

Objective: Protect the quality and quantity of Acton's water supply.

Objective: Promote environmentally sound solid waste and wastewater management.

Objective: Pursue regional solutions to environmental problems.

Objective: Establish environmental standards for new development.

Goal: Preserve Acton's historic and cultural resources.

Objective: Provide incentives and aid to preserve and revitalize historic structures and places.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Goal: Preserve the remaining elements of Acton's rural character.

Objective: Protect and maintain Acton's remaining farmland, and promote active farming in the Town.

Objective: Conserve open space parcels that have been identified as key remaining elements of Acton's rural character.

Objective: Create greenbelts of conserved lands along waterways, to include key wildlife habitats.

Objective: Manage and enhance resource opportunities at Acton's conservation lands.

Goal: Provide a variety of recreational opportunities for all Acton residents.

Objective: Provide water recreational opportunities beyond existing facilities.

Objective: Preserve open spaces which have value as aesthetic, recreational, wetland, water, and wildlife resources.

Objective: Improve access to and between recreation and conservation areas.

Objective: Develop, maintain, and encourage the use of Acton's recreational resources.

Objective: Provide recreational opportunities for families with young children.

Objective: Encourage entertainment opportunities for teenagers.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Goal: Provide high quality services, facilities, and administration within the fiscal capacity of the Town.

Objective: Plan for new and expanded facilities as needed to serve the community.

Objective: Construct new, and expand and renovate existing school facilities at the local and regional levels to meet the needs of increased school enrollment.

Objective: Enhance the level of services that the Town can provide by continually seeking operational efficiencies and by using federal, state, and private funding sources to supplement Town funds.

Objective: Consider alternative ways of generating local revenues to pay for services and amenities desired by residents.

Objective: Explore and develop strategies to reduce reliance on the residential property tax to fund services and facilities, particularly for senior citizens and those on fixed incomes.

Goal: Provide a variety of high quality educational opportunities.

Objective: Maintain the excellence of the public school system.

Objective: Provide educational facilities and resources to support the increased student enrollment at the local and regional levels.

Objective: Encourage day-care facilities.

Objective: Provide a variety of continuing education programs.

Objective: Sustain and promote Acton's excellent library services.

Objective: Encourage the use of conservation areas and historic resources for educational purposes.

Objective: Provide services and facilities to enable the elderly and persons with disabilities to live independently in Acton.

Objective: Encourage greater access for all residents to cultural events, opportunities and services.

Goal: Continue to mitigate the impact of development upon natural resources

Objective: Work with Acton Water Supply District to maintain adequate supply and quality of water and to address the state water withdrawal limit.

Objective: Continue working to avoid and alleviate pollution resulting from failed septic systems.

Objective: Continue planning and implementing a sewerage system as needed to protect water resources and service desired development

TRANSPORTATION AND CIRCULATION

Goal: Provide a transportation system that meets the mobility and access needs of the community, is environmentally sound, safe and convenient, and reduces dependency on the automobile.

Objective: Regulate the amount and intensity of new growth as one measure to control traffic.

Objective: Establish transportation system capacity limits to be consistent with Acton's character and with the roadway's functional classification system.

Objective: Minimize Town expenditures for road improvements by maximizing the use of federal and state funds, and private mitigation efforts.

Objective: Promote local and regional public transportation.

Objective: Provide facilities that will encourage walking and bicycling, including on-road bicycle access.

Objective: Encourage regional and public/private cooperation in transportation planning.

Objective: Provide adequate vehicle carrying capacity on the major traffic corridors to maintain mobility, safety and access to land and minor roads.

Objective: Make improvements at hazardous locations while maintaining the scenic character of Acton's roads.

Objective: Improve parking availability in the village centers consistent with village plans and community design standards.

Objective: Improve connectivity and circulation between and within residential neighborhoods, and between and within business districts.

Buildout Analysis¹

The methodology for the buildout analysis is comparable to that used for the 1991 Master Plan. The analysis assumes that individual parcels will develop to their maximum potential under existing zoning:

- For a parcel in a residential zoning district, the analysis estimates the maximum number of dwelling units that could be constructed based on the minimum lot area for the district;
- For a parcel in a nonresidential district, the analysis estimates the maximum floor area that could be constructed based on dimensional regulations including the developable site area, maximum allowed building height and floor area ratio, and minimum required open space and off-street parking.

The analysis is based on the primary zoning district listed in the database (that is, it does not include separate analyses for parcels that are split into more than one district and does not account for variations in development densities due to the presence of overlay districts).

RESIDENTIAL BUILDOUT ESTIMATES

Acton's estimated residential buildout is approximately 10,600 dwelling units, a net increase of about 3,400 units over the current housing stock.² The Residence 2 zoning district accounts for the largest portion of this potential growth, with 2,157 dwellings (64% of the total potential development). The total buildout estimate incorporates the loss of 202 dwellings in nonresidential zoning districts (shown as negative numbers in), since the analysis assumes that all available nonresidentially-zoned land will be converted to nonresidential use.

