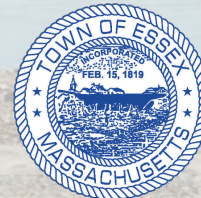


Town of Essex Open Space & Recreation Plan 2026 Update

Open Space Committee Meeting #4
February 4, 2026, 4pm



Agenda

- Where we are in the process
- Environmental and Land Analysis
 - Open space inventory
 - Review of required maps
- Survey results
- Looking ahead: Needs Analysis & Action Plan
- Next steps

Group agreements

- Listen for understanding, not disagreement
- Consider the opinions and experiences of others
- Bring a spirit of experimentation and creativity
- Take space, make space (take turns speaking, make room for others to speak)
- Speak for yourself and/or the group you represent, not for others

Any modifications?



Where we are in the process

Task 1. Setting the foundation

Task 2. Environmental and Land Analysis

- Regional context
- Population characteristics
- Growth and Development Patterns
- Environmental Inventory
- Conservation & Recreation Land Inventory

Task 3. Community Engagement

- Online survey
- Event #1
- Event #2

Task 4. Needs Analysis

Task 5. Draft 10-Year Action Plan

Task 6. Writing a Plan

Aug – Sept 2025

Sept – Dec 2025

Oct 2025 – April 2026

January – April 2026

April – May 2026

June 2026

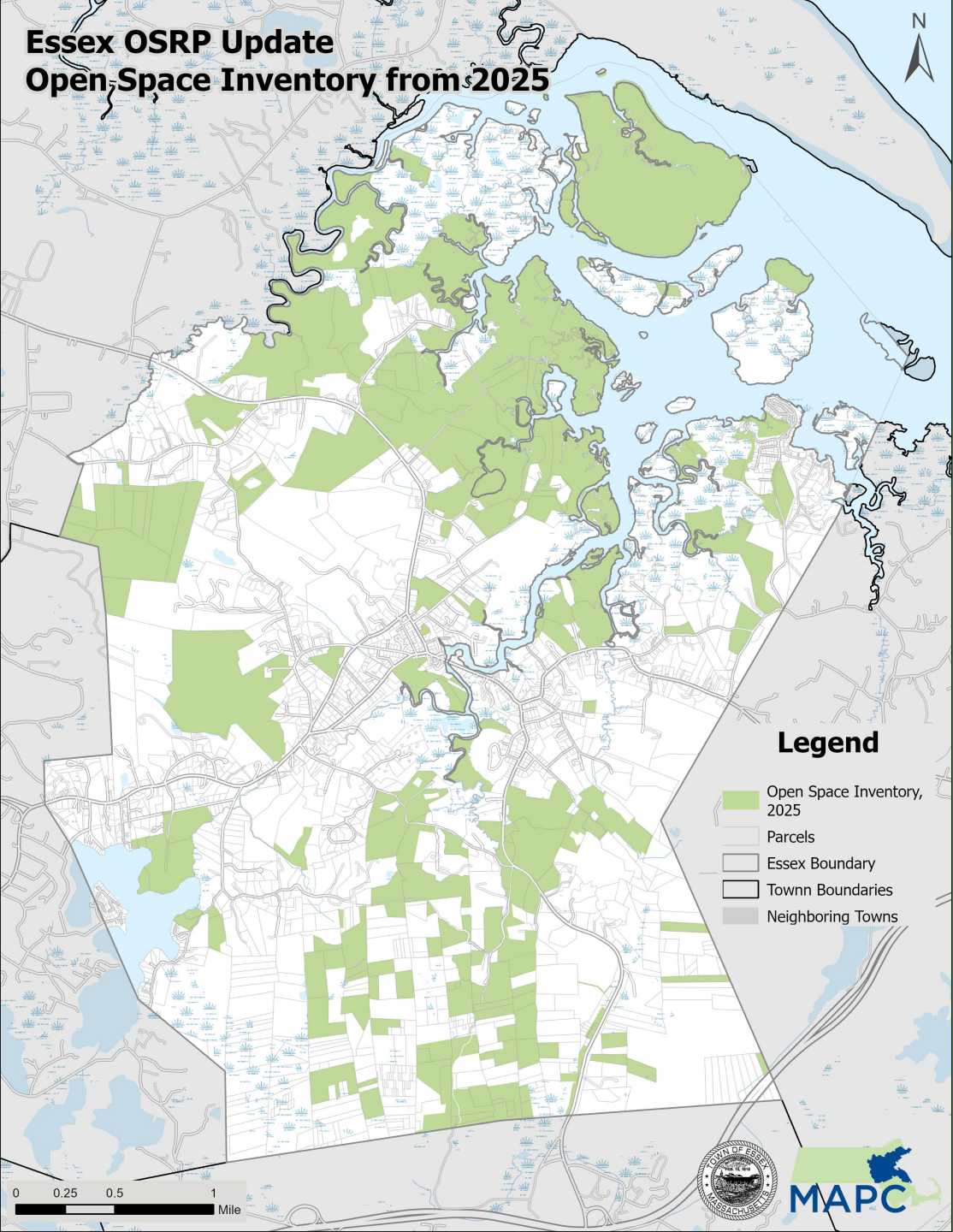
Agenda

- Where we are in the process
- **Environmental and Land Analysis**
 - **Open space inventory**
 - Review of required maps
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- Looking ahead: Needs Analysis & Action Plan
- Next steps

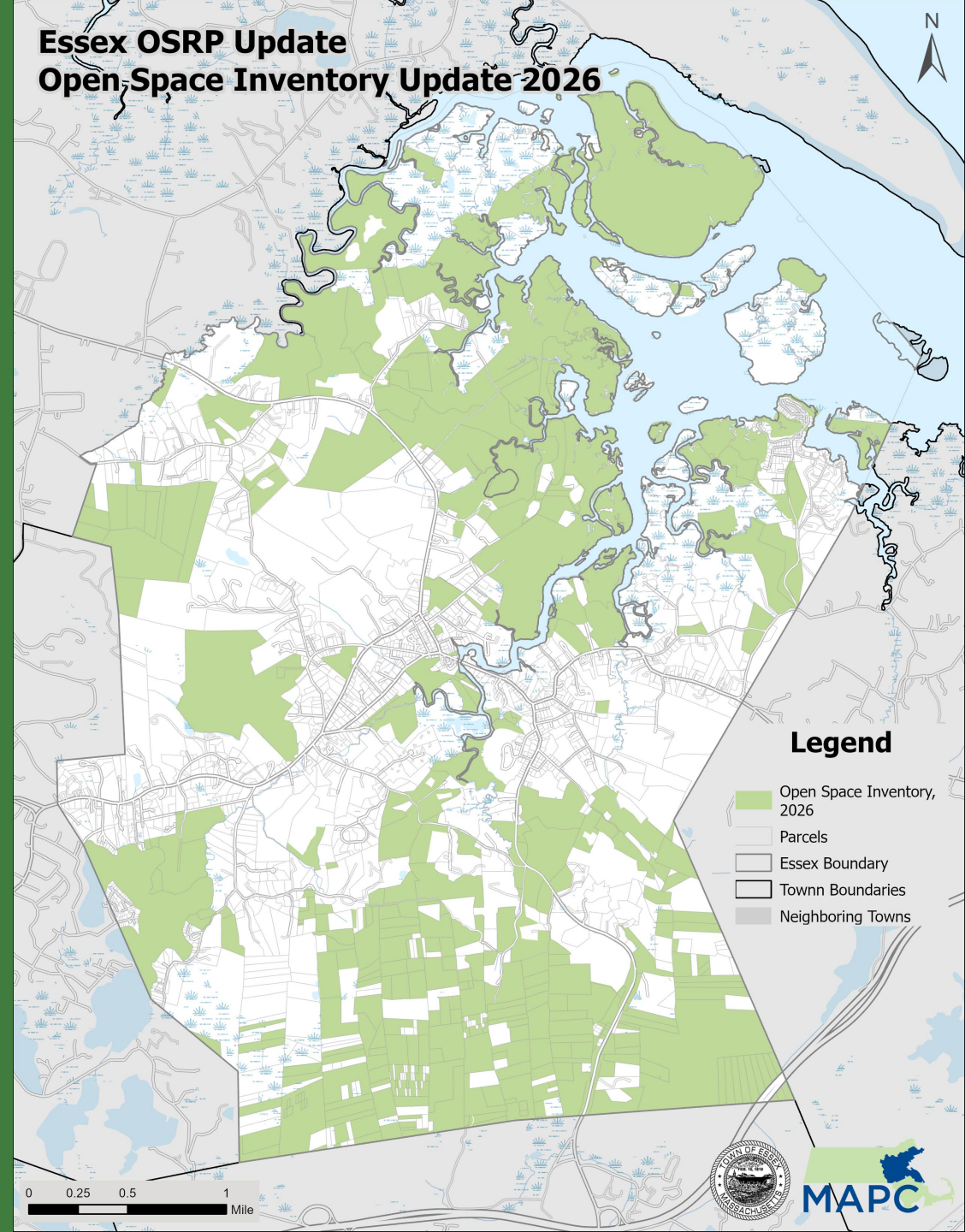
Open space inventory

- Inventory has been updated for 2026. It now includes:
 - Everything owned by non-profit land trusts. ECGA, MECT, The Trustees, etc.
 - All municipally owned woodlots, salt marsh lots, and other areas that are being held for conservation.
 - Municipally owned recreation areas such as the town landing, Paglia Park, Clammer's Beach, etc.
 - Parcels previously overlooked, such as Cogswell's Grant

Essex OSRP Update Open Space Inventory from 2025

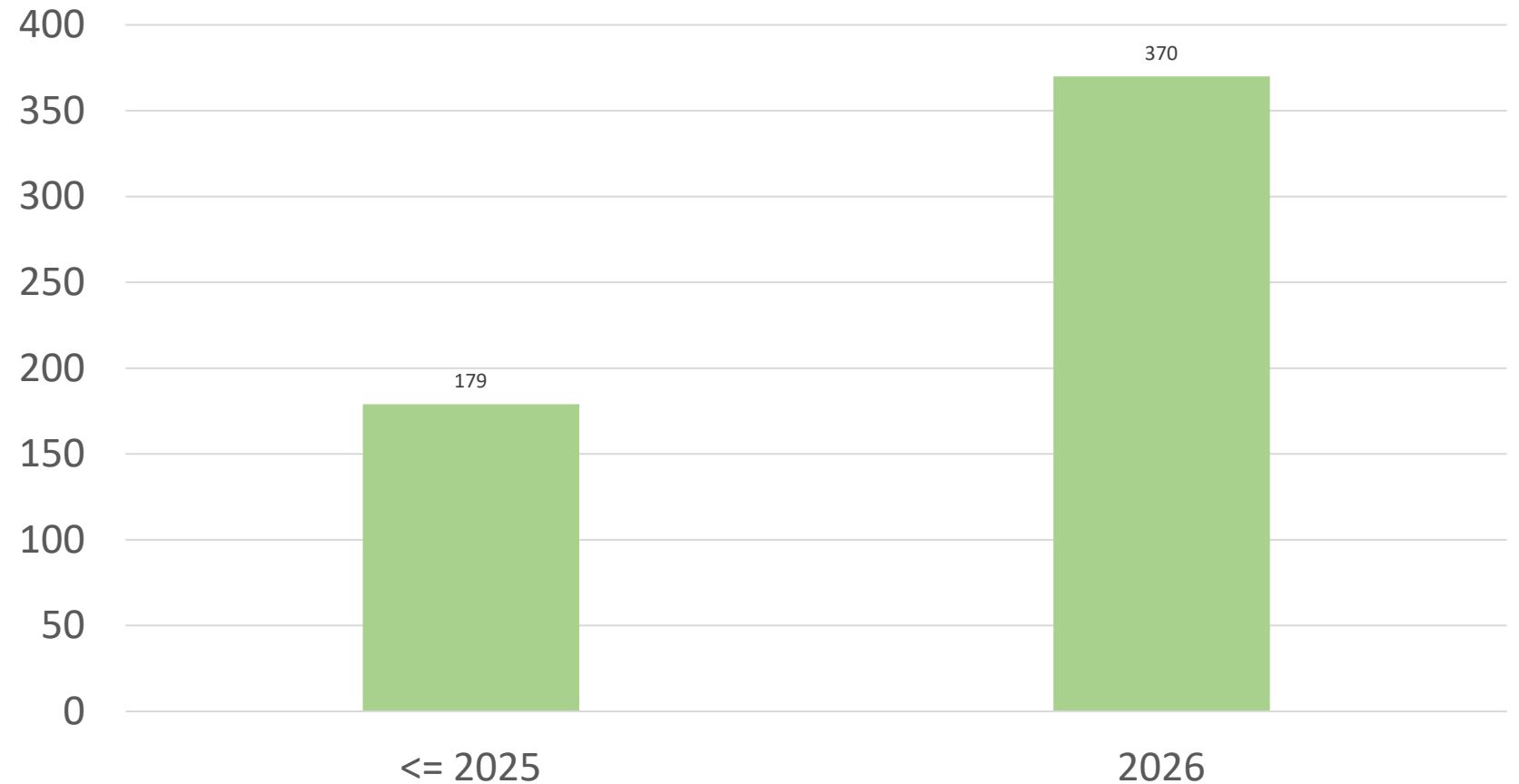


Essex OSRP Update Open Space Inventory Update 2026



Open space inventory

Parcels in the Open Space Inventory



2025

3,346 sq acres

5.23 sq miles

2026

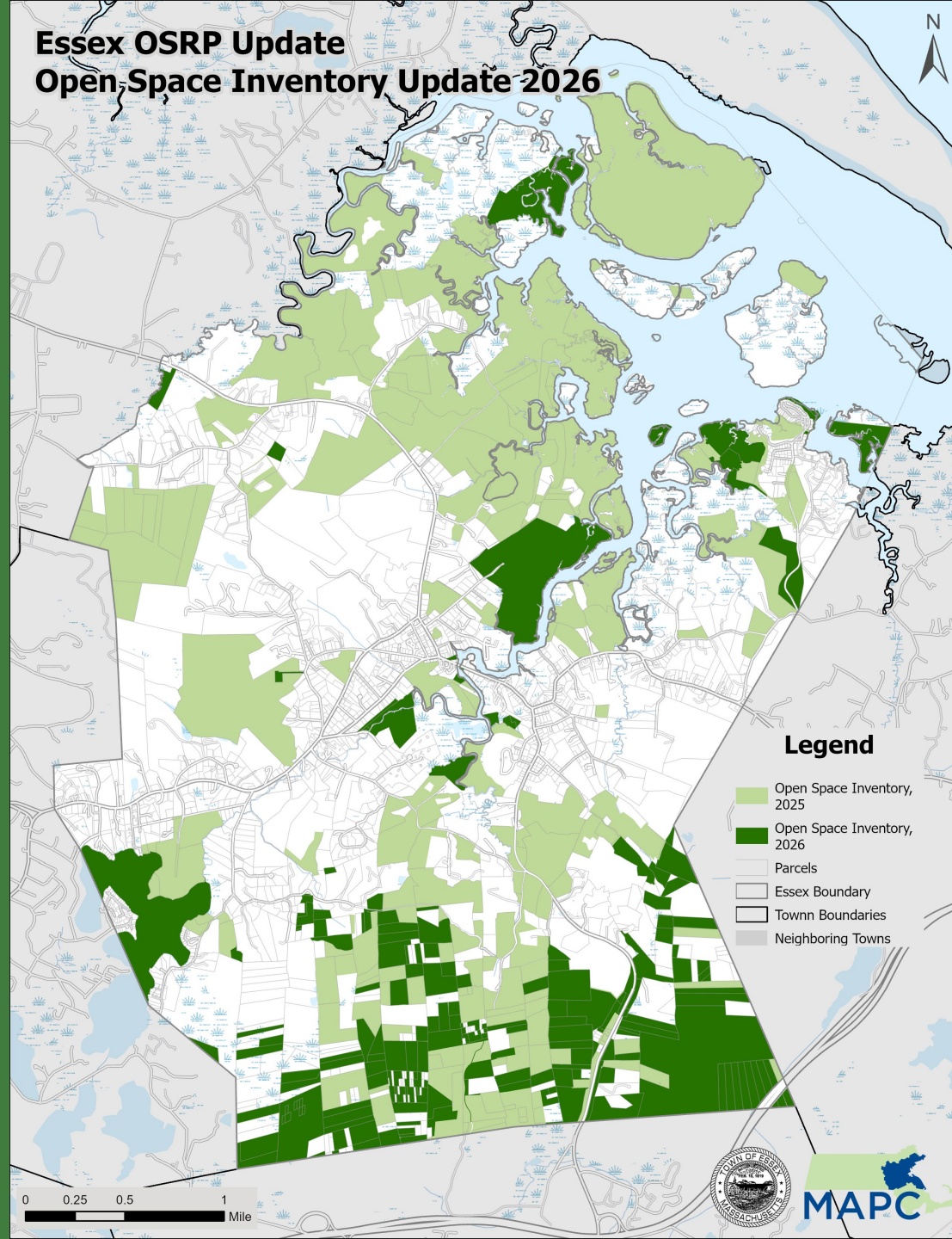
4,182 sq acres

6.53 sq miles

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

25% in total
inventory land
area increase.

An additional
1.3 square
miles in the
inventory!



Agenda

- Where we are in the process
- **Environmental and Land Analysis**
 - Open space inventory
 - **Review of required maps**
- Survey results
- Looking ahead: Needs Analysis & Action Plan
- Next steps

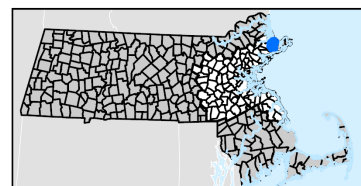
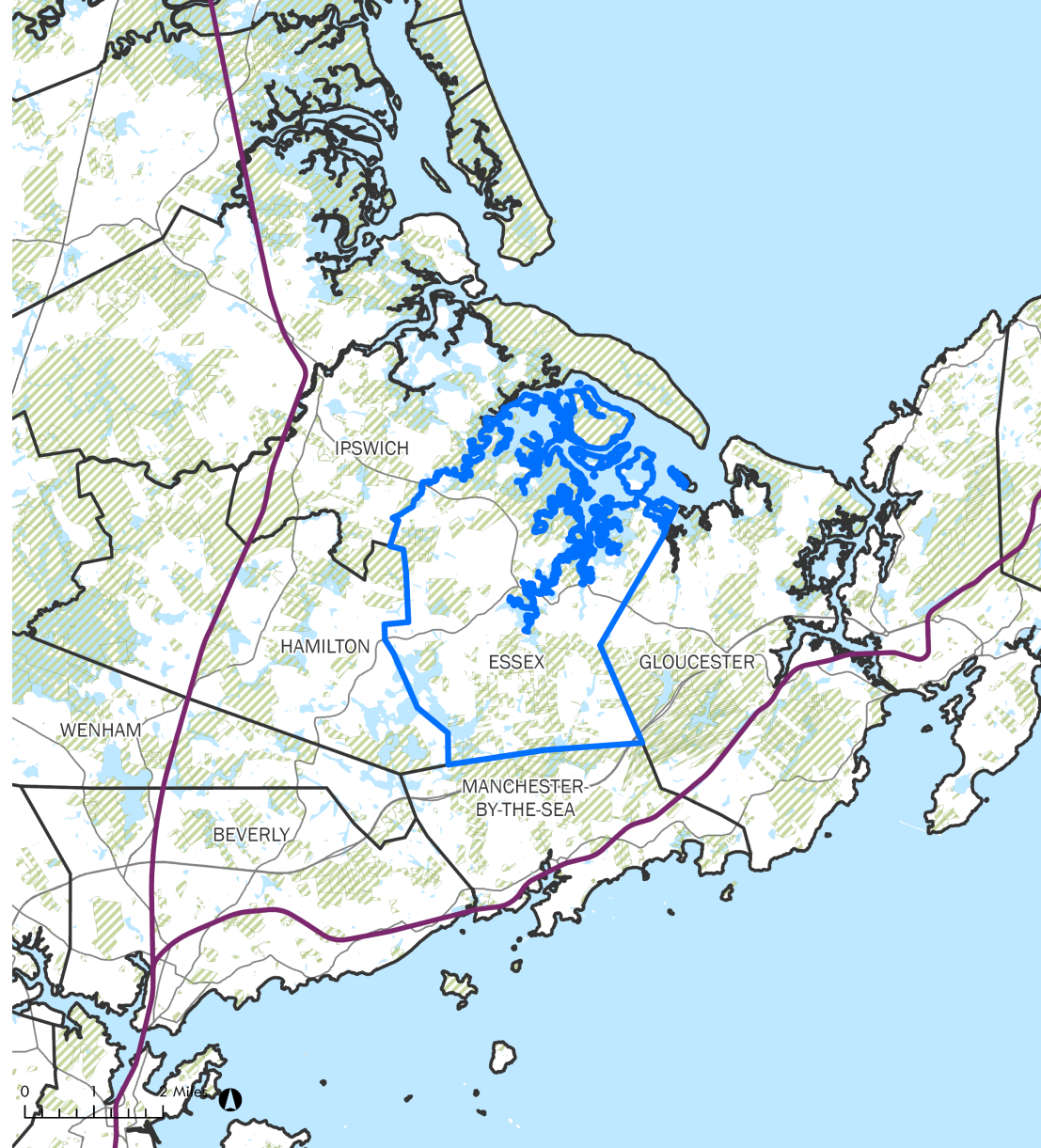
State OSRP requirements

