

# Chapter 7

Public Facilities and  
Municipal Services



## **CHAPTER 7: Public Facilities and Municipal Services**

### **A. Overview**

As has been stated throughout this Master Plan, the single strongest theme to emerge from the Master Plan Survey was a nearly unanimous wish on the part of Stow residents to retain the Town's rural character. In relation to municipal services, the MPC believes the best course of action is to retain core community services that exist today while expanding into new service areas when absolutely necessary. Any new services should be carefully evaluated.

Municipal services lie at the core of a community's operations – and its survival. Encompassing the entire spectrum of infrastructure needs, the topic of municipal services also seeps into social services, education, and even recreation. In general, when we talk about municipal services, we are talking about the range of functions that the Town fulfills in order to keep all systems and departments up and running – which in turn keeps the community functioning smoothly. Usually, but not always, municipal services are funded by the Town's operating budget. Not every city or town offers a full range of services, and in general, smaller communities provide fewer services. However, core services usually consist of emergency response (police, fire, department of public works or highway department) and schools. Most suburban communities located between Worcester and Boston would also consider their public library and senior services to be core services.

In addition to the aforementioned core services, examples of municipal services can include water and sewer provisions, electricity, public housing, recreation, trash disposal and ambulance. The next tier that could still be considered municipal falls under the rubric of social services: transportation and other forms of community care for seniors, health services and libraries. School services, while municipal, are funded separately in Massachusetts as a stand-alone appropriation and are managed under an elected school committee, typically with an appointed superintendent. Schools are therefore not subject to the policy direction of the Chief Executive Body in town (for Stow, the Board of Selectmen); nor are schools influenced by the management decisions of the Town Administrator. The exception to this is capital decisions impacting school facilities or school buildings. Nonetheless, the school system and municipal services must be coordinated and both must work, to some degree, in collaboration. Needless to say, each of these functions plays a key role in the community, and the general wealth and size of the community are critical to how readily a community can fund the municipal services it desires.

As a community grows, increases in residential or commercial population can impact the need for services. Therefore, even if all municipal services are running with ease right now, any discussions about future growth and development in the Town need to take place within the context of the municipal services that will be required to support those changes.

There are essentially two ways that towns can approach the subject of municipal services. One is to look at every possible infrastructural need for the community, actual or potential, and figure out whether meeting that need is a priority and if so, how to do that. The other option is to consider it a priority to keep town services lean, offering only those services a community relies on for survival: emergency response and road maintenance (snow removal). Therefore, on a recurrent basis, it is incumbent upon the Town to address the question of which approach it wishes to take. Is the goal to foster safe and effective development plans by meeting as many emerging needs as possible, or to lessen the financial impact on taxpayers by maintaining a low but critical level of municipal services?

### **B. Budgetary Spending**

A quick perusal of the Town’s operating budget provides a useful overview of what is currently covered by Stow’s municipal services. Decisions about growth, change in the community’s demographics, and economic development in the community all impact what other possibilities the Town might need to explore.

The Nashoba Regional School Committee recently released its own extensive Master Plan, which does a very effective job of spelling out the Town’s educational needs, and the Open Space and Recreation Plan delves into issues of land conservation and outdoor recreational facility needs. This Master Plan does not attempt to replicate or replace either of those two aforementioned plans because both were highly comprehensive and have been produced quite recently. It would be redundant, therefore, to revisit the School Master Plan or the Open Space and Recreation Plan within the context of this process.

More information on school expenses can be found in subsection F, “Schools.”



Within the municipal operating budget, the following amounts were appropriated by the Town for the major service areas over the past five years:

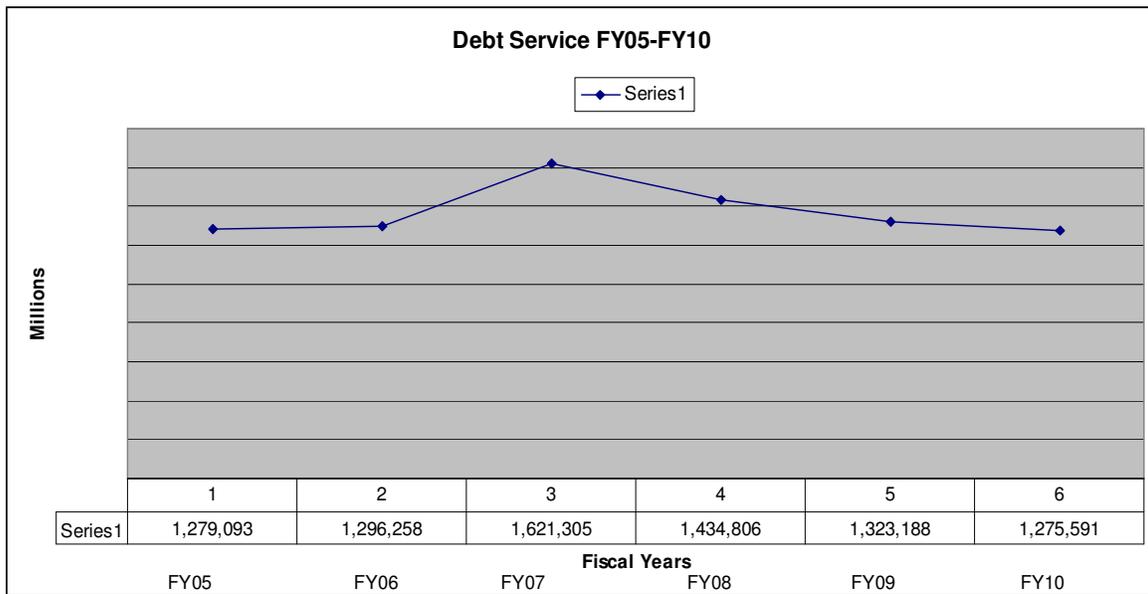
<b>Fiscal Year:</b>	<b>05</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>08</b>	<b>09</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Percent Increase (decrease) FY05 vs. FY10</b>
<b>Department:</b>							
<i>General govt.</i>	663,428	726,614	797,093	813,184	908,714	948,792	<b>43.01%</b>
<i>Public safety</i>	1,594,073	1,639,492	1,742,086	1,831,709	1,896,744	1,944,727	<b>22.00%</b>
<i>Culture &amp; Recreation</i>	218,548	236,052	246,598	255,700	264,947	271,254	<b>24.12%</b>
<i>Public Works &amp; Facilities</i>	676,811	761,198	776,249	815,548	921,294	945,632	<b>39.72%</b>
<i>Human Services</i>	170,434	199,620	211,033	231,954	242,850	250,483	<b>46.97%</b>
<i>Town wide shared operating expenses</i>	587,530	647,054	677,550	710,400	714,454	733,200	<b>24.79%</b>
<b>TOTAL MUNICIPAL</b>	<b>3,910,824</b>	<b>4,210,030</b>	<b>4,450,609</b>	<b>4,658,495</b>	<b>4,949,003</b>	<b>5,094,088</b>	<b>30.26%</b>
<b>TOTAL SCHOOLS</b>	<b>11,048,194</b>	<b>11,835,084</b>	<b>12,493,700</b>	<b>12,959,231</b>	<b>13,571,181</b>	<b>13,843,439</b>	<b>25.30%</b>
<b>TOTAL DEBT SERVICE</b>	<b>1,279,093</b>	<b>1,296,258</b>	<b>1,621,305</b>	<b>1,434,806</b>	<b>1,323,188</b>	<b>1,275,591</b>	<b>-0.27%</b>
<b>TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET</b>	<b>16,238,111</b>	<b>17,341,372</b>	<b>18,565,614</b>	<b>19,052,532</b>	<b>19,843,372</b>	<b>20,213,118</b>	<b>24.48%</b>

The data above represent only the total expenses and do not distinguish among funding sources. Later in this chapter we present a discussion of revenue sources and how they have changed over time.

