

Stow Master Plan Update



Adopted by the Planning Board, November 7, 2010

Credits and Acknowledgments

Stow Board of Selectmen:

Stephen M. Dungan, Chairman
Thomas H. Ruggiero, Clerk
Kathleen K. Farrell
Ellen S. Sturgis
Laura Y. Spear

Stow Town Administrator:

William Wrigley

Stow Planning Board:

Kathleen Willis, Chair
Ernest Dodd, Vice Chair
Stephen Quinn, Clerk
Leonard Golder
Lori Clark
Bruce Fletcher, Voting Associate Member



Stow Master Plan Committee:

Marcia B. Rising, Chair – Representing Board of Health
Stephen Dungan – Representing Board of Selectmen
Rebecca Mattison – Representing Conservation Commission
Charles Kern – Representing Finance Committee
Kathleen Willis – Representing Planning Board
Karen Kelleher - At Large
Roy Miller - At Large

Special thanks to Karen Kelleher for her tireless work behind the scenes keeping the committee organized, collecting information, and spearheading research. We also thank Kristen Domurad for her outstanding mapping skills.

Project Consultant:

The Ciccolo Group, LLC
Michelle Ciccolo, Principal Consultant
Nancy S. West, Associate



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** Please note that some figures may be difficult to view in this format due to size or color graduations. Full-color and large-scale versions are available for viewing in the Planning Board Office.*

Chapter 1

Introduction



CHAPTER 1: Introduction



Welcome to the 2010 update of the Town of Stow’s Master Plan, published in the fall of that year. We also encourage you to visit the Town’s website, www.stow-ma.gov, for electronic copies of this report along with larger-scale versions of maps and other graphics.

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. These goals help gauge where we are going and where we want to go, and remind local leaders of what the residents’ priorities are. Establishing goals and priorities at the outset provides us with a way to monitor our own progress.

A. Master Plan Requirements

The requirements for a Master Plan are established in Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 41 Section 81D. In a somewhat unusual situation, Stow’s Town Charter, Section 7.7c, 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

FIGURE: 1 Excerpt from Town Charter

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held in accordance with Section 2-5(a) during the year following the year in which it is appointed.

- (c) Master Plan Committee: The Master Plan shall be reviewed at the direction of the Planning Board every five years, and a Master Plan Committee shall be appointed two years before the next update is due. The Board of Selectmen shall appoint a special committee of seven members comprised of a member of the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Board of Health, the Conservation Commission, and the Finance Committee and two Stow voters at large, who are not members of the above named boards.

The appointed committee shall present a final report to the Planning Board and said report shall include a Master Plan or updates to any existing Master Plan as required by Chapter 41 of the General Laws. The committee shall be discharged six months after the Master Plan or Master Plan updates have been presented to the Planning Board.

- (d) If the Board of Selectmen so approves, any review committee appointed hereunder may retain counsel to assist in its review and expend such funds as may be appropriated.

In Stow, the predominant challenge is to balance the goal of diversity – as it relates to both housing and demographics – with the wish not to fundamentally alter our small-town heritage and rural character. It is difficult to pursue development to accommodate the desired diversity and economic

growth without compromising the equally important priority of land conservation. Only by soliciting input from as diverse a range of voices as possible can we ensure that we have met the Town's needs to the best of our ability.

Therefore, we revise our Master Plan based on feedback from key constituencies including the Open Space Committee, the Recreation Commission, the Planning Board, the Board of Health, the Conservation Commission, the Board of Selectmen, the Town's various housing groups, the School Committee, town and municipal employees including the police and fire chiefs and the head of the Highway Department, other ad-hoc committees and residents. In doing so, we attempt to create a fixed set of benchmarks against which future decisions can be weighed and future priorities examined.

This 2010 update is laid out in a topical format. Each chapter is devoted to a different component of planning with an emphasis on the major statutory elements of a Master Plan. Those nine statutory elements, as defined in MGL Chapter 41, Section 81D, are as follows:

- **Goals and Policies** - Public process
- **Land Use Plan** – Existing zoning and desired development patterns
- **Housing** – Desired type, quality, density and affordability, neighborhood considerations
- **Economic Development** - appropriate development locations
- **Natural and Cultural Resources** – Historic preservation, heritage landscapes, and cultural resources
- **Open Space and Recreation** - Natural resource protection, recreation facilities
- **Municipal Services and Public Facilities** – Capital planning and municipal funded services
- **Transportation** – Circulation, mobility, transit, parking
- **Plan Implementation**

When MGL Chapter 41 Section 81D was first adopted, personal computers, graphic design, and the digital age of mapping and photography had not yet made their way into the typical workplace. Thus, municipal planning back in the 1960s and 1970s was much more rudimentary. Echoing the sophistication made available by better technology and available data, standards have evolved to include ever increasing planning expectations. Master Plans have thus become increasingly complex.

In addition, state and federal agencies have responded in turn with greater requirements on what a municipality is expected to produce for various plans that require state certification. For instance, the Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs has explicit guidelines for Open Space Plans which, if not met, prevent the community from being eligible for certain grants. Similarly, in order to receive School Building Assistance funds, communities must undergo predevelopment plans consistent with the Massachusetts School Building Authority requirements. A final example includes the Housing Production Plan, which is certified by the

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) if the plan complies with its guidelines. Approved Housing Production Plans provide the community with greater authority and control over proposed developments.

A Master Plan, when approached as a stand-alone document without the benefit of any existing municipal plans, can take years to produce and cost a community a significant amount of money for technical assistance. However, when a community already has many of the topical components available, the community can and should draw on the existing plans, especially those that have been certified by the appropriate state agency. Stow is in the enviable position of having several of its plans recently produced and adopted by the state. Thus, this Master Plan update does not attempt to replace or replicate those documents. Instead, this Master Plan is generally functioning to augment existing plans and fill in content where none is available.

Again, as mentioned above, Stow has done a fair amount of local planning, and this document draws on the themes, and conclusions of those existing plans that are current and comprehensive. Existing plans recently produced by the Town of Stow that should be noted include:

Plan Name	Date	Certified By	Prepared By	Web Link (if posted)
Open Space and Recreation – “Stow Forever Green”	6/08	EOEEA	Open Space and Recreation Committee	http://www.stow-ma.gov/pages/StowMA_BComm/StowMA_OpenSpace/2008%20Stow%20OSRP%20-%20large%20version/
Elementary School Master Plan – “Stow Public Schools”	5/07	School Building Assistance Bureau	SMMA	http://www.stow-ma.gov/pages/StowMA_BComm/StowMA_SchoolBuild/Miscellaneous%20ESBC%20docs/
Housing Production Plan 2010	2010	Pending	Karen Sunnarborg Consulting, SMAHT	

Other planning studies and projects that contributed to the development of this plan include:

- **Master Plan "Stow 2000" - May 1996**
- **Stow Historic House Inventory**
- **Community Development Plan - 2004**
- **"Housing Choice - A Housing Plan for Stow"**
- **Mixed Use Zoning Project, Priority Development Fund Project - 2005**
- **Visual Preference Survey – 2005**
- **Land Use Task Force Final Report – 2009**
- **Recreation Department Master Plan – 2007**

- **Heritage Landscape “Stow Reconnaissance Report,” prepared by Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation & Freedom’s Way Heritage Area**

To obtain copies of these reports, please inquire with the Planning Department.

Despite drawing heavily on the above plans for content, one critical distinction should be made. Because the Master Plan must attempt to balance a series of competing needs and demands, goals and their relative priority may in some places deviate slightly from the priorities laid out in plans produced through other venues. Since we live and operate in a system that has limited financial and physical resources, sometimes the priorities we set and choices we ultimately make will inevitably come into conflict with other equally valid goals. For example, although recreation proponents might wish to use open land for new sports fields, housing specialists might prefer to develop affordable housing on that same parcel, while open space proponents will advocate for preserving the land in its pristine condition.

While the Master Plan attempts to take all of these needs into consideration, it cannot realistically predict or prescribe all of the actions that will occur in future years. Rather, it sets out a road map and lays out a framework in which to evaluate future municipal decisions. It identifies what the community values and provides a long-term vision. It is, however, ultimately just a document, and the Master Plan cannot implement itself. Thus, the final chapter in this document highlights implementation strategies with specific actions items, a timeline, and the municipal entity primarily responsible for that goal.

Notwithstanding the Master Plan’s attempt to set priorities, change, where it is driven by municipal action and not from outside pressures, will primarily be implemented by the actions of Town Meeting, which must vote on all appropriations and all zoning changes. Therefore, it is critical for residents to stay engaged, attend public meetings, and participate in local voting opportunities if they want to advance the goals of this Master Plan.

This document can serve as a valuable tool for all elected and appointed boards and committees in guiding their policy decisions and in influencing their priorities. New board and committee members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this plan and to read related attachments and appendices where appropriate. The Town will endeavor to post progress updates on its website once the plan moves from the paper to implementation phase, and all residents are encouraged to stay engaged.

B. Vision Statement

The Master Plan attempts to express a longer-term vision for the future of Stow. To help the Town arrive at a general vision statement, the existing community values must first be examined and understood.



1. Values

When the question, “What do you value most about Stow?” is asked of a Stow resident, the most frequent answer is, “A sense of community consistent with its rural character.” Our many open spaces and historic village settings contribute to Stow’s rural character. Conservation lands, farms, orchards, and golf courses are the resources of Stow that provide and preserve this rural character. We value our villages for their rich colonial and Victorian heritage and for the services they provide. We value those qualities that make Stow a wonderful place to live and raise a family. A strong sense of community, including involvement in our schools, churches, recreation, and social organizations and programs, provides opportunities for our children to excel and for adults to feel part of a supportive community.

Stow is far more than a collection of well-maintained houses where people sleep. Churches, civic institutions, governmental bodies, and volunteer organizations give Stow residents many different venues in which to get to know and appreciate their fellow citizens. Furthermore, that sense of community is aided by the fact that Stow has a rich mix of people of all ages from different economic strata.



These statements of value were derived in large part from comments received by planning participants and from data gathered and compiled over the past several years. The survey conducted by the Master Plan Committee (MPC) in the fall of 2008 indicated that overwhelmingly, residents generally want to preserve the existing character of the Town. The full survey and its results appear in the Appendix. Policies for growth and protection of land must therefore reflect that desire within the context of what is presently possible under existing zoning.

2. Vision for Stow

The following vision has been derived from the statement of values, with significant weight given to the views expressed by the residents in various forums, through surveys, and an ongoing dialog with the community.

We envision a future in which Stow continues to place a high value on quality education, recreation, and



agriculture. As a community, we will welcome diversity and place a high priority on providing housing that matches various ages and income levels. The need for economic growth will be balanced with maintaining a small-town feel. Recognizing the dual goals of physical fitness and community warmth, neighborhoods will be physically linked through a natural trail network and sidewalks. Through planning, Stow will maintain its rural character, ensure that the environment is protected by supporting the goals of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, and provide housing choices. Above all, the Town will continue to ensure that its citizens have the highest possible quality of life.

That vision, along with the principles outlined below, helped to guide the Master Plan Committee in the creation of this document and played a significant role in the development of its recommendations.

C. Smart Growth and Principles for Sustainability

1. Explanation of “smart growth”

The state has a set of Smart Growth and Sustainable Development principles that it has promulgated and revises from time to time. However, in a community such as Stow, whose rural character dominates the landscape, not all of the state’s sustainable development principles are relevant or appropriate. Therefore, we have taken care to modify those concepts and mold them to be more suitable for Stow.

Smart growth is a principle of land development that emphasizes mixing land uses, increases the availability of a range of housing types in neighborhoods, takes advantage of compact design, and fosters distinctive and attractive communities. It preserves open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas; strengthens existing communities; provides a variety of transportation choices; makes development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective; and encourages community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Attractive village and town centers, vibrant residential neighborhoods, historic mill buildings, and fields, forests, and streams characterize Stow. Revitalizing and reinforcing these areas is a key smart growth strategy. A critical component of smart growth is identifying the areas that are appropriate for development and those that should be protected and preserved.

2. Principles for sustainability

The state has worked hard to encourage planning and development that protect our natural resources, promote social and economic health and meet the needs of our residents. As a basic guide for local officials, developers, and citizens about what smart growth is, the Office for Commonwealth Development released a set of Sustainable Development Principles.

Based on these guidelines and adapted to meet Stow's unique character, the Master Plan Committee recommends adoption of the following Sustainability Principles:

- **Redevelop first:** Revitalize existing neighborhoods in a way that doesn't consume forest and fields, and find new uses for historic buildings and underutilized Brownfield sites, such as the Gleasondale Mill area.
- **Concentrate development:** Encourage compact development to conserve land and foster vibrant, walkable districts.
- **Be fair:** The benefits and burdens of development should be equitable and shared by all. Where new development may adversely effect some areas of town, appropriate mitigation should be required. We should work toward transparent and predictable permitting that will result in cost-effective and fair outcomes. This means that bylaws and regulations will be clear and consistent so that developers can have a reasonable understanding of what to expect.
- **Restore and enhance the environment:** Promote the conservation, protection, and restoration of water, land, and cultural resources to provide a high quality of life and ecological health.
- **Conserve natural resources:** Encourage renewable energy and efficient use of building materials and water to contribute to a healthier environment that limits waste in a cost-effective fashion.
- **Diversify housing opportunities:** Diversify units to ensure that people of all abilities, income levels, and ages have appropriate housing options.
- **Provide transportation choice:** Look for ways to provide opportunities for public transit, walking, and biking.
- **Expand transportation infrastructure to enhance economy:** Connect people with jobs in town or near their homes by expanding transportation infrastructure to enhance our economy.
- **Foster sustainable businesses:** Work to identify and promote new, innovative, environmentally friendly industries that contribute to the social, economic, and environmental health of our state.
- **Plan regionally:** Where possible, coordinate intermunicipal and regional planning to produce better outcomes that recognize that economic development, water, transportation, and housing are regional in nature; they don't stop at the Town boundary.

3. Smart growth techniques for future development

We recommend the following smart growth techniques in planning for the future growth of Stow:

- **Village-style development:** Includes a variety of housing types, a mix of land uses, an active center, and a walkable design.

- **Open space residential design:** An approach to residential development that promotes open space preservation, based on environmental and social priority. It features partnership in development design between municipal officials and developers that provides innovative flexible incentives for highest marketability, mixed housing types and land uses, and minimal disturbance to the natural terrain.
- **Accessory dwelling units:** An accessory dwelling unit is a self-contained apartment in an owner-occupied single-family home that is either attached to the principal dwelling or in a separate structure on the same property. Accessory units (also known as accessory apartments, guest apartments, in-law apartments, family apartments, or secondary units) provide supplementary housing that can be integrated into existing single-family neighborhoods to provide a low-priced housing alternative with little or no negative impact on the character of the neighborhood.
- **District improvement financing (DIF) and tax increment financing (TIF):** District improvement financing (DIF) and tax increment financing (TIF) are economic tools that promote redevelopment by use of public/private partnerships. TIF offers tax breaks to developers, while DIF channels tax dollars to targeted redevelopment districts. Both of these tools require Town Meeting approval in order to implement them.
- **Low impact development (LID):** Low impact development (LID) is a more sustainable land development pattern that results from a site planning process that first identifies critical natural resources, and then determines appropriate building envelopes. LID also incorporates a range of best management practices that preserve the natural hydrology of the land.
- **Inclusionary zoning:** Inclusionary zoning requires a portion of the housing units in certain real estate developments to be reserved as affordable to low and moderate-income households. It is an effective tool that can be used to ensure that adequate affordable units are included in the normal course of real estate development.
- **Preserving agricultural land and farming opportunities:** Preserving agricultural land and farming opportunities in Massachusetts has been a high priority for several decades. Through a variety of state and local initiatives, opportunities have emerged for agricultural preservation. Many communities have successfully preserved land and farming opportunities using a wide array of financial and legal tools.
- **Brownfields reuse:** The state is committed to the cleanup and redevelopment of Brownfield properties as a way to stimulate the economy and promote environmental protection goals. Several incentives are available to developers, including assistance with insurance and flexibility in remediation schedules.
- **Water resources:** Water is a finite resource that needs to be managed to meet current and future human needs, as well as those of the environment. Our approaches to water management must ensure continued and sufficient quantity

and quality of water for current and future human uses, while maintaining ecological integrity.

4. Resources for smart growth

The following web links provide further information on the topic of smart growth:

http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/

<http://www.ma-smartgrowth.org/>

<http://www.environmentalleague.org/news-issues-smart-growth.php>

D. Visions for Individual Topical Areas

1. Open space vision

While residential and commercial development is somewhat inevitable, the vision we have for Stow is to utilize zoning and other creative tools that will help to preserve open space. The current Zoning Bylaw and its standard Subdivision Regulations require large lot sizes for traditional residential subdivisions. This forces development to consume large amounts of open space which, when developed, become long driveways, lawns and landscaped areas, instead of being preserved in their natural state.

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. In this fashion, open space can still be protected, while privacy and a peaceful way of life can remain the norm.

The Town has recently produced an Open Space and Recreation Plan. Further depiction of vision and goals for Open Space and Recreation are outlined in that plan, which can also be viewed at www.stow-ma.gov/pages/StowMA_BComm/StowMA_OpenSpace/index. However, the Master Plan Committee wishes to highlight the following goals in its vision for Open Space:

- Complete the Assabet River Rail Trail through Stow
- Preserve open space in underserved quadrants
- Proactively negotiate to purchase Crow Island for conservation and recreational purposes
- Address the issue of eutrophication in Lake Boon
- Encourage Low Impact Development
- Secure easements to complete the “Emerald Necklace” walking trail network

2. Housing vision

Stow is a largely residential community with a distinct country character provided by numerous orchards, golf courses, forests, wetlands, and areas of open space. As a relatively old community (incorporated in 1683), Stow has a variety of housing stock, including historical dwellings, a few farms and farmhouses, typical New England single and multiple family dwellings, and limited affordable and elderly housing communities. However, the current mix of housing stock is overwhelmingly single-family detached homes (91% of all housing units) on moderate- to large-sized lots. Furthermore, like much of eastern Massachusetts, the cost of these homes has escalated dramatically with the result that these homes are not available to first-time buyers or those with modest income.

Our 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.

Key priorities for housing:

- Establish a comprehensive housing policy for Stow
- Consider employing professional support for housing issues
- Create a plan that effectively uses the combined resources of Community Preservation Act funds and Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust funds for increasing our affordable housing
- Identify parcels appropriate for small dwellings worthy of preservation as affordable units
- Enact zoning changes to encourage the building of diversified housing stock
- Provide for multi-family dwellings in Planned Conservation Developments (PCDs)

3. Economic development vision

Residents of Stow have articulated a vision for Stow's economy that is not much changed from today. The economy of Stow will continue to provide the everyday goods and services that residents need through its small businesses, independent retail shops, and network of professionals. Larger, "big box" retail will be discouraged along with malls and noxious manufacturing facilities. Land zoned for commercial activity should be a minor part of the overall land use while still leaving some select areas for non-intrusive larger facilities. The mill will be restored to use as thriving activity centers of commerce and perhaps mixed use. Finally, the golf courses will remain in their current use and not sold off for residential or more intensive commercial use.

4. Natural and cultural resource vision

Relative to Natural and Cultural Resources, the vision we imagine is a town that has extended land protection to important vistas and natural areas, especially those which have sensitive environmental habitats. It will also be a community where expanded arts and cultural opportunities are prevalent. Innovative, local and varied community-based cultural programming will exist and be supported by area residents.

5. Public facilities and municipal services vision

Like many small New England towns, Stow is likely to continue with a light-handed (and less expensive) rather than a heavy-handed (and more expensive) approach to municipal services. The MPC's vision for public facilities and municipal services is that 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.

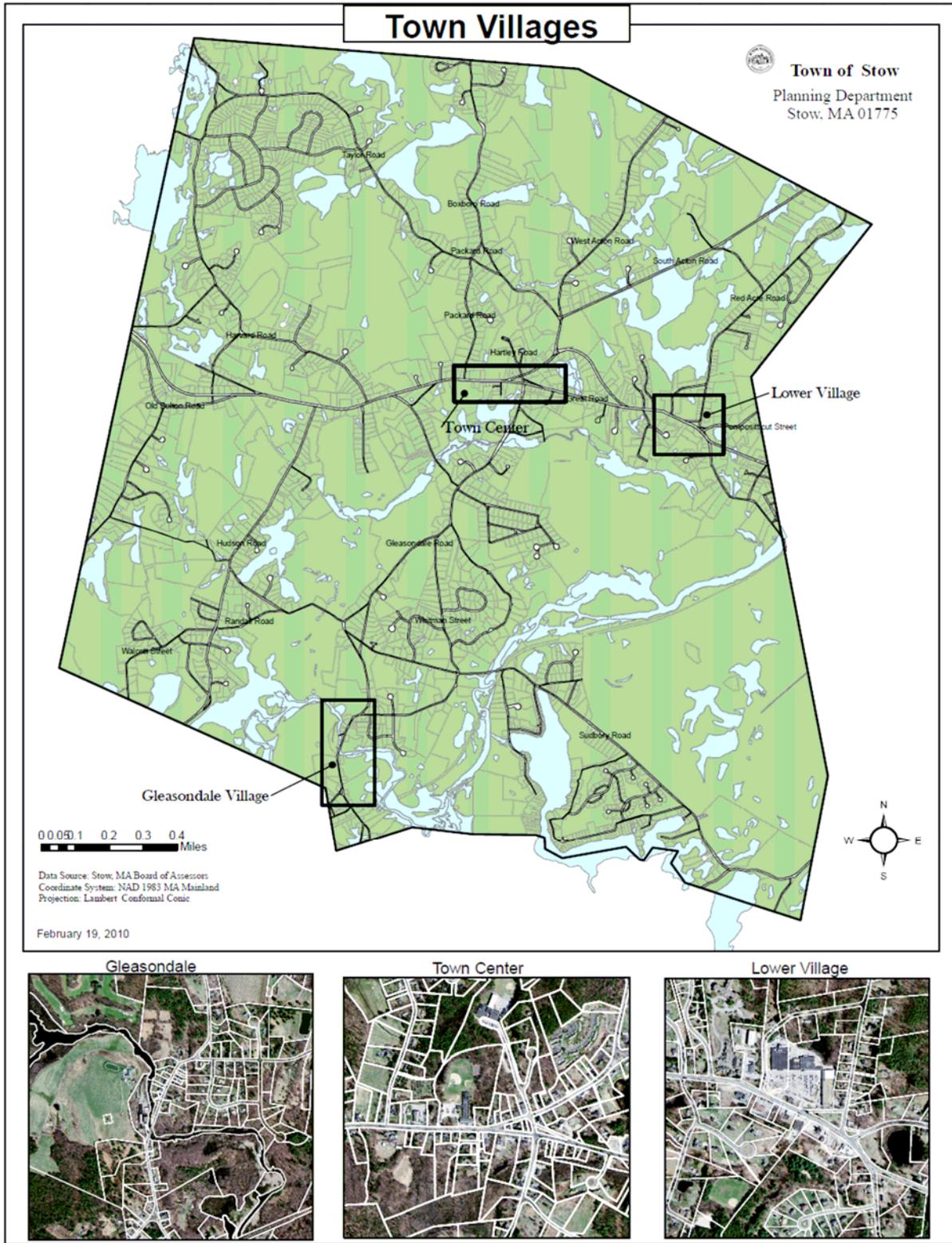
6. Transportation vision

The vision for transportation is to continue to find ways to improve upon safety and offer residents alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle. Over time, more sidewalks and trails will be built. Shuttle services for seniors will be expanded to other age groups to get to and from the train station in Acton and to other transit service connections. Car pooling, biking, and walking will be encouraged.

7. Land use and zoning vision

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.

FIGURE: 2 Village map



In general, Lower Village comprises our existing commercial retail area. Gleasondale is the area of town that is noteworthy for its historic mill and Victorian period housing. The Town Center contains our Colonial period buildings, which currently house our civic center and town buildings including the library, schools, monuments, and churches. By contrast, West Stow is an area of town with a lot of recent residential development and no history as a village center.



This plan envisions building on the existing village structure to augment and enhance possibilities of smart growth and sustainable development in the following specific ways:

- For Lower Village, we see an opportunity for additional commercial activity primarily through redevelopment of underutilized parcels and infill development. The potential for additional senior housing which would be conveniently located near shopping and other amenities would also be ideal for this area. This housing could be smaller than traditional single family housing, and slightly more densely constructed to minimize use of raw land.
- The Gleasondale Mill could lend itself well to a vision that includes artisan lofts, or residential and/or business (so-called “mixed use” – see description below)¹.
- West Stow, as it evolves, is ripe for smart growth and sustainable development.
- The Town Center is projected to remain essentially as it is now, but additional municipal uses for this area could be explored. Updating existing facilities, providing adequate parking, and generally enhancing this area is part of our vision for Town Center.

¹ Mixed use is a term which generally means combining one or more allowable zoning uses in one zoning district. Mixed use can vary greatly from one community to the next because the particulars of the definition are explicitly defined within a community’s zoning code. In the case of a suburban/rural community such as Stow, when we use the term mixed use, we are intending to suggest low-density combining of office/business uses with residential or retail with residential. Mixed use, when it is adopted, should fit the character of the community within which it is being recommended. In Stow’s case, this would mean clustering of uses within existing structures such as mills or obsolete commercial buildings, or possibly low-height buildings (not exceeding 35’) that can accommodate retail/office on the first floor with lofts or apartments on the second floor in buildings no more than 3 stories high, where appropriate. In all cases, adoption of mixed use zoning would require approval of the legislative body (Town Meeting).

Town Center Land use and zoning priorities:

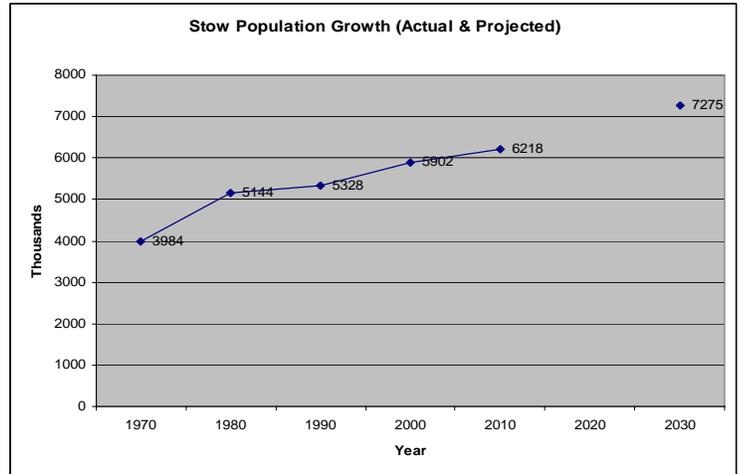
- Explore mixed use overlay districts to allow redevelopment and new development that promotes diverse housing stock
- Revitalize existing commerce
- Encourage pedestrian-friendly development
- Reduce roadway congestion
- Promote a sense of community
- Assist in the creation of common water and sewage facilities where appropriate
- Explore creative parking solutions



E. Existing Conditions – Background and Context

- Current demographics

Population: **6,218**
Registered voters: **4,436**
School Enrollment **1,173**
Income per capita: **\$38,260**
Median Household Income
\$102,530
EQV Per Capita **\$195,088**
Estimated Jobs in Town:
2,082



- The above chart illustrates population data derived from US and Local Census statistics and combines projections from the Metropolitan Area

Planning Council (MAPC). The most striking of the above statistics is the 56% population growth in Stow since the year 1970. Based on existing trends, the amount of available land, and Stow's location between two major highways proximate to both Boston and Worcester, MAPC predicts (in its Data Common analysis derived from US Census data) that Stow's population will grow at a rate greater than 17% between now and the year 2030. However, that same analysis projects that the job base in Stow will only grow 11-15% based in part on the relative scarcity of commercially zoned land in Stow and likely in part on the lack of water and sewer infrastructure to support large-scale commercial growth.

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs conducted a full community-wide "build-out analysis" in 2000 which was intended to present a picture of what the community could become if all available and usable land was developed in accordance with present zoning. That build-out analysis appears in detail in the Appendix. It helps set the context for what Stow could become over time if present land use patterns remain unchanged. That analysis concluded that Stow could see around another 1,100 housing units built and significant commercial square footage constructed under the present zoning scheme.

This information provides a picture of what Stow could become if full build out were achieved. It predicts that there would be an additional 3,689 residents for a new population of 9,482 at total build out and school aged children would approach numbers around 1,793. While it might take decades for Stow to approach these full build-out figures, they are nonetheless important

in setting the stage for what Stow could become if present conditions and zoning regulations are left untouched. Through this Master Planning process, Stow must consider if the above statistics are acceptable or if it wishes to modify some of its planning practices to direct the community's growth in a fashion which differs from current trends.

F. Goals and Policies

1. Proceed with a transparent process

A significant number of public meetings have been devoted to the topic of revising the Master Plan over the past decade, and hundreds of people have participated along the way. Along with six public forums, the committee has met on its own more than 120 times since 2001. As is mandated in Stow, each meeting of this committee was publicly posted at least 48 hours in advance, along with an agenda.

The MPC made every effort to involve the public in the process. This campaign for public awareness of the work of the MPC began in earnest with the public forum in early February 2009, which was attended by approximately 40 town residents. Meanwhile, the MPC drafted a series of weekly installments for the *Stow Independent* summarizing various aspects of the Master Plan, such as affordable housing, economic development, open space, zoning, etc. Several of those articles that appeared in the newspaper are also included in the Appendix.

2. Create opportunities for public input

In December 2008, the MPC solicited information via a townwide survey. That survey, which was available to residents both online and in hard copy, investigated every aspect of municipal life, from traffic congestion to zoning regulations and from affordable housing to recreational facilities. There was little emphasis on school-related priorities simply because those priorities are established by the Nashoba Regional School District. Also, Stow's Elementary School Building Committee was engaged in its own planning process, and we wished to avoid the cost and confusion of duplication of effort.

In February 2009, the MPC held a public forum to discuss the survey results, measure them against the interests of meeting attendees, and gauge the Town's involvement and interest in the process. During an extensive mapping exercise done in small groups, useful information emerged concerning use of our town resources and options we all face in terms of future development.

3. Involve multiple stakeholders

The Board of Selectmen was responsible for appointing members to the MPC. They chose representatives from each of the other major boards in town: the Board of Health, the Finance Committee, the Conservation Commission, and the Planning Board. In addition, one Selectman

was named to the committee, as were two members-at-large. Most of the members were long-time Stow residents with a wealth of knowledge and institutional memory about town issues as well as a deep-seated commitment to the Town's future. Each member of the MPC brought the interests of his or her committee to the table along with personal knowledge of the community.

In March, the MPC began an ongoing process of inviting various stakeholders to its biweekly meetings. Each invited group was urged to send at least one or two representatives of the group to discuss special interests with the MPC. When necessary, members of the MPC represented the views of the other committees on which they served. This series of meetings brought the MPC face to face with the Open Space Committee, the Recreation Commission, the Fire Chief, the Police Chief, the Board of Health, the Land Use Task Force and the Town Administrator for in-depth discussions about how their respective needs could best be met by a revised Master Plan.

4. Provide opportunities for public comment

The MPC first issued a draft of the Master Plan in February 2008. Public response to the draft suggested the need for considerably more input and discussions, which touched off an expansive revision process. By bringing in a municipal management consulting firm, the MPC leveraged professional input to streamline the process and ensure the use of industry-recognized best practices. Working with consultants, the MPC began drafting revised chapters of the Master Plan in April 2009, and began rolling out chapters of the new draft in late summer, with a complete draft available for public review and a 30-day comment period beginning in April 2010. The MPC then produced the final version, which is expected to be subsequently adopted by the Planning Board.

Chapter 2

Existing Land Use



Chapter 2: Existing Land Use

A. The Community of Stow

1. Community characteristics

Stow is a town distinguished for its beautiful scenery with agricultural uses, open lands, forests, and other natural resources predominating. Primarily a residential community, Stow still maintains its rural, farming character, although suburban uses gradually continue to creep into the landscape. The community comprises 17.62 square miles, which equates to approximately 10,711 acres of land when roads and water bodies are subtracted. The Town itself is divided into approximately 2,282 parcels of separately titled land. This figure compares to the 2,483 individual parcels noted in the 1996 Master Plan. In 1996, there were 50 miles of public roads within Stow; today there are 60.32.² These numbers provide perspective on how the Town has changed over the recent decade or so.

2. Access to Stow

The Town of Stow is centrally located in the eastern part of Massachusetts nearly equidistant from two major cities. It is approximately 23 miles northwest of Boston and 20 miles northeast of Worcester as the crow flies.

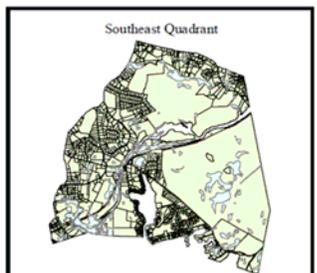
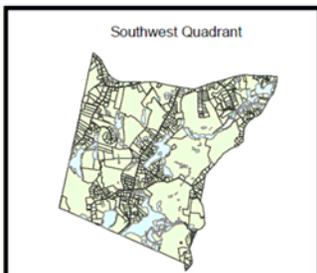
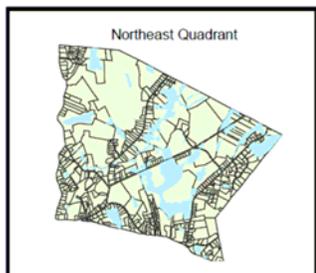
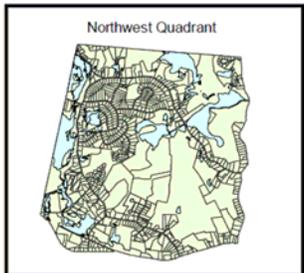
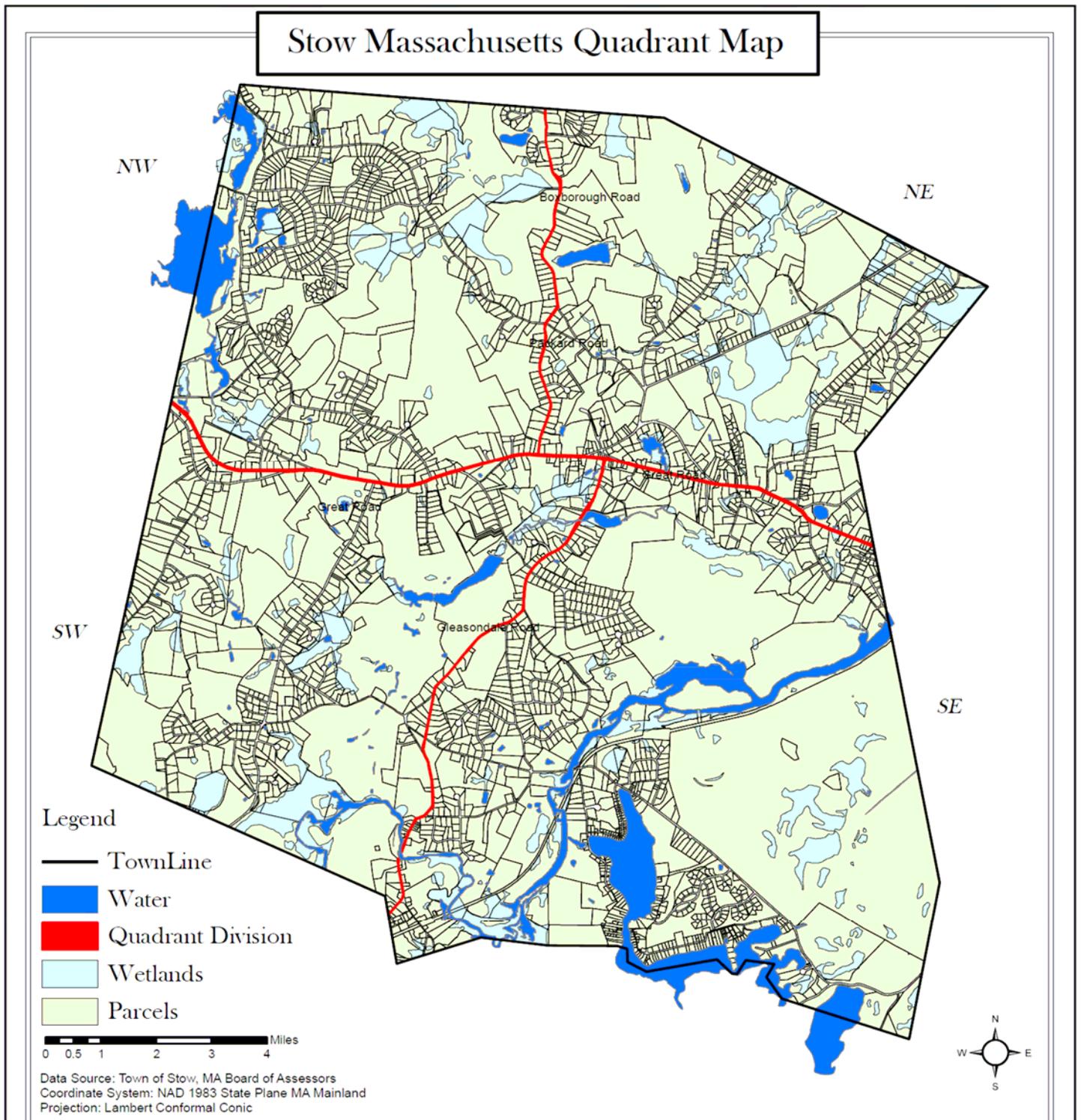
Local and state highways 117, 85, 62 and 27 provide access to Stow by connecting with major interstate highways I-495, 2 and I-290. The lack of a direct highway connection probably helps to maintain Stow in the relatively pristine state it enjoys and deters some of the trends toward ever-increasing residential development in the suburbs closest to Boston.

3. Quadrants

For the purposes of ease of discussion, the Town has been divided into four quadrants primarily along the major routes through the community. East to west, the Town is neatly divided by Route 117. South to north, the Town can be split by Gleasondale Road (Route 62), to Packard Road to Boxboro Road.

² 2006 figure as reported in the MMA 2008-2009 “Massachusetts Municipal Directory.”

FIGURE: 3 Quadrant map



4. Predominant development patterns

- The Northeast quadrant of town includes Lower Village, where most retail and service businesses are located, and parts of the Town Center, which is home to many of the community's municipal services.
- The Southeast quadrant of town is predominantly residential and open space. Within this area lies the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge, which falls under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- The Southwest quadrant of town contains the Gleasondale Mill area with its surrounding mill-style housing and other commercial and industrial areas along with a residential mix. The Open Space and Recreation Plan has identified this quadrant as an underserved area with regard to protected open space, as it contains more than 600 acres of undeveloped land with less than 100 acres protected from further development. This part of town also hosts several of Stow's golf courses. The largest employer in town, Bose Corporation, is located in the Southwest quadrant.
- The Northwest quadrant of town, which is the closest to I-495, contains the largest raw land areas, including some that have been permitted for development but not yet developed, including the Ridgewood Estates Active Adult Neighborhood.

B. Current Zoning

The requirement that a community have a Zoning Bylaw dates back more than 30 years and is laid out in Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40A. Stow's Zoning Bylaw is even older, having first been adopted in 1949. In Stow, as in any community, the Zoning Bylaw is critical to helping define, regulate and maintain the quality of life for the Town's residents. As much as any other municipal topic, zoning is an issue in which nearly everyone in town has a vested interest: it influences the aesthetics of our town, its industry, its population density, its tax base, its diversity. A town that gives significant weight to zoning decisions is protecting the health, safety and general welfare of its inhabitants.

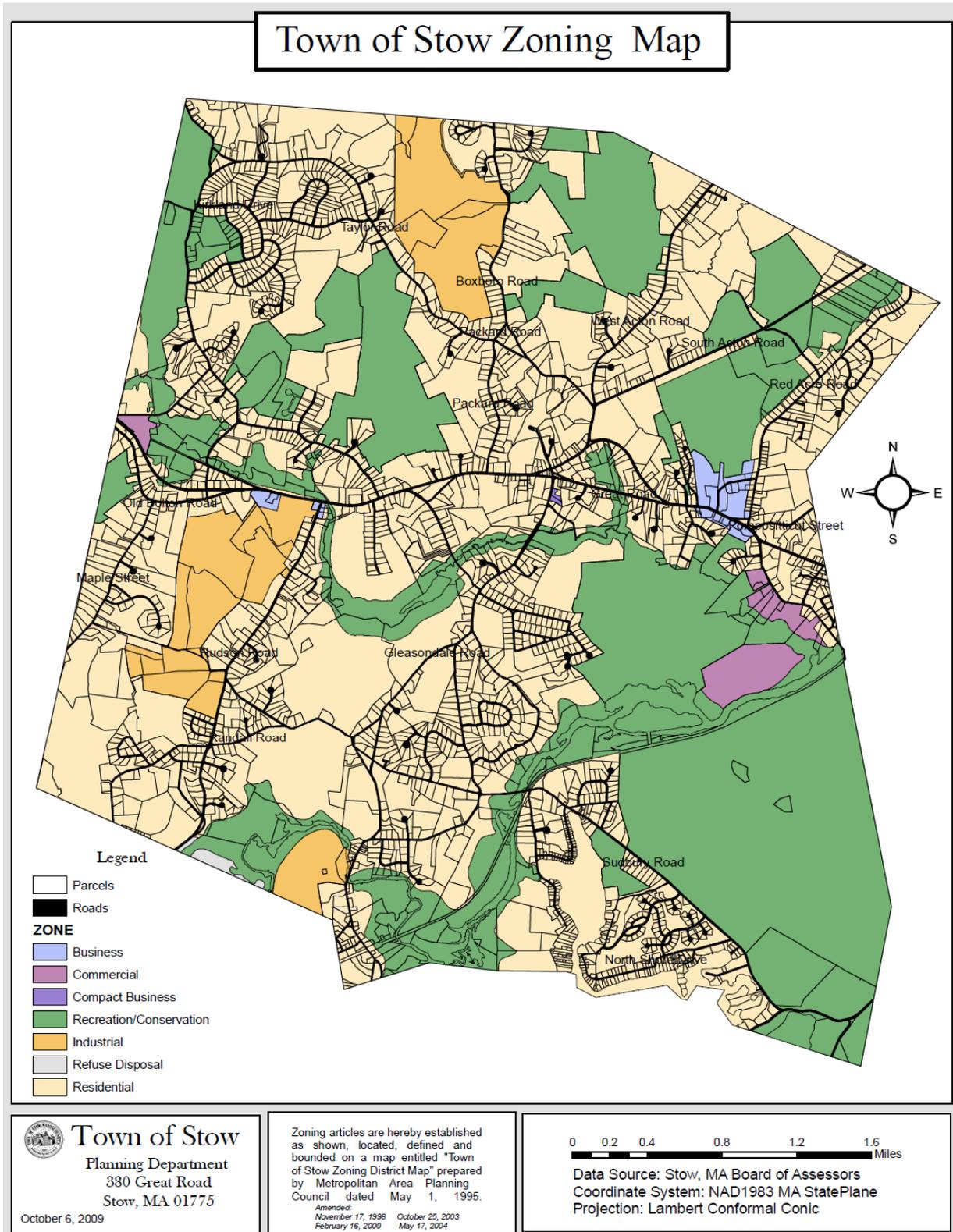
The Zoning Bylaw not only determines which parts of town are residential and which are commercial but also how nonresidential space may be used. For example, is an area or neighborhood zoned for retail, industrial, recreation, active adult neighborhood designation, accessory apartments, mobile homes, daycare, cell tower placement, adaptive reuse? The options for zoning are generally the first of the criteria that a business examines before considering locating within a community.

As a town and its inhabitants grow and evolve, needs inevitably arise for changes in the Zoning Bylaw. Oversight of zoning issues lies under the aegis of the Planning Board. Changes can be made, but not without due process and close examination. MGL Chapter 40A stipulates that a change to a town's Zoning Bylaw requires a two-thirds super majority vote at Town Meeting, to be preceded by a public hearing held by the Planning Board at least 21 days prior to the adoption of the zoning change. This is intended to give the public ample time to contemplate and respond to any individual's or business's wish to see a change made to current zoning.

The following page presents the current zoning map for the Town of Stow, last amended in 2004. This version reflects the Wireless Service Facility zoning put into place in 2001 and the Active Adult Neighborhood overlay district implemented in 2002. The reader should note that the permissible underlying zoning does not necessarily reflect the actual development patterns one would observe today. Many structures in town were built before zoning went into effect which sets up so-called "grandfathered" lots where the uses are allowed because they preexisted the zoning constraints. These are often referred to as "pre-existing, non-conforming, uses."