Existing Community Setting

- Regional Context (**map**)
- Population Characteristics
 - Demographics (tables and charts shared at Mtg #3)
 - Environmental justice communities (**map**)
- Growth and Development Patterns
 - Recent development activity and existing land use (shared at Mtg #3)
 - Existing zoning (**map**)
 - Existing infrastructure – walking and biking trails (**map**)

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Regional Context Map



- Town Highlight
- Open Space
- MBTA Rapid Transit Lines
- MBTA Rapid Transit Stations
- MBTA Commuter Rail
- MassDOT Interstate**
- Interstate
- U.S. Highway
- State Route

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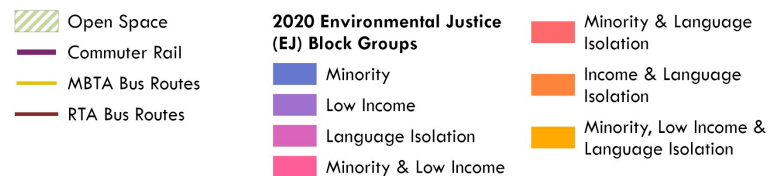
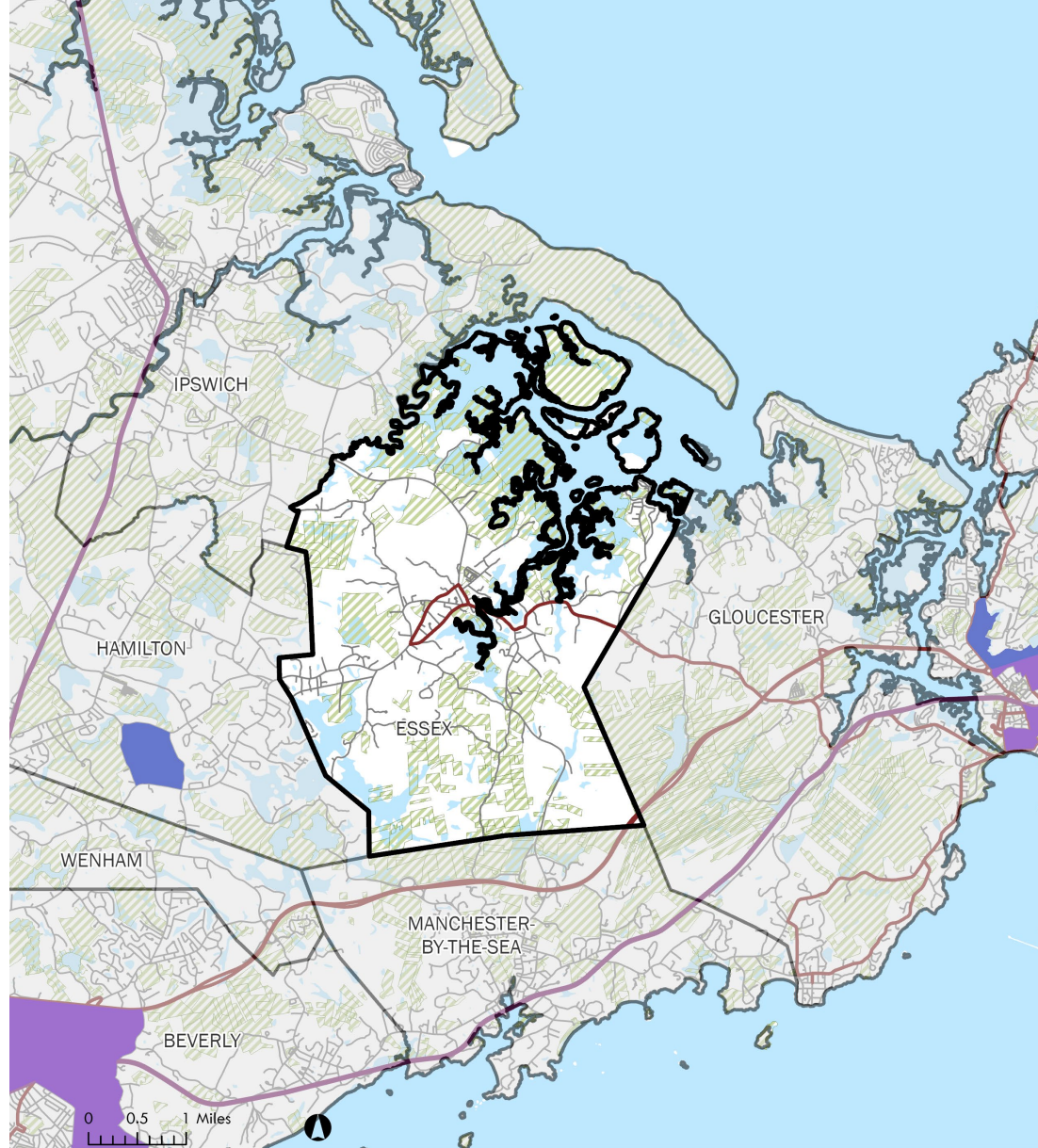
Data sources: MAPC, MassGIS, MassDOT, Town of Essex

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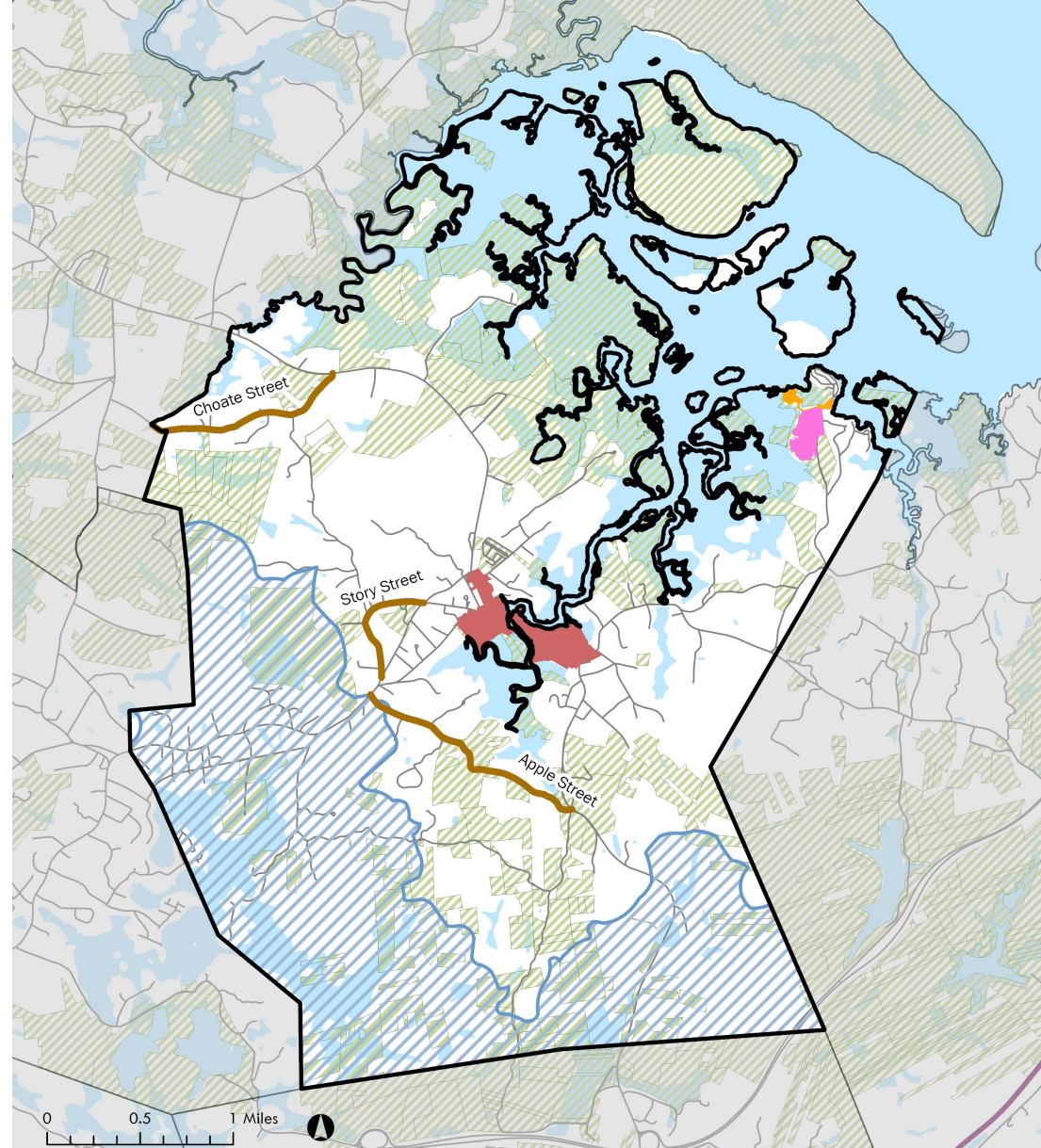
Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update






Environmental Justice Communities



Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Existing Zoning in Essex



- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  Downtown District |  Water Protection Overlay District |
|  Central Conomo Point Zoning District |  Town-Designated Scenic Roads |
|  Southern Conomo Point Zoning District |  Open Space |

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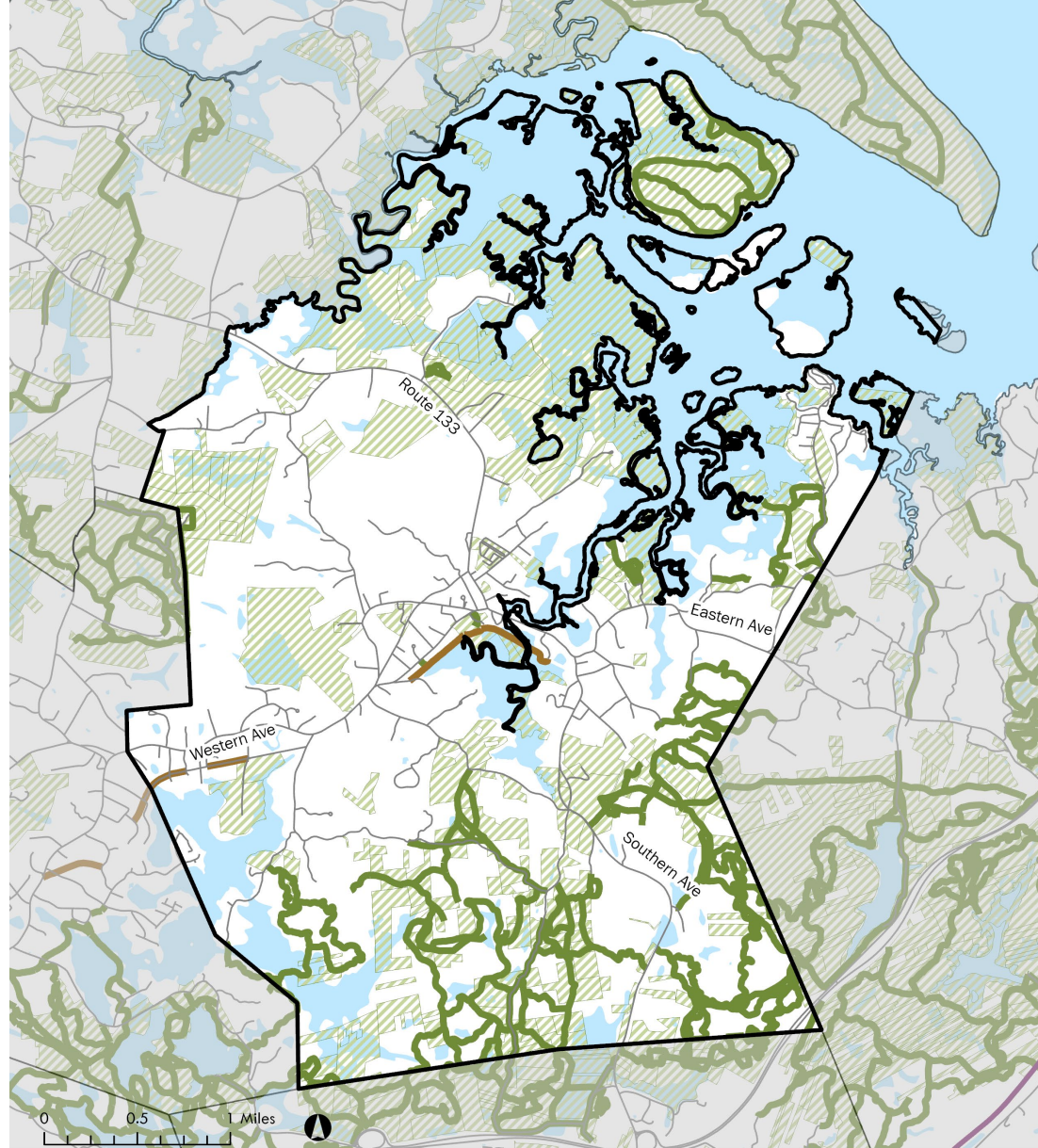
Data sources: MAPC, MassGIS, MassDOT, Town of Essex


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Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Existing Trail Network in Essex



-  Bike Facilities
-  Shared Use Paths
-  Walking Trails
-  Open Space

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State OSRP requirements

Environmental Inventory & Analysis

- Soils and Topography (**map**)
- Water Resources (**map**)
- Climate Change Impacts (**map**)
- Scenic Resources and Unique Environments (**map**) *** input needed

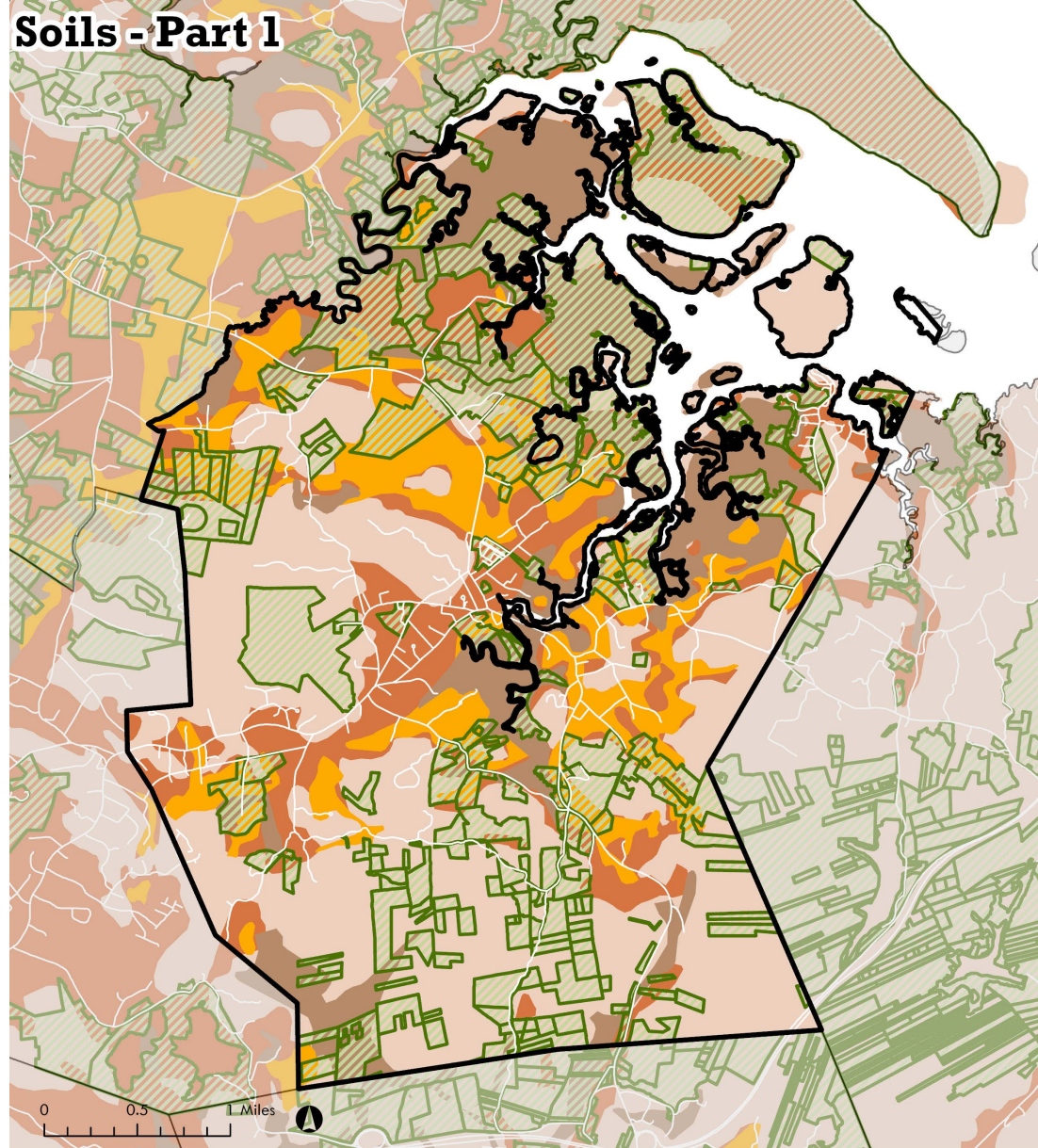
Soils & Topography

Information required by the state workbook

- “Describe **effects of topography and soils on recreational opportunities** and how they may determine future land use.”
- “The required soils map should show **soil types grouped by development limitation.**”

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update


Soils - Part 1



 Open Space

Surficial Geology

 Sand and Gravel

 Till or Bedrock

 Fine-Grained Deposit

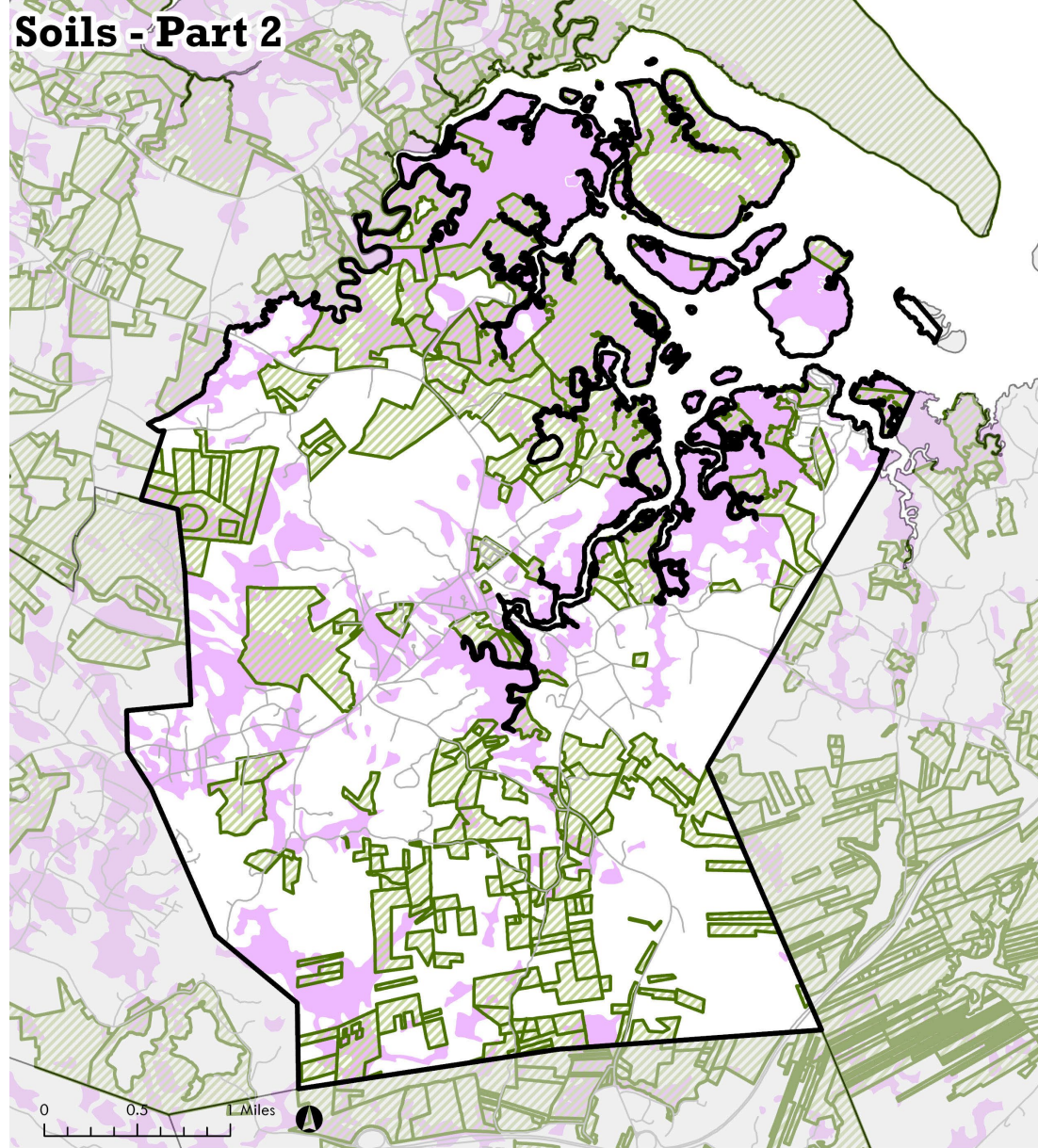
 Floodplain Alluvium

What is identified so far:

- **Sand and Gravel** – Good for development but need to manage groundwater and recharge tradeoffs.
- **Till and Bedrock** – Buildable but costly; often better for conservation or recreation.
- **Fine-Grained Deposit + Floodplain Alluvium** – Poor drainage and flood risk. Best for wetland restoration or open space.
- **Farmland of unique importance** – Prime soils for protection; ideal for agriculture or community gardens.

