

This is the first of an ongoing series of releases from the Master Plan Committee, intended to help keep citizens aware and enlightened as the Master Plan update takes shape.

Submitted by the Master Plan Committee

MASTER PLAN 101 – AN OVERVIEW

As Stow's Master Plan Committee moves forward with the complicated challenge of updating and revising the Master Plan, some townspeople still wonder what the motivation behind this project is. What is a Master Plan? Why have one? Can't the town make decisions based on zoning laws, budgetary allocations and priorities that have already been established by consensus?

The concept of a Master Plan is laid out in Massachusetts General Law Chapter 41, Section 81D. As stated therein, a community's Master Plan should have nine key elements. In brief, these elements address the topics of goals and policies, land use, housing, economic development, natural/cultural resources, open space/recreation, public facilities/services, and transportation, as well as covering an implementation strategy for any determinations that arise from the Master Plan. Not only is the establishment of a Master Plan written into Massachusetts General Law, but Stow's individual charter requires that it be updated every five years. By keeping a master plan current and vital, a community greatly increases its eligibility for various forms of state funding.

Just as with a business plan that company leaders might draw up, a Master Plan sets out goals as clearly as possible with the intent of creating benchmarks and guideposts. Put simply, it helps us gauge whether we are going where we want to go and reminds local leaders of what the citizenry's priorities are. By establishing goals and priorities at the outset, it provides a way to monitor our own progress.

Respondents to the survey that the Master Plan Committee conducted at the end of 2008 established a clear consensus on one thing: Stow's residents care enormously about their community and want to see decisions made carefully and fairly. It would be hard to find a single voter in Stow who took a lackadaisical view of the town or expressed indifference toward the prospect of imminent changes. The people of Stow love their small, semi-rural town and want to preserve its many assets while also being proactive in managing any necessary changes. People who take responsibility for their town, and are willing to roll up their sleeves in support of that devotion: from such passions arise the most effective, most workable Master Plans.