

## **DRAFT Goals and Objectives and Strategies: DRAFT 4**

*The following is a draft of the Revised Goals and Objective with associated proposed strategies. The strategies are based on input from the public, the Committee and Town Staff, and the Consultant Team.*

*NEXT STEPS... The next step will be for us to begin finalizing the strategies associated with the objectives in order to develop an implementation plan.*

### **GOAL 1: Preserve Town Character**

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 1.1: Preserve rural characteristics and open space**

##### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Define rural characteristics (buildings, views, landscapes, etc.) and incorporate into a plan to actively preserve these; be sure to:
  - Explore ways of saving stone walls, barns, and other structures with rural character
  - Ensure that new sidewalks conform with Acton's Sidewalk Design Guidelines whenever possible. (choice of layout, materials, landscaping) should be in keeping with the nature of the area (see Guidelines for Acton Sidewalk Design<sup>1</sup>)
- Preserve and acquire open space
  - Create a proactive strategy to anticipate and be poised to respond to open space in terms of protection and acquisition of parcels, as well as water resource protection issues.
    - Define primary purpose of protecting open space and develop criteria for prioritizing parcels(e.g. conservation, views, active recreation, protection of water resources, etc.); build on Open Space Plan
    - Create a short list of open space protection priorities and stay focused on that list (avoid getting side-tracked by less relevant opportunities)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=856>

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- Clarify for better public understanding regarding which open space is not protected and to what degree protected space is indeed protected
- Conduct research on alternative methods of purchasing and protecting open space
- Use zoning to protect open space parcels
  - Zone for infill development in and around key centers such as Kelley's Corner where density is desirable so as to protect open space outside the centers
  - Utilize cluster zoning for most residential development outside the centers
  - Provide incentives for transfer of development <sup>2</sup>away from open land to desired growth centers (thus preserving the entire open parcel) and cluster zoning for the development that does occur outside the centers (thus preserving half of the parcel).
- Acquire open space parcels identified as desirable as opportunities arise and funds allow.
  - Use tax income generated from economic development and higher Community Preservation Act surcharges to accelerate purchases of open space
  - Purchase priority sites with Community Preservation Act funds and potentially other funds
- Utilize other regulatory tools and incentives to protect open space
  - Actively support agriculture (e.g. right to farm by-law)
  - Provide tax incentives to protect open space
  - Promote community gardens, country fairs and farmer's markets
- Develop a comprehensive site and design review process
  - Support the further refinement of Acton's design guidelines for commercial development<sup>3</sup> and the extension of the guidelines to include residential and mixed-use development.
  - Promote use of by-laws (e.g. prevention of demolition, clear cutting, etc.)
  - Use tax and CPC funds to create incentives for the provision of deed restrictions
- Manage growth proactively
  - Build on the 1998 Master Plan recommendations
  - Encourage regional cooperation; create more formal structures for collaborating with neighboring towns to address common issues (including 40B developments, open space protection, etc.)
  - Guide residential growth in such a way so that it is consistent with other goals and so that fiscal impacts are taken into account
  - Address 40B (see Objective 5.2)

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<sup>2</sup> Short definition or reference as to where to find definition

<sup>3</sup> See current at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=343>

## Objective 1.2: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes

### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Develop preservation priorities
  - Define historic characteristics (buildings, views, landscapes, etc.) and work with relevant Committees to actively preserve these
  - Preserve historically significant buildings, landscapes and other historic features (see Heritage Landscape Inventory)
  - Consider desirability of expanding current historic districts to include older historic homes and historically significant structures (as listed in the Cultural Resources List)
- Implement Scenic Roads By-law to preserve stone walls along certain roads
- Conduct outreach to private historical property owners from town or preservationists to help with funding and encourage preservation
  - Ensure that historic preservation efforts, regulations, and administration help instead of hinder owners to maintain their historic properties, business to grow, and historic centers to thrive economically

## Objective 1.3: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.

### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Invest in tourist support infrastructure for certain key sites and publicize town features (historic site, nature trails, etc)
- Improve town entrances / gateways to be welcoming & reflect the Town's historic heritage
- Support historic celebrations
- Increase awareness of historic past (e.g. events, plaques, other markers)

