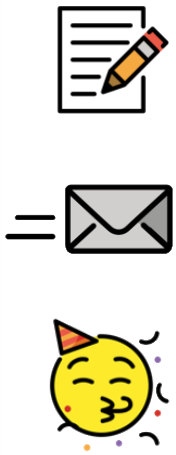
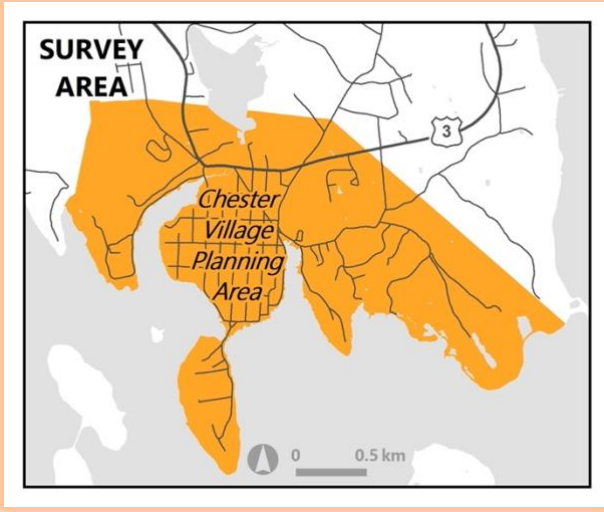
THE MUNICIPALITY OF CHESTER

VILLAGE OF CHESTER PLAN REVIEW: RESIDENT SURVEY
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS SUMMARY

SEPTEMBER 2021



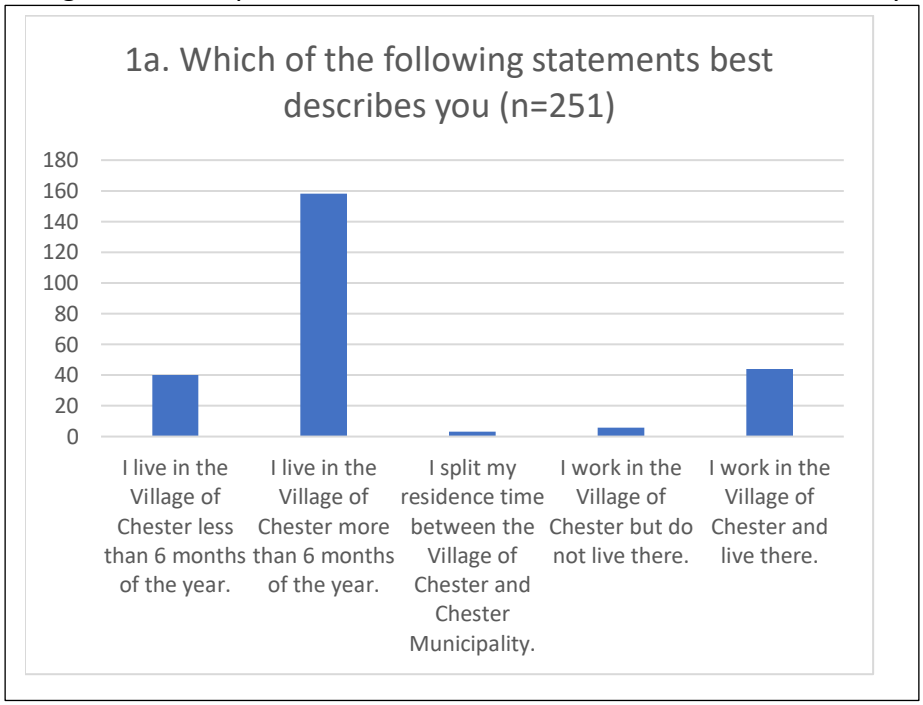


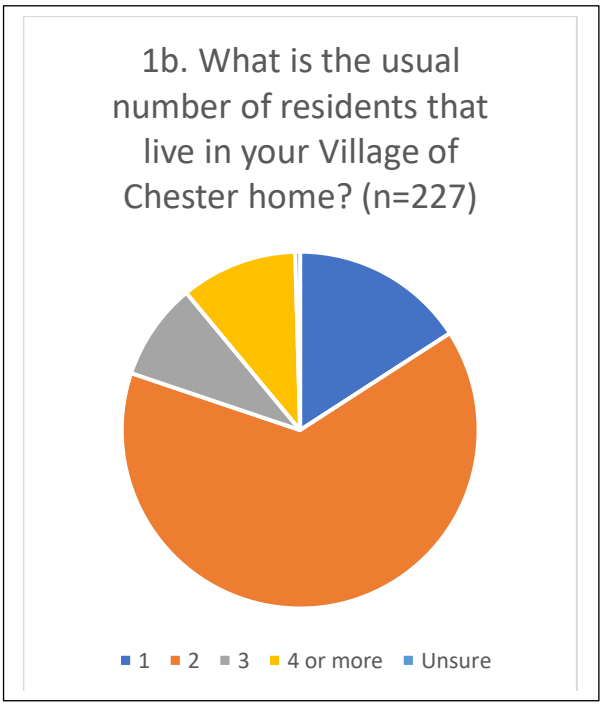


This report is based on the collated results of 236 returned surveys, representing a 31% response rate. An analysis of results, including unprompted written comments, is presented below on a per question basis.

1. Respondent Info

Village of Chester Planning Advisory Committee have identified several priorities for plan review. Before we get to those questions, we would like to know a bit more about you!



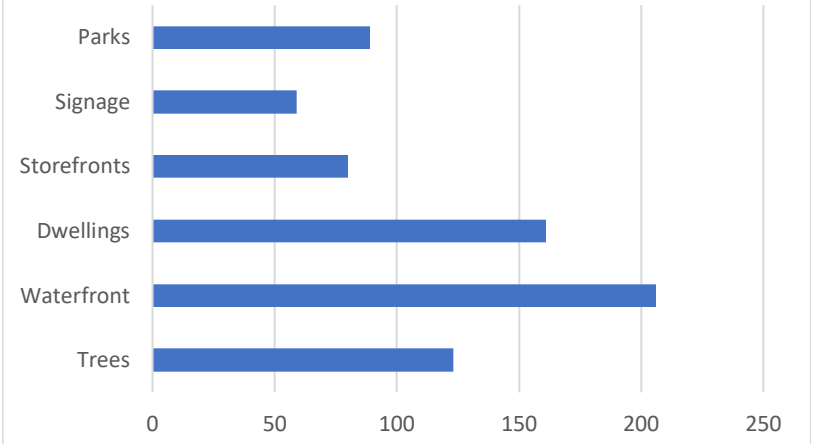


Analysis: These were "warm up" questions to get respondents into the flow of the survey. However, it is striking that a majority of respondents do live in Chester most of the year given the common conception of "snow birds", transient residents or tourists as a majority. The majority single or paired residents in a home in the village is consistent with the suburban cottage setting of the Village of Chester.

