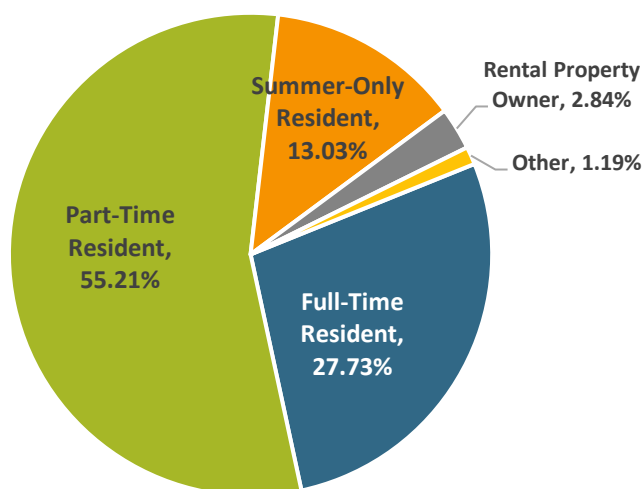
Q1. Type of Resident

Part-time residents made up the majority of respondents, with full-timers comprising a bit over a quarter. In most cases, these were the only classes of residency suitable for further breakdown across varied issues and policies.

Table 1. Summary of Survey Responses to Question 1: Type of Resident

Residency Status	Count	Percentage
Part-time resident	233	55.21%
Full-time resident	117	27.73%
Rental property owner	12	2.84%
Summer-only resident	55	13.03%
Other	5	1.19%
Total	422	100%

Figure 1. South Bethany Residency by Type



Q2. How Long Have You Owned?

It was more difficult to tabulate how long survey respondents had owned property in South Bethany. Not everyone answered, and though the survey anticipated responses to be an integer (i.e., 12 years), this was not always the case. Some responded, “since 1984,” or spelled out the number of years. These could be closely converted into a set number of years. A handful of responses were given as “at least 30 years” or similar. In these cases, the response was assigned as 30 years. The responses range from 0.67 years (8 months) to 64 years (“Since 1960”). Common values include 5, 7, 20, 25, and 40 years, with many responses derived from purchase years (e.g., 1983 = 41 years).

Visualizations were not especially useful for this question. Instead, we elected to present the mean, median, and mode. On average (mean), respondents had lived/owned in South Bethany for **21.49 years**. The median figure was **20 years**. The most common response given was **5 years**.

These figures do not necessarily represent the population (full or part-time) of South Bethany. They are simply a reflection of who chose to respond to the survey. **Clearly, the average shows us that many respondents have lived or owned in South Bethany for a good chunk of time.** Long-time residents were clearly very responsive. Overall, the methodology was somewhat conservative. In a number of instances, respondents indicated that their family had owned the home for many decades, but clarified that they, personally, took ownership more recently. In these instances, the default is personal ownership. In other cases, respondents said “at least x-number of years.” The analysis used the most conservative number. However, newer residents also made up a significant proportion of respondents, as evidenced by the strong cohort of roughly five years.

Table 2. Frequency Table of Property Ownership Durations in South Bethany

Duration Range (Years)	Count
0–5	61
5–10	81
10–15	54
15–20	36
20–25	60
25–30	46
30–35	31
35–40	29
40–45	17
>45	7
Total	422

Notes: The table is based on 422 valid responses to the question: “How long have you owned your South Bethany property?” Durations were grouped into 5-year intervals, with durations exceeding 45 years combined into the “>45 Years” category. The mode (most frequent duration) is 5 years, with 32 occurrences, falling within the 5–10-year bin.

Q3. What Street Do You Live On?

South Bethany has several unofficial “neighborhoods,” and there is certainly a distinction between the bay side and the ocean side. The survey requested respondents’ street of residence to ensure it captured input from all areas. Even though the response rate was very strong, the sample size was not large enough to detect statistically significant differences between geographic areas.

The figure and frequency table below detail the response numbers by street. In both figures, all streets with fewer than five recorded responses are either not depicted or grouped under “other” to preserve the measure of anonymity one would expect in an unsigned survey.

Overall, there seemed to be more engagement from the central and western areas of town than from the eastern (ocean) side.

Figure 2. Table and Map of Frequency of Survey Respondents by Street Name

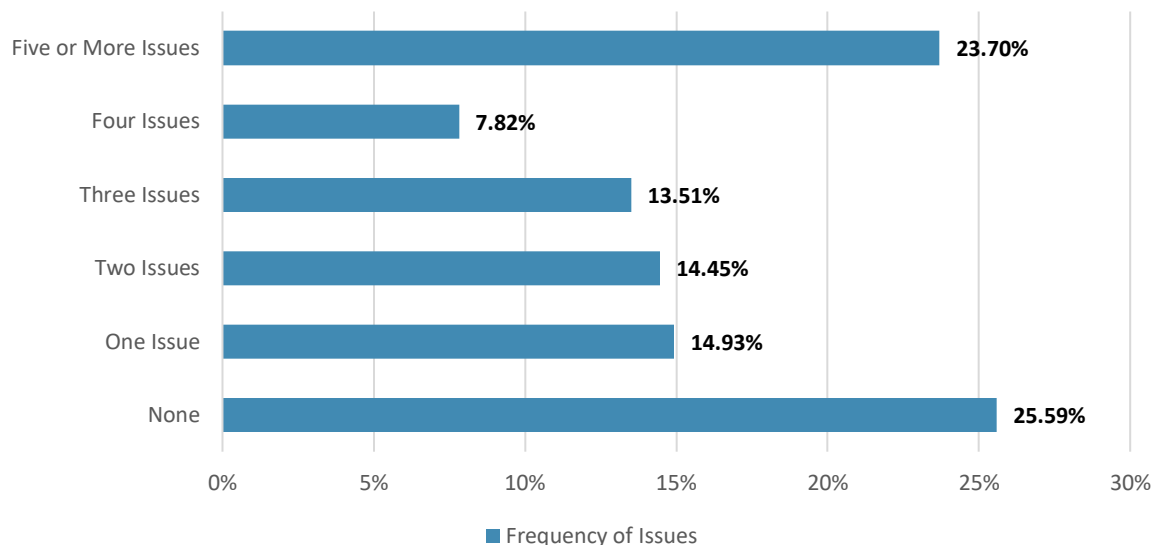
Street Name	Count	Percentage
Anchorage	34	9.37%
Bayshore	33	9.09%
Tamarack	25	6.89%
Black Gum	22	6.06%
York	21	5.79%
Layton	18	4.96%
Elizabeth	17	4.68%
Petherton	15	4.13%
Henlopen	14	3.86%
New Castle	13	3.58%
South Ocean	13	3.58%
Carlisle	10	2.75%
Periwinkle	9	2.48%
Victoria	9	2.48%
West 1st	7	1.93%
South 9th	6	1.65%
Bristol	6	1.65%
Cattail	5	1.38%
South Anchorage	5	1.38%
West 8th	5	1.38%
Other	76	20.94%
Total	363	100%



Q4. What Coastal or Back Bay Issues Are You Dealing With?

There were 422 responses to the question: “What coastal/back bay issues are you currently dealing with?” Respondents could list none, one, or multiple issues, with responses varying in format and detail. Responses such as “none,” “none of the above,” “N/A,” and “unsure” were grouped into a single “None” category. Each response was analyzed to count the number of distinct issues reported.

Figure 3. Number of Back Bay Issues by Frequency



The table below summarizes the number of respondents reporting each classification of coastal/back-bay issues, along with the percentage of total responses.

Table 3. Number of Issues Reported

Number of Issues Reported	Count	Percentage
Five or More Issues	100	23.7%
Four Issues	33	7.8%
Three Issues	57	13.5%
Two Issues	61	14.5%
One Issue	63	14.9%
None	108	25.6%
Total	422	100%

Notes: Total Responses: 422 valid responses were analyzed.

Grouping of "None" Responses: Responses explicitly stating "none," "none of the above," "N/A," or "unsure" were categorized as "None," totaling 108 responses.

Counting Issues: Each distinct issue mentioned (e.g., "Increased property flooding," "Sea level rise," "Overtopping of bulkheads") was counted as one issue. Narrative responses (e.g., "People are removing every single tree when clearing a lot for building") were treated as a single issue unless multiple distinct issues were clearly listed.

Following a preliminary presentation of survey findings, the **Community Planning and Advisory group wondered whether there was an identifiable difference between the various types of respondents (most notably full- and part-time)**. The concern was that residents who were not present year-round might under-report impacts. This does not appear to be the case with part-time residents, though summer residents, in a very limited sample, did show this trend.

Table 4. Number of Issues Reported by Type of Survey Respondent

Number of Issues Reported	Full Time		Part Time		Summer	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Five or More Issues	21	17.8%	51	21.9%	12	22.6%
Four Issues	11	9.3%	20	8.6%	2	3.8%
Three Issues	17	14.4%	34	14.6%	6	11.3%
Two Issues	18	15.3%	35	15.0%	6	11.3%
One Issue	19	16.1%	36	15.5%	8	15.1%
None	32	27.1%	57	24.6%	19	35.9%
Total	118	100%	233	100%	53	100%

Notes: Total Responses: 404 valid responses are displayed for both coastal/back bay issues and residency type. Sample sizes for “business” and “weekend only” were too small to yield reliable results.

