



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan

February 2012

Acton 2020

Prepared for:
Town of Acton
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720
978-929-6631
www.acton-ma.gov

Prepared by:
the Collaborative, Inc.
122 South Street
Boston, MA 02111
617.338.0018
www.thecollaborative.com

Community Circle
Six Dover Lane
Lexington, MA 02421
781.862.1780

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

Foreword

In the course of working together as residents on the Acton 2020 committee, we've read a number of other comprehensive community plans. Many of these plans seem to start with a simple extrapolation of past trends put forth for the future, but looking back and then forward at the edge of our 20-year planning scope, we don't think this is the right approach for Acton. Instead, we are proposing something bolder, something that responds to the changes happening all around us.

Over the last sixty years, Acton has been defined by its rapid growth from a rural community to a bedroom suburb.¹ Growth was driven by the post-war boom in suburbia, the broad availability of state and federal support to build infrastructure, the availability of relatively cheap land in Acton, and cheap energy everywhere. But now, land has become more scarce and fuel more expensive. Demographics and sensibilities are changing too - as the population gradually shifts towards more seniors and fewer children and awareness and concern increase for environmental sustainability. From a fiscal standpoint, we also know that we can't rely on an ever increasing population to pay for ever more services. And we are more aware that most new residen-

tial development now comes at an increasing cost:² more traffic, more risk to water supplies, more infrastructure to pay for and maintain, and more costs for services.

Actonians are pragmatic and smart. We see changes are coming and we want to find a positive future. What we on the committee have learned during this planning process is that there is an emerging sense among residents of what sorts of shifts will be needed to navigate the coming changes in order to foster a resilient and vibrant community. Indeed, the feedback we've received from residents strongly reflects both a desire for an increased "sense of community" and concern regarding the "future resilience" of the Town. These two themes really frame the Comprehensive Community Plan.

As you read through this document, please keep in mind that the elements of the plan we have laid out do not comprise a simple wishlist that residents expect the Town can achieve by waving a magic wand. The Plan presents a vision of how to support each other by creating a different sort of Town prosperity driven by the richness of social connection, a deep appreciation for the historic and natural realms in which we are em-

bedded in Acton, and a commitment to a good shared future. And it will take broad and deep resident participation to move in this direction; the Town government itself can only do so much.

By communicating with many residents, boards, and committees through numerous meetings and a number of public workshops,³ a Roadmap for Guiding Growth has emerged that we feel strongly can create Town prosperity. We invite you to join with Town officials, volunteers, and

- The Acton 2020 Committee

Margaret Woolley Busse

Margaret Woolley Busse, Chair

Jim Snyder-Grant

Jim Snyder-Grant, Vice-Chair

Celia Kent

Celia Kent

Paulina Knibbe

Paulina Knibbe

Charles Mercier

Charles Mercier

Sahana Purohit

Sahana Purohit



The Committee extends its thanks to everyone who participated in the planning process.

residents to make this vision a reality.

- The Planning Department staff put the plan at the top of their very full work priorities. Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl, and Kim Gorman contributed countless hours to attending meetings, document production and review, and, over and over, educating the rest of us by answering our questions about how the Town works.
- The rest of the Town's staff have decades of experience in Acton and helped us improve the plan each time they engaged with our process.
- Our consultants at the Collaborative and Community Circle worked tirelessly on building the plan and on nurturing the community-wide conversation that formed the basis of the plan.
- The volunteers of every Town board and committee spent some time on parts of the plan, improving it with their deep knowledge of particular areas, out of their commitment

to Acton.

- And most importantly, there was an unprecedented engagement by the citizens of Acton at each stage of the planning process. Your commitment and involvement in the future of this Town is the key ingredient that gives us hope for Acton's future.

“Thank you!”