What is most interesting to note about the budget trends is that the fastest-growing sector of the overall budget is human services, which grew nearly 47% over a period of six years. However, as the smallest appropriated value, any change in this line item appears as a substantial budgetary increase. In actual dollar amounts, the budget remains quite modest. Increases in this area also reflect the impact of an aging population, which has likely led to a need to provide more senior services. The second fastest growing area of the budget was general government, and the costs therein are primarily driven by the ever-expanding cost of providing salary and benefits to existing employees. Excluding school employees, since 1993 a total of six new full-time staff positions were added within the municipal government side of the cost equation. In addition, nine part-time positions were added, bringing the total part time employee base to 26 individuals. This is a relatively slow rate of growth in employees, with an average annual increase in total employees of just 1.5%.

Also worthy of note is that debt service has remained virtually level and in fact dropped modestly since FY05. Payment for outstanding debt peaked in FY07 and, due to the retirement of debt on Hale Middle School, it has been declining since that year. This seems to indicate a community that is disciplined in its approach to long-term capital spending. It may also demonstrate that the Town is not relying unduly on capital borrowing to fill equipment needs or other purchases for which municipalities sometimes borrow in lean budget years.

The FY10 actual debt service payment is \$1,272,591, which is down from a high of \$1,586,317. However, despite the brief decline, looking forward it can be expected that debt service will increase significantly with the expansion and reconstruction of the elementary school building.



Relative to debt service, Stow can also be extremely proud of its recently upgraded bond rating which is now AA on the Standard and Poors rating. Back in 1996, at the time of the last Master Plan, that bond rating was at a Moody’s A1 and an S&P “A,” indicating the Town’s rating has been improved by two levels. Increases in a community’s bond rating result from a number of independent variables analyzed by the bonding companies, but generally relate to the fiscal health and stability of the community overall. Sound management practices, sufficient financial reserves, relative community wealth, and consistent leadership all play a role in one’s bond rating. Thus, the recent upgrade is another factor highlighting Stow’s successful management policies.

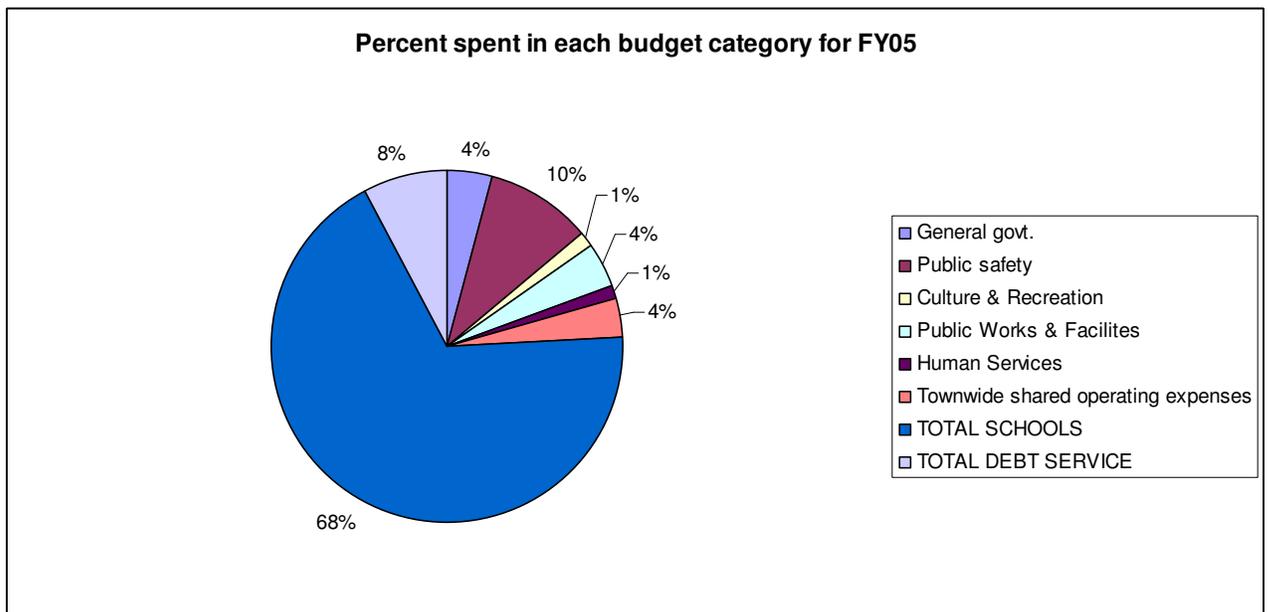
Moreover, it is believed that only five communities in Massachusetts with populations under 10,000 saw their bond ratings upgraded in recent years. This is likely due to the fact that a community’s size influences its ability to repay loans. It is also hard for towns with relatively undiversified tax bases to be rated highly because diversification in real estate tends to protect