2. Unique Chester Look

The Village of Chester has several built and environmental features that contribute to a unique character and "Chester look." Each resident may describe that uniqueness differently.

2a. Please circle which of the following (if any) significantly contribute to a unique "Chester look" in your opinion (n=718):



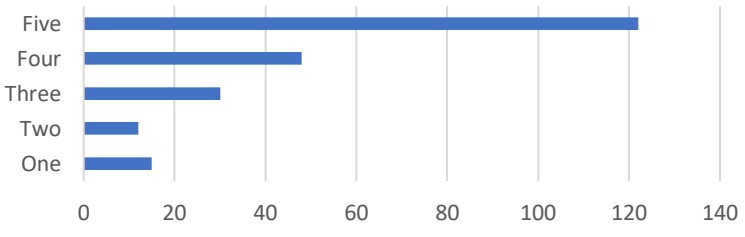
2b. Write here how you would describe a "unique Chester look" using key words, phrases, or your favourite building:

Traditional, tidy, green space, natural light, sidewalks or pathways.
The Cape Cod roof and gables make Chester look like a community connected to the ocean, plus the low height of the buildings.
Waterfront and those using it!
Traditional housing. Public salt water wharfs a seawater pool. Lordly House and Zoe Valley Tower.
A walk in the village includes the water, rope loft, churches and yacht club and tavern
Quaint; New England Style; Nautical Themes; Lovelev Gardens: Flowers

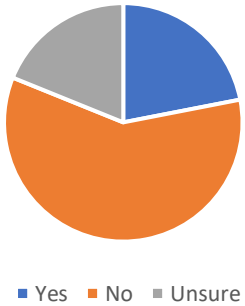
Analysis: These results provide preliminary background for a future planned architectural study of the Village. A significant number of negative comments referenced a "modern" building style that did not match with surrounding design.

The results of 2d reflect a good resident understanding of municipal regulations and that those regulations are appropriate in scope. This is strong validation for planning to "maintain course" around architectural controls.

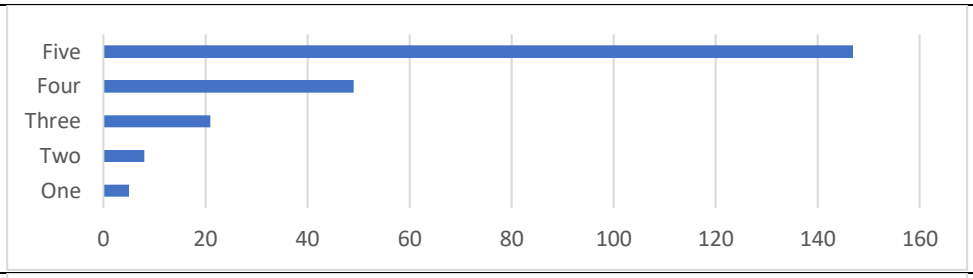
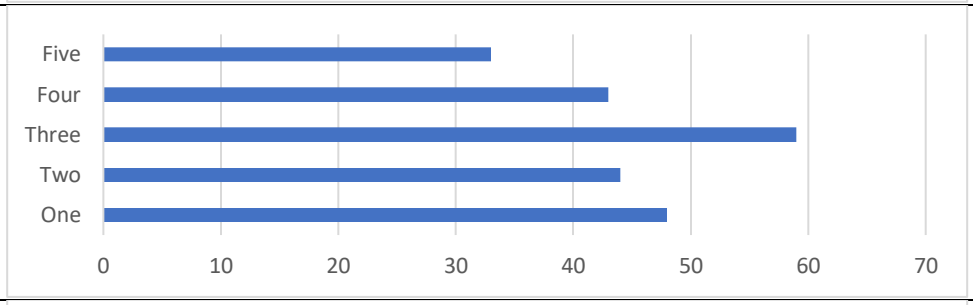
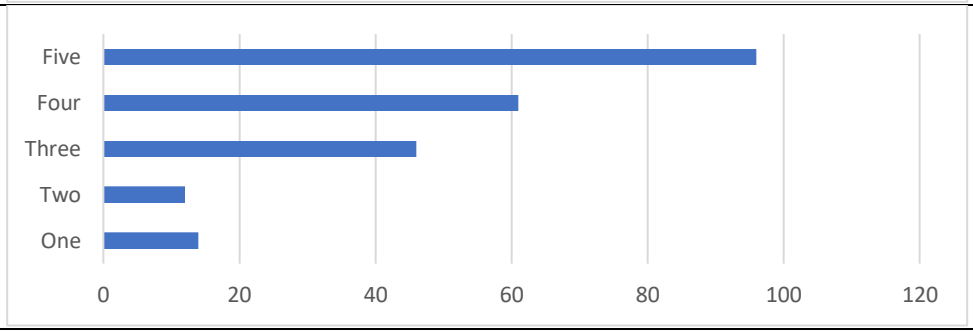
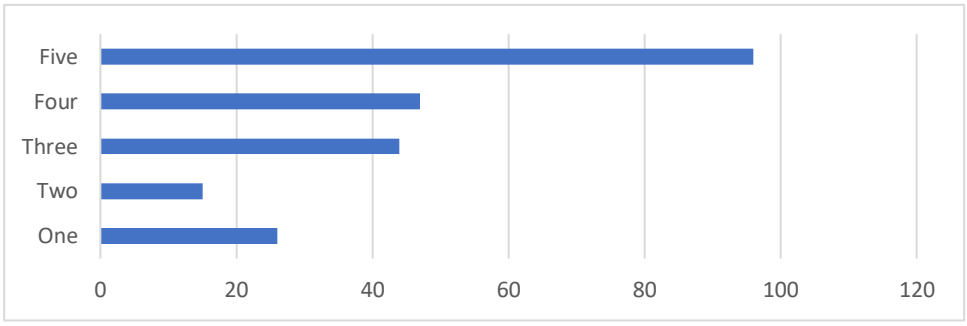
2c. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being least important and 5 being most important, please rate how important it is to you that a new construction conform to the design and scale of adjacent buildings? (n=227)

