

Section

7

Section 7: Analysis of Needs

A. Summary of Resource Protection Needs

1) Groundwater Protection

The Town of Sturbridge adopted a Groundwater Protection District at its 2002 spring Town Meeting and this map was again updated in 2009 to include the Zone II contribution areas for Well # 4. The district covers the Town's groundwater resources as determined by the US Geological Survey, as well as the Zone II contribution areas for the Town's drinking water wells. The regulations of the district include a limit on the amount of impervious surfaces, a limitation on the types of allowable land uses and standards for the use and storage of hazardous materials. A plentiful, safe supply of water is vital to public health. The public drinking water supply and groundwater supplies must be protected. This can be achieved not only through land acquisition, but by limiting tree clearing, grading, and impervious cover. Undeveloped land, with its upland forests and wetlands vegetation, also protects air and water quality and provides critical wildlife habitat. Effective management assures an abundant supply of drinking water, prevents flooding, and, in turn, protects our water supply. The protection of current and future drinking water supplies will require the cooperation of the Open Space Committee, Town Planner, and Department of Public Works Director to effectively protect water supply areas from pollution, enforce Water Supply Protection District Bylaws, and acquire critical land areas necessary for water supply protection.

2) Wetlands

The Town has adopted a Wetland Protection Bylaw and the Conservation Commission is charged with its administration. The Bylaw requires a 25-foot no disturbance zone around wetlands and streams, and a 50-foot no permanent structure zone. Additional buffers are required for significantly sloping land in close proximity to wetlands.

3) Development Pressures

As noted earlier in this plan, the Town of Sturbridge is an attractive community due to its charming character, excellent town services and schools, abundant lakes and ponds and location. During the early 2000's, the town experienced periods of rapid development. This trend halted during the 2008 economic downturn. However, new construction is resuming and the population is beginning a gradual incline. Most development has centered on tear-downs and re-builds on lakefront properties. Especially at risk are large open areas on the outskirts of town and these lakefront properties.

It is clear from this planning process that Sturbridge residents are not opposed to healthy, balanced growth. However, there is a desire to insure that a balance between open space preservation, recreational opportunities and development is achieved. Equally important to residents and public officials is that redevelopment around the lakes be done in an environmentally sound manner.

Annual Town Meeting adopted an Open Space Residential Development Bylaw in 2009. This bylaw provided an alternative to conventional subdivision design and is one of the tools that can help to minimize residential sprawl in communities. This flexible approach to subdivision design provides for a greater level of natural resource protection while allowing greater flexibility with regard to lot sizes and setbacks. Less land clearing occurs, the amount of impervious surface is reduced, and at least 50% of the entire parcel is preserved as permanently protected open space. However, the bylaw had not been utilized at all since adoption. The bylaw was further revised at the Annual Town Meeting in 2017 to allow a variety of housing types with a more streamlined permitting process. It is hoped these changes will encourage use of this tool.

As noted there are seven major lakes in Sturbridge that meet the definition of Great Ponds. However, access to the lakes is of particular concern as points of access are poorly defined. Better defined access to the lakes and more public beach areas arose as an issue of importance to residents during the forum and survey. Improving access would allow more people to not only take advantage of these resources, but to better appreciate, value and potentially protect them. While there is a good deal of state and federally protected lands around several lakes, in some cases there is little or no protected land. Additionally, the Army Corp of Engineers Streeter Point Beach has been closed since 2010. We have been advised that once the Corp closes a beach area it will not be opened again. The community should look for acquisition opportunities to provide enhanced access to these recreational resources, to help protect water quality, and to preserve open space in these very much "in demand" areas. These efforts in addition to the investigation of land use regulatory tools such as Lakefront Overlay Zoning can help insure protection of these resources for the long term.

Access to the Quinebaug River is also a recurring theme in various plans and forums. Many believe that enhanced access can help to promote economic vitality for the community while showcasing this beautiful resource. The Master Plan (2011), Town of

Sturbridge Commercial Tourist District Improvement Plan (2014), and the Recreational Trails Master Plan (2012), all discuss the importance of better access to the river as a goal of the plan. Eventually, a portion of the Grand Trunk Trail will be built across the Riverlands and a connection from the Commercial Tourist District is a vital part of the revitalization of this corridor. This plan also calls for the creation of pocket parks and streetscape improvements including street trees and other plantings to help enhance this area of town. It is expected that once complete, the improvements in this District can serve as a model for similar efforts in other areas of the community. The Open Space Committee can work with the Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Trails Committee in its efforts to identify appropriate parcels that can provide access points to the river, parking areas and pocket parks within the District.