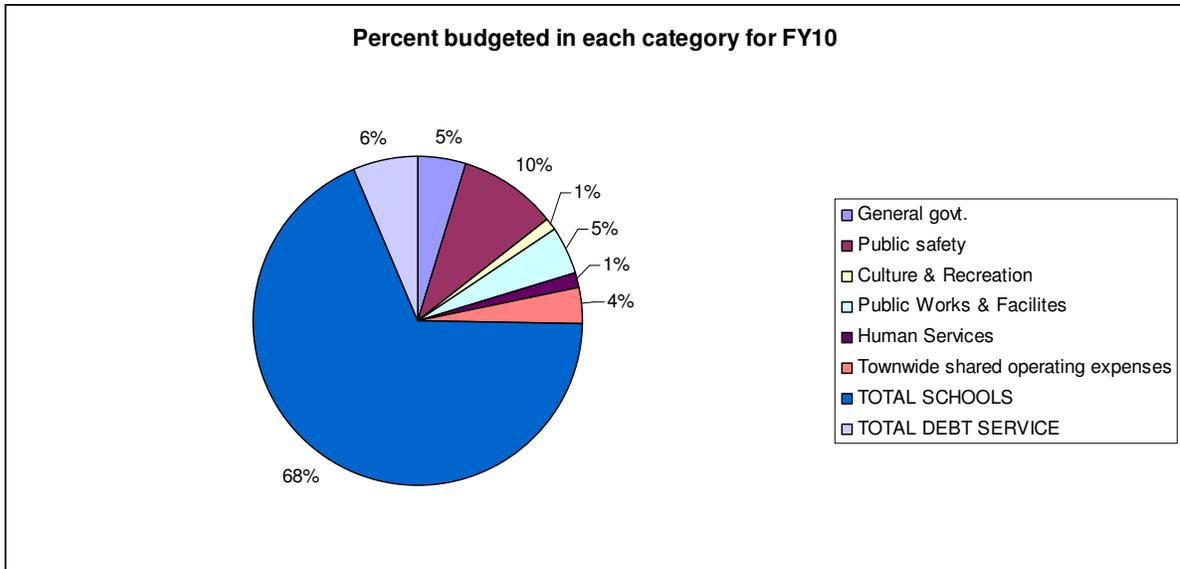
the Town's revenue stream when downtrends in one sector depress values. These are additional reasons that Stow is to be commended for its upgrade in rating. The recent good fortune of its upgraded bond rating will result in a savings of approximately \$3,000 per year for Stow.

FIGURE: 19 Credit Ratings Guide

<u>Credit Risk</u>	<u>Moody's</u>	<u>Standard and Poor's</u>	<u>Fitch Ratings</u>
Investment Grade			
Highest Quality	Aaa	AAA	AAA
High Quality	Aa	AA	AA
Upper Medium	A	A	A
Medium	Baa	BBB	BBB
Not Investment Grade	Omitted from Chart		

FIGURE: 20 Budget expenditures by category





Any analysis of budget would be incomplete without examining what portion of the overall budget is spent on what services and taking a look how that has changed over time.

Not surprisingly, as is the case with most municipalities, the largest proportion of spending in all categories went to the schools. In FY05, this category was responsible for 68% of the total operating budget. This trend continues into the FY10 budget, where the school share remains at the same proportion. The growing elements of the pie include general government and public safety, while debt has declined in terms of the total share of the budget from 8% in FY05 to the projected amount in FY10 of 6%.

### **C. Trends in Revenue and Receipts**

#### **1. Local tax revenue**

The table below, taken from the Department of Revenue Tax Recapitulation worksheets, illustrates revenue over seven years in each of the various categories: residential, commercial, industrial, and personal property. These data reflect a community that is changing at very modest rates. Remarkably, despite the trend toward larger houses and a greater development interest in residential subdivision, the residential sector of the Town's revenues has remained consistently at 91% of the Town's total tax revenue. The only category for which we are seeing a modest shift is in the declining revenues coming from the industrial sector and slow modest growth in personal property. This latter category suggests that Stow residents and businesses are doing well enough to amass some wealth in order to purchase durable goods, equipment, toys, and other items taxed as personal property.

In real dollars, commercial and residential total revenue has grown 32% since FY 2003. Valuation of property in these two categories has grown 28%. Despite the moribund economy

and recession in the residential building market, the Stow residential and commercial markets do not appear to have been hit particularly hard. The only year that saw a decline in total residential values was from FY08 to FY09, when the residential sector lost only 0.35%. In actuality, of course, the average single family home may have lost more than 0.3% because the above figure includes new residential properties that have come on line during the fiscal year. During that same fiscal period, commercial values did not drop but rather continued to increase reflecting an ongoing and steady growth rate since FY03.

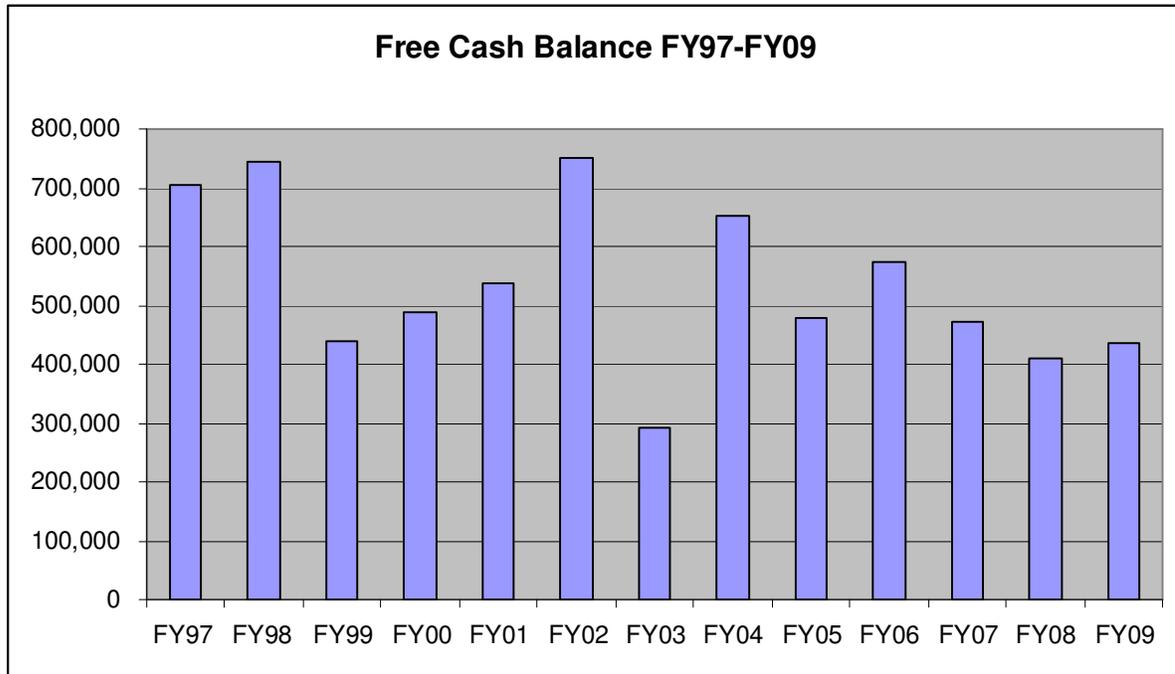
FIGURE: 21 Revenue by type over 7 years

Revenue:	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09
Residential %	91.44	91.49	92.23	91.90	92.02	91.65	91.17
Residential Levy	11,398,798	12,632,947	13,600,171	14,622,502	15,491,485	16,292,773	16,841,547
Total Residential Value	787,210,000	862,906,400	947,087,300	1,041,489,400	1,120,947,300	1,106,095,200	1,102,196,200
<b>Tax Rate</b>	<b>14.48</b>	<b>14.64</b>	<b>14.36</b>	<b>14.04</b>	<b>13.82</b>	<b>14.73</b>	<b>15.28</b>
Commercial %	4.78	4.91	4.57	4.53	4.62	4.75	4.76
Commercial Levy	596,160	678,423	673,948	721,403	777,024	844,536	878,620
Commercial Value	41,171,400	46,340,100	46,932,200	51,381,600	56,224,500	57,333,900	57,501,300
Industrial %	2.63	2.36	2.03	2.24	2.07	2.13	2.19
Industrial Levy	327,430	326,432	299,254	356,731	348,320	377,913	403,942
Industrial Value	22,612,100	22,297,500	20,839,600	25,408,000	25,204,500	25,655,600	26,435,600
Personal %	1.15	1.23	1.17	1.33	1.29	1.48	1.89
Personal Prop Levy	143,570	170,085	172,571	211,391	217,550	262,253	349,445
Personal Prop Value	9,915,300	11,617,800	12,017,400	15,056,400	15,740,980	17,804,470	22,869,290

## 2. Actual Free Cash Balance

The chart below indicates that Stow’s smallest free cash balance was in FY03, when the total amount was just under \$300,000. That figure more than doubled the following year and has averaged in the vicinity of \$425,000 since. Nonetheless, it has been many years since Stow has seen the strong balances it once had, topping more than \$700,000.