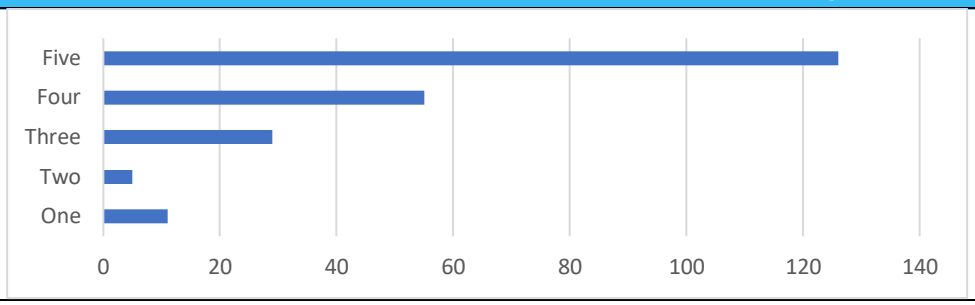


2d. Thinking of any additions or builds you have imagined but did not complete, were municipal regulations or restrictions a significant factor in your decision to not complete that project? (n=196)



2e. Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Statement	Disagree	Agree
I value the architectural heritage of the Village of Chester. (n=230)		
Increased municipal architectural controls create unnecessary barriers and costs for homeowners. (n=227)		
It is important to me that the municipality limit permitted changes to already designated heritage properties. (n=229)		
Districts of the Village of Chester should have their heritage properties protected with district-specific regulations distinct from the rest of the municipality. (n=228)		

Properties should be evaluated for heritage protection on a case-by-case basis. (n=226)	

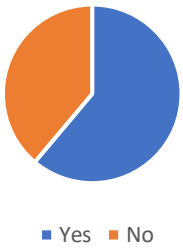
Analysis: The unique "Chester Look" produced a lot of feedback. Interesting feedback included a denial of the uniqueness of a "Chester Look", focussing rather on the similarities with architectural features in Lunenburg or Mahone Bay. Other feedback focussed on cleanliness, typically singling out properties for perceived or real by-law infraction. Parking is considered a significant issue, especially when tourists are visiting, like Race Week. This could indicate that residents are aware of the "ebb and flow" nature of many of the problems faced by a tourist community, instead of a consistent problem unaddressed by the municipality. When targeting major parking issues, planners should focus their language on alleviating problems during peak tourist times.

A striking result is the second prompt in the above table. Respondents did not provide a clear positive or negative response but rather gave a (roughly) even distribution of responses. This hints again at the tension between heritage protection and owner choice. This points to the careful balance planners will need to use when dealing with heritage issues. With no "consensus" response, it could indicate that the wrong kind of architectural control could garner greater public pushback (or support) from those less sure.

3. Heritage Protection

The municipality and province have the authority and tools to designate individual buildings or properties for heritage protection. Alterations or expansions to a registered heritage property must be approved by a municipal Heritage Advisory Committee. Heritage properties are listed in a municipal registry.

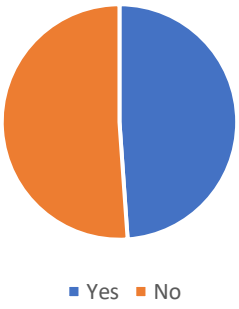
3a. Were you aware that heritage protection exists in the municipality for buildings that have been identified as having significant heritage value? (n=229)



3b. Thinking of the architecture that makes the Village of Chester unique, would you favour increased protection of that architecture if it slightly decreased owner choice of future builds? (n=222)



3c. Are you aware that if you would like to request heritage protection for your property, there is a process in place for you to do that? (n=225)



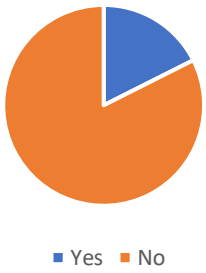
Analysis: These questions were added to confirm an intuition by planning staff that there was a lack of knowledge in the community about heritage designation processes. The results confirm the ambiguous relationship residents have with heritage protection. While residents are generally aware that places or buildings can be designated, the local process is confused and unknown. Some respondents confused provincial heritage with municipal heritage.

The results display residents' tension between protecting heritage and protecting owner freedom to alter their property. Though these are not mutually exclusive, they have some overlapping exclusivities; such as the current heritage property replacement restrictions being limited to modern equivalents only. Many additional comments indicated that their agreement to 3b was contingent on any restrictions being truly slight.

4. Animals

According to current by-laws in the Village of Chester, any lot could keep up to 19 chickens, fowl or rabbits. Larger lots or those exclusively in the rural zone may keep more or even larger animals.

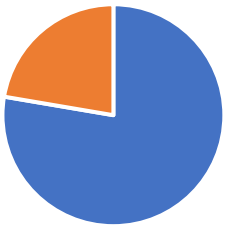
4a. Were you aware of the above numbers of permitted farm animals per lot in the Village of Chester? (n=239)



4b. Should noisier small animals like roosters be excluded from the number of animals permitted on a property in the Village of Chester? (n=222)



4c. Should large animals (horses, cows, sheep etc.) continue to be prohibited in the Village of Chester? (n=224)



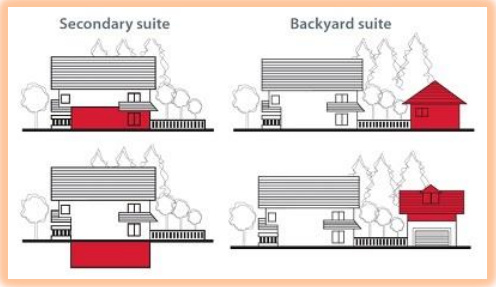
Analysis:
Farm animals in the village was identified as something that creates a lot of public engagement. This survey was no different, with this section garnering many unprompted comments. Many of these comments were questioning the claim that animals were prohibited in the Village. Their confusion could've been avoided by including a note about the residential rural zone distinction for keeping animals.

These results point to the necessity for education on existing municipal regulations in the Village.

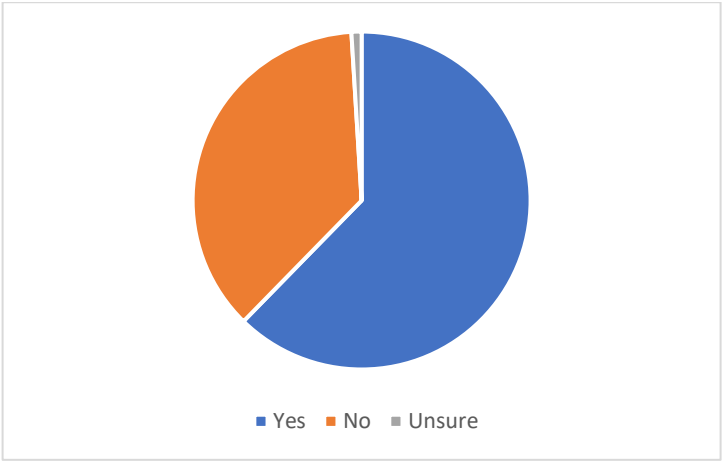
Comments indicated that barking dogs could be a worse nuisance than crowing roosters.