This raw estimate of buildout is subject to an important qualification. Sixty-eight percent of the estimated potential housing growth represents the subdivision of existing single-family lots (see). Thus, based solely on minimum lot area requirements (that is, not taking into account the dimensions, shapes or soil conditions of individual lots), the buildout calculations estimate that additional development on existing single-family lots in Acton could increase the Town's housing stock by 31.9%.

In contrast, development of open land plays a much smaller role in the buildout estimates. Land currently classified as "developable residential land" or "potentially developable residential land" is estimated to support the construction of fewer than 500 dwelling units. Another important

¹ Excerpted from Acton Master Plan (1998). For purposes of considering Acton's future housing needs, the Master Plan buildout analysis was substituted for the EOE A Buildout Study because the former is considered to be a more accurate source of the town's growth potential.

² This estimate is very close to the 1989 buildout estimate of 11,010 dwelling units. The two estimates were derived using similar methodologies, and the slight decrease is most likely attributable to a combination of two factors: some land, considered developable in 1989, may have been preserved for open space, rezoned, or otherwise removed from the supply of residential land; and some parcels may have been developed at a lower density than estimated in the previous buildout.

component of the buildout is land currently assessed for forestry under Chapter 61. There are currently 37 parcels in Acton in the Chapter 61 assessment program, totaling about 662 acres. The analysis estimates that these parcels can support 432 new dwelling units.

Table : Estimated Buildout of Parcels with Existing Dwelling Units

Existing Units	Units Added	No. Of Parcels	Total Area (Acres)	Average Parcel Size	Existing Dwelling Units	Average Units Per Acre	Buildout Dwelling Units	Potential Increase
1	1	518	806.11	1.56	518	0.64	1,036	518
1	2	138	318.29	2.31	138	0.43	414	276
1	3	76	232.57	3.06	76	0.33	304	228
1	4	39	168.95	4.33	39	0.23	195	156
1	5	25	87.04	3.48	25	0.29	150	125
1	6-10	60	368.13	6.14	60	0.16	519	459
1	>10	29	504.03	17.38	29	0.06	568	539
2	1	1	1.70	1.70	2	1.18	3	1
2	>1	4	8.89	2.22	8	0.90	17	9
>2	1	3	6.48	2.16	11	1.70	14	3
>2	>1	2	35.35	17.68	33	0.93	52	19
All developed lots with potential for additional lots		895	2,537.54	2.84	939	0.37	3,272	2,333

These characteristics of the estimated buildout lead to two important observations about Acton's future residential growth. First, although most residential growth in the next 10 to 15 years is likely to occur on land that is now vacant, the total supply of raw land available for residential development is limited: the database contains only 216 vacant parcels, with a total area of 1,231 acres, that could support residential growth under existing zoning. These parcels have a total development potential of approximately 1,100 dwelling units. By itself, this supply of open land would support 15 years of growth at an average rate of 72 new homes per year (the median for the 1980-1997 period).

The second point is related to the first: as open land disappears, most of the potential growth in Acton will come from infill development, whether through individual splits of smaller single-family lots or through creation of new subdivisions on land that is currently occupied by a single-family home but has significantly more land area than is required by the Zoning By-Law (older units may also be replaced but this is unlikely to effect the overall buildout). This means that the actual ultimate buildout will probably be significantly lower than the maximum number computed in this analysis: many homeowners, particularly in an affluent community like Acton, will prefer to retain their larger lots rather than split off a new house lot; and many other properties, while having the required minimum area for another dwelling, will be constrained from further development by other factors such as topography, access and the shape of the lot.

It is not feasible to analyze each lot individually to determine how extensive these limitations on development might be. However, by making a few assumptions we can estimate a “likely” buildout number that is lower than the theoretical maximum buildout. These assumptions concern the likelihood of infill development on existing residential parcels, and are simply rough guesses about owners’ behavior. For example, we may assume that the owner of a parcel with an existing single-family dwelling will be more likely to subdivide the lot if more than one additional dwelling can be accommodated: the expected higher return more likely justifies the effort and cost, and the impacts on the existing dwelling. We may also assume that the more existing units there are on a site, the more difficult it will be to separate additional lots for new units. Based on these assumptions, we assume that the portion of all parcels with estimated growth potential that will actually be divided to create additional dwelling units may approximate the following percentages:

Assumed percentage Existing dwelling units and computed development potential	of buildout potential that will be realized
Lots with one dwelling unit, with sufficient area for:	
• One additional unit	25%
• Two additional units	50%
• Three to five additional units	75%
• More than five additional units	100%
Lots with two dwelling units, with sufficient area for:	
• One additional unit	0%
• More than 1 additional unit	25%
Lots with more than two dwelling units, with area for one or more additional units	
	0%

Based on these assumptions, Acton’s “likely” **residential buildout would be approximately 10,200 dwelling units**, or about 400 units less than the estimated maximum buildout. At the long-term growth rate of 72 new units per year, this potential will accommodate **approximately 40 years of continued residential growth** in Acton (see). Assuming that the average household size remains the same as in 1990 (3.12 per unit for single-family homes, and 2.69 per unit for all housing types), this implies a **total population of about 24,500 in the year 2020, and about 29,300 at buildout.**

Acton Community Housing Forums

Session #1: October 7, 2003

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What housing needs – if any – are not met by ordinary market development in Acton? Who cannot find suitable housing in Acton today?