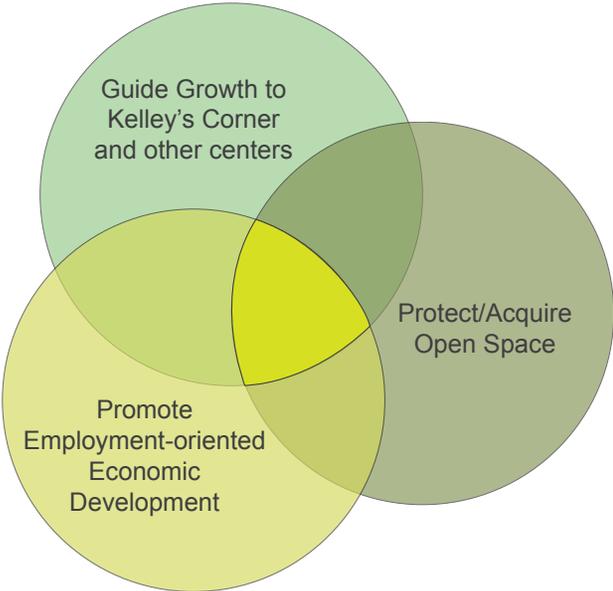
Introduction

The purpose of the Acton 2020 Plan is ultimately about how to create a better community and covers a whole range of different elements, including land use, recreation, transportation, and housing, to name a few; these are reflected in the Plan’s seven goals and corresponding objectives. The Plan is a decision-making tool to be used by Town officials and citizens to express a desired future and the steps that lead there. It is intended to help guide the future growth and development of Acton and to give the Town a strong sense of direction, positioning Acton well so as to take advantage of opportunities as they arise.

The Plan is based on **Underlying Themes** (see sidebar) that were expressed by Actonians. These themes connect residents’ desires and concerns with the Plan’s Goals and Objectives that as mentioned above comprise the entire breadth of the Plan and refer to a range of concepts such as Town character, the environment, and Town facilities.

Many of the themes have to do with growth and its consequences. With the recognition that growth can be guided, but not fully avoided, the main thrust of the Plan describes the **Roadmap**

for addressing our Town’s future growth. The **Roadmap**, while only a sub-set of the overall plan, represents its core and has three main parts. As shown below, these overlap to create a sweet spot that combines both environmental and fiscal sustainability. How those parts work together is explained on the following pages and in the diagram on page 4.



The three parts of the **Roadmap** intersect to provide more environmental and fiscal sustainability.

Underlying Themes

<p>An increased ‘sense of community’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Gathering: desire for indoor and outdoor places and events to meet and interact casually, spontaneously as well as in a planned, more formal fashion. • Town Character: desire to preserve and enhance features - physical and other - including a commitment to excellence in education, rural and historic characteristics, including the preservation of open space and the small town feeling, which make Acton unique and contribute to its sense of community. • Connectivity: desire for walking, biking, public transportation, traffic calming and improvements, and increased opportunities for social networks and connections.
<p>The ‘future resilience’ of the Town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Sustainability: concern regarding our ability to ensure that future health and well-being of our environment. • Social and Economic Diversity: concern regarding the ability to accommodate a range of socio-economic levels as well as the ability to age in place. • Financial Viability: concern regarding the ability of the Town to protect its assets and maintain a viable balance between taxes and services provided.

Roadmap for Guiding Growth

Acton can't avoid all future growth, but it can guide the expected growth in a way that better fits with the Town's goals. The three major parts to this approach, and how they relate, are described and illustrated below:

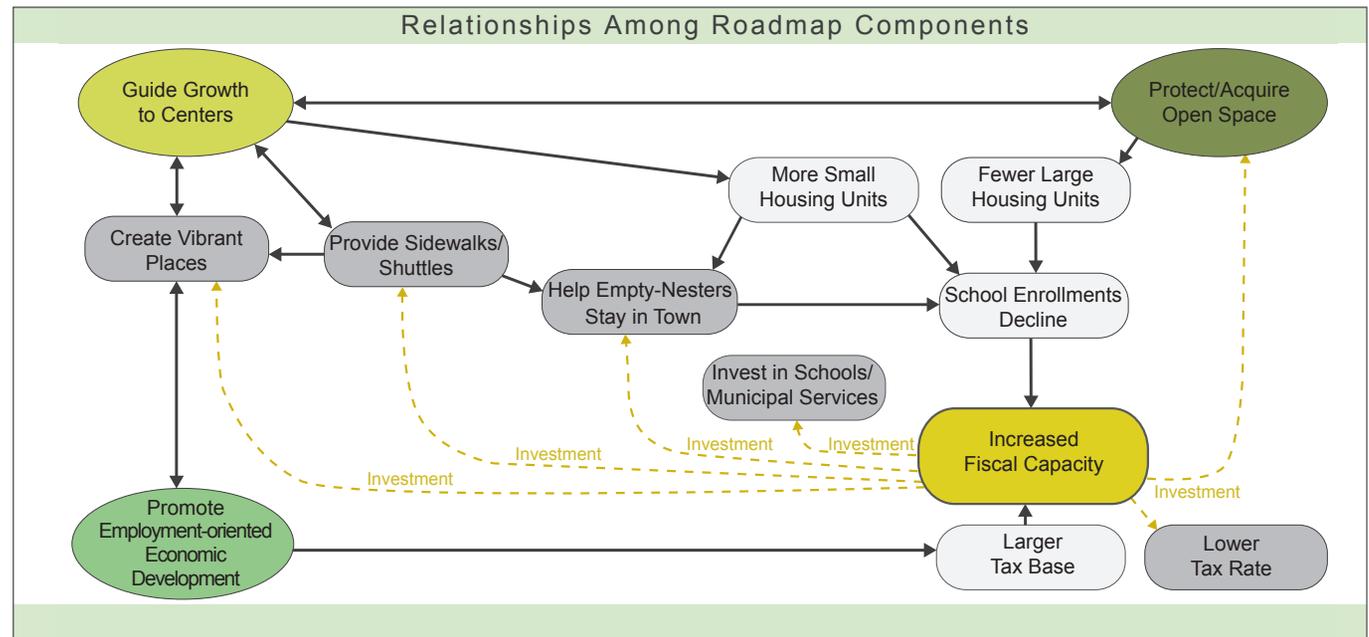
Guide growth to Kelley's Corner and Key Village Centers (such as West and South Acton) where smaller residential units will fit the growing market and provide more options for seniors and young people. This type of development strives to be both fiscally and environmentally sustainable.⁴ Place-specific guidelines and design review will ensure that new development helps create successful places.⁵