5. Secondary and Backyard Suites

A secondary suite is a separate dwelling unit completely contained within the primary dwelling on a property. A basement apartment is an example of a secondary suite. A backyard suite is a detached dwelling unit completely separate from the primary dwelling unit but on the same property.



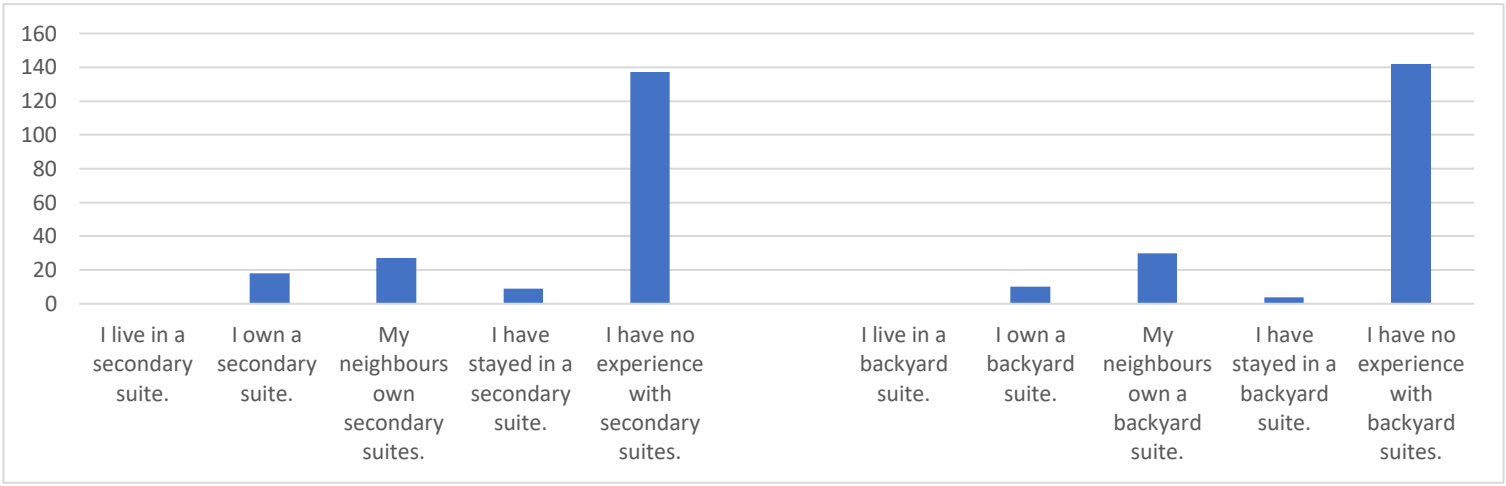
5a. Given the above definitions, do you think secondary suites and backyard suites should be regulated differently in the Village of Chester? (Circle one) (n=207)



Analysis: This question generated confusion. The question contained an ambiguity that should have been clarified. The confusion was: "regulated differently" from the current way, or from each other? The intention was to ask the latter, but respondent confusion has added an unexpected layer of complexity to the results.

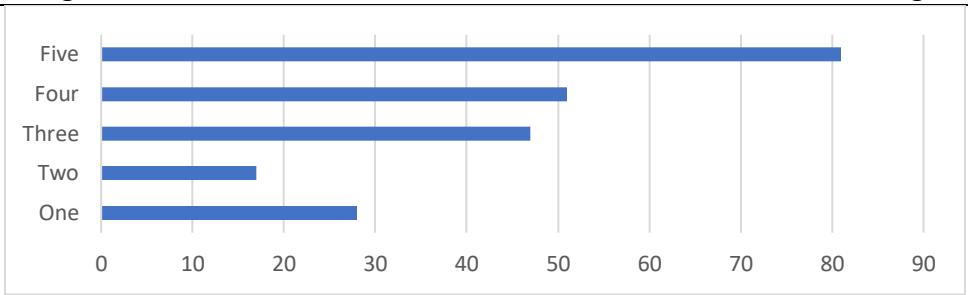
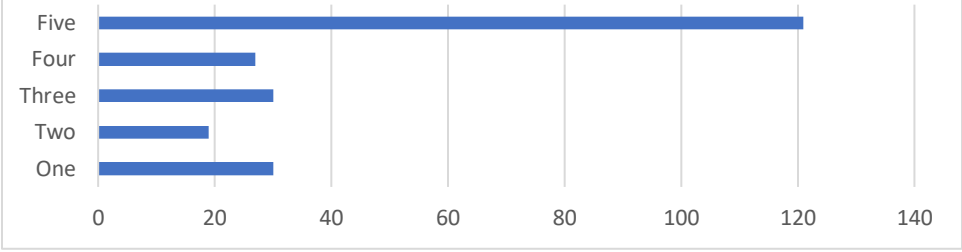
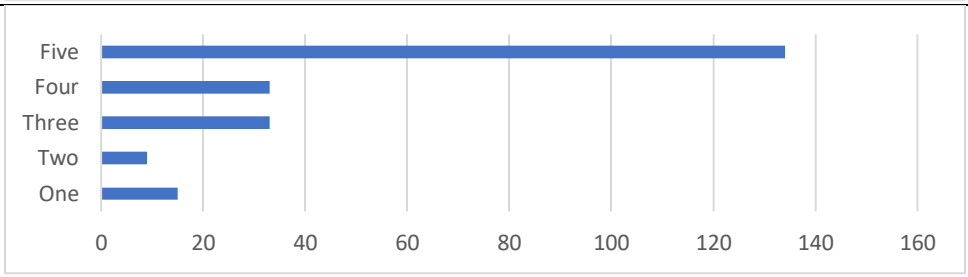
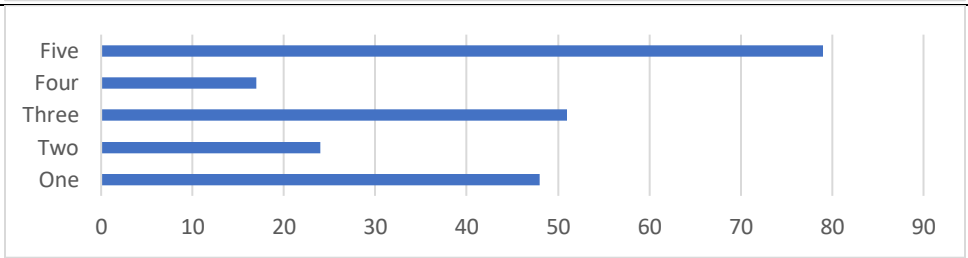
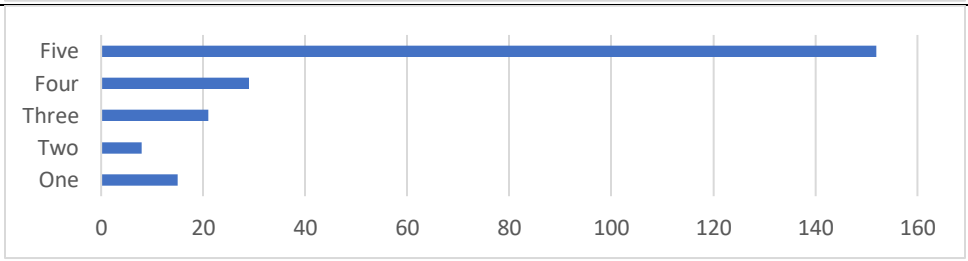
This result and many comments indicate that secondary/backyard suites (and short term rentals) are all front of mind for residents. Planners should take care to balance residents' strong feelings and low familiarity with secondary/backyard suites (and short term rentals).

