

*Town of Acton*  
*State of the Town*  
*Meeting*



*Tuesday, November 13, 2007*

**The State of the Town Meeting will convene at 7:00 P.M. in the  
Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Auditorium  
36 Charter Road**

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**Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Auditorium**

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**Internet Resources**

We hope as many people can attend the meeting to communicate in-person, however, if you cannot attend and wish to comment, electronic mail contacts are available.

All of the committees contributing to this Report are available via e-mail in addition to traditional communication methods. By using the following addresses, the Town automatically forwards your message to all members of the committee.

**To contact the...**

Board of Selectmen  
School Committee (Acton-Boxborough)  
School Committee (Acton Public)  
Finance Committee  
Planning Board  
Fire/EMS Advisory Task Group  
Council on Aging

**Send e-mail to...**

bos@acton-ma.gov  
ab\_school\_committee@mail.ab.mec.edu  
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coa@acton-ma.gov

## **Introduction to the State of the Town Meeting/Gathering/Discussion**

The Acton Board of Selectmen has decided to continue what has been a successful meeting practice and called for a State of the Town Meeting. We plan to adjourn the meeting at about 10:00 p.m.

It is our intent to provide a forum in which the Town's citizens may provide their thoughts and opinions on the selected topics to the elected and appointed leadership of the Town. Such an exercise should provide the town leaders with an enhanced sense of the community as we grapple with important matters concerning the future of the Town of Acton.

This State of the Town Discussion will not be a Town Meeting in the conventional or statutory sense. Attendance and participation will not be limited registered voters, there will be no check-in, no Warrant Articles, no visual presentations, motions will not be accepted, and no votes will be taken. On the other hand, it is expected that the same decorum expected at a Town Meeting will be maintained in this gathering.

Information thought necessary by various Boards and Committees as background for an informed discussion of the chosen topics has been provided in this booklet. There may be further written materials prepared by the officials/staffs of the Town or Schools which did not meet the booklet deadline also available at the door. In addition, any attendee at this State of the Town Discussion is free to prepare his/her own signed handouts for the attendees and place any such material on the table near the door.

Initial leadership oral presentations to introduce each topic will be made by a single individual and very severely limited by the presiding officer so as to maximize the time for citizen input and feedback. Similarly, attendees and members of Boards/Committees offering later comments will be requested to be as succinct as possible in their offerings so that as many people who desire to speak may be heard. The discussions will be confined, as far as possible, to the chosen topics listed below in the interests of being able to hear comments on each topic in some depth. Questions posed from the floor may be gathered for subsequent, rather than immediate, response. So that oral feedback and comments may be obtained on all the chosen topics, arbitrary limits may be imposed by the presiding officer as to the length of the discussion of each topic, if necessary.

Giving due consideration to the available time, and anticipating a good turnout, the following topics have been chosen for this initial State of the Town Meeting. The topics will be taken up in this order:

1. North Acton Fire/EMS Station
2. Comprehensive Community Plan
3. School Capital Spending Plan
4. Design of a New Senior Center/Council on Aging Building

To emphasize the difference from a special or annual Town Meeting, at this gathering the physical set up of the auditorium will not include any stage seating or designated seating for Boards and Committees, and overhead and computer projector equipment will not be available for use. The setup of the floor microphones, however, will be in the same pattern as that used for Town Meetings. The Chairman of the Board of Selectmen will preside over the meeting, from the front center below the stage. The Vice-chair will speak, if such is necessary, for the Board of Selectmen. It has been requested that the designated "point person" for each topic be ready, when appropriate, to designate who from Boards, Committees, and/or staff should answer particular questions when allowed by the presiding officer, again so as to maximize time for citizen input.

We hope to see you at this State of the Town Meeting at 7:00 p.m. on November 13, 2007.

After the meeting, the Board of Selectmen (e-mail: [bos@acton-ma.gov](mailto:bos@acton-ma.gov)) will welcome your comments as to whether or not we achieved the stated goal of this meeting to your satisfaction.

F. Doré Hunter  
Chairman,  
Acton Board of Selectmen



*North Acton Fire/EMS Station*

## North Acton Fire/EMS Station

It is proposed to close the Acton Center Fire Station and replace it with a new Fire/EMS Station constructed near the intersection of Routes 2A and 27, constructed on Town-owned land. The new station's three apparatus bays would routinely house two first response pieces of apparatus (pumper & ladder truck), a proposed second ambulance purchased for this new facility, and a boat. It would include all the other features of a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century firehouse staffed by a paid professional force.

