

Section

6

Section 6: Community Vision

A. The Planning Process

A variety of public participation activities were conducted for the Open Space and Recreation Plan update this year in an effort to reach all age groups for input into this important planning process. The Committee used surveys, presentations, social media sites, emails, and mailings to spread the message about the update process.

The Town Planning Department staff worked with staff from CMRPC to develop a survey. This

survey contained a variety of questions used during the last OSRP update and the last Master Plan update, but also contained new questions with a renewed focus on learning about recreational needs and the desires of the community in general and, specifically, the needs of our increasingly older population by including a question posed to those over 50. The survey and results can be viewed in Appendix A.

A postcard containing a link to the survey and info about the photo contest and Forum were mailed to every household (4,555) in Sturbridge on March 15th. The postcards provided a reminder to take the survey and information on the date and location of the Public Forum. In addition to an on-line survey, paper copies were available at the Town Hall, Center Office Building, Joshua Hyde Public Library and the Senior Center. The survey was available from March 9th through March 30th and 238 surveys were completed. In addition, notices about the survey availability were sent out via Twitter, the Town Administrator's Blog, the Sturbridge Community Facebook Page, and a notice for the Public Forum went up on the sign board outside the Public Safety Complex a few days before the meeting.



Figure 6-1: Postcard mailed out to promote the OSRP survey and public forum.

The Town Planner wrote an article about the Open Space and Recreation Plan and the update process. That article was sent out via the Town Administrator's blog and Twitter account and was run in the March 23, 2018 issue of the Quaboag Current. A copy of this article is contained within Appendix C.



Figure 6-1: Public Forum at the Publick House was well attended.

The Town Planner spoke at the Senior Center on March 15th. There was a good turnout with over 30 seniors attending the session. The current Open Space and Recreation Plan and the update process were discussed. Seniors were given the opportunity to complete the survey and ask questions that were related to the plan and open space and recreation in general. A reminder in the Senior Center newsletter about the Forum and encouraging all to attend followed this meeting.



Figure 6-3: Photo contest entries.

A photo contest was also held as a way to engage more individuals in the update process. There was a good amount of participation, with 28 photos being submitted in four different age brackets. There was also a best in show category, with that winning entry being featured on the cover of the plan. Local merchants provided gift certificates and planning staff provided merchandise for prize packs for each category. All of the winning photos have been used in this plan, as well as displayed on the Open Space Committee webpage. The winners were selected by ballot voting at the Public Forum.

The Public Forum was held on Wednesday, April 11th in Paige Hall at the Publick House. Fifty-six people attended the Forum and participated in a variety of activities. Attendees were provided ballots upon registration and time was provided to allow people to view the photographs submitted to the photo contest and vote for their favorites. Some of the voting margins were very close between submissions! Local restaurants as well as the Conservation, Recreation, and Planning Departments donated prizes for the contest. At the public forum, an overview of the survey results was presented and small group discussions and mapping activities took place at the Forum. The presentation can be viewed in Appendix D.

The public participation activities were successful in bringing new people and ideas to the table. While many of those that attended were board and committee members, we also saw some residents attending a forum for the first time. This robust participation helped as we came to a shared vision for the open space and recreation plan update.

The overall open space and recreation plan vision for the Town of Sturbridge is to maintain the small town character of the town, protect our groundwater resources, and expand opportunities for active and passive recreation for all ages and abilities. This vision continues to build upon the previous Open Space and Recreation Plan goals, but places a new focus on considering the demographics of our community as we develop and implement this new plan.