

# TOWN OF WELLS

## 2020 Sustainability and Coastal Resilience Assessment

As the “friendliest town in Maine”, Wells is committed to creating a thriving and healthy community for its residents, visitors, and ecosystems. As part of this commitment, in 2019 Wells joined a coalition of six towns in coastal York County to create the Regional Sustainability and Resilience Program. The program aims to foster more sustainable and resilient communities in coastal York County by leveraging regional collaboration to enhance the effectiveness of local government action. To identify and direct sustainability and resilience efforts, the program is establishing a baseline of sustainability and resilience efforts and needs in individual communities and the Coastal York Country region. Wells is working diligently to assess and adapt to coastal hazards and coastal climate change impacts. Through the work of the Wells Energy Advisory Committee, Wells has made substantial progress implementing municipal solar and promoting renewable energy development.

Using the SMPDC Sustainability Progress Framework (SPF), Wells was evaluated on many strategies within twelve sustainability and resilience categories. Strategies were grouped into 22 indicators, shown below. Wells’s status on each progress indicator ranges from “Not Yet Considered” to “Excelling”. Explanations for each indicator and suggested next steps are detailed on the following pages.

CATEGORY	INDICATOR	STATUS
Climate	Establish a GHG emissions inventory, target, and plan	Interested
	Climate change vulnerability assessment	Making Progress
Coastal Hazards	Integrate coastal risk reduction measures in zoning and regulations	Making Progress
	Incorporate future climatic conditions into land use requirements and municipal policies	Interested
Economic Development	Promote and support sustainability and resiliency actions for local businesses	Interested
Energy	Reduce municipal fossil fuel consumption and implement municipal energy efficiency measures	Getting Started
	Promote energy efficiency for residents and businesses	Interested
	Support development of and access to renewable energy	Making Progress
Land Ecosystems	Promote and practice environmentally-friendly and sustainable landscape approaches	Making Progress
Leadership	Participate as an active member of a national/regional sustainability and resilience network	Getting Started
Mobility	Promote and facilitate transit systems as well as bicycle and pedestrian networks	Making Progress
	Adopt a complete streets policy	Interested
	Support the electrification of the transportation system, leading by example with the municipal fleet	Getting started
Municipal Operations	Formally adopt sustainability and resilience goals, policies, and strategies	Interested
	Establish local financing strategies for sustainability and resilience activities	Getting started
	Incorporate sustainability and resilience criteria in municipal expenditure policies	Not yet considered
Sustainable Communities	Connect residents to resources and services that support well being and enhance community resilience	Almost There
	Actively engage community members in local climate, sustainability, and resilience issues	Interested
Sustainable Development	Facilitate compact, mixed-use development that reduces environmental impacts and increases housing affordability	Getting started
Waste & Recycling	Deliver sustainable and affordable waste management services	Getting Started
Water	Include Low Impact Development in performance and design standards	Interested
	Establish and enforce progressive watershed protection measures	Getting Started

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**Climate:** Wells has not yet begun measuring greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions for municipal or community-wide inventories. Wells is participating in a Maine Coastal Communities Grant-funded project assessing the economic and social vulnerabilities associated with sea level rise and coastal flood events. In 2014 a New England Climate Adaptation project lead by Wells Reserve conducted a risk assessment evaluating Wells' vulnerability to climate change.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Complete municipal and community-wide GHG inventories.
- Work with the Wells Energy Advisory Committee (WEAC) to establish a GHG emissions reduction target for municipal and/or community-wide emissions.
- Create a climate adaptation or resilience plan and begin implementing climate adaptation strategies.

**Coastal Hazards:** Known for its expansive barrier beach and coastal wetlands, Wells has sustained significant flood-related damage in the past and has been working to address its flood risk through a series of studies, including updated flood modeling. Wells has completed several initiatives to evaluate and plan for coastal hazards, including completing the Flood Resilience Checklist and participating in grant-funded projects examining the feasibility of a regional dredge to address shoaling in Wells Harbor, assessing the economic and social vulnerabilities associated with sea level rise and coastal flood events, and developing a model coastal resilience ordinance. The Town has already incorporated some flood risk reduction measures in its floodplain management ordinance. Wells has partnered with the Conservation Commission to use proceeds from sales of tax-foreclosed properties to purchase flood-prone land in town.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Establish a coastal hazard overlay zoning district and accompanying development standards to ensure new and redevelopment in areas vulnerable to storm surge and future sea level rise are resilient.
- Resume participation in the Community Rating System to reduce flood risk and flood insurance costs.
- Incorporate future precipitation projections in land use regulations and amend ordinances to require the use of more robust storm frequencies (e.g., 24-hour rainfall of a 30-year storm event) for stormwater management and design standards.
- Adopt a policy that limits municipal funds being used for development in flood hazard areas, unless expressly for adaptation, mitigation, or resilience measures.

**Economic Development:** Wells has not yet taken specific actions to promote and support sustainability and resiliency actions for local businesses.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Engage the business community on climate change and resiliency issues, potentially as part of SMPDC's EDA grant-funded project on coastal economic resilience.
- Support the establishment of a regional business sustainability award or recognition program.

**Energy:** Reducing municipal fossil fuel consumption has been a priority for Wells and the WEAC. The Town has conducted a pilot project to replace current streetlight bulbs with more efficient LED bulbs. Wells installed solar panels at the Town Garage and at the Wells Sanitary District. The Town is currently developing a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a power purchase agreement to procure solar electricity for municipal operations. Wells has not yet undertaken efforts to promote energy efficiency for residents and businesses. The Town has worked to support the development of renewable energy, passing a Property Assessed Clean Energy ordinance and facilitating the development of solar farms on underutilized town-owned properties.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Finalize and release the Request for Proposals for the municipal solar project and work with SMPDC to evaluate bids.
- Work through the WEAC to connect residents and businesses to energy efficiency resources and educate the community about renewable energy options.
- Adopt a renewable energy ordinance prescribing the permitting, standards, and allowable use of renewable energy systems.

