

**ACTON 2020
COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN
TODAY.TOMORROW.TOGETHER**



**PUBLIC WORKSHOP:
Comprehensive Community Plan
Phase II**

Acton Boxborough Regional High School
Wednesday, October 20, 2010

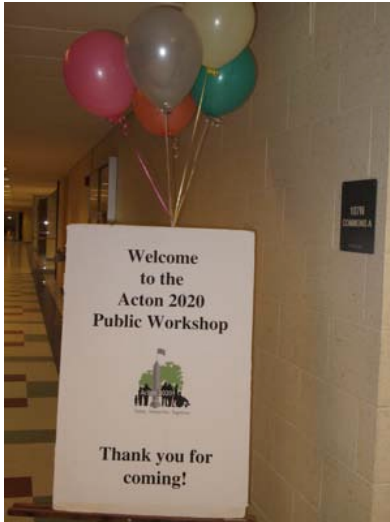
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MEETING PURPOSE AND PROCESS



Public Workshop

Acton Boxborough Regional High School
Wednesday, October 20, 2010
6:30 p.m.

Attendees: approximately 65 residents

Purpose

A town-wide public workshop was held at the Acton Boxborough Regional High School on Wednesday, October 20, 2010. The meeting was held to both inform the public about the comprehensive community planning process as well as to solicit their input on generating ideas to help move forward on Acton's master plan. More specifically, the purpose of this meeting was to bring together residents, business owners and other stakeholders to confirm the vision and goals developed in Phase I, and to begin to take these to the next step by taking stock of preliminary findings of an inventory of existing resources. The main objective is to continue the community conversation that will result in formulating recommendations for a community master plan for the future of Acton.

Process

Approximately 65 residents (based on sign-in sheets) and six (6) Acton 2020 Committee members attended the public workshop. The number of years participants reported having lived in Acton ranged from one (1) to forty-five (45). Participants were greeted at a sign-in table, were given several hand-outs and assigned to two small group discussions. Attendees were invited to view displays, information tables as well as to provide written input on large comment sheets located on the walls of the cafeteria while waiting for all to gather. There were also refreshments and childcare provided for anyone wishing to have their children supervised while they attended the workshop.

The Consultant Team (Planners Collaborative and Community Circle) presented a PowerPoint slide show summarizing the planning process, work completed to-date, and provided a brief overview of the inventory (data and analysis) they have recently completed of Acton's existing resources.

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The inventory of existing resources is organized by **master plan topic** (or element); these are:

Housing
Economic Development
Open Space and Recreation
Natural Resources

Historic and Cultural Resources
Traffic and Circulation
Public Services and Facilities
Land Use (to be completed)

Discussion Groups

Participants were then invited to join small discussion groups. The number of participants per group ranged from five (5) to fifteen (15). The groups were organized around the six primary goals that emerged from the Phase I Visioning process. These goals were developed around the six core values that were identified as being those that most residents cared most about; these were:

- ❖ Preserve Town Character
- ❖ Plan for Sustainability
- ❖ Improve Connections
- ❖ Provide Opportunities for Community Gathering
- ❖ Support Inclusion and Diversity
- ❖ Preserve and Enhance Town Assets

Participants were given a few minutes to skim the information handouts (described below), and then they were asked to participate in a facilitated discussion. They were asked the following questions in each group and were given the opportunity to participate in two groups (to discuss two goals of the six):

1. *Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.*
2. *Do you see objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?*
3. *Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?*
4. *What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?*
5. *What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?*

Participants were assigned to two discussion groups, so that two separate groups would discuss each goal. The main objectives of the discussion were to:

- Provide an opportunity for participants to review goals and objectives developed in Phase I
- Briefly review inventory of existing conditions and begin to relate these to the goals and objectives
- Begin to identify potential action steps to reach goals

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Informational Handouts

For each of these core values, participants were provided with “Goal Pages” a set of handouts that contained the goals and objectives developed around each of these (these goals are listed in the pages that follow under each the relevant discussion group summaries; participants had more complete descriptions to review).

Additionally, attendees were provided with a packet of “Summary Sheets.” These were organized by master plan element or topic (housing, economic development, open space and recreation, etc.) and summarized both what residents had said about this topic in Phase I (their concerns and desires) and what the Consultant’s have found in their inventory of existing conditions in Acton.

For example, for the topic of “Open Space and Recreation” residents in the Phase I Outreach seemed to agree in a variety of forums that they very much appreciated Acton’s open space and in fact would like more of it. They expressed this in a variety of ways such as:

WANT: “One of the things I like most about Acton is the parks, open spaces and green.”

- Almost three-fourths of Acton residents (74.4%) said they would like to see more open space preserved in Acton¹.

Research conducted by the Consultants in order to complete the Inventory of Existing Conditions revealed such facts as the following:

HAVE: “Approximately 25% of Acton’s 13,000 acres is in some form of public open space or recreation use. This is a higher percentage than Chelmsford, Westford and Littleton, but less than Concord, Carlisle, Maynard & Stow, and about the same as Boxborough.”

- More than 2000 acres are permanently protected

Participants were asked to also look at the other goals and to review all the master plan topics where there were both “wants” and “haves” that could potentially be seen as competing. For example, many residents reported wanting more activities – recreation, entertainment, restaurants, etc. On the other hand, many Acton residents also say they would like to see the “rural characteristics” preserved, more open space, etc. These two goals are potentially in conflict. Among the next steps in the discussion are deciding how to reconcile these by prioritizing and identifying locations where each of the goals can be most appropriately implemented.

The Existing Conditions Inventory provides information that describes demographic and market trends, current resources and their condition, potential future needs, etc. in order to aid in this discussion.

Report Back

All attendees were then asked to re-group for a brief report back and a summation of next steps. Door prizes were then awarded by lottery.

¹ From town-wide mail and web survey of all Acton residents

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HIGHLIGHTS OF PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

Among other issues, participants identified the following as being important to consider. Comments relate to each goal and to how the goals potentially relate to one another and to the inventory of existing conditions. The following is a partial list of suggestions offered by participants (see complete list in pages that follow).

PRESERVE TOWN CHARACTER

Missing / Emphasize:

- Preserve town character goal overlaps somewhat with the Town Assets goal
- Add something about Preserve and Protect Natural Resources
- Create more formal structures for collaborating with neighboring towns to address common issues (including 40B developments, open space protection, etc.
- Historic preservation should encompass landscapes as well as buildings
- Acknowledge the agricultural aspects that contribute to our rural heritage incl. orchards, pastures, dairy farms
- Importance of Design Guidelines to ensure business and residential development is in keeping with the goal
- “Preserve” West Acton and “enhance” the other villages
- Need:
 - More information and broader participation
 - Better governing structures to encourage an integrated approach to problem-solving
 - More data
 - To clarify which open space is not protected and to what degree protected space is indeed protected
 - To understand how water limits growth\

Limitations & Potential Obstacles:

- Provision of sidewalks could potentially conflict with aspects of other goals
- The cost of preserving historic sites is a potential obstacle to meeting the goal

Critical Steps to meet this goal:

- ❖ Create a visual build-out plan that captures goals for entire town
- ❖ Create a pro-active strategy to anticipate and react to open space, water resource protection issues and opportunities
 - Propose a package of by-laws (including for prevention of demolition, clear cutting, zoning, etc.)
 - Provide better incentives to preserve community assets
 - Plant trees to enhance Acton streets, especially in villages & Kelley’s Corner
- ❖ Consult the 1998 Plan

Additional Steps:

- Encourage regional cooperation
- Expand historic districts to include older historic homes
- Better non-car oriented connections
- Control residential development
- Strengthen village centers
- Publicize and make accessible town features (historic site, nature trails, etc.)

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- Improve town entrances / gateways to be welcoming & reflect our historic heritage
- There is no conflict with other goals because the others cannot exist without sustainability

PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Missing / Emphasize:

- The goal needs to be more active (e.g. not plan but do); needs more sense of urgency. Other things missing from goal: water, air, land use, quality of life, green house gases, encouraging denser zoning close to South Acton train station.
- Define and discuss sustainability further (what does it mean? Where are we and where to we want to go?, etc.)
- Identify specific actions
- Provide incentives
- Relate to transportation goals
- Relate to development, type, amount and location and reflect in zoning
- Relate to water
- Educate people on the need to be more sustainable
- Sustainability goal needs more attention to pollution threats and environmental threats
- Acton is a precarious place – the high school is at capacity and the town’s high tax rate discourages people from staying long term—it is not sustainable!

