

**Executive Summary  
Dialogue for the Future  
Strategic Planning Survey**

**Process**

Starting in the Fall of 2002 the Board of Selectmen established a regularly scheduled “Dialogue for the Future” discussion forum on the second Monday of every month from 6:30 PM to 7:30 PM. From these discussions, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the community were discussed first in summary and later in detail. In June, 2003, from the information gathered during this process, the Selectmen created four sub-committees that were charged with reviewing the detailed information further. These sub-committees are as follows:

Affordable Housing Sub-Committee – With the need to develop affordable housing for young families and older citizens, the availability of funding from the Community Preservation Act and the demands placed on the Town to create affordable housing and reach the 10% affordable housing stock required by Chapter 40B of Mass. General Laws, the Town needs to analyze needs, land availability, ownership (private or public), the role of the Housing Authority, how proactive the town wants to be, creation senior or family affordable housing (or both).

*The goal is to reach consensus of where, who and how affordable housing projects will be developed in the future to ensure they are positive additions to the community and what steps the Town should be taking over the next five years to accomplish this goal.*

Community Development Sub-Committee – This sub-committee took up the issues of zoning, land use, community preservation, environmental issues, growth and development and where the community should be in the future. Issues that have been discussed are that Sturbridge has experienced rapid growth due to tourism, location, attractiveness of the community, low crime rates and quality schools. This sub-committee will review the two citizen surveys and the business survey that have been done over the past five years, study the build-out analysis conducted by the state and review the Town’s infrastructure.

*The goal is to develop the proper balance between residential, commercial and industrial development to ensure the Town continues to prosper, yet protects the historical, environmental and rural character of the community through possible re-zoning or changes to the zoning bylaws over the next five years and the role of the Community Preservation Committee in funding some of the goals that are developed.*

Recreation, Youth & Seniors Sub-Committee – This sub-committee will discuss issues specific to the services provided through the Recreation Committee, youth programs and Council on Aging to determine the appropriate levels of service that should be provided to the community. These discussions will include:

- (1) Discuss the level of services provided at the Senior Center and the availability of quality housing for seniors in the community. Also, what can the Town offer to help seniors stay in their homes.
- (2) Is the Town providing a reasonable level of recreation programs for the kids? There has been discussion regarding the shortage and quality of fields given the number of youth sports offered in Town (soccer, baseball, softball & football). Are the fields at Burgess, the Town Barn, Turner's Field and the Jr. High School sufficient and what improvements will make them better?

*The goal will be to develop a five-year plan that will include a determination of recreation needs of the community, program enhancements at the Senior Center; determination of additional housing assistance that can be provided to seniors and a review of recreational opportunities, recommendations for improvements and a five-year plan to accomplish these improvements.*

Municipal Service Levels Sub-Committee – This sub-committee will discuss everything else that the Town does and the appropriate levels of service to be provided to the community. Areas where increases or decreases in service levels will include a five-year plan to achieve these changes. This sub-committee will focus on public safety, cultural activities, public works, education, the underlying administrative costs of local government and the available funding levels required to meet service demands. Since funding and level of service is directly linked, this sub-committee will conduct a detailed analysis of each department's budgets and what services are actually provided to the community at the current funding levels and what additional services could/should be provided and at what cost.

*The goal of this sub-committee is to review and recommend the appropriate levels of service to be provided by the Town and how best to maintain costs to keep local government services affordable to residents and businesses. Budgets will be reviewed and discussions held on the effect of increasing or decreasing financing of municipal departments, including the school department.*

These sub-committees helped develop the questions that were asked on a survey of town residents. This survey was designed to be a statistical significant survey to allow the Town to estimate opinions of the overall town within  $\pm 4\%$ . The raw data from the survey is attached as Appendix 1.

The Board of Selectmen asked the Town Administrator to forward the survey results to the various sub-committees, meet with them and to solicit input from all parties that had participated in the process from the outset. Once this was accomplished, the Board of Selectmen asked the Town Administrator to provide a report with recommendations on the actions the Town should consider during the next five years.

