



**2010
Comprehensive Plan
Update**

Community Survey Report

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I. Introduction

The following report was prepared by the Stow Planning & Development Department and includes comments from the February 23, 2010, Town Meeting and the responses from the online Community Survey which was conducted from February 23, 2010, through April 16, 2010.

Comments were collected during the Town Meeting and were analyzed along with the responses from the online Community Survey. Common themes emerged and are presented in this report.

A total of 178 respondents completed the online survey from 2/23/10 through the close of the survey, 4/16/10. It should be noted that while there were 178 respondents to the online survey, not all answered every question. Because the survey contained open-ended questions where respondents could express various comments for each question, comments from a single respondent may have fit into more than one theme or category. It is clear from the detailed responses in this survey; citizens took some time and effort to express their thoughts.

In order to obtain as much public input as possible, the online survey was publicized in a variety of ways:

- Flier in Stow water bill (approx. 12,000 households)
- Notices distributed to schools
- News release in Stow Sentry & Akron Beacon Journal
- Members of several groups were contacted via e-mail including:
 - Stow Industrial Companies
 - Stow Munroe-Falls Chamber of Commerce
 - Stow Rotary
 - Stow Kiwanis
 - Stow Booster Club
- Kiosk at Stow Munroe Falls Community Showcase 4/10 & 4/11 where residents could complete the survey
- Surveys were made available at Stow Senior Center and announcements were made at the Stow Sunshiners luncheon.

II. Survey Questions Analysis

Question #1 Seasons Road and State Route 8

With the opening of the Seasons Road interchange, more development will be occurring in this area. Already there are light industrial uses. The City also expects a medical facility, offices, service retail, and possibly a hotel and restaurants to be built around this interchange.



Do you have any concerns or recommendations about how development will occur in this area?

As can be seen from the table below, there was substantial support for development of the Seasons Road/State Route 8 interchange area from attendees of the Town Meeting on February 23, 2010, as well as the respondents to the online survey. Environmental concerns regarding the development of this area were expressed by both groups of participants. The third theme that emerged was the issue of constructing new buildings when there are existing empty buildings available in Stow.

44	22%	1	Environmental concerns regarding development of the Seasons Road area including Flood/storm water management, and loss of open space/natural areas
19	10%	2	Is there a need for new business development, fill empty buildings before build new
65	33%	3	Support development of this area with qualifications
44	22%	4	Support development of this area with no qualifications
5	3%	5	Create space for teens
12	6%	6	Miscellaneous
9	5%	7	Traffic/infrastructure concern
198			

The results indicate that 109 out of 195 total responses to this question have supported development without any qualifications or with qualifications (Themes 3 & 4). ***It is important to note that the term “supported development with qualifications” does not carry any negative connotations towards development of this area.*** A participant’s comment was listed as supporting development with qualifications if they indicated they want a particular type of development or business to locate in this area or development was supported with the required infrastructure improvements. Some examples include:

“...I suggest more industries are built in this area so that the city of Stow can benefit from their taxes...”

“...Would like upscale restaurants...”

“...Rather than have the usual high density development, design the area so there are buffer areas of open land and trees between buildings/parking lots to control erosion and water runoff. Single businesses on a lot, rather than the strip store design...”

“...Be sure there is enough parking...”

A participant's comment was listed as supporting development with no qualifications if there response was along the lines of:

“...No...”

“...No. Any progress in this area would bring much needed employment to Stow...”

“...Getting it done properly and quickly...”

The second theme that has emerged to date from this process is environmental concerns, including storm water management, loss of open space and natural areas. Examples of comments made regarding environmental concerns include:

“... Yes, because even the widened two-lane road will not handle the increased traffic. Will need traffic signals at Wyoga, Seasons and State Road. Also am concerned where Mud Run can handle the runoff. Today the stream is over its banks due to snow melt. With the proposed development it is sure to flood more often and endanger residents downstream...”

“...Anything that could possibly negatively affect the Wyoga Lake Estates should be dealt with properly with regard to the residents of that area.. Floods are a major concern...”

“...Concerns about storm water runoff...”

