Town of Berwick
Planning Board Meeting Agenda

Thursday, April 2, 2026
Burgess Meeting Room, Berwick Town Hall
6:30 p.m.

Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance

Introduction of Board Members

Approval of Minutes

- March 19, 2026

Public Comment

Public Hearing

Old Business

New Business

- Planning Board Workshop

Public Comment

Informational Items

Adjournment

Town of Berwick
Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 19, 2026
Town Hall Meeting Room
6:30 p.m.

Call to Order

Pledge of Allegiance

Introduction of Board Members

Nichole Fecteau (Chair); Rick Raynes (Vice-Chair); Niles Schore; Daniel Hook; Katelyn Clark
Regular Members Absent:
Staff Members Present:
James Bellissimo, Director of Planning and Development; Terry Wilson, Code Enforcement Officer

Approval of Minutes

- February 19, 2026

Motion: Rick Raynes motioned to approve the minutes as presented.
Second: Niles Schore

VOTED – 5-0-0 in favor, Motion Passed.

In favor: Rick Raynes; Nichole Fecteau; Niles Schore; Jillian Richards; Katelyn Clark
Opposed: None
Abstain: None

Public Comment

Public Hearing

- Conditional Use. Restaurant, Fast Food. 513 Portland Street (R72-5). RC/I Zone. Aaron Barth.

The applicant briefly described the proposed fast food establishment, offering pizza, tacos, and wings.

Old Business

- Conditional Use. Restaurant, Fast Food. 513 Portland Street (R72-5). RC/I Zone. Aaron Barth.

Motion: Daniel Hook motioned to approve the Findings of Fact.
Second: Niles Schore

VOTED – 5-0-0 in favor, Motion Passed.

In favor: Rick Raynes; Nichole Fecteau; Niles Schore; Jillian Richards; Katelyn Clark
Opposed: None
Abstain: None

Motion: Niles Schore motioned to approve the Application.
Second: Daniel Hook

VOTED – 5-0-0 in favor, Motion Passed.

In favor: Rick Raynes; Nichole Fecteau; Niles Schore; Jillian Richards; Katelyn Clark
Opposed: None
Abstain: None

Public Comment

Informational Items

Terry Wilson pointed out that the roads are posted. Vehicles over 23,000 pounds are restricted from posted roads. Concerns were noted regarding heavy trucks operating during restricted hours.

Adjournment

Motion: Rick Raynes motioned to approve the Findings of Fact.
Second: Daniel Hook

VOTED – 5-0-0 in favor, Motion Passed.

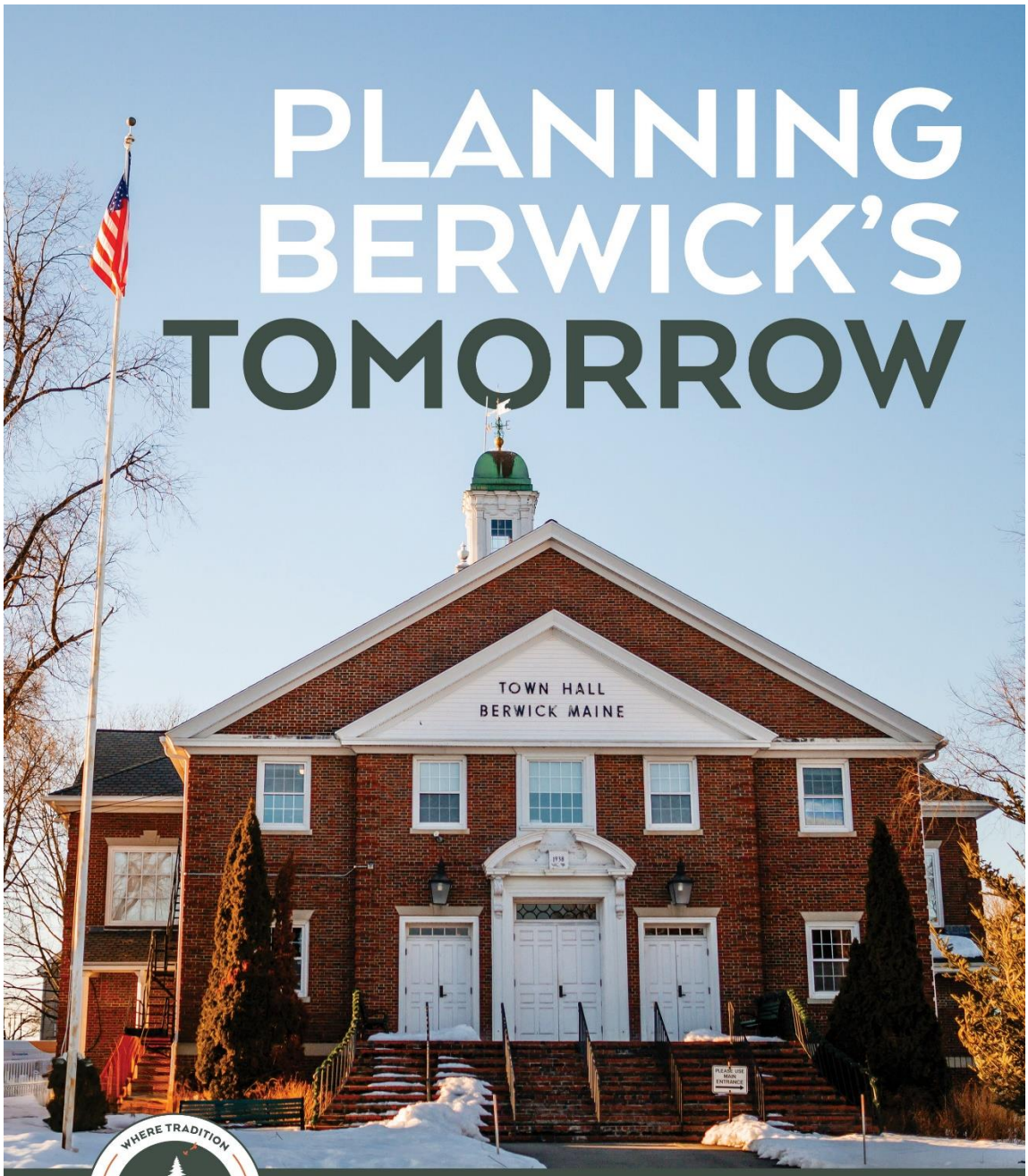
In favor: Rick Raynes; Nichole Fecteau; Niles Schore; Jillian Richards; Katelyn Clark
Opposed: None
Abstain: None

Signed as Approved by the Board:

_____ _____

Chair Date

PLANNING BERWICK'S TOMORROW



WHERE TRADITION
BERWICK Maine
MEETS TOMORROW

TOWN OF BERWICK MAINE
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2026

We, the municipal officers of the Town of Berwick, hereby certify that this Comprehensive Plan has been adopted in accordance with 30-A M.R.S.A. §4324 and the Comprehensive Plan Review Criteria Rule (Chapter 208).

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VISION STATEMENT

Established in 1713, Berwick is a rural New England community where tradition meets tomorrow. We are a town of working farms, river corridors, and a village center in active renewal, a place where civic pride and a can-do attitude runs deep and people show up for each other. Looking toward 2036 and beyond, Berwick will succeed by:

PROMOTING a thriving local economy where small businesses, creative culture, entrepreneurship, and working lands are supported and celebrated;

FOSTERING a healthy relationship with the land and river through conservation, responsible growth, and recreation programs that connect residents to the natural landscape they value;

CREATING a friendly, explorable and affordable town where youth, families, and community come together;

COLLABORATING across generations and across borders with Southern Maine and Seacoast New Hampshire to address shared challenges and opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

The Berwick Comprehensive Plan is a guide for how the Town will grow and invest through 2036 and beyond. It reflects the values, priorities, and aspirations of Berwick's residents and landowners and builds on the foundation established by the 1991 Comprehensive Plan. Where that earlier plan focused on managing rapid growth, this plan reflects a community that has matured, invested in itself, and is focused on shaping the next chapter.

Berwick is a town in active transition. Downtown redevelopment, brownfield remediation, infrastructure investment, and sustained civic engagement have produced visible results. The work is not finished, but the direction is clear. This plan captures where Berwick stands today and outlines how the Town will build on that progress over the next decade. The chapters that follow form an integrated strategy rather than a collection of separate plans. Decisions in one area shape outcomes in others, and this plan reflects those connections.

Berwick's strength has always been its people. Volunteers, committees, community organizations, and engaged residents have driven the progress documented in these pages. This plan is both a product of that engagement and a commitment to sustaining it.

This Comprehensive Plan includes and builds upon the following supporting plans:

- 2019 Recreation Master Plan & Memorial Field Feasibility
- 2023 Brand Guidelines
- Milone & MacBroom Downtown Vehicle Bicycle & Pedestrian Study
- VHB traffic study
- Bartlett Downtown Lighting Plans
- Camoin Market Reports
- Open Space Plan
- Envisioning Downtown Berwick's Vision Report and associated documents.
    - Reference Document to the Berwick Downtown Vision Plan
    - APPENDIX A Charrettes, Comparisons and Inspiring Images
- Tax Increment Financing Development Program

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SUMMARY

This plan is built on direct community input. Beginning in 2019, the planning committee engaged residents through a dedicated survey distributed to every household in Berwick using Every Door Direct Mail, reaching more than 3,500 addresses. The survey was also available at Town Hall and through the Town's website. A short video introducing the planning effort was shared through social media and viewed more than 500 times. In total, 442 residents completed the survey, providing the community feedback that forms the foundation of **this** plan. The Vision Statement draws from and expands upon the vision developed through the Envisioning Downtown Berwick process.

TOP THEMES & PRIORITIES

Community input consistently returned to the same themes. Residents value Berwick's can-do spirit and expect that civic energy to be matched by thoughtful, responsive government. Affordability of taxes, housing, and everyday costs remains a top concern. Protection of farmland, natural resources, and open space is a clear priority, as is maintaining high-quality public services in public safety, public works, and municipal operations. Residents expect excellent recreational facilities and programs, clear and consistent communication from Town government, a vibrant and active downtown village center, and continued investment in infrastructure and capital improvements. These themes run through every chapter of this plan.

MEASURING PROGRESS

A plan without a way to measure progress is only a statement of intent. Berwick will evaluate the implementation of this Comprehensive Plan every five years, beginning in 2031. Each evaluation will track four measures: the degree to which Future Land Use Plan strategies have been carried out; the percentage of municipal growth-related capital investments directed to designated Growth Areas; the location and amount of new development relative to designated Growth, Transitional, and Rural areas; and the amount of critical natural resources, rural land, and waterfront areas protected through acquisition, easements, or other means. The Planning Department will prepare a progress report on each of these measures beginning in 2031 and every five years thereafter, with findings presented to the Select Board and Planning Board for review.

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CHAPTER 1: POPULATION & DEMOGRAPHICS

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's future is shaped by people, by the families who move here, the residents who remain here, and those deciding whether Berwick can meet their needs over time.

Over the past several decades, Berwick has experienced steady demographic change. After periods of rapid growth in the 1970s and 1980s, the Town entered a more moderate phase of expansion. Growth has continued at a measured pace, supported by regional employment access and housing demand across southern York County and the Seacoast. At the same time, the population is aging, household sizes are shrinking, and housing affordability pressures are increasing. These trends will define Berwick's fiscal stability, service demands, and land use patterns through 2036 and beyond.

An aging population will influence emergency response needs, accessibility improvements, transportation planning, and housing design. Smaller households mean that even modest population increases require additional housing units and infrastructure. Housing type decisions will directly affect school enrollment patterns, workforce attraction, and long-term tax base stability. Demographics are not separate from planning decisions. They are the foundation of them.

Berwick remains more balanced than many rural Maine communities, with working-age residents, families with children, and older adults all represented in meaningful numbers. That balance is not guaranteed. Communities that lose younger households struggle to sustain schools, fill workforce pipelines, and share the cost of public services across a broad tax base. Communities that lose older residents lose institutional memory, civic engagement, and the generational continuity that gives a place its character. Keeping Berwick a town where people can arrive young, raise families, and grow old without being forced out by cost or circumstance is one of the most practical goals this plan can pursue.

The Town will integrate demographic data into land use decisions, housing strategy, capital improvement planning, and long-range fiscal forecasting. Growth will be aligned with infrastructure capacity so that roads, water systems, recreation facilities, and public safety services can keep pace. Housing policy will encourage a range of unit types that support families, workforce households, and residents seeking to age in place. Coordination with MSAD60 and regional partners will remain important as enrollment and workforce patterns evolve.

By planning for people rather than reacting to pressures after they emerge, Berwick can remain grounded in its rural character while adapting responsibly to change. Demographic awareness will allow the Town to protect its fiscal health, sustain community life, and ensure that Berwick continues to meet the needs of current and future residents.

Introduction

Population trends are not abstract statistics; they shape daily life. They determine how many children attend local schools, how many emergency calls occur each year, how much housing is needed, and how municipal costs are distributed across taxpayers.

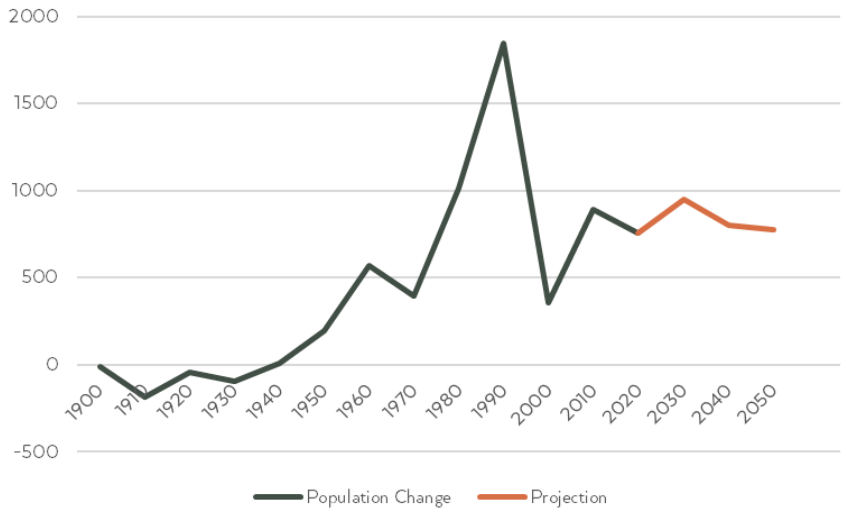
Berwick's demographic story cannot be understood in isolation. Residents commute to Portsmouth, Dover, and Portland. Housing prices in coastal communities push buyers inland. Economic shifts in regional employment centers shape who moves to Berwick, who stays, and who leaves. Understanding local population trends requires understanding the broader regional system of which Berwick is a part.

As growth pressures continue, Berwick must understand who lives here today and anticipate who will live here in the future. This chapter provides the demographic foundation for land use planning, housing strategy, infrastructure investment, and fiscal policy throughout this Comprehensive Plan.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

POPULATION CHANGE AND PROJECTIONS

This chart shows how Berwick's population has changed from 1900 to today, along with projections through 2050. The numbers tell a story of a town that has seen both quiet years and busy ones. There were times when people left, and times when new families arrived in large numbers. The decades ahead are expected to bring steady growth, but not the sharp spikes of the past.



In the early 1900s, Berwick lost residents, much like many small towns in Maine. Things began to change in the middle of the century. Growth picked up in the 1970s and surged in the 1980s, when the population jumped by 44 percent in a single decade. By the early 1990s, that pace had raised concerns. The 1991 Comprehensive Plan focused on slowing things down and bringing growth under control. If the Town had kept growing at that earlier rate, Berwick would be much larger today.

Instead, a mix of economic change and local planning decisions kept growth more measured through the 1990s and early 2000s.

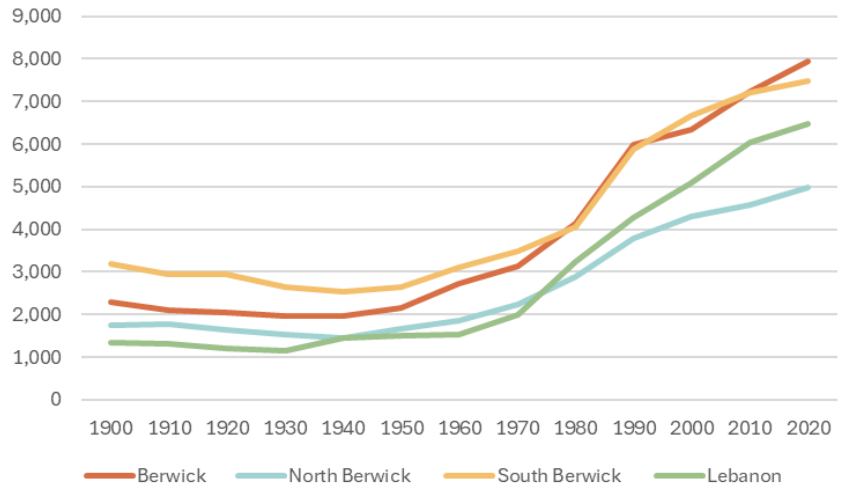
Around 2009, the Great Recession and the closure of Prime Tanning hit the community hard and population dipped. Since then growth has returned, increasing about 9 percent between 2010 and 2020, faster than the state as a whole.

The long-term trend is clear: Berwick grows. The question is not whether more people will come but whether the town is ready for them. Roads, schools, public safety, and housing all need to keep pace with demand. Growth that outstrips infrastructure does not strengthen a community. It strains it.

When compared to neighboring towns, Berwick's pattern is not unusual. South Berwick and Lebanon saw strong growth in the late twentieth century, while North Berwick's increases have been steadier. Across southern York County, communities have grown together, shaped by shared job markets, commuting patterns, and housing demand.

Berwick does not grow in isolation. Families move within the region. Workers commute across town lines and state borders. Housing pressures ripple from one community to the next. Understanding that bigger picture will help the Town plan carefully, protect its character, and make sure growth remains steady, practical, and sustainable.

POPULATION GROWTH IN BERWICK AND NEIGHBORING COMMUNITIES



The ten-year growth rate comparisons table places Berwick's growth in the context of York County and the State of Maine. In nearly every decade, Berwick grew faster than the statewide average and often outpaced York County. While Maine averaged under 6 percent decennial growth across this period, Berwick averaged nearly 21 percent, reflecting stronger long-term expansion.

In the 2010s, Berwick grew by about 9 percent, compared to 7.5 percent in York County and 2.6 percent statewide. This confirms that southern York County continues to grow more rapidly than

Maine overall, and that Berwick remains part of that higher-growth region.

Among neighboring towns, Lebanon posted the highest long-term average growth, while South Berwick experienced particularly strong expansion in the 1980s. Overall, Berwick's trajectory aligns with regional trends but consistently exceeds state averages, underscoring the importance of planning at both the local and county scale.

TEN-YEAR GROWTH RATE COMPARISONS

YEAR	BERWICK	NORTH BERWICK	LEBANON	SOUTH BERWICK	YORK COUNTY	MAINE
1950s	26.41%	11.42%	2.33%	17.61%	6.27%	6.07%
1960s	14.54%	20.61%	29.27%	12.08%	12.25%	2.35%
1970s	32.30%	29.41%	63.09%	16.00%	25.18%	13.37%
1980s	44.49%	31.79%	31.82%	45.25%	17.84%	9.18%
1990s	5.97%	13.18%	19.24%	13.51%	13.46%	3.83%
2000s	14.06%	6.59%	18.65%	8.23%	5.56%	4.19%
2010s	9.03%	8.78%	7.26%	3.42%	7.53%	2.56%
AVERAGE	20.97%	17.40%	24.52%	16.59%	12.58%	5.94%

Source: US Decennial Census

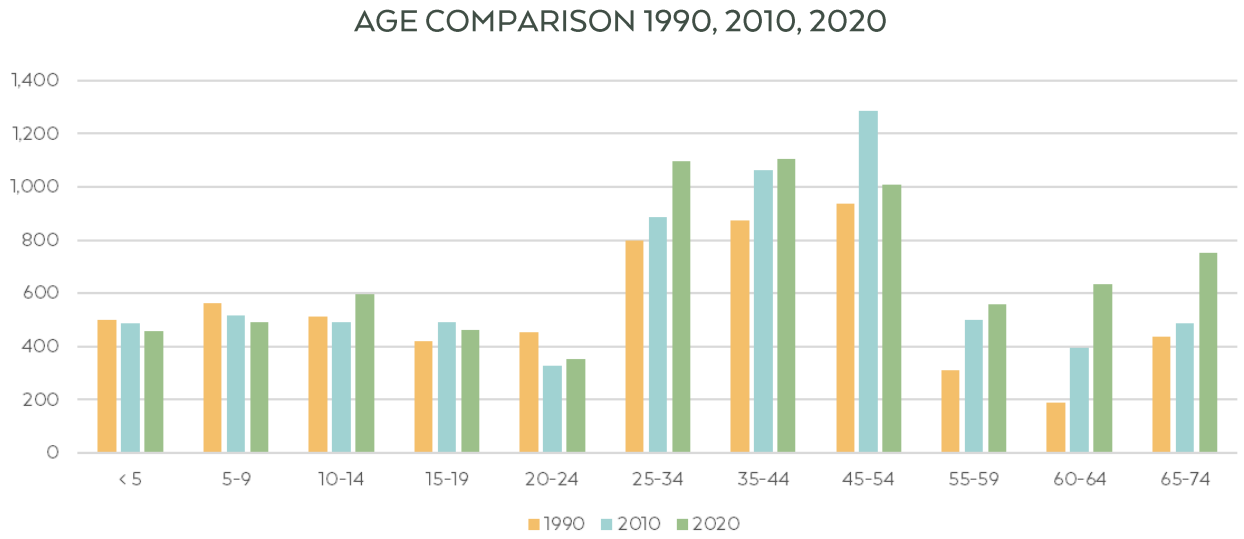
AGE STRUCTURE

Berwick's median age has risen steadily over the past three decades, increasing from approximately 31 years in 1990 to 41.4 years in 2020, and reaching roughly 44 years in the most recent American Community Survey estimate. While the Town remains slightly younger than York County and the State of Maine overall, the population is clearly aging.

The number of residents aged 65 and older has grown significantly, increasing from 799 in 2010 to nearly 1,200 today. Approximately one-third of Berwick households include at least one person over the age of 60. Many of these residents have lived in their homes for decades, reflecting strong community ties while also signaling future needs related to aging in place, accessibility, transportation, and emergency services.

At the same time, Berwick maintains a meaningful population of children and working-age adults. In 2020, the largest age cohort was residents aged 35 to 44, representing approximately 17 percent of the population, and the Town continues to have a higher share of residents aged 10 to 19 than both York County and the State of Maine. This generational mix distinguishes Berwick from many rural communities experiencing sharper youth decline. Preserving that balance will be important, as shifts

in age distribution directly influence school enrollment, housing demand, service costs, and long-term fiscal stability.



Source: US Decennial Census

ECONOMIC AND HOUSING CONDITIONS FOR OLDER RESIDENTS

Older residents in Berwick are not a single economic group. While many have stable housing and strong community roots, financial circumstances vary widely. About 16 percent of households headed by someone 65 or older earn less than $20,000 a year. Roughly 28 percent earn $75,000 or more. Nearly half fall below the Elder Economic Security Index threshold of around $31,000 annually, the income level considered necessary to meet basic needs without assistance. For a substantial share of Berwick's aging population, the challenge is not simply getting older in place. It is affording to.

Housing costs are a significant factor. About one quarter of homeowners aged 65 and older with a mortgage spend 30 percent or more of their income on housing, while cost burden rates among older renters are substantially higher. At the same time, approximately 72 percent of older homeowners have lived in their homes for more than 25 years. While this reflects deep roots and neighborhood stability, it also means many residents occupy aging housing stock that may require maintenance, accessibility upgrades, or modification to support aging in place.

Disability rates further shape service needs. According to Pew Research, 24 percent of residents aged 65 and older report at least one disability, with that rate increasing to over 46 percent for those aged 75 and older. These conditions have direct implications for transportation access, emergency medical response, housing design, and social isolation risk.

Understanding the economic realities behind demographic trends is essential. Planning for aging in Berwick must consider not only population size, but income stability, housing affordability, and the physical condition of the housing stock.

% OF BERWICK'S RESIDENTS WHO REPORT A DISABILITY

24%

OF RESIDENTS AGED 65+

46%

OF RESIDENTS AGED 75+

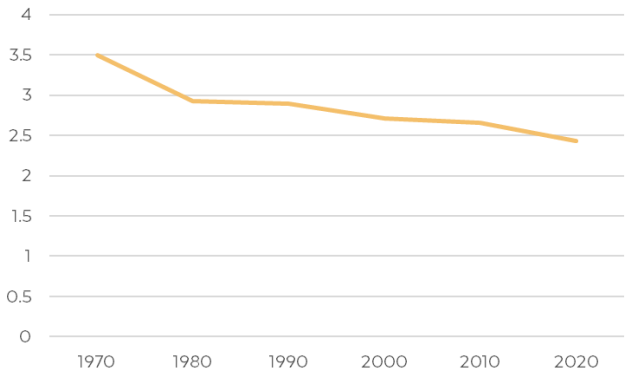
HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS

Average household size has declined in line with statewide trends. Smaller households reflect aging residents, fewer children per family, and an increase in individuals living alone. Since 1970, the average household size in Berwick has declined by more than 30 percent.

Homeownership rates remain high, particularly among older residents. However, housing cost burdens affect a significant share of renters and mortgage holders. Rising regional housing prices are influencing those who can afford to move to or remain in Berwick.

As household sizes shrink, more housing units are required to serve the same population level. This dynamic affects land use planning and infrastructure demand.

AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE 1970-2020



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT & WORKFORCE

Berwick's educational attainment levels are broadly comparable to York County and slightly stronger than statewide averages at the higher end of the spectrum. Approximately 35.8 percent of Berwick residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher, exceeding both the county and state averages. This reflects a well-educated resident base and supports the Town's integration into the broader regional economy. Berwick also shows slightly higher percentages of residents with associate degrees

compared to both York County and Maine, suggesting a strong presence of skilled trades and technical professions. At the same time, the percentage of residents without a high school diploma remains low and generally consistent with regional patterns.

These educational trends reinforce Berwick's position within the southern Maine and Seacoast labor market. A relatively high level of educational attainment supports workforce mobility, entrepreneurial activity, and income stability. As housing and economic development policies evolve, maintaining access to a range of employment opportunities will remain important to sustaining this demographic profile.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, 2020

	MAINE	YORK COUNTY	BERWICK
Less than 9th grade	2.30%	1.90%	1.10%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	4.50%	4.40%	7.20%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	31.30%	29.50%	30.90%
Some college, no degree	19.20%	20.90%	12.60%
Associate degree	10.20%	11.10%	12.40%
Bachelor's degree	20.30%	20.80%	23.50%
Graduate or professional degree	12.20%	11.30%	12.30%
High school graduate or higher	93.20%	93.80%	91.70%
Bachelor's degree or higher	32.50%	32.20%	35.80%

RACE

Berwick's population remains predominantly White, consistent with southern Maine. In 2010, 96.2 percent of residents identified as White alone. By 2020, that share had declined to 92.1 percent, a gradual diversification over the past decade.

The most notable change occurred in residents identifying as Two or More Races, which increased from 1.6 percent in 2010 to 4.8 percent in 2020. Similar trends were observed in York County and statewide, demonstrating both demographic change and updates to Census race reporting in 2020. Other racial categories, including Black and Asian residents, experienced modest increases but remain small shares of the total population.

Hispanic or Latino residents increased from 1.3 percent of Berwick's population in 2010 to 1.8 percent in 2020. This growth mirrors trends in York County and Maine overall, where Hispanic populations also rose modestly during the same period.

While Berwick remains relatively homogeneous, demographic patterns are gradually shifting. Even modest changes can influence community engagement, housing needs, and municipal communication.

RACE COMPARISON 2010 vs 2020

CATEGORY	2010 BERWICK	2020 BERWICK	2010 YORK COUNTY	2020 YORK COUNTY	2010 MAINE	2020 MAINE
White	96.2%	92.1%	96.4%	92.1%	95.2%	90.8%
Black	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%	1%	1.2%	1.9%
Native American	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%	0.6%
Asian	1.3%	1.5%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%
Other	0.2%	0.8%	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.7%
Two or More	1.6%	4.8%	1.4%	4.6%	1.6%	4.7%

Analysis & Trends

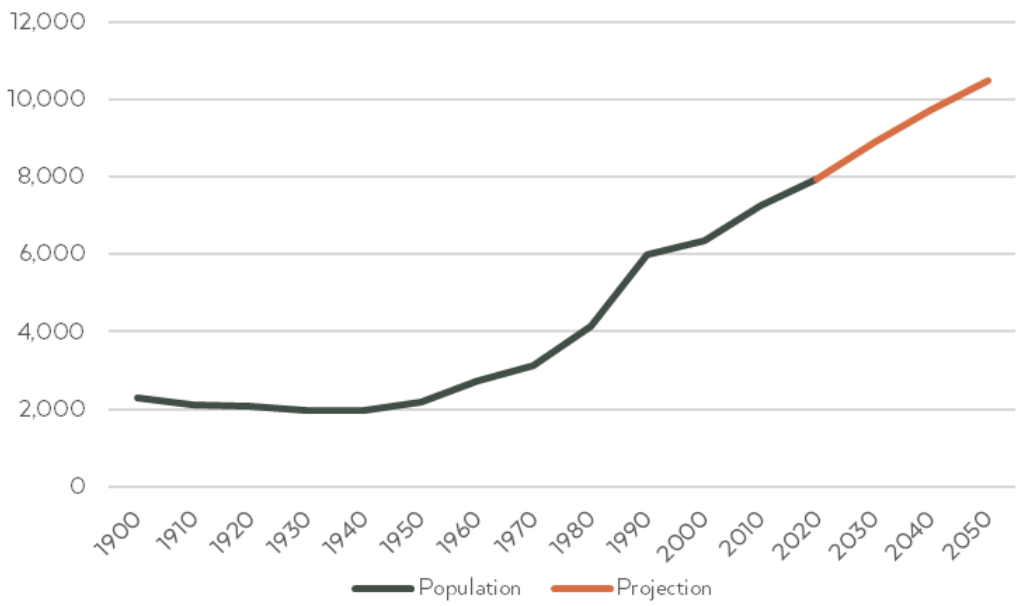
CONTINUED MODERATE GROWTH

Regional housing demand and statewide housing policy changes suggest that Berwick will continue to grow in the coming decades. Recent multifamily and residential development reflects steady demand for housing within commuting distance of job centers across southern Maine and the Seacoast.

Current projections indicate that Berwick's population will likely surpass 10,000 residents sometime between 2045 and 2050. While this growth is expected to remain gradual rather than sudden, reaching that level will mark an important point in the Town's history. Steady increases, even at a moderate pace, bring added demand for roads, water systems, public safety services, schools, and recreation facilities

Growth can strengthen the tax base, but it also carries costs. The key will be making sure development keeps pace with infrastructure capacity and long-term budgeting. By planning ahead and aligning housing and capital investments carefully, Berwick can accommodate continued growth without placing strain on services or altering the character residents value.

CUMULATIVE GROWTH & PROJECTIONS 1900-2050



AGING POPULATION

As Berwick plans for the future, it must address the needs of both older adults and younger families. Berwick's population is aging, consistent with statewide trends. As the share of residents over 65 increases, demand for emergency medical services, accessibility improvements, and age-friendly housing will grow.

AS BERWICK PLANS FOR THE FUTURE, IT MUST ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF BOTH OLDER ADULTS AND YOUNGER FAMILIES.

An aging population also affects fiscal dynamics. Changes in school enrollment, service utilization, and property tax reliance must be monitored carefully.

Supporting residents who wish to age in place while maintaining generational balance will be critical to long-term stability. Climate-related events, including extreme heat, ice storms, and flooding, add urgency to that work. Older adults and residents with disabilities face disproportionate risks during emergencies, and Berwick's preparedness planning must account for their specific needs as this population grows.

HOUSING MIX & DEMOGRAPHIC COMPOSITION

Recent and proposed housing development includes a significant share of smaller units. Smaller units may attract singles, couples without children, or older adults downsizing.

Ensuring a range of housing types, including family-sized units and workforce housing, will help maintain demographic balance. Housing policy decisions directly influence age distribution, school enrollment, and long-term fiscal health.

Access to quality and affordable childcare is closely tied to workforce participation and family stability. As Berwick continues to attract working-age households, monitoring childcare availability and supporting regional efforts to expand access will become an increasingly relevant planning consideration.

DEMOGRAPHIC MONITORING

To maintain long-term stability, Berwick should continue tracking key demographic indicators that influence housing, services, and fiscal health. These include the pace of aging relative to regional trends, housing cost burdens, changes in school enrollment, concentration of specific housing types, and shifts in commuting patterns and workforce participation.

Monitoring these trends allows the Town to make informed adjustments to land-use policy, housing strategy, capital planning, and budget decisions before imbalances strain services or infrastructure. Proactive tracking supports measured decision-making rather than reactive responses.

As demographic patterns continue to evolve, ensuring that municipal services and communication remain accessible and welcoming to all residents will help support inclusive and responsible growth.

Moving Forward

Berwick's demographic trends point to a clear set of priorities. The population is aging, household sizes are shrinking, and housing affordability is squeezing out the younger families and workforce households the town needs to remain balanced. None of these pressures are unique to Berwick, but none of them resolve themselves without deliberate planning.

The most important thing Berwick can do is make sure that housing policy reflects demographic reality. That means supporting a range of unit types and sizes that work for families with children, working adults, and older residents who want to stay in the community they built. It means paying attention to where housing gets built and whether that location supports or strains the infrastructure and schools that give Berwick its quality of life.

Supporting older residents will require more than housing. Transportation access, emergency preparedness, accessibility improvements to facilities and communications, and programs that reduce social isolation are all practical needs that will grow as the share of residents over 65 continues to rise. Coordination with Berwick for a Lifetime and regional partners will be essential.

Demographic patterns shift gradually and the consequences show up slowly, in school enrollment numbers, in emergency call volumes, in the cost of services relative to the tax base that pays for them. Berwick will track these indicators regularly and use them to guide land use, housing, and capital decisions before pressures become problems.

The goal is a town where people can arrive young, raise families, and grow old without being forced out by cost or circumstance. That is not a complicated vision. But it requires consistent attention to the people behind the numbers.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: BCM is Berwick Communications & Media; CC means Conservation Commission; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Maintain a stable rate of growth consistent with the ability of the Town to provide necessary services while maintaining the rural character of Berwick.	Use historical growth patterns to determine a stable growth rate for Berwick.	SB, PB, P&D, TM	Short
	Comply with state requirements regarding tracking of residential development.	P&D	Annually
	Coordinate residential development phasing with school, water, sewer, road, and public safety capacity.	PB, P&D, TM, WD, PW	Ongoing
Retain and attract young adults and working families to sustain Berwick's generational balance	Identify barriers that cause young adults and working families to leave or bypass Berwick, and identify the community assets, amenities, recreational programs, housing options, employment opportunities, and educational characteristics that attract and retain this population; use both to develop targeted strategies in coordination with Envision Berwick, BCM, MSAD60, and regional partners.	SB, TM, P&D, BCM, EB	Short
Improve access to childcare and early childhood services for working families.	Monitor childcare availability and explore partnerships with regional providers, employers, and educational institutions to expand childcare capacity serving Berwick residents.	SB, TM, P&D	Mid
Encourage the development of housing types that are attainable for first-time buyers and young families.	Review zoning and development standards to ensure that family-sized housing, townhomes, duplexes, and other attainable housing types are allowed in appropriate growth areas.	PB, P&D	Short

Support aging in place	Review zoning and housing ordinances to allow appropriate housing options for older residents, including accessory dwelling units and smaller lot configurations where infrastructure supports it.	PB, P&D	Short
Promote housing affordability consistent with local incomes.	Track housing cost burden using Census and ACS data and report findings during Comprehensive Plan updates.	P&D	Annually
State of Maine Goal for Age-Friendly: To encourage municipalities to develop policies that accommodate older adults with aging in place and that encourage the creation of age-friendly communities.	Assess ADA accessibility of public buildings, sidewalks, and recreation facilities and develop a prioritized improvement schedule.	PW, TM	Short
	Coordinate with the Library, Parks & Recreation, and regional organizations to identify and promote programming and services available to older residents.	TM, P&R	Ongoing
	Continue participation in the AARP Network of Age-Friendly States and Communities or a similar framework to benchmark progress and access technical assistance.	TM, SB	Mid

CHAPTER 2: HERITAGE

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's heritage is rooted in its rivers, early settlement patterns, agricultural history, and later industrial growth. From Native American presence along the Salmon Falls River to early sawmills, mast production, farming settlements, and textile mills, each period has shaped the Town's identity and landscape.

Many of the buildings, cemeteries, roadways, and river corridors that define Berwick today reflect this layered history. Historic homes in the village, early garrison sites, churches, monuments, and former mill properties continue to influence how the community looks and feels.

Preserving heritage in Berwick does not mean preventing change. It means guiding reinvestment in a way that respects the Town's historic patterns and character. Moving forward, Berwick will support updated historic inventories, coordinate with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission where appropriate, and encourage adaptive reuse of historic structures. Preservation efforts will remain practical and balanced, protecting significant resources while allowing thoughtful growth.

Introduction

First, there was the river.

The Salmon Falls River shaped Berwick's earliest settlement, its economy, and its identity. From Native American travel routes to timber harvesting, farming, industrial growth, and modern redevelopment, the river has remained central to the Town's story.

Berwick is one of the earliest settled communities in Maine, originally part of Kittery's Upper Parish. Over four centuries, the Town evolved through timber extraction, agriculture, industrial expansion, and modern reinvestment. Each era left physical and cultural markers that remain visible today.

Understanding these historic layers provides context for present-day planning decisions. Heritage is not separate from growth policy. It informs how Berwick manages land use, protects rural character, and directs reinvestment.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

EARLY SETTLEMENT AND RIVER ECONOMY (1630S–1713)

European settlement began along the Salmon Falls River as early as 1631, when Berwick was part of Kittery's Upper Parish. A sawmill was constructed at the falls, producing clapboards and beams. Large white pines were harvested and transported to England as ship masts for the King's navy.

In 1652, Scottish prisoners captured at the Battle of Dunbar were brought to New England as indentured servants. Many settled in the Upper Parish, and their family names remain in the region today.

From 1675 through the early 1700s, conflict known as the Indian Wars affected settlement patterns. Battle sites near Route 236 and Worster Brook reflect this period. Berwick was formally set off from Kittery on June 9, 1713. Settlement patterns during this period established the river-oriented development pattern that continues to influence road alignments, property boundaries, and village form today.

TIMBER DECLINE AND AGRICULTURAL EXPANSION (1720–1820)

As timber resources declined, agriculture became dominant. Blackberry Hill Road, once known as a Mast Road, was settled around 1720 by farming families. A meeting house was completed there in 1752, establishing an early parish center.

Ebenezer Lord migrated to Great Falls and built mills near the gorge below present-day Moulton Street. His 1795–1796 home on Sawmill Hill still stands. The transition from timber extraction to farming permanently altered land use patterns, replacing dense forest with fields, farm roads, and dispersed homesteads that still define much of Berwick's rural landscape.

The Town's history includes Sarah, known as "Black Sarah," an enslaved woman who later gained her freedom and is buried in the Lord Cemetery. Her life reflects a broader and more complex colonial history that remains part of Berwick's cultural record.

South Berwick separated in 1814. Maine achieved statehood in 1820.



INDUSTRIAL GROWTH AND VILLAGE FORMATION (1825–1913)

Beginning in 1825, mill development at Great Falls shifted population and economic activity back toward the river. Downtown Berwick emerged as a commercial and civic center. The concentration of mills, housing, and civic institutions near the river established the compact village pattern that remains the Town's historic core.

The Civil War had a significant local impact. Approximately 200 of Berwick's 1,000 residents enlisted. Later generations served in World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and more recent conflicts. The Soldiers' Monument and other memorials serve as visible reminders of this service.

Key milestones during this era include the relocation of the Town House to School Street in 1878, construction of the steel bridge to Somersworth in 1906, dedication of the Civil War monument in 1911, and Berwick's bicentennial celebration in 1913.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY INDUSTRY AND CIVIC INSTITUTIONS (1913–1986)

Prime Tanning expanded to Berwick in 1935 and became a defining employer and riverfront presence for decades. Its large industrial footprint shaped the downtown for the twentieth century and influenced infrastructure investment, employment patterns, and housing demand.

Lena Clark's bequest funded construction of the Town Hall, completed in 1937. Civic institutions such as schools, churches, and fraternal halls continued to serve as gathering places throughout the twentieth century.