### **Survey Results**

While the results of the survey can be debated, it is pretty clear from the results that residents believe Sturbridge is a very good place to live. The results from the survey are summarized below:

- Residents rated town departments that they had contact with during the prior year between “good” and exceeding “very good” (approaching “excellent”). The departments with the highest ratings were the Fire Department, Joshua Hyde Library, Council on Aging and Police Department.
- For town services not already provided, the greatest interest for new services was for municipal sanitation services and that they were willing to spend approximately \$23.00 per month for this service.
- While only 43% indicated they had visited the Town’s website, 90% found the information on the website useful. Residents indicated an interest in having program registration, online bill payment and mapping services included on the website.
- Residents indicated that most (88%) were opposed to spending \$7M to remove the overhead wires on Route 20 & Route 131 and place them underground and installing period style street lamps. However, this number (58%) changed significantly if 50% were funded through grants.
- Residents indicated opposition to increasing lake patrols (including residents that live on lakes); developing more stringent bylaws for fire protection; adding an employee to maintain town fields; and computerizing the permit tracking process.
- Residents indicated they will support adding Passport services in the Town Clerk’s office if the cost was minimal.
- Residents indicated support for developing a sports complex but opposition to the cost of renovating the Town Hall/Center School.
- Residents indicated support for purchasing a senior van to provide transportation services to seniors (55%) and wider support if it were partially grant funded (78%). Residents also supported the development of a senior health clinic at the senior center (81%).
- Most of the residents that responded to the survey were homeowners (92%); in the 41-55 age group (41%); worked in Worcester County (68%);

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

had internet service (90%) and have lived in town for over 15 years (46%).

- Residents indicated that word of mouth is the most popular way to become informed about Sturbridge issues (26%) while the Worcester Telegram and Southbridge Evening News were tied as the second most popular way to become informed (at 20% each).
- Most residents (84%) feel they have adequate opportunities at Town Meeting to express their opinion and that their vote at Town Meeting matters. 52% stated they had attended a Town Meeting in the past three years.
- Most residents indicated their vision for Sturbridge in the future was as a family-oriented, rural community.
- Most residents indicated the three greatest threats to Sturbridge was the potential for a casino development, high taxes, not enough jobs/too much development (tied).
- Residents felt the Town needed to plan for the inevitable growth as development pushes west from the Boston-metro area and that commercial and industrial growth should occur near major activity areas. Most (81%) did not believe their neighborhood could accommodate more growth.
- Residents indicated growth should be limited to where there is adequate infrastructure and that the Town should develop more flexible zoning to guide the density of development.
- Most residents (35%) felt there was no reason they will not retire in Sturbridge, but the high cost of housing (23%) was the major reason given for not retiring in Sturbridge. Most residents (61%) felt there was no reason not to raise a family in Sturbridge, the high cost of housing (16%) was again cited as the major reason they will not raise a family in Sturbridge.
- Most residents (72%) believe the environmental resources of the town are being adequately protected and 93% indicated that it was important for development to be designed and sited to protect significant water, plant and animal habitats.
- Most residents felt they can shop for every day retail items (84%) but most felt there is not a satisfactory range of employment opportunities (70%).
- Most residents felt that the town should have consistent commercial design and landscape requirements (87%) and that commercial signage should be upgraded and improved to a consistent design standard (75%).
- Most residents (79%) felt the Town should actively pursue the town-wide trail system that is underway.
- Most residents (95%) felt that the historic assets of the community should be protected.
- Most residents (98%) indicated Sturbridge was either a good or great place to live.