The issue of environmental concerns regarding the development of the Seasons Road/State Route 8 interchange area, and specifically with the perceived potential impact upon the residents of Wyoga Lake Estates has been clearly expressed during this process. The issue of the storm water management plan for this area was addressed at a public meeting on April 13, 2010. This meeting was arranged based upon the feedback received on the public participation aspect of the Comprehensive Plan Update and a general understanding of residents' concerns. The Mud Brook Watershed Study was presented at this meeting as well as a description of the regulations that have been adopted in order to mitigate the potential impacts of development upon the Wyoga Lake area.

In addition, a traffic study on the proposed development at Seasons Road is in process of being completed. This traffic study will suggest off-site improvements for the area. Open space preservation issues will be addressed during site plan review.

There was also one comment that advocated no development of this area at all, and several that included a reference to not wanting to see all of the open space in Stow developed.

The third theme expressed through the answers to Question 1 was the issue of constructing new commercial buildings with empty buildings in the community. This was a comment made by 19 respondents to this question and this theme was also expressed in other questions. Examples of comments made here included:

“...Don’t build office/retail buildings unless there are potential leases. We don’t need empty buildings...”

“...The only concern I have is putting all the money into it and nothing ends up going into the building and it just sits empty. We have plenty of new empty buildings in Stow and we just keep on building...”

“...Concern of the demand to support new buildings...”

The issue of constructing new commercial⁽¹⁾ buildings while there are empty business buildings in Stow is one that has been expressed often in the past by residents. The reuse of vacant buildings in Stow is a theme that was expressed throughout the survey and during the February 23 Town Meeting and clearly must be addressed in this Comprehensive Plan.

The main point to be gleaned from responses to this question is that development at the Seasons Road/State Route 8 interchange is supported by survey respondents. A related point is that there are concerns that environmental issues related to the development of this area must be addressed.

(1) Commercial includes any non-residential or institutional structure

Question #2 Connectivity

The ability of people to circulate throughout the City by a variety of methods and routes is an important element of sustainability.

Where are good places to add sidewalks on busy streets and more biking/walking trails?



There was strong support for sidewalks and bike trails expressed during the Town Meeting and by the respondents of the Community Survey. Providing sidewalks and/or bike trails along main roads emerged as the largest theme. The second most often made comment expressed the need to make connections from residential neighborhoods to parks, schools, or services. Expanding and/or maintaining bike trails was the third largest theme. Safety was the primary concern for many who wanted sidewalks particularly on busy or narrow streets.

80	40%	1	Support sidewalks and/or trails on main roads (Darrow, Graham, Stow Fishcreek)
43	22%	2	Support sidewalks in residential neighborhoods or to make connections to other services, parks or other uses
18	9%	3	Support sidewalks/trails but have safety concern with existing or possible bike trail
12	6%	4	Did not feel it was an important issue or felt there are adequate sidewalks/trails in the City
27	14%	5	Like bike trails/lanes or need more bike trails/lanes
12	6%	6	No comment/opinion
8	4%	7	Miscellaneous
200			

Of the 200 comments received, 168 (Themes 1, 2, 3, & 5) supported expanding the network of sidewalks and/or bike trails in Stow. The highest percentage of respondents (40%) suggested that sidewalks and/or trails should be provided on main roads (i.e. Darrow, Graham, Stow, and Fishcreek Roads). Some examples of this sentiment are:

"...Some parts of Darrow Rd have no sidewalks and I think it would be very efficient for there to be sidewalks on such a busy street..."; and

“...On any major road, Fishcreek, Darrow, Kent , there are a lot of people who walk it would be much safer if they weren't walking in the street in the way of car, it's especially dangerous when there is snow out...”

The second largest theme that emerged from this question was that sidewalks should provide connections to retail services, parks, schools and other uses. There were 43 comments out of the 200 (22%) that expressed this opinion, such as:

“...I have always wished there were sidewalks to connect Higby Drive down Rt. 91 to the plaza with Wendy's, Burger King, Giant Eagle, etc. This would give the residents of Cresswood Estates and adjacent condos (of which there are many) better access to walk to retail establishments...”

“... Connecting neighborhoods to existing bike trails, the City Center and City schools...”

Many believed it was important to link trails or sidewalks to parks and/or existing bike trails were important,

“...It would be helpful if Progress Park had sidewalks. This road is well traveled and walkers/joggers also use this street after using the bike/hike trail...”

