

# Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw What We Heard Report



prepared by

**UPLAND**

for



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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 About the Plan Review

The Municipality of the District of Yarmouth (MODY) is currently undergoing a review of its Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS) and Land Use Bylaw (LUB). An MPS is the primary planning document for the Municipality which establishes the vision, goals and policies for growth and development. The LUB is a companion document that sets out the various rules and regulations that have to do with development activities, including zoning. Together, the MPS and LUB shape our communities by determining what types of development can happen where.

The new Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use Bylaw represent an exciting opportunity to renew and reinforce the vision for the Municipality, to make the Municipality's role in land use regulation easier, and to ensure planning policy better serves residents and businesses of MODY.

This report summarizes the input from the community during the initial phase of engagement that took place from July 2021 to January 2022.

## 1.2 How this Report Will Be Used

This report is a summary of the initial phase of engagement and consists of "What We Heard" from the public throughout the consultation process. Some of this feedback will be used to inform policy decisions in the Plan Review, some will be passed on to the Municipality for consideration through other parts of their operations, and some of it will be filed away without municipal action and simply as an understanding of where the community is coming from. Certain topics addressed by residents throughout the consultation relate to matters outside of the Municipality's jurisdiction, such as road infrastructure, but are still included in this report to increase Staff and Council's understanding of the issues that matter to the residents of MODY.

The following is a brief and non-exhaustive list of what the *Municipal Government Act* enables Municipalities to control through an MPS and LUB:

- » Uses permitted on land
- » Lot standards, building size and placement
- » Location of services such as sewer and water
- » Processes required for certain types of development
- » Development in environmentally sensitive areas or where hazards exist

The following are outside of the Municipality's jurisdiction to regulate:

- » Roads and highways
- » Resource activities like forestry and mining
- » Land ownership and taxation
- » People

### 1.3 What We Did

The initial phase of engagement sought to gather input from residents and stakeholders to determine their priorities for the Plan Review. We asked participants to share their perspectives and insights on land use and development in the municipality. Over the course of several months, we hosted a series of in-person and online engagement activities. This engagement was promoted through the following:

- » The Municipality's website and social media
- » The project website ([www.planmody.ca](http://www.planmody.ca))
- » Sharing through social media
- » The local newspaper
- » Postcards with information about engagement activities

Engagement activities for the MPS and LUB Review included:

- » A public survey (available online and hard copy upon request) with 61 respondents
- » A business owners survey (available online) with 4 respondents
- » An online mapping exercise with 183 unique visitors, over 500 page visits and 91 comments
- » A workshop with Municipal Staff
- » A workshop with Municipal Council & the Planning Advisory Committee
- » Two pop-up engagement sessions to build project awareness (Mariner's Centre & Dayton Red & White) with 81 citizens engaged

We also contacted over 50 stakeholders and conducted interviews with 19 different groups and individuals including:

- » 5 local business owners
- » 2 local seafood and fisheries companies
- » The Town of Yarmouth
- » Municipality of Argyle
- » Tusket River Environmental Protection Association (TREPA)
- » Southwest Nova Biosphere Reserve Association
- » Yarmouth and County Trail Development Association
- » Mersey Tobiatic Research Institute
- » Canadian Wildlife Service
- » The Mariner's Centre
- » A local property manager
- » A local realtor
- » A former warden of MODY

The results from these engagement activities demonstrate a series of key themes and findings, which this report explores.

## 1.4 Context and Gaps

This engagement took place during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Opportunities for in-person engagements were limited due to public health restrictions, posing challenges for reaching certain demographics of the population, such as seniors or low-income residents without consistent internet access. Some of the planned engagement opportunities for this phase of work were not possible due to the limitations caused by the pandemic, and will be moved into the Draft Plan engagement phase scheduled for early this summer in an effort to reach a broader base of the population.

### Public Survey Demographics

With any survey for the general population, the goal is for the results to accurately represent the population. Samples should represent the demographic characteristics of a population with regards to age distribution, gender identity, and income. If a sample is not a true representation of the population, actions can be taken to engage with underrepresented cohorts, and/or results can be weighted to more accurately depict the 'true' population in a community.

The project team used Statistics Canada 2016 Census data (the most up to date data currently available) as a comparative measure to the Public Survey results to understand how the survey sample compares to the community's profile. We found the following when comparing survey respondent demographic data with the census:

- » Under representation of residents 24 and younger – no respondents in these age cohorts
- » Over representation of older residents, with 60% of survey respondents aged 55 or older, despite this being only 39% of the overall population

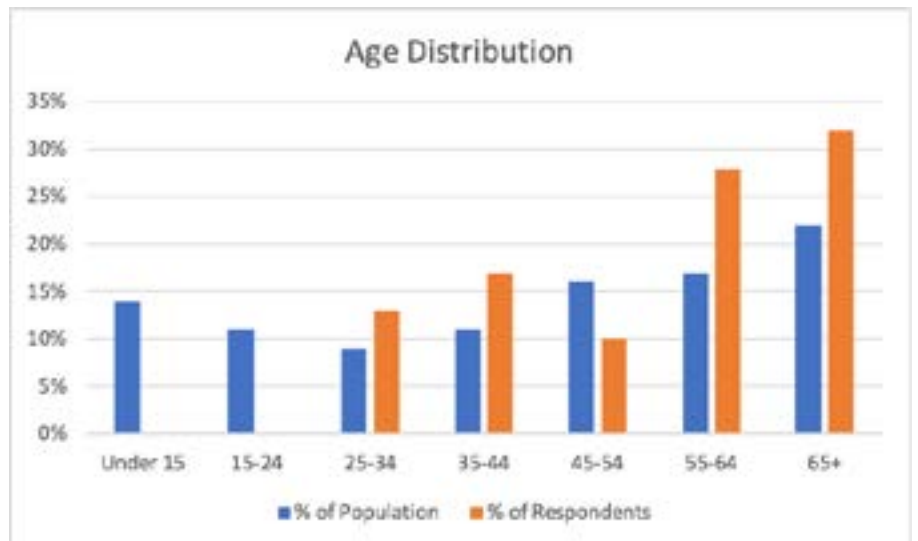


Figure 1: Age Distribution in MODY, survey respondents compared to Statistics Canada 2016 Census data.



