

Town of Bridgton Inventory and Analysis

Prepared for the Town of Bridgton
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Introduction

Tucked away near the eastern edge of the White Mountains, the Town of Bridgton (the Town) is situated among lakes and scenic forests. Bridgton's cultural and natural resources have been inextricably linked to its way of life. Events like Music on Main, cultural assets like the Bridgton Historical Society, and the Town's many lakes, trails, and parks provide opportunities for the community to gather and create a shared sense of place. Bridgton offers year-round opportunities for visitors and residents to be outdoors—whether they are looking to see golden and red leaves speckled through the pine at peak fall foliage, jump into the cool water on a warm summer day, or ski into downtown to have coffee at a local shop.

Bridgton is located in the Lakes Region along Route 302; it is 40 miles from Portland, 45 miles from Lewiston and Auburn, and 25 miles from Conway, New Hampshire. The Lakes Region stretches from the Sebago Lake area in the east to the White Mountains in New Hampshire in the west. The Town's location is an asset, providing easy access for visitors and enabling access for residents to other regions of Maine and New Hampshire. Bridgton also serves as a service center for those in neighboring communities who rely on assets like the Bridgton Hospital and a variety of retail and grocery stores.

Mill closures through the late 1800s and 1900s along Stevens Brook severely impacted the Town's economy and year-round population. By the 1950s most mills had closed, and the Town's economy shifted more heavily toward retail and service industries; however, there are opportunities for year-round residents to live, work, and play.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, Maine saw high levels of in-migration, with people drawn to various state amenities. In 2021, Maine saw the highest percentage of inbound moves in the United States and the second highest in 2022.¹ Bridgton's population grew an estimated 4.2% from 2020 to 2022.

Bridgton has seen recent housing development, which has likely contributed to its population growth. However, there continues to be a high demand for housing of all types, and housing costs have increased in the past few years. Prior to the pandemic, those earning the Town's median income could largely afford the Town's median home price. Today, the income needed to afford the median home price is much higher than the Town's median income, resulting in a widening affordability gap.

As Bridgton seeks to navigate various social, economic, and environmental changes and chart a path for the future, an understanding of current conditions, challenges, and opportunities is important to consider. This document provides a snapshot of existing conditions in Bridgton in 2023. This analysis will

¹ Valigra, Lori. January 3, 2023. "Maine Among the Most Popular States to Move to in 2022." *Bangor Daily News*. Accessed August 30, 2023. <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2023/01/03/business/maine-inboundmoving-2022>



serve as the basis for refining the Town’s vision statements and developing recommendations and actions for the Town of Bridgton Comprehensive Plan Update. The purpose of the Comprehensive Plan is to guide future growth and development in the Town for the next decade. Recommendations in the plan will provide direction for the Select Board, staff, boards, committees, and other responsible agencies in updating land use ordinances and regulations, directing capital investments, and making policy decisions.

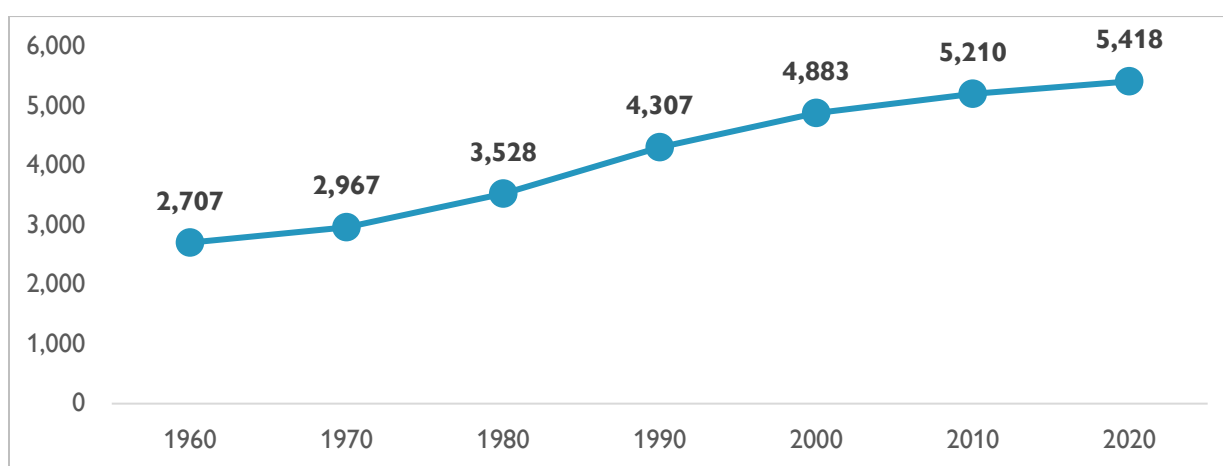
The inventory and analysis includes an assessment of current conditions, provides an overview of recent trends, and identifies key issues to further explore in the next phase of the planning process. An understanding of the Town’s current state as it relates to resident and community concerns will inform the direction of the plan. Understanding current conditions and how the Town has developed and evolved is essential to creating an actionable plan that will support the Town in achieving its vision. This inventory uses the most recent available data from sources like the U.S. Census, the American Community Survey (ACS), MaineHousing, and Maine State Economist; however, there are limitations to available data, including timeliness and accuracy. Although some data are from 2023, the most recent data from other sources is 2021. Larger surveys, like the U.S. Census and ACS, are limited by the accuracy of responses and have some standard error included. In some cases, data may not exist on certain topics. This analysis is based on available data as well as interviews with Town staff and stakeholders. In some instances, inferences are made about trends for recent years where data are not available. These cases are noted in the text as assumptions based on the best available information.

1 Population and Demographics

Introduction

Bridgton has experienced steady growth since the 1960s, with the most significant growth occurring from the 1980s to 2000. While growth has continued in recent years, state population projections estimate a slight decline in population in the Town and region by 2040. Although many factors impact population change in the region, the aging population and declining workforce have been statewide concerns for several years.

Figure 1.1: Population Growth



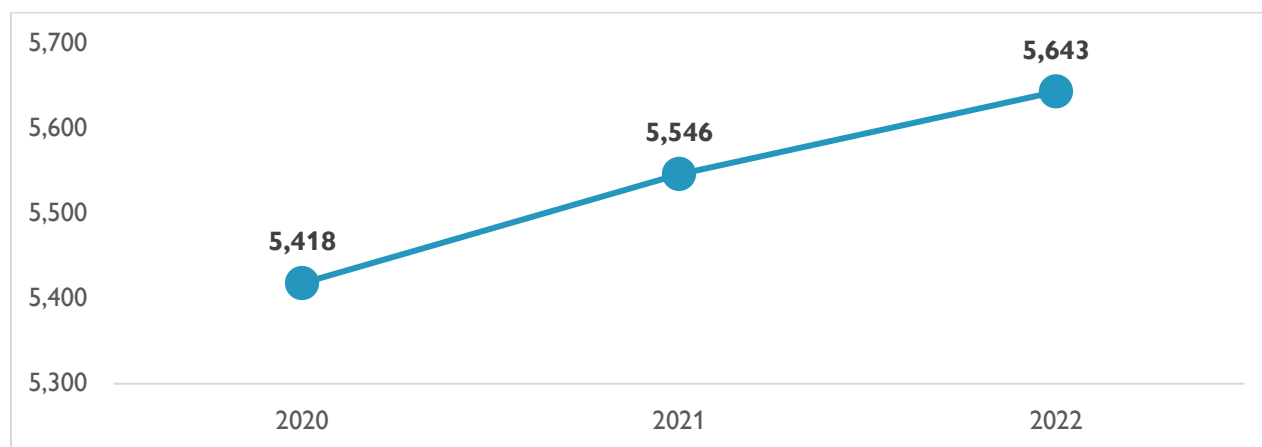
Source: U.S. Census

Shifts in the Town's seasonal population have been difficult to track and significantly impact the region's economy and demand for services and amenities. Approximately 43% of the Town's housing units are for seasonal use. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many seasonal homeowners came to Bridgton to live year-round, according to Town officials. It is unclear exactly how many seasonal residents transitioned to temporary or permanent full-time residency. The Town's population growth from 2020 to 2022 is likely due, in part, to this transition from seasonal to permanent. As more workers return to the office, this trend may be reversing, but it is difficult to predict. There are many factors to consider in assessing the Town's growth potential, as discussed in this section.

Population Change

The Town's population has continued to grow through 2022, with significant growth since 2020. From 2010 to 2020, the Town's population increased 4.0%. In just two years, from 2020 to 2022, the population grew another 4.2%—from 5,418 to 5,643 residents—according to U.S. Census and Census population estimates.

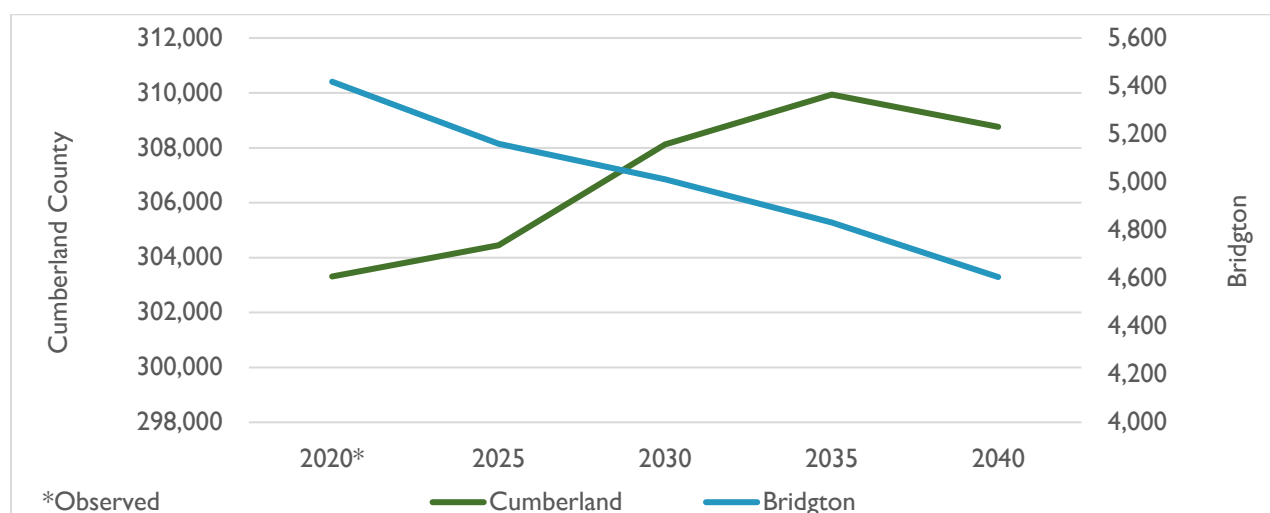
Figure 1.2: Bridgton Population, 2020 – 2022



Source: U.S. Census; U.S. Census Population Estimates

In 2023, the Maine State Economist released new population projections, which estimate a 4.7% population decline in Bridgton from 2020 to 2040. During the same time period, total population for Maine and Cumberland County are projected to grow. Recent population growth in Bridgton and ongoing housing development may indicate a divergence from these projections, which are based on historical population trends and birth/death rates. The Town's significant population growth in recent years appears to be contrary to projections that anticipate continued population decline for each five-year time period from 2020 to 2040. Still, a relatively low birth rate and aging population will impact the Town's growth.

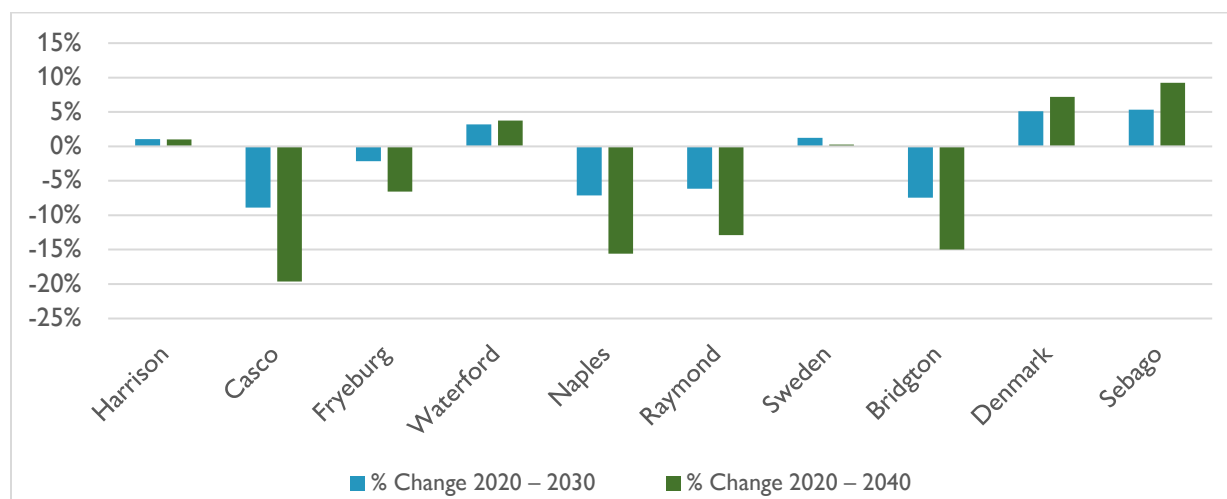
Figure 1.3: Population Projections, 2020 – 2040



Source: Maine State Economist

While Cumberland County (including Portland and other coastal communities) is expected to grow in the next two decades, a slight population decline is expected for Oxford County and the Lakes Region.

Figure 1.4: Regional Population Projections by Municipality



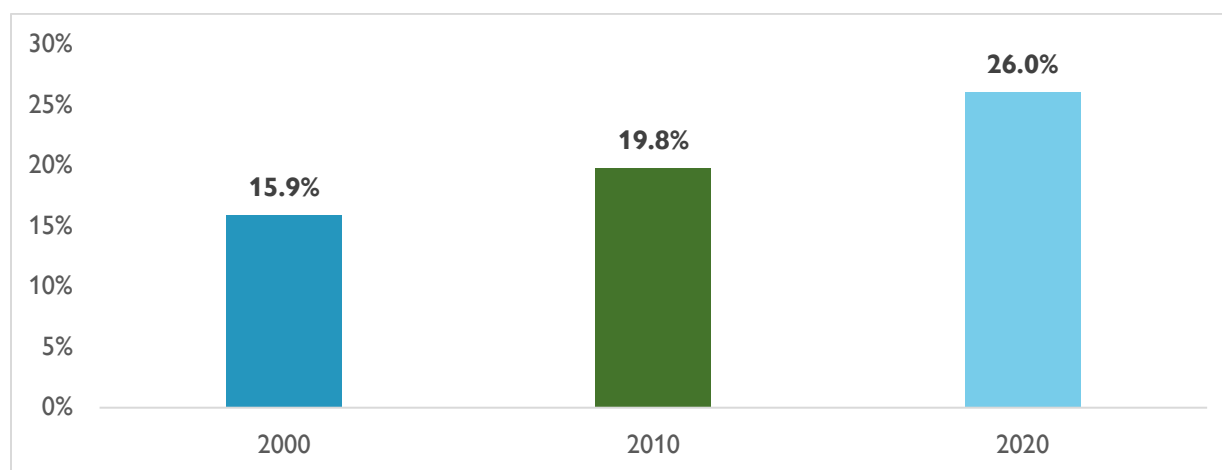
Source: Maine State Economist

Age

Following state and national trends, Bridgton’s population is aging, and the Town has experienced natural population decline (more deaths than births). With the population continuing to age, attracting younger people to the region and state is critical to support the declining workforce.

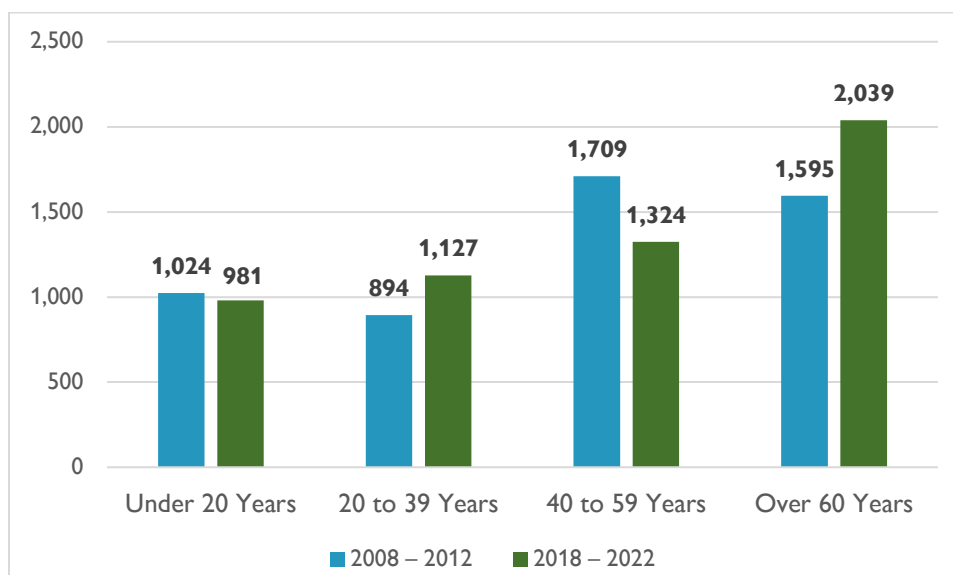
The Town’s population has continued to age in the past few decades. The median age increased from 45.6 in 2010 to 49.9 in 2020, but Census estimate data for 2018 to 2022 reflects a slight decline from 2020 (47.6), which may be indicative of a more recent influx of younger people. Similarly, the percentage of the population over age 65 has continued to grow to more than 25% of Bridgton’s total population (1,411 residents).

Figure 1.5: Percentage of Bridgton Population 65 and Older



Source: U.S. Census

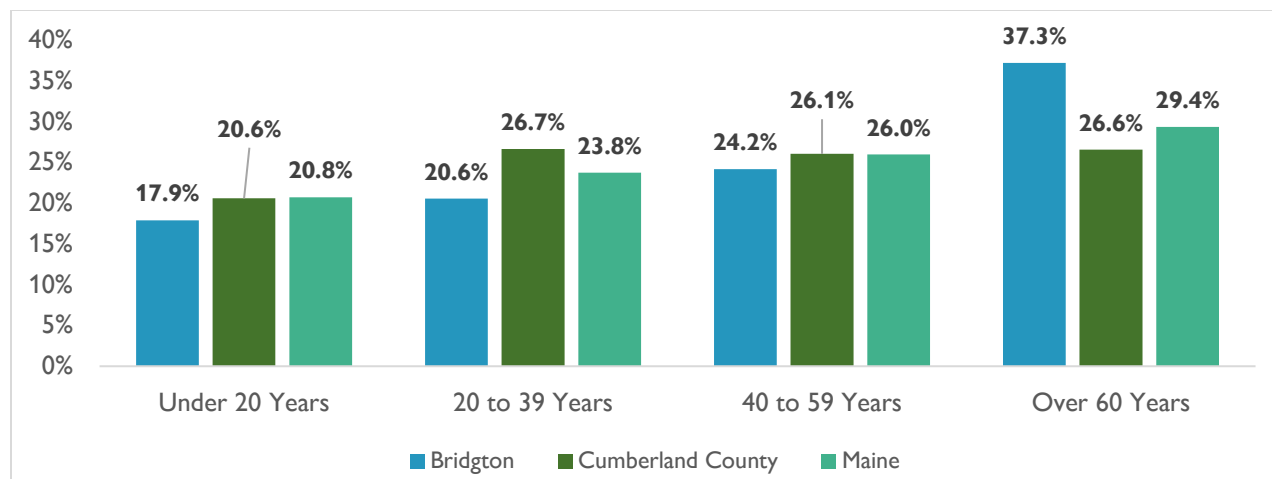
Figure 1.6: Bridgton Population Change by Age Category



Source: ACS 2012 and 2022 5-year estimates

While this trend is not unique to Bridgton, the Town is already older (based on median age) than both the county (42.4) and state (44.8), with Maine being the oldest state in the nation. This trend is expected to continue, with a projected 53.7% increase in Cumberland County's population over age 65 from 2020 to 2040.

Figure 1.7: Percentage of Population by Age Category (2018 – 2022)



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

While the older adult population in Bridgton is growing, the youth population has decreased in recent years, with a 4.2% decrease in the population under 20 years from 2012 to 2022. The population of young children (under age 5) experienced an especially steep decline from 272 young children to 81 during that time period. Although smaller data sets, like the ACS, have a greater margin of error, the

trend of a shrinking youth population and an expanding retirement-age population is consistent across the region and state.

Household Size

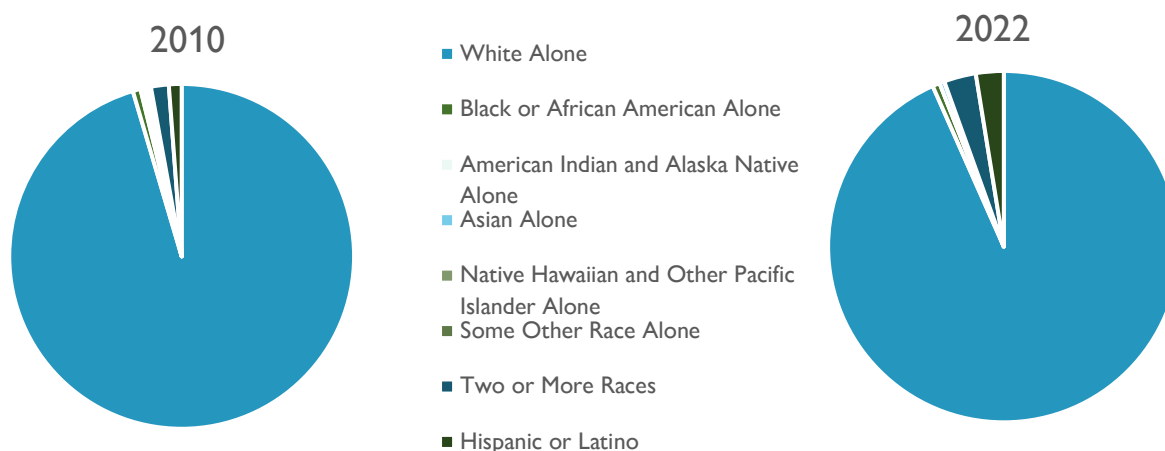
Bridgton's average family size has declined since 2010, and average household size has declined slightly. This is indicative of the aging population and the shift to smaller households as children become adults and form their own families and households.

The percentage of households with children under 18 has also declined slightly from 20.5% (2008 – 2012 five-year estimates) to 15.6% (2018 – 2022 five-year estimates), or 375 households with children in 2022.

Race and Ethnicity

While Bridgton, like the rest of the Lakes Region, is predominantly white, the Town has become slightly more racially and ethnically diverse in the last decade. The most notable change has been an 83% increase (from 88 to 161) in people who identify as two or more races. This could, in part, be due to more people now identifying as two or more races, as this was not an option on earlier versions of the Census form. Additionally, the number of residents who identify as Hispanic or Latino increased from 63 to 140.

Figure 1.8: Race and Ethnicity in Bridgton, 2010 – 2022



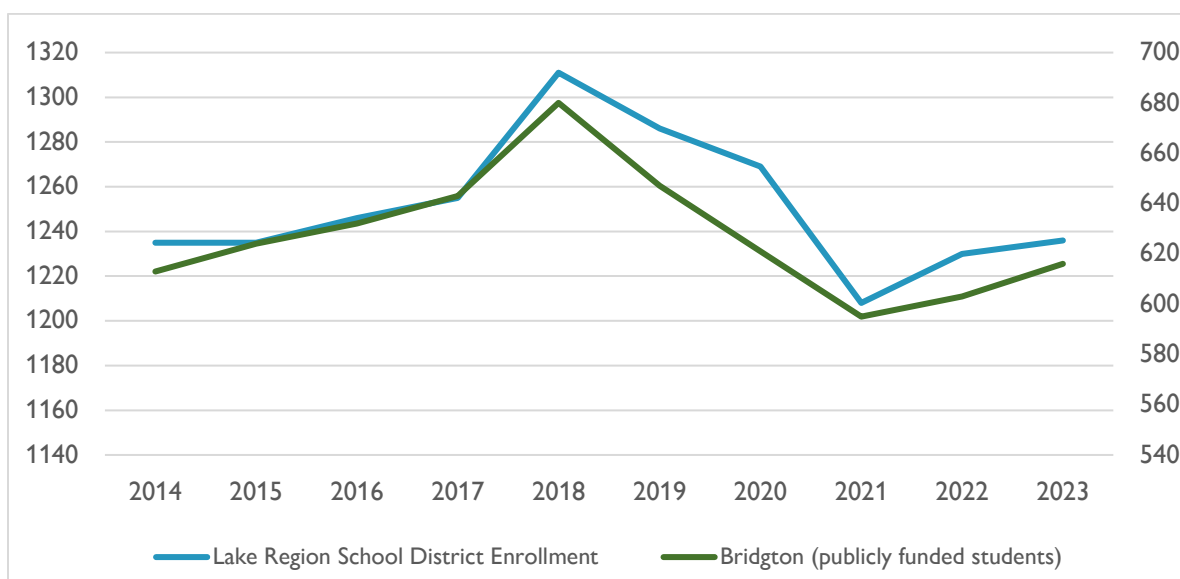
Source: 2010 U.S. Census, 2022 ACS 5-year estimates

Education

School Enrollment

The Lake Region School District serves Bridgton, the Town of Casco, and the Town of Naples. Total school enrollment experienced a steeper decline in 2020 and 2021. Total school enrollment for the district and enrollment of Bridgton students had increased slightly since 2021 but has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

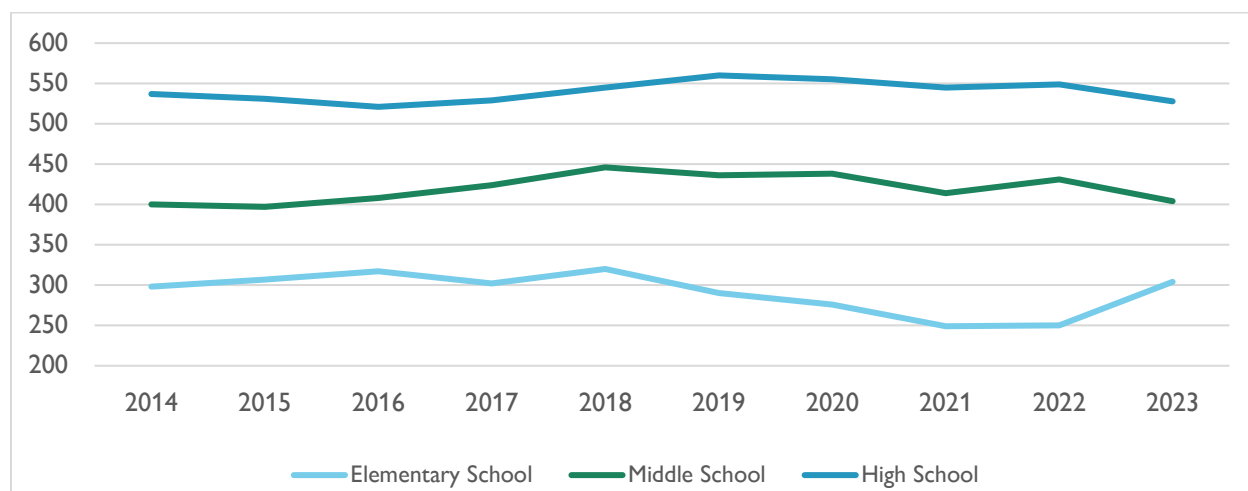
Figure 1.9: Public School Enrollment Over Time



Source: Maine Department of Education

Total enrollment for the three Lake Region elementary schools for 2023 is higher than 2019 enrollment rates (304 compared to 290), while middle school and high school enrollment have not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Similarly, elementary school enrollment increased from 2022 to 2023, while middle and high school enrollment both declined. Additionally, the number of homeschooled students in the Lake Region School District area has increased. In 2020, there were 80 homeschooled students, which increased to 145 students in 2021 and 149 students in 2022. The total number of homeschooled students declined to 127 in 2023.

Figure 1.10: Lake Region School District Enrollment Over Time by School



Source: Maine Department of Education

Educational Attainment

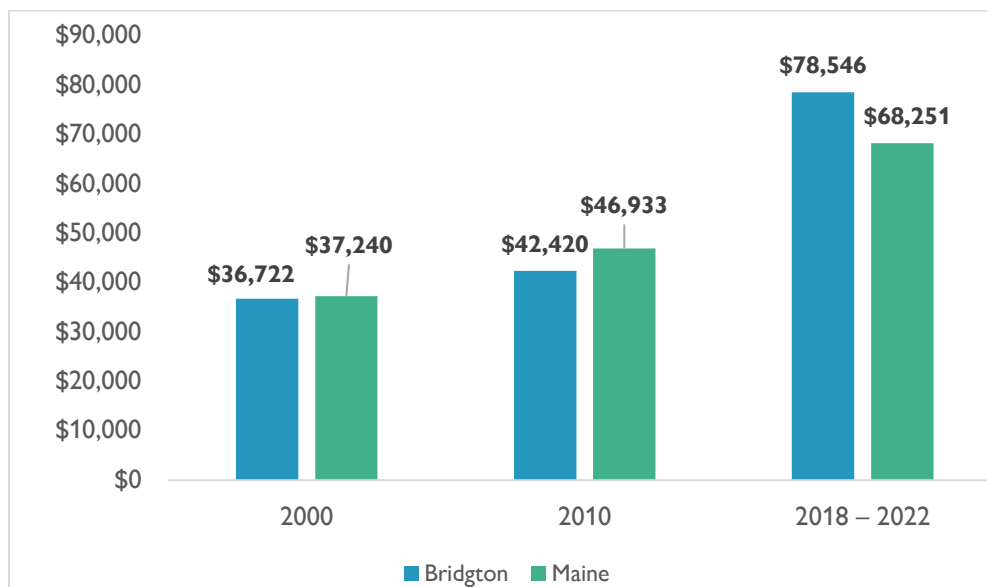
Bridgton has seen an increase in educational attainment, with over half (51.3%) of residents over age 25 with an associate degree or higher—up from 34.9% in 2010. Similarly, the percentage of adults over 25 with a bachelor’s degree or higher increased from 24.9% in 2010 to 35.8% in 2022. During that same time, there was a slight increase (6.4% to 8.9%) in the percentage of adults who did not complete high school or equivalency.

Income and Poverty

Bridgton is economically diverse and seeing increasing affluence in recent years, which may be influenced by recent development in the Town as well as more affluent seasonal homeowners transitioning to live in Bridgton full-time.

Bridgton’s median income (\$78,546 based on 2018-2022 estimates) is higher than the state but lower than the county (which has the highest median household income of any county in the state). While median household income has increased across Maine, Bridgton’s median household income increased at a faster rate (85.2% increase) than the state (45.4% increase) since 2010. This is a shift from the previous decade (2000 to 2010), which saw slower income growth in Bridgton (16% increase in median income) when compared to the state’s income growth (26%).

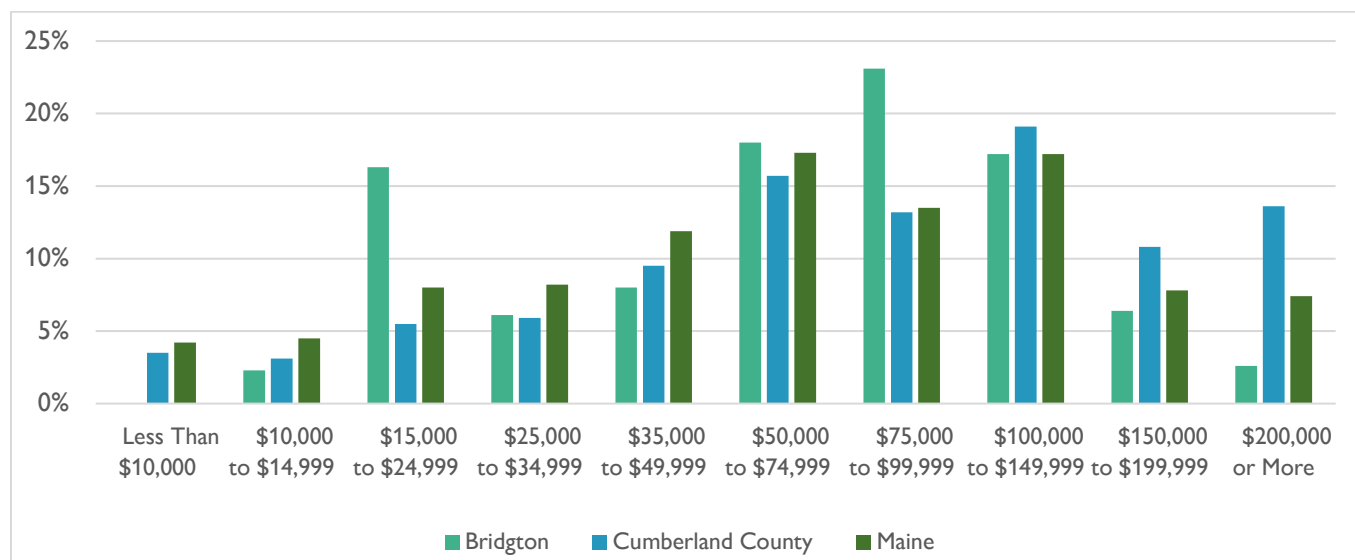
Figure 1.11: Median Household Income



Source: ACS 5-year estimates, U.S. Census

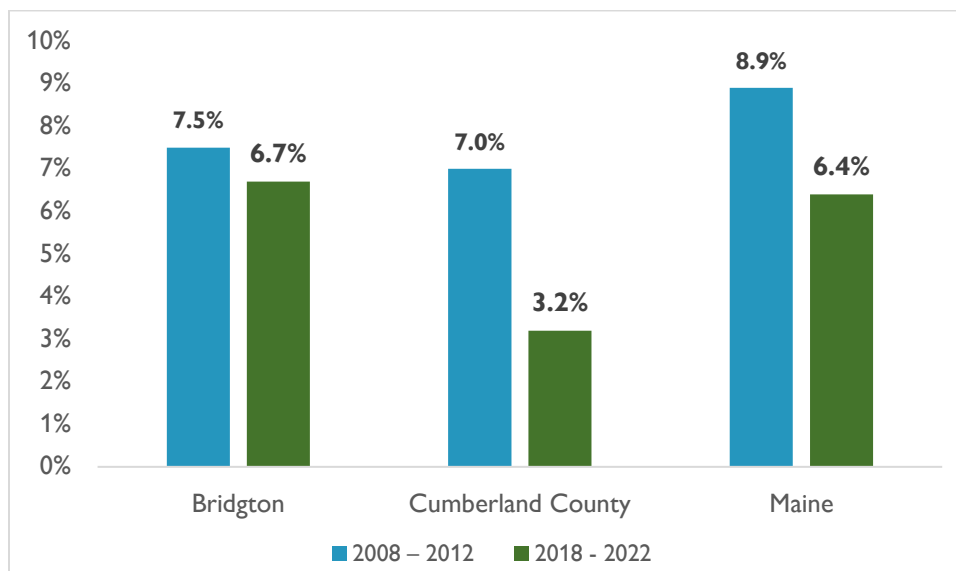
When considering the Town's breakdown by income category, there is a significantly higher percentage of households earning \$15,000 to \$24,999 compared to the county and state, which may reflect the higher proportion of retirement-age people living in the Town.

