

# COMMUNITY ISSUES

# 2

## Overview

To gain a comprehensive understanding of issues and concerns that were important to the community, a series of public meetings, a community survey, interviews, and other exercises were conducted throughout the planning process.

The Plan of Conservation and Development Steering Committee used the results of these activities to identify and prioritize the most important community issues before developing strategies to address them.

*“It is really the community itself which must try to pull together ... in order to preserve those things that the community values and to foster the growth and change that the community wants.”*

Russell Peterson  
Former EPA Director

**Workshop Meetings**



**Public Meetings**



**Telephone Survey**



**Working Meetings**



*Residents clearly value Somers' community facilities, and open spaces as well as community and historic character.*

## **Things to Encourage ...**

At a meeting attended by approximately 60 residents early in the planning process, residents were asked to identify things in Somers that they were particularly proud of.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that make their community special to them and things that they would like to encourage in the future.

	<b>“Prouds” in Somers</b>	<b>Percent of Total Votes</b>
<b>Community Facilities</b>	Field Road Recreation Area, firehouse, Somers Library, Piedmont Hall, Recreation Department, recreation programs, school activities, school complex, school system, Senior Center, Town Hall, youth programs.	<b>40%</b>
<b>Open Space</b>	Northern Connecticut Land Trust open space, open space, Shenipsit State Forest, Soapstone Mountain, Town Green, undeveloped areas, Cedar Knob Golf Course.	<b>16%</b>
<b>Community Character</b>	Apple orchards, beautification group, farms, flowering gardens, McCann Farm, rural character, small town character, Somersville Mill, Worthington Pond Farm.	<b>16%</b>
<b>Historic Resources</b>	Historic buildings, historic houses, historic Main Street, Historical Museum, Indian (Somers Mountain) Museum, Robert Pease House.	<b>13%</b>
<b>Business Development</b>	Colonial Flower Shop, Dzen's Garden Market Area, lack of fast food franchises, small shops on Main Street, Child's Place Preschool.	<b>5%</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	Cooksville, Green Tree Lane development, center of town, Four Town Fairgrounds, new sidewalks, 624 Springfield Road, 5 Main Street.	<b>10%</b>

**Choosing “Prouds”**



**Choosing “Sorrys”**



## Things to Discourage ...

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Residents were also asked to identify things in Somers that they were particularly sorry about.

This type of question typically results in residents identifying things that concern them about their community and things that they would like to discourage in the future.

*Residents also expressed desire for protecting and improving community character*

*Groundwater contamination and the firehouses were largely responsible for the concern over natural resources and community facilities.*

	<b>“Sorrlys” in Somers</b>	<b>Percent of Total Votes</b>
<b>Business Development</b>	Field Road an eyesore, Field Road metal buildings, junk yard area on Field Road, new metal "box" on South Road, Egypt Road industrial park, should have an industrial park, Eleanor Road industrial building, Gold House, CBT, Clarissa's Villa/Plaza, Dunkin Donuts, Italian Villa, Johann's, Maturo's Golf Center, Micky Finn's, Mobil, Somersville used car lots, spot commercial area on Springfield Road, need to be more business-friendly, failed opportunities for business development, center of Somers - loss of business area, lack of business development, lack of development in Somersville.	<b>32%</b>
<b>Historic Resources</b>	Somersville Mill, loss of historic buildings in the center of Somers, failure to take advantage of older buildings.	<b>23%</b>
<b>Community Character</b>	Abandoned/rundown houses, Egypt Road/Field Road storage area in residential neighborhood, light pollution, Somersville homes, unregistered/abandoned cars/trucks, Worthington Pond Farm, deforested building lots on Brookford Drive.	<b>13%</b>
<b>Natural Resources</b>	Contaminated land on Field Road, contaminated land on Springfield Road, contaminated Properties, Egypt Road needs more trees, litter on George Wood Road at Somers/Enfield Line area, pollution, water pollution from prison, water pollution, Shady Lake unused by youth.	<b>9%</b>
<b>Community Facilities</b>	Poor condition of Field Road playground, Kibbe Fuller School, Land Use staff, new fire house, old firehouse – not used by police, school objectives for students, Town Hall.	<b>9%</b>
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	64 Springfield Road, Mill Road, high taxes, Zoning Commission, firehouse cell tower, prisons, rod & gun club, lack of senior / affordable housing, Mill Pond Apartments, Partridge Run development, Route 190 goes through the center of town, Car dominated Town Center, Intersection of Rtes. 190 and 83, Rte. 83 curb cuts, Somersville used car lot drive unapproved.	<b>15%</b>

