

1. Vision and Goals

Community Vision

Sturbridge is a community that cherishes its small town character, its vast open spaces, and the natural resources that provide numerous cultural and recreational opportunities. This rural character is the Town's core value as expressed by the many scenic vistas, the places where people gather, the open spaces, and the historical and cultural assets that residents and visitors hold dear. The Town is further defined by the design of its development and transportation system. Sturbridge believes that its identity and sense of place is what attracts people who would like to live, work, shop and play in the community. This Master Plan sets the course for the Town to protect the living spaces of its residents as well as important natural, historic, and cultural areas; create new economic opportunities for business; and enhance the design of the built environment. Through its actions thus far and ongoing implementation of the goals of the 2010 Master Plan, the Town will continue to thrive and build further upon these assets.

Land Use and Community Design Goals

- ▶ Encourage the balance between residential, commercial and industrial development to ensure the Town continues to prosper while protecting the historic, environmental and rural character of the community.
- ▶ Improve the architectural quality and streetscape of Main Street (Routes 20 and 131) business areas to make them more attractive to businesses, residents, visitors and tourists.
- ▶ Promote growth that is environmentally sustainable and capable of withstanding economic downturns.
- ▶ Identify design values the Town considers important in preserving the historic character of its corridors.

Housing Goals

- ▶ Provide high-quality affordable housing in attractive neighborhoods through development of appropriate zoning bylaws, regulations and programs designed to encourage a variety of housing types.
- ▶ Develop a plan designed to guide the Town toward meeting the 10% goal for housing affordability under Chapter 40B.

- ▶ Provide opportunities for existing low and moderate income Sturbridge residents to make improvements and repairs to their existing homes, while at the same time, increasing the affordable housing stock in the community.
- ▶ Ensure that housing choices are available to meet the needs of current and future generations Sturbridge.

Economic Development Goals

- ▶ Foster economic sustainability via focused and integrated support of the existing business base while simultaneously encouraging longer-term economic diversification (such that Sturbridge is not so heavily dependent on tourism/hospitality).
- ▶ Take a more pro-active approach to marketing the town's assets in order to promote additional business growth.
- ▶ Promote economic development from a regional perspective.
- ▶ Maximize the opportunities to encourage redevelopment along the Route 20 and Route 131 corridors and development within the Special Use District.
- ▶ Create a Brand Promise/Identity for Sturbridge that presents a distinctive and positive image of the town.

Natural, Historic and Cultural Resources Goals

- ▶ Provide better public access to water resources for passive recreation.
- ▶ Preserve water resources through stormwater management and lakefront zoning protection.
- ▶ Integrate natural, historic and archaeological resource identification, documentation, and evaluation into local planning.
- ▶ Develop and strengthen local planning and protection measures for natural and historic resources.
- ▶ Incorporate specific historic preservation objectives in community revitalization and economic development efforts.
- ▶ Create and enhance cultural opportunities in Sturbridge.

Open Space and Recreation Goals

- ▶ Preserve the small town New England character of Sturbridge.
- ▶ Educate residents and others about the importance of open space preservation for passive recreation, habitat protection and water supply protection.
- ▶ Increase the inventory of open space within the Town by fee, conservation restriction, donation or easement in perpetuity. Give emphasis to these parcels that create green corridors, protect our water supplies and natural, cultural and historic resources, and provide access to our recreational resources.

- ▶ Expand outdoor recreational opportunities, both passive and active for all Sturbridge residents regardless of age or ability.
- ▶ Encourage the appropriate use of public lands and recreational resources as a tool to promote sustainable tourism and enhance economic development within the community.
- ▶ Protect and enhance drinking water supplies.
- ▶ Promote a cooperative and regional approach to open space and resource protection.

Transportation Goals

- ▶ Develop an identity and sense of arrival into Sturbridge through the creation of distinct gateways and streetscaping, especially given the number of tourists coming to the area; prioritize Route 20 through the CTD.
- ▶ Balance the need to facilitate traffic flow with desires to make the roadways more walkable and bikeable and calm vehicle traffic speeds where appropriate (especially through the Commercial Tourist District along Route 20).
- ▶ Eliminate sign clutter and improve wayfinding to the key destinations.
- ▶ Make public transportation more available and increase opportunities for residents to walk and bicycle safely around Sturbridge.
- ▶ Develop access management and traffic impact study guidelines.
- ▶ Establish a collaborative working relationship with MassDOT.
- ▶ Develop a transportation plan that emphasizes safety and compliance with ADA requirements for sidewalks, crosswalks, and intersections.