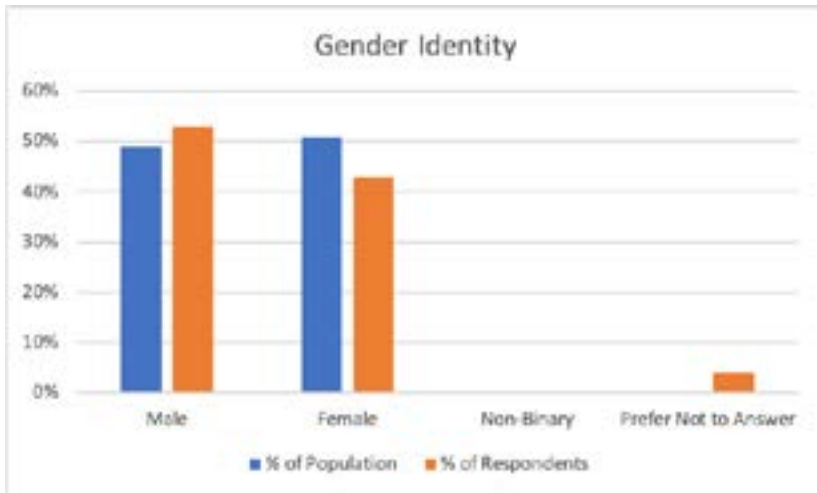


Figure 2: Gender Identity in MODY, survey respondents compared to Statistics Canada 2016 Census data.

- » Fairly even distribution across gender, with a slightly higher proportion of men responding than women, and no respondents identifying as non-binary
- » Over representation of higher income households, with 35% of respondents earning more than \$90K per year, despite being only 5% of households within the overall population of MODY
- » Under representation of low income residents – with 50% of the population earning \$29,999 or less in MODY, but only 18% of survey respondents falling into this income bracket.

Demographic information was not collected for the Business Survey because the targeted nature of this survey inherently prevents population-representative results.

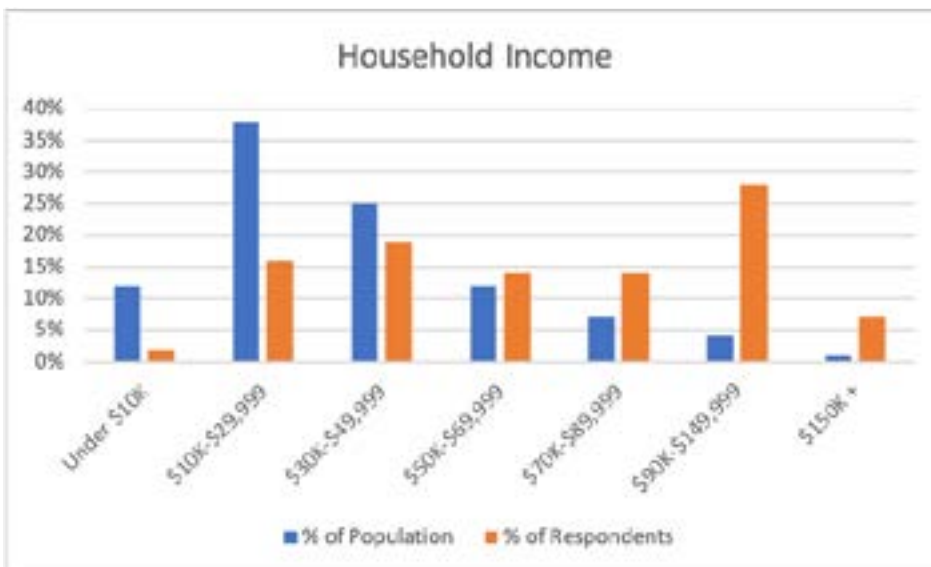


Figure 3: Household Income in MODY, survey respondents compared to Statistics Canada 2016 Census data.

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# 2 Major Themes



## 2.1 Environment

Residents of the Municipality place a strong emphasis on the environment and feel it is a very important part of their cultural identity. It was also cited as the top issue survey respondents wanted to see addressed in this process (see Figure 4). One respondent noted that there is a “sense of belonging to land and sea” in the community, echoed by many throughout the consultation, and demonstrating the deep connection that residents feel to the natural landscape in MODY.

Respondents regularly cited the natural beauty of MODY as adding to their quality of life and contributing greatly to the draw for tourists. 83% of survey respondents said that access to nature was what makes MODY a great place to live (see Figure 5). Across all methods, the environment was consistently top of mind, especially when it comes to how it is balanced with economic development opportunities. Residents voiced their concern around prioritizing industry at the expense of the environment and would like to see the Municipality take a firmer approach to environmental protection and sustainability.

Multiple survey respondents commented that MODY could do more to promote its natural beauty, both as a way to draw more tourists, but also to attract new residents.

The recent proposal by Boreal Salmon for a fish farm at Chebogue Point came up across methods, consistently. All respondents who mentioned this topic voiced their concern about the project and the potential ramifications for the surrounding ecosystem. Residents are concerned that the proposed aquaculture project will negatively impact existing industries, like lobster, clam and bloodworm harvesting, as well as seaweed harvesting and processing. The primary concern is that the treated effluent from the proposed fish farm will have negative impacts on water quality and lead to the decline of the aforementioned industries, considered by many to be the backbone of the local economy. Other concerns voiced by community members include the siting of this proposed project, particularly its proximity to wetlands, as well as the risks associated with foreign business interests who have little investment in the wellbeing of the larger community.

