Town of Whiting Communication Plan

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April 2023

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Town of Whiting Communication Plan

The Town of Whiting contracted with Sunrise County Economic Council (SCEC) to develop this communication plan to support the town's work increasing its resilience to climate driven events. This plan was funded by the Governor's Office of Planning, Innovation, and the Future through a Community Action Grant.

Goals:

1. Increase community engagement and understanding of town services, initiatives, and resources, which inform future communication.
2. Increase awareness of what is going on in the Whiting community.
3. Increase engagement by encouraging and enabling residents and business owners to participate in community activities and provide access by reducing barriers to reach the broadest possible audience.
4. Provide community members with a stronger understanding of how town government works and the opportunities available for them to take part in town leadership
5. Increase knowledge in the community of emergency situations and appropriate responses needed to protect public safety.

Objective: Measurable Outcomes

- Ensure 100% of the town residents have access to information regarding town meetings, announcements, resources, and events.
- Deploy on-line and offline emergency notifications regarding potential/developing emergency events within 1 hour of Whiting town officials receiving notification.

Audience:

The 488 people in the Whiting community are older, better traveled, more educated, economically endowed, mobile, and more diverse than the rest of Washington County. Spread across 46.7 miles with two major roads that do not bisect or connect traveling through it, the community members commute about twice as far to their places of work as other residents of Washington County. These factors have a strong bearing on community members' capacity to receive information.

Community Demographics

Median age 49.1
- **a little more than** the figure in Washington County: 48.4
- **about 10 percent higher** than the figure in Maine: 44.7 ±0.1

Diversity: 86% white, 8% Hispanic, 4% 2 or more races

Per capita income $28,826
- **a little higher** than the amount in Washington County: $27,437
- **about 80 percent** of the amount in Maine: $36,171

Median household income $48,702
- **a little higher** than the amount in Washington County: $46,689 ±$2,587
- **about three-quarters** of the amount in Maine: $63,182 ±$651

Mean travel time to work 43.1 minutes
- **about double** the figure in Washington County: 21.5 239,830 (±1 / ±12,886)

Number of households 203

Moved since previous year: 23%
- **more than 1.5 times** the rate in Washington County: 14.3%
- **nearly double** the rate in Maine: 12.6%

High school grad or higher: 97.6% ±27.4% (370 ±67.2)
- **about 10 percent higher** than the rate in Washington County: 91.2%
- **a little higher than the rate in Maine:** 93.7%

Population with veteran status 20.6%
- **more than 1.5 times** the rate in Washington County: 12.3%

Map of Whiting

Areas of note:
Orange- Structures along Rt. 191
Blue Dot-- (Upper right)- Whiting Town Office
Black Dots – E911 Addresses

Working Group

Communications plans work best when they have community-wide buy-in and support behind them. While this plan was written by Sunrise County Economic Council staff, it is recommended that members of the town who represent various community segments form a working group to advise and revise this plan. Members of key stakeholders in the broader community will also be engaged. While not exhaustive, potential groups and individuals to form this working group are found in the sidebar.

What does the Whiting Community care about?
A community meeting to identify town concerns and opportunities for improved resilience prompted the development of a communications plan. Sunrise County Economic Council undertook a survey and a media monitoring exercise to ascertain the community's shared interests, values, and concerns.

Potential Working Group Members

MEMA Rep
WaCo Emergency Management Director- Lisa Hanscom
Maine Coast Heritage Trust-Jacob Van De Sande
County Public Information Manager
Select board
UMM GIS lab
Three Angels Seventh Day Adventist Church
Hope Bible Baptist Church
Whiting Village School
Business owners
Community Groups
FEMA

Whiting Community Communications Survey:

A survey was undertaken in late 2022. Using USPS Every Door Direct Mailing, paper copies were distributed to the 188 year-round addresses in Whiting (93% of households). Facebook and the town's website were also used to market the survey which was designed to be either completed on paper or on-line.

The survey was completed by 56 households and businesses with 29% of the surveyed population responding (18 paper copies were returned). Key concerns findings and interests flagged in the survey include:

- **Disconnection from Community**

  20% of the respondents have moved to Whiting recently and feel unconnected to their community. (This closely maps to 2022 Census Data)

- **Incorrect Perceptions of Isolation**

  Less than 6% of respondents live on Rt. 191 despite there being a high degree of concern at the public meeting that a substantial portion of the community was 'out of the loop' because they lived there.

- **Strong Desire for Information about Town Business**

  Nearly 91% of respondents said they wanted more information from the town in general.

  Over 85% of respondents listed Town meetings/Agendas and Town Actions/Decisions as items for which they were seeking information.

  55% of respondents wanted more communication about Town Policies, Ordinances, Programs and services.

- **Strong Desire for Emergency Communication**

  65% of respondents were interested in receiving emergency alerts and knowing about special projects happening in the town.

- **Low Expressed Need for General Town News**

  Less than 40% of respondents looked to the Town for information about police arrests or breaking news. This is probably because about 1/3 of respondents reported reading either the Quoddy Tides or Machias Valley News Observer for their local news.

- **Strong Interest in Volunteering and Community Participation**

  Nearly 49% of respondents said they were interested in learning about volunteering opportunities. The community of Whiting is quite civic minded. Nearly 68% of the survey respondents said they were affiliated with the town's churches, schools, land trusts, clubs, participated in town government or were engaged in civic activities in nearby towns.

- **English is Whiting's Language of Choice**

  The survey specifically queried the need for multiple language choices to facilitate effective community communication. No respondent indicated they wished to receive information in any language other than English, though one indicated if it was needed by others, they would support communication materials being made available in another language.

 The full survey results are found below in Appendix 1.

Media Monitoring:
Media was monitored back five years to gain a sense of the events which have occurred in Whiting and their potential impact on community interests.

Identified Concerns and Interests:
  1. Route 1 is dangerous with people moving through the town at high rates of speed paired with an elevated level of drug and alcohol use.
> "Teenage driver dies in crash in Down East Maine." Associated Press. 2020
> "Whiting Crash" Maine Dept. of Public Saftey.2021
> "Eleven-year-old killed in Washington County crash" Ellsworth American 2022

  2. Drugs, Domestic violence and sexual assault affect town
> "Whiting Man Wanted for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Arrested" WGAN 2018

  3. Storms and Outdoor Lifestyle Conspire to Place People in Danger
> "Ice storm search and rescue has happy ending in Cutler" Machias Valley News Observer 2022

  4. Whiting Dam is an important safety and cultural resource to the community
> "Whiting voters to decide fate of Mill Pond dam" Quoddy Tides 2021
> "More Than $300 Million for Maine Secured by Senator Collins in FY23 Funding Bills" Senator Collin's Press Office 2022

  5. Whiting has a strong conservation tradition built around its waterways
> "Hiking in Maine: Paddling, hiking in the Orange River Conservation Area" Portland Press Herald 2021

Facilitated discussions:
The initial discussion which provoked the creation of this communication plan identified the need for a more robust method of informing citizens about town activities and events. A flyer inviting residents to a community workshop to discuss local climate resilience priorities had been mailed to all addresses in the town property tax database but was not received by many of those who attended - some had read a mention in the local papers, some had seen the flyer at the local store, others had been informed by neighbors.

The town's select board, further, hoped a cohesive communication approach would help them find volunteers for committees and boards.

General Communications Principles

No matter the action or media Whiting town officials are using in each circumstance, the following communication standards will be met. All communications will conform to general principles of effective communication aiming for clarity, specificity, consistency, and accessibility. Communications from the town, whether announcing a town picnic or a major emergency will:

- Present the information in sequence. Present the reason for the message, the supporting information, and the conclusion
- Word the message precisely, making every word count
- Avoid jargon, codes, and acronyms
- Use common terminology for all personnel and facilities
- Omit unnecessary details
- Speak in sync with other related authorities
- Keep messages consistent across various media

From the survey, community conversations, literature reviews focused on best practices, and on advice from experts in their field the following actions are recommended to the Town of Whiting:

Recommended Actions:

- Expand Broadband Access
- Consolidate and manage Facebook page(s)
- Expand and update Town Website
- Create an E- Newsletter
- Install an electronic remotely updatable sign at Town Office
- Establish a Municipal Mass Emergency Notification System
- Provide robust off-line communications pathways
- Purchase an electronic solar powered remotely programmable sign trailer
- Create a phone tree to notify vulnerable community members of emergency events
- Build connections in the community
- Use all communication tools to promote town government volunteering opportunities
- Review Communications Plan every ten years

Action Plan:

Expand Broadband Access

The most efficient way to communicate with the largest number of the widely spread-out Whiting population instantaneously is by utilizing the internet and cell service. However, as with many rural communities, internet access and cellular signal are patchy. While it is accepted that 100% of the community will never be on-line, it is important to community safety that physical access to the resources and economics are not barriers. Whiting needs to reach out to their incumbent internet service providers and request upgrades to their current service to explore emergency alert possibilities. Further, Whiting will reach out to the Maine Connectivity Agency and work with their Regional

Broadband Coordinator to build universal connectivity on affordable, forward-looking infrastructure for all its residents, businesses, and institutions.

