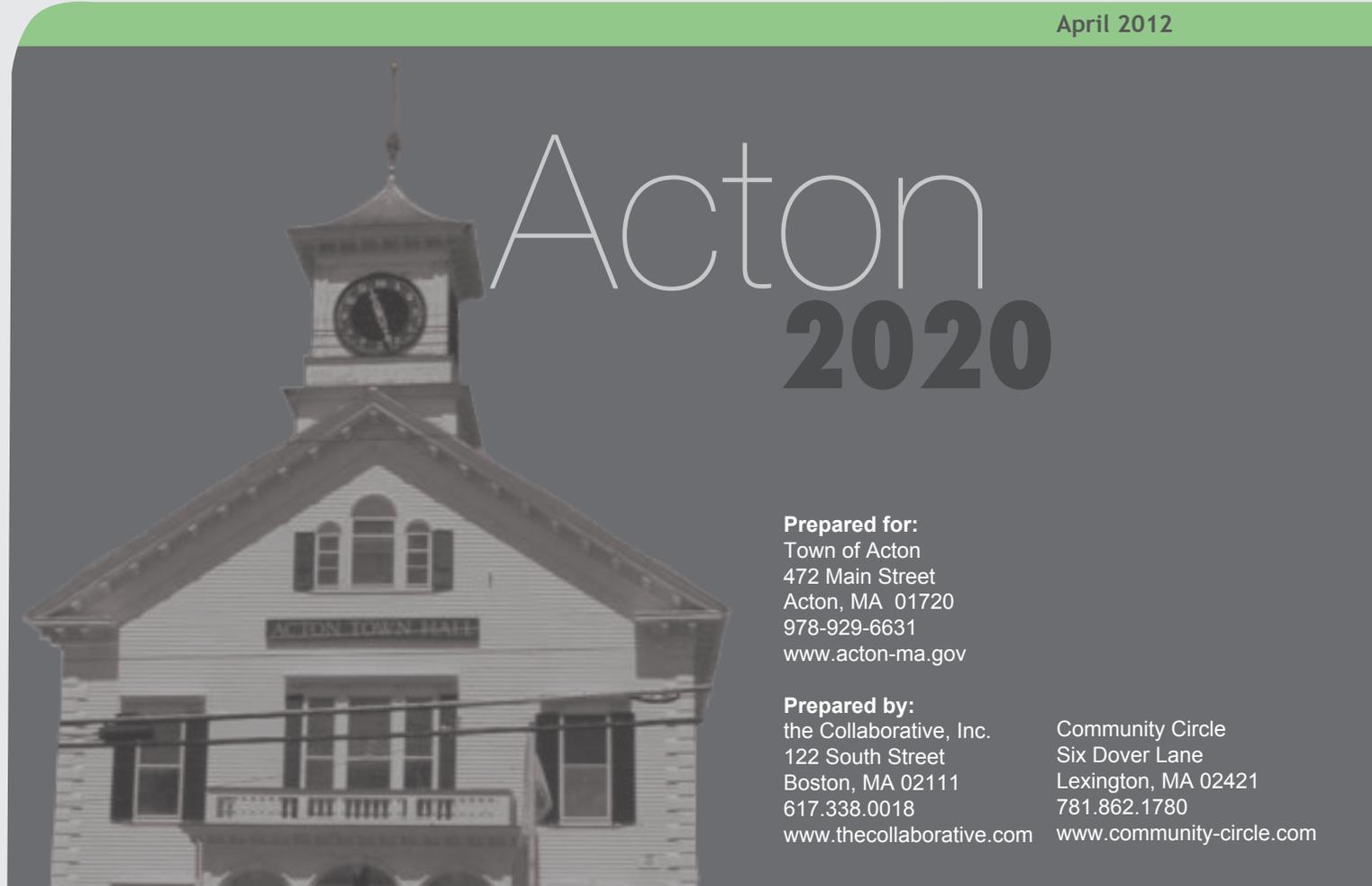




Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan

April 2012



Acton 2020

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Acton's Boards, Commissions, and Committees, whose members provided invaluable information and input; and to the **Phase I Outreach Committee** for their hard work in establishing the groundwork for the planning process.

The Acton Planning Department

who worked tirelessly to provide information, support and institutional memory to the process.

Roland Bartl, Acton Planning Director
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Kim Gorman, Planning Department Secretary
Scott Mutch, Assistant Planner and Zoning Enforcement Officer

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Other Organizations who participated

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Acton Community Access Television
Acton Water District

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FOREWORD



Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Foreword

In the course of working together as residents on the Acton 2020 committee, we've read a number of other comprehensive community plans. Many of these plans seem to start with a simple extrapolation of past trends put forth for the future, but looking back and then forward at the edge of our 20-year planning scope, we don't think this is the right approach for Acton. Instead, we are proposing something bolder, something that responds to the changes happening all around us.

Over the last sixty years, Acton has been defined by its rapid growth from a rural community to a bedroom suburb.¹ Growth was driven by the post-war boom in suburbia, the broad availability of state and federal support to build infrastructure, the availability of relatively cheap land in Acton, and cheap energy everywhere. But now, land has become more scarce and fuel more expensive. Demographics and sensibilities are changing too - as the population gradually shifts towards more seniors and fewer children and awareness and concern increase for environmental sustainability. From a fiscal standpoint, we also know that we can't rely on an ever increasing population to pay for ever more services. And we are more aware that most new residen-

tial development now comes at an increasing cost:² more traffic, more risk to water supplies, more infrastructure to pay for and maintain, and more costs for services.

Actonians are pragmatic and smart. We see changes are coming and we want to find a positive future. What we on the committee have learned during this planning process is that there is an emerging sense among residents of what sorts of shifts will be needed to navigate the coming changes in order to foster a resilient and vibrant community. Indeed, the feedback we've received from residents strongly reflects both a desire for an increased "sense of community" and concern regarding the "future resilience" of the Town. These two themes really frame the Comprehensive Community Plan.

As you read through this document, please keep in mind that the elements of the plan we have laid out do not comprise a simple wishlist that residents expect the Town can achieve by waving a magic wand. The Plan presents a vision of how to support each other by creating a different sort of Town prosperity driven by the richness of social connection, a deep appreciation for the historic and natural realms in which

we are embedded in Acton, and a commitment to a good shared future. And it will take broad and deep resident participation to move in this direction; the Town government itself can only do so much.

By communicating with many residents, boards, and committees through numerous meetings and a number of public workshops,³ a Roadmap for Guiding Growth has emerged that we feel strongly can create Town prosperity. We invite you to join with Town officials, volunteers, and residents to make this vision a reality.

- The Acton 2020 Committee

Margaret Woolley Busse

Margaret Woolley Busse, Chair

Jim Snyder-Grant

Jim Snyder-Grant, Vice-Chair

Celia Kent

Celia Kent

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**The Committee extends its thanks
to everyone who participated in the planning process.**

- The Planning Department staff put the plan at the top of their very full work priorities. Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl, and Kim Gorman contributed countless hours to attending meetings, document production and review, and, over and over, educating the rest of us by answering our questions about how the Town works.
- The rest of the Town’s staff have decades of experience in Acton and helped us improve the plan each time they engaged with our process.
- Our consultants at the Collaborative and Community Circle worked tirelessly on building the plan and on nurturing the community-wide conversation that formed the basis of the plan.
- The volunteers of every Town board and committee spent some time on parts of the plan, improving it with their deep knowledge of particular areas, out of their commitment to Acton.
- And most importantly, there was an unprecedented engagement by the citizens of Acton at each stage of the planning process. Your commitment and involvement in the future of this Town is the key ingredient that gives us hope for Acton’s future.

“Thank you!”

1. Rapid growth (p.ii): See growth chart, page 21. Acton’s population has grown at a rate of over 3,000 persons per decade since 1950.
2. Increasing cost of new residential development (p.ii): See Fiscal impact research in Appendix 6, Volume III, Harrison and French, Introduction to Fiscal Impact Analysis, UNH; and Kotval and Mullin, Fiscal Impact Analysis.
3. Number of public forums (p.ii): See Process section, page 177.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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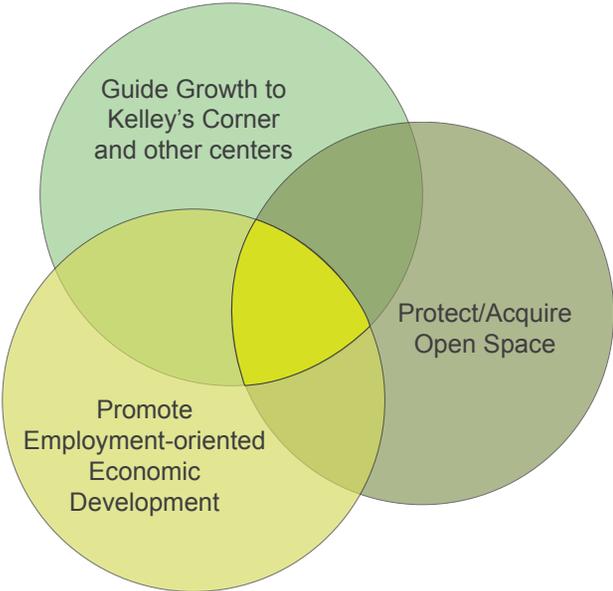
Introduction

The purpose of the Acton 2020 Plan is ultimately about how to create a better community and covers a whole range of different elements, including land use, recreation, transportation, and housing, to name a few; these are reflected in the Plan’s seven goals and corresponding objectives. The Plan is a decision-making tool to be used by Town officials and citizens to express a desired future and the steps that lead there. It is intended to help guide the future growth and development of Acton and to give the Town a strong sense of direction, positioning Acton well so as to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

The Plan is based on **Underlying Themes** (see sidebar) that were expressed by Actonians. These themes connect residents’ desires and concerns with the Plan’s Goals and Objectives that as mentioned above comprise the entire breadth of the Plan and refer to a range of concepts such as Town character, the environment, and Town facilities.

Many of the themes have to do with growth and its consequences. With the recognition that growth can be guided, but not fully avoided, the main thrust of the Plan describes the **Roadmap**

for addressing our Town’s future growth. The **Roadmap**, while only a sub-set of the overall plan, represents its core and has three main parts. As shown below, these overlap to create a sweet spot that combines both environmental and fiscal sustainability. How those parts work together is explained on the following pages and in the diagram on page ES-4.



The three parts of the **Roadmap** intersect to provide more environmental and fiscal sustainability.

Underlying Themes

An increased 'sense of community'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Gathering: desire for indoor and outdoor places and events to meet and interact casually, spontaneously as well as in a planned, more formal fashion. • Town Character: desire to preserve and enhance features, physical and other, including a commitment to excellence in education, rural and historic characteristics, including the preservation of open space, and small town feeling, which make Acton unique and contribute to its sense of community. • Connectivity: desire for walking, biking, public transportation, traffic calming and improvements, and increased opportunities for social networks and connections.
The 'future resilience' of the Town
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Sustainability: concern regarding our ability to ensure the future health and well-being of our environment. • Social and Economic Diversity: concern regarding the ability to accommodate a range of socio-economic levels as well as the ability to age in place. • Financial Viability: concern regarding the ability of the Town to protect its assets and maintain a viable balance between taxes and services provided.

Roadmap for Guiding Growth

Acton can't avoid all future growth, but it can guide the expected growth in a way that better fits with the Town's goals. The three major parts to this approach, and how they relate, are described and illustrated below:

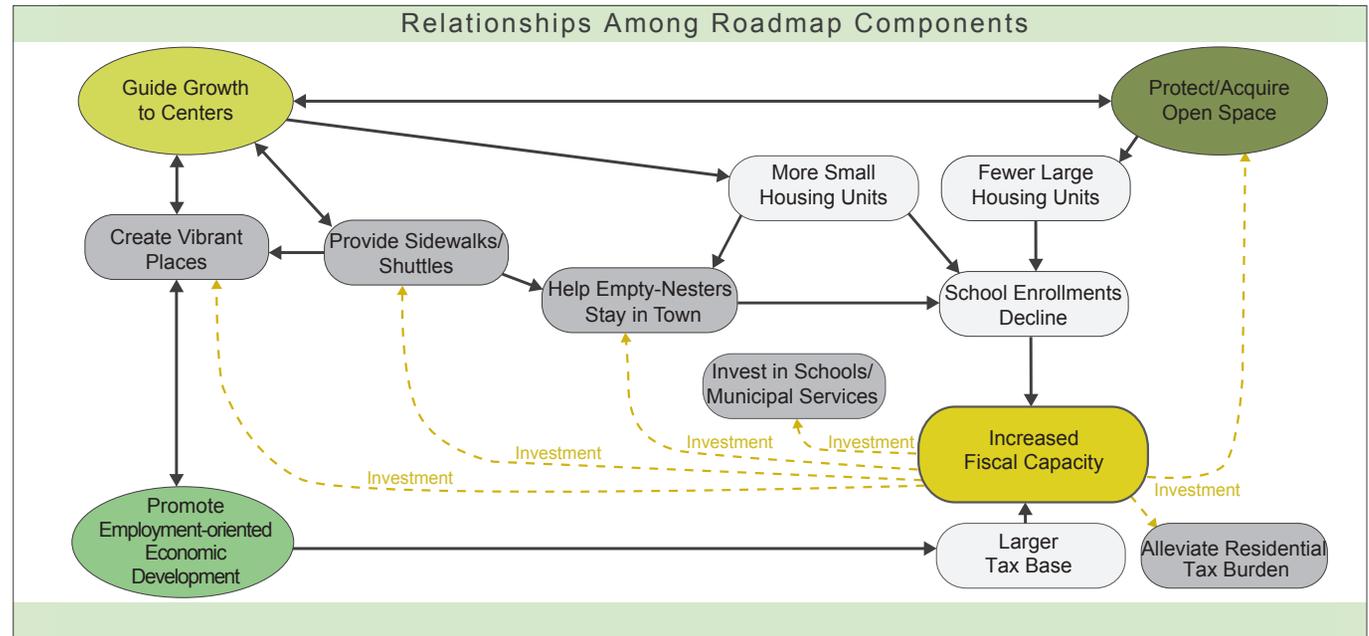
Guide growth to Kelley's Corner and Key Village Centers (such as West and South Acton) where smaller residential units will fit the growing market and provide more options for seniors and young people. This type of development strives to be both fiscally and environmentally sustainable.⁴ Place-specific guidelines and design review will ensure that new development helps create successful places.⁵

Guiding the majority of growth to village centers in smaller units helps to reduce future school enrollments,⁶ provides more affordable housing for empty-nesters who want to continue to live in Acton,⁷ and makes it feasible to create livelier walkable places for the whole community to gather.⁸

Preserve Additional Open Space by providing incentives to property owners in outlying areas to leave their land undeveloped and instead encouraging them to participate in development in the centers. This will result in preserving the rural characteristics so appreciated by Acton residents. The tool recommended to accomplish this is called Transfer of Development Rights (TDR - see explanation in endnote 9)⁹; it is used to guide growth away from the subdivision of large tracts of land and to the centers without having

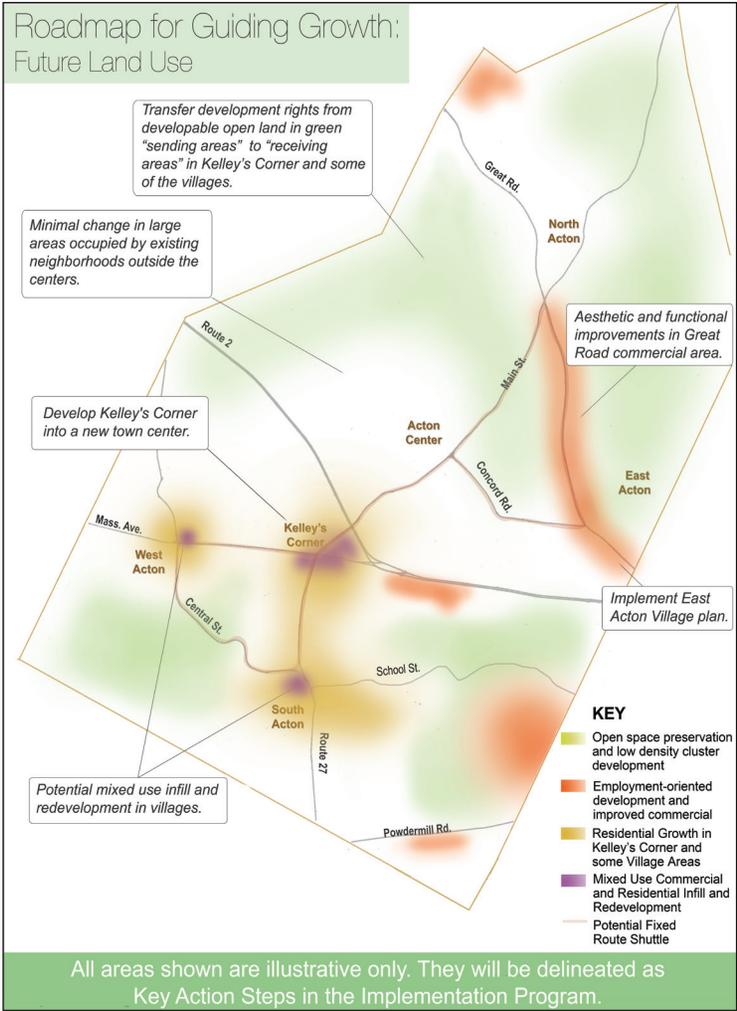
to pay for open space acquisition. It is also recommended that priority parcels be acquired by the Town when possible.

Actively Promote Employment-Oriented Economic Development, which will increase the tax base and, along with the mixed-use development in the centers, will produce more tax revenue than the cost of services for the new development¹⁰ and also create local jobs and reduce commuting for more residents.



Relationships among **Roadmap** components (colored ovals), other strategies (darker gray bubbles), and fiscal capacity (gold bubble). This diagram is explained on page 15 of the full report.

The following concept map illustrates the Roadmap for Guiding Growth and identifies some key features:



This map is explained on page 15 of the full report.

How the Roadmap Addresses Key Concerns

Financial Resilience. Acton is currently financially sound with a top bond rating and funds in reserve, but the Town budget is under pressure and costs are expected to rise as healthcare costs and other post-employment benefits increase.¹¹ In order to address this, some combination of higher taxes, reduced costs or services, and a bigger property tax base will be needed.¹²

The **Roadmap promotes economic development in appropriate locations**, and encourages **fiscally beneficial residential development** by shifting from large lot subdivisions, which increase school enrollments and costs, to compact development with smaller units that have been shown to have fewer school-age children and therefore generate more tax revenue than costs.¹³

Environmental Resilience.¹⁴ Acton is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and protecting its water resources. These efforts have some costs, but the investments will be repaid in lower energy costs and avoiding the need to later remediate impacts to the Town's drinking water.¹⁵

The Roadmap and More

- The Plan is comprehensive and contains much more than the Roadmap for Guiding Growth; it contains strategies to implement the complete set of Goals and Objectives (page ES-7).
- The Key Implementation Strategies (pages ES-8 & ES-9) are a summary of the highest priorities of a much more extensive list of strategies and action steps recommended to achieve the goals and objectives, and are listed in the full report and at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>.
- This document also includes some interesting facts about Acton on the page entitled "Did You Know?" (page ES-13). Finally, while this summary contains a page of Notes and References keyed to the text that provides some basic explanations and support for the report's statements, it is the full Acton 2020 plan that provides a thorough explanation and examination of each of the plan's components.

Where the Roadmap Takes Us

- Kelley’s Corner becomes a busy, walkable Town center.
- Villages become denser with redevelopment of non-residential parcels; stronger design review preserves and enhances existing character.
- School enrollments decline gradually; school costs rise more slowly as the population ages and the housing mix in the new development provides smaller units for seniors and others.¹⁶
- The tax base is expanded by economic development.
- Home values (adjusted for inflation) outside the centers will be maintained and those in the villages may increase.¹⁷
- Many large parcels of open land will be protected through acquisition and transfer of development rights to the centers; on those that do develop, part of the parcel can be protected through cluster zoning.¹⁸

By concentrating growth, it becomes feasible to serve more of Acton’s population by public transportation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, saving money for residents, and providing access for Actonians who can’t drive or don’t wish to be automobile-dependent. It also gives residents the opportunity for walking, which

benefits fitness goals and increases sense of connection to others.

Future Contingencies

A Comprehensive Plan should be resilient – it should continue to be a guide even if the unpredictable happens. The “**wild cards**” that Acton might have to face include:

- Prolonged economic downturn combined with escalating healthcare and pension costs.
- Energy costs rise even more sharply than in recent years.
- Weather events, such as more frequent and more violent storms and significant climate changes.
- School enrollments that don’t decline as expected.
- Revival of the housing market leading to a major residential subdivision proposed for a large tract of land.

There is also the risk that things don’t turn out as anticipated, e.g., more or less development pressure, tighter budgets, or unforeseen infrastructure needs.

By guiding growth to the centers and protecting open space through transfer of development rights, the development of a large tract of land

with consequent increases in school and other costs, can potentially be channeled into compact mixed-use development with smaller units that generate less school cost and pay more taxes than their cost to service.

By emphasizing employment-oriented economic development, the most promising source of added tax revenue, Acton can do better than similar towns that don’t invest in attracting commercial growth, even in a prolonged downturn.

By moving to more sustainable land use patterns, alternatives to the automobile become more feasible, reinforcing these patterns and enabling people to reduce their energy costs.

By calling for appropriate guidelines and more rigorous review of development in the centers, particularly Kelley’s Corner where sewers are already in place, the Town’s water supply can be better protected from wastewater impacts, largely funded by new development. A key recommendation is a study of each center to assess capacity and potential impacts.

And if Town finances constrain desired improvements, the phasing of major investments can be adjusted to correspond to available resources (see page ES-10).

Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1:	Preserve and Enhance Town Character	Objective 4.2:	Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands.
Objective 1.1:	Strengthen planning tools to manage growth pro-actively.	Objective 4.3:	Support additional cultural activities.
Objective 1.2:	Preserve and enhance key centers.	GOAL 5:	Support Inclusion and Diversity
Objective 1.3:	Preserve rural characteristics and open space.	Objective 5.1:	Support residents of all ages.
Objective 1.4:	Preserve historic buildings and landscapes.	Objective 5.2:	Support households of all income levels.
Objective 1.5:	Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.	Objective 5.3:	Embrace cultural diversity.
GOAL 2:	Ensure Environmental Sustainability	Objective 5.4:	Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community.
Objective 2.1:	Protect the quality and quantity of Acton’s water.	GOAL 6:	Preserve and Enhance Town-Owned Assets and Services
Objective 2.2:	Reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins.	Objective 6.1:	Protect Town-owned open space.
Objective 2.3:	Reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.	Objective 6.2:	Support excellence in schools.
Objective 2.4:	Move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.	Objective 6.3:	Manage the Town’s facilities efficiently.
GOAL 3:	Improve Connections	Objective 6.4:	Provide high quality services that are responsive to community needs.
Objective 3.1:	Make walking and biking easier and safer.	Objective 6.5:	Provide excellent public health and safety services.
Objective 3.2:	Improve transportation around Town.	GOAL 7:	Maintain and Improve the Financial Well-Being of the Town
Objective 3.3:	Promote communication among Town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.	Objective 7.1:	Promote fiscal responsibility.
Objective 3.4:	Support and strengthen neighborhoods.	Objective 7.2:	Promote economic development that supports other Acton 2020 planning goals.
GOAL 4:	Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation	Objective 7.3:	Improve existing commercial areas.
Objective 4.1:	Create new gathering spaces and make better use of existing ones.	Objective 7.4:	Support the financial ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime.

Key Implementation Strategies

The Goals and Objectives and Roadmap for Guiding Growth will be implemented through a number of strategies that involve one or more action steps. The full Implementation Plan is in the body of the report and online at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>. Fifteen key recommendations stand out as highest priority among the more than 200 proposed action steps and are listed below, not in priority order.

Roadmap Strategies for Guided Growth

► Guide Growth to Kelley’s Corner and Villages

- **Develop Kelley’s Corner into a mixed-use Town center and transportation hub** in conformance with a specific plan for the area. Encourage mixed use with people living in smaller housing units near vibrant shops and restaurants with opportunities for socializing, running errands, dining, and community gathering. Creating more activities and a safe and pleasant pedestrian environment will also attract teens from the nearby school complex; they should be involved in the planning for the area.
- Prepare a plan to improve Kelley’s Corner and to **preserve and enhance village centers**. The **Key Centers Plan** will set priorities for new development and redevelopment in centers. The plan should consider Kelley’s Corner and the villages as a system, build on existing strengths in each, identify necessary aesthetic and functional improvements, assess capacity for density incentives, and prioritize and sequence which areas to work on first. This plan would include a quantitative analysis of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) system, to verify which incentives are most likely to create the desired changes.

The **Kelley’s Corner Development Plan** will be part of the Key Centers Plan; it will provide the basis to proceed with zoning changes and infrastructure investments needed to begin the improvements at Kelley’s Corner and promote development and redevelopment of key parcels as soon as practicable.

- **Actively promote employment-oriented economic development** (e.g., Research and Development, high tech, office) to expand the tax base. This may also reduce commute time for some residents.
- **Protect, acquire, and improve open space** for conservation, farming, and recreation, using a combination of acquisition and zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to move development away from open land and to the key centers. This will help protect Town character and the environment, as well as provide additional opportunities for recreation.

Other Strategies

- **Consider a sewer extension and/or advanced package wastewater treatment** with groundwater recharge in order to support an increase in



small-scale commercial development and better manage wastewater in West Acton.

- ▶ **Improve the transfer station to increase recycling and reuse.**
- ▶ **Construct more sidewalks and facilities for safe bicycling, in centers and Town-wide.** This will help connect people and places and provide opportunities for fitness while also being beneficial for the environment (by reducing car fumes).
- ▶ **Reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote Town-wide energy conservation.** Support joint community/Town efforts to reduce reliance on fossil-fuel energy sources and to explore shifting to renewable sources.
- ▶ **Develop policies and strategies to keep empty-nesters in Acton.** As the senior population continues to grow, they will need a number of facilities and services that meet their special needs.
- ▶ **Continue to fund, and later expand, MinuteVan** to build ridership with more frequent service between village centers, Kelley’s Corner, and the rail station. This will connect various places in Town and also provide a service to those who cannot drive as well as to those wishing to use public transportation.
- ▶ **Construct a new building to accommodate the Senior Center and larger community,** when finances permit. This will serve to provide space for expanded programming for an increasing senior population as

well as a meeting and gathering place for the community at large.

- ▶ Prepare a proactive plan that encourages the **provision of a wide range of housing types** to meet the needs of empty nesters, Town employees, young couples, and those of moderate income, by locating housing **in small, scattered sites near walkable service and business destinations**, especially village centers. Consider possible Town participation in desired housing developments. The plan should address the Town’s relationship to the state’s affordable housing law (Chapter 40B), but its purpose is to address Acton’s local and regional housing needs.
- ▶ Create a new **committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and language groups in Town** to provide **information to newcomers and assist with organizing multi-cultural activities.** This will help build bridges, knitting the community closer together, and it will provide guidance to those unfamiliar with the Town and its resources.
- ▶ **Continue to support and achieve high standards of excellence in Acton’s schools.** A majority of residents when asked “Why did you move to Acton?” responded: “because of the schools.” The schools and school-related activities are a major community focus contributing to the culture of Acton.
- ▶ **Continue to work to control cost,** planning for future financial responsibilities like pension liabilities and finding new ways to reduce current costs, such as regionalization and cooperation with other towns.



Cost and Phasing of Major Actions

Town finances are being squeezed between the desire for services (excellent schools and other Town priorities) and a limited tax base, reduced state aid, and unfunded liabilities. Fortunately many of the Plan’s top recommendations can begin to be implemented with existing Town staff and relatively small additional expenditures (e.g., small-scale studies to prepare for appropriate growth in the centers).¹⁹ Other priorities like a new building to serve seniors and the larger community, or an expanded shuttle system, are more expensive.

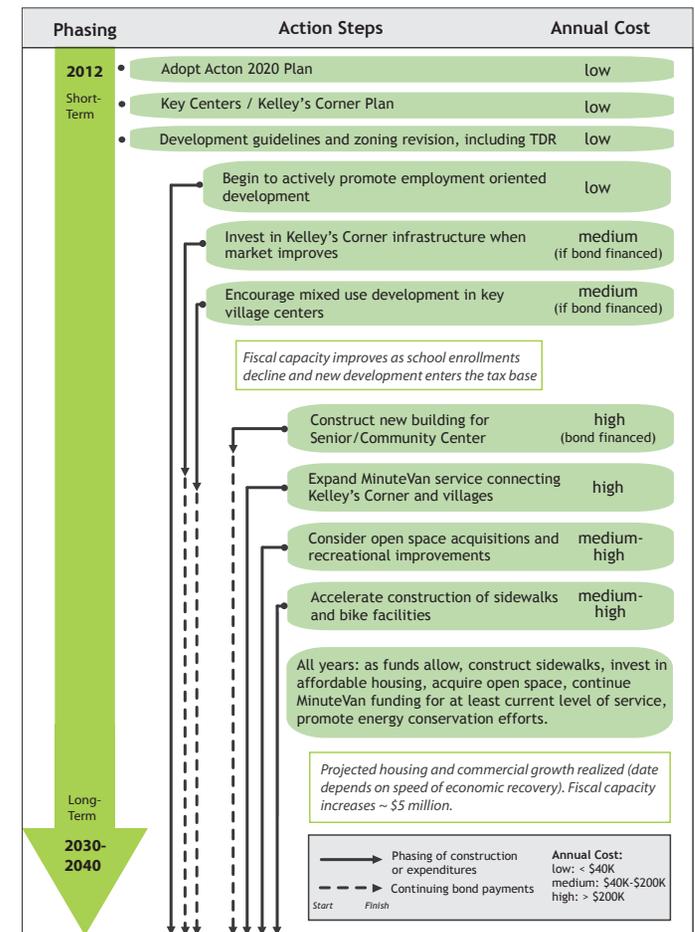
The solution to this challenge is to **phase the major actions as finances permit**. This can include some open space acquisition²⁰ and investment in pedestrian and bicycle facilities each year as can be afforded, continuing to fund the MinuteVan at current levels²¹ until expansion becomes feasible, phasing improvements to support desired redevelopment in Kelley’s Corner as the market revives, and planning for a new senior/community center,²² but putting off construction until it can be afforded.

In the meantime, Town fiscal capacity can be improved by promoting economic development, seeking special purpose state funding and grants,

continuing to explore public-private partnerships for specific projects, and cooperating with surrounding towns to provide services more efficiently. Also, the current economic slowdown is an opportunity to complete the initial planning steps so that the Town is poised for action when opportunities arise and/or the economic climate changes. The recommendation to reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote townwide energy conservation will pay for itself and also help to save money for residents and businesses.

It is significant that a fiscal analysis of the **Roadmap** concluded that by the time 1,200 new housing units and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space have been built (longer than 20 years because of the current economic downturn), Acton’s fiscal capacity will be increased by nearly 5 million dollars per year compared to a business-as-usual scenario where no roadmap for growth is implemented.²³ More detail on costs is presented in the body of the report.²⁴ In addition to the major investments, the Plan also identifies actions

Phasing Key Investments:



that don’t cost much to implement but have significant benefits; these “ripe apples” are identified throughout the Implementation Plan (see Full Plan Report).²⁵

Process

The Plan was developed in two phases.²⁶ The first, **Phase I**, comprised extensive and intensive outreach to the Acton community through a variety of means including:

- town-wide visioning sessions
- focus groups with Town boards and committees and other specific stakeholder groups
- town-wide mail and telephone surveys covering all households and businesses and
- multiple opportunities and input for and from the town's youth

This extensive public input resulted in an “Emerging Vision Statement” and a set of Goals and Objectives that encapsulated what residents and business owners envisioned for the Town's future.



Phase II involved the following major activities:

- Development of an inventory of existing conditions of the town's resources (including housing, transportation, public services and facilities, open space and recreation, cultural and natural resources, economic development, and land use.)
- Refinement of the Goals and Objectives.
- Identification of Key Issues, Opportunities, and Challenges and development of a preliminary list of ways to address them.
- Development of a comprehensive Implementation Plan that provides a prioritized and phased proposal for moving forward to fulfill the vision and goals.
- Facilitation of an extensive level of public involvement, including:
 - Use of the internet both to disseminate information regarding the process and the content of the Plan as well as to provide an additional opportunity for people to interact with the content of the Plan (blog, Facebook, and interactive posting of the entire Implementation Plan).
 - Six major public forums and more than 10 public meetings with special outreach to specific town boards and committees.

Components of the “Emerging Vision” (from Phase I)

- *Preserving the rural and historic characteristics*
 - *A sustainable future*
 - *Excellent schools*
 - *Recreational opportunities*
 - *Lively, safe neighborhoods*
 - *Attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas*
 - *Sidewalks and bike paths*
 - *A town shuttle*
 - *Open communication and accessible information*
 - *Opportunities for the community to gather*
 - *Vibrant village centers*
 - *Kelley's Corner as walkable town center*
 - *Welcoming residents*
- Production of a movie “It's a Wonderful Acton” to raise awareness and increase turnout to a key forum.
 - Involvement of youth through art contest.

Notes and References

The notes below provide sources and explanations for the statements in the report that are flagged with the corresponding numbers.

1. Rapid growth (p.ii): See growth chart in full report, page 21. Acton's population has grown at a rate of over 3,000 persons per decade since 1950.
2. Increasing cost of new residential development (p.ii): See Fiscal impact research in Appendix 6, Volume III, Harrison and French, Introduction to Fiscal Impact Analysis, UNH; and Kotval and Mullin, Fiscal Impact Analysis.
3. Number of public forums (p.ii): See Process section in full report, p.164.
4. Fiscally and environmentally sustainable (p.ES-3): fiscally sustainable because of smaller units and more compact development making it easier to serve town streets and infrastructure. Residential development can be fiscally positive (p.ES-4): the main reason residential development in the past has cost more than the taxes it generates is the added burden to the schools, which comprise over 2/3 of Acton's budget. Even though there are individual instances of many children in a small housing unit, on average, the number of school children is strongly correlated with the number of bedrooms in the new housing. This has been substantiated in the number of new school enrollments generated by the Avalon Acton housing development. Smaller units have fewer school children and generate more taxes than costs to the town.
5. Place-specific guidelines (p.ES-4): a key strategy is to do design studies for Kelley's Corner and village centers to set priorities and determine what kind of development is compatible, then make these guidelines part of the zoning review process.
6. Smaller units reduce school enrollments (p.ES-4): see note 4.
7. More affordable housing for empty-nesters (p.ES-4): in the sense that smaller units that empty-nesters may desire will cost less than single family homes; "affordable" does not necessarily refer to state housing definitions and goals, but could include some of this type of units.
8. Livelier walkable places (p.ES-4): compact mixed-use development with pedestrian amenities has been shown to create lively places where people want to be.
9. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) (p.ES-4): TDR is a zoning mechanism that has been used across the United States; a property owner in a designated "sending area" can work with an owner in a "receiving area", e.g. Kelley's Corner, to sell the rights to development of the sender's property to the owner in a receiving area; there is no cost to the town except development review, and the sending property is protected from any future development.
10. Economic development produces more taxes than costs (p.ES-4): This is mostly due to the fact that commercial development does not add to school costs. (See references cited in note 2).
11. Healthcare and pension expenses increase (p.ES-5): Acton, like most Massachusetts towns, needs to prepare to pay for obligations to teachers and employees who will retire over the next 20 years.
12. Bigger property tax base needed (p.ES-5): it is preferable to raise property tax revenues to pay for increasing costs from new development of the type that is fiscally positive, instead of higher taxes on existing residential and commercial property; see notes 4 and 10.
13. Fiscally beneficial residential development (p.ES-5): development with smaller units that consequently generate fewer school enrollments overall; see note 4.
14. Environmental resilience (p.ES-5): Shifting residential growth from large lot subdivisions to compact development in the centers saves energy by reducing auto dependency, and it enables wastewater to be handled better via sewers or advanced package treatment plants, while leaving more open space undeveloped. Dealing with existing and anticipated stormwater issues in the centers can be planned for now, instead of waiting for worsening conditions.
15. Town's drinking water (p.ES-5): Acton's public water supply comes from groundwater wells; therefore it is essential to protect the groundwater from sanitary wastewater and other contaminants and to recharge stormwater to the ground.
16. Smaller units for seniors and others (p.ES-6): the compact development that would be encouraged for Kelley's Corner and, potentially, other village centers, would be mixed-use with apartments and condo units in low-rise buildings, suitable for seniors, empty nesters, and small families.
17. Home values (p.ES-6): Acton homes would keep their value as the town's character and excellent schools are preserved; village-specific plans and development guidelines would make them desirable places and potentially increase the value of existing homes.
18. Cluster zoning (p.ES-6): in areas away from villages, Acton's current zoning permits new housing units to be concentrated on approximately half of a residential parcel, leaving the other half in deeded open space.
19. Small-scale studies (p.ES-10): These relatively inexpensive studies (less than \$40,000) are the key to determining development priorities and developing guidelines to create successful places, preserve existing character, and minimize impacts.
20. Open space acquisition (p.ES-10): the town would continue to use Community Preservation Act funds to acquire open space when it becomes available; when finances permit, additional land acquisition can protect more open land and pre-empt large-lot subdivision that is likely to increase school costs more than it contributes in property taxes; see note 4.
21. MinuteVan (p.ES-10): continuing this service is important to moving toward a more sustainable transportation system that provides an alternative to car travel and serves the town's key centers.
22. Senior center (p.ES-10): the current center is not large enough to fully serve today's seniors; as the population ages, a larger center will be even more needed. The limited hours scheduled for use by seniors would permit the larger community to be served by the same facility.
23. These cost scenarios were developed to help make informed planning choices, but more detailed analysis of individual costs will be needed in the Implementation Phase.
24. Fiscal analysis of Roadmap for Guiding Growth (p.ES-10): see page 20 of the full report.
25. "Ripe apples" (p.ES-10): also called "low hanging fruit," i.e., relatively low cost for the benefits provided.
26. Two phases of the 2020 Plan (p.ES-11): see "Process" section of full report, beginning Page 175. Both phases involved extensive outreach.

Did You Know?

Extensive research was done by the consultant team, the 2020 Committee, and additional information was contributed by some members of the public.

The “snapshot” on this page is largely drawn from the Inventory Report, which is summarized in the next-to-last section of this volume and presented in full in Volume II.

Housing and Population

- Acton’s 2010 U.S. Census population was 21,924, up 8% since 2000.
- The percent of residents 65 and older is expected to nearly double over the next 20 years from less than 10% to over 18%.
- Over the same period the number of school-age children is expected to decline slightly, even while the total population increases.
- Acton had 8,530 housing units in 2010, up 11% from 2,000. 63% are single family houses.
- Projections by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council suggested that, based on current policies, population will increase by 10% by 2030 and housing units will increase by 1,000 units or 12%.

Schools and School Enrollments

- In 2010 there were 218 students (K-12) per 1,000 population, the third highest of the towns Acton touches.¹
- Acton Public Schools spent \$11,246 per pupil in 2009-2010, the second lowest of the towns it touches.
- Acton-Boxborough Regional High School was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009.

Land Use

- Acton’s land area is approximately 13,000 acres (20 square miles).
- 29% of Acton’s land area is open space (lower than five of the towns it touches). Roughly 1/3 of this open space is not protected from development.
- There are about 2,200 acres of developable land (vacant and not wetland).
- Based on 2008 land use data, approximately 1,800 additional housing units could be built on land now zoned residential, bringing the total at build-out² to 10,300, or 22% more than today. This would take more than 30 years at the projected growth rates.

¹ These are Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, Sudbury, and Westford.

² “Build-out” occurs when all developable land has been fully developed.

Water and Wastewater

- All of Acton’s public water supply comes from groundwater wells.
- Water demand has been relatively constant over the past six years, approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY), reflecting water conservation efforts. Acton’s state permit allows up to 708.1 MGY.
- Residential water demand is estimated by Acton Water District to be roughly 55 gallons per bedroom per day, substantially lower than the norm of 70.
- 80% of Acton’s homes have on-site septic systems, a high ratio for a town of Acton’s population. The other 20 percent use sewers or package treatment to dispose of wastewater.

And...

- The average household in Acton drives 76 miles per day, the lowest of the adjacent towns except Concord.
- 87.5% of town revenues come from residential property, in the middle of the group of towns it touches.
- Acton was named the 16th Best Place To Live among small towns in the country by Money Magazine in 2009 and in 2011.



INTRODUCTION

- History & Background

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Introduction

The purpose of the Acton 2020 Plan is to guide the future growth and development of Acton. It is an opportunity to document those aspects of the Town which Acton residents care about and to develop the means to protect and enhance what’s valued. It is also an opportunity to document residents’ concerns and recommend changes that will improve the experience of living in Acton.

The Acton 2020 Plan is a decision-making tool, to be used by Town officials and citizens alike to understand and express a desired future and the steps that lead there. It is intended to help put the Town in a position to take advantage of opportunities as they arise and to have a strong sense of direction when moving forward on initiatives.

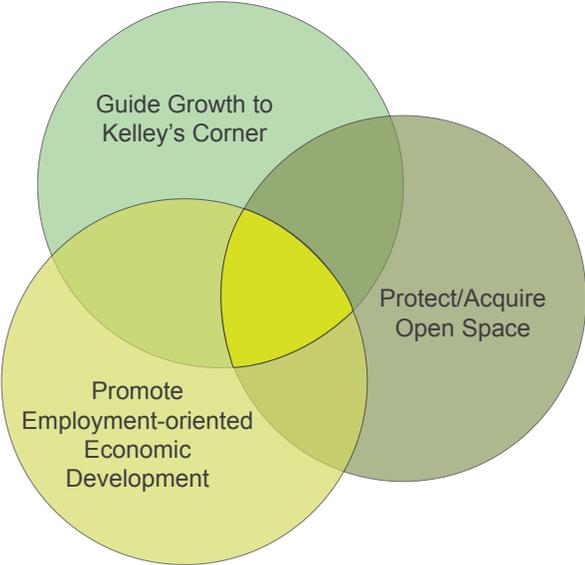
The Plan is based on **Underlying Themes**,¹ a distillation of the desire for an increased sense of community that was expressed by many Actonians and their concern for the Town’s future resilience. Many of these themes are about growth and its consequences. With the recognition that growth can be guided, but not fully avoided, the main thrust of the Plan describes the **Roadmap** for addressing our Town’s future growth. The **Roadmap**, while only a sub-set of the overall

1 See page 30.

plan, represents its core and has three main parts. As shown below, these overlap to create a sweet spot that combines both environmental and fiscal sustainability. How those parts work together is explained in the section that starts on page 13.

How to Use this Report

The report begins with the background and history of planning in Acton.



The three parts of the **Roadmap** intersect to provide more environmental and fiscal sustainability.

The section on the Roadmap for Guiding Growth describes its main components and how they are interrelated, how it would affect future land use, and its effects on housing, open space, developable land, and the Town’s fiscal capacity.

The Foundations section describes the Plan’s Vision, the Goals and Objectives, Opportunities and Challenges, and how the Plan deals will Future Contingencies. A section called “Did You Know?” lists important facts and figures.

The Implementation Plan section includes Key Implementation Strategies, which are a summary of the highest priorities, followed by a much more extensive list of strategies and action steps that are listed in detail beginning on page 51. The full Implementation Plan is a database located at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>.

The section also discusses costs and phasing of major investments.

The Process section documents the extraordinary level of public participation that went into the Plan.

A final section summarizes the research and data that was collected on existing conditions; full inventory reports are included in Volume II.

History & Background

Brief History of Acton

Acton is an upper middle class suburban town in Middlesex County, Massachusetts (U.S.), located about 21 miles west-northwest of Boston along Route 2, west of Concord and about ten miles southwest of Lowell. The Town's population is 21,924 (2010 Census).

Prior to its settlement by farmers from Concord, the area that became present-day Acton was frequented by Nipmuck-related Native Americans who may have practiced some limited agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering. Many areas of Acton were good campsites, especially areas along Nashoba and Fort Pond Brooks as well as Nagog Pond. Artifacts from early hunting and fishing villages have been found in Acton, in the Pinehawk site in the south of Acton and in the area of Nagog Pond.

What is A Comprehensive Community Plan?

- a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality (MGL Ch 41 Sec 81D)
- a process that leads to a plan for action that is based on the Town's values and goals
- a set of priorities for addressing the full range of issues facing the Town

Nearly all of present day Acton's 12,990 acres is comprised of portions of four early land grants. The two largest were: Major Simon Willard's Grant (which became Iron Work Farm), and the New Grant or Concord Village. Next to these grants was the Praying Indian Township of Nashoba Plantation, which lay entirely outside present-day Acton.

The early colonial landscape included large areas of meadows. These prime grazing lands were the reason Concord sought to annex these additional lands in 1655. The earliest European settler was John Law, Concord's shepherd, who built his home in 1656 on School Street near Lawsbrook Road.

By 1730 there were at least two-dozen settlers scattered across the Town. In 1735 Acton was incorporated as a town with the same Open Town Meeting and Board of Selectmen that are still here today. A meetinghouse was built in the center of Town with roads coming from the outlying farms. Although Acton was primarily an agricultural community in its early days, residents were involved in a range of other economic activities, including sawmills, gristmills, the manufacture of barrels to store and ship



Town Center 1890

foodstuffs, a pencil factory, and even a woolen industry centered on the Faulkner Mills in South Acton; one of the first large-scale manufacturers of woolen cloth in this country. Remnants of that original mill still exist.

Only with the arrival of the railroad did the villages really begin to grow, especially West Acton Village. It wasn't until after the Civil War that the railroad finally went through East and North Acton. The rail beds remain today and are locations for the proposed Assabet River Rail Trail and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.

The 1890s brought a shift in population towards South and West Acton, which caused the precincts and school districts to be realigned. The North and East District Schools were combined

into the Center District. Although the districts were officially changed the residents still thought of the villages as East and North Acton. At the turn of the century Acton was still an agricultural community, with five villages and a population of 2,120. Apples were Acton’s main agricultural export being shipped not only to Boston but to Europe. Before modern refrigeration, space in the cellar of the Town Hall was auctioned off for storage. Apples were stored in the center of West Acton into the 1950s. Improvements were coming however; a water district was formed in 1912 for West and South Acton; the Center was added later. A Town fire department, starting in 1915 with West Acton, replaced the independent fire companies.

1950 marks the shift from apples to houses, with most of that development in the southern half of the Town. There were 3,500 people in Acton in 1950; by 1974 there would be 17,000. The orchards and open fields turned into subdivisions; although Acton still kept its agricultural ties, with apples being a major crop into the 1960s. The Town was then three villages; Acton Center, West Acton and South Acton.



