

Sterling Master Plan Update: Community Services, Land Use

Master Plan Committee Meeting
December 13, 2018



Community Facilities

STERLING MASTER PLAN



From Chapter 41, Section 81D:
(5) Services and facilities element which identifies and analyzes existing and forecasted needs for facilities and services used by the public.

State Requirement

About this Master Plan Element

- Master plan is ultimately about a community's *physical* evolution ...
- Goals of this element:
 - Document and understand the what Sterling provides for municipal and school services, where service demands seem to be changing and how they're like to change in the near future.
 - Inventory and capacity assessment of existing facilities town hall, public safety, schools, etc.)
 - Is there a need for new/renovated/expanded facilities? If so, where?

Entire Scope

- Municipal and school buildings
- Outdoor facilities, esp. schools (playing fields, lights, field house)
- Building grounds
- Cemeteries
- Infrastructure: water, sewer, drainage, technology, wireless communications
- Organization/responsibilities/size of local government
- Tax base, financial policies



Typical Scope & Sequence: Services & Facilities

- Existing Conditions:
 - Inventory of municipal & school services by type, staffing, budget. Includes utilization data (where appropriate/if available)
 - List & description of municipal properties used for services, e.g., town hall, police station, recreation center, senior center, etc.
 - Location of existing facilities
- Issues & Opportunities – Services aligned with population needs? Capacity shortages? Impact of changing demographics?
- Action Plan



Current Trends: Services & Facilities Elements

- Accessibility ... for all!
 - Program access
 - Physical access
- Sustainability
 - Location, energy & water conservation, stormwater management, building materials, etc.
- Financing new facilities
- Policies for disposition of existing property
- Co-located facilities, e.g., senior center & community center
- Solid waste

Current Trends (cont'd)

- Demographic changes: impact on municipal service delivery (especially public safety)
- Adequate outdoor play spaces for sports
- Multilingual services
- Infrastructure
 - For economic growth
 - To address environmental or public health problems
- Governance
- Regionalism

Discussion Questions

- What is your vision for services and facilities in Sterling?

Questions

- What is Sterling's "best outcome" for town/school services and facilities over the next 10 years?
- What town (or school) services do you use most? How about your neighbors?
- What services seem adequate today in terms of capacity to meet demands, location of services, access to/use of technology?
- What services do not seem adequate under existing conditions? Where are there already signs of capacity shortage or some other problem?
- For services that are currently adequate today, where can you reasonably see some near-term needs? What are the needs?

Questions

- What services do not seem adequate under existing conditions? Where are there already signs of capacity shortage or some other problem?
- For services that are currently adequate today, where can you reasonably see some near-term needs or problems? What are they?
- What municipal/school facilities would you give high marks to for overall quality? Location? Access?
- Which facilities need the most attention? Why? What are the problems?

Questions

- Overall, is Sterling's town government organized to meet future demands for services? Setting priorities? Running the town day-to-day? Responding to change?
- What opportunities can you foresee for regional collaboration, i.e., services or facilities shared with nearby towns?

Land Use

STERLING MASTER PLAN

State Requirement

From Chapter 41, Section 81D:

Land use plan element which identifies present land use and designates *the proposed distribution, location and inter-relationship of public and private land uses.*

This element shall relate the proposed standards of population density and building intensity to the capacity of land available or planned facilities and services. *A land use plan map illustrating the land use policies of the municipality shall be included.*

About this Master Plan Element

- Master plan is ultimately about a community's physical evolution ...
- Goals of this element:
 - Document existing land use pattern; understand how it evolved.
 - Given existing and future needs (from all other elements), where should growth occur in the future? Where should the town *encourage* future land use change?
 - Where should development be discouraged?
 - What tools will the community use to achieve its land use goals?

Typical Scope & Sequence

- Brief history of town's development/explanation of today's development pattern (how did Sterling become what it is now?)
- Overview of existing zoning, other development controls
- Existing capacity
- Examples of development generally supported and development generally regretted
- Goals for future land use pattern
- Best fit between tools and desired outcomes

Current Trends

Special focus areas:

- Village centers
- Historic neighborhoods
- Landmarks (as organizing principles for growth & change)
- Highway access areas

Special concerns:

- Affordable housing; housing diversity
- Water resource protection
- Economic development
- Needs for unrestricted municipal land
- Building capacity of town boards, staff

Land Use Discussion Questions

STERLING MASTER PLAN

Questions

- What is Sterling's "best outcome" for growth, change, and preservation over the next 10 years? How about longer term?
- What brings people to Sterling? What drives the housing market here? Demands for business space?
- What towns in your region do you think Sterling is most like today?
- What towns have qualities that you would like Sterling to have (or have more of) in the future? What are those qualities?

