

Acton 2020

BURNING ISSUES: Highlight Sheets

HOUSING HIGHLIGHTS

Key Points to Consider

Population

- Population growth has slowed in recent years. It has been reduced to about 0.7% per year from 2000 to 2010, from about 1.4% per year from 1990 to 2000.
- There have been and will continue to be significant shifts in the age and ethnic structures of Acton. The white population decreased in its share of the total from 88% to 83%, while the Asian population increased from 9 to 14% of the total between 2000 and 2010.
- Acton's population is highly educated.
- Expected continued slow population growth (of about 0.04% per year) is likely to create a market for about 500 new housing units by 2020 and an additional 400 units by 2030. This will be an addition of almost 6% (by 2020), and 10% (by 2030) to the estimated 8963 housing units now in Acton.

Housing and Households

- There has been a shift in housing construction from 4 and 5 bedroom units to 2 to 3 bedroom units. This is likely to continue, as average household size is expected to remain relatively small (2.50 in 2010 and 2.51 in 2020 and decrease to 2.40 in 2030).

- The fastest growing category of households are those headed by females with children under age 18, although this is not a major category of households (accounting for about 4% of all households).

Existing Housing Stock

- Seventy-six percent of Acton's housing stock has been built in the last 50 years.
- Acton's housing vacancy rate is low; about 3% of the total units are vacant.
- Acton's housing stock is predominately single-family detached units.
- Seventy-five percent of Acton's housing is owner-occupied.

Tenure

- The average length of stay for a household in owner-occupied units is 17 years.
- The average length of stay for a household in renter-occupied units is 7 years.

Housing Market

- Since 2000 773 residential building permits have been issued.
- In 2010 the average selling price of a single-family home was \$498,750. The average selling price of a condominium unit was \$280,000.

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- About 5% of Acton’s housing stock is sold each year. This has averaged about 400 sales per year, but has fallen in recent years owing to the economic downturn.

Housing and Land Use

- Acton has a moderate (meaning between 2 and 4 dwelling units per acre) overall housing density of about 0.4 acre per housing unit.
- At current and projected rates of residential growth Acton is expected to come close to its estimated build-out capacity of 10,200 housing units based on existing zoning (within 93% by 2020 and 97% by 2030).

Housing Affordability

- Seven and two-tenths percent (7.2%) of Acton’s housing stock is classified as affordable.*
- Between 1998 and 2010, 375 units of affordable housing have been created, a rate of 31 per year.*

Other Issues

- Residential uses pay 87% of all property taxes in Acton.
- Because of its moderate housing density (1/2 acre lots on average) and relatively low level of public transportation, Acton is a very automobile dependent town. Average vehicle ownership is about 2.5 vehicles per household.



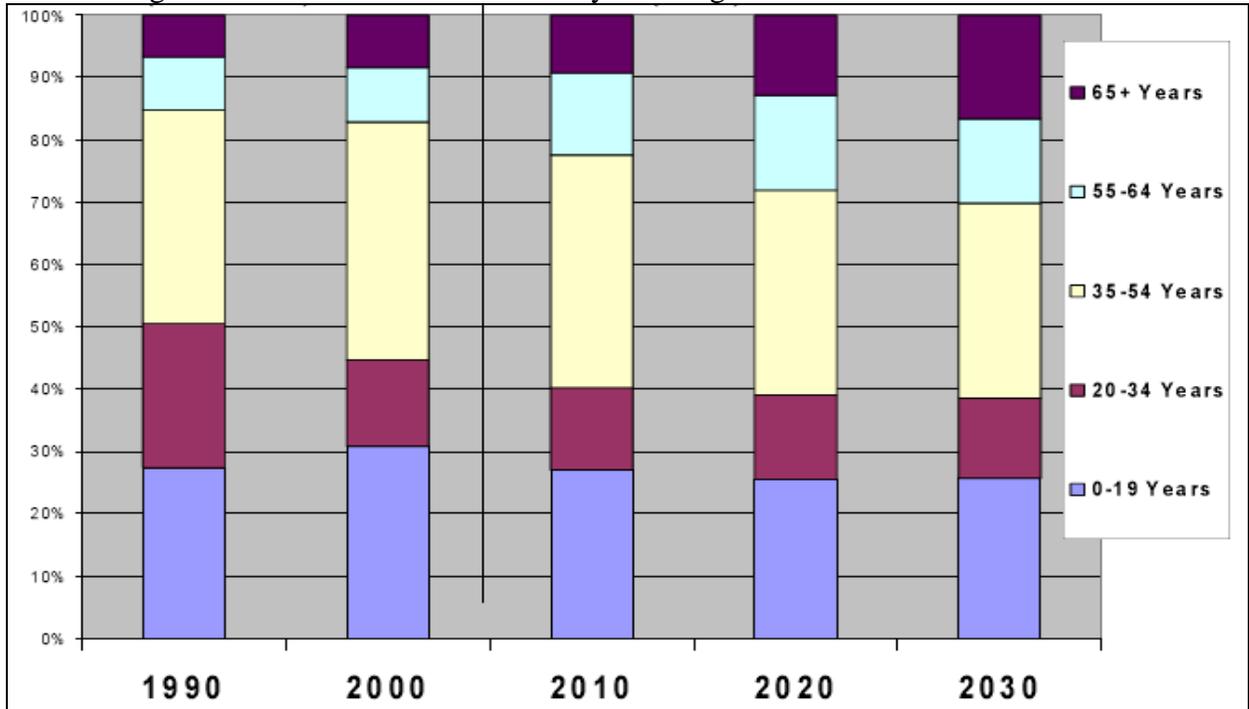
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* See definition of “affordable” on page 4.