South Acton Train Station



Horse and Buggy



Acton Center School



North Acton School



West Acton Center



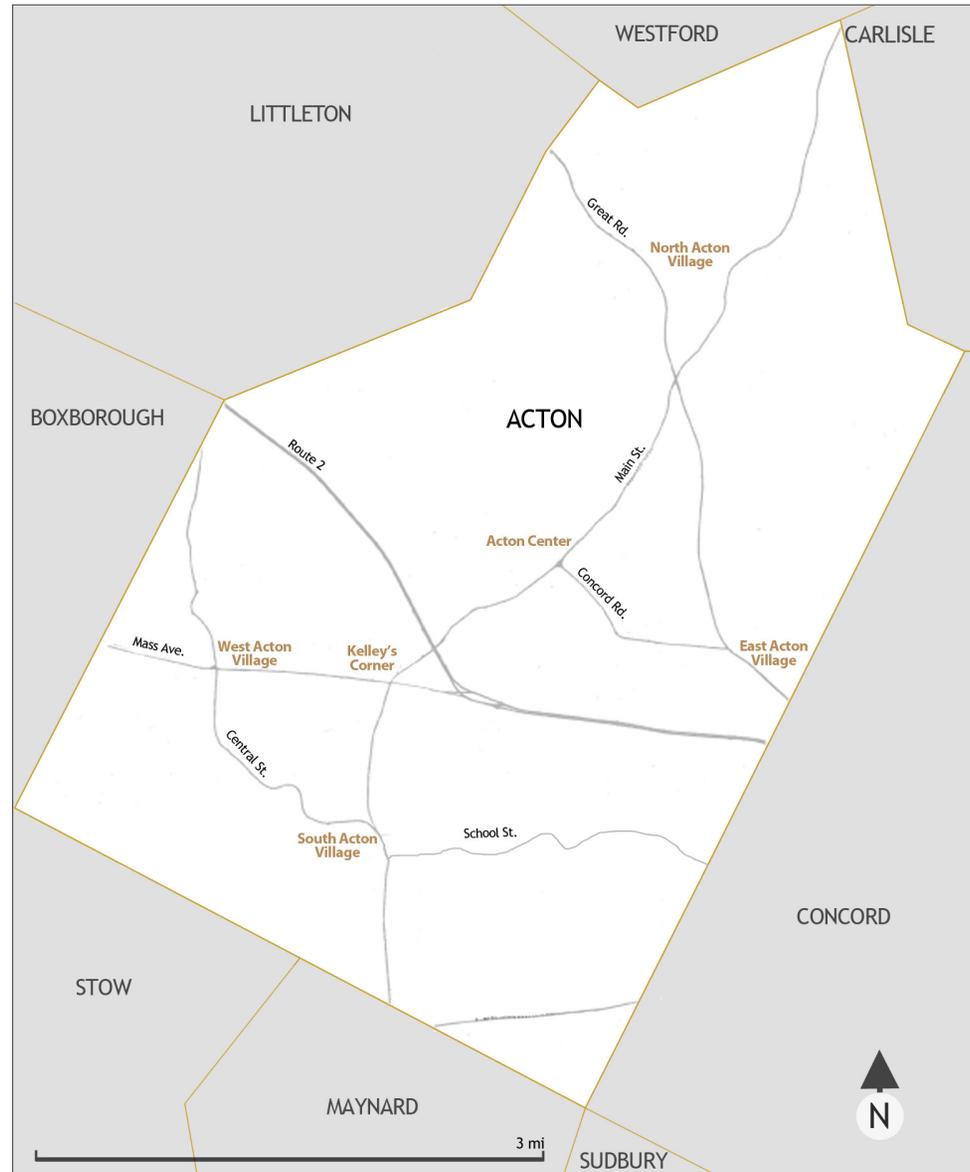
Acton Library

The Five Village Centers¹ and Kelley's Corner

While Acton Center has been the civic center of the Town since the revolution, the four other village centers earned their nomenclature from the names of their corresponding railroad station.

- **Acton Center** is the civic center of the Town and is the site of the Town Hall, the main public library, a children's playground, an obelisk monument commemorating Acton's role in "the Concord Fight" of the Revolutionary War, a fire station, a Congregational church, a 64-acre arbo-retum and conservation area, and a former post office. The modern post office and the police station are each located about one-half mile away in opposite directions along Main Street. Otherwise, Acton Center is generally a residential area.
- **West Acton** is an important commercial area of town, with shops and businesses centered along Route 111. It developed in response to the opportunities created by the Fitchburg Railroad in the 1840s. West Acton also has a fire station, a playground, a small public library, and two nearby elementary schools, and it is surrounded by extensive neighborhoods.

¹ Based on info from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acton_Massachusetts



- **South Acton**, also on the Fitchburg Railroad, used to be the most industrialized area of the Town of Acton. Already in the 18th century, this area held many mills and other small industrial workshops that used water power generated by Fort Pond Brook. Today South Acton has a few small businesses and shops and includes the Jones Faulkner Homestead (‘Faulkner House’), the oldest home still standing in Acton, Jones Tavern, Exchange Hall, a fire station, two playgrounds and ball fields, nearby conservation land, and many surrounding neighborhoods. The South Acton MBTA station is the only rail station on the Fitchburg line still active in Acton.
- **East Acton** was the site of several small 18th Century mills and an early iron forge located along Nashoba Brook. A small commercial area that grew up around the East Acton train station in the 19th century, also called Ellsworth. With the advent of the automobile, and the demise of this branch of the railroad, East Acton became a largely residential area with a sizeable commercial base that is dispersed along the Route 2A corridor.
- **North Acton** is the village located where Main Street (Rt. 27), Harris Street, and Quarry Road come together. Historically, the vil-

lage was associated with quarrying activity in the late 1800s, utilizing the rail line which ran along Rt. 27. Several historic homes are located along Main Street. There is a mixture of commercial and light industrial uses along with single family homes. The North Acton Recreation Area (NARA Park) is located nearby.

- **Kelley’s Corner** is the commercial area at the intersection of Main Street (Rt.27) and Massachusetts Avenue (Rt. 111). Commercial development, primarily retail and restaurant, extends east from this intersection to Rt.2 and along Main Street from Rt. 2 to Prospect Street. Development, which began in the 1950s, took advantage of the roadway access, central location in Acton, and drive-by traffic. The Charter Road school campus and a residential neighborhood are adjacent to the commercially zoned land. The area is characterized by several strip mall-type shopping developments with a significant amount of paved area dedicated to parking. A K-Mart store occupies a large parcel on Main Street south of the principal intersection. Several smaller buildings on separate parcels contain professional and bank offices and restaurant uses. A Sunoco filling station occupies a prominent corner of the intersection, a former muffler shop, now

converted to a restaurant, is on the opposite corner, and Acton Bowl-a-Drome is located to the south. Multifamily housing is also located on three parcels. The area has been served by sewers since 2002.

Infrastructure

Public infrastructure grew to accommodate the increasing population. A Water District was established in 1912 and a Town-wide Fire Department was established in 1913. In 2005 a new Public Safety Building was built that expanded space for the Police Department and provided for a Joint Dispatch area with the Fire Department. The Acton Water District is a community public water supply that delivers drinking water to the majority (about 90 percent) of the residents of the Town of Acton. Most homes and businesses in Acton (approximately 80%) use private on-site sewage systems (i.e. septic tanks). Higher density developments, such as condominiums and apartment buildings (approximately 10% of the Town) use private sewers that go to small-scale private treatment plants. In 2001, Acton completed its first public sewer system, which serves approximately 10% of the Town, primarily in South Acton. Approximately 45% of Acton households are served with natural gas.

Schools

“Schools” is among the top responses to the question: “Why did you move to Acton?” and is a critical component of the experience of living in Acton and of building a community. At the beginning of the century, each village in Acton had its own grade school, but until 1925, when the Towne School was built, Acton students were sent to Concord’s high school. In 1953, new schools were constructed to accommodate the growth in the student population. In 1954, Acton and Boxborough created a regional school district for grades 7-12, replacing the Towne School. The Merriam School was constructed in 1958. Other schools quickly followed.² In 1967 a building was constructed for the junior high. In 1973 a large addition was added to this building and it became the high school; the junior high moved to the 1954 high school building. Both the junior high and high school were enlarged and renovated in 2000-2005.

Residents tend to place a high value on education and are very proud that the high school, Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009.

² Douglas (1966), Gates (1968), and Conant (1971)

Acton has a unique method of assigning students to elementary schools, called “Open Enrollment.” In contrast to surrounding communities which assign elementary schools by neighborhood district, first-time incoming kindergarten parents in Acton participate in a lottery-based selection process where the parents choose the school by listing their preferences in ranked order.

This method of school choice has a significant impact on the nature of the community. Acton is less oriented around neighborhoods than towns that have neighborhood-based schools. While neighborhood ties are reportedly strong and depending on the neighborhood people identify strongly with geography, school choice also results in providing students and their families with opportunities for additional social connections that are independent of their neighborhood.

Previous Planning Efforts

The Town’s previous master plan was completed in 1991 and updated in 1998. The 1991 Master Plan addressed those issues that most concerned Acton’s residents at the time, mainly traffic, commercial growth management, environmental protection, and affordable housing. The Master Plan proposed strategies for managing com-

mercial development and guiding it into existing village centers and Kelley’s Corner, and for preserving open space by employing the strategy of cluster development.

The 1998 Update was based on the 1991 Master Plan; it did not find that the community values, goals and/or development trends and issues had changed significantly. Instead the 1998 Update refined the main ideas in the 1991 Master Plan. The 1998 Update identifies two underlying and complementary objectives, that of promoting and enhancing village centers as growth areas, and that of preserving open space. The main themes of the Update were as follows:

- Control residential growth
- Preserve Town character, particularly by strengthening the villages for both residential and business uses
- Encourage appropriate economic development to build the tax base and provide a greater variety of goods, services, and employment opportunities in Acton
- Protect the environment and cultural resources
- Calm traffic and encourage non-automobile transportation
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle connections



The recession and subsequent recovery in the early 90s undercut many of the assumptions made in the 1991 Plan. As a result growth assumptions had to be adjusted accordingly in the 1998 Update. The general direction was not altered, just the pace.

While overall, the 1998 Update was ambitious – it contained 12 goals, 65 objectives that articulated these goals more specifically, 126 strate-



gies to achieve the objectives, and 143 actions – an impressive number of these (approximately 70%)³ have been implemented. In several cases, implementation is ongoing.

Changes since the 1998 Update

In some ways this Acton 2020 Plan has a similar relationship to the Master Plan 1998 Update that the 1998 Update had to the 1991 Master Plan in that there have not been any significant changes in the Town’s core values.

Residents are still concerned with preserving open space and are very interested in enhancing the village centers. They may, however, be more concerned with environmental sustainability and the economy than they were in 1998. As a result, many of the 1998 Update recommendations are reiterated and refined in the 2020 Plan. The Plan also identifies and supports on-going efforts to continue to implement the previous plan’s goals and objectives.

³ Through discussion with the Planning Director and follow-up with the Natural Resources and Conservation Department, it was determined that 102 of the actions (70%) were addressed in some manner: 61 actions (42%) were fully implemented, 31 actions (21%) were partially implemented, and 7 actions (5%) were acted upon but not implemented by Town staff, Town boards/commissions, or Town Meeting.

What has changed since the 1998 Plan

- **Demographics, primarily in the form of:**
 - an increase in the elderly population.
 - an increase in the Asian population.
 - changes in the projected school enrollments which, in contrast to the period between 1991 and 1998 when they grew faster than forecasted growth (resulting in the need for a school expansion program), are instead expected to decline resulting in increased fiscal capacity.
- **Awareness with regard to planning issues, including environmental sustainability, relationship between planning and health and wellness, and smart growth principles.**
- **Market trends such as growing demand for smaller housing units in walkable neighborhoods.**
- **The public outreach conducted for the 2020 Plan was much more extensive so that it can be said that the 2020 Plan perhaps has broader understanding, support, and political will to implement the recommendations.**



ROADMAP FOR GUIDING GROWTH

- Background
- Planning for a Resilient Acton
- Implementation of the Roadmap
- Analysis of the Roadmap

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Roadmap for Guiding Growth

The 2020 Plan embodies a central concept or **Roadmap**, which was built on the foundation of the Goals and Objectives; these in turn were developed with the significant input of Acton citizens.

The **Roadmap** responds to people’s widely expressed desires and concerns over the past four years. Chief among these are:

- Protecting Acton’s character and preserving open space.
- Creating vibrant walkable centers where people can live, shop, eat, and gather together.
- Planning for a resilient and financially viable town.
- Creating a plan that is responsive to environmental concerns.

The **Roadmap** addresses the crucial issue of future development, which can be guided but not avoided. The main focus is to maximize open space and minimize developed land, not to limit population.

Main Components

The Roadmap has three main components:

- ▶ **Guide Growth to Kelley’s Corner and Key Village Centers** (such as West and South Acton), where smaller units will fit the growing



market for empty-nesters and provide more options for young people. This type of development strives to be both fiscally and environmentally sustainable as described below. Place-specific development guidelines and improved design review will help preserve village character and ensure that new development meets Town needs and helps create successful places.

Guiding growth to village centers in smaller units helps to reinforce the trend in a reduction in future school enrollments, provides more housing options for empty-nesters who want to continue to live in Acton, and makes it feasible to create livelier walkable places for the whole community to gather.

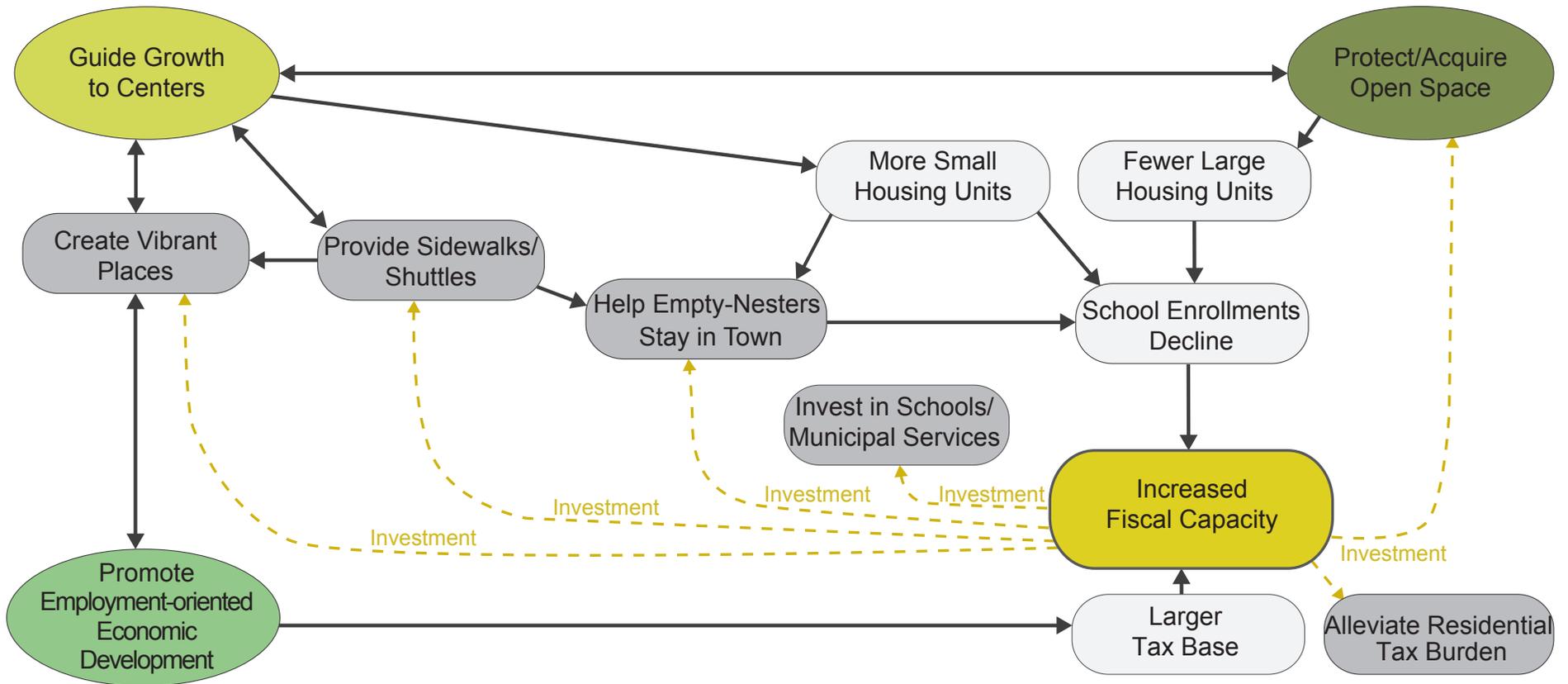
- ▶ **Protect, Acquire, and Improve Open Space** for conservation, farming, and recreation, us-

ing a combination of acquisition and zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to guide development away from open land and to the key centers. This will help protect Town character and the environment, as well as provide additional opportunities for recreation. These efforts will be supplemented by continuing to purchase open space with CPA funds.

- ▶ **Actively Promote Employment-Oriented Economic Development**, which will increase the tax base and, along with the mixed use development in the centers, will produce more tax revenue than the cost of services for the new development. Additionally, there will be local employment opportunities and reduced long distance commuting for some residents.



Relationships among Roadmap Components (colored ovals), Other Strategies (darker gray bubbles), and Fiscal Capacity (gold bubble)



Relationship of Plan Components

The diagram on the preceding page shows how these three key components of the Roadmap interact to further the Plan’s goals and improve fiscal capacity.

- Guiding Growth to Centers and protecting Open Space are linked by the TDR mechanism.
- Guiding growth to Kelley’s Corner and other centers results in development of more small housing units, and the protection of large developable parcels reduces the number of new large housing units.
- Together with more sidewalks and public transportation, Guiding Growth results in vibrant places where people want to live, shop, and gather; this helps keep empty-nesters in town and provides more opportunities for all residents to shop, dine, and socialize.
- Demographic trends predict lower school enrollments, and shifting the new housing to smaller units will strengthen this trend.
- Reduced school enrollments will provide more fiscal capacity, which can be used for improving the schools, investing in improvements

throughout Acton that further the Roadmap strategies, and/or reducing the tax burden on residential property.

- Promoting Employment-Oriented Economic Development will increase the tax base, further increase fiscal capacity, and provide some residents with the opportunity of reduced commuting time.

Future Land Use under the Roadmap

The map on the next page illustrates the idea of guiding growth.

- Areas of developable open land (green) tend to be situated outside the already developed neighborhoods.
- Some future development would be guided away from the green areas to Kelley’s Corner and some villages (gold); Transfer of Development Rights would provide incentives for property owners to participate.
- The centers would include potential mixed-use development (purple) as appropriate, with strict design review based on detailed studies of their capabilities to support these uses.
- Economic development would be targeted to

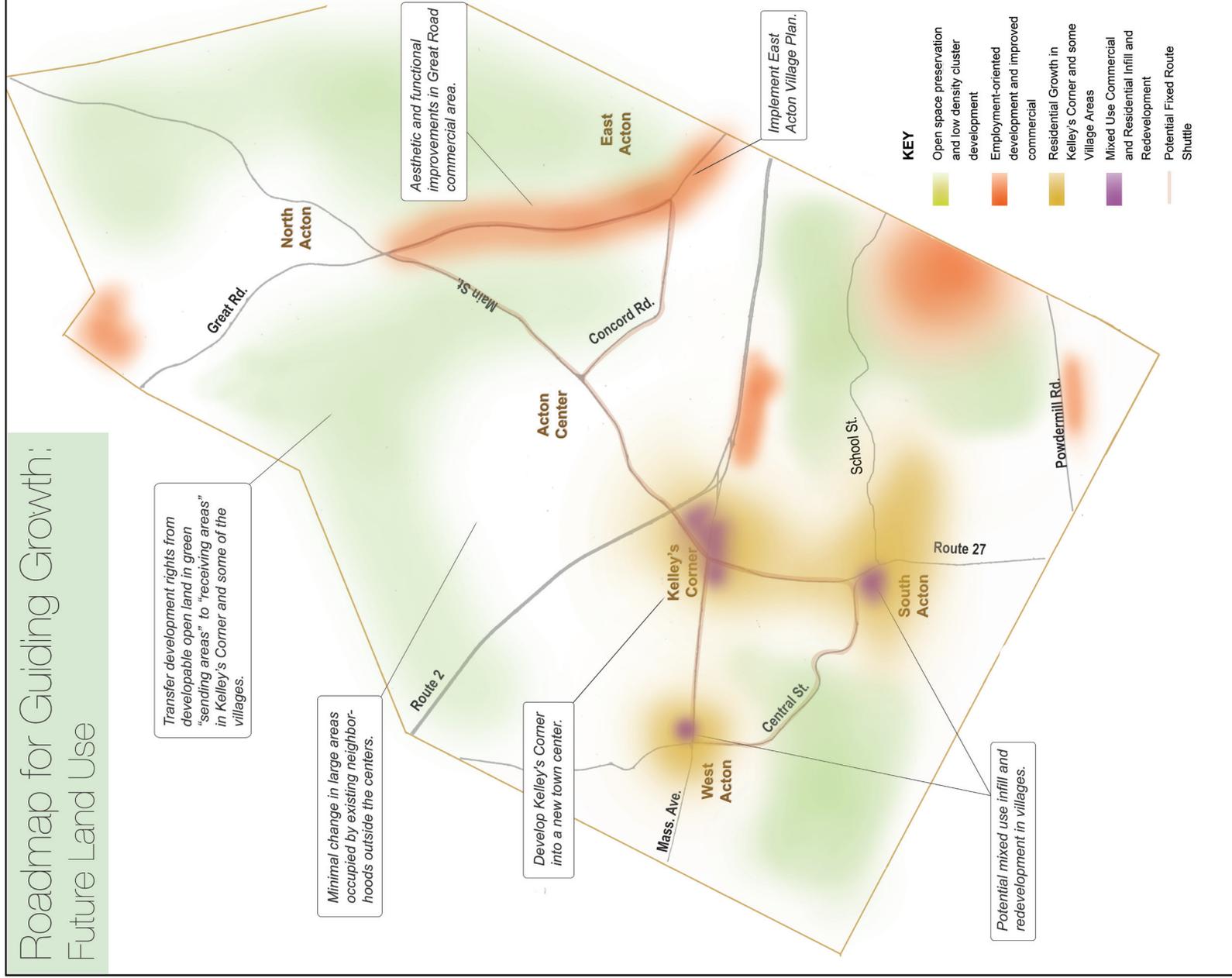
appropriate areas (red). These will be primarily small shops and restaurants.

The map is illustrative only! Actual areas will be delineated after detailed study in the implementation phase.

Does the Roadmap promote growth?

- Growth is the result of the residential and commercial market and property owners’ plans. The Acton 2020 Plan cannot prevent growth but it can guide it.
- Growth can be measured many ways: amount and type of land developed, number of square feet constructed, pressure on the schools, traffic, etc. Most of these have more impact on Acton’s character and quality of life than the Town’s population.
- The Roadmap uses zoning incentives to make TDR effective and the desired type of new development to happen in the desired places. It uses development controls tailored to each location to minimize visual impacts, manage traffic, and create vibrant places where people want to be, for example turning Kelley’s Corner into a new Town Center.
- The result will not be less growth but rather more open space, opportunities for empty nesters to stay in town, and more harmonious and vibrant walkable centers that are more environmentally sustainable than the growth that would occur without the Roadmap.
- The Roadmap also seeks to promote more economic development in appropriate locations.

Roadmap for Guiding Growth: Future Land Use



All areas shown are illustrative only and will be delineated as Action Steps in the Implementation Program.

Background

In June 2011 a public workshop considered three alternatives for managing growth. One, Disperse Growth, was a continuation of current practices. A second, Limit Growth, emphasized aggressive acquisition of open space to reduce residential development and proactively encouraging employment-oriented economic development in limited commercial areas. The third, Concentrate Growth, emphasized directing growth to key centers such as Kelley's Corner and some of the villages. The outcome of the workshop was a strong majority in favor of concentrating growth in mixed use centers but also stepping up the acquisition of open space and the promotion of economic development. These aspects form the **Roadmap for Guiding Growth**.

The **Roadmap** uses zoning incentives to attract growth to the centers, particularly Transfer of Development Rights, a technique that has been successfully used nationwide that allows a developer (or the Town) to acquire rights from owners of property that should remain open and using those rights in a targeted center, with an incentive in the form of additional development units or density.



Mixed use village center (Lexington)



Village Green (South Hadley aerial photograph)



Village Green buildings located at the street edge and parking behind. Its site design includes public places for informal gathering. (South Hadley)

Where the Roadmap Leads

- Kelley's Corner becomes a busy, walkable Town center.
- Villages become denser with redevelopment of non-residential parcels; stronger design review preserves and enhances existing character.
- School enrollments decline gradually, and school costs rise more slowly as the population ages and the housing mix in the new development provides smaller units for empty-nesters and others.
- The tax base is expanded by economic development.
- Home values (adjusted for inflation) outside the centers will be maintained; and those in the villages may increase.
- Many large parcels of open land will be protected through acquisition and transfer of development rights to the centers; on those that do develop, part of the parcel can be protected through cluster zoning.
- By concentrating growth, it becomes feasible to serve more of Acton's population by public transportation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, saving money for residents, and providing access for Actonians who can't drive or don't wish to be automobile-dependent. It also gives residents the opportunity for walking, which benefits fitness goals and increases sense of connection to others.

Planning for a Resilient Acton

While financial and environmental conditions can't be predicted with certainty, it is prudent to act now to prepare for the Town's future. The Acton 2020 Plan is an opportunity to do this.

Financial Resilience

Acton is currently financially sound with a top bond rating and funds in reserve, but the Town budget is under pressure and costs are expected to rise even if the level of services remains constant, as healthcare costs and other post-employment benefits increase. In order to address this, some combination of higher taxes, reduced costs or services, and a larger property tax base will be needed.

Increasing the property tax base will require growth, but people are concerned that too much development will negatively affect the Town's character as well as put undue pressure on existing services.

One answer is to **promote economic development in appropriate locations, and to encourage fiscally beneficial residential development.**

This can be done by shifting from large lot subdivisions that increase school enrollments and costs, to compact development with smaller units that have been shown to have fewer school age children and therefore generate more tax revenue than costs.

At the household level, rising energy costs strain family budgets, and the cost of living overall sometimes makes it hard for some seniors to remain in Town. Smaller housing units in compact walkable centers cost less to buy or rent and save on both transportation and heating costs.

Additionally, the Plan encourages the exploration of alternative and creative ways of funding capital and operating costs that invite private sector participation.

Environmental Resilience

Acton is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and protecting its water resources. These efforts have some costs, but the investments will be repaid in lower energy costs and avoiding the need to later remedy impacts to the Town's drinking water.

Shifting residential growth from large lot subdivisions to compact development in the centers saves energy owing to reduced auto dependency, and it enables wastewater to be handled better via sewers or advanced package treatment plants, while leaving more open space undeveloped. Dealing with existing and anticipated stormwater issues in the centers can be planned for now, instead of waiting for worsening conditions.

Future Contingencies:

A comprehensive plan should be resilient – it should continue to be a guide even if the unpredictable happens. The “wild cards” that Acton might have to face include:

- Prolonged economic downturn combined with escalating healthcare costs and other post-employment benefits.
- Weather events, such as more frequent storms and significant climate change.
- School enrollments that don't decline as expected.
- Revival of the housing market leading to a major residential subdivision proposed for a large tract of land.

The 2020 Plan has resilience in the face of such unexpected trends and events as well as the possibility of more or less development than anticipated, tighter budgets, or unforeseen infrastructure needs.

By guiding growth to the centers and protecting open space through transfer of development rights, the development of a large tract of land with consequent increases in school and other costs, can potentially be channeled into compact mixed use development with smaller units that generate less school cost and pay more taxes than their cost to service.

By emphasizing economic development, the most promising source of added tax revenue, Acton can do better than similar towns that don't invest in attracting commercial growth, even in a prolonged downturn.

By calling for appropriate guidelines and more rigorous review of development in the centers, particularly Kelley's Corner where sewers are already in place, the Town's water supply can be better protected from wastewater impacts, with improvements largely funded by new development. A key recommendation is a study of each center to develop place-specific design guidelines and evaluate potential impacts due to traffic and wastewater disposal.

Implementing the Roadmap

Residential

- Limit and guide growth geographically through infill and redevelopment in and around existing centers (West Acton, South Acton and Kelley's Corner).
- Utilize cluster zoning for most residential development outside the centers.

Commercial

- Redevelop Kelley's Corner (KC) and village commercial areas into mixed use centers that improve KC and respect the existing village character.
- Promote employment-oriented development in areas that don't directly impact neighborhoods: Great Road, Nagog Park, Powdermill Road, W.R Grace property, and large commercial parcels on Rt. 2.
- Improve existing commercial areas with retail and restaurants.

Protection of Village Character and Historic Resources

- Prepare strong design guidelines for Kelley's Corner and villages to which growth is guided, with incentives dependent on preserving character and compatibility with historic resources.



- Use strong design review to protect historic character and natural resources.

Open Space Preservation

- Provide incentives for transfer of development away from open land to desired growth centers (thus preserving the entire open parcel) and cluster zoning for the development that does occur outside the centers (thus preserving at least half of the parcel).
- Use tax income generated from economic development to accelerate purchases of open space.
- Develop opportunities for recreation near village centers and small vest pocket parks and tot lots in villages.

Transportation

- Concentrate transportation investments such as sidewalks and traffic calming in and around Kelley's Corner and the villages.
- Provide bicycle accommodation through both off-road paths and on-road improvements (e.g., bike lanes and wider shared lanes).
- Build MinuteVan shuttle into a more comprehensive system providing access between villages, Kelley's Corner, commercial areas, and the MBTA commuter rail.

Water Resources Management and Protection

- Prioritize Kelley's Corner development, which has sewer service.
- Consider extension of sewer and/or advanced package wastewater treatment in West Acton Village to serve redevelopment of the commercial area on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue and in other commercial areas.
- Actively manage stormwater in new development.

Fiscal Viability

- Continue to find ways to control costs, including regional options and cooperation with other towns.

Analysis of the Roadmap

Projections

- Analysis of the **Roadmap** rests on some assumptions about how much growth will occur over the next 20 years. Based on projections by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, this was expected to total approximately 1,000 additional housing units. The **Roadmap** includes the use of incentives to induce property owners to use the proposed Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) option and developers to meet stringent guidelines; these incentives would raise the total to approximately 1200 units, increasing Acton's total housing stock about 15 percent to 9,387 units in 2030. Population would increase approximately 14 percent to 25,000 people. (See charts on page 21.)
- The current economic downturn will delay the start of new development, but this simply pushes back the date when the projected totals will be reached. (In any case, growth would continue beyond the horizon of the Plan.)
- Commercial development is more difficult to project; projections are based on the assumptions that the real estate markets will revive, and that Acton will actively work to attract up to 1.5 million square feet of development.

Fiscal Impacts

- Implementing the **Roadmap** would result in 260 fewer school children than at present. This is the result of demographic shifts Town-wide and the lower school enrollments that result from smaller housing units, encouraged by the Plan, compared with large single family homes. The relationship between number of bedrooms and the number of school children is based on national trends and has been confirmed locally, including the enrollments generated by the Acton Avalon development.*
- The result is that total revenues from all residential property in Acton will exceed total costs (including schools) by \$5.6 million. If the target for commercial development is reached, this would increase net revenues by another \$1.5 million. The net benefit in the last year of the projections would thus be \$7.1 million, minus infrastructure cost.
- The investment needed to fully implement the Plan would depend on whether wastewater treatment costs are borne by the Town or by developers. Some additional staff would also be needed. Assuming \$1.3 million in annual infrastructure cost, plus a wastewater contingency of \$1 million in annual bond costs, the Plan with all components (see page 22) would be fiscally positive.

Open Space

- The amount of land left for development at the end of the projection period depends on how much open space is protected. The Roadmap is estimated to protect 880 acres through TDR, cluster zoning, and some purchase. This would increase Acton's protected open space from 1,837 acres to 2,717 acres (see chart on p. 22.)

Water

- The Acton Water District currently supplies approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY). The Roadmap for Guiding Growth would raise this amount to 684 MGY, which is less than the state permitted withdrawal limit of 708.1 MGY.

Schools

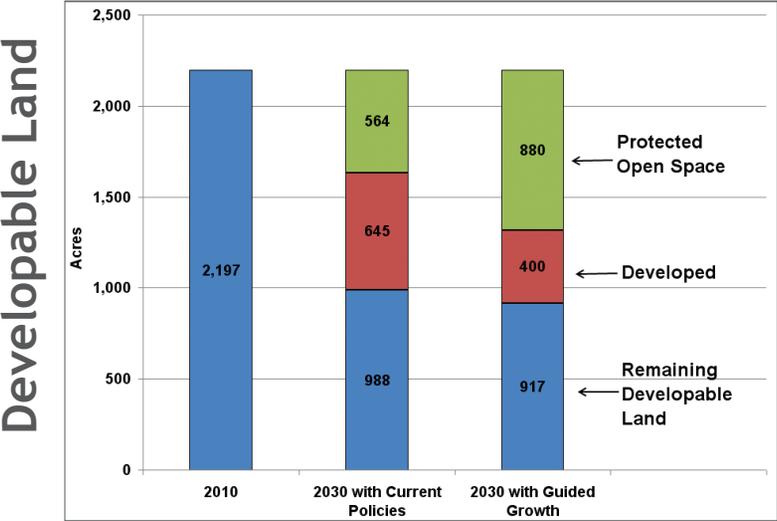
- Enrollments are expected to decline due to a projected average decrease in family size. The Plan reinforces this trend by encouraging the development of smaller housing units (see chart on page 22). This will result in a reduction in class size which has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on education, especially in the younger grades.

* The assumptions about declining school enrollments are based on demographic trends and are more conservative than the School Department's enrollment projections (which extend only to 2023).

Land Use and Buildout

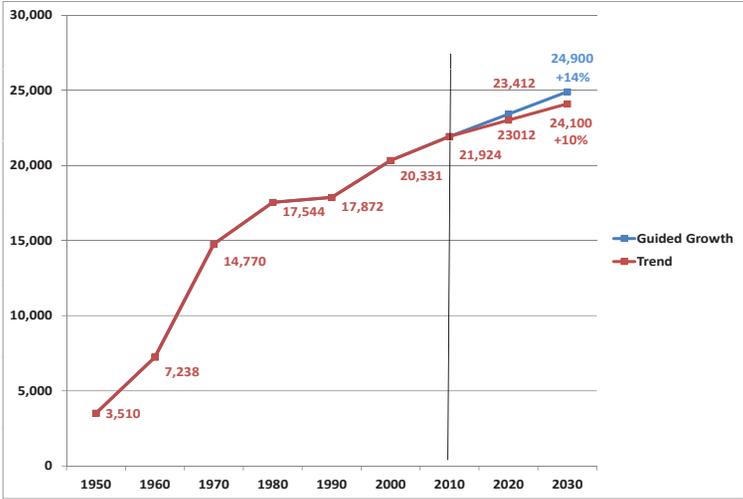
- By concentrating residential growth in the centers, the total land consumed for all types of development would total 400 acres. Developable land would be further reduced by 880 acres of open space. Subtracting the 1,280 acres from the roughly 2,200 acres of developable land that remained in 2010, would leave approximately 900 acres of developable land in 2030. Therefore, build out would occur well beyond 2030.
- The following charts illustrate the different impact of the Roadmap as compared to continuing with current policies as measured by a variety of growth factors (e.g. land developed, population, housing, school children, and open space).

If current policies are continued, more than half of the Town’s current developable land would be developed or added to the amount of protected open space; implementing the **Roadmap** would result in a higher percentage of developable land set aside as open space than under current policies.



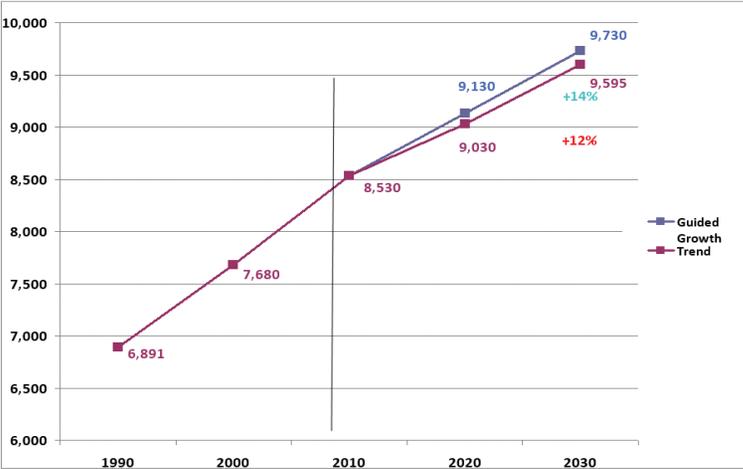
Acton grew rapidly in nearly every decade since 1950, but the rate of growth is projected to decrease, even after the current economic downturn ends. Implementing the **Roadmap** would result in slightly higher growth to provide an incentive to use TDR.

Population



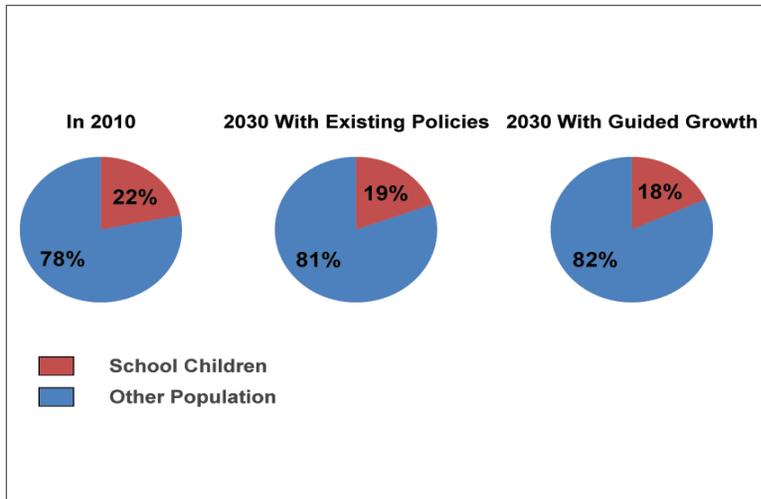
The growth of housing parallels population growth, except that demographic changes will result in fewer persons per household, and therefore more housing units in relation to the population.

Housing Growth



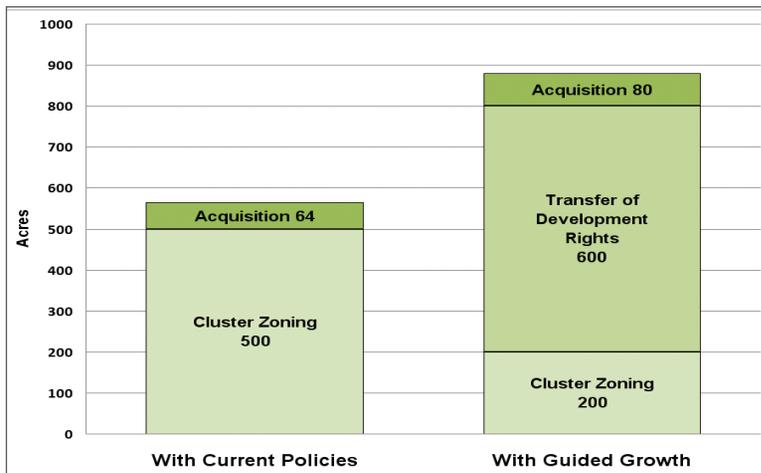
School-age Children

The number of bedrooms in the smaller housing units expected to result from implementing the **Roadmap** will result in a smaller ratio of school children to total population.



In addition to future open space purchase and open space set aside in cluster subdivisions, the use of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is expected to result in protecting substantially more open space.

Open Space



Summary of Roadmap Analysis

	2030 with Current Policies	2030 with Guided Growth
Housing Units Added and Percent Increase from 2010	1,000 (10%)	1,200 (12%)
In Centers	Few	800
In Outlying Areas	Nearly 1,000	400
Average number of bedrooms in new housing	3.04	2.55
Change in Population and Percent Increase from 2010	Approx. 2,200 (10%)	Approx 3,000 (14%)
Change in Number of School Age Children	Decrease of 112	Decrease of 260
Acres of Residential Land Developed	645	400
Acres of Developable Land Remaining and Percent of Currently Developable	988 (45%)	917 (42%)
Added Acres of Protected Open Space and Percent of Currently Protected	564 (31%)	880 (48%)
Added Acres of Commercial Development	85	135
Water Demand in million gallons per year (MGY) and Relationship to Current Permitted Withdrawal of 708.1 MGY	675 MGY (33 under)	684 MGY (24 under)
Increase in Fiscal Capacity by 2030*		
From Reduced School Enrollments	\$4.5 M	\$5.6 M
From Added Commercial Development	\$1.0 M	\$1.5 M
Subtotal	\$5.5 M	\$7.1 M
Major expenditures in 2030	(\$0.5 M)	(\$1.3 - \$2.3 M)
Net Increase in Fiscal Capacity	\$5.0 M	\$4.8 - \$5.8 M

* Potential annual costs may include \$1 million for bond payments for sewer or wastewater treatment infrastructure, which are uncertain and may be off-budget. See page 48 for list of Acton 2020 major expenditures. These are estimates that illustrate the relative costs and changes in fiscal capacity of current policies when compared to the **Roadmap**.

Important Points about the Roadmap

- School enrollments are expected to decline simply because of demographic trends. This can be an opportunity to make Acton’s schools even better than they are now by reducing class sizes.
- Reducing the ratio of school children to overall population will not be drastic, but the effect at the margin will be to increase fiscal capacity.
- The analysis of fiscal capacity is conservative, assuming less reduction in school enrollments than the School Department projections indicate. The improvement in fiscal capacity is due to a number of factors, particularly shifting future residential development to a small size on average, so that the school costs associated with the new housing is, on average, less than it will pay in property taxes. Added to this is the property taxes paid by new economic development, which costs less to service than it pays.
- Providing incentives to develop smaller housing units in key centers will result in a wider range of housing choices. Turnover in the larger homes and some additional building of such homes means that there will always be an ample supply of 3-4 bedroom single family homes. The Roadmap will result in the addition of small units for empty-nesters, town staff, and young adults who want to live in walkable neighborhoods.
- The Plan’s major investments – in transportation, infrastructure to support mixed use development in the centers, community facilities, open space purchase, etc. – are paid for out of increased fiscal capacity as it develops over the next 20 years.
- These investments are phased (see page 46) so that major expenditures occur only as fiscal capacity increases. If this occurs more slowly than projected (or in the worst case not at all), the Town will not need to spend beyond its means.
- Much of the growth in the centers will be infill and redevelopment of non-residential property. The amount and location will be determined by detailed study of each center, including how the new development will look, how it will be served by parking and utilities, and how traffic will be managed. Strong development review will protect existing character of the centers and adjacent neighborhoods.
- Zoning changes to implement the Roadmap (including Transfer of Development Rights) will be determined based on a Key Centers Plan and place-specific studies.
- The “village focus” of the 1991 Master Plan and 1998 Update did not succeed in changing development patterns, although the previous plan for Kelley’s Corner came very close to the necessary 2/3 vote of Town Meeting. Now, the Roadmap’s proposed TDR mechanism has stronger incentives for property owners to use it, demographic trends are being reflected in a residential market for quality smaller housing units in vibrant walkable centers, and people’s understanding of the benefits of this kind of development (for the environment, personal health, and quality of life) has created the political will to make it happen.
- The Roadmap uses Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to protect open space and help create vibrant centers. This technique has been used successfully across the United States in communities both smaller and larger than Acton. It has a number of features that can be designed to fit Acton’s specific needs. This will be done in the implementation phase.



Today. Tomorrow. Together.

PLAN FOUNDATIONS

- Guiding Principles
- Goals and Objectives
- Outreach - Acton Voices Phase I
- Outreach - Acton Voices Phase II
- Key Opportunities and Challenges
- Did You Know?

Guiding Principles

The Plan was developed on a strong foundation of extensive public input that resulted in a vision, set of goals and underlying themes, and on the results of research regarding existing conditions and future trends.

The following “guiding principles” are intended to guide future decision-making and form the foundation upon which the implementation plan was built:

- ▶ Vision statement
- ▶ Key underlying themes
- ▶ Planning goals

A Vision for Acton (Phase I)

- Preserving the rural and historic characteristics
- A sustainable future
- Excellent schools
- Recreational opportunities
- Lively, safe neighborhoods
- Attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas
- Sidewalks and bike paths
- A Town shuttle
- Open communication and accessible information
- Opportunities for the community to gather
- Vibrant village centers
- Kelley’s Corner as walkable Town center
- Welcoming all its residents

Vision Statement

The following vision statement describes a desired future as articulated by the hundreds of Acton residents who participated in this planning process.

Let us plan so that in the future Acton has retained its uniqueness by preserving its rural and historic characteristics – with ample open fields and meadows, tree-lined roads with meandering sidewalks, ponds, farms, wooded areas, stone walls, and beautiful renovated historic buildings. Imagine a future Acton where growth is managed and developed in keeping with the Town’s character. A town that proactively strives for a sustainable future and where new residents continue to be attracted to: the excellent schools; as well as to a variety of recreational opportunities; welcoming, safe and lively neighborhoods; and attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas. In addition to sidewalks and bike paths, a town shuttle connects people and places, providing alternatives to automobile travel. Residents are also connected by way of open communication and accessible information, and there are numerous opportunities for the community to gather.

In the future, Acton will have several vibrant village centers – each distinct in its character; and walkable for enjoyable and unique window shopping with locally-owned shops; stores to run to for daily errands and a variety of places to eat; and where you can run into people you know. Envision our ethnic communities enlivening our villages with cultural celebrations, music, and food from their countries of origin. The villages are “quaint but not cute;” they are authentically Acton.

Kelley’s Corner will become a walkable town center. It is vibrant with a wide range of shops and restaurants. Parking, sidewalks, benches, street lighting and signage are all oriented to the pedestrian. Redevelopment is guided by design guidelines and review so that all buildings are lovely and in keeping with Acton’s character.

Acton will continue to welcome all its residents – of all ages, socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds – by providing a variety of housing choices and support services; communicating in multiple languages. Acton will increasingly invite all to contribute to Acton’s civic and social life by creating opportunities for inter-generational experiences and cultural celebrations to be shared and enjoyed by all.

Goals and Objectives

Serving Acton's Goals

The Acton 2020 Plan is based on seven major goals that were developed through listening to nearly 2000 residents. Care has been taken to weave all of them together in a well thought out Implementation Plan. Many of the recommended action steps serve multiple goals. For example, vital centers like the future Kelley's Corner permit more sustainable transportation to be effective, they provide the kinds of gathering places Actonians have asked for, they serve the goal of diversity and inclusion by increasing the stock of less expensive housing, and as analysis of the plan concept shows, they promote fiscal stability.

GOAL 1: Preserve and Enhance Town Character

- Objective 1.1: Strengthen planning tools to manage growth pro-actively.
- Objective 1.2: Preserve and enhance key centers.
- Objective 1.3: Preserve rural characteristics and open space.
- Objective 1.4: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes.
- Objective 1.5: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.

