

APPENDIX F
TOWN OF CHARLESTOWN COMPREHENSIVE PLAN SURVEY REPORT

Town of Charlestown
Comprehensive Plan
Survey Report

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Introduction

The purpose of this survey project is to provide insight into residents' perceptions, attitudes and opinions with respect to planning issues. The information provided by the project is intended to be useful in revising the Town's Comprehensive Plan.

Surveys were sent to all Charlestown residential mailboxes during the Fall of 1990. A total sample size of 1307 was generated. See Appendix I for an overview of the sample.

The major findings of the project follow, for additional detail please consult the computer printout. To help make the discussion of the findings as clear as possible, this section follows the sequence of questions as they appear on the questionnaire (Appendix II). Please consult the questionnaire for the exact wording of the questions.

Throughout the report, meaningful differences in attitudes and opinions between various subgroups (e.g. age groups, income groups) will be discussed. A discussion of all differences between groups would make the report very cumbersome. The crosstabulations in the computer printout should be consulted by those who wish to further explore differences between subgroups.

The first 14 questions on the survey are Likert items which asked respondents to indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with a set of statements. The available response categories were: Strongly Agree, Slightly Agree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Slightly Disagree and Strongly Disagree. In this section, when the word "agree" is used, it refers to combining those who strongly and slightly agree. Similarly "disagree" is a combination of those who slightly and strongly disagree. The percentages reported are based upon those who responded to the specific question. The majority of the items in this section pertain to development issues.

Greater Shopping Opportunities

There is a great divergence in opinion among residents as to the need for a greater variety of shopping opportunities in town. Forty-four percent would like to see greater variety and 45% would not like to see an increased variety of shopping opportunities. Those under 30 years old are more interested than others in having a greater variety of shopping opportunities: 63% would like to see a greater variety. Additionally, those with higher incomes appear to be less interested in seeing more shopping opportunities than those with lower incomes.

More Employment Opportunities

The majority (51%) of individuals would like to see more employment opportunities in Charlestown, however, a sizeable portion (28%) would oppose such a change. Those who reside in town for less than 10 months per year are less interested in greater employment opportunities (41%). Renters are more interested than others (69%). Additionally, younger residents and residents with lower incomes are more interested in increasing employment opportunities than others.

Preservation of Present Rural Character

Residents strongly support preserving the town's present rural character. Ninety-two percent of those responding advocate this position. No other statement on the survey garnered this much support. Indeed, 78% of those responding strongly agree with this position.

Increase Town's Tourism Industry

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the following, "Steps should be taken to increase the town's tourism industry to increase tax revenue and/or employment opportunities." Forty-nine percent of residents agree with this statement and 39% disagree. Increased tourism appears to be a viable development option for a large number of residents, however, a sizeable number are averse to this option.

Quality of Education

Sixty-one percent of residents believe that the quality of education in regional schools needs to be improved. Only 9% disagree with this statement, however, 30% are either indifferent or unsure. Only 45% of those who reside in town for less than 10 months see a need to improve the quality of education. 77% of those with school age children believe that there is a need to improve education quality in regional schools.

Additional Affordable Housing

Townpeople's opinions are almost evenly split over the need for additional affordable housing in Charlestown for those with low or moderate income. Forty-one percent would like to see additional housing of this nature, and 37% would not. Only 28% of those who reside in town for less than 10 months per year are interested in seeing additional affordable housing. 65% of renters are interested in additional affordable housing. Those with lower incomes are far more supportive of additional affordable housing as shown by the following:

Income Level	Percent Supportive of Additional Affordable Housing
Under \$20,000	60%
\$20,000-\$40,000	50%
\$40,000-\$60,000	30%
Over \$60,000	24%

Commercial Development Along Route 1

Eighty-four percent of those surveyed agree with the following: "Commercial development along Route 1 should be limited to maintain its rural character and safety." Only 11% disagree. Ninety-four percent of those who live in Charlestown less than 10 months per year would like to see development of Route 1 limited.