The need to build a Fire Station at or near the proposed site has long been discussed and planned. The principal justification for this proposal is to provide acceptable fire and ambulance response times across the whole Town. The area along and north of Route 2A is currently underserved.

The realization that locations in North Acton were underserved is first documented in 1970, only nineteen years after the present Acton Center Station<sup>1</sup> opened. On September 23, 1970, the Minutes of the Acton Town Building and Land Acquisition Committee Meeting contain the following entry: "Fire Chief Barry presented his proposal for solving problems of inadequate space, manpower and station location. In general, the first proposal involved closing the present Acton Center Fire Station and building a new station further north on Main Street large enough to house a ladder truck."

A Special Report on Fire Protection Requirements dated April 8, 1971 followed, discussing the growth of the area served by the Acton Center Station over the five year period between 1965 and 1970, identified fire response in that area as a growing problem, partly due to the continued growth in the north and partly due to the fact that the department was having difficulties with the availability of Call Firefighters<sup>2</sup>. The solutions recommended were for the Town to purchase land to construct a Fire Station closer to Routes 2A and 27, add day time paid firefighters to the Acton Center Station, and to modify the Acton Center Station in order to be able to house a ladder truck there.

The goal sought was to respond to locations in North Acton within an acceptable time frame. This is essentially crucial in the event of a critical medical emergency such as a heart attack or possible stroke. There were fifty-one (51) such incidents within the past year in the North Acton area. There are currently portions of North Acton that have 8-10 minute response times. It should be noted that a fire will spread outside its original room of origin in 6-8 minutes with a phenomena that is known as "flashover"<sup>3</sup> occurring within 10 minutes at which time the chance of survival is significantly reduced.

Subsequently, in 1980, the Town did indeed purchase a site for a future Fire Station on the East side of Main Street (Route 27), just north of Route 2A, for \$150,000. That land is the site for the currently proposed new North Acton Fire/EMS Station.

Since 1971, Acton has upgraded to a paid, professional full time fire and emergency medical service department<sup>4</sup> and has a ladder truck. However, the Acton Center Station cannot physically house that ladder truck, so it is stationed in South Acton even though the greater need for that vehicle is in the North.

Since 1971, as then predicted, the population in North Acton has continued to increase.

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<sup>1</sup> This is the station that is closest to North Acton.

<sup>2</sup> Call firefighters are not full time personnel, they are volunteers summoned from their normal activities to respond to an emergency, but are paid a stipend for each call to which they respond.

<sup>3</sup> Occurs at the stage of a fire at which all surfaces and objects ignite.

<sup>4</sup> There is still one dedicated Call Firefighter who responds when available.

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau documents that from 1980 to 2000 population in North Acton, (defined as Census tract 3631.02) **increased 46% to 4,752 residents** while the overall Town population increased only 15%. This census tract is the area along and north of Route 2A. Population increases in the three other Census tracts comprising the Town of Acton increased only 11%, 13%, and 1% respectively. We predict that this surge in population in North Acton will continue. This population surge in the North Acton area has been fueled by a number of large residential complexes such as Avalon-Acton, Bellows Farm, the Arbors, and the North Briar subdivision. Total growth has resulted in the addition of 1,233 residential units which have been added to this area in the last twenty years.

In 1980, a study of the Acton Fire Department resources was undertaken by the firm of Charles M. Evans & Associates in Carlisle, MA. The study recognized that the “fire service” had changed and is “no longer limited to the original function of providing men and equipment to fight fires. It now is a widening group of emergency-oriented services ranging from fire prevention education to para-professional medical treatment.” And it was further noted “As this study shows in detail... the number of ‘fire only’ type calls are gradually becoming a smaller relative portion of the total services being provided.” That trend continues today and has recently been recognized by the Selectmen’s decision to now refer to the department as the Fire/Emergency Medical Service department. As a result of this continuing trend our EMS response protocol today is to send our single ambulance and the closet engine to a medical emergency as all our first line apparatus has life saving equipment and is staffed by trained firefighter/EMTs. These personnel begin immediate patient assessment and treatment followed by an ambulance transport of the patient to the closest appropriate medical facility.

The 1980 Evans Study recommended a further increment of paid professional firefighters be added to the force (then a Fire Chief, 4 Captains, 24 firefighters, 4 emergency medical technicians, a fire prevention officer, and approximately 30 call personnel<sup>1</sup>) and further advised that “the Town proceed with the work of selecting and acquiring a future station site in the Northeast area as fast as feasible”. Now, twenty-seven years later, the proposed site for the construction of the North Acton Fire/EMS Station is in the center of area that the Evans Study recommended that the station be located.

