



Acton 2020

Community Comprehensive Plan

**Choose Your Own Acton:
Three Alternatives for Future Growth**
June 23, 2011





This Evening

- Welcome, Introduction, and Presentation
- Break into Small Groups – 7:30 to 8:30
- Reconvene in Large Group – 8:30 to 9:30





The Planning Process





Acton 2020 Comprehensive Plan

- Phase 1 Outreach
- Goals and Objectives
- Inventory
- Burning Issues
- **Alternatives**
- Recommended Actions based on selected alternative
- Implementation Strategy
- Final Acton 2020 Plan





Phase I Outreach

- Phase I in 2008 developed Emerging Vision and Goals
- Input from:
 - people who consider the schools one of Acton's most important assets.
 - residents concerned about the high cost of living.
 - people for whom sustainable development is a major concern.





Final Goals

1. Preserve Town Character
2. Ensure Environmental Sustainability
3. Improve Connections
4. Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation
5. Support Inclusion and Diversity
6. Preserve and Enhance Town-Owned Assets
7. Maintain and Improve Financial Well-being of the Town





THE ALTERNATIVES





2020 Plan Components

Three Growth Alternatives

Other Choices

(affordable housing, water, etc.)

Actions Common to All Alternatives





Growth Alternatives

- About “where” and “what type” of growth (big picture).
- Biggest - but not only - choice to make.
- Final alternative can be a composite.
- Also must make choices about how best to address affordable housing, water resources, community/senior center, etc.
- Defer discussion of implementation tools.





Three Growth Alternatives

- **1. Disperse Growth**
 - Extend Current Trends/Continue Present Planning Policies
- **2. Limit Growth**
 - Limit Residential/Expand Commercial/Acquire Open Space
- **3. Concentrate Growth**
 - Guide Growth to Key Town Centers
- **The final alternative may be a composite.**





1. Disperse Growth

Focus on:

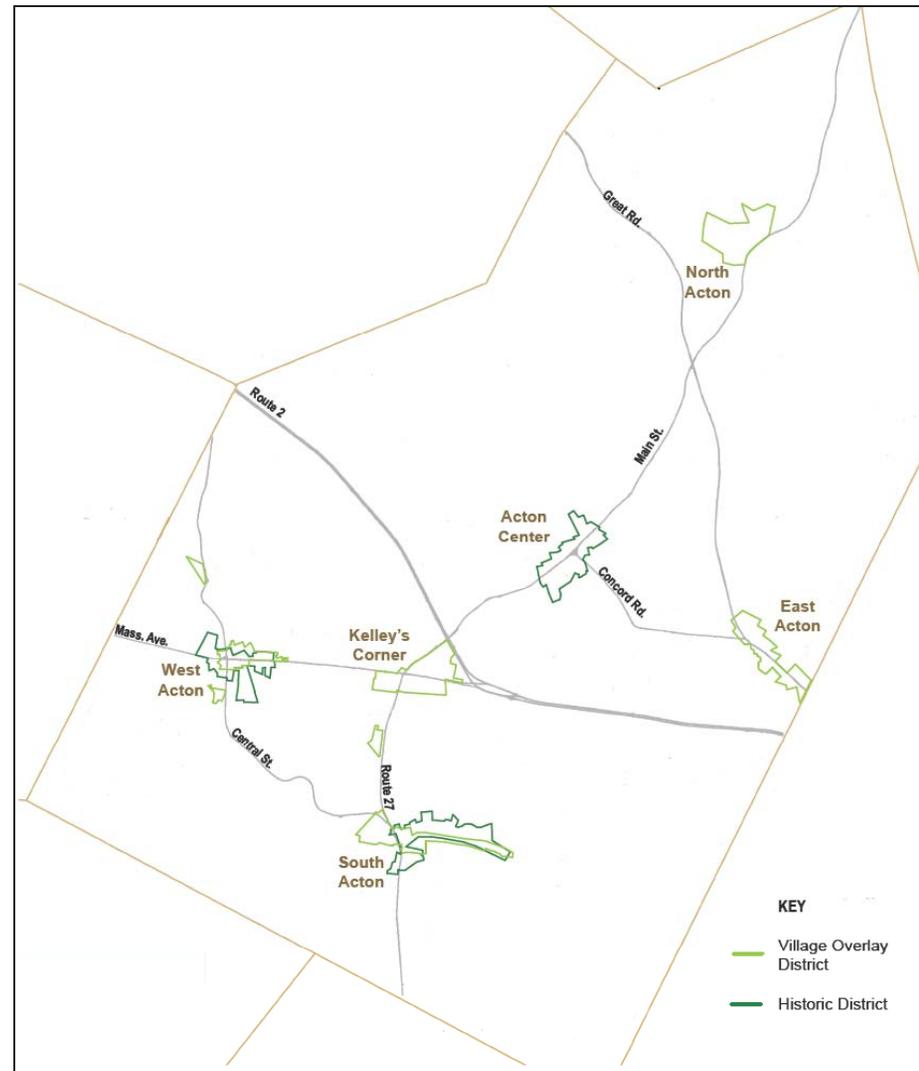
- Continuing use of cluster zoning to protect open space.
- Encouraging small scale commercial development, especially in the villages.
- Continuing open space acquisition/protection.





