

**Comments from the
Sterling Open Space and Recreation Plan
Public Opinion Survey**

The following list is a series of comments obtained from survey responses of the recent Public Opinion Survey of Sterling Residents. Over 5,000 surveys were distributed to the Town residents, through a Total Market Coverage issue of the Landmark, and through various other distribution efforts including the Chocksett Middle School, three central locations in town, the Boy Scouts, the Lake Association, etc. To date, we have received 144 responses, a response rate of 2.9 percent of the population. Of these, 43 respondents offered comments.

General Comments

1. I think it is sad that this town will not support 100% playground for Pre-K children, and like other things for recreation it is turned into a political nightmare. It seems like it is more important to spend money on cars, trucks, snow removal equipment, etc. than it is to provide some place for children to enjoy in their own town. Someplace that will far outlast all the machines. I guess recreation is not considered a "service". To me it is a disservice and a disgrace especially with all the new families in town that could benefit from this type of "service". Why does it always have to be a rat race?
2. Being able to access land for hunting w/o parking in someone's yard is important. It is difficult getting to many tracks of land. Widen roads and provide better shoulders on roads so that they don't break down so rapidly, for running and cycling.
3. We were not able to fairly rate items list in #8. We are not aware of their existence other than that we know of 1 boating access point and beach facilities
4. We are in favor of preserving people's right to do with their property as they choose, based on laws issued by federal and state legislatures, not modified by a select few individuals in town.
5. The planning board is a joke. Need new faces and intelligence.
6. This is a town with a country look-fast disappearing. What's with this "Mulligans"? To keep our property values -keep Sterling rural.
7. Survey after survey asks to retain rural character of the town. Town government has not done so. Many of our problems are due to too rapid growth
8. It would be nice if the town had a nine-hole golf course for its residents.
9. The real problem with growth in Sterling is that town government has facilitated developers and development and has not done planning (i.e. Master Plan) that would have helped preserve more open space, farms, and rural character.

10. I live on Meetinghouse Hill Rd near the center of town and have two young children, one of whom is learning to ride a bike. To do so, we have to drive him to the Houghton/Chocksett school parking lot or use the former tennis courts behind the Old Butterick School. I spent a lot of time on those courts as a youth (not to mention the swings, merry-go-round and monkey bars) and it is very disappointing that my children have nothing like that. I can't believe a playground was converted to parking and nothing has been done to replace the lost facilities- In the center of the town no less. Talk about poor planning!
11. Please fix tennis courts!
12. I think there are enough recreational facilities for children. Spend townspeople's money on preservation of open space to keep the original farm town character that is Sterling. I hate to see the town turning into another Auburn or Marlborough; look at the traffic in West Boylston!! We can't be apple town when houses replace the apples.
13. We don't need more recreational land, we need better use of land available. We need to preserve open land and farms.
14. Sterling must be involved in the purchase of Clinton land-especially in the Heywood Reservoir area-to compliment Leominster's efforts in land preservation. We cannot afford to loose this land to Clinton's interests. We do not need a municipal (Clinton) golf course in this sensitive area. We must also compliment the MDC's land purchases. Before we can identify uses for land we need to have the land.
15. I would like to see the town of Sterling build a larger tax base to include more business and industrial tenants. We have a great location and lots of land, to attract more comp anies to Sterling.
16. Puppet shows, movies for children, community playground-centrally located near downtown, skate park, hiking map of location of conservation areas and public lands, rail-trail crushed stone. The ice skating rink was great. Possibly certain hours could be set aside for hockey.
17. Sprawl has blighted Sterling. It must stop!
18. Let's limit use of open space to low impact types of activities, and prevent destruction of land by overuse from dirt bikes, ATV's or mountain bikes. Non-motorized are probably ok in some areas, but some restrictions are needed. From I-190 along the power line, you can see trails that are getting worse and worse-not to mention the noise that would result from "open" use of public land by motorized vehicles. Maybe designate separate space or something.
19. I can't fathom why the town is even considering spending money on "recreation". This is optional-non-essential? There are enough state parks and places in surrounding towns to accommodate most people's "recreational needs". Plus, how many ball fields does a town need anyway, especially when we can't even afford to mow them this year because of budget cuts. I want to spend our dollars buying land and leaving it natural for conservation to offset the surge of development in town.
20. Please don't forget horseback riders. They have been a large part of Sterling for decades. Open spaces and trails are being built up with houses at a terrifying rate. We need to act quickly to preserve what little remains. We may be able to do little about the Artic Wildlife Refuge but we ought to be able to do something in our own town. The Heywood Basin Reservoir would be an excellent place to start.
21. We are new to Sterling by one year. I just wanted to tell you we love living in such a great community. The children are happy with their schools. And we love the quiet quaintness that Sterling has to offer. The only concern is the fast pace of all the new residential construction.
22. To preserve open space, require builders who want to create subdivisions to make house lots smaller and have each subdivision contain several acres of open space. Builders and acre-size ++ lots are a problem. Each subdivision should have a proportionate number of acres of open space. Smaller house lots. Builders are responsible for misuse of land! LAWNS ARE TOXIC!! We need to all wake up on this matter.