In 1996, the three major Town boards, Selectmen, School and Finance Committees cooperated to create a model for a multimillion dollar, five year plan which encompassed planned and proposed funding for major capital projects, including enlargement and renovation of the Acton Memorial Library, creation of NARA park, renovation and enlargement of the Raymond J. Grey Junior High School, creation of the Middle Fort Pond Brook Sewer system serving the Central School complex and many South Acton residents, the building of the new “Twin School” housing two elementary schools, and the new Public Safety Facility. Building a North Acton Fire/EMS Station, along with the renovation of the other stations, was at the bottom of that list, and is only now being reached for implementation.

After the proposed North Acton Fire/EMS Station is constructed, it will still be necessary to renovate the West and South Stations, both of which were built for a different type of department and will be more than fifty years old. Should the Town Meeting not approve the construction of the proposed North Acton Fire/EMS Station it would then be necessary to renovate/rebuild the Center Station as well.

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<sup>1</sup> The current staffing of the Fire/EMS Department is a Chief, Deputy Chief, 4 Captains, 4 Lieutenants and 32 Firefighters. Thirty-eight (38) of these personnel are also certified EMTs.

As a component of a failed proposal to house Fire/EMS apparatus in the present Public Safety Facility<sup>1</sup>, a further study was conducted in-house in 2001 by a volunteer body titled the “Fire/EMS Task Force”, but which has become known as the “Reetz Study” after its Chairman, then Finance Committee member Jack Reetz. That study’s goals were to look at the Fire/EMS situation again with the following:

**Assumptions:**

- \* Maintain/improve Level of Service with cost sensitive solutions having sufficient growth potential
- \* Retain level staffing (excluding plan for joint Dispatch)<sup>2</sup>
- \* Retain two-person first response

**Three Options were identified by the Task Force:**

- #1 Retain current three station locations
  - \* Renovate three buildings to code
- #2 Relocate Acton Center to North (27/2A) to potentially improve overall Town response times
  - \* Build one new station (27/2A)
  - \* Renovate two stations
  - \* Reuse Acton Center as-is for other Town needs; maintaining site for potential future Fire/EMS renovation/reuse if necessary
- #3 Add fourth station at 27/2A
  - \* Improve Town-wide response time
  - \* Build one new station (27/2A)
  - \* Renovate three stations
  - \* Will require additional staff and equipment

The **Reetz Study concluded** that the **Best Long Term Strategic Direction** was to adopt **Option 2** because it would:

- \* Deliver More Equitable Town-Wide Service
- \* Likely Eliminate the Future Need for a Fourth Station
- \* Best Deploy the Ladder Truck Where Most Needed – Now and in the Future
- \* Better Meet Future New Growth in North Acton
- \* Slightly Improve Current Level of Service Regardless of Growth
- \* Permit Implementation in Phases as Budgets Permit

In the spring of 2007, the Selectmen formed an Fire/EMS Advisory Task Group (FEATG) to bring a North Acton Fire/EMS Station proposal forward. The Site Task Force of FEATG was tasked to again review the question of where such a station should be located. Nine potential sites were reviewed and the resulting decision was once again that the land that the Town purchased in 1971 just north of Route 2A on Main Street on the east side, now adjacent to Veterans Field, is the best site, despite some obvious contour problems.

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<sup>1</sup> The Fire/EMS Chief, Deputy Chief, Secretary and Police & Fire/EMS Dispatch, are today located in the Public Safety Facility.

<sup>2</sup> Since established.

**Fire/EMS Department Chief's Personal Comments:** During my career with the Acton Fire Department, I have always attempted to provide the highest level of protection and emergency response for the Citizens of the Town of Acton. In preparing for various presentations up to and including this State of the Town document, I have once again reviewed all of the previous studies and recommendations which recommended that the currently proposed fire station be constructed to better serve the increasing population in North Acton. As previously mentioned, Fire Chiefs that preceded me have continued to recognize the necessity of this project. More importantly, these recommendations have been based on future needs of the Town. It is my opinion that what once was characterized as a "future need" has in fact now become a present reality. The time has come to act on the numerous recommendations that have been published and the commitments that have been made toward this critical public safety need.

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# 2

## *Comprehensive Community Plan*

## Comprehensive Community Plan



What will the town of Acton be like in 5 or 10 years? In 20 years? If we do nothing to change the Town, will it stay the same? What would change? What would we like to change? How shall we go about making Acton an even better place to live, work, and play?

