

Goals and Objectives & Preliminary Strategies: DRAFT 1

The following is a draft of the Revised Goals and Objective with associated proposed strategies. The strategies are based on input from the public, the Committee and Town Staff, and the Consultant Team.

GOAL 1: Preserve Town Character

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 1.1: Preserve rural characteristics and open space

Ideas for Strategies

- Define rural characteristics (buildings, views, landscapes, etc.) and actively preserve these
 - Ensure that new sidewalks conform with Acton's Sidewalk Design Guidelines whenever possible. (choice of layout, materials, landscaping) should be in keeping with the nature of the area (see Guidelines for Acton Sidewalk Design¹)
 - Promote community gardens, country fairs and farmer's markets
 - Explore ways of saving stone walls, barns, and other structures with rural character
- Preserve and acquire open space
 - Define primary purpose of protecting open space
 - Use zoning tools to protect existing open space and to add additional protected open space
 - Actively support agriculture (e.g. right to farm by-law)
 - Create a proactive strategy to anticipate and react to open space, water resource protection issues and opportunities
 - Create a short list of open space protection priorities and stay focused on that list and avoid getting side-tracked by less relevant opportunities
 - Zone for infill development where density is desirable so as to protect open space
 - Purchase priority sites with Community Preservation Act funds
 - Clarify for better public understanding regarding which open space is not protected and to what degree protected space is indeed protected

¹ <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=856>

Acton 2020

4 April 2011

- Provide tax incentives to protect open space
- Consider the value and quality of water resources when evaluating open space
- Establish a build out limit based on schools at capacity, water and waste water at capacity, and roads at capacity.
- Conduct research on alternative methods of purchasing and protecting open space
- Develop a comprehensive site and design review process
 - Support the further refinement of Acton's design guidelines for commercial development² and the extension of the guidelines to include residential and mixed-use development.
 - Promote use of by-laws (e.g. prevention of demolition, clear cutting, etc.)
 - Use tax and CPC funds to create incentives for the provision of deed restrictions
- Manage growth proactively
 - Understand if and how water supply limits growth
 - Build on the 1998 Master Plan recommendations
 - Encourage regional cooperation
 - Guide residential growth in such a way so that it is consistent with other goals and so that fiscal impacts are taken into account
 - Improve governing structures to encourage an integrated approach to problem-solving
 - Address 40B through deed restrictions program
 - Create more formal structures for collaborating with neighboring towns to address common issues (including 40B developments, open space protection, etc.)

Objective 1.2: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes

Ideas for Strategies

- Develop preservation priorities
 - Define historic characteristics (buildings, views, landscapes, etc.) and actively preserve these
 - Preserve historically significant buildings, landscapes and other historic features (see Heritage Landscape Inventory)
 - Consider desirability of expanding current historic districts to include older historic homes and historically significant structures (as listed in the Cultural Resources List)
- Implement Scenic Roads By-law to preserve stone walls along certain roads
- Conduct outreach to private historical property owners from Town or preservationists to help with funding and encourage preservation
 - Ensure that historic preservation efforts, regulations, and administration help instead of hinder owners to maintain their historic properties, business to grow, and historic centers to thrive economically

² See current at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=343>

Objective 1.3: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.

Ideas for Strategies

- Invest in tourist support infrastructure for certain key sites and publicize town features (historic site, nature trails, etc)
- Improve Town entrances / gateways to be welcoming & reflect the Town's historic heritage
- Support historic celebrations
- Increase awareness of historic past

Objective 1.4: Preserve and enhance village centers

Preserve West Acton Village Center

Ideas for Strategies

- Consider desirability of developing West Acton into the Town's "center."
- OTHER??

Enhance Village Centers

Ideas for Strategies

- Implement the Village District Plans so that the centers' full potential as villages are realized
- Encourage activity by promoting a variety of uses at different times of day and night, including grocery store, family restaurant, a variety of businesses, places for programmed events, etc.
- Support walkability in the centers by providing sidewalks along the street and well-lit and landscaped pathways to buildings and within parking lots. Provide parking on street and in combined lots behind buildings
- Encourage unique and fun window-shopping
- Support locally owned shops; develop "buy local" campaign
- Identify, seek, and support anchor with "pulling power"
- Define desired character (e.g. "quaint, but not cute"). Each village should have its own distinct character
- Employ traffic mitigation measures (i.e. on-street parking, street-trees, etc.)
- Provide more on-street parking
- Plant flowers and trees to enhance Acton streets, especially in villages and Kelley's Corner
- Invite ethnic communities to contribute vitality through celebration, food, etc.
- Develop a non-profit semi-government organization to revitalize village centers

Acton 2020

4 April 2011

- Use West Acton and West Concord as models
- Preserve and create new green spaces along roads and in front of buildings
- Improve Kelley's Corner
 - Encourage wide range of shops and restaurants
 - Redevelop area with pedestrian orientation (including sidewalks, benches, signage, etc.)

