

Public Facilities and Services

6

Introduction

The public facilities and services portion of a master plan helps to guide decisions and develop a plan relevant to public buildings, utilities, and infrastructure to meet future needs of the community. A public facility is any municipal property that has been improved for public purposes, such as a town hall, library, police or fire station, parks and playgrounds, and schools. Public services are provided by a municipal government to people living within its jurisdiction. Examples of public services include utilities, such as water and trash collection.

Public facilities make it possible for municipal employees and volunteers to provide services for the public good. The adequacy of municipal facilities for the functions they serve is largely determined by four factors:

- ▶ The form, size, and organization of the community's local government;
- ▶ Projected population and economic growth;
- ▶ The community's land use pattern; and
- ▶ The expectations of the community's population.

A municipality's ability to provide adequate facilities and services depends on effective capital planning and a commitment to implementation, asset management policies, and the amount of revenue available for local government operations. Effective capital planning and asset management policies are often challenged by limited revenue for government operations. This can put long-term investments at risk. Prioritizing goals for short- and long-term investment needs can help a municipality ensure it meets the community's expectations.

The Town of Sterling provides a robust set of public services to residents including, but not limited to, emergency services, public works, snow removal, and recreation. The town also has a reputation for excellent schools. The buildings, infrastructure, utilities, and services

provided by the town to its residents offer a critical foundation for the wellbeing and functioning of the community.

This chapter includes an analysis of the adequacy of the town's public facilities and services. It is based on the outreach to the heads of Town Departments, as well as additional information and goals put forth in related documents and plans.

Baseline Conditions Analyses

Sterling's municipal services operate from multiple facilities located in different areas of the town. **Table 6-1** includes a list of these facilities including their locations.

Table 6-1. Public Facilities and Locations

Building	Location
Town Hall (Municipal Office Building)	1 Park Street
Department of Public Works and Water Department	171 Worcester Road
Fire Department	5 Main Street
Police Department	135 Leominster Road
Sterling Municipal Light Department	50 Main Street
Senior Center	36 Muddy Pond Road
Conant Public Library	4 Meetinghouse Hill Road

Town Government and Municipal Office Building

Local Government

The Town Administrator, who is appointed by the Select Board, works to achieve the goals of the Select Board, and implements their policies. The Town Administrator is also responsible for administering and overseeing the day-to-day functions, activities, and services provided by town government. In order to ensure that town resources are utilized in the most efficient and effective manner, the Town Administrator strives for a high degree of coordination, communication, and cooperation between all boards, committees, and departments of the town.



Mary Ellen Butterick Municipal Office Building

The Town Administration operates out of the Butterick Municipal Office Building. The following departments and boards, included but not limited to, are located within this town facility:

- ▶ Administration
- ▶ Assessor's Office
- ▶ Board of Health
- ▶ Building Department
- ▶ Planning and Zoning
- ▶ Recreation Department
- ▶ Select Board
- ▶ Town Administrator
- ▶ Town Clerk
- ▶ Treasurer/Collector

Current Status and Projected Needs

The town has yet to develop an asset management plan for all town facilities. Best practices require that proposed facility work have energy and maintenance costs calculated over a few decades as part of the initial and final decision processes. The town would benefit from undertaking an asset management plan to identify strategies and actions to preserve facilities for future generations.

A space assessment of the Butterick Municipal Office Building will identify ways to enhance the utilization and efficiency of space allocation within the building. Of note are the additional space needs of the Recreation Department and possible consolidated office consisting of Planning, Zoning, and Inspectional Services. Related to the latter, a consolidated Department of Planning and Development has been proposed in Sterling to include staff for, but not limited to, the fields of planning, zoning, building, economic development, and master planning. If this consolidation moves forwards, a centralized location within the Butterick Municipal Office Building should be identified for optimal customer service.

Ultimately, the purpose of the abovementioned consolidation is to provide better customer service for the end user in the form of “one stop shopping” for all, and to remove the traditional departmental “silos.” Increased efficiency, in the form of the removal of role redundancy and effort duplication is another benefit.

In addition to space needs, other building needs at the Butterick Municipal Office Building include roof repairs. Funding for such repairs was recently approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting, along with allocations for a land use records management system.

