

PRESENTING... THE PLAN:

Public Meeting

A Public Meeting to Present the Comprehensive Community Plan for Acton's Future



Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Tuesday, March 6, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Acton Town Hall, Room #204

Purpose: The purpose of this meeting was to present the Comprehensive Community Plan. The presentation was followed by a discussion and question and answer session with the public. The now completed Plan will help guide Acton towards the desired future expressed by the vision, goals and objectives developed with extensive input from the community at large.

Process

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Acton 2020 Committee presented a PowerPoint slide show summarizing the process to date, research findings, results of the extensive public input and resultant recommendations. They explained the underlying themes upon which the Plan was developed and presented the implementation plan, which includes the steps recommended to attain the goals and objectives the Committee developed to reflect the public's input.

The slides were followed by a presentation of certificates to the winners of the Acton 2020 Art Youth Contest. Participants in the contest were asked to illustrate one of the seven planning goals. Winning entries were exhibited at the meeting.

Public Meeting: Presenting... The Plan. March 6, 2012

The majority of the meeting was focused on soliciting feedback from attendees who were asked the following questions:

- Which features of the Plan do you most appreciate?
- What concerns you most about the Plan?
- What do you find difficult to understand about the Plan?
- Other Comments

The discussion took place in a large group format. There were also additional opportunities provided for participants to give their feedback in written form, mainly on the back of their agendas as well as on large comment pads to which they could adhere post-it notes.

The forum was well attended and was characterized by positive energy with constructive questions and productive dialogue. Over one hundred (100) people were in attendance. The participants were almost equally divided into three categories, those who have been following and participating in the process since Phase I, those who joined during Phase II, and those for whom this meeting was their first introduction to the Plan.



Key Themes:

The following are the key themes that emerged from the questions and comments at the public meeting. Input was solicited in a number of ways (see pages which follow for more detailed notes):

Need for better **UNDERSTANDING/EXPLANATION** regarding the following:

- **School enrollment projections** – what does this mean about the school system, the population, the fiscal capacity, and what if it doesn't happen?
- Why is **employment-oriented development** important in Acton?
- How exactly will **Kelley's Corner** be improved? Traffic? Density? Parking? What about opposition from surrounding residents (as in the past)?
- What is being proposed for **West Acton**? It is quite attractive/successful the way it is... does the Plan propose to change it?
- Why does the Plan promote **smaller housing units**? What is the main idea because won't this result in there not being enough housing for people growing up in Acton to live here with their children?
- Will **TDR** result in more development? How do we measure growth?
- What about **North Acton**?
- More about **implementation phase**: progress, participation, etc.

Participants were most **APPRECIATIVE** of the following regarding the Plan:

PROCESS

- **Participation process** (opportunities to comment and be involved in planning for the Town's future, the variety of forums, the fact that the input gathered in Phase I is reflected in Phase II).
- The **report** – is beautiful, would like to purchase it.
- Large **amount of work** which is evident when looking at report and web.

CONTENT

- The **Roadmap**, especially making improvements to Kelley's Corner and the emphasis on increased walkability, biking and public transportation.
- The provision of **options for wide range of people** (including young people, empty nesters, etc.)
- Use of **Transfer of Development Rights** as a tool
- Emphasis on **environmental sustainability**
- Celebration of **cultural diversity**

Participants were most **CONCERNED** and/or found **DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND** the following about the Plan:

PROCESS

- Make it explicit that **goals** are **not listed in order of importance**.
- Would like to know that there will be **opportunities for participation** in next phase
- How will we know **progress** is being made **on implementation**?
- Should be careful not to **generalize** from the relatively **small number of participants at public meetings** and should write a disclaimer expressing an understanding that this may not reflect the entire town.
- Need to **solicit input from groups** whose needs are **not as well represented**, e.g. high school students and young adults.