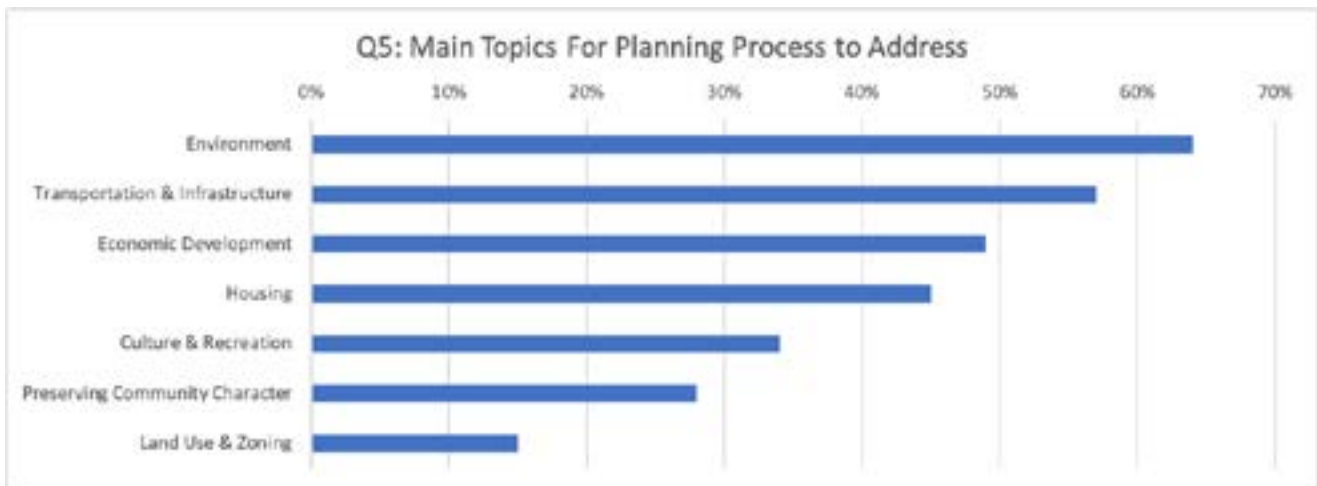


Figure 4: Topics survey respondents want to see addressed through the Plan Review.

Many residents voiced support for aquaculture more generally, but want to see the current regulations that permit closed-containment operations remain in place.

Residents feel that the Municipality must place a higher emphasis on environmental protection around local lakes and limit or restrict development to protect water quality. Respondents at the in-person engagements spoke of algal blooms in Brazil Lake, Ogden Lake and Kempt Back Lake. They also voiced concern around the clearing of land for development around these lakes, as well as Mink Lake, and the impact that the loss of vegetation was having on water quality. Stakeholders with knowledge of the flora and fauna of the area spoke of the particular importance of protecting water quality for the Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora, a family of plants, many of them endangered, that are only found in this part of Canada. This plant family is highly susceptible to

nutrient pollution, making issues like dense cottage development, fertilizer run-off and septic field failures particularly impactful on their survival. Many respondents want to see better enforcement of lakeshore developments to ensure water quality is not compromised moving forward.



Figure 5: Survey responses regarding what makes MODY a great place to live.

## 2.2 Housing

Access to housing was the next most prevalent theme for residents and stakeholders. Housing, particularly affordable options, is a rising concern across the province and the country as housing prices rise while wages remain stagnant. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought many issues regarding housing in our communities to light and the experience in MODY is no exception. According to the public survey, 47% of respondents found housing very difficult to access, and another 34% found it somewhat difficult. A lack of housing diversity was cited as a major challenge for many, as the vast majority of the housing stock in the Municipality consists of single family detached homes. When asked about possible solutions to address housing availability and affordability, respondents ranked the need for more physically accessible homes as the top priority, followed by energy efficiency upgrades to existing housing stock and adaptive reuse and

conversions of large homes, churches and halls (see Table 1, opposite, for full list).

Of all survey respondents, 96% were homeowners and there was no representation from current renters (the other 4% of respondents were not current residents of MODY), although 40% of respondents did have past rental experience within the Municipality. The top three issues for those with rental experience were a lack of housing options, property in need of major maintenance or repair, and unaffordable rent. For homeowners the top three issues were difficulty accessing amenities without a vehicle, property in need of major maintenance or repair, and difficulty paying property taxes.

During in-person engagements, we heard first hand accounts of the struggles to find suitable housing in the municipality. We heard stories of young adults unable to leave their parents' homes due to a lack of