## Objective 1.4: Preserve and enhance village centers

### Enhance Village Centers

### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Complete a Village Centers Plan that considers all potential village centers as part of a system of centers (identify and define roles, character, uses, issues in each village).
  - Define desired character (e.g. “quaint, but not cute”). Each village should have its own distinct character
- Limit and guide growth geographically through infill and redevelopment in and around existing centers (West Acton, South Acton and Kelley's Corner)
- Implement the Village District Plans (with adjustments) so that the centers' full potential as villages are realized
- Provide small-scale “vest-pocket” parks and playgrounds in the village centers and Kelley's Corner

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- Encourage vitality; create attractive and walkable villages centers
  - Encourage activity by promoting a variety of uses at different times of day and night, including grocery store, family restaurant, a variety of businesses, places for programmed events, etc.
  - Support walkability in the centers by providing sidewalks along the street and well-lit and landscaped pathways to buildings and within parking lots. Provide parking on street and in combined lots behind buildings
  - Encourage unique and fun window-shopping
  - Support locally owned shops; develop “buy local” campaign
  - Identify, seek, and support anchor with “pulling power”
  - Provide more on-street parking
  - Plant flowers and trees to enhance Acton streets, especially in villages and Kelley’s Corner
  - Invite ethnic communities to contribute vitality through celebration, food, etc
  - Use West Acton and West Concord as models
  - Employ traffic mitigation measures (i.e. on-street parking, street-trees, etc.)
  - Preserve and create new green spaces along roads and in front of buildings
  
- Develop a non-profit semi-government organization to revitalize village centers

### Preserve West Acton Village Center

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Consider designating West Acton as a “key center” to which some growth is guided.
- Prepare strong design guidelines with incentives dependent on preserving character and compatibility with historic resources. Concentrate transportation investments such as sidewalks and traffic calming in and around the village.

### Improve Kelley’s Corner

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Develop Kelley’s Corner into a mixed use town center and transportation hub
- Encourage wide range of shops and restaurants
- Redevelop area with pedestrian orientation (including sidewalks, benches, signage, etc.); encourage the provision of outdoor seating; separate seating areas from sidewalk with plants, low fence, etc.
- Develop design guidelines to control “look and character”; encourage redevelopment with parking on side and back of buildings; ensure that new development uses historical references, e.g. building facades that are in keeping with Acton’s historic character

## **GOAL 2: 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 2.1:** 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, and to ensure that future development fits within the constraints of these local water cycles.

### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Include groundwater, stormwater, and surface water; and specifics on how planning can identify and address the limits to development implicit in our water systems
- Prioritize Kelley's Corner development, which has sewer service.
- Consider extension of sewer to West Acton Village to serve redevelopment of the commercial area north of Massachusetts Ave and can also serve existing high priority neighborhoods identified in the Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan.
- Utilize advanced package wastewater treatment with groundwater recharge for other concentrations of residential and commercial development.
- Monitor groundwater quantitative and quality and plan for necessary Water District service expansion, quality improvements, and well-head protection.
- Include broad-based education on sustainability and actively support approaches toward business and citizen participation

**Objective 2.2:** To move toward a material economy in which there is no waste or accumulation of toxins.

### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Conduct research with the goal of making the transfer station a 100% recycling center
- Develop policies that discourage the use of plastic (bottled water, single-use bags)
- Implement trash reduction programs
- Institute single-stream recycling at the transfer center.
- Conduct e-waste education
- Expand drop/swap and hazardous waste day events

**Objective 2.3:** To reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases from residential, commercial, industrial, and municipal uses.

