Informing the Future of Fire Island Pines

Key Themes from the Focus Groups

FiPPOA

The Pines Foundation



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As FIPPOA approaches its 70th anniversary, the organization is turning its attention to the future. FIPPOA has made significant progress in addressing many of the immediate challenges and opportunities facing the community, but other challenges require a longer-term vision and strategy to solve. These challenges are harder to address in a traditional season-to-season approach to planning.

In September 2021, FIPPOA and the Pines Foundation launched an initiative to engage the Fire Island Pines' multiple constituency groups (e.g., homeowners, business owners, renters, real estate agents, heads of community organizations) in shaping the future of the community. The goal of the planning effort was to identify and prioritize the most critical long-term challenges and opportunities facing the community as a starting point for developing long-term plans to address these issues.

As part of this effort, a series of ten focus groups were held in October and November 2021. Approximately 50 community members participated in the focus group process. Participants reflected a broad cross-section of the community in terms of their relationship with Fire Island Pines (homeowners, co-op shareholders, renters, and boaters) as well as key demographic characteristics. In addition, separate focus groups were held with leaders of Pines organizations and Pines business owners.

The key findings from the focus groups, which are summarized in this report, will inform the development of a community-wide planning survey to be launched this winter. The goal of the survey process is to engage the entire Pines community in prioritizing the key issues identified through the focus group discussions. The survey will also help to build community engagement and buy-in to the process.

Key themes from the focus groups are summarized below. Additional information on these issues is included later in the report.

Across the focus groups, two "macro themes" emerged about the **role of FIPPOA**:

- There is a need to build a shared understanding of the role and responsibilities of FIPPOA
- There is a desire for FIPPOA to play an increased role as a platform for education, communication, and coordinated action across the community

Infrastructure and Services: The discussion about infrastructure and services typically began with an acknowledgement that Fire Island (in general) and Fire Island Pines (specifically) was not built for the size of the population it supports today, and that new investments in infrastructure and services are needed to support the increased size of the population and the increased demand from the population. While participants applauded the "10-year" timeframe for the planning effort, it was noted that investments in infrastructure often have a 50+ year timeline and that a 50-year vision for these investments will be critical. The most frequently mentioned issues related to infrastructure and services included:

- Increasing the number and availability of contractors
- Upgrading the sewage / septic system
- Increasing frequency and reliability of the ferry service
- Expanding options within the business district

Environmental Stewardship and the Impact of Climate Change: Across the board, the rising water level was seen as the most critical and existential challenge facing the long-term future of the Pines. Multiple participants shared they were unsure if their homes would still be there in 20 or 50 years. While significant attention has been paid to the oceanside and the beach, there is increasing concern about bayside flooding and rising groundwater. Focus group attendees acknowledged that reversing climate change was beyond the mandate of FIPPOA, however there were suggestions for ways that Fire Island Pines could ameliorate some of the impacts of the rising sea levels and serve as better stewards of the Fire Island National Seashore by:

- Developing a long-term strategy to address the rising water level and increased flooding
- Striving to become a net zero community / model community for environmental stewardship

Expanding the Season / Operating as a Year-Round Community: Over the past several years, the Pines season has slowly expanded from "summer only" to a three-season community (with a few diehards using their homes year-round). One of the unintended impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic was to accelerate the number of community members using their homes in the "off-season," however it is unclear whether this is a temporary response to Covid (i.e., it was not possible to travel to other places) or if there will be a sustained change in home usage. Looking to the long-term future of the Pines, a shift to a three-season community has implications for infrastructure, services, and community that FIPPOA could help support by:

- Collecting data about home usage to inform decision-making by the community and Pines businesses and organizations
- Collaborating with businesses to provide a basic level of services, and potentially to provide assurances for a minimum level of business income, in the off-peak season
- Providing information about winterizing homes and renovating and winterizing FIPPOA buildings

Fostering a Strong Sense of Community: Fire Island Pines is undergoing a time of significant change within the population. The past two years have witnessed significant turnover in homeownership. The community is diversifying beyond its traditional demographic of older, gay, white men. There has been an expansion of the season and a desire for increased programming in the shoulder seasons. And there has been an increase in the number of shorter-term rentals and single-day visitors. With these changes come differing expectations for what the "Pines experience" should include and the kind of programming and events the Pines should provide. As the Pines looks to the future, participants suggested the following opportunities:

- Providing programming that is inclusive of the expanding interests and demographics of the Pines community
- Sharing information and connections for new homeowners and first-time visitors
- Leading efforts to preserve the history of Fire Island Pines
- Creating places for community gathering and convenings
- Building upon the "sub-community barter movement" that have begun forming within the Pines
- Providing Pines businesses and organizations with insights into the demographics and interests of community members

The themes listed in this Executive Summary are further detailed on the pages that follow.

Background on the Focus Group Process

An email announcing the long-term planning effort was sent to all FIPPOA members, leaders of Pines organizations, and Pines businesses owners in September 2021.

170+ members of the community expressed interest in participating in the focus groups.

Approximately 30% of community respondents (*homeowners, co-op share holders, renters, boaters*) were selected to participate in the focus groups (approximately 50 participants).

A total of 10 focus groups were held. Eight with community members, one with Pines Organization leaders, and one with Pines business owners. All of the focus groups were facilitated by Josh Mintz of CHP Mintz, the consulting firm partnering with FIPPOA and the Pines Foundation on this effort.

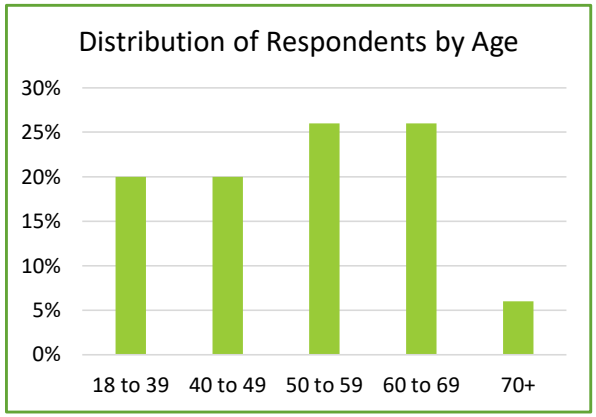
One unanticipated benefit of the focus group process was the opportunity for community-building that it provided. Many of the participants had not met each other (in real life) prior to the focus group and appreciated the opportunity to meet new neighbors.



The focus groups provided a platform to hear from a cross-section of the community. Given the demographics of the community, the majority of focus group participants were gay, white, male homeowners, however an effort was made to ensure the voices of other members of the community were heard as well.

Of the community participants:

- 84% homeowners / 16% renters, boaters, and co-op shareholders
- 88% identified as male / 12% identified as other than male (or did not respond)
- 86% identified as gay / 14% identified as other than gay (or did not respond)
- 78% identified as white / 22% identified as other than white (or did not respond)



As part of the sign-up form for the focus groups, community members were asked their opinion about the "most important (long-term) issue the community needs to address over the next decade."

Four key themes emerged from the responses. These topics served as a starting point for the focus group discussions. During the focus groups, participants were asked to identify which of the topics were most important to them. The topics are listed in order of priorities.

While long-term investments in infrastructure and services received the most votes, there was strong agreement that sustainability and the impact of climate change was the most critical (existential) issue for the long-term future of the Pines.

- **Infrastructure and services**: issues related to the need for long-term investments in infrastructure and increasing access to services to support the community (e.g., construction, freight, sewer, waste, utilities, ferry/access, maintenance of community resources)
- **Sustainability and addressing the impact of climate change on Fire Island Pines**: issues related to the impact of rising water levels, promoting environmental resilience, and demonstrating environmental stewardship (e.g., solar, recycling, resilient buildings)
- **Operating as a year-round community**: issues related to operating as a year-round or three-season community (e.g., weatherizing buildings, infrastructure, services, dining, community amenities)
- **Fostering a strong sense of community**: issues related to ways the Pines can maintain and strengthen its strong sense of history and community as it navigates changes in the demographics and interests of community members (e.g., increasing diversity with representation from beyond the traditional majority older, gay white male population; navigating period of generational turnover in ownership; shift from summer season to more year-round community; increase in rentals and single day visitors)

MACRO-LEVEL THEMES ACROSS THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

There is a need to build a shared understanding of the role and responsibilities of FIPPOA
There is an opportunity to clarify, re-envision and communicate the mission, role and function of FIPPOA (and the limits of its role).

- Some people view FIPPOA's role to represent the interests of the "property owners" while others see the organization as playing a larger role in the community.
- Some people look to FIPPOA as a community organization while others look to it as more of a governing authority.
- Several people suggested that FIPPOA explore the opportunities, challenges, and fiscal implications of incorporating the Pines. While this has been discussed in the past, there is a new generation of community members that are interested in understanding what that choice would mean for Fire Island Pines.

There are conflicting desires for the future of the Pines
Across the focus groups, participants shared desires for the future of the Pines that are seemingly in contradiction with each other. Many of these contradictions existed within the positions of a single individual. For example:

- There is a desire to preserve the "remote" identity of the Pines and a desire to increase access to the community.
- There is a desire to maintain the "bohemian, small town" nature of the Pines and a desire for more stores, restaurants, and community amenities.
- There is a desire to be good environmental stewards of the Fire Island National Seashore and a desire for consumption that produces a large amount of waste.
- There is a desire for the Pines to remain a haven for gay men and a desire to become a more diverse and inclusive community.
- There is a desire for the Pines to remain a community of owners and long-term renters and a desire to create welcoming environment for short-term renters and visitors.

FIPPOA as a platform for education and coordinated action
Across all of the focus groups and all of the issues discussed, there was a recurring theme of FIPPOA playing an increased role in communication and education about the challenges and opportunities facing the community, and coordination in facilitating the community's response. For example:

- Hosting educational session on infrastructure issues (e.g., winterization, septic, do-it-yourself home repair).
- Providing a listing of vetted contractors and vendors who work on the Island rather than relying solely on word-of-mouth referrals (e.g., Yelp for Fire Island Pines). This is particularly important for newer residents that haven't yet tapped into the Pines informal information networks.
- Producing a "homeowner guide" that helps people navigate through the systems, processes and various providers related to life in the Pines. This was particularly important to newer residents who noted how challenging it is to figure out "how to get things done" in the Pines and "who to go to for what" (e.g., Coastline, ferry, trash).

FIPPOA as a trusted source of (real-time) news and information
Focus group participants recommended that FIPPOA develop a long-term plan and strategy for enhancing its communications including a more significant investment in social media and "real-time" updates. As they looked to the future, focus group participants envisioned FIPPOA serving as an "information hub," providing access to news and update about the community; real time information on the ferry (including special boats); connections to contractors and services information; connections to Pines organizations and businesses; events and program calendar; and opportunities to get involved.

There was recognition that this function may be outside of FIPPOA's traditional role and may need to be undertaken in partnership with others. There was also acknowledgement that there would be additional costs associated with these efforts. However, there is a strong sense that a centralized information source is needed (rather than the unofficial options that currently exist on Facebook or informal word-of-mouth).

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

The discussion about infrastructure and services typically began with an acknowledgement that the Island was not built for the size of the population it supports today, and that investments in infrastructure and services are needed to support the increased size of the population and the increased demand for services. While participants applauded the "10-year" timeframe for the planning effort, it was noted that investments in infrastructure often have a 50-year timeline and planning should be undertaken accordingly. The most frequently mentioned issues included:

- ***Increasing the number and availability of contractors***: There was a high level of frustration expressed about the limited number, and even more limited availability, of contractors (builders, repair people, plumbers, electricians, service providers) who work in the Pines. Participants noted that Pines contractors seem to be a "closed community," that many of the long-term contractors are approaching retirement age, and that it is logistically and politically challenging for new people to enter the market. Participants envisioned a role for FIPPOA in attracting, encouraging, and supporting new contractors; providing vetted information about contractors who work in the community (versus the current informal word-of-mouth process); and identifying strategies that would make it easier for contractors to work in the Pines (e.g., storage, beach passes, getting staff and supplies to the Island, options for housing). It was also suggested that FIPPOA consider employing a handyman, particularly during the height of the season, who could take on small, basic repair jobs with the fees going to back to FIPPOA.

- ***Upgrading the sewage / septic system***: Participants noted that septic systems on the Island do not have the capacity to support the increased number of residents and visitors, and that the rising ground water puts these already overburdened systems at risk of overflowing, leeching, and rupturing. People saw an opportunity for FIPPOA to collect and share information about the state of the septic system in the Pines (e.g., studies conducted by the Army Corp of Engineers and FEMA; undertaking new data collection); provide information about new septic requirements, best practices, and resources; represent and connect the Pines to city, county and state efforts to address sewage related issues (such as the Suffolk County Sewage Planning Group); and to explore the potential of creating (or partnering to create) a community treatment station as has been done in other communities.

- ***Increasing frequency and reliability of the ferry service***: Ferry service is seen as the greatest limiting factor on residents' ability to access the Pines. Looking to the future, and with the expectation that the Pines will become more of a three-season community, there was a desire to work with the ferry company to increase the frequency and reliability of service. While participants expressed frustration about the limitations of the ferry service, there was also an openness to better understanding the business model and working creatively with the company to identify strategies that would increase access for residents while minimizing risk to the company. This might include addressing the flooding of the ferry dock, exploring opportunities to increase the size of the ferry dock; supporting development of an app that would provide real-time information on the ferry status, creating a platform that would enable "coordination of demand" through crowdsourcing and cost sharing for specials; and the potential to subsidize extended season ferry service. FIPPOA could also play a role in data collection about demand for ferry service and frequency of the flooding of the ferry dock in order to inform long-term planning efforts. Finally, participants acknowledged that little could be done to address the freezing of the bay, and that alternative strategies for accessing the Pines (e.g., shared rides down the beach during the off-season) should be explored.

- ***Expanding options within the business district:*** There is a strong desire for more commercial business options and some frustration with the perceived "monopoly control" of the business community. While some people would like to see the Pines have multiple dining and entertainment options similar to The Grove, most had a more modest vision for additional business options in the Pines. Additional dining options and a hardware store were most frequently mentioned. Participants asked whether the size of the commercial district could be expanded to make room for new offerings, including the potential for "pop-up" businesses throughout the year. Both residents and business owners spoke about the changing social contract between the two groups, with more people using off-Island delivery services (e.g., Peapod) which is undermining the viability of local businesses at the same time that people are asking these companies to expand their selection, hours, and length of season. Several participants suggested that FIPPOA partner with businesses, particularly the food stores, to provide a platform for online ordering. This could help support purchasing from local stores, assist the stores in managing inventory (particularly with advance ordering for the weekend), reduce the number of individual deliveries to the Pines, and make it easier for residents to obtain supplies without having to carry everything over with them. Participants also suggested exploration of a "membership model" that would provide minimum guaranteed income to support the businesses in the off-season. It was recommended that a group comprised of business owners and residents be established to work collaboratively on solutions to increase business options that would advance the interests (and minimize the risks) for everyone.

Additional Infrastructure and Services Issues Raised during the Focus Groups

- ***Expanding and/or upgrading the boulevard and boardwalk:*** addressing the ongoing flooding and erosion of the boulevard; improving drainage; exploring the pros and cons of having a paved surface; expanding the boardwalk to provide additional space for cyclists, carts, contractors, and stalls.
- ***Increasing access to public amenities***: while the Pines has a stated goal of being a more welcoming community, the lack of public amenities such as bathrooms, showers, changing rooms, water and storage negatively impact the visitor experience, especially for single day visitors. Currently, the business community is providing some access to these services at its own expense, and there were many stories of visitors taking matters into their own hands in the absence of public facilities. If the Pines is serious about welcoming day trippers, it will need to create access to public amenities.
- ***Expanding the freight dock***: the current freight dock is seen as too small to support the community's needs (both incoming freight and outcoming trash and debris). Determine if it is feasible to expand the dock and/or identify alternative ways to transport materials to and from the Island.
- ***Ensuring fire safety and fire service***: multiple participants shared stories of recent fires that have damaged or destroyed homes in the Pines. Particularly during the off-season, there is limited capacity from the volunteer fire department, which is a great concern for many homeowners. While mutual aid agreements exist, access to the Pines may be limited during severe weather events (storms, frozen bay). As the Pines becomes more of a three-seasons or full-year community, a hybrid fire department that includes professional staff may become necessary and should be explored.
- ***Re-building the drainage system***: several participants noted that there is an existing drainage canal system that may help alleviate some of the flooding and water flow impacting the community. It was suggested that the drainage system be cleaned out, re-opened, and expanded if needed and possible.
- ***Starting a Tool Library (co-op):*** Across the focus groups, one of the most wished for additional businesses is a hardware store. In lieu of this, several participants suggested a "hardware co-op" where residents could borrow tools, ladders, etc. There was also interest in "how-to" programming for homeowners.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Across the board, the rising water level was seen as the most critical and existential challenge facing the long-term future of the Pines. Many participants were unsure if their homes (and the Pines in general) would still be there in 20 or 50 years. While significant attention has been paid to the oceanside and the beach, there is increasing concern about bayside flooding and rising groundwater. Focus group attendees acknowledged that reversing climate change was beyond the mandate of FIPPOA, however, there were suggestions for ways that Fire Island Pines could ameliorate some of the impacts of the rising sea levels and advance environmental stewardship within the community.

Developing a long-term strategy to address the rising water level and increased flooding: There were numerous comments and suggestions related to addressing the impact of sea level rise on the Pines. Most of these focused on providing accurate information and creating a plan to take collective action in the best interest of the community versus the interests of individual owners. Focus group members noted that taking action in one place can have unintended impacts in another area, so it was suggested that FIPPOA collaborate with other local communities to think about Fire Island as a whole rather than having each individual community going it alone.

- Participants requested that FIPPOA provide access to experts, information and educational programming related to projections of the impact of climate change on the community. There were also multiple suggestions about conducting an environmental impact study (or making the results of recent environmental impact studies available to residents) as a next step to inform the community's (and individual's) planning efforts.

- While much of FIPPOA's past focus has been on beach erosion and replenishment, there was a call for a broader, more holistic view of the impact of rising water on Fire Island Pines (specifically) and Fire Island (more broadly). This may include exploring options for the creation of artificial reefs or raising the bulkheads to prevent bayside flooding; addressing the drainage off the Boulevard; continued replenishment of the beach; and maximizing the Pines access to federal, state, and local government funding for environmental projects.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE (CONTINUED)

Striving to Become a Net Zero Community / Model Community for Environmental Stewardship: Participants take great pride in the Pines being a national seashore and feel a strong sense of stewardship for the local environment. Focus group attendees noted, however, that residents' commitment to the concept of stewardship does not always translate into action. The Pines has been producing more waste in recent years and opportunities for use of renewable energy, recycling, and composting are limited.

There was a great deal of excitement around the idea of Fire Island Pines becoming a "model community" for environmental stewardship. While there was acknowledgement that FIPPOA could not mandate environmental policy, it could model, promote, educate and advocate for best practices and principles of environmental stewardship. This might include:

- Developing, promoting, and educating on **Principles and Standards of Environmental Stewardship**, and to encouraging residents to make choices and act in alignment with these principles. The principles could address issues like building design, renewable energy, recycling, composting, light pollution, environmental protection, goals/targets for energy independence, and planting of native species.

- Exploring the potential for **solar energy** in the community with a goal of becoming a "net zero" community. This could include supporting a community-wide assessment of the potential benefits and risks of solar, educational programming on solar energy including the costs for homeowners, negotiating a "bulk purchase" agreement with a solar energy company to bring down the cost to individual homeowners, and installing solar in all FIPPOA buildings. Participants noted FIPPOA's role in coordinating with Version FIOS as a model for going solar.

- Planning for a shift to **electric vehicles** (private vehicles, carts, contractor vehicles) and installing the infrastructure needed (powerlines, charging stations) to support these vehicles. It was also suggested that any future FIPPOA vehicle purchases (carts, etc.) be electric vehicles.

- Promoting **recycling**. There was a great deal of frustration that recycling was not available in the community and that many of the recycling practices that have been adopted in other communities have not been adopted in the Pines (e.g., carry out containers, plastic straws, plastic bags). Advocating for residents and commercial businesses to switch from glass to aluminum cans was seen as another possibility to support environmental stewardship. Possibilities of partnering with other Fire Island communities on recycling were also suggested.

- Support and encourage **composting**. As part of the net zero goal and to reduce the volume of waste being shipped off the Island, participants suggested that FIPPOA promote composting, whether at the individual or community level. There was a surprisingly high level of interest in this idea across the focus groups. Participants suggested that FIPPOA could provide educational programming about composting, apply for grants to support the purchase of composting bins, coordinate the bulk purchase of composting bins, and explore the potential of a centralized composting station.

EXPANDING THE SEASON / OPERATING AS A YEAR-ROUND COMMUNITY

Over the past several years, the Pines season has slowly expanded from summer only (Memorial Day to Labor Day), to May through September, and then to April through October. A small number of community members have begun arriving in March, others are now staying through November and a few diehards are using their homes year-round. One of the unintended impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic was to accelerate the number of community members using their homes in the "off-season," however it is unclear whether this was a temporary response to Covid (i.e., it was not possible to travel to other places) or if there will be a sustained change in home usage.

While there is some interest in seeing the Pines become a year-round community, there was a higher level of interest in becoming a three-season community (March/April to October/November). In fact, many participants noted that Fire Island Pines is already a three-season community, but it just hasn't fully acknowledged it yet nor has it put in places some of the systems and structures needed to support the community in the shoulder- and off-season.

Expanding the season deeper into the fall has been possible as the weather has remained warmer into October and even November. Conversely, the colder winters have made March and April a less attractive time to visit based on the weather. Despite this trend line, focus group participants noted that a major fall storm typically results in the community closing for the season regardless of their anticipated plans, creating a significant risk for the business community. Looking to the long-term future of the Pines, a shift to a three-season community has implications for infrastructure, services, and community that FIPPOA could help support:

- ***Collecting data to inform decision-making***: collecting and sharing data about residents' expectations and plans for using their homes would help to inform decision making by FIPPOA, Pines organizations, Pines businesses, and other Pines community members about when to open and close for the season, and opportunities for events and service hours in the shoulder season. It might also be helpful for the community to understand the needs of the business community, including the costs and risks they incur when opening in the extended season and the volume they need to make opening profitable for them. This could help break the "catch-22" where people don't want to come out if the services aren't available, but businesses aren't going to offer services if people aren't coming out.

- ***Collaborating with businesses to provide a basic level of services – and help ensure a minimum level of business income in the off-season:*** As noted above, businesses don't want to remain open if they aren't going to do the volume of sales needed to be profitable, and people aren't going to show up to the Pines in large numbers if there aren't a basic level of services available. Top among items named as "basic services" were groceries, ferry service, liquor store, fire/emergency service, and snow removal. While a restaurant would be preferred, it was understood that this may be more challenging in the off-season. Participants suggested collaborating with businesses to help them minimize the risk of remaining open in the extended season (e.g., "membership models," minimum revenue guarantees, access to low-cost housing for staff). Other suggestions included support for online grocery / liquor ordering (in advance) so that the local stores could know what to have on hand and minimize the likelihood of spoilage or opening up and not having any customers.

- ***Winterizing homes and FIPPOA buildings:*** to operate as a year-round community, homes, the co-op, and community buildings like White Hall would need to be winterized. FIPPOA could play a role in education, sharing of best practice, and providing links to contractors to support individual homeowners as they make these decisions. FIPPOA could help coordinate an effort to explore the cost of winterizing the co-op and would have direct responsibility for winterization of community buildings.

