

CHAPTER 7: OTHER PROJECTS IN THE EAST ACTON VILLAGE PLANNING AREA

East Acton Village Green

On the northwestern corner of Concord Road and Great Road are two half-acre parcels that EAVPC is recommending to be turned into East Acton Village Green (“EAV Green”). The Town of Acton currently owns the parcels. These parcels have importance to the Town for the following reasons:

- Historically Significant
- Gateway to EAV
- Recreationally and Ecologically Significant

This section will speak to the importance of the EAV Green, the processes that EAVPC went through to arrive at the proposed EAV Green, the plan itself and the future of the EAV Green.

Why the EAV Green?

The one-acre area where the proposed EAV Green would be located has significant historic ties. The site was the location of the East Acton Railroad Depot. The Depot was part of the Lowell to Framingham railroad line and was founded in the late 1800’s. It was in operation until the mid-1930’s. The structure was torn down and the pieces were used to construct a house in South Acton. Figure XX is a photograph of the Depot before its demise. EAV still has a few structures remaining that have direct ties to the Depot. The telegraph pole shown in the photograph and railroad ties are still present on the site and should be preserved and maintained. The home of the last stationmaster (Arthur Raynor) of the Depot is located on the opposite side of Great Road from the EAV Green. This home is being restored by the current owner.

The EAV Green abuts Ice House Pond. The Pond was known for harvesting ice in the 1800’s through the 1950’s. At the east end of Ice House Pond, across Concord Road, was a Grist Mill that has been turned into a residence and can be seen from the proposed EAV Green.

The EAV Green is strategically located near the northwesterly edge of the village. These parcels would act as the gateway into the heart of the village. EAVPC is proposing that a sign be placed on the EAV Green that faces the east bound traffic on Great Road that would identify East Acton Village. Figure XX is a sample of a similar sign.

One of the two parcels is already zoned Agriculture, Recreation and Conservation (“ARC”). As part of the EAV plan, the second parcel is recommended to be rezoned from Limited Business to ARC. The EAV Green

abuts the Ice House Pond and is in close proximity to the Morrison Land, which is under review by the Town for future ARC uses. The proposed Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (“BFRT”) would bisect the EAV Green and the EAV Green integrates the proposed trail into its design but would not dependent on the BFRT being completed.

Lastly, in the residential survey and the focus groups, the participants overwhelmingly desired open space within the village. The EAV Green will allow EAV businesses to give their employees an outdoor place to eat their lunch in the warmer weather. Users of the BFRT can stop and rest before continuing down the trail or over to the village. Neighbors can simply stop and enjoy the pond views.

What was the Process?

EAVPC formed a subcommittee to review the possibility of re-establishing a Green on the corner of Concord Road and Great Road. The committee drafted design criteria and approached three landscape designers. The firm selected informed the committee that State grants could be available for the design work. The committee applied to the Commonwealth and received a \$5,000 grant for the design of the EAV Green. The Commonwealth named The Cecil Group (one of the three firms originally selected) as the preferred designer.

The committee worked with The Cecil Group to incorporate the criteria that the EAVPC felt were important. Specifically, the design had to include the following elements:

- Gateway to East Acton
- Scenic rest-stop
- Educational enlightenment:
 - History of EAV
 - Natural feature
- Low-water/low maintenance/low impact on landscaping
- Compatible with the proposed BRFT

What is the design for EAV Green?

The current plan for EAV Green is located at Exhibit XX. The plan calls for a blue stone area at the former location of the train depot that corresponds to the footprint of the depot. Three of the four corners of the blue stone area would be framed with granite slabs that would double as benches. The fourth corner would be an informational kiosk that could display information about EAV’s history and current events in EAV.

There would be short walking paths that would connect the sidewalk along Concord Road, the blue stone area and the BFRT. A few granite benches would

be located along the paths. The paths would be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The EAV Green would only occupy approximately 25% of the site and would be located next to Concord Road and Ice House Pond. The remainder of the site would be undeveloped with the exception of the rail bed, which may be converted to the BFRT.

What next?

The Cecil Group estimated that if the Town contracted out all the construction work for the EAV Green, the cost would be approximately \$100,000. Members of EAVPC have been working with local EAV businesses to make donations or donations in kind to reduce the overall cost. As of this writing, a significant portion of the costs have been pledged from these businesses. Other potential funding sources include the Community Preservation Act, private donations, State grants, etc.

