

Acton 2020
BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

HOUSING WORKSHOP: DRAFT AGENDA

- 7:00 – 7:30 Introduction and Welcome
powerpoint (information and explanation of process and purpose)
handouts
“experts” - ??
question & answers
- 7:45– 9:15 Small Discussion Groups
role play
mapping
- 9:15 – 9:30 Large Group Reconvene
Share Conclusions
Next Steps

BREAK OUT GROUPS

- 7:45 – 8:15 **Introductions**
Participants assigned a role play partner & a role
Participants given **time to review and discuss 2 handouts:**
a) a 2-3 page summary: HIGHLIGHTS (See DRAFT) from the Inventory (this information will also be presented in the intro powerpoint
b) a ROLE GUIDE with the most recent (Phase II) goal and objectives language and how this goal might relate to the topic and potential trade-offs + list of questions for discussion –(see DRAFT)
- 8:15 – 9:15 **Discussion of Questions:** Role play questions, General Questions & Concluding Questions (*6 questions would mean 10 minutes per question, mapping exercise will take more time*)

TO DO

- Decide on goal perspectives
 - Which ones?
 - How much “script” information should be provided to participants?
- Can participants see each other’s scripts (does everyone have access to everyone else’s role guide?)
- Decide which questions to answer “in character”
- Decide on questions and their order

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yellow = consultant work to be done

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

HOUSING: ROLE-PLAYING GUIDE

The following represent the 5 most relevant goals to the topic. This will result in 5 role play teams (pairs) per group (10 participants per group), if more people join the group then there will be 3 members to a role on some).

ROLE-PLAYING PERSPECTIVES

Instructions: *Read through the goal and relate objectives provided below. It is your assignment to discuss this goal with your role partner and come up with ideas regarding what your position would be if you only had this goal in mind when making decisions regarding housing in Acton. Then use these positions when answering the role play questions. It's OK to make extreme arguments in order to exaggerate your points. The purpose here is to illustrate the diversity in points of view and the potential trade offs of decisions.*

ROLE 1: Preserve Town Character

GOAL: We feel strongly about preserving and enhancing what makes Acton special and unique, including its rural characteristics, historic buildings and landscapes, and its village centers.

Objective 1: Preserve rural characteristics and open space

Objective 2: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes

Objective 3: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.

Objective 4: Preserve and enhance village centers

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Housing, in its various aspects, is a key contributor to existing neighborhood character and its preservation and /or enhancement. Population attributes such as income, age and ethnic/racial diversity also contribute to neighborhood character.

e.g. "building multi-family housing goes completely against the rural character of the town" e.g. "building more single family housing gobbles up our open space"

MORE??

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BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

ROLE 2: Support Inclusion and Diversity

GOAL: We value our diversity in all its forms, reflecting a range of ages and socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. We wish to foster respect, promote interaction and actively encourage a wide variety of individuals to live, work, and play in our community.

Objective 1: Support all ages

Objective 2: Support households of all income levels

Objective 3: Embrace cultural diversity

Objective 4: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community

SCRIPT GUIDE:

The price of housing is critical in creating and maintaining affordable housing. Use of 40B provisions to create such housing is possible, as is new local zoning bylaws that would require “inclusionary” housing in new developments. 40B is the state law that allows developers to obtain a comprehensive permit to create housing over-riding local zoning provisions, provided that 25% of the new units are “affordable” according to state and federal guidelines. Creation of more rental housing would also contribute to the goal of creating more affordable housing. Mixes of housing types in terms of architectural styles, square footage of homes and lots, numbers of bedrooms, and types of structure (single- or multi-family) would better enable diversity in population (ages, income, and household size).

e.g. providing different types of housing allows different types of people to live in our town, including our elders, our children, our town staff and teachers

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ROLE 3: Maintain and Improve Financial Well-being of the Town

GOAL: We believe it is critical for us to sustain and strengthen our town's financial well-being. This includes commercial and economic development that reflects the long-term goals of both businesses and residents of the community.

Objective 1: Improve existing commercial areas

Objective 2: Promote economic development that supports our other goals

Objective 3: Achieve a balance of services and taxes

Objective 4: Support the ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Population and housing are the major factors driving the overall need for Town services and facilities, and consequently the biggest determinant of the financial equation.

e.g. Providing housing with a fewer number of bedrooms tends to attract smaller families and/or families without children which have a positive fiscal impact (place less pressure on the schools)

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BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

ROLE 4: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

As Acton residents, we recognize that our health and well-being depend on protecting the web of life of which we are a part. Therefore, it is vital that we live and work here in a manner that supports that web and the well-being of people everywhere, including future Acton citizens.

Objective 1: To protect the quality and quantity of the water that cycles through our ground water, surface water, drinking water, waste water, and storm water systems.

Objective 2: To reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins in our environment.

Objective 3: To reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from residential, commercial, industrial, and municipal uses.