Critical Steps to meet this goal:

- ❖ Increase Awareness
 - Education in schools
 - Increase awareness town-wide (make goal more action-oriented)
 - Massive energy conservation drives
- ❖ Change rules and regulations (water, air quality, land use, green building, smart growth, mixed use development, etc.)
 - Water Resource Protection
 - Change zoning to restrict residential growth
- ❖ Town needs to be more financially sustainable
- ❖ Provide alternatives to car travel (public transportation, rail trails, paths, bike paths, sidewalks, share the road, light rail)

Additional Steps:

- Winterize homes
- Continue with town’s sustainability efforts (e.g. recycling, low-level street light fixtures, low-fuel vehicles, protecting water resources, etc.).
- We need actions not just “raised awareness about the need to plan”

Limitations & Potential Obstacles:



Planner’s Collaborative and Community Circle



11/15/10

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IMPROVE CONNECTIONS

Missing / Emphasize:

- Need to make biking safer
- Traffic congestion should be addressed (e.g. enforce lower speed limits, plow wider shoulders in winter, speed bumps, etc.)
- Provide better social connections for newcomers
- Potential conflict: adding sidewalks and protecting town character
- Need better communication of existing resources and events (signs, website, community bulletin board in multiple languages)

Limitations & Potential Obstacles:

- Budgetary constraints
- Walking and biking should be considered separately – they can potentially be in conflict

Critical Steps to meet this goal:

- ❖ More sidewalks
- ❖ More bike paths/lanes (and increase awareness regarding sharing the road issues)
- ❖ Improve communication regarding paths and events
 - Keep maps current showing sidewalks and bike paths
 - Community Bulletin Board
 - Use Acton TV or Radio Station for better town-wide communication
 - Better town wide opt-in email communication system
- ❖ Provide transportation alternatives
 - Provide free shuttle around town
 - Add train station in West Acton

Additional Steps:

- Create neighborhood email lists
- Pave woody shortcuts so bikes, wheelchairs and strollers can use them

SUPPORT INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

Missing / Emphasize:

- American Indian history doesn't get as much focus as European history of the town
- Consider allowing people to subdivide their homes to allow parents and family members to live more economically
- We need to break out information regarding the Latino populations. The schools have this information
- We need to accommodate different needs (housing for the disabled, income diversity)
- We have more entrepreneurs and an increase in businesses out of the home
- Many town buildings, activities and trails are not accessible, that increases isolation
- Increase number of community events to include biking – kids learning together to bring community together
- Needs to be better communication between the Selectmen and the Housing Authority
- Too much talk about diversity – we just need to live our life
- Utilize seniors in the schools. What am I going to do when my children are not in the schools? What are we doing for our aging population?

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- ❖ Increase affordable housing²

Limitations & Potential Obstacles:

- Trying to find a balance
- Need to validate demographic projections
- More and more people are bringing their families-parents. Zoning needs to be more flexible.
- Future demographics have impact
- Who doesn't live here? Are you able to live in Acton no matter what your race, age, ability, economics?
- Connections are easier with people who have children
- Morrison Farm – trails – do we make them accessible – green vs. paved trails?
- Elderly moving out of town because cannot afford to live here
- Chinese population is very involved in their own community
- Economic recession
- Hostility in town towards low income housing

Critical Steps to meet this goal:

- ❖ Identify and use the tools we need to reach goals (e.g. zoning, disability, historic register protection)
- ❖ Increase the dialogue between multi-cultural groups
- ❖ Make a commitment to a community center
- ❖ Provide options for voting at Town Meeting (on-line, offsite, etc.)
- ❖ Transportation to connect seniors, teens, etc.
- ❖ Increase number and variety and location of community events

Additional Steps:

- Connect with technology

**PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR COMMUNITY
GATHERING**

Missing / Emphasize:

Community Center

Accessibility is key

- Community Center must be centrally located (Kelley's Corner?)
- Change the Kmart into a Community Center
- Should be a place where kids can walk after school

Other Considerations

- Offer place for connections with various ages and interests
- Expensive – which causes potential competition with other goals
- Create a virtual community center (but defeats the purpose of seeing friends and neighbors so would still need a place to meet).

Senior Center

- Given demographic trends, current senior center inadequate, location not ideal, should be a bigger resource for intergenerational connections
- Make it a community center with an emphasis on seniors
- Consider bring Danny's Place together with senior center
- Center should be central and versatile
- Should be multi-generational

² While Massachusetts has a statutory definition of affordable housing, participants may have defined this term in other ways.

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Other Ideas for Community Gathering

- Make the library more youth-friendly
- Need to develop a real town center (maybe West Acton?) to reduce driving/energy use
- Emphasize small outdoor gathering spaces (other than NARA Park)
- Acton Yard Sale or Flea Market (in Kmart parking lot)
- Increase use of current Senior Center
- More places to listen to and play music
- Look for ways to make existing community gatherings more multi-cultural and inclusive, e.g. Oktoberfest could be more diverse
- Danny's Place for adults
- Would be nice to have a town-wide group like the current Neighborhood Forums
- Movie Theater
- Need a diversity of places
- More collaboration – e.g. Community Ed, Rec Department and Town Boards should get together to offer programs
- Open space provides opportunities for community gathering (enhanced by Community Center). Protect open space.

Limitations & Potential Obstacles:

- Cost
- Accessibility (walking, parking, shuttle, location)
- Current budget priorities emphasize kids and education
- Lack of sewer in key central spots like West Acton
- People against change
- By-laws may present obstacles
- Security and safety
- Potential conflicts between:

- Desire for more businesses and unwillingness to pay for infrastructure to support them.
- Desire to protect open space and desire for more places to go (e.g. how do we bring in more restaurants and preserve character.... But there are opportunities for infill development, we need to zone where density is desirable so as not to gobble up our open space)

Critical Steps to meet this goal:

- ❖ Identify responsible party to lead effort (e.g. form a committee that plans programs)
- ❖ Ensure that zoning and budget are consistent with community gathering goal
- ❖ Identify development opportunities (partner with private sector)
- ❖ Utilize existing resources (identify potential)
- ❖ Identify accessible location(s) for gathering places
- ❖ Need community's consensus

Additional Steps:

- Ensure infrastructure and interests are in place
- Provide non-auto ways to access
- Careful design
- Foresee traffic impacts



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**PRESERVE AND ENHANCE
TOWN ASSETS**

Missing / Emphasize:

- The word “resources” should be used instead of “assets”
- People are assets, this should be a core value
- Stress the value and quality of water resources, both surface and drinking water
- Stress the value, protection and preservation of agricultural land
- Maintain and protect open space
- Include road capacity, rail trails and walking trails among assets
- Traffic not being addressed
- Need to serve low-income
- Need more non auto-transportation options
- Assets do not necessarily have to be publicly owned
- Non-public assets should be encouraged

Limitations & Potential Obstacles:

- Recreation uses versus Open Space
- Development versus Open Space
- Economic Development versus traffic impact
- Development versus water resources, road capacity, preservation and fiscal impact
- All the objectives are in conflict with the goal
- Need more data to better determine goal (including comparison to other towns)
- Developer’s need for profit
- Loss of private historical properties due to lack of resources of owners

- No outreach to private historical property owners from town or preservationists to help with funding
- Lack of tools and planning to allow agility for development

Critical Steps to meet this goal:

- ❖ Reduce growth
- ❖ Retain and preserve historic character
- ❖ Revisit 1998 Master Plan goals and objectives
- ❖ Strong support for historic assets (including roads, buildings, landscapes, stone walls)
- ❖ Identify and prioritize land needs and uses for all land in town (public and private)
- ❖ Develop practical implementation plan for the Comprehensive Plan
- ❖ Reduce town and school spending
- ❖ Define future obligations (measure impact of development, determine maximum capacity of town services)

Additional Steps:

- Redevelop economic development areas
- Ban clear cutting
- Archaeological by-law to preserve stone walls
- Indoor community facility
- More open space acquisition

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Some participants felt the need for additional data, while several participants expressed some frustration at not having enough time to review the information provided at the meeting.

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COMPILED PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

The following is a complete listing of suggestions made by participants in the small group discussions (the previous section summarized these and provided highlights). There were two group discussions per goal; both of these are combined for the purpose of the summary below. (Please see the Appendix for a detailed documentation of each group's comments listed separately.)

Preserve Town Character

GOAL: We feel strongly about preserving and enhancing what makes Acton special and unique, including its rural and historic characteristics and its village centers.

Objective: Preserve Rural and Historic Characteristics

Objective: Preserve and Enhance Village Centers

Question 1: Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.

Overlapping goal. There is overlap with town assets goal

Natural Resources. Preserve and protect Acton's natural resources (features of land + water not just about owning it - but preserving and protecting).

Traffic. Come up with ways to ameliorate traffic

40 B Developments. Be active to ensure 40B developments don't undermine other goals. Make a plan, with other towns.

Historic Preservation

Emphasize value of historic preservation -historic roadways, landscapes, and walls, not just buildings.

- Preserve Morrison Farm as historic

Increase Awareness/Attention of Acton in revolutionary war period (and civil war)

Promote Historical tourism in Acton

Restore Acton Heritage (Gunpowder, pencils)

Create historic special events

Civil war: library, arboretum encampment, davis guards.

Attention to historic sites from Rail Trail

Rural Characteristics

Increase focus on **rural qualities:** Farms, orchards. (specifically: pasturelands / dairy farms)

Question whether Acton is rural. It is suburban, not rural.

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Question 2: Do you see objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

Sidewalks

- Conflict with preserving what's there.
- Disability access (brick walkways) may conflict with historic design
- Sidewalks - conflict with image but not reality - not really in conflict with town character.
- Sidewalks vs. trees + stone walls
- Enhancing connections - bike lanes + sidewalks - hard to do on historic narrow winding streets
- Creating connecting sidewalks (and safety for children) may compete with historical preservation

Implementation: Goals vs. reality. How do we do them?

40B Development. poses challenge because of lack of local control.
• 40B Housing may impact existing historical housing

Design guidelines/considerations

- General housing development - to maintain town character / design considerations
- Economic development, without design guidelines.

Cost of preserving historic sites

Question 3: Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?

There are 3 **Historic Districts**

- Expand boundaries of historic areas
- Less school children = more \$ for historic buildings.
- Preserving town walls
- "Demolition by neglect"

Cultural Resources List - a good starting point

Open Space protection. Clarify what land that looks open is not protected - or to what degree it is protected.