Figure 4. Number of Issues Reported by Type of Survey Respondent

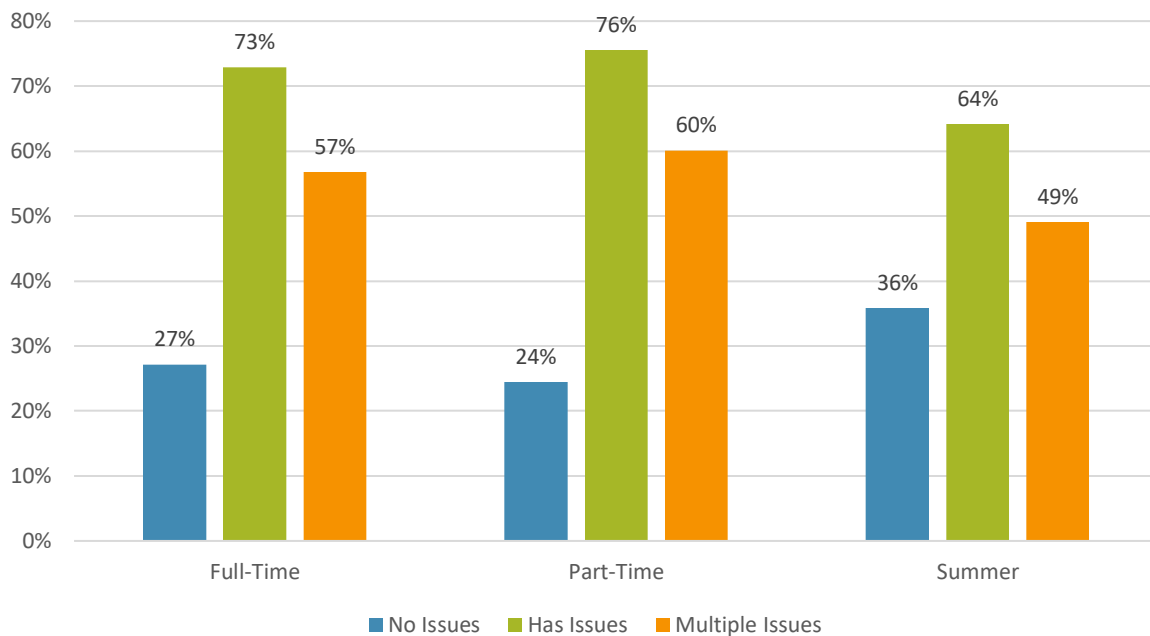
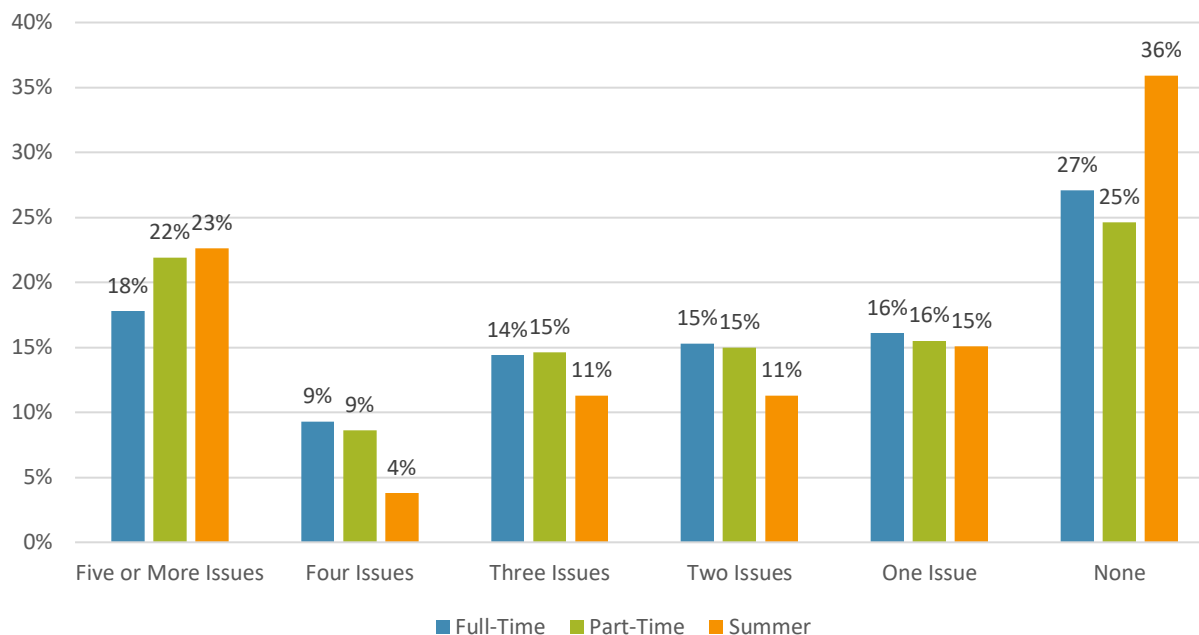


Figure 5. Number of Issues Reported by Type of Survey Respondent



In a follow-up question, property flooding, roadway flooding, none, and overtopping of bulkheads were the most prevalent. The table below summarizes the frequency of each identified coastal/back bay issue, including the percentage of total items (560) that mentioned each issue. Issues with fewer than five mentions are grouped as “Other.”

Table 5. Frequency of Each Identified Coastal Back Bay Issue

Issue Type	Count	Percentage
Increased roadway flooding	132	23.6%
Increased property flooding	121	21.6%
None	108	19.3%
Overtopping of bulkheads	83	14.8%
Storm surges	46	8.2%
Sea level rise	42	7.5%
Damage to infrastructure	17	3.0%
Other	11	2%

Notes: Total Responses: 422 valid responses were analyzed.
 Grouping of “None” Responses: Responses explicitly stating “none,” “none of the above,” “N/A,” or “unsure” were categorized as “None,” totaling 108 responses.
 Other Category: The “Other” category includes issues with fewer than 5 mentions, such as “Algae in canal” (2), “Canal depth/dredging issues” (2), “Neighbor-related runoff/riprap issues” (2), “Standing water in yard” (1), “Tree removal increasing flooding” (1), “Street light pollution” (1), “Clogged street drains/silted drainage pipes” (1), “Lack of drainage at intersection with Rt 1” (1), “Wetland flooding encroachment” (1), and “Lack of enforced rules for yard maintenance” (1), totaling 11 mentions.

Q5. Perceived Scope of Coastal/Back Bay Issues in South Bethany

The dataset contains 422 responses to the question: “In your opinion, how much of your town is affected by these coastal/back bay issues?” Responses were categorized into five distinct groups. The categories are:

1. My property is not affected, but I am aware of the issues
2. I am unsure
3. My property is affected, with minimal impact beyond
4. My property is affected, and the impact is widespread in my neighborhood
5. My property is affected, and the impact is affecting a significant portion of the town, including my property
6. My property is affected, and the issues are affecting the entire town

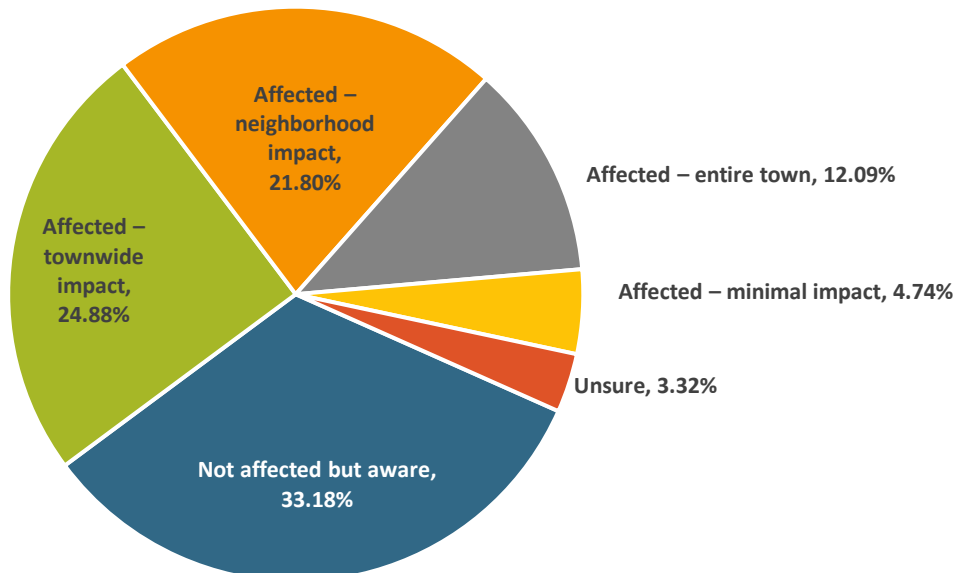
Responses were analyzed to determine the frequency of each category, and percentages were calculated as the proportion of respondents in each category relative to the total 422 responses. The table below summarizes the frequency of each perceived scope of coastal/back bay issues, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 6. Frequency of Perceived Scope for Coastal/Back Bay Issue

Issue Type	Count	Percentage
Not affected but aware	140	33.2%
Affected – townwide impact	105	24.9%
Affected – neighborhood impact	92	21.8%
Affected – entire town	51	12.1%
Affected – minimal impact	20	4.7%
Unsure	14	3.3%
Total	422	100%

Notes: Total Responses: 422 valid responses were analyzed. Single response per respondent. Percentages based on total respondents.

Figure 6. Frequency of Perceived Scope for Coastal/Back Bay Issue



Again, examining any potential disparity between various types of responding residents, most notably full- and part-time, there did not appear to be a significant difference aside from the previously noted tendency of seasonal residents to skew more toward the edges.

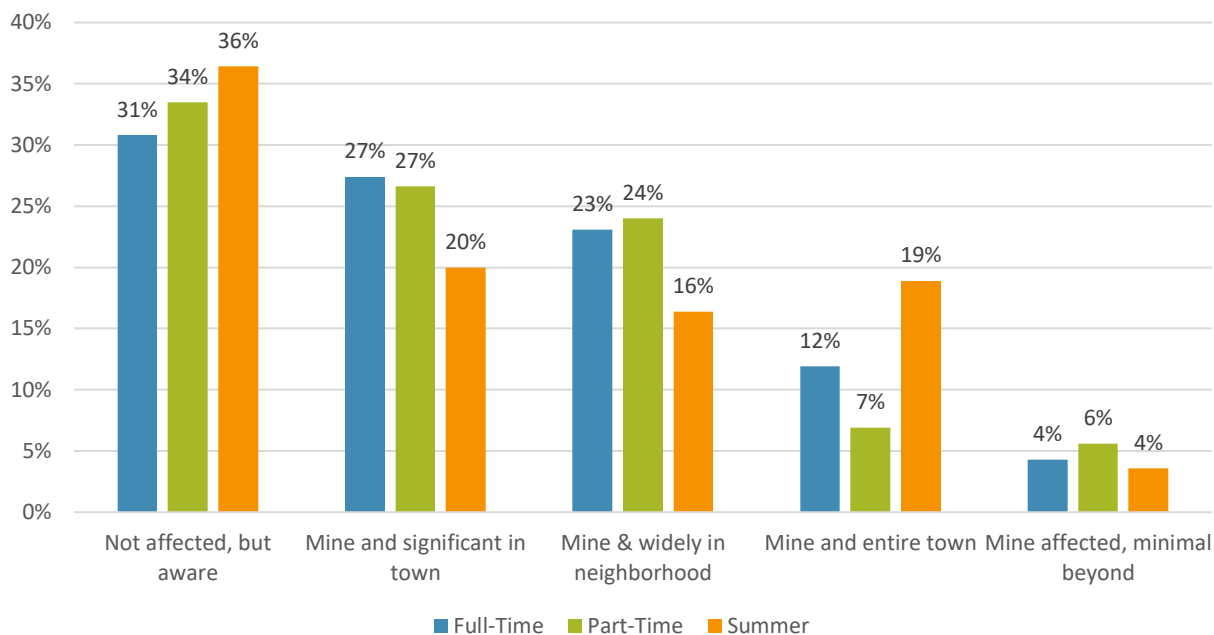
The table below summarizes the frequency of each perceived scope of coastal/back bay issues by residency type (full-time resident, part-time resident, summer-only resident), including the percentage of respondents within each residency type.

Table 7. Frequency of Perceived Scope for Coastal/Back Bay Issue

Perceived Scope of Issues	Full Time		Part Time		Summer	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Not affected, but aware	36	30.8%	78	33.5%	20	36.4%
I am unsure	3	2.6%	8	3.4%	3	5.5%
Mine affected, minimal beyond	5	4.3%	13	5.6%	2	3.6%
Mine & widely in neighborhood	27	23.1%	56	24.0%	9	16.4%
Mine and significant in town	32	27.4%	62	26.6%	11	20.0%
Mine and entire town	14	11.9%	16	6.9%	10	18.9%
Total	117	100%	233	100%	55	100%

Notes: Total Responses: 405 valid responses were analyzed after omitting Rental Property Owner (9 respondents) and Other (7 respondents), leaving Full-time resident (117), Part-time resident (233), and Summer-only resident (55).

