

Acton 2020

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: PUBLIC WORKSHOP

BURNING ISSUES: Committee Role-Playing



Eat, work, shop: Economic development in Acton

Thursday, March 3, 2011

7:00 p.m.

Acton Town Hall

PURPOSE: *To hold a public workshop with the purpose of gaining a better understanding of economic development by inviting “experts” and the public to discuss some of the key issues important to Acton’s future. Also to further understand the variety of viewpoints and people’s concerns regarding this issue.*

Do Actonians want to live in a more self-contained community, with enough of its own retail establishments and industry to reduce the need to drive to employment, entertainment, recreation, and shopping venues? Or do we prefer to let other towns host the businesses we patronize and instead emphasize the more rural and/or bedroom-community characteristics of the town? If economic development is pursued, what kind should be encouraged and where should it be located? We need your input as we assess and prioritize economic development in Acton.

- 7:00 – 7:30 Welcome and Introduction (including powerpoint presentation)
- 7:30 – 8:30 Role-play including discussion
- 8:30 – 9:15 Small Group Discussions including mapping and prioritization exercises
- 9:15 – 9:30 Reconvene as Large Group
Next Steps

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Purple = committee decision

yellow = consultant work to be done

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1. QUESTION FOR LARGE GROUP:

What kind of a community do you envision Acton being? One that includes availability and variety in places to shop for food, clothing, home furnishings, home improvement, restaurants, coffee shops, places of employment OR one that is more bucolic and where one needs to travel to other communities for goods and services?

Get some sense as to majority opinion in the room

2. Move on to ROLE PLAY

Purpose of Role-play: To articulate concerns surrounding economic development and to have Acton “win” the role-play (as opposed to one particular point of view winning) by coming up with a list of concerns to address and some mitigating measures

The following is a hypothetical scenario that has been imagined to be somewhat extreme in order to best dramatize trade offs and positions. The role-play will consist of Committee members representing the 5 most relevant goals to the topic. Role-play guides are provided.

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HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO

Let us suppose the following (this is not a real scenario and some of the facts have been stretched in order to dramatize issues):

Spaulding and Not So Shy (names changed to protect both the innocent and the guilty) have purchased a number of adjacent parcels in Acton that they were able to assemble into one large 200 –acre lot. Some portions of this lot are wooded; some are open fields. They are proposing to develop it as an industrial park with some manufacturing and some research and development uses. This lot is located near an elementary school in a neighborhood where many of the children walk to school, but where not all the streets have sidewalks leading to the school.

VITAL STATISTICS: Hypothetical Industrial Park of 200 Acres	
Floor area of industrial buildings	1.5 million square feet
(Floor area ratio of .2: 35% set aside for open space)	Parking of 13 acres
Buildings value	\$255,000,000 @ \$170/sq. ft. construction cost
Land value	\$100,000,000 @ \$500,000/acre
Total taxable value	\$355,000,000
2011 tax rate	\$18.08
Annual tax yield	\$6,418,400
Water Use	120,000 gallons per day
Septic Disposal	100,000 gallons per day
Stormwater Disposal Requirements ¹	930,000 gallons (for every inch that falls)

¹ The storm water estimate is for the building(s) footprint only, and assumes a one story building(s), permeable surfaces for parking, roadways and land and streetscaping. In all likelihood 200 acres of industrial land would be subdivided into 5 parcels and 5 300,000 square foot buildings would be built with 5 separate parking areas and interior roadways, with 5 separate septic systems.

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PROJECTED HYPOTHETICAL IMPACTS

Fiscal impact. Amount reduction in residential property tax (average residential property) = 8.9%. = \$805.

Environmental impact. some encroachment on wetlands and the habitat of the blue-spotted salamander (rare species listed among those of special concern)

Traffic impact. It is estimated that the development will result in between 6,000 and 8,000 additional trips per day (5% of which are likely to be trucks). In initial discussions there was some mention of the fact that those employed in the research and development were on more flexible schedules, thus diffusing the peak traffic time.

Impact on town character. the proposal is not complete but the siting and design of the building seem not to have taken aesthetics into account. Additionally, there is no mention of using planting as a visual screen.

Impact on employment. Provision of a range of job opportunities for different skill levels

Agglomeration effect. will most likely stimulate an increase in other types of economic development, such as restaurants, copy centers, etc.

NOTE: An office park would produce slightly more taxes because construction costs are slightly higher for office buildings. Office space would not offer the same wages for workers with only high school educations. The industrial park envisioned conforms to current Acton zoning regulations but a 200-acre site would probably have to be rezoned for it. Currently there are 295 acres of vacant land zoned for industry but they are not all in the same place. The argument can be made that if 1,500,000 sq. ft. of industrial buildings were built on the scattered sites now zoned for industry the same fiscal impacts would result.