Guiding the majority of growth to village centers in smaller units helps to reduce future school enrollments,⁶ provides more affordable housing for empty-nesters who want to continue to live in Acton,⁷ and makes it feasible to create livelier walkable places for the whole community to gather.⁸

Preserve Additional Open Space by providing incentives to property owners in outlying areas to leave their land undeveloped and instead encouraging them to participate in development in the centers. This will result in preserving the rural characteristics so appreciated by Acton residents. The tool recommended to accomplish this is called Transfer of Development Rights (TDR - see explanation in endnote 9)⁹; it is used to guide growth away from the subdivision of large tracts of land and to the centers without having

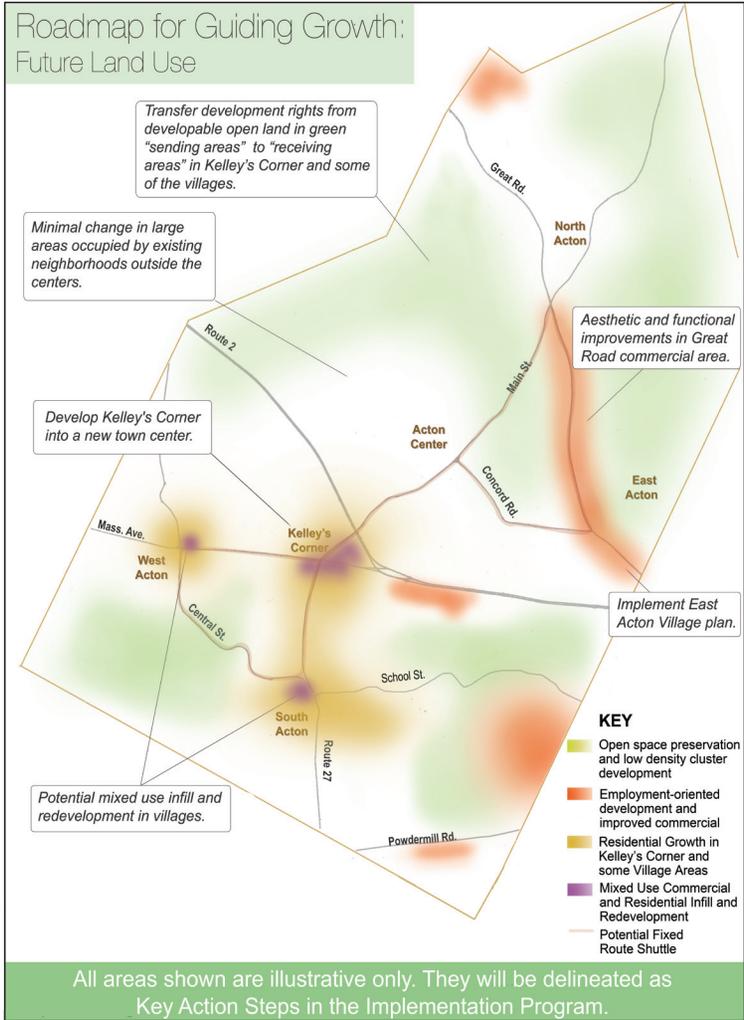
to pay for open space acquisition. It is also recommended that priority parcels be acquired by the Town when possible.

Actively Promote Employment-Oriented Economic Development, which will increase the tax base and, along with the mixed-use development in the centers, will produce more tax revenue than the cost of services for the new development¹⁰ and also create local jobs and reduce commuting for more residents.



Relationships among **Roadmap** components (colored ovals), other strategies (darker gray bubbles), and fiscal capacity (gold bubble). This diagram is explained on page 15 of the full report.