Figure 7. Frequency of Perceived Scope for Coastal/Back Bay Issue



Responses from self-identified full- and part-time residents were very similar. Some variance was observed for summer-only respondents. These generally tended to be more likely to report “not affected.”

Q6. Perceived Frequency of Flooding Severe Enough to Impede Access to Property

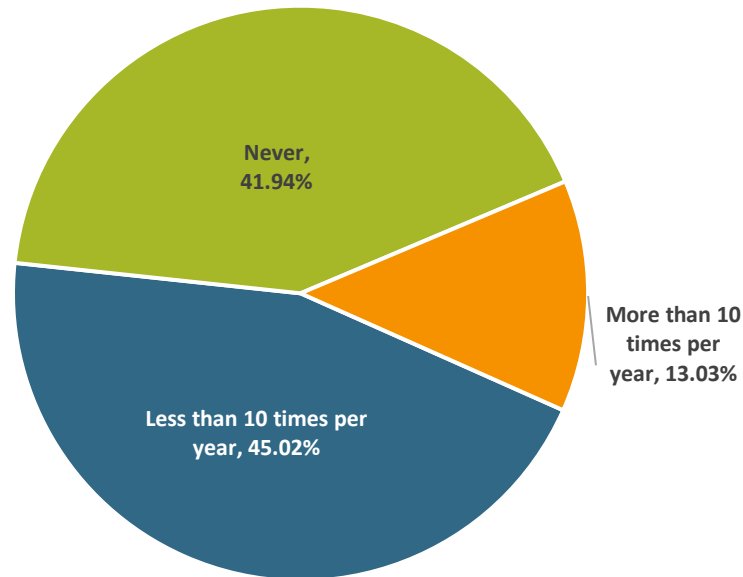
The table below characterizes responses to how frequently residents experienced roadway flooding severe enough to impact their ability to access their property. After reviewing the preliminary data, committee members wondered if the question’s wording may have been perceived as a “higher bar” than, perhaps, intended. In particular, the phrase, “that impedes access to your property,” was questioned. Obviously, the respondent’s choice of vehicle, physical ability, personal risk tolerance, and residency status could all potentially play a role.

Table 8. Perceived Frequency of Access-Impeding Flooding

Flooding Frequency	Count	Percentage
Less than 10 times per year	190	45.0%
Never	177	41.9%
More than 10 times per year	55	13.0%
Total	422	100%

Notes: Total Responses: 422 valid responses were analyzed. Single response per respondent. Access-Impeding flooding refers to flooding that blocks or impedes access to property.

Figure 8. Perceived Frequency of Access-Impeding Flooding



Over 45 percent of respondents reported encountering flooding significant enough to impede access to their property between one and ten times per year. Fully 13 percent reported flooding of this severity ten or more times per year. Conversely, 42 percent of respondents reported never encountering flooding of that magnitude.

Perhaps a question with less strict qualifications would have resulted in fewer “never” responses. Still, as asked, nearly 60 percent of South Bethany respondents reported encountering relatively severe roadway flooding multiple times each year—severe enough to impede access to their property.

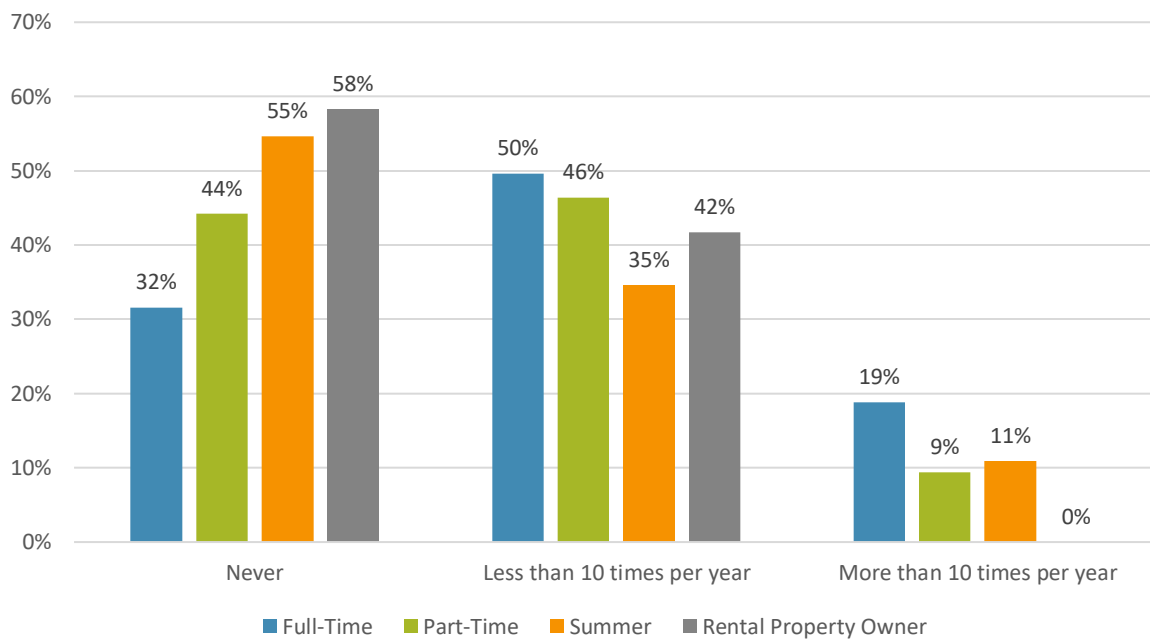
Moreover, the respondent's residency type appeared to correlate with the seriousness and frequency of perceived flooding. The possibility of part-time, summer-only, or otherwise less-present residents under-observing or under-reporting issues or impacts was a question some residents raised after reviewing the preliminary results. With other survey questions, there did not appear to be a significant difference. However, there is a perceivable difference regarding flooding impacts.

Table 9. Perceived Frequency of Flooding by Residency Type

Flooding Frequency	Full Time		Part Time		Summer		Rental Property Owner	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Never	37	31.6%	103	44.2%	30	54.6%	7	58.3%
Less than 10 times per year	58	49.6%	108	46.4%	19	34.6%	5	41.7%
More than 10 times per year	22	18.8%	22	9.4%	6	10.9%	0	0%
Total	117	100%	233	100%	55	100	12	100%

Notes: Total Responses: 417 valid responses were analyzed.

Figure 9. Perceived Frequency of Flooding by Residency Type



Full-time residents were significantly less likely to report “never” encountering access-impeding flooding than part-time or summer-only respondents. They were also the most likely to report flooding in both provided categories. “Never” increases as respondents report spending less time in town. Aside from a very small sample of rental property owners, reports of flooding decreased relative to the amount of time the various classes of resident would be expected to be present.

Q7. Sources of Information Used for Flood Information and Emergency Response

The table below summarizes the frequency of each identified source of information for flooding risk and emergency preparedness, including the percentage of total mentions (460).

Taken together, the town’s website and NOAA accounted for roughly 88 percent of all mentions. The next most chosen was “other.” Local news received less than two percentage points.

Table 10. Sources of Information Used for Flood Information and Emergency Response

Information Source	Number of Mentions	Percentage
South Bethany Website/Communications	297	64.6%
NOAA/Weather Services	108	23.5%
DNREC's I-ADAPT Tool	12	2.6%
Local News (TV, Radio, Newspapers)	8	1.7%
Neighbors/Word of Mouth	5	1.1%
FEMA	2	0.4%
Other	16	3.5%
None	12	2.6%
Total Mentions	460	100%

Notes:

Total Responses: 422 valid responses were analyzed, yielding 460 total source mentions.

Categorization: Responses were grouped into common themes based on key terms. For example:

“South Bethany website,” “S. Bethany emails,” “South Bethany Instagram,” “SBPOA notifications,” and “Emails from Board members” were combined into the “South Bethany Website/Communications” category. “NOAA,” “Weather Bug,” “Weather app,” “The Weather Channel,” and “Accu-Weather” were combined into the “NOAA/Weather Services” category. “Local news,” “WBOC TV and radio,” “Coastal Point,” and “local TV News/weather” were combined into the “Local News (TV, Radio, Newspapers)” category. “Neighbors,” “Neighborhood Watch,” and “Word of mouth” were combined into the “Neighbors/Word of Mouth” category.

Other Category: Includes less frequent or unique sources (each mentioned by fewer than 2 respondents), such as “I look out my window,” “my cameras on site,” “Tidal flooding chart,” “Call Town hall,” “Flood level info,” “USGAS,” “General news feeds,” “Internet search,” “FirstStreet.org,” “Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Co.,” “Homeowners insurance website,” “Weather emails,” “Facebook groups,” “Conversations,” and “My own knowledge,” totaling 16 mentions.

None Category: Includes responses explicitly stating “None,” “no idea,” “Have never researched,” or “Above choices are inadequate,” totaling 12 mentions.

Q8. What Do You Like Most About South Bethany?

Respondents provided free-text answers, often listing multiple features they appreciated about the town. To arrive at common themes, the researchers made some judgment calls. Similar terms were grouped (e.g., “quiet,” “peaceful,” “serenity” as “Quiet/Peaceful Atmosphere”; “small town feel,” “quaint,” “hometown feel” as “Small Town Feel/Quaint”).

The table below summarizes the frequency of each most-liked feature in South Bethany, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 11. Frequency of Feature Liked Most About South Bethany

Feature Liked Most About South Bethany	Count	Percentage
Quiet/Peaceful Atmosphere	174	25.7%
Small Town Feel/Quaint	107	15.8%
Beach/Ocean Access	105	15.5%
Friendly Neighbors/Community	80	11.8%
Canals/Bay/Water Access	62	9.2%
Family-Oriented Atmosphere	39	5.8%
Lack of Commercialization	25	3.7%
Natural Environment/Wildlife	24	3.6%
Proximity to Amenities (e.g., restaurants, shops)	12	1.8%
Cleanliness/Well-Maintained	11	1.6%
Safety	9	1.3%
Low Taxes	4	0.6%
Limited Parking/Controlled Access	4	0.6%
Other	20	3%
Total Mentions	676	100%

Notes

Total Responses: 676 valid mentions were analyzed.

Other Category: Includes less frequent features (each mentioned by fewer than 4 respondents), such as “low crowds,” “bike-friendly,” “great town government,” “memories,” “bird sanctuary,” “trees/pine trees,” “dark skies/no street lights,” and other unique mentions, totaling 20 mentions.

Respondents clearly valued their peace, followed closely by a small-town aesthetic, family, and friends. Of course, the beach, or perhaps water access in general, was highly prized.

Q9. Familiarity with the Term “Coastal Resilience?”