*Residents were asked to identify topics that they felt were most important for Somers to address in the Plan. The top priorities were:*

<b>Primary Planning Issues</b>		
Rank	Topic	% of Total Vote
<b>1</b>	Open Space	21%
<b>2</b>	Business Development	19%

## **Things to Focus on...**

To identify the top issues to be addressed in the Plan, residents were each given 50 planning points and asked to identify the issues that were most important to them by voting with their points for a variety of planning topics likely to be included in the Plan. The results are described below.

In December of 2003, a random telephone survey of 401 households was conducted to validate the public input received to date, as well as many of the strategies developed by the Steering Committee to address identified issues. While the results of the survey are incorporated throughout this Plan, some of the highlights are summarized below by planning topic.

### **Primary Issues**

Among the broad categories of conservation, development, and infrastructure topics, conservation was the most important, garnering 44% of the participant's votes, led by the number one issue of open space (21%). Development issues closely followed conservation issues with 41% of the votes, led by the number two issue of business development (19%).

Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote	Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote	Rank	Topic	Percent of Total Vote
<b>Conservation Topics</b>		<b>44%</b>	<b>Development Topics</b>		<b>41%</b>	<b>Infrastructure Topics</b>		<b>15%</b>
<b>1</b>	Open Space	21%	<b>2</b>	Business Development	19%	<b>9</b>	Vehicular Circulation	5%
<b>3</b>	Natural Resources	12%	<b>4</b>	Village Enhancement	12%	<b>10</b>	Pedestrian/Bike Circulation	5%
<b>6</b>	Community Character	8%	<b>5</b>	Housing Needs	9%	<b>11</b>	Community Facilities	3%
<b>7</b>	Historic Resources	8%	<b>8</b>	Residential Development	7%	<b>12</b>	Utilities	2%

### *Open Space*

Residents at the April 17, 2003 public meeting expressed a number of reasons for preserving more open space including preserving wildlife habitat, preserving community character, providing recreation areas, and reducing development potential. The telephone survey results supported these findings as indicated by the following responses.

<b>Open Space</b>	<b>Response</b>
• Somers should connect open spaces into a system of greenways, with trails	80%
• Somers should require open space as part of every new development	65%
• Would pay \$50 to \$100 more per year in taxes, to have the Town acquire more open space	59%
• Somers should preserve more open space	58%

*Business Development*

Business development was the number two issue identified. However, concern for business development was not limited to the need for tax revenue, shopping opportunities or jobs. Many residents were concerned with the quality and appearance of industrial and commercial development and its effect on community character. Others accepted Somers' role as a rural bedroom community and want it to stay that way. Once again, the survey results presented below support these findings.

<b>Business Development</b>	<b>Response</b>
• I would shop more in Somers if stores met my everyday needs	80%
• Somers needs a grocery store	72%
• Somers could do a better job of controlling the design of commercial development in town	72%

**Secondary Issues**

Natural resources and village enhancement issues were in a virtual tie for the third and fourth most important planning issues.

*Natural Resources*

Natural resource protection was the third most important issue identified, receiving 12% of residents' votes. Residents were primarily concerned with protecting surface and groundwater quality as well as preserving forest and farmland. Despite being the third ranked concern among meeting participants, 83% of residents surveyed agreed that Somers was doing a good job protecting natural resources.

<b>Natural Resources</b>	<b>Response</b>
• Somers is doing a good job protecting natural resources	83%

*Residents found protecting natural resources and village enhancement to be equally important to the future of Somers.*

**Secondary Planning Issues**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>% of Total Vote</b>
<b>3</b>	Natural Resources	12%
<b>4</b>	Village Enhancement	12%

**Business Development**



**Natural Resources**



### *Village Enhancement*

Village enhancement received slightly fewer votes than natural resources yet also garnered 12% of the votes. Village enhancement issues raised by meeting participants included: the need for pedestrian enhancements; protecting historic buildings and the New England charm of the villages; moving parking to the rear of buildings; property maintenance; and creating draws within the villages to attract residents and visitors.