The following concept map illustrates the Roadmap for Guiding Growth and identifies some key features:



This map is explained on page 15 of the full report.

How the Roadmap Addresses Key Concerns

Financial Resilience. Acton is currently financially sound with a top bond rating and funds in reserve, but the Town budget is under pressure and costs are expected to rise as healthcare costs and other post-employment benefits increase.¹¹ In order to address this, some combination of higher taxes, reduced costs or services, and a bigger property tax base will be needed.¹²

The **Roadmap promotes economic development in appropriate locations**, and encourages **fiscally beneficial residential development** by shifting from large lot subdivisions, which increase school enrollments and costs, to compact development with smaller units that have been shown to have fewer school-age children and therefore generate more tax revenue than costs.¹³

Environmental Resilience.¹⁴ Acton is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and protecting its water resources. These efforts have some costs, but the investments will be repaid in lower energy costs and avoiding the need to later remediate impacts to the Town's drinking water.¹⁵

The Roadmap and More

- The Plan is comprehensive and contains much more than the Roadmap for Guiding Growth; it contains strategies to implement the complete set of Goals and Objectives (page 7).
- The Key Implementation Strategies (pages 8 & 9) are a summary of the highest priorities of a much more extensive list of strategies and action steps recommended to achieve the goals and objectives, and are listed in the full report and at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>.
- This document also includes some interesting facts about Acton on the page entitled "Did You Know?"(page 13). Finally, while this summary contains a page of Notes and References keyed to the text that provides some basic explanations and support for the report's statements, it is the full Acton 2020 plan that provides a thorough explanation and examination of each of the plan's components.

Where the Roadmap Takes Us

- Kelley’s Corner becomes a busy, walkable Town center.
- Villages become denser with redevelopment of non-residential parcels; stronger design review preserves and enhances existing character.
- School enrollments decline gradually; school costs rise more slowly as the population ages and the housing mix in the new development provides smaller units for seniors and others.¹⁶
- The tax base is expanded by economic development.
- Home values (adjusted for inflation) outside the centers will be maintained and those in the villages may increase.¹⁷
- Many large parcels of open land will be protected through acquisition and transfer of development rights to the centers; on those that do develop, part of the parcel can be protected through cluster zoning.¹⁸

By concentrating growth, it becomes feasible to serve more of Acton’s population by public transportation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, saving money for residents, and providing access for Actonians who can’t drive or don’t wish to be automobile-dependent. It also gives residents the opportunity for walking, which

benefits fitness goals and increases sense of connection to others.

Future Contingencies

A Comprehensive Plan should be resilient – it should continue to be a guide even if the unpredictable happens. The “**wild cards**” that Acton might have to face include:

- Prolonged economic downturn combined with escalating healthcare and pension costs.
- Energy costs rise even more sharply than in recent years.
- Weather events, such as more frequent and more violent storms and significant climate changes.
- School enrollments that don’t decline as expected.
- Revival of the housing market leading to a major residential subdivision proposed for a large tract of land.

There is also the risk that things don’t turn out as anticipated, e.g., more or less development pressure, tighter budgets, or unforeseen infrastructure needs.

By guiding growth to the centers and protecting open space through transfer of development rights, the development of a large tract of land

with consequent increases in school and other costs, can potentially be channeled into compact mixed-use development with smaller units that generate less school cost and pay more taxes than their cost to service.

By emphasizing employment-oriented economic development, the most promising source of added tax revenue, Acton can do better than similar towns that don’t invest in attracting commercial growth, even in a prolonged downturn.

By moving to more sustainable land use patterns, alternatives to the automobile become more feasible, reinforcing these patterns and enabling people to reduce their energy costs.

By calling for appropriate guidelines and more rigorous review of development in the centers, particularly Kelley’s Corner where sewers are already in place, the Town’s water supply can be better protected from wastewater impacts, largely funded by new development. A key recommendation is a study of each center to assess capacity and potential impacts.

And if Town finances constrain desired improvements, the phasing of major investments can be adjusted to correspond to available resources (see page 10).