FIGURE: 22 Free Cash balances FY97-FY09



## 3. Receipts and Free Cash usage in support of budget

FIGURE: 23 Receipts and Free Cash usage in support of budget FY03-FY09

	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09
Local Receipts estimated	1,635,900	1,657,030	1,757,906	1,804,595	1,440,281	1,383,500	1,527,300
Free Cash projected for use in balancing budget	600,687	0	287,667	233,262	213,672	244,045	248,000
Available Funds projected for use in recap	206,687	475,705	92,340	55,838	83,464	73,425	71,835

After a significant usage in FY03 in support of that budget, dependency on Free Cash dropped precipitously between FY03 and FY04, and then remained fairly consistent for the ensuing years of FY05 to FY09. The figure of “0” in FY04 also suggests there may have been an anomaly in reporting to the Department of Revenue (DOR) during this period. At 1.25% of the total budget, a Free Cash usage in the \$200,000 range indicates fiscal discipline and good spending controls which reduces dependency on this revenue source.

The low usage of Free Cash may not be sustainable as the Town nears its excess levy capacity, which in FY09 stood at just \$153,446. A greater proportion of Free Cash may be called upon in future years to balance the budget. However, there is no standard of how much is an appropriate amount to use, and achieving an ideal number depends significantly upon goals and community desires. Some communities prefer to keep taxes as low as possible by utilizing all available financial resources, while others take a more conservative approach and leave some funds in Free Cash to act as a rainy day fund. Others transfer these “excess” funds into Stabilization Accounts which can be accessed only by a two-thirds majority vote of Town Meeting. Stow’s Stabilization Fund balance as of December 2009 was \$572,793 – an amount roughly equal to 2.3% of the total operating budget.

Local receipts have been expended at a fairly consistent low rate, and this usage has declined 7% in FY09 when compared to FY03.

All of these indicators suggest a healthy and robust fiscal picture. The Town has meaningful reserves and is not overly dependent on Local Receipts or Free Cash. It would be prudent for Stow to continue its present practice of maintaining healthy reserves to cover for unexpected events and to minimize disruption to services during down economic turns. In recent years, Stow has employed a practice of putting around \$50,000 into its stabilization fund, which sets aside those monies in a protected account. Management goals around stabilization fund balance include a desire to see the total increased to around \$1 million. The Master Plan Committee recommends that the Town pursue this objective.

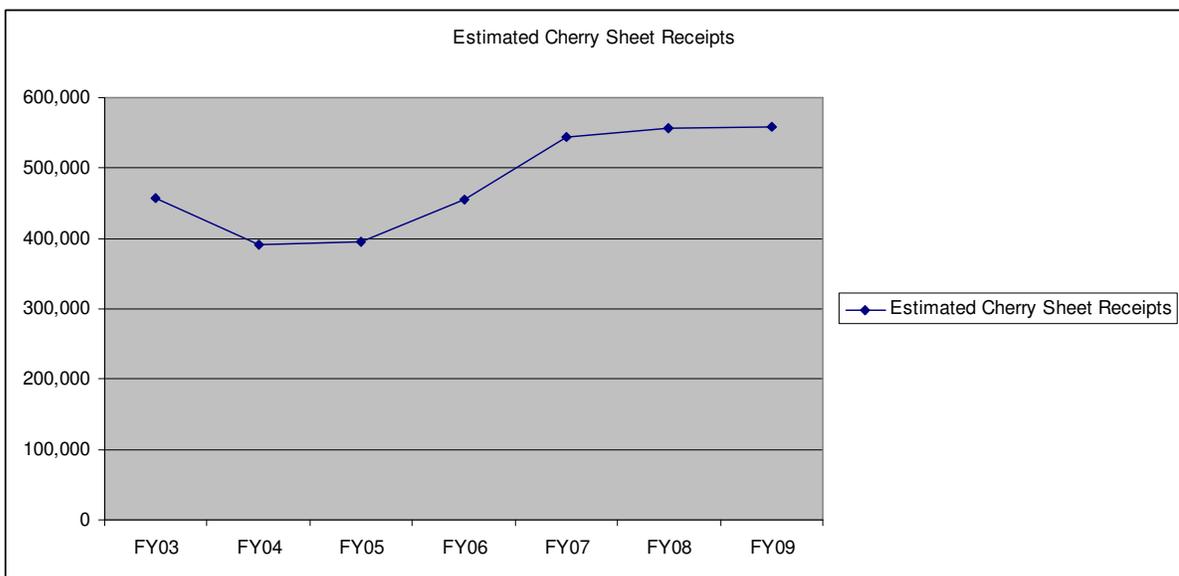
Stow presently has a stored asset balance of approximately \$1,110,000, which includes free certified cash at \$605,000 and \$505,000 in Stabilization Funds. This Free Cash balance is the highest it has been since 2004, which is a highly positive development in this fiscal climate.

Free Cash balances and Stabilization Funds are extremely important to ensuring a community has the ability to make regular purchases of equipment and rolling stock without having to resort to borrowing for routine capital costs. Borrowing regularly for small items virtually doubles the cost paid out for the item when interest and carrying costs are factored into the equation. As a matter of policy, and one which the Master Plan Committee supports, the Town makes an effort not to borrow for any capital item costing less than \$100,000.

Stow presently utilizes approximately \$200,000 per year of its stored asset balance in support of its capital outlay to purchase items such as police cars and small trucks for the Highway Department, and to make minor repairs on buildings (roofs, painting, boilers, etc.). From time to time, it is worthwhile to evaluate this proportion of distribution relative to the overall budget to ascertain if it is an adequate amount to keep pace with ongoing equipment replacement.