- Senior Citizens and 18-24 year olds... definitely people who are just starting out
- Empty nesters, the elderly, young professionals, young families
- Lacks housing for people who work here
- How diverse do we want Acton to be?
- Can residents live here over a long time?
- Do we want people to move to Acton?
- Town employees... we want the firemen in town, many current town employees and school employees cannot afford to purchase (even some 40B units are still beyond their means)

Setting aside legal requirements, do you think communities have an obligation to provide for affordable housing? Why, or why not?

- Town doesn't have an obligation, but should do things that allow it to be built, i.e. zoning
- It is important as a community to have affordable housing... affordable housing is good, how to provide it
- Don't like the word obligation
- Affordable = moderate and middle income
- Yes, to provide a diversity of incomes, race etc...
- Provides an entry to the community
- Yes, new immigrants

What factors would make you more likely to oppose an affordable housing development?

- Loss of open space
- Positive locations for affordable housing would be in an isolated area of town or in or near a village or business center
- Would oppose because of design issues, location in an isolated area of town, traffic, environmental reasons, non friendly family setting, a heavily affordable "project"
- Neutral about affordable housing that might be located next their home or neighborhood, attached multi-family buildings rather than single family homes, rental vs. ownership units, loss of open space
- Don't want it to change the character of Acton
- Affordable housing comes with bureaucracy
- Affordable housing can be blighting
- People living there sense a negative connotation

What factors would make you more likely to support an affordable housing development?

- More than the required minimum number of affordable units... would depend on the project
- units that sell at prices affordable to a range of incomes
- Lowest possible density... depends on the project
- Located in a particular area or areas of town... this is not necessary
- Housing built for seniors would be okay
- Housing built for families, yes!
- Housing built for persons with disabilities would be okay
- Housing needs and gaps should be identified and should be supported
- There is a lack of connectivity... good communities are being developed in South and East Acton... connectivity of Acton as a whole would be supported
- Need to develop more housing and jobs around the commuter rail... better commerce

Compared to other local needs, how important is affordable housing?

More Important

- Protecting open space
- Preserving historic resources
- Traffic and schools are the biggest issues
- Need to feel connected, need to establish willingness to commit personal energies to this happening...there are fewer volunteers than in the past

Less Important

- Controlling traffic congestion
- Controlling property tax increases

Same

- Managing economic growth
- Controlling population growth

Issues

- Affordable housing is an unfunded mandate
- Clash between private property rights and 40B
- Turn older stock to condos and apartments
- How useful are statistics, especially 30% of income for housing costs
- Silly list, they are all important

Which of the following options seems most appropriate for an affordable housing strategy in Acton?

- A little bit of everything
- Using CPA revenue to convert existing market rate homes into permanently affordable housing

- Accessory apartment in single family neighborhoods – even if it were your neighbor’s home
- Using CPA revenue to convert existing market rate homes into permanently affordable housing
- Accessory apartments in single-family neighborhoods – even if it were your neighbor’s home
- Allowing and encouraging multi-family development in business areas, such as above stores
- Using some of the town’s land for affordable housing development: Willow Street

How important is architectural and landscape design to a project’s palatability to the surrounding neighborhood? What features would people like to see incorporated into the design of the buildings and the streetscape?

- Very important and should remain/be consistent with the neighborhoods

Would an affordable housing development be more acceptable to the community if it included a mix of housing types – such as small two-family homes, some garden apartments or townhouse, and larger single-family residences? Less acceptable? Why?

- Generally yes, but it depends on the location
- How would density fit into Acton? Removing barriers to do accessory apartments and conversions...
- Can McMansionization be limited with a restriction?
- Use CPA to buy down condos
- Investigate other towns that don’t have hostile 40Bs... LIP?
- Zoning to allow conversions of single family homes to multifamily homes
- Landscaping matters even if it increases the cost of things
- Variety is needed... public transit stops near new cluster/village development is important
- Land taken for taxes, is it usable?
- We need other mechanisms than new construction
- Hostile 40Bs hurt the town, we need to be proactive!
- 40Bs are currently driven by sales to developers
- Zoning to allow some conversion of single-family units to increase density
- More creative zoning
- Clash of private property rights and town’s need for 40B development
- Can turn over older housing stock into condos/apartments

Issues

- Can residents remain in Acton if they want to?
- Do we want people moving to the community?
- Do we want a diverse population?
- Teachers and service people cannot afford to live here... this is a concern to some
- The goal for housing is to support the kind of community that we have
- In the late 60s, most of the people Joe knew lived in town... it created a great community environment... there were many volunteers for many activities

- Family life has changed... there are more single family homes now, fewer volunteers, dual income households, quality of life... stay in town
- If a real estate developer wants to do affordable housing, what resources are available? what is permit process? deed restrictions?

