

Acton 2020 Committee Minutes

Date: April 13, 2011, 7:00 pm

Location: Town Hall, Rm 204

Attending: Kristen Alexander, Roland Bartl, Celia Kent (minutes-taker), Bill Marathias, Sahana Purohit, Jim Snyder-Grant, Margaret Woolley Busse, Clint Seward (Finance Ctee), Sandeep Verma (membership pending), Jim Purdy (Planners Collaborative)

I. Approved minutes.

Sandeep will become a full member of the committee shortly. A few minutes were spent with general introductions.

II. Blog

- a. Jim S reviewed recent blog posts and feedback. Clint's blog on food sustainability has gotten feedback, and we had a new participant, Janice Ward, respond to the blog on Kelly's corner. Her comment about Acton being a "drive-through" community on multiple levels – literally when commuters drive through with no reason to stop, and over time when families come to Acton primarily for the schools and leave for lower-tax communities when their kids are grown – generated a bit of conversation about how we don't have conclusive data on how many people stay or leave once their kids graduate. But a relevant data point is Acton's high % of school age children to total population.
- b. Future blog postings and other outreach
 - * Clint pointed out that Acton doesn't provide settings where you can really debate issues. The blog provides a useful place for debate. We decided to invite guests to submit blog posts.
 - * We discussed the recent invitation from the School Committee to participate in their long-range planning process and how we should respond. The focus of their long-range topics does not directly overlap with our planning efforts, but it is important to collaborate given that the futures of the town and the schools are inextricably linked with potential changes in one inevitably affecting the other. Roland reminded the committee that Peter Ashton has offered to come to an Acton2020 meeting to talk about enrollment projections.

TO DO: 1) Jim S will write a blog inviting people to submit blog posts, and he'll include guidelines and instructions to send their posting to either Margaret or Jim for review to insure relevance and to add relevant links. 2) Margaret will talk with Xuan Kong about how to coordinate Acton2020 planning with the School Committee's long-range planning efforts. 3) Bill will write a blog, perhaps about the transfer station. Celia will prepare something related to the historic resources inventory data. Clint has a few other blogs in waiting. Sahana will

develop a blog based on comments posted on the public boards at the town and library.

III. Committee voted to accept the written summaries of the three workshops as the official record of those workshops.

IV. Objectives analysis

- a. Metrics. Jim discussed the importance of determining how we might measure each objective so that we know whether there is a way to measure progress. The effort to document and agree on measures also helps the committee members verify that we are in agreement on what objectives mean. Jim will work on clarifying language for ensure sustainability. We need to clarify what we mean by improving circulation (and Jim hopes that the objective is not about getting through town more quickly). Jim will talk with Cathy Fochtman about how to consider recreational opportunities (she is also working on a plan report). The strategies we develop will help us define what we mean by some of the more open-ended objectives like “embrace cultural diversity” or “support all ages”. Strategies are often more measureable than objectives. Jim commented that the Land Stewardship Committee is working on an open space inventory so that will help measure part of goal 6. Margaret will ask Xuan about what kind of survey studies the School Committee has done which they can share with us.
- b. Connections. Jim presented an initial analysis of connections data. Looking for loops but don’t have many yet. Margaret encouraged members of the committee who hadn’t worked on the connections exercise to do so over the next few days.

V. Discuss “alternatives”

Jim Purdy review material in packet. He described the elements common to all the alternatives and what’s different, as well as the “wild cards” which are unforeseen or unpredictable events that could affect any of the alternatives. Each alternative should be attractive and viable to some extent.

1st. Baseline alternative. Margaret suggested that the “Stay the Course” option not be called that because that might prejudice opinion. The baseline option should be given a name like each of the other options so people can consider each on its merits.

2nd. Limit Growth. Sandeep pointed out that limiting growth could still generate population growth if growth is accomplished with smaller multi-unit housing and denser clusters. Celia questioned the inclusion of “Avalon-type” developments as a facet of this alternative, especially given that the goal of limiting growth for many people will be to preserve town character. It may be possible to create attractive apartment building clusters which are better designed and more integrated into Town neighborhoods than Avalon, but Avalon itself shouldn’t be a model. We could consider including a focus on the creation of a single town center as part of the Limit Growth alternative.

3rd Guide Growth to Villages. Celia suggested we define what we mean by villages if we decide to include this alternative. She also thought we shouldn't refer to the villages as if they already exist because at this point in Acton's history, many of the features of the original villages have been obliterated. The only village that actually is identifiable as a village is West Acton. Perhaps our goals for Kelly's Corner are better described as "Town Center" rather than "Village".

Overall, it was agreed we need to sharpen the distinctions between the alternatives. Clinton suggested that we look at the effect of each alternative on one or two locations to aid in comparing options, e.g. Brewster Conant's land and/or certain parcels in Kelly's corner.

Roland commented we need to capture sustainability measures. Issues related to sustainability could also be addressed using the wild cards.

TO DO: Jim P will prepare a new version of "alternatives" and distribute it to the Committee a week before our next meeting so that we can review and come prepared to discuss.

VI. Publicity

We'll focus on publicity strategies at our next meeting. One idea might be to set up a booth about Acton 2020 for a few weeks in the library with information and a board for collecting feedback. The booth can occasionally be staffed.

VII. a. Concord tax proposal

Margaret received a query about our interest in supporting a tax proposal seeking the legal authority for towns to be able to levy an income tax. The theory is that if towns can raise funds from income tax then that would lower the property tax; the total tax levy would be distributed among different sources. Property taxes are quite regressive. Wealthy people have a lot of wealth that isn't necessarily reflected in their property. So the likely effect is that wealthier people would pay more overall taxes and lower income people would have relatively less tax. Bill commented that it's the middle class that gets taxed the most from income tax. Wealthy can afford to find loop holes. Clint suggested another approach is to have the property tax be more progressive. Offer more circuit breaker relief (income based criteria). Bottom line – Margaret will reply that we can't help out with this tax proposal, that it is beyond the scope of our committee's work.

b. Cable TV. Didn't discuss.

Note: Margaret explained that we will have a new committee structure with all seven members being full members. So our quorum has increased to four.

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