The table below summarizes the frequency of each familiarity rating for the term “Coastal Resilience,” including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 12. Frequency of Familiarity for the Term “Coastal Resilience”

Familiarity Rating	Count	Percentage
1 (Least Familiar)	87	20.6%
2	85	20.1%
3	113	26.8%
4	76	18.0%
5 (Most Familiar)	61	14.5%
Total	422	100%

Responses were very middle of the road about familiarity with “Coastal Resilience.” Slightly more respondents indicated very little familiarity (1–2) with the term than those who felt familiar or very familiar (4–5). All available demographic information suggest residents are highly educated and very unlikely to not understand the concept; rather, they may have expected the term to represent a standardized methodology or approach to sustainability planning in coastal areas.

Q. 10a. To What Extent Would You Support: Limiting Surfaces on Individual Lots That Do Not Allow Water to Infiltrate into the Ground (also known as Impervious Surfaces)

The table below summarizes the frequency of each level of support for limiting impervious surfaces, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 13. Frequency of Level of Support for Limiting Impervious Surfaces

Support Level	Count	Percentage
1 (Least Support)	18	4.3%
2	29	6.9%
3	79	18.7%
4	104	24.6%
5 (Most Support)	192	45.5%
Total	422	100%

The potential limitation of impervious surfaces was a popular response. Opposition to the policy was muted, and a considerable percentage of respondents gave it the most enthusiastic level of support available on the scale provided.

Q. 10b. To What Extent Would You Support: The Creation of a Reserve Fund?

The table below summarizes the frequency of each level of support for the creation of a reserve fund, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 14. Frequency of Level of Support for Creation of a Reserve Fund

Support Level	Count	Percentage
1 (Least Support)	16	3.9%
2	29	6.9%
3	86	20.4%
4	112	26.5%
5 (Most Support)	179	42.4%
Total	422	100%

The potential creation of a reserve (or sustainability) fund was also a relatively well-received policy suggestion. As with limitations of impervious surfaces, nearly 70 percent of

respondents ranked a sustainability fund with the highest or second-highest level of support available.

Q. 10c. To What Extent Would You Support: Requiring Property Owners to Incorporate Freeboard in New Construction or Redevelopment?

The table below summarizes the frequency of each level of support for requiring freeboard in new construction or redevelopment, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 15. Frequency of Level of Support for Requiring Freeboard in New Construction or Redevelopment

Support Level	Count	Percentage
1 (Least Support)	22	5.2%
2	35	8.3%
3	85	20.1%
4	107	25.4%
5 (Most Support)	173	41.0%
Total	422	100%

The incorporation of freeboard was supported by roughly two-thirds of respondents. A slightly higher percentage reported being opposed or indifferent, as compared to impervious surfaces and a reserve fund.

Q. 10d. To What Extent Would You Support: Permit Owners to Raise Their Bulkheads to a Designated Height?

The table below summarizes the frequency of each level of support for permitting owners to raise their bulkheads to a designated height, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 16. Frequency of Level of Support for Permitting Owners to Raise Their Bulkheads

Support Level	Count	Percentage
1 (Least Support)	17	4.0%
2	28	6.6%
3	90	21.3%
4	115	27.3%
5 (Most Support)	172	40.8%
Total	422	100%

There was support for this policy option. **Fully 68 percent of respondents supported or strongly supported this policy option.**

Q. 10e. To What Extent Would You Support: Offering Incentives to Encourage Residents to Plant Trees, Native, and Salt-Tolerant Plants on Their Properties?

The table below summarizes the frequency of each level of support for offering incentives to encourage residents to plant trees, native, and salt-tolerant plants, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 17. Frequency of Level of Support for Offering Incentives to...

Support Level	Count	Percentage
1 (Least Support)	14	3.3%
2	31	7.4%
3	79	18.7%
4	111	26.3%
5 (Most Support)	187	44.3%
Total	422	100%

This policy option seems to have been the most broadly supported. Nearly 71 percent of respondents supported or strongly supported the concept, and barely ten percent opposed it.

Q. 10f. To What Extent Would You Support: Raising the Height of Vulnerable Roadways?

The table below summarizes the frequency of each level of support for raising the height of vulnerable roadways, including the percentage of total responses (422).

Table 18. Frequency of Level of Support for Raising the Height of Vulnerable Roadways

Support Level	Count	Percentage
1 (Least Support)	23	5.5%
2	34	8.1%
3	93	22.0%
4	112	26.6%
5 (Most Support)	160	37.9%
Total	422	100%

Raising vulnerable roadway heights was supported, but **slightly less enthusiastically than the other policy options presented**. About 64 percent of respondents supported or strongly supported the policy, while 22 percent were neutral, and over 13 percent indicated minimal or no support.

Policy Option Scoring

The table below summarizes the mean scores for each coastal resilience measure, ranked by overall mean, with breakdowns for full-time, part-time, and summer-only residents.

Table 19. Coastal Resilience Measure by Mean Score

Coastal Resilience Measure	Overall Mean	Full-time Mean	Part-time Mean	Summer Mean
Limiting Impervious Surfaces (Question 10)	4.05	4.11	4.02	4.03
Offering Incentives for Planting Trees/Native Plants (Question 14)	4.01	4.06	3.98	4.02
Creation of a Reserve Fund (Question 11)	3.97	4.01	3.95	3.91
Permitting Owners to Raise Bulkheads (Question 13)	3.94	3.98	3.92	3.84
Requiring Freeboard in New Construction/Redevelopment (Question 12)	3.89	3.93	3.87	3.84
Raising the Height of Vulnerable Roadways (Question 15)	3.83	3.91	3.79	3.84

Notes:

Total Responses: 422 valid responses were analyzed overall; 406 responses were analyzed for residency breakdowns (107 Full-time, 242 Part-time, 57 Summer-only).

Calculation: Mean scores were computed as the sum of response values (1–5) divided by the number of responses (422 for overall, 107 for Full-time, 242 for Part-time, 57 for Summer-only), rounded to 2 decimal places.

Overall, and across all statistically significant residency classes, the policy options presented in the survey rank in the order listed above. Moreover, even the least supported option, “raising the height of vulnerable roadways,” scored at very nearly a four. On the survey’s 1–5 scale, this would indicate relatively solid support.

There were perhaps some interesting observations to be made regarding policy preferences and the type of resident. However, in no case were the differences significant enough to change the base rank-order, indicating no detectable difference in the priorities and preferred policy options of full-time, part-time, or summer-only residents. Generally, full-time residents were marginally more supportive of all potential policies than part-time or summer-only residents. This was most notable among full-time residents’ support for roadway height, compared with all respondents. Still, the policy option remained least favored by full-time residents.

Q11. Other Suggestions

The responses highlight a range of resiliency and flood-prevention methods, with a significant portion of respondents either unsure or not providing specific suggestions. The most frequently mentioned methods include wetland restoration, living shorelines, sea walls, and earthen berms, reflecting the survey’s prompted examples. Other suggestions focus on improving drainage infrastructure, raising bulkheads uniformly, and limiting new development or impervious surfaces. Some respondents emphasized cost-effectiveness, environmental considerations, and the need for expert studies or regional cooperation. Key themes include:

- **Wetland Restoration** (23.7%): Frequently suggested, often paired with living shorelines, to enhance natural flood barriers and protect ecosystems
- **Living Shorelines** (15.2%): Proposed as a natural approach to stabilize coastlines and reduce erosion
- **Sea Walls** (12.3%): Suggested for physical flood protection, though some noted aesthetic or environmental concerns
- **Earthen Berms** (11.4%): Advocated for creating barriers along vulnerable areas like York Road
- **Improved Drainage/Storm Drains** (7.6%): Suggestions included clearing drainage grates, adding backflow preventers, and enhancing storm drain systems
- **Raising Bulkheads** (6.6%): Often recommended with a uniform height standard to prevent uneven flooding impacts
- **None/Unsure** (33.7%): A significant portion of respondents were unsure, lacked expertise, or provided no specific suggestions
- **Other** (11.8%): Includes less frequent suggestions like dredging canals, installing flood gates, using pumps, limiting lot fill, enforcing building codes, and exploring offshore jetties or wave mitigation devices

Meeting Summaries

May Kickoff Meeting

The meeting began with Mayor Dondero explaining the project’s inception and schedule, as laid out in the introduction to this document. The group then heard from Brent R. Jett, P.E., CFM, CC-P, of GMB Architects/Engineers.

Sea Level Rise Primer—Brent R. Jett, P.E., CFM, CC-P



Sea Level Rise Primer

“The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired, in value.” Theodore Roosevelt, 1907

Mr. Jett’s full presentation may be accessed on the town’s website at <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/2025/05/23/may-15-2025-univ-of-de-community-planning-meeting-presentations/>

A video of the entirety of the proceeding is also hosted by the town at <https://youtu.be/v1YO5SESJDk?si=ZvMoJRiGo0CD5kZI>

Mr. Jett shared alarming projections for potential levels of sea level rise, emphasizing the variance of the myriad projection’s reliability but grounded in the observable certainty that the seas are, in fact, rising. He evidenced this by comparing projected and actual tidal levels, noting a number of instances where the actual low tide for a set time and location routinely exceeded the projected high tide. He went on to outline the driving causes of sea level rise in coastal areas.

How Much Flooding to Expect?

- Nuisance? Problem?

High Tide Flood Days	Number of Days
2000	4
2020	8
2024	21
2030 projected	15-30
2050 projected	50-135

He concluded the flooding discussion referencing a figure from his firm’s study (above) illustrating the dramatic increase in the number of high-tide flood days expected; from dozens of days a year to approximately as much as a third of the year in the coming decades. Obviously, the impacts of this projected severity and frequency of flooding would be substantial, as he detailed in another slide.

What Effects Does SLR Have on South Bethany?

- Threat Multiplier
- Impacts our connection to nature
- Affects Insurance; rates, availability, coverages
- Saltwater intrusion to upland area
- Intense Rainfalls lead to standing water and temporary flooding

Here he emphasized the threat to the very assets that make South Bethany so desirable, noting that climate change, in general, is multi-faceted and a threat multiplier. For example, a higher number of tidal flooding days exacerbated by rainfall events of increasing severity. Saltwater intrusion would eventually spoil upland soils and habitats. Unsustainably high insurance rates may increase costs of ownership beyond the capabilities of even its current, relatively affluent, residents. In subsequent slides, he shared illustrations of potential areas of inundation, which were considerable.

Before taking questions, Mr. Jett closed with a sobering assessment of where Delaware, Sussex County, and South Bethany rank, nationally, in their risk and susceptibility to climate disasters. The slide speaks for itself.

Lay of the Land...

- Delaware is #5 at-risk state to climate driven disasters by NOAA
 - hurricanes, floods, wildfires
- Delaware is #5 at-risk state by Climate Check
 - Precipitation, heat, fire, drought, flood
- Delaware is the lowest lying state in the Country.
- Sussex County is the lowest county in the state.
- Coastal Sussex is one the most vulnerable areas in the County to all climate impacts.
- Impacts affect all of South Bethany

There was an extensive question-and-answer (Q&A) period for Mr. Jett, much of which was residents taking advantage of his engineering expertise to better understand the technical aspects of various projections, definitions, and stormwater management concepts.