In the months ahead, Acton will begin a community-wide process to plan for our future. Please take the next step with us in building a stronger community! Working together, we can address concerns in our Town. With the Comprehensive Community Planning process we intend to build a better community by making connections — neighbor to neighbor — neighborhood to neighborhood — and taking action together, one step at a time.

Acton's 1990 Master Plan and 1998 Master Plan Update were catalysts to re-development in South Acton Village, more sidewalks in Kelley's Corner, new restaurants, and business re-vitalization in West Acton. The East Acton Village Plan has been completed. NARA is open and developing into a prime place for Town events and recreational opportunities. Since 1990, Acton's population and number of households have each increased by nearly 15% to about 20,500 and 7,930 respectively; Acton's ethnic diversity has increased; infrastructure has aged; the Internet has provided new opportunities for communication and participation in Town affairs.

### Why a New Plan

Today, with change happening all around us, long range planning is a way of being proactive about Acton's future to ensure sustainable ways that meet the needs of all who live and work in our ever-changing community. It's a way of making sure that what we value is preserved, what we do not like is changed, and that we create a sense of place that supports and expresses our community for future generations. The Comprehensive Community Planning process is going to begin very soon. We need your help in three areas:

- Dedicating enough funds to do this job right.
- Helping us reach out to more Acton residents and business owners.
- Beginning to think about our needs, services, and goals from a community perspective.

### Investment in Acton's Future

The 2007 Annual Town Meeting has appropriated \$180,000 for a new master plan that would be similar to previous master plans. Since then, the Selectmen have identified a need for much greater involvement by our citizens and a much broader planning scope. We expect that this greater effort will require additional funds.

### Your Participation

The Board of Selectmen will conduct an unprecedented publicity and outreach campaign before actually working on the plan. We will do this with the help of a consulting firm that specializes in eliciting public participation and input. We hope to reach as many people as possible: Residents, business people, community and neighborhood groups, as well as people who don't typically participate in Town meetings and have therefore been underrepresented in our planning and decisions. We intend to provide a wide

range of opportunities for people to give us their ideas and express their concerns including going to where they are rather than expecting them to come to us. The process of including more of our citizens in the participation process in and of itself will result in community building. We hope that the connections made between Town government and residents and amongst residents will be long lasting and continuous.

### **A More Comprehensive Plan**

Past master plans have focused on policies that guided land use, development, and zoning. This plan, which we are tentatively calling the “Comprehensive Community Plan,” will reach farther. It will identify needs for public services and facilities; evaluate the structure and style of Town government required to best deliver needed services; assess the state of our infrastructure such as streets and drainage systems; assess the Town’s educational services; identify new ways and opportunities for interaction between residents, businesses, and Town government that utilize newest communication technologies; and paint a clear vision for what we want Acton to look and feel like. We need to ask ourselves how we will address our needs for water, waste disposal, elder services, social services, education, transportation, health, recreation, safety, to name some; and how we define our quality of life.

The truth is Town government cannot do everything we wish it would do for you. However, as partners, we can accomplish more. Mindful of costs, we need to set priorities and plan for how we deliver services most efficiently. Who better to set the community’s priorities than thoughtful, concerned, and involved citizens? Prudent planning begins with finding out:

- What is important to you?
- What do you feel the Town needs to do now to better prepare for the future?
- What is the identity of Acton?
- What do we care about the most?

At the State of the Town Meeting, we hope to introduce the community outreach campaign and ask for your active participation. We hope you will take the time to attend. The Board of Selectmen will form a Steering Committee. Interested in joining us? Please contact the Planning Department at [planning@acton-ma.gov](mailto:planning@acton-ma.gov). We welcome your ideas and participation.

Paulina Knibbe  
Lauren S. Rosenzweig

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# 3

## *School Capital Spending Plan*

# Acton Public Schools Capital Plan

Location	Item	Cost
Conant	Boiler	\$178,250
Conant	Masonry	\$45,000
Douglas	Roof	\$486,450
Douglas	Boiler	\$189,750
Gates	UV	\$299,900
	<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>\$1,199,350</b>
Conant	UV	\$299,900
Gates	Boiler	\$178,250
Merriam Admin	Roof	\$448,500
Merriam Admin	UV	\$179,950
Merriam Admin	Window	\$90,000
Douglas	Window	\$86,000
	<b>Phase 2</b>	<b>\$1,282,600</b>
Gates	Roof	\$601,450
Conant	Roof	\$626,750
Merriam Admin	Boiler	\$155,250
	<b>Phase 3</b>	<b>\$1,383,450</b>