4) Habitats/Green Corridors

Several endangered and/or threatened species have been identified in Sturbridge and the large tracts of State land, most especially the wildlife management areas, create corridors for the movement of wildlife. These corridors are interrupted by natural barriers (such as the Quinebaug River in parts) as well as built barriers (the Mass Pike being an example), but do exist to some degree. These corridors need to be documented for different species and appropriate corridor preservation strategies developed.

The western boundary of the town is well protected at the current time with many parcels in various states of protection forming a nearly continuous corridor that is bisected in several areas by natural and man-made barriers. However, at least fifteen of these parcels are under private ownership and are only temporarily protected by their inclusion in the Chapter Land Program discussed in Section 5 of this Plan. As we have seen with the Barrett Farm on Doudy Road, this temporary protection can change even with a first right of refusal option.

Other substantial corridors exist at the southern, eastern and northeastern sections of town. The southern green corridor includes the Breakneck Brook Wildlife Management Area, Hull Forestland properties and several other Chapter Land parcels. There is a large swath of Core Habitat Land and Critical Natural Landscape designated lands in this corridor as well. The same holds true for the green corridor in the northeast section of town. Comprised of Wells State Park and lands held by the Opacum Land Trust, a substantial portion of the Critical Natural Landscape and Core Habitat areas in this section is permanently protected. However, there is still significant designated acreage that is not protected. The McKinstry Brook Wildlife Management Area on the eastern side of town contains a designated Core Habitat Area. Some of this land is under private ownership but is protected by conservation easements.

All of these green corridors warrant further review and investigation by the Open Space Committee to determine priority parcels worthy of permanent protection. The town will need to be proactive and vigilant in its efforts to protect critical habitat areas so that diversity of species can be protected.

5) Streetscapes

The character of the community of Sturbridge is important to its residents. It is equally important to its business community, particularly those businesses catering to tourists, which rely on the historic and scenic qualities of the Town. A principle trait of the Town's New England character, especially for tourists, is its streetscapes.

The Town's Public Shade Tree bylaw was adopted by Town Meeting in April 1997 and amended in April 1998. This bylaw recognizes the aesthetic, environmental, and economic value of street trees. It can be used to prevent the removal of healthy street trees and provides for penalties for unauthorized removal of trees. The Town's commitment to being a Tree City USA for the past thirty years, and its investment in preserving street and significant trees should be reinforced by additional plantings. While grant funds may continue to provide a supply of trees suitable for street tree planting purposes other funding sources (such as donations of money or memorial gifts, partnerships with garden clubs and other community organizations, or creation of a small town nursery to produce street trees cost-effectively) need to be identified so that the program can continue.

The Town also adopted a Scenic Road Bylaw at the spring 2004 Town Meeting in accordance with MGL Chapter 40, Section 15C. Currently, portions of thirty-one local roads have been designated as Scenic Roads through Town Meeting action. A comprehensive listing of these roads can be found on file with the Town Clerk.

The Commercial Tourist District Revitalization Study that covers about a one mile section of the western part of Route 20 running from Holland Road to just past Cedar Street has provided a blueprint for creating a more pedestrian friendly, aesthetically pleasing commercial district. Recommendations in this plan include updated design standards, streetscape and parking improvements, pocket parks and exploring possibilities for a public park/picnic area/boat ramp/parking in the vicinity of the mill dam with preference given to an area adjacent to Turner's Field. Connections to the Riverlands and Grand Trunk Trail from the Commercial Tourist District are also important components. The Open Space Committee can help identify priority parcels for pocket parks and river access. Funding will also be required to complete the significant streetscape improvements recommended by this plan.

B. Summary of Community's Needs

Multiple community outreach efforts were conducted in 2018 to collect input on the needs and demands for open space and recreation opportunities in the Town of Sturbridge. A town-wide survey was made available online and in hard copy at three public locations for three weeks, beginning March 9, 2018 and closing on April 2, 2018. Paper surveys were available for pick-up and drop-off at the Center Office Building, Senior Center, and the Public Library circulation desk. Each household in Sturbridge was mailed a postcard advising of the survey availability and of the Public Forum.

