



To: Mayor and Council
From: Scot Hunn, Planning Director
Date: February 14, 2025
Agenda Item: Highlands Parcels Planning and Public Engagement – Update and Direction

Background:

The Highlands Parcels Nos. 1 & 2 have been acquired by the Town as part of the Settlement Agreement executed in 2024 between the Town and Battle North. Parcels 1 & 2 present a unique opportunity for the Town to achieve certain strategic and community plan policy goals while generating revenue specifically earmarked for the water enterprise fund which may be used to offset the design and construction of a new water treatment plant and/or offset water rates for the Town's citizens. To this end, Town Council has directed staff to facilitate a public review and engagement process to assist in determining the most appropriate, beneficial use of the Parcels.

Process:

As a first step in the process to inform Council's decision on how to best use the Parcels, staff completed the following tasks in January 2025:

- A [webpage](#) providing background information on the Bolts Lake area – specifically the Settlement Agreement and Highlands Parcels 1 & 2 – has been created.
- A short survey was conducted between January 13th and January 31st.
- An open house was held Wednesday, January 29th, from 4:30pm-7:30pm at Town Hall.

The goal of this public engagement process – specifically the survey and open house – has been to gather public input regarding community preferences, ideas, and concerns related to the future use of the Parcels, including the potential disposition (sale) of the Parcels to be considered by the Council.

The results of the survey and open house are summarized in more detail below and the next steps in this process include discussion and direction by Council on alternative scenarios. Based on Council's direction, staff, including the Town Attorney and Town Engineer, will further analyze preferred scenarios and come back to Council with recommendations, stakeholder considerations, and critical path timelines/scopes of work for each scenario.

Survey and Open House Results

248 participants, including residents and non-residents, took the survey which asked two (2) questions about respondents' preferences for the Highlands Parcels. The open house was also a success, with over 40 residents and non-residents, including key stakeholder representatives from Eagle County Open Space, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, and the U.S. Forest Service in attendance.

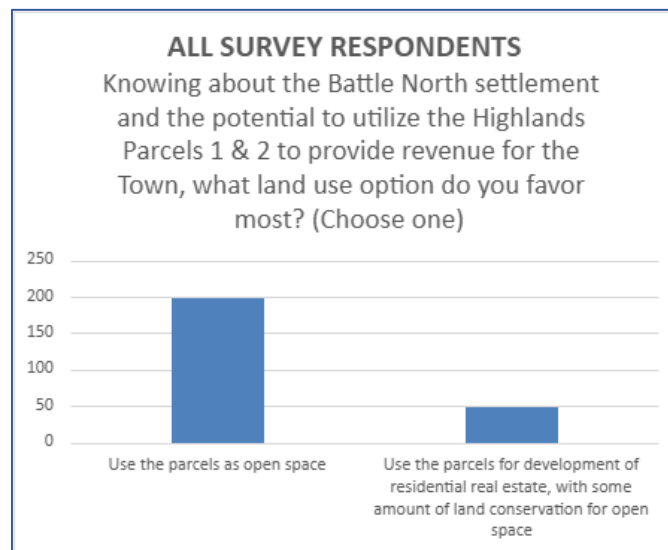
As a reminder, the questions in the January 2025 survey were based on a similar question asked in the 2024 Minturn Community Survey and were crafted to confirm community's preferences. The open house used poster boards with identical questions/wording as were asked in the January 2025 survey. The one exception was that the open house participants were not asked to indicate if they were residents or non-residents.

By the Numbers

The following summary of the survey and open house responses provide a clear picture of the sentiments and preferences for the future use of the Highlands Parcels Nos. 1 & 2 by those who participated. (A summary of written responses obtained during the open house is attached to this memo).