**Capital Plan Total:      \$3,865,400**

## History

- Acton 2020 meetings focused on developing comprehensive Capital Plan.
- Over the last 4 years we have continued working with the Capital Planning Sub-committee.
- Schools developed a systems approach incorporating large systemic based needs in Spring 2006.
  - Roofs
  - Boilers
  - Univents
  - Envelope
  - Equipment
  - Civil Site Work

## Boiler Deficiency



## Fluid Nature Capital Planning

- Understanding desires of Constituents
  - Incorporate “smaller” capital items into operating budget
    - i.e. Capital Equipment, Paving, Civil Site Drainage
- Price Fluctuation
- Emergence of critical items (Conant Masonry)
- System failures before capital plan implementation
  - Conant Sewer Line / Jr. High Sewer Line / Admin Heat Pipes

## UV



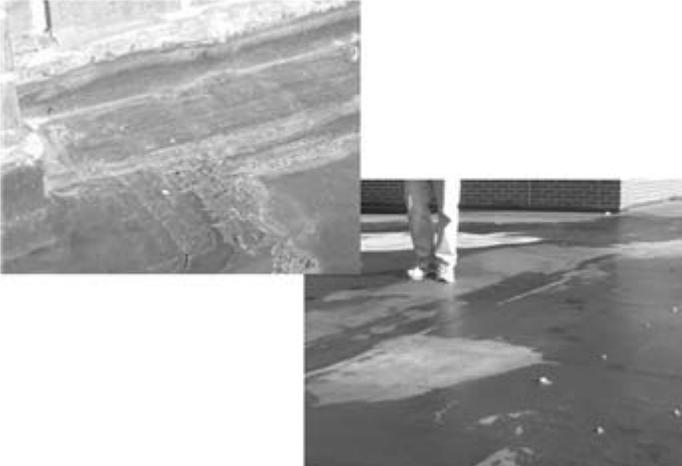
## Boilers



## HVAC Efficiency

- With updated systems we have seen a 25 % to 30 % reduction in costs per square foot in Natural Gas
- Looking only at Conant, Gates, and Douglas we could estimate an APS savings of approximately \$ 42,000 to \$ 51,000 per year in our Natural Gas budget line item combined.

### Roofing



### Conant Masonry

- Problems grow at an exponential rate as failures become great enough to allow water intrusion, which freezes and thaws thus expanding and contracting between the bricks

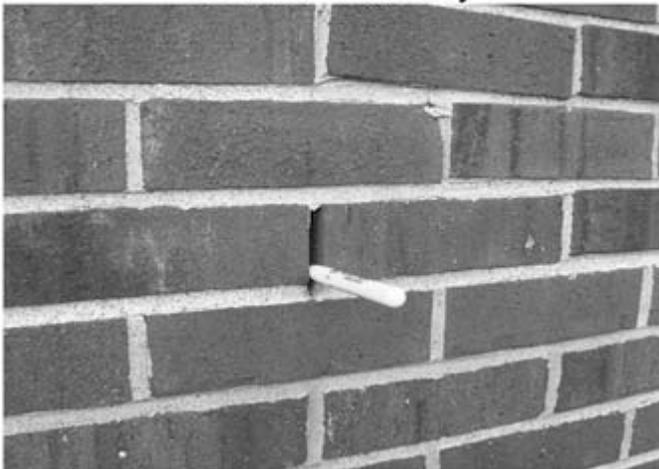
### Roofing

- Insulation with greater R Value per inch, like polyiso, may be used.
- Incorporating two (2) layers of insulation with staggered joints will certainly increase the insulation's thermal efficiency over using a single layer since heat loss through gaps will be minimized
- Post installation we would expect a R-20 insulation value
- Currently we have R – 16.7 at Doug, and R – 10 at Conant and Gates
- From July 2003 to July 2007 we have spent \$ 92,184.83 in roofing repairs at Gates, Conant, and Douglas

### Next Steps

- Bring total project to Town Meeting in April 2008
- Bond over 20 years
- Assess Implementation Strategy – Such items as Project Timeline and possible opportunities found in “Economies of Scale”

