

# Seabrook Dune Walkway Survey Summary

October 2024



Prepared by the Rockingham Planning Commission in partnership with the Town of Seabrook, the Seabrook Hamptons Estuary Alliance and University of New Hampshire Sea Grant. This project was funded, in part, by NOAA's Office for Coastal Management Under the Coastal Zone Management Act in Conjunction with the NH Department of Environmental Services Coastal Program



**SEABROOK-HAMPTONS  
ESTUARY ALLIANCE**



# Acknowledgements

The Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC), Seabrook Hamptons Estuary Alliance (SHEA), and UNH Sea Grant (UNHSG) extend their sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of this survey and report. The active participation of Seabrook residents—who attended public meetings, provided valuable input, and completed the survey—was essential to strengthening and localizing the findings. This community engagement has significantly enhanced the relevance and accuracy of the outcomes presented in this summary.

## Executive Summary

### Project Background

The Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC), Seabrook Hamptons Estuary Alliance (SHEA) and UNH Sea Grant, with the help of Seabrook town staff, board and committee members and interested stakeholders, have been working together since early 2023 to assess the condition of Seabrook's municipal dune walkways, which connect Ocean Drive to the town's beaches, crossing over critical dune systems. These walkways, particularly in the northern part of Seabrook Beach, serve as the only public access points from the streets to the beach.

Over time, concerns have been raised by residents and visitors regarding the deteriorating state of some walkways, which may pose safety risks. There has also been increasing awareness about the potential negative effects of walkway design and usage on the health and integrity of the dunes. This assessment aims to address these concerns while preserving the ecological value of Seabrook's dunes and ensuring public safety and accessibility.

### Coastal Resilience Grant

In response to these concerns, the Town of Seabrook, in partnership with RPC, SHEA and UNH Sea Grant, applied for and was awarded a Coastal Resilience Grant from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services' Coastal Program. This grant provides the resources necessary to evaluate Seabrook's existing dune walkways, identifying opportunities to improve public safety and accessibility while ensuring that the ecological integrity of the dunes is maintained. The evaluation process focuses on balancing the need for public access with the protection and preservation of these vital coastal systems.

### Public Survey

From July to October 2024, the RPC, SHEA, NHSG (here forward referred to as the Project Team) conducted a public survey to gather feedback and understand local perspectives regarding Seabrook's dunes and walkways. The survey was designed to assess what residents value about these natural resources, the challenges they face when using the walkways, and their ideas for improving public access and preserving the resilience of the dune systems.

To encourage widespread participation, the survey was distributed through a combination of outreach methods, including postcard distribution, online promotions, and direct emails to residents. In total, 309 individuals responded to the survey, generating nearly 6,000 individual responses to specific questions and 262 additional open-ended comments.

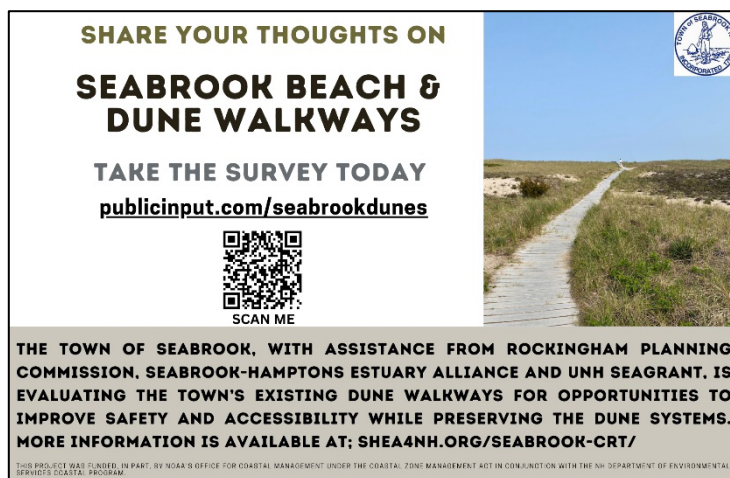
## Survey Purpose

The primary purpose of this survey was to capture public input to inform the ongoing evaluation of the dune walkways. By surveying residents and visitors, the project team was able to identify key themes around what people value most about the dunes, what challenges they face when using the walkways, and what improvements they hope to see. Survey responses also helped highlight broader concerns regarding the preservation of the Seabrook Dune system and its resilience to coastal erosion and storm surges.

Respondents were encouraged to share their concerns and priorities through both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. The responses collected from this survey will help guide recommendations for improving the walkways and ensuring the continued health of the dunes.

## Survey Distribution Process

The survey development process began in early 2024, with collaborative efforts from Seabrook staff, board and committee members and interested residents to ensure clarity and accessibility in the design of the survey. Questions were refined to make sure they were clear and understandable for the target audience. The Rockingham Planning Commission played a key role in testing the survey software to ensure it was user-friendly and accessible to all participants.



The survey was officially launched in early July, and outreach efforts were made to engage as many Seabrook residents as possible. The survey link was distributed through the town's website, the Seabrook Beach Civic Association, Facebook, and email lists. Postcards with the survey link were also distributed at various public locations around town, including town offices, ensuring that the survey reached a wide audience.

Through these combined efforts, the Project Team was able to gather meaningful feedback that will play a crucial role in shaping future recommendations for improving the dune walkways and preserving the ecological integrity of Seabrook's coastal environments.

# Survey Results

A total of 309 individuals participated in the survey, providing 5,990 responses across all questions and contributing 262 written comments. As all survey questions were optional, not every respondent answered every question. Therefore, the percentages presented are based solely on the individuals who responded to each specific question. All survey responses were submitted anonymously. Additionally, 182 respondents voluntarily provided their contact information to receive updates on the survey results and future developments related to the Dune Public Walkways project.