Consolidate and Manage Facebook page(s)

Currently the Town of Whiting has two Facebook pages. The survey showed more than 64% of the respondents *had not yet visited the new Facebook page*. However, 42% said they would like to get their news about the town from Facebook. As the old Facebook page was not being updated, this was a significant break in information continuity. A 2021 Pew Research Center Study found, 48% of Americans get their news from social media so it is imperative that:

1. Users be redirected from the old Facebook page to the new one
2. The old Facebook page be 'killed"
3. Procedures are put in place so that the Town's Facebook page is monitored and managed professionally by a dedicated person beyond any one person's tenure. This could effectively be done by a community member
4. Community members are encouraged to submit events to the Facebook administrator for posting

Expand and Update Town Website

Currently the town's website is rudimentary and deeply underutilized as a communication avenue. Pages associated with Whiting's past contain good amounts of information, including interpretation of the Mill Pond Stone Dam, the Union Meeting House and excellent information on the Town's cemeteries. A selection of town ordinances are available, property tax information and the town's office hours. Meeting times for the select board and planning board are posted.

The community survey found 14% of respondents currently get their news about the town from the website, and nearly 28% would like to. However, the 'current town news' section of the website is unpopulated as is an area designated for "Our Community." Since more than a quarter of respondents are willing to use the website as a resource, the town will invest in making the website one of its primary points of communication with the community. As websites can always be improved upon, a three-tier approach is recommended.

Tier 1: Essential Town Communications

- All committee, board and public meeting times prominently displayed on the town's home page
- Complete set of Town Ordinances available for download
- Complete set of meeting minutes from all committee, board, and public town meetings available for download
- Access to legally required town communications such as warrants, building permits, RFPs displayed prominently on homepage
- Current town government news area maintained and up to date
- Information on accessing town services such as location of transfer station and hours
- Emergency services information, including phone tree opt in
- Capacity for a banner or other attention-grabbing communication to be utilized for emergency communications

- Linked to new town Facebook page and any other town social media
- Town government volunteering opportunities

Tier 2: Basic Community Information—Website Contains Tier 1 information *and:*

- Fully fleshed out "Our Community" area which helps new residents become oriented (20% of survey respondents had moved to Whiting in the last 5 years, and nearly 7% said they did not know anyone in town)
- Current News Section updated weekly and used as a clearinghouse of all community activities and events—both those directly led by town government and those sponsored by other groups in the community. E.g.—Town meetings, to bean suppers and land trust led river paddles
- Well-developed information about the Town's history, natural and cultural resources
- Opt in portal for town e-newsletter
- Opt in for paper newsletter

Tier 3: Fully Integrated Whiting One Stop Shop--Website contains Tiers 1 & 2 information *plus*

- Active well maintained and organized links to all community businesses and community organizations

Create an E- Newsletter

When asked how they would like to receive information about the town, 61% of survey respondents requested the town send them e-newsletters which could be distributed for free through Mail Chimp (https://mailchimp.com/). Once a town template is produced, information can be easily updated for each new issue. The same information can be easily inserted into a Word doc or other desktop publishing template to print paper copies.

Install an electronic remotely updatable sign at Town Office

The Town of Whiting maintains a large sign in front of the town office on Rt. 1 near the northeast corner of the town line. In the survey, 53% of respondents reported living on Rt. 1 or on a road that connects to Rt. 1 and 18 % stated they would like to receive news from a town sign. Knowing that Rt. 1 is the main northeast to southwest route through the township, a remotely updatable sign at the town office would provide a highly flexible tool to passively engage with a large part of the community. Further, installation of an electronic sign would address concerns expressed over the present sign's poor legibility and tendency to be out of date.

Concerns expressed at the town meeting for residents on Rt. 191 were specifically addressed in the survey in Question 5, with a pointed query whether an electronic sign would be useful if placed along Rt. 191. Of the two residents to respond in the affirmative, neither indicated they lived on or near Rt. 191. It is hoped the recent installation of an electronic sign on Rt. 191 will help better integrate this portion of the community with the rest of the town that is more generally oriented towards Rt. 1.

The installation of an electronic sign at the Town Office, while useful, does not offer a communications panacea to the Town of Whiting. The Town Office is at the northeast edge of the town (46.7 s.m.), while the magnet town of Machias, with a hospital, banks, university, high school, grocery store and

pharmacies, is seventeen miles southwest on Rt. 1. Despite 53% of the town residents extensively using Rt. 1, 83% of respondents indicated their primary barrier to knowing more about what was happening in their town, was that they "Don't travel by the Whiting Town Office often."

Provide robust off-line communications pathways

It was noted 32% of survey respondents *filled out and returned paper surveys.* Further, more than 17% of survey responders indicated they had no internet or cell phone capacity. Considering the age demographic of the community and a [Pew Research Center Study](#) in 2021 which found 25% of adults over the age of 65 had never gone on-line, Whiting must develop and maintain a strong off-line suite of communication approaches to meet its goals. To meet the needs of offline community members the town will undertake several paper-based communication activities. A list of local media contacts can be found in Appendix VI

1. Develop an opt in direct mailing newsletter

It is understood that the creation of a newsletter requires a high degree of capacity and has a cost, however nearly 26% of the survey respondents requested information via direct mail. A newsletter could be created using volunteer labor to collate community and town events into a monthly publication and do the mailing. This work might also be undertaken as a community service project by a Whiting high school student(s). The content for the newsletter could be recycled to provide material for the town website and e-newsletter to boost communication efficiency and consistency. It would not be unreasonable to consider offering this to community members on a subscription basis at a dollar a month. Free copies of this publication will be offered to the local churches, the school, and Cobscook Institute.

2. Place and regularly up-date community flyers at Archibald's in East Machias, the Whiting General Store, Cobscook Institute and Whiting Town Office

While only 9% of respondents indicated they received information about town events from flyers at the Town Office or Whiting General Store, and only 7% indicated this is how they would like to receive information in the future, bulletin boards and flyers will remain a consistent part of the town's communication activity.

3. Advertise Whiting events in the Machias Valley News Observer and the Quoddy Tides.

Newspapers can be used to disseminate information that is not time critical. This media is especially effective for presenting in-depth analysis of developing situations and for educating the public about preparedness. Importantly these are media outlets where over 60% of community respondents said they get their news about Whiting. Further, 45% of respondents specifically stated newspapers are their preferred way of receiving information about town happenings.

4. Host in-person events such as public meetings to get information to the community.

When carefully planned and executed, these events can be a powerful tool for the town to communicate messages to the community while also guiding the news media to valuable information for broader dissemination. Public meetings have the advantage of being interactive, allowing participants a chance to voice their questions and concerns. However, to be effective these meetings

must be thoughtfully facilitated to stay on the subject at hand and may expose presenters to tough questions.

5. Utilize television and radio as appropriate

Television and radio can be used to disseminate information quickly, through the Emergency Alert System (EAS), Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and news programs. More in-depth features can also be presented. These media offer a quick turnaround for broadcasting urgent messages and can reach a wide audience. It is important to keep in mind that messages may be filtered through a reporter or other spokesperson, and thus may be edited or cut to fit available time.

Establish a Municipal Mass Emergency Notification System

Many private software companies offer mass notification systems targeting multiple channels to people in a designated geographic area on their preferred device, whether via email, SMS, voice, or desktop alerts. These systems provide one-way communication which can reach many people quickly, wherever they are located. They allow a municipal government to communicate valuable information in real-time to help them make informed decisions.

Washington Emergency Management Agency is exploring the use of NIXLE to meet these needs at a county level. Whiting will also consider establishing a mass emergency notification system ideally that has the capacity to dovetail with the larger county system as it comes online. This needs to be thoroughly explored as 31 % of the survey respondents particularly expressed an interest in receiving emergency alert texts. This service would allow community members to register themselves to receive updates from the town.

New community members and seasonal residents will be particularly encouraged to sign up for the NIXLE as they may not have any other social network to keep them informed.

Purchase an electronic solar powered remotely programmable sign trailer

As Whiting is a geographically large community separated in its center and running east/west by a large complex of wetlands and ponds, and a series of large lakes north of Rt. 1 with small access roads wiggling between them, flexible communication options are essential. (See Appendix VII for Maps of Whiting) A solar powered remotely programmable trailer sign would provide a highly adaptable means of communicating with targeted portions of the community during emergency events. This sign would also be useful during emergency situations to convey information regarding road closures for events, and community activities in general. While mobile, this sign will be stationed on Rt. 1 at or near its junction with Halls Mill Rd. at the southwestern end of Whiting. This placement will support 83% of the respondents who noted they did not regularly travel past the town office at the northeastern edge of the town.

Create a phone tree to notify vulnerable community members of emergency events

As the people who are least likely to have multiple modes of communication are also potentially the most vulnerable in the Whiting community during an emergency, a phone tree will be instituted. A phone tree system can help spread a brief message quickly and efficiently to many people. The town will use all its communication modes to encourage people who do not have cell phones or use the internet to opt into the emergency phone tree. The paper newsletter subscriptions' role will be double used in

this regard, as significant overlap will exist between these groups. In gathering contact information, participants on the phone tree will annually designate when they are in the area, as some of these residents may spend time out of the area at other homes during a portion of the year.