Figure 1.12: Income Breakdown by Region



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

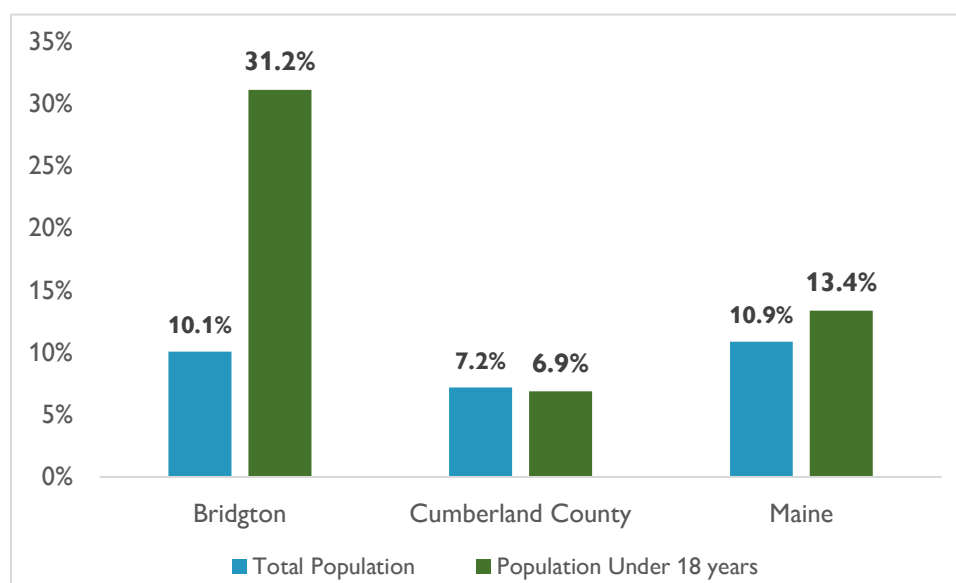
Figure 1.13: Poverty Status by Families by Region, 2012 – 2022



Source: ACS 2012 and 2022 5-year estimates

Similar to the income trends for the Town, the percentage of families living below the federal poverty line decreased from 7.5% to 6.7%. Overall, the Town's 8101% poverty rate of the total population (for which poverty status is determined) is higher than the county (7.2%) and slightly below the state poverty rate of 10.9%. Of note is the higher rate of child poverty in Bridgton, with 31.2% of children under 18 years living below the poverty line.

Figure 1.14: Poverty Status by Region



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Seasonal Population

The Lakes Region in western Maine is a popular tourist destination and location for seasonal homes. Similar to the rest of the region, Bridgton's population increases during the summer tourist season. The U.S. Census does not count seasonal residents and visitors in the Town's total population count, and the total number of visitors can be difficult to track. The U.S. Census does provide information on vacant housing, including seasonally occupied housing. There are approximately 2,382 vacant housing units in Bridgton for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. This is approximately 50% of the Town's total housing stock. Based on this number of seasonal residences, the Town's population could nearly double during peak tourist season.

Anecdotally, the Town has experienced seasonal population shifts in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of remote work. Town staff have noted more seasonal residents spending more time in Bridgton or transitioning to full-time residence. It is difficult to estimate how many seasonal residents have made this transition or the impact of these residents on Town services and infrastructure. Other factors and shifting trends, including the return to office-based work for many employees and the growing number of retirement-age people, are also influencing seasonal population changes in the Town.

Impact on Services

The Town's recent downtown infrastructure improvements, including upgrading and expanding the wastewater system, will enable and encourage more growth within the downtown area. With these improvements, the Town is preparing to support a growing community and improve quality of life to attract new residents and visitors. With recent housing development attracting younger residents, the Town can anticipate a growing demand for recreational, social, and entertainment amenities.

As the population continues to age, the demand for services for older adults—including transportation assistance, healthcare, home repair, recreational activities, and housing—will increase. In addition, addressing the needs of the Town's youth population, especially those who are experiencing poverty, will continue to be a concern for Bridgton.

Challenges and Opportunities

As noted in this chapter, recent changes and trends in the past few years, including the pandemic-related surge in domestic migration to Maine and the ongoing housing crisis, make it difficult to accurately predict demographic changes for the Town. Bridgton has seen new housing development under construction and recently permitted, which will help address housing needs, especially for older adults and those looking to rent in Bridgton. Still, the state and regional housing crisis will continue to impact housing demand in the Town.



Bridgton's large seasonal population, for which there are limited data, is an added challenge in predicting the Town's future service needs. While population projections estimate an overall population decline in the next decade, current trends in Bridgton—including significant housing development, commercial growth, steady tourism, and infrastructure improvements to accommodate development—indicate continued growth. The Town and region will need more working-age adults to support the declining labor force as the population ages. Providing services and amenities for residents and visitors of all ages will be critical to support the retirement-age population, attract workers, and continue to be a desirable place for young families.

There continues to be a high demand for housing of all types in Bridgton and the region, as housing costs have increased dramatically in recent years. Ongoing housing development since 2020 is likely contributing to recent population growth. Whether housing development continues and how and where the Town may encourage or restrict development in the future will also affect population growth and service needs as the state continues to experience in-migration and a high demand for housing.

Sources

American Community Survey

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Lake Region School District

Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Maine State Economist

Maine Department of Education

U.S. Census

2 Natural and Water Resources

Introduction

Bridgton's natural resources are important to the Town's character and identity. There has been an enduring history and commitment to the lakes and natural settings. Historically, the Wabanaki tribe inhabited the wooded areas and lands adjacent to lakes and streams to hunt, fish, and trade. The Town's rich natural resources have, and continue to be, a way to support the livelihood of the community. Over time, the lumber mills, farming, and industry developed within the Town. The Town eventually evolved into a tourism- and recreation-based economy. In the summer, visitors flock to the lakes and forest, and in the winter, to the mountains and ski slopes. An understanding of Bridgton's natural environment and its relationship to the built environment is essential for making land use decisions and meeting community goals. Bridgton has a rich diversity of natural and water resources and is committed to protecting their quality and managing their quantity. Bridgton's natural and water resources include freshwater wetlands, rivers, lakes, aquifers, ponds, and estuaries. Accommodating growth and transient populations with the preservation and protection of Bridgton's natural and water resources continues to be a priority.

Geology and Soils

The Lakes Region was scoured by retreating glaciers. As the ice moved, meltwater filled the depressions, which were further supported by moraines, which acted like dams by holding in the water and creating the lakes of the region. The geology of Bridgton consists primarily of till, wetlands, and glaciofluvial and glaciolacustrine deposits, which are sand, gravel, silt, and mud mixtures deposited from glacial retreat. All this loose material overlies solid ledge. Throughout the Town, there are exposed bedrock outcroppings. These natural features add to the scenic character of Bridgton, impact water flows, and constrain development. Most of the surface areas are deposits formed by glacial and deglacial processes during the last stage of continental glaciation, which began 25,000 years ago. The remaining surficial deposits are the products of postglacial processes, such as river floodplains and human activity (fill and earthwork). Land use decisions and environmental issues are related to surficial geology. Construction projects that involve activities such as locating new roads, excavating foundations, or siting new homes are affected by the geology of the site.

Landforms and Watersheds

A watershed is a land area that directs and channels water, both rain and snowmelt, to creeks, streams, rivers, and, eventually, to discharges, like the ocean or a bay. All land is in a watershed. As the water flows, it impacts people, land, and wildlife and is critical to the overall health and well-being of communities. Rain and snow that run off the land often pick up pollutants, which adversely affect the watershed's ecology and, ultimately, its receiving waterbody. The more developed and impermeable



surfaces that are created, the more natural landscapes and hydrology are changed. Watershed management is challenging, as watersheds tend to cross municipal boundaries and require coordination and partnership.

Bridgton falls almost entirely within the Willett Brook and Brandy Pond watersheds.² The Willett Brook watershed stretches from the towns of Sweden and Waterford to Highland Lake and through downtown Bridgton; it crosses into the Town of Demark in Oxford County. The Willett Brook watershed is part of the Sebago Lake and Presumpscot watersheds. The Brandy Pond watershed stretches from the towns of Waterford and Sweden—encompassing much of Long Lake within Bridgton—and ultimately into the Town of Naples and Brandy Pond. The Brandy Pond watershed is part of the Sebago Lake and Presumpscot watersheds. Bridgton also contains parts of the Kezar Pond, Moose Pond, Muddy River, Baker Pond, Peabody Pond, Bear River, and Pleasant Pond watersheds.

Land use, municipal operations, infrastructure, and individual users greatly impact the quality of water within a watershed. The Clean Water Act requires the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to identify state waters that fail to meet state and federal water quality standards. Bridgton has historically been known for having some of the healthiest, cleanest lakes and streams in Maine. There are no Maine DEP 303(d) listed urban impaired streams. These would be identified for failing to meet DEP standards for water quality and would require an in-depth evaluation and efforts to improve water quality. The lack of urban impaired streams in Bridgton reinforces Bridgton's commitment to healthy waters within the Town and downstream.

Surface Waters

Bridgton has abundant surface waters (lakes, rivers, wetlands, reservoirs, creeks, and estuaries). Healthy surface waters are a crucial resource because of their ecological, social, scenic, and recreational uses. The State has developed classification systems for lakes, rivers, and saltwaters. These systems are based on standards for uses such as drinking water supply, fishery habitat, and recreation. Bridgton has significant streams, lakes, ponds, rivers, and wetlands that make up its surface water network. Highland Lake, Long Lake, Kezar Pond, Moose Pond, Peabody Pond, Woods Pond, Beaver Pond, Otter Pond, Adams Pond, Holt Pond, Ingalls/Foster Pond, Willets Brook, Stevens Brook, and various wetlands are the primary features comprising the diverse and complex surface water network in Bridgton.

² Lakes Environmental Association Watershed Map [link](#)



Rivers and Streams

All the rivers and streams in Bridgton have been classified as Class A except for Steven's Brook, which is Class B. Class A is the second highest classification and is defined as freshwaters suitable for drinking water after disinfection. These waters are also suitable for fishing, agriculture, recreation in and on the water, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life. Class B is the third highest classification and is suitable for drinking water supply after treatment. These waters are also suitable for fishing, agriculture, recreation in and on the water, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life. The habitat must be characterized as unimpaired. Stevens Brook has experienced water quality issues because of increased nutrient loads from surrounding land as well as Town wastewater discharges. The discharges of treated water into the stream were not meeting water quality requirements. In 2018, Bridgton was awarded significant funding to offset the costs for three major infrastructure improvements to replace the failing wastewater system, where recent tests were showing that the wastewater systems were contaminating parts of Stevens Brook.³

Lakes and Ponds

As the area is known as the Lakes Region, it is no surprise that Bridgton has an abundant number of lakes and ponds: 11 lakes and ponds provide recreation, habitat, and scenic resources year-round. All lakes in Bridgton are classified as GPA, which is the State's sole classification for great ponds and natural lakes. Lakes not meeting this standard require municipalities to evaluate water quality impacts and implement best management practices to achieve a GPA level. Class GPA waters are suitable for the designation of drinking water after disinfection. They can also be used for recreation, fishing, agriculture, industrial process and cooling water supply, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, and as habitat for fish and other aquatic life. The habitat must be characterized as natural. Recent development and an increase of impervious surfaces within lake watersheds have also increased phosphorus and other nutrients. Phosphorus is a natural element found in soil particles and organic matter (such as leaves) that are transported to lakes and streams through erosion and stormwater runoff. Sources include pet waste, lawn fertilizers, seeping septic systems, and decomposing organic matter. Phosphorus controls are considered and regulated in the shoreland zoning and plan review process. A holistic approach that addresses nonpoint source (NPS) contamination, soil and erosion control, and stormwater runoff needs to be considered.

³ Town of Bridgton. October 1, 2018. "Bridgton Awarded \$11.5M in Grants to Complete Three Critical Infrastructure Projects. *Town of Bridgton*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://bridgtonmaine.org/notices/bridgton-awarded-11-5m-in-grants-to-complete-three-critical-infrastructure-improvements/>

Highland Lake: Highland Lake has a lake surface of 1,334 acres and a maximum depth of 50 feet. It stretches from downtown Bridgton to the town line at Sweden. Due to the proximity to downtown, it is often the center of municipal-focused activities during events and festivals. There are more than 16 miles of shoreline, and the lake offers a range of recreation opportunities, scenery, and habitat. In the summer, residents and visitors enjoy swimming, fishing, water skiing, rowing, wildlife, and Highland Lake Beach; in the winter, they enjoy cross-country skiing, ice fishing, and snowmobiling.

Long Lake: With a lake surface of 4,935 acres, Long Lake is the second largest body of water in southern Maine. It has a maximum depth of 59 feet and is a popular recreation destination in the region, which includes public beaches at Plummer's Landing and Salmon Point. It provides the ideal community destination for swimming, boating, and fishing. It connects Brandy Pond and Sebago Lake and creates a regional network for boat tours and excursions. Long Lake supports a substantial black bass fishery and is one of the most popular lakes in southern Maine for fishing tournaments. The lake has numerous public boat launches, including one in Bridgton along Power House Road.

Kezar Pond: Kezar Pond is located in Bridgton and Fryeburg. It has a lake surface area of 1,851 acres and a maximum depth of 12 feet. Access to Kezar Pond is provided via Hemlock Bridge Road for car-top boats, canoes, and kayaks. Visitors must first traverse Old Course Saco River waterway before arriving at the pond. The pond supports populations of chain pickerel, yellow perch, and white perch.

Moose Pond: Moose Pond is located in Bridgton, Sweden, and Denmark at the base of the Pleasant Mountain range. It has a lake surface of 1,617 acres and a maximum depth of 70 feet. Route 302 is the major route connecting regional visitors to the Pleasant Mountain Ski Area. Route 302 also connects to Sabatis Island and separates the pond into north and main basins. Moose Pond is a popular destination for fishing, boating, and swimming. The pond supports large populations of landlocked salmon, lake trout, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, and others. There is a public boat launch off of Route 302.

Peabody Pond: Peabody Pond has a surface of 740 acres and a maximum depth of 64 feet. It is located between Bridgton, Sebago, and Naples. There is a public boat launch off of Route 107; however, there is otherwise limited access to this pond via private residences and a camp (Camp Micah). The camp offers a variety of water sports on the pond, including kayaking, sailing, water skiing, tubing, and more. The pond also supports populations of landlocked salmon, smallmouth bass, white perch, yellow perch, and others.

Woods Pond: This smaller pond is roughly 462 acres with a maximum depth of 29 feet. It is a popular destination for swimming, fishing, and boating, as the Town maintains a municipal beach, Woods Pond Beach, and a municipal boat launch. The Woods Pond Water Quality Association, a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to preserve, protect, and enhance the water quality of Woods Pond, recently supported a milfoil boat wash station to help mitigate the spread of invasive species.

Beaver Pond: Beaver Pond is a small pond of 69 acres with a maximum depth of 35 feet. The pond was historically used as source waters for milling at Sucker Brook. Today, the pond is the backdrop for residential lots with no public access. Local residents use the pond for recreation and fishing. Beaver Pond's habitat is ideal for warmwater species, largemouth bass, chain pickerel, and white perch.

Otter Pond: This small pond has two outlets that both drain to Long Lake. Otter Pond has a lake surface area of 90 acres and a maximum depth of 21 feet. There is limited access to this pond via private residences and camps. The shallow pond makes it best suited for warmwater fish, and the lake tends to be a weedy habitat.

Adams Pond: Located in southern Bridgton, Adams Pond is a carry-in access pond with restrictions on motorboats over 10 horsepower. This small pond has a lake surface area of 43 acres and a maximum depth of 51 feet. Brook trout, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, and white perch provide fishing opportunities. Adams Pond is stocked annually with brook trout.

Holt Pond: This 41-acre pond has a maximum depth of 10 feet and is part of a larger conservation area called the Holt Pond Preserve. The preserve has more than 700 acres of wetlands, forests, fields, and streams with the goal of protecting habitat and providing a place for visitors to learn about the importance of watershed conservation. The preserve has an extensive network of boardwalks and trails. The shallow waters and floating vegetation provide the ideal habitat for largemouth bass and chain pickerel.

Ingalls/Foster Pond: Located in the southern portion of Bridgton, this pond has a lake surface area of 149 acres and a maximum depth of 29 feet. Located in a rural area with limited access, this pond is a habitat for smallmouth bass, yellow perch, and chain pickerel. The pond is stocked annually with brook trout, but the warm waters make it poorly suited for cold-water species.

Table 2.1: Lakes Environmental Association 2022 Water Testing

	Average Deep Water Phosphorus (ppb)	Water Color (SPU)	Clarity Trend	Phosphorus Trend	Chlorophyll-a Trend
Highland Lake	12.5	26.8	Increasing – High Clarity	Decreasing – Moderate Range	Decreasing – Low Range
Long Lake	8.8	21.8	Stable – Moderately Clear	Decreasing – Moderate Range	Decreasing – Moderate Range
Kezar Pond	40.0	40.0	*Low Clarity	Stable – High Range	Stable – Low Range

	Average Deep Water Phosphorus (ppb)	Water Color (SPU)	Clarity Trend	Phosphorus Trend	Chlorophyll-a Trend
Moose Pond	7.5	26.9	Stable – High Clarity	Stable – Moderate Range	Decreasing – Moderate Range
Peabody Pond	7.8	26.6	Increasing – High Clarity	Stable – Low Range	Stable – Low Range
Woods Pond	N/A	34.4	Stable – Moderately Clear	Stable – Moderate Range	Stable – Moderate Range
Beaver Pond	25.5	27.0	Increasing – Moderately Clear	Decreasing – Moderate Range	Stable – Moderate Range
Otter Pond	27.0	41.0	Increasing – Moderately Clear	Stable – Moderate Range	Decreasing – Moderate Range
Adams Pond	34.0	18.9	Increasing – High Clarity	Stable – Low Range	Stable – Low Range
Holt Pond	20.0	100	Stable – Low Clarity	Stable – High Range	Stable – Moderate Range
Ingalls/Foster Pond	N/A	17.9	Decreasing – Moderately Clear	Stable – Moderate Range	Increasing – Moderate Range

Source: Lakes Environmental Association, Water Testing Data

Note: *Indicates that the Secchi disk touched the pond bottom but was still visible during sampling. When the Secchi disk touches the bottom but is still visible, the resulting reading does not represent an accurate water clarity measurement. Clarity trends are not reported when the Secchi disk hits the bottom.

Water Quality

The Maine DEP's Biological Monitoring Program assesses the health of rivers, streams, and wetlands by evaluating the composition of resident aquatic benthic macroinvertebrate and algal communities. The program also assesses the health of a waterbody based on the number and types of aquatic macroinvertebrates and algae living in it, which changes when waterbodies are polluted or disturbed. For example, a polluted stream will often lack pollution-sensitive organisms, like mayflies and stoneflies, and



will have more pollution-tolerant organisms, like snails and leeches.⁴ Town staff and partners do water quality testing as part of watershed management plans. Maine DEP has biological monitoring wetland stations at Otter Pond and Holt Pond.

There are also local and regional plans and efforts to identify and eliminate pollution sources in Bridgton. The Town's Wastewater Division manages wastewater treatment facilities and monitors the treated effluent. These systems are regulated under a Maine DEP waste Discharge License. The current system is 30 years old, at capacity, and will soon require significant investment to maintain. The Town has undertaken the construction of a new treatment plant and system upgrades that will triple the capacity of the current system. Slated to be completed in 2024, the new system will improve water quality and help ensure effluent discharges meet the highest water quality standards.

The Lakes Environmental Association (LEA) is a nonprofit organization with a mission to protect the waters and watersheds of western Maine. LEA is headquartered in Bridgton and focuses on action, advocacy, and analysis in order to protect natural resources and improve water quality. The organization conducts year-round water monitoring and shares trends and data with other organizations and agencies. LEA also works to address nutrient control and invasive species across the Lakes Region. LEA's monitoring results combined with the Maine Stormwater Management Design Manual have been used to determine phosphorus allocations for each lake and drive policy considerations in Bridgton's Land Use Ordinance around shoreland zoning, erosion and sedimentation control standards, water quality, and subdivision review.

Bridgton does not participate in the municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit. In general, the water quality of the Town's streams, rivers and lakes is good, and aggressive stormwater management changes are not necessary; however, as more development continues to occur, and more impervious surfaces are created, continued monitoring and good stewardship of water quality and nutrient control will be important. Stormwater management is addressed in the water quality section of the Land Use Ordinance. Specific regulations are outlined in the shoreland zoning, general plan review, large-scale water extraction, and mineral extraction sections. In addition, Maine's Stormwater Management Law regulates stormwater volume and quality from new construction in watersheds at risk. These are evaluated on current water quality, potential for internal recycling of phosphorus, potential as a cold-water fishery, volume and flushing rate, or projected growth rate in the watershed. Maine DEP does not permit discharge of treated wastewater to any of the Town's waterbodies, and therefore, a pressurized drip dispersal (PDD) is providing a subsurface disposal system that returns treated water to the soil by way of perforated tubes installed in the ground.

Maine DEP's Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan was issued in 2020. NPS pollution has a major impact on Maine's lakes, rivers, streams, and marine waters. Unlike pollution from point sources,

⁴ Maine Department of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources Protection Act

such as industrial and sewage treatment plants, NPS pollution comes from many diffuse sources. It is caused by rainfall or snowmelt moving over and through the ground and picking up natural and human-made pollutants, such as fertilizer, road salt, sediment, oil, and bacteria, along the way. Eventually, these contaminants end up in waterbodies, where they can threaten drinking water supplies, cause nuisance algal blooms, diminish recreational activities, and endanger aquatic habitats. The NPS Management Program Plan outlines goals and approaches for protecting and restoring water quality statewide and at the watershed level.

Stream Crossings

Stream crossings intend to maintain the continuity of streams to control stream volume, accommodate wildlife, and protect stream health. Stream continuity is critical to stream health and the wildlife that depend on streams, including invertebrates, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals. Typical stream crossing problems include undersized crossings; shallow or perched crossings easily blocked by debris; scouring, erosion, and high-flow velocities; and habitat and migration limitations. Currently, 40 culverts convey streams across roads and other structures in Bridgton.⁵ These culverts and their conditions have been mapped by the Department of Marine Resources' Maine Coastal Program. The Stream Connectivity Work Group was convened by the Maine Coastal Program in 2009 and is a partnership of state, federal, industry, and non-governmental organizations working cooperatively to improve Maine's stream restoration efforts. Currently, Bridgton has a variety of road stream crossings that have barriers, potential barriers, and no barriers. Bridgton is committed to improving these crossings as the need arises to support fish and wildlife. There are also seven dams in Bridgton disrupting stream continuity and affecting habitat and fish migration. The Bridgton Public Services Department (PSD) addresses stormwater- and infrastructure-related maintenance, including dams.

Maine DEP's Municipal Stream Crossing Grant Program provides grants that match local funding for the upgrade of culverts at stream crossings on municipal roads. Program-funded projects benefit public infrastructure and safety by replacing failing culverts at risk of complete washout or collapse. They also reduce flooding and increase resiliency with the installation of larger, higher capacity and longer-lived crossings, benefitting fish and wildlife by opening and reconnecting stream habitat fragmented by undersized and impassable culverts. Bridgton has taken advantage of this program in the past and was awarded a 2023 Municipal Stream Crossing Grant for Wildwood Road.⁶

Wetlands

⁵ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. n.d. "Maine Stream Habitat Viewer." *Maine Coastal Program*. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://webapps2.cgis-solutions.com/MaineStreamViewer/>

⁶ Maine DEP. March 3, 2023. "Maine DEP Has Announced New Grant Awards for Municipal Stream Crossings." *Maine DEP*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://www.maine.gov/dep/news/news.html?id=10544549>

Significant wetlands are located throughout Bridgton, including a large wetland area around Willet Brook and Otter Pond. Wetlands are identified by the presence of hydraulic soils, hydrophilic (i.e., water-loving) plants, and a high-water table for a portion of the year. Wetlands are important for cleansing water, providing flood control, protecting shorelines from erosion, maintaining stream flows, and supporting wildlife habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is the principal federal agency tasked with providing information on the extent and status of the nation's wetland and deepwater habitats as well as changes to these habitats over time.⁷ As part of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986, FWS maps wetlands in the U.S., conducts decadal national wetlands status and trends studies, and reports the findings to Congress. Wetlands are located and mapped throughout Bridgton. While the majority of wetlands are located in proximity to lakes and ponds, there are many types of wetlands in Bridgton. These include freshwater emergent wetland, freshwater forested/shrub wetland, freshwater pond, riverine, and lake.

Vernal pools are naturally occurring, temporary wetlands that are seasonal depressional inland bodies of water in glaciated areas and usually occur from winter to spring. They are particularly important because they provide critical breeding habitat for several native amphibian species that, in turn, sustain many other forms of woodland wildlife. As the summer heat dries up the pools, young frogs, salamanders, turtles, and fairy shrimp crawl onto nearby dry land to their fall and winter homes. Vernal pools also provide food and water for upland forest animals such as deer, moose, and ermine.

Vernal pools are an important water feature and can be found throughout Bridgton. The majority of significant vernal pools have been mapped around Highland Lake, Stevens Brook, and Long Lake. Significant vernal pools are defined under the Natural Resources Protection Act (NRPA) and, as such, cannot undergo development. Limited development is allowed around the pool; however, regulations do not protect the full suite of habitats that vernal pool wildlife use, including breeding, summering, and wintering habitats. Significant vernal pools must be identified on development plan reviews. Many other pools that harbor wildlife do not receive any protection under the NRPA, and recent changes to federal wetland rules leave most vernal pools unprotected. It is likely that many vernal pools located within Bridgton have not been mapped yet. Urbanization and new development continue to threaten these areas.

Maine's wetlands are resources of great value to communities, the state, and the nation. All three levels of government have a stake in their continued health and availability. Congress established federal regulatory power concerning wetlands under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act. In Maine, the NRPA established state regulatory authority over wetlands in 1988. Bridgton regulates lands within 250 feet of wetlands, salt marshes and salt meadows, and wetlands associated with great ponds and rivers, which

⁷ U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. n.d. "National Wetlands Inventory." *U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services*. Accessed November 20, 2023. <https://fwsprimary.wim.usgs.gov/wetlands/apps/wetlands-mapper/>



are rated "moderate-" or "high-" value waterfowl and wading bird habitat, including nesting and feeding areas through the shoreland zoning ordinance.

Floodplains

Floodplains are low, mostly flat areas adjacent to rivers, streams, ponds, and the ocean and are periodically covered by rising water during major periods of rain or snowmelt. The mapped 100-year floodplain has a 1% chance of being flooded during any year. As Bridgton is in the Lakes Region, it is unsurprising that the Town is susceptible to flooding around bodies of water and impervious infrastructure. Many of the Town's lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands create areas prone to flooding, and snowmelt compounds these concerns with additional runoff. Bridgton participates in the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to help manage flood risks. Through this program, Bridgton adopted and enforces floodplain management ordinances that define building standards for new and existing development in high-risk flood zones. This allows residents to be eligible to purchase NFIP flood insurance and to receive disaster assistance for flood-related damage. Cumberland County's Preliminary Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMs) were issued in 2018. Bridgton adopted a floodplain management ordinance that requires the recognition and evaluation of flood hazards in all official actions relating to land use in floodplain areas with special flood hazards. This ordinance also establishes a flood hazard development permit system and review procedures for development activities in the designated flood hazard areas of the Town.

Groundwater

Large aquifers exist under the earth's surface in Bridgton. Groundwater is water found underground in the spaces between pieces of rock, like sand and gravel, and in the cracks that form large layers of solid rocks. Groundwater accumulates from rain and snowmelt that soak into the ground, where it seeps through soil and other rock materials before landing in an aquifer. An aquifer is a porous layer, such as gravel, sand, or rock, where all the cracks and spaces are filled with water. The type of soil greatly impacts an aquifer's ability to recharge as does the development and creation of impervious surfaces. Sand and gravel deposits beneath the Town have created large volumes of groundwater. The Sawyer Brook Aquifer in the northwest, Willett Brook Aquifer in the center of the Town, and the Bear River Aquifer in the north are significant aquifers that provide drinking water for the Town through private and publicly owned wells. These aquifers are not only critical to Bridgton water supply, but also impact the community's drinking water network through stormwater runoff and land use decisions. The Bridgton Water District pumps from the Willett Brook Aquifer in the southwest corner of the Town as Bridgton's primary source of drinking water.

Scenic Resources

Scenic resources help define a community and celebrate significant landscape features. They are attributes that give a community identity and make a place appealing to live and attract visitors. These



resources include natural views and vistas as well as cultural assets identified by the State of Maine and the community as defining parts of the Town's character. The natural beauty of the region is abundant, including many peaks and views of lakes, mountains, and forests. Many of the Town's trail networks provide access to points of high elevation.

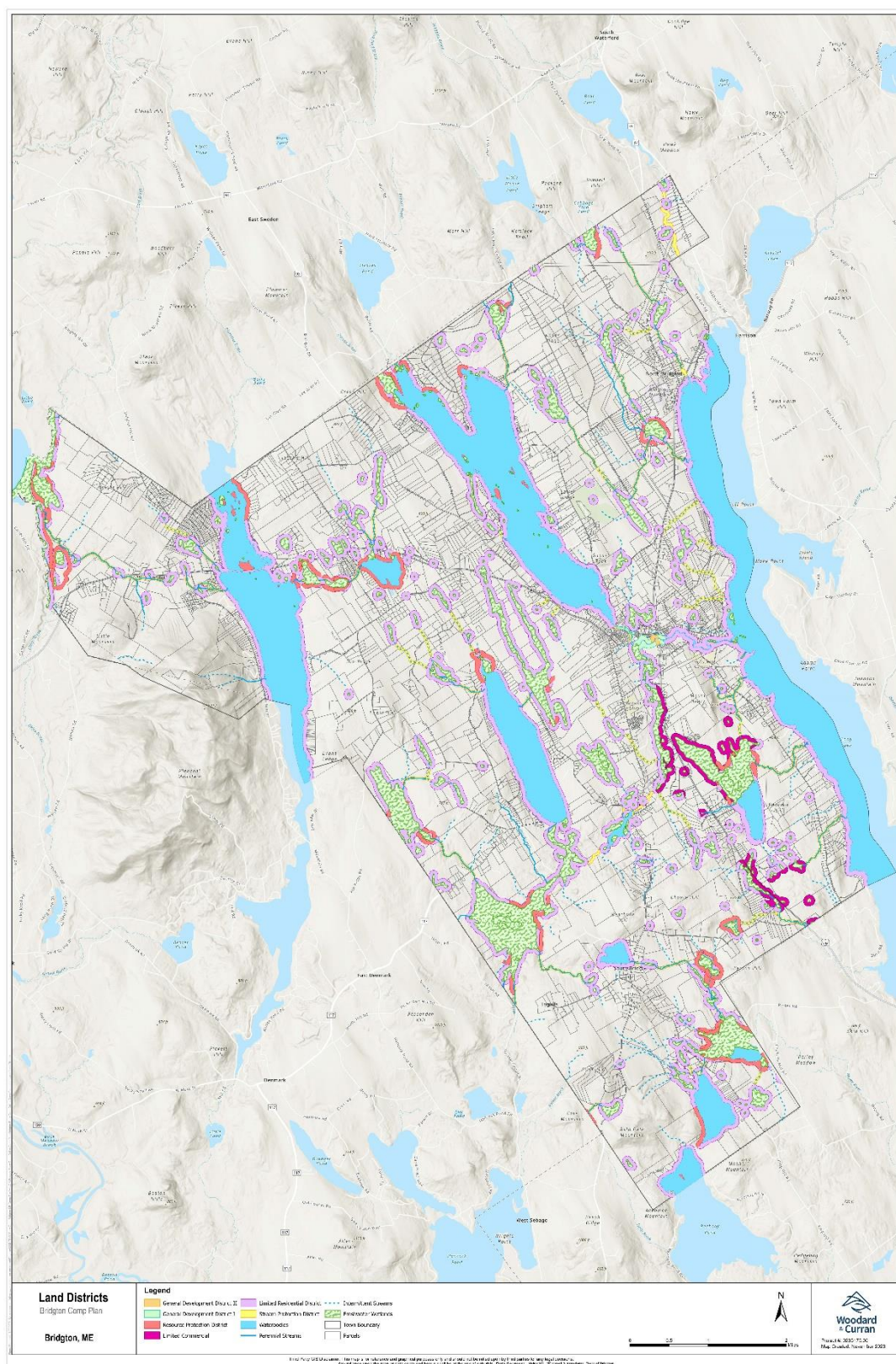
Shoreland Zoning

The Town established a shoreland zoning overlay district in 2005, last modified in 2016, to regulate development in shoreland areas for the protection of natural resources. Bridgton's ordinance overlays a shoreland zone 250 feet from the normal high-water line of any designated great pond, river, and freshwater wetland of 10 or more acres. It also includes land area within 75 feet of the normal high-water line of streams and all tributary streams. Bridgton's Land Use Code outlines the rules and regulations of the shoreland zone and requires special review and permitting for development within the zone. The purpose of the ordinance is to further maintain safe, healthful conditions; help prevent and control water pollution; protect fish spawning grounds, aquatic life, birds, and other habitats; conserve visual and actual points of access to inland waters; and anticipate and respond to the impacts of development in shoreland areas. The shoreland zone is divided into the following six districts:

1. **Resource Protection (RP) District:** Areas in which development would adversely affect water quality, productive habitat, biological ecosystems, or scenic and natural values. These districts include floodplains, steep slopes, wetlands greater than two acres, and land area along rivers subject to bank erosion, undercutting, or riverbed movement.
2. **Limited Residential (LR) District:** Areas suitable for residential and recreational development.
3. **General Development I (GD-I) District:** Areas of two or more contiguous acres devoted to commercial, industrial, or intensive recreational activities, or a mix.
4. **General Development II (GD-II) District:** Areas of two or more contiguous acres devoted to commercial, industrial, or intensive recreational activities, or a mix. Similar to GD-I but with no allowable private sewage disposal systems.
5. **Stream Protection (SP) District:** Includes all land areas within 75 feet of the normal high-water line of a stream, exclusive of those areas within 250 feet of the normal high-water line of a great pond or river or within 250 feet of the upland edge of a freshwater wetland, which are regulated under the shoreland zoning district associated with that water body or wetland.
6. **Limited Commercial (LC) District:** Includes areas of mixed, light commercial and residential uses, exclusive of the SP district, which should not be developed as intensively as GD-I or GD-II districts. This district includes areas of two or more contiguous acres devoted to a mix of residential and low-intensity business and commercial uses. Industrial use is prohibited.

The shoreland zoning outlines permit requirements as well as the bulk and use regulations within each district of the overlay.