Acton Community Housing Forums

Session #2: October 8, 2003

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What housing needs – if any – are not met by ordinary market development in Acton? Who cannot find suitable housing in Acton today?

- There is a lot of new housing of a particular type
- Town is not good to rely on for people who don't want cars, maybe take that into more consideration
- Not enough housing for first time low-income buyers
- First time homebuyers
- Option of the elderly to remain due to affordability
- 24-35 age group
- Everything needs to be overlayed with sustainability and good design
- Those looking for housing in the \$250K-\$500K is missing
- New development is single family and very expensive, town staff is having trouble buying in town...
- What can people afford? What are they willing to pay for is an even better question...

Setting aside legal requirements, do you think communities have an obligation to provide for affordable housing? Why, or why not?

- Don't like the word obligation
- No, not an obligation, but there might be an advantage to provide for affordable housing
- Yes, Acton does have an obligation to town employees
- Also obligated to promote diversity... you can't deny to those who can't afford what I can
- No, Acton doesn't have an obligation, but it is a necessity...

What factors would make you more likely to oppose an affordable housing development?

- Loss of open space
- Poor planning, if poorly planned and designed, we don't want it

What factors would make you more likely to support an affordable housing development?

- Character of neighborhoods
- Consistency of style and location of town where there was consistency with what was there... don't want something that clashes
- Housing built for seniors
- Housing built for persons with disabilities
- Lowest possible density (and some people wanted it at the highest possible density), even if it means affordable housing sale prices set at the maximum allowed by law
- Housing built for seniors
- Housing built for persons with disabilities (there were mixed opinions about this)

Compared to other local needs, how important is affordable housing?

- Protecting open space, controlling traffic congestion, managing economic growth are all more important than affordable housing
- Acton is really starting to lose the community feel it used to have
- Affordable housing is just as important as all of these things
- We need more education about 40B law
- What is this information going to be used for? what is the implementation? what is the tangible result of this process?

Which of the following options seems most appropriate for an affordable housing strategy in Acton?

- NO, new construction (via Chapter 40B or local zoning) or market rate housing that includes some affordable units
- YES, using CPA revenue to convert existing market rate homes into permanently affordable housing
- YES, allowing and promoting two-three- or four-family dwellings, through conversion of existing single-family residences or new construction
- YES, accessory apartments in single-family neighborhoods, even if it were your neighbor's home
- YES, allowing and encouraging more new multi-family ownership or rental housing, especially if above stores
- Wllowing and encouraging multi-family development in business areas, such as above stores, CONVERSION yes, NEW no

How important is architectural and landscape design to a project's palatability to the surrounding neighborhood? What features would people like to see incorporated into the design of the buildings and the streetscape?

- Sustainable design is what is important, just how it looks isn't the only thing that matters anymore
- Would an affordable housing development be more acceptable to the community if it included a mix of housing types – such as small two-family homes, some garden apartments or townhouse, and larger single-family residences? Less acceptable? Why?
- Yes, but scattered throughout the community

Visual Preference Survey-Summary (October 2003 Meetings)

SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

- Respondents strongly prefer single-family housing to other housing types.
- Images of two historic houses in Acton ranked highest in the VPS. Image 1 is a bungalow with a deep front porch set close to the street with mature trees and landscaping. Image 3 is a historic colonial with original clapboards, six-over-six windows, shutters, two masonry chimneys and mature trees.
- Image 7 was the third ranked image of single-family houses. Two new, two-story houses with multi-gabled roofs, dormered windows and two-bay garages facing the street are pictured set close together on a curvilinear street with tall trees behind the houses.
- A picture of a very large “McMansion” with numerous gables, turrets, green glass windows and immature shrubs (Image 9) received the lowest ranking of single family homes and tied for lowest in the whole VPS.
- Respondents did not like a modernist house (Image 5) with square windows and cantilevered rooms located in Acton on a wooded lot.
- A tidy trailer park (Image 6) with mature trees in Acton also received low scores.

MULTI-FAMILY HOMES

- Respondents prefer multi-family properties designed to look like single-family homes.
- Three of the four highest-ranking images are new construction.
- The most highly ranked house (Image 10) is a large, historic structure in the New England vernacular on a corner lot with tall trees in Ayer, MA that has been divided into apartments.
- Two pictures from a recently built 40B subdivision in Boxford, MA (Images 12 and 14) also received high scores. The houses in this subdivision are duplexes and triples painted in a variety of colors that have the scale and bulk of single-family houses.
- The homes are made of clapboard and have pitched roofs, porches and distinct windows (two-over-two and six-over-six).
- Respondents like Image 25, a new multi-family house in a 40B project in Lincoln, MA. The house mimics the historic vernacular of the house in Image 10 with a wraparound porch and is sited on a well-landscaped corner lot.
- A picture of attached, three-story townhouses with first floor garages, sided in vinyl with nearly flat roofs and long staircases made of unstained lumber (Image 17) was strongly disliked by respondents. No trees, shrubs or lawn are visible.
- Image 18, a dark brick garden-apartment building with small balconies and a dominant parking lot, rated poorly.
- A historic, shingled, three-story apartment building with a flat roof and new vinyl windows (Image 19) received a low rating too.

