

# Stow Town Center Phase II

## Final Report

Prepared for: The Town of Stow  
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Center for Economic Development

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Date: April 28, 2015



## Acknowledgements

This project could not have been conducted without the continual guidance and support from the Stow Planning Department staff, Karen Kelleher and Jesse Steadman. We send our deepest gratitude to the members of the various Stow departments, boards, trusts, and committees who worked with us along the way including: Detective Michael Sallese of the Police Department, Kathy Sferra of the Conservation Commission, Laura Greenough of the Recreation Commission, Mike Kopczynski and Laura Spear of the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, Dick Perkins, Don Rising, Susan Crane of the Stow Conservation Trust, and Bob Wilber, Chris Rodstrom, Bill Maxfield of the Stow Open Space Committee, Dot Spaulding, Bill Byron, Rosemary Bawn, and Marilyn Zaborski of the Historic Commission, Melissa Fournier, Library Director, and Craig Martin, Building Commissioner.

A special thanks to Roy Miller and Liz Moseley of the First Parish Church and Bob Mong of the Union Church for their input on the Town Center. Furthermore, we are indebted to the 25 Stow residents who participated in the Town Center Forum. It was a pleasure working with such an involved and passionate group of citizens. Last but not least, we would like to thank our Professor John Mullin for his charisma, boundless energy, and wealth of knowledge. Your encouragement and direction were pivotal in the success of this project.

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## Executive Summary

In the Fall of 2014, the Center for Economic Development (CED) at the University of Massachusetts conducted a preliminary study of the Town Center and an in depth analysis of the newly Town owned 323 Great Road parcel located on Minister's Pond in the Town Center. Phase II of the Town Center Study broadened CED's approach to examine a variety of issues facing the Town Center. After providing the introduction, context, and purpose of the report, Section 2 describes the existing conditions of the Town Center. Section 3 contains a review of Town Documents, and Section 4 discusses the results of a Storage Needs Survey conducted during Phase I of the study.

After all of the foundation research, CED identified nine areas for opportunity within the Town Center in Section 5. These areas include the Fire Station, Common Road, the future of the Library, the Crescent Street Highway Building, Linkages and Connections, Historic Preservation, Water Supply, Sustaining the Churches, and Traffic and Transportation. CED then formulated various proposals and recommendations for each area based on the information gathered throughout the Town Center Study. Section 6 completes the report with conclusions and recommendations for the Town Center.

## Recommendations

CED recommends the Town conduct a neighborhood needs survey to further gain community input. The survey should question what specific uses the community feels are best suited for the Fire Station. Additionally, Town residents should identify any Historic Resources that they feel should be preserved in the Town Center.

CED recommends converting the Fire Station into a recreation center designed for Hale Middle School students needing a place to relax, study, and play after school. The Library and Recreation Commission should collaborate to provide the appropriate services to the right demographic. This should be done after a structural evaluation is conducted for the building. The remainder of the property should be converted into parking for the Town Center and Library.

It is CED's position that regulating the entrance and exit of Common Road from Great Road is necessary. CED recommends stubbing Common Road at Great Road to create a cul-de-sac so vehicles can turn around and exit on Library Hill Road. A full traffic analysis of main

intersection light. There are three main areas where sidewalks appear to be most needed. Along Great Road by the Common, along Library Hill Road, and a section on the north side of Crescent Street from the cemetery to Pilot Grove. Since there are no places where sidewalks are on both sides of the street, crosswalks are needed in several places to safely connect pedestrians with the existing sidewalk infrastructure. There are also several trail opportunities, especially if the Minister's Pond Park becomes a reality at 323 Great Road.

Since the Library is in the process of searching for opportunities and funding for its renovations, the Town should collaborate with the Library in finding resources to maintain the structure and properly preserve it. Additionally, improving the connections between all of these facilities, which are in close proximity to each other, would boost the Town Center and its use.

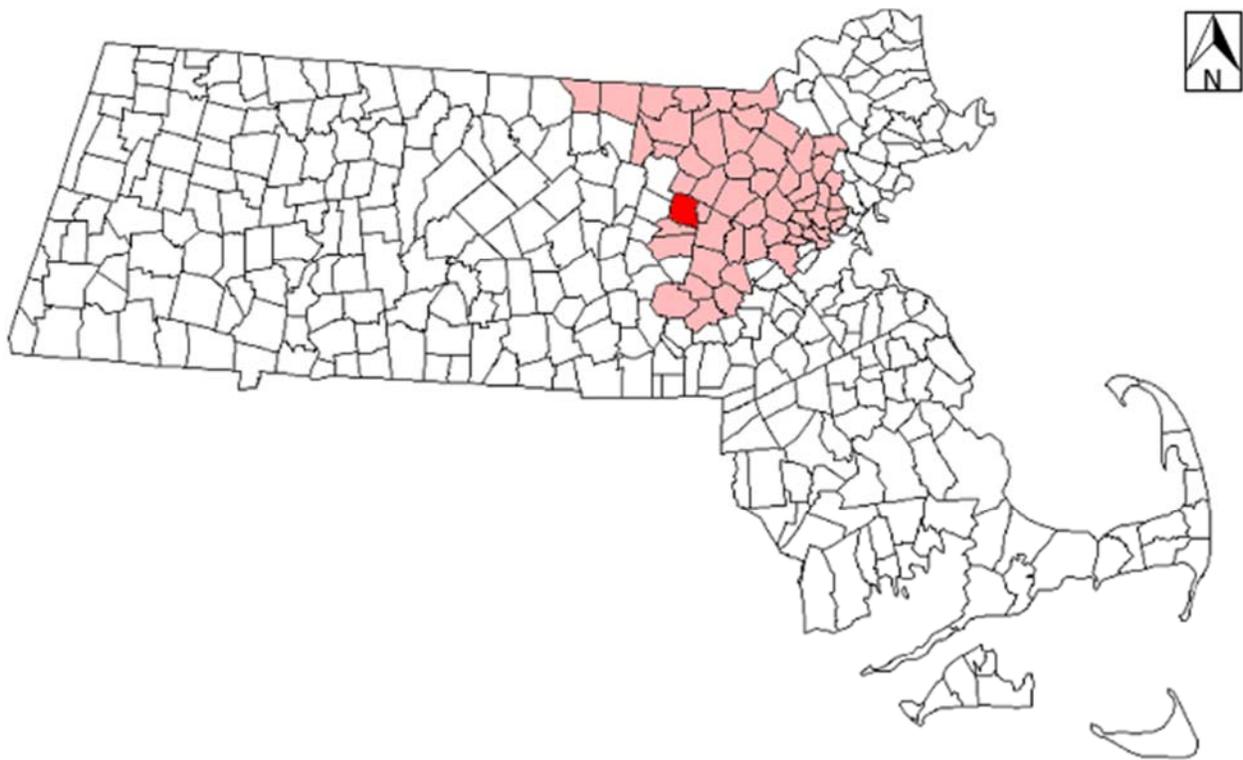
It is CED's position that the highest and best use of the Crescent Street Highway Building in the near future is to keep it as a storage facility. The building does not have great potential for retrofitting for a different use and the Town still has storage needs. Since this structure is slightly further from the main Town Center intersection, it is more appropriate for storage than the Fire Station.

In terms of historic preservation, Stow has a historic Town Center, with many historic structures and action should be taken to provide some protection for these properties, which give Stow its colonial character. CED recommends moving forward with a National Register District, which will not restrict property owners unless they receive federal grants or tax credits. Additionally, Stow should designate the Town Center as a Local Historic District and/or Neighborhood Conservation District, and craft its own set of restrictions designed by the Historic Commission with input from the community.

Lastly, the Town should investigate the possibility of a water supply at the 323 Great Road property and Minister's Pond and determine how it could be an asset to the Town Center. Using the water supply for fire protection would provide a great benefit and security to the churches and other historic structures in Town. Furthermore, the Town should continue to collaborate with the churches to support them in their future.

## Section 1: Introduction, Context, and Purpose

The Town of Stow is a small, rural, and prosperous community located approximately 21 miles west of Boston in Middlesex County. As of 2013, Stow’s population was 6,737 with a median household income of \$115,714, more than double that of the state of Massachusetts. The Town is majority Caucasian (93.2%) with a small Asian (2.9%) and Latino population (2.9%). According to Stow’s Master Plan Update in 2010, residents most valued Stow’s “sense of community consistent with its rural character.” The Town has a large quantity of open spaces, farms, orchards, and four golf courses and three village centers that help define it as a historical New England town. Stow has a beautiful history and is in the process of growth and changing needs, creating the necessity for this planning study.



*Figure 1 Stow, Massachusetts Location Map*

The Town of Stow is interested in examining the future use of a set of parcels along Great Road from the westerly border of the Center School to the easterly edge of Minister’s Pond. On the north side of Great Road, the parcels include the Center School, the Hale Middle School, the Fire Station, the Town Library, and the Police Station. Beyond these municipal uses, there are two

institutional uses: The First Parish Church and the Union Church. Mixed among these uses are many residential structures, several commercial properties, developable land and extensive wetlands. The southerly side of the project includes Russell’s Convenience Store (390 Great Road) and the Town Hall parcel on the western end, and moves eastwardly ending with the parcel across from the Police Station. The project extends along Crescent Street to the east and north of Minister’s Pond, and includes properties on the north side of Crescent Street, west of West Acton Road.

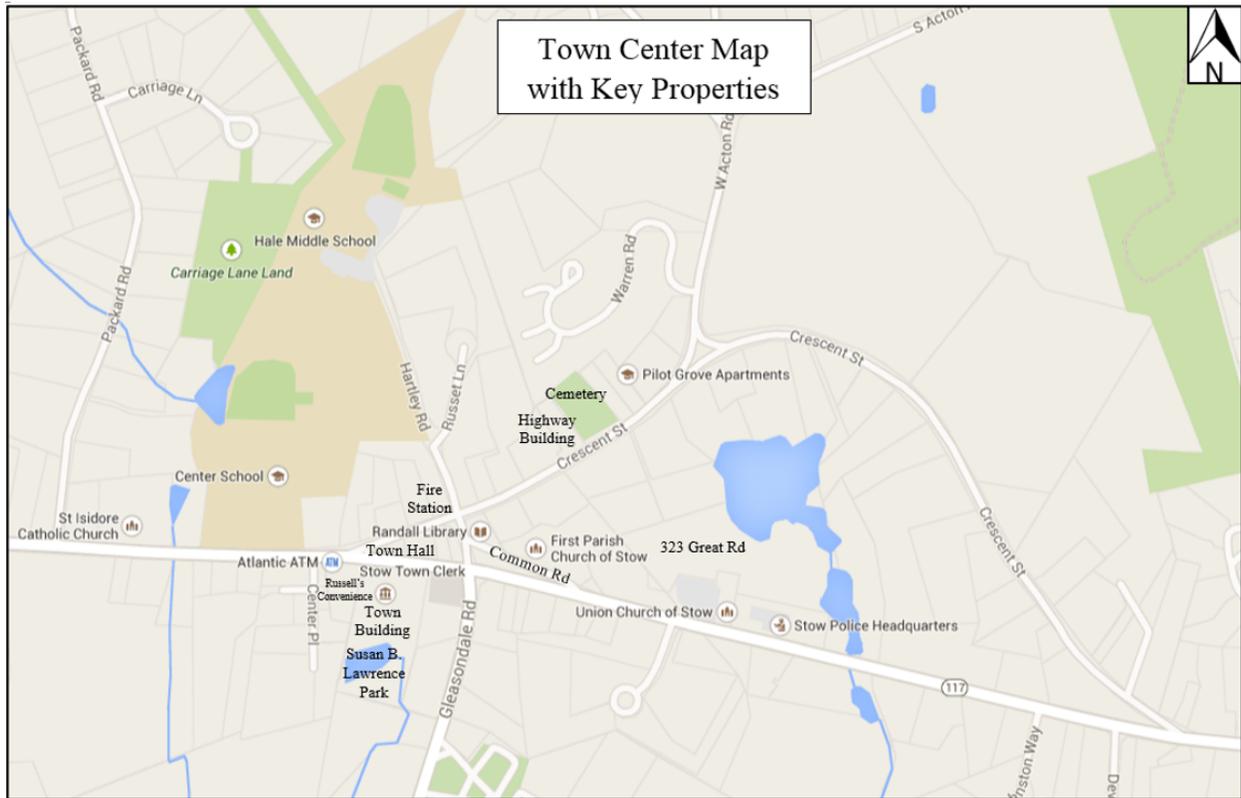


Figure 2 Map of Town Center with Key Properties Labeled.

In the Fall of 2014, the University of Massachusetts Center for Economic Development (UMass CED) assisted the Town of Stow on a Town Center Study that included developing the existing conditions of the Town Center, hosting a community charrette, meetings with various stakeholders, and evaluation of five proposals for the 323 Great Road parcel. The Phase I report consisted of the existing conditions, evaluation the 323 Great Road proposals and recommendations to each of the proposing boards as to how to strengthen their proposals for a

second round of more detailed proposals to the Town. Phase II of this study examines the future uses of the larger Town Center area described above and depicted in Figures 2 and 3 below.

The key issues facing the Town include the following.

1. What should be the future of the Fire Station lot?
2. What should be the future of the town Library building?
3. What should be the future of the Crescent Street Highway lot?
4. Are there opportunities to increase Stow's affordable housing stock in the area?
5. Are there opportunities to improve the Susan Lawrence Park area (behind the Town Building)?
6. What uses should be considered for the four acre portion of 323 Great Road, given the pivotal location adjacent to Minister's Pond?
7. What can be done to increase pedestrian safety and walkability, as well as improve traffic flow?
8. Is there an opportunity to create a historic district that benefits the Town government, as well as the residents?

All of the above questions are part of a larger set of issues facing the Town's facilities. While these facilities have served the Town well, they are increasingly dated, outmoded and too small to serve its steadily growing and changing population. Like many other colonial New England towns, these facilities are all located within close proximity to each other in the Town Center, creating wonderful opportunities, as well as some constraints.

Given all of the above, the University of Massachusetts Center for Economic Development (UMass CED) has prepared a set of alternative scenarios regarding the Town Center. It has been undertaken as part of the Selectmen's examination of the future capital needs of the community. The first phase of this project focused on the reuse opportunities for 323 Great Road. The second phase of this project focuses more on the reuse opportunities for the other Town owned properties and structures in the Town Center such as the Fire Station, Library, and Crescent Street Highway Building. The Town recently approved the relocation of the Fire Station and several other municipal departments to the Pompositticut School, creating a new opportunity in the Town Center.

The purpose of this study is to prepare a comprehensive report for the future use of the Town Center and Minister's Pond area. This comprehensive report includes:

- An existing conditions report on the Town Center and evaluation of the municipal buildings and properties based on input gained from departments, boards and committees, a community charrette, and in depth site visits.
- Recommendations for various municipal, institutional, residential, and recreation use options in the Town Center.

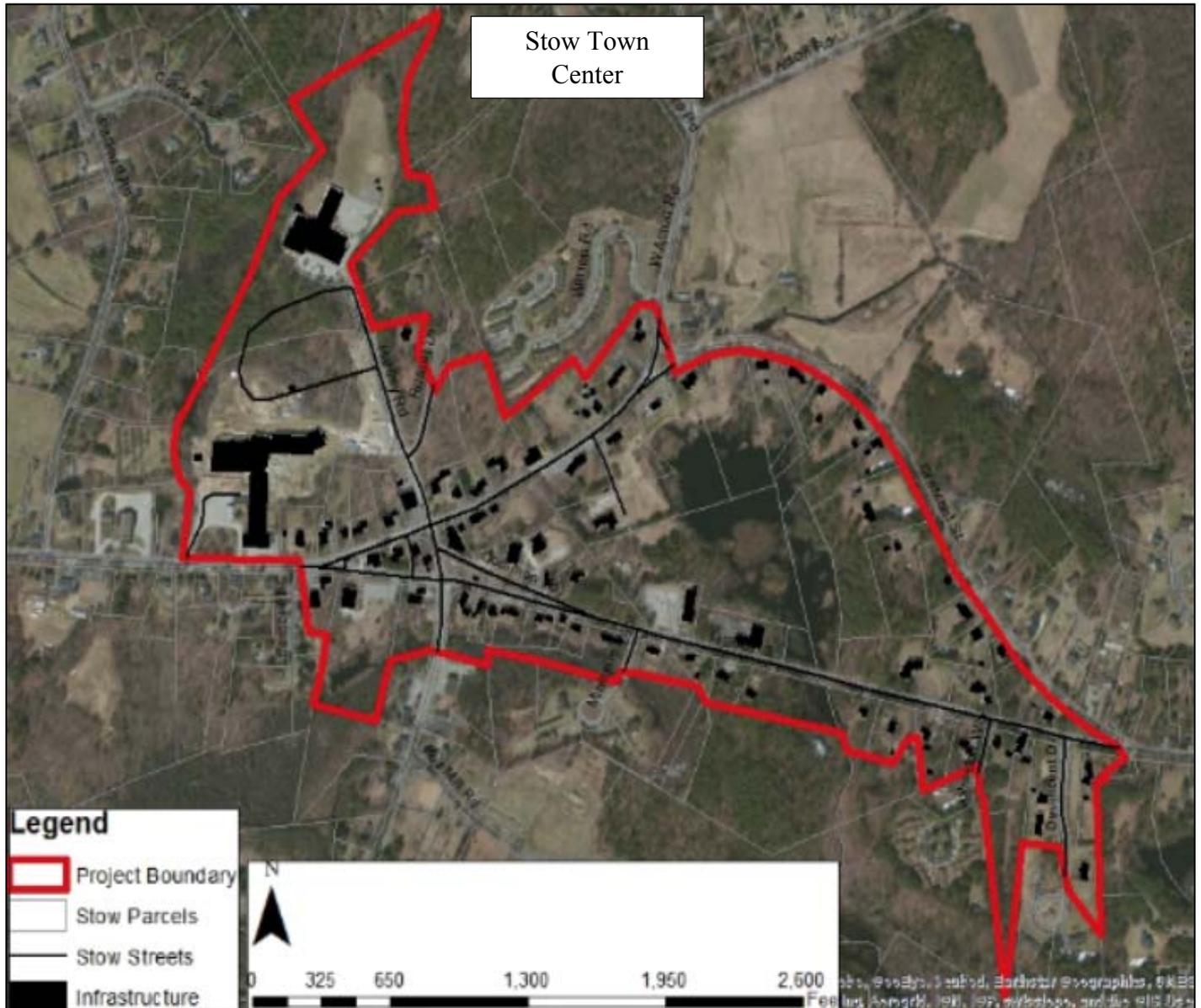


Figure 3 Stow Town Center Boundary Aerial Map

## Section 2: Existing Conditions

### Site Visits and Photographs

Seven site visits were conducted between August 2014 and March 2015 by the CED team. This included traversing the Town Center area and 323 Great Road parcel by vehicle and on foot. These visits were conducted to gain knowledge and experience of how the Town Center operated and to identify opportunities and constraints. Below is a discussion of the CED team's observations throughout the Town Center. The observations are organized into the categories of Traffic and Pedestrian Walkability, the 323 Great Road Parcel, Town Buildings/Infrastructure, and Commercial Properties.

#### Traffic and Pedestrian Walkability

The CED team observed difficulty in crossing the road in much of the Town Center area. Great Road only has a sidewalk on the northern side of the road in most areas. There is no sidewalk on either side of Great Road along the Common, requiring Common Road to act as the sidewalk. The side walk is in good condition; however, it is fairly narrow. There are two crosswalks connecting the Old Town Hall and the Town Building. The main intersection has three crosswalks. There are four additional crosswalks along Library Hill Road and Crescent Street near the Fire Station. Residents, including mothers with strollers were observed crossing Great Road in areas to the east of the main intersection. They were observed crossing in areas with no crosswalks from the neighborhoods from the south. One section of the sidewalk located in between the two churches known as “the Grove,” pictured below, has a very steep section that makes it difficult for wheelchairs and strollers. Figure 5 below depicts the crosswalk and sidewalk gaps in the Town Center.