Department of Public Works

The Department of Public Works (DPW) is responsible for the maintenance and construction of all town-owned roads, sidewalks, and public ways – including trees, cemeteries, and parks and athletic fields. It also oversees stormwater management, trash collection, and recycling. The Water Department operates completely under the DPW, and is responsible for the town’s water service. The DPW facility is located at 171 Worcester Road, which includes the administration offices, Highway Division, Parks Division, and Water Department.



DPW Facility located at 171 Worcester Rd

Highway Division

The Highway Division of the DPW maintains 120 town roads (approximately 95 miles). This Division is responsible for building new roads, roadway maintenance and repair, as well as snow plowing. In addition, this Division assists with maintenance of street signs, crosswalks, and catch basins. A full list of the services provided by the Highway Division are available on the town’s website.

The Highway Division has an extensive fleet of vehicles that support the services that are provided, in general these include trucks, plows, tractors, graders, trailer and painters. A full list of the Highway Divisions vehicle fleet is available on the town’s website.

Parks Division

The Parks Division of the DPW maintains approximately 7.5 acres of parks. Parks under its purview include Sholan Park on Lake Waushacum and Memorial Park behind the fire station. Sholan Park contains picnic tables, firepits and charcoal grills, a volleyball court, and a basketball court; permitted parking is available. Memorial Park, which includes an undersized gazebo, is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) non-compliant and needs repairs. There is also limited parking. This park is used for the town's Memorial Day and Veterans Day formal ceremonies, as well as summer concerts.

Water Department

The Water Department is responsible for ensuring high quality drinking water that meets all state and federal standards for quality and safety, including water system infrastructure installations, repairs, and testing. Approximately 80% of the town's population is supplied with public water, with the remainder obtaining their potable water from private wells. Public water in Sterling derives from six groundwater sources including Wells #2A, 2B, and 2C (Pump Station #2) near Worcester Road/Route 12, and Wells #3, 4, and 5 (West Sterling Pump Station) near Redemption Rock Trail. Additionally, the town has three remote storage tanks that are used to even pressure throughout the system. The town has agreements with Leominster and West Boylston that allow it to pull water in case of emergencies. In recent years, the Water Department has had to enact mandatory water bans due to increased demand, notably from landscaping irrigation systems.

Wastewater Management

The town presently relies solely on on-site disposal of wastewater. Given the number, density, and age of existing on-site disposal systems in town, protecting the town's groundwater resources is a growing concern. Sterling has begun to explore long-term wastewater disposal options. In 2018, a Sewer Feasibility Study was performed that looked at providing sewer service to the town's downtown area along Route 12, and possibly extending sewers to the town's light industrial zoned area to improving economic growth. Until a long-term wastewater disposal solution can be implemented, the town must continue to rely on the Board of Health to oversee the operation and maintenance of the growing number and age of these on-site systems.

Current Status and Projected Needs

The town will need to create an asset management plan coordinated with town financial software to manage equipment more efficiently. The town's Community Resilience Building Workshop Summary of Findings prepared under the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness grant program calls for an asset management system for the town's roadways, culverts, and stormwater infrastructure. As part of the road management plan, the town will explore the creation of a pavement management plan.

Due to recently enacted Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) laws and considering the amount of roads and culverts in the town, there is a need to set up a system for tracking the town's many outflows. In addition, increased regulations for water sources

will coincide with the degrading quality of aquifers in the region as a century of pesticide and salt use seep into the water supplies. The town will need to address this by either purchasing water from neighboring town filtration facilities or constructing a filtration facility of its own. Additional wells for quality water resources are also needed. Regarding water use, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) allows the Sterling Water Department to use only a certain amount of water each year and the town is now essentially at this maximum. The town needs to address water efficiency and restriction options and develop a town-wide plan over the next few years.

Sterling's solid-waste and recycling approach is behind almost all similarly sized communities in the state in that the curbside pickup is essentially unlimited. This will be changing in the next few years as Sterling embraces the updated approach of providing residents with bins and automated pickup.

Funding for a town assets and comprehensive facilities assessment was recently approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting, as was a pavement management plan and upgrades to the town's current water meter system. These upgrades include the installation of new meters and associated equipment.

Physical Facilities

The DPW facility is outdated and has extended past its anticipated useful life. As such, the DPW facilities requires a major renovation or replacement. As part of these updates, an additional storage building is desired for a secure, covered space for equipment. Funding for a use and feasibility study for this DPW facility and town-wide vehicle storage was recently approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting. In the short term, a continued focus will be on addressing ongoing maintenance improvements.