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

- For the type of development that should occur, most residents indicated favoring the following five (in order) types of development: Light industry; small in-town shops; technology based industries; museums cultural and educational developments; and artisans and craftsmen.
- Most residents indicated they will support re-zoning to create more industrial areas (69%) and commercial areas (69%) in town.
- Most residents (85%) felt the Town should be working to acquire open space.
- Most residents (88%) felt the Town should provide flexible design to encourage open space in subdivisions; ensure business developments are attractively designed and landscaped (92%); create a lakefront zoning district (74%); and promote housing affordability (72%).
- Most residents (72%) felt there was effective enforcement of the Town's existing bylaws.
- Most residents (61%) felt Sturbridge was on the right tract and meeting their expectations in the areas of residential, commercial and industrial development and the protection of open space. 83% opposed the development of a casino in Sturbridge.
- All of the schools (both building/grounds and educational programs) received ratings between 7.0 and 8.1 (out of 10) with the exception of Burgess Elementary School which was rated 5.4 for buildings and grounds.
- Most residents stated they had used the sidewalks on Route 20 (63%) and would like to see more sidewalks on major streets (71%) but not in their neighborhood. Most residents 52% indicated a willingness to pay for the construction of new sidewalks through town-wide assessments.
- 91.5% felt Old Sturbridge Village played either a very important role (64%) in town or a somewhat important role (27.5%) in town.
- Most residents indicated an interest in seeing that recreation programs were funded through user fees (51%) or a combination of user fees and property taxes (40%).
- Residents were split on whether the Town should own an affordable housing project with 20% stating the town should own a housing project; 40% stating the Town should own a housing project that was only open to seniors and 40% stating the Town should not own a housing project.
- Most residents did not believe the Town should develop an industrial park (62%).

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are divided into the four sub-committee groups:

### Affordable Housing Issues

The Affordable Housing Sub-Committee started much later than other sub-committees. The survey results and discussions this group had during the past few months found indications that while there may not be interest in a town-owned affordable housing project that there is a growing concern that

- Younger individuals and families cannot afford to purchase a home in Sturbridge, discouraging multi-generational families in town.
- Seniors are having a harder time affording to stay in their homes.

The Sub-Committee indicated the direction the Town should be pursuing to address housing affordability are to encourage private developments to meet the goals of Chapter 40B for affordable housing by including a set percentage set aside for affordable housing units, but not to pursue the development of publicly-owned and subsidized housing.

### *Recommended Actions/When:*

- *That the Town Planner, working with the Affordable Housing Sub-Committee and Housing Authority members, develop bylaw proposals that encourage subdivision development that provides affordable housing within new residential developments (2005). The recommendation should include a proposal to require new developments to provide affordable housing opportunities to assist the Town in meeting the Chapter 40B goals (2005-06). This proposal should include flexibility in design standards and density to encourage developers to provide affordable housing opportunities while not making new projects unprofitable. An annual report on the state of Affordable Housing in the community should be developed by the Housing Authority and presented to the Board of Selectmen on an annual basis (2005-09).*
- *That the Town Planner, Affordable Housing Sub-Committee and Housing Authority work with the Community Preservation Committee to develop a program to use Community Preservation Act Funds to encourage the conversion of existing older homes to affordable housing units (2005). The proposal should include the use of CPA funds as grants to make repairs and improvements to existing housing in exchange for the property owner placing a deed restriction on the property to maintain the property as an affordable housing unit (2006). The development of this proposal should include who will be eligible, what type of housing will be eligible, how grant*

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

*awards will be made, development of a “form” for the deed restriction and how the repairs and improvements will be accomplished - whether privately or publicly managed (2006). A recommendation to use CPA funds for this purpose should be made to Town Meeting (2006) and the program should be implemented thereafter (2006-09).*

### Goals:

- *To provide high-quality affordable housing in attractive neighborhoods through development of flexible zoning bylaws and regulations.*
- *To meet the 10% goal for housing affordability of Chapter 40B.*
- *To provide opportunities for existing Sturbridge residents to make improvements and repairs to their existing homes, while at the same time, increasing the affordable housing stock in the community.*

### Who:

- *Town Planner*
- *Affordable Housing Sub-Committee*
- *Community Preservation Committee*
- *Planning Board*
- *Zoning Board of Appeals*
- *Sturbridge Housing Authority*

### Community Development Issues

The results of the survey and discussions held by this group and the Dialogue for the Future group indicated the following:

- That residents understand that growth is expanding westward out of the Boston metropolitan area and that the Town should be planning to accommodate the current high growth that is currently being experienced as well as future growth. This planning should aim to maintain the small-town, family-oriented “feel” the community has had in the past.
- Any new growth should balance the historic and attractive qualities of the community with the need to provide high quality employment opportunities.
- Although indications are that Sturbridge is a nice town and a very good place to live, commercial and industrial design standards should be upgraded to provide a consistent, attractive business community.
- That protection of the environmental resources of the community should be one of the highest priorities in siting new development and that flexibility in zoning and development standards to allow development to be designed to protect environmental resources should be considered.