#### 4. Cherry Sheet Receipts (State Revenue)

Named for their original pink paper, cherry sheet receipts are the funds paid out to the Town for various state reimbursement programs, local aid, school aid, etc. Since Chapter 70 School Aid for Stow students goes directly to the regional school system and does not get distributed to the Town, Stow’s receipts from state aid are a very modest portion of the Town’s total revenue picture. Generally hovering around \$500,000, state receipts are a small portion of the funds used to support the Town’s operating budget. In FY09, for instance, even when school building assistance payments are lumped together with receipts from state aid, it still amounts to only 5% of the total amount obtained in support of the budget. Since FY03, Cherry Sheet Receipts are up 18.14% after having dropped for a period of time in FY04 and FY05.



An 18.14% increase may seem very positive unless one also analyzes the charges the state imposes for various *benefits* the Town receives. Below is presented a broader picture. This nearly 10-year historical analysis shows that from FY00 to FY09, net receipts (after state assessments are subtracted) increased only 13.72%. This 13.72% figure is not nearly sufficient to keep pace with inflationary factors.

FIGURE: 24 Net Receipts FY2000-FY09

FY	Receipts	Assessments	Net
2000	446,757	37,680	409,077
2001	481,858	25,266	456,592
2002	473,625	33,930	439,695
2003	456,525	43,543	412,982
2004	391,535	56,054	335,481
2005	395,296	64,401	330,895
2006	454,466	75,612	378,854
2007	544,427	79,770	464,657
2008	555,680	81,494	474,186
2009	557,710	83,564	474,146

The two charges that grew the most significantly include mosquito control (28% increase) and MBTA (65%). In the case of the latter, forward funding for the MBTA’s debt service was the primary influence on this increase, which amounted to a real dollar increment of an additional \$25,000 per year.

This \$25,000 MBTA assessment has enabled the Town to join a Regional Transit Authority and redirect its assessment toward services that are more relevant to the needs of Stow residents. Through its membership on the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART), the Town receives services for Senior transportation.

#### **D. Staffing**

Below is a summary of the current makeup of the major departments and operating centers within the municipal government (exclusive of schools).

- Police department: 11 employees including chief
- Fire department: two people on duty at all times with EMT certification. Current staffing includes: 1 fire chief, 30 call firefighters, 4 full-time firefighters, 1 EMT/firefighter and 2 per diem EMT/firefighters
- Town offices, mostly located in Town Building. Offices serve all areas necessary to running the Town, e.g., Assessors, Town Clerk, Treasurer-Collector, Building Dept., Cemetery Dept., Conservation Commission, Council on Aging, Board of Health, Planning Board, Selectmen, Town Administrator, Town Accountant.
- Library: 1 full-time and 4 part-time employees
- Highway Department: 7 full-time and 5 part-time employees

Total number of paid town employees is 72, of which 26 are part-time and 46 are full-time.

Throughout the course of the development of this Master Plan, one theme seems to have been repeated on a somewhat regular basis. Residents, and in particular active board members, have

identified that Stow may lack some of the professional capacity that it might need in order to function at the desired levels. For instance, this sentiment was described in the Housing chapter where the need to be more proactive in a number of affordable housing areas was observed. These deficient areas include: monitoring to prevent loss of units on the subsidized housing inventory (SHI); developing strategies to better manage 40B applications; promoting better quality housing developments; and taking the lead on expanding the Town's SHI. The need was also articulated in discussions around the Economic Development chapter, where some have recognized that grant writing, technical expertise, and capital project assistance could all be of value.

Finally, some have questioned whether there is sufficient staff in the Town Administrator's office to fill all of the emerging needs as the Town continues to grow. In particular, capital project management, contracting and procurement, personnel management, and grant writing are duties which are sometime delegated to a professional assistant when the Town's growth is at a point where these high level responsibilities can not be exclusively fulfilled by the Town Administrator.

Discussions around this topic have led to comments that the Town might need a Planning Director, a Community Development Director, or an Assistant Town Administrator. Others have felt that the Town can make do for a while by developing its relationships with consultants who have the specific expertise in the areas in which the Town is presently lacking. Going the route of hiring consultants as needed might help the Town save money on salary and benefits, as long as the consultants' fees do not exceed what would have been paid out for in-house staff. Sufficient outsourced capacity must also be in place to prevent the Town from making costly mistakes which could have been avoided by having proper staff in place.

Delving into employment decisions is outside the realm of this Master Plan, and no personnel decision should be advanced without due care. Nonetheless, the MPC recommends that the Town undertake a limited personnel study. Ideally, the study should pursue an evaluation of existing Town Hall administrative and planning positions, analyze job descriptions, compare duties to towns of similar size and wealth, and interview boards about capacity issues which may need to be addressed. In this fashion, the study could help the Town determine if there are existing staff who could perform some of the functions presently being overlooked or if new hiring might indeed be necessary. The study could help in establishing job descriptions for any positions that are recommended and/or in developing criteria needed to hire appropriate consultants.

### **E. Operating Issues**

There are a number of areas where the Town does not provide any direct services but rather leaves it up to the individual homeowner to obtain the necessary services through private sector contractors. The most notable of these are:

- Trash disposal
- Water
- Sewer

If the private sector continues to be able to fill the needs of residents, one might ask, why would the Town consider changing the way it presently operates? Usually, there is no impetus to do so unless, for some reason, the private sector is no longer able to perform the desired function or if the community changes its appetite for the quality or quantity of service. In the case of trash disposal, if for some reason area transfer stations or landfills closed and caused a decline in vendors, the Town might have to step in and provide the service. Or, if private sector trash pickup routes began to impede traffic, the Town might have to regulate the private vendors or might choose to perform the function itself. Sometimes, aggregating all residences into one contract could yield a much lower price for all, and that in itself could be a motivating factor to influence the Town to take over this service on a fee basis.

Currently, in May of each year, the Board of Health holds a Hazardous Waste Disposal Day. This is one example of an area where residents wanted a greater level of service and thus the Town stepped up to provide it.

Water and sewer are more complex issues and are discussed in detail later in this chapter. However, it is worth noting here that several of the public buildings in the center of Stow have a public water supply but there are no public sewers.

### **F. Schools**

Stow's schools operate within a regionalized K-12 network with two adjoining towns, Bolton and Lancaster. At present, the pre-K program for Stow students is located in Bolton. Students in grades K-8 attend schools in Stow, as listed below. Students in grade 9-12 may attend Nashoba Regional High School in Bolton or Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical School in Lexington.

There are three schools located in Stow:

- Pompositticut School for grades K-2, which contains 36,415 sq. ft. plus 3700 sq. ft. in modulars and 322 students
- Center School for grades 3-5, containing 36,007 sq. ft. and 272 students
- Hale Middle School for grades 6-8, containing 64,650 sq. ft. and 257 students

There is a new campus plan for Center School which includes a renovation/addition plan to the current school. At a special Town Meeting held on October 19, 2009, the majority vote of the meeting passed Article 1 relating to Elementary School Building Construction. This approval instructed the School Building Committee to expend \$35,629,000.00 for the Pompositticut/Center School elementary school addition and renovation. Eligibility for a construction grant from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) “shall not exceed 50.85% of the eligible approved costs.” This grant amount is calculated to be \$18,132,259.

