



Today. Tomorrow. Together.

ACTON.
TODAY.
TOMORROW.
TOGETHER.

Visioning for the Future of Acton

WANT: Acton Voices¹:

“What Makes Acton Unique?”³

“excellent schools, community commitment to education”

small town, close to Boston

“Not Your Average Wonderbread Town”

“semi-rural/town and country suburb”

“peaceful, quiet, family-oriented, friendly, safe, socially aware, livable”

location, access

“seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, picturesque, old barns”

“good value”

“sense of community, small town feeling, run into people you know”

history and historic New England architecture

train

degree of volunteerism

village centers

open space and recreation

“culturally diverse, accepting, welcoming”

“good balance between nature and development”

“high achieving, driven, ambitious”

community events

charm, atmosphere

“highest taxes in the state”

“a great safe place to raise a family”

“wonderful woodland trails”

Discovery Museum, Bowling alley, NARA Park, Library

“Preserve the small town feel, and rural and historic characteristics”

“Be proactive about planning for a sustainable future”

“Maintain excellence in schools”

“We would love to have vibrant and walkable village centers.”

“Kelley’s Corner needs to be improved.”

“We want to be an inclusive community that is welcoming for all.”

“We need more places to shop, eat, and for entertainment for all ages”

“There is too much traffic”

“We need more things for young people to do, place for them to go.”

“We need to continue to support excellence in our town services including the library and the Senior Center.”

“The look and traffic of the Great Road could be improved.”

“We need to control growth and find a way to preserve our open space.”

“We need to take care of our seniors and our teens.”

“We need to expand the tax base.”

Community Conversation

In early 2008, nearly two-thousand Acton residents participated in a six-month long process to develop a Vision and Goals for the Town’s future². This degree of public outreach and participation is unprecedented in Acton. The following is a partial list of the opportunities provided to the public to participate in the community conversation:

- **12** Outreach Committee meetings
- **7** Targeted focus groups
- **5** Presentations to varied organizations (ranging from Chamber of Commerce to school teachers)
- **3** Town-wide Visioning Sessions
- **3** Focus groups with Town Boards, Committees and Commissions
- **2** Locations with a Comment Board (for public comment)
- **1** Roundtable Discussion with Town Department Heads
- **1** Town-wide mail and web survey to all Acton residents (15.6% response rate)
- **1** Town –wide mail and web survey to all Acton businesses (5.4% response rate)
- **1** Phone survey of a random sample of 366 Acton residents
- **1** Meeting with the Student Council at the High School
- **1** web site for dissemination of information and taking survey
- Many opportunities for all Acton students to participate by conducting surveys, drawing, writing, creating movies and songs regarding their vision for the future of Acton



Scenes from various community conversation meetings



ACTON VOICES: Residents & Business Owners - Top Responses

Public Forum	Favorite Things about Acton ⁴	Least Favorite Things About Acton ⁵	If you could do one thing....? ⁶
Visioning Workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rural character, natural features Schools Village Centers Sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic Lack of walkability No real town center Affordability Lack of adequate site plan, subdivision & design reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make pedestrian & bike-friendly Create centers for congregating Plan for sustainable development Expand the commercial tax base
Resident Mail Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools Diversity of activities & uses Conservation land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High Cost of Living Traffic Lack of continuous pedestrian/bike paths 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Open Space⁷ Historic homes protected & preserved Affordable housing
Business Mail Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools Town Character Open Character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic Taxes Parking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [More] development [More] business [More] walkable
Seniors (mini-visioning workshop)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Center NARA Park Nursing Service Rural character Actonians Hospital Library 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too much housing development Traffic Taxes No one town center Not enough public transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower taxes Hold Town Meeting & Election Day on Saturday More public transport Provide handicap parking West Acton
Focus Groups (Targeted Outreach)⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools Parks, open space Proximity to jobs Friendly, welcoming Small town feel Safe Family-orientation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of walkable center Poorly maintained recreation facilities Lack of sidewalks & public transport Traffic issues No trash collection Poor water quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do more to plan for sustainability Provide full day K for all Space for cultural celebration Public transportation for seniors & teens Preserve excellent schools Improve parking at train
Teen Themes (Acton Students)⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools Arboretum Sense of community Trees, horses History 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not enough to do Need to plan for sustainable future Need for walking Too much traffic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Movie theater Sidewalks Bike paths Public transportation Club for older kids

¹ Compiled responses of residents in a variety of public forums. ² For a complete report please see Phase I: Emerging Vision & Goals for Acton's Future. ³ Asked in public meetings, focus groups, surveys, and comment boards collecting written responses. ⁴ In some forums this question was asked as "What are Acton's most important assets?" ⁵ In some forums this question was asked as "What are Acton's most important challenges?" ⁶ "If you could do one thing to make Acton a better place, what would it be?" ⁷ "Which would you like to see more of in Acton" ⁸ With representatives of Acton's Latino, Chinese, Indian and Brazilian residents. ⁹ Responses to survey by 8th grade Acton students



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Population & Housing

WANT: Acton Voices¹:

“Mansionization makes housing not affordable and [negatively] affects town character.”²

“There is a need for more site plan review and subdivision and design review of new housing developments.”³

“Stop single-family development to reduce pressure on open space and to reduce pressure on schools.”⁴

“We need a variety of housing types – to support people with different economic resources as well as different ages and needs.”⁵

“Houses are expensive” (as response to “what are the three most important challenges you feel face Acton?”)⁶

“There is more affordable housing than in other comparable communities.”⁷

“My most important concern regarding aging, is aging in place in my home and being able to afford the taxes.”⁸

“Control residential growth because it adversely impacts class size at the schools.”⁹

Over one-third (37.5%) of the survey respondents said that would like to see more affordable housing in Acton, and more than half (69.3%) said that they would like to see more historic homes protected and preserved.¹⁰

HAVE: Existing Conditions¹¹:

Increasing diversity of Acton’s population:

Percent of total population 1990 to 2010

Race	1990	2010
White	95%	85%
African-American	1%	1%
Asian	4%	14%

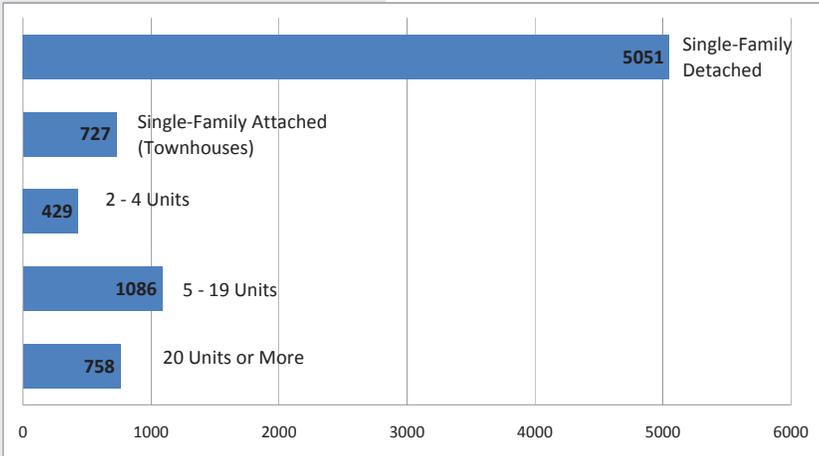
Percentages rounded; other categories represented were native-american, pacific islander.

Existing Conditions

- By 2020 there are expected to be about 600 fewer people under age 55 living in Acton than in 2010. There are expected to be about 1,400 more people age 55 and over living in town.
- Household size is expected to decline from 2.57 people in 2010 to 2.52 by 2020.
- Thirty-five residential building permits were issued in 2009, down from the most recent high of 71 in 2006. Nineteen have been issued through July of this year. On average, 52 residential building permits were issued annually over the last 10 years.
- From January to July, 2010, there were 101 single-family home sales and 71 condominium sales in Acton. Average sales prices for these homes were \$479,000 (single-family) and \$255,000 (condominiums).
- There are about 6,000 owner-occupied homes in Acton and 1,700 renter-occupied homes. The average estimated length of residence is 17 years for owner-occupied homes and 7 years for renter-occupied homes.
- There are 518 units of subsidized housing in Acton. This represents 6.7% of

its housing stock. There are current plans to create about 50 more units of subsidized housing.

- Acton's estimated housing mix by type of structure is:



Acton's Housing Stock by types of Residential Structures



An ECHO unit attached to a Colonial Home

- Five bedroom homes cost the town almost \$14,700 per year (i.e., service costs exceed tax revenue). Four bedroom homes cost the town almost \$4,700 per year. Three bedroom homes provide a town budget surplus of about \$800 per year, while two bedroom homes provide a town budget surplus of about \$2,600 per year, and one bedroom homes provide an annual town budget surplus of about \$3,800.
- About 87% of the annual property tax revenues is generated by residential property. The average tax bill for a single family home was \$8,767 in fiscal-year 2010.

Preliminary Observations

- Acton has all the 4 and 5 bedroom homes it needs to supply future projected demand. There will be a need for smaller homes in the future as household size continues to decrease and the population ages.
- Smaller, aging households will produce a market for age-restricted housing units, accessory apartments and ECHO (elderly cottage housing opportunities), in addition to contributing to the overall market for 1 and 2 bedroom housing units.
- 4 and 5 bedroom homes are a drain on the town budget, while 1, 2 and 3 bedroom homes produce a surplus for the town budget.
- There are small clusters of higher density housing in village areas that could become the nuclei of larger compact villages.
- The town-wide overall density figure of 0.42 acres per housing unit can be maintained by providing attached single-family and multi-family units in combination with open space required in each development project.
- To reach the 10% affordability goal Acton needs to produce about 35 affordable units each year to the year 2020. This is more than half of the total number of housing units expected to be produced each year.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:

Opportunities & Challenges¹²:

- Producing 35 units of affordable housing each year will be a real challenge.
- If the 40B Comprehensive Permit Law is rescinded this November, the Town will face a very important decision about whether it wants to keep a goal for the production of affordable housing units.
- The Town could replace the existing Affordable Housing Incentives and Overlay District bylaw (Section 4.4) with a simplified inclusionary housing bylaw.
- The Town could adopt an anti-mansionization bylaw.
- The Town could create additional incentives to guide development into village areas.

¹ Input collected in a variety of forums during Phase I, see *Emerging Vision and Goals for Acton's Future*. ² Visioning workshop I ³ From town-wide visioning workshop I ⁴ From town-wide visioning workshop II ⁵ From written comment, visioning workshop II ⁶ From 8th grade student survey ⁷ From focus group with Acton's Latino community ⁸ From mini-visioning session with seniors ⁹ From focus group with Acton's Chinese community ¹⁰ Consultant documentation, based on review of previous studies, data collection, interviews, meetings, site visits. ¹¹ Consultant recommendations, initial thoughts.



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2 Economic Development

WANT: Acton Voices¹:

"It would be nice to have more places to shop and to eat to choose from."²

"We need more economic development to increase the tax base."³

"Improve regulations to encourage businesses (including permitting & signage)."⁴

"More needs to be done to improve the appearance of strip malls on Great Rd."⁵

"Reduce traffic and congestion and keep town character; don't overdevelop."⁶

"Restaurants" were frequently mentioned as a response to the survey question "What would you like to see MORE of?"⁷

"Development" was frequently mentioned as a response to the survey question: "What would you like to see LESS of?" (comments were mostly directed towards housing, but also included big box, fast food, and strip malls as undesirable)⁸

HAVE: Existing Conditions⁹:

Labor Force and Income

- 11,870 employed workers live in Acton.
- 735 people are unemployed (unemployment rate of 6.2%); the state rate is 9.0%.
- 74% of Acton's labor force is in high skill occupations.
- 1,005 workers are self-employed.
- Median household income for 2010 is estimated to be \$117,122.
- Employment in Acton is projected (by MAPC) to grow to 11,900 by 2020 (and 12,600 by 2030).