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

- That new development should essentially be more of the type of development that already exists in Sturbridge and that the Town should consider additional areas of town that could be re-zoned commercial or industrial.
- That there was not support for the Town fully funding a Main Street improvement project that will place all overhead wiring underground and replace existing street lighting with period-style street lights. That there was additional support if a large portion was funded through grants or other funding such as federal highway appropriations.

### *Recommended Actions/When:*

- *That the Board of Selectmen develop concepts of what gives Sturbridge its “small-town, family-oriented feel” (2005) and promote and encourage the expansion of programs, projects, developments, etc. that meet these concepts (2005-09). The Board of Selectmen should begin to use their “Dialogue for the Future” meetings to conduct these discussions, gain input from interested parties and residents and develop a report outlining programs and projects that provides this “small-town” feel (2005).*
- *The Historic Commission should develop initiatives to protect any historic assets that are threatened by development to encourage developers to incorporate the historic asset in design (2005). The Town Planner, working with the Historic Commission should develop a bylaw proposal that will require any project that will involve or threaten any historic asset to be reviewed by the Historic Commission for recommendations to the Planning Board (2005-06). The proposal should include whether the Historic Commission’s recommendation would be advisory or mandatory and binding. The Community Preservation Committee and Historic Commission should review whether Community Preservation Funds could be used as a financial incentive to developers to re-use historic buildings and/or acquire these buildings for re-use as affordable housing units (2005-06).*
- *The Town Planner, Planning Board and Design Review Committees should develop initiatives to upgrade existing commercial and industrial building designs and encourage new building designs to meet a consistent, high-quality design, landscape and signage guideline (2005-07). The Selectmen and Planning Board should hold joint meeting(s) to discuss this issue and whether there is a need to hire a consultant to assist the Town in reviewing current bylaws, bylaws that exist in other towns and to develop appropriate design bylaws for Sturbridge (2005-06).*
- *The Town Planner, Planning Board and Conservation Commission should develop flexible development bylaws and processes that will encourage the protection of environmental resources through flexibility in design standards. This should include a review of bylaws established in other communities, existing bylaws in Sturbridge and what would be appropriate to meet the*

- goal of providing flexibility in design to encourage and/or require developers to develop “around” sensitive environmental areas (2005-07).*
- *Determine the best location(s) to meet the development needs of the community in regard to commercial and industrial development for the future. This should be done through joint meetings between the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board with the assistance of the Town Administrator and Town Planner (2005). The Town Administrator, DPW Director and Town Planner should review the adequacy of infrastructure near major activity areas and where there is adequate infrastructure and develop a list of improvements that should be required of any new commercial or industrial development to address area specific infrastructure needs required by any specific development (2006). A Sub-Committee to consider any re-zoning should be created by the Board of Selectmen (2005) to study this issue and make recommendations consistent with any goals developed by the Board of Selectmen and Planning Board (2007-08). Recommendations for re-zoning, if any, should be made to Town Meeting (2008).*
  - *That the Town Administrator pursues funding options for a Main Street project that would provide a large portion of the funding from the state and/or federal governments (2005-06). If there are funding options that are viable, that the Town Administrator work with various parties to develop a valid cost estimate to complete such a project and develop a timeline for such a project (2006-07). Submit grant and other funding applications (2007) and present to Town Meeting any additional funding request that may be required (2008) and implement the project (2008-09).*

Goals:

- *Eliminate inflexible zoning requirements that create a need for developers to reduce quality and adversely effect environmental resources.*
- *Protect and retain historic buildings and assets through incorporating existing historic buildings into new construction and to highlight and protect other significant historic assets.*
- *To upgrade new construction and redeveloped buildings with new design standards for commercial and industrial uses to improve the overall “look” of Main Street (Routes 20 and 131).*
- *To balance development in the community to ensure that there is sufficient commercial and industrial development to offset the high growth in residential development and the associated costs that the Town will experience with the rate of residential development.*
- *To ensure that developers that are responsible for creating infrastructure needs are also responsible for the full costs or share in the cost of upgrading existing infrastructure to provide services to their developments.*