### Conant Masonry



Building	Last replaced	Sq Ft	Priority	Cost Estimate	District	Comments
Douglas	1983	38,461 sq ft of roof	Roof 1 of 4	\$486,450	APS	The Roof insulation value is R – 16.7 not sure if it would meet energy code. Old skylights at entry and lobby have been roofed over. Flashing is less than desirable. Since Sept 2003 we have spent \$44,830.08 in repairs, in addition we have proposed rep
Merriam Admin	1982	33,360 sq ft of roof	Roof 2 of 4	\$448,500	APS/ABRSD	Adhered EPDM roof, installed 1982. The Roof insulation value is R – 20 not sure if it would meet energy code. Since Sept 2003 we have spent \$ 6,548.55 in repairs.
Gates	1986	47,546 sq ft of roof	Roof 3 of 4	\$601,450	APS	Ballasted EPDM (River Stone), on main roof, adhered EPDM on slopes, all on top of original built roof. Roof insulation value is R-10, which is less than current energy codes as of 1997. We have spent \$ 1,280.85 in repairs since Sept 2003; in addition we
Conant	1986	49,546 sq ft of roof	Roof 4 of 4	\$626,750	APS	Ballasted EPDM (River Stone), on main roof, adhered EPDM on slopes, all on top of original built roof. Roof insulation value is R-10, which is less than current energy codes as of 1997. We have spent \$ 3,610.55 in repairs since Sept 2003.

Notes: Based on a cost of \$11 per square foot. Would include demo and disposal of existing surface and would replace with adhered EPDM roof (rubber membrane). Estimated life expectancy of 20 to 30 years. We have also included a 15% construction contin

Total Roof  
Costs \$2,163,150

APS/ABRSD Capital Plan

Boiler

Building	Last replaced	Priority	Cost Estimate	District	Comments
Conant	1970	Boiler 1 of 4	\$178,250	APS	Functional now, but has leaks and efficiency issues. Should be replaced as soon as possible.
Douglas	1965	Boiler 2 of 4	\$189,750	APS	Also has the air handling units for admin and gym that need replacement as well. The boiler was retubed in 2000 which gave it some additional life.
Gates	1967	Boiler 3 of 4	\$178,250	APS	Has a few years of life in it. Installed new safety valves and pumps this year which help the system, spent approx \$10,000.
Merriam Admin	1985	Boiler 4 of 4	\$155,250	APS/ABRSD	Functioning without major issue at this time but is 20 plus years old and outside the warranty period.

Included in the cost is a 15% construction contingency to cover bid costs and other possible

**Total Boiler  
Costs                    \$701,500**

APS Capital Plan

Univents

Building	Last replaced	Priority	Cost Estimate	District	Comments
Gates	1967	UV 1 of 3	\$299,900	APS	Received some minor upgrading this year, including dampers, actuators, balancing and new T-stats. It has been shown that replacement of these systems leads to a significant efficiency payback.
Conant	1970	UV 2 of 3	\$299,900	APS	Received some minor upgrading this year, including dampers, actuators, balancing and new T-stats. It has been shown that replacement of these systems leads to a significant efficiency payback.
Merriam Admin	1959	UV 3 of 3	\$179,950	APS/ABRSD	Received some minor upgrading this year, including dampers, actuators, balancing and new T-stats. It has been shown that replacement of these systems leads to a significant efficiency payback.

Notes: Figures based on the Douglas School Univent job performed summer 2004. An inflation number of 4% per year over three years has been incorporated in the cost, as well as, a projected cost for engineering/design, and a 10% contingency for possible asbestos abatement and other unforeseen conditions.

**Total UV  
Costs            \$779,750**

APS/ABRSD Capital Plan

Envelope

Location	Item	Priority	Cost	District	Comments
Admin	Window	1 of 2	\$90,000	APS/ABRSD	Replace old inefficient single pane windows
Douglas	Window	2 of 2	\$86,000	APS	Replace old inefficient single pane windows
Conant	Masonry	3 of 3	\$45,000	APS	Deterioration in brick mortar could lead to structural problems over time.

**Total  
Envelope  
Costs** \$221,000

# 4

## *Design of a New Senior Center/ Council on Aging Building*

## **Design of a New Senior Center/Council on Aging Building**

### **Whom does the Acton Council on Aging/Acton Senior Center Serve?**

The Acton Council On Aging, housed in the Acton Senior Center, serves the Acton community, primarily Acton seniors ( defined as residents 60 and over), but also younger residents looking for assistance caring for older family members or who are looking for social service assistance in general.

### **Where is the Senior Center and How Large is it?**

The Senior Center, located at 50 Audubon Drive in South Acton, is a one story building with 5,180 square feet of usable space.

The building consists of a large living room and a large dining room, 3 staff offices and one computer room, in addition to bathrooms, storage alcove and storage basement ( only accessible from outside bulkhead entrance). Built in 1994 in conjunction with the Audubon Hill “55 and over” condominiums, it is leased to the Town for a nominal fee each year from the Audubon Hill Community Corporation.