No Chemicals or pesticides. Two excellent State parks are nearby – Leominster and West Boylston Rail Trail. Use them! Avoid new costs! Plenty is already available FREE!! More publicity is needed. Expand school site resources for redundant, continuous use. This will save money and get school kids better facilities.

23. I am shocked that many of Sterling's recreational resources are available! I am a new resident (2 years). You need publicity!
24. Really need a preschool playground (nothing for this age)! Thank goodness for the library. Need a brochure to tell about what is available in town and how to get to it. Teens need a place to go. Pool room/pizza place. Coffee shop. Cheese-shop.
25. More concerts in the park, program/shows for pre-school age.
26. As an elder retired couple in town, we do not have answers to many questions that are of greater interest to those with families.
27. Sterling needs a skate board facility for our young people
28. I would like to suggest that the bike race start and finish out of Sterling Center. It totally jams the center on a Saturday when taxpayers would like to go to the bank, the recycle center, and the library. Every year people get angrier about it.
29. Please continue the ice rink in center of town-great asset. Could a map be printed in the paper showing different "public" ownership of land in the town? Is bandstand big enough for a band concert?
30. Keep Sterling green. Enforce existing regulations. Encourage planning board to think preservation.
31. This survey was incomplete because I don't have baseline information on open space. You need a public information/education effort. I would have liked to see a map of Sterling that listed what already exists. I didn't know we had camping, ice-skating.
32. I would do a lot to maintain open space in Sterling. However, it should be open space so we can breathe, drink clean h2o, maintain life. Put the words "provide recreation" in ANY portion of the info and I will totally refuse to do anything to help-there is no need to provide Recreation for the people of today and I will DEDUCT any portion of my taxes that would go to this end.
33. I believe that the controversy about lack of athletic fields is unfounded-it is more an issue of scheduling. All the organizations want the field at the same time. Plan schedules to use them when they are empty.
34. I feel it would be a tremendous loss if Sterling lost its open space. While I recognize the revenue opportunity to develop the land I'm confident we (as a community) could find creative ways to secure the opportunities and preserve the land. I would be willing to help
35. We like Sterling very much. It would be good to keep the small town atmosphere & scenic New England quality of Sterling.
36. I have been involved with recreational programs for many years. The real problem with recreational needs (despite those who want the moon) is that scheduling of fields and activities is very poorly organized. Fields are either empty or everyone waits to use them at the same time. The planning board in this town is a joke. It facilitates development and planders to developers. The sites committee is totally unrealistic.
37. SLOW DOWN GROWTH
38. Slow traffic down, speed signs, speed bumps, law enforcement

39. I'm a life long sailor. I might be interested in exploring a sailing program for kids. Its something I've given some thought to in the past and have ideas about.
40. Sterling needs to slow down on development of building houses and development. We are building too many "McMansions" and fragmenting our natural, open spaces, which are important for wildlife habitat.
41. Town needs guidance on land purchases. The MDC restricts many uses of their property in ways which don't make sense. Dogs not allowed? Give me a break, there are other uses which have more potential for water quality concerns. Their signs need to be clear on what is or is not allowed and be friendlier. I would like to know more about town conservation lands-where are they, are there maps are there any restrictions on use I.e. hunting is that allowed on those lands. What are the land use policies on sterling land trust property?
42. You should check out the town of Wenham and their sidewalks-they are wonderful! Wish Sterling had a similar side walk and bike trail program.
43. We think each building lot should be larger to help preserve Sterling. Sterling is a quaint little town. The downtown area could use some updating, maybe something to add to Sterling's charm. Maybe publicize Mary Sawyer and little lamb more.