**PARTICIPANTS**  
**309**



**RESPONSES**  
**5,990**



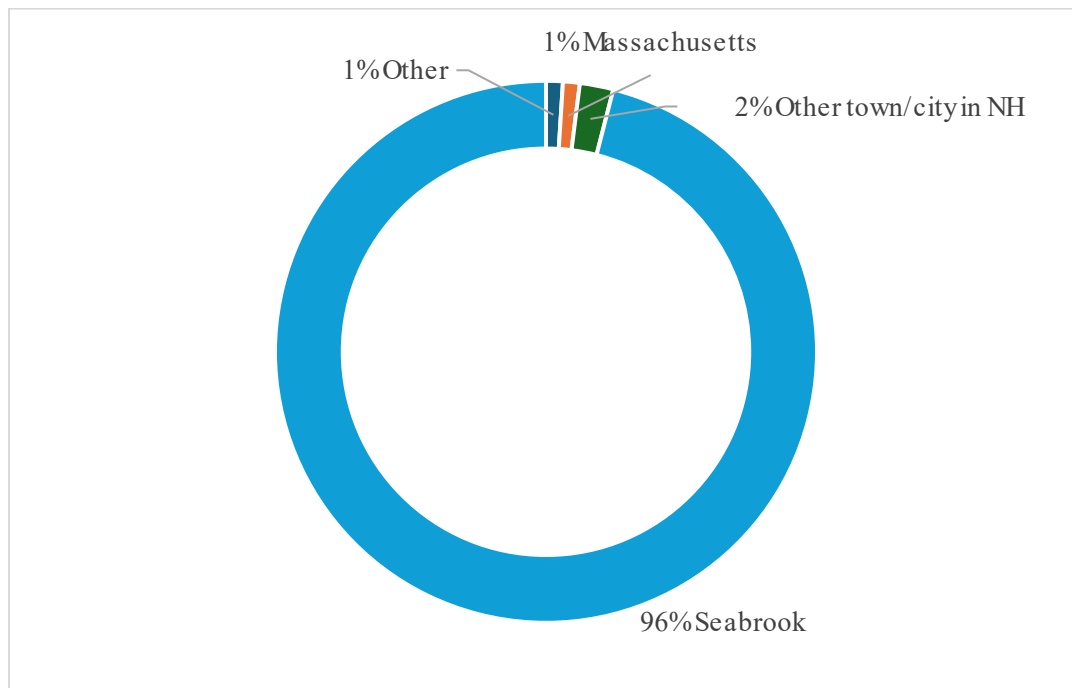
**COMMENTS**  
**262**



**SUBSCRIBERS**  
**182**

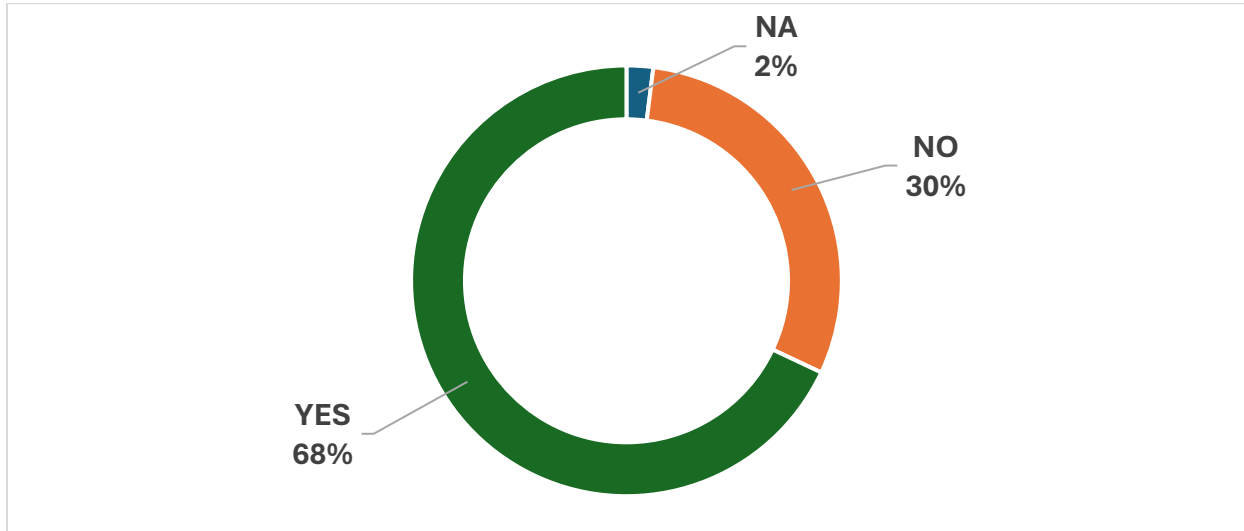
## Question 1: Where do you live? (Total Responses: 305)

Of the 305 respondents who chose to answer this question, 292 respondents (96%) indicated they live in Seabrook.



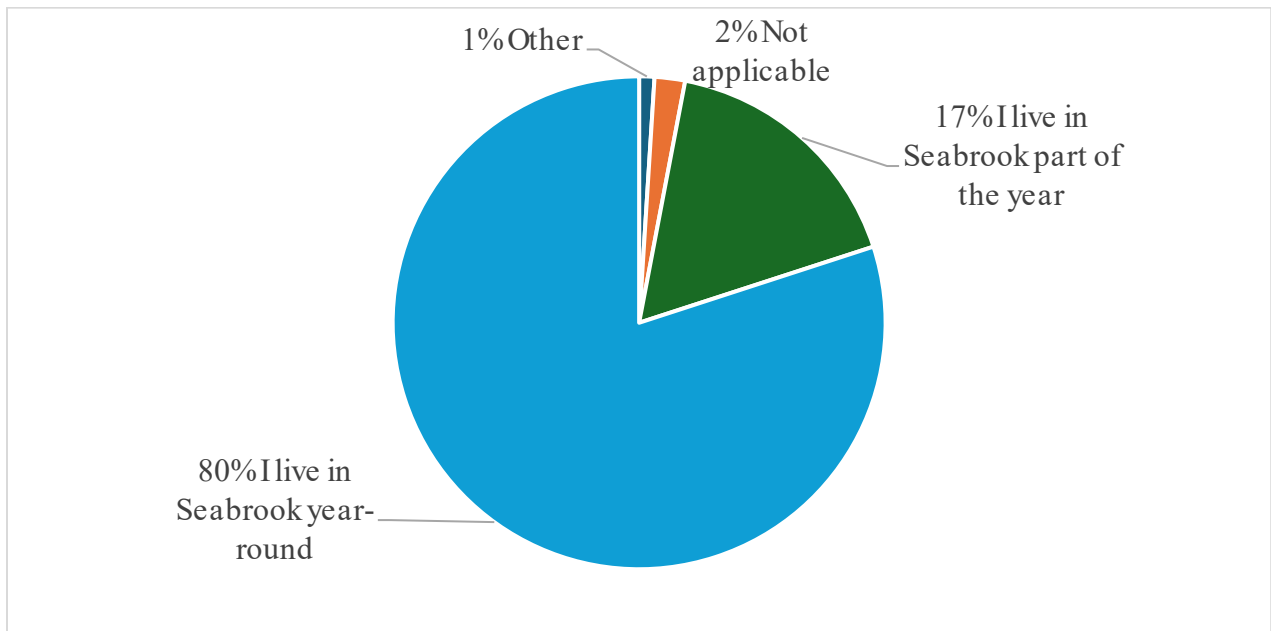
**Question 2. If you live in Seabrook, do you live at Seabrook Beach? (Total responses: 303)**