- Preserving town space - support acquisition of property

Water. highlight how water limits will affect what we can do.

- Protecting land around surface water - need buffer zones
- There are 13 named streams in Acton - not 36.

Village/town centers. "Preserve" isn't the right term for villages except West Acton. Do need to "enhance".

- "connectedness: of building & enhancing town center
- commerce enlivens centers

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More data would be helpful

- Open Space and Recreation Data - comparative data from other towns would be helpful.
- Need more data on growth and development
- Want to Understand discrepancy between household count and units
- Need data checking - some seems to conflict.

Question 4: What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?

Growth Management. Unmitigated growth

- Lack of structures and will to manage growth
- Need to be proactive vs. reactive in general

Cumulative Impact. We don't look at cumulative impact, though our bylaws include it (i.e. wetlands bylaw)

- We're not implementing the cumulative impact rules we have.

Open space Preservation. Have limited options for open space preservation. Only tool used seems to be municipal purchase.

40B

Financing.

- Bad economy - people struggling.
- Competing fiscal priorities.
- Lack of incentives to restore historic residences - very costly - need to make it more conducive

Decision-making. Sometimes, lack of transparency, lack of information to encourage broad participation in decision-making esp. in order to preserve our assets.

- In group / out group. People get alienated.
- Lack of broad communication mechanism (like Beth Petr's list). Newspaper is fading.
- Fragmentation of Board and Committee responsibilities. Hard to look at whole issues.

Other Considerations

- **Sustainability** vs. historic improvements (ex: windows, doors)
- **Accessibility** (benches, wider sidewalks) vs. maintaining historic buildings.
- Need building & parking regulations that **maintain town character**
- (2A can be "anytown") - need to make businesses "uniquely Acton" / pedestrian friendly
- **Traffic** vs. expanding commerce and population
- Need indoor/outdoor **gathering areas** (ice cream)

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Question 5: What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

Critical Steps to meet Goals and Objectives of Preserving Town Character³

Action Step	Comments	# of groups (of two)	Priority Rating⁴
Visual build-out plan	That captures our goals for entire town	1	6
Better incentives	To preserve community assets	1	5
Traffic Mitigation		1	4
HDC, HC, Planning Board – package of bylaws	To prevent demolition, clear cutting, demolition by neglect, expanding HDC districts, improve zoning bylaws	1	4
Pro-active strategy	To anticipate and react to open space, water resource protection issues and opportunities – develop multiple tools	1	4
Preserve tree-lined streets	Tree-lined streets in West Acton and Villages and Kelley’s Corner.	1	3
Encourage regional cooperation	Urge people in town government to talk with other towns about common problems Learn from & collaborate with and share resources. Formalize structure for collaboration with other towns	1	2
Expand historic districts	To include older historic homes	1	2
Better non-car oriented connections	Park, eat, coffee/ice cream	1	2
Control residential development	To maintain character & open space/woods, keep the trees!	1	2
Strengthen village centers	Strengthen activities in village centers. Create destinations. Encourage strong town centers and less just passing through.	1	1
Publicize & make accessible town features	Highlight walking tours, etc. / draw people into Acton	1	1
Town entrances	Change + improve, more historic/welcoming	1	-
Consult 1998 Plan	Learn from ideas there. <i>Most participants asked that this be sent as a separate message.</i>	1	- see comment

³ both discussion groups compiled together

⁴ All participants were given an opportunity to contribute to a list of critical steps to meet the goal under discussion. Once the discussion was completed, all group members were asked to raise their hands up to three times in order to prioritize the list of steps.

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Plan for Sustainability

GOAL: Increase Awareness Regarding the Need to Plan for Sustainability
We value taking responsibility for our actions and planning for the future. We are mindful of our actions today because we are considerate of future generations living tomorrow.

Objective: Define and Discuss Sustainability

Question 1: Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.

Missing

It is missing **water, air, and land use**

Quality of life is missing

Green house gases is missing

Urgency is not in goal

Wording of goal is off we need action

It is missing something on pushing denser **zoning** close to South Acton train station.

The goal is all wrong, no need to increase awareness we all know we need to be greener, we need to plan and implement changes **we need action** not planning

Definition and Discussion. What does sustainability mean?

Define and discuss sustainability what is the really

We have to not make things worse for future generations

How does a green house get built?

Historical, what is the impact of past changes to zoning?

Where are we and where do we want to go

Actions

Having town make **decisions** based on sustainability of their actions

Increase implementation **stream and water protection**

Control of fertility of **lawns and chemicals** in homes

Protect Acton ground water we drink our septic water

Water resource management is lost on our town

Globally green house gases are killing us we need to **think locally** and act globally

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Question 2: Do you see objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

Goal needs to be more active.

Nothing on actually doing anything no need to be aware
Not active enough more like other goals
It is actually a regressive goal where is the action?????

No conflict with others cannot exist without sustainability

It is all possible

Acton as a town is not sustainable we will not be here in 10 years. Acton should only and can only sustain a population of 5000 people we need to move back to the cities

Question 3: Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?

We **need more time** to digest the information can get this done tonight

Goal is not measurable or action items **we need action**

Green goals should be **incentives** for **economic** activity

Incentives to business to be sustainable give them a carrot not a stick

Use East Acton incentives for the rest of town

Transportation goals schedule for public transportation

Car pool parking spots at the train station

Transportation, Traffic

Business need to pay for transportation to the train

Attract young people. Make town interesting to younger people too many large homes

Population, housing and land use

22,000 is not sustainable

Control the type of housing that gets built we need co-housing and green living

Build near the train station

WATER



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Question 4: What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?

Way of life

Our way of life is not sustainable
Consumption is unsustainable too many products
We need to re think our way of life

Development

Development is not thoughtful we have thoughtless builders and planning in town
Sprawl development is killing us
Stop residential development
Change zoning to stop residential development
Town lacks planning
Too many people

Transportation

Better rotary is only going to increase cars
Lack of public transportation is killing us
Lack of transportation planning is very bad
Stop rail trails they need to be for trains
We need trains north to south not just east to west

Education

Educate people on the need to be more sustainable

Zoning

Change zoning to decrease lawns and increase trees

Economics

Economy is under stress
Fuel cost too high



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Question 5: What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

Critical Steps to meet Goals and Objectives of Plan for Sustainability⁵

Action Step	Comments	# of groups (of two)	Priority Rating⁶
Education	K-12 education program	1	8
Change rules & regs	On water, air quality, land use & start smart growth policies, green building, mixed use development	2	8
Massive energy conservation drives	Include businesses, schools, residents, municipality	1	7
Change zoning to restrict residential growth	Stop increasing FAR Acknowledge limits of residential growth	2	6
Increase awareness	Get people to understand the need for sustainability, make goal more action oriented	2	6
Financial sustainability of town	Town needs to be more financially sustainable	1	6
Provide alternatives to car travel	Public transportation, rail trails, paths, bike paths, sidewalks, share the road, light rail	2	6
Water Resource Protection		1	5
Winterize homes & Increase public transportation	Town government should obtain grants	1	1

⁵ Both discussion groups compiled together

⁶ All participants were given an opportunity to contribute to a list of critical steps to meet the goal under discussion. Once the discussion was completed, all group members were asked to raise their hands up to three times in order to prioritize the list of steps.

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Improve Connections

GOAL: We recognize that a community that is connected is safer, stronger, and provides more opportunities for meaningful interaction. We envision supporting these connections through physical means including sidewalks, bike paths, trails and public transportation to connect people and places, and to support independent and safe travel for all. We also envision open communication as a means to further connect residents (e.g. through the web, cable TV, community bulletin boards, etc.).

Objective: Improve Walking and Biking Experience

Objective: Explore Ways to Improve Circulation In and Around Town

Objective: Improve Communication

Question 1: Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.

Walking and biking

- Walking and biking should be considered separately. Walking and biking requirements are different and cannot be grouped together. In fact, providing facility for one can take away from the other.
- Bikers on road is dangerous (minority view) – others suggested more signage to remind motorists to share road with bikers will help improve awareness
- No designated bike paths in many areas – e.g. Central Street
- Investigate Framingham/Lowell, Marlborough “Right-of-way” (?) systems – used for both rail and recreation; last mile to/from home could be shuttle

Traffic congestion issues within town not addressed

- Need wider shoulders that are plowed during the winter
- Speed bumps on Main St to encourage slow driving
- Saturday traffic is too slow – frustrating to get around (so may end shopping in neighboring towns to avoid traffic)
- Tough spots to get around – e.g. Hayward Rd & Main St junction

Social Connections

- Better social connections for new comers (one person); but others responded such a service already exists. May be better publicity/communication of such resources required?

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Question 2: Do you see objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

- Where is **Kelly's Corner** plan at?
- Adding **sidewalks** may conflict with natural resources (trees, etc.), town character? Sidewalk committee member present in the group said that such conflicts may be the case in most places.
- **Budgetary constraints**, of course!!

Question 3: Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?

- **Multi-use rail/walking trail**
- **Bike paths**
- Existing **signs for public events**
- **Better communication** of public events needed on Town web-site
Community bulletin board in multiple languages for centralized reference guide of existing Town resources

Question 4: What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?