Goals and Objectives

<p>GOAL 1: Preserve and Enhance Town Character</p> <p>Objective 1.1: Strengthen planning tools to manage growth pro-actively.</p> <p>Objective 1.2: Preserve and enhance key centers.</p> <p>Objective 1.3: Preserve rural characteristics and open space.</p> <p>Objective 1.4: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes.</p> <p>Objective 1.5: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.</p> <p>GOAL 2: Ensure Environmental Sustainability</p> <p>Objective 2.1: Protect the quality and quantity of Acton’s water.</p> <p>Objective 2.2: Reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins.</p> <p>Objective 2.3: Reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.</p> <p>Objective 2.4: Move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.</p> <p>GOAL 3: Improve Connections</p> <p>Objective 3.1: Make walking and biking easier and safer.</p> <p>Objective 3.2: Improve transportation around Town.</p> <p>Objective 3.3: Promote communication among Town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.</p> <p>Objective 3.4: Support and strengthen neighborhoods.</p> <p>GOAL 4: Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation</p> <p>Objective 4.1: Create new gathering spaces and make better use of existing ones.</p>	<p>Objective 4.2: Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands.</p> <p>Objective 4.3: Support additional cultural activities.</p> <p>GOAL 5: Support Inclusion and Diversity</p> <p>Objective 5.1: Support residents of all ages.</p> <p>Objective 5.2: Support households of all income levels.</p> <p>Objective 5.3: Embrace cultural diversity.</p> <p>Objective 5.4: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community.</p> <p>GOAL 6: Preserve and Enhance Town-Owned Assets and Services</p> <p>Objective 6.1: Protect Town-owned open space.</p> <p>Objective 6.2: Support excellence in schools.</p> <p>Objective 6.3: Manage the Town’s facilities efficiently.</p> <p>Objective 6.4: Provide high quality services that are responsive to community needs.</p> <p>Objective 6.5: Provide excellent public health and safety services.</p> <p>GOAL 7: Maintain and Improve the Financial Well-Being of the Town</p> <p>Objective 7.1: Promote fiscal responsibility.</p> <p>Objective 7.2: Promote economic development that supports other Acton 2020 planning goals.</p> <p>Objective 7.3: Improve existing commercial areas.</p> <p>Objective 7.4: Support the financial ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime.</p>
---	--

Key Implementation Strategies

The Goals and Objectives and Roadmap for Guiding Growth will be implemented through a number of strategies that involve one or more action steps. The full Implementation Program is in the body of the report and online at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>. Fifteen key recommendations stand out as highest priority among the more than 200 proposed action steps and are listed below, not in priority order.

Roadmap Strategies for Guided Growth

► Guide Growth to Kelley’s Corner and Villages

- **Develop Kelley’s Corner into a mixed-use Town center and transportation hub** in conformance with a specific plan for the area. Encourage mixed use with people living in smaller housing units near vibrant shops and restaurants with opportunities for socializing, running errands, dining, and community gathering. Creating more activities and a safe and pleasant pedestrian environment will also attract teens from the nearby school complex; they should be involved in the planning for the area.
- Prepare a plan to improve Kelley’s Corner and to **preserve and enhance village centers**. The **Key Centers Plan** will set priorities for new development and redevelopment in centers. The plan should consider Kelley’s Corner and the villages as a system, build on existing strengths in each, identify necessary aesthetic and functional improvements, assess capacity for density incentives, and prioritize and sequence which areas to work on first. This plan would include a quantitative analysis of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) system, to verify which incentives are most likely to create the desired changes.



The **Kelley’s Corner Development Plan** will be part of the Key Centers Plan; it will provide the basis to proceed with zoning changes and infrastructure investments needed to begin the improvements at Kelley’s Corner and promote development and redevelopment of key parcels as soon as practicable.

- **Actively promote employment-oriented economic development** (e.g., Research and Development, high tech, office) to expand the tax base. This may also reduce commute time for some residents.
- **Protect, acquire, and improve open space** for conservation, farming, and recreation, using a combination of acquisition and zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to move development away from open land and to the key centers. This will help protect Town character and the environment, as well as provide additional opportunities for recreation.

Other Strategies

- **Consider a sewer extension and/or advanced package wastewater treatment** with groundwater recharge in order to support an increase in

small-scale commercial development and better manage wastewater in West Acton.

- ▶ **Improve the transfer station to increase recycling and reuse.**
- ▶ **Construct more sidewalks and facilities for safe bicycling, in centers and Town-wide.** This will help connect people and places and provide opportunities for fitness while also being beneficial for the environment (by reducing car fumes).
- ▶ **Reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote Town-wide energy conservation.** Support joint community/Town efforts to reduce reliance on fossil-fuel energy sources and to explore shifting to renewable sources.
- ▶ **Develop policies and strategies to keep empty-nesters in Acton.** As the senior population continues to grow, they will need a number of facilities and services that meet their special needs.
- ▶ **Continue to fund, and later expand, MinuteVan** to build ridership with more frequent service between village centers, Kelley’s Corner, and the rail station. This will connect various places in Town and also provide a service to those who cannot drive as well as to those wishing to use public transportation.
- ▶ **Construct a new building to accommodate the Senior Center and larger community,** when finances permit. This will serve to provide space for expanded programming for an increasing senior population as

well as a meeting and gathering place for the community at large.

