

Lyme Community Development Committee (LCDC) and Planning Board (PB)
Summary Report to the Select Board
June 2019

In April 2017, the Lyme Town Select Board asked for town resident volunteers to form an Economic Enterprise Committee (EEC). This group was later renamed the Lyme Community Development Committee (LCDC) and early in 2018, the Planning Board and LCDC started to have joint meetings. Although the charge by the Select Board went through several iterations, the April 23, 2018 direction is below:

Select Board charge to LCDC and PB

Weather events, deteriorating road conditions, and the rising cost of quality education have escalated demands on the town budget. There is little reason to expect these budget pressures to ease under the current fiscal and tax structure in the state of New Hampshire. This committee is charged by the Select Board to begin exploring revenue-side tradeoffs relating to Lyme's budget challenges. Specifically, this Committee is charged to:

1. Evaluate the current real estate tax structure of Lyme.
2. Describe the trajectory of taxes.
3. Describe the types of business or residential development that will positively affect the tax base.
4. Describe the trade-offs of additional development.
5. Assess community opinion regarding possible additional development.

Membership:

The Community Development Committee shall consist of not less than seven or more than nine members appointed by the Select Board. It shall include one Select Board member as an ex officio member.

Duties and Responsibilities:

The Committee shall:

Elect its own chair and establish its own organization per the Town of Lyme Committee handbook.

Follow and abide by the Town of Lyme Committee handbook and NH state statutes.

Meet monthly or as needed

Identify businesses that would fit into the Lyme community with a net positive impact to Lyme's real estate tax structure.

Identify restrictions or impediments to those business relocating to Lyme.

Recommend measures to enable appropriate businesses for Lyme.

Identify residential development opportunities that have a net impact to Lyme's real estate tax structure.

Submit an interim report on how you will get c through f done.

Identify what the engagement plan will be.

Submit a final report with recommendations to the Select Board by January 31, 2019.

LCDC and PB work status

Despite vigorous and wide-ranging debate in 2017 and 2018, (see meeting minutes and the preliminary report on the town website under the LCDC folder) the meeting attendees could not reach consensus as to valid data sets and likely conclusions. The group then decided that an outside consultant might provide an unbiased analysis.

The LCDC privately raised \$15,000 to retain a consultant. The LCDC, along with members of the Planning Board and town departments, worked with Resilience Planning of Plymouth NH. **Their presentation is available for you to read at: <http://bit.ly/LCDC-Presentation>**

Our first public forum was held on Thursday, January 24, 2019 at 7:00pm in the Lyme School gymnasium. Approximately 55 Lyme residents attended, heard the consultant's presentation, and had a lengthy discussion. **(You can watch a video of the presentation at: <http://bit.ly/LCDC-Forum>)**

The consultant's report offered these conclusions:

- Lyme is unusual because it has both expensive homes (on average) and a high tax rate
- Lyme's tax burden per home is high - 2.7 times the county average
- Lyme's tax rate increased 19% over the last decade (after inflation), or almost 2% per year
- Lyme has a higher school enrollment (as a percent of population) than other towns in Grafton County.
- Lyme's geography, topography, and conserved areas limit its developable area
- No large-scale developers would be interested in projects in Lyme because of low traffic volumes, topography, and lack of infrastructure, such as municipal water and sewer, and high-speed internet
- Lyme has an opportunity for small-scale residential and commercial development
- Overall, the development scenarios evaluated would not have a significant tax effect, positive or negative.

The committees also designed a questionnaire to ask questions about the forum and issues of importance in Lyme. Two questionnaires were mailed to each household (approximately 815 households) and an online version was made available at: **<http://bit.ly/LCDC-Feb2019>**. The goal was to have every resident or landowner in town complete a questionnaire by March 2019 to help the LCDC complete its work.

The following summaries are written based upon the 151 responses the group received to the questionnaire. We hope that the data presented by Resilience Consulting and residents' responses will aid the Select Board in setting policy and budget goals.

Questionnaire Summaries

What people feel about taxes and tax rates

There is consensus that taxes in Lyme are too high. Of the 151 respondents, 101 said taxes were too high, 41 said they were about right, one respondent thought taxes were too low. Eight persons did not respond to the question.

The respondents' comments regarding the causes of Lyme's high taxes and proposed solutions are varied.

Number of respondents	Causes of high taxes and proposed solutions
38	School budget too high, educational cost control ineffective
5	Roads and maintenance costs too high
19	General over-spending
8	Conservation easements and current use not being equitably taxed
13	Need for a state income tax or state tax sharing for education
24	Need for increased development / broaden our tax base

What people like best about Lyme

Respondents to the Forum Questionnaire appreciate many of the same qualities that make Lyme the best little town in New Hampshire. The top five qualities are Lyme's residents, its size, its natural surroundings and its school. Most frequently mentioned were the people in Lyme- described as friendly, generous, convivial, caring, agreeable, well-mannered and constructive. They are also characterized as an active community comprised of people who care, dig in, make things happen, volunteer and work together.