MIXED-USE PROPERTIES

- Respondents like nearly all of the mixed-use images presented in the VPS.
- The most highly rated mixed-use building (Image 41) is a corner store built in a new subdivision in Chapel Hill, NC. It is a two-and-a-half story fieldstone and clapboard structure on a corner lot that mimics the scale and massing of a large, single-family house. The first floor is retail and the others are apartments.
- Images 31 and 39 were both taken in downtown Andover, MA. Respondents like both of these large, brick historic buildings with ground floor retail and apartments on the upper stories.
- Most respondents like a historic brick school in Washington, DC that had been renovated and converted to apartments and had a new commercial addition on one wing (Image30).
- The four mixed-use buildings that respondents did not like (Images 28, 32,33 and 37) are similar to each other. All four are large, four or five-story structures built in California or Florida. The location (suburban or urban) and the uses of these buildings are not clear from the pictures. There is little landscaping and the architecture is out of context for New England.

DESIGN IN ACTON

- Respondents overwhelmingly prefer that housing styles, rooflines and garages vary throughout a subdivision to create visual variety and create character. Respondents like new subdivisions to look like they were built over time and not produced in a “cookie-cutter” manner.
- Respondents also strongly support trees, landscaping and sidewalks and think they are a necessity despite their cost.
- Natural resource protection, open space protection and less-expensive housing are all equally important goals for cluster subdivisions. Respondents also think community and safety, intimate and friendly neighborhoods, efficiency, shared services and good design should be goals for cluster subdivisions.
- They think the houses in cluster subdivisions should have character and charm, include a variety of housing types (single and multi-family), respect the topography of the site and should create a sense of privacy for each unit.
- An equal number of respondents said they like row houses, town houses, garden apartments and multi-family houses that look like single-family houses. None of the respondents like apartment buildings.
- Respondents think two and three-family houses, townhouses and subdivided historic structures can be integrated into a neighborhood with single-family housing.
- Retail and neighborhood services (bank branches, barber, small grocer) mixed with apartments is the most preferred type of mixed-use structure. Respondents frequently stated that they like a pedestrian scale and pedestrian amenities.

Affordable Housing Strategy Meetings Session #1: February 2, 2004

Acton Community Housing Corporation
Acton Housing Authority
Board of Appeals
Board of Health
Board of Selectmen
Community Preservation Committee
Conservation Commission
Historical Commission
Historic District Commission
Planning Board

The Board of Selectmen will sponsor a meeting on an affordable housing strategy for Acton on Monday, February 2, 2004, at 7:00 p.m in Town Hall, Room 204. The primary goals for the meeting are to produce criteria or standards that the town wants Chapter 40B developments to meet and to agree on a list of trade-offs that we are willing to consider to increase Acton's supply of affordable housing. Toward these ends, we need active participation from all boards, committees and officials with a role in planning, development review or permitting. The ideas and recommendations discussed at this meeting will have a significant impact on an affordable housing plan that Judi Barrett of Community Opportunities Group, Inc., is preparing for the town. The meeting will begin with a presentation by Ms Barrett on key issues that need to be addressed in Acton's housing plan. Thereafter, we expect to engage in a lively discussion that includes evaluating a mock development project and identifying criteria that Acton should use to review comprehensive permits for appropriateness of location, design quality, and overall benefits to the community.

Please contact our office by January 23, 2004, to confirm your attendance.
(978-264-9612; bos@acton-ma.gov)

Discussion Questions

1. What outcomes or results does Acton want from affordable housing development?
Some examples:
 - Housing for families
 - Housing for the elderly or persons with disabilities
 - Housing for empty nesters
 - Rental housing
 - The lowest possible density that can be achieved without making the project uneconomic
 - Design that is similar in styles, materials and quality to residential buildings in the surrounding neighborhood
 - Usable open space
 - Locations identified in the Master Plan as appropriate for higher-density land use
 - Inclusion of affordable units in mixed-use developments
 - Retention of Acton's young citizens
 - Housing affordable to middle-income families – even though the units will not count on the Subsidized Housing Inventory
 - Use of existing homes for affordable housing units

2. What outcomes are most important?
(Prioritize outcomes identified by the group)
Related question:
 - Is there a significant difference between the highest, middle and lowest priority outcomes?
If yes, why – i.e., what makes them so different?

3. Assuming that the town cannot secure all of the outcomes it wants, which ones are negotiable, and to what extent? Would you be willing to accept ... (examples):
 - Higher density to obtain more open space?
 - Less open space to obtain lower density?
 - Higher density to obtain age-restricted housing units?
 - Higher density on a commercially or industrially zoned site in order to preserve some of the land for economic development?
 - Larger housing units or single-family homes in order to obtain more open space, even if larger homes are more likely to attract families with children?