Since the Town of Acton owns the parcels, the final EAV Green design would require submission to the Board of Selectman for their approval. Also, because a portion of the EAV Green encroaches on the former rail line, which is now owned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, approvals from the State would be required before any work can begin. There is no current timetable for the construction of the EAV Green, but it is EAVPC's desire to see the EAV Green completed in the next few years.

The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail

As described in the History Chapter, East Acton was once served by railroads, with a station located near the intersection of Concord and Great Roads. The tracks ran all the way from Framingham to Lowell and were used as recently as the early 1990's to bring supplies to Rex Lumber and Acorn Structures. After the tracks were no longer in use, ownership of the railroad right of way was transferred to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Executive Office of Transportation and Construction.

Now there is a plan to convert the unused railroad bed to a multi-use, paved path that will run the full 22 miles from Framingham to Lowell (near Cross Point Towers). It is currently referred to as "the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail" (BFRT) in honor of Bruce N. Freeman, a late State Representative from Chelmsford who championed the creation of this rail trail. Completion of the portion of the BFRT from Lowell through Westford is scheduled for 2004.

The Acton portion of the BFRT railroad bed is approximately 4.6 miles long. It begins in the north near the intersection of Main Street (Route 27) and Route 225 at the Carlisle town line. It then runs roughly along Main Street south to Great

Road, where it curves slightly southeast through East Acton to the Concord town line at Route 2. The majority of the BFRT in Acton is very near Nashoba Brook. For details on the proposed design and construction of the BFRT in Acton, see the comprehensive *Acton Rail Trail Feasibility Study*, recently drafted for the Town of Acton by Fay, Spofford, and Thorndike.

EAVPC strongly supports the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and sees it as a significant transportation, recreation, and historic asset for Acton and EAV. The main reasons are as follows.

First, there is strong support for the BFRT among residents and business owners. When East Acton residents and Town Meeting attendees were asked to rate their potential rail trail use, the majority said they expected to use the trail occasionally to very frequently. Almost half (48%) of East Acton residents said they expected to use the trail “Very Frequently.” Among the 46 respondents to the business survey, only two expected the BFRT to have an unfavorable effect on their business or property; 23 expected it to have a favorable effect.

Second, the BFRT will bring increased pedestrians and bicyclists to EAV and is an important part of making EAV more bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly.

Third, the BFRT will provide residents an important and healthy route to travel to destinations in EAV (such as Nashoba Brook, Ice House Pond, the Morrison Land, and all the businesses in EAV), destinations along the southeastern part of Great Road and the northern part of Main Street (such as all the businesses along Great Road, Veterans Memorial Field, Nashoba Brook Conservation Area, the Bay Circuit Trail, and the North Acton Recreation Area), and eventually destinations to the north as far as Lowell. Once the Route 2 rotary is replaced, the BFRT is planned cross Route 2, allowing users of the trail to travel south to West Concord, Sudbury, and Framingham. It is particularly important to ensure that the BFRT safely crosses Route 2, because then it provides a convenient connection from East Acton to the West Concord train station, allowing people to begin and end their daily commute by walking or biking instead of driving. In addition to simply transportation, the BFRT will provide excellent recreational opportunities in East Acton; the trail is being designed to be appropriate for multiple non-motorized uses, including biking, walking, roller blading, cross-country skiing, etc.

Fourth, because it bisects the East Acton Village Green, the BFRT is a significant and highly visible part of the Green. The Green will be designed to provide a convenient place for people to stop and rest, learn about EAV history through the kiosk displays, and enjoy Ice House Pond.

Specific recommendations on how the BFRT fits into the EAV Plan can be found in the sections on Transportation and Infrastructure, Environment, and Village Character and Housing.

ACRONYMS

ACT	Acton Conservation Trust
AWD	Acton Water District
BFRT	Bruce Freeman Rail Trail
BOH	Board of Health
BOS.....	Board of Selectmen
ConsCom	Conservation Committee
EAVO	East Acton Village Organization (proposed)
EAVPC	East Acton Village Planning Committee
EDC.....	Economic Development Committee
Engineering	Engineering Department
Highway.....	Highway Department
MassHighway	Massachusetts Highway Department
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSRC.....	Open Space and Recreation Committee
PB	Planning Board
Planning.....	Planning Department
TAC	Transportation Advisory Committee
TM	Town Meeting

GLOSSARY
(to be included)

**APPENDIX
(to be included)**