Fleet Vehicles and Equipment

Funding to acquire several key vehicles and equipment for the DPW was recently approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting. These include an excavator or tractor and a dump truck, as well as a leaf blower ride-on and truck loader for leaves.

Staffing

Currently, the DPW Superintendent oversees the Department. There are multiple subdepartments within the DPW, including the Water Department and the Highway Division that the Superintendent also manages.

Within the next year or so, the DPW will need to hire another trained person for inspections and the multitude of reports required under the MS4 program. The DPW is in the process of hiring a new superintendent, a new water foreman, and a new office manager.

Fire Department

The Fire Department is a first responder public safety agency responsible for the protection of lives, property, and the environment. Services and programs include fire suppression, fire prevention, rescue, emergency medical service, hazardous materials mitigation, and emergency management. The Fire Department responds to a wide variety of emergency

and non-emergency calls annually, estimated to be 1,400 for calendar year 2019. In 2018, the fire prevention division issued 820 fire prevention and controlled burning permits and performed several hundred on-site inspections. Permits and inspections for 2019 are estimated to be slightly higher due to several commercial projects in progress.



Sterling Fire Department

Organizational Structure

The Fire Chief serves as head of the Fire Department and Sterling Emergency Agency. The Chief is responsible for the administration and operation of the Department, including, but not limited to, management, service delivery, and budgeting. The Chief is appointed by and reports to the Select Board.

Current Status and Projected Needs

Physical Facilities

The current headquarters of the Fire Department is located in the town center and houses offices, meeting and conference rooms, equipment rooms, apparatus bays, supply and equipment storage, and staff quarters. The 7,680 square foot building was completed in 2005 and is adequate in terms of meeting its intended needs. Provision of additional bunk space will be required as full-time personnel are added. Funds have been provided for work on the roof and major heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) repair and replacement.

A storage facility for emergency response trailers is currently being researched. These would include trailers for forestry (i.e., brush and woodland fires) equipment, hazardous materials supplies, emergency management supplies and equipment, mass casualty response supplies, and an off-road four-wheeler.

Fleet Vehicles and Equipment

The Department operates two advanced life support (ALS) ambulances, three all-purpose pumpers, and one aerial ladder that respond to all reports of building and vehicle fires. Specialized apparatus consists of one rescue pumper and four vehicles designed for off-road fires in woodland, brush, and grass. Additional equipment includes two utility vehicles,

an inflatable boat with trailer, and several trailers containing supplies, and equipment for various types of emergencies.

Funding to acquire several key vehicles and equipment was recently approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting. These include a Rescue 1 fire apparatus replacement, an ALS Intercept sport utility vehicle (SUV) replacement, a forestry pick-up truck, and a Jaws of Life replacement.

Staffing

The Fire Department is a combination department consisting of both full-time and on-call personnel. Full-time staff includes the Fire Chief, a Fire Prevention Officer, four Firefighters and Paramedics, and an Administrative Assistant. Twenty-eight on-call Firefighters and Firefighter and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) supplement the full-time force when alerted for emergency incident response and routine duties.

Since most emergency incidents require more personnel than those on duty, on-call personnel are also alerted to respond at all hours and on all days.

While Sterling strives to meet standards developed by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) in terms of staff, seldom are there enough personnel on-duty to manage emergency calls without additional help. For this reason, on-call firefighters are relied on at most emergencies: fires, rescue situations, disasters, and some emergency medical calls as well. Unfortunately, the number of staff that serve in this vital role has steadily decreased in Sterling and most other departments that have a call force. While the Department will continue to rely on call firefighters for the immediate future.

Funding for one new full-time firefighter and EMT was recently approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting. However, additional full-time staff may be required in future years if call volumes increase.

Police Department

The Police Department is tasked with providing protection for the citizens of Sterling and to enforce the laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.



Sterling Police Department

Organizational Structure

The Department operates under the direction of the Chief of Police, who reports through the Town Administrator to the Select Board.

Services Provided

The Police Department has a number of initiatives that support the community, including, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Rape Aggression Defense Training;
- ▶ Medication Disposal;
- ▶ Firearms Licensing; and
- ▶ Infant and Child Car Seat Installation.

In addition, the Police Department provides protection for fire fighters, protection for the schools, performs traffic control, performs fraud investigation, and functions as the Dispatch Center for both Fire and Police.