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ROLE-PLAYING PERSPECTIVES

Instructions: *Read through the blurb describing the hypothetical scenario and issue and then think about how you might respond to this if you were to represent your assigned goal. In other words think about what your position would be if you only had this goal in mind when making decisions regarding economic development in Acton. It's OK to make extreme arguments in order to exaggerate your points. The purpose here is to illustrate the diversity in points of view and the potential trade offs of decisions in order to get the discussion off to a "burning" start!*

1. Playing your role, comment on what pleases you and what concerns you about this proposal? Can you think of ways to mitigate some of your concerns?

2. Use the questions as a guide to ask questions of the experts and of the public.

Goal viewpoints for the role-playing will be:

Financial (pro)
Town Character (con)
Community Gathering (pro)
Environmental Sustainability (con)
Connections (con)

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ROLE: Maintain and Improve Financial Well-being of the Town

GOAL: We believe it is critical for us to sustain and strengthen our town's financial well-being. This includes commercial and economic development that reflects the long-term goals of both businesses and residents of the community.

Objective 1: Improve existing commercial areas

Objective 2: Promote economic development that supports our other goals

Objective 3: Achieve a balance of services and taxes

Objective 4: Support the ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Commercial and industrial development tends to require less in services than residential development, and these uses thus make a positive net contribution to the town's fiscal balance.

POSITION: Pro

"By increasing our economic development we will increase the tax base and have more money to pay for our essential and desired town facilities and services"

Additional Concerns:

- How much and what type of economic development is best for Acton's financial well-being?
- "How can we structure the payment of taxes (and perhaps even "linkage fees") to best meet our town's needs?"
- How can we use economic development to positively impact residential taxes? (*e.g. how much development would we need in order to offset residential taxes? What kind of development would best meet this objective? Split tax rate?*)
- How can we capture more local shoppers who currently shop out of town?
- How can we attract job-creating businesses to Acton?
- What makes Acton attractive to business or industry? What may possibly make Acton unattractive? How can we make Acton more attractive?
- How important are sewers and other infrastructure to support economic development?

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ROLE: Preserve Town Character

GOAL: 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: Preserve rural characteristics and open space

Objective 2: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes

Objective 3: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.

Objective 4: Preserve and enhance village centers

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Some economic activities are housed in buildings that are not compatible with Acton's town character. This is both a question of architectural design and site planning. There will be opportunities to improve site planning and architectural design in future redevelopment and rehabilitation of some commercial and industrial properties, as well as in new commercial developments. On the other hand, some businesses are housed in historic buildings and in historic districts. Their business success supports the maintenance of these historic assets. Consumer choices and government laws, regulations and policies can significantly alter a businesses success and future outlook.

POSITION: Con

"More economic development often negatively affects the rural feel of the Town"

Additional Concerns:

- How can we ensure that new development is in keeping with Acton's town character? (e.g. Design Guidelines, Design Review, Site Plan Review, tax breaks to encourage in-fill development)
- What are some positive examples in Acton of development that is in keeping with our town's character? What about examples from other towns of things you would like to see in Acton and what kinds of zoning /other regulations/incentives would support this kind of development (e.g. inhibits fast food chains and big box stores)
- How can we ensure that any new development or redevelopment is in keeping with Acton's town character?
(e.g. Design Guidelines, Design Review, tax breaks to encourage in-fill development, etc.)

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ROLE: 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 1: Provide a community facility large enough to accommodate a variety of uses and a wide range of programming

Objective 2: Maintain and improve existing gathering spaces and look for opportunities to create informal gathering spaces.

Objective 3: Support additional cultural activities

Objective 4: Maintain and increase recreational opportunities

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Creating attractive and well functioning indoor and outdoor gathering places in commercial developments will aid in improving social interactions between people, and in increasing customer traffic and sales for local businesses.

POSITION: Pro

“Having more places to go for shopping and for dining will create more of a sense of community as residents will stay in Town and there will be more opportunities to run into each other.

- the industrial park will spur the development of more eating places
- can we get the developer to provide more recreational opportunities, either on site or off site?

Additional Concerns:

- What kinds of private development can provide opportunities for community gathering?
- Where should such places be best located? (criteria)

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ROLE: 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 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.

Objective 2: To reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins in our environment.

Objective 3: To reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from residential, commercial, industrial, and municipal uses.