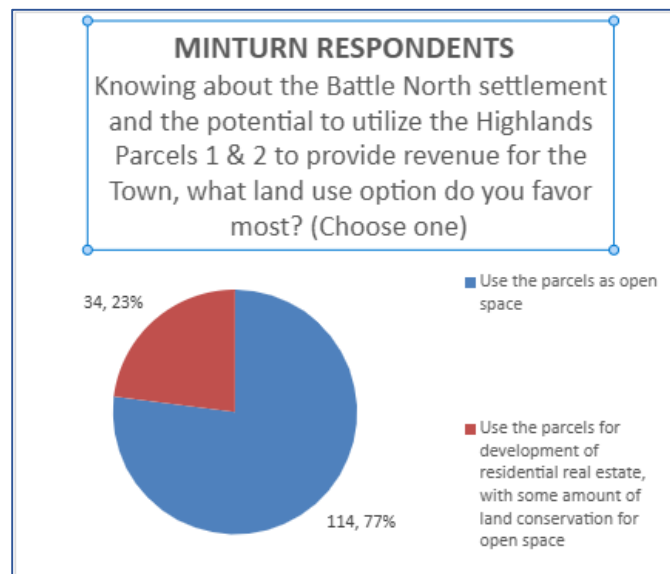
Survey Results:

- 248 individuals completed the survey, with 148 (60%) responding as Minturn residents, and 40% (100) identifying as non-residents. The survey was anonymous and was offered online, and by hard copy.
- Overall, survey participants expressed a strong preference to see the Highlands Parcels remain or be protected as open space rather than to see the Parcels developed for some combination of real estate development and open space. (This January 2025 survey result mirrors and reinforces the responses given in the Town of Minturn 2024 Community Survey in spring 2024 to a similar question).

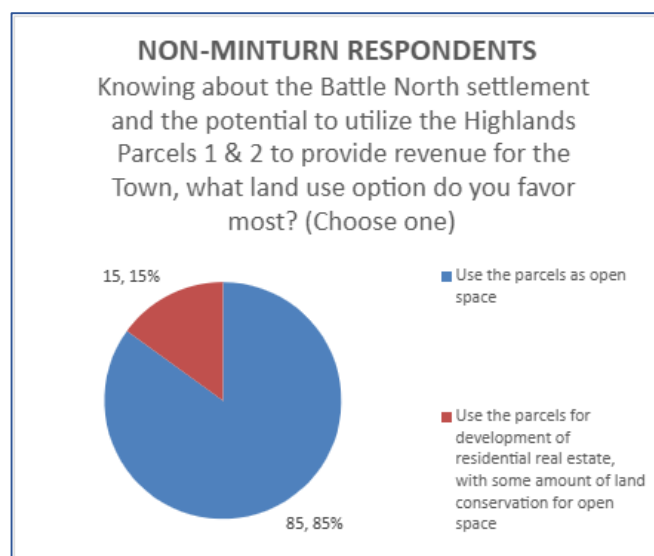


- Considering all respondents (residents and non-residents), nearly 81% (199 responses) indicated a preference to use the Parcels as open space (survey question No. 1). When split out as residents or non-residents, 114 Minturn residents (77%) preferred open

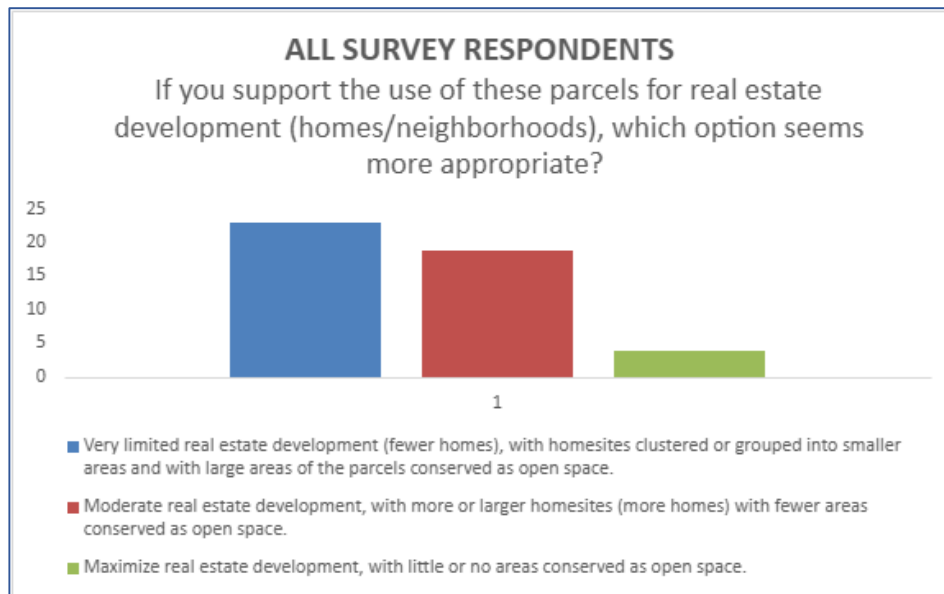
space as an option, while 23% preferred to use the Parcels for some type of real estate development combined with open space.