CONTENT

- **School enrollments**
 - What if the projected decrease doesn't happen?
 - What does this mean about the quality of our schools/education? Is the school district becoming less desirable/competitive?
 - Isn't there too much expectation that there will be more money from this than is realistic given current needs at the schools?
 - Believe that there will be a reduction in ratio of students to the population at large, but not

in the absolute number of students

- **Transfer of Development Rights**
 - How can we ensure that Town doesn't inadvertently provide a blank check to developers to motivate them to use TDR, the Town has been taken advantage of in the past
 - Concentrating more development in W. Acton village could be a disaster, how can we be sure to control where and what it looks like?
 - In Phase I people expressed a desire to control development, Plan seems to promote it
 - How does one define increased vitality? Most businesses in the center will provide relatively low wage jobs.
- **Kelley's Corner**
 - Traffic already congested, won't additional development worsen this?
 - Already some high density housing in the area that attendee doesn't consider to be an asset to the area
 - Need to improve traffic flow
- **North Acton**
 - Not enough about North Acton Village in the Plan

- Not enough emphasis on need for fire station in North Acton
- **How is this plan different from previous?**
 - Why will this plan work when the others didn't?
 - Should consider a mechanism for village-level governance
 - Should form an Economic Development Corporation
 - How can we prevent "non-plan-friendly development"? Will the Town have the authority to prevent it?
- **Would like to see more:**
 - Discussion of active recreation. Why is there so much emphasis on preserving open space?
 - The Town should publicize the MinuteVan more in order to increase ridership
 - Promotion of the arts – theater, dance, music, etc.
 - Attention on young people and their needs



Notes from Large Group Discussion

Which features of the Plan do you most appreciate?

I like to walk and bike and appreciate that plan addressing this.

Appreciate the work that was done and the large amount of public input that was gathered.

Hats off to the Acton 2020 Committee – the input gathered in Phase I is reflected in the Phase II Plan.

Is glad to see that Transfer of Development Rights and environmental sustainability are included in the plan.

Appreciates the Plan addressing walking and biking and options for lower income people (e.g. people in their 20s) to stay in town.

Kudos to the Committee and Consultants for their staying power. Was involved in Phase I. Impressed at how far the Plan has come and can see the continuity from Phase I.

Just moved to Acton because of its great schools and stable housing prices. Appreciate the opportunity to comment and get involved in planning for the Town's future.

Looking forward to be able to bike around Town.

The participation process was amazing. Hopes it will continue during implementation.

Is a life-long resident; his parents left because they couldn't afford to stay in Town so appreciates emphasis on supporting empty-nesters ability to stay in town.

Very much appreciates the hard work of the Committee; it's a very talented group.

The Plan is a beautiful. Urges that copies made available for sale; suggests \$20 cost.

Thanks for all the workshops. Appreciates the Roadmap.

Vibrancy, connections, more sidewalks and bike paths appreciated

Thanks for all the work! Everyone should attend the Town Meeting, especially younger folks.

Agree that it would be nice to buy a copy of the report.

Applauds the outstanding efforts. It's great to see more about the arts in Acton – theater, dance, music, etc. The arts need more support.

What concerns you most/ you find difficult to understand about the Plan?

How will the Town Meeting presentation work? It's limited to 20 minutes.

What if school enrollments don't decline?

What about recreation for Acton's youth?

The Plan should make clear that the goals are not listed in order of importance.

Will the absolute number of school students decrease or just the ratio of students to population? Don't believe the absolute number will decline for long.

Suggest that the Town form an Economic Development Corporation.

What opportunities will there be to engage with the 2020 process in the future?

Should consider a mechanism for village-level governance.

Need more amenities in villages, particularly North Acton Village.

A concern: how is the 2020 Plan different from past plans; haven't seen results from those plans.

The report doesn't give enough emphasis to the need for a fire station in North Acton, and there's not much in the Plan about North Acton generally.

Kelley's Corner traffic is already congested – how will development be accommodated? Need to improve traffic flow.

How will we know progress is being made on implementation?

Questions Kelley's Corner Plans because traffic is heavy and there's already some high density housing that he does not consider an asset to the area.

Don't provide a blank check to developers to motivate use of TDR; caution is needed; the Town has been taken advantage of in the past.