### **What Input Did the Recent Senior Survey Provide?**

In the fall of 2006, the COA Board and COA staff developed a comprehensive needs and interests survey, distributed to about 2,000 senior households. Almost 500 responses were received. In addition to other categories of information, ideas were solicited for desired programs the Senior Center could offer.

Responses included:

- More classes in Strength and Balance Training
- Music and Art Appreciation
- Photography
- Foreign Languages
- World Religions
- Cooking
- Variety of Day Trips
- Evening Social and Educational Programs

Today’s senior citizens as well as the up and coming “Baby Boomers” are clearly looking for a wide range of programs and services in their communities when they retire, to help them stay active, healthy and independent as long as possible. They recognize the need to keep their minds and bodies active. They want to maintain the skills they have and develop new skills, hobbies and interests. They want to give back to their communities by finding meaningful volunteer opportunities. The Acton Senior Center is and should continue to be an important and central resource to our senior residents as they pursue these goals.

### **What Types of Programs/ Classes are Offered?**

- Cultural Programs: Opera and Classical Music, Foreign Languages
- Art Classes: Watercolor, One Stroke Painting
- Exercise: Aerobics( daily), “Stretch and Flex”
- Health and Wellness: Blood Pressure and Podiatry Clinics as well as Individual Consultations offered by Acton Public Health Nursing Service
- Nutrition: Luncheon 4 days a week, home delivered meals 5 days/ week , Healthy Cooking and Nutrition Programs
- Computer Instruction: Group and Individual instruction in Digital Photography, Genealogy, Email, Internet, Drop In Computer Club
- Multi Cultural Programs: Indian and Chinese Luncheons and Programs

- Leisure / Social Activities: Bridge, Mahjongg, Billiards, varied Card Games, Arts and Crafts, Knitting, Quilting, Crocheting, Movies
- Discussion Groups: Book Groups, Genealogy, “Grief” Support
- Individual Consultation: Health Insurance, Legal issues, Income Taxes, Home Safety Assessments, Fuel Assistance, Long Term Care Planning, Financial Concerns, Caregiver Resources
- Pre-Retirement Forums
- Programs affiliated with Framingham State “Life Long Learning” program: History of World Religions, Musical Enrichment
- Special Events: Musical Entertainment, Holiday Tea, etc.
- Informational Forums: Health Insurance, Prescription Coverage, Legal, Financial, Residential Options, Real Estate Tax Relief, Chronic Disease Management
- Volunteer Opportunities: Over 150 volunteers provide services to Acton seniors within the Senior Center or in residents’ homes.

### **What are the Limitations of the Existing Space?**

Our living room and dining room provide the only space available for most programs and classes as well as luncheons and special events. The computer room, the only private meeting space, is in great demand for private consultations as well as individual and family meetings with our Outreach Coordinator (who shares office space with our program coordinator).

The health clinics are held in the far corner of the dining room.

It is increasingly challenging to schedule new programs, classes and events because of this limited space. Even though the living room is large and has a curtain divider, only one program/ class/ event can be scheduled at a time because the curtain does not muffle sound significantly. It is difficult to schedule many classes in the dining room when lunch is being set up for.

All drop in groups, important to seniors as they make new friends and practice new skills, are difficult to find space for and often have to be relocated or have meeting times changed. Exercise classes, top on the list of important activities for seniors, cannot accommodate all who wish to come and the flooring is not appropriate. Support groups have little privacy and there is often no room for our outreach coordinator to meet privately with a senior or family member who drops by with a critical issue to discuss.

### **Are There any Other Functional Problems with the Building?**

The main entrance to the Senior Center has no lobby area with space for a receptionist and the staff offices are located in the back of the building. Therefore, there is no one to greet visitors and no way to alert staff that someone has entered the building. There is no welcoming drop in area (e.g. library, café) where friends can meet, talk, read before lunch or after class.

The Center is located at the end of a long driveway in an isolated area. There are 5 entrances to the building, only one of them visible from the staff office area. This presents safety concerns for staff and seniors, particularly if an emergency arises.

Access to our cellar with a large store of donated durable medical equipment (walkers, shower seats, canes, etc.) presents problems, particularly in wet weather. Numerous residents borrow equipment each month for themselves or family members. The only access to the cellar is through the outside bulkhead. The steps can be slippery when wet and sometimes the lock freezes, making it impossible to access equipment at all.

Storage, other than basement storage, is inadequate in every part of the building.

### **What about Parking?**

There are 39 spaces around the center in two parking lots and along the driveway. Whenever multiple classes/ clinics overlap or when a large dinner/ program/ special event is scheduled, parking is a problem. Although residents are always encouraged to carpool to events and the COA van can provide some transportation, some residents will still need to park far down the driveway or on Audubon Drive, an uphill walk to the senior center. For seniors with ambulatory or respiratory problems this is too difficult, particularly in inclement weather.