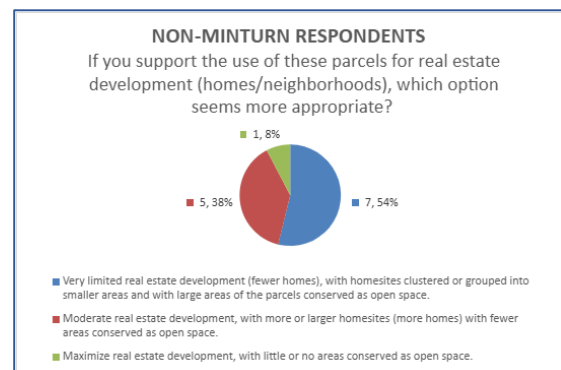
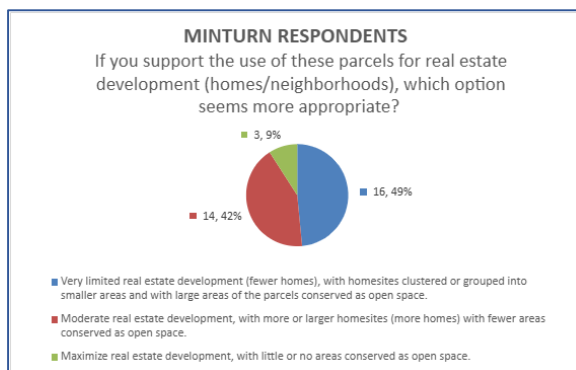
- Interestingly, the percentage of non-residents preferring open space to real estate development was even higher (85%) than Minturn residents.



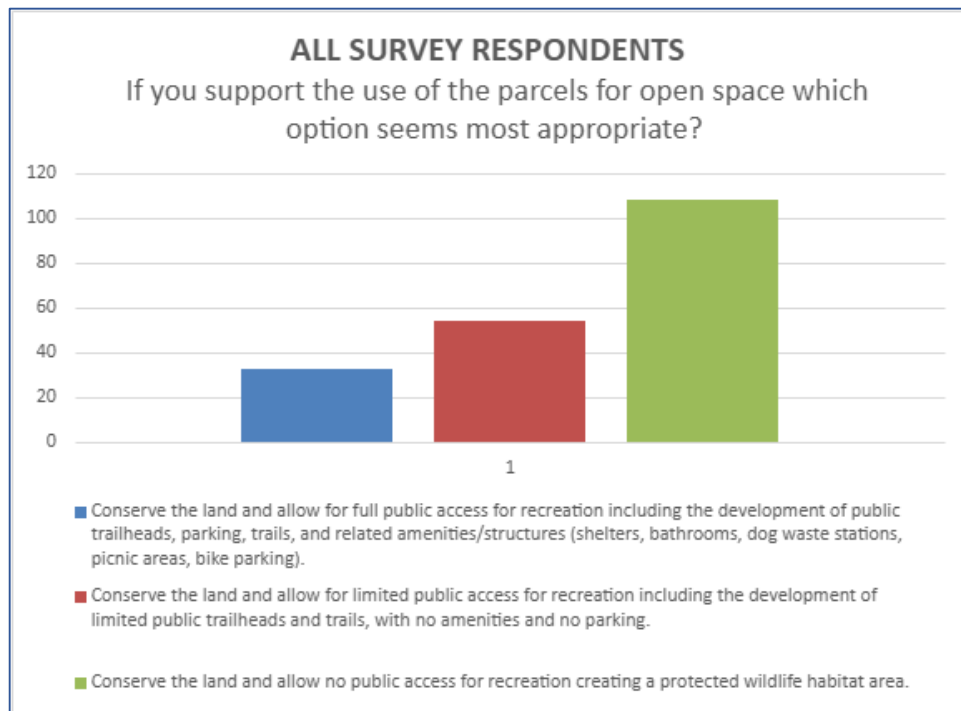
- For all respondents (residents and non-residents) who preferred real estate development of some kind (49 responses out of 248 total responses, or 19%), just over 90% (42 responses) indicated support for either “Very limited” real estate development with larger areas of open space or “Moderate” real estate development with more or larger homesites and fewer areas of open space. Only 4 respondents supported the option to maximize real estate development and minimize open space.