Population Growth Rate

Fifty-six percent of residents believe that Charlestown's present population growth rate is too fast. Only 14% disagree with this position, 31% are either indifferent or undecided. Individuals who have lived in town longer are more likely to perceive the population growth rate as too fast as shown below:

Length of Residence In Charlestown	Percent Perceiving Population Growth Rate As Too Fast
Less than 3 years	40%
3-15 years	55
Over 15 years	63

Relatedly, older individuals are more likely to view the population growth rate as too fast.

Commercial Development

Thirty-two percent believe that the present rate of commercial (retail, industry) development in Charlestown is too slow, 50% disagree with this position. This tends to indicate that the typical resident believes that the present rate of commercial development is somewhat too fast. More affluent individuals are more likely than others to perceive the commercial development rate as too fast.

Traffic Congestion

Twenty-five percent of residents consider traffic congestion to be a major problem in Charlestown. Fifty-seven percent do not consider it to be a major dilemma. Individuals who live in area 7 and those who have lived in town for more than 15 years are more likely than others to consider traffic congestion a major problem.

Manufacturing and Industry versus Seasonal Housing

Individuals were asked whether they "would rather see an increase in the amount of manufacturing and industry than an increase in the amount of seasonal housing." Residents' preferences are split virtually equally between the two options. Forty-one percent prefer an increase in manufacturing and industry, while 43% prefer an increase in the amount of seasonal housing.

Increase Manufacturing and Industry

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with the following: "Steps should be taken to increase the amount of manufacturing and industry in town to help increase tax revenue and/or employment opportunities." Again, residents' opinions are almost split equally between the two options. Forty-five percent support increasing manufacturing and industry to help with taxes and employment, while 44% oppose this position.

Reduce Residential Lot Sizes

Only 10% of those surveyed support reducing residential lot sizes to encourage growth. Eighty-three percent oppose this alternative. This is one of the most striking findings of the project. A reduction in the size of residential lots is likely seen as a threat to the town's rural character.

Encourage Growth of Retail Stores

Forty-six percent of residents support taking steps "to encourage the growth of retail stores to help increase tax revenue and/or employment opportunities." Forty percent oppose this position. Again residents are almost equally split on an issue.

Summary of Likert Items

Residents are far from unanimous on a number of issues addressed in this section. Indeed, residents' attitudes are split almost equally with respect to 5 items. An almost equal number of residents support and oppose each of the following: 1. increased variety of shopping opportunities, 2. increased affordable housing, 3. an increase in manufacturing and industry versus an increase in seasonal housing, 4. increased manufacturing and industry to help taxes and employment, and 5. increased growth of retail stores to help taxes and employment. In other words, these data indicate that regardless of the position the town takes with respect to these five issues, about half of the residents will support it and half will oppose it.

The most striking finding of the above section is the very strong (almost unanimous) support for preserving Charlestown's present rural character. The very strong opposition to reducing the size of residential lots and increased commercial development along Route 1 is not surprising in light of the importance of the town's atmosphere. Additionally, the prevailing feelings that population and commercial growth are proceeding too quickly are consistent with the concern for the town's character. Of all the development opportunities discussed in these initial 14 items, tourism appears to be the most popular with 49% supporting an increase in the tourism industry and 39% in opposition. Clearly the support for tourism is far from unanimous.

It is interesting to observe that 51% of those sampled would like to see more employment opportunities in town (28% would not). Yet this concern for increased employment is not translated into a similar level of support for increased manufacturing and industry (45% support, 44% oppose) and retail stores (46% support, 40% oppose).

Traffic congestion is not presently a major concern for the majority of residents, however, the need to improve the quality of education at regional schools is a pressing issue for most residents.

Greatest Concerns for the Future of Charlestown

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to discuss their greatest concerns for the future of their town. The most common responses were identified and coded into 12 categories. The results are shown below and in Appendix III. 766 individuals out of the total sample of 1307 took the time to write answers to this open-ended question. The percentages that are reported are based upon the 766 individuals who answered this question. The percentages add to more than 100% because respondents were free to mention as many concerns as they wished.