The town will form a list of volunteers with excellent communication capacity responsible for making calls to community members. This small group will be the "Key Group" that will form the primary branches of the phone tree. The Key Group does not need to be big since each person will be responsible for calling several other people on the lists. It is critically important that the members of the Key Group are reliable. A key group of 8 individuals tasked with calling only 8 members of the vulnerable list can cover 31.5% of Whiting households.

Appendix IV includes an initial list of potential individuals who could make up the Key Group.

Build connections in the community

An important but hard to quantify part of a community's communication capacity is word of mouth. Whiting potentially is not getting as much benefit from this organic form of communication as possible. The survey noted 19 % of Whiting's community members have moved there in the last five years. Nevertheless, 42% of the respondents to the survey said they get information about the town from their neighbors. These informal networks are a crucial communication pathway. In fact, over the town sign, website, or newspapers, most respondents reported their news about town events comes to them via this 'bush telegraph.'

Whiting will sponsor events specifically aimed at building this informal network. Town events might include, "Meet Your Neighbor Day," community cookouts, historical talks or even a silly boat regatta on the mill pond.

Use all communication tools to promote town government volunteering opportunities

The strong need identified by the select board for volunteers to assist in town management did not match the reported high levels of interest expressed in the survey. Including information about volunteer roles and opportunities, especially as they relate to town governance, will be highlighted in all the town's communication activities. This even includes emergency events as a network of volunteers would strongly support the security of the town's most vulnerable community members.

Review Communications Plan every ten years

The community of Whiting is changing. Covid-19, housing shortages, climate change, and improved internet have all encouraged a migration out of cities into rural regions in the last two years. While long-term trends are hard to guess, further change is certain. Therefore, the town of Whiting is committed to reviewing its communication plan every ten years. Items to consider should include new modes of communication, clever utilization of modern technology and the potential inclusion of materials in languages other than English. The principle of consistent, multi-faceted and broad communications will underpin these updates as they have supported this initial document.

Emergency Communications Application

Whiting has been proactive in its interactions with the Washington Emergency Management Agency, to access the most up-to-date and well-coordinated information possible. Like many small towns, it

struggles with community capacity. This could create a serious emergency communication vulnerability during a crisis if the town's Emergency Management Coordinator has other tasks to perform during a disaster. Thus, the Emergency Management Coordinator **will not be** a fire chief or select person. In an emergency, these community members will have other tasks and may be unable to undertake communications duties.

Yet communication with the community is a critical part of any emergency response. Emergency communication systems do not and will not stand alone for critical events. Rather, communication systems created and maintained by the town for more general news and updates will be used as the basis for emergency communications. Within the existing communication structure, well-conceived and effectively delivered emergency messages can help ensure public safety, protect property, facilitate response efforts, elicit cooperation, instill public confidence, and help families reunite.

Emergency communications may include:

- Alerts and warnings
- Directives about evacuation and/or sheltering in place
- Curfews, and other self-protective actions and
- Information about response status, family members, and available assistance

The extent to which people respond to a warning message is influenced by many factors, including:

- Individual characteristics and perceptions
- Whether the message comes from a credible source
- How the message is delivered and
- The message itself

Studies show that during an incident, *information is as critically important to people as food or water*. Not only can accurate information mean the difference between life and death, but it can also provide reassurance that response and recovery are truly underway. Use of this communication plan before an emergency will improve the town's credibility and the community's responsiveness.

Emergency communications differ from routine communications and must be adapted with these differences in mind. It is more difficult for people to hear messages during an emergency. Stress, change of routine, and lack of sleep all can be hurdles to overcome when communicating during emergencies. Thus, it is imperative that messages be particularly clear, consistent, and succinct. If official answers are not promptly available, rumor and speculation quickly fill the information vacuum. Then, not only must the town disseminate correct information, but must also counter any misinformation that has circulated. To use the media in a timely fashion, the town will learn the local media's news cycles and deadlines while undertaking routine communications and activate this knowledge in an emergency. Finally, most standard communications require no particular response from the community, but emergency warnings' purpose is to elicit a specific response from the public, rather than merely raise awareness or provide information. **It is vitally important that the response needs to be clearly articulated to the community.**

Successful warnings are those that are taken seriously and responded to in a timely and effective manner. Multiple factors may have an impact on whether people respond to a warning, including:

- Individual characteristics—Age, education, language, access and functional needs, family composition, and length of residency, among others
- Perceptions—Previous experience with a hazard and perceptions of proximity and risk
- Message source—Who issues the warning, credibility of the warning source, and the level of trust in that source
- The message itself—Accuracy, clarity, timeliness, consistency, and specificity of the message; and its focus on immediate needs

Research has identified several community, experiential, and individual factors that influence how much alerts and warnings are received, comprehended, and heeded. These factors must be considered and addressed *before* an emergency and figure strongly into the recommended actions.

Community Factors

- Type of community: Residents of rural communities have more difficulty receiving warnings than those living in urban areas.
- Level of community interaction: People who have more contacts in the community will receive more warnings and are more likely to act; also, they are more likely to trust officials.
- Family composition: Families, more than individuals, tend to heed evacuation warnings. Research indicates that people tend to confer with family, extended family, and friends prior to deciding. They do this to ensure their loved ones are safe and to determine if they may need to provide protection for them. Their decisions are based on the following factors related to family composition:
    o Family network: People are more likely to act if they have relatives nearby who may warn them and offer them short-term shelter.
    o Presence of children: Concern for children's safety will elicit quicker response from parents.
    o Presence of pets: People often view their pets as they would their children and will protect them. However, whereas families with children usually act more quickly to take precautions, in emergencies requiring evacuation, people with pets may endanger their own lives by refusing to evacuate, because many public shelters do not allow pets. **It is imperative to accommodate pets and there needs to be specific communication about where pets are welcomed during an evacuation.**

Experiential Factors

- Interpretation of message: When different people listen to the same message, there may be a variation in what they hear, leading to different interpretation and response.
- Previous experiences: Often people will rely on their previous experiences with the hazard to determine what actions they initially take (or do not take).
- Observations: Individual responses to warnings vary, but most people will seek some form of confirmation. For example, some people will look for more information through environmental cues, while others will seek to contact other trusted sources. Optimism bias (thinking that "disasters happen to other people") is overcome with confirmation.

- Perception of risk/proximity: People tend to make a rapid assessment of the relative safety of their location, producing an emergent perception of risk. If their perception of personal risk is high, people will act quickly. When the perception is low, they will delay acting.

Individual Factors

- Age: Children and older adults may not be able to receive and/or respond appropriately to alerts and warnings. Many in this group may also need assistance.
- Length of residency: Transients, tourists, and newcomers to the area lack knowledge of local hazards and the history of local disasters, so they may react differently.
- Access and functional needs: Individuals with access and functional needs may need alerts in accessible formats and additional time and assistance for evacuating. Accessibility of alert and warning messages refers to whether individuals hear and understand them. Alternative alert and warning methods are needed for individuals with access and functional needs such as those blind, deaf, or low vision or hearing. Both audio and equivalent text messages will be available.
- Level of individual preparedness: People who have taken the time to prepare for hazards (i.e., they have a plan and disaster supply kit, and have exercised the plan) are more likely to heed warnings and act appropriately. Getting the preparedness buy-in is often a challenge. The town will include a Family Emergency Plan templates on its website and communicate the need for a plan to residents. A sample template can be found in Appendix VIII.

When considering communicating during an emergency event, the audience and urgency of the message will be considered, and tools developed for general communications will be selected with these in mind. Choosing the right communication tool(s) is a matter of getting the right information to the right people at the right time so they can make the right decisions. The most effective communication tools are those that reliably reach the target audience with information when they need it, for as long as they need it in a situation when resources may well be limited. Most often, the town will choose to use a combination of methods to deliver a consistent message to the whole community. For instance, the town may utilize the sign trailer to alert travelers on a minor town road of a washed-out culvert during a heavy rain event, but engage an SMS alert, Facebook and Website posts, phone trees and utilize both mobile and town office signs during a town-wide event like a forest fire.

Because emergency events are highly stressful, as much work as possible regarding communications will be done in advance and follow well-worn pathways. This will make communications as smooth as possible during a tumultuous event. To prevent errors or omissions which can occur in moments of urgency, Whiting will develop templates tailored to threats and hazards highlighted in the Washington County Hazard Mitigation Plan ranked as "Severe" (Multiple deaths, mass casualties, or millions of dollars in damages) or "High" (Deaths or injuries; or $100,000's in damages) or "Moderate" (Single death or injuries, or $10,000's in damages). These include severe winter and summer storms, flooding, and wildfires. Using a template that incorporates pre-approved language can reduce delays in issuing alerts and warnings. A sample template can be found in Appendix III.