<b>Village Enhancement</b>	<b>Response</b>
• The Town should do more to create walkable villages	69%
• Somers should encourage mixed-use development within the villages, such as apartments and offices over first floor retail stores	49%

Survey results were mixed with respect to the public meeting results, with clear support for making the villages more pedestrian friendly but only moderate support for mixed uses within the villages. However, there was clear support for the mixed-use redevelopment of the Somersville Manufacturing Company mill, with survey results ranging from 59% in favor of lodging uses up to 83% in favor of office uses within the mill.

### **Tertiary Planning Issues**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>% of Total Vote</b>
<b>5</b>	Housing Needs	9%
<b>6</b>	Community Character	8%
<b>7</b>	Historic Resources	8%
<b>8</b>	Residential Development	7%
<b>9</b>	Vehicular Circulation	5%
<b>10</b>	Pedestrian/Bike Circulation	5%
<b>11</b>	Community Facilities	3%
<b>12</b>	Utilities	2%

### **Tertiary Issues**

Housing needs, community character, historic resources, and residential development make up the third tier of planning issues, receiving seven to nine percent of residents' votes. While not discussed in detail during the initial public meeting, survey results clearly support strategies to address issues in these areas.

#### *Housing Needs*

Housing for older residents and active adults, first time buyers and moderate-income households were all identified as significant housing needs while additional apartments and condominiums were not supported.

<b>There need to be more:</b>	<b>Response</b>
• Housing for elderly persons	91%
• Housing for active adults who are 55 and older	83%
• Moderate-income housing	70%
• Housing for first-time home buyers	60%

#### *Community Character and Historic Resources*

Despite being ranked sixth among issue areas, the issue of community character spilled over into many of the public discussions on other issues such as open space, business development, and village enhancement. Historic resources are an important component of Somers community character.

Survey respondents were clearly supportive of community character and historic resource protection strategies.

<b>Community Character and Historic Resources</b>	<b>Response</b>
• Somers should do more to protect scenic resources	72%
• Somers should create economic and regulatory incentives for historic preservation	72%
• Somers should create regulatory controls for historic preservation	69%
• The Town should do more to protect scenic roads	65%

*Residential Development*

Residential development is closely tied with both open space preservation and housing needs. Residents surveyed were moderately to strongly supportive of strategies to manage residential development patterns in an effort to protect natural resources and preserve more open space. A strong majority of residents were also in favor of housing diversity, reinforcing the findings for housing needs.

<b>Residential Development</b>	<b>Response</b>
• Residential subdivisions that preserve more public open space but keep the same number of houses are a good idea	72%
• Somers needs a variety of housing types to maintain a diverse community	71%
• Residential subdivisions that reduce lot sizes to avoid environmentally sensitive areas, but keep the same number of houses, are a good idea	53%

*Infrastructure*

Infrastructure topics received the lowest public interest, which was mirrored by the survey results in which residents generally found community facilities and services to be adequate for their needs.

Despite the low priority of infrastructure issues, survey respondents moderately to strongly supported infrastructure related strategies.

<b>Infrastructure</b>	<b>Response</b>
• The intersection of Route 190 and Route 83 is a problem	71%
• Somers needs after-school programs for teenagers	70%
• There should be sidewalks or trails connecting Somers and Somersville to each other as well as to other activity areas such as the School / Library campus and the Recreation Area	63%
• Somers' sewer system should be expanded to accommodate future development	60%
• Somers' public water systems should be expanded to accommodate future development	59%
• Somers needs some form of outdoor water recreation such as a swimming area, pool or children's recreational fountains	58%

## Overall Plan Direction

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### Overall Philosophy

Based on this input from residents and committee members, it appears that the overall guiding philosophy of the Plan is to:

**Balance conservation and development  
to protect and enhance community character and  
improve Somers' quality of life.**

### Themes

To accomplish this overriding goal, the plan has been organized under the following strategy themes

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Components</b>
<b>Protecting Important Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Preserve more open space</li><li>• Protect natural resources</li><li>• Preserve farmland</li><li>• Protect historic and scenic resources</li></ul>
<b>Guiding Appropriate Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improve patterns of residential development</li><li>• Guide appropriate, quality business development</li><li>• Support desired development patterns</li></ul>
<b>Addressing Community Needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain quality community facilities and services</li><li>• Ensure a safe and efficient transportation system</li><li>• Address changing housing needs</li></ul>

**Voting on Important Issues**



**Walkable Community Workshop**