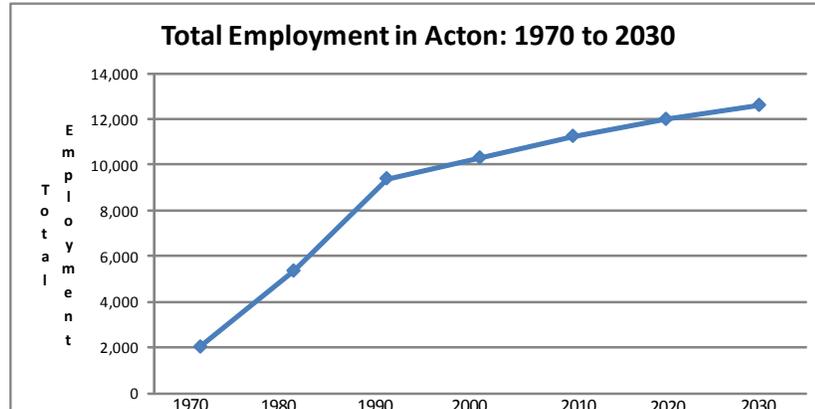
Businesses in Acton

- There were 781 private business establishments in Acton (2009).
- 12 establishments were lost in 2007 and 6 more were lost in 2008.
- Employment in these businesses in 2009 was 9,202.
- Average establishment size was 12 employees in 2009.
- Average weekly wages were \$938 (2009).
- 662.8 acres of land contain commercial (458.9 acres) and industrial (203.9 acres) uses.
- Education and health services (25.4%) followed by trade, transportation and utilities (24.0%) and professional and business services (19.2%) are the most prevalent private business types in Acton.
- There were 1,071 public sector employees in Acton in 2009, accounting for 10.7% of all employment in town.



Preliminary Observations:

- Most of Acton’s businesses are strung out along Great Road. Some are located in village areas.
- Chain stores are well represented in Acton.
- There are a few traffic choke points along Great Road where there are major businesses on both sides of the road.
- There is ample parking for businesses although some traffic congestion occurs in commercial areas limiting access.
- Kelley’s Corner has additional potential to provide shopping and office space opportunities.
- Approximately 1/3 (30%) of Acton’s residents responding to the mail survey reported doing about half of their shopping in Acton.

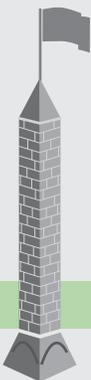


WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:

Opportunities & Challenges¹⁰:

- Further development of shopping villages is possible because of relatively abundant land.
- Zoning changes can be made to encourage a diverse economic base, enhance the investment worth and taxable value of commercial and industrial land, and encourage higher-density housing in and adjacent to commercial areas.
- Public investments in the village districts and Kelley’s Corner can help to create more vibrant and active centers.
- Creating incentives to encourage micro-businesses and small, start-up companies can help to add to the tax base while being compatible with Acton’s vision of itself.
- There is more potential for legislative, organizational and capacity-building measures to strengthen the Acton Economic Development and Industrial Corporation’s role in community economic development.
- The village centers each have their own distinct character. They present a challenge to preserve and enhance, and an opportunity to provide pedestrian-friendly neighborhood centers. Growth in them could be encouraged through property tax incentives, reduced land prices (using town-owned land) and use of transfer of development rights.

¹Resident input, see Phase I Vision Emerging Vision & Goals for Acton’s Future ²From town-wide visioning session I ³From focus group with representatives of Acton’s Indian community ⁴From focus group with representatives of Acton’s business community (Rotary Club) ⁵From focus group with representatives of Acton’s Latino community ⁶From town-wide visioning session II ⁷From mail survey to Acton residents ⁸From mail survey to Acton residents ⁹Consultant documentation, based on review of previous studies, data collection, interviews, meetings, site visits. ¹⁰Consultant recommendations, initial thoughts.





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3 Natural Resources

WANT: Acton Voices¹:

"Trees, open land, seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, rural feel...make Acton unique."²

"The rural character and natural features are my favorite things about Acton."³

"I wish there was more wildlife in Acton."⁴

"I think the Town should acquire or by other means preserve more open space."⁵

"Protect and enhance wildlife corridors, including conserving diverse ecosystems: meadows, woods, lowland, upland."⁶

"What I enjoy most visually in Acton is its nice rural area look."⁷

"Preserve rural and historic characteristics," was identified as the number one priority in six public meetings⁸

"One of the main reasons I moved to Acton was the green – trees and conservation land."⁹

"The cost of open space is very high... we will need to prioritize parcels."¹⁰

Close to one-half of the town's residents identified "rural character, agricultural land, and conservation land as among the town's three most important assets."¹¹

"I would like to see less growth taking over open space ...and more preservation of wooded areas."¹²

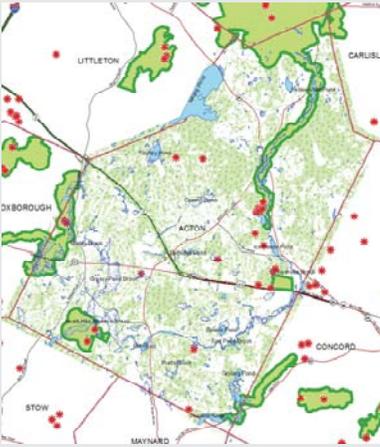
"Acton used to be rural; it is turning into a city."¹³

"Great wonderful conservation land, trails, ponds, woods... "¹⁴

HAVE: Existing Conditions¹⁵:

Geology, Topography & Soils

- The underlying bedrock is Nashoba Formation that dates back between 430 and 500 million years.
- Acton Granite, a younger intrusion into the underlying formation, was a source of foundation stone for many older buildings.
- The topographic character of Acton is due to glacial activity that deposited glacial till, drumlins (Great Hill), kettle-holes (Grassy Pond), eskers (Acton Arboretum), kames (Forest Road west of Hosmer Street), and alluvial and swamp deposits along stream beds.
- The average elevation is about 230 feet, the highest point is 430 feet, and the lowest is 130 feet.
- In general Acton soil groups are moist, rough and stony in character with many areas of sandy loam. Wet soils are located in stream valleys and certain areas have ledge.



- There are habitats for 9 state-listed rare plant or animal species, concentrated along the major brooks (outlined areas on map).
- There are 23 certified vernal pools – important habitat for wood frogs, salamanders, etc. (red stars on map)
- Acton has 7,128 acres of forest land (55% of its total area) – light green areas on map

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:

- High ground water, stoniness, and excessively drained soils present challenges for location of underground septic systems in most areas.

Surface Water

- There are two major watersheds – Nashoba Brook and Fort Pond Brook.
- Acton Stream Teams (<http://www.actonstreams.org>) monitors and educates the public about the town's 36 streams (more than 25 miles).
- Nagog Pond was assigned to Concord by the General Court in 1884 for its water supply.
- Acton watersheds account for 65% of the recharge of its aquifers – the source of the town's drinking water.

Major Wildlife Resources (see map to left)

- Two “hotspots” for biodiversity were identified in state's BioMap Project – Grassy Pond (partially protected) and wetlands (unprotected) along the town boundary with Stow and Maynard.

Preliminary Observations

- Many soil types are poorly suited to on-site septic systems.
- Despite development, Acton has many important natural areas that enrich residents' lives and contribute greatly to the town's character.
- Several large protected forest areas provide important habitat for wildlife and could be expanded by further open space protection efforts.
- Wetlands and streams are important for wildlife habitat, visual character, and for the town's supply of drinking water.

Opportunities & Challenges¹⁶:

- Acton has many areas of natural beauty, but many important natural resources remain unprotected.
- There are opportunities to create corridors that connect already protected areas.
- Protecting ground water supplies is a challenge – especially with the town's soils and many on-site septic systems.
- Continued support for open space protection will help preserve habitats, drinking water, and the visual character of the town.
- Uncontrolled development is likely to intrude on the natural character of vistas, forests, and the few remaining agricultural areas that define much of Acton's rural appearance.
- Protection of key wildlife habitats is important for maintaining biodiversity.
- Fragmentation of the few large forested areas will decrease biodiversity.
- Acton has a highly motivated, skilled, and active Conservation Commission, and citizens have generally supported land protection efforts.

¹ Resident input, see Phase I Vision Emerging Vision & Goals for Acton's Future ² From town-wide Visioning Session I ³ The number one response to the question: "What are your favorite things about Acton?" from town-wide Visioning Session I ⁴ Caption of drawing by 8 year old boy at town-wide Visioning Session I ⁵ 60% responded "yes" to this question in a telephone survey of residents ⁶ Written comment made on wall map at town-wide visioning session II ⁷ 7th grade student survey ⁸ Including town-wide Visioning Session II, meetings with Boards, Committees & Commissions, and additional public meetings. ⁹ From focus group with representatives of Acton's Chinese community. ¹⁰ From roundtable discussion with Town Department Heads ¹¹ From town-wide mail survey to all Acton residents ¹² Response to open-ended question: "What would you like to see LESS of in Acton?" in town-wide mail survey of all Acton residents ¹³ Response to open-ended question "What Makes Acton Unique?" in town-wide mail survey of Acton residents ¹⁴ Written comment on Comment Board placed in lobby of Town Hall with question: "What Makes Acton Unique?" ¹⁵ Consultant documentation, based on review of previous studies, data collection, interviews, meetings, site visits. ¹⁶ Consultant recommendations, initial thoughts.





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4 Historic & Cultural Resources

WANT: Acton Voices¹:

"The historic, New England architecture describes Acton's character."²

"In addition to the historic architecture, there is a pride and awareness of our local history (e.g. Isaac Davis, Crown Resistance Day, Patriots Day)."³

"I want more historic homes protected and preserved." (according to 74% of respondents)⁴

"Preserve rural and historic characteristics," was identified as the number one priority in six public meetings⁵

Approximately one-fifth (19.8%) of Acton's residents reported that history and historic architecture were among Acton's three most important assets⁶.

"Most residents are unaware of our history.. they are here for the schools and will not stay."⁷

"I would like a community center, more restaurants, cultural activities and a movie theater."⁸

"If I could do one thing to make Acton a better place to live I would get us a movie theater!"⁹

"There is not enough variety in activities, places to go, entertainment for all."¹⁰

"If I could do one thing to make Acton a better place to live I would create more centers for congregating."¹¹

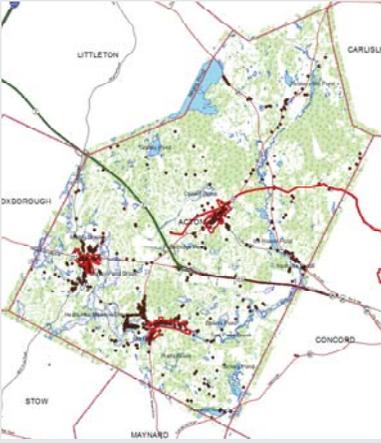
"I would like more opportunities for music, theater, films and other gathering places and entertainment."¹²

Almost 40% (39.4%) of Acton residents report wanting more cultural activities in Acton (theater, art exhibits, concerts, etc.)¹³.

HAVE: Existing Conditions¹⁴:

History

- Native Americans pre-settled the area for hunting, fishing, gathering, and some agriculture – especially around Nagog Pond.
- Concord shepherds settled the area that would become Acton (in 1655) because of its prime grazing lands.
- Mills were developed on Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook as early as 1670 – several mill sites remain.
- In 1735, Acton incorporated as a town and a Meeting House was built in Acton Center.
- Railroads came in 1843 with stations in South Acton and West Acton that became village centers; by 1865 another rail line went through East Acton and North Acton.
- By 1900, the population in the 5 villages was 2,120, and apples were the major export.



- There are three Local Historic Districts – Acton Center, West Acton Village, and South Acton Village (outlined in red).
- The Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System and Acton Historical Commission list more than 600 historically significant areas, buildings, burial grounds, objects, and structures (dots on map).

- In 1950, there were 3,500 people, and apples were still important, but by 1974 the population had reached 17,000 people, as orchards and fields turned into subdivisions – with some concentration around three villages: South Acton, Acton Center, and West Acton.

Historic Resources (see map at left)

- The Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory lists Conant Farm, Grassy Pond, Miller Farm/Station Master's House, Nagog Pond, Nashoba Brook, Rt. 2 Gateway Agricultural Fields, South Acton Village, Stonefield/Simeone Farm, and Wetherbee Street Woods as significant cultural landscapes.
- Historic stone walls contribute greatly to the town's character.

Cultural Resources

- Acton boasts a culturally diverse population.
- Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council and Acton Recreation Department list variety of cultural events – ethnic, musical, film festivals, theatre, arts & crafts, storytelling, and dance.
- Theatre III is an Acton non-profit dedicated to promoting the performing arts through education and high-quality, reasonably priced performances.
- The Acton Recreation Department hosts a long schedule of events, most at NARA Park, throughout the year.
- Acton Memorial Library hosts an active schedule of events and community meetings including storytelling, book discussions, historic site explorations, musical events, movies, English language conversation groups, art exhibits, computer training, etc.
- Several of Acton's churches host cultural events.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:

Opportunities & Challenges¹⁵:

- Acton has a rich heritage worthy of pride and protection.
- Acton's sense of place is largely defined by its historic villages, stone walls, and structures.
- Residents place great value on town's historic and cultural resources.
- Many historic and cultural assets are unprotected and some suffer from traffic, unsightly surroundings and lack of support.
- Many note concern that town character is threatened by uncontrolled development.
- Expanded design standards and guidelines could help maintain historic character.
- There is support for more public gathering places and improvement to pedestrian environment in villages and other areas of town.
- Consider additional Historic Districts and expansion of existing districts.
- Consider enlivening villages with historically sympathetic, mixed use infill development.

¹Resident input, see Phase I Vision Emerging Vision & Goals for Acton's Future ²From town-wide Visioning Session I ³Response to question: "What Makes Acton Unique?" in town-wide Visioning Session I ⁴From town-wide mail survey of Acton residents ⁵Including town-wide Visioning Session II, meetings with Boards, Committees & Commissions, and additional public meetings. ⁶In town-wide mail survey to all Acton residents ⁷Response to open-ended question: "What Makes Acton Unique?" in town-wide mail survey of all Acton residents. ⁸Most frequent responses to a telephone phone survey of Acton residents ⁹By far the number one response of teens in all forums ¹⁰At least half of the groups mentioned this among their least favorite features of Acton, from town-wide Visioning Session I ¹¹"Voted" among top three priorities to "If you could do one thing to improve Acton, what would it be?" in town-wide Visioning Session I ¹²From town-wide Visioning Session II ¹³From town-wide mail survey to all Acton residents ¹⁴Consultant documentation, based on review of previous studies, data collection, interviews, meetings, site visits. ¹⁵Consultant recommendations, initial thoughts.



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5 Open Space & Recreation

WANT: Acton Voices¹:



"Farms, conservation lands, NARA Park, Arboretum, and the commitment to preserving open space" were cited as responses to the question: "What Makes Acton Unique?"²

"I would like a big town pool that only Acton people and their guests can go to."³

"Recreational facilities are poorly maintained and there is a need for more bathrooms and parking."⁴

"I want more activities other than sports and school."⁵

"NARA Park should be free for all residents."⁶



"One of my favorite things about Acton are the recreational resources such as the tennis courts."⁷

"I would like to see more parks and places to play for young children..."⁸

"I would like more open space (including trails, meadows, woods and recreational areas." (according to 82.7% of respondents)⁹

"One of the things I like most about Acton is the parks, open spaces and green."¹⁰



"The rural character, NARA Park, conservation land & the Arboretum are among my favorite things about Acton."¹¹

"Soccer at school and at Teamworks on the Great Road are one of the things we most like about Acton."¹²

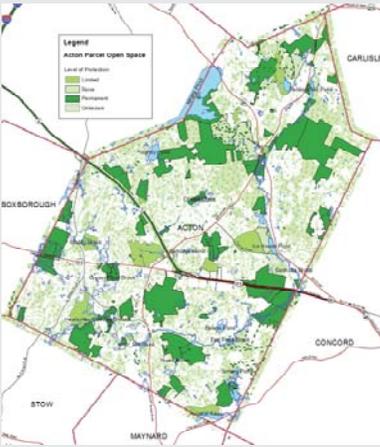
"There is an increasing demand on existing recreational facilities, including athletic fields, and more demand for local recreation."¹³

Almost three-fourths of Acton residents (74.4%) said they would like to see more open space in Acton."¹⁴

HAVE: Existing Conditions¹⁵:

Open Space Resources

- 25% of Acton's land (3,253 acres) is in some form of public open space or recreation use
- More than 2,150 acres are permanently protected (Conservation Commission – 1,721 acres, Water Department – 448 acres)
- There are over 6 miles of paths and 15 miles of trails in Acton including a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail – a 200 mile greenway corridor between Rt. 495 & Rt. 95
- Some of the major open spaces include: Acton Arboretum, Great Hill, Camp Acton, Spring Hill, Grassy Pond, Wills Hole, NARA Park, and Nagog Hill – All have trail systems and maps available on-line (see <http://www.actontrails.org/index.htm>)



- Many of the town’s open spaces protect important natural resources as well as historic and geological features
- Many privately owned open spaces (common land, back land, etc.) contribute to the town’s sense of nature and some create important corridors

Recreation Resource

- Recreation Department has an active and varied program of activities and events
- Recreation Department manages activities at 7 baseball/softball fields, 9 soccer fields, 2 tennis courts, 1 outdoor basketball court, 7 playgrounds, 2 practice fields, 2 fishing areas, 1 swimming beach, 1 amphitheater, a skate park, and 3 picnic areas
- Schools also have fields and indoor recreation facilities
- Two Community Gardens sites – North Acton Community Gardens & Morrison Farm Community Gardens
- Major recreation sites include NARA Park, School Street Field, Veteran’s Field, Elm Street Fields, and Great Hill
- There is one golf course in town and two in adjacent towns

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:

Opportunities & Challenges¹⁶:



- Acton has an active and diverse recreation program
- National Park and Recreation Association (NRPA) standards would suggest additional tennis courts, baseball diamonds, soccer fields, picnic areas, neighborhood parks and playgrounds
- NARA Park is an important recreation and gathering site and meets NPRA standards for a “Community Park”
- Conservation Commission has identified and prioritized potential additional open space
- Funding is crucial for maintaining facilities and expanding programs
- Future of privately owned open spaces (golf course, etc.)
- Opportunities to create town-wide trail system using existing open spaces, additions, private open spaces, and sidewalks (see additional discussion in Circulation and Transportation summary)
- On-going efforts to assure access to recreation facilities for the diversity of all residents
- May be opportunities to expand use of some existing facilities
- Will there be sufficient recreation opportunities for an aging population

¹ Input collected in a variety of forums during Phase I, see *Emerging Vision and Goals for Acton’s Future*. ² Resident input from Town-wide Visioning Session I ³ Caption from child’s drawing from Town-wide Visioning Session I ⁴ From focus group with Acton’s Latino community ⁵ From 8th grade student survey ⁶ From focus group with representatives of Acton’s Chinese community ⁷ From focus group with representatives of Acton’s Indian community ⁸ 8th grade student survey ⁹ From a town-wide mail survey of Acton residents ¹⁰ identified as one of top three most valued features of town in focus group with representatives of Acton’s Latino community. ¹¹ From mini-visioning session with seniors ¹² From focus group with representatives of Acton’s Brazilian community ¹³ From roundtable discussion with Town Department Heads ¹⁴ From town-wide mail survey of all Acton residents ¹⁵ **Consultant documentation, based on review of previous studies, data collection, interviews, meetings, site visits.** ¹⁶ **Consultant recommendations, initial thoughts.**





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6 Community Facilities & Services

WANT: Acton Voices¹:



"Schools" were cited as among the top three "favorite things" about Acton.²

"We need to improve the senior center, provide more activities, better transportation, and opportunities for intergenerational interaction."³

"The needs of teens and active seniors are the most unmet."⁴

"It would make people who speak languages other than English at home, feel more comfortable and welcome if materials related to town services were translated. Also most immigrants are not familiar with the volunteer process and do not know what to do and how to enter the system."⁵

"We need full day Kindergarten for everyone, the lack of neighborhood schools, and some overcrowded classrooms are my concerns."⁶

"We need a place to hold cultural celebrations."⁷

"The town website should be kept up to date & we need a community bulletin board."⁸

"Allow all tax payers (including non-citizens) to vote on town issues."⁹

"There is an increasing demand for 'virtual' town services."¹⁰

"The Library, an important gathering space for the community, is facing a number of challenges including changes in technology and diversity of languages."¹¹

"Transportation, trash, senior services, sidewalks, parking, and sewer" were services most frequently mentioned as unmet.¹²

Schools were cited by 3/4 (75%) of respondents as being among Acton's three most important assets¹³



HAVE: Existing Conditions¹⁴:



- Major needs identified in past community plans have been fulfilled through the Parker-Damon school building, expansion of the junior high and high schools, new Public Safety Facility, and major expansion of Memorial Library.
- The five elementary schools, Grey Junior High School, Acton-Boxboro Regional High School, and the "Administration Building" have enough space for current and projected enrollments, which are relatively stable.
- The school facilities are in good to excellent condition, reflecting pro-active capital investment.
- Acton's Leadership Group (Town Manager, School Superintendent, Board of Selectmen, and Finance Committee) has kept the town's budgets relatively stable and balanced school and non-school priorities.

Acton's Town-Owned Buildings

Town-Owned Building	Gross Square Feet
Town Hall (expanded 1988)	24,144
Memorial Library (expanded 1998)	48,259
Public Safety Facility (2005)	26,033
Public Works	19,200
3 Fire Stations	15,688
Senior Center (1994)	6,704
Citizen's Library	2,008
3 other occupied buildings	10,516
5 vacant buildings	32,793
Total: 17 buildings	185,345

Source:
Municipal Properties Department

- Schools currently use about 68% of the tax levy (the amount raised on property taxes).
- The principal town buildings (Town Hall, Memorial and Citizens' Libraries, Public Safety Facility, three Fire Stations, Senior Center, Public Works) are in good to excellent condition.
- Acton has proactively invested in these buildings to keep them in good condition and reduce their energy use.
- Community Preservation Act funds have been used to improve Citizen's Library and the historic Windsor Building in West Acton.
- Memorial Library's circulation increased from 558,549 in 2007 to 666,353 in 2009, a 20% increase. The library is increasing its use of technology and provides materials in ten languages. 14,696 Actonians have library registrations. Approximately 600 meetings are held in the library each year.
- The Acton Water District supplies over 590 million gallons from its 22 wells. It currently meets all regulations for water quality and water conservation.
- The Water District has invested in a new treatment plant for its wells in North Acton, and it has been replacing old water mains that are in poor condition.
- Peak water demand is about 2.6 million gallons per day, which exceeds the safe yield of the wells, making summer watering restrictions necessary. The District has programs to encourage water conservation.
- Acton's wastewater system serves Kelly's Corner and South Acton (where the treatment plant is located) but 80% of residents and most of the town's businesses and municipal buildings are served by on-site septic systems, and a few shared systems or "package" wastewater plants.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:

Opportunities & Challenges¹⁵:

Acton's Schools

Building	Gross Square Feet
Acton Boxboro Regional High School (1964/expanded 2004)	390,000
RJ Grey Jr. High School (1955/expanded 2001)	144,280
Total, Grades 7-12 (incl. Boxboro)	534,280
Parker Damon Building (2001) (McCarthy Towne and Merriam Schools)	139,639
Luther Conant School (1970)	55,017
Douglas School (1965)	47,100
Gates School (1970)	53,933
Total, Grades K-6	295,689
Merriam Administration Building (1959)	37,123
Totals:	867,092

Acton Public Schools and Acton-Boxborough Regional School District

- The Fire Department has expressed the need for an additional fire station in North Acton, but unless the Fire Department staff and equipment are increased, one of the three existing stations would need to be closed.
- Departments at the Town Hall need more space. Creating a Town Hall Annex (possibly in the current fire station) could relieve the problem.
- People have expressed the desire for a new Senior Center located next to Nara Park in North Acton; the \$7 to \$8 million cost has been a challenge since it was proposed.
- Expansion of the sewer system to the Spencer-Tuttle-Flint Road area and West Acton (east of the railroad tracks) is a possible major investment that is being studied by the Wastewater Advisory Neighborhood Task Force.
- Continued investment in small to medium size improvements to schools and town buildings will avoid later larger improvements and continue to reduce energy use.
- Changes in demographics may influence the types of services needed and the way they are delivered (e.g. growing senior population with needs regarding health/wellness, transportation, and social activities; increasing ethnic diversity with cultural and linguistic needs; and a new generation with expectations about technology and concerns regarding future sustainability).

¹ Resident input, see Phase I Vision Emerging Vision & Goals for Acton's Future ² From town-wide Visioning Workshop I ³ From town-wide Visioning Workshop #2 ⁴ From town-wide mail survey of residents ⁵ From focus group with representatives of Acton's Latino community ⁶ From town-wide Visioning Workshop I ⁷ From focus group with representatives of Acton's Brazilian community ⁸ Focus group with representatives of Acton's Indian community ⁹ Focus group with representatives of Acton's Chinese community ¹⁰ Roundtable discussion with Town Department Heads ¹¹ Director of the Library, from roundtable discussion with Town Department Heads ¹² Responses to open-ended question in town-wide mail survey of Acton residents ¹³ From town-wide mail survey of all Acton residents ¹⁴ Consultant documentation, based on review of previous studies, data collection, interviews, meetings, site visits. ¹⁵ Consultant recommendations, initial thoughts.



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7 Circulation & Transportation

WANT: Acton Voices¹:

“Acton should provide more safe bicycle and walking trails/lanes and sidewalks.”²

“You can’t turn left in most places in town due to traffic congestion.”³

“There is a lack of public transportation and too much dependence on cars.”⁴

“Easy access to highways and commuter rail are important assets to the town.”⁵

“Expand parking at South Acton Train Station.”⁶

“I don’t like that there isn’t a traffic light near my house at the intersection. If there were, then driving would go a lot more smoothly.”⁷

“Build the sidewalk ALL along Main St., one end of town to the other.”⁸

“We need public transportation for those who cannot drive.”⁹

“One of my favorite things about Acton is the commuter rail (especially the “super express” from Acton to Porter Square).¹⁰”

“The senior van is limited in terms of when and where it goes; we need more public transportation.”¹¹

“Traffic safety is a serious obstacle to attracting customers.”¹²

Almost 1/2 (46.4%) of respondents cited traffic as one of Acton’s three most important challenges.¹³

HAVE: Existing Conditions¹⁴:

Transportation Facilities in Acton

- 166 miles of roadway and 21 miles of sidewalk, paths, and trails¹⁵
- 19,000 vehicles per day on Great Rd. near Pope St.¹⁶ and 10,000 vehicles per day on Main St. near Great Rd.¹⁷
- Midday Council on Aging Senior Van service for elderly residents and on-demand LRTA Road Runner paratransit service for residents with disabilities.
- South Acton Train Station (SATS) with 873 daily boardings on average¹⁸
- Newly implemented commuter shuttle between SATS and parking at West Acton Fire Station¹⁹

Moving Around Acton

- 22% of Acton residents work in Acton; 21% of Acton workers live in Acton.²⁰
- Growing sidewalk infrastructure with recent improvements around South Acton Train Station (SATS) and on Central St., Lower Prospect St., Great



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?:

Rd., High St., and Main St; additional Sidewalk Committee projects are planned.

- Most recent and planned roadway improvements are targeted at congestion hot spots and locations with safety issues.
- Town priorities for shared use path projects with federal funding include the Assabet River Rail Trail and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.²¹

Getting to and from Acton

- 28% of Acton residents work inside Route 128; 2% of Boston workers live in Acton.²²
- Route 2 west of Route 27 carries approximately 40,000 vehicles per day.²³
- SATS improvements are under design incorporating Acton's comments.

Preliminary Observations

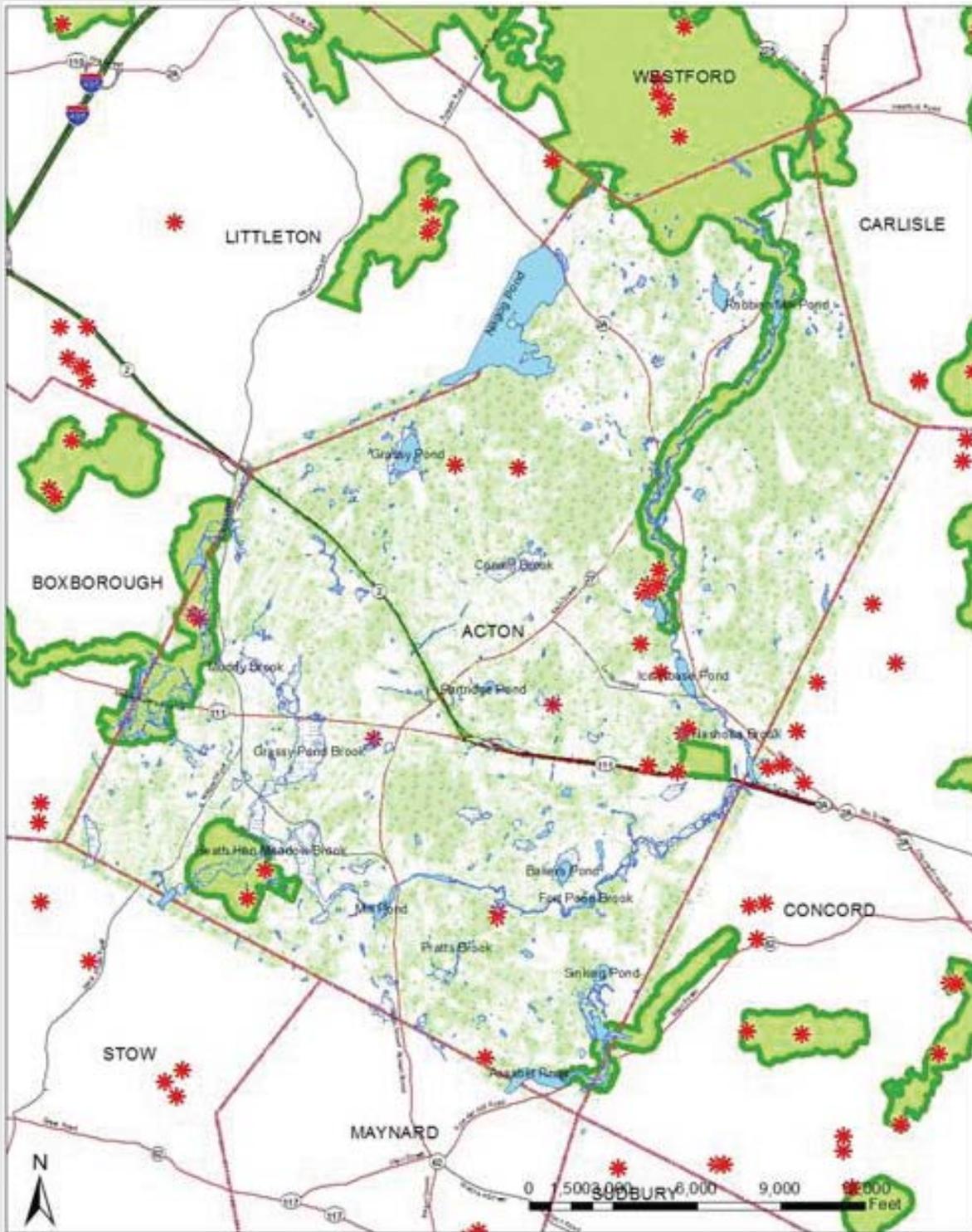
- Peak-period congestion continues to create long backups at major intersections and at the Concord Rotary. To bypass congestion, some commuters use local roads, including Piper Rd., Hosmer St., and School St.
- The town's engineering and highway departments manage a regular program of road and traffic flow improvements.
- The police department responds to resident concerns about speeding and uses portable speed monitoring equipment.
- Residents request town intervention to address speeding and through traffic on local roads; the town's method for addressing these concerns is more complaint-driven than systematic.
- Roadway improvements will not eliminate congestion; promoting alternatives to the car (include public transportation, walking, and bicycling) will become increasingly important.
- There is no standing bicycle advisory committee in Acton.