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Soils - Part 2



Open Space

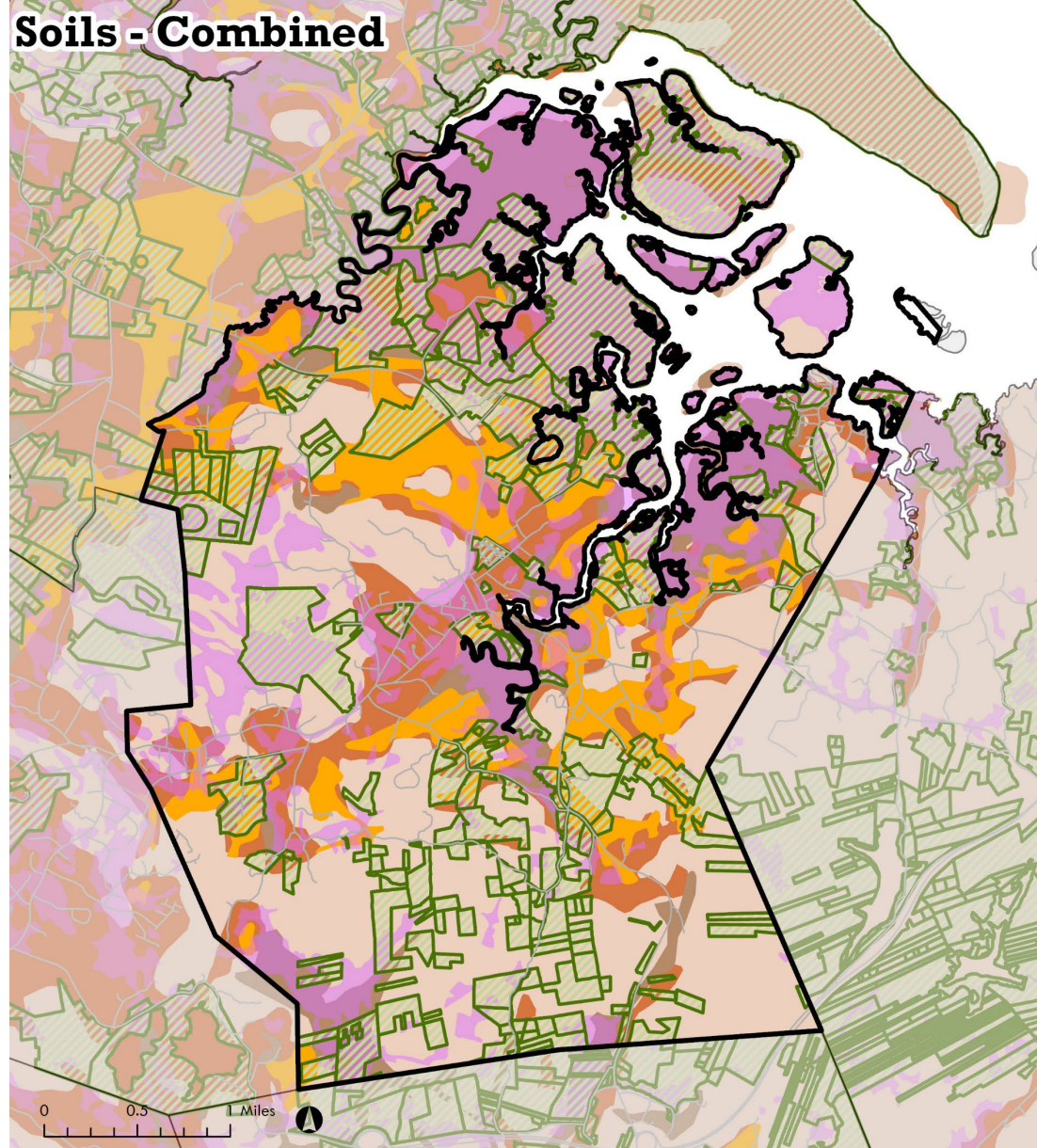
Farmland of Unique Importance

What is identified so far:

- **Sand and Gravel** – Good for development but manage groundwater and recharge tradeoffs.
- **Till and Bedrock** – Buildable but costly; often better for conservation or recreation.
- **Fine-Grained Deposit + Floodplain Alluvium** – Poor drainage and flood risk. Best for wetland restoration or open space.
- **Farmland of unique importance** – Prime soils for protection; ideal for agriculture or community gardens.

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Soils - Combined



What is identified so far:

- **Sand and Gravel** – Good for development but manage groundwater and recharge tradeoffs.
- **Till and Bedrock** – Buildable but costly; often better for conservation or recreation.
- **Fine-Grained Deposit + Floodplain Alluvium** – Poor drainage and flood risk. Best for wetland restoration or open space.
- **Farmland of unique importance** – Prime soils for protection; ideal for agriculture or community gardens.

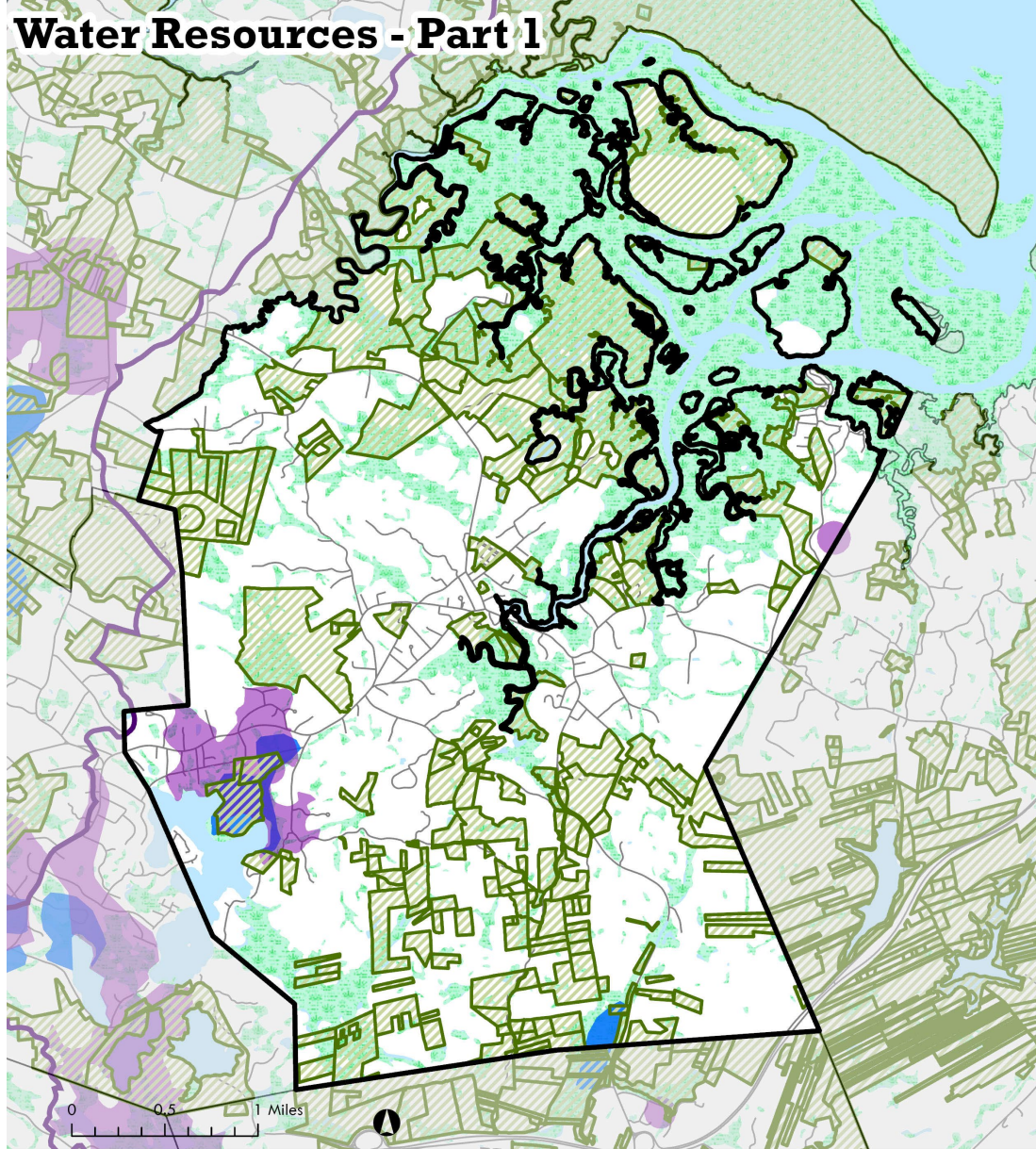
Water Resources

Information required by the state workbook

- “Describe known **water quality and quantity problems** that affect **recreational use of water bodies.**”
- “This section should include descriptions and mapping about:
 - Watersheds
 - Surface water
 - Wetlands
 - Aquifer recharge areas
 - Flood hazard areas”

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Water Resources - Part 1

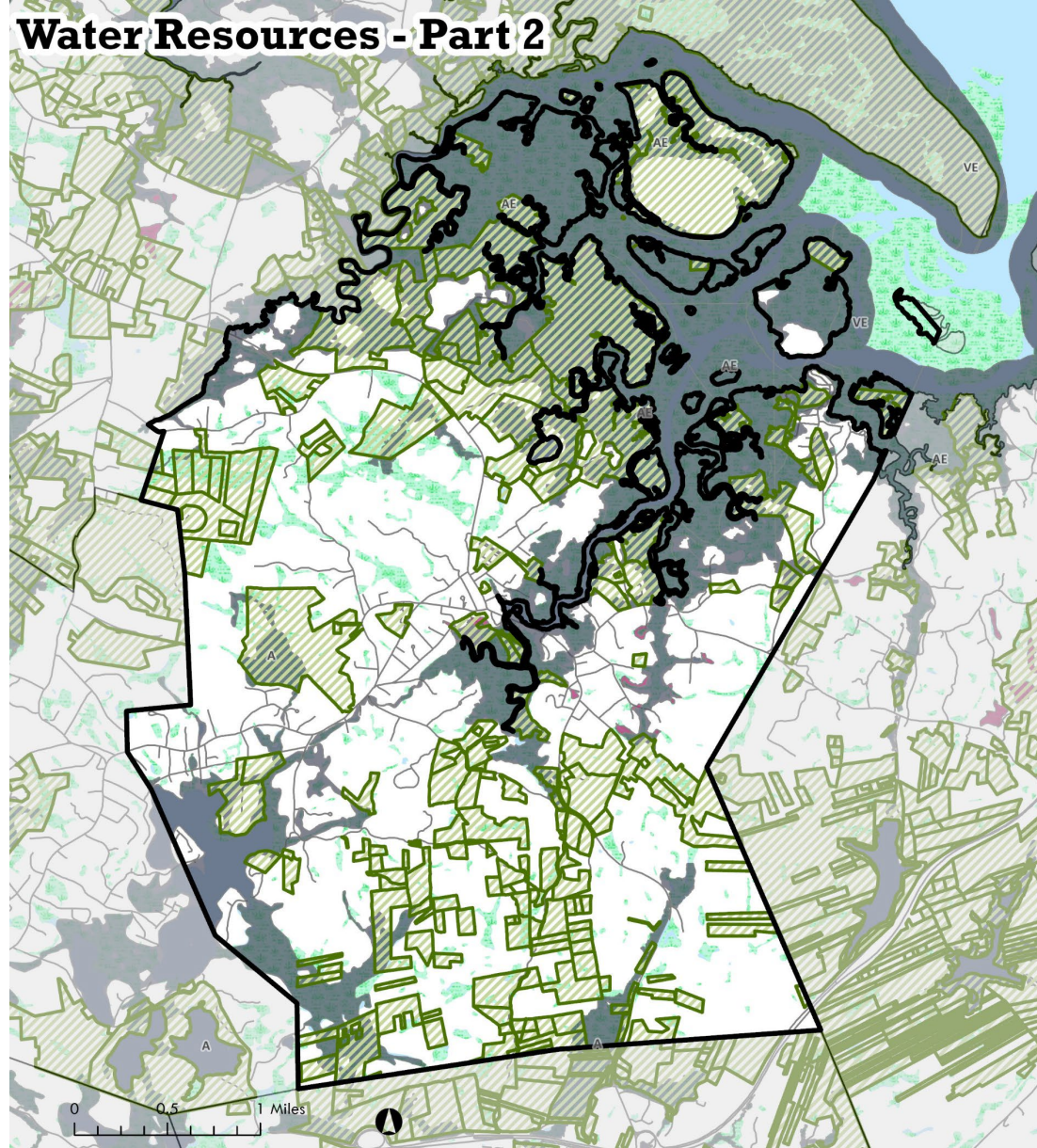


What is identified so far:

- **Major watershed:** North Coast Watershed
- **Surface water**
 - Essex River and estuary
 - Chebacco Lake (Great Pond)
 - Alewife Brook
- **Wetlands**
 - Extensive wetlands, including Great Marsh ACEC
- **Wellhead protection areas**
 - Two identified
- **Aquifers**
 - Two identified

Water Resources - Part 2

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update



Open Space
Surface Water

Wetlands

FEMA Flood Hazard

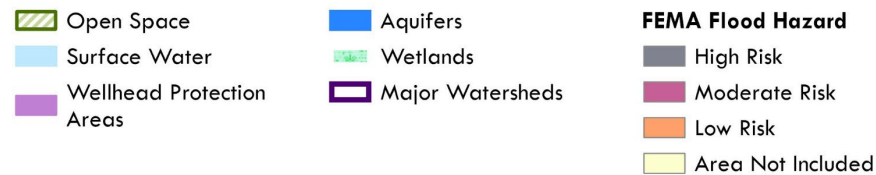
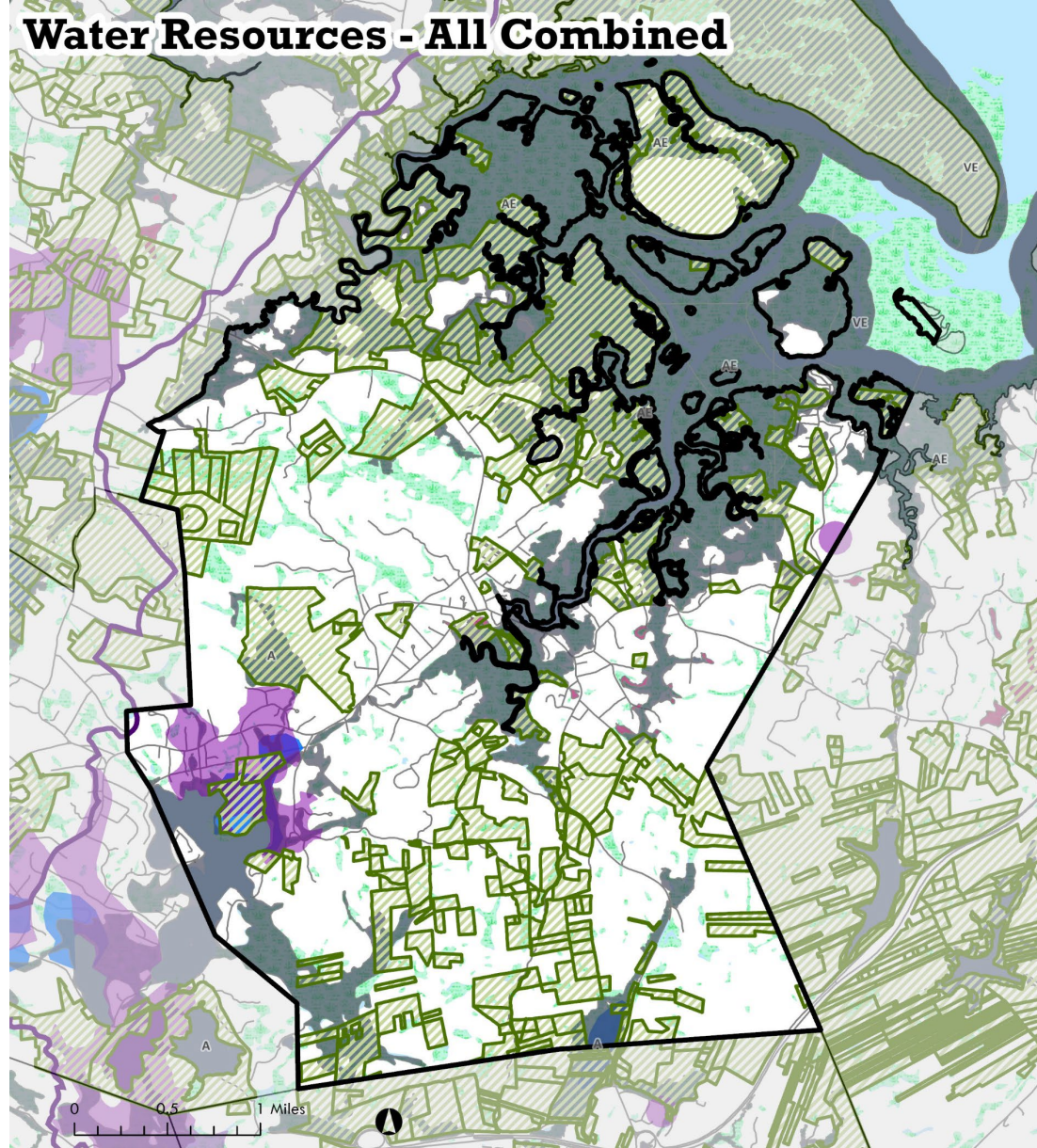
High Risk
Moderate Risk
Low Risk
Area Not Included

What is identified so far:

- **FEMA Flood Hazard**
 - Majority are high risk, with small pockets of Moderate Risk areas

Town of Essex
2026 OSRP Update

Water Resources - All Combined



Additional water issues to document in writing:

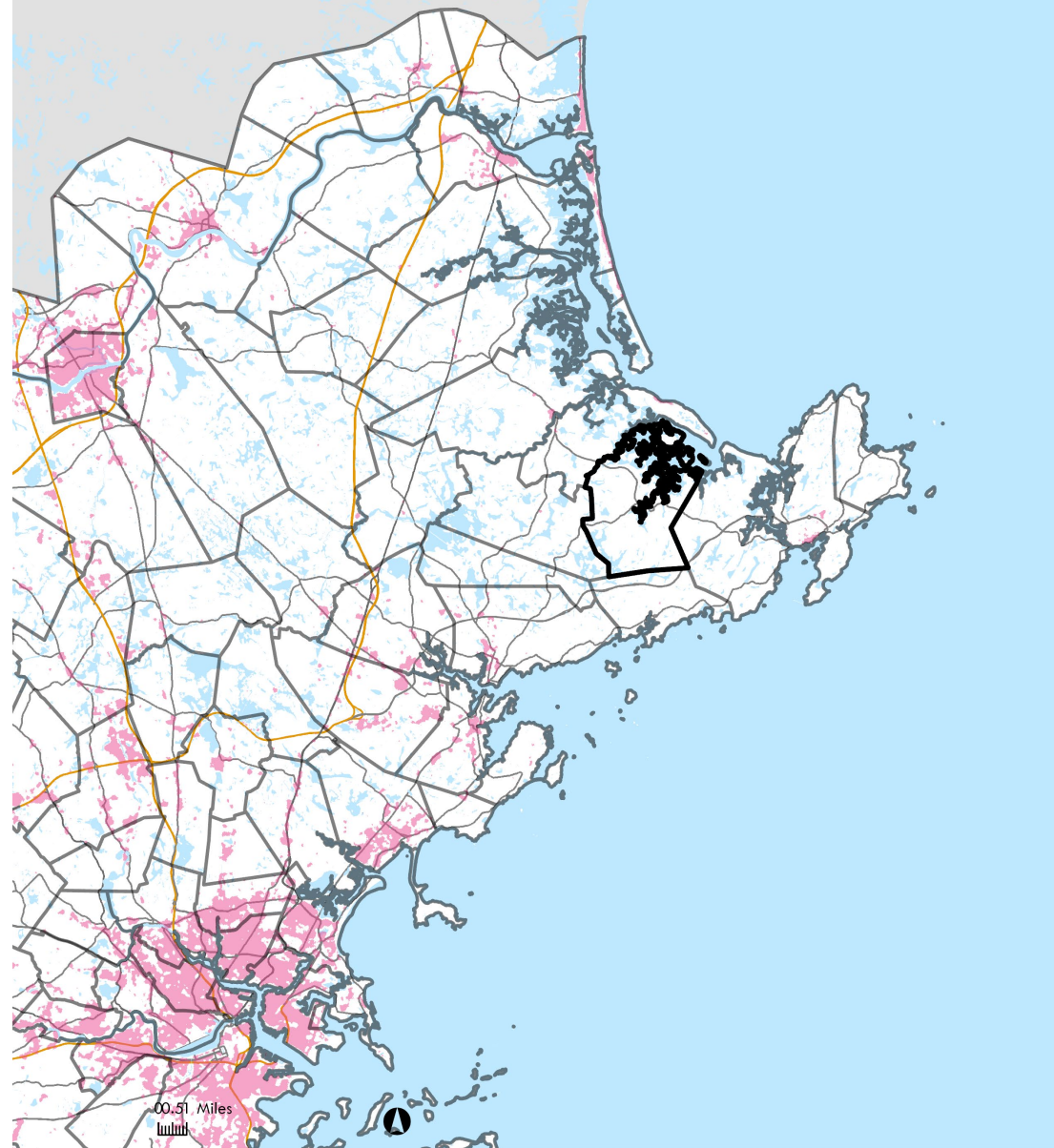
- Water quality issues in Essex River
- Preservation of the Alewife herring breeding habitat
- Flooding issues (tidal, storm floods)

Climate Change Impacts

Information required by the state workbook

- “This section is where you can add information that your community has gathered through MVP planning process. Any relevant sections from your community’s MVP may be copied and pasted into the OSRP.”
- “Land protection and park development are important mitigation strategies to protect against the worst impacts of climate change.”
 - **Heat hot spots** → “Help identify where to locate new parks or think about [...] other heat mitigation strategies.”
 - **TNC’s Resilient Lands Mapping Tool** → “Plan for potential land acquisitions that will benefit the climate.”

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update



Heat Hot Spots

What is identified so far:

- Heat Hot Spots
 - Statewide Land Surface Temperature (LST) Index “Hot Spots” depicts top 5% highest LST index areas for each region in the state
 - Not present in Essex

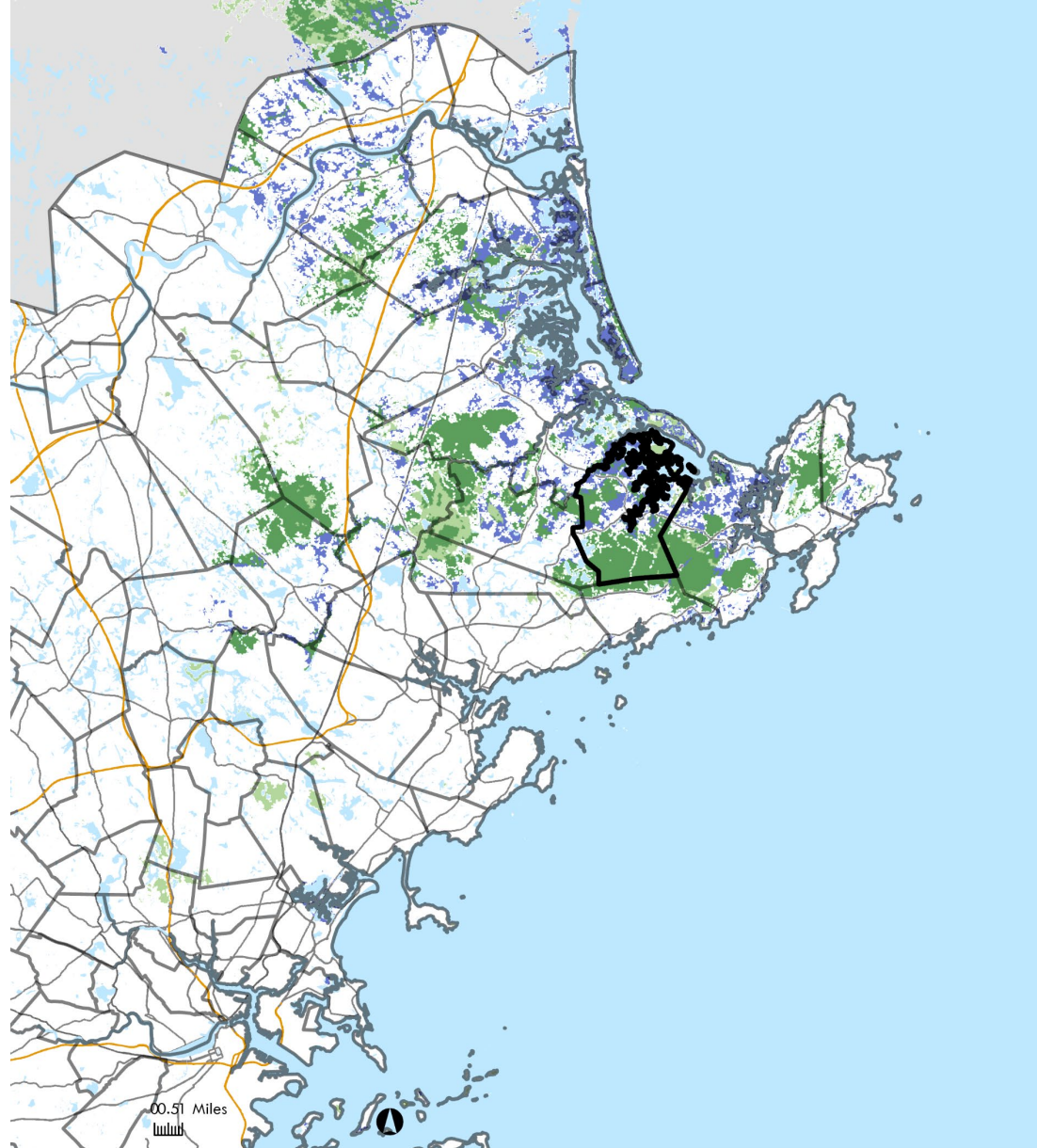
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Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update



Resilient and Connected Network TNC Customized (Simple)

- High Resilience, High Flow, and Recognized Biodiversity
- High Resilience and High Flow

■ High Resilience and Recognized Biodiversity

- Average Resilience with Biodiversity and/or High Flow
- Tribal lands excluded (pending review)

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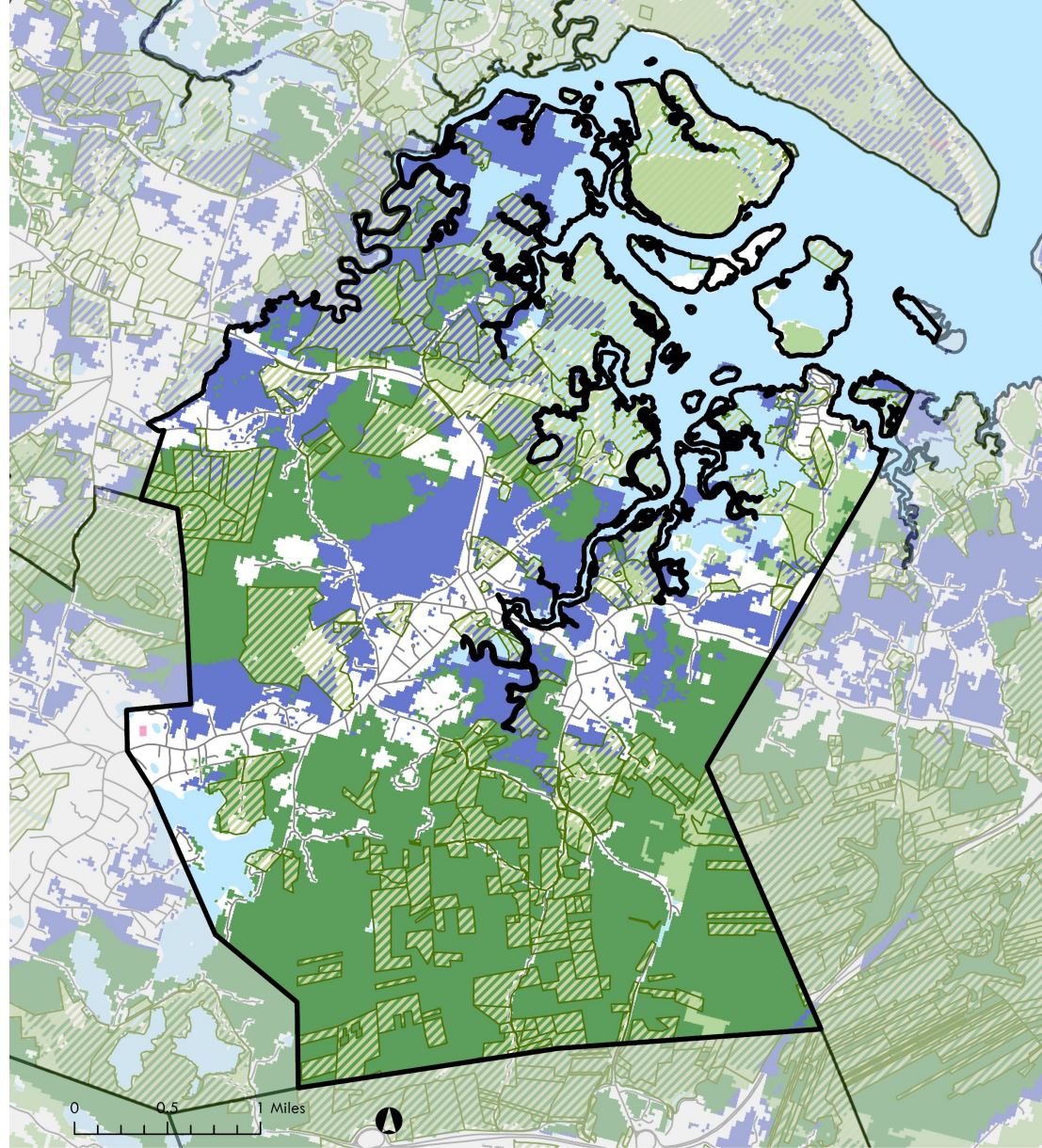
Data sources: MAPC, MassGIS, MassDOT, Town of Essex

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What we've identified so far:

- Resilient and Connected Network (RCN)
 - Prepared by The Nature Conservancy
 - “Connected network of resilient, biodiverse lands covering 35% of the US representing all ecoregions and geophysical settings. Finds areas of co-occurrence between **resilient land**, **high climactic flow**, and **biodiversity**.”
 - Shows regional **significance of Essex**

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update



Resilient and Connected Network TNC Customized (Simple)

- High Resilience, High Flow, and Recognized Biodiversity
- High Resilience and High Flow
- High Resilience and Recognized Biodiversity

- Average Resilience with Biodiversity and/or High Flow
- Tribal lands excluded (pending review)

- Heat Hot Spots
- Open Space
- Surface Water

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Data sources: The Nature Conservancy, MAPC,
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Document Path: K:\SG Land Use\Planning Projects by Municipality\Essex\Essex OSRP 2026\Mapping\Essex_OSRP_MapSeries_Draft1\Essex_OSRP_MapSeries_Draft1.aprx

Other content we can highlight in the narrative:

- Essex Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) recently adopted in 2025
 - Risk areas
 - Hazard mitigation strategies
 - [Linked here](#)

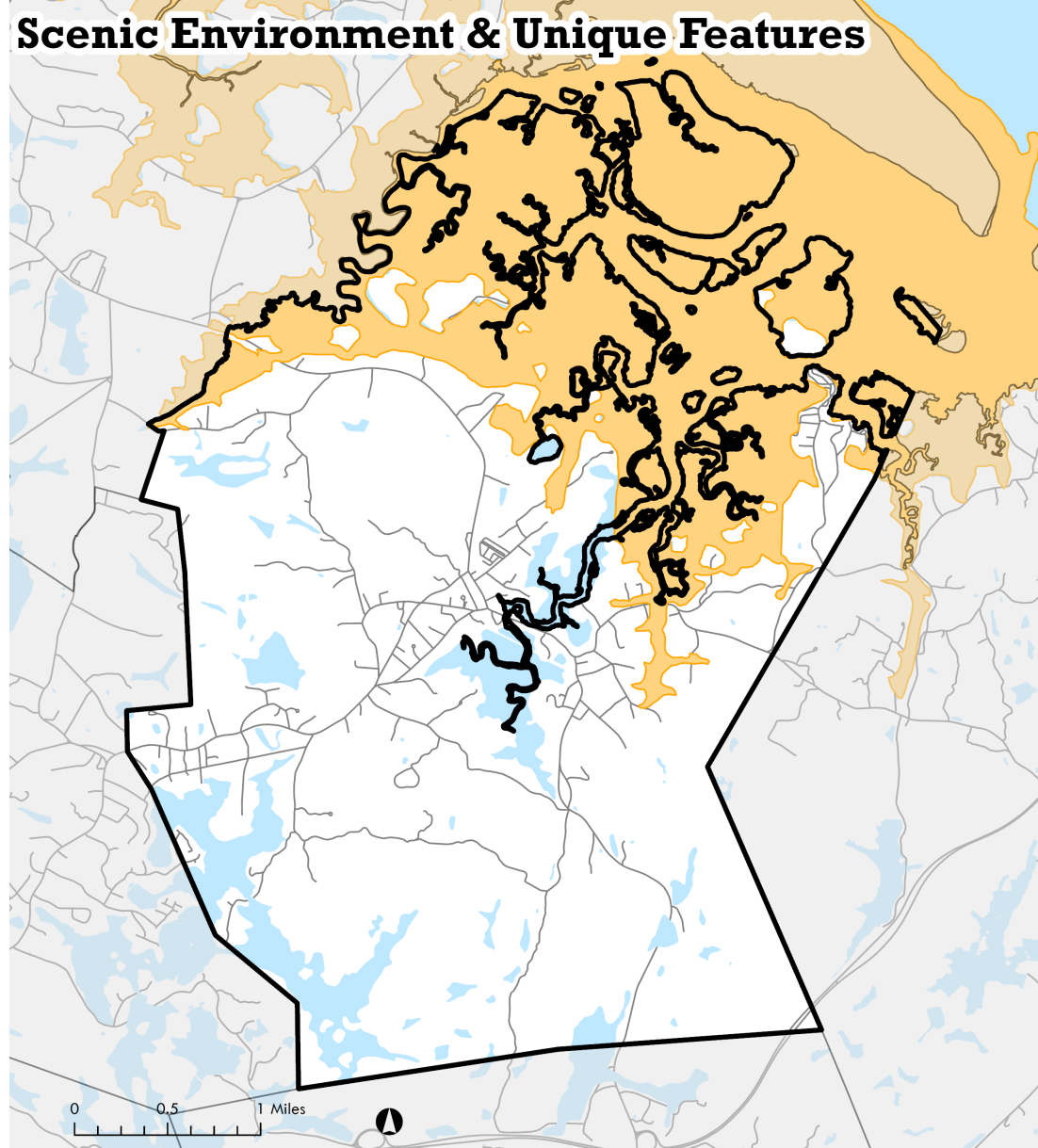
Scenic resources & unique environments

Information required by the state workbook

- “This section should identify and map those area that **contribute to the community’s character** from the perspective of open space and recreation.”
- “Include elements that give your community character and make it different from your neighbors:
 - **Unique environments** – Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
 - **Scenic landscapes** – hilltops, stream corridors, open meadows, agricultural landscapes, scenic views, and scenic roads
 - **Major characteristic or unusual geologic features** – ridgelines, glacial erratics, etc.
 - **Cultural, archeological and historic areas** – history of your community’s open space and recreation resources”

Town of Essex
2026 OSRP Update

Scenic Environment & Unique Features



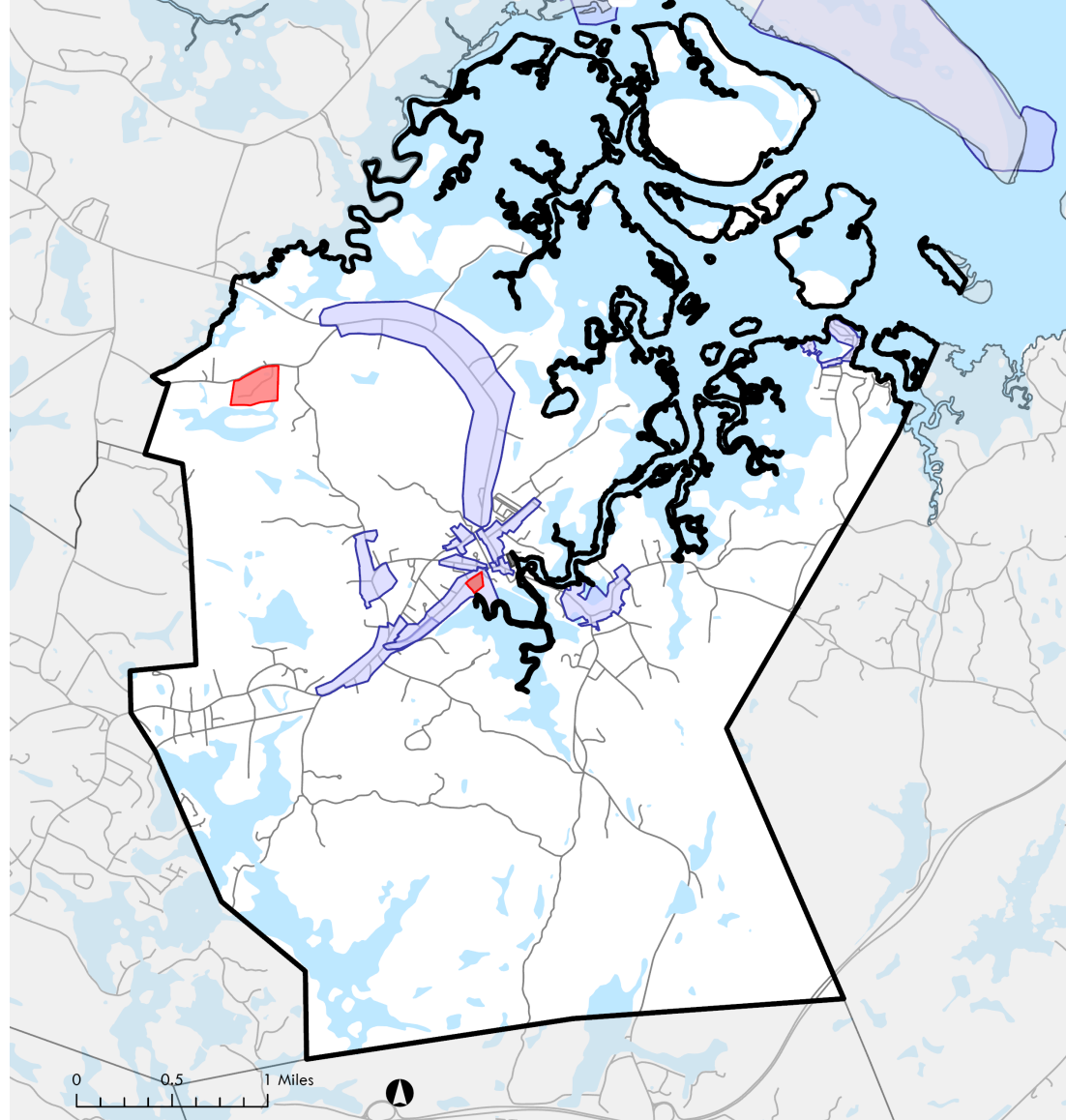
- Surface Water
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern

What is identified so far:

- Areas of Environmental Concern (state designation)
 - Great Marsh

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Scenic Environment & Unique Features



Surface Water

MassHistoric Commission
Inventory (Areas)

National Register of
Historic Places

Local Historic District

NRHP and LHD

Preservation Restriction

Massachusetts Historic
Landmark

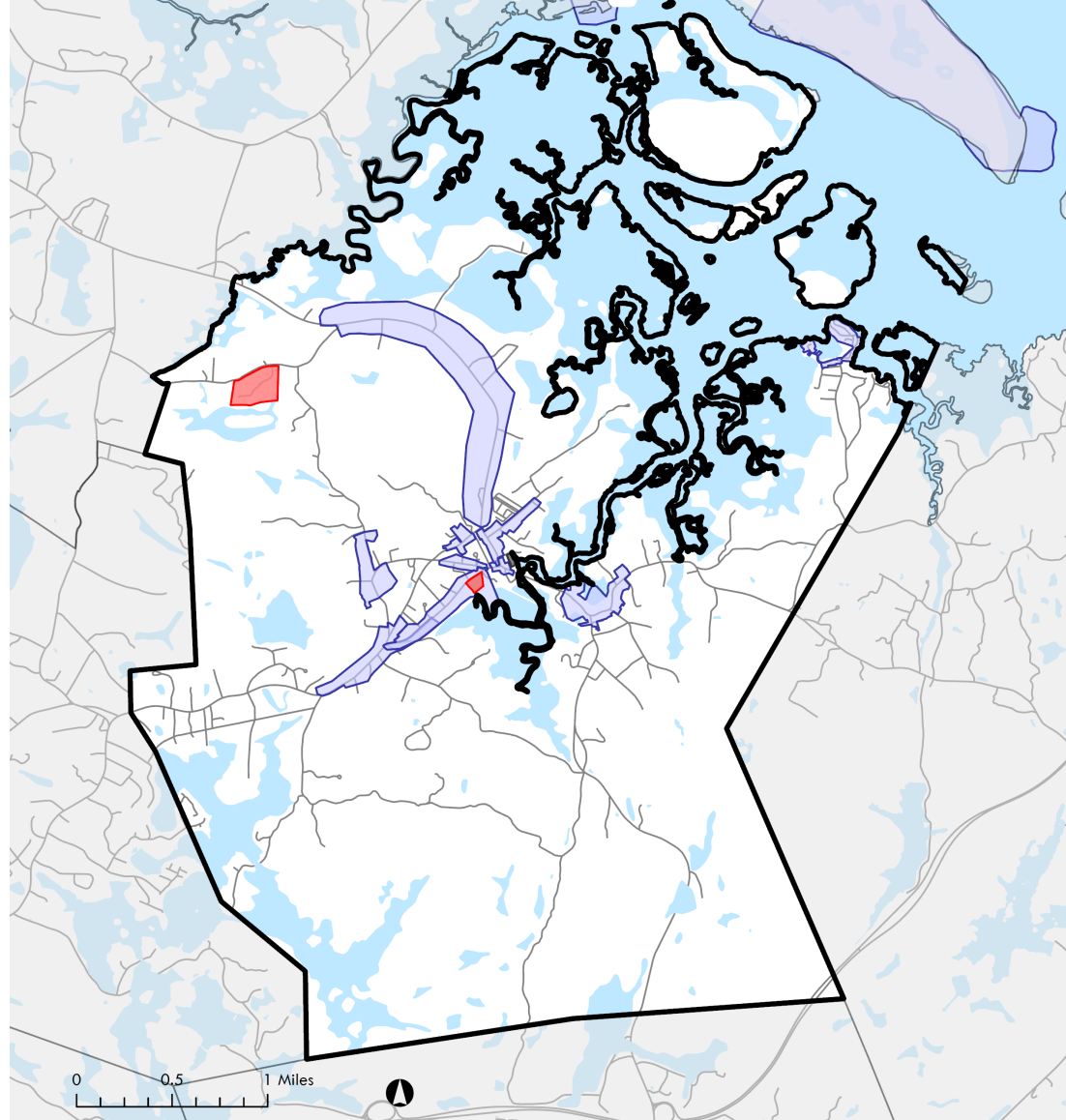
Inventoried Property

What is identified so far:

- National Register of Historic Places:
 - George Giddings House and Barn
 - Essex Town Hall and Library
 - Cogswell Grant & David Burnham House
- Preservation Restrictions
 - Essex Shipbuilding Museum

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Scenic Environment & Unique Features



Surface Water

MassHistoric Commission
Inventory (Areas)

National Register of
Historic Places

Local Historic District

NRHP and LHD

Preservation Restriction

Massachusetts Historic
Landmark

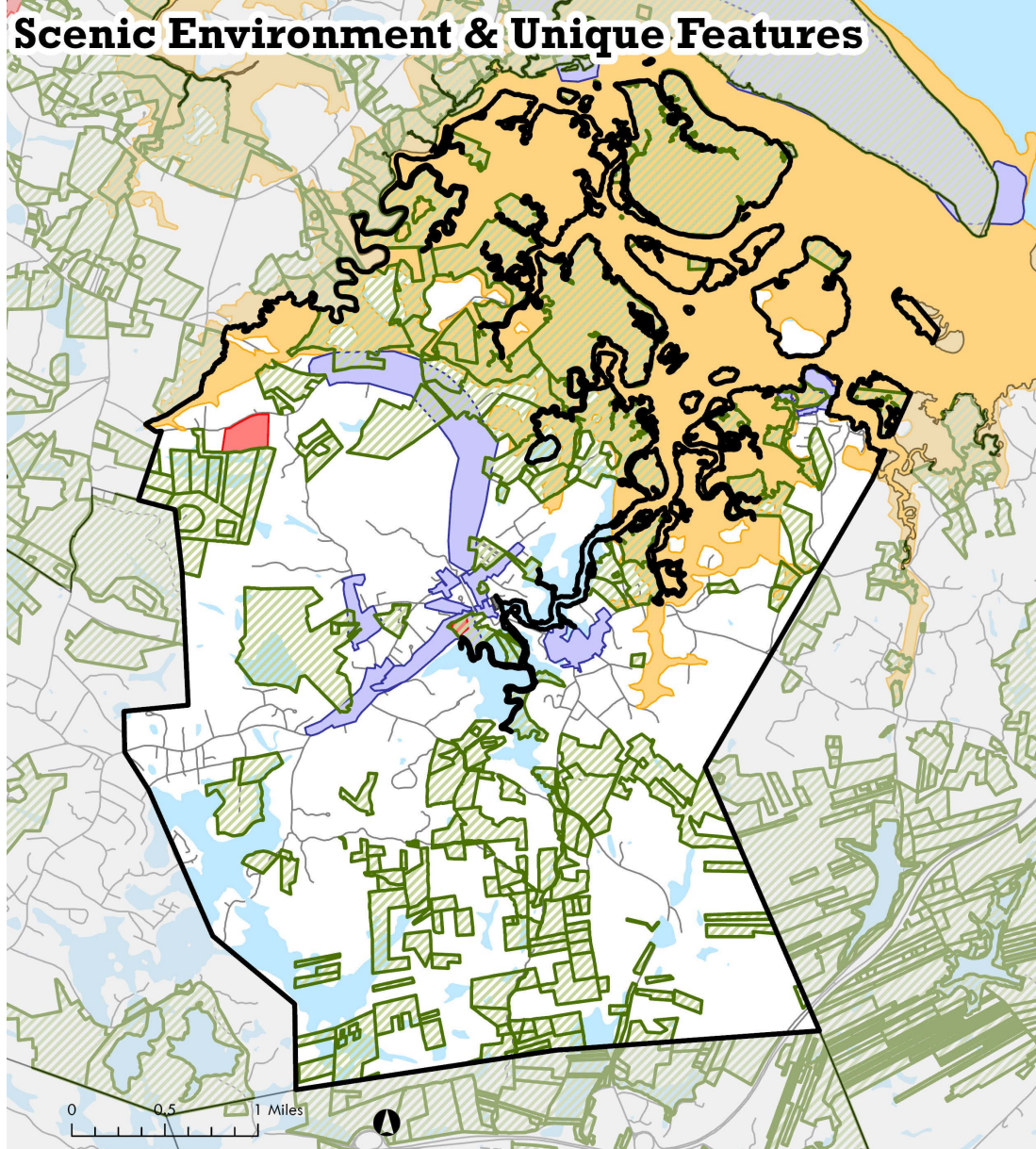
Inventoried Property

What is identified so far:

- “Inventoried but not designated with one of the previous designations”
 - Northern Ave Streetscape
 - Western Avenue
 - Main Streetscape
 - Causeway
 - Winthrop Streetscape
 - Martin Streetscape
 - Story Streetscape
 - Conomo Point
 - South Essex Area
 - Essex Falls District

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update

Scenic Environment & Unique Features



The 2016 OSRP also notes:

- Essex Coastal Scenic Byway
- Essex River Cultural District
- Locally designated Scenic Roads (Apple St, Belcher St, Choate St, Story St)
- Glacial Erratics – Big Agassiz Rock (Trustees)
- Glacial Drumlin – White’s Hill, Stavros Reservation

Is there anything new we should add since last OSRP?

Wrapping up this phase of work

- We will share these materials with the committee via email
- Please let us know if you have any edits or additions

Agenda

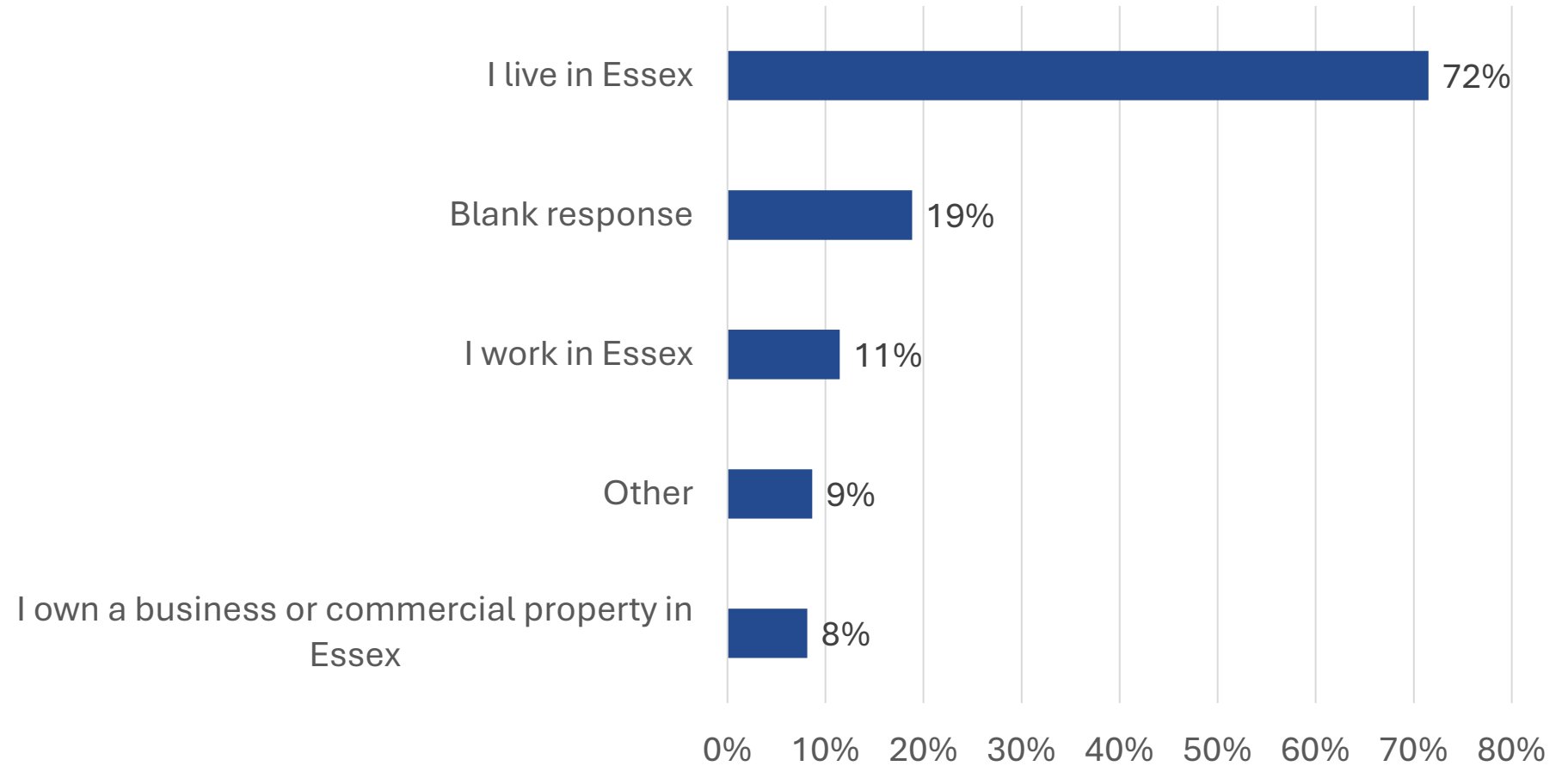
- Where we are in the process
- Environmental and Land Analysis
 - Open space inventory
 - Review of required maps
- **Survey results**
- Looking ahead: Needs Analysis & Action Plan
- Next steps

Survey Responses

- Survey available from Oct 20 – Dec 19
- 488 people engaged with the survey
 - 6 hard copy submissions + 482 online submissions
- Sample cleaning:
 - Checked for duplicate IP addresses
 - Removed submissions that were completely blank (95)
 - **Final sample: n = 393**
- This represents ~ 10% of current Essex population (3,680 people)

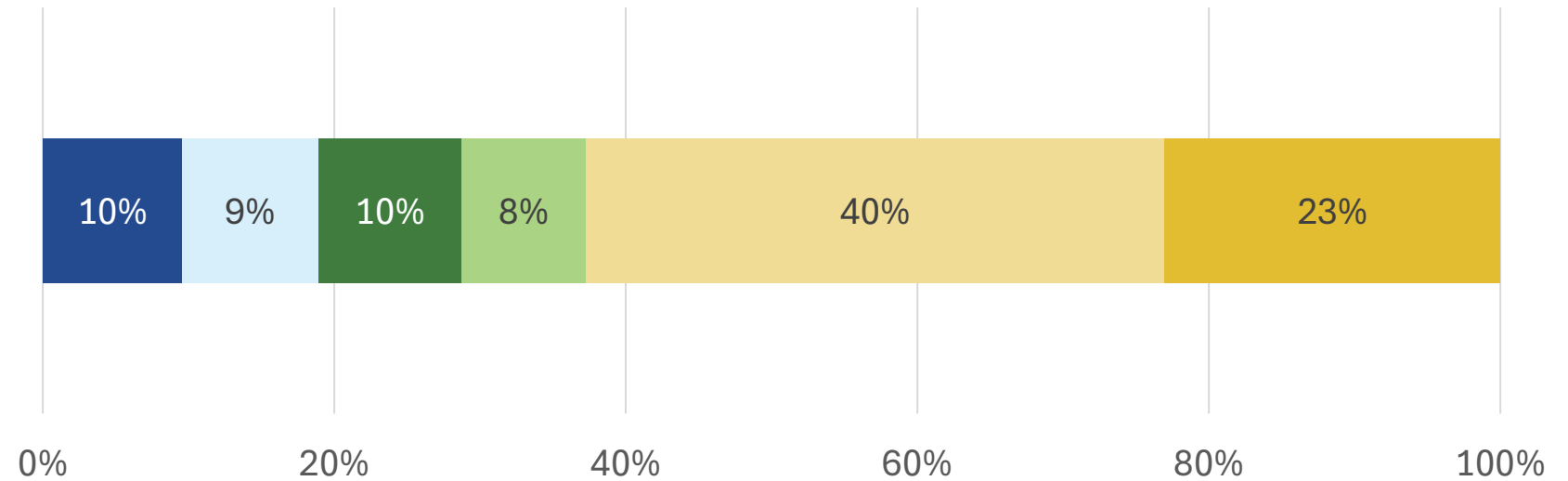
Participant Demographics

What is your connection to Essex? Select all that apply



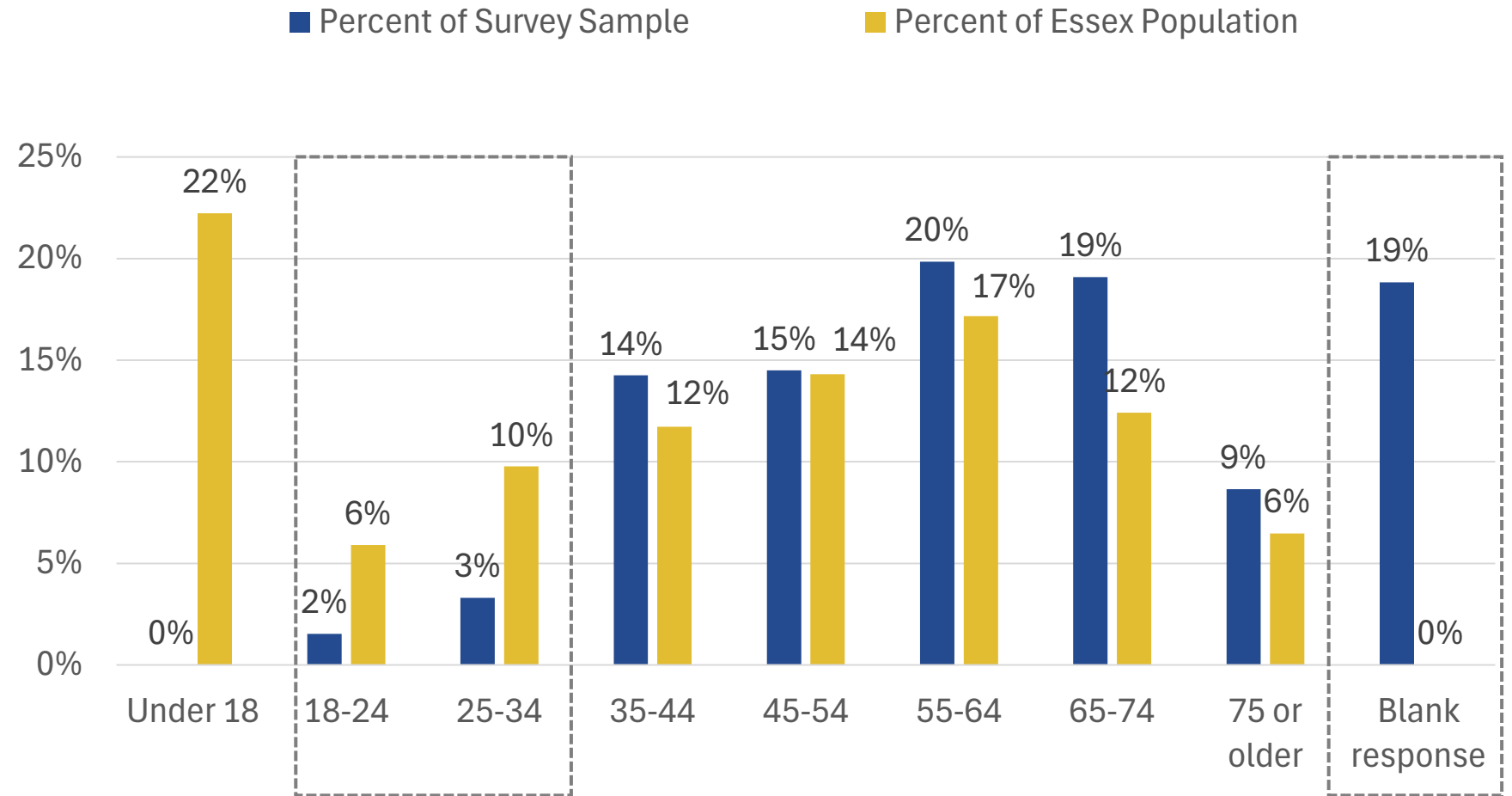
Note: Respondents could select more than one response.

How long have you lived in Essex? (Percent of resident survey responses only)



- Less than 5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 21+ years
- Prefer not to answer / No response

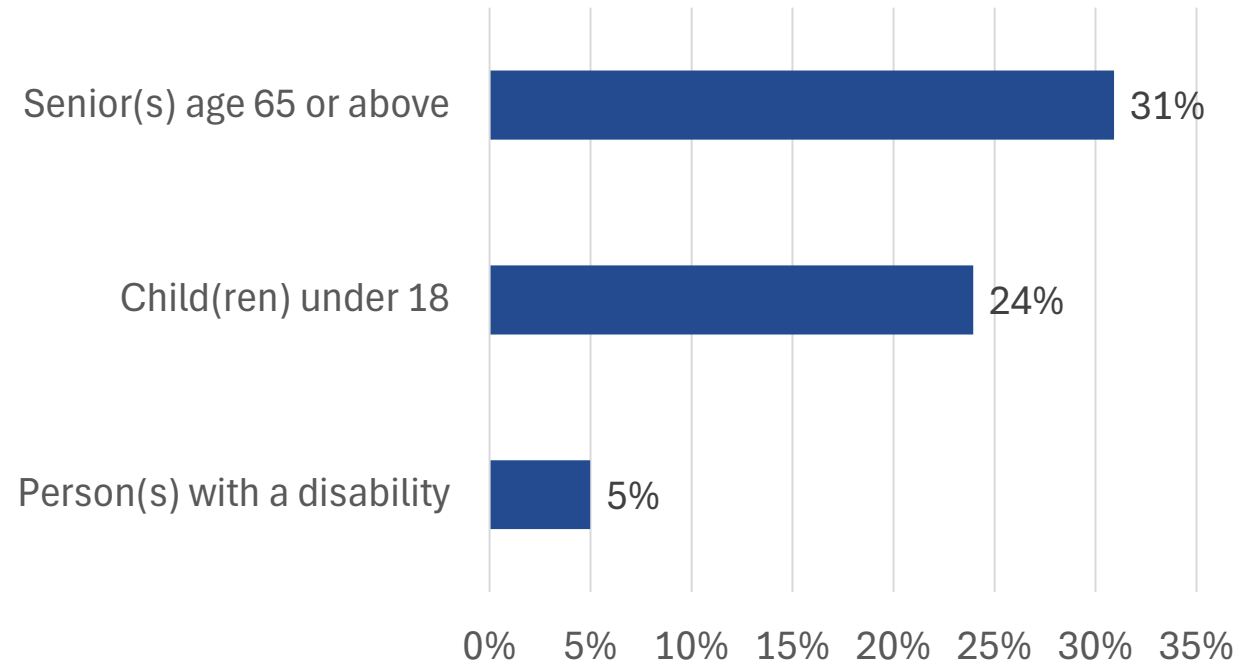
How old are you?



Source: ACS 5-year estimates, 2019-2023

Do you or any members of your household match the following descriptions? Check all that apply.

Percent of Survey Respondents

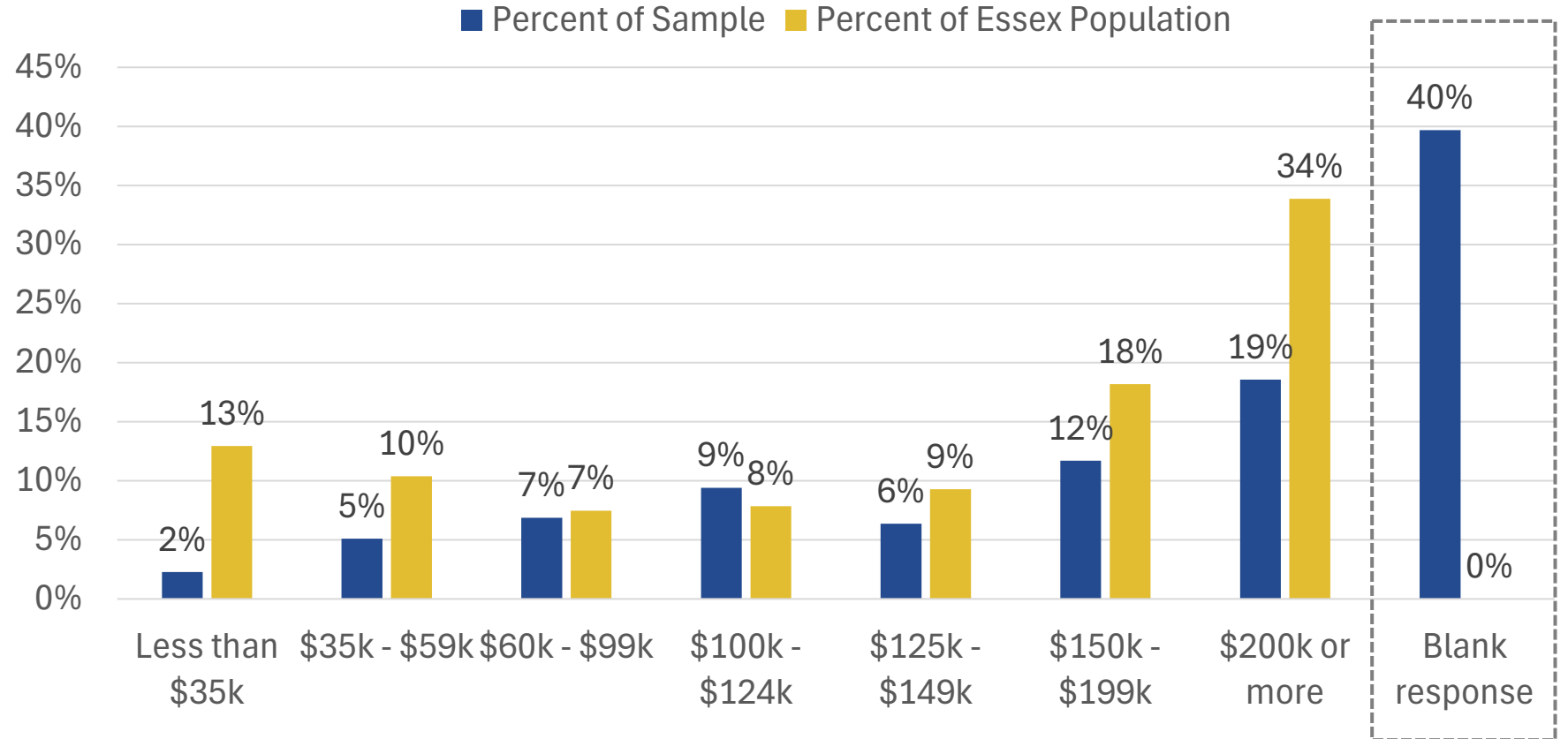


➔ 27% of Essex households include seniors

➔ 38% of Essex households have children under 18

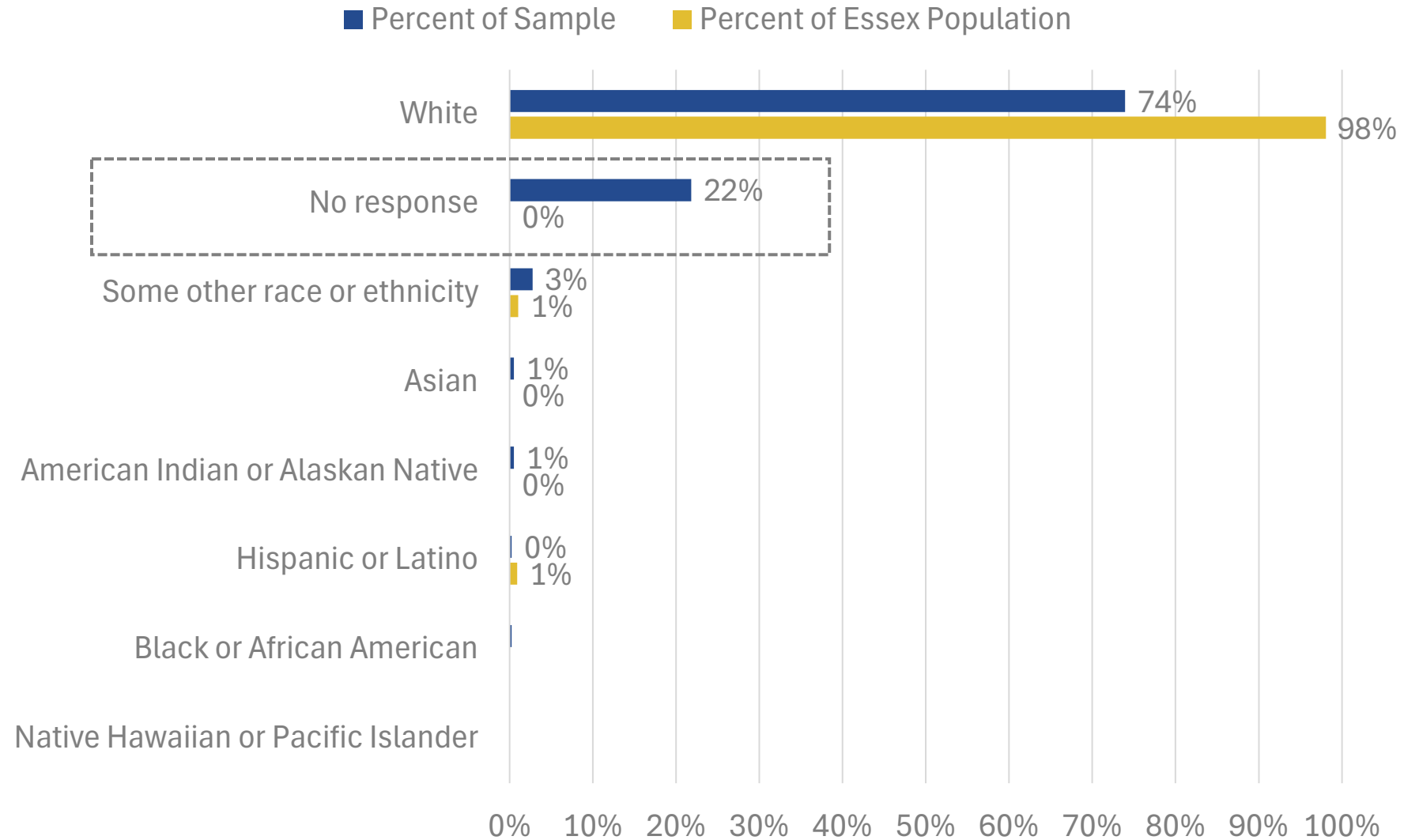
➔ 12% of Essex residents

What is your annual household income?

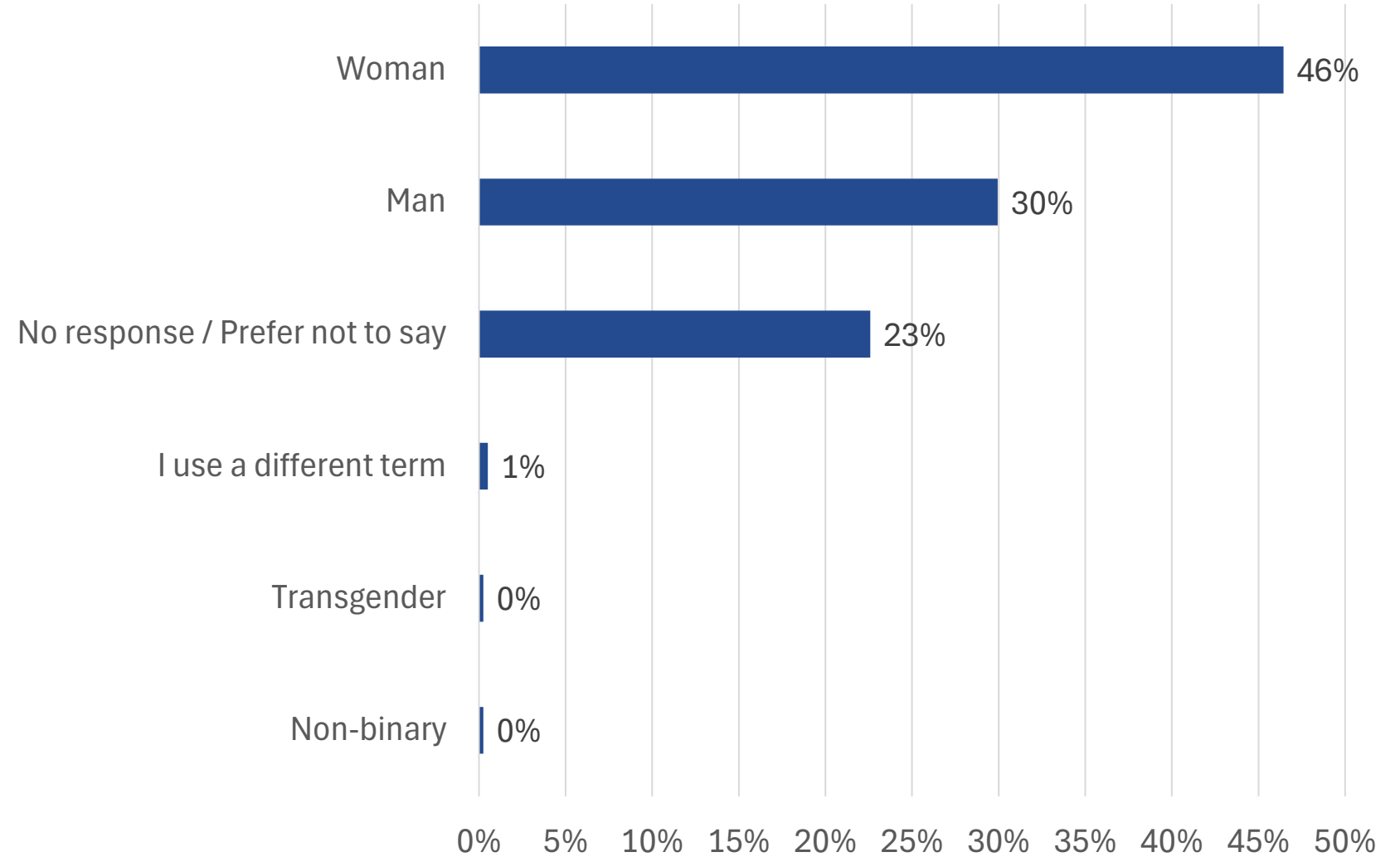


Source: ACS 5-year estimates, 2019-2023

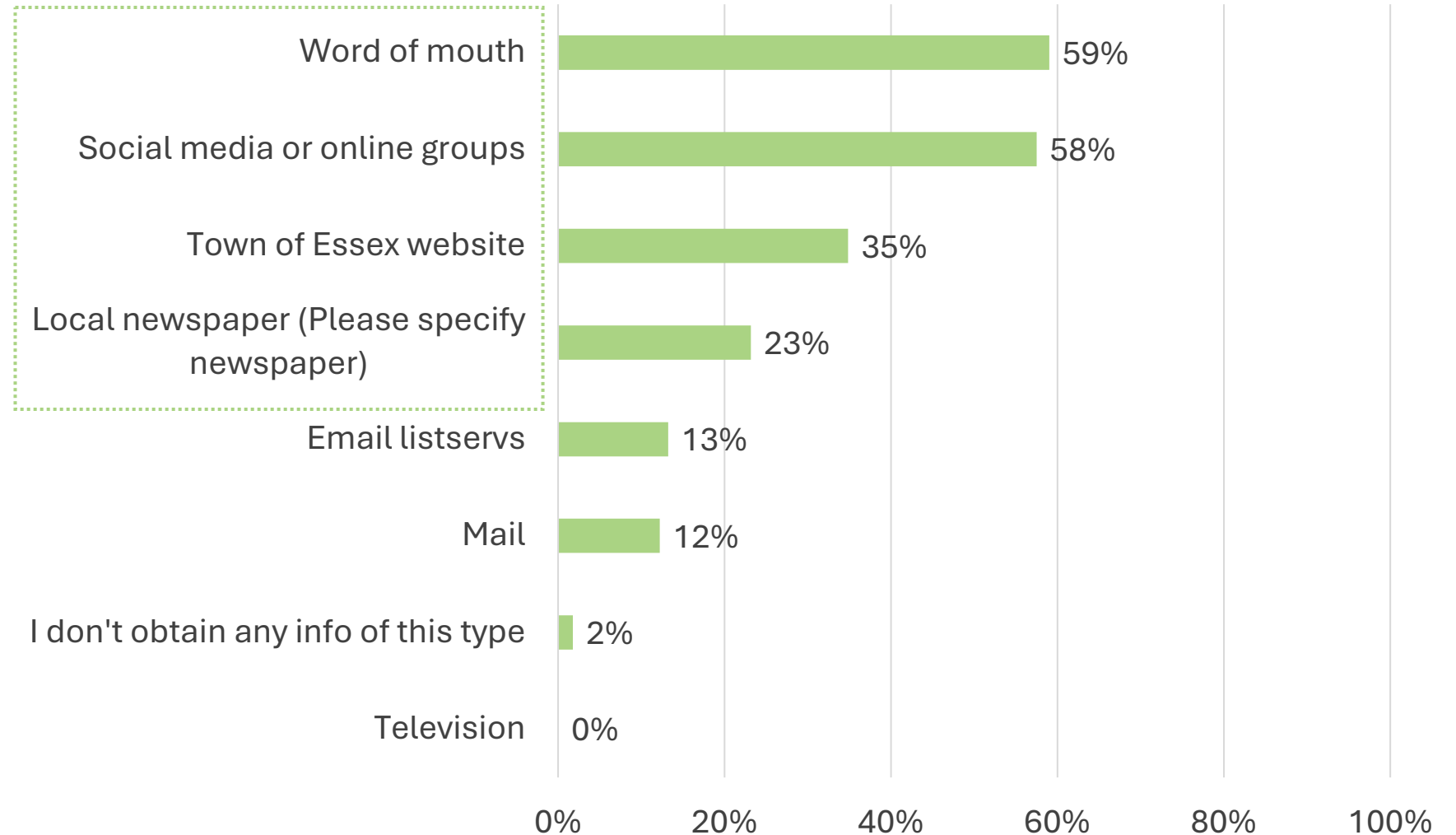
What is your racial-ethnic identity?



How do you describe your gender identity? Select all that apply

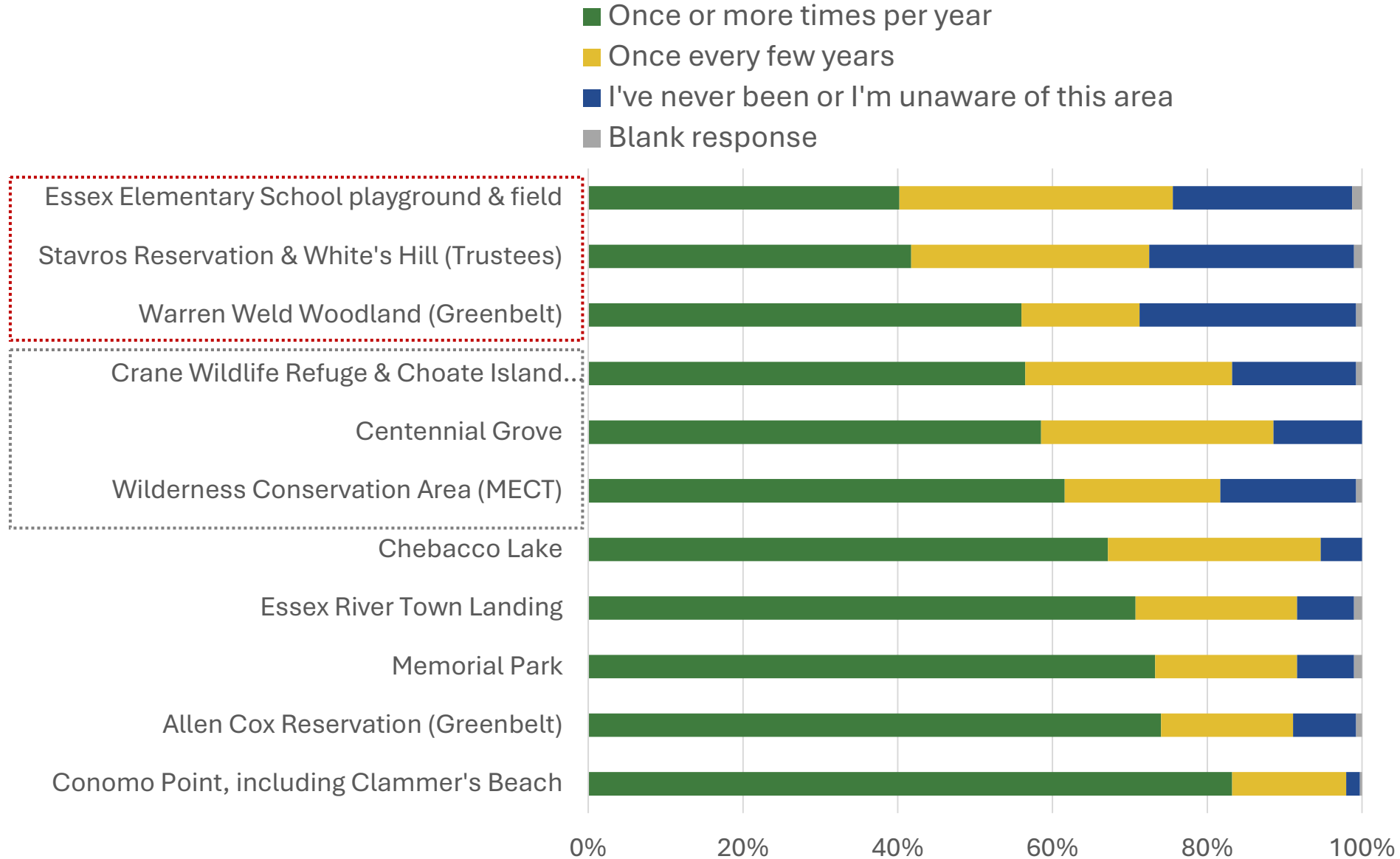


How do you currently obtain information about news, events, and activities in Essex? Check all that apply.