GOAL 2: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

- Objective 2.1: Protect the quality and quantity of Acton's water.
- Objective 2.2: Reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins.
- Objective 2.3: Reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.
- Objective 2.4: Move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.

GOAL 3: Improve Connections

- Objective 3.1: Make walking and biking easier and safer.
- Objective 3.2: Improve transportation around Town.
- Objective 3.3: Promote communication among Town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.
- Objective 3.4: Support and strengthen neighborhoods.



GOAL 4:

Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation

- Objective 4.1: Create new gathering spaces and make better use of existing ones.
- Objective 4.2: Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands.
- Objective 4.3: Support additional cultural activities.

GOAL 5:

Support Inclusion and Diversity

- Objective 5.1: Support residents of all ages.
- Objective 5.2: Support households of all income levels.
- Objective 5.3: Embrace cultural diversity.
- Objective 5.4: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community.

GOAL 6:

Preserve and Enhance Town-Owned Assets & Services

- Objective 6.1: Protect Town-owned open space.
- Objective 6.2: Support excellence in schools.
- Objective 6.3: Manage the Town’s facilities efficiently.
- Objective 6.4: Provide high quality services that are responsive to community needs.
- Objective 6.5: Provide excellent public health and safety services.

GOAL 7:

Maintain and Improve the Financial Well-Being of the Town

- Objective 7.1: Promote fiscal responsibility.
- Objective 7.2: Promote economic development that supports other Acton 2020 planning goals.
- Objective 7.3: Improve existing commercial areas.
- Objective 7.4: Support the financial ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime.

Underlying Themes:

An increased 'sense of community'

- **Community Gathering:** desire for indoor and outdoor places and events to meet and interact casually, spontaneously as well as in a planned, more formal fashion.
- **Town Character:** desire to preserve and enhance features – physical and other – including a commitment to excellence in education, rural and historic characteristics, including the preservation of open space and the small town feeling, which make Acton unique and contribute to its sense of community.
- **Connectivity:** desire for walking, biking, public transportation; traffic calming and improvements; increased opportunities for social networks and connections.

The 'future resilience' of the Town

- **Environmental Sustainability:** concern regarding our ability to ensure the future health and well-being of our environment.
- **Social and Economic Diversity:** concern regarding ability to accommodate a range of socio-economic levels as well as the ability to age in place.
- **Financial Viability:** concern regarding the ability of the Town to protect its assets and maintain a viable balance between taxes and services provided.

What Makes Acton Unique?

One of the objectives of a Comprehensive Community Plan is to identify those features that make a community special and are treasured by its residents; and to protect the particular "sense of place" that makes a community unique and distinct from other communities. It is part of the role of a Comprehensive Community Plan to define these themes and identify measures and means by which to preserve and enhance them. These need to be taken into account when determining how to manage growth and mitigate related impacts.

Residents were asked several times and in a variety of ways to identify the features that make Acton unique. This is some of what they said:

- *"excellent schools, community commitment to education"*
- *"small town, close to Boston"*
- *"Not Your Average Wonderbread Town"*
- *"semi-rural/town and country suburb"*
- *"peaceful, quiet, family-oriented, friendly, safe, socially aware, livable"*
- *"location, access"*
- *"seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, picturesque, old barns"*
- *"good value"*
- *"sense of community, small town feeling, run into people you know"*
- *"history and historic New England architecture"*
- *"train"*
- *"degree of volunteerism"*
- *"village centers"*
- *"open space and recreation"*
- *"culturally diverse, accepting, welcoming"*
- *"good balance between nature and development"*
- *"high achieving, driven, ambitious"*
- *"community events"*
- *"charm, atmosphere"*
- *"its bucolic beginnings"*
- *"a great safe place to raise a family"*
- *"wonderful woodland trails"*
- *"the presence of the past"*

Outreach - Acton Voices

Outreach Highlights: Acton Voices from Phase I¹

Phase I of the Plan involved intensive and extensive outreach to a wide range of residents, business owners and town officials. The intention was to understand what Actonians most appreciated about their Town and to identify what they perceive as the most important future challenges. The Comprehensive Community Plan addresses these issues in the proposed **Roadmap** and Implementation Plan.

▶ Most important assets

- Schools
- Open space, conservation land, natural features
- Historic buildings/landscapes
- Town character (including rural and historic characteristics)

Also: sense of community, easy access/location, commuter rail, small town feel

▶ Priority challenges

- Need to control growth and development
- Need to plan for sustainability
- High cost of living (incl. taxes)
- Lack of transportation options (incl. walking/biking)
- Traffic

Also: lack of adequate opportunities for casual social interaction, Town government issues, erosion of Town character

¹ See Volume II (Phase 1) for a detailed documentation of public input.

▶ If you could do one thing to make Acton a better place what would it be²?

- Make pedestrian and bike-friendly
- Develop a sustainability plan
- Expand the commercial tax base
- Make traffic improvements
- Control development
- Protect and acquire open space
- Provide public transportation

▶ If you could do one thing to make Acton a better place for teens what would it be³?

- Movie theater
- Sidewalks

Also: a club for older kids, another park, plan for sustainability, provide public transportation, more restaurants, swimming pool, amusement park

² From Visioning Workshop 1 (March 29, 2008)

³ From high school survey

▶ What are your least favorite things about Acton that you feel are important to change⁴?

- Traffic
- Lack of walkability
- No real Town center
- Affordability (including housing)
- Lack of adequate site review, subdivision and design review
- Kelley’s Corner
- Biking and walking not safe
- Lack of growth management
- Poorly designed commercial areas
- Improvements needed at train station
- Lack of variety in places to go

⁴ From Visioning Workshop 1 (March 29, 2008)



Outreach Highlights: Acton Voices from Phase II⁵

Phase II continued the extensive outreach to Acton residents, business owners, and Town officials. Acton 2020 provided multiple opportunities for public input and focused on specific questions; top responses to key questions are listed below.

▶ If you could do one thing to address economic development issues in Acton what would it be⁶?

- Space for solo-preneurs
- Village infill development
- Create a land development corporation
- Kelley's Corner

▶ If you could do one thing to address housing issues in Acton what would it be⁷?

- Mixed use pedestrian village
- Sewers to villages
- Increase density
- Lower property tax
- Mandatory design review

▶ If you could do one thing to address transportation issues in Acton what would it be⁸?

- More sidewalks
- Fixed route bus

- Finish Bruce Freeman Trail
- Kelley's Corner redesign
- Create bike lanes and paths

▶ Which scenario do you prefer to help guide growth and development in the future⁹?

The large majority of participants preferred the scenario that guided growth to the villages, developed Kelley's Corner into a Town center, and preserved open space. What people seemed to appreciate most about this alternative:

- Villages with places to go and opportunities to gather and mingle, including opportunities for more theater and music
- Energy savings due to walkability
- Protection of open space in outer areas
- Efficient use of infrastructure

Also wanted to focus on: employment oriented development, limiting growth to protect rural characteristics, preservation of historic character and sidewalk/bikeway and public transportation improvement, among other things.

▶ Which center should we focus on first: Kelley's Corner or West Acton or other¹⁰?

Most participants felt that the Town should focus on Kelly's Corner first; some felt that West Acton has more potential and should receive attention first.

▶ How can the Town of Acton and the residents of Acton start preparing now for what might happen if oil and other fossil fuel products become much more scarce and expensive over the next 20 years?

Participants offered a range of recommendations including exploring alternative sources of energy, tracking the carbon footprint and planning for local capacity in terms of energy, water, food, etc. Most comments made connections between land use, planning and sustainability by focusing on mixed-use development, sidewalks, local shopping options walkable from neighborhoods, improvements to biking, clustering housing, and supporting employment oriented businesses.

5 See Volume II (Phase II) for a detailed documentation of public input.

6 From "Burning Issues" public workshop, March 3, 2011

7 From "Burning Issues" public workshop, March 12, 2011

8 From "Burning Issues" public workshop, March 9, 2011

9 From "Choose Your Own Acton" public workshop, June 23, 2011

10 From "How Do We Get There?" public meeting, Nov.9, 2011



Key Opportunities and Challenges

Phase II of the Plan began with extensive re-research on all aspects of the Town, from natural resources to services and facilities; highlights of this research is presented in the next-to-last section of Volume I, and the full inventory report is in Volume II.

From this research several key opportunities and challenges stand out. (More detail is provided in those sections of this report.)

External

External forces pose the challenges of a slow economy, rising gas prices, and climate change, so it will take longer to realize desired commercial development, and the Plan should aim at enabling less driving and reducing Acton’s carbon footprint.

At the same time, there are opportunities in changing public attitudes about the need for sustainability and the desire for alternatives to driving. Additionally, there has been a recent shift

in the demand in residential markets from large, single-family houses to smaller units in walkable neighborhoods that are fiscally beneficial.

Internal

Slower growth during the economic downturn is a challenge, because growth in commercial uses is needed to increase the tax base for fiscal stability. However, the downturn is also an opportunity to prepare for the future and to plan for additional residential and commercial uses, their desired type and location.



Future school enrollments are projected to gradually decline as demographics change.

Acton’s population will include more seniors, and school enrollments will gradually decline, improving fiscal capacity.



Stormwater management will be an ongoing concern.

Acton’s natural resources, especially water, are currently in good condition for the most part, but keeping them that way will require continued vigilance: managing wastewater and stormwater, and monitoring groundwater quantity and quality.



Acton’s transportation system depends heavily on the automobile, as in most towns in the area.

Transportation poses both challenges and opportunities. Despite the desire for alternative transportation, Acton is still highly auto-dependent, but there are many opportunities to promote and accommodate walking, cycling, and public transportation.



The current Senior Center is too small and not designed to fully serve Acton’s growing senior population.

Town facilities are in good condition and, except for the Senior Center, adequate for the future. A new building that serves seniors and the wider community would respond to this challenge. More study is needed of how best to provide emergency services to the north side of Town.

Future Contingencies

A Comprehensive Plan should be resilient – it should continue to be a guide even if the unpredictable happens. The “wild cards” that Acton might have to face include:

- Prolonged economic downturn combined with escalating cost of healthcare and other post-employment benefits.
- Energy costs rise even more sharply than in recent years.
- Weather events such as more frequent and more violent storms and significant climate changes.
- School enrollments that don’t decline as expected.
- Revival of the housing market leading to a major residential subdivision proposed for a large tract of land.



There is also the risk that things don’t turn out as anticipated, e.g., more or less development pressure, tighter budgets, or unforeseen infrastructure needs.

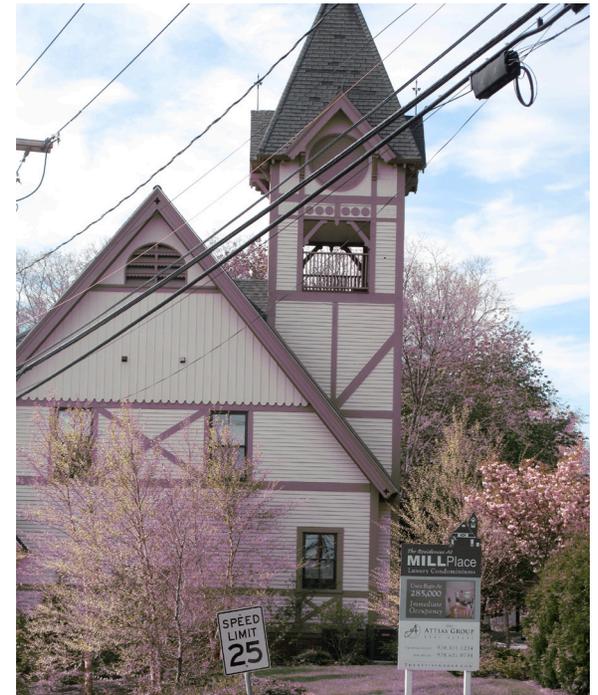
The 2020 Plan has resilience in the face of such unexpected trends and events.

By guiding growth to the centers and protecting open space through transfer of development rights, the development of a large tract of land with consequent increases in school and other costs, can potentially be channeled into compact mixed use development with smaller units that generate less school cost and pay more taxes than their cost to service.

By emphasizing employment-oriented economic development, the most promising source of added tax revenue, Acton can do better than similar towns that don’t invest in attracting commercial growth, even in a prolonged downturn.

By moving to more sustainable land use patterns, alternatives to the automobile become more feasible, reinforcing these patterns and enabling people to reduce their energy costs.

By calling for appropriate guidelines and more rigorous review of development in the centers, particularly Kelley’s Corner where sewers are already in place, the Town’s water supply can



be better protected from wastewater impacts, largely funded by new development. A key recommendation is a study of each center to develop place-specific design guidelines and evaluate potential impacts due to traffic, wastewater disposal, and stormwater management.

And if Town finances constrain desired improvements, the phasing of major investments can be adjusted to correspond to available resources. (See page 46.)

Did You Know?

Extensive research was done by the consultant team and by the 2020 Committee and additional information was contributed by some members of the public.

The “snapshot” on this page is largely drawn from the Inventory Report, which is summarized in the next-to-last section of this volume and presented in full in Volume II.

Housing and Population

- Acton’s 2010 U.S. Census population was 21,924, up 8% since 2000.
- The percent of residents 65 and older is expected to nearly double over the next 20 years from less than 10% to over 18%.
- Over the same period the number of school-age children is expected to decline slightly even while the total population increases.
- Acton had 8,187 housing units in 2010, up 9% from 2000. 63% are single family houses.
- Projections by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council suggested that, based on current zoning, population will increase by 10% by 2030 and housing units will increase by 1000 units or 12%.

Schools and School Enrollments

- In 2010 there were 218 students (K-12) per 1,000 population, the third highest of the towns Acton touches.
- Acton Public Schools spent \$11,246 per pupil in 2009-2010, the second lowest of the towns it touches¹.
- Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009

Land Use

- Acton’s land area is approximately 13,000 acres (20 square miles).
- 29% of Acton’s land area is open space (lower than five of the towns it touches). Roughly 1/3 of this open space is not protected from development.
- There are about 2,200 acres of developable land (vacant and not wetland).
- Based on 2008 land use data, approximately 1,800 additional housing units could be built on land now zoned residential, bringing the total at build-out² to 10,300, or 22% more than today. This would take more than 30 years at projected growth rates.

¹ These are Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, Sudbury, and Westford.

² “Build-out” occurs when all buildable land has been fully developed.

Water and Wastewater

- All of Acton’s public water supply comes from groundwater wells.
- Water demand has been relatively constant over the past six years, approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY), reflecting water conservation efforts. Acton’s state permit allows up to 708.1 MGY.
- Residential water demand is estimated by Acton Water District to be roughly 55 gallons per bedroom per day, substantially lower than the norm of 70.
- 80% of Acton’s homes have on-site septic systems, a high ratio for a town of Acton’s population. The other 20 percent use sewers or package treatment to dispose of wastewater.

And...

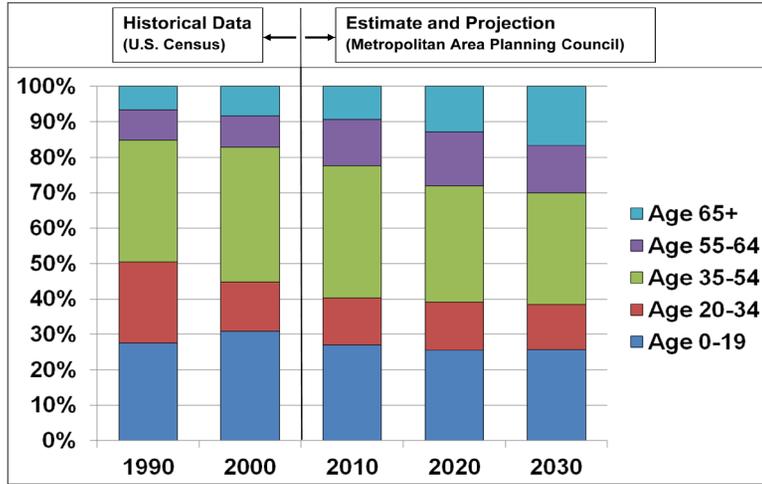
- The average household in Acton drives 76 miles per day, the lowest of the adjacent towns except Concord.
- 87.5% of Town revenues come from residential property, in the middle of the group of towns it touches.
- Acton was named the 16th Best Place To Live among small towns in the country by Money Magazine in 2009 and in 2011

The charts on the following two pages provide a graphic illustration of demographic projections and a comparison between Acton and surrounding towns on a number of relevant factors including multi-family housing, school children, and taxes.

Demographic Change

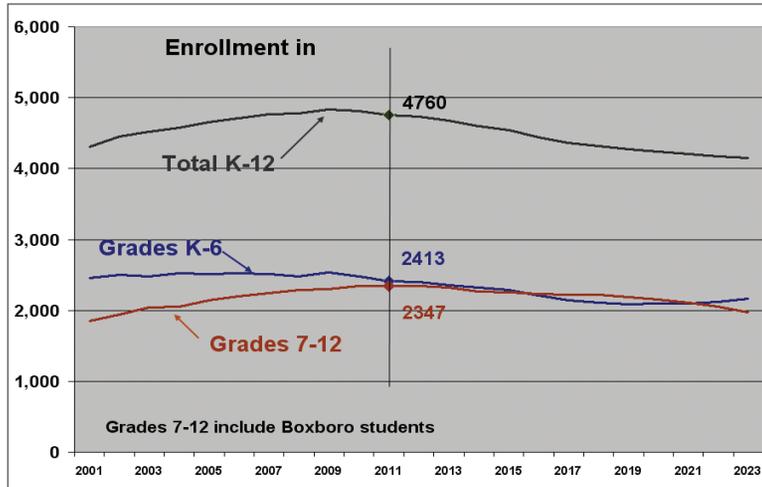
Percentage of Population Age Groups

Seniors 65+ and "empty nesters" 55-64 are projected to increase as proportion of the total population, while the proportion of children will decrease.



Historic and Projected School Enrollments

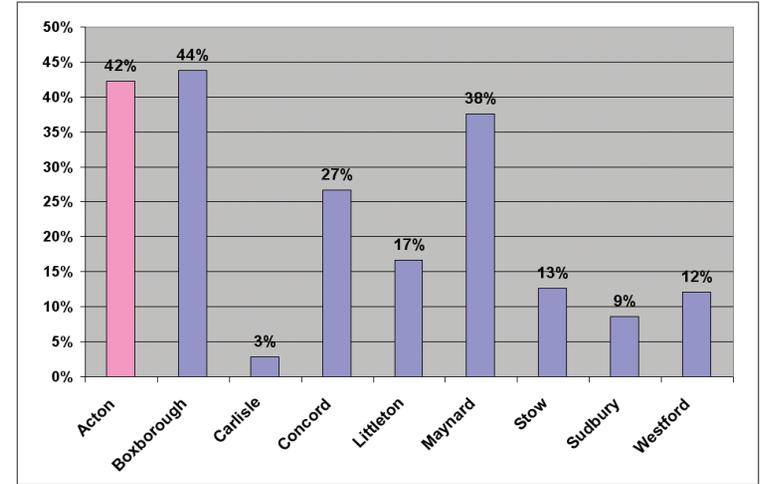
Enrollments reached a peak in 2009, and demographic changes are projected to cause a steady decline even as the Town grows.



Multi-Family Housing

Percent of Housing in 2+ unit Buildings

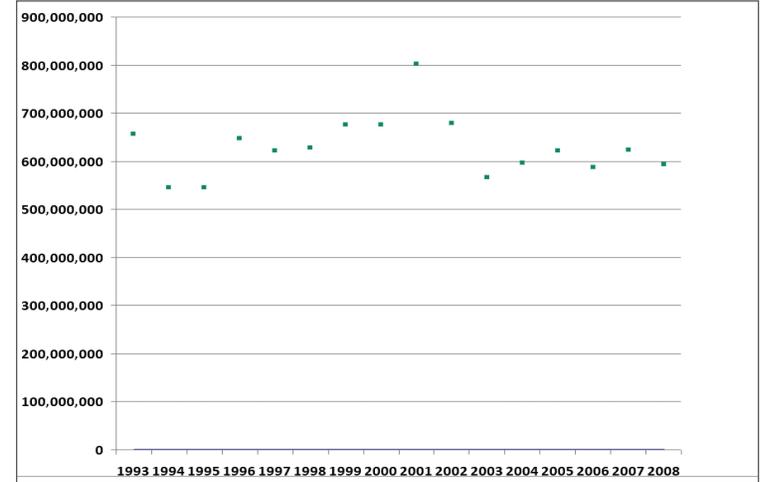
Acton has a higher percentage of housing with two or more units in a building than six of the adjacent towns, but is in the same range as Boxborough and Maynard.



School Enrollment

Water Supplied by Acton Water District, 1993-2009, Gal. per year

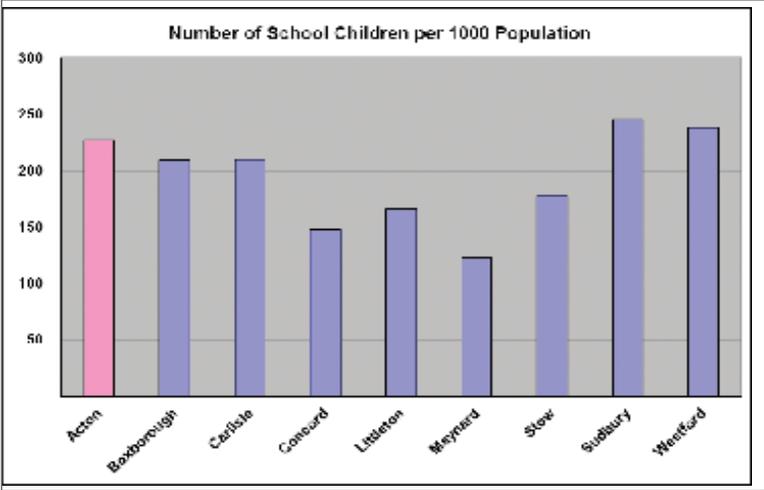
Due to conservation efforts promoted by AWD, there has been little growth in water use since 2002.



Ratio of School Children to Total Population, 2010

Acton had 218 school children per 1,000 population in 2010, which is in the middle of the adjacent towns, but still relatively high on a statewide basis, putting pressure on the Town budget.

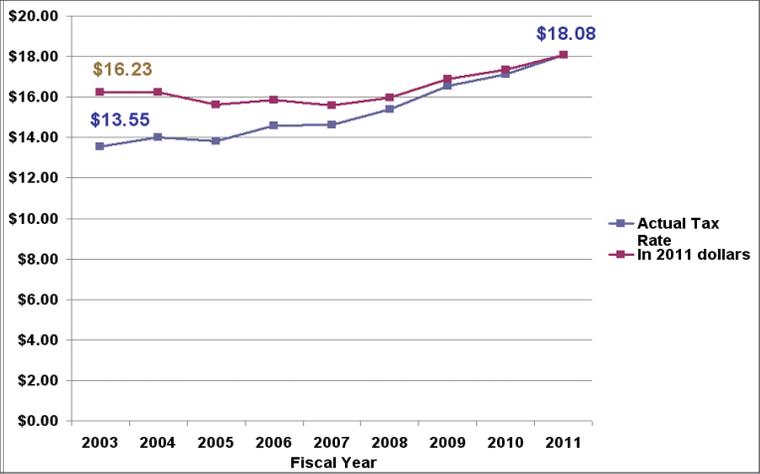
School Children



Acton's Tax Rate FY2003-2011

The property tax rate increased 33.4% from FY 2003 to FY 2011 or 4.2% year; however when inflation is taken into account, the real increase was 1.4% per year. (Source: Massachusetts Dept. of Revenue and U.S. Dept of Commerce Consumer Price Index for Boston).

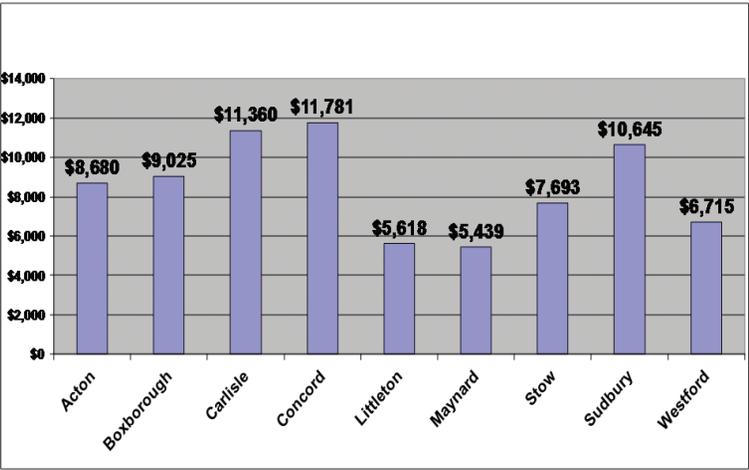
Tax Rate Changes



Average Single Family Home Tax Bill, 2010

Acton has a high tax rate, but the average tax on a single family house is lower than four other adjacent towns with lower tax rates but more expensive houses.

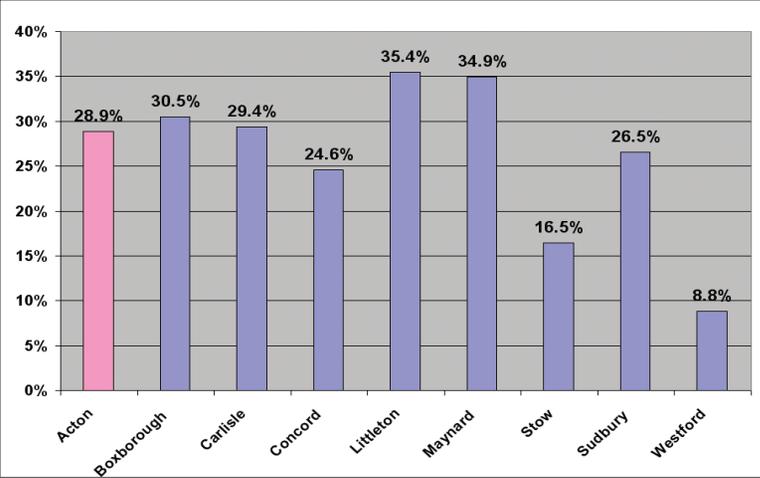
Tax Bill



Percent Increase in the Tax rate 2004-2011

Taxes have increased everywhere during the past eight years, but the increase in Acton was less than in four of the adjacent towns.

Tax Increase





IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- Key Implementation Strategies
- Cost and Phasing
- Detailed Implementation Plan Tables

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Implementation Plan

The heart of the Acton 2020 Plan is the Implementation Plan that is presented in this section. It has been developed in order to achieve the Plan’s vision and goals. It consists of strategies comprising one or more action steps under each of the seven goals and their objectives.

The Implementation Plan is organized by goal and objective because this most clearly shows how the proposed action steps relate to the things Acton residents have said they want.

The following section on Cost, Phasing, and Financing discusses relative costs and the potential to phase these action steps for financial feasibility.

The many other action steps are intended to be implemented over the next 10 to 20 years by Town staff, Boards and Commissions, and other citizens as opportunities arise and staff resources permit.

In addition to the following pages of this printed Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan, the Implementation Plan is also an **online database** that can be viewed and searched at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>

The Implementation Plan is a program for Phase III of Acton 2020, in which the action steps are

Priorities: The 2020 Plan has assigned priorities to approximately 40% of the 238 action steps, **38 highest priority** and **59 with second highest priority**; these are the things that are most important to accomplish.¹ Some of the highest priority actions involve significant expense, such as building a senior center or expanding the MinuteVan shuttle, and the most expensive actions includes wording like “as town finances permit.”²

Ripe Apples: In addition to the high-priority actions, there is a list of action steps that are **relatively easy to accomplish and have immediate benefits**, such as providing more bike racks or encouraging recycling and composting. These are called “**ripe apples**” and are listed in a sidebar in this section.

“Support” or “Continue”: Several action steps acknowledge **efforts** that are **currently underway**.

Sequence of Steps: The Implementation Plan is specific about what is intended to be done, and in many cases this requires a **sequence of steps**, e.g., do a Village Centers Plan to establish priorities, and then conduct place-specific design studies to develop guidelines for the priority areas.

“Explore” or “Consider”: In some cases it is not possible to be specific without further work, and words like “explore” or “consider” are used.

“Educate”: Several action steps involve the need to raise public awareness or educate people about the advantages or importance of individual initiatives such as recycling or energy conservation.

1 The list of Key Recommendations on the following pages combines closely related action steps that in some cases are listed under more than one goal. This condenses the high priority actions to 15.

2 The following section on Cost and Phasing discusses relative costs and the potential to phase these action steps for financial feasibility.

carried out. The Board of Selectmen should create an **Acton 2020 Implementation Committee** and charge its members with overseeing the implementation and upkeep of this plan as well as giving the Town annual “State of the Plan” updates.

Priorities and Owners

The 1998 Master Plan update had 143 actions organized under 12 goals. Approximately 70 percent of those recommended actions had been addressed in some way by the beginning of the Acton 2020 process in 2007.

The Acton 2020 Plan has 238 recommended action steps, each of which has a “lead owner” (i.e., the lead responsible party, such as the Planning Department), whose job it is to take the initiative and “other owners” (such as other departments, Boards, and Commissions) that need to be involved. All of the actions have been discussed with those owners.

The online database can be searched and sorted to create lists of actions for each owner.

Master Plan Elements

Although organized by goal, each action step is associated with one of the nine master plan “elements” such as land use, housing, open space, etc. Eight of these elements are traditional and are specifically mentioned in the state law that governs municipal master plans, and a ninth element, sustainability, has been added because it is not fully covered by the other elements.

The Implementation Plan tables in the database identifies the main element and other associated elements for each actions step.

Ripe Apples (also called “Low Hanging Fruit” - low cost with significant benefit.)

- 🍏 Support the creation of a Kelley’s Corner Business Association
- 🍏 Recognize waterbodies as part of Acton’s heritage
- 🍏 Outreach to private historic property owners
- 🍏 Provide water education
- 🍏 Update private well standards
- 🍏 Educate regarding disposal of unwanted items
- 🍏 Create a Zero Waste Committee to promote recycling, reduction, and reuse
- 🍏 Provide recycling bins in public places
- 🍏 Reduce use of throw-aways
- 🍏 Improve Transfer Station waste reduction
- 🍏 Promote composting
- 🍏 Educate regarding unwanted electronics (e-waste)
- 🍏 Increase the number of local hazardous waste days
- 🍏 Promote use of non-toxic products
- 🍏 Educate and increase people’s awareness of the need to reduce their carbon footprint
- 🍏 Promote energy-efficiency upgrade programs
- 🍏 Leverage Green Communities grants
- 🍏 Discourage invasive plantings
- 🍏 Provide more bike racks
- 🍏 Update pedestrian and bike maps
- 🍏 Increase awareness regarding sharing the road issues
- 🍏 Publicize volunteer opportunities
- 🍏 Provide contact info for new residents to connect with organized neighborhood groups
- 🍏 Create one-stop reservations and calendar
- 🍏 Coordinate library services and community education
- 🍏 Involve teens in Town governance
- 🍏 Recruit volunteers from ethnic and language minorities
- 🍏 Form a technology committee
- 🍏 Complete long-range capital plan
- 🍏 Ensure financially efficient Town services
- 🍏 Supplement revenues with grants, fees, etc.
- 🍏 Explore regionalization opportunities
- 🍏 Create grants and funding clearinghouse
- 🍏 Develop a “Buy Local” campaign
- 🍏 Balance regulatory burden between public benefits and business needs

Key Implementation Strategies

The Goals and Objectives and Roadmap for Guiding Growth will be implemented through a number of strategies that involve one or more action steps. Fifteen key recommendations stand out as highest priority among the more than 200 proposed action steps. The full Implementation Plan is in the body of the report and online at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>. They are not listed in priority order.

Roadmap Strategies for Guided Growth

► Guide Growth to Kelley’s Corner and Villages

- Prepare a plan to improve Kelley’s Corner and to **preserve and enhance village centers**. The **Key Centers Plan** will set priorities for new development and redevelopment in centers. The plan should consider Kelley’s Corner and the villages as a system, build on existing strengths in each, identify necessary aesthetic and functional improvements, assess capacity for density incentives, and prioritize and sequence which areas to work on first. This plan would include a quantitative analysis of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) system, to verify which incentives are most likely to create the desired changes. The **Kelley’s Corner Development Plan** will be part of the Key Centers Plan; it will provide the basis to proceed with zoning changes and infrastructure investments needed to begin the improvements at Kelley’s Corner and promote development and redevelopment of key parcels as soon as practicable.

This action should be undertaken immediately to prepare for the

development of Kelley’s Corner. The Kelley’s Corner Development Plan component can be accelerated to expedite implementation.

- **Develop Kelley’s Corner into a mixed-use Town center and transportation hub** in conformance with a specific plan for the area. Encourage mixed use with people living in smaller housing units near vibrant shops and restaurants with opportunities for socializing, running errands, dining, and community gathering. Creating more activities and a safe and pleasant pedestrian environment will also attract teens from the nearby school complex; they should be involved in the planning for the area.

This is a major part of the Roadmap. Similar actions may later be taken to accommodate more growth in some of the village centers.

- **Actively promote employment-oriented economic development** (e.g., Research and Development, high tech, office) to expand the tax base. This may also reduce commute time for some residents.



This is a major part of the Roadmap and helps to pay for a whole range of Town services by expanding the tax base. General locations are indicated in the Plan Concept map.

- ▶ **Protect, acquire, and improve open space** for conservation, farming, and recreation, using a combination of acquisition and zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to move development away from open land and to the key centers. This will help protect Town character and the environment, as well as provide additional opportunities for recreation.

As Town finances permit, acquisition of open space can utilize revenue from an expanded tax base in addition to Community Preservation Act funds.

Other Strategies

- ▶ **Consider a sewer extension and/or advanced package wastewater treatment** with groundwater recharge in order to support an increase in small-scale commercial development and better manage wastewater in West Acton.

Extension of sewerage is a topic that needs careful study and discussion; package treatment may be a more cost-effective alternative for supporting village development, potentially with improvements paid for in part by developers.



- ▶ **Improve the transfer station to increase recycling and reuse.**

The Implementation Plan also encourages composting, and measures to address curbside recycling pickup by private companies.

- ▶ **Construct more sidewalks and facilities for safe bicycling, in centers and Town-wide.** This will help connect people and places and provide opportunities for fitness while also being beneficial for the environment (by reducing car fumes).

This action extends the current level of sidewalk construction and includes both bike paths and bike lanes.

- ▶ **Reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote Town-wide energy conservation.** Support joint community/Town efforts to reduce reliance on fossil-fuel energy sources and to explore shifting to renewable sources.

This action extends the current effort in energy conservation and use of renewable energy resources.

- ▶ **Develop policies and strategies to keep empty-nesters in Acton.** As the senior population continues to grow they will need a number of facilities and services that meet their special needs.

The type of housing envisioned for Kelley's Corners and the villages would help to keep more seniors in Acton.

- ▶ **Continue to fund, and later expand, MinuteVan** to build ridership with more frequent service between village centers, Kelley’s Corner, and the rail station. This will connect various places in Town and also provide a service to those who cannot drive as well as to those wishing to use public transportation.

The shuttle is one of the key features supporting the Road Map. It enhances the improvement of Kelley’s Corner and village centers and is an important part of environmental sustainability and improving connections.

- ▶ **Construct a new building to accommodate the Senior Center and larger community**, when finances permit. This will serve to provide space for expanded programming for an increasing senior population as well as a meeting and gathering place for the community at large.

Further consideration is needed on what the facility should contain and where best to locate it to support the Roadmap.

- ▶ Prepare a proactive plan that encourages the **provision of a wide range of housing types** to meet the needs of empty nesters, Town employees, young couples, and those of moderate income, by locating housing **in small, scattered sites near walkable service and business destinations**, especially village centers. Consider possible Town participation in desired housing developments. The plan should address the Town’s relationship to the state’s affordable housing law (Chapter

40B), but its purpose is to address Acton’s local and regional housing needs.

This plan should also address the Town’s relationship to the 10% goal set by the state’s affordable housing law (Chapter 40B) but its purpose is to address Acton’s local and regional housing need.

- ▶ Create a new **committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and language groups in Town** to provide **information to newcomers and assist with organizing multi-cultural activities**. This will help build bridges, knitting the community closer together, and it will provide guidance to those unfamiliar with the Town and its resources
- ▶ **Continue to support and achieve high standards of excellence in Acton’s schools**. A majority of residents when asked “Why did you move to Acton?,” respond: “because of the schools.” The schools are a major magnet attracting people to the Town and schools and school-related activities are a major community focus contributing to the culture of Acton.

This action is one of the most important to Actonians.

- ▶ **Continue to work to control cost**, planning for future financial responsibilities like the cost of post-employment benefits and finding new ways to reduce current costs, such as regionalization and cooperation with other towns.



Cost and Phasing

Town finances are being squeezed between the desire for services (excellent schools and other Town priorities) and a limited tax base, reduced state aid, and unfunded liabilities. Many of the Plan's top recommendations can begin to be implemented with existing Town staff and relatively small additional expenditures (e.g., small-scale studies to prepare for appropriate growth in the centers). Other priorities like a new building to serve seniors and the larger community, or an expanded shuttle system, are more expensive.

Increasing Fiscal Capacity

One of the 2020 Plan's main goals is to increase fiscal capacity (the ability to pay for desired services and capital investments). It does this by promoting economic development, seeking special purpose state funding and grants, continuing to explore public-private partnerships for specific projects, and cooperation with surrounding towns to provide services more efficiently. The recommendation to reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote Town-wide energy conservation will pay for itself and also help to save money for residents and businesses.

It is significant that a fiscal analysis of the **Roadmap** concluded that by the time 1,200

new housing units and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space have been built (longer than 20 years because of the current economic downturn), Acton's fiscal capacity will be increased by roughly \$5 million per year. This analysis is described in the chapter on the **Roadmap**.

Phasing of Major Expenditures

The solution to this challenge is to **phase the major actions as finances permit**. This can include some open space acquisition and investment in pedestrian and bicycle facilities each year as can be afforded, continuing to fund the MinuteVan at current levels until expansion becomes feasible, phasing public infrastructure improvements to support desired redevelopment in Kelley's Corner as the market revives, and planning for a new senior/community center but putting off construction until it can be afforded.

The diagram on page 47 illustrates the phasing of major expenditures. The timeline runs from 2012 to the point at which the **Roadmap** is realized, with the construction of 1,200 new dwelling units. This was originally projected to take 20 years from the date of the 2020 Plan, but the current economic downturn will likely push this date out by several years.

The diagram lists major actions in the short term, mid term and long term. The arrows are a schematic indication of how long the expenditures go on; for example a new senior/community center would be financed with a bond, that would be repaid in annual increments over a period of perhaps 25 years, so the annual expenditures for this capital improvement would begin when Town finances permit and continue through the time horizon shown in the diagram. Other investments, such as infrastructure improvements to support development of Kelley's Corner into a Town center, could occur over a period of four or five years after the real estate market has improved; they may or may not be financed through a bond depending on circumstances at the time.

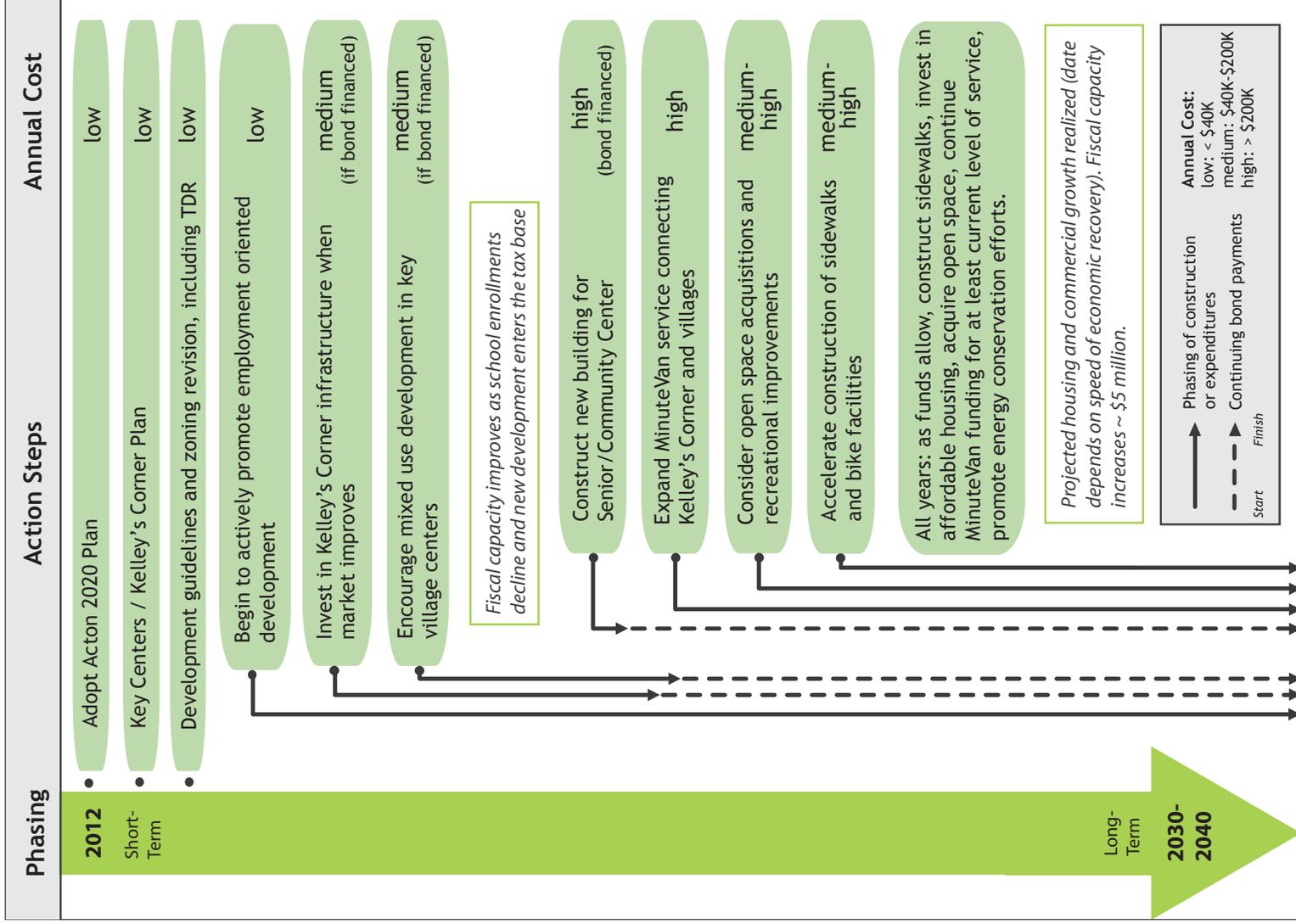
The diagram indicates the relative annual cost ranges of the major actions. The short-range actions that are essential to prepare for the desired improvements at Kelley's Corner and some of the villages would be relatively inexpensive and should occur as soon as the Town can afford them.

The Plan also encourages the exploration of public/private opportunities for funding.



Phasing Diagram

The following diagram is a proposal for phasing the Plan's recommendations over time.



Tax Rate Implications

Since the timing of development that would expand the tax base is uncertain, the fiscal implications of the recommended major investments are calculated in relation to Acton’s current total assessed property value.

Each annual expenditure implies an increment of the tax levy to pay for it, and consequently an increment to the property tax rate. (It is assumed that residential and commercial property are taxed at the same rate as at present.) The tax rate impact is currently about 2.8 cents per \$100,000 of annual expenditure. This is applied to the average single family home value in Acton, which is currently approximately \$500,000; each \$100,000 expenditure would add approximately \$13.75 to the tax bill for the average home.

The table on the right shows the estimated annual costs and tax bill implications for the major expenditures recommended in the plan. Not all items would be occurring simultaneously, particularly in the short term. The annual total would correspond to a cross-section of the Phasing diagram at a particular point in time. Costs for items like sidewalks and open space acquisition can be varied from year to year. In the long term,

bond payments would continue for investments in a senior/community center and infrastructure at Kelley’s Corner and potentially some village

centers. However, fiscal capacity is expected to increase by several times this cost, and some of the current bonds would have been retired.

Estimated Cost of Recommended Major Expenditures*

RECOMMENDATION	Estimated Cost	Average Tax Burden per Year
Kelley's Corner Improvements (sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, landscaping)	\$2 million total Bond payments of approx. \$133 thousand per year for 25 years, = \$158,000 per year (could also be financed without bonding for approximately \$400,000 per year during the construction period)	\$22
Open Space Purchase and Park Improvements in addition to CPA funds	\$2.5 million total Average \$125,000 per year	\$17
Town-wide Sidewalks & Bike Paths/ Lanes	\$2 million total Average \$100,000 per year	\$14
New Senior/Community Center	\$8 million total - Bond payments of approx. \$534,000 per year for 25 years	\$73 (if entire amount is from Town indebtedness)
Expanded MinuteVan Shuttle	\$350,000 per year	\$48
TOTAL, ALL ITEMS	\$1.27 million/yr	\$174

* Excludes possible infrastructure costs in West Acton, which are uncertain.

Detailed Implementation Plan Tables

The complete Implementation Plan is listed on the following pages. Strategies are organized under the planning objective they help to attain.

For each goal a brief introduction describes the relationship of each goal to the vision, identifies priority action steps, those items related to increasing awareness, and lists some of the activities already underway.

The tables for each goal were extracted from the complete Implementation Plan database <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>. The database can be searched and sorted by the lead owner and other owner of each action step and the master plan element (land use, economic development, etc.) to which it belongs.

The Strategies are arranged in table format under each objective with the following information:

- ▶ **Strategy**
- ▶ **Short Name of Action Step**
- ▶ **Complete text of Action Step**
- ▶ **Priority**
- ▶ **Timing**
- ▶ **Lead Owner**

Key to Notation

Italics: is used to indicate reference to an existing document or study.

Dollar sign (\$): indicates a capital and/or operating expense.

See Also: is used to indicate the instances when a strategy relates to more than one goal; these are indicated in green type.

Endnotes: provided when relevant for additional detail and/or references.

Ripe Apple 🍏: When an action step can be accomplished with low cost and significant benefit.

Lead Owner: is the department, board, or other entity that is designated to initiate action and see it through to the end.

Priority: Top priorities are designate as “Highest” or “2nd Highest.” All other actions of lesser priority do not have a designation in the priority column.

Timing for implementation is indicated as follows:

- Ongoing: currently being done and should be continued or expanded.
- Short-term: should be completed by 2015.
- Medium-term: should be completed by 2020.
- Long-term: should be completed by 2030.
- New Sustained Effort: should be started in the short-term and continued through 2030.

Implementation Strategies for:

GOAL 1

Preserve and Enhance Town Character

Goal Statement:

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

Relationship to Vision

The action steps under Goal 1 are designed to realize an Acton that has retained its uniqueness by preserving its rural and historic characteristics and by ensuring that any future growth results in the creation of successful places, with attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas. Kelley’s Corner will become a walkable Town center and there will be several vibrant village centers, each distinct in its character.

Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Guide as much as possible of any future growth to key Town centers, to mixed use infill and redevelopment.
- Carefully review all current zoning Townwide and its build-out potential to ensure that zoning supports the goals articulated in this master plan.
- Consider ways to improve the design review process.
- Develop Kelley’s Corner (KC) into a mixed use Town center and transportation hub.
- Complete a *Key Centers Plan* to determine which villages should receive more concentrated growth and to assess the amount and type of new development that is appropriate. A *Kelley’s Corner Development Plan* is part of the Key Centers Plan; it provides the basis to proceed with the zoning changes and infrastructure investments needed to begin the process of improving Kelley’s Corner

as soon as practicable.

- Support the development of an organization to revitalize Kelley’s Corner such as a business association.
- Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Provide incentives for Transfer of Development Rights away from open land to desired growth centers. Consider multiple ways to fund the acquisition of desirable open space parcels.
- Coordinate Historic District Commission review with development of design guidelines and BoS special permit review of development in historic village centers.
- Provide staffing to assist with plans for villages and key centers, development review, and economic development.

“Kelley’s Corner equals eyesore. Make it a first priority, other [villages] to follow.”

~ Acton Resident

GOAL 1

Preserve and Enhance
Town Character cont.

Youth Art Contest Winners: Mackenzie Abernethy



“ My artwork specifically portrays objective 1.2. In my opinion, Acton should preserve and enhance village centers because it’s what makes Acton Unique. ”

Alex Zhang

“ I drew this piece of art because I think it’s a good example of some natural habitat for Acton to have in the future. I decided to draw the Nagog Pond at sunset. Drew with pastel. ”



Goal 1: Preserve and Enhance Town Character			
Objective 1.1: Strengthen planning tools to manage growth pro-actively.		Priority/Timing	Owner
	<p>Strategy 1.1.1: Roadmap for Guiding Growth Use the Roadmap, affirmed at the June 23 2011 public meeting, to guide Acton's planning.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 1.1.1.1: Concentrate growth Guide as much as possible of any future growth to key town centers, to mixed use infill and redevelopment.¹² This includes a focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transforming new and redeveloped commercial space to fit each village or town center's character. • Emphasizing walking, biking, and public transportation • Continuing open space acquisition/protection <p>See Also: Traffic and parking in centers Development planning that includes water limits Stormwater planning to support 2020 plan Enhance quality of water discharges.</p>	<p>Highest</p> <p>New Sustained Action</p>	<p>Planning Department</p>
	<p>Strategy 1.1.2: Revise planning process Review and revise the Town's bylaws and planning process to support the 2020 Plan goals.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 1.1.2.1: Review zoning in light of plan goals and buildout potential Carefully review all current zoning and its build-out potential to insure that zoning supports the goals articulated in the master plan. Aim to simplify the zoning code to insure clarity of intent and to support the regulatory review process. See Also: Zoning to support Key Centers Plan Zoning that includes water quality impacts Zoning to encourage agriculture Zoning to protect open space Ensure Zoning takes in to account the impact of new development. Consider fiscal impacts of new development when amending the Zoning Bylaw and reviewing special permit applications. Allow more dividing of existing lots for economical housing</p>	<p>Highest</p> <p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Planning Department</p>

	<p>Action Item 1.1.2.2: New development bylaws Research further use of by-laws beyond those already in place (e.g. transfer of development rights, impact fees to include effects on air and water quality, etc.) See Also: Tree-clearing bylaw Simplify sign bylaw Scenic Roads Bylaw Enact a bylaw to control where landscape contractors dispose of debris. Consider fiscal impacts of new development when amending the Zoning Bylaw and reviewing special permit applications</p>	Short-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 1.1.2.3: Regional cooperation on development issues Encourage continued regional cooperation; consider creating more formal structures for collaborating with neighboring towns to address common issues (including affordable housing developments, transportation, open space protection, etc.)</p>	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Manager Department
	<p>Action Item 1.1.2.4: Legislation to increase local control over development Support legislation that would increase the Town’s control over local land use decisions. See Also: Affordable Housing Strategy</p>	Long-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 1.1.2.5: Planning/Economic Development staff Add a full-time position to the Planning Department to assist with plans for villages and key centers, development review, and economic development. This position would also fulfill the role of Economic Development Officer (EDO). \$ (Staffing Expense)</p>	Highest Short-Term	Manager Department
	<p>Action Item 1.1.2.6: Index of developable parcels Prepare a database of developable parcels to better inform land use and economic development planning.</p>	Short-Term	Planning Department
	Strategy 1.1.3: Develop a comprehensive site and design review process.		
	<p>Action Item 1.1.3.1: Extend design guidelines Further refine Acton’s Design Guidelines for Commercial Development.³ and extend the guidelines to include large multifamily and village center mixed-use development⁴⁵</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Design Review Board
	<p>Action Item 1.1.3.2: Improve design review process Consider ways to improve the design review process, defining the role of the Design Review Board (DRB), and enhancing the coordination with the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen, while reserving permit authority with these Boards as applicable. Improve coordination with Historic District Commission when appropriate. Implement improvements.⁶</p>	Highest Short-Term	Selectmen

Objective 1.2: Preserve and enhance key centers.			
	Strategy 1.2.1: Enhance Key Centers. See Also: Be more business friendly Traffic and parking in centers		
	Action Item 1.2.1.1: Key Centers Plan To determine which villages should receive more concentrated growth and the amount and type of new development, complete a <i>Key Centers Plan</i> that includes the recognized villages and Kelley’s Corner. Part of the Key Centers Plan will be a Development Plan for Kelley’s Corner, specifying needed infrastructure improvements and zoning changes. ⁷ The Plan should include a review of the existing Village Plans and their outcomes to date, and identify the highest priority components for early implementation to help the Town realize the centers’ full potential as destinations.	Highest Short-Term	Planning Department
	Action Item 1.2.1.2: Zoning to support Key Centers Plan Develop and enact zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights, to guide growth through infill and redevelopment in and around existing centers in support of the <i>Key Centers Plan</i> , including the Development Plan for Kelley’s Corner. ⁸	Highest Short-Term	Planning Department
	Action Item 1.2.1.3: Town’s financial participation in key center development Explore the possible benefits and risks of the Town’s financial participation in the development of key centers, with the objectives of catalyzing desired development, increasing control over outcomes, and sharing the financial benefits. Financial participation could include the acquisition of developable parcels and/or the acquisition of development rights to be used in Transfer of Development Rights.	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Selectmen
	Action Item 1.2.1.4: Village-specific sidewalk guidelines As part of the <i>Key Centers Plan</i> update the Sidewalk Design Guidelines to include village-specific design guidelines.	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Sidewalk Committee
	Action Item 1.2.1.5: Encourage developer contributions of public space to town centers Encourage developer contributions of land ⁹ and/or construction of public realm improvements in Kelley’s Corner and village centers, e.g., small-scale “vest-pocket” parks that might include bioretention areas and rain gardens, playgrounds, and public seating areas.	Medium-Term	Selectmen
	Action Item 1.2.1.6: Strategic plan for commercial properties Develop a <i>Strategic Plan for Commercial Properties</i> by developing an inventory of all such properties in terms of their existing and build out potential. Identify owners of multiple lots.	Short-Term	Planning Department
Strategy 1.2.2: Improve Kelley’s Corner.			
	Action Item 1.2.2.1: Redevelop Kelley’s Corner Develop Kelley’s Corner (KC) into a mixed use town center and transportation hub. Prepare a <i>Development Plan for Kelley’s Corner</i> as part of the <i>Key Centers Plan</i> . ¹⁰ See Also: Concentrate town investments in Kelley’s Corner	Highest Short-Term	Planning Department

	<p>Action Item 1.2.2.2: Concentrate town investments in Kelley's Corner Concentrate Town investments such as sidewalks, landscape and streetscape improvements and traffic calming in Kelley's Corner to make it more pedestrian-friendly and to serve as a gateway.¹¹ See Also: Teen place Redevelop Kelley's Corner \$\$</p>	Highest Medium-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 1.2.2.3: Design studio or competition for Kelley's Corner Collaborate with area universities to do a design studio that tests plans through design for their "place-making potential" and/or hold a design competition to develop an urban design vision for Kelley's Corner. Utilize the results in the Development Plan for Kelley's Corner.</p>	Short-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 1.2.2.4: Kelley's Corner Association Support the development of an organization to revitalize Kelley's Corner such as a business association that could in time become a Business Improvement District or Community Betterment Association. (These are different ways of allowing groups of contiguous businesses or other landowners to each pay for services and infrastructure improvements that benefit the entire location.)</p>	Highest Short-Term 	Business Owners
Strategy 1.2.3: Improve West Acton Village Center while preserving its historic character			
	<p>Action Item 1.2.3.1: West Acton – Plan some growth Consider designating West Acton Village (WAV) as a "key center" to which some growth is guided. This action step is a planning process focused on WAV that should consider the planning context provided by the <i>Key Centers Plan</i>.¹² Prepare a design study and development plan for the village to provide the basis for zoning changes and infrastructure investments.¹³ See Also: Key Centers Plan</p>	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 1.2.3.2: Concentrate investments in West Acton As recommended in the Key Centers Plan and the development plan for West Acton Village, concentrate Town investments such as sidewalks, landscape and streetscape improvements, traffic calming, and wastewater treatment facilities in and around the village.¹⁴ See Also: West Acton Village sewers \$\$</p>	2 nd Highest Long-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Strategy 1.2.4: Consider directing some growth to North, East, and South Acton Villages Based on the Key Centers Plan, consider designating North, East, and South Acton Villages as growth centers and preparing a development plan or plans based on detailed design studies in a manner similar to the Kelley's Corner and West Acton development plans.</p>	Long-Term	
Objective 1.3: Preserve rural characteristics and open space			
	<p>Strategy 1.3.1: Document and prioritize rural characteristics Document the rural characteristics that should be preserved. Develop a mechanism for prioritizing those elements which contribute to an appreciation for Acton's history and the pleasure of living here. See Also: CPA funding for some sidewalks</p>		

	<p>Action Item 1.3.1.1: Scenic Roads Bylaw Consider expanding Acton’s <i>Scenic Roads Bylaw</i> to protect stone walls, mature trees, and other landscape features to other locations that have been identified as needing protection.¹⁵</p>	Long-Term	Historical Commission Tree Warden
	<p>Action Item 1.3.1.2: Freedom’s Way Landscape Inventory Support the further exploration/implementation of recommendations from the 2006 Freedom’s Way Landscape Inventory.¹⁶</p>	Short-Term	Historical Commission
	<p>Action Item 1.3.1.3: Recognize waterbodies as part of Acton's heritage In planning for historical preservation and appreciation, be sure to include the streams and ponds of Acton as part of Acton's heritage. See Also: Acton Stream Teams</p>	Short-Term 	Historical Commission
	Strategy 1.3.2: Protect open space		
	<p>Action Item 1.3.2.1: Implement OSRP (Open Space portion) Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) including its proactive strategy to anticipate and respond to open space in terms of protection and acquisition of parcels, as well as water resource protection.¹⁷ \$</p>	Highest Short-Term	Open Space Committee
	<p>Action Item 1.3.2.2: Zoning to protect open space Use zoning to protect open space parcels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue the existing practice of encouraging the use of cluster zoning for most residential development outside the centers • Provide incentives for transfer of development away from open land to desired growth centers.¹⁸ See Also: New development bylaws	Highest Short-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 1.3.2.3: Funding of open space protection Consider multiple ways to fund the acquisition of desirable open space parcels so the Town is in a position to take advantage of opportunities when they arise. This action step should begin in the short term and continue through the long term as opportunities and finances permit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use tax income from economic development • Consider higher Community Preservation Act assessments and continue to use Community Preservation funds for purchase of high priority sites • Borrow funds for major purchases • Research other fund opportunities • Consider “purchase and develop part” strategies as a way of funding open space purchases See Also: Housing sites with open space purchases \$\$	Highest Ongoing	Open Space Committee

	<p>Action Item 1.3.2.4: Other tools for protecting open space Utilize other regulatory tools and incentives to protect open space. This action step should begin in the short term and continue through the long term as opportunities arise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively support agriculture Provide tax incentives to protect open space Promote community gardens, country fairs and farmer’s markets Purchase agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs), with money coming from the Community Preservation Act funds, Transfer of Development Rights, and other sources. 	2 nd Highest New Sustained Action	Natural Resources Department Selectmen
Objective 1.4: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes.			
	Strategy 1.4.1: Develop preservation priorities.		
	<p>Action Item 1.4.1.1: Identify historic features Continue to define historic characteristics (buildings, views, landscapes, etc.) and work with relevant committees to actively preserve these.¹⁹</p>	2 nd Highest Ongoing	Historical Commission Historic District Commission
	<p>Strategy 1.4.2: Preserve historic features Preserve historically significant buildings, landscapes and other historic features. See Also: Scenic Roads Bylaw</p>		
	<p>Action Item 1.4.2.1: Coordinate Historic District review process Coordinate Historic District Commission review with development of design guidelines and BoS special permit review of development in historic village centers. Consider giving HDC jurisdiction to review color choices.</p>	Short-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 1.4.2.2: Protection outside of Historic Districts Explore options for protecting historic landscapes and historic resources located outside the established historic districts. (See Cultural Resources List) See Also: Develop preservation priorities</p>	Medium-Term	Historical Commission
	<p>Action Item 1.4.2.3: Outreach to private historic property owners Conduct outreach to private historic property owners to promote an understanding of their buildings' place in Acton's history and to help with funding for preservation.²⁰</p>	Short-Term 	Historical Commission Historic District Commission

Objective 1.5: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.			
Strategy 1.5.1: Promote an active interest in the past on the part of residents and visitors alike.			
	Action Item 1.5.1.1: Tourist infrastructure Invest in tourist support infrastructure for certain key sites and publicize town features (historic site, nature trails, etc).	Long-Term	Historical Commission
	Action Item 1.5.1.2: Town gateways Improve town entrances / gateways to be welcoming and reflect Acton’s historic heritage. See Also: Improve Kelley’s Corner \$	2 nd Highest Long-Term	Economic Development Committee Historical Commission
	Action Item 1.5.1.3: Historic celebrations Continue to support historic celebrations and efforts to increase awareness of Acton’s historic past (e.g. events, plaques, Historic Marker program, school curriculum).	Ongoing	Historical Commission
	Action Item 1.5.1.4: Include Native history Expand the telling of Acton’s history to include a wider time period and events including Native American history as well as European history of the town. (For example, the ‘Trail Through Time’ in North Acton.)	Ongoing	Historical Commission

¹ For a more complete write-up of the results of the June 23 workshop see <https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-33530/...>

² See the links under See Also for examples of how to increase the sustainability of these already concentrated areas and avoid risks to air and water quality.

³ See current at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=343>

⁴ Add incentives dependent on preserving character and compatibility with historic resources. Make guidelines specific to targeted growth centers and other areas of town to make residential and commercial development consistent with other 2020 Plan goals. Single and two-family residential would not be included in design review.

⁵ Consider how design guidelines can encourage actions in support of preserving or remediating surface and groundwater and air quality, such as alternative energy, vegetated roofs, bioretention areas, etc.

⁶ For special permits, expand and standardize the information required from developers, e.g., fiscal and traffic impacts of proposed development

⁷ The Key Centers Plan will set priorities for new development and redevelopment in centers. The plan should consider Kelley’s Corner and the villages as a system, build on existing strengths in each, identify necessary aesthetic and functional improvements, assess capacity for density incentives, and prioritize and sequence which areas to work on first. This plan would include a quantitative analysis of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) system, to verify which incentives are most likely to create the desired changes. The Kelley’s Corner Development Plan will be part of the Key Centers Plan; it will provide the basis to proceed with zoning changes and infrastructure investments needed to begin the improvements at Kelley’s Corner and promote development and redevelopment of key parcels as soon as practicable.

⁸ The zoning should be specific to each center and should specify minimum performance standards and density incentives for meeting additional criteria, including Transfer of Development Rights from areas the Town wishes to preserve. It should address both buildings and landscape/streetscape. Examples of achieving vitality, attractiveness, and walkability include:

- Encourage activity by promoting a variety of uses at different times of day and night, such as grocery store, a variety of businesses, family restaurant, places for programmed events, pubs, movie house, etc.
- Support walkability in the centers by providing sidewalks along the street and well-lit and landscaped pathways to buildings and within parking lots. Provide parking on street and in combined lots behind buildings
- Encourage unique and fun window-shopping
- Support locally owned shops; develop “buy local” campaign
- Identify, seek, and support anchor with “pulling power”
- Provide more on-street parking to support businesses and help slow down traffic
- Plant flowers and trees to enhance village streets and contribute to traffic mitigation
- Encourage our ethnic communities to contribute vitality through cultural events, celebration, food, etc.

⁹ Priority should be given to parcels identified in the Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan.

¹⁰ Based on this study:

- Delineate areas that should receive development, infill, and redevelopment.
- Determine desired density and type of use for these areas, e.g., wide range of shops and restaurants.
- Prepare KC-specific design studies and design guidelines.
- Create list of criteria to apply as incentives during special permit development review, e.g., proactive solutions for potential groundwater issues; provision by developers of outdoor seating; separating seating areas from sidewalk with plants, low fence, etc.
- Consider Kelley’s Corner gateway opportunities, i.e., what the design of this area should communicate to visitors and citizens as they drive into town.
- Plan how to resolve existing and potential stormwater issues in Kelley’s corner

¹¹ Such investments include sidewalks, benches, signage, landscaping (for aesthetics and to mitigate runoff), etc.; encourage the provision of outdoor seating; separate seating areas from sidewalk with plants, low fence, etc.

¹² Use this planning process to ensure we understand what makes West Acton currently a successful village so that efforts to enhance it don’t threaten what contributes to its village identity and livability.

¹³ Based on this study:

- Delineate any areas that should receive development, infill, and redevelopment.
- Include water and air quality considerations when delineating areas to be redeveloped/subject to infill, and include low impact development and advanced stormwater management in design guidelines.
- Prepare WAV-specific design guidelines.
- Create a list of criteria to apply as incentives during special permit development review.
- Make necessary zoning changes and infrastructure improvements.

¹⁴ Sewer extension and package wastewater treatment plants are options to consider. This action step can begin in the medium term (after Kelley's Corner investments) but may not be completed until the long term.

¹⁵ Acton's Scenic Roads Bylaw regulates the removal of stone walls and trees within the right of way for 33 roads. Using this prioritization as a starting point, consider other locations where stone walls or other landscape features provide an important reminder of Acton's historical development and land use or contribute to our appreciation of the landscape.

¹⁶ The *Freedom's Way Landscape Inventory* is a 32 page report prepared in June 2006 by Acton citizens in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Freedom Way Heritage Association. The report includes many recommendations related to preserving rural character. <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/recon...>

¹⁷ Based on the 2012 OSRP, define primary purpose of protecting open space and develop criteria for prioritizing parcels (e.g. conservation, views, active recreation, protection of water resources, etc.); create a short list of open space protection priorities and stay focused on that list. Ensure broad public understanding regarding which open space is not protected and to what degree protected space is indeed protected.

¹⁸ Transfer of development rights can preserve the entire open parcel; cluster zoning usually preserves just over half of the parcel.

¹⁹ Incorporate appropriate recommendations from 2006 Freedom's Way Heritage Landscape Inventory and refer to Mass Historic Commission Survey Forms. Consider desirability of expanding current historic districts to include older historic homes and historically significant structures (as listed in the Cultural Resources List)

²⁰ HDC is developing a revolving loan/grant program, potentially funded in part by CPA funds, modeled after the Town's revolving loan fund for septic system improvements.

Implementation Strategies for:

GOAL 2 Ensure Environmental Sustainability

Goal Statement:

We recognize that our health and well-being depend on protecting the web of life of which we are a part. Therefore, it is vital that we live and work here in a manner that supports that web and the well-being of people everywhere, including future Acton citizens.

Relationship to Vision

The strategies listed under this goal relate specifically to resident, business owner and Town officials’ stated objective to take measures directly to save energy and reduce the carbon footprint. There are also a number of strategies listed under other goals that help to attain the goal of environmental sustainability by, for example, providing alternatives to car travel.

Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Continue to monitor groundwater quantity and quality, and plan for necessary Acton Water District (AWD) service expansion, quality improvements, and well-head protection.
- Use a proactive approach to mitigating existing stormwater issues and avoiding new problems.
- Improve the Transfer Station to encourage recycling, and turn part of it into a renewable energy power plant.
- Encourage the growth of local businesses that can provide local shopping opportunities and employment.
- Evaluate supporting a “Transition Initiative,” a community-wide collaborative effort of citizens and Town government, using education, planning, and action steps to move Acton

toward local resilience and energy autonomy.

- Protect existing agricultural land through acquisition or transfer of development rights and promotion of agricultural tax abatements.

“ *Support mixed use development so that people live, shop, dine, work, etc. in one locale thus reducing transportation demand.* ”

~ Acton Resident

GOAL 2 Ensure Environmental Sustainability cont.

Youth Art Contest Winner: Sanjana Krishna



- “
- Solar powered car - less emissions of gases
 - Solar powered town bus
 - Solar powered houses (powered by solar panels on roof)
 - Composter in a home
 - Rain water collector in town hall and in one of the homes so people don't waste water
 - Fresh water pond to support biodiversity of water animals
 - Less cars on road = less gas
 - A bike path to encourage healthy recreation
 - Vegetable garden to grow healthy locally produced food
- ”

Goal 2: Ensure Environmental Sustainability			
Objective 2.1: Protect the quality and quantity of Acton’s water.		Priority/Timing	Owner
	<p>Strategy 2.1.1: Development planning that includes water limits Make specific plans to identify and address the limits to development implicit in our water systems that take our groundwater, stormwater, and surface water into account.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.1.1.1: Monitor groundwater quantity and quality Continue to monitor groundwater quantity (i.e. groundwater surface elevation and flow rates) and quality, and plan for necessary Acton Water District (AWD) service expansion, quality improvements, and well-head protection. See Also: Monitoring private wells</p>	Highest Ongoing	Acton Water District Health Department
	<p>Action Item 2.1.1.2: EPA WaterSense fixtures Consider regulatory changes and/or incentives requiring EPA WaterSense fixtures in new construction and major renovations.</p>	Short-Term	Building Department
	<p>Action Item 2.1.1.3: Zoning that includes water quality impacts Zoning needs to take water quality impacts into consideration; for example, ensuring riparian protection areas, and limiting density and types of use near water resources.</p>	Ongoing	Planning Department
	<p>Strategy 2.1.2: Locate and design new development and supporting infrastructure to limit and mitigate impacts on groundwater quality. See Also: Redevelop Kelley’s Corner Implement the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.1.2.1: West Acton Village sewers Consider extension of sewer and/or advanced package wastewater treatment in West Acton Village to serve redevelopment of the commercial area north of Massachusetts Ave and also to serve existing high priority neighborhoods identified in the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan.¹ Consider whether to rely on betterment fees for these improvements or to include Town or developer contributions. \$\$ (Enterprise Fund) See Also: Implement the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan</p>	2 nd Highest Long-Term	Health Department Selectmen

	<p>Action Item 2.1.2.2: Advanced package wastewater treatment Where possible and consistent with water quality protection, utilize advanced package wastewater treatment with groundwater recharge for other concentrations of residential and commercial development.² See Also: Implement the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan</p>	<p>2nd Highest Ongoing</p>	<p>Board of Health</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.1.2.3: Enhance quality of water discharges. Enhance the quality of all discharges into the ground (both stormwater and wastewater) in current and new sources.³</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Board of Health</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.1.2.4: Move industrial activity away from recharge areas Consider zoning and incentives to slowly move industrial activity from rivers and wellfield recharge areas.</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>Planning Department</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.1.2.5: Match Water District and Town protection zones Amend the groundwater protection overlay bylaw to make the overlay districts fully consistent with Acton Water District protection zones.⁴</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Planning Department</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.1.2.6: Protect AWD buffer zone along Mass Ave. Ensure that Acton Water District land and buffer zone on Mass Ave in West Acton is not targeted for development.</p>	<p>Long-term</p>	<p>Planning Department</p>
	<p>Strategy 2.1.3: Manage Stormwater Manage stormwater to reduce impacts on streams and to recharge groundwater.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.1.3.1: Stormwater planning to support 2020 plan Use a proactive approach to mitigating existing stormwater issues and avoiding new problems throughout Acton. In Kelley's Corner and West Acton, do this in a manner consistent with the objective of concentrating growth, and use planning and development review to address these issues. Review existing stormwater management techniques for applicability. This action step should commence in the short term and continue through the long term. See Also: Key Centers Plan</p>	<p>Highest Long-Term</p>	<p>Health Department</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.1.3.2: Limit impervious surfaces In reviewing development, consider incentives and infrastructure to create better managed runoff recharge by limiting impervious surfaces. This action step should begin in the short term and continue through the long term.⁵</p>	<p>2nd Highest New Sustained Action</p>	<p>Planning Department</p>

	<p>Strategy 2.1.4: Encourage private action to conserve water Inform the public and encourage private action to conserve water and reduce impacts to groundwater quality.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.1: Provide water education Provide broad-based education on how our water systems work; where our water resources are located, and how water flows through withdrawal, use, and disposal of wastewater; and promote sustainable use by residents and businesses.⁶ See Also: Acton Stream Teams</p>	2 nd Highest Ongoing 	Acton Water District
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.2: Continue and expand on Acton Water District water conservation encouragement programs.</p>	2 nd Highest Ongoing	Acton Water District
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.3: Support Acton Water District in enforcing and strengthening water use regulations.</p>	Short-Term	
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.4: Monitoring private wells Create better incentives and systems to ensure private well owners also monitor and report on their wells.⁷</p>	Short-Term	Board of Health
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.5: Update private well standards Update water quality standards for residential private wells, including provisions to decommission unused or noncompliant private wells according to Massachusetts DEP guidelines.</p>	Short-Term 	Board of Health
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.6: Encourage environmentally friendly lawns and gardens Identify and encourage the replacement of all or part of home lawns with low-maintenance perennials or gardens. This action step should begin in the short term and continue through the long term.⁸ See Also: Promote healthy biological communities</p>	Ongoing	Acton Water District
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.7: Rainwater harvesting Encourage rainwater harvesting for irrigation and landscaping. This action step should begin in the short term and continue through the long term.⁹</p>	Long-Term	Acton Water District
	<p>Action Item 2.1.4.8: Acton Stream Teams Encourage the revival of the Acton Stream Teams to have citizens periodically monitor and report on the state of streams in Acton - so the Town can document changes and identify and resolve issues.</p>	Short-Term	Citizens and citizen groups

Objective 2.2: Reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins.			
Strategy 2.2.1: Reduce the size of the solid waste stream.			
	Action Item 2.2.1.1: Education on disposal of unwanted items Distribute information to residents on how they can reduce unwanted items, and make items no longer needed available for use by others. ¹⁰	Short-Term 	Zero Waste Committee
	Action Item 2.2.1.2: Create a Zero Waste Committee to promote recycling, reduction, and reuse.	Short-Term 	Selectmen
	Action Item 2.2.1.3: Provide recycling bins in public places Provide recycling bins in central locations around the Town, and a system for processing them. ¹¹	Short-Term 	Zero Waste Committee
	Action Item 2.2.1.4: Reduce use of throw-aways. Encourage the public to reduce the use of throw-away plastic (bottled water, single-use bags). Lead by example: provide water pitchers and, where practicable, washable cups for Town board and committee meetings (especially for high-profile public meetings such as Town Meeting). Leverage Scout troops and schools to influence children.	Short-Term 	Zero Waste Committee
	Action Item 2.2.1.5: Packaging reduction incentives Encourage local stores to implement packaging reduction incentives. ¹²	Medium-Term	Zero Waste Committee
	Action Item 2.2.1.6: Support expanded bottle bill Support the state initiative to expand beverage container deposits.	Ongoing	Zero Waste Committee
Strategy 2.2.2: Increase recycling and reuse.			
	Action Item 2.2.2.1: Improve Transfer Station to promote waste reduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a permanent sheltered drop/swap site at the transfer station. • Research single-stream recycling at the transfer center. • Re-consider implementing a ‘pay as you throw’ system. • Allow any Acton resident to get a “recycling only” sticker for free. See Also: Local hazardous waste days	Highest Short-Term 	Board of Health

	<p>Action Item 2.2.2.2: Private trash haulers - waste reduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require multifamily residential developments to provide a recycling strategy for residents. As a license condition, require that trash contractors report annually to the town on numbers of households they serve, and trash and recycling amounts, as a first step toward creating trash policies that include the curbside providers. 	<p>2nd Highest</p> <p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Selectmen</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.2.2.3: Encourage sports teams to use reusable sports bottles.</p> <p>See Also: Reduce use of throw-aways.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Recreation Commission</p> <p>School Committees</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.2.2.4: Enact a bylaw to control where landscape contractors dispose of debris.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Selectmen</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.2.2.5: Promote composting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate, advocate, and encourage home composting, and provide inexpensive composting bins. Provide more composting services at the transfer station. Study if requiring or encouraging curbside composting service would be practical and effective. Encourage the schools to explore options and develop a food composting program, starting at the central campus. 	<p>2nd Highest</p> <p>Short-Term</p> 	<p>Green Advisory Board</p> <p>School Committees</p> <p>Sustainability Coordinator</p>
	<p>Strategy 2.2.3: Manage hazardous waste appropriately.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.2.3.1: Educate regarding unwanted electronics (e-waste)</p> <p>Conduct e-waste education, and support events where cost effective certified e-waste specialist services are easily available.¹³</p>	<p>2nd Highest</p> <p>Short-Term</p> 	<p>Green Advisory Board</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.2.3.2: Increase number of local hazardous waste days</p> <p>Have more hazardous waste days at the transfer station. Continue accepting pharmaceuticals, and continue to explore expanding the items to be collected.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> 	<p>Board of Health</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.2.3.3: Regional hazardous waste days</p> <p>Consider joining the Devens Hazardous Waste Collection Consortium, or a similar regional program elsewhere.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Selectmen</p>

	<p>Action Item 2.2.3.4: Promote use of non-toxic products Reduce or eliminate the use of toxic cleaning products, pesticides in municipal and school buildings and grounds. See Also: Promote healthy biological communities</p>	Short-Term 	Municipal Properties School Committees
Objective 2.3: Reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.			
Strategy 2.3.1: Encourage use of cleaner energy sources.			
	<p>Action Item 2.3.1.1: Renewable energy at transfer station Turn part of the transfer station into a renewable energy power plant.¹⁴</p>	Highest Ongoing 	Manager Department
	<p>Action Item 2.3.1.2: District heating Permit and provide incentives where applicable for the use of multi-building ground-source heating systems (“district heating”) for new dense development and redevelopment.</p>	Short-Term	Building Department
	<p>Action Item 2.3.1.3: Geothermal energy Advocate for the use of geo-thermal heat pumps in new residential and commercial construction where appropriate.</p>	Medium-Term	Green Advisory Board
Strategy 2.3.2: Reduce energy use in new and renovated buildings.			
	<p>Action Item 2.3.2.1: Advice on energy reductions Provide advice to home-owners, businesses and contractors to undertake new building and renovation projects that reduce energy use.¹⁵</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Green Advisory Board
	<p>Action Item 2.3.2.2: LEED certification Adopt a policy that new public buildings are to be LEED certified Gold or better.</p>	Medium-Term	Selectmen
Strategy 2.3.3: Reduce energy use in existing buildings.			
	<p>Action Item 2.3.3.1: Sustainability coordinator Create a position for a Sustainability Coordinator, funded by the Town at ½ full-time equivalent (0.5 FTE), and expand these hours as other sources of funding allow. As workload permits, this person would assist the Green Advisory Board with other sustainability efforts.¹⁶ \$ (Staffing expense)</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Manager Department
	<p>Action Item 2.3.3.2: PACE legislation Support Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) legislation.¹⁷ Implement this program if it becomes available for Acton.</p>	Short-Term	Selectmen

	<p>Action Item 2.3.3.3: Energy retrofits on public buildings Continue to retrofit existing public buildings to increase energy efficiency. Establish a policy on the minimum pay-back period for these investments \$</p>	<p>2nd Highest Ongoing</p>	<p>Municipal Properties School Committees</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.3.3.4: Energy-efficient ("Cool") roofing Encourage the use of more reflective roofing, especially in the infrared range, to reduce heating costs.¹⁸ Sometimes this "cool" roofing is lighter colored, but not always. Allow such 'cool' roofing in historic districts.¹⁹</p>	<p>Medium-Term</p>	<p>Building Department</p>
	<p>Strategy 2.3.4: Reduce transportation-related CO2 emissions. See Also: Provide and encourage public transportation Make walking and biking easier and safer</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.3.4.1: Encourage the growth of local businesses that can provide local shopping opportunities and employment. See Also: Be more business friendly Enhance Key Centers</p>	<p>Highest Medium-Term</p>	<p>Economic Development Officer</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.3.4.2: Support web-based car pooling and ride sharing.</p>	<p>2nd Highest Medium-Term</p>	<p>Transportation Advisory Committee</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.3.4.3: Reduce vehicle idling Educate the public and enforce and encourage compliance with anti-idling laws, especially at schools and the train station.</p>	<p>Medium-Term</p>	<p>Police</p>
	<p>Strategy 2.3.5: Inform and educate Acton residents and businesses regarding energy efficiency.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.3.5.1: Educate and increase people’s awareness of the need to reduce their carbon footprint.</p>	<p>Short-Term 🍎</p>	<p>Citizens and citizen groups Green Advisory Board</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.3.5.2: Promote energy-efficiency upgrade programs Help promote utility and/or state sponsored energy-efficiency upgrade programs for appliances, lighting, and weatherization.²⁰</p>	<p>2nd Highest Short-Term 🍎</p>	<p>Green Advisory Board</p>
	<p>Action Item 2.3.5.3: Encourage Air-drying of clothing Continue to encourage air-drying of clothing, and advocate for the removal of any home-owner association restrictions on outdoor line-drying.²¹</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Green Advisory Board</p>

	<p>Action Item 2.3.5.4: Energy 'barn raisings' Support and expand on existing energy-saving 'barn raisings' by community organizations and individuals.²²</p>	Ongoing	Citizens and citizen groups
	<p>Strategy 2.3.6: Continue planning for reducing Acton's carbon footprint.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.3.6.1: Leverage Green Communities grants Continue to leverage Green Community grants for energy-reduction activities.</p>	Ongoing 	Green Advisory Board
	<p>Action Item 2.3.6.2: Expand GAB role Expand the role of the Green Advisory Board to include researching and advocating for energy savings in residential, commercial, and industrial sectors.</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 2.3.6.3: Carbon Footprint measurement and reduction plan Conduct town-wide carbon footprint tracking and prepare and implement an energy reduction plan.²³</p>	Short-Term	Green Advisory Board
	<p>Action Item 2.3.6.4: Joint community and town effort to use less fossil fuels Evaluate supporting a "Transition Initiative," a community-wide collaborative effort of citizens and Town government, using education, planning, and action steps to move Acton toward local resilience and energy autonomy.²⁴</p>	New Sustained Action	Citizens and citizen groups Green Advisory Board
	<p>Objective 2.4: Healthy Patterns of Land Use Move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.</p>		
	<p>Strategy 2.4.1: Adopt land use strategies that reduce the development of open land. See Also: Concentrate growth Zoning to support Key Centers Plan Protect open space Provide and encourage public transportation</p>		
	<p>Strategy 2.4.2: Biodiversity Maintain and increase biodiversity on Town conservation land and private land.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.4.2.1: Remove invasive plants Organize efforts to remove invasive plant species from public and private land.²⁵</p>	Long-Term	Conservation Commission

	<p>Action Item 2.4.2.2: Promote healthy biological communities Consider regulations, and promote practices, that support healthy communities of plants and animals. Act to minimize the use of broad-spectrum herbicides and pesticides, and promote organic agriculture and landscaping practices. See Also: Environmentally Friendly Lawns and Gardens Manage hazardous waste appropriately</p>	Medium-Term	Board of Health
	<p>Action Item 2.4.2.3: Discourage invasive plantings Continue to discourage residential and commercial property owners and landscape contractors from planting invasive plant species.²⁶</p>	Ongoing 🍏	Natural Resources Department
	<p>Action Item 2.4.2.4: Education on native plants and biodiversity Develop and implement a public education program on the role of native plants in supporting Acton's biodiversity.</p>	Medium-Term	Natural Resources Department
	<p>Action Item 2.4.2.5: Tree-clearing bylaw Explore the adoption of a tree-clearing bylaw, which would require notice and justification from landowners for certain large tree clearing operations on private parcels.</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 2.4.2.6: Plant and protect large trees Provide education and support the public and private planting and protection of large, long-lasting, carbon-sequestering trees.²⁷ See Also: Manage, preserve, and replace Acton's street trees.</p>	Long-Term	Tree Warden
	<p>Strategy 2.4.3: Conserve farm land and support agriculture in Acton. See Also: Promote healthy biological communities Conserve farming on town-owned land</p>		
	<p>Action Item 2.4.3.1: Protect existing agricultural land Protect existing agricultural land through acquisition or transfer of development rights and promotion of agricultural tax abatements.</p>	Highest Ongoing	Natural Resources Department
	<p>Action Item 2.4.3.2: Support new farming Support new and expanded farming, including organic farming, Community Supported Agriculture, and community gardening on Town-owned land.</p>	2 nd Highest Ongoing	Natural Resources Department
	<p>Action Item 2.4.3.3: Support the Morrison Farm plan Final report is here: www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=865</p>	Ongoing	Morrison Farm Committee

		<p>Action Item 2.4.3.4: Zoning to encourage agriculture Change zoning to encourage the use of cluster development common land for gardening and agriculture; consider density bonuses.</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Planning Department
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¹ These locations are addressed in the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan. These issues, including the relationship of local costs for betterments and townwide benefits, should be included in planning for development of West Acton Village and other designated growth centers

² Package treatment plant effluent discharged in a Zone II water protection area should undergo the highest possible level of treatment. No discharge is allowed into a Zone I.

³ Focus especially on reducing phosphorus discharges for surface water and nitrogen discharges for ground water, and other contaminants typically found in stormwater runoff, such as pesticides and herbicides used on lawns, and contaminants from automobiles found in parking lot runoff

⁴ Town Meeting in 2011 made the Zone II definitions almost the same for the Town and Water District.

⁵ Limiting impervious surfaces might lead to adverse impact of groundwater in Zone II's; this should be a tiered system depending on the sensitivity of a site's location.

⁶ Groups that have been doing this for some time include Acton Citizens for Environmental Safety (ACES), The Discovery Museums, and the Stream Teams.

⁷ Consider a requirement for private irrigation wells in Zone IIs to meter and report their water use during periods when the Water District limits or prohibits watering. At some point water use monitoring for private wells may be required by our DEP water withdrawal permit, and count against the town's withdrawal limit.

⁸ Advocate for removing any home-owner association restrictions against replacing lawns with other vegetation that needs little or no irrigation and chemical applications, and provide public education on home landscaping options that use less water and avoid or reduce fertilizer and pesticide/herbicide applications.

⁹ A key step is to amend the health board ban on cisterns to forbid only cisterns that serve as potable water supplies.

¹⁰ Examples of unwanted items include catalogs and junk mail; ways of making items available for re-use include Freecycle and tag sales. A flyer was developed in the past by the "Life after NESWC" Committee.

¹¹ Bins should be located where their contents, if spilled accidentally or by vandalism, do not adversely impact stormwater systems or surface waterbodies.

¹² Examples: money off if you bring your own bags, sales of products in bulk, etc.

¹³ Green Acton has held annual Drop and Swap days since 2010 that include e-waste recycling.

¹⁴ A Power Purchase Agreement is in progress; it would involve placing photovoltaic panels on unused Transfer Station property.

¹⁵ This includes both the construction process (site development, choice of materials) and their design – promoting energy efficiency (as well as water savings, and a healthy indoor environment in weather-tight buildings.)

¹⁶ This role could include the current part-time position of energy coordinator for the schools as well as other sustainability efforts.

¹⁷ PACE allows home-owners to pay for energy upgrades over time with a line item on their local tax bill, with financial backing from the Commonwealth.

¹⁸ <http://www.nyc.gov/html/coolroofs/html/how/benefit...>

¹⁹ Guidelines are needed to address situations such as flat or pitched roofs, in and outside of historic districts. A future step, if research supports it, would be to provide incentives or require such roofs in appropriate situations

²⁰ The MassSave program provides resources that can be used. Work with builders and suppliers to make clients aware of energy saving options.

²¹ Advocacy may be done association by association, or via a town-wide bylaw, or via lobbying the Massachusetts legislature to pass a ban on homeowner association bans of clotheslines.

²² Barn raisings” refers to community-organized home energy audits followed by volunteer energy-reduction work: caulking, bulb changes, etc.

²³ This is part of the Town’s existing commitment to ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability).

²⁴ For more details on Transition Initiatives, see <http://transitionus.org/> or <http://greenacton.org/transition>)

²⁵ For information on this topic see: <http://www.newfs.org/protect/invasive-plants/index>. An example is the work that has been done on garlic mustard eradication on Acton property. Care in implementing this recommendation is needed, as there is not always agreement on which plant species are invasive.

²⁶ Acton Garden Club has done a lot of education around invasive plants.

²⁷ Disease-resistant Elm and Chestnut trees are becoming available.

Implementation Strategies for:

GOAL 3 Improve Connections

Goal Statement:

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.)

Relationship to Vision

Actonians expressed a strong desire to improve connections, both physical and virtual, so that they have safe and pleasant ways to travel and so that communication is improved. Residents recognized that extending sidewalks, providing safe biking and extending the Town shuttle improve connections between people and places, provide opportunities to meet fitness and wellness goals, and takes better care of the environment. The strategies listed under this goal are ways of addressing these needs and desires.

Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Construct new sidewalks according to the sidewalk priority list. Follow the sidewalk design guidelines when constructing new sidewalks or updating existing ones.

- Continue to fund the MinuteVan shuttle, and later expand the system with more vehicles, more frequent service, and longer service hours. Consider making it a fixed route system.

“A shuttle should absolutely be available all day for all citizens with frequent runs. Teenage use should be promoted.”
 ~ Acton Resident



GOAL 3 Improve Connections cont.