On April 11, 2018, the Open Space and Recreation Committee, Planning Department and the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) hosted a public forum to

gather local input on existing conditions of open space and recreational resources, as well as future direction and opportunities. The following is a summary of findings from the community survey results and public forum (See Appendix F for the entire survey results).

Sturbridge residents who responded to the survey consider their town to be historic, family-friendly, safe, unique, and a rural town. The top reasons respondents choose to live in Sturbridge include the town's accessibility to highways, the schools, small town character, low rates of crime/vandalism, open space, and friends/family who live in town. While open space is one of the top reasons that residents choose to live in town, only 10% of survey respondents Strongly Agree that the Town of Sturbridge is adequately served by current open space and recreational facilities (i.e. Town Common, hiking trails, athletic fields, playgrounds, or indoor/outdoor swimming). This is compared to 49% of survey respondents who do not feel that the town is adequately served by current open space and recreational facilities.

The survey showed that residents view open space preservation as a priority in Sturbridge. A majority (51%) of survey respondents rated the importance or need to preserve open space and natural areas in town as Very Important. Residents also have great concern with pollution, as challenges highlighted in the public forum included septic pollution and wastewater treatment, stormwater runoff (especially into lakes), and groundwater protection. Approximately 72% of survey respondents are in favor of utilizing Town funding to increase open space to protect Town water resources, including groundwater protection. In order to maintain the town's character, there should be enforcements in place such as Low Impact Development Standards, Lakefront Overlay Zoning and Neighborhood Architectural Conservation Districts which can ensure that open space is preserved and protect the rural charm of the community.

The most popular recreation area frequented by Sturbridge residents *almost daily* is the Burgess School Playground and Fields (11% of respondents frequent almost daily). Recreation areas frequented *weekly* by survey respondents are Burgess School Playground and Fields (17%), Old Sturbridge Village (10%), and Westville Recreation Area (10%). Recreation destinations used *monthly* according to survey respondents include Old Sturbridge Village (17%), Burgess School Playground and Fields (14%), Westville Recreation Area (14%), and Town Common (12%). Areas that are used *ten or fewer times per year* include Town Common (69%), Westville Recreation Area (37%), Old Sturbridge Village (63%), and Wells State Park (43%). Based on these responses, the Burgess School Playground and Fields is a highly popular recreation destination in town and playgrounds are in high demand by locals. Multiple comments throughout the survey and in the public forum highlighted the need for playgrounds that are not associated with the elementary school and are available for public use during school hours.

The top five recreational facilities in town that were rated as most needed are as follows, in order of importance: sidewalks and walking trails (39%); public access to water bodies for swimming, boating or fishing (33%); soccer fields (32%); conservation areas (32%); and bike trails/paths (26%). Throughout the survey comments, respondents expressed a demand for recreational facilities that are largely inclusive to all age groups and abilities, as well as increased opportunities for more passive recreation, particularly a dog park.

Figure 7-1 shows the recreational activities that were rated on their need in town and whether residents would be willing to pay more taxes in order for the Town to provide them. The top activities that residents would be willing to pay more taxes for include team playing fields (48%), bike trails (42%), walking/running trails (41%), indoor sports recreation facilities (37%), outdoor swimming (35%), and hiking trails (34%). In general, residents voted that activities the town *does not need* more of include hunting areas, 4-wheeling/ATV areas, snowmobile trails, horseback riding trails, and tennis courts.