Current Status and Projected Needs

Physical Facilities

The current headquarters of the Police Department at 135 Leominster Road is in good condition. The building is an independent one-story structure that includes one jail cell.

It was noted that the Police Department building has had issues with the HVAC system and further maintenance will likely be required.

Fleet Vehicles and Equipment

Funding is needed to acquire several key vehicles, including one replacement cruiser and one specialty vehicle, a car for the Police Chief, and a vehicle for Animal Control. Additional

funding is needed for dispatch consoles replacement, police radio upgrades to the console for interoperability, computer server replacement, defibrillators, and taser replacements.

Funding for a public safety radio tower site at Pratt's Junction was recently approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting. In addition to the above facility, fleet, and equipment needs, the Police Department will require additional resources to handle an increasing opioid crisis, as well as mental illness training to improve outcomes during police encounters with those who suffer mental illness.

Staffing

The Department has 22 staff members. Among this staff, there is a Chief, Executive Assistant to the Chief, five Patrol Officers, three Sergeants, a Detective, one Dispatch Supervisor that is supported by full and part time Dispatchers, and one part time Animal Control Officer.

Funding for one new full-time police officer was approved at the 2021 Annual Town Meeting. Additional full-time staff may be required in future years if call volumes increase.

Sterling Municipal Light Department

The Sterling Municipal Light Department is a progressive public power utility. Their primary building was originally the 1883 Sterling High School. Serving Sterling for over 100 years, the Sterling Municipal Light Department has more than 3,700 residential, commercial, municipal, and industrial customers. Customers are fed power through approximately 160 miles of distribution lines. The Sterling Municipal Light Department is a member of ISO New England (NE) and a wholesale aggregator of power with power purchases from generation throughout New England and New York. Power supply consists of an extremely clean portfolio of separate power agreements with Baltic Mill Hydro, Carbolon Cogeneration, Contoocook Hydro, Macquarie Energy Services, ISO NE Energy Market, Mass Municipal Wholesale Electric (MMWEC), Mechanicsville Hydro, Methuen Falls Hydro, Millstone III, Power Authority of the State of New York (PASN), Centennial Hydroelectric Facility, Seabrook, and Stony Brook combined cycle units.

The Sterling Municipal Light Department's mission is to provide smooth, clean, reliable power at a reasonable price, while staying abreast of society's technological advances for the benefit of its customers.



Sterling Municipal Light Department

Organizational Structure

The Sterling Municipal Light Department is governed by a three-person board elected directly by the citizens of Sterling.

Services Provided

Low-cost reliable electrical energy twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, year-round, as well as supplementary services such as tree and roadside trimming, school zone flashers, bunting and flag installation.

Current Status and Projected Needs

Physical Facilities

The Sterling Municipal Light Department has two buildings, at 50 Main Street and 2 Leominster Road, and a substation on Chocksett Road. The Main Street building consists of offices and conference rooms, while the Leominster Road building is primarily for the housing and maintenances of vehicles.

The Sterling Municipal Light Department is bringing in fiber cable to the center of town to provide Wi-Fi and internet connections to all town departments. It is in the process of surveying rate payers to determine the level of interest that there may be in having cable offered to all its customers.

Fleet Vehicles and Equipment

The Sterling Municipal Light Department has a variety of fleet vehicles and equipment, including trucks and cherry pickers. There were no identified additional fleet needs at the time of this writing.

Staffing

Led by a General Manager, the Department has an Office Manager, Operations Supervisor, Staff Accountant, Billing Clerk, an Office Assistant and seven Line Workers.

Schools

Sterling is a member of the Wachusett Regional School District. The schools within this district in the town include Houghton Elementary School (grades Kindergarten through 4) and the Chocksett Middle School (grades 5 through 8), both of which are located on Boutelle Road. High School students in grades 9 through 12 attend the Wachusett Regional High School in Holden. Sterling students have the option of pursuing a technical and vocational education through Montachusett Regional Vocational Technical School in Fitchburg or through private schools.



Houghton Elementary and Chocksett Middle Schools

Schools within Sterling are serving 493 students during the 2020-21 school year. **Table 6-2** shows current enrollments by public school as well as those in the regional school system.