Opportunities & Challenges²⁴:

- With two significant shared use path projects in development, on-road bicycle accommodation should become a priority, including consideration for adding signs and lane markings to all improvement projects as appropriate.
- With limited resources for addressing resident concerns, the town can benefit from a more organized approach with public information and methods to set priorities that are fact-driven.
- Future studies should continue to target safety issues and commuter cut-through traffic, while considering environmental and cultural impacts of traffic improvements.

*Input collected in a variety of forums during Phase I, see **Emerging Vision and Goals for Acton's Future**.¹ Resident input² From resident survey session³ From Steering Committee minutes⁴ From Steering Committee minutes⁵ From resident survey⁶ From town-wide visioning session⁷ From 1st grade student, My Dreams for Acton survey⁸ From visioning session⁹ Response to open-ended question: "Which public service needs are unmet?" in a town-wide mail survey¹⁰ From focus group with representatives of Acton's Chinese community¹¹ Priority identified by seniors in a mini-visioning session¹² From a focus group with representatives of Acton's business community, Rotary Club¹³ From town-wide mail survey of all Acton residents¹⁴ **Consultant documentation, based on review of previous studies, data collection, interviews, meetings, site visits.**¹⁵ Town GIS, 2010¹⁶ MassDOT Traffic Volumes, 2006¹⁷ MassDOT Traffic Volumes, 2007¹⁸ MBTA Fitchburg Commuter Rail Line Improvement Project Alternatives Analysis Report, 2007¹⁹ Acton MinuteVan Rail Shuttle, 2010²⁰ U.S. Census, 2000²¹ Boston Region MPO Transportation Improvement Program Database, 2010²² U.S. Census, 2000²³ MassDOT Traffic Volumes, 2004²⁴ **Consultant recommendations, initial thoughts.***

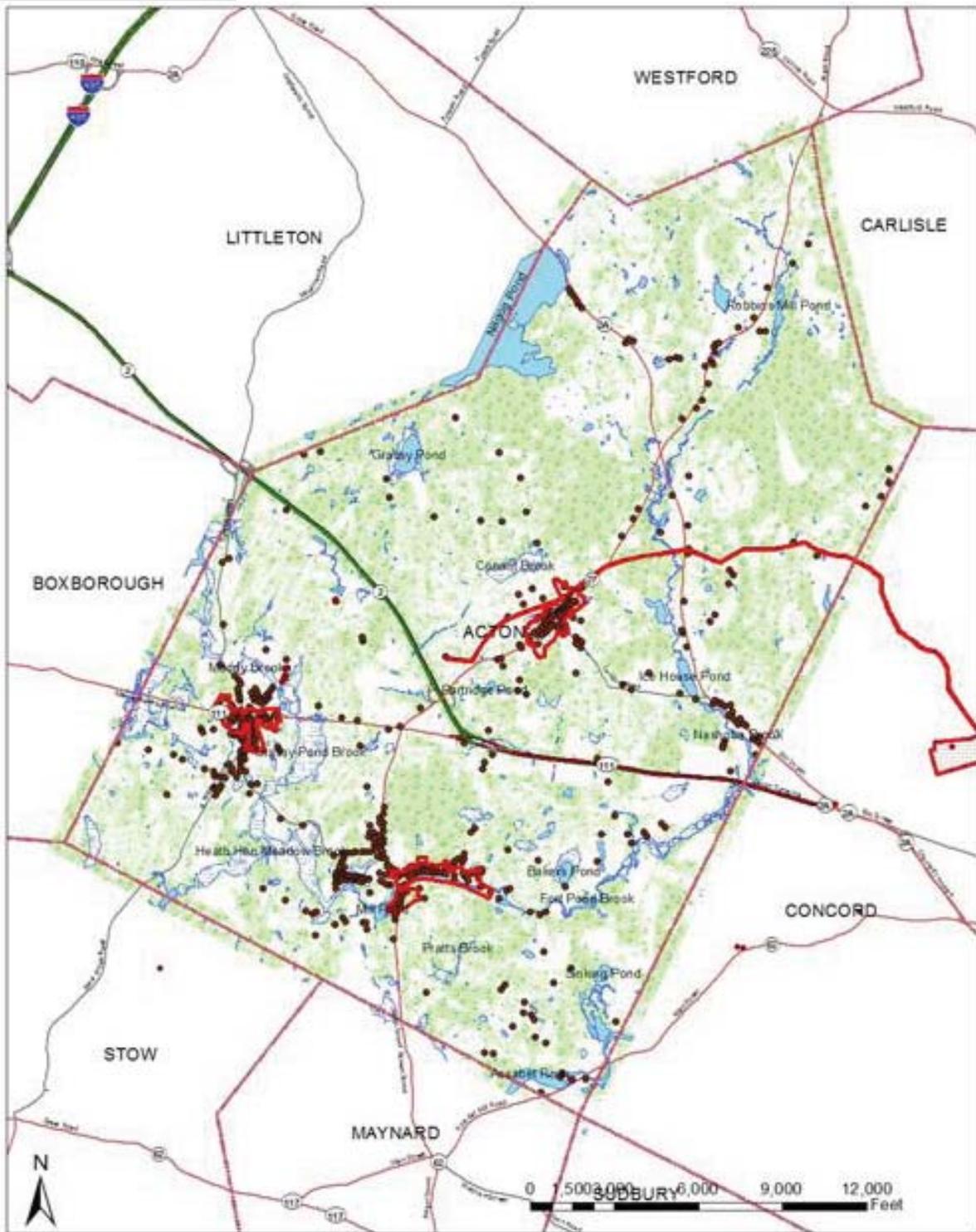
Natural Resources - Map Detail



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Planners Collaborative with Community Circle

Historic & Cultural Resources - Map Detail



Open Space & Recreation - Map Detail

