

Buildings and Housing

Goal 1: Commercial and industrial buildings and homes in Acton are built and retrofitted to be energy efficient, net zero carbon, healthy, affordable, and resilient.

Goal 2: Acton actively influences policies at the state and federal level to support rapid and affordable building decarbonization.

Update Acton's zoning and planning to diversify the town's housing options for people of all means, prioritizing access, affordability, and sustainability

BH1: Adopt zoning changes to allow for broader and more multifamily housing choices and flexible approaches to achieve housing affordability and accessibility.

This includes allowing smaller-scale units, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) of various sizes, and mixed-used developments such as apartments over commercial businesses. Ensure zoning aligns with land conservation goals by working closely with Natural Resources Department and stakeholders in developing these changes. Explore ways to use zoning to encourage housing development to be as sustainable as possible.

BH2: Develop an actionable plan for affordable housing and mixed-use development within 1/2 mile of public transit and near existing business centers and village districts.

In addition to alignment with the Planning Department, Town's Housing Production Plan, and new state policies, ensure sustainable land use practices, access to green spaces, and improved infrastructure for bikes and pedestrians are part of these developments. Prioritize rehabilitation or reuse of existing buildings, where feasible.

Support residents and businesses to improve the energy efficiency of their homes and buildings and transition to clean heating and cooling

BH3: Work with Mass Save to improve outreach about financial and technical assistance available for landlords, condo associations, and renters to improve their homes' energy efficiency and switch to efficient electrified heating and cooling systems.

Mass Save is a ratepayer funded program that provides incentives and information to improve building energy efficiency. Mass Save programs will continue to evolve and focus more on reducing carbon emissions in existing buildings in alignment with the State's climate goals. This effort will include researching mechanisms to ensure that these programs do not negatively impact the cost of living for renters.

BH4: Expand outreach about the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program to increase program participation.

The PACE program allows a property owner to take a transferrable lien on their property and undertake energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades, which saves money on energy bills, with a longer payback period of up to 20 years. Eligible buildings include commercial, industrial, multifamily properties with five or more units, and buildings owned by nonprofits. This effort will include researching mechanisms to ensure that these programs do not negatively impact the cost of living for renters.

BH5: Pilot and implement geothermal micro-districts that can make it more affordable to transition to electric heating and cooling systems at scale.

A geothermal micro-district connects adjacent buildings using a shared ground source heat pump system to provide fossil fuel free heating and cooling.

BH6: Explore pursuing an aggregated triple electrification model in Acton to decarbonize buildings while improving energy efficiency and adding onsite renewables.

An aggregated electrification model uses a combination of private and public funding sources to raise capital and offer low-interest loan and lease programs to help residents gradually improve the energy performance of their homes. In this model, Acton will consider hiring a third-party vendor to provide a financing strategy and retrofit services for buildings that include options such as energy efficiency improvements, electrification of home heating and cooling systems, onsite renewables and storage, and smart technologies. The program will include mechanisms for offering a zero-cost or very low-cost financial product for low- and moderate-income residents.

Spotlight Corner

Ithaca, NY developed a Building Energy Efficiency Retrofit and Thermal Load Electrification Program. The program will use a combination of incentives from the State of New York, combined with private financing, to offer affordable financing and services for residents and businesses to perform deep energy retrofits, combining energy efficiency, electrification, and onsite renewables. -

<http://www.cityofithaca.org/DocumentCenter/View/13214/City-of-Ithaca-Retrofitting-Electrification-RFP>

Lead by example to improve the energy efficiency of the Town's municipal buildings and schools and transition that building stock to net zero emissions

BH7: Adopt a net zero carbon standard for new municipal buildings and major retrofits and town-funded affordable housing.

The Town will research and set a policy and timeframe for all municipal buildings and town-funded affordable housing to be net zero emissions. This will include establishing trigger points, such as retrofits at a certain threshold and new construction, that require these buildings to transition to net zero emissions. The Electrification Roadmap developed by both the Town and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School District will provide a clear pathway towards this policy. Explore strategies and new innovations to achieve a complete zero standard for a new building or major retrofits.