Improve Kelley's Corner

Ideas for Strategies

- Develop design guidelines to control "look and character"
- Ensure that new development uses historical references, e.g. building facades that are in keeping with Acton's historic character
- Encourage the provision of outdoor seating; separate seating areas from sidewalk with plants, low fence, etc.

GOAL 2: 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 2.1: 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, and to ensure that future development fits within the constraints of these local water cycles.

Ideas for Strategies

- Include groundwater, stormwater, and surface water; and specifics on how planning can identify and address the limits to development implicit in our water systems
- Include broad-based education on sustainability and actively support approaches toward business and citizen participation

Objective 2.2: To move toward a material economy in which there is no waste or accumulation of toxins.

Ideas for Strategies

- Conduct research with the goal of making the transfer station a 100% recycling center
- Develop policies that discourage the use of plastic (bottled water, single-use bags)
- Implement trash reduction programs
- Conduct e-waste education
- Expand drop/swap and hazardous waste day events

Objective 2.3: To reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from residential, commercial, industrial, and municipal uses.

Ideas for Strategies

- Increase the use of safer and renewable energy sources
- Provide incentives to home-owners and businesses to build green and save energy
- Retrofit public buildings to be energy efficient
- Eliminate idling vehicles
- Organize web-based car pooling
- Start a “Transitional Town Project” toward self-sufficiency and energy autonomy
- Turn the transfer station into a renewable energy power plant (also use yard waste)
- Use the transfer station as a model for sustainable development, including exhibiting trash as art

Objective 2.4: To move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture

Ideas for Strategies

- Provide public transportation/walking/biking facilities
- Encourage denser zoning close to South Acton train station
- Relate land use planning to transportation planning
- include planting and protecting large, long-lasting, carbon-sequestering trees
- support new and expanded farming
- Involve Acton’s ethnic communities; many come from cultures that have a history and tradition of sustainability
- Increase awareness and educate people on the need to be more sustainable
 - Provide education in schools
 - Promote greater public awareness town-wide
 - Develop massive energy conservation drives

GOAL 3: Improve Connections

We recognize that a community that is connected is safer, stronger, and provides more opportunities for meaningful interaction. We envision supporting these connections through physical means including sidewalks, bike paths, trails and public transportation to connect people and places, and to support independent and safe travel for all. We also envision open communication as a means to further connect residents (e.g. through the web, cable TV, community bulletin boards, etc.).

Objective 3.1: Improve walking and biking experience

Ideas for Strategies

- Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety
- Complete the development and construction of the Bruce Freeman Trail
- Create and extend connections, system of sidewalks, trails, bike paths, bike racks where feasible and where they will be utilized and increase awareness regarding sharing the road issues
- Explore North American and European models and incorporate relevant elements and become a model for a walkable and bikeable community
- Improve communication regarding paths
 - Keep maps current showing sidewalks and bike paths
- Consider planning issues for walking and biking facilities separately (they can potentially be in conflict)
- Wherever possible ensure that provision of sidewalks does not conflict with protecting Town character
- Consider paving “woody” shortcuts where appropriate so bikes, wheelchairs and strollers can use them

Objective 3.2: Improve circulation around town

Ideas for Strategies

- Support and explore ways of increasing ridership of the Town-wide shuttle
- Support the improvements to the train station
 - Provide more parking
 - Town shuttle to and from parking
 - Build train station building
 - Increase overhang on canopy for weather protection
 - Provide safe bike lane to station
 - Explore possibility of developing train station as mixed-use center with shops, more parking, etc.
- Address traffic congestion (e.g. enforce lower speed limits, plow wider shoulders in winter, speed bumps, etc.)

Objective 3.3: Promote communication amongst Town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.

Ideas for Strategies

- Keep Town web site up-to-date
- Create community bulletin board
- Use multiple languages (both staff and written materials should reflect the Town's population)
- Improve communication and coordination between the Schools and the Town regarding future planning and use of resources
- Promote active engagement of citizens and the transparency of Town government processes and decision-making
- Improve communication with businesses
 - Provide information regarding Town processes (e.g. permitting, etc.) for business owners
 - Town Hall should work more closely with businesses
 - Acknowledge business owners for their participation in Town (donations, etc.)
- Attract more volunteers in order to engage more citizens so as to strengthen the community
 - Publicize and promote more
 - Use website
 - Provide information in multiple forums
 - Conduct broad-based outreach and recruit new volunteers
 - Provide incentives
 - Provide flexibility in scheduling/timing
 - Provide and advertise opportunities for one time volunteering (as a trial)
- Improve communication and centralized information regarding existing resources and events
 - Use Acton TV or Radio Station for better Town-wide communication
 - Improve Town wide opt-in email communication system
 - Provide signs, website and written information in multiple languages
 - Create a community bulletin board
- Create neighborhood email lists
- Support and expand the Acton Newcomer's Club and provide additional opportunities for newcomers to connect