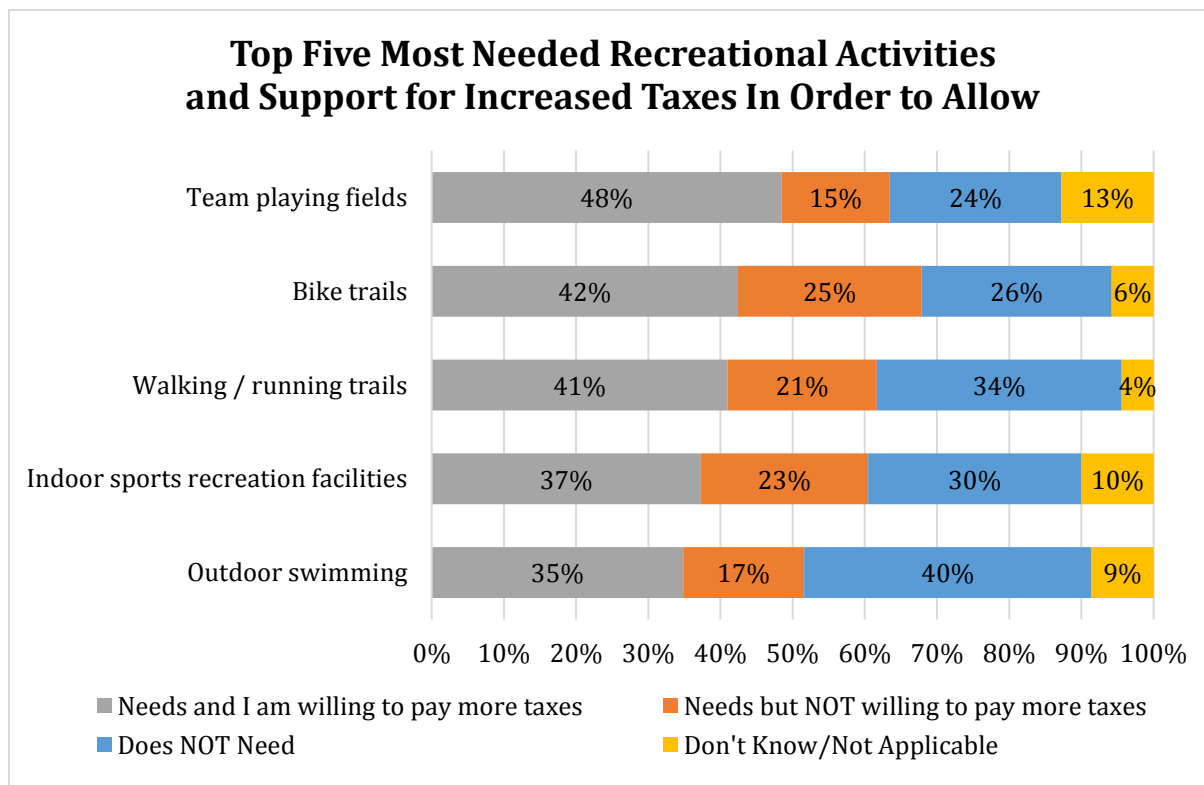


Figure 7-1: Top Five Most Needed Recreational Activities and Support for Increased Taxes In Order to Allow. Responses from the Open Space and Recreation Survey.

Comments in the survey and public forum noted the lack of accessible sidewalks and bike paths, which limits mobility and threatens safety for many town residents and visitors. Of the existing sidewalks, trails, and paths, there is a general consensus that maintenance of these areas is minimal which limits accessibility for users. Approximately 38% of residents reported that they were overall satisfied with the general conditions of the Town's parks and recreational spaces and facilities, compared to 20% who were not satisfied and 45% who felt neutral. When asked whether they would support the use of town funds to increase general maintenance of existing grounds, buildings, and landscape, 67% of survey respondents reported they would favor the use of town funding for increased maintenance compared to 8% who reported little to no support. Additionally, 66% supported the use of town funds to improve and/or expand sidewalks in Town compared to 15% who reported little to no support.

The Town of Sturbridge recognizes the need to provide open space and recreational opportunities to all regardless of age or ability. The federal Americans with Disabilities

Act (ADA) of 1991 states that public facilities, including town lands, should meet federal guidelines for accessibility for handicapped persons and the town is taking steps to insure that this requirement is met. As reflected by the information provided in the Appendix, the town is making steady progress in making its open spaces and recreational areas accessible. Many parking areas have been updated since the last Open Space Plan to include accessible parking spaces, ABA Trails and Universal Trails. The Town should ensure that all public recreational facilities are accessible to those who have mobility limitations and should seek to provide additional passive recreation facilities responsive to the specific needs of the elderly and people with disabilities.

As shown in the age distribution data of Section 3 (Table 3-4), the Town of Sturbridge has a higher rate of residents over the age of 40 and lower rate of residents in the 20-39 age bracket, as compared to the County and the State. With an aging population in town, there is a demand for open space and recreational opportunities for older adults. With this in mind, staff felt it was important to include a survey question specifically asking adults over the age of 50 to indicate their support for additional recreational activities to fit their needs.