Youth Art Contest Winners:

Luca Ilic



“ My artwork is a drawing of me (at bottom) thinking of 4 ways to improve transportation and connections around Town. ”

Meghna Sundaram



“ Goal 3.2. & 3.3.: Improve Transportation around Town using existing resources and improve communication
Goal 6 & 7: Manage Town facilities efficiently by reusing buses. Promote fiscal responsibility - lesser Town vehicles to maintain. ”

Peter Busse



“ Picture of a boy on a bike. ”

Goal 3: Improve Connections			Priority/Timing	Owner
Objective 3.1: Make walking and biking easier and safer.				
	Strategy 3.1.1: Build appropriate sidewalks See Also: Village-specific sidewalk guidelines Non-motorized access to open space			
	Action Item 3.1.1.1: Maintain sidewalk priority list Continue to update the Sidewalk Construction Priority List. Emphasize projects that provide safe access to schools, recreation areas, the train station, and the villages, particularly the designated growth centers. As public transportation options grow, provide sidewalk access to transit access spots. See Also: Non-car access requirements in commercial development Village-specific sidewalk guidelines		Ongoing	Sidewalk Committee
	Action Item 3.1.1.2: Construct more sidewalks Construct new sidewalks according to the priority list. Follow the <i>Guidelines for Acton Sidewalk Design</i> when constructing new sidewalks or updating existing ones. ¹ \$		Highest Ongoing	Engineering Department
	Action Item 3.1.1.3: CPA funding for some sidewalks Investigate opportunities to use CPA funds for some sidewalk connections. Consider historic characteristics or recreational opportunities. See Also: Document and prioritize rural characteristics \$		Short-Term	Planning Department Sidewalk Committee
Strategy 3.1.2: Increase opportunities for safe biking See Also: Non-motorized access to open space				
	Action Item 3.1.2.1: Planning for bicycle improvements Develop guidelines for bike lanes and off-road paths. Identify locations and develop a construction plan for off-road multi-use paths and bike lanes to improve the ability of people to bicycle to destinations in Town.		2 nd Highest Short-Term	Transportation Advisory Committee
	Action Item 3.1.2.2: Assabet River Rail Trail Complete the construction of the Assabet River Rail Trail. Need to influence MassDOT and Boston MPO.		Ongoing	Planning Department
	Action Item 3.1.2.3: Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Complete the construction of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail. Need to influence MassDOT and Boston MPO.		Ongoing	Planning Department

	<p>Action Item 3.1.2.4: Connect ARRT and BFRT Explore ways to connect the Assabet River Rail Trail and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.</p>	Long-Term	Planning Department Transportation Advisory Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.1.2.5: Provide more bike racks Locate bike racks where feasible and where they will be used.</p>	Short-Term 	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 3.1.2.6: Multi-use path planning Identify locations for off-road multi-use paths, bike lanes, and wider shared lanes and shoulders where appropriate to improve the ability of people to bicycle to destinations in Town. Prepare town-wide recommendations for locations, and construct improvements.² \$</p>	2nd Highest Medium-Term	Engineering Department Planning Department Transportation Advisory Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.1.2.7: Multi-use paths through open space Consider making some paths in town open space usable by bikes, wheelchairs and strollers, in order to create safe bicycle paths between neighborhoods and other destinations. \$</p>	Long-Term	Transportation Advisory Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.1.2.8: Developers provide off-road multi-use paths Increase the requirement in the subdivision regulations for developer contributions to off-road multi-use paths and sidewalks.</p>	Medium-Term	Planning Board Planning Department
<p>Strategy 3.1.3: Improve communications about walking and biking paths</p>			
	<p>Action Item 3.1.3.1: Update pedestrian and bike maps Keep maps current showing sidewalks, bike paths and hiking paths. Make these available on the town website. Consider providing updated information to Google Maps for incorporation in their database.</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term 	Engineering Department Land Stewardship Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.1.3.2: Non-car access requirements in commercial development Consider incorporating requirements for pedestrian and bicycle accommodation in new commercial development.³</p>	Medium-Term	Planning Department

	<p>Action Item 3.1.3.3: Pedestrian safety at town facilities Improve accessibility and safety at Town facilities, particularly the libraries and schools, for pedestrians, people with wheelchairs, and bicyclists. \$</p>	Short-Term	Municipal Properties
	<p>Action Item 3.1.3.4: Increase awareness regarding sharing the road issues Provide outreach to drivers and cyclists to increase awareness of their responsibility to share the road safely.</p>	Short-Term 	Transportation Advisory Committee
Objective 3.2: Improve transportation around town.			
	<p>Strategy 3.2.1: Provide and encourage public transportation See Also: Concentrate growth Provide more transportation service for seniors. Teen activities accessible without cars</p>		
	<p>Action Item 3.2.1.1: Expand MinuteVan Expand the MinuteVan shuttle system with more vehicles, more frequent service, and longer service hours. Provide more options for the disabled community. Consider making it a fixed route system.⁴ \$\$ (operating cost)</p>	Highest Medium-Term	Selectmen Transportation Advisory Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.2.1.2: Coordinate MinuteVan and CoA Van Coordinate the MinuteVan and Council on Aging shuttles, and consider combining them into a single system with both fixed route and demand-responsive capabilities.⁵</p>	Short-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 3.2.1.3: Coordinate shuttles with neighboring communities Consider opportunities to work with neighboring communities to expand ridership of the shuttles.⁶</p>	Medium-Term	Manager Department Selectmen Transportation Advisory Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.2.1.4: Public/private funding for shuttle Explore public/private funding opportunities for the expanded shuttle system.⁷</p>	Medium-Term	Selectmen Transportation Advisory Committee

	<p>Action Item 3.2.1.5: Increase resident use of commuter rail Increase the number of Acton residents who use the commuter rail system.⁸ See Also: Consider ways to increase the amount of parking at the train station.</p>	New Sustained Effort	Planning Department Transportation Advisory Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.2.1.6: Consider ways to increase the amount of parking at the train station</p>	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Transportation Advisory Committee
	<p>Strategy 3.2.2: Improve traffic circulation and reduce traffic impacts See Also: Organize web-based car pooling and ride sharing. Increase resident use of commuter rail</p>		
	<p>Action Item 3.2.2.1: Traffic and parking in centers Address local traffic circulation and parking in planning for key centers.</p>	Short-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 3.2.2.2: Reconfigure street layouts Consider reconfiguring specific street layouts to provide alternate routes for congested areas and/or one-way streets to improve traffic flow.</p>	Long-Term	Planning Department Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 3.2.2.3: Traffic calming Consider traffic calming at locations where speeds are inconsistent with residential areas and village centers. \$</p>	Medium-Term	Engineering Department
	<p>Action Item 3.2.2.4: Improve Business access Continue to make improvements to business access and transportation safety. \$</p>	Ongoing	Selectmen
	<p>Strategy 3.2.3: Work with MassDOT to improve access to and from Acton</p>		
	<p>Action Item 3.2.3.1: Concord Rotary improvements Work through the Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization to promote the completion of planned improvements at the Concord Rotary.⁹</p>	Long-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 3.2.3.2: Improve commuter rail Work with the MBTA and surrounding communities to promote continued and improved commuter rail service.</p>	Ongoing	Manager Department

	<p>Action Item 3.2.3.3: Regional public transit Work through the Boston MPO to explore regional public transportation options. See Also: New Regional Transit Authority</p>	Long-Term	Planning Department Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 3.2.3.4: New Regional Transit Authority Work with MassDOT and surrounding communities to explore the formation of a Regional Transit Authority. See Also: Regional public transit</p>	Long-Term	Manager Department
<p>Objective 3.3: Promote communication among town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.</p>			
	<p>Strategy 3.3.1: Promote citizen engagement in town government Promote active engagement of citizens and the transparency of town government. Improve communication and centralized information regarding existing resources and events. See Also: One-stop reservations and calendar More multilingual staff and materials</p>		
	<p>Action Item 3.3.1.1: Publicize town information sources Continue to disseminate information about existing Town resources and services, such as Dial-a-Ride and Social Safety Net, using the Town Website, mailings, and posters/flyers at locations such as the Senior Center, libraries, and on shuttle vehicles.</p>	Ongoing	Memorial Library
	<p>Action Item 3.3.1.2: Citizen's academy Encourage citizen education efforts such as the formation of an Acton Citizens Academy providing classes, information, and events, where participants (both newcomers and established residents) learn about the different functions of local government including volunteer opportunities.¹⁰</p>	Ongoing	Citizens and citizen groups
	<p>Action Item 3.3.1.3: Usable video archives of key meetings Broadcast meetings of key boards (Board of Selectmen, School Committee, Finance Committee, Planning Board) and place copies of these broadcast videos on the Town website.</p>	Ongoing	Acton TV
<p>Strategy 3.3.2: Attract more volunteers to help with town affairs by conducting broad-based outreach.</p>			
	<p>Action Item 3.3.2.1: Publicize volunteer opportunities. Use town website and other Acton media to publicize volunteer opportunities.</p>	Short-Term 	Volunteer Coordinating Committee
	<p>Action Item 3.3.2.2: More flexibility in volunteer opportunities Provide flexibility in scheduling/timing of volunteer opportunities and consider creating opportunities for shorter-term volunteering (single event, single task, etc).</p>	Short-Term	Volunteer Coordinating Committee

Objective 3.4: Support and strengthen neighborhoods. See Also: Make walking and biking easier and safer Outdoor spaces near neighborhoods			
	Action Item 3.4.1: Encourage private efforts to organize neighborhoods Encourage private efforts to organize communication among neighbors and group activities. ¹¹	Short-Term	Citizens and citizen groups
	Action Item 3.4.2: Provide contact info for new residents to connect with organized neighborhood groups.	Short-Term 	Memorial Library
	Action Item 3.4.3: Encourage the business community to organize providing new residents with business information, such as provided by Welcome Wagon ^(tm) in other communities.	Short-Term	Economic Development Committee

¹ See Guidelines for Acton Sidewalk Design at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=856>

² The primary purpose of these improvements is transportation rather than recreational cycling.

³ Pedestrian and bicycle accommodation includes safe walkways from the public sidewalk to building entrances and bike racks.

⁴ The system could have stops but also route deviations on either side of the fixed routes. Stops could include the train station, the schools, Kelley’s Corner, West Acton Village, Acton Center, East Acton, and the proposed community center. The CoA shuttle can specialize in demand-responsive service and destinations outside Acton.

⁵ The expanded MinuteVan could become a scheduled fixed route system with limited deviations from the route in response to customer requests; the CoA shuttle is a door-to-door on-request service.

⁶ Coordination can include high traffic destinations such as the commuter rail station and Emerson Hospital.

⁷ An example is the joint funding of Lexington’s Lexpress shuttle by the town and developers (including Avalon).

⁸ Ways to encourage commuter rail ridership include:

- Complete the connection of the Assabet River Rail Trail to the commuter rail station to encourage commuting by bicycle.
- Consider guiding growth to South Acton near the station (see Objective 1.1).
- Develop partnerships with local businesses to provide van shuttles to the train station.
- Facilitate car-pooling to the station.

⁹ The Boston MPO process for updating the regional transportation plan and Transportation Improvement Program is one means to increase priority for the Concord Rotary project. The project would reduce cut-through traffic caused by back-ups as well as provide the access needed for economic development.

¹⁰ The League of Women Voters has been doing education in this area for some time.

¹¹ Communication and interaction among neighbors might include email lists, Google groups, newsletters, etc. Group activities might include block parties, neighborhood books groups, walking groups, etc.

Implementation Strategies for:

GOAL 4 Provide More Opportunities for Gathering and Recreation

Goal Statement:

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 inter-generational experiences and for sharing of inter-cultural celebration, and we aim to provide recreational opportunities for all ages.

Relationship to Vision

As previously mentioned, the frequency and emphasis with which Acton residents stated their desire for more opportunities to meet with one another was striking. The strategies listed under this goal outline various ways of meeting this need in outdoor and indoor spaces, formal and informal places, and for a variety of ages.

Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Seek Town Meeting approval to fund the planning, siting, and design of a building that can accommodate the Senior Center and the larger community. Construct the building when Town finances permit.
- Implement the recommendations of the 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Develop a schedule to create conservation

land, maintain and improve existing public playgrounds (with priority to NARA), and create new playgrounds using both public and private funds.

- Encourage the creation of conservation lands associated with new housing development, including but not limited to situations where cluster zoning provisions are applicable.

“ *Let’s create a place where seniors can have private use times when the community could use the facility for other functions.* ”
 ~ Acton Resident

GOAL 4

Provide More Opportunities for Gathering and Recreation cont.

Youth Art Contest Winner: Joy Wang



“The nature of Acton is well protected. People and animals live in harmony. The beautiful environment attracts more people and more animals to live in Acton.”

Goal 4: Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation			Priority/Timing	Owner
Objective 4.1: Create new gathering spaces and make better use of existing ones. See Also: New Restaurants				
Strategy 4.1.1: Create a building that can accommodate the senior center and the larger community. See Also: Universal Design / Town facilities Explore ideas for accommodating preschool children				
Action Item 4.1.1.1: Design and Build a community/senior center Fund the design of a facility that can serve both as a senior center and for other community center needs. Include representation from Council on Aging, the Recreation Commission and other potential users of the building to develop a space program, operating budget, and architectural design for the facility, and investigate potential funding sources to supplement Town funds. ¹ Construct the building when town finances permit. See Also: Explore regionalization opportunities \$\$			Highest Medium-Term	Council on Aging Recreation Commission Recreation Department Selectmen
Strategy 4.1.2: Facilities for pre-school children and parents Create and/or make available indoor and outdoor facilities for use by families with young children.				
Action Item 4.1.2.1: Explore ideas for accommodating preschool children Explore accommodating the needs of families with young children in existing and/or new Town buildings, e.g., re-use of the existing Senior Center and scheduling space in schools and a new Senior Center. See Also: Evaluate underused buildings			2 nd Highest Short-Term	Recreation Commission Recreation Department
Strategy 4.1.3: Encourage use of existing and new gathering spaces See Also: Evaluate underused buildings				
Action Item 4.1.3.1: One-stop reservations and calendar Create a 'one stop' mechanism for viewing a calendar and reserving meeting spaces in either town or school facilities. ²			Highest Short-Term 	Information Technology Department
Strategy 4.1.4: Outdoor areas for gathering in centers Create parks and informal outdoor gathering places in key centers, and encourage commercial opportunities for gathering. See Also: Encourage developer contributions of public space to town centers New restaurants				

Objective 4.2: Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands.			
	Strategy 4.2.1: Parks and play areas. Create and maintain parks and playgrounds, and increase opportunities for active recreation for all age groups.		
	Action Item 4.2.1.1: Implement OSRP (Recreation portion) Implement the recreation recommendations of the 2011 <i>Open Space and Recreation Plan</i> (OSRP). Develop a schedule to maintain and improve existing public playgrounds (with priority to NARA), and create new playgrounds using both public and private funds. See Also: Implement OSRP (Open Space portion) \$	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Recreation Commission Recreation Department
	Action Item 4.2.1.2: Playground for young children Improve a playground to include facilities suitable for young children. \$	Medium-Term	Recreation Commission Recreation Department
	Action Item 4.2.1.3: Improve playground and park amenities Add shade trees, benches, and other amenities at existing parks and playgrounds. \$	Medium-Term	Recreation Commission Recreation Department
	Action Item 4.2.1.4: Encourage contributions toward construction of playgrounds and/or parks in new developments. See Also: Encourage developer contributions of public space to town centers	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Planning Board Selectmen
	Action Item 4.2.1.5: Playground Committee Consider forming a Citizens' Playground Committee and finding alternative funding sources for maintenance of playground equipment and grounds.	Short-Term	Recreation Commission
	Action Item 4.2.1.6: Make play areas accessible Ensure that parks, playgrounds, and playing fields are wheelchair accessible to the extent practicable. See Also: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community \$	Medium-Term	Recreation Department

	<p>Strategy 4.2.2: Create and maintain conservation lands See Also: Maintain sidewalk priority list</p>		
	<p>Action Item 4.2.2.1: Maintain conservation lands Continue the work of maintaining the Town conservation lands.</p>	Ongoing	Land Stewardship Committee
	<p>Action Item 4.2.2.2: New conservation lands with new development Encourage the creation of conservation lands associated with new housing development, including but not limited to situations where cluster zoning provisions are applicable.</p>	Highest New Sustained Action	Planning Board Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 4.2.2.3: Private and public funding mix for conservation lands Implement the recommendations of the OSRP with respect to the maintenance of conservation lands, including trails, using a combination of public funds and private fundraising.³</p>	Short-Term	Natural Resources Department
	<p>Strategy 4.2.3: Increase opportunities for team sports.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 4.2.3.1: Ensure that playing fields are available to both youth leagues and adult leagues.</p>	Short-Term	Recreation Department
	<p>Action Item 4.2.3.2: Explore methods to maximize the use of existing playing fields and create new playing fields.</p>	2 nd Highest Ongoing	Citizens and citizen groups Recreation Commission School Committees
	<p>Action Item 4.2.4: Non-motorized access to open space Improve walking and biking access to open space resources. \$</p>	Long-Term	Sidewalk Committee

		Objective 4.3: Support additional cultural activities. See Also: Actively recruit a small-scale movie theater to locate in Acton.		
		Action Item 4.3.1: Non-commercial movie showings Create a non-commercial showing of regularly scheduled movies at one or more appropriate locations. ⁴	Medium-Term	Recreation Commission
		Action Item 4.3.2: Coordination for more multi-age activities Increase the coordination between the Acton Memorial Library, the West Acton Citizen’s Library, and the Council on Aging. Continue to support programming geared to different age groups (particularly children and seniors).	Short-Term 	Memorial Library
		Action Item 4.3.3: Programs to connect those with shared interests Continue to offer a wide range of community education / recreation programs that reflect the interests of Acton residents. Promote connections among participants through shared interests.	Ongoing	Community Education Recreation Commission
		Action Item 4.3.4: Support cultural activities via publicity and space Support the efforts of the Acton Boxborough Cultural Council and private organizations to provide local opportunities and publicity for theater, concerts, dance, and multi-cultural events and celebrations. Make Acton’s public venues available when appropriate and support the dissemination of information regarding these as possible (e.g. post on town website). See Also: One-stop reservations and calendar	Ongoing	
		Action Item 4.3.5: Support expanding private fundraising efforts for cultural events.	Ongoing	Acton Boxborough Cultural Council

¹ The Selectmen have established a committee to begin this process.
² The feasibility of making this system web-based should be explored. Include the library in this system.
³ Explore the use of a combination of public and private funds for maintenance of conservation land, as recommended in the OSRP.
⁴ Admission to films would have to be free to avoid the costs of commercial screening of copyrighted films.

Implementation Strategies for:

GOAL 5 Support Inclusion and Diversity

Goal Statement:

We value our diversity in all of its forms. We welcome citizens of all ages, socio-economic, cultural, racial and ethnic backgrounds. We strive to foster respect and appreciation, promote interaction, and actively encourage a wide variety of individuals to live, work, and play in Acton.

Relationship to Vision

This goal relates to community-building, to taking care to include and support all segments of the population. This includes seniors, who may be on a fixed income, youth who may need infrastructure to support their increasing independence, and newcomers, some of whom may

have cultural and/or linguistic barriers to getting involved with Town activities. Consistent with the state mandate, the Town has expressed a desire to provide a range of housing options that are affordable to empty nesters wishing to downsize, Town employees, young couples, and/or others with low and moderate incomes.

Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Provide more housing and transportation for seniors.
- Prepare a proactive plan to make rental and owner housing available at prices that Acton families of low and moderate income can afford and at the same time provide means to meet the 10% state goal that frees Acton from 40B development. The plan should emphasize providing this housing at small, scattered sites near walkable business and service destina-

tions, especially in proximity to village centers in a manner consistent with the planning for key centers. The plan should consider the Town’s participation in desired housing development and it should consider the purchase of deed restrictions as one means to meet the state affordable housing goal.

- Create a new committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and other such groups in Town whose main charge will include providing information to newcomers and organizing multi-cultural activities.

“*Let’s provide and plan housing developments that are accessible to shopping and transportation.*”

~ Acton Resident



GOAL 5

Support Inclusion and Diversity cont.

Youth Art Contest Winner: Carrie Yu



“My little brother plays soccer with Acton-Boxboro Youth Soccer. As in the enclosed picture, his teammates are from all different backgrounds. This is the kind of diversity in Acton, which is exemplary.”

Goal 5: Support Inclusion and Diversity				
Objective 5.1: Support residents of all ages			Priority/Timing	Owner
		<p>Strategy 5.1.1: Support seniors Support seniors by providing easier access to housing, transportation, and connecting with the community. See Also: Incentives to keep post-school-age households in town Create a building that can accommodate the senior center and the larger community Make walking and biking easier and safer Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands</p>		
		<p>Action Item 5.1.1.1: Housing for seniors Support the provision of housing that is appropriate to seniors (e.g. smaller units, located within walking distance of goods and services such as Kelley’s Corner). See Also: Roadmap for Guiding Growth Affordable Housing Strategy</p>	Highest Medium-Term	Planning Department
		<p>Action Item 5.1.1.2: Provide more transportation service for seniors. \$</p>	Highest Medium-Term	Council on Aging Transportation Advisory Committee
		<p>Action Item 5.1.1.3: Inter-generational programs Create opportunities for inter-generational interaction and learning in a new senior center and through community programs and volunteer activities. See Also: Coordination for more multi-age activities</p>	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Council on Aging
		<p>Action Item 5.1.1.4: Outreach to new seniors, especially across languages Conduct outreach to seniors (including newly arrived seniors who may speak languages other than English). See Also: More multilingual staff and materials Recruit volunteers from ethnic and language minorities</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Council on Aging
		<p>Action Item 5.1.1.5: Senior tax abatement strategies Offer more paid part-time positions at Town Hall and tax exemptions for seniors. See Also: Incentives to keep post-school-age households in town</p>	Medium-Term	Selectmen

	<p>Strategy 5.1.2: Integrate Teens Integrate teens in the community by providing services, easier mobility, and activities.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 5.1.2.1: Continue to support services for younger Actonians at the T.J. O'Grady Skate Park and Danny's Place.</p>	Ongoing	Recreation Department
	<p>Action Item 5.1.2.2: Outreach to teens for planning In order to best address youth needs, conduct outreach to youth to guide them to articulate their needs, and involve them in the planning process.</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term	Planning Department School Committees
	<p>Action Item 5.1.2.3: Teen activities accessible without cars Provide more activities for teenagers that are accessible without an automobile, e.g. improved walking access from the schools to Kelley's Corner and an expanded shuttle system. See Also: Public/private funding for shuttle Make walking and biking easier and safer</p>	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Citizens and citizen groups
	<p>Action Item 5.1.2.4: Teen place Consider creating and/or programming a park or other gathering place that is accessible for and attractive to teens. See Also: Improve Kelley's Corner \$</p>	Medium-Term	Recreation Commission
	<p>Action Item 5.1.2.5: Involve teens in town governance Involve youth in town governance by providing teen part time work and volunteer opportunities in town services including creating a "student representative" to town government. Explore possibilities for providing school and/or community service credit for these activities.</p>	2 nd Highest Short-Term 	Human Resources Department School Committees
	<p>Strategy 5.1.3: Support the inclusion of families with young children into community life.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 5.1.3.1: Provide gathering places and recreational opportunities for families with young children. See Also: Create new gathering spaces and make better use of existing ones Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands \$</p>	Medium-Term	Recreation Commission

	Strategy 5.1.4: Identify how age demographics are changing community needs.		
	<p>Action Item 5.1.4.1: Document needs of an aging population Meet with department heads to explore ways of documenting the changing needs of an aging population by recording usage of services and facilities (e.g. minuteman shuttle, parks, library, etc.) and identify ways of reaching missing demographics.</p>	Short-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 5.1.4.2: Identifying seniors at risk Explore the need for identifying “At Risk” seniors, living alone and/or with problems communicating with public health and safety officials.</p>	Short-Term	Community Services Coordinator
Objective 5.2: Support households of all income levels			
	<p>Strategy 5.2.1: Affordable Housing Strategy Develop a comprehensive and proactive affordable housing strategy that supports the provision of a wide range of housing types including for people of limited means, and also allows Acton to make progress on the Commonwealth's affordable housing goals set forth in Chapter 40B of the General Laws. See Also: Legislation to increase local control over development</p>		
	<p>Action Item 5.2.1.1: Housing Plan Prepare an updated proactive plan¹ to make additional rental and owner housing available at prices that Acton families of low and moderate income can afford and at the same time provide a means to make progress toward the 10% state requirement for affordable housing.²³ The plan should be consistent with the planning for key centers See Also: Roadmap for Guiding Growth Housing for seniors</p>	Highest Short-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 5.2.1.2: Incentives for well-located affordable housing Provide incentives for the development of housing that is “affordable” (meeting state standards) and/or simply within the means of people and families with low and moderate incomes, such as empty nesters, town staff, and young families, at small scattered sites especially in proximity to village centers.</p>	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 5.2.1.3: Purchase deed restrictions in existing housing Explore ways to continue and expand the conversion of existing below-market housing units to affordable units through purchase of deed restrictions. \$</p>	Long-Term	Acton Community Housing Corporation

	<p>Action Item 5.2.1.4: Allow more dividing of existing lots for economical housing In the review of Acton’s zoning bylaws, support and expand the ability of residents who wish to subdivide their homes (and property) for economical housing (e.g., “in-law apartments”) by increasing the number of houses that qualify under the <i>Zoning Bylaw</i>⁴ and providing regulations that permit subdivision of a single residential lot for affordable housing purposes, subject to review of septic systems and effect on historic districts, as applicable. See Also: Review zoning in light of plan goals and buildout potential</p>	<p>2nd Highest Short-Term</p>	<p>Health Department Planning Department</p>
	<p>Action Item 5.2.1.5: Housing sites with open space purchases When the Town purchases large open space parcels, consider designating a portion as an affordable housing site.⁵ See Also: Funding of open space protection</p>	<p>New Sustained Action</p>	<p>Open Space Committee</p>
	<p>Strategy 5.2.2: Provide social support and economic opportunities for residents of low and moderate income. See Also: Publicize town information sources</p>		
	<p>Action Item 5.2.2.1: Match people in need with agencies Increase volunteer and community connections by working with the school system and the Town to identify those in need and match them with volunteers and agencies.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Community Services Coordinator</p>
	<p>Action Item 5.2.2.2: Support agencies serving residents in need Continue to support agencies working to serve the needs of the Town’s low and moderate income residents.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Selectmen</p>
<p>Objective 5.3: Embrace cultural diversity</p>			
	<p>Strategy 5.3.1: Support diverse cultures within Acton and welcome new residents of all ethnicities. See Also: Citizen’s academy</p>		
	<p>Action Item 5.3.1.1: Town space for cultural activities Continue to support and provide Town space for cultural activities and celebrations.</p>	<p>2nd Highest Ongoing</p>	<p>Municipal Properties School Committees</p>
	<p>Action Item 5.3.1.2: Acknowledge more holidays Support the recognition of cultural holidays town-wide (including by noting these on the town web site and supporting their recognition in the schools) and consider holding an annual Acton Multi-Cultural Celebrations Day.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p>	<p>School Committees Selectmen</p>

	Action Item 5.3.1.3: Consider establishing a Diversity Awareness Day with diversity training materials and programs.	Short-Term	School Committees Selectmen
	Action Item 5.3.1.4: More multilingual staff and materials Consider hiring and providing multilingual staff and materials at Town facilities. Provide signs, website, and written information in multiple languages. See Also: Extend multi-language support	Long-Term	Manager Department
	Action Item 5.3.1.5: Include non-citizen residents in town affairs Encourage non-citizen residents to serve on town boards where possible	Long-Term	Selectmen
	Action Item 5.3.1.6: Recruit volunteers from ethnic and language minorities Create a new committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and language groups in town whose main charge will include providing information to newcomers and organizing multi-cultural activities. This will help build bridges, knitting the community closer together, and it will provide guidance to those unfamiliar with the town and its resources.	Short-Term 	Selectmen
	Action Item 5.3.1.7: Expand language offerings Explore whether the schools think it is feasible to expand foreign language options to include Portuguese, Russian, and the Indian languages, as well as the current Chinese language offerings.	Medium-Term	School Committees
Strategy 5.3.2: Identify how cultural demographics are changing community needs.			
	Action Item 5.3.2.1: Extend multi-language support Explore the need and feasibility of implementing actions such as: having the Police Department subscribe to AT&T's translation service, translating key portions of the Town's website especially pages dealing with regulations, services and emergency announcements, etc. See Also: More multilingual staff and materials	Medium-Term	Manager Department
	Action Item 5.3.2.2: Focus groups to improve outreach Conduct follow up focus groups with the goal of identifying ways of broadening the participation of residents from all segments of Acton's population.	Short-Term	Planning Department
	Action Item 5.3.2.3: Document the changing needs of a multicultural population Meet with Town Department Heads to identify ways in which demographic changes (specifically cultural and linguistic) may have affected community needs and the provision of services.	Short-Term	Manager Department

Objective 5.4: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community.			
	<p>Action Item 5.4.1: Universal Design / Town facilities Consider Universal Design principles at new Town facilities and in development guidelines and review to provide physical access benefits to all.⁶ See Also: Make play areas accessible Create a building that can accommodate the senior center and the larger community</p>	2 nd Highest Long-Term	Municipal Properties
	<p>Action Item 5.4.2: Universal Design / Housing Encourage the use of Universal Design principles in both affordable and market housing through development guidelines and review.</p>	Short-Term	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 5.4.3: ADA Transition Plan Update the Town's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Transition Plan, including identification of priorities for corrective action.</p>	Medium-Term	Municipal Properties
	<p>Action Item 5.4.4: Employment information for the disabled Support and provide information on job training and career counseling opportunities for disabled individuals.</p>	Short-Term	Commission on Disabilities
	<p>Action Item 5.4.5: Expanding access to team sports Work with the Recreation Commission to create opportunities for participation in team sports by people with disabilities.⁷ See Also: Make play areas accessible</p>	Medium-Term	Commission on Disabilities

¹ The Town's last housing plan is here: <https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-2277>

² The Commonwealth allows for greater local control over affordable housing projects when a threshold of 10% of deeded affordable housing is achieved, or when significant progress is made in a given year. These thresholds are generally difficult for Acton to achieve, but achieving them is very helpful for the town's goals, if they can be achieved without significantly risking the general land use strategy of this plan.

³ The housing plan should explore the potential of forming a partnership with a regional non-profit development entity.

⁴ Zoning Bylaws: <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=659>

⁵ Adding affordable housing to an open space purchase plan also helps fund the open space purchase.

⁶ Universal Design refers to design principles that accommodate people with and without disabilities in the same way, e.g., curb ramps that provide access for strollers and shopping carts as well as wheelchairs. All new Town facilities and alterations must comply with ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

⁷ The Town is working to install a "Field of Dreams" athletic field that will support leagues focused on serving youth with disabilities.

Implementation Strategies for:

GOAL 6

Preserve and Enhance Town-owned Assets & Services

Goal Statement:

We value our Town assets and wish to preserve and enhance them. These include our open spaces, schools, municipal properties and facilities.

Relationship to Vision

The strategies listed under this goal relate to a sense of responsibility to maintain, protect and improve Town assets, including Acton's excellent schools, Town-owned buildings and recreational facilities. It also relates to ways of updating the provision of Town services through the use of technology and maximizing the efficiency of providing services by exploring regional opportunities.

Overview of Priority Action Steps

- Conserve existing farming on Town-owned land and support new and expanded agricultural activity and uses.
- Continue to keep the school system up to date and achieve academic excellence, using standards and best practices as they are developed.
- Form a technology committee to explore ways to better leverage technology, both in the schools and in the municipality to reduce costs and improve services.
- Explore ways in which Town Hall can use current technology to communicate and disseminate information and provide services, including:
 - Updating the contents, aesthetics and access of the town website. (See also Objective 3.3 and 4.3)
 - Expand payment notifications for taxes and other bills online for residents, thus making

- the transactions easier for residents and also cutting down costs of labor and materials.
- Making the permitting process simpler by establishing online application forms and database, and converting all files into digital records.

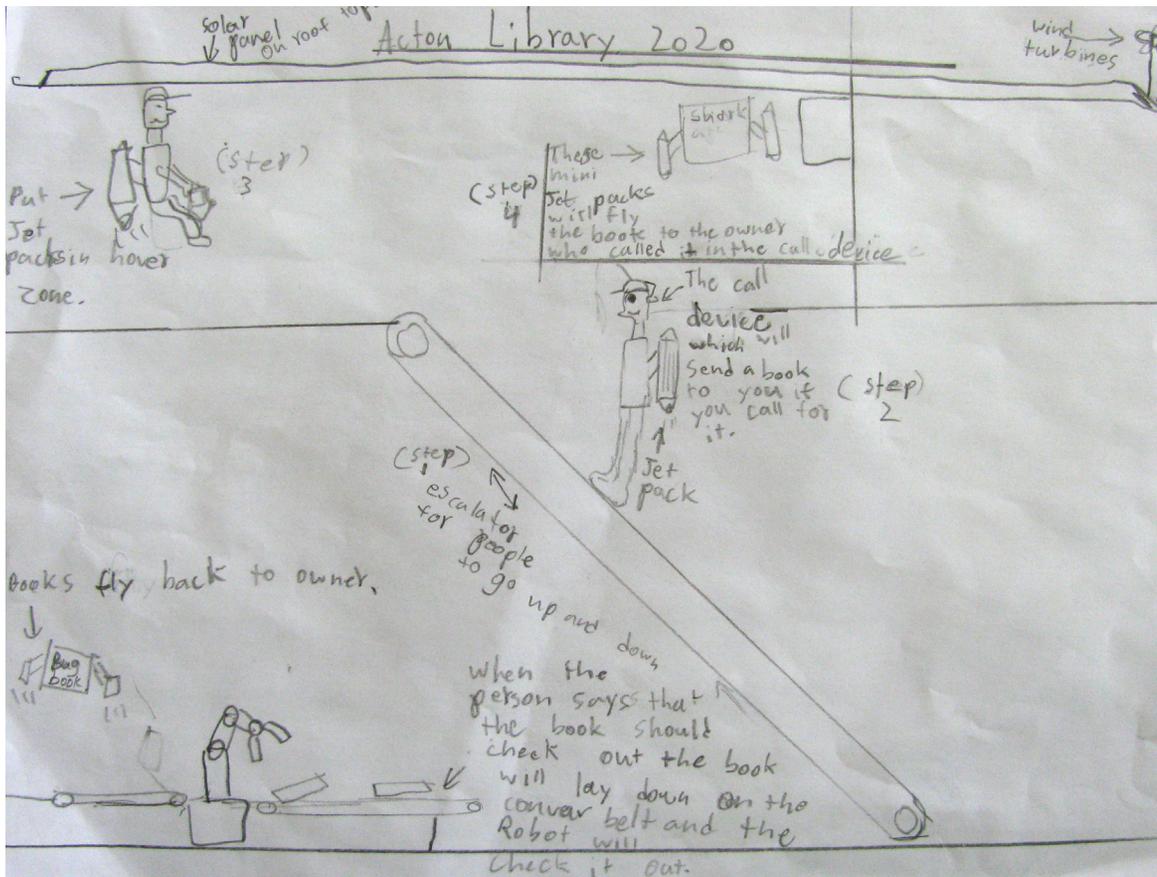
“Great schools keep property values high. We should invest what is needed to stay at the top and allocate the rest to other priorities.”

~ Acton Resident

GOAL 6

Preserve and Enhance
Town-owned Assets & Services cont.

Youth Art Contest Winner: Jyo Pari



“ I sketched a picture of the Acton Library in 2020. I want to find books and check out books faster without much human interventions. ”

Goal 6: Preserve and Enhance Town-owned Assets & Services			Priority/Timing	Owner
Objective 6.1: Protect Town-owned open space				
See Also: Recognize waterbodies as part of Acton's heritage				
Strategy 6.1.1: Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan. See Also: Implement OSRP (Open Space portion) Implement OSRP (Recreation portion)				
		<p>Action Item 6.1.1.1: Preserve and acquire open space Protect and increase Town-owned open space by applying a range of preservation and acquisition measures, e.g., purchase of conservation restrictions or use of Transfer of Development Rights zoning. See Also: Other tools for protecting open space</p>	<p>2nd Highest Ongoing</p>	<p>Citizens and citizen groups Open Space Committee Planning Department</p>
Strategy 6.1.2: Preserve farmland and conservation land with agricultural and forestry uses. Set up an Agricultural Commission				
		<p>Action Item 6.1.2.1: Conserve farming on town-owned land Conserve existing farming on town-owned land and support new and expanded agricultural activity and uses.¹ See Also: Support the Morrison Farm plan</p>	Short-Term	<p>Natural Resources Department Open Space Committee</p>
		<p>Action Item 6.1.2.2: Forestry Management Plan Support the Conservation Commission's efforts to develop a Forestry Management Plan.</p>	Ongoing	Natural Resources Department

Objective 6.2: Support excellence in schools				
	Strategy 6.2.1: Ensure that school facilities are well-maintained and updated. See Also: Fiscal balance between town and schools			
	Action Item 6.2.1.1: Minuteman renovation Work with other participating districts to renovate the Minuteman Career and Technical High School.		Medium-Term	School Committees Selectmen
	Action Item 6.2.1.2: Support existing efforts to explore regionalization opportunities in the K-6 grades.		2 nd Highest	School Committees
	Strategy 6.2.2: High educational standards Continue to support and achieve the high educational standards of Acton's schools, including the Minuteman Career and Technical High School, a regional school that serves Acton. See Also: Minuteman renovation			
	Action Item 6.2.2.1: Support the schools' Long Range Strategic Plan Continue to keep Acton's school systems up to date and achieve academic excellence, using standards and best practices as included in the Long Range Strategic Plan.		Highest	School Committees
	Action Item 6.2.2.2: Volunteers for schools Continue to develop an active volunteer community to improve and maintain excellence in school activities.		Ongoing	School Committees
	Action Item 6.2.2.3: Enhance community education programs Enhance community education programs ensuring they meet the needs and desires of Acton residents. See Also: Programs to connect those with shared interests		2 nd Highest	Community Education

Objective 6.3: Manage the Town’s facilities efficiently			
	<p>Strategy 6.3.1: Review and manage Town facilities in a manner that is pro-active and cost effective.</p> <p>Continue to explore the most efficient and environmentally sensitive ways to implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan with respect to Acton’s sewer system.</p> <p>See Also: Energy retrofits on public buildings One-stop reservations and calendar ADA Transition Plan Transfer Station waste reduction Create a building that can accommodate the senior center and the larger community Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community. Monitor groundwater quantity and quality</p>		
	<p>Action Item 6.3.1.1: Preventive maintenance of buildings and grounds</p> <p>Continue to apply preventive maintenance measures in order to extend the life of municipal and school buildings and grounds, and to ensure that they fully support the activities they house.</p>	2 nd Highest	Municipal Properties School Committees
	<p>Action Item 6.3.1.2: Evaluate underused buildings</p> <p>Evaluate the condition and use of all buildings owned by the Town (including schools) to determine their most effective use. Identify appropriate reuse for potentially surplus facilities and determine whether or not it is more cost-efficient to sell, lease, mothball or demolish. Evaluate the possibility of any of these buildings becoming effective public gathering spaces.</p>	2 nd Highest	Municipal Properties School Committees
	<p>Action Item 6.3.1.3: Implement the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan</p> <p>Continue to explore the most efficient and environmentally sensitive ways to implement the recommendations of the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan with respect to Acton’s sewer system.</p> <p>See Also: West Acton Village sewers Advanced package wastewater treatment</p>	2 nd Highest	Health Department
	<p>Action Item 6.3.1.4: Manage, preserve, and replace Acton’s street trees.</p> <p>See Also: Plant and protect large trees</p>	Ongoing	Tree Warden

Objective 6.4: Provide high quality services that are responsive to community needs.			
See Also: Continue to support services for younger Actonians at the T.J. O’Grady Skate Park and Danny’s Place. Nursing Service One-stop reservations and calendar Be more business friendly Coordination for more multi-age activities Parks and play areas.			
Strategy 6.4.1: Explore ways of using technology to enhance the provision of Town services See Also: Explore regionalization opportunities Coordination for more multi-age activities			
	Action Item 6.4.1.1: Technology for delivering services Explore ways in which Town government can use current technology to communicate and disseminate information and provide services, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating the contents, aesthetics and access of the town website. • Setting up payment notifications for taxes and other bills online for residents, thus making the transactions easier for residents and also cut down costs of labor and materials. • Making the permitting process simpler by establishing online application forms, database and converting all files into digital records. See Also: One-stop reservations and calendar Streamline business permitting	Highest	Information Technology Department
	Action Item 6.4.1.2: Form a technology committee Form a committee to explore ways to better leverage technology both in the schools and in the municipality to reduce costs and improve services.	Highest 	Selectmen
	Action Item 6.4.1.3: Coordinate Library Services and Community Education Increase the coordination between the Acton Memorial Library, the West Acton Citizen’s Library, and the Council on Aging, and Community Education. Continue to support programming geared to different age groups (particularly children and seniors).	Short-Term 	Memorial Library

Objective 6.5: Provide excellent public health and safety services			
See Also: Explore regionalization opportunities			
Strategy 6.5.1: Ensure that public health and safety services respond to demographic and other changes.			
	Action Item 6.5.1.1: Explore efficiencies for public safety Determine the most effective way to deliver public safety services (including dispatch) quickly and efficiently as the Town grows and its distribution changes.	Highest	Fire Department Police
	Action Item 6.5.1.2: Public Safety staffing levels Continue to monitor the staffing levels of the police and fire departments and adjust appropriately as the population increases and ages.	Ongoing	Manager Department
	Action Item 6.5.1.3: Nursing Service Evaluate the Acton Nursing Service to determine the most appropriate way of delivering this service, in light of an aging population.	Short-Term	Manager Department

¹ Consider the creation of an agricultural commission.

Implementation Strategies for:

GOAL 7 Maintain and Improve the Town's Financial Well-being

Goal Statement:

We believe it is critical for us to sustain and strengthen our Town's financial well-being. This includes commercial and economic development that reflects the long-term goals of both businesses and residents of the community. This also includes promoting vigilance in controlling Town expenses and continual evaluation of the balance between reasonable taxation and providing quality Town services.

Overview of Priority Action Steps

- Do more to promote economic development to enhance the commercial tax base in order to reduce the residential portion of the tax levy.
- Actively promote employment-oriented development (e.g., high tech/R&D offices) in targeted areas.
- Continue planning to cover long term obligations such as retiree health insurance and life insurance.
- Explore regionalization opportunities to cut costs in service delivery, particularly police and fire dispatch services and services such as a community center, housing authority, inspectional services, veteran's services, and nursing.
- Improve and streamline the business permitting process, including implementing permit tracking software.
- Consider incentives to encourage seniors and empty-nesters to stay in Acton such as tax relief, preference in hiring for part time jobs with the Town, an adequate supply of smaller housing, and a new senior center.

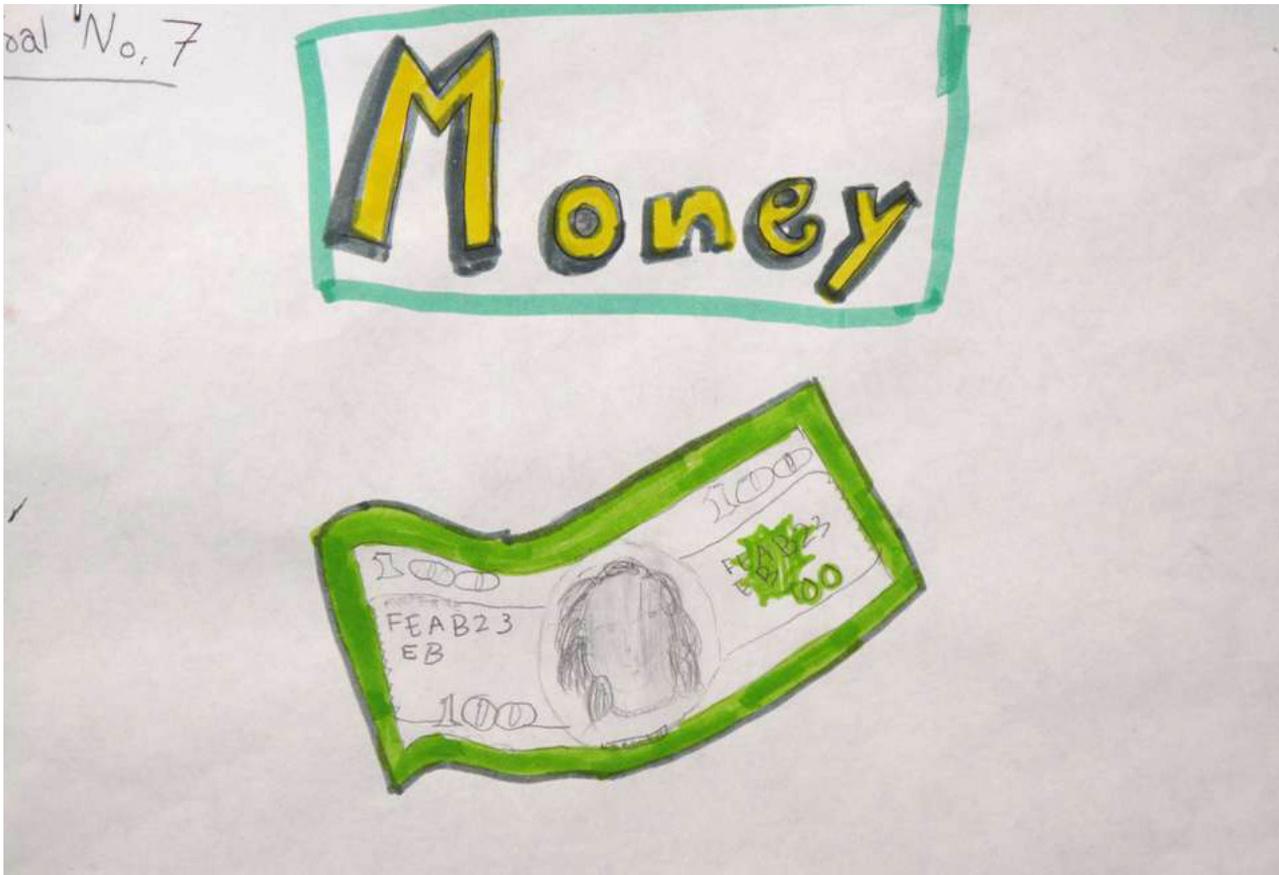
Ongoing Activities

- Support ongoing efforts to balance the financial requirements of the school system and other Town resources.
- Accelerate the process of long-range planning for major capital expenditures such as remodeling Town or school facilities or constructing new buildings.
- Continue to scrutinize all budget items to ensure Town services are a "good deal" for taxes paid.
- Continue the strategy of supplementing current revenues with sources other than the property tax, e.g., grants and fees.
- Continue to enhance the level of services that the Town can provide with existing resources through the evaluation of priorities and by incorporating improvements in technology.
- Continue to seek federal, state, and private funding sources to supplement Town funds.

GOAL 7

Maintain and Improve the
Town's Financial Well-being cont.

Youth Art Contest Winner: Gretel Busse



“\$100 bill with “money”
written at the top”

Goal 7: Maintain and Improve Financial Well-being of the Town			Priority/Timing	Owner
Objective 7.1: Promote fiscal responsibility				
		Strategy 7.1.1: Actively manage Town finances to avoid an undue tax burden on residential property		
		Action Item 7.1.1.1: Enhance commercial tax base Do more to promote economic development to enhance the commercial tax base in order to reduce the residential portion of the tax levy. See Also: Promote economic development that supports other Acton 2020 planning goals Improve existing commercial areas	Highest Ongoing	Economic Development Committee
		Action Item 7.1.1.2: Encourage empty nesters to stay in Acton Continue to develop policies that encourage empty nesters and seniors to stay in Acton in order to increase the taxpayer/student ratio. ¹ See Also: Create a building that can accommodate the senior center and the larger community Support seniors Support the financial ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime Housing for seniors Incentives to keep post-school-age households in town	Highest Ongoing	Council on Aging
		Action Item 7.1.1.3: Fiscal balance between town and schools As enrollments decline in Acton schools, continue the work of the Acton Leadership Group to allocate increased fiscal capacity in an appropriate balance between educational improvements and other priorities of the town.	2 nd Highest Ongoing	Finance Committee School Committees Selectmen
		Action Item 7.1.1.4: Complete Long-range Capital Plan Improve the process of long-range planning for major capital expenditures such as remodeling town or school facilities or constructing new buildings. ²	2 nd Highest Ongoing 	Finance Committee Manager Department
		Action Item 7.1.1.5: Planning for long term obligations Continue planning to cover long term obligations such as retiree health insurance and life insurance.	Highest Ongoing	Manager Department

	<p>Action Item 7.1.1.6: Ensure financially efficient town services Continue to scrutinize all budget items to ensure town services are a "good deal" for taxes paid. See Also: Explore other sources of funding town services</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> 	<p>Manager Department School Committees</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.1.1.7: Supplement revenues with grants, fees, etc. Continue to seek federal, state, and private funding sources, including grants and fees, in order to supplement current revenues with sources other than the property tax.³ See Also: Create a grants and funding clearinghouse Leverage Green Communities grants Private and public funding mix for conservation lands Public/private funding for shuttle Support expanding private fundraising efforts for cultural events.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> 	<p>Manager Department</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.1.1.8: Consider utilizing public-private partnerships Consider utilizing public-private partnerships in order to fund large capital and other expense items</p>	<p>2nd Highest</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Finance Department</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.1.1.9: Explore other sources of funding town services Explore ways of using federal, state, and private funding sources to supplement Town funds in providing town services See Also: Supplement revenues with grants, fees, etc. Create a grants and funding clearinghouse Leverage Green Communities grants Manage the Town's facilities efficiently Explore efficiencies for public safety Financially efficient town services</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> 	<p>Manager Department</p>
	<p>Strategy 7.1.2: Continuously improve the efficiency and performance of Town services. See Also: Form a technology committee</p>		
	<p>Action Item 7.1.2.1: Explore regionalization opportunities Explore regionalization opportunities to cut costs in service delivery, particularly police and fire dispatch services and services such as a community center, housing authority, inspectional services, veteran's services, and nursing. See Also: Regional cooperation on development issues New Regional Transit Authority Regional hazardous waste days Support existing efforts to explore regionalization opportunities in the K-6 grades.</p>	<p>Highest</p> <p>Short-Term</p> 	<p>Manager Department</p>

	<p>Action Item 7.1.2.2: Create a grants and funding clearinghouse Create a clearinghouse within the Town IT system for sharing grant and funding opportunities among Town departments and committees.</p>	Short-Term 	Information Technology Department
	<p>Strategy 7.1.3: Consider fiscal impacts of new development when amending the Zoning Bylaw and reviewing special permit applications.</p>	Ongoing	
	<p>Action Item 7.1.3.1: Ensure Zoning takes in to account the impact of new development. On an ongoing basis, ensure that all zoning is coordinated with and takes into account the impact of new development on town services, facilities and infrastructure. See Also: Review zoning in light of plan goals and buildout potential Zoning to support Key Centers Plan</p>	2 nd Highest Ongoing	Planning Department
	<p>Action Item 7.1.3.2: Impact fees Consider supporting legislation that would enable Massachusetts towns to charge impact fees on new development.</p>	Long-Term	Selectmen
<p>Objective 7.2: Promote economic development that supports other Acton 2020 planning goals</p>			
	<p>Strategy 7.2.1: Recruit and retain businesses Increase the Town’s fiscal capacity to implement all goals by proactively recruiting new businesses and retaining existing ones throughout the Town. See Also: Planning staff Enhance Village Centers Improve Kelley’s Corner West Acton Village sewers Be more business friendly Zoning to support Key Centers Plan</p>		
	<p>Action Item 7.2.1.1: Employment-oriented development Actively promote employment-oriented development (e.g., high tech/R&D offices) in targeted areas.⁴</p>	Highest New Sustained Action	Economic Development Committee
	<p>Action Item 7.2.1.2: Actively recruit a small-scale movie theater to locate in Acton. See Also: Non-commercial movie showings</p>	2 nd Highest Medium-Term	Economic Development Officer

	<p>Action Item 7.2.1.3: New restaurants Actively recruit restaurants to increase their number and variety.⁵</p>	<p>2nd Highest</p> <p>New Sustained Action</p>	<p>Economic Development Officer</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.2.1.4: Balance regulatory burden between public benefits and business needs Work to better balance regulatory burden between public benefits and business needs, so that businesses can thrive in Acton. See Also: Simplify sign bylaw Streamline business permitting</p>	<p>2nd Highest</p> <p>Ongoing</p> 	<p>Economic Development Officer</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.2.1.5: Develop a “Buy Local” campaign Promote a Buy Local campaign for Acton businesses.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p> 	<p>Economic Development Officer</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.2.1.6: Develop and maintain good relationships with existing businesses Develop and maintain good relationships with existing businesses See Also: Be more business friendly Promote communication among town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Economic Development Officer</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.2.1.7: Encourage “Solo-preneurs” Support “solo-preneurs” and other local small businesses through a variety of measures aimed at helping them to conduct business in Acton; these could include encouraging restaurants to provide "conference room space" for use by solo practitioners working out of their homes, and also by promoting the sharing of office space and support services.</p>	<p>New Sustained Action</p>	<p>Economic Development Officer</p>
<p>Objective 7.3: Improve existing commercial areas</p>			
	<p>Strategy 7.3.1: Be more business friendly See Also: Encourage the growth of local businesses that can provide local shopping opportunities and employment. Recruit and retain businesses</p>		
	<p>Action Item 7.3.1.1: Simplify sign bylaw Rewrite and simplify the sign bylaw to increase flexibility of standards while continuing to protect aesthetics.</p>	<p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Planning Department</p>
	<p>Action Item 7.3.1.2: Streamline business permitting Improve and streamline the business permitting process, including implementing permit tracking software. See Also: Technology for delivering services</p>	<p>Highest</p> <p>Short-Term</p>	<p>Manager Department</p>

	<p>Strategy 7.3.2: Improve the aesthetics of shopping areas See Also: Simplify sign bylaw Preserve and enhance key centers.</p>		
	<p>Action Item 7.3.2.1: Work with property owners to make improvements to existing commercial areas. See Also: Recruit and retain businesses</p>	New Sustained Action	Economic Development Committee
<p>Objective 7.4: Support the financial ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime</p>			
	<p>See Also: Housing for seniors Support seniors Affordable Housing Strategy Actively manage Town finances to avoid an undue tax burden on residential property</p>		
	<p>Action Item 7.4.1: Incentives to keep post-school-age households in town Consider incentives to encourage seniors and empty-nesters to stay in Acton such as tax relief, preference in hiring for part time jobs with the Town, an adequate supply of smaller housing, and a new Senior Center. In Acton, households without school-age children generally pay more in taxes than they receive in services, so it can be financially advantageous for the town to encourage these households to stay. Also, when households spend more years in Acton, the web of connections between people within town is strengthened (Goal 3) See Also: Senior tax abatement strategies Housing for seniors Support seniors Encourage empty nesters to stay in Acton Improve Connections</p>	Highest Medium-Term	Selectmen
	<p>Action Item 7.4.2: Natural gas extension Advocate for extensions of natural gas lines where this would provide options for homeowners to switch away from oil or electric heat. This will save money for homeowners.⁶</p>	Medium-Term	Selectmen

¹ Acton currently has a relatively high ratio of students to its total population, which results in a relatively high proportion of taxes needed to support the school.