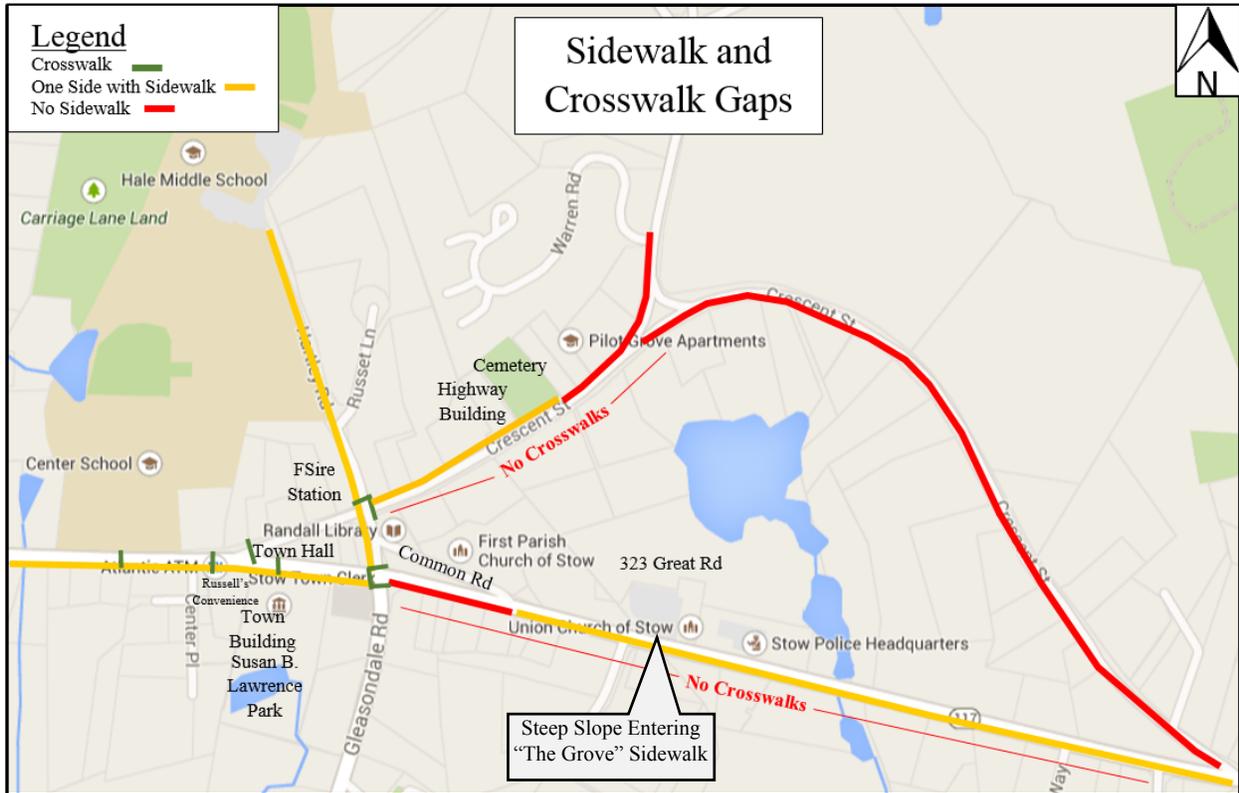


Figure 4 Map of sidewalk and crosswalk gaps in the Town Center.



Photograph 2 Protected "Grove" in between the two churches.



Photograph 1 Steep entrance to "The Grove" sidewalk.

The intersection of Crescent Street and Library Hill Road has two sidewalks, one on the north side and one on the east. Students coming from Hale Middle School to the north often walk this way to the Library; however, there are no sidewalks on the west side of Library Hill Road and none on Hartley Road to the north. Crescent Street only has sidewalks on the north side from Great Road to the cemetery 0.2 miles to the east. There are no sidewalks on the majority of Crescent

Street east of the cemetery. The inconsistency of sidewalks and crosswalks makes it difficult for pedestrians to navigate the Town Center.

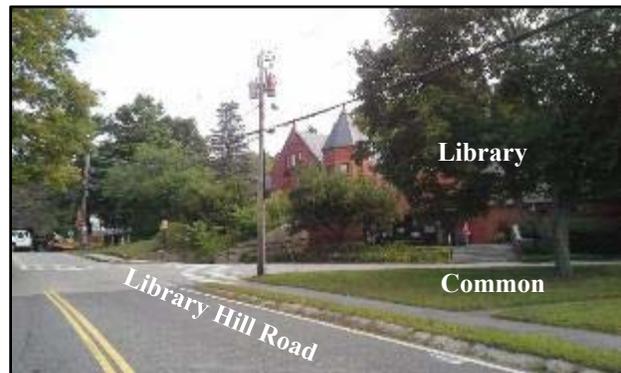


*Photograph 3 Crosswalks between the Library and Fire Station*

In terms of vehicular traffic flow, the main intersection backs up half a dozen or more car lengths frequently throughout the day and much more during rush hour. Common Road was observed as a haphazard parking area and a cut through for both cars and pedestrians. The road is narrow and does not adequately meet the needs of these uses.



*Photograph 5 First Parish Church along Common Road*



*Photograph 4 Town Library along Library Hill Road*

323 Great Road Parcel

This parcel was accessed via the Union Church’s parking lot. The remnants of the former house, as well as miscellaneous items, such as drums, wood, and car parts were observed on the westernmost highlands. An informal trail was identified from the parking lot down to the pond alongside a meadow. A small hut over the drinking water well for the former residents was

observed halfway down the hill. The trail nearly connects all the way back to Great Road in between Union Church and the Police Department. Several trees along the water appeared to have been eaten by beavers. Wetland flags were observed within 10 to 20 feet of the water's edge. Although there is a thin line of trees along the edge of Minister's Pond, the views from the meadow were spectacular.



*Photograph 7 Union Church*



*Photograph 6 Entrance to the 323 Great Road Parcel from the Union Church parking lot*



*Photograph 9 Abandoned drums and debris on the 323 Great Road Parcel*



*Photograph 8 Debris on the 323 Great Road Parcel*



*Photograph 11 Western uplands of the 323 Great Road Parcel*



*Photograph 10 Western uplands of the 323 Great Road Parcel*



*Photograph 13 Evidence of a trail on the 323 Great Road Parcel*



*Photograph 12 Wetlands marker on the edge of Minister's Pond*



*Photograph 15 Floating islands in Minister's Pond*



*Photograph 14 View of Minister's Pond*



*Photograph 17 Beaver damage to trees along shoreline*



*Photograph 16 View of Minister's Pond*

### Town Buildings/Infrastructure

The Town Building and Police Department Building appears to be the newest municipal structures and in good condition. The Fire Station and Crescent Street Highway Building were observed in poorer conditions.

The Library is an iconic structure that is loved by Stow residents and is on the Town seal. Parking for the Library is a major issue, as well as the safety of patrons, adults and children, walking along Library Hill Road and Common Road to access the Library. The Town Common in front of the Library is small, irregularly shaped, and underutilized. This may be due to the confusion that Common Road presents with vehicles travelling and randomly parking on both sides, creating a barrier from the Library and Hale Middle School to the common. There is also no sidewalk on the north side of Great Road along the Common. This requires the narrow Common Road to act as both a road, parking for the First Parish Church and Library, and a sidewalk. In this busy intersection, the lack of a sidewalk here makes pedestrians feel as though there is no buffer between the Common and Great Road.



*Photograph 19 Town Building*



*Photograph 18 Old Town Hall. Built circa 1847-49*



*Photograph 20 Library. Built 1894*



*Photograph 21 Library*



*Photograph 22 Overcrowding on the first floor of the Library. Photograph 23 More open second floor of the Library.*



*Photograph 24 Front of the Fire Station. Built 1965*



*Photograph 25 Rear of the Fire Station*



*Photograph 26 Rear paved area of Fire Station for possible Town Center parking*



*Photograph 27 Interior of Fire Station showing open space for possible recreation center*



*Photograph 28: 40 Crescent Street Highway Building. Built circa 1934. Photograph 29 Rear woods of Highway Building where a possible trail connecting to the Pilot Grove Apartments and Hale Middle School.*



*Photograph 30 Old Fire Truck in Highway Building*



*Photograph 31 Storage in Highway Building that is moving to the Pompositticut facility*

Commercial Properties



*Photograph 32 Quinn Electric and Auto Garage  
(43 Crescent Street) Built 1948*



*Photograph 33 Citgo and Auto Garage (368 Great Rd.)*



*Photograph 34 Stow Florist (15 Crescent St.) Built 1850*



*Photograph 35 Stowaway Inn (271 Great Rd.) Built 1835*

## Meetings with Town Departments and Stakeholders

The first round of interviews with stakeholders was conducted as part of Phase I of the Town Center Study on November 25, 2014 at the Town Building. Several additional interviews were conducted via telephone or email. The persons interviewed and relevant information are discussed below.

### **Police Department: Detective Michael Sallese**

Detective Michael Sallese was interviewed to gain some perspective on the issues related to traffic flow, accidents, and ideas for improving transportation in the Town Center. According to Detective Sallese, traffic congestion is worse heading eastbound on Route 117/Great Road in the morning commute and heading westbound on 117 in the evening commute. In the evening, the backup begins just east of the Town Center in the vicinity of the Lower Village and the Maynard town line and causes a backup at the Town Center intersection. During the hours of 7:00 am to 9:00 am and 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm, there is a posted turning restriction leaving Crescent Street onto Route 117. This forces vehicles from the north of the Town Center to funnel into the Town Center intersection. Additionally, the Center School has a “live drop off” for students that causes vehicles to backup westbound on Route 117 and even onto Crescent Street.

A major issue needing attention is the Town Center intersection. There is confusion of where vehicles coming from the north on Library Hill Road should stop at the red light as there are no painted lines. Vehicles do not sort out into proper turning lanes and there is no green/protected left hand turn for these vehicles. Coming from the south on Route 62 into this intersection, vehicles sometimes have a protected green right hand turn but not always. This leads to a false sense of safety making the right hand turn and causes accidents.

Two other issues identified by Detective Sallese were the lack of sidewalks on the south side of Route 117. Pedestrians, including students at the Hale Middle School and Center School, cross over to the south side of the street for various reasons and do not have a proper sidewalk on the narrow road. Residences from the neighborhood to the south also have no crosswalks to the sidewalks on the north side by the Police Station. These residences often walk to the Lower Village shops approximately one mile to the east.

Common Way, utilized as a driveway and parking for the First Parish Church and Library, is also used by pedestrians, many of whom are young and families who face greater pedestrian risks, heading to the Library. Detective Sallese noted that vehicles will use Common Way as a cut through either from Library Hill Road or from Route 117 heading west to avoid the intersection. This causes issues as the right of way cannot handle the parking, congestion, pedestrians, and speeding cars cutting through.

Detective Sallese's recommendations are to put a "Do Not Enter" sign on Common Way from Route 117 to prevent vehicles from cutting through. Another option would be to completely block that entrance/exit and create a cul-de-sac so cars could turn around and exit on Library Hill Road. Detective Sallese also recommended painting lane lines on Library Hill Road, adding a green left arrow coming south into the intersection, and adjusting the green/protected right turn coming from the south. Sidewalks and crosswalks would also assist in helping pedestrians and vehicles navigating throughout the Town Center.

**Conservation and Recreation: Kathy Sferra, Conservation Coordinator and Laura Greenough, Recreation Director**

According to Ms. Sferra, the senior population, which is generally defined as 65 years of age or older, in Stow declined in the 1990's, and then doubled between 2000 and 2010. Three new 55+ communities have been developed in Stow in the past 15 years, one of which is located to the south of Minister's Pond and is expanding in the near future. Despite having a large amount of conserved open space and parks in the town, Stow lacks an accessible natural park. Additionally, the majority of Stow's parks are on the edge of Town, away from the Town Center. Due to the increase in the senior population, as well as the location of one of the 55+ communities in this area, an accessible park with smooth, properly graded trails, and benches would be an asset to the community.

The accessibility component of 323 Great Road is a must for the Conservation and Recreation Departments. In regards to their proposals for an accessible park with or without three affordable housing units on the uplands, they believed the potential park should be used for light recreational uses such as walking, picnicking, and fishing from the shore. Ms. Sferra noted that several of the oak trees along the shore have been girdled by the beavers and will not recover. It was suggested that the trees could be used for the wood for the benches. This would also open up

the views to the pond. Ms. Sferra indicated that moving the proposed housing units to the western edge may be needed to avoid conflicts of privacy, though this would eliminate the possibility of a perimeter trail. It is Ms. Sferra's opinion that if affordable housing is constructed on the property, it should be 100% affordable and not market rate as the land is being donated by the Town.

In regards to the potential future use of the Fire Station, Ms. Greenough was interested in using the space as Stow's first ever teen center. Stow has never had a teen center or Boys and Girls Club and she feels there is a need to provide a space for Stow's youth to recreate after school. Stow lacks such a resource and this space is in close proximity to two of its schools, as well as adjacent to the Library. Both Ms. Sferra and Ms. Greenough believed using the Fire Station for storage would be a waste of prime Town Center real estate.

**Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (SMAHT) Members: Laura Spear and Mike Kopczynski**

According to Ms. Spear and Mr. Kopczynski, approximately one third of Stow's land already has a conservation restriction. Stow currently has 170 subsidized "affordable" units that comprises 7.2% of its housing stock. This is short of the Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 40B provision of 10%. Communities who have not met this provision are vulnerable to affordable housing developers overriding certain aspects of their zoning bylaws and requirements. Since Stow has achieved the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) benchmark with its Affordable Housing Production Plan, Stow currently has approximately six more months of "safe-harbor" protections from Chapter 40B proposals.

As discussed below in the summary of the proposals (Section 4b), SMAHT is interested in constructing between 12 and 16 units of housing in the form of small cottages on the 323 Great Road parcel. An initial analysis by SMAHT indicated that the property could support approximately 12 to 16 housing units with a shared septic system and onsite shared public drinking water well. If 12 to 16 units were constructed, four to six would be affordable for ownership and the rest market rate to subsidize the affordable units. If a subsidy was available, only four units would be proposed with each being affordable. SMAHT believes only four units could be constructed on the uplands so any additional units would be constructed further down the hill towards the pond.

SMAHT would also be willing to construct a potable drinking water well on the property of greater capacity than the housing would require. This excess could provide a water source for other facilities in the Town Center. The Selectboard members have told SMAHT members that they do not want to operate a Town well; however, they realize the need for water supply in the Town Center. SMAHT could create a condominium association that would manage the water supply and sell it off to the Town or other interested parties, such as abutters or the nearby churches for fire protection or drinking water. SMAHT also indicated they would be willing to pay a monthly fee to the Union Church of Stow for use of its driveway to access the property and to tie into its septic system if needed.

Access easements exist from Crescent Street and through the Union Church property. Conversations with Union Church officials indicates a willingness to deed a 30' wide strip of land along the southwest side of the parking lot in exchange for a triangle piece of land along on the north side of the parking lot with the understanding that Union Church reserves the right to use the driveway as an exit from the parking lot. In addition, Union Church officials noted that their septic system, which is up to code and located under the parking lot, is underutilized and they might be interested in a potential agreement for the 323 Great Road property to tie into the system.

**First Parish Church: Roy Miller and Liz Moseley, Members**

Mr. Miller and Ms. Moseley discussed four of First Parish Church's (FPC's) interests: 1) Common Road/parking, 2) potable water supply, 3) fire protection water supply, and 4) the FPC parsonage / Fitzpatrick parcel (also known as 323 Great Road now owned by the Town). It was apparent from the interview that FPC has had a history of working with the Town of Stow and is interested in continuing in that tradition with the hopes that it benefits both parties. Below is the written summary provided by Mr. Miller.

Common Road /Parking:

“FPC recently completed a major capital improvement project which included an addition of a Connector Building. Drives and parking areas were paved as part of this project. Although the required number of parking spaces were provided, including a few spaces made available for the Randall Library, additional parking would be helpful for both church use or for community events. One possibility is to provide angle parking on FPC property along Common Road.”

### Potable Water Supply:

“FPC has had shared water with the Town for a long period of time (70+ years). This was initiated when the church well became contaminated by drainage from Great Road. During the past year, an agreement was negotiated between the Town and FPC whereby FPC pays for metered water from the Town supply located on Town property and FPC also provides some offset to the Town for capital improvements to the town supply. Any changes to the Town water supply could potentially impact FPC.”

### Fire Protection Water Supply:

“During the design/construction of the new Connector Building, fire protection sprinklers were considered for the entire FPC complex. Absent an ‘available water source’, the project was impractical as the cost was prohibitive. FPC has a long term goal of protecting this historic site and would have an interest in a Town ‘fire water main’.”

### FPC Parsonage / Fitzpatrick Parcel:

“In the early days of New England churches, it was customary to provide housing for the clergy in the form of a Parsonage. Over the years, clergy has sought to build home equity outside their current employment. This left FPC to deal with an adjacent parcel and building. A decade ago, FPC invested in the Parsonage with new windows, furnace, kitchen and more, with the intent of offering a rental property. Rents received, minus taxes, barely covered the investment. As the church grew, the Parsonage was considered for space needs. Limited use for church purposes was made a few years ago. However, to render the building suitable for widespread use (offices, classrooms) would take quite an investment. The Parsonage is not in close proximity to other FPC facilities. Instead, three years ago we turned again to rental use. Again, a significant investment was made (redecorating, renovating the bathroom). Again, the financial return after taxes was low.

We are now considering strategic options including: Remodel and use for church use (unlikely), remodel and use as rental property (questionable), sell the parcel and building (unlikely, we want to retain the land), sell and relocate the building (poor market for this), donate and relocate the building (affordable housing), demolish the building (associated costs). Long term, we see the value of this property being for campus expansion including added parking.”

According to FPC, it would cost between \$27,000 and \$33,000 to relocate the building within one mile. The building has lead paint and a faulty septic system. Moving the building would allow for expansion and parking.

The FPC is an active and prospering institution right in the heart of the Town Center. It is the Center for Economic Development’s (CED’s) understanding that the FPC is and has always been willing to cooperate with the Town of Stow in manners regarding the Town Center. As

detailed above, FPC is concerned with Common Road and would be interested in hearing ideas to improve the right of way. Additionally, the Town could enter into conversations with FPC regarding the Parsonage building and assist them in determining its future. The FPC appears interested in using some of its eastern lands near the Parsonage for parking. Perhaps the Town could offer FPC water for fire protection, a major concern for the parish, in exchange for use of the very eastern boundary of their property that abuts the western uplands of the 323 Great Road parcel for affordable housing.

**Open Space Committee: Bob Wilber, Chris Rodstrom, and Bill Maxfield and Stow Conservation Trust: Dick Perkins, Don Rising, and Susan Crane**

Both the OSC and SCT believe that this is a pivotal moment to create an accessible Town Center park at the 323 Great Road parcel. This may be the last chance Stow will have to create a connected park in the Town Center and located adjacent to the scenic Minister's Pond. The 1965 Open Space Plan reportedly called for this parcel to be conservation land. Both organizations believe this land should be a Town park with accessible trails and spaces rather than Town conservation land that is not used.

The Town Center is already well served by affordable housing with the 37 affordable units at the Pilot Grove apartments approximately 0.4 miles from the site to the north of Crescent Street and 50 affordable units at the Plantation Apartments approximately 0.4 miles from the site to the southeast of Great Road and Minister's Pond. The Plantation Apartments for seniors is also scheduled to be expanded. The OSC and SCT believe there are other areas in the town, outside of the Town Center that could be used for affordable housing such as properties on Red Acre Road and White Pond Road. It was also suggested that the second floor over commercial buildings be used for affordable housing to locate them in close proximity to services and amenities.

**Building Inspector: Craig Martin**

According to Mr. Martin, the Fire Station was built in 1965 on the site of the original Hale High School, which had burned down a few years earlier. The building is a masonry structure and has settled in some areas, which may be due to the subsurface conditions. Mr. Martin believed the Town would be well served by taking the building down and providing additional parking at this site for the Town Center.