The Town does provide a wide variety of recreational and conservation programs for residents of all ages. Programs include a summer recreation program at the Cedar Lake facility, girl's softball, adult summer tennis and basketball leagues to name a few. The Conservation Commission has hosted Adopt-A-Trail events and Winter Scavenger Hunts on the trails. The Friends of Sturbridge Trails (FROST) hosts walks on the trails including a First Night Walk on an annual basis. These events are always well attended by young families. The relatively stable youth population and the expansion of recreation and conservation programs to serve this segment of our population should continue to serve the needs of the community over the coming plan period.

Table 7-1 on the following page shows which activities older adults reported in favor of, with walking groups (57.1%), health and wellness programs (20.9%), and fitness classes (19.2%) as the top three desired activities. While substantial trail networks provide passive recreational opportunities for all, there is a need for increased recreational opportunities for senior residents and ensuring these activities are ADA compliant and accessible. Other suggestions from older residents noted in the survey comments include group sewing/quilting/knitting, outdoor swimming, and development of a dog park.

Table 7-1: *If you are a resident over the age of 50, what types of recreational activities would you like to see more easily available in town? (2018 Open Space Survey)*

Answer Options	Responses	
Walking groups	57.1%	38
Health and wellness programs (cooking classes, healthy aging resources)	20.9%	35
Yoga, Tai-Chi, or other fitness classes	19.2%	32
Community gardening	17.6%	30
Games such as bocce, pickleball, horseshoes, or badminton	16.5%	29
Bird watching, photography, or appreciating nature	15.9%	28
Swimming or bicycling	15.4%	27
Music programs	14.8%	26
Seasonal activities such as skiing or snowshoeing	14.3%	24
Book clubs	13.2%	22
Social activities such as pot-luck dinners	12.1%	22
Arts and crafts	12.1%	19
Spiritual activities such as meditation	10.4%	17
Boating or fishing	9.3%	16
Sports such as softball, tennis, or golf	8.8%	15
Dance classes	8.2%	10
Board games, bingo	5.5%	9
Memory Cafes	5%	6

In hindsight, we are not certain that many respondents would have known what a Memory Café was, since it is a newer concept. However, in April 2018, the Sturbridge Senior Center applied for the Dementia and Age-Friendly Capacity Building Grants from the Massachusetts Councils on Aging (COA) to develop a memory café and conduct a community-wide dementia friendly education effort. A memory café is a gathering place for individuals with forgetfulness or other changes in their thinking and for their caregivers, family, and friends. Each café is structured differently and fits the needs of the community members. Memory cafés meet at a variety of places including coffee shops, museums, or community organizations.

The staff and volunteers at the Sturbridge Senior Center requested funding to develop and open “A Caring Place” Café within the Town’s existing Senior Center. A Caring Place Café is a place for loved ones to gather and cultivate a sense of community, offering a respite from their troubles to spend time making impactful memories with fun activities. The Memory Café will provide a safe space for community members with dementia, Alzheimer’s and all other memory-related conditions to heighten their quality and enjoyment of life and

mental wellness. It was created with the mission of bringing more awareness and understanding for those living with these conditions. A Caring Place Café will provide guests and their loved ones a judgment-free atmosphere, where they can comfortably come together with other families to socialize, explore new ideas and activities, or share resources.

The Memory Café is a welcoming, inclusive, and comfortable space for guests and their caregivers, accommodating those with wheelchairs and anyone regardless of diagnosis. Participants will enjoy opportunities to make arts and crafts, play musical instruments, as well as participate in singing, dancing, interactive events, and games. There will also be opportunities to participate in yoga, stretching, and other healthy physical activities, all free of charge. Such opportunities make long-lasting and moving impacts on people on an individual level, but also help to create a ripple effect by building community through interactive, stimulating, and participatory activities.