5b. Which of the following best describes your current experience with secondary suites (Circle any that apply) (n=377):



Analysis: "Airbnb" came up in many informal comments, typically with a negative perspective. Disturbing noise, neglect of property tidiness and lack of parking were commonly connected with increased numbers of Airbnb properties/visitors. A connection was clear in respondent's minds that these problems are linked to increased tourism, creating a tension between an essential economic driver and resident comfort.

5c. Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree:

Statement	Disagree — Agree
Secondary and backyard suites provide an affordable option for housing in the Village of Chester. (n=224)	
It is important to me that the secondary or backyard suite owner live on the property. (n=227)	
Secondary and backyard suites should only be permitted one per lot. (n=224)	
Secondary suites should never add to the building footprint of existing construction. (n=219)	
Backyard suites should be regulated so that their size is smaller than the primary dwelling. (n=225)	

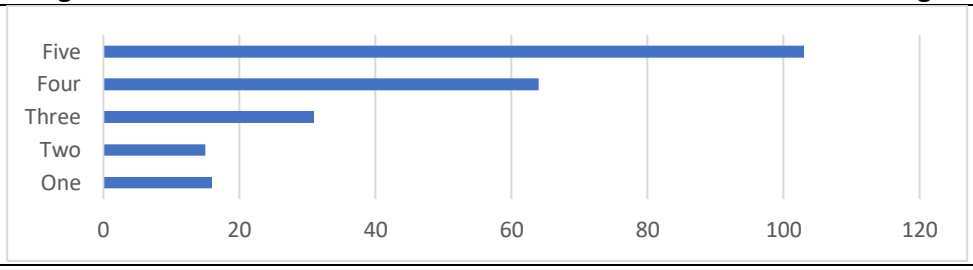
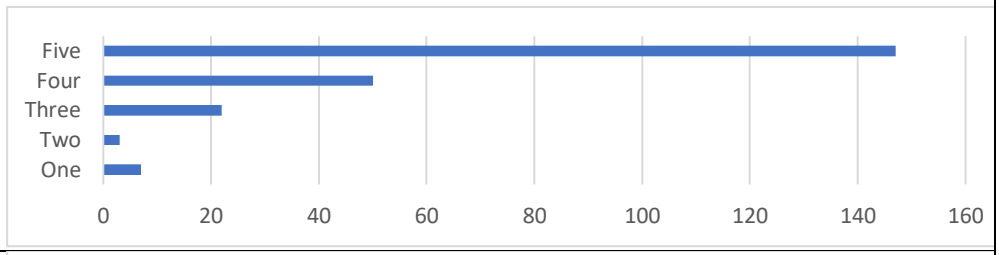
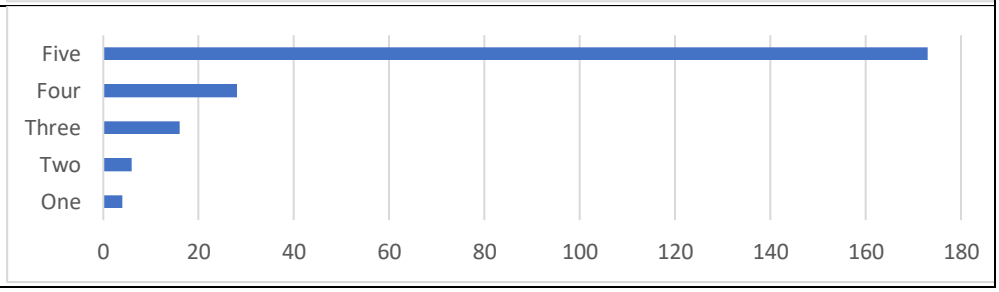
Analysis:
Residents revealed a tension between housing stock and resident comfort. Another tension was between increased rental stock and "short term rental"/Airbnb. Residents are sensitive to the problem with housing, but do not want to have any advance made on housing to simultaneously (or disproportionately) benefit Airbnb.

These questions should have been more explicit about the distinction between secondary and backyard suites. These results do reveal a general "common sense" around secondary/backyard suites, similar to planners' intuitions. The "soft density" of this housing form is respected by residents but complicated by their personal experiences with short term rentals. These negative experiences caused many residents to warn against short term rentals and to distrust any "soft density" as merely an avenue for increased short term rental use.

6. Signage

Signage is essential for advertisement of community amenities and visitor navigation. Signage also significantly influences a unique "Chester look" and should be regulated appropriately. New signage technology like digital or backlit signs are currently not permitted in the Village of Chester planning area.

6a. Please rate your agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree (Circle one):

Statement	Disagree — Agree
There is sufficient signage in the Village for tourists to locate amenities, shops or other destinations. (n=229)	
Hanging signs (pictured) above entrances contribute to the uniqueness of the Village of Chester. (n=229)	
The current restriction on digital signs in the Village of Chester maintains the unique Chester look. (n=227)	

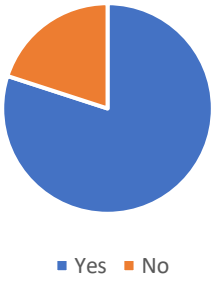
Analysis:
These results show a strong community aversion to digital signs in the village. The results also confirm an intuition noticed by the Summer Student Planner that the frequency of hanging signs (like the one pictured in the original survey) are an important fixture of the built form in the community.

