Informing the Future of Fire Island Pines

Results from the All-Community Planning Survey

FiPPOA

The Pines Foundation



Fire Island Pines All-Community Survey Summary
CHP Mintz, LLC
January 11, 2022

Overview of the All-Community Survey

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

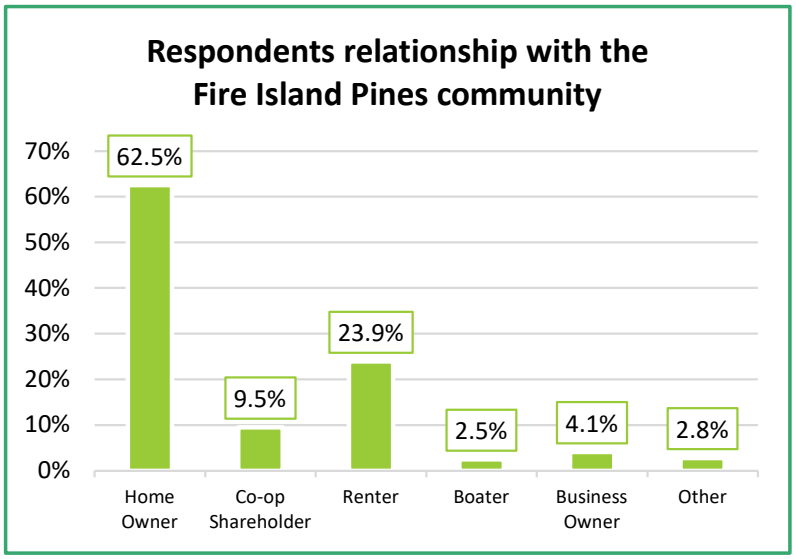
In September 2021, FIPPOA and the Pines Foundation launched an initiative to engage the Fire Island Pines' multiple constituency groups (e.g., homeowners, business owners, renters, real estate agents, heads of community organizations) in shaping the future of the community. The goal of the planning effort 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.

In Phase One of the planning process, a series of focus groups was held with community members, business owners, and Pines organization leaders to develop an initial list of the long-term issues facing Fire Island Pines. In Phase Two, a community-wide survey was launched to engage the entire Pines community in refining and prioritizing these issues and to inform potential next steps for The Pines Foundation and FIPPOA in addressing these opportunities and challenges.

611 people responded to the All-Community Survey. The survey was sent to everyone on the FIPPOA email list (approximately 1500 people) resulting in a response rate of approximately 40%. This is an exceptionally strong response rate for a voluntary survey.

72% of respondents were property owners (62.5% homeowners and 9.5% co-op shareholders). Most of the respondents have a long-term connection to the Pines. 49% have been connected to the Pines for 20 years or more, and 23% have been connected for 10 to 19 years. Approximately 17% of respondents have been connected to the Pines for 5 to 9 years and 10% for less than 5 years.

Survey responses will be analyzed and summarized by CHP Mintz, the consulting firm assisting FIPPOA and The Pines Foundation with this planning effort. The findings from the survey are summarized on the following pages.



Infrastructure and services was the most important issue for most survey respondents.

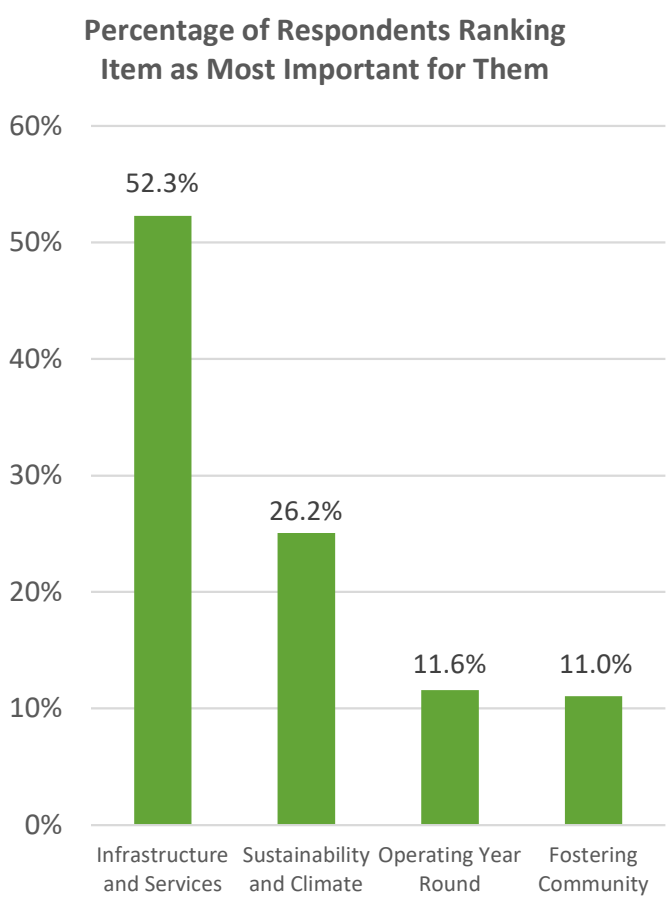
Four key themes emerged from the initial round of focus groups. Survey respondents were asked to rank the issues in order of importance.

Infrastructure and services was listed as the top priority overall. **52% of respondents listed this as their top issue.** This includes issues related to the need for long-term investments in infrastructure and increasing access to services to support the community (e.g., contractors, freight, septic systems, garbage and bulk pickup, utilities/gas/electric/water, ferry access, maintenance and updating of community buildings).

Sustainability and addressing the impact of climate change on Fire Island Pines was listed as the second most important issue. 26% of respondents listed this as their top issue. This includes issues related to the impact of rising water levels, protecting the Fire Island National Seashore, and environmental stewardship (e.g., solar, recycling, composting).

Operating as a year-round community as identified as the third priority, **with 12% of respondents identifying this as their top issue.** This topic includes issues related to operating as a year-round or three-season community (e.g., winterizing buildings; access to basic services such as groceries, ferry service and fire/medical services; dining options).

Fostering a strong sense of community was rated as the fourth priority, with 11% of respondents identifying this as their top issue. This includes 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; increase in rentals and single day visitors).



Infrastructure and Services

There is widespread agreement that long-term investments in infrastructure and services are needed to support the increased size of the Fire Island Pines population and the increased demand from the population for services.

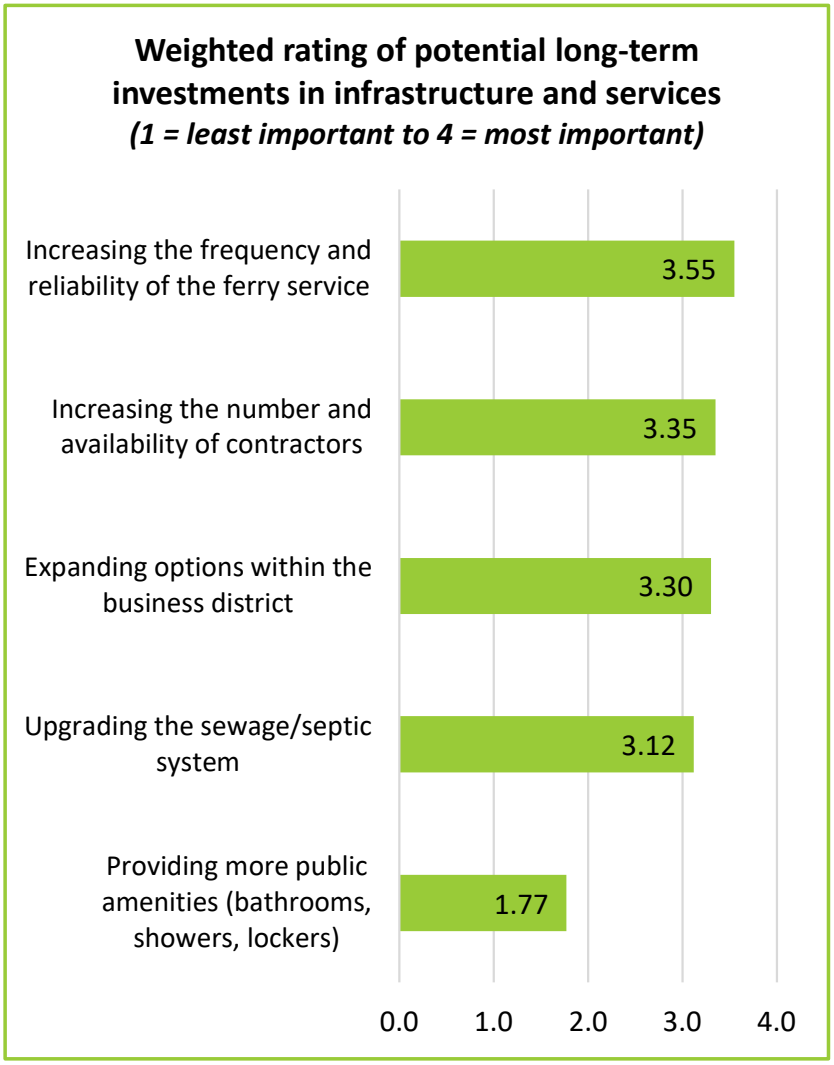
Five potential areas for long-term investment were identified through the focus group process. Survey respondents were asked to prioritize these opportunities in order of importance to them.

Increasing the frequency and reliability of the ferry service received the highest rating, with 54% of respondents listing this as their 1st or 2nd highest priority. Increasing the number and availability of contractors and expanding options within the business district came in close behind.

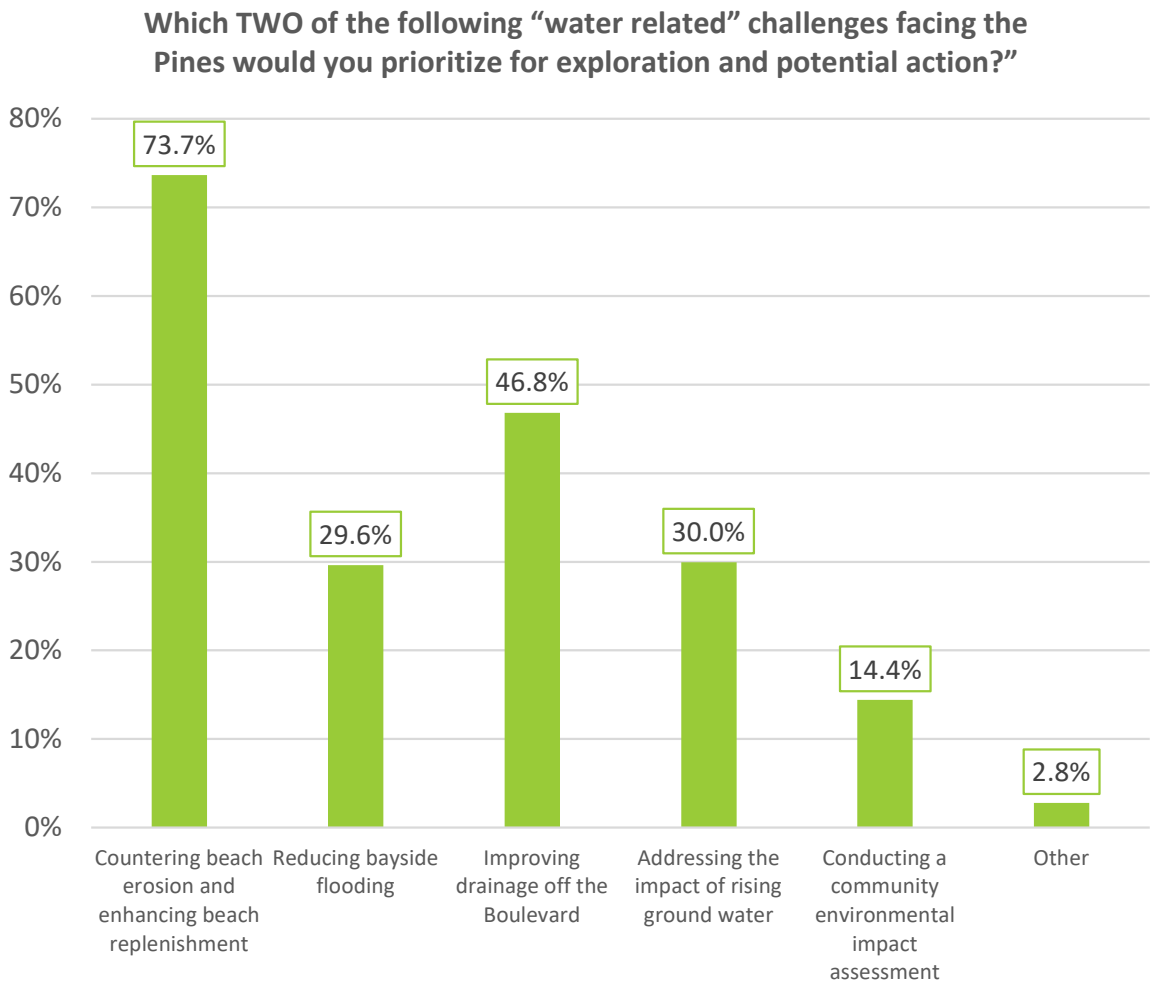
Over 180 comments were submitted regarding additional long-term infrastructure and services challenges and opportunities. Most of the responses addressed topics that were included in other parts of the survey, and so they are not highlighted here, though it is worth noting that drainage and maintenance of the Boulevard was perhaps the most mentioned issue.

Among the frequently mentioned topics *that are not addressed in other parts of the survey* were:

- Parking/decreasing of the number of cars permitted in FIP
- Enforcement of zoning regulations and community rules
- Improving internet and cell phone service
- Burying of the utility wires for both safety and aesthetics



Environmental Stewardship and the Impact of Climate Change

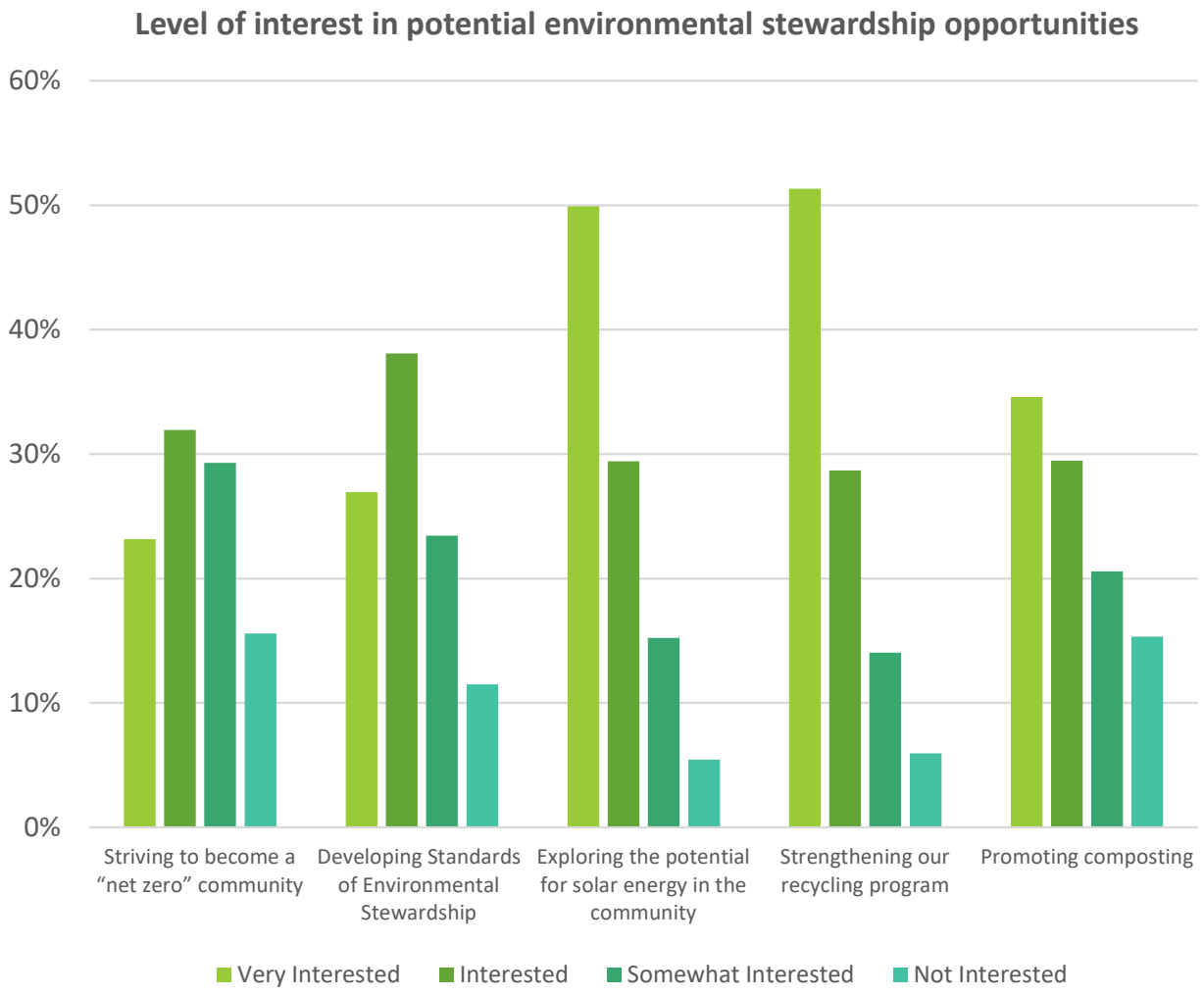


Developing a long-term strategy to address the rising water level and increased frequency of flooding was identified as one of the most important things FIPPOA could do to protect and preserve the long-term future of the Pines.

75% of respondents would be likely or very likely to attend educational programming on the impact of climate change on the community if the programs were offered virtually (including 37% of respondents who would be "very likely" to attend such a session).

58% of respondents would be likely or very likely to attend if the programs were offered in-person.

Environmental Stewardship and the Impact of Climate Change (continued)



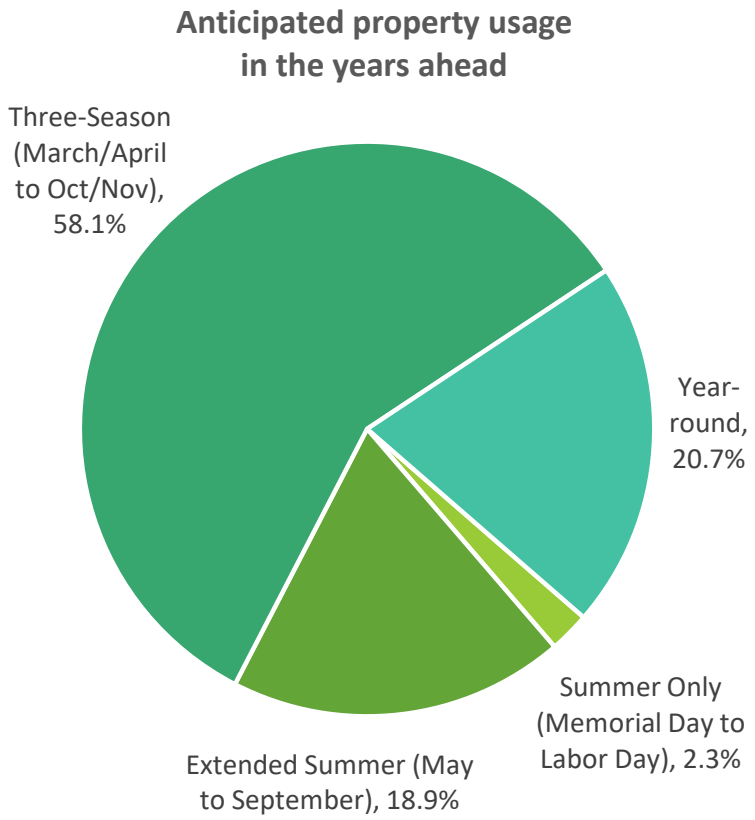
Beyond addressing the rising water level, multiple opportunities to model environmental stewardship were identified in the planning process.

Approximately 50% of respondents were "very interested" in strengthening the recycling program and exploring the potential for solar energy in the community.

There were numerous additional suggestions offered in the open-ended comments, all of which have been shared with FIPPOA. Among the most frequently mentioned ideas: recycling glass and reducing single-use plastics; shifting to electric vehicles, considering of all forms of alternative energy (not just solar); and increasing education of visitors, renters, and homeowners about environmental stewardship.

Operating as a Three-Season or Year-Round Community

Over the past few years, the Pines has shifted from a "summer only" community to more of a three-season community, with some residents visiting year-round. Looking to the future, respondents were asked to envision how they anticipate using their property in the years ahead, and to explore the implications of operating as a three-season or year-round community in terms of services and infrastructure.



