

Section

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## Section 2: Plan Summary

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### A. The Community

Sturbridge is a small south central Massachusetts community located at the junction of Interstate 84, Interstate 90 and US Route 20. Sturbridge is known as a desirable community, boasting a central location for commuters, quality schools, an abundance of open space, and a quintessential small New England historic town feel. While perhaps best known for Old Sturbridge Village, a re-created village that depicts life in the early 1800's, and Wells State Park, Sturbridge is much more than that to its residents.

Sturbridge gains much of its natural beauty in the hills, woods, lakes and ponds that characterize the Town. Its past is present at every turn from the Town Common and cemeteries to the cellar holes and stonewalls. Originally a farming community, Sturbridge saw the boom and decline of water-driven mills. Currently, tourism and the hospitality industry are large employment sectors for the community and the need to preserve the community's character and appearance is an essential part of maintaining the Town's economic base and viability, as well as a key ingredient in its economic development efforts.

### B. The Purpose of this Plan

The Open Space Committee began this most recent plan update during the winter of 2017. Since the Committee and Town have accomplished many of the goals outlined in the 2011 plan including, but not limited to, land acquisition, bylaw adoption, trail construction, and due to the expiration date of the current plan fast approaching, the update was needed.

Many of the goals outlined in the 2011 plan have been accomplished. An overview of some of the major accomplishments is highlighted in this section. One major accomplishment during this plan period was the acquisition of the Plimpton Community Forest. Readers can learn about this acquisition in Section 5 of this plan. It is important to note that this was identified as a Priority Parcel in the plan and that was helpful in securing grants and aligning with other partners for this acquisition.

There is now an active Historic Commission and it has been busy working to inventory the historic and archaeological resources of the Town. While the current focus has been on historic buildings, when that work is completed efforts will turn to the archaeological resources. An active Historic Commission has been lacking for some time. We are now encouraged that this group is progressing in terms of preservation of many of the assets that contribute to the small town new England character that we strive to keep intact despite development pressures.

The Trails Committee has been very busy in implementing the goals of the Recreational Trails Master Plan and aspects of the 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan. This group of volunteers has worked tirelessly on creating new trails systems, parking areas and other trail amenities such as wayfinding signage and kiosks. Additionally, a comprehensive trail guide was published and all 3,000 copies were distributed. This trail guide is also available on the town website and provides a wealth of information for residents and visitors about the vast trail network that is available for use. We view the trails as a great asset. Trails contribute to the quality of life in this community, and serve as an economic development component with tourists and day travelers from within the region seeking passive recreation opportunities on these peaceful properties.

The Town has updated several zoning bylaws since the last plan was adopted. Most notable was the update of our Open Space Residential Development Bylaw. The update removed minimum parcel size that would be eligible and to allow a variety of housing types. It is hoped that these amendments will encourage the use of this bylaw – which has not been used since it was adopted in 2009. The Stormwater Bylaw was also updated to require the use of Low Impact Development techniques.

In addition to the Plimpton Community Forest property, the Town acquired several other small parcels including open space in the Stony Brook Drive and Regep Lane subdivisions. A sizeable parcel on Warren Road that was taken for back taxes was also retained for open space. These parcels provide smaller pockets within developed neighborhoods for resident recreational opportunities, habitat protection and connectivity, and water quality protection.

This plan update process began with updating the town's Open Space Map to include parcels acquired during the last seven years. The maps provide a visual representation of protected lands within the community. The Open Space Map was also further updated to ensure that all protected land – both permanently protected parcels and Chapter Land<sup>1</sup> were included in the mapping. Since the map includes Chapter Lands that are currently protected, but may not always be protected in

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter Land refers to lands protected under the Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 61. See Section 5 for more information on this topic or refer to MGL Chapter 61.

the future, this visual representation can help the Committee develop planning, acquisition and protection strategies for the next plan period.

Overall, the purpose of this Plan is to reassess the Town's past open space and recreation goals, determine what has been accomplished, ascertain changes since the previous Plan was written and adopted, and to continue to plan for future open space and recreation needs.

When complete, this 2018 Open Space and Recreation Plan will:

- Articulate the goals and objectives for open space preservation and active and passive recreation opportunities in the Town of Sturbridge for the next seven year period;
- Provide a comprehensive planning document to give direction to Town boards, committees and citizens in planning for the open space and recreation needs of the community; and
- Continue the process of reviewing Town bylaws, regulations and policies to determine their impact on Open Space preservation.

The Open Space Committee has been greatly supported in its endeavors and is confident that support will continue as it periodically updates this plan and redefines goals and actions. Open Space protection and the provision of recreational opportunities for the community have consistently been rated as high priority items for the community as we have undertaken this planning process. Therefore, we truly believe that our purpose in this plan update is to ensure that the goals and desires of the residents we represent are reflected in this plan.

## **C The Planning Process and Public Participation**

The Open Space Committee worked very closely with the Town Planner and Planning Department Assistant to draft this most recent update. However, this writing process was not a solo activity; the Open Space Committee reached out to a variety of groups for input. The Board of Selectmen, Recreation Committee, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee, Trails Committee, and Planning Board all had representatives in attendance at the Public Forum.

The staff of Central Massachusetts Planning Commission worked with the Planning Department staff and Open Space Committee on developing the survey and compiling the results. They also had an active role in the Public Forum, which was well attended. All the different public participation components that were part of this planning process are outlined in Section 6 of this plan.