Of the 303 respondents who answered this question, 205 respondents (63%) indicated that they live at Seabrook Beach. 92 respondents (30%) indicated that they live in Seabrook, but not within the beach district.



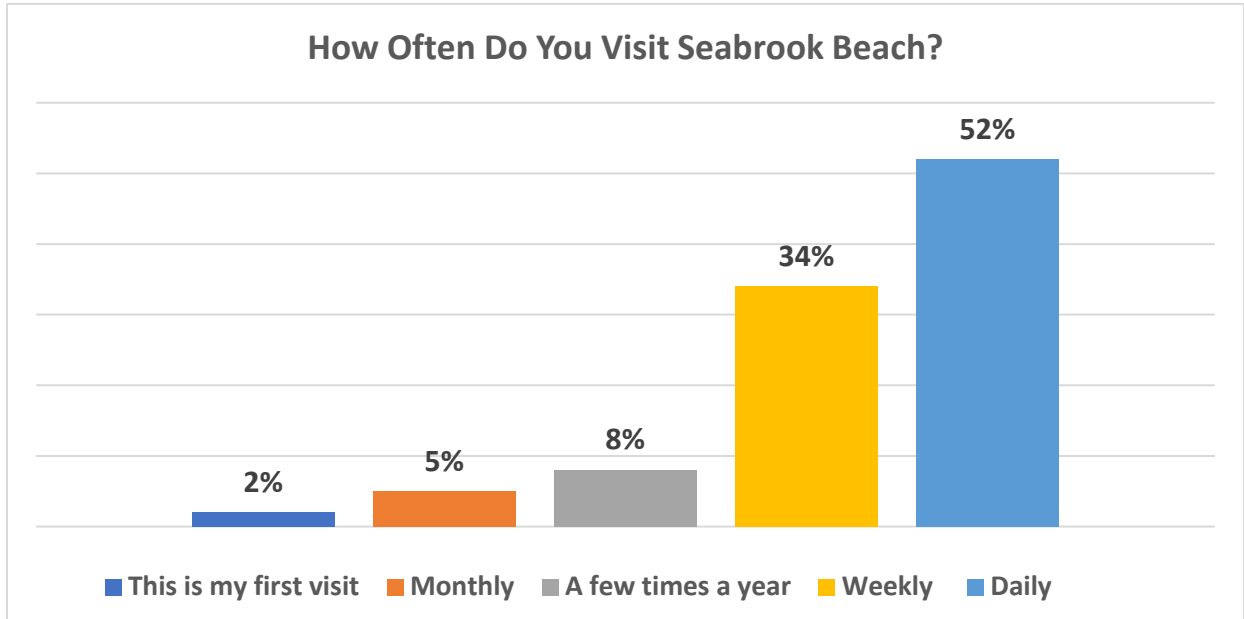
**Question 3. If you are a Seabrook resident, which of the following best describes you? (Total Responses: 277)**

Of the 277 respondents who answered this question, 222 (80%) indicated that they live in Seabrook year-round. 48 respondents (17%) indicated that they live in Seabrook for part of the year.



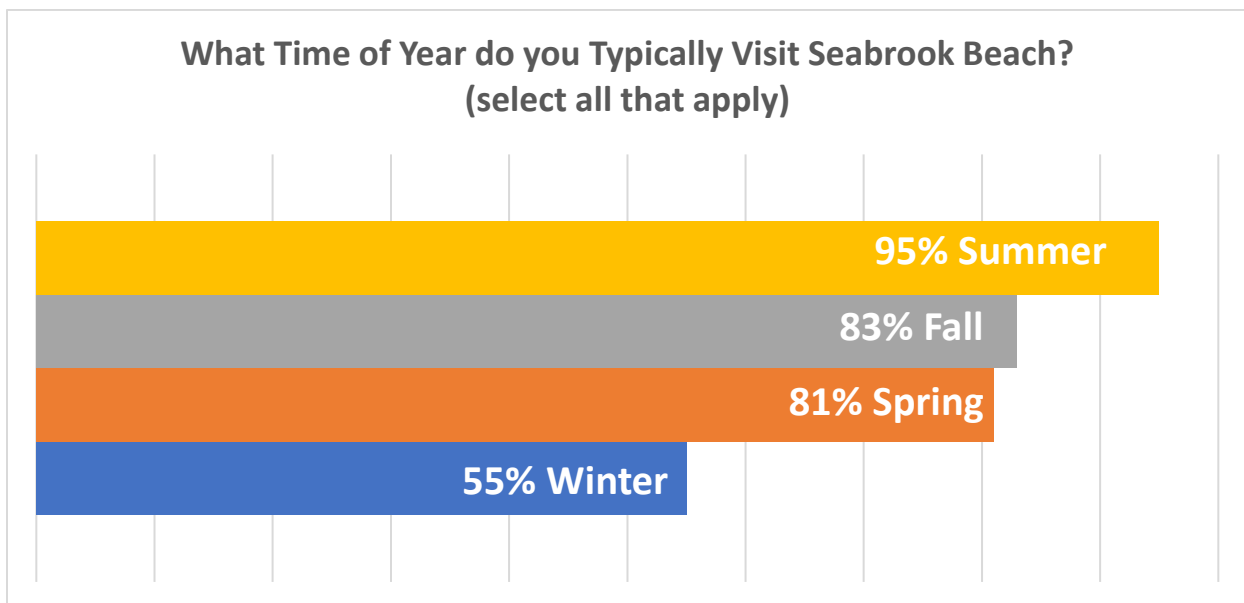
**Question 4: How often do you visit Seabrook Beach? (Total responses: 289)**

Out of the 289 respondents who answered this question, 52% (150 individuals) reported visiting Seabrook Beach daily, while 34% (97 individuals) indicated they visit weekly. Additionally, 8% (23 respondents) visit a few times a year, 5% (14 respondents) visit monthly, and 2% (5 respondents) took the survey after their first visit to Seabrook Beach.