Weighted ratings of the most important considerations when thinking about visiting the Pines in the "off season"?
(1 = not important to 4 = most important)

- Frequency and timing of ferry service (3.52)
- Access to grocery store (3.43)
- Availability of fire/EMS (3.34)
- Access to liquor store (2.41)
- Dining/entertainment / pop-up options (2.29)
- Availability of snow removal (2.09)
- Respondents also noted that the ferry service was the most significant factor in the ability to operate as a three-season or year-round community and highlighted the importance of alternative transportation and emergency evacuation options during bad weather.

HOME WINTERIZATION

25% of respondents have already winterized their homes.

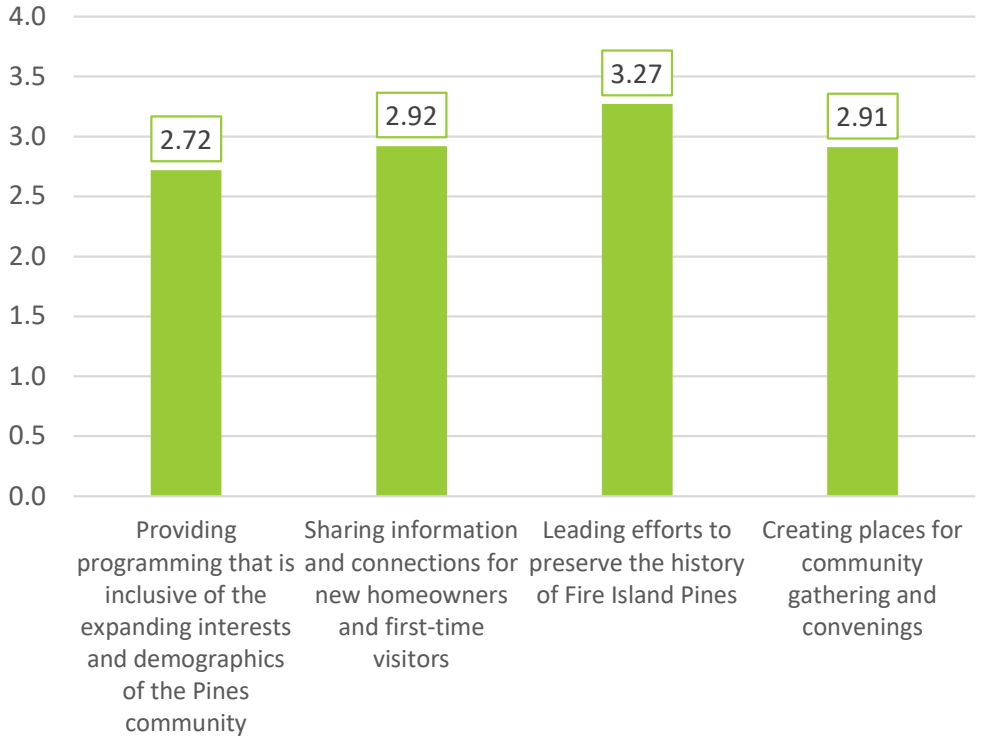
29% of respondents are interested or very interested in winterizing their homes in the future.

11% of respondents are not interested. The question was not applicable for 23% of respondents.

Fostering Community

Fire Island Pines is undergoing a time of significant change within the community. Given the turn-over in homeownership, increase in shorter-term renters/ visitors, and changes in demographics, the needs and interests of the community continue to change. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of potential community building activities that were suggested in the planning process.

Weighted ratings of the importance of potential community building activities
(1 = not important to 4 = very important)



Other ideas of ways to foster a strong sense of community within the Pines include:

- Providing timely news and information about FIP through social media and other technology platforms to keep the community updated and connected
- Creating opportunities for newer and long-time homeowners to come together – to build community, to support intergenerational connections, and to share lessons learned about navigating home ownership in the Pines.
- Addressing the perceived challenges created by the increase in short-term renters and visitors

It is important to note that there are differing opinions about the level of effort FIPPOA should place on programming, services and public amenities for visitors and short-term renters. For some respondents, there is a role for FIPPOA in supporting these initiatives to help make the Pines more accessible to broader and more diverse communities. For others, the appeal of the Pines is that it is remote and less populated, and these efforts are beyond the scope of FIPPOA's role as a homeowner's association.