

Milton Planning Board: 2009 Town Wide Survey

Summary of Responses

This document is a short summary of the results obtained by the Milton Planning Board's 2009 Town Wide Survey.

The survey results consist of three parts: this summary of responses; a graphic summary of the responses to the multiple-choice questions; and fifteen appendices containing the detailed responses to the essay-type questions in the survey. These detailed responses give additional information to clarify the responses on the multiple-choice questions. The multiple-choice results should be considered in this context.

Methodology

This survey was an online survey using SurveyMonkey. Paper copies of the full survey were available at the Milton Town Hall, the Milton Public Library, and the Council on Aging. Publicity included posting on the Town's website, articles in the *Milton Times*, the *Milton Record Transcript* and the *Patriot Ledger*, text notices and a public service announcement on Milton cable access, emails from Town Hall's public notice service and from the Superintendent of Schools' office, and mention at televised Planning Board, Board of Selectmen, and School Committee meetings.

655 people responded online and thirty-eight people responded by paper questionnaire, for a total of 693 responses.

After numbering the paper surveys from 1-38, the Planning Board Chair manually entered them on SurveyMonkey and identified each questionnaire by its number under Question 87. Each paper survey can therefore be tracked should there be any question as to the manual entries.

Limitations of the Survey

By its very nature, an online survey has both benefits and limitations. The number of people able to respond was much larger at a far lower cost. That in itself is a major benefit, given the need to include as many people as possible and financial constraints.

A major limitation is that the respondents were those who had both heard of the survey and were motivated to participate. Because of this, many people whose opinions would be valuable in a full master plan process were not heard from.

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A few survey respondents queried the language and the style of some of the questions, and there were a very few technical difficulties with the SurveyMonkey site.

Despite these limitations, the survey results are a valuable basis for the next steps in the master planning process.

Multiple-Choice Questions

SurveyMonkey tabulated the multiple-choice questions and represented the answers in bar graph form, highlighting the answer receiving the highest number of responses.

The percentages are based on the number of respondents answering the individual question as not everyone answered each question. Some answers allowed multiple responses, so adding the percentage responses together may result in a total higher than 100%.

Who Answered the Survey?

Part I: Questions 1-12

The majority of respondents were from the C zoning district. Many people were unsure which zone they lived in.

Just under 98% of respondents are Milton residents, 6.2% are business owners and 13% work in Milton. The majority has lived here over twenty-one years; the next highest group has lived here between eleven and twenty years.

The majority of respondents (60%) were between thirty-six and fifty-four years of age. 30.5% of the respondents were over the age of fifty-four.

There was a good balance of respondents among the eleven precincts, although 17.4% were unsure of their precinct.

58.5% of the respondents had children in school; 45% in public schools. (Some had children in both public and private schools). 46.1% of respondents did not currently have children in school.

22% of respondents own their own business. A slight majority of those were home-based. For those whose businesses were not located in Milton, a majority

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would not move their business to Milton, but a significant number were not sure. The majority of businesses were office-based, rather than retail.

77.9% of respondents commute to work; the vast majority of those by car, the next highest response was for trolley and/or T.

Satisfaction with Milton and Municipal Services

Part I: Questions 13-15

Respondents were **very satisfied** with Milton

- as place to live,
- as a place to raise children,
- community pride and friendliness,
- protected open space,
- the reputation of the public schools, and
- the overall appeal of the community.

Respondents were **satisfied** with Milton's

- buildings and places of historic character,
- passive recreation facilities, and
- small-town rural New England character.

Respondents were **somewhat satisfied** with Milton as a place to do business.

Respondents were **very satisfied** with

- the public schools,
- law enforcement,
- fire protection and prevention, and
- the library.

Respondents were **satisfied** with

- street lighting,
- yard waste pickup,
- trash pickup,
- the senior center, and
- parks and recreation.

Respondents were **somewhat satisfied** with road maintenance.

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The range of answers for Questions 13 and 14 and the number and depth of the essay responses to Question 15 will require careful study to understand the reasons for satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Part II: Questions 75-86

The Planning Board invited department heads and board and committee chairs to submit questions for the survey. Many of these questions were essay-type. The Planning Board will share the responses with the relevant departments, boards, and/or committees.

The responses to the multiple-choice questions indicate the following:

A majority of respondents were in favor of renovating or replacing the three existing firehouses in the town and renovating or replacing the existing town DPW yard and offices.

A majority of respondents did consider the historic character of the town to be an important factor to consider in any new improvement of facilities and services to be used by the public.

A majority felt the town should implement pedestrian and bicycle improvements to improve access to public transit.

Equal numbers of respondents were satisfied and not satisfied with the location and quality of bike lanes in the town. The majority of bicyclists use their bikes for recreation and fitness with a minority who use bikes for shopping, errands, commuting to work and taking a child to school. The factors that are most discouraging for bicycling are riding in traffic and the lack of bike lanes. A smaller number of respondents were concerned with the condition of roads.

