



## PROCESS

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Today. Tomorrow. Together.



# PROCESS

The plan was developed in two phases:

## Phase I

was comprised of extensive and intensive outreach to the Acton community accomplished by providing multiple opportunities for input to residents and the business community. This extensive public input (which included visioning sessions, focus groups and Town-wide mail surveys) resulted in an “Emerging Vision Statement” and a set of Goals and Objectives that encapsulated what residents and business owners envisioned for the Town’s future.

## Phase II

included completing an inventory of the Town’s existing resources as well as identifying future trends and issues. The unprecedented degree of public participation begun in Phase I, was continued in Phase II in a variety of ways including organizing a number of innovative public workshops and providing continuous opportunity for update and response through the internet on the Acton2020 website, a blog and Facebook page (see pages that follow).

An Implementation Plan was developed which identifies the strategies and action steps recommended to attain the vision and goals as articulated in the first phase and refined in Phase II.

Phase III is the next phase where Town officials, residents, business owners and developers use this document to meet the vision, goals and objectives articulated by the Acton2020 Committee.



# Definition of Phases I and II

## Phase I: Visioning for the Future of Acton

Articulating a shared vision is the first step in developing a Comprehensive Community Plan.

The Vision describes the kind of community participants would like to strive towards. In early 2008, nearly two-thousand Acton residents participated in a six-month long process to develop an “Emerging Vision” and set of Goals for the Town’s future.

A concerted effort was made to reach out to a broad range of Acton residents and to include diverse points of view in the community discussion. People gave their opinions in written form, in verbal form, as part of small groups where they decided on their group’s priorities as well as individuals in surveys or in targeted outreach meetings. These ideas were carefully documented. See sidebar for an overview of the process and a summary of the public’s input.

## Community Conversation: Phase I

In early 2008, nearly two-thousand Acton residents participated in a six-month long process to develop an Emerging Vision and Goals for the Town’s future.

This degree of public outreach and participation is unprecedented in Acton. The following is a partial list of the opportunities that were provided to the public to participate in the community conversation:

- 12 Outreach Committee meetings
  - 7 Targeted focus groups
  - 5 Presentations to varied organizations
  - 3 Town-wide Visioning Sessions
  - 3 Focus groups with Town Boards, Committees and Commissions
  - 2 Locations with a Comment Board (for public comment)
- 1 Roundtable Discussion with Town Department Heads
  - 1 Town-wide mail and web survey to all Acton residents (15.6% response rate)
  - 1 Town-wide mail and web survey to all Acton businesses (5.4% response rate)
  - 1 Phone survey of a random sample of 366 Acton residents
  - 1 Meeting with the Student Council at the High School
  - 1 Web site for dissemination of information and taking survey
  - Many opportunities for all Acton students to participate by conducting surveys, drawing, writing, creating movies and songs regarding their vision for the future of Acton



## Phase II: Creating a Comprehensive Community Plan

Phase II involved the following major activities:

- Developing an **Inventory of Existing Conditions** of the Town’s resources (including housing, transportation, public services and facilities, open space and recreation, cultural and natural resources, economic development, and land use.)
- Continuing the **Community Conversation** regarding the Comprehensive Community Plan begun in Phase I by organizing a number of public forums inviting both the public at large, the business community, as well as specifically targeting relevant Town Boards and Committees.
- Developing an **Implementation Plan** is a prioritized and phased proposal for moving forward to fulfill the vision and goals. It outlines the recommended strategies and action steps necessary to do so and identifies the lead responsible party (“owner”) and potential partners charged with overseeing the implementation of each strategy. The Plan also provides guidance for the prioritization and sequencing of steps.

## Community Conversation: Phase II

Phase II continued the unprecedented degree of public participation in Acton and included the following venues:

- 60 Acton 2020 Committee Meetings
- 7 public workshops, including
  - 1 workshop for participants to review results of inventory and revise planning goals and objectives
  - 3 thematic workshops (housing, open space and transportation) where Committee members represented the seven planning goals and through role play “performed” these by reacting to a scenario; this was followed by discussion with “experts” and the public at large
  - 1 workshop to review three alternatives for guiding future growth in Acton
  - 1 workshop to review implementation plan where participants were asked to comment on major action steps and “spend” Acton dollars in an exercise intended to identify participants spending priorities.
  - 1 public forum to present the final plan and answer the public’s questions
- 10 roundtable discussions with Town Boards, Committees and Commissions
- movie and video clips to generate excitement and inspire residents to get involved in the process <sup>1</sup>
- 1 focus group with business owners in Kelley’s Corner
- 1 roundtable discussion with the Town Department Heads
- Several articles in the Acton Patch and Beacon announcing and describing related events
- Many opportunities for all Acton residents to participate continually by logging on to the internet and communicating to the Committee and others by:
  - Website <http://acton2020.info/>: continuous updates on the planning process as well as an opportunity for residents to comment on the Plan.
  - Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/acton2020/>): continuous updates on the process and an opportunity for public comment.
  - Blog: <http://acton2020.info/blog/2011/02/21/two-openings-on-acton-2020-committee/>: a direct extension of the community conversation where issues are posted for public comment and discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> The Acton 2020 Committee collaborated with local writer, Leigh Davis Honn and local director, Christo Tsiaras, to film the funny and informative film about getting Acton residents excited about planning for the future of the Town. See movie, “It’s A Wonderful Acton”: [http://acton.patch.com/articles/its-a-wonderful-acton#youtube\\_video-6516131](http://acton.patch.com/articles/its-a-wonderful-acton#youtube_video-6516131).

- **Research of Precedents.** A number of best practice precedents (“how is it done elsewhere?”) were researched including urban planning and design ideas regarding village

development, mixed use, pedestrian-orientation, etc. as well as regulatory precedents for Transfer of Development Rights.

# Acton Voices - Phase I

## Community Conversation: Phase I Residents and Business Owners – Top Responses

### Acton Voices

The following is a summary of the on-going conversation with the Acton community which began in 2008 and that will continue on-line on the Acton 2020 website even after the publication of this Plan. The summary below identifies the areas where residents seem to agree most about what they wish to preserve, what they would like to change, what they hope to improve, how they would describe a desired future, and the steps they would support as being the most effective ways of getting there.<sup>1</sup>The “Emerging Vision” and Goals form the basis upon which the implementation plan that outlines steps of how to get to the desired future as articulated by the participants was developed.

<sup>1</sup> Please see Volume II (Phase I) and Volume II (Phase II) for a more detailed documentation of public input into the Comprehensive Community Plan.

Public Forum	Favorite Things about Acton	Least Favorite Things About Acton	If You Could Do One Thing...?
<b>Visioning Workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural character, natural features</li> <li>Schools</li> <li>Village centers</li> <li>Sense of community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Lack of walkability</li> <li>No real Town center</li> <li>Affordability</li> <li>Lack of adequate site plan, subdivision &amp; design reviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make pedestrian &amp; bike-friendly</li> <li>Create centers for congregating</li> <li>Plan for sustainable development</li> <li>Expand the commercial tax base</li> </ul>
<b>Resident Mail Survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools</li> <li>Diversity of activities &amp; uses</li> <li>Conservation land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High cost of living</li> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Lack of continuous pedestrian/bike paths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open space</li> <li>Historic homes protected &amp; preserved</li> <li>Affordable housing</li> </ul>
<b>Business Mail Survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools</li> <li>Town character</li> <li>Open character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Taxes</li> <li>Parking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[More] development</li> <li>[More] business</li> <li>[More] walkable</li> </ul>
<b>Seniors (Mini-Visioning Workshop)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior Center</li> <li>NARA Park</li> <li>Nursing service</li> <li>Rural character</li> <li>Actonians</li> <li>Hospital</li> <li>Library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too much housing development</li> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Taxes</li> <li>No one Town center</li> <li>Not enough public transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower taxes</li> <li>Hold Town Meeting &amp; Election Day on Saturday</li> <li>More public transport</li> <li>Provide handicap parking West Acton</li> </ul>

**Community Conversation: Phase I Residents and Business Owners – Top Responses cont.**

<p><b>Focus Groups (Targeted Outreach)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Parks, open space</li> <li>• Proximity to jobs</li> <li>• Friendly, welcoming</li> <li>• Small town feel</li> <li>• Safe</li> <li>• Family-orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of walkable center</li> <li>• Poorly maintained recreation facilities</li> <li>• Lack of sidewalks and public transport</li> <li>• Traffic issues</li> <li>• No trash collection</li> <li>• Poor water quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do more to plan for sustainability</li> <li>• Provide full day K for all</li> <li>• Space for cultural celebration</li> <li>• Public transportation for seniors &amp; teens</li> <li>• Preserve excellent schools</li> <li>• Improve parking at train</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teen Themes (Acton Students)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Arboretum</li> <li>• Sense of community</li> <li>• Trees, horses</li> <li>• History</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough to do</li> <li>• Need to plan for sustainable future</li> <li>• Need for walking</li> <li>• Too much traffic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movie theater</li> <li>• Sidewalks</li> <li>• Bike paths</li> <li>• Public transportation</li> <li>• Club for older kids</li> </ul>