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Increase the use of safer and renewable energy sources
- Provide incentives to home-owners and businesses to build green and save energy
- Retrofit public buildings to be energy efficient
- Eliminate idling vehicles
- Organize web-based car pooling
- Start a “Transitional Town Project” toward self-sufficiency and energy autonomy
- Turn the transfer station into a renewable energy power plant (also use yard waste)
- Use the transfer station as a model for sustainable development, including exhibiting trash as art

**Objective 2.4:** To move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Provide expanded public transportation/walking/biking facilities linking the villages and Kelley’s Corner
- Encourage denser zoning close to South Acton train station
- Relate land use planning to transportation planning
- include planting and protecting large, long-lasting, carbon-sequestering trees
- support new and expanded farming
- Involve Acton’s ethnic communities; many come from cultures that have a history and tradition of sustainability
- Increase awareness and educate people on the need to be more sustainable
  - Provide education in schools
  - Promote greater public awareness town-wide
  - Develop massive energy conservation drives

## **GOAL 3: 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 3.1: Improve walking and biking experience**

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Create and extend connections with a system of sidewalks, trails, bike paths, on-road bike accommodation
  - Extend sidewalks according to plan; wherever possible ensure that provision of sidewalks does not conflict with protecting town character (see Guidelines for Acton Sidewalk Design<sup>4</sup>)
  - bike lanes and wider shared lanes and shoulders where appropriate
  - bike racks where feasible and where they will be utilized
  - increase awareness regarding sharing the road issues
  - Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety
  - consider planning issues for walking and biking facilities separately (they can potentially be in conflict)
  - consider paving “woody” shortcuts where appropriate so bikes, wheelchairs and strollers can use them
  - complete the development and construction of the Bruce Freeman Trail and Assabet River Trail
- Explore North American and European models and incorporate relevant elements and become a model for a walkable and bikeable community
- Improve communication regarding paths
  - Keep maps current showing sidewalks and bike paths

### **Objective 3.2: Improve circulation around town**

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Support and explore ways of increasing ridership of the town-wide shuttle and expand the shuttle system
  - Build MinuteVan shuttle into a more comprehensive system, possibly incorporating the Council on Aging shuttle, that provides access between villages, Kelley’s Corner, commercial areas, and the MBTA commuter rail with better frequency, hours, and coverage than the current shuttle.
- Support the improvements to the train station
  - Provide more parking
  - Build train station building

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=856>

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- Increase overhang on canopy for weather protection
- Provide safe bike lane to station
- Explore possibility of developing train station as mixed-use center with shops, more parking, etc., consistent with guiding growth to key centers.
- Address traffic congestion (e.g. enforce lower speed limits, plow wider shoulders in winter, speed humps, etc.)

### **Objective 3.3: Promote communication amongst town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.**

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Improve communication and centralized information regarding existing resources and events and promote active engagement of citizens and the transparency of town government processes and decision-making
  - Use Acton TV or Radio Station for better town-wide communication
  - Improve town wide opt-in email communication system
  - Provide signs, website and written information in multiple languages
  - Create a community bulletin board
  - Keep town web site up-to-date
  - Use multiple languages (both staff and written materials should reflect the town's population)
- Improve communication and coordination between the Schools and the Town regarding future planning and use of resources
- Improve communication with businesses
  - Provide information regarding town processes (e.g. permitting, etc.) for business owners
  - Town Hall should work more closely with businesses
  - Acknowledge business owners for their participation in Town (donations, etc.)
- Attract more volunteers in order to engage more citizens so as to strengthen the community
  - Publicize and promote more, use website
  - Provide information in multiple forums
  - Conduct broad-based outreach and recruit new volunteers
  - Provide incentives
  - Provide flexibility in scheduling/timing
  - Provide and advertise opportunities for one time volunteering (as a trial)

### **Objective 3.4: Support and strengthen neighborhoods**

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Promote walkability with the provision of sidewalks, benches, etc.
- Provide facilities such as playground, neighborhood swimming pool, etc. and ensure resources to maintain them
- Ensure that physical environment is pleasing and compatible with Acton's character (e.g. aesthetically pleasing features including public art, open space, parking behind stores, architecture in keeping with town character, meandering sidewalks<sup>5</sup>)

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<sup>5</sup> except in the villages