Mr. Martin believed the Crescent Street Highway barn was built in the 1920's based on the type of block used for the walls. The building is used solely for cold storage, most of which is used by the Cemetery Department. A few miscellaneous items, including the Old Fire Truck and MRC Trailer are stored in the building and will be moved to the new Fire Station/Community Center in 2016. Mr. Martin indicated that he plans to paint the exterior of the building in 2015 and make any exterior repairs as necessary. It is Mr. Martin's opinion that the building should remain as storage for Cemetery Department. The Cemetery Department is actively pursuing the construction of a new structure at Brookside Cemetery.

## Phase II Interviews

A second round of interviews was conducted as part of Phase II of the Town Center Study to reach more individuals and stakeholders. These one on one and small group interviews were conducted on February 24, 2015 and March 12, 2015. The purpose of these interviews was to take a step back from the focus on 323 Great Road, to brainstorm opportunities and constraints regarding the greater Town Center, as well as to focus on specific aspects of the Town Center. Mr. Jesse Steadman, Stow Planner, joined in the interviews.

### **Union Church: Bob Mong**

Mr. Mong was interviewed on February 24, 2015 at the Union Church. Mr. Mong has been associated with the church for over 50 years. Mr. Mong stated that although Union Church has thrived for decades, the church is decreasing in size in recent years. The current attendance rate is approximately 50 to 60 parishioners. The church has a pastor, Reverend Susan Scott and a youth minister, Reverend Andy Edwards. To assist the church in sustaining itself into the future, they are hiring a professional to work with marketing and other ways to make the church more attractive to new members.

The sanctuary portion of the church was constructed in 1902. The single story rear of the church, which contains offices, classrooms, and a kitchen, was constructed in 1963. Although the building is mostly in solid structural condition, most of the walls have little to no insulation, causing drafts and high heating bills. Fire suppression is not a current major concern for the church. Mr. Mong did state that bringing in wet fire sprinklers above the ceiling would be an issue

due to freezing. The piping may have to be entirely suspended from the ceilings so the pipes would not freeze.

The Union Church has a septic system and leaching fields beneath their parking lot, which is largely over capacity for the facility. Mr. Mong stated that the church would be very interested in leasing some of its capacity to housing or other uses at 323 Great Road if needed. Mr. Mong stated that septic systems do not work as well when underutilized so there would be multiple benefits to sharing the system, if Board of Health regulations would allow for it. This information could not be confirmed.

The Union Church has had conversations with the Town of Stow regarding a triangular piece of land located to the north of the parking lot. The church would like to acquire this land for snow storage and is willing to use this to grant a right of way access to the 323 Great Road parcel. The only suggestion Mr. Mong had regarding extra vehicles using their parking lot as a driveway was to place an entrance sign on the eastern driveway access and an exit only sign on the western driveway to create a better understood vehicular pattern.

Mr. Mong expressed interest in having the Town remove a large pine tree that appear in poor health at the southwestern corner of the parking lot. Additionally, the slope to the sidewalk going west into “the Grove” from the church parking lot is very steep. Mr. Mong suggested the Town improve this and create a more walker friendly slope. He also noted there is no crosswalk for residents and seniors who live to the south of the church to cross to the sidewalk, which is not plowed in the winter.

In regards with the proposed park or affordable housing for the 323 Great Road parcel, which abuts the church to the northwest, Mr. Mong saw merits in both. He believed the church could use a park in their backyard for the youth if they bring back a vacation bible school to run off some energy or separate into groups to work and study. The takeaway from this meeting was that the Union Church has been and is currently interested in collaborating and cooperating with the Town for the greater good of the community.

#### **Kathy Sferra: Conservation Coordinator**

Ms. Sferra was interviewed to generate ideas regarding open space, trails, linkages, and connections throughout the Town Center, as well as connecting the Town Center with other

conservation areas outside of the Town Center. Ms. Sferra indicated that filling in the gaps of missing sidewalks would open up possibilities of pedestrian activities and connections throughout the Town Center. The most outstanding sidewalk gap exists from the cemetery on the north side of Crescent Street around the turn onto West Acton Road to the Pilot Grove apartments. This would open up possibilities for the approximately 300 students at Hale Middle School to walk safely to and from school.

Two other areas lacking adequate sidewalks include the eastern portion of Crescent Street and Library Hill Road near the Common. Only a small strip of sidewalk exists in front of the Library on Library Hill Road going north to the intersection with Crescent Street. No sidewalk connects the main intersection with the Library and there is no sidewalk along the Common, forcing pedestrians to use the Common or Common Road as the sidewalk.

Ms. Sferra indicated the possibility of connecting a path from Crescent Street through the Crescent Street access road into the 323 Great Road parcel if it were to become a park. Last year, Ms. Sferra investigated a trail on the east side of Minister's Pond on the west side of the 271 Great Road. The trail snaked its way along the east side of the pond some distance until ending in a back yard off of Crescent Street. The Town owns the pond, which contains a portion of the eastern shore; however, Ms. Sferra believes the trail actually crossed through several other properties. This would make a Minister's Pond perimeter trail difficult due to the need for several easements with different property owners.

Another idea discussed was to construct a trail connecting the rear of the Library with the 323 Great Road parcel, again, if it were to become a park. The trail could hug the north side of the FPC buildings along a ridge for approximately 670 feet (0.14 miles) to the potential Minister's Pond Park. The current connection walking along Common Road to Great Road and through the Union Church parking lot is approximately 1,100 feet (0.21 miles). Both of these distances are relatively short. Research shows that pedestrians are willing to walk rather than drive if the distance is within one quarter of a mile. Additionally, safety and scenery aid in promoting walkability. Walking along the sidewalk may be a better or safer option for some, while others may be intrigued by the shorter and more direct nature trail.

Unbeknownst to many Stow residents, the Town Center does have a park. The Susan B. Lawrence Park is located behind the Town Building. The park contains several picnic tables under

a maple tree, some grass area, and a small pond. The pond is commonly known as the “skate pond”; however, skating is no longer permitted due to insurance liability. To boost this park, Ms. Sferra suggested several ideas. A sign welcoming people to the park is needed, as the park just looks like the back yard to the Town Building and off limits to residents. A kiosk or monument telling Susan B. Lawrence’s story would also help connect residents to the park.

Additionally, the park should be formally made into a place of contemplation. Ms. Sferra suggested the Stow Garden Club may be interested in creating this atmosphere of reflection by installing benches and plantings. An outdoor meeting patio with a few square tables could be used by the Town Building. Ms. Sferra indicated that there may be a possible connection to some woodlands to the south of the park towards the Elizabeth Brook. Ms. Sferra noted that Stow has lots of water but little access. Mr. Steadman noted there may be potential for boardwalks or platforms with kiosks for bird watching possibilities in these areas.

#### **Historic Commission: Dot Spaulding, Bill Byron, Rosemary Bawn, and Marilyn Zaborski**

The Historical Commission was interviewed to gain a perspective on the assets and needs of the Town Center. The Historical Commission members admire Stow’s rural and colonial character. They believe that Stow possesses an “old fashion Town Center,” which should be preserved and protected. It is the Historical Commission’s opinion that the Town Center landmarks, including the Library, Town Hall, and the two churches, as well as several of the old historic homes in the Town Center, should be retained.

The Historical Commission did not consider the Fire Station or the Crescent Street Highway Building to be historically significant to the Town Center. The Fire Station lot could be used for parking and/or a parklette. The building was thought to be in too poor of condition to host any other uses besides storage. Additionally, the Historical Commission did not believe there is a significant demand for a teen center, as most youth these days are fully booked with other extra-curricular activities. The Highway Building is in need of repairs. The building was not thought to be of historic nature but would be missed by “old timers”.

In regards to the Library, the Historical Commission does not believe the addition from the 1970’s is in alignment with the older architecture and also has problems with water intrusion. The Library was thought to have a 10 year plan to stay in its location, though there were rumors of the

Library seeking a new building elsewhere. The Historical Commission thought the structure should stay and could be used as a meeting hall.

The Old Trolley Stop, which is located on the Town Common should be preserved. The Old Trolley Waiting Shelter was constructed in 1916 at the height of the rail service within Town and connecting to Hudson and Maynard. From 1901 to 1922, the Concord, Maynard, and Hudson Street Railway ran two cars in each direction every hour from six in the morning to eleven in the evening. The line had an annual ridership of over one million for most of its two decades of service before being shut down as use of automobiles rose. Many people used to take the trolley from the Town Center and many more used it when it was a bus stop. Placing an Old Trolley on the Common may add to the historic sense of the stop and provide better context.

The Historical Commission is interested in preserving and protecting the Town Center's historic structures; however, they are concerned about the restrictiveness of placing properties on a historic register or creating a historic district. Ms. Spaulding was interested in exploring the idea of a Town Historic Register with three historic districts located around the Town Center, Gleasondale, and Lower Village. The Historical Commission is primarily concerned with the demolition of its historic structures and any major changes or additions to the structures. The Historical Commission appears to be less concerned with minor details or the use of the structures, as long as they are preserved. Please refer to Section 6 for information regarding historic districts and designations.

Lastly, there was consensus amongst the Historical Commission that fire protection was a concern for many of the historical landmarks in the Town Center. Neither of the churches, the Stowaway Inn, the Library, or the Town Hall have fire sprinklers. Most of these structures are wood frame construction. One of the major obstacles to installing fire sprinklers in the Town Center is the lack of a sufficient water source.

**Melissa Fournier: Library Director**

Ms. Fournier provided CED and Mr. Steadman a tour of the Library and provided information regarding the Library's needs and desired future. The Library is a historic icon in the center of Stow that is on the Town seal. The Library was constructed in 1894. An addition was

constructed on the southeastern side of the building in 1975. According to Ms. Fournier, the addition leaks and some feel does not match the historic architecture of the original building.

Ms. Fournier stated that she has been working on obtaining a Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners (MBLC) grant to renovate the Library. The grant reportedly requires more parking; however, using parking at the Fire Station (if allowed in the future) would not be allowed by the grant due to the unsafe connection across the intersection of Library Hill Road and Crescent Street. There is a need for a better designed intersection for the Hale Middle School students who walk down Library Hill Road to the Library and the Town Center. Raised crosswalks, pedestrian lights, or other design features could create a greater degree of safety at this intersection. Additionally, the current handicapped entrance could be better situated within the existing sidewalk network to provide for more safety and ease of use.

Ms. Fournier did state that, although the Library has a ten year plan of staying in its current facility, they have thought about the possibility for a new facility at 323 Great Road or another site. Although space has been an issue in the Library, new technologies, such as e-books, are assisting in space management and the Library no longer needs more space. The Library would ideally stay within the original building if renovations could be made to fix the leaks. Ms. Fournier's proposal is to demolish the 1975 addition and create a better addition in that location.

According to a study conducted by the Library in the past several years, approximately 10 to 20 students ages 11 to 18 (most 11 to 14) come to use the Library every day after school. This number has been growing since the Library began increasing program for this age group. Ms. Fournier believed a (Pre) Teen/Recreation Center at the Fire Station would be a great asset and the Library would be interested in sharing space, resources, and parking. Additionally, the Library would be interested in a bookshop, gift shop, or café that could either be permanent or a pop up market at the Library or possibly Recreation Center.

### **Craig Martin: Building Commissioner and Director of Facilities**

Mr. Martin was interviewed to gain a sense of the physical condition of some of the important structures in the Town Center. Mr. Martin has been Building Commissioner and Director of Facilities in Stow for approximately seven years. Mr. Martin discusses his knowledge

of the Crescent Street Highway Building, the Fire Station, the Town Hall, the Library, and the two church buildings.

### Crescent Street Highway Building

The building was the Town's fire station in the 1920's and is in fairly good condition. The building will be getting some exterior repairs and paint this summer. The building is currently unheated with no water or septic connections. The current items stored are mostly for the cemetery department, who have plans for a new storage facility at the Brookside Cemetery. Other items will be moved to the new facility at the Pompositicut School. Mr. Martin noted that the Highway Department's other storage facility appeared to have space constraints and may be able to use the space to store vehicles or other equipment. The best use of the current building is for cold storage. Renovating the building for a different use would not be worth the price. If the building no longer serves its purpose as a storage facility, it could be demolished for housing or a different use.

### Fire Station

The current Fire Station, which will be moving to the Pompositicut School in the near future, was constructed in 1965 on the remains of the former Hale School. Due to some settling, a structural evaluation of the building would be required prior to another use. Mr. Martin believed that the Town's demands are growing and there is a high need for additional parking in the Town Center. Mr. Martin believed that current residents and those moving into Stow from more urban areas, desire more amenities, including sidewalks and walkability. Parking could be incorporated into the Fire Station lot with the building standing or demolishing the structure, which would provide a greater number of spaces.

### Old Town Hall

According to Mr. Martin, the building is very expensive to maintain and to heat. The average heating bill is approximately \$15,000 per year. The building also has leaks along the walls due to the difficult winter of 2015. The building also has no fire suppression. Mr. Martin believed that with the new use of the Pompositicut School for community facilities, many of the Town Hall uses, such as meetings, presentations, and dance rehearsals, will move out of the Town Hall and to the Pompositicut School. Possible future uses could be for seasonal events such as a Spring Festival, a place to display artists' works or for the historical commission's artifacts.

## Churches

Mr. Martin stated that during the First Parish Church's renovations and additions in the past several years, he offered his services to help make the building more energy efficient. He did a preliminary energy audit and added insulation where needed as a Town employee. Mr. Martin stated that he would be willing to do the same for the Union Church. Mr. Martin also noted that the churches, the Library, and the Old Town Hall do not have fire suppression. A water source would be a major obstacle. Using a well at Minister's Pond may create possibilities in supplying fire suppression to some of these critical buildings; however, further analysis would be required to determine its feasibility. Mr. Martin stated that if the Library were to do a major renovation, they would likely be required to sprinkler the building for fire suppression.

## Section 3: Review of Town Documents

### Master Plan

Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 41 Section 81D requires municipalities to establish a Master Plan. Master Plans are generally created to look 10 to 20 years in the future. In accordance with its forward thinking, the Town of Stow's Charter, Section 7.7c, which was adopted in May of 1991, requires its Master Plan to be updated every five years. "Updating a Master Plan provides a community with a formal avenue through which to make regularly scheduled assessments of its progress, both in terms of reviewing the effectiveness of development decisions and in terms of satisfying the priorities the Town has established for itself" (Stow Master Plan Update 2010). The plan was last updated in the Fall of 2010 by the Ciccolo Group, LLC and the Stow Master Plan Committee.

The Master Plan is divided into seven sections: Housing, Economic Development, Natural and Cultural Resources, Open Space and Recreation, Public Facilities and Municipal Services, Transportation, Zoning and Land Use. Each area has an individual vision and goals. Below is a brief discussion of each section.

The housing vision is to "reestablish diversity in our community by creating housing stock where young, middle-aged, and older residents of all income levels can together share the common values that existed in this community many years ago. Workforce housing is also desired in the community so those who work here can live near where they work" (p. 19).

The economic development vision seeks to keep the economy of Stow stable and capable of providing the everyday goods and services that residents need through its small businesses, independent retail shops, and networks of professionals, as well as to enhance the tax base.

Protecting land with important vistas, natural areas, and sensitive environmental habitats is central to the natural and cultural resource vision. Increasing arts and cultural opportunities, as well as supporting innovative, local, and varied community-based cultural programming.

The open space vision seeks to utilize zoning and other creative tools to preserve open space in Stow. "It is possible to direct development away from the open space parcels we wish to preserve by implementing smart growth principles. These principles recommend that you

concentrate growth where development already exists” (p. 18). Although the Town Center is not specifically mentioned, one major open space goal is to preserve open space in underserved quadrants. The Town Center is located within the Northeast Quadrant, pictured below.

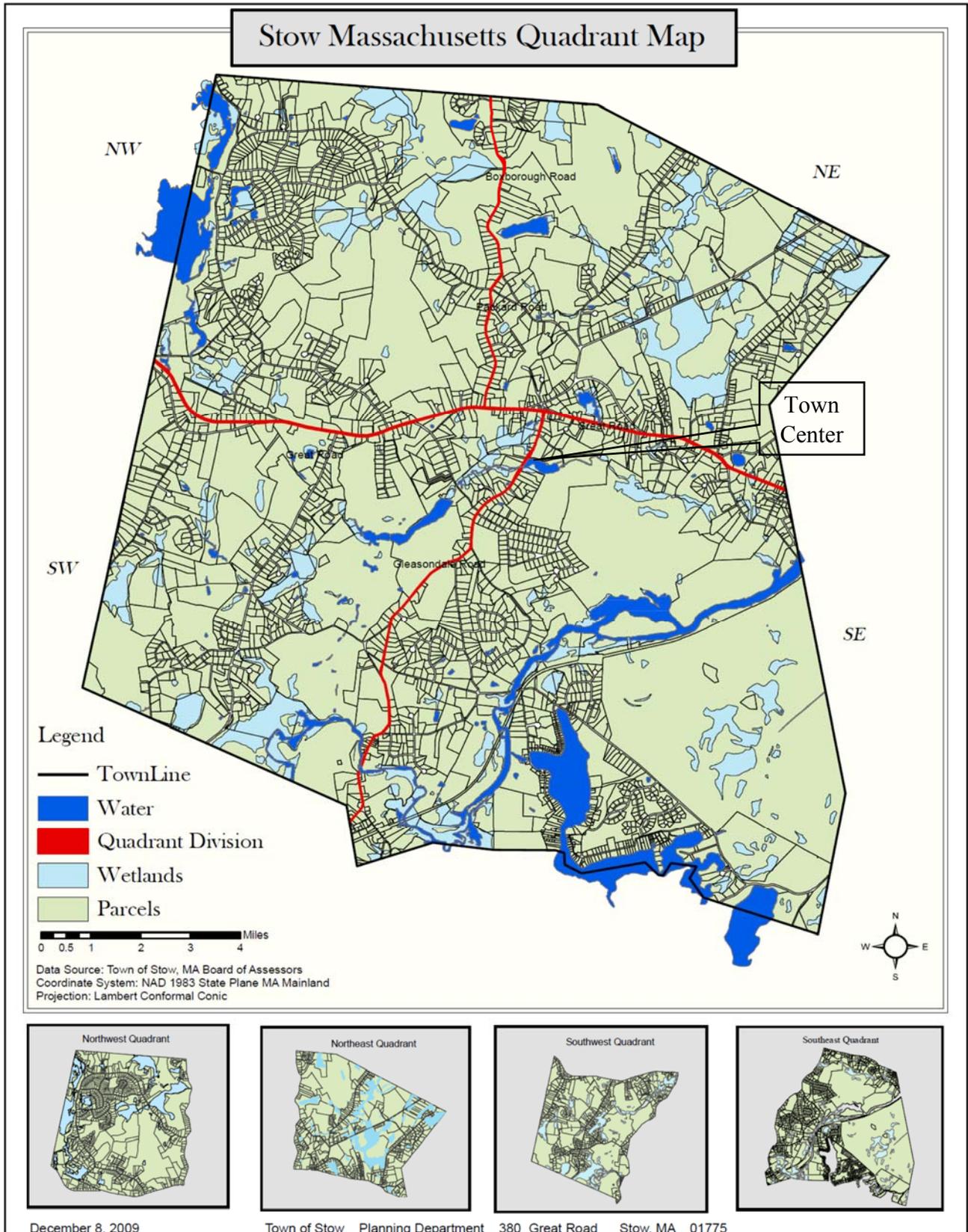


Figure 5 Stow Quadrant Map

The vision for public facilities and municipal services is to continue with providing services in an inexpensive manner. “Existing needs for infrastructure, services and safety will continue to be met without incurring significant new costs. We also envision employing the Pompositticut School facilities to meet demands for an intergenerational community center, especially one that could provide a variety of useful and desirable services for the growing population of seniors” (p. 20). This project is already well underway.

