



Shrewsbury Comprehensive Master Plan Boards & Committees 5-Question Survey Summary

Overview

As part of the background information gathering phase of the Comprehensive Master Plan update, the consultant team of Barrett Planning Group and Kimley-Horn developed a five-question survey that was distributed to town boards and committees to provide input, in September 2026. This five-question survey gathered local knowledge and perspectives on the decision making framework, current conditions, recent changes, and emerging issues in Shrewsbury. The survey provided an opportunity to hear directly from those involved in topics included in the implementation of the Master Plan as it relates to land use, housing, economic development, historic, cultural, and natural resources, open space and recreation, transportation, municipal services and facilities including sustainability. The consultant team will use the information gathered from this short survey to guide the planning process and continue to solicit input from the cross-section of boards and committees in town.

Participation

In total, 21 members of boards and committees completed the five question survey form.

Survey Summary by Question

Which town board or committee do you represent?

We received responses from one or more members of the following boards and committee, with some respondents serving on and representing multiple committees:

- Affordable Housing Trust
- Community Preservation Committee
- Conservation Commission
- Cultural Council
- Finance Committee
- Historic District Commission
- Master Plan Steering Committee
- Parks & Cemetery Commission
- Planning Board
- School Committee
- Shrewsbury Council on Aging (COA) / Shrewsbury Senior Center
- Shrewsbury Development Corporation
- Sustainability Committee
- Trails Committee
- Zoning Board of Appeals

What do you consider your major accomplishments over the past ten years?

Major accomplishments include funding a wide variety of community projects, supporting major development projects, attracting new businesses, increasing access to recreational opportunities, and providing excellent services to residents. Some respondents, particularly those representing newer committees and boards, note challenges with figuring out the role of their group and how to relay that information to Shrewsbury residents. Some examples of specific accomplishments are highlighted below.

Affordable Housing Trust

- The work of the Trust is guided by the 5 year strategic plan, which was completed in 2023.
- The Trust has limited funds and is partnering with other groups to amplify its ability to fulfill its mission. The Trust is working with the Community Preservation Committee to bring a rental assistance pilot program to assist families and individuals struggling to pay their rent. Through a partnership with Habitat for Humanity, the Trust launched a home repair program aimed at helping seniors make minor repairs and improve accessibility, allowing them to age in place. The Trust is supporting the Shrewsbury Housing Authority in exploring the creation of additional affordable units on Elizabeth Street, adjacent to a current apartment complex managed by the Shrewsbury Housing Authority.

Historic District Commission

- The Historic District commission has:
 - supported numerous entities in the district with their Certificates of Appropriateness for projects that preserve the historic character of Shrewsbury;
 - developed an historic Walking Tour of the district via an app;
 - shepherded CPA funding for Historic Gravestone restoration;
 - implemented the MA General Laws regarding Historic Districts;
 - installed Historic District Roadside Markers;
 - rededicated the Civil War Monument at the 150th Anniversary;
 - updated the HDC webpage on the town website;
 - created a drone overview of the Historic District for the webpage; and
 - completed outreach through the Historical Society, schools and community groups, as well as Shrewsbury Media Connection that has highlighted historic homes and landmarks within the Historic District.

School Committee

- The School Committee has provided excellent educational services, to all levels of learners, during very tight budget times and with many changes at the federal and state level in how education services are required.

Shrewsbury Council on Aging (SCOA) / Shrewsbury Senior Center

- Over the past 6 years, the Council on Aging and Senior Center have grown significantly in both participation and the range of services provided to the community. The Senior Center has

evolved beyond the traditional perception of a senior center and has become an active community resource offering social, educational, health and wellness, nutrition, transportation, outreach, volunteer, and recreational opportunities.

- Recent years have included significant growth in participation, with nearly 20,000 visits annually. We have expanded programming, transportation options, outreach services, food assistance, volunteer opportunities, and communication through our newsletter, website, social media, HootBoard, and MySeniorCenter. Improvements have also been made to the Senior Center facility and accessibility, and Shrewsbury has become a Dementia Friendly Community.
- The SCOA's most important accomplishment has been increasing awareness that the Senior Center is not simply a place people come when they need assistance. It is a place to remain engaged, connected, active, and involved in the community.

Trails Committee

- Accomplishments of the Trails Committee include:
 - publicizing town hiking areas and increasing accessibility to town lands;
 - the development of Camp Wunnegan trails, including a much-needed parking area;
 - the initiation of new trails on Rawson Hill, which provides a nicer and safer alternative for walkers, particularly with dogs;
 - approaching National Grid about making a long trail on their property next to the power lines which would provide a very useful north-south trail through the town; and
 - initiating a series of informal dinner meetings with trails committees (or their functional equivalents) from the surrounding towns with the goal of greater trails connectivity.

How has your work changed?

"I am increasingly focused on leaving Shrewsbury a more liveable town for future generations."

- **Evolving Needs:** Some respondents, particularly the Council on Aging/Senior Center, note that demographic changes have required expanded services, perhaps beyond what was traditionally offered. Other respondents noted feeling that their committee was no longer consulted as they once were.
- **Public Perception:** Respondents note experiencing an increase in contentious projects and redevelopments. This necessitates listening carefully to community members to understand their perspective on the kind of community they want to live in, including the services they require.
- **Financial and Resource Constraints:** Due to increasingly limited funds and finite resources, respondents state their work has increasingly involved project prioritization and careful evaluation of needs, wants, and required services.
- **Technological Advancements:** Several respondents note that they have been able to take advantage of new technologies to provide additional services and better reach residents.

"Communication has also changed dramatically. We now need to reach residents through print, digital platforms, social media, email, websites, and in-person outreach. At the same time, we must continue serving residents who may not use technology."

- **Organizational and Structural Changes:** Board and committee members are navigating transitions such as moving from a volunteer organization to an official town committee, understanding and following Open Meeting laws, defining missions, and integrating new members.

What are your plans for the next ten years?

All respondents hope to continue to make Shrewsbury a great place to live and work. The following goals were mentioned:

- Make Shrewsbury more livable;
- Provide services and amenities to residents;
- Bring affordable housing and help people stay in their homes;
- Increase outreach;
- Improve facilities;
- Listen to and represent the public;
- Increase collaboration and develop partnerships with other boards, committees, and organizations in town;
- Consider the needs and desires of all residents and make sure all voices are heard;
- Use evidence-based decision making;
- Increase access to recreational areas and improve connectivity between open spaces within Shrewsbury and to neighboring communities;
- Focus on attracting substantial development to the existing commercial cores;
- Support changes to enliven the Town Center;
- Prepare for changing demographics and continue to evolve services accordingly; and
- Plan proactively rather than react to growth and change.

How do you interact with the current (2016) Master Plan?

- **Limited or Indirect Engagement:** Several respondents have not interacted with the 2016 Master Plan, do not know about it, or refer to it only occasionally, or for general reference. A few note that the Master Plan is 10 years old, and their groups rely on newer and more current plans, such as the Climate Action Resilience Plan.
- **Strategic and Goal Alignment:** Others actively use the plan as a roadmap to set annual and long-term goals, inform strategies, and guide planning.
- **Topic-Specific References:** Specific groups focus on sections most related to their work such as environmental and climate concerns, historic interests, and housing needs.



How is your area of work perceived by Town administration? The general public? Do you have issues getting things done?

- **Town Administration:** Some find the Town administration to be very supportive of their efforts and even a collaborative partner, while others experience Town administration as more hands-off. A few respondents are uncertain how their group's work is perceived or understood by administration or feel like "extra work" for the Town.
- **General Public:** Similarly, different boards and committees have different experiences with the general public:
 - Some respondents find the general public very supportive of their group's work.
 - Others note that the general public is either unaware of their existence, confuses their role with other entities, or becomes critical when project outcomes do not align with their interests.
 - Both reaching and educating the broader community is a significant hurdle. Several respondents note outreach is an increasingly important aspect of their group's work.

"Communication to the broader public is always the greatest obstacle to getting things done."

- **Operational and Resource Hurdles:** For some groups, getting things done is hindered by challenges such as budget constraints, limited staffing, facility space, communication barriers, and difficulties maintaining quorums. Others, with more modest needs, find few, if any, barriers to accomplishing their work.

"Communication between the various town boards and committees is key, and an area that needs improvement."