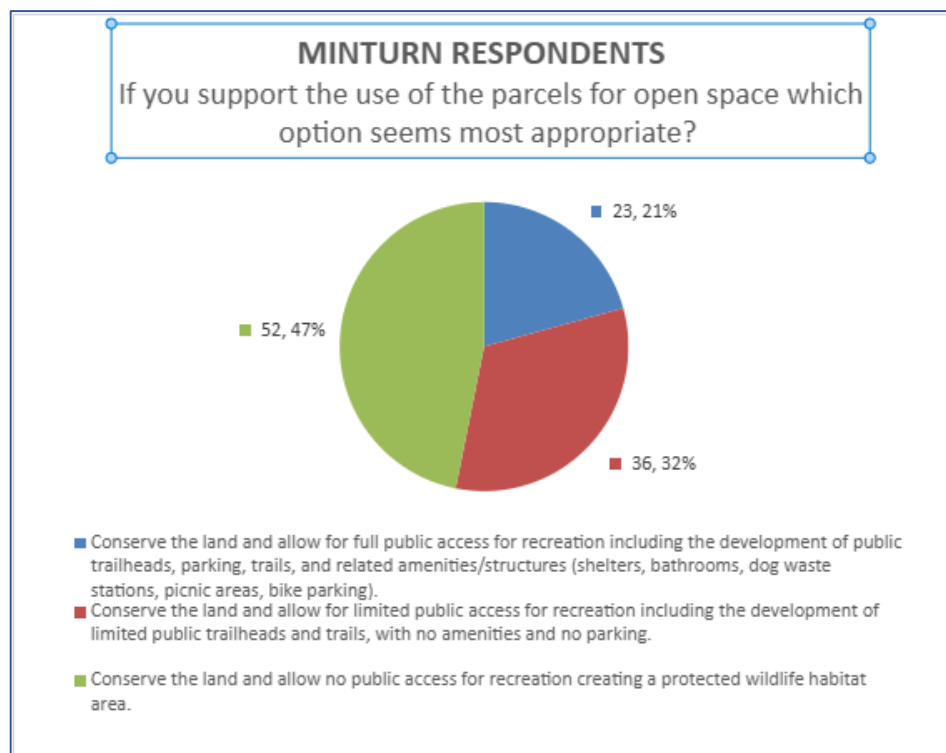
- When splitting out Minturn residents who prefer real estate development from non-residents who feel the same way, the numbers were identical for both groups, with 91-92% of respondents preferring either limited or moderate real estate development, while only 8-9% (four respondents across residents and non-residents) indicated support for maximizing real estate development on the Parcels.