Signage occupies a lot of the planners time in MOC. Comments from the survey indicate that this is an aspect of the village that residents are also frequently occupied with. In particular, residents are concerned about signage being adequately visible for drivers around corners.

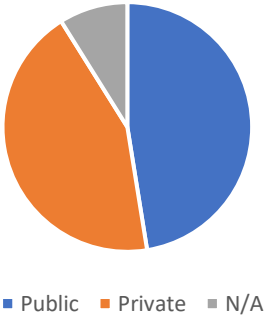
7. Waterfront

The Village of Chester has abundant waterfront access, but not all of it is public. The waterfront is also a major tourist attraction and contributor to the unique "Chester look".

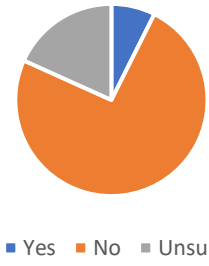
7a. Do you access the ocean from the Village of Chester for boating, beaches, fishing, or for any other reason? (n=230)



7b. Thinking about your usual habit for accessing the ocean, would you estimate most of your access is by public or private access (wharf, ramp, beach etc)? (n=236)



7c. Thinking back over the last 5 years, have you used a public ocean access point that later became inaccessible? (n=230)



7d. Would an increase in the number of public wharves increase the likelihood that you would use these amenities in the Village of Chester? (n=226)

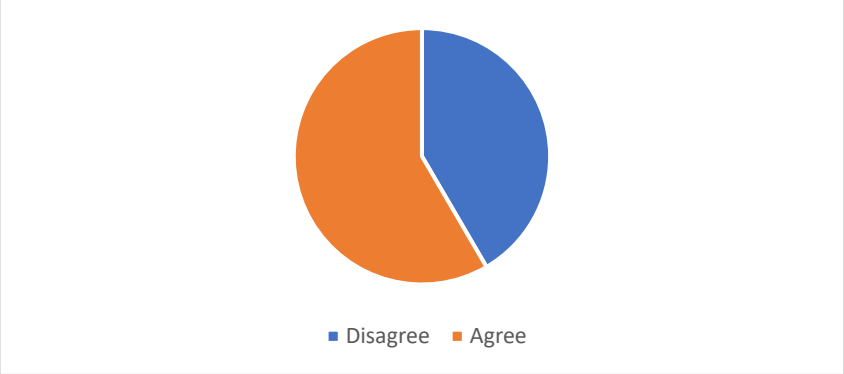


Analysis:
The ocean was identified several times as a key Chester feature. When the Tancook Ferry is moved, the waterfront will be under much careful planning consideration. From residents' comments, the waterfront is clearly cherished and there is a clear desire to maintain as much public access to this amenity as possible.

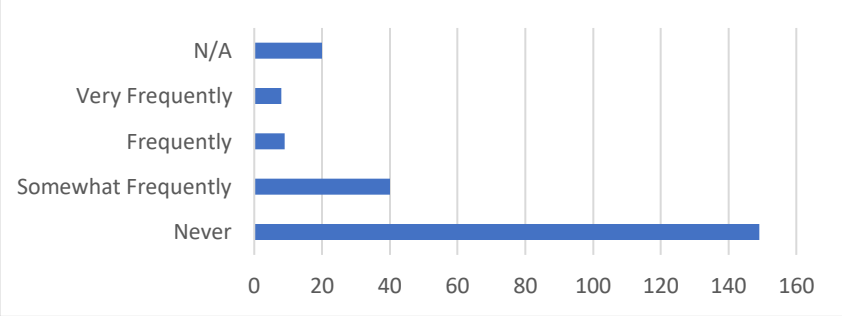
8. Transportation and Parking

The Village of Chester is located on a small peninsula and parking will always be limited. Municipal regulations can promote parking availability by leveraging available assets like unused space. Parking availability impacts resident, tourist comfort and accessibility and contributes to the unique "Chester look".

8a. Do you agree or disagree that increased enforcement of existing parking rules would benefit the availability of parking in the Village of Chester (n=214)? (Circle one)

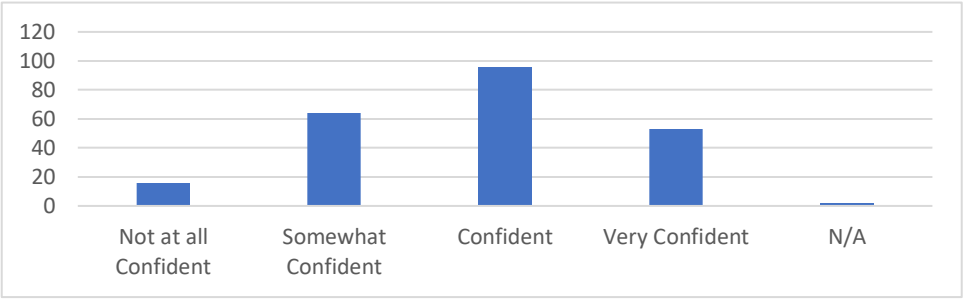


8b. When walking in the Village of Chester, how frequently do you feel you are trespassing or walking on an informal path (n=226)? (Circle one)

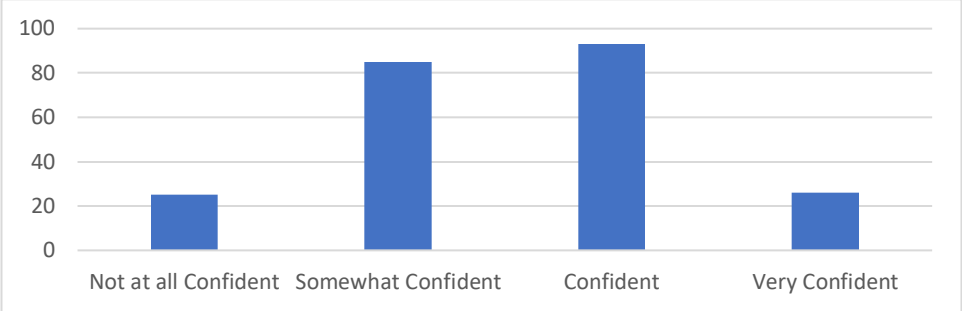


Analysis: This question was based on an observation by the Summer Student Planner. However, the results do not show that unmarked "goat paths" of municipal or public property cause much disturbance to residents moving thorough the village.