# Acton Voices - Phase II

## Community Conversation Continued: Phase II

In Phase II, the community conversation was continued by holding six public workshops, at least ten meetings with Town Boards and Committees, and countless meetings with the Acton2020 Committee. Additionally a variety of on-line opportunities provided continual access to the process; a blog, Facebook page, and website with opportunities to comment on all phases of the plan and throughout the process. The following are some highlights of this public input.

### Public Workshop #1:

Participants confirmed and refined the “emerging vision” statement and goals and objectives that had been developed in Phase I. At this workshop participants were also presented with a preliminary list of key issues, opportunities and challenges and they offered their thoughts on how to address these. Please see box for a summary of participant input.

### “Burning Issues” Public Workshops (3):

Three public workshops were conducted on what the Acton 2020 Committee identified as being “burning issues: these were housing, transportation, and economic development. Participants

included invited “experts” on each subject as well as the public at large.

### “Choose Your Own Acton” Public Workshop:

Participants were asked to select from three development alternatives that were each designed to meet the planning goals in different ways and in different degrees.

### “How Do We Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on (“Implementation Plan”) Public Workshop:

Please see box for a listing of the strategies that participants felt were most important.

### “Fall Implementation Plan Meetings”, Fall 2011:

A series of meetings were held with Town Boards and Committees to carefully review the implementation plan and solicit input into the strategies. It was also an important opportunity to invite “owners” to take the lead responsibility for specific strategies and to identify any relevant potential partners.

### On-going Opportunity for Plan Updates and Public Input:

Use of the internet both to disseminate information regarding the process and the content of the

plan as well as to provide an additional opportunity for people to interact with the content of the plan (blog, Facebook, and interactive posting of the entire Implementation Plan).

## List of Phase II Outreach Venues

- **Revisit, Refine Vision and Goals: October 20, 2010**
- **Burning Issues**
  - Economic Development: March 3, 2011
  - Transportation: March 9, 2011
  - Housing: March 12, 2011
- **“Choose Your Own Acton”: Alternatives: June 23, 2011**
- **Fall Meetings: Input from Committees, Boards, etc.**
  - Kelley’s Corner: September 14, 2011
  - Sustainability, Financial Well-being: Sept. 21, 2011
  - Affordable Housing, Inclusion/Diversity: Sept. 28, 2011
  - Connections, Community Gathering: Oct. 12, 2011
  - Town Character, Town-owned Assets: Oct. 26, 2011
- **“How Do we Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on: Proposed Implementation Plan/Prioritization: November 9, 2011**
- **“Presenting the Plan,” March 6, 2012**
- **Blog**
- **Facebook Page**
- **Website**

# Public Workshops (Phase II)

## Public Workshop #1: Review, Refine and Revise Goals and Objectives October 20, 2010

Representative workshop participant quotes responding to Emerging Vision and Goals and Objectives developed in Phase I.

- *“Sustainability goals and objectives should be more action-oriented”*
- *“There should be more emphasis on the preservation of natural resources”*
- *“Ensure that historic preservation encompasses landscapes as well as buildings”*
- *“Reiterated strong desire for increased opportunities for community gathering, both indoor and outdoor, formal and informal; continued conversation about community/senior center”*
- *“Need for regional approaches to address shared issues”*
- *“Concentrate efforts on village centers”*
- *“Emphasis on improving non-car transportation (e.g. sidewalks, bike paths, public transportation)”*
- *“Improve town entrances”*
- *“Want a town center”*
- *“Provide better social connections for newcomers”*
- *“Need better communication of existing resources and events”*
- *“What are we doing for our aging population? Elderly moving out of town because cannot afford to live here”*
- *“Are you able to live in Acton no matter what your race, age, ability, economics?”*
- *“Connections are easier with people who have children”*



## Summary of Key Themes from Burning Issues Workshops

### Housing

There seemed to be general consensus regarding a desire to focus on meeting Acton’s specific housing needs rather than 40B requirements (especially not in one large development) and that small, scattered and integrated sites of “affordable” housing is more in keeping with the Town’s character and attitudes. Many thought that infill in and around village centers was a desirable and appropriate location for smaller, more affordable housing units.