- ▶ Prepare a proactive plan that encourages the **provision of a wide range of housing types** to meet the needs of empty nesters, Town employees, young couples, and those of moderate income, by locating housing **in small, scattered sites near walkable service and business destinations**, especially village centers. Consider possible Town participation in desired housing developments. The plan should address the Town’s relationship to the state’s affordable housing law (Chapter 40B), but its purpose is to address Acton’s local and regional housing needs.
- ▶ Create a new **committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and language groups in Town** to provide **information to newcomers and assist with organizing multi-cultural activities.** This will help build bridges, knitting the community closer together, and it will provide guidance to those unfamiliar with the Town and its resources.
- ▶ **Continue to support and achieve high standards of excellence in Acton’s schools.** A majority of residents when asked “Why did you move to Acton?” responded: “because of the schools.” The schools and school-related activities are a major community focus contributing to the culture of Acton.
- ▶ **Continue to work to control cost,** planning for future financial responsibilities like pension liabilities and finding new ways to reduce current costs, such as regionalization and cooperation with other towns.



Cost and Phasing of Major Actions

Town finances are being squeezed between the desire for services (excellent schools and other Town priorities) and a limited tax base, reduced state aid, and unfunded liabilities. Fortunately many of the Plan’s top recommendations can begin to be implemented with existing Town staff and relatively small additional expenditures (e.g., small-scale studies to prepare for appropriate growth in the centers).¹⁹ Other priorities like a new building to serve seniors and the larger community, or an expanded shuttle system, are more expensive.

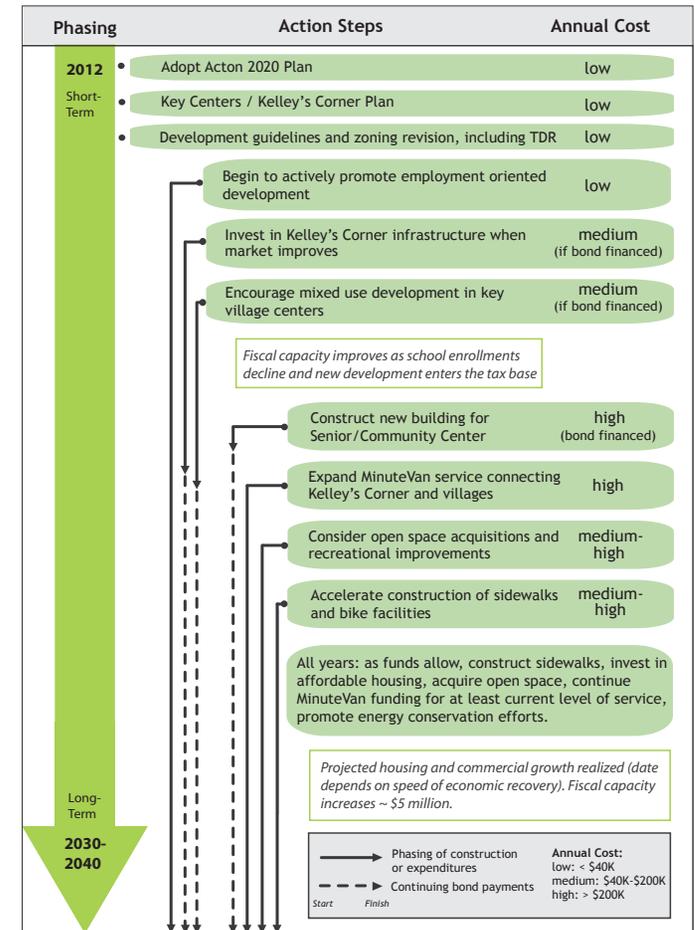
The solution to this challenge is to **phase the major actions as finances permit**. This can include some open space acquisition²⁰ and investment in pedestrian and bicycle facilities each year as can be afforded, continuing to fund the MinuteVan at current levels²¹ until expansion becomes feasible, phasing improvements to support desired redevelopment in Kelley’s Corner as the market revives, and planning for a new senior/community center,²² but putting off construction until it can be afforded.

In the meantime, Town fiscal capacity can be improved by promoting economic development, seeking special purpose state funding and grants,

continuing to explore public-private partnerships for specific projects, and cooperating with surrounding towns to provide services more efficiently. Also, the current economic slowdown is an opportunity to complete the initial planning steps so that the Town is poised for action when opportunities arise and/or the economic climate changes. The recommendation to reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote Town-wide energy conservation will pay for itself and also help to save money for residents and businesses.

