

City of Easthampton, MA
Master Plan Community Survey Results as of March 10, 2007

Key Issues and Debates:

To Be Northampton or Not To Be Northampton

There was support and distain for Easthampton's proximity and shared characteristics with the adjacent town. This debate was focused in two areas: 1) Easthampton is currently an affordable place to live, work and have an artist's studio—either keep it that way by keeping taxes low or use government funds to support the artisan industry. 2) Northampton has experienced gentrification and driven out its artist base, now it's just a bunch of stores, we don't want that here vs. encourage more economic development in the form of boutiques, small retailers and restaurants so that residents don't have to go to Northampton for entertainment. The issue of balancing economic development, taxes and support for the arts is very prevalent and can be found in other areas too.

Walkability—a.k.a. "my sidewalks are cracked"

There was a lot of interest in promoting a more walkable downtown area, with great support for improving sidewalks in areas where they are deficient, especially neighborhoods. Reasons included less dependence on cars, a safer place to play and stroll, a more visually appealing downtown and the desire for school children to be able to walk to school safely. When comparing modes of transportation (walking, biking, bussing) there was considerable support for more walkable areas and less emphasis on bike lanes or more PVRTA routes or stops. The responses to Question 29 about the PVRTA indicated that even though only 8.4% of respondents said they use the PVRTA, 39.4% said they would use it more if certain improvements were made.

Renovation and/or Construction of Schools

This is going to be a hot issue with arguments for and against construction and/or renovation. Some public education on what issues, options and outcomes is going to be imperative. The almost 94% response rate on Question 11 indicates that there is very wide and interested audience. There were some respondents that wanted the \$100 in Question 19 to go towards Education and Schools.

Transfer Station, Private Pick-up and Level of Government Service

Concerns about the transfer station include infrequency of hours/days of operation, fees, types of items that can be dropped off, and general education. Many comments addressed the high cost of private trash collection and how this should be a basic service provided by Easthampton now that it's a City.

Please! Major Retail vs. No Way! Major Retail

There were a generous amount of comments that addressed how there is no where to buy basic items (other than food) in Easthampton, and how since Ames has left one must go to Northampton, Holyoke or Hadley for a pair of socks. There were also a generous amount of comments that addressed a desire to keep big box store out of town, protect the local retailers and not over develop the commercial and retail base. See comments for quotes about the pros and cons of the Stop and Shop development.

Land conservation, Natural resource protection, Farmland Preservation

There are a lot of comments such as "save all the open space that we have left", "no more ugly condos", "save the farmland", "save Mt. Tom". There is heavy undertone of a land conservation ethic that runs through the majority of survey responses.

Concerns and Accomplishments:

The quality of the responses was generally very high. I had very few problems with legibility of written responses, and I think that the entering errors should be very low. The map on Question 9 was almost illegible, and many respondents commented on how they found it difficult to read. The mistake on Question 26 that referred to Question 24A instead of Question 25 caused some confusion but the response rate was very high.

One of the major accomplishments of the survey was to raise awareness about key issues facing the town in the Master planning process. There are a lot of general comments that thank the committee for the survey or for their interest. Of course, there were one or two that thought the survey was bogus—but that's to be expected. Many of the comments address the need for further education on important issues like school renovation and construction, the transfer station and the various conservation measures available to the town, in particular methane recovery from landfills. There seemed to be a general confusion about what conservation areas in town were under permanent protection (Mt. Tom and Arcadia) and which ones will require more resources to restore and preserve (Nonotuck Park, Nashawannuck Pond). This survey presents a wonderful opportunity to follow-up on some of the key issues with targeted public education.