“...Make connections from residential areas to the bike trails..”

“...I think there should be sidewalks on the side of every street because of kids walking, or runners running. Bike trails should be added in various places that lead to parks...”

Safety concerns, particularly for children walking to school, due to the lack of sidewalks in certain areas were also expressed by some,

“...Darrow Rd, Graham Rd, Fishcreek Rd, Kent Rd all need sidewalks as well as any other busy streets involved with our children walking to school...”

“...The main roads that kids take to walk to and from school need sidewalks. (Graham, Fischcreek, N. River Rd., Kent, Darrow)...”

The issue of providing safe routes to school for students is currently being studied as part of the ODOT program, “Safe Routes to School”. The City of Stow and the Stow-Munroe Falls School District have received an ODOT grant to prepare a School Travel Plan (STP) for elementary schools. After the plan is completed, Stow will be eligible to apply for future grants to make either physical improvements (i.e. sidewalks, enhanced crosswalks, and signage) or other non-

physical improvements (i.e. educational programs, promotions, enforcement) that will enhance the safety of children either walking or biking to school.

A total of 12 or 6% indicated that sidewalks and/or bike trails were either not an important issue, or believed there are adequate sidewalks/trails in Stow.

“... Do not see a great need at this time...”

“... We are good...”

The cost of constructing sidewalks was an issue raised by some,

“...none – don’t spend more money...”; and

“...No opinion regarding bike trails. Don’t spend money for sidewalks on busy streets; very few pedestrians use existing sidewalks...”

Regarding the financing of sidewalks, typically they are constructed at the time of development whether it is a single family residence or a commercial building, and the cost is borne by the property owner. Bike trails are typically constructed with the assistance of grants (State or Federal) and the City of Stow paying for a portion of the project.

Based on the responses in this survey, improving pedestrian connections throughout the City is an important issue. This policy will be explored further as part of this update. While financing the construction of sidewalks or trails is an important consideration, it should not limit policies or recommendations regarding improving connectivity in Stow. There are numerous examples in Stow where pedestrian and/or bike trails have been constructed many years after recommendations have existed in plans. Often they are built incrementally with either private or public funds as property is developed or grant money becomes available.

discussions took. There were 71 total comments from The Town Meeting and online survey. The themes from these comments and the number of respondents are listed below:

- A) Generally did favor development assistance: 34 (48%)
- B) Generally did not favor development assistance: 10 (14%)
- C) Redevelopment of existing buildings is an issue. Some respondents favored using incentives for redevelopment: 17 (24%)
- D) Schools are a concern: 3 (4%)
- E) Miscellaneous: 7 (10%)

The support by a majority of respondents for development assistance to businesses by either tax breaks or infrastructure improvements suggest an overall support for economic development in Stow. This is not surprising considering the many benefits businesses provide to a community, and that a strong base of businesses has a positive impact upon the fiscal well being of a community and its residents.

One comment that was interesting was the issue of redevelopment of existing commercial/industrial buildings. This was not a part of the question but respondents felt strongly enough about this issue to make their position known on this question. In addition, 24% of the respondents offering comments preferred to use incentives to reutilize empty buildings.

Question #4 City Center

Over the years, the City has developed the City Center complex at Darrow and Graham Roads with a variety of public uses.



What kind of other uses should the City promote as part of a Town Center area north of the Post Office? Offices, small retail like a restaurant/coffee house/florist/bagel or ice cream shop, a community center and housing are uses that were discussed for this area when the City Center Plan was approved.

Offices

Community Center

Small retail businesses
(i.e. restaurant, coffee shop, florist)

Housing

Other _____

Question 4 yielded two types of information: the statistical breakdown from the online survey and comments collected at the 2/23/10 Town Meeting. Regarding the type and mix of uses that should be encouraged in the City Center, the following is a breakdown of the online survey responses:

Offices	Small Retail	Community Center	Housing	Total
37	97	118	16	171 ^(a)
22%	57%	69.0%	9%	

(a) The sum in each category does not equal the "Total" because respondents could select more than one category.