Briefings

While most of the communication plan's standard practices can be utilized in some way during an emergency, news briefings may also be added to Whiting's communication repertoire during an emergency. Briefings enable the town to bring a carefully developed message to the media and the public and to build important community relationships in the process. When planning these public events, representatives of the Town of Whiting will keep in mind:

- News briefings will only be used for notable events or significant added information—not just to say there is nothing new to report
- There will be no delay in the release of valuable information for a scheduled briefing—especially if it impacts life and safety

When preparing for and conducting a media briefing the town representatives will have:

- Identified objectives
- Met with town officials and experts in advance to ensure that they have all the information available
- Prepared a statement and handout materials. Materials will be focused, concise, informative, and cover the basics: who, what, when, where, how, and possibly why
- Anticipated difficult or sensitive questions and be prepared to address rumors and incorrect news statements. Brief, honest responses are ideal. "I will get back to you on that when I have more information," is always better than theorizing
- Make provisions to comply with all legal requirements

Conclusion

The town of Whiting is aware its geographies both natural and human-made have created potential barriers to communication, especially in emergency situations. Further, after a careful survey, the town has discovered a suite of communications needs arising from its demographics. New people are moving in, who are unconnected to long established neighborhood networks of communications. Many residents are getting older and are not using electronic media which can inform people quickly. The rural nature of the community can cut people off physically during an emergency, and internet and cellular service is inconsistently spread across their landscape. The town of Whiting is stepping forward to meet these identified needs with a multimodal communication approach which will increase community engagement and understanding of town services and community events, and support community members during emergency situations so that they can protect themselves and their loved ones.
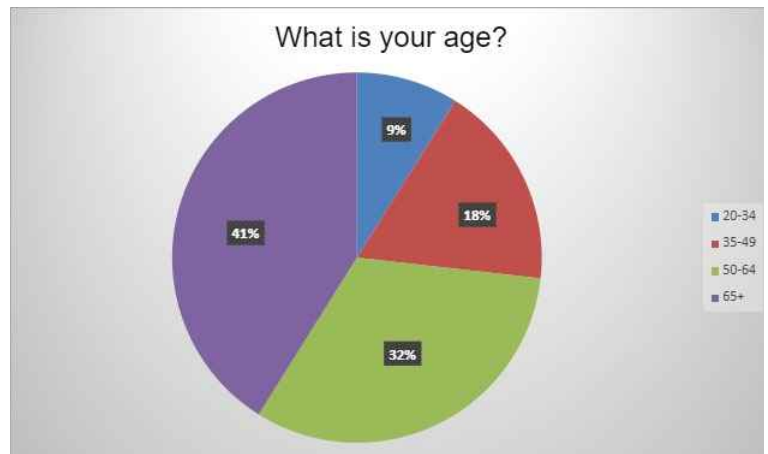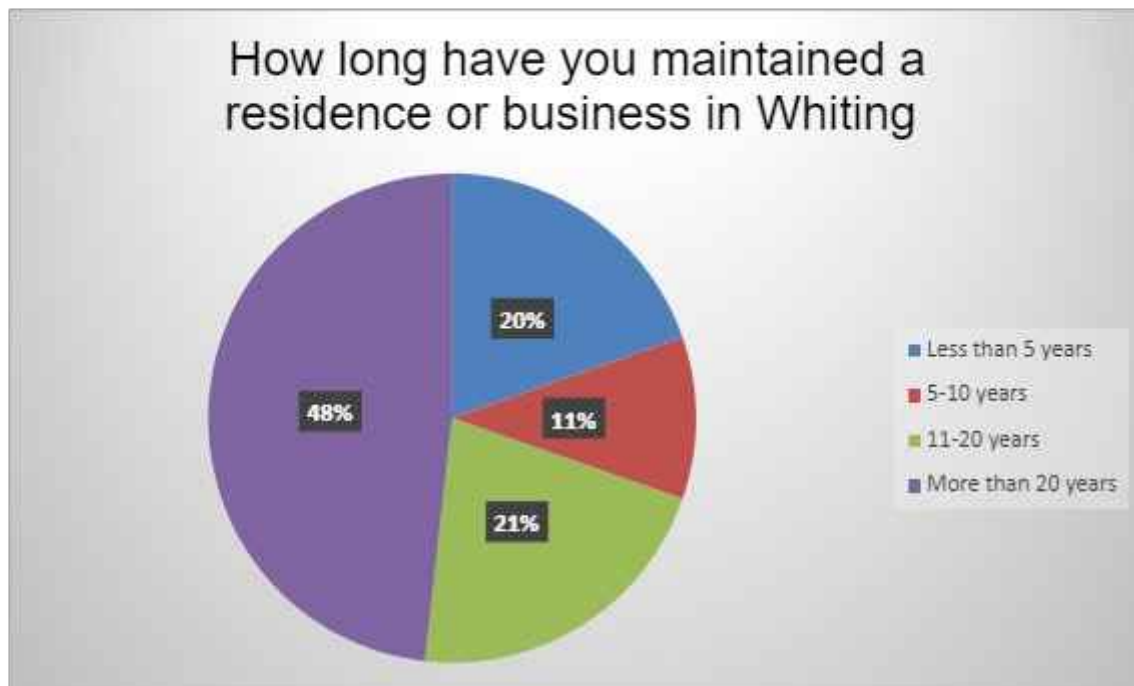
Appendix 1

The Survey:

Additional responses have been consolidated for brevity, inconsistencies of road names have been rationalized and clarified.

Question 1. **What is your age?**

Answer Choices		Responses
Under 20	0.00%	0
20-34	8.93%	5
35-49	17.86%	10
50-64	32.14%	18
65+	41.07%	23

Question 2. **How long have you maintained a residence or business in Whiting**

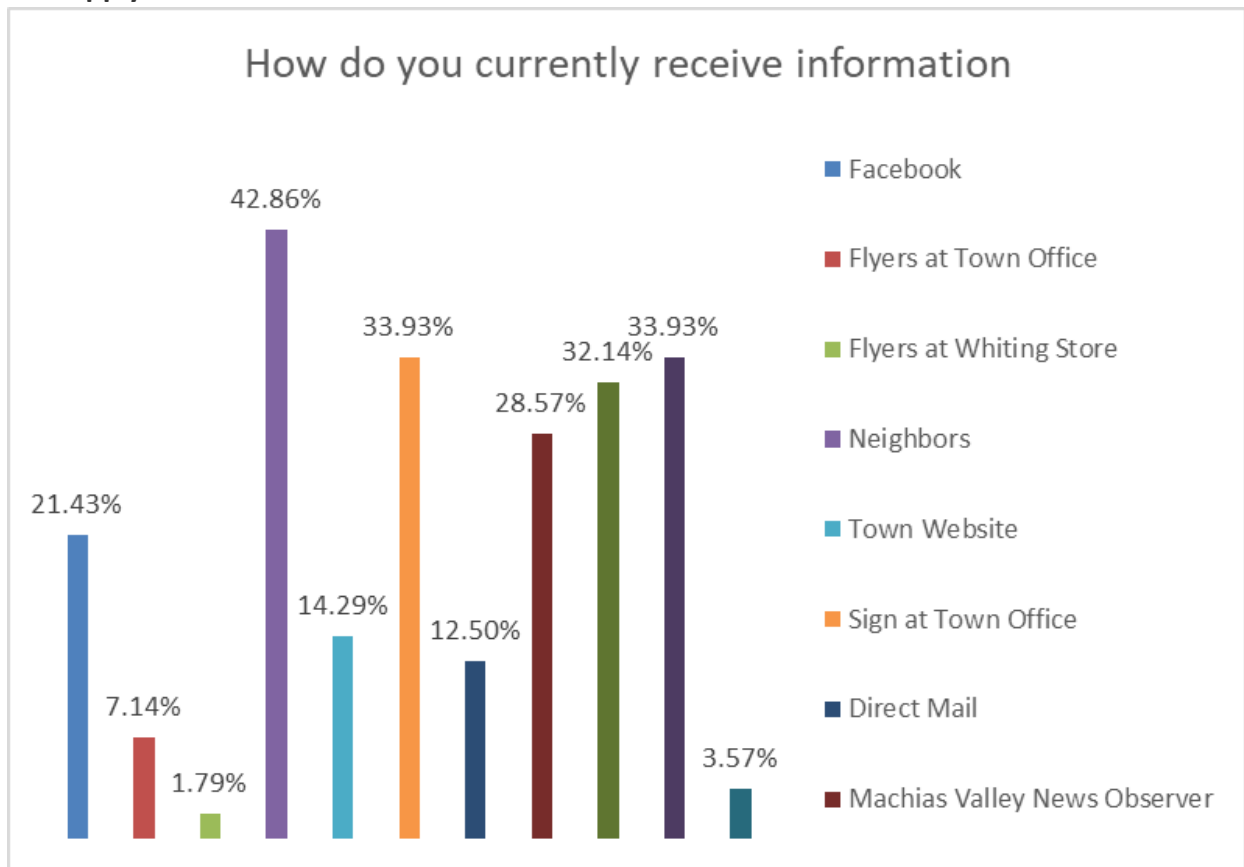Question 3. **Where is your residence/business in Whiting?**

| Answer Choices	Responses	
On or near Rt. 1	30.77%	16
On or near Rt. 191	5.77%	3
On or near Rt. 189	17.31%	9
On or near Yellow Birch Rd.	13.46%	7
On or near Dodge Rd.	5.77%	3
On or near Halls Mill Rd.	17.31%	9
On or near Tech Camp Rd.	5.77%	3
On or near Orange Lake Rd.	3.85%	2
Other (please specify)		8