On October 29, 2009, voters cast a majority affirmative vote on this school article for the purpose of “allowing the Town of Stow to exempt from the provisions of Proposition two-and-one-half, so called, the amounts required to pay for the bonds issued in order to construct the Pompositticut/Center School elementary school addition and renovation.” When the building project is completed, the Pompositticut School will be returned to the Town.

At this time, two-thirds of our tax revenue supports schools. The remainder supports all other expenses for municipal needs. The following table shows how this expenditure compares with surrounding towns (FY08 data).

<b>Town</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Non-School</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% School</b>
Stow	12,952,386	6,484,367	19,436,753	66.6%
Harvard	10,986,488	9,275,925	20,262,413	54.2%
Boxborough	11,449,844	7,331,852	18,781,696	61.0%
Lincoln	12,368,204	13,499,187	25,877,391	47.8%
Berlin	4,316,578	4,295,738	8,612,316	50.1%
Bedford	28,720,867	35,566,716	64,287,583	44.7%
Maynard	13,636,000	14,697,879	28,333,879	48.1%
Bolton	10,221,347	6,173,619	16,394,966	62.3%
Lancaster	8,774,728	6,105,403	14,880,131	59.0%

At nearly 67%, Stow’s percentage is among the highest of area towns. This reflects Stow’s emphasis on education but probably also is indicative of Stow’s relatively low level of other municipal services.

## **G. Capital Needs and other Emerging Community Desires**

### **1. General facilities**

As a community grows and changes, so too do its needs. The following emerging needs have been noted during discussions with departments and residents during this planning process. Town employees, and in particular department heads, were asked to identify and help prioritize municipal needs for their respective departments. How we as a community prioritize those needs among all municipal needs will depend in large part on funding availability and other financial resources. Certainly, not all of the needs identified below can be fulfilled in the short-

term, especially in this tight fiscal period. For the foreseeable several years, local aid will continue to be a dwindling and less reliable source of revenue. Fortunately in Stow, it is only about 5% percent of the budget. Nonetheless, despite fiscal constraints we felt it important to acknowledge these potential capital needs as identified by the various departments:

- **Fire & Public Safety:** The Fire Department is out of capacity in its present building. It is unable to house all its equipment inside the building. According to both the past and present fire chiefs, the building is not conducive to proper management and deployment of the firefighting personnel. The current building's doors are smaller than Fire Department standards, which results in our being unable to purchase standard size equipment. Specifically, no commercially available extension truck would fit in the current firehouse, and the cost of a custom-made truck that might fit would be much higher. A new facility to replace the current facility is needed. Should Pompositticut School become vacant, it may be a suitable site for a new Fire Station. According to the Fire Chief, a substation elsewhere is not practical at this time as it would require additional staffing as well as equipment. The Fire Chief is currently working on a plan to expand the current building and has recently consulted with the Elementary School Building Committee. These discussions focused on safe access for emergency vehicles and the potential for shared septic and shared water.
- **Police department:** Climate-controlled room for computer equipment associated with new 911 system, more office space, new dispatch area.
- **Highway:** The Highway Barn is 30 years old and at capacity. As the Town continues to grow and add roads, the barn will need expansion and renovation, probably in the next 5-10 years. There should be room to expand on its present site. Additional office space, room for changing/sleeping quarters, and additional equipment storage and service areas have been identified as deficient.
- **Sidewalks:** The Planning Board has formed a Pedestrian Walkway Planning Sub-Committee that will be responsible for preparing a draft pedestrian walkway master plan. The goal of that plan will be to enhance the Town's sidewalk network and make the Town more walkable.
- **Library:** The interior space could be reconfigured to allow for some expansion, acknowledging that expansion could result in the need for additional staff. The Library Director also identified a current need for additional parking, especially if the nearby church is also having a function.
- **Town Building:** With most town departments (Board of Health, Clerk's Office, Building Department, etc.) housed in the Town Building, the structure requires additional meeting spaces and more bathrooms along with spaces for document filing and storage. More parking is needed for users of Town Hall, Town Building and public library, especially during evening meetings.

Should Pompositticut School become available, the Town should consider possible other uses including a fire station, community center, or private daycare facility. This is an area that the Master Plan Committee believes should be approached with robust public process and participation.

One idea that has been floated for the reuse of Pompositticut is as a location for the regional school administration offices. However, their needs would not likely fill the entire building, which could leave sufficient space for an intergenerational community center serving seniors and youths alike. Soccer fields and open space could be retained at the location, and the site could become a thriving community facility. Another option is for the Town to sell the site and use the revenue in support of some of the other identified capital needs. The Master Plan Committee recommends that in a near-term upcoming budget, money be set aside for a feasibility study to evaluate the re-use options for this facility.

## **2. Consideration of a multigenerational Community Center**

A Stow Community Center would be a facility that encourages all residents to congregate for any number of activities. We envision one community center that finds creative ways to accommodate all constituents simultaneously: seniors, youth, small children, families. We envision one Stow community facility that, by its physical plant and by its activities, will bring people together. Most spaces within the community center would be shared among various groups and have multiple uses.

One option is that one of our existing schools may become available for this purpose. In future years, the facility and land could be returned to school use if needed. We expect that after a short time, the Stow community center would be a break-even operation and not a drain on taxpayers. The major objective is an attractive and active facility that draws residents together, but it need not be an elaborate or expensive facility. Facilities within the community center should be designed to benefit all sectors of society and might contain some of the following amenities:

- A function space that can welcome up to 150 people
- Meeting rooms with top-quality audio visual equipment
- A gym and fitness center
- A stage and sound system to attract performing artists
- Food preparation and service area for general use and catered events
- Locker rooms with showers
- Storage space
- Specialized services to accommodate pre-school children, teens, clubs, service groups, a learning center, and future needs

Additional community and civic organizations whose needs that might be accommodated within municipal facilities include the following:

- Stow TV/Local Access Channel Advisory Committee: Working space for equipment and one person at a minimum, preferably more. Secure storage for equipment. Sound-proof studio space also desired.
- Food pantry: Room for two refrigerators, two freezers and 20 feet of shelves for dry goods. Need parking for several cars, optimally out of sight.
- Lake Boon Commission: Filing space and possible boat storage at some point in future.
- Boy Scouts: Permanent, reliable meeting space. Also, equipment storage for tents, stoves, canoes, etc.
- Meeting rooms for other ad hoc committees and volunteer organizations.

From a capital planning perspective, it is important to note that building construction projects and water and sewer projects can take a very long time to be properly developed. Public construction in Massachusetts is subject to MGL Chapters 7 and 149, requiring a feasibility study, designer selection process, and filed sub-bids. This process means that it typically takes two or more years to prepare plans and specifications before a project can be bid.

Furthermore, for water and sewer projects, if the Town should decide to pursue any, there are state and federal regulatory agencies (DEP/EPA Water Quality Certification, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System) from which the Town must obtain licenses, and this too requires a long lead time. Thus, funding decisions should be made proactively so that, to the extent possible, the building or facility is able to be brought on line when the Town projects it will be needed.