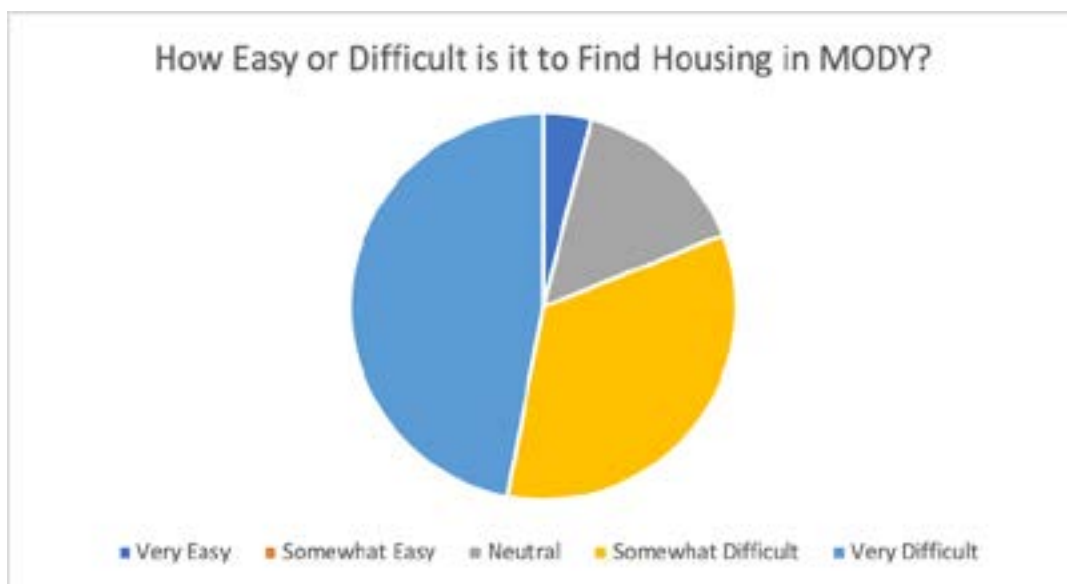


Figure 6: Survey responses regarding the ease or difficulty of accessing housing in MODY.

1. Accessible housing options
2. Energy efficiency upgrades
3. Adaptive reuse and conversion of large homes, churches and halls
4. Alternative ownership/tenure models (such as co-ops, community land trusts, etc.)
5. Housing for 1 person households
6. Tiny homes
7. Multi-unit
8. Increased density in some existing communities
9. Co-housing clusters
10. Dormitory housing for seasonal employees
11. Lot Infill

Table 1: Ranked approaches to addressing housing availability and affordability.

affordable options, particularly rentals. We also heard of many situations where three or four generations were forced to live under the same roof, due to a lack of available housing. The issue of housing availability is perceived by many to be disproportionately affecting young people entering the housing market (both from a rental and a home ownership perspective), and seniors seeking appropriate housing for their changing needs. One suggestion from a pop-up participant was to convert underutilized municipal buildings to seniors housing.

There is also a need for higher end rentals for professionals working temporarily in the community. This issue is seen by some survey respondents as particularly affecting healthcare professionals and exacerbating the challenge of attracting doctors and medical students to the area.

## 2.3 Infrastructure

Municipal infrastructure was identified as a primary theme during the initial engagement phase of this project, with 57% of survey respondents wanting to see this topic addressed through the planning process. Within this theme, four main topics emerged: Transportation, Water and Wastewater, Energy, and Telecommunications. General recommendations included focusing new development in proximity to existing services, and working towards net-zero emissions for all infrastructure upgrades and new projects.

### Transportation

Across engagement methods we heard a lot about transportation.. The most common topic raised was roads and a desire to see better maintenance of the road network throughout the municipality. Multiple survey respondents noted that poor road conditions were detrimental to tourism and attracting new residents to the community, in addition to posing a safety hazard. In terms of new road infrastructure, there was an interest expressed in building an off-ramp to the Industrial Park from Highway 101. We heard that accessing the park currently requires a big detour from the highway, and that such a connection might encourage more development in the park.

There is also a desire to see some form of public transportation established to decrease reliance on personal vehicles and allow low-income residents and those with disabilities to access amenities more reliably. There are particularly challenges with respect to transportation during evenings and weekends, when HOPE Dial-A-Ride is not running. We heard that the lack of public transportation options is also a hindrance for those tourists walking off the ferry.

Respondents also want to see more active transportation infrastructure in the municipality. More specifically, we heard calls for a network of separated bicycle lanes as well as the addition of sidewalks in community cores. Respondents felt that making neighbourhoods more conducive to walking, cycling, and other forms of active transportation would help to attract younger demographics and tourists alike. The addition of sidewalks in community cores was also suggested for accessibility, making it easier for those with mobility challenges to access amenities and live a more independent life.

Regional rail transportation was also mentioned, with respondents interested in seeing investment in passenger and freight rail infrastructure to take the pressure off of roads. The closure of the airport was another issue that came up, with interest in resuming the short haul passenger route between Halifax, Yarmouth, Boston, and St John. There were also calls for an expansion of EV charging stations throughout the municipality.



### **Water and Wastewater**

System capacity, treatment, and stormwater management, were all raised as issues of concern across the various engagement channels, both in the context of environmental concerns and as topics that relate to a general interest in new serviced development within the Municipality.

Several specific suggestions came up with respect to the extension of water and wastewater servicing. Hardscratch Road was identified as a prime location for new infrastructure, where new development could be supported along that corridor by an extension from the existing line that terminates a few hundred metres north of Starrs Road. A service extension was also suggested in the vicinity of Small Gaines Road, near the airport.

### **Energy**

An interest in generating electricity from renewable sources was heard throughout the engagement process. Discussions focused mostly on wind and solar applications but points of discussion ranged widely, from the impacts that wind projects can have on views, to the need to compromise for the sake of the environment, to economic spin-off benefits of co-locating wind projects with other coastal developments. There was support for an industrial solar farm, and a call for greater rebates for domestic solar installations.

### **Telecommunications**

High speed internet access emerged as a priority for MODY residents, and for higher end economic development. However, seniors in particular rely more heavily on the telephone for communication. Throughout this engagement we heard calls for the Municipality to both improve internet connectivity and continue using non-digital means of communication such as telephone and printed media.

## 2.4 Economic Development

The big picture that emerged from discussions about local economic development in the Municipality includes a wide ranging diversity of perspectives, but most were centered around the notion that industrial and commercial development must be in balance with the environment. As one survey respondent noted: “While the economy often seems to be at war with the environment, we are at a time in our history where we must place the environment first. If we don’t have a healthy environment, we have nothing.” This sentiment was expressed consistently by residents across engagement methods.