Figure 2.2: Shoreland Zoning Districts

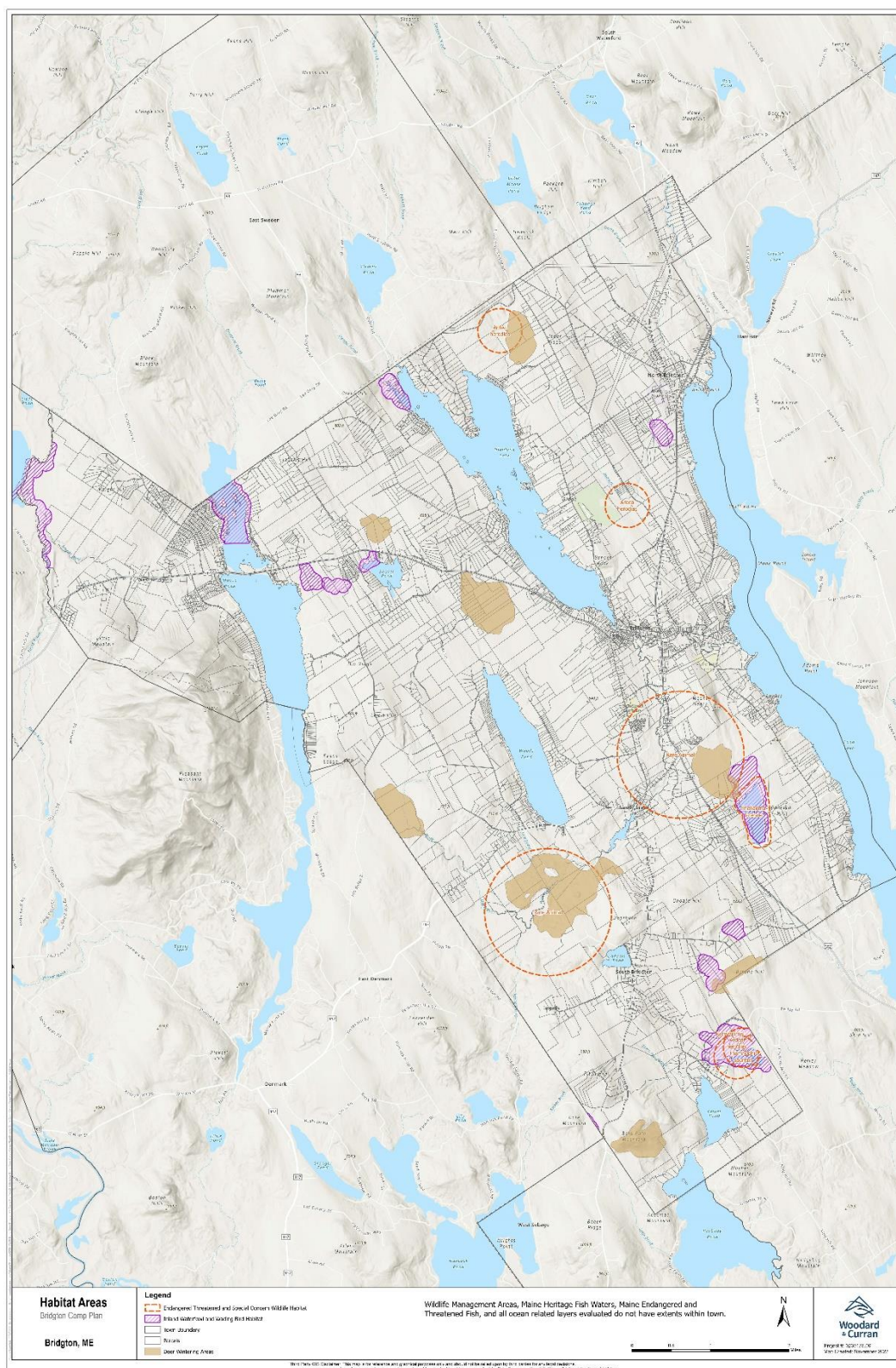




Critical Habitat

Given limited development, the amount of undeveloped land, and an abundance of natural resources, Bridgton features a diverse range of habitats. The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife (MDIFW) established the Beginning with Habitat program to help municipalities, landowners, and land trusts build habitat conservation into their long-term plans. The program has identified a catalog of rare animals in the region. These include comet darter, eastern ribbon snake, great blue heron, New England bluet, northern brownsnake, Blanding's turtle, and spotted turtle. Rare, identified plants include birch-oak rocky woodland, pitch pine woodland, red pine woodland, and Canada mountain-ricegrass. High-value plant and animal habitats have also been mapped as part of the Beginning with Habitat Program. These include deer wintering areas, wildlife wetlands, significant vernal pools, inland waterfowl and wading bird habitat, and rare plant locations. Deer wintering areas are protected by the state and part of Bridgton's plan review and subdivision process.

Figure 2.3: Critical Habitat Areas





Challenges and Opportunities

Protection of natural resources is important to the Town's character and critical for the long-term health of the region's environment and habitat areas. State and federal regulations, Town initiatives, and support from community organizations have all helped protect natural areas and maintain a healthy environment.

As noted throughout this chapter, existing and future development patterns have the greatest impact on water quality and overall environmental health. As the Town continues to experience development pressure, consideration for where, how, and how much development is allowed and encouraged in the Town will have long-term impacts on the region's natural resources. Land use and zoning decisions should consider potential development impacts, including stormwater runoff, disruption of wildlife corridors and habitat areas, vulnerability to flooding, and other impacts to natural areas and systems.

The Town's valuable natural resources are not bound by the Town border but are regional assets that require regional coordination to preserve and protect. Lakes, streams, open spaces, habitat areas, and other natural systems are also assets that contribute to the desirability of the region that all impacted municipalities have an interest in protecting. Coordination with neighboring municipalities and regional organizations will be essential in implementing broad environmental initiatives.

Maine continues to experience more high heat days, warmer winters, and more extreme weather related to broader climate shifts. These climate hazards can severely impact natural resources, including the loss or degradation of wetlands, changes in species and populations of ecosystems, and warming of lakes and ponds that result in changes to lake ecology. Protection of natural resources and systems will need to include efforts to mitigate climate impacts and consideration for the potential long-term changes to the Town's surface waters, open spaces, and habitats.

Sources

Lakes Environmental Association

Maine Department of Conservation, Maine Geological Survey

Maine DEP, Maine Nonpoint Source Management Program Plan 2020-2024

Maine DEP, Maine Statutory Water Classification

Maine DEP, Natural Resources Protection Act

Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Town of Bridgton Land Use Code, 2022, Shoreland Zoning

Town of Bridgton Floodplain Management Ordinance

3 Agriculture and Forestry

Agricultural and forest resources are valuable assets for communities. Forest and agricultural lands provide habitat for wildlife, contribute to the local food economy, and play an important role in preserving natural resources. Farmland provides food for both the community and wildlife, helps control flooding, protects wetlands and watersheds, and maintains air quality. Farmlands also filter and absorb wastewater and provide groundwater recharge, where surface water can move downward into the water table.

Healthy and managed forests provide wildlife habitat, clean air and water, stabilize the soil, and provide recreational opportunities. Despite continued growth in undeveloped areas, forests are the predominant land cover in Bridgton. The woodlands and forest closed canopy are a defining character of the region and part of the rural draw that attracts people to live in and visit the Lakes Region. Historically, the forestry industry has been one of Maine's largest industries and has contributed heavily to the state's economy and culture. Today, the forestry industry still provides jobs for people across the state. In 2021, roughly 2% of Maine's total employment was in the forestry sector, and the industry had about \$5.1 billion in sales. Today, roughly 1.2% of Bridgton's population is employed in the agriculture, forestry, and wildlife sectors. The industry has seen a decline nationwide and is looking to adapt to new challenges and demands.

Agriculture

Today, Bridgton has a small percentage of actively farmed land. The State of Maine has four current use programs that offer property owners a reduction in their property's assessed value. Properties used for farmland, open space, tree growth, and working waterfront are eligible to enroll in one of the four current land use programs. To qualify for the farmland program, property owners must use their land for farming, agriculture, or horticulture, and the parcel must contribute at least \$2,000 in gross income from farming activities each year.

As of 2022, Bridgton had 56 acres of farmland and 86 acres of woodland across three parcels enrolled in the program. Land enrolled in the farmland Current Land Use Program accounts for less than 1% of Bridgton's total land area. The total number of acres and parcels enrolled in the program has decreased since 2009 when the State started publishing these data online. The total number declined from 77 acres of farmland and 106 acres of woodlands across seven parcels. This follows a greater trend across Cumberland County. According to the most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Census of Agriculture, the number of farms in Cumberland County has declined by 7%, the total acres of farms has declined 20%, and the average farm size has declined 14%.

Figure 3.1: Agriculture, Open Space, and Tree Growth

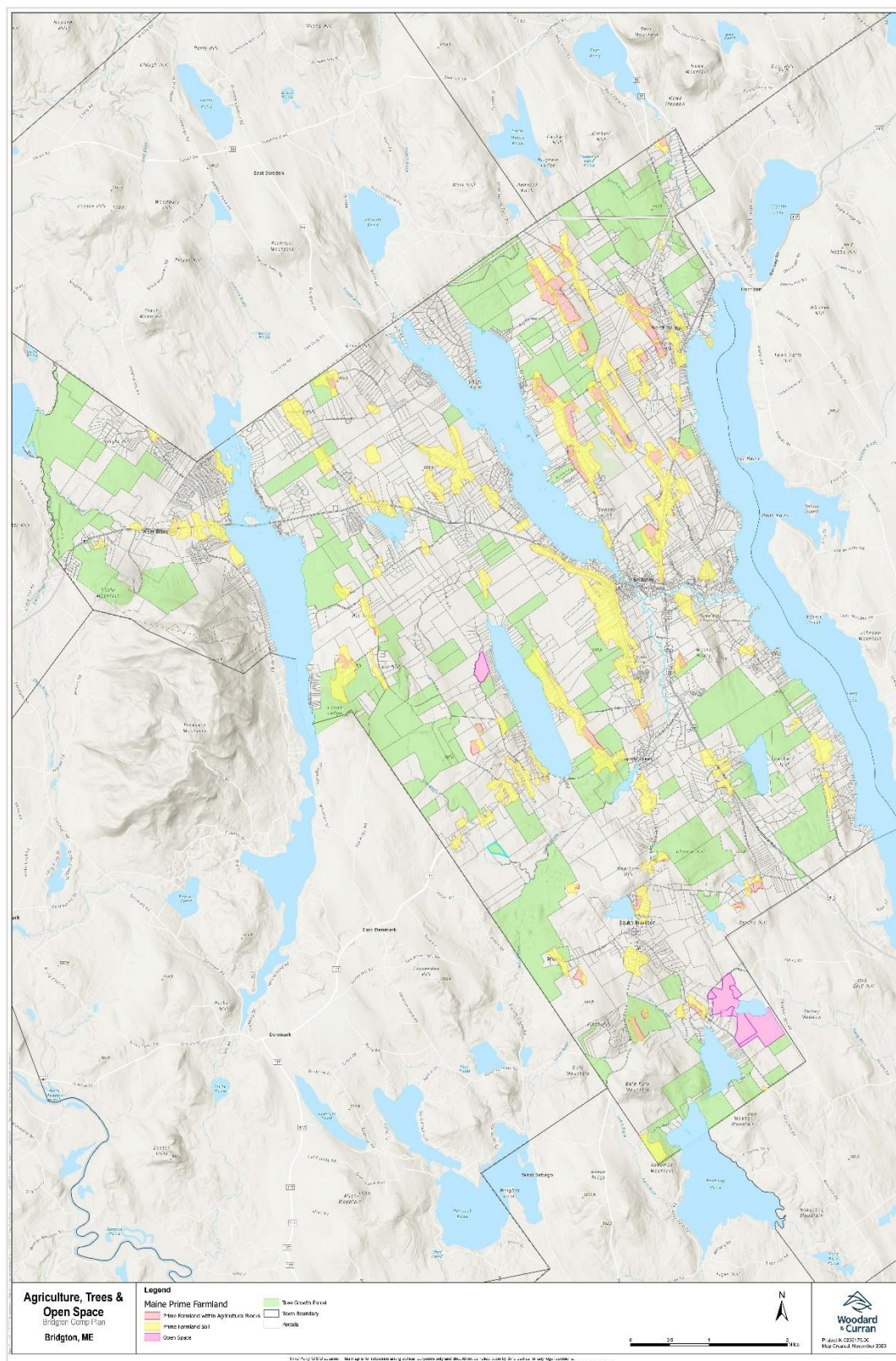


Table 3.1: Farmland Current Land Use Program Data

Year	Number of Parcels	Farmland Acres	Woodland Acres	Total Farmland Valuation	Total Woodland Valuation
2009	7	77	106	\$26,950	\$25,719
2022	3	56	86	\$15,470	\$30,896

Maine Valuation Return Statistical Summary

The same data show a significant decline in agriculture statewide but an increase in the number of small farms. Despite a decline in overall land dedicated for agricultural use, the state is experiencing a resurgence in farming, as more than 100 new organic farms were added from 2008 to 2014.

There are several areas in Bridgton identified as prime farmland. Prime farmland is land with the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing agricultural products like food, fiber, or feed. Prime farmland produces consistently high yields of crops when managed and farmed. There is a significant amount of prime farmland in Bridgton, including the following locations:

- Between South High Street, Route 302, and Woods Pond
- Along Highland Road, Chadbourne Hill Road, and Sanborns Grove Road
- Along Middle Ridge Road, Upper Ridge Road, and Del Chadbourne Road
- Between Chadbourne Hill Road and Kimball Road
- Along Sweden Road, Hio Ridge Road, and Sam Ingalls Road
- Along South Bridgton Road

As Bridgton looks to determine growth areas, it will have to consider how to balance future development and the protection of prime farmland.

Farmers Markets

The Bridgton Farmers Market was founded in 1996. The summer market is held every Saturday from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. in the lot behind Reny's on Depot Street from May to October. The winter market is held from November to April from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Oriental Lodge on Harrison Road. Farmers markets serve important roles in communities across the country, providing access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and other locally sourced items. The Bridgton Farmers Market features vendors from the Town and throughout the Lakes Region. The farmers market also provides residents with low incomes access to fresh and locally sourced food by accepting Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Some vendors accept Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program benefits.



Community Gardens

In 2011, the Bridgton-Lake Region Rotary Club built an initial set of community garden beds at the Bridgton Community Center. In 2023, the Rotary Club and Extension Master Gardeners Program added additional garden beds. The master gardeners manage the 30 beds at the Community Center.⁸

The Bridgton Community Center operates a seasonal community garden program for new and experienced gardeners. Community members can purchase a garden bed in the spring and garden through the fall. The center now has 30 beds for the community to use. Master Gardeners manage the current beds and help provide food for the Bridgton Food Pantry.

Forest Resources

Maine has the largest contiguous block of undeveloped forestland in the eastern United States. Despite more than 200 years of harvests, Maine has the highest percentage of forested land in the United States, with about 90% of the state being forested.

Forests provide key habitats for plants and animals and are important to the overall health of watersheds. Bridgton's forests are a mix of softwoods like balsam fir, white pine, spruce, hemlock, and hardwoods, including maples, beech, birches, and red oak. These resources provide economic and employment opportunities to the region. The harvesting of timber is an important component of Bridgton's local economy. The Maine Department of Administrative and Financial Services (DAF) regulates timber harvesting activities to minimize adverse impacts on forest resources, including improper harvesting leading to erosion, phosphorus pollution in lakes and streams, and increased runoff. Bridgton is committed to sustainable harvesting. The Maine Tree Growth Tax Law helps landowners maintain their properties as productive woodlands through well-planned harvesting. In addition, timber harvesting is regulated in Bridgton's shoreland zoning regulations.

Over half of Bridgton's land area is forested, and 8,225 acres (roughly 20% of Bridgton's land area) are enrolled in Maine's Tree Growth Tax Program. The State incentivizes the active management and utilization of land through the program. This program is similar to the Current Use Tax Program for agriculture. When enrolled in the program, landowners can receive favorable property tax assessment reductions. Landowners must have an approved forest management plan in order to participate, and forests can be managed to meet a variety of landowner goals, including recreation, wildlife habitat, and lake and fishery protection. The program requires some commercial harvest in line with the property's approved forest management plan.

⁸ The Sun Journal. May 19, 2023. "Bridgton Club Builds Garden Beds at Community Center." *The Sun Journal*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <https://www.sunjournal.com/2023/05/19/bridgton-club-builds-garden-beds-at-community-center/>

In 2022, Bridgton had 132 tree growth parcels. The Town has 1,759 acres of softwood, 4,829 acres of mixed wood, and 1,637 acres of hardwood. In 2022, the total value of timber harvested was \$3,005,720. Since 2009, the number of parcels enrolled in the program has increased; however, the total number of enrolled acres has declined. Despite the decline, in 2022, Bridgton had the second highest total acres in tree growth in Cumberland County behind Standish (9,202 acres).

Table 3.2: Tree Growth Current Land Use Program Data

Year	Number of Parcels	Softwood Acres	Hardwood Acres	Mixed Wood Acres	Total Acres	Total Value
2009	131	2,153	1,127	4,827	9,532	\$2,923,418
2022	132	1,759	1,637	4,122	8,225	\$3,005,720

Maine Valuation Return Statistical Summary

According to data from the Town's year-end landowner reports to the State, there has been a decline in lumber harvested since 1991, with peaks occurring in 1994 and 2002. From 1991 to 1999, 319 acres were clear-cut. Since 2000, 19 acres have been clear-cut.

Forests also provide various recreational benefits for local residents and visitors. Publicly accessible land offers scenic benefits and recreational opportunities, including hiking, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and cross-country skiing. Bridgton and conservation partners continue to seek protection opportunities as well as ways to connect trail and recreation networks.

The Highland Research Forest is a 420-acre preserve in Bridgton and part of the headwaters for Highland Lake. In 2016, the Hancock family donated 340 acres of land to the LEA, and in 2018, the Hatch family donated another 80 acres. In 2019, trails were installed with a small parking lot and information kiosk. The goal of the preserve is to establish a research forest that offers visitors educational opportunities around sustainable harvesting, the importance of a forested watershed, and a space for long-term research projects related to woods, wildlife, soil, and water. The forest features a network of nine trails that connect to a larger network of regional and cross-country ski trails.

The State of Maine and Bridgton have a long history of managing multiple-use forests. Forests in Bridgton are actively managed alongside recreation and ecological conservation. Forests are managed to preserve land, protect water supply, provide wildlife habitat, and drive sustainable tourism and recreation. Public and private landowners manage forested areas and provide access to recreation.

Loon Echo Land Trust (LELT) manages the conservation of more than 8,500 acres of land across Bridgton and the Lakes Region. LELT owns permanent land acquisitions, manages land, provides access to recreation and open space, and hosts educational events. LELT works closely with the Town of Bridgton to maintain and preserve access to forests and open spaces.

Challenges and Opportunities

Emerging challenges can impact the health of forests and cropland in Bridgton. Tree disease and insects—beech leaf disease, wood borers, insects, and defoliators—are becoming more common and are impacting tree health across Maine. Native trees are also being displaced by invasive species. Invasive plants out-compete native plants and can lead to a reduction in the diversity of species in a forest, and invasive plants can make it difficult for property owners to achieve objectives for their property. Additionally, warmer, wetter weather can cause trees stress, which can lead to poorer tree health and wood products.

Warmer winters and heavy rains, which the state has been experiencing and will likely continue experiencing, can impact the ability of foresters and loggers to conduct harvests and actively manage forests because heavy equipment and machinery cannot travel across wet or flooded grounds. This can lead to less healthy forests, decreased amounts of timber that can be harvested on a property, and less valuable timber.

Additionally, heavier rains can cause farmers to delay their planting season, which can delay harvesting. Excessive rain can also damage soil and deplete soils of nutrients, potentially impacting local farming production and disincentivizing new community members from getting involved in local agriculture.

Bridgton has taken several measures to preserve its agricultural and forest resources. As the Town examines areas for development, it will have to determine how to best preserve forests, tree canopy, and green space in the future. The Town will also have to consider how to best preserve prime farmland and support and encourage local agriculture. The Town should look to limit development in rural areas of Bridgton to better preserve natural resources, like prime farmland, open space, and woodlands. The Town should also continue collaborating with partner organizations, like the Bridgton Community Center, Rotary Club, and others, to support local farming and increase the abundance of locally grown food. Additionally, the Town could consider ways to support farmers in mitigating the impacts of heavy rains and floods on their crops.

As the Town looks toward its future resilience, regional collaboration and the efforts of groups like LEIT will be essential for long-term progress. When considering resources and issues that extend beyond the Town, such as habitat management, a regional approach is important in understanding the issue from a broader perspective and leveraging and coordinating resources to address these challenges. As Bridgton is located on the edge of Cumberland County, it will likely have to work with neighboring municipalities in Oxford County to coordinate resources and address these challenges.

Sources

Lakes Environmental Association

Loon Echo Land Trust



Cumberland County Census of Agriculture Profile

State of Maine Census of Agriculture Profile

Maine Prime Farmland Determination Guidelines

American Farmland Trust – Farmland Information Center

Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summary

Bridgton Community Center – Community Gardens

Bridgton Farmers Market

USDA Urban Agriculture

National Association of State Foresters

Impact of Climate Change on Maine Forests

American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture, How does Weather Affect Farming?

4 Land Use

History of Development in Bridgton

Initial development of Bridgton was concentrated around the numerous mills constructed along Stevens Brook beginning in the late 18th century in what is now downtown Bridgton. Additional early settlements in North Bridgton and South Bridgton developed around the same time period to support the growing mill town, but commercial activity remained predominantly along Main Street and North High Street. Over time, commercial development extended south along Route 302, which connects Bridgton to Portland, and, to a lesser extent, Route 117 north of Main Street.⁹

The Town has maintained its historic Main Street and preserved several historic structures downtown. Initiatives to preserve the Town's history and village character contribute to Bridgton's desirability as a tourist destination and place to live.

Growth Management

In 1971, the Town approved its first zoning ordinance, creating residential, commercial, and industrial zones. After several amendments to the ordinance and substantial disagreement among residents around allowing business uses and home occupations, the Town voted to repeal the zoning ordinance in 1977.¹⁰ The Town remained without any zoning regulations until 2019, with development controlled primarily by state-mandated shoreland zoning.

Land use recommendations in Bridgton's 2004 Comprehensive Plan focused on maintaining the "old New England" town character and preserving rural areas and natural resources. The plan encouraged medium-density housing development (low-rise apartments, duplexes) and light commercial activities in downtown that would maintain and complement the architectural character of the Town. The plan also discusses techniques to further preserve open space and rural areas, including a building permit cap, purchasing development rights, tax incentives for farmland and forests, and purchasing land for conservation and recreation.

Bridgton's 2014 Comprehensive Plan established an approach to reintroduce zoning and greater land use regulation. The 2014 plan recognized the need to control and intentionally guide growth and development to preserve the Town's critical natural assets and rural areas and to encourage development and economic growth in a way that supports the Town's values. The future land use section of the 2014 plan recommended seven separate land use designations. The designation of these

⁹ Geraghty, Gail. September 5, 2023. "When Bridgton Was a Mill Town." *The Bridgton News*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <http://www.bridgton.com/when-bridgton-was-a-mill-town/>

¹⁰ Geraghty, Gail. October 16, 2014. "A Short History of Zoning in Bridgton." *The Bridgton News*. Accessed November 15, 2023. <http://www.bridgton.com/a-short-history-of-zoning-in-bridgton/>

areas was based on several factors: The Town's natural resource systems, historic development patterns, a desire to preserve the village and countryside character, efficient use of public services and utilities, desire to create opportunities for housing and commercial growth, and input from the community.

As stated in the 2014 plan, the recommended approach to development standards would focus on building form and relation to the public realm (e.g., structure dimensions and setbacks), allow for flexibility, and support a mix of uses and structures. This focus on design and functionality was in response to public input and past concern about the limitations of inflexible standards for separating uses, as was done with the Town's first zoning ordinance.

Land Use Districts

The recommended districts can broadly be grouped into three categories: downtown village districts, corridor districts, and residential districts. When the Town officially established land use districts into ordinance in 2019, these three categories were adhered to, with additional breakdown of the downtown village and corridor categories to accommodate transition areas. Per the 2019 ordinance, the Town is divided into the following nine land use districts:

- **Downtown Village Business I (DVB-I) District:** The DVB-I district includes Depot Street and Main Street from North High Street to Portland Road (Routes 302/117). The district also extends south to include the Stevens Brook Elementary School campus and Town facilities off of Willett Road. This district is intended as a higher density growth area to support business, retail, and entertainment uses in the village center. Development should be pedestrian-oriented and respect the historic character of the district.
- **Downtown Village Business II (DVB-II) District:** The DVB-II district extends just north (along Route 117), east (along Main Street), and south (along Route 302) from the DVB-I district. The DVB-II district serves as a transitional growth area from residential neighborhoods to higher density development of DVB-I. The district is characterized by low-density, mixed-use development.
- **Downtown Village Neighborhood (DVN) District:** The DVN district extends out from the DVB districts, including areas to the west along Main Street and Smith Avenue, areas directly north of the DVB-I district between Harrison Road (Route 117) and Wayside Avenue, and areas to the west along North High Street, South High Street, and north of Pondicherry Park. The DVN district is a designated residential growth area and is characterized by its walkability and historic structures.
- **Inner Corridor (IC) District:** The IC district extends south of the DVB-II district along Route 302. This district is a designated growth area for higher density, mixed-use development.



- **Outer Corridor (OC) District:** The OC district extends south of the IC district along Route 302 from Sandy Creek Road to the Naples town line. The OC district serves as a transitional area, supporting a variety of medium- and low-density uses, including multifamily housing.
- **Mixed-Use Corridor (MUC) District:** The MUC district includes areas along Harrison Road (Route 117) and Route 302 northwest of downtown. This district is characterized by low-density, mixed-use development, including commercial and recreational uses along the rural highway corridor.
- **Lakeside Neighborhood (LN) District:** The LN district includes areas surrounding the Town's 10 ponds and lakes and Willett Brook. The LN district is primarily a low-density, single-family residential development. The district includes areas around the Town's lakes and is intended to protect existing vegetation and critical watershed areas.
- **Outer Village (OV) District:** The OV district includes villages nodes in North Bridgton and South Bridgton. The OV district includes historic village nodes that provide a transition from the node to rural areas and include some small neighborhood-oriented businesses and residential development.
- **Rural Neighborhood (RN) District:** The RN district is the largest district by area and includes the rural and residential areas outside of downtown and commercial/mixed-use corridors. The RN district is primarily a low-density, single-family residential development. It is intended to preserve the rural character and open space of the district and enable low-density residential development and low-intensity, rural-serving non-residential uses.

Shoreland Zoning

The Town maintains shoreland zoning regulations, in accordance with Maine's Mandatory Shoreland Zoning Act, to regulate land use activities within 250 feet of the normal high-water line of great ponds, rivers, and tidal water; within 250 feet of the upland edge of wetlands; and within 75 feet of streams. Bridgton has established six shoreland zoning districts, which are overlay districts, meaning the restrictions of the underlying land use district also apply to areas within shoreland zoning districts. The shoreland zoning districts are described in greater detail in Chapter 2 (Natural and Water Resources).

Revision to Land Use Ordinance

In 2021, the Select Board approved a consolidation of the Town's ordinances regulating land use and development into one consolidated Land Use Code. This consolidation included review and reconciliation of requirements in the Land Use Ordinance, Site Plan Review Ordinance, Shoreland Zoning Ordinance, Building/Plumbing/Razing Ordinance, and Subdivision Regulations. The purpose of this change was to create a more user-friendly document, remove redundancies and conflicts between ordinances, update sections to comply with state law and case law, and address any gaps in development regulation. Several other amendments to the Town's land use and zoning regulations were proposed as a part of the consolidation but were not approved due to the substantive nature of these items and the need for additional review and guidance from an updated comprehensive plan. Discussion of these proposed amendments should be revisited as part of this planning process.

In 2022, the Land Use Code was updated to specifically include provisions for solar energy facilities to be allowed in certain areas with site plan approval and for accessory solar energy systems to be allowed by permit in certain locations with restrictions.

Existing Land Use

Bridgton is characterized by its rural landscapes, with the majority of the Town's land being undeveloped forested areas. Developed areas are predominantly low-density, single-family homes. There are almost 5,000 acres of conservation areas in Bridgton (approximately 14% of the Town's total land area) and several publicly and privately owned recreational areas with multipurpose trails and other recreational facilities. With 11 lakes and ponds within or partially within the Town, much of the Town's residential development is oriented toward the lakes and ponds. The lakes and Pleasant Mountain Ski Area are the main drivers of tourism in the Town, along with other recreational and incidental hospitality uses, including campgrounds and other lodging. The Town has worked to balance development that supports Bridgton's tourism and recreation economy while also preserving the character of natural areas that initially attracted visitors.

While the Town is predominantly rural, Bridgton has a compact and historic downtown area where most commercial and institutional development exists. Within downtown, there are numerous retail shops, personal and professional services, restaurants, arts and cultural institutions, community organizations, government offices, Bridgton Hospital, and Stevens Brook Elementary School. Many of these uses serve the broader region, with people regularly traveling from neighboring communities to access goods and services in downtown Bridgton. There has been steady commercial, multifamily, and mixed-use development along primary corridors leading to downtown, especially Portland Road (Route 302) toward Naples. This development has predominantly been suburban and automobile oriented.

Challenges and Opportunities

Recent and current infrastructure improvements, including expansion of the Town's wastewater treatment facility, have increased capacity for development in downtown where property owners were previously limited in the type and size of development that could be accommodated by Town wastewater services. Beautification efforts and streetscape improvements have also added to the desirability of downtown as a place to live, work, and visit.

With increasing development pressure related to the state's housing crisis and households being priced out of the Portland area housing market, Bridgton will likely continue to experience growth and development. Protecting rural areas and corridors from sprawling development will continue to be a concern for the Town for environmental reasons and to maintain Bridgton's small-town aesthetic and scenic views.

Revisiting the proposed substantive changes to the Land Use Code will be done in accordance with this plan, once completed, to help ensure the Town's land use and development regulations will allow and encourage the type of development the community desires while limiting development that does not support the Town's vision.

Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Bridgton 2004 Comprehensive Plan

Town of Bridgton Land Use Code, amended November 8, 2022

5 Parks, Recreation, and Open Space

Introduction

Parks, recreation, and open space are vital to the culture, economy, and quality of life in Bridgton. Whether its skiing, snowmobiling, boating, hiking, camping, or relaxing on the beach, Bridgton's lakes, mountains, and woods offer a variety of opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy year-round recreation. The Town has abundant parks and open spaces, access to trails and sports fields, and a variety of recreational programming, including adult and youth classes and Town events.

Municipal Parks and Programming

The Town of Bridgton owns 430 acres of land, including roughly 150 acres of parkland. These properties include beaches, parks, nature preserves, and over 90 miles of multiuse trails. The Town also owns and maintains the Ham Recreation Complex (Ham Complex), Harmon Field, a seasonal ice rink, and skate park. The Town also maintains 16 cemeteries across 35 acres of land. There are 11 lakes and ponds in Bridgton used for recreation throughout the year, though most use is in the summer months.

The Ham Complex includes several athletic fields that serve the local community and also attract sports teams from across New England. The complex was completed in 2022 by a group of local community members who formed the Bridgton Recreation Advancement Group (BRAG). BRAG coordinated the development of the Ham Complex with the intention of turning the property over to the Town to operate and maintain once completed. The Town acquired the property in July 2022 and is currently working on a master plan for the complex.

The Town's largest park is Pondicherry Park, offering visitors access to low-impact, accessible trails. In 2012, the Town purchased Pondicherry Park from LEIT with a perpetual conservation easement. Through a collaborative effort with LEA, 66 acres of woodlands and 3,200 feet of stream shore were preserved in downtown Bridgton. LEIT holds a conservation easement on the land to help ensure protection of natural resources. The park is overseen by the Pondicherry Park Committee, which comprises Town representatives, LEIT and LEA representatives, and a Town Select Board member.

The Recreation Department has three full-time staff members and hires seasonal employees. The Recreation Department also works with several volunteers to support programs and events. The PSD supports the Recreation Department in maintaining parks, fields, and cemeteries.

The Town offers a significant amount of programming for people of all ages and abilities, from young children to older adults. Programming varies seasonally and can include pickleball, exercise classes, before- and after-school enrichment, and sports and theater camps, among others. Bridgton's Recreation Department currently operates out of the Old Town Hall. Activities like pickleball, before- and after-school care, and community fitness classes are hosted at the Old Town Hall. The Recreation Department provides transportation to a variety of family and adult trips, including regional fairs and cultural events throughout southern and western Maine. The department also supports the production of a variety of fairs and events in Bridgton.

Table 5.1: Bridgton Recreation Amenities

Name/Address	Facility Type	Miles of Trails	Athletic Fields	Water Access	Playground	Trails/Walking Paths	Passive Recreation	Memorial	Gazebo/ Amphitheater	Indoor Recreation
Pondicherry Park	Park	2.3				X	X		X	
Town Common	Park				X		X			
Shorey Park	Park					X	X			
Farragut Memorial Park	Park						X	X		
Salmon Point Beach	Beach			X						
Salmon Point	Campground			X		X				
Woods Pond Beach	Beach			X						
Highland Lake Beach	Beach			X						
HAM Complex	Athletic Fields		X							
Harmon Field	Athletic Fields		X							
Old Town Hall	Activity Center									X
Peabody-Fitch Woods	Natural Area	2.5				X	X			
Bald Pate Preserve	Natural Area	6.7				X	X			

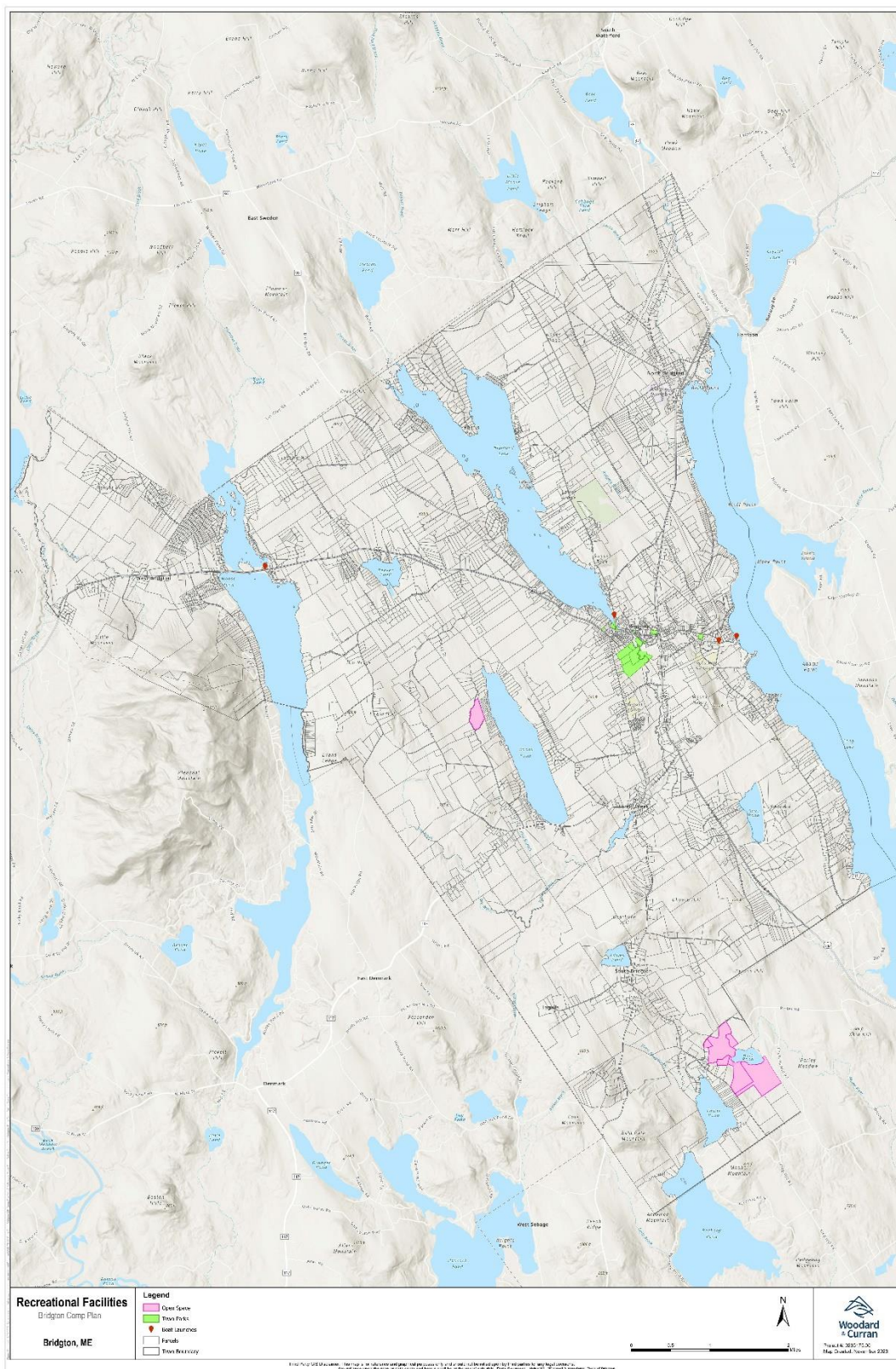
Name/Address	Facility Type	Miles of Trails	Athletic Fields	Water Access	Playground	Trails/Walking Paths	Passive Recreation	Memorial	Gazebo/ Amphitheater	Indoor Recreation
Pleasant Mountain Preserve	Natural Area	10.5				X	X			
Holt Pond Preserve	Natural Area	4.5				X	X			
Woods Pond Boat Launch	Boat Launch			X						
Highland Lake Boat Launch	Boat Launch			X						

Non-Municipal Facilities and Programming

Non-municipal and private facilities in Bridgton also provide recreation opportunities and programming to supplement those offered by the Town. The Bridgton Community Center offers a variety of programming and community events, including senior lunches, community kettle dinners, table games, support groups, community gardens, and other specialized programs.