BH8: Complete retro-commissioning and energy efficiency improvements for all buildings owned by the Town of Acton and Acton-Boxborough Regional School District.

As a near-term step, the Town will assess all of its municipal and school building stock, providing retro-commissioning services to ensure building equipment is operating at peak efficiency and pursue all cost-effective energy upgrades. This strategy will be followed by Strategy E4.

Advocate for policy changes and resources at the state and federal level that will enable the rapid and affordable transition to carbon free buildings in Acton

BH9: Exclude fossil fuel use in new construction projects and major retrofits across Acton, with exceptions as appropriate.

Acton will advocate for and pursue approval from the state legislature of its home rule petition to require that all new building construction or significant renovation projects qualify as fossil-fuel free or to obtain a waiver (emergency generators and central hot water for large buildings would be exempt).

BH 10: Advocate for more incentives for electric heating and cooling from Mass Save.

As the state's ratepayer funded program that provides incentives for energy efficiency, Mass Save is the primary mechanism for funding building improvements in the Commonwealth. Acton will participate in the monthly Energy Efficiency Advisory Council (EEAC) meetings that advise Mass Save Program Administrators and advocate during the Three-Year Planning processes for greater incentives for building electrification and decarbonization.

BH11: Advocate for financial assistance and low-cost financing options from the state and federal government to support triple building electrification.

Electrifying all of Acton's building stock will require greater state and federal incentives. Acton will build relationships with organizations that advocate on behalf of municipalities for building decarbonization, and also use its direct relationships with the Town's state and local representatives to discuss this priority. This work will include advocating for innovative finance mechanisms, such as a state Green Bank, that can incentivize and/or support residents, business owners, and the Town in making more triple electrification investments – combining energy efficiency, electrification, and onsite renewable energy wherever feasible – with affordable financing. These efforts can directly support Strategy BH6.

BH12: Advocate for a net zero building code.

Acton will become an active participant in the state's building code process by monitoring and advocating as part of the MA Department of Energy Resources (DOER) and Board of Building Regulations and Standards (BBRS) processes for developing the state's new net zero stretch energy code approved in the Next Generation Climate Roadmap Bill. Once finalized, Acton will vote to opt into the new stretch code and, if needed, continue to advocate for a stronger net zero stretch code.

Spotlight Corner

The Home Energy Efficiency Team (HEET) nonprofit is working with Eversource to pilot its GeoGrid concept in the Greater Boston region. A GeoGrid is geomicrodistrict that uses a network of ground source heat pumps to heat and cool adjacent buildings. - <https://heet.org/geogrid/>

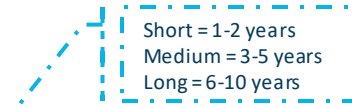
BH13: Expand program to track gas leaks and advocate to the utility for fixes for the most major or dangerous gas leaks.

The Town will keep an up-to-date catalogue tracking gas leaks in Acton that are Grade 1, 2, or Grade 3 with Significant Environmental Impact (SEI) and larger than 2,000 ft². Key municipal staff will continue to coordinate municipal paving, water, and sewer infrastructure planning to align with needed gas leak repairs. The Town will continue to attend Multi-Town Gas Leaks Initiative meeting with National Grid to review and advocate for needed repairs to dangerous leaks or those of SEI, while avoiding replacing gas infrastructure that is not needed. The Town will also prioritize pursuing strategies in the Buildings and Housing section of this Blueprint to accelerate that transition away from natural gas heating and cooling systems.



Insulation of the Memorial Library attic.