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

- *To improve the Main Street business area to make it more attractive to businesses, residents, visitors and tourists.*

### Who:

- *Board of Selectmen*
- *Planning Board*
- *Community Preservation Committee*
- *Town Administrator*
- *Town Planner*

### Recreation, Youth and Senior Issues

This Sub-Committee was responsible for reviewing the recreational needs for the community as well as issues involving seniors in the community. According to the US Census for 2000, 23.9% of Sturbridge residents were 55 years of age or older. The results of the survey and discussions held by this group and the Dialogue for the Future group indicated the following:

- That residents supported expanded programs for Senior Citizens in the community.
- That residents supported new recreational opportunities for both youths and the general population of the community.

### *Recommended Actions/When:*

- *That the Council on Aging Director develop a program proposal for senior transportation that will address how the program will operate, what services will be provided, where the van will operate, who will be served and the full cost of providing this program to residents of the community to include charges that residents will pay, if any (2005). Once the program proposal is complete, to submit the proposal to the Council on Aging for review, modification and approval and for the Council on Aging and Board of Selectmen to meet to review to modify/approve the program (2005-06). Further, that the Council on Aging Director pursue grant funds to purchase a van to be used for a senior transportation program and to recommend an amount necessary, if any, for additional appropriations through Town Meeting (2005-06).*
- *That the Council on Aging Director develops a program proposal for a bi-monthly health clinic to be offered for seniors at the Sturbridge Senior Center (2005). This proposal should include the full cost of providing this program, review insurance and liability issues, address privacy concerns and what health programs will be provided and by whom and to present recommendations as part of the annual budget process (2005-06).*

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

- *That the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and Trail Committee develop regular updates and plans for the existing trail development and future trail extensions (2005-09). This should include a regular quarterly update from the representatives on the Trail Committee and posting of information relative to the trail development on the Town's website (2005).*
- *That the Recreation Department develop a report of existing recreation fields and the level of use at each field by various sports leagues and groups to determine overall needs of the community (2005). This report should be forwarded to the Board of Selectmen and Recreation Committee who should hold meetings with representatives of youth recreation programs to discuss this report and any recommendations on the development of new recreational fields (2005-06). If there is a determination that new recreational fields are needed to address the demand for field use, the Selectmen should establish a new ad hoc committee to be called the "Field Development Committee" (2006) with the responsibility to review land currently owned by the Town that could be used for new fields and/or whether the Town should be seeking to purchase land to develop new fields (2006-07). If a need is determined, the Committee should prepare their recommendation to Town Meeting (2007) to include all costs so that the Town can purchase, design and develop any new recreation fields that have been determined to be necessary (2007-09).*

### Goals:

- *To provide a livable community that provides for the recreational needs of all members of the community.*
- *To promote a healthy and active community.*
- *To meet the transportation needs of senior citizens of the community by providing taxpayer supported senior transportation.*

### Who:

- *Board of Selectmen*
- *Council on Aging*
- *Recreation Committee*
- *Trail Committee*
- *Town Administrator*
- *Council on Aging Director*
- *Recreation Coordinator*

### Municipal Service Levels

This Sub-Committee was responsible for reviewing the needs for the community in regard to the level of services that the Town provides to its residents through the

various town departments. Residents indicated overall satisfaction with the services provided by the Town, the assumption being that the Town should continue to provide services at the present level. The results of the survey and discussions held by this group and the Dialogue for the Future group indicated the following:

- That residents overall are satisfied with the level of and quality of town services provided by town departments.
- That the greatest demand for new services involved development of a sanitation department to handle trash removal.
- That while residents found the Town's website useful, many indicated they had not visited the Town's website or knew that there was a Town website.
- That lake patrols by the Police Department should not be expanded.
- That there was interest in having the Town become a passport processing facility.
- That there was not support for renovating and improving the Town Hall and Center School. Despite this information, the Town at some point will need to make repairs to the Town Hall and Center School. Additionally, it is anticipated that given the space needs of Town departments, additional room will be needed for office space and records storage.
- That residents felt the Town should work to acquire and protect open space.
- That the Town and School needed to address the buildings and grounds at Burgess Elementary School.
- That residents use the sidewalks that were developed on Route 20 in the 1990s and desire additional sidewalks on major streets.