FIGURE: 4 Current Zoning Map



1. Residential areas of town

Residential uses are fairly uniformly distributed throughout town in a traditional style of development. Typically lots were carved out along existing roads in a pattern known as “ANR” (approval not required) lots. These lots are allowable as long as they meet the minimum lot acreage and have the appropriate number of linear feet of frontage along the road to comply with the underlying zoning. In accordance with state law today, the Planning Board must approve any such application for an ANR lot.³

The other type of residential pattern predominant in town is a traditional Massachusetts-style subdivision where new roads are primarily cul-de-sac connections off of main roads. Stow’s zoning code describes maximum cul-de-sac length and other characteristics of the new lots to be created. In this fashion, the lots tend to fan out from the newly created cul-de-sac circle.

The one notable area of town that has minimal residential development is the Southeast quadrant of town, where protected land, floodplains, and wetlands are prevalent.

Below are several maps depicting existing residential development patterns along with land areas that could be developed.

³ Owners of land must submit a plot plan prepared by a registered surveyor depicting how the new lot will be laid out and obtain signature of the Planning Board. This final ANR plan then must get recorded at the Registry of Deeds before the new lots are officially created.

FIGURE: 5 Map of existing residential use and zoning

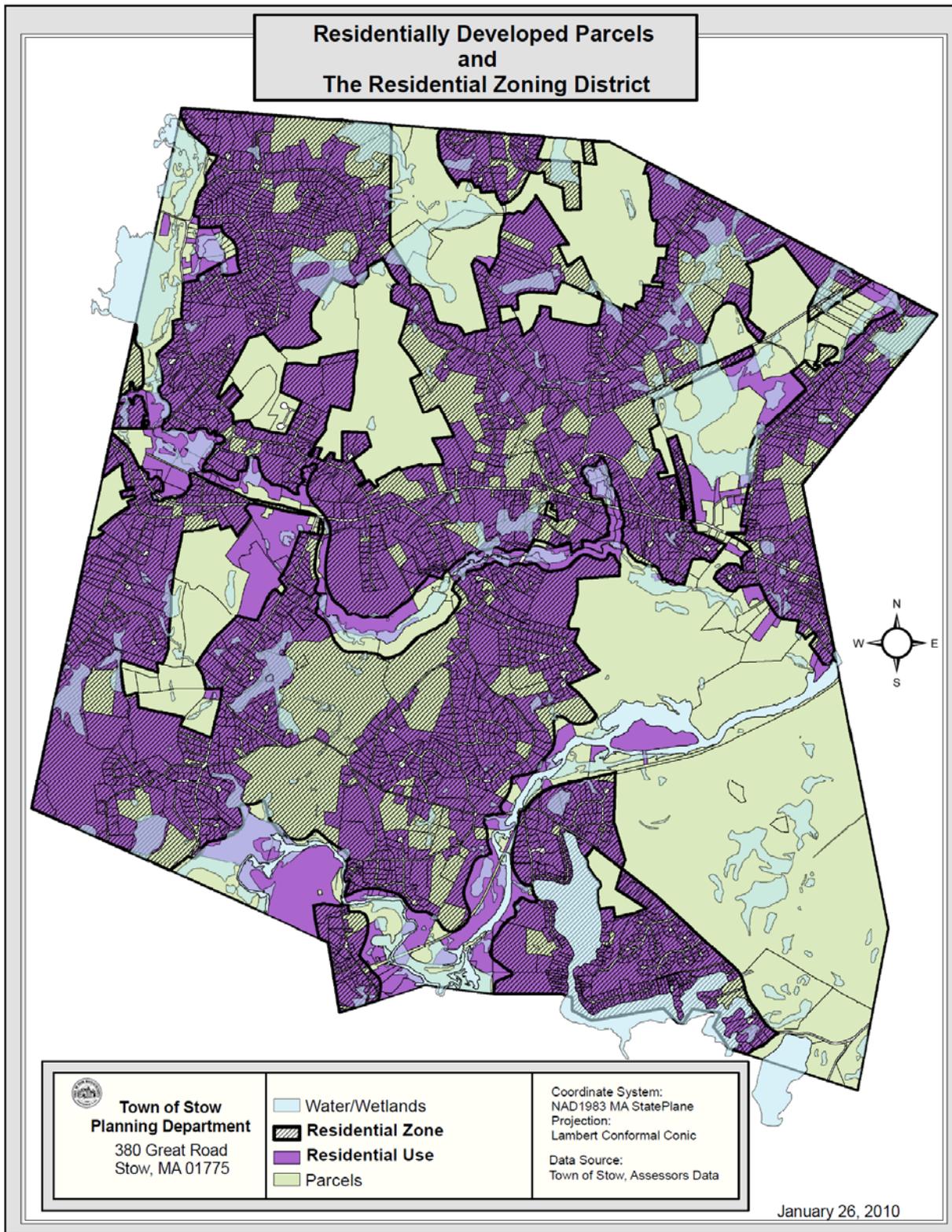
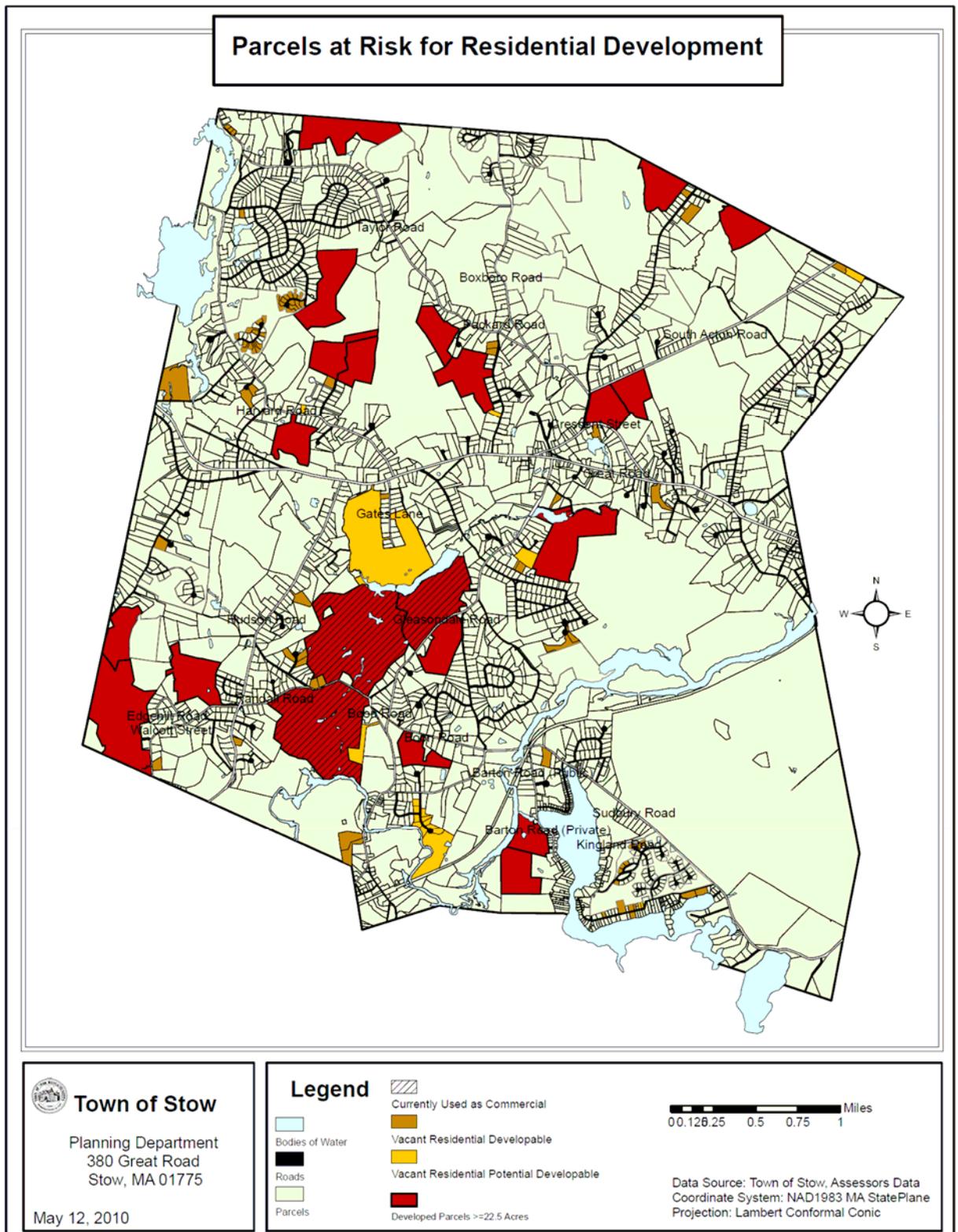


FIGURE: 6 Land parcels which could be developed as residential subdivisions



2. Commercial areas of town

With the exception of the Gleasondale Mill noted above and the Bose facility, there is minimal commercial and industrial activity throughout town. Most of the commercial activity is in the retail and service sector and is located along the major routes through town, most notably Routes 117 (Great Rd.) and Route 62.

Areas zoned for commercial development but not necessarily built out yet are concentrated in the Southwest quadrant around the mill area and, to a lesser extent, in the Northwest quadrant by the Stow airport. The Southwest quadrant contains a small strip of commercial zoning along Route 117 and Hudson Rd., some of which is still undeveloped. There is another small pocket of business zoning near the Maynard town line along Route 117 and in the Southeast quadrant by the Stowaway golf course and Astro Crane facilities.

As you can see from this map (red and yellow areas), Stow has relatively little land zoned for industrial that is presently built out with commercial and/or industrial uses sited thereon.

FIGURE: 7 Developed industrial land

This map also depicts in cross-hatching all the areas presently zoned for industrial use.

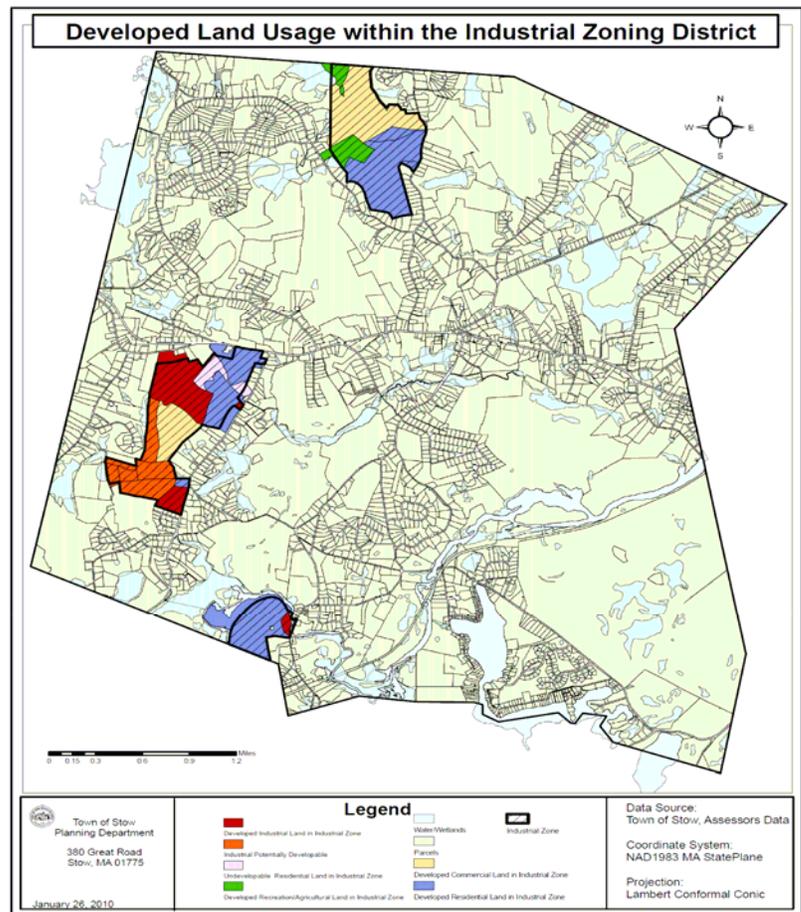
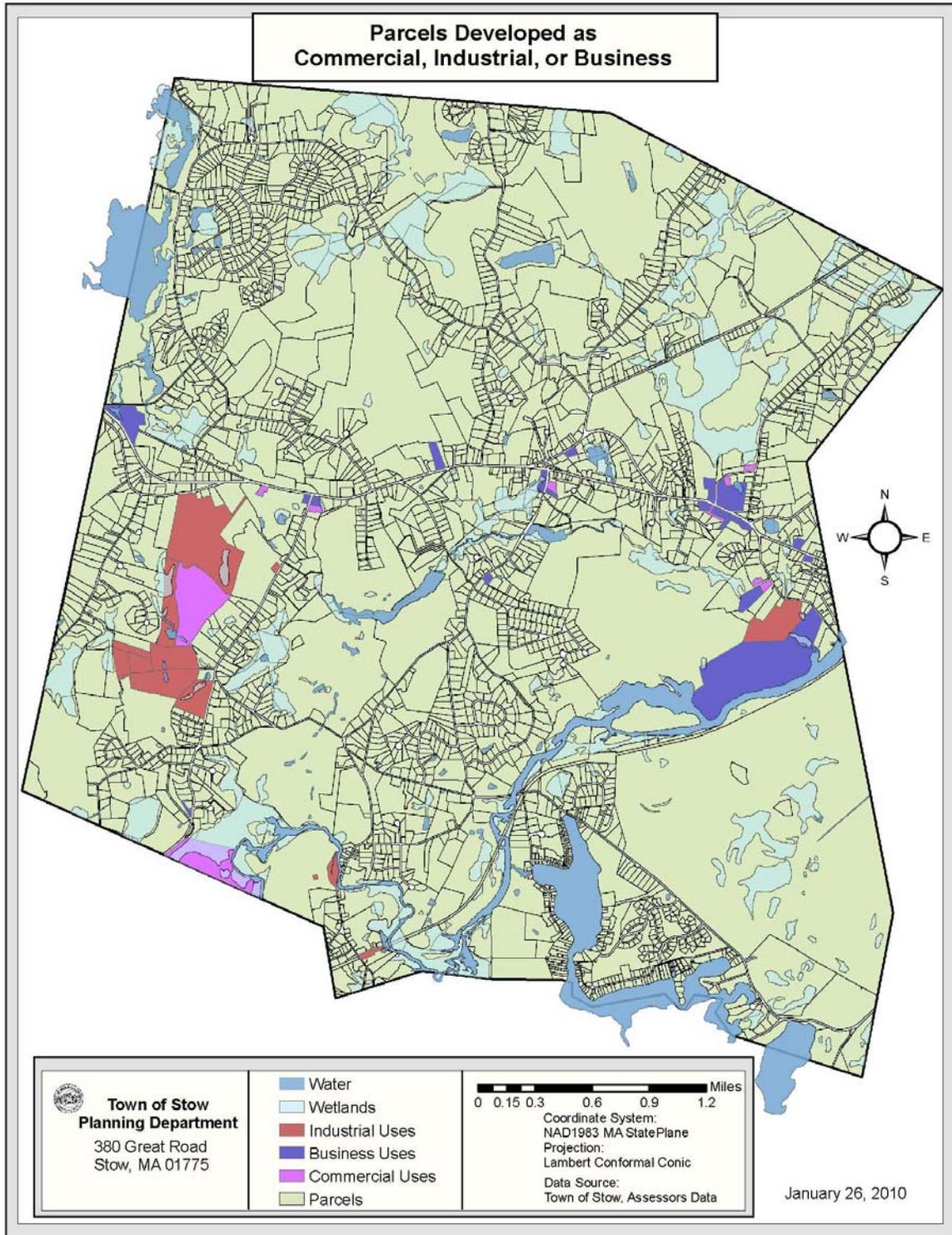


FIGURE: 8 Map of Commercial and Industrial Use

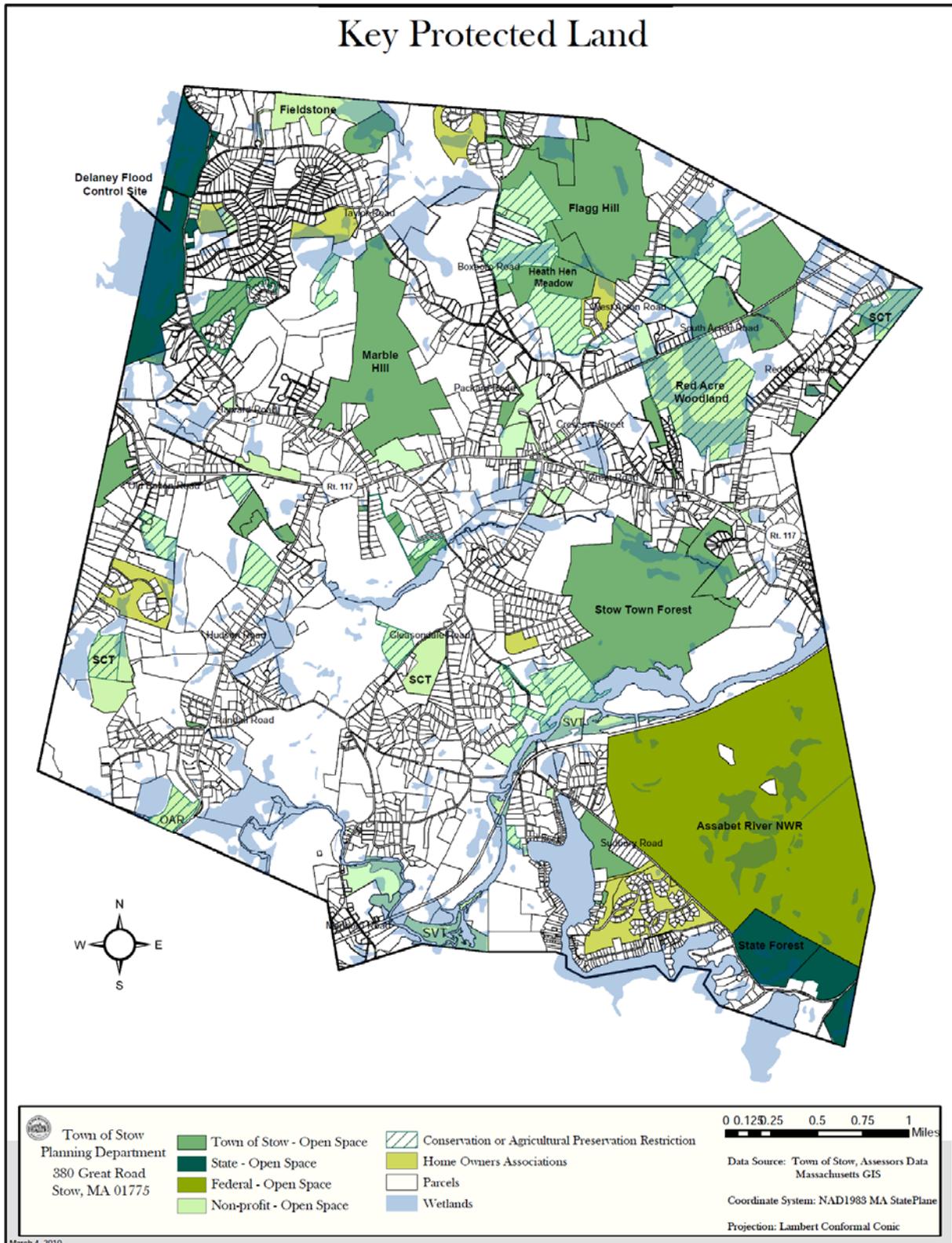


3. Open space areas of town

By far the most notable zoning district in Stow is the Recreation-Conservation Zone which dominates the Southeast quadrant of town but can be found in other quadrants as well. Distinct for its use constraints, it is an asset to the community in helping it preserve its rural small-town character and sense of open space. In addition, the Recreation-Conservation district areas provide habitats for a variety of plants and animals as well as aquifer and groundwater protection, and provide open spaces for agriculture, education and recreation. It should be noted that this zoning designation does not completely forestall the opportunity for development; allowed uses in this district are delineated in the Use Regulations of the Town's Zoning Bylaws.



FIGURE: 9 Map of key protected lands



Chapter 3

Housing



CHAPTER 3: Housing

A. Setting the Context

The source of most of the information in this chapter is “Housing Production Plan 2010 for Stow, Massachusetts,” heretofore referred to as Housing Production Plan 2010. This plan should be used as a primary detailed guide in implementing the recommendations of this section of the Master Plan.

As the name suggests, “Housing Production Plan 2010” focuses on a *variety in housing types, a range of prices and access to ownership and rental opportunities, including special needs housing*. It also includes “workforce housing” focused on people who work in Stow and who would also like to live in Stow.



This chapter contains many references to “affordable housing.” For most people, the term refers to homes that they can afford given their income. However, Stow is also concerned with the definition that relates to the Town’s Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI). Only homes that qualify for the SHI count toward the state’s 10% goal. In order to qualify for the SHI, a home must meet the following criteria:

- The home must be subsidized by one of the low- or moderate-income programs approved by the state.
- The income of the owner or renter, after adjustment for household size, must not exceed 80% of the area median income as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Asset limitations may apply.
- For homeownership, the down payment must be at least 3% of the purchase price, the mortgage must be a 30-year fixed loan at a rate not more than two percentage points above the current MassHousing (www.masshousing.com) interest rate, and monthly housing costs must not exceed 30% of monthly income for a household earning 80% of the area median income (adjusted for household size).
- For rental properties, monthly housing costs (including utilities) must not exceed 30% of monthly income for a household earning 80% of the area median income (adjusted for household size).
- In a rental development, if at least 25% of units are to be occupied by Income Eligible Households earning 80% or less than the area median income, or alternatively, if at least 20% of units are to be occupied by households earning 50% or less of area median income, and meet all criteria outlined above, then all of the units in the rental development are eligible for inclusion on the SHI.
- If fewer than the aforementioned percentages of units in the development are so restricted, then only the units that meet the requirements above may be included on the SHI.
- Accessory apartments can be included the SHI provided they meet the requirements of the Local Initiative Program. (For details, refer to the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development website or click on <http://tinyurl.com/auoaoa>)
- Use of the property must be restricted by a deed for a term not less than 15 years for rehabilitated units and not less than 30 years for newly created units. The use restriction places limits on income as noted above and it requires that tenants and home owners occupy their units as their principal residences. The deed restriction also contains terms and conditions for the resale of a homeownership unit, including definition of the maximum permissible resale price, and for the subsequent rental of a rental unit, including definition of the maximum permissible rent.

Ultimately, it is incumbent upon the Townspeople to decide what their priorities are in relation to housing and diversity. The goal of making our community open to a wide range of people – married and single, newly graduated and retired, large families and couples – might prompt us to consider higher-density housing possibilities. However, if that is pursued, higher density should be offset by increased open space protection so that the Town’s overall residential density does not increase. Another approach would be to allow the market and developers to choose for us. In that case, it is important to recognize that with the current cost of land, it is not possible to build an affordable home on a 1.5-acre lot. Therefore, affordable homes need to be on much smaller lots, resulting in higher density. Market-driven affordable housing sponsored by developers will likely be pursued and permitted through permissions granted by

MGL Chapter 40B, the so-called “anti-snob” zoning which takes much control away from the local community and overrides municipal zoning laws. Alternatively, planning for targeted higher density may require consideration of infrastructure changes, and residents will need to decide if they want to pay for expanded water, sewer, and transportation services. When these competing constraints are taken into consideration, Stow residents may conclude that no action is necessary to modify the status quo.

B. Vision

Our vision is a town that contains a wide variety of housing stock, providing residential options for a diverse cross-section of society comprising various ages, family types and income levels.

In the 2008 Master Plan Survey, residents were asked several questions related to affordable housing. One question dealt with the need for an increase in housing of various types. The two most favored responses relating to what demographic group requires more variety in housing options were “elderly parents on fixed income” and “town employee or local teacher.”

Clearly, the greatest emerging need is for an increase in housing for a) elderly retirees (i.e., seniors on a fixed income, perhaps with limited physical abilities, interested in small, low-maintenance homes); b) town employees – “workforce housing;” and c) starter homes for young families, singles, newlyweds, and other first time home buyers.

While this vision addresses these needs, results from the 2008 Master Plan Survey show that residents want housing trends for Stow to head in a very different direction. For example, by a margin of 252 to 116, respondents said they would not support using town funds to subsidize the development of affordable housing. This response is not surprising given the common perspective that development should be left to the private sector. In addition, a general wariness of affordable housing is also often prevalent in small communities where concerns about the costs associated with educating children tend to outweigh desires to be inclusive in housing.

Another survey question related to support of zoning to allow townhouse or condominium developments to provide more diverse housing stock. By over a 2-to-1 margin, residents said they would not support such zoning. The response to this survey question shows that there is little desire to add this type of housing to the community.

One of our recommended actions involves funding the Affordable Housing Trust with appropriations from the Community Preservation Committee. The survey data, however, begs the question as to what Stow should do with these funds that are required to be spent on affordable housing.

Two other survey questions also suggest a very difficult “sell” for more affordable housing. Given a town-sponsored development, residents were asked which would be more important: maximize the number of affordable units while maintaining consistent neighborhood standards, or minimize the cost to the Town by including more market-rate units. By nearly a 2-to-1

margin, residents said minimizing cost was more important. The response to this question suggests that people are more concerned with the Town's out-of-pocket costs than with building affordable housing.

The last survey question asked if residents would support the use of town-owned land for affordable housing. Again by a nearly 2-to-1 margin, they said no. Here, too, we see the implication that there is little enthusiasm for developing more affordable housing. However, it is important to remember that the response to this particular question may have less to do with feelings about the presence of affordable housing and more to do with feelings about the presence of undeveloped land parcels; that is, people may be expressing a vote in favor of open space rather than against affordable housing. Using town-owned land for affordable housing would require a vote at Town Meeting, and the likelihood of passage of such a vote is not necessarily indicated by these survey results. Moreover, the response to this survey, though robust by survey standards, does not necessarily parallel the demographics or the interests of those who show up to vote at Town Meeting.

In spite of these survey results, residents must also consider Chapter 40B. It is the law, and we must adhere to it. Therefore, we have two choices:

- Proactively establish policies and programs so that we can consistently meet our affordable housing goals, thereby immunizing our residential growth against unplanned and potentially overwhelming large-scale developments that need not conform to our Zoning Bylaw
- OR
- Admit that politically we cannot (or will not) make the individual and town-wide investments and trade-offs to conform to Chapter 40B requirements, and resort to reactive management when the next Comprehensive Permit hearings begin.

If these survey responses reflect the position of the majority of residents, it may be very difficult if not impossible to implement the housing vision. It seems apparent at this time that affordable housing construction will need to continue to be driven by non-profit and private sector initiatives.

Nonetheless, some consider it a positive sign that the CPA has been able to advance affordable housing projects in the past year. Since the survey was conducted, the Town Meeting voted in October 2009 to spend CPA funds on two affordable housing projects, sponsored by nonprofit, private sector entities. This seems to suggest that a collaboration between the non-profit sector and municipal government might be an effective way to proceed.

C. Background

Numerous plans have already been drafted and in some cases adopted to make changes to housing. A summary follows.

1. Stow 2000 (1996)

The last Master Plan was prepared in 1996, but its official title is “Stow 2000.” As adopted by the Planning Board, this plan identified three housing goals:

- Provide housing opportunities for those at the entry level of homeownership, “empty nesters,” elder residents, and those requiring housing assistance and rental housing units
- Ensure maintenance of the present housing mixture including single-family, two-family and multi-family dwelling units
- Encourage the elderly and disabled to remain in Stow, preferably in their own homes

“Stow 2000” included several recommendations mainly involving zoning techniques. Since this plan was adopted, the Town has taken several steps to improve planning for new developments. They include the following:

- Adoption (in 2001) of an “Active Adult Neighborhood” (AAN) bylaw, which allows homes for “over-55” households on commercially and industrially zoned land. The bylaw restricts the number of AAN units to no more than 6% of the total number of single-family DWELLING UNITS in the Town of Stow and two have already been approved: Arbor Glen and RidgeWood, each with a total of 66 units, seven of which have affordability restrictions. Four of the units are made available only to residents earning 80% of median income and three of the units are geared toward those earning 150% of median income.⁴ In addition, each of the developments is required to make a cash payment for the 3 affordable units, such payment shall be for 150% of the remaining 3 units (4.5 units). The cash payment shall be calculated at 35% of the average sale price of new construction affordable dwelling units. To date, payments for 3 units at the Arbor Glen AAN have been deposited in the Housing Trust Fund account.
- Adoption of a “Planned Conservation Development” (PCD) bylaw that encourages developers to preserve open space by designing compact housing clusters, including a mix of attached housing units and traditional single-family homes. Examples of developments constructed under this bylaw include: Wildlife Woods (1998) on 118.7 acres with 67 units, Brandymeade Circle (2000) on 27.2 acres with 12 units, Trefry Lane (2003) on 51 acres with 16 units, and Derby Woods (2003) on 69 acres with 33 units. (Note that the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw applies to PCDs – see below.)
- Adoption (in 2003) of inclusion of an affordable housing bylaw that applies to any development of six or more units, requiring that at least 10% of the units be affordable and comply with the state’s Local Initiative Program (LIP). The

⁴ Median income based on the 2000 Census for the Boston Metropolitan Statistical Area and adjusted for inflation is \$66,150 for a family of 4.

bylaw and MGL allow developers to build the requisite number of units off-site as well or pay a fee in-lieu of actual units based on three times 80% of the HUD area median income for a household of four. No units have been developed to date through this bylaw, suggesting that developments of six or more units have not been proposed due to market conditions.

- Adoption (in 2002) of a Comprehensive Permit Policy that conveys the Town's expectations for housing developed under Chapter 40B including minimum performance standards and trade-offs the Town is willing to explore with developers. This policy stated that the most acute housing need was rental housing for all income levels and encouraged rental development proposals. It also recognized a significant gap between affordable units and high-end housing and promoted a range of housing alternatives to address more moderate-income households as well. This policy has not been well used to date and should be revisited and updated to better reflect changes in state and local regulations, policies and needs. Newer programs sponsored by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) allow for some units which are made available only to moderate income families to qualify for incentives and in some cases special funding.

2. Housing Production Plan (2002)

Stow's last Housing Production Plan was prepared in 2002. The consulting firm Community Opportunities Group developed this plan and it was in effect until December 2008 when state approval expired. Subsequently the Town engaged Karen Sunnarborg Consulting to update this plan. The result is "Housing Production Plan 2010," which is still pending approval of the Town for submission to and certification by DHCD. It offers strategies that differ from housing studies in that they identify a means by which the Town intends to encourage the production of affordable housing. Those communities with a DHCD-approved Housing Production Strategy are given the added benefit of being able to forestall, or in some cases deny, 40B proposals for up to two years if the community is producing a minimum of 1% affordable housing in any given year or a one-year exemption if the community produces 0.5% in a year.⁵ This can have great value to a community such as Stow, because Stow still has ample available buildable land and is only technically at 6.26% of subsidized affordable housing. Without this plan and concomitant production, in order to outright deny a 40B application a community must be at 10% affordable housing, as certified by DHCD. See the 40B discussion later in this chapter for more information.

It is important to note that considerable progress has been made in addressing the 2002 recommendations including the following:

⁵ For more information on Housing Production Plans go to:
<http://www.mass.gov/Ehed/docs/dhcd/cd/pp/hpguidelines.doc>

- The Town approved a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust at its 2005 Town Meeting, followed shortly after by the appointment of its members by the Board of Selectmen. The Housing Trust is fulfilling the range of activities included in the 2002 Housing Plan, including the oversight of “Housing Production Plan 2010.”
- Stow established a Local Housing Trust Fund which will allow local officials to pool their housing resources and allocate them to public or nonprofit organizations without Town Meeting approval. This greatly increases the Town’s ability to be responsive to housing needs in an expedited fashion.
- Stow submitted a Planned Production Strategy to DHCD for approval under 760 CMR 31.07(d). If a community has an affordable housing production plan (a planned production strategy) and is making steady progress toward achieving its goals, it can achieve temporary immunity from Chapter 40B development. Stow needs to increase the number of affordable homes by 0.5% each year for immunity. Of course the total number of homes continues to increase, thus increasing the number of affordable units required each year for immunity. The Town prepared a housing production plan that was approved by DHCD, but the plan expired in December 2008. Housing Production Plan 2010 will meet new state requirements for housing plans under 760 CMR 56.03(4).
- The Community Preservation Committee submitted a plan to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to use CPA (Community Preservation Act) funds to purchase deed restrictions on relatively inexpensive homes and permanently set them aside as affordable units. The Town had hoped that DHCD would then count them as eligible units on Stow’s SHI. Unfortunately, DHCD did not approve this plan but this may still be something worth pursuing again in the future.

3. Community Development Plan (2004)

The Community Development Plan prepared in 2004 was designed to assist the Town in the implementation of “Stow 2000.” It included the following recommendations related to housing, with current status in italics:

1. Establish a permanent Housing Partnership Committee. *Dissolved in 2009; duties transferred to Affordable Housing Trust.*
2. Modify existing zoning regulations to facilitate single- family to multi-unit conversions for large residences built prior to 1950. *(Section 3.2.2.3 of the Zoning Bylaw permits conversion of a one-family dwelling into a two-family dwelling.)*
3. Amend the Zoning Bylaw to encourage mixed use village development through overlay districts or by Transfer of Development Rights (TDR). The mixed use strategy is covered in Ch. 4, Economic Development. *After extensive consideration, the MPC concluded that while it is a very attractive concept, it is probably unworkable in practice. Thus, TDR strategy is no longer recommended due to its complexity and the relative low probability that it could be an effective tool.*

4. Replace existing regulations for Planned Conservation Development with a mandatory open space-residential development bylaw that applies to all divisions of land into five or more lots or developments of five or more units, and provide a modest density incentive to preserve exemplary open space or create a higher percentage of affordable housing units than required under the Town's new Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw. *Included in this plan's recommendations. (Action Item 2c)*
5. Modify the fee in-lieu-of provisions of the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw (ATM 2003) to more accurately reflect the Town's cost to provide affordable housing units. *Included in this plan's recommendations. (Action Item 2b)*
6. Modify the Inclusionary Zoning Bylaw to provide for a percentage of homes affordable to "below-market" households, e.g., households with incomes between 81% and 110% of area median income. *Included in this plan's recommendations. (Action Item 2b)*
7. Petition the General Court to create a Local Housing Trust Fund. *Done.*
8. Commit a greater percentage of each year's CPA revenue to affordable housing that exceeds statutory minimum of 10% set aside, in order to fund a Local Housing Program. *Included in this plan's recommendations. CPA requires that a minimum of 10% each year be set aside for the creation of affordable housing. (Action Item 1c) It should be noted here that the CPC does not support setting aside a larger percentage than 10% because it wishes to maintain the maximum flexibility in the CPA fund and have an opportunity to evaluate individual projects. The Master Plan Committee believes it is still worth pursuing the development of a Local Housing Program and that any appropriate housing proposals should still be brought forward to the CPC.*
9. Integrate affordable housing into the Town's next Open Space and Recreation Plan by identifying lands of conservation interest that would be suitable candidates for a mixed-income limited development project if the sites were acquired as open space. *Included in this plan's recommendations. (Action Item 2d)*
10. Supplement the capacity of Stow Community Housing Corporation with a local development corporation created by petition to the General Court. *The Master Plan Committee does not see the need for a separate corporation.*
11. Modify the Comprehensive Permit Policy (December 2002). Refer to the Action Item (Section E) and Housing Production Plan 2010 for details. *Included in this plan's recommendations. (Action Item 1d)*
12. Request that developers pay a reasonable fee to the Town for peer review services when the Zoning Board of Appeals receives a comprehensive permit application. Peer review consultants retained by and reporting directly to the Zoning Board of Appeals are now fairly common standard procedure for many communities and ensure the community can obtain the technical assistance it needs to properly review these complex projects. Furthermore, requiring the developer to pay for this is explicitly allowable under MGL. *Included in this plan's recommendations. (Action Item 1e)*
13. Designate an individual officer of the Town to negotiate with comprehensive applicants. *Not included in this plan's recommendations. The Zoning Board of Appeals has this responsibility.* Depending on the specific situation and project, if needed, the Zoning Board of Appeals can designate a specific staff person, special municipal counsel, or

other consultant to develop the negotiations to sufficient specificity to then be ready for full Board approval.

14. Submit a Planned Production Strategy to DHCD for approval under 760 CMR 31.07(d). *A Planned Production Strategy was submitted to and approved by DHCD in 2002 and was in effect through December 2008 when state approval expired. An updated Planned Production Strategy (Housing Production Plan 2010) has been prepared.*

4. Commissions, Boards and Committees involved in Housing Initiatives

There are a variety of municipal entities and private organizations that have responsibilities for creating and managing housing in Stow, as follows.

- **Stow Housing Authority (SHA)**
The Stow Housing Authority (SHA) administers a housing voucher program that consists of 26 state and federal vouchers. Created in the late 1980s, the SHA originally provided the backup vouchers that ensured that the affordable units at Pilot Grove would have a reliable subsidy. The SHA is also responsible for administering lotteries on affordable units.
- **Stow Community Housing Corporation (SCHC)**
An offshoot of the Stow Elderly Housing Corporation (SEHC), the Stow Community Housing Corporation (SCHC) was formed in 1987 to create affordable housing for the entire community, not just the elderly. It created Pilot Grove Apartments, a mixed-income rental development that has 60 units. There are 37 affordable units at Pilot Grove, an unusual level of affordability. Permanent deed restrictions for affordability were acquired using Community Preservation funds.
- **Community Preservation Committee (CPC)**
Stow passed the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act (CPA) in 2001, which led to the creation of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC). The CPC administers the CPA funds, which come from a 3% property tax surcharge and up to a 100% match by the State. The CPC is required to spend at least 10% of its revenue on each of affordable housing, historical preservation, and open space preservation.
- **Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (SMAHT)**
Town Meeting accepted a new State statute in 2005 that allowed the Board of Selectmen to create a Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust. SMAHT is a public corporation that can receive monies intended for affordable housing from all sources and expend them as it sees fit to create affordable housing. The Trust also leads the strategic affordable housing planning for the Town (such as maintaining a long-term housing production schedule), acts as an advisor to the various town boards on affordable housing matters, and interacts with various governmental and private funding vehicles to ensure ongoing funding for affordable housing.
- **Planning Board (PB)**
This elected body reviews and approves the division of land under the State Subdivision Control Law (MGL. Ch. 41) and the Stow Subdivision Rules and Regulations; serves as

a special permit granting authority under the State Zoning Act (MGL. Ch. 40A) and the Stow Zoning Bylaw; and guides the process of Zoning Bylaw amendments under the State Zoning Act (MGL. Ch. 40A). Under State Law, the Board is charged with the responsibility of protecting the health, safety and welfare of Stow's residents. The Planning Board proposes new bylaws and modifications to existing bylaws in an effort to meet Stow's housing needs and make the most efficient use of buildable land.

- **Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)**
The ZBA's housing-related role is to grant or deny comprehensive permits for 40B developments. The ZBA may also issue special permits and variances for various projects pursuant to the Town's zoning bylaws.
- **Board of Selectmen (BOS)**
The Selectmen have overall responsibility for implementation of the Master Plan including the associated housing strategies.
- **Open Space Committee (OSC)**
The OSC identifies and prioritizes parcels for potential acquisition to add to the Town's open space inventory. It leads the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan. The OSC advises the Board of Selectmen and other public and private stakeholders on the protection of the Town's open space priorities, and it coordinate with other town boards on community planning initiatives as recommended in the Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- **Council on Aging (COA)**
The COA provides support to seniors by being a resource of information on elder affairs, and by providing social activities, outreach services, and assistance to help the senior population of Stow remain in their homes as long as safely possible.
- **Stow Elderly Housing Corporation (SEHC)**
SEHC was created by Town Meeting in 1979. It secured a federal grant to build Plantation Apartments in 1982. It has recently refinanced Plantation Apartments to refurbish the structures and make them viable for the next 20 years.

D. Data Relevant to Housing Decisions

In order to set the stage for subsequent discussion of our vision, housing needs, and recommended actions, we must first consider demographics, trends, affordability issues, and an important state law known as Chapter 40B.

Stow is a small town in one of the state's most rapidly growing regions. It is a primarily residential community with a distinct country character provided by numerous orchards, golf courses, forests, wetlands, and areas of open space. As a relatively old town, incorporated in 1683, the housing stock includes historic dwellings, farmhouses and typical New England style single-family homes. There is also a limited number of multiple dwellings, including affordable elderly and family housing complexes.

While the pattern and density of residential land use vary somewhat across the Town, Stow's housing stock is largely uniform, comprising almost exclusively large, detached single-family homes. As a result, most households are both families and homeowners.

Thirty years ago, Stow was a place where young families could purchase starter homes. In the last 25 years, while the general Consumer Price Index (CPI) rose 100%, home prices in Stow increased 400% to 500%. Thus, without subsidies, starter homes are now often out of reach for many aspiring to live in the community. Moreover, Stow residents face a substantial tax burden and find few downsizing options in town when they reach that stage of life.

The table on the following page shows population and family data starting with 1980 and includes the most recent official census in 2000. The population as of April 2009 was 6,660 living in 2,467 separate households. This yields an average household size of 2.7, slightly below the 2.83 level in 2000.



FIGURE: 10 Stow Residential Demographic Data, 1980-2009

	1980		1990			2000			2009			
	#	%	#	%	% Change	#	%	% Change	#	% Change		
Total Population	5,121	100	5,328	100	4.0%	5,902	100	10.8%	6,660	12.8%		
Minority Population*	142	2.8	126	2.4	-11.3%	267	4.5	111.9%				
Total Households	1,571	100	1,793	100	14.1%	2,082	100	16.1%	2,467	18.5%		
Family Households**	1,353	86.1	1,459	81	7.8%	1,678	81	15.0%				
Female Heads Households**	41	2.6	97	5.4	136.6%	70	3.4	-27.8%				
Non-family Households**	218	13.9	334	19	53.2%	404	19	21.0%				
Average Household Size	3.26		2.96			2.83			-4.4%		2.70	-4.6%
Source of above table: 1980, 1990, 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, & Stow Town Officials												

*All non-White classifications

** Percent of all households

Despite a significant increase in population through the most recent decade, the number of households has grown even faster (10.8% versus 16.1%, respectively). Household growth continues to outpace population growth in the current decade, as shown by 2009 data. The apparent discrepancy can be explained by the smaller number of residents per household. This decline also reflects the much more rapid growth in residents over 54 versus those 17 and under. As Table 3.2 shows, the number of school-age children rose 17.1% over the last decade, compared with a 45.3% increase for those over 54. (Age group demographic data are not available for 2009.)

Older residents clearly make up the fastest-growing population segment (Table 3.2). Stow has tried to address the demand for those wishing to “downsize” by approving “active adult neighborhood” developments like Arbor Glen and Independent Adult Living Residences like Meeting House at Stow. Furthermore, according to the Metropolitan Area Planning Council,

significant population increases are projected to occur in the older age brackets, with an 83% increase in those 55 to 64 and 107% for those age 65 and over through 2030. Such a substantial growth in the aging baby boomers suggests a greater need for a greater number of smaller units with minimal maintenance needs, more handicapped accessible units as well as more housing with supportive services to enable residents to stay in their homes as they age.

Table 3.2 Population Change by Age Group, 1990-2000

Age Cohort	1990	2000	% Change
<18	1,423	1,667	17.1%
18-24	420	246	-41.4%
25-34	731	575	-21.3%
35-44	1,124	1,230	9.4%
45-54	842	1,039	23.4%
>54	788	1145	45.3%
Total Population	5,328	5,902	10.8%
% <18	26.7%	28.2%	
% >54	14.8%	19.4%	

1. Interpreting the Data

a. Home owners

Although the absolute number of homes has increased since the previous plan, the relative distribution of different housing types is essentially unchanged: about 90% of Stow's housing stock consists of single-family detached homes.

Despite considerable wealth in the community, there remains a significant and highly vulnerable segment of population within Stow with very limited financial means. For example, 203 or almost 10% of all households had incomes of less than \$25,000 in 2000, and there were 157 individuals and 26 families living in poverty in 1999.

Like other communities nearby, Stow has a highly competitive housing market, and since 1990 the median single-family sale price more than doubled, from \$187,000 to \$390,000 as of the end of March 2009. However, reflecting nationwide economic trends, this price is down considerably from the height of the market in 2006 when the median price was almost \$500,000.

Stow's established development pattern makes inefficient use of land. The large lot requirements of most single family zones in town encouraged large homes to be built. This

occurred, and continues to occur, because a developer must build a large home in order to recoup land costs. In addition, infrastructure limitations prevent construction on smaller lots.

Stow's zoning policies stop short of encouraging the preservation of village density and form even though the Master Plan's land use element and the Town's Comprehensive Permit Policy emphasize the importance of village development.

b. Renters

The nominal inventory of multi-family housing in Stow helps to explain two salient features of the Town: its strikingly low rental vacancy rate of 1.4% (Pilot Grove), and the prevalence of single-family homes in the renter-occupied housing inventory.⁶ The wait list for units at Plantation Apartments is currently two years. Nearly 40% of all units occupied by tenants are single-family homes, located randomly throughout the Town. The remaining units are in older two-, three or four-unit buildings or in two small rental housing developments near Lower Village. About 13% of all renters living in Stow have occupied the same dwelling unit for 20 or more years.

The substantially different circumstances of renters complicate the meaning of "rental housing market," for the demand side is not at all homogenous. As for the supply side, at least four conditions exist in Stow and nine nearby towns with overlapping market characteristics: the supply is small, expensive in relation to renter incomes, older than the supply of homeownership units, and in many cases vulnerable to homeownership conversion. (The other nine towns are Acton, Bolton, Boxborough, Harvard, Hudson, Lancaster, Littleton, Maynard, and Sudbury.)

By policy, Stow and most towns nearby discourage or prohibit multi-family housing development through one or more land use controls, e.g., confining allowed residential uses to detached single-family homes, restricting density to one dwelling unit per acre (or more), or allowing attached housing units at a density high enough to attract some condominium development but not high enough to attract rental development. Given these and other constraints on multi-family housing, it is not surprising to find that single-family homes contribute nearly 20% of all renter-occupied units in the ten-town area, reaching as high as 80% in Bolton.

Stow's rental housing inventory consists of about 270 units that were fully occupied when the last federal census was taken in April 2000.⁷ The 3.8% rental vacancy rate that existed in Stow a decade ago has been eclipsed by intense market pressure, a condition found throughout the state.

⁷ Of the town's 46 vacant units, only 18 were for sale on April 1, 2000. The remaining vacant units are seasonal or vacation homes and a few were not available for occupancy, i.e., classified by the Census Bureau as "other vacant."

Prospective renters face low odds of finding moderately priced housing in Stow's market area. Current rental prices for Stow as of the end of April 2009 were approximately \$1,000 per month, although there are few actual listings as most units turn over by word of mouth, particularly in single-family homes.

2. Affordability and Chapter 40B

40B and Stow

Home prices have appreciated to a point where 45% of Stow residents could not afford to buy a home in Stow at current assessment rates, nor could 71% of households throughout the Boston metropolitan area. Although Stow has some lower-cost homes, they do not all meet the definition of an affordable housing unit under state law. (See "Setting the Context" above.) Stow has 132 units of housing that qualify as "affordable" under Chapter 40B,⁸ a law that is highly controversial in most communities because it overrides local zoning regulations that make low- and moderate-income housing economically unfeasible to build. The device that overrides local zoning is known as a comprehensive permit. Towns such as Stow need to be vigilant in how 40B decisions are handled. If the Town is not proactive in making its own decisions as far as location and style of affordable housing, it risks sacrificing these decisions to a developer who may or may not have any interest in the Town's overall desires.

There is a real risk of losing more potential, nonresident tax base if homes continue to be built on industrial land, and two 66-unit Active Adult Neighborhood developments have already been permitted on two parcels located in the Industrial District/Active Adult Neighborhood Overlay District. There is a risk of 40B developments on any parcel that is zoned for non-residential uses.

Enacted in 1969, Chapter 40B establishes a legal presumption of unmet housing needs when less than 10% of a community's year-round housing stock is affordable to households at or below 80% of the area median income. Generally, communities that do not have at least 10% of their housing units on the state's SHI must issue a comprehensive permit unless there is an unusual or compelling basis to deny one. Developers, in turn, may ask the state's Housing Appeals Committee (HAC) to overturn a local Zoning Board of Appeals decision. In most cases, they negotiate a compromise with town officials, but HAC's less frequent overrides have left a lasting impression on communities and form the basis for most of the opposition from local governments today. DHCD is responsible for certifying each community's SHI based on those units that meet the state's subsidized housing affordability requirements. According to "Stow 2000," the Town's affordable housing ratio was 7% back in 1996. Unfortunately, there has been no progress toward the state's 10% goal because, despite moderate gains in new subsidized housing units, there has been a greater increase in non-subsidized units. Only 6.26% of Stow's current housing stock qualifies as affordable as defined by state requirements. In

⁸ Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory [database online], available at <<http://www.mass.gov/dhcd.html>, [updated April 2002; cited April, August 2002].

2010, the state will recalculate all communities' SHIs which will result, in most cases, in declining SHI scores.

The legislature's intent in enacting Chapter 40B was to assure a "fair-share" distribution of low-income housing across the state, but housing policy analysts do not define affordable housing need on the basis of a fixed 10% standard. The national definition of housing affordability assumes that a home is affordable to its owners if their monthly housing costs – a mortgage payment, property taxes, and house insurance – are equal to or less than 30% of their monthly gross income. Similarly, an apartment is considered affordable to tenants if they pay 30% of their gross monthly income, or less, for rent and utilities. Under these criteria, "affordable housing need" exists when households pay more than 30% of their gross income for housing costs. In housing industry parlance, they are classified as "housing-cost burdened." According to the 2000 federal census data, 23.4% of all homeowners in the Boston metropolitan area and 22.1% in Stow qualify as housing-cost burdened. The condition is more pronounced among renter households, for 36.9% of Boston-area tenants pay more than 30% of their monthly income for rent and utilities, compared to 31.4% in Stow.⁹

In a competitive real estate market like Stow's, the cost of housing creates a significant challenge for lower-income households. The measure of "low-income" varies by household size and region. By federal definition, a low- or moderate-income household has annual income equal to or less than 80% of the area median income, adjusted for household size. Each year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) publishes income eligibility guidelines for various housing assistance programs. The 2000 HUD statistics showed that about 18% of Stow's population was low- or moderate-income – up from 11.5% a decade before.¹⁰

Affordable housing is also defined according to percentages of median income for the area, and most housing subsidy programs are targeted to particular income ranges depending upon programmatic goals. Extremely low-income housing is directed to those earning at or below 30% of area median income as defined by HUD (\$24,350 for a family of three for the Boston area) and very low-income is defined as households earning less than 50% of area median income (\$40,600 for a family of three). Low-income generally refers to the range between 51% and 80% of area median income (\$59,550 for a family of three at the 80% level), and moderate-income from 81% to 100%, and sometimes 120% of median income (\$90,200 and \$108,240, respectively).

⁹ Census 2000, Summary File 3, Tables DP-4 and H-84.

¹⁰ Standard Census 2000 data tables do not measure low- and moderate-income households. HUD works with the Census Bureau to estimate each community's low- and moderate-income population by cross-tabulating household size and income cohorts. A conservative estimate can be made from the number of households with incomes below the one-person household tier (meaning the lowest tier) in HUD's income guidelines for 2000. In the Boston metro area, 31.6% of all households earned \$35,000 or less, and in Stow, 14.4%, as of April 2000. Stow's average household size was 2.82 persons and in 2000, and 17.9% of its households had incomes below HUD's three-person income limit of \$45,200 at that time. However, 17.9% exaggerates the percentage of low-income households in Stow because most households with incomes below \$45,200 also had fewer than three people and may have also had substantial financial assets.

HUD considers Stow to be in the Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, Massachusetts-New Hampshire metropolitan area. To qualify for affordable housing in Stow, a family of four cannot earn more than \$66,150 (as of March 2009). HUD reviews and updates the income limits every year in the March timeframe. (See the HUD User website at www.huduser.org.)

It is also important to emphasize that affordability is often related to density. This point is illustrated very well in the excellent report recently issued by the 495/MetroWest Partnership. “Density Through Design” (Appendix) includes a review of two model projects in Medway and Sudbury to illustrate how land can be used much more efficiently. The report also states that the high home costs resulting from low-density development make it impossible to create workforce housing. As a result, workers often cannot live near their place of employment, or worse, they leave the state altogether. As the report concludes, “Greater Boston’s housing problem has become an economic development problem.”

As is the case with many other affluent communities throughout the state, the population of young adults entering the workforce and forming their own families has declined, largely as a result of increasing housing prices and a lack of job opportunities in these communities. The anticipated decline of those in this younger-adult age range could be boosted somewhat with increased efforts to provide first-time homeownership opportunities in Stow as well as more rental options.

3. Current affordable housing inventory

Stow’s inventory of low- and moderate-income housing that qualifies on the DHCD SHI includes the following:

- Pilot Grove – 60 rental units affordable in perpetuity and developed through a comprehensive permit by the Stow Community Housing Corporation in partnership with The Community Builders
- Plantation Apartments – 50 rental units affordable through 2025 and developed through a comprehensive permit by the Stow Elderly Housing Corporation, also in partnership with The Community Builders
- Stow Farms – 7 units of homeownership housing with limited affordability restrictions, also developed through a comprehensive permit
- DMR Group Homes – 4 units sponsored by the state Department of Mental Retardation for special needs individuals
- Arbor Glen – 7 affordable units from a 66-unit age-restricted homeownership development through the Active Adult Neighborhood (AAN) bylaw with affordability restrictions in perpetuity and developed by Pulte Homes.
- Ridgewood at Stow - This 66-unit age-restricted homeownership development was permitted through the Active Adult Neighborhood bylaw with affordability restrictions in perpetuity. Due to existing real estate market conditions which has

slowed construction, the special permit for this development was modified to extend the permit to June 24, 2011.

- The Villages at Stow - With construction ongoing at the time of this report, this comprehensive permit allows a 96-unit housing development with 24 permanently restricted affordable units. As of April 1, 2010, 17 building permits out of the 24 have been issued for the affordable units.

The SHI therefore comprises 110 rental apartments, including 50 age-restricted units, four special needs units, and 18 homeownership units, seven of which are age-restricted. These 132 units equal 6.26% of Stow's year-round housing stock. Again, as mentioned above, this 6.26% figure will most likely be adjusted following the 2010 Federal Census, and that number may decline.

E. Needs

By choice, Stow is poised to attract affluent family households. To control the total amount of residential development, the Town relies on large-lot zoning and policies that favor single-family homes. Though these techniques have and will continue to limit the number of dwelling units in town, they create significant challenges to meeting Stow's other housing goals. With so many new single-family residences sized to attract families, it is not surprising that between 1990 and 2000, Stow absorbed a 12% increase in married couples with children – or a 14.2% increase in all family households with children.¹¹ Such trends have likely continued since then given the type of housing that has been built: largely single-family homes.

The high incidence of housing cost burden among householders 45-54 years of age in Stow is also a concern. Given their foreseeable decline in household income over the next 10 years, it is not at all clear how Stow intends to retain its present generation of middle-aged people.

Another consideration involves housing choice for renters and persons with disabilities. There are very few housing units that are accessible to persons with disabilities. Although the 2000 census indicates that there were 422 individuals living in Stow who claimed a disability, it is unclear how many of the 422 individuals have a physical handicap requiring a handicapped accessibility unit. Some accommodation for individuals with special needs should be integrated into the housing stock either through handicapped accessibility or supportive services. On the other hand, since the Stow Planning Board has been informed that it is difficult to market handicapped-accessible units, even in an AAN development, another approach is to require AAN units to be ADA adaptable should the owner or occupant need this feature at a later date.

¹¹ The Stow Master Plan (1996) notes similar trends in a comparison of 1980-1990 household statistics (*Stow 2000*, 74). Significantly, the number of married couples with children had declined by 7% between 1980-1990. Census 2000 shows that the number of married couples with children recovered during the 1990s, though not to 1980 proportions. In Stow today, there are 1.1 couples with children for every couple without children – in contrast to 1.6 two decades ago.

Although the Zoning Bylaw includes a mechanism to develop multi-family housing units (Planned Conservation Developments, Active Adult Neighborhoods and Independent Adult Living Residences and developments subject to inclusion of affordable housing), Stow should be looking for ways to make multi-family rental housing feasible.

Finally, Stow does not have effective regulations to preserve its historic mix of single-family homes. Major expansions or alterations to existing homes and demolition-rebuild projects attract new investment to the community. However, as these activities cause older homes to appreciate in value, they also remove lower-cost housing from the market. Strategies to secure the affordability of these homes may help Stow establish a base of Chapter 40B-eligible units for lower-income homebuyers or renters, avoid the environmental costs of new development, and preserve the range of architectural traditions that pre-date modern conventional subdivisions.

1. Priorities identified by Housing Production Plan 2010

“Housing Production Plan 2010” identified the following priority housing needs:

- **Rental Housing:** As prescribed in the Town’s Comprehensive Permit Policy, the Town has had a preference for rental units, particularly given the relative scarcity of such units. This plan suggests that at least two-thirds of the affordable units produced as a result of the Town’s housing strategies be rental units. These units should include a mix of sizes, and a target should be to have one-third of all rental units in town be suitable for the elderly and disabled. We note, however, that residents who responded to our 2008 survey expressed rather marginal support for more rental housing in Stow. The survey presented three types of rental housing. They are listed below with the percentages of respondents in favor:
 - Rental single family homes: 42%
 - Rental apartment style housing units in multi-family buildings: 32%
 - Rental town house style housing units in detached buildings: 54%
- **Homeownership:** As affordable starter housing is still rare in Stow and so are affordable opportunities for seniors to downsize, this plan suggests that approximately one-third 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 above 80% of area median income who are still priced out of the Town’s private housing market. These units should include a mix of sizes, and one-third should be targeted to the elderly and disabled.
- **Special Needs Population:** Because of Stow’s aging population, a very limited number of handicapped accessible units, the number of disabled residents, and an extremely limited supply of units with supportive services, this plan suggests the need for ADA adaptable units and supportive services.

2. Workforce housing

A critical goal is to provide workforce housing so that both municipal and business employees who work in Stow have an opportunity to live in Stow. Residents who contemplate its importance often think first in terms of the cultural and socioeconomic diversity that work force housing implies: their values dictate that they want to live in a town whose population includes not just business people and high-end professionals but also blue-collar workers, teachers, craftspeople and manual laborers.

It is also important to look at the pragmatic value of having a town's work force live locally. In the event of a natural or manmade disaster, it is the emergency workers and the manual laborers whose presence will be most critical as initial responders: paramedics, ambulance drivers and hospital workers to help care for the injured; police officers and fire fighters to direct the emergency response and maintain crowd control; and then, once the initial catastrophe has passed, construction workers, highway workers and other infrastructure specialists to begin repair and rebuilding efforts on townwide systems such as bridges, roads and public buildings.

Moreover, to families with school-aged children, there is inherent value to having teachers and school staff live in town: shorter commutes for school employees mean less absenteeism in the event of inclement weather. Teachers and school staff also fit into the rubric described above: in case of an emergency that makes access to town problematic, it will be easier to get systems up and running again if employees can reach their workplace easily.

Finally, thinking globally, workers who reside close to their jobs drive less and thus emit less CO₂. Shorter commutes also means more time to be with family, less stress and fatigue, and more time for leisure pursuits. A short commute results in a higher quality of life.

F. Action Items

The following recommended actions come from "Housing Production Plan 2010," the 2008 draft of the Master Plan, and the Community Development Plan.

- 1. Build Local Capacity to Promote Affordable Housing**
 - a. Conduct ongoing community outreach to continue to inform local leaders and residents on the importance of affordable and work force housing and to present information on local housing initiatives.
 - b. Consider obtaining resources to help with implementation of the Housing Production Plan 2010" document by hiring, sharing or using consultants.
 - c. Capitalize the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust through a number of resources, including payments through the fees in-lieu of actual units, private donations of land and funding, and negotiations with developers. In addition, the Community Preservation Committee could be asked to make a recommendation at Annual Town Meeting to allocate the 10% required funding for affordable housing to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund for a

specific purpose. This will allow the Stow Affordable Housing Trust to respond quickly to new affordable housing opportunities without having to wait for the next Town Meeting for fund allocation approval. Frequently, when deed-restricted affordable units come up for sale on the open real estate market, it can be difficult to locate an eligible purchaser who both income-qualifies (as low and moderate income) and who can simultaneously get bank financing to purchase the housing unit. The deed restriction only allows a brief time-frame for the municipality to locate a buyer. When it can not do so quickly, the deed restriction becomes void and the affordable housing unit is sold as a market rate unit to any buyer. The affordability restriction is entirely lost in this scenario and the Town's SHI is reduced. For this reason, it may make sense to have a fund available through the Trust that has enough capital to purchase a typical unit. This will buy the Town adequate time to locate an eligible buyer who income qualifies and thus preserve the affordability restriction. The Trust would then replace the money used by redepositing it in the trust fund when the unit is transferred to the new owner.

- d. Modify the Comprehensive Permit Policy (December 2002) to ensure that it is more in line with the housing needs, production goals and strategies including in this Housing Plan as well as state guidelines that have changed significantly since then. Also, the Comprehensive Permit Policy should be revisited to determine if the conclusion that the most "acute" need is rental housing for all income levels and to determine if this is still what the Town wants. Finally, in all cases affordable housing units should be required to have perpetual deed restrictions.
- e. Require fees from developers to the Town for peer review services from applicants of comprehensive permits per requirements set forth in 760 CMR 56.05 and 56.06.

2. **Make Zoning and Planning Reforms**

- a. Identify acceptable forms of affordable housing so the Town can then determine appropriate modifications to the Zoning Bylaw or to encourage the same.
- b. Modify the inclusion of affordable housing zoning bylaw (2003 Annual Town Meeting) to allow more housing types in such developments, including a more reasonable restriction on multi-family housing; insert more specific density provisions to permit a specified amount of units beyond what would be allowed in a conventional plan and sufficient to fully offset the costs of the affordable units; provide for a percentage of homes affordable to "below-market" households, i.e., households with incomes 81-110% of area median income. Nonetheless, despite this recommendation, the Town should take care to offset the density bonus by protecting more open space elsewhere in Town so that the overall residential density in the community is not increased by this provision. Also, we recommend modifying the fee in-lieu-of provision

to more accurately reflect the Town's cost to provide affordable housing units. However, if a modification of this provision is considered, it should be done with care so as not to provide a disincentive to prevent developers from making these fee payments.

- c. Modify or replace existing regulations for Planned Conservation Development to include incentives for affordable housing (PCDs are subject to inclusion of affordable housing) and several other provisions to strengthen the bylaw and make it more responsive to more current needs and priorities. For example, density incentives could be added to the PCD bylaw. Also, the Town should look at the provisions in the model bylaws developed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and other organizations.
- d. Create an inventory of land parcels that are potentially suitable for some amount of affordable/work force housing, mixed income, or mixed use development. (Part of this task has already been completed by the Land Use Task Force. Refer to their 2009 report for the details.)

3. Partner with Developers to Produce New Affordable Units

- a. Provide suitable public property for development of land owned by the Town or other public entities but not essential for government purposes.
- b. Offer predevelopment funding through CPA funds to ensure that the development will be feasible.
- c. Support permitting as appropriate, to expedite approvals and lend local support during the permitting process on affordable housing developments.
- d. Provide gap financing to leverage project financing. CPA and SMAHT money can provide the last "gap filler" to make projects feasible and the key leverage to secure necessary financing from state and federal agencies as well as private lenders.

4. Preserve Existing Housing

- a. Continue to pursue the Affordable Housing Deed Restriction Program that has been funded with CPA funds to purchase deed restrictions from lower income property owners, converting these units to long-term affordability upon resale. A priority should be the purchase of permanent deed restrictions on the Elm Ridge homes and Plantation Apartments.
- b. Monitor and maintain affordability of the Subsidized Housing Inventory to avoid loss of individual units as they come up for resale.
- c. Help qualifying residents access housing assistance including a wide range of programs and services for counseling, support with housing-related expenses, and home improvements.

Chapter 4

Economic Development



CHAPTER 4: Economic Development

A. Overview

Economic development, particularly in a small suburban community like Stow whose residents value their multifaceted community character, is a topic that attracts mixed reactions. For the most part, Stow’s residents love their quiet streets and unblemished landscapes. Many people hear the term “economic development” and immediately picture office parks and strip malls overtaking our apple orchards and dense forests.

But others take the opposite stance, pointing out that it is large commercial developments that can sometimes provide a town’s only hope for lessening the residential tax burden. When conversations arise about the need for school construction or a new fire station, the question is inevitably “How much is it going to cost each taxpayer?” Companies who move into a residential community pay a large share of the taxes and make infrastructural changes more of a possibility – and less onerous to the individual homeowner.

Historically, Stow has taken a fairly measured approach to the subject of economic development. A few large property owners, such as Bose, and a few large retailers, such as Shaw’s Supermarket, are generally seen as useful contributors to the community. Not only do midsized or large businesses alleviate the tax burden, but they also offer the possibility to some residents of working close to home. A shorter commute lightens traffic in the area and also complies with many people’s goals of reducing their individual carbon footprint. Similarly, economic development as it applies to smaller, locally owned businesses such as dry cleaners, restaurants and small stores give residents the opportunity to keep money within the community and avoid long drives to neighboring towns.

B. Economic Development Objectives

1. Vision

Stow envisions a local economy that meet the needs of Stow residents with predominantly small businesses geared toward services, professional office, and retail options. A significant amount of land use will continue to be dedicated to commercial agriculture. Within this vision is tolerance for selective larger employers who are building or developing clean technologies, high-tech, bio-tech, and light manufacturing in existing commercially zoned districts.

2. Approach

Stow recognizes the relatively moderate role the local government can play in influencing what is typically market-driven development in the commercial arena. Thus, the basis for those recommendations that come later in this chapter is the notion that goals and objectives should be geared toward complementing what the private sector will do on its own and in protecting what is already here today. The goals and action items primarily contemplate relatively



minor adjustments to commercially zoned districts, some new opportunities that could be created through overlay districts, and infrastructure that could encourage economic development. Beyond zoning, we believe that the appropriate role of government in economic development is to support local business through fostering a collaborative regulatory climate, and bolstering communication between the business sector and the local government. Stow has a good record of performing land-use permitting in a professional and appropriate fashion. Nonetheless, permitting for small businesses and in some cases residents can still be daunting and overwhelming. One way to provide an economic development service to the commercial sector is to develop a guidebook to permitting which those citing businesses in Stow can use as a tool to assist them in understanding the process. Keeping forms current and up to date on the Town's website and simplifying the process where possible, are all positive things that can help encourage business.

3. Contributing plans

Planning and dialog around this subject have occurred in many forums with written analysis in several major reports. Additionally, there have been public forums and surveys aimed at understanding the residents' desires and will. Background for this chapter was derived in part from material found in a variety of sources, primarily including the following:

- "Stow 2000" – the Town's last Master Plan, produced in 1996
- Stow Community Development Plan (CDP) – 2004
- Mixed Use Zoning Project funded through a Priority Development Fund Grant – 2005
- Master Plan Survey 2008

4. Progress on 2004 Community Development Plan goals

The Community Development Plan identified three broad goals for economic development:

1. Providing shopping and services to local residents
2. Revitalizing and improving the aesthetics of the community
3. Increasing the non-residential tax base in town

However, that plan was issued at a time when the economy was much stronger than it is today. Thus, it is difficult to measure progress toward these larger goals because after modest gains in the mid-2000s, the economy is presently contracting. Some data that will be discussed below appear to suggest that Stow has actually lost business, and there have been few, if any, start-ups within the community during that interval. Relative to goal number 2, many of the zoning changes identified in 2004 and discussed below have not yet been implemented. The combined effect of minimal to no progress on goals 1 and 2 render goal 3 also unchanged. Nonetheless, many of the specific recommendations in the 2004 CDP are still worthy goals and identified by the Master Plan Committee as still relevant.

A more detailed discussion of the present recommendations for economic development is included in the final section of this chapter. For initial perspective, the 2004 CDP goals are outlined below in a chart format with an indicator of their relevance to today's conditions and objectives.

CDP Excerpt (*with commentary in italics*) – “General Activities to implement the Economic Development goals”

- a) Establish town committee to work on coordination of tourism efforts between golf, orchards, etc. Encourage establishment of Chamber of Commerce and Website or a business networking group to provide feedback to town on business issues.

Not yet done but still worth pursuing. Ideally a broad-based “Economic Development Committee” would be more appropriate than one that limited its charge to tourism. The Assabet Valley Regional Chamber of Commerce and Stow Business Association provide services to Stow businesses.

- b) Work with Bose to determine how to meet needs of that business and its employees in a manner that will have least impact on residents of the Town, while encouraging Stow's other Plan goals (e.g., coordinate hotel/inn efforts to meet tourism but also business goals, or promote zoning to provide retail/services for employees nearby Bose facility).

This responsibility should become part of the charge for the new

committee, if one is created, per the above goal.

c) Examine rezoning some areas to meet the specific goals expressed in the Economic Development Discussions. This could result in several different business, commercial and industrial zoning districts, rather than one category of each at this time, in order to allow for specific uses in designated areas of the Town.

Still recommended for consideration in this Master Plan update. However, based on the Priority Development Grant forums convened in Stow by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), it is clear there is still work to be done in building consensus and clarifying actual zoning objectives. Again, the detailed discussion of recommendations is at the end of this section.



The following chart depicts recommendations for commercial area zoning changes that came out of the 2004 CDP and it includes the Master Plan Committee’s current view on these goals:

Location:	2004 Community Development Plan Goals	Present (2009) Status	Comments/current view
<i>Lower Village</i>	Promote redevelopment of the Lower Village business district and a rezoning to allow multiple types of uses within the same zoning district (ie - retail and residential)	Forum held with MAPC and bylaw drafted and a subsequent public meeting held but due to significant resistance, the zoning has not been changed	Still a desired goal of the MPC, but boundaries still need to be determined carefully and tight controls imposed on type of development identified before zoning overlay could be advanced
<i>Route 117 Industrial Zone (South of Bose to Athens Street)</i>	Retain and promote this area for expansion of office park	Unchanged	Still desirable; however, much of the remaining industrial land has access issues
<i>White Pond Road area and Commercial Area along River</i>	Change zoning from Commercial to Business; To promote natural resource-based/oriented businesses; maintain 50% open space requirement as part of development	Unchanged	Still desirable with the exception of Stowaway Golf Course; see Chapter 6
<i>Airport Industrial Area (to the south and East of Airport)</i>	Promote lower intensity uses such as support facilities for cleaning or landscaping services/ businesses, or small light industrial facilities (due to poor road access)	Goal sidetracked as a portion of the land has been put aside for Active Adult Neighborhood Overlay district	Part of the remaining land still could be pursued for zoning changes to promote lower intensity uses as recommended in the CDP as well as commercial recreation uses.
<i>Gleasondale Village and Orchard Hill Industrial Zone</i>	In conjunction with TDR proposal for Gleasondale, encourage redevelopment of Gleasondale Mill as a mixed use retail/office or (if possible) retail/residential space as the core of a mixed use area that can serve the needs of the additional nearby residential uses	Unchanged but draft overlay bylaw developed through MAPC Priority Development Grant	As discussed in Chapter 3, the MPC concluded that TDR strategy is no longer recommended due to the complexity of TDR and the relative low probability that it could be an effective tool. However, the goal to promote redevelopment of the mill with some amount of mixed use is still a high priority. MPC recommends protecting Orchard Hill with an Agricultural Preservation Restriction or rezoning

Location:	2004 Community Development Plan Goals	Present (2009) Status	Comments/current view
<i>Route 117-Business Zone at the Habitech 40B development site, and nearby Industrial and residential zoned areas</i>	Consider inclusion of adjacent Industrial and Residentially zoned land in a mixed use zone to establish a “West Village”	Effort initiated but stalled due to neighborhood opposition	Needs further study
<i>Route 117-Far West (Commercially zoned lands at West border of town</i>	Leave as commercial zone, but re-write zoning to promote the specific desired land uses in conjunction with the offices currently there	No progress to date	Still a goal but of lower priority

C. Current Economic Activity

1. Tax base

To begin to paint a picture of the local economy, it is important to examine the present tax base and understand how that influences local municipal needs and objectives. Out of approximately 11,000 acres of land in Stow, about 600 acres are zoned for either commercial or light industrial use. This is only 5.5% of the total land area within the community. Nonetheless, a slightly greater amount, more than 6.5% of the Town’s tax revenue, comes from the commercial sector. In FY10 the revenue from the various sectors can be categorized as follows: Personal Property 1.8799%, Industrial 2.1521%, and Commercial is 4.7399% and residential is 91.2281%. Some of the revenue from Personal Property taxation is likely coming from the commercial sector but it is not tracked and broken down separately. It’s unclear from this data if commercial properties yield higher values and thus a higher proportion of taxes or if the data merely reflects the influence of one or two large properties. Of the 600 acres of land which is zoned commercial, there remain only 142 acres of land yet to be built upon. Still that is 23% of the commercially zoned land that could eventually be income producing properties.

2. Tax rates

Stow does not have a split tax system. Rather, it charges the same rate for so-called Commercial, Industrial, and Personal Property (CIP) as it does for Residential taxpayers. Thus, as reflected in the chart below, the CIP rates for Stow are among the lowest of the surrounding communities. Assuming the community wishes to continue with this structure, these favorable rates are something the Town could use to its benefit in trying to attract new businesses.

Alternatively, as towns grow their commercial tax base, some will elect to shift the burden of taxes onto the commercial sector as a means to minimize the amount residential rate payers will have to pay. Some believe that such a shift will act as a deterrent to new businesses that might

want to locate within the community and is probably not advised for a town such as Stow which already has difficulty in attracting businesses. However, if a handful of very large businesses were to locate in town, Stow might want to revisit its tax classification system to see if it makes sense to move toward a split system. Before doing so, a review of the assessed value of existing CIP rate payers' properties would need to be conducted to determine what the impact would be, and extensive discussions with the community would need to be undertaken.

As may be inferred from the chart below, those communities with a split tax rate (Hudson, Maynard, Marlborough, and Sudbury) likely rely heavily on the commercial sector in supporting their town wide revenue needs.

Commercial tax rates for Stow and surrounding communities:

Town	Tax Rate (per \$1,000 of RE Value)
Stow	13.82%
Acton	14.62%
Berlin	11.66%
Bolton	14.06%
Hudson	20.79%
Maynard	21.78%
Marlborough	23.72%
Sudbury	19.30%

3. Employers in town

Stow had 186 different employers in 2008¹². This figure is considerably less than the year 2000 figure cited in the 2004 Community Development Plan from data gathered by the Central Transportation Planning Staff. At that time, that data set indicated there were roughly 249 businesses in town. However, we cannot conclude from these data that 25% of Stow's business base was lost because the data came from two different sources, and the earlier set might have counted more home-based businesses not reflected in the recent federal data. The present figure of 186 may still seem like a very large total number, but many of those businesses are smaller establishments employing only a few individuals. In 2000, 72% of Stow's businesses had just four or fewer employees. Furthermore, when compared with surrounding towns, one sees that as a percentage of jobs per commercial acre of land, Stow has the lowest percentage of any of

¹² ES 202 data collected by the State and Federal government

the nearby communities, averaging just 10-15 jobs per commercial acre.¹³ The low number of jobs per acre is also probably indicative of the many rural and agricultural based businesses prevalent in Stow.

The chart below from the Executive Office of Workforce Development shows 2008 data on employment by various industry sectors:

Industry	Commercial Establishments	Total Wages	Average Employment	Average Weekly Wage
Total, All Industries	186	\$115,749,224	2,070	\$1,075
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	4	\$993,359	28	\$682
Construction	25	\$13,748,806	229	\$1,155
Wholesale Trade	16	\$4,841,048	68	\$1,369
Retail Trade	13	\$3,535,772	185	\$368
Information	7	\$4,844,210	54	\$1,725
Finance and Insurance	5	\$1,712,594	31	\$1,062
Professional and Technical Services	32	\$3,736,034	62	\$1,159
Administrative and Waste Services	14	\$982,370	35	\$540
Health Care and Social Assistance	7	\$1,564,360	66	\$456
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	9	\$4,303,520	187	\$443
Accommodation and Food Services	10	\$1,486,558	97	\$295
Other Services, Ex. Public Admin	22	\$2,242,799	57	

It is interesting to note that the largest number of business establishments is in the professional and technical services sector, but the arts/entertainment/recreation cluster employs the second-largest number of people. This is followed by the construction trades, and other services not easily classified. In Stow’s case, the “other” category likely reflects schools, government, and other municipal services. Retail trade reflects a surprisingly low number of companies, which may be because many establishments that one would normally consider retail are reflected in the other categories such as food services or entertainment. However, relatively speaking, the retail sector had one of the highest average employment of workers: third after the construction, arts, and entertainment sectors, respectively. So those few retail establishments employ large numbers of people. Although these data identify only four agricultural businesses, we know there are considerably more than four commercial farms in town, and these establishments are likely spread between the wholesale trade and “other” category.

4. The population of workers

The median household income in Stow was \$96,290 in 2000 - an extraordinarily high figure notable because it was more than double the national median household income of \$41,994. At that time. According to federal census figures from 2000, there are about 3,600 workers – meaning adults employed or seeking employment – living in Stow. Relative to the total population in Stow, more than 50% of residents are in the workforce, which indicates a

¹³ Mass Department of Employment and Training, and MassGIS data

relatively low number of children and/or retirees per household. The unemployment rate in March 2009 was 6.1%, approximately 2% lower than the state average at that time.

This low unemployment rate is probably due to the difference in education level among the Town's population compared with state and national averages. According to that same census, 28% of adults 25 or over in Stow hold a master's, professional or doctorate degree, more than twice the percentage statewide (13.7%) and more than three times the percentage nationally (8.9%).

For adults whose highest degree is a bachelor's, the percentages are 33.8% for Stow, compared with 19.5% statewide and 15.5% nationwide.

	Labor force	Employed	Unemployed	Rate of unemployment
Statewide	3,404,500	3,124,900	279,600	8.2%
Stow	3,494	3,281	213	6.1%

Above figures are from March 2009 data obtained from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. The table below shows the trends since 2000, when Stow's unemployment rate was at an astounding 2% low. The rates peaked in 2003 at 5%, dropped for several years, and then began climbing at the end of 2008 and continuing on into 2009, reflecting some improvement since March. As of November 2009, the Stow and Massachusetts unemployment rates were 5.7% and 8.3%, respectively.

Labor force, Employment and Unemployment (2005 total Stow Population 6,179)					
(not seasonally adjusted)					
Month	Year	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
06	2009	3,536	3,303	233	6.6
05	2009	3,498	3,279	219	6.3
04	2009	3,498	3,293	205	5.9
03	2009	3,494	3,281	213	6.1
02	2009	3,504	3,278	226	6.4
01	2009	3,497	3,291	206	5.9
Annual	Year	Labor Force	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate
Average	2008	3,535	3,390	145	4.1
Average	2007	3,505	3,390	115	3.3
Average	2006	3,446	3,320	126	3.7
Average	2005	3,426	3,303	123	3.6
Average	2004	3,379	3,243	136	4.0
Average	2003	3,419	3,247	172	5.0
Average	2002	3,432	3,264	168	4.9
Average	2001	3,409	3,301	108	3.2
Average	2000	3,328	3,263	65	2.0

5. Commuting patterns

Because of the minimal amount of commercial and industrial development within town, it is not surprising that most Stow residents leave town for work, though it is worth noting that there is a significant number of self-employed workers and telecommuters, both categories comprising people who work from their homes, within the Town. The following numbers come from the 2000 census:

“In-migration”: people who live in other towns and commute to Stow to work	2,687
“Out-migration”: people who live in Stow and commute out of town to work	3,112
People who live and work in Stow	545

With growing awareness of energy consumption, more and more workers are prioritizing a shorter commute. Promoting economic development within the Town would not only create more commercial tax revenue; it would also allow more people to work closer to home. The following table gives current information on typical commute times for residents:

Length of commute	Number of workers
0- 9 minutes	312
10-19 minutes	559
20-29 minutes	474
30-39 minutes	608
40-59 minutes	671
60+ minutes	308

It is important to note that more than 50% of workers have commutes of 30 minutes or longer. This is indicative of a town that has relatively few jobs within the community. In Stow’s situation, this imbalance is exacerbated by the fact that the higher price of housing means that in order to live within the community, one must earn above-average wages. However, many of the jobs in Stow are more moderate wage jobs. The average weekly wage paid to workers in Stow yields an annual individual income of \$55,900 which is well below the median household income of \$96,290 for Stow residents. This creates an imperative where workers must typically go outside the community for work to earn at the levels needed to live in Stow.

D. Future Economic Activity

Many questions surround the topic of economic development. For example, is the current industrial zoning allotment in Stow adequate, too dense, or not dense enough? Are the restrictions on industrial construction – such as the size of a facility in relation to its parcel of land, and the permissible height of buildings – sufficient for preserving our community the way we want it? How do the currently unused mill buildings factor into the community’s economic potential? Do we want to consider ways to make better use of those buildings: for example, allowing overlay zoning to permit mixed use purposes such as combining retail and residential options within the same building?

The 2008 Master Plan Survey posed this question to gauge respondents’ attitudes toward increasing the possibility of economic development in town, “Do we need more industrial or commercial land in town?” The results were mixed: 179 said yes while 191 said no.

One way to foster economic development without significantly changing a community’s character is through the selective use of overlay districts, which can enable multiple kinds of zoning to be combined. Typically, it is done to allow an additional discrete use not normally permitted in that zone. For example, mixed use zoning can be overlaid in a commercial zone, or age-restricted higher-density housing can be allowed at targeted areas in a single-family residential zone. The Planning Board is exploring bylaws for mixed use overlay districts, and discussing specific areas of town in which this strategy might be used to capture the scale and character of traditional New England villages and allow development and redevelopment that differ from conventional zoning regulations. The intent of such a bylaw is to promote a range of compatible land uses, including various types of single-family and multi-family dwellings; commercial, industrial and office uses that focus on serving the needs of our community; and common, public open space.

Two specific areas in which overlay zoning could foster economic development without devaluing the community’s character are Gleasondale and Lower Village.

Gleasondale is now both a residential and work center with a growing artisan industry, waterways, rail bed, and Victorian influence. Our vision is to encourage restoration of the mill building as an anchor for a village rich in tradition, thereby promoting village-style redevelopment and re-establishing Gleasondale as a neighborhood commercial center where people want to work, shop, and reside.

A mixed use overlay district for Gleasondale would encourage economic development by helping to redevelop the mill for a combination of "village-scale" businesses, retail, and housing.

Lower Village, once typical of small villages in New England, is now our business center, with shopping, banking, the post office, and convenient high-density residences for seniors, a village

green and historic homes. “Stow 2000” (the 1996 Master Plan) described Lower Village as an area identified by the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, in which Stow would like to focus its business development by encouraging mixed use development. In 1990, the Town nominated Lower Village as a Concentrated Development Center under the Metropolitan Area Planning Council’s (MAPC) comprehensive regional plan, Metro-Plan 2000. Our recommendation is to use the MAPC’s guidelines to encourage development and redevelopment of the Lower Village area in a manner consistent with a traditional livable and walkable New England.

A mixed use overlay district for the Lower Village business zoned area would encourage economic development by accommodating infill and expansion where appropriate and supports a pedestrian-friendly range of compatible uses, including a mix of residential and nonresidential uses. However, imposing a mixed use overlay district requires significant changes in zoning regulations, which would have to go through an extensive approval process. If the Town does favor the idea of mixed use for Lower Village, the next step should be to start investigating the necessary zoning changes.

Respondents to the 2008 Master Plan Survey were supportive of planning efforts and possible zoning changes to create village districts in the Gleasondale, Lower Village and West Stow Areas, broken out as follows:

VILLAGE	YES	NO
Gleasondale (Encourage restoration of the mill building as an anchor to promote redevelopment and re-establishment of a neighborhood commercial center with a mix of housing types that are in proximity to jobs, shops and services; increase the Town’s stock of affordable housing; and promote a greater sense of Gleasondale’s community throughout the Town)	277	101
Lower Village (Encourage redevelopment of the commercial center; increase the Town’s stock of affordable housing; enhance the Lower Village’s identity and development potential as a focal point for pedestrian-related uses; and promote a greater sense of community.)	276	105
Northwest/Southwest Stow (Promote small retail shops to support existing high-density development and foster recreational amenities with a goal toward protecting additional open space where possible.)	260	115

Near the Lower Village business zone is commercially zoned land located off of White Pond Road, extending from the road to the Assabet River. The build-out potential for this area is huge. The 1996 Master Plan reports that another 886,476 square feet of commercial building space can be constructed in this vicinity. Although this is unlikely because most of the allowed commercial uses include outdoor storage, construction yards, contractors, or lumber yards, these types of uses could be detrimental to the character of the nearby Lower Village. Some residents voiced concern that this area should be rezoned to Recreation/Conservation due to its

proximity to the Assabet River, Gardner Hill Conservation Land (Town Forest) and Department of Fisheries and Wildlife property.

Many townspeople believe that Stow would benefit from more cultural and societal resources: that is, not just business for the sake of business but businesses that offered personal benefits to the community, such as coffee shops, pubs, galleries, bookstores, etc. As reflected in the following chart, results from the recent Master Plan Survey suggest that residents are not eager to see more large industrial businesses in town but would welcome small businesses, shops, and professional services such as physicians, financial professionals, and attorneys.

Would you support the rezoning of industrial properties for commercial use for the following classifications?		
Retail	253	70%
Offices	266	74%
Research and design (a category that connotes lower employee occupancy and less traffic than traditional office space)	327	91%

E. Additional Factors

1. Discussion of commercial tax implications

Along with the attitude of townspeople as outlined above, there are many other factors that influence the success of economic development.

A common notion held by many homeowners is that an increase in economic development would lower their property taxes significantly. However, this assumption can be more or less accurate depending on the characteristics of the community. Currently, in Stow about 85-90% of the cost of running the Town and paying for education comes from our property taxes. If the Town were to seek more commercial revenue, it could do so by encouraging more sites to be built or by imposing a split tax rate. As was stated above, Stow’s current zoning only has 5.5% of the land area designated for commercial and much of that land is already built upon.

In 2007, a selectman and an assessor evaluated a series of numbers, based on a set of assumptions, that enabled them to identify possible savings from more commercial growth. Their first step was to identify the top two commercial taxpayers for FY 2007. They then developed a model assuming that Stow had additional commercial taxpayers equivalent to the top two already in Stow. In other words, they wanted to determine the impact of doubling the taxes paid by the top two commercial employers.

For FY 2007, the top two businesses paid taxes totaling \$386,362 based upon a valuation of \$27,956,700. Therefore, using the 100% increase in the model, Stow would have received \$772,724 in commercial taxes and the residential taxes would have been reduced by \$386,362.

The actual average residential tax per household in FY 2007 was \$7,042. The average household tax with the additional businesses in the model was \$6884 for a reduction of 2.2% or \$158 (about \$40 per quarter). This number may be viewed as trivial or highly significant, depending in part upon how many years one expects to pay taxes and on a family's particular economic position. For a resident expecting to live in town 25 more years, it is a difference of nearly \$4,000, and the model does not take into account the lost opportunity cost of the \$158 annually. That is, what else could you have done with that money if you could spend it or invest it? For those on a fixed income or those with more moderate incomes, this \$158 per year is quite meaningful.

The analysis was also not able to take into account other variables, such as the compounding effects of the additional commercial revenue over time. The savings to each household could be further augmented significantly beyond the \$158 per year if a split tax rate were imposed, should the Town wish to pursue that option. An analysis was not done as to what the split tax rate would yield in residential property tax relief.

However, the assessor did take the model one step further to calculate the impact of a range of economic development on residential taxes. The analysis showed that to achieve a reduction of \$1,000 in the average tax bill, this appeared to require the addition of nearly \$200 million to the commercial tax base.

There are some other important considerations beyond the financial impact in the model. For example, there would need to be sufficient land to accommodate more commercial activity. The top two firms used in the model occupy nearly 100 acres. Stow presently has only a limited supply of vacant commercial and industrial zoned lands. Thus, if the Town were to set out with a goal of fostering the building of commercial facilities, it might need to consider rezoning some land currently classified for other uses, and it might have to explore providing water and sewer infrastructure (see below).

The aforementioned model seems to demonstrate that there may likely be only minimal residential tax savings even if space and infrastructure could be provided. Nonetheless, it does not negate the value of fostering limited economic development because, as discussed above, there are other non-monetary reasons why communities desire commercial activity.

2. Discussion of infrastructure issues

A major impediment to the redevelopment of Lower Village involves Stow's current lack of water and sewer infrastructure. Most small to moderate sized businesses would also likely need water and sewer in order to be viable. There are also currently a few existing commercial properties not in compliance with DEP's public drinking water requirements. The cost of providing this infrastructure is typically out of reach for small businesses, and renders medium-sized commercial development uncompetitive if a sizable up-front capital investment is

necessary for water and sewer. On several fronts, options continue to be evaluated and considered relative to bringing a water supply to Lower Village.

For a large-scale employer such as Bose, putting in a water/sewer system is merely part of the cost of doing business, but the lack of public water and sewer could easily be enough to deter a small retailer or restaurant owner from considering real estate in Stow. Some in Town would say that it is expressly desirable to limit commercial growth by not providing water and sewer, while others would say we need to expand infrastructure to encourage expansion and redevelopment. An extensive discussion of the challenges of developing new water and sewer infrastructure appears in Chapter 7, but the topic merits mention here as well since it is intrinsically connected to the whole idea of economic development.

Infrastructure expansion tends to have the by-product of encouraging economic expansion. Given this tendency, the Town needs to proceed slowly and diligently when recommending new infrastructure to support commerce. It especially needs to make certain that appropriate bylaws and regulations are in place prior to the installation of new infrastructure so that the Town is not later burdened with inappropriate development or excessive density. Development, where it is allowed, should happen on the Town's terms to the extent it is possible to control.

In addition to the water and sewer issues, economic development comes with other, less tangible considerations that need to be carefully examined as the community considers promoting or discouraging economic development in various areas of town.

General growth or specific commercial projects may require traffic improvements. For large-scale projects, these costs are often passed on to the developer, who is required to make the physical improvements or pay the Town to perform the necessary modifications. However, with smaller incremental growth, it is often difficult to require a small business to make upgrades to area roads. Again, it is economically unfeasible to place that burden on a small business.

Nonetheless, Stow needs to take particular care to ensure that new developments are evaluated for any impacts they may have on the local road network and municipal services such as public safety. The best way to do this is to have major developments reviewed by an outside peer reviewer who has expertise in traffic, civil engineering, and municipal operations. This review is normally paid for by the developer and can be an invaluable tool in assisting a community to mitigate adverse effects of large development. It also aids in ensuring that the development is consistent with local character and objectives. Stow's Planning Board should continue its practice of using peer review consultants.

Traffic infrastructure was explicitly studied by the Lower Village Committee when it undertook its work evaluating options for Lower Village. This committee believes a pair of modern roundabouts would be appropriate to be installed in the Lower Village along with a number of permanent pedestrian traffic calming islands. For more information on this topic, we direct you to the Transportation section of this plan.

F. Conclusions Regarding Economic Development Costs and Benefits

There are also less tangible factors influencing economic development, including the availability of suppliers to businesses, the regulatory environment, the presence of regional competitors, the opportunities for alliances with other companies, the access businesses would have to consultants and educational institutions, and new state and federal tax incentives. Most of these components are difficult, if not impossible, for a locality to influence. Nonetheless, there are some minor areas where the municipality could have an impact.

For example, Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is an excellent way to provide a business incentive for a new or expanding company. Tax Increment Financing (TIF) is a tool that permits local governments to help finance economic development by forgiving a portion of local taxes for a set period of time. A portion of the taxes on the new growth or incremental increase of real estate value, created from the expansion or new construction is reduced by a negotiated percentage. This provides a meaningful reduction of annual overhead costs to the developer or job creator and helps to ensure the financial success of the venture. In Massachusetts Tax Increment Financing is approved locally and by the Economic Assistance Coordinating Council (EACC) through the Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP). This state approval also allows the job creator to be eligible for State Investment Tax Credits. In order for a Town to grant TIF's it must first be part of an Economic Target Area designated and approved by the EACC.

The MPC believes the Board of Selectmen should pursue joining an economic target area so that it has the option with Town Meeting approval to offer and negotiate Tax Increment Financing.

Those residents in favor of more business generally do not want it built near their homes or in lieu of open space protection. Commercially zoned land that is both available and buildable is virtually nonexistent. Zoning changes would allow more commercial activity, but the required infrastructure would be expensive if the Town had to pay for it. Nonetheless, while the community might perceive there to be more negatives than positives in pursuing economic development, some modest commercial growth would help relieve the pressure on residential tax values over the long term while potentially also providing nearby services for Stow residents.

While Stow today has the majority of its revenue provided by the residential rate payers, there is still meaningful revenue contribution generated by the commercial sector. To the extent feasible, maintaining the present balance by preserving existing businesses within the community will help to prevent residential taxes from becoming even more onerous than they are today.

The model that is likely to be the most palatable to residents and also the most feasible is to encourage small infill development of retail and service business along existing commercial

corridors while also promoting redevelopment of current commercial areas that are not presently thriving. Infill development (buildings placed between existing structures) is entirely consistent with smart growth provisions and tends to be the best way to maintain open space and community character. It is also consistent with objectives expressed in the

Existing Retail Area – Stow Shopping Center

2008 Master Plan Survey, in which residents indicated a desire to have more diverse shopping and alternative retail options. Providing areas within town to shop also helps to reduce a community's carbon footprint as residents drive shorter distances to obtain the goods they need for everyday life. Asked whether they would support possible zoning changes that would foster the development of small retail businesses in West Stow, approximately 70% of respondents to the 2008 Master Plan Survey indicated that they would; almost exactly the same number said they would support the rezoning of existing industrial properties for retail classification.



There are some specific zoning overlays or modifications to underlying zoning that could be explored in this pursuit. The next sections are dedicated exclusively to the zoning recommendations that came out of this Master Plan update.

G. Recommended Areas of Focus for Economic Development

Inherent to the character of Stow are orchards, farms and golf courses, which are businesses that must be economically viable to survive. Tourism is essential to the well-being of these businesses, along with the Town's various bed-and-breakfast inns.

We recommend that as many townspeople representing as many perspectives as possible be brought into the discussion about what changes to make toward improvements in economic development. We also recommend that Stow develop a bureau of tourism and actively market what it has to offer.

The December 2005 Special Town Meeting created the Stow Agricultural Commission to help preserve the rural character of Stow through the preservation and promotion of agriculture. The Commission will help keep Stow farms viable by promoting agriculture through educational

literature, events, and articles. The Commission can act as a voice for agriculture in town government, helping to ensure that the various boards understand the impact of their actions on agriculture.

Stow's zoning bylaws should be supportive of these businesses by allowing uses such as restaurants, inns and bed-and-breakfast operations, which would bring more tourism to town. Bed-and-breakfasts have the additional benefit of providing incentives for the preservation of historic homes. For more information on Massachusetts bed-and-breakfast regulations, go to <http://tinyurl.com/2wfp1bc>

In addition to agriculture, goods and services, other types of entrepreneurship are part of the economic fabric of Stow. A recurring problem has been the lack of space for expansion of "cottage industry" businesses that have outgrown the owner's home. Stow's zoning should recognize this need and support areas for affordable "incubator" space for these businesses.

H. Specific Recommendations for Key Areas of Town

1. Lower Village

The Master Plan's vision for this area of town includes the following objectives:

- Encourage revitalization of the commercial center
- Increase the Town's stock of affordable housing by sprinkling occasional units throughout the area
- Promote village-style redevelopment
- Enhance the Lower Village's unique identity and development potential as a focal point for pedestrian-related uses
- Reduce roadway congestion
- Promote a greater sense of community

To help accomplish some of these goals, the following specific recommendations should be followed:

- The Town should evaluate existing conditions and traffic concerns and review relevant studies on this area of Town such as the 2006 FST Lower Village Traffic Report and Lower Village Streetscape proposed specifications
- With this information as background, the Town should prepare an in-depth Master Plan for Lower Village utilizing a highly inclusive, public participation process which includes reaching out to businesses and residents alike
- Through the Master Planning process, once substantial consensus has been achieved, recommendations for design guidelines and appropriate zoning uses

should be identified. This information can then potentially become part of a Lower Village Overlay District proposal for Town Meeting's consideration

We envision development and redevelopment of Lower Village in a manner consistent with a traditional livable and walkable New England village. Toward this end, we recommend further evaluation of the idea of creating a new Lower Village mixed use overlay district. (The evaluation should include careful consideration of the district's boundaries, appropriate transition zones, and controls to limit over development) A mixed use overlay district for the Lower Village could allow development and redevelopment that support a pedestrian friendly range of compatible uses, including smaller-scale housing and commercial services. It is important to note that any consideration of new zoning for this area must emphasize maintaining and preserving the character of Stow. Thus, design guidelines and zoning modification, if presented to Town Meeting, should be careful to consider potential adverse effects as well as potential positive outcomes. Consideration to control site lighting, signage, traffic, noise, odors, maintenance, and other potentially problematic complications of commercial and mixed use, should be factored into recommendations for this area.

If advanced, characteristics of this district should include:

- Provisions for existing business parcels to be more retail oriented, allowing up to 100% retail/office use, and no more than 20% residential use
- A mix of residential and non-residential uses
- "Village-scale" businesses which are limited in height and scale and have design guidelines that encourage traditional facades
- Setbacks that keep businesses and residences close to the street
- New development and redevelopment that are in harmony with the traditional style of village development

The goals should be as follows:

- Preservation of existing historic structures
- Diversified housing
- Conversion and/or building of infill housing with an emphasis on affordable housing

Lower Village Improvement Plan

We should implement the Lower Village Sub-Committee's improvement plan as a top priority. To integrate the characteristics we envision, the following goals should be considered:

- Improve the Lower Village Common to create a visual link from the common to the cemetery. Use the recently expanded green area as a focal point for events, such as a farmers' market or art exhibits

- Beautify Lower Village Common with additional plantings with funds provided by the Stow Garden Club or other creative source
- Reclaim the Town land on the Route 117 between Red Acre Road and Pompositticut Street, creating a link between the existing common and Lower Village Cemetery, and create a walkway from Pompositticut Street to Red Acre Road
- Encourage landscape improvements to the Stow Shopping Center
- Realign curb cuts to promote safer and more efficient traffic flow
- Continue to find ways to address pedestrian safety and traffic issues in Lower Village

White Pond Road area and commercial area along river:

- Change zoning from Commercial to Business; promote natural resource-based/oriented businesses; maintain a requirement of 50% open space as part of the development

2. Gleasondale

Gleasondale is both a residential and work center, with its historic mill and growing artisan industry, waterways, rail bed, and Victorian influence. Our recommendation is to encourage restoration of the mill building as an anchor for a village rich in tradition; promote village-style redevelopment; re-establish Gleasondale as a neighborhood commercial center where people want to work, shop, and reside and where visitors can access its recreational, historic, and commercial features; increase the Town's stock of affordable housing; and promote a greater sense of the Gleasondale community throughout the Town.

Supporting Elements Currently in Place – Gleasondale, originally known as Rock Bottom, grew around its mill industries. It featured saw mills, grist mills, a woolen mill, a post office, a general store and housing for the mill workers.

Hazardous Waste Sites - The Gleasondale Mill has environmental issues which complicate its reuse. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was cited for discharging sewage into the canal that fed into the Assabet River. Fortunately, owners complied with BOH orders to install chemical toilets. Later, a wastewater treatment system was installed at the Mill and is still regularly pumped. In 1989, it was declared a 21E site, thereby subject to cleanup under the DEP before it can be developed. In 1994, it was classified as a Tier 1B, with the Fahey Exhibits Building listed as a phase 2. The reports stated that "VOCs and chlorinated solvents released resulting in release to soil and also a groundwater release." In 1992, there were some soil samples tested by Enviro Corp. The samples were drawn from two sites located on either side of the Fahey property. Those two samples appeared to be clean.

There is a variety of funding sources at both the state and federal level that might be able to help with subsequent cleaning of this site. The Town should look for opportunities to facilitate communications and to assist private developers to access these funding sources.

Potential Buildout – A quick review of the parcels in Gleasondale revealed that a significant majority of the lots has less frontage and land area than is currently required by our present Zoning Bylaw. These characteristics combined to create the unique mill village feel of the Gleasondale area. However, if the residentially zoned Gleason-Perkins land and the adjacent industrially zoned farmland, pasture and woodland are developed along with the nearby golf courses and apple orchards become house lots, it will likely become difficult to distinguish Gleasondale village from the surrounding community. Should this happen, the village may no longer be an identifiable entity, and its noteworthy heritage could be lost. The following table shows the build-out potential of Gleasondale under our current zoning:

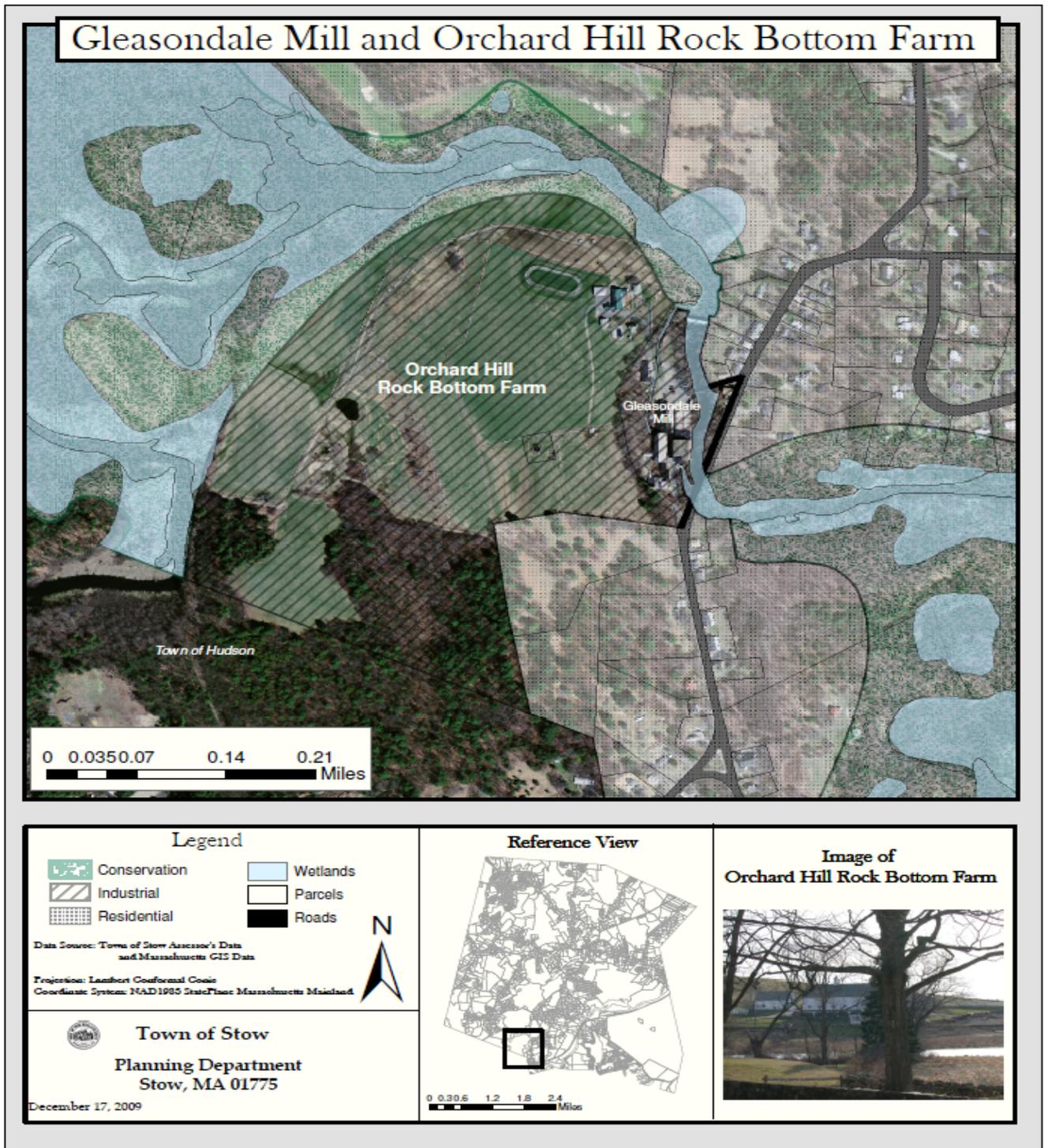
Acres	Existing Dwelling Units	Additional Dwelling Units	Existing Industrial Floor Area	Additional Industrial Floor Area
162.66	71	103	91,920 sq. ft.	272,376 sq. ft.



Published by Parker & Croft.

Iron Bridge over the Assabet, Gleasondale, Mass.

FIGURE: 11 Map of Gleasondale



Orchard Hill, also known as Rockbottom Farm, is a 90-acre industrial zoned parcel, situated on an esker behind the mill buildings. This is an important historic scenic vista, with two farmhouses (1820 and 1870), an 1851 barn complex which was expanded over the course of several decades, and agricultural fields sloping down to the Assabet River. This was a mill farm that produced food for the mill works and continues to operate as a farm today.

At present, Rockbottom Farm is enrolled in Chapter 61A. Converting the horse farm into an industrial development would likely have the undesirable result of creating an additional 235,710 square feet of industrial floor area. Because of its historical and aesthetic value, the MPC recommends the Planning Board explore modifying the zoning on this key parcel along with other large agricultural properties to create a new commercial agricultural zone that limits the type of commercial activity to agricultural and farming pursuits. If the Town joins an Economic Target Area (see TIF discussion above) the Town could further consider designating these parcels as economic target areas so that farmers might be able to reap the benefits of both a local TIF and the state Tax Investment Credit for property, equipment, and other capital investments in their facilities. This might help bolster the vitality of the local agricultural economy and help to ensure that farms, and orchards continue to be profitable in the area.

The Gleasondale Mill is located on two parcels that total almost five acres of land. However, these parcels have significant development constraints with slopes greater than 25% and no feasible access for industrial development. The options are either agricultural restriction or rezone to recreation/conservation.

Under current zoning, the additional floor area of the Gleasondale Mill would be 34,070 square feet. Ideally, economic development in Stow's villages will occur among and be compatible with the existing historic structures and places. In Gleasondale, it would be appropriate to foster mixed use redevelopment of the historic mill. The Gleasondale Mill could house the small incubator businesses that have been so important to Stow. It would also be appropriate to allow artists' studios in combination with an artist's dwelling or loft in the Gleasondale Mill.

Gleasondale Recommended Actions – We recommend a number of specific actions and supporting initiatives be put in place for Gleasondale over the next five years, keeping in mind that roadway widths, water and sewer infrastructure are limiting factors in this area.

Establish Gleasondale Mill Mixed-Use Overlay District

We envision development and redevelopment of the Gleasondale Mill in a manner consistent with a traditional livable and walkable New England village and recommend the adoption of a new Gleasondale Mixed-Use Overlay District.

A mixed use overlay district for Gleasondale will also allow development and redevelopment that supports a pedestrian friendly range of compatible uses, including various types of single-family and multi-family dwellings and commercial services. The overlay district should encourage:

- Redevelopment of the mill for a combination of business, retail, and housing
 - A transition zone that allows a mixture of uses while maintaining the character of existing historic structures (for example, an artist studio and individual artist dwellings and lofts)
 - Setbacks that keep businesses and residences close to the street
 - New development and redevelopment that is in harmony with the present village character and environment
 - Preservation of existing historic structures
 - Diversified housing
 - Establish a list of uses and design guidelines
- Responsibility: Planning Board (lead), Board of Health

We should consider establishing an Economic Development Committee to work with the Planning Board to broadly pursue economic development opportunities including:

- Explore joining an Economic Target Area and the use of Tax Increment Financing (TIFs) and special tax assessments
- Establish a Gleasondale village improvement plan
- Actively engage landowners and business owners in discussions to promote redevelopment to include mixed use residential and retail
- Actively seek out specific businesses, such as artist studios, coffee shops and cafes to fill vacancies or locate within town
- Establish public/private partnership for redevelopment of the mill
- Seek Brownfield funding

Pursue rezoning of Orchard Hill (Rock Bottom Farm) to Recreation/Conservation or protect it with an Agricultural Preservation Restriction.

If the Town is able to join an Economic Target Area, the Committee should explore designation of Gleasondale as an Economic Opportunity Area. This should ultimately be brought to the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting for approval.

3. Southwest Stow

Southwest Stow presents an opportunity to apply smart growth principles (see Appendix). It is a section of town with a larger proportion of existing industry and industrially zoned land than other areas in town. Southwest Stow, a neighborhood with much high-density housing and the Stow Community Park, would be enhanced by the addition of limited retail elements if developing them could avoid clutter and congestion.

Southwest Stow consists of large areas of industrially and residentially zoned land, a small business zone and a small recreation-conservation zone. It also contains large areas of wetlands. While some of the residentially zoned land has been developed, this area contains

two golf courses (Butternut Farm Golf Club and Stow Acres Country Club) whose combined acreage totals 420 acres as well as several large undeveloped parcels, two of which, a 100+ acre parcel and a 45 acre parcel, have recently been marketed for development. The Stow Open Space and Recreation Plan has identified this area as important for future open space protection due to its large amounts of undeveloped land and scarcity of protected land. The MPC agrees that more land in this area needs permanent protection to help maintain the rural character of Stow and should be balanced with any further development.

Southwest Stow currently has two small business-zoned districts: one is located near the intersection of Hudson Road and Route 117 with an office building, gas station/convenience store and liquor store, and the other is next to the Bose access road in front of the Villages at Stow development. The latter business zoned area is undeveloped.

While there are some industrial businesses in this area (Bose Corporation, Radant and Hydrotest), large areas of undeveloped industrial land remain. These parcels are most likely undeveloped due to lack of frontage and because Stow is not located directly off of a major highway, and some have additional access issues.

Most recently, developers have recognized the potential of the large industrial and residential parcels in this area. One developer worked with the Town to change the Zoning Bylaw to add provisions for an Active Adult Neighborhood (AAN), an overlay district within the industrial zone. A 66-unit development, Arbor Glen, was permitted and is currently under construction on a 44+ acre parcel. Another developer has used the provisions of Chapter 40B to permit a 96-unit development of single-family and townhouse units on the industrial land along Route 117.

Approximately 70% of respondents to the 2008 Master Plan Survey indicated that they would support the rezoning of existing industrial properties for retail classification. This response, in addition to the Town's action to adopt an Active Adult Neighborhood overlay district within the industrial zone, sends a fairly clear message that residents do not support additional industrial development.

The residential development potential for Southwest Stow is significant. With 162 dwelling units presently under construction between Arbor Glen and Villages at Stow, and the fact that other parcels in the area are also being considered for or have the potential for development, the repercussions of such a huge population increase in this one area would be significant.

Southwest Stow Recommended Actions – We recommend the following actions for Southwest Stow.

Smart Growth Principles

Identify the appropriate smart growth principles that are applicable to Southwest Stow and methods to achieve those principles. These principles include compact development, preservation of the environment, and conservation of natural resources.

Responsibility: Planning Board (lead), Conservation Commission

Zoning

The Town should explore ways to encourage appropriate development. The parcels that are zoned for small business along Route 117 and Hudson Road should be developed with businesses and services, such as small convenience shops, restaurants, cafés and other retail businesses that support the growing number of local residents. Employees in this area would also benefit from and support these types of businesses. It may be necessary to evaluate current zoning to consider if modifications need to be made to ensure that the Town is encouraging this type of small-scale retail development while excluding less desirable types of commercial growth.

The Town should evaluate current zoning to maintain and support expansion of the existing businesses in the Industrial District and evaluate current industrial zoning to consider modification to the permitted uses consistent with the type of development Stow wants.

We should work with Bose to determine how to meet needs of that business and its employees in a manner that will have the least impact on residents of the Town, while encouraging Stow's other planning goals (e.g., coordinate hotel/inn efforts to meet tourism but also business goals, or promote zoning to provide retail/services for employees nearby Bose facility).

As discussed above, the Town via the Board of Selectmen should establish an Economic Development Committee. Relative to this section of Stow, this committee, if created could work on coordination of tourism efforts among golf courses, orchards and farms. This task would involve working collaboratively with the Agricultural Commission, Stow Business Association and Regional Assabet Valley Chamber of Commerce to accomplish its goals.

In lieu of modifying the zoning at the Orchard Hill (Rock Bottom Farm) parcel as discussed above to restrict its use to agricultural, the Town could also consider rezoning it from Industrial to Recreation. Another option would be to encourage the property owner to consider an Agricultural Preservation Restriction.

Pedestrian Access

We should plan for pedestrian access as this area is developed. A sidewalk is planned for along Route 117 from Hudson Road to the Bose entrance. We also need to place sidewalks along Hudson Road from the entrances of Arbor Glen to Route 117, at a minimum. Pedestrian trails within Arbor Glen will provide access to Bose and connect to the pedestrian trails within the Villages at Stow. However, these trails are useable only during daylight hours in non-winter months. The sidewalk should be extended along Route 117 from Harvard Road to Old Bolton Road and on to the Stow Community Park. The Master Plan Committee recommends requiring new development and significant redevelopment to incorporate provisions for pedestrians in their site planning process.

4. Northwest Stow

Northwest Stow is defined as all parcels north of Route 117 and west of Packard Road and Boxboro Road to the Bolton, Boxborough and Harvard town lines, along with connecting roads.

This area of town, while primarily zoned Residential, contains a small commercially zoned area along Route 117 near the Bolton town line as well as significant areas zoned Recreation-Conservation and Industrial.

The Delaney Flood Control project encompassing 170 acres and the Marble Hill Conservation Area encompassing 249 acres are also located here.

This area has a 33-lot subdivision (Derby Woods) under construction and a 66-unit Active Adult Neighborhood (Ridgewood at Stow) that has been permitted but not yet developed due to market conditions. While some residentially zoned parcels remain vacant, some have constraints due to wetlands and poor access.

Minute Man Air Field is located in this quadrant along with several industrial businesses and a café. Some of the industrial land remains vacant due to its isolated location and roadway access. As stated in the 1996 Master Plan, Minute Man Air Field is a privately owned, public-use general aviation air field located off of Boxboro Road, two miles north of the Town Center. The airfield owns the following acreage:

- 125 acres classified (by the assessors) as commercial and industrial uses
- 32.3 acres classified as developable and potentially developable residential land
- 20,660 square feet of non-residential existing building space
- 39.8 acres of developable commercial/industrial land with a build-out potential of another 326,700 square feet of commercial space

In the 1990s, an industrial subdivision located next to Minute Man Air Field was granted by the Planning Board, but the conditions of the approval were appealed by the land owner and no construction has occurred. As approved, the site would support approximately 600,000 square feet of building space. Limited access to the site may diminish its build-out potential as an industrial subdivision. Only Boxboro Road leads to the site: it is a fairly narrow, winding country road that becomes much narrower at the Stow/Boxborough town line.

Northwest Stow Recommended Actions

Smart Growth Principles

Not all Smart Growth Principles can be applied here, but those that can should be implemented, including compact development, preservation of the environment, and conservation of natural resources.

Evaluate Zoning and consider modifications for parcels in the Industrial District in and around Minute Man Air Field to promote lower-intensity uses such as support facilities for cleaning or landscaping services/businesses, or small light industrial facilities, incubator businesses and commercial recreation

I. General Action Items

- Work with owners of commercial properties that do not meet DEP compliance standards and monitor those that might be on the verge of noncompliance to see how they can be assisted in securing DEP approval.
- Work with Planning Board to consider developing peer review guidelines and having peer review consultants with a variety of skill sets at-the-ready or “on-call” to assist when large projects come up.
- Engage those with diverse perspectives to participate in dialog about appropriate ways to improve economic development.
- Facilitate creation of a town committee, perhaps working in cooperation with the Agricultural Commission, to develop a bureau of tourism and actively market what Stow has to offer, including the promotion of local products and recreation.

Chapter 5

Natural and Cultural
Resources

CHAPTER 5: Natural and Cultural Resources

“Preserving the Town’s rural character” emerges time and time again as a high priority among Stow’s residents, and is a priority that we cite often in this Master Plan. Although many different angles – ranging from housing density to traffic congestion to economic development – factor into the question of how we can preserve our rural character, the foundation of the discussion rests on the rural character itself: the Town’s natural landscapes and features, as well as the historic buildings and other sites that reflect the Town’s timeless appeal. This chapter attempts to inventory the various aspects of Stow’s natural and cultural resources in order to give us a better sense of what we have, what we want to keep, what we risk losing, and how to use that information to meet our priorities.

Lundy Property



A. Vision

We envision a town that continues to place value on protecting our present natural resources, while working to expand and augment the arts and cultural opportunities within our community. Stow will continue to implement measures to preserve key land features and sensitive environmental areas. It will also explore new and innovative ways to support a variety of community-based cultural programming.

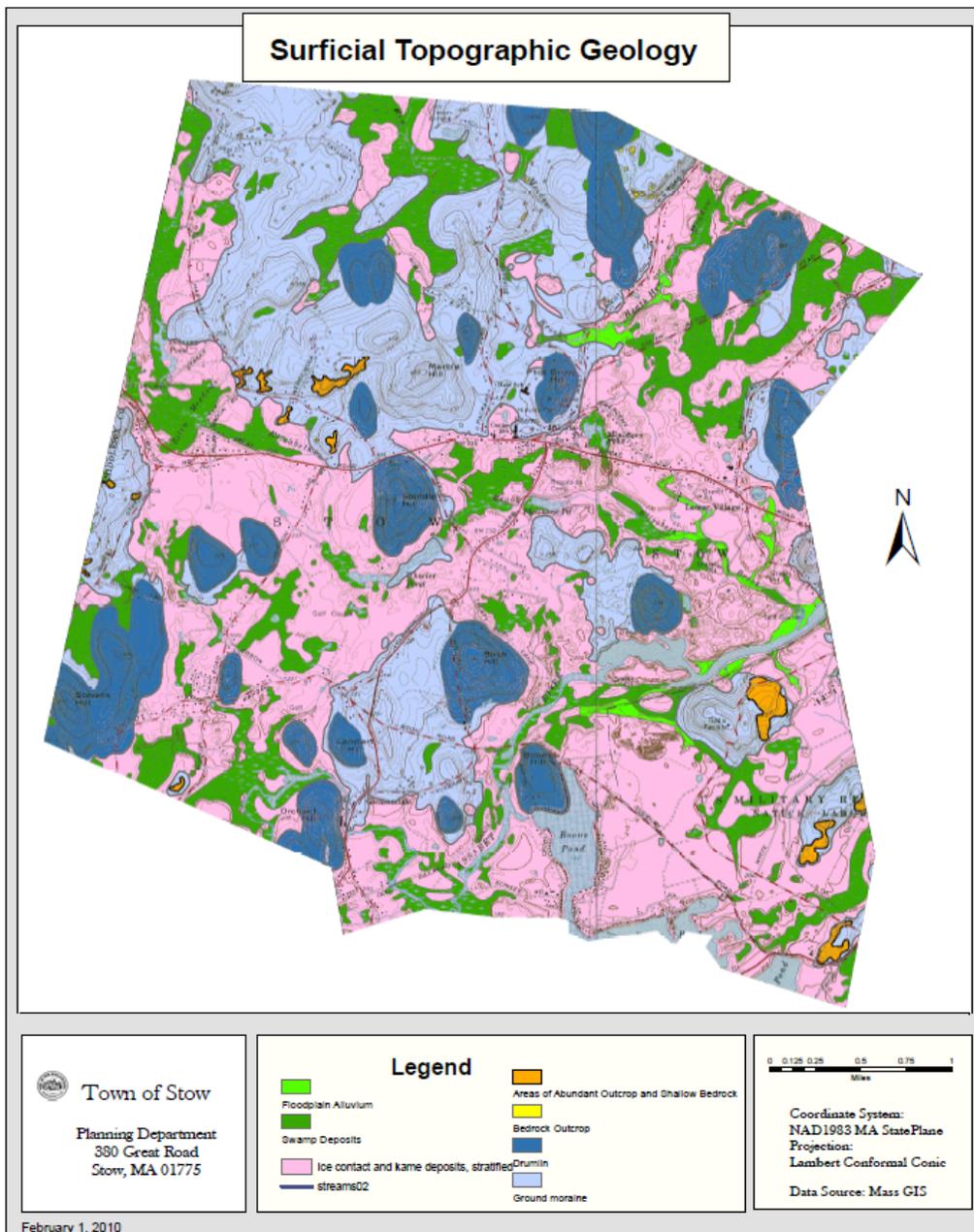
B. Natural Resources

The Pleistocene Glaciations formed the hummocky topography that is such a significant characteristic of Stow today. As can be seen from the map below, very little bedrock (orange and yellow areas) is exposed in Stow. The bedrock is buried under glacial deposits. Our soils, topography and drainage patterns were established when the glaciers finally receded – about 12,000 years ago in this area. Many of the high areas (including but not limited to Flagg Hill, Gardner Hill, Spindle Hill) are drumlins (dark blue on map). Drumlins are composed of relatively impermeable, unsorted glacial deposits known as tills. Other high areas (such as Marble Hill) are interpreted to be ground moraines (light blue areas), similar in composition to the drumlins, but deposited differently. The valleys in between are composed of better sorted, more permeable “outwash” deposits. Outwash deposits form soils that are more tillable, and are

the sources of our aquifers. Some of the outwash deposits date back to glacial origins (pink on map), while others at the surface are overprinted by modern surface processes (light and dark green on map). Notice that the “green” deposits are the products of today’s rivers and streams as they rework the landscape through which they flow.

Modern surface processes are often a combination of “natural” conditions (e.g., the seasonal ebb and flow of streams, weather patterns) combined with others that have a decidedly “human” component. Some of the latter include the dams on our rivers (e.g., the dams forming the Delaney Project, the Gleasondale mill area, and Lake Boon); changes associated with farming (clearing, cultivating, filling of wetlands); woodlot management; recreation modifications (golf courses, ball fields, trail clearing); and development (e.g., impervious pavement; site leveling, tree removal).

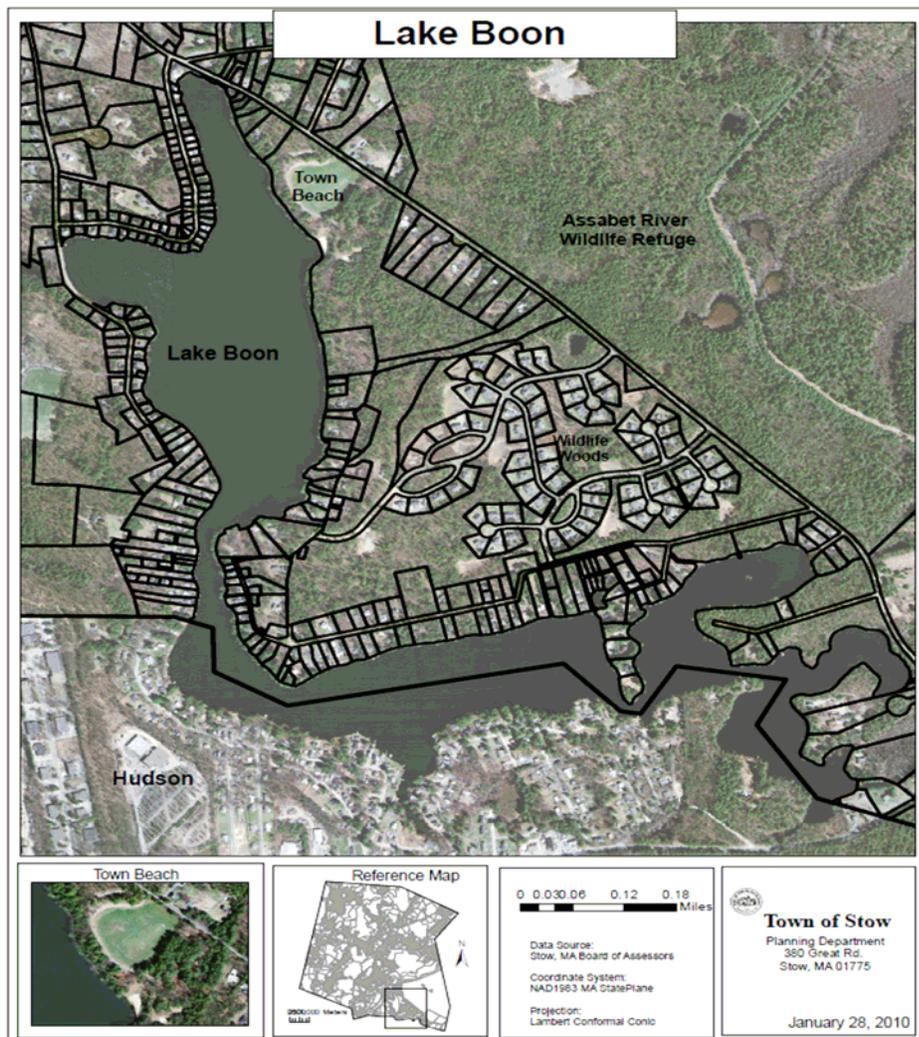
FIGURE: 12 Surficial Geologic Map of Stow



Of the 17.62 square miles that comprise our town, approximately 2-3% is water. The open water is concentrated in our streams, brooks, lakes and the wetland associated with them. Stow lies completely within the SuAsCo Watershed, which is formed by the convergence of the Sudbury and Assabet Rivers into the Concord River. Stow relies on the SuAsCo system for many things: recreation (swimming, boating, fishing), agriculture, golf courses, and drinking water, to name a few examples.



FIGURE: 13 Lake Boon Map



One of Stow’s major water resources is Lake Boon, a dammed-up tributary feeding the Assabet River. The lake is shared with the Town of Hudson. Stow maintains recreational facilities on the lake (Pine Bluff beach and fields; boat ramp).

Lake Boon is unique. Its small lots, narrow dirt roads, tree-lined shores and shallow near-shore wells have a lot of character, and hark back to its days as a summer community. These same features make its transformation into a thriving year-round community somewhat problematic.

In particular:

- The small lots make compliance with the Board of Health septic-well regulations extremely challenging.
- As smaller cottages are updated, the impervious surfaces and runoff increase, further compromising the water quality (see next paragraph).

Another major concern with the Lake Boon area is the lake itself. It is an ecological fact that Lake Boon suffers from eutrophication, a condition in which, due to an excess of nitrogen and phosphorus, plant life in a water body grows excessively, taking up most of the dissolved oxygen, thereby killing other forms of life such as fish. The rate of decay and prognosis is debatable. If we as a town merely wait for this inevitability, we will severely restrict our options at that time. Many in town feel that we must make every effort to protect this asset, and support for this directive must be tested.

Two organizations in Stow are directly involved with the oversight of Lake Boon:

1. The **Lake Boon Association (LBA)** is a community based organization, supported by membership dues. On their website (www.lakeboon.org) they describe themselves as follows:

“Lake Boon Association (LBA) – Incorporated in 1921 as the Lake Boon Improvement Association, Inc., it is currently known as The Lake Boon Association. Although its name has changed throughout the years, its Charter has always been to foster, maintain and improve the quality of the environmental and recreational aspects of Lake Boon.

Mission Statement - It is the mission of the Lake Boon Association and the Lake Boon Commission to preserve, protect and enhance the environmental, aesthetic, recreational and economic value of Lake Boon, and to strive for a sensible balance between recreational activities and healthy wildlife habitats through in-lake and watershed management.”

“Activities - Although originally founded to emphasize recreational activities, its emphasis has been modified to include the environment. Toward that end, there have been fundraising, recreational and educational activities. Fundraising and recreational activities to date have included: walkathons, raffles, dances, boat parades, water carnivals, music boat/lighting of the lake and flea markets. The educational activities have been directed toward understanding the nature of some of the problems and defining actions individual lake residents can take to minimize deterioration of lake quality.” (www.lakeboon.org)

2. The **Lake Boon Commission** is a state-regulated board, administered by a board appointed by the selectmen in the Towns of Hudson (1 member) and Stow (2 members). Their duties, as described on the LBA website, are as follow:

“**Lake Boon Commission (LBC)** -- This unpaid commission is empowered to regulate recreational activities and the use of motorboats.”

Joint responsibilities

The two work closely together to maintain and improve many aspects of the lake.

Educational programs supported by the groups include a **Lake Stewardship Program** that includes an information-rich website with “green” recommendations to encourage “lake-friendly” lifestyles. These include but are not limited to “green” household products, lawn care recommendations, a group-rate septic system maintenance (offered twice a year), storm water runoff and prevention information, and wildlife information.

A long-range plan to reverse the eutrophication of the lake provided funding for chemically treating the lake with an herbicide to kill off the yearly weeds. Several years of chemical treatment have reduced the weeds to a manageable level. The second phase of the project is to implement a yearly drawdown of the water level in the late fall until the exposed lake shore freezes; then the lake would be allowed to fill, pulling the ice (and weeds) up in the process. The method has promise, and has worked in other towns.

This phase of the project has run into some obstacles:

- A large number of Lake Boon residents have shallow wells that may be adversely affected if the water table falls too much. A 40-inch drawdown may be too much. A concrete plan to deal with wells going dry needs to be in place before the drawdown begins. So far, there is no plan. The Lake Boon Commission, the Conservation Commission, Board of Health, and the MASS DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) are working on a solution that will help keep the weeds in the lake under control, while ensuring that the water supply to the neighborhoods is not compromised.
- As houses in the Lake Boon area get renovated, shallow wells often get replaced with deep wells. An accurate record of how many shallow wells still exist has not been easy to compile. A contingency plan is hard to design without this information.
- A contingency plan costs money. So far, nobody has come up with funding. At its spring 2009 meeting, the LBA generously voted \$10,000 toward the project.

Our waterways are only one natural resource contributing to Stow’s rural character. The Town-held conservation lands (Annie Moore Land, Captain Sargent Farm Land, parts of Flagg Hill,

Gardner Hill /Town Forest, Heath Hen Meadow Brook Woodland, Marble Hill, parts of Spindle Hill) provide a network of trails, many of which are close enough to each other to bring the “Emerald Necklace” tantalizingly close to reality. The trails in the network are in woods, open fields, and wetland areas, and allow residents to enjoy the woods and wetlands in the Town. Many groups in town (Stow Conservation Trust, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts) as well as individuals use the conservation lands regularly.

Protecting our natural resources is an area of ongoing concern and is addressed continuously by various groups in town. Some of these are town-appointed (including the Conservation Commission and the Lake Boon Commission), while others are not (Stow Conservation Trust, Lake Boon Association). It will be important for municipal leaders to work collaboratively and cooperatively with the independent groups to ensure an atmosphere that yields consensus and directs civic energy to address problems as they arise. Looking forward, there will be an ever-growing need for mandates and regulations to help us protect natural resources.

C. Cultural Resources

Cultural resources can be as simple as community get-togethers or as carefully planned as outdoor concert series or community theaters. Activities sponsored by the library, the Recreation Department, the Council on Aging, the public schools, and other organizations all fall under the category of cultural resources. In a less tangible way, our town’s strong sense of community can be counted as a cultural resource as well. This sense of community flows from many of the elements described in earlier sections and includes the following:

- Our community pride in open space and the outdoors, including our farms, orchards, golf courses, conservation land, Lake Boon, and the hills of Stow (Pilot Grove, Marble, Gardner, Flagg, Spindle)
- The visual connection of the library, the Town Common, the Fire House, Town Hall and the Town Building and the Assabet River flowing past the Gleasondale Mill and near the clustered residences of Gleasondale connote a sense of community that dates to the 1800s
- Lake Boon and its clustered residences along the shore with the nearby beach (Pine Bluff Recreation Area)
- Our respect for our town’s history, including our Minutemen, colonial homesteads, burial grounds, and our agricultural heritage ties us directly to the establishment of Stow’s incorporation in 1683
- Our people, who gather together in churches, at schools, for bloodmobiles, during recreation, participating in town government, and more

The Stow Cultural Council (SCC) is a group of residents appointed by the Board of Selectmen to dispense public funding to support community-based projects and activities in the arts, humanities, and interpretive sciences to benefit the residents of Stow. These funds come from money allocated to the SCC by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, as well as other funds that may come from the Town, foundations, or private donations.

The SCC defines its mission as follows: “to create a closer-knit community in Stow by sponsoring and supporting activities and events that bring the diverse elements of our community together for enjoyment and cultural enrichment.”

For the last fiscal year, the SCC approved \$6,765 to support a wide variety of programs. Not all of the programs occur in Stow, but the appeal is widespread and draws in residents and visitors alike. Following are some examples:

- The Lake Boon Water Carnival Music Boat
- The Stow West School Open Houses
- The Hale Middle School Play
- Decorating the light control boxes by the library
- Stow video contest
- The Sounds of Stow Concert Season
- Symphony Pro Musica
- The American Boys Choir
- Stow Garden Tour
- Charlie Chaplin Movie Night
- Three Apples Story Telling Festival
- The Rivers Edge Community Concert
- The Exhibition of Arts and Crafts at the Fitchburg Art Museum
- The Community Arts Festival at Center School
- Jeff Bernhardt Performances at Pompo, Center, and Town Hall
- The Randall Library Summer Reading Program
- The Discovery Museum Stow Day
- Clarence Darrow Performance
- Senior Musical: Best loved songs of the early 20th century with John Root

Numerous other yearly traditions enhance cultural life in Stow as well. The following are annual events funded by a combination of town monies and private donations.

- SpringFest weekend
- FireFighters Association Family Day and “Wash a Fire Truck” Day
- Sounds of Stow Concerts

D. Historic Elements

Much of Stow's character reflects traces of its beginnings over 300 years ago, through its historic buildings, its monuments, and even the layout of the Town Center. We are obligated as a community to support the preservation of this character, working both through organized groups and through stewardship or ownership of historic structures.

Stow has a wealth of early dwellings and structures listed in a Massachusetts Historical Commission inventory prepared back in the 1980s. At Town Meeting in 2009, a vote was taken to enable this inventory to be updated over the next three years. The Master Plan Committee suggests that not only should this inventory be updated, but during this process consideration should be given to how the Town might aid in preserving those buildings which are homes, barns, garages, and other structures.

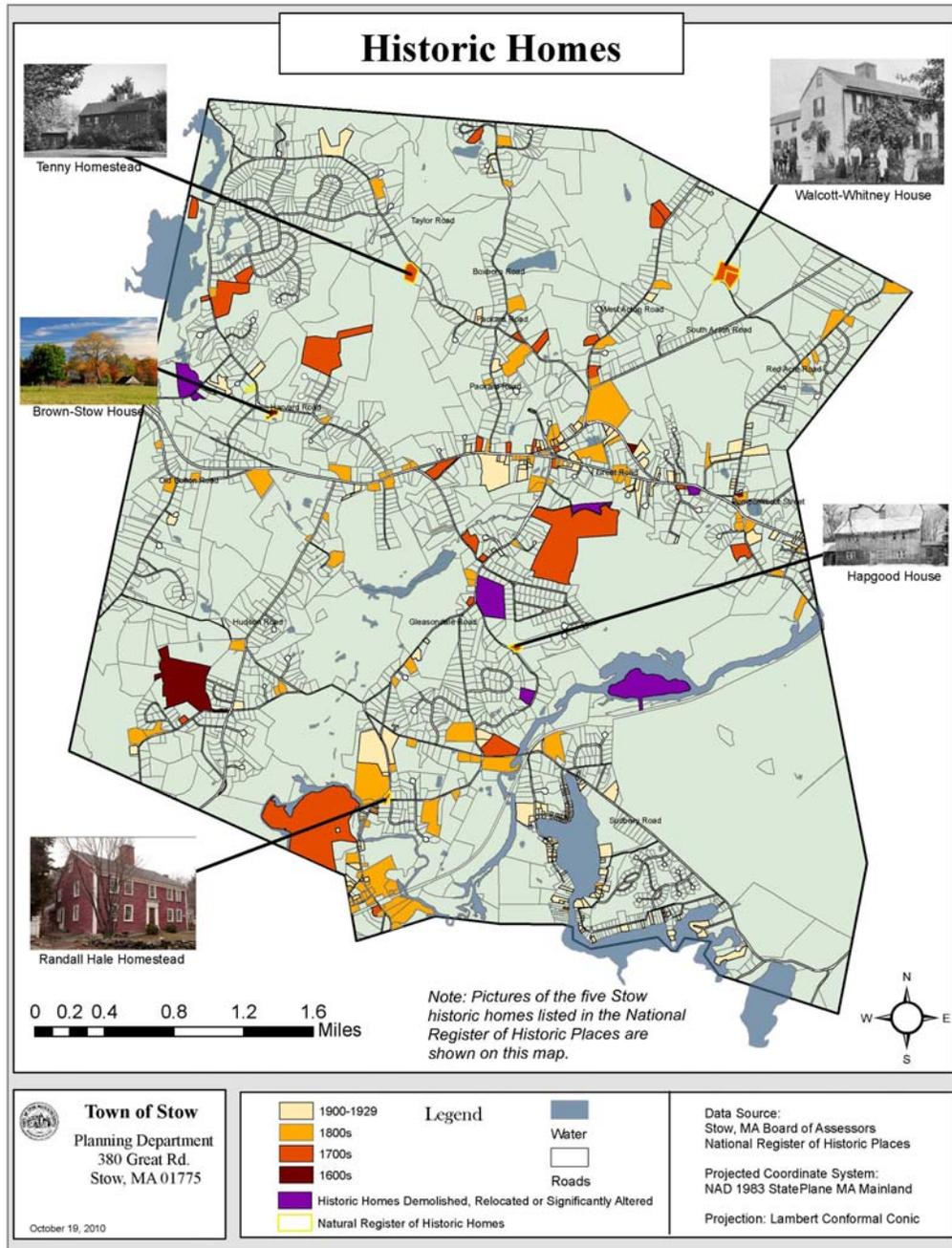
The 1982 inventory lists the following data:

- From 1600-1700 there are 4 buildings.
- From 1700-1800 there are 31 buildings.
- From 1800-1900 there are 132 buildings.
- From 1900-1930 there are 115 buildings, with some but not all of them located around Lake Boon. Interestingly, there is a windmill from 1889 listed.
- The Gleasondale Mill is dated 1854. Information about "Rockbottom," as Gleasondale was known, provides an interesting history of the workings of a mill village.



One can see from the below map that these various historic structures are scattered around town but also clustered in certain key areas closest to the civic center of the community.

FIGURE: 14 Historic Structures Map



As of 2009, we currently know of approximately ten early buildings that have been demolished in recent years along with one that was dismantled and moved to Connecticut.

Options to consider if we want to further protect our historic buildings include the following:

- Adopt a Historical District
- Help to register properties on the State or Federal historic inventory
- Implement demolition delay bylaws
- Provide other incentives to assist property owners in maintaining these properties

The last efforts to establish historic districts in town, undertaken in the early 1990's were met with great resistance by the community. The more recent Master Plan Survey seems to suggest a different trend, reflecting that 69% of the respondents support the creation of a historic district within the Center.

Nonetheless, the size of a district and nature of the proposed restrictions and regulations play a large part in determining if residents will find these protections valuable or onerous. When the Town undertakes its update of the historic properties inventory, the Master Plan Committee strongly suggests that opportunities for protecting these valuable resources in the Town be explored and further public input sought. As land prices continue to increase in the future, and as buildable land becomes more scarce, it is typical for communities to see more and more occasions where older structures are torn down to make way for new development. Wholesale loss of community character can occur if this pressure is allowed to proceed unchecked. Bylaws or regulations pertaining to what can be built on properties where a structure has been removed can help to introduce a disincentive to tearing down older homes and barns. This should also be explored as a means to help preserve the historical resources in the community.

1. Town Center

Our current Town Center is of colonial design, and it houses our historical Town Hall (built in 1847-49), our Town Building with municipal offices, our library, churches, police and fire departments and schools along with a small convenience store. The Town Center also features a prominent Town Common at the intersection of routes 117 and 62. It has a few valuable monuments and proximity to the Stow cemetery. A mix of housing on small lots creates a small neighborhood that is



pedestrian-friendly, and sidewalks let people more easily access the services offered in this area. These elements, together with a scarcity of commercial enterprise, combine to convey a sense of old New England at the hub of the Town.

In 1992, the Stow Historic District Study Committee (SHDSC) proposed the formation of Local Historic Districts as provided in MGL Chapter 40C. The SHDSC determined that the two most likely districts would be in Gleasondale and in Stow Center.

Although residents recognized the need for historic preservation and the fact that a local historic district often leads to increased property values, they said that they did not want to be subject to another layer of regulation. As indicated in the Historic Homes Map of Stow, existing historic homes are located throughout town rather than one localized area, making it difficult to determine a localized area for a Historic District. The Town is in the



process of updating the historic properties inventory. Once this inventory is completed, the Master Plan Committee strongly suggests that the Town seek further public input on opportunities (such as adoption of a Historic District, a Conservancy Overlay District, Demolition Delay Bylaw, and encouragement of property owners to register properties in the Mass Historic Inventory) for protecting historic structures in the Town and on ways to protect them.

2. Buildings

In 1849, the present brick mill in Gleasondale, constructed when the original wooden structure burned, was built in the Greek Revival style. From the mid-1800s to the end of World War II, the Gleasondale Mill housed the fourth oldest woolen mill in the United States. At the end of World War II, the mill was converted to burlap manufacturing, and in 1966, it was converted to its present use as the Gleasondale Industrial Park. In the 1800s, houses for workers were built near the Gleasondale Mill, and many of these houses still exist along Gleasondale Road. The predominant architectural style of the village is Federal, but there are fine examples of Colonial, Greek Revival, Victorian and Italianate architecture within the village.

3. Historic homes

Standing houses in Stow range from the late 1600s to the present. Many substantial houses were built in the early 1800s. These historic buildings are fundamental to Stow's identity. The survival of these historic resources today is neither accidental nor a guarantee for their future. In 1989, Stow lost a 1775 Federal-style dwelling, located at 194 Great Road (Route 117),

adjacent to the current Stow House of Pizza, when the structure was disassembled and moved out of state.

When the post office relocated to the Lower Village, there was an attempt to save an 1875 Greek Revival dwelling, which was temporarily relocated to the same lot. Unfortunately, due to zoning restrictions, the owner was unable to find an economically feasible use. In 2003, the house was demolished. Stow should explore zoning opportunities that might make it easier to save these structures.

An 1859 Italianate-style house, known as the “Faxon House” and located at 189 Great Road, stands on a site that has been developed as a senior living development. The Planning Board, in its permitting process, successfully negotiated a plan that preserved the Faxon House as part of the design of the development. This was an excellent example of collaboration to preserve an historic property with development and redevelopment. It might be possible, in the future, to augment existing regulations to make such collaboration more of a requirement rather than a negotiated process. This should be explored in the future as an improvement to local permitting regulations.

Other historic homes the Town has recently lost include the following:

- Carbury house, Great Road: dismantled and moved out of state
- Eaton house, Great Road: demolished
- Vogel house, Sudbury Road: demolished
- Weathers house, Sudbury Road: demolished
- Kelley house, Treaty Elm Lane: demolished
- Stephenson house, Gleasondale Road: demolished
- Noonan house, Hudson Road: demolished
- Fletcher Box Mill: demolished
- Hop House: demolished
- Zanders Cider Mill, Delaney Street: significantly altered

FIGURE: 15 Antique home photos

Still existing today are some of Stow's most noteworthy historic homes:



E. Heritage Landscapes

It is increasingly common in municipal planning discussions to refer to “heritage landscapes,” loosely defined as the places we picture with a sense of pride and comfort when we run our mind’s eye over our hometown. If you took a trip to the other end of the world and felt homesick, what are some of the landscapes and vistas you would be picturing as you thought about the concept of home? Put another way, if you had to take a photo to put on a calendar to represent Stow, what would you photograph? Featured might be a particular apple orchard, a stretch of road, an old barn or farmhouse, or a certain view of the Town Center. These are all examples of vistas we should attempt to protect in the name of preserving our heritage landscapes.

Stow conducted its own Heritage Landscapes project in 2006 in conjunction with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (which provided funding) and Freedom’s Way Heritage Association¹⁴, a consortium of 37 Massachusetts communities actively engaged in preserving certain aspects of the community for historical or aesthetic reasons (as opposed to, for example, environmental or diversity reasons). That project gathered more than 20 townspeople representing town boards, nonprofits, and private interests to identify what they considered to be heritage landscapes. The group then narrowed its list down to five designated “priority heritage landscapes,” identified as the Assabet River, the Blacksmith Shop, Gleasondale, Lower Village, and Lake Boon/Cottage Neighborhoods.

The committee drew up specific recommendations for the future of each of the priority areas, which can be summarized as follows (for more details, see the Stow Reconnaissance Report in the appendix). The Master Plan Committee agrees that these recommendations are all worthy of pursuit by the Historical Commission once the historical homes inventory is done.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the Town look to establish an historical park area where larger artifacts, perhaps even including small buildings, can be located, displayed, and preserved in lieu of tearing them down or disposing of them. Stow has potentially many old railroad artifacts and certainly has some buildings whose owners may no longer wish to maintain these structures. The best of these items, could perhaps be clustered at one location under the jurisdiction of either a non-profit historical society or under the control of the Town’s Historical Commission. Such an undertaking might also be partially funded with the use of CPA funds.

¹⁴ Freedom’s Way Heritage Association has recently obtained National Heritage Area designation by Congress. For more information on Freedom’s Way, go to: <http://www.freedomsway.org/>

1. **Assabet River**

Recommendations from the Heritage Landscapes project:

- Obtain community representation on the OAR Board and work with them as well as regional organizations such as the SuAsCo Watershed Association in efforts to preserve the river and marshland
- Work in conjunction with the Town of Hudson to resolve issues surrounding the ARRT
- Document historic resources along the river, particularly the crossings, Gleasondale and Crow Island

2. **Blacksmith Shop**

Recommendations from the Heritage Landscapes project:

- Prepare a Massachusetts Historical Commission (MHC) Form B
- Consider additional documentation by an historic structures report
- Measure, photograph and stabilize building
- Develop a reuse and preservation plan
- Consider town needs for various types of space
- List in the National Register to make the blacksmith shop potentially eligible for Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF)
- Contact the MHC to learn of MPPF status when ready to pursue rehabilitation of the shop

The MPC recommends that the Town explore feasible and cost-effective options for relocating the Blacksmith Shop to accommodate Center School construction.

3. **Gleasondale**

Recommendations from the Heritage Landscapes project:

- Document the Gleasondale heritage landscape on an MHC Area Form
- Evaluate for appropriate National Register boundaries and prepare National Register nomination
- Pursue local historic district designation for this well preserved village
- Seek input on tax advantages that could be used to rehabilitate and reuse mill complex, and work with the sellers to promote these advantages to prospective buyers

4. **Lower Village**

Recommendations from the Heritage Landscapes project:

- Document the Lower Village heritage landscape on an MHC Area Form and update 1980s individual property forms
- Evaluate for appropriate National Register boundaries and prepare National Register nomination, particularly for the area near White Pond Road, Red

Acre Road, Pompositticut Street and Route 117 including historic houses, the cemetery and the Common

- Work with the Planning Board to study and develop a village center bylaw that develops a pedestrian streetscape by placing buildings close to the road consistent with extant historic buildings and locating parking behind or screened from view
- Consider neighborhood architectural conservation district designation in order to address size, scale and materials of new construction and additions, consistent with extant historic resources

5. Lake Boon and Cottage Neighborhoods

Recommendations from the Heritage Landscapes project:

- Document the Lake Boon neighborhood on an MHC Area Form and individual forms for certain cottages, the dam and town beach
- Develop a preservation plan considering neighborhood architectural conservation district designation
- Encourage the Planning Board to consider limiting development of large dwellings on the lake shore
- Consider potential use of special permit process particularly in the event that an existing cottage is demolished to build a new house

F. Preserving and Enhancing Natural Land Features

The priority goals for natural resource and open space protection have been identified by other town committees and in published reports such as the Community Development Plan as the following:

- Protect more open space (open space will be discussed further in the next chapter)
- Implement wildlife corridor and linkages of open space with trails
- Protect the existing character consisting of stone walls, trees, etc, including preserving and replacing shade trees
- Protect groundwater quality

Many of the priorities expressed by residents relating to open space appear oriented toward protection of the natural resources and community character of Stow rather than toward provision of additional recreational uses. Two exceptions to this are the goal of completion of acquisition for the inter-municipal multiple use Assabet River Rail Trail and the acquisition of land along the river. According to those participating in the Community Development Plan (EO418) forum, Crow Island/Track Road's high score in prioritization is related to the potential use of this site for active recreational uses (such as soccer fields and the rail trail connection) in

addition to its natural resource characteristics. Funding for various sections of Track Road has been provided by the Community Preservation Act.

Three immediate opportunities for preserving and enhancing our natural resources are the Emerald Necklace trail network, the Assabet River Rail Trail and Lake Boon. Regarding these areas, the MPC recommends adopting the recommendations from the 2006 Stow Reconnaissance Report.

1. Emerald Necklace

In the next five years, we need to continue work toward completing the Emerald Necklace walking trail of conservation land throughout the Town of Stow. The Stow Conservation Trust (SCT) has led the drive for the creation of this walking trail. Once a year, a hardy group of residents and friends walk this trail, which currently extends about ten miles through Stow. While there are gaps in this trail, the SCT and the Conservation Commission are working together to join all the pieces together.

2. Assabet River Rail Trail

The Assabet River Rail Trail, once a vision, is now a reality in adjoining communities. Stow is the missing link. We need to identify the financial issues, the concerns of current landowners, and the possibilities for action to complete the rail trail in Stow and connect to the pieces in our neighboring towns. We must make proposals that alleviate concerns and explore all options, including incentives for property owners, so as to make this opportunity a reality in Stow. Recently the Town concluded a successful purchase of the remaining right-of-way on Track Road, which connects with Maynard and runs to Sudbury Road in Stow by the Sudbury Road bridge. It is from here to Hudson that the establishment of a trail needs work. Once the trail is connected to Hudson, Stow residents will be able to easily enjoy the existing 5.5 miles of trail that run through that community and into downtown Marlborough. (See Chapter 8 for more information on the Rail Trail.)

3. Lake Boon

As discussed earlier in this chapter and elsewhere in this Master Plan, the eutrophication of Lake Boon is an ongoing problem that will not improve with time. Spatial limitations for wells and septic systems are not going to change. The eutrophication problem is ongoing. The chemical treatments for the weeds have made a difference, but are a short-term fix. They have, however, postponed the necessity for action by slowing the weed growth until decisions about the next step can be made. The drawdown proposal has merits, but there are some problems with it that have to be worked out. In either case, a decision will have to be made soon, if the lake is not to revert to its previous state. This would, over time, turn more and more of the lake into a wetland area instead of a body of water. The MPC recommends that the Town support ongoing action to prevent this from happening.

Many in town feel that we must make every effort to protect this asset, but the full measure of support for this directive is yet to be ascertained. Relevant Town Meeting votes, committee and board policies, and other municipal actions going forward will help the community evaluate the level of willingness the community has to take action. In order to help guide that process, various stakeholders should work toward developing a scope which depicts a vision of what recovery means, what it will look like, and what it will cost. Broad consensus will need to be achieved on that vision. Once the vision is developed, individual problem areas can be detailed and studied. Diverse committee participation and especially the assistance and leadership of the Lake Boon Association, should be sought in developing solutions to this critical problem. Then, a thoughtful implementation plan and schedule could potentially be rolled out which will depict how the community will address the identified problems in order to improve the lake and help it meet the desired vision. Measures such as a Betterment Fee or other funding mechanisms will need to be explored to enable the Town to implement the preferred approach. When the problem analysis is being conducted, special attention should be given to the areas outlined below.

a. Weeds

For years now, it has been recognized that the weed problem in Lake Boon has not been resolved. The basins are becoming filled with vegetative growth. The density of population around the lake both in Stow and in Hudson is overwhelming the land and its ability to keep the lake environment both clean and safe for use. The prognosis for this area is poor, and efforts need to be taken now to prevent further degradation.

b. Fertilizers

We need to educate the residents of lake properties that using fertilizer on their lawns feeds the weeds and perpetuates their spread. The use of fertilizers must be prohibited near the lake, whether through a buffer zone or outright prohibition. Fertilizers are non-point source pollutions that come from a variety of sources and they are one of the biggest offenders in the lake pollution.

c. Septic failures

Existing cesspools and failing septic systems exacerbate the weed problem. Before 1940, Lake Boon was a summer colony with small cottages and cesspools that had two months of use. For the rest of the year, the lake area “rested.” Today large year-round houses on small lots have replaced many of the small cottages, and septic systems on these lots are being stressed from heavy usage. Some failed systems have been replaced, but providing “maximum feasible upgrades” only postpones the inevitable. In the future, lake residents will saturate the ground and its water sources with waste that has nowhere else to go.

Town officials and residents must work together to create a plan to save this valuable resource for future generations. Years ago, the selectmen sponsored an engineering study to explore alternatives to sewers for lake residences. The study proposed a three-phase implementation

that included the Hudson side of Lake Boon in the third phase. The study was never implemented. Meanwhile, aging and failed septic systems continue to adversely affect the lake.

4. Assabet River

There is no question that Stow's charm and the health of the Assabet River are intertwined. The Assabet River is a major component of the SuAsCo Watershed, running "free" through Stow from the dam at Gleasondale to the Ben Smith Dam in Maynard. The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) is responsible for monitoring its waters to ensure that they are in compliance with the Massachusetts Water Quality Standards (MWQS) (314 CMR 4.0). The DEP ascertained that the Assabet does not comply, and issued a report (2004) entitled "Assabet River Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for Phosphorus"¹⁵ as part of its "pollution budget," designed to restore the health of the river. More recently, the Army Corps of Engineers released its 2009 draft of "Assabet River, Massachusetts Sediment and Dam Removal Feasibility Study." This report explores the cost, process and end results of dredging, limiting winter discharge levels of phosphorus and removing the dams from the Assabet River as measures to bring the river into compliance with the law.

The 2004 report describes the Assabet as an "effluent dominated, impounded river," as it has nine dams, four major publicly owned treatment works (POTW) and three minor ones along its length from Westborough to Concord. Stow is the only town on the river that does not have a POTW discharging into the river. The Assabet fails to comply with the MWQS on the following counts: the phosphorus content and organic enrichment are too high, while the dissolved oxygen is too low. Together, these mean that the river is eutrophied.

Phosphorus, dissolved oxygen levels and organic enrichment are not unrelated. Phosphorus is a major contributor to excessive plant growth which results in organic enrichment, and when the bloom dies, it decays, depleting the dissolved oxygen in the system. Phosphorus comes in two forms: Ortho-phosphorus is dissolved in the water column and is readily available to plants. The second form, "particulate" phosphorus, settles into the sediment, and is not readily available to plants. The sediments are trapped primarily behind the dams. The cycle continues: as the ortho-phosphorus is removed from the water (it is either taken up by plants, or flows out of the system downstream), excess particulate phosphorus dissolves into the water column, where it becomes available to plants. As long as there is any phosphorus in the system, plants can use it. The conventional thinking was that phosphorus discharge in the growing season (April to October) was much more of a concern than during the winter (November to March).

The DEP has identified the sources of the excessive phosphorus. The sources get split into "point source" and "non-point source" categories. The point source pollution sites are the POTWs. The POTWs discharge both forms of phosphorus. The report includes a study that looked at how much of the phosphorus comes from point sources vs. non-point sources. The

¹⁵ Report Number MA82B-01-2004-01; Control Number CN 2010; available from the DEP, or online at: <http://www.state.ma.us/dep/brp/wm/tmdls.htm>

point sources were found to contribute 82 - 97% of the total phosphorus in all conditions except for rare very wet, high water conditions, when the non-point sources are major contributors. The Elizabeth Brook (at the Maynard end) is listed in the report as a non-point source. Under high water and wet conditions, it carries an extremely high phosphorus load.¹⁶

Stow was not included in the preliminary talks, or the first draft report but did submit comments at the appropriate time. Many of Stow's concerns were addressed in the revised 2009 report. In addition, Stow has been allowed to join the *Assabet River Study Coordination Team*, but only as non-voting members. Appointed representatives have attended the meetings held between the two reports.

The 2009 Feasibility Study (released in November 2009) cites that the non-growing season phosphorus discharges are not as benign as formerly thought. In fact, they are significant contributors to the sediment phosphorus. The study discusses the prospects of using combined methods to reduce the overall phosphorus budget for the river. These include dredging, dam removal, and limiting the non-growing season phosphorus discharge levels to those required for growing season levels. Dredging on its own is considered to be a short-term, nonpermanent fix, unless the overall point source phosphorus discharge levels are drastically reduced year round. Growing season reduction levels of discharge, combined with the removal of all the dams, and dredging would bring the river closer to its goal of 90% reduction in sediment-bound phosphorus, but still will not get it there. The study discusses each dam individually, as the project would be staged. Removing the Ben Smith Dam would have the largest benefit because it impounds the longest reach of river, so has collected the most phosphorus-rich sediment.

The report also points out that the Ben Smith Dam:

- Is part of an historic district eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- Has profound effects on the upstream wetlands
- Would be the most expensive to remove (estimated at \$13 million)
- Removing it has the blessing of the US Fish and Wildlife Service as part of its project to restore former migratory corridors in the SuAsCo Watershed

Obviously, the removal of the dams would drastically change Stow's section of the Assabet. The excess phosphorus is a problem, but as the reports state, the source of the phosphorus is overwhelmingly from the POTWs. Several related papers and reports have been released¹⁷ in the last few years. These should be carefully read. It is important to note that nothing definitive has been decided about the dam removal.

¹⁶ Ibid. Page 21 Of 104

¹⁷ Assabet River, Massachusetts Sediment and Dam Removal Feasibility Study; Army Corps of Engineers 2009.

Assabet River Sediment and Dam Removal Study Modeling Report, prepared for the Army Corps of Engineers, 2008

When the 2009 Army Corps report was released (November 2009) the Board of Selectmen held a public meeting that included representatives from the Corps and the firm that did the study. Comments from Stow citizens, and from Stow's boards were collected. On November 19, 2009, Mass DEP and the Army Corps of Engineers held a meeting in Stow to get citizen feedback about the newly released study. Both events were well attended, and the overwhelming consensus of those present was that the dams should not be removed.

Comments from Stow residents and comments from the Stow boards were collected and compiled into a letter strongly opposing dam removal. The letter was sent to the Mass DEP, state and federal representatives and the Army Corps of Engineers during the period open to public comment.

G. Action Items

- Continue efforts to procure funds and work collaboratively with SCT and other groups to complete the Emerald Necklace trail
- Continue procuring parcels and working with property owners to establish contiguous access as a right-of-way to the Rail Trail
- Actively pursue improvements to Lake Boon problems by educating residents as to environmental use of fertilizers, septic, wells, etc.
- Restrict new building permits
- Discourage teardowns
- Limit square footage of new development to protect against overbuilding
- Pursue zoning and bylaw changes to limit development on the lake
- Find ways to preserve existing structures
- Stay engaged in ongoing discussions and studies such as the *Assabet River Study Coordination Team* and maintain an active role in any future studies initiated
- Identify sources and develop strategies to mitigate excess of phosphorus in Elizabeth Brook during high-water, wet weather conditions
- Encourage the DEP to fund follow-up studies of non-growing season phosphorus discharge and its role in the overall nutrient budget of the river

- Explore protection of the Town Center through possibilities such as a historic district, conservancy overlay district, demolition delay bylaw, Mass historic inventory
- Explore protection of historic homes and buildings through possibilities such as a historic inventory; zoning/bylaw changes to discourage teardowns; restrict rebuilds; and inclusion of eligible properties in the State and/or National Historic Register
- Explore improvements to the Lower Village including a village-friendly bylaw;
- Find ways to enhance subdivision rules and site plan regulations to attempt to require stone walls and other natural features to be preserved and maintained

Chapter 6

Open Space and
Recreation



CHAPTER 6: Open Space and Recreation

A. Introduction

Residents of Stow recognize what a special place this is and how rare it is that, despite the increasing development pressure that has changed many surrounding communities, Stow has maintained a rural ambience. As evidenced by the recent Master Plan Survey, few resources are as highly valued by Stow residents as their open space.

“The Town’s rural character” was the number one answer to the question “What do you like best about Stow?”, and not surprisingly, preserving that character showed up recurrently on the question about what residents want to see in 2020. But how exactly can that priority be implemented? Agreeing on the importance of rural vistas and undeveloped fields and forests in which we can exercise, play with our children, meditate and admire nature is one thing, but what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the Town is able to act on that priority?

In 1968, Stow designated certain areas as recreation-conservation district zoning and defined its uses as “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.” This provides added protection for the Town’s open spaces by restricting building near the zone and laying out the many ways that the designated areas can be used, ranging from farming and horticulture to cross-country ski trails and boat landings.

The responsibility for completing an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) lies with the Stow Conservation Commission (SCC). The SCC appointed an Open Space and Recreation Plan Committee, which worked with Stow’s Open Space Committee to complete the Town’s plan. The most recent version, released in June 2008, is an excellent document that contains a wealth of useful information and well conceived strategies for protecting open space in numerous areas. Go to http://www.stow-ma.gov/pages/StowMA_BComm/StowMA_OpenSpace/index for details.

Seen as a critical tool for creating an inventory of a community’s protected land and water areas and for identifying undeveloped parcels that are a priority for protection, an OSRP is valid if it has been accepted by the state and is updated every five years. By having a valid OSRP, which Stow does, a community also becomes eligible for grant programs offered by the DCS, many of which are specifically geared to land and water preservation.

While an OSRP is a critical factor to consider in making recommendations or decisions about how land and resources can best be deployed, the key challenge that this Master Plan must address, where open land is concerned, is how to reconcile the Town's high priority on open space with the responsibility to find ways to use available resources to meet emerging needs. Although the OSRP provides excellent guidance from the specific perspective of land preservation, there are other questions to consider as well. For example, how can we use existing land and water resources to meet the Town's needs as it grows but still avoid the overdevelopment that would dilute Stow's highly valued rural character? Not only personal preferences but also Department of Environmental Protection guidelines, Board of Health requirements, and the protection of land around wellhead areas need to factor in to these discussions.

Exploring how to accommodate these needs will be the focus of this chapter.

B. Vision

Our vision for open space and recreation lands is as follows:

Stow residents will continue to value their town's sense of community, rural character, open spaces, quiet, agricultural, small-town feel, with linkages of open space and trail networks providing opportunities for biking and hiking in addition to those provided by the Rail Trail.

Preservation and improvement of Stow's environmental resources and open spaces are important considerations when planning for Stow's future development. Environmental resources such as soils, groundwater, surface water, woodlands, marshes, wildlife and open space add to Stow's character and quality of life of its residents as well as provide recreational opportunities. As the Town grows, it will be important to increase the amount of protected open space so that residents can continue to enjoy the sense of openness and the rural character that initially attracted them to Stow.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan identified the following nine objectives for protecting land in Stow:

1. Protect agricultural lands to preserve and enhance Stow's agricultural base, and maintaining its viability for the long term.
2. Protect lands that provide areas for active and passive recreation including ball fields and trails.
3. Protect lands that link existing conservation holdings in Stow and surrounding communities.
4. Protect lands in areas of town currently underserved by protected open space.
5. Protect land with significant surface and ground water resources.
6. Protect land that will preserve Stow's small town nature.
7. Protect important natural habitats and wildlife corridors.
8. Protect important scenic vistas.
9. Protect land with significant historical or cultural resources.

The Master Plan Committee acknowledges the importance of these nine objectives, many of which mirror the goals in this chapter. These will be addressed in another section of this chapter.

C. Progress

Stow should be proud of the progress it has made to date in realizing some of the goals it set for itself in the last Master Plan (“Stow 2000”). In particular, the following goals from the last Stow 2000 have been successfully met.

- Additional lands have been permanently protected. The current Open Space and Recreation Plan as well as the Land Use Task Force Report recommend that one acre of land be protected for every one acre developed.
- Additional land for agriculture has been preserved with Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APR) on both the Mosley and Tyler properties and two parcels of town owned land are being leased to a local farmer for agricultural purposes. One of these parcels consisting of six acres is a portion of the Snow property where our new recreation complex is sited. If this land is not farmed in the future, it could be used for any municipal purpose.
- Improved trail network within Stow.

Some progress has been made on several other goals, including acquiring easements on land needed for the Assabet River Rail Trail connections.

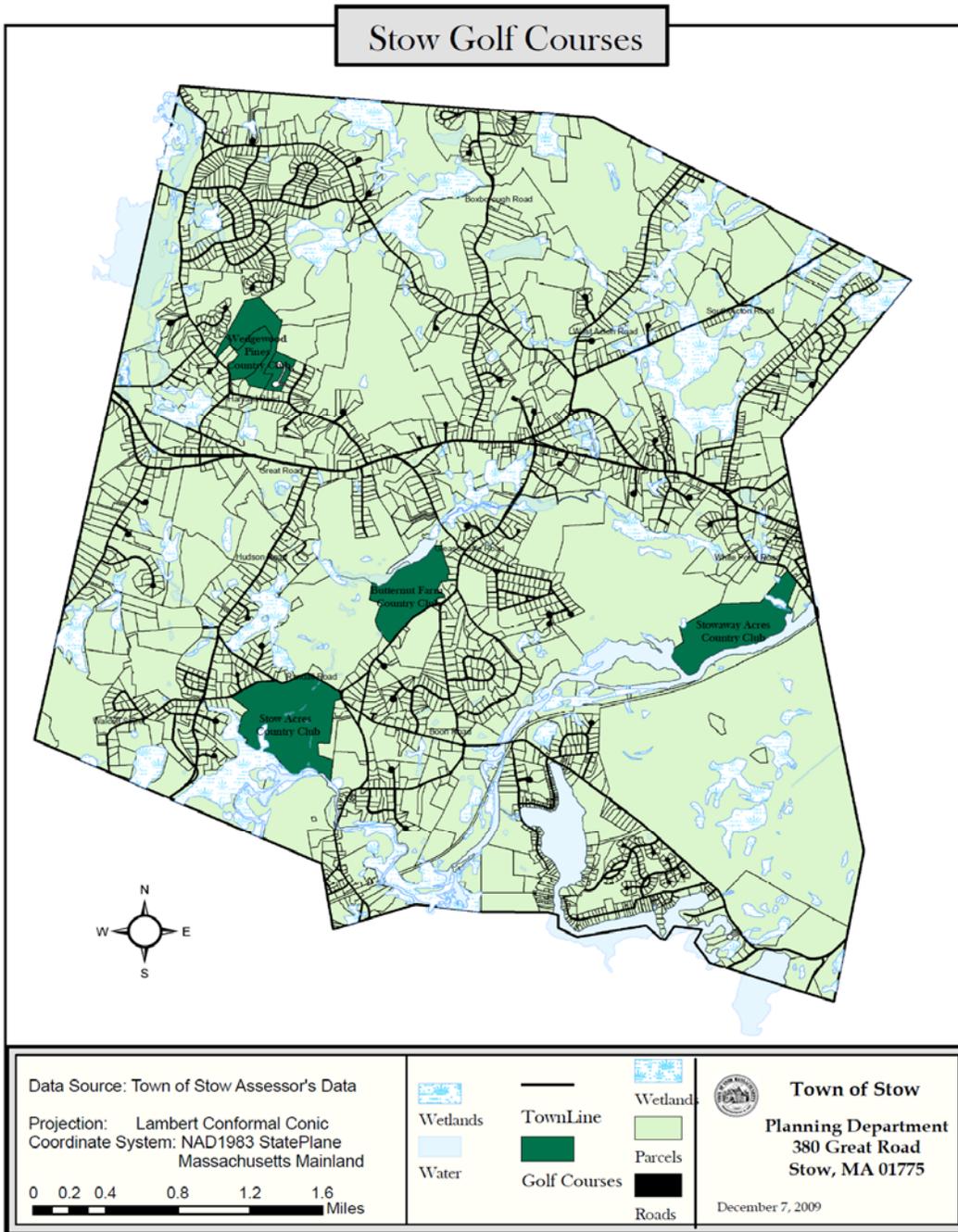
D. Golf Courses: What’s in Their Future?

Within the Town of Stow lie five privately owned golf courses: Stow Acres North and South, Butternut, Wedgewood and Stowaway. Many residents understandably lump the golf courses into the category of open space, either consciously or subconsciously, because they do indeed provide open vistas of undeveloped land. However, it is important to remember that golf courses have no legal protections to ensure that they remain open space. If the commercial entities that owned the golf courses decided to close up shop, they could sell their land to any buyer they chose, just as any other landowner could do. A parcel that now represents a grassy stretch of land with 18 holes could be converted into a subdivision with numerous houses or a dense 40B development. The following data regarding zoning and development reflect the current status of each golf course. (Note that the abbreviation R/C denotes recreation/ conservation, and that MGL Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B are discussed in the section following the chart.)

Golf course	Acreage	Current zoning	Desired outcomes	Notes
Butternut Golf Club	91.34 acres	Some Recreation Conservation mostly Residential	Active recreation, PCD residential dev. in interior of parcel with open space maintained along Rt. 62	Currently enrolled in Chapter 61B
Stow Acres Country Club	328.06 acres	Residential	Maintain open vistas along Randall Rd, PCD residential dev. with homes in the interior portion, recreation, open space	Currently enrolled in Chapter 61B
Stowaway Golf Course	110.50 acres	Small portion Recreation Conservation, mostly Commercial	Entire parcel should be rezoned Recreation/Conservation as commercial portions are separated by the R/C district; canoe/kayak launch, wildlife habitat, passive and active rec.	Elizabeth Brook frontage. NOT enrolled in Chapter 61B
Wedgewood Pines	146.66 acres	Recreation/ Conservation	Wildlife habitat, passive and active rec. (playing fields)	Currently enrolled in Chapter 61B

Stow Master Plan – Published October 2010

FIGURE: 16 Golf Course Map



The Town should consider undertaking a golf course study to explore the desired outcome for each of these parcels. One option to consider is adoption of special zoning regulations for golf courses to guide the Town and the landowner if the time should come that they are no longer to be used as golf courses. For example, applying open space residential design (OSRD) zoning to the golf courses or establishing a new zone specifically for the golf courses, to allow more dense development than allowed in a PCD in exchange for additional open space and preservation of existing views, may be an appropriate strategy.

OSRD is a “smart growth” principle that provides a method of planning residential development with the goal of conserving open land in a new subdivision. Traditional zoning bylaws requiring, for example, two-acre zoning were originally conceived of as a way of preventing overdevelopment, but these requirements have resulted in a very inefficient use of open space. With traditional zoning, parcels are quickly consumed by houses and lawns, leaving no individual lot with enough land for fields, meadows or forests. OSRD discards traditional zoning bylaws and instead imposes a four-step planning process that, in the words of the Green Neighborhoods Alliance of Massachusetts, “reverses the typical subdivision planning process. First, the open space is designated; second, the houses are sited; third the roads and trails are planned; and fourth, the lot lines are drawn.”

In other words, houses are sited more densely in order to allow for larger swaths of unsullied land. This is typically done to allow no greater number of actual new units than a conventional subdivision but to require at least 50% of the land to remain as open space. The benefits to the environment of OSRD are myriad, and include lower water usage (less lawn space), fewer pesticides and chemicals utilized in manicuring lawns, fewer miles of roads for a municipality to maintain, more ground water recharge as impervious areas are reduced, and more. As mentioned above, designating the open space first, before determining where homes will be sited, is an idea worth considering.

In 1995, Stow adopted a Planned Conservation Development (PCD) bylaw, which is an OSRD zone but under different nomenclature. The PCD bylaw permits a reduction of lot dimensional requirements, thereby promoting clustered developments with 60% open land. The regulations provide for single-family and multi-family dwelling units, establish setbacks for building to public ways and property lines, and specify the dimensional requirements and allowed uses of the open land. MGL Chapter 40A Section 9 requires that the land be permanently protected as conservation or park land.

E. Farms, Orchards and Golf Courses: The Reach of Chapter 61

Land is acquired by the Town in various ways: negotiation with developers as part of the permitting process, Chapter 61, donation, tax foreclosure, and town purchase. Of these methods, only Chapter 61 and town purchase require a monetary exchange.

1. An overview of Chapter 61

Certain open land parcels can be classified under Massachusetts General Law Chapter 61 (forestry), 61A (agriculture) and 61B (open space/recreation), which allow for some privately held properties, including farms, orchards and golf courses, used for the stipulated purposes to receive reduced tax assessments in exchange for a promise to maintain the land for the specified use for a specified number of years. In Stow, this status currently applies to 2228.96 acres on 113 separate parcels of land. That represents 19.7% of Stow’s total land acreage,

significantly higher than most communities. It is not, however, a surprising percentage when one considers Stow's predominately rural and agricultural makeup.

The statute requires that such a classification includes a commitment by the land owners to offer the Town the right of first refusal if the lands are ever sold for development or converted by the owner to another use. Towns can assign that right to a nonprofit land conservation agency if they so choose.

However, the "first refusal" clause can be somewhat difficult to execute as it requires that a decision be made within 120 days, and often it is challenging to convene a Town Meeting to approve the necessary funds within that time period. One way around this is for the Town to obtain prior approval to purchase key parcels if they become available. However, a source of funding would still need to be readily available, and the appropriation of funds must be done by the legislative body for the community, which in Stow's case is Town Meeting. Thus, it remains difficult for a municipality with a Town Meeting form of government to be able to act quickly on a land acquisition. Alternatively, it is possible for Stow to use CPA funds (with Town Meeting approval) or other accounts to set aside money into a land conservation fund¹⁸ to buy specified parcels of Chapter 61-protected land in the event that the land is put up for sale. Other financial resources available for the purchase of Chapter 61 land include public/private partnerships with nonprofit conservation groups such as Stow Conservation Trust (SCT), OAR (Organization for the Assabet River), and SVT (Sudbury Valley Trustees); and the Conservation Commission Conservation Fund.

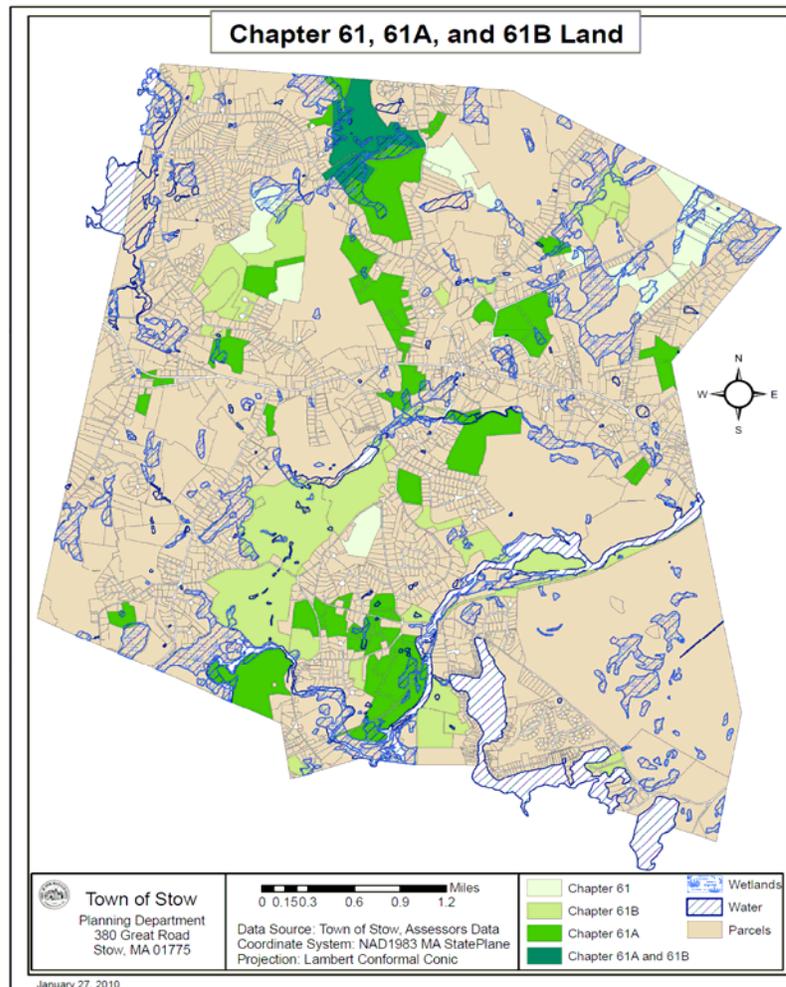
In November 2008, the Selectmen adopted a comprehensive policy regarding sale of Chapter 61 properties; see Appendix . This policy set out procedures it will utilize when parcels become available but did not attempt to prioritize parcels of land the Town might wish to protect.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan includes a complete listing of properties with Chapter 61 status; see Appendix. The MPC recommends that the "Evaluation Criteria for Ranking Parcels" developed by the Open Space Committee and outlined in the OSRP from June 2008 be utilized in evaluating these parcels. The Open Space Committee is updating the Criteria for Ranking Parcels, and once this work is done will resume the ranking of parcels. This is an ongoing and very time-consuming process.

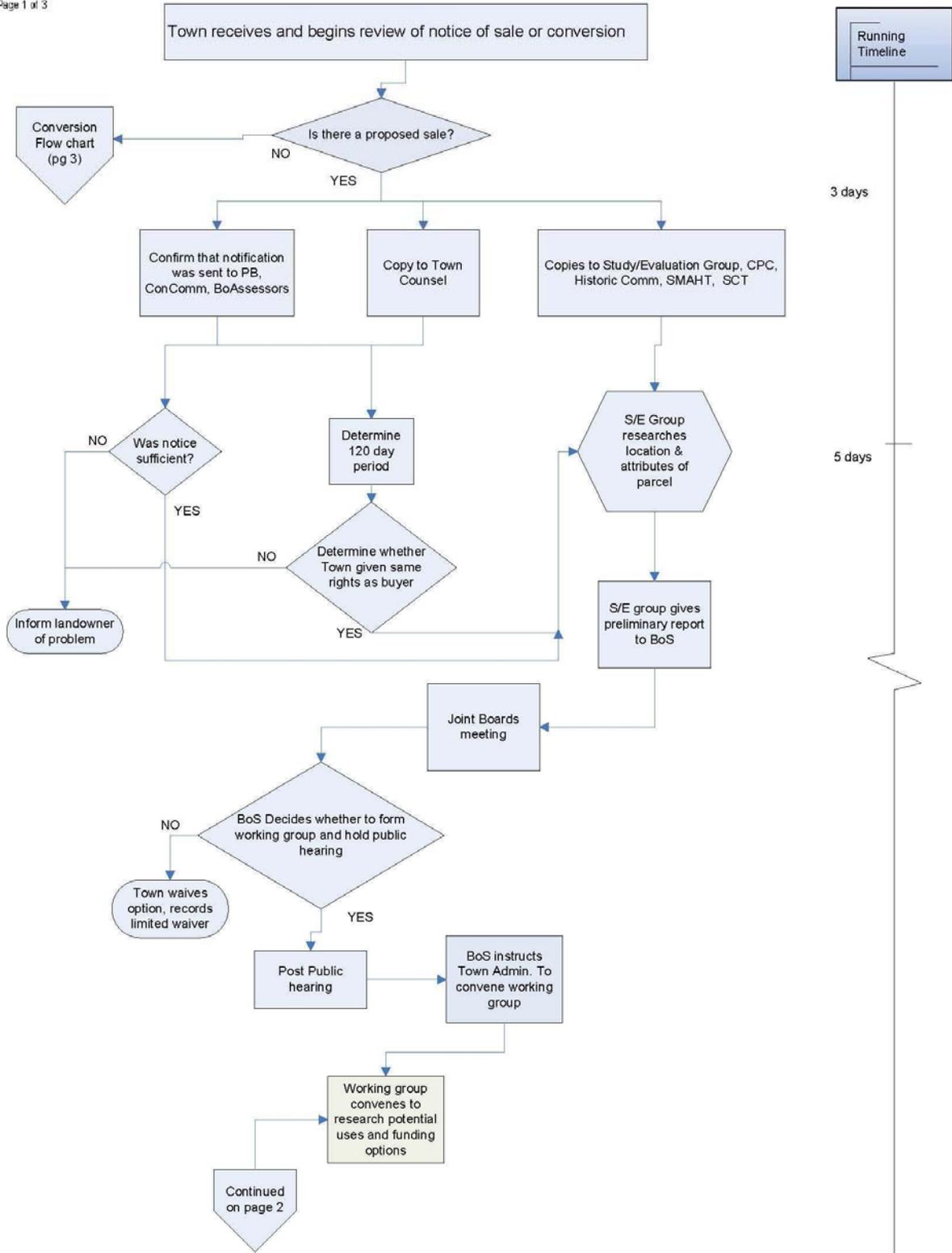
2. Recent changes to Chapter 61

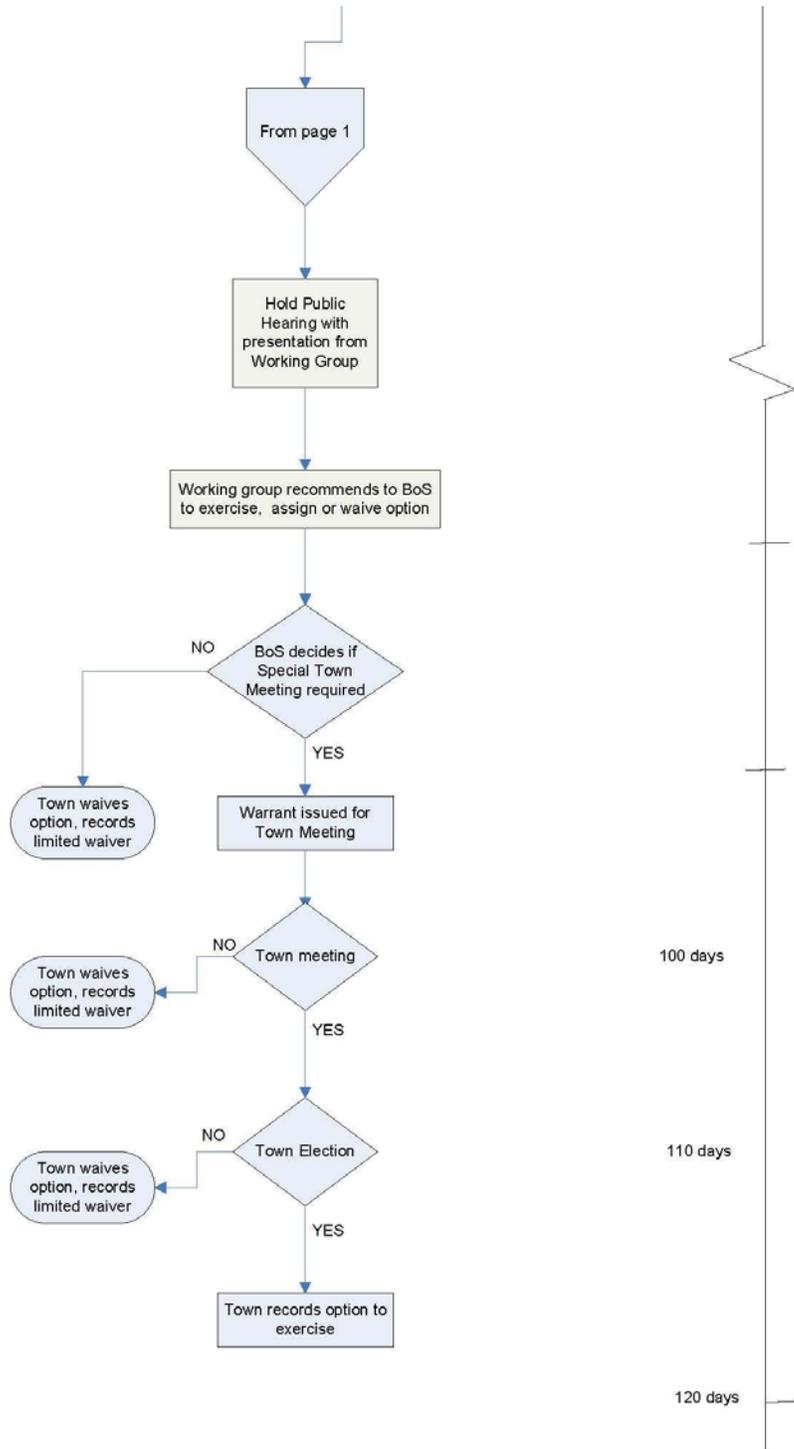
Recent changes (provided by Chapter 394 of the Acts of 2006 and effective as of March 2, 2006) have clarified the existing law and addressed some problems but did not address other issues. The Town should work with our state representatives to proactively seek changes that adopt a more equitable compensation to the Town when rollback taxes are calculated. Rollback taxes should be based on the current appraised or offered value for the property, considering its new use, and be applied to any change in use, which may occur in the succeeding ten-year period from the time the property is removed from Chapter 61 tax protection. See the Appendix for the Land Use Task Force recommendations (#3 on banking of rollback taxes for future land purchases).

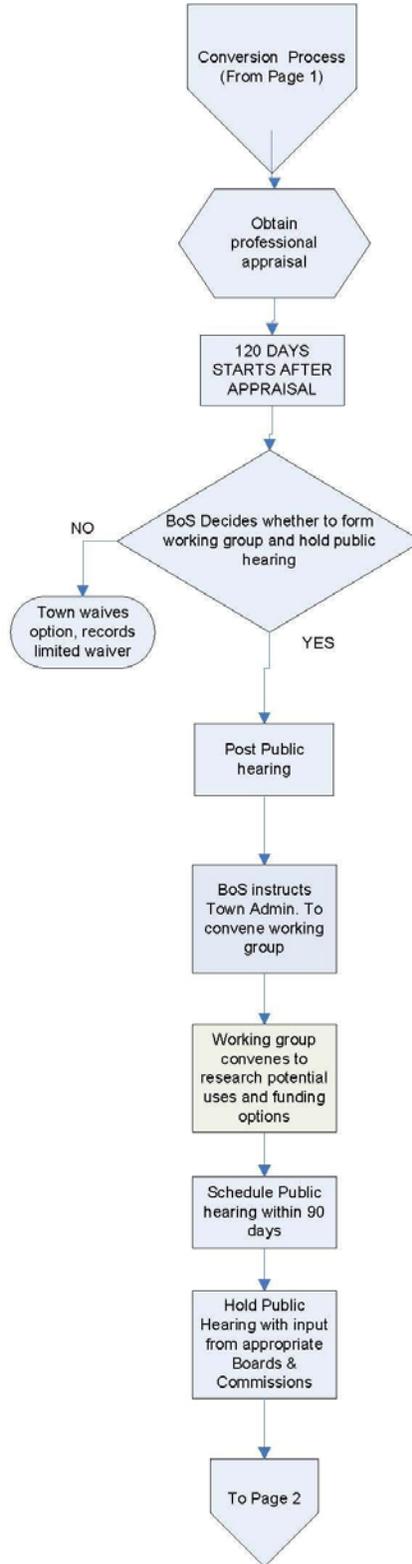
FIGURE: 17 Chapter 61, Chapter 61A & B Parcels in Town as of 2010



The following flow chart shows the typical course of action to be followed by the Town as lands are removed from Chapter 61. This procedure was adopted by the Board of Selectmen in November 2008 as a recommendation from the appointed Land Use Task Force.







F. “Right to Farm” Bylaw

In 2005, Stow adopted a “Right to Farm” General Bylaw (see <http://tinyurl.com/2wew6ok>) mirroring the regulations of MGL Chapter 40A, Chapter 90 and Chapter 128. The purpose of the bylaw is to encourage the centuries-old use of Stow’s rich natural resources for the pursuit of agriculture as an economic opportunity and to minimize conflict with abutters and/or town agencies. For example, farms are more protected than other businesses or residences would be from complaints about odors, presence of animals, dust, noise, etc. The bylaw also serves as notification to potential property purchasers within town that the area is considered friendly to agriculture and that the small aforementioned inconveniences can accompany farming practices. Having this bylaw also helps the Town with its annual Commonwealth Capital scorecard and thereby improves Stow’s ability to successfully compete for various state grants (see below).

G. Commonwealth Capital Program

For the past few years, Massachusetts towns and cities have benefited from the availability of the Commonwealth Capital Program, an initiative designed by state agencies to promote better land use choices through planning and zoning measures that are consistent with Sustainable Development Principles. The state encourages municipalities to implement these measures by using funding as an incentive.

Communities that have planned for land conservation and development and enacted zoning, subdivision and other regulations consistent with the state’s Sustainable Development Principles (see Chapter 1) are more likely to receive financial assistance from the state. Over the past four years, this incentive has produced dozens of plans and hundreds of improvements to zoning and other local land use regulations. The Town of Stow was last certified in 2008. The MPC recommends that Stow work to continue to increase its Commonwealth Capital score as long as doing so would not result in a conflict with other desired goals.

H. Bylaws and Regulations to Protect Open Spaces

Bylaws and regulations are also in place to protect valuable, open space resources. The following bylaws and regulations can be found on the Town’s website:

- Zoning Bylaw
- Wetlands Bylaw
- Planned Conservation Development (PCD) Bylaw: requires 60% open space
- Active Adult Neighborhood Bylaw: requires 30% open space
- Planning Board Rules and Regulations
- Board of Health Regulations
- Subdivision Rules and Regulations

Because the Town does not manage a public water supply or sewage system for residences, one negative by-product is that Stow's zoning promotes suburban sprawl. Our Board of Health and Zoning Bylaw require a minimum of 1½ acres to support an individual well and septic system. An expansive lot size is often needed in order to prevent the two systems, required on each lot, from coming into conflict with one another. It should be noted that the lack of town water and/or sewer helps to slow the build-out of Stow. The MPC recommends that the Stow Board of Health consider a bylaw, more restrictive than Title V, to require package treatments plants for parcels in the Water Resource Protection Overlay District. This would provide additional protection to ground water supplies and ground water recharge areas. One possibility to consider is the potential for an expanded public water supply if the Harvard Acres system is piped to the center of town. The MPC recommends the BOH investigate creating a bylaw that enables the Town to become more stringent than the standard Title V regulations, particularly in water resource protection areas to protect drinking water sources.

I. Encourage Low Impact Development

As part of the development process, we need to continue to promote Low Impact Development (LID) techniques in our Zoning Bylaw, Planning Board Rules and Regulations, and negotiations with developers. See Chapter 9 for more information on LID.

J. Encourage Agricultural Based Businesses

Early businesses within Stow were all resource-based, the resource being agriculture. We must encourage and support the small farms, orchards, and golf courses that embody our agricultural heritage today, along with their supporting businesses, such as farm stands and bed-and-breakfast establishments.

The December 2005 Special Town Meeting created the Stow Agricultural Commission to help preserve the rural character of Stow through the preservation and promotion of agriculture. The Commission will help keep Stow farms viable by promoting agriculture through educational literature, events, and articles. The Commission can act as a voice for agriculture in town government, helping to ensure that the various boards understand the impact of their actions on agriculture.

We encourage the creation of a town committee—perhaps the newly created Agricultural Commission working in cooperation with the Stow Conservation Trust—to focus on promoting Stow's "green" tourism potential, including the promotion of local products. For example, we can realize much potential in marketing "Stow apples" as a recognized "brand" in Massachusetts and New England markets.

K. Recreation

In terms of town planning, it is helpful to define two types of recreation: active recreation and passive recreation. Active recreation encompasses soccer fields, playgrounds, tennis courts, and indoor sports facilities; passive recreation refers to activities which are non-motorized, non-commercial, noncompetitive and require little or no modification to the natural landscape, such as trails for walking, biking and wildlife viewing.

1. Active recreation

Current active recreation facilities in Stow include Memorial Field, Pine Bluffs Recreation Area, Pine Bluffs Beach, Pompo upper field, Center School tennis courts, and the indoor gyms at the schools. The Stow Community Park on Old Bolton Road, our newest recreation complex, contains two basketball courts; two tennis courts; walking paths with exercise stations; two Little League 60-foot baseball fields; a large rectangular field for soccer, lacrosse or field hockey; a pavilion; and associated parking.

A report that the Recreation Commission submitted to the Land Use Task Force in March 2009 (see Appendix) examined the forecast for future needs in terms of both indoor and outdoor recreation as the Town moves closer to its maximum buildout. To accommodate the outdoor recreation needs, approximately 35 acres plus associated parking and storage will be needed. There remains a strong desire for enhancements to canoe/kayak access points to Lake Boon and the Assabet River; these have not been included in the 35-acre computation.

The Stow Recreation Committee recommends in its master plan construction of a multigenerational community center to include a swimming pool, two basketball courts, a fitness center, and a community gathering space. Such a multigenerational center would require adequate separate space for children and seniors alike. This would be a major financial investment, but nonetheless is something the MPC also endorses. In order to take initial steps toward creating such a center, the MPC recommends an ad-hoc committee be appointed by the Board of Selectmen. Public-private partnership opportunities should be explored at the onset of the project before a feasibility study is conducted.

2. Passive recreation

Because of its abundance of undeveloped land and natural space, the Town of Stow lends itself well to passive recreation opportunities. Those that are used frequently include the Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Captain Sargent Land, Delaney Project, Fieldstone, Flagg Hill, Gardner Hill/Town Forest, Heath Hen Meadowbrook Woodland, Kalousdian Land (OAR), Marble Hill, Marlboro-Sudbury State Forest, Pine Bluffs, Red Acre Woodland and Spindle Hill. The landlocked Corzine and Hale Woodlands properties will soon be accessible due to the donation of an easement fronting on Edgehill Road. Walking these lands provides the opportunity for exercise and enjoyment of the outdoors, including viewing a variety of animal and plant life. The open land parcels of the Derby Woods, Trefry Lane and Wildlife

Woods PCDs offer additional opportunities to enjoy the outdoors. The addition of sidewalks to the Town will increase mobility and walking/biking opportunities.

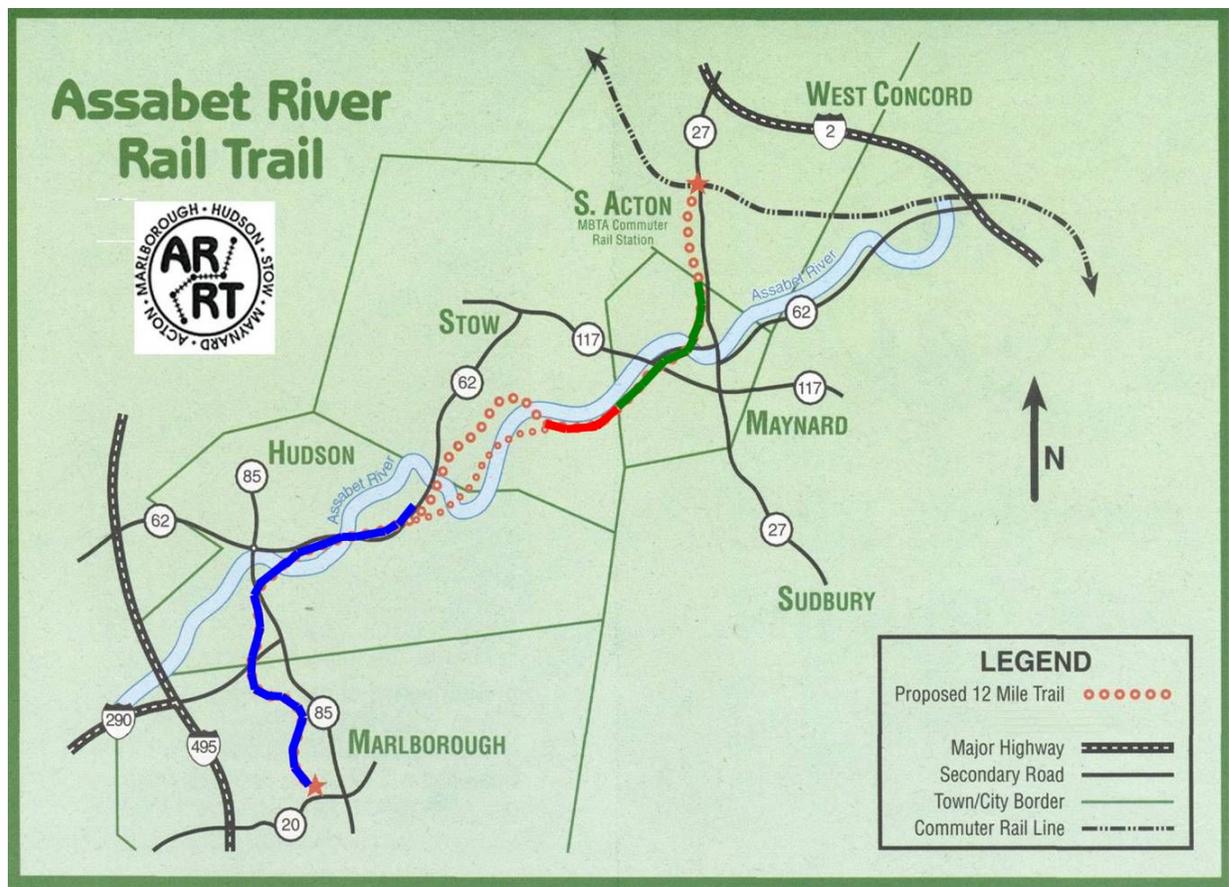
Opportunities to develop more passive recreation areas include the following, which are also discussed in Chapter 5:

a. Emerald Necklace

We need to continue work toward completing the Emerald Necklace walking trail of conservation land throughout the Town of Stow. We must identify and work to secure and protect easements over missing links in the Emerald Necklace and expand the network to Southwest Stow. Where appropriate, specifics are described in the Open Space and Recreation Plan (on file in the office of the Conservation Commission).

b. Assabet River Rail Trail

The Assabet River Rail Trail is now a reality in adjoining communities. Stow is the missing link. We need to identify the financial issues, the concerns of current landowners, and the possibilities for action to complete the rail trail in Stow and connect to the rail trails in our neighboring towns.



The completed 6 miles of the trail in Marlborough and Hudson are in green. The section in red is the proposed trail in Stow, Maynard and Acton. The two green sections in Maynard and one in Stow are walkable, but not paved yet.

c. Assabet River

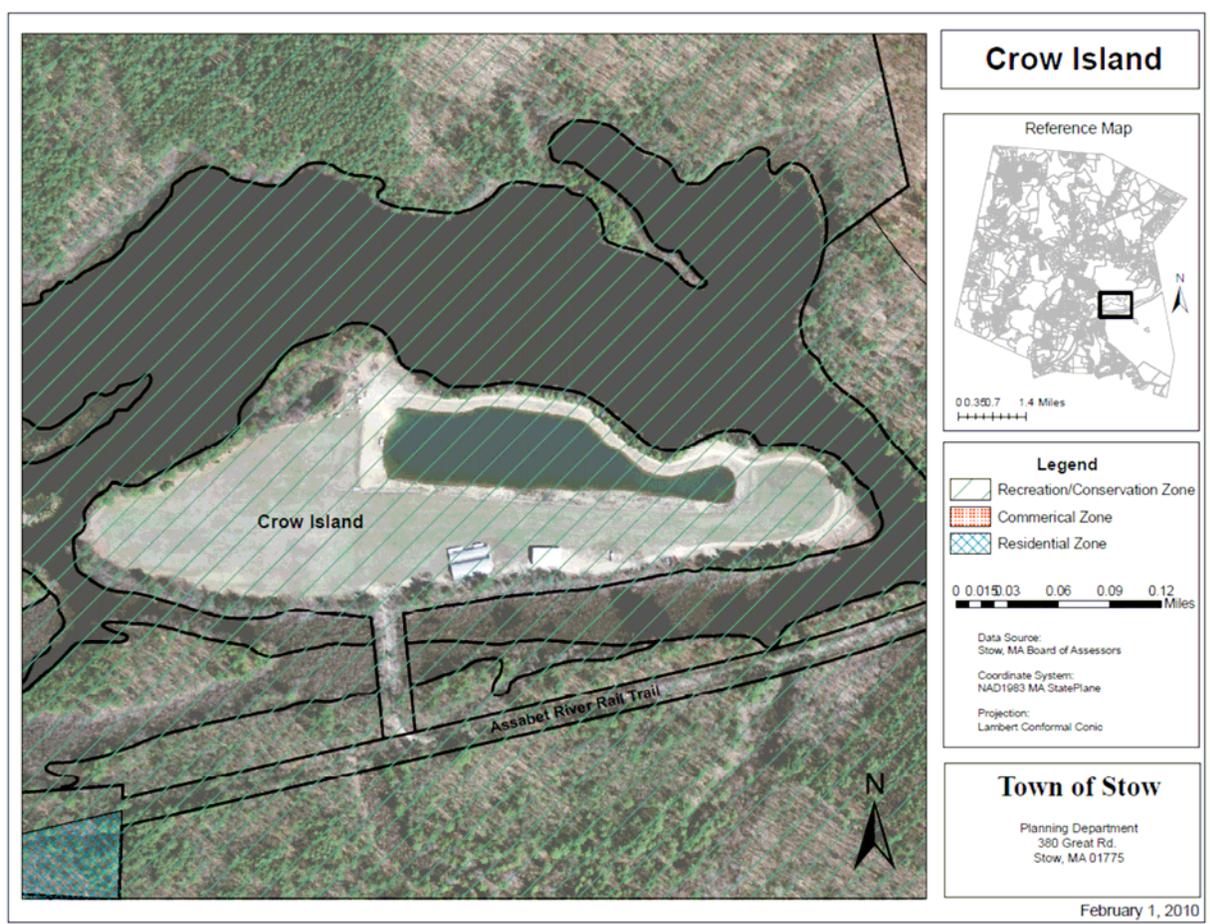
The river is popular for canoeing and kayaking; thus, opportunities to create small boat launch facilities should be explored. The health of the river is constantly threatened by pollution from the wastewater treatment facilities in several neighboring towns. The Town should work collaboratively with the Organization for the Assabet River (OAR) to help protect and improve the river. The Army Corps of Engineers' recently completed Sediment and Dam Removal Feasibility Study on the Assabet River has many potential negative implications for Stow. These include altering the river as it flows through Stow, which would result in lowering the water level, causing a loss of critical water source for farming, golf courses, orchards, fire protection and recreation as well as possible secondary effects on Lake Boon and surrounding shallow wells. The Town has responded to Mass DEP in opposition to dam removal and will continue to closely monitor this situation.

d. Crow Island

The privately owned Crow Island presents attractive options for the Town as a recreational parcel and general access to the Assabet River, and as a link to the Rail Trail, Assabet River National Wildlife Refuge, and Stow's Emerald Necklace. We need to identify the issues and

opportunities in acquiring Crow Island. We should be proactive in negotiating the purchase of Crow Island for conservation and recreational purposes.

FIGURE: 18 Crow Island photo and parcel map



e. Lake Boon

Lake Boon provides many recreational opportunities including boating, swimming and wildlife viewing. Pine Bluffs and the Town Beach area continue to experience erosion and sedimentation issues that will continue to need to be addressed. A much more detailed exploration of the challenges regarding preservation of Lake Boon appears in Chapter 5.

L. Needs

It is critical that all interested parties participate in educating Stow residents as to the benefits that open space provides to the entire community. As stated in the OSRP, the perception that

Stow has a lot of open space is misleading, as 70% of the land in town appears green and open but less than half of that has legal protections to ensure it remains open space.

GIS mapping was used to determine that approximately 30% of the land in Stow has been developed, approximately 30% of the land has been protected, and approximately 40% is potentially available for development. How we choose to utilize this remaining 40% of land in town will forever affect the character of Stow. If we are serious about protecting our “rural character,” we must make a concerted effort to do so now.

The OSRP recommends that one acre of land be protected for each acre that is developed in the future. The Land Use Task Force, in their final report, supported this recommendation; the Master Plan Committee supports the 1:1 recommendation of the OSRP. This means that approximately one-half of the potentially developable remaining 40% will be permanently protected. In addition, as requests for development come before the Planning Board, consideration will be given to LID designs and protected open space.

The evaluation criteria for ranking parcels developed by the Open Space Committee will be useful in determining which parcels should be protected. This will be an ongoing process with various town boards and committees. This is an impressive goal, but one that cannot be met without a concerted effort to encourage development to occur on the most suitable parcels, while preserving those with the highest resource value.

Providing permanent protection to land in the Southwest quadrant of Stow, where there are 600 acres of undeveloped and unprotected land as well as two large golf courses with an additional 420 acres, is critical to preserving the “town’s rural character” and open space. As this area of town has the least amount of permanently protected land and a large amount of undeveloped land, it will continue to be vulnerable to development.

M. Action Items

The MPC has identified the following goals and action items to address in regard to open space and recreation.

- Protect lands that will preserve Stow’s “rural character.”
- Complete the Rail Trail by linking existing trails.
- Implement a Golf Course Study with a goal to protect existing scenic vistas and evaluate the preferred method of future development on those parcels.
- Identify issues and opportunities for recreation on, and additional conservation of Crow Island.

- Protect and preserve the health of Lake Boon.
- Protect Open Space in Southwest Stow.
- Acquire and preserve land for future active and passive recreation needs.
- Expand recreation/conservation district zoning to establish Wildlife Habitat corridors which will ensure the continued movement of wildlife as lands are developed. These important parcels should be protected with conservation restrictions.
- Change Planned Conservation Development bylaw to require that the open space be designated prior to determining where the homes will be sited.
- Implement a new bylaw requiring sewage package treatment plants for parcels in the Water Resource Protection District.
- Complete the Stow Emerald Necklace by linking or creating trails.
- Formulate a Demolition Delay Bylaw and evaluate areas of town for implementation.
- Educate the public on the benefits of open space.
- Foster pedestrian mobility through the implementation of sidewalks and other planning strategies.
- Limit the alteration of trees and stonewalls along Stow's scenic roadways by adopting the Scenic Roads Preservation Bylaw.
- Obtain prior Town Meeting approval to purchase key open space parcels when they become available.
- Appoint a committee to explore building a multigenerational community center.

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:

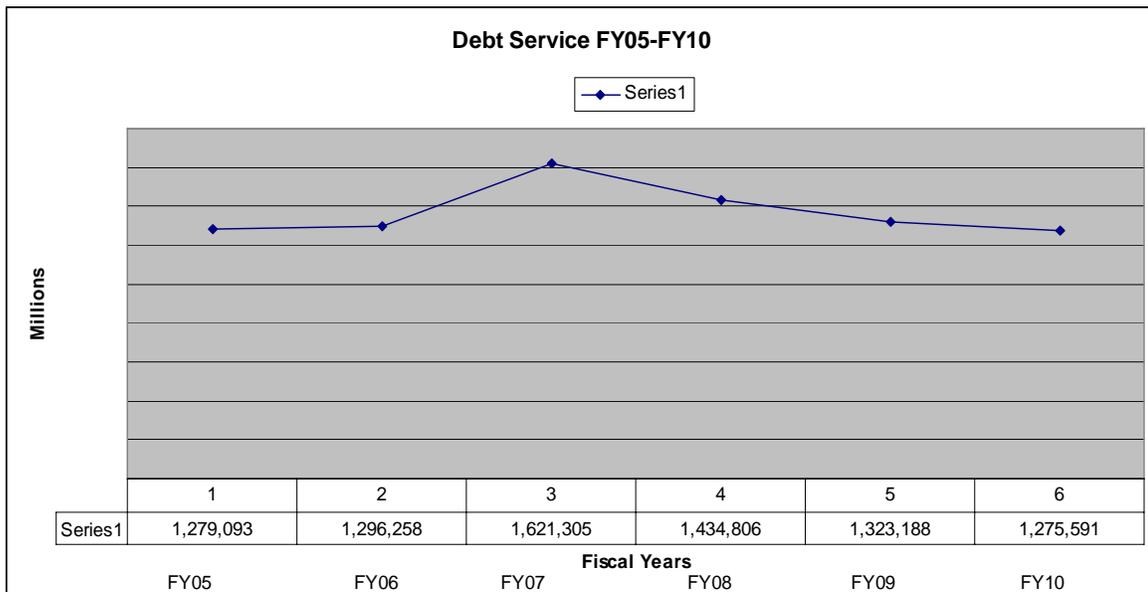
Fiscal Year:	05	06	07	08	09	10	Percent Increase (decrease) FY05 vs. FY10
Department:							
<i>General govt.</i>	663,428	726,614	797,093	813,184	908,714	948,792	43.01%
<i>Public safety</i>	1,594,073	1,639,492	1,742,086	1,831,709	1,896,744	1,944,727	22.00%
<i>Culture & Recreation</i>	218,548	236,052	246,598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

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.

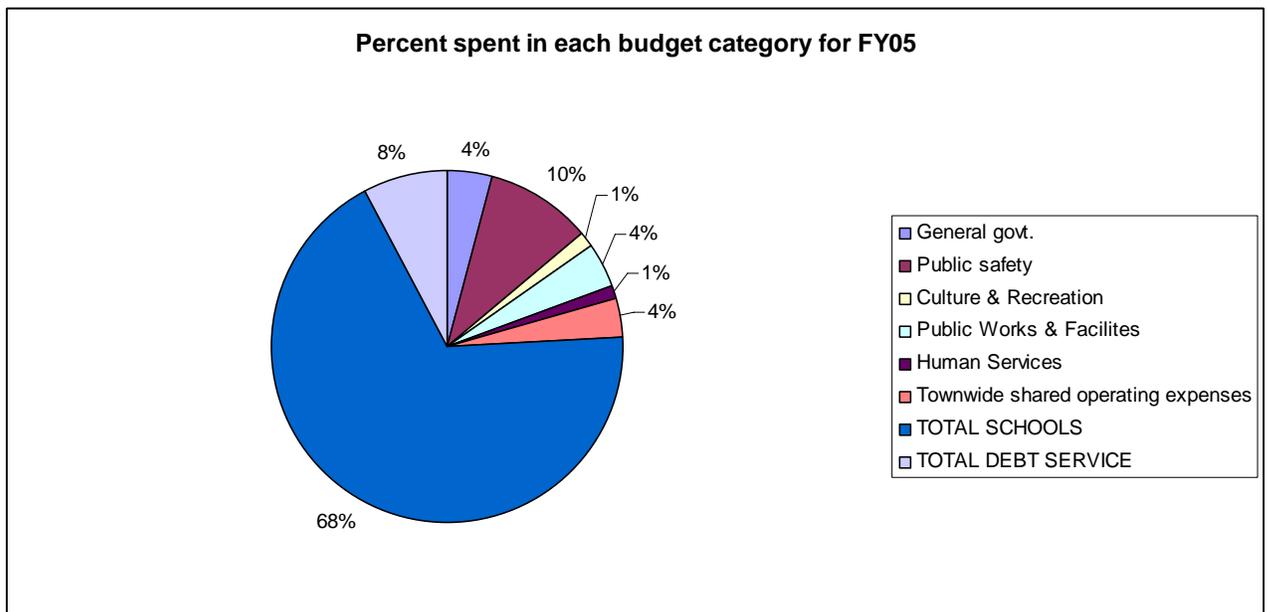
Moreover, it is believed that only five communities in Massachusetts with populations under 10,000 saw their bond ratings upgraded in recent years. This is likely due to the fact that a community’s size influences its ability to repay loans. It is also hard for towns with relatively undiversified tax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

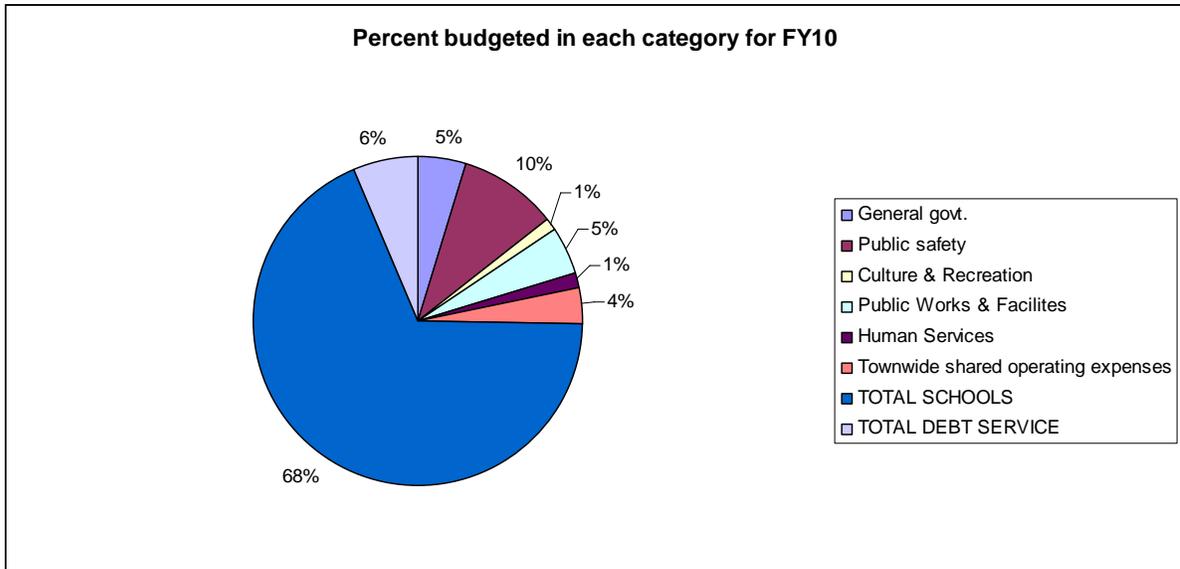
the Town's revenue stream when downtrends in one sector depress values. These are additional reasons that Stow is to be commended for its upgrade in rating. The recent good fortune of its upgraded bond rating will result in a savings of approximately \$3,000 per year for Stow.

FIGURE: 19 Credit Ratings Guide

Credit Risk	Moody's	Standard and Poor's	Fitch Ratings
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.

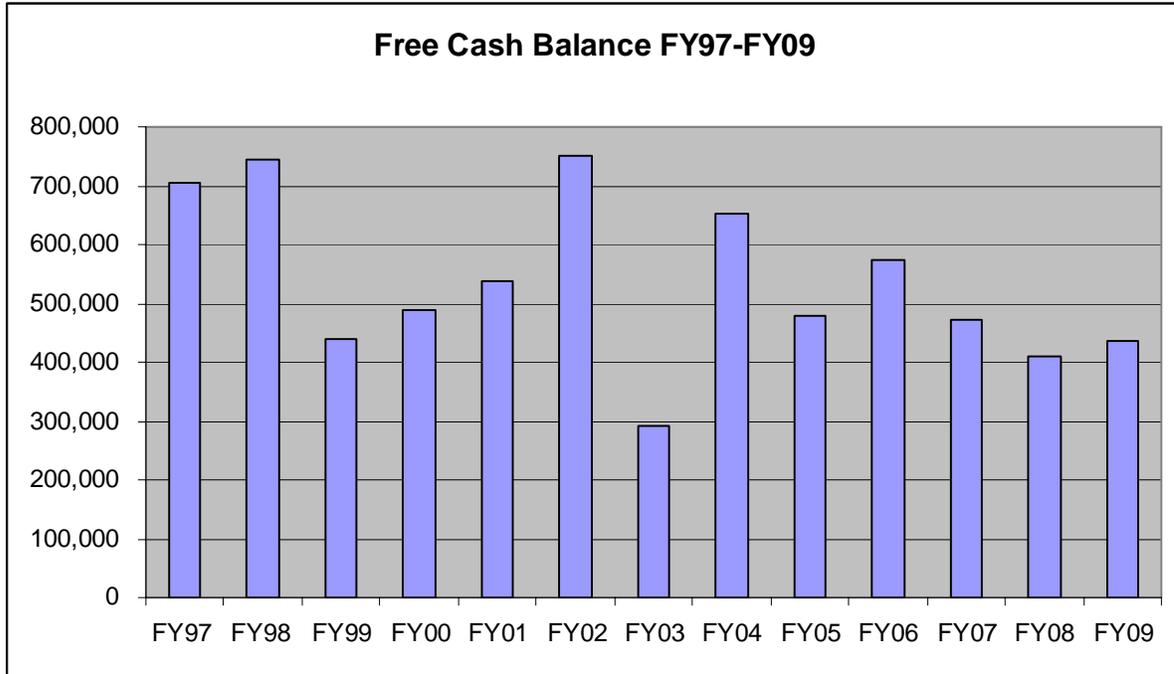
FIGURE: 21 Revenue by type over 7 years

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
Tax Rate	14.48	14.64	14.36	14.04	13.82	14.73	15.28
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.

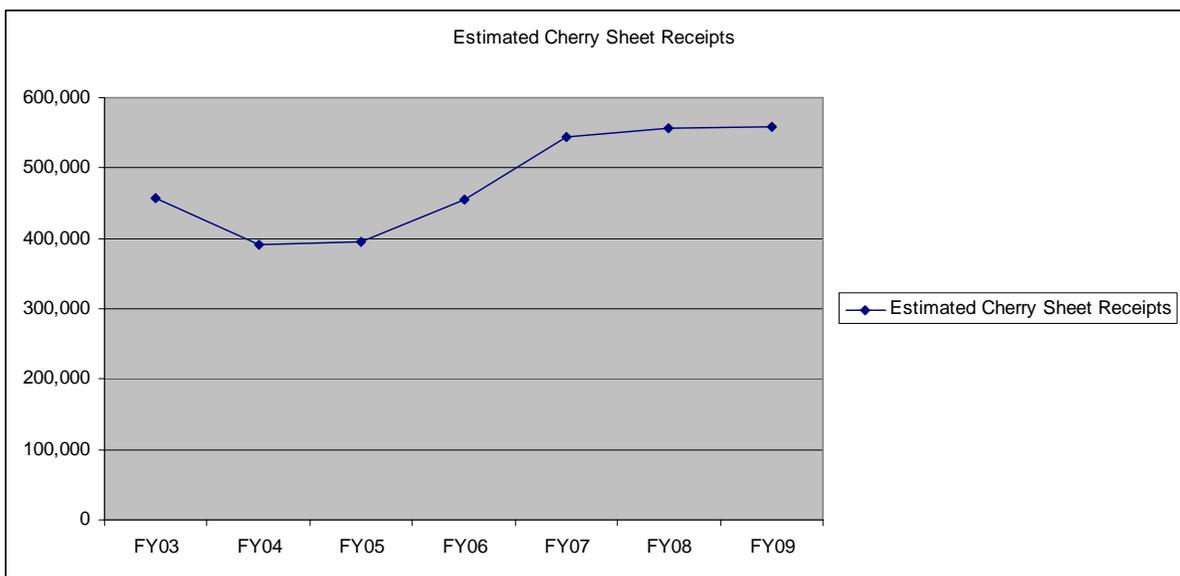
Stow presently has a stored asset balance of approximately \$1,110,000, which includes free certified cash at \$605,000 and \$505,000 in Stabilization Funds. This Free Cash balance is the highest it has been since 2004, which is a highly positive development in this fiscal climate.

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).

Town	School	Non-School	Total	% School
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.

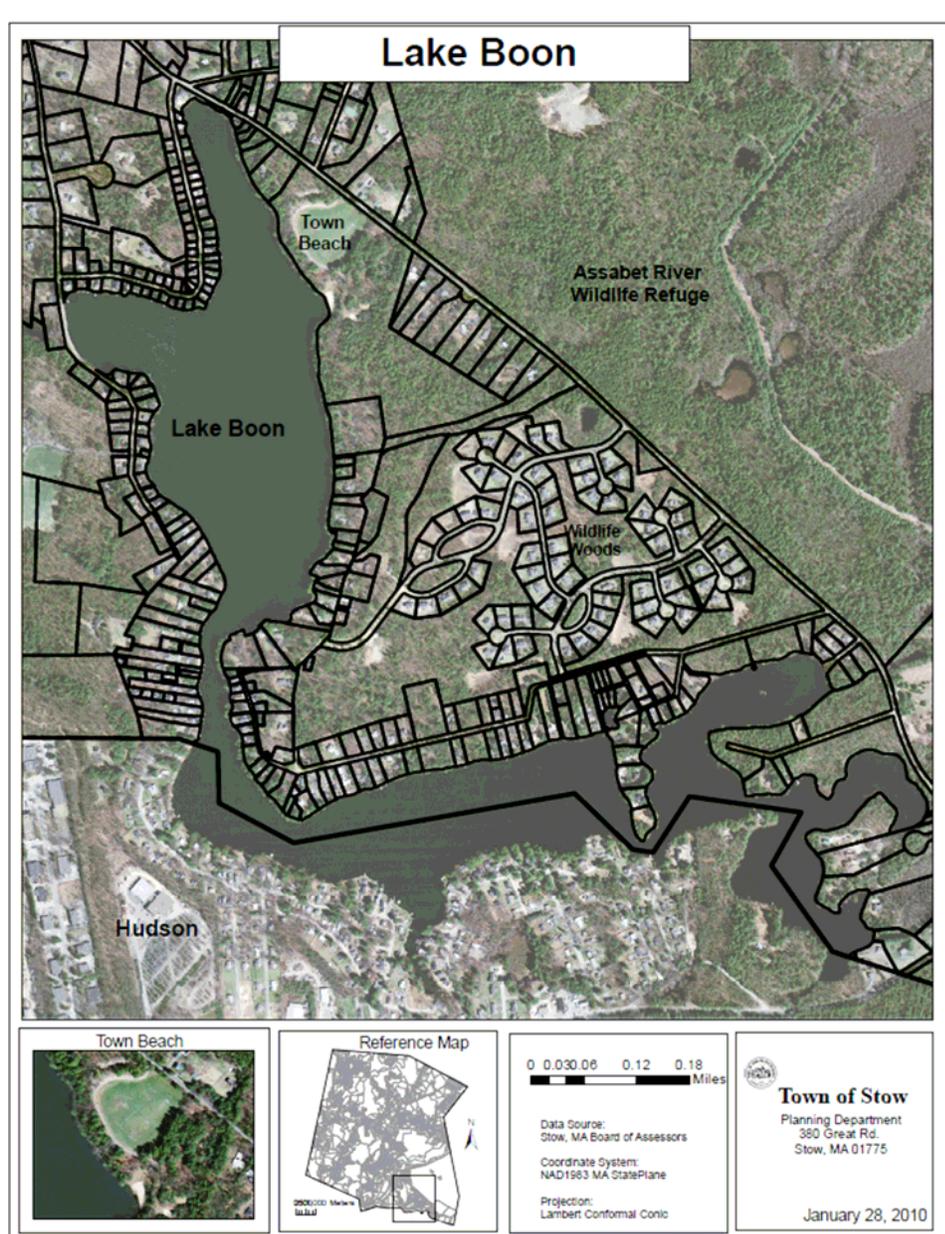
I. Issues Associated with Lake Boon

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, 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.

Chapter 8

Transportation



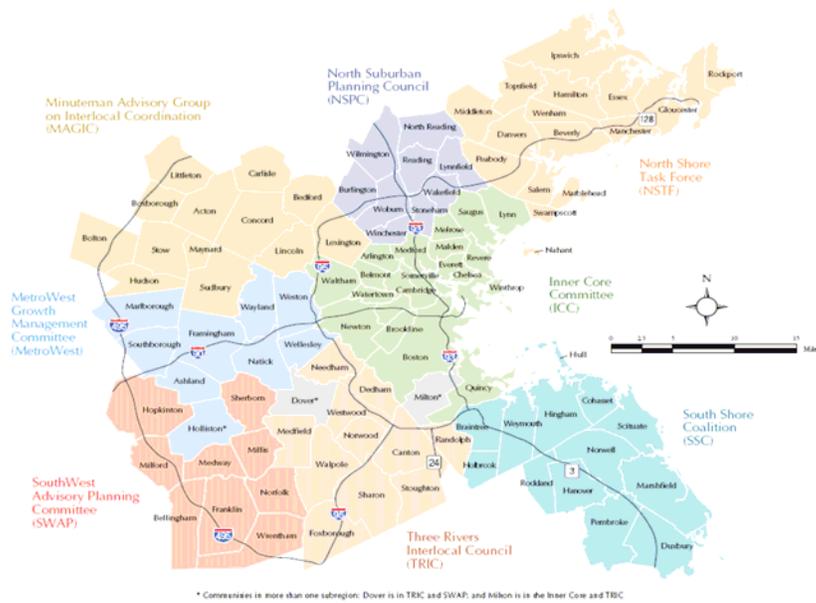
CHAPTER 8: Transportation

A. Background

Transportation and all the issues it encompasses are a key component of our community’s Master Plan. This chapter deals with a variety of issues surrounding mobility, connectivity, and access.

“Transportation” is a broad term and can mean different things to different people. We use the term for everything from our state highways to the Assabet River Rail Trail, and from the way we use our sidewalks to the option of a public shuttle that could drop people off at the train station. However, for the purposes of this chapter, we are primarily concerned with those issues related to transportation that can be impacted and influenced by the local policy choices made by the Town of Stow. Issues that fall into this category include roads and roadway maintenance, participation in a Regional Transit Authority, development of trails, sidewalks, and other linkages, safety, parking, congestion, and traffic impacts.

FIGURE: 26 Metropolitan Planning Organization



Stow is a member of the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which coincides with the boundaries and falls within the planning region of the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), a planning organization established by MGL Chapter 40B, Sections 24-29 and comprising 101 cities and towns in the greater Boston region.

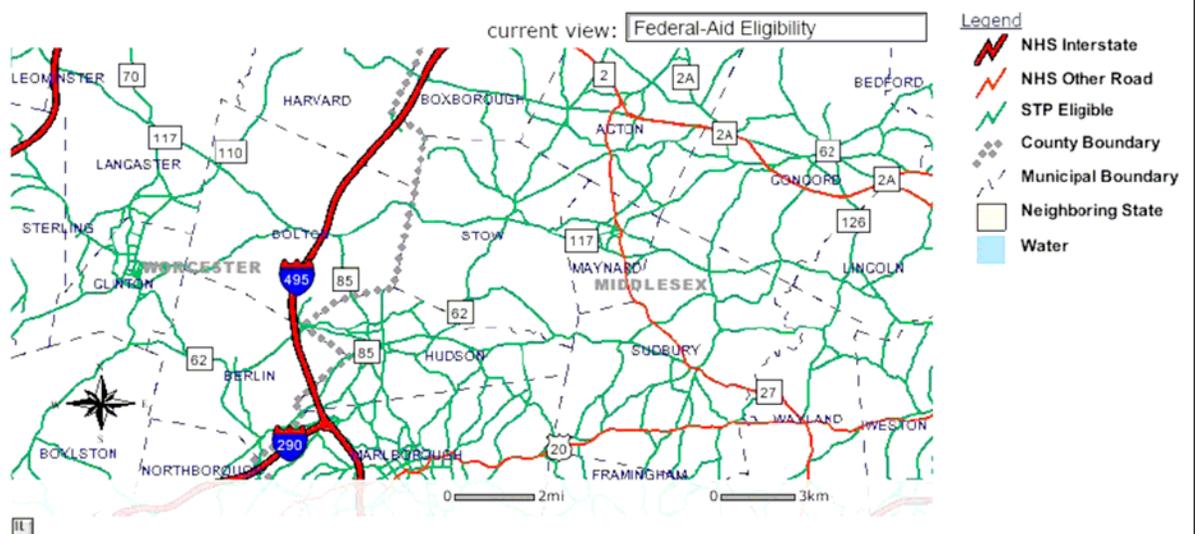
Stow is within the MAPC subregion known as “MAGIC,” which stands for the Minuteman Advisory Group on Interlocal Coordination. The Boston MPO is responsible for programming transportation funds for federal aid projects within its jurisdiction.

It is relevant to note that should Stow wish to seek Boston MPO funding of any projects, only certain roadways designated as eligible can receive federal aid assistance. Those roads tend to be the roads with particular functional classifications such as *Collectors and Arterials*.

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) website notes the following:

Functional classification defines the character of services that a particular roadway is intended to provide. Roads serve to provide mobility for vehicle access to locations. The process of functional classification was mandated by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 and implemented in 1993 by the Office of Transportation Planning in cooperation with the 13 regional planning agencies.

The roads noted in green below are those roadways which can receive federal aid transportation funds:



B. Vision

We envision a transportation network for our community that is safe and convenient for pedestrian and vehicular traffic alike while also preserving and enhancing Stow’s quality of life. Our preferred network would encourage healthy living and recreation by making it easy for people to walk or bike if they wished to do so; it would lessen congestion for those who drive their own cars; and it would offer sufficient public transportation options for those who choose to cut back on their individual car use, whether for environmental, economical or physical fitness reasons.

C. Comparison to the Last Plan

In 1996, it was reported in the Master Plan (titled “Stow 2000”) that Stow had 50 miles of public roads and 10 miles of private roads. The total miles of roads a community must

maintain impact the municipality's receipt of Chapter 90 road maintenance funding, which is calculated in part based on a formula that includes total miles of local roads (and in part on population and employment data). Stow's apportionment in 2010 was \$204,963, based on 51.57 miles of public roads, population: 5,902, and employment: 2,098. As of May 2009, the Town of Stow has 60.32 miles of public roads. The Master Plan Committee recommends that the Town update the road inventory with the Department of Transportation on an annual basis. This will enable the Town to maximize its receipt of Chapter 90 monies and obtain full credit for the roads it has within its borders.

In recent years, two traffic studies focusing on specific areas of Town have also been conducted. Copies of those studies are available at the Planning Department. Those plans have helped to inform the concepts and recommendations later in this chapter.

Since funding is the greatest impediment to making roadway improvements, it is also important for the Town to monitor opportunities for funding through grants or other funding streams. As mentioned above a select few roads are eligible for Boston MPO funding through the Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). However, in order to obtain such funding, the Town would need to go through a lengthy design and review process with MassDOT. Nonetheless, participating annually in the TIP development by, at the very least, designating a local TIP Coordinator is one way to ensure that no opportunity is missed or overlooked. This is especially important for state numbered routes and bridges within the community.

D. DATA

1996 Master Plan Commuting Data

<i>Commuting to Work</i>	
No. of workers 16 yrs. +	2,939
Drive alone	82.1%
Drive in carpool	6.94%
Use public transportation	3.03%
Use other means	0.54%
Walk or work at home	7.38%
Mean travel time to work	23.67 minutes

Census 2000 Commuting Data

Commuting to Work	
No. of workers 16 yrs. +	3,112
Drive alone	84.2
Drive in carpool	4.6%
Use public transportation	3.5%
Use other means	0.1%
Walk or work at home	7.1%
Mean travel time to work	31.1 minutes

There has been very little materially relevant change in commuting patterns since 1996. However, minor, perhaps insignificant, shifts do seem to be occurring. Unfortunately, single occupancy vehicular trips as a mode of transportation have increased slightly. Fewer people are using public transportation and fewer are using other means of travel to get to work. This may reflect the increasing dispersal of jobs throughout the region in a greater sprawling pattern with less employment concentrated in central urban areas. As the I-495 and 128 regions continue to grow, fewer workers are likely to be traveling into Boston, and options for public transportation, carpooling, and other alternative modes are less viable when employment is decentralized.

With the soon to be released Federal Census for 2010, the Town will have more updated information on which to base any future policies relative to transportation. Perhaps, if smart growth initiatives begin to bear fruit, there will be more opportunities in the future to encourage ride-share, and small-scale transit such as shuttle buses and van pools.

In 2004, concurrent with the drafting of a Community Development Plan, a forum was held at which participants generated a list of transportation-related issues and concerns. Many are no longer relevant today, either because they have now been resolved or because priorities have changed; however, the MPC believes the following still have merit. The bullet reflects the original 2004 text; the wording in parentheses reflects the MPC's current position.

- There is a need for electronic signs. (One has recently been acquired. The MPC agrees that usage of this sign will be a valuable asset.)
- Lower Village study to include traffic circulation and economic development options. The Lower Village Subcommittee recently conducted an extensive traffic study. The key result of that study was recommendation of a roundabout. (The MPC recommends that the Selectmen pursue funding for further steps, such as a feasibility study and preliminary design, through either grant opportunities or other municipal appropriations.)

- Improve parking at Town Building. (In May 2009, Town Meeting voted appropriation of funds to improve parking at the Town Building. The MPC recommends that this work continue.)

E. Discussion of Needs

1. Intersections

As the Town of Stow continues to grow, congestion and safety issues surrounding intersection capacity are likely to become more of a concern. It is important for the community to regularly monitor both intersection functioning and intersection safety factors so that there is a clear sense of which intersections may need improvements. Keeping an eye on this list will ensure that the Town has problem intersections evaluated when nearby development permitting presents an opportunity for the Town to request traffic studies. The Town might also choose to seek program design and/or improvement funds for projects of greatest concern.

Transportation specialists assign an “LOS,” or “level of service,” rating to intersections in roadways throughout the commonwealth. The rating reflects the delay a driver experiences when traveling through an intersection. The standardized measure of level of service ranges from A to F. In a suburban setting, the typical functioning level of service range is C-E, which means a delay of 20 to 80 seconds for motorists attempting to make a specific turning movement. Generally, an E represents a compromised intersection operating near its capacity and an F is a failed vehicular movement. However, it is not uncommon for an intersection to be rated F for left turns only or rated E during rush hour but considered to function adequately at other times of the day. Each intersection’s level of service is determined by the configuration of the intersection, and the ability of an intersection to accommodate the traffic demand that is placed upon it.

The Town's Safety Officer and Fire Chief have identified the following list of intersections as areas of concern. The Master Plan Committee further includes those intersections noted below as intersections to watch carefully when development impacts occur:

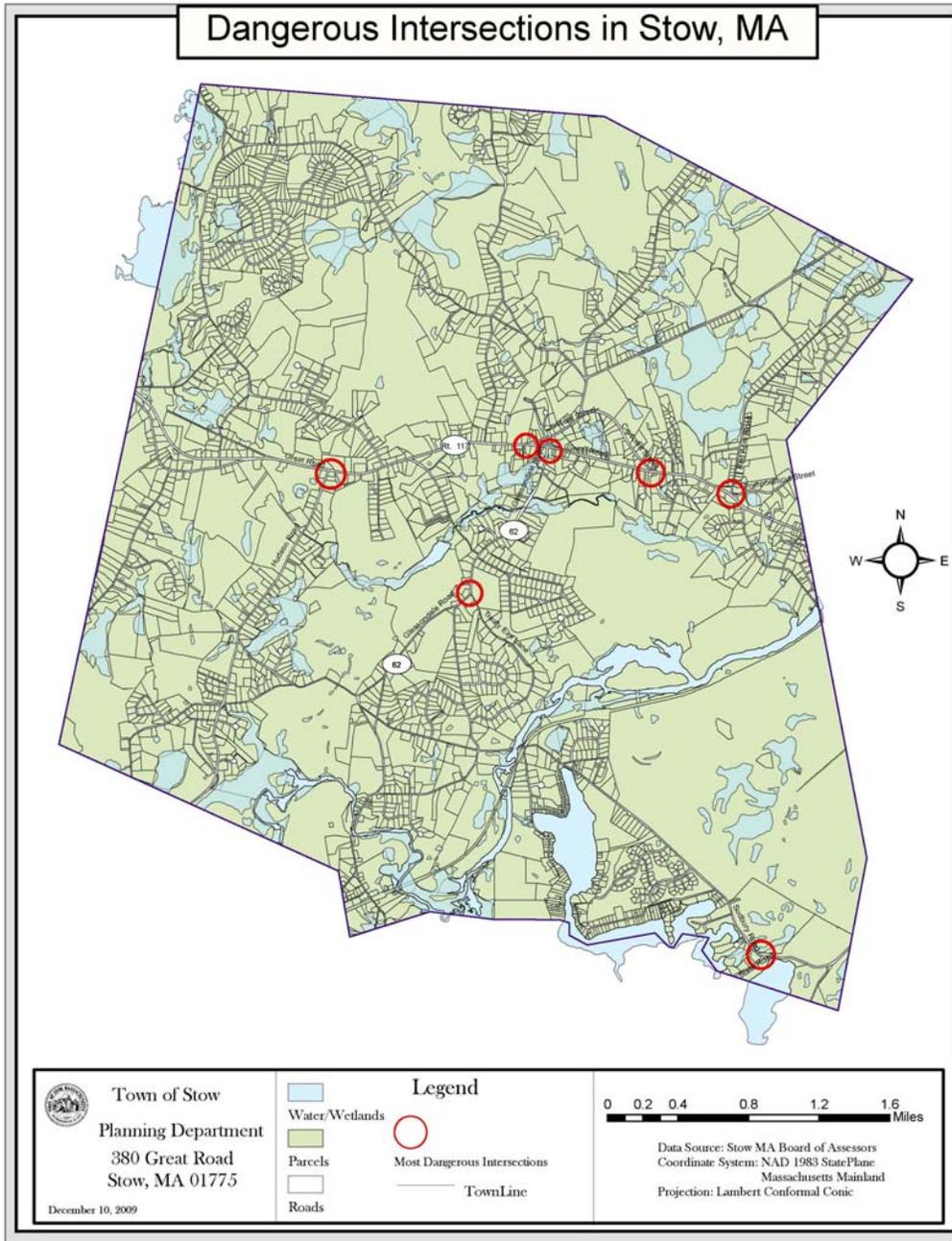
FIGURE: 27 Table of intersections of concern

Intersection Name	Quadrant	LOS (if known)	High Crash rating? (Y/N)	Issue / Concern (eg. Pedestrian crosswalks, delay, turning movements)
Route 117 at Red Acre Rd	Northeast	Red Acre Road southbound = F	2001 reported = 0 2002 reported = 2 2003 reported = 1	Pedestrian crosswalks, delay, turning movements
Route 117 at Pompositticut Street	Northeast	Pompositticut Street southbound: a.m. peak = C p.m. peak = F	2001 reported = 1 2002 reported = 0 2003 reported = 1	Pedestrian crosswalks, delay, turning movements
Gleasondale at Treaty Elm	Southeast			Sight lines/dangerous curve
Gleasondale and Great Road	Northeast and Southeast			(Limited visibility responding from the Fire Station looking west on Route 117) Lack of pedestrian crossways
Hudson Road and Route 117	Southwest			Limited visibility
State Road (Hudson line to Sudbury Road)	Southeast			Limited visibility
Crescent Street (Both intersections with Route 117)	Northeast			Limited visibility

In addition, the Lower Village Traffic Study, developed by Fay, Spofford & Thorndike identified at least 12 turning movements into roads or driveways along Great Road that are currently at LOS F and several more that are at LOS E. That study evaluated a number of different solutions to address safety and congestion in Lower Village. Intersection enhancements, a roundabout, and signalization were the three primary alternatives evaluated in that study. For those interested in traffic considerations, that study can be obtained from the Planning Department. It should be noted that the Lower Village Committee strongly favors the roundabout option at two locations (Rt. 117, Red Acre, & Pompositticut Roads and Rt. 117 & Elm Ridge Road) while some residents and perhaps even businesses are not in support of that

option. Nonetheless, for safety reasons and to address congestion and pedestrian mobility, some action needs to be taken in the Lower Village area. The Master Plan Committee recommends further evaluation, dialog, and consensus building to be undertaken so that improvements can move forward. Some of these intersections are further depicted on the following map:

FIGURE: 28 Map of Dangerous Intersections



In addition, the MPC suggests as a lower-order priority that a traffic calming policy be developed. The following links provide useful information on how other communities have successfully implemented traffic calming policies:

Federal Highway: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/tcalm/index.htm>

Northampton - <http://www.northamptonma.gov/tpc/trafficcalming/>

Newton - http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/cdbg/transportation/documents/traffic_calming_guidelines.pdf

Burlington VT - <http://www.dpw.ci.burlington.vt.us/transportation/neighborhoods/>

MassDOT (formerly MassHighway) also has entire sections in its design manual dedicated to traffic calming and bike/pedestrian safety. See chapters 11 and 16 of that document in particular: <http://tinyurl.com/5bddeo>

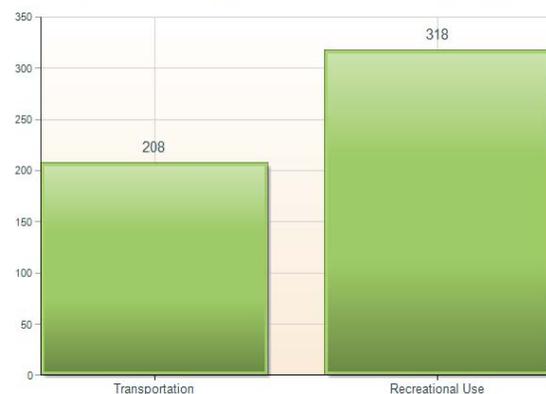
2. Bike and pedestrian mobility

a. Sidewalks

There is considerable interest in expanding the sidewalk network in Stow. Some people in town have expressed a desire to have sidewalks for mobility in getting from place to place, but a significant majority have identified recreational use as their primary motivation for wanting sidewalks in town. The recent Master Plan Survey revealed the following:

The Planning Board recently formed a Pedestrian Walkway Planning Sub-Committee, comprising two Planning Board members, one member of the Board of Selectman and two members-at-large, tasked with the preparation of a Draft Pedestrian Walkway Master Plan to enhance the Town's sidewalk network. The committee will consult with the Superintendent of Streets, Board of Selectmen, Conservation Commission and Board of Health and incorporate the Town's goals of creating a pedestrian link between neighborhoods and an "Emerald Necklace Trail" linking conservation areas with walking trails, where feasible.

If there were more sidewalks or trails, would you or your children use them regularly for either of the purposes below? (Check all that you support)



It will be important for this committee to also consider opportunities for key linkages between subdivisions and cul-de-sacs where easements may be needed in the future. This is an often overlooked opportunity to connect neighborhoods via trails or walkways and reduce the

number of vehicle trips that must be taken to drive children to a house around the block or to visit a neighbor. Strategic planning around large tracts of undeveloped land can help the Planning Board make requests of future developers to include these easements and/or build the walkway connections as part of their subdivision plan. Often, a small connection between backyards can be accomplished with a few hundred feet of trail, while but that same trip by car would amount to a drive of a quarter-mile or more. To assist in this endeavor, it would be productive for the Town to develop GIS mapping of all existing easements, rights of way, and trail connections to provide a visual representation of opportunities to enhance connectivity.

One recommendation pertaining to sidewalks worth noting is the notion of developing “pathways” or “pedestrian ways” that are set back from the road away from traffic. Several nearby Towns (such as Sudbury and Lincoln) use this approach when constructing new sidewalks to avoid disturbing street trees, rock walls, and other natural land features. While ROW can be an obstacle to this type of sidewalk, the benefits can often outweigh the sometimes added complexity of working with abutters to lay out a sidewalk of this type. Snow plowing, for instance, does not end up being pushed onto these more detached pedestrian ways as they are distant from the impacted area.

The biggest impediment to building sidewalks is, of course, funding, as the capital costs can be quite daunting. Moreover, obtaining easements and developing engineering solutions to navigate around stone walls, trees, significant grade changes, and other obstacles can be equally challenging. Stow may want to look to communities such as Sudbury and Lincoln for an example of path-building that can accomplish many of the same goals as sidewalks but in some cases be built to a less robust standard. Paths in these communities tend to meander around obstacles in the natural and built environment and minimize disruption. As an added benefit, abutting property owners are often more accepting of such designs.

Finally, it may be worth exploring the feasibility of utilizing betterment assessments as a source of complementary funds to augment direct town appropriations. In this fashion, neighborhoods advocating most vociferously for a sidewalk can elect to incur a tax surcharge and match municipal funds to advance their projects. Such betterment surcharges are typically amortized over 20 years and shared among the property owners either on a per house basis or per linear foot of frontage. Either method can be valid depending on the particular circumstances of the street receiving the betterment.

3. Safety

Increasingly, roadway planning now includes a component for bike and pedestrian safety. The Safe Routes to School program, founded in 2005, provides limited funding to help communities address getting children safely to school on bike or foot. The Master Plan Committee recommends that Stow investigate the possibility of participating in the program. The committee also recommends evaluating curb cuts.

4. Roundabouts

Modern roundabouts have become a favored solution, in lieu of a traffic signal, to improve vehicular circulation and safety. When properly located, designed, and constructed they reduce overall vehicular speed while simultaneously reducing congestion. The idea is that cars flow continuously through the roundabout but at slower speeds. Unlike traditional “rotaries” vehicles enter roundabouts at a 90 degree approach and must therefore slow to a near stop prior to entering circulation. However, some people feel that a roundabout can sacrifice pedestrian mobility through an intersection as it can be challenging to site crosswalks with adequate site-distances to provide safety. Considerable literature can now be found on the use of roundabouts and MassDOT is favoring the use of these devices as they also eliminate the need to maintain traffic lights and pay for electricity usage. For more information on roundabouts, the reader is directed to:

http://www.mhd.state.ma.us/downloads/designGuide/CH_6.pdf

It should be noted here that the Lower Village Committee is strongly favoring a roundabout at the intersections of 117, Red Acre Road, and Pompositticut Roads along with a roundabout at Route 117 and Elm Ridge Road. That committee also feels roundabouts should be considered when the Town evaluates design alternatives for other intersections throughout town. The Master Plan Committee supports pursuing improvements to traffic in Lower Village. However, the Master Plan Committee also wants to acknowledge that public opinion may not yet be ready to embrace roundabouts. Further outreach, education, and analysis might be necessary to achieve consensus before the Town could move forward with design plans at various locations.

In general the Master Plan Committee is in favor of passive traffic solutions throughout town where such solutions make sense from a safety perspective. It is our preference to avoid the installation of numerous traffic lights that may only be needed during peak periods of travel. Traffic calming, pedestrian refuge islands, and other creative methods to slow traffic or channelize it in a safer fashion is preferable to the cost and unsightliness of adding new traffic lights.

5. Shoulder width

Roadway widths are typically being increased to accommodate a 4-foot shoulder for bicyclists, and new techniques are often added to allow greater ease in crossing roads. This can sometimes present a problem for a community such as Stow which is trying to preserve rural character and protect wetlands. Any increase in overall road width can often come into direct conflict with the desire to keep stone walls, meandering ways, and maintain the scenic elements of the roadway. Nonetheless, where possible, when roadways are being reconstructed, every effort should be made to accommodate a shoulder for bike and pedestrian use.

6. Crosswalks

Pedestrians are an integral part of the transportation system, and should be able to cross roads safely. Although marked crosswalks are traditionally used to facilitate pedestrian crossings, in some instances other treatments should be considered to provide a safer environment for pedestrians. Alternative treatments could include:

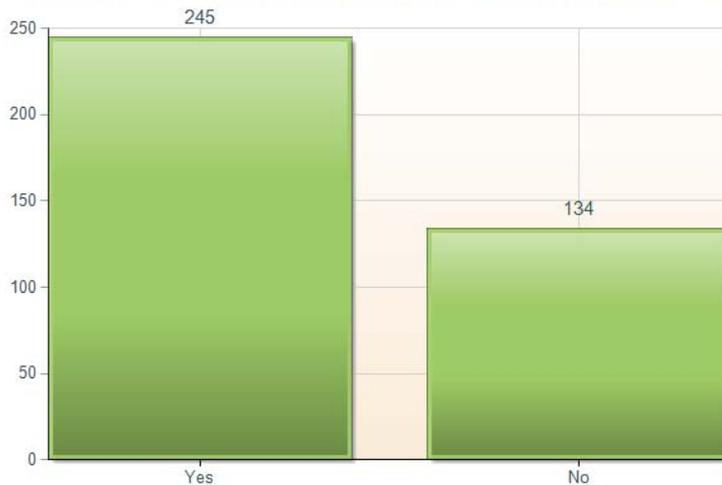
- Angled crosswalks in pedestrian refuge islands to direct pedestrians to face oncoming traffic
- Raised crosswalks
- “Dragon teeth” to designate an upcoming crosswalk
- Pedestrian refuge islands
- Pedestrian signals
- “Stop for Pedestrians” signage

The Town should continually work to improve safety and encourage pedestrian traffic. The Master Plan Committee recommends that the Town adopt guidelines identifying the preferred kind of crosswalk treatment for various types of crossings and then use that policy to implement a consistent format throughout town. Priority locations for new crosswalks should be at school crossing locations and destination areas such as the Lower Village business zoned area and town recreation fields.

7. Refuge islands

Pedestrian refuge islands are usually defined as a small section of pavement or sidewalk, surrounded by asphalt or other road materials, where pedestrians can stop halfway across the street while crossing the roadway. Not only do they make pedestrians safer by giving them a traffic-free spot on which to stand; they also have the secondary effect of creating an interruption to the traffic flow that slows cars down. Our Master Plan Survey revealed strong support for refuge islands as shown on the following graph:

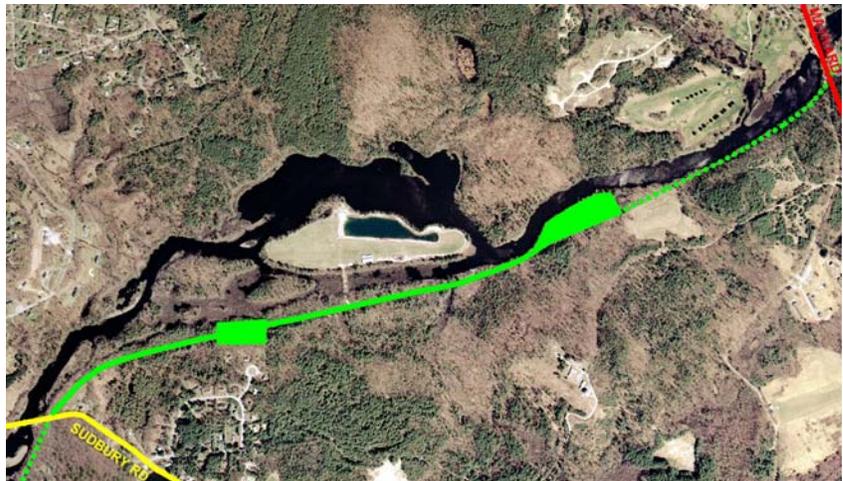
In order to slow traffic and accommodate pedestrian crossing, the Town installed temporary pedestrian refuge islands in the Lower Village area. Would you support installation of permanent pedestrian refuge islands?



8. Trails

The Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) has been under design and development for more than a decade. This trail will eventually be a 5-town multiuse trail connecting the communities of Marlborough, Hudson, Stow, Maynard, and Acton. The Marlborough and Hudson section, comprising approximately 5.5 miles, has been constructed and is open for public use. The Acton and Maynard sections are presently under design. For more information on the trail in general, go to www.ARRT.org. In Stow, the ARRT Committee has been engaged in discussions over an extended period of time to try to find ways for Stow to complete its section of the trail. See Figure 17 in Chapter 6 for ARRT Map.

The Town has acquired a two-mile easement over a portion of the railroad right-of-way which is presently in private use as “Track Road.” Efforts may soon be underway to evaluate design possibilities for a trail along that section. However the actual route for some areas of the trail is still to be determined.



The two-mile easement over “Track Road is depicted in green. Sudbury Road is depicted in yellow. The Maynard Town Line is depicted in red.

The Stow ARRT Committee voted on Feb. 17, 2009 to use existing trails in the Assabet National Wildlife Refuge for some of the route through Stow. The committee is now working on ways to connect the northern end with the Rail Trail in Maynard and the southern end with the Hudson Rail Trail. The Master Plan Committee strongly supports prompt completion of this project since state and federal funds may not be available much longer.



From the collection of R.R. Conard B&MRRHS

9. Public Transit

In 2007, the Board of Selectmen voted to join the Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (MART), a separately constituted legal entity that provides transit services. The primary motivation behind this vote was a recent state law that allowed towns without MBTA service to deduct money paid to RTAs from their annual MBTA assessments. MART is one of Massachusetts' 15 regional transit authorities. It is a public, non-profit organization charged with providing public transportation to an area consisting of the cities of Fitchburg, Leominster and Gardner, and the adjoining towns of Ashburnham, Ayer, Shirley, Lancaster, Sterling, Hubbardston, Royalston, Littleton, Winchendon, Ashby, Templeton, Westminster, Hardwick, Lunenburg, Harvard, Bolton, Boxborough, and Stow.

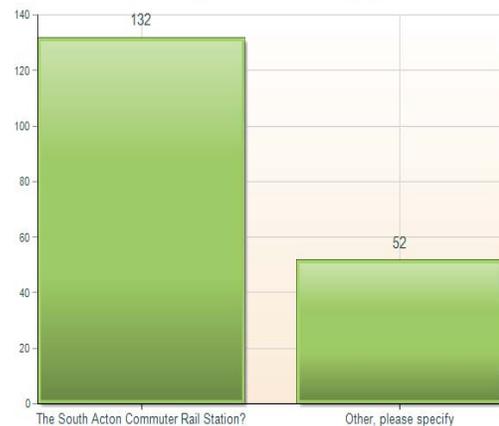
MART operates 15 fixed route bus services together with paratransit services. It also provides connections to the MBTA Commuter Rail line at Fitchburg station. Currently, MART provides Stow with a senior van. Discussions have taken place regarding a shuttle service to the South Acton train station, but there are no specific plans to increase MART's service within Stow at the moment.

The Master Plan Survey revealed that there is a reasonable level of interest among the populace for a shuttle from Stow to the South Acton train station as well as a few nearby shopping areas. Of the 387 respondents, 87% answered “yes” to the question “If a public shuttle service were available in Stow, would you use the shuttle to/from the South Acton Commuter Rail Station?”, while 34% said they would use a public shuttle service to nearby retail and business areas in Stow as well as in Maynard, Acton and/or Concord.

There are other factors we must consider as well when evaluating if we have adequate transit services in town:

- Is the Town providing a sufficient level of public transportation for those who wish to use it?
- Are factions such as the elderly and disabled for whom driving may not be an option adequately served by public transportation options?

If a public shuttle service were available in Stow, would you use the shuttle to/from (please check all that apply)



The MAGIC subregion of MAPC is presently pursuing a number of studies and initiatives to help expand suburban mobility within the

region. One is a study with a working group, to identify the small-scale public and private transit options within the region and make suggestions on cross-community connections to augment those present activities. For more information on MAGIC’s activities, go to <http://www.mapc.org/subregions/minuteman-advisory-group-inter>

The other study is an effort to evaluate whether or not bus rapid transit (BRT) could be developed in conjunction with the proposed rail trail slated to be built on the MassCentral Branch Railroad. This trail is known as the Wayside Trail and it runs roughly from Waltham through, Weston, Wayland, Sudbury, Stow, Hudson, Bolton, and on to Clinton. A BRT or some other form of public transit in conjunction with the trail would be of great benefit to the residents of Stow, who presently have no public transportation options (except the Senior Shuttle). The MPC recommends that Stow participate actively in the efforts of this MAGIC study and follow closely the possibilities and recommendations that could come out of this study. It may also be appropriate for the Board of Selectmen to designate an individual to act as Stow’s liaison in this matter. A point person could become the local expert, providing information to appropriate Boards including the Selectmen and Planning Boards and represent Stow’s interests at various meetings and venues at which this topic will be discussed.

A. Action Items

- Pursue participation in the state's Safe Routes to School program
- Participate actively in the efforts of the MAGIC study to evaluate whether or not bus rapid transit (BRT) could be developed in conjunction with the proposed rail trail slated to be built on the MassCentral Branch Railroad and follow closely the possibilities and recommendations that could come out of this study.
- Pursue funding for further steps that would follow up on the recent Lower Village traffic study, such as a feasibility study and preliminary design, through either grant opportunities or other municipal appropriations.
- Pursue means to connect the northern end of the Stow Assabet River Rail Trail with the Rail Trail in Maynard and the southern end with the Hudson Rail Trail while state and federal funding are still available to do so
- Pursue the development of a town-wide Traffic Calming policy and include in it the preferred construction form of crosswalk treatments appropriate for various types of roadway crossings
- Monitor and participate in decision making on opportunities for expanded transit service through MART or MBTA
- Explore opportunities for funding of roadway projects through the Boston MPO including designating a staff person to act as the municipality's TIP Coordinator.

Chapter 9

Zoning & Land Use
Recommendations



CHAPTER 9: Zoning & Land Use Recommendations

A. Overview of Zoning Concepts

As stated in Chapter 2, Stow's Zoning Bylaw was adopted in 1949 and plays a fundamental role in defining and maintaining the kind of community that residents have chosen in terms of what parcels of land can be used for what kinds of purposes.

Some communities, including Stow, use visual representation in the form of a map to stipulate zoning requirements; other communities rely on written descriptions of areas and sectors to define zoning parameters. Whichever method is used, the Zoning Bylaw not only determines which parts of town are residential and which are commercial but also how nonresidential space may be used.

For situations in which a town believes it is in its best interest to make a change to the Zoning Bylaw, there are various means in which to do this. One way is by creating an overlay district, which does not revoke the previous zoning applied to an area but puts additional options on it. For example, an area zoned for retail can take on a mixed use overlay, which would allow residential and commercial uses to co-exist in the same facility. Overlay districts are typically reserved for unique uses that are less common but still appropriate for the underlying zone. Other common examples of overlays include "wireless communications" (or cell tower) zones, "over-55" housing districts, "adult entertainment," and more. There is no limit to how many overlays a community can layer over a zone.

A town's Planning Board can invoke additional control over development decisions by requiring site plan approval or other regulatory procedures or by designating certain types of uses to be done through a special permit application. This enables the Planning Board to condition approvals based on requirements that mitigate issues such as traffic, parking, light spillover, noise, landscape screening, etc.

B. Broader Statewide Context – Zoning Reform

During the time of the writing of this Master Plan, a broader statewide dialogue has been taking place regarding zoning reform in Massachusetts. The present gubernatorial administration under Deval Patrick has established zoning reform as a key policy element on which to focus. Prior to the Deval Patrick administration, the Land Use Reform Act (LURA) was released to the legislature but failed to garner enough support to make its way through the legislature. Following up on this work, when Gov. Patrick took office, he created a Zoning Reform Task Force with the objective of introducing new legislation in 2009.

The Task Force was charged with the difficult goal of trying to simplify the State's zoning laws which underlie all local zoning bylaws. Unlike previous attempts at reform, there was a considerable effort to involve the development industry to understand its point of view, while also involving municipalities in this dialog. Not surprisingly, cities and towns cited lack of control around approval not required (ANR) subdivisions and a worry that reform would undermine local control. Developers generally sounded the concern that bylaws differ from one community to the next and the overall permit approval process just takes too long. While this is an oversimplification of what is a complex law, it is nonetheless important to note that this area is being looked at for comprehensive reform.

Around the same time, and working at similar objectives in parallel to the governor's task force, another group of legislators and municipal officials established the Zoning Reform Working Group. This second group started with Land Use Reform Act (LURA) as its basis and further evolved the legislation to what is now generally known as CPA II or the Community Planning Act. Concurrently, the governor's Zoning Reform Task Force began consideration of LUPA – the Land Use Partnership Act – in the fall of 2008. Various proponents of these two separate measures are working to integrate the best approaches from each bill to come up with a compromise position that will ultimately garner enough support to pass the legislature. This compromise legislation is presently known as the Comprehensive Land Use Reform and Partnerships Act (CLURPA).

In this context, it is important for Stow to stay up to date on these zoning reforms, as the final legislation may require modifications to Stow's current zoning rules or regulations in order to maintain compliance with state law. Alternatively, the legislation may present some opportunities and benefits for the so-called "opt-in" communities which agree by local option to modify some zoning provisions in exchange for key benefits pertaining to things such as grandfathering provisions and/or control over "approval not required" (ANR) lot creation.

The Town of Stow has been thus far following the debate and issued a comprehensive letter about its serious concerns with the two pieces of legislation. That letter can be obtained by request from the Planning Department.

For more on zoning reform, see the following websites:

LUPA <http://tinyurl.com/2wt7n5w>

[N1]

CPA 2

<http://www.massmunilaw.org/zoning.htm?sid=60> – click on Zoning Reform

CLURPA: <http://www.apa-ma.org/572>

As has been stated elsewhere, it is important to note that this document cannot by itself modify zoning. Zoning changes should always, where possible, be preceded by meaningful public deliberation and broad-based community consensus. For some of the suggestions below, additional study or professional expertise may be needed in developing appropriate bylaw language or in evaluating the impacts of a proposed change.

Furthermore, it is important to understand how zoning provisions are modified in practice. A zoning change presently requires a two-thirds super-majority vote of the legislative body, which in Stow's case is its Open Town Meeting (at which only registered voters can participate). Annual Town Meeting Warrants containing the language of all Articles to be voted upon are mailed to each household in Stow at least seven days prior to the Town Meeting. The body responsible for calling the Town Meeting and setting its date is the Board of Selectmen. Warrant articles can be submitted in one of three ways: by a property owner with a legal interest in the property to which the zoning change applies, by any town agency acting through a majority of its members, or by Citizen's Petition. The Town Clerk can guide any resident interested in learning more about Citizen's Petitions.

Once a warrant article has been filed for each zoning article, the Planning Board must conduct a public hearing at least 21 days in advance of Town Meeting. From the results of that Public Hearing, the Planning Board then makes a recommendation to Town Meeting on the zoning article in question.

For more information on the local process surrounding zoning modifications, contact the Town Clerk and/or the Board of Selectmen's offices, or read the zoning section on Stow's website at http://www.stow-ma.gov/pages/StowMA_Planning/Zoning%20Bylaw%20-%20Amended%20through%20May%203,%202010%20.pdf

C. Opportunities for New Zoning Tools

The Town of Stow has done an excellent job of updating its local zoning code to keep abreast of changing standards. The Planning Board, Planning Coordinator, Selectmen, and other key leaders are to be commended for their ongoing efforts to update bylaws and embrace new zoning concepts. For this reason, unlike many other communities, Stow is in the enviable position of not needing to overhaul local zoning in order to modernize practices. However, there are always areas that can be improved upon. This section puts forth some options and new ideas that the community might wish to explore.

1. Adaptive Reuse Bylaws

Adaptive reuse bylaws are special provisions intended to help encourage the reuse of unusual structures in town. They are sometimes called mill reuse overlay districts, historic structures reuse bylaws, etc. Typically, but not always, adaptive reuse bylaws are applied as an overlay district to existing areas of town in which the community wants to encourage new uses to emerge. Thus, a community seeking to encourage small business incubator space might apply an overlay of this sort to old retail areas of town, giving the overlay area the additional zoning uses of office space, light manufacturing, etc.

In Stow's case, the Master Plan Committee is very interested in pursuing an Adaptive Reuse Overlay for the Gleasondale Mill complex of structures.



The present concept for this site is that it be redeveloped to allow a combination of both residential and commercial activity. It is not yet clear whether the site would lend itself best to the uses being segregated by building within the same parcel or whether the buildings themselves could support mixed uses. In order to further develop this concept, some additional study would likely be required.



The Town should gather more data on the site itself and compile examples of zoning bylaws it might wish to emulate. Once it has a clear vision for how the uses would be mixed and at what proposed density, along with data on the site itself, and a sample bylaw drafted, targeted outreach to nearby neighbors and residents should then be conducted. Following positive feedback on the concept plan, it would be appropriate to bring a bylaw to Town Meeting for its approval. Refer to Chapter 4 for more information and recommendations.

Some links on this topic including sample bylaws from various communities are below:

Smart growth toolkit (model bylaw)

http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/bylaws/MRD-Incremental-Bylaw.pdf

Town of Millbury - [http://www.millbury-](http://www.millbury-ma.org/Public_Documents/MillburyMA_ZoningBylaws/new/section27adaptive%20reuseover)

[ma.org/Public_Documents/MillburyMA_ZoningBylaws/new/section27adaptive%20reuseover](http://www.millbury-ma.org/Public_Documents/MillburyMA_ZoningBylaws/new/section27adaptive%20reuseover)

Town of Hudson -

http://www.townofhudson.org/Public_Documents/HudsonMA_WebDocs/Zoning%20By-Laws%20May08-AppendixA.pdf

2. Mixed Use Zoning Bylaw

Somewhat similar to Adaptive Reuse is the concept of mixed use zoning overlay districts. In practice, actual mixed-use bylaws can differ dramatically from one community to another. Nonetheless, in its simplest sense, a mixed use overlay is a zoning provision that allows more than one use to be conducted on the same parcel of land. While adaptive reuse can often allow mixed uses, it differs from straight mixed use in that it requires a structure to be reused or redeveloped. That is not always the case for a mixed use district, which offers the possibility of a combination of uses within one or more new construction buildings. Nonetheless, despite this mix of uses which an overlay might grant to an area, the zoning provision can be crafted to enable the community to encourage exactly what type of mixed use it wishes to see evolve. Height and density restrictions can be applied, as can overall floor area ratios, maximum percentage of each type of use, and even building construction type. This type of zoning tool can provide great flexibility and control for the local community.

In a variety of forums, a number of Stow boards and committees have been exploring a desire to encourage village center zoning. However, interpretations of that concept might differ. The Master Plan Committee has refined its vision to include a desire to promote the rezoning of some parts of town that are presently commercial to allow residential apartments or condominiums to be constructed upstairs at the same retail or commercial site. Village-style zoning can often include the stipulation that parking be in the rear, while the structure itself is located relatively close to the front of the parcel. This encourages buildings of the sort that one would have found being developed one hundred or more years ago in a traditional New England town.