Additional responses:
Lubec Rd.: 1
Spruce Pt. Rd.: 1

Question 4 **How do you currently receive information about Town events and news? Select all that apply**

How do you currently receive information

- Facebook
- Flyers at Town Office
- Flyers at Whiting Store
- Neighbors
- Town Website
- Sign at Town Office
- Direct Mail
- Machias Valley News Observer

42.86%
33.93%
33.93%
32.14%
28.57%
21.43%
14.29%
12.50%
7.14%
3.57%
1.79%

Question 5. **How would you to prefer to receive information about town events and news? Select all that apply**
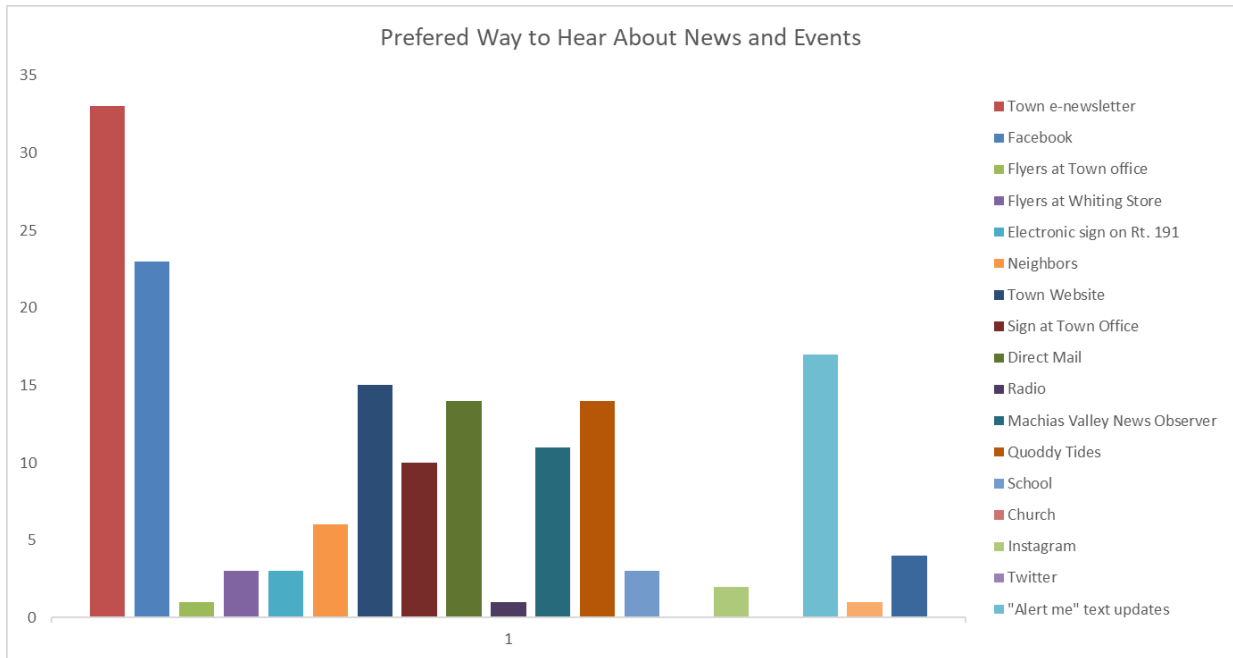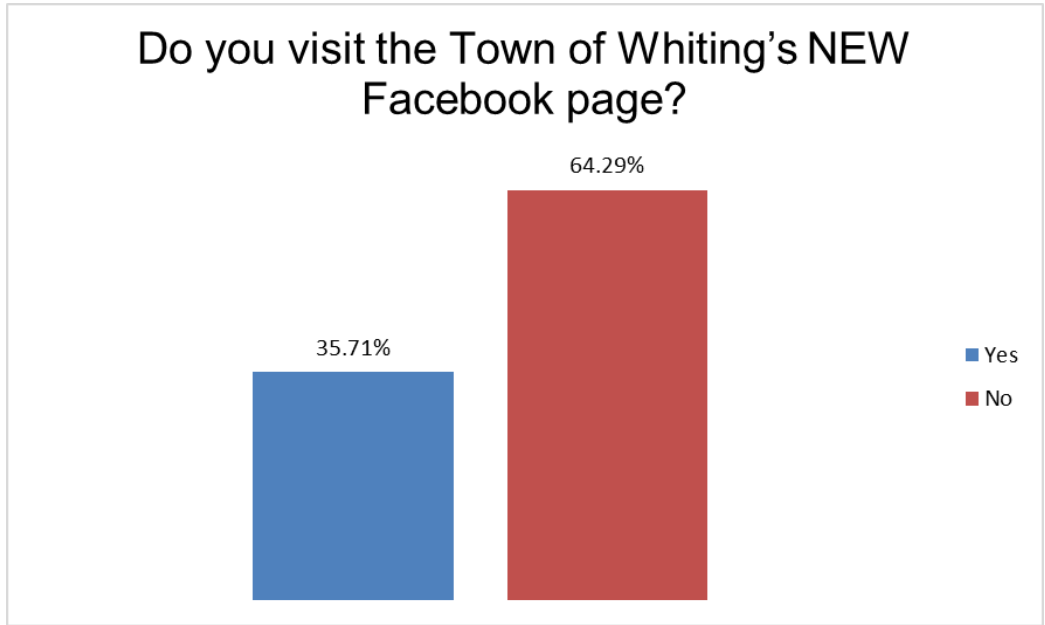

Additional responses:
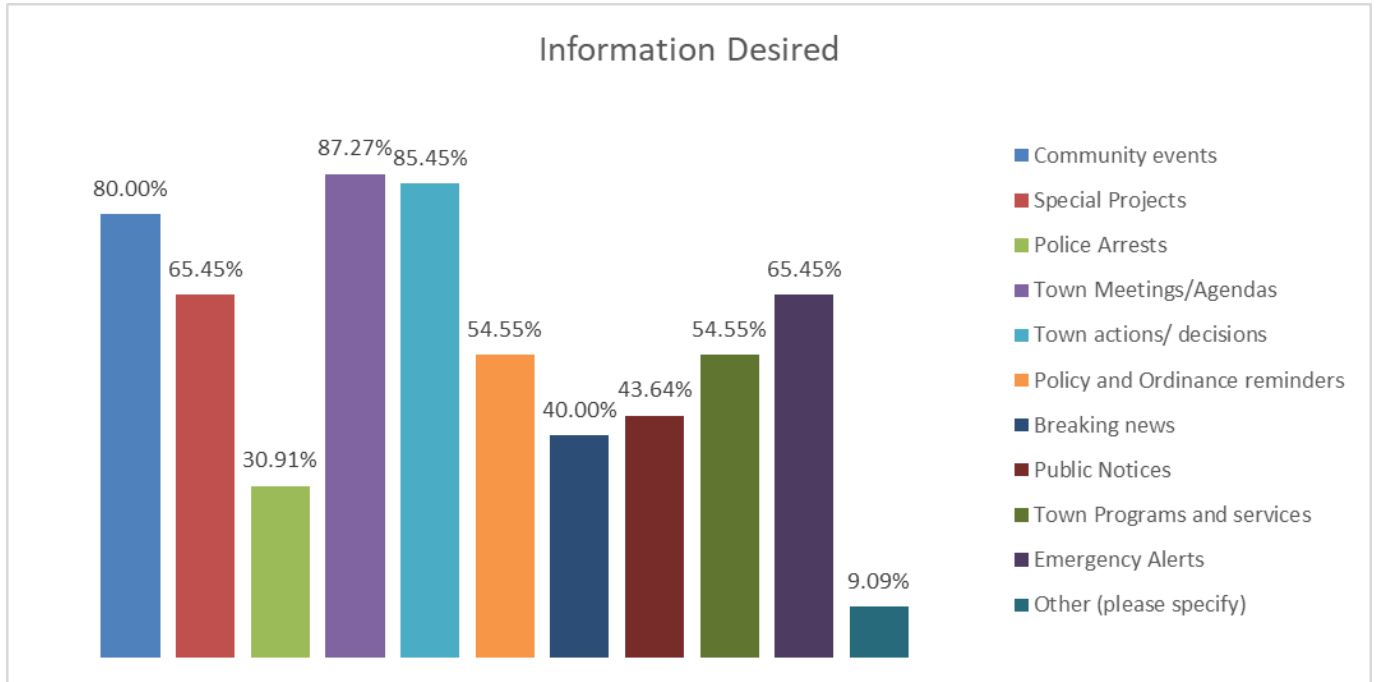Flyers at Archibald's Gas Station in East Machias