² Capital investment items in this implementation plan are the first items in this list: <http://implementation.acton2020.info/action-item-s...>

³ Currently, each department and committee does this on their own

⁴ Targeted areas for commercial development include Great Road, Nagog Park, Powdermill, and large commercial parcels on Rt. 2.

⁵ Desired restaurants include mid-level, family, casual, and additional ethnic restaurants. Encourage outdoor seating where appropriate.

⁶ This may or may not represent a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions - this depends on the source of the natural gas, the heating source being displaced, and any leaks in the natural gas distribution system



DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

- Population and Housing
- Economic Development
- Natural Resources
- Historic and Cultural Resources
- Open Space and Recreation
- Transportation and Circulation
- Facilities and Services
- Land Use and Zoning
- Sustainability

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

The following is a summary of the extensive research and data collected for the Inventory of Existing Conditions section of the Comprehensive Plan. Information was collected using the traditional master plan elements, and is therefore presented under the following headings:



- 1. Population and Housing
- 2. Economic Development
- 3. Natural Resources
- 4. Historic and Cultural Resources
- 5. Open Space and Recreation
- 6. Transportation and Circulation
- 7. Facilities and Services
- 8. Land Use and Zoning
- 9. Sustainability

For a more complete description and discussion see Volume II of the Plan.

**EXISTING
CONDITION**

Population
and Housing

Population and Housing

Population and housing are the prime measures and indicators of growth and stability in a community. If a community wants to be in control of its growth it takes steps to manage its rate of housing development – to slow or accelerate it, to encourage or discourage housing types, such as single- or multi-family housing, or steer housing to desired locations. Population, income, age structure and diversity are key indicators of community character. Type of housing stock is also an important community characteristic. Housing stock has various dimensions such as architectural types, density of residential development, and age, condition and historic importance of residential buildings.

Acton’s population is expected to continue to grow relatively slowly, as it has in the recent past, because it is running out of prime developable land and has wastewater disposal constraints (see Volume II, Facilities and Services). There are significant shifts in the age composition of Acton’s population. These shifts are important because they indicate what types of services and facilities and housing will be needed in the future. Households are expected to grow more quickly than population because household size is expected to continue to decline, a

trend that has been observed since 1990. There are 343 lots ready for residential construction. Potential demand estimates for housing units by 2020 (213 new units) suggest that all new forecast units can be accommodated on lots already approved. Currently 7.2% or 548 units in Acton are considered affordable, using Commonwealth of Massachusetts statutory definitions.

Summary of Key Points

- Acton has a moderate overall housing density of about 0.4 acre per housing unit. At current and projected rates of residential growth Acton will come close to, but not exceed its buildout capacity by the year 2030, based on existing zoning.
- In 2010 the average selling price of a single-family home was \$498,750. The average selling price of a condominium unit was \$280,000.
- About 5% of Acton’s housing stock is sold each year. This has averaged about 400 sales per year, but has fallen in recent years owing to the economic downturn.
- Forty-seven percent of Acton’s households could not afford to buy an average priced house in Town.

Acton Voices*

“Mansionization makes housing not affordable and [negatively] affects Town character.”

“There is a need for more site plan review and subdivision and design review of new housing developments.”

“Stop single-family development to reduce pressure on open space and to reduce pressure on schools.”

“We need a variety of housing types – to support people with different economic resources as well as different ages and needs.”

“Houses are expensive” (as response to “what are the three most important challenges you feel face Acton?”)

“There is more affordable housing than in other comparable communities.”

“My most important concern regarding aging, is aging in place in my home and being able to afford the taxes.”

“Control residential growth because it adversely impacts class size at the schools.”

Over one-third (37.5%) of the survey respondents said that would like to see more affordable housing in Acton, and more than half (69.3%) said that they would like to see more historic homes protected and preserved.

Over one-third (36.7%) of the respondents to a mail survey said they would like to see LESS of one or more of the following: “development,” “building,” “housing,” “construction,” or “apartments.”

** public input from Phase I of the planning process*



- Seven and two-tenths percent (7.2%) of Acton’s housing stock is classified as officially affordable, meaning it is deed restricted into perpetuity, and counts toward the Town’s 10%.
- Between 1998 and 2010, 375 units of affordable housing have been created, a rate of 31 per year. Residential uses pay 87% of all property taxes in Acton.

Population

- Population growth has slowed in recent years.
- There have been and will continue to be significant shifts in the age and ethnic structures of Acton.
- Acton’s population is highly educated.



Housing and Households

- There is likely to be a demand for about 1,000 new housing units over a 20-year period after the housing market revives. This may not be fully realized by 2030.
- There has been a shift in housing construction from 4 and 5 bedroom units to 2 to 3 bedroom units. This is likely to continue.
- The fastest growing category of households are those headed by females with children under age 18.

Existing Housing Stock

- Seventy-six percent of Acton’s housing stock has been built in the last 50 years.
- About 6% of Acton’s housing units are vacant.
- Acton’s housing stock is predominately single-family detached units. Since 2000 building permits for 773 new residential units have been issued.

Housing and Land Use

- Acton has a moderate overall housing density of about 0.4 acre per housing unit.
- At current and projected rates of residential growth, by 2030 Acton will come close to, but not exceed its buildout capacity, based on existing zoning.

Table 1.5: Past and Projected Number of Households, Housing Size and Housing Units

	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Households	6,600	7,495	8,187	8,909	9,316
Housing Units	6,891	7,680	8,530	9,176	9,595
Population per Household	2.74	2.69	2.68	2.59	2.57

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and the Collaborative

Housing Tenure

- Seventy-four percent of Acton’s housing is owner-occupied.
- The average length of stay for a household in owner-occupied units is 17 years.
- The average length of stay for a household in renter-occupied units is 7 years.

Housing Market

- In 2010 the average selling price of a single-family home was \$498,750. The average selling price of a condominium unit was \$280,000.
- About 5% of Acton’s housing stock is sold each year. This has averaged about 400 sales per year, but has fallen in recent years owing to the economic downturn.



Housing Affordability

- Forty-seven percent of Acton’s households could not afford to buy an average priced house in Town.
- Seven and two-tenths percent (7.2%) of Acton’s housing stock is classified as affordable, meaning it is deed restricted into perpetuity, and counts toward the Town’s 10%.
- Between 1998 and 2010, 375 units of affordable housing have been created, a rate of 31 per year. This includes public housing rental units administered by the Acton Housing Authority and privately developed rental and ownership units.

Taxes

- Residential uses pay 87% of all property taxes in Acton.

Table 1.13: Median Sales Price of Housing in Acton and Surrounding Towns through September, 2010

	2000 Census Year-Round Housing Units	Subsidized Housing Inventory Units	Percent
Acton	7,645	548	7.2%
Boxborough	1,900	24	1.3%
Carlisle	1,647	20	1.2%
Concord	6,095	363	6.0%
Littleton	3,018	245	8.1%
Maynard	4,398	365	8.3%
Stow	2,108	143	6.8%
Sudbury	5,582	280	5.0%
Westford	6,877	347	5.0%
Subregion Totals	39,270	2335	5.9%
Statewide Totals	2,526,963	243,630	9.6%

Source: The Warren Group, Banker and Tradesman

Table 1.13: Median Sales Price of Housing in Acton and Surrounding Towns through September, 2010

	All Housing Units	Rank	Single-Family Units	Rank
Acton	\$459,900	4	\$498,750	4
Boxborough	\$345,000	8	\$492,500	5
Carlisle	\$675,000	1	\$690,000	1
Concord	\$621,500	2	\$680,000	2
Littleton	\$389,250	5	\$400,000	8
Maynard	\$295,000	9	\$307,500	9
Stow	\$379,850	6	\$424,900	7
Sudbury	\$585,000	3	\$619,600	3
Westford	\$350,450	7	\$431,500	6

Source: The Warren Group, Banker and Tradesman

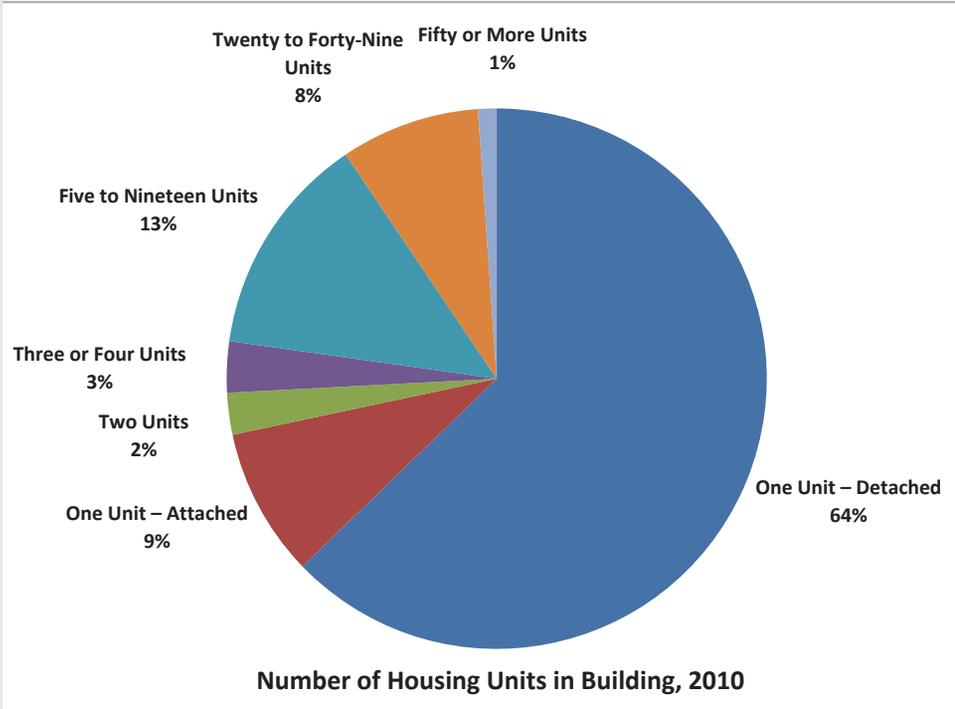
In conclusion, Acton has a strong and diverse economic mix of activities that provides a base for further growth. While further strengthening its role as a sub-regional employment center, Acton can improve its visual character by better design in new and redeveloped commercial and industrial properties.

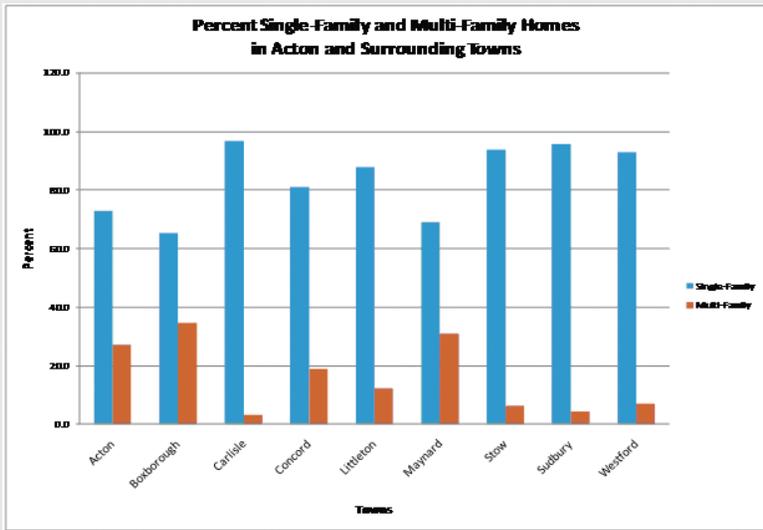
Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Population and Housing Existing Conditions

- Creating affordable housing is both a challenge and an opportunity to retain residents.
- It is a challenge to get renters to stay longer than 7 years on average.
- Building up residential densities in and around village centers is a challenge.
- Assuring that new housing created best matches likely demographic changes will be challenging but also an opportunity to develop a land use pattern that may be more sustainable.
- Matching residential growth to Town infrastructure and services capacities is a challenge.
- Creating more moderately priced market-rate housing and holding down municipal expenses to maintain or lower property tax rates will be challenging.

In conclusion, Acton is a very desirable place to live because of its schools and other municipal services, and the high quality of its

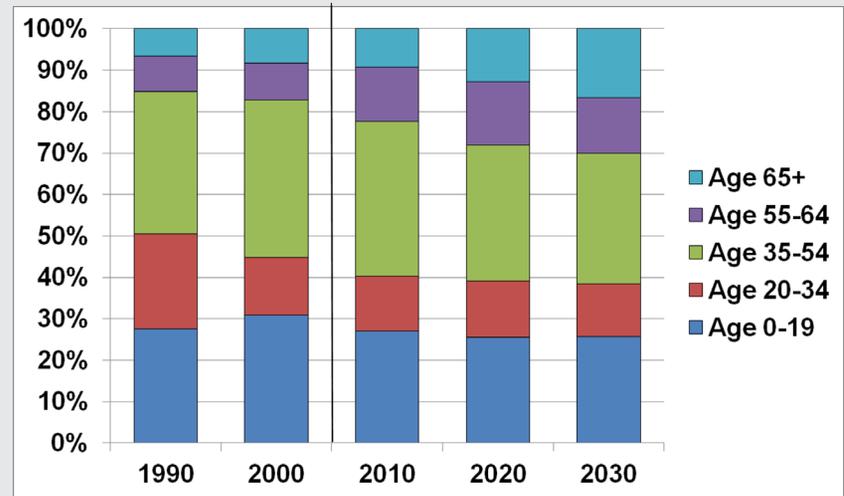
housing stock. Acton is, however, an expensive place to live, requiring relatively high household incomes to maintain the quality of one’s home, cover transportation costs, and pay the property taxes needed to support good quality Town facilities and services.



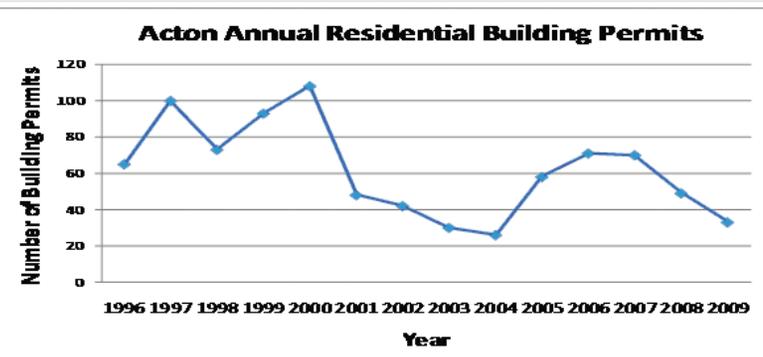


Source: 2000 Census of Housing updated with Building Permit data to 2010

Figure 1.3: Relative Shifts in Life Cycle Categories from 1990 to 2030



Sources: U.S. Census of Population, Acton Town Census for July 2010, and MAPC for future years



Source: 2000 Census of Housing updated with Building Permit data to 2010

**EXISTING
CONDITION**

2

Economic
Development

Economic Development

Economic development is important to achieving the Plan’s goals because employment is essential for economic well being, and because commercial areas contribute to the character of Acton. Providing opportunities to shop in Town may be important so people do not have to travel long distances to obtain essential goods and services. Finally, commercial development is a major source of tax revenue for the Town.

Employment has grown steadily in Acton when viewed over the long term. It is expected to continue to grow. Average establishment size is small (12 employees per establishment). There are about 11,000 people employed in establishments located in Acton. The Town accounts for 18.5% of total employment in the nine community sub-region made up of Acton and its surrounding towns. Acton has the most retail employment and retail sales of any of the nine communities but it is apparent that considerable retail purchases of Acton residents are made out-of-town. While some Acton retailers attract out-of-town shoppers, all of Acton’s retailers only capture less than half of in-town resident’s retail purchases. Acton has two rapidly growing employment categories that provide a basis for

future strong growth (Health Care and Social Assistance and Computer Systems Design and Related Services).

There were 11,757 people in the Acton Labor Force in September, 2010. In that month 11,079 of those people were employed and 678 were unemployed, resulting in an unemployment rate of 5.8%. This is considerably lower than the statewide rate of 8.0% and the national rate of 9.0%. Acton’s lower unemployment rate results from its well educated and highly skilled labor force.

Summary of Key Points

Employment Based in Acton

- Acton is an important employment center in its nine town sub-region. Concord and Westford are the other important employment centers. Acton is expected to remain an important sub-regional employment center.
- In 2010, on average, 11,248 people were employed in jobs located in Acton.
- In 2000 (the most recent year for which data is available) only 20.5% of jobs in Acton were held by Acton residents and 79.5% by residents of other cities and towns.

Acton Voices*

“It would be nice to have more places to shop and to eat to choose from.”

“We need more economic development to increase the tax base.”

“Improve regulations to encourage businesses (including permitting & signage.)”

“More needs to be done to improve the appearance of strip malls on Great Rd.”

“Reduce traffic and congestion and keep Town character; don’t overdevelop.”

“Restaurants” was frequently mentioned as a response to the survey question “What would you like to see MORE of?”

“Development” was frequently mentioned as a response to the survey question: “What would you like to see LESS of?” (comments were mostly directed towards housing, but also included big box, fast food, and strip malls as undesirable.)

“If you could do one thing to address economic development issues in Acton what would it be?” Response: “Space for solo-preneurs.”

** public input from Phase I of the planning process*

- Major categories of employment in Acton are retail trade, public administration including public schools, health care and social assistance, computer systems design and related services, education services (not including public schools), and eating and drinking establishments.
- Health care and social assistance and computer systems design and related services are the fastest growing categories of employment located in Acton (147% and 112% respectively, between 2001 and 2009).
- The average weekly wage in Acton establishments was \$938 in 2009, but it ranged widely from \$226 for used merchandise stores to \$2,346 for scientific research and development services.
- Average weekly wages ranged from \$226 (used merchandise stores) to \$2,346 (scientific research and development services).

Acton’s Labor Force

- In September, 2010 Acton had a labor force of 11,757 (Acton residents who hold jobs anywhere.)
- In September, 2010 5.6% of Acton’s labor force was unemployed (compared to a state-wide figure of 8.0%)

- The largest number of Acton residents are employed in the high wage/high education categories of management, computer/mathematical, educational/training/library, sales related, and office/administrative support.

Businesses

- There were 795 establishments in Acton in the second quarter of 2010, according to data from the Massachusetts Office of Workforce Development.
- The number of businesses has varied by about 10% in recent years although the number in 2009 is about the same as in 2001 (780).
- There are about 500 home based businesses in Acton, many of them not included in the 795 establishments listed by the Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development.
- Acton is a town of small businesses, with an average of employees per business in 2009; this includes only businesses recognized by the Department of Workforce Development.
- The value of retail sales in 2007 in Acton was \$644,864,000.
- Motor vehicle and parts dealers and food and beverage stores accounted for 58% of all retail sales in 2002 and 64% in 2007.

- Most of Acton’s commercial development is located along its numbered highways (Routes 2, 2A and 27) and in village centers.

Taxes

- Acton collects 87.1% of its property taxes from residential property and 12.9% from commercial and industrial property.
- For the last eight years, Acton has had the highest residential tax rate of all towns around it, except for Stow, which had a higher rate from 2003 to 2005.
- The average residential tax bill in Acton has been closer to the middle of the nine towns, but it has been consistently slightly above the average for these towns (See chart on page 37).



Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Economic Development Conditions

- Floor-area ratios (the ratio of square footage in buildings to the area of the lot on which they are located) in industrial areas and the villages can be increased to obtain greater density and more intensive utilization of the land.
- It is possible to seek home rule authority to establish a differential property tax policy in order to encourage and retain start-up ventures, micro-business incubators, and micro-business cooperatives in Acton.
- A graduated commercial property tax increase, starting from a lower base, would make Acton desirable for start-up companies and entrepreneurs by reducing their operating costs for three to five years.
- Economic development and housing affordability are mutually dependent public policy issues. Businesses are attracted by a local labor force. Many businesses need lower skill workers with lower wages for maintenance, security, and clerical jobs. Affordable

housing helps to attract these kinds of workers and thus helps economic development.

- Commercial development can be focused on creating more local opportunities to shop for goods and obtain services, and publicizing the shopping opportunities that already exist.
- Existing strip commercial development is un-sightly but presents opportunities to redesign and redevelop it.

In conclusion, Acton has a strong and diverse economic mix of activities that provides a base for further growth. While further strengthening its role as a sub-regional employment center, Acton can improve its visual character by better design in new and redeveloped commercial and industrial properties.

Table 2.3: Growth in Employment in the Largest Sectors of Acton's Economy

Sector	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	% Growth 2001-2009
Retail	1680	1868	1898	1866	1677	< -1%
Educational Services	1080	1230	1097	1157	877	-18.8%
Health Care and Social Assistance	568	762	1121	1286	1403	+147%
Public Admin. including Public Schools	1178	1281	1197	1374	1301	+10.4%
Food Services and Drinking Places	688	548	585	674	621	-9.7%
Computer Systems Design and Related Services	387	322	459	828	820	+112%

Source: Series ES-202 Employment Data from the Mass. Department of Workforce Development.

**EXISTING
CONDITION**

3

Natural
Resources

Natural Resources

Acton’s natural resources provide services to the citizens of Acton. Clean water and air are critical for the Town’s future. Healthy ecosystems and habitats with a diversity of wildlife are indicators that families can live healthy lives and enjoy their surroundings. Measures to protect natural resources will be important strategies for the Comprehensive Plan. One of the primary ways to help preserve the Town’s character that was identified in developing a vision for Acton’s future was the preservation and additional acquisition of open space.

Acton has a varied topography and large forested and wetland areas supporting biodiversity, potentially including 9 state-listed rare plant or animal species. Surface waters are generally of good quality but are impacted by nutrients from storm water runoff, which the Town’s Storm Water Management Plan is designed to reduce.

Summary of Key Points

Geology and Topography

- The underlying bedrock is Nashoba Formation that dates back between 430 and 500 million years.
- Acton Granite, a younger intrusion into the un-

derlying formation, was a source of foundation stone for many older buildings.

- The topographic character of Acton is due to glacial activity that deposited glacial till, drumlins (Great Hill), kettle-holes (Grassy Pond), eskers (Acton Arboretum), kames (Forest Road west of Hosmer Street), and alluvial and swamp deposits along stream beds.
- The average elevation is about 230 feet, the highest point is 430 feet, and the lowest is 130 feet.

Soils

- In general Acton soil groups are moist, rough and stony in character with many areas of sandy loam. Wet soils are located in stream valleys and certain areas have ledge.
- High ground water, stoniness, and excessively drained soils present challenges for location of underground septic systems in many areas, but 80% of Acton homes use these systems. (See Volume II for further discussion.)

Surface Water Resources

- There are two major watersheds – Nashoba Brook and Fort Pond Brook.
- Acton Stream Teams ([## Acton Voices*](http://www.acton-

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“Trees, open land, seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, rural feel...make Acton unique.”

“The rural character and natural features are my favorite things about Acton.”

“I wish there was more wildlife in Acton.”

“I think the Town should acquire or by other means preserve more open space.”

“Protect and enhance wildlife corridors, including conserving diverse ecosystems: meadows, woods, lowland, upland.”

“What I enjoy most visually in Acton is its nice rural area look.”

“Preserve rural and historic characteristics,” was identified as the number one priority in six public meetings.

“One of the main reasons I moved to Acton was the green – trees and conservation land.”

“The cost of open space is very high... we will need to prioritize parcels.”

Close to one-half of the Town’s residents identified “rural character, agricultural land, and conservation land” as among the Town’s three most important assets.

“I would like to see less growth taking over open space ...and more preservation of wooded areas.”

“Acton used to be rural; it is turning into a city.”

“Great wonderful conservation land, trails, ponds, woods... ”

** public input from Phase I of the planning process*



streams.org) has done visual shoreline monitoring and educates the public about the Town’s 36 streams (more than 32 miles).

- The state has classified Acton’s surface waters, with the exception of Nagog Pond, as Class B. This classification indicates that the waters are generally suitable for primary and secondary contact recreation, may be used for water supply with appropriate treatment, and will provide good wildlife habitat.
- Nagog Pond (Class A) was assigned to Concord by the General Court in 1884 for its water supply.
- Excess nutrients are a problem in some of Acton’s surface water bodies. Much of the excess nutrients come from storm water run-off.



Drainage from impervious surfaces, parking lots, streets, and the roofs of structures impacts surface water quality. All of these sources of storm water run-off carry pollutants that end up in the Town’s wetlands and waterways. In response to these problems the Town has developed a Storm Water Management Plan and a Nonpoint Source Control Program. These efforts identify sources of pollutants and steps to mitigate their impacts.

- Acton watersheds account for 65% of the recharge of its groundwater aquifers – the source of the Town’s drinking water. The other 35% is contributed by watersheds that are not wholly within Acton.

Major Wildlife Resources

- Over the last 100 years, Acton, like many surrounding communities, has been transformed from a community dominated by fields and orchards, to one dominated by suburban development and forests.
- Acton includes five “hotspots” for biodiversity identified in the state’s BioMap 2 Project:
 - NARA/Wills Hole/Kennedy/Marshall Land/Nashoba Sportsman Club (partially



Town-owned and Zone II Wellhead Protection Area)

- Grassy Pond (partially Town-owned)
- Assabet River in the southeastern corner of Town, including a portion of Zone II Wellhead Protection Area
- Heath Hen Meadow, a wetland area and wetlands along the town boundary with Stow and Maynard, including a portion of a Zone II Wellhead Protection Area, and
- Reformatory Fields/Weatherbee Conservation Land, including portion of a Zone II Wellhead Protection Area.
- Acton has state-designated Priority Habitats of Rare Species.
- Acton has approximately 7,000 acres of forest

land (more than 50% of its total area). This total includes small private holdings such as back land on residential lots as well as larger forested areas on public open space.

- Wetlands, both forested and non-forested, comprise nearly 13% of the Town's area and are important habitats.
- There are 23 certified vernal pools and 142 potential vernal pools – important habitats for wood frogs, salamanders, etc.
- Acton includes habitats for 9 state-listed rare plant or animal species. These habitats are concentrated along the major brooks.



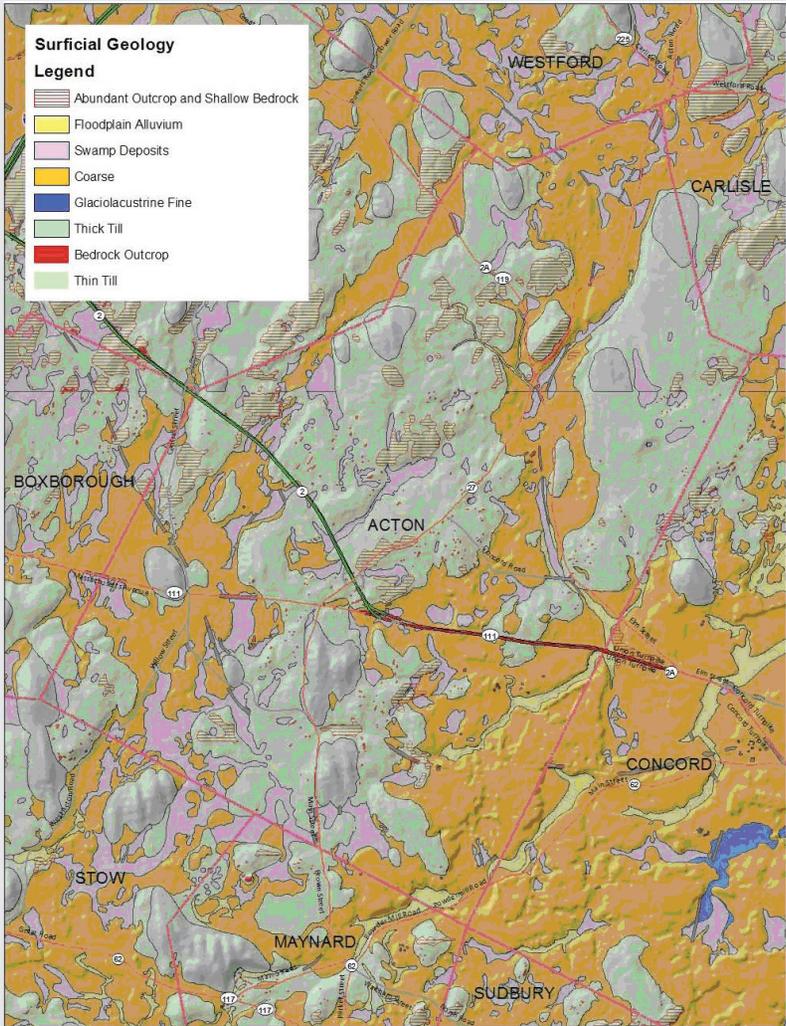
Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Natural Resource Conditions

- Despite development, Acton has many important natural areas that enrich residents’ lives and contribute greatly to the Town’s character. The challenge will be to continue to protect those areas and resources.
- Acton soils represent a challenge for the operation of septic systems. The Board of Health will need to continue to be diligent in enforcing their regulations in order to protect water resources. (See the discussion of water and wastewater in Volume II.)
- Protecting surface water resources from pollutants in storm water will be a continuing challenge.
- Adding to already protected conservation land is an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity to protect additional wildlife and water resources and create connections between protected areas is contrasted with the increasing costs of acquiring land.

- Existing privately owned forested areas represent an opportunity to increase the size of existing protected forested areas.

In conclusion, Acton has a wealth of natural resources that contribute to the Town’s character and help to preserve biodiversity and water quality, but which require on-going effort to protect and preserve.

Figure 3.1: Surficial Geology



Natural Resources

Figure 3.3: Major Habitats



**EXISTING
CONDITION**

4

Historic and
Cultural Resources

Historic & Cultural Resources

Acton’s many historic and cultural resources are important and valued attributes that help establish the character of the Town and past efforts to preserve, promote, and enhance them attest to their value to residents.

Historic and cultural resources include both physical resources (buildings, landscape features, landscapes, and archaeological sites) as well as non-physical resources such as organizations, clubs, programs, and traditions, both of which contribute to the Town’s quality of life.

Acton’s rich history is well represented by the Town’s three historic districts (Acton Center, West Acton Village, and South Acton Village), and by individual houses, other structures, historic landscapes, and stone walls in many parts of Town. The Acton Historical Commission and the Acton Historic District Commission have been successful in preserving many of these resources, and with non-profit organizations such as the Historical Society, in educating people as to their importance. Acton also has a diversity of modern cultural resources through the Town’s libraries, churches, museums, theater and cultural societies, groups, and clubs, as well as the Acton Boxborough Cultural Council.

Summary of Key Points

History

- Native Americans pre-settled the area for hunting, fishing, gathering, and some agriculture – especially around Nagog Pond.
- Concord shepherds settled the area that would become Acton (in 1655) because of its prime grazing lands.
- Mills were developed on Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook as early as 1670 – several mill sites remain.
- In 1735, Acton incorporated as a town and a meeting house was built in Acton Center.
- Railroads came in 1843 with stations in South Acton and West Acton that became village



Acton Voices*

“The historic, New England architecture describes Acton’s character.”

“In addition to the historic architecture, there is a pride and awareness of our local history (e.g. Isaac Davis, Crown Resistance Day, Patriots Day).”

“I want more historic homes protected and preserved.” (according to 69.3% of respondents)

“Preserve rural and historic characteristics,” was identified as the number one priority in six public meetings.”

“Most residents are unaware of our history; they are here for the schools and will not stay.”

“I would like a community center, more restaurants, cultural activities and a movie theater.”

“If I could do one thing to make Acton a better place to live I would get us a movie theater!”

“There is not enough variety in activities, places to go, entertainment for all.”

“If I could do one thing to make Acton a better place to live I would create more centers for congregating.”

Approximately one-fifth (19.8%) of Acton’s residents reported that history and historic architecture were among Acton’s three most important assets.

When asked if they would like to see more cultural activities in Acton, almost 40% (39.4%) of respondents to a mail survey reported wanting more theater, art exhibits, concerts, etc. in Town.”

** public input from Phase I of the planning process*

centers; a branch line connected South Acton with Marlborough in the 1850s, and by the 1870s another rail line went through East Acton and North Acton.

- By 1900, the population in the 5 villages was 2,120, and apples were the major export.
- In 1925 Acton population was large enough to sustain its own high school.
- The Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory lists Conant Farm, Grassy Pond, Miller Farm/Station Master's House, Nagog Pond, Nashoba Brook, Rt. 2 Gateway Agricultural Fields, South Acton Village, Stonefield/Simeone Farm, and Wetherbee Street Woods as significant cultural landscapes.
- Historic stone walls contribute greatly to the Town's character.

Cultural Resources

- Acton boasts a culturally diverse population.
- Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council and Acton Recreation Department list a variety of cultural events – ethnic, musical, film festivals, theatre, arts & crafts, storytelling, and dance.
- Theatre III and the Open Door Theater are

non-profits dedicated to promoting the performing arts through education and high-quality, reasonably-priced performances.

- The Acton Recreation Department hosts a long schedule of events, most at NARA Park, throughout the year.
- Acton Memorial Library hosts an active schedule of events and community meetings including storytelling, book discussions, historic site explorations, musical events, movies, English language conversation groups, art exhibits, computer training, etc.
- Several of Acton's churches and a number of businesses host cultural events.

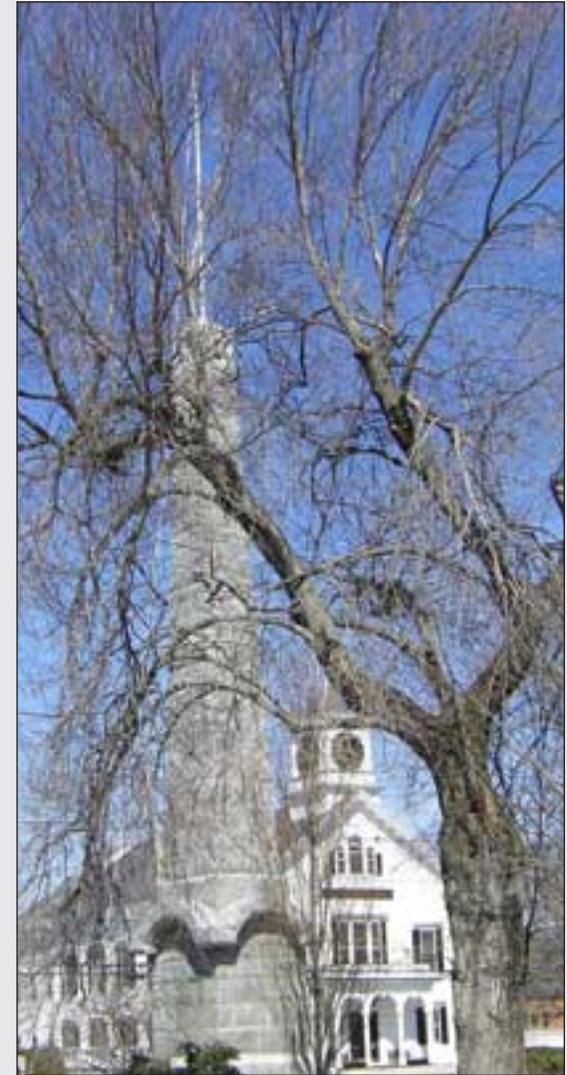


Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Historic and Cultural Resources Conditions

- Efforts to update the inventory of historic resources are continuing.
- Farms that were central to Acton's history are slowly disappearing or are threatened.
- Acton retains many historic barns, reflecting the Town's agricultural past. They represent an opportunity for reuses that would help preserve character. Current measures to ensure their long term protection and productive use may not be adequate.
- Acton's many stonewalls that contribute to the Town's character are often threatened by new development.
- Traffic through the villages has increased and is a threat to the safety of pedestrians and detracts from the appeal of the villages.
- Some development along Massachusetts Avenue, Route 2A/119, and elsewhere does not complement the historic character of Acton.
- Acton's design requirements within the existing zoning regulations (for commercial development) do not always achieve the

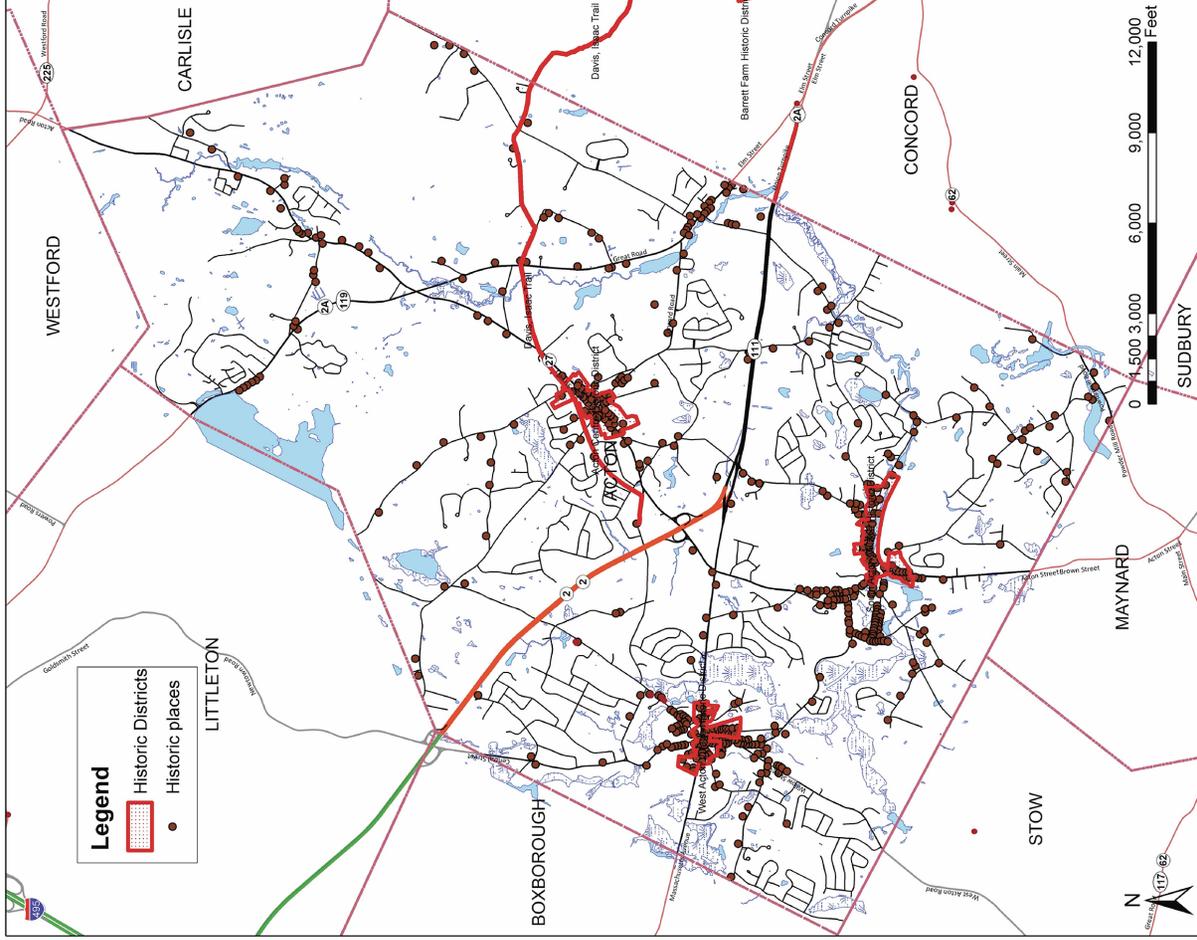
look and feel desired.

- Public utilities can sometimes overwhelm the character of the villages.
- The Town has not developed a strategy for managing technological developments (such as cell towers) and ensuring these developments are implemented in a way consistent with and harmonious with the rural character of the Town.
- Acton has a number of sites of archaeological interest and many have not been researched, documented, and protected from destruction from land development.
- There has been ongoing discussion of expanding the historic districts to include more of the historic resources and revising the design guidelines.
- Much of the historic path of the Line of March (Isaac Davis Trail) is not protected.
- **In conclusion**, historic and cultural resources are strengths of the Town and an important ingredient in creating its unique character and supporting diversity. Ongoing effort is needed to preserve the past and to provide opportunities for cultural involvement by all.



Historic and Cultural Resources

Figure 4.6: Historic Resources



The Map of Historic Resources shows the Existing Local Historic Districts, the Isaac Davis Trail, National Register Properties outside the districts and the historic places listed in the Acton Historical Commission's and Massachusetts Cultural Resources inventory lists.

**EXISTING
CONDITION**

5

Open Space
and Recreation

Open Space and Recreation

Acton was settled by European colonists in the 1600s because it had many open meadows for grazing. To this day Acton’s open spaces and natural resources provide the Town’s rural characteristics of protected natural areas with trails, tree-lined roads, stonewalls, ponds, meadows, wetlands, forests, wildlife habitats, and farmland. These characteristics and areas for recreation, help define its sense of place and contribute greatly to the quality of life of its residents.

One of the primary ways to help preserve the Town’s character that was identified in developing a vision for Acton’s future was the preservation, protection, and additional acquisition of open space.

Potential conflicts may exist between identified goals related to open space and natural resource protection and other components of the Plan, such as traffic and economic development.

Summary of Key Points

Open Space Resources

- Approximately 29% of Acton’s 13,000 acres of land (3,717 acres) is in some form of public open space or recreation use. This is a higher percentage than Chelmsford, Westford, Box-

borough, and Littleton, but less than Concord, Carlisle, Maynard, and Stow.

- More than 2,000 acres are considered permanently protected (Conservation Commission – 1,642 acres, Water District – 395 acres).
- There are over 6 miles of paved paths and 15 miles of trails in Acton including a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail – a 200 mile greenway corridor between Rt. 495 & Rt. 95.
- Some of the major open spaces include: Acton Arboretum, Great Hill, Camp Acton, Spring Hill, Grassy Pond, Wills Hole, NARA Park, and Nagog Hill – All have trail systems and maps available on-line (see <http://www.acton-trails.org>).
- Many of the Town’s open spaces protect important natural resources, as well as historic and geological features.
- Many privately owned open spaces (common land, back land, etc.) contribute to the Town’s sense of nature, and some create important corridors. Open space in cluster developments is protected by Special Permit Conditions.

Acton Voices*

“Farms, conservation lands, NARA Park, Arboretum, and the commitment to preserving open space” were cited as responses to the question: “What Makes Acton Unique?”

“I would like a big Town pool that only Acton people and their guests can go to.”

“Recreational facilities are poorly maintained and there is a need for more bathrooms and parking.”

“I want more activities other than sports and school.”

“NARA Park should be free for all residents.”

“One of my favorite things about Acton are the recreational resources such as the tennis courts.”

“I would like to see more parks and places to play for young children...”

“I would like more open space (including trails, meadows, woods and recreational areas.” (according to 82.7% of respondents)

“The rural character, NARA Park, conservation land & the Arboretum are among my favorite things about Acton.”

“Soccer at school and at Teamworks on the Great Road are one of the things we most like about Acton.”

“There is an increasing demand on existing recreational facilities, including athletic fields, and more demand for local recreation.”