### Transportation

There was a strong interest expressed in reducing auto travel by providing alternatives including walking facilities (significant interest was expressed in extending the sidewalks system), bike lanes/paths, Town shuttle, and by reducing driving to the schools.

### Economic Development

There was relative consensus regarding the fact that what seemed both more desirable as well as most feasible in terms of future development was small-scale – mostly in the form of restaurants and shops – in-fill development in the village centers and Kelley’s Corner. The discussion also focused on the importance of understanding how to attract and retain desirable businesses (e.g. providing incentives, investing in infrastructure, streamlining permitting etc.). Participants also emphasized the importance of supporting small and home-based businesses.

## Choose Your Own Acton” Public Workshop

There was a high degree of consensus regarding which was considered to be the “preferred alternative” and it was a composite combining features of the alternatives. “Alternative 3,” the alternative which proposed concentrating growth in village centers, was preferred for the following features:

- Community gathering, qualities including vibrant people-oriented villages with places to go and opportunities to gather and mingle, including opportunities for more theater and music
- Energy savings due to walkability
- Protection of open space in outer areas
- Efficient use of infrastructure

Participants seemed to also want to focus on:

- Open space preservation/acquisition
- Preservation of historic character through historic preservation efforts and strong design review
- Employment-oriented development
- Limiting growth and protecting rural characteristics
- Sidewalks/bikeways/public transport (Minuteman van), traffic calming/mitigation



## “How Do We Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on Public Workshop

The top priority strategies are listed in the participants priority order as follows:

- Create a building that can accommodate the Senior Center and the larger community
- Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan
- Continue to support and achieve the high educational standards of Acton’s schools
- Preserve historically significant buildings, landscapes and other historic features
- Protect the quality and quantity of the water
- Increase opportunities for safe biking
- Provide & encourage public transportation
- Develop and implement a comprehensive site and design review process
- Build more sidewalks

Also high priority were:

- Increase the Town’s fiscal capacity to implement all goals by proactively recruiting new businesses and retaining existing ones throughout the Town
- Increase recycling and reuse
- Reduce energy use in existing buildings
- Review and revise the Town’s bylaws and planning process to support the 2020 Plan goals



## AFTERWORD



Today. Tomorrow. Together.



# AFTERWORD

## OK, THAT’S THE PLAN. NOW WHAT?

A final word from the Acton 2020 committee.

Thanks for reading this far. We hope you have seen how the different parts of the plan work together to show how to steer Acton toward the sort of future that we all want to live in. Without any steering, our present course will cause Acton to drift toward risking what is important to us, including our water quality, our open space, our historic characteristics, and the special qualities that make so many of our neighborhoods and villages be the places that residents want to be in.

Our financial and environmental sustainability depend on executing a good plan. A good plan has three jobs it needs to do well:

- describe a desirable and achievable future;
- show what has to happen to get there; and
- engage the people that will need to work to attain it.

As for the first job, the vision for Acton’s future described in this plan has been well-tested in the visioning and planning phases of this process. We are confident that we have captured the general consensus of how people in Acton

want the Town to serve them in the future, as a sustainable place to live, play, work, and shop; and as a place to connect with one another, and to connect with the natural beauty and historic depths of our Town.

The next question, of how to get there, and how to best preserve what we already have, is also well-laid out in this plan, in outline at least; but compared to the clarity of vision, we know there are some gaps or uncertainties where the implementation plan can only use words like “consider” or “study” or “plan” – where further work is needed to prove or improve the plan and add detail.

The final question of engagement is the most important one. Looking back on the process of preparing the plan, including the roadmap, the goals and objectives, the inventory of existing conditions, and the detailed interlinked implementation plan, what stays in our minds as committee members is not all these words and concepts, but instead the depth of caring and participation from so many residents. That’s what’s going to make the plan work from here. The foundation is now done, but the implementation is where the action happens.