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**Land Ecosystems:** Wells strives to practice sustainable landscaping by replacing turf with sustainable landscaping alternatives and use integrated pest management strategies for municipal landscapes to reduce impacts from fertilizers and pesticides. Wells also restricts residential/commercial pesticide application in the Aquifer Protection District. Since 1981, the Wells Conservation Commission has served to protect the town's natural assets, establishing a land bank for residents to invest in the purchase of ecologically significant lands.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Work through the Conservation Commission and partnerships with local non-profit organizations to educate the community about the value of trees, native plants, and sustainable landscaping.
- Consider adapting the subdivision and development codes to encourage sustainable landscaping in the community.
- Encourage community-wide use of integrated pest management strategies through a pesticide policy and/or community education programs to reduce fertilizer and pesticide use.

**Leadership:** Wells has not yet participated as an active member of national and/or regional sustainability and resilience networks. The Town frequently partners with Wells Reserve and local schools to research sustainability and resilience issues in the community.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Participate in regional state, and/or national networks to plan for and achieve sustainability and resilience, such as ICLEI: Local Governments for Sustainability or the New England Municipal Sustainability Network.
- Share information about municipal leadership in sustainability broadly in the community and externally.

**Mobility:** While Wells has no formal Bike and Pedestrian committee, the Public Works Department works to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety and infrastructure. The Wells Transportation Center is a hub for transit in coastal York County, and Wells coordinates with transportation partners to expand transit opportunities. The town does not have a Complete Streets Policy but has begun supporting the electrification of the transportation system by installing EV charging stations at public sites and leasing an Electric Vehicle as part of the municipal fleet.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Consider establishing a Bike and Pedestrian Committee to advise on strategies for improving connectivity and safety.
- Consider establishing a Complete Streets Policy to ensure safe access for all users.
- Continue to pursue public EV charging station installation and collaborate with businesses to develop EV infrastructure.
- Establish a fleet purchasing policy to prioritize electric vehicles and continue exploring EV fleet opportunities.

**Municipal Operations:** Wells has not yet formalized any sustainability and resilience goals, policies, or priorities. While the WEAC does work on some topics regarding sustainability and resiliency, these are not officially part of the Committee's charge. Wells has taken advantage of different financing strategies for renewable energy projects, but the Town does not have regular financing strategies in place for sustainability and resilience activities outside of committee budgets. Sustainability and resilience criteria are not incorporated into the Town's municipal expenditure policies.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Ensure that sustainability and resilience are incorporated into the next Comprehensive Plan update.
- Budget and plan for long-term energy efficiency equipment upgrades.
- Integrate sustainability and resiliency into capital planning criteria.

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**Sustainable Communities:** Many municipal departments link town residents with resources and services that support well being and enhance community resilience, including Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, Parks and Recreation, and Wells Volunteers. Wells supports local food access at the Wells Farmers Market. The Town has not yet actively engaged community members in local climate, sustainability, and resilience issues.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Take emergency management lessons from the Covid-19 pandemic to increase community preparedness and resilience.
- Work through the WEAC to host events educating the public about climate change, renewable energy, and energy efficiency.
- Support and promote the development of a community garden and increased access to local foods.

**Sustainable Development:** Wells land use zoning allows for a diverse variety of housing types and emphasizes open space conservation. The Town is prioritizing commercial development in the new Transportation Center District to support the Wells Transportation Center and is supporting the redevelopment of an underutilized and contaminated landfill site and gravel pit for solar farms. There is currently no mixed-use specific zoning to promote walkability and neighborhood development.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Modify zoning and building regulations to facilitated mixed-use and infill development.
- Explore incentives for green building in new construction and re-construction.

**Waste & Recycling:** Wells has a Pay as You Throw program for trash to encourage recycling. The transfer station allows residents and businesses to dispose of hard to recycle items including electronics, construction debris, and bulky items. The Town does not currently have a recycling or solid waste committee. Residential composting services are not currently available in Wells.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Consider creating a Solid Waste Committee to advise the Select Board on ways to provide sustainable and affordable waste management services and educate the community about waste reduction, recycling, and composting.
- Provide recycling and composting infrastructure at public places.
- Develop a mandatory recycling ordinance that applies to single and multifamily residences and businesses.
- Work to gain access to curbside composting services for residents and businesses.

**Water:** Wells is served by the regional Water District KKW. Undeveloped parcels around the headwaters of the Webhannet River Watershed and conserved lands managed by the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge near the mouth of the River offer some protection of water quality within Wells. The Town's land use regulations include groundwater protection districts and stormwater management measures for aquifer recharge areas.

**NEXT STEPS:**

- Enhance the Town's existing land use regulations and policies by encouraging and/or requiring the use of low impact development and green infrastructure approaches for stormwater management for all development and redevelopment projects requiring site plan review.
- Incorporate wetland impact assessment requirement in land use requirements and enact and enforce policies that preserve, protect, and restore wetlands, including those smaller than the 10-acre threshold used for shoreland zoning.
- Enact a pesticide and fertilizer ordinance.
- Complete an inventory of septic systems in Town to inform planning and water quality protection efforts.
- Develop a septic inspection and pump out ordinance to ensure septic systems, especially those in areas vulnerable to current and future flooding, function properly and to minimize potential detrimental impacts to water quality and the environment.