Safety was identified as a main factor in the transportation vision. Increasing other modes of transportation beside single occupancy vehicles, shuttle services for seniors, and connecting to the Acton train station were noted. The vision seeks to provide more sidewalks and trails for the residents of Stow.

In terms of land use and zoning, “the vision for land use is that today’s proportional mix of open space, rural, farmland, and residential use will continue virtually unchanged into the future. Stow’s residents appreciate the charm associated with large amounts of green space, forests, and natural vistas. These areas will be protected where possible. Zoning, as a tool, should primarily be used to emphasize the current characteristics of Stow’s land use patterns and enhance current character. Some commercial areas will be improved upon by focusing the zoning to encourage the types of development seen as desirable by the residents” (p. 20).

The Master Plan indicated the Town Center is projected to remain essentially as it is today. The vision for the Town Center included exploring additional municipal uses, updating existing facilities, providing adequate parking, and generally enhancing the area (p. 22). Land use, zoning, and general priorities are identified below:

- Explore mixed use overlay districts to allow redevelopment and new development that promotes diverse housing stock
- Revitalize existing commerce
- Encourage pedestrian-friendly development
- Reduce roadway congestion
- Promote a sense of community
- Assist in the creation of common water and sewage facilities where appropriate
- Explore creative parking solutions
- Explore protection of the Town Center through possibilities such as a historic district, conservancy overlay district, demolition delay bylaw, or Mass historic inventory

## Zoning

Stow's zoning has been updated through October 28, 2013. The zoning district map was prepared by Metropolitan Area Planning Council dated May 1, 1995. The Town Center area is mostly zoned Residential District; however, several parcels around Minister's Pond are zoned Recreation/Conservation District. The western portion of the 323 Great Road parcel, including the uplands are zoned residential.



Figure 6 Stow Zoning Map

There are three properties with pre-existing, non-conforming uses in the Town Center. Russell's Convenience Store (390 Great Road), Quinn Electric and an auto garage (43 Crescent Street), and the Concord Fuels Gas Station (368 Great Road) are commercial uses within the residential district. The gas station does have a special permit, granted by the Zoning Board of

Appeals, because the use has changed/expanded over the years. The property at 23 Gleasondale Road is in the residential District (across from two parcels located in the Compact Business District, which is intended to provide certain limited business uses within a structure) has historically been a pre-existing non-conforming use. Although, it currently houses Steppingstones School (preschool), which is an allowed use the in the residential district.

Additionally, areas surrounding Minister's Pond and properties to the south of Great Road are located within the Town's **Floodplain Overlay District**. The western portion of 323 Great Road, including the uplands are not located in this district. These properties are also located within a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Floodplain as indicated by the maps below. The FEMA floodplain map indicates approximately 2/3rds of the land area, or approximately 1.75 acres) of the 323 Great Road parcel are out of the AE Zone: 100 year (1% Annual Chance of Flooding) and X Zone: 500 year (0.2% Annual Chance of Flooding) floodplains.

All development in the district, including structural and non-structural activities, whether permitted by right or by special permit must be in compliance with Chapter 131, Section 40 of the Massachusetts General Laws and with the following:

- Section of the Massachusetts State Building Code which addresses floodplain and coastal high hazard areas (currently 780 CMR 120.G, "Flood Resistant Construction and Construction in Coastal Dunes");
- Wetlands Protection Regulations, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) (currently 310 CMR 10.00);
- Inland Wetlands Restriction, DEP (currently 310 CMR 13.00);
- Minimum Requirements for the Subsurface Disposal of Sanitary Sewage, DEP (currently 310 CMR 15, Title 5)

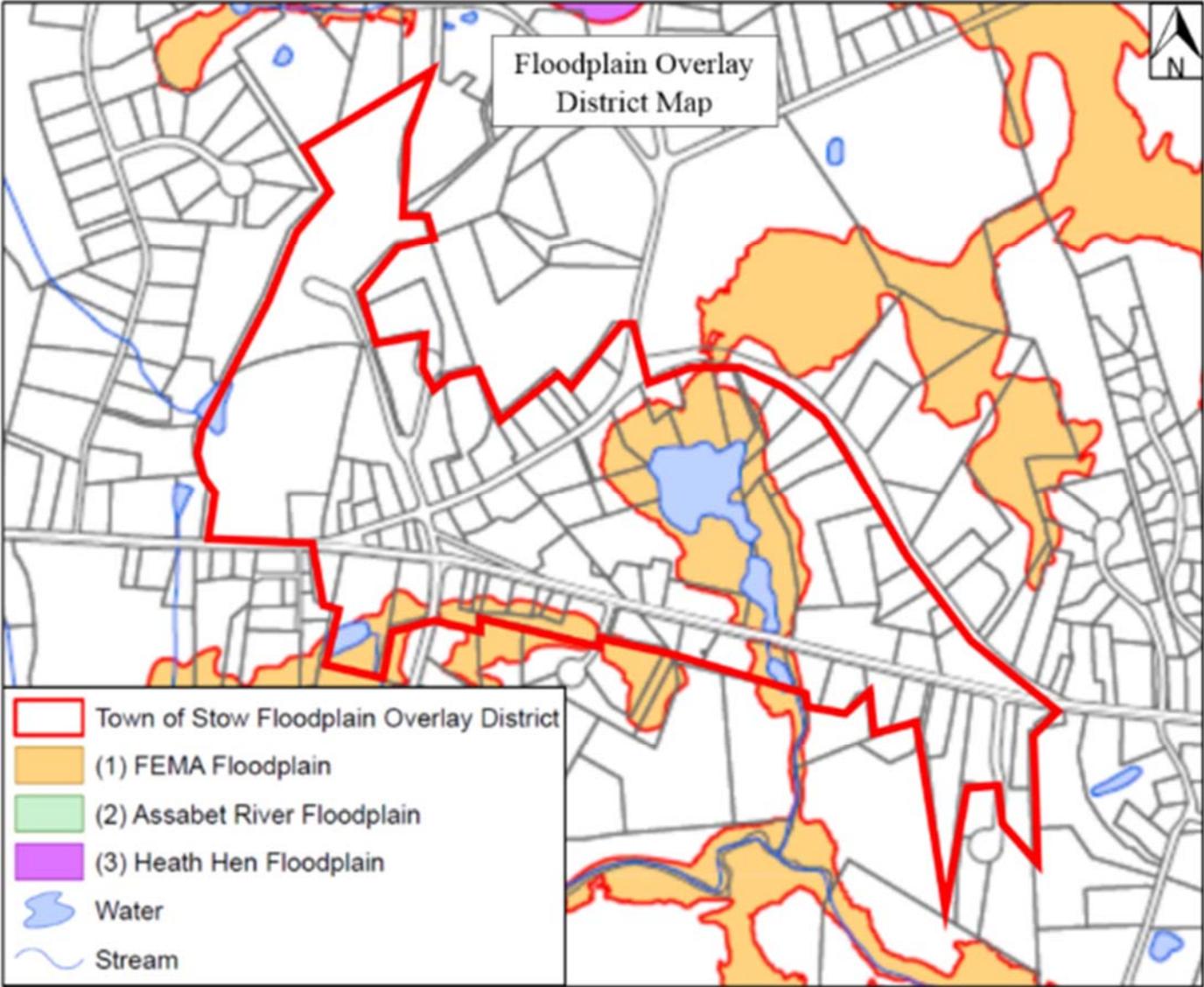


Figure 7 Stow Floodplain Overlay District Map

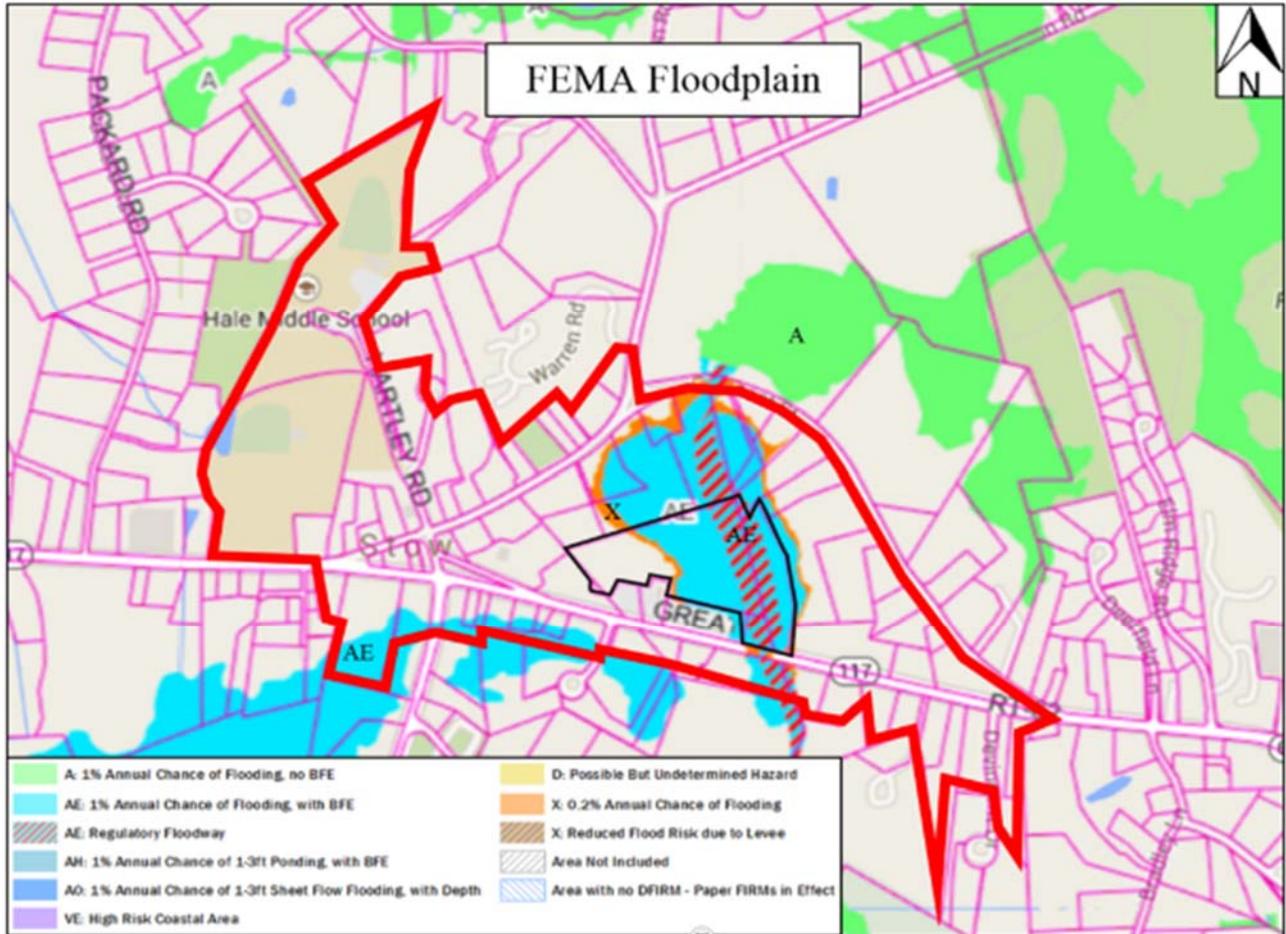


Figure 8 FEMA Floodplain Map

The **Residential District** is intended as a district for typical rural, single-family residential and non-commercial uses. The **Recreation-Conservation District** is intended to protect the public health and safety, to protect persons and property against hazards of flood water inundation and unsuitable and unhealthy development of unsuitable soils, wetlands, marsh land and water courses; to protect the balance of nature, including the habitat for birds, wildlife, and plants essential to the survival of man; to conserve and increase the amenities of the Town, natural conditions and open spaces for education, recreation, agriculture, and the general welfare. No buildings are allowed within 100 feet of a district boundary line. Below is the Table of Principal Uses in these three districts. Additional requirements and standards are listed within the zoning bylaw.

<b>Table of Principal Uses in the Town Center</b>			
<b>Principal Uses</b>	<b>Residential</b>	<b>Recreation Conservation</b>	<b>Floodplain Overlay</b>
Agriculture	Y	Y	Y
Conservation	Y	Y	Y
Recreation	SPA	SPP	SPA
Single Family Dwelling	Y	N	N
Single Family Dwelling with Accessory Apartment	SPP	N	N
Duplex Dwelling	SPP	N	N
Multi-Family Dwelling	SPP	N	N
Conversion to 2-Family Dwelling	SPA	N	N
Combined Residence/Home Occupation	Y	N	N
Bed and Breakfast Home	Y	N	N
Bed and Breakfast Home or Establishment	SPA	N	N
Boarding House or Rooming House	Y	N	N
Playgrounds	SPA	N	N
Conservation Areas, Farming and Horticulture, Orchards, Nurseries, Forests, Tree Farms, Sale of Farm Produce	Y	Y	Y
Storage of Farm Vehicles	Y	N	N
Accessory Buildings and Uses	Y	Y	SPA
Hammerhead Lots	SPP	N	N
Common Drives	Y	N	N
Child Care Facility	Y	Y	Y
Family Day Care Home	Y	N	N
Private Schools and Colleges, Dance and Music Studios	SPA	N	N
Nursing Homes	SPA	N	N
Day Camps, Overnight Camps, and Camp Sites	N	SPP	N

Municipal	Y	Y	Y
Public Service Corporation	Y	Y	Y
Religious	Y	Y	Y
Educational (Non-Profit)	Y	Y	Y
Wireless Communication Facilities	SPP	SPP	N
Restaurants	N	SPP	SPP
Country Clubs or Other Membership Clubs	N	SPP	SPP
Golf Courses	SPP	SPP	SPP
Ski Areas, Marinas and Boat Landings	SPA	SPP	SPP
Cross Country Ski Areas	SPP	N	N
Veterinary Hospitals, Stables and Kennels, Raising or Breeding of Animals for Sale, and Boarding Animals	SPA	N	N
Commercial Solar Photovoltaic Renewable Energy Installation	SPP	SPP	N
SPA: Special Permit Authorized by the Board of Appeals			
SPP: Special Permit Authorized by the Planning Board			
SPS: Special Permit Authorized by the Selectboard			

*Table 1 Table of Principal Uses in the Town Center. Source: Stow Zoning Bylaw May 3, 2010.*

## Open Space and Recreation Plan

The Stow Open Space and Recreation Plan was created in June 2008 with the slogan “Stow: Forever Green. Preserving the Stow we Know.” The plan is an update to the 1997 plan prepared by the Town. According to Ms. Kathy Sferra, the plan is in the process of being updated. “The plan summarizes the progress that the town has made in providing for its open space and recreation needs and sets forth goals and specific action items for the next five years. The plan is designed to provide a framework for the efforts of various town boards and committees involved in the protection Stow’s open lands and to guide municipal partnership efforts with both state and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations.” The plan serves as the Natural Resources and Open Space component of the Master Plan discussed above. As indicated by the Open Space Lands map below, the Town currently owns the pond and the land to the south and west, including 323 Great Road. The majority of the pond is currently protected Open Space, while the western portion and the 323 Great Road parcel are not protected.

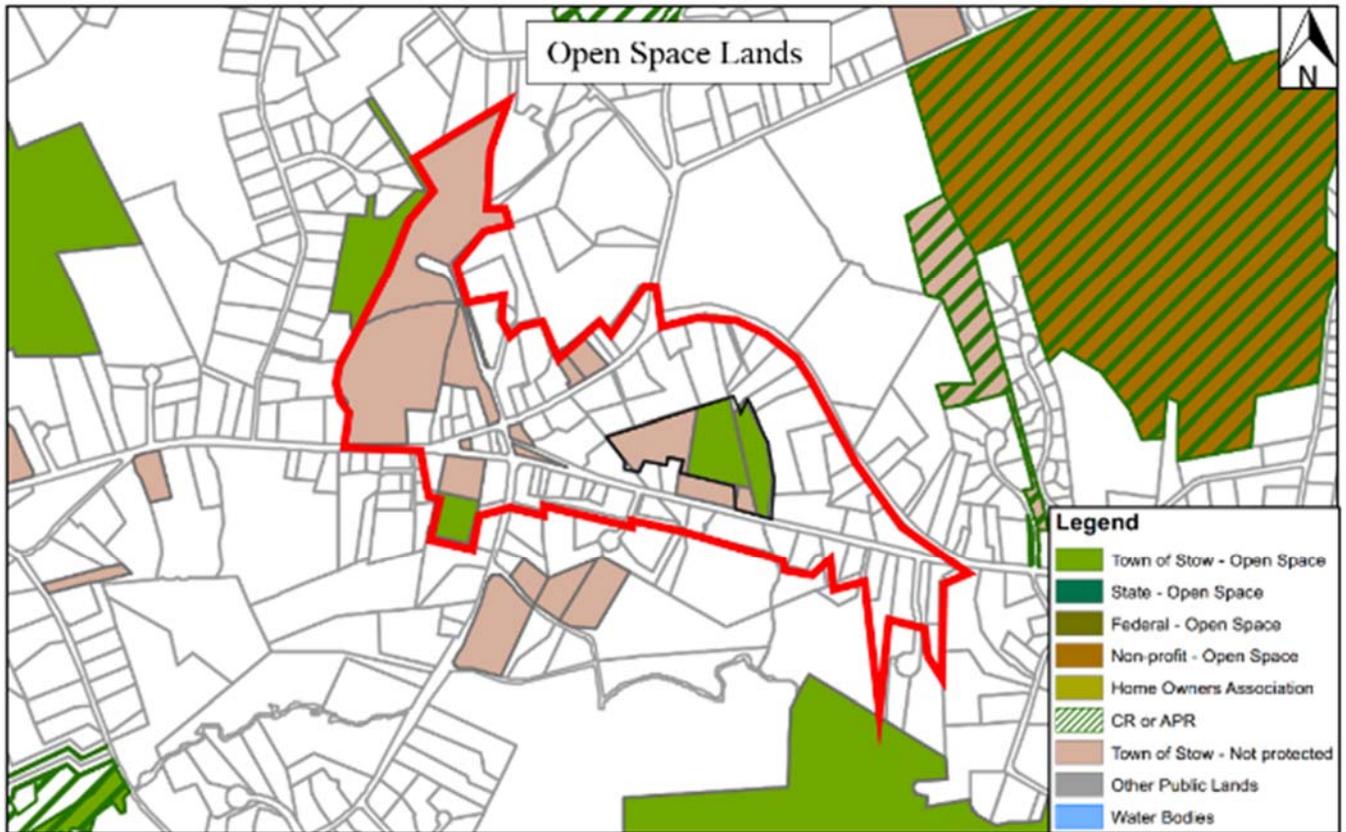
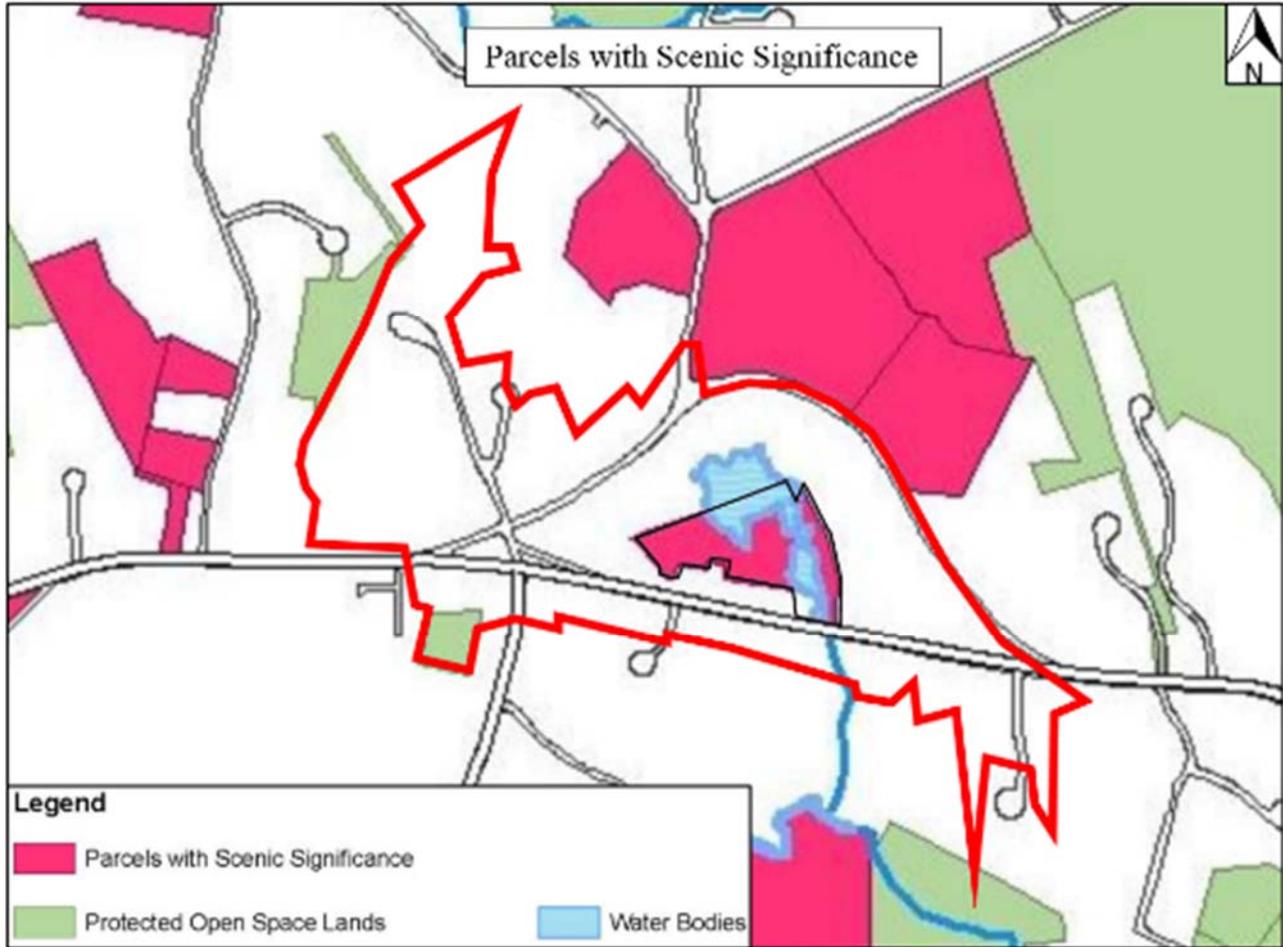


Figure 9 Stow Open Space Lands Map

The plan identified the 323 Great Road parcel as an unprotected parcel of surface and groundwater significance scenic significance, and wildlife habitat significance. However, it was not identified as a parcel with historical or cultural significance.