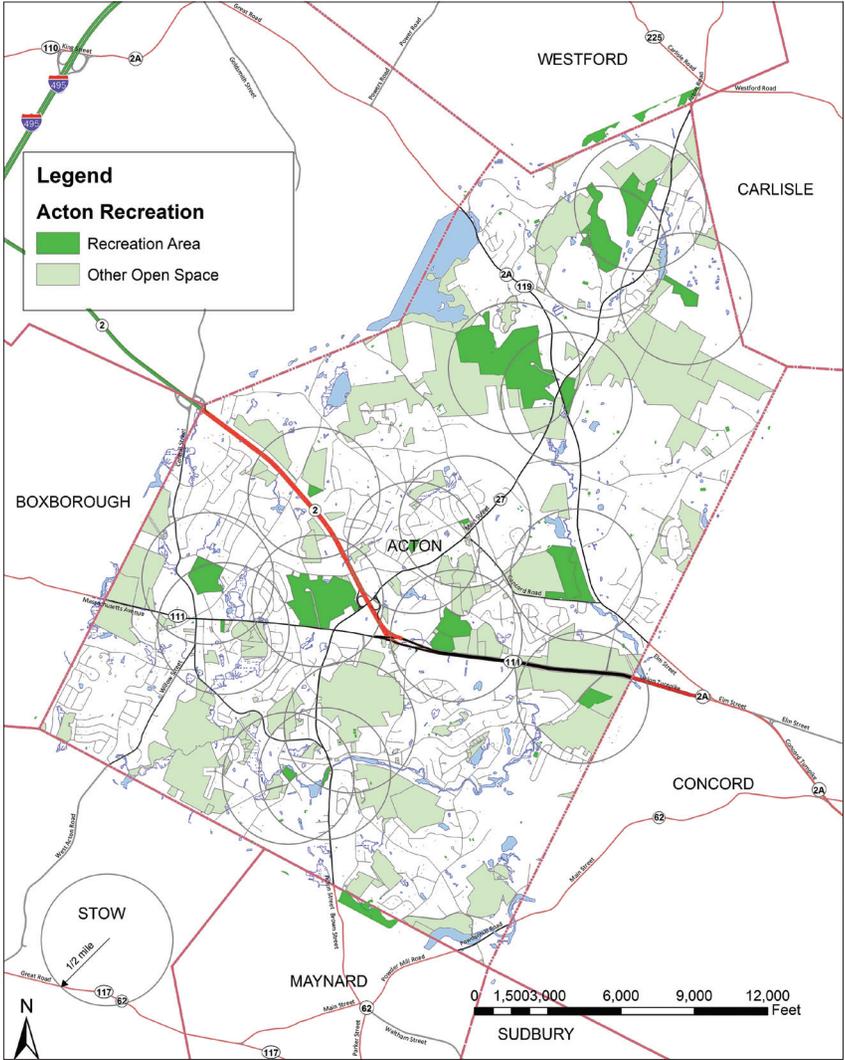
Almost three-fourths of Acton residents (74.4.%) said they would like to see more open space preserved in Acton.

* public input from Phase I of the planning process

Recreation Resources

- Recreation Department has an active and varied program of activities and events.
- Recreation Department manages activities at:
 - 7 baseball/softball fields
 - 9 soccer fields
 - 1 outdoor basketball court
 - 7 playgrounds
 - 2 practice fields
 - 2 fishing areas
 - 1 swimming beach
 - 1 amphitheater
 - 1 skate park
 - 3 picnic areas
- Schools have fields and indoor recreation facilities.
- There are two Community Garden sites – North Acton Community Gardens and Morrison Farm Community Gardens.
- Major recreation sites include NARA Park, School Street Field, Veteran’s Field, Elm Street Fields, Great Hill, Jones Field, and Gardener Field.
- There is one golf course in Town and several in adjacent towns.

Figure 5.2 Acton Recreational Resources



Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Open Space and Recreation Conditions

- Acton still has some small privately owned and operated farms producing produce sold in local markets. These agricultural areas are highlighted in the Open Space and Recreation Plan as important assets deserving of protection. They also help provide some diversity of habitat. These scattered agricultural areas have value for wildlife and help provide some of the distinctive character of the Town. They also have a greater value as sustainable, local sources of food.
- Much of the Town’s wildlife diversity is a



result of its variety of habitat types. The challenge of maintaining that diversity will require protection of both small and large areas like those identified in the Priority Habitats and BioMap Core Areas and areas of different habitats; non-forested wetlands, forested uplands, open/vacant areas, grasslands, and open space corridors that make connections between areas.

- Protection of Priority Habitats and BioMap Core Areas is an important conservation priority for the region as well as the Town. These areas include several already protected areas. There is an opportunity to expand protection of these important resource areas.
- Part of the Town’s scenic quality is due to the visual impact of broad vistas and more intimate views. Retaining that quality will be an on-going challenge and opportunity.
- The 2011 Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan is being developed by the Open Space Committee. It contains a priority list of open space parcels for acquisition or protection.

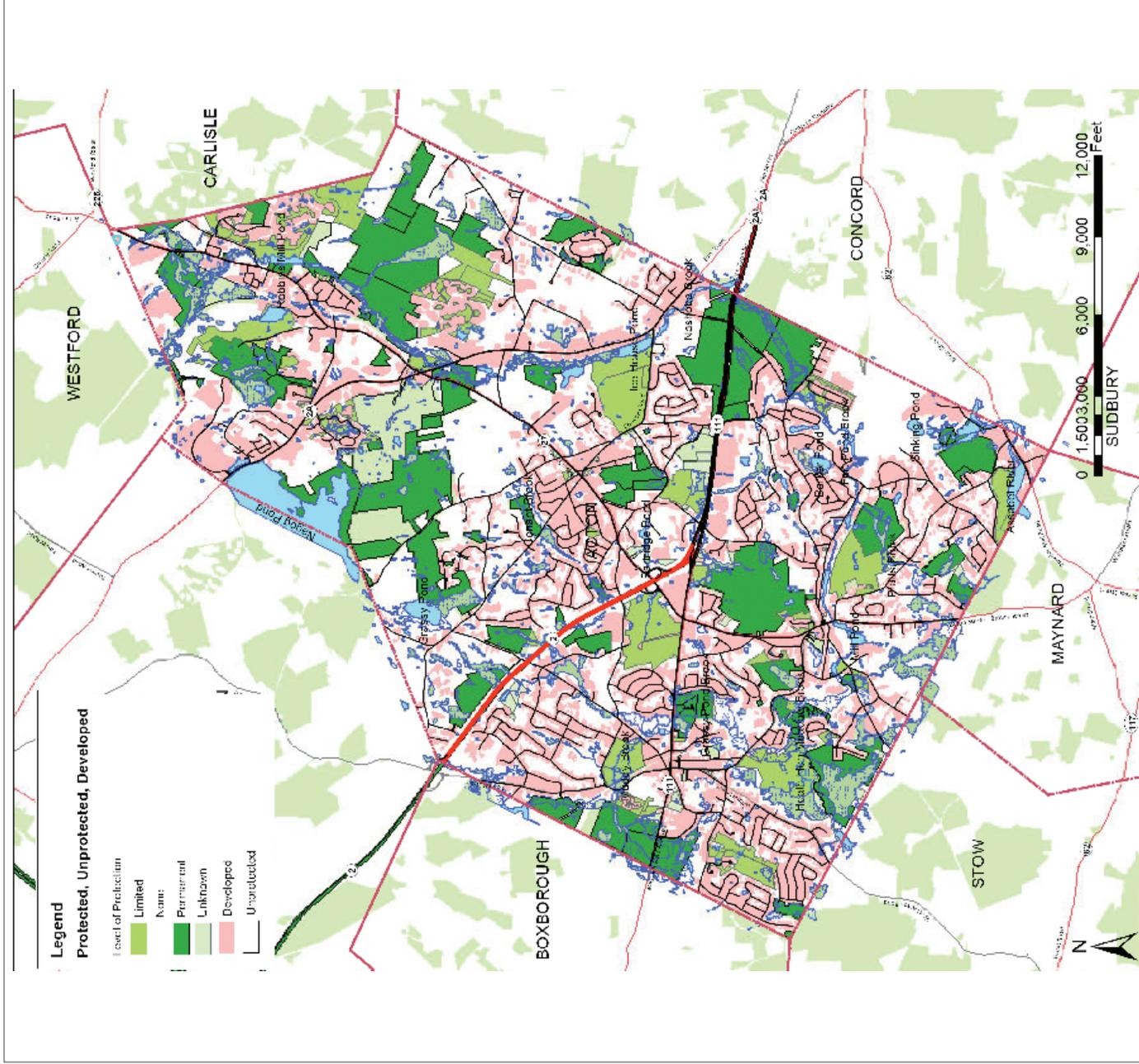
Table 5.1: Open Space Acreage

Owner	Total Acres
Town of Acton (includes School Dept. & other)	773
Town of Acton Conservation Commission	1,642
Town of Acton Water Department	395
Commonwealth of Massachusetts (includes Department Of Corrections)	192
Non-profit Land	78
Private Land (includes golf course, common land & other)	6659
Other Town (Maynard, Concord) Land	71
Total	3,810

In conclusion, Acton has done an admirable job of preserving and managing open space and recreation resources, but continuing investment and effort to manage these resources will pay dividends in the Town’s quality of life, help to preserve its character, and advance the goal of ensuring environmental sustainability.

Open Space and Recreation

Figure 5.1: Acton Open Space



**EXISTING
CONDITION**

6

Transportation
and Circulation

Transportation and Circulation

Almost everyone needs access to transportation resources on a daily basis. Because those who cannot get around easily are often disconnected from the rest of the community, transportation access and circulation becomes an essential component of community comprehensive planning.

Acton’s transportation system is primarily a network of roadways, most of which were not designed for today’s traffic volumes. At the same time, many Acton residents are interested in better public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities. Efforts by Acton’s TAC and its Sidewalk Committee, and interested citizens have resulted in a new shuttle service to the South Acton Train Station, a better station design, and new, well-designed sidewalks and sidewalk design guidelines. Two major shared use paths, the Assabet River Rail Trail, and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail are moving closer to construction. However, Acton does not have a bicycle committee, and in general, the Town lacks staff dedicated to encouraging public transportation use and bicycle improvements other than the rail trails.

Summary of Key Points

Overview

- As the cost of transportation continues to increase (both driving and using public transportation), the cost of commuting will likely be an important factor in residential and employment decision making.
- As with neighboring communities, the 2000 Census showed that nearly 90 percent of workers living in Acton drove or road in a car to work and 4.5 percent used public transportation.
- While car travel and to a lesser extent regional commuter transit will continue to predominate in the Town, participants in the planning process have expressed a desire for other viable alternatives.

Roadways

- Acton’s principal roadways were never designed to carry high traffic volumes. Also, because of the historical importance of some roads, maintaining their visual character is an important element in how the community views and considers roadway improvements.
- Many of the intersections along these corridors

Acton Voices*

“Acton should provide more safe bicycle and walking trails/lanes and sidewalks.”

“You can’t turn left in most places in Town due to traffic congestion.”

“There is a lack of public transportation and too much dependence on cars.”

“Easy access to highways and commuter rail are important assets to the Town.”

“Expand parking at South Acton Train Station.”

“I don’t like that there isn’t a traffic light near my house at the intersection. If there were, then driving would go a lot more smoothly.”

“Build the sidewalk ALL along Main St., one end of Town to the other.”

“We need public transportation for those who cannot drive.”

“One of my favorite things about Acton is the commuter rail (especially the “super express” from Acton to Porter Square).”

“The senior van is limited in terms of when and where it goes; we need more public transportation.”

“Traffic safety is a serious obstacle to attracting customers.”

Almost 1/2 (46.4%) of respondents cited traffic as one of Acton’s three most important challenges.

* public input from Phase I of the planning process

are uncontrolled, which means that left-turning traffic creates backups; left-turns entering from side streets can also be difficult. This is particularly challenging along Great Road (Route 119) where multiple driveways permit entries and exits that can result in conflicts and potentially in crashes.

- Speeding is a problem on many of the Town’s roadways, particularly on road segments between congestion hot spots.

Public Transportation

- The MBTA recently began improvements to the Fitchburg Line, which include extending double tracking from Boston to Ayer to increase train speeds and on-time performance. The project also includes renovating the South



Acton Train Station (SATS). In March 2010, the MBTA adopted the design alternative proposed by Acton residents. The Acton Historic District Commission has approved the latest design proposal from the MBTA (details here).

- The MBTA is working on improvements to the Littleton/495 commuter rail station. When construction is completed, express service currently available at SATS will be moved to the new station, thereby relieving some parking congestion at SATS.
- Although the MBTA provides commuter rail service to Acton, the Town is also part of the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) service area for paratransit service to Acton’s senior and disabled communities. LRTA does not provide fixed route bus service in Acton.
- In 2009, Acton received \$95,188 in federal funding to initiate the MinuteVan shuttle service between the SATS and a 22-space satellite parking lot behind the West Acton Fire Station.
- The MinuteVan shuttle also offers dial-a-ride service outside of the commuter service hours to any destination in Acton and to seven locations in adjacent towns.



- The Acton Council on Aging also provides shuttle service for Acton residents 60 years old and older and for residents with disabilities as space allows.
- Yankee Line, Inc. provides weekday morning and evening charter-bus trips between East Acton, Concord Center, and Copley Square in Boston.

Pedestrian Facilities

- Acton’s sidewalks often exist on only one side of the street. With the notable exception of recent sidewalk projects, most of Acton’s sidewalks are narrow. Often, for reasons that include avoiding historic stone walls, large street trees, or property takings, sidewalks

sometimes shift from one side of the street to the other.

- Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations require developers to provide pedestrian improvements as deemed necessary by the Planning Board. They also require local streets to have a sidewalk on at least one side, while collector and arterial streets must have sidewalks on both sides.
- The Town's Sidewalk Committee helps set priorities for pedestrian improvements, and Acton has recently completed construction of many sidewalks.
- Since one of the challenges to providing pedestrian facilities is the perception of many



residents that they are inconsistent with the Town's rural character, it is noteworthy that the Sidewalk Committee has published design guidelines for sidewalks that address this concern.

Bicycle Facilities

- Acton has many two-lane roads that are ideal for recreational cycling during off-peak times. However, these same roads are less than optimal for cycling when vehicular traffic volumes are higher and there are no marked bicycle lanes in the Town.
- At present, there is no bicycle committee or TAC (Transportation Advisory Committee) subcommittee on bicycling.
- Acton is directly involved in two major rail trail projects: The Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) Phase 2 is under design, which would provide an important commuter link to SATS, and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT), for which the Town has selected a design firm for final design.
- The Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations also address bike paths as deemed necessary by the Planning Board.



The Bruce Freeman Trail will be extended through Acton.



Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Transportation Conditions

- Some improvements in conditions on Acton’s roadway network are possible, but the areas in which Acton can improve transportation most appear to be in public transportation, walking, and bicycling. These improvements would ultimately help to reduce traffic (as would housing and economic development choices that would reduce commuting and would make walking, biking, and use of public transportation more feasible for many people by reducing the distance one needs to travel to shopping, work, and other destinations).
- As the cost of transportation continues to increase because of the increasing fuel prices and public transportation fares, the expense of commuting will likely be an increasingly important factor in residential and employment decision making.
- Federal and state funding for the MinuteVan is expected to decline in future years, and Acton will need to decide how and whether

to continue funding these services.

- The addition of the MinuteVan Dial-a-Ride (DAR) service has shown that a more locally tailored service is popular. Discussions with adjacent towns and Montachusett Area Transit Authority (MART) are underway regarding MART provided contracted transportation services, which could be more locally tailored than the service currently provided by LRTA.
- The market for the MinuteVan service exists, but to maximize use, the current pricing options for parking and using the shuttle should be evaluated (annual subscription, ten-ride passes, and pay-by-the-day hangtags), and options such as schedule improvements and route extensions should be explored.
- Although controlling traffic speeds, particularly in residential areas through design (“traffic calming”) and enforcement, and managing traffic entering principal roads are both challenges, these initiatives may be worthwhile in terms of improvements in safety and livability.
- Sidewalk maintenance, particularly in winter months, is an ongoing challenge, owing to its cost.

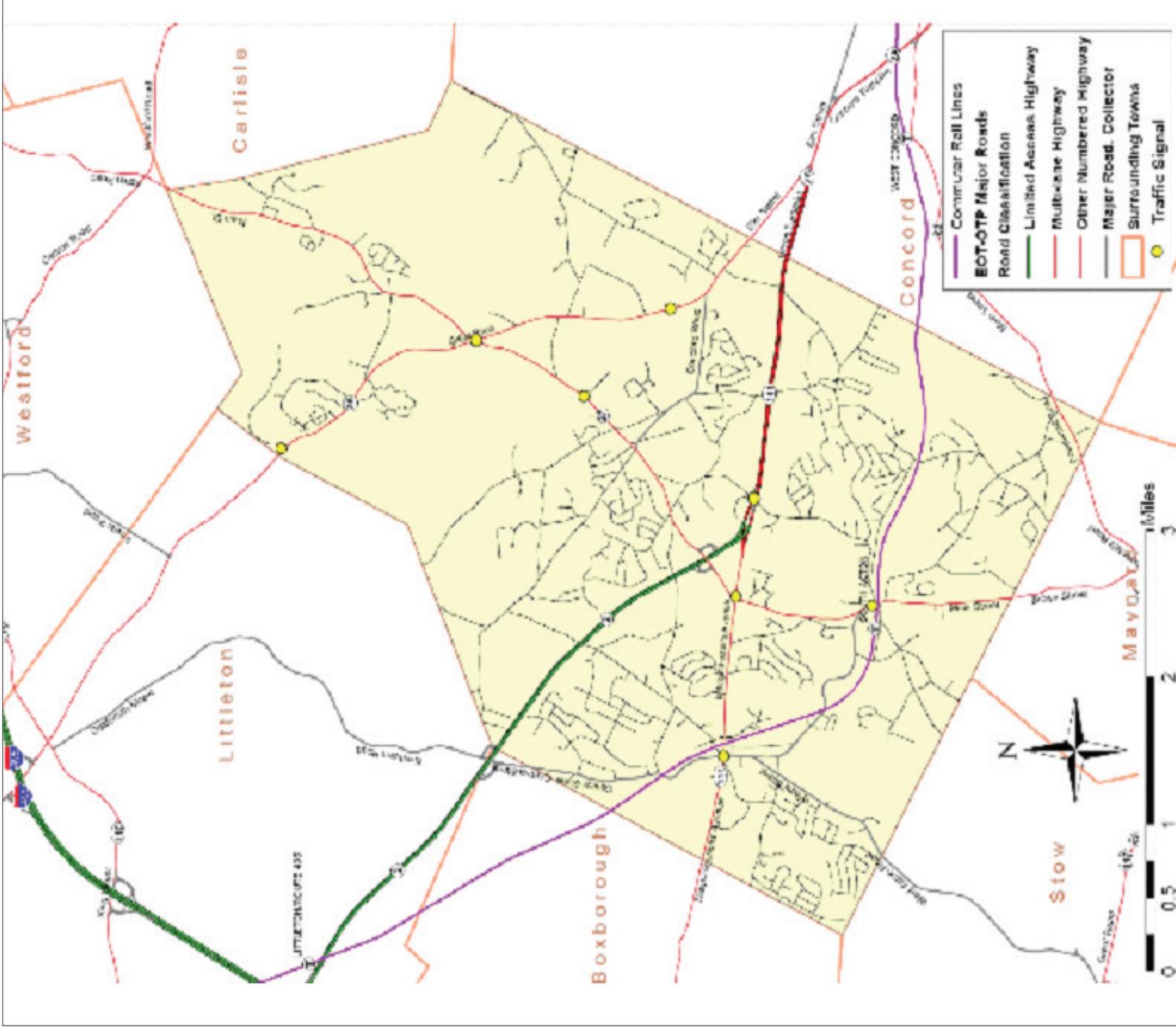
- Pathway linkages can be explored, particularly where connections can be made between adjacent parcels and from residential areas to commercial areas.
- With two shared use paths in development and bicycle parking program expansion, there is an opportunity for the Town to form a bicycle committee, either independently or as part of the TAC.

In conclusion, some improvements in conditions on Acton’s roadway network are possible, but the areas in which the Acton 2020 plan can improve transportation most appear to be in public transportation, walking, and bicycling.



Transportation and Circulation

Figure 6.1: Acton's Multimodal Transportation Network



**EXISTING
CONDITION**

7

Facilities
and Services

Facilities and Services

Facilities and services are the core functions of Town government. The way they are provided determines what residents and businesses get from the Town and, conversely, what taxpayers must pay to provide those services and facilities. Particularly for capital facilities such as schools and other Town buildings, the level of investment today affects Acton’s ability to provide the services Actonians desire, and today’s investments have implications for future budgets.

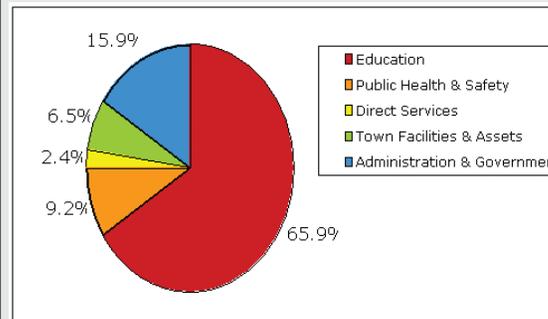
Acton provides a high quality set of services and facilities in return for the taxes paid by property owners. The Town’s facilities are generally in very good condition and are for the most part adequate in size to serve the needs foreseen over the 20-year horizon of this comprehensive plan; the possible exceptions are the proposals to build a larger Senior Center and a new fire station. While not perfect, the Town’s water supply meets enforceable standards and is adequate in capacity to serve all but summer outdoor watering needs. Stormwater is well-managed in accordance with federal and state regulations. The Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan identified 15 Areas of Need, 14 of which need appropriate action to manage wastewater in

a manner that preserves the quality the ground-water that supplies most of the Town’s drinking water.

Summary of Key Points

- Acton provides excellent services to its residents and businesses, of which education and public health and safety are major parts with substantial costs.

Figure 7.1: FY 2009 Expenditures by Purpose



Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue

- Since FY 2004, Acton has had the highest residential tax rate of all towns around it (except Stow in FY2004 and FY2005). However, the tax bill, which is the tax rate times the assessed value, is more significant than the tax rate itself; on this basis Acton is in the middle of this group of towns.

Acton Voices*

“Schools” were cited as among the top three “favorite things” about Acton.

“We need to improve the senior center, provide more activities, better transportation, and opportunities for intergenerational interaction.”

The needs of “teens” and “active seniors” are the most unmet.

“It would make people who speak languages other than English at home, feel more comfortable and welcome if materials related to Town services were translated.”

“We need full day Kindergarten for everyone, the lack of neighborhood schools, and some overcrowded classrooms are my concerns.”

“We need a place to hold cultural celebrations.”

“The Town website should be kept up to date and we need a community bulletin board.”

“Allow all tax payers (including non-citizens) to vote on Town issues.”

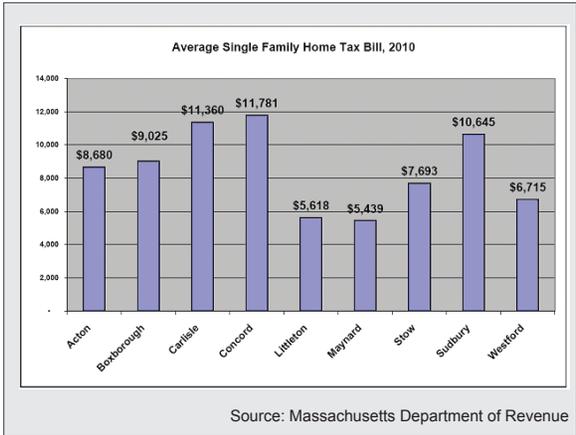
“There is an increasing demand for ‘virtual’ Town services.”

“The Library, an important gathering space for the community, is facing a number of challenges including changes in technology and diversity of languages.”

“Transportation” (31.5%), “trash” (18%), senior” services (14.5%), “sidewalks” (6.4%), “parking” (5.8%) or “sewer” (5.8%) were services most frequently mentioned as unmet.

Schools were cited by 3/4 (75%) of respondents of a mail survey as being among Acton’s three most important assets.

* public input from Phase I of the planning process



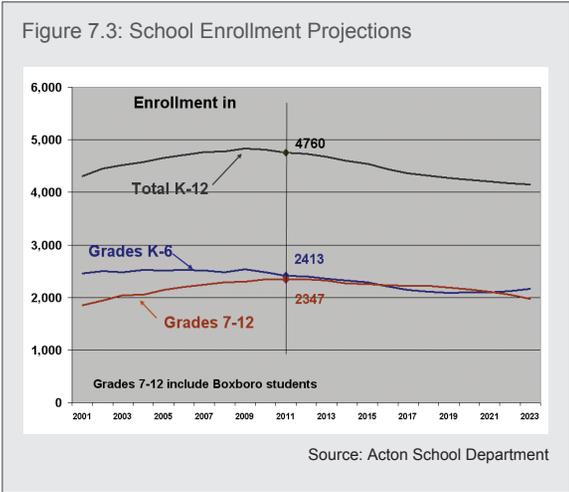
- Acton does not use a separate tax rate for commercial and industrial property.

Schools

- Acton’s schools provide high quality education at a lower cost per pupil than most school systems of comparable quality.
- The portion of the municipal budget that goes to education is large in Acton, as is the case in most communities.
- Acton has made substantial investments in two elementary schools, and the ABRSD junior high school and high school; three elementary schools were built in 1965 and 1970. Although ongoing improvements are needed, particularly in the three older schools, the School

Department has regularly maintained and improved the school buildings.

- Based on detailed enrollment projections, Acton’s schools are currently at peak student population and enrollments are expected to gradually decline, making expanded school facilities unnecessary.
- Many families undoubtedly move to Acton because of its good schools, and while some of them leave the Town when their children have graduated, many others plan to stay; this is not unusual for a town with relatively affordable housing and topnotch schools.



Municipal Buildings

- Along with the school projects described above, several other major facility needs identified in 1991 have been fulfilled.
- The Town buildings are generally in good condition. The Municipal Properties Department, which maintains these buildings, has made a series of improvements to make them more energy efficient.
- The primary municipal facilities issues and constraints are the amount of Town Hall office space for Town departments, insufficient public meeting space, the amount of space in the Senior Center, and the Fire Department’s proposal to build a new facility in North Acton to improve response times.

Water Supply

- Water supply and wastewater management are both partly dependent on Acton’s soils, subsurface geology, aquifers and groundwater. These natural resources are as much a part of these systems as the public and private infrastructure that supplies water and treats wastewater.
- The Acton Water District has supplied approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY), which is equivalent to 1.64 million gallons per day (MGD) over the past six years; the trend is essentially flat because conservation and use of private wells offset increases in demand due to growth.
- Water demand varies seasonally because of outdoor water use in the summer.
- Maximum daily demand is often greater than 2.0 MGD and in the summer months reaches 2.6 MGD, the District’s self-imposed limit. As a result, summer watering bans have been instituted.
- The water supply system is composed of groundwater wells, water treatment facilities, storage and pumping facilities, and water mains.

- The water being supplied meets the primary standards promulgated by the U.S. EPA, as the law requires. Secondary standards are currently not required to be met, but should these become enforceable, additional treatment facilities may be needed.
- The wells are surrounded by protection zones. Land uses in the protection zones around the wells are limited through Acton’s zoning bylaw to protect the quality and quantity of the groundwater resource.
- The capacity of the water system is limited by the capacity of the individual wells and well-fields, but more importantly, by state regulation. The current withdrawals are well within the permitted amount.
- The Water District has identified the replacement of aging water mains as a priority and has been doing so on an ongoing basis.

Wastewater Management

- Wastewater management involves a combination of private on-site disposal systems as well as the public “centralized” Middle Fort Pond Brook wastewater treatment plant on Adams Street in South Acton.

- There is additional capacity available at the Middle Fort Pond Brook Plant of approximately 50 percent of that which is currently used.
- An additional 10 percent of properties are estimated by the Health Department to be served by clustered on-site septic systems or package treatment plants.
- The remaining 80 percent of properties have on-site systems.
- The majority of these on-site systems are believed to function well. Nonetheless, the proportion of systems that require variances is an indication of the limitations of many Acton’s soils for wastewater disposal.
- The Town’s water supply and its wastewater treatment and disposal exist within a compli-



Middle Fort Pond Brook Wastewater Treatment Plant

cated system that has multiple interactions between stormwater, surface water bodies (ponds and brooks), and groundwater both within and outside Acton’s borders.

- Innovative/Alternative (I/A) systems are now allowed for replacement of conventional systems (sometimes for new construction), which assists in finding solutions for difficult lots.
- The Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan (CWRMP) concluded that over 90% of the existing on-site wastewater systems can remain as on-site systems for the planning period (which extends to 2024), with approximately 3.5% of these requiring I/A technology.
- In summary, on-site treatment is viable for most, but not all, residential lots in Acton; meeting on-site treatment standards on some lots may involve additional cost, compared to lots that have soils that are considered “good” for on-site disposal.
- The great majority of on-site wastewater systems identified for replacement has been through the mandatory inspection requirement when a house is sold.
- The Phase II CWRMP completed in 2006

identified 15 wastewater planning “Areas of Need” and categorized five of those as high priority needs areas.

- The initial implementation of the CWRMP has focused on evaluating which Areas of Need could feasibly be served by the existing wastewater treatment plant and identified priority areas for sewer extensions. There is additional capacity available at the Middle Fort Pond Brook Plant of approximately 50 percent of that which is currently used.
- The CWRMP identified Wastewater Management Districts (WMD) as the primary or secondary solution to be considered for most of the 15 Needs Areas.

Stormwater Management

- Management of stormwater includes both measures to reduce the rate of flow and to improve quality through settling or other means. Together these measures are known as Best Management Practices (BMPs). The 2003 Acton Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP) contains recommendations for managing stormwater to reduce quality impacts and comply with federal regulations.
- Acton has had bylaws and regulations since



the late 1980s that embodied what are now called BMPs, and these regulations have been modified as necessary to comply with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection MADEP standards under the permit.

- The Town has implemented all of the measures identified in the SWMP, including outreach, public education, and regular maintenance and cleaning of stormwater structures such as catch basins.

Services for Seniors

- The number of Acton residents 65 years or older is expected to increase over the next two decades. The Acton Council on Aging believes that a larger senior center is needed to serve current and future needs and provide a fuller range of programs.

Libraries

- Demand for Acton’s libraries is steadily increasing and meeting it requires more resources; however, the library buildings are generally adequate for the future.

Public Safety

- The recently constructed Public Safety Building is adequate for the future needs of the Police Department.
- Acton’s Fire Department has three fire stations built 40 or more years ago. With the steady growth of the northern part of the Town, there is a case to be made for a new fire station in North Acton replacing one of the existing stations, but there are other means of improving response time, such as cooperation with other towns.

Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Facilities and Services Conditions

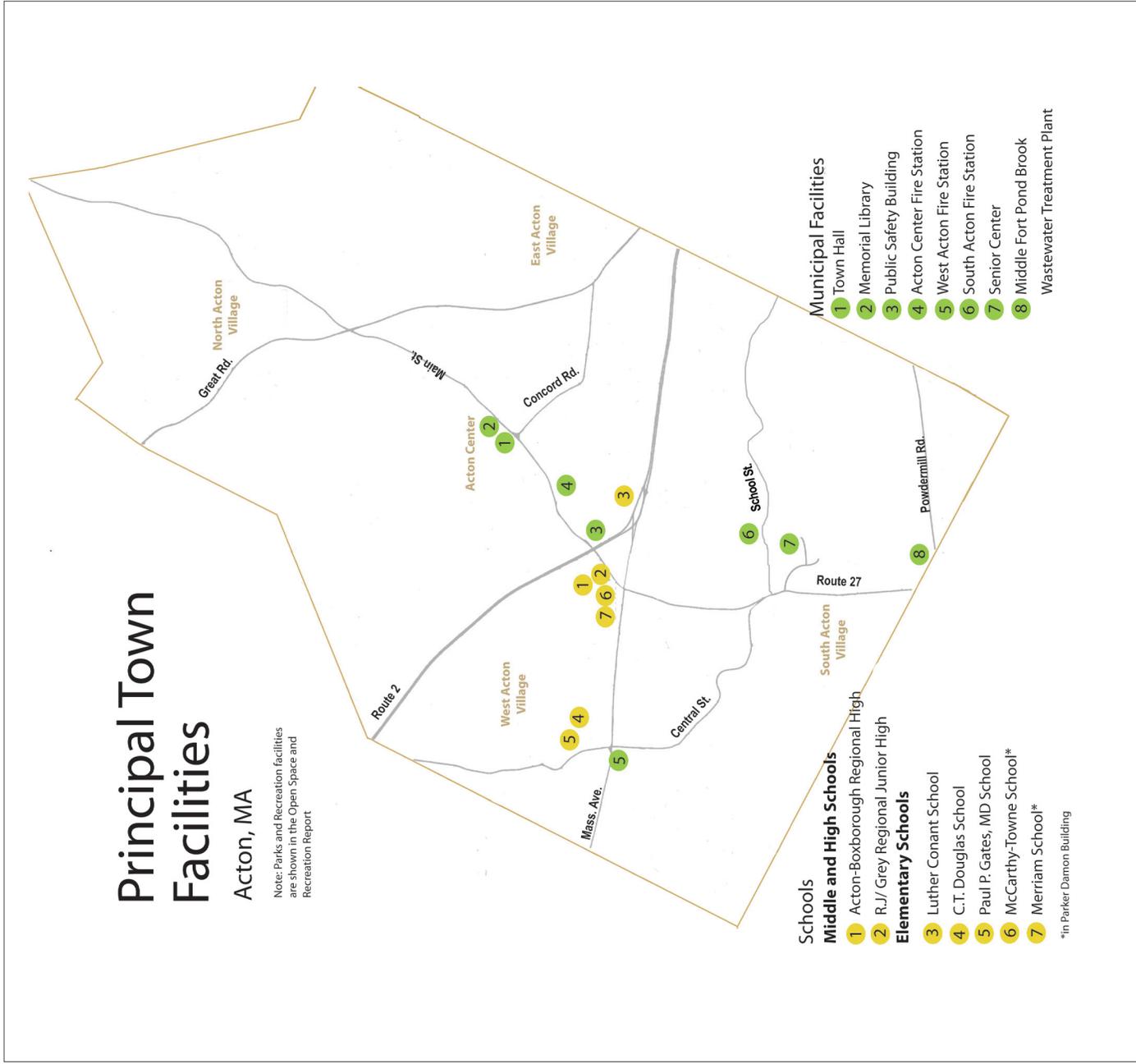
- As in all towns concerned with high quality schools and other public services, there is an on-going tradeoff between what the Town provides and the cost to taxpayers.
- Acton has a generally very good inventory of schools and other Town buildings that are adequate in capacity for future needs, but on-going improvements are needed, particularly in the older buildings.
- The water supply system is expected to be adequate in quantity for future needs, but on-going improvements in the distribution system are needed, and ongoing efforts are needed to preserve quality.
- Water quality is an issue both in terms of land uses in the areas surrounding the groundwater wells and protection of the larger groundwater aquifer that supplies them but receives 90 percent of the Town’s sanitary wastewater.
- Because of the limitation of much of Acton’s soils, better management of on-site wastewater

disposal and/or some extension of the Fort Pond Brook wastewater treatment plant may be needed in identified Areas of Need.

- Acton’s growing population of seniors would be better served by a new senior center large enough to accommodate seniors and the larger community.
- Ways of improving Fire Department response times in North Acton should be studied.
- Acton’s libraries are key resources for cultural information and as public gathering places; while adequate in size, they will continue to need more resources to serve demand.

In conclusion, Acton is fortunate to have excellent schools, very good facilities, and high quality services. Prudent budgeting to resolve competing priorities and maintain financial well-being is a continuous process that is well served by Town Government but requires the ongoing effort of officials and citizens. Continuing effort is needed to manage risk to the Town’s water supply and surface water quality.

Facilities & Services



**EXISTING
CONDITION**

8

Land Use
and Zoning

Land Use and Zoning

Land use and zoning are critical elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Land use planning defines the location of uses within the community. Where people live, work, shop, play, and educate is reflected in the land uses. Existing land use reflects past decisions about the locations of these activities and is the basis for future decisions. Zoning and subdivision regulations are among the Town’s legal tools for enforcing where and in some ways how these activities are located and built.

Summary of Key Points

Land Use

Major Land Use Categories, 2008	
Residential	26.7%
Commercial/Industrial	5.1%
Open Land*	63.7%
Water & Wetland	4.8%
	100%

* Includes agricultural, recreation, forest, forested wetlands, open wetlands, cemetery, and other relatively undeveloped land.

- Key Centers are Kelley’s Corner and the five villages: Acton Center, West Acton, South Acton, and, less well defined, East Acton, and North Acton.

- The dominant residential type is a single-family home on a variety of different sized lots.
- Multi-family homes are principally concentrated along Great Road and also at Kelley’s Corner, and in parts of South Acton. A multi-family assisted living community is also located in North Acton. Other multi-family homes are dispersed throughout other parts of Town.
- Since the late 1980s most subdivisions of more than five lots have been cluster subdivisions (either Planned Conservation Residential Communities or Open Space Developments).
- Commercial uses are concentrated along Great Road, Massachusetts Avenue (around Kelley’s Corner), and along Powder Mill Road (Rte. 2) in Acton’s southeast corner along the Assabet River, with smaller commercial areas in West Acton, South Acton, and a few other sections of Town.
- Industrial uses are concentrated in North Acton, along Massachusetts Avenue east of Kelley’s Corner (mixed with commercial/office uses), and in Acton’s southeast corner, with a few smaller industrial areas located in other parts of Town.

Acton Voices*

“What we are really missing is a Town center. It would be so great to turn Kelley’s Corner into such a place.”

“There needs to be more thoughtful planning of development and commercial zoning limits.”

“Focus on: open space, Town center, designated walkable shopping areas.”

“I would like to see more strict zoning.”

“I would like to see less growth in Town and in the schools, Acton feels like Framingham did 20 years ago and look at it now.”

“Need to attract more business (light industrial or office), perhaps on Route 2 corridor to help offset the heavy taxes homeowners pay; a senior center more centrally located.”

“I would like to see less new housing and retail development overtaking historical and environmental necessities.”

“I would like to see more restaurants, retail shops, small stores, not big box stores (Walmart), florists.”

“Less inappropriately developed land and less traffic.”

“I want more [swimming] pools and wish there were more places to buy Pokemon cards.” (1st grader)

“No more “40B” condo/apartment/truck housing.”

In a mail survey one third (31.7%) of Acton’s residents felt that the diversity of activities, including open and wooded land areas, homes and businesses was among Acton’s three most important assets.

* public input from Phase I of the planning process

Zoning

- The Town has nine residential districts, five village districts, two office districts, three business districts, five industrial districts, two special zoning districts, and four overlay districts.
- More than 60% of the Town is zoned for residential uses: 58.1% for single-family homes, and 1.7% for multi-family homes.
- A Village Residential District (VR, 0.5% of the Town's area) allows mixed residential and commercial uses.
- Two provisions of the zoning ordinance allow Open Space Development (OSD) and Planned Conservation Residential Community (PCRC), to encourage the preservation of open space, thus facilitating the preservation of significant land, water, historic, archeological, and natural resources. They are special permit options for residential development in all the single-family residential districts (R-2, R-4, R-8, R-8/4, R-10, R-10/8).
- Multi-family dwelling units are allowed under the provisions of the Residence A district (5 units/acre) and Residence AA district (15 units/acre).
- The five village districts comprise 1.2% of the Town's total area. They allow a mixture of business and residential uses and have a number of provisions to encourage compact development including transfer of development rights from the Great Road corridor to the North Acton and East Acton Village Districts (NAV and EAV), and within these village districts.
- Office and business zones comprise 6.9% of the land in Acton and are located along some of the key transportation corridors in the Town, including Routes 2A (Great Road) and 111 (Massachusetts Avenue).
- There are three office parks, one located in the northwest corner of town and two along Massachusetts Avenue (Route 2 and 111).
- The main business zones are located along Great Road, at Kelley's Corner (KC), and the Powder Mill district (PM), with other business located in West Acton and the other villages.
- Industrial districts comprise 6% of the town's area and are located in North Acton, along Post Office Square and Hayward Road near Acton Center, the southern end of Main Street, and in the Powder Mill area in the southeast corner of Acton.
- The Technology District (TD) is located in the southeast corner of Town off Independence Road and Knox Trail.
- The Agriculture-Recreation-Conservation District (ARC) (14.1% of the town's total area) applies exclusively to land owned by the State, the Town, and the Acton Water District. It excludes all residential, office, commercial, and industrial uses. Agriculture, conservation, recreation, municipal, educational and religious uses are allowed by right.
- There are four overlay districts:
 - Affordable Housing – encourages the development of affordable housing in new development.
 - Flood Plain – regulates development in flood-prone areas.
 - Groundwater protection – regulates the development in the Town's water supply protection areas.
 - Open Space Development – encourages the preservation of common land; significant natural, historical and archeological resources; scenic vistas; rural character; village clusters; water supply resources; and better overall all site planning.



- PCRC is the preferred method of land development and may be applied to any of the single-family districts in Acton.
- Full buildout of all developable land would result in an increase from Acton’s current 8,350 housing units to an order-of-magnitude total of 10,300 units, depending on the assumptions used in the analysis. A key point is that residential buildout is unlikely to be reached in the next 30 years.

Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Land Use and Zoning

- Agriculture and some other relatively undeveloped land is challenged by continuing development.
- The use of Open Space Development and Planned Conservation Residential Community provisions in the last 20 years has provided a considerable amount of common land that is an opportunity for maintaining much of the Town’s character.
- Concentrations of automobile-oriented businesses, especially along Great Road, result in congestion.
- The mixture of residences, businesses and industries provides some residents with an opportunity to live and work in the same community.
- Several relatively innovative zoning provisions encourage open space and a mixture of uses in some areas of Town.
- There is very little space in several districts available for new development.

- Pressure for redevelopment will increase as areas for new development are filled.
- Kelley’s Corner and some of the villages, especially West, South, and East Acton are opportunities to concentrate future development and leave more land open at the periphery of Town.

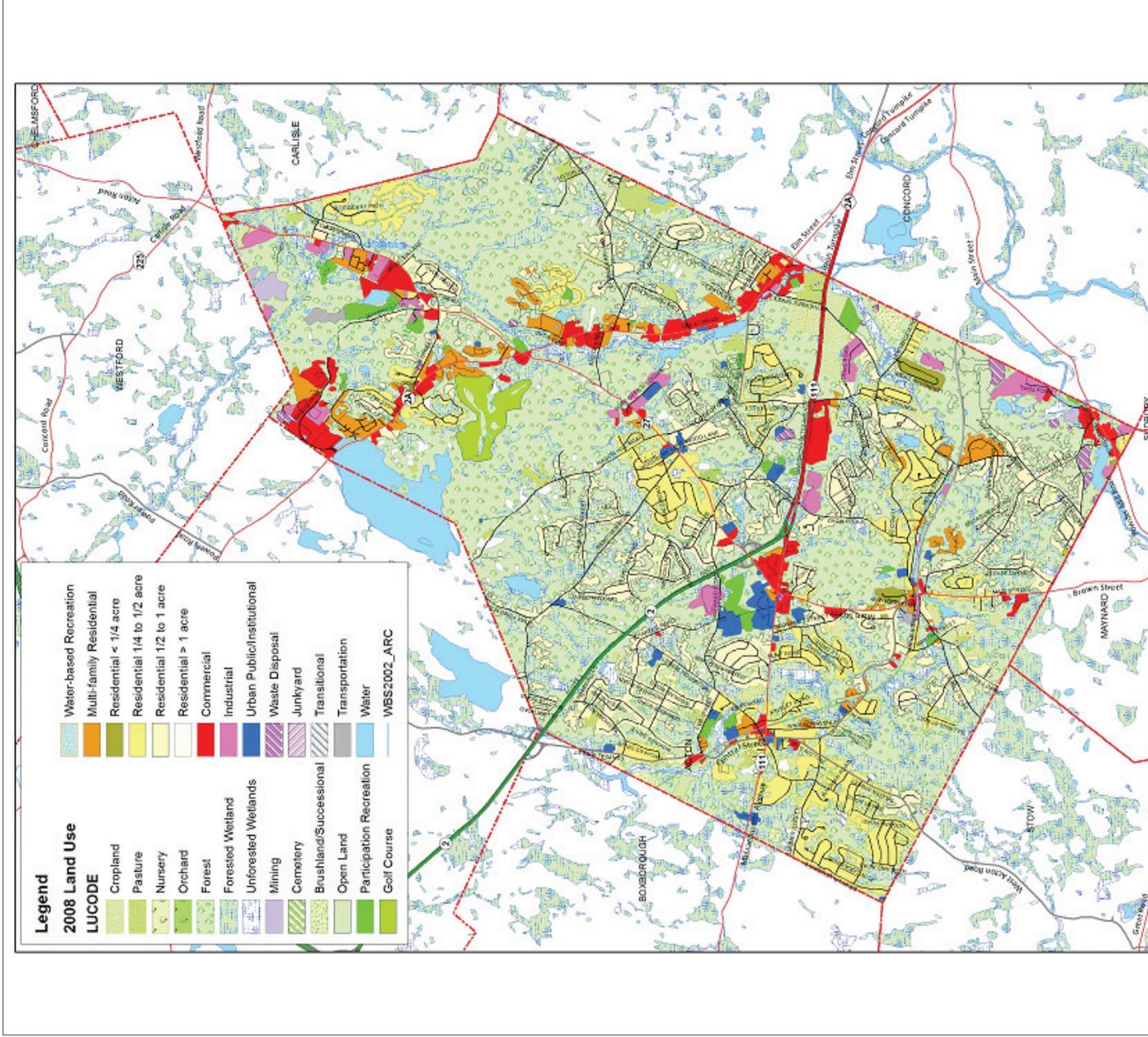
In conclusion, zoning and future changes in zoning, along with the provision of services, can guide future land use. What future land use will be depends on the desires of Acton’s residents and their determination to make and implement choices about the Town’s future.