Table 6-2 Sterling School District – Enrollment by School (2020-21)

Grade	Houghton Elementary	Chocksett Middle School	Wachusett Regional High School (Total)	Students in Wachusett Regional High School (Sterling)	Montachusett Regional High School (Total)	Montachusett Regional High School (Sterling)
Pre-K						
Kindergarten	55					
Grade 1	65					
Grade 2	67					
Grade 3	69					
Grade 4	50					
Grade 5		77				
Grade 6		65				
Grade 7		83				
Grade 8		75				
Grade 9			494	65	355	15
Grade 10			504	68	354	19
Grade 11			488	65	363	13
Grade 12			501	69	345	15
Total	193	300	1990	267	1417	53

Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021

Houghton Elementary School

Houghton Elementary School is a child-centered school focused on learning. The school has a population of five hundred children within a grade span of kindergarten through grade four. The school has a 3-year Improvement Plan (2017-2020) that outlines Goals, Strategic Initiatives, Outcomes and Actions. Its student to teacher ratio is 15.6 to 1 vs. the state average of 12.6 to 1.

Chocksett Middle School

The mission of Chocksett Middle School is to provide students with a multi-faceted education in a safe, supportive environment that contributes to the development of 21st century skills necessary to become independent and successful citizens in a global society. The school is located at 40 Boutelle Road.

The school has a 3-year Improvement Plan (2016-2019) that outlines Goals, Strategic Initiatives, Outcomes and Actions. Its student to teacher ratio is 12.9 to 1 vs. the state average of 12.6 to 1.

Council on Aging (Senior Center)

The mission of the Senior Center is to promote the physical and mental health for seniors by providing recreational and social outlets. They do this by offering a wide variety of active programming. Senior Center has a Director and Outreach Coordinator and is located at 36 Muddy Pond Road. Senior Center provides most of its programming at no cost and makes reasonable accommodations when requested.

Organizational Structure

The Senior Center reports through the Sterling Council on Aging to the Select Board and Town Administrator.

Services Provided

The Senior Center has a number of services that support the community, including, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Hot lunches at the Senior Center;
- ▶ Programming and activities such as yoga, bingo, ukulele classes, bridge, pool and pickleball;
- ▶ Organized hikes;
- ▶ Parkinson and Caregivers Support Group;
- ▶ SHINE Counselor;
- ▶ Dementia friendly;
- ▶ Balancing and Walking Exercise programs;
- ▶ Blood Pressure and Wellness Clinics Monthly;
- ▶ Flu Clinic Annually;
- ▶ Publish a monthly newsletter;

- ▶ Transportation to medical appointments, shopping, and other personal destinations, (450 Trips in 18 months); and
- ▶ Veteran Services

Current Status and Projected Needs

Physical Facilities

The Senior Center is a one-story completely accessible building that is 6,450 square feet in size. It contains a large kitchen, large meeting room, game room, offices, bathrooms, etc. There is a garage to house the vans and the electric car, which is currently under construction.

Due to the projected increase in the 65-plus community, there could be a space shortage at the Senior Center. With this in mind, the Director is actively exploring ways that the Council on Aging and Recreation Department can work together to advocate for more space for recreational programming in which seniors can take part. There is a current space crunch at times when exercise programs are fully subscribed.

Fleet Vehicles and Equipment

The Montachusett Regional Transportation Authority covers the operating cost of the vans and an electric car, including the cost of gas and maintenance.

Staffing

The facility is operated by one full time Director, four part time support staff, and 97 volunteers.

Conant Public Library

Organizational Structure

The Conant Public Library is administered by an elected six-member Board of Library Trustees, which has statutory responsibility for the library, its services, collections, and facility. This Board appoints a Library Director, who reports to the board, makes policy recommendations to the board, and is responsible for operations and management.



Conant Public Library

Services Provided

Library services are designed to meet the informational, educational, and recreational needs of the community. The library provides broad access to library materials, resources, and services for enrichment and enjoyment in an environment that is welcoming to all. The Library offers space and opportunity to gather and connect knowledgeable friendly staff to assist, and the tools to grow and thrive in an increasingly digital world.

Improving access to services to homebound individuals, including close coordination with the Sterling Senior Center, and access to the Talking Book Library, through the CW MARS on-line catalog service, and other relevant services are among current goals. The Library also recently introduced a book loan and swap kiosk at the Town Beach.

The Library is open from 10:00 to 8:00 PM Monday through Thursday, and 10:00 to 3:00 on Saturdays. It is closed Friday and Sunday.