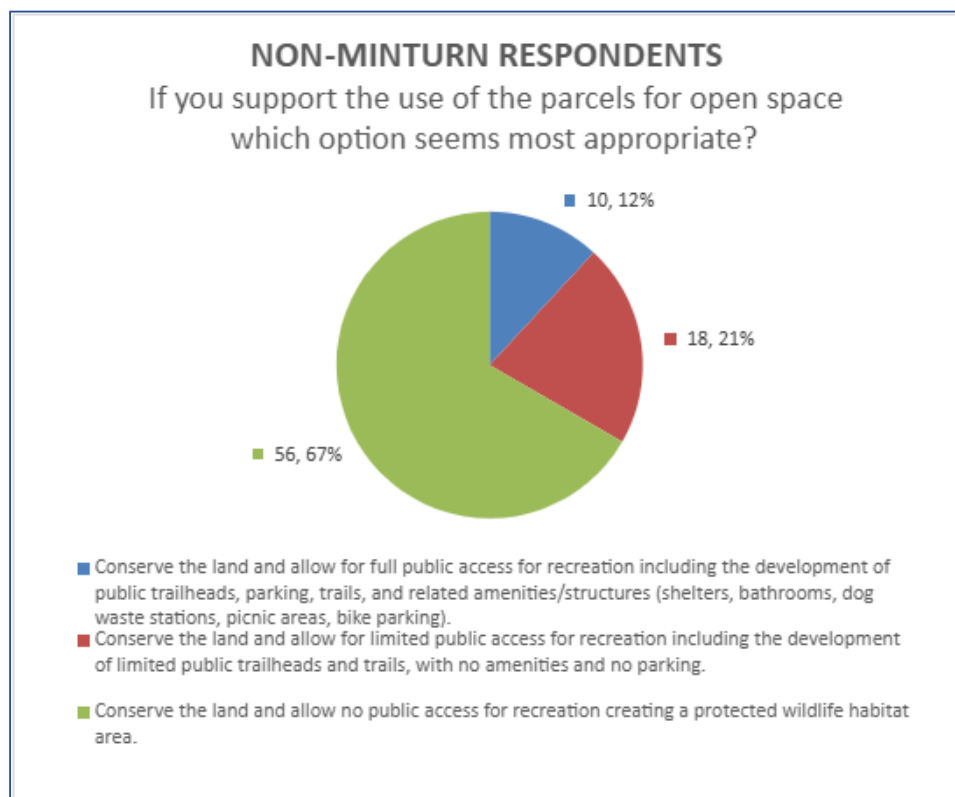
- When resident and non-resident survey (all) participants who preferred to see the Parcels preserved as open space were asked to choose between three potential open space scenarios, 55% supported the option to “Conserve” the land with no public access for recreation, 27% were open to conservation while allowing for “limited” public access, and just 17% supported conservation with full public access for recreational purposes.



- Minturn residents who supported an open space option leaned heavily toward conservation with no public access and/or wildlife habitat preservation (47%, or 52 individuals) or conservation with limited access (another 36 individuals, or 32%), or nearly 80% for the most restrictive open space scenarios.