*Recommended Actions:*

- *That the Town Administrator Board of Health and DPW Director review options related to the Town providing municipal sanitation services. This should include a review of estimated costs for the service, rate structure, where refuse will be disposed, capital costs and labor costs (2006-07). This review should include whether it is possible for the Town to develop a contract with one private sanitation company to provide services to all residents that opt to have curbside pick-up. A report of the findings should be filed with the Selectmen and Finance Committee (2007). Any recommendations should be implemented with a proposal for providing services if it is determined to be financially feasible and benefits the community (2008).*
- *That the Town Administrator re-establish the Town Web Committee and hold regular quarterly meetings (2005) to discuss web content and general website improvements and to ensure information is updated and timely*

*(2005-09). That the Town Administrator develop a public information campaign to ensure residents are aware of services provided online (2005). The following specific improvements should be made to the website:*

- That the Finance Director pursue and establish online bill payment (2004)*
- That the Town Planner and Asst. Assessor provide Assessors' Maps and information online (2005-07).*
- That the Town Planner provide GIS maps online (2005-09).*
- That the Town Administrator and Recreation Coordinator develop an online program registration for all recreation leagues. This should include a proposal to handle program registration fees and coordination with recreation leagues (2005-07).*
- That the Council on Aging Director and Town Administrator develop a registration program online for Senior programs, including a transportation program if one is developed (2007).*
- That the Police Chief review the costs/benefits of providing lake patrols in Town, including a report on the services provided since the inception of the current program, with a recommendation on the future of this program, including anticipated costs and benefits (2005).*
- That the Town Clerk review the process of becoming a Passport Processing Facility, develop estimated costs of providing the service, estimated revenues from providing the service and present a proposal as part of the budget process for the FY06 budget (2005).*
- That the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator review the original proposal for renovating the Town Hall and Center School, determine whether the original proposal and cost estimates are adequate and appropriate (2005). That the Selectmen and Administrator determine if there are any alternatives and present the question to Town Meeting with justification for any renovations or repairs (2006). The Town Administrator should pursue funding through the Community Preservation Act Committee for a portion of any plan that is developed (2005-06). If a plan is approved at Town Meeting, implement the repairs or renovations to the Town Hall and Center School, as appropriate (2006-08).*
- That the Open Space Committee and Town Planner review and update the Open Space Plan and review this update with the Community Preservation Committee (2005-06) to ensure it is consistent with the community's goals. This plan should include a justification why individual parcels are considered high priorities to assist the Community Preservation Act Committee when making presentations to the Selectmen, Finance Committee and Town Meeting. That the Community Preservation Committee use the Open Space Plan to proactively seek to obtain parcels that are deemed as the highest priorities in the Open Space Plan (2005-09). That the Community Preservation Committee and Conservation Commission begin to meet to discuss long-term management of town-owned open space with the goal of*

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

*filing a report to be used as an addendum to the Open Space Plan outlining the recommended management of open space (2006-07).*

- *That the Burgess School Needs Committee continue to proceed with the review of the buildings and grounds at Burgess Elementary School and present/disseminate their findings and recommendations to various town boards, committees and the general public to educate voters on options the Town will be faced with in the upcoming 5-10 years. This should include design, benefits of the recommendations, funding options, timeframes and tax rate implications (2005-09). One other issue that should be addressed by this Committee is whether there is an opportunity to address other town/school needs in regard to community recreation.*
- *That the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator and DPW Director continue to pursue that the addition of sidewalks are incorporated on the Route 131 project (2005-08). Additionally, the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator, DPW Director and Police Chief should review other major town streets and determine if there are other streets that warrant construction of sidewalks (2005) and provide a recommendation to Town Meeting for funding sidewalks (2006) and if funded, to begin the process of obtaining any necessary rights-of-way, design and construction of new sidewalks (2006-09).*