- **Budget dependence** on state and federal budgets
- **Preservation/Conservation issues**
- Inability to **enforce lower speed limits**
- Master plan should be **flexible** enough to allow for course-correction down the line if circumstances require it



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Question 5: What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

Critical Steps to meet Goals and Objectives: Plan for Improve Connections⁷

Action Step	Comments	# of groups (of two)	Priority Rating ⁸
More sidewalks		2	17
More bike paths/lanes	And increase town-wide awareness regarding sharing the road with bikes	2	14
Free shuttle	Around town	2	7
Improve communication regarding paths and public events	Via maps that are kept current (existing sidewalks and bike paths)	1	7
Better opt-in email communication system	Town-wide (if exists, do not create)	1	5
Multi-use options for transportation		1	4
Use Acton TV or Radio	Station (out of ABRHS?) for better town-wide communication	1	2
Community Bulletin Board		1	2
Add train station	In West Acton	1	2



⁷ both discussion groups compiled together

⁸ All participants were given an opportunity to contribute to a list of critical steps to meet the goal under discussion. Once the discussion was completed, all group members were asked to raise their hands up to three times in order to prioritize the list of steps.

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Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering

We value the small town feeling and appreciate the sense of community that results from frequent opportunities for interaction. We support providing places for casual social interaction and organized events that bring members of the community together. We believe in offering opportunities for intergenerational experiences, and for sharing of inter-cultural celebration (e.g. community/senior center, park, farmer's market, cultural venues, community garden).

Objective: Expand Senior / Community Center

Objective: Increase Amount and Variety of Restaurants

Objective: Support Additional Cultural Activities

Question 1: Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.

Library. Making the library a more youth-friendly environment needs higher priority

Environmental Concerns. The sustainability goal needs more attention to pollution threats and environmental threats we face

Need for Town Center. Need attention to developing a real town center.... maybe West Acton? Where is "downtown"?

Outdoor spaces. Parks and outdoor spaces must be emphasized -- areas other than NARA. Small Outdoor gathering spaces.

Accessibility, "it's key." The current Senior Center is difficult to get to. Citizens should be able to walk to a Community Center.

- Centrally Located Community Center: could be in Kelly's Corner, must be walkable. Change the Kmart into a Community Center (A Community Center across from the bowling alley—how fun!).
- Acton needs a new, better location for a Community Center. Location is important---should be a place where the kids can walk after school.

Question 2: Do you see objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

Desire for more business but unwillingness to pay for infrastructure. There seems to be conflict between the widespread desire for more business and restaurants... and the willingness to allow/pay for infrastructure and development that would bring these in.

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Desire to protect open space and desire for more places to go.

- There ARE opportunities for in-fill development, e.g. West Acton, we don't need to gobble up our open space, and we need to zone in on those places where density is desirable.
- There is conflict between the desire to protect open space, and the desire for more places to go, things to do, in other words, development.
- How do we bring in new restaurants AND preserve character? There's a conflict

Lack of "real center". One challenge is that Acton is made of "pockets", no real center.

- Need a real town center to reduce driving, energy use getting around.

Community Center

- Community Center would offer place for lots of connections with various age and interests.
- Community Center would be expensive, so this causes competition with other Goals.
- To decrease cost of creating a Community Center, create a virtual community.
- Virtual Community defeats purpose of seeing friends and neighbors in town. Virtual Community would still need a place to meet.

Ideas for Opportunities for Gathering

- An Acton Yard Sale or Flea Market would be good in the Kmart parking lot.
- I'm not sure what the current Senior Center is used for.
- It would be nice to have a place to listen to and play music. Currently limited to Acton Jazz Café. NARA has good music programs. So does The Faulkner House.
- It would be nice to have a Danny's Place for adults. Maynard has bars that have music; this is lacking in Acton.
- The current Neighborhood Forums are great; would be nice if there is a town-wide group

Limitations

- What are our limitations?
- Cost
- Self-sustaining

Question 3: Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?

Senior / Community Center

- If the demographics hold true, look at our senior center, it's inadequate, location not ideal, it should be an intergenerational place, a bigger resource for social connections across generations.
- Make it a "community center" with an emphasis on seniors
- Maybe bring Danny's Place together with the senior center in a multi-generational space
- A center should be central and versatile
- Look for ways to make existing community gatherings more multi cultural and inclusive, e.g. Oktoberfest could be more diverse
- *A Community Center offers space for all people in Acton---multi-generational.

Movie Theater.

The desire for a movie theater fits in well with our goal, it's a gathering place.

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Accessibility

Transportation. "If you can't get there, you can't get there."

- A van service has possibly already started in Acton.
- Fixed-route schedule would be good.
- Location is important.
- Walking is ideal; we need sidewalks.
- Parking needed---and a shuttle bus.

Housing and zoning. Dense area for housing needed---zoning.

A **diversity of places** is needed: many available places in Acton should be/can be developed.

Question 4: What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?

Current emphasis on children.

- Current community budget priorities emphasize kids and education... will need a shift to prioritize spending on other goals like senior centers

Lack of sewer in key central spots like West Acton

People against change, e.g. opposition to WAVE project

By-laws present possible obstacles.

- Are there things in zoning by-laws which are making things difficult?
- Are there parking by-laws?

Funds---sidewalks and programs for different groups.

Collaboration. Community Ed, Rec Department, Town Boards should get together to offer programs.

Open Space/land

- Land equals Community Gathering, enhanced by Community Center.
- It would be great to have a movie theatre...a drive-in! In the Kmart Parking lot!
- The uncontrolled development is taking over Open Space. Open Space equals Gathering Areas.

Security and Safety

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Question 5: What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

Critical Steps to meet Goals and Objectives of Plan Community Gathering⁹

Action Step	Comments	# of groups (of two)	Priority Rating¹⁰
Identify responsible party to lead effort	Person, champion, professional whose job it is to realize this goal Form a committee that plans a program every week for different age groups Publicize	2	9
Ensure zoning & budget are consistent with community gathering goal		1	8
Identify development opportunities	And market to private developers/ investors willing to align with this goal	1	5
Utilize existing resources	Protect open space and different types of spaces; identify the potential for these resources and environmentally sensitive ideas. Review existing options, e.g. Great Road, define appropriate & realistic vision	2	5
Identify accessible location	Evaluate current spaces, new or established; Where will the community gathering place be located ¹¹	2	4
Need community's consensus		1	3
Ensure infrastructure & interest is in place		1	2
Provide non-auto ways to access	Alternatives to car for getting to gathering places	1	2
Careful design	e.g. parking lot locations	1	2
Foresee traffic impacts		1	1
"I'm Speechless"	Apparently said jokingly	1	1

⁹ both discussion groups compiled together

¹⁰ All participants were given an opportunity to contribute to a list of critical steps to meet the goal under discussion. Once the discussion was completed, all group members were asked to raise their hands up to three times in order to prioritize the list of steps.

¹¹ added after prioritization exercise had been completed

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Support Inclusion and Diversity

GOAL: We value a diverse population and wish to foster respect, promote interaction and actively support a wide variety of individuals to live, work, and play in our community. This includes a range of ages and socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Objective: Support All Ages

Objective: Support Socio-economic Diversity

Objective: Embrace Cultural Diversity

Objective: Support the Disabled Community

Question 1: Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.

Demographics

- Balance-a holistic balance-“always fighting extremes”.
- “We need to validate the demographic projections.”
- I interpreted the question differently- who doesn’t live here? There are very few black people- very few disabled in the community.”
- “I am an American Indian- we participated in the American Revolution. We are Maliseet, part of the first international treaty- there is not a lot of Native American history here. There is a little bit of history but not a lot especially being a revolutionary town.”
- Focus on people who will want to live here. How do you manage this growth? Projections show downward trend for the future, but people will move here – it is attractive.
- “These are great. I love it”.
- “I wish I hadn’t drawn this ticket. I’m not sure this should be a goal. My wife is Hispanic. The more we talk about diversity- we need to just live our life”

Options to make housing more affordable

- “What do you do about letting people subdivide their homes to allow parents and family members to live more economically? A thoughtful way for the town to increase the stock of housing- think about this!”
- “I work with people in low income who state Acton is affordable.”
- “I dispute some of the figures presented- this is visceral not facts.”
- “More and more people are bringing in their families-parents. Zoning needs to be more flexible.”

Question 2: Do you see objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

- “Where does Acton position itself environmentally- globally?”
- Future demographics have impact-businesses have direct impact.
- “I think it is supportive- hand in hand- not at all in conflict”
- Consistent with town assets.

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Question 3: Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?

Demographics

- “Love the idea of saying who is not here. We are driving people out to the woods and cars. We are building town houses. Who are we not serving? Who lives here? We are not taking care of people we have...”
- Existing conditions-“Are you able to live in Acton no matter what your: race, age, ability, economics?”
- Category white/including Hispanic. “We need to break out Latino populations. That is happening the schools are very aware.”
- Incredible multiage population. Good school system equals an increase in property values.
- Chinese population is very involved in their own community.
- Historical demographics in slide presentation only made some reference to Native American. It doesn’t get as much focus as European History of the town
- “Data was provided as fact- housing- septic”

Seniors

- “We need to be putting our thoughts into what we need to do for our aging population. We have a great school system, but? What about services for everyone else?”
- Multigenerational is more of an issue. Utilize seniors in the schools.
- “That’s why I am here-I have two children in the schools-connection in community through the schools. What am I going to do when my children are not in the schools? I am not involved in a church or senior group.”