Based on this response, a Community Center is clearly favored as a component of the City Center with 118 out of the 171, or 69% of the respondents indicating as such. This preference was also expressed in the Town Meeting discussion groups. The next preference expressed in the Community Survey was for small retail (i.e. restaurant, coffee shop, and florist) where 97 comments or 57% indicated this was a preferred land use. A smaller percentage preferred office (22 %) and housing (9%). In reviewing the Town Meeting comments and some made in the "other" category of the online survey, there were several respondents that indicated that the City Center should be a place that brings the community together with a wide range of activities available. Comments included,

... "A place to eat, shop, and entertainment are a great way to bring family and friends together"; and

*'
"...I'd like to see a community center to attract young families to our city".*

Some preferred community or family oriented activities including an amphitheater but without a focus on business uses. An example was,

"Prefer more family/community oriented uses and less business for now i.e. amphitheater".

The amphitheater was noted by many as a desirable component, although fiscal issues was a concern expressed,

"An outdoor place for people to gather", and

"Amphitheater – find a low cost solution that is self-sustaining".

The issue of establishing a City Center area has been a recommendation in the 1991 and 2001 Stow Comprehensive Plans. In 1991 the Plan recommended that a development pattern in this area be established that fostered community identity with a mixed-use town center at Darrow and Graham Roads.

A goal expressed in the 2001 Stow Comprehensive Plan echoed the desire to establish community identity with a mixed-use development at Darrow and Graham Roads, and to create a central gathering place for the community. The 2001 recommendation went further and suggested the preparation of a City Center Plan. This recommendation was implemented when Stow City Council adopted the Stow City Center Plan in 2006. This plan provides the community with some direction as to the future development of the City Center area.

The support for a community center and small retail in the City Center area, as well as comments supporting the amphitheater, suggests that the development of the City Center should continue. The types of comments expressed as part of this question also suggest that residents must be part of the City Center planning process in the future.

Question #5 Mixed Use Development

Mixed-use developments blend neighborhood retail, service and office uses with residential uses and various amenities on a single property. Traditional suburban development seldom looks like this, but it could.



Stow has some areas that could be considered for mixed-use development as opposed to strictly retail or residential. What do you think of this development concept?

Based on the comments received at the 2/23/10 Town Meeting and the respondents of the Community Survey there was significant support for the concept of mixed use development in Stow. Out of the total 182 received, 135 or 74% supported the concept either with or without qualifications. A smaller number, 26 or 14% felt the various land uses should remain separate.

89	49%	1	Support with no qualifications
46	25%	2	Support with qualifications
26	14%	3	Do not support or felt uses should remain separate
9	5%	4	Not sure
12	7%	5	Miscellaneous
182	Total		

Many respondents liked the mixed use concept for number of reasons including reducing dependence on automobiles, increasing convenience or attempting to ensure viability of retail businesses.

"...I think that a mixed development area may help the retail businesses as they would be in close proximity to the residents. This would possibly create a better chance of these retail businesses being successful as in strip malls they do not seem to be successful..."

"...i like it, i think we should have a more general area for people to walk around and visit different shops without having to drive..."

“...I think it would be beneficial for people that don't have transportation to get around all over the city. It would be great to have shopping centers within walking distance for them...”

Many respondents (17) believed that the Stow-Kent Shopping Center was a prime candidate for a mixed use development. Some examples:

“... Great idea! This should be build at the current sight of the stow-kent shopping center. This is defiantly something that would attract young families and keep residents from leaving...”

“...I support mixed-use, as it encourages more pedestrian traffic rather than people driving from their home, parking, and then using the retail services. Stow-Kent Plaza is the perfect area for this. I also think the Stow-Kent Plaza is the perfect area for a new movie theater...”

There were some, 26 or 14% who did not embrace this concept because they either thought the uses should remain separate or just preferred traditional development patterns,

“...I don't think I would like to live intermingled with retail stores or shop so close to someone's home...”

“...I prefer the traditional suburban development...”

Given the general support for this concept, mixed use development will be explored further in this Comprehensive Plan Update. Part of that study should include exploring strategies to develop vacant or underutilized commercial buildings as mixed-use developments.

General Questions

The following are the general questions that were posed during the 2/23/10 Town Meeting and also included in the online Community Survey.