In 1986, Berwick enacted its first Land Use Ordinance, marking a formal shift toward structured development review and growth management.

PLANNING, TRANSITION, AND REINVESTMENT (1986–PRESENT)

The Town adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1991, and the Land Use Ordinance was amended in 1993 to align with updated planning goals.

Prime Tanning permanently closed in 2008 and declared bankruptcy in 2010, marking a major economic transition.

Beginning in 2012, the Downtown Vision Committee led public discussions about the future of the village and riverfront. In 2014, the group evolved into Envision Berwick. Brownfield grants awarded in 2015 and 2016 supported cleanup of the former Prime Tanning site. The Berwick Landing at Newichawannock was constructed in 2015, reconnecting residents to the river.

In 2016, the community selected the slogan "Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow." In 2019, the former Prime Tanning site was purchased for redevelopment, with Planning Board approval granted in 2022.

Today, Berwick is once again turning toward the river for recreation, housing, and reinvestment.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES AND DEVELOPMENT

Berwick contains a significant number of buildings more than 100 years old, particularly within the village and along early road corridors. Many homes date to the 18th and 19th centuries, while structures from the late 1800s and early 1900s reflect industrial expansion and commercial growth.

Notable historic homes and buildings include the Ricker Homestead, Hersom Homestead, Lord Homestead, Odd Fellows Hall, the former Great Falls Post Office, Allen Street School, and commercial buildings in Sullivan Square. Historic churches, civic buildings, and monuments also

contribute to the Town's character, including the Soldiers' Monument, Town Hall, and long-standing religious institutions. These structures reflect distinct periods of growth and remain important visual anchors within the community.

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) Comprehensive Planning Historic Preservation Data Set identifies 243 recorded historic resources in Berwick, documented through 12 separate survey projects conducted between 2010 and 2024. Survey coverage spans multiple corridors including Route 236, School Street/Route 9, Rochester Street, Sullivan Street/Sullivan Square, and the Salmon Falls River waterfront. All but two properties were surveyed at the reconnaissance level; the Evergreen Cemetery complex received intensive-level survey.

Of the 243 recorded resources, 29 have been determined eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, 2 are currently listed, 6 have been designated "not determined," and 206 were found not eligible at the time of survey. The two listed properties are the Memorial Chapel and the Memorial Gate at Evergreen Cemetery (55 Cemetery Road), both documented through intensive survey and listed as a cohesive complex.

The eligible properties represent a cross-section of Berwick's architectural and agricultural heritage. Prominent among them are three historic farm complexes: Wentworth Farm (7 New Dam Road, ca. 1780), Blackberry Hill Farm (9 Brackett Lane, ca. 1875), and the Gilman Stacy Farm (95 Wentworth Road, ca. 1860). Also eligible are the Richard L. Goodwin House and Carriage House (261 Route 236), the War Memorial at Rochester and Sullivan Streets (1911), the 1938 Town Hall at 11 Sullivan Street, Hackmatack Farm/Guptill Farm (538 School Street, ca. 1830), the William Hooper House/Master Sullivan's Schoolhouse (134 School Street, 1743), the Forget-Me-Not Service Station (534 School Street, ca. 1930), and a house and barn at 233 School Street (ca. 1820).

Architecturally, Berwick's recorded resources reflect patterns common to rural southern Maine. Vernacular construction predominates across all property types. Greek Revival is the most commonly identified formal style, followed by Italianate, Georgian, Queen Anne, and Second Empire examples concentrated along the older road corridors. Recorded resources date primarily from the nineteenth century, with the largest cluster constructed between 1800 and 1899. A smaller number of pre-1800 structures survive, representing the town's earliest period of settlement.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESOURCES

No comprehensive professional archaeological survey has been completed in Berwick. However, the Salmon Falls River and Little River corridors were central to Native American travel, trade, and settlement. The broader Newichawannock and Piscataqua region supported Indigenous communities prior to and during early European settlement. Artifact discoveries along Route 236 and near river corridors indicate potential areas of archaeological significance.

Historic archaeological sites may include early garrison houses and farmsteads such as Hamilton's Garrison, Tozier's Garrison, and the Plaisted Site. Physical remnants of early settlement remain, including mill foundations below Great Falls, a stone structure near the Salmon Falls River, and cellar holes associated with early garrison and schoolhouse sites. These resources provide tangible links to Berwick's earliest periods of development and may warrant additional study when significant land disturbance is proposed.

CULTURAL HISTORY AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Berwick's heritage includes settlers, farmers, industrial workers, civic leaders, and families whose lives shaped the Town's development. Community institutions, including schools, churches, and fraternal halls, have long served as gathering places.

The Berwick Historical Society continues to preserve artifacts, documents, and photographs that contribute to public understanding of local history. Together, these cultural resources reinforce a shared identity rooted in the river, the land, and generations of civic participation.

Analysis & Trends

RIVER AS DEFINING FEATURE

The Salmon Falls River has shaped every phase of Berwick's development, from early settlement and timber harvesting to industrial expansion and modern redevelopment. The river determined where roads formed, where mills were built, and where the village center emerged.

Today, interest in the riverfront reflects environmental awareness, recreation demand, and renewed economic investment. Public access improvements, redevelopment of former industrial properties, and growing housing demand are bringing new activity to the corridor. As this reinvestment continues, the river area will face increasing pressure for housing, commercial activity, and expanded public use.

The challenge is not whether change will occur, but how it will be managed. Protecting historic views, mill remnants, and the natural character of the river corridor while accommodating reinvestment will remain a central planning consideration. Increased housing demand and mixed-use redevelopment near the river will require careful review to ensure that building scale, materials, and site design respect historic patterns while accommodating growth.

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PRIORITIES

Community survey responses provide clear guidance on what residents value when discussing preservation and rural character. Residents identified a broad mix of civic landmarks, historic buildings, farmland, forests, river corridors, and recreation areas.

Town Hall was the most frequently mentioned location, reflecting its symbolic and civic importance. Downtown and its historic brick buildings were also widely cited, reinforcing the importance of maintaining the architectural character of the village core.

TOWN HALL WAS THE MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED LOCATION, REFLECTING ITS SYMBOLIC AND CIVIC IMPORTANCE.

Beyond the downtown area, respondents emphasized working farmland, open fields, wooded areas, and river corridors, including the Salmon Falls River and Little River. Recreation areas such as Hatfield's Pond, Keay Brook Trail, and Murdock Lake were also noted. Individual historic homes and long-standing landmarks were specifically identified.

Taken together, these responses demonstrate that residents define preservation broadly and expect land use decisions to reflect that priority. It includes not only historic structures, but also rural landscapes, natural resources, and community gathering places. This reinforces the need for balanced land use policies that protect both built heritage and open land while allowing appropriate reinvestment.

REINVESTMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT

The closure of Prime Tanning marked a major economic shift and left a large footprint along the riverfront. Brownfield cleanup grants beginning in 2015 and subsequent redevelopment planning initiated a new chapter for the former industrial site. Community-led efforts, including the Downtown Vision Committee and Envision Berwick, emphasized reconnecting the village to the river and strengthening the historic core.

Reinvestment presents both opportunity and risk. Thoughtful redevelopment can strengthen the tax base, increase housing options, and restore underutilized properties. However, incremental changes, if not carefully reviewed, can gradually alter historic character and erode visual cohesion.

Balancing reinvestment with preservation requires clear standards, consistent review, and awareness of historic context. Growth and preservation are not opposing goals, but they must be aligned intentionally.

NEED FOR UPDATED INVENTORY

Much of Berwick's formal historic inventory work dates to earlier planning efforts. Since that time, buildings have aged, ownership has changed, and redevelopment pressures have increased.

An updated historic and archaeological survey would provide clearer information about building condition, potential eligibility for historic designation, and areas of archaeological sensitivity. Better documentation supports more informed land use decisions, helps property owners understand preservation incentives, and ensures that important resources are identified before significant change occurs.

As development activity continues, maintaining accurate and current information will be essential to protecting the Town's historic assets while allowing appropriate growth. Without updated documentation, significant resources may be altered or lost before their importance is fully understood.

Moving Forward

Berwick will approach preservation with the same steady mindset that has shaped its history. The goal is not to freeze the Town in time, but to guide change in a way that respects historic patterns, landscapes, and structures.

An updated inventory of historic and archaeological resources will be a priority. Working with Maine Historic Preservation Commission standards, the Town will identify significant properties, document their condition, and clarify areas of archaeological sensitivity. Accurate information allows better planning decisions and gives property owners a clearer understanding of potential incentives and responsibilities.

In the village and riverfront areas, where redevelopment pressure is greatest, the Town will consider practical tools to maintain historic character. These may include design guidance, context-sensitive development standards, or voluntary preservation discussions supported by residents. The intent is to protect scale, materials, and visual cohesion without discouraging investment.

Along river corridors and early settlement areas, coordination with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission will occur when substantial land disturbance is proposed. Early awareness reduces conflict and helps protect important resources before they are lost.

Partnerships will remain central. The Town will continue working with the Berwick Historical Society and community volunteers to promote local history through education, interpretive signage, and public events. Understanding the past strengthens civic pride and supports informed decision-making.

Berwick's history shows that the community evolves in cycles. The river that once powered industry now anchors recreation and reinvestment. By managing growth with awareness of historic patterns and community values, the Town can protect its heritage while allowing the next chapter of its story to unfold.

Berwick's history is also a story of civic determination. Residents have repeatedly chosen investment over inaction, from the early mill builders who shaped the river economy to the volunteers and officials who turned a contaminated brownfield into a catalyst for downtown renewal. That same can-do spirit is the foundation of this Comprehensive Plan and the reason its goals are achievable.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: BHS is Berwick Historical Society, BCM is Berwick Communications & Media; CC means Conservation Commission; EB is Envision Berwick; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; RC is Recreation Commission; PB is the

Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TC is Town Clerk; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Complete and maintain an updated inventory of Berwick's historic, architectural, and archaeological resources.	Conduct an updated survey of historic and architecturally significant structures, using Maine Historic Preservation Commission standards, to document condition and identify preservation priorities.	BHS, P&D,	Short
	Identify areas of archaeological sensitivity along the Salmon Falls River, Little River, and early settlement corridors and document known sites including garrison houses, mill foundations, and farmstead remnants.	P&D,	Mid
	Incorporate updated historic and archaeological inventory data into Planning Board review processes for subdivisions and non-residential development.	PB, P&D	Short
Protect historic structures, archaeological sites, and village character through land use standards and development review.	Amend land use ordinances to require developers proposing work in or near archaeologically sensitive areas to take appropriate protective measures, including site design modification, construction timing, and limits on excavation.	PB, SB	Mid
	Consider practical design guidance or context-sensitive development standards for the village core and riverfront to protect historic scale, materials, and visual cohesion during reinvestment.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Coordinate with MHPC when substantial land disturbance is proposed in areas with known or potential archaeological resources.	P&D, PB	Ongoing
Support adaptive reuse of historic structures and reinvestment in the village and riverfront.	Promote awareness of state and federal historic preservation tax incentives and other tools available to property owners of historic structures.	BHS, P&D	Short
	Support redevelopment of the former Prime Tanning site and other brownfield properties in a manner consistent with the historic character of the riverfront and village core.	P&D, PB, SB	Ongoing
	Work with the Berwick Historical Society to develop educational materials, interpretive signage,	BHS, EB	Short

Promote public awareness of Berwick's history and support the Berwick Historical Society.	and public programming that connect residents to Berwick's layered history.		
	Support the Berwick Historical Society in establishing a permanent location for a local history museum to store and display artifacts, documents, and photographs.	BHS, SB, TM	Long
Protect and preserve important historic documents and records.	Coordinate with the Town Clerk to evaluate current storage conditions at Town Hall for historic documents and improve as necessary.	TC, TM	Short

CHAPTER 3: NATURAL RESOURCES

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's rivers, forests, wetlands, and farmland play a central role in shaping the town's identity, protecting public health, and supporting the local economy. These natural features help define the rural character that residents value and rely on, while also providing essential services such as clean drinking water, flood control, and wildlife habitat. As growth continues and severe weather becomes more frequent, the town faces new challenges in maintaining the quality and function of these systems. Berwick's future growth will test the capacity of these natural systems. The decisions made over the next decade will determine whether development reinforces long-term environmental stability or increases infrastructure costs and risk. Natural resource planning is, therefore, not separate from fiscal planning. It is foundational to it.

Clean water remains one of the most important priorities. The Salmon Falls River and several aquifers supply drinking water to hundreds of homes and businesses. Wetlands and forested areas slow down stormwater, filter pollution, and help recharge groundwater. If these systems are degraded or lost, the cost of replacing their functions with built infrastructure would be significant.

This chapter outlines a plan to manage development in a way that respects the land's natural capacity. It identifies high-priority conservation areas such as Beaver Dam Heath, Hatfield Pond, and the Little River corridor. It also highlights recharge zones, flood-prone areas, and soils that are poorly suited for new construction. By guiding development to areas where the landscape can support it, Berwick can avoid long-term maintenance burdens and protect public investments in water, roads, and emergency services.

The town's participation in the MS4 stormwater program and the Community Resilience Partnership strengthens this approach. Through open space planning, land conservation, and regional cooperation, Berwick is taking clear steps to ensure its environmental health remains strong amid climate and land-use pressures.

Natural systems provide measurable fiscal value. Wetlands reduce the need for engineered stormwater systems. Forested recharge areas protect drinking water infrastructure. Directing growth away from poorly suited soils avoids long-term road and septic failures. Environmental planning and fiscal planning are closely connected.

Protecting natural resources is a practical strategy for Berwick. It reflects the community's values and supports fiscal responsibility by reducing future costs and risks. With careful planning and continued action, Berwick can remain a rural town that is both resilient and economically sound for generations to come.

Introduction

Berwick has a rich tapestry of natural treasures, quiet forests, open farmland, winding wetlands and rivers, and a scenic lake. The Salmon Falls River forms the town's western border, creating a natural edge that also connects us to Somersworth, New Hampshire. The river doesn't separate, it connects, weaving together our story with the land, the water, and the communities around us.

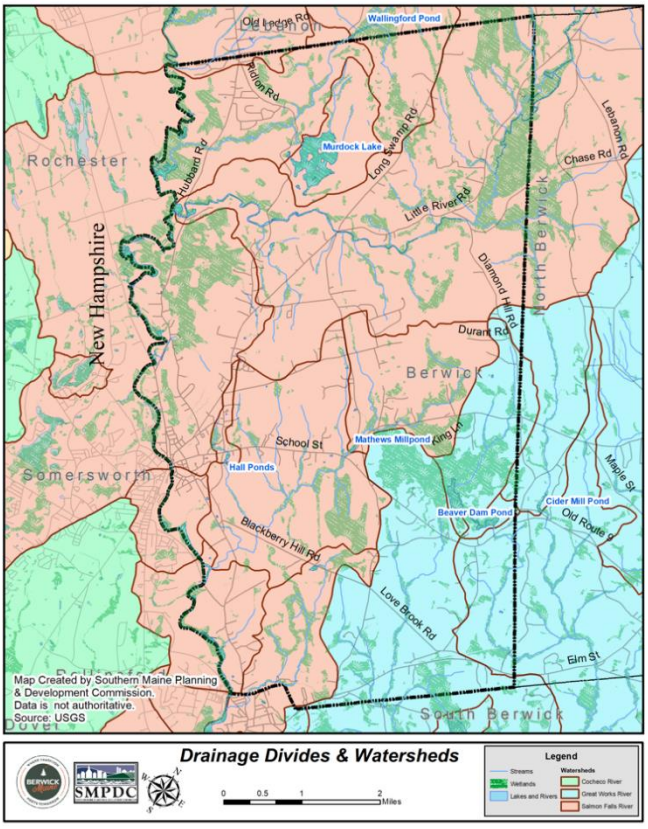
These larger, undeveloped habitat blocks and scenic vistas give Berwick a sense of place. As we look to the future, protecting these spaces means preserving the character, beauty, and ecological health that make Berwick feel like home.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

SURFACE WATER, DRAINAGE & WATERSHEDS

A watershed is an area of land where all the water drains to a common waterbody. According to Beginning with Habitat (BWH), everything within a watershed, water, soil, nutrients, and pollutants, is connected. Berwick lies within two major watersheds: the Great Works River Watershed and the Salmon Falls River Watershed.

The Great Works River Watershed covers 84 square miles and includes the Great Works River, Estes Brook, West Brook, and several smaller streams. The river flows for 24.5 miles, dropping 520 feet from its start in Sanford to where it meets the Salmon Falls River in South Berwick. This watershed includes parts of Sanford, Wells, York, Berwick, North Berwick, and South Berwick. While it's not a main source of drinking water, it does receive treated wastewater from North Berwick



The Salmon Falls River Watershed covers 238 square miles and includes the Salmon Falls River, Great East Lake, Lovell Lake, Lake Murdock, and other nearby rivers. The river runs for 37.5 miles and provides drinking water for both Berwick and Somersworth. It also receives treated wastewater from Berwick, South Berwick, Milton, Somersworth, and Rollinsford.

WETLANDS

Wetlands are important ecosystems, often identified by saturated soils and plant species that thrive in wet conditions. These areas are challenging and costly to develop due to their soft ground and environmental sensitivity. Protecting wetlands is essential because they provide a wide range of environmental benefits. They help recharge and cleanse groundwater, support rare and endangered species, and maintain the quality of lakes and rivers by filtering out excess nutrients. Wetlands also play a key role in flood control by storing and slowly releasing water and by trapping sediment from agricultural runoff, improving overall water quality. Beyond their ecological functions, wetlands offer scenic beauty and open space, contributing to the rural character and visual appeal of the landscape.

Wetlands are regulated at both the federal and state levels under the Clean Water Act and Maine's Natural Resources Protection Act. Local land use review plays an important role in ensuring that development proposals respect wetland buffers and minimize disturbance. Identifying high-density wetland areas early in the planning process reduces costly redesign and environmental risk.

The location of wetlands is important to consider when the town plans growth and future development. Zoning and appropriate uses should be considered in areas of high wetland density or wetlands noted for significant importance.

WATER QUALITY PLAN

Berwick's varied water resources include the Salmon Falls River, Little River, Hatfield Pond, Beaver Dam Pond, Worster Brook, Keay Brook, Love Brook, Beaver Dam Brook, and numerous other brooks, streams, and wetlands. These surface waters, along with underlying aquifers, form the foundation of the Town's drinking water supply and ecological health.

Berwick draws its public drinking water from the Salmon Falls River and relies on groundwater aquifers for many private wells. Studies conducted in 1989 and again in 2020 evaluated the potential for developing an underground municipal water source. While no suitable sources were identified near existing infrastructure, promising groundwater areas were located several miles away near Hatfield Pond and the Little River corridor. Protecting water quality in these areas is essential to safeguarding potential future drinking water supplies and maintaining long-term system reliability.

In addition to the Town of Berwick Water Department, other communal water supplies in town include Beaver Dam Campground, Sunrise Mobile Home Park, Noble Middle School, and Noble Knowlton School. The health of shared surface and groundwater resources therefore affects not only municipal infrastructure but also private and institutional users.

Given the identification of promising groundwater areas near Hatfield Pond and the Little River corridor, future planning efforts should include mapping and protecting potential municipal well sites and associated recharge zones. Proactively identifying and safeguarding these areas allows the Town to integrate long-term water supply protection into land use decisions before development pressures limit future options.

LAKES AND PONDS INVENTORY

Berwick contains several lakes and ponds that contribute to the town's natural character and recreational opportunities. These include Beaver Dam Pond, 13 acres, maximum depth 5 feet, warmwater fishery; Hall Pond 1, 2 acres; Hall Pond 2, 1 acre; Hall Pond 3, 1 acre; Mathew's Millpond, 2 acres, maximum depth 7 feet, coldwater fishery; and Murdock Lake, also known as Hatfield Pond, 144 acres, maximum depth 13 feet, warmwater fishery. Among these waterbodies, Beaver Dam Pond and Murdock Lake qualify as "great ponds," defined under Maine law as inland waterbodies greater than 10 acres in size.

Great ponds are subject to stricter development standards under the Natural Resources Protection Act. These protections are intended to minimize activities that pose risks to water quality, including nutrient runoff, sedimentation, and shoreline disturbance. Municipalities may adopt additional local controls around significant waterbodies, such as larger lot sizes, shoreland setbacks, vegetated buffers, managed water access, and road maintenance standards. Careful land use planning around these resources helps protect water quality, fisheries, and the long-term ecological health of Berwick's lakes and ponds.

PHOSPHORUS AND NITROGEN POLLUTION

A major threat to our waterbodies is too much phosphorus and nitrogen. These nutrients come from things like fertilizers, farms, roads, and construction. When it rains, runoff carries them into lakes.

Too much phosphorus or nitrogen causes algae blooms, which use up oxygen in the water and can kill fish and other wildlife. Maine loses at least one lake a year to this problem. To help, the Maine DEP created rules that limit how much phosphorus new developments can release. These limits depend on how sensitive the lake is. While the rules focus on phosphorus, reducing nitrogen is also important.

Waterbodies can be protected through practical, everyday actions that reduce nutrient runoff and pollution. This includes using less fertilizer on lawns and fields, planting and maintaining vegetated buffer zones along shorelines and streams, reducing the amount of paved or impervious surfaces that increase stormwater runoff, and incorporating environmentally responsible building practices into site design and construction. Together, these measures help protect water quality, aquatic habitat, and the long-term health of Berwick's lakes, ponds, and rivers.

SALMON FALLS RIVER

The Salmon Falls River is subject to the jurisdiction of many municipal and county governments. There are 19 communities in the river's watershed, served by three regional planning commissions.

The Maine DEP monitors the Salmon Falls River Basin and its smaller streams. They check water quality at ten main river sites and 45 tributary sites. The Salmon Falls River meets Class B standards for oxygen, aquatic life, and bacteria. Class B means the water is clean enough for most

recreational activities and supports a healthy environment. However, there are several large discharges into the river from places like South Berwick, Berwick, and North Berwick. Sometimes, bacterial levels in the river exceed safe limits, usually after storms. Some tributaries also occasionally fail to meet oxygen or bacterial standards, likely due to pollution from scattered sources or natural factors. The Bureau of Water Quality and DEP agree that maintaining Class B water quality is a reasonable goal for the river until more is done to address problems in the tributaries.

POINT AND NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION

Berwick's 2023 MS4 Stormwater Management Plan identifies 13 municipal stormwater outfalls within the Town's urbanized area: seven discharge directly to the Salmon Falls River and six discharge to Ferguson Brook, Worcester Brook, and an unnamed tributary. The River carries a Class C designation for the segment between the Route 9 bridge in Berwick and the Route 4 bridge in South Berwick, established through a 1999 Use Attainability Analysis finding that Class B dissolved oxygen standards were unattainable due to upstream impoundments. The River is listed on Maine's 303(d) impaired waters list as Category 5-D for PCBs and dioxin from historic industrial discharges, and is separately listed as impaired for bacteria, though Maine DEP has not fully identified the source. Adams Brook carries a Category 5-A listing for aquatic life impairment. Berwick has no Urban Impaired Streams under Maine DEP Chapter 502.

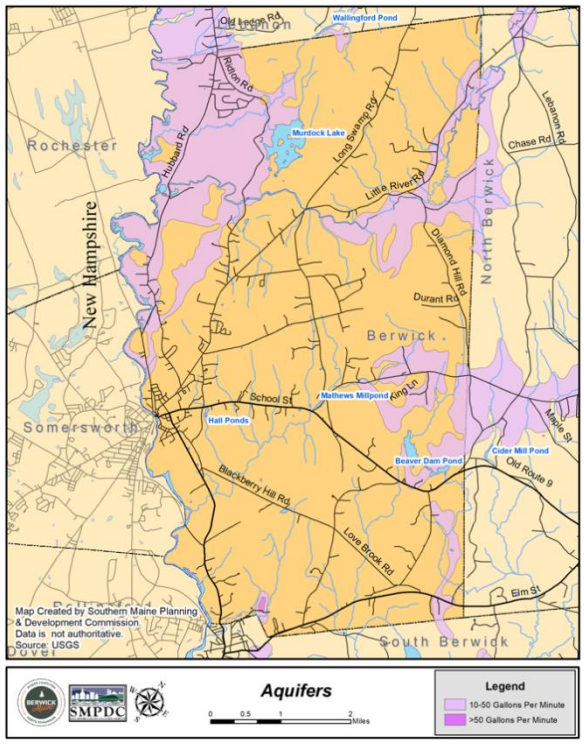
The 1999 TMDL found no widespread significant phosphorus loading from nonpoint sources relative to point source inputs at the time of sampling. The Bacteria TMDL does not identify a specific nonpoint source; Maine DEP has indicated that stormwater is a suspected contributing factor. Addressing bacteria loading through the Town's Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination program, including dry-weather outfall sampling and investigation of suspect discharges, satisfies the current MS4 permit requirement for this impairment.

SURFACE DRINKING WATER

The Berwick Water Department provides drinking water to about 1,000 homes and businesses. This water comes from a single intake on the Salmon Falls River, making the river's water quality essential to the health and well-being of many Berwick residents.

In 2003, the Maine Drinking Water Program evaluated the river as part of its Source Water Assessment Program to assess the river's future contamination risk and help protect it over the long term. The assessment looked at land use, development, recreation, and other activities in the watershed that could affect water quality. Based on this information, the river was rated as having a moderate risk of contamination. Key concerns included high-intensity farming upstream and a railroad corridor running close to the river. The report also noted that the lack of protective zoning and land ownership near the intake increases the risk. To keep our drinking water safe, Berwick must continue to monitor the river and work with state agencies and neighboring towns to reduce pollution risks.

AQUIFERS AND RECHARGE AREAS



Many homes in Berwick rely on private wells that draw water from underground aquifers. These aquifers are layers of sand, gravel, or fractured rock that store groundwater and supply drinking water to rural households. On the map to the left, significant aquifer areas are shown in purple, identifying the portions of town where groundwater resources are most abundant and most sensitive. Aquifers depend on recharge areas where rain and snow soak into the ground and refill the supply. If recharge areas are paved over, compacted, or contaminated, both the quantity and quality of groundwater can decline. Protecting these aquifer areas and their recharge zones is essential to maintaining safe drinking water for residents and preserving future water supply options. Identifying and safeguarding these areas is a practical long-term strategy for protecting public health and guiding responsible growth.

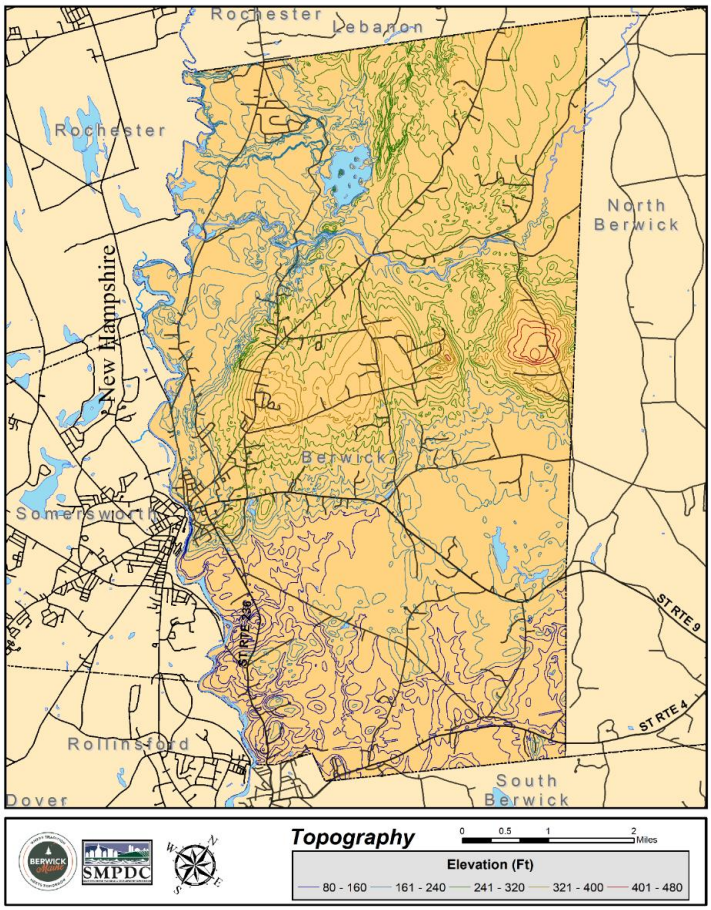
TOPOGRAPHY

Topographical features have a strong influence on the way a town develops. Steep slopes affect the feasibility of development, water drainage patterns, infrastructure costs, and scenic views. Berwick's topography is defined by generally rolling terrain with several prominent high points and a broad river valley along its western boundary. Elevation ranges from approximately 80 feet above sea level near the Salmon Falls River to nearly 480 feet at the highest inland ridges. The lowest elevations are concentrated along the Salmon Falls River corridor and its tributaries, where flatter terrain has historically supported settlement, transportation routes, and industrial activity.

Moving east and north from the river, the landscape transitions into gently rolling uplands with occasionally steeper hills. One of the most noticeable high-elevation areas lies in the northeastern portion of town, where contour lines tighten and elevation rises more sharply. These steeper areas can limit development potential and heighten concerns about erosion, runoff, and road construction costs.

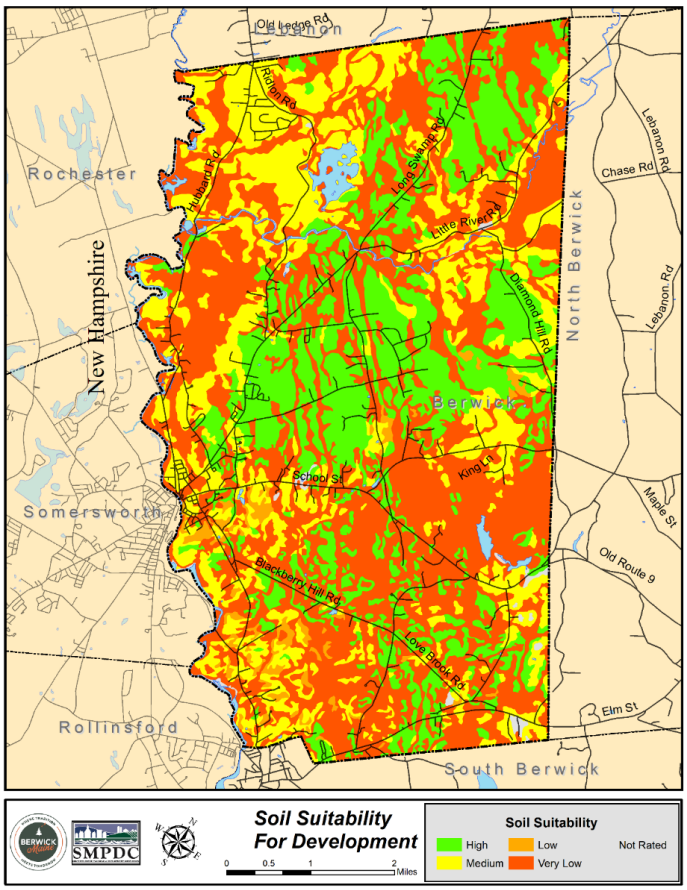
Overall, Berwick consists largely of moderately sloped terrain rather than mountainous land. The combination of flatter river valleys and rolling uplands has contributed to the long-standing success of agriculture, forestry, and rural residential development throughout the community. However, steeper slopes and higher elevations require careful site design to manage drainage, protect scenic character, and avoid unnecessary long-term infrastructure impacts.

Berwick's topography, shown with 20-foot contour intervals on the map below, continues to shape land-use decisions. Lower elevation areas near existing roads and utilities are generally more suitable for development, while steep slopes and high ridgelines may warrant additional review to protect natural drainage systems and reduce future maintenance burdens.



SOILS AND DEVELOPMENT

The type of soil in an area plays a significant role in how well it can support homes, septic systems, and roads. Building on poor soils can lead to structural problems, higher construction costs, drainage failures, and environmental or health risks. The Maine Department of Environmental Protection and the York County Soil and Water Conservation District provide soil surveys that evaluate land for suitability for low-density development, such as single-family homes served by on-site septic systems.



The map shown illustrates soil suitability across Berwick. Areas shown in green indicate soils rated high for development suitability. Yellow areas represent medium suitability. Orange areas are rated low, and red areas are very low suitability. In general, the more orange and red an area appears, the more constraints exist for septic systems and building foundations. These limitations may include shallow bedrock, poor drainage, high water tables, or unstable soils.

The most important factor in determining suitability is whether the soil can properly support a septic system. If it cannot, the land is considered unsuitable for typical residential development, even if structures or roads could technically be constructed. Much of Berwick contains soils with moderate to severe limitations, meaning careful site design and additional engineering may be required.

Protecting high-quality soils and avoiding development on severely limited soils is key to keeping Berwick safe, affordable, and rural. Directing growth toward areas with better soil conditions reduces long-term maintenance costs, protects groundwater quality, and helps prevent expensive infrastructure problems in the future.

FLOODPLAINS AND FLOOD HAZARD AREAS

FEMA flood zone mapping identifies areas along the Salmon Falls River and its tributaries that are subject to periodic flooding. These areas, primarily concentrated in the river corridor and low-lying areas near tributary streams, are regulated under the National Flood Insurance Program and local floodplain management ordinances.

Development in floodplains is restricted to reduce property damage, protect public safety, and maintain eligibility for federal flood insurance. Preserving natural floodplain functions also reduces downstream flood risk by allowing rivers to spread across natural overflow areas during high-water events. As climate patterns shift and intense rainfall events become more frequent, floodplain management will remain an important component of land use planning. Protecting undeveloped floodplains supports both public safety and long-term infrastructure resilience.

Analysis & Trends

CONSERVATION PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Berwick has identified several areas of high ecological value through co-occurrence mapping and beginning with Habitat analysis. These areas, including Beaver Dam Heath, the Hatfield Pond watershed, and the Little River corridor, are documented in the town's Open Space Plan, which provides detailed conservation priorities and implementation strategies. Natural resource protections outlined in this chapter, including aquifer overlay districts, wetland buffers, and shoreland zoning, work in coordination with the Open Space Plan to preserve sensitive areas while directing growth to appropriate locations.

As development pressure increases and weather patterns shift, Berwick's natural systems face growing stress. More intense rainfall events, expanded road networks, and additional housing development increase runoff, strain drainage systems, and place pressure on wetlands and recharge areas. At the same time, the Town relies heavily on these natural systems for drinking water, flood control, and long-term fiscal stability.

The challenge is not simply protecting resources in isolation. It is managing growth in a way that works with the landscape rather than against it. As development proposals increase, these mapped conservation areas provide a clear framework for decision-making. Protecting large habitat blocks and recharge areas reduces long-term infrastructure costs and preserves the rural landscape that residents consistently identify as a priority.

RESILIENCY

Berwick is taking meaningful steps to prepare for the impacts of severe weather events and protect its rural character, natural resources, and infrastructure. Through participation in the Community Resilience Partnership, a statewide program led by the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, Berwick is aligning with Maine's plan, Maine Won't Wait, to build resilience to extreme weather. As a small rural town, Berwick faces risks from heavy rain, flooding, ice storms, and extreme temperatures. These events can damage roads, strain emergency services, and threaten drinking water and farmland. Building resilience helps protect the town's natural beauty, public health, and local economy.

Berwick has hosted a community workshop to gather input on priorities, completed a self-evaluation to identify strengths and gaps in emergency preparedness, identified key priorities such as open

space preservation, infrastructure improvements, and education, written an Open Space Plan, supported the creation of a community garden and preserved land along the river and improved stormwater treatment and access to the river.

Recent years have brought heavier rainfall events and more frequent freeze-thaw cycles. These patterns increase road damage, erosion, and stormwater system strain. Infrastructure that was designed decades ago may not be sized for current conditions. Integrating climate projections into capital planning and road design will be necessary to avoid escalating maintenance costs.

MS4 COMMUNITY

Berwick participates in the MS4 Program, which requires the Town to actively manage stormwater in designated urbanized areas. As development increases and more land is covered by roads, rooftops, and parking areas, stormwater runoff also increases. This runoff carries sediment, nutrients, and pollutants directly into rivers and streams.

Compliance with the MS4 permit requires mapping, inspection, public education, and maintenance of stormwater systems. These responsibilities create ongoing operational costs and infrastructure demands. As impervious surfaces expand, the Town will need to continue investing in drainage improvements and stormwater treatment to maintain water quality standards.

Stormwater management is now a permanent municipal responsibility tied directly to development patterns. As impervious surface coverage expands, maintenance obligations and regulatory requirements increase. Aligning zoning, subdivision review, and capital planning with MS4 obligations will be essential to avoid escalating long-term costs and compliance risk.

Under its MS4 General Permit, Berwick implements best management practices for municipal operations to reduce pollutant runoff. Public Works sweeps all publicly accepted paved roads and parking lots annually following snowmelt and maintains a sweeping log as documentation. Catch basins are inspected at least every two years and cleaned when sediment exceeds three inches. The Town maintains a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan for the Public Works Garage, provides annual stormwater training to Public Works, Police, and Fire personnel, and maintains written Operation and Maintenance procedures for municipal facilities with stormwater pollution potential, reviewed annually by the Director of Public Works.

DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE AND WATER RESOURCES

Recent housing growth and regional market demand are placing increasing pressure on both areas served by public water and sewer infrastructure and rural areas dependent on private wells and septic systems. Expansion of rooftops, driveways, roads, and parking areas increases impervious surface coverage, which in turn increases stormwater runoff and reduces natural groundwater recharge.

Recharge zones near Hatfield Pond and the Little River corridor represent long-term municipal water supply opportunities. If these areas become fragmented or intensively developed without careful review, future drinking water options may be constrained. Protecting recharge areas now is more cost-effective and more practical than attempting restoration after contamination or overdevelopment occurs.

Existing aquifer protection standards provide a baseline level of regulatory protection. However, as development intensity increases and land use patterns evolve, periodic evaluation of performance standards, prohibited uses, and buffer requirements may be necessary. Ongoing review of Aquifer Protection District standards ensures that local regulations remain aligned with emerging environmental risks, infrastructure capacity, and long-term water supply needs.

MOVING FORWARD

Berwick will align natural resource protection with land-use planning and capital-investment decisions. Development will be directed toward areas with adequate infrastructure while conserving wetlands, recharge zones, and large habitat blocks that provide long-term environmental and fiscal benefits.

The Town will continue participating in the MS4 program and regional watershed partnerships to protect the Salmon Falls River and its tributaries. Stormwater infrastructure will be maintained and upgraded as needed to meet regulatory requirements and protect water quality.

Protection of recharge zones near Hatfield Pond and the Little River corridor will remain a priority. As future water supply needs evolve, these areas may become increasingly important.

The Town will also integrate climate resilience into road design, drainage planning, and open space strategies. Preserving natural systems reduces the need for expensive engineered solutions and supports long-term municipal stability.