Discussion Notes

- “Good Design” more important than density
 - but not high density t.l. to t.l.
 - “good design” needs work -- re: define it
- Take pro-active steps
 - guidelines for developers
 - establish collaborative process before or outside 40B with abutters
- Good design makes density more acceptable
- Use zoning to work to generate affordable housing
 - buy off-site affordable units
 - deed restrictions off-site
- Use (re-)development in and around centers
- Incentives for dwelling conversions with affordable component, and infill
- Ease approval process where possible
- Discussion on where high-density is acceptable or should be encouraged
- “High” density with good design in existing (or new) centers
- More emphasis on open space outside of centers
- Take context of site into consideration
- Incentives for affordable housing in centers
- Identify existing affordable units for possible deed restrictions
- Better process for dealing with affordable housing
- Create an incentive for collaborative process
- Town be proactive in affordable housing
 - plan (comprehensive) to do it
 - see what the town can get
 - get out front of developers
- Create new “transportation” on hubs
- Look for walkability

- Respect “smart growth” ideas
- Focus affordable housing plan in area between Rt. 2 and commuter rail
- Housing for teachers, police, etc.
- Housing design for affordable housing not visibly different from market rate
- Form, scale, placement
- Increase affordable housing without building new housing – deed restrictions
- More orientation for access to public transit
- Find ways to integrate affordable housing with look and feel of town
- End corrosiveness of current process

What outcomes or results does Acton want from affordable housing development?

- Key Issues
 - Development by right economic returns
 - Fully diverse community
 - Mixed housing
 - Compatibility with community character, form, scale, and location on property
 - Mixed housing types
 - Strengthen village centers
 - Meet the needs of people over 55 who are downsizing
- Keep services here
- Consider accessory apartments by right in new construction
- Look at terminology affordable housing vs. deed restriction low and moderate housing
- Plan w/40B
- Use 40B i.e., the town use it
- Change EDIC legislation to include housing charge

Affordable Housing Strategy Meetings Session #2: April 27, 2004

Acton Community Housing Corporation
Acton Housing Authority
Board of Appeals
Board of Health
Board of Selectmen
Community Preservation Committee
Conservation Commission
Historical Commission
Historic District Commission
Planning Board

The Board of Selectmen will host the second session of the All-Board Housing Strategy Meeting on Tuesday, April 27 at 7:00 p.m. This session is designed to complete the work we initiated on February 2, 2004, when participants explored and discussed outcomes that Acton would like Chapter 40B developments to achieve. On April 27, however, we will ask you to help us review a mock development proposal and work through a series of trade-offs in order to prioritize outcomes that are important to the town. The mock review process includes a hypothetical developer's proposal and several alternatives. We will ask you to choose an alternative that you think would be most appropriate for Acton, considering the town's affordable housing needs and other important planning concerns.

Please contact our office by April 20, 2004, to confirm your attendance.

Attachment: Flipchart notes of February 2, 2004 All-Board Strategy Meeting – Session 1

MAKING CHOICES

Affordable Housing Scenario (April 27, 2004 Strategy Meeting)

A developer has told local officials that he will seek a comprehensive permit for a 140-unit housing development known as Acton Woods. He has signed a purchase-and-sale agreement with the owner of two parcels that have a combined total of 49.5 acres of land. The site is adjacent to conservation land, an old farm, and several new house lots with homes that sold for an average of \$850,000. Both parcels are in a residential zoning district that requires a minimum lot size of 80,000 square feet. Less than a mile away, there is a research and development facility in an industrial district. During peak hours, the road that passes in front of the site carries a moderate volume of commuter traffic. Proximity to the industrial area means that the developer has access to public water and sewer service.

The developer hired a wetlands consultant to delineate wetlands and the town's conservation agent agrees with the delineation. Excluding the resource areas and buffer zones, the site's developable land area is about 41 acres. Assuming a factor for odd-shaped lots and roadways, the site's yield potential in a conventional subdivision is a maximum of 18 house lots. To build 140 units, the developer proposes a mix of 60 single-family homes, 30 duplexes and 50 townhouses in ten five-unit buildings. Since the state requires at least 25% of the units to be affordable to low- or moderate-income homebuyers, 6 of the single-family homes, 15 of the duplexes and 15 of the townhouses will be Chapter 40B units (total of 35). Although the developer could have priced the affordable units a little higher, he decided to set the maximum sale prices at \$150,000 for a three-bedroom duplex, \$150,000-\$165,000 for two- and three-bedroom townhouses, \$180,000 for a three-bedroom single-family home and \$190,000 for a four-bedroom single-family home. According to the developer's market study, the "market" single-family homes will sell quickly if he prices them in the \$575,000-\$620,000 range, and the "market" duplexes and townhouses in the \$275,000-325,000 range. Between the residential buildings, accessory structures, sidewalks and roadways, total site coverage will be about 52%.