Objective 4: To move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.

SCRIPT GUIDE:

The energy efficiency of housing is becoming increasingly important as communities, the nation and the world are increasingly concerned about critical environmental issues such as climate change and use of sustainable energy resources. Housing is especially important because typically over fifty percent (50%) of energy used in all buildings is used in homes.

e.g. "Smaller homes use less energy, we should be promoting this in the interest of being more energy conscious".

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BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

ROLE 5: Preserve and Enhance Town-owned Assets

We value our Town assets and wish to preserve and enhance them. These include our open spaces, schools, municipal properties and facilities.

Objective 1: Protect Town-owned open space

Objective 2: Support excellence in schools

Objective 3: Maintain municipal properties and facilities

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Managing and expanding publically owned housing in Acton is an important part of maintaining town assets. Currently the Acton Housing Authority owns and operates 158 units of public housing, and is responsible for managing the placement of subsidy-eligible residents in 170 units of privately owned housing. Keeping these publically and privately owned units up to nationally recognized standards is important. It is also important for the Town to maintain and increase its capacity to oversee the development of new affordable housing developments, and to monitor and maintain the affordability restrictions on privately owned affordable homeownership and rental units.

e.g “We need to maintain our existing supply of “affordable housing” and have the responsibility to continue to find ways of providing more both in order to provide housing for lower income individuals as well as to increase our 40B percentage so that we may have more control over development in our town.”

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BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ROLE PLAY QUESTIONS. Begin with “staged debate” in order to highlight variety of points of views and potential tradeoffs . Answer the following questions “in character” (think about what representing your goal in its extreme would mean).

1. Who lives in Acton? Who would like to live in Acton? How can we support our goals of supporting our elderly, range in incomes, teachers, police officers, etc. through the provision of housing?
2. What is the effect of new housing (market and affordable) on schools, town facilities and services, traffic, and tax rate.

GENERAL QUESTIONS. Specific questions for each topic AND use of map with question which included issue of geographic location. Answer the following questions as yourself (incorporating all goal “characters”, working in the town’s best interest)

3. What kind of housing is missing?
 - a. Is more housing development desirable? If so, what kind ?
 - b. Who would this housing be for?
 - c. What are ways of ensuring that the housing goes to the people it is intended for?
 - d. Where is the best place to put what kind of housing?

USE MAP AND PROPS

4. How do we reconcile new housing development on currently open parcels or farmland with the goals of preserving open space, protecting our remaining farms, and preserving/enhancing town character? (one example might be farmland on Upper Prospect near Ace Hardware which is currently part of overlay district
5. What are possible measures to consider which could encourage or discourage certain housing types or impose higher design review standards?
6. Housing that is affordable versus 'affordable housing'
The state defines 'affordable housing' in one way, and households deciding if they can afford to live in Acton define it a different way.
 - a. How should the town view its various housing obligations: legal ones to the state, moral ones to the people of Acton, and a self-interested view of

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BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

- what mix of housing will create the diversity of residents that would make the town a more workable and interesting and varied place to live?
- b. Can/should the Town agree on a formal affordable housing plan that would allow us to limit 40B developments to the areas that work best for the town?.
 - c. What would it take to make existing housing affordable, by the state's definition, rather than building a lot of new housing? This question can be considered in terms of legal technicalities as well as in terms of having these homes be in good condition and well located such that the cost to maintain them, pay for utilities, commute to work, etc. is affordable, too.

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS (same for all three burning issues)

- What would you say are your main concerns regarding this topic following our group's conversation?
- What are your main objectives regarding this topic for Acton?
- Please suggest up to 3 remedies that would help to achieve your objectives

VOTE: prioritize with dots

RELEVANT REFERENCES

To Live in Acton report

PROPS

Maps with developable lots, what else ??

Color-coded legos representing different kinds of housing (e.g. single – family, condo, apartments, senior, etc)

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BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: ROLE PLAYING GUIDE

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ROLE-PLAYING PERSPECTIVES

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Financial Well-being, e.g. “by increasing our economic development we will increase the tax base and have more money to pay for our essential and desired town facilities and services”

Town Character, e.g. “more economic development may negatively affect the rural feel of the Town”

Community Gathering, e.g. “having more places to go for shopping and for dining will create more of a sense of community as residents will stay in Town and there will be more opportunities to run into each other

Environmental Sustainability, e.g. “providing more goods and services and even some jobs nearby may result in decreasing people’s driving distance which will be better for the environment”

Connections, e.g.” providing more establishments in town may help support the use of alternative modes of transportation such as walking, biking and the town shuttle”

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ROLE PLAY QUESTIONS. Begin with “staged debate” in order to highlight variety of points of views and potential tradeoffs . Answer the following questions “in character” (think about what representing your goal in its extreme would mean).

