

From: [Margaret Woolley Busse](#)
To: [Jim Snyder-Grant](#); ["Daphne Politis"](#)
Cc: [Roland Bartl](#); [Kristin Alexander](#)
Subject: RE: Thoughts on what we need to know more about.
Date: Saturday, February 19, 2011 10:06:20 AM

Ok, here are some of my additional comments below (mine are in the more muted blue color; Celia's are in the brighter blue).FYI, I had a phone conversation with Daphne yesterday about changes that needed to be made in the Highlights document.

From: Celia Kent [mailto:celia.kent@gmail.com]
Sent: Friday, February 18, 2011 11:45 PM
To: Daphne Politis
Cc: Margaret Woolley Busse; Roland Bartl; Kristin Alexander
Subject: Fwd: Thoughts on what we need to know more about.

I've added a few more questions under Jim's categories below (I'm running out of steam so I hope these are coherent), and I especially echo the question about what and where are the success stories that we can learn from?

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From: **Jim Snyder-Grant** <jimsg@newview.org>
Date: Wed, Feb 16, 2011 at 8:53 PM
Subject: Fwd: Thoughts on what we need to know more about.
To: Acton 2020 Committee <acton2020@acton-ma.gov>, Daphne Politis <daphne@community-circle.com>, Jim Purdy <jpurdy@thecollaborative.com>

We mentioned this rant at tonight's meeting. If you have more questions, get them to Daphne by Friday Feb 18.

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From: **Jim Snyder-Grant** <jimsg@newview.org>
Date: Fri, Feb 11, 2011 at 2:29 PM
Subject: Thoughts on what we need to know more about.
To: Margaret Woolley Busse <bussehome@comcast.net>, Daphne Politis <daphne@community-circle.com>, Jim Purdy <jpurdy@thecollaborative.com>, Roland Bartl <rbartl@acton-ma.gov>, Kristin Alexander <kalexander@acton-ma.gov>

(This was supposed to be thought through and written and sent out yesterday, but I had the unfortunate delay of spending most of the day getting our neighborhood internet infrastructure working again.)

What I would want to know more about to help find committee resolution on burning issues?

*** Residential development:

-More about water resource planning impact on additional homes: is it

more accurate to think of the impact of additional housing on water infrastructure and supply as a linear function of numbers (more people is fine because more revenue comes in); or as a series of step functions (over this many people or this much water and we hit the very expensive additional cost of securing additional supply), or as a risk-curve (we don't know when we will hit hard limits and risks, but the less water we need to supply, the less the risk).

-More about financial impact: are there studies that people trust that use local numbers to model the fiscal impact of more residential impact? What sort of planning assumptions would need to shift for the predicted school population curve to go up not down? At what school-age population, if any, would the school budget actually be able to come down?

-What techniques, if any, have actually worked in different towns (preferably in Massachusetts) to slow residential development, in such a way that open space is preserved, traffic concerns abate, and the ability of residents of all incomes and ages to stay in town are preserved (ie - taxes don't shoot way up to accomplish the slowdown)?

-What techniques, if any, have worked in Massachusetts town to provide for affordable housing via reuse and deed restrictions rather than new development? And if this happened worked yet, what ideas are worth exploring? (A simpler version: if I deed restrict my house to keep the resale value within affordable limits, and I have a low-enough income, does my house count towards Acton's state-mandated 10%?)

- About re-use - are there models for funding renovation of older housing stock to improve it's energy efficiency and make it more attractive for low-income families who can benefit from the lower utility costs? Re-using is a sustainability principle.

--I think knowing how all of our neighboring towns have fared with housing over the last 30-50 years vis a vis Acton will be very telling. If Acton is an aberration within these towns, that will be saying something about Acton and its policies, but if it's kept pace, then that tells a different story. Historic and geographic context is VERY important for this discussion. So we need to make sure we have all this data at our fingertips. Here is just a brainstorm—we need both historical and geographical comparisons (I think we have most of this already).

- population growth
- taxes, residential vs. commercial, tax rate
- size of schools vs overall population
- % in private schools
- number of household units, and what types of units (single family, two family, multi-family etc.)
- average number of persons per household

*** What kind of economic development do we want?

Don't have many specific questions here. I'd mostly like to see development that allows residents who currently commute to work here,

so I guess I'd be paying attention to what sorts of jobs people that live here have, and how to attract those businesses here; also, how to capture some more of those shoppers that live here but go far away for shopping that they would rather do locally. I am personally not very engaged by the detailed technical questions about what actually succeeds in attracting desired business here (and repelling undesired businesses), and I am hoping that between PC and the EDC and other resources we can learn what we need to write a decent plan.

--One kind of question we'll want to ask our participants is what kind of towns would we want to emulate, in terms of the commercial development they might have. In this vein, I think our experts should be perhaps prepared to share any thoughts they might have on towns that Acton could become like with the right mix of zoning, incentives, etc. How does one attract a big employer (e.g., like IBM in Littleton) or little mom and pop shops? What kind of zoning inhibits fast food chains and big box stores (if we don't want those)? How important are sewers, at least in certain areas of town, to economic development?

*** Why do we love cars & hate traffic?

What low- to medium-density towns have made a transition away from more and more cars? How did they do that?

Are there detailed studies that show what suburban people mean when they say there is 'too much traffic'? What exactly is stressful about it, and what municipal interventions act successfully to relieve that stress?

A question that relates to all topics is how do new streets get created? I don't mean just streets in a development that give access to the houses in the development - I mean real street patterns that are interwoven into the street infrastructure of the town. The town developed (in terms of residential and commercial and industrial activity) along certain major roads, and often crossroads are points of important activity. All new development still seems to rely on this same infrastructure - these developments are often self-contained nodules off the main old road and are single-use (e.g. residential or office parks but not a mix). I just don't understand what the process for building new Town roads is...Roads that can have retail, business, residences, corners and intersections etc. would it be a matter of the Town developing a road plan and then seeking to purchase the land necessary to construct these roads or negotiating with a developer to do it as part of a new development (so that it might get built in phases).

Also what kind of changes can we make on 2A given that it's a state road? Similar question for Rt 27. It seems to me that we really have to come to an understanding of what we want these roads to be like because they are like the backbone on which are town rests.

Scanning these, it seems that in general I'm looking for us all to learn about success stories from elsewhere, preferably from towns that we can understand as having somewhat similar issues, constraints, and resources as Acton. This is a real area of ignorance for me that I am

looking to the help of Planner's Collaborative to fill in the gaps.

--How much do sidewalks cost? How much do bike paths cost? How much room is needed to put in sidewalks and/or bike paths? How much room do Acton's streets have?

--What can be done to encourage more biking, besides actually creating the bike paths? What have other communities done to do this (public outreach campaigns, bike parking stations, etc.)