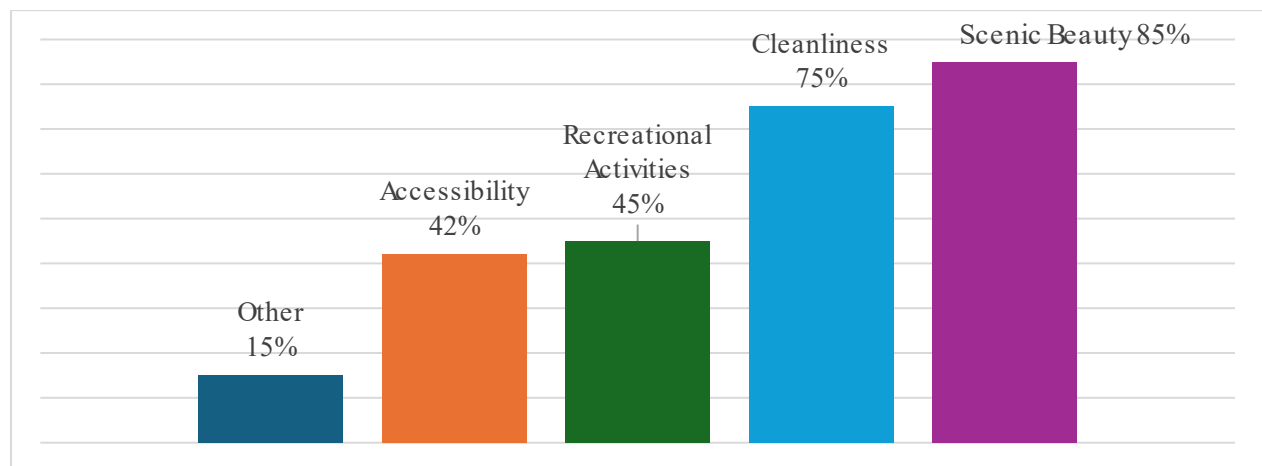
**Question 5: What time of year do you typically visit Seabrook Beach? Select all that apply. (Total responses: 257)**

Of the 271 respondents who answered this question, 257 respondents (95%) chose Summer, 225 respondents (83%) chose Fall, 219 respondents (81%) chose Spring, and 148 respondents (55%) chose Winter.



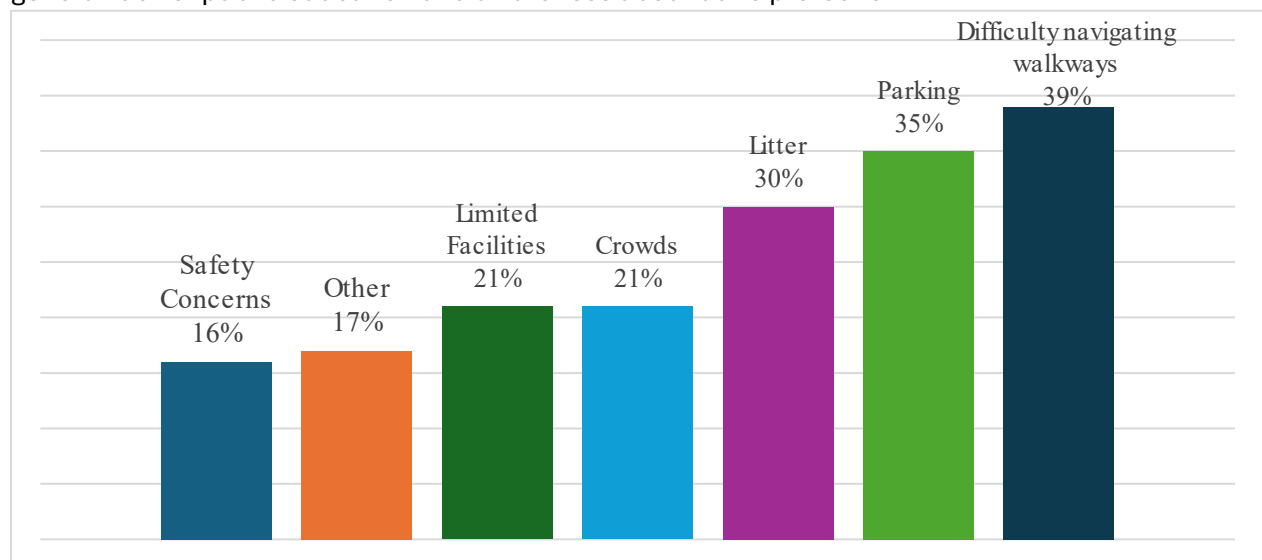
**Question 6: What do you like most about Seabrook Beach? Select all that apply. (Total Responses: 274).**

Most respondents (85%) identified Seabrook Beach's scenic beauty as the aspect they enjoy most, followed by its cleanliness (75%), recreational activities (45%), accessibility (42%), and other factors (40%). Among the 40 respondents (15%) who selected "other," many highlighted the perceived benefits of property ownership, such as private access, as what they value most about the beach.