Residents were also interested in state or federal initiatives, particularly DelDOT's plans, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). There was a general recognition that the town's efforts, alone, would be insufficient.

Flooding Adaptation in South Bethany—Philip Barnes, Ph. D., Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration

Dr. Barnes' full presentation may be accessed on the town's website at <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/2025/05/23/may-15-2025-univ-of-de-community-planning-meeting-presentations/>

A video of the entirety of the proceeding is also hosted by the town at <https://youtu.be/v1YO5SESJdk?si=ZvMoJRiGo0CD5kZl>

Dr. Barnes began reframing the nature of the challenge facing South Bethany. Conceding that flooding was the obvious issue, he pivoted to challenge residents to build a consensus and find commonality between their varied perspectives. Dr. Barnes contended that the flooding, in and of itself, was a solvable problem, provided that community leaders chose to face it in a unified and consistent manner.

Different Types of Adaptation Strategies

- **Protect:** Soft or hard engineering designed to prevent flooding/damage
- **Accommodate:** Altering existing assets to reduce vulnerability to flood impacts
- **Avoid:** Not placing assets in areas exposed to flood impacts
- **Relocate:** Moving existing assets to areas that are less likely to be exposed to flooding

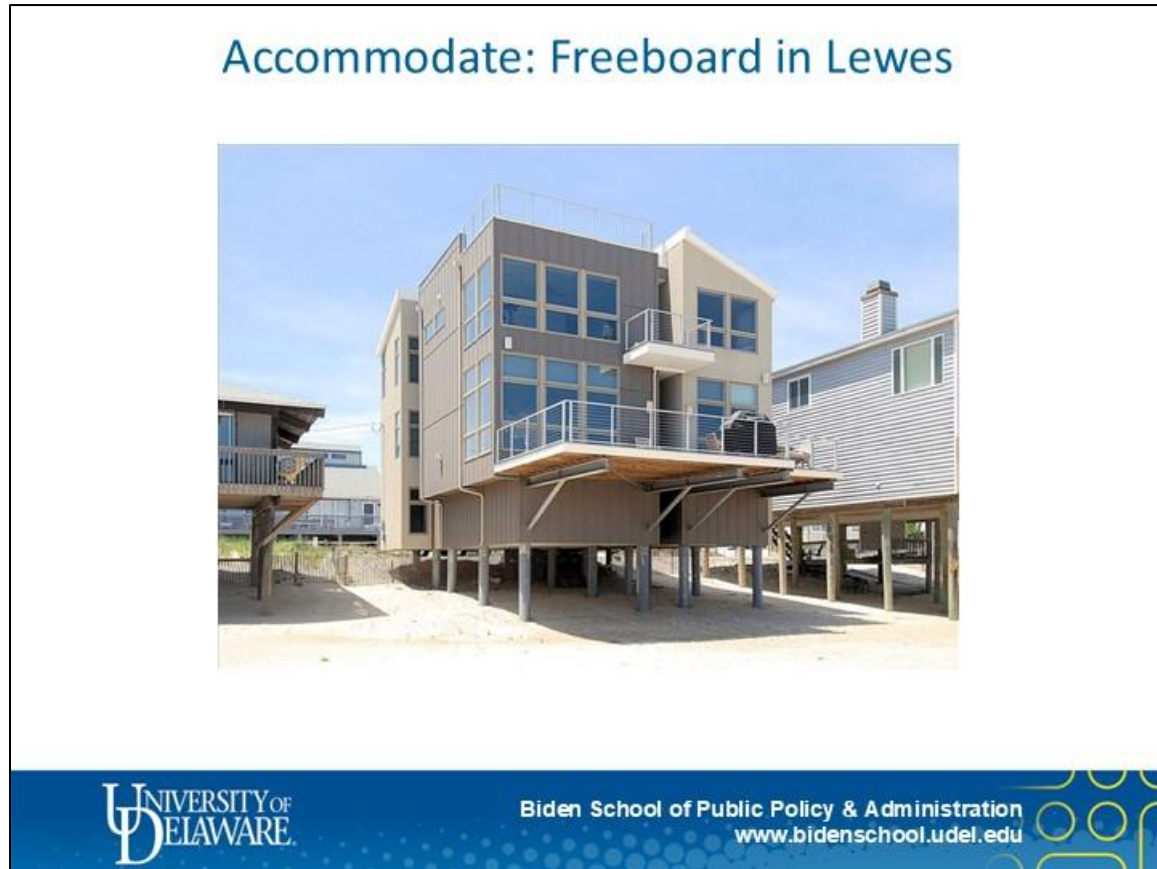
Butler, W. H., Deyle, R. E., Mutnansky, C. (2016). Low-regrets incrementalism: Land use planning adaptation to accelerating sea level rise in Florida's coastal communities. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 36 (3), 319-332.

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Facilitating this line of reasoning, Dr. Barnes walked attendees through some of the most common, high level, approaches to climate adaptation. In subsequent slides, he shared local and regional examples of each approach. Notable examples he shared were freeboard regulations in Lewes, allowing existing structures to accommodate climate impacts, the Bethany Beach Nature Center as evidence of that town's choice to avoid development all together in an extremely vulnerable area, and Bowers Beach's decision to relocate a Bocce Court from a flood-prone area.

Dr. Barnes explained that the upcoming policy discussion would likely fit into one or more of the "bucket" approaches outlined in his presentation. There was an extensive Q&A period for Dr. Barnes. Residents sought Dr. Barnes' opinions on possible approaches to local sustainability because of his obvious expertise and interest in the topic, but also because he was seen as a neutral, outside expert, not burdened by local politics or financial interests.

Dr. Barnes generally responded that there were no perfect solutions and that the “best” solution would only be revealed through skilled leadership, dedicated cooperation, and a willingness to not only agree academically on favored approaches, but to make the sacrifices and concessions necessary to implement favored policies.



South Bethany Community Response Survey Results—Kylie Tugend and Alexandria McClellan, Graduate Research Assistants, Joseph R. Biden, Jr. School of Public Policy and Administration


Ms. Tugend and Ms. McClellan were involved from the beginning of the project, crafting, revising, and analyzing the town’s survey data.

However, since they were presenting on “initial” findings midway through the data collection process, and because CHAPTER 5 discusses the final results in detail, the presentation is not recreated here.


Their full presentation may be accessed on the town’s website at <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/2025/05/23/may-15-2025-univ-of-de-community-planning-meeting-presentations/>

A video of the entirety of the proceeding is also hosted by the town at <https://youtu.be/v1YO5SESJDk?si=ZvMoJRiGo0CD5kZl>

Survey Overview



- As of April 30th, the Survey received 292 responses (more responses have been received since then)
- Survey gathered:
 - Basic geographical information about resident
 - Opinions on potential policy plans for the community based on a 1 (Do not use this strategy) to 5 (I would encourage use of this strategy)
- **The goal of the survey:** Gain an understanding of what the South Bethany Community would like to accomplish through a new Coastal Resiliency Plan

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Facilitated Discussion of South Bethany Policy Deliberation—William DeCoursey, IPA Associate Policy Scientist

Mr. DeCoursey and town leadership led the group through a brief review of the day and began a focused feedback session, aiming to explore attendees’ attitudes, preferences, and willingness to further engage. A video of the entirety of the proceeding is hosted by the town at <https://youtu.be/v1YO5SESJDk?si=ZvMoJRiGo0CD5kZl>. There were no formal slides.

After a question asking for a summary of the status of similar initiatives, committees, and grants, the group honed in. A rough outline of the questions discussed appears below, with a summary to follow.

- From an engineering perspective, and given our geography, where will excess runoff go?
- What bulkhead regulations are envisioned? How might they be applied?
- Relating to Dr. Barnes’ presentation, what “policy buckets” begin to address these concerns?
- What are the best ways to interface with larger governments and agencies (i.e., DNREC, USACE, Sussex County, DeIDOT)? How do we coordinate efforts? What assurance do we have that they will continue their work?
- Is the town able to meet the local match on desirable grants?
- Regarding street maintenance and adaptation, who is responsible?
- What are the policy preferences vs. fiscal impacts considerations? How does the town prioritize approaches, by impact at any price, or value for the dollar?
- Of the potential implementation items that have been tried by neighboring municipalities and those suggested by GMB, which make might work in South Bethany?
- What are the upcoming capital expenses and grants?
- Regarding bulkhead raising, will it occur all at once or be incremental?
- What’s the best implementation approach, enforce or incentivize?
- What tree and vegetative preservation options exist for stormwater control policy?
- What is the geographic reach of this collaboration?
- Who has succeeded that we may emulate?

Discussion Summary

- **Current Status** – A great deal of the discussion was centered around the status of ongoing initiatives. The town informs citizens of resiliency efforts through regular notices, minutes, agendas. Discussion participants wonder if there is more that needs to be done.
- What is this current effort? Where does it fit in with similar projects?
 - **Strategic pre-planning/policy prioritization**
 - IPA is a policy-based organization that also has a foundation in comprehensive planning.
 - Genesis of this project was the need to update the comprehensive plan.
 - Understanding that not much is likely to change regarding land-use and that the “big push” would likely be the resiliency element.
 - Reluctance to use the routine/rote/technical comp plan update process as the sole vehicle.
 - A desire to have greater and broader visibility, engagement, deliberation, and consensus before turning it over to the planning commission.
 - Project runs until late 2025. Remaining tasks:
 - A limited number of priority-specific zoom meetings (topics to be discussed today)
 - Wrap-up public workshop (flexible)

- Written report out on proceedings and summary of potential policy recommendations (presumably for inclusion in the comp plan).
- **Starting from scratch or following the leader?**
 - Attendees (and organizers) were equally vexed about how to present/frame the discussion.
 - South Bethany is, indeed, a pioneer community in its efforts and willingness to engage in sustainability planning. However, it is not the first.
 - To what extent should it innovate and break trail as opposed to capitalizing on the successes of others and emulate what makes sense?
 - This is one of the central questions this group will determine.

Policy-Specific Discussion

- **Policies surveyed/discussed:**
 - Limiting surfaces on individual lots that do not allow water to infiltrate into the ground (also known as impervious surfaces)
 - Creating a reserve fund that appropriates a portion of town revenue to be used solely for flood mitigation or other resiliency enhancing projects
 - Requiring property owners to incorporate freeboard in new construction or redevelopment
 - Increasing the permitted height to which owners may raise their bulkheads
 - Offering incentives to encourage residents to plant trees, native, and salt tolerant plants on their properties
 - Raising the height of vulnerable roadways

Characterization of Policy Discussion

A considerable portion of the discussion was devoted to **bulkheads**, including the efficacy of increasing the current permitted height and the myriad regulatory and logistical hurdles that would be involved, such as the need for buy-in from property owners.