Question 6. **Do you visit the town's website?**
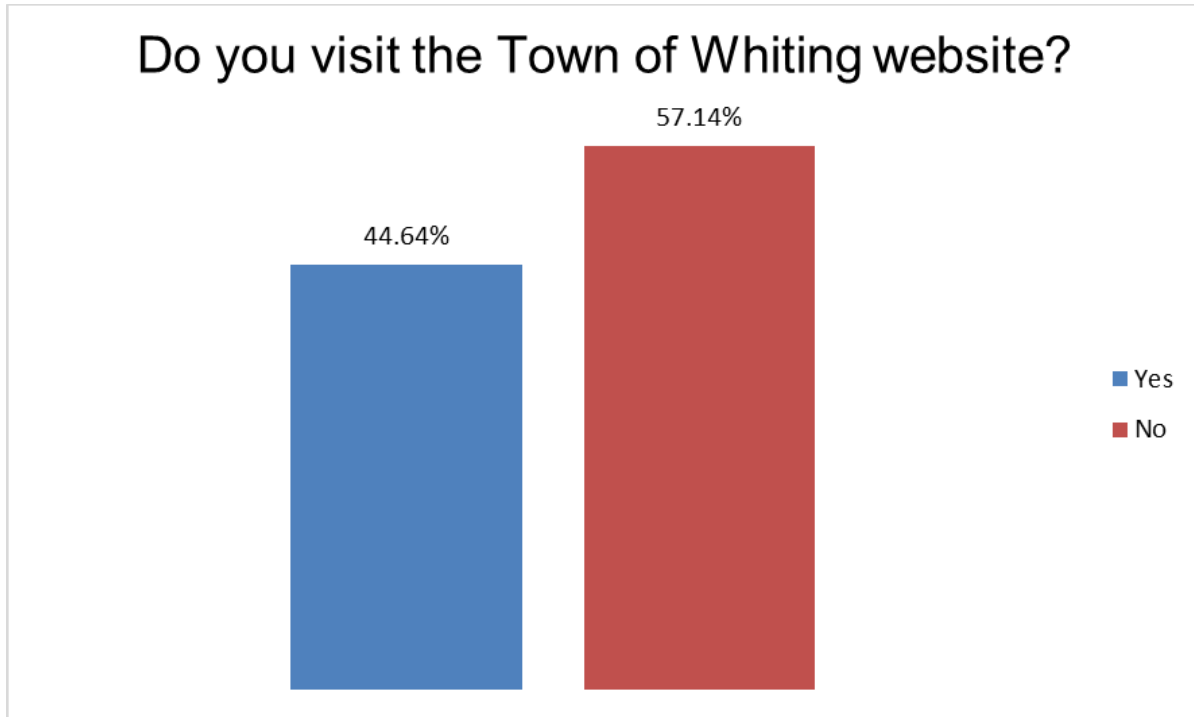
Question 7. **Do you visit the Town of Whiting's NEW Facebook page?**

Question 8. **What information are you most interested in? Select all that apply**

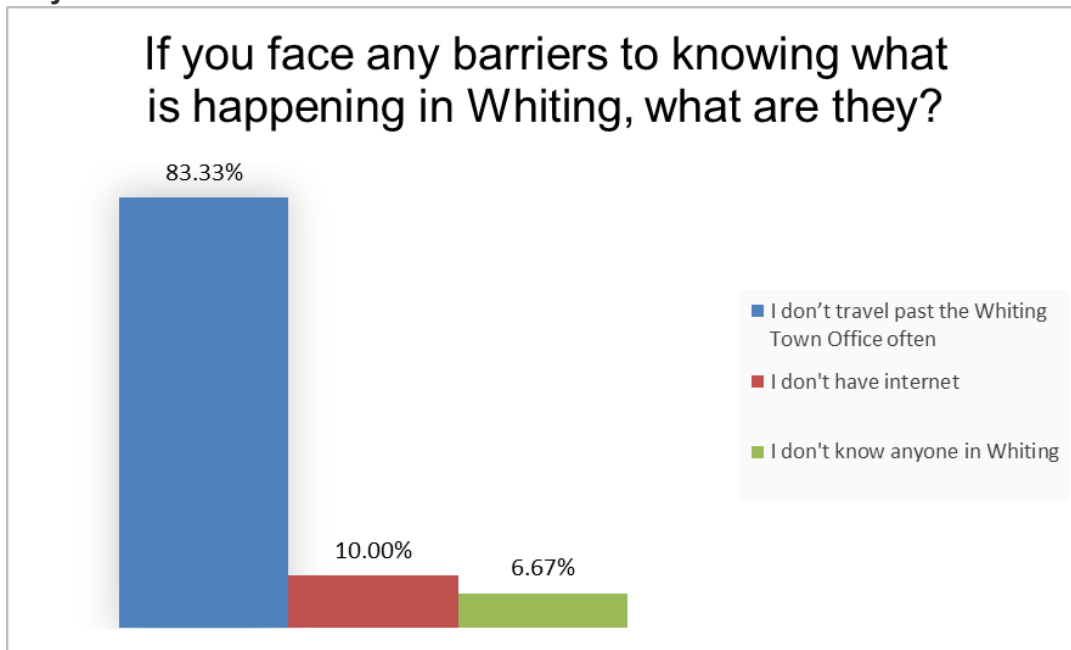Additional responses:
Content of voter ballots
Activities of land trusts regarding management of the Whiting Dam
All information

Question 9. **Is the frequency with which you receive news from the town sufficient?**

Current Communication Levels

90.74%

9.26%

0.00%

■ Just right ■ Not enough ■ Too much
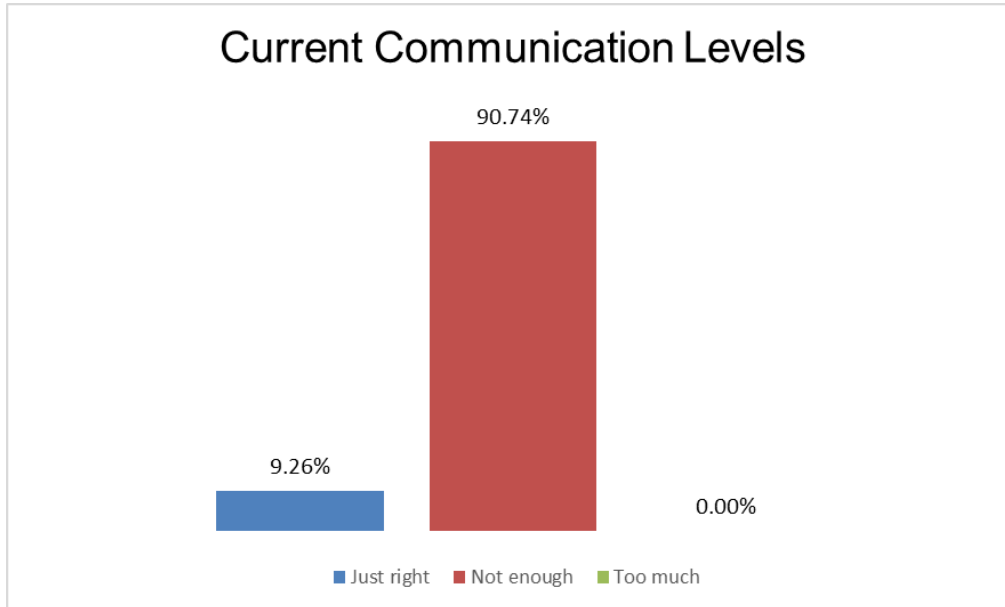
Question 10. **If you face any barriers to knowing what is happening in Whiting, what are they?**

If you face any barriers to knowing what is happening in Whiting, what are they?

83.33%

■ I don't travel past the Whiting Town Office often
■ I don't have internet
■ I don't know anyone in Whiting
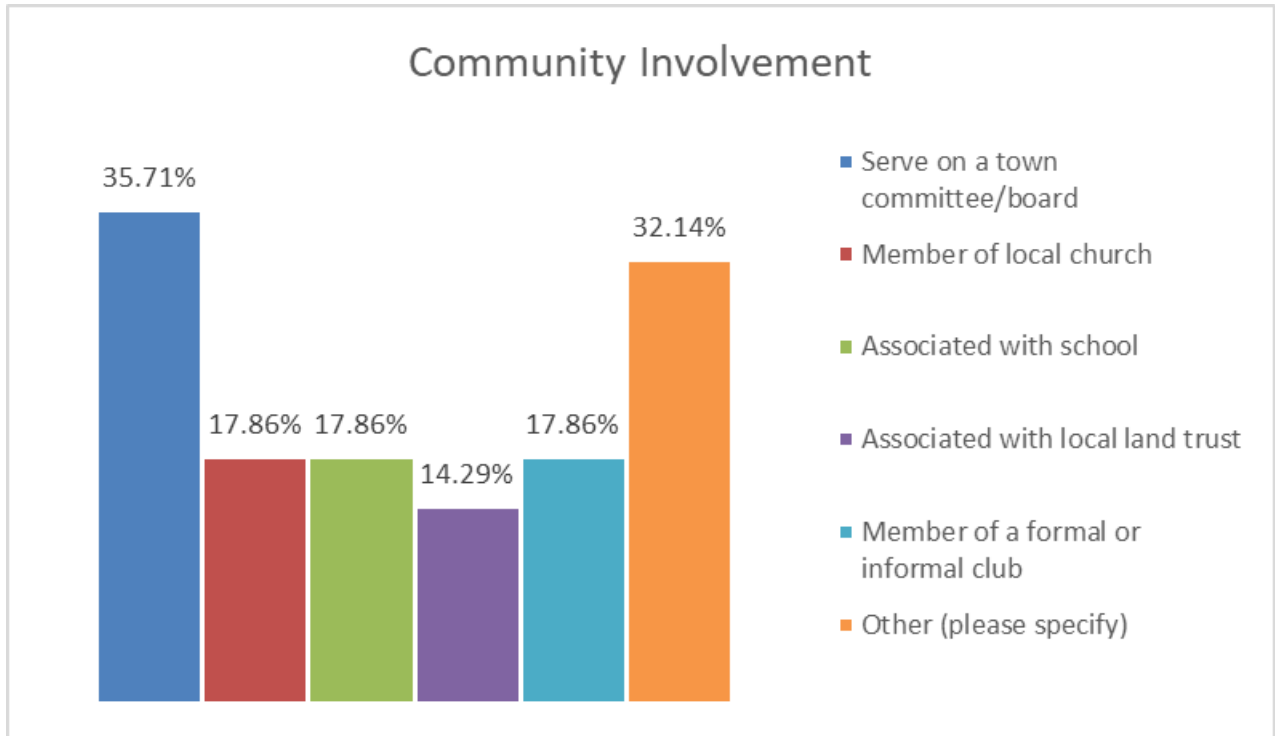
10.00%