Socio-economic Diversity

- There are 500 other businesses in town that are not reported to the State. We have more entrepreneurs an increase of businesses out of the home.
- Housing-disabled, income diversity- we need to accommodate different needs.
- Family units are very diverse these days. They should feel included.

Disabled Community

- Increase handicap accessibility. Many buildings in town are not handicap accessible that increases isolation. (Theater III is getting funding, but Exchange Hall, Citizens Library are examples of buildings not accessible.)
- Activity examples: Oktoberfest- running, add biking marathons, wheelchair races.
- Morrison Farm- trails- do we make them accessible- green vs. paved trails.

Ways of Connecting

- Increase number of community events to include biking events- all kids learning together to feel normal to have the events in common.
- Connections are easier with people who have children.

Question 4: What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?

Elderly moving out of town because they cannot afford to live here. Working for the town to get minimal money off of your taxes- why would you do that? Elderly have limited income. WE need to do something about that. It is a real dilemma. It is a loss for the town.

Economics is a threat. Funded by soft money. Hard time effect firefighters etc. Length of recession is a factor. People go where the work is this will impact Acton.

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In order to have socio-economic diversity in Acton there is **hostility in town toward low income** housing. People forget these are our neighbors.

There needs to be **better communications** between the Selectmen and the housing authority.

Question 5: What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

Critical Steps to meet Goals and Objectives: Inclusion & Diversity¹²

Action Step	Comments	# of groups (of two)	Priority Rating¹³
Identify & use the tools we need to reach goals	- Zoning, designations (historic register), protections, laws – disability and accessibility, documentation - We need to document and either ignore or serve our current obligations. How do we measure who we are not serving?	1	10
Increase the dialogue between people in town in different situations	- How do we accommodate multi-cultural groups and get them talking? - Put funds towards a great community center to have a place to stay connected. The town needs to make a commitment to a community center	1	10
Provide options for voting for Town Meeting	Saturday voting, on-line voting/ offsite voting	1	8
Transportation to connect seniors, teens, etc.	Get people to group functions. How to get teenagers to use public transportation – how to make it “cool.”	1	8
Increase number & variety & location of community events	Include variety of ages, encourage diverse groups, bike events, walks, bike education. Acton Recreation & Community Ed need to spread out community wide events & activities to other geographic areas beside NARA Park.	1	8
Increase affordable housing ¹⁴	Avoid tear downs. Try to maintain income housing	1	8
Connect with technology		1	7

¹² both discussion groups compiled together

¹³ All participants were given an opportunity to contribute to a list of critical steps to meet the goal under discussion. Once the discussion was completed, all group members were asked to raise their hands up to three times in order to prioritize the list of steps.

¹⁴ While Massachusetts has a statutory definition of affordable housing, participants may have defined this term in other ways.

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Preserve and Enhance Town Assets

GOAL: We value our Town assets and wish to preserve and enhance them. These include our open spaces, schools, historic sites, municipal properties, commercial areas, recreational areas, and our neighborhoods.

Objective: Protect Existing and Acquire Additional Open Space

Objective: Support Excellence in Schools

Objective: Improve Commercial Areas and Promote Economic Development

Objective: Maintain and Increase Recreational Opportunities

Objective: Support and Strengthen Neighborhoods

Objective: Preserve Historic Buildings and Landscapes

Objective: Maintain Town Properties

***Question 1:** Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.*

The word resources should be used instead of assets

- Assets also pertain to buildings, housing, schools
- A neighborhood is not an asset
- People are assets, this should be a core value

Water Resources

- Should stress the value and quality of water resources both surface and drinking water
- Protect the quality and preserve our natural resources
- Water resource protection should be added as a goal
- Include water resources and the importance of land that helps protect environmental resources (aquifers, streams, etc)

Agricultural Land. Need to stress the value, protection, and preservation of agricultural land and water used for it

Open Space Maintain and protect open space and water resources

Road capacity should be listed

Rail trails and walking trails

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Question 2: Do you see objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

Potential Conflicts

- Recreation uses versus Open Space
- Development versus Open Space
- Economic development versus traffic impact
- Development versus water resources, road capacity, preservation, and fiscal impact
- “All the objectives are in conflict with the Goal” (one person)

Additional Concerns

- Traffic not being addressed
- Need to serve low income
- Need more non-auto transportation options

Other

- Redevelop commercial land to generate revenues to buy open space (one person)
- Assets do not necessarily have to be publicly owned
- Non public assets should be encouraged e.g. YMCA
- Define obligations (priorities?) as they relate to build out (one person)
- **Need more data** to better determine goal

Question 3: Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?

- The trend downward for housing development is a good thing
- Existing conditions data needs to be compared with other towns so we can know where we stand (one person)
- Need to include goals in data presentation

Question 4: What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?

- Profit pressure on developers
- Loss of private historic properties due to lack of owner’s resources
- No outreach to private historic property owners from town or preservationists to help with funding
- Lack of tools and planning to allow agility for development

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Question 5: What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

Critical Steps to meet Goals & Objectives: Protect /Enhance Town Assets¹⁵

Action Step	Comments	# of groups (of two)	Priority Rating¹⁶
Reduce growth	Understand limits to growth Establish objectives to limit growth that would be in the best interest of the town, first determine what is in the best interest	2	9
Retain & preserve historic character/assets	Including roads, buildings, landscapes, stone walls Encourage siting of development to retain rural character e.g. house back in woods to allow fields in front (merged into retain historic character)	2	7
Revisit the 1998 Master Plan goals & objectives	To use same wording for protect and preserve natural resources, esp. water	1	5
Identify & prioritize land needs & uses	For all land in town, public and private	1	4
Implementation plan	Develop practical implementation plan for the Comprehensive Plan	1	4
Reduce town & school spending		1	3
Define future obligations	Measure the impact of development and build out Determine maximum capacity for water, schools, roads	1	3
Redevelop economic development areas	To generate new revenues	1	2
Ban clear cutting		1	2
Archaeology bylaw	To preserve stone walls	1	2
Indoor community facility	Encourage building of such facility, such as YMCA	1	1
More open space acquisition		1	-

¹⁵ both discussion groups compiled together

¹⁶ All participants were given an opportunity to contribute to a list of critical steps to meet the goal under discussion. Once the discussion was completed, all group members were asked to raise their hands up to three times in order to prioritize the list of steps.

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COMMENTS FROM COMMENT WALL

Post-It Note comments from the side wall

Improve Connections

1. Be creative. Do it without adding infrastructure or cost.
2. Get grants and/or use volunteer efforts to bring housing authority homes to be wireless and train residents to use computers – use adaptive technology when necessary.
3. Create neighborhood email lists
4. Pave woody shortcuts so bikes, wheelchairs and strollers can use them (e.g., Idylwilde to Boxborough, the path from ABRHS to Dunkin Donuts, the path from West Acton Cemetery through conservation land to South Acton, Piper Rd. through Great Hill to Roche Brothers, and the Crossing at Quail Ridge to connect Acorn Park to Rte. 27).

Preserve and Enhance Town Assets

1. Preserve and protect natural resources, including water. It's not just about acquiring land but also protecting its features, including streams, wetlands, groundwater, etc.
2. Buy all the land – control our destiny. It's cheaper.

Preserve Town Character

1. Preserve and protect our natural resources, especially water – streams, ponds, etc., and drinking water.
2. Don't screw up West Acton.
3. How to save barns.

Support Inclusion and Diversity

1. Define who we care about.

Plan for Sustainability

1. "Sustainability" concept needs to include very long-range planning at water, power, and agricultural resources. Food-sheds and energy-sheds will be increasingly important realities.
2. Continue with Acton's sustainability efforts – recycling, low-level street light fixtures, low-fuel vehicles, protecting water resources, etc. We need actions – not just "raised awareness about the need to plan."
3. What is the capacity of our water?
4. This goal is regressive. It talks about education – we are already well into implementation. Re-work this goal.
5. Need to include the protection of our grand water supply system to ensure its sustainability.

Opportunities for Community Gathering

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1. Social and emotional well-being could be hugely enhanced by the creation of a central, multi-use, multi-generational community center!!!
2. The challenge will be where to locate it. [Arrow to above comment]
3. Leverage existing facilities better – empty buildings.

COMMENTS ON BACK OF AGENDA

“Erroneous statement – 75% of Acton not ... suitable for onsite wastewater disposal. Check map in Phase I CWRMP

Streams not important for Acton’s drinking water. Acton gets all its water from shallow overburdened wells.