- Support both formal and informal communication and interaction among neighbors
  - Block parties
  - Neighborhood newsletter, email lists
  - Create neighborhood email lists, create and maintain database of residents by neighborhood
  - Promote neighborhood book groups, walking groups, etc.
  - Organize competitions between neighborhoods
  - Establish community projects
  - Support and expand the Acton Newcomer's Club and provide additional opportunities for newcomers to connect

## **GOAL 4: 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 4.1: Provide a community facility large enough to accommodate a variety of uses and a wide range of programming

### **Ideas for Strategies**

*Explore the possibility of providing a Community Center and consider*

- Accessibility; locate in central location within walking distance for kids access after school
- Potential and opportunities for connections with various ages and interests
- Bringing Danny's Place together with the senior center

*Explore the need for new and/or an expanded Senior Center and consider*

- That a senior center could be utilized by different groups after hours (like schools) and/or have other community uses
- Providing transportation alternatives to the center

Objective 4.2: Maintain and improve existing gathering spaces and look for opportunities to create informal gathering spaces.

### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Enhance Memorial Library's value as an important community gathering place; in particular make the library more youth-friendly and increase programming geared to seniors
- Use design guidelines and provide incentives for developers to provide gathering places in new infill and redevelopment in Kelley's Corner and other village centers.
- Protect open space; it provides opportunities for outdoor community gathering
  - Develop additional small outdoor gathering spaces (other than NARA Park)

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- Encourage the development of a variety of small spaces including utilizing in between and/or “left over” spaces (examples include mini-parks and plazas with outdoor seating to encourage passersby to sit and linger and sidewalks and benches in village areas)
- Consider “temporary” use of outdoor spaces for gathering, e.g. promote and support Acton Yard Sale or Flea Market e.g. in Kmart parking lot)
- Increase collaboration – e.g. between Community Education, Recreation Department, and Town Boards to offer additional programs as opportunities for gathering
- Consider use of existing resources and whether they are being used to their full potential

### Increase Amount and Variety of Restaurants

- Provide guidelines and incentives for the provision of outdoor seating
- Actively recruit and try to attract mid-level, family, casual, and additional “ethnic” eateries
- Address lack of sewers in key locations such as West Acton

### Objective 4.3: Support additional cultural activities

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Encourage development of a Movie Theater (including independent art films, armchairs and food)
- Support Community Theater (including capacity to show film)
- Support creation of more music venues (including classical music)
- Support additional venues for theater productions (drama, concerts, dance)
- Increase number and variety and location of community events
- Look for ways to make existing community gatherings more multi-cultural and inclusive
- Support the creation of a town-wide group like the current Neighborhood Forums

### Objective 4.4: Maintain and increase recreational opportunities

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

- Provide more indoor and outdoor community recreational opportunities
  - Create small parks in neighborhoods
  - Consider requiring playgrounds for children in developments as part of approval process
- Provide recreational opportunities for all ages
  - Expand focus beyond school sports
  - Provide more recreational opportunities for teens (possibilities include swimming pool, teen center, bike trails, etc.)
- Maintain and repair existing facilities including NARA, the tennis courts; provide bathrooms, parking, and lighting where needed

## **GOAL 5: Support Inclusion and Diversity**

We value our diversity in all its forms, reflecting a range of ages and socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. We wish to foster respect, promote interaction and actively encourage a wide variety of individuals to live, work, and play in our community.

### Objective 5.1: Support all ages

#### **Ideas for Strategies**

##### Seniors

- Support the provision of housing that is appropriate to seniors (e.g. affordable, located within walking distance of goods and services, smaller units)
- Provide transportation options for seniors to travel
- Explore the need to improve or expand the existing senior center
- Provide resources to promote health, fitness/wellness (including basic infrastructure like sidewalks to educational resources like classes,)
- Provide inter-generational opportunities for interaction and learning (e.g. invite seniors to contribute to school activities)
- Conduct outreach to seniors (including newly arrived seniors who may speak languages other than English)
- Offer more paid part time positions at Town Hall and tax exemptions to seniors