Your town currently has 161 Chapter 40B units or 2.11%. To reach 10%, you need 604 Chapter 40B units. State regulations limit each Chapter 40B development in your town to a maximum of 300 units unless local officials are willing to exceed the 300-unit cap. In addition, if the Board of Appeals approves a 153-unit development, your town could deny additional comprehensive permits for up to 12 months thereafter, assuming a building permit is issued during the same 12-month period.

If you were:

- On the Board of Appeals
- A member of the Planning Board or Board of Selectmen
- A member of the ACHC
- An abutter
- An interested observer

How would you evaluate Acton Woods? What would make the proposal as beneficial as possible to the town?

Assumptions

For this activity, you may consider the following tradeoffs:

Local Concern	Developer's Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of units could be reduced to 100 without making the project uneconomic. You want a smaller development, so you ask the developer for a density reduction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He agrees, but if he reduces the number of units he will eliminate townhouses and build only single-family homes. Result: 100 single-family homes instead of 60, no duplex or townhouse units.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You decide to negotiate for rental instead of homeownership units, in which case all of the units will be added to the Chapter 40B Inventory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The developer submits a counter-proposal for 156 apartments in five 24-unit buildings and one 36-unit building, three stories each. He might agree to scale back some of the buildings, but ultimately the rental project would include a mix of 18-, 24- and 36-unit buildings and a range of 156-162 units.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You want to preserve as much open space as possible. The developer's proposal is a conventional subdivision that divides the entire site into small house lots, except that all of the townhouses are in one area, near some new, high-end single-family homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The developer says he will consider a different site plan, e.g., an open space-cluster development, but in exchange, he wants 15 more townhouses because he will have to eliminate some single-family homes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You want the developer to build only age-restricted housing, so you ask him to change the project to an over-55 development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He will consider your request <u>if</u> he can add an assisted living facility and you agree to let him exceed the 300-unit cap. Result: 80 townhouses and cottage units for over-55 households and a 225-unit assisted living facility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You do not want to exceed the 300-unit cap, so you ask the developer to make 25% of the units age-restricted (over-55). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He says yes -- <u>if</u> the town agrees to 165 units instead of 140.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You want to reduce the price of some of the Chapter 40B units to make them affordable to low-income families. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The developer agrees, but he will not reduce the number of units in the development below 140.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The town desperately needs more facilities for youth sports. You are convinced that the development will exacerbate this problem because it will bring more children into the community. So, you ask the developer to contribute \$250,000 to the town's recreation fund. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> He says no cash, but offers to redesign the site and donate five acres of land to the recreation department. In exchange, he wants 20 more townhouses because he will lose house lots to the land donation, <u>and</u> he wants the Town to endorse his project through the state's Local Initiative Program, a move that would require the selectmen to co-sign his application for site approval.

Questions To Consider

- Would a development of all single-family homes be more or less beneficial to the town?
- Would increasing the development to 153+ units be worth the political fallout – knowing that a 153-unit would satisfy the “recent progress” rule and give the town a 12-month break from having to approve other comprehensive permits?
- Would a rental development that gets the town much closer to 10% be more or less beneficial to the town? Note: compared to a homeownership development, rental housing may generate more children, but not necessarily more school-age children.
- If you wanted more open space at Acton Woods, what areas of the site would you want to preserve?
 - Would you want open space that provides connectivity to adjoining open space and existing neighborhoods, or would you want buffers between the development and adjoining neighborhoods?
 - Where should most or all of the development be located?
- If the developer offered to donate land suitable for a future recreation area in lieu of donating cash to a local recreation fund, would you consider the offer reasonable – even if it means increasing the number of townhouses?
- Would it ever make sense – under any circumstances – for the selectmen to facilitate or streamline the Chapter 40B site approval process by helping the developer apply to the Local Initiative Program for project eligibility? (If yes, what circumstances?)
- The developer assumes you will oppose 140 units. If accepting 140+ units means that you could win concessions from the developer, which of the following outcomes would be most important to you?
 - Increase in the number of affordable units
 - Reduction in sale price of affordable units
 - More open space
 - Age-restricted housing
 - Higher-quality building design
 - A cash contribution to the town for recreation or other facilities, i.e., a “mitigation payment”
 - Other ideas?

Discussion Notes

Roland Bartl opened the meeting at 7:10 PM.

- He generally explained the materials that were distributed to meeting participants and asked that participants not discuss proposed/pending Chapter 40B projects.
- The meeting was going to be about housing in general.
- He briefly explained the agenda:
 - Judi Barrett would go over the exercise and meeting materials with the participants;
 - Participants would break into 5 working groups to discuss and determine how they would make the hypothetical proposal as beneficial as possible;
 - Everyone would reconvene and each group would present their findings.

Judi Barrett explained the meeting in more detail.