Objective 3.4: Support and strengthen neighborhoods

Ideas for Strategies

- Promote walkability with the provision of sidewalks
- Provide facilities such as playground, neighborhood swimming pool, etc. and ensure resources to maintain them
- Ensure that physical environment is pleasing and compatible with Acton's character (e.g. aesthetically pleasing features including public art, open

space, parking behind stores, architecture in keeping with Town character, meandering sidewalks³)

- Provide benches and opportunities for outdoor eating
- Support both formal and informal communication and interaction among neighbors
 - Block parties
 - Neighborhood newsletter
 - Create neighborhood email lists, create and maintain database of residents by neighborhood
 - Promote neighborhood book groups, walking groups, etc.
 - Organize competitions between neighborhoods
 - Establish community projects

GOAL 4: Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation

We value the small town feeling and appreciate the sense of community that results from frequent opportunities for interaction. We support providing places for casual social interaction and organized events that bring members of the community together. We believe in offering opportunities for intergenerational experiences and for sharing of inter-cultural celebration, and we aim to provide recreational opportunities for all ages.

Objective 4.1: Provide a community facility large enough to accommodate a variety of uses and a wide range of programming

Ideas for Strategies

Explore the possibility of providing a Community Center and consider

- Accessibility; Community Center must be centrally located and optimally within walking distance for kids access after school
- Potential and opportunities for connections with various ages and interests
- Bringing Danny's Place together with the senior center

Explore the need for new and/or an expanded Senior Center and consider

- That a senior center could be utilized by different groups after hours (like schools) and/or have other community uses
- Providing transportation alternatives to the center

Objective 4.2: Maintain and improve existing gathering spaces and look for opportunities to create informal gathering spaces.

Ideas for Strategies

- Enhance Memorial Library's value as an important community gathering place; in particular make the library more youth-friendly and increase programming geared to seniors
- Explore possibility of creating a town center (maybe West Acton?)

³ except in the villages

Acton 2020

4 April 2011

- Develop additional small outdoor gathering spaces (other than NARA Park)
- Promote and support Acton Yard Sale or Flea Market (in Kmart parking lot?)
- Encourage the development of a variety of small spaces including utilizing in between and/or “left over” spaces (examples include mini-parks and plazas with outdoor seating to encourage passersby to sit and linger and sidewalks and benches in village areas)
- Increase collaboration – e.g. between Community Education, Recreation Department, and Town Boards to offer additional programs as opportunities for gathering
- Protect open space; it provides opportunities for a different kind of community gathering than can be provided by a new Community Center
- Partner with private sector and provide incentives to private developers
- Consider use of existing resources and whether they are being used to their full potential
- Consider accessible locations for new gathering places and the availability of alternative transportation to the sites

Increase Amount and Variety of Restaurants

- Provide indoor/outdoor seating
- Increase number of mid-level, family, casual, but not pizza places to eat
- Increase availability of ethnic foods
- Increase number of fine dining establishments
- Address lack of sewers in key locations such as West Acton

Objective 4.3: Support additional cultural activities

Ideas for Strategies

- Encourage development of a Movie Theater (including independent art films, armchairs and food)
- Support Community Theater (including capacity to show film)
- Support creation of more music venues (including classical music)
- Support additional venues for theater productions (drama, concerts, dance)
- Increase number and variety and location of community events
- Look for ways to make existing community gatherings more multi-cultural and inclusive
- Support the creation of a Town-wide group like the current Neighborhood Forums

Objective 4.4: Maintain and increase recreational opportunities

Ideas for Strategies

- Provide more indoor and outdoor community recreational opportunities
- Provide recreational opportunities for all ages
 - Expand focus beyond school sports
 - Provide more recreational opportunities for teens (possibilities include swimming pool, teen center, bike trails, etc.)
- Create small parks in neighborhoods

- Protect and continue to maintain NARA
- Make maintenance repairs to existing facilities including to the tennis courts, providing bathrooms, parking, and lighting where needed
- Require playgrounds for children in developments as part of approval process

GOAL 5: Support Inclusion and Diversity

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 5.1: Support all ages

Ideas for Strategies

Seniors

- Provide housing that is affordable to those on a fixed income (e.g. retired)
- Provide transportation options for seniors to travel
- Explore the need to improve or expand the existing senior center
- Provide resources to promote health, fitness/wellness (including basic infrastructure like sidewalks to educational resources like classes,)
- Provide inter-generational opportunities for interaction and learning (e.g. invite seniors to contribute to school activities)
- Conduct outreach to seniors (including newly arrived seniors who may speak languages other than English)
- Offer more paid part time positions at Town Hall and tax exemptions to seniors

