

RESILIENT COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

City of Lewes – Public Listening Sessions and Survey Summary



Background

The Resilient Community Partnership (RCP), established and administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control (DNREC) Delaware Coastal Programs, provides assistance to municipalities in Delaware through an open and cooperative process to address environmental challenges.

The RCP leverages federal funding provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to help Delaware communities improve their planning and preparation capabilities. As part of the RCP, Delaware Coastal Programs provides technical support, public outreach and training to support a community's efforts to be more resilient to coastal and climate hazards.

The 2021 RCP is being conducted in collaboration with the University of Delaware Institute for Public Administration (IPA), the City of Lewes, and Delaware Coastal Programs. This RCP is focused on assisting the City of Lewes address coastal environmental challenges and hazards. As an important first step in the process, the University of Delaware IPA hosted three listening sessions on June 8, 9 and 10, 2021 to better understand the concerns of the City of Lewes community members. Delaware Coastal Programs supported these listening sessions by providing technical assistance and hosting an on-line survey containing the same questions. Approximately 50 people attended the listening sessions and 113 responses to the survey were received. Please note that this summary is a compilation of the comments received during the sessions and through the survey and are not ranked or prioritized. The information provided under each question is presented alphabetically to avoid any perceptions of prioritization.

The following are the questions posed during the sessions/survey with a synopsis of responses. The summary does not include detailed descriptions of comments or suggestions for addressing issues, although all information received was provided to the City of Lewes and the University of Delaware IPA.

Questions received during the listening sessions will be addressed through informational resources posted to <http://de.gov/resilientcommunity> or during future education and outreach events as part of the RCP.

Question 1: As a coastal community, how do you envision Lewes in the future?

Please note that responses for Question 1 were categorized based upon desired vision versus anticipated vision of the future of Lewes.

Desired vision:

Appearance/atmosphere

- Attractive and prosperous for all life
- Beautiful beach
- Community small town feel
- Family friendly atmosphere
- Historical significance
- Maintained as a coastal community
- More beautiful homes
- No change in the current atmosphere
- Promotes an active, healthy lifestyle
- Quiet atmosphere
- Refuge for retirees and people looking for a second home
- Safe
- Social atmosphere
- Vibrant community
- Welcoming to all

Climate change

- Addressing/mitigating the effects of climate change
- Empowered leaders that make the necessary changes now to mitigate sea level rise
- Protection of economically and historically important houses on the bay/beach

Economic growth

- Businesses survive and prosper
- Higher taxes to discourage development
- Less emphasis on tourism and associated revenue
- More industry and corporations nearby for more job availability

Governance

- City/Public Works master plan(s) to upgrade infrastructure including water, sewer, stormwater management, roads, etc.
- Cooperation between the city and county over development issues
- Educated, unbiased government that looks at long-term viability for Lewes
- Progressive enough to face the challenges
- Residents allow elected officials make decisions in best interest of constituents
- Understand vulnerabilities

Infrastructure

- Access to beach for all residents
- Attention to the geography when developing
- Better restaurants and stores
- Better swales and ditches
- Better ways of treating sewage and organic waste
- Building guidelines that allow residents to elevate their homes with adjusted height restrictions
- Building guidelines that are sensitive to environmental issues
- Expansion of infrastructure with adequate roads in and out
- Green city with the environment in mind for all future development
- Hardware store in the town center
- Improved internet connectivity
- Infrastructure to keep up with the rapid population growth
- Less roadside parking
- Limiting future development in Lewes and the beach area
- More buffers and byways
- More renewable energy
- More workforce housing in town
- No high rises
- No additional beach parking or expanded services in order to discourage vehicular congestion
- No additional restrictions on individual homeowners
- Older (50+ years) homes likely rebuilt or renovated
- Permanent outdoor concert venue
- Permit parking for in town residents
- Plenty of sidewalks, walkways, and bike paths
- Reuse stormwater
- Safe access to the beach
- Visitor parking restricted to established areas
- Well-planned long-term growth
- Wide roads to alleviate traffic issues