It is significant that a fiscal analysis of the **Roadmap** concluded that by the time 1,200 new housing units and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space have been built (longer than 20 years because of the current economic downturn), Acton’s fiscal capacity will be increased by nearly 5 million dollars per year compared to a business-as-usual scenario where no roadmap for growth is implemented.²³ More detail on costs is presented in the body of the report.²⁴ In addition to the major investments, the Plan also identifies actions

Phasing Key Investments:



that don’t cost much to implement but have significant benefits; these “ripe apples” are identified throughout the implementation program (see Full Plan Report).²⁵



Process

The Plan was developed in two phases.²⁶ The first, **Phase I**, comprised extensive and intensive outreach to the Acton community through a variety of means including:

- Town-wide visioning sessions
- focus groups with Town boards and committees and other specific stakeholder groups
- Town-wide mail and telephone surveys covering all households and businesses and
- multiple opportunities and input for and from the Town's youth

This extensive public input 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 involved the following major activities:

- Development of 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.)
- Refinement of the Goals and Objectives.
- Identification of Key Issues, Opportunities, and Challenges and development of a preliminary list of ways to address them.
- Development of a comprehensive Implementation Plan that provides a prioritized and phased proposal for moving forward to fulfill the vision and goals.
- Facilitation of an extensive level of public involvement, including:
 - 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).
 - Seven major public forums and more than 10 public meetings with special outreach to specific Town boards and committees.

Components of the “Emerging Vision” (from Phase I)

- *Preserving the rural and historic characteristics*
 - *A sustainable future*
 - *Excellent schools*
 - *Recreational opportunities*
 - *Lively, safe neighborhoods*
 - *Attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas*
 - *Sidewalks and bike paths*
 - *A Town shuttle*
 - *Open communication and accessible information*
 - *Opportunities for the community to gather*
 - *Vibrant village centers*
 - *Kelley's Corner as walkable Town center*
 - *Welcoming residents*
-
- Production of a movie “It's a Wonderful Acton” to raise awareness and increase turnout to a key forum.
 - Involvement of youth through art contest.

Notes and References

The notes below provide sources and explanations for the statements in the report that are flagged with the corresponding numbers.

1. Rapid growth (p.1): See growth chart in full report, page 21. Acton's population has grown at a rate of over 3,000 persons per decade since 1950.
2. Increasing cost of new residential development (p.1): See Fiscal impact research in Appendix 6, Volume III, Harrison and French, Introduction to Fiscal Impact Analysis, UNH; and Kotval and Mullin, Fiscal Impact Analysis.
3. Number of public forums (p.1): See Process section in full report, p.165.
4. Fiscally and environmentally sustainable (p.4): fiscally sustainable because of smaller units and more compact development making it easier to serve Town streets and infrastructure. Residential development can be fiscally positive (p.1): the main reason residential development in the past has cost more than the taxes it generates is the added burden to the schools, which comprise over 2/3 of Acton's budget. Even though there are individual instances of many children in a small housing unit, on average, the number of school children is strongly correlated with the number of bedrooms in the new housing. This has been substantiated in the number of new school enrollments generated by the Avalon Acton housing development. Smaller units have fewer school children and generate more taxes than costs to the Town.
5. Place-specific guidelines (p.4): a key strategy is to do design studies for Kelley's Corner and village centers to set priorities and determine what kind of development is compatible, then make these guidelines part of the zoning review process.
6. Smaller units reduce school enrollments (p.4): see note 4.
7. More affordable housing for empty-nesters (p.4): in the sense that smaller units that empty-nesters may desire will cost less than single family homes; "affordable" does not necessarily refer to state housing definitions and goals, but could include some of this type of units.
8. Livelier walkable places (p.4): compact mixed-use development with pedestrian amenities has been shown to create lively places where people want to be.
9. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) (p.4): TDR is a zoning mechanism that has been used across the United States; a property owner in a designated "sending area" can work with an owner in a "receiving area", e.g. Kelley's Corner, to sell the rights to development of the sender's property to the owner in a receiving area; there is no cost to the Town except development review, and the sending property is protected from any future development.
10. Economic development produces more taxes than costs (p.4): This is mostly due to the fact that commercial development does not add to school costs. (See references cited in note 2).
11. Healthcare and pension expenses increase (p.5): Acton, like most Massachusetts towns, needs to prepare to pay for obligations to teachers and employees who will retire over the next 20 years.
12. Bigger property tax base needed (p.5): it is preferable to raise property tax revenues to pay for increasing costs from new development of the type that is fiscally positive, instead of higher taxes on existing residential and commercial property; see notes 4 and 10.
13. Fiscally beneficial residential development (p.5): development with smaller units that consequently generate fewer school enrollments overall; see note 4.
14. Environmental resilience (p.5): Shifting residential growth from large lot subdivisions to compact development in the centers saves energy by reducing auto dependency, and it enables wastewater to be handled better via sewers or advanced package treatment plants, while leaving more open space undeveloped. Dealing with existing and anticipated stormwater issues in the centers can be planned for now, instead of waiting for worsening conditions.
15. Town's drinking water (p.5): Acton's public water supply comes from groundwater wells; therefore it is essential to protect the groundwater from sanitary wastewater and other contaminants and to recharge stormwater to the ground.
16. Smaller units for seniors and others (p.6): the compact development that would be encouraged for Kelley's Corner and, potentially, other village centers, would be mixed-use with apartments and condo units in low-rise buildings, suitable for seniors, empty nesters, and small families.
17. Home values (p.6): Acton homes would keep their value as the Town's character and excellent schools are preserved; village-specific plans and development guidelines would make them desirable places and potentially increase the value of existing homes.
18. Cluster zoning (p.6): in areas away from villages, Acton's current zoning permits new housing units to be concentrated on approximately half of a residential parcel, leaving the other half in deeded open space.
19. Small-scale studies (p.10): These relatively inexpensive studies (less than \$40,000) are the key to determining development priorities and developing guidelines to create successful places, preserve existing character, and minimize impacts.
20. Open space acquisition (p.10): the Town would continue to use Community Preservation Act funds to acquire open space when it becomes available; when finances permit, additional land acquisition can protect more open land and pre-empt large-lot subdivision that is likely to increase school costs more than it contributes in property taxes; see note 4.
21. MinuteVan (p.10): continuing this service is important to moving toward a more sustainable transportation system that provides an alternative to car travel and serves the Town's key centers.
22. Senior center (p.10): the current center is not large enough to fully serve today's seniors; as the population ages, a larger center will be even more needed. The limited hours scheduled for use by seniors would permit the larger community to be served by the same facility.
23. These cost scenarios were developed to help make informed planning choices, but more detailed analysis of individual costs will be needed in the Implementation Phase.
24. Fiscal analysis of Roadmap for Guiding Growth (p.10): see page 19 of the full report.
25. "Ripe apples" (p.10): also called "low hanging fruit," i.e., relatively low cost for the benefits provided.
26. Two phases of the 2020 Plan (p.11): see "Process" section of full report, beginning Page 175. Both phases involved extensive outreach.