**Question 7: Have you experienced any of the following issues or challenges at Seabrook Beach? Select all that apply. (Total Responses: 255)**

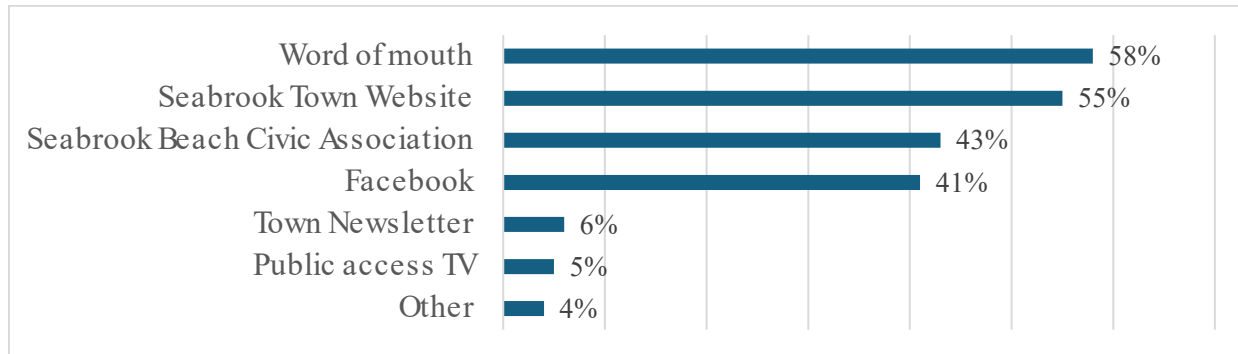
Among the 255 respondents who answered this question, the most commonly reported challenges at Seabrook Beach were difficulty navigating the walkways (39%), parking issues (36%), and litter (31%). Other concerns included crowds (23%), limited facilities such as bathrooms and changing rooms (22%), and safety concerns (15%). Additionally, 18% of respondents identified other issues, including violations of dog leash and waste rules, lack of lifeguards, fireworks disturbances, and a general lack of public education and awareness about dune protection.



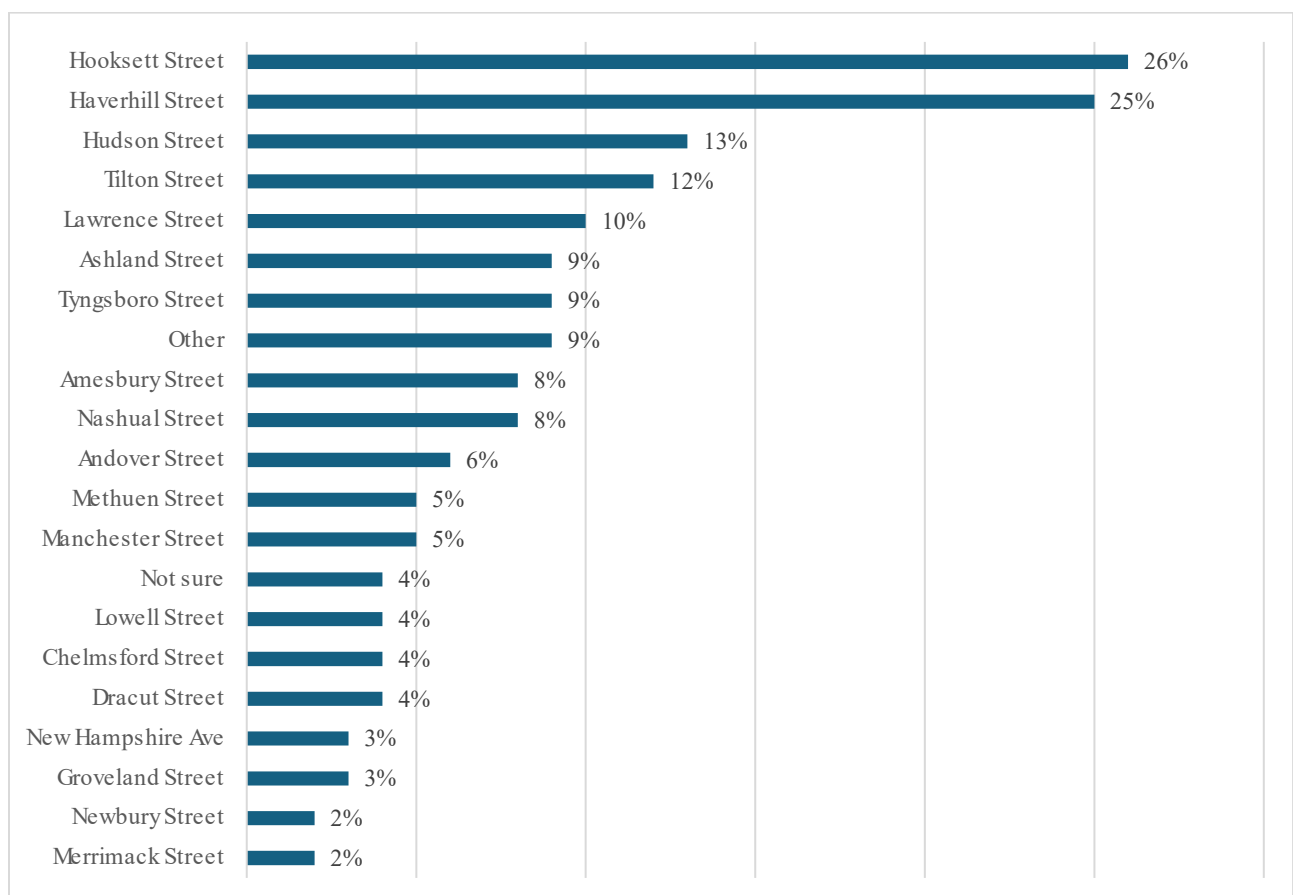


**Question 8: Where do you find information on Seabrook Beach? Select all that apply. (Total Responses: 265)**

Of the 265 respondents who answered this question, the majority (58%) indicated they primarily get their information about Seabrook Beach through word of mouth. Other common sources included the Seabrook Town website (55%), the Seabrook Beach Civic Association (43%), and Facebook (41%). Fewer respondents relied on the town newsletter (6%) or public access TV (5%). Additionally, 4% of respondents mentioned other communication methods, such as Town Hall meetings and the digital platform NextDoor.