The fiscal reality of South Bethany’s impending (and potential) fiscal obligations and the sometimes-staggering cost of resiliency related infrastructure projects led to a discussion on **grants**. On one hand, the town advised that the impacts of sea level rise are not a problem that South Bethany will be able to “grant its way out of.” However, there was also discussion on the size and scale of grants the town should pursue, particularly in light of the effort that can go into securing them. The natural trade-off discussed here was the much higher match required to secure grants of a scale that would be most appropriate to South Bethany compared to the likelihood of success for much more modest sums. While the town is fiscally stable, does it need a **resiliency fund** or designated revenue stream to support such efforts?

Freeboard was not discussed at length. The group was advised that there are voluntary standards on record and that minor alterations to the code could be made to elevate accessory uses or utilities. This could be an accessible “win,” but did not stand out as a local priority. What does the group think?

Raising the height of vulnerable roadways was discussed in the context of specific projects such as York Road. The need to raise streets was not the focus of discussion as much as how to fortify the stormwater management system to drain the runoff.

There was some discussion regarding **tree preservation**, regulations, and best practices to discourage buyers from denuding a parcel upon acquisition. Participants (and survey respondents) seemed generally supportive, but the sustainability impact is less apparent/pronounced than some others, and the opportunity much smaller.

The discussion of **impervious surfaces** was lively and in-depth, both in terms of the percentage of a lot that should be allowed to not be pervious and, also, a critical evaluation of whether common “pervious” surfaces truly are. This seemed to be perceived as having a real impact on runoff, stormwater management, flooding, and parking.

Town leadership ended the meeting, advising attendees of an anticipated fall workshop, as well as opportunities to attend meetings of the Community Planning Advisory Group (CPAG) that would be working through the specifics of the broad outlines established at this workshop.

Community Planning Advisory Group Meetings

Policy recommendations were developed during four CPAG meetings held over the summer of 2025: June 23rd, July 28th, August 13th, and August 25, 2025. Public meeting #2 was hosted on September 22, 2025, to summarize and discuss the draft recommendations before finalizing the report.

June 23, 2025 CPAG Meeting

After the spring 2025 public engagement session, municipal leadership and IPA met regularly, updating and refining survey data and processing initial feedback from the session. At the June 23, 2025 CPAG meeting, leadership felt their group (open to all) would be the best vehicle to deliberate potential policy solutions. There was also a general consensus to begin with the potential policies that had polled well in the survey and had begun to be fleshed out at the first big public meeting. Finally, town leadership and the CPAG agreed that draft recommendations would be brought back before the residents at a second public meeting before finalizing the report, recommendations, and next steps.

The official meeting minutes of the June 23, 2025 CPAG meeting are available here: <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/events/community-planning-advisory-group-meeting-5/>

July 28, 2025 CPAG Meeting

Following the results of the June CPAG recommendation, the July 28, 2025 CPAG began focused on impervious surface regulations, largely as they related to stormwater runoff. Jen Reitz, IPA policy scientist, began the meeting with a presentation outlining varied definitions of permeability, a review of existing regional regulations regarding impervious surfaces, and potential incentives or methods of implementation. The official agenda and minutes are available here: <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/events/community-planning-advisory-group-meeting-6/>

Presentation by Jen Reitz, IPA Policy Scientist

Mrs. Reitz explained that the definitions included on this slide were drawn from neighboring towns and Sussex County. Intrinsically, there is nothing “wrong” with South Bethany’s existing definition. However, she did point out that some other locales, for example, Dewey Beach, expand the basic definition by listing examples of acceptable materials. Lewes has defined permeability by providing a standard rate of “permeability” as the ability to infiltrate two inches of rainfall per hour.

	Impervious	Pervious
S Bethany	Materials that prevent precipitation from contacting the existing soil and do not allow water to penetrate the soil.	Materials that permit water to enter the ground by virtue of their porous nature or by large spaces in the material
Lewes	A surface composed of any material that significantly impedes or prevents the natural infiltration of rainfall into the soil. This includes, but is not limited to roofs, concrete surfaces, asphalt surfaces, structures, non-pervious pavers, sidewalks, swimming pools, and multi-purpose courts; and any material that does not meet the definition of pervious. ¹	Any material or surface that allows rainfall to infiltrate into the soil. This includes, but is not limited to, grass, meadows, planting beds, mulch, 1/4 inch spaced decking above pervious surfaces, washed gravel and stones greater than 3/8 inch diameter, shells, pervious pavers, porous pavement, and/or any material that, when tested, has an infiltration rate greater than two inches per hour.
Dewey	A material or surface that does not allow water or other fluids to pass through it, preventing water infiltration that leads to increased runoff which can contribute to flooding and erosion. Impervious materials include but are not limited to asphalt, concrete, and plastic.	A material or surface that allows water or other fluids to pass through it and infiltrate into the ground, reducing runoff and helping to recharge ground water. Pervious surfaces include but are not limited to gravel, porous concrete, or permeable pavers.
Sussex County	The sum of parking lots, roads, buildings, sidewalks or other created surfaces that do not allow significant amounts of rainwater to pass or infiltrate the soil.	NA

The primary question for the town was whether they wanted to add a standard for permeability or pursue the “examples of materials” approach. The general consensus was that the town would prefer a definition that included a list of potential or approved materials. The feeling was that a metric or permeability standard would be confusing, difficult to enforce, and potentially unequitable (as property owners have no control over their underlying soil type).

The eventual consensus was to lay out a list of acceptable materials or solutions that the town has pre-approved. There was no appetite for individual soil samples and analysis. There was also concern about the burden this would place on code enforcement.

A member of the audience who had experience in the field explained that in many cases, the porosity of an “approved” material does not change with the capacity of the soil underneath. He also noted, how in a seasonal destination, many property owners preferred pavers or hardscaping over growing grass, all common examples of pervious materials.

Municipalities approach impervious surfaces from two sides: either by enforcing a maximum percentage of impervious coverage or by setting a minimum pervious area. South Bethany takes the latter approach, requiring that a minimum of 55 percent of the area of the required side and rear yards. Mrs. Reitz explained that because the required yards remain the same depth regardless of lot size, that larger lots will have a disproportionate increase in impervious surfaces. In addition, though the area of the permeable surfaces is calculated based on the required yards, the location of the permeable surfaces is not regulated in the ordinance. Oftentimes, this results in the permeable surface being placed in one yard rather than distributed throughout the lot.

Approaches: Minimum Pervious Area

South Bethany:

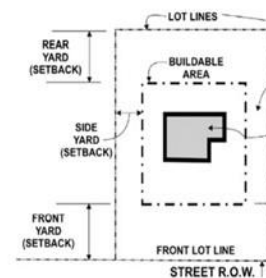
- No lot coverage maximum
- At least 55% of the sum of required building setback area shall be covered with pervious covering materials

Sample Lot:

Typ. 4,800 SF lot (50' x 96')

- Front Yard- 20'
- Rear Yard- 10' or 20'
- Side Yards- 8' or 10'


- Setback area= 3,036 or 3,920
- Min 55% pervious = 1,670 or 2,156
- Approx 35% or 45% of lot area
- The percentage goes down the larger the lot is



For comparison, Mrs. Reitz summarized the lot coverage approaches used by Bethany Beach, Lewes, and Rehoboth. Lewes and Bethany Beach have a maximum lot coverage, that is, a maximum percentage of impervious coverage based on the lot size. Rehoboth is similar to South Bethany in that it also requires a minimum pervious or “natural area” but bases it on the lot size rather than the required yards. Using the example from Slide 2 (above), the Rehoboth regulation results in 2,400 square feet of permeable surface rather than the 2,100 square feet in South Bethany.

Approach: Lot Coverage

	Lot Coverage Definition	Regulation
S Bethany	The land area of a lot covered by a principal building within required setbacks, including steps, porches, garages, decks, carports and accessory buildings, but not including heat pumps, heaters or air-conditioning units, provided that such equipment shall be adjacent to the principal building and shall not extend more than five feet into a setback area.	Lot coverage shall be located within the setback lines
Lewes	The percentage of a lot which is covered with impervious surfaces. (See note 2 below for calculation re: driveways)	Max Lot coverage ranges from 55% to 60% depending on district
Bethany Beach	That portion of the lot area that is covered by buildings; the building gross floor area divided by the lot area.	Max: 40% with incentives to go down to 36%; See table below.
Rehoboth	NA	In R-1(S), R-1 and R-2 Districts, a minimum of 50% of the gross lot area and 50% of the front yard setback area of every building lot shall remain as natural area



The full presentation went on to share specific examples from nearby municipalities. A consensus was evident that the Town could likely strengthen its ordinances to increase the amount and effectiveness of permeable surfaces. One way this could be done is to clarify that the 55 percent minimum permeable surfaces requirement must apply to each of the setback areas (front, two sides, and rear), rather than being located in one area. This recommendation was received favorably by the committee.

Another option briefly discussed was to increase the overall minimum permeable surface required to be commensurate with other towns. Generally, it was thought that this may be acceptable for new development and redevelopment, though would likely face a tough road to adoption.

A resident in attendance expressed concern over how any code changes would impact existing residents and potentially create a hardship. However, it was pointed out that any new regulation would only apply to new development or redevelopment and could not be retroactively applied to existing development (i.e., the town could not force a property owner to remove impervious surface to meet the updated requirement).

In either case, updated ordinance regulations would only apply to the small portion of properties in town where new development or redevelopment occurs each year. The benefits of such incremental improvements would take time to accrue and should be one piece of a comprehensive strategy. There was strong support for a strategy that provided incentives for property owners who voluntarily take actions to improve the flood resilience of their lots.

Key Points and Suggestions

- A suggestion to adjust the existing ordinance to require a minimum of 55 percent of EACH setback (not the net percentage from all yards). The thought was that this would more evenly distribute the benefits of the pervious surfaces.
- A recognition that South Bethany is a unique place with canals and coastline. Solutions, whether they be policy or engineering, will need to be tailored to the town’s particularities, though should still be informed by best practices.
- The beginnings of a debate between incentives and mandates, with incentives clearly being favored, but with regulatory change potentially being acceptable for new development.
- A strong preference for simplicity and understandability in both regulations and enforcement. For example, building a home (or installing a deck) should not require black-box calculations.
- General assurances from municipal leadership that everything, as is, would be grandfathered with any new regulations only being triggered by the same “rebuild of over 50 percent value,” already in place for other regulations.
- Some concern that incentives and gradual adaptation may lag behind projected climate impacts

The presentation discussed the goals of providing incentives, largely to reduce stormwater runoff and flooding.