Concern	Percent of Sample Responding
1. Commercial + Industrial Overdevelopment	42%
2. Residential Overdevelopment + Population Growth	36%
3. Environment	29%
4. Broaden Tax Base/ Encourage Business	19%
5. Schools	16%
6. Roads and Traffic	16%
7. Need Additional Recreational Facilities + Services	12%
8. Need Additional Town Services	12%
9. Taxes	11%
10. No Golf Course at Ninigret Park	10%
11. Need Sewers + Town Water	9%
12. Need Drug Store + Supermarket	4%

The three most commonly mentioned concerns (1. Commercial and Industrial Overdevelopment, 2. Residential Overdevelopment + Population Growth and 3. Environment) further reinforce the overriding concern for protecting Charlestown's rural character. Issues such as preserving the natural beauty of the town, protecting groundwater and ponds, conservation and recycling are typical of the comments that were recorded as reflecting a concern for the environment.

While overdevelopment is feared, it is important to note that the responses to this question should not be interpreted as total opposition to development. This is made clear by the fact that the fourth most commonly mentioned concern pertains to the need to broaden the tax base and encourage business. These findings when taken together appear to support a cautious, conservative approach to development which will have a minimal effect upon the present atmosphere.

Supported Projects

Residents were provided with a list of projects and asked to indicate which ones they support even if it resulted in an increase in taxes. The results follow:

Project	Percent of Sample Supporting ¹
1. Support of Charlestown Ambulance Service	58%
2. Acquisition of Land for Conservation + Recreation	56%
3. Maintenance of Cross Mills Library	52%
4. Road Improvements	47%
5. Multi-purpose Community Center	26%
6. Additional School Buildings	19%
7. Sidewalks	14%

The desire to acquire land for conservation and recreation further reinforces the desire to maintain the present rural atmosphere as well as the desire to protect the environment. It appears that residents do not believe that additional school buildings are necessary to bring about the desired improvement in the quality of education.

Supported Recreational Facilities

Respondents were provided with a list of recreational facilities and were asked to indicate which ones they would like the town to build even if it resulted in increased taxes. The results follow:

Facility	Percent of Sample Supporting ²
No need for additional recreational facilities	36%
1. Bikepaths	33%
2. Acquire Land for Beaches	28%
3. Boat Launching Facility	28%
4. Indoor Swimming Pool	19%
5. Softball Fields	13%
6. Ice Skating Rink	13%
7. Baseball Fields	13%
8. Tennis Courts	12%
9. Basketball Courts	12%
10. Volleyball Courts	9%
11. Skate Boarding Facilities	8%
12. Horseshoe Pits	8%
13. Roller Skating Rink	5%
14. Football Fields	4%
15. Shuffleboard	4%

¹These percentages are based upon the 1,148 individuals who responded to this question.

²These percentages are based upon the 1,183 individuals responding to this question.

Ninigret Park Activities

Respondents were asked to indicate which activities they believe the town should permit at Ninigret Park. The results follow:

Activity	Percent of Sample Supporting ³
1. Seafood Festival	91%
2. Circus	85%
3. Concerts	80%
4. Development of Golf Course	31%

Summary

The major findings of the initial 14 items are supported by the findings from the rest of the questionnaire. Residents of Charlestown want to preserve the present rural character, however, they do tend to believe that some development is necessary to provide tax revenue and employment opportunities. It appears that the most desirable form of development is one that would have a minimal impact upon the rural character of the town as opposed to one which would provided a greater amount of tax revenue and employment at the expense of impacting the town's character.

Residents are virtually unanimous in their desire to maintain the present character of the town. However, there is a great deal of disagreement surrounding the role that manufacturing and industry, retail and tourism should play in the development process. While there are many residents who support each of these types of development opportunities, there are almost an equal number who do not. It is clear, however, that the vast majority of residents oppose significant commercial development along Route 1.

³These percentages are based upon the 1,254 individuals responding to this question.