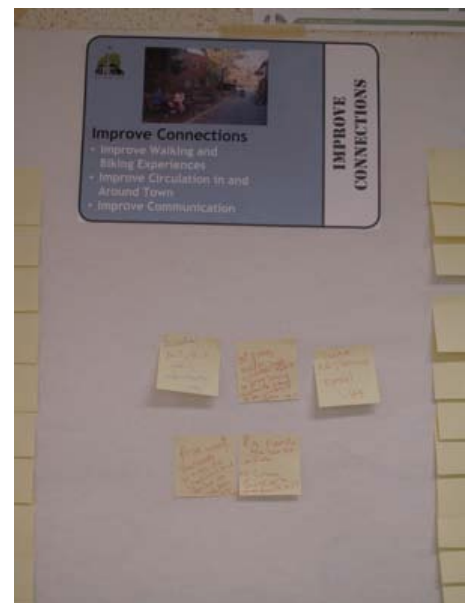
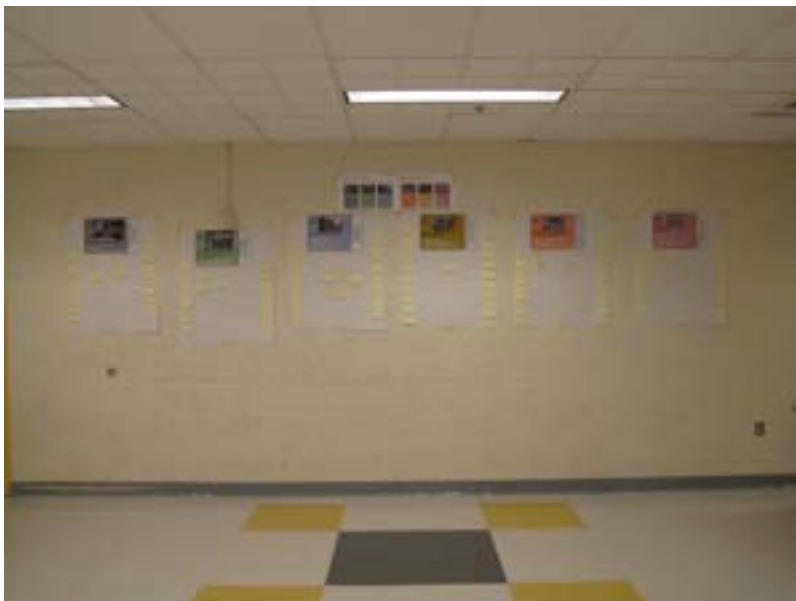
Nothing for water, air, land use under sustainability.

Nothing for storm water management – CID, NPDES”

“Acton is a precarious place – the high school is at capacity and the town high tax rate discourages people from staying long term – it is not sustainable!”

“This is a good exercise to encourage participation in town boards and to focus attention on the town needs.”

“Missing: One of the goals should be to Protect and Preserve Natural Resources and especially to protect both surface water and our drinking water. Please use the 1998 Master Plan Update as a basis for goals and objectives, for this and other subjects. Clean water is something that is both critical and highly valued in Acton and essential to our quality of life.”



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**APPENDIX:
DETAILED NOTES FROM EACH OF THE
DISCUSSION GROUPS
(Facilitators' Notes)**

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PRESERVE TOWN CHARACTER

1) Overlap with town assets goal

Preserve and protect Acton's natural resources (features of land + water not just about owning it - but preserving and protecting).

come up with ways to ameliorate traffic

be active to ensure 40B developments don't undermine other goals. Make a plan, with other towns.

Question whether Acton is rural. It is suburban, not rural.

Emphasize value of historic preservation -historic roadways, landscapes, walls, not just buildings.

(2) Potential Conflicts

Sidewalks - conflict with preserving what's there.

sidewalks - conflict with image but not reality - not really in conflict with our town character.

Economic development, without design guidelines.

Goals vs. reality. How do we do them?

Sidewalks vs. trees + stone walls

40B poses challenge because of lack of local control.

Enhancing connections - bike lanes + sidewalks - hard to do on historic narrow winding streets.

(3) Inventory Data

there are 3 Historic Districts

Cultural Resources List - a good starting point

Open Space and Recreation Data - comparative data from other towns would be helpful.

Clarify what land that looks open is not protected - or to what degree it is protected.

Highlight how water limits will affect what we can do.

Protecting land around surface water - need buffer zones

There are 13 named streams in Acton - not 36.

"Preserve" isn't the right term for villages except West Acton. Do need to "enhance".

Need more data on growth and development

Want to Understand discrepancy between household count and units

Need data checking - some seems to conflict.

(4) THREATS

Unmitigated growth

Lack of structures and will to manage growth

We don't look at cumulative impact, though our bylaws include it (i.e. wetlands bylaw)

We're not implementing the cumulative impact rules we have.

need to be proactive vs. reactive in general

Have limited options for open space preservation. Only tool used seems to be municipal purchase.

40B

Bad economy - people struggling.

Sometimes, lack of transparency, lack of information to encourage broad participation in decision-making esp. in order to preserve our assets.

In group / out group. People get alienated.

Lack of broad communication mechanism (like Beth Petr's list). Newspaper is fading.

Fragmentation of Board and Committee responsibilities. Hard to look at whole issues.

Competing fiscal priorities.

(5) ACTION STEPS

> **4**) 1. Traffic Mitigation

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- > (4) 2. HDC, HC, Planning Board -> package of bylaws coming to prevent demolition, clear cutting, demolition by neglect, expanding HDC districts, improve zoning bylaws.
- > (2) 3. Urge people in town government to talk with other towns about common problems. Learn from + collaborate with + share resources. Formalize structure for collaboration with other towns.
- > (4) 4. Pro-active strategy to anticipate & react to open space water resource protection issues + opportunities - develop multiple tools.
- > (0 but many folks asked that this be sent as a separate message) 5. Consult 1998 plan + learn from ideas there.
- > (1) 6. Strengthen activities in village centers. Create Destinations. Encourage strong town centers, and less just passing through.

Top vote getters were 1,2 & 4.

Most in group wanted #5 to be a general message to committee. Not just a step on a list.

Town Character: GROUP 2

#1

- Increase focus on rural qualities: Farms, orchards. (specifically: pasturelands / dairy farms)
- Preserve Morrison Farm as historic
- Increase Awareness/Attention of Acton in revolutionary war period(+civil war)
- Promote Historical tourism in Acton
- Restore Acton Heritage (Gunpowder, pencils)
- Create historic special events
- Civil war: library, arboretum encampment, and Davis guards.
- Attention to historic sites from Rail Trail

Q#2

- Creating connecting sidewalks (and safety for children) may compete with historical preservation
- 40B Housing may impact existing historical housing
- General housing development - to maintain town character / design considerations
- Cost of preserving historic sites
- Disability access (brick walkways) may conflict with historic design.

#3

- Less school children = more \$ for historic buildings.
- Preserving town space - support acquisition of property
- Preserving town walls (editor note: (malls?) (halls?))
- "demolition by neglect"
- "connectedness: of building & enhancing town center
- commerce enlivens centers
- expand boundaries of historic areas

#4 Threats

- Lack of incentives to restore historic residences - very costly - need to make it more conducive
- Sustainability vs. historic improvements (ex: windows, doors)
- Accessibility (benches, wider sidewalks) vs. maintaining historic buildings.
- Need building & parking regulations that maintain town character
- (2A can be "any town") -> need to make businesses "uniquely Acton" / pedestrian friendly
- Traffic vs. expanding commerce and population
- Need indoor/outdoor gathering areas (ice cream)

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Question 5 Most Critical Steps

- (3) 1. Tree-Lined streets in W. Acton + Villages + Kelley's corner.
- (6) 2. Have visual build-out plan that captures our goals - for entire town.
- (0) 3. Town entrances - change + improve: more historic / welcoming
- (2) 4. Better Connections within town WITHOUT DRIVING (Park, Eat, coffee/ice cream)
- (1) 5. Publicize + make accessible additional town features/highlights: walking tours, etc / draw people in to Acton
- (2) 6. Control residential development to maintain character & open space / woods / keep the trees!
- (2) 7. Expand Historic Districts to include older historic homes
- (5) 8. Better incentives to preserve community assets

Top vote getters: 1,2,8

PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Notes from 10/20/10

How many years in Acton

Years: 3, 15, 13, 5, 36, 17, 36, 12, 15, 7, 35, 4

Question 1

It is missing something on pushing denser zoning close to South Acton train station.
The goal is all wrong, no need to increase awareness we all know we need to be greener, we need to plan and implement changes we need action not planning.
Increase implementation stream and water protection
It is missing water, air, and land use
Quality of life is missing
What does sustainability mean?
Green house gases is missing
We have to not make things worse for future generations
Having town make decisions based on sustainability of their actions

Question 2

Nothing on actually doing anything no need to be aware
Not active enough more like other goals
It is actually a regressive goal where is the action?????

? 3

We need more time to digest the information can get this done tonight
Green goals should be incentives for economic activity

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Incentives to business to be sustainable give them a carrot not a stick
Use East Acton incentives for the rest of town
Transportation goals schedule for public transportation
Car pool parking spots at the train station
Make town interesting to younger people too many large homes

? 4

Development is not thoughtful we have thoughtless builders and planning in town
Better rotary is only going to increase cars
Lack of public transportation is killing us
Consumption is unsustainable too many products
Our way of life is not sustainable
We need to re think our way of life
Educate people on the need to be more sustainable
Change zoning to decrease lawns and increase trees
Economy is under stress
Fuel cost too high

? 5

8 votes Education of Sustainability get a k to 12 education program
7 votes Change rules and regulation on water, air quality, land use and start smart growth policies
5 votes Alternatives to the car: public transportation, rail trails, paths, sidewalks, share the road
7 votes Massive energy conservation intuitivism conservation drives to include businesses, schools, residents, municipals

Group 2

Years in Acton
15, 11, 2, 41, 36, 43, 45, 22, 2, 3, 10 18

? 1

Control of fertility of lawns and chemicals in homes
Protect Acton ground water we drink our septic water
Define and discuss sustainability what is the really
How does a green house get built?
Historical, what is the impact of past changes to zoning?
Wording of goal is off we need action
Where are we and where do we want to go
Urgency is not in goal
Globally green house gases are killing us we need to think locally and act globally
Water resource management is lost on our town

? 2

No conflict with others cannot exist without sustainability
It is all possible
Acton as a town is not sustainable we will not be here in 10 years. Acton should only and can only sustain a population of 5000 people we need to move back to the cities

? 3

22,000 is not sustainable

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Not measurable or action items we need action

Control the type of housing that gets built we need cohousing and green living

WATER

Transportation

Traffic

Build near the train station

Business need to pay for transportation to the train

? 4

Stop rail trails they need to be for trains

Lack of transportation planning is very bad

We need trains north to south not just east to west

Town lacks planning

Sprawl development is killing us

Stop residential development

Too many people

Change zoning to stop residential development

? 5

1 vote Town government needs to get grants to winterize homes and increase public transportation

0 votes make goal more action oriented

0 votes acknowledge limits of residential growth of the town

0 votes plan for sustainability

6 votes change zoning to restrict residential growth stop increasing FAR

6 votes Get people to understand the need for sustainability

6 votes Town needs to be more financially sustainable

1 vote light rail and bike paths

1 vote green building smart growth mix use development

5 votes water resource protection

IMPROVE CONNECTIONS

Facilitators: Ashish Kumar & Padmini Narayan

- 7 people in the first session, all long-time Acton resident ranging from 10 yrs to 41 yrs.
- 10 people in the second session, ranging from 1 yr to 36 yrs.