##### Teens

- Provide more accessible activities for teenagers
- Consider creating a club (e.g. like Danny's Place) for older kids, another park, or other gathering place for teens
- Extend sidewalks and increase access to public transportation to help teens get around
- Conduct outreach to youth, listen and take seriously their input regarding their needs
- Involve youth in town governance by providing teen part time work and volunteer opportunities in town services

## Objective 5.2: Support households of all income levels

### Ideas for Strategies

- **Develop a comprehensive pro-active affordable housing strategy to include:**
  - Providing incentives for the development of small, scattered sites especially in and around village centers.
  - The provision of housing affordable<sup>6</sup> to empty nesters, Town staff, and young families (ensuring that the design of the “affordable housing” is in keeping with Town character)
  - The support to residents wishing to subdivide their homes (and property ????) to allow parents and family members to live more economically
- Coordinate with the school system and Town Community Services Coordinator to identify those in need and match them with volunteers and agencies willing and able to help them.
- Continue to support home-based businesses
- Continue to support agencies working to serve the needs of the Town’s low income residents

## Objective 5.3: Embrace cultural diversity

### Ideas for Strategies

- Provide space for celebration and cultural activities
- Support and encourage all people to participate in Town government such as the policy that any Acton resident can participate on Town board or committee (regardless of whether or not they are a U.S. citizen)
- Provide more English as a Second Language classes
- Provide organized welcome (contact people, welcome committee, reference guide to existing resources)
- Increase access to public transportation (especially useful for households with only one car and for those who cannot drive and/or do not have driver’s license)
- Increase the dialogue between multi-cultural groups
  - Provide easily accessible contact information for various ethnic and cultural communities (including Brazilian, Chinese, Latino, Russian, and Indian communities)
- Provide recognition of holidays in the schools (and maybe allowance for time off)
- Hire multi-lingual staff and materials at Town Hall and Memorial Library
- In addition to Chinese languages, include Indian languages and Portuguese and Russian as foreign language options at the schools
- Promote Native American history as well as European history of the town.

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<sup>6</sup> While Massachusetts has a statutory definition of affordable housing, participants may have defined this term in other ways.

Objective 5.4: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Apply Universal Design principles<sup>7</sup> to provide physical access benefits to all
- Provide more transportation options accessible to the disabled community
- Support job training and career counseling opportunities for disabled individuals
- Provide housing for the disabled
- Consider ways to provide access to all town-owned buildings and town-wide activities (e.g. clearly marked accessible parking, car pool options, etc.)
- Explore the desirability of paving trails (e.g. Morrison Farm and other “woody” shortcuts) so that bikes, wheelchairs and strollers can use them

## **GOAL 6: Preserve and Enhance Town-owned Assets**

We value our Town assets and wish to preserve and enhance them. These include our open spaces, schools, municipal properties and facilities.

Objective 6.1: Protect Town-owned open space

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Use cluster zoning and transfer of development<sup>8</sup> rights to key centers to protect existing open space
- Promote National Wildlife programs
- Support bio-diversity education
- Raise awareness in the public at large regarding the value of preserving open space

Objective 6.2: Support excellence in schools

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Ensure that school facilities are well-maintained and updated
- Address divisiveness in community caused by financial burden schools place on Town resources.
- Work through the Acton Leadership Group as enrollments decline and commercial development occurs to allocate increased fiscal capacity to educational improvements (such as reduced class size) and spending on other priorities such as open space acquisition, affordable housing, and investments in transportation improvements and other infrastructure.

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<sup>7</sup> Definition

<sup>8</sup> Short definition or reference as to where to find definition

Objective 6.3: Maintain municipal properties and facilities

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Conduct an energy audit of Town buildings and identify ways to increase energy efficiency
- Use the transfer station for solar power generation and as a model for sustainability
- Maintain Memorial Library
- Explore ways in which Town Hall can use more recent technology to provide services
- Implement relevant 1998 Master Plan goals and objectives

**GOAL 7: Maintain and Improve Financial Well-being of the Town**

We value our Town's future and as such, it's critical for us to sustain and strengthen its financial well-being. This includes building commercial and economic development plans that reflect the long-term goals of both businesses and residents of the community.

Objective 7.1: Improve existing commercial areas