

# Green Communities Act

## Executive Summary

Sept 18<sup>th</sup>, 2009

In April of 2008, the Acton Board of Selectmen identified the Greening of Acton as one of our top long term priorities. In January of 2009, the BoS created a Green Advisory Board whose initial charter is to develop strategies for improving Acton's energy profile. The Green Advisory Board is recommending that Acton become a 'Green Community' as defined by the Massachusetts Green Communities Act. The Green Communities Act is being managed by the Department of Energy Resources (DOER).

The Green Communities will be eligible for grants that will provide up to \$10 million annually to fund programs such as efficiency initiatives, renewable energy projects and innovative programs.

There are five requirements for becoming a Green Community. We believe that Acton has already satisfied the first two requirements:

- 1) Adopt 'as of right' siting in designated locations for Renewable/Alternative Energy generation or renewable/ alternative energy research and development or renewable / alternative energy manufacturing.

Acton allows 'as of right' siting for development and manufacturing of renewable or alternative energy (RE/AE) equipment and systems in designated industrial areas. (This allows the manufacturing of components used in energy manufacturing – not the creation of various forms of power plants). At the Special Town Meeting in April, Acton re-affirmed this commitment with a clarification in wording of our manufacturing zoning bylaws.

- 2) Purchase fuel efficient vehicles.

The Town of Acton has already begun a program of using high efficiency model vehicles where possible when replacing town vehicles. We are investigating whether we will need to increase this level of commitment.

In order to qualify as a Green Community, Acton would also need to:

- 3) Adopt an expedited (12 month) application / permitting process for the uses allowed under the first requirement. The expedited application and permitting process applies only to the proposed facilities which are subject to the as-of-right siting provision. The state is in the process of generating model guidelines for this permitting process.

Acton would still be able to permit or deny applications based on codes, etc. But the process

would need to complete in one year or the permit would automatically be granted.

**ACTION ITEM 1: If the BoS wishes to proceed with this, we should ask the Planning Department and the Planning Board to investigate expedited permitting.**

- 4) Establish an energy use baseline inventory with a program to reduce this baseline by 20% in 5 years.

The Green Advisory Board has begun investigating this task by consulting with town and school staff. They recommend that we sign up for the EPA's New England Community Energy Challenge. This requires Acton to do three things:

- a) Assess — benchmark — the energy performance of all municipal buildings, schools and or drinking water/wastewater treatment facilities in our community
- b) Set a goal to reduce energy use in buildings by 10% or more. The timing of this commitment is up to the town
- c) Promote energy efficiency and renewables to companies and organizations in our community

The EPA provides an interactive tool (Portfolio Manager) to track energy use. The Green Advisory Board has investigated this tool and feels it is an appropriate tool for Acton's energy benchmarking initiative. The DOER has also indicated that this tool is acceptable for the energy audit that they are requesting as part of the Green Communities Act.

The GAB recommends we begin the process of adding last year's data into our energy baseline with an intern who will work over Christmas break. Additional data can be added by staff as part of routine bill paying.

**ACTION ITEM 2: If the BoS wishes to do this, we should sign the EPA challenge documents**

The Green Advisory Board is also likely to recommend that we join ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. ICLEI provides technical consulting, training, and information services to build capacity, share knowledge, and support local government in the implementation of sustainable development at the local level. ICLEI is promoting a 'Cities for Climate Protection' campaign to reduce greenhouse gases among other things.

The GAB will present more information at their annual review session on October 19th.

5) Adopt the state's "stretch" building code.

In general, municipalities may not adopt building codes that are stricter than the state's building codes. The state has recently created an optional "stretch code" that requires higher efficiency in building design. If Acton adopts this code, new residential buildings that are larger than 3,000 square feet would need to have a more efficient energy profile. In addition, new commercial buildings over 5,000 sq ft would also need a more efficient energy profile.

The state DOER will hold regional information sessions about the stretch code. Our regional coordinator has not yet been hired but is expected to be working by the end of September.

The business community is interested in this issue and the GAB will work with the EDC to find out more information about the program.

**ACTION ITEM 3: Organize a regional seminar (ideally, with the cooperation of the EDC, the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce and/or the Planning Board) to present info about the stretch code and answer questions. The timing of this seminar is largely dependent on when we can get a qualified speaker from the state.**