Natural Resources

- Enable wetland migration and protect marshes
- High amounts of undeveloped floodplain
- High value in nature preservation
- Maintain wetlands for fish nurseries
- More connecting green ways and more open space
- Preserve natural resources and infrastructure while keeping up with population growth
- Progressive in tackling environmental challenges
- Reduce trash on beaches
- Reforestation

Population growth

- Growth provides opportunities for raising families
- Less second home properties
- More full-time residents
- No major population growth

Values

- Coastal community leader in environmental stewardship, sustainability, best practices, and land/development management
- Community-created vision for the town that includes environmental issues, economy, etc.
- Demographic, economic and environmental diversity
- Engaged community that plans for the future together
- Great biking town
- Great respect for science
- Inclusive community
- Progressive
- Protects the natural environment
- Residents are aware of the town's vulnerability to climate change
- Retains historic downtown
- Sustainable
- Synergy between how we live and the nature we live within
- Volunteer community
- Works with nearby coastal communities to achieve shared goals

Anticipated vision:

Appearance/atmosphere

- Continue to be a resort community
- Gentrification
- Loses its current character and charm due to the annexation process
- People stop wanting to come to Lewes because of the massive development and lack of infrastructure improvements
- Safety issues

Climate change

- Aquifer becomes contaminated
- Canal exceeds banks and the area east of the canal is no longer habitable
- Global warming impacts
- Homes falling into wetlands
- Increased damage to homes because of increased storm events
- Increased flooding due to building on marshes
- Increased flooding due to rainfall/storms throughout periods of the year
- Increased flooding due to sea level rise
- Loss of beaches

- Saltwater intrusion
- Sunny day flooding becomes normal
- Water table issues

Governance

- More taxation

Infrastructure

- Continued filling of the wetlands
- Concerned about types and locations of developments (e.g. suburban style development adjacent to a walkable street grid town, developments in marshes, etc.)
- Difficulty during emergency situations because of the traffic
- Eventually, built-in flood mitigation will be useless against sea level rise
- Increased traffic limiting access to Lewes
- More flood-avoidance structures installed that increase flooding for surrounding neighbors
- More suburban style development
- Parking issues and parking garages
- Underserved by essential services due to population influx
- Underwater
- Wastewater treatment facility flooded if not elevated/moved

Miscellaneous

- Develop/define a vision for the city
- Higher cost of living (too expensive)
- Plan for Lewes being a better place

Natural Resources

- Decrease in farmland in/around Lewes due to development resulting in a decrease in local food supply
- Destruction to marshes due to construction
- Impacts to the natural beauty and resources by excess visitors
- Increased pollution due to more residential construction
- Over-use of resources
- Reduction of trees
- Too little natural spaces/areas

Population growth

- Increased population and overcrowding
- More annexation
- Overdevelopment
- Overrun by tourists and rental properties
- Wastewater treatment plant won't be able to keep up with a higher population

Values

- Lack of concern for the environment will exacerbate the effect of climate change on the city
- Lack of cohesiveness to tackle issues associated with climate change
- Quality of life will be more expensive to maintain

Question 2: As a coastal community, what environmental challenges do you think Lewes faces in the future?

Challenges related to climate change

- Coastal flooding
- Drought
- Groundwater rise
- Increased heat/global warming
- Marsh migration
- Saltwater intrusion
- Sea level rise
- Storms/hurricanes/Nor'easters- increased frequency and intensity
- Sunny-day flooding

Challenges related to development:

- Competition for limited resources such as land and beach access
- Deforestation
- Flooding related to increased impervious surfaces
- Gentrification
- Limited coastal access
- Limited infrastructure
- More restrictions on people and businesses
- Overcrowding/increased population
- Over-development leading to loss of natural landscape/habitat loss and increased impervious surfaces
- Parking
- Roads
- Tidal wetland encroachment
- Traffic