General Comments

1. Artificial linking of two very different topics – physical connections (walking, biking, shuttle) vs. communication. They should have been discussed separately.
2. Too much material to digest (especially summary sheets) in the given time that evening.
3. Not too many responses for Questions 2 & 3 due to lack of time to review the material.

Question 1:

1. Walking and biking requirements are different and cannot be clubbed together. In fact, providing facility for one can take away from the other.
2. Traffic congestion issues within town not addressed
3. Need wider shoulders that are plowed during the winter
4. Bikers on road is dangerous (minority view) – others suggested more signage to remind motorists to share road with bikers will help improve awareness
5. No designated bike paths in many areas – e.g. Central Street

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6. Investigate Framingham/Lowell, Marlborough “Right-of-way” (?) systems – used for both rail and recreation; last mile to/from home could be shuttle
7. Speed bumps on Main St to encourage slow driving
8. Saturday traffic is too slow – frustrating to get around (so may end shopping in neighboring towns to avoid traffic)
9. Tough spots to get around – e.g. Hayward Rd & Main St junction
10. Better social connections for new comers (one person); but others responded such a service already exists. May be better publicity/communication of such resources required?

Question 2: (folks felt they didn’t have much time to review other goals to provide much useful feedback for this question)

1. Where is Kelly’s Corner plan at?
2. Adding sidewalks may conflict with natural resources (trees, etc.), town character? Sidewalk committee member present in the group said that such conflicts may be the case in most places.
3. Budgetary constraints, of course!!

Question 3: (again, not enough time to review summary sheets, so what’s listed below is what folks thought was MISSING!)

1. Multi-use rail/walking trail
2. Bike paths
3. Existing signs for public events
4. Better communication of public events needed on Town webs-site
5. Community bulletin board in multiple languages for centralized reference guide of existing Town resources

Question 4:

1. Budget dependence on state and federal budgets
2. Preservation/Conservation issues
3. Inability to enforce lower speed limits
4. Master plan should be flexible enough to allow for course-correction down the line if circumstances require it

Question 5: (both groups came up with very similar priorities)

	Group 1	Group 2
1. More side-walks	6	11
2. More bike-paths or bike lanes along with increasing town awareness of sharing the road with bikes	6	8
3. Better communication of Town-wide opt-in email system (if it exists, if not create)	5	-
4. Free shuttle service to go	1	6

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around town		
5. Improve communication of existing side-walks, bike-paths (via maps that are kept current) as well as better communication of public events	-	7
6. Multi-use options for transportation	-	4
7. Use Acton TV or Radio Station (out of ABRHS?) for better town-wide communication	2	-
8. Community bulletin board	-	2
9. Add train station in West Acton	-	2

SUPPORT INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

Acton 2020 Committee Public Workshop

Goal: Support Inclusion and Diversity

The participants in group one lived in Acton for the following number of years:

5, 10, 14, 15, 15, 25, 27, 35, and 36 years.

Goal and Objective pages for this theme were reviewed.

Ground rules for participation were read.

Question 1- Looking at the goal pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.

Balance-a holistic balance-“always fighting extremes”.

“These are great. I love it”.

Then we shared a reading of all six core values.

Focus on people will want to live here. How do you manage this growth? Numbers say the numbers are down for the future, but people will move here it is attractive.

“What do you do about letting people subdivide their homes to allow parents and family members to live more economically? A thoughtful way for the town to increase the stock of housing- think about this!”

“I work with people in low income who state Acton is affordable.”

“I dispute some of the figures presented- this is visceral not facts.”

“More and more people are bringing in their families-parents. Zoning needs to be more flexible.”

“We need to validate the demographic projections.”

I interpreted the question differently- who doesn't live here? There are very few black people- very few disabled in the community.”

*Question 2-*Do you see these objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

“Where does Acton position itself environmentally- globally?”

Future demographics have impact-businesses have direct impact.

Question 3- Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal?

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“Data was provided as fact- housing- septic”

“Love the idea of saying who is not here. We are driving people out to the woods and cars. We are building town houses. Who are we not serving? Who lives here? We are not taking care of people we have...”

“We need to be putting our thoughts into what we need to do for our aging population. We have a great school system, but? the services for everyone else?”

Existing conditions-“Are you able to live in Acton no matter what your: race, age, ability, economics?”

“We haven’t read the summary we may be off the mark.”

“The handouts are 6 goals- the summary is difficult to absorb tonight.”

“Look for what is the one category that conflicts with or helps another. A Narrow example is the Towne building. It is an historical building which qualifies for a tax credit which brings investors to build affordable housing. The Historical register is not always on the radar.”

Category white/including Hispanic. “We need to break out Latino populations. That is happening the schools are very aware.”

Incredible multiage population. Good school system equals an increase in property values.

What about utilizing bright seniors to be in the schools-intergenerational, interdiverse, intermingling.

Chinese population is very involved in their own community.

“That’s why I am here-I have two children in the schools-connection in community through the schools. What am I going to do when my children are not in the schools? I am not involved in a church or senior group.”

“I wish I hadn’t drawn this ticket. I’m not sure this should be a goal. My wife is Hispanic. The more we talk about diversity- we need to just live our life”

Connections are easier with people who have children.

Multigenerational is more of an issue. Utilize seniors in the schools.

Question 5-What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

1-Identify and use the tools we need to reach goals:

Zoning, designations (historical register), protections, laws-disability and accessibility, documentation.

We need to document and either ignore or serve our current obligations. How do we measure who we are not serving?

2-Increase the dialogue between people in town in different situations. How do we accommodate multicultural groups and get them talking?

Put funds towards a great community center to have a place to stay connected. The town needs to make a commitment to a community center.

3-Connect with technology.

4-Saturday voting, online/ offsite voting for town meeting.

Votes for numbers are as follows:

1-10 votes

2-10 votes

3-7 votes

4-8 votes

Our group had a member who requested to put all three of her votes on one topic. The group said no, but the 2020 committee members moving from group to group said yes.

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Group Two

People participating lived in Acton for 8, 13, 15, 17, 18, 25, 27years.

Question number 1

“I am an American Indian- we participated in the American Revolution. We are Maliseet, part of the first international treaty- there is not a lot of Native American history here. There is a little bit of history but not a lot especially being a revolutionary town.”

Question number 2

“I think it is supportive- hand in hand- not at all in conflict”

Consistent with town assets.

Question number 3-

Demographics hit in slide presentation. Historical- some reference to Native American. It doesn't get as much focus as European History of the town.

Housing-disabled, income diversity- we need to accommodate different needs.

Family units are very diverse these days. They should feel included.

Increase number of community events to include biking events- all kids learning together to feel normal to have the events in common.

Activity examples: Oktoberfest-running, add biking marathons, wheelchair races.

Increase handicap accessibility. Many buildings in town are not handicap accessible that increases isolation. (Theater III is getting funding, but Exchange Hall, Citizens Library are examples of buildings not accessible.

Morrison Farm- trails- do we make them accessible- green vs. paved trails.

There are 500 other businesses in town that are not reported to the State. We have more entrepreneurs an increase of businesses out of the home.

Question number 4-Biggest threats

Elderly moving out of town because they cannot afford to live here. Working for the town to get minimal money off of your taxes- why would you do that? Elderly have limited income. WE need to do something about that. It is a real dilemma. It is a loss for the town.

Economics is a threat. Funded by soft money. Hard time effect firefighters etc. Length of recession is a factor. People go where the work is this will impact Acton.

In order to have socio-economic diversity in Acton there is hostility in town toward low income housing. People forget these are our neighbors.

There needs to be better communications between the Selectmen and the housing authority.

Question number 5- Critical Steps Acton should make to meet this goal and related objectives.

1-Transportation to connect seniors etc. Get people to group functions. How to get teenagers to use public transportation- how to make it “cool.”

2- Increase community events inclusive of age. Encourage divers groups, bike events, walks, bike education. Acton recreation and Community Ed need to spread out community wide events and activities to other geographic areas besides Nara Park.

3- Avoid tear downs. Increase affordable housing and try to maintain moderate income housing.

The votes for the 3 critical steps were 8 votes for each step.

