General Information
On the Construction of Sidewalks

A typical sidewalk constructed in Acton without a grass strip requires an area six feet wide measuring from the existing edge of pavement. In some cases the existing roadway pavement is excessively wide and can be narrowed somewhat to provide some of this width. The six-foot width allows for a five-foot wide paved sidewalk with a one-foot wide cape cod style berm adjacent to the road. In special cases other types of curbing are used such as sloped or vertical granite (on sharp curves and historic districts respectively) or vertical asphalt. In any case, abutters should be aware that some grading would be necessary beyond the six-foot width to blend the existing grades to the sidewalk. It is our policy to work with the individual abutters to resolve any design or landscaping issues to their reasonable satisfaction. In special cases where more land is available the sidewalk can be constructed further back from the roadway pavement. This often creates a more pleasing appearance, as the sidewalk will tend to wind it's way around natural features such as trees, stonewalls, boulders, etc.

On older streets in Town, sidewalks are not as easy to build. Stone walls, steep shoulder grades, public shade trees, narrow culverts and the lack of sufficient street right-of-way widths are common obstacles to building sidewalks on colonial era roads. It also becomes more difficult when other residents object to the sidewalk, particularly if their cooperation is needed for additional right-of-way or a sidewalk easement. Streets in Acton are classified as either Arterial (numbered routes), Collector or Local. Most sidewalk construction takes place on Arterials and Collectors. The collectors are the colonial era roads that often present the most problems. Some have surveyed layouts that define a right-of-way width (usually 40 or 50 feet), but many do not. The ones that do not are typically two rods wide (33 feet) and are defined as the width between the remnants of the old stone walls that originally lined the road. In these cases sidewalk easements are usually necessary from abutters.

The Town's Engineering and Assessor's Departments can provide the neighborhood contact person with a plan of the street that shows the street addresses and the map and parcel numbers for the abutting lots and a list showing each abutter's name and their mailing address. The Engineering Department can also provide the classification of the street and determine if the street has a surveyed layout. In addition a preliminary meeting with the contact person(s) can be scheduled with the Engineering Department to walk the road and determine which side would be better suited for a sidewalk and where crossovers need to be located.

The petitioner can also rank the sidewalk based on a Sidewalk Prioritization Plan that has been created by the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC). The Sidewalk Prioritization Plan is a uniform method of ranking a proposed sidewalk project consistent with the objectives of the Town's Master Plan. A copy of the Sidewalk Prioritization Plan is enclosed with the petition.

Funding for sidewalk construction is subject to yearly appropriation at the Annual Town Meeting in the spring. The Town of Acton uses a five-year plan for capital projects. A copy of the current Five-year Sidewalk Capital Budget Plan is available from the Engineering Department.