FOSTERING A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Fire Island Pines is undergoing a time of significant change within the population. The past two years have witnessed significant turnover in homeownership. The community is diversifying beyond its traditional demographic of older, gay, white men. There has been an expansion of the season and a desire for increased programming in the shoulder season. And there has been an increase in the number of shorter-term rentals and single-day visitors. With these changes come differing expectations for what the "Pines experience" should include and the kind of programming and events the Pines should provide. As the Pines looks to the future, participants suggested the following opportunities:

- ***Providing programming that is inclusive of the expanding interests and demographic of the Pines***: looking to the future, the Pines will continue to become more diverse, not just racially, but in terms of age, sexual orientation, families with children, and people who are "short-term" visitors (single day visitors or short-term renters). The Pines should better understand the backgrounds and interests of the community and provide programs that are inclusive of the community as a whole, as well as special interest programming. Examples given were programs for families, young queer people, new homeowners, people from diverse backgrounds). Programming could be offered earlier or later in the season (not July and August) to help extend the season and make the programming more accessible to all outside of the "peak weeks."

- ***Sharing information and connections for new homeowners and first-time visitors:*** focus group participants noted the challenge of navigating the Pines systems and connecting into the community. Whether understanding how to use Coastline, borrowing a ladder, or knowing how to call for a basic repair, there is a desire for FIPPOA to serve as an information hub and resource for homeowners. Similarly, there were suggestions that FIPPOA could be a connector through new owner outreach and social programming. Participants also suggested that FIPPOA could provide information that could be shared with shorter-term renters and visitors to help them navigate the Pines (e.g., norms around community conduct, what to do with your trash, how to return Peapod boxes).

- ***Leading efforts to preserve the history of Fire Island Pines:*** Multiple focus group participants noted the important and historic role that Fire Island and Fire Island Pines plays within the LGBTQ+ community. As one participant stated, "the impact of this place goes far beyond the community." There were suggestions for more programming about the history of the Pines, undertaking an oral history project, and being thoughtful about the aspect of the Pines we are trying to preserve in a time of change.

- ***Creating places for community gathering and convenings***: focus group participants noted that there are few places within the Fire Island Pines community for people to gather. There were suggestions to repair and upgrade Pines buildings, specifically White Hall, so these places can be used as community gathering spaces with appropriate audio-visual infrastructure and spaces to "hang-out." People also suggested creating common spaces on the deck and pavilion (seating, etc.).

- ***Build upon the "sub-community barter movement" that have begun forming within the Pines***: According to focus group participants, a number of "pods" have emerged within the community in which neighbors barter, exchange, and share resources. There was some interest in exploring whether this concept could be built upon at the community level. For example, establishing a "tool library" where people could collectively purchase and then borrow tools, having a list of community members who are willing to barter or exchange services (whether teaching people how to compost or helping with a minor repair).

- ***Providing Pines businesses and organizations with insights into the demographics and interests of community members***: the turnover in homeowners and the changing demographics of the community creates opportunities and challenges for Pines organizations and businesses. There is a need to better understand the community and to provide services and programming that will appeal to them. There was interest, particularly among the Pines organizations leaders, about learning more about the changing nature of the community and how they could more effectively increase awareness and engagement in their programming.

Next Steps

CHP Mintz will begin development of an All-Community Survey to obtain input on the key issues identified in the focus group process. The survey will primarily be quantitative (asking respondents to prioritize and rank the importance of these issues), but there will also be room for qualitative responses (open-ended questions).

The goal is to develop and administer the survey in December 2021. Survey analysis and reporting will be completed in January 2022.

A summary report from the survey will be provided to the FIPPOA Board of Directors in late January – early February 2022. That report, in addition to this focus group report, will serve as the basis for a board discussion about priorities for long-term planning and potential next steps.

The Board of Directors will select a limited number of issues for further development by FIPPOA Task Forces in Spring 2022.