Questions

Where are Sterling's most significant growth challenge problems? (Could be environmental constraints, location, zoning misfit with the market, other factors)

Where do you want to *provide* for future growth?

Where do you want to *encourage* future growth?

Where do you want to *discourage* future growth?

Where do you want to *prohibit* change in the future?

Questions

- What kinds of land use tensions are most prevalent in Sterling today?
 - Agriculture – residential
 - Business – residential
 - Affordable/mixed-income/multifamily housing
 - Unexpected change of any kind
 - Expectations that town boards can stop development
 - Frustration with approval/permitting procedures
 - Traffic, loss of open space

BEST OUTCOMES — 10 Years

- Emergency response – adequate, state of the art, maintain level of service
- Broadband internet to households
- School/recreation properties and use in day
- Natural gas availability/viability
- Expansion of electrical storage capacity
- Continued and additional regional collaborations/inter-municipality
- Support DPW — salting/sanding/paving services
- More municipal parking
- Additional playing/sports fields
- Accessibility issues and private business challenges

MOST USED MUNICIPAL SERVICES

- Fire
- School
- Police — parking compliance, security alarms
- Animal control
- Trash/recycling
- Water
- Electricity

ADEQUATE TODAY/FUTURE . . .

- Fire and EMS/paramedic
- Overall good
- Library — but ADA challenges
 - Lift and interior
 - Construction grants
- Police — dispatch center demands/tech.
- Senior Center — 2 years old; perhaps capacity in future
- Road infrastructure challenges
- Library programming/capacity
- Master Plan needed to guide future
- Water supply challenges
 - Adequate capacity to meet demand
 - Water Management Act challenges
 - DPW and Public Works Board
- Challenge of meeting town goals, giving town structure/governance/appointed vs. elected Boards
- Is town organized to handle change?

- Status of building conditions/government response?
- No dedicated recreation/community use/co-location
- Who maintains recreation fields? DPW

HIGH MARKS

- Recycling center and curbside pickup
- Safety departments/fire/police
- Municipal light department
- Recreation department
- COA
- Library
- Town Hall staff and services
- Schools

NEEDS ATTENTION

- Technology/underfunded services/tech
- Roads
- Parent responsibilities and improved communication technology

REGIONAL COLLABORATION

- Why do people object?
- Potential loss of community with regionalization
- Loss of control. Who do you contact?
- Part-time position can merge into full-time
- Need to build community network and not always tied to services
- Who pays their fair share/loss of control
- Mutual interest — shared spaces/fields/open space

LAND USE

1. Best Outcome

- Conservation pattern
- Rt.12 is “identity” of Sterling/gravel pit first impressions/“gateway management”
- Rt.12
 - Keep identity of Sterling and not gas stations
 - Distinct town feel in Sterling
- Historic areas near rail trails/keep area precious and maintained
- Rail trail/bike trail connection/interconnection

2. What brings people/business here?

- Highway access/interchanges

- Gliding Club at airport
- Labor force
- Small/lower density town/rural environment
- Orchards/vistas
- Library
- Common
- Downtown lacks aesthetics/outsider landlords

3. Most Like

- Poor Westminster
- Bolton/Harvard? Open space/orchards
- Berlin

4. Qualities/Likes

- Northampton
- Harvard Center/General Store
- Retail/unique shops/arts...plays as a destination
- Bolton Rt.117 and specialized retail
- “Crazy Corner” needs to be fixed
- Bad municipal development choices — re: SMLD, DPW in reference to visibility and gateways
- Adherence to agricultural lands regulations, right to first refusal, establishing criteria
- Community Preservation Act funding options
- Improve appearance of private properties and revitalize downtown/infrastructure

GROWTH CHALLENGES

- Reg. tools for Rt.12/avoid development hodgepodge
- Diverse housing types/balance for generations
- Cluster zoning missing
- 2-acre zoning hurts/sprawls/loss of neighborhood
- More development in I-90 and Rt.12 corridor
 - Impediment of Zone II overlay/growth control

ENCOURAGE GROWTH

- Downtown
- Rt.140
- Rt.12
- Chocksett Rd/Champion Kennels

Discussion Questions
STERLING MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE
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