*Figure 10 Map of Parcels with Scenic Significance in the Town Center*

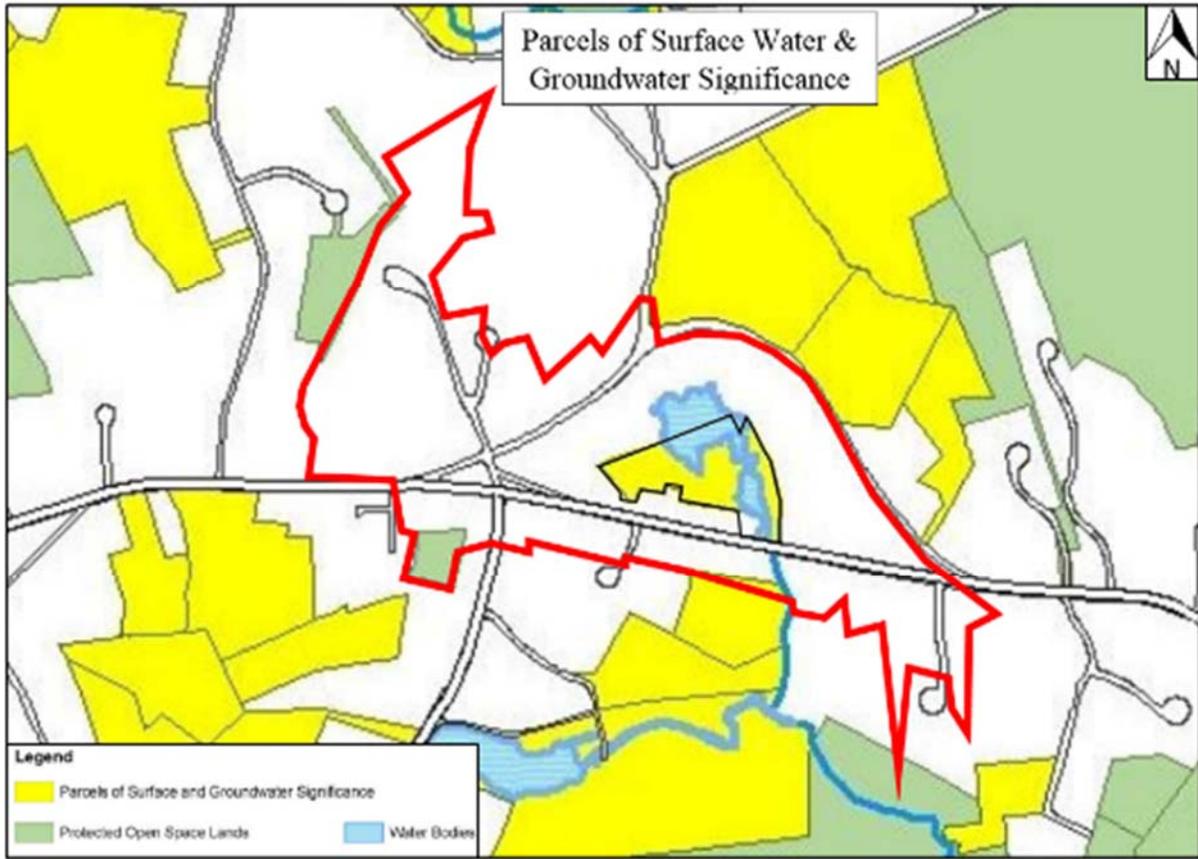


Figure 11 Map of Parcels with Surface Water and Groundwater Significance in the Town Center

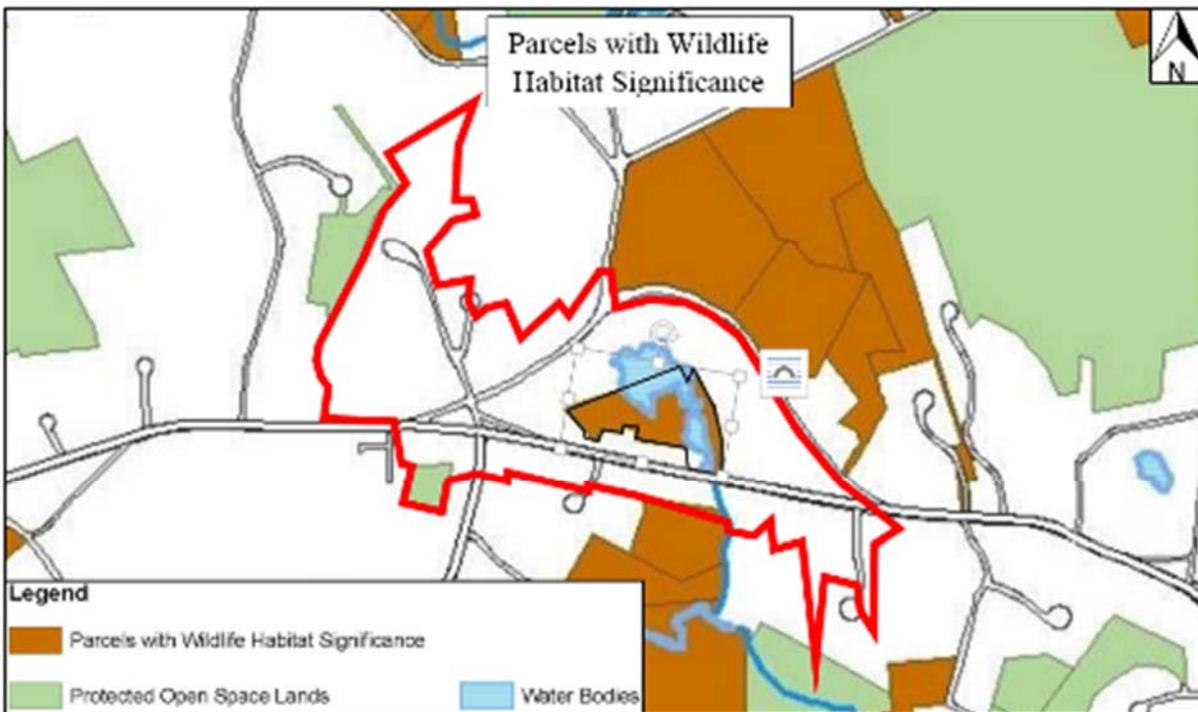
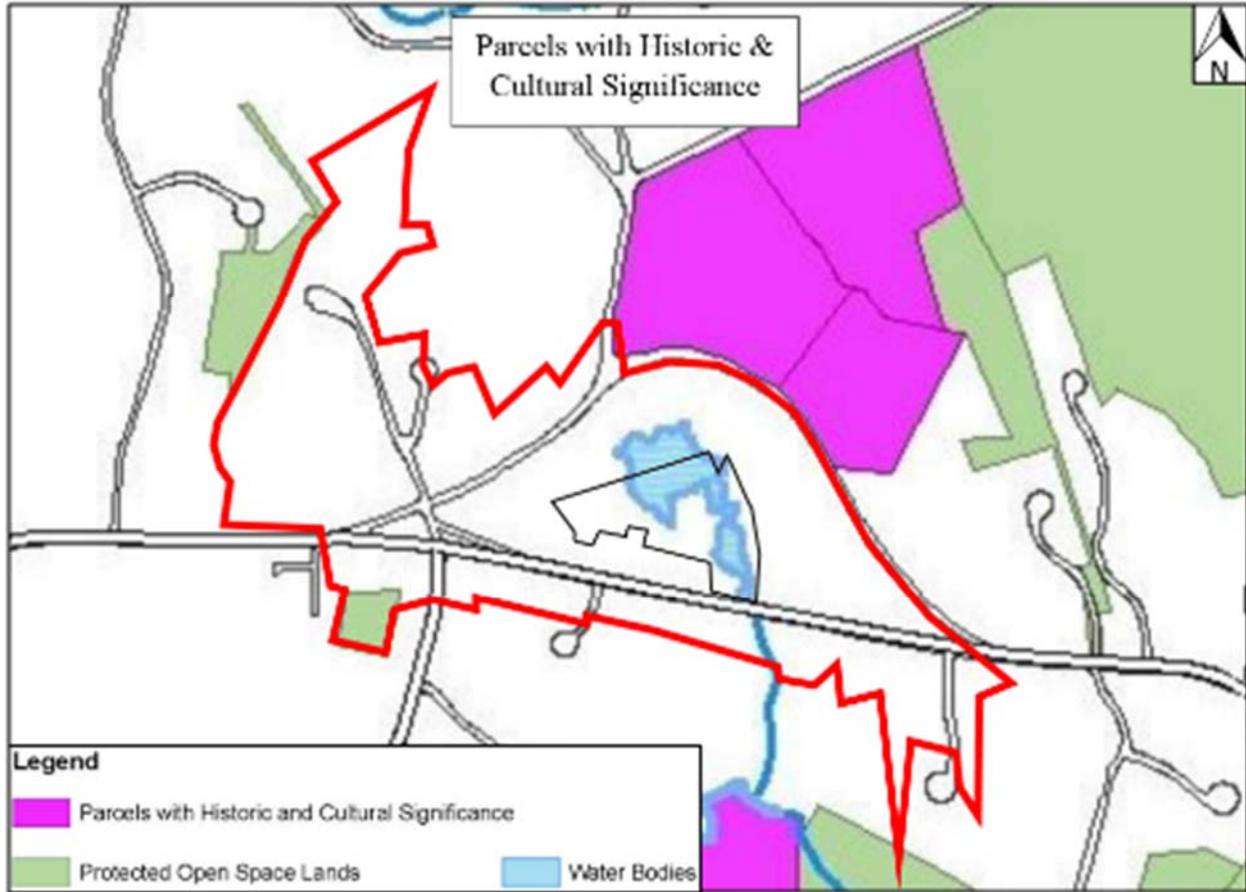


Figure 12 Map of Parcels with Wildlife Habitat Significance in the Town Center



*Figure 13 Map of Parcels with Historic and Cultural Significance in the Town Center*

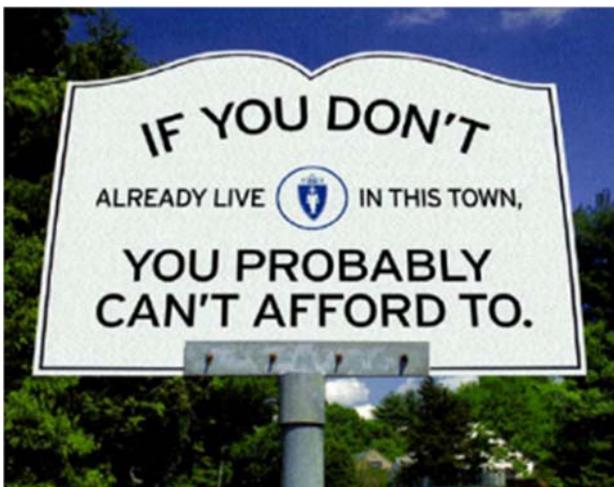
The plan notes that 62% of Stow residents live in Stow due to its rural character including its open space, farms and orchards, and Lake Boon. Additionally, over half of the residents surveyed during the Master Plan process identified “small town community” as the main reason they decided to live in Stow. Preserving its rural nature and providing recreational opportunities to its residents is very important to Stow and the Town Center is lacking in these areas. Ultimately, the plan promotes protecting agricultural lands, areas for active and passive recreation, significant surface and groundwater resources, scenic vistas, and historical or cultural resources.

## Housing Production Plan

Karen Sunnarborg Consulting of Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts prepared the *Housing Production Plan Update* for the Town of Stow and the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (SMAHT) in 2011 that builds off of the 2002 plan. “A Housing Production Plan (HPP) is a community's proactive strategy for planning and developing affordable housing. The HPP shall contain at a minimum [of] the following elements, covering a time period of five years: 1. Comprehensive housing needs assessment; 2. Affordable housing goals; and 3. Implementation strategies.”

One of the main objectives of the HPP is to assist Stow in coming “closer to meeting the state’s 10% affordable housing threshold by presenting a proactive housing agenda of town-sponsored initiatives.” Stow has made great progress and is currently has 7.16% subsidized. Massachusetts Chapter 40B regulations, in municipalities where less than 10% of its housing qualifies as affordable under the law, a developer can build more densely than the municipal zoning bylaws would permit, allowing more units per acre of land when building a new development, if at least 25% of the new units have long-term affordability restrictions. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has approved Stow’s HPP, placing Stow in a position to have more control over proposals that do not align with Town goals, bylaws or policies – a position often referred to as “safe harbor”. According to Ms. Laura Spear of SMAHT, this gives Stow more control over comprehensive permit applications for approximately another six months, unless more progress is made in producing affordable housing.

Although the HPP identified rental housing as the first priority need in Stow, home



ownership was identified as the second highest priority. “Affordable starter housing is still rare in Stow as well as affordable opportunities for seniors to downsize. This Plan suggests that approximately half of the affordable units produced as a result of the Town’s housing strategies be for homeownership and also include additional units for those earning

*Photograph 36 Source: HPP, p. 34, 2011.*

above 80% of area median income who are still priced out of the private housing market. The affordable units should include a mix of sizes and 10-15% should be targeted to the elderly and disabled.” As shown in the figure below from the HPP, in 2000, 91% of Stow’s housing stock consisted of single-family detached residences.

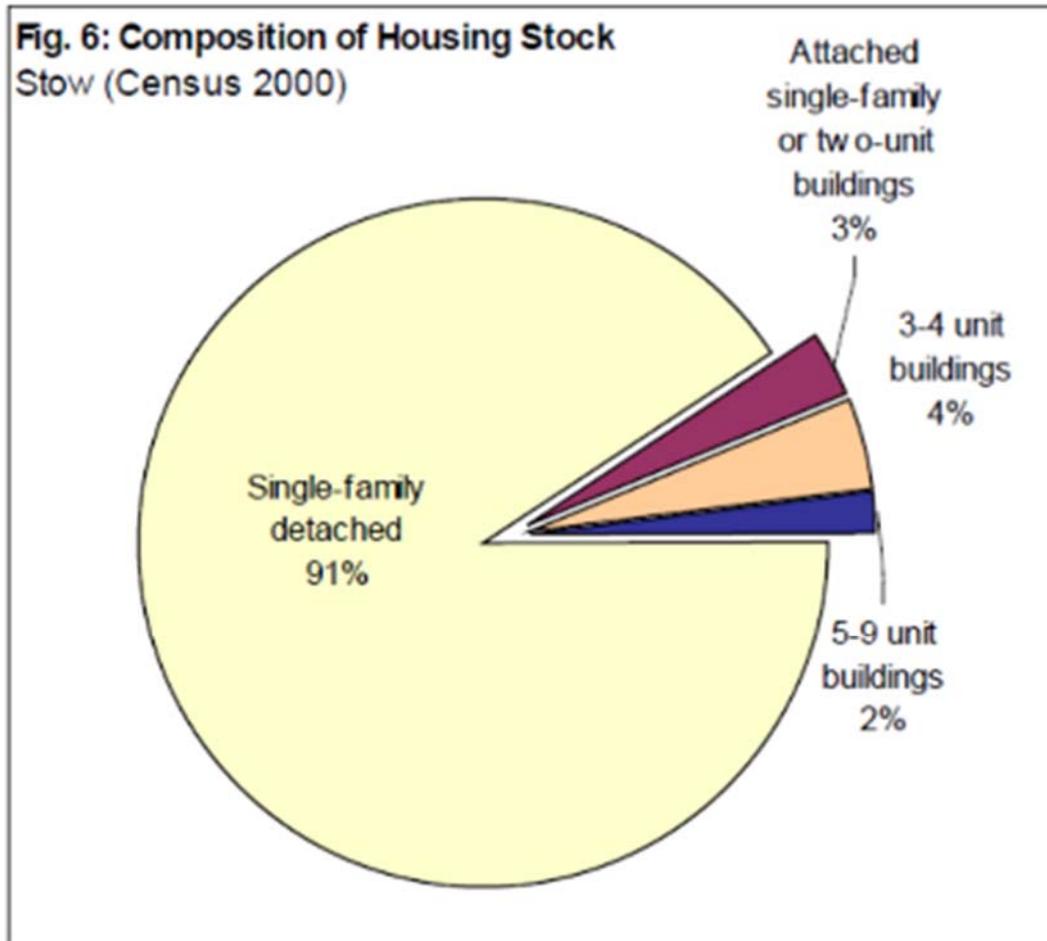


Figure 14 Composition of Housing Stock. Source: HPP, p. 17, 2011.

The Comprehensive Permit Policy adopted by the Selectboard in 2013 states that “since our town is a small, low-density community, we prefer affordable housing developments of 50 units or less, with a density of 3-4 single-family dwellings per acre or 7-10 common-wall units per acre. Buildings in an affordable housing development need to meet Stow’s 35 foot height limit. They should be designed to a maximum floor area ratio of 0.5 while preserving 30% open land on the parcel.” The Policy also promotes the qualities and attributes of villages. “A village needs a focus, a social amenity to act as its defining feature, such as a community center or recreational

facility, trail linkages to adjacent open space, or in appropriately zoned areas, a small commercial establishment.”

## Pedestrian Walkway Study

The Pedestrian Walkway Study (PWP) was concluded in 2012 by the Pedestrian Walkway Planning Subcommittee, which was created by the Planning Board in 2009 to make Stow more pedestrian friendly as recommended in the Master Plan. Along with the Master Plan, the study considered public opinion by way of a survey. According to the survey, 90% of the people interviewed are in favor of sidewalks, 86% are in favor of a continuous sidewalk along Route 117/Great Road, and 73% would be willing to provide an easement for that matter if necessary.