8c. How confident do you feel that someone unfamiliar with the Village of Chester could easily navigate in the village on **foot** (n=231)? (Circle one)



8d. How confident do you feel that someone unfamiliar with the Village of Chester could easily navigate in the village by **car** (n=231)? (Circle one)



Analysis:
Residents were somewhat less confident about easy navigation by car than by foot. This could be due to a perception that a. the village is small enough to be navigated easily and b. pedestrian traffic is restricted to residents who are familiar with the area.

Many comments identified issues with “uniform signage”, particularly on roads outside the village planning area. Signage in the village was mostly criticized for visibility around corners. Signage theme and design was also identified as an important feature of the villages’ attractiveness.

8e. Street "Right of Ways" (highlighted) can be used as parking, landscaping, sidewalk, road shoulder, etc. Please rank in order of priority, with 1 being highest priority, which of the following uses of street right of ways are most important to you:

Priority	Result Ranking
Sidewalk	First
Road Shoulder	Second
Parking	Third
Landscaping	Fourth



Other comments provided by residents:
Crosswalks
Should not be used for landscaping!
Many open ditches in the core prevent these options
Bike lane
Public Space/Placemaking
Parking only on one side of the street

Analysis:
This question was meant to gauge resident creativity about small but flexible pieces of land in the Village that were identified by planners and VPAC as generating conflict. As identified in VPAC, the right-of-ways are a contentious issue between residents, particularly when used as "landscaping". This reveals to planners that residents are actively considering novel options for flexible space in the Village. This can be used to alleviate some of the "creative" work that planners need to do to solve problems. Engaging community will generate solutions for planners to evaluate and balance.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!



Here are some selected comments from residents. A full listing of comments is available upon request.
Comments are copied as received with minor spelling corrections or additions of "(illegible)" when appropriate

Better signage for streets that lead right to the water for better access.

More one way streets should be made to facilitate better walking and parking issues. Particularly water street to the yacht club

Street parking on the parade should not be eliminated in front of the band stand, just for landscaping especially. That area has the only "unique" look in Chester and should not be changed.

I do not like the word "unique when describing Chester Village.

Sight lines on streets with low trees being trimmed everywhere. Streets and corners have very poor visibility.

The true uniqueness is the beautiful water views from the village. But, I feel that the "private property" signs and "private wharf" signs make it very unfriendly. We must remember the "little people" who have always been the backbone of the community. If we just focus on beautification and not keeping it real, the "little person" could possible be pushed out of their home.

Chester has a "parking problem" and it really effects businesses and residents.
There are solutions (in my opinion) to the parking issues: a. Chester needs some "one way" streets eg. Duke St. Water St. and Queen St. Would be a good place to start. During the summer it is very difficult to even get through the downtown core. This interferes with tourism as people cant park to go to the shops. Also for the "fire" equipment to get through the village, most days would be almost impossible. One way streets wouldnt create more parking just allow for an easier "flow" of traffic. b. The upper parking lot of the Chester Legion could be used as a parking lot. Most businesses allow staff to park in front of or beside the workplace, this takes away parking for locals and tourists. C. Also the rink parking lot could be used for parking in the summer for large events like race week, and a shuttle service could be provided.

The beauty and look of Chester needs to be preserved as much as possible; as it is the reason we like it so much. I also realize we need more housing in the village. We can have both but we need to protect existing regulations to do that! Be all means, allow more development. But maintain most of our controls now in place.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!



Here are some selected comments from residents. A full listing of comments is available upon request.
Comments are copied as received with minor spelling corrections or additions of "(illegible)" when appropriate

I would also like to comment on the sidewalk dining that we now have at a few locations in the downtown core. It seems that the ones (illegible) on Duke street seem to be causing very little congestion and appear to fit in an add a certain new feel to the village. However I must say the addiiton of sidewalk dining in from of the Focsle Tavern has issues for traffic. The tables up closer to the tavern, on the sidewalk are OK but the passage/walkway created by the ropes and blocks extend inyo Pleasant street and create traffic flow issues and issues for our walking public! This is an accident waiting to happen, it creates congestion and confusion.

Signage should be uniform (ie not to exceed a certain size)
Install better signage; directional (so tourists can find their way) and for streets
Increase street cleaning, including better maintenance of storm troughs.

There are a few things I think special "comfortable" looking buildings. Foot traffic is still very important in Chester. Please encourage some in any compatible manner and areas. Several parking areas planned that would encourage walking of visitors and residents alike. Comfortable sitting areas along the water front. (illegible) policing/encouragement of "quiet" traffic and speed limits. Continue to encourage proper garbage disposal local signage. eg Where's the rink? the beach, the Lido, that town wharf, Lordly Park and playground, Historical sites etc.

Perhaps some thoughtful one way traffic would be a help - especially along the "public" waterfront area. Parking is a problem.

I would love for Chester to improve it's walkability score and create safer options for active transportation. Ie Market at the trainstation is dangerous to walk for bike to due to lack of crosswalks and cars speeding along #3. Affordable housing in the village should be a priority so the village continues to grow as a year-round community instead of a summer town.

I don't like the idea of more public wharf's as this could result in more people not owning in Chester using them. Ie people from outside just keeping their boats in Chester. That is what a marina is for.

We obviously have a shortage of parking space. I feel it would be a serious mistake to block off the road triangle at parade square. Not only because of parking, but traffic flow as well. Having little space to turn, and increasing parking near the entrance to the Government wharf sharp blind turn, would be a nightmare. I have been keeping an eye on this all summer and feel very strongly about this due to the high use density. We have narrow roads, so adding an abundance of sidewalks is not the answer to pedestrian walking or parking. However, if we were to increase the use of drainage culverts on a lot of side roads that now have ditches (many of which were increased in (illegible) recent paving improvements, much to our disarray) we could provide unfilled space that would increase both the walking and parking safety and not further narrow our vehicle traffic spaces. It would also add to the Chester charm as sidewalks tend to take away that charm. Maintenance of these area should be a priority as should be the clearing of knottweed and alders etc. Lighting in the village is an issue. WHile I'm all for safety, the amount and brightness of lighting in a lot of areas is highly overkill. The wattage of street lamps in particular on side roads in residential areas is also blinding when sitting on your veranda. I suggest a lower wattage bulb or some sort of reflector or shading to soften the viewing experience. The parade square bandstand is so light up at night that it is uncomfortable to sit there, as the brightness takes away from its charm and hingers the view of the harbour and really detracts from any stay and star gazing experience

Parking I feel will always be a challenge. Perhaps in the high tourist season you could have a trolley to pick up tourists from a general parking area to go through the village as a hop on hop off option.