Teens

- Provide more accessible activities for teenagers
- Consider creating a club (e.g. like Danny's Place) for older kids, another park, or other gathering place for teens
- Extend sidewalks and increase access to public transportation to help teens get around
- Conduct outreach to youth, listen and take seriously their input regarding their needs
- Involve youth in Town governance by providing teen part time work and volunteer opportunities in Town services

Objective 5.2: Support households of all income levels

Ideas for Strategies

Acton 2020

4 April 2011

- Provide housing affordable⁴ to empty nesters, Town staff, and young families (ensuring that the design of the “affordable housing” is in keeping with Town character)
- Coordinate with the school system and Town Community Services Coordinator to identify those in need and match them with volunteers and agencies willing and able to help them.
- Continue to support residents wishing to subdivide their homes (and property ????) to allow parents and family members to live more economically
- Continue to support home-based businesses
- Continue to support agencies working to serve the needs of the Town’s low income residents

Objective 5.3: Embrace cultural diversity

Ideas for Strategies

- Provide space for celebration and cultural activities
- Support and encourage all people to participate in Town government such as the policy that any Acton resident can participate on Town board or committee (regardless of whether or not they are a U.S. citizen)
- Provide more English as a Second Language classes
- Provide organized welcome (contact people, welcome committee, reference guide to existing resources)
- Increase access to public transportation (especially useful for households with only one car and for those who cannot drive and/or do not have driver’s license)
- Increase the dialogue between multi-cultural groups
 - Provide easily accessible contact information for various ethnic and cultural communities (including Brazilian, Chinese, Latino, Russian, and Indian communities)
- Provide recognition of holidays in the schools (and maybe allowance for time off)
- Hire multi-lingual staff and materials at Town Hall and Memorial Library
- In addition to Chinese languages, include Indian languages and Portuguese and Russian as foreign language options at the schools
- Promote Native American history as well as European history of the Town.

Objective 5.4: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community

Ideas for Strategies

- Apply Universal Design principles⁵ to provide physical access benefits to all
- Provide more transportation options accessible to the disabled community

⁴ While Massachusetts has a statutory definition of affordable housing, participants may have defined this term in other ways.

⁵ Definition

Acton 2020

4 April 2011

- Encourage job opportunities and training
- Provide accessible public spaces
- Provide housing for the disabled
- Consider ways to provide access to all Town-owned buildings and Town-wide activities (e.g. clearly marked accessible parking, car pool options, etc.)
- Explore the desirability of paving trails (e.g. Morrison Farm and other “woody” shortcuts) so that bikes, wheelchairs and strollers can use them

GOAL 6: 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 6.1: Protect Town-owned open space

Ideas for Strategies

- Use zoning to protect existing open space
- Promote National Wildlife programs
- Support bio-diversity education
- Encourage cluster development
- Raise awareness in the public at large regarding the value of preserving open space

Objective 6.2: Support excellence in schools

Ideas for Strategies

- Ensure that school facilities are well-maintained and updated
- Address divisiveness in community caused by financial burden schools place on Town resources.

Objective 6.3: Maintain municipal properties and facilities

Ideas for Strategies

- Conduct an energy audit of Town buildings and identify ways to increase energy efficiency
- Use the transfer station as a model for sustainability
- Maintain Memorial Library
- Explore ways in which Town Hall can use more recent technology to provide services
- Implement relevant 1998 Master Plan goals and objectives

GOAL 7: Maintain and Improve Financial Well-being of the Town

We value our Town's future and as such, it's critical for us to sustain and strengthen its financial well-being. This includes building commercial and economic development plans that reflect the long-term goals of both businesses and residents of the community.

Objective 7.1: Improve existing commercial areas

Ideas for Strategies

- Improve the aesthetics of shopping areas
- Provide more parking
- Increase safety, especially at entries of commercial areas
- Connect strip malls, especially along Great Road
- Encourage an increase in development of shopping and eating options
- Expand Acton Day
- Reduce traffic congestion
 - Make improvements to transportation – walking, shuttle, interconnect paths
- Be more business friendly
 - Improve the permitting process
 - Include business owners in events and notices
 - Be more welcoming to new businesses
 - Increase flexibility on sign allowances

Objective 7.2: Promote economic development that supports our other goals

Ideas for Strategies

- Determine the net cost effect (fiscal impact analysis) to the Town of different types of economic development

Objective 7.3: Achieve a balance of services and taxes

Ideas for Strategies

- Ensure that all development is coordinated with and takes into account the impact on town services and facilities
- Promote economic development to enhance the commercial tax base (in order to pay for needed services)

Objective 7.4: Support the ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime

Ideas for Strategies

- Develop a housing plan that includes the preservation and creation of a wide range of housing types.