The next grouping of frequently mentioned positive qualities of the Town are its rural nature, the relationship between buildings and the landscape, the lovely natural areas and open spaces and that Lyme is not crowded, is a small town or has a small population.

The Lyme School was described as terrific and a quality of Lyme that supports high land value.

Many respondents noted the sense of community and community spirit, the access to the outdoors, preserved open spaces, trails and recreation opportunities, the appropriately sized commercial district with its small, but sufficient local businesses.

Lastly, many thought that Lyme is fine as is and complimented the hardworking municipal employees.

Reading through each and every questionnaire one learns about each and everything that people value, but these important qualities, like dark night sky, lively common and not much traffic were mentioned by fewer than nine people.

Number of respondents	Positive quality of Lyme
27	Friendly, generous, convivial, caring, agreeable, well-mannered
25	Not crowded, small town feel, small population
25	Lovely natural resources, beautiful open spaces, close to nature
24	Terrific school, supports high land values
23	Active community, involved people, volunteers, work together, dig in to make things happen
23	Rural nature, small town, buildings sit well in landscape
17	Access to outdoors, preserved spaces, recreation, trails, conservation ethic
16	Sense of community, community spirit
12	Commercial district, small but sufficient, local business

Development and Growth

Of the 151 survey responses received, about 40% favored some kind of increased development. The breakdown was:

- 15% favored residential growth only
- 10% favored business growth only
- 15% favored both residential and business growth
- 20% expressed a desire for no change from current practices
- 40% of the respondents did not explicitly address growth or development issues

Housing: Of the forty-two (42) respondents supporting some form of increased residential/housing development, 12 added qualifying language such as “small”, “limited”, “slow growth”, “keep it rural”, “carefully planned”, etc. to describe their preferences.

Number of respondents	Comments about Housing/Residential Development
42	Mentioned some form of increased housing options, specifically...
15	Affordable housing
12	Senior housing
9	Cluster housing
4	Higher density housing
4	Multi-family housing
1	Planned development

Business: Of the 37 respondents who supported some form of increased business/commercial development, 23 added qualifying terms such as "small", "limited", "appropriate", "quality", "in certain areas", etc. to describe their preferences.

Number of respondents	Comments about Business/Commercial Development
37	Favor increased Business/Commercial Development
23	Favor "small", "limited", etc. business/commercial development

Note: The totals in the tables above total to more than 100% because many responses addressed/included multiple topics.

Recommendation: The Planning Board should review these results and consider the appropriate response to this input.

What people think about municipal services and other topics

There were a wide variety of responses to this question. In the 151 responses, municipal services were ranked either very satisfied (45), satisfied (45), neutral (38), unsatisfied (13), very unsatisfied (3). Four persons did not respond. The respondents' comments regarding municipal services are grouped below

Some groupings contain similar comments. The need for high speed internet and increased options for public transportation would be two examples.

Municipal services, Waste and Roads all have a plethora of ideas and themes. Each individual response can be viewed in the details of the report.

Category	Like	Dislike or lacking
Municipal services	6	12
Public Safety	0	6
Waste and Recycling	0	7
Roads	4	12
Transportation	0	6
Communication/Internet	0	16
Other	2	12

Note: The totals in the table above sum to more than 100% because many responses addressed/included multiple topics.

What people said about Lyme Schools

Of the 151 responses received from the survey, 95 contained thoughts relevant to the Lyme Schools (56 respondents were silent on schools).

Respondents' comments pertaining to the Lyme School contained 39 stating that school spending is too high, 31 stated that the school system is good-to-great with 14 stating that the School is "too good", and more like a private school. Twenty were in favor of lobbying the state for more school support, voicing support for a broad-based state tax to fund schools. Other comments were suggestions for combining town and school annual meeting, better communications to keep people informed about school activities, and to renegotiate high school tuition.

The challenge, of course, is to maintain an excellent school while reining in spending.

Number of respondents	Comments about Lyme Schools
39	Limit school budget; control costs; too many choices & options
31	Great/Excellent/Good school system
20	Lobby for state support of schools; broad-based tax acceptable
14	School is too good for value; "Cadillac"; like a private school
4	Don't permit high school choice
4	Combine Town and School meetings to get town to talk together
4	People disapprove, but keep voting for the proposed budget
3	School board should communicate better re: meetings, events.
3	Renegotiate high school tuition contracts
56	Response did not contain information about the schools

Note: The totals in the table above sum to more than 100% because many responses addressed/included multiple topics.