The study proposes the building of sidewalks following two phases. The first has already

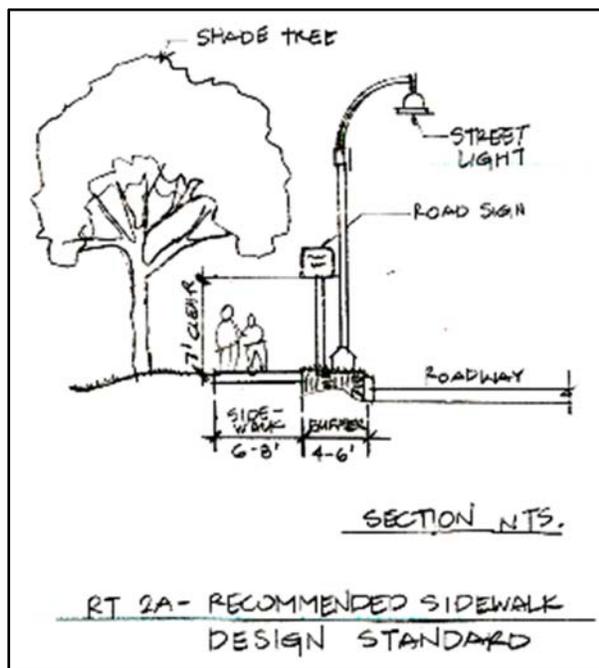


Figure 15 Recommended sidewalk design standard.  
Source: PWP Presentation 2010.

been finished and included the design and construction of several walkway segments along Route 117 to connect the Upper Common to Old Bolton Road. The image to the left shows the recommended sidewalk design standards with a four to six foot buffer between the sidewalk and the roadway. The second phase has the objective to prioritize a list of future walkway projects to be implemented as funds become available. The criteria for the prioritizations are: Potential pedestrian volume, Connectivity / key destinations, Safety and Ease of implementation.

According to the PWP, the estimated costs for building sidewalks in the areas encompassing the Commons and for Great Road totaled \$60,000, a per foot cost of \$62.50 in 2012 dollars. This is based on the average found in the Town of Sudbury, and the maintenance cost is estimated to be \$4,200 every 20 years in 2012 dollars. Funding is available through the Massachusetts DOT in their Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) and Chapter 90 Program. Additionally, Town is actively pursuing Certification in the Complete Streets Program, which will open up a new funding stream for communities certified to make upgrades to their bike and pedestrian infrastructure.

The aerial photograph below shows the point-to-point foot traffic patterns at the upper Common civic center. Such an area is an important civic center, consisting of the Center and Hale school buildings, the Public Library, the Town Hall, and the Town Building. Primary parking facilities are also located at Center School, adjacent to the Town Building, and along Common Road near the Public Library. Facilitating convenient point-to-point foot traffic will increase pedestrian safety in this area, especially for young adults and children who tend to choose a direct path to their intended destination.



*Figure 16 Point-to-point foot traffic Upper Common civic center. Source: PWP, p. 4, 2012.*

Finally, this plan goes into direct alignment with the Massachusetts Boston Region Pedestrian Transportation Plan. This state planning group has identified Great Road in Stow as one of the highest priority for walkways in Stow, as the above map shows. The regional vision includes priorities to “close gaps in the pedestrian network” and to “prioritize schools, civic and commercial sites”.

## Town Center Beautification Plan 1966

Maurice and Gary Incorporated, Landscape Architects and Thomas Associates, Community Planners created two drawings of the Town Center for the Stow Beautification Program. The images are included in the appendices. The drawings add new street trees along Crescent Street, Library Hill Road, and the western portion of Great Road. New plantings are also depicted in a central island at the intersection of West Acton Road and Crescent Street. The plan suggests relocating the gas station at the main intersection, adding decorative lighting, plantings and benches around the Town Green and Library, and adding sidewalks and commercial properties south of Great Road on Route 62.

A nature trail is drawn connecting the schools on the western portion of the Town Center, then traveling east around Pilot Grove Hill, then southeast behind the Hillside Cemetery and across Crescent Street. The trail continues along the north and east sides of Minister's Pond and finally across Great Road to the south.

The plan has an inset map of a proposed Town Common in the location of the current Town Building and Susan Lawrence Park. An access road leads south to a parking lot just north of the "Skating Pond". A terrace and amphitheater are located in the central portion of the area. Three additional terraces and benches are depicted just north of the pond.

Several of these beautification proposals have come to fruition, while others have not. The trail was never realized and may not be possible in some of the locations; however, the Town Center still has opportunities for trails and recreation. The park behind the Town Building current receives little use and skating is not allowed on the pond any longer due to liability issues. The one picnic table is also underused according to interviews with municipal employees.

## Town Center Planning Board Special Meeting Minutes 1970

A Special Meeting was held by the Planning Board on May 27, 1970 to discuss needs and problems of the Town Center and promote better communication between the boards and committees. The meeting indicated that there was a need for affordable elderly housing. Possible locations were noted as the Lawrence property, Crescent Street between the Crescent Street Garage and Lund's property, in the lower village, and the Pilot Grove Farm. Other concerns consisted of

increasing the size of the Library due to its current space being inadequate. Parking and sewage disposal were noted as major problems. Expansion at the time was not allowed by the zoning bylaws.

The Conservation Commission had no plans for the Town Center except to keep Minister's Pond remaining in its present state. Sidewalks were desired on Great Road. A water system for the Town Center using Federal funds was proposed to create a well on Crescent Street; however, this would have cost approximately half a million dollars in 1970 dollars. The Finance Committee noted that the tax rate had been in a spiral and that commercial development would be essential to stop the spiral. The Development and Industrial Commission proposed rezoning the property near the Post Office to business for professional offices. The Selectboard strongly opposed commercial development in the Town Center and felt that its character should be preserved.

The Selectboard also noted the need for a sewerage system for the Town Center and stated that the need for a new Town Barn for the Highway Department for storage. Traffic problems, including speeding in the school zones led to the request for "Slow Children" signs, flashing lights, and crosswalks. In general, the committees promoted beautifying the Town Center and adding sidewalks to make it more walkable. Many of the issues brought up at the special meeting, including the water supply, walkability, and Town storage are still alive today, 45 years later.

## Crowell History of Stow Regarding Minister's Pond

"The Reverend Jonathan Newell, who at one time owned a great deal of land in the lower village, later purchased land nearer Stow center. He lived on the place now owned by Clifton Fletcher, which according to the map of 1830, was occupied by Dr. Newell's widow. Dr. Newell, being of a scientific mind, and having great interest in the town of his choice, made many improvements. At this time on the corner lot, opposite Henry H. Warren's, was a very large pond of water. This was supplied by a brook, known as "Strong Water Brook," and the pond known as "Strong Water Pond." So great was this body of water, that at times it reached to the Center school-house road (Pilot Grove School). Dr. Newell dug a trench deep enough to turn the course of this stream from the north to the south, causing it to flow through a culvert, under the road below Union Church, till it joined "Assabet" brook which flows into Assabet river. The land was well drained also. For this he received great reward from the Middlesex County Horticultural Society, for the

greatest achievement in Middlesex County. From that time on, the pond below Union Church, is known as "Minister's Pond."

## Historical Commission Inventory

In July 2012, Bruce Clouette, Consultant to the Stow Historical Commission, began a Town Historic Update. The Massachusetts Historical Commission's Form B-Building was completed to determine the eligibility of historic designation for nine structures in the Town Center. These structures include: the Old Stow Town Hall, Union Evangelical Church, First Parish Church, Randall Library, the Old Firehouse/Crescent Street Highway Barn, the "Bungalow Shop", Stow Academy Boardinghouse (also known as the Parsonage Building), Pilot Grove School, and a residence at 412 Great Road. Each structure was determined to be contributing to a potential historic district. The Old Stow Town Hall, the residence at 412 Great Road, Union Evangelical Church, and First Parish Church were recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

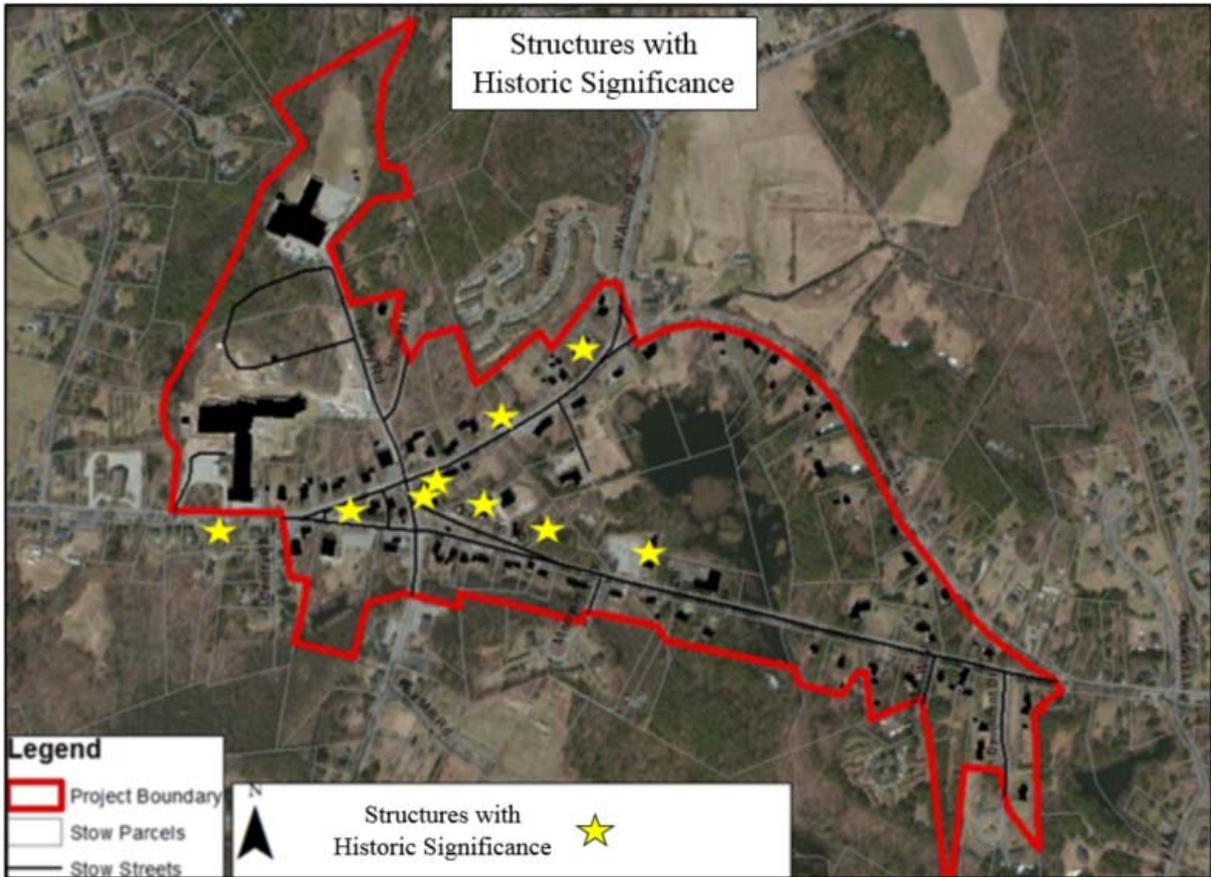


Figure 17 Map of structures with historic significance according to the Town Center Historic Update, 2012. From left to right the structures are a residence at 412 Great Road, the Old Stow Town Hall, Randall Library the “Bungalow Shop”, First Parish Church, the Old Firehouse/Crescent Street Highway Barn, the Parsonage Building, Pilot Grove School, and Union Evangelical Church.

## Section 4: Phase I Storage Needs Survey

In order to better understand the population's needs regarding alternatives for potential uses of the old Fire Station building, as well as the Crescent Street Highway Building next to the cemetery, CED asked for the planning department of Stow to undertake a quick survey to the key stakeholders. The survey consisted of four straight to the point questions to be textually answered and are listed below:

1. *Where do you currently store items related to your department? (E.g. vehicles, trailers, equipment, files, etc.)*
2. *Do you believe you have sufficient storage space for current and future needs?*
3. *If the Fire-Station was converted into a storage building, would your department like to make use of that space?*
4. *Do you think using the Fire-Station and the Crescent St. Highway buildings as storage is the best use for those buildings?*

The survey was sent by the Stow Planning Department to stakeholders whose interests are directly involved with the future use of those spaces in Stow Town Center. The outreach included 48 addresses representing the following: Accountant, Agricultural Commission, Assessors Department, Building Department, Cemetery Department, Council on Aging, Community Preservation Committee, Conservation Commission, Police Department, Fire Department, Finance Committee, Selectboard, Board of Health, Highway Department, IT, Library, Recreation Department, Stow TV, Town Administrator, Town Clerk, Treasurer, Town Nurse, and Veterans Agent.

Fourteen surveys were collected in total. The respondents are not identifiable except for if they chose to include personal marks onto their answers. In the analysis of the results, it is possible to see that the majority of respondents are currently experiencing problems with lack of storage space, and different ideas as alternative uses for the two aforementioned buildings. The survey revealed that although storage is an issue for many Town departments, the majority of respondents felt the Fire Station was not the best place for storage. The space is too central and prime for a better use. The Highway Building would be a better place for cold storage.

1. Where do you currently store items related to your department? (E.g. vehicles, trailers, equipment, files, etc.)

Text Response
· Old Town Hall, Stow Community park barn, Pine Bluff storage shed
· Election equipment - Town Building attic and maintenance shed at Center
· Our office file cabinets and in the vault
· Office, Flagg Hill Garage
· In my tiny attic office
· Town Building attic, my office, and some election equipment is in the maintenance building at Center School
· The only items requiring storage are my files and they are all kept in my office
· On site in building
· In our office or in the vault
· Closets, desks and wherever we can
· Town Building 3rd Floor attic space, Lower Level - Pump Room, Back Hallways, etc. Highway Department Yard, Crescent St. Highway building, Pompo School
· Office closets, vault (sparingly), ugly bankers' boxes in our office
· In the closet area next to our office/TV station.
· Maintenance Building is at Brookside Cemetery, off of Box Mill Road. The garage is 16x32 with two storage addition 1at 10x12 and the other at 8x10; equaling a total of 712 sq. ft. The other storage area is two garage bays at the Crescent Street Garage. The garage bays are 24x28 totaling 672 square feet.

The question above shows that all the stakeholders that responded do need (and make use of) space for storing different types of objects ranging from items that can be as small as office material to as big as raw material for grave yard maintenance.

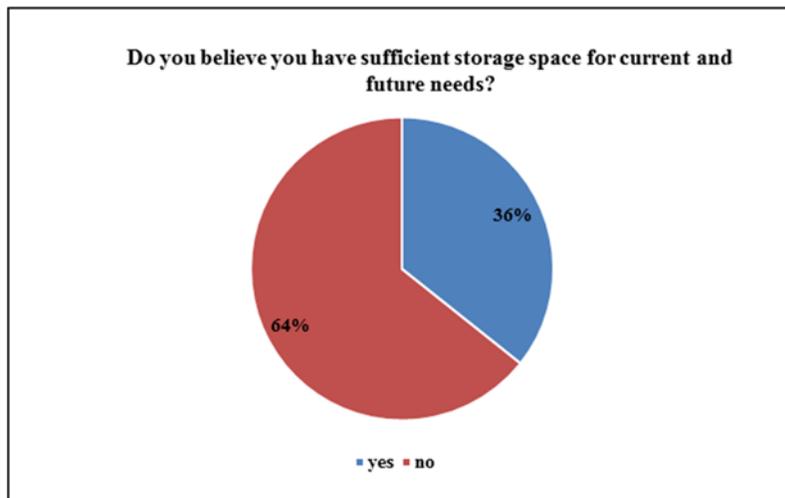
It is possible to find that there are users in need of more adequate spaces for storage, considering answers such as:

- “*wherever we can*”
- “*ugly bankers' boxes*”
- “*in my tiny attic office*”

2. Do you believe you have sufficient storage space for current and future needs?

Text Response	
·	No
·	Yes
·	No
·	Yes
·	Yes
·	Yes
·	I do
·	No
·	No, we haven't had sufficient space since I started working here!
·	No
·	NO!
·	No. I can foresee space shortage in the next 5 years.
·	We could use more
·	NO. The Cemetery Committee will be looking to expand our maintenance and our storage areas.

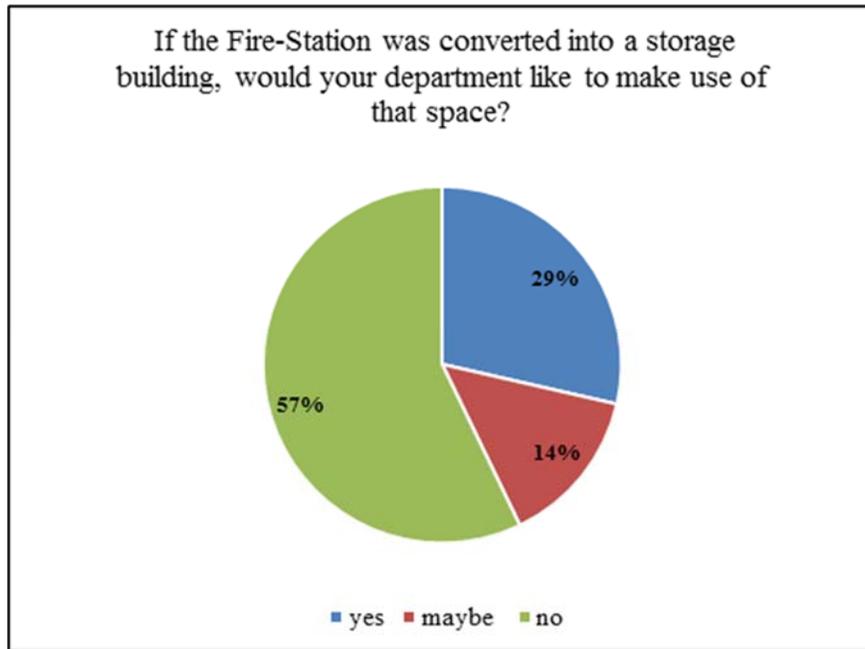
Based on the answers from the question number two, it is possible to determine a potential demand for storage space ongoing right now, as well as having in mind for future necessities.



3. If the Fire-Station was converted into a storage building, would your department like to make use of that space?

Text Response
· Yes
· No
· Possibly
· No pressing need
· Most likely
· No
· No
· Yes
· Yes possibly for older documents that we are required to keep forever.
· Not if we go to Pompo as well.
· No
· Yes!
· Most items we store are regularly needed. It would not be practical to go over to the fire station to find some of the items.
· NO.

The answers from the third question show that the option for using the current building of the old Fire Station as a storage space is not necessarily a priority, since more than fifty percent of the respondents said no to using that place as a storage. However, it could be of some help for that matter.

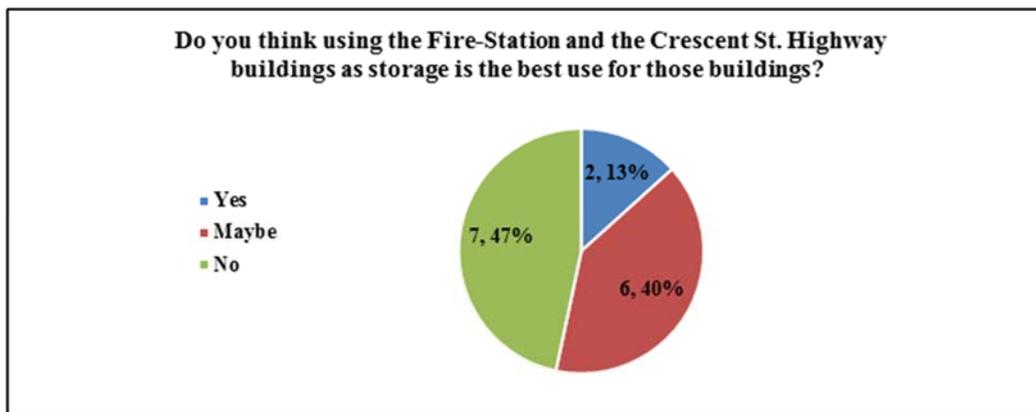


4. Do you think using the Fire-Station and the Crescent St. Highway buildings as storage is the best use for those buildings?