Question #6

What was the best thing that was developed in Stow in the last ten years?

The largest theme that emerged from this question was that the Stow Community Shopping Center II (former K-Mart) was perceived to be one of the best things developed in the last ten years. Two other positively perceived improvements in Stow included the Akron General Wellness Center & Steels Corners Area (33 out of 172 or 19%) and Parks, Playgrounds & Trails (31 out of 172 or 18%).

33	19%	1	Akron General Medical Center & Steels Corners Area
22	13%	2	Municipal buildings (City Center, Fire Stations, Senior Center)
48	28%	3	Stow Community Shopping Center II
31	18%	4	Parks, playgrounds, trails
11	6%	5	Road/Infrastructure Improvement
13	8%	6	Various retail, industrial or residential developments (excluding Stow Community)
14	8%	7	Misc.
172	Total		

It is interesting to note that while 48 respondents or 28% believed that the Stow Community Shopping Center II (former K-Mart) believed was one of the best things that was built in the last ten years, new retail development emerged as 19% of the comments indicated that either specific retail developments were a negative or that there is too much retail generally. However, when residents were asked about what “one thing” they would like to see developed in Stow in the next ten years, 23% of the respondents indicated some additional retail, entertainment or service use.

Question #7

What was the worst thing that was developed in Stow in the last ten years?

24	17%	1	Vacant buildings including Stow-Kent Plaza
26	19%	2	New retail developments (WalMart, Hobby Lobby) or too much retail
14	10%	3	Courthouse
7	5%	4	Steels Corners Area development and/or traffic
16	12%	5	Municipal development or programs
12	9%	6	Road other infrastructure conditions
10	7%	7	Calls Farm Development
16	12%	8	Don't know/no comment
13	9%	9	Miscellaneous
138	Total		

Question #8**If you could make anything happen in Stow, what would it be?**

37	23%	2	Maintain/fix up existing vacant buildings (i.e. Stow-Kent Plaza)
15	9%	3	Recreation center/swimming pool
9	6%	4	Places for teens
28	18%	5	Transportation/roads/city services
18	11%	6	Other Retail/Service
17	11%	7	"Downtown" or community gathering place
1	1%	8	High tech/medical facility
13	8%	9	Other
13	8%	11	Schools
8	5%	12	Preserve green space, natural areas
159	Total		

It should be noted that the highest number of comments related to vacant or underutilized commercial buildings.

Question #9

What is the one thing Stow doesn't have that you would like to see be developed in the next ten years?

18	11%	1	Nice upscale restaurant
17	11%	2	A "downtown", community gathering place; amphitheater
37	23%	3	Recreation center/swimming pool
7	4%	4	Places for teens
11	7%	5	Nothing
37	23%	6	Other Retail/Service
12	8%	7	Additional parks, trails, sidewalks
8	5%	8	High tech/medical facility
12	8%	9	Other
159	Total		

III. General Themes from Survey/Town Meeting

The major themes expressed by respondents to the 2010 Comprehensive Plan online survey and the attendees at the February 23, 2010 Town Meeting are listed below:

- Development of the area around the Seasons Road/State Route 8 interchange area is supported and viewed favorably.
- There are environmental concerns regarding the development of this area.
- There is support for sidewalks and bike trails in Stow. Linking sidewalks and bike trails to schools, shopping areas and parks was the second most often mentioned comment to question 2 on connectivity.
- A community center as a component of the City Center was favored by 69% of respondents to question 4.
- There was a fairly strong concern expressed by respondents regarding the need to address the vacant buildings in Stow, particularly the large retail shopping centers (i.e. Stow Kent Shopping Center). This theme was expressed throughout the survey in Questions #1, #7 and #8.
- Many respondents questioned the need to develop new commercial buildings while there are vacant or underused buildings in Stow.
- Mixed-use type development was strongly supported.

The general themes expressed throughout the survey and during the Town Meeting will be integrated into the process of updating the Comprehensive Plan including the formulation of the policies and goals that will serve as the foundation of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Stow Planning & Development Department prepared this report and is responsible for the content. The actual responses to the questions are available for review by contacting the Planning Department staff at 330-689-2819 or planning@stow.oh.us