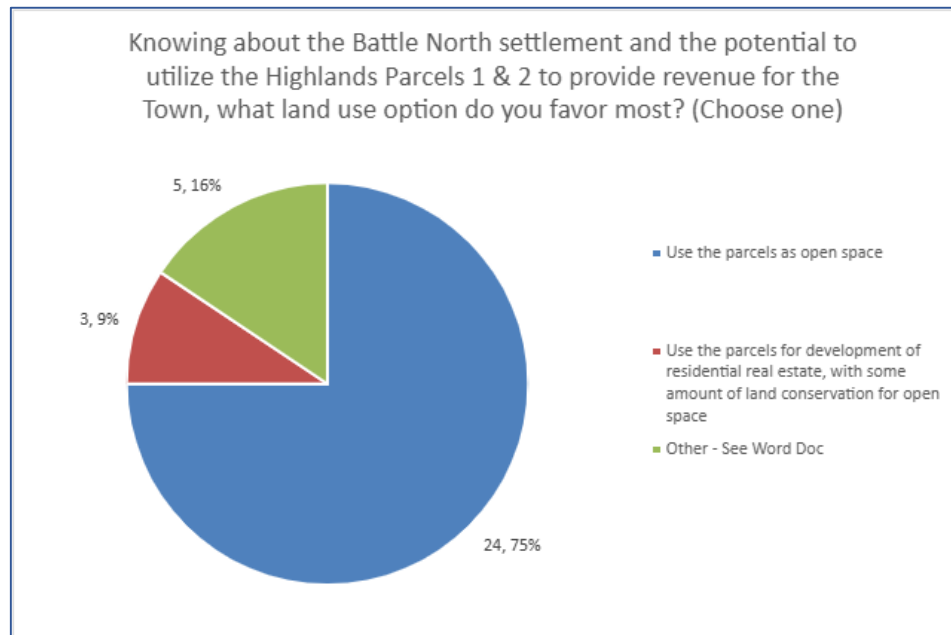


- Finally, when non-residents were asked the same question, the percentage of respondents who preferred open space conservation with no public access was even higher at 67% (56 respondents) than residents. Another 21% of non-residents supported conservation/open space options that allowed for some or limited public access, while an even lower percentage (10 individuals, or 12%) supported an option allowing full public access and the development of trails and amenities.

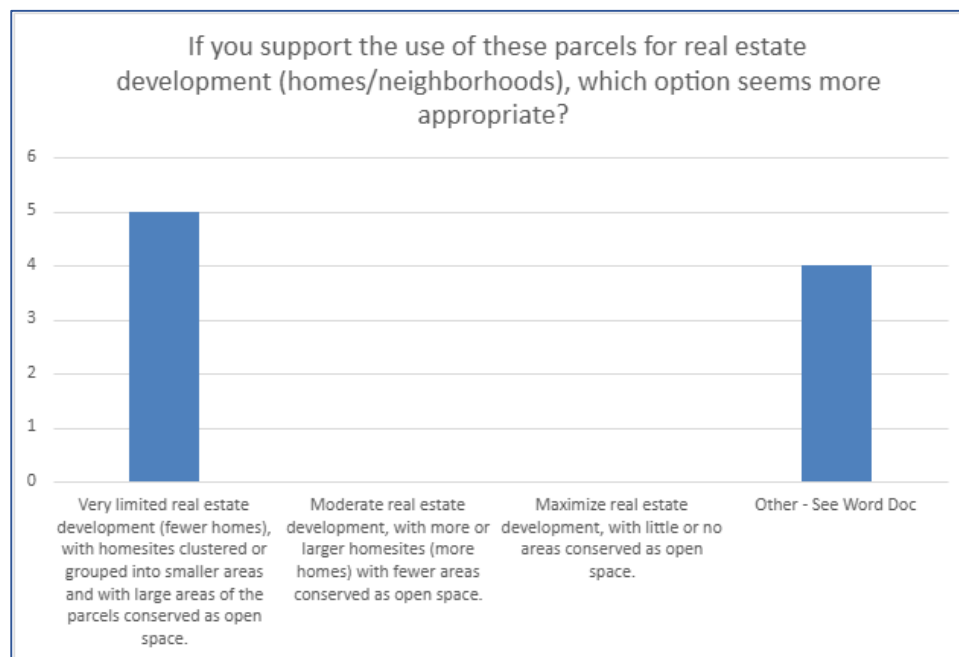


Open House Results:

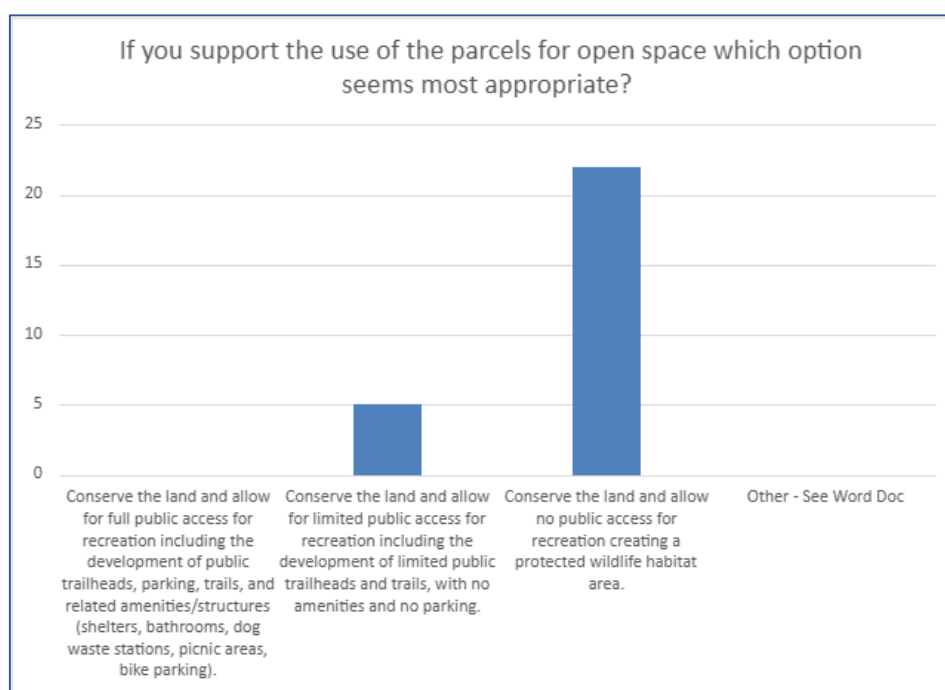
- Approximately 40 people attended the open house on January 29th, 2025.
- Similar to the survey results, the majority (24 individuals, or 75%) of participants at the open house expressed a strong preference for using/selling the Highlands Parcels for open space purposes.



- For those attendees who preferred options that include some amount of real estate development, most (5 individuals) support limited development of clustered homesites, with large areas of open space conservation.



- Another four people provided written comments/ideas that were more specific (Summary of Open House write-in comments attached), including the creation of a tiny home village, or the creation and sale of one or two “estate” lots – larger acreage residential lots – where homesites could be created and the rest of the Parcels would be preserved as open space.
- Of those attendees who supported an open space option, 22 (91%) preferred to see the Parcels conserved/protected for wildlife habitat (no public access for recreation), while another 5 individuals would be amenable to allowing some or limited public access for recreation purposes.



Next Steps:

Staff observes that the results from the 2024 Community Survey and this more recent community engagement effort resulted in an overwhelming preference to see the Highlands Parcels Nos. 1 & 2 preserved in some manner as open space – either as fully protected wildlife habitat, or as open space allowing some amount of recreational access or activities. However, the survey and open house also revealed some support for limited real estate development on the parcels.

Additionally, there have been specific ideas put forth wherein the Town would permit very limited, large estate lot residential uses - perhaps allowing for the creation of one or two large (20+ acre) parcels with small building envelopes and the remainder of the parcels conserved as open space – to achieve a balance between real estate development and land conservation/protection.

Of critical importance to the Town is the use of the Parcels to generate income for the Town's water enterprise fund. Based on the results from the Town's public engagement on this topic, the two preferred general options – conservation/open space primarily for the protection of habitat or allowance for very limited real estate development combined with open space conservation – likely allow for several variations that should be studied further to determine:

1. Feasibility.
2. Potential revenue generation.
3. Sources of funding (i.e., sale to private buyers, sale to public entities, public-private partnerships, or public-private-nonprofit partnerships).
4. Timing and logistics (i.e., additional land use approvals such as zoning, subdivision, surveying and/or land planning; additional stakeholder outreach; investigating partnerships).
5. Impact on staff capacity and budget considerations; need for additional third-party consultants.

Staff request direction from Council on which alternatives to pursue further before proceeding with any additional work. Once staff have direction, the Planning Director will work with the In-House Interim Town Administrator, Jay Brunvand, Town Attorney, and Town Engineer to establish goals for the project, a scope of work, estimated timelines, and a proposed budget for Council's consideration.