Comments on Specific Questions

These comments are in response to the "Other" (please list) option on several questions.

Question 1. Is it important to preserve or protect: (yes, no) Six respondents gave suggestions:

- ? land or landmarks of historical significance
- ? open land for deer hunting
- ? waterways
- ? vernal pools
- ? protect the town from over building. Keep building to a minimum
- ? ski paths, sports/soccer area for walking with animals

Question 2. To preserve open space, would you: (answer each, yes or no). Four respondents offered the following comments.

- ? Does the 2-acre minimum spread the town out too much?
- ? I would help on projects to raise money
- ? I contribute to land trust fund already
- ? I would donate if I had land or money

Question 3: Of the following open space related problems, which do you believe are the most critical for Sterling? Six respondents offered these observations:

- ? keep residential building down
- ? litter
- ? loss of non-mdc open space
- ? need a plan to guide town in land purchase decisions and recreation priorities
- ? you need farmers for farms
- ? town should regulate developers to prevent any more eyesores like Heritage Builders on Route 62

Question 4. What actions should Sterling take regarding protection of East Lake Waushacum and other waterbodies? (yes or no)

- ? don't know enough about current town policies to answer accurately

- ? increase lot size in subdivisions
- ? lake shore owners should take responsibility
- ? not totally aware of what is going on but would like to protect lake at all costs
- ? reduce development
- ? require lakefront properties to update septic systems or face fines. Perhaps state or town to share cost.
- ? restrict motorized water craft and monitor septics
- ? use land for non-threatening use
- ? regulate watercraft type on East Lake Waushacum

Question 6. Please check your top five Recreational Interests. A few respondents listed recreational interests that were not included in the list, including tennis and cross-country skiing. Some would like to see the tennis courts either returned or improved.

Question 7. How often do you use Sterling's recreational resources? (answer all that apply) The following comments to question 7 pointed out a need for publicizing the recreational offerings of the town. MDC lands, open fields, tennis courts and trails were not listed in the question.

- ? Didn't know we had a bike path
- ? I am shocked these services are available. I am a new resident -(2 years) you need publicity
- ? mdc reservoir lands
- ? open fields orchards for cross country skiing, birdwatching, snow shoeing
- ? Tennis Courts
- ? Tennis courts/often
- ? the trail from the mill works to the quag and the track near houghton
- ? track often - would be often if we had one downtown
- ? would like to use bike paths. Where are they?

Question 8. Rate your satisfaction (from 1 to 5) with each of the recreational facilities listed: Five respondents listed the following observations:

- ? airport needs improvement
- ? I say snowmobile trails are excellent because I don't think there should be any.
- ? poison ivy needs to be contained on rail trail and at fishing areas.
- ? the track has lots of rocks on it.
- ? town should have a preschool/playground accessible 7 days week during daytime hours.

Question 10. Which of the following actions should Sterling pursue regarding recreation opportunities? (Check all that apply) Fourteen respondents gave the following opinions:

- ? don't know
- ? Improve or replace tennis courts
- ? leave conservation land alone
- ? MAKE BETTER USE OF existing facilities
- ? need maps or other info on town lands. Work w mdc to allow for other recreation
- ? paved bike/rollerblade trail
- ? provide more open space and take actions to limit development in inappropriate areas
- ? publish what is available. People may not know
- ? recreational/youth center
- ? Offer a sailing program for kids
- ? tennis courts
- ? what sidewalks!!!! (in response to the option improve sidewalks)
- ? widen roads for running/cycling currently many are dangerous
- ? With current budget restrictions, recreation is not a priority spending concern. These are all optional needs. There are enough events in surrounding areas to provide recreation of all types.

Question 11. Which of the following events would you like to see more of in Sterling? (Check all that apply) Three respondents offered comments:

- ? community events - things that would draw members of community out
- ? golf program
- ? public use of rock wall at school