

Town of Sturbridge ** Community Preservation Committee Plan

The Town of Sturbridge is a suburban town with a population of 9,542 in the year 2006. The town has always been known for its natural resources and beauty, its open spaces, wetlands, forests, farmland and wildlife, as well as its popular tourist destination Old Sturbridge Village. Over the years, the community has experienced evolutionary changes to some of its industries and farms, but prides itself in knowing that generation after generation families have been able to continue to call Sturbridge their home. Sturbridge's ability to manage its growth while maintaining its character and traditions is a priority the town takes seriously. It continues to place a high value on balancing its commercial and residential growth without compromising historical treasures or natural beauty. Sturbridge's strategic location in central Massachusetts at the intersections of I-84 and the Massachusetts Turnpike has made it an attractive place for locating businesses and homes. Nevertheless, Sturbridge continues to be a community that, while open to all, maintains its unique personality and charm.

Introduction

The Community Preservation Act (MGL Chapter 44B) is statewide enabling legislation allowing cities and towns in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to adopt a property tax surcharge with revenues from this surcharge (plus state matching funds) to be used for open space preservation, creation of community housing, preservation of historic buildings and landscapes, and creation of recreation opportunities. Sturbridge adopted the CPA at a Town Election in April 2001. The surcharge went into effect with the start of the fiscal year 2002 on July 1, 2001.

Consistent with the requirements of the CPA and with a bylaw adopted at the April 2001 Annual Town Meeting, the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) was formed to study the needs, possibilities and resources of the town regarding community preservation. The CPC, appointed by the Town Administrator with the confirmation of the Board of Selectmen, consists of nine members, one member from each of the following entities – the Conservation Commission, the Historical Commission, the Planning Board, the Recreation Committee, the Open Space Committee and the Housing Partnership Committee, and three additional “at large” members appointed by the Town Administrator with Board of Selectmen confirmation. Time has passed and CPA has successfully implemented the acquisition of open space properties and historical preservation projects. The Committee continues to work toward affordable housing and recreation goals.

In January 2007, the CPC reviewed previous policies and created this formalized plan as an ongoing guide for the future.

The Sturbridge CPC determined that:

- it will be a catalyst for projects
- it will be a funder, not a developer
- it will utilize community goals previously set forth in other public documents, such as the Master Plan, updated Open Space Plan, and Dialogue for the Future which have received wide scrutiny and public input
- it will attempt to meet multiple community preservation goals in each project
- it will communicate its mission and goals to the general public

The Sturbridge CPC's goals will form the basis for projects recommended by the CPC. While it is assumed that other projects unrelated to these goals will be submitted over time, and, further, that these goals may be amended over time as the needs of the town change, consistency with the main goals as found in this plan, and as amended, will receive preference.

Many of the goals of this plan are carried forward from the four town committees: Open Space Committee; Historic Commission; Affordable Housing, and Recreation Committee.

Open Space: Overview

Sturbridge enjoys a variety of open space resources distributed throughout the town and, with its most recent acquisition in 2006 of 826 acres of land from Old Sturbridge Village, it now boasts a swath of greenspace that diagonally bisects the entire town. It is anchored by the Leadmine Wildlife Management Area at the southwest end and continues to Wells State Park at the northeast end. These areas include

conservation lands maintained by the Sturbridge Conservation Committee, Department of Conservation and Recreation, Department of Fish & Game, The Trustees of Reservations, and Opacum Land Trust. Many privately owned large parcels of land are still available in Sturbridge which add significantly to the rural character of the town but which are not permanently protected from development.

The 2005 updated Open Space and Recreation Plan includes goals for the protection of the town's water resources, protection of wildlife habitat, trail linkage, recreation facilities for active and passive recreation, and preservation of the town's historic character.

CPC has worked hard since CPA passed in Sturbridge, with the highest concentration and probably the most ecologically significant lands being purchased in 2005 and 2006. We want to continue our endeavors for the future of Sturbridge. The stakes are high, and time is of the essence. In our view, we see an ideal town where development is phased in over time to keep pace with our ability to maintain services and schools, and with a finite limit on the build-out capacity for Sturbridge. We see a town that is pedestrian friendly, with sidewalks and greenway recreation trails, linking the north, south, east and west. We envision a town that has a rich abundance of healthy functioning ecosystems, linked together through existing and future conservation lands. We see a town that has ample open space for active and passive recreation and that values and preserves our remaining farmland and forests, and provides ample watershed and natural resource protection.

Open Space Goals

Goal: Protect and preserve critical~natural~resources~and~wildlife habitat

(1) identify critical parcels of land for municipal purchase or other methods of permanent protection from development

(2) establish and maintain lines of communication with landowners to take advantage of opportunities to acquire and/or preserve property

(3) support town acquisition of open space based on identified priorities, and

(4) explore means and costs of purchasing development rights and other options for funding open space preservation

Goal: Protect surface and groundwater quality and quantity

Goal: Preserve, enhance and connect, where feasible, large parcels currently in agriculture, open space and recreational use, and other undisturbed natural areas

Goal: Develop sustainable land uses on town-owned properties, such as eco-tourism

Goal: Create trail linkages including new trails, bike paths, walkways and greenways

Goal: Increase public awareness and support of open space conservation

Specific Criteria for Open Space Projects

Open space proposals that address as many of the following criteria as possible will receive preference:

- Preserve a priority parcel as identified in the 2005 updated Open Space and Recreation Plan, or a parcel that is added to that list by the Open Space Committee

- Permanently protect important wildlife habitat, including areas that are of local significance for biodiversity; contain a variety of habitats, with a diversity of geologic features and types~of vegetation; contain a habitat type that is in danger of vanishing from Sturbridge; or preserve habitat for threatened or endangered species of plants or animals

- Preserve Sturbridge's rural and agricultural character

- Provide opportunities for passive recreation and environmental education

- Protect or enhance wildlife corridors, promote connectivity of habitat~or prevent fragmentation of habitats
- Provide connections with existing trails or potential trail linkages
- Preserve scenic views
- Border a scenic road
- Border land already permanently preserved
- Protect drinking water quantity and quality
- Enhance flood control/storage. Preserve important surface water~bodies, including wetlands, vernal pools or riparian zones

Historical Commission: Overview

Reverence for the past is amply demonstrated in Sturbridge in areas where the look and feel of a small New England town have been preserved. Residents treasure the open space, common areas, stonewalls, and beautiful older homes, barns, and buildings that grace the scenic roadways. An active Historical Commission works to enhance preservation efforts.

Since inception, the CPC has assisted the town in creating digital replicas of town meeting records from 1738 through 1945. The purpose is to make these priceless documents more accessible to the general public, and to preserve them in case the originals might be damaged or destroyed at the town hall. Completed, printed replicas, and duplicate CD-Roms join the Joshua Hyde Public Library's collection.

Over the last few years the CPA has funded the town's historical interpretive signage. The general boundaries of the Common Historic District are now noted by signs on Main and Haynes Streets. Additionally, informational markers have been erected at the Common, the Center School/Old Burying Ground, the North Cemetery, and the Snellville School which is the current Senior Center. Maintenance repairs were also completed to some tombstones in the Old Burying Ground and North Cemeteries.

Goal: Preserve and maintain Sturbridge's historic landmarks and maintain the community's historic tradition and character

Goal: Continue to preserve Sturbridge's historic documents, photographs and artifacts

Goal: Increase public awareness and usage of historic buildings and properties

Affordable Housing: Overview

The plan of the Community Preservation Committee is to encourage greater diversity of housing opportunities in Sturbridge to meet the needs of a changing and diversified population with respect to age, household size and income.

In the Year 2000 Federal Census, Sturbridge had 3,141 year round housing units for a goal of 314 affordable units. As of January 2007, Sturbridge had 207 housing units that met the affordable standard set by Chapter 40B.

It is important to note that when the 2010 Federal Census is completed, Sturbridge's goal will increase substantially. Our population was about 7,800 in 2000, which showed 3,141 year round housing units. Currently our population is 9,542 with over 4,000 housing units, so our goal will be over 400 units.

In addition, 130 of our qualified affordable housing units will expire in 2011, so the task before Sturbridge is significant.

CPC intends to complete its first affordable housing project in the next two years with our first step being that the CPA recommended for 2007 annual meeting an article on the warrant to hire a consultant to conduct a Housing Needs Assessment and develop an Affordable Housing Action Plan. We feel that by properly identifying the specific affordable housing needs that exist in Sturbridge, we will be able to do a better job in working to meet those needs.

Affordable Housing Goals

Goal: Provide financial support for approved programs

Goal: Support the efforts of the Housing Partnership Committee to help achieve its affordable housing and community housing goals

Goal: Encourage and support a future inclusionary zoning bylaw

Specific Criteria for Affordable Housing projects

Affordable Housing proposals that address as many of the following criteria as possible will receive preference:

- Contribute to the goal of 10% affordability
- Promote a socioeconomic environment that encourages diversity
- Provide housing that is harmonious in design with its neighborhood
- Intermingle affordable and market rate housing
- Promote use of existing buildings or Town-owned sites
- Convert market rate to affordable units
- Give priority, to the extent allowed by law, to current Town employees

Recreation: Overview

The CPC works to support the Recreation Committee, which offers activities where participants are able to make constructive use of leisure time and contribute to positive physical and mental health, and good sportsmanship.

The CPC supports the Recreation Committee's priorities relating to programs and facilities. The Recreation Committee maintains records of youth sports organization's applications, insurances to operate within Sturbridge facilities, and organizational structures. Recreation also schedules field and gym use for youth sports and other organizations on town-owned and school-owned facilities (after school hours). In working closely with the various town leagues, the Recreation Committee also provides financial, logistical and planning support.

The Recreation Committee is committed to working together with other departments and residents to ensure that Sturbridge maintains the quality of life that residents should be afforded.

Sturbridge Recreation Goals

Goal: Create additional active and passive recreational facilities, areas, and programs to serve the needs of Sturbridge residents while protecting our natural resources

Goal: Optimize the use of land already owned by Sturbridge

Goal: Promote the creation of opportunities for safe and healthful non-motorized transportation

Goal: Preserve Town assets

Specific Criteria for Recreation Projects

- Support multiple recreational uses
- Serve a significant number of residents
- Expand the range of recreational opportunities and facilities available to Sturbridge residents of all ages
- Maximize the current use of existing recreational facilities already owned by Sturbridge via capital improvements
- Promote the creative use of corridors to create safe and healthful non-motorized transportation opportunities

GUIDELINES FOR APPLICATION FOR COMMUNITY PRESERVATION FUNDING

The Sturbridge Community Preservation Committee will give preference to proposals that meet the following general criteria:

- Are eligible for CPA funding according to the requirements described in the CPA legislation
- Falls within established parameters as defined by the four CPA categories
- Preserve the essential character of the town as described in this document
- Save resources that would otherwise be threatened and/or serve a currently under-served population
- Serves one or more CPA purpose (linking open space, recreation and community housing)
- Demonstrate practicality and feasibility of the proposed project
- Clearly define implementation and completion within the proposed project budget and time constraints
- Produce a realistic cost/benefit value
- Leverage additional public and/or private funds, such as private grants, state monies, donations, etc.
- Preserve or utilize currently owned town assets
- Receive endorsement by other municipal boards or departments

Each community preservation project will also be judged based on the category-specific Criteria listed in each area. The CPC reserves the right for final decision based upon established priorities of CPC and budget constraints.

Guidelines for Submission

- 1. Submit 12 hard copies and one digital copy of application form provided by the Sturbridge Community Preservation Committee.*
- 2. Applicant must be present for initial proposal presentation.*
- 3. Requests must include a statement of need, and be documented with appropriate support information. The use of maps, visual aids and other supplemental information is encouraged.*
- 4. Submit estimated time schedule for start and completion of the project.*
- 5. Obtain quotes for project costs whenever possible. If not, cost estimates may be used provided the basis for the estimate is fully explained.*
- 6. If request is part of a longer-term project, include the estimated total project cost.*
- 7. If applicant has multiple project requests, prioritize projects.*
- 8. Requests received by September 30th may be considered for the following April Town Meeting.*
- 9. Submissions for Special Town Meetings will be considered on a case-by-case basis. To get approval of placing an article for funding on the warrant of a Special Town Meeting the burden of proof of hardship and time-sensitivity of the project is on the applicant.*

*All submittals, hard copy and digital, shall be forwarded to: Community Preservation Committee, Sturbridge Town Hall, 308 Main Street, Sturbridge, MA 01566 ** communitypreservation@town.sturbridge.ma.us*