### Goals:

- *To continue to provide quality services to the community that are the most in demand.*
- *To address requests for new services in a thoughtful, thorough manner with public discussion and decision-making.*
- *To consider the condition of the historic Town Hall and Center School and the space needs of Town departments to ensure public services and meetings can be held so that they are accessible to all members of the public.*
- *To develop a priority-based proactive open space preservation plan and to implement it accordingly.*
- *To ensure the educational facilities are consistent with the community's expectations.*
- *To promote a healthy and active community through providing safe walking trails and sidewalks.*

### Who:

- *Board of Selectmen*
- *Board of Health*
- *Town Clerk*
- *CPA Committee*
- *Open Space Committee*

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

- *Conservation Commission*
- *Burgess School Needs Committee*
- *Town Administrator*
- *DPW Director*
- *Finance Director*
- *Town Planner*
- *COA Director*
- *Asst. Assessor*
- *Recreation Coordinator*
- *Police Chief*

### General Issues

In addition to the issues specific to the four Sub-Committee discussions, there are issues of general interest that should be further reviewed and discussed as follows:

- Over two-thirds of Sturbridge residents commute away from Sturbridge on a daily basis. Similarly, over two-thirds of the survey respondents indicated that they felt Sturbridge did not offer satisfactory employment opportunities. This issue can be addressed through several of the mechanisms discussed above and by using local tax incentive programs to attract new businesses and/or retain existing businesses interested in expansion. New industrial businesses should be similar to the existing base and are high-tech or light industrial. New commercial businesses should complement existing commercial establishments. This will need to occur on an ongoing basis, but the results of planning on issues discussed above will drive where and how these businesses develop as well as what type.
- Over fifty percent of survey respondents stated they attended a town meeting in the past three years. There are approximately 5,800 registered voters in Sturbridge, which indicates that approximately 3,000 voters have attended a Town Meeting in the past three years. Some respondents may have confused Town Meeting with a town meeting (such as a Planning Board meeting). Attendance at Town Meetings are generally less than 400 voters or 6.9 percent of registered voters. Discussions should take place in the upcoming five years to determine whether the Open Town Meeting form of government continues to best serve the residents of Sturbridge or whether other forms, such as Representative Town Meeting or the Council-Manager form may better serve the residents. The Town Charter requires an appointed Charter Review Committee every five years. The next Charter Review Committee is due to be appointed in 2006. This could be discussed during this review and a recommendation if there should be a change in the form of government should be included in their report. It should be noted that any change in the form of government could only come from an elected Charter Commission.

## Sturbridge Strategic Planning Report – Discussion Draft

- There were many suggestions and information the Town received through this process that indicates that most residents believe the Town does a good job enforcing its bylaws. However, in developing new proposals that are aimed at improving the community, these will be meaningless unless there is a concerted effort to ensure enforcement.
- That Old Sturbridge Village plays a vital role in the continuing development of the Town of Sturbridge and the commercial development of Main Street, programs the Town provides and the overall “look and feel” of the community should be consistent with protecting this valuable asset. Over the next five years, the Town of Sturbridge and Old Sturbridge Village should continue to expand the cooperative relationship that has been created and develop Town goals and programs that are consistent with the value Old Sturbridge Village brings to the community.

### Summary

Overall, the impression from reviewing the opinions of Sturbridge residents, driving the streets in Sturbridge or comparing the level of services that Sturbridge provides with other communities is that Sturbridge does a lot of things really well and that it's both a good community to work in and to live in. However, some services can improve or expand and long-range planning can improve to ensure the community exists twenty years from now consistent with the vision residents have expressed. The survey indicated that the majority of residents felt Sturbridge was a “good” place to live (71%) while fewer residents felt Sturbridge was a “great” place to live (27%). The overall goal of establishing a strategic planning process and implementation goals should be to develop a process of continuous improvement. The Town's goal should be to continue to provide quality services that exist currently and establish programs, plans and services consistent with the recommendations above so that more residents begin to feel that Sturbridge is a great place to live. This can only occur through teamwork and thoughtful, public discussion *and action* by various town boards, committees and departments working together as a team to ensure the recommendations discussed above are implemented as intended.

### ***“MAKING STURBRIDGE A GREAT PLACE”***