

## 2006 ANNUAL REPORT PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The Planning Department has Roland Bartl as Town Planner, Kristin Alexander as Assistant Planner, and Kim DeNigro as Secretary. Its principal role is the support of all Planning Board functions and activities. In 2006 the Planning Department also provided staff support to the Economic Development Committee and the Community Preservation Committee. Highlights of work include plan reviews of the Woodlands at Laurel Hill Senior Residence project before the Planning Board, 19 Railroad Street condominium conversion for the Board of Selectmen, and several Comprehensive Permit (Chapter 40B) projects before the Board of Appeals; efforts to advance rail trails in Acton; revisions to the Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations; development of effective strategies for generating affordable housing through Acton's own initiatives; and maintaining Acton's State housing certification. See also the separate reports from the Economic Development and the Community Preservation Committees. All duties are carried out under the direction of the Town Manager.

### **Planning Board**

Members of the Planning Board are Selectmen appointees. At the end of 2006, the Board's seven regular members were:

Gregory E. Niemyski, Chairman  
Christopher R. Schaffner, Vice-Chairman  
Edmund R. Starzec, Clerk  
Ruth M. Martin  
Michael C. Densen  
Bruce A. Reichlen  
Alan R. Mertz

Former members Gary R. Sullivan and William F. King resigned during the year.

Planning Board meetings are open to the public, usually at 7:30 PM at the Memorial Library on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month.

### *Development Activity*

When reviewing development applications, the Planning Board strives to protect the health, safety, and welfare of Acton's residents, and preserve the integrity of Acton's character. This aspiration is framed by the Town of Acton Master Plan and Zoning Bylaw. The Planning Board's authority to approve or disapprove development applications is also defined and limited by the State Zoning Act (MGL Ch. 40A), the State Subdivision Control Law (MGL Ch. 41, S. 81K-GG), and the constitutional rights of land owners.

In 2006, the Board granted one Planned Conservation Residential Community special permit, one Senior Residence special permit, one sign special permit, and approved two definitive and two preliminary subdivisions. Fourteen ANR Plans (Approval Not Required plans in Subdivision Control Law) were signed. Overall, the Board approved new building lots for 30 single-family homes. The table below shows the ten-year history of approved new residential lots.

Year	New Residential Lots Approved
1997	35
1998	68
1999	76
2000	33
2001	15

2002	103
2003	4
2004	8
2005	8
2006	30

In addition, the Planning Board approved the development of 64 senior residence units at the Woodlands at Laurel Hill. It should be noted that the Acton Board of Appeals also approved the development 23 additional dwelling units by Comprehensive Permit under M.G.L. Chapter 40B.

### *Zoning*

The Acton Zoning Bylaw is the regulatory blueprint that affects the future use and development of land in Acton. It is the intent of the Planning Board that the Zoning Bylaw and any changes to it are generally consistent with the Master Plan. After holding public hearings, the Planning Board recommended and the 2006 Annual Town Meeting voted Zoning Bylaw and Map amendments:

- To revise the definitions of special waste and fill to follow a recommendation of the Town's Environmental Standards for Fill Advisory Committee.
- To broaden exemptions from the parking lot design standards to include parking lots for conservation and municipal recreation.
- To allow the more productive use or reuse of vacated or underutilized industrial properties in the Small Manufacturing (SM) District.
- To make several housekeeping corrections and clarifications.
- To rezone land off Charter Road to General Industrial (GI).

### **Special Projects**

#### *Bicycle Lockers*

Kim DelNigro oversees the bicycle locker rentals at the South Acton train station. In 2006, 29 lockers out of 40 lockers were rented for the whole year and several more were rented from month to month. This continues the steady increase in the use of the bicycle lockers since they were initially offered in 1996, and expanded in 2004.

#### *Rail Trails*

The Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) is a 12.5-mile bicycle and pedestrian trail from Marlborough Center through Hudson, Stow, and Maynard to the South Acton train station. The southern section in Marlborough and Hudson is completed. Funding for the design of the Acton/Maynard segment has been secured through Federal High Priority Project designation with the help of Representative Meehan and Senators Kennedy and Kerry, through Acton Community Preservation Funds for the Acton portion, and from other sources. Design is scheduled to begin in 2007. Federal construction funding is programmed for 2010. ARRT, Inc. ([www.arrtinc.org](http://www.arrtinc.org)) is a regional non-profit group that supports and advocates for the trail.

The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) is a 22 mile bicycle and pedestrian trail from Lowell, through Chelmsford, Westford, Carlisle, Acton, Concord to Sudbury. Acton has secured Community preservation funds for the preliminary design of the +/-4.4-mile Acton segment and hired an Engineering firm to proceed. Federal construction funding is programmed for 2010. The Friend of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail ([www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org](http://www.brucefreemanrailtrail.org)) is a regional non-profit group that supports and advocates for the trail.

In an effort to address potential environmental liabilities to the Town, Acton joined with Wakefield and Lynnfield to file a bill for environmental insurance coverage for rail trails. The bill was enacted into law thanks to the leadership on the issue from State Senator Resor and State Representative Paulsen. It provides for a 50% State match for rail trail environmental insurance under the Massachusetts Brownfields Redevelopment Access to Capital Program (BRAC). With this in place, Acton has renewed its efforts for the acquisition of the rail trail corridors from the MBTA and the Executive Office of Transportation.

*Affordable Housing*

Representatives from the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, and the Acton Community Housing Corporation met with an affordable housing consultant, Community Opportunities Group, during 2006 to develop a Town policy vis-à-vis Chapter 40B affordable housing projects that would define which types of 40B developments the Town would generally view favorably and which ones it would not. The "Town of Acton Comprehensive Permit Policy" was adopted by the Board of Selectmen in April 2006.

Respectfully submitted,  
Roland Bartl, AICP  
Town Planner