Concerned about school enrollments going down. Where are we headed as a school system?

Why is there so much emphasis on preserving open space? It could be developed for active recreation. Would be concerned about negative qualities of preserving stagnant water. [Explained that recreation is a possible use of open space.]

The Town should publicize the MinuteVan more; usage is not what it could be.

Has some discomfort as a younger resident – does the plan express my concerns?

Acton schools didn't always meet her particular needs. Excited to see programs on yoga and acupuncture, sustainability, etc. Looking for a way to connect with her vision.

Acton 2020 Community Comprehensive Plan

Although the bulk of the Town seems to be represented at this meeting, need to solicit input from groups whose needs are not well represented, e.g., high schoolers. Want to engage in different ways of thinking and living. His appreciation for the plan far outweighs his concerns, however.

Concern: although public outreach was phenomenal compared to the past, doesn't think we should generalize from the relatively small number of people who attended the November 9, 2011 workshop.

In Phase I there was a survey of Town residents – a majority said we should control development, but this Plan seems to promote it.

TDR is scary. Concentrating more development in West Acton Village could be a disaster. E.g., doesn't like the new condo units at the corner of Spruce and +Arlington.

Traffic is a major problem in Kelley's Corner, which in the previous plan it was proposed to upzone from FAR 0.7 to FAR 2.0; that's why the previous proposal was rejected by Town Meeting.

How does one define "increased vitality?" Is in favor of economic development, but most business in the centers is retail, with relatively low wage jobs.

Written Comments: Back of the Agenda

Participants were invited to submit written responses to the same questions discussed in the large group. The following is a compilation of the responses.

Which features of the Plan do you most appreciate?

- The Roadmap (5)
 - Making the Town center more vibrant with good walkability, connections and accessibility
 - Sidewalks
 - Walkable neighborhoods – sidewalks
 - Kelley's Corner being improved
 - Very holistic view – how everything interacts, really like ___ fluidity and input
- The inclusion of public transportation (2)
 - despite the young "age" of the MinuteVan.
 - Reducing dependence on cars by having public transportation/bike paths around town – great news to empty nesters
- Cultural Diversity Celebration via a Committee (2)
- Promotion of economic development locally. Great for increasing town revenues and reducing/eliminating traffic.
- Clustering of housing in villages, saving open space
- [the] encouraging of economic diversity

What concerns you most about the Plan?

- Will we as a Town have the authority to prevent non-plan-friendly development? For example, did we need another bank where it is going in and will we be able to affect this type of decision? How can we prevent piecemeal, anti-plan projects?
- Also will we be able to make zoning changes to allow cutting big houses up into apartments? I would like that.
- I often cringe when I see the conclusions of charts from small numbers of meetings (same comment as Wayne Frederichs). Report those lightly.

- Can we get town-owned or cooperatively owned businesses in Kelley's Corner?
- [The difficulty] of passing zoning rules that preserve open space so that "sprawl" doesn't fill up the countryside.
- How to ensure we have top-tier educational programs, which is my big, draw to Acton?
- Kelley's Corner is already congested. How to fit more development in such tight space? Will there be any road improvements/traffic flow improvements?
- School enrollments going down, more seniors in town, more empty nesters. This makes me wonder if the adult age in town is going up. Is Acton school district becoming less desirable (considering the absolute numbers are going down)?
- Keep TDR from becoming "wrong side of the tracks" (less desirable places to live in areas with commercial)
- Smaller housing prevents young people of Acton from staying with their kids.

What do you find difficult to understand about the Plan?

- Employment-oriented development: what is that? How is it important in Acton?
- Why do we want to preserve so much open space? We could have developed recreational areas and actually develop some scenic areas around Nagog Hill/Nagog Pond. Stagnant water bodies are an insect infestation hazard - shouldn't we clean up some of these open areas?