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PRESERVE AND ENHANCE TOWN ASSETS

Facilitator: Mike Kreuze

Recorder: Nancy Tavernier

Group #1: 5 attendees

1. Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.
 - Include water resources and the importance of land that helps protect environmental resources (aquifers, streams, etc)
 - Need to stress the value, protection, and preservation of agricultural land and water used for it
 - Maintain and protect open space and water resources
 - Road capacity should be listed
 - Rail trails and walking trails
2. Do you see these objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?
 - Define obligations (priorities?) as they relate to build out (one person)
 - Need to serve low income
 - Economic development versus traffic impact
 - Need more non-auto transportation options
 - Development versus water resources, road capacity, preservation, and fiscal impact
3. Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?
 - The trend downward for housing development is a good thing
 - Existing conditions data needs to be compared with other towns so we can know where we stand (one person)
 - Need to include goals in data presentation
4. What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?
 - Profit pressure on developers
 - Loss of private historic properties due to lack of resources of owners
 - No outreach to private historic property owners from town or preservationists to help with funding
 - Lack of tools and planning to allow agility for development
5. What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives? (votes)
 - Define future obligations and measure the impact of development and build out (3)

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- Establish objectives to limit growth that would be in the best interest of the town, first determine what is in the best interest. (3)
- Retain and preserve historic character (3)
- Encourage siting of development to allow retention of rural character, e.g. house back in woods to allow fields in front. (merged into retain historic character)
- Determine maximum capacity for water, schools, roads (merged into define future obligations)

List top 3 priorities.

1. Define future obligations and measure the impact of development and build out
2. Establish objectives to limit growth that would be in the best interest of the town, first determine what is in the best interest.
3. Retain and preserve historic character

Group #2: 10 attendees

1. Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more of a priority in the comprehensive plan.
 - The word resources should be used instead of assets
 - Assets also pertain to buildings, housing, schools
 - A neighborhood is not an asset
 - People are assets, this should be a core value
 - Should stress the value and quality of water resources both surface and drinking water
 - Protect the quality and preserve our natural resources
 - Water resource protection should be added as a goal
2. Do you see these objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?
 - Recreation uses versus Open Space
 - Development versus Open Space
 - Need more data to better determine goal
 - “All the objectives are in conflict with the Goal” (one person)
 - Redevelop commercial land to generate revenues to buy open space (one person)
 - Assets do not necessarily have to be publicly owned
 - Traffic not being addressed
 - Materials provided for discussion not relevant (one person)
 - Non public assets should be encouraged e.g. YMCA
3. Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?
 - This question was not answered due to the time taken up by disruptive group members
4. What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?
 - This question was not answered due to the time taken up by disruptive group members
5. What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives? (Votes)
 - Strong support for historic resources including roads, buildings landscapes, stone walls (4)

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- Revisit the 1998 Master Plan goals and objectives to use same wording for protect and preserve natural resources, especially water resources (5)
- Reduce town and school spending (3)
- Identify and prioritize land needs and uses for all land in town, public and private. (4)
- Encourage the building of an indoor community facility such as YMCA (1)
- Understand limits to growth, reduce growth (6)
- Re-develop economic development areas to generate new revenues (2)
- Need a practical implementation plan for the Comprehensive Plan (4)
- Ban clear cutting (2)
- Archeology bylaw to preserve stone walls (2)
- More open space acquisition (0) (They had run out of votes by then)

List top 3 priorities.

1. Understand limits to growth, reduce growth
2. Revisit the 1998 Master Plan goals and objectives to use same wording for protect and preserve natural resources, especially water resources
3. Need a practical implementation plan for the Comprehensive Plan

OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY GATHERING

Helen Payne Watt (and Deb Verner, she'll submit notes for our second group)
October 27, 2010

12 participants, 2 facilitators, lived in Acton from 1-18 years

Q1: What's missing or needs more attention?

- Making the library a more youth-friendly environment needs higher priority
- The sustainability goal needs more attention to pollution threats and environmental threats we face
- Need attention to developing a real town center.... maybe West Acton? Where is "downtown"?

Q2: Is there conflict between any of these goals? Or, between our "Community Gathering" goal and the others?

- There seems to be conflict between the widespread desire for more business and restaurants... and the willingness to allow/pay for infrastructure and development that would bring these in.
- There is conflict between the desire to protect open space, and the desire for more places to go, things to do, in other words, development.
- One challenge is that Acton is made of "pockets", no real center.
- Need a real town center to reduce driving, energy use getting around.
- How do we bring in new restaurants AND preserve character? There's a conflict.
- But there ARE opportunities for in-fill development, e.g. west acton, we don't need to gobble up our open space, we need to zone in on those places where density is desirable.
- What are our limitations?

Q3: What is important to highlight/recognize about the Community Gathering Goal? What did we learn from the research that informs this goal?

- If the demographics hold true, look at our senior center, it's inadequate, location not ideal, it should be an intergenerational place, a bigger resource for social connections across generations.
- Make it a "community center" with an emphasis on seniors
- Maybe bring Danny's Place together with the senior center in a multi-generational space

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- The desire for a movie theater fits in well with our goal, it's a gathering place.
- A center should be central and versatile
- Look for ways to make existing community gatherings more multi cultural and inclusive, e.g. Oktoberfest could be more diverse

Q4: Biggest Threats to meeting this goal?

- Current community budget priorities emphasize kids and education... will need a shift to prioritize spending on other goals like senior centers
- Lack of sewer in key central spots like West Acton
- People against change, e.g. opposition to WAVE project

Q5: Brainstorm of steps needed to meet the "Community Gathering" goal

Top 3 per voting

Make sure zoning and budget are consistent with community gathering goal 8

Identify a person, a champion, someone professional who's job it is to realize this goal 6

Identify development opportunities and market to private developers/investors willing to align with the goal 5

Others

Need community alignment/consensus around the goal 3

Make sure infrastructure and interest is in place 2

Put plans for non-auto ways to get to gathering places in there 2

Do a review of existing options, e.g. Great Road... what are appropriate and realistic visions? 0

Be careful of design features e.g. parking lot locations 2

Foresee traffic concerns 1

Identify the place – where will the community gathering place be located? (this was added on at the end after the voting when someone felt it needed to be said.)

Deb Verner, Scribe (Acton citizen for 7.5 years)

Core Value: Community Gathering and Connections

Group Two

Participants and time living in Acton:

Helen (Facilitator) 4 years

Bill, 12 years

Angie, 10 years

Susan, 23 years

Anne, 35 years

John, 20 years

Questions:

1. Looking at the Goal Pages, please tell me whether you feel something is missing or should be given more priority in the comprehensive plan.

*Parks and outdoor spaces must be emphasized; areas other than NARA. Small Outdoor gathering spaces.

*Accessibility, "it's key." The current Senior Center is difficult to get to. Citizens should be able to walk to a Community Center.

*Centrally Located Community Center: could be in Kelly's Corner, must be walkable. Change the Kmart into a Community Center (A Community Center across from the bowling ally—how fun!).

*Acton needs a new, better location for a Community Center. Location is important---should be a place where the kids can walk after school.

2. Do you see these objectives as being potentially in conflict with other goals and objectives?

*Cost

*Self-sustaining

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- *Community Center would be expensive, so this causes competition with other Goals.
- *To decrease cost of creating a Community Center, create a virtual community.
- *Virtual Community defeats purpose of seeing friends and neighbors in town. Virtual Community would still need a place to meet.
- *The current Neighborhood Forums are great; would be nice if there is a town-wide group.
- *Community Center would offer place for lots of connections with various age and interests.
- *An Acton Yard Sale or Flea Market would be good in the Kmart parking lot.
- *I'm not sure what the current Senior Center is used for.
- *It would be nice to have a place to listen to and play music. Currently limited to Acton Jazz Café. NARA has good music programs. So does The Faulkner House.
- *It would be nice to have a Danny's Place for adults. Maynard has bars that have music; this is lacking in Acton.

3. Is there any information in the inventory of existing resources (see Summary Sheets) which you would like to highlight and/or relate to this goal and objectives?

- *Accessibility: Transportation. "If you can't get there, you can't get there."
- *A van service has possibly already started in Acton.
- *Fixed-route schedule would be good.
- *Location is important.
- *Walking is ideal; we need sidewalks.
- *Parking needed---and a shuttle bus.
- *Dense area for housing needed---zoning.
- *A diversity of places is needed: many available places in Acton should be/can be developed.
- *A Community Center offers space for all people in Acton---multi-generational.

4. What are the biggest threats to meeting these objectives?

- *Are there things in zoning by-laws which are making things difficult?
- *Are there parking by-laws?
- *Funds---sidewalks and programs for different groups.
- *Community Ed, Rec Department, Town Boards should get together to offer programs.
- *Open Land equals Community Gathering, enhanced by Community Center.
- *It would be great to have a movie theatre...a drive-in! In the Kmart Parking lot!
- *The uncontrolled development is taking over Open Space. Open Space equals Gathering Areas.
- *Security and Safety.

5. What are the most critical steps that Acton should take to meet this goal and related objectives?

- A. Utilizing current resources and Protecting Open Space, and different types of spaces. Review what Acton has: human resources, money, buildings and spaces, the **potential** for these resources and environmentally sensitive ideas. (5 votes)
- B. Form a committee that plans a program each week for different age groups. (3 votes)
- C. Create accessible location for a community center. Evaluate current spaces, new or established; Publicize; Form Town Committee. (4 votes)
- D. "I'm Speechless" (1 vote)

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