The Library is heavily used by all age groups. In 2019, programming attendance was 4,620, materials lending was 13 per capita (the national average is 4.4 and the state average is 6), and library visits were 44,470. Approximately 60% of residents hold library cards. The programmed activities include a special focus on youth services, including organized story times and summer reading programs.

According to a national study, two-thirds of library visitors borrow print books, around half go to read, study, or engage with media. Many are interested in programs. More people are seeking quiet space and Wi-Fi to pursue studies. A Pew Research study reports that trends show the public is seeking their library to be an agent of community, with activities that bring people together and events that unite the community. Libraries are also facing a dual challenge of upholding free speech, while being a source of reliable accurate information.

Public safety is also, as for so many organizations, a real issue because libraries must remain open to all.

Other Resources

Materials, information, and other resources are available in print, digital, electronic, and audio-visual formats as well as online sources. Programming and activities are provided for children and adults. The library is a member of CW MARS, a resource sharing network of 149 libraries in central and western Massachusetts. It also provides personal computers for public use.

While the Library is in compliance with ADA requirements, it is currently facing issues with its outside lift and inside elevator.

In 2019, the entire HVAC system was replaced with one much more efficient and effective. There is also an interior renovation ongoing, including painting, flooring, and updated furnishings.

Current Status and Projected Needs

Staffing

The Library has a staff that includes the Library Director, an Assistant Library Director, a Children's Librarian, Circulation Services staff members, a Tech Services staff member, and a Financial Assistant. Library staff members wear many hats in order to provide traditional library services, to keep up with evolving technologies, both to operate in a business-like way and to assist the public with access to and use of those evolving technologies. The level and range of skills necessary to provide the same high level of service during all hours of operation is a challenge. A great deal of training is involved, so retention is extremely important.

Physical Facilities

The original building was built in 1885, with the Library occupying the second floor of 900 square feet and town offices and an "Antiquarian Room" on the first floor. Over the years there have been several renovations and additions to address accessibility and space issues. Currently, the useable square footage is 7,800 square feet (exterior dimensions of 9,000 square feet). The Library's biggest challenge in providing services is space limitation. Lack of a sewer system in the Sterling Town Center is a handicap to any possible building expansion because open land is currently used for the septic system and leach field.

While legally compliant with ADA, the Library does not adequately provide for people who use assistive devices for mobility. The mix of a lift from outside to the main floor and an interior elevator serving the three levels of the Library is a problem. Facing estimated needed elevator repairs of \$80,000 and decreasing availability of parts, the best solution appears to be construction of a replacement elevator that provides ground level entry and access to all three floors. This could be similar to the elevator at the Butterick Municipal Office Building.

Recreation Department

The mission of the Recreation Department includes a dedication to providing affordable, quality recreational programs that will enhance the quality of life for all of Sterling's residents. The Department is committed to providing year-round programs that include active and passive recreational activities, and strives to work with other departments to promote its programs and offer safe, accessible, and well-maintained recreation facilities.

Organizational Structure

The Recreation Department is led by the Recreation Director. The Director is supported by a part-time assistant and the Recreation Committee, which is a seven-member board appointed by the Select Board. Members of the Recreation Committee serve five-year terms.

Services Provided

The Recreation Department administers or supports recreational programming at various locations throughout Sterling. Such programming, including children's swimming, the Sterling Rec Road Race, ski and snowboard program passes, and virtual programming (e.g., Blast Babysitting and Safety Training, Central Mass eSports League), is advertised in paper flyers and newspapers, as well as on the town's website and the Department's social media accounts. The Department has instituted an electronic registration system for its programs.

The Department strives to provide accessibility accommodations, where needed. For example, its children's swim program provides additional aides for participants with special needs.

Other Resources

The Recreation Department's developed recreational sites serve as the locations for much of the Department's programming. More information on these sites is provided in Chapter 5, *Open Space and Recreation* and the 2019 Update to the town's *Open Space and Recreation Plan*. The Recreation Department's many fields and facilities include:

- ▶ Redstone Hill (ball field);
- ▶ Sholan Park (beach, picnic, basketball, volleyball, boating, recreation, camp);
- ▶ Memorial Park (concerts, picnic);
- ▶ SPARC Park (tot lot, picnic, play equipment, walking trail, pond);
- ▶ West Sterling Athletic Fields (ball fields, tennis, pickleball, basketball, bathrooms);
- ▶ 1835 Town Hall (dance, aerobics, etc.);
- ▶ Griffin Road Fields (ball fields, track, basketball, fitness, and cross-country running trails, soccer, football);
- ▶ Muddy Pond Fields (ball fields, t-ball, soccer field); and
- ▶ Houghton School/Chocksett School (play equipment, ball fields, four square, open field).