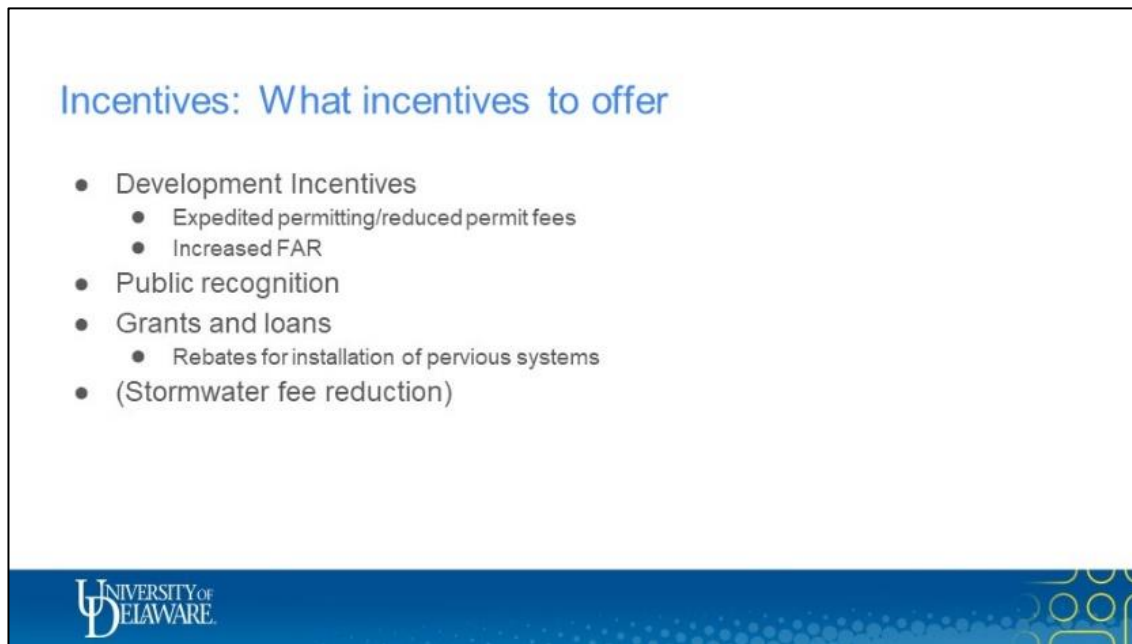
Incentives: What to incentivize and how

1. Prevent additional impervious from being installed (existing impervious is grandfathered)
2. Incentivize the replacement of existing impervious with permeable
3. BMPs (infiltration, bioretention, conservation landscaping, etc.)

There was considerable discussion regarding what to incentivize and some technical back and forth regarding the efficacy of varied stormwater management approaches.

Ultimately, the group defaulted to the earlier articulated position that South Bethany is unique and that any incentives should be specifically targeted to strategies or “best practices” that have been vetted with the town and fit the needs of its residents.

Finally, the discussion of incentives revolved around what the town had available to give as an incentive. Public recognition was a strong contender, with many favoring a placard or social media recognition for those making an extra effort.



Grants and loans always remain a possibility, but opportunities are currently few and far between and can be a heavy lift when starting from scratch (from a municipal perspective) and carry administrative burdens. There were also some cautionary thoughts on the complexities of such an undertaking.

Town leadership felt that fast tracking development review would likely be beyond current capabilities. Similarly, review and permit fees are an essential part of the town’s budget, supporting the staff that perform those duties. There is little room to waive those revenues.

A discussion regarding stormwater impact fees and resiliency funds developed. Though not the same thing, these fees and funds are often closely related. With a conventional stormwater impact fee, the fee is calculated based upon the impervious coverage of the lot and the fees collected are used to upgrade stormwater management infrastructure (both hard, “grey” infrastructure and soft or “green,” such as nature-based solutions). These in turn bolster resilience by helping to mitigate flooding. If the town were to implement a stormwater fee based on impervious surfaces, property

owners who install BMPs could receive the “incentive” of reduced fees. Town leadership felt that was a suggestion and topic best taken to council after the initiative wrapped up.

BMPs that could be Incentivized

<p>Bioretention: Rain Garden Tree Box Filters Raised Planter Box</p>	<p>Permeable Pavement: Permeable concrete pavers Grid pavement system Pervious concrete Porous Asphalt</p>
<p>Impervious Removal</p>	<p>Rainwater Harvesting Rain Barrels Cisterns</p>
<p>Conservation Landscaping</p>	<p>Tree Planting</p>
<p>Rooftop Disconnect</p>	<p>Dry Well</p>





Figure 31: Resident's Conservation Landscaping
One resident's conservation landscaping along Bayard Street Extension in Fenwick Island.

Source: Coastal Municipalities Impervious Surface Coverage Report, 2016




August 13, 2025 CPAG Meeting

Following the results of the July CPAG recommendation, the August 13, 2025 CPAG focused on impervious surface regulations as they related to parking and driveways. Mrs. Reitz began the meeting with a quick recap of the prior gathering. The official agenda and minutes are available here: <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/events/community-planning-advisory-group-meeting-7/>

Recap: July 28th CPAG

Key Takeaways:

- Definitions: Materials based approach is preferable.
 - Existing definition should be strengthened to include a list of approved materials and avoid using an infiltration metric
 - Avoid individual lot soil testing or infiltration testing. Too much burden on code enforcement and potentially arbitrary or unattainable
- Regulatory approaches
 - Some support for stricter regulatory approaches for new development and major redevelopment.
 - Existing lots and structures grandfathered.
 - Consider increasing Minimum Pervious: Increase from current “55% of total setback area,” to “55% of each setback” in municipal ordinance. Vegetative or pervious strip between lots and canals



Recap: July 28th CPAG

Key Takeaways (cont.)

- Incentives:
 - BMPs: Incentives to improve stormwater management on existing lots
 - Town should assemble a list of agreed upon best practices for on-site SWM
 - These could either allow for increases in FAR or as credits towards a civic engagement/awards program.
 - Development Incentives
 - Expedited permitting/reduced permit fees- *town doesn't have this ability*
 - Public recognition- *may be the most feasible approach*
 - Grants and loans- *limited availability*
 - Could tie incentives to discussions of future Sustainability/Resilience Fund



Presentation— Jen Reitz, IPA Policy Scientist

Mrs. Reitz highlighted the town’s familiar parking regulations: Spaces are 10x20 feet, two per dwelling unit; no maximum driveway width. Combined with the town’s existing “total yard” pervious requirements, the lack of maximum driveway width results in many front yards being entirely paved for parking (as shown in the next slide).

Parking and Driveways: Challenges

Current regulations result in:

- Front yards which are entirely or nearly entirely paved
- Reduced infiltration, which contributes to flooding issues
- Reduced availability of on-street parking for guests and visitors



All around, it was a challenging discussion with the competing priorities of providing adequate parking and addressing stormwater runoff. A related challenge the town is facing is purely a parking concern. If the entirety of everyone's front yard is parking, how can essential on-street parking also be accommodated?

The key discussion centered around the impervious standards and the proposal from the previous meeting that 55 percent of each setback area must be permeable. There was also a discussion of truly open (grassy) areas versus pervious pavers or other permeable alternatives. There was consensus on moving away from asphalt and concrete and implementing incentives and best management practices.

Parking and Permeability: How do other towns address them?

- Lewes:
 - 50% of the area of driveways made of shells or gravel count toward lot coverage
 - 25% of the area of driveways made of pervious systems count toward lot coverage
- Bethany Beach
 - Included in maximum ground coverage
 - Parking ratios based on per bedroom
- Dewey Beach
 - Required to use pervious materials
 - 20' maximum width for driveway
 - Two spaces per unit up to four bedrooms plus one additional space per additional two bedrooms



Balancing Parking and Permeability

Code provisions:

- Design/Dimensional standards → Maximum lot width
- Permeability standards → How driveways are counted
- Other options?

Code alternatives:

- Promote available parking/rideshare options on website
- Other innovative options for parking management and incentives

Balancing Parking and Permeability

Code provisions for discussion:

- **Design/Dimensional standards → Thoughts on a maximum lot width for driveways?**
 - 10' = 1 car; 20' = 2 cars; (based on min parking space width of 10')
- **Consider new standards for permeability**
 - Requiring new driveways to consist of permeable materials
 - Requiring areas of a driveway wider than 10' to be permeable
 - Requiring 55% of the front yard to be permeable (should permeable driveways count?)
 - Consider other best management practices (as discussed last month) for driveways (i.e., installation of dry wells before ROW)



Mrs. Reitz was able to summarize the meeting's progress as a willingness to propose the following approaches:

- Regulate a max driveway width at the right-of-way (ROW)
- Prohibit asphalt and concrete as permitted driveway materials (initial step)
- Require driveways to be constructed of permeable materials (more ideal)
- Adjust the municipal non-conforming use regulations regarding driveways so that nonconforming driveways would need to meet any new permeable standards when upgraded within a certain time period (i.e., ten years).
 - The thinking was that permeable driveways are a “big win” and the typical driveway or parking pad life cycles much faster than a home or the likelihood of a major renovation. Also, driveway maintenance is an expected, and comparatively affordable expense.

August 25, 2025 CPAG Meeting

Following the results of the August 13th CPAG meeting, the August 25th CPAG meeting switched gears from the technical and delved into finance and policy. Mrs. Reitz began the meeting with a presentation recapping the prior meeting's main points, and exploring the meaning, set up, purpose, and distribution of resiliency funds. The official agenda and minutes are available [here](https://southbethany.delaware.gov/events/community-planning-advisory-group-meeting-8/): <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/events/community-planning-advisory-group-meeting-8/>

Recap: Aug 13, 2025 - Parking and Driveways

Key Takeaways:

- Additional support for requiring 55% of each setback/buffer to be permeable (the front yard is currently exempt from this requirement)
- Consider requiring a maximum driveway width of 20' to 25' feet, *measured at the right-of-way line, thus allowing for expansion of driveway beyond the right-of-way*
- Consider requiring driveways to be permeable; at very least prohibit asphalt driveways
- Amend the nonconforming regulations to require that as driveways are redeveloped over the long-term they have to come into conformity with the new regulations (grandfathering is time limited)



According to the presentation, a resilience fund is, “A pool of money dedicated to helping the town withstand, adapt to, and/or recover from challenges related to climate change impacts and natural disasters. These funds may provide financial assistance, capacity building, or technical support to strengthen long-term resilience and prevent future crises.”

As discussed earlier, stormwater utility fees and resilience or sustainability funds are not necessarily the same thing, depending on the municipality. Conventional stormwater impact fees are calculated based upon the impervious coverage of the lot and the fees collected are used to upgrade stormwater management infrastructure (both hard, “grey” infrastructure and soft or “green,” such as nature-based solutions). Resilience funds are funded through a wide variety of sources and used for a

Resilience Funds

Municipality	Funding Source	Purpose/Uses
Coral Gables, FL “Resiliency Fund”	Stormwater fee increases over 10 years	Untouchable until closer to 2040; to be used for grant matching funds; Goal of \$100M
Bethany Beach, DE “Storm Emergency Relief Fund”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$0.01 of the property tax rate (2016) • 1% of the Residential and Commercial Rental Tax Rate (2016) • 0.25% of the Hotel Rental Tax Rate (2016) • \$0.25 of the hourly parking rate (2020) 	To accumulate funds to be used to aid in recovering from a severe storm event
Sussex County, DE	3% accommodations tax adopted in November 2019 The surcharge is for the rent of any room or rooms in a hotel, motel, or tourist home in unincorporated portions of the county	Revenue collected earmarked for projects and programs, such as waterway dredging, economic development, and water quality/flood control;
Boston, MA	Developer fees- specific to the Seaport District	seawall




variety of purposes as seen in the slides. In Delaware, only Lewes has both, though theirs is not a conventional storm water fee. In contrast, Coral Gables, Florida, calls its stormwater utility fee a resilience fund and it has a designated purpose: creating a fund to match future grants aimed at resilience.