Challenges related to flooding

- Canal-side flooding
- Over-development and increased impervious surfaces
- Stormwater management

Challenges related to planning

- Absence of a clear and shared vision of what Lewes is and should be in the future

- Adjacent Sussex County developments that effect Lewes and the lack of input
- Building in floodplain
- Building code for freeboard requirement
- Buffer areas around waterways and marshes
- Evacuation plan
- Impervious surface coverage management
- Lack of holistic approach to planning
- Lack of master plan
- Lack of meaningful environmental laws/code or ordinance changes
- Preservation of open space and concerns about the loss of open space and loss of farmland
- Wastewater treatment plant location

Challenges related natural resources

- Beach erosion/beach loss and need for beach replenishment
- Dune management/protection
- Lack of protection for endangered species
- Loss of native species
- Open space
- Removal of trees
- Wildlife protection

Challenges related to pollution

- Air quality
- Contaminated stormwater run-off
- Delaware Bay contamination related to historic industry
- Herbicides
- Light
- Litter
- Motorized boats/jet ski idling and exhaust
- Noise
- Oil spills from boat related spills
- Plastics
- Septic systems
- Sewage spills
- Yard waste
- Waste management
- Water quality of drinking water and Delaware Bay

Miscellaneous challenges

- Access to electric charging stations
- Better sea level rise prediction maps and models
- Lack of acceptance of current conditions and unrealistic expectations
- Lack of planning for managed retreat (from where and to where)

- Not using alternative energy sources such as wind, solar, geothermal, water, etc.
- Number of seasonal residents
- Sufficient drinking water supply

Question 3: What are the important resources and services that the City of Lewes provides?

Governance and communication

- Board of Public Works
- Building permits
- COVID information/leadership
- Development oversight
- Email communications
- Framework/process for public engagement
- Master planning
- Resource management
- Safety – police, fire, ambulance services
- Zoning

Miscellaneous

- Aesthetics (e.g. flowers)
- Clean public restrooms
- Partnerships
- Personality of the city/small town feel
- People (knowledge and commitment)

Places

- Bays
- Beaches
- Biden Center
- Businesses and restaurants
- Community gardens
- Cultural and historical resources
- Library
- Marinas
- Open space
- Parks and recreation (state and local parks)
- Places of worship
- Tourist destination
- Trails (biking and walking)
- Wetlands

Programs

- Beach grass planting
- Beach replenishment
- Concert series
- Continual learning programs
- Education
- Environmental awareness programs
- Festivals
- Hazardous waste disposal days
- Oyster program
- Prescription take-back

Utilities and infrastructure

- City maintenance
- Drinking water
- Electricity
- General infrastructure
- Medical facilities
- Parking
- Road maintenance
- Snow removal
- Stormwater
- Trash and recycling
- Yard waste

Question 4: What are the environmental challenges facing the City of Lewes that may impact those resources and/or services?

Challenges related to climate change

- Adaption efforts to minimize the effects of climate change
- Better predicting and understanding the effects of climate change
- Cost and prioritization of mitigating the effects of climate change
- Creating a sustainable community
- Frequency and intensity of storms and hurricanes
- Flooding
- Global warming
- Increased energy demands due to rising temperatures
- Major storm events
- Negative effects of property values if nothing is done to plan for climate change
- Saltwater intrusion
- Sea level rise
- Storm surge

Challenges related to development and population growth

- Beach access
- Depletion of coastal resources
- Development in Sussex County
- Funding for the protection of infrastructure and resources
- Growth outpacing city services
- Over-development/uncontrolled growth
- Parking
- Traffic
- Unregulated development

Challenges related to emergency preparedness

- Lack of emergency response planning
- Lack of emergency shelters
- Lack of evacuation plans
- Lack of protection during storm surges
- Power line damage due to storms

Challenges related to infrastructure

- Aging infrastructure
- Disagreements between City Council and Board of Public Works
- Evacuation routes
- Increase of impervious surfaces exacerbating runoff
- Lack of infrastructure
- Location, operation, and discharge of the wastewater treatment plant
- Pipe conditions
- Poor street conditions resulting in hazards for bikes and people
- Stormwater management