### **Why are we asking for Design Money for a New or Expanded Senior Center Now?**

In 1994, Acton had 2,000 senior citizens. Today, the senior population has increased to almost 3,200, an increase of 60%. By 2020, our senior population is projected to be at least 4,400, a total increase of 120% since the center first opened.

We already have scheduling and parking problems at the senior center. We know that this problem will markedly increase in future years, as we try and keep pace with the needs and interests of this growing senior population.

The Executive Office of Elder Affairs recommends that senior center size be based on 5 – 6 square feet per senior. By their calculations, our center (5180 square feet) should be 16,000 square feet for today's senior population and 22,000 square feet if we are planning ahead at least 12 – 14 years. We are clearly undersized for the population we are and will be serving. Design for a new or renovated building should try and plan adequate space for Acton's senior residents at least 20 years in the future.

We realize that design of an expanded or new senior center will take at least two years, which will bring us to 2010 - 2011, if funds are approved in April 2008. It is not yet clear, due to zoning regulations and other restrictions, whether the present building can be significantly expanded. Parking will be needed for at least 60 cars, which will present other challenges, as the available space around the building is very limited. If the decision is made to look for alternate space, that process will take more time. Although part of the design process can begin now based on our knowledge of functions that the senior center provides and our review of similar facilities, final design will need to wait until this question of location has been decided.

By the time construction funds are approved and the new or renovated building is ready to move into, it will be at least 2013.

To postpone the first step of this project means that any significant expansion of programs/ services will not be possible until more than six years from now.

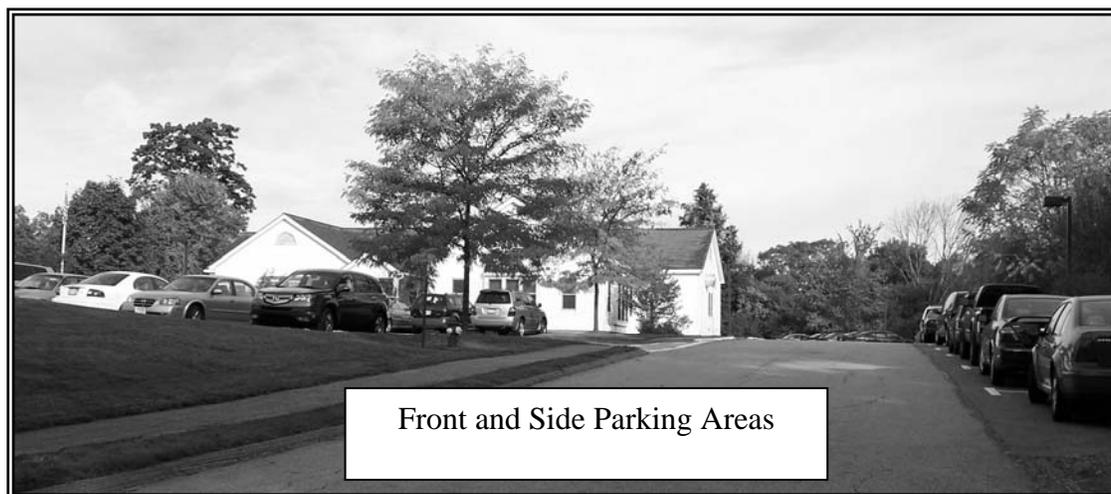
### **Current Research/ Planning**

\$25,000 was approved for a Feasibility Study for Expansion of the Senior Center and Parking Area in the FY08 budget. We are using this money to further define the current and future space needs of the Senior Center.

The Council on Aging staff and the Council on Aging Board have been visiting other senior centers to take photographs and gain ideas for optimal space configuration and layout, what works and what doesn't. Staff have formulated a list of anticipated room requirements, based on what is already taking place in our senior center, what we would like to provide and can't because of space restrictions and what we anticipate to be the demand in the future.

Staff recently attended a presentation by an architectural firm which has designed a number of senior centers, with the focus on *Green Design*. There were many good recommendations for existing centers as well as new construction/ renovation. That type of information will be very helpful during the design process.

We are beginning the process of eliciting ideas, suggestions and feedback from the senior community, a process which will expand to the greater Acton community if this project moves ahead. Discussion at this State of the Town Meeting is an important step in that process.





Watercolor Painting Class



Beginning Computer



Prison Pups Program



Monthly Men's and Ladies Breakfast



Stretch and Flex Exercise Class

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