6.67%

Additional responses:
- Town sign, physical message board and website are not kept up to date
- Town sign is illegible
- Town relies too much on physical message board at Town Office and Whiting Store
- Limited use of internet
- Do not use Facebook
- Are new to the area and don't know where to get information

Question 11. **Would you prefer to receive communications about the town in a language other than English?**

Would you prefer to receive communications about the town in a language other than English?

100.00%

0.00%   0.00%

■ No   ■ Yes, Spanish   ■ Yes, French
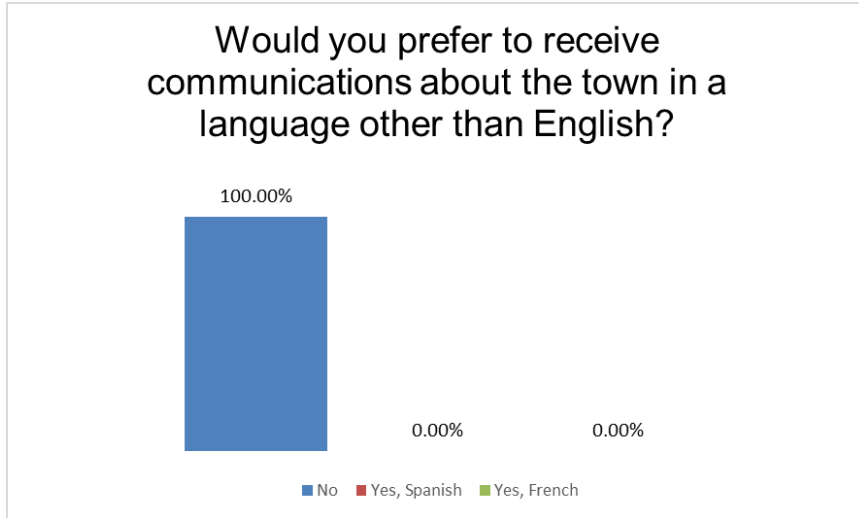
Additional responses: Yes, to help others who could use a 2nd language

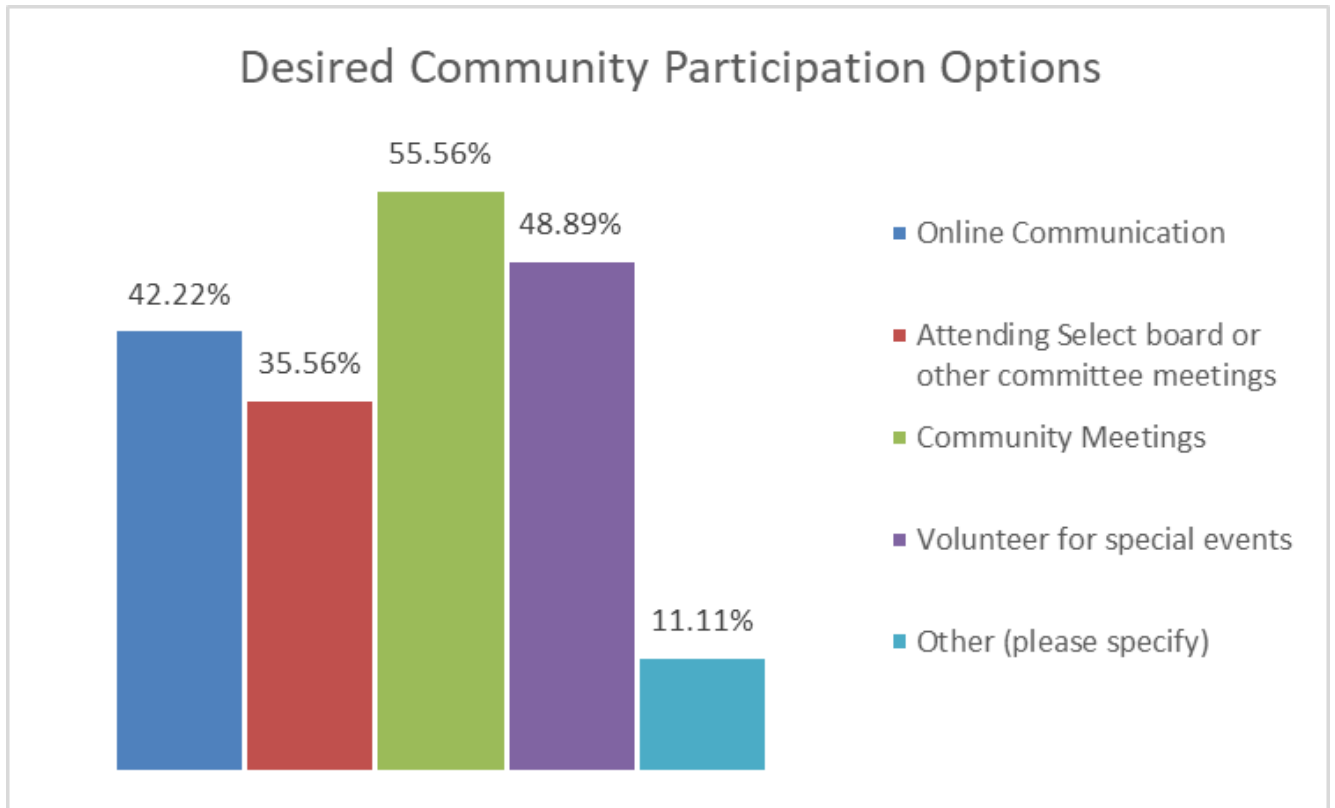Question 12. **Are you a member of any community organizations? Select all that apply**

Community Involvement

35.71%

32.14%

17.86%   17.86%

14.29%

17.86%

■ Serve on a town committee/board

■ Member of local church

■ Associated with school

■ Associated with local land trust

■ Member of a formal or informal club

■ Other (please specify)

Additional responses:

Town sign maintenance   Just moved here
Save the Millpond group   Work at Cobscook Institute (Trescott)
Volunteer at Porter Library (Machias)   Have in the past
Work at Sherrif's Office (Machias)   Pastor of church

Question 13. **If you wanted to be more involved in the town, how would you participate?**
Select all that apply

Desired Community Participation Options

- Online Communication
- Attending Select board or other committee meetings
- Community Meetings
- Volunteer for special events
- Other (please specify)

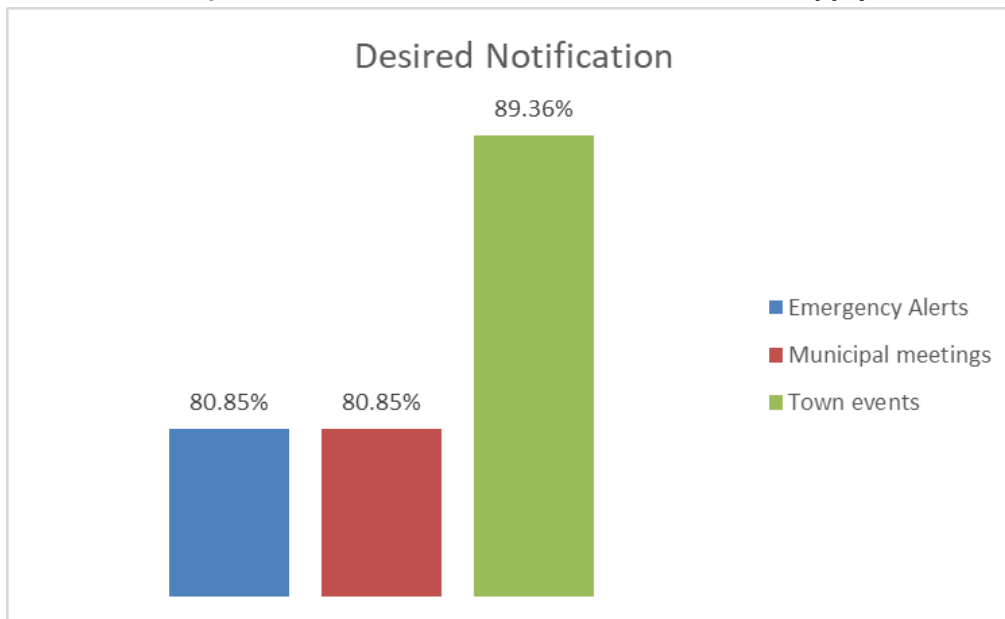42.22% | 35.56% | 55.56% | 48.89% | 11.11%

Additional responses:
provide expertise in environment situations   Town suppers and other events
Town historical society

Question 14. **Do you want to receive notice of…? Select all that apply**

Desired Notification

89.36%

80.85%   80.85%

- Emergency Alerts
- Municipal meetings
- Town events

Appendix II

FEMA *Effective Communication* (IS-242.b) Student Manual February 2014.