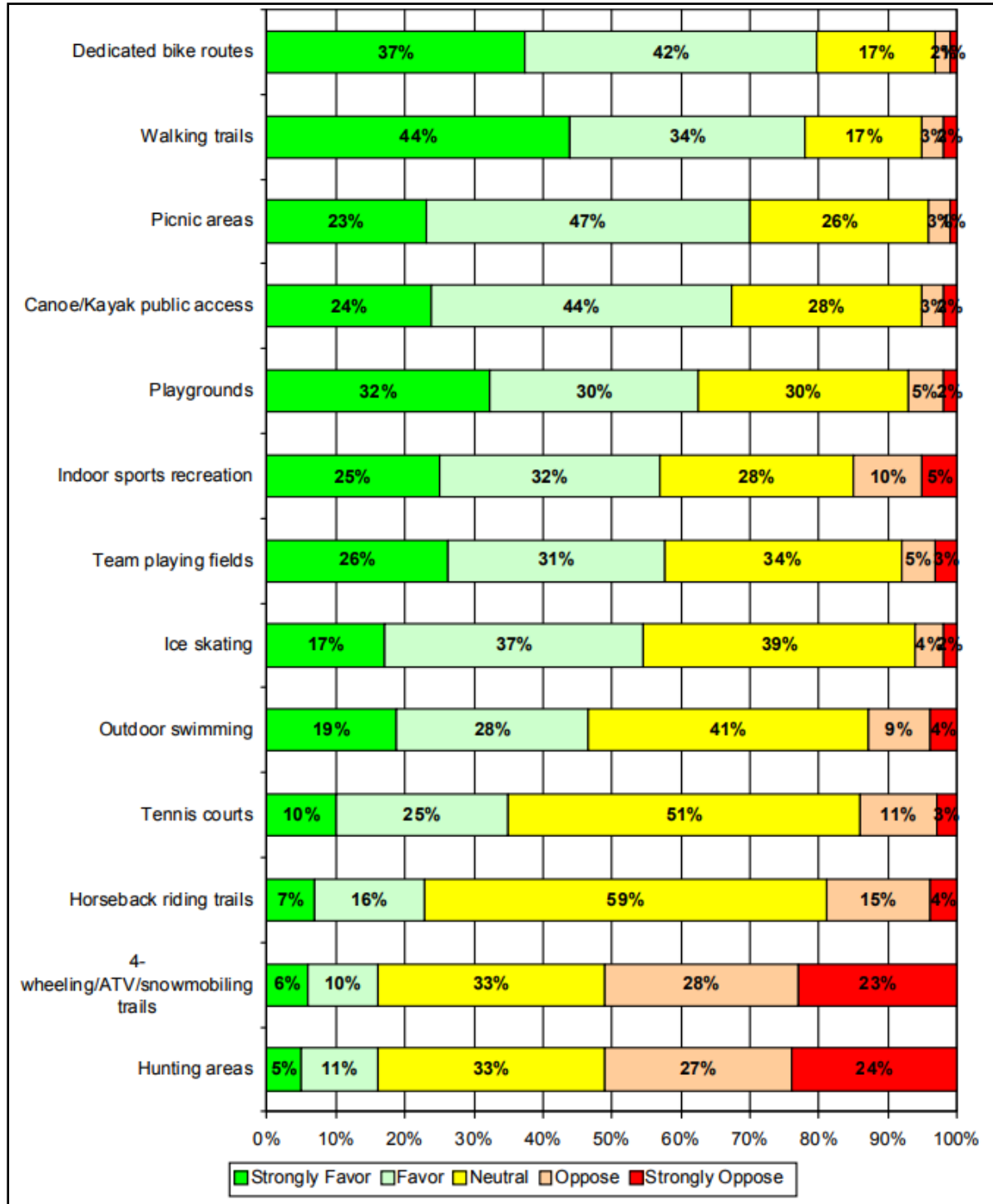
In 2010, the Town of Sturbridge completed a Master Plan and utilized a survey to collect public input on the Town's open space, recreation, transportation, town services, and development, in which 930 residents submitted responses. The results of the Master Plan community survey emphasize the overarching themes that are evident in the previously discussed 2018 Open Space and Recreation public forum and community survey. Firstly, it is unmistakable that Sturbridge residents are highly concerned with the protection of water quality and resources, as this was the most popular answer when asked in the Master Plan survey why the Town should manage, acquire, and/or preserve open space. The subsequent two most popular answers were "preserve forests and woodlands" then "passive recreation". In the Master Plan survey, 70% of residents responded that they would like to see more open space and recreation areas in their neighborhood or area of town. Since the time of this survey, it would appear that this mode of thought has not changed drastically among residents, as only 33% of 2018 OSRP survey respondents said that they agree or strongly agree the Town is adequately served by current open space and recreational facilities. Thus, the desire for more open space and recreation opportunities prevails in Sturbridge.