Objective 4: To move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Building construction (both new and rehabilitation) and maintenance practices that save energy, reduce carbon footprints and use renewable resources are ways to increase sustainability in economic development. In the survey done two years ago, a majority (53.5%) of Acton's business people indicated that they would use affordable "green" construction techniques for their businesses. Additionally, locating establishments within walking or biking distance of neighborhoods may result in reducing people's dependence on their cars.

POSITION: Con

"Providing more goods and services and even some jobs nearby may result in decreasing people's driving distance which will be better for the environment"

"How can we be assured that some of these jobs will go to Actonians?"

"How can we mitigate some of the traffic impacts? What about impacts to the wetlands and the habitat of the blue-spotted salamander?"

Additional Concerns:

- How likely is it that Actonians choose to work in Acton? What kinds of professions would be more likely to do so?
- Where should such establishments best be located? (criteria)

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ROLE: 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 1: Improve walking and biking experience

Objective 2: Improve circulation around town

Objective 3: Promote communication amongst town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.

Objective 4: Support and strengthen neighborhoods

SCRIPT GUIDE:

Pedestrian pathways can be created and/or improved with better site planning in commercial and residential developments. Vehicle connections that do not require use of public roads (e. g., between parking and internal circulation spaces) can be made in some cases between adjacent commercial properties.

POSITION: Con

“The new development will add traffic to the already congested streets.”

“Providing more establishments in town may help support the use of alternative modes of transportation such as walking, biking and the town shuttle”

“At the very least, we need to request that the developer pay for sidewalks to the nearby elementary school. The additional traffic that will result from the development will add to the already congested streets and therefore, go against our goal, so how else can the developer contribute (e.g. pay for traffic calming/control)?”

Additional Concerns:

- Where do we need more walking and biking facilities?
- How can we increase ridership of the town shuttle?

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DISCUSSION with Experts & Public

BRIEF SUMMARY OF INPUT AND DISCUSSION UNTIL THIS POINT

ENDING QUESTION (no longer in role-play)

1. Why economic development- which would you say is the main reason Acton needs economic development (which leads to what type)?
 - to provide more goods and services (retail, professional offices)
 - to provide more choices for places to go for dining/entertainment (restaurants, coffee shops, pubs, theater)
 - to provide opportunities for casual interaction (coffee shops, pubs)
 - to increase job opportunities (high tech, manufacturing)
 - to increase the tax base in order to pay for public services
 - other _____??

Complete list and ask for a show of hands for top choice

Brief Discussion

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SMALL GROUP EXERCISE (45 minutes)

Brief Introduction and description of small group exercises (10 minutes)

You will be asked a couple of questions, next you will be invited to participate in a mapping exercise and finally you will be asked to prioritize action steps.

1. Where do you work?

A. Ask for a show of hands

<i>Where?</i>	<i>How many?</i>
At home	
In-town	
Out-of-town	

B. How many of you would like to work in Acton if you had the opportunity to do so? *Ask for a show of hands (yes, no)*

2. Where do you shop and dine? (how often in Acton, how often out-of-town)? Ask for a show of hands

<i>Where?</i>	<i>Shop</i>	<i>Dine</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Mostly in Acton			
Mostly out of town			

Mapping (15 minutes)

3. Think about the goods and services would you prefer be located in Acton that you currently have to go out of town for (either they don't exist at all or there is not enough of)?

Restaurants/coffee shops/pub

Small shops

Big box

Personal services (e.g. dry cleaners, tailor)

Professional offices (e.g. doctor, dentist, lawyer)

Industrial/manufacturing

High tech/R&D

Where would the different kinds of economic development be best located?

Use color-coded legos for types² (see above list)

Prioritizing (5 minutes)

If you could do one thing to address economic development issues in Acton, what would it be? PRIORITIZE WITH DOTS: After all participants have added their thoughts to the list, give each participant 5 dots. They may not use more than 3 on any one item.

RELEVANT REFERENCES

² 9 available lego colors

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Maps

Commercial and Industrial Areas in Acton (Figure 2.7 in Inventory)
Housing Opportunities Identified in the 2006 Community Development Plan (Figure 1.6)
Acton Open Space (Figure 5.1)
Existing Zoning (Figure 8.2)
Acton Sidewalk Locations (Figure 6.2)
Acton Multimodal Transportation Network (Figure 6.1)
Acton Recreational Resources (Figure 5.2)
Historic Resources (Figure 4.6)

Copy of inventory

Other Relevant Reports?

PROPS

Use **legos or colored stickers** to indicate desired locations + type / kind of economic development