Existing use of open space; Barriers & needed improvements

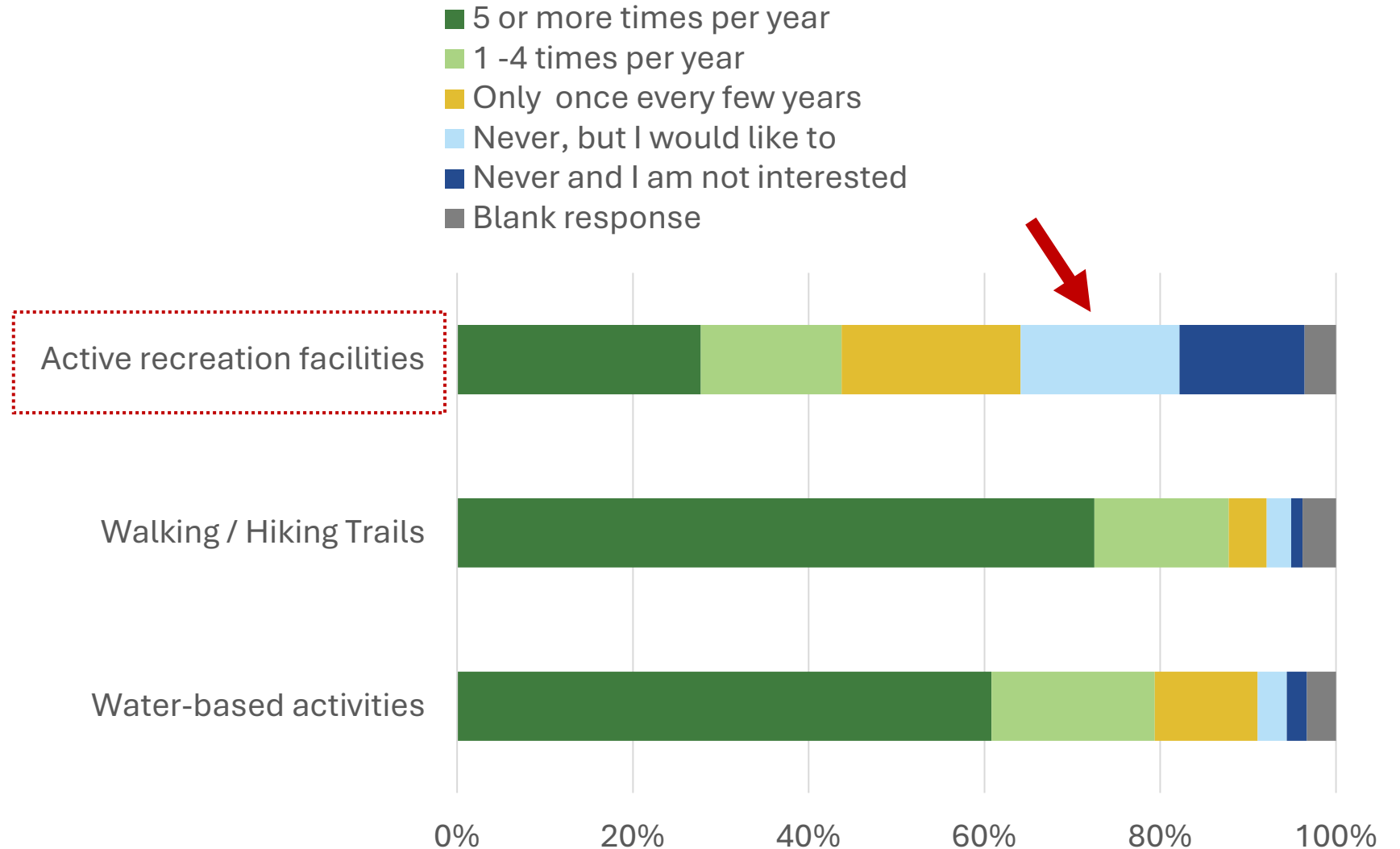
How often do you visit or use the following open space and recreation areas?



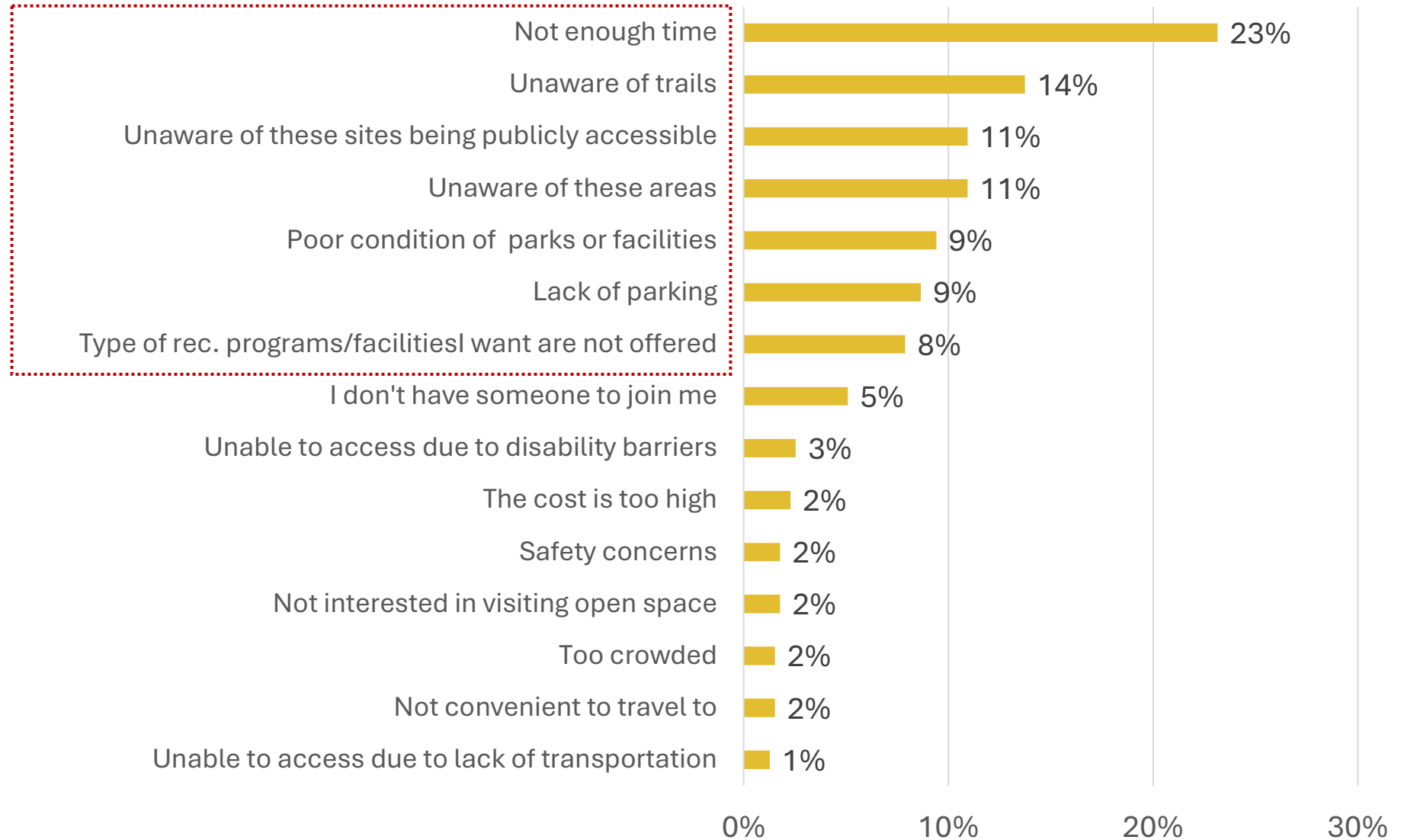
Are there any other places in Essex where you engage in outdoor recreation?

- Cogswell Grant
- Cape Ann Golf Course
- Other sites outside Essex

How often do you or your household partake in, or use, the following activities in Essex?



What prevents you from visiting the open space and recreation areas listed in the previous questions? Check all that apply



What prevents you from visiting the open space and recreation areas listed in the previous questions? (Text response n = 51)

- **Tennis courts** in disrepair
- **Chebacco Lake & Centennial Grove** in disrepair, inaccessible to residents, or difficult to access due to lack of parking
- **Lack of awareness**; lack of promotion & communication about what is available to the public
- Some places don't allow **dogs**
- Lack of **bike access** for youth & kids
- Lack of **bathrooms** at Conomo Point
- Note that several respondents (20+) said **they face few to no barriers** to visiting open spaces in Essex, other than lack of time, or desire for variety

Please provide your input on how open space and recreation areas could be improved and/or made easier to use and access. Please be as specific as possible. (Text responses, n = 188)

- **Renovating tennis courts** at Memorial Park
- **Adding pickleball courts**; suggestion to add them to Memorial Park or Centennial Grove.
- **Other field sports are also missing**, especially **soccer**.
- **Improving playgrounds**: Memorial Park playground is the only one in Town, and has issues with fencing, light, equipment; suggestions for splash pad and equipment for toddlers.
- **Recreational programming and events** for youth and for seniors in particular
- **Improving access to the water and waterfronts**: Boat access to the river including for kayaks, paddleboards; **beach access** including at **Conomo Point**; and lake access at Chebacco Lake.
- Generally improving access and amenities at **Centennial Grove & Chebacco Lake**
- **Lack of parking**, specifically mentioned for Conomo Point, town landing

Please provide your input on how open space and recreation areas could be improved and/or made easier to use and access. Please be as specific as possible. (Text responses, n = 188)

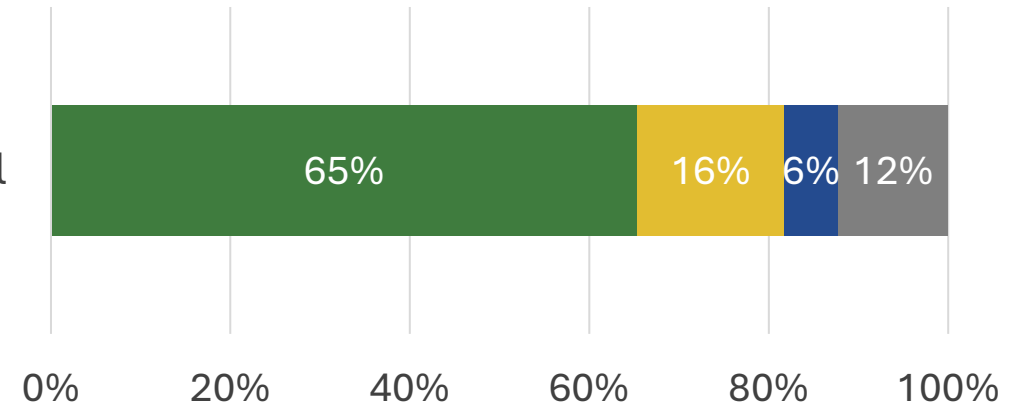
- **Trail upkeep:** Adding clearer signage, better trail markings, and maps at trailheads
- Improving **sidewalks and lighting on Main Street;** better use of **new pocket park**
- **Improving bike access,** including off-road trails; need for a safe connection along Southern Avenue to Manchester.
- Natural preservation of existing open spaces, keeping the “**pristine**” nature of Essex
- Need to protect and preserve water quality (watershed, Chebacco Lake, Alewife Brook, Great Marsh)

Prioritization of goals and strategies

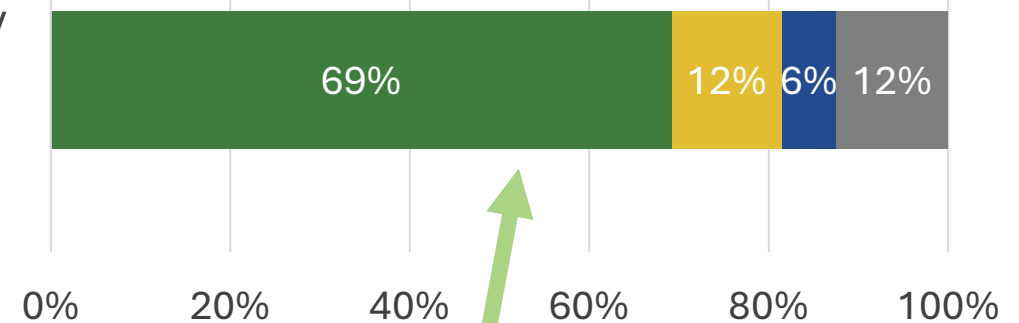
Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

■ Strongly Agree / Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree / Strongly Disagree ■ No Response

Existing open spaces in Essex are effectively protecting the most critical natural resources of the town.



Essex should do more to proactively preserve and conserve additional natural resources in the town.

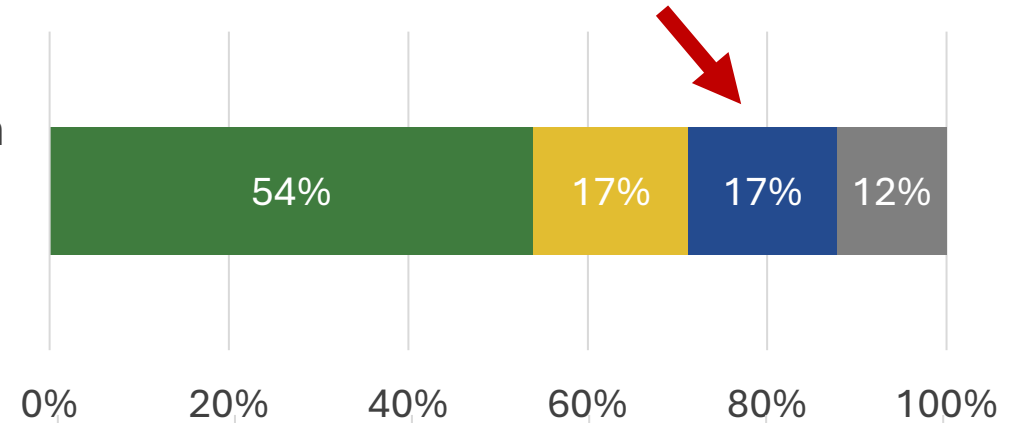


Largest share of Strongly Agree + Agree within this section of the survey

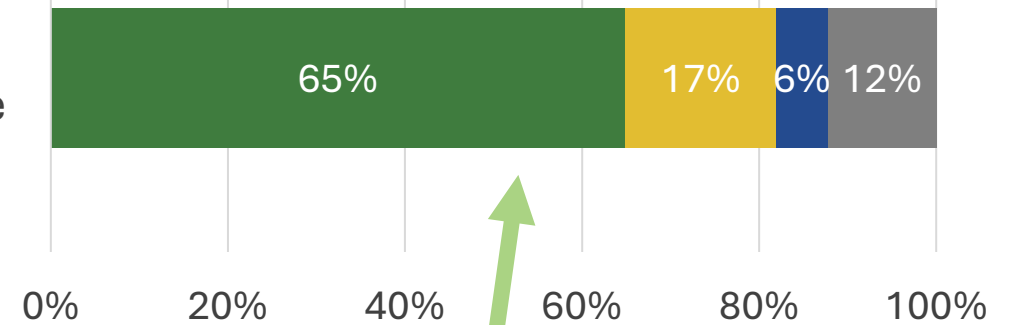
Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements

Strongly Agree / Agree Neutral Disagree / Strongly Disagree No Response

Existing parks and recreational sites in Essex are meeting my and my household's recreation needs.



Essex should do more to expand recreational amenities and programming to meet the needs of the community as a whole.