The results of a question from the 2010 Master Plan survey, displayed in Figure 7-2 below, are consistent with the results of the 2018 OSRP about which recreational facilities and activities the Town should or should not provide more of. In the 2010 survey, the top responses of facilities desired by residents consist of walking trails, dedicated bike routes, and playgrounds while the top facilities that residents felt the town does not need more of include hunting areas and 4-wheeling/ATV/snowmobiling trails. Town residents continue to desire opportunities for passive recreation in Sturbridge.

The need for increased and better maintained walking/running trails and bike routes in the Town is a major theme from the Master Plan Survey. 79% of respondents favored or strongly favored dedicated bike routes provided by the Town while 78% also were in favor of more walking trails (Figure 7-2). This survey highlighted that there are numerous streets and intersections that are considered unsafe in town by locals, particularly the intersection of Route 20 and New Boston Road. Passive recreation such as walking or biking is one of the most accessible forms of exercise and pastime, so improving sidewalks, trails, and bike paths will not only enhance safety but improve mobility and community wellbeing, as well. Sidewalks and

dedicated bike routes were the top two answers when respondents were prompted about which alternative types of transportation the Town should investigate or encourage participation in, with over 80% favorability for both options.

Figure 7-2– *Do you favor or oppose the Town of Sturbridge providing more of the following?*
(Town of Sturbridge Master Plan, 2010)



In 2017, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Outdoors Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) was updated to reflect the ongoing recreational demands and needs of Massachusetts residents. An online survey taken by 780 respondents mirrored many of the demands that Sturbridge residents voiced at the public forum and in the survey. The SCORP online survey results showed that Massachusetts residents most frequently participate in water-based recreation and trail-based recreation, and would like to see additional funding primarily for trails, playgrounds, and water such as swimming pools or canoe/kayak access. This state data shows that demands for increases and improvements to recreational areas such as trails and water-based activities is not only an issue in Sturbridge, but is also a theme across the Commonwealth.

C. Management Needs, Potential Change of Use

1) Continue the Work of the Town's Open Space Committee

The Town should continue to support the endeavors of the Open Space Committee, which serves to advise, advocate, and coordinate open space issues in Sturbridge. The Committee's first role is to advocate for open space and build consensus around land conservation issues. As an ongoing, standing group, the Committee is able to react in a timely fashion when necessary and provides a consistent, vigilant view of land conservation activities. It is the Open Space Committee who is responsible for the timely updating of this document. Having a State-approved Open Space & Recreation Plan maintains the Town's eligibility for State grants regarding recreation and open space acquisition.

The committee's various charges include:

- Maintain the Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- Report annually to the Town Meeting and Selectmen assessing progress on action plan.
- Evaluate all properties being considered for open space acquisition, including Chapter 61/61A/61B options offered to the Town (i.e., right of first refusal).
- Implement some of the action plan items, as appropriate.
- Serve as the Town's advocate for open space and open space issues.
- Act as liaison with State, regional, and federal agencies and non-profits on open space preservation and connection, maintain communications with open space advocates in abutting communities.
- Work with Betterment Committee and Community Preservation Committee when appropriate to acquire land and develop recreational facilities.

2) Prioritization for open space acquisition

Communities acquiring land for open space, recreation, and conservation purposes frequently attempt to devise criteria to compare or prioritize land for acquisition. These systems often list locations of threatened or endangered plant or animal species as among the highest priority land to buy or protect. Water supply protection land and agricultural land, particularly productive land also ranks high. Preserving open land in more densely

settled areas is another priority. Land that connects existing open space areas or creates buffers between sensitive natural resources ranks high as well.

It is proposed that land for acquisition should accomplish one of the following objectives: protect present or future water supplies or sensitive natural resource areas; provide public access to natural resources; create connections between existing open space parcels; or provide recreational facilities or amenities, particularly in settled areas. Land that achieves more than one of these objectives would be highly ranked. The Open Space Committee will continue to refine its system of prioritizing land for acquisition or acceptance by the Town.