In 2009, accessibility accommodations at the Recreation Department's developed recreational lands were assessed. Since then, the town installed handicapped accessible portable toilets at the Town Beach at Sholan Park and at the playing fields at Griffin Park. Additionally, handicapped portable toilets were installed at Memorial Park and the Sterling Greenery Community Playground on Muddy Pond Road.

Current Status and Projected Needs

Physical Facilities

The Department of Recreation operates out of the Butterick Municipal Office Building. Among its facility needs, the Recreation Department requires additional storage space for its equipment and further accessibility improvements per the 2009 evaluation. Additionally, its recreational spaces are somewhat unevenly geographically distributed, and greater access to indoor space would enhance programming. Regarding the latter, inclement weather can force the Recreation Department to cancel outdoor programs, which is difficult for parents or caregivers who cannot make last minute schedule changes. Having available indoor space for the programs would allow the Recreation Department to provide reliable programming regardless of the weather. At the Town Beach, erosion is a prominent concern, as stormwater runoff requires sand replacements on an annual basis. This run-off can also degrade water quality and beachfront aesthetics. In response, the town's Conservation Commission authorized an engineering report on this stormwater issue and will be working with appropriate entities on implementing its findings.

Also at the Town Beach, the restrooms are in need of major renovation or replacement, along with ADA upgrades. It was noted that the Town Beach does not fully open until July. With springs and summers arriving noticeably earlier during the year due to climate change, the community has requested that the opening of the Town Beach be timed accordingly.

In addition to facility needs, the town's recreational programming might consider greater accommodations for audiences with various abilities and intergenerational programming. This would be consistent with the community's desire to become more age and dementia friendly.

Goals and Actions

Each Master Plan Chapter contains draft Goals and Recommended Actions that will face public review. Following public review, the finalized Goals and Recommended Actions will be utilized by Sterling for implementation.

Current draft Goals and Recommended Actions will be presented to the public via a survey. Feedback will be reviewed, presented to the public online, and will be incorporated into the finalized Goals and Recommended Actions as necessary. Part I of the survey identifies the Goals of each Master Plan Chapter and asks for comments pertaining to each chapter. Part II of the survey asks each contributor to assess their priority based on what is critical to the success of Sterling and what is highly desired by the community. Priority assignments should consider individual actions relative to all other actions within the same Master Plan

Chapter. This part of the survey also offers the ability to provide general feedback on the Recommended Actions.

Goal 1: Develop plans and funding to rebuild, expand, or replace key public facilities, and ensure appropriate levels of staffing needed to support the town's operations.

***Action #1:** Develop a Public Facilities Improvement Plan for all Town buildings that identifies near-, mid-, and long-term improvements (and costs), so that the town will have a comprehensive inventory of the required maintenance and capital improvements needed for its public facilities.*

The following are highlights of the items that were identified for addressment and can be included in a Public Facilities Improvement Plan.

- ▶ *Town Hall:*
 - *Consolidation and expansion of spaces based on needs, especially for the Recreation Department (potential relocation to the 1835 Town Hall)*
 - *Consolidation of multiple departments, boards, committees for greater oversight and to better serve the public*
 - *Roof repairs*
 - *ADA improvements*
 - *Records and systems storage updates to explore options for document storage to include storage facilities in any new buildings constructed by the town and digitizing documents wherever possible (i.e., reduce the need for storage of paper copies)*
 - *Sprinkler system maintenance and upgrades*
- ▶ *1835 Town Hall:*
 - *Study and quantify the potential to add more sewer capacity (See Goal 4, Action #3)*
 - *Explore the Recreation Department's potential space needs (See Goal 3, Action #3)*
- ▶ *DPW Building: (See Goal #2)*
- ▶ *Fire Department:*
 - *Ice damming issues on the roof*
 - *Completion of women and unisex bathroom facilities*
- ▶ *Police Department:*
 - *Sprinkler system maintenance and upgrades*
- ▶ *Conant Public Library:*
 - *ADA improvements*
 - *Study the need for a generator*
- ▶ *Senior Center: (See Goal 3, Action #2)*
- ▶ *Town Beach:*
 - *Implementation of stormwater run-off and erosion improvement measures*
 - *Replacement and repair of bathrooms and roofs*