According to respondents from the Business Owners Survey, MODY is a good place to do business, with half of respondents describing it as “excellent” and the other half as “good” (see Figure 7). Business owners overall were satisfied with the size of available parcels of land and had no issues with the rules and regulations set forth by the Municipality. One respondent would like to see more serviced lands available for economic development opportunities, and another would like to see more land zoned for economic development purposes.

We heard about both the benefits and drawbacks of development, including the need to support the primary and secondary marine industries along the coast, as well as questions about the opportunities and protections merited in the Hamlets and other special places such as Big Pond. Surprise was expressed at the fact that these special places have not yet been developed with accommodations and restaurants. At the same time, we heard that there has to be a balance between economic development and quality of life. Several people we spoke with raised the issue of blue green algae, and the theory that it started from the mink farms.

There were also concerns raised about the limited availability of products and services in the Municipality. For instance, the supportive health care industry is limited, gas is hard to access, building supplies are only sold in Town, and although Yarmouth is a lobster capital there are very few restaurants actually serving lobster. Some comments focused on the fact that there are many business opportunities in the area, but that there has been a lack of progress by the Municipality on big issues and a more open and friendlier business environment might help everything fall into place. A high-end Nordic spa and a Starbucks were suggested as examples of businesses that would entice people to come to the area. However, it was noted that while costs are increasing, the Municipality lacks both financial capital and creativity, and that diversifying the economy and retaining working professionals both remain a challenge. The airport was identified numerous times as a good location for a technology and innovation hub.



Figure 7 Business survey responses regarding respondents impression of doing business in MODY.

## **Forestry**

In our discussions about forestry, we heard that ecological integrity has to inform how the forestry industry operates in the Municipality. As noted in section 1.2 of this report, it's important to note that the *Municipal Government Act* does not grant municipalities the power to regulate resource industries, as this falls under provincial jurisdiction. With that being said, it is important to note the concerns of residents of MODY regarding these activities.

The Lahey Report was referenced, as well as triad zoning which involves three forest types: Extensive Forests (where natural patterns and ecosystem functioning are maintained while managing for multiple resource uses), Intensive Forests (where tree growth is maximized for industrial use), and Forest Conversion (where natural forest landscapes are replaced by other land uses). It was pointed out that designating some areas as high production is cheaper but generates a lower quality product, and that selective cutting, while more expensive, generates a higher quality product. Opportunities for public input were requested, both when a cut is proposed and during the environmental assessment process. A question was also raised about how many times an area of land can be cut over, and what restoration looks like after that happens.

## **Aquaculture**

Fish farming was a topic that came up many times throughout the engagement process, as discussed in the Environment section, and the overwhelming majority of comments were of concern with the land-based salmon farm proposed at Chebogue Point. The issues raised included the sensitivity of the location as a flyover for a diversity of bird species, that some of the land should be recognized as a wetland, that the area has value as a beautiful location that hosts a mix of residential, dairy farming, beef grazing, clamming, and real estate, and concerns around managing the outflow of wastewater. We also heard that while care is required in the approval of an aquaculture operation, it should be possible to do, so long as it does not harm the surrounding environment.

## **Fisheries**

The fact that Yarmouth is one of the fishing capitals of Nova Scotia informed some important points about the local fisheries. We heard that landings in this area are incredible, and that significant local income is derived from that. However, we also heard that there is no fish processing available in the Municipality, and that lobster and fish are sent out whole to be processed in New Brunswick. Conversations also touched on the importance of sustainability in the fisheries, and that while the Indigenous fishery has a right to exist, there is fear about the impact it will have.

## 2.5 Recreation

Throughout the engagement period, we heard mixed opinions on the state of recreation in Yarmouth. While many people identified good options for sports and recreation, important gaps were also identified such as the lack of an arena in the Municipality, and the need for a new swimming pool to support getting youth into sport. It was also noted that seniors need a safe place to walk, which could be either indoor or outdoors, and that the Municipality would benefit from a central gathering place. In addition, survey respondents noted that more recreation programs for seniors are needed.

There was a recognition that partnerships with the Town and other nearby municipalities make sense, considering the level of demand for services and the resources currently available. It was also noted that there are opportunities to consider how commercial and industrial uses can support recreation, such as along the commercial strip across from the Mariner's Centre and at the Port Maitland Fog Alarm Building, where picnic tables and food services could draw people to recreate at this historical location.

### Indoor Recreation

The Mariner's Centre was widely identified as a positive development for the Municipality, with highlights including the updated ice rinks, the 25m pool, the workout room, and the potential field house. It was identified as a place where youth get to know one another, and where community activities are happening. However, we also heard concerns about the fact that the current plans do not include a multi-purpose gymnasium facility, and that currently the only gymnasiums located in the Municipality, the Town, and the Municipality of Argyle are all within schools, which limits access during school hours. We also heard that a concerted effort will need to be made to ensure that access to the Mariner's Centre is affordable and inclusive.

We also heard about the existing recreation facilities available through the various schools in the Municipality, including access to gymnasiums, playgrounds, soccer fields, classrooms, cafeterias, and the roster of current programming including day camps, minor basketball, Health Promoting Schools, After The Bell, Remembrance Day Services, and other local events.

The Hebron Recreation Complex was also identified, in terms of the facilities there including tennis courts, the Rotary Centre hall, public washrooms, baseball diamonds, the playground, the soccer field, access to trails, and many local events, summer programs, and activities.

## **Trails**

Walking and cycling for recreation were both issues that came up for many people throughout the engagement, and the Yarmouth County Rail Trail was frequently cited as one of the greatest recreational assets in the Municipality. There were calls to increase trails funding to enable ongoing trail maintenance, improve trail accessibility, and support an expansion of the trails network in general. It was noted that bike lanes and sidewalks that connect communities to trails would be a good way to promote active transportation, and that the existing trails network has tourism potential since it already connects to many scenic locations.