- She mentioned that participants can refer to the notes from the last housing strategy meeting although they don't directly relate to the activities planned for tonight's meeting.
- The activity planned for tonight is intended to force tough choices.
- She went over the locus map of the fictitious "Acton Woods."
- Ultimately, she wants each group to:
 - answer the questions on the handout;
 - sketch on the locus map where the housing in Acton Woods should be located.
- She went through the questions participants will have to answer in their groups.
 - If Acton Woods contained assisted living units, the assumption is that they would be home ownership units.
 - It is assumed that there is no public transportation within 5 miles of Acton Woods.
 - Mixed use (non-residential and residential) would not be allowed in Acton Woods since it would not be allowed under current Ch. 40B regulations.
 - It is assumed that "The Farm" is not deed restricted conservation land. In other words, it could be developed.
 - It is assumed that the "conservation" land is deed restricted.
 - There is a road that leads into the site from the main road to the south of the site. The road leading into the site eventually turns into a cart path which leads to the wetlands onsite.
 - If Acton Woods contained assisted living units, at least some of the assisted living units would have to be "affordable" under Ch. 40B (part of the minimum affordable housing requirement of 25%).

At 7:50 PM, participants were assigned a number from 1-5 and went to the corresponding table. Participants then worked in groups on the handout questions and the locus map.

At 8:45 PM, everyone reconvened. Each group presented their findings while their locus maps were displayed on the screen in the front of the room.

GROUP 1:

- They recommended that all units be rental units – 156 rental units total, 5 24-unit buildings and 1 36-unit building.
- They would propose 2 accesses to the project. Both accesses would be off Maple Avenue.
- The group wanted to preserve as much open space as possible.
- 156 rental units would give the town a 12-month break from having to approve other comprehensive permits. The group thought that during the 12-month break that they could try to work toward acquiring “The Farm” by applying for and receiving Community Preservation Act funds.
- The group is not sure whether the Selectmen should facilitate the Ch. 40B process by helping the developer apply to the Local Initiative Program (LIP) for project eligibility.
- They would be looking for a sliding scale on the rental units.
- Their proposal of clustering the 6 buildings to the north end of the site would make it more economical for the developer because there would be less infrastructure.

A participant from another group commented that their proposal shows about 10-12 units/acre which is more of an urban design. He said with that density, the Town might not receive the design they would want.

GROUP 2:

- The group felt it would be less beneficial to the Town to have all the units as single-family homes.
- It is not worth increasing the project to 153 units to receive a break from comprehensive permits for 12 months.
- The group didn’t like the rental unit conditions. The conditions didn’t make sense for the site. They didn’t believe that 5-6 large, big box style buildings made sense for the site.
- Because there are only 2 homes on Maple Avenue, the group proposed clustering houses near them and away from the wetlands.
- The group would want a connection to the cul-de-sac (off Maple Avenue) east of the site. It could be a road or just a connection for emergency access.
- The group proposed a no build buffer along “The Farm.” They would want to buy “The Farm” later if possible.
- The group feels that the Town already has the recreation land, so they would want cash from the applicant to develop recreation “facilities.”
- They believe that the Ch. 40B process where the Selectmen negotiate and help the developer apply to LIP is always the more favorable option. With this project, they would also want more control over design, so they would prefer the LIP application process.
- If a 140-unit project was accepted, the group believes the following outcomes would be important (listed from most important to least important):
 - Increase in the number of affordable units
 - More open space
 - Higher-quality building design
 - Reduction in sale price of affordable units
 - Cash contribution to the Town

- The group believed that some age-restricted units would not be bad, but they would not want all or a lot of age-restricted units.

GROUP 3:

- They felt that all single-family homes is not a useful tradeoff. A mixture of housing types would probably be more affordable in general (even if they weren't all considered "affordable" under State regulations).
- The group believed that the 12-month break from comprehensive permits (if the Town approved a 153 unit development) is too short of a time frame by the time you get through litigation, etc. For this reason, they don't think it would be worth it to approve 153 units to receive the 12-month break.
- The group felt that rental units are more affordable than ownership units for the populations they want to serve.
- They think that a mix is best.
- The group proposed that the highest density in Acton Woods be placed up near the conservation land to provide a sense of space near it. It also places the higher density near the abutters.
- The group proposed open space in the middle of the site with a path connection.
- The group was concerned about where access to and parking for the recreation land would be if the developer donated recreation land. As a result, the group had mixed feelings on whether they would want to accept recreation land in lieu of cash from the developer.
- If the Ch. 40B process where the Selectmen negotiate and help the developer apply to LIP is used, the group wasn't sure if the process would bring in abutters. The group felt that it is important to involve abutters early.
- If a 140-unit project was accepted, the group believes the following outcomes would be important (listed from most important to least important):
 - Higher-quality building design
 - Increase in the number of affordable units
 - Reduction in sale price of affordable units
 - More open space
 - Age-restricted housing (the group wasn't sure if this was good)
 - Cash contribution to the Town

GROUP 4:

- The group felt that all single family homes would be less beneficial to the Town.
- It is not worth increasing the project to 153 units to receive a break from comprehensive permits for 12 months.
- The group believed that rental development would be more beneficial to the Town "if" it has good architecture. The group felt, however, that the project should maybe not be all rental.
- The group proposed that the northern "peninsula" and the area around and including the wetlands in Acton Woods be open space.
- They proposed that there be 2 access points into Acton Woods; both from Maple Avenue.