Resilience Fund: Examples in Delaware

<u>Stormwater utility fee*</u> :	<u>Resilience fund:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Newark ● Wilmington ● Dover ● Lewes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bethany Beach ● Lewes ● Sussex County

*There are more than 1,800 SW utilities in 41 states, plus DC



A discussion of similar funds, in the state and nationally, provoked the following questions:

1. How are sustainability funds funded?
2. What can they be used for?
3. How can funds be grown to meaningful amounts?
4. Was there a risk of being over-prepared and not receiving assistance in the aftermath of a tragedy because the town had planned ahead?
5. What constitutes a “disaster,” and who makes that determination?
6. Is there a funding mechanism available that could serve other sustainability purposes?
7. Is there already too much redundancy in the town’s contingency funds?
8. Can they be used for property buy-outs after a disaster?

In sum, “resilience funds” are varied and unique to the municipality they serve. Some municipalities, such as Coral Gables, Florida, call what effectively operates as a stormwater utility/impact fee a resilience fund, while Bethany Beach uses its resilience fund for emergency disaster relief. Town leadership was able to convey a great deal of background information and the town council’s desired direction. According to the mayor, South Bethany already has reserve/emergency funds for infrastructure and other assets, as well as a set aside for emergency operations. Therefore, the consensus is that a disaster recovery fund is the missing piece. The idea is

to establish a fund that cannot be raided for infrastructure hardening or road raising (even though those are both “sustainable” steps). The key, according to leadership, would be how it is funded—a decision everyone felt was best deliberated by the finance committee and council.

One participant noted that, if there is a new revenue mechanism, it would make sense for it not to come from general property taxes. A fee is much easier to leverage as an incentive. Others sought more specificity on what the exact purpose of the fund would be and how it would relate to any consideration of a stormwater impact fee. The meeting concluded without any major breakthrough, but the consensus next steps was:

- Submit a recommendation to consider the advisability of a stormwater impact fee to the finance committee.
- Develop a disaster relief fund to address short-term needs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

Public Resiliency Forum

In the fall of 2025, IPA, GMB, and the town collaborated on a second public forum, hosted on September 22nd. It was nearly the exact format as the initial May endeavor, discussed above. It was similarly well-attended. As hoped and intended, it also drew a high percentage of residents who were not able to attend the first time.

Mr. Jett’s full presentation may be accessed on the town’s website at <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/2025/05/23/may-15-2025-univ-of-de-community-planning-meeting-presentations/>

The agenda and video of the entire proceedings may be accessed here: <https://southbethany.delaware.gov/events/community-planning-advisory-group-meeting-9/>

Mrs. Reitz’ presentation may be viewed here: https://southbethany.delaware.gov/files/2025/11/S-Bethany-Community-meeting-09222025_IPA-presentation.pdf

Mr. DeCoursey’s presentation may be viewed here: https://southbethany.delaware.gov/files/2025/11/SouthBethany-IPA-SurveyPresentation-BJ9_12_25.pdf

Mr. Jett’s presentation and the survey results were described earlier in this document. The following section summarizes the discussion and potential next steps discussed at the meeting.

The presentation gave the background of the initiative noting that the town wanted to focus on impervious surfaces, resiliency funding, and (time permitting) tree preservation.

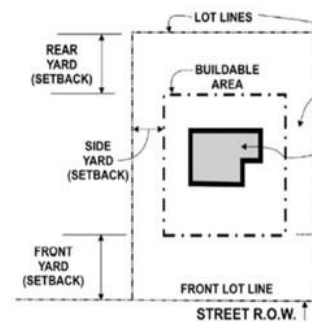
Impervious Surface Recommendations

- Strengthen and clarify the existing municipal definition of “Pervious/Permeable” (and related) to include a list of approved (permeable) materials.
 - This reflects the committee’s preference for simplicity while providing greater guidance on what qualifies and what does not.
 - Avoid soil testing or infiltration testing on individual lots.

Impervious Surfaces – Draft Recommendations

Regulatory approaches

- Some support for stricter regulatory approaches for new development and major redevelopment.
- Consider increasing Minimum Pervious Coverage from current “55% of total setback area,” to “55% of each setback” in municipal ordinance.
- *Updated regulations would only apply to new development/redevelopment; Existing lots and structures would be grandfathered*



- Consider clarifying minimum pervious coverage from the current 55 percent of total setback area, as it is formally in the municipal ordinance, to 55 percent of each setback.
- An understanding that virtually all of the steps taken in the context of the resiliency initiative would grandfather in existing lots and structures.
- Develop a list of favored Best Management Practices concerning stormwater management and impervious surfaces.
 - These may be used as “scorecards” for local incentives to reduce impervious cover.
- Consider potential incentives, such as:
 - A Public Recognition Program (most favored)
 - Grants and Loans (complicated and slow)
 - Could have a tie-in to reductions in a potential stormwater impact fee

- Suggesting the finance committee consider the advisability of a stormwater fee was another recommendation.


2. Parking and Driveways


Two-fold Challenge

- Impervious surface leads to decreased infiltration and increased flooding
- Driveways that take up the entire front yard decrease available on-street parking needed for visitors and guests

Existing Regulations

- No maximum driveway width or impervious surface coverage
- Front setback areas can be used without limitation





Parking and Driveways

- Consider requiring 55 percent of each setback/buffer, including the required front yard, to be permeable.
 - This recommendation perfectly mirrors a suggestion about impervious coverage in general. Clarifying that a portion of each yard must be permeable evenly distributes the benefits of permeable surfaces and ensures that the entire front yard cannot be paved.
 - Front yards are currently exempt.
- Consider requiring a maximum driveway width of 20 to 25 feet, measured only at the right-of-way (ROW) line. Presumably, driveways could expand beyond the ROW to accommodate additional parking.
- Consider requiring driveways to be permeable (or, at least, prohibit asphalt and concrete).
- Amend the municipal regulations related to nonconforming uses to require that driveways generally come into conformance over the long term. Allow the grandfathered status of driveways (not properties) to expire after a particular time.
 - The consensus was that driveway maintenance and replacement was a foreseeable expense and a much more common occurrence than a 50 percent or greater remodel or recovery from a devastating disaster.

- Replacing a driveway with years’ notice is not a hardship for the municipality’s typical resident.

Resilience Fund Recommendations

- Develop a disaster relief fund to address short-term needs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and a resiliency fund to pay for future flood mitigation projects.
- Task the municipality’s finance committee with considering how it may be funded.
 - Single or multiple revenue sources
 - Existing or new funds (e.g., a stormwater impact fee)
- Codify or formalize the Town’s definition of “disaster” including who declares it.
- Codify or formalize the acceptable and prohibited uses for both new funds.

Discussion

Following the presentation, there were several questions about how this effort fit with the mitigation projects, including raising bulkheads and streets, which were understandably at the forefront of people’s minds. It was reiterated that the Resiliency Committee was specifically charged with looking at those projects and working to advance feasibility studies and other steps needed to move those strategies forward. A number of potential studies and efforts were discussed.

Additional comments included:

- It was correctly pointed out that these recommendations result in incremental improvements in flood mitigation and that those improvements are difficult and expensive to quantify. We intuitively know that the amount of impervious coverage on a particular street impacts the amount of flooding on that street, but this effort does not specify those amounts.
- Ordinance amendments that allow residents to come into compliance over time are more incremental but relatively less expensive efforts that the town can take now.
 - Also discussed was a 2016 study funded by DNREC that compared the increase in impervious surfaces and the ordinance provisions of Delaware beach towns. Study results show that South Bethany’s ordinances were among the weakest, especially when compared to Rehoboth, Dewey Beach, and Bethany Beach. Directly correlated to this, the study also showed that South Bethany experienced the greatest increase in impervious surface. The study supports the notion that there is room—and reason—for improvement. The study can be found [here](https://documents.dnrec.delaware.gov/coastal/Documents/ResilientCommunityPartnership/delaware-coastal-communities-impervious-surface-project.pdf): <https://documents.dnrec.delaware.gov/coastal/Documents/ResilientCommunityPartnership/delaware-coastal-communities-impervious-surface-project.pdf>.
- Did the CPAG look at raising freeboard? The Resiliency Committee is exploring this question. According to Code Enforcement, the majority of construction is voluntarily incorporating freeboard, so the need to make it mandatory requires further discussion.

- Is the town setting aside money for infrastructure improvements for flooding mitigation? Reiteration that the town has a minimum of four months of emergency operations funding; asset replacement and maintenance (ARM) fund to replace buildings and vehicles; and the infrastructure reserve, which includes a wide variety of projects, including road raising. The gap—and what is being proposed herein—is the emergency fund to get resources in after a disaster for needs such as heavy equipment and dumpsters, debris cleanup and removal, temporary relocation of essential town services, etc.

Recommendations

The South Bethany CPAG worked through the summer of 2025 to develop a series of recommendations to strengthen the town’s policies relating to flooding, resilience, and sustainability. This section summarizes those recommendations. Upon approval by the CPAG, the recommendations will be shared with the Resiliency Committee and Town Council for further consideration.

Summary of Recommendations

- Strengthen and clarify the existing municipal definitions for “impervious materials” and “permeable materials” (and related) to include a list of approved materials to increase understanding and transparency.
- Consider clarifying minimum permeable regulations to require that 55 percent of each setback area shall be maintained with permeable surfaces.
- Developing an incentives program that would reward property owners who voluntarily implement BMPs on their properties. Such incentives could include:
 - A Public Recognition Program (most favored)
 - Grants and Loans (complicated and slow)
 - Could have a tie-in to reductions in a potential stormwater impact fee
 - Suggesting that the finance committee consider the advisability of a stormwater fee was another recommendation.
- As part of the incentives program, develop a list of stormwater Best Management Practices (BMPs) that are thought to be effective, practical, and preferable to South Bethany residents. Consider organizing common BMPs into a tiered list that emphasizes which BMPs should be targeted for incentives.
- Set a maximum driveway width of 20–25 feet, to be measured at the right-of-way (ROW) line. This would accommodate two cars side by side, while retaining needed on-street parking spaces. Beyond the ROW, driveways may expand to allow for additional parking on-site.
- Regulate driveway materials. Ideally, driveways should be required to be constructed of pervious materials, such as pavers. At the very least, asphalt and concrete should be prohibited.
- Amend municipal regulations related to nonconforming uses so that the grandfathered status of nonconforming driveways would expire within ten years of adoption of the updated standards for materials and width.
- Develop a disaster relief fund to address short-term needs in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and a resiliency fund to pay for future flood mitigation projects.
- Task the municipality’s finance committee with considering how they may be funded.
 - Single or multiple revenue sources
 - Existing or new funds (e.g., stormwater impact fee)

- Codify or formalize the town’s definition of “disaster” and what level of disaster triggers use of the disaster relief fund.
- Codify or formalize the acceptable and prohibited uses for both new funds.



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