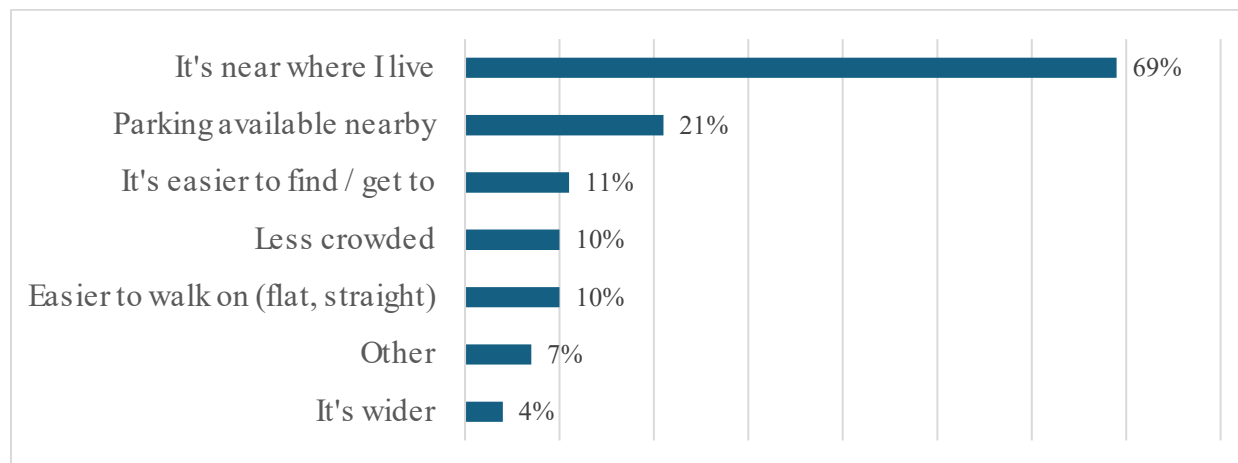
**Question 9: From which street(s) or walkway(s) do you normally access Seabrook Beach? Select all that apply. (Total Responses: 272)**





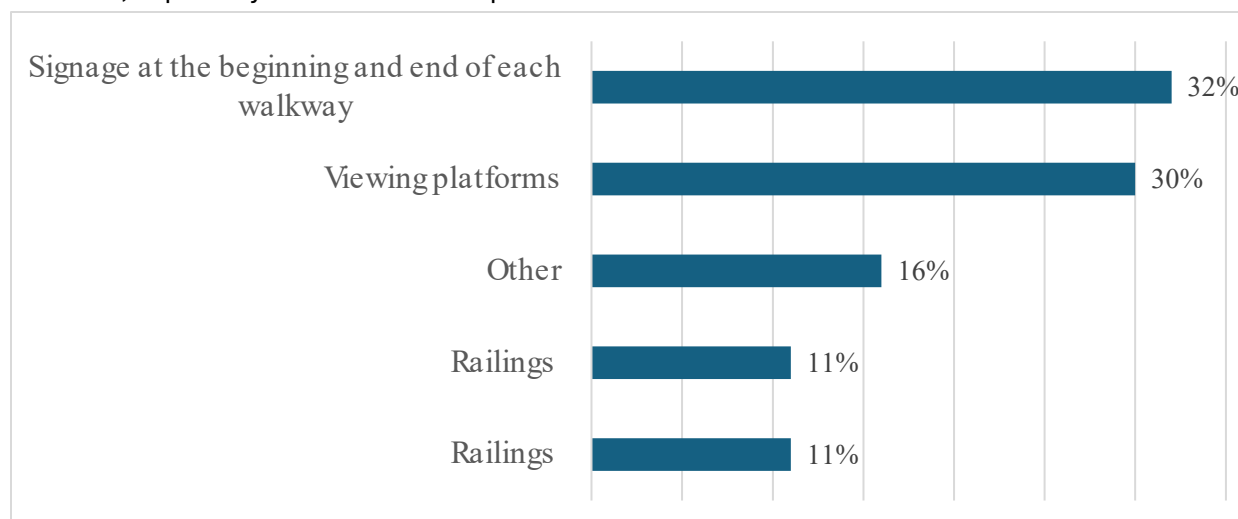
**Question 10: Why do you use these Streets or Walkways? Select all that apply. (Total Responses: 274)**

Of the 274 respondents who answered this question, the majority (69%) indicated they use the streets or walkways near where they live to access Seabrook Beach. A smaller group (21%) chose their route based on the availability of nearby parking. Ease of navigation, less crowding, and easier walking surfaces were factors for around 10-11% of respondents. These results suggest that proximity to residence and parking availability are the primary factors influencing the streets and walkways chosen by respondents to access Seabrook Beach.



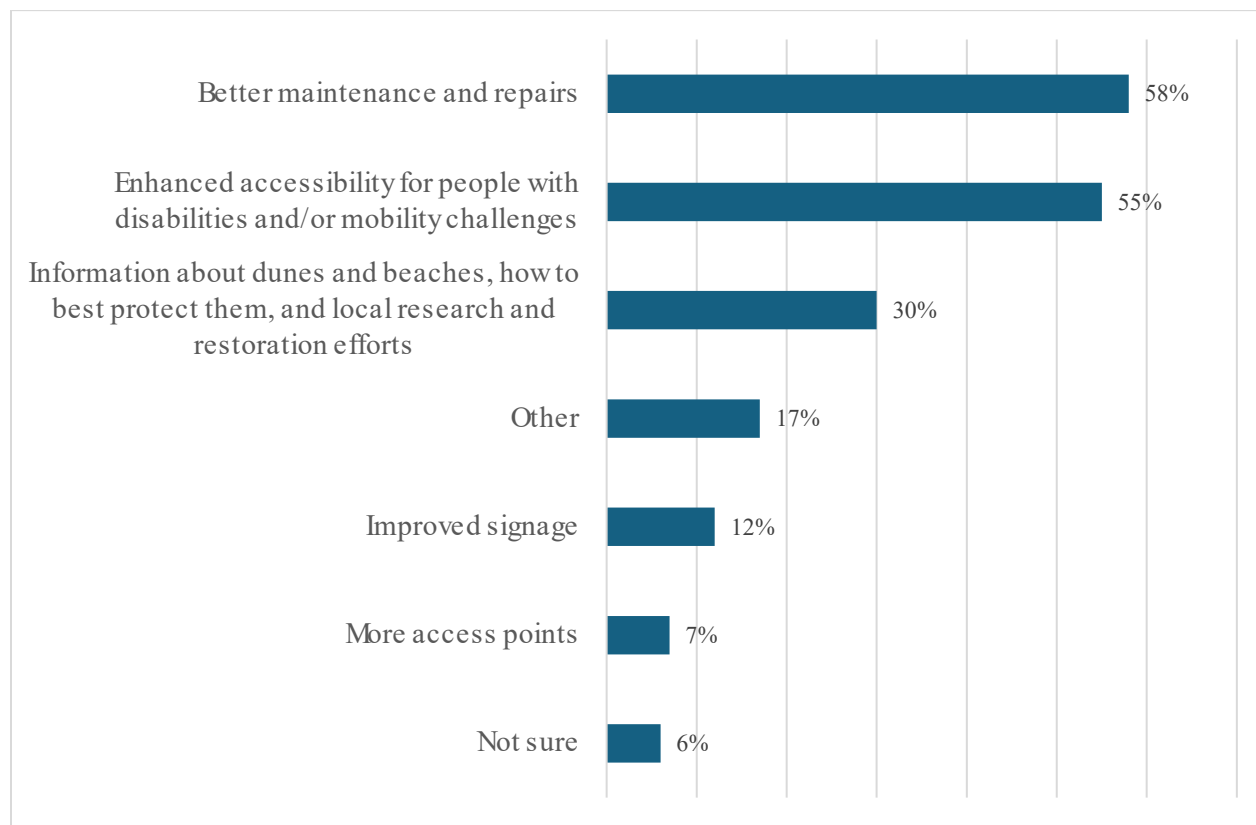
**Question 11: Which of the following features do you like most about the municipal walkways? Select all that apply. (Not all the walkways have these features.) (Total Responses: 244)**