### **3. Utility Poles**

It needs to be noted that at least one committee and several individuals commented on the unsightliness of utility poles. There seems to be a growing desire among residents to consider submerging utilities where possible. However, such an undertaking can be extremely costly and complex. For a community that does not have public water and sewer, approaching the problem of burying utilities seems perhaps a bit ambitious.

Nonetheless, because it was mentioned numerous times, we acknowledge it here in the hopes that there may be opportunities in the future to consider this goal. The Planning Board or other entity might want to develop regulations for large-scale reconstruction of commercial areas that requires the developer to underground the utilities. Another approach would be to have the Town install conduit when it rebuilds roads to enable the eventual development of an underground system. In cases where the Town needs to license certain utilities, the Town might consider negotiating for key areas of Town to have the wires placed underground.

Certainly for commercial areas under expansion, it would be appropriate for the Town to consider mandating an underground connection from the street to the building. This would

facilitate connecting at a later date. When eventually the road side utility poles can be submerged, then each individual parking lot would not need to be torn up in order to connect commercial buildings.

There may be other creative options the Town can pursue to facilitate removal of the overhead unsightly wires. The Master Plan Committee is in support of this concept, provided that it is not undertaken at great expense to the Town.

## **H. Additional Services to Consider for the Future**

### **1. General needs likely to emerge in the future**

There are two possible needs that cannot be classified as emerging needs right now but will need to be taken into account in the longer term.

- **Trash pickup/recycling:** According to the Master Plan Survey, public opinion is mixed regarding the desire to see a change in this area.
- **Traffic controls in Lower Village:** Something to enable cars to turn against traffic onto 117 during rush hours from shopping areas, Red Acre Road, and Pompositicut streets. A traffic study completed by Fay, Spofford and Thorndike in October 2005 provides information on alternatives for improving circulation in the Lower Village. The Lower Village subcommittee will likely recommend construction of at least one roundabout to facilitate traffic flow on Route 117.

### **2. Water and wastewater considerations**

Lower Village is the first sector in town for which the Town's hand is being forced on making decisions about public water and sewer. Other parts of town may follow suit, so a decision made about Lower Village will have far-reaching implications throughout town.

The Town Administrator cautions that public water and/ or sewers are very expensive undertakings, and the costs and complexity keep escalating as federal and state requirements increase. Pursuing water and sewer is not recommended at this time. That being said, the only way to allow denser development would be to provide either water or sewer to remove the need to maintain offsets within a smaller lot. Perhaps independent water districts that are financially self-sufficient are the solution the Town should encourage. Politically, common sewer is an unlikely solution, as people look to Title V to hold back development.

In 2006, the Town Administrator convened a working group to develop a plan to provide water to the businesses in Lower Village. This action was the result of enforcement efforts by the DEP to require one business owner to find a new source of water. In this case, there was not enough land to allow a well that met the septic setback requirement. The Town Administrator was informed that this was just the first of similar steps to compel other Lower Village businesses to comply with DEP regulations.

The working group's objective was to find a source of water that could be leased to a private water company. The group started by considering land already owned by the Town. The parcels that were reasonably close to Lower Village were under the control of the Conservation Commission. Putting a well on conservation land constitutes a "change of use" and would trigger a process known as an Article 97 Disposition. This revelation led to prolonged discussions with the Conservation Commission and various officials in state government. Everyone who was consulted agreed that installing a well on conservation land would indeed require the Town to go through the Article 97 process.

It became clear that this process would take a lot of time and the chances for approval were very slim. This part of state law was designed to make sure that land in conservation stays that way. Therefore, the idea of a potential well site on conservation land was abandoned.

Offers were made to a private land owner, a governing board for a residential development, Shaw's Supermarket, and the Town of Maynard, but all parties declined to sell water to Stow.

The Town Administrator spent a great deal of time discussing the problem with the area DEP office in Worcester. These conversations led to a commitment from the DEP to provide a low-interest loan to a water company if a water source could be identified. More importantly, the DEP agreed to hold off on further enforcement actions for the time being.

Ultimately, all options for a well site near Lower Village were exhausted. The group then contemplated the possibility of a water line from the well that currently serves the Harvard Acres subdivision. As of now, it is unclear whether the water company will be able to serve Lower Village with water from Harvard Acres.

The working group concluded that there needs to be a critical review of the Town's land needs when parcels become available, and all interested parties must come to a decision regarding the highest-priority use of the land at the time. This long and currently unsuccessful effort clearly illustrates how Stow is handicapped when it comes to supporting commercial and/or industrial activity.

Public water and sewer would provide property owners the incentive and the Town the ability to promote redevelopment of Lower Village. Contamination of groundwater from hazardous waste has occurred in numerous locations throughout the Town and within the Lower Village area. Several of these areas are listed as 21E sites and are subject to cleanup under the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). DEP has determined that these sites need remediation to rectify the damage to the groundwater; the contamination has been analyzed, and remediation efforts have commenced. However, once groundwater is contaminated, it can often take decades to fully remediate.

DEP is now investigating properties in the Lower Village to determine compliance with current regulations. The Stow Shopping Center site, under DEP orders, recently replaced its wastewater treatment system. DEP is also in discussion with owners of property on the south

side of Route 117 concerning non-compliance issues for drinking water. The presence of businesses that may not be able to meet compliance standards is of great concern and an issue that should be monitored carefully by the Board of Health and Board of Selectmen. Providing a central water source for Lower Village is currently the Selectmen's top priority. Nonetheless, the Master Plan Committee cautions that appropriate development controls should be in place before a public water supply is made available so as to avoid incentives for excessive development.

With the support of the Planning Board's Lower Village Sub-Committee, the Assabet Water Company conducted a feasibility study for developing a privately funded, owned and operated public water supply. They investigated three options:

- Develop a larger and more comprehensive groundwater supply system in Stow
- Connect to the Town of Maynard's water or sewage system
- Connect to the Town of Acton's water system for service

They determined that an extension from the Maynard Water Supply system was the most certain and cost-effective path to pursue. The Town of Maynard did not support this recommendation.

The Town of Stow, acting as a facilitator under the direction of the Town Administrator, is investigating a variety of options to obtain a public water supply for the Lower Village that would be privately owned and operated or provided by a neighboring town.

The MPC wholeheartedly endorses exploring arrangements with private water suppliers and recommends that the Town Administrator and departments work collaboratively with appropriate private entities to expand water supply to schools, municipal facilities and private users.

Availability of water in Lower Village and other commercial areas would be a great boon to helping attract businesses to this area and creating incentives for existing establishments to renovate or expand. The concomitant need for sewer to support economic development may still stymie development in this area. Without large areas of land for septic or package treatment plants, development is still out of reach for any but the largest companies who can afford to put in their own drinking water wells and effluent treatment facilities. The Board of Health should be encouraged to continually evaluate new technologies and techniques to enhance the ability of private individuals and companies to provide clean drinking water and treat raw effluent. There may be opportunities that arise in the future that will enable sharing of septic or other means of combining resources so that small scale commercial development will become more viable.