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Figure 1.3: Relative Shifts in Life Cycle Categories from 1990 to 2030



Sources: U.S. Census of Population, Acton Town Census for 2010 and MAPC for future years.

Demographic shifts in age categories will be significant for town services and facilities and housing. Elderly population is expected to grow substantially, while school age children will decline slightly in numbers.

Table 1.8: Number of Housing Units, by Size in 2010

Type (Size) of Structure	Units in Structure	% of Housing Stock
One Unit – Detached	5,433	61
One Unit – Attached	782	9
Two Units	196	2
Three or Four Units	266	3
Five to Nineteen Units	1,168	13
Twenty to Forty-Nine Units	708	8
Fifty or More Units	410	5

Source: Claritas¹ Estimates adjusted by Planners Collaborative based on the U. S. Census of Housing.

Acton is predominately a single-family detached housing unit town. Sixty-one percent (61%) of Acton’s housing stock is estimated to be in single-family detached units in 2010.

¹ Claritas is a proprietary data provider.

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Opportunities and Challenges posed by Existing Conditions

Acton is a very desirable place to live because of its accessible location, reputable schools and other municipal services, and the high quality of its housing stock. Acton is however an expensive place to live, requiring relatively high household incomes to maintain the quality of the existing housing stock, to cover transportation costs, and pay the property taxes needed to support good quality town facilities and services.

- Creating affordable housing² is both a challenge and an opportunity to retain residents
- It is a challenge to get renters to stay longer than 7 years on average.
- Building up residential densities in and around village centers is very desirable because of the greater housing choice opportunities that will be created, the increased social interaction that will result, and the infrastructure costs that will be reduced.
- Acton needs to work to ensure that new housing that is created matches likely demographic changes, particularly with regard to the Town's aging profile.
- Residential growth must be matched to town infrastructure and services capacities.
- Effort is needed to ensure that new housing will contribute to maintaining the overall existing character (look and feel) of the town.
- Creating moderately priced market-rate housing while holding down municipal expenses to maintain or lower property tax rates will be challenging.

² Affordable Housing is defined in Massachusetts by Statute (M.G.L. Chapter 40B, Sections 20-23), as housing for households with incomes not exceeding 80% of the metropolitan area median income, and requires that housing to restrict rents or home prices for a specific period of time, generally in perpetuity. These households are designated as "low and moderate income." The price range of affordable homes is currently \$140,000-175,000. Deed riders restrict the future re-sales of these properties to other income eligible families. Furthermore, housing is considered affordable if it does not consume more than 38% of gross household monthly income. There may be some properties in Acton that are valued at these low prices but unless they are deed restricted for income eligible families, they can neither be counted toward the Town's Statutory 10% Housing goal under Chapter 40B, nor officially termed Affordable Housing. [Adapted from the Acton Community Housing Corporation (ACHC) Website.]