Of the 244 respondents who answered this question, the most popular feature of the municipal walkways was benches, with 74% of respondents indicating they liked them. Viewing platforms followed, with 30% of respondents mentioning them, while 11% preferred railings. Signage at the beginning and end of each walkway was noted by 32% of respondents. Additionally, 16% of respondents appreciated other accessibility features such as Mobi Mats and provided recommendations for improvements, including making signage more visible at night and reinstalling benches, especially those for handicap and disabled access.



**Question 12: What improvements would you like to see for the municipal dune walkways?  
Select all that apply. (Total Responses: 260)**

Of the 260 individuals who answered this question, most (58%) indicated they'd like to see better maintenance and repairs of the municipal walkways followed by enhanced accessibility for people with disabilities and/or mobility challenges (55%), information on sand dunes and beaches, how best to protect them and local research and restoration efforts (30%), other (17%), improved signage (12%), more access points (7%) and not sure (6%).



**Question 13: Do you have any other questions or concerns about the municipal dune walkways?**

The following synthesizes the comments received in question 12 as well as the 100 comments received in response to this question, #13. All comments can be found in Appendix A.

**1. Positive Feedback:**

- **Mobi Mats:** Highly appreciated for improving accessibility; requests for extended wider mats at all access points.
- **General Maintenance:** Many residents express gratitude for the beauty and upkeep of the beach.
- **Beach Civic Association:** Commendation for the association's efforts, including flower planters.

**2. Concerns and Recommendations:**

**A. Walkway Conditions and Safety:**

- a. Walkways are warped, uneven, and slippery, causing tripping hazards.
- b. Boards are reported as loose, broken, and improperly installed.
- c. Some walkways, like Lawrence Street, are too steep, lack handrails, and fail to meet ADA requirements.
- d. Deferred maintenance plans for ongoing repairs and improvements are urgently requested.

**B. Accessibility:**

- a. Expanded use of Mobi Mats is critical to support people with mobility issues.
- b. ADA compliance is lacking at many access points, with calls for additional handicapped parking and better pathways.

**C. Parking Issues:**

- a. Beachfront homeowners are increasing driveway widths, reducing public parking availability.
- b. Residents report illegal parking, misuse of placards, and lack of enforcement.
- c. Suggestions include alternating parking sides annually and clearer markings for legal parking.

**D. Environmental Concerns:**

- a. Overgrowth of dune grass is narrowing walkways and extending toward the water, raising concerns about beach access and erosion.
- b. Unauthorized paths and activities in the dunes (e.g., private walkways, mowing dune grass) are seen as threats to their viability and protective function.
- c. Recommendations include educational outreach on erosion, dune preservation, and the environmental impact of misuse.

**E. General Beach Management:**

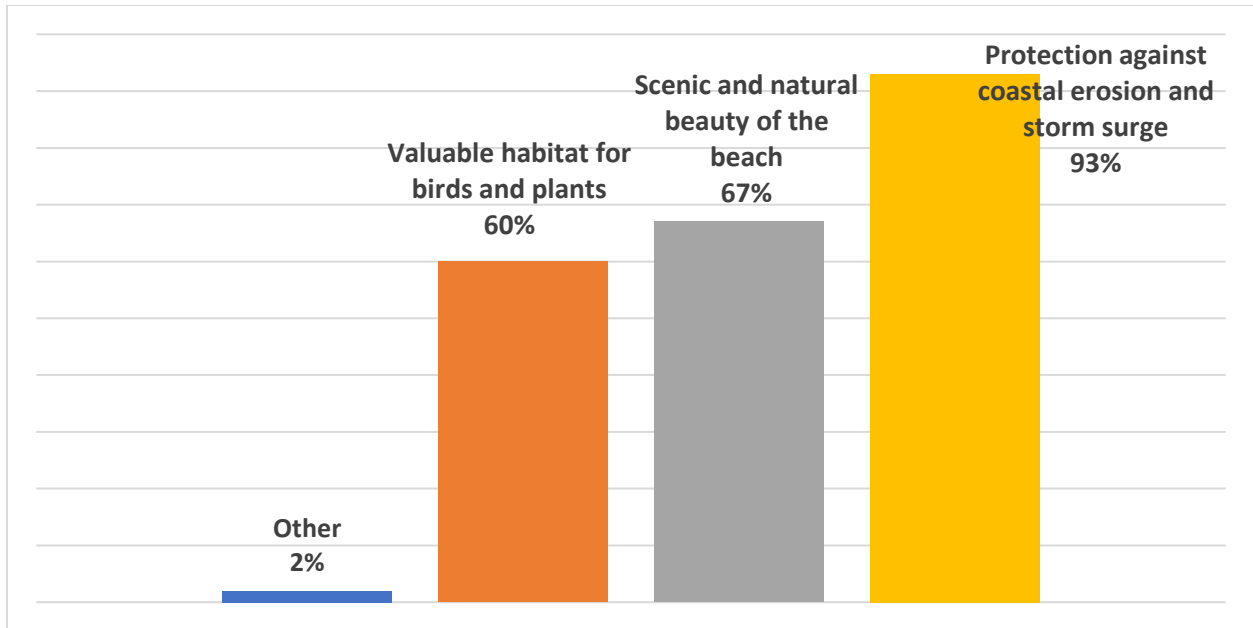
- a. Residents desire more trash pickup, dog waste stations, and enforcement of leash laws.
- b. Concerns about excessive signage clutter and lack of rule enforcement.
- c. Desire for better communication about town projects, grants, and studies related to beach preservation.