Did You Know?

Extensive research was done by the consultant team, the 2020 Committee, and additional information was contributed by some members of the public.

The “snapshot” on this page is largely drawn from the Inventory Report, which is summarized in the last section of this volume and presented in full in Volume II.

Housing and Population

- Acton’s 2010 U.S. Census population was 21,924, up 8% since 2000.
- The percent of residents 65 and older is expected to nearly double over the next 20 years from less than 10% to over 18%.
- Over the same period the number of school-age children is expected to decline slightly, even while the total population increases.
- Acton had 8,530 housing units in 2010, up 11% from 2,000. 63% are single family houses.
- Projections by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council suggested that, based on current policies, population will increase by 10% by 2030 and housing units will increase by 1,000 units or 12%.

Schools and School Enrollments

- In 2010 there were 218 students (K-12) per 1,000 population, the third highest of the towns Acton touches.¹
- Acton Public Schools spent \$11,246 per pupil in 2009-2010, the second lowest of the towns it touches.
- Acton-Boxborough Regional High School was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009.

Land Use

- Acton’s land area is approximately 13,000 acres (20 square miles).
- 29% of Acton’s land area is open space (lower than five of the towns it touches). Roughly 1/3 of this open space is not protected from development.
- There are about 2,200 acres of developable land (vacant and not wetland).
- Based on 2008 land use data, approximately 1,800 additional housing units could be built on land now zoned residential, bringing the total at build-out to 10,300, or 22% more than today. This would take more than 30 years at the projected growth rates.

¹ These are Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, Sudbury, and Westford.

Water and Wastewater

- All of Acton’s public water supply comes from groundwater wells.
- Water demand has been relatively constant over the past six years, approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY), reflecting water conservation efforts. Acton’s state permit allows up to 708.1 MGY.
- Residential water demand is estimated by Acton Water District to be roughly 55 gallons per bedroom per day, substantially lower than the norm of 70.
- 80% of Acton’s homes have on-site septic systems, a high ratio for a town of Acton’s population. The other 20 percent use sewers or package treatment to dispose of wastewater.

And...

- The average household in Acton drives 76 miles per day, the lowest of the adjacent towns except Concord.
- 87.5% of Town revenues come from residential property, in the middle of the group of towns it touches.
- Acton was named the 16th Best Place To Live among small towns in the country by Money Magazine in 2009 and in 2011.