Please rate the importance of the following statements

 **Environmental Protection**

 **Recreation Facilities and Programming**

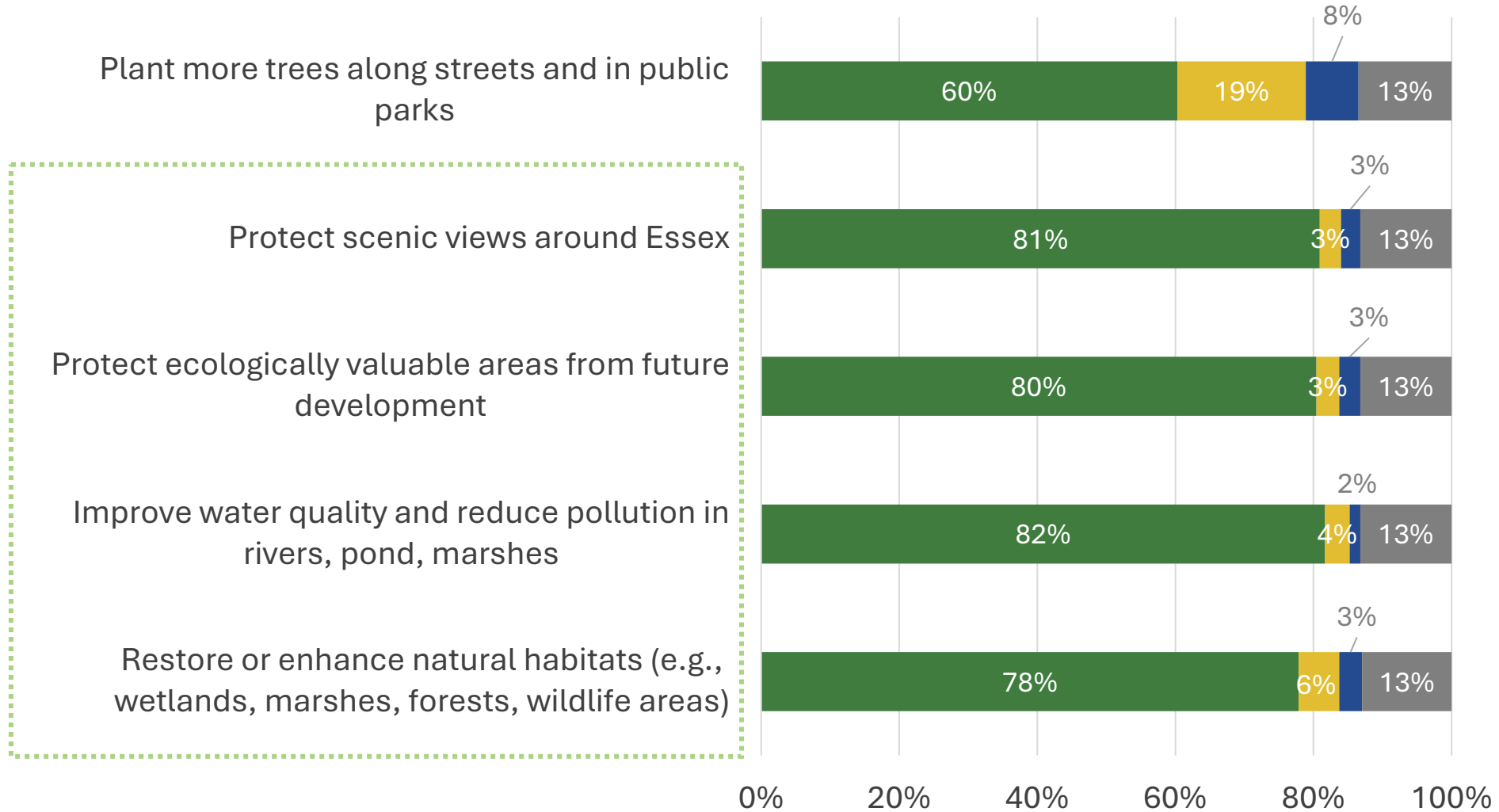
 **Access and Connectivity**

 **Communication and Education**

 **Long-term Maintenance & Acquisition**

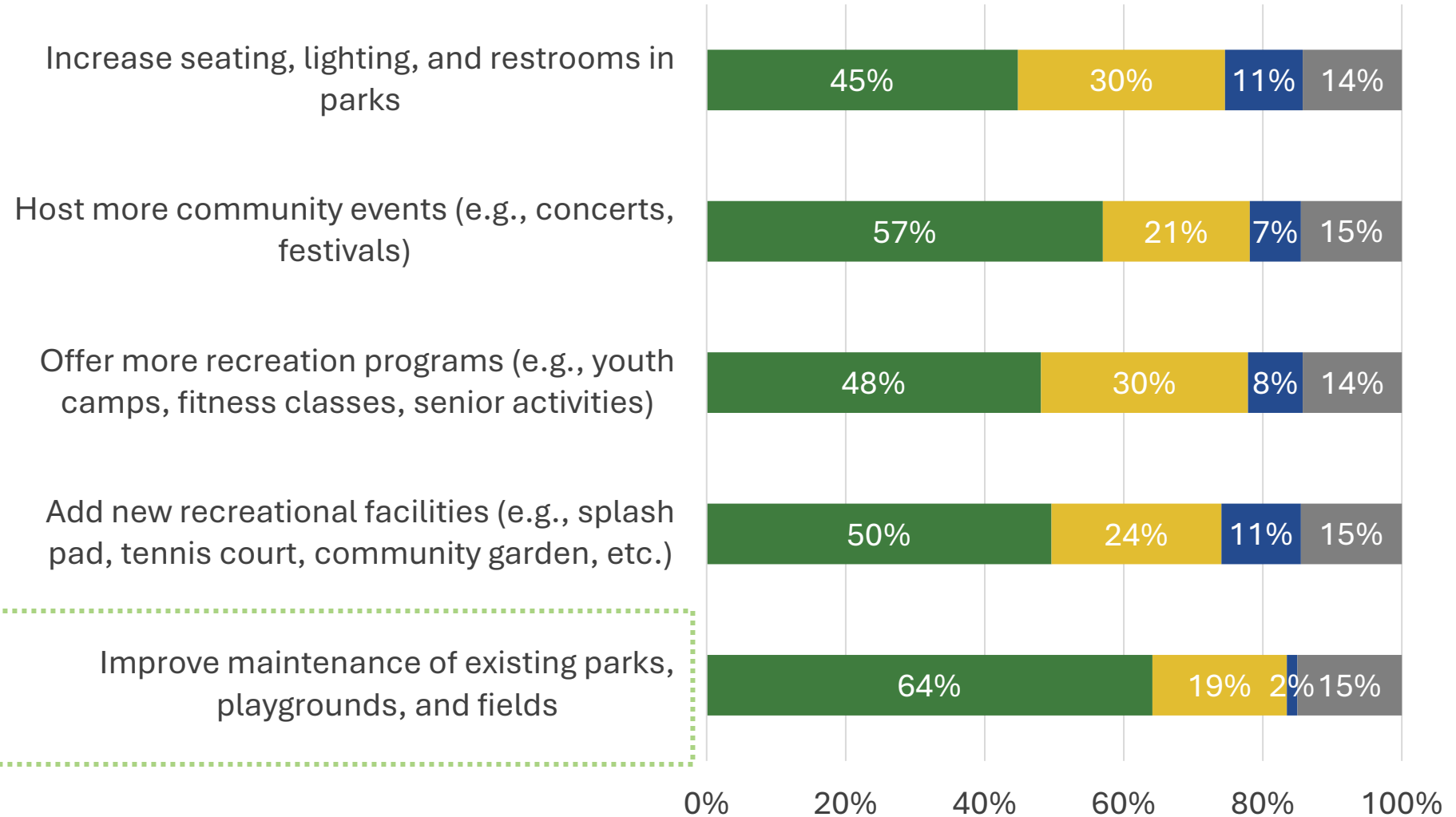
 Environmental Protection

■ Very Important / Important
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Less Important / Not Important
 ■ No Response



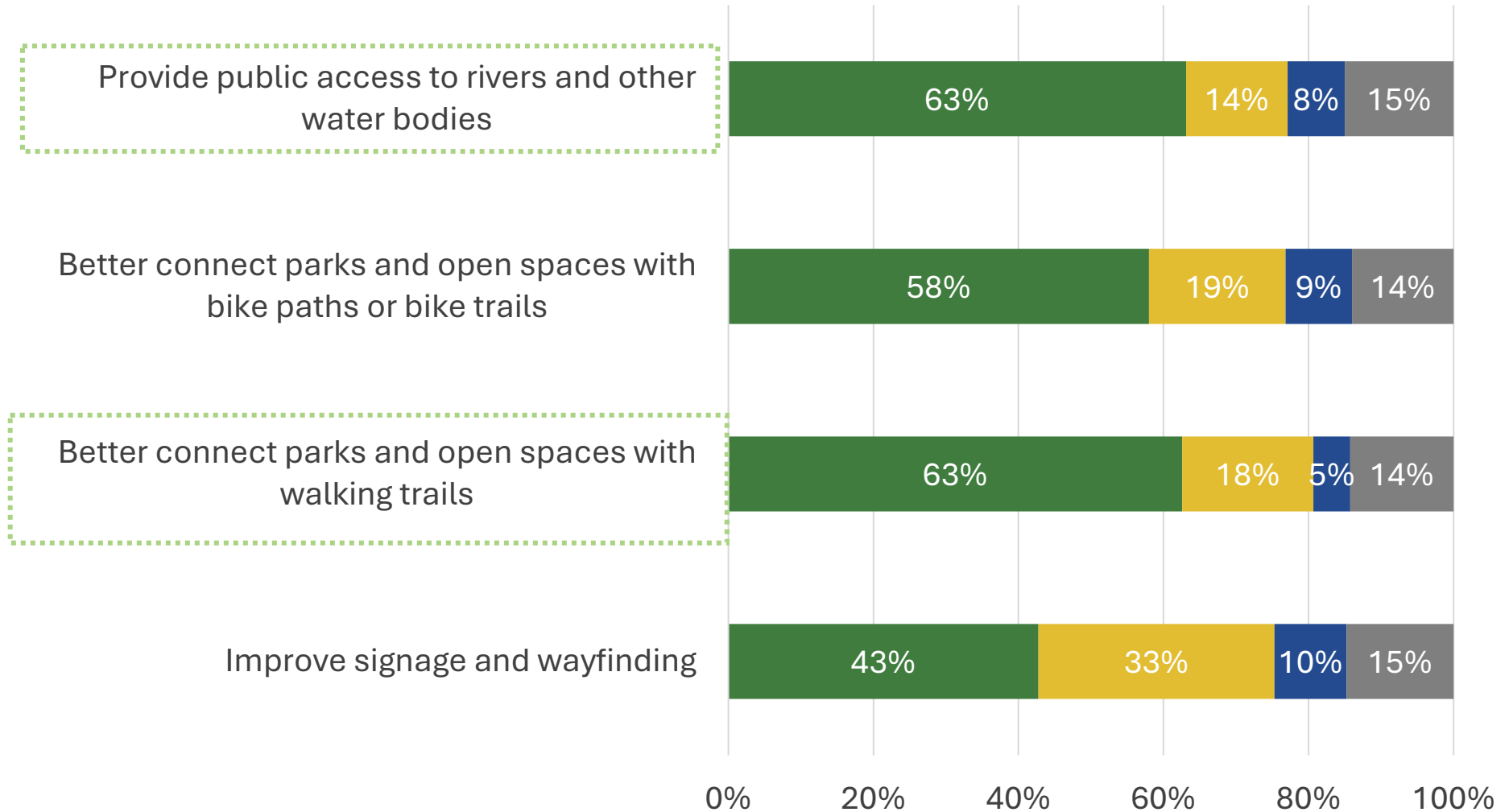
Recreation Facilities and Programming

■ Very Important / Important ■ Neutral ■ Less Important / Not Important ■ No Response



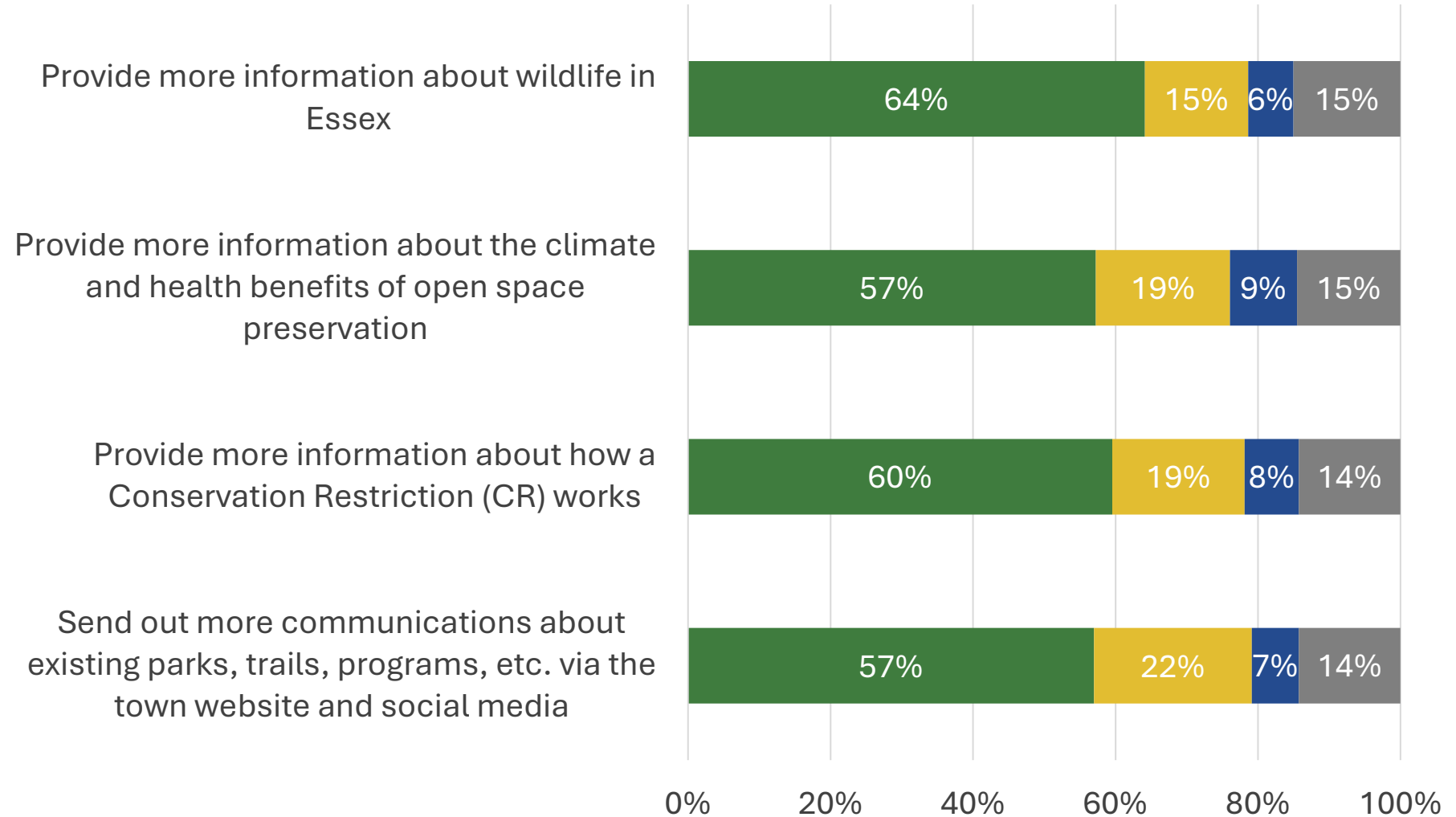
Access and Connectivity

■ Very Important / Important ■ Neutral ■ Less Important / Not Important ■ No Response

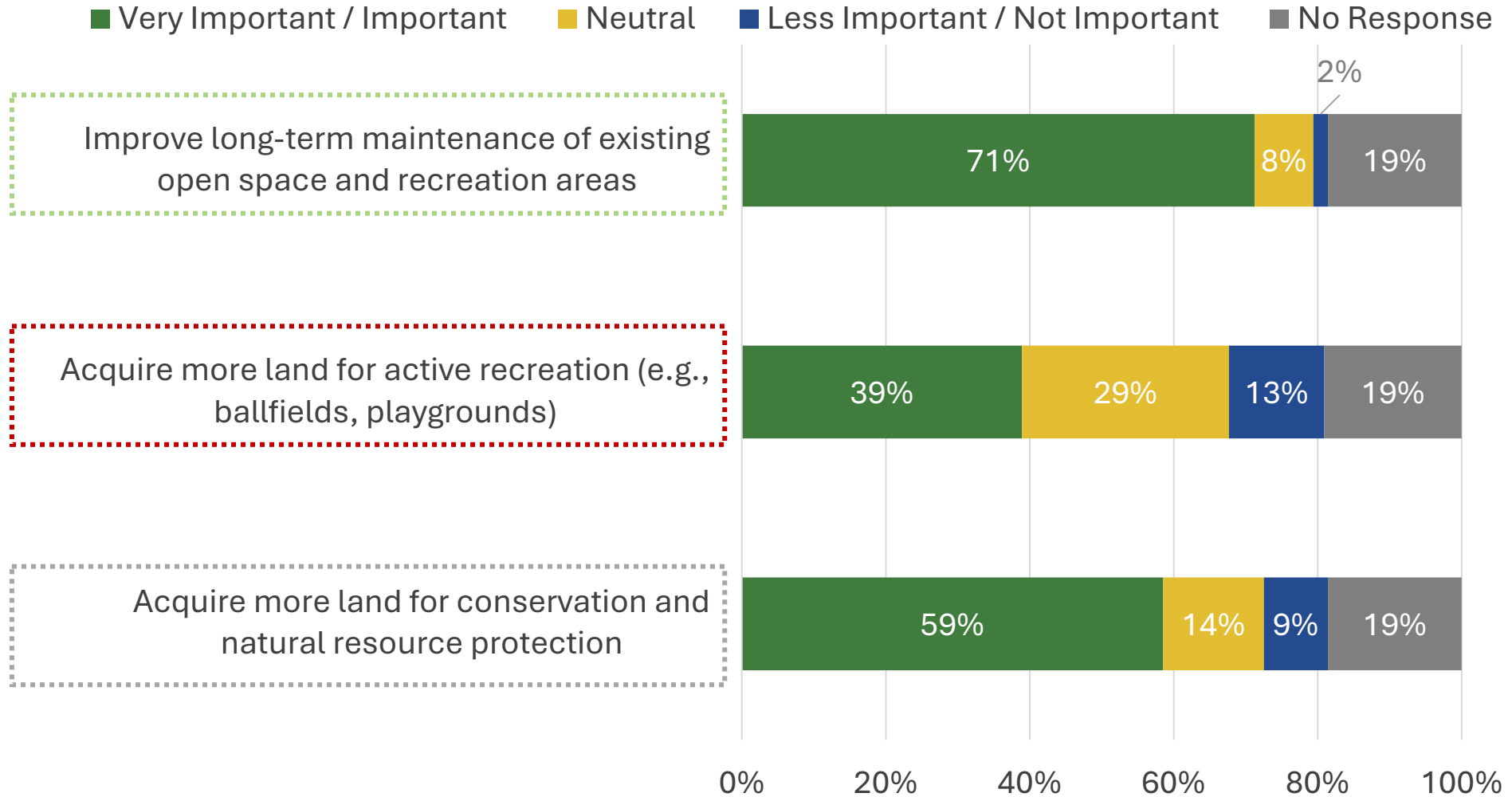


Communication and Education

■ Very Important / Important ■ Neutral ■ Less Important / Not Important ■ No Response



Long-term Maintenance & Acquisition



Parcels for permanent protection

Are there any parcels you think the Town should investigate permanently protecting for conservation or recreation purposes?
(Text responses, n = 80)

- **Great Marsh** and **wetlands**
- **Route 133** and surrounding parcels and **farmland**
- **Wooded lots** near Southern Ave & MECT area
- **30 Apple Street**
- **Conomo Point** -- return the land to open space for all residents
- Chebacco Lake and surrounding watershed; former **Camp Menorah** property on Wood Drive

*“This is a complex question as the **town also greatly needs more affordable housing which will almost certainly impact certain areas** that might otherwise be classified as protected open space”*

*“No, Essex is adequately and beautifully protected as-is. **Essex needs more housing, development, businesses, and tourism to become more economically stable** and maintain or improve the quality of education and other services in the town.”*

*“The Town of Essex should be selective in permanently protecting any parcels of land for conservation or recreational purposes. **Based on the amount of land protected now the town can't afford much more loss of tax revenue.**”*

Summary of themes

Town of Essex 2026 OSRP Update



Very strong support for environmental protection of conservation areas and maintenance of existing resources. **However, there is debate** about how much *more land* should be preserved for conservation due to fiscal / other priorities.



Lack of recreational opportunities in Essex due to:

- (1) Existing facilities being in disrepair (tennis courts, playground, Centennial Grove)
- (2) Lack of desired recreational amenities (soccer, pickleball)

Higher priority placed on maintenance of existing recreation open space – rather than acquiring **new** land for recreation.



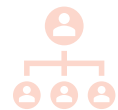
Need for improved access to Essex water resources, which are seen as great assets (waterfront and Chebacco Lake). **However, there is debate** about how/whether to expand access, vs. maintain limited access for residents only.



Need for more walking, hiking and biking connectivity in general, with some specific sites and areas noted more often than others.



Lack of awareness can be a barrier to use of open space. Desire for more awareness, education, and communication about resources and benefits.



[Less central] Some management & governance issues raised. E.g. no centralized parks department or recreation center/services; trail maintenance, etc.

Discussion

- Any clarifying questions?
- Did anything surprise you? What stood out to you?
- What do the results mean for you as we start thinking about goals and actions?

Agenda

- Where we are in the process
- Environmental and Land Analysis
 - Open space inventory
 - Review of required maps
- Survey results
- **Looking ahead: Analysis of Needs & Action Plan**
- **Next steps**

Analysis of Needs

“[This section] should be a systematic examination of **what is needed to achieve the community's stated goals** for open space conservation and outdoor recreation as heard through the public participation process.”

- **Natural resource protection needs:** What actions must be taken to keep land, water, air, and wildlife healthy?
- **Recreation needs:** What are the outdoor recreation needs of your residents?
- **Management needs:** What management / governance structure is needed to implement the goals and objectives of the Action Plan?

Action Plan

Goals

→ Objectives

→ Actions

Timeline

Funding

Party responsible

SECTION 9:

SEVEN YEAR ACTION PLAN

All actions contained in the seven-year plan will be initiated and led by the Open Space Committee unless otherwise noted.

Goal A. Protect and Preserve Essex's Open Spaces

Objective A-1. Preserve and protect the singular and threatened habitats of Essex

<i>Action</i>	<i>Schedule</i>	<i>Funding Source</i>
Meet with MECT representatives to gain clear understanding of the current Essex Woods conservation campaign and what the Town's role should be	Spring of 2017	N/A
Meet with the Chebacco Lake Watershed Association and identify opportunities for buffer preservation	Spring of 2016 and ongoing	N/A
Research ownership, co-ordinate with MCET and negotiate gift, sale or deed restrictions for Woods parcels lacking frontage.	Ongoing	CPA
Educate the public and bring to town vote a proposal to conserve the 114+ acres of Town-owned tax-title woodlots within the Woods.	2018	N/A

Objective A-2. Preserve and protect scenic open spaces

<i>Action</i>	<i>Schedule</i>	<i>Funding Source</i>
Meet with Selectmen, NGO representatives, and Planning Board to review properties under Chapter 61, 61A and 61B protection, discuss prioritized lands as determined by this Plan, and plan strategy in case of chapter program refusal	Spring-Fall of 2018	N/A
Continue to ensure Open Space & Recreation are priorities for implementation of the Strategic Plan	Ongoing	N/A
Designate Lufkin and Island Roads to the Scenic Road By-law	2016	N/A
Request Special Legislation to allow Town regulation of John Wise Avenue as a Scenic Road	2018	N/A

Community Event #2

- **Purpose:** Get input on the goals and action items we proposed to include in the updated OSRP
- **Potential timeline:** mid or late April
- **Format:** To discuss!
 - Are there any community events that we could leverage?
 - Other ideas?

Next steps

MAPC / Town of Essex



Synthesize the
analysis of needs

+ Finish research on active
recreation resources



Analyze the 2016
Action Plan



Prep OSC Meeting #5
(March) and Community
Event #2 (April)

Open Space Committee

- **Interest in inviting Greenbelt to present at OSC Meeting #5?**
- Brainstorm ideas for Community Event #2
- As desired, review draft maps and inventory for final comments
- Let us know your preferred date for OSC Meeting #5 in March!

Thank you!

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John Cruz, MAPC - jcruz@mapc.org