What kind of a community do you envision Acton being? One that includes availability and variety in places to shop for food, clothing, home furnishings, home improvement, restaurants, coffee shops, places of employment OR one that is more bucolic and where one needs to travel to other communities for goods and services?

What kind of economic development do we want?
Why (to provide more goods and services, to provide more choices for places to go, to provide opportunities for casual interaction, for job opportunities, for increasing the tax base in order to pay for public services)?

GENERAL QUESTIONS. Specific questions for each topic AND use of map with question which included issue of geographic location. Answer the following questions as yourself (incorporating all goal “characters”, working in the town’s best interest)

Where do you work?

Where you shop and dine?

Where would the different kinds of economic development be best located?

What are some obstacles to economic development?

What are some possible trade-offs or negative effects to mitigate and/or avoid?

How can we use economic development to positively impact residential taxes?

How can we ensure that any new development or redevelopment is in keeping with Acton’s town character?

HERE OR SUSTAINABILITY ????

Density to promote commercial and community vitality within and near villages

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Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

Many of our planning ideas are about how to concentrate new development in to the existing centers. What really makes that transition work? When is in-fill development a good idea and what can we do to encourage in-fill development. When is in-fill development a bad idea because it fundamentally changes patterns of development and land use that contribute to our perception of town character?

CONCLUDING QUESTIONS (same for all three burning issues)

- What would you say are your main concerns regarding this topic following our group's conversation?
- What are your main objectives regarding this topic for Acton?
- Please suggest up to 3 remedies that would help to achieve your objectives

VOTE: prioritize with dots

RELEVANT REFERENCES

PROPS

Maps

Use _____ to indicate desired locations + type / kind of economic development

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BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

SUSTAINABILITY: ROLE PLAYING GUIDE

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ROLE-PLAYING PERSPECTIVES

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Environmental Sustainability, e.g. "Providing alternative methods of getting around town (other than the car) will reduce toxins in the environment"

Community Gathering, e.g. "Having people walk, bike and taking the town shuttle may create more a sense of community as there are more opportunities for casual encounters"

Diversity, e.g. "Providing public transportation options supports teens and seniors to get around as well as individuals who do not own cars (or who cannot afford to own more than one)"

Financial Well-being, e.g. "How much is all this going to cost and is it worth it?"

Connections, e.g. "providing better physical connections (e.g. sidewalks, bike paths) may contribute to strengthening the social ties in our neighborhoods."

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

ROLE PLAY QUESTIONS. Begin with “staged debate” in order to highlight variety of points of views and potential tradeoffs . Answer the following questions “in character” (think about what representing your goal in its extreme would mean).

Traffic. What is it that really rankles people about the life of cars in Acton, and can we do anything about it? Are traffic issues more about safety and predictability about getting things done and less about the speed of getting from one place to another?

Testing the Value of Density as a planning tool

a) A lot of recent literature about suburban planning seems to be about the ecological and other negative consequences of sprawl (low density housing chewing up open space), and the value of density (concentrations of people and activity approaching urban levels allows for more human interaction, and less use of energy and land and cars). What can we do to change the economic incentives and regulatory requirements so that developers are motivated to do in-fill development and not sprawl development in Acton?

a. Density vs Sprawl in primarily residential areas

One zoning tool Acton has used to encourage preservation of open space while still creating residential developments is cluster zoning (single family homes) and Planned Conservation Residential Communities (PCRC, which allows up to four dwelling units/building). Has that been successful? [from von Hoffman, Wrestling with Growth in Acton, Massachusetts (Jan 2010), “ many opponents of growth in Acton dislike the law because they feel that it increases the number of allowable dwellings by allowing developers to count wetlands, on which wetland restricts prohibit development, in calculating their land-to-housing unit ratios.” p. 20-21]

GENERAL QUESTIONS. Specific questions for each topic AND use of map with

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Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

question which included issue of geographic location. Answer the following questions as yourself (incorporating all goal “characters”, working in the town’s best interest)

How can we love cars and hate traffic: Getting Around Acton

How often do you walk? Why and where do you walk (exercise, destination,)

How safe is it to walk or bike in Acton?

Do we have the density to make shuttles/buses work?

How often do you car pool?

What kinds of things can we do to reduce traffic congestion?

Where do you go on a frequent basis by car (which route) that you would choose to go with another mode if it were available/accessible?

USE MAP --- what are the main locations and/or routes that should be priority for sidewalk/bike improvements and/or public transportation (USE COLOR CODED PIPE CLEANERS TO INDICATE MODE NEEDED)

What are some obstacles to the use of alternative modes of transportation?

Walk	Train
Bicycle	Other?
Shuttle	

What can we do to encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation?

Walk	Train
Bicycle	Other?
Shuttle	

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Acton 2020
BURNING ISSUES: Role-Playing

RELEVANT REFERENCES

PROPS: Maps with color –coded pipe cleaners

Do we have info such as:

Areas of most congestion?

Location of existing sidewalks /bike paths?

Shuttle route?