1. Disperse Growth

- Most new housing in scattered cluster developments.
- Some new housing and commercial in village overlay districts.





1. Disperse Growth





2. Limit Growth

Focus on:

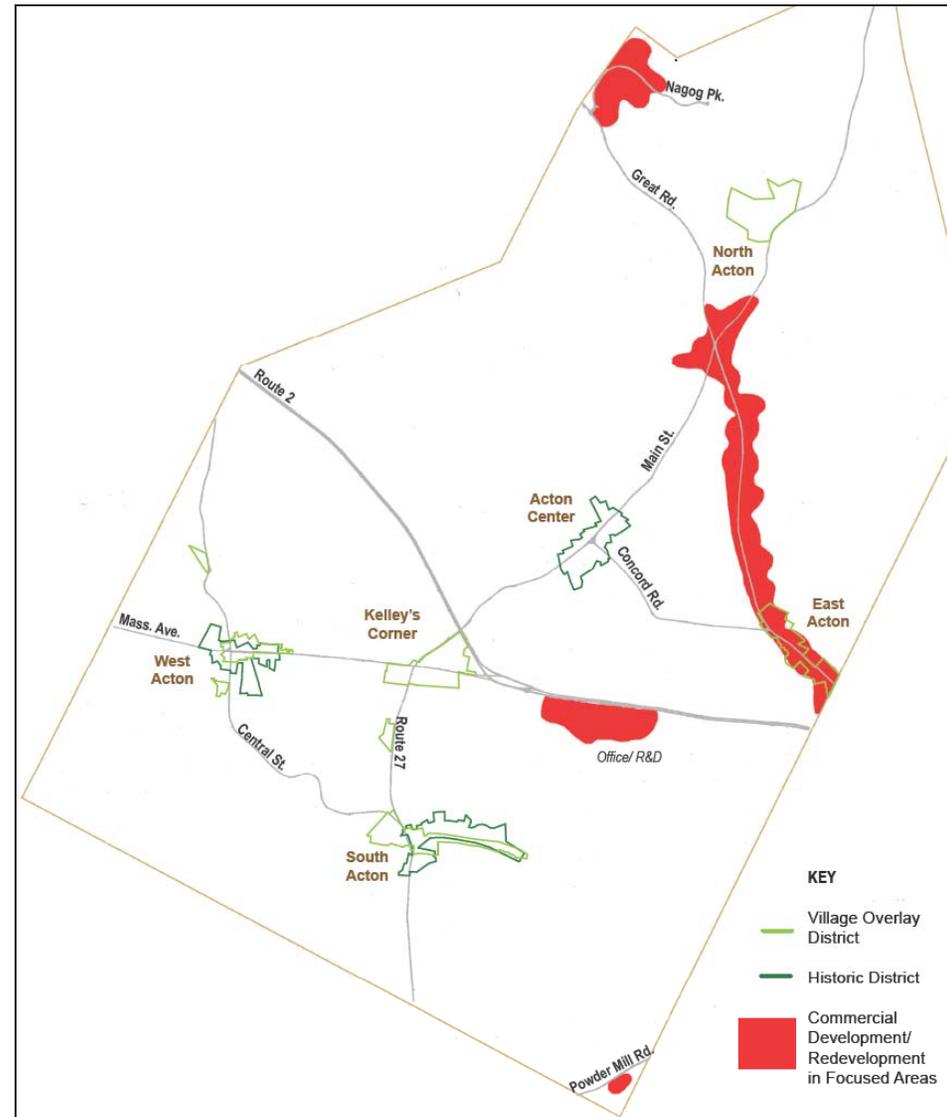
- Limiting the residential growth rate; no change in type of size.
- Encouraging employment-oriented, low-impact commercial development.
- Increasing open space acquisition/protection.