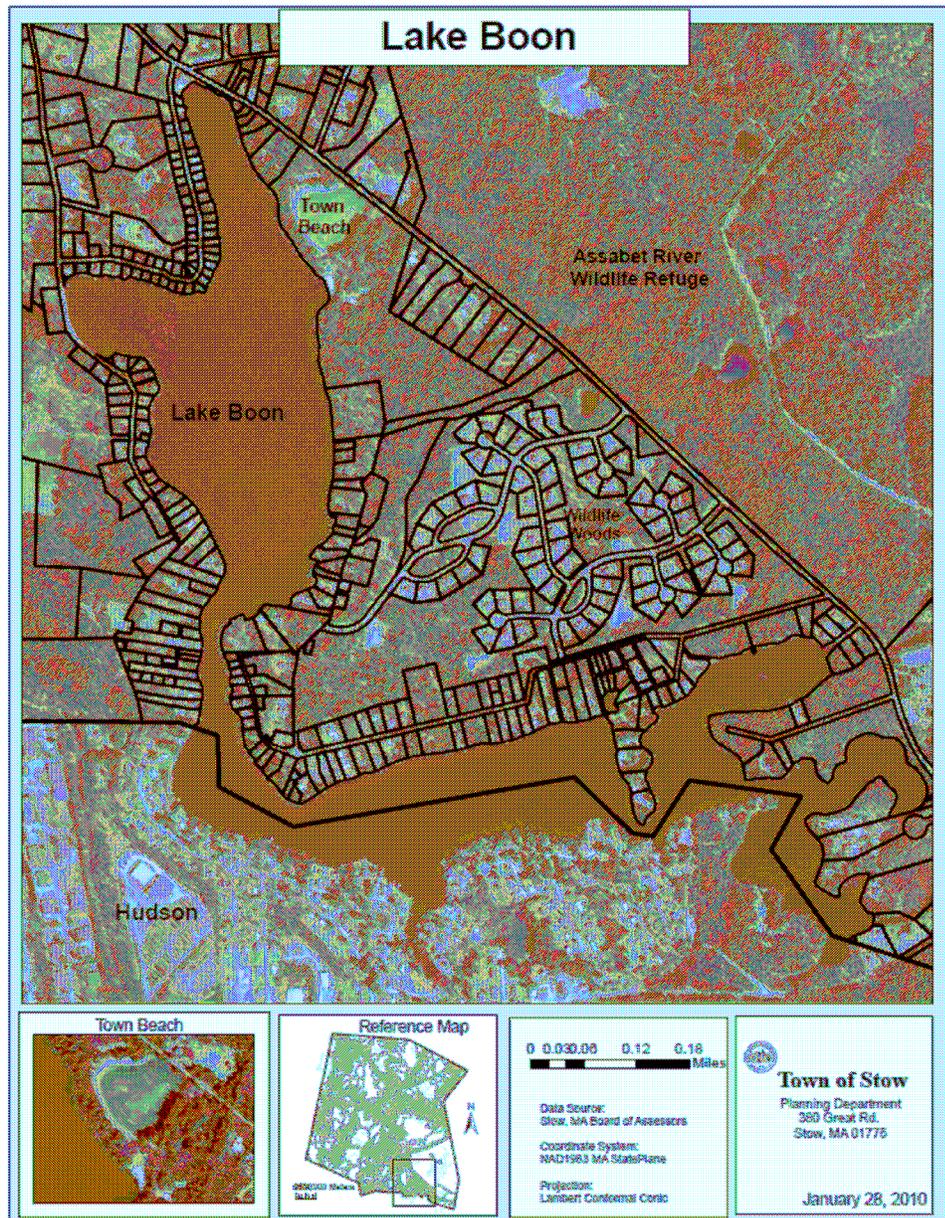
## **I. Issues Associated with Lake Boon**

Problems concerning Lake Boon have already been covered to a large degree in Chapters 5 and 6. From a municipal standpoint, there are several issues to consider regarding Lake Boon, some to be addressed by the Lake Boon Commission and others by the Town as a whole.

Because the lake straddles both Stow and Hudson, decisions regarding Lake Boon in its entirety must often be made jointly with the Town of Hudson under the policy direction of the Lake Boon Commission. A decision about a drawdown of Lake Boon is under appeal and currently under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts DEP.

Water quality for drinking is a much more complex issue. The residential lots surrounding Lake Boon tend to be approximately one-eighth of an acre on average and densely sited. Original homes on these lots were primarily summer cottages, and not year-round winterized residences. Over the years, these cottages have been torn down and replaced with larger structures.

FIGURE: 25 Visual of Lake Boon, surrounding parcels, & locator map



Larger homes generally require larger septic system capacity. However, because it is in an area where the groundwater table is high and wells and septic systems are, by necessity, sited close together, the Lake Boon area is often plagued with septic and well system failures. This is a part of town that must be examined closely for the policy implications associated with what the Town might need to do to address public health issues that arise from failing septic and water supply contamination. The Master Plan Committee recommends that this area be further evaluated, with special consideration to the following: building limitations or moratoriums on new homes; public water or sewer system; zoning changes; etc.

The proximity of the homes to the lake itself also presents the need for greater public education around the issue of phosphorus contamination of the lake. The Master Plan Committee recommends the Town embark on an outreach program to educate residents in this area to reduce fertilization of lawns and gardens and to reduce the use of phosphorus-laden detergents (in laundry and dishwashing) and other contaminants that enter the lake and groundwater through run-off and/or infiltration from septic systems. The Town of Stow has adopted an extensive stormwater management plan that can be viewed at Town Hall or the Highway Department office.

To learn more about issues related to Lake Boon, see the Lake Boon Association website at [www.lakeboon.org](http://www.lakeboon.org), as well as the discussions of this topic in the preceding chapters.

#### **J. Action items**

- Increase stabilization fund balance to approximately \$1 million to cover for unexpected events and to minimize disruption to services during economic downturns
- Undertake a limited personnel study that would include evaluation of existing Town Hall administrative and planning positions, analyze job descriptions, compare duties to towns of similar size and wealth and interview boards about capacity issues
- Set money aside in the near future for a feasibility study to evaluate the re-use options for the Pompositticut School facility.
- Explore arrangements with private water suppliers and work collaboratively with appropriate private entities to expand water supply to schools, municipal facilities and private users.
- Further evaluate septic system policy in Lake Boon neighborhood, with special consideration to the following: building limitations or moratoriums on new homes; public water or sewer system; zoning changes; etc.
- Undertake outreach program to educate residents in the Lake Boon neighborhood to decrease phosphorus contamination by reducing fertilization of lawns and gardens and to reduce the use of phosphorus-laden detergents (in laundry and dishwashing) and other contaminants that enter the lake and groundwater through run-off and/or infiltration from septic systems.