Challenges related to planning

- Adopting and enforcing policies that protect the economy and the environment
- Bicycle use planning and protecting bike facilities
- Finding a balance between development, the physical space, the natural environment and a sustainable quality of life
- Flood plain development
- Impervious surface management
- Lack of consensus driven planning
- Lack of flexibility in planning to include new and innovative technology
- Lack of holistic planning efforts
- Lack of proactive planning
- Lack of sufficient planning efforts
- Lot coverage restrictions
- Managed retreat

- Marsh migration
- Over-burdensome building codes
- Reliability of the energy grid

Challenges related to pollution

- Air quality
- Chemicals
- Fecal contamination on Lewes Beach and the associated waterways
- Herbicides
- Litter
- Noise
- Plastics
- Sewage spills
- Waste management
- Water quality

Challenges related to resource management and protection

- Beach erosion
- Deforestation/tree protection
- Dune restoration
- Loss of habitat (aquatic and terrestrial)
- Loss of wetlands
- Maintaining a sufficient supply of fresh, potable water
- Phragmites management
- Protection of the excellent recharge areas
- Protecting open space, farmland, and recreational area
- Stewardship of natural resources
- Stormwater management

Miscellaneous environmental challenges

- Lack of alternative sources of energy
- Science denial

Question 5: What other environmental topics would you like to learn about?

Climate Change

- Activities that residents can do to mitigate impacts
- Decarbonization and reduction of fossil fuels
- General information on climate change and sea level rise
- Impacts of sea level rise on infrastructure and other buildings
- Sea level rise projections

Flooding

- Actions homeowners can take to address flooding
- Impacts of wind as it relates to flooding

- Reasons for increasing the minimum height of a structure above FEMA requirements

Groundwater:

- Clarification of the lot coverage requirements as it relates to excellent recharge areas
- General aquifer information (flow, depth, etc.)
- Hydrogeology of the area
- Recharge area for groundwater and changing groundwater levels
- Reasoning how excellent recharge areas are designated
- Saltwater intrusion on aquifer and impacts to wells
- Uses of the aquifers around Lewes Beach, existing protections and reasons for those protections

Habitat and Wildlife:

- Beach rules and regulations
- Buffer zones and importance
- Endangered species
- Forestry and tree management
- Impacts of oil spills on resources including the beach
- Impacts of stormwater on fishing
- Marsh migration
- Movement of invasive species (e.g. lionfish)
- Open space plan
- Preservation and protection of wildlife
- Requirements for tree planting by developers
- Storage capacity of marshes
- Water conservation

Miscellaneous

- Assessment of resources both natural and human
- Downstream impacts from larger cities (e.g. Philadelphia)
- Excess burdens on businesses (e.g. limitations of equipment use for contractors/landscapers)
- Impacts of plastic on health and the coastline
- Monitoring protocols
- Process by which DNREC gauges environmental impacts and if the impacts can be reversed

Social

- Methods city uses to disseminate information
- Social Justice issues

Storm Readiness

- Capabilities/resources of community to respond to natural disasters such as hurricanes
- Emergency evacuation plans
- Information for homeowners on what to do in case of major storms such as hurricanes

Stormwater:

- Discharge of stormwater into Great Marsh
- Stormwater remediation

Structures and Property

- Consequences of raising buildings
- Impacts to property values
- Infrastructure impacts of raising buildings
- Reasons for raising buildings

Utilities and Energy

- Burying of electric lines
- Current source of electricity
- Frequency of potable water testing
- Hydroelectric alternatives
- Management of wastewater by the Board of Public Works
- Offshore wind farms
- Relocation of the sewage treatment facility
- Renewable energy (solar, wind, economics, etc.)
- Treatment of drinking water for Lewes
- Wastewater effluent discharge and possible alternatives (e.g. spray irrigation)