Table 8.1: Major Land Use Categories, 1971 to 1999

	1971		1999	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
Agriculture	830.3	6.4	582.3	4.5
Undeveloped	7,724.4	59.6	6,329.7	48.8
Developed	4,411.5	34.0	6,054.2	46.7
Total	12,990	100	12,990	100

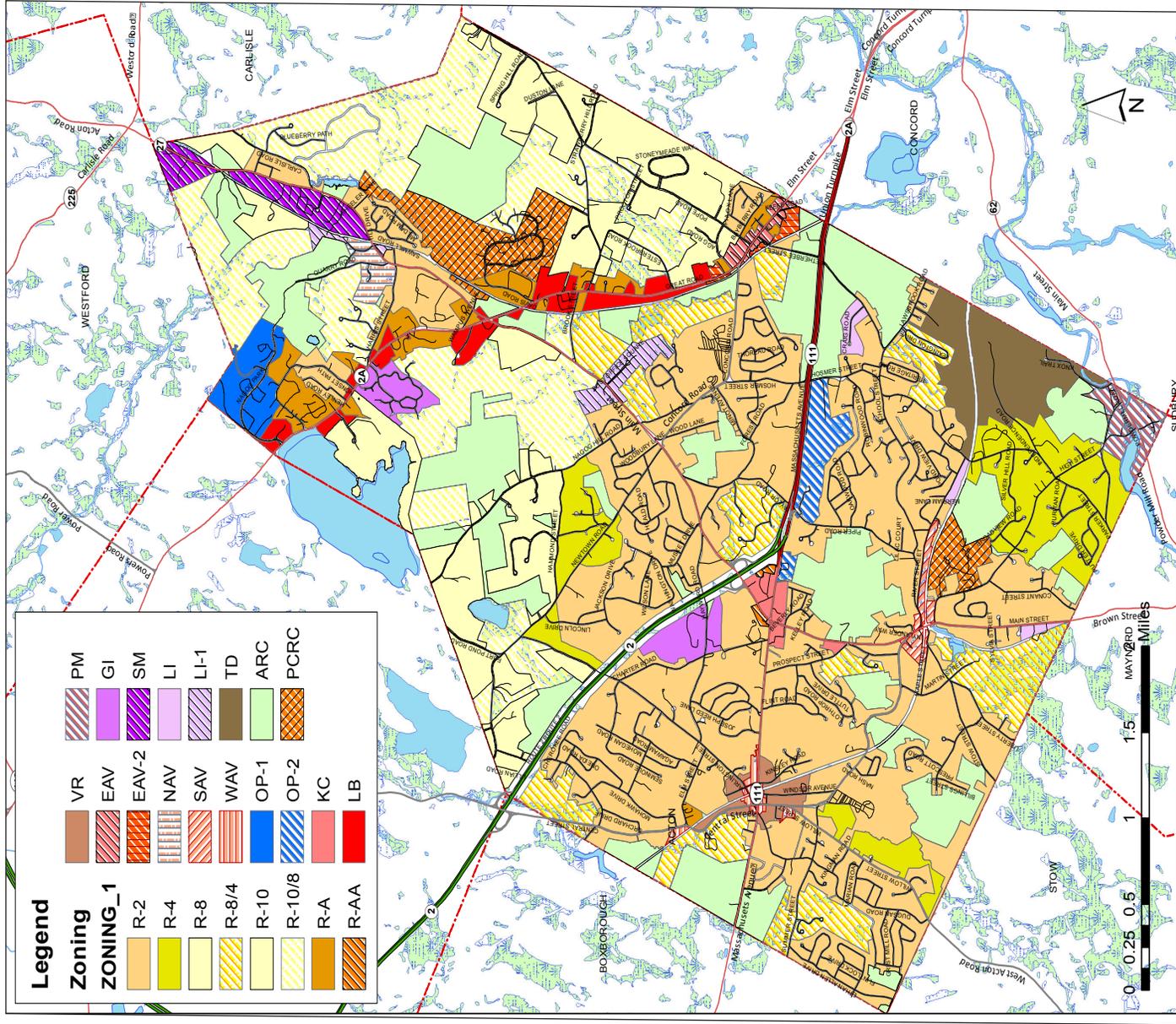
Land Use & Zoning

Figure 8.1 Acton Existing Land Use



Zoning

Figure 8.1 Acton Existing Land Use



**EXISTING
CONDITION**

9

Sustainability

Sustainability

Traditional comprehensive community plans are comprehensive in the sense that they address all important aspects of a town, from housing and economic development to transportation and public facilities. But it has become clear that the world is rapidly changing and that climate, energy and resource use are interrelated topics that have enormous implications for our children and grandchildren but have not traditionally been part of a comprehensive community plan. As discussed below, water quality is addressed in traditional plans, but because it has characteristics similar to climate and energy, it is also a subject of this element.

Acton has made a serious commitment to sustainability in its membership in ICLEI and its certification under the Massachusetts Green Communities Act. The Town has completed a benchmark survey of its energy use in schools and other public buildings and is working to improve the energy efficiency of these buildings and to encourage behavior that reduces energy use.

Summary of Key Points

Water Quality and Quantity

- Preserving water quality and quantity includes measures to ensure that well-fields are protected from development that would lead to contamination or depletion; ensuring that on-site wastewater disposal (which is used by approximately 90 percent of properties in Acton) is properly managed and regulated; and managing storm water to maintain the quality supply of both surface water and groundwater. All of these functions are being performed by the Town and the Acton Water District. More than 2,000 acres are considered permanently protected (Conservation Commission – 1,642 acres, Water District – 395 acres).

Agricultural Land

- Farmland, which was once the predominant land use in Acton (including most areas that are now forested), has become scarce with the replacement of farms with houses and business areas.
- Local agriculture has importance to human ecology as well as serving as habitat. Active farms illustrate our connection to the land and recall Acton’s history as a farming community.

Acton Voices*

“Publicize sustainability issues to promote greater public awareness of the problem and potential solutions.”

“Eliminate idling vehicles.”

“Turn the transfer station into a renewable energy power plant (also use yard waste).”

“Re-think how Town staff works and commutes.”

“Involve the ethnic communities; many come from cultures that have a history of sustainability.”

“Use the transfer station as a model for sustainable development, including exhibiting trash as art.”

“Organize web based car pooling.”

“Explore the use of renewable energy sources.”

“Look to other countries for models.”

“If there were more options for public transportation and easier and safer biking and walking, that would help a lot.”

Almost two-thirds (74.4%) of respondents to a mail survey replied: “Yes” to the question: “Should Acton actively reduce greenhouse gases?”

Over two-thirds (79.4%) of respondents to a mail survey replied: “Yes” when asked: “Are you willing to support taking action as long as it doesn’t cost too much?”

Slightly over half (55%) of the business owners responding to the mail survey responded favorably to the idea of using “green construction techniques.”

** public input from Phase I of the planning process*

- Local farming also serves the sustainability goal by connecting us to the source of our food, which in modern American society has become a matter of long-distance transport.
- Many communities have encouraged local farming through community-supported agriculture (CSA).
- Community gardens are another way of connecting people to the land, furnishing fresh produce to families, providing a healthy and creative use of leisure time that can involve people of all ages, and educating children regarding where our food comes from. Acton has community gardens in North Acton and at Morrison Farm.



Biodiversity

- Acton contains major wildlife resources including five “hotspots” for biodiversity identified in the state’s BioMap 2 Project.
- Protection of biodiversity within Acton is primarily a matter of protecting land from development and ensuring that land which is developed is developed in ways that preserve natural habitat.

Reducing Waste and the Accumulation of Toxins in our Environment

- The number of households using the Transfer Station is approximately 4,000, (roughly half of all households). The other half of Acton’s households are served by private solid waste disposal firms. In calendar year 2008, Acton reported a recycling rate of 22 percent of its solid waste. This is similar to Littleton but substantially less than the other adjoining towns, five of which exceed 40 percent.

Conserving Energy and Reducing Carbon Emissions

- Acton’s contribution of carbon dioxide from energy use is clearly a small part of the world-wide problem of global warming and climate



change. However, mitigating the problem by reducing carbon emissions requires that all energy users be part of the solution. Acton is already engaged. The Town has taken the step of becoming a member of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. In addition, Acton has been awarded Green Community status under the Massachusetts Green Communities Act. These sustainability commitments are the foundation of an ongoing program to carry out the Green Community commitments and the ICLEI milestones.

- As a result of its Green Community status, Acton was able to receive a \$150,000 grant for capital improvements and education programs to reduce municipal building energy use.

- Electricity use per square foot varies widely among Acton’s public buildings.
- Acton’s public buildings also vary considerably in natural gas use per square foot.
- Acton recently converted all of its street lights to energy conserving metal halide luminaires.
- Since 2006 residential electric use has declined by 10.6 percent, which may reflect consumer awareness of the need to conserve and particularly the replacement of incandescent lighting with compact fluorescent lamps.
- However, even with the recent reduction, households in Acton had an average electricity use of approximately 8300 kWh. According to NStar, the average residential customer uses 6,000 kWh per year, indicating that Acton



households use substantially more than the average, possibly owing in part to the 10-11% of households that use electricity for home heating.

- Non-residential use of natural gas for heating (which includes public buildings as well as private business and industry) is of roughly the same magnitude as for all residential customers.
- Although the sources of data differ, the estimated average Acton household uses approximately 830 to 894 therms of natural gas each year. NStar’s average residential gas heating customer uses 850 therms per year.
- Approximately 27 to 29 percent of Acton households use oil heat.
- The largest use of energy by residents of Acton is for transportation, accounting for an estimated 43 percent of the Town’s carbon footprint and 59 percent of the residential portion of the carbon footprint. 80.8 percent of Acton residents commuted to work in 2000 by driving alone; another 7.4 percent used car pools, and 4.5 percent used public transportation; the remaining 7.7 percent walked, biked, or worked at home.
- Electricity and home heating fuel each account

for approximately 20 percent of the residential portion of the carbon footprint. Acton households had the third lowest vehicle miles traveled among the nine adjoining towns, averaging 76.0 miles per day for all trip purposes. Nonetheless, driving is the single largest component of Acton’s total carbon footprint.

- Trips for shopping, entertainment, socializing, medical appointments, and other purposes outweigh commuting trips by more than four to one. This is significant because even those residents who use modes other than driving alone to commute are likely to drive to most other destinations. Energy saving modes such as public transportation and shuttle bus, walking, and bicycling are highly dependent on favorable land use patterns that provide enough density to make public transportation feasible and destinations close enough together to make walking and bicycling reasonable alternatives.

Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Conditions

- Preserving water quality involves the opportunities and challenges described in Volume II, Facilities and Services, including measures to implement the Comprehensive Water Resources management Plan.
- Acton’s public open space including conservation land and Morrison Farm provide opportunities to preserve biodiversity and to promote local agriculture.
- There may be opportunities to provide pick-up points for Community Supported Agriculture in locations like the farmer’s market in West Acton village.
- Water supply for irrigation may be a challenge in expanding community gardening.
- Since farmland is generally well-drained and easily developable, development pressure on private agricultural land is a challenge to sustaining its use. Community Supported Agriculture is a potential opportunity for promoting local agriculture.
- The fact that Acton does not have public curbside trash pickup is a challenge to

- increasing the rate of recycling of solid waste; however, there is an opportunity to facilitate recycling at the TCRP by exploring single stream recycling, and some aspects of keeping material goods out of the waste stream can be served at the Transfer Station and Recycling Center (TSRC), for example setting up swaps of usable goods from one household to another.
- Providing financial incentives such as free disposal of recyclables while charging on a per-bag basis for non-recyclables would be an opportunity to improve the recycling rate.
- Acton’s baseline/benchmark data can be the basis of ongoing efforts to encourage progress in saving energy, both in public buildings and in Acton’s households and businesses.
- Acton households’ use of substantially more electricity than average NStar customers will be a challenge to reducing energy use.
- Energy prices worldwide are expected to trend upward over the next decade. This is an opportunity to encourage energy conservation by households and businesses. Currently low interest rates increase this opportunity by shortening the payback period on investments

- such as household energy improvements. This is therefore an opportune time for Town programs to encourage home and business energy improvements.
- Acton’s low density land use pattern makes encouraging less driving a challenge; however, there are opportunities to strengthen (and emulate) existing villages which are more amenable to reducing vehicle miles traveled.

In conclusion, Acton is on the path to environmental sustainability, but continued effort is needed to reach the goal. In the area of reducing energy use (and therefore carbon emissions) there is much more to do, but the Town has made a strong start with its Green Community Status and commitment to the ICLEI milestones.





PROCESS

- Definition of Phases I and II
- Acton Voices - Phase I
- Acton Voices - Phase II
- Public Workshops

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

PROCESS

The plan was developed in two phases:

Phase I

was comprised of extensive and intensive outreach to the Acton community accomplished by providing multiple opportunities for input to residents and the business community. This extensive public input (which included visioning sessions, focus groups and Town-wide mail surveys) resulted in an “Emerging Vision Statement” and a set of Goals and Objectives that encapsulated what residents and business owners envisioned for the Town’s future.

Phase II

included completing an inventory of the Town’s existing resources as well as identifying future trends and issues. The unprecedented degree of public participation begun in Phase I, was continued in Phase II in a variety of ways including organizing a number of innovative public workshops and providing continuous opportunity for update and response through the internet on the Acton2020 website, a blog and Facebook page (see pages that follow).

An Implementation Plan was developed which identifies the strategies and action steps recommended to attain the vision and goals as articulated in the first phase and refined in Phase II.

Phase III is the next phase where Town officials, residents, business owners and developers use this document to meet the vision, goals and objectives articulated by the Acton2020 Committee.



Definition of Phases I and II

Phase I: Visioning for the Future of Acton

Articulating a shared vision is the first step in developing a Comprehensive Community Plan.

The Vision describes the kind of community participants would like to strive towards. In early 2008, nearly two-thousand Acton residents participated in a six-month long process to develop an “Emerging Vision” and set of Goals for the Town’s future.

A concerted effort was made to reach out to a broad range of Acton residents and to include diverse points of view in the community discussion. People gave their opinions in written form, in verbal form, as part of small groups where they decided on their group’s priorities as well as individuals in surveys or in targeted outreach meetings. These ideas were carefully documented. See sidebar for an overview of the process and a summary of the public’s input.

Community Conversation: Phase I

In early 2008, nearly two-thousand Acton residents participated in a six-month long process to develop an Emerging Vision and Goals for the Town’s future.

This degree of public outreach and participation is unprecedented in Acton. The following is a partial list of the opportunities that were provided to the public to participate in the community conversation:

- 12 Outreach Committee meetings
 - 7 Targeted focus groups
 - 5 Presentations to varied organizations
 - 3 Town-wide Visioning Sessions
 - 3 Focus groups with Town Boards, Committees and Commissions
 - 2 Locations with a Comment Board (for public comment)
- 1 Roundtable Discussion with Town Department Heads
 - 1 Town-wide mail and web survey to all Acton residents (15.6% response rate)
 - 1 Town-wide mail and web survey to all Acton businesses (5.4% response rate)
 - 1 Phone survey of a random sample of 366 Acton residents
 - 1 Meeting with the Student Council at the High School
 - 1 Web site for dissemination of information and taking survey
 - Many opportunities for all Acton students to participate by conducting surveys, drawing, writing, creating movies and songs regarding their vision for the future of Acton



Phase II: Creating a Comprehensive Community Plan

Phase II involved the following major activities:

- Developing an **Inventory of Existing Conditions** of the Town’s resources (including housing, transportation, public services and facilities, open space and recreation, cultural and natural resources, economic development, and land use.)
- Continuing the **Community Conversation** regarding the Comprehensive Community Plan begun in Phase I by organizing a number of public forums inviting both the public at large, the business community, as well as specifically targeting relevant Town Boards and Committees.
- Developing an **Implementation Plan** is a prioritized and phased proposal for moving forward to fulfill the vision and goals. It outlines the recommended strategies and action steps necessary to do so and identifies the lead responsible party (“owner”) and potential partners charged with overseeing the implementation of each strategy. The Plan also provides guidance for the prioritization and sequencing of steps.

Community Conversation: Phase II

Phase II continued the unprecedented degree of public participation in Acton and included the following venues:

- 60 Acton 2020 Committee Meetings
- 7 public workshops, including
 - 1 workshop for participants to review results of inventory and revise planning goals and objectives
 - 3 thematic workshops (housing, open space and transportation) where Committee members represented the seven planning goals and through role play “performed” these by reacting to a scenario; this was followed by discussion with “experts” and the public at large
 - 1 workshop to review three alternatives for guiding future growth in Acton
 - 1 workshop to review implementation plan where participants were asked to comment on major action steps and “spend” Acton dollars in an exercise intended to identify participants spending priorities.
 - 1 public forum to present the final plan and answer the public’s questions
- 10 roundtable discussions with Town Boards, Committees and Commissions
- movie and video clips to generate excitement and inspire residents to get involved in the process ¹
- 1 focus group with business owners in Kelley’s Corner
- 1 roundtable discussion with the Town Department Heads
- Several articles in the Acton Patch and Beacon announcing and describing related events
- Many opportunities for all Acton residents to participate continually by logging on to the internet and communicating to the Committee and others by:
 - Website <http://acton2020.info/>: continuous updates on the planning process as well as an opportunity for residents to comment on the Plan.
 - Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/acton2020/>): continuous updates on the process and an opportunity for public comment.
 - Blog: <http://acton2020.info/blog/2011/02/21/two-openings-on-acton-2020-committee/>: a direct extension of the community conversation where issues are posted for public comment and discussion.

¹ The Acton 2020 Committee collaborated with local writer, Leigh Davis Honn and local director, Christo Tsiaras, to film the funny and informative film about getting Acton residents excited about planning for the future of the Town. See movie, “It’s A Wonderful Acton”: http://acton.patch.com/articles/its-a-wonderful-acton#youtube_video-6516131.

- **Research of Precedents.** A number of best practice precedents (“how is it done elsewhere?”) were researched including urban planning and design ideas regarding village

development, mixed use, pedestrian-orientation, etc. as well as regulatory precedents for Transfer of Development Rights.

Acton Voices - Phase I

Community Conversation: Phase I Residents and Business Owners – Top Responses

Acton Voices

The following is a summary of the on-going conversation with the Acton community which began in 2008 and that will continue on-line on the Acton 2020 website even after the publication of this Plan. The summary below identifies the areas where residents seem to agree most about what they wish to preserve, what they would like to change, what they hope to improve, how they would describe a desired future, and the steps they would support as being the most effective ways of getting there.¹The “Emerging Vision” and Goals form the basis upon which the implementation plan that outlines steps of how to get to the desired future as articulated by the participants was developed.

¹ Please see Volume II (Phase I) and Volume II (Phase II) for a more detailed documentation of public input into the Comprehensive Community Plan.

Public Forum	Favorite Things about Acton	Least Favorite Things About Acton	If You Could Do One Thing...?
Visioning Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural character, natural features Schools Village centers Sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic Lack of walkability No real Town center Affordability Lack of adequate site plan, subdivision & design reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make pedestrian & bike-friendly Create centers for congregating Plan for sustainable development Expand the commercial tax base
Resident Mail Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools Diversity of activities & uses Conservation land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High cost of living Traffic Lack of continuous pedestrian/bike paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open space Historic homes protected & preserved Affordable housing
Business Mail Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools Town character Open character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic Taxes Parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [More] development [More] business [More] walkable
Seniors (Mini-Visioning Workshop)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Center NARA Park Nursing service Rural character Actonians Hospital Library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much housing development Traffic Taxes No one Town center Not enough public transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower taxes Hold Town Meeting & Election Day on Saturday More public transport Provide handicap parking West Acton

Community Conversation: Phase I Residents and Business Owners – Top Responses cont.

<p>Focus Groups (Targeted Outreach)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools • Parks, open space • Proximity to jobs • Friendly, welcoming • Small town feel • Safe • Family-orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of walkable center • Poorly maintained recreation facilities • Lack of sidewalks and public transport • Traffic issues • No trash collection • Poor water quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do more to plan for sustainability • Provide full day K for all • Space for cultural celebration • Public transportation for seniors & teens • Preserve excellent schools • Improve parking at train
<p>Teen Themes (Acton Students)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools • Arboretum • Sense of community • Trees, horses • History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough to do • Need to plan for sustainable future • Need for walking • Too much traffic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Movie theater • Sidewalks • Bike paths • Public transportation • Club for older kids

Acton Voices - Phase II

Community Conversation Continued: Phase II

In Phase II, the community conversation was continued by holding six public workshops, at least ten meetings with Town Boards and Committees, and countless meetings with the Acton2020 Committee. Additionally a variety of on-line opportunities provided continual access to the process; a blog, Facebook page, and website with opportunities to comment on all phases of the plan and throughout the process. The following are some highlights of this public input.

Public Workshop #1:

Participants confirmed and refined the “emerging vision” statement and goals and objectives that had been developed in Phase I. At this workshop participants were also presented with a preliminary list of key issues, opportunities and challenges and they offered their thoughts on how to address these. Please see box for a summary of participant input.

“Burning Issues” Public Workshops (3):

Three public workshops were conducted on what the Acton 2020 Committee identified as being “burning issues: these were housing, transportation, and economic development. Participants

included invited “experts” on each subject as well as the public at large.

“Choose Your Own Acton” Public Workshop:

Participants were asked to select from three development alternatives that were each designed to meet the planning goals in different ways and in different degrees.

“How Do We Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on (“Implementation Plan”) Public Workshop:

Please see box for a listing of the strategies that participants felt were most important.

“Fall Implementation Plan Meetings”, Fall 2011:

A series of meetings were held with Town Boards and Committees to carefully review the implementation plan and solicit input into the strategies. It was also an important opportunity to invite “owners” to take the lead responsibility for specific strategies and to identify any relevant potential partners.

On-going Opportunity for Plan Updates and Public Input:

Use of the internet both to disseminate information regarding the process and the content of the

plan as well as to provide an additional opportunity for people to interact with the content of the plan (blog, Facebook, and interactive posting of the entire Implementation Plan).

List of Phase II Outreach Venues

- **Revisit, Refine Vision and Goals: October 20, 2010**
- **Burning Issues**
 - Economic Development: March 3, 2011
 - Transportation: March 9, 2011
 - Housing: March 12, 2011
- **“Choose Your Own Acton”: Alternatives: June 23, 2011**
- **Fall Meetings: Input from Committees, Boards, etc.**
 - Kelley’s Corner: September 14, 2011
 - Sustainability, Financial Well-being: Sept. 21, 2011
 - Affordable Housing, Inclusion/Diversity: Sept. 28, 2011
 - Connections, Community Gathering: Oct. 12, 2011
 - Town Character, Town-owned Assets: Oct. 26, 2011
- **“How Do we Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on: Proposed Implementation Plan/Prioritization: November 9, 2011**
- **“Presenting the Plan,” March 6, 2012**
- **Blog**
- **Facebook Page**
- **Website**

Public Workshops (Phase II)

Public Workshop #1: Review, Refine and Revise Goals and Objectives October 20, 2010

Representative workshop participant quotes responding to Emerging Vision and Goals and Objectives developed in Phase I.

- *“Sustainability goals and objectives should be more action-oriented”*
- *“There should be more emphasis on the preservation of natural resources”*
- *“Ensure that historic preservation encompasses landscapes as well as buildings”*
- *“Reiterated strong desire for increased opportunities for community gathering, both indoor and outdoor, formal and informal; continued conversation about community/senior center”*
- *“Need for regional approaches to address shared issues”*
- *“Concentrate efforts on village centers”*
- *“Emphasis on improving non-car transportation (e.g. sidewalks, bike paths, public transportation)”*
- *“Improve town entrances”*
- *“Want a town center”*
- *“Provide better social connections for newcomers”*
- *“Need better communication of existing resources and events”*
- *“What are we doing for our aging population? Elderly moving out of town because cannot afford to 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”*



Summary of Key Themes from Burning Issues Workshops

Housing

There seemed to be general consensus regarding a desire to focus on meeting Acton’s specific housing needs rather than 40B requirements (especially not in one large development) and that small, scattered and integrated sites of “affordable” housing is more in keeping with the Town’s character and attitudes. Many thought that infill in and around village centers was a desirable and appropriate location for smaller, more affordable housing units.

Transportation

There was a strong interest expressed in reducing auto travel by providing alternatives including walking facilities (significant interest was expressed in extending the sidewalks system), bike lanes/paths, Town shuttle, and by reducing driving to the schools.

Economic Development

There was relative consensus regarding the fact that what seemed both more desirable as well as most feasible in terms of future development was small-scale – mostly in the form of restaurants and shops – in-fill development in the village centers and Kelley’s Corner. The discussion also focused on the importance of understanding how to attract and retain desirable businesses (e.g. providing incentives, investing in infrastructure, streamlining permitting etc.). Participants also emphasized the importance of supporting small and home-based businesses.

Choose Your Own Acton” Public Workshop

There was a high degree of consensus regarding which was considered to be the “preferred alternative” and it was a composite combining features of the alternatives. “Alternative 3,” the alternative which proposed concentrating growth in village centers, was preferred for the following features:

- Community gathering, qualities including vibrant people-oriented villages with places to go and opportunities to gather and mingle, including opportunities for more theater and music
- Energy savings due to walkability
- Protection of open space in outer areas
- Efficient use of infrastructure

Participants seemed to also want to focus on:

- Open space preservation/acquisition
- Preservation of historic character through historic preservation efforts and strong design review
- Employment-oriented development
- Limiting growth and protecting rural characteristics
- Sidewalks/bikeways/public transport (Minuteman van), traffic calming/mitigation



“How Do We Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on Public Workshop

The top priority strategies are listed in the participants priority order as follows:

- Create a building that can accommodate the Senior Center and the larger community
- Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan
- Continue to support and achieve the high educational standards of Acton’s schools
- Preserve historically significant buildings, landscapes and other historic features
- Protect the quality and quantity of the water
- Increase opportunities for safe biking
- Provide & encourage public transportation
- Develop and implement a comprehensive site and design review process
- Build more sidewalks

Also high priority were:

- Increase the Town’s fiscal capacity to implement all goals by proactively recruiting new businesses and retaining existing ones throughout the Town
- Increase recycling and reuse
- Reduce energy use in existing buildings
- Review and revise the Town’s bylaws and planning process to support the 2020 Plan goals



AFTERWORD



Today. Tomorrow. Together.

AFTERWORD

OK, THAT'S THE PLAN. NOW WHAT?

A final word from the Acton 2020 committee.

Thanks for reading this far. We hope you have seen how the different parts of the plan work together to show how to steer Acton toward the sort of future that we all want to live in. Without any steering, our present course will cause Acton to drift toward risking what is important to us, including our water quality, our open space, our historic characteristics, and the special qualities that make so many of our neighborhoods and villages be the places that residents want to be in.

Our financial and environmental sustainability depend on executing a good plan. A good plan has three jobs it needs to do well:

- describe a desirable and achievable future;
- show what has to happen to get there; and
- engage the people that will need to work to attain it.

As for the first job, the vision for Acton's future described in this plan has been well-tested in the visioning and planning phases of this process. We are confident that we have captured the general consensus of how people in Acton

want the Town to serve them in the future, as a sustainable place to live, play, work, and shop; and as a place to connect with one another, and to connect with the natural beauty and historic depths of our Town.

The next question, of how to get there, and how to best preserve what we already have, is also well-laid out in this plan, in outline at least; but compared to the clarity of vision, we know there are some gaps or uncertainties where the implementation plan can only use words like “consider” or “study” or “plan” – where further work is needed to prove or improve the plan and add detail.

The final question of engagement is the most important one. Looking back on the process of preparing the plan, including the roadmap, the goals and objectives, the inventory of existing conditions, and the detailed interlinked implementation plan, what stays in our minds as committee members is not all these words and concepts, but instead the depth of caring and participation from so many residents. That's what's going to make the plan work from here. The foundation is now done, but the implementation is where the action happens.

We hope that many of you will choose to participate in the next phase, by joining the implementation committee, or participating in future public meetings, or, most importantly, by finding the parts of the plan that you most care about and working to shape them in to specific choices, programs, budgets, and actions. In other words, find a way to make the plan a reality, and keep finding ways to work with the important details to keep improving the plan.

This plan would not be where it is today without so many educated and concerned citizens who have taken part in shaping the future of our Town. And so, you will also be a key way forward for this plan. It is yours. Please carry the plan in to the implementation phase with the same pride and excellence you have brought to this phase, now ending, of creating the Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan.

-The Acton 2020 Committee

As poet William Stafford wrote, “A poem is not the end, but the beginning, of an excursion.”

Each of the Acton schools in the Acton public school system participated in the visioning process for the comprehensive community plan in their own way. Students and teachers prepared a large number of varied ways of expressing their concerns and desires for the future. The following are the lyrics from a song developed from a teacher-led brainstorm with the 6th grade students and written by the Music Department.

*This Town is Your Town**



“This town is your town; this town is my town, From the edge of Box
borough to the Concord border. From the pine tree forests to the Nagog
waters, This town will change with you and me.”

*“Install some streetlights and maybe
sidewalks.*

*I’ve walked past litter and don’t enjoy it.
Add many trashcans to make it cleaner,
Then Acton will be a better place.”*

Chorus/Refrain

*“As I was walking around Acton
I saw we needed bike paths and park space,
A community center, more ethnic
restaurants.*

This town should change; don’t you agree?”

Chorus/Refrain

*“Stop building condos and houses, too.
Let’s make it greener for me and you.
Use solar panels and biofuel.
If we unite it will come true.”*

Chorus/Refrain

*by Acton 6th graders and the Music Department

APPENDICES



Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Appendix 1: Transfer of Development Rights

Transfer of Development Rights: What Is It, and Where Has It Been Used?

What is TDR?

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is a zoning technique that has been in use around the United States for more than 30 years; there are about 140 programs nationwide. The basic idea is to achieve less development in areas that the Town wants to preserve by shifting it to locations where development is more desirable. Because property owners have rights to develop under the basic underlying zoning, it is not possible to prevent development, but the TDR mechanism provides incentives for voluntary cooperation with the Town's planning goals.

Hypothetical Example:

Ms. Smith owns a piece of land the Town would like to preserve as open space. She could build 30 units of housing under the existing zoning, but her land has been designated a "sending area" if she should choose to use TDR.

Mr. Jones owns a parcel in a center (perhaps Kelley's Corner) that has been designated a "receiving area" for TDR. He could build up to 40 additional units on his property if he (a) can get the rights to 30 units from a sending area and (b) his proposal meets a list of incentives specified in the zoning for the receiving area (some of these are automatic for a TDR, others are for "going beyond" the minimum requirements). Jones' development must go through Special Permit review to ensure it meets stated guidelines and merits the incentives.

Smith and Jones are brought together by a broker. They negotiate a transaction in which Smith gets the value of more than a 30-unit development; Jones gets the proceeds from his development including the extra 40 units, which exceeds what he could otherwise do on his parcel of land.

In a variation of the technique, the Town buys Smith's development rights and puts them in a development bank. Later, Jones buys the rights to these units from the development bank.

Another variation is that the TDR mechanism can allow some of the residential development rights from the sending area to be converted to commercial square footage at a specified rate.

Examples of Where TDR Has Been Used or Is in the Process of Being Adopted

Chesterfield Township, NJ

In this township of approximately 6,000 people, a TDR system was established to protect open space and guide residential development to a designated center called Old York Village. As of 2007, 313 residential units had been sold in four developments in the designated receiving area.



Warwick Township, PA

As of 2010, the Warwick, Pennsylvania, TDR system that was established in 1991 has preserved 1,318 acres of farmland. The associated development rights for 287 housing units have been sold by the township to developers for use in a designated receiving area.

Falmouth, MA

- One of the first TDR bylaws in the Commonwealth, from 1985
- TDR can only be part of a subdivision application but the Planning Board handles both operations to streamline the process
- Density bonuses range from 20 to 40% depending on sending and receiving areas

Pinelands, NJ

- In 1981, the Pinelands Commission administered the Pinelands Development Credit (PDC) program in order to preserve rural land
- Development rights are acquired by purchasing PDCs
 - Four TDRs equals one PDC
- The Pinelands Development Credit Bank, developed in 1985, monitors the process of administering, buying, and selling PDCs
 - The Pinelands Development Credit Bank also has the ability to purchase PDCs, effectively removing them from the market
- Rural regions, such as preservation and agricultural areas, serve as the sending areas
 - In order to sell PDCs, landowners must apply for certification through the Pinelands Development Credit Bank
 - Type of land, number of acres, and current land use determine the number of PDCs available for landowners in sending areas
- High density Regional Growth Areas, designated by the Pinelands Commission, serve as the receiving areas
- As of May 2011, 10,865 TDRs (2,716.25 PDCs) have been utilized
- Since its implementation, the PDC Program has preserved approximately 47,980 acres

Newburyport, MA

Ordinance has been drafted (not yet adopted) to transfer development from open space preservation areas to designated development areas. Both residential and commercial development rights can be transferred. Transfers may be arranged between private landowners, but conservation restrictions must be deeded to the City. This ordinance also provides for a TDR open space bank that holds development rights that the City may purchase to protect an open space parcel in a sending area and later sell to developers of receiving areas.



King County, WA

The County (which includes Seattle as well as several other centers and large expanses of undeveloped land) set up a TDR program to encourage infill and compact development in key centers such as Sammamish, Bellevue, and Issaquah.

- Since 2000, 141,000 acres of open space has been protected and 2,467 residential units built in centers instead of rural areas.
- As TDRs are sold, only the part of the property represented by the TDRs has a conservation easement put on it. So if there is a remaining part it can be developed to the baseline zoning level.
- TDRs are applicable in some rural areas as long as they fulfill certain requirements such as existing public water service, being within a certain range of other similarly sized developments, and not affecting environmentally sensitive areas.
- The county also had “amenity funds” to offer compensation for additional density in cities. These funds could be used for features such as public art, cultural or community facilities, parks, recreation, open space and transit-related improvements.
- A TDR bank also exists so the County can buy TDRs to sell at another time, maintaining a healthy market. The County also carefully tracks and records the sales and prices of TDRs.

Exeter, RI

The Town of Exeter is drafting a TDR bylaw as part of a planning process aimed at concentrating development in two villages and thereby preserving large parcels of agricultural land and protecting rural character. An incentive for using TDR is provided by providing bonus units at transfer ratios that depend on the Town’s priorities in preserving different sending areas.

Warwick, NY

The town of Warwick, New York (population 32,000) established a TDR system to protect open space and transfer development to Warwick Village. Established in 2008 during the real estate downturn, the TDR provisions have not been used yet.

Montgomery County, MD

- Established a TDR program after downzoning failed to curb development
- With the TDR program 90,000 acres of farmland and open space were rezoned to 1 du /25 acres. If the landowners chose to participate in the TDR program they could sell the original density rights (1 du/ 5 acres).
- Land in the TDR program has a permanent restriction from development once the density rights are sold.



- Receiving areas were also rezoned with a baseline density (no-TRD) and a higher density for development with TDRs.
- TDRs may be bought on a speculative basis for resale.

St. Mary's County, MD

- Sending and receiving areas overlap.
- Existing zoning is generous, hurting the incentive for developers to by TDRs.
- There are other density incentives (connecting to existing water and sewer systems, planned unit development, design enhancements) that also undermined the importance of TDRs.
- Since this TDR system was not as popular as hoped, the County changed the system:
 - Any development beyond the first dwelling unit on a rural property must use TDRs.
 - The number of TDRs required for each dwelling unit would vary based on the existing density (increasing as the density increased).
- After these changes were made the use of TDRs increased.

Charles County, MD

- Strict requirements for sending areas (must qualify under the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation)
- Once a single TDR is sold from a property, the entire property is restricted and is not eligible for development. (Though the remaining TDRs can still be sold later.)
- A landowner can buy back TDRs from his/her property or another as long as there is not a net loss in preserved land.
- When the county noticed that the TDR program was not popular they downzoned an area of the county near the development district, but instead of encouraging development in the development district this pushed more new development into rural areas.
- The county is not involved in the negotiations or sales of TDRs and the records are not public.
- In 10 years, only 690 TDRs were sold. This lack of performance is attributed to:
 - The lack of supply of TDRs due to the high standards of qualifications
 - The lack of demand for TDRs due to the fact that developers can attain the density levels they want in other ways
 - The opaque TDR market.



Queen Anne's County, MD

- The County has had a TDR program and a density transfer program (called a Non-Contiguous Development program) since 1987. In 1995, the TDR program was reconfigured to focus on environmentally sensitive land.
- The NCD program focuses on rural to rural density transfers, offering a high increase in the amount of density a property can have (shifting from 1 du/20 ac to .9 du/ ac).
- Meanwhile, the TDR program limited TDR development to designated growth areas that already had a high density zoning.
- In the beginning of the programs, the TDR program was more popular, but when all the restrictions were added the NCD program took over as most popular since developers could gain so much more for their purchases.

Sources:

- Transfer of Development Rights in U.S. Communities: Evaluating Program Design, Implementation, and Outcomes by Margaret Wells and Virginia McConnell, 2007.
- Smart Growth Through the Transfer of Development Rights, New Jersey Future. 2010
- Transfer of Development Rights Case Studies from www.mass.gov
- Interviews with city and town planners.

ⁱ These development guidelines include basic requirements like maximum height and density that limit how large the development can be, as well as extras like providing public open space as part of the development. These guidelines would also apply to non-TDR developments.

ⁱⁱ Downzoning is a change in the zoning to reduce the amount of development permitted in a zoning district.

ⁱⁱⁱ du = dwelling unit



Appendix 2: Affordable Housing in Acton

The following is a summary of affordable housing issues in Acton. It includes information regarding definitions, roles and responsibilities of agencies providing such housing, a brief overview of the history of affordable housing in Acton and a comparison of Acton's housing supply with that of surrounding communities.

The topic of “affordable housing” can be a confusing one for many reasons, not the least of which being that often people mean different things when they use the term because the term has different meanings. Affordable to whom? Affordable for how long? Affordable for rental or ownership?

Affordable Housing - the official statutory definition: “Affordable Housing is defined in Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 40B regulations as housing for households with incomes not exceeding 80% of the area median income, and requires deed restrictions on rents or home prices for a specific period of time, generally in perpetuity. These households are designated as “low and moderate income.”¹

Other definitions of affordable housing:

Housing that is affordable does not exceed 30-38% of a household's gross income. Housing costs considered in this guideline generally include taxes and insurance for owners, and usually include utility costs.² When the monthly carrying costs of a home (ownership or rental), including insurance, taxes, and condo association fees exceed 30–38% of household income, then the housing is considered unaffordable for that household. Households who pay more than 30-38% of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation and medical care.

Sustainable affordable housing (Affordable Housing Institute – US)

- **Housing.** The housing must be market-competitive quality that can blend in to its neighborhood. Thus we are explicitly excluding substandard locations, configurations, constructions, maintenance. Such ‘structures’ — to use the Kenyan euphemism — may be ‘shelter’ but are not housing.
- **Affordable.** The housing must be affordable for its target market. This means what the householder pays. Affordability must also continue throughout the expected life of the tenancy.
- **Sustainable.** Housing quality and housing affordability must continue over the housing's expected useful life (typically 30-50+ years). This implies that the housing must take in enough cash flow to cover its expenditures, including capital expenditures.

¹ MGL Chapter 40B was enacted in 1969 to help address the shortage of affordable housing statewide by reducing barriers created by local zoning, and other restrictions. The law was upheld in a 2010 referendum.

² Utility costs are included in rental, not in ownership units.



History of “affordable housing” in Acton

Acton needs 3.9% more of its housing stock to be affordable to provide a minimum of 10% of its housing inventory as affordable.

Why all this talk of reaching a 10% threshold? Reaching this 10% of housing units counting as “affordable” (by State definition) is one way of assuring that developers of housing cannot override Acton’s zoning and wetland bylaws.

Homes meeting the state definition of affordability. Given the current figure of 519 affordable units, 378 additional affordable units would be needed to achieve the ten percent (10%) figure.

- Extending achievement of the target to 2030 (9,595 total yearround housing units) means that 40% of all new housing units between 2010 and 2030 would need to be “affordable”.
- This is an annual rate of 22 units if the target is to be met by 2030.
- The 2011 median 4-person household income for the Boston Metropolitan area that includes Acton is \$96,500.
- For a household of four, 80% of the median household income is \$64,200. This is the maximum qualifying income allowed or affordable

units for a household of four.

Twenty-six percent (26%) of Acton’s households are estimated to be income eligible for affordable housing, using the 80% criterion.

Town efforts through The Acton Community Housing Corporation and 40B housing developments have helped to raise the number of units that count towards the state’s figure from 2.5% in the previous decade.

- Avalon Acton, a 40B development, with its 296 units of rental housing is a major factor in bringing this number up since all units count in a rental development, affordable or not.

Currently 6.1% or 519 units in Acton are considered affordable, using Commonwealth of Massachusetts statutory definitions.

Affordable Homes in Acton The average selling price of all residential units in Acton was \$459,900 in 2010.

- The annual income needed to buy the average priced home is \$131,567, based on a 5% down payment, 30% of income dedicated to home purchase, a 4.5% fixed-rate 30-year mortgage, and annual payments for homeowners insurance (\$2,760) and local real estate taxes (\$8,316).

This means that about half of the households in Acton could not afford to buy an average priced home in the Town today, if they were to move here now.

40B is one way to create affordable housing but not the only way.

The following two agencies work on creating housing opportunities for low and moderate income individuals.

Acton Community Housing Corporation³

The Acton Community Housing Corporation (ACHC) is appointed by the Board of Selectmen and charged with facilitating affordable housing for working families and individuals with modest incomes.⁴ The Board oversees First Time Homebuyer programs and moderate income rental units. ACHC was instrumental in the creation of 47 additional ownership units.

³ The responsibilities of the ACHC include: Acting as the Town’s initial contact and preliminary negotiating agency with developers of proposed affordable residential housing projects (40B’s), Reviewing design and density, Determining consistency with Comprehensive Permit Policy, Initiating action to create affordable residential housing developments on Townowned properties, monitoring Deed Riders used to ensure continued affordability resale of affordable units.

⁴ Funding: The Corporation has a Community Housing Program Fund using Community Preservation Act funds. In 2011 it received \$150,000 from these sources. In 2007 it initiated a pilot Condo Buy-Down Program with its funds with limited success. Housing gift funds from some developers of housing projects have also been used by ACHC.



- Acton has created 23 deed restricted home ownership units without using 40B.
- These local action units are approved by the Mass. Department of Housing and Community Development for counting toward the Town’s goal of 10% affordable housing
- ACHC has funded the construction of new units and has subsidized the purchase of several existing market units and made them deed restricted.
- Creation of more rental housing would address a major housing need and also contribute to the goal of creating more affordable housing.

Acton Housing Authority

The Town of Acton, at its Annual Town Meeting in 1970, established the Acton Housing Authority (AHA).⁵ The AHA has a five person Board of Commissioners, four are elected and one is appointed by the Governor. The Board is responsible for setting policy and for budget oversight. The AHA was established to create affordable rental housing for elderly, disabled and lowincome families.

⁵ Funding. Funding for the AHA for the housing units it owns has been provided by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts under its housing programs. In 2010 the Town of Acton provided \$250,000 from its Community Preservation Act Fund for the creation of 12 new housing units. AHA projects have also received funding from the Steinberg-Lalli Charitable Trust.

In 1980, the Acton Housing Authority (AHA) welcomed its first residents at Windsor Green, a sixty-eight unit affordable housing complex for elderly and disabled residents of Acton. The Housing Authority has continued to meet its commitment to providing affordable rental housing to Acton residents over the past three decades, adding to the inventory by building and buying new units. The AHA has two developments for elderly and/or handicapped individuals; 68 units located on Windsor Avenue and 23 units located on Sachem Way. The AHA has a 12 unit home for people with disabilities which was purchased in 1985 and built in 1900. The

AHA has 12 family units in six duplexes and 31 condominium units scattered throughout Acton. The AHA also manages 170 rental subsidies. These rental subsidies are used to assist low-income individuals and families rent housing in the private market.

The AHA gives preference to local residents, who live and/or work in Acton, that are on our waiting list. Currently, 164 local residents are on the waiting list. The wait for affordable rental housing is long. These residents are placed on a waiting list where they will stay for 6 months to a year if they are elderly, 2-3 years if they are a family, and years if they are disabled.

Acton’s “Affordable Housing” Inventory as compared to surrounding towns

	2000 Census Year-Round Housing Units	Total Development Units ⁶	SHI Units ⁷	Percent %
Acton	8,475	897	519	6.1%
Boxborough	2,062	324	24	1.2%
Carlisle	1,740	52	46	2.6%
Concord	6,852	738	713	10.4%
Littleton	3,443	420	269	8.2%
Maynard	4,430	365	365	8.2%
Stow	2,500	301	143	5.7%
Sudbury	5,921	422	281	4.7%
Westford	7,671	667	371	4.8%

See tables on the following pages to see: how home prices in Acton compare in affordability for household incomes in Acton and the surrounding region.

⁶ Total Development Units are defined as the market rate units in development projects that contain units able to be counted as affordable (e.g. the 75% of units in a project that has 25% “affordable” units) where affordability is defined using the state’s definition.

⁷ SHI=Subsidized Housing Inventory: The inventory includes 40B units and other deed restricted units including housing authority units, and state group homes. The inventory is current as of June 30, 2011.



Policy Decisions

Key choices need to be made among different ways to provide affordable housing.

The price and type of housing is critical in creating and maintaining its affordability, regardless of which definition is being used. Specifically:

- Mixes of housing types in terms of architectural styles, square footage of homes and lots, numbers of bedrooms, and types of structure (single- or multifamily) enable diversity in population (ages, income, and household size).
- Supporting such diversity is one of the seven planning goals.

Some Acton Voices⁸

- “Acton has too much affordable housing”
- “Acton needs more affordable housing”
- “We should focus on meeting Acton’s specific affordable housing needs and not on meeting 40B requirements”
- “Housing that is affordable to seniors, young families, Town employees and others should be located in small, scattered sites”
- “The Town should just build large rental and affordable housing developments to meet 40B requirements so as to get this regulation off our backs.”

⁶ Total Development Units are defined as the market rate.



Appendix 3: Acton 2020 Youth Art Contest Winners

A Youth Art Contest was held to involve youth and teach them a little about the comprehensive community planning process by asking them to read through the goals and objectives, to choose one and illustrate it. Additionally the youth art contest helped illustrate each of the goals and in this way provided inspiration by helping us to imagine them through the fresh eyes of youngsters. All Acton youth were invited to participate by submitting a drawing that illustrated one of the seven planning goals. Entries were judged based on their creativity, originality, and artistic quality as well as how well they depicted the intent of the goal. Artwork was submitted from all of Acton's schools and for each of the goals. Winning entries were exhibited and winners announced at the March 6th Public Workshop. First place winning entries are published in Volume I of the Plan, while all winning entries can be found in the appendices in Volume III.

GOAL	Age Group	Name
GOAL 1		
First Place	12-15	Mackenzie Abernethy
First Place	6-11	Alex Zhang
GOAL 2		
First Place	6-11	Sanjana Krishna
Second Place	6-11	Hannah Keenan
	6-11	Iniyah C.K.
Honorable Mention	6-11	Lucas Escobedo
GOAL 3		
First Place	12-15	Luka Ilic
First Place	6-11	Meghna Sundaram
	6-11	Peter Busse
Second Place	6-11	Emily Gouveia – Vigeant

GOAL	Age Group	Name
Honorable Mention	6-11	Emily Streeter
GOAL 4		
First Place	6-11	Joy Wang
Second Place	6-11	Vanessa Pare
	6-11	Vivian Shen
Honorable Mention	6-11	Maria Redmond
GOAL 5		
First Place	6-11	Carrie Yu
GOAL 6		
First Place	6-11	Jyo Pari
GOAL 7		
First Place	6-11	Gretel Busse

A complete list of all Youth Art Contest Winners, including their art work, can be found in Appendix 7 in the Appendices volume.