3) Recreation Committee Long-Range Capital Plan

Since 2007, the Recreation Committee has expended a great deal of effort working on a Field Study and plans and permitting for new multi-user fields for the Town. Despite not being approved at Town Meeting several years ago, as of this plan update the Committee is once again holding public information sessions to explain the field proposal in the hopes that there will be enough support at the Annual Town Meeting to be held on June 4, 2018 to fund this project.

Regarding the future of recreation opportunities, the Town needs to improve access to water bodies for water-based recreation such as boating, fishing, and swimming as well as evaluate how to provide for additional playing fields for team sports if the large multi-use field plan once again fails at Town Meeting. Passive and active recreational opportunities for all Sturbridge residents should be expanded upon and improved while meeting ADA/ABA compliance. Additionally, to meet this goal, the Town must work to create an improved network of multi-use trails, sidewalks, and bike lanes between neighborhoods, conservation and recreation lands, and commercial areas.

4) Overall Management Needs

The Town of Sturbridge is fortunate that it generally does not have a lack of volunteers to assist with projects and to serve on Boards and Committees. Volunteerism is very strong throughout the Town. In the future, volunteers of all ages should be nurtured in order to increase volunteer numbers and heighten the sense of community involvement around Town projects. Volunteers are a critical component of open space and recreation efforts but since volunteerism generally lacks consistency, the Town should not be fully dependent on volunteers. Rather, there needs to be a shared effort between Town staff and community members. In order to improve the quality of open space and recreation in Sturbridge, Town staff will need to work cooperatively and strategically with boards, committees, and the local community members.

Improved communication and coordination between Town departments and private non-profit groups involved with the open space and recreation needs of the community has improved the effectiveness of the services provided and management of facilities. However, the growth and development of Sturbridge and the increasing demand on our natural resources and increasing demand for additional recreational opportunities calls for additional management. Mutual discussions and coordination of activities between the

many organizations and departments will serve to develop management strategies that both protect the town's open spaces and meet the recreational needs of the community.

The Department of Public Works is responsible for the maintenance and care of municipal properties including parks, recreation areas and some open space properties. One of the major issues faced by the DPW is maintaining an open space and recreation system that is continually growing and changing. The same holds true for the Recreation Department which operates with a part time Director and seasonal staff. A robust group of volunteers performs seasonal trail maintenance and clean up on other open space areas. The town must be aware that as demand for manicured open space areas such as parks and boat ramps, and the demand for recreation opportunities increases, staffing and volunteer needs may have to be evaluated.

In recent years, an effort has been made to improve the methods of providing information to the public about open space resources in Sturbridge and communicating with the public on open space projects and initiatives. The Town maintains a recently improved website with many great features and easy navigation which provides an opportunity for locals and visitors to access information on open space and recreation in Sturbridge. This website should be used as a central location for Town Hall staff to post helpful information, maps, and trails for town properties. A Guide to Trails Open Spaces of Sturbridge was created in 2017 and is currently posted to the website for public view, in addition to hard copies available in the Town Hall at no charge. Other resources such as a lakes protection brochure, trail maps, and wetlands regulations are easily available on the town website. Public outreach will continue to be a significant component of ensuring open space lands and recreational opportunities are widely accessible.

Continuing the education of residents and others about the importance of open space preservation was also identified during public forum discussions as a priority. The survey results found that a majority (64%) of respondents receive their information about open spaces, recreational opportunities and events in town primarily through word of mouth (i.e. family, friends, neighbors, etc.) compared to Facebook (50%), local newspapers (47%), the Town's website (37%), and flyers/signs posted around town (35%). To make progress towards public education and information sharing, staff should continue utilizing the newly designed Town website along with social media, newspapers, flyers, and tabling at events to promote conservations efforts, recreational resources, and volunteer opportunities. Sturbridge is a highly involved community, therefore it is important that opportunities for locals to participate in open space conservation and maintenance are shared on a regular basis.

With additional recreation fields and activities to coordinate, new parks and fields to maintain, and an aggressive open space acquisition program in place, the management needs related to Open Space and Recreation will need to be re-evaluated by the community and a long term plan including future staffing needs should be developed. This will ensure that the valuable resources we have worked so hard to acquire and/or develop over the years are maintained and used in an appropriate manner.