Not in Favour of more public wharves. The current wharf by Lido Pool has the same boats tied to it most of the summer. That is not public access.

With the wider sidewalks in the Village core, driving is tricky with parking on both sides of the road. Navigating the downtown "T" corner is particularly bad. Also, local restaurants moving onto the sidewalk and street area is making downtown driving worse. As a "COVID" measure, it was understandable (hopefully the establishment was paying for the use of public property). What if all the businesses want to move onto the sidewalk street?

Waterfront in the front harbour is a great aasset that needs attention.

The Village of Chester could be greatly benefted from a well thought out plan for the Tancook Ferry Wharf.

I think the village/municipality needs to get very serious about protecting the waterfront around the front harbour. It is degrading visibly and should be a great public asset, the whole strategy development around waterfront and the plans for the Tancook Ferry what must be activated urgently.

Maintain Seawalls - ie Pig Loop Rd, Water Street by Park, Sharp turn Duke St to Water St by Condo.

Pig loop needs total improvement - speed, sidewalks, etc. Increased Traffic and walkers make it very dangerous.

Sidewalk along water side of water street. Again, very unsafe for walkers, residents and tourists want to see the water, not ducking between cars. Walkway could be next to water, then parking and perhaps one way road.

In our opinion secondary suites in our village become primarily another AIRBNB opportunity NOT an affordable housing option. Prices for AIRBNB rentals are so high the temptation for short term rental will be as well. This leads to "bait and switch" with applications presented as long term affordable housing but properties being rented short term. There is currently no control in the form of by laws or regulations that we are aware of for an AIRBNB business. There are rentals in the village proper on quiet residential streets that actually promote accommodation for up to 17 (some times very noisy guests and your pets are welcome). A form of control is essential and the village needs to face this and have a discussion.

We do not agree with decision making based on one PIN/one vote. Why do we have one say but those who own 20 PIN have 20 votes? What happened to one person one vote?

Some of the busier streets such as Victoria as well as others would be well served with a lower speed limit.

The Village of Chester has a very unique look which should be preserved. Very modern - all glass boxes of houses should be discouraged. A house maybe of a more modern design, but it should retain a wood shingle or board and batten cladding.

The character of surrounding structures should always be taken into account when planning permission is for new buildings.

Please regulate signage - there is no need to announce the village of chester on three different signs. Gold course/rink signage should be standardized and limited.

Blind corners due to bushes etc or cars when turning
No exit signs not visible until you enter streeet.
Cars should be ticket when they are on road limiting walking space - not safe.

Secondary and Backyard suites should not be permitted until village as public water supply.

Speed control on Victoria Road (speed limit signs)

Exit 7 - Better signage entering village - Remove old at exit 7

Stop digging large and deep ditches in the village (no shoulder)(See Prince St)

Earlier this year, you showed us a plan to change the Parade Square to a Green Park. Which would eliminate a roadway, and many parking spaces (unreplaceable in that area) The parade is a hub of activity and is well used by citizens and visitors. To change it woul dbe losing valuable parking spaces providing easy access to the band stand, LIdo and yacht club. It seems to be serving us quite well, there doesnt seem to be any problems. Please do not change.

When the Tancook Ferry moves, we will have fantastic waterfront/boardwalk/recreational opportunity, please contact DevelopNS for suggestions/help.

I do not boat but recognize access to waterfront/wharves/launes is a huge plus.

There are 2 sections of streets in chester you could develop as walking routes - they have no houses joining the streets and they are not used in winter. The bottom of union and the back of regent. That would be an enrichment to Chester, not wharves and entitling the few that live here all year.

Speed of Vehicles on Victoria St is way too fast - especially coming in over the bridge. I realize this is a "provincial" road but we need to press for more restricted speeds.
I would also suggest more 4-way stops within the Chester Peninsula. Some stops north/south are open, some are east/west. If there are more 4-way stops it is easier for all to predict a stop and to navigate (seeing as one of my kids was hit by a car in the village a few years ago)

Pig Loop Rd should have a name on both ends. Not just one end

I am constantly asked "which why to the golf club", "downtown" or OHC indication signage is inadequate.

The value of Chester for tourism is its architecture and heritage - without regulation you are going to lose this. However, if the building cant be viewed from ocean or road.

There should be signage at each public access point showing it is a public space to sit and enjoy the water. This is what Chester should be all about.

We should exempt existing parking restrictions for race week. We should make the visitors feel welcome.

Parking should be on one side of the street only ie Pleasant, Duke, Queen, Victoria and Water
Landscaping out to the street in front of houses to keep cars away is unfriendly. We should be more welcoming, When the favour is gone parking will not be the same problem except for "Race Week"

Because each property is unique in Chester it should require a visit to a property before a decision can be made regarding a change.

Hand painted signage not digital or backlit.

Planting more trees, remember trees are tireless workers for clean air and their roots hold water in the ground.

Ideally Chester would have an out of village parking area where visitors could park for a small fee… These areas would be serviced every 5 minutes by mini-bus/golf cart type units driven by either elderly or young people to circle the village helping to point out sites. The golf cart type units could seat 10-12 and be speed controlled. It would lessen congestion, reduce pollution, provide needed jobs and reduce speeding vehicles in the village.

Proper sidewalks along water front with maybe some lights

Larger boat ramp

Chester should consider allowing registered electric golf carts to use the roads within the Village of Chester. Quiet and environmentally responsible.

Charging stations for electric automobiles may be a great idea for tourism.

Use culverts instead of ditches - would widen roads
You should encourage as much central space as possible

I agree, it is extremely important to maintain the existing heritage landscape in the village. However, more needs to be done to allow for the incorporation of modern buildings within the village in areas that allow for new construction. Modern additions can also compliment an existing structure. Highlighting architectural progress, and removing a need to copy-cat the past.

Acessibility: Chester's public spaces are extremely inaccessible for disabled persons. I would like to see more focus on inclusive policy for disability rather than gatekeeping policies for building facades.

Parking in the downtown core; waterfront wouldn't be an issue. If the (when?) the Tancook Ferry moves to Blandford.

If you increase the parking on Pleasant Street you will decrease access to local businesses.
Visitors and residents (old and young) are always frustrated by the lack of parking downtown and by the excellent waterfront amenities (Lido, Freda's beach, cenotaph, yacht club)
Do not reduce parking in that area - more is required. Hopefully the new Ferry Terminal will assist in parking for Rope Loft