Buildings and Housing



ID	Action	Co-Benefits	Action Type	Implementation Timeline	Municipal Lead Implementers	Potential Community Partners
BH1	Adopt zoning changes to allow for broader and more multifamily housing choices and flexible approaches to achieve housing affordability and accessibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserves green and open spaces Centers equity and environmental justice Scalable or transferable to other neighborhoods; 	Policy /Regulations/ Standards	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Natural Resources ACHC Acton Water District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Citizens' Housing and Planning Association Housing and Community Development Community planning organizations Acton Conservation Trust Committee for Action on Housing and Climate Change Other local stakeholders
BH2	Develop an actionable plan for affordable housing and mixed-use development within 1/2 mile of public transit and near existing business centers and village districts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preserves green and open spaces Centers equity and environmental justice Scalable or transferable to other neighborhoods Improves public health 	Policy /Regulations/ Standards	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AHA Planning Recreation Economic Dev. ACHC Transportation Sustainability Acton Water District 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Habitat for Humanity Citizens' Housing and Planning Association Housing and Community Development The Nature Conservancy Committee for Action on Housing and Climate Change Other local stakeholders
BH3	Work with Mass Save to improve outreach about financial and technical assistance available for landlords, condo associations, and renters to improve their homes' energy efficiency and switch to efficient electrified heating and cooling systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves local resilience Centers equity and environmental justice Improves public health 	Training /Education/ Outreach	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AHA Sustainability Community Resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee for Action on Housing and Climate Change Landlords Condo association management organizations Mass Save All In Energy Energize Acton

Buildings and Housing (cont.)

ID	Action	Co-Benefits	Action Type	Implementation Timeline	Municipal Lead Implementers	Potential Community Partners
BH4	Expand outreach about the Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) program to increase program participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centers equity and environmental justice Supports "green" workforce developments 	Training /Education/ Outreach	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> AHA Sustainability Economic Dev. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee for Action on Housing and Climate Change Landlords Condo association management organizations Business owners
BH5	Pilot and implement geothermal micro-districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produces local energy Improve local resilience Scalable or transferable to other neighborhoods Improves public health Supports "green" workforce developments 	Feasibility assessment/Pilot program	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building Planning Public Works Green Advisory Board Sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HEET Eversource MassCEC
BH6	Explore pursuing an aggregated triple electrification model in Acton to decarbonize buildings while improving energy efficiency and adding onsite renewables.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves local resilience Centers equity and environmental justice Scalable or transferable to other neighborhoods Supports "green" workforce developments Improves public health 	Feasibility assessment/Pilot program	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Planning Building Green Advisory Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eversource MA DOER MassCEC Communities in the MAGIC subregion/ MAPC region
BH7	Adopt a net zero carbon standard for new municipal buildings and town-funded affordable housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centers equity and environmental justice Improves public health 	Policy /Regulations/ Standards	Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Municipal Properties Building Planning AHA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building practitioners Housing developers Eversource
BH8	Complete retro-commissioning and energy efficiency improvements for all buildings owned by the Town and ABRSD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves local resilience Scalable or transferable to other neighborhoods Supports "green" workforce developments 	Capital Improvement	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Municipal Properties ABRSD Green Advisory Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eversource National Grid MA DOER
BH9	Exclude fossil fuel use in new construction projects and major retrofits across Acton, with exceptions as appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centers equity and environmental justice Improves public health 	Policy /Regulations/ Standards	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Building Planning Engineering Green Advisory Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building practitioners Housing developers Mass Save Acton Climate Coalition

Buildings and Housing (cont.)

ID	Action	Co-Benefits	Action Type	Implementation Timeline	Municipal Lead Implementers	Potential Community Partners
BH10	Advocate for more incentives for electric heating and cooling from Mass Save.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centers equity and environmental justices Improves public health 	Advocacy	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Green Advisory Board Select Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building practitioners Housing developers Eversource Mass Save
BH11	Advocate for financial assistance and low-cost financing options from the state and federal government to support triple building electrification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centers equity and environmental justice Improves public health 	Advocacy	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Green Advisory Board Select Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acton Climate Coalition
BH12	Advocate for a net zero building code.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves public health 	Advocacy	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Green Advisory Board Select Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acton Climate Coalition
BH13	Expand program to track gas leaks and advocate to the utility for fixes for the most major or dangerous gas leaks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improves air quality Improves public health Improves local resilience 	Policy /Regulations/ Standards	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustainability Public Works GIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> HEET MassCEC Mother's Out Front National Grid