Text Response	
·	Fire station would make a great teen center
·	NO the fire station lot should be parking for town center.
·	Don't know--what are other options?
·	No
·	Depends upon the current needs? Did anyone think of recreation there? It's near fields and the garage would make a great indoor gaming area. Like basketball, Ping-Pong, table tennis, foosball and so much more
·	The Fire Station should be torn down and a parking lot created. The old Fire Station/Highway Bldg. near cemetery is ok for storage.
·	From a cost/benefit perspective, I do not think it would be cost efficient or effective to retain operational use of the existing station with the accompanying loss of the use of that space for needed parking.
·	No
·	Don't have an opinion really, but highway garage seems an unlikely storage bldg.

· Unless the Library uses it as an annex and parking options.
· No
· Yes if the building doesn't need lots of costly renovation.
· It seems like there must be better ways to use these large buildings or areas. · Yes; We are lacking in adequate storage space now.

The answers for the fourth question shed light to future uses of the buildings located on Crescent Street Highway and the Fire-Station. Most respondents are not in favor of turning these buildings into storage spaces, or are conditionally willing to do so – due to other issues like cost/benefit. Some respondents even suggested other options for use like a teen recreation center, as well as turning the Fire-Station in a parking lot while the Crescent St. Highway Building being a better suit for storage.



## Section 5: Town Center Opportunities and Recommendations

After conducting our existing conditions assessment of the Town Center, CED has identified nine opportunities and formulated various proposals and recommendations. Each issue can be addressed from several angles. The status quo could be continued by doing nothing, allowing the current use to remain. Then more intense approaches can be used to elicit various results. CED has proposed various options below and identified what it believes to be the best option; however, it is ultimately up to the Town of Stow to determine which opportunity fits best with where Stow is heading.

### Fire Station Use

The current Fire Station, 16 Crescent Street, is located at the northeast corner of the intersection between Library Hill Road and Crescent Street. The Fire Station property is very centrally located. The Hale Middle School is adjacent to the north. The Center School is located to the west, along with several single-family residences. The Library is located to the southeast. The Town Hall is located to the southwest. The Fire Station; however, is moving to the new municipal facility at the Pompositticut School in the near future, opening an opportunity for a prime parcel in Stow's Town Center.

According to the Stow Assessor's Property Record Card, the property totals three acres and the Fire Station was built in 1965. The building is totals approximately 4,500 square feet and contains four bays. The building is a masonry structure and has settled in some areas, which may be due to the subsurface conditions. There is approximately 8,800 square feet of paved asphalt in front of the structure and nearly 3,000 square feet in the rear. Although this structure has served the Fire Department well, it is no longer meets the needs of the department and is beginning to have structural issues that will likely limit its use in the future.



*Photograph 37 View of the Fire Station from Library Hill Rd. Photograph 38 East and north sides of the Fire Station.*



*Photograph 39 Paved storage area behind the Fire Station. Photograph 40 Interior of the Fire Station*

When the Fire Department moves from this location, the Town has a great opportunity. CED has identified the following possibilities for the Fire Station property:

1. Do nothing or keep as storage (status quo)
2. Demolish and use as a Town Center parking lot
3. Convert to a Teen Center or recreation facility and use the front for parking for the Library and Town Center
4. Keep for other municipal use (Library)

The status quo would be to do nothing with the structure or property. This is a possibility to wait until a more compelling option presents itself. Another use that would sustain the status quo would be to use the structure for much needed storage for municipal uses. As seen in the Storage Needs Survey conducted in the Fall of 2014, some Town departments have space limitations and are interested in possibilities for additional storage; however, the results were

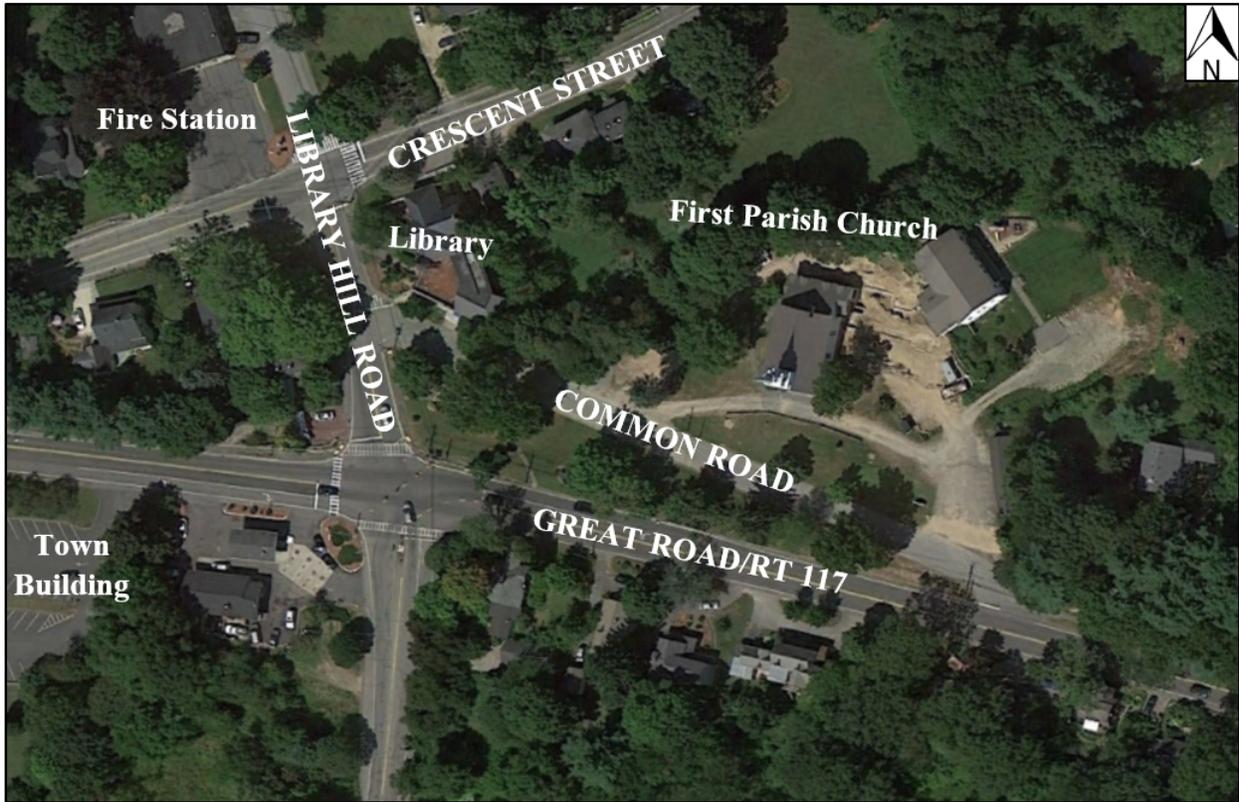
mixed on whether the Fire Station should be used for storage. CED does not recommend using the Fire Station for storage, unless it is for a temporary period of time or only in a portion of the structure.

The second option is to demolish the structure and utilize the entire lot for parking. Parking has been identified by many stakeholders as a need in the Town Center. CED agrees that this site could be very useful for parking; in an area where pedestrian facilities and walkability are desired and needed, any discussion of parking should adhere to a complete streets design.

The third and fourth options reuse the structure for another municipal use. It has been suggested to utilize the building by the Recreation Department as a Teen Center. There is currently no Teen Center or Boys and Girls Club type organization in Stow. The Recreation Department could utilize the structures close proximity to both the Hale Middle School and Center School, as well as the Library, as an asset for the youth of Stow. Another option would be to open the structure up for Library uses, whether that be storage or activity space. The merit in this opportunity is that some of the already paved areas of the Fire Station property could be used as a Town Center parking lot, meeting two needs of the Town. This recommendation is a good compromise that can meet the parking needs of the Town Center while providing time for the Town to determine the future use of the building.

## Common Road

Common Road is located immediately to the south of the Library and First Parish Church and to the north of the Common. Common Road travels east-west connecting Library Hill Road with Great Road. The right of way is approximately 24 feet wide; however, vehicles park alongside the road, creating a very narrow feel. Since there is no sidewalk along Great Road to the south, Common Road is used as the pedestrian walkway in this area. Many children and families walk through this area to go to the Library and First Parish Church. Vehicles often use Common Road as a cut through to avoid the main intersections light.



*Figure 18 Map of Common Road in the Town Center*

1. Do nothing (status quo)
2. Put a “Do Not Enter” sign at the entrance from Great Road (Route 117)
3. Put a “No Right Hand Turn” sign exiting Common Road onto Great Road
4. Stub Common Road at Great Road. Create a cul-de-sac so vehicles can turn around and exit on Library Hill Road.

Again, doing nothing and promoting the status quo is a possibility; however, Stow will continue to see the issues that were discussed in the interview with Detective Sallese. Stow is growing and one of the goals of the Town Center Study is to promote and expand the use of the Town Center. With the likely possibility of even more people using this area, Common Road becomes even more of a priority. The safety and efficiency of the roads and sidewalks is important to the sustainability of the Town Center.

**Option 2**, put a “Do Not Enter” sign at the entrance from Great Road would remove the possibility of vehicles racing through Common Road as a cut through to avoid the light. **Option 3** also alleviates some unnecessary vehicular traffic on Common Road by not allowing vehicles to turn right from Common Road onto Great Road. Crescent Street has a right hand turn restriction due to the angle of the exit, which would cause drivers to cross the central yellow line to make the

turn. This happens at Common Road as well and is much closer to a busy intersection. These improvements could go hand in hand with an improved signal at the main intersection at Route 117 and Route 62.

**Option 4** creates the most change for Common Road. By stubbing Common Road at Great Road and creating a cul-de-sac, vehicles would turn around and exit on Library Hill Road. Detective Sallesse noted significant concern on the use of Common Road as a cut through. If there is sufficient space to allow for a cul-de-sac in this area, vehicles will drive much slower, creating a safer environment for those utilizing the First Parish Church, Library, and Common. Additionally, an official sidewalk along the south side of the Common on the north side of Great Road would lead to fewer people using Common Road as a sidewalk.

**Option 4** is optimal; however, several elements must be considered. This reconfiguration would impact the First Church that has several parking spaces along Common Road. Their official parking area can often times get blurred with Common Road itself. By closing off the entrance and exit of Common Road at Great Road would impact their parishioners on Sundays and days of other events that may bring higher traffic to the First Church. A traffic analysis may be needed to determine if constraining First Church to solely use the Library Hill entrance of Common Road would be sufficient or if it would cause traffic congestion or back up in other areas. If this is a concern, the entrance and exit could be left open with time restrictions of when vehicles may use the entrance and exit from Common Road.

## Library Future

The Library, constructed in 1894, is arguably the most important landmark to the Town of Stow. The Library is on the Town seal and is an icon in the Town Center.



Figure 19 Town Seal. Source: [www.anglefire.com](http://www.anglefire.com)



Figure 20 Randall Library, 1894. Source: Stow Historical Society

1. Do nothing (status quo)
2. Work with the Town and an architect/designer to renovate, reconstruct the inadequate addition, historic preservation, and provide assistance in acquiring funding
3. Utilize the Fire Station for storage, offices, or special events
4. Evaluate possibilities to connect the Library better with the schools, Town Hall, and Minister's Pond. Install cross walks, connect sidewalks, raised cross walks with flashing lights in critical areas, possible trails, and wayfinding signs.

The facility requires renovations, most notably to repair water intrusion issues. The Library would like to demolish the addition and reconstruct a better addition. The building should also be protected in some way due to its historic nature and deep connection with the essence of Stow. Since the Library is in the process of searching for opportunities and funding for its renovations, the Town should collaborate with the Library in finding resources to maintain the structure and properly preserve it.

The Library has done a fantastic job at programming, with events nearly every night, according to the event calendar. The Library and Recreation Commission should collaborate on the possibility of creating a recreation center at the Fire Station. The Library is blessed with a central location in close proximity to two schools, two churches, and the majority of the Town facilities. Improving the connections between all of these facilities, which are in close proximity to each other, would boost the Town Center and its use.

## Crescent Street Highway Building

The Crescent Street Highway Building does not appear to be a significant historic structure to the Town or the Historic Commission. The building lacks water, septic, or heating and is not in a condition to be significantly altered for another use.

1. Keep as cold storage (status quo)
2. Determine if there is extra space for additional storage that may eliminate the need to use the Fire Station for storage (much of the current items are moving to new facility)
3. Demolish and create affordable housing
4. Demolish and create parking
5. Create trail behind to connect Crescent Street to Pilot Grove Apartments and to schools

In this case, keeping the building for cold storage, despite maintaining the status quo, may actually assist the Town of Stow in utilizing the Fire Station property for a more progressive use.

The Fire Station is located on a more centrally located and prime parcel than the Crescent Street Highway Building and should be used for a better purpose than storage. The Storage Survey from the Fall of 2014 indicated that there is still a need for storage amongst the various Town departments. Some items will be moved to the new Pompositticut facility, opening this structure up for additional storage; however, unheated.

It appears clear that renovating the current structure for any other use than storage would not be feasible. The structure has no water, septic, or heat. Demolishing the structure would be the best and cheapest option to redevelop this site for another use. If the Town felt there is no need for the structure as a storage facility, the best option would likely be to demolish it and start fresh. Several affordable housing units could be constructed or the site could be used as a Town Center parking lot. The parcel is located 700 feet (0.14 mile) from the main intersection and only 500 feet (0.10 mile) from the Library. This distance is certainly walkable; however, it may appear more as an overflow lot, rather than a first option for parking in the Town Center.

## Linkages and Connections

Stow's Town Center feels like a quintessential historic, colonial Town Center in rural New England. The mix of municipal facilities, schools, churches, residences, and now several commercial facilities sound like the recipe for a walkable Town Center. However, this has yet to be fully realized in the Town Center. Several key linkages and connections are missing throughout the Town Center and to amenities outside of the Town Center. Below are some of the opportunities CED has identified.

1. Connect all sidewalks in Town Center
2. Create trail behind the Crescent Street Highway Building to connect to Pilot Grove Apartments and to schools as in 1966 Beautification Plan
3. Create trail from the Library, along the north side of FPC, connecting to 323 Great Road
4. Work to connect the Town Center with Red Acre Woodlands and Marble Hill Conservation Area
5. Wayfinding signs around Town Center with directions to key attractions and facilities, including 323 Great Road/Minister's Pond
6. Reduce speeds along Great Road and create ways to connect Town Center with the Lower Village (crosswalks from neighborhoods south of Great Road to connect with a widened sidewalk)

There are three main areas where sidewalks appear to be most needed. 1) Along Great Road by the Common, 2) along Library Hill Road, and 3) a section on the north side of Crescent Street from the cemetery to Pilot Grove. Since there are no places where sidewalks are on both sides of the street, crosswalks are needed in several places to safely connect pedestrians with the existing sidewalk infrastructure. There are also several trail opportunities, especially if the Minister's Pond Park becomes a reality at 323 Great Road.

## Historic Preservation

Stow is a historic town with a long history. It was first settled by Europeans circa 1660, established in 1669, and incorporated in 1683. Of the surrounding towns of Harvard, Boxborough, Acton, Maynard, Sudbury, Hudson, and Bolton, Stow and Maynard are the only two without a historic district. Many communities with similar histories and characteristics of Stow, such as Concord and Lexington, also have historic districts. According to the National Register of Historic Places listing, there are five properties in Stow that are registered, each of which are outside the Town Center. Historic preservation has been discussed in the Town for years; however, the idea has never stuck, with many residents concerned about tight restrictions on their property rights. Below is a discussion of several options for historic preservation.

1. Local Town Center Historic District
2. National Register Historic District
3. Preservation Restrictions/Easements
4. Register some of the oldest and most historic individual buildings on the National Registry
5. Neighborhood Conservation District

### **Local Historic District**

Local Historic Districts are an act of legislation (i.e. the town enacts a bylaw or ordinance), meaning it must follow due process and go through the necessary legislative process. It works very similarly to zoning in that it is entirely locally regulated, but it is less concerned with land use and is more about aesthetic and structural controls. The town has the ability to decide just how restrictive it wants the bylaw to be; however, and can go to the extreme of limiting paint colors, or can be more relaxed and simply restrict major alterations such as demolition or additions. This is the option that can have the most teeth if the Town is very serious about protecting its assets and historic character; however, it is also flexible and can allow the Town to protect specific elements

by designing their own restrictions. The Town would need to form a committee to oversee applications for work in the district in addition to any planning, building, and conservation permits.

### **National Register District**

Whereas the Local Historic District has a lot of teeth, National Register Districts are much more symbolic. National Register Districts recognize the importance of the buildings but it do not necessarily protect them from change or destruction. Having a National Register District does not restrict private property owners' use of their property in any way unless there is involvement from the state or federal government in the form of funding (i.e. tax credits) or permitting. In essence, a property owner can change the building in any way, even knock it down, as long as they haven't accepted federal or state money to protect or improve it, and as long as there aren't other unrelated restrictions on the property such as wetlands, deed restrictions, etc.

At this point, the background work necessary for listing has been completed for most of the Town. To move forward, the Town would need to work with the Massachusetts Historic Commission on getting the district listed, if they desired.

### **Preservation Restrictions/Easements**

Preservation Restrictions/Easements are another option. It can be very effective, but is entirely voluntary on the part of the property owners. In this option, the property owner donates their rights to alter the appearance of the historic structure on their property, or the town purchases those rights. This is done on a case by case basis and requires a legally binding agreement between the property owner and the town. It is important to point out that the restriction/easement stays with the land, meaning that even if the property changes ownership, the restrictions remain in place. This does not give the town the right to use the property in any way, it only gives them the right to restrict the appearance of the building's exterior. The incentive for the property owner is a reduction or elimination of property taxes on that property. Generally speaking, the restrictions apply only to the exterior appearance of the building, and allow any changes to be made to the interior.

If none of the property owners are willing to donate their rights to alter the exterior of the building, the Town can use Community Preservation Act (CPA) money to purchase them. This may be the best option in terms of actually protecting properties without causing tensions to rise or getting majority approval. The Town Center; however, is unique in that many of the historic structures are municipal or church facilities. If the Town is interested in at least protecting its Old

Town Hall and Library, they could do so without infringing on private property rights. They could also work with the two churches to determine how best to protect those structures.

### **Churches/Municipal Buildings**

To assist the Town and the churches financially, the MA Preservation Projects Fund has grant money for municipalities and non-profits. This fund offers a 50% reimbursable matching grant. If the grant is accepted and used, the Town must enter into a preservation restriction and maintenance agreement in perpetuity. This means the state has some control over how the building is used and any alterations made to it. It does not, however, mean the state owns the deed or has rights to use the property. Any work done before a grant is awarded is ineligible for funding consideration. The property for which the project funding is requested must be listed on the National Register. Further information can be found on their website (<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcmppf/mppfidx.htm>).

### **Demolition/Reconstruction of additions to historic properties**

Often there is concern regarding additions and demolition of historic structures. There are no restrictions if the building is listed on the Register and no state or federal money/subsidies have been invested in the property. This is true for both public and privately owned structures. If the structure is a town owned building and the town accepts grant funding from the MA Preservation Projects Fund, then any work will have to be in accordance with the preservation restriction. The town would need to be in correspondence with the MHC to ensure they are complying with the restriction. If the building is privately owned and tax credits have been accepted, additions may be made as long as the addition does not contribute to the historical significance of the building. The owner should first confirm with MA Historical Commission before they go through with any work.

### **Quick Facts about Historic Preservation**

- The Town can have both a Local Historic District and a National Register District, and they can both be combined with a preservation easement on specific properties.
- The Town does not need approval from property owners to include their property within a National Register District. However, listing of the district can be stopped if the majority of property owners submit notarized objections.