Planning for the Future

Part I: Questions 16-17

33% of respondents would be willing to serve on the committee that would work with the Planning Board on elements covered by a master plan process. Another 40% were unsure.

Of the seven elements of a master plan listed in question number seventeen, the ones that scored the highest were land use, economic development, cultural historical and natural resources, open space, and town facilities and services. Housing was next, and traffic circulation was of least concern.

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Part III: Question 87

Responses to this essay question included further suggestions for the Planning Board both with regard to the survey itself and on a possible planning process.

Examination of Master Plan Elements

Land Use

Part II: Questions 19-24

These questions asked for opinions on land use in residential and business sounds.

Residential Zones

Respondents

- **were satisfied** with the current land use in their neighborhood,
- **did not believe** that Milton's current zoning needed to be changed,
- **did not believe** that Milton's current land use could be significantly changed without adverse impact to the quality of life,
- **did believe** that changes in land use could improve the quality of life of Milton's residents, and
- **did not believe** that more dense development of a significant scale would result in a significant improvement in that Milton's ability to meet its expenses.

Business Zones

Respondents

- **were not** satisfied with the current land use in other areas of town.
- **did believe** that Milton's current zoning needed to be changed in areas zoned for business.
- **did believe** that Milton's current land use could be significantly changed without adverse impact the quality of life for the residents,
- **did believe** that changes in land use could improve the quality of life of Milton's residents, and
- **did believe** that more dense development of a significant scale would result in a significant improvement in Milton's ability to meet its expenses.

Of the respondents who are not satisfied with current land use, the majority were dissatisfied because they felt the current zoning was too restrictive.

Some of these questions included a significant number of respondents who answered "maybe".

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Part III: Questions 71-74

Most respondents did not believe the size of building lots in the C zone is too small, and they did not believe that the size of the building lots in the AA zone is too large. A majority did believe that the size of building lots in the town has had a major impact on the town's quality of life, and most believed that changes in the size of building lots would likely cause changes in the town's quality of life.

A significant number of respondents answered "no opinion" to these questions.

Parks and Open Space

Part II: Questions 25-29

A majority of respondents did use the parks, recreation areas, and other open spaces in Milton. Of those, most used these areas weekly. The majority used them for hiking or walking, with the next highest number of responses being for family activities, youth sports, and nature observation.

A majority felt that the town offers a wide variety of recreation programs and felt that all areas of Milton have adequate parks and recreation areas and adequate natural open space areas.

Part III: Questions 46-49

A majority of respondents felt that the town should adopt zoning bylaw that would provide incentives for development of all parcels over a specified size to allow preservation of some open space or the most significant natural and/or historic resources of the site.

A majority of the respondents supported zoning that would further restrict development on open space, including conservation and recreation lands. A majority also supported acquisition of open space to prevent future land development. Most were against accepting the Community Preservation Act, although a significant number of respondents answered "maybe" to that question.

Housing

Part II: Questions 30-34

Respondents were asked about options for existing large houses with adequate parking, where the house was too large for the current owners. A majority were

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in favor of allowing bed and breakfasts and condominium units. A majority were against allowing rental apartments.

A majority of respondents believed that increased development of rental apartments in residential zones would not make Milton more desirable. Most believed the same about condominium units.

The majority of respondents had neither adult members of more than one generation in their households, nor one or more unrelated boarders. A majority believed that more relaxed zoning allowing creation of a separate apartment in their house would not be helpful.

Most believed that the Town should not take reasonable measures to require more housing for households at or below the affordable housing income limits, although a significant number of respondents answered "maybe".

Part III: Questions 63-70

Respondents were about equally split on allowing housing developments with three or more units on a single lot of land in residential zones, with adequate parking and provision for significant open space for conservation and recreation. A majority of respondents were not in favor of a developer being allowed to build more units than would otherwise be allowed under conventional subdivision in the relevant zone. A majority of respondents were against a developer being allowed to build more units than otherwise allowed if the developer offered 10% of units as affordable housing subject to applicable affordable housing income limits.

Most believed that new two-family dwellings should be allowed in some or all of the residential zones. However, a large majority felt that there should be strict limits for where and when two-family dwellings could be built.

A majority of respondents felt that the town did not need more housing restricted to elderly persons, and most believed that the Town should not encourage development of housing restricted to persons aged fifty-five and over. A majority of residents felt that if the town did encourage fifty-five and over housing, it should be limited to specific sites specified in the new zoning and most were against such housing being allowed in any residential zone in the town.

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Economic Development

Economic development has been a subject of conversation in the town for several years. Because of this, and because of several studies previously done by the town that are referenced in the survey introduction and whose conclusions were tested in the body of the survey, the questions on economic development were quite detailed.

Questions in Part II cover the current business districts of East Milton, Central Avenue, and Milton Village.

Questions in Part III covered existing businesses in residential zones and possible expansion of those businesses or establishment of new business districts.

Part II: Questions 35-44

In rating objectives in zoning for businesses, a majority of respondents felt that increase tax revenue is very important, most believed that more jobs, more retail space, and better quality of life were important, and most were neutral on more office space (with a very close second rating it important). However, there was a range of answers on all of the objectives that should be explored in more detail.

Most respondents believed that the quality of life in Milton would decrease if current business districts were enlarged in nearby residential areas, but believed the quality of life would improve if grandfathered businesses in residential areas were allowed to expand and underutilized parcels in residential areas were allowed to be zoned for business. A significant number of respondents answered "not sure" on these questions.

A majority of respondents believed that the existing business districts in East Milton, Central Avenue, and Milton Village are not adequate to serve the town, and that the need to shop for certain items in other communities does adversely affect Milton's residents.

A little over a third of respondents indicated that they would be comfortable with a percentage increase of 10% in the current commercial tax base. Just under a third of respondents chose a 5% increase. The remaining respondents favored an increase of 3% or less. Most respondents believed that the creation of new and/or bigger business districts would hold promise of a significant net increase in commercial tax revenue without lessening of the quality of life of residents. A significant number of respondents answered "not sure" on that question.

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A majority of respondents believe that zoning bylaws for the existing business districts should be reviewed and revised to maximize business development in the existing business districts and a majority believed that the Town should explore expanding those districts into some of the surrounding residential areas.

The majority of residents felt that on street parking and new parking lots for businesses should be permitted in nearby residential zones. Most would allow the parking of small commercial vehicles in residential zones.

Finally, a majority of residents believed a Design Review Board should be established to help with the review of business development proposals.

Part III: Questions 50-62

Most respondents felt that restrictions on existing businesses and residential zones should be relaxed; however, an almost equal number of people answered "maybe" to this question.

Most respondents answered "maybe" to the question of whether permitted business use of grandfather business parcels in residential areas should be increased. The next largest group of respondents answered "yes", and a significant number answered "no".

A majority of respondents believed that certain types of new businesses which are compatible with residential use should be permitted in residential zones and that long-term planning should investigate and highlight town parcels that could be developed for business without a major effect on residents.

Although most respondents believed that new business zones should be created out of open areas currently zoned residential, a significant number of respondents answered "no" and "maybe" to this question.

A majority of respondents believe the town should establish new commercial zones in an effort to expand the commercial tax base and that the establishment of new business zones would be likely to result in a significant increase in the collection of commercial real estate taxes. A significant number of respondents answered "no" and "maybe".

A majority of respondents believed that if new business districts are established, all buildings should be allowed only upon issuance of a special permit by the Planning Board.

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A majority of residents believed that the town should

- consider rezoning the Milton Hospital as a new healthcare district,
- try to establish new "neighborhood retail" zoning districts, and
- explore new zoning to allow taxable development associated with tax-exempt institutions via a special permit process.

A majority of residents felt that changes in zoning should only be undertaken with careful study and evaluation of the consequences to the town, but also that changes in zoning for specific sites are properly undertaken in order to enable proposed developments which appear desirable.

The majority of respondents feel that Milton's current zoning has impeded development with adverse consequences and has created an obstacle to the town in raising sufficient funds for its needs through the real estate property tax.

Qualitative Responses

The SurveyMonkey format for reporting the multiple-choice answers may give an impression that some of the results are definitive. This is a false impression.

In order to properly evaluate the results of the survey, one must look at the number of answers marked "maybe" or "no opinion", the strength of the minority response to each question, and, most importantly, the detail provided in the responses to the essay-type questions.

In addition to providing further clarification these responses offered comments, suggestions and criticisms on the survey and the master plan process. These need careful consideration.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Although there were some weaknesses in the structure of the survey, the data collected does give the Planning Board important information for use in the master planning process.

The results, particularly in the section on economic development, are far more complicated than they might initially appear. Some seem contradictory. The Planning Board will have to consult with other boards and committees and the residents of the town to carefully evaluate and explore the reasons underlying the answers on the survey.

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The following are the next steps for the Planning Board:

- post the entire survey on the Planning Board's website;
- share the results of our survey with department heads and other boards and committees;
- hold a public meeting to discuss the results of the survey in more detail;
- ask for town volunteers to be part of a committee or committees to further evaluate the answers in the survey;
- further evaluate the essay responses and sort them by age, zone, precinct, etc. to obtain a complete picture of Respondents' opinions and concerns;
- review the survey for areas which the Planning Board can immediately address; and
- research and apply for grants to underwrite study of the four main master plan elements of land-use, housing, parks and open space, and economic development.

These answers revealed a variety of perspectives – some want a planning process and some don't; some want more development and some want less development; from some are pleased with the way town government works and some are not.

The good news is that people love Milton and want it to be better - the disagreement is on the definition of "better". As the Planning Board moves forward, part of our responsibility will be to ensure that the wide variety of opinions and concerns are heard, recognized and incorporated into ongoing planning efforts.

Submitted 7 May 2009

Milton Planning Board

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