2. Limit Growth

- Most new housing in scattered cluster developments
- Most new housing outside villages
- Commercial concentrated





2. Limit Growth





3. Concentrate Growth

Focus on:

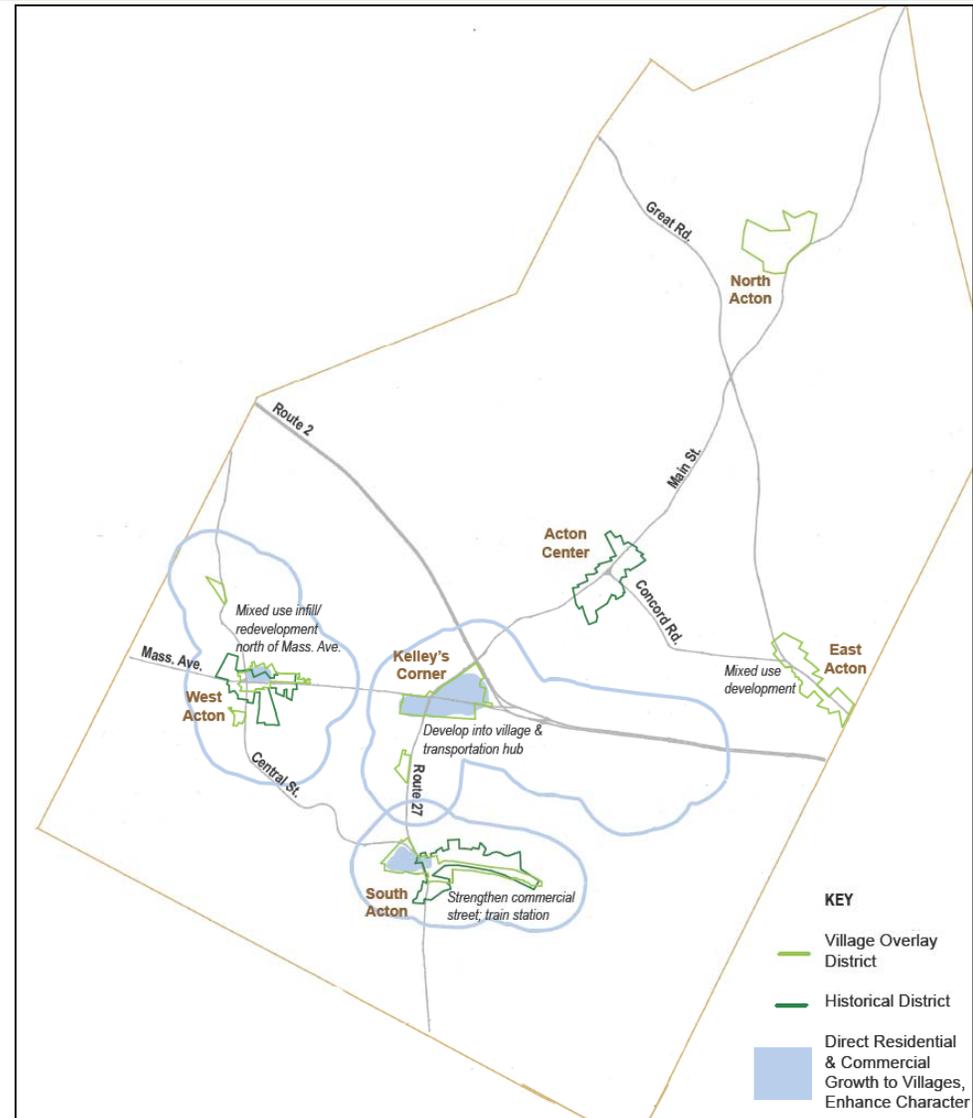
- Directing residential growth to mixed use infill and redevelopment.
- Transforming existing commercial development to fit village character.
- Emphasizing walking, biking, and public transportation.
- Continuing open space acquisition/protection.





3. Concentrate Growth

- Some new housing in scattered cluster developments.
- 60% of new housing and commercial thru infill and redevelopment in key centers.





3. Concentrate Growth





Affordable Housing

- A key choice
- Providing housing Actonians can afford
- Getting protection from 40B development





Chapter 40B

- State law passed in 1969
- Enables local Zoning Boards of Appeals to approve affordable housing developments under flexible rules if at least 20% of the units have long-term affordability restrictions.
- “Friendly” and “Unfriendly” 40Bs
- If developer unsatisfied with local ZBA decision, can appeal to state Housing Appeals Committee.
- All rental units in development count toward 10% goal, even if 80% are not affordable.





Affordable Housing Approaches

- Three approaches
 - A. One or two large rental developments
 - B. Small scale renter and owner housing dispersed through Acton
 - C. Secure future affordability of existing units
- 40B protection
 - Get to 10% affordable as soon as possible (Approach “A”)
 - Housing Production Plan (Approaches “B” and “C”)





Affordable Housing Choices

- Choices are generally independent of the three alternatives, however:
- Small scale dispersed or in villages more consistent with Alternatives 1 and 3.
- Quick relief from 40B more important with Alternative 2.