## **Parks and Wilderness**

Many comments were made about the extensive coastline, lakefront, and river systems in the Municipality. Several people spoke to the Lake Milo waterfront specifically, with calls to upgrade the Boathouse with public seating, a food and crafts market, and educational opportunities such as an aquarium. We heard about the need for improved parking and other facilities at the public boat launches at Salmon Lake and Doctors Lake. We also heard calls to have some lakes designated as motor-free, in order to ensure peaceful places exist for fishing, paddling, swimming, and other non-motorized activities.

Big Pond emerged as an important wilderness asset used extensively by local residents for hiking, ATVing, hunting, foraging, and birding. It was identified as a significant and unique coastal habitat within a migratory flyway that is not suitable for an industrial fish farm, and it was suggested that it be zoned as Coastal Wetland.

The Sandyland Ponds and Beaver River Beach were noted as another important bird nesting area, habitat for deer and otters, and a beautiful place to walk. It was suggested that this area would be a natural extension of the Port Maitland Provincial Park, which is already a local gem that hosts a variety of recreational activities and where the beach is lifeguarded through July and August.

Bunker Island was another site suggested for consideration as parkland, with trail connectivity and potential for accommodating cruise ship traffic.

Ellenwood Provincial Park was identified as a popular location for off-season activities through the fall and winter, including walking and cross country skiing.

Other noted waterfront assets include Brazil Lake, Gardners Mills Stillwater, Cook's Beach and Pinkney's Point Beach, where it is possible to walk to the Island at low tide.

## 2.6 Governance

We heard across all engagement methods about governance and the existing planning documents. Multiple survey respondents felt that the current MPS is great, aligns well with the community's vision for itself and its values, and requires very little in terms of revisions. Where respondents do see opportunity for change is for the Municipality to improve the alignment of their decision making to support the goals and priorities set forth in those documents.

We also heard calls for a more integrated approach to governance that considers the uniqueness of the place while prioritizing cooperation between the Municipality, the Town, and the Municipality of the District of Argyle. Commenters pointed out that cooperation can lead to cost savings and other efficiencies when collaborating on projects and needs that transcend political boundaries. We also heard that in many cases, residents do not distinguish between the Town and Municipality, and instead view it as one community. One stakeholder noted that incentivizing businesses to locate outside of the Town boundary works against densification and some of the objectives of sustainable urbanism, namely by encouraging development outside of serviced areas. This, and comments like it, showed up primarily in discussions around the potential benefits of amalgamation. The suggestion of amalgamation with the Town was brought up by multiple survey respondents and stakeholders who would like to see more cooperation and efficiency in local service delivery.

There was also feedback received through the survey and in-person engagements around transparency and communication. Although it is the role of municipal staff to advise and provide information to council, some residents felt that there is a power imbalance, with staff exercising too much influence over the political process. Residents would also like to see greater diversity in council, with a focus on inclusivity and representation of marginalized voices.

In a discussion about how to attract more candidates to municipal politics, it was noted that the Town elects Councillors through an at-large system rather than by wards, and that adopting such a system in the Municipality may increase the level of competition for and interest in holding Council seats. Enacting this recommendation would require a change to the *Municipal Government Act* as the rules for such systems are outlined within the Act and are different between jurisdictions (Towns vs. Rural Municipalities, Regional Municipalities and District Municipalities).

### Customer Service

The experiences that residents shared with us in dealing with the Municipality on municipal issues were overwhelmingly positive. In particular, it was shared that working with the Municipality in moving to the industrial park is a very good process, and that throughout the process of applying for development approvals the Municipality is a helpful partner every step of the way. However, it was noted that that process might be more challenging for people who aren't familiar with the context. 37% of survey respondents found that municipal land use regulations were confusing and hard to follow (see Figure 8). We also heard from some commenters that the Municipality is stuck in old ways, and could benefit from some modernization.

### Enforcement

Several concerns were raised with respect to bylaws enforcement, such as development within the riparian buffer zone around Brazil Lake, and commenters pointed to a need to hire more staff. We also heard that building inspection reports are returned without comment, input, or guidance when the building is not in compliance.

### Municipal Services

While everyone wants more services for less taxes, we heard that in general the level of service provided with respect to snow removal and salting is satisfactory. Some participants noted that the level of service in the Municipality is the same as in the Town, while the taxes in the Municipality are half or a quarter of what they are in the Town.