OTHER:

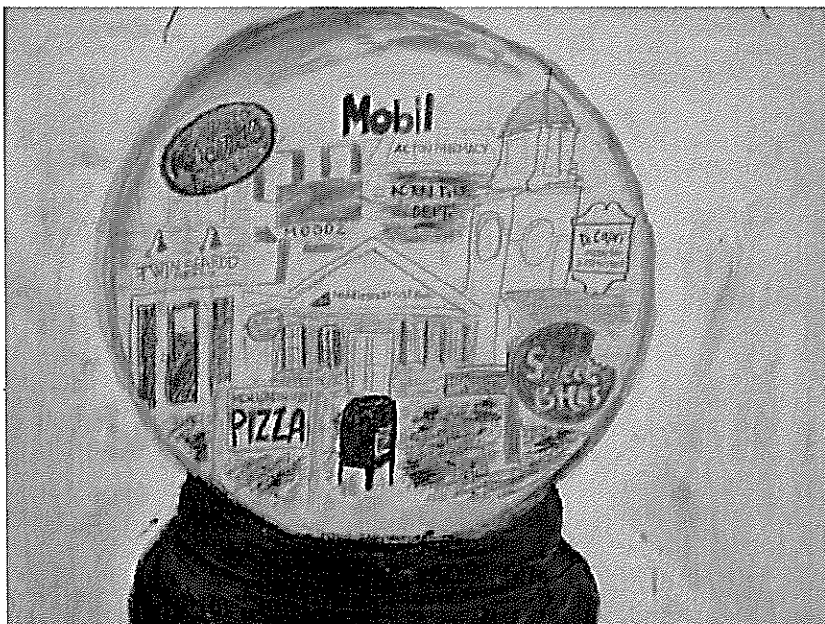
- Please put an arrow (on that flow chart) directly from the shuttle to economic growth (bottom left corner) – not just to vibrant centers. Having public transportation allows companies, office parks and potential employees to grow in number and use.
- Winning drawing should get on T-shirts
- Would like to see some way to control building of accessible housing

ART CONTEST WINNERS

We reached out to Acton's youth to help us to illustrate and therefore-- to imagine through their renderings -- each of the seven planning goals. Entries exceeded our expectations both in their artistic quality as well as in their conceptual representation of the goals.

- There was representation from all of Acton's schools
- Every goal was represented
- The Selection Committee judged entries within each goal and within the designated age groups. The names of the artists were not revealed to the Selection Committee until after the winners were selected.

There was also one “**all around Acton2020 winner**” – an entry that impressed the Selection Committee both with the artistic talent it exhibited but also with an understanding of the core plan concept. This entry, with the artist's permission, will be framed, courtesy of Powers Gallery in Acton, and hung in Town Hall.



The entry is a snow globe or even crystal ball of West Acton village, is a beautiful depiction of town character and emphasizes the positive features of guiding growth to village centers.

The artist is: Mackenzie Abernethy.

For photographs of all the winning entries please visit: <http://acton2020.info/>

Acton 2020 Youth Art Contest: Winners

GOAL	Item Letter	Age Group	Name
GOAL 1			
First Place	R	12-15	Mackenzie Abernethy
First Place	Q	6-11	Alex Zhang
GOAL 2			
First Place	P	6-11	Sanjana Krishna
2 nd Place	D	6-11	Hannah Keenan
	J	6-11	Iniyah C.K.
<i>Honorable Mention</i>	F	6-11	Lucas Escobedo
GOAL 3			
First Place	N	12-15	Luka Ilic
First Place	H	6-11	Meghna Sundaram
	B	6-11	Peter Busse
Second Place	I	6-11	Emily Gouveia – Vigeant
<i>Honorable Mention</i>	C	6-11	Emily Streeter
GOAL 4			
First Place	M	6-11	Joy Wang
Second Place	K	6-11	Vanessa Pare
	A	6-11	Vivian Shen
<i>Honorable Mention</i>	O	6-11	Maria Redmond
GOAL 5			
First Place	L	6-11	Carrie Yu
GOAL 6			
First Place	E	6-11	Jyo Pari

Acton 2020 Community Comprehensive Plan

GOAL 7			
First Place	G	6-11	Gretel Busse