- Historic Preservation Tax Credits, whether state or federal, are only available to owners of income-producing private properties. Public properties, or private properties which are not used for income-producing purposes are not eligible.
- If a property owner wants to apply for tax credits and their property is within the historic district, their property must have been included on the original listing as a contributing property, or they must go through the extra step of proving that it contributes to the district.
- Public properties can be listed on the Register and within a National Register District.

### **Recommended Information Links**

- The Massachusetts Historic Commission site provides a good explanation of the difference between the two types of districts. <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/difference.pdf>
- Preservation Planning Division of the MA Secretary of State's office has links to all necessary forms and information and brief descriptions of the different preservation options. <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhchpp/ppdhpp.htm>
- National Park Service's "fundamentals" of the National Register provides general information about what listing entails and how to do it. [http://www.nps.gov/nr/national\\_register\\_fundamentals.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/national_register_fundamentals.htm)

## **Water Supply**

The Town of Stow currently has no municipally supplied water. Each property has its own private drinking water well. Historically and currently, several properties may share wells. For example, the Town Building and First Parish Church have shared drinking water in both directions for over 100 years. The lack of Town water and sewer may be a hindrance on future development and growth. This may be an appropriate way to control growth, if that is what the Town desires; however, it leads to the issue of fire protection. None of the Town Center municipal or church facilities presently have fire suppression, with the exception of the Town Building. The First Parish Church recently received an exemption for fire suppression due to the burden of lack of a water source.

1. Develop water supply well at 323 Great Road and supply the Town Center with potable and fire protection water

## **Fire Suppression-Sprinklers**

Fire suppression is not absolutely necessary unless properties, like the First Parish Church, are planning on making renovations that are equal to or more than 30% of the value. In that case, everything in the building must be brought up to code, including fire compliance. The MA Preservation Projects Fund grants can be used for building code compliance.

## **Well/Water Supply at Minister's Pond**

As discussed in the Phase I report, Warrant Article language leading to a 2013 Town Meeting vote of approval to purchase the property, noted the potential space for a public water supply well that could yield in the vicinity of 10,000 gallons per day (gpd), completely containing the necessary Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) mandated Zone 1 protection radius. Each of the proposals agreed with providing a water source at the 323 Great Road property. A study would need to be conducted to determine the feasibility of using Minister's Pond and the potential well for fire suppression throughout the Town Center.

## **Sustaining the Churches**

Throughout CED's many interviews and the Town Center Forum, it was clear that the two churches in the Town Center are icons to the people of Stow. The consensus was that the Town Center would not be the same without the historic structures, thriving as churches. In the past decade or so, many churches have been closing their doors and consolidating. Often times, smaller and less prosperous churches move into these facilities, unable to maintain them. It is in Stow's best interest to support these two institutions.

1. Create an agreement between the churches that if either decides to sell, they will give the Town the first right of refusal to purchase the property
2. Offer water source for fire protection to bring buildings up to code and increase long term security of the church facilities
3. Collaborate with FPC to utilize the eastern portion of the parsonage parcel for affordable housing and/or the extension of a park and trails connecting the Library and church with the pond
4. Grant easement from 323 Great Road for snow piling for the Union Church of Stow
5. Remove large pine tree from edge of Union Church parking lot
6. Install a cross walk from the neighborhoods on the south side of Great Road to the sidewalk on the north side to allow residents to walk to church

7. Assist churches in long term, financial, historic preservation, and emergency planning (provide resources as needed)

The above options have been discussed in the sections above. It is clear that the two churches and the Town of Stow have collaborated well for over a century and should continue to work together for the betterment of the Town Center. In most cases, the Town may be able to provide resources and information to the churches to assist them in their plans for the future.

## Traffic and Transportation

As a Town with many residents commuting to work outside of Stow, traffic congestion can be an issue during rush hour in the Town Center, despite having a relatively small population. Additionally, the walkability of the Town Center is lacking in several areas. Below are several possible opportunities for the Town to improve its traffic and transportation in the Town Center.

1. Connect all sidewalks in Town Center and explore possibilities of adding a sidewalk on the south side of Great Road
2. Reduce speeds along Great Road and create ways to connect Town Center with the Lower Village (crosswalks from neighborhoods south of Great Road to connect with a widened sidewalk)
3. Conduct full traffic analysis of main intersection light. Add lanes on Library Hill Road, install green arrow, etc.
4. Create cul-de-sac on Common Road and install speed bumps to prevent speeding
5. Consider complete streets design in any redevelopment in the Town Center?

## Section 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

Phase II of the Stow Town Center Study has been successful at uncovering some of the important opportunities in the Town Center as Stow evolves into its future. Phase II developed the existing conditions of the Town Center through site visits and in depth interviews with key stakeholders. This process assisted in bringing some key issues to the surface and promoted better communication amongst the participants in the Town Center. Lastly, CED was able to collect this knowledge and information to create a variety of proposals and recommendations for the Town within nine different topics. Below is a summary of CED's top recommendations.

- CED recommends the Town conduct a neighborhood needs survey to further gain community input. The survey should question what specific uses the community feels are best suited for the Fire Station. Additionally, Town residents should identify any Historic Resources that they feel should be preserved in the Town Center.
- CED recommends converting the Fire Station into a recreation center designed for Hale Middle School students needing a place to relax, study, and play after school. The Library and Recreation Commission should collaborate to provide the appropriate services to the right demographic. This should be done after a structural evaluation is conducted for the building. The remainder of the property should be converted into parking for the Town Center and Library.
- It is CED's position that regulating the entrance and exit of Common Road from Great Road is necessary. CED recommends stubbing Common Road at Great Road to create a cul-de-sac so vehicles can turn around and exit on Library Hill Road. A full traffic analysis of main intersection light. There are three main areas where sidewalks appear to be most needed. Along Great Road by the Common, along Library Hill Road, and a section on the north side of Crescent Street from the cemetery to Pilot Grove. Since there are no places where sidewalks are on both sides of the street, crosswalks are needed in several places to safely connect pedestrians with the existing sidewalk infrastructure. There are also several trail opportunities, especially if the Minister's Pond Park becomes a reality at 323 Great Road.
- Since the Library is in the process of searching for opportunities and funding for its renovations, the Town should collaborate with the Library in finding resources to

maintain the structure and properly preserve it. Additionally, improving the connections between all of these facilities, which are in close proximity to each other, would boost the Town Center and its use.

- It is CED's position that the highest and best use of the Crescent Street Highway Building in the near future is to keep it as a storage facility. The building does not have great potential for retrofitting for a different use and the Town still has storage needs. Since this structure is slightly further from the main Town Center intersection, it is more appropriate for storage than the Fire Station.
- In terms of historic preservation, Stow has a historic Town Center, with many historic structures and action should be taken to provide some protection for these properties, which give Stow its colonial character. CED recommends moving forward with a National Register District, which will not restrict property owners unless they receive federal grants or tax credits. Additionally, Stow should designate the Town Center as a Local Historic District and/or Neighborhood Conservation District, and craft its own set of restrictions designed by the Historic Commission with input from the community.
- The Town should investigate the possibility of a water supply at the 323 Great Road property and Minister's Pond and determine how it could be an asset to the Town Center. Using the water supply for fire protection would provide a great benefit and security to the churches and other historic structures in Town. Furthermore, the Town should continue to collaborate with the churches to support them in their future.

## References

- The Ciccolo Group, LLC. (2010) Stow Master Plan Update.
- Clouette, Bruce, Consultant to the Stow Historic Commission, Stow Town Center Historic Update, dated July 2012.
- Crompton, L. John, 2007, “The Impact of Parks and Open Spaces on Property Values,” Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences Texas A and M University, Volume 63, No. 1, p. 32.
- Karen Sunnarborg Consulting. (2011) Stow Housing Production Plan Update.
- Stow Open Space and Recreation Plan (2008).
- Stow Pedestrian Walkway Planning Subcommittee Report (2012).
- Stow Zoning Bylaw. Amended through October 29, 2013.
- Report of the Sudbury Walkway Committee, Feb. 2000, Section 6.3 ("Sudbury Report").

## Appendix: Phase I Public Forum

On October 29, 2014, the CED team held a Town Center Planning Forum at the Stow Town Hall from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. Residents of Stow and members of the committees who submitted proposals for the 323 Great Road parcel were invited to participate. A memo was sent by the Stow Planning Department to the residents in the Town Center area. The 25 participants included eight members of the Stow Conservation Trust, the members of the Stow Open Space Committee, three members of the Stow Conservation Commission, two members of the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust, one member of the Stow Recreation Department, two planning board members, and a member of the Selectboard.

The workshop began with a short presentation of the Town Center Study and an overview of the 323 Great Road proposals. The participants were then split into four groups for a breakout exercise that include a “SWOT” analysis of both the Town Center and each of the 323 Great Road proposals. A SWOT analysis is a structured planning exercise used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats associated with a project or area. Analysis of the results are listed below.



*Photograph 41 Town Center Forum*



*Photograph 42 Town Center Forum*

The forum began with a short presentation of the Town Center Study and an overview of the 323 Great Road proposals. The participants were then split into four groups for a breakout exercise that include a “SWOT” analysis of both the Town Center and each of the 323 Great Road proposals. A SWOT analysis is a structured planning exercise used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats associated with a project or area. Analysis of the results are listed below.

**Team 1 SWOT Analysis:**

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) The parcel and Town Center are beautiful.</li> <li>❖ (2) 323 Great Rd is a potential water source.</li> </ul>	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) Access to the central parcel may be difficult.</li> <li>❖ (2) The site may be too small for housing.</li> <li>❖ There may be issues with traffic flow</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) The parcel could be a park and hold community events.</li> <li>❖ (2) 323 Great Rd is a potential water source.</li> <li>❖ (3) The parcel could be used for affordable housing</li> </ul>	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) A permanent change may be a threat to the parcel and pond.</li> <li>❖ (2) Housing may negative impact the land.</li> </ul>

**Team 1 – Five most important actions:**

- I. Designate a conservation restriction on the property.
- II. Conduct a land use design competition.
- III. The water supply should be preserved.
- IV. Access to the parcel and traffic mitigation should be explore and planned.
- V. An integrated plan for the Town Center should be created.

**Team 2 SWOT Analysis:**

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) The parcel has a strong character including history, architecture, and iconic views of Stow and the churches.</li> <li>❖ (2) Minister’s Pond and the view from the intersection at Crescent St. and Pilot Grove farm are a strength.</li> <li>❖ (3) The Town Center is defined by separating shopping and commercial activities out of the center.</li> <li>❖ The market value of the parcel is a strength.</li> <li>❖ Affordable housing at Pilot Grove would find the open space useful.</li> </ul>	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) The parcel is inaccessible and needs public access.</li> <li>❖ (2) Traffic and lack of parking in the Town Center are weaknesses.</li> <li>❖ Increasing the amount of low income housing in the Town Center would be a weakness. It should be spread out more throughout the town.</li> <li>❖ There are no parks in the Town Center.</li> <li>❖ The parcel is fairly hidden.</li> <li>❖ The pond is shallow with silt and has a choked off water flow.</li> <li>❖ High amount of impervious area with affordable housing would be a weakness</li> <li>❖ Affordable housing may not fit with recreation.</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) Opening up Minister’s Pond to public access and view is a major opportunity.</li> <li>❖ The condition of the pond could be improved.</li> <li>❖ Pop-up market (farmers, spring fest, culture)</li> <li>❖ The parcel could be used as a water supply for the Town Center.</li> <li>❖ A community park could tie together the Town Center.</li> <li>❖ A small park could allow for small steps to exploring nature for people new to the outdoors.</li> <li>❖ Birding, fishing</li> </ul>	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) Losing the rural character of center is a threat.</li> <li>❖ (2) A threat is not being able to utilize this asset and take advantage of this opportunity.</li> <li>❖ Do nothing and let it overgrow with invasive plants.</li> <li>❖ Development that increases traffic is a threat.</li> </ul>

**Team 2 – Five most important actions:**

- I. The Town should figure out what is needed to develop the water supply. Does it need a treatment building? Will it be used for potable water or fire suppression?
- II. The Town should determine if the parcel is going to be permanently preserved, for what uses, and determine what steps are needed to preserve it.
- III. The Town should undertake a view shed study.
- IV. The Town should study mobility options between Town buildings and 323 Great Road.
- V. The Town should evaluate storm water impacts on the parcel.

**Team 3 SWOT Analysis:**

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) The parcel is in the Town Center.</li> <li>❖ The parcel is very beautiful.</li> <li>❖ The parcel is in close proximity with Town buildings and services.</li> <li>❖ The current appearance and character of the area is good.</li> </ul>	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ The Town Center is not very walkable.</li> <li>❖ There are no obvious parking options.</li> <li>❖ Public access to the parcel is a weakness.</li> <li>❖ The parcel site configuration is not ideal for housing.</li> <li>❖ If the parcel is used for housing it will seem less welcoming for the public.</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ There is an opportunity to create a unified Town Center.</li> <li>❖ The Town could create an attractive public access to pond.</li> <li>❖ The parcel could be a community and youth gathering place with its proximity to schools.</li> <li>❖ It is a potential site for a public water source.</li> </ul>	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) This may be one of last chances for public access to Minister’s Pond.</li> <li>❖ Unauthorized access to the parcel would be a threat.</li> <li>❖ Without planning, the Town Center could grow haphazardly rather than in a unified way.</li> </ul>

**Team 3 – Five most important actions:**

- I. The Town should designate and protect the 323 Great Road parcel for use as a community park with trails.
- II. The Town should create a plan for a community park at the 323 Great Road parcel.
- III. The Town should develop funding sources for the redevelopment of 323 Great Road parcel such as Community Preservation Act (CPA) grants.
- IV. The Town should create a unified circulation plan addressing pedestrian and vehicular traffic patterns for the 323 Great Road parcel and Town Center.
- V. The Town should create an endowment for ongoing stewardship of a community park.

**Team 4 SWOT Analysis:**

<p>Strengths:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) The parcel is still undeveloped.</li> <li>❖ (2) There are opportunities from multiple use changes in this area.</li> <li>❖ (3) The parcel is conveniently located in the center of Town.</li> <li>❖ (4) The parcel is in close proximity to public institutions including the Library, Police &amp; Fire Stations, Town Hall and churches.</li> <li>❖ The pond and parcel are very beautiful.</li> <li>❖ The parcel has access to Great Rd. and Crescent St.</li> <li>❖ The area is safe.</li> <li>❖ The parcel has varied topography.</li> <li>❖ The ponds edge is stable.</li> </ul>	<p>Weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) There is challenging access from Great Road and the right of way from Crescent Street is limited.</li> <li>❖ The pond is ecologically sensitive and recreation may have a negative impact.</li> </ul>
<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Changing uses is an opportunity to plan across the larger area.</li> <li>❖ The parcel could be recreation for the Pilot Grove apartments.</li> <li>❖ Opportunity to continue the HPP and extend safe harbor.</li> <li>❖ The traffic pattern needs to be reconfigured.</li> <li>❖ Town center water supply is an opportunity.</li> <li>❖ It could be a walker-friendly parcel.</li> <li>❖ Expand active recreation with fields.</li> <li>❖ There are church-related opportunities in the meadow.</li> <li>❖ The parcel could be cleaned up and the pond properly managed.</li> </ul>	<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ (1) Access to the parcel from 117 is challenging and the right of way from Crescent Street is limited.</li> <li>❖ The pond is ecologically sensitive and recreation may be a threat.</li> </ul>

**Team 4 – Five most important actions:**

- I. The Town should connect the sidewalk on Crescent Street to the Pilot Grove Apartments.
- II. The Town should create a Park and/or Housing Master Plan for the 323 Great Road parcel.

- III. The Town should conduct a traffic study.
- IV. The Town should create a Master Plan for the Town Center.
- V. The Town should analyze the opportunities for the current Fire Station and Crescent Street Highway Building.
- VI. The Town should consider a Library collaboration program.
- VII. The Town should create renderings and a design plan for the 323 Great Road parcel.

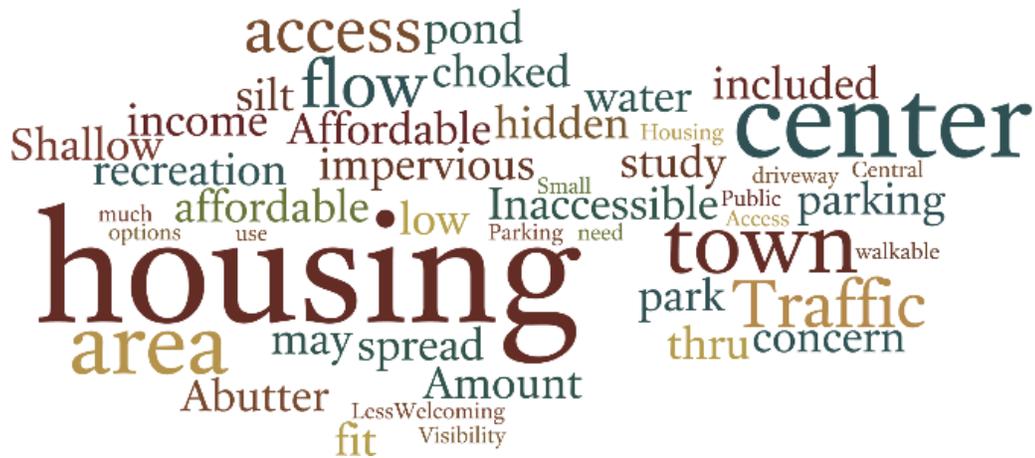
## ALL TEAMS STRENGTHS:



An analysis of the strengths pointed out by the four different tables during building of the SWOT charts reveals that there is a consensus on the aesthetic character of the area surrounding Minister's Pond within the Town Center. Another aspect that appeared in all mentions relates to the prime location of the 323 Great Road parcel, due to its adjacency to the Minister's Pond, as well as to other major civil services such as the two schools, the Library, the Police and Fire Stations, the Town Hall, and Town Building.

The participants also highlighted the rural character of the area with its connectedness with other parts of Stow, be it by walking or driving. According to participants, the architecture is an important element for ensuring that the rural character of Stow is maintained.

## ALL TEAMS WEAKNESSES:



Housing was identified as one of the main weaknesses that were cited by the participants of the forum. As previously noted, the forum participants were heavily weighted towards conservation issues. Most participants were not necessarily against affordable housing but saw building any substantial structures on the 323 Great Road parcel as a weakness. Affordable housing could be constructed just outside the Town Center, or even possibly on the Crescent Street Highway Building property.

Issues like increased car traffic, as well as accessibility [or lack of] to the Minister's Pond were also considered to be weaknesses. Many participants noted how difficult it can be to even view the water from the pond from Crescent Street or Great Road. Walkability and accessibility of the area were also identified as weaknesses. Participants indicated the need for more sidewalks and/or trails connecting the Town Center. Specifically, it was noted that there are no sidewalks to the north of the pond on Crescent Street up to West Acton Road where the large affordable housing "Pilot Grove" development is located.

## ALL TEAMS OPPORTUNITIES:



Participants mentioned the chance to create a unified town center. It was strongly noted that this might be Stow’s last chance to establish a public-oriented use for the Minister’s Pond. Participants wished to take advantage of the natural elements and recreational potential of the area. Access was mentioned often. The use of 323 Great Road for more public uses also creates opportunities for hosting events like farmer’s markets, festivals and other community events. Although the area may be suitable as a park, the possibility for creating a place for affordable housing in this prime location was also considered as an opportunity.

ALL TEAMS THREATS:



Most of the threats that were mentioned by the participants relate to future possibilities that work against the aforementioned strengths related to the current and traditional rural character of Stow. The dangers of new developments that do not follow a clear pattern of integration between Town Center and the other surrounding area were also noted.

Other threats stated relate to the environmental properties of the Minister's Pond, whose ecosystem is fragile and requires careful management. Here again, the risks of unplanned development were often brought by the participants as something to be avoided. Problems with access to the pond, as well as unauthorized access, were mentioned as threatening.