- ▶ *Sterling Municipal Light Department:*
 - *Assess need to convert the unisex bathrooms to accommodate women's bathroom and locker facilities*

***Action #2:** Develop a financial plan and action plan, including through appropriating and allocating funds in the town's Capital Improvement Plan, to implement the recommendations identified in the Public Facilities Improvement Plan.*

***Action #3:** Develop a staffing plan to assess current and future staffing needs and enhance necessary staff trainings to all departments to address anticipated growth in municipal services and implement the recommendations included in the Master Plan, so that the town can deliver its services effectively.*

Goal 2: Ensure the town has adequate Department of Public Works (DPW) facilities to address today's needs as well as projected future needs of the community.

***Action #1:** The need to address the deficiencies in the DPW facilities (such as the potential renovation or replacement of the existing building and storage needs) were noted as a high priority as part of this master planning process. In concert with creating a Public Facilities Improvement Plan, review the specific needs of the DPW facilities to address physical needs, as well as operational and support equipment needs.*

***Action # 2:** In anticipation of future regulations for water resource management, plan for adequate staffing to ensure the town has the resources necessary to assist with the monitoring and training that will be required to continue to ensure safe water and water quality throughout Sterling.*

Goal 3: Become more age and dementia friendly, including through targeted recreational opportunities.

***Action #1.** Explore the feasibility of expanding the current Senior Center to meet the space needs for programs serving the town's senior population. As part of this study, determine what feasible recreational programming will be in demand for both seniors and the town's youth to incorporate such programming into the facility.*

***Action #2.** Seek opportunities to encourage collaboration among the Council on Aging (COA), Recreation Department, and Sterling's Public Schools to promote intergenerational activities.*

***Action #3.** Continue to evaluate and enhance transportation services offered to seniors and residents with disabilities.*

Goal 4: Develop plans for key infrastructure elements that need improvement.

***Action #1:** Continue to fund annual improvements to roadways and seek opportunities to obtain state funding for long-term transportation enhancements as identified in the Circulation and Transportation chapter. In the process, seek opportunities to obtain grants that will enable the town to further the implementation of Completes Streets and active transportation projects.*

***Action #2:** In coordination with Goal #2, prepare an assessment of the town's forecasted future needs for investments in pump stations, wells, and the delivery of water.*

***Action #3:** Revisit the town's Sewer Studies completed by Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC) to understand if the alternatives identified should be refined and further studied. As part of this effort, update the cost and understanding of potential grant funding to support this effort.*

Goal 5: Continue to take advantage of opportunities to plan for Sterling's long-term success by advancing efforts to address its sustainability and resiliency.

***Action #1.** In conjunction with Goal 1, Action #1, advance energy upgrades for the town's existing buildings to improve overall performance and costs.*

***Action #2.** Undertake a fleet vehicle assessment to ascertain opportunities to right size vehicles and convert to electric alternatives.*

***Action #3.** Incorporate cost-effective green infrastructure strategies into all municipal projects for stormwater management.*

***Action #4.** Continue to work with the Sterling Municipal Light Department to deliver low-cost renewable energy to the Sterling community.*

***Action #5.** Seek opportunities to expand high speed internet access throughout Sterling, particularly to those that are most in need (e.g., low-income households).*

***Action #6:** Invest in educational programs and materials that provide residents and business owners information about the town's solid waste and recycling programs to improve the town's overall diversion rate.*

***Action #7:** Develop a plan and costs estimates to provide electric vehicle (EV) charging stations for vehicles at all the municipal buildings and parking lots.*

***Action #8:** Continue to pursue Action Grants for the implementation of resilience measures, particularly those that are nature-based, through the State's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness program.*

Goal 6: Invest in the town's schools to promote high performing educational facilities and programming.

***Action #1.** Work closely with the Wachusett School Department, Sterling representatives on the Wachusett School Committee, and the Finance Committee to identify and support capital improvements that are needed to support school operations.*

***Action #2** Work with the School Committee to assess the ability to better utilize the public school facilities and programs for other community uses, especially as it pertains to the interaction between the schools and the Senior Center.*