Public Services and Facilities Goals

- ▶ Establish efficiency and cost-effectiveness as a guiding principle for delivery of public services.
- ▶ Ensure that the Town can meet its infrastructure and service needs as growth and demand increases.
- ▶ Given the often conflicting demands, establish priorities for building and facility upgrades and replacement.
- ▶ Work to ensure that municipal staffing levels are adequate as the Town grows and service demands increase.
- ▶ Lead by example in municipal facilities and operations, fostering partnerships, communication, and sustainability principles through its investments and initiatives.

Energy and Sustainability Goals

- ▶ Work toward becoming a Green Community by meeting state criteria for the designation.
- ▶ Promote sustainability in municipal and public operations, starting with a Sustainability Task Force that can advise and support sustainability efforts by Town departments.
- ▶ Encourage energy efficiency, conservation, and sustainability in Sturbridge to reduce energy consumption and cost.
- ▶ Establish best management practices and economically viable technologies in future construction, renovation, and maintenance of public buildings and facilities.
- ▶ Reach out to the community as a whole to inform and educate residents and businesses regarding energy conservation, recycling and sustainability principles.

Survey and Public Participation

In April 2010, the University of New Hampshire Survey Center conducted a survey for the Sturbridge Master Plan effort. Residents were asked about their attitudes and opinions of the community, town services, open spaces, development, and transportation issues. Surveys were sent to 3,149 randomly selected household members and 930 Sturbridge residents responded. The resultant response rate of 30 percent is very respectable for a survey of this type. The following is a summary of the key findings from the survey and more details can be found in Appendix 1.

- ▶ When asked why they moved to Sturbridge, half of Sturbridge residents said they moved because of the quality of life, followed by the rural town character and location as the major reasons.
- ▶ Many of the respondents ranked public services as excellent, ambulance/paramedic services ranking highest.
- ▶ When asked to indicate the three most important reasons for the town to manage, acquire and/or preserve open space, more than half of Sturbridge residents said “to protect water quality and resources,” followed by “preserve forests and woodlands”, and “passive recreation” (44%).
- ▶ Eight in ten Sturbridge residents would like the Town to provide more dedicated bike routes, followed by walking trails, picnic areas, and canoe/kayak public access.
- ▶ Most Sturbridge residents favor a movie theatre, followed by more health care services, art galleries, boutiques, and small retail shops.
- ▶ Along Route 15, Sturbridge residents favor a movie theatre, followed by recreational facilities, and small scale retail or restaurants.
- ▶ Town residents believe the town should investigate and or encourage participation in alternative types of transportation such as sidewalks, dedicated bike routes, and transit. Another set of questions asked respondents to identify intersections that are considered unsafe and congested. See Appendix 1 for the detailed responses to these questions.

The survey was only one part of the overall public participation effort. Additionally, there were two town-wide public forums—one at the early stages of the planning process and one toward the end.

On Saturday, November 21, 2009, the Town of Sturbridge convened a public forum to discuss the 2010 Master Plan Update project. Approximately 80 people attended the forum, which was held at Old Sturbridge Village from 8:30 AM until 12 noon. The forum was attended by Jean Bubon, AICP, Town Planner; Sandra Gibson-Quigley, Chair of the Master Plan Steering Committee; members of the Master Plan Steering Committee; and representatives from the VHB and RKG consulting team (Ralph Willmer, FAICP; Juli Beth Hinds, AICP; Joe Wanat, P.E., PTOE; and Mike Casino).

After a presentation on Sturbridge land use and demographic data, a Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT) analysis was conducted. Participants were asked to describe aspects of living, working, shopping and playing in Sturbridge that was both positive and negative. After the lists were generated, they were given four “voting dots” which were to be placed next to those items that the audience thought was most important issues to address in the master planning process. The results of this analysis can be found in the Appendix 2 to this Plan.

The second forum was held on Thursday, November 18, 2010 from 6:30 pm–9:00 PM at Paige Hall at the Publick House. This forum was attended by approximately 75 people. The presentation focused on the key findings from the research and data gathering phase of the project for each plan element. The major recommendations were summarized, followed by discussion and comments from the audience.

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Public Forum – November 21, 2009