The Master Plan Committee believes this would encourage more diversity of housing types, allow for residential dwellings in close proximity to services (thus reducing vehicle trips), and help to bolster the local economy as residents who live close to retail will often patronize those nearby establishments. Mixed use is generally accepted as a smart growth tool for these reasons and more:

- Encourages diversity in the Town’s housing stock
- Provides design guidelines to promote village-style redevelopment with a mixture of uses
- Encourages revitalization of existing commercial uses and historic buildings
- Provides a focal point for pedestrian-related uses
- Reduces roadway congestion
- Promotes a greater sense of community

Prior to advancing this type of zoning bylaw, the Town would need to carefully define the areas of town to which the bylaw will apply. It might be sensible to start with a relatively few areas of town to test the concept before implementing it elsewhere in town. Currently, the areas where this is being considered are the Lower Village business zone and the Gleasondale Mill.

Then, design guidelines should be developed concurrently with the bylaw to enable residents to understand the desired outcomes of the zoning district. Additional public meetings may need to be conducted in order to gauge residents’ sentiments relative to the suggested zoning boundaries and to refine program objectives.

3. Municipal Buildings reuse

As Stow has a number of municipal buildings that may become obsolete as new schools are built or older buildings replaced, it may behoove the Town to consider creating a municipal buildings zoning overlay. Such an ordinance could give the Town the maximum options available for redevelopment of these structures and potentially yield a better return if the Town pursues sale or lease of the property to an outside party. This type of overlay zoning bylaw could establish in advance the permissible and non-permissible uses that will be allowed within these structures. It could also establish whether all or part of the existing buildings can or can not be demolished, and whether expansion of the structures will be allowed.

D. Low Impact Development

Low Impact Development (LID) is a smart growth tool that employs an ecosystem-based approach. It allows for greater development potential with less environmental impact. This is done through the use of smarter designs and advanced technologies that achieve a better balance between conservation, growth, and ecosystem protection, and public health and quality of life. Along with protecting wildlife corridors to the extent possible, LID uses the natural terrain and manages runoff at its source. Examples include swales and rain gardens, pervious pavement, and multi-purpose landscaping and vegetation. The state’s Stormwater Management Guidelines, which promote LID techniques, have been incorporated into Stow’s Subdivision Rules and Regulations and into the policy handbook of the Planning Board.

(For more information on Low Impact Development, see the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs website at www.mass.gov.)

E. Areas for Potential Zoning Change

1. Mandatory OSRD

Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) is the term commonly used for residential zoning that enables houses to be built on smaller lots, clustered closer together, while larger acreage, often 51% or more is left as undisturbed open space. In Stow this type of zoning is called *Planned Conservation Development (PCD)*.

The general rules in Stow for this overlay district are as follows:

- Minimum Tract Size – to utilize this zoning subdivision option, the parcel must have at least ten acres and be located in a Residential District
- Permitted Uses –
 - Single-family dwellings, single-family dwellings with accessory apartments
 - Multi-family dwellings (not more than 25% of the total number of dwelling units to be constructed under the PCD subdivision and no more than four dwelling units per building)
 - Accessory uses and structures incidental to principal uses indicated above are allowed as long as they are not the primary use
- Number of Lots - The number of lots allowed in the PCD shall be the number of lots into which the parcel could be divided and built upon under the normally applicable dimensional requirements and land use regulations.
- The minimum lot area per dwelling is 20,000 sq. ft.
- Minimum frontage - 100 feet (this requirement may be reduced to 50 feet if the lot is served by a common drive)
- Minimum front, rear and side yard setbacks of 20 feet
- Open Land - A minimum of 60% of the total area of the tract of land shall be designated as open land dedicated and used for conservation, historic preservation and education, outdoor education, recreation, park purposes, agriculture, horticulture, forestry, or for a combination of these uses
 - Open land shall not contain more than 50% wetlands
 - Wells and sewage disposal areas or facilities may be located on the Open Land as permitted or regulated by Title 5 or local Board of Health regulations, if these facilities are serving the PCD
- No building shall be located within 100 feet of an existing public way or within 50 feet of the boundary line of the PCD or the Open Land set aside as part of the subdivision

As described in Chapter 6, the benefits of OSRD are numerous and include reduced impervious areas, reduced municipal maintenance of roads (shorter plowing routes), reduced lawn area (leading to reduced pesticides and fertilizer being discharged), increased undisturbed natural habitat, etc. With all of the positive outcomes of OSRD, Stow might consider making this type of residential subdivision the norm with by-right subdivision submission and eliminate the

option of building a conventional subdivision as-of-right. In so doing, it could retain the conventional option by Special Permit. Whenever a town makes one type of permit easier to get and increases the difficulty of another, this is a clear signal to developers indicating which type of development the municipality prefers.

Since there are relatively few advantages, if any, of a conventional subdivision, the Master Plan Committee feels that long term, OSRD is the preferred residential zoning strategy for Stow. Again, depending on public sentiment which should be gauged in a variety of public venues, the Town might implement such a change on an area basis before going entirely to this new approach. It may also require additional planning staff or professional peer review consultants to assist the Town in reviewing the OSRD. This is because the OSRD requires the developer to demonstrate how many lots can be obtained for a subdivision, after subtracting wetlands and other unbuildable areas. This yield number is then utilized to determine how many units are permissible under the OSRD. Since this extra step somewhat increases the complexity of the OSRD filing, it may be worthwhile for Stow to explore other means to simplify the unit yield calculation and enable a more streamlined filing system.

In the past, there has been some confusion and disagreement in Stow as to how open space created through OSRD should be utilized by the Town. This is a key issue and one which can generate controversy. Some have suggested that the newly preserved spaces be established through a permanent bylaw change as lands available for passive recreation only. However, the MPC recommends a different approach. It suggests that the Planning Board evaluate carefully, within the context of its public hearings on each OSRD subdivision, what uses are appropriate and allowable for these open space areas. This determination should then become a special condition permanently attached to the subdivision approval permit. Such a methodology will establish clarity and forestall confusion later on. Down the road, should a neighborhood or developer wish to change the open space use designation, it would have to do so in the context of a change to its subdivision permit which would open a public hearing requirement and enable a fair public participation process in order to make such a change.

2. Golf Courses

As discussed in several earlier chapters, the five golf courses in Stow present a concern from an open space perspective, should the present owners decide to sell the land for development. In some cases, the large sections of golf course abutting major routes make them key view sheds in the community. It is incumbent upon the Town to find ways to either protect these major parcels or to ensure that if they are developed, the type of development is conducive to Stow's long term vision of maintaining its rural character. Since the golf courses themselves offer key vistas and natural settings the Master Plan Committee recommends the Town explore zoning tools that might help preserve these areas. Similar to the OSRD discussion above, zoning constraints the Town might want to consider include mandatory preservation areas or land set-asides of key vistas in exchange for higher density on the inland portions of the parcels with a lot yield equal to or greater than that which the owner could develop under a conventional

subdivision. The Town could then go further and consider density bonuses for developments that include greater percentages of open space. However, unlike OSRD, in the case of the golf courses the Town might want to consider pre-designating the preservation areas. Such a process would of course require careful evaluation, study, public process, and frank and open dialogue with property owners.

4. Demolition Delay Bylaw

As stated in the 1996 Master Plan, residents clearly want to preserve historic buildings and sites; however based on past experiences when historic districts were proposed, it is unclear if they would be willing to approve the additional level of regulation that can often be associated with official adoption of historic districts. We should consider passing a Demolition Delay bylaw as an alternative measure for historic preservation. The purpose of a Demolition Delay bylaw is to postpone demolition permits for a specified period of time while requiring interested parties to evaluate all alternatives to the demolition of a structure. Such a bylaw must first identify the structures to which it should apply and that designation becomes part of the bylaw considered by Town Meeting. Thus, it is possible to create a narrowly targeted bylaw to avoid over regulating structures that would not need to be included in this bylaw . The Town could in this fashion strategically focus on only those properties most worthy of preservation.

5. Historic Structure Reuse

One of the ways to prevent demolition of important historic structures is to expand the range of reuse options available to owners. Stow is fortunate to have such tools already built into its bylaws for many of the zoning districts in town. For example, Section 3.2.3.5 of the Zoning Bylaw spells out that as follows:

Uses not otherwise permitted in the Residential District, if such uses preserve historic and/or culturally significant BUILDINGS and STRUCTURES, provided that the historic and/or cultural character of the site, and BUILDING or STRUCTURE, in the opinion of the Special Permit Granting Authority, is not significantly altered, and the Special Permit Granting Authority finds that such uses, with any necessary mitigation measures, are in harmony with the character and uses permitted in the Residential District. This Section shall not eliminate the requirements of Section 3.2.2.5, which shall remain intact as written.

While the above clause does allow many uses inside historic structures, it does so by requiring a Special Permit which adds time, money, and costs to a normal project. Furthermore, there are several zoning districts which do not include the above provision. To ease the process of permitting and encourage reuse of historic structures, it may be worth developing pre-approved uses and establishing them as a “by-right” provision within the bylaw. As mentioned above, many developers and homeowners are still reluctant to seek a Special Permit. With such a change, the Town could, for instance, consider allowing only in-law apartments or home offices as of right in the bylaw. Or, it could go further and even stand-alone housing units

(condominiums or apartments) to be constructed inside these structures in a way that preserves the character of the exterior of structure and the neighborhood.

It is important to publicize the availability of this zoning tool and the building department and planning departments should go out of their way to advise people of this option if they come in inquiring about building demolition. The Town's historic society could also publish a pamphlet describing some of these zoning options to encourage building reuse.

F. Districts to consider restricting building permits

1. Lake Boon area

As septic systems continue to fail and water wells potentially become compromised, the Town may eventually find itself in a situation where it must limit annual building permits in the Lake Boon area. This approach could help the Town limit



growth by slowing the number of expansions, tear-downs, and new development near the lake. Making it harder for summer residences to be converted to year-round use is another by-product of rationing building permits. Although it might seem a draconian approach, it may be the necessary step the Town will have to take to protect the health of residents presently dwelling in this neighborhood. As described elsewhere, this area needs further study and zoning and building permit restrictions are just one tool the Town might consider as it further evaluates the needs of this area.

2. Other areas where growth is not smart

Similar to the Lake Boon watershed, Stow is ripe with sensitive environmental areas near the Assabet River, wetlands, and other water bodies described in the Natural Resources section. As a matter of policy, the Town might want to limit development in this areas by restricting building permits or expanding its Wetlands Protection By-law making it more difficult to build in proximity to wetlands, rivers, streams, in floodplain, etc.

G. Commercial Areas

1. Promote “village-style”

Old historic New England villages had structures built close to the street with services located in the rear (parking and stockpiling of goods behind buildings). These villages often had residential upper floors and were sited very close together. Business owners’ current notions of commercial development discourage this type of development and encourage, instead, large parking fields in front with buildings set so far back it is hard to identify the stores from the road. An example of this is shown to the right. From the road,



this strip mall is non-descript and unimaginative. However, there are still key commercial areas along major routes in Stow that have yet to be fully developed. Before they are carved up into strip-mall style development, the Town might want to consider modifying the development constraints in the bylaw to encourage a more traditional style of buildings set closer to the road with parking servicing those buildings set behind.

Other development constraints could dictate the type and style of building architecture, signage guidelines, lighting, and other elements that if controlled could help promote a village-feel to future buildings. This type of development is often more pedestrian friendly with large front sidewalks and other connecting linkages between parcels and tends to discourage large parking fields:



FIGURE: 29 Existing Retail in Town



2. Expand allowable commercial uses

It has been a while since the Town has evaluated its allowable commercial uses permitted in existing retail zones. Discussions around the Master Plan Committee table suggested there is an opportunity for the Town to examine present uses and perhaps add some new additional uses that were not previously permissible. This is a task appropriate for the Economic Development Committee should it be created and also a task for the Planning Board.

Chapter 10

Implementation



CHAPTER 10: Implementation

M.G.L. Chapter 41, Section 81d, provides a clear statement of the requirements for implementation of master plans. The implementation section "...defines and schedules the specific municipal actions necessary to achieve the objectives of each element [section] of the master plan. Scheduled expansion or replacement of public facilities or circulation [transportation] system components and the anticipated costs and revenues associated with accomplishment of such activities shall be detailed in this element. This element shall specify the process by which the municipality's regulatory structures shall be amended so as to be consistent with the master plan."

To view the text of the statute, go to <http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/41-81d.htm>

The Master Plan is established under the jurisdiction of the Planning Board. However, it deals with many elements in the community that are not directly under the control of the Planning Board. For instance, capital planning of municipal facilities generally falls under the policy direction of the Board of Selectmen and within the job description of the Town Administrator. Thus, it is important to involve a wide range of local leaders in implementing the goals of the plan.

However, nearly as soon as a Master Plan is published, some elements become obsolete due to new information emerging, urgent needs surfacing, and in some cases a change in political will. The long-term Master Plan attempts to project as nearly as possible what the community's goals and priorities should be into the future. Nonetheless, it is critical for this section and the specific tasks within the Master Plan to be evaluated on a regular basis. Annually is ideal but certainly at least every other year, the community should engage in a dialog around its priorities.

Because a Master Plan looks comprehensively at known deficiencies and structural goals voiced by the community, it is not possible to have completely adequate information on each of the topical areas in order to set short-term priorities. For instance, how can we know if a fire station or a new school should be built within the next two years, five years, or ten years, without first evaluating the costs of each project? Similarly, while we can say it is desirable for the community not to get involved in providing water or sewer services, will that approach change by necessity should Stow's groundwater become contaminated or should a local water supplier serving hundreds of houses no longer be financially solvent? These examples highlight why priorities can and perhaps should change in response to new information. These examples also suggest the importance of pre-planning toward larger goals.

Where possible, in order to assist the community in taking steps to implement this plan, we suggest smaller steps to take toward accomplishing the larger goals. As an example, in the Economic Development chapter we identify having a more diversified local tax base as a goal

and we indicate a number of actions to assist in this endeavor. There are also a number of areas where we suggest zoning improvements but we are careful to emphasize the need to have a robust public process in developing those zoning amendments.

Because of the changing factors discussed above, Master Plan Committee members had mixed feelings as to the value of ordering goals and priorities by rank across the various topical areas. Nonetheless, an attempt to do so was made in the following sections where a number of charts are offered. These charts were created as a tool to assist the reader in identifying the items that did rise to the top as being among the most important short-term and long-term goals. We have also made an effort in these charts to specify which entities in town should bear the primary responsibility for implementing specific goals. However, as another note of caution, the “responsible party” could change if the Town seeks a different course of action than is prescribed in this document. Or, the “responsible party” could be modified to reflect new ways of doing things such as expanded or consolidated departments, newly formed committees, active resident participation, etc.

The Master Plan Committee is also pleased to report that the Board of Selectmen intends to take an active role in implementing this document. Following its publication, steps will be taken to ensure that the goals and priorities are regularly evaluated against existing expenditures, staffing, and management plans.

Specifically, the Town of Stow will create an implementation team under the direction of the Board of Selectmen to establish an evaluative system governing the decision-making process in undertaking the programs and projects identified in the Master Plan. The process will include an assessment of all priorities identified in the Master Plan and ultimately, the development of an actionable, long-range community development plan. Working in concert with the appropriate boards and committees, the Selectmen will facilitate overall design, funding, construction, and management of the Master Plan’s highest priorities.

This implementation team will be responsible for the ongoing process of identifying costs associated with undertaking individual items and in recommending to the Finance Committee and Town Meeting the programming of revenue to pay for the various undertakings.

The Master Plan Committee suggests this implementation team include a member from each of the topical areas discussed in the plan as well as a member from the Finance Committee, the Town Administrator’s office, and the major department heads in town. The Implementation Team might wish to take an active role in evaluating the Capital Plan, budget, and Town Meeting Warrant by way of submitting an annual report to Town Meeting indicating which articles support the goals of the Master Plan and which do not.

Furthermore, the Implementation Team might wish to develop measurement indicators by which the progress toward achieving various goals will be measured. These types of indicators are sometimes also called “benchmarks” and other times termed “evaluation measures.” It is important to have some means of determining progress toward meeting a goal.

Within this document there may be some goals that have yet to be fully fleshed out due to the comprehensive nature of this report and the difficulty in including specificity on every topic. Therefore, a final task for the Implementation Team could be to serve as a catalyst to help develop further clarity on goals in their nascent stage.

While there are goals and priorities for each element listed at the end of some chapters, they are also distilled here into these cohesive tables printed below. Again, these tables will assist the reader and the Implementation Team in comparing the various priorities and needs competing for scarce revenues.

When considering implementation, it is important to note that the Master Plan is best used as a living document and not one shelved upon completion. For this reason, the Master Plan Committee has taken due care to release drafts of this document along the way to various committees and other interested parties. It then held a public forum on April 12, 2010 to obtain feedback from the community and met again to consider specific suggestions, edits, and comments.

The Master Plan Committee wishes to thank all of the Boards and Committees, as well as individuals who provided written comments subsequent to the draft release of this document. We have tried to include revisions addressing as many of the comments as possible. In some cases we received comments that conflict with one another, thus making it difficult to satisfy all reviewers. Nonetheless, we did our best to incorporate as much as we felt was appropriate.

As a final stage of releasing the document, the Master Plan Committee intends to go around to each of the various board and committees plus department heads and discuss with them the elements of this plan that are pertinent to areas within their control. Where various individuals or boards and committees are designated to carry the ball on specific goals, these parties will be consulted and engaged in the endeavor of implementation.

Through this process we hope to establish a truly collaborative approach to successfully implement this Master Plan.

The following section includes a variety of charts intended to present priority action items in a variety of different ways to enhance the readers understanding of what this plan ultimately determined were important goals. When all information was culled from the various chapters, there were 70 items that merited inclusion and emphasis in this final implementation chapter. In order to distill all of this information, committee members rank ordered each of the items with a system using “1” for *low priority*, “2” for *medium priority*, and “3” for *high priority*. Then we took an average among all committee members’ responses and discussed the results to verify that the data were representative of how the committee wished to portray the importance of each item. The committee then followed a similar process to rank the relative time frame for implementation of each action item. “1” was used for *short term* for items that that the committee felt the Town should tackle in the next 1-2 years. “2” signified *medium term* for those projects to undertake in years 3-5, and “3” depicted *longer term* projects which would take 6 or more years to either initiate or complete.

In the priority ranking, we then sorted the results to be able to list them in descending order with the highest priority items at the top of the chart. That chart is presented below:

FIGURE: 30 Comprehensive Implementation Chart

<u>Priority Rank</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Action item</u>	<u>Average Priority Rank</u>	<u>Committee Priority</u>
1	5	Identify sources and develop strategies to mitigate excess of phosphorus in Elizabeth Brook during high-water, wet weather conditions	2.8333	High
1	3	Monitor and maintain affordability of the Subsidized Housing Inventory to avoid loss of individual units as they come up for resale.	2.833	High
1	5	Actively pursue improvements to Lake Boon problems by educating residents about key environmental issues especially use of fertilizers and products containing phosphorus, proper septic maintenance, well water quality, etc.	2.833	High
1	6	Implement a Golf Course Study with a goal to protect existing scenic vistas and evaluate the preferred method of future development on those parcels.	2.833	High
1	6	Protect and preserve the health of Lake Boon.	2.833	High
2	4	Establish Lower Village Mixed-Use Overlay District	2.8	High
2	5	Pursue zoning and bylaw changes to limit development on the lake	2.8	High

<u>Priority Rank</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Action item</u>	<u>Average Priority Rank</u>	<u>Committee Priority</u>
3	4	Work with owners of commercial properties that do not meet DEP compliance standards and monitor those that might be on the verge of noncompliance to see how they can be assisted in securing DEP approval.	2.6666	High
3	3	Capitalize the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust through a number of resources, including payments through the fees in-lieu of actual units, private donations of land and funding, and negotiated fees from developers. In addition, the Community Preservation Committee could be asked to make a recommendation at Annual Town Meeting to allocate the 10% required funding for affordable housing to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund for a specific project purpose. A better capitalized trust will allow the Stow Affordable Housing Trust to respond quickly to new affordable housing opportunities without having to wait for the next Town Meeting for fund allocation approval.	2.666	High
3	5	Stay engaged in ongoing discussions and studies such as the Assabet River Study Coordination Team and maintain an active role in any future studies initiated	2.666	High
3	6	Protect Open Space in Southwest Stow.	2.666	High
3	6	Foster pedestrian mobility through the implementation of sidewalks and other planning strategies.	2.666	High
3	7	Explore arrangements with private water suppliers and work collaboratively with appropriate private entities to expand water supply to schools, municipal facilities and private users.	2.666	High
3	8	Pursue funding for further steps that would follow up on the recent Lower Village traffic study, such as a feasibility study and preliminary design, through either grant opportunities or other municipal appropriations.	2.666	High
3	8	Pursue means to connect the northern end of the Stow Assabet River Rail Trail with the Rail Trail in Maynard and the southern end with the Hudson Rail Trail while state and federal funding are still available to do so.	2.666	High

<u>Priority Rank</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Action item</u>	<u>Average Priority Rank</u>	<u>Committee Priority</u>
4	4	Evaluate Zoning and consider modifications for parcels in the Industrial District in and around Minute Man Air Field to promote lower-intensity uses such as support facilities for cleaning or landscaping services/ businesses, or small light industrial facilities, incubator businesses and commercial recreation	2.6	High
4	6	Protect lands that will preserve Stow's "rural character".	2.6	High
5	3	Create an inventory of land parcels that are potentially suitable for some amount of affordable/work force housing, mixed income, or mixed use development. This action also includes integrating affordable housing into the Open Space and Recreation Plan. (Part of this task has already been completed by the Land Use Task Force. Refer to their 2009 report for the details.)	2.5	High
5	5	Encourage the DEP to fund follow-up studies of non-growing season phosphorus discharge and its role in the overall nutrient budget of the river	2.5	High
5	6	Complete the Rail Trail by linking existing trails.	2.5	High
5	7	Increase stabilization fund balance to approximately \$1 million to cover for unexpected events and to minimize disruption to services during economic downturns	2.5	High
5	7	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	2.5	High
5	7	Set money aside in the near future for a feasibility study to evaluate the re-use options for the Pompositticut School facility.	2.5	High
5	7	Undertake outreach program to educate residents in the Lake Boon neighborhood to decrease phosphorus contamination by 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.	2.5	High
6	4	Establish Gleasondale Mill Mixed-Use Overlay District	2.4	Medium

<u>Priority Rank</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Action item</u>	<u>Average Priority Rank</u>	<u>Committee Priority</u>
6	4	Identify the appropriate smart growth principles that are applicable to Southwest Stow and methods to achieve those principles.	2.4	Medium
6	8	Monitor and participate in decision making on opportunities for expanded transit service through MART or MBTA	2.4	Medium
6	8	Explore opportunities for funding of roadway projects through the Boston MPO including designating a staff person to act as the municipality's TIP Coordinator.	2.4	Medium
7	3	Modify zoning to allow residential development under more conditions that would increase the diversity of housing types and choice, integrating affordable housing into more areas as well. For example, the Town could consider allowing free-standing multi-family housing, creating an overlay district with incentives for the development of "cottage housing", etc.	2.333	Medium
7	3	Provide gap financing to leverage project financing as such funding. Typically CPA money in the case of small towns, often provides the last "gap filler" to make projects feasible and the key leverage to secure necessary financing from state and federal agencies as well as private lenders.	2.333	Medium
7	3	Help qualifying residents access housing assistance including a wide range of programs and services for counseling, support with housing-related expenses, and home improvements.	2.333	Medium
7	5	Continue procuring parcels and working with property owners to establish contiguous access as a right-of-way to the Rail Trail	2.333	Medium
7	5	Discourage teardowns	2.333	Medium
7	6	Expand recreation/conservation district zoning to establish Wildlife Habitat corridors which will ensure the continued movement of wildlife as lands are developed. These important parcels should be protected with conservation restrictions.	2.333	Medium
7	6	Change Planned Conservation Development bylaw to require that the open space be designated prior to determining where the homes will be sited.	2.333	Medium

<u>Priority Rank</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Action item</u>	<u>Average Priority Rank</u>	<u>Committee Priority</u>
7	7	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.	2.333	Medium
7	8	Participate actively in the efforts of the MAGIC study to evaluate whether or not bus rapid transit (BRT) could be developed in conjunction with the proposed rail trail slated to be built on the MassCentral Branch Railroad and follow closely the possibilities and recommendations that could come out of this study.	2.333	Medium
8	4	Implement Smart Growth Principles in Northwest Stow including compact development, preservation of the environment, and conservation of natural resources;	2.2	Medium
9	3	Modify or replace existing regulations for Planned Conservation Development to include incentives for affordable housing (PCDs are subject to inclusion of affordable housing) and several other provisions to strengthen the bylaw and make it more responsive to more current needs and priorities. For example, density incentives could be added to the PCD bylaw. Also, the Town should look at the provisions in the model bylaws developed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and other organizations.	2.166666	Medium
9	3	Continue to pursue the Affordable Housing Deed Restriction Program that has been funded with \$250,000 in CPA funds to purchase deed restrictions from lower income property owners, converting these units to long-term affordability upon resale. A priority should be the purchase of permanent deed restrictions on the Elm Ridge homes and Plantation Apartments.	2.16666	Medium
10	4	Engage those with diverse perspectives to participate in dialog about appropriate ways to improve economic development.	2.1666	Medium
10	3	Modify the Comprehensive Permit Policy (December 2002) to provide more explicit architectural design guidelines, emphasize acceptable density ranges, be consistent with new state guidelines and better reflect housing strategies and production goals. Also, the Comprehensive Permit Policy should be revisited to determine if the conclusion that the most "acute" need is rental housing for all income levels and to determine if this is still what the Town wants.	2.166	Medium

<u>Priority Rank</u>	<u>Ch.</u>	<u>Action item</u>	<u>Average Priority Rank</u>	<u>Committee Priority</u>
10	4	Work with Planning Board to consider developing peer review guidelines and having peer review consultants at-the-ready or “on-call” to assist when large projects come up.	2.166	Medium
10	5	Continue efforts to procure funds and work collaboratively with SCT and other groups to complete the Emerald Necklace trail	2.166	Medium
10	6	Acquire and preserve land for future active and passive recreation needs.	2.166	Medium
10	6	Implement a new bylaw requiring sewage package treatment plants for parcels in the Water Resource Protection District.	2.166	Medium
10	6	Appoint a committee to explore building a mutigenerational community center.	2.166	Medium
11	3	Conduct ongoing community outreach to continue to inform local leaders and residents on the importance of affordable and work force housing and to present information on local housing initiatives.	2	Low
11	3	Consider obtaining resources to help with implementation of the Housing Production Plan 2010” document by hiring, sharing or using consultants.	2	Low
11	3	Establish a reasonable fee to the Town for peer review services from applicants of comprehensive permits per requirements set forth in 760 CMR 56.05 and 56.06.	2	Low
11	3	Modify the inclusion of affordable housing zoning bylaw (2003 Annual Town Meeting) to allow more housing types in such developments, including a more reasonable restriction on multi-family housing; insert more specific density provisions to permit a specified amount of units beyond what would be allowed in a conventional plan and sufficient to fully offset the costs of the affordable units; provide for a percentage of homes affordable to “below-market” households, i.e., households with incomes 81-110% of area median income. Also, modify the fee in-lieu-of provision to more accurately reflect the Town’s cost to provide affordable housing units.	2	Low

Priority Rank	Ch.	Action item	Average Priority Rank	Committee Priority
11	3	Offer predevelopment funding through CPA funds to ensure that the development will be feasible, particularly given site conditions.	2	Low
11	3	Support permitting as appropriate, to expedite approvals and lend local support during the permitting process on affordable housing developments.	2	Low
11	5	Find ways to preserve existing structures	2	Low
11	6	Identify issues and opportunities for recreation on, and additional conservation of Crow Island.	2	Low
11	6	Complete the Stow Emerald Necklace by linking or creating trails.	2	Low
11	6	Limit the alteration of trees and stonewalls along Stow's scenic roadways by adopting the Scenic Roads Preservation Bylaw.	2	Low
11	6	Obtain prior Town Meeting approval to purchase key open space parcels when they become available.	2	Low
11	8	Pursue participation in the state's Safe Routes to School program	2	Low
11	8	Pursue the development of a town-wide Traffic Calming policy and include in it the preferred construction form of crosswalk treatments appropriate for various types of roadway crossings	2	Low
12	3	Provide suitable public property for development as the contribution or "bargain sale" of land owned by the Town or other public entities but not essential for government purposes.	1.8333	Low
12	5	Restrict total number of new building permits	1.833	Low
12	5	Limit square footage of new development to protect against overbuilding	1.833	Low
12	5	Explore protection of historic homes and buildings through possibilities such as a historic inventory; zoning/bylaw changes to discourage teardowns; restrict rebuilds	1.833	Low
12	5	Explore improvements to the Lower Village including a village-friendly bylaw; inclusion in the National Register	1.833	Low

12	6	Formulate a Demolition Delay Bylaw and evaluate areas of town for implementation.	1.833	Low
13	5	Explore protection of the Town Center through possibilities such as a historic district, conservancy overlay district, demolition delay bylaw, Mass historic inventory	1.666	Low
14	4	Facilitate creation of a town committee, perhaps working in cooperation with the Agricultural Commission, to develop a bureau of tourism and actively market what Stow has to offer, including the promotion of local products and recreation.	1.5	Low
15	6	Educate the public on the benefits of open space.	1.5	Low

The next chart contains some of the same information organized instead by chapter. Intentionally omitted from this chart is a recommendation on which department or board or committee should likely be tasked with the responsibility of implementing the priority. There is a constant fluctuation of available resources, volunteer and staff capacity, and other emerging needs. Given this reality, the Master Plan Committee felt that the implementation team, in conjunction with the Town Administrator is best suited to assign priorities to responsible parties. Nonetheless, the chart can serve as a good starting point to begin to discuss these tasks with the various boards and committees who will likely be drawn into the work. Feedback from those involved should inform the implementation team on how it should proceed.

Also included in this chart is the proposed or anticipated timeline for implementing the various tasks. This too is subject to feedback, changing conditions, and further information that might provide insight into the need to accelerate or increase when a project gets implemented.

Also included in this chart is the proposed or anticipated timeline for implementing the various tasks. This too is subject to feedback, changing conditions, and further information that might provide insight into the need to accelerate or increase when a project gets implemented.

FIGURE: 31 Chapter Priorities

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
3	Conduct ongoing community outreach to continue to inform local leaders and residents on the importance of affordable and work force housing and to present information on local housing initiatives.	1.166	Short
3	Establish a reasonable fee to the Town for peer review services from applicants of comprehensive permits per requirements set forth in 760 CMR 56.05 and 56.06.	1.333	Short
3	Monitor and maintain affordability of the Subsidized Housing Inventory to avoid loss of individual units as they come up for resale.	1.333	Short
3	Help qualifying residents access housing assistance including a wide range of programs and services for counseling, support with housing-related expenses, and home improvements.	1.5	Short
3	Modify the Comprehensive Permit Policy (December 2002) to provide more explicit architectural design guidelines, emphasize acceptable density ranges, be consistent with new state guidelines and better reflect housing strategies and production goals. Also, the Comprehensive Permit Policy should be revisited to determine if the conclusion that the most “acute” need is rental housing for all income levels and to determine if this is still what the Town wants.	1.666	Medium
3	Modify zoning to allow residential development under more conditions that would increase the diversity of housing types and choice, integrating affordable housing into more areas as well. For example, the Town could consider allowing free-standing multi-family housing, creating an overlay district with incentives for the development of “cottage housing”, etc.	1.666	Medium

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
3	Modify the inclusion of affordable housing zoning bylaw (2003 Annual Town Meeting) to allow more housing types in such developments, including a more reasonable restriction on multi-family housing; insert more specific density provisions to permit a specified amount of units beyond what would be allowed in a conventional plan and sufficient to fully offset the costs of the affordable units; provide for a percentage of homes affordable to “below-market” households, i.e., households with incomes 81-110% of area median income. Also, modify the fee in-lieu-of provision to more accurately reflect the Town’s cost to provide affordable housing units.	1.666	Medium
3	Modify or replace existing regulations for Planned Conservation Development to include incentives for affordable housing (PCDs are subject to inclusion of affordable housing) and several other provisions to strengthen the bylaw and make it more responsive to more current needs and priorities. For example, density incentives could be added to the PCD bylaw. Also, the Town should look at the provisions in the model bylaws developed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and other organizations.	1.666	Medium
3	Offer predevelopment funding through CPA funds to ensure that the development will be feasible, particularly given site conditions.	1.666	Medium
3	Consider obtaining resources to help with implementation of the Housing Production Plan 2010” document by hiring, sharing or using consultants.	1.833	Medium
3	Support permitting as appropriate, to expedite approvals and lend local support during the permitting process on affordable housing developments.	1.833	Medium

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
3	Capitalize the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust through a number of resources, including payments through the fees in-lieu of actual units, private donations of land and funding, and negotiated fees from developers. In addition, the Community Preservation Committee could be asked to make a recommendation at Annual Town Meeting to allocate the 10% required funding for affordable housing to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund for a specific project. This will allow the Stow Affordable Housing Trust to respond quickly to new affordable housing opportunities without having to wait for the next Town Meeting for fund allocation approval.	2	Medium
3	Create an inventory of land parcels that are potentially suitable for some amount of affordable/work force housing, mixed income, or mixed use development. This action also includes integrating affordable housing into the Open Space and Recreation Plan. (Part of this task has already been completed by the Land Use Task Force. Refer to their 2009 report for the details.)	2	Medium
3	Provide suitable public property for development as the contribution or “bargain sale” of land owned by the Town or other public entities but not essential for government purposes.	2	Medium
3	Provide gap financing to leverage project financing as such funding. Typically CPA money in the case of small towns, often provides the last “gap filler” to make projects feasible and the key leverage to secure necessary financing from state and federal agencies as well as private lenders.	2	Medium
3	Continue to pursue the Affordable Housing Deed Restriction Program that has been funded with \$250,000 in CPA funds to purchase deed restrictions from lower income property owners, converting these units to long-term affordability upon resale. A priority should be the purchase of permanent deed restrictions on the Elm Ridge homes and Plantation Apartments.	2.155	Long
4	Establish Lower Village Mixed-Use Overlay District.	1.2	Short
4	Establish Gleasondale Mill Mixed-Use Overlay District.	1.4	Short
4	Work with owners of commercial properties that do not meet DEP compliance standards and monitor those that might be on the verge of noncompliance to see how they can be assisted in securing DEP approval.	1.5	Short

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
4	Identify the appropriate smart growth principles that are applicable to Southwest Stow and methods to achieve those principles.	1.6	Short
4	Evaluate Zoning and consider modifications for parcels in the Industrial District in and around Minute Man Air Field to promote lower-intensity uses such as support facilities for cleaning or landscaping services/ businesses, or small light industrial facilities, incubator businesses and commercial recreation.	1.6	Short
4	Work with Planning Board to consider developing peer review guidelines and having peer review consultants at-the-ready or “on-call” to assist when large projects come up.	1.666	Medium
4	Engage those with diverse perspectives to participate in dialog about appropriate ways to improve economic development.	1.666	Medium
4	Implement Smart Growth Principles in Northwest Stow including compact development, preservation of the environment, and conservation of natural resources.	1.8	Medium
4	Facilitate creation of a town committee, perhaps working in cooperation with the Agricultural Commission, to develop a bureau of tourism and actively market what Stow has to offer, including the promotion of local products and recreation.	2.333	Long
5	Pursue zoning and bylaw changes to limit development on the lake.	1.4	Short
5	Actively pursue improvements to Lake Boon problems by educating residents about key environmental issues especially use of fertilizers and products containing phosphorus, proper septic maintenance, well water quality, etc.	1.5	Short
5	Encourage the DEP to fund follow-up studies of non-growing season phosphorus discharge and its role in the overall nutrient budget of the river.	1.5	Short
5	Discourage teardowns.	1.666	Medium

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
5	Stay engaged in ongoing discussions and studies such as the Assabet River Study Coordination Team and maintain an active role in any future studies initiated.	1.666	Medium
5	Identify sources and develop strategies to mitigate excess of phosphorus in Elizabeth Brook during high-water, wet weather conditions.	1.666	Medium
5	Explore improvements to the Lower Village including a village-friendly bylaw; inclusion in the National Register.	1.833	Medium
5	Find ways to preserve existing structures.	2	Medium
5	Continue efforts to procure funds and work collaboratively with SCT and other groups to complete the Emerald Necklace trail.	2.166	Long
5	Continue procuring parcels and working with property owners to establish contiguous access as a right-of-way to the Rail Trail.	2.333	Long
5	Restrict total number of new building permits.	2.333	Long
5	Limit square footage of new development to protect against overbuilding.	2.333	Long
5	Explore protection of historic homes and buildings through possibilities such as a historic inventory; zoning/bylaw changes to discourage teardowns; restrict rebuilds.	2.333	Long
5	Explore protection of the Town Center through possibilities such as a historic district, conservancy overlay district, demolition delay bylaw, Mass historic inventory.	2.5	Long
6	Protect and preserve the health of Lake Boon.	1.5	Short
6	Protect lands that will preserve Stow's "rural character"	1.6	Short
6	Implement a Golf Course Study with a goal to protect existing scenic vistas and evaluate the preferred method of future development on those parcels.	1.666	Medium
6	Change Planned Conservation Development bylaw to require that the open space be designated prior to determining where the homes will be sited.	1.666	Medium

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
6	Educate the public on the benefits of open space.	1.666	Medium
6	Protect Open Space in Southwest Stow.	1.833	Medium
6	Expand recreation/conservation district zoning to establish Wildlife Habitat corridors which will ensure the continued movement of wildlife as lands are developed. These important parcels should be protected with conservation restrictions.	2	Medium
6	Implement a new bylaw requiring sewage package treatment plants for parcels in the Water Resource Protection District.	2	Medium
6	Formulate a Demolition Delay Bylaw and evaluate areas of town for implementation.	2	Medium
6	Foster pedestrian mobility through the implementation of sidewalks and other planning strategies.	2	Medium
6	Limit the alteration of trees and stonewalls along Stow's scenic roadways by adopting the Scenic Roads Preservation Bylaw.	2	Medium
6	Obtain prior Town Meeting approval to purchase key open space parcels when they become available.	2	Medium
6	Obtain prior Town Meeting approval to purchase key open space parcels when they become available.	2	Medium
6	Appoint a committee to explore building a mutigenerational community center.	2	Medium
6	Complete the Rail Trail by linking existing trails.	2.166	Long
6	Identify issues and opportunities for recreation on, and additional conservation of Crow Island.	2.166	Long
6	Acquire and preserve land for future active and passive recreation needs.	2.666	Long
6	Complete the Stow Emerald Necklace by linking or creating trails.	2.666	Long
7	Set money aside in the near future for a feasibility study to evaluate the re-use options for the Pompositicut School facility.	1.166	Short

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
7	Explore arrangements with private water suppliers and work collaboratively with appropriate private entities to expand water supply to schools, municipal facilities and private users.	1.166	Short
7	Undertake outreach program to educate residents in the Lake Boon neighborhood to decrease phosphorus contamination by 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.	1.333	Short
7	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.	1.666	Medium
7	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.	1.666	Medium
7	Increase stabilization fund balance to approximately \$1 million to cover for unexpected events and to minimize disruption to services during economic downturns.	2.166	Long
8	Monitor and participate in decision making on opportunities for expanded transit service through MART or MBTA.	1.4	Short
8	Pursue means to connect the northern end of the Stow Assabet River Rail Trail with the Rail Trail in Maynard and the southern end with the Hudson Rail Trail while state and federal funding are still available to do so.	1.5	Short
8	Explore opportunities for funding of roadway projects through the Boston MPO including designating a staff person to act as the municipality's TIP Coordinator.	1.6	Short
8	Participate actively in the efforts of the MAGIC study to evaluate whether or not bus rapid transit (BRT) could be developed in conjunction with the proposed rail trail slated to be built on the MassCentral Branch Railroad and follow closely the possibilities and recommendations that could come out of this study.	1.666	Medium

Ch.	Task	Average Time Frame	Time Frame
8	Pursue funding for further steps that would follow up on the recent Lower Village traffic study, such as a feasibility study and preliminary design, through either grant opportunities or other municipal appropriations.	1.666	Medium
8	Pursue participation in the state's Safe Routes to School program	2	Medium
8	Pursue the development of a town-wide Traffic Calming policy and include in it the preferred construction form of crosswalk treatments appropriate for various types of roadway crossings	2.2	Long

Chapter 11

Appendices
and
Supplemental
Information



CHAPTER 11: Appendices and Supplemental Information

Some items as noted are contained in hard copy in a separately bound appendix. For more information or to request hard copies of the appendix and/or the entire Master Plan, please contact the Planning Department at:

Town of Stow
Planning Department
380 Great Road
Stow, MA 01775
(978) 897-5098
planning@stow-ma.gov

A. Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAN	Active Adult Neighborhood
APR	Agricultural Preservation Restriction
BMP	Best Management Practices
BOH	Board of Health
BOS	Board of Selectmen
CC	Conservation Commission
CIP	Commercial, Industrial, and Personal Property
COA	Council on Aging
CPA	Community Preservation Act
CPC	Community Preservation Committee
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DCS	Division of Conservation Services
DEP	Department of Environmental Protection
DHCD	Department of Housing and Community Development
DIF	District Improvement Financing
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
HAC	Housing Appeals Committee
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
LID	Low Impact Development
LIP	Local Initiative Program
LOS	Level of Service
MAPC	Metropolitan Area Planning Council
MGL	Massachusetts General Law
MHC	Massachusetts Historical Commission
MP	Master Plan
MPC	Master Plan Committee
OAR	Organization for the Assabet River
OSC	Open Space Committee
OSRD	Open Space Residential Design
PCD	Planned Conservation Development
PMSA	Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area
ROW	Right of Way
SCC	Stow Cultural Council
SCHC	Stow Community Housing Corporation
SCT	Stow Conservation Trust
SEHC	Stow Elderly Housing Corporation
SHA	Stow Housing Authority
SHI	Subsidized Housing Inventory
SMAHT	Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust
SVT	Sudbury Valley Trustees
TDR	Transfer of Development Rights
TIF	Tax increment financing
ZBA	Zoning Board of Appeals

B. Build Out Analysis

Potential Build Out - In the year 2000, the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA) published a projection for the Town of Stow showing the potential build out given the existing zoning bylaws and undeveloped land. At build out, Stow’s population will be 9,582 residents vs. our present 6,385 residents with a school population of 1,726 students vs. our present population of 1,148 students. Dwelling units will increase from the present 2,300 to 3,447. This does not count the dwelling units permitted under Stow’s Active Adult Neighborhood Overlay District (the underlying district is industrial or commercial) and Chapter 40B developments, which are not considered by the EOEA. The detailed projections can be viewed at the EOEA website.

The following is a brief tabulation of the build out results:

Demographic Projections

<i>Population</i>		
1990	5,328	people
2000	5,902	people
Build out	9,482	people
<i>Students</i>		
1990	884	students
2000	1,027	students
Build out	1,726	students
<i>Households</i>		
1990	1,793	dwelling
2000	2,128	dwelling
Build out	3,447	dwelling
<i>Water Use (gallons/day)</i>		
1990	79,128	gallons
Build out	595,043	gallons
<i>Build Out Impact</i>		
Additional residents	3,689	people
Additional school children	699	children
Additional residential units	1,319	dwelling
Additional developable land area (acres)	2,857	acres
Additional solid waste (tons/year)	1,888	tons
Additional roadways at build out (miles)	30	miles

C. Additional appendix items contained in separate volume:

1. Density Through Design
2. Stow Reconnaissance Report (Landscapes Heritage project)
3. Chapter 61 policy, adopted by the Board of Selectmen
4. Listing of properties with Chapter 61 status
5. "Right to Farm" General Bylaw
6. Recreation Commission's Report to Land Use Task Force - March 2009
7. Open Space and Recreation – "Stow Forever Green" - June 2008
8. Elementary School Master Plan - "Stow Public Schools" - May 2007
9. Community Development Plan - 2004
10. "Housing Choice - A Housing Plan for Stow"
11. Mixed Use Zoning Project, Priority Development Fund Project - 2005
12. Visual Preference Survey – 2005
13. Land Use Task Force Final Report – 2009
14. Recreation Department Master Plan – 2007

D. Maps & Visuals

Larger-format and/or color versions of the maps and figures presented in this document can be viewed at the Planning Department.