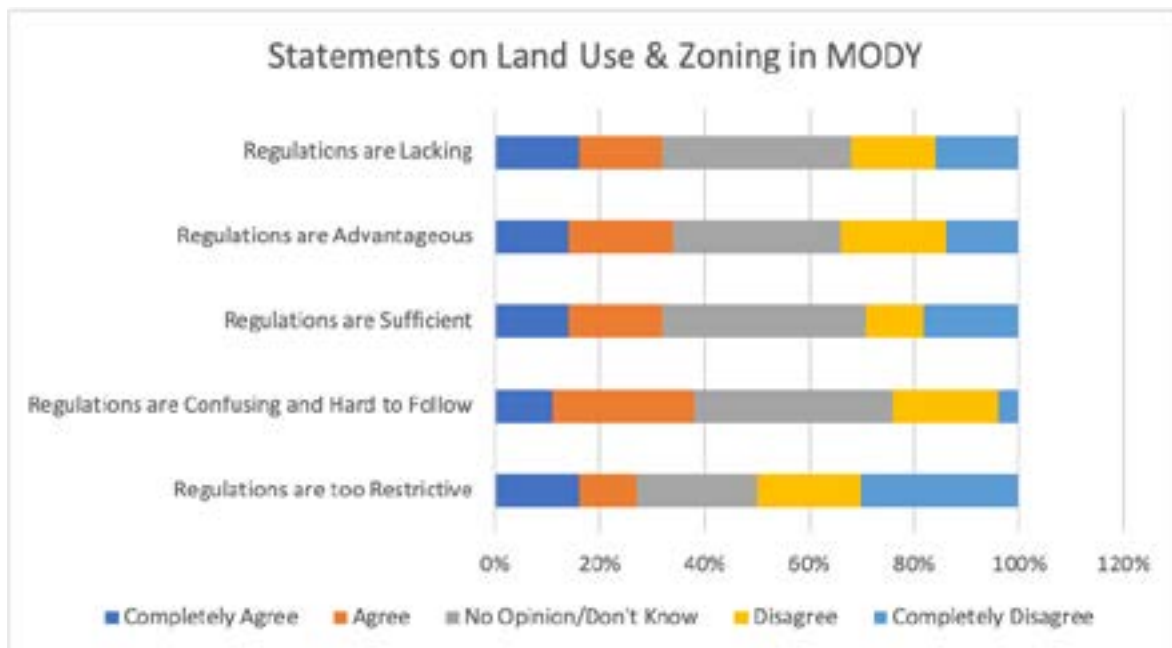


Figure 8: Survey responses regarding statements on land use and zoning in MODY.

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# 3 Minor Themes



### 3.1 Health

Access to healthcare was another topic that came up across engagement methods, taking the top spot for survey respondents when asked about the challenges of living in MODY (see Figure 9). This is a common topic across the province, especially in rural communities. Survey respondents noted that they'd like to see more done by the Municipality to attract and retain healthcare providers in their communities. As mentioned in the earlier discussion on housing, many feel that a lack of suitable housing options contributes to the lack of medical professionals being able to move to the area. Survey respondents also commented that the lack of access to family physicians could be affecting growth in the community, with many retirees reluctant to move to an area where they can't access suitable health services.

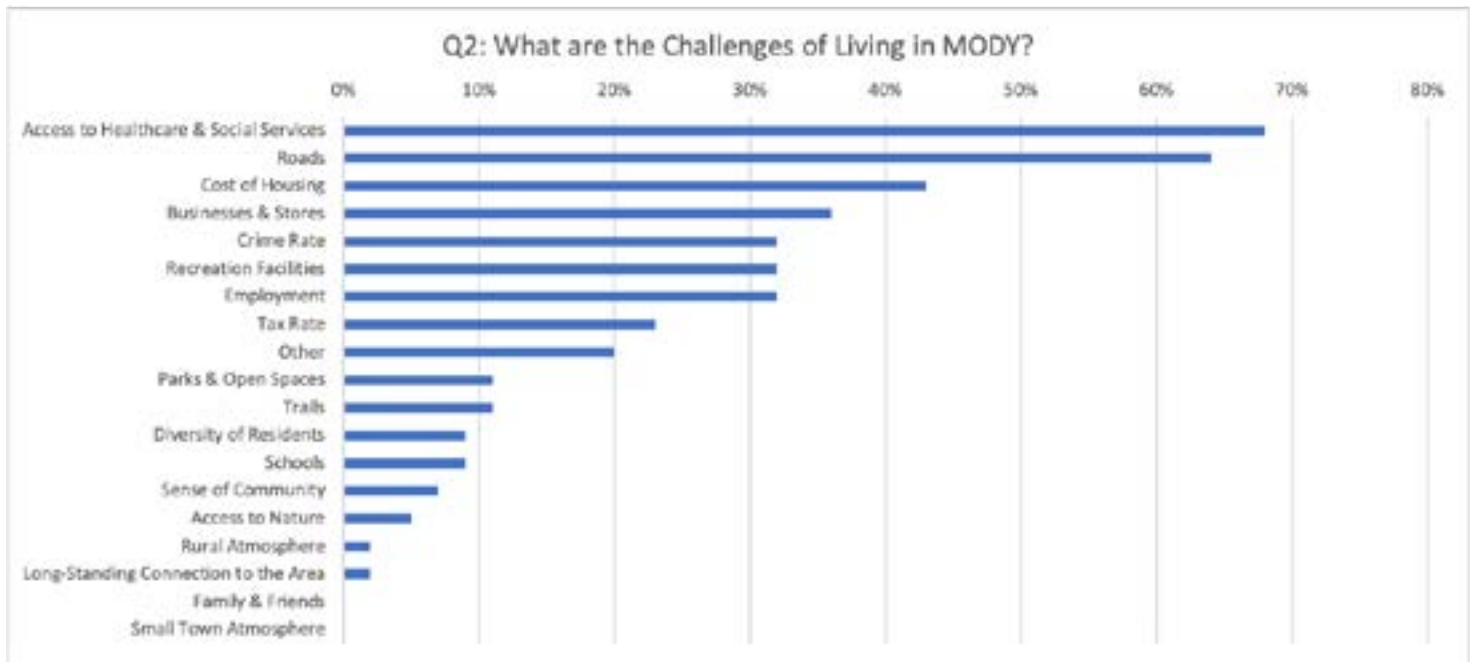


Figure 9: Survey responses regarding the challenges of living in MODY.

### 3.2 Growth and Decline

Population trends suggest that MODY is growing for the first time in many years. This is primarily due to the high volume of international and inter-provincial migration that has taken place during the pandemic, and the recent trend towards remote working arrangements. Engagement participants noted that there has been a recent influx of people moving to MODY, and a surge in property sales in the area. We heard from residents at the pop-up engagements who have returned to the area after working for many years in other parts of the country, but who have returned home to put down roots.