**F. Specific Issues:**

- a. Residents point out specific walkways needing attention, such as Amesbury, Tilton, and Dracut streets.
- b. Requests for more patrolling and ticketing to curb unauthorized vehicle use and illegal parking.

**Question 14: Sand dunes provide many environmental and community benefits. Which of the following benefits do you think are most important? Select all that apply.**

Of the 236 respondents who answered this question, the most commonly cited benefit was protection against coastal erosion and storm surge, with 92% of respondents emphasizing its importance. A majority of 66% of respondents also valued the scenic and natural beauty of the beach. Additionally, 59% of respondents recognized the dunes as a valuable habitat for birds and plants, highlighting their ecological significance.



### Question 15: Do you have any other questions or concerns about the sand dunes in Seabrook?

The following synthesizes the comments received in Question 14 as well as the 52 comments received with this question #15.

#### 1. Invasive Species and Non-Native Vegetation

- **Invasive Plants:** Participants noted the spread of invasive plants like shrubs and non-native trees, which threaten the natural ecosystem of the dunes.
- **Desire for Native Plant Restoration:** There is strong support for increasing biodiversity by planting native species and removing non-native vegetation.

#### 2. Dune Protection and Misuse

- **Trampling and Pathways:** Repeated concerns about people walking through and damaging the dunes, often creating unauthorized pathways. Residents and renters are called out for these actions.
- **Private Pathways:** Many highlighted issues with oceanfront property owners building walkways, patios, or cement slabs within the dunes, contributing to erosion and environmental damage.

#### 3. Environmental Impacts and Flood Protection

- **Erosion and Sea Grass:** Comments reflect a concern that while dune grasses protect against flooding, they are encroaching on the beach, reducing usable space. Some participants want controlled maintenance to prevent further beach shrinkage.
- **Flooding Concerns:** The dunes are seen as critical barriers against flooding, with calls for increased protection and restoration to mitigate risks to properties and ecosystems.

#### 4. Behavior and Enforcement Issues

- **Trash and Misuse:** Littering in the dunes (e.g., beer cans, water bottles) and behaviors like letting pets run loose or people climbing over the dunes are common frustrations.
- **Calls for Regulation:** Suggestions to fine violators, enforce rules more strictly, and educate the public about the importance of dunes.

#### 5. Collaboration and Education

- **Public Awareness:** Multiple respondents suggested education initiatives to promote awareness about protecting dunes and maintaining a healthy coastal environment.
- **Regional Collaboration:** Some proposed sharing dune management strategies between Seabrook, Hampton, and other nearby communities to improve resilience collectively.

#### 6. Balancing Preservation and Use

- **Beach Access vs. Dune Growth:** Several comments point to a perceived conflict between protecting the dunes and preserving public beach access. Concerns about overgrown dunes reducing beach size were prominent.
- **Public vs. Private Use:** Strong opinions were voiced on prioritizing public access and limiting private modifications that harm the shared environment.

#### 7. Miscellaneous

- **Wildlife Concerns:** Issues like skunk infestations in the dunes and frustration over beach closures for piping plovers were noted.
- **General Observations:** Some commenters recognized the town's efforts in other areas, such as emergency services and trash removal, but emphasized neglected beach-related responsibilities.

## Conclusion & Next Steps

The survey provided valuable insights into the preferences, challenges, and concerns of those who visit Seabrook Beach and utilize its public walkways. With a strong response rate of 309 participants, the results reflect a diverse range of perspectives on the beach's accessibility, environmental health, and the quality of the municipal walkways.

The feedback revealed that visitors appreciate the natural beauty and cleanliness of Seabrook Beach, but they also face several challenges, including crowding, parking issues, and the condition of walkways. Many respondents emphasized the need for better maintenance and improvements to walkways, as well as increased protection for the dunes, which play a crucial role in coastal erosion prevention. Additionally, there was strong support for continued efforts to educate the public on respecting the dunes and preserving the beach's natural habitat.

Furthermore, respondents highlighted the importance of the dunes not only for environmental protection but also for their role in supporting wildlife and enhancing the beach's overall aesthetic

appeal. There was a significant demand for better signage, benches, and other accessibility features on the walkways to improve user experience and ensure that Seabrook Beach remains an inclusive and enjoyable destination for all visitors.

The results of this survey will play a crucial role in informing the ongoing evaluation of the dune walkways, currently being conducted by the Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC), SHEA, and NH Sea Grant. By providing valuable insights into community concerns, preferences, and priorities, these findings will help shape and refine the strategies, recommendations, and proposed solutions that emerge from the assessment process. The survey data will be integrated into a comprehensive analysis that considers both environmental factors and public input, ensuring that the final recommendations align with the needs of the community and the goals of coastal preservation. This collaborative effort will contribute to the development of actionable, sustainable solutions aimed at improving access and protecting the dunes.

The Seabrook Dune Walkway Evaluation is expected to be completed by June 2025. In May, a public workshop will be held to present the findings of the evaluation and discuss the next steps for the town in terms of protecting and enhancing the dunes and dune walkways. This workshop will provide an opportunity for the community to engage with the project team, ask questions, and provide feedback on the proposed recommendations.

To stay updated on the progress of the Seabrook Dune Walkway Evaluation, upcoming events, and other important developments, please visit the project website at: <https://shea4nh.org/seabrook-crt/>.