Pleasant Mountain Ski Area offers skiers diverse skiing opportunities, including uphill and downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, and night skiing. Pleasant Mountain brings visitors from across the Lakes Region and beyond. The Lakes Region ATV club maintains trails and hosts monthly events from April to November for local community members to access trails and volunteer. The Bridgton Easy Riders snowmobile club also maintains trails throughout the Lakes Region and hosts events for members. The Bridgton Highlands Country Club offers access to golf courses and tennis courts, and the Country Club has event spaces open to rent. LElt and LEA also provide the community with access to trails and open space throughout Bridgton.

Figure 5.1: Parks and Open Space



Open Space

Conservation

Approximately 15% of Bridgton's land area is in conservation. This means that the land is protected for the purposes of protecting natural, scenic, or open spaces; ensuring its availability for agricultural, forest, recreational, or open space use; and protecting natural resources and enhancing water and air quality.

In addition to farm and forestlands, the State has a Current Land Use Program for open space. To meet the requirements, a parcel must be preserved or restricted in use to provide public benefit, which includes public recreation, scenic resources, game management, and wildlife habitat. The market value of an open space parcel receives a reduction on its valuation based on requirements from the State, and the property owner's property taxes are based on the reduced valuation.

Bridgton has 1,920 acres across 24 parcels conserved in the open space program. Bridgton has the most open space conserved in the program in Cumberland County. Brunswick and Sebago each also have over 1,000 acres conserved. The total number of parcels and acreage enrolled in the open space Current Land Use Tax Program has increased since 2009. In 2009, Bridgton had 348 acres across six parcels enrolled in the program.

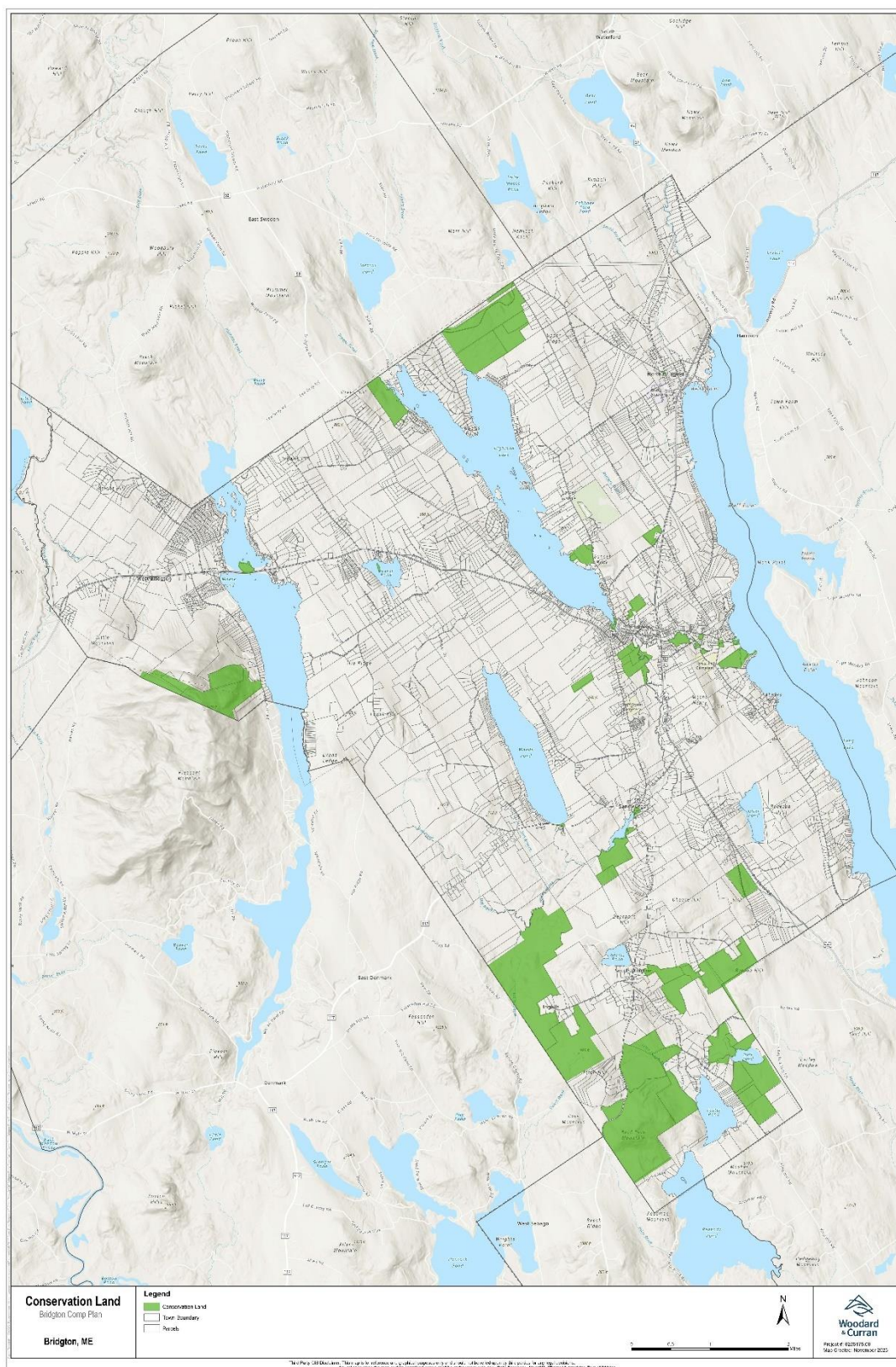
Table 5.2: Open Space Current Land Use Program Data

Year	Number of Parcels	Total Acres	Total Value
2009	6	348	\$118,560
2022	24	1,920	\$787,013

Maine Valuation Return Statistical Summary

LELT is a nonprofit organization established in 1987 by community members who sought to preserve open space and natural resources throughout the Lakes Region. LELT owns permanent land acquisitions and conservation easements to keep lands open and preserved in perpetuity. LELT is supported by volunteers who help monitor and maintain land and trails. In Bridgton, LELT lands include Peabody-Fitch Woods, Pondicherry Park, Pleasant Mountain, and Bald Pate Mountain. Other important blocks of conservation lands include the Holt Pond Preserve owned by LEA; the northwest corner of Highland Lake owned by the Hancock Foundation; and smaller parcels of land preserved by private property owners.

Figure 5.2: Conservation Land





Open Space Plan

In 2023, the Town of Bridgton adopted the Open Space Plan to set a vision and goals for the Town's open space resources. The development of the plan was funded by the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation, and the Future (GOPIF) Community Resilience Partnership Program. The plan includes background on previous open space initiatives and the history of open space protection and recreation in Bridgton.

To inform the plan, the Town underwent an extensive public engagement process, which included feedback and input from LELT, the Community Development Advisory Committee, and community members. The plan had three overarching goals: protect, connect, and activate. The first goal, protect, aims to create and interconnect a network of large, protected areas and linear green spaces. The second goal, connect, reinforces Bridgton's downtown core as a desirable destination for trail users, and the goal aims to extend new and existing trail systems to downtown and provide amenities for trail users to enhance and extend their recreational use. The third goal, activate, aims to increase the level of use and diversity of activities in Bridgton's open space system, including physical improvements, programming, and strategic partnerships to increase winter recreation, develop multiuse parks, and facilitate regional solutions to challenges.

Challenges and Opportunities

Open space and access to recreation opportunities are important to the Town, and there are significant opportunities to engage in recreation year-round. Recreation-based tourism contributes significantly to the Town's economy, and it is important to consider ways to continue to preserve Bridgton's open space and recreational resources.

As demand for more recreation and open spaces increases, consideration should be made to help ensure appropriate staffing and funding levels to maintain quality services. Currently, two full-time staff members are responsible for the Town's recreation programming. The Town has struggled to attract seasonal workers to support summer camps and additional programming, which may impact the Town's ability to provide programming at current levels. Additionally, as demand for programming increases, the Town will have to consider whether the Old Town Hall can continue to meet the community's needs. The Old Town Hall has been updated to accommodate recreational uses, but the facility is aging. There has been some support for a new community or recreation center in Bridgton to provide additional opportunities for residents to engage in physical activity and other programming. Furthermore, the Open Space Plan identifies several sources for funding open space maintenance and acquisition projects. Funding is often the largest barrier to implementing open space and recreation goals.

Climate change is likely to continue generating warmer temperatures. As a result, climate projections anticipate shorter winters with less snow, placing stress on winter recreation throughout Maine.



Additional challenges, like an increase in vector-borne illnesses and warmer summer temperatures, may impact summer recreation as well.

Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Bridgton Open Space Plan

Bridgton Recreation Department

Climate Change Resource Center – Recreation

Lakes Environmental Association

Loon Echo Land Trust

Municipal Valuation Return Statistical Summary

Pondicherry Park Committee

6 Economy

Introduction

From the mid-1800s to the mid-1900s, Bridgton's economy thrived. Manufacturing firms located along Stevens Brook provided substantial employment and wages to workers in the area. By the mid-1900s, technology had improved to replace mill operations, and mills across Bridgton closed. Manufacturing saw a slight resurgence in the 1950s and 1960s, but the resurgence dwindled, and most manufacturing businesses closed permanently by 1990. Throughout this time, Bridgton's downtown provided retail opportunities and services to the community. As the mills began to close, and competition from retail locations in Conway, NH, Windham, and the Maine Mall grew, several of Bridgton's downtown businesses closed. With the loss of year-round manufacturing jobs, Bridgton's economy became increasingly dependent on tourism.

Since the 1800s, people have been drawn to Bridgton's lakes and mountains for recreation. From the 1800s to mid-1900s, visitors would rent cottages for a week or two at a time, creating constant turnover of new tourists who used services and shopped in Bridgton. Beginning in the 1960s, more families began to buy cottages to use as vacation homes, reducing the consistent turnover of tourists that the Town had previously had.

Today, Bridgton is often described as the service center for the Lakes Region, providing access to medical care, retail opportunities, entertainment, and other services. Bridgton's location along several major regional road networks makes it easy for the community to access Bridgton's services and to connect people from neighboring communities to the Town.

Past and Current Economic Initiatives

The Town's 2014 Comprehensive Plan outlines a strategic plan for Bridgton's economic future, current available workforce, and technologies. The economic goals included providing stable employment at a living wage, providing a downtown with ample goods and services for residents and visitors, and creating a sustainable tax base to provide efficient municipal services to support the community. The plan focused on Bridgton's geographic location as an asset to build upon the tourism sector and enhance future growth. The plan identified construction, healthcare, senior support services, schools, and other businesses as sectors for additional growth. The plan also noted that Bridgton's New England character attracts people to Bridgton.

Expanding upon the 2014 Comprehensive Plan, the Town and the Maine Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Southern Maine created an economic and market analysis in 2019. The analysis examined the Town's economic base, workforce and employment trends, real estate market conditions, and demographic profile. The analysis also includes peer benchmarking, which provided a comparison of Bridgton's economic profile with communities of similar size, population, or

economic makeup. The analysis was not an economic development strategy nor a business attraction plan, but it does provide data to inform a strategy.

Economic Conditions

Throughout the 2010s, the average total number of people employed in Bridgton was fairly stagnant across all industries, with a slight peak in 2019. Pandemic-related closures resulted in a significant decline since 2020, though total jobs have grown since the pandemic. Some Maine businesses and industries were more insulated from the economic impacts of the pandemic compared to other states. During the pandemic, Maine experienced significant in-migration of people leaving larger urban areas for smaller communities with more open space and recreational opportunities. Additionally, with air travel limited, many tourists from nearby states were still traveling to Maine, where COVID-19 rates were relatively low and outdoor recreation opportunities were abundant. These new residents (some temporary) and visitors helped to support many Maine businesses during the pandemic.

Bridgton has seen consistent residential and commercial development in the last 50 years. The retail industry has grown over the past decade. The real estate and rental and leasing, wholesale trade, finance and insurance, and construction industries have also seen consistent job growth. While still the largest employment industry, the healthcare and social assistance industry has declined slightly over the last decade. The manufacturing industry saw growth from 2013 to 2019 but has declined since the pandemic. The information, professional and technical services, management, and administrative and support industries have also declined over the past decade.

Table 6.1: Bridgton Change in Labor Force by Sector

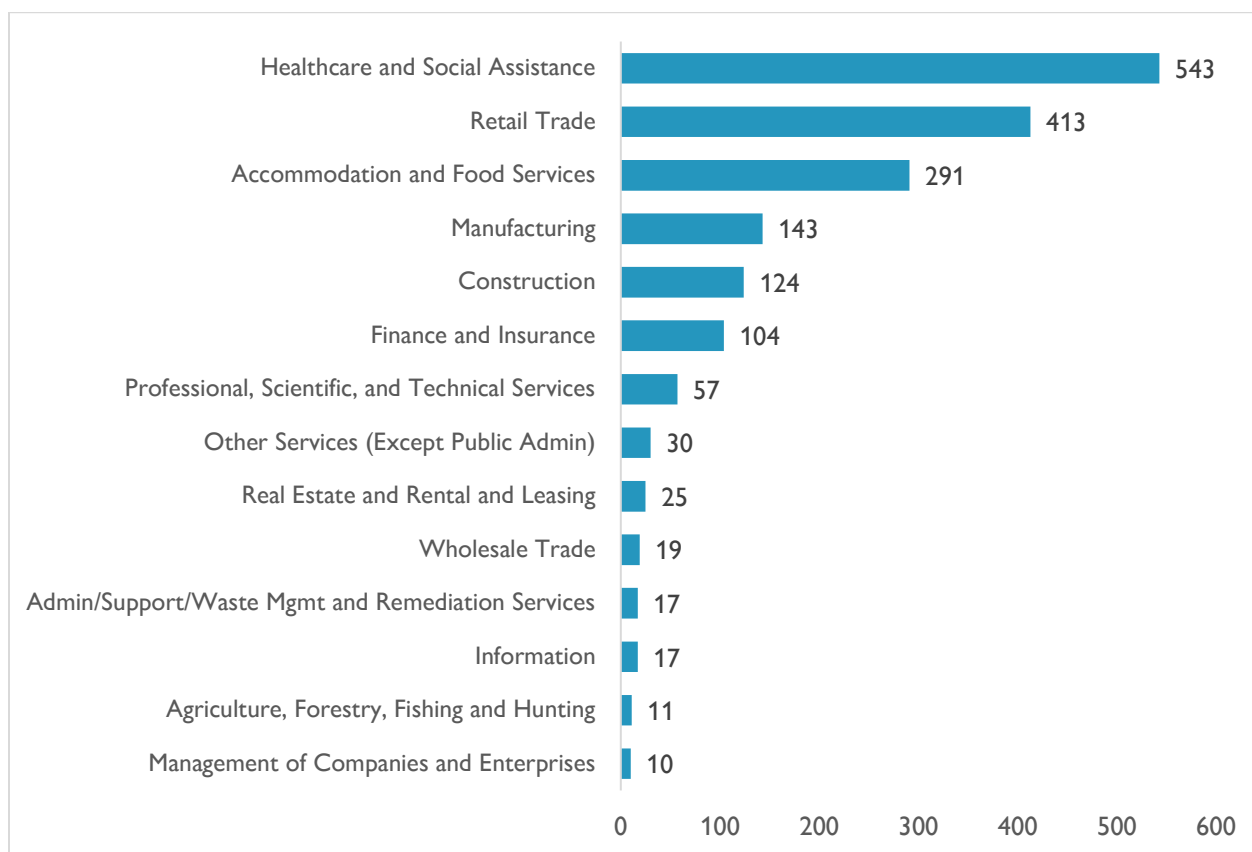
Sector	10-Year Change (2013 – 2023)	4-Year Change (2019 – 2023)
Construction	55%	13%
Manufacturing	9%	-14%
Wholesale Trade	73%	138%
Retail Trade	11%	2%
Information	-61%	-54%
Finance and Insurance	24%	9%
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	127%	47%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	-8%	-30%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	-47%	-50%

Sector	10-Year Change (2013 – 2023)	4-Year Change (2019 – 2023)
Administrative Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	-82%	-81%
Healthcare and Social Assistance	-11%	-1%
Accommodation and Food Service	9%	-23%
Other Services (Except Public Administration)	-14%	0%

Source: Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information

In 2023, the healthcare and social assistance industry employs an estimated 543 people. The retail trade (413 people) and accommodation and food service (291 people) are the second and third largest industries in Bridgton.

Figure 6.1: Total Employment by Sector (Q1 2023)

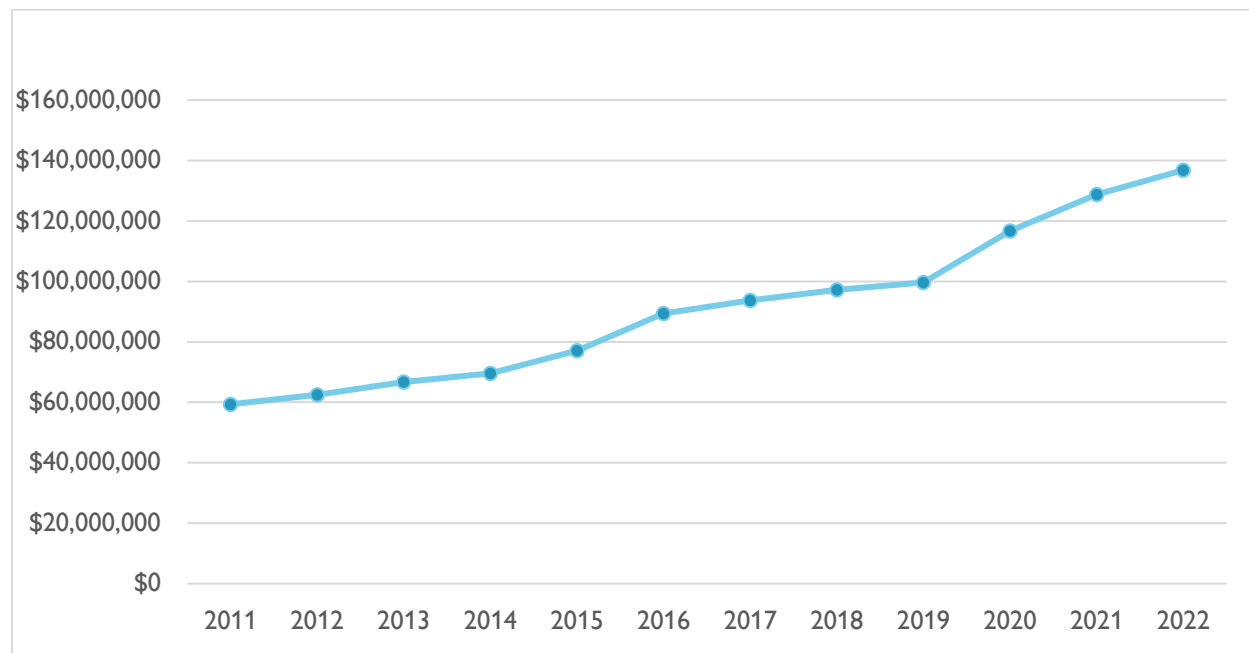


Source: Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information

Taxable sales in Bridgton have increased consistently over the last decade, with continued growth during the pandemic. Taxable sales in Bridgton have increased 105% since 2013 (\$66,714,808 in 2013 to

\$136,807,472 in 2022), and 37% since the start of the pandemic (\$99,653,768 in 2019 to \$136,807,472 in 2022).

Figure 6.2: Bridgton Annual Taxable Sales



Source: Maine Revenue Services, Sales Tax Report

Bridgton is a regional hub for nearby communities. Its central position between larger service areas, like Portland or the Conways and amenities make it attractive for those in neighboring communities to seek services in Bridgton. In addition, arts and cultural events and amenities, community programs, restaurants, and recreational opportunities all attract visitors from neighboring communities year-round.

Neighboring communities, like Sebago and Naples, also have significant population increases in the summer months, and their economies tend to focus on tourism. The lakes and access to recreation throughout the Lakes Region make it desirable for visitors and recreators. The region as a whole has seen a decline in the manufacturing sector, shifting more toward retail and professional services.

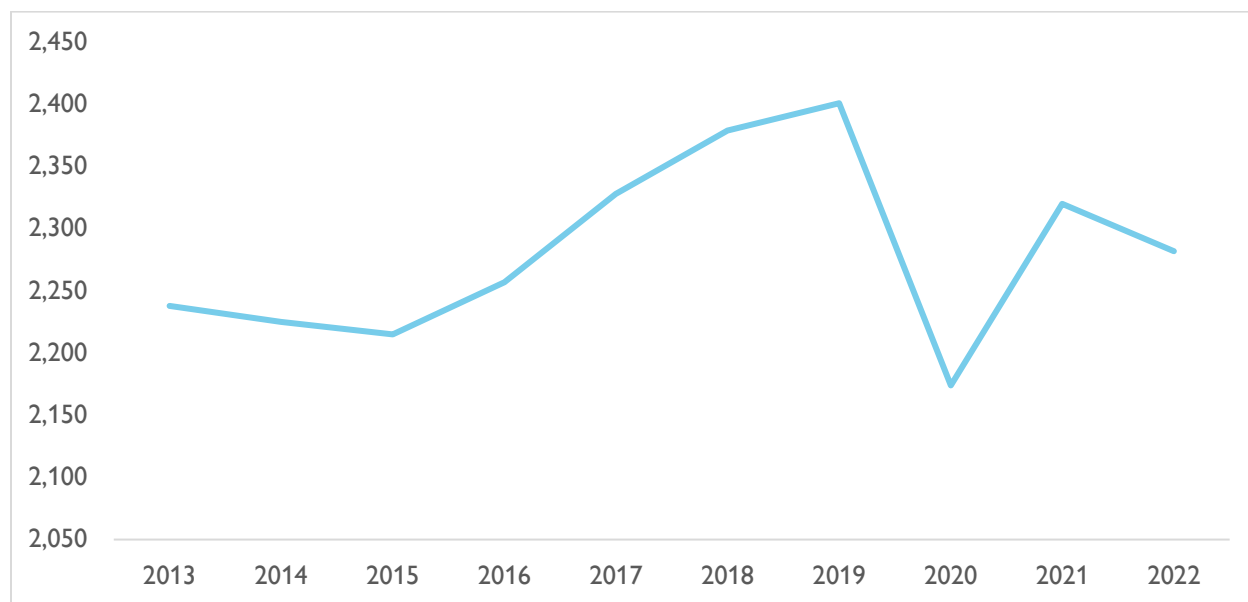
Employment and Wages

Employment

Employment in Bridgton peaked in 2019 before declining in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Bridgton saw an increase in employment from 2020 to 2021 but declined in 2022. Data from Q1 (January – March) 2023 show another increase in employment, though average annual data for the full year is not yet available. In Q1 2023, Pleasant Mountain Ski Resort was the 24th largest employer in Cumberland County; however, its employment in the summer and fall months is likely not as high.

Other major employers in Bridgton include Bridgton Hospital, Bridgton Academy, and Hannaford. In 2022, there were an average of 2,282 people employed in Bridgton.

Figure 6.3: Bridgton Total Employment, 2013 – 2022



Source: Maine Center for Workforce Research and Information

Healthcare and social assistance is the largest employment sector in the Town and comprises roughly 20% (413) of all jobs in Bridgton. The number of jobs in the retail sector increased from 372 in 2013. Retail and accommodations and food services were the second and third largest employment sectors, respectively, in 2022. Combined, the two sectors make up 35% of all jobs in Bridgton. Though these sectors comprise a significant portion of Bridgton's economy, they also have lower weekly wages than most economic sectors in Bridgton.

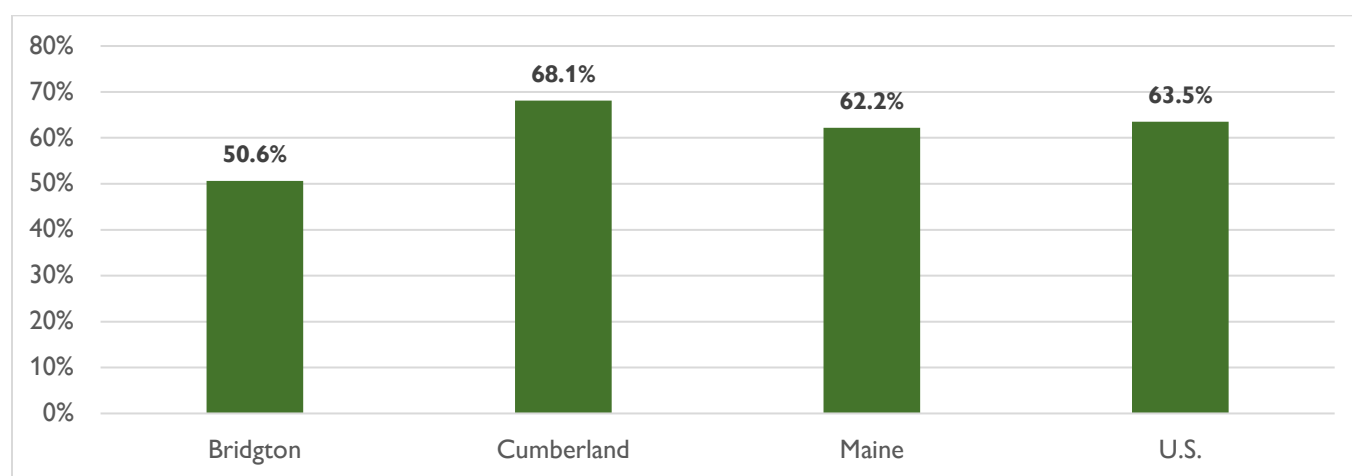
Labor Force

In 2021, approximately 72% of people working in Bridgton were living outside of the Town and commuting for work. Additionally, approximately 77% of Bridgton's employed residents commuted outside of the Town for work. Most workers commuting outside of Bridgton for work were traveling to communities east of Bridgton (Portland metro area). In 2020, 401 people lived and worked in Bridgton. Since 2018, the number of people both living and working in Bridgton has declined. This could be due, in part, to rising housing costs and relatively low wages across major economic sectors, like retail and food service. The most recent Census OnTheMap data are from 2021. There have likely been changes to commuter trends since 2021 related to the COVID-19 pandemic and housing crisis, including a rise in remote work and longer commutes for some as people struggle to find housing near employment centers. According to ACS five-year estimates, in 2022, roughly 30% of Bridgton residents commuted 60 or more minutes to work, up from 15% in 2012. There may be more people moving

from the Portland metro area to Bridgton due to housing affordability, and more people living in Bridgton may be commuting to the Portland metro area for work.

Since 2020, Maine's labor force participation rate has remained lower than the national average, largely due to aging and retirement. Labor force is defined as all people aged 16 and older who are either employed or unemployed and seeking employment. Those who are retired or those who are not actively looking for work are not considered to be part of the labor force. Bridgton has a lower labor force participation rate (50.6%) than the county, state, and nation. Bridgton's population is older, and its workforce is likely to continue to be impacted by aging and retirement. Bridgton's labor force declined from 2013 to 2018; however, labor force participation peaked at 61% in 2019.

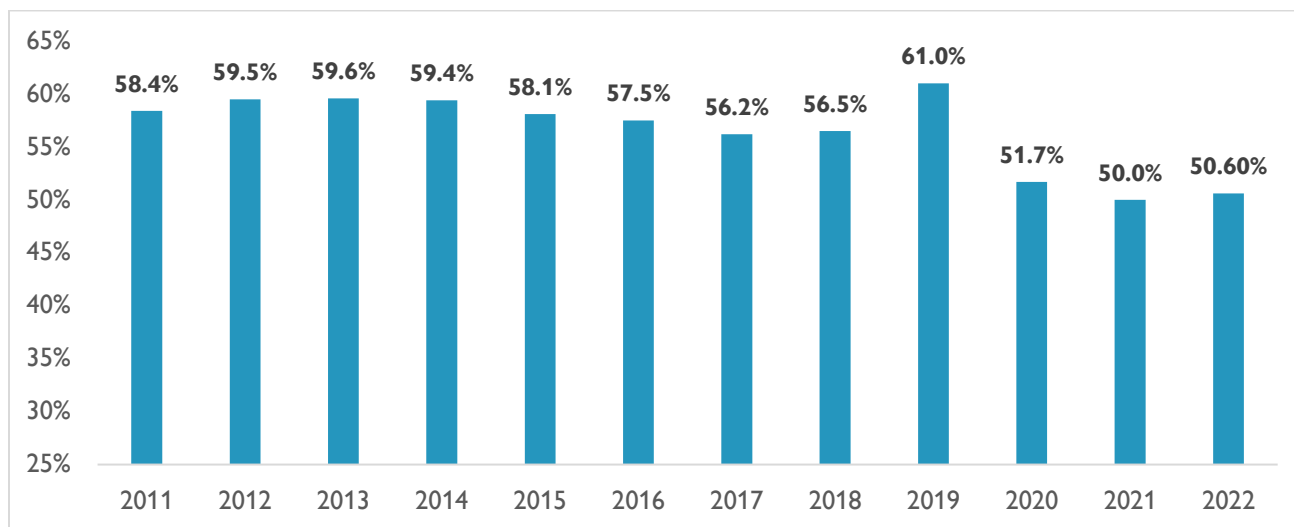
Figure 6.4: Labor Force Participation Rate



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Similar to a broader state and national trend, labor force participation in Bridgton has declined since the pandemic in 2020. In addition to aging and retirement, the lack of affordable child care and older adult care opportunities has resulted in workers leaving the labor force to care for family. A slight increase from 2021 to 2022 reflects the increase in working-age people in Bridgton in recent years.

Figure 6.5: Bridgton Labor Force Participation Rate, 2011 – 2022

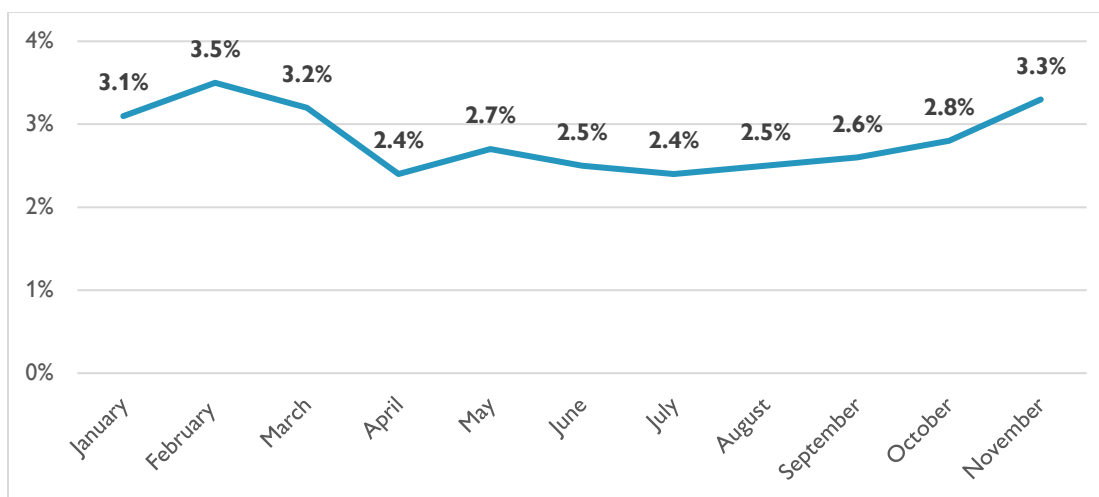


Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Unemployment

While Bridgton is a year-round community, there are several seasonal businesses and residents. Bridgton typically has lower unemployment in the summer months during tourist season and higher unemployment in winter months; however, in 2023, unemployment has been similar month to month.

Figure 6.6: Bridgton Unemployment Rate by Month, 2023

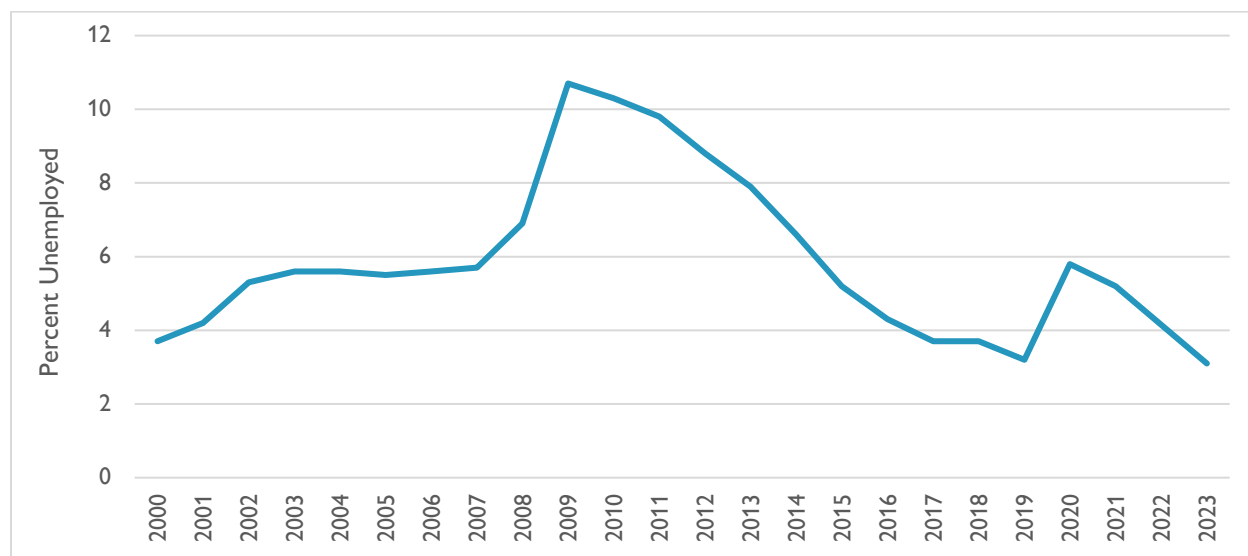


Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information

The average annual unemployment rate for the Bridgton-Paris labor market area (LMA) declined between 2009 and 2019, from roughly 10.7% unemployment in 2009 to 3.2% in 2019. The Bridgton-Paris LMA includes the towns of Bridgton and Harrison in Cumberland County and several towns in Oxford County. In 2020, unemployment rose to 5.8% in the LMA as a result of the pandemic.

Unemployment has declined overall since 2020, and unemployment for the Town of Bridgton has been slightly lower than the average annual unemployment for the LMA. Similarly, unemployment rates across the country have been declining since peaking in 2020. Maine’s unemployment rates have been somewhat lower than the national averages in recent years. This is largely due to Maine’s growth during and following the pandemic with significant in-migration, the quick rebound of the tourism industry, and the decline of the labor force due to aging.

Figure: 6.7: Average Annual Unemployment, Bridgton-Paris LMA

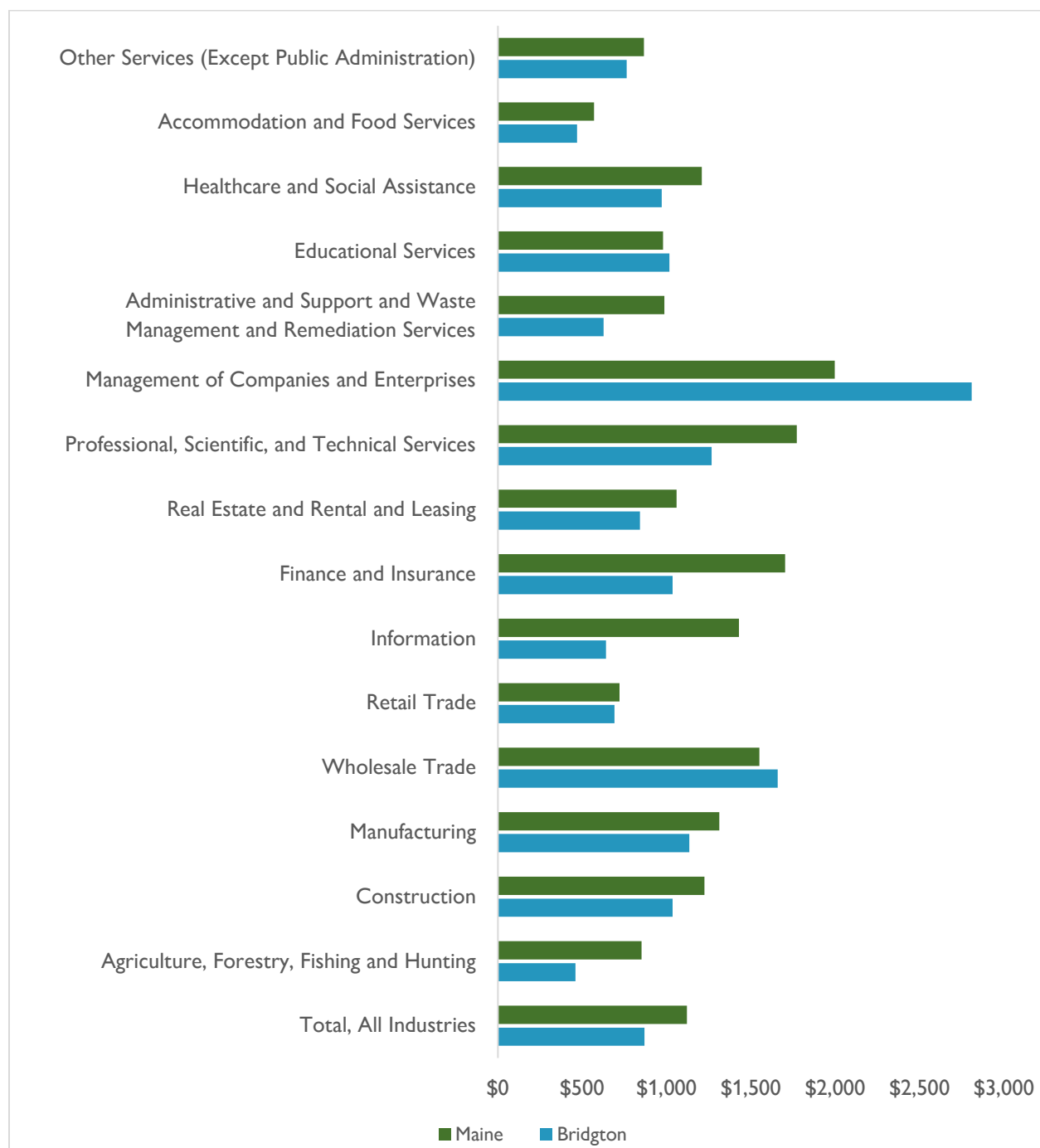


Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information

Wages

Average wages for people working in Bridgton are lower than the state for nearly all industries. One exception is management of companies and enterprises, which has a much higher average weekly wage compared to the state. Still, the average weekly wage for Bridgton employees is 22% lower (\$869 per week for the second quarter of 2023) than the state’s average wage of \$1,121 per week. While average weekly wages have increased in Bridgton since the pandemic—consistent with growth in the state—the cost of living and, especially, housing have increased as well. Many people who live in Bridgton commute to neighboring cities and towns for work, which likely have higher wages, contributing to a median income higher than that of the state.

Figure 6.8: Weekly Wages, Q2 2023



Source: Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information

Current Economic Trends

Maine communities have struggled in recent years with a dramatic increase in housing costs and the limited availability of affordable housing. Affordable and available housing in Bridgton has become a

critical economic development issue. The desirability of Maine and the increase in tourism after the pandemic have exacerbated housing challenges across the state. Based on experiences in other Maine communities, businesses may have challenges attracting workers who can afford current housing prices.

The recent growth in remote work has drawn people to Maine who are no longer office bound. Bridgton's amenities, culture, and recreation opportunities have been a draw for many people from outside the Lakes Region and Maine.

Commercial Development and Growth Areas

The 2014 Future Land Use Plan identified several commercial and residential growth areas. Growth areas included a Downtown Village Business District, Downtown Village Neighborhood, and Inner Corridor. The Downtown Village Business District is located along Route 302 and Route 117, where Bridgton's downtown is located. The area extends south to Willett Road and east to Willett Brook. The Downtown Village Business District is at the junction of major roadways in Bridgton, and visitors and residents alike travel through the area. This area has traditionally accommodated a higher population density, and this designation was intended to encourage revitalization and expansion. This area has seen growth and redevelopment since 2014, and the Town has had an increase in small businesses. Recent murals and public art projects, events like Music on Main, and a blend of local businesses have helped elevate downtown Bridgton as a destination for residents and visitors.

Downtown Village Neighborhood areas are primarily located along North High Street, Harrison Road, Main Street, and Highland Road, adjacent to Bridgton's downtown. These areas were intended to allow for infill development and greater density than rural and lakeside areas of Town. Outer village corridors were designated as areas that were expected to see some residential growth, but not to the scale of Downtown Village Neighborhood areas.

The Town is completing infrastructure improvements in the downtown growth area, including a major upgrade to enhance and expand capacity of the Town's wastewater system as well as improvements to sidewalks and the streetscape along Main Street. These improvements will help enable and encourage commercial growth in downtown.

Challenges and Opportunities

Tourism-based industries will likely continue to comprise a significant portion of Bridgton's economic base. The Town has an opportunity to continue marketing and supporting recreation, retail, and cultural assets. There are currently a significant number of summer visitors, and Pleasant Mountain Ski Area attracts visitors in the winter. Both the 2019 Economic and Market Analysis and 2023 Open Space Plan discuss expanding Bridgton's recreational opportunities to include more year-round offerings for visitors and residents, which could establish Bridgton as a year-round destination.



The Town has a long history of manufacturing and industry with numerous mills centered around Stevens Brook that formed the foundation for the Town's economy through the mid-19th century. While this type of manufacturing has faded, there are opportunities for the Town to encourage new industrial development that would help to diversify the Town's tax base and provide high paying jobs.

Bridgton has the opportunity to attract more remote workers. The 2019 Economic and Market Analysis states that almost half of seasonal and part-time residents reported working remotely at least part of the time while staying in Bridgton. After the pandemic, remote work opportunities have expanded. The analysis explains that workers are more likely to move to places with recreational and cultural amenities and offer a lower cost of living. Bridgton could continue to pursue strategies to target remote workers.

Bridgton's aging population will likely impact the Town's labor force. Bridgton Hospital, medical offices, Bridgton Community Center, and other social services that serve the Town and region will be important to continue to support the health and well-being of the community as well as serve as an important employment sector. Bridgton will need to continue attracting a labor force to support medical and social services in Town and help support an aging population. Housing and transportation will be other considerations that the Town will need to examine to support an aging population while also attracting and maintaining its labor force.

Bridgton plays an important role in supporting the broader community and benefits from being a regional commerce center; however, the Town could look to be more intentional in funding services and infrastructure improvements to help ensure fiscal stability. Projects like the new wastewater treatment facility and streetscape improvements have begun addressing challenges and strain on existing infrastructure to cultivate additional economic opportunities. The Town will continue encouraging economic growth and investing in infrastructure and services to support the broader region in a way that is fiscally responsible and focused on supporting a high-quality of place for residents, workers, and visitors.

Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Bridgton Economic and Market Analysis 2019

Bridgton Open Space Plan

Maine Department of Labor, Center for Workforce Research and Information

Maine State Economist

U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey



7 Housing

Housing needs and affordability in the state and region have changed dramatically since the 2014 Comprehensive Plan. The 2014 plan addresses housing, primarily related to the countywide housing need and requirements of the Maine Growth Management Act, which calls for communities to set a goal of having at least 10% of new residential development be affordable.

Although housing costs in Bridgton have remained lower than the county average and slightly lower or comparable to state averages, significant shifts in the housing market and the widespread rising costs of housing have created a statewide housing crisis. The state has now documented the need for 38,500 more housing units to make up for historic underproduction and more than 84,000 total units to meet the state's growing housing needs by 2030.¹¹

The impacts of this housing crisis on the Town are nuanced, and the current housing challenges were not anticipated in 2014. The 2014 plan notes that “Bridgton does have an adequate balance of [housing] types, including affordable housing for full and part-time residents.” The Town and region are now experiencing an increase in demand for affordable homes and different housing types, including rental apartments and senior housing. The percentage of households in Bridgton that could not afford the median home price in the Town increased from 55.8% in 2014 to 76.8% in 2022.

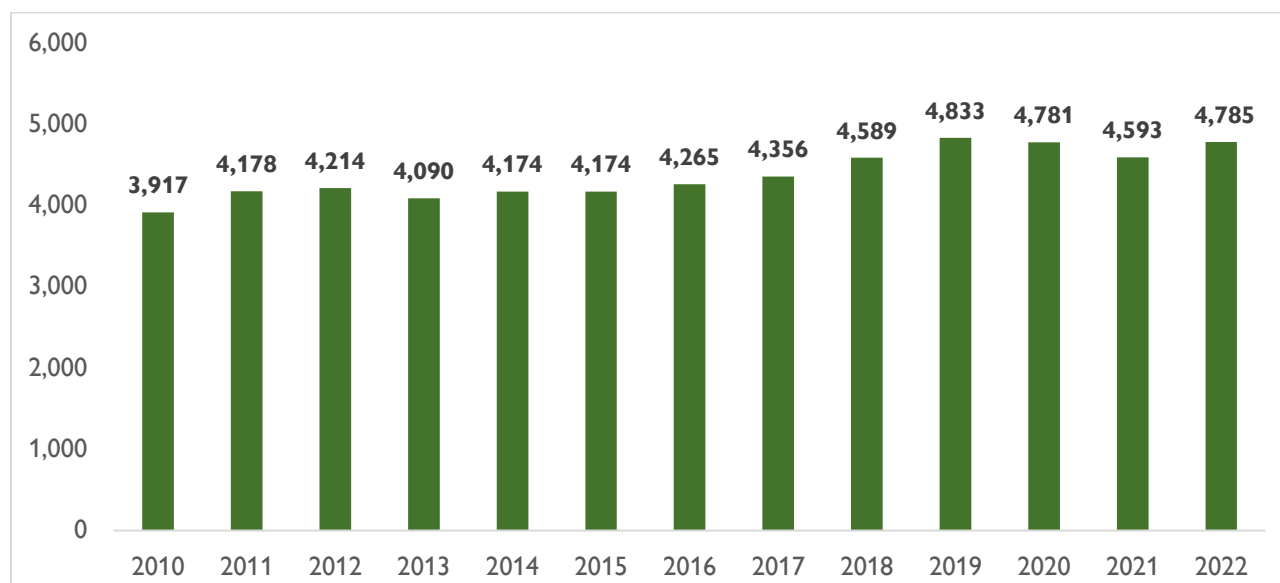
While Bridgton is experiencing continued residential construction, changing demographics and the growing desirability of Bridgton as both a place to live permanently and as an ideal place for a vacation home have impacted the demand for housing in the Town.

Housing Stock

Bridgton experienced significant housing development in the 1980s and 2000s, with growth slowing in the 2010s. This was consistent with a nationwide trend of slowed growth and a decline in housing development following the Great Recession (from late 2007 to 2009).

¹¹ MaineHousing. October 2023. *State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study*. Accessed October 23, 2023. https://mainehousing.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/state-of-maine-housing-production-needs-study_full_final-v2.pdf

Figure 7.1: Bridgton Total Housing Units

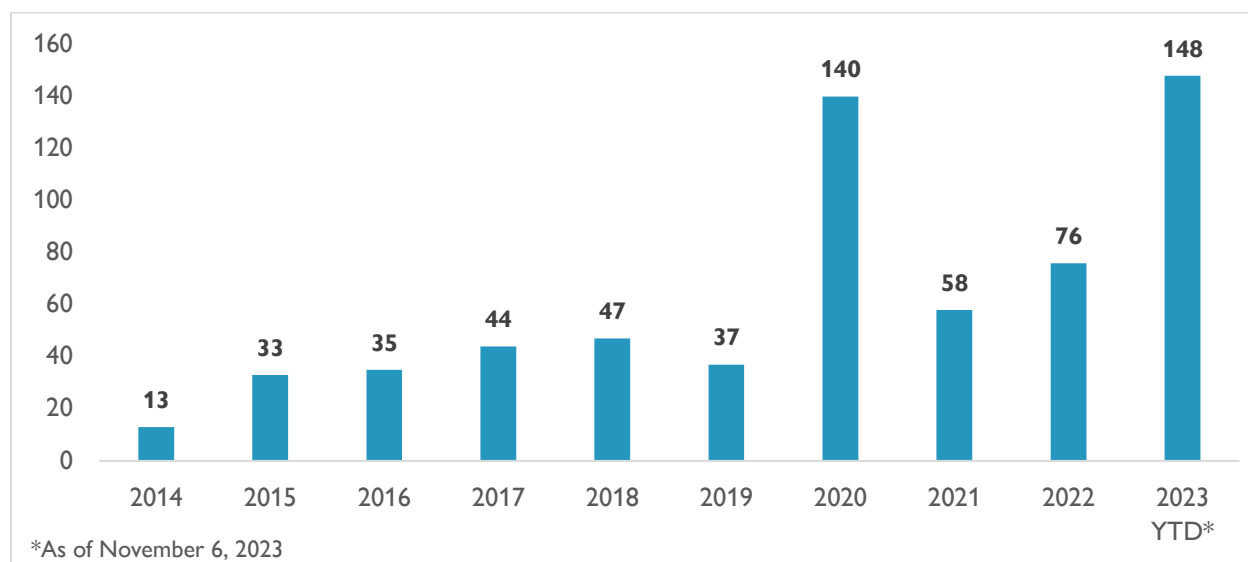


Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Bridgton had approximately 2,785 housing units in 2022 (2018 – 2022 five-year estimate), which was a slight decline from 2019. Since 2021, there has been significant construction of new housing developments in the Town, which likely has increased total housing units. The net loss of housing units from 2019 to 2022 could be due to the demolition of blighted properties, the removal of structures on lots where new housing is proposed but not yet built, combining housing units, or conversion of housing to another use.

From 2020 to October 2023, 422 housing units were permitted by the Town, including more than 200 apartments. Once all units are completed, this will be an 8.8% increase in total housing units from 2020. The addition of multifamily housing is also shifting the breakdown of housing types in Town.

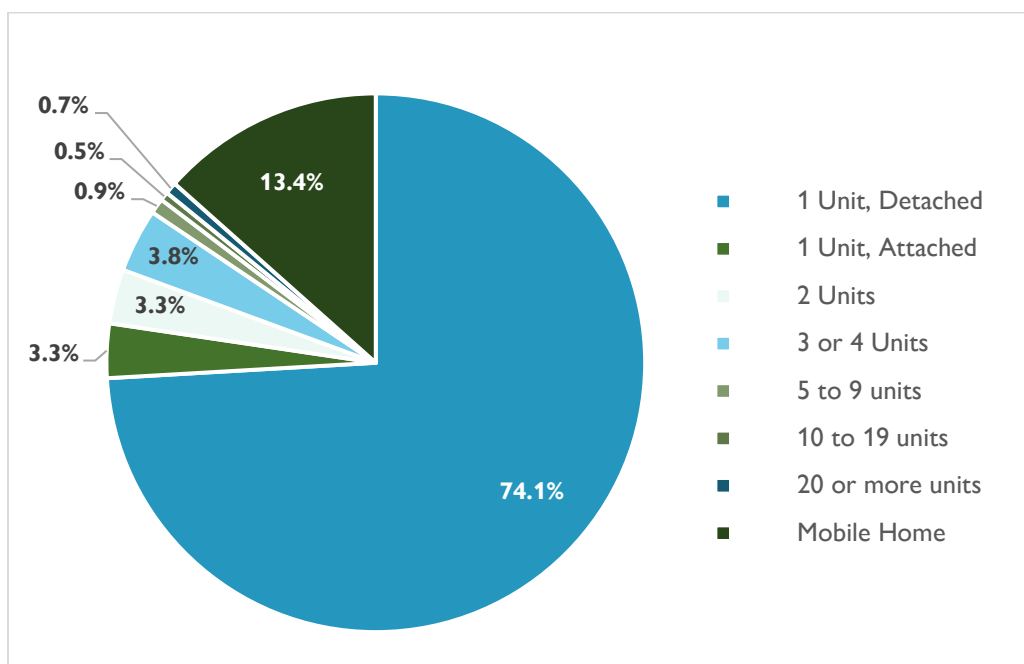
Figure 7.2: New Housing Units Permitted



Source: Town of Bridgton

Nearly 94% of Bridgton’s housing units are single-family units, including single-family detached units (74%), single-family attached units (3.3%), and mobile homes (13.4%). Since the latest housing data was published (2022 five-year estimates), there has been a significant increase in the number of multifamily housing units, adding to the diversity of available housing types and an increase in rental housing. In 2022, approximately 17.6% of housing units were renter-occupied, and roughly one-fourth (23.7%) of occupied housing units were newly occupied since 2018, indicating shifts in Town population and demographics.

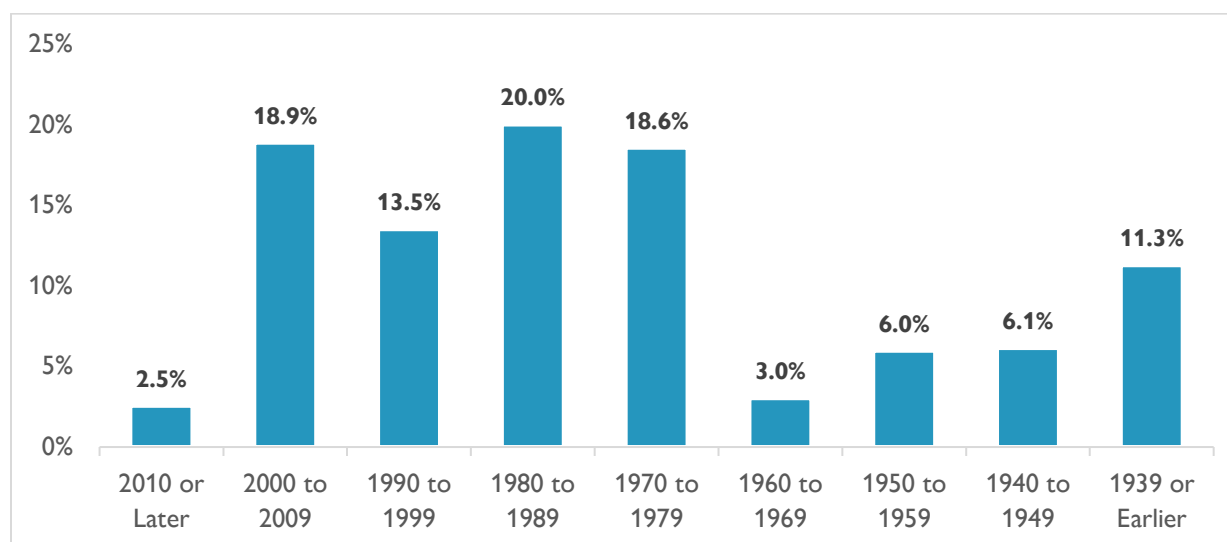
Figure 7.3: Percentage of Housing Units by Type



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

There is a variety in the age of the Town's housing stock, with about 20% of housing units constructed since 2000, 35% built between 1980 and 1999, 19% built from 1960 to 1979, and 26% constructed prior to 1960. These data do not include recently completed housing or housing units currently under construction which will significantly increase the percentage of units built since 2010.

Figure 7.4: Housing Units – Year Built



Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

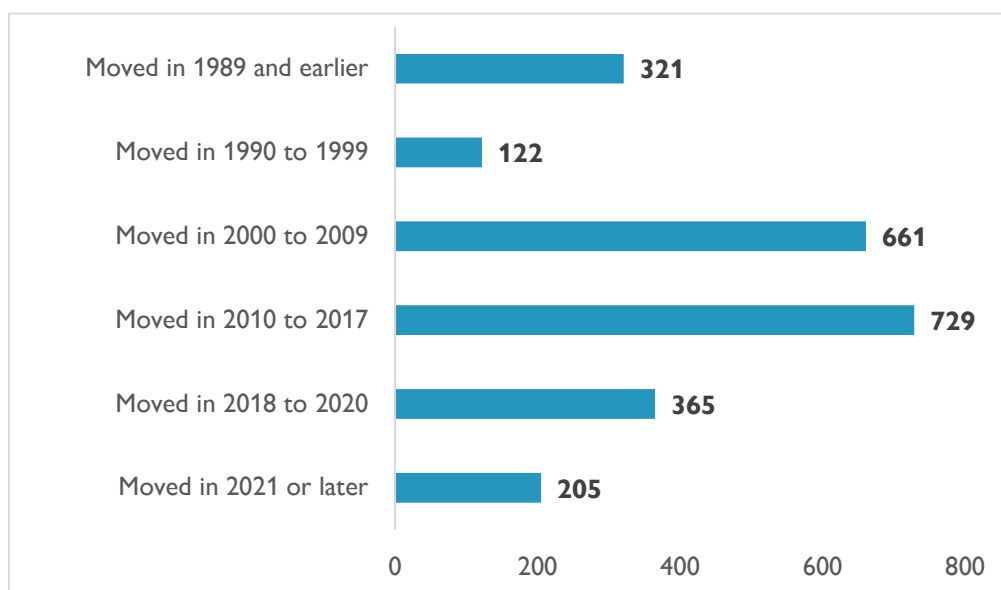
Housing Tenure and Longevity

Occupied housing units are divided into two categories regarding tenure. Approximately 82% (2,403) of occupied housing units in Bridgton are owner-occupied and 17% (424) are renter-occupied. The addition of Lakewood Apartments and other rental housing projects that were recently completed or are under construction in Bridgton (not accounted for in the 2018 – 2022 ACS data) will likely shift this number to include a higher percentage of renter-occupied homes.

Recently developed rental units will also impact other demographic indicators. Because only 5.9% of the Town's housing units are in multifamily structures (3 or more units in a structure), the majority of Bridgton's rental housing inventory is single- or two-family homes. Related to this, the average household size for renter-occupied units in Bridgton is 2.99, while the average household size for owner-occupied units is only 2.08. Typically, apartments are smaller in size and, therefore, have smaller households.

Approximately one-fourth (23.7%) of occupied housing units were newly occupied since 2018, with that percentage likely to increase with the previously noted new housing construction.

Figure 7.5: Tenure in Housing Unit (for Occupied Housing Units in Bridgton)



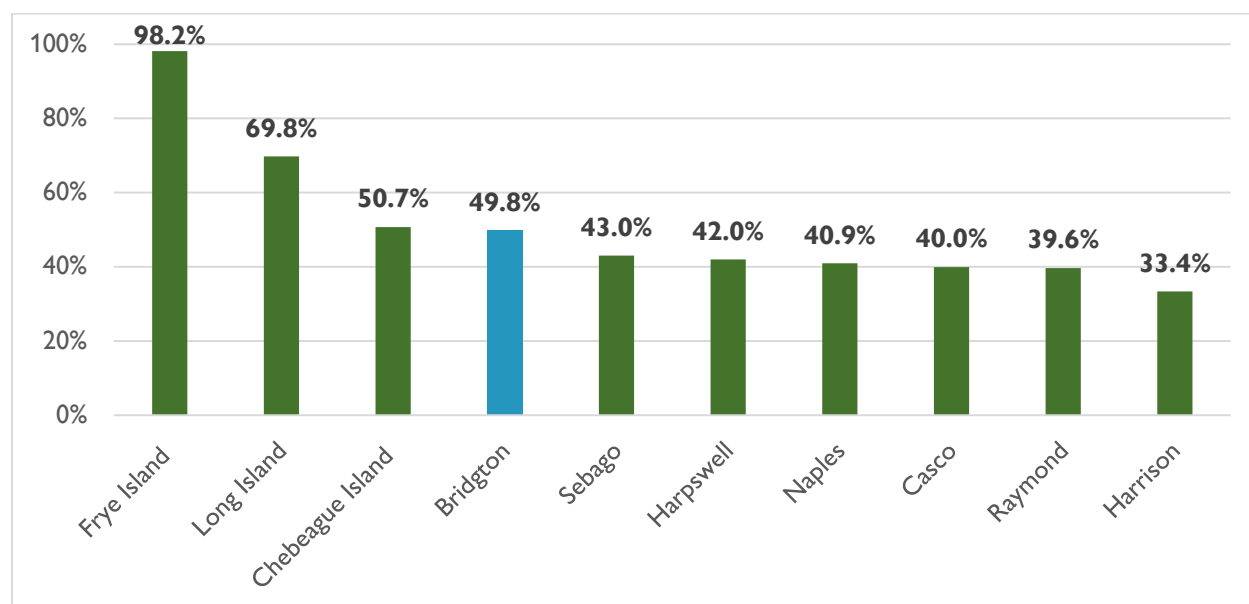
Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Vacant Housing

Data from 2018 to 2022 indicate that roughly half (49.8%) of housing units in Bridgton are vacant. This includes housing units vacant for sale, new units not yet occupied, units for seasonal or temporary use where the owner has a primary residence elsewhere, and units otherwise vacant (not including

condemned housing) or used for non-residential purposes. This is an increase in the percent of vacant units from 45.0% of all housing units in 2012 (1,898 units) to 49.8% (2,382) in 2022.

Figure 7.6: Percentage of Vacant Housing Units (Top 10 Municipalities in Cumberland County)



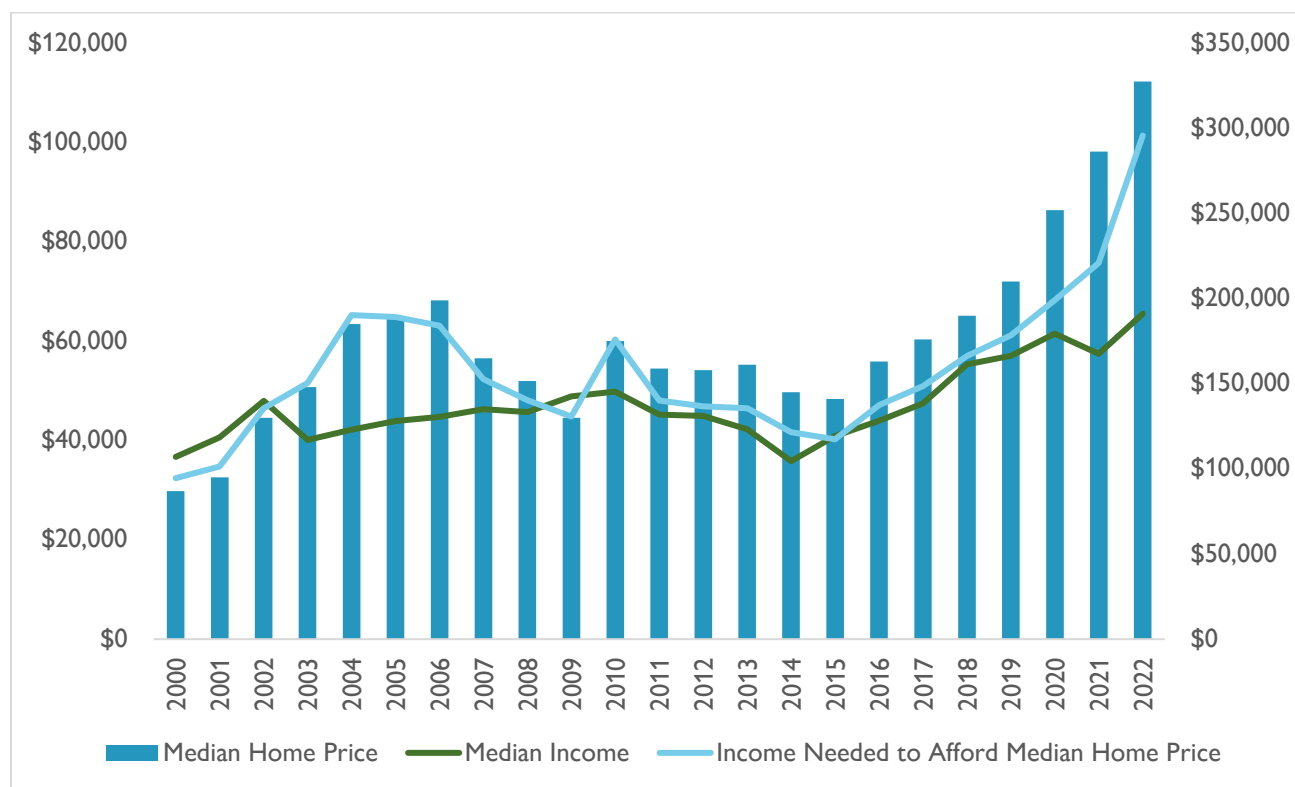
Source: ACS 2022 5-year estimates

Lack of data and shifts in the status of part-time to full-time residents make it difficult to accurately estimate the number of seasonal residents in Bridgton. Anecdotal data from Town staff indicate that many seasonal residents transitioned to full-time residency during the pandemic, resulting in fewer seasonally vacant units. It is difficult to estimate how many people have made this transition and if the transition was permanent or temporary (with the recent trend of returning to in-person office work).

Affordability

Prior to 2020, homeownership in Bridgton was relatively affordable, with the median income roughly within a reasonable range to afford the median home price. In 2012, the gap between the median income and income needed to afford the median home price was 4.3%. This gap widened dramatically to 54.8% in 2022, resulting in many more households priced out of the current housing market.

Figure 7.7: Home Ownership Affordability



Source: MaineHousing

This increase in housing price relative to income is consistent with changes in home prices in Cumberland County and Maine. Similarly, rental housing costs have increased as well. While the most current U.S. Census data indicate a median rent of \$1,002 (2018 – 2022 ACS five-year estimates), more recent evaluation of the rental market, including several commercial real estate websites, indicates an average monthly rental price anywhere from \$1,250 (for a two-bedroom apartment) to over \$2,000 (median for all property types).¹²

Supply

The State of Maine Housing Production Needs Study (October 2023) determined that Maine needs approximately 38,500 housing units to make up for historic underproduction of housing and will need an additional 37,900 to 45,800 new homes to meet future demand through 2030. Bridgton experienced an

¹² Zillow. n.d. "Bridgton, ME Rental Market." Zillow. Accessed October 16, 2023. <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/bridgton-me/>; Best Places. n.d. "Cost of Living in Bridgton, Maine." Bestplaces.net. Accessed October 16, 2023. https://www.bestplaces.net/cost_of_living/city/maine/bridgton; Dwellics. n.d. "Cost of Living Bridgton, Maine." Dwellics. Accessed October 16, 2023. <https://dwellics.com/state/maine/cost-of-living-in-bridgton>



overall loss of housing units from 2019 to 2021 despite population growth during that time. Factors impacting housing supply in Bridgton include an aging housing stock and a shifting seasonal home market.

Maine has an older housing stock, and with recent underproduction of housing, the housing market is especially vulnerable to loss of housing units due to disrepair. More recent shifts in seasonal residency (as mentioned above) and growth of the short-term rental market make it challenging to understand the true year-round housing supply within the Town. Because of Bridgton's significant seasonal population and attractiveness as a tourist destination, it is challenging to differentiate the seasonal and vacation rental housing market from the year-round housing needs of the community. According to AirDNA, there were 278 short-term rental listings in Bridgton in October 2023. There is also the potential for loss of year-round housing units to conversion to seasonal homes and/or use as short-term rental housing.

Recent housing development, including multifamily apartments and age-restricted (55+) housing developments, has contributed to an increase in housing supply and diversity of housing types in Bridgton.

Demand

While state population projections anticipate a population decline in Bridgton and the region, it is difficult to predict based on recent trends. Changes in the seasonal population (some residents transitioning from seasonal to permanent) and in-migration from larger, more expensive cities have resulted in an increase in population, contrary to population estimates, which are partially based on the existing population and the anticipated natural population decline (more deaths than births). The state's housing crisis and lack of housing inventory is pushing people to move to where housing is being built, resulting in supply driving demand at a local level. Bridgton has significant potential for growth with recent downtown investments in infrastructure and as a service center and outdoor recreation destination.

Changing demographics, including the type and size of households, has influenced the type of housing needed by current and future Bridgton residents. An aging population has resulted in a smaller average household size, with many older adults looking to downsize and/or find housing that supports aging in place. With this trend of aging households with grown children leaving home to form their own household(s), the demand for housing will continue to grow even if the total population does not; however, the current housing stock, which is largely single-family homes, will not meet the needs of the population which will include more retirees and fewer households with young children.

Household income also impacts the demand for type and price point of homes. As home prices have increased, fewer residents can afford the median single-family home price, resulting in an increased demand for smaller, more affordable units and multifamily housing types. While in-migration has broadly brought new residents with higher incomes and greater ability to afford housing, there has also been a



rise in homelessness in Maine and the region. In addition to the increased demand for social services, there is also a need for transitional and supportive housing and housing for very low-income households.

Recent and Proposed Housing Development

Bridgton has been experiencing significant new housing growth in recent years. Since 2020, the Town has permitted 422 new housing units, including 208 apartments. Once construction is complete, this will be an 8.8% increase in the Town's housing stock since 2020. Pending developments will also result in a shift in housing type to have a greater percentage of the Town's housing within multifamily units and as rental units.

Many of the housing units have been completed in the last year. Anecdotally, property managers for new apartment units have noted that tenants tend to be younger (compared to the Town's average age of 49+), and many residents are coming from outside of Bridgton and Maine.

Affordable Housing

Bridgton has 128 income-restricted rental housing units in five developments. Three of these developments (totaling 84 housing units) are also age-restricted for older adults (ages 55 and over or ages 62 and over) or adults with disabilities.

- **Wayside Pines:** Wayside Pines is located north of Main Street on Wayside Avenue and includes 12 one- and two-bedroom units for residents 62 and older and adults with disabilities.
- **Deerfield Village Apartments:** Deerfield Village is located just east of downtown and includes 24 one- and two-bedroom units for residents 62 and older and adults with disabilities. Rehabilitation of the property for use as affordable housing was partially funded by Section 515 (Rural Rental Housing) and Section 521 (USDA Rental Assistance Program).
- **Pike's Farm:** Pike's Farm is located on South High Street across from Bridgton Hospital and close to other services and amenities in the region. The development includes 24 one- and two-bedroom units for residents of all ages.
- **Sandy Creek Apartments:** Sandy Creek Apartments were developed by Avesta Housing off of Swamp Road and include 20 one-, two-, and three-bedroom units for residents of all ages.
- **Harrison Ridge:** Harrison Ridge will be the newest affordable development in Bridgton, located just north of Main Street on Harrison Road (Route 117). The development includes 48 one-bedroom units for adults 55 and over. This is the first new development in Bridgton to use the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program administered by MaineHousing.



Some Bridgton residents also access housing subsidies through the federal Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) or Section 8 program, with some housing vouchers being used at the properties listed above. The HCV program is administered by MaineHousing for the Town of Bridgton. Demand for housing assistance exceeds the limited resources available, and there is often a waitlist for assistance.

Challenges and Opportunities

Affordability is a primary concern for both renters and homebuyers. Housing that is affordable to young families is essential for growing the workforce. There is also a growing demand for affordable senior housing for residents seeking a smaller, more affordable home with access to services, amenities, and transportation. While there is new housing development in Bridgton, some new housing is built and purchased for seasonal use and, therefore, not contributing to increasing the year-round housing supply.

Only a small percentage (approximately 2.8%) of housing units are income-restricted affordable rental housing units. The Town will consider the need for more income-restricted affordable housing and look to ways to maintain the current affordable housing stock. Additionally, the need for housing for very low-income and unhoused families and individuals has increased in recent years. This need is most visible in larger urban areas but is also a challenge in rural areas as noted by service providers in Bridgton and the region. Consideration for access to services and transportation when identifying housing solutions is critical for the most vulnerable populations.

With the addition of more than 200 multifamily apartment units, Bridgton is seeing a greater diversity of housing types and sizes. Based on demographic trends of smaller household sizes, an increase in the population over age 60, and fewer households with children, there will be a growing need for smaller housing units and a greater diversity of housing types. The Town will look to identify where different housing types are most appropriate and to create development opportunities for a variety of housing types to meet the range of needs of the community.

The seasonal housing market and popularity of short-term rentals are both impacting the Town and region's housing market in ways that are difficult to quantify due to limited data. As Bridgton continues to be a popular seasonal destination, the Town will need to understand the impact of short-term rentals and trends in seasonal population shifts to address housing needs.

Sources

Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

U.S. Census, ACS

U.S. Census

MaineHousing



Maine Housing Production Needs Study, 2023

Avesta Housing

Realty Resources Management

Pike's Farm Apartments

Town of Bridgton, Code Enforcement Office

8 Transportation

Introduction

Located approximately 40 miles northwest of Portland in the heart of Maine's Lakes Region, Bridgton is considered a commuter town to Portland as well as a visitor destination that creates an increase in the summer population. Within Bridgton, the Pleasant Mountain Ski Area and the various lakes attract regional visitors, which contributes to local traffic.

The majority of the transportation infrastructure runs southeast to northwest, and downtown Bridgton is a nexus point where the two major corridors split—Portland Road/U.S. Route 117 and Main Street/U.S. Route 302. Main Street is a vibrant small-town, mixed-use destination with restaurants, shops, housing, pocket parks, municipal buildings, event spaces, and a movie theater. There are more than 200 miles of local roads, state routes, and U.S. routes throughout Bridgton; beyond the downtown, these roads are primarily in wooded areas with limited sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure. Maintaining transportation infrastructure for residents and visitors and developing infrastructure and transportation options in a way that cost effective and resilient are critical to the Town's ability to support growth.

Public Services Department

The Bridgton PSD is responsible for general maintenance of Town-wide public infrastructure, including pavement management under its Highway Division. As part of PSD, the Highway Division maintains and repairs all public roads and has seven full-time staff members. PSD also maintains and repairs sidewalks; maintains ditches; empties trash receptacles on Town properties; conducts snow plowing and sanding, road striping and sign installations; and, in the spring, sweeps and grades roads. The Highway Division has a paving schedule; however, the Division performs an annual paving assessment to reprioritize and address replacement and maintenance, as needed. . The division also has an emergency response system that attends to unplanned incidents and issues like potholes, weather-related problems, and traffic light malfunctions. This group maintains approximately 75 miles of Town roads, and in the winter, the division manages snow removal for 220 miles of combined local and regional roads. The Town has 18 bridges across the community: 5 are owned by the Town, and the remaining 13 are owned by Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT).

In the winter, the Highway Division clears snow from streets, public parking lots, and sidewalks. The Town updated its salt shed since the last comprehensive plan to better serve the community and has identified that the sand shed needs concrete rehab, which is slated to take place in 2024. PSD also constructs parking lots for parks and other public facilities, installs small furniture and street amenities, and replaces storm drains. The division hangs decorations from street infrastructure during events and holidays, supports set up and clean up for events, manages road closures, and cleans public restrooms.

Currently, there is no cross-department asset management software. Individual departments coordinate projects and planning. According to staff, a new asset management system is currently being explored and expected to be implemented in the near future.

Traffic Counts

U.S. Route 302, U.S. Route 117, and North High Street (U.S. Route 302) experience the highest traffic volumes in Bridgton. Although average daily traffic counts leveled off or even dipped in 2016, traffic is once again growing as population increases and people continue to move to more rural areas from urban areas.

Table 8.1: Traffic Volume Over Time (Average Annual Daily Traffic Count)

Road Location	2013	2016	2022
U.S. Route 302			
South of Main Street	9,500	10,680	11,020
South of Willett Road	9,980	8,570	No data (N/D)
East of Elm Street	7,590	6,790	7,170
East of Highland Drive	6,450	N/D	6,280
Northeast of Gage Street	6,280	6,600	5,900
Northwest of S High Street	5,930	6,000	N/D
U.S. Route 117			
North of Main Street	5,940	6,130	6,100
South of Pond Road	5,160	5,180	5,730
South of Route 37	5,100	4,850	5,790
North High Street (U.S. Route 302)			
Southeast of Lake Drive	5,640	5,390	N/D
West of Hio Ridge Road	4,450	N/D	4,400
East of Knights Hill Road	4,090	N/D	3,910
East of Mountain Road	N/D	N/D	3,310
West of Jim Douglas Road	3,530	N/D	3,650

Source: MaineDOT, Traffic Division

Crash Data

In 2022, there were 157 car crashes on public roads in Bridgton. This was an increase from 127 crashes in 2021.¹³ Most accidents in 2022 occurred from October to March between 2 and 4 p.m.; this was likely due to winter weather conditions and peak travel times. Of the 157 crashes, 41 were caused by the vehicle going off the road, and 48 were caused by deer, suggesting the rural character of the roads is contributing to crashes. Other types of crashes (e.g., rear end/sideswipe, intersection movement) are more common in more developed areas. There were no fatal car crashes in 2022, which suggests traffic conflicts are due to congestion and road/intersection configurations instead of high-speed conflicts. Only four crashes in 2022 were due to exceeding the posted speed limit and eight crashes were for driving too fast for conditions. Only two sections of road have been identified as high crash locations by MaineDOT from 2020 to 2022:

- North High Street from Hio Ridge Road to Sam Ingalls Road (17 crashes, seven injuries)
- North High Street from Stack'Em Inn Road to Kendal Ham Drive (10 crashes, four injuries)

Regional Transportation

The Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) is a regional agency formed and sustained by 25 communities in Cumberland County. GPCOG is a Regional Planning Organization that provides technical assistance to municipalities. Within GPCOG, the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) is responsible for conducting a continuing, cooperative, and comprehensive regional transportation planning process. PACTS focuses on finding effective solutions to local and regional transportation problems and assisting with applications for state and federal funding. It works collaboratively with municipalities, MaineDOT, and community members to address a wide range of transportation issues.

In 2017, PACTS and GPCOG partnered with regional communities to complete the Moving Southern Maine Forward: Regional Transit Development Plan for 2018 – 2023. The plan identified that the community and area experience significant regional transportation challenges. The proximity to Portland and regional seasonal recreation creates a regional transportation need. In 2013, the Regional Transportation Program (RTP) began operating the Lakes Region Explorer (LRX), a bus providing service between downtown Portland and Bridgton along Route 302. Since 2013, LRX ridership has more than doubled and is busiest during the morning inbound trip with commuters and riders traveling for healthcare purposes. Despite declines in ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in August 2023, RTP announced the LRX would be expanding to include year-round Saturday service. The LRX runs a commuter schedule Monday through Friday from 6 a.m. to 5:20 p.m. and a Saturday schedule from 8:30

¹³ Maine Department of Transportation. Maine Public Crash Query Tool. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://mdotapps.maine.gov/MaineCrashPublic/>



a.m. to 6 p.m. There is no Sunday service. Stops include the Bridgton Community Center, Naples American Legion, South Casco Fire Station, North Windham Shopping Center, and Prides Corner. The LRX stops at the downtown transit hub METRO PULSE at 21 Elm Street in Portland.

Airport

Known as the Runway to the White Mountains, the Eastern Slope Airport (IZG) is located in the Mount Washington Valley in Fryeburg 10 miles from the Bridgton border. This public airport serves general aviation, business, and charter flights and provides critical infrastructure for life flights, search and rescue, animal rescue, forest fire control, Civil Air Patrol, and support for military aviation operations. There are no regularly scheduled air services, but Air New England and Reliant Air offer on-demand air charter service throughout the Northeast. Airport services include a passenger terminal and 24/7 pilot lounge, full-service fueling, ramp parking and tie downs, hanger leasing, Wi-Fi, restrooms, refreshment center, and rental cars.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Facilities

Pedestrian sidewalks and crosswalks are concentrated along U.S. Route 302, Main Street, and North and South High Street. U.S. Route 117 has limited sidewalks and is rural in nature. Given the car-oriented character of the Town, the majority of the pedestrian-focused infrastructure happens downtown to support a mixed-use core and help create a vibrant public experience with connections to downtown parks. There are currently no separate bike lanes in the Town, and cyclists tend to use roadways and shoulders. There is an abundance of trails where people bike throughout the Town. The 2023 Open Space Plan identified improvement opportunities to increase the number of safe bike lanes and links between downtown and parks/conservation lands.

Rail Transportation

Historically, the Bridgton and Saco Railroad was a narrow-gauge railway that connected Bridgton with Hiram. The line was an important link for the Bridgton-Lakes Region area, connecting the Town to nearby communities for both freight and passengers, especially in the summer tourist months. Today, there are no passenger or freight rails operating in Bridgton. The lack of rail for passengers or freight means all movement of goods is by car or truck, which contributes to road congestion. A planned mixed-use development at Main Street and Depot Street will honor the Town's historic train station.

Challenges and Opportunities

The cost of maintaining roads has increased in recent years. Since 2020, MaineDOT and other municipalities have been canceling projects due to costs more than doubling. Bridgton's budgeted road and sidewalk maintenance costs have increased since 2021. In FY23, the PSD budget for paving was \$500,000. As of Q2, the Town had spent \$231,915 on paving projects—an increase from \$157,205



spent in FY22 and \$188,693 spent in FY21. Some paving projects, like the Church Street project, have costs offset by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. Working with PACTS to find additional funding opportunities from the state and federal government would alleviate Bridgton's cost burden for maintaining roads. There may also be state and federal funding to reinforce roads (i.e., retaining walls, rip rap, plantings to stabilize soil, etc.) so that maintenance costs can be curbed.

There are opportunities for roadway and streetscape improvements when completing necessary subsurface infrastructure upgrades such as those recently completed for the wastewater collection system project. Funding was secured from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development for the recently completed wastewater collection system upgrades, which allowed the Town to also install drainage infrastructure. The Town also coordinated with the Water District during the Downtown Bridgton Main Street Improvement Project to simultaneously install water service pipes and implement streetscape improvements in the downtown area. This approach to infrastructure upgrades, especially in locations of more dense development, can yield cost efficiencies for the Town, providing opportunities for new development and the expansion of existing businesses to share roadway infrastructure such as parking, sidewalks, lighting, and signage. The Town is currently looking to expand this work, in coordination with MaineDOT, along state-owned Route 304 through the Inner Corridor District.

With the number of crashes along North High Street between Hio Ridge Road and Sam Ingalls Road and Stack'em Inn Road to Kendal Ham Drive, an opportunity exists to enhance safety in these locations.

Sources

Bridgton Public Services Department

Maine Department of Transportation

Maine DOT Crash Records

Greater Portland Council of Governments

Moving Southern Maine Forward: Regional Transit Development Plan 2018-2023

Lakes Region Explorer

Bridgton Open Space Plan 2023

9 Historic and Cultural Resources

Bridgton History

Members of the Abnaki tribe originally inhabited the Town of Bridgton and the region, living between the Kennebec River in Maine and Lake Champlain in Vermont. The tribe occupied the headwaters of the Kennebec, Androscoggin, and Saco Rivers.¹⁴ It is suggested that there were many tribes of Abnaki people living in Maine, though few remain in New England today. Once European settlement began, settlers created an assortment of neighborhoods, and communities dispersed over 40,000 acres in the region.¹⁵

The Town of Bridgton was formed by a grant from the Massachusetts Legislature on February 24, 1763. The grant formed Pondicherry Township; however, the township was eventually named Bridgton after Moody Bridges who was influential in securing the grant. Captain Benjamin Kimball, the region's first settler, settled along the shores of Long Lake in North Bridgton in 1768. Several years later, settlers from the Andover-Boxford area of Massachusetts moved into South Bridgton to develop farms and homesteads.

Over time, the Town developed settlements in South Bridgton and North Bridgton. Jacob Stevens set up a sawmill and gristmill at an outlet of Highland Lake. These mills contributed to the Town's economy and provided hydropower. Other businesses, such as tanneries, woodworking mills, and door and sash manufacturers flourished in the Town. The woolen industry proved to be the most significant industry to expand the Town's economy. Rufus Gibbs developed the Cumberland Mill, and, subsequently, the Pondicherry Mill was developed, and the Forest Mills Company entered into the fabric production industry. These three mills employed more than 400 people. Mill employment created a demand for housing, commercial expansion, and railroad connections. The Bridgton and Saco Railroad was built for freight transport and coal deliveries to power the various mills in the Town.¹⁶

The commercial and residential areas of the Town began in the vicinity of Main Hill and eventually crept southward. Homes on North High Street and in the Main Street periphery were some of the first permanent homes in the Town. The area south and east of Pondicherry Square was developed as a residential area by Frederick J. Littlefield to serve workers employed in the mills.

¹⁴ Vetromile, Rev. Eugene. 1866. *Abnakis and Their History*. New York: James B. Kirker. Accessed November 21, 2023. https://library.umaine.edu/content/Wabanaki/The_Abnakis.pdf

¹⁵ Coolidge, Austin Jacobs and John Brainard Mansfield. 1859. *A History and Description of New England, General and Local*. Cambridge: H. O. Houghton and Company. https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_OcoMAAAAYAAJ/mode/2up

¹⁶ Bridgton, Maine. 2014. *Bridgton Maine Comprehensive Plan*. Bridgton: Bridgton, Maine. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/towndocs/6481/>

Following the Civil War, the Town was regarded as the trading center of western Maine until the proliferation of automobiles and the development of paved roads in the 1920s. Following World War I, the woolen industry began to decline. The Forest and Cumberland Mills closed, and as a result of the Great Depression, the Pondicherry Mill also closed. The mill operated partially until the early 1950s.¹⁶

The resort industry has been a part of the Town's economy since 1860, with the Cumberland and Bridgton House catering to summer vacationers. In 1897, a total of 15 inns and boarding houses served summer vacationers. Following the Great Depression, many of the inns and hotels closed and were replaced with summer cottage communities and motels. Rental cottages and vacation homes, either developed or owned by nonresidents, have sprung up in the Town and reduced the number of accommodations available. Campsites, a more recent development, also cater to the Town's vacationers.

The Town experienced a steep decline in its manufacturing base between 1994 and 2010, with Malden Mills closing its Bridgton Knitting Mills operation, Sebago, Inc. closing its Pleasant Mountain Moc division, and Dielectric Communications and Acorn Manufacturing closing operations. These closures have sharply reduced the number of manufacturing jobs available in the Town.

Historic Resources

The Town of Bridgton has a rich history that is evident through its preservation of historic buildings. The Town has 11 historical buildings designated by the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP):

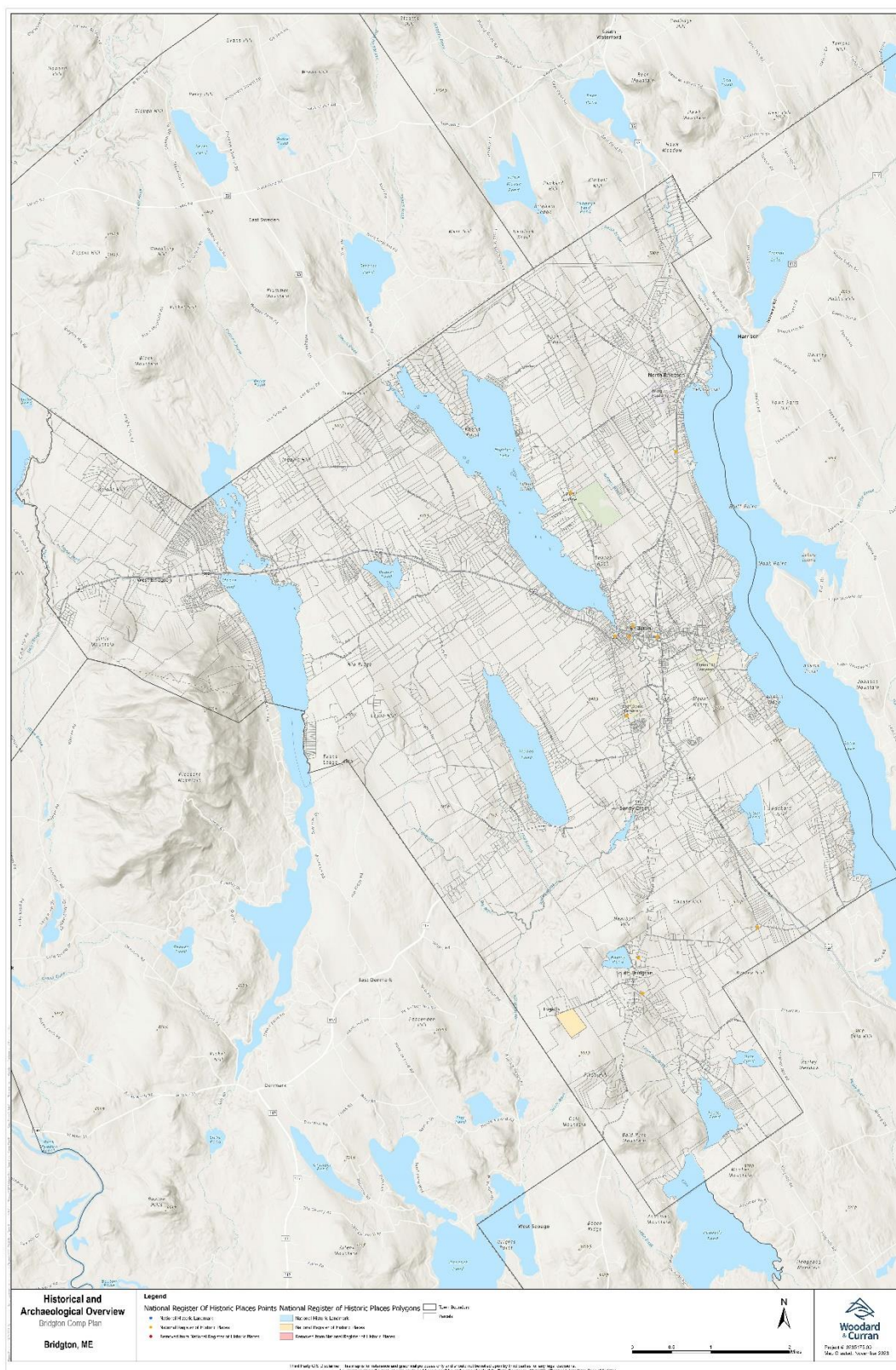
Table 9.1: NRHP Listings in Bridgton

No.	Listing	Date Built	Location
1	Lt. Robert Andrews House: A home built by John Kilborn Jr. for Lt. Robert Andrews, a veteran of the Battle of Bunker Hill who served in the Continental Army.	1805	428 South Bridgton Road, Bridgton
2	Benjamin Cleaves House: A two-story home known for its two well-preserved interior murals painted by Rufus Porter.	1828	South High Street, Bridgton
3	Dalton Holmes Davis Memorial Library: Designed by Lewiston architect Harry S. Coombs, this library has been a component of the Town and is an architecturally distinguished Classical Revival building. The building is now the Bridgton Public Library.	1913	Main Street, Bridgton
4	Farnsworth House: A house built by Dr. Samuel Farnsworth Jr. and known for its Federalist architecture. The house has a well-designed interior with mantels, moldings, paneling, and a staircase.	1825	Route 17, North Bridgton

No.	Listing	Date Built	Location
5	Peabody-Fitch Farm (Narramissic)/; An early Federalist-style home and farm that was occupied by William Peabody and exemplifies 19 th -century farm and field systems.	1790	Off Ingalls Road, South Bridgton
6	William F. Perry House: This house was originally built by William W. Cross and later occupied by William F. Perry, a textile mill owner. The house blends Italianate and Second Empire elements.	1874	6 Main Hill, Bridgton
7	South Bridgton Congregational Church: The church was designed by Francis Henry Fassett and blends Italianate and Gothic architecture.	1870	Fosterville Road, South Bridgton
8	Stone House: A granite house built by John Mead, Sr. following the destruction of his previous home. It is a rare example of a house fully built in stone in western Maine.	1830	Burnham Road, Bridgton
9	Wales and Hamblen Store: Built by Samuel Cook and eventually operated by Joseph Wales and John Hamblen, the store exemplifies Italianate architecture with its facade. The building is now used as an antique store.	1882	134 Main Street, Bridgton
10	Walker Memorial Hall: Designed by Frederick Thompson, the building is a rare example of a Queen Anne-style public building. Historically, the hall was used for community events and Sunday services.	1892	Highland Road, Bridgton
11	John and Maria Webb House: A residence on Main St. that is well preserved and exemplifies Federal and Greek Revival architectural styles.	1842	121 Main Street, Bridgton

Source: The National Park Service, NRHP

Figure 9.1: Historic Resources



The majority of Bridgton’s historic structures and landmarks are residences or former residences constructed in the 19th century. According to the Bridgton Historical Society, the Town is also home to seven historic graveyards, which allow residents to trace family histories:

Table 9.2: Historic Graveyards in Bridgton

No.	Listing
1	South Bridgton
2	Sandy Creek
3	South High Street
4	Forest Hills
5	Four Corners
6	North Bridgton
7	Glines Graveyard

Source: Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

Bridgton’s rural landscape is a key feature of the Town’s historic significance and character. The Town’s rolling terrain, farmland, lakes, and mountains offer scenic views and insight into the community as it was in past centuries. According to the Bridgton Historical Society, there are 10 designated open lands with historic significance:

Table 9.3: Open Lands With Historic Significance in Bridgton

No.	Listing
1	Upper Ridge Road (Linscott Farm): An open field with an intact farmhouse from 1830.
2	Del Chadbourne Road: A 19 th -century gravel road with an intact 1830s farmhouse at the end of the road.
3	Chadbourne Hill Road: A road overarched with trees that turns into Del Chadbourne Road and Upper Ridge Road.
4	Highland Ridge Road: A scenic road with views of open fields and historic buildings from the late 18 th and 19 th centuries. Transitions into Ingall’s Grove.
5	South Bridgton Village: A nearly intact 19 th -century agrarian village and the site of the Peabody home and the first church of Bridgton. Located a parcel north of South Bridgton along Route 107.
6	Bear Trap Mountain: A large stone cavern previously used to trap bears. Located a parcel north of South Bridgton Village along Route 107.
7	Base of Pleasant Mountain: An open field at the corner of Route 302 and Mountain Road. The field provides a scenic view and entrance to the mountain. This area has been under development pressure.

No.	Listing
8	Sabatis Island (Winona's Island): Located in Moose Pond, this island provides a scenic view of Pleasant Mountain. The island is owned by the State of Maine and is leased to the Town.
9	Route 302 south of Bridgton: An area north of the Naples line along Route 302. The highway is wooded and separates Bridgton and Naples. The highway also provides a view of Pleasant Mountain.
10	Peabody-Fitch Farm (Narramissic): A farm owned and operated by the Bridgton Historical Society. The property includes a house built in 1797, an 1830's barn, and a functioning blacksmith shop. The land is 25 acres of open fields and provides scenic views and access to nearby hiking trails.

Source: Bridgton 2014 Comprehensive Plan

The historic and aesthetic significance of these open lands provide a visual connection to the Town's history and contribute to the rural character of the region that attracts residents and visitors to Bridgton.

Archaeological Sites

The Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) recommends considering two types of archaeological sites in preparing municipal growth management plans: prehistoric archaeological sites and historic archaeological sites. Prehistoric sites are Native American sites that come from the period before European arrival. Historic sites are post-European arrival era. Prehistoric sites are commonly located within 50 meters of canoe-navigable waterways on well-drained, level land. Ancient sites dating back to more than 10,000 years ago may be located on sandy soils within 200 meters of small streams.

According to the MHPC, Bridgton is home to seven prehistoric archaeological sites and four historic archaeological sites. These sites are listed by the MHPC as numbers 22.5, 22.9, 22.11, 22.12, 22.15, 22.16, and 22.63. These areas either lie along the Peabody Pond shoreline or along Stevens Brook. The location of 22.5 is confidential to maintain the condition of the land. Sites that need additional surveying, inventorying, and analysis include Bear River, the shorelines of Moose Pond, Highland Lake, Long Lake, and other smaller bodies of water.

There are nine historic archaeological sites in Bridgton. These sites are from periods of significance following European arrival. The Town has not conducted professional surveys for historic archaeological sites. The MHPC recommends any future archaeological survey focus on the identification of potentially significant resources associated with the town's agricultural, residential, and industrial heritage, particularly those associated with the earliest Euro-American settlement of the town in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Table 9.4: Historic Archaeological Sites

No.	Listing	Period of Significance
1	Kittson Pottery	1815 – 1890
2	Keene Machine Shop	1927 - 1956
3	American Legion Hall, Post 67	1900 - 1956
4	Peabody-Fitch Farm Grounds	1797 – present
5	B.M. Fernald Farmstead	1850 – 1969
6	Glines Farmstead and Beaver River Sawmill	1871
7	Elden Martin Blacksmith Shop	Undetermined
8	Martin Blacksmith Shop	1871
9	Blacksmith Shop (location unknown)	Undetermined

History of Preservation in Bridgton

In 1953, the Bridgton Historical Society (BHS) was established to preserve the Town’s local history, traditions, and customs. The BHS operates a museum and research center in downtown, and also maintains 241 historical artifacts of buildings and residences as a photo catalog. The BHS is entirely staffed by volunteers and receives funding from private donors and from the Town.¹⁷

The Statewide Historic Preservation Plan (SHPP) noted five goals for increasing historic preservation:

- Supporting and expanding Maine’s preservation network
- Protecting historic properties and revitalizing communities
- Recognizing, documenting, and promoting historic places
- Safeguarding historic and archaeological resources
- Resiliency and the effects of climate change¹⁸

¹⁷ Bridgton Historical Society. n.d. “Welcome—Bridgton Historical Society.” *Bridgton Historical Society*. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://www.bridgtonhistory.org/>

¹⁸ Muzzey, Elizabeth, Kirk F. Mahoney, Christi Chapman-Mitchell, Megan M. Rideout. October 2021. *Heritage for The Future: Maine’s Statewide Historic Preservation Plan, 2021 – 2026*. Maine State Historic Preservation Office, Historic Preservation Commission. Accessed November 21, 2023. https://www.maine.gov/mhpc/sites/maine.gov/mhpc/files/inline-files/Approved%20State%20Plan%2010_2021.pdf



The MHPC Cultural and Architectural Resource Management Archive (CARMA) viewer also identifies several properties that are currently not on the NRHP but are eligible for designation, potentially allowing for the expansion of historic preservation in the Town in line with the SHPP.

Incentives for Rehabilitation

The Maine Historic Tax Credit (HTC) incentivizes business and real estate owners and developers to rehabilitate and reuse income-producing historic buildings in Maine. The HTC provides a building owner or developer with a state tax credit of 25% (or 35% for affordable housing) of historic improvement costs for the rehabilitation and reuse of a building that is a certified historic structure (structures that are on the National Register and within a National Register District).¹⁹

Cultural Resources

Bridgton has a wide variety of arts and cultural offerings, including concerts, movies, plays, and museums. Events and facilities range from venues such as the Magic Lantern Theatre to the Bridgton Drive-In Theatre. The Town is in proximity to several other venues, including the Lake Region Community Theatre in Casco and the Stone Mountains Art Center in Brownfield. The Town also hosts many events, such as Music on Main, Haunted Nightmare Walks, and a Festival of Lights Celebration.²⁰

Challenges and Opportunities

Bridgton's historic landmarks and cultural resources are valuable assets to the community, providing an important connection to the Town's rich history and contributing to the unique sense of place and quality of life in Bridgton.

Adaptive Reuse

Many historic homes are limited in how they can be restored for reuse based on building code requirements and the Town's current zoning regulations.²¹ Revising zoning regulations could be considered with regard to flexibility to allow for productive uses, reuses, and preservation and restoration of historic properties.

Several of the Town's historic landmarks, such as the John and Maria Webb House and the William F. Perry House, have been repurposed for additional uses. The John and Maria Webb House is home to

¹⁹ Maine State Legislature's Office of Program Evaluation & Government Accountability. November 2021. *Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit (HRTC)*. <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/7476>

²⁰ Town of Bridgton. n.d. "Home." *Town of Bridgton*. Accessed October 30, 2023. <https://bridgtonmaine.org/>

²¹ Town of Bridgton. November 2, 2021. *Town of Bridgton Land Use Code*. Bridgton: Town of Bridgton. Accessed November 21, 2023. <https://bridgtonmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Bridgton-Land-Use-Code-effective-2021-11-02-with-Subdiv-Regs-and-Maps-reduced.pdf>

the Rufus Porter Museum, which commemorates Rufus Porter, a painter, writer, inventor, teacher, and founding publisher and editor of the *Scientific American* magazine.

Due to the increasing cost of construction and additional costs associated with historic renovations, additional incentives could be considered to provide and encourage preservation and reuse. For example, the HTC program, which was substantially expanded in 2008, could provide opportunities for the Town to leverage for the reuse and revitalization of historic buildings.

Preservation

Bridgton does not currently have any formalized efforts focused on the preservation of historic structures at the local level. Bridgton has several structures listed on the NRHP; however, there are many other historic structures within the Town that may be eligible for listing or could be protected in some way. Bridgton's preservation efforts have been largely initiated by private property owners who recognize the value of protecting historic assets. The MHPC identified additional sites for preservation, which could open opportunities for preserving additional infrastructure and assets:

Table 9.5: National Registry-Eligible Properties in Bridgton

No.	Listing
1	Structures on the Hazen-Kimball-Holden Farmstead Property
2	Structures on the Brigham-Sanborn-Linscott Farm Property
3	Bridgton Memorial U.S. Army Reserve Center
4	Grand Army of the Republic Hall
5	Sandy Creek Bridge #3966
6	240 Fosterville Road
7	Sumner Foster House
8	Moose Pond Causeway
9	Moose Pond Bridge

Source: MHPC CARMA Map View

As the Town continues to grow, opportunities to explore the expansion of historic preservation should be considered. Properties, such as those with eligibility to be designated under the NRHP, could potentially be incorporated into the Town's preservation efforts. The Town may also want to consider bolstering its current preservation commitments via the establishment of historic districts or via the establishment of a Historic Preservation Commission to assist property owners in applying for NRHP designation.

Sources



The Abnakis and Their History

A History and Description of New England, General and Local

Bridgton Comprehensive Plan, 2014

Bridgton Historical Society

Heritage for The Future: Maine's Statewide Historic Preservation Plan

Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Cultural and Architectural Resource Management Archive

Maine State Legislature's Office of Program Evaluation & Government Accountability

Maine State Museum

National Register of Historic Places

Town of Bridgton Land Use Code, amended November 8, 2022

10 Town Facilities and Public Services

Police

As of January 2024, the Bridgton Police Department has one chief, one public safety administrative officer, one sergeant, five patrol officers, and one reserve patrol officer. The department also has two animal control officers and a seasonal park ranger from June to August. Over the next five to ten years, the department will look to hire additional staff to expand capacity and double patrol coverage; currently, only one patrol officer is on duty overnight.

Emergency call volume has increased from roughly 5,000 calls per year before the COVID-19 pandemic to roughly 6,500 calls per year in 2022. The Town has also seen an increase in mental health-related calls—a similar trend to other Maine communities. Staff reported that mental health calls increased from 50 to 60 per year before the COVID-19 pandemic to approximately 150 in 2022. The Town has also seen an increase in substance use calls, deaths by suicide, and domestic violence calls in recent years. The department collaborates with community partners and other Town departments to support mental health-related calls and provide service to unhoused residents.

The department regularly collaborates with both the Bridgton Fire Department and Emergency Management Agency (EMA). Additionally, the Opportunity Alliance has a 40-hour mental health liaison to support the department with mental health-related calls. The department also works with Through These Doors on public education initiatives and grant opportunities, and the Stanton Foundation funds the department's K-9 program.

The department is currently housed in the Town Office Building but has expressed the need for additional space. As the Town grows, the department expects to increase patrol coverage, grow the fleet, and support administrative functions.

The department is in the process of working toward Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation. To receive accreditation, agencies follow a voluntary process to show their compliance with Maine law enforcement's best practices and standards. The accreditation requires robust records management, and the department will need additional administrative support.

In 2011, the Town disbanded its dispatch center, and all calls for service are dispatched through Cumberland County Regional Communications Center in Windham. The Town's dispatch center previously maintained police and fire records and created reports. Today, one full-time position is shared with the fire department to maintain records. In the future, the department anticipates needing two full-time staff to cover administrative operations.

Like many police departments in Maine and throughout the U.S., the Bridgton Police Department has struggled with hiring to fill vacancies. There are currently 10 sworn staff members, though staff reported



that they would like to hire additional staff to double patrol coverage. In addition to declining interest in public safety professions, the shift to addressing social service issues through policing has been a deterrent to some.

Fire

The Bridgton Fire Department is a paid call department, except for a full-time fire chief and a part-time fire prevention staff member who began in August 2023. There are four deputies who are paid a stipend, and approximately 30 volunteer staff are paid hourly for calls and training.

The department responds to fires and conducts technical rescues like auto extraction, water and ice rescue, wilderness search and rescue, and hazardous material response. The department also responds to carbon monoxide calls, conducts inspections for sprinklers and alarms for commercial structures and non-single-family homes, and provides educational trainings and resources. United Ambulance manages 911 medical emergency calls, and the department supports as needed. Population growth and new housing have added to the department's workload, including plan review, inspections, and increased alarm calls.

The department has successfully retained volunteer staff and added 10 volunteers since 2021. Staff reported that most calls come between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., and in the future, volunteer staff may struggle to continue to respond to calls during work hours. Staff reported there may be a point at which they need to bring on additional full-time staff to respond to calls during the day or transition from a call department to full-time staff.

In 2012, the State created a mutual aid agreement that the Bridgton Fire Department opted in to. Approximately 13 to 14 departments from surrounding towns are part of a mutual aid agreement for training and response. There are some joint equipment purchases, which could potentially be expanded, and departments are looking to conduct more regional trainings. Departments meet once per month. The Bridgton fire chief attends meetings with chiefs from across Cumberland County. The department is a part of the Cumberland County dispatch, which is based in Windham.

There are four fire stations in Bridgton: Central Station, North Station, South Station, and West Station. Stations are located throughout the Town to enable faster response times across the Town's land area. Staff reported they will likely need to replace or substantially upgrade the Central Station. In 2017, the department conducted a feasibility study and needs assessment for a new facility.

Emergency Management Agency

Bridgton's EMA is responsible for creating, reviewing, and updating emergency operation plans for extreme events, including weather events, evacuations, transportation, and pandemics. EMA also follows federal requirements to involve coordinating responses to emergencies by police, fire, and highway staff. The agency is required to submit paperwork to FEMA for reimbursement for disaster-related expenses.



In recent years, the agency has focused on installing generators in municipal facilities. All four fire stations and the Community Center have generators. Last year, the school budget included funds to add a generator at the school. Staff reported that the transfer station is the next facility that will receive a generator, followed by pump stations and the new wastewater treatment plant once construction is completed.

Additionally, the agency started a drone program to support police and fire during emergencies or search and rescue calls.

Staff reported it has been a challenge not having a dispatch center in the Town, and Bridgton will eventually have dispatch staff in the future. As Bridgton continues to grow, staff reported that their capacity to support residents during emergency events will diminish if department capacity is not increased. Staff also expressed the need for future large-scale residential buildings to have generators or emergency services to provide residents with additional shelter or services during an emergency.

Library

The Bridgton Public Library was founded in 1895 and remains an important community resource. The library provides programming, online and digital resources, and access to print resources.

The library had 16,361 visits in FY23, up from 11,323 in FY22 and 8,429 in FY21. Though the library is slowly gaining visitors following the COVID-19 pandemic, total annual visits is less than what it was prior to the pandemic. In FY19, the library had 21,757 visits, and in FY18, the library had 25,051 visits.

In addition to programming and collections resources, the library also provides access to meeting rooms and work cubicles. Program and workshop attendance increased from 3,478 in FY22 to 4,349 in FY23. Public computer and wireless use increased as well, from 9,285 in FY22 to 21,631 in FY23. The library also saw increases in total patron cards; new books, DVDs, and audio books; and circulation of books, DVDs, and audio books.

The library is a nonprofit corporation operated by a board of trustees. The library receives roughly 40% of its funding from the Town. The remaining funds are raised through annual donations, gifts, proceeds from the 4 on the Fourth Race, and fundraising support from the Friends of Bridgton Library.

Schools

The Lake Region School District serves students throughout Casco, Naples, and Bridgton. The Stevens Brook School is located in Bridgton and serves children from pre-K to fifth grade. The school has 65 staff members. Middle school-aged children in Bridgton attend Lake Region Middle School in Naples. Lake Region High School is also located in Naples and serves students in grades 9 – 12. Center Lake Region Vocational school is also located in Naples, and the school has nine programs for students to participate in: computer technologies, culinary arts, health occupations, automotive technology,



construction technology, diversified occupations, early childhood occupations, law enforcement, and cooperative education. The school is a member of Maine's network of career and technical education (CTE) schools. The Lake Region and Fryeburg Area Adult Education program offers the community accessible education and training opportunities, including business and skills training, English language learner (ELL) courses, GED courses, college prep courses, digital literacy, and other personal enrichment courses. The adult education program is located in Naples.

Bridgton Academy is an all-male preparatory school that provides a one-year postgraduate environment for students following high school. Students are 18 to 19 years old. The school was founded in 1808 and is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

Total public school enrollment declined in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Total school enrollment for the district and enrollment of Bridgton students have increased slightly since 2021 but has not returned to pre-pandemic levels.

Total enrollment for the three Lake Region elementary schools for 2023 is higher than 2019 enrollment (304 compared to 290), while middle school and high school enrollment have not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. Similarly, elementary school enrollment increased from 2022 to 2023, while middle and high school enrollment both declined.

The school district is funded by each of the three towns and state contributions in accordance with state law. Demographic changes and fiscal capacity of Naples and Casco will continue to impact funding for public education for Bridgton students. The 2023 – 2024 school year is the final year in which the district will have federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support staffing, programs, and services for the school district. ESSER funds were made available during the COVID-19 pandemic to support pandemic response by public school districts. The final tier of these funds will expire on September 30, 2024.²²

Town-Owned Facilities

The Town is responsible for the maintenance and operations for facilities across Bridgton. A full listing of facilities is provided in Table 10.1 and can be viewed on the map in Figure 10.1.

²² Lake Region School District. March 20, 2023, and May 9, 2023. "MSAD #61 2023-24 Budget Public Hearing." Presentation. https://drive.google.com/file/d/17co_jbaeVcf-SHrb0_BYGy3aEo9_mhCQ/view

Table 10.1: Town-Owned Facilities

Facility	Location
Municipal Building	3 Chase Street
Garage, Sand Shed, Salt Shed	31 Willet Road
Town Hall, Skating Rink Building, Boy Scout Building	26 North High Street
Fire Station	7 Gibbs Avenue
Community Center, Garage/Storage	15 Deport Street
Recycling Building and Compactor, Transfer Station, Scale House	118 Sandy Creek Road
Fire Station	305 South Bridgton Road
Fire Station	1116 North Bridgton Road
Fire Station	923 North High Street
Wastewater Treatment Facility	78 McKegney Road
Pump Station	Depot Street
Pump Station	Meadow Street
Pump Station	293 Portland Road
Pump Station	Park Street
Pump Station	Frances Bell Drive
Pump Station	Portland Road and Willet Road
Pump Station	Oak and Main Streets
Pump Station	Maine Alternative Caring Plaza
Adams Pond Dam	South Bridgton Road
Woods Pond Dam	676 South High Street
Concession/Bathroom, Building, Equipment Shed	40 Brag Way
Salmon Point Campground Buildings	Salmon Point Road
Salmon Point Beach Public Restroom	Salmon Point Road
Highland Lake Beach Public Restroom and Boat Launch	Highland Road
Woods Pond Beach Public Restroom and Boat Launch	South High Street
Peabody Pond Boat Launch	503 Peabody Pond Road
Moose Pond Boat Launch	972 North High Street



Source: Town of Bridgton Insurance Facilities Inventory

In addition to the facilities listed above, the Town maintains structures and facilities at municipal parks, beaches, fields, and campgrounds. Five of Bridgton's 18 bridges are also under the Town's purview. The Town is in the process of expanding its wastewater treatment capacity and will be bringing new facilities online in the coming years.

Public Health and Community Services

Through the State's General Assistance (GA) program, the Town serves families and individuals who need support for basic needs like utility bills, food, prescriptions, medical expenses, and housing. The program provides a specific amount and type of aid for defined needs for eligible residents.

Municipalities are required to administer a GA program to serve all eligible residents in accordance with state law. The State allocates funding to communities and reimburses municipalities for a portion of the cost of the program. In recent years, the Town has seen an increase in the number of clients requesting assistance from the Town through the GA program. In FY20, (July 2019 through June 2020), the Town had 29 GA clients. The number of clients increased to 45 in FY21, decreased slightly to 35 in FY22, and increased to 50 in FY23. From June to December 2023, the Town had 22 GA clients.

The Town partners closely with local nonprofit organizations to support community services and public health initiatives. The Bridgton Community Center is a nonprofit organization that serves as a multigenerational space for community members to gather or receive services in Bridgton. The Community Center hosts several programs and events, including senior lunches, table games like bridge and cribbage, a community kettle dinner, and support groups. The center has offered more specialized programming, including income tax preparation courses and driver safety courses. It also has community garden beds available for community members to rent seasonally.

Outside of programming, the Community Center provides a variety of services. It operates a warming and cooling center, fuel assistance program, and transportation. The center also operates a Community Navigator Program, where community members can meet with staff for a variety of needs, including help applying for services from federal, state and local agencies, such as food stamps, Section 8, Social Security, and unemployment insurance; help with budgeting; assistance with job searches; help with landlord/tenant issues and homelessness; and GED information and assistance. The Community Center is supported by volunteers who help with meal programs, annual events, office and technical support, and maintenance. The Community Center is run by an executive director and supported by a board of directors.

Through These Doors provides safe, accessible services to people affected by domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking in Cumberland County. Through These Doors operates a 24-hour hotline to support victims of violence. The organization also hosts support groups, provides violence intervention



services, and offers emergency shelter and services. Through These Doors – Lakes Region is located on Main Street in Bridgton.

The Opportunity Alliance provides a network of 55 connected programs to serve Cumberland County. The Opportunity Alliance is a nonprofit organization that provides mental health and substance use services, homelessness prevention, early care and education, and other services to the community. The Bridgton Police Department works closely with both the Opportunity Alliance and Through These Doors to support its own response to emergencies and support residents in accessing services.

Bridgton Hospital was built in 2002 and has 25 beds. The hospital provides essential healthcare services to Bridgton residents and to communities across the Lakes Region. In addition to traditional hospital-based services, Bridgton Hospital provides primary care, specialty care, and urgent care services. The hospital also participates in a variety of health promotion and education initiatives throughout the community. The hospital is part of the Central Maine Healthcare system, which includes the Central Maine Medical Center, Rumford Hospital, Topsham Care Center, and physician practices throughout the region.

The Bridgton Food Pantry was created in 1987 as an outreach mission of the Bridgton United Methodist Church, and it originally served seven to ten families. Today, the Food Pantry provides roughly 750 meals to more than 250 families per week. The pantry has nonperishable items, frozen meat and seafood, fresh produce, and household and pet items. Individuals and families can shop like they are at a grocery store and select items that work best for them. Community members are also able to volunteer and donate to support the pantry.

Infrastructure

Public Sewer System

On January 2, 2024, the Town's new wastewater treatment system came online. The system includes significant sewer expansion beyond the immediate downtown area to serve not only existing businesses and residences that currently rely on septic, but also new development and areas zoned to provide future economic development opportunities. In total, the sewer user base will be expanded by a factor of three.

Upgrades to the existing collection infrastructure comprised the first phase of construction and included sidewalk, lighting, and road upgrades along Upper and Lower Main Street. The collection system expansion project followed, during which approximately 23,000 linear feet of gravity sewer and 7,500 linear feet of force main piping were installed. The proposed sewer will encompass the downtown area along Main Street and the connected side streets from approximately the ball field on the eastern side of downtown to the Civil War Monument on the western side. The sewer will also extend south

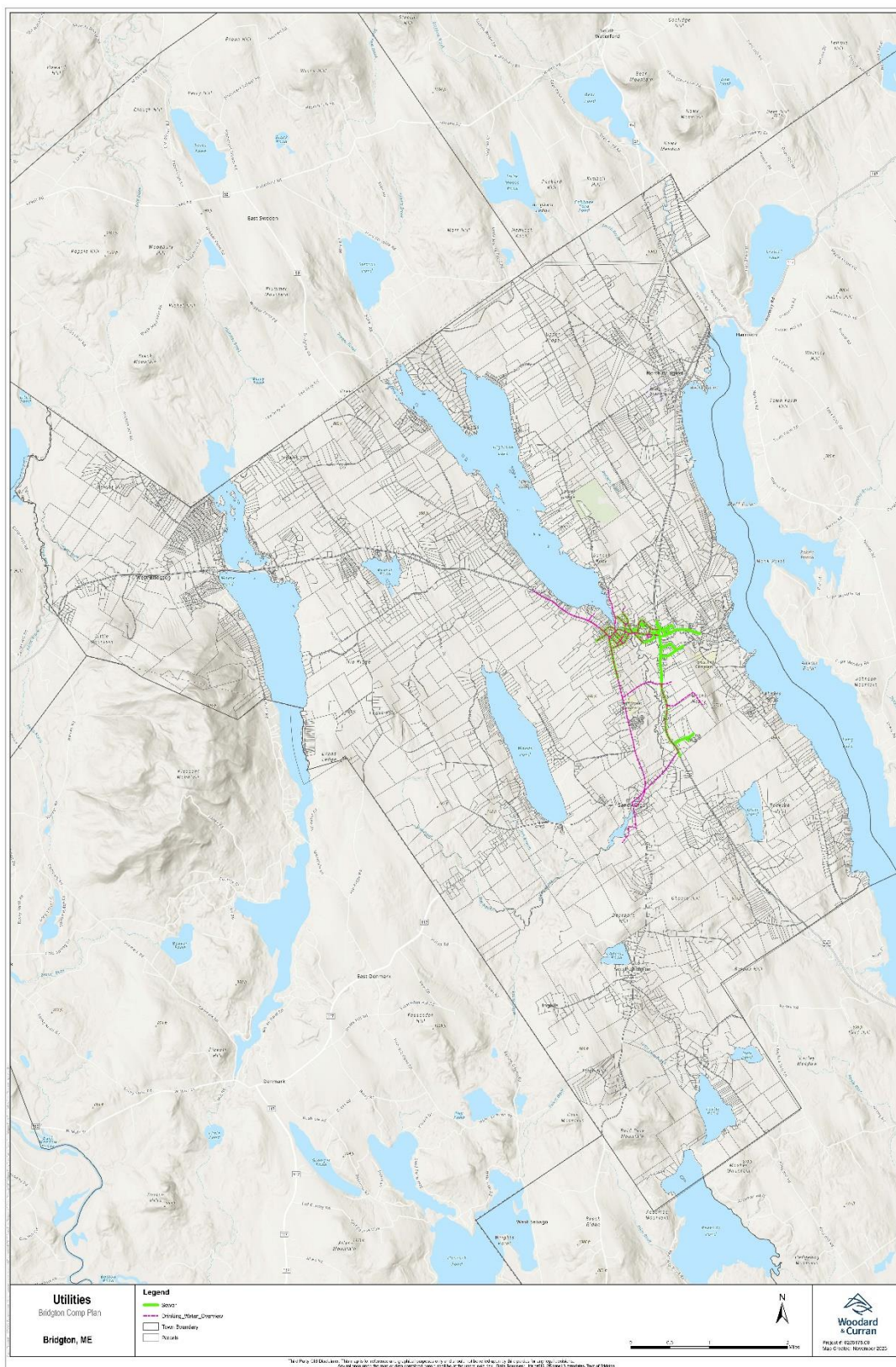


along South High Street to Bridgton Hospital and along Route 302 to Meadow Road/Route 117. This extension aligns with growth areas identified in the 2014 Comprehensive Plan.

During the final phase of construction, existing pump stations were upgraded, and four new pump stations were constructed to convey flow to the new wastewater treatment facility. The new facility is a package plant in a single location with a pressure dispersal system that will release the treated wastewater into the ground. The Bridgton PSD will continue to support the operations and maintenance of the wastewater facilities and infrastructure. The PSD has hired a wastewater foreman with an operator's license.

The Town will require all serviceable customers to be connected to the new system within 10 years of the treatment plant going online to protect future water quality. The Town is providing stem lines from the sanitary sewer main to the property line, and property owners are responsible for sewer laterals. The existing treatment system at the lower ball fields is being converted to a pump station and will redirect sewer flow to the new facility. The existing disposal fields will be decommissioned and available for other uses once the new system goes online.

Figure 10.2: Utilities





Public Drinking Water

Primarily, the Bridgton Water District provides drinking water to the Town. It is a quasi-governmental agency governed by three trustees and staffed with operators. It consists of intake wells as well as conveyance pipes and treatment. The Bridgton Water District pumps from the Willet Brook Aquifer in the southwest corner of the Town. As part of the sewer upgrades, several water mains are being addressed and upgraded. In addition to the Bridgton Water District, the Harrison Water District serves roughly 200 customers in northern Bridgton with a main along Route 117. This water is pumped from the Bear River Aquifer. Water quality and capacity are adequate for Bridgton's existing population and for planned growth. The Bridgton Land Use Code provides regulations to protect drinking water quality and public safety.

Public Services Department

Bridgton PSD is responsible for maintaining and repairing public infrastructure, including roads and public rights-of-way. The department also oversees the Town transfer station, parks, cemeteries, wastewater infrastructure, highways, and lake-level management at two Town dams. Overall, PSD has 20 staff. Of the 20, 4 are at the transfer station, six work in the wastewater division, and seven work in the Highway Division. The department owns and maintains 50 vehicles. PSD has one enclosed garage and one cold storage garage for vehicles. It also has a salt shed, which was upgraded in 2022, and a sand storage shed, which needs concrete rehabilitation. Currently, the facilities are aging, and there are limited facilities for staff. The department has identified a new garage; 10 vehicle bays and underground fuel storage are a priority in a new facility. Currently, the department is exploring an asset management platform to help track Town-wide infrastructure and manage workflow and requests.

PSD oversees all Town parks, mowing the lawns and managing foliage. It also maintains the playgrounds, plows the sidewalks, decorates for events, and conducts post-event cleanups. The Town also recently took over the Ham Complex in 2022, which is a multi-recreation destination including lacrosse, youth soccer, softball, baseball, and tee-ball. This new complex added additional responsibility for PSD.

The Town has 16 cemeteries that PSD manages. In the summer, staff focus on landscaping and grounds maintenance and transitions to snow removal in the winter. The group does routine maintenance and repairs roads as needed.

The Highway Division is responsible for the maintenance and repair of 75 miles of Town streets in the spring and summer months. The group maintains ditches and manages culvert maintenance and installation. Warm weather maintenance also includes roadside mowing, brush cutting, and catching up on planned projects. The department contracts tree trimming services and maintenance around power lines. In the winter, the department is responsible for snow removal and winter maintenance on 220 miles of Town and state roads. The group also plows sidewalks and municipal parking lots.



Solid Waste Management

PSD manages the Town transfer station. The facility is aging and needs significant upgrades, including a replacement of the scale. The facility manages recycling and bulk waste and is located at the former home of the Town's landfill. There are four staff who manage the transfer station and operate the thrift store, which sells various found items at discounted prices. The transfer station is open only on select days. Bridgton residents can purchase a transfer station sticker at the Town Office or at the transfer station for an annual ticket.

The transfer station accepts recyclable materials through a single-sort program through EcoMaine. Residents do not have to sort most recyclable materials; however, they are required to separate recyclables from trash items. Metal, TVs and electronics, tires, and batteries are recycled separately from the single-sort program. The transfer station also operates a bottle return program to benefit different nonprofit groups and organizations.

Septic Waste Disposal

All subsurface sewage discharge systems must be installed in conformance with the State of Maine's Subsurface Wastewater Disposal Rules. Clearing or removing woody vegetation is necessary to site a new subsurface wastewater disposal system and any associated fill extensions must not extend closer than 100 feet from the normal high-water line of a water body or the upland edge of a wetland. A holding tank is not allowed for first-time residential use in the shoreland zone. Bridgton PSD does not currently treat septic for Bridgton residents.

Energy Infrastructure

Central Maine Power provides energy infrastructure to Bridgton, is a subsidiary of AVANGRID, and is the primary electricity provider in central and southern Maine. Central Maine Power provides power to the downtown core as well as to rural areas. Transmission lines run throughout Bridgton and under road infrastructure. Given the increase of storms and the rural forested character of Bridgton, downed power lines continue to be a concern and reinforcing and created redundancy is a priority for the utility and the community.

Broadband

Affordable and reliable broadband internet access is important to the quality of life of Bridgton residents and workers. Over the past few years, the Town has worked with individual service providers and local broadband groups to try to provide more access options. The Town is surveying residents in order to incorporate local data into grant applications beginning in 2023. In April 2023, Spectrum applied for a grant through the Maine Connectivity Authority to reach unserved residents but did not win the grant.

The 2019 Market and Economic Analysis lists broadband infrastructure as a strategic opportunity for the Town to leverage. Increases in remote and hybrid work opportunities require reliable broadband access. In order to attract new residents and support businesses, the 2019 analysis suggests the Town prioritize broadband infrastructure updates and engage in state and county grant opportunities.

The state has a goal of making broadband service universally available; however, Maine's population is not dense enough for the private sector to cover all regions. Maine's Broadband Action Plan proposes that the State will contribute 25% of the total cost to expand broadband access to rural areas.

Challenges and Opportunities

As Bridgton continues to grow, the Town will have to consider how growth will impact the ability to maintain facilities and provide services. Bridgton covers a large geographic area, which is broken up by several lakes. Expanding development beyond designated growth areas could have long-term financial impacts on the Town. Service providers, like police and fire, have been experiencing an increase in calls, and the Town will have to consider ways to help ensure Town staff can maintain service levels as Bridgton grows and the cost to provide services increases. Planning for future needs and identifying opportunities to increase efficiency in operations will be critical for the Town to provide a high level of service in all areas while minimizing the impact to taxpayers.

As Bridgton's population continues to age, the Town will have to consider how to best provide services to older residents. The diversity and affordability of housing types, availability of transportation options, and community services all impact how older residents can continue to participate in the community. Bridgton should also consider the impact of an aging community on its services.

The Town and its partners should also continue work to support residents in need of mental health and substance use support as well as those experiencing homelessness. Housing affordability has been stated as a challenge by Town staff. The Town has seen challenges in filling vacant positions, including in the Bridgton Police Department. Staffing challenges can limit the Town's ability to continue providing a high level of service and supporting residents. Additionally, the Bridgton Fire Department will have to consider if it should transition from an on-call department to a full-time department.

Climate hazards are the effects of climate change that can impact Bridgton's people, infrastructure, economy, and ecosystem. There are several climate hazards facing Bridgton and the region. Warmer temperatures have shortened Maine's winters and lengthened summers by roughly two weeks. Weather is also becoming more variable, and extreme winter cold snaps are becoming more frequent. Maine can expect an increase in high heat index days (over 90 degrees Fahrenheit) per year. Warmer annual temperatures throughout the year have increased the likelihood that ticks survive the winter and are more active through the spring and summer. Maine has seen an increase in Lyme disease cases and, as of March 2023, babesiosis is endemic in the state.



Hazards, like increased weather intensity and extreme weather events, can damage properties and infrastructure. More extreme and more frequent weather events could impact Bridgton EMA's ability to continue to provide a high level of service and support residents in evacuating or responding to hazards.

Sources

Bridgton Academy

Bridgton Community Center

Bridgton Community Development Report April 2023

Bridgton Economic and Market Analysis 2019

Bridgton EMA

Bridgton Fire Department

Bridgton Food Pantry

Bridgton General Assistance

Bridgton Hospital

Bridgton Land Use Code, Shoreland Zoning Ordinance

Bridgton Police Department

Bridgton Public Library

Bridgton Public Services Department

Bridgton Transfer Station

Bridgton Wastewater Department

Lakes Region Schools

Maine Broadband Action Plan

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Environmental and Community Health

Maine Won't Wait Climate Action Plan

Opportunity Alliance

Through These Doors

11 Fiscal Capacity and Capital Investment Plan

As Bridgton experiences continued residential and commercial development, understanding the Town's fiscal capacity for growth is critical. With the upcoming completion of the wastewater system upgrade and regional development pressure, Bridgton is poised to welcome more new development in the downtown area. Growth and changing demographics will impact the Town's fiscal capacity. Whether these changes have a net positive or net negative impact on the Town's overall financial position and ability to provide services at current/increased future levels will depend on a number of factors, including the location, type, and density of new development, as guided by this plan.

Fiscal Capacity in the Planning Context

The Town's fiscal capacity and ability to provide adequate levels of high-quality services is largely dependent on creating and maintaining a diverse economic environment. As a regional service center, Bridgton is well positioned in the region to support business and employment growth, attract visitors, and support new and existing residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the economy and was especially challenging for the Town to continue to provide essential services to residents and commercial partners in a time of great uncertainty. Significant federal and state funding supported municipalities, businesses, and residents in economic recovery and allowed for significant capital investments to support long-term growth. Bridgton has benefited from broader shifts to remote work, migration to Maine and smaller communities, and an increased interest in outdoor recreation.

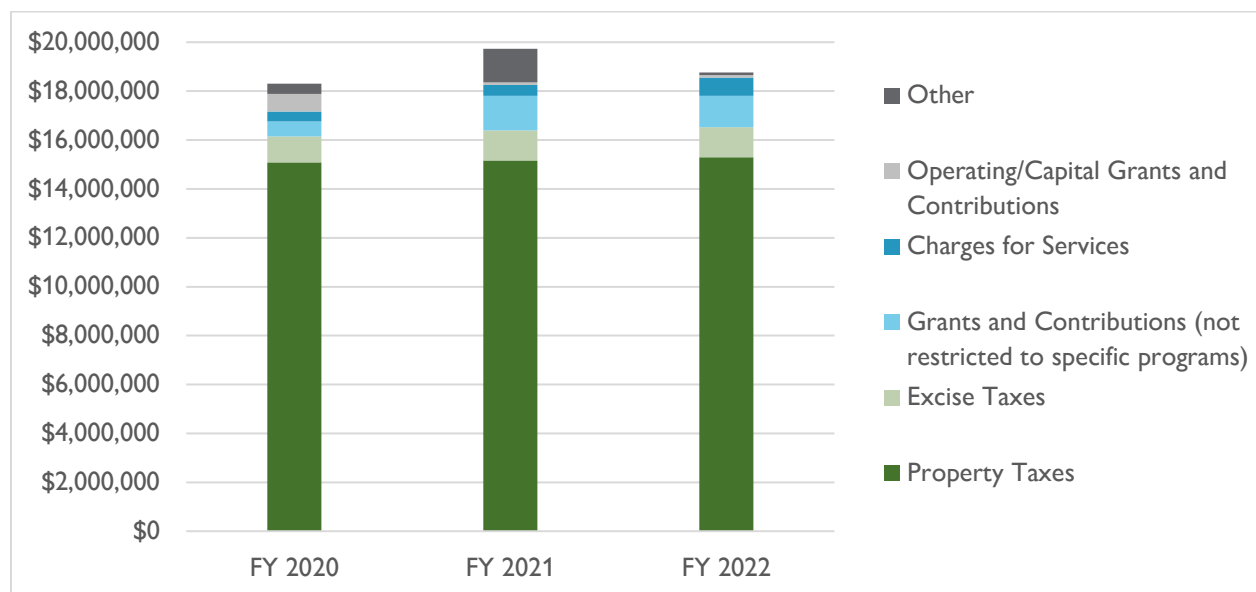
Though not a financial forecast in the traditional sense, through this comprehensive planning effort, the Town is looking to plan for future growth as a means to improve Bridgton's fiscal position. This could be by expanding the tax base with new commercial development; enhancing and marketing the Town to attract visitors and seasonal residents; supporting business growth and job creation; and/or maintaining current service levels, infrastructure investment, and amenities to continue to support the well-being and quality of life of existing residents. The outlining of core revenue and expense elements, and the projected impacts of economic development and strategic capital investment on those elements, may assist the Town with prioritizing goals and initiatives. Understanding the Town's fiscal capacity in greater detail may provide for additional information to consider when planning for anticipated growth and to help ensure a thriving economy and subsequent fiscal health of the Town.

The Town can intentionally cultivate interdependence between economic needs and residential and commercial needs through land use regulation, infrastructure investment, and fiscal policies that complement and support the Town's neighborhoods, service delivery hubs and sectors, community partners, built environment, and natural environment. This, in turn, can help ensure expansion of the Town's fiscal capacity for the future.

Revenue and Expenses

To establish a baseline for measuring fiscal capacity growth, it is necessary to understand the Town's core revenue-generating capacity. Figure 11.1 shows major general fund revenue sources from FY 2020 to FY 2022. The majority of annual general fund revenue is raised via property taxes (82% in FY 2022).

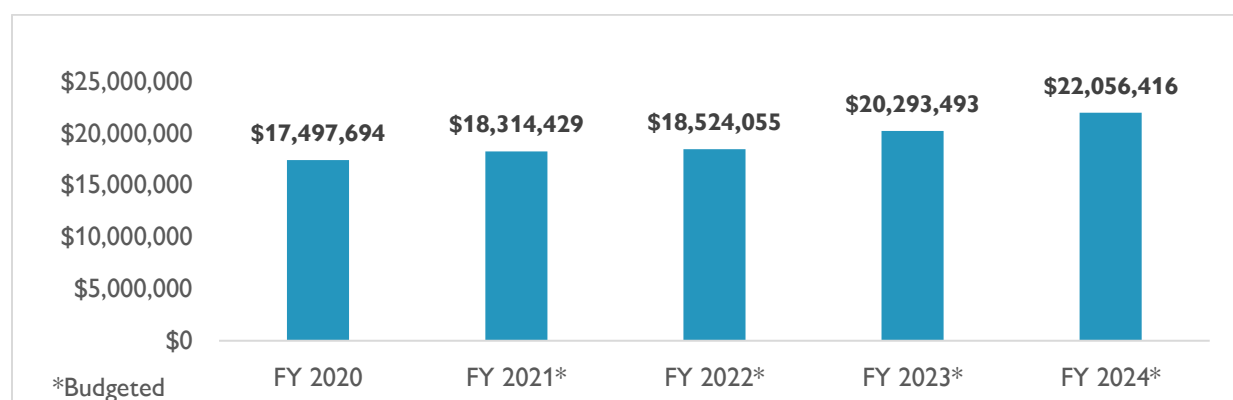
Figure 11.1: Major Revenue Sources FY 2020 – FY 2022 (Dollars in \$1,000s)



Source: Town of Bridgton

As the cost of materials, labor, and equipment have increased substantially in recent years, so have expenses for the Town. Bridgton's operating expenses have continued to increase annually, with a 26% increase in budgeted expenses from FY 2020 to FY 2024.

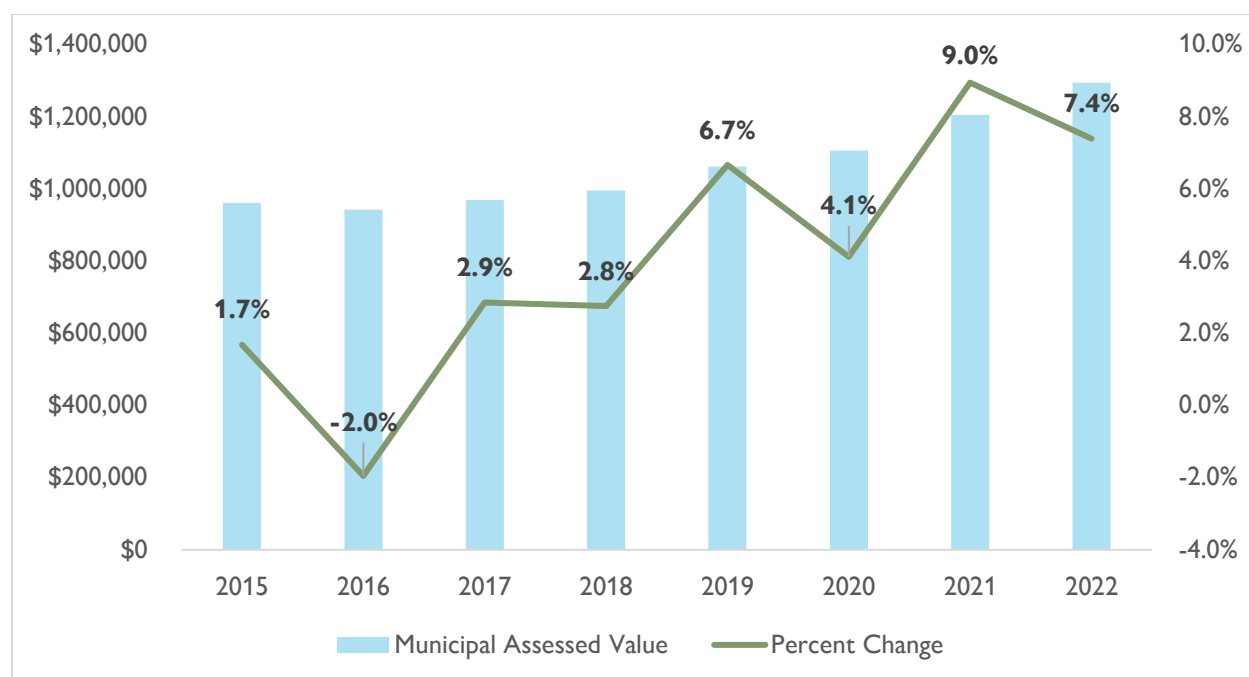
Figure 11.2: Bridgton Annual Expenses



As is evident from Figure 11.1, the majority of annual general fund revenue secured by the Town is raised via property taxes. As a result, it is important for the Town to continue to foster overall municipal valuation growth through policy and land use decisions. This will help guide development that will best support revenue growth and continued strategic investment in critical infrastructure and

services. Figure 11.3 outlines the growth in overall municipal valuation from FY 2015 to FY 2022. The Town has experienced substantial assessed valuation growth since 2020, similar to other communities in the region. This is significant because it provides the Town with a snapshot of estimated revenue available to be raised via property taxes based on tax rates. Because the Town's reliance on revenue derived from property taxes is substantial (at roughly 80% of total revenue), if overall municipal valuation year-over-year increases are not realized to historic levels, they may have a significant adverse impact to the Town's ability to maintain current service levels. While impacts may be somewhat mitigated through tax rate adjustments, increasing rates would adversely impact property owners.

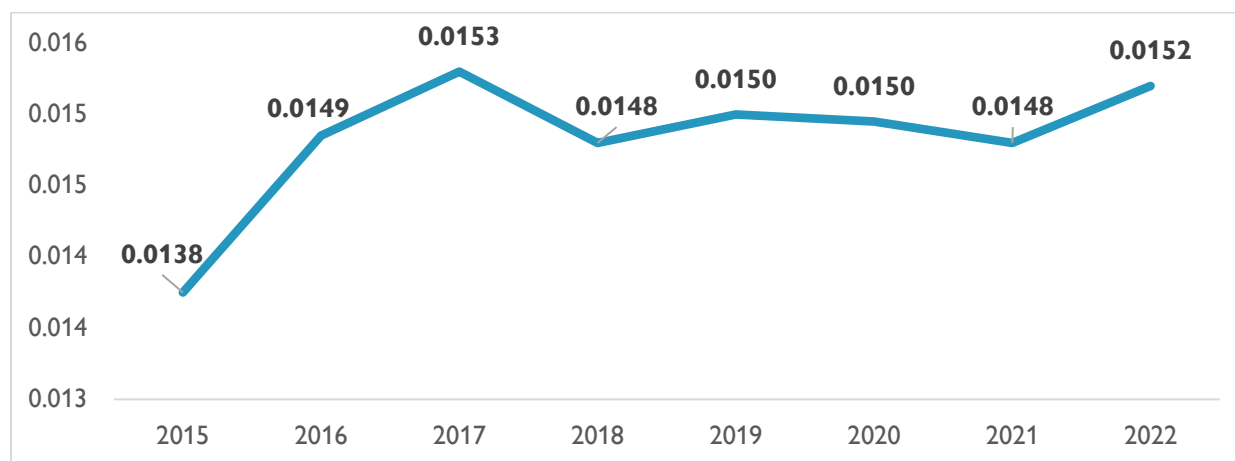
Figure 11.3: Bridgton Municipal Valuation Growth, 2015 – 2022



Source: DACF, Maine Revenue Services

Maintaining the municipal tax rate is important to help ensure long-term livability for full-time residents of Bridgton. While the 2023 property tax rate (\$15.20 per \$1,000 of assessed value) has remained relatively stable since 2016, property values in the Town and region have increased dramatically, resulting in higher tax bills for many residents. Whether the tax rate for the Town will increase or decrease from the prior year will largely depend on whether property values appreciate, depreciate, or remain steady. As can be seen in Figure 11.4, the residential tax rate has remained somewhat flat since FY 2016, presumably in large part due to the increases in assessed values over the same period.

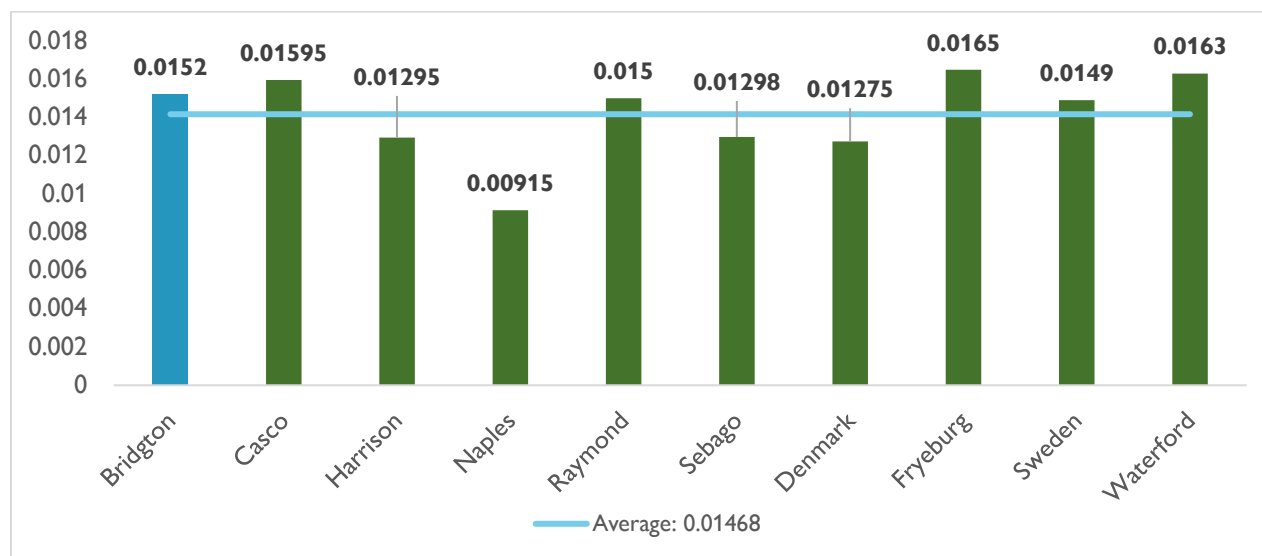
Figure 11.4: Municipal Property Tax Rate, 2015 – 2022



Source: DACF, Maine Revenue Services

Bridgton's property tax rate is comparable to other communities in the region. While the Town has a higher tax rate than some other nearby towns, including Naples, Sebago, and Denmark, it provides a higher level of services to residents and visitors, including a full-time police department, paid call fire department, community development activities, and a range of recreation opportunities.

Figure 11.5: Comparison of Municipal Tax Rates, 2022



Source: DACF, Maine Revenue Services

Debt Capacity

In addition to overall municipal valuation and various county and educational commitments, the property tax rate for the Town also depends on short-term revenue requirements and projected funding for current and future investments. Increases (or, in less common instances, decreases) to



annual property tax rates can be permanent due to increased spending needs or temporary due to debt issuance or capital investments.

Bridgton relies on the sale of bonds for its most substantial financing needs, including the current wastewater system improvement project. State statutes limit the amount of general obligation debt a municipality may issue to 15% of its total state-assessed valuation. The Town's outstanding debt in 2022 was \$15,895,875, which is approximately 1.2% of the Town's total valuation and is far below the state-established limitation.

Capital Planning

Between FY 2019 and FY 2022, an average of 5.6% of total government expenditures (excluding school appropriations and business-type activities) were related to capital outlays. This includes a sharp increase in capital outlays in FY 2021 related to the Lower Main Street Reconstruction project. Although capital outlays are a relatively small percentage of total expenditures for the Town, the long-term maintenance costs and eventual replacement costs need to be considered when making capital investment decisions. Capital investment policy should support a capital investment strategy related to the ability to generate revenues beyond the cost to maintain and replace infrastructure. As maintenance and replacement costs increase, this becomes more critical.

Similarly, strategic investments in business-type capital infrastructure, such as water and sewer infrastructure, should be considered for the potential to generate revenues and to increase the level of service to those who pay to use and maintain the services. For example, the design and construction of the Town's wastewater treatment system can be considered an investment, with the potential return on investment from planned and potential future development that the new system will accommodate. This may contribute to expansion of the Town's tax base and, thus, its capacity to generate revenue.

Addressing deferred maintenance and capital replacement needs throughout the Town requires a strategic approach. Updating and constructing new transportation and utility infrastructure and facility investments should focus on a return on investment. Planning for the maintenance of existing buildings and facilities and the construction of new facilities can be targeted to support and encourage new development. Strategic capital improvement investments may provide the foundation for growth and present the Town with additional opportunities to generate revenues beyond the capital construction and maintenance costs for facilities over the course of their useful life. The Town should also consider the long-term implications of investing in major infrastructure and facilities projects now versus waiting another five to ten years (or not completing the project at all), including limiting the level or range of services and the impact on the tourism economy and new business growth.

Financing Tools

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Districts

The Town currently uses municipal TIF districts to provide financial assistance to applicable development projects and to direct incremental property tax revenue generated by the new investment to fund special projects, programs, and initiatives.

TIF districts allow the Town to shelter the increased property valuation within the district from computation of its state subsidies (general purpose aid to education and municipal revenue sharing) and County tax assessments. TIF districts are used to encourage development by allowing some or all property tax revenue generated by new development to be used to supplement project costs and for targeted projects that support economic development for the community as a whole, such as road repairs or sidewalks. Bridgton has three active TIF districts:

- **The Portland Road TIF** is 537 acres and extends along Portland Road (Route 302) from the intersection of Sandy Creek Road to Main Street, including the east end of Main Street to Nulty Street. This district was designated in 2007 and is set to expire in 2033.
- **The Magic Lantern Municipal Development TIF** is 4 acres including the Magic Lantern Theater. The district was designated in 2005 and is set to expire in 2026.
- **The Woodlands Senior Living Municipal Development TIF** is 36 acres along North High Street and was designated in 2020 to promote the development of a senior memory care facility and support the Town's economic development initiatives.
- **Harrison Ridge Affordable Housing TIF** is 7 acres along Harrison Road and Route 117. The TIF was designated to promote the development of 48 low-income apartments for residents over age 55.

The total valuation of all municipal TIF districts is \$43,024,069. TIF funds have been used and plan to be used for projects such as sidewalk construction, streetlights, wastewater system upgrades, and playground improvements. The Town should continue to review TIF district revenue capture rates and assess the likelihood of using TIF revenues for specific purposes related to the design and construction of projects. Furthermore, the Town should review the real growth assumptions within current TIF districts and related impacts to valuation increase assumptions to allow for greater accuracy of estimates.

Community Development Block Grant

Bridgton is one of two municipalities within Cumberland County that receives special set-aside allocations of the County's CDBG program funds. Bridgton and South Portland qualify for a set-aside allocation based on the low-/moderate-income population for which the program is intended to serve.



The Town's annual CDBG allocation is approximately \$200,000, which is used to fund infrastructure and community services projects. For the 2023 – 2024 allocation year, the projects selected for funding included the Church Street sidewalk, the Bridgton Community Center Navigator Program, and the Bridgton Food Pantry.

Other Grant Funding

In addition to CDBG funds, the Town has actively pursued other grant funding opportunities. For the wastewater expansion project, the Town is set to receive \$1.4 million in congressional earmark grant funding awarded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and has designated \$450,000 of the Town's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for the project.

The Town has also sought and been awarded additional funding for specific programs and projects from federal and state agencies, Cumberland County, and private organizations. Recently, the Town has been awarded funding from GOPIF, Community Heart and Soul, and GPCOG to support planning initiatives.

Challenges and Opportunities

As the cost to provide services increases, Bridgton, like other communities, will need to find creative solutions to maintain current service levels. Determining where to encourage growth and what type of growth to allow in the Town will have a significant impact. The Town will look to balance fiscally responsible growth with the desire to preserve natural areas, open space, scenic views, and Bridgton's small-town character.

In addition, this plan will consider alternative funding sources, such as the continued or expanded use of TIF districts, fees for service, additional grant opportunities and grant management, and use of Town-owned land. The Town has successfully leveraged state and federal funding to make needed investments in infrastructure and services; however, the possibility of the Town losing its status as a CDBG entitlement community is a concern. As the demographics of the Town shift, this is a potential long-term concern. Planning for how the Town would fill the gap if the current CDBG funding were to disappear is a realistic and cautious approach to fiscal planning for the long-term to help ensure the continued quality of place in Bridgton.

Sources

Federal Compliance Audit, Town of Bridgton, Maine, June 30, 2021

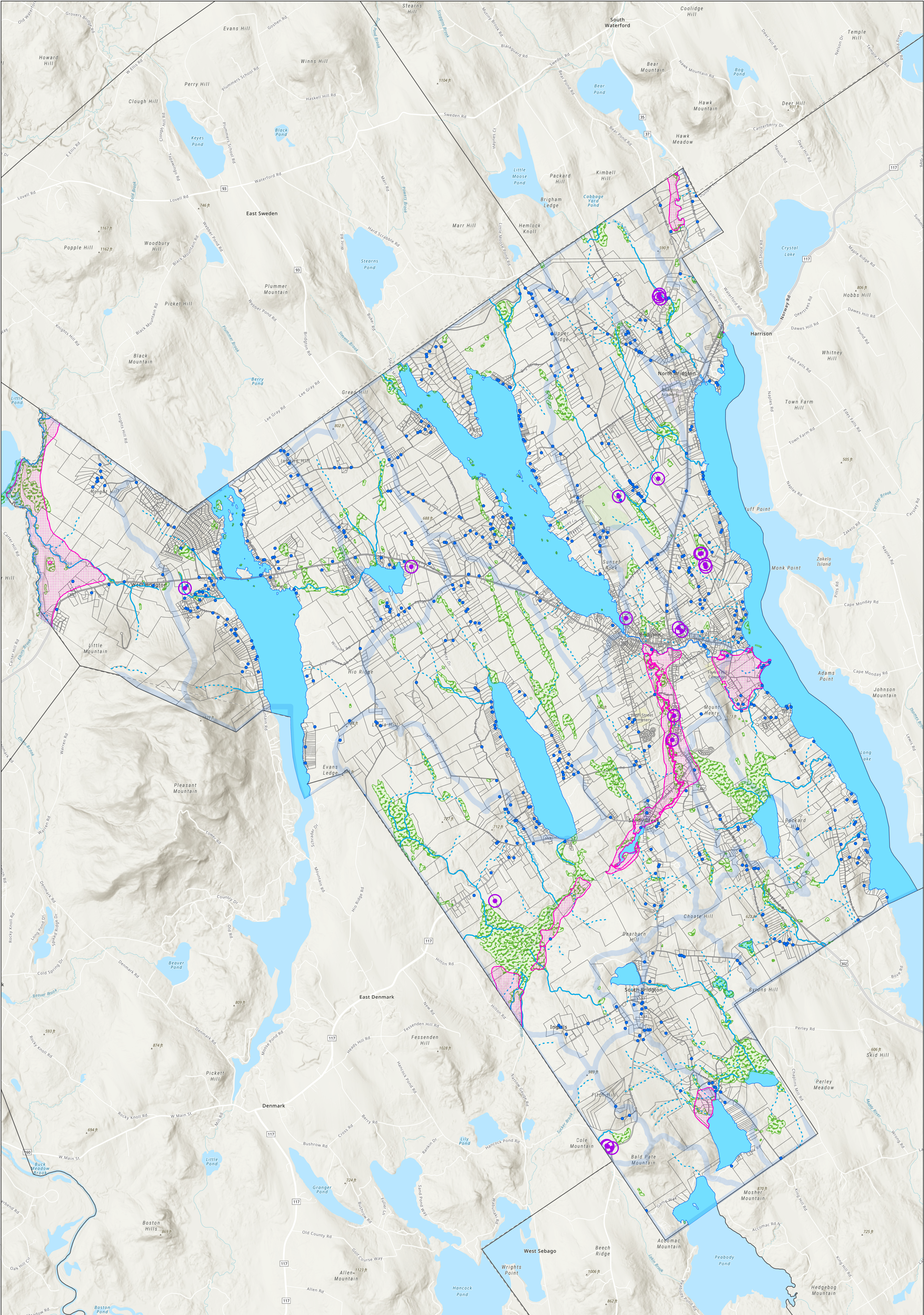
Federal Compliance Audit, Town of Bridgton, Maine, June 30, 2022

Maine Department of Economic and Community Development

Department of Administrative and Financial Services, Maine Revenue Services

Town of Bridgton, Town Budget FY 2024

12 Appendix A: Maps



Water Resources

Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

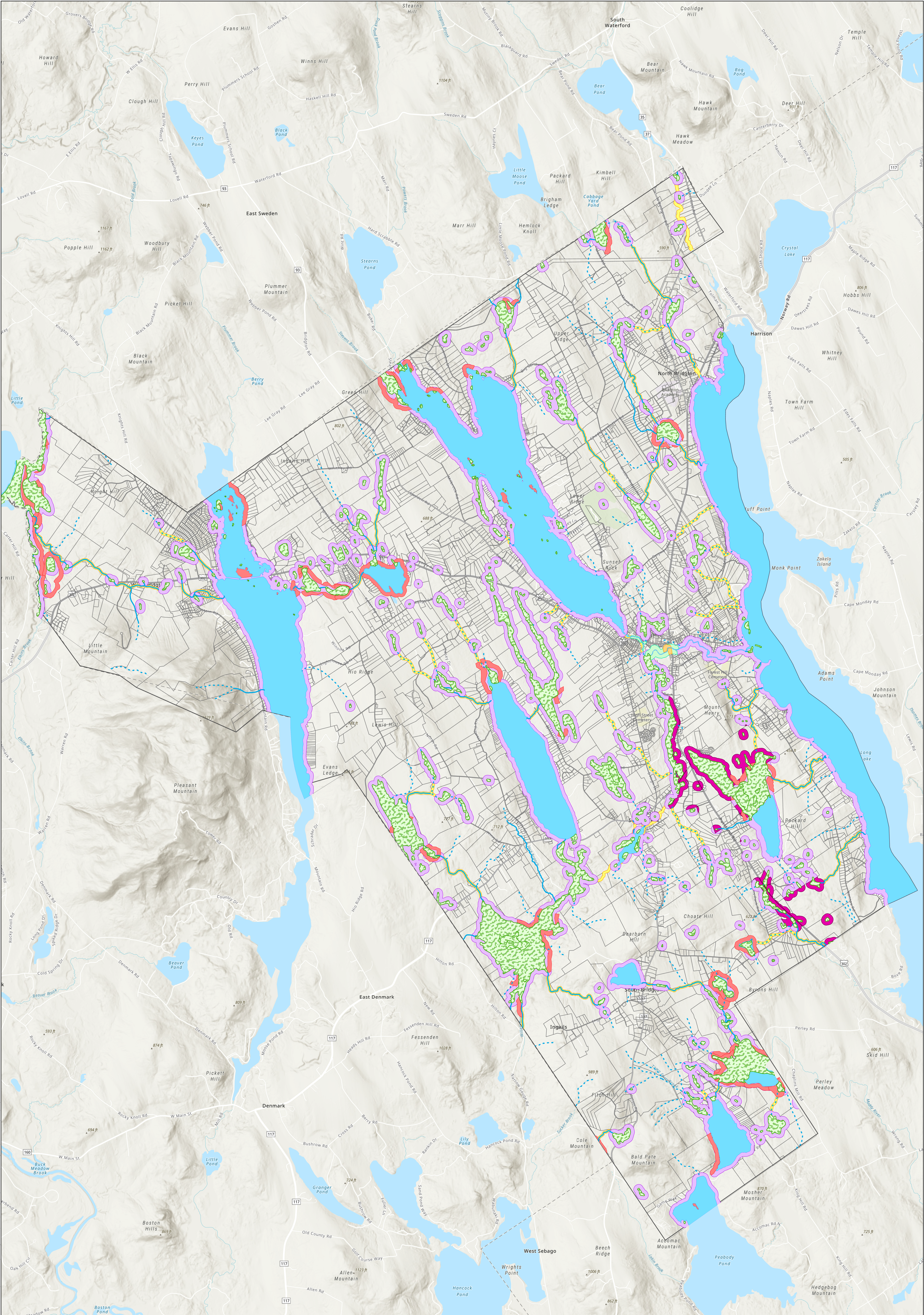
Legend

Waterbodies	Freshwater Wetlands	Aquifers
Watershed Boundary	Vernal Pool	Town Boundary
Perennial Streams	Well Locations	Parcels
Intermittent Streams		

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

Project #: 0235175.00
Map Created: November 2023

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Land Districts
Bridgton Comp Plan

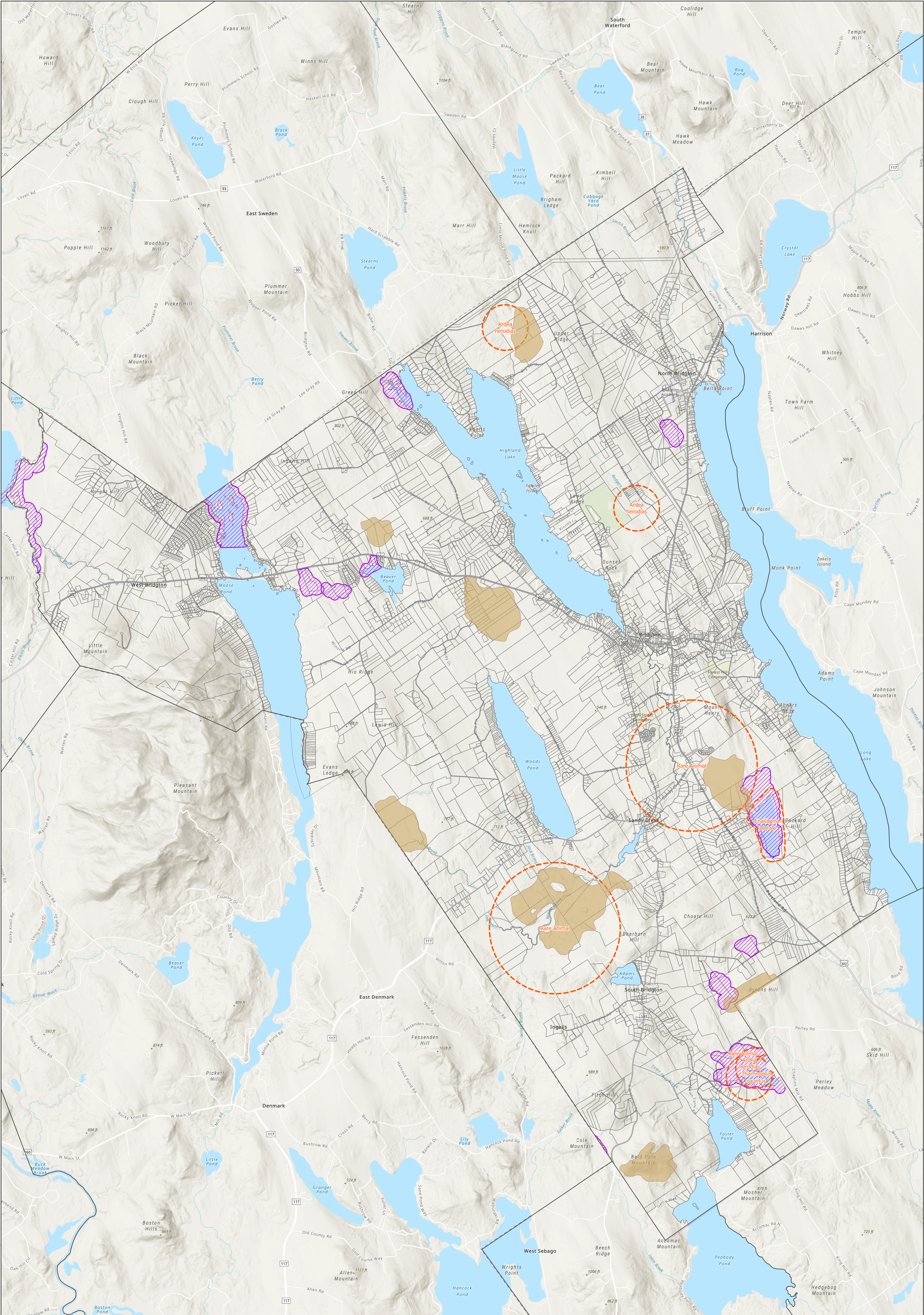
Bridgton, ME

Legend			
General Development District II	Limited Residential District	Intermittent Streams	
General Development District I	Stream Protection District	Freshwater Wetlands	
Resource Protection District	Waterbodies	Town Boundary	
Limited Commercial	Perennial Streams	Parcels	

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

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Habitat Areas
Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

Legend

- Endangered Threatened and Special Concern Wildlife Habitat
- Inland Waterfowl and Wading Bird Habitat
- Town Boundary
- Parcels
- Deer Wintering Areas

Wildlife Management Areas, Maine Heritage Fish Waters, Maine Endangered and Threatened Fish, and all ocean related layers evaluated do not have extents within town.

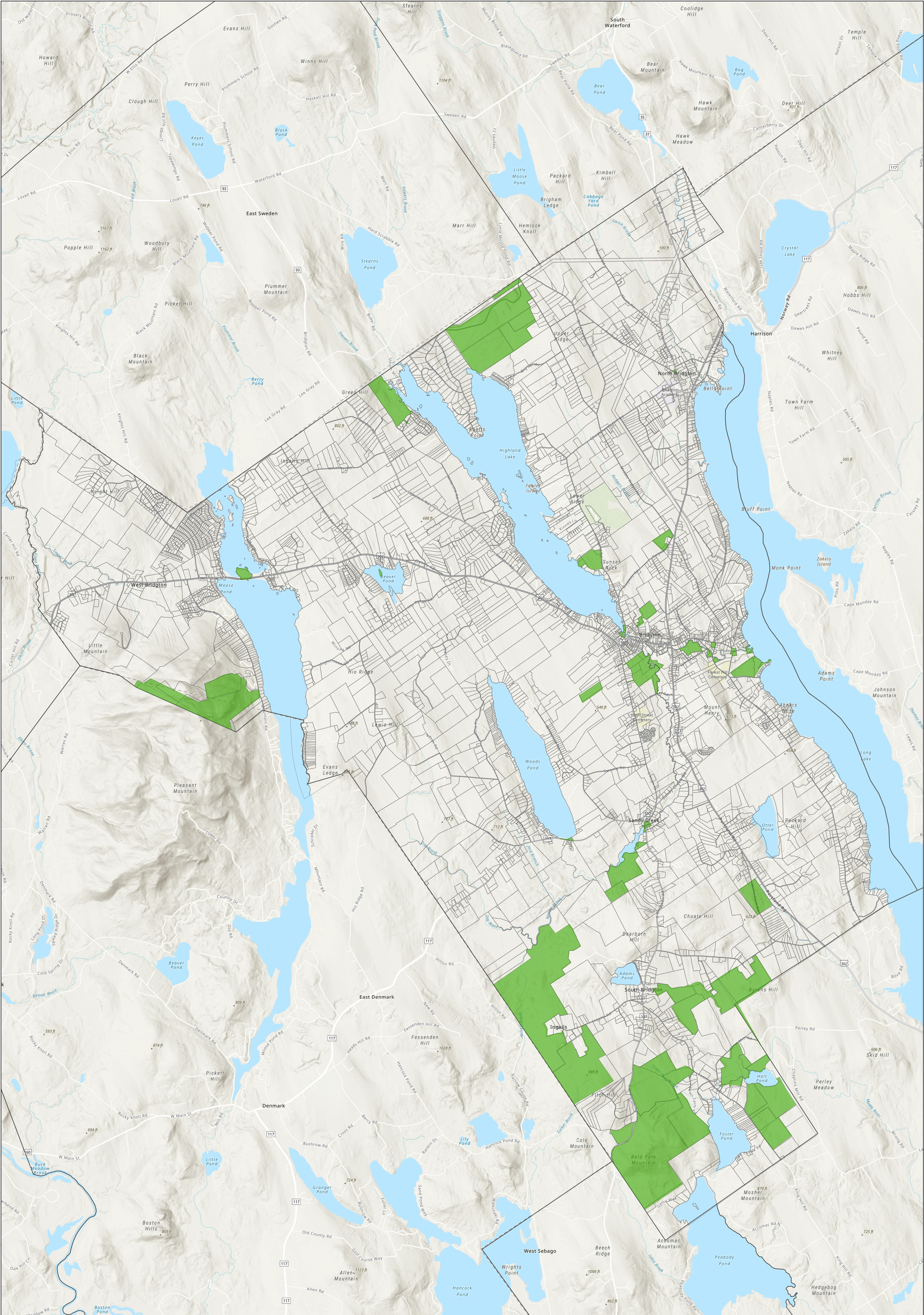
00.512

Miles

N

Woodard & Curran

Project #: 0235175.00
Map Created: November 2023



Conservation Land

Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

Legend

Conservation Land

Town Boundary

Parcels

0

0.5

1

2

Miles

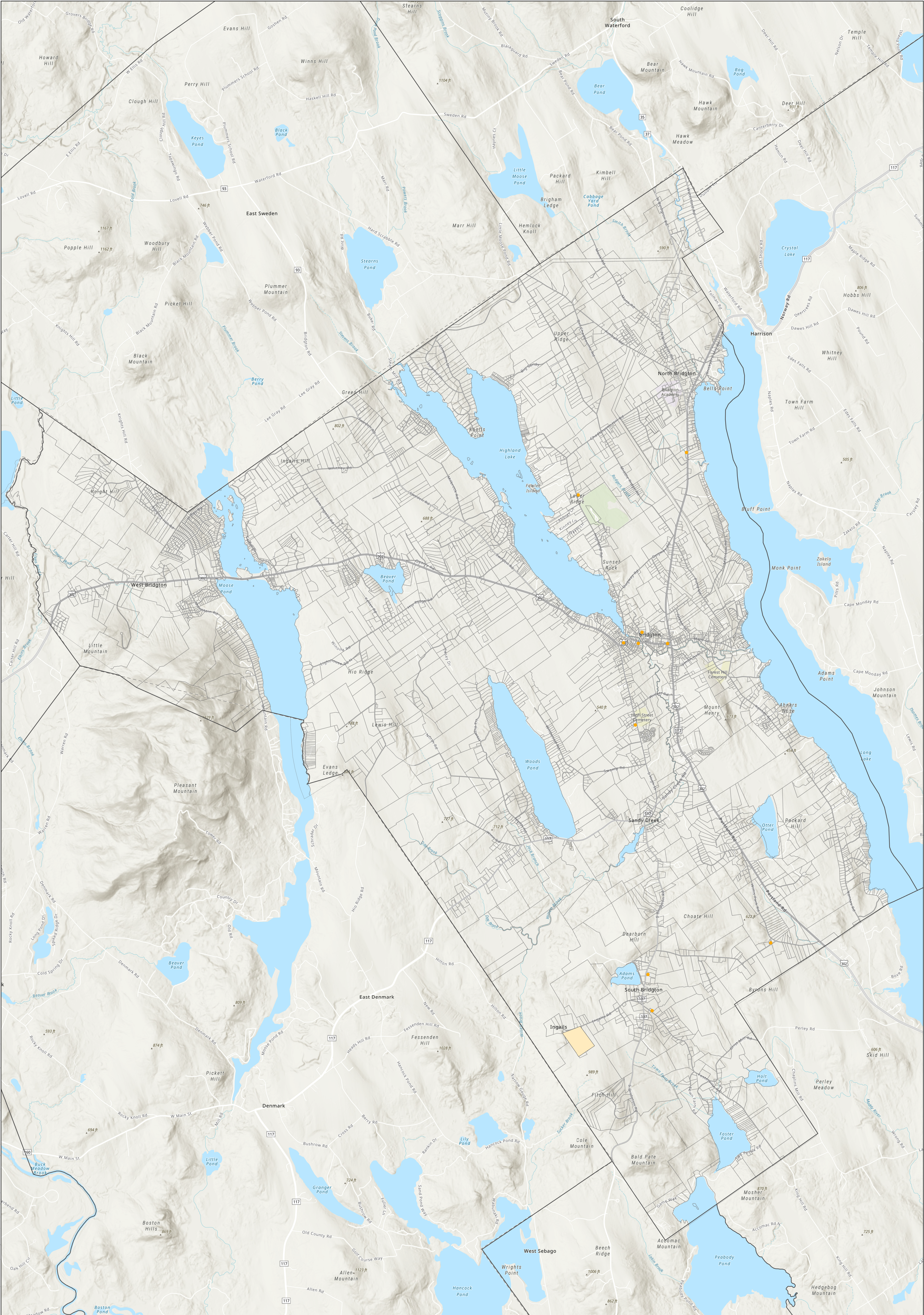
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Woodard & Curran

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Historical and Archaeological Overview
Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

Legend

National Register Of Historic Places Points

- National Historic Landmark
- National Register of Historic Places
- Removed from National Register of Historic Places

National Register of Historic Places Polygons

- National Historic Landmark
- National Register of Historic Places
- Removed from National Register of Historic Places

Town Boundary

Parcels

0 0.5 1 2 Miles

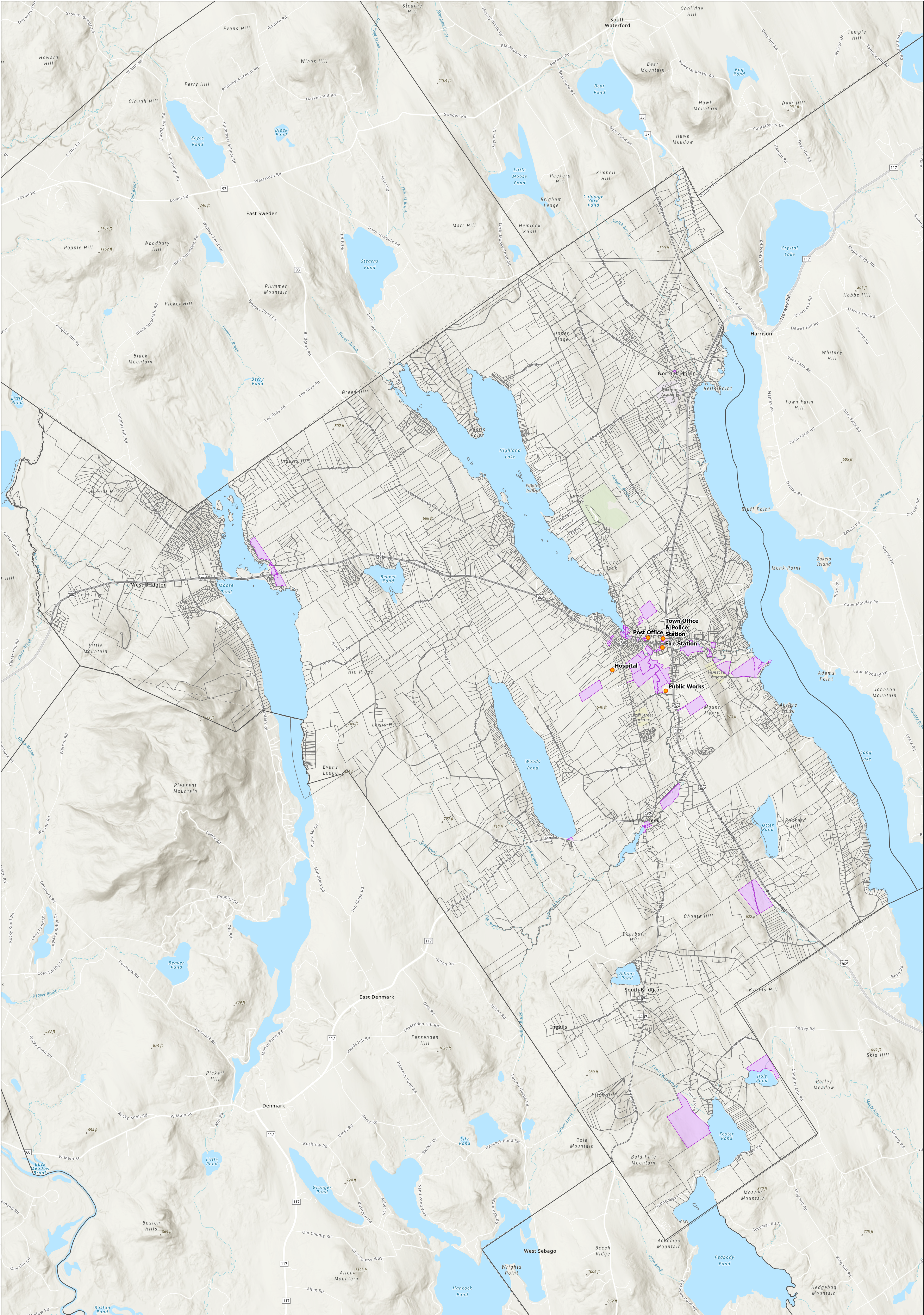
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Woodard & Curran

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Town Facilities

Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

Legend

Town Owned Land

Town Facilities

Town Boundary

Parcels

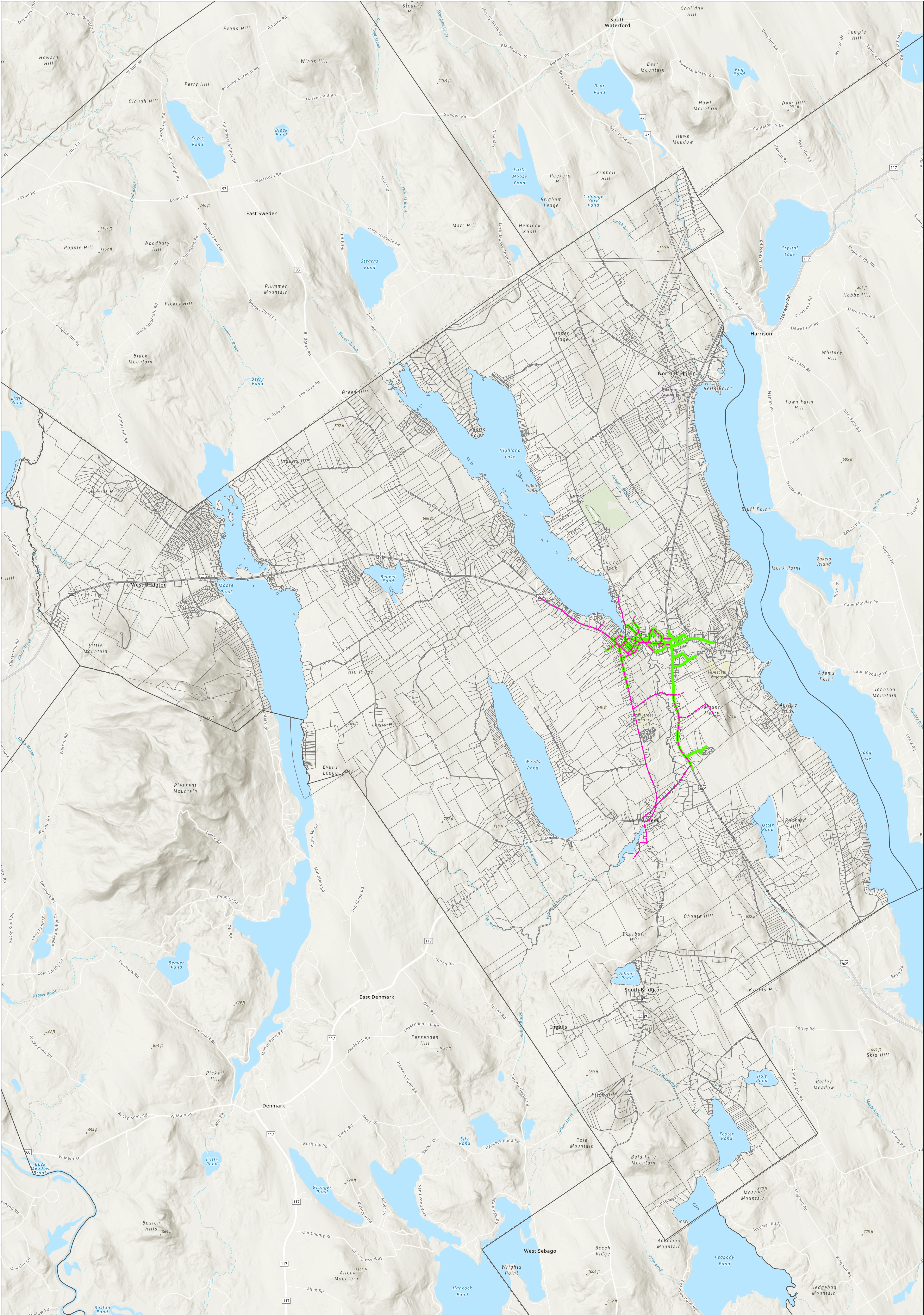
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Miles

Project #: 0235175.00
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Utilities
Bridgton Comp Plan

Bridgton, ME

Legend

- Sewer
- Drinking_Water_Overview
- Town Boundary
- Parcels

N

0

0.5

1

2

Miles

Woodard & Curran

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