Fothergill, A., Peek, L.A. Poverty and Disasters in the United States: A Review of Recent Sociological Findings. *Natural Hazards* **32**, 89–110 (2004). https://doi.org/10.1023/B:NHAZ.0000026792.76181.d9

Mccray, B. "The secret to finding more volunteers in small towns," *Small Biz. Survival* https://smallbizsurvival.com/2013/05/secret-to-finding-more-volunteers-in-small-towns.html

National League of Cities *Why Natural Disasters Hit Vulnerable Groups Hardest*
 Pew Research Center September 20, 2021.

Sacks, B. "A dangerous side of America's digital divide: Who receives emergency alerts," *Washington Post* Dec. 21,2022.

Valigra, L. "Maine was among the most popular states to move to in 2022" *Bangor Daily News* Tuesday, January 3rd, 2023.

Walker, M, Matsa, K. E. "More than half of Twitter users get news on the site regularly*" NEWS Consumption Across Social Media* in 2021.

Washington County Emergency Management Agency *Washington County Me Hazard Mitigation Plan 2018 Revision* 2018.

(Headline field) Immediate Evacuation Ordered for [geographic description of area to be evacuated]

(Description field) Effective immediately and extending until [further notice or expiration time], the Select Board of Whiting has issued an evacuation order for all persons living, working, or traveling in the vicinity of [geographic description of area to be evacuated]. This area is at immediate risk from [brief description of the hazardous conditions].

(Instruction field) To protect yourself and your family from this dangerous situation, the following actions are strongly urged: *Leave your home or workplace immediately for a safe destination outside the hazard area via [specify recommended route(s) of travel]. *Take only pets and essential items such as medications with you. [*Instruction related to school children if applicable, e.g., Do not pick up your children from school. They are being evacuated by school officials.] A shelter operated by [organization, e.g., the Red Cross] is available at [address of public shelter]. If you need evacuation assistance, call 555-9999. Do not call 9-1-1 unless you have a serious personal emergency. For further information, tune in to radio station WXYZ.

Appendix IV

Phone Tree

Steven Pressley—Emergency Management Coordinator
|

|

Possible community participants

Ashley Warren, Steven Pressley Sr., Janice Bronson, Janet Robertson, James Bradley, David Burns, Kenneth Smith, Charles Spencer Thomas Harmon, Derek Stevens, James Burns, Harold Crosby, Donald Vose, Jacob Spencer, Carol Grochmal, Donna Burns, Hope Pressley, Robyn Bryant, Scott Johnson, Debra Hall, Craig Smith, Steven Libby, Sheldon Lyons, Jacob Maker, Jason Ramsdell, William Manchester

Appendix V
Budget

Item	Frequency	Cost	Funding Source
Stationary sign- remote programmable	once	22,000	
Trailer sign—remote programmable & solar powered	once	13,000	
e-newsletter service- using MailChimp	annually	0	
Paper newsletters (1 mailing per month at $1 per mailing to 25% of community)	annually	1464	Subscription based @ $12 per year
NIXLE Emergency SMS	annually	Unknown currently	
TOTAL		36,464	

Appendix VI
Media Outlet Contacts

<u>Radio</u>

WUMM Radio Station Office at 207.255.1240

WCRQ/ WQDY 207.454.7545 or 207.255.4652

Maine Public Radio TellMeMore@mainepublic.org

Community events calendar https://www.mainepublic.org/community-calendar
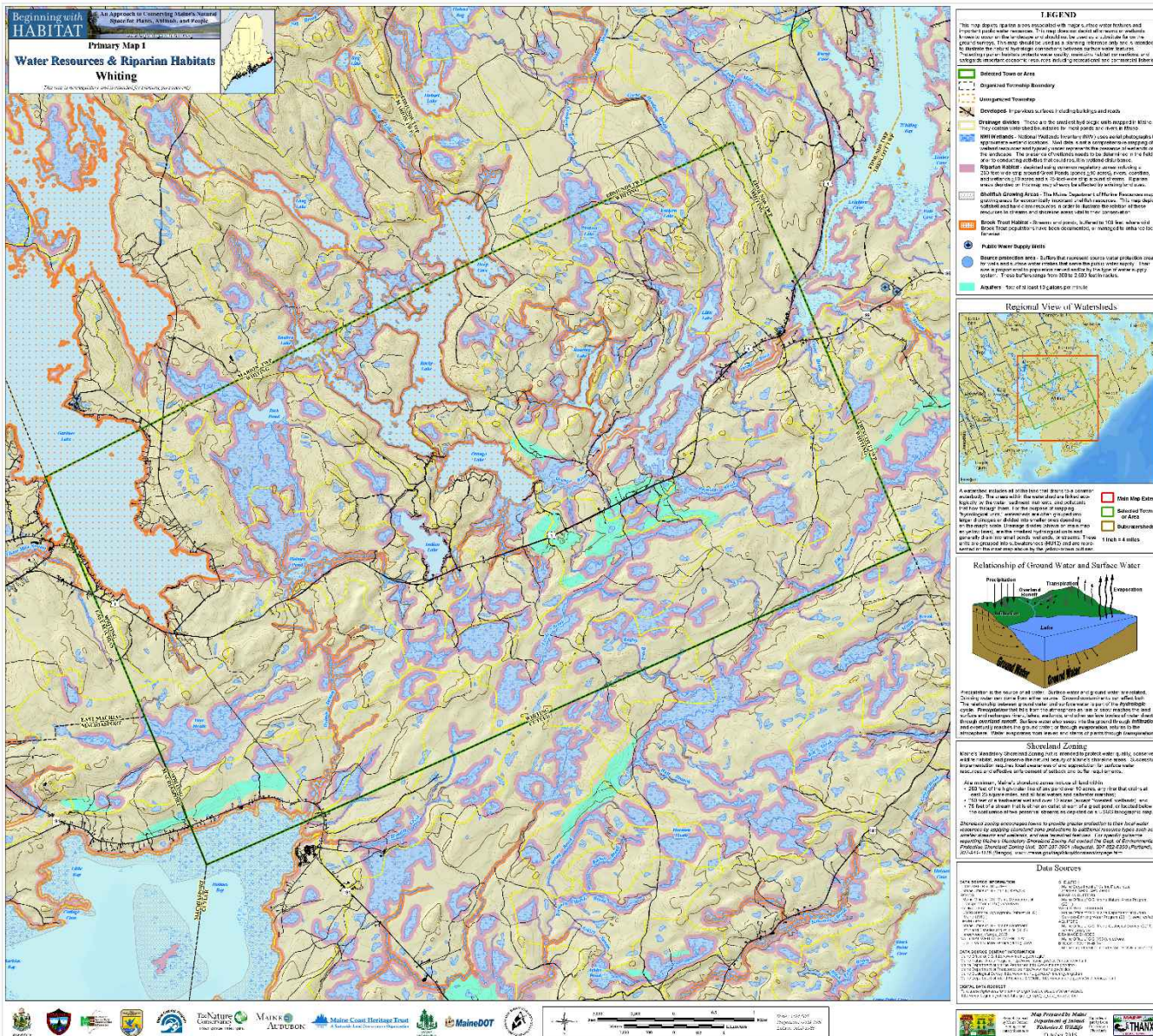
<u>Television</u>

WABI Phone Number: 207-947-8321 Email Address: wabi@wabi.tv

<u>Newspaper</u>

Machias Valley News Observer - (207) 255-6561 info@machiasnews.com

Quoddy Tides Tel. (207) 853-4806 qtides@midmaine.com <qtides@midmaine.com

Family Emergency Communication Plan

Household Information

Household Phone:

Household Address:

Family Members - include name, cell #, email, important medical or other information

Emergency Plans

Enter information for schools, childcare, caregivers and workplaces.

Emergency Contacts - include name, cell #, email, address

Emergency Meeting Places - Location, Instructions

Medical Information

Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222

Doctor Name:

Doctor Phone:

Pediatrician Name:

Pediatrician Phone:

Allergy information and prescriptions:

Veterinarian Name:

Veterinarian Number:

Additional Information: