

Acton 2020 Committee Minutes

Date: December 1, 2010, 7:00 pm

Location: Memorial Library, Meeting Room.

Attending: Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl, Sue Benson, Margaret Woolley Busse, Jim Snyder-Grant (minutes-taker), Celia Kent, Bill Marathias, Sahana Purohit, Clint Seward (Fincom liaison), Planners Collaborative (Daphne Politis, Jim Purdy)

I. Approve minutes

November 10 minutes approved with minor changes.

II. Update on outreach to potential volunteers

Reviewed how and when committee members should contact volunteer advisors.

Idea: Find a few key findings and send them out to attendees (and others).

Idea: Identify provocative questions.

Clint S. noted that he's gotten in to Land Use & has read the chapter in the '98 master plan update, and is in touch with Terra F. and others about it.

Jim S-G notes a similar effort may be underway with respect to Sustainability – a forum that Jim S-G could attend & bring ideas back to the committee.

Concern raised about OML, and reviewed the right way to do this (meetings should not be organized by committee members. Subquorum of committee members can attend meetings set up by others. Ideas come back to Acton 2020 Committee for discussion).

These sorts of efforts for our various goals & elements will each be different, because of different amounts of interest, and because of different stakeholders. Reminded: we have previously identified which committees and groups might be relevant to each goal.

Daphne suggests these questions for existing groups & committees:

1. What are you working on – main projects? 2. what are your 3 main goals? 3. what do you see as challenges and opportunities coming up in the future? (added later in the meeting:) 4. What long-range plans are you working on or contemplating working on?

III. Brainstorm possible tasks for Planning Board

Idea: Ask the 'Daphne' questions above. (and let's hit the major boards as well with these questions).

V. Discuss with PC

a. Follow-up on discussion re: schools/population

Jim S-G briefly reviewed recent conversations with school committee members and with Sahana.

More info will be available later, after Peter Ashton presents latest school enrollment projections at School Committee. Committee decided they would like to take Peter Ashton up on his offer to come by to a future Acton 2020 meeting.

b. De-brief Oct. 20th workshop

Reviewed earlier committee feedback, from minutes of Oct 27.

Daphne from PC presented her thoughts:

-More time is needed for review in multiple ways: by committee before meeting, by facilitators for training, by all committee attendees to get oriented and take them through.

-Weekend would get a more diverse crowd.

-How to engage people? We can't get everyone, but we could get more. We could do smaller events at the places where people gather.

The big three content issues that Daphne saw:

-Growth & Development are the big concern (cuts across many goal areas & elements).

-Preservation of Town Character vs other goals (sidewalks, housing, more places to go, etc.). To deal with these need to focus on specific details of where, when & how.

(side bar on the fine sidewalk design guidelines to address the perceived conflict with character)

-Strong desire to support alternatives to car use: trains, bikes, sidewalks, shuttle.

-Second tier of issues:

-Improve communications, between residents, and between town & residents.

-Senior center / community center. Combined or separate – still a big issue

Reminder: PC will send us proposed revisions to goals by next Wednesday, based on the Oct 20 feedback.

IV c. i. Long term planning approach—see handout from Clint

Reviewed the list that Clint had put together of various long-term plans that exist and/or are needed. Noted new ALG long-term planning spreadsheet (3 year projection). This new planning spreadsheet is under development between ALG / fincom / school committee / BoS. Clint has reviewed his list of long-term planning needs with FinCom and various contacts.

Discussion: Some of the plan in Clint's list are in the scope of comprehensive plan, some will be recommended in plan, and some will be referenced in plan. Governance issues are out of scope of plan. Items in comprehensive plan will include cost info (scale of expense aka 'planning level cost'). That will serve as input to town's financial process. Comprehensive plan includes a 6-year capital plan in the contract scope. Also, this list of long-range plans will be helpful in talking with committees and boards. The word "planning" needs to be broken down a bit: need to make distinctions between planning for routine & expected work vs. new ideas.

Margaret will be at Fincom on Dec. 14. She will raise the long-term financial plan issue.

IV – 1998 master plan update

Many committee members noted that despite the sprawl of the last plan, many recommendations in the '98 Master Plan have come true. Jim P had gone through the 98 update and prepared a scorecard memo (DocuShare link below). One conclusion – choose fewer actions, more focused & prioritized. Next time: tie the plan more closely to finance – capital plan & 10 year finance plan.

Discussion continued, to identify some key hot issues:

1. Water Quality & Quantity. More specifically Sewer / Septic / Management districts. Even more

specifically the Spencer / Flint / Tuttle neighborhood & West Acton.

2. Zoning history and future – ½ acre zoning to start with in Acton. Increased to bigger sizes to slow down impact, but as land prices & wealth increased, larger & larger parcels are being developed, need new tools besides just making zoning larger, which just creates sprawl. We need tools that address the issues directly. Also, need geographic specificity: what do we want to go where.

3. The positive feedback loop between these factors: / perceived relative school quality / in-migration of families / house costs and taxes / demand for more residential development / loss of open space. There are some negative feedback loops: such as more families creating larger class sizes creating a loss of perception of school quality; but we don't know enough to know the timing and impact of the negative loops vis a vis the apparently large positive loop.

Scenarios can get developed to show the trade-offs of various goals. PC doesn't see scenarios as part of main flow of final docs, but instead an intermediate doc to encourage focused discussion.

Daphne passed out sheet on preliminary thoughts regarding main themes / topics (see DocuShare links)

Daphne will send out link to recent Concord Village plans, that has specifics about village character. Weston town plan also has nice village design guidelines. Celia will think more deeply about gathering visual data on town character. From different groups. Video and pictures. Specific looks and general feel. Don't forget the recent Heritage Landscape Inventory as another source of lots of specifics. Idea: Use blog to gather thoughts on Acton's character. (would need another committee member or volunteer to help manage – Jim is at task-overload.) Photos & words. Get more people involved. Splash on website. Announcement on town website. Use new <http://acton.patch.com> (a new reporter from Patch was present).

Discussed the community center / senior center / community gathering goal. Is it appropriate as a comprehensive plan goal: it seems odd and/or controversial to pick out one major capital expense and treat it as a top-level goal, and other potential capital expenses are buried in objectives or detailed action plans.

IVcii2: Elements vs. Goals.

Daphne handed out two more handouts – samples of how to organize the plan. (see DocuShare). PC would prefer the two volume approach. Feedback was not to call them merely Vol 1 and Vol 2: need a more compelling way of distinguishing between the element-organized material & the goal-organized material. And we will need a third volume, with all the technical detail.

IVciii – Committee can't handle another big event in January. Maybe smaller events? Need other event planners. Road show that can be replicated with various groups. Piggyback on existing big events.

Another handout (see DocuShare): What PC needs public input on.

Starting point for public input from Daphne's 'preliminary thoughts' memo, perhaps? Or gather input by elements? Topics are a better draw. Can we construct a set of hot topics that also cover the areas we need input on?

If we wait on public meetings, until after April or so, then we don't make our 2012 Town Meeting date. Is that OK? Extra cost. Review: at town meeting, approve goals and objectives (not entire plan), plus,

whatever specific first implementation steps need town meeting approval. A special town meeting is more subject to special interest manipulation. Or we have a special town meeting at the right time? PC to consider what it takes in terms of money or scope to stretch this out 6 months.

Margaret & Jim to sort out action items from these minutes.

It was agreed that the next meeting (Dec 15) will also need to include more discussion on how to structure the next pieces of community input. This meeting is already scheduled to include a review of the completed inventory, and a review of proposed changes to goals and objectives.

Adjourned 9:35.

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The documents used as background for this meeting are here:

<https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-3888>

Here is a list:

- 000 - 12-1-2010 Acton 2020 Committee Meeting Agenda
- 010 - I. - 11-10-2010 Acton 2020 Minutes - Draft
- 040 - IV.b. - 10-27-10 Acton 2020 Minutes - Oct 20 Workshop Comments Highlighted
- 040 - IV.b.1. - Proposed Plan Organization & Public Workshops Topics - Politis - 12-1-10
- 041 - IV.c.i. - Long Term Planning Subjects - update from Clint S - REVISED 11-10-10
- 042 - IV.c.ii. - Data Requested from Planners Collaborative - 11-8-10
- 043 - IV.c.ii. - Review of the 1998 Master Plan Update - PC
- 044 - IV.c.ii. - Review of the 1998 Master Plan Update - Statistics - PC
- 045 - IV.c.iv. - Project Schedule - Planners Collaborative - 7-14-10