EVALUATING THE ALTERNATIVES





Residential Growth

- Alternative 1: Baseline forecast of **1,000** new housing units over 20 years
- Alternative 2: Limit growth to **600** new housing units over 20 years
- Alternative 3: Provide incentive to locate in key centers: **1,300** new housing units over 20 years





School Age Children in 2030

- Current: 4,782
- Alternative 1: 4,670 (-112)
- Alternative 2: 4,480 (-302)
- Alternative 3: 4,580 (-202)





Fiscal Impact of Residential

- Result of 3 factors:
- **Reduced school costs** (based on 2010 per pupil cost) from reduced enrollments from **all units** in Acton.
- **Non-school costs of new units** (based on 2010 costs by size of housing unit).
- **Tax revenues from new units.**
- All three depend on housing size/bedroom mix.





Fiscal Impact in 2030

- Annual fiscal impact of residential growth compared to 2010:
 - All three alternatives have a **fiscal benefit** compared to today
 - Alternative 1 saves **\$4.5 million.**
 - Alternative 2 is close to Alternative 3 (fewest school children, bigger houses).
 - Saves **\$5.1 million.**
 - Alternative 3 has largest fiscal benefit (more units than 2 but smaller units cost less to service).
 - Saves **\$5.3 million.**





Fiscal Impact in 2030

- Annual fiscal impact of commercial growth:
 - All three alternatives have a fiscal benefit
 - Alternative 2 has most added commercial tax base: **+\$1.5 million in today's dollars**
 - Alternatives 1 and 3 have same amount of added commercial tax base: **+\$1.0 million in today's dollars**
 - Commercial development less certain than residential, could be less than projected, especially in Alternative 2.





Total Fiscal Benefit

- **Compared to 2010**
- **Alternative 1: \$5.5 million/year**
- **Alternative 2: \$6.6 million/year**
- **Alternative 3: \$6.3 million/year**
- Fiscal benefit depends on assumptions about number of bedrooms
- Benefit could be smaller, especially in Alternatives 1 and 2 if more bedrooms than assumed.





Water Consumption

- Acton Water District currently withdraws approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY)
 - Permitted withdrawal is currently **708.1 MGY**
- All three alternatives would fit within the currently permitted withdrawal by 2030:
 - Alternative 1: **669 + 14 = 683 MGY (25 under)**
 - Alternative 2: **642 + 23 = 665 MGY (43 under)**
 - Alternative 3: **685 + 14 = 699 MGY (9 under)**





Residential Land Developed

- Most residential development outside villages would use cluster zoning
- Acton had 1775 acres of developable residential land in 2010
- Alternative 1: uses **575 acres**
- Alternative 2: uses **345 acres**
- Alternative 3: uses **450 acres**





Open Space Added/Protected

- Open space protected in Acton's cluster zoning is approximately equal to the area of the house lots
- Residential and commercial development adds Community Preservation Funds (for open space, historic preservation, and affordable housing)
- Fiscal savings can be used to purchase open space or development rights





Bottom Line

- Three alternatives differ in how Acton will look and “feel”, especially in walkability.
- Different outcomes for sustainability.
- All three are fiscally beneficial.
- All three can be accommodated by current water system and school infrastructure.
- All three continue to preserve open space.
- None reach buildout by 2030.
- All require staff and citizen resources to manage growth.





Questions and Answers





Group Discussions





Small Group Discussions

- Break into Small Groups
- Work with Partners/Individual Evaluations
- Work toward Small Group Consensus
- Transition to Large Group





Small Group Discussions

- Purpose: use evaluation materials to think about and discuss the three alternatives.
- What are the pros and cons of each?
- Which one supports Acton's "sustainability"?
- What parts of each alternative would you like to see in the final alternative?





Large Group Discussion

- “Vote” by adding dots to the big matrix
 - Red dot for your overall choice
 - Yellow dots for parts of any of the alternatives you’d like to keep in the final
- Discuss likes and dislikes about the alternatives
- Which would be most “resilient” if things change (“wild cards”)?
- Discuss key questions about the most popular alternative with the most votes
- How could it be made better?







Build-Out Capacity

- “Build-Out”: How much can be built on existing developable vacant land?
- Most recent town estimate:
 - 10,200 units at build-out
 - 8,963 current
 - 1,237 additional
- At projected growth rates, reach 93% in 2020, 97% in 2030
- Will look at scenarios in next phase of Acton 2020.





Affordable Housing

- State definition: uses no more than 38% of disposable income
- Translates to \$140,000 to \$175,000 for owner-occupied units.
- Currently, 7.2% of Acton's housing stock meets state definition.
- Chapter 40B is applicable unless 10% of housing units in town are "affordable".
- Since 1998, have created 375 total affordable units (31 per year).