We also heard about the general trend of young people moving away from rural areas, only to return later in life. Although housing prices in MODY have increased dramatically over the past few years, those prices are still comparatively low compared to other parts of Canada. We heard about the need to

reexamine zoning and growth boundaries in the Municipality, in order to avoid haphazard development. It was suggested that the Municipality identify specific growth areas to ensure growth and density are targeted, and to avoid ribbon development. We also heard about the need to tie land use planning into broader sustainability goals.

The public survey found that over 75% of respondents were satisfied (43%) or completely satisfied (33%) with MODY as a place to retire (see Figure 10). One survey respondent suggested that the municipality could attract more retirees to the region, and that this would be beneficial for the local economy due to an influx in disposable income to the area, without the competition for limited employment opportunities.

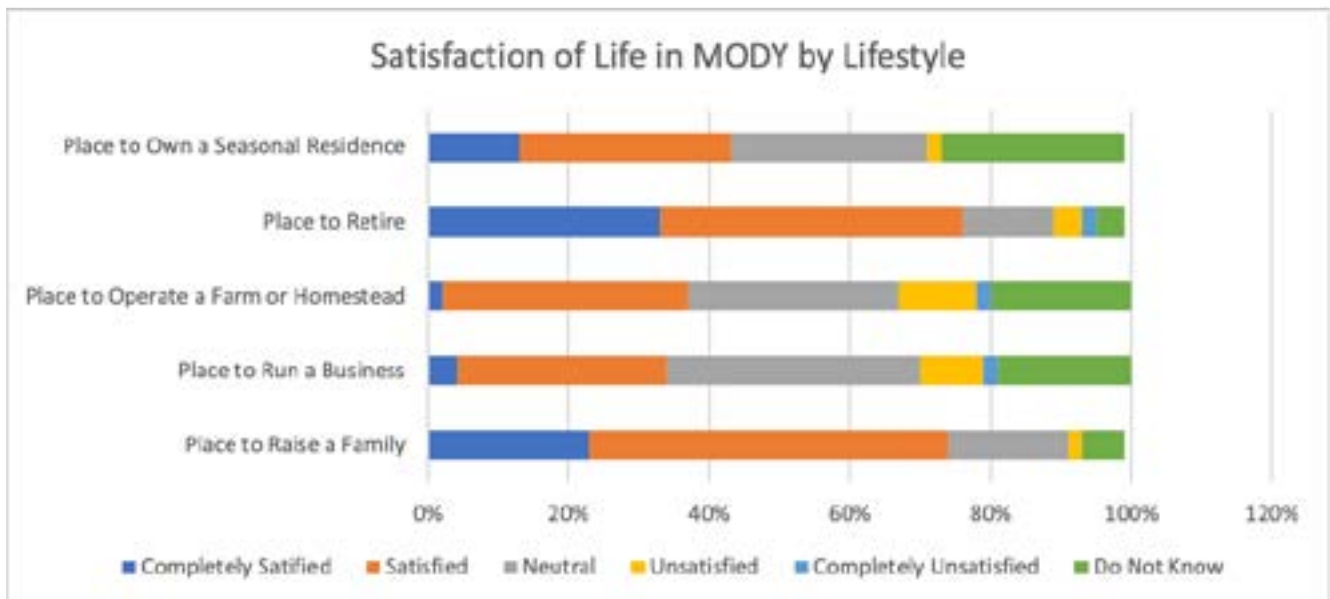


Figure 10: Survey responses regarding satisfaction of life in MODY by lifestyle.

### 3.3 Quality of Life

Overwhelmingly, we heard that the quality of life in the Municipality of the District of Yarmouth is excellent. With its mild climate, beautiful coastal landscape, relatively low cost of living, and friendly and welcoming community of people, the Municipality offers many qualities that are important for families and businesses when considering relocating to the area. At the same time, we heard about the importance of businesses being able to attract and retain a workforce, and how providing recreational, cultural, and health facilities is a key aspect of that.

The Hamlets were noted especially for their character and charm, and some concern was raised with respect to the sustainability of these communities and their built assets.

We also heard that many people who live in the Town are working at minimum wage or lower paying jobs, renting their home, and depending on social services. We heard that the Town tends to draw people who are not able to afford the costs of transportation, and are in greater need of access to healthcare services, and that those who choose to live in the Municipality are more likely to own their home.

Another concern that we heard is that in this part of the province, as people age they are less likely to want to heat their home with wood due to the manual labour involved. This is especially a factor in larger, older homes. Since wood is cheaper than oil or electric heat, seniors who are unable to do the work that comes with wood heating have to either pay more for heat or sell their home and move.

### **3.4 Tourism**

Residents of MODY are clearly very proud of their community and eager to show it off to visitors. That pride is particularly evident when it comes to the raw, natural beauty of the region. Survey respondents spoke often of the untapped potential for tourism in MODY, especially with the unique UNESCO Southwest Nova Biosphere designation and the proximity of the Dark Sky Preserve. Some suggestions for tourism development included a higher focus on eco-tourism, such as birdwatching and astronomy experiences, as well as opportunities for experiential tourism such as fishing and clamming. The west shore of Cape Forchu was identified as a good location for a seaside resort. The local history and archaeology both came up as ways to generate tourism interest. One survey respondent suggested exploring the potential for increased tourism at Overton Rock, likening its potential to Oak Island near Mahone Bay, while another respondent identified potential for the Port Maitland fog alarm building to serve as a historical point of interest in the area.

Many survey respondents want to see MODY realize its tourism potential, and think that some inspiration can be gleaned from other parts of the province, as well as the northeastern United States. One survey respondent suggested an incentive program for businesses that provides funding to beautify their storefronts, increasing the overall appeal of community cores and helping to offset the costs associated with aesthetic maintenance.

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