We hope that many of you will choose to participate in the next phase, by joining the implementation committee, or participating in future public meetings, or, most importantly, by finding the parts of the plan that you most care about and working to shape them in to specific choices, programs, budgets, and actions. In other words, find a way to make the plan a reality, and keep finding ways to work with the important details to keep improving the plan.

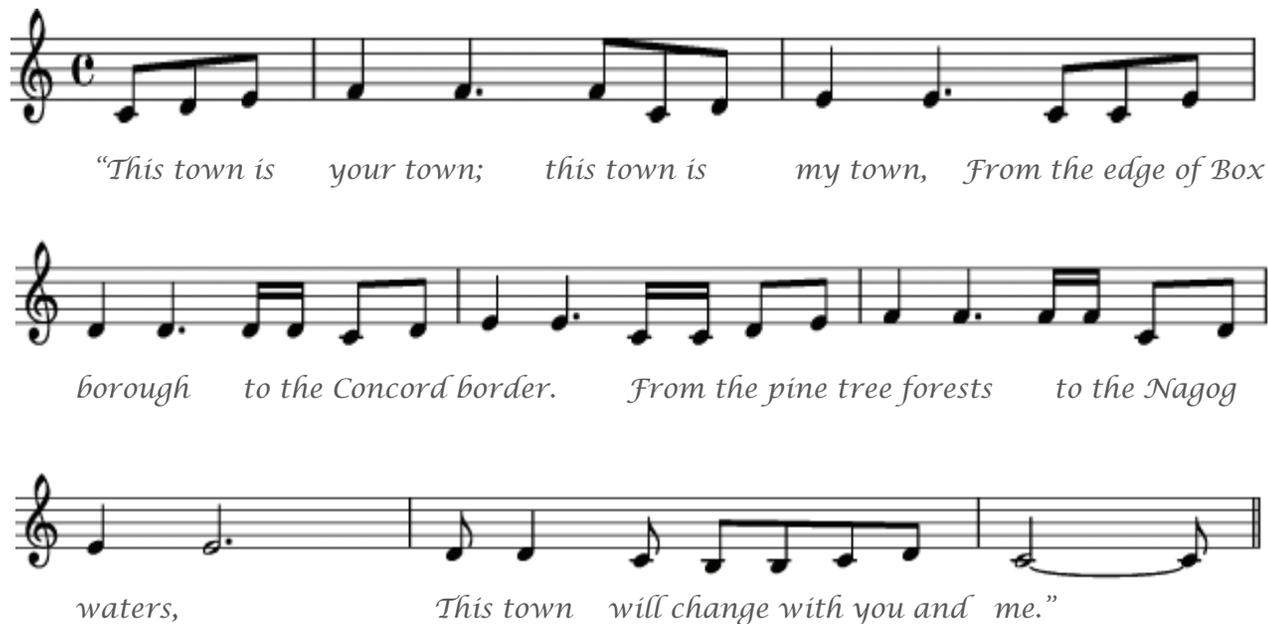
This plan would not be where it is today without so many educated and concerned citizens who have taken part in shaping the future of our Town. And so, you will also be a key way forward for this plan. It is yours. Please carry the plan in to the implementation phase with the same pride and excellence you have brought to this phase, now ending, of creating the Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan.

-The Acton 2020 Committee

As poet William Stafford wrote, “A poem is not the end, but the beginning, of an excursion.”

Each of the Acton schools in the Acton public school system participated in the visioning process for the comprehensive community plan in their own way. Students and teachers prepared a large number of varied ways of expressing their concerns and desires for the future. The following are the lyrics from a song developed from a teacher-led brainstorm with the 6th grade students and written by the Music Department.

### *This Town is Your Town\**



“This town is your town; this town is my town, From the edge of Box  
borough to the Concord border. From the pine tree forests to the Nagog  
waters, This town will change with you and me.”

*“Install some streetlights and maybe sidewalks.*

*I’ve walked past litter and don’t enjoy it.  
Add many trashcans to make it cleaner,  
Then Acton will be a better place.”*

*Chorus/Refrain*

*“As I was walking around Acton  
I saw we needed bike paths and park space,  
A community center, more ethnic  
restaurants.*

*This town should change; don’t you agree?”*

*Chorus/Refrain*

*“Stop building condos and houses, too.  
Let’s make it greener for me and you.  
Use solar panels and biofuel.  
If we unite it will come true.”*

*Chorus/Refrain*

*\*by Acton 6th graders and the Music Department*