Pipeline Survey Results

The Pipeline which contained the survey was mailed out to the entire list of Charlestown households and PO boxes, which consisted of 5,177 recipients. Copies were also left in the library (50) and Town Hall (150) but not all of these have been picked up and read. There were a few duplicated copies filled out, no doubt from a member of a household where another person had already filled out the bright yellow mailed copy.

As of July 13, the Planning Department received 87 responses – the responses are summarized below by question.

Are You:

- 78 Resident of Charlestown
- 7 Seasonal Resident
- 2 Non-resident Charlestown land owner

1. What do you value most about Charlestown?

The answers to this first question were overwhelming similar, which included:

The ocean, beaches, salt ponds, open space, woods (and the recreational opportunities these natural features provide), natural and scenic beauty, landscapes, small town and rural character, sense of community, lack of commercialization, no big boxes (small businesses), tranquility, dark skies, responsible (limited) growth, history, overall quality of life – it feels like “Country by the Sea”.

Specific references were made to Ninigret Pond, Ninigret Park, Frances Carter Preserve, Burlingame Park and Watchaug Pond.

Many also mention low taxes (16) and a few, the good schools (4) and low crime (1).

A few mention the seasonal changes in population – quiet winters contrasted with summer influx of people and activity, and that it is a great retirement community.

Just two respondents chose not to mention the physical attributes, instead referred to good governance and financial stewardship.

Only two declined to answer this first question (and they had very specific complaints about government) and a couple respondents said “what it used to be!”

An attached letter seems to summarize the overwhelming viewpoint:

“My family and I are full-time residents of Charlestown. I have lived in this area since 1978. I'm now 42 and have two children who are growing up as I did in a town that has everything it needs and nothing more. Keep this tiny slice of heaven the same as it is.”
2. Do you have concerns about the future of Charlestown?

No: 5

“It will continue to be a great place to live”

Yes: 82

Potential loss of rural character, overdevelopment, commercial growth (too much or big box), or inappropriate development (including casinos – 3 comments on these) (36)
Of the 36 concerned with over development, 9 specifically mentioned excess commercialization.

Too many seasonal residents, too many outsiders imposing their values, coastal areas becoming too crowded, stress on aquifers, beach houses too big and ugly (6)

Loss of local control (mention of statewide initiatives as a threat to rural character) (2)

Small business growth and more restaurants and entertainment needed, too many restrictions on and lack of support for business, stagnant economic growth, decline of business (10)

Increased taxes, lack of diversified tax base, too much open space (7)
Families with children are too expensive (1)

Politics, political divisiveness, one party control, “special interest” groups (8)

Lack of affordable housing for elderly, low income and families (who will be priced out of Charlestown) (3)

Affordable housing in the business district (against) (2)

Well water quality (2)
Pollution of the salt ponds/ conflict of uses in the salt ponds (3)

Viability of Chariho School system (2)
Lack of code enforcement (1)
3. Is there anything you would change in Charlestown?

No or no answer: 13

“Love it”

Politics – improve political climate/work together/civil discourse (11)

More office space/light industry for tax base, additional retail, small businesses and services, more restaurants, more activity (6)
Central downtown/ town center with small stores and affordable housing (3)
Better business climate, establish enterprise zone (3)

Better signage for businesses and attractions (3)

Add safe pedestrian and cycle ways/better access for walkers and bicyclists, and sidewalks (to Charlestown Beach and along Old Coach Road) (6)

Upgrade/more development in Ninigret Park (6)
More recreational opportunities outside of Ninigret, more playing fields, more walking trails (3)
More beach parking (2)

More open space, keep/enhance rural character (8)
Stop development of coastal areas, stop overdevelopment (3)

Better balance conservation and development (too much anti-development) (2)

Lower taxes (cut Town Hall staff, too many town employees – 2 comments on this) (4)

No quarries/stop Copar (2)

(Fix) lack of public transportation (2)

Allow more apartments, housing options (2)

More aquaculture (2)

Add town water (2)

Misc:
Convert Cross Mills Fire Station to an arts center
Stickers for the town dump
Repair roads
More septic system choices (less costly)
Note: A few comments about things needing to change were not really relevant (“summertime humidity" comes to mind and stopping residential development with children (!) was another)

4. On a scale of 1-5, do you feel Charlestown is changing for the better or worse?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BETTER</th>
<th>NOT CHANGING</th>
<th>WORSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No Answer: 5

Why?

Those answering 1:

Good leadership (several comments on this), good government, good regulations (inc. OWTS), comprehensive plan, open space protection, good roads, keeping Charlestown a “jewel”, it has “grown and prospered” over 20 years (10)

Those answering 2:

Responsible government (and Town Council), good employees, fine quality of life, sense of community, many amenities (Ninigret Park, library, farmers markets, locally owned businesses) and healthy activities, maintenance of its rural and small town character, open space, good school system, low tax rate, good roads, National Flood Insurance Community Rating System (insurance premiums reductions) (18)

“Best town in the state: thanks for asking!”

Those answering 3:

Neutral or things are going well – 11 comments received, including the following sentiments:

“I love Charlestown the way it is now”

“We don’t want any change or development to affect the priceless irreplaceable rural beauty of Charlestown”
Improvements or changes needed – 21 comments received:

Protect against overdevelopment and wind turbines, too many subdivisions and too much coastal development, “don’t become South Kingstown” (6)

VS

Restrictions against reasonable development, anti-business town government, Ninigret Park is under-utilized -- should support more venues and recreation activities, town needs more small businesses and restaurants, a town center would be nice, more summer activity to support economy, too many underutilized business buildings, lack of parking at the beach, need to address drinking water issue, change the rancor in government, some overregulation, high taxes and lack of services (15)

“We will need to balance preservation with progressive attitude toward suitable business growth”

Those answering 4:

Pressure to build and commercialize, more investment needed in natural resources (4)

Underutilized commercial properties, anti-development attitude, need more activity and businesses (3)

General government complaints, taxes going up, too many regulations and town employees (6)

Middle class being forced out, lack of affordable housing (2)
Proposals for affordable housing not needed

Those answering 5:

Too much open space (3)
Not enough growth for the tax base, businesses are run down
One party control
Specific complaint about boating restrictions on the ponds

Compiled by J Weidman, 17 July 2015