Natural resource protection in Berwick is not about limiting growth. It is about directing growth to areas that can support it while conserving wetlands, recharge zones, and high-value habitat blocks that reduce long-term infrastructure costs. When land use decisions reflect environmental capacity, the Town protects drinking water, reduces road and drainage burdens, and strengthens fiscal stability. That approach supports both rural character and responsible economic growth.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Protect the quality of groundwater, including potential groundwater resources.	Identify and map potential future municipal well sites and groundwater recharge areas.	WD, P&D, TM	Short
	Strengthen Aquifer Protection District requirements, including performance standards for high-risk land uses.	PB, P&D	Short
	Coordinate groundwater protection strategies with updates to the Future Land Use Map.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
Protect the water quality of rivers, streams, lakes, and aquifers in Berwick to support aquatic life, public drinking water, and recreation.	Develop and implement a water quality protection plan that includes public awareness, monitoring, riverbank buffers, and low-impact development standards.	WD, CC	Short
	Improve Low Impact Development (LID) standards in the Berwick Land Use Ordinance.	PB, P&D	Short
	Amend local land use ordinances to incorporate stormwater runoff performance standards consistent with Maine law and MS4 requirements.	PB, P&D	Short
	Where applicable, develop an urban impaired-stream watershed management or mitigation plan to promote continued development or redevelopment without further stream degradation.	TM, PB	Mid
Ensure water quality and quantity for all water users.	Evaluate groundwater availability and quality in areas such as growth areas.	WD, P&D	Ongoing
	Encourage landowners to protect water quality. Provide local contact information at the municipal office for water quality best management practices from resources such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Soil and Water Conservation District, Maine Forest Service, and/or Small Woodlot Association of Maine.	P&D, DH	Ongoing
	Adopt water quality protection practices and standards for the construction and maintenance of public and private roads and public properties, and require their implementation by contractors, owners, community officials, and employees.	PW, P&D, TM	Short

	Provide educational materials at appropriate locations regarding aquatic invasive species.	P&D, DH	Ongoing
Maintain and conserve unique natural resources and their natural functions.	Develop and adopt a critical habitats and rare and endangered species map for inclusion into a Resource Protection Overlay Zoning District.	PB, P&D, CC	Short
Coordinate with other partners within Berwick, neighboring communities and regional and state resource agencies to protect shared critical natural resources.	Ensure that land use ordinances are consistent with applicable state law regarding critical natural resources.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
	Through local land use ordinances, require subdivision or non-residential property developers to look for and identify critical natural resources that may be on site and to take appropriate measures to protect those resources, including but not limited to modification of the proposed site design, construction timing, and/or extent of excavation.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
	Through local land use ordinances, require the planning board (or other designated review authority) to include as part of the review process, consideration of pertinent BwH maps and information regarding critical natural resources.	PB	Ongoing
	Initiate and/or participate in interlocal and/or regional planning, management, and/or regulatory efforts around shared critical and important natural resources.	SB, TM, CC	Ongoing
	Pursue public/private partnerships to protect critical and important natural resources, such as through the purchase of land or easements from willing sellers.	SB, CC	Ongoing
	Distribute or make available information to those living in or near critical or important natural resources about current use tax programs and applicable local, state, or federal regulations.	P&D	Ongoing
Apply environmentally sustainable practices to all action items	Ask core questions regarding energy, materials, low-impact development, and other considerations for sustainability.	SB, PB, TM	Ongoing
Utilize up-to-date green technology and solutions to support economic, social, and environmental sustainability.	Establish formal protocol for new development and redevelopment that requires thorough consideration of environmentally sound procedures, building materials, and energy sources; encourage application of options most conducive to long-term sustainability.	PB	Short
	Research and implement renewable energy and energy-efficiency techniques on Town property.	TM	Short
Strengthen Berwick's Resource Protection Districts and	Provide and/or revise performance standards in the Resource Protection Overlay District to regulate land use types, densities, and setbacks.	PB, P&D	Mid

environmental performance standards.	Evaluate performance standards to minimize development impacts on groundwater, stormwater, erosion, air quality, and noise.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Review and strengthen shoreland zoning standards to ensure consistency with state requirements and local environmental goals.	PB, P&D	Short
	Evaluate aquifer protection overlay standards and update setback and use requirements to reflect current best practices.	PB, P&D, WD	Mid
State of Maine Goal for Water Resources: To protect the quality and manage the quantity of the State's water resources, including lakes, aquifers, great ponds, estuaries, rivers, and coastal areas.	Continue participation in the MS4 stormwater program and implement required stormwater management practices to protect surface water quality.	PW, P&D	Ongoing
	Coordinate with the Berwick Water District and regional partners to monitor and protect the Salmon Falls River as the Town's primary drinking water source.	WD, TM	Ongoing
	Protect recharge zones near Hatfield Pond and the Little River corridor from incompatible development to preserve long-term municipal water supply options.	PB, P&D, WD	Ongoing
State of Maine Goal for Natural Resources: To protect the State's critical natural resources, including, without limitation, wetlands, wildlife and fisheries habitat, shorelands, scenic vistas, and unique natural areas.	Maintain and enforce shoreland zoning, wetland buffer, and Aquifer Protection District standards to protect critical natural resources from incompatible development.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
	Require Planning Board review of Beginning with Habitat maps and critical natural resource data for subdivision and non-residential development proposals.	PB	Ongoing
	Partner with the Conservation Commission and Great Works Regional Land Trust to pursue conservation of high-value habitat blocks, wetlands, and scenic landscapes.	CC, SB	Ongoing

CHAPTER 4: AGRICULTURE

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's history in agriculture predates the establishment of the United States. Agricultural land is one of Berwick's most valuable and most vulnerable resources. Once farmland is developed, it is almost impossible to bring back. Residents have said clearly, through surveys and public input, that protecting farmland is a top priority for preserving Berwick's rural character and way of life.
To meet this challenge, Berwick must act now. The 2023 Berwick Agricultural Survey showed strong support for permanently protecting farmland, providing property tax relief, and updating ordinances to support farm businesses. Farmers asked for flexibility to allow agritourism, worker housing, and on-farm sales. Statewide guides such as Cultivating Maine's Agricultural Future recommend similar steps, including farmland easements, clustering and overlay districts, development fees for preservation, and "Right to Farm" protections. Together, these resources give Berwick a roadmap for action.

Moving forward, Berwick's agricultural plan should focus on preserving farmland through easements, clustering rules, and agricultural overlays; supporting farmers with reduced permitting barriers, a Conservation Commission, and updated ordinances; and keeping farmland affordable through tax relief programs, impact fee policies, and new funding tools. Another priority is expanding opportunities in agritourism, which includes farm tours, hayrides, pick-your-own crops, seasonal festivals, and on-farm dining. These activities not only help farms remain profitable but also connect residents and visitors to Berwick's agricultural heritage. Finally, Berwick must plan for the future by recognizing the importance of resiliency and ensuring that policies remain flexible for the next generation of farmers.

By combining community input with proven statewide strategies, Berwick can preserve its farmland, support farm families, and keep agriculture a vital part of the town's economy and identity.

Introduction

The rural character of Berwick is deeply tied to its farms, open spaces, and local food traditions. Residents have consistently voiced their concerns about sprawl and overdevelopment, often describing the need to protect the town's woods, waters, and farmlands. Comments from recent surveys illustrate this sentiment: "The rural nature of the town is special and needs to be recognized and preserved." Another respondent shared, "Support our farmers!" Others spoke about their desire to buy local food, participate in farm-to-table efforts, and keep a sense of community by sustaining Berwick's agricultural roots.

The 2023 Agricultural Survey reinforced these themes. Respondents identified permanent farmland protection as a top priority and supported property tax relief for farms, and encouraged flexibility in local ordinances to allow agritourism and on-farm sales. Many noted that current-use tax programs exist but are not well understood, pointing to the need for better education and outreach.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

AGRICULTURE IN CONTEXT

Berwick's agricultural story is part of a larger regional picture. Farming in York County has shifted over the past two decades, showing both growth and new challenges. According to the *USDA Census of Agriculture 2022*, the number of farms rose from 685 in 2002 to a peak of 779 in 2012, before gradually declining to 698 farms in 2022. At the same time, the total amount of land in farms followed a similar trend, climbing to more than 64,000 acres in 2012 and then shrinking to just over 50,700 acres by 2022. This drop suggests that while farming remains strong in the county, farmland itself is being lost to other uses.

The average size of farms has also declined slightly, from about 84 acres in 2002 to 74 acres in 2022. This reflects a pattern seen across Maine, where many new and beginning farmers are managing smaller parcels of land, often serving local markets rather than large-scale production.

Despite fewer farms and less farmland overall, the market value of agricultural products has continued to grow. The value of production increased from $18.7 million in 2002 to more than $31.6 million in 2022. On average, each farm generated $27,372 in 2002 compared to nearly $46,000 in 2022. This shows that York County farms are becoming more productive and are adapting to changing markets, even as the total amount of farmland decreases.

Together, these figures suggest that while the agricultural base of York County is shrinking in size, it remains an important and increasingly efficient part of the regional economy.

Locally, Berwick's assessing database records 12 farmland parcels totaling more than 1,200 acres, with an average size of 101 acres. Tree growth lands, another important part of the rural landscape,

cover about 1,539 acres across 30 parcels. These figures demonstrate both the presence of working farmland in Berwick and the ongoing importance of forestry as a traditional industry.

MAINE FARMING IN TRANSITION

Farming across Maine is shifting toward new business models and emerging opportunities. Many farms are taking advantage of the growing interest in local food and direct marketing. They are extending growing seasons with greenhouses and hoop houses, creating new processing and storage facilities, and developing value-added products such as cheeses, wines, jams, and meats. Agritourism is also reshaping how farms operate, drawing visitors through on-farm dinners, educational programs, and seasonal events.

At the same time, Maine faces demographic challenges. Nearly one-third of the state's best farmland is expected to change ownership in the next decade due to the age of farm operators. Without intervention, much of this land could be lost to development. For Berwick, this transition presents both a risk and an opportunity: with the right tools, the town can help keep farmland in production and support a new generation of farmers.

Statewide goals reinforce the urgency of local action. Maine's climate action plan calls for increasing the amount of Maine-produced food consumed in-state and conserving 30 percent of land statewide by 2030, with farmland-specific protection targets still being developed. These goals underscore that protecting Berwick's farmland is not simply a local preference, but part of a broader regional commitment to food security and land stewardship.

AGRITOURISM

Agritourism represents one of the most promising ways for farms to diversify their income while strengthening the connection between people and the land. Across Maine, communities have demonstrated how agritourism can help keep farms viable, attract visitors, and generate new opportunities for small-town economies. With its active agricultural landscape and rural setting, Berwick is well positioned to benefit from these opportunities.

Agritourism experiences can range from simple seasonal traditions to more immersive farm-based activities. Families may visit a pumpkin patch, pick their own strawberries or blueberries, or take part in hayrides, corn mazes, and harvest festivals that celebrate the fall season. Farm tours and school visits provide children with the opportunity to see firsthand where their food comes from. Christmas tree farms and winter sleigh rides extend these experiences into colder months, helping farms become year-round destinations. On-farm dinners, tasting events, and seasonal celebrations allow farmers to capture more of the consumer dollar while offering visitors authentic rural experiences rooted in local agriculture.

Agritourism also blends naturally with outdoor recreation. Visitors who arrive for a farm event may stay to hike woodland trails, ride horses, or enjoy cross-country skiing. Farm stands, breweries, craft food producers, and rural bed-and-breakfasts can complement these activities, creating a network of experiences that support one another. By pairing agriculture with recreation and hospitality, Berwick can strengthen its appeal as a rural destination while helping local farms remain economically viable.

For agritourism to succeed, supportive local policies are essential. Simplifying permits, allowing flexible use of signage, and reducing barriers for seasonal or small-scale farm events can make a significant difference. Ensuring that everyday productive farm activities, including roadside stands, greenhouses, firewood operations, and pick-your-own operations, are clearly permitted in agricultural areas can also remove practical barriers that survey respondents identified.

Neighboring communities offer useful models. Eliot's Agricultural Tourism Ordinance permits activities such as pick-your-own operations, farm tours, educational events, crop mazes, and seasonal harvest festivals by right for farms that have been in continuous operation for three years, eliminating the need for special permits. York's Farm Enterprise Overlay District similarly allows qualifying farmers to host educational events, establish recreational trails, and process and sell agricultural products directly from the farm. Both approaches reduce administrative burdens while providing clarity about what types of agritourism activities are encouraged. As Berwick updates its land use ordinance, establishing similar clarity could help farmers expand their operations while ensuring compatibility with surrounding neighborhoods.

PRESERVATION

Preserving farmland requires both local action and regional cooperation. In recent years, Great Works Regional Land Trust (GWRLT) and Maine Farmland Trust (MFT) have permanently protected farms across southern York County, including Tibbetts Farm, Lapierre Farm, Boisvert Farm, and Orange Circle Farm in Berwick. These projects show the power of conservation easements to keep land in agriculture even as development pressures grow.

The loss of farmland has been visible throughout the region. Productive farms that once supported local communities have been steadily disappearing. Conserving the land that remains has been a major focus of Great Works Regional Land Trust since its founding in 1986. Serving Berwick, North Berwick, South Berwick, Eliot, Wells, and Ogunquit, the Trust accepted its first agricultural easement at Back Field Farm in Eliot. Over time, GWRLT added more farmland to its portfolio, including Tibbetts Farm, Brooks Farm, and Wright Farm.

In 2014, Maine Farmland Trust expanded its efforts in southern Maine, where farms are smaller and land values are higher. GWRLT hosted joint meetings with MFT in Eliot and North Berwick to connect with farmers and landowners, which directly led to easements on Lapierre Farm and Boisvert Farm. Orange Circle Farm soon followed as a Maine Farmland Trust project, adding to Berwick's growing list of "forever farms."

Berwick has already seen successful examples of farmland preservation through conservation partnerships. One of the most notable is Tibbetts Farm on Blackberry Hill Road, a 269-acre dairy farm that has been worked by the Tibbetts family for more than two centuries. Through collaboration with the Great Works Regional Land Trust, the family voluntarily sold the development rights to the property, permanently protecting the land from subdivision while allowing it to remain in active agricultural use. At the time the easement was secured, the property could have supported roughly sixty residential lots. Instead, the rolling pastureland remains a working dairy farm and a visible reminder of Berwick's agricultural heritage.

Orange Circle Farm provides another example of what farmland protection can accomplish. In 2017, the 70.5-acre farm on Blackberry Hill Road was protected through a conservation easement partnership between Maine Farmland Trust and Great Works Regional Land Trust. The property includes approximately 31 acres of open fields and 40 acres of forest and has been farmed since at least the mid-1800s. As part of the conservation effort, the farm was transferred to a new agricultural operation, allowing the land to remain permanently affordable for farming while ensuring it would continue to be actively cultivated.

Together, the Tibbetts Farm and Orange Circle Farm easements have protected more than 500 acres of farmland on Blackberry Hill Road, demonstrating what is possible when landowners, conservation organizations, and new agricultural enterprises work together to keep farmland in production

The town has additional tools to guide farmland preservation. Agricultural overlay districts and clustering rules can steer development away from prime soils. Local ordinances can be updated to reduce barriers for agritourism and on-farm processing. Development fees and municipal funds can be directed to farmland protection, while Right to Farm policies can reinforce protections for active farms. Alternative land access models, such as long-term leases and cooperative ownership, may help new and beginning farmers enter the field.

Soils are another key consideration. According to Beginning with Habitat, Berwick has about 2,346 acres of prime farmland soils, with parcels ranging from one acre to more than 120 acres. An additional 6,746 acres are classified as soils of statewide importance for food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Forestry also remains part of Berwick's rural economy, with prime forestry soils mapped by the USDA. Where commercial or subdivision development is proposed in critical rural areas, maintaining prime farmland soils as open space to the greatest extent practicable is a practical and achievable standard worth codifying in the Land Use Ordinance.

The Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program (VMFSP) offers another powerful tool. Under state guidelines, Berwick can adopt a local program that lowers property taxes on participating farms beyond what current-use taxation already provides. In exchange, participating farmers grant the town an agricultural conservation easement that remains in effect for at least 20 years, protecting that land from development without requiring the town to raise capital to purchase easements outright.

To qualify, a property must be at least five contiguous acres and generate a minimum of $2,000 annually in agricultural products. The Town of Winslow, which adopted the state's first VMFSP in 2016 after a community survey process similar to Berwick's own 2023 Agricultural Survey, found that framing the program as a form of economic development, returning tax revenue to farm businesses much as Tax Increment Financing does for other industries, was key to building Town Council support. Maine's Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry provides direct technical guidance to towns developing a VMFSP. Berwick does not need to build this from scratch.

The fiscal case for farmland protection is equally compelling. National Cost of Community Services research, compiled by American Farmland Trust from more than 30 years of studies across the country, consistently shows that farms require a median of about $0.37 in municipal services for every dollar of tax revenue they generate, compared to $1.16 for residential development. Farmland costs the town less than the housing that replaces it. Sharing this data with residents, budget committee members, and local assessors can help build durable public support for the protection tools outlined in this chapter.

The key to preserving farmland is ensuring it remains economically viable. Without the ability to sustain farming as a business, agricultural lands risk becoming little more than vacant fields. By combining conservation with strong local policies and support for farmers, Berwick can ensure that farmland continues to produce food, support the local economy, and preserve the rural character that residents value.

FORESTRY

Tree growth lands are easy to overlook. Unlike working farms with open fields and roadside stands, Berwick's forests recede into the background of daily life, until they are gone. But the 1,539 acres enrolled in the Tree Growth Tax Program represent a working landscape with real economic value, and one that faces the same pressures as farmland: incremental subdivision, rising land values, and ownership transitions that favor development over continued forest management.

The ecological stakes are equally significant. Large, contiguous forest blocks support wildlife habitat, filter water into aquifers, and provide a buffer against stormwater runoff that smaller fragmented parcels cannot replicate. Once a forest block is divided into residential lots, those functions are difficult or impossible to restore. The same parcelization trend driving farmland loss is quietly reshaping Berwick's forested landscape in ways that will not be fully visible until the cumulative effect has already set in.

The Tree Growth Tax Program is the Town's most direct tool for keeping forestlands intact, reducing the tax pressure that might otherwise push landowners toward subdivision. Outreach and education to eligible landowners, particularly those approaching ownership transitions, can help ensure more parcels remain enrolled. Local planning policies that treat forestry as a legitimate, valued land use rather than a placeholder for future development will reinforce that message and protect Berwick's

working forest economy for the next generation. Recognizing agriculture and commercial forestry explicitly in Berwick's economic development planning, rather than treating them as land use questions alone, signals that working lands are part of the town's economic identity and not simply a default condition of undeveloped parcels.

Analysis & Trends

Berwick's agricultural story is shaped by two converging pressures: the gradual loss of farmland to development across the region, and the generational transition underway as longtime farm operators age and their land faces an uncertain future. York County has lost more than 13,000 acres of farmland since 2012, and a significant share of Maine's working farms are expected to change hands within the next decade.

At the same time, the economic value of agricultural production is rising. Farms that remain in operation are becoming more productive, more market-oriented, and more diversified. Agritourism, direct marketing, and value-added products are creating new income streams that help farms remain viable even as land prices increase and development pressure grows.

Berwick's locally recorded farmland, more than 1,200 acres across 12 parcels, represents a meaningful but vulnerable resource. The town's soil inventory confirms substantial acreage of prime and statewide-importance farmland that warrants active protection. Without local policy tools to complement the conservation work of GWRLT and Maine Farmland Trust, that land will remain exposed to subdivision and development as ownership transitions occur.

The community has been clear in its priorities. Survey responses, public meetings, and agricultural outreach all point in the same direction: residents want Berwick to remain a place where farms are active, visible, and viable. Meeting that expectation requires more than statements of intent. It requires updated ordinances, accessible tax programs, and a willingness to use available tools before the opportunity to act passes.

Moving Forward

Berwick has something many towns lack when it comes to agriculture: a clear picture of what its farming community needs and a set of practical tools to respond. The 2023 Agricultural Survey named the priorities. The conservation easements on Tibbetts Farm, Orange Circle Farm, and others show what is possible when the Town and its partners act with intention. The Tree Growth Tax Program, the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program, Right to Farm protections, and updated ordinances for agritourism are available tools awaiting use.

The window for action is real. As farm operators age and land changes hands, parcels that are not actively protected become vulnerable. The town that acts before those transitions occur keeps options open. The town that waits often finds the decision has already been made by the market.

Berwick's agricultural future will be shaped by the choices made in the next several years on zoning amendments, tax program outreach, conservation partnerships, and the signals the Planning Board sends about what kind of rural economy this town intends to sustain. The vision residents expressed is clear. The roadmap is in this chapter. The work is next.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

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GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Protect farmland from development and fragmentation.	Adopt a Farmland Protection District and explore a sliding scale fee structure for lots to fund farmland conservation.	PB, P&D, SB	Mid
	Add a farming disclosure requirement for all Planning Board approvals in agricultural areas.	PB, P&D	Short
	Evaluate a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program to redirect growth from rural resource lands toward growth areas.	PB, P&D, SB	Long
	Coordinate with land trusts and regional partners, including GWRLT and Maine Farmland Trust, to pursue conservation easements on high-priority farmland parcels.	CC, SB, P&D	Ongoing
	Amend land use ordinances to require commercial or subdivision developments in critical rural areas to maintain areas with prime farmland soils as open space to the greatest extent practicable.	PB, P&D	Short
	Develop an Agricultural Overlay District mapped to prime farmland soils and contiguous working farm areas, establishing standards that allow additional farm uses by right, require clustering of new development, and limit infrastructure expansion that would open agricultural land to subdivision.	PB, P&D, SB	Mid

Support farmers with updated ordinances, reduced barriers, and tax relief tools.	Review and update local ordinances to reduce permitting barriers for agritourism, on-farm sales, worker housing, and seasonal farm events.	PB, P&D	Short
	Host an informational forum and distribute materials to potentially qualifying landowners to raise awareness about Maine's current use tax programs, including the Farmland, Open Space, and Tree Growth programs.	P&D,	Short
	Improve ongoing public education and outreach on current-use tax programs so that eligible farmland owners understand and can access available relief.	P&D,	Ongoing
	Adopt Right to Farm protections in local ordinances to reinforce protections for active agricultural operations.	PB, P&D, SB	Mid
	Explore developing and adopting a Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program (VMFSP) in Berwick to lower property tax burdens on qualifying farmland beyond what current use taxation provides.	SB, TM, P&D	Mid
	Permit land use activities that support productive agriculture and forestry operations, such as roadside stands, greenhouses, firewood operations, sawmills, log buying yards, and pick-your-own operations.	PB, P&D	Short
Expand agritourism opportunities to support farm viability and rural economic development.	Allow flexible use of signage and reduce barriers for farm stands, seasonal events, and direct marketing on agricultural properties.	PB, P&D	Short
	Include agriculture, commercial forestry operations, and land conservation that supports them in local or regional economic development plans	TM, P&D, SB	Ongoing
	Evaluate zoning amendments to support agritourism uses such as on-farm dining, tasting rooms, bed-and-breakfasts, and educational programs on agricultural land.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Promote Berwick's agricultural heritage and agritourism opportunities through town communications and regional tourism coordination.	TM, P&D	Ongoing
	Amend the Land Use Ordinance to permit core agritourism activities by right for farms in continuous operation, including farm tours, pick-your-own operations, crop mazes, and seasonal harvest festivals, without requiring a special permit.	PB, P&D	Short
Protect forestry lands and ensure compatible use alongside agricultural resources	Consider planning practices that protect tree growth lands from conflicting uses and promote forestry as a compatible partner to agriculture.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Maintain tree growth and farm parcels in the assessing database to track the status of working lands over time.	P&D	Annually

Support the next generation of farmers and ensure long-term agricultural succession.	Connect landowners with inactive farmland to agricultural producers seeking land access, in partnership with Maine Farmland Trust and Great Works Regional Land Trust.	CC, P&D	Mid
	Explore alternative land access models, including long-term leases and cooperative ownership, to support new and beginning farmers.	P&D, TM	Short
	Track farmland ownership transitions and flag parcels at risk of development loss as part of regular land use monitoring.	P&D	Annually
State of Maine Goal for Farming & Forests: To safeguard the State's agricultural and forest resources from development which threatens those resources.	Consult with the Maine Forest Service district forester when developing any land use regulations pertaining to forest management practices as required by 12 M.R.S.A. §8869	P&D	Ongoing
	Consult with Soil and Water Conservation District staff when developing any land use regulations pertaining to agricultural management practices.	P&D	Ongoing

CHAPTER 5: OPEN SPACE

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's forests, wetlands, rivers, wildlife habitat, scenic landscapes, and conserved lands form a connected open space network that defines the town's rural character and long-term resilience. These lands provide ecological, economic, and social benefits. They protect water quality, support biodiversity, store carbon, reduce flooding, and offer opportunities for recreation and quiet enjoyment.

Residents have consistently expressed strong support for preserving open space as Berwick continues to grow. Community input shows that people value forests and wooded areas, access to water, and smaller neighborhood-scale natural spaces as much as larger habitat blocks. At the same time, ecological science makes clear that large, connected areas of undeveloped land are essential to maintaining healthy ecosystems and wildlife movement.

Berwick should focus on protecting large habitat blocks, improving connectivity between conserved lands, and preserving riparian corridors and wetlands. The town should strengthen partnerships with regional land trusts, use a consistent decision-making framework to evaluate conservation opportunities, and guide growth away from high-value natural areas. Improved communication, signage, and mapping will help residents better understand and access the open spaces that already exist. By planning intentionally for open space, Berwick can balance conservation with thoughtful growth, protect its environmental assets, and maintain the rural landscape that residents value.

Introduction

Open space in Berwick includes forests, wetlands, streams, rivers, habitat corridors, scenic vistas, and conserved lands. These areas form a functional ecological network that supports the health of the town's environment and community.

Open space provides ecosystem services that are often invisible but essential. Forests and wetlands filter water, recharge aquifers, and reduce flood risk. Large habitat blocks support wildlife species that require extensive territory. Riparian corridors protect stream health and contribute to water quality downstream. Scenic landscapes reinforce Berwick's identity as a rural New England town.

Public engagement during the Open Space planning process emphasized several core values, including rural character, connectivity, accessibility, diversity of open space types, stewardship, ecosystem services, and community resilience. Residents expressed a desire for both conservation and access, supporting the protection of large natural areas while also seeking smaller, closer-to-home open spaces.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

Berwick contains approximately 22,296 acres of land, of which roughly 14,951 acres, or about 67 percent, remain undeveloped. These undeveloped lands include forests, wetlands, agricultural lands, riparian corridors, and large habitat blocks. Berwick's most significant conservation areas include Hatfield Pond, a 144-acre warmwater fishery surrounded by town-owned shoreline and beach frontage; Beaver Dam Heath, a rare peat bog supporting specialized plant communities; the Little River corridor, identified as a priority groundwater recharge zone; and the Penny Woods, a forested preserve with interpretive trails used for education and quiet recreation.

The Route 236 district contains the largest contiguous undeveloped block in town, approximately 3,600 acres, large enough to support big game species and maintain ecological integrity across the landscape. Approximately 1,680 acres are permanently conserved through municipal ownership and conservation easements. These conserved lands include forested preserves, wetlands, and open fields that protect habitat and water resources and, in some cases, provide public access. More than 5,800 acres in Berwick are mapped as habitat for endangered, threatened, or species of concern. In total, 24 parcels of at least 90 acres remain undeveloped, representing significant opportunities for long-term conservation.

Undeveloped land tends to increase in parcel size toward the outer areas of town. Wetlands, streams, and riparian corridors are distributed throughout Berwick and play an important role in stormwater management and ecosystem health.

Analysis & Trends

In Berwick, the science of open space protection has a clear local application. The Route 236 habitat block, Hatfield Pond, and the Little River corridor represent exactly the kind of large, connected landscape that ecological research identifies as most valuable, and each faces incremental development pressure as rural parcels change hands and road frontage is divided. Preserving these areas requires proactive action, not just reactive review. As development fragments forest and wetland systems, ecological function and wildlife movement can decline.

Community survey results show strong support for preserving land for recreation and the enjoyment of natural areas. Residents favor a distributed pattern of open space, with both large conservation areas and smaller neighborhood-scale spaces. Cross-boundary coordination is increasingly important. Ecological systems do not follow municipal lines, and open space networks extend into neighboring communities. Continued collaboration with regional land trusts and adjacent towns will strengthen conservation outcomes.

Public input also revealed that awareness of existing conserved lands is limited. Many residents are unaware of access points or permitted uses. Improved signage, mapping, and digital communication would strengthen stewardship and engagement.

As growth continues, development pressure may increase on remaining large, undeveloped parcels. Strategic planning is necessary to guide growth toward appropriate areas while protecting high-value natural resources.

Moving Forward

Berwick's Open Space Plan is a standalone, adopted document that forms an official part of the town's Comprehensive Plan. This chapter summarizes its key priorities and implementation framework, but the full Open Space Plan contains the detailed mapping, background data, public engagement findings, and action tables that guide the town's work. Residents, landowners, and decision-makers are encouraged to review the complete Open Space Plan for a deeper understanding of the strategies outlined here.

Moving forward, Berwick will protect large, connected blocks of undeveloped land to preserve wildlife habitat, ecosystem services, water quality, and the rural character that defines the community. The town will strengthen connectivity between forests, wetlands, riparian corridors, and conserved lands, while guiding growth away from high-value natural areas through thoughtful land use standards and clustering. Conservation efforts will prioritize wetlands, headwaters, and stream buffers to safeguard long-term ecological health.

The adopted Open Space Plan provides a Future Open Space Map and a structured decision-making framework that the town will use when evaluating conservation opportunities, land

acquisition, easements, and zoning amendments. Ecological principles, including habitat size and connectivity, will inform development review and long-range planning decisions. The town will continue to coordinate with regional land trusts and neighboring municipalities to maintain landscape-scale connectivity and pursue voluntary conservation easements in priority areas. The Conservation Commission, created and appointed by the Select Board, is charged with implementing the Open Space Plan.

At the same time, Berwick will balance conservation with appropriate public access. Improved signage, mapping, and town communications will increase public awareness of existing open spaces and responsible use guidelines. Implementation will also rely on sustainable funding mechanisms, including grants, impact fees, and other conservation tools identified in the Open Space Plan. Through collaboration, strategic investment, and consistent application of the adopted framework, Berwick can ensure that its open space network remains intact, resilient, and accessible for generations to come.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: BHS is Berwick Historical Society, BCM is Berwick Communications & Media; CC means Conservation Commission; EB is Envision Berwick; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Protect and conserve Berwick's open space network through land conservation partnerships and the adopted Open Space Plan.	Continue partnering with the Great Works Regional Land Trust to conserve open space and work with property owners.	TM, P&D, SB, CC	Ongoing
	Use the Open Space Plan's decision-making framework to evaluate potential properties for future open space acquisition and make recommendations to the Select Board.	CC, P&D, SB	Ongoing
	Identify opportunities to acquire additional land using open space impact fee funds to support future expansion of conserved land.	P&R, P&D, SB, CC	Ongoing

	Conserve an additional 100 acres of farmland or historic farms through conservation easements.	CC, SB	Mid
Guide development away from high-value natural areas using zoning, cluster standards, and fiscal tools.	Evaluate and strengthen the cluster development ordinance, including evaluating mandatory clustering for larger subdivisions to maximize quality open space conservation.	PB, P&D, SB	Mid
	Evaluate performance standards of subdivision regulations to minimize the impact of development on open space, including stormwater, erosion control, air quality, and habitat protection.	P&D, PB, SB	Mid
	Establish a Density Transfer Charge program to fund conservation from development activity.	P&D, PB	Mid
	Limit non-residential development in critical rural areas to natural resource-based businesses, nature tourism, farmers' markets, and home occupations.	P&D, PB, SB	Short
Protect and monitor water quality at Hatfield Pond and the Salmon Falls River corridor.	Recruit and train volunteers to monitor conditions at Hatfield Pond through the Maine Volunteer Lake Monitoring Program.	CC	Short
	Preserve land along Salmon Falls River and coordinate with Rochester, Rollinsford, and Somersworth on shared watershed protection.	CC, SB	Ongoing
	Leverage requirements of the MS4 permit and associated ordinances to strategically protect open space and reduce stormwater impacts.	P&D, P&R	Ongoing
Fund open space conservation through dedicated, sustainable funding sources.	Create and maintain a funding roadmap of annual grants and funding opportunities for open space projects, including eligibility requirements and application deadlines.	P&D, P&R	Short
	Create an annual and five-year budget for open space projects, including funding for opportunistic use, new acquisitions, programming, and maintenance.	CC, P&R	Short
Increase public awareness of and access to open space resources across all areas of Berwick.	Establish a communications approach to open space using the Berwick BiMonthly, Berwick Communications and Media, open space signage, and open space maps; produce print and digital maps of parks and trails with hours, distances, and permitted activities.	P&R, BCM, CC	Short
	Maintain the Penny Woods educational boards and develop additional interpretive signage at key open space sites.	P&R, P&D	Ongoing
	Develop a pool of volunteer open space stewards empowered to monitor, track usage, and ensure maintenance of parks and trails through an adopt-a-site program.	CC	Mid
Expand trail connectivity and access to the Eastern Trail and regional trail networks.	Create new trails and use existing Berwick trails to connect to the Eastern Trail and East Coast Greenway.	P&R, CC, SB	Long

	Begin a feasibility study for an off-road, non-motorized multi-use trail connection between Route 236 and Pine Hill.	CC	Mid
	Coordinate with New England Forestry Foundation to enhance access to Hurd Forest, including parking, signage, and trails.	CC	Long
	Partner with community organizations, including the Berwick Historical Society, to incorporate historic assets into public open space projects.	CC	Long

CHAPTER 6: HOUSING

Summary & Plan for the Future

Housing shapes who can live in Berwick and how the Town grows. Over the past two decades, housing production has followed broader economic cycles, with periods of strong construction followed by slowdowns. Today, demand remains steady, driven by regional job access, limited vacancy, and broader housing shortages across southern Maine.

Berwick's housing stock is primarily single-family, with nearly three quarters of homes in that category. Vacancy rates remain very low, leaving little flexibility in the market. Since 2021, rising home prices and higher interest rates have significantly reduced affordability. What was once attainable for the median household has become increasingly difficult for first-time buyers and workforce families.

Recent state housing reforms encourage greater housing diversity and increased production in designated growth areas. These changes place added responsibility on municipalities to align zoning, infrastructure capacity, and long-term planning. For Berwick, the focus will remain on steady, manageable growth that makes practical sense.

Housing development will be directed to areas served by water, sewer, roads, and public services. A modest expansion of housing types in those areas can help meet demand while protecting rural landscapes and established neighborhoods. The goal is not rapid expansion, but balanced growth that supports residents, maintains fiscal stability, and preserves the character that defines the community.

Housing is also a community-building tool. A mix of unit types that serves young families, workforce households, older residents aging in place, and newcomers seeking a foothold in the region is not just a fiscal strategy. It is how Berwick remains a place where multiple generations can live alongside each other, which is precisely the kind of community residents have said they want to be.

Introduction

Housing affects nearly every part of community life. It influences school enrollment, workforce stability, tax base growth, infrastructure demand, and long-term fiscal health. The type, cost, and availability of housing determine whether young families can move in, whether seniors can stay, and whether workers can live near their jobs.

Berwick is part of a broader regional housing market that extends across southern York County and into New Hampshire. Housing pressures do not stop at the town line. Understanding local housing conditions, and how they fit within regional and statewide trends, is essential to responsible planning through 2036.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION TRENDS

Residential development in Berwick has closely followed broader economic cycles over the past two decades, while also reflecting the Town's evolving growth pattern and market maturity.

From 2004 to 2006, Berwick experienced a period of strong housing production, with annual building activity reaching some of the highest levels in the dataset. This pre-recession expansion was followed by a sharp decline beginning in 2007 and accelerating through the Great Recession. Between 2011 and 2013, new housing construction reached its lowest levels of the twenty-year period, reflecting national economic contraction, tightened lending standards, and reduced market confidence.

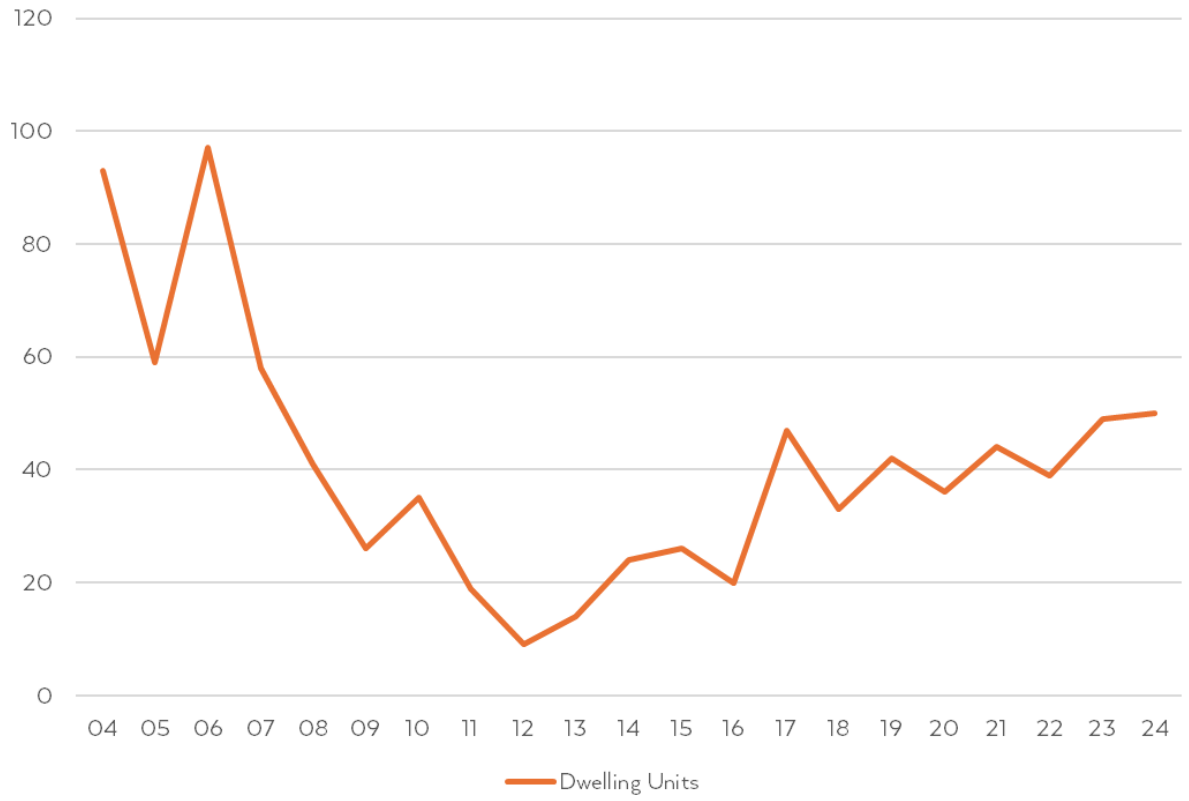
Beginning around 2014, residential construction gradually recovered. Activity stabilized in the mid-20s annually before increasing again after 2016. From 2017 forward, Berwick entered a more consistent phase of moderate growth, with annual production generally ranging from the mid-30s to upper-40s. In the most recent years (2021–2024), construction levels have remained comparatively strong and steady, signaling sustained demand for housing in the community. While current production does not reach the peak levels of the mid-2000s, it reflects a healthier and more balanced pattern than the volatility experienced prior to and during the recession.

Looking beyond recent building trends, the age of Berwick's housing stock provides additional context. Approximately 60 percent of the Town's housing units were constructed between 1980 and

2009. This period represents Berwick's most active era of long-term growth and suburban expansion. As a result, much of the housing inventory is now between 15 and 45 years old.

This aging profile has important implications. While these homes form the backbone of Berwick's residential neighborhoods, many will increasingly require reinvestment, energy upgrades, system replacements, and general maintenance over the next two decades. Future housing policy must therefore balance two priorities: accommodating continued growth to meet demand, while also supporting reinvestment and preservation of existing neighborhoods.

Together, these trends suggest that Berwick's housing market has matured into a more stable growth pattern. Continued monitoring will be important as interest rates, construction costs, demographic shifts, and state housing policies shape the next phase of residential development.



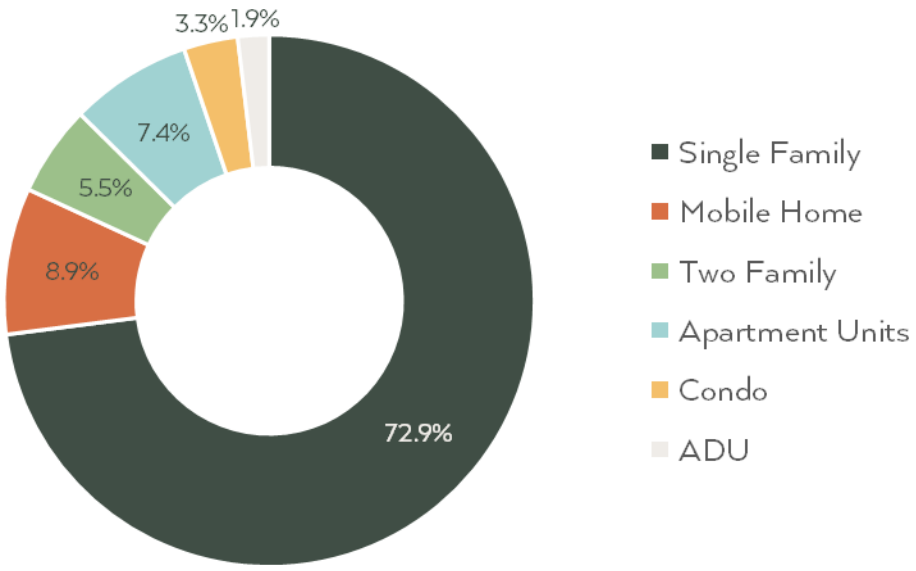
HOUSING OCCUPANCY

Berwick's housing stock is overwhelmingly year-round residential. Approximately 96 percent of units are occupied, placing the Town among the highest occupancy rates in the region. South Berwick shows a similar pattern, while York County and the State of Maine have lower occupancy rates due in part to seasonal homes.

A 96 percent occupancy rate signals strong demand and very limited slack in the market. With few vacant units available, new demand must largely be met through new construction rather than

turnover of existing homes. Even modest population growth can therefore create noticeable pressure on supply.

HOUSING TYPES



Single-family homes make up approximately 72.9 percent of Berwick's housing stock. Mobile homes account for about 8.9 percent, apartment units 7.4 percent, and two-family homes 5.5 percent. Condominiums represent roughly 3.3 percent, and accessory dwelling units make up just under 2 percent.

This distribution reflects Berwick's rural character and traditional development pattern. While the Town does have some housing diversity, smaller units and multifamily options remain a relatively small share of the overall supply. As household sizes decline and affordability pressures increase, modest expansion of varied housing types may help serve residents at different stages of life.

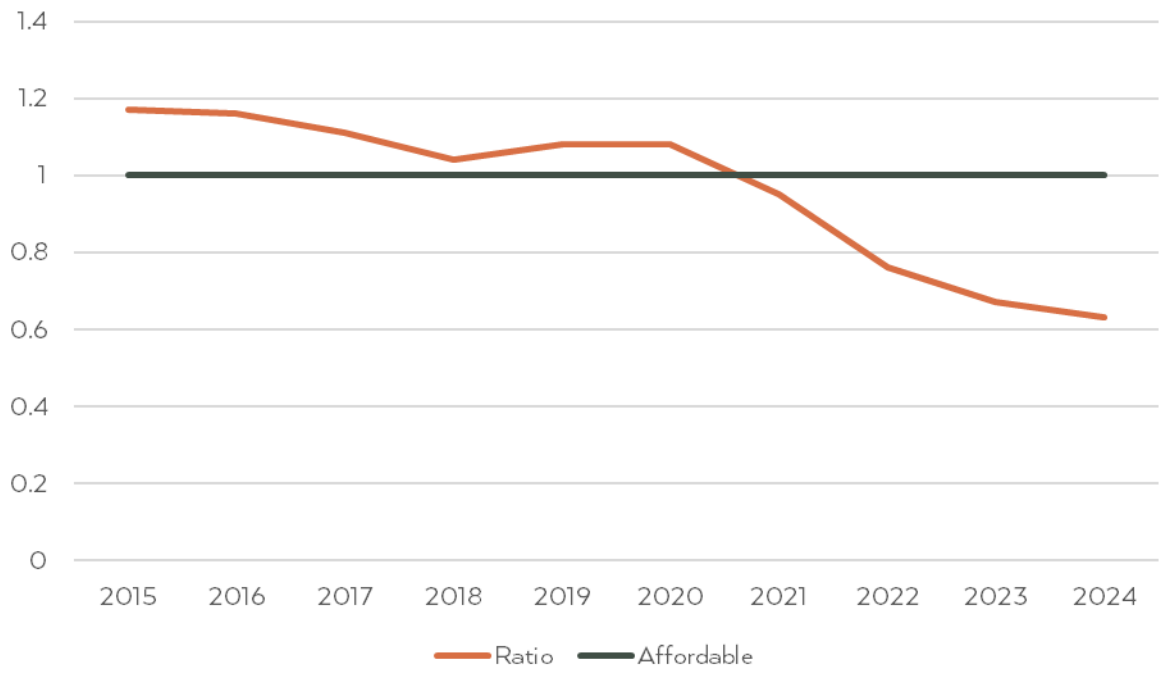
Manufactured home parks represent a distinct and established segment of Berwick's housing supply. Sizable parks operate in Town, providing permanent, owner-occupied homes for a meaningful number of households. These communities offer an entry point into homeownership at a lower cost than traditional site-built housing, and they contribute to the diversity of housing options available to residents. Manufactured home parks are permitted uses in Berwick's R1 and R2 zoning districts under the current Land Use Ordinance, consistent with the State of Maine's requirement that municipalities provide reasonable opportunities for manufactured housing under 30-A M.R.S.A. §4358, and the Town has no plans to change that.

At the same time, manufactured home park residents face housing challenges that are distinct from other homeowners. Because residents typically own their home but not the land beneath it, they are

exposed to rent increases and, in some cases, the risk of park closure or sale. These conditions can undermine the financial stability that homeownership is otherwise meant to provide. Berwick recognizes manufactured housing as an important part of its housing supply while also acknowledging that it carries complexity. The Town will continue to monitor conditions in its parks and remains open to exploring additional affordable housing models, including smaller housing types, that may offer residents greater long-term security and ownership over both home and land.

HOUSING COSTS AND AFFORDABILITY

The Homeownership Affordability Index shows a clear turning point around 2021. Between 2015 and 2020, the median household income in Berwick could reasonably support the median home price. Beginning in 2021, that balance shifted. The affordability ratio fell below the threshold of 1.0 and has continued to decline through 2024. In addition to rising home prices, cost burden remains an important consideration. Households paying more than 30 percent of income toward housing are considered cost burdened. As housing prices increase faster than wages, a growing share of households may experience financial strain. Monitoring cost burden trends can help identify whether housing pressures are affecting long-term financial stability for residents.



This change reflects rising home prices, higher interest rates, and regional market pressures. While Berwick has historically been more affordable than much of York County, recent years have narrowed that advantage. As of the most recent data, nearly half of households would be unable to afford the median home price under standard mortgage assumptions.

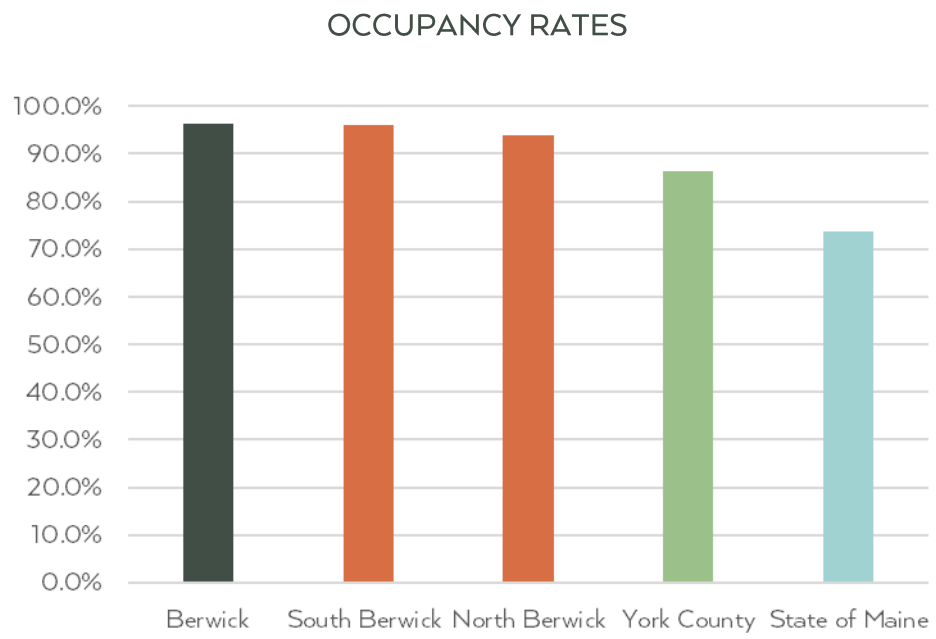
RENTAL HOUSING CONDITIONS

While most of Berwick's housing is owner-occupied, rental units remain an important part of the local housing market. Rentals provide options for workforce households, young adults, and residents who are not ready or able to purchase a home. When rental supply is limited, mobility within the housing market declines and pressure on home prices can increase. Monitoring rental vacancy rates, average rents, and renter cost burden will help the Town understand broader housing conditions. If rental availability remains tight, affordability challenges may affect both renters and prospective homebuyers alike.

Analysis & Trends

STRONG DEMAND, LIMITED VACANCY

Low vacancy rates and continued residential development indicate sustained demand. As population grows and household sizes shrink, more housing units are required even if growth remains moderate. Limited supply can contribute to rising prices and reduced mobility for local residents.



STATE HOUSING POLICY CHANGES

Maine has adopted significant housing reforms in recent years. LD 2003 requires municipalities to allow greater housing density, including accessory dwelling units and up to four units in designated growth areas. LD 1829 reinforces the importance of directing housing growth to areas served by public water, sewer, and existing infrastructure.

In 2024, the State also established housing production goals calling for roughly 76,000 to 84,000 new homes by 2030, with the intent of doubling recent construction levels. These targets reflect the depth of Maine's housing shortage and the pressure communities are experiencing statewide.

For Berwick, these changes do not remove local responsibility. Instead, they make careful planning even more important. Zoning updates, capital improvement planning, and infrastructure investment must work together so that housing growth occurs where roads, utilities, and public services can realistically support it.

AGING HOUSING STOCK

With much of Berwick's housing inventory built between 1980 and 2009, reinvestment will become increasingly important. Many of these homes were constructed during the Town's most active growth period and now require ongoing maintenance, system upgrades, and modernization. At the same time, the Town's aging population brings new housing needs. Most homes from that era were not designed with aging in place in mind. Supporting modest accessibility improvements, accessory dwelling units, and smaller housing options can help longtime residents remain in the community while maintaining independence.

Much of Berwick's housing stock was built before current energy codes and was not designed with extreme weather resilience in mind. As storms, freeze-thaw cycles, and heat events intensify, supporting homeowners in weatherization and resilience upgrades will become increasingly important to protecting housing stability and reducing emergency response demand.

BALANCING GROWTH AND CHARACTER

Housing expansion can strengthen the tax base and support local businesses, but it also brings added demand for roads, water systems, public safety, and recreation facilities. The issue is not whether housing will continue to be built, but whether it is built where the Town can reasonably support it. Infrastructure capacity must guide housing decisions. Water and sewer availability, road conditions, and emergency response times all determine how much growth can be sustained. Aligning housing development with realistic infrastructure limits helps ensure that new growth adds value without creating long-term service costs or financial strain.

Moving Forward

Over the next decade, Berwick will manage housing growth carefully. New development will be directed to areas already served by public water, sewer, and existing roads, or where those services are planned. Focusing growth in these areas makes better use of infrastructure and avoids spreading costs into rural parts of town.

Zoning updates will reflect state housing requirements while protecting local priorities. Accessory dwelling units, duplexes, and smaller multifamily buildings will be allowed in designated growth areas

where they fit. At the same time, rural landscapes, natural resources, and established neighborhoods will be protected from development that does not belong there.

Housing decisions will be tied directly to the Capital Improvement Plan. The Town will consider road conditions, utility capacity, emergency response times, and long-term maintenance costs before allowing additional density. When growth moves faster than infrastructure, taxpayers feel the strain. When it is aligned, the community benefits.

Affordability will remain a priority. The drop in homeownership affordability since 2021 shows that the market has changed. Monitoring home prices, rents, and income trends will help the Town adjust when needed so that families, working households, and older residents can continue to live in Berwick.

Berwick does not aim to grow quickly. The goal is steady, balanced growth that strengthens the tax base, protects taxpayers, and preserves the character residents value. Careful planning today will help ensure the Town remains financially stable and livable in the years ahead.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Direct housing growth to areas served by existing infrastructure and public services.	Update the zoning map to clearly designate growth areas aligned with existing water, sewer, road capacity, and emergency service coverage.	PB, P&D, SB	Short
	Evaluate rural areas of town for development suitability and establish clear standards that discourage residential sprawl in locations without adequate service capacity.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Tie residential density decisions directly to the Capital Improvement Plan so that growth	PB, P&D, SB, TM	Ongoing

	approvals reflect realistic infrastructure investment schedules.		
State of Maine Goal for Housing: To encourage and promote affordable, decent housing opportunities for all Maine citizens. To encourage municipalities to develop policies that provide for accessory dwelling units.	Ensure all Ordinances comply with all existing and new State laws. Reevaluate all ordinances and standards to reflect the goals and vision of the Comprehensive Plan.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
Encourage and support the efforts of the regional housing coalitions in addressing affordable and workforce housing needs.	Support the efforts of local and regional housing coalitions in addressing affordable and workforce housing needs and explore options such as Affordable Housing Trusts and Regional Housing Authorities	SB, TM, P&D	Mid
	Seek to achieve a level of at least 10% of new residential development built or placed during the next decade be affordable.	PB, P&D, SB	Ongoing
Monitor housing market conditions to inform planning decisions.	Track homeownership affordability, rental vacancy rates, renter cost burden, and home price trends annually using Census and ACS data and report findings as part of regular planning updates.	P&D	Annually
	Assess the prevalence of short-term rental activity in Berwick and evaluate whether it is materially affecting housing availability or neighborhood character, reporting findings to the Planning Board.	P&D	Mid
Support reinvestment in Berwick's aging housing stock.	Identify and promote state and federal programs available to homeowners for energy efficiency upgrades, accessibility improvements, and general rehabilitation of aging housing units.	P&D, TM	Short
	Coordinate with Efficiency Maine, MaineHousing, and regional partners to promote weatherization, energy efficiency, and climate resilience programs available to homeowners, with priority outreach to cost-burdened households and older housing stock.	P&D, TM	Short
Encourage housing diversity in designated growth areas.	Review and update zoning to allow a range of housing types, including duplexes, small multifamily, and ADUs, in areas served by public water and sewer, consistent with state law and community character.	PB, P&D	Short
	Develop clear ADU design and permitting standards that comply with state law, remove unnecessary barriers, and provide straightforward guidance to property owners seeking to add an accessory dwelling unit.	PB, P&D	Short

CHAPTER 7: ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's economy reflects two realities that must be advanced together: strong regional employment access and a local tax base that remains heavily residential. The Town benefits from proximity to major job centers and from a workforce with a notable presence in manufacturing and related trades. At the same time, non-residential property value represents a relatively small share of overall assessed value, reinforcing the need to strengthen the commercial and light industrial tax base in locations that fit Berwick's character and infrastructure capacity.

The redevelopment of the former Prime Tanning site as The Edge at Berwick represents a generational opportunity to reshape the downtown economy. With significant residential and commercial space planned, the project has the potential to strengthen downtown as an economic center and create a more walkable village environment that supports local business growth. A stronger downtown district will help rebalance the Town's valuation structure by expanding non-residential value in areas already served by infrastructure.

To realize that opportunity, Berwick must take a proactive approach to business recruitment, corridor planning, and downtown management. Economic development in Berwick is inseparable from community identity. Placemaking, branding, and cultural programming reinforce market perception and long-term economic resilience. Commercial growth should be encouraged in appropriate areas, including downtown, business parks, and designated corridors. At the same time, practical operational issues such as circulation, parking, snow maintenance, and streetscape design must be addressed to ensure that growth strengthens rather than strains the downtown experience.

By aligning land use decisions, infrastructure investment, and economic development strategy, Berwick can expand opportunity, support small businesses, and reduce long-term pressure on residential taxpayers while preserving community character.

Introduction

For generations, Berwick residents have gone elsewhere to earn and come home to stay. That speaks well of the community, and it points to an opportunity. Building a local economy that captures more of that energy, through downtown investment, commercial growth, and a stronger tax base, is the work of this chapter

Inventory & Existing Conditions

According to the 2023 American Community Survey, Berwick's median household income was $77,790.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME	MAINE	YORK COUNTY	BERWICK
TOTAL HOUSEHOLDS	589,085	90,250	3,497
MEDIAN	$71,773	$82,904	$77,790
AVERAGE	$96,507	$104,151	$97,912

Approximately 33 percent of Berwick households earn more than $100,000 annually, while roughly one-third earn less than $50,000. Educational attainment trends show a relatively strong presence of residents with associate's and bachelor's degrees compared to county and state averages.

Employment data indicate that Berwick residents work across a broad range of occupations. A notably high percentage are employed in manufacturing and production-related fields compared to the county and state. This reflects the influence of regional employers such as Pratt & Whitney, Hussey Seating, and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.

Unemployment trends over the past decade have generally tracked state patterns, with temporary increases during the COVID-19 pandemic followed by recovery.

BUSINESS COMPOSITION

Berwick's economy is driven by small businesses. The average establishment employs fewer than eight individuals. Local employment is concentrated in construction, retail trade, services, and selected manufacturing operations.

The diversity of small businesses supports local households while also serving regional markets. This reinforces the importance of maintaining predictable permitting processes and strengthening commercial districts where small businesses can succeed.

STATE OF THE DOWNTOWN

To understand where Berwick's downtown is headed, it helps to understand where it has been. Prime Tanning opened in 1930 and for nearly eight decades served as the economic heart of the community, employing more than 600 workers at its peak. When the company closed in 2008 and

filed for bankruptcy, it left behind 11.7 acres of contaminated industrial buildings at the center of downtown. The closure affected not only employment but the day-to-day activity that had sustained the village center for generations.

The Town did not wait for the problem to resolve itself. Beginning in late 2012, Berwick launched a formal visioning process that included townwide surveys, public workshops, and community charrettes. In 2013, the Select Board began the process of securing EPA brownfields funding. In 2014, the Town took ownership of the Prime property, and private entities are not eligible for federal remediation grants. Envision Berwick was established to continue revitalization work and sustain community engagement throughout the process.

Cleanup and remediation of the site involved removing thousands of tons of waste, contaminated soil, and hazardous materials. Total cleanup and development costs are expected to exceed $52 million. The Town secured $1.2 million in EPA brownfields grants and $200,000 from the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission to support the cleanup. Great Falls Construction purchased the property in 2019 and has committed more than $50 million in private investment to build out the mixed-use development now known as The Edge at Berwick.

The transformation is already underway. Renovated and newly constructed buildings on the site are occupied, dozens of businesses have opened, and assessed values are rising. When fully built out across multiple phases, The Edge will add hundreds of residential units and significant commercial space to the village center, along with a new internal street designed to function as a pedestrian-scaled Main Street corridor. The project serves multiple markets: new residents seeking walkable village living, employees at regional employers, and commuters to employment centers in southern Maine and across the New Hampshire border.

The Edge is a catalyst, not a complete solution. A thriving downtown requires the entire village to function well, existing businesses supported, legacy buildings activated, streetscapes maintained, and public spaces that draw people in. Downtown revitalization must be comprehensive. Infill development, upper-floor residential or office activation, reinvestment in underutilized buildings, and improved connections between properties will ensure that economic momentum extends beyond a single parcel and strengthens the entire village center.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Volunteer-led civic organizations are a meaningful part of Berwick's economic development capacity. Envision Berwick was established in 2014 to continue the revitalization work begun by the Downtown Vision Committee and has since played an active role in shaping downtown identity, organizing community events, and sustaining resident engagement across a decade of planning and construction. Approximately 100 active volunteers are currently engaged across Berwick's committees and community organizations, a level of civic participation that is a genuine asset.

Envision Berwick has also incubated programs that have grown beyond their origins. Berwick for a Lifetime, a volunteer-driven initiative supporting older adults, began as an Envision Berwick idea and

now operates with its own momentum. Great Falls Park, a 2.7-acre riverfront green space, was secured through grant funding with no impact to local taxpayers. The Berwick Community Garden provides residents with an inclusive outdoor space focused on sustainable organic gardening, food education, and community connection, and has donated more than 1,800 pounds of produce to those in need. The Winter Farmers Market grew from a community programming idea into a recurring seasonal gathering that supports local producers and strengthens Berwick's agricultural identity. The Berwick Landing kayak launch, which reconnected residents to the Salmon Falls River, was advanced through Envision Berwick's advocacy and partnership work. The Berwick Art Association, founded in 2012, has helped anchor a creative community that has always been part of the downtown vision. Most recently, an ad hoc committee on rural land use and sustainability reflects Envision Berwick's expanding focus beyond downtown to the broader landscape and values that define the community. Taken together, these efforts demonstrate that Envision Berwick functions not only as a downtown advocacy organization but as a civic incubator that identifies community needs and builds lasting programs around them.

As economic development activity grows in scale and complexity, particularly with the multi-phase buildout of The Edge, the need for sustained business recruitment, and the approach of the TIF district's 2036 expiration, the Town and its partners will need to evaluate whether the current organizational structure is sufficient to meet the moment. Exploring a more formal nonprofit structure, participation in Maine Downtown Center programs, or other sustainable models will help ensure that economic development capacity keeps pace with opportunity.

PRIVATE-SECTOR ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND IMPLICATIONS

Berwick's private economy is structurally small-scale, trade-oriented, and locally anchored. With 207 establishments employing 865 workers, the Town does not rely on large employers but instead on a broad base of small firms distributed across multiple sectors. This decentralization provides resilience but also limits total wage generation within municipal boundaries.

Construction is the largest employment sector, reinforcing Berwick's connection to regional housing growth and infrastructure demand rather than internally generated commercial activity. This suggests that much of the Town's economic strength is tied to regional market forces rather than local industry clustering.

Manufacturing, while modest in establishment count, produces comparatively strong wages and represents one of the more economically productive sectors in town. Its presence supports workforce stability and provides a foundation for potential expansion of light industrial activity in appropriate growth areas.

NAICS Title	#	Emp.	Total $	Avg. Weekly
Total, All Industries	207	865	$46,862,254	$1,042
Construction	28	143	$8,814,874	$782
Manufacturing	9	85	$4,553,075	$1,185
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	40	38	$3,755,563	$992
Administrative, Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	18	77	$3,535,203	$4,780
Finance and Insurance	8	29	$3,092,178	$614
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	12	76	$3,086,859	$1,042
Management of Companies and Enterprises	18	12	$2,982,921	$1,922
Other Services (except Public Administration)	18	53	$2,624,338	$476
Retail Trade	11	80	$2,561,014	$2,128
Accommodation and Food Services	8	77	$1,906,784	$981
Wholesale Trade	10	15	$1,677,983	$1,033
Health Care and Social Assistance	9	26	$1,308,685	$1,873
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	4	8	$404,223	$2,056
Educational Services	3	2	$227,276	$884
Unclassified	1	0	$0	$952
Source 2024 Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information. Private Ownership				

Professional and technical services show a high number of establishments but relatively low employment concentration. This indicates a prevalence of small firms and sole proprietorships, consistent with remote work trends and home-based or small-office businesses. The Town's regulatory and infrastructure framework will influence whether these firms remain small or scale into commercial spaces locally.

Retail, accommodation, and food services collectively represent a meaningful employment base but generally lower wage levels. These sectors are highly sensitive to foot traffic and downtown vitality, reinforcing the importance of coordinated downtown activation beyond a single development site.

Agriculture remains economically relevant, not merely symbolic. Employment levels suggest that working lands continue to contribute directly to income generation, supporting the Town's rural character while providing economic diversity.

Wage distribution across sectors highlights a structural challenge: higher-wage industries are present but not dominant. Much of the local employment base is concentrated in moderate- or lower-wage service sectors. As a result, household income is significantly influenced by employment outside of Berwick, reinforcing the Town's role as a residential community within a larger labor market.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Berwick's economic structure points to several long-term considerations that should shape planning and economic development policy.

The most fundamental is the relationship between where residents work and where the tax base is built. Because many of Berwick's higher-income earners commute to jobs outside the Town, the local tax base remains structurally residential. The economic strength of the household does not

translate into commercial value within municipal boundaries. Expanding higher-value, infrastructure-compatible commercial and light industrial uses in appropriate locations is the most direct way to address that imbalance and strengthen long-term fiscal stability.

At the same time, Berwick's small-business base requires sustained attention. With the average establishment employing fewer than eight people, most local firms have limited capacity to absorb regulatory complexity or absorb operational disruptions. Supporting growth and scaling opportunities for these businesses is as important as attracting new investment from outside. Many of Berwick's professional and technical service firms begin as home-based or small-office operations. Ensuring that zoning and permitting provide a clear pathway for those businesses to scale into commercial spaces locally is one of the most practical tools available for growing the commercial tax base organically.

Downtown vitality is not a separate concern from economic development. Retail, food service, and personal services are directly tied to foot traffic and the overall activity level of the village center. A more active downtown supports existing businesses and creates conditions for new ones to succeed.

Agriculture, while modest in scale, remains economically relevant and reinforces the rural character that residents consistently identify as one of Berwick's defining assets. Encouraging value-added production and agritourism where appropriate can strengthen farm viability and generate local economic activity that fits the Town's identity.

Workforce development is an underutilized lever in Berwick's economic strategy. The Town's relatively strong presence of manufacturing and skilled trades workers reflects an existing connection to regional training and apprenticeship pipelines, but that connection is informal. Strengthening relationships with regional workforce training programs, community colleges, and MSAD60 can help ensure that Berwick residents are positioned for higher-wage employment opportunities and that local employers can access the talent they need to grow.

Taken together, Berwick's economy is stable but externally oriented. The strategic opportunity is to capture more of the economic value that the Town's location, workforce, and community character already generate, directing it into sectors and places that provide strong wages, align with infrastructure capacity, and reinforce rather than strain what makes Berwick worth investing in.

Analysis & Trends

Berwick's economy is shaped by its position within a larger regional labor market. Access to employment centers in southern Maine and New Hampshire strengthens household incomes and supports residential stability, but it also limits how much economic value is retained locally. Many residents earn their wages outside of Town and spend a portion of them elsewhere as well. Increasing commercial activity within designated growth areas is the most practical way to capture more of that value without disrupting Berwick's role in the broader regional economy.

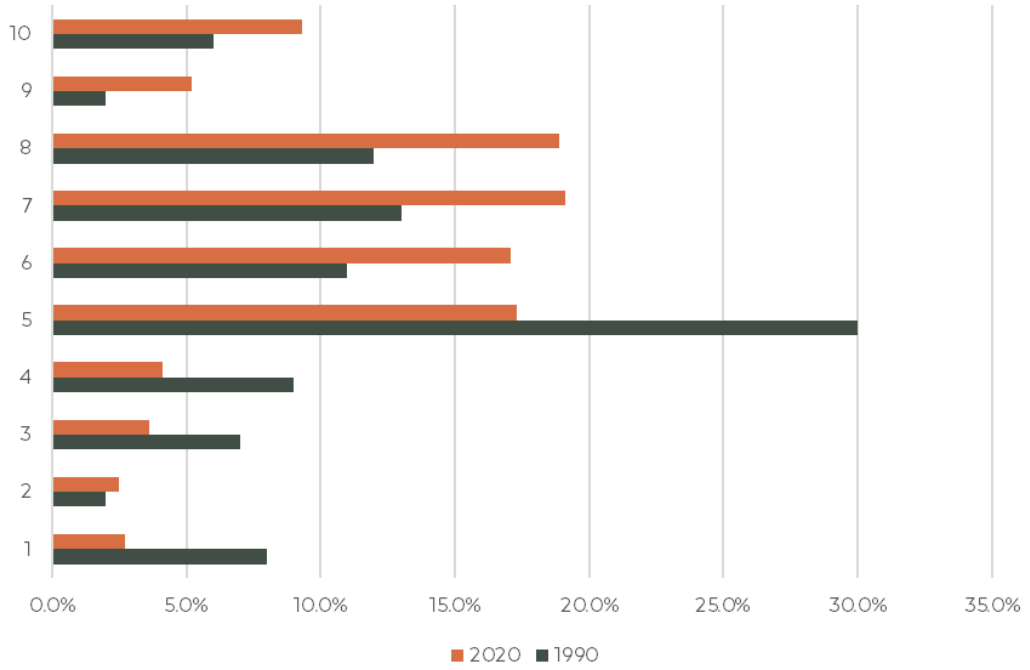
The relatively high share of residents employed in manufacturing reinforces this dynamic. Manufacturing wages tend to exceed those in retail and service sectors, which supports household stability and contributes to the income profile that makes Berwick an attractive place to live. At the same time, long-term shifts in the manufacturing industry require continued diversification so that the local economy is not overly dependent on any single sector or employer.

Both of these realities point to the same underlying challenge: the current valuation structure relies heavily on residential taxpayers. Expanding non-residential development in appropriate locations, whether commercial, mixed-use, or light industrial, can help rebalance that structure and improve fiscal resilience over time without compromising the rural character that defines the community.

INCREASING OPTIMISM AND A CAN-DO ATTITUDE

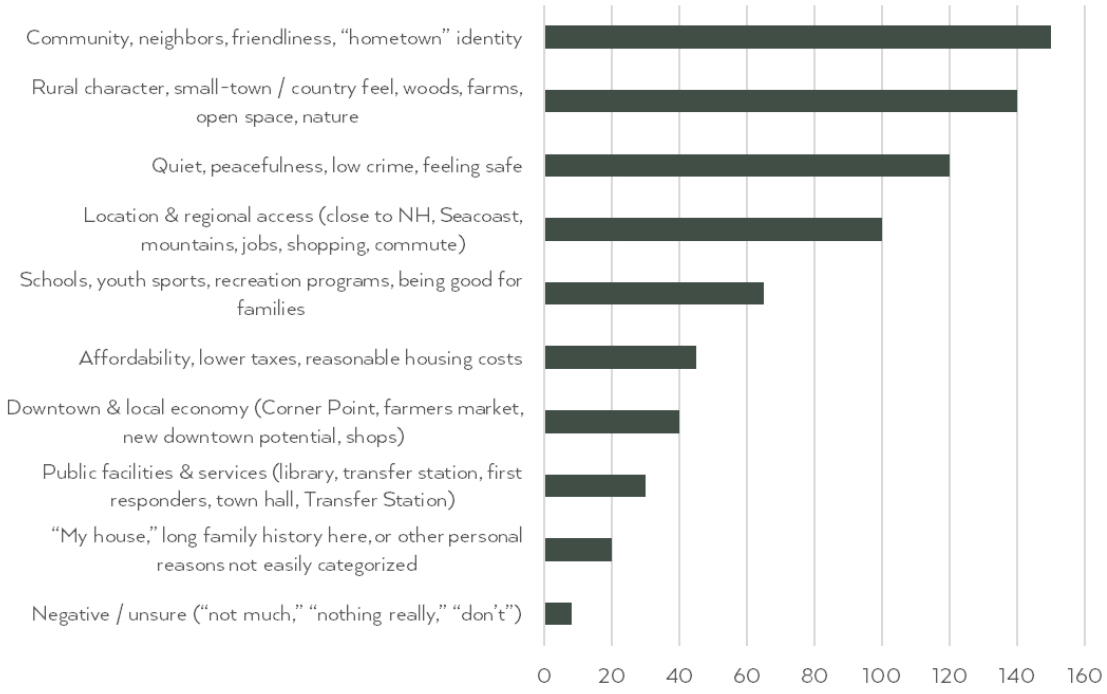
In 1990, most residents rated the Town in the middle range, with a large share selecting a 5 out of 10. Higher ratings were less common, and a noticeable number of residents selected lower scores.

In 2020, responses shifted upward. Ratings of 7 and 8 became the most common, and more residents selected 9 or 10. Mid-range ratings declined, and lower scores became less frequent.



Overall, the results suggest that residents feel more positive about the Town's direction today than they did three decades ago. While not everyone rates the Town at the highest level, the trend reflects growing confidence as Berwick has reinvested in infrastructure, downtown improvements, and community services.

WHAT RESIDENTS VALUE MOST ABOUT BERWICK



Survey responses show that residents most strongly value Berwick's sense of community and small-town identity. The most frequently cited reason people appreciate living in Berwick was community connection, including neighbors, friendliness, and a "hometown" feel.

Closely following were responses highlighting rural character and natural features, including woods, farms, open space, and the overall country setting. Quiet surroundings, low crime, and a general sense of safety were also identified as major strengths.

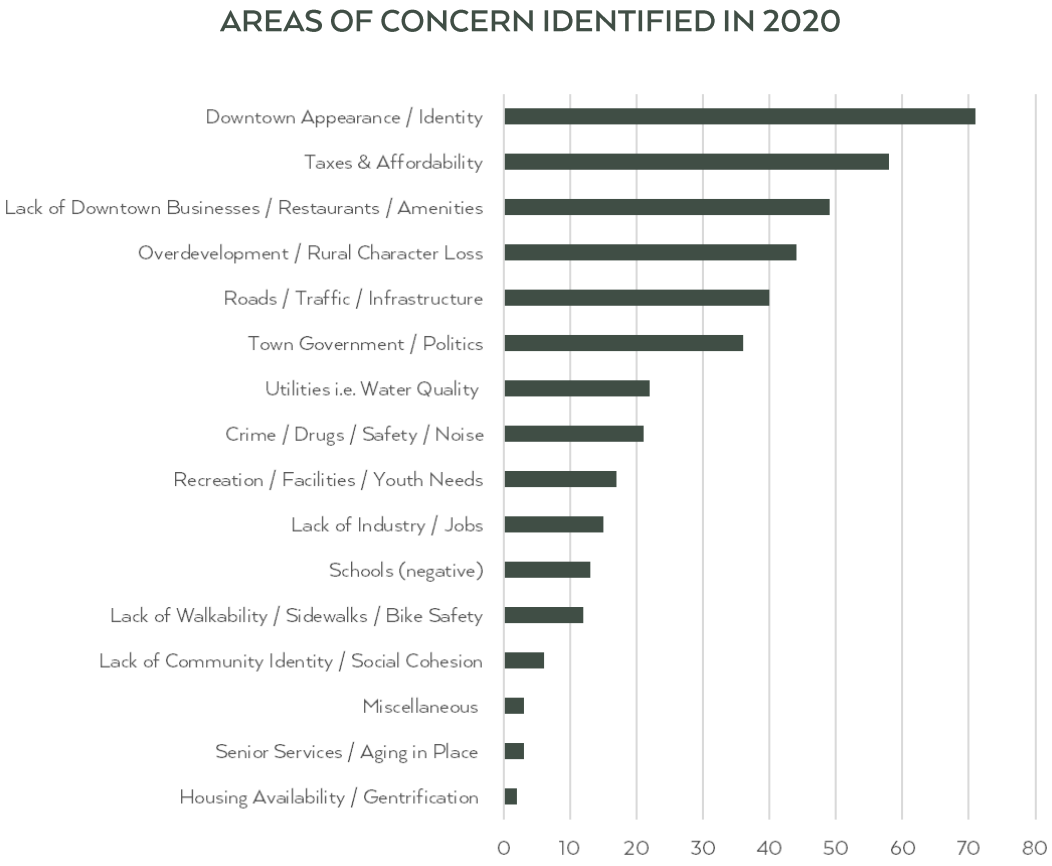
Location and regional access ranked highly as well. Many residents value Berwick's proximity to New Hampshire, the Seacoast, employment centers, shopping, and recreational destinations. This balance between rural setting and regional connectivity appears to be a defining feature of the Town's appeal.

Schools, youth sports, and recreation programs were mentioned regularly, reflecting the importance of family-oriented amenities. Affordability, including lower taxes and reasonable housing costs, was also cited, though less frequently than community character and location.

Downtown and local economic potential received moderate recognition, suggesting that while residents see value in these assets, they are secondary to community identity and rural character. Public facilities and services were acknowledged but were not primary drivers of overall satisfaction.

Few responses expressed negative or uncertain views.

Overall, the results suggest that Berwick's strongest assets are relational and environmental rather than purely economic. Residents value community identity, safety, rural character, and regional access. These themes provide important guidance as the Town considers future growth and investment decisions.



Survey responses collected in 2020 highlight several recurring concerns among residents. The most frequently cited issue at that time was downtown appearance and identity. Many respondents expressed a desire for a stronger, more defined village center and improved visual character. Taxes and affordability were also identified as major concerns, reflecting ongoing sensitivity to household costs and property tax impacts.

Residents also noted a perceived lack of downtown businesses, restaurants, and amenities. This theme appeared consistently in responses and suggested interest in a more active, walkable downtown with additional local services. Concerns related to overdevelopment and potential rural character loss were also present, along with issues involving roads, traffic, and infrastructure.

Other topics mentioned included town government and politics, utilities such as water quality, safety and noise, recreation needs, and employment opportunities. Issues such as housing availability, aging

in place, and senior services were raised less frequently but remain important considerations as the population ages.

It is important to note that these responses reflect conditions and perceptions as of 2020. Since that time, the Town has taken meaningful steps to address several of the top concerns. Downtown reinvestment efforts, including the redevelopment of The Edge at Berwick and intersection improvements, have strengthened downtown appearance and identity. Ongoing corridor planning, streetscape improvements, and economic development efforts are intended to support business growth and improve the overall village environment.

While progress has been made, the themes identified in 2020 continue to provide useful guidance. They underscore the importance of balancing downtown revitalization, infrastructure planning, fiscal responsibility, and rural preservation as Berwick moves forward.

DOWNTOWN ACTIVATION

As redevelopment activity increases, coordinating operations across the entire village will be essential. Design standards, facade improvements, circulation planning, parking management, snow operations, lighting, signage, and pedestrian safety must function cohesively throughout downtown, not solely within a single development site. Public spaces, intersection improvements, and streetscape investments should reinforce a unified village identity and support both new and long-established businesses.

The Town will take a proactive role in business recruitment, targeting uses such as restaurants, financial services, and neighborhood-serving retail that serve both new and existing residents. Engagement with existing property owners to encourage building improvements, upper-floor activation, and infill redevelopment will help ensure that economic momentum extends beyond a single parcel. The Credit Enhancement Agreement will continue to be monitored to ensure it delivers the commercial activity and long-term tax value it was designed to produce.

Downtown revitalization must be comprehensive. A village center that functions well operationally, looks cared for, and offers a range of services and experiences will attract and retain the businesses and residents that sustain it over time. Community events have demonstrated Berwick's capacity to attract meaningful private sponsorship when programming authentically reflects local identity. That model of civic investment in quality over scale is directly applicable to broader downtown activation efforts.

Moving Forward

Berwick's economic development work over the next decade will focus on three connected priorities: strengthening the village center, expanding the commercial and light industrial tax base, and building the organizational and partnership capacity to sustain that work over time.

Downtown is the most visible front. Supporting the continued buildout of The Edge at Berwick, recruiting commercial tenants that serve the broader community, and ensuring the village center functions well operationally are all part of the same effort. Existing businesses need structured support and predictable permitting. Legacy buildings need investment and activation. Streetscapes, lighting, parking, and snow removal must reflect the standards of a community serious about its village center. These priorities will be advanced in coordination with Envision Berwick and other community partners.

Beyond downtown, commercial and light industrial growth will be encouraged along Routes 4, 9, and 236 and in designated business parks, targeting uses that provide strong wages, align with infrastructure capacity, and fit the Town's character. Reducing the residential share of the tax base is a long-term fiscal priority, and land use decisions will consistently reflect it.

Creative culture programming will continue as a core part of the downtown activation strategy, not a secondary amenity. Events, public art, and an active arts community strengthen the identity and foot traffic that make commercial investment viable. Continued investment in these areas supports both the village center and the broader community character residents value.

Regional partnerships will remain essential. The Town's record of securing competitive grant funding from the EPA, SMPDC, MaineDOT, KACTS, and other partners is among its most valuable planning assets. Continuing to build those relationships, pursue available programs, and leverage the TIF district's remaining years before its 2036 expiration will help sustain the pace of investment the downtown requires.

Growth will be measured, purposeful, and aligned with infrastructure capacity. The goal is a downtown that serves the community for the long term and a tax base that reflects a healthy balance between residential and commercial value.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; EB is Envision Berwick; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Expand the local tax base by growing commercial and light industrial activity in appropriate locations.	Identify and inventory available commercial and light industrial sites along Routes 4, 9, and 236 and in designated business parks.	P&D, PB	Short
	Engage property owners along key corridors to gauge interest in commercial or industrial development and connect them with prospective buyers or developers.	TM, P&D	Short
	Require new commercial and industrial development to meet design standards addressing setbacks, screening, signage, glare, and landscaping.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
	Conduct a fiscal impact analysis for major commercial proposals to evaluate long-term tax base and service cost implications.	P&D, TM	Short
Strengthen downtown Berwick as the Town's primary economic and civic center.	Support full buildout and occupancy of The Edge at Berwick by coordinating with the developer, monitoring the Credit Enhancement Agreement, and recruiting targeted commercial tenants.	TM, SB	Ongoing
	Conduct a downtown business needs and market demand survey to identify recruitment targets and gaps in local services.	TM, P&D, EB	Short
	Develop clear marketing materials and a defined value proposition to support business recruitment in downtown and other commercial areas.	TM, EB	Short
	Engage existing downtown property owners to encourage building improvements, upper-floor activation, and infill redevelopment.	P&D, EB	Mid
	Evaluate and update downtown design and signage standards to reinforce a unified village identity.	PB, P&D	Mid
Ensure downtown operations support economic vitality and a positive visitor and resident experience.	Coordinate circulation, parking, and snow removal operations to ensure downtown functions effectively as redevelopment increases activity.	TM, PW	Ongoing
	Review and update off-street parking requirements and winter maintenance policies to reflect downtown redevelopment conditions.	TM, PW, P&D	Short
	Maintain and improve streetscape, lighting, and pedestrian connections throughout the downtown to support walkability and business activity.	PW, P&D	Ongoing
	Install low-maintenance native plantings and public art in downtown green spaces to improve visual character and sense of place.	TM, EB	Mid
Support existing businesses and foster a climate for entrepreneurship and small business growth.	Maintain predictable, transparent permitting and ordinance frameworks that support small business startup and expansion.	P&D, PB	Ongoing
	Conduct structured outreach to existing businesses to identify operational challenges, expansion needs, and retention risks.	TM, EB	Annually

	Facilitate relocation opportunities for businesses that would benefit from different locations within Berwick's commercial districts.	P&D, EB	Ongoing
	Participate in regional economic development initiatives through SMPDC, Southern Maine Finance Agency, and neighboring communities.	TM, SB	Ongoing
Pursue a sustainable organizational and funding structure for economic development.	Explore the feasibility of establishing a nonprofit economic development organization or joining the Maine Downtown Center / Main Street Maine program.	TM, SB, EB	Short
	Leverage TIF district revenues and available grant programs to fund economic development activities, downtown improvements, and placemaking initiatives.	TM, SB, FD	Ongoing
	Engage with SMPDC and regional partners to access technical assistance, site marketing, and funding resources.	TM, P&D	Ongoing
Make downtown Berwick a destination for community events, arts, and cultural activity.	Support and expand recurring community events including outdoor concerts, farmers' markets, art fairs, and seasonal programming.	EB, P&R	Ongoing
	Identify a permanent location and pursue funding for a community gathering or resource facility near the Village Center.	TM, SB, EB	Mid
	Create and maintain public focal points of community pride in the Village Center, including public art installations and gathering spaces.	EB, PW, P&D	Mid
	Support local farming, arts, and creative businesses through market venues, pop-up programming, and ordinance frameworks that welcome street musicians, artists, and makers.	EB, P&D	Ongoing
Support workforce development and connect local talent to economic opportunity.	Establish relationships with regional workforce training programs, community colleges, and vocational schools to connect Berwick residents with emerging employment opportunities.	TM, SB	Short
	Coordinate with MSAD60 and regional partners to identify workforce gaps and promote career pathways aligned with local and regional employer needs.	TM, P&D	Mid
	Promote awareness of apprenticeship, skilled trades, and technical training programs among residents, particularly younger workers.	TM, EB	Ongoing
Support the growth of home-based and small-office businesses into commercial spaces.	Review zoning and land use ordinances to ensure they provide appropriate pathways for home-based and small-office businesses to scale into commercial districts as they grow.	PB, P&D	Short
	Include small and scaling businesses in structured outreach efforts to identify space needs, barriers	P&D, EB	Ongoing

	to growth, and relocation opportunities within Berwick's commercial districts.		
State of Maine Goal for Economic Development: To promote an economic climate which increases job opportunities and overall economic well-being.	Track and annually report key economic indicators, employment by sector, median wage, commercial vacancy rates, and permit activity, to monitor progress and guide policy adjustments.	P&D, TM	Annually
	Evaluate the TIF district's performance and economic development return in advance of its 2036 expiration, and develop a transition strategy to maintain investment momentum as captured value returns to the tax roll.	TM, SB, F	Mid
	Coordinate with Maine Department of Labor and regional workforce partners to monitor employment trends and ensure Berwick's planning and zoning decisions remain responsive to shifts in the regional labor market.	TM, P&D	Ongoing

CHAPTER 8: CREATIVE CULTURE & THE ARTS

Summary & Plan for the Future

Arts and cultural activity contribute to Berwick's identity, strengthen community connections, and support the local economy. In many ways, the arts in Berwick are easy to overlook because they rarely appear in large institutions or formal cultural districts. Instead, creative activity is embedded throughout the everyday life of the town in the form of community theater, school performances, craft traditions, festivals, and the work of individual artists.

These forms of creative expression bring residents together and help define the character of the community. Programs at local schools, performances at regional venues such as Hackmatack Farm & Playhouse, seasonal festivals, and the work of local artists and craftspeople all contribute to a cultural landscape that is active but often informal.

Looking ahead, Berwick has an opportunity to more clearly recognize and support the arts as part of the town's civic and economic life. Encouraging artistic programming, supporting local artists and organizations, and integrating art into public spaces can strengthen community identity while contributing to tourism and small business activity. By recognizing the creative work already present in the community and building upon it, Berwick can foster a cultural environment that supports both quality of life and economic vitality.

Introduction

Arts and culture play an important role in shaping the identity and quality of life of small communities. In rural towns like Berwick, creative activity has historically developed through schools, volunteer organizations, and community gatherings rather than through large institutions.

Throughout Maine, community meeting halls and gathering spaces historically served as informal cultural centers. Grange halls and similar buildings often included a stage and large assembly room where residents gathered for plays, concerts, lectures, dances, and seasonal celebrations. Traveling educational and cultural programs appeared in many rural towns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, drawing large audiences across rural New England and beyond. These events helped establish a tradition of community-based arts participation that continues to shape rural cultural life today.

Berwick reflects this broader tradition. The town's arts culture is built from many small contributions: local theater productions, school programs, craft traditions, seasonal festivals, and the work of individual artists. These activities may not always appear as a coordinated cultural sector, but together they form an important part of the community's social life and identity.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

Berwick's arts and cultural resources include performing arts venues, school programs, local artists, community organizations, and public events that bring residents together.

One of the most significant cultural institutions associated with the town is Hackmatack Farm & Playhouse. Located on a historic family farm that has been in operation for generations, Hackmatack represents a continuation of Maine's long tradition of summer stock theater. Founded in the early 1970s, the theater operates from a converted barn and presents a summer season of plays and musicals. Performers and audiences travel from across the region to attend productions, making the theater an important cultural asset for both Berwick and the surrounding Seacoast communities. Its setting on a working farm, where visitors often walk the grounds and view the bison herd before performances, creates a distinctive experience that combines theater, agriculture, and rural heritage.

Arts education also plays a significant role in the town's cultural life. Students in the Noble School District participate in visual arts, music, and theater programs that provide opportunities for creative expression and performance. Noble High School maintains an active theater program that stages productions in the Hussey Theatre on the Sheila Jordan Stage. These productions involve students not only as actors but also as participants in lighting design, stage management, sound production, and set construction. School arts programs provide an important entry point for young residents to develop creative skills while strengthening connections between the schools and the broader community. Hackmatack Farm & Playhouse extends that tradition beyond the school year through a

long-running summer camp where many young people in the region have their first experience performing on stage.

Community theater activity further contributes to the local cultural landscape. Groups such as Our Theatre Company have previously organized productions involving local residents and volunteers on the stage at the auditorium in Berwick Town Hall. These grassroots efforts reflect the strong tradition of volunteer-driven arts activity that is common in rural communities.

Music is another thread running through Berwick's community life. Student musicians and singers from the Noble School District regularly perform at town events, including the Christmas and Memorial Day Parade and tree lighting ceremony, bringing school-based arts programs into direct contact with the broader community and giving young performers a public stage outside the school building. Noble band and chorus performances have also become significant draws for Berwick Communications & Media programming. Corner Point Brewing hosts a monthly blues jam that draws musicians and audiences from across the region. Hackmatack Farm & Playhouse extends its cultural presence beyond the theater season with a weekly Sunday at the Farm series. The Berwick Public Library hosts musicians and performers as part of its regular programming. Dirigo Ranch Feed and Seed has become an unexpected gathering place through line dancing events that blend rural tradition with community social life. The Winter Farmers' Market brings local vendors, food producers, and community members together in a seasonal gathering that reflects Berwick's agricultural roots and creative economy in equal measure. These venues and events demonstrate that Berwick's creative culture is woven into the everyday fabric of the town.

Visual arts are supported by a network of local artists and regional arts organizations. Berwick has a longer and richer creative history than many residents realize. In the early 2010s, the now-defunct Berwick Art Association was founded and attracted artists from across southern Maine and the Seacoast region of New Hampshire. The Association brought together painters, photographers, sculptors, and other artists through exhibitions, gallery shows, street art installations, collaborative programming, community murals, and pop-up events that brought creative work directly into public spaces. These efforts demonstrated that there was both a local audience and a regional network willing to engage with creative activity in Berwick. Although the Association is no longer active, the pattern it established remains important: when given even modest support and a platform to gather, artists in and around Berwick consistently organize, collaborate, and contribute to community life.

Individual artists also contribute to Berwick's creative identity. Sculptor Rick Burns, a longtime Berwick resident, has exhibited regionally and is known locally for welded metal sculptures displayed prominently on his property in downtown Berwick. These distinctive lawn sculptures are among the few visible examples of public-facing art in Berwick.

Craft traditions are another important component of the town's creative life. Local artisans produce pottery, textiles, woodworking, jewelry, photography, and other handmade work that appears at seasonal craft fairs and community markets. Events held at locations such as Dunn Farm, Town

Hall, and other community venues provide opportunities for makers to connect with residents and visitors while supporting a culture of handmade and locally produced goods.

Creative activity also appears in community festivals and public events. Bring Your Lawn Chairs to Sullivan Square is among the most visible expressions of Berwick's creative culture. Born from a 2019 conversation between town staff and community volunteers, the event has grown from a small concert series into a fully realized annual festival combining live music, circus arts, variety performance, a curated makers market, and community gathering. The festival's guiding philosophy of charm over scale, local over generic, and handmade over commercial reflects the same values residents identify as central to Berwick's identity. Its commitment to aesthetic cohesion, zero-waste operations, multigenerational programming, and a makers' market featuring only local handcrafted goods makes it a model for how cultural programming can express community character rather than simply fill a calendar date.

Taken together, these resources demonstrate that the arts in Berwick are present throughout the community, though often in decentralized and informal ways.

Analysis & Trends

Berwick's cultural environment reflects a pattern common in many rural communities. Creative activity is sustained primarily through volunteer organizations, schools, and individual artists rather than through large cultural institutions.

While this decentralized structure can make the arts less visible than in larger cities, it also reflects a strong tradition of grassroots participation. School productions, community events, local festivals, and the work of independent artists continue to attract audiences and contribute to the town's social life.

Across Maine and New England, communities have increasingly recognized the role that arts and cultural programming can play in economic development. Festivals, public art installations, galleries, theaters, and artisan markets help attract visitors, support local businesses, and strengthen a community's identity. In rural areas especially, creative programming often complements tourism, agriculture, and outdoor recreation by providing additional reasons for visitors to spend time in a community.

Examples across the state demonstrate how creative activity can support local economies. Communities such as Rockland, Belfast, and Bridgton have developed strong reputations through arts festivals, galleries, and cultural programming that draw visitors throughout the year. Even smaller towns have successfully supported artisan markets, performance venues, and cultural events that generate economic activity for nearby restaurants, shops, and lodging. Berwick's own experience bears this out. Bring Your Lawn Chairs to Sullivan Square has demonstrated that a carefully produced, community-rooted event can attract regional audiences, support local businesses, and strengthen downtown identity without sacrificing the rural character residents value. The festival's

approach to sponsorship, treating partners as participants in a community ritual rather than purchasers of ad space, offers a model worth applying to future cultural programming.

Berwick already possesses many of the ingredients needed to support a stronger cultural presence. Local artists, community organizations, regional theater traditions, school arts programs, and well-attended public events all contribute to a creative environment that could be more fully recognized as part of the town's community and economic development strategy.

Moving Forward

Berwick has an opportunity to more intentionally recognize and support the creative activity that already exists within the community. Strengthening partnerships with schools, local artists, and community organizations can help expand opportunities for exhibitions, performances, and public events.

Public art represents one area where the town could build upon existing creative resources. Sculptures, murals, artist-designed signage, and temporary installations can enhance parks, trails, civic buildings, and downtown spaces while highlighting the work of local artists. Even small projects can create visual landmarks that contribute to the character and identity of the community.

Berwick should explore the development of a small public art program that encourages the placement of sculptures, murals, and artist-designed installations in public spaces. Partnerships with local artists, schools, and arts organizations could support initiatives such as rotating sculpture displays, community mural projects, artist-designed interpretive signage, or temporary installations during festivals and events. These types of projects can often be implemented with modest funding while creating lasting cultural and aesthetic benefits.

Cultural programming can also contribute to economic vitality. Festivals, performances, and artisan markets attract visitors and support local businesses. Communities across Maine have successfully used arts programming to strengthen downtown activity, support tourism, and encourage small business development.

Berwick already has a foundation to build on. Early creative programming and temporary art spaces demonstrated that demand for cultural activity existed even before the broader downtown revitalization began. Outdoor events and public programming in the village center reinforced how cultural activity can draw residents together and activate public spaces. The demand for creative space, programming, and a downtown that feels culturally active has never disappeared; it has simply been informal and under-resourced. Arts programming increases foot traffic in commercial districts, strengthens place identity, and contributes to local economic activity. Creative businesses, including studios, galleries, design firms, and craft producers, support small business development while reinforcing the community character that residents say they value most.

Sustaining creative culture programming over time requires more than enthusiasm. Berwick's most successful cultural initiatives have demonstrated that intentional funding structures, including private sponsorship, earned revenue, and dedicated reserves kept with the program, are what allow events and organizations to grow in quality year after year. Applying that discipline to future creative programming will be essential to its long-term viability.

Moving from occasional efforts toward a more coordinated approach will require modest but deliberate steps. This may include supporting a volunteer Creative Culture Committee to help connect artists, organizations, and town initiatives, ensuring that local ordinances allow flexible use of downtown spaces for temporary events and creative activity, and strengthening the formal connection between arts programming and the Town's economic development strategy. That strategy should explicitly recognize studios, galleries, design firms, and craft producers as local businesses worth attracting and retaining, and zoning and permitting should reflect that welcome clearly.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: BCM means Berwick Communications & Media; dCC means Conservation Commission; EB is Envision Berwick; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Recognize creative culture as a core component of Berwick's civic and economic identity.	Include creative culture objectives in downtown activation planning, economic development discussions, and annual budget conversations.	BCM, SB, TM, EB	Short
Support the formation of a volunteer Creative Culture Committee to coordinate arts and cultural activity in Berwick.	Establish the committee through the Select Board, define its scope and relationship to Envision Berwick and Planning and Development, and charge it with developing an initial cultural programming agenda.	SB, TM, EB, P&D	Short
Develop a public art program that places artist-created work in downtown and civic spaces.	Identify potential sites, establish a partnership process with local artists and arts organizations, and pilot the program with one or two installations during a community event or festival.	P&D, EB, P&R	Short

Strengthen connections between Berwick's schools, library, and arts organizations to expand creative opportunities for young residents.	Explore joint programming between the Recreation Department, schools, the library, and local arts organizations, including student involvement in public art projects, festival performances, community exhibitions, and expanded after-school creative programs.	P&R, EB, P&D	Short
Support local arts organizations in building long-term capacity and community reach.	Provide coordination support and promotion through Envision Berwick for active local arts organizations and explore opportunities to support the re-emergence of a visual arts organization in Berwick.	EB, TM	Ongoing
Develop a sustainable funding and volunteer model for creative culture programming.	Establish clear funding strategies and volunteer management structures to ensure long-term viability of cultural programs and events.	EB, TM	Short
Protect the character and quality of Berwick's cultural events as the town grows	Include local focus, curated participation, and aesthetic integrity as a standard when evaluating new events or expansions of existing ones.	BCM, EB, P&R, P&D	Ongoing
Connect creative businesses and working artists to Berwick's economic development strategy	Ensure zoning and permitting provide a clear pathway for creative businesses to establish and scale in appropriate downtown and commercial locations.	P&D, PB, EB	Mid
Support the informal network of venues and gatherings that make up Berwick's everyday creative life	Identify and maintain relationships with venues and organizers hosting regular community cultural programming, and explore low-barrier ways the town can provide support such as promotion, permitting assistance, and recognition.	EB, BCM, P&D	Ongoing

CHAPTER 9: IDENTITY & COMMUNICATIONS

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's brand and communications system represents a framework for trust, identity, and connection between town government and the people it serves. The town has evolved from informal and decentralized communication efforts into a coordinated system that reflects Berwick's values, character, and aspirations. The brand, expressed through its motto "Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow," captures the balance between honoring Berwick's heritage and embracing its growth and innovation.

Branding and communication play two essential roles in Berwick's future. The first is economic: a cohesive and recognizable brand helps attract residents, businesses, and investment by projecting vitality and professionalism. The second is civic: clear and consistent communication strengthens transparency, builds public trust, and makes it easier for residents to participate in local government. Together, these roles make communication a foundation of Berwick's long-term sustainability and quality of life.

As technology and public expectations continue to evolve, Berwick's communications must remain flexible and adaptive. Social media platforms change, new tools emerge, and audience habits shift, yet the principles of clarity, consistency, accessibility, and authenticity endure. Maintaining a single, coherent identity across departments and platforms ensures that every interaction with town government reinforces the same sense of belonging and professionalism.

Looking forward, Berwick needs to codify its existing Communications Plan and Brand Standards as official guiding documents to ensure continuity through future leadership changes. Regular review will help keep these standards relevant as technology and practices evolve. The town's communications will continue to evolve through outreach, creative media, and public education, connecting residents to information and to one another. All of our town communications, from The Berwick Daily and community media to public signage, social media, and the town website, support that connection and reinforce a shared civic identity.

How a town communicates is inseparable from how it governs. A consistent, thoughtful communications system reflects who Berwick is today and helps shape what it becomes tomorrow.

A strong brand and communications system also supports economic development directly. When Berwick projects a clear, consistent, and professional identity, it signals to prospective residents, businesses, and investors that this is a community that takes itself seriously. The work of promoting small businesses, creative culture, and a vibrant downtown depends in part on how effectively Berwick tells its own story.

Introduction

The Berwick Town Seal, created in 1963 for the town's 250th anniversary by UNH art major Jean Wilcox, depicts the pine trees of Pine Hill, a Native American figure symbolizing the area's first inhabitants, and a sawmill along the Salmon Falls River: one of the earliest in the nation, once located in what is now South Berwick's Great Works section.

Berwick's modern branding and communications have evolved through years of collaboration and community effort. In 2014, a town-wide contest produced the motto "Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow," capturing both Berwick's history and its forward-looking spirit.

In 2018, the Select Board partnered with the design firm Pixels & Pulp to develop a new logo, brand, and visual identity system grounded in the town's motto, while also modernizing the town seal. The result was a cohesive and enduring brand that unified departments, signage, and materials under a consistent visual framework.

The volunteer group Envision Berwick continued that work through its Digital Communications, Branding, and Signage Subcommittee, helping extend the identity across town facilities and community projects. By 2024, Berwick Community Media had grown into Berwick Communications & Media (BCM), expanding beyond cable broadcasting to include digital publishing, video, photography, design, and public outreach. BCM now manages the Berwick Daily, which is the town's digital hub for news and updates. BCM maintains an active presence across the town website, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube, with daily website updates and regular social media posts, as well as cable broadcast on Channels 22 and 95 for government meetings and hyperlocal content.

Together, these efforts have built a professional and authentic communications framework. Today, Berwick's brand serves as both a practical tool and an expression of civic pride, linking every sign, post, and publication under one shared identity.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

Berwick's communications and branding system is a living framework that touches nearly every aspect of town operations. The Berwick Brand Guide, developed by Pixels & Pulp and adopted in 2023, defines the town's logo system, typography, and color palette, balancing modern clarity with warmth and approachability. Heather Forest and Heather Orange remain the town's signature colors, and the consistent use of Arquitecta and companion fonts gives materials a cohesive and recognizable look.

Each department uses approved logos or emblems derived from the primary town design, and the official seal remains reserved for legal and ceremonial use. The signage system, one of the brand's

most visible applications, includes custom welcome signs, facility markers, and letterboard-style message panels designed to match the town's color palette and aesthetic. These handcrafted signs preserve Berwick's charm while keeping communication flexible and readable.
BCM oversees the town's digital and print communications, managing website updates, photography, video, and social media. The Berwick Daily serves as the primary online source for municipal news and stories, while printed materials, bulletin boards, and welcome sign message boards continue to reach residents who prefer traditional communication methods.

The Berwick Bimonthly, released at the start of each month with a mid-month update, complements the Daily as a town calendar and newsletter highlighting local events, elections, school activities, and departmental updates. Together, these channels ensure that information reaches residents in multiple formats and remains accessible to all.

Berwick Stories demonstrates how local storytelling builds civic pride. Created by Envision Berwick in 2019 and now produced through Berwick Communications & Media, the video series highlights residents, volunteers, and small business owners, capturing the spirit and humanity of local life. Complementary podcasts and other media continue this work, using a consistent voice and authentic tone to strengthen residents' connection to the community.

Because communication tools evolve quickly, the town treats its system as adaptable rather than fixed. The emphasis is on consistency of tone, quality, and accessibility, regardless of platform or medium.

Analysis & Trends

The evolution of Berwick's communications system has significantly improved how residents engage with their government. Consistency in design, tone, and message has replaced the fragmented materials of the past with a clear and recognizable identity. This consistency builds trust, promotes participation, and strengthens Berwick's reputation as an organized and professional community.

Centralizing communication has allowed the town to manage its public voice more effectively. The unified system combines digital news, social media, and visual storytelling, helping residents see their government as approachable and transparent. It also reinforces economic development by projecting stability and creativity to potential residents and businesses.

As technology changes, the town faces the ongoing task of remaining current without losing its character. New platforms and trends can quickly shift how people seek information, and maintaining a balance between innovation and authenticity will remain a core challenge. Equally important is ensuring accessibility for all residents, whether they connect online or through traditional means.

Berwick's approach reflects a broader shift in small-town communication: from one-way announcements to relationship-building through story and design. The town's challenge and

opportunity is to keep that approach nimble, inclusive, and rooted in the same values that shaped its brand. Increased engagement through digital publishing, video storytelling, and consistent visual identity has strengthened resident participation and improved the clarity of municipal information.

Moving Forward

Berwick will maintain a clear and consistent communications system that supports transparency, community pride, and public trust. Effective communication is central to good governance and to how residents experience their town.

The town will continue to uphold the principles of clarity, accessibility, and professionalism in every message it sends. To ensure continuity, Berwick should formally adopt and periodically review its Communications Plan and Brand Standards as guiding documents. Codifying these materials will secure their longevity and ensure consistent application across departments and administrations.

Berwick's communication strategies will continue to evolve through three interconnected areas: outreach, creative media, and education. Together, these efforts create a system that not only informs but invites participation.

Outreach will continue to bridge the gap between online and in-person engagement. The town's message boards, located at the Transfer Station and at Berwick's gateway welcome signs, extend the communication system beyond digital channels. These analog message panels, styled in keeping with the town's custom signage, share timely announcements and seasonal messages while preserving Berwick's cohesive aesthetic. Their presence in daily routines, whether during errands or along main travel routes, keeps town communication visible, accessible, and connected to the community's identity.

Creative media will remain the town's most powerful tool for storytelling. Programs that feature residents and local projects, whether through short videos, photography, or written features, help residents see themselves reflected in the life of the town.

A Community Story Archive, developed in partnership with The Berwick Historical Society, could extend our shared storytelling by preserving photos, recordings, and interviews for future generations. A rotating Town Photography Collection displayed in Town Hall and other civic spaces could celebrate Berwick's people and seasons through a shared visual record.

Education completes the picture. Through workshops, partnerships, and mentorship, Berwick can build communication literacy and pride across generations. A Youth Media Corps in partnership with Noble Schools could engage students in digital storytelling and civic participation, giving young people a voice in the town's ongoing story. Staff and committee training in brand use, plain-language writing, and accessibility will help keep communication consistent and inclusive.

Regular Visual Accessibility and Engagement Audits will measure how effectively these tools reach the community. Reviewing type, color, and layout alongside analytics and resident feedback will ensure the town's communication remains clear, equitable, and responsive.

By blending outreach, creativity, and education, Berwick will continue to strengthen its identity and connection to residents. Communication is how the town delivers information and builds community. Through consistency, accessibility, and thoughtful design, Berwick ensures its message remains clear, welcoming, and aligned with its enduring motto: Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: BHS is Berwick Historical Society, BCM is Berwick Communications & Media; CC means Conservation Commission; EB is Envision Berwick; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Maintain a consistent, professional, and accessible communications system that builds public trust and civic identity.	Formally adopt the Communications Plan and Brand Standards as official Town guiding documents and schedule regular reviews to keep them current.	TM, SB	Short
	Ensure the Brand Guide is followed consistently across all departments, committees, and communications platforms.	TM, BCM	Ongoing
	Conduct regular visual accessibility and engagement audits reviewing type, color, layout, and analytics to ensure communications remain clear and equitable.	BCM	Annually
	Maintain and expand the town's multi-channel outreach system including the Berwick Daily, Berwick Bimonthly, social media, website, and physical message boards to reach residents through multiple formats.	BCM	Ongoing

Strengthen community connection and civic pride through local storytelling and creative media.	Continue and expand programs that feature residents, volunteers, and local businesses through video, photography, and written features.	BCM, EB	Ongoing
	Develop a Community Story Archive in partnership with the Berwick Historical Society to preserve photos, recordings, and interviews for future generations.	BCM, BHS	Mid
	Establish a rotating Town Photography Collection displayed in Town Hall and other civic spaces to celebrate Berwick's people and community life.	BCM, TM	Mid
Build communication literacy and civic participation across generations.	Explore a Youth Media Corps in partnership with Noble Schools to engage students in digital storytelling and civic participation.	BCM, TM	Mid
	Provide staff and committee training in brand use, plain-language writing, and accessibility standards to ensure consistent and inclusive communication across Town operations.	TM, BCM	Annually
Support economic development and community identity through a strong and recognizable town brand.	Leverage the Town's brand and communications assets in business recruitment, downtown marketing, and regional partnership efforts.	TM, EB, BCM	Ongoing
	Coordinate with Envision Berwick and community partners to ensure signage, events, and public programming reinforce a unified village identity.	EB, BCM, P&D	Ongoing

CHAPTER 10: PARKS & RECREATION

Summary & Plan for the Future

Recreation plays an essential role in Berwick's health, identity, and sense of community. Residents value youth sports, summer camp, trail use, paddling, creative programs, and community events. The 2016 Recreation Master Plan, adopted by town vote, provides the foundation for this chapter and outlines a long-term vision based on surveys, a public forum, and a full inventory of facilities.

The town has completed important upgrades, including the Newichawanak Landing kayak launch on the Salmon Falls River, new trails at Penny Pond, and the creation of Great Falls Park. A new playground was installed at Memorial Park, and new tennis and pickleball courts expanded recreation options. Memorial Park now has a scheduled and routine maintenance plan. Conserved lands and the Open Space Plan continue to protect trail corridors, wildlife habitat, and sites for low-impact recreation.

Public engagement identified clear priorities: better maintenance of existing facilities, more community events, a dedicated community center, improved communication, and stronger connections between neighborhoods, downtown, and recreation sites. Residents also expressed interest in expanded water-based recreation and family amenities such as a public pool, splash pad, or ice-skating rink.

Looking ahead, Berwick will need to match growing demand with steady, strategic investment. Priorities include maintaining Memorial Park, creating flexible community activity spaces, improving communication and signage, expanding trails and greenways, and strengthening partnerships with MSAD60, the library, and regional organizations. The town also has opportunities to create new outdoor destinations at Hatfield Pond, where it owns wooded shoreline and beach frontage, and at Hornes Mill along the Little River. As development continues, impact fees and open space planning will help guide the growth of parks, trails, and water-access areas.

By following the Recreation Master Plan, coordinating with partner organizations, and making strategic, affordable improvements, Berwick can support a recreation system that remains accessible, resilient, and central to community life. Recreation and natural resource stewardship are inseparable in Berwick. The trails, river access points, and open spaces that make the town's recreation program possible exist because of the forests, wetlands, and river corridors that have been protected over time. Sustaining the recreation program means sustaining the natural systems that underpin it, and the town's investment in one reinforces the value of the other.

Introduction

Berwick's parks, fields, trails, and open spaces reflect both its rural character and its changing role as a growing service center. Recreation facilities are spread across town, from Memorial Park near the village center to trails, preserves, and water access points. School facilities play a major role in meeting community needs, and private landowners and local organizations contribute significantly to recreation opportunities.

The Recreation Master Plan provides the foundation for this chapter. It documents how residents use existing facilities, what they value, and where they see gaps. It also recognizes that recreation is closely tied to land use, transportation, open space conservation, economic development, sense of place, and community identity. As the town continues to grow, a coordinated approach to Parks & Recreation will help preserve quality of life and support healthy, active living.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

RECREATION ADMINISTRATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Berwick Parks & Recreation Department is responsible for maintaining town recreation facilities and coordinating town-run programs, events, and holiday activities. The Department includes one full-time Director, one part-time program coordinator, and seasonal staff. A volunteer Recreation Commission advises the Department on policy, programming, budgeting, and capital improvement planning. The Commission generally meets monthly, and its members assist with events and outreach.

The town's recreation system is supported by a network of partners. The Noble school district (MSAD60) oversees team sports for students from Berwick, North Berwick, and Lebanon. Noble Adult and Community Education offers personal enrichment classes that often include arts, fitness, and outdoor activities. Various activity and booster groups organize and run programs that draw participants from throughout the region. Local nonprofits, service organizations, and volunteer committees, such as Berwick for a Lifetime, contribute to special events, planned recreation activities, and facility improvements.

Parks & Recreation Department operating funds are included in the town's annual budget. Town recreation programs are supported by participation fees held in dedicated accounts.

Capital projects are occasionally funded through individual warrant articles. Voters have approved purchases, including the 71 Sullivan Street property and the Great Falls Park site. Recreation and open space impact fees from new development, adopted in 2017, are divided equally between recreation and open space accounts. A Tax Increment Financing district in the downtown village area, created in 2017, can direct captured revenue toward infrastructure, aesthetic improvements, and

projects with recreation value. Additional support for recreation has come from community fundraisers, booster groups, and state and federal grants.

ATHLETIC FACILITIES

Berwick provides athletic facilities through a combination of town-owned sites and school district properties. Most town-run activities and community-organized youth sports use Memorial Park, while school programs rely on MSAD60 facilities.

Memorial Park, widely known as the "Rec Field," was a ten-acre complex at the end of Sweetser Street. With the recent purchase of an adjacent three-acre parcel, the site now totals thirteen acres. It includes multiple baseball fields, soccer fields, a multi-purpose field used for T-ball, football, field games, and soccer. Additionally, it features two basketball courts, a playground, a fenced pickleball and tennis court, a pavilion, a concession stand, storage areas, and on-site parking. The field is heavily used by Berwick Youth Soccer, Noble Youth Baseball, Noble Youth Football and Cheering, and the Berwick Recreation Summer Day Camp, as well as for other community events and informal activities.

In 2021, the town commissioned Tom Irwin Advisors to conduct a three-part study of Memorial Park's athletic fields covering existing conditions, supporting infrastructure, and a stakeholder vision process. The study has guided the Parks & Recreation Department's ongoing work ever since. The field conditions assessment found that all fields scored in the C to C- range, with every field below standard in playability. Primary issues included poor surface planarity, insufficient turf cover, substandard surface hardness, inadequate rotational traction, and high compaction. Soil testing identified a high percentage of fine-grained silt, limiting drainage and durability. The infrastructure review found widespread irrigation deficiencies, very low soil infiltration rates, no dedicated sports turf staff, and no formal written policies governing field use or maintenance. Since that assessment, the Parks & Recreation Department has made meaningful progress toward the study's recommendations, including establishing a routine maintenance plan, and continues to work with Tom Irwin Advisors.

School facilities in Berwick include fields, playgrounds, and indoor spaces at the Vivian E. Hussey School, Eric L. Knowlton School, and Noble Intermediate School. These sites host multi-purpose fields, baseball fields, gymnasiums, cafeterias, and a range of support spaces used for athletic programs and community events. Noble Middle & High School in North Berwick offers additional facilities, including football, baseball, and soccer fields, a track and field area, cross-country trails, two gymnasiums, a cafeteria, and an auditorium. Many of these indoor spaces are available for rental, supporting both school and community uses.

Noble Athletics offers a full slate of varsity and junior varsity sports across three seasons, including soccer, field hockey, football, cross country, basketball, wrestling, ice hockey, track, baseball, softball,

and lacrosse. These programs serve students from all three district towns and depend on continued access to well-maintained fields and facilities.

INVENTORY OF ATHLETIC FACILITIES

The town and school district maintain Berwick's existing athletic facilities. One site, Noble High School, is located outside the town boundary.

RECREATION FACILITIES

TOWN FACILITY	DESCRIPTION
Memorial Park (popularly known as the "Rec Field"	This 13-acre complex is located at the end of Sweetser Street and located at 71 Sullivan Street. Facilities include: Baseball Fields (3: rookie, minor, major) Soccer Field Multi-purpose Field (T-ball, football, field games, soccer) Basketball Courts (2) Playground Fenced Pickleball & Tennis Court Pavilion Concession Stand Storage Areas Parking
MSAD60 FACILITY	**DESCRIPTION**
Vivian E. Hussey School	Multi-purpose Field Baseball Field Playground Gymnasium* Cafeteria*
Eric L. Knowlton School	Playground Gymnasium* Cafeteria* Multipurpose Field
Noble Intermediate School	Football Field Walking Track Baseball Field Tennis Courts Practice Field Gymnasium* Cafeteria*
Noble Middle & High School (located in North Berwick)	Football Field Track and Field Area Baseball Field Soccer Field Practice Field Cross-Country Running Trails Gymnasium (2)*

	Fitness Center Cafeteria* Auditorium*

COMMUNITY CENTER NEEDS

Berwick does not currently have a dedicated community center. Programs that would typically be housed in such a facility are distributed across the Berwick Public Library, Town Hall, and Noble High School's Adult and Community Education Center. This arrangement has allowed many activities to operate, but it limits scheduling flexibility and makes it harder to build a cohesive hub for recreation and community life.

The recreation survey indicated strong support for a future community center, with roughly ninety-five percent of respondents in favor. Residents were asked to rank a preselected list of potential activities and could also suggest additional uses. High-priority activities included fitness equipment, art facilities, function space for private events, yoga, meeting rooms, and a game room. Participants at the public forum echoed these preferences and emphasized the value of indoor space for summer camp during inclement weather, as well as regular weekly activities such as toddler time, arts and crafts, lectures, and movie screenings.

Preliminary planning suggested that a twelve-thousand-square-foot facility including a multipurpose room, could accommodate the highest-ranked activities. Given that construction costs would reach into the millions, attention has instead shifted to maximizing programming opportunities in existing and emerging facilities, such as the library, and renewed interest in using the Town Hall auditorium.

COMMUNITY EVENTS & CREATIVE CULTURE

Recreation in Berwick includes a strong cultural and creative component. Programs at the Berwick Public Library, Noble Adult and Community Education, and other community partners offer opportunities for arts, crafts, music, and lifelong learning. The library regularly hosts musicians, performers, authors, artists, and speakers, as well as book discussions, story time, craft programs, and movies. Adult education courses cover arts and crafts, fitness, health and wellness, and home and family topics. The Recreation Master Plan found strong interest in arts and crafts programming for a future community center, along with high enthusiasm for festivals, concerts, and fireworks. With concerts ranking as the top survey priority, town committee members explored a concert series that ultimately became Envision Berwick's Bring Your Lawn Chairs to Sullivan Square.

Berwick's annual event calendar reflects a strong culture of community gatherings. Seasonal highlights include the Winter Farmers' Market, the Masquerade Dance, Trash Bash Earth Day cleanup, the Easter Eggstravaganza, Memorial Day Parade, Library plant sale, Power Wheels Race, the Berwick Car Show, Bring Your Lawn Chairs to Sullivan Square, Trunk-N-Treat, and the Christmas Parade and tree lighting ceremony. These events contribute to a sense of belonging, encourage volunteerism, and support local organizations and businesses.

Community events and cultural programming also play an important role in supporting Berwick's local economy and downtown vitality. Festivals, concerts, markets, and seasonal celebrations draw residents and visitors into shared public spaces, increase foot traffic for local businesses, and strengthen Berwick's identity as a place to live, work, and gather. As recreation programming continues to evolve, these events offer opportunities to reinforce connections between recreation, community life, and economic development.

As Berwick's event calendar continues to grow, the quality and character of individual events matter as much as their number. The experience of other regional festivals shows that adding generic vendors or commercial attractions can gradually erode the community character that makes an event worth attending. Berwick's most successful programming has succeeded precisely because it has resisted that drift, prioritizing coherence, local authenticity, and charm over scale.

EVENT CALENDAR

Town-wide events spur creativity, community loyalty, and belonging. Berwick's recurring events include:

MONTH	EVENT
January	Berwick Winter Farmers' Market
February	Berwick Winter Farmers' Market
March	Berwick Winter Farmers' Market Easter Eggstravaganza
April	Berwick Winter Farmers' Market Trash Bash Earth Day Cleanup Masquerade Dance
May	Power Wheels Race Memorial Day Parade Library Plant Sale
June	Berwick Car Show
July	
August	Bring Your Lawn Chairs to Sullivan Square

September	
October	Trunk-N-Treat Legion Auxiliary Craft Fair
November	Thanksgiving Community Dinner
December	Tree Lighting Christmas Parade Christmas Community Dinner

TRAILS, PARKS, AND OPEN SPACE

Berwick residents consistently express a desire for places to walk, hike, run, bicycle, skate, snowshoe, and cross-country ski. Many also enjoy horseback riding, mountain biking, snowmobiling, off-roading, fishing, hunting, picnicking, and simply spending time outdoors. While the town encompasses about thirty-eight square miles of land and water, it has relatively few formal parks and trails. Much of the land is privately owned, though many landowners continue Maine's tradition of allowing responsible public use.

Town-level planning over the past several decades has emphasized the importance of including the downtown area within recreation planning and of improving connections between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and open space. The Recreation Master Plan, downtown visioning process, and subsequent surveys have reinforced this message.

The Great Works Regional Land Trust plays a significant role in conserving land for recreation and habitat. Formed in 1986 to respond to rapid growth in the region, the land trust now serves six towns, including Berwick. It maintains multiple preserves with trails and guided hike programs. Great Works collaborates with state agencies, federal programs, other nonprofits, and municipal governments to protect farms, forests, wetlands, and scenic areas.

In Berwick the land trust has completed numerous projects protecting over thirteen hundred acres, including working farms and preserves such as Brooks Farm Wildlife Preserve, Grant's Meadow at Beaver Dam Heath, Keay Brook Preserve, Newichwannock Woods, Tuckahoe Preserve, and several other fee and easement properties. These sites provide opportunities for hiking, wildlife observation, and low-impact recreation while safeguarding important natural resources.

Other notable sites include Penny Pond, with its wheelchair accessible boardwalk, loop trail, interpretive signage, and potential return to pond ice skating; Great Falls Park along the Salmon Falls River; The Community Garden at the Public Safety Complex that serves as a link in a central greenway; and several town-owned or privately accessible properties that offer informal trails and scenic views. Ensuring that recreation facilities are accessible to residents of all abilities is a priority. The kayak launch at Berwick Landing was designed with accessibility in mind and serves as a model for future improvements at Memorial Park, Hatfield Pond, and other recreation sites. The Horace A.

Hurd Memorial Forest, owned by the New England Forestry Foundation, offers trails and public access for hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Working lands such as Harvard Turf Farm permit limited foot access under specific guidelines.

WATER-BASED RECREATION

Water resources provide important opportunities for recreation in Berwick. Residents fish, paddle, and skate at various locations and have expressed interest in expanded facilities for swimming and water play.

Berwick Landing at Newichawannock, established in 2015 at 111 Rochester Street, is the town's first public launch for non-motorized craft. The site includes accessible features such as a transfer bench and slide board, along with roll-off ramps to make launching easier and drier for paddlers of all abilities. Managed by the Parks & Recreation Department, the launch provides access to more than ten miles of navigable river upstream and a scenic route downstream toward downtown and the Great Falls Dam. Paddlers are advised to exercise caution near the dam and to return upstream before reaching hazardous waters.

Hatfield Pond, also known as Murdock Lake, is a man-made impoundment with several small islands. Fishing is the dominant use, with species such as largemouth bass, chain pickerel, and hornpout present. The town owns a small waterfront parcel on Ridlon Road that provides access for canoes, kayaks, and small boats with trolling motors. Survey results indicate that signage at Hatfield Pond is still needed.

Additional water access points include small town properties along the Little River at Messenger Bridge and near Diamond Hill Road, which support fishing and informal access to this trout and bass stream. In the past, Penny Pond was occasionally cleared for ice skating. The Salmon Falls River, which forms Berwick's western border, offers extensive opportunities for paddling, fishing, and nature observation. Because the river is also a drinking water source for both Berwick and Somersworth, state and regional partners advise caution around certain reaches and near wastewater discharge locations.

COMMUNICATION

The success of recreation programming depends not only on the quality of facilities and events, but also on how well residents know about and can access them. Berwick's recreation opportunities are organized by multiple entities, each of which communicates separately. Digital tools such as the town website, social media, and email are widely used, while flyers, mailers, posters, and messaging signage also play important roles.

Survey and forum participants consistently identified the need for clearer, centralized information about parks, trails, and recreation sites. Residents expressed interest in maps showing trail locations,

access points, hours of use, and basic rules, as well as improved on-site signage to help orient visitors. Addressing these communication gaps represents a relatively low-cost opportunity to improve access, safety, and overall use of existing recreation resources.

Most town-sponsored activities are promoted through the town's social media, calendar, and website, as well as the Parks & Recreation Department's section of the town website and through berwickrec.com, which uses the MyRec software platform for registration and payments. The Recreation Director manages these sites with assistance from the Recreation Commission.

The recreation survey and forum identified communication as a significant challenge. Many residents reported that they were unaware of local walking trails or did not know where to find reliable information about recreation opportunities. Others noted scheduling conflicts among programs and expressed a desire for better coordination, particularly for heavily used facilities like Memorial Park.

Analysis & Trends

Berwick's Parks & Recreation system reflects both strengths and pressures. The town benefits from a dedicated Parks & Recreation Department with one full-time staff member, an active Recreation Commission, and strong partnerships with schools, land trusts, and community organizations. Memorial Park, school facilities, and conserved lands provide a solid foundation of fields, trails, and open space. The kayak launch, Great Falls Park, Penny Pond Trail, and Keay Brook Preserve demonstrate the town's ability to deliver high-quality projects that respond to community needs.

At the same time, several trends point to growing demands on the system. Population growth and new housing development are increasing the number of residents seeking access to fields, trails, and programs. The Recreation Master Plan documents high levels of participation in youth sports and summer camp, as well as strong interest in adult fitness, arts programming, and family-friendly events. As use increases, the town faces challenges related to maintenance, scheduling, and facility wear.

Staffing and funding levels have not always kept pace with community expectations, with many Parks & Recreation Department responsibilities historically supported through grants, volunteer labor, and one-time warrant articles. Today, the town is in a stronger position. Following the Recreation Master Plan survey, which identified limited staffing and resources, the town expanded departmental capacity by adding a full-time position and a part-time position. Maintenance challenges have also been addressed through the steady growth of a dedicated maintenance line item and the introduction of a user fee, both of which help support the ongoing upkeep of facilities and programs. Looking ahead, staffing levels will need to continue to keep pace with population growth and the increasing demand on facilities and programs.

Facility use distribution presents another challenge. The majority of structured recreation activities are concentrated at Memorial Park and school sites, while formal parks and trails remain limited

relative to the town's overall land area. Some rural neighborhoods lack convenient access to public recreation land. Connections between downtown, The Berwick Public Library, Memorial Park, the Public Safety Complex, Penny Pond, and other key sites are still developing. As Berwick continues to encourage walkable, village-centered growth, demand for sidewalks, greenways, and safe routes to parks and schools is likely to increase.

Finally, the town's recreation and open space systems are closely tied to broader land use and conservation efforts. As development occurs, opportunities for informal recreation on private land may decrease. The Open Space Plan and the work of Great Works Regional Land Trust will play a crucial role in preserving key landscapes for both habitat and recreation. Coordinating recreation planning with conservation, transportation, and land use policies will help ensure that Berwick maintains its rural character while providing accessible, high-quality amenities for residents.

Moving Forward

Berwick's recreation system is in a stronger position today than it was a decade ago. Staffing has grown, Memorial Park has a routine maintenance plan, new facilities have been added, and the Recreation Master Plan has given the department a clear framework for investment. The foundation is solid.

The work ahead is about building on that foundation in a way that keeps pace with growth. Population increases and new housing will put more pressure on fields, trails, and programs. Meeting that demand will require steady capital investment aligned with the CIP, continued use of recreation and open space impact fees, and a clear schedule for deferred improvements at Memorial Park and other sites.

Connectivity is the next major priority. Residents have consistently asked for safe walking and biking routes between neighborhoods, schools, parks, and downtown. A greenway linking Memorial Park, Penny Pond, Great Falls Park, Berwick Landing, and the Public Library would strengthen the recreation system and reinforce the town's walkable village character.

Water-based recreation presents the clearest near-term opportunity. The town owns shoreline at Hatfield Pond and has expressed interest in Hornes Mill along the Little River. Both sites could become meaningful outdoor destinations with modest, targeted investment.

Communication remains a low-cost, high-impact gap. Many residents are unaware of trails, access points, and programs that already exist. Maps, signage, and a stronger web presence would increase use of existing assets without adding infrastructure.

Community events and programs are equally essential. The annual event calendar, summer camp, youth sports, and community gatherings do something fields and trails cannot: they bring people together. Expanding and sustaining that programming is central to what makes recreation matter in a town like Berwick.

Recreation and natural resource stewardship are inseparable in Berwick. The trails, river access points, and open spaces that make the town's recreation program possible exist because of the forests, wetlands, and river corridors protected over time. Sustaining the recreation program means sustaining the natural systems that underpin it, and the town's investment in one reinforces the value of the other.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: BHS is Berwick Historical Society, BCM is Berwick Communications & Media; CC means Conservation Commission; EB is Envision Berwick; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; RC is Recreation Commission; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Maintain and improve Memorial Park as Berwick's primary athletic and recreation facility.	Continue to implement the Memorial Park Feasibility Study recommendations, including paving and lining parking areas and installing a walking and running circuit around the park.	P&R, RC	Short
	Enhance lighting and improve video surveillance at Memorial Park.	P&R, TM	Short
	Add horseshoe pits and boule sports courts (bocce, petanque) to expand recreational options at Memorial Park.	P&R, RC	Mid
	Develop a Memorandum of Understanding between the Town and MSAD60 to maximize efficient use of athletic facilities and reduce scheduling conflicts.	TM, P&R, MSAD60	Short
Expand and improve Berwick's trail network and park connections.	Adopt and execute a sidewalk and greenway plan connecting Memorial Park, Penny Pond, Great Falls Park, the Public Library, and downtown.	P&R, P&D, PW	Mid
	During downtown redevelopment, incorporate a central greenway providing safe connections to Great Falls Park, Memorial Field, Berwick Landing, and Penny Pond.	P&R, P&D, SB	Mid

	Connect Memorial Field to Berwick Landing at Newichawannock by formalizing the existing trail.	P&R	Short
	Install clear and consistent wayfinding signage at all public parks, trails, and water access sites.	P&R, BCM	Short
	Use pervious surfaces for new trails and provide accessible accommodations at new and existing parks.	P&R, P&D	Ongoing
	Ensure funding is adequate for effective maintenance and management of existing parks and trails while planning for addition of new sites.	P&R, RC, TM	Ongoing
Expand water-based recreation access and programming.	Improve the access road and launch area at Hatfield Pond and install a public dock.	P&R, SB, TM	Mid
	Consider establishing an access management policy for Hatfield Pond to balance recreation use with water quality protection.	P&R, SB	Short
	Consider establishing a canoe and kayak rental system at Berwick Landing.	P&R, RC	Mid
	Produce and maintain a map, both print and digital, of water-based recreation locations showing hours, permitted activities, and available facilities.	P&R, BCM	Short
	Explore feasibility of developing new outdoor water destinations at Hatfield Pond and Hornes Mill along the Little River.	P&R, P&D, SB	Long
Strengthen community programming, events, and cultural activities.	Continue and expand the annual community events calendar, including seasonal celebrations, concerts, markets, and youth activities.	P&R, RC	Ongoing
	Maximize use of existing facilities, including Town Hall auditorium, the Public Library, and school spaces , for recreation, arts, and community programming while a dedicated community center is not available.	P&R,	Ongoing
	Explore options for a dedicated community center or flexible multipurpose space to support fitness, arts, youth programs, and community gatherings.	TM, SB, RC	Long
	Encourage the establishment of youth nature and hiking clubs and expand youth outdoor programming.	P&R, RC	Mid
Improve communication and public awareness of recreation opportunities.	Produce and maintain a print and digital map of all public parks and trails with hours, distances, permitted activities, and facilities.	P&R, BCM	Short
	Develop an information kit for distribution at Town Hall covering town facilities, events, summer programs, trails, and recreation opportunities.	P&R, BCM	Short
	Enhance the Parks & Recreation web presence including the town website, MyRec platform, and social media.	P&R	Ongoing
	Work with public and private landowners to extend and maintain a network of trails for motorized and	P&R, GWRLT, RC	Ongoing

	non-motorized uses and provide educational materials on Maine's landowner liability law (Title 14, M.R.S.A. §159-A).		
Coordinate recreation planning with open space conservation, land use, and transportation.	Use recreation and open space impact fees to support acquisition of land for future parks, trails, and water access areas as development occurs.	P&R, P&D, SB, CC	Ongoing
	Coordinate with GWRLT and other conservation organizations on land conservation for passive recreation and trail connectivity.	P&R, CC	Ongoing
	Align recreation facility planning with the Capital Improvement Plan to ensure infrastructure investment is scheduled and funded.	P&R, TM, RC	Annually

CHAPTER 11:

TRANSPORTATION

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's transportation system reflects the Town's historic development pattern, rural geography, and role as a regional connector between Maine and New Hampshire. State highways, local roads, bridges, sidewalks, and transit services provide essential access to employment, healthcare, education, and commerce. As Berwick continues to grow and reinvest in its downtown and key corridors, the transportation network must evolve to support new development while maintaining safety, accessibility, and community character.

Traffic volumes, crash data, and redevelopment activity demonstrate that transportation planning in Berwick is increasingly focused on safety and access, not simply on moving vehicles efficiently. Streets, particularly in the downtown area, must function as shared public spaces that safely accommodate drivers, pedestrians, cyclists, and transit users. As investment continues, there is a growing need to improve pedestrian safety, manage vehicle speeds, reduce conflict points, and better coordinate transportation improvements with land use changes.

Consistent with the Southern Maine in Motion Plan, Berwick supports the principles of Vision Zero and the long-term goal of eliminating traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries. This approach recognizes that human error will occur and emphasizes designing streets, intersections, and corridors to reduce the likelihood that mistakes result in severe outcomes. Safer street design, appropriate speed management, targeted intersection improvements, and protection of vulnerable road users are central to this strategy.

In practice, this means prioritizing improvements at documented high-crash locations, particularly along Routes 4, 9, and 236 and at key downtown intersections. It also means ensuring that new development and redevelopment projects incorporate appropriate transportation and streetscape improvements that strengthen safety and walkability.

Berwick has demonstrated success in advancing transportation projects through regional coordination and competitive grant funding. Building on this record, the Town will continue to work with MaineDOT and the Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation System to pursue data-driven, safety-focused investments that improve corridor function, support downtown vitality, and minimize impacts on local taxpayers.

Introduction

Transportation systems shape how residents access employment, services, schools, and regional destinations. In Berwick, roadway design and traffic patterns reflect decades of land use decisions, regional commuting trends, and infrastructure investment.

Berwick functions as both a residential community and a regional connector. Major state highways link the Town to employment centers in Dover, Portsmouth, Rochester, and throughout the Seacoast. At the same time, downtown streets must serve local businesses, pedestrians, and neighborhood traffic.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

Transportation in Berwick has largely been shaped by land use patterns and geography. The compact, historically developed downtown supports vehicles, pedestrians, bicycles, and fixed-route transit services, while the Town's rural areas rely almost exclusively on roadways designed for vehicular travel.

Berwick is served by three major state highways, Route 4 Portland Street, Route 9 School Street, and Route 236 Allen Street. These routes function as arterial roadways connecting Berwick to regional destinations. Route 9 provides access to Route 16 in New Hampshire and Interstate 95 via Exit 19 in Wells, which includes the Wells Transportation Center with intercity bus and commuter rail service to Boston, Portland, Saco, and Brunswick. Interstate 95 also provides access to Portland, approximately 52 miles north. Southbound access to I-95 is available via New Hampshire Routes 4 and 16 through Portsmouth.

Routes 4 and 236 also accommodate commercial and freight traffic, particularly related to regional industrial and employment centers. Balancing freight mobility with pedestrian safety remains an ongoing consideration.

METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION (MPO)

Berwick is part of a federally designated urbanized area that includes Dover and Rochester, New Hampshire, and the Maine communities of Eliot, Kittery, South Berwick, and York. The five Maine communities form the Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation System (KACTS), which serves as the Metropolitan Planning Organization for the area.

KACTS receives annual federal and state transportation planning and project funds. Member municipalities may access these funds with relatively low local match requirements. Berwick has successfully leveraged KACTS funding for projects including the Sawmill Hill realignment engineering, a Route 4 safety study, and the 2019 Downtown Vehicle, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Study.

ROADWAY NETWORK

ROAD CLASSIFICATION AND MAINTENANCE

Roadways are the primary mode of transportation in Berwick and are classified as follows:

State Highways: Routes 4, 9, and 236

State Aid Roads: Hubbard Road / Rochester Street

Town Ways: The majority of municipally maintained roads

Summer Town Ways: Ridlon Road and Togue Brook Road

Berwick maintains approximately 70 miles of roadway, of which nearly 80 percent are Town ways. Road maintenance is performed by the Berwick Highway/Public Works Department, which implements the Town's roadway Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) developed by the Road Commissioner. The CIP guides preservation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts.

The Town encourages developers to construct roads to town standards so they may be accepted without additional upgrades. Berwick continues to evaluate roads and intersections for safety, right-of-way constraints, and redevelopment integration—particularly in and around downtown and former industrial sites. Improved tracking of private roads and their long-term impacts remains a priority.

TRAFFIC VOLUMES AND TRENDS

Street	Approximate Cars Per Day
Route 4	9,500 - 11,900
Route 236	4,700 - 6.900
Route 9	6,200 - 10,500
Rochester Street	6,000 - 7,900
Sullivan Street	4,100 - 8,700
Pine Hill Road	4000
Other Local Roads	200 - 2,400

MaineDOT maintains permanent and temporary traffic count locations throughout Berwick. The most recent data, generated in October 2025, include Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) estimates through 2024 at multiple locations across the community. Traffic volumes vary significantly between state highway corridors, downtown collector streets, and rural local roads.

STATE HIGHWAY CORRIDORS

Routes 4, 9, and 236 carry both local traffic and significant regional commuter volumes. Route 4 in particular experiences the highest traffic counts and serves as a primary north-south connection to New Hampshire employment centers. These corridors function as critical economic and mobility links but also present safety and access management challenges.

COLLECTOR AND DOWNTOWN STREETS

Streets such as Rochester Street and Sullivan Street play an important role in downtown access, redevelopment activity, and neighborhood connectivity. Traffic volumes in these areas reflect a mix of through traffic and local destination trips.

LOCAL AND RURAL ROADS

Local and rural roads generally carry between 200 and 2,400 vehicles per day, with some very low-volume roads carrying fewer than 100 vehicles per day. These lower volumes reflect Berwick's rural character outside the downtown area and the dispersed pattern of residential development in outlying areas.

COMMUTING PATTERNS AND MODES OF TRANSPORTATION

According to the American Community Survey, Berwick had approximately 4,394 workers aged 16 and over in 2024. The majority of residents commute by private vehicle.

Mode	%
Car, Truck, Van	78.8%
Work from Home	20.2%
Public Transportation	0.5%
Taxi or Ride-Hailing	0.5%

Commute time data indicate that Berwick residents generally experience moderate travel times consistent with regional employment patterns. The mean travel time to work is approximately 29.5 minutes.

More than half of residents commute between 15 and 34 minutes, with the largest share falling in the 15 to 19 minute and 30 to 34 minute ranges. Only 7.8 percent of residents report commute times of 60 minutes or more, while approximately 7.3 percent commute less than 10 minutes.

These patterns reflect Berwick's role as a residential community serving regional employment centers in southern Maine and New Hampshire. The concentration of commute times under 35 minutes suggests continued reliance on regional highway corridors such as Routes 4, 9, and 236, while relatively low rates of very long commutes indicate that Berwick remains well positioned within the Seacoast labor market.

BRIDGES

Berwick has 16 bridges, including six municipally owned structures. Bridges are inspected biennially by MaineDOT and assigned a Federal Sufficiency Rating (FSR).

Two bridges fall below an FSR of 50—Prays Bridge and Roberts Bridge—making them eligible for federal replacement or rehabilitation funding. Several additional bridges fall within the 50–80 range and remain eligible for rehabilitation funding. Bridge condition and funding eligibility continue to be monitored through coordination with MaineDOT.

Analysis & Trends

SAFETY, CRASH HISTORY, AND VISION ZERO

Over the past decade, Berwick has experienced 1,319 crashes, including 16 fatalities. Half of all fatal crashes occurred along a 2.9-mile segment of Route 4. Pedestrian and bicycle crashes, primarily in the downtown area, have included serious injuries, underscoring the need for focused safety improvements.

MaineDOT crash analyses conducted between 2019 and 2025 consistently identify several intersections and corridor segments in Berwick as priority safety locations.

Between 2019 and 2021, MaineDOT designated four High Crash Locations within the community, including the Jordan Street / Sullivan Street intersection and several roadway segments along major corridors.

More recent data from 2023 through 2025 highlight continued concerns at key intersections. The Jordan Street / Sullivan Street / Wilson Street intersection experienced eight reported crashes, 12.5 percent of which involved injury. The Old Pine Hill Road / North Old Pine Hill Road / Route 9 intersection also experienced eight crashes, with a significantly higher injury rate of 62.5 percent.

Corridor screening conducted in 2026 further identified segments of Route 236, including New Dam Road to Powerhouse Road and Raegan Lane to New Dam Road, as areas warranting focused safety evaluation.

Together, these analyses consistently identify Routes 4, 9, and 236, along with key downtown intersections, as priority safety areas requiring targeted improvements.

Berwick's safety efforts align with Vision Zero principles, which recognize that traffic fatalities and serious injuries are preventable through system-level design, speed management, and data-driven investment. Vision Zero emphasizes protecting vulnerable road users, anticipating human error, and reducing crash severity rather than expanding roadway capacity. In Berwick, this translates into targeted corridor redesign, speed management, pedestrian crossing improvements, and intersection reconfiguration rather than roadway widening.

DOWNTOWN AND CORRIDOR PLANNING INITIATIVES

In 2019, Berwick completed the Downtown Vehicle, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Study to guide multimodal improvements in anticipation of redevelopment activity within the village center. The study evaluated roadway geometry, sidewalk connectivity, bicycle accommodations, traffic circulation, and pedestrian safety conditions. It identified sidewalk gaps, limited bicycle infrastructure, complex intersection configurations, and areas where pedestrian crossings could be improved. At the same time, the study recognized the downtown's strong potential for walkability and its importance as a shared civic and economic space.

Several improvements recommended in the study have since been implemented. Intersection upgrades at Sullivan Street / Main Street / Eleanor's Way and at Jordan Street / Sullivan Street / Wilson Street have improved traffic flow and pedestrian safety. Additional safety and circulation improvements remain planned in coordination with MaineDOT and the Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation System, with implementation anticipated in 2027 pending funding and final design.

Building on this work, the 2023 Corridor Study evaluated safety, access management, and circulation along key state highway corridors, including Routes 4, 9, and 236. The study emphasized context-sensitive solutions that balance regional mobility with local access and redevelopment activity. Key themes included improved driveway access management, speed management, intersection safety enhancements, and pedestrian crossing improvements.

Together, these planning efforts reinforce Vision Zero principles and align closely with documented crash trends and traffic volume data. They provide a clear framework for implementing targeted, data-driven transportation improvements that enhance safety while supporting economic vitality and community character.

REGIONAL ALIGNMENT AND PROJECT PRIORITIZATION

Berwick's transportation planning aligns with regional priorities established through the KACTS Metropolitan Transportation Plan and related regional studies. As part of the Southern Maine in Motion Study, Berwick submitted multiple projects and achieved strong regional rankings:

#3 Overall – Downtown Multimodal Safety & Streetscape Project (Estimated $4.5 million): sidewalk improvements, utilities, drainage, ornamental lighting, improved crossings, RRFBs, streetscaping, traffic calming, signal replacement, and intersection improvements.

#34 Overall – Route 4 Corridor Safety & Access Management Project (Estimated $6.0 million): turn lanes, driveway access management, curb closures, and median islands.

These rankings validate Berwick's data-driven, safety-focused approach and position the Town well for future funding.

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Public transit is provided by Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST) and York County Community Action (YCCAC). COAST operates fixed routes connecting Berwick to regional employment centers and transit hubs, while YCCAC provides demand-response service for shopping and medical trips.

Moving Forward

Moving forward, Berwick will continue to maintain and improve its roads and bridges through proactive capital planning that emphasizes long-term preservation and fiscal responsibility. The

Town will focus on addressing high crash locations using safety-focused, Vision Zero-informed strategies that prioritize reducing fatal and serious injury crashes.

Berwick will continue to advance corridor and intersection improvements in coordination with MaineDOT and the Kittery Area Comprehensive Transportation System (KACTS), ensuring that local transportation needs are aligned with regional priorities and funding programs. Improving pedestrian and bicycle connectivity—particularly in the downtown and other activity centers—will remain a key focus as redevelopment occurs and travel patterns evolve.

The Town will continue to leverage regional, state, and federal grant funding to implement priority transportation projects, building on its demonstrated success in securing competitive funding. Transportation investments will be coordinated with land use planning, economic development initiatives, and public safety goals to ensure that improvements support community vitality while minimizing impacts on local taxpayers.

By aligning local investment with regional planning and safety data, Berwick will advance a transportation system that supports economic opportunity, protects public safety, and preserves community character over the long term.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Improve traffic safety and circulation within the downtown village center.	Continue implementing recommendations from the Downtown Vehicle, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Study, including intersection improvements, traffic calming, and pedestrian safety enhancements.	TM, SB, P&D, MDOT, KACTS	Ongoing
Coordinate transportation improvements with land use planning and redevelopment activity.	Review development proposals to ensure transportation improvements are integrated with site design and corridor planning efforts.	PB, P&D	Ongoing

Enhance pedestrian safety and walkability in the Village Center.	Expand and improve sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian connections to ensure safe travel to, from, and within downtown.	PW, P&D, MDOT	Mid
	Evaluate ADA compliance of all sidewalks, crosswalks, and pedestrian facilities and incorporate accessibility improvements into transportation capital planning.	PW, P&D	Short
Improve bicycle connectivity within the downtown and surrounding areas.	Identify opportunities for bicycle lanes and shared-use facilities along major streets and corridors.	P&D, PW, MDOT	Mid
Improve safety at documented high-crash locations.	Study and implement safety improvements at intersections and roadway segments identified through MaineDOT crash analysis.	PW, MDOT, P&D	Short
Implement Route 4 corridor safety improvements.	Advance recommendations from the Route 4 Safety Study including intersection upgrades, speed management, and access management improvements.	MDOT, P&D, SB	Mid
Strengthen coordination with regional transportation planning efforts.	Continue collaboration with MaineDOT and KACTS to advance transportation projects and pursue regional transportation funding opportunities.	TM, SB, P&D	Ongoing
Improve mobility options for residents without access to a private vehicle.	Coordinate with COAST and other regional transportation providers to assess transit needs and service opportunities.	TM, P&D	Mid
Support transportation options for older adults and vulnerable populations.	Coordinate with regional transportation providers to assess mobility needs of residents aged 65 and older.	TM, P&D	Mid
Maintain and preserve the Town's roadway network.	Continue implementing the roadway Capital Improvement Plan to prioritize maintenance, preservation, and reconstruction of Town roads.	PW, TM	Ongoing
Improve data and mapping to support transportation planning.	Continue improving GIS transportation data, traffic counts, and mapping accuracy to support infrastructure planning and decision making.	P&D	Ongoing
Expand trail and recreational connectivity.	Establish and maintain trail connections linking downtown Berwick with parks, trails, and public facilities.	P&R, P&D	Long
Ensure local transportation policies remain consistent with state transportation regulations.	Review and update local ordinances as necessary to remain consistent with state access management regulations, traffic permitting requirements, and the Sensible Transportation Policy Act.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
Maintain functional and efficient downtown parking while preserving village character.	Review and modernize off-street parking requirements to support downtown redevelopment and maintain an attractive streetscape.	PB, P&D	Mid
Improve long-term roadway planning and maintenance.	Develop and maintain a comprehensive street and roadway master plan that prioritizes preservation and identifies annual roadway maintenance needs.	PW, TM	Mid

CHAPTER 12: PUBLIC FACILITIES & SERVICES

Summary & Plan for the Future

Public buildings and services are the visible expression of Berwick's values and identity. In Berwick, our schools, town offices, fire and police station, recreational facilities and parks, library, public works buildings, and transfer station reflect our commitment to community, safety, learning, and civic life. These spaces are where neighbors gather, decisions are made, and essential services are provided. Together, these facilities form an interconnected system that supports growth management, public safety, service delivery, and long-term community resilience.

As Berwick continues to grow, investing in public buildings is essential to fulfilling the vision of this Comprehensive Plan. Our facilities should be energy-efficient, accessible, and welcoming, but also visually appealing and thoughtfully designed. Public spaces that reflect quality craftsmanship, strong design principles, and aesthetic beauty help instill civic pride and elevate the daily experience of residents and visitors alike. Attractive, well-maintained buildings not only support town services but also signal Berwick's values, encourage community use, and contribute to a cohesive, vibrant identity and sense of place.

As the town looks ahead, maintaining and improving this system will require not only careful stewardship and appropriate security, but a renewed focus on welcomeness and shared use. Public buildings should feel accessible and inviting, places where residents can enter without hesitation and feel a sense of belonging. By encouraging broader use of facilities for recreation, arts, and community activities, and by creating stronger connections between departments and local organizations, Berwick can ensure its public spaces are not only well-managed but also active, visible, and alive.

Introduction

Berwick's public facilities form a connected network that supports nearly every aspect of community life. From schools and public safety services to roads, water systems, Town Hall, and the Library, these places and services shape how residents learn, travel, work, and gather. Public facilities are service providers and growth regulators. The capacity, condition, and geographic distribution of infrastructure directly influence where development can occur safely and efficiently. Aligning land-use decisions with water, sewer, roadway, and emergency-service capacity reduces long-term costs and supports fiscally responsible growth. Coordinated planning across departments ensures that infrastructure investment reinforces the Town's Future Land Use Plan rather than reacting to it.

These facilities do not operate in isolation. Enrollment patterns affect traffic circulation. Housing growth affects emergency response demand. Water and sewer capacity influence development potential. Public Works infrastructure supports nearly every municipal function. Together, these systems reflect Berwick's responsibility to serve the public efficiently and equitably.

Over the past decade, service demand across many departments has increased alongside population growth and development activity. Emergency medical responses, building permits, and infrastructure maintenance responsibilities have all expanded. At the same time, municipal services have become more complex, reflecting broader responsibilities. As is the case in many communities, municipalities often struggle to increase staffing levels at the same pace that service demands grow. These trends highlight the importance of long-term staffing planning, facility investment, and careful capital planning to ensure that municipal capacity keeps pace with community needs.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

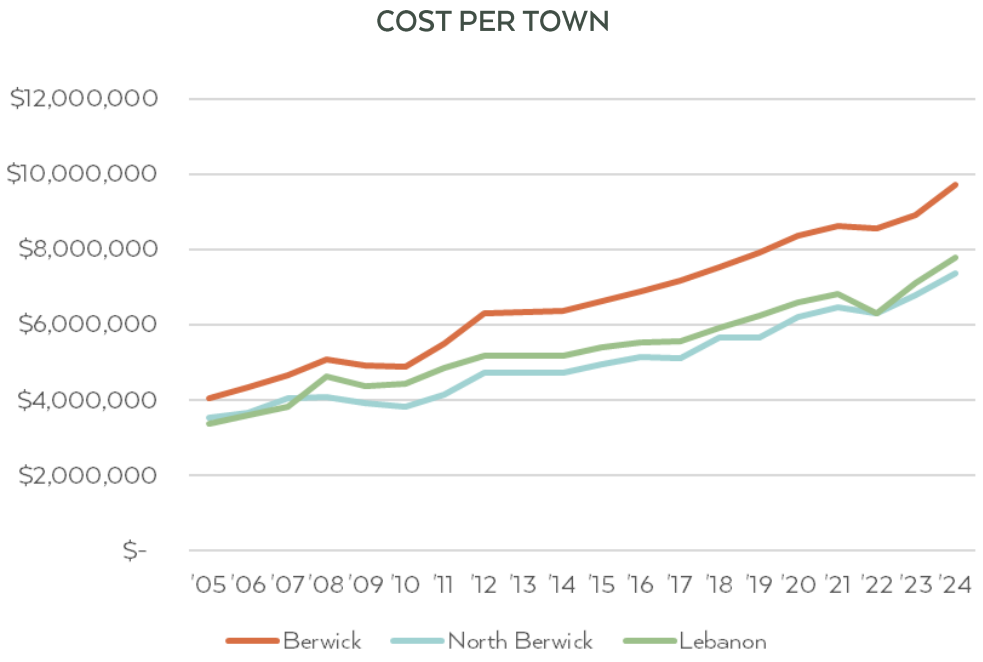
SCHOOLS

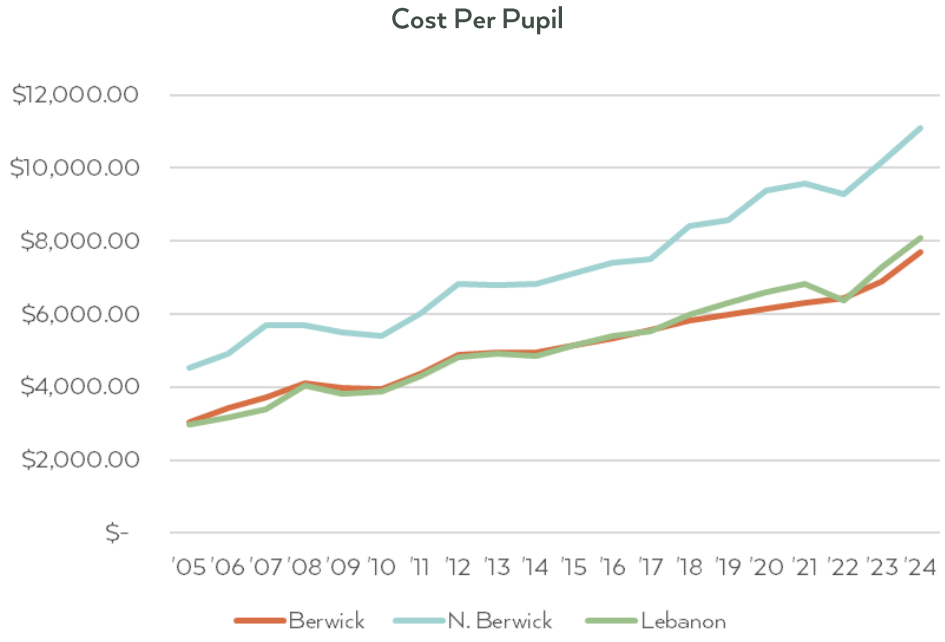
Public education in Berwick is provided through Regional School Unit 60 (MSAD60), which serves Berwick, North Berwick, and Lebanon. Facilities serving Berwick area students include Vivian E. Hussey Elementary School, Mary Hurd Academy, Eric Knowlton School, Noble Intermediate School, Noble Middle and High School, and Noble Adult and Community Education.

MSAD60's strategic plan, The Road to Noble 2030, emphasizes student well-being, clear learning pathways, and community engagement. The district views education as part of a broader civic ecosystem and promotes partnerships with municipal departments and local organizations.

MSAD #60 served 2,773 students across eight campuses as of the most recent reporting period. In fall 2024, Harriman and Associates completed a comprehensive facilities study that assessed building conditions, infrastructure needs, and future enrollment trends. The study confirmed an overall decrease in district-level enrollment while identifying areas needing repairs, safety enhancements, and solutions for space constraints. A state-awarded grant brought approximately 90 Pre-K students to the district beginning fall 2025, selected by lottery.

The district allocates costs using a 50% valuation and 50% enrollment formula. As the community with the largest number of students, Berwick has the highest overall cost. Long-range coordination between the Town and MSAD60 is important to align housing growth, enrollment patterns, and infrastructure planning.





POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Berwick Police Department provides year-round law enforcement services and mutual aid to surrounding communities. The Department safeguards life and property, enforces Town ordinances and state law, and partners with the community to enhance quality of life.

Staffing includes command staff, patrol officers, investigative capacity, administrative support, and animal control services. The Department has achieved accreditation through the Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation Program after a multiyear process that requires documented policies and compliance with professional standards.

Calls for service remain consistently high, at over 10,000 per year, reflecting both traditional law enforcement needs and broader community safety responsibilities. Monitoring long-term trends in call volume helps inform staffing, training, facility planning, and coordination with social services.

The Department works closely with schools through the School Resource Officer program and maintains communication with General Assistance and other municipal services to respond to complex or vulnerable situations in a coordinated manner.

The Police Department operates from a renovated former school building that has served both the department and the community well. Over time, the Town and the department have managed renovations and capital improvements carefully to ensure the facility continues to meet operational needs. While ongoing maintenance and periodic upgrades will be necessary, the building currently provides adequate space and functional capacity to support the department's operations and anticipated future needs.

FIRE & RESCUE

Berwick Fire & Rescue provides fire suppression, non-transport emergency medical response, vehicle extrication, fire prevention education, and mutual aid services. The Department operates as a combination department with career, per diem, and on-call personnel providing twenty-four-hour coverage.

The Department operates from a single fire station and maintains a diversified fleet that includes engines, a quint ladder-and-pumper combination, a tanker, rescue units, forestry apparatus, command vehicles, and a rescue boat.

Call volume has increased significantly over the past decade, driven largely by rising emergency medical responses, storm-related incidents, and broader public safety demands. This trend reflects both population growth and the evolving role of fire departments as first responders to a wide range of emergencies.

Like many communities, Berwick faces the broader national challenge of maintaining an on-call fire service workforce. Changes in work patterns, longer commute times, and shifting volunteer

availability have made it more difficult for municipalities to rely solely on traditional call firefighters. Many departments are increasingly supplementing on-call staffing with per diem and full-time personnel to ensure that minimum safe staffing levels can be maintained during all hours of the day.

Recruitment and retention of on-call personnel remain ongoing challenges common to many communities. As service demand grows, maintaining safe and reliable response coverage may require a gradual shift toward additional full-time staffing to ensure consistent response capability. Long-term planning must account for staffing capacity, apparatus replacement, and facility investment to maintain service readiness and firefighter safety.

Berwick currently relies on Stewart's Ambulance Service for advanced life support and transport. This arrangement has served the community, but as call volumes increase and response time expectations grow, the long-term relationship between fire response and emergency medical services warrants careful evaluation. Communities across Maine are increasingly examining whether locally controlled advanced life support capability, through paramedic-level training for fire personnel or a municipal ambulance unit, better serves growing populations. For Berwick, this is not an immediate decision but a planning question that deserves honest assessment before demand makes it urgent. The cost, staffing, training, and facility implications of any transition would be significant and must be evaluated against long-term financial capacity and community need.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Berwick maintains emergency operations protocols coordinated with York County Emergency Management Agency. Critical facilities including the Public Safety Complex and Town Hall are equipped with backup power. The Town conducts regular tabletop exercises with regional partners, including the City of Somersworth, to strengthen cross-border emergency response capacity.

PUBLIC WORKS

The Public Works Department maintains approximately 70 miles of roadway and more than 100 public roads, with winter maintenance extending to approximately 140 lane miles. Responsibilities include snow and ice control, pavement maintenance, drainage improvements, culvert inspection and replacement, roadside ditching, signage, pavement markings, and maintenance of Town-owned properties.

Operations are based at the Public Works Garage on Rochester Street. The facility has identified needs for expansion and renovation, including improvements to insulation, roofing, and heating systems. Facility condition directly affects operational efficiency and equipment longevity.

Given these conditions, a formal facility assessment and phased improvement strategy will be necessary to determine whether renovation, expansion, or long-term replacement is the most cost-effective solution.

The Department also serves as Director of Facilities and supports Town Hall operations, elections, recycling, and surplus management through the Transfer Station, and maintenance tasks such as painting and demolition of outdated fixtures.

Long-range capital planning for fleet replacement, specialized equipment acquisition, and facility upgrades will be essential to maintaining service levels and managing lifecycle costs.

TRANSFER STATION

The Berwick Transfer Station is operated by four part-time employees under the Public Works Department and serves as one of the most frequently visited municipal facilities in town. The facility accepts household trash, single-stream recycling, construction and demolition debris, brush, leaves, Christmas trees, tires, mattresses, and a wide range of special materials, including waste oil, antifreeze, universal waste such as batteries, fluorescent bulbs, mercury, and motor oil, as well as refrigerants requiring certified drainage. Metal, refrigerators, air conditioners, and electronics are also accepted, some with associated fees to offset disposal costs charged to the Town by contracted haulers. Aluminum can proceeds are donated to the Fire Department's Toys for Tots program.

Household trash and recycling move through a compactor system that consolidates material into a receptacle, which is then pulled and replaced by Waste Management when full. Single-stream recycling accepts aluminum, plastic, cardboard, and other recyclables together, which are then sorted at the Waste Management facility in Rochester. Construction and demolition debris is kept separate from household waste and transported to the Rochester facility as well. Brush, leaves, and organic material are collected in a dedicated pile area and periodically removed by a private contractor.

A notable community amenity at the facility is Ye Olde Stoppe and Swappe Shoppe, a reuse space operated in partnership with Envision Berwick and Noble High School's Transition Department and ACCESS program. Staffed by volunteers, the shop accepts donated goods including toys, books, housewares, clothing, and other reusable items, making them available to residents at no cost. The program reduces the volume of usable material entering the waste stream and provides a vocational and community connection for participating students.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Development activity has increased municipal workload across departments responsible for permitting and land use review. Building permits, renovations, and energy-related improvements have grown significantly over the past decade, reflecting both new construction and reinvestment in existing housing stock. Between 2014 and 2024, total permits issued increased from 112 to 391, nearly tripling in a single decade. Permit activity fluctuates with broader economic and housing cycles, and 2014 occurred during a period of slower construction following the national housing downturn. Even with those fluctuations, the comparison illustrates the scale of development activity now occurring in Berwick.

WATER

The Berwick Water Department provides potable water to approximately 900 to 1,000 service connections, serving an estimated 2,500 residents. The system draws water from the Salmon Falls River and includes a surface water treatment plant, approximately 15 miles of distribution mains, a 1-million-gallon storage tank on Pine Hill, and more than 130 hydrants.

Daily production typically ranges between two hundred thousand and three hundred thousand gallons per day, below the system's one million-gallon-per-day capacity. Recent upgrades have included filter media replacement, pump improvements, manganese treatment enhancements, and infrastructure refinements totaling more than three point three million dollars in planned improvements supported by federal and state funding.

Hydraulic limitations in certain areas have led to lower pressure in some neighborhoods. A feasibility study is underway to explore a potential interconnection with Somersworth to improve redundancy and resilience.

Water infrastructure is directly linked to fire protection, land use planning, housing growth, and public health.

SEWER

Wastewater service is provided by the Berwick Sewer District, an independent entity governed by a Board of Trustees appointed by the Select Board. The system supports higher-density residential, commercial, and industrial uses that would not be feasible with on-site systems.

Sewer extensions are typically funded by benefiting users. Long-term planning must coordinate with growth areas identified in the Future Land Use Plan and ensure regulatory compliance and environmental protection.

LIBRARY

The Berwick Public Library serves as a central civic institution offering physical and digital collections, internet access, programming, and meeting space. Beyond traditional book lending, the library functions as a technology access point, educational hub, and shared community space supporting education, workforce development, and civic engagement. In the most recent reporting period, the library recorded 25,388 visits, circulated 26,915 items, offered 314 programs with 4,303 attendees, and issued 354 new library cards. Ongoing building maintenance, accessibility improvements, and technology upgrades will be necessary to support evolving service expectations and community needs.

INTERNET & CABLE

Broadband service is available through multiple providers, including cable and some fiber options. Berwick is effectively fully served, with very few areas lacking access to reliable high-speed internet.

Remote work, telehealth, education, and business development remain important infrastructure considerations as the community continues to grow.

TOWN HALL

Constructed in 1939, Town Hall serves as the center of municipal governance and a defining civic landmark. Public input identified the Town Hall as the most important place to preserve to maintain rural character.

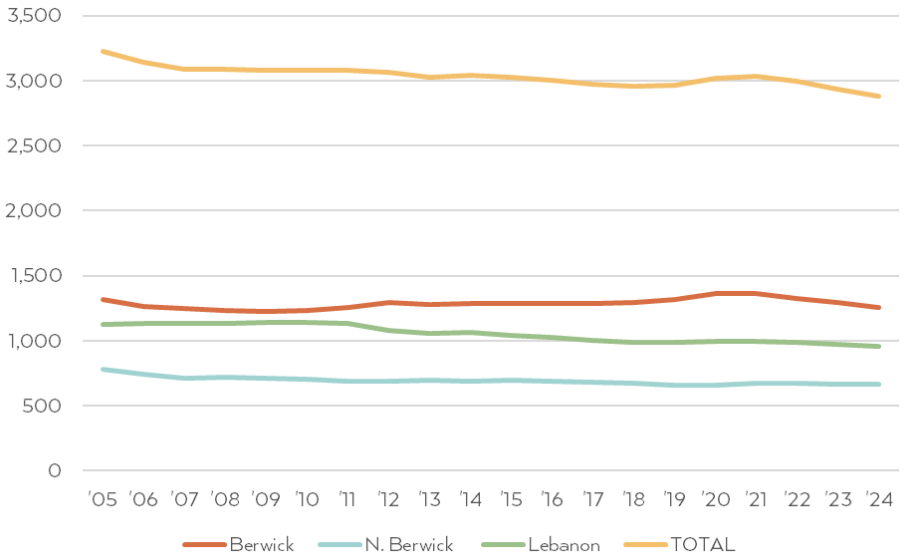
Recent improvements have included replacing the heating system. Identified needs include addressing water infiltration, rehabilitating exterior wood elements, including the clock tower, improving climate control, and replacing deteriorated exterior steps.

Preservation efforts must balance historic character with energy efficiency, accessibility, and operational needs.

Analysis & Trends

SCHOOLS

District-wide enrollment has declined in recent years, yet local housing production and redevelopment patterns may influence where enrollment pressures occur within specific schools. Even in a declining enrollment environment, grade reconfiguration, building utilization changes, and capital reinvestment decisions can affect transportation networks, municipal infrastructure, and neighborhood activity.



Future school-related impacts will likely center on traffic circulation, pedestrian safety, and long-term building reinvestment decisions. Coordination between municipal planning and MSAD60 will

remain important to ensure that housing growth, infrastructure capacity, and educational facility planning remain aligned. To formalize this coordination, the Town will establish an annual meeting between municipal leadership and MSAD60 to review enrollment trends, housing development activity, transportation impacts, and capital planning alignment. Regular communication will help anticipate infrastructure needs and reduce reactive decision-making.

POLICE DEPARTMENT

Calls for service remain consistently high and reflect the evolving nature of law enforcement responsibilities. While total call volume has remained relatively stable, the nature of calls has shifted. Police departments increasingly respond to medical emergencies, mental health situations, housing instability, substance misuse, and other complex social service issues alongside traditional enforcement duties.

As development patterns shift and housing density increases in certain areas, service demand may become more geographically concentrated. Long-term trends in call volume, rather than short-term fluctuations, should guide staffing, training, and facility planning decisions. Maintaining accreditation standards and professional facility conditions will continue to require capital attention and operational oversight.

FIRE & RESCUE

Fire and emergency medical response calls more than doubled over the past decade, growing from 567 calls in 2014 to 1,148 in 2024. This increase reflects broader demographic trends, an aging population, and increased development activity.

The combination staffing model provides flexibility, but recruitment and retention of on-call personnel remain a structural challenge. Long-term sustainability will depend on proactive staffing strategies, capital planning for apparatus replacement, and careful evaluation of facility capacity.

Growth in designated development areas must remain aligned with emergency response coverage and hydrant distribution to maintain acceptable response times and service reliability.

PUBLIC WORKS

Berwick maintains a large roadway network relative to its population size. Seasonal demands, particularly winter maintenance, place significant pressure on equipment, staffing, and facilities.

Aging infrastructure and deferred maintenance can increase long-term costs if not addressed proactively. The Public Works Garage has identified structural and capacity needs that directly affect equipment longevity and operational efficiency.

As development continues, road maintenance demand, drainage capacity, and pavement lifecycle management will require more formalized asset management practices and disciplined capital planning. Developing a centralized GIS-based asset management system will improve coordination

across departments by tracking infrastructure condition, lifecycle costs, and replacement timing. Integrated mapping and data management will support more informed capital planning decisions.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

TRANSFER STATION

The Transfer Station provides a broad and essential range of services that go well beyond basic trash disposal, functioning as a materials recovery, reuse, and hazardous waste management hub for the community. As Berwick's population grows, demand across all of these service streams is expected to increase proportionally, placing greater pressure on staffing, equipment, and site capacity.

Compactor capacity is central to the facility's ability to manage household waste volume efficiently. As usage grows, the Town should monitor compactor demand and plan for compactor capacity needs in the Capital Improvement Plan before operational pressure makes it urgent. Recycling market conditions and evolving state and federal solid waste regulations will continue to shape disposal costs and material acceptance policies, requiring ongoing flexibility in contracts and hauling partnerships.

The Swappe Shoppe represents a low-cost, high-value community program that reduces waste, builds community, and supports student development. Long-term facility planning should ensure the shop has adequate dedicated space as the overall facility evolves. A formal site capacity assessment should evaluate traffic flow, storage areas, staffing levels, and hours of operation relative to growing demand to keep the Transfer Station efficient, accessible, and financially sustainable.

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Beyond the point of approval, each new development introduces long-term administrative responsibilities. Compliance monitoring, complaint response, and infrastructure oversight, particularly for stormwater systems, extend the workload associated with land use decisions well beyond the initial permit. Regulatory programs such as MS4 stormwater requirements, which apply for the life of a development, illustrate how land use approvals translate directly into ongoing inspection, documentation, and enforcement obligations. As development patterns evolve, ensuring that Code Enforcement and Planning functions are adequately resourced will remain as important as the standards that guide where and how growth occurs.

WATER

The water system currently operates below its maximum production capacity, indicating potential ability to support additional growth. However, hydraulic balance, pressure distribution, and aging infrastructure present localized challenges.

Recent investments in treatment improvements, including manganese mitigation, reflect responsiveness to water quality concerns and regulatory standards. Continued capital planning will be necessary to address pressure variability, system redundancy, and resilience planning, including potential interconnection. Exploration of a permanent interconnection with Somersworth represents a potential long-term resilience strategy that could enhance redundancy, emergency supply flexibility, and future growth capacity.

Water infrastructure decisions will directly influence where growth can occur safely and efficiently within the Future Land Use Plan.

SEWER

Centralized wastewater infrastructure enables higher-density residential and commercial development in appropriate locations. Sewer availability directly shapes land-use patterns by determining where compact development can occur safely and efficiently. Directing higher-density growth to areas served by existing or planned sewer infrastructure reduces environmental risk, protects rural areas that rely on on-site septic systems, and improves long-term municipal service efficiency.

Effective growth management requires ongoing coordination between the Town and the Sewer District to ensure that system capacity aligns with designated growth areas in the Future Land Use Plan. Capital improvements must be timed strategically to support planned development while maintaining system reliability.

As sewer infrastructure continues to age, steady investment will be required to maintain regulatory compliance, environmental protection standards, and system performance. Clear communication regarding capacity, limitations, and planned upgrades will remain essential to responsible infrastructure and land use planning.

LIBRARY

Demand for public internet access, programming, and shared community space reflects the Library's expanding role beyond traditional collections. Digital access and technology services are increasingly part of essential infrastructure.

Future planning must consider technology upgrades, flexible interior space, and maintenance of a welcoming civic environment that supports learning and community engagement.

INTERNET & BROADBAND

Broadband access is now core infrastructure supporting remote work, telehealth, education, and economic development. While most areas of Berwick have multiple providers, isolated service gaps remain.

Future competitiveness and quality of life will depend on maintaining reliable, high-speed connectivity throughout the community. Monitoring service coverage and encouraging provider coordination will remain important.

TOWN HALL

Town Hall remains both a functional municipal building and a symbolic civic landmark. As an aging structure, it requires ongoing investment to address building-envelope issues, energy performance, and accessibility.

Deferred maintenance increases long-term costs and risk exposure. Strategic, phased reinvestment will be essential to preserve historic character while maintaining safe and efficient municipal operations. A phased capital improvement plan specific to Town Hall will help prioritize envelope repairs, accessibility upgrades, climate control improvements, and preservation of historic features while managing long-term costs.

Public input clearly prioritizes preserving the Town Hall, reinforcing its importance as a long-term capital planning priority.

INFRASTRUCTURE COORDINATION AND LONG-TERM RESILIENCE

Several consistent themes emerge across Berwick's public facilities and services: increasing service demand, aging infrastructure, growing regulatory complexity, and the need for stronger long-term capital planning.

In addition to capital investment, maintaining service quality will require regular evaluation of departmental staffing levels relative to service demand and projected growth. Over the past decade, both the Fire Department and Public Works Department grew from four to seven full-time staff members, reflecting real increases in service demand that capital planning must continue to anticipate.

Monitoring workload trends across departments will help ensure that facilities, equipment, and personnel capacity remain aligned.

Berwick's long-term fiscal stability will depend on proactive capital planning rather than reactive repair. Deferred maintenance increases future costs and operational risk. Strategic timing of investments, coordination across departments, and alignment between infrastructure capacity and the Future Land Use Plan will determine whether the Town can maintain service quality while protecting long-term affordability.

Climate resilience is an infrastructure planning consideration, not a separate program. Backup power, flood-proofing of critical facilities, and emergency shelter capacity should be evaluated as part of capital improvement planning for all major municipal buildings.

Infrastructure decisions made today will shape Berwick's financial flexibility, public safety, and growth patterns for decades.

Moving Forward

Berwick will implement this chapter through disciplined capital planning, coordinated infrastructure investment, and alignment between public facilities and the Future Land Use Plan.

The Town will maintain and annually review a multi-year Capital Improvement Plan that prioritizes fleet replacement, facility rehabilitation, water system upgrades, roadway preservation, and public safety infrastructure. Capital investments will be phased to protect service reliability while maintaining long-term fiscal sustainability.

Growth will be directed to areas where adequate water, sewer, roadway, and emergency response capacity already exists or can be efficiently expanded. Infrastructure planning will remain closely integrated with land use decisions to avoid extending services in ways that create long-term operational burdens or fiscal imbalance.

The Town will monitor enrollment patterns, emergency response trends, infrastructure condition, and utility system performance on a regular basis. This monitoring will inform staffing decisions, facility investments, and policy adjustments over time.

Berwick will continue to pursue grant funding, regional coordination, and intergovernmental partnerships to strengthen infrastructure resilience while reducing impacts on the local tax base.

Public buildings will remain accessible, welcoming civic spaces. Investments will prioritize safety, ADA accessibility, energy efficiency, and long-term durability while respecting historic character and community identity. Municipal spaces should be functional and inviting for residents of all ages and abilities.

By aligning infrastructure investment with growth management and fiscal capacity, Berwick will protect service quality, maintain public safety, and ensure that public facilities remain reliable, resilient, and financially sustainable for the next generation.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; FD is Fire Department; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; PD is Police Department; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

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GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
MSAD60			
Strengthen coordination between municipal infrastructure planning and school facility planning.	Establish an annual coordination meeting between Town leadership and MSAD60 to review enrollment trends, housing development patterns, traffic impacts, and capital planning alignment.	TM, SB	Annually
FIRE, EMS & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT			
Ensure Fire and Rescue staffing and training keep pace with call volume growth and community need.	Develop and implement a proactive recruitment and retention strategy for on-call Fire and Rescue personnel to address structural staffing challenges.	TM, SB, FD	Short
	Assess the feasibility and cost implications of transitioning Fire Department personnel to paramedic-level certification to support advanced life support capability.	TM, SB, FD	Long
	Establish a regular training review cycle to ensure personnel certifications remain current and service capabilities keep pace with call type changes.	FD	Ongoing
	Evaluate facility capacity to determine whether existing stations can support anticipated staffing, apparatus, and operational needs over the next decade.	TM, SB, FD	Mid
Evaluate the long-term emergency medical services model for Berwick and plan for future advanced life support capability.	Evaluate the long-term adequacy of the current third-party ambulance arrangement with Stewart's Ambulance Service relative to call volume growth, response times, and community need.	TM, SB, FD	Mid
	Assess the capital, staffing, and operational requirements of a municipal ambulance unit as a long-term option for Berwick's emergency medical services model.	TM, SB	Long
	Review mutual aid agreements with neighboring communities to ensure coverage gaps are identified and addressed as call volumes grow.	TM, FD	Ongoing
Align Fire and Rescue capital planning with growth, apparatus replacement schedules, and emergency medical service demands.	Include apparatus replacement schedules in the Capital Improvement Plan and maintain a rolling five-year forecast for major equipment needs.	TM, SB, FD	Ongoing
	Include emergency medical service capacity and apparatus needs in the Capital Improvement Plan	TM, SB, FD	Ongoing

	to ensure long-term planning reflects realistic growth in call volume.		
	Ensure that growth in designated development areas remains aligned with emergency response coverage and hydrant distribution to maintain acceptable response times.	PB, P&D, FD	Ongoing
	Evaluate the need for additional station capacity or strategic repositioning of apparatus as development patterns shift and response time data is analyzed.	TM, SB, FD	Long
GENERAL			
Improve long-term infrastructure decision-making through formalized asset management.	Develop a GIS system for the town that will support all departments and improve infrastructure efficiency and maintenance. Map all Town infrastructure as separate layers onto a single centralized GIS map.	TM, DH	Short
State of Maine Goal for Public Facilities & Services: To plan for, finance, and develop an efficient system of public facilities and services to accommodate anticipated growth and economic development.	Maintain and annually update a multi-year Capital Improvement Plan.	TM, SB	Annually
	Coordinate public facility capacity with the Future Land Use Plan.	P&D, TM, SB	Ongoing
	Direct growth to areas served by existing water, sewer, roadway, and emergency infrastructure.	P&D, PB, SB	Ongoing
	Monitor infrastructure condition and service demand trends across departments.	TM, DH	Annually
	Pursue grant funding and regional partnerships to reduce local capital burden.	TM, SB, DH	Ongoing
Support Aging in Place	Conduct an accessibility audit of municipal facilities and prioritize improvements in the Capital Improvement Plan.	TM, PW	Mid
Ensure all Departments have the staffing and resources needed to effectively handle additional growth and to sustain, maintain, and incrementally improve new facilities, amenities, and programs over time.	Explore options for regional delivery of local services.	SB, TM, DH	Short
	Evaluate departmental staffing levels relative to service demand and projected growth.	SB, TM, DH	Short
POLICE DEPARTMENT			
Maintain accreditation and ensure the Police Department meets professional standards as call volume and community complexity grow.	Maintain compliance with the Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation Program and complete all required policy reviews and audits on schedule.	TM, SB, PD	Ongoing
	Monitor long-term call volume trends annually and report findings to the Select Board to inform staffing, training, and facility planning decisions.	PD, TM	Annual
	Evaluate staffing levels relative to call volume growth and the evolving nature of law enforcement responsibilities, including mental health response, substance misuse, and housing instability.	TM, SB, PD	Mid

Strengthen coordination between the Police Department and social services to address complex community safety needs.	Maintain the School Resource Officer program and its coordination with MSAD60.	PD, TM	Ongoing
	Formalize coordination protocols between the Police Department, General Assistance, and other municipal services for responding to vulnerable residents and complex situations.	TM, PD, DH	Short
Ensure Police Department facilities support operational needs, accreditation standards, and long-term service capacity.	Assess current Police Department facility conditions and identify capital improvement needs in the Capital Improvement Plan.	TM, SB, PW	Mid
	Evaluate facility adequacy as development patterns shift and service demand grows to determine whether long-term expansion or reconfiguration is warranted.	TM, SB, PD	Long
PUBLIC WORKS			
Ensure Public Works facilities are modernized to support operational efficiency, equipment longevity, and employee safety.	Complete a facility assessment and develop a phased improvement or replacement plan for the Public Works Garage, including insulation, roofing, heating systems, and storage capacity improvements.	TM, PW, SB	Short to Mid
Maintain Berwick's roads	Develop a roadway pavement management and drainage prioritization program to guide annual resurfacing and culvert replacement decisions.	PW, TM	Short
TOWN HALL			
Preserve and modernize Town Hall as a functional and symbolic civic landmark.	Develop a phased capital improvement plan for Town Hall addressing water infiltration, exterior wood rehabilitation, climate control upgrades, accessibility improvements, and exterior step replacement.	TM, SB, PW	Mid
WATER			
Provide high-quality, dependable water to all water users on the town system, ensuring that an adequate supply is available for projected growth in town growth areas.	Evaluate options to improve water pressure, including standpipe improvements, adding a standpipe, a pump station, or alternative options.	WD, TM, SB	Short
	Establish permanent interconnection with Somersworth, NH	WD, SB, TM	Short to Mid
	Continue actions to further improve the existing distribution system.	WD	Ongoing
	Continuing maintenance of the Pine Hill Road water storage tank.	WD	Ongoing
	Evaluate the feasibility of using the aquifer in the Ridlon area for the town's water source.	WD, SB, TM	Mid

CHAPTER 13: REGIONAL COORDINATION

Summary & Plan for the Future

Many of the issues facing Berwick extend beyond the town line and require cooperation with neighboring municipalities, regional organizations, and cross-border partners. This chapter outlines Berwick's role within the larger network of communities in southern York County and the Seacoast, emphasizing how collaboration strengthens water resources, transportation systems, housing opportunities, public services, and the local economy.

Berwick residents live and work across a regional geography that no single municipality can plan for in isolation. Major employers in Kittery, North Berwick, and across the Seacoast draw workers from throughout southern York County, generating commuter traffic on shared highway corridors and contributing to housing demand that stretches well beyond any one town's borders. These conditions reinforce the need for coordinated land use, transportation, and housing strategies at the regional level. The Joint Land Use Study led by SMPDC in partnership with the Town of Kittery and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, completed in 2020 and continuing through ongoing implementation phases, offers a model for how regional partners can address the transportation and workforce housing challenges that large employers create across a multi-town geography.

Berwick is already an active partner in regional efforts such as the Southern Maine Stormwater Working Group and the KACTS Metropolitan Planning Organization. It shares education responsibility with North Berwick and Lebanon through MSAD60, and participates in SMPDC to align local planning with broader regional strategies. Looking ahead, Berwick will strengthen these partnerships across transportation, housing, economic development, shared services, and emergency preparedness. By coordinating with neighboring towns and drawing on county and state resources, the Town can reduce costs, protect critical resources, and ensure long-term resilience for its residents.

Introduction

Berwick sits at the southern edge of Maine, bordered by New Hampshire to the south and connected by road and river to communities in both states. The Salmon Falls River does not stop at the town line, and neither do the roads Berwick residents drive to work each morning. Housing markets, school districts, watersheds, and transportation networks all stretch across municipal boundaries in ways that make purely local planning insufficient. A decision made in an upstream community about land use can affect the quality of the Salmon Falls. A neighboring town's choices about water infrastructure can affect Berwick's supply. A new employer anywhere in the Seacoast can add hundreds of cars to regional highway corridors every weekday. Recognizing this interconnectedness is not a matter of preference; it is a practical requirement for sound planning. Berwick has worked to build and maintain relationships with neighboring communities, regional organizations, and state agencies precisely because the challenges that matter most to residents rarely stop at the town line.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

Transportation is one of the most visible areas of regional cooperation. Berwick participates in the KACTS Metropolitan Planning Organization, helping guide transportation planning and funding decisions so that local priorities, such as road maintenance, sidewalk extension, and downtown circulation improvements, are represented. Berwick has steadily expanded its pedestrian and bicycle routes, with a long-term goal of creating a safe, continuous connection to Somersworth. Regional transit complements this work: the Cooperative Alliance for Seacoast Transportation (COAST) provides service that links Berwick to surrounding communities, improving access to work, services, and recreation while reducing reliance on single-occupancy vehicles.

Major employers throughout the Seacoast region draw workers from communities across southern York County and into New Hampshire. The Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery illustrates this pattern clearly. According to the Seacoast Shipyard Association, 433 Berwick residents were employed at the Shipyard in 2024, making Berwick one of the top five source communities in the region. The data reflects a workforce that is broadly distributed across the region, commuting daily on shared highway corridors including Routes 4, 9, and 236. Other major employers, including Pratt & Whitney in North Berwick, contribute to similar patterns. Addressing that commuter demand requires coordination across towns, with MaineDOT, and through the KACTS planning process.

REGIONAL SHIPYARD EMPLOYMENT

MUNICIPALITY	COUNT	MUNICIPALITY	COUNT	MUNICIPALITY	COUNT
Sanford, ME	573	S. Berwick, ME	374	N. Berwick, ME	231
Rochester, NH	527	Eliot, ME	322	Somersworth, NH	224
Dover, NH	469	Lebanon, ME	329	York, ME	189

Kittery, ME	453	Wells, ME	262	Barrington, NH	170
Berwick, ME	433	Portsmouth, NH	235	Biddeford, ME	162

Source: Seacoast Shipyard Association CY 2024

The JLUS, a planning effort led by SMPDC in partnership with the Town of Kittery and Portsmouth Naval Shipyard, completed in January 2020 and funded by the Department of Defense, provides a useful example of how regional partners can collaboratively address the transportation and workforce housing pressures that large employment centers create across a broad geography. As part of JLUS implementation, the Urban Land Institute convened a Technical Assistance Panel in 2021 that examined both Kittery and Berwick, focusing on workforce housing and transit options for commuters. The JLUS Partnership was formalized through a memorandum of understanding in 2021 and continues to advance multimodal transportation and housing recommendations. Berwick's participation in SMPDC and KACTS positions it to remain engaged as this regional work progresses.

Water resources present another key shared priority. The Salmon Falls River is the principal source for Berwick's public water supply, but its health depends on consistent management across the watershed. The Town participates in the MS4 stormwater program and is an active member of the Southern Maine Stormwater Working Group (SMSWG), which brings together neighboring municipalities and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in collaborative efforts to reduce stormwater pollution, monitor river health, and promote best practices. The Berwick Water District, which draws primarily from the Salmon Falls, works closely with the Town and with upstream and downstream partners to safeguard water quality and supply reliability.

Berwick and the City of Somersworth have developed a strong partnership around water system planning and emergency preparedness. The two communities are working together to design a water system interconnection that would allow Somersworth to supply water to Berwick during an emergency disruption, strengthening redundancy and formalizing mutual aid across municipal lines. Staff and water operators regularly share technical information, coordinate planning, and collaborate to protect the shared watershed. This ongoing cooperation improves reliability for both communities and reflects practical, effective regional coordination.

In recent years, the Town and the City of Somersworth have conducted two joint, multi-department, multi-disciplinary emergency response tabletop exercises. Each brought together dozens of participants from both communities to walk through coordinated response scenarios, clarify roles and communication protocols, and strengthen regional preparedness. These exercises reflect an ongoing commitment to shared planning and cross-border collaboration in protecting public health and safety.

Housing and education are likewise shaped by regional conditions. Rising housing costs in York County and coastal communities have pushed much of the workforce inland, making Berwick part of

a broader regional housing market. Workforce housing near major employment centers is in short supply across the Seacoast, and the resulting pressure falls on communities like Berwick that offer relatively more affordable options. Berwick is also a member of MSAD60 along with North Berwick and Lebanon. Together, the district must balance educational quality and resources while ensuring fairness in cost sharing across the three towns.

Berwick is closely connected to the regional economy. Its downtown revitalization strategy is inherently regional in nature, benefiting from its position in the greater Seacoast economy. Partnerships with Somersworth, Rollinsford, South Berwick, North Berwick, and other nearby municipalities help attract visitors, support entrepreneurship, and align business development strategies across municipal boundaries.

York County itself has developed significant new institutional infrastructure. The county has built a first responder training center and a substance use recovery center on county-owned land off Layman Way in Alfred. The training facility serves law enforcement, fire, EMS, dispatch, corrections, and related emergency roles, offering workforce development close to home. The recovery center includes over 50 beds and a range of treatment and observation services to meet regional needs. These county facilities present opportunities for Berwick to integrate into broader training, emergency support, and human services systems, expanding capacity and reducing duplication across municipal boundaries.

State agencies also play an important role in regional coordination. The Maine Office of Community Affairs provides guidance and funding to help municipalities align local plans with statewide priorities. The Maine Department of Transportation, Department of Environmental Protection, Maine State Housing Authority, Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, and the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention support transportation planning, watershed protection, housing policy, land conservation, and public health coordination. Their technical assistance and funding programs strengthen local decision-making and help communities respond consistently across municipal boundaries.

Regional planning entities such as SMPDC serve as critical intermediaries, helping municipalities coordinate transportation planning, economic development, resilience, and data analysis across communities. Together, these state and regional partners create a framework in which Berwick can collaborate effectively across jurisdictional lines, pursue shared funding opportunities, and advance coordinated strategies that reflect the interconnected nature of transportation systems, watersheds, housing markets, and economic development.

Analysis & Trends

Emerging trends strengthen the case for regional coordination. Transportation planning is increasingly multimodal, encompassing roads, sidewalks, bike paths, and transit, with funding favoring projects that integrate across jurisdictions. Without active participation in KACTS, Berwick risks

being passed over in competition for state and federal transportation funds. The commuter patterns created by large regional employers further underscore the need for multimodal solutions that no single town can implement on its own.

Intensifying extreme weather events, upstream land use change, and development pressures make watershed protection and stormwater resilience more urgent than ever. The fiscal pressures facing municipalities further underscore the value of shared services and cooperative arrangements in delivering public services cost-effectively.

Housing demand continues to outstrip supply across southern York County and the Seacoast, creating affordability pressures no individual town can resolve alone. Workers employed at regional job centers are increasingly priced out of communities closest to those employers and are looking further inland, including in Berwick. Coordinated approaches across towns and using county-level resources and planning frameworks will be necessary to make meaningful progress. Meanwhile, economic growth is most sustainable when towns collaborate, pooling marketing and visitor attraction strategies and aligning redevelopment efforts rather than acting in isolation.

The county's new training and recovery center facilities reflect shifting regional service models. These facilities can function as hubs for resilience, emergency preparedness, professional development, and human services, offering a model for how municipal plans like Berwick's can complement and leverage county infrastructure.

Moving Forward

Berwick's success will depend on strong regional partnerships. Many of the Town's biggest challenges, including transportation, water quality, housing, and emergency preparedness, cross municipal lines. Continued coordination with neighboring communities will strengthen efficiency and long-term stability. The Town will stay engaged with regional transportation planning through KACTS and continue working with nearby communities to protect the Salmon Falls River and strengthen stormwater management. Housing and education will also require ongoing regional coordination, especially as workforce needs and school funding affect more than one town. Berwick will continue exploring shared services and joint purchasing and will align economic development efforts with the broader Seacoast region.

Collaboration with York County will support coordinated emergency response and shared services. At the state level, agencies provide guidance, funding, technical support, and public health coordination that strengthen local decision-making and regional preparedness. Berwick's future will not be built in isolation. By maintaining steady partnerships at the municipal, county, and state levels, the Town ensures that it remains competitive for funding, prepared for emergencies, and aligned with the broader economic and environmental systems that shape daily life.

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Maintain active participation in regional transportation planning through KACTS.	Continue participation in the KACTS Metropolitan Planning Organization to ensure Berwick's transportation priorities are represented in regional funding and planning decisions.	TM, P&D	Ongoing
	Advance sidewalk, pedestrian, and bicycle route improvements in coordination with KACTS and regional partners, with a long-term goal of a continuous connection to Somersworth.	P&D, PW	Ongoing
	Support COAST transit service as a regional mobility option that reduces single-occupancy vehicle trips and connects residents to employment and services.	TM, SB	Ongoing
Protect the Salmon Falls River watershed through coordinated regional water quality management.	Maintain active membership in the Southern Maine Stormwater Working Group to reduce stormwater pollution, monitor river health, and share best practices with neighboring municipalities and the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard.	P&D, PW	Ongoing
	Continue coordination between the Town and the Berwick Water District to safeguard water quality and supply reliability in the Salmon Falls River watershed.	TM, WD	Ongoing
	Complete planning and design for the Berwick-Somersworth water system interconnection to ensure emergency water supply redundancy across municipal lines.	TM, WD, SB	Short
Strengthen emergency preparedness through cross-border exercises and mutual aid.	Continue joint multi-department emergency response tabletop exercises with Somersworth and other neighboring communities to clarify roles, test communication protocols, and improve regional preparedness.	TM, DH	Annually
	Explore integration with York County's first responder training center in Alfred to expand	TM, DH	Short

	workforce development opportunities for Berwick emergency personnel.		
	Maintain and update mutual aid agreements with neighboring municipalities to ensure coordinated emergency response across jurisdictional lines.	TM, SB	Ongoing
Coordinate with regional partners on housing, economic development, and shared services.	Continue participation in the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission to align local plans with regional economic development, transportation, and resilience strategies.	TM, P&D	Ongoing
	Explore shared services and joint purchasing opportunities with Somersworth, North Berwick, South Berwick, and other neighboring municipalities to reduce costs and improve service delivery.	TM, SB	Annually
	Align downtown revitalization and economic development efforts with regional Seacoast strategies to attract visitors, support entrepreneurship, and strengthen the broader regional economy.	TM, P&D	Ongoing
	Monitor developments in the JLUS Partnership process led by SMPDC and remain engaged through KACTS and SMPDC on multimodal transportation and workforce housing strategies that address commuter demand from major regional employment centers.	TM, P&D	Ongoing
Coordinate with MSAD60 on education funding, facilities, and workforce needs across Berwick, North Berwick, and Lebanon.	Maintain active communication with MSAD60 on school funding, capital planning, and educational programming to ensure fair and effective cost sharing across the three district towns.	TM, SB	Ongoing

CHAPTER 14: FISCAL CAPACITY

Summary and Plan for the Future

Fiscal capacity is a town's ability to raise enough revenue to fund the services and facilities its residents depend on while keeping the tax burden manageable. Berwick raises money primarily through the property tax, supplemented by motor vehicle excise taxes, state revenue sharing, intergovernmental grants, user fees, and charges for services. It spends that money on education, public safety, public works, general government, and capital investments. The margin between what comes in and what goes out, managed carefully over time, determines whether a town can meet its obligations, maintain its infrastructure, and invest in its future without destabilizing its tax rate.

By that measure, Berwick is in a solid position. Total taxable valuation has more than doubled since 2010, rising from approximately $613 million to $1.243 billion in 2025. Total revenues grew from $18.6 million in FY2021 to $25.4 million in FY2025. The Town carries a manageable long-term debt load, now below $6.2 million and declining. Fund balances have grown steadily, with the total fund balance reaching $6.3 million in FY2025. Five consecutive clean audit opinions reflect strong internal controls and reliable financial reporting. These are genuine strengths that support borrowing capacity, grant eligibility, and long-term planning.

Several trends require attention. The tax base is heavily residential, which concentrates the cost of municipal services on homeowners and limits revenue flexibility. Inflation has permanently raised the baseline cost of operations, contracted services, wages, and capital projects, meaning valuation growth does not translate directly into expanded purchasing power. Education costs, which are set by MSAD 60 rather than the Town, represent the single largest expenditure and have grown faster than most other budget lines. Grant funding has supported meaningful capital investments in recent years and will continue to be pursued as an important supplement to local revenue. When the TIF district expires in 2036, the full value of the redeveloped downtown properties returns to the general tax roll. That is good news for Berwick's long-term fiscal health, though the Town will need to account for how the change affects state revenue sharing and education subsidy calculations.

Berwick will focus on maintaining strong reserves by regularly updating a multi-year Capital Improvement Plan, pursuing grant funding to offset capital costs, monitoring major cost drivers, and diversifying the tax base through commercial and mixed-use development. Sustaining this discipline is what keeps the Town's financial position stable and makes the investments outlined throughout this Comprehensive Plan achievable.

Introduction

In Maine, municipalities shoulder a wide range of direct service responsibilities, from public safety and road maintenance to schools, water systems, and recreation. Fiscal health underpins the Town's ability to follow through on nearly every priority in this plan.

Berwick's fiscal capacity is shaped by four interrelated factors. The first is the tax base, primarily the total assessed value of property in town, which determines how much revenue can be raised at any given tax rate. The second is the mix of revenue sources, including state aid, excise taxes, user fees, and grants, each of which carries different levels of reliability. The third is the cost structure, the ongoing obligations the Town carries for staffing, services, debt, and infrastructure maintenance. The fourth is financial management, the reserve policies, capital planning practices, and budgeting discipline that determine how well the Town can absorb uncertainty and invest strategically over time.

These four factors do not operate independently. A residential-heavy tax base shifts the burden of funding services onto homeowners and limits the Town's ability to grow revenue without raising tax bills. In some years, costs rise faster than property values, which means the Town's purchasing power can shrink even as the tax base grows. Deferred capital investment saves money in the short term but compounds future obligations. And land use decisions made today, where growth is directed and what it looks like, shape fiscal conditions for decades.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

VALUATION AND TAX BASE

Maine Revenue Services' Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summaries provide a long-term picture of Berwick's taxable valuation. Between 2010 and 2015, valuation growth was modest, increasing approximately 2.2% over five years following the Great Recession. From 2015 to 2020, valuation increased approximately 15%, reflecting renewed development and market recovery. The most significant change occurred between 2020 and 2025, when the valuation increased by more than 72% in five years.

BERWICK TOTAL VALUATION HISTORY

2010	2015	2020	2025
$612,885,611	$626,615,551	$721,532,871	$1,243,000,000

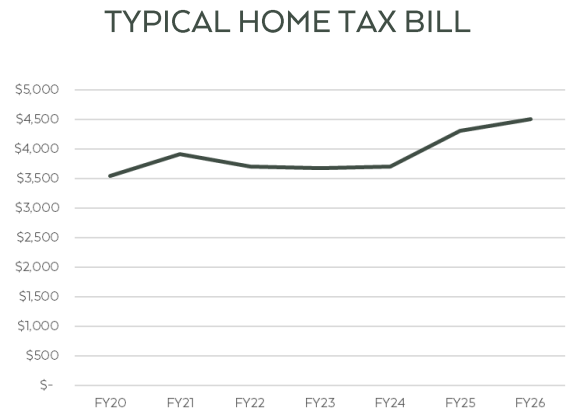
Overall, Berwick's total valuation has increased approximately 103% since 2010, rising from roughly $613 million to $1.243 billion. This growth strengthens the Town's fiscal capacity by expanding the tax base and improving bonding potential. However, that growth has been driven primarily by residential real estate appreciation rather than commercial or industrial expansion. A residential-

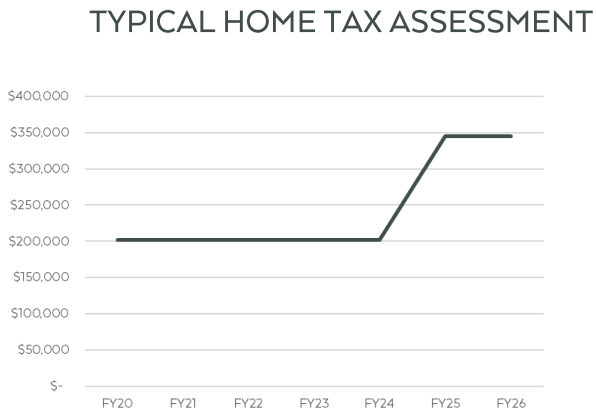
heavy tax base places the burden of funding public services on homeowners and limits the Town's ability to grow revenue without increasing residential tax bills. Encouraging commercial and mixed-use development, particularly within designated growth areas, remains essential to achieving a more balanced and resilient tax base.

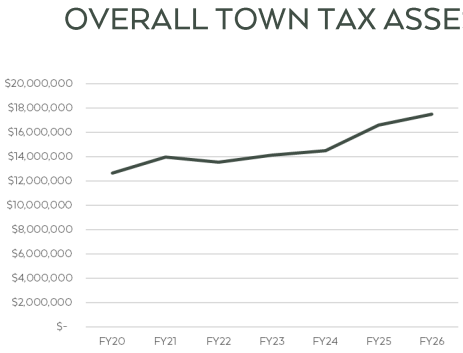
TYPICAL HOME

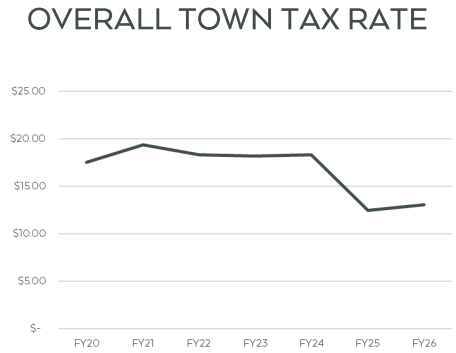
The "Typical Home" charts below illustrate how Berwick's property tax system functions over time. The top left chart shows the annual tax bill for a typical home, while the top right shows the assessed value of that property. The remaining charts show the Town's total annual tax commitment and the municipal tax rate. Together, these charts demonstrate the relationship between municipal spending and individual tax bills. In Maine's property tax system, the amount raised through property taxes is determined primarily by the Town's annual tax commitment. Assessed values influence how the tax burden is distributed among properties, but do not independently determine the total revenue collected.

Following the Town-wide revaluation, the tax rate declined because higher assessed values expanded the tax base, allowing the same overall tax commitment to be raised at a lower rate. This illustrates a common misconception: higher property values do not automatically result in higher tax bills unless the Town's overall tax commitment also increases.



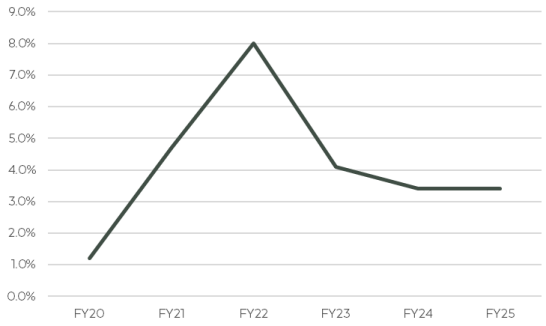






INFLATION

Inflation has materially impacted all aspects of municipal operations in recent years. Rising costs for fuel, road salt, equipment, construction materials, contracted services, health insurance, and employee wages have increased baseline operating expenses and capital project estimates. Competitive labor markets have placed additional upward pressure on municipal wages as communities seek to attract and retain qualified staff.



At the same time, inflation and broader market pressures significantly influenced property valuation growth between 2020 and 2025. Housing shortages, strong regional demand, limited inventory, and elevated construction costs contributed to rapid residential price appreciation. As a result, a portion of the Town's valuation increase reflects inflationary market conditions rather than solely new development or expanded economic activity.

Because inflation affects both municipal costs and assessed values, increases in valuation do not automatically translate into proportional gains in purchasing power. Long-term fiscal stability, therefore, depends on careful revenue forecasting, disciplined budgeting, and proactive capital planning to manage cyclical market conditions.

REGIONAL VALUATION CONTEXT

In 2025, Berwick's total valuation of approximately $1.243 billion places it in the middle tier of York County municipalities, ranking 15th out of 29 towns and cities. It is comparable in valuation to communities such as Eliot, South Berwick, Acton, and North Berwick.

Unlike coastal municipalities such as York, Wells, and Kennebunk, Berwick does not benefit from high-value shoreline property or significant seasonal residential valuation. As a result, the Town's fiscal capacity relies more directly on year-round residential property owners and modest commercial activity. This context reinforces the importance of intentional economic development and tax base diversification to maintain fiscal balance.

REVENUE SOURCES

Berwick's primary revenue source is the property tax. Additional revenues include state revenue sharing, motor vehicle excise tax intergovernmental grants, user fees, permits, and charges for services.

State revenue sharing and grant funding can fluctuate based on state and federal policy decisions. While grant funding can support capital improvements or one-time investments, it does not replace stable ongoing revenue. Maintaining conservative revenue forecasting practices helps reduce volatility and ensures predictable budgeting.

REVENUE

REVENUE CATEGORY	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
PROPERTY TAXES	$14,011,405	$13,599,618	$13,740,863	$14,017,217	$16,362,386
EXCISE TAXES	$1,830,179	$1,722,563	$1,689,030	$1,807,842	$1,957,761
GRANTS & CONTRIBUTIONS (UNRESTRICTED)	$1,577,610	$2,817,382	$2,382,993	$2,544,654	$2,448,016
OPERATING GRANTS & CONTRIBUTIONS	$96,417	$200,711	$349,981	$1,047,917	$2,838,644
CHARGES FOR SERVICES	$488,253	$620,346	$645,629	$937,505	$859,661
MISC.	$562,891	$394,718	$1,024,794	$833,585	$981,470
TOTAL REVENUES	$18,566,755	$19,355,338	$19,833,290	$21,188,720	$25,447,938

The grants and contributions section is divided into two separate categories that measure different things. "Grants and contributions not restricted to specific programs" (Unrestricted) covers ongoing state reimbursements including state revenue sharing, homestead exemption reimbursement, Business Equipment Tax Exemption (BETE) reimbursement, tree growth reimbursement, and veterans reimbursements. This category grew between FY2021 and FY2022 and has held fairly steady since, coming in between roughly $2.4 million and $2.8 million each year.

Operating grants and contributions, on the other hand, captures project-based funding that comes and goes. This line climbed from $96,417 in FY2021 to $2,838,644 in FY2025, driven largely by federal programs including Community Directed Spending (CDS) funding and Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. These programs have done real good for the Town, but they are one-time or time-limited, and they should not be counted as steady, year-to-year income when thinking about long-term fiscal health. As these funds run out, the Town should expect that revenue line to drop and budget with that in mind.

EXPENDITURES AND COST DRIVERS

Municipal expenditures in Berwick are driven primarily by education (MSAD60 assessment), public safety, public works and infrastructure maintenance, and general government operations.

Education represents the single largest municipal expenditure. The MSAD 60 assessment grew from approximately $8.36 million in FY2021 to $9.70 million in FY2025, an increase of more than 16 percent over five years. Because this assessment is determined by the regional school district rather than the municipality, the Town has limited direct control over this cost driver. Careful fiscal planning therefore requires anticipating education cost growth alongside other municipal obligations.

Maintaining fiscal sustainability requires aligning service levels with valuation growth while closely monitoring long-term cost drivers such as education funding, public safety staffing, infrastructure maintenance, and rising operational costs.

EXPENSES

EXPENDITURE CATEGORY	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
General Government	$1,398,301	$1,338,531	$1,550,298	$1,934,633	$2,161,378
Public Safety	$3,279,052	$4,002,382	$3,867,652	$4,333,952	$3,958,163
Public Works	$1,679,370	$1,931,767	$1,981,235	$2,198,896	$1,547,350
Recreation & Culture	$464,564	$541,750	$720,306	$731,540	$825,263
Health & Welfare	$4,835	$26,209	$26,685	$39,461	$60,681
Education (MSAD 60 Assessment)	$8,358,594	$8,140,455	$8,548,782	$8,909,024	$9,704,779
County Tax	$357,114	$363,324	$376,096	$400,007	$437,194
Outside Appropriations	$23,101	$21,700	$24,200	$32,460	$38,085
Unclassified	$257,472	$418,163	$920,902	$1,058,884	$2,539,840
Unallocated Depreciation	$25,833	$22,105	$29,088	$26,748	$40,283
TOTAL EXPENSES	$15,848,236	$16,806,386	$18,045,244	$19,665,605	$21,313,016

FUND BALANCE AND FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Berwick's financial statements are audited annually by an independent accounting firm. The Town has received clean, unmodified audit opinions for five consecutive fiscal years (FY2021 through FY2025). Auditors reported no material weaknesses in internal controls and no instances of reportable noncompliance under Government Auditing Standards. This consistent record reflects strong financial management practices and reliable financial reporting.

Strong internal controls and accurate financial reporting support transparency, credibility, and long-term fiscal planning.

FUND BALANCE HISTORY

TYPE	FY 20	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
Non-Spendable	$85,043	$161,990	$220,938	$225,672	$182,433	$127,520
Committed	$247,646	$213,400	$203,671	$247,821	$344,794	$386,188
Assigned	$974,100	$-	$1,530,000	$1,716,492	$1,279,550	$1,272,380
Unassigned	$2,702,910	$4,508,185	$3,925,062	$3,637,090	$3,930,972	$4,534,433
TOTAL	$4,009,699	$4,883,575	$5,879,671	$5,827,075	$5,737,749	$6,320,521

Maintaining healthy unassigned fund balance reserves provides cash-flow stability, protection against economic downturns, flexibility for one-time investments and support for favorable borrowing conditions.

Reserve policies help stabilize the tax rate and provide financial resilience during periods of uncertainty.

GROWTH AND FISCAL IMPACTS

Valuation growth alone does not guarantee fiscal sustainability. Growth can increase demand for public safety services, road maintenance and snow removal, school capacity and transportation, water and sewer infrastructure and recreation and public facilities.

When growth occurs in areas already served by infrastructure, such as designated growth areas and downtown, service delivery is typically more efficient. Dispersed rural development can increase per-unit service costs and long-term maintenance obligations.

Aligning land use policy with fiscal planning will remain critical to maintaining balance between development and service capacity.

TAX INCREMENT FINANCING TIF DISTRICT

Berwick's Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district is a strategic tool to increase economic activity in an area targeted for redevelopment. Scheduled to expire in 2036, the district was established to stimulate private investment, expand the tax base, and support public infrastructure improvements. The primary objective during the life of the district is to maximize taxable value so that, upon expiration, the full assessed value returns to the general tax base, strengthening long-term fiscal capacity and helping offset future tax pressure.

As part of this effort, the Town entered into a performance-based Credit Enhancement Agreement (CEA) with JCS 16 Great Falls Construction to incentivize redevelopment. The agreement leverages

private capital through a time-limited tax reimbursement structure designed to accelerate value creation that might not otherwise occur.

As the TIF district approaches its final year in 2036, the Town will use careful budgeting and long-term planning to prepare for the full value returning to the tax roll. This added value is expected to strengthen the tax base, but it may also affect state revenue sharing and education subsidies.

DEBT AND CAPITAL PLANNING

Debt is an important financing tool for long-lived capital assets such as buildings, roads, vehicles, and infrastructure improvements. Prudent debt management ensures that borrowing remains aligned with asset life and does not compromise long-term fiscal flexibility. As valuation increases, borrowing capacity expands; however, responsible use of debt requires careful coordination with capital planning.

LONG-TERM DEBT

FISCAL YEAR	GOVT. ACTIVITIES DEBT	BUSINESS-TYPE DEBT	TOTAL OUTSTANDING
FY21	$7,130,846	$281,491	$7,412,337
FY22	$6,960,594	$216,757	$7,177,351
FY23	$6,407,950	$152,023	$6,559,973
FY24	$6,456,772	$115,638	$6,572,410
FY25	$6,038,808	$77,707	$6,116,515

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (CIP)

A structured, multi-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) helps identify infrastructure needs in advance, schedule investments strategically, phase projects to maintain affordability, and align capital investments with growth patterns. Proactive capital planning is particularly important to ensure infrastructure keeps pace with community expectations.

DEPARTMENT & PROJECT	DESCRIPTION	FUNDING APPROACH	TIMEFRAME
COMMUNICATIONS & MEDIA			
Replace Meeting Room Cameras	Replace aging cameras in the Select Board meeting room to improve video quality for public meetings and recordings.	$30,000	Short
FIRE DEPARTMENT			
Replace Aerial Truck	Replace the Fire Department's aging aerial truck, which is critical for fighting structure fires and conducting rescues at	Dedicating UFB toward purchasing	Mid

	height. The current apparatus is approaching end of service life.	and financing the remaining balance of $1,500,000	
Mobile & Portable Radios	Maintain and replace mobile and portable radio equipment to ensure reliable communications for fire personnel on scene and during emergency operations.	Annual operating budget; grants as available	Ongoing
PPE	Ongoing replacement of personal protective equipment (turnout gear, helmets, gloves, SCBA) per NFPA standards to ensure firefighter safety and regulatory compliance.	Annual operating budget; FEMA/SAFER grants as available	Ongoing
Hose Replacement	Systematically test and replace fire hose inventory on a rotating basis to ensure operational readiness and meet service life requirements.	Annual operating budget	Ongoing
PARKS & RECREATION			
MEMORIAL PARK			
Design Memorial Field Building	Design of building to meet needs of the department, including permanent bathrooms, improved storage, and programming space.	$20,000	Short
Construct Memorial Field Building	New building to include permanent bathrooms, improved store, meet goal of department.	$3,500,000	Long
Equipment to Maintain Memorial Park	Equipment to support the ongoing maintenance plan for Memorial Park facilities and fields.	$ 25,000	Short
Rookie Field Improvements	Required improvements to the Rookie baseball field at Memorial Park.		Short
Denny Moore Field (Minor) Improvements	Required improvements to the Minor baseball field (Denny Moore Field) at Memorial Park.		Short
Denny Moore Scoreboard	Electrical work and related improvements to restore the scoreboard to working condition.	$9,000	Short
Major Field Scoreboard	Electrical work and related improvements to restore the scoreboard to working condition.	$9,000	Short
Design 3-acre parcel	Design for park expansion of the acquired three-acre parcel adjacent to Memorial Park.		Short
Curbing around playground area	Curbing designed to keep mulch within the playground area.		Short
Design & Construct Walking Path	Walking path around Memorial Park, consistent with the Recreation Master Plan recommendation to install a walking and running circuit.		Mid
Design/Install Splash Pad	Design and installation of a splash pad at Memorial Park, responding to resident interest in family water amenities.		Mid
Field Lighting	Field lighting to support night games at Memorial Park.		Long
Security / Key Card System	Key card system for building and facility doors at Memorial Park.		Short
BERWICK LANDING KAYAK LAUNCH AT NEWICHAWANNOCK			

Kayak Equipment	2 racks, kayaks, paddles, life preservers for use at Berwick Landing.		Short
Shed	Shed to store kayak and paddling equipment at Berwick Landing.		Short
HATFIELD POND			
Parking Lot Improvement	Grading and related improvements to the parking/access area at Hatfield Pond.		Mid
Cameras	Security cameras at Hatfield Pond.		Mid
Kayak Equipment Racks	Racks, kayaks, paddles, and life preservers for use at Hatfield Pond.		Mid
Shed	Shed to store related equipment and materials at Hatfield Pond.		Mid
GENERAL PARKS			
Park Vehicles	Vehicle to maintain parks and recreation facilities.		Short
PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT			
Tax Maps Improvements Annually	Update and maintain digital and paper tax maps annually to reflect new subdivisions, lot line adjustments, and ownership changes, ensuring accurate parcel data for assessing and planning purposes.	$15,000	Ongoing
Planning/Code Software	Purchase or upgrade software used by the Planning and Code Enforcement departments to manage permit applications, track inspections, and streamline land use review workflows.	$25,000	Short
Plotter Printer	Replace or purchase a large-format plotter printer for in-house production of site plans, tax maps, zoning maps, and other planning documents, reducing reliance on outside printing services.	$4,500	Short
Replace Code vehicle (From Berwick PD)	Obtain a vehicle from the Berwick Police Department fleet for use by the Code Enforcement Officer, replacing the current aging or unavailable vehicle at minimal cost to the department.	Interdepartmental transfer; minimal cost	Short
POLICE DEPARTMENT			
Fleet Program	Ongoing replacement and maintenance of Police Department vehicles to support patrol and law enforcement operations.	UFB and Operating Budget	Ongoing
PUBLIC WORK & HIGHWAY			
Public Works Expansion & Renovation	Expansion and renovation of the Public Works Garage on Rochester Street, including improvements to insulation, roofing, heating systems, and storage capacity.	$2,000,000	Mid
Shoulder Machine	Single-sided road widener and shouldering machine, compatible with skid steers, loaders, and graders. Used for placing and shaping road shoulder material.	$65,000	Mid

Crack Sealing Machine	Self-contained hot-pour crack sealing machine with compressor and applicator. Used by Public Works to clean and seal pavement cracks on Town roads, preventing water infiltration and extending pavement life before full-depth failure requires more costly resurfacing.	$90,000	Mid
TOWN HALL			
Renovate Kitchen	Kitchen renovation at Town Hall.		Mid
Renovate Bathrooms	Bathroom renovation at Town Hall.		Short
Improve Auditorium Climate Control	Climate control upgrades for the Town Hall auditorium.		Mid
Improve Auditorium Acoustics	Acoustic improvements for the Town Hall auditorium.		Mid
Clocktower Improvements	Rehabilitation of exterior wood elements and related improvements to the clock tower.		Short
Replace Boiler	Replace two aging oil-fired hot water boilers with new Weil McLain units, including near-boiler piping, controls, and vent connections to the existing chimney.	$90,000	Short
TRANSFER STATION			
Purchase 4 Compactors	Purchase of four compactors for the Transfer Station's household trash and recycling operations.	$115,000 UFB	Short
WATER			
Water Plant Upgrades	Ongoing upgrades to the surface water treatment plant, including manganese treatment.	Grants, Bonds, Water Users	Ongoing and Mid
Somersworth, NH Interconnection	Establishment of a permanent water system interconnection with Somersworth, NH to improve redundancy and system resilience.	Grants, Bonds, Water Users	Mid

Analysis & Trends

Berwick's fiscal position has strengthened considerably over the past fifteen years, but several trends require ongoing attention to maintain long-term stability.

The most significant structural challenge is the composition of the tax base. Despite the dramatic valuation growth between 2020 and 2025, that growth has been driven primarily by residential real estate appreciation rather than commercial or industrial expansion. A residential-heavy tax base places the burden of funding public services disproportionately on homeowners and limits the Town's ability to grow revenue without increasing residential tax bills. Encouraging commercial and mixed-use development, particularly within the downtown TIF district and designated growth areas, remains essential to achieving a more balanced and resilient tax base.

Inflation has complicated fiscal planning in ways that outlast any single budget cycle. Rising costs for construction materials, fuel, health insurance, contracted services, and municipal wages have permanently elevated the baseline cost of operations and capital investment. While the 2020 to 2025 valuation surge expanded the tax base, it does not fully offset inflationary pressure on expenditures. The Town must continue to budget conservatively and update capital project cost estimates regularly to avoid underestimating future obligations.

The TIF district, scheduled to expire in 2036, presents both an opportunity and a planning imperative. When the district closes, the full assessed value of the redeveloped Prime Tanning site and surrounding properties will return to the general tax roll, which will strengthen long-term fiscal capacity. However, this transition will also affect state revenue sharing calculations and education subsidy levels. Planning for that shift now rather than in 2035 will ensure the Town is positioned to absorb the change without disruption.

Population and housing growth are increasing demand for services faster than infrastructure capacity in some areas. Public safety staffing, road maintenance, school capacity, and recreation facilities all face growing pressure. When new development occurs in rural or dispersed locations, per-unit service costs rise. Concentrating growth in areas already served by infrastructure is not only a land use principle; it is a fiscal one. The alignment of land use policy with fiscal planning will be increasingly important as development activity continues.

Finally, Berwick's fund balance has grown steadily and the Town maintains clean financial audits. These are genuine strengths that support borrowing capacity and provide a cushion against economic uncertainty. Sustaining this discipline, particularly as capital needs grow and inflation persists, will require continued commitment to reserve policies and multi-year financial planning.

Moving Forward

Looking ahead, Berwick will focus on maintaining long-term fiscal stability while supporting community priorities identified throughout this Comprehensive Plan.

The Town will continue to maintain strong financial reporting and internal controls, monitor fund balance levels and reserve policies to ensure long-term resilience, and develop and regularly update a multi-year Capital Improvement Plan. Infrastructure investments will be aligned with designated growth areas to promote efficiency and cost-effectiveness, while commercial and mixed-use development will be encouraged to diversify the tax base. The Town will also evaluate long-term service costs relative to valuation growth to ensure fiscal sustainability and preserve affordability for residents. Maintaining fiscal discipline will be essential to preserving affordability and managing future obligations.

Fiscal capacity planning will remain integrated with land use policy, housing strategy, public facilities planning, and economic development initiatives. Coordinated planning will help ensure that growth strengthens Berwick's financial position rather than creating structural imbalances.

By combining disciplined financial management with strategic investment and thoughtful growth planning, Berwick can maintain a stable tax base, support high-quality public services, and preserve long-term affordability for residents while protecting the Town's fiscal health for future generations.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; F is Finance Director; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TR is the Treasurer; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Finance existing and future services and facilities in a cost effective manner.	Actively reach out to federal, state and regional organizations for grants, guidance, and assistance.	TM, SB, P&D	Ongoing
	Ensure Berwick's compensation package for staff is competitive with the region.	TM, SB	Annually
	Develop 15-Year Capital Improvement Plan	TM, DH, F, SB	Short
	Update the CIP annually to reflect changing priorities, cost estimates, and available funding.	TM, F, DH, SB	Annually
	Evaluate the performance of the TIF district annually and plan for full value returning to the tax roll in 2036.	TM, F, P&D, SB	Annually
Maintain strong financial management and reporting.	Monitor and report on long-term cost drivers including education, public safety, and infrastructure.	TM, F, DH	Annually
Manage debt responsibly to preserve long-term fiscal flexibility.	Adopt a formal debt management policy establishing limits and guidelines for borrowing.	TM, F, T, SB	Short
	Ensure all debt issuances are tied to the CIP and aligned with asset useful life.	TM, F, T, SB	Ongoing
Ensure growth reasonably pays for itself.	Review development-related fees (permits, impact fees, inspections) periodically to ensure they reflect actual costs.	TM, F, P&D	Short

CHAPTER 15: CURRENT & FUTURE LAND USE

Summary & Plan for the Future

Berwick's physical form reflects three overlapping forces: a historic village development pattern, a late-twentieth-century development boom, and decades of steady lot-by-lot residential growth. Once a rural agricultural community, Berwick is growing into a vibrant mid-sized Maine town anchored by a traditional New England village. This chapter documents where that evolution has brought us and establishes a framework for where we go from here.

Most of the town remains rural in character, defined by forest, farmland, wetlands, and low-density residential development. The downtown and surrounding neighborhoods served by public water and sewer represent a more compact pattern that continues to attract reinvestment. The redevelopment of the former Prime Tanning site into The Edge at Berwick signals renewed confidence in Berwick's core, marking a shift from heavy industrial use to mixed residential and commercial activity.

Residential growth has gradually extended deeper into rural areas through individual lot splits along public streets and private rights-of-way, steadily increasing roadway and service obligations over time. Between 2010 and 2020, nearly half of all new dwelling units were built in the Rural Residential and Farm district, and survey data point to a long-term shift toward smaller parcels and more fragmented land ownership compared to 1990. Meanwhile, commercial and industrial activity remains concentrated along Routes 4 and 9, supporting employment and diversifying the tax base. These development patterns form the foundation for future zoning, infrastructure investment, and fiscal planning.

Berwick's Future Land Use Plan establishes a vision for where and how the town should grow, organized into four designations: Growth Areas, Transitional Areas, Rural Areas, and Economic Focus Areas. The framework supports growth where infrastructure exists, protects sensitive areas from overdevelopment, and reinforces Berwick's identity. Land-use policy will encourage compact, walkable growth downtown where water and sewer are available, while preserving rural landscapes through low-impact, clustered development. Protections for aquifers, wetlands, and wildlife habitat will be strengthened, and strong design standards will guide commercial and industrial growth along Routes 4 and 9. Land use policies will be aligned with infrastructure capacity and environmental goals throughout.

The Future Land Use Plan is not a static map but a living framework, one to be refined as conditions change and Berwick's vision continues to take shape.

Introduction

Land use planning shapes how land is organized and developed over time, reflecting zoning regulations, subdivision standards, infrastructure capacity, market conditions, and decades of incremental private investment. This chapter documents existing conditions and trends that define Berwick's physical form today and establishes the Future Land Use Plan as the framework for where and how the town will grow in the years ahead, providing the foundation for future zoning, ordinance updates, and capital investment decisions.

Regional employment centers throughout Southern Maine and the Seacoast continue to influence housing demand and reinforce Berwick's role within a broader regional market. That pressure is not new to Berwick. During the 1980s, Berwick was one of the fastest-growing communities in Maine, expanding by approximately 50 percent between 1980 and 1988, with nearly 69 new single-family homes constructed annually. That rapid expansion extended development into rural areas and reshaped the residential landscape. In response, the Town strengthened subdivision standards, zoning regulations, and infrastructure planning to better organize development and protect rural character, laying the foundation for its current growth management framework.

Building on that foundation, the Future Land Use Plan bridges Berwick's enduring values with modern realities, including state housing mandates, market pressures, and shifting economic trends. Its purpose is to guide where growth should occur and where it should be limited, ensuring development supports community values, protects critical resources, uses public infrastructure efficiently, and strengthens the sense of place that defines Berwick.

Inventory & Existing Conditions

HISTORY OF ZONING IN BERWICK

In the mid-1980s, Berwick experienced a period of rapid growth and intense civic debate. Rising development pressures placed new demands on schools, roads, and municipal services. At the same time, a private company identified land in Berwick as a potential location for a large regional landfill. Its scale and potential impact raised concerns about environmental protection, infrastructure capacity, and the town's long-term character.

In response, the Planning Board began drafting a land use and zoning ordinance to establish local development standards and provide clearer tools for reviewing large-scale projects. Zoning, however, was controversial. Many residents viewed it as an unnecessary restriction on private property rights, while others questioned whether it would effectively address growth challenges. Public meetings were well attended, petitions circulated, and town-wide votes were closely watched. At one point, zoning was rejected by voters.

Despite early opposition, the conversation continued. The ordinance was revised, additional hearings were held, and the issue returned to voters. A land use ordinance was eventually adopted and voters

also supported regulations for landfills. Together, these actions gave the town clearer authority to guide development. The proposed regional landfill ultimately did not move forward.

The experience marked a turning point in Berwick's planning history, demonstrating that land use policy here evolves through open debate, disagreement, and ultimately public votes. Many of the planning practices used today, including site plan review standards and an emphasis on transparency, reflect lessons learned during that period. Looking back helps explain why Berwick continues to value public participation, local decision-making, and an appropriate balance of regulations and private property rights.

OVERALL DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Most of Berwick's approximately thirty-eight square miles consists of rural land. Large tracts of forest, active and historic farmland, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, and low-density housing define the majority of the Town's land base. Residential parcels represent a large share of land use, and the gradual conversion of large tracts into smaller lots reflects long-term parcelization trends that continue to shape the Town's physical form.

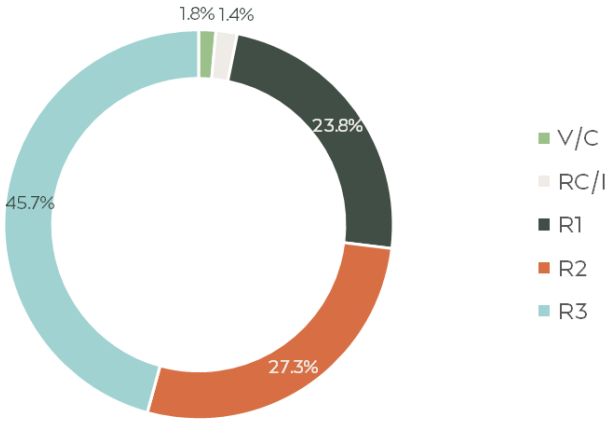
The historic village center contains the most compact development. Buildings sit closer to the street, lot sizes are smaller, and residential, civic, and commercial uses are integrated. Public water and sewer infrastructure support higher-density development in this area.

Outside the village core, development is more dispersed. Individual homes are frequently located along existing public roadways, often on lots with substantial frontage. In many areas, private rights-of-way extend from public roads to serve additional homes.

DWELLING UNIT GROWTH BY ZONE

An analysis of dwelling unit construction between 2010 and 2020 provides insight into how recent residential growth has been distributed across Berwick's zoning districts and helps illustrate where development pressure has been most concentrated.

Nearly half of all new dwelling units during this period were located in the R3–Rural Residential and Farm District. Slightly more than one quarter occurred in the R2–Transitional Residential District, and nearly one quarter occurred in the R1–Urban Residential District. Residential growth in V/C–Village Commercial District and RC/I – Rural Commercial/Industrial District was limited.



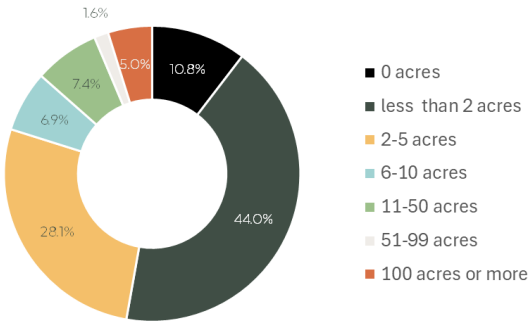
This distribution confirms that, while development occurs across multiple districts, rural areas continue to account for the largest share of new housing units.

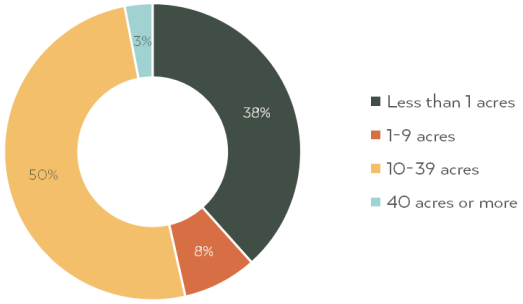
PARCEL SIZE AND LAND OWNERSHIP PATTERN

Parcel size and land ownership patterns in Berwick have shifted over several decades as the Town has transitioned from a predominantly agricultural landscape to an incrementally subdivided residential community.

In 1990, half of survey respondents reported owning between ten and thirty-nine acres, reflecting the prevalence of larger farms and woodlots. Recent survey data show a different distribution, with 44 percent of respondents owning less than two acres and 28.1 percent owning between two and five acres. Parcels are smaller and more fragmented than they were a generation ago.

This shift reflects decades of incremental subdivision and lot creation. While many large tracts remain, their relative share has declined. Parcel size trends influence housing availability, agricultural viability, forest management, and the overall perception of rural character, making them an important consideration in long-term land use planning.





ZONING FRAMEWORK

Berwick's zoning ordinance establishes base districts and overlay areas that regulate development intensity and land use. Public water and sewer infrastructure are concentrated in and around the village core. Any future utility extension would depend on development proposals and financial feasibility. Rural areas rely on private wells and septic systems. Soil conditions and lot size requirements influence residential density in these areas.

VILLAGE/COMMERCIAL DISTRICT – V/C

The Village & Commercial District includes the historic downtown and adjacent properties. This district permits residential, commercial, and light industrial uses and supports a compact development form.

URBAN RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT – R1

The Urban Residential district surrounds the village core and permits higher-density residential development supported by public water and sewer.

TRANSITIONAL RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT – R2

The Transitional Residential district lies beyond the more compact neighborhoods and provides a transition between urban and rural areas. Infrastructure exists in portions of this district, and any expansion of utilities would depend on development demand and financial feasibility.

RURAL RESIDENTIAL AND FARM DISTRICT – R3

The Rural Residential and Farm district comprises the majority of the Town's land area. It is characterized by large lot requirements, agricultural uses, forested land, and environmentally sensitive areas.

SHORELAND AND RESOURCE PROTECTION AREAS – SC/I, LR, RP, AP, SP

Shoreland zoning protects rivers, streams, wetlands, and ponds. Resource Protection areas restrict development in floodplains, steep slopes, and high value habitat areas. Aquifer protection areas safeguard groundwater recharge zones and public drinking water supplies.

Analysis & Trends

INCREMENTAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

Individual lot splits along existing public streets and private rights-of-way have long shaped Berwick's residential landscape. While subdivision regulations organize larger projects through coordinated road layouts and infrastructure standards, many homes have been added gradually

along rural roadways rather than through planned neighborhoods. Each individual approval may be modest, but the cumulative effect extends development deeper into rural areas.

Private roads present a recurring challenge. Berwick does not accept dead end private roads into public ownership. Roads serving three or more homes must meet NFPA or Town construction standards, but private ownership means maintenance and upkeep fall to the residents who use them. Over time, deferred maintenance, seasonal conditions, and longer travel distances can affect how quickly emergency services reach those homes. As more of Berwick's growth occurs on private roads, the Town should have a clear picture of how many residents are affected and whether current policies are adequate.

SHIFT IN PARCEL SIZE

Parcel fragmentation is one of the quieter ways Berwick loses its rural character. The open fields, working farms, and unbroken woodlands that define the Town's landscape depend on land staying in large pieces. A forest divided into house lots is no longer a forest. A farm split among several owners is rarely farmed. Once that land is gone, it is very difficult to get back. The long-term trend toward smaller parcels is not just a data point; it is a gradual reshaping of what Berwick looks and feels like.

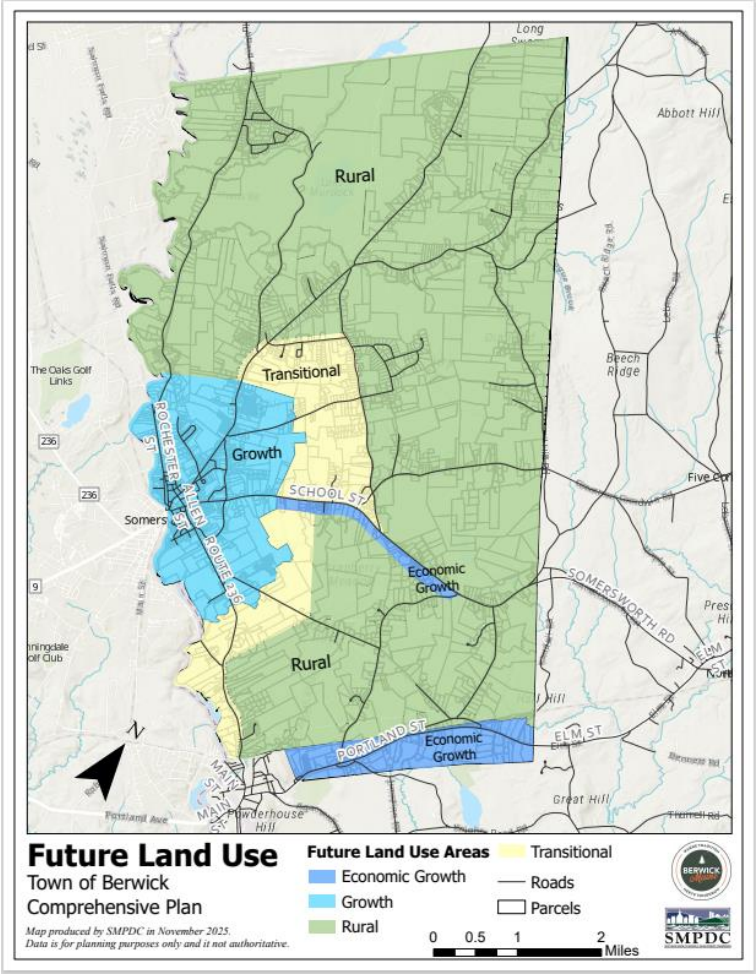
DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSING GROWTH

The concentration of nearly half of new dwelling units in the Rural Residential and Farm district between 2010 and 2020 illustrates a familiar tension: people move to Berwick for its rural character, and in doing so, gradually change it. Each new home in the countryside potentially adds road miles to plow, pavement to maintain, and response distances for public safety. Over time those incremental extensions add up in ways that are easy to miss year to year but significant over a decade.

Growth in the Urban and Transitional districts tells a different story. Demand for housing near existing infrastructure is real, and continued reinvestment in the village core suggests that compact, walkable development still has appeal. The challenge for Berwick is that both trends are happening at once, and the Town's long-term fiscal and environmental health depends on finding the right balance between them.

FUTURE LAND USE PLAN & MAP

These trends inform the Future Land Use framework, which organizes Berwick into four designations that reflect where growth should be directed and where it should be limited: Growth Area, Transitional, Economic Growth & Rural.



GROWTH AREA

Berwick's Growth Area encompasses the downtown core and surrounding neighborhoods where public water and sewer are available. This area represents the heart of the community, a walkable, mixed-use environment that blends homes, shops, services, and civic spaces.

Under new state law, lots with both water and sewer must be at least 5,000 square feet. Because Urban Residential (R1) currently requires 10,000 square feet, this effectively doubles the allowable density. Through thoughtful planning, the town can position itself to achieve goals for infill, housing diversity and affordability, and a stronger town center while helping to limit sprawl in rural areas.

Over time, expansion of the R1 zone may be appropriate in adjacent neighborhoods where infrastructure can be extended cost-effectively. Encouraging small-scale multifamily housing, accessory dwelling units, and mixed-use buildings will help meet housing demand while maintaining our New England architectural character and Berwick's sense of place.

Growth in these areas should follow a historical development pattern, characterized by compactness, connectivity, and design that prioritizes people over cars. Walkability and access to destinations should remain priorities.

TRANSITIONAL AREAS

Berwick's Transitional Areas serve as visual and functional buffers between the town's compact growth zones and its rural countryside. These areas help define gateways into the community, ensuring that development patterns shift gradually rather than abruptly.

The current Transitional Residential zoning district already supports this purpose by allowing moderate-density housing and low-impact commercial uses that maintain rural aesthetics. Future design standards should emphasize landscaping, building scale, and setbacks that complement adjacent land uses.

Transitional areas also represent long-term potential for future growth if infrastructure or community needs change. Maintaining flexible yet protective zoning will help Berwick adapt without compromising the integrity of its rural landscape.

ECONOMIC GROWTH (ROUTE 4 AND ROUTE 9 CORRIDORS)

Berwick's economy is closely tied to its regional location and transportation corridors. The Route 4 and Route 9 corridors function as economic gateways, connecting Berwick to North Berwick, South Berwick, and the greater Seacoast region.

While these corridors are not designated growth areas, they play an important economic role by supporting commercial, industrial, and service uses. Continued development, if left uncoordinated, could diminish the aesthetic quality of these entrances to town. As such, these areas should be managed through enhanced design standards, access management, and targeted zoning updates that encourage high-quality development such as clean manufacturing, technology-based industries, or small-scale business parks.

Berwick's goal is to create corridors that are both economically productive and visually appealing, places that signal the town's forward-looking approach while preserving its rural gateway character.

Because the Growth Area is defined at a district scale, portions of established residential neighborhoods fall within its boundaries. Future planning should incorporate measures to mitigate impacts at locations where commercial development may adjoin residential uses.

RURAL AREAS

Most of Berwick's land area is rural, characterized by forested landscapes, working farms, and scenic backroads. These areas are vital to the town's identity, economy, and environmental health. Residents have consistently affirmed their desire to preserve these rural landscapes while allowing for reasonable, low-impact development that complements the character of the land.

The existing Rural Residential zoning largely achieves this balance by limiting density and supporting uses compatible with the natural environment. These areas should continue to accommodate farming, forestry, home-based businesses, and appropriate housing, while discouraging major subdivisions that fragment farmland or wildlife habitat.

Each Rural Area has a set of unique challenges and opportunities that include natural and agricultural value. These include:

- **Beaver Dam Heath**, a wetland complex of statewide ecological significance that supports rare species and unique natural communities such as white cedar swamp.
- **Hatfield Pond, also known as Lake Murdock** in the northwest, where wetlands, forested buffers, and the town's largest aquifer converge.
- **Little River corridor** along the northern boundary, a sensitive riparian system.
- **Farmland between Route 9 and Route 4**, an area of active and historic agricultural use whose proximity to highways and developable land increases the pressure for conversion.

Moving Forward

Berwick's land use pattern reflects both where it came from and where it is heading. Parcels are smaller than they used to be. Homes have spread along rural roads. Most of the housing built over the past decade went up in the countryside, not near the village. That pattern has real consequences for roads, budgets, and the open landscape that makes Berwick what it is. The decisions ahead should be guided by those facts, not just by short-term demand.

The Future Land Use Plan sets the framework for what comes next. The Land Use Ordinance should be reviewed and updated to reflect housing laws and the direction set out in this Plan. Conservation should be strategic to better protect farmland, forests, and sensitive natural areas. Subdivision and design standards should be refined to encourage cluster development, manage the edges between growth areas and rural land, and improve the look and function of Route 4 and Route 9.

Infrastructure investment should follow the plan. Water, sewer, and transportation improvements should be directed toward designated growth areas so that public dollars support efficient, sustainable development rather than sprawl. Coordination with the Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission, KACTS, and neighboring towns will remain important as the region works through shared challenges around housing, transportation, and growth.

Every land use decision Berwick makes in the coming decades will either reinforce or chip away at the character of this place. Done well, growth can strengthen the village, protect the countryside, and keep the Town on sound financial footing. That is the goal this Plan is built around.

PLANNING FOR TOMORROW

The table below lays out the goals and actions needed to carry out this chapter. Each action lists who is responsible and when the work should begin. The abbreviations are as follows: CC means Conservation Commission; DH is Department Heads; P&D is Planning & Development; P&R is Parks & Recreation; PB is the Planning Board; PW is Public Works; SB is the Select Board; TM is the Town Manager; and WD is the Water Department.

Ongoing actions are part of regular Town operations and continue year-round. Annually means the action takes place once each year, usually as part of budget or policy review. Short-term actions

should begin within one to two years. Mid-term actions should begin within three to five years and often require planning, engineering, or funding. Long-term actions extend beyond five years and usually involve larger investments or major infrastructure decisions tied to growth and financial capacity.

GOAL	ACTION	CHARGE	TIMEFRAME
Preserve the small-town atmosphere and rural character of Berwick.	Evaluate density and dimensional requirements to determine if higher density should be further encouraged where water and sewer are provided, and if development should be regulated more strictly elsewhere.	P&D, PB	Short
	Encourage linkage between existing cul-de-sacs for vehicles and/or pedestrians.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Review and update the Land Use Ordinance to ensure consistency with this Comprehensive Plan and current state law.	PB, P&D, SB	Short
	Require underground utilities where feasible under new development and redevelopment.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Refine design standards that reflect Berwick's New England architectural character.	PB, P&D	Mid
Direct growth to areas with existing infrastructure and away from sensitive rural and natural resource lands.	Align capital improvement planning for water, sewer, and transportation with designated Growth Areas identified in the Future Land Use Plan.	SB, TM, PW, WD	Short
	Evaluate the establishment of Conservation Overlay Districts to protect sensitive natural and agricultural areas from inappropriate development.	PB, P&D, CC	Mid
	Refine cluster development and subdivision design standards to improve the quality of compact development and protect open space.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Periodically review zoning district boundaries to ensure consistency with Future Land Use Plan designations.	PB, P&D	Long
	Evaluate minimum lot size and dimensional requirements in each zoning district and amend as needed to reflect current goals.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Coordinate with the Conservation Commission and local land trusts to pursue strategic land acquisition and conservation easements in areas identified in the Open Space Plan, with priority given to active farmland, forestland, and wildlife corridors.	CC. TM	Mid
	Encourage participation in Maine's Tree Growth, Farm and Open Space, and Working Waterfront tax programs as tools to keep large rural tracts intact and support working landscapes.	CC, P&D	Ongoing
Support downtown vitality and compact, walkable growth in the village core.	Encourage small-scale multifamily housing, accessory dwelling units, and mixed-use buildings within the Growth Area.	PB, P&D	Short

	Evaluate opportunities to expand the Urban Residential (R1) zone into adjacent neighborhoods where infrastructure can be cost-effectively extended.	PB, P&D, PW, WD	Long
	Enhance downtown appearance through design standards, streetscape improvements, and underground utility requirements in redevelopment projects.	PB, P&D, SB	Mid
	Ensure the Village Overlay District meets community needs; evaluate Section 6.4 of the Land Use Ordinance and update as appropriate.	PB, P&D	Short
	Determine the upper limit of the Village Overlay District to include appropriate properties and prevent unplanned expansion.	PB, P&D	Short
	Monitor the build-out of the downtown and coordinate with developers to ensure public infrastructure, streetscape connections, and downtown circulation goals are met as the project progresses.	TM, P&D, PW	Ongoing
Support the Route 4 and Route 9 economic corridors through design standards and access management.	Refine design standards for Routes 4 and 9 that encourage high-quality development and preserve the rural gateway character of these entrances to town.	PB, P&D, SB	Mid
	Evaluate zoning along Routes 4 and 9 to encourage clean manufacturing, technology industries, and small-scale business parks.	PB, P&D	Mid
	Incorporate measures to mitigate impacts where commercial development may adjoin established residential neighborhoods.	PB, P&D	Ongoing
Ensure effective administration, monitoring, and public participation in land use decisions.	Provide the Code Enforcement Officer with the tools, training, and support necessary to enforce land use regulations; ensure certification in accordance with 30-A M.R.S.A. §4451.	TM, DH	Short
	Track new development by location, type, and zoning district in accordance with state requirements and use this data in annual reporting.	P&D	Annually
	At a minimum, every five years, review implementation progress of this Plan and update goals and actions as conditions change.	SB, PB, P&D	Annually
	Maintain publicly accessible records of land-use decisions, zoning amendments, and planning studies to support transparency.	P&D, TM	Ongoing
	Ensure Town staff and the Planning Board have sufficient resources to implement this Plan and respond to growth-related demands.	SB, TM	Annually
State of Maine Goal for Land Use: To encourage orderly growth and development in appropriate areas of each	Conduct a fiscal impact analysis of rural residential growth patterns, including the cost of road maintenance, snow removal, and emergency response for frontage development along rural	P&D, TM	Short

community and region while protecting the State's rural character, making efficient use of public services and preventing development sprawl.	roads, and use findings to inform zoning and subdivision standards.		
	Inventory private roads serving residential development, assess emergency access conditions, and evaluate whether any policy response is warranted regarding construction standards or disclosure requirements.	P&D, PW	Mid
	Coordinate with SMPDC and neighboring municipalities to align growth area designations and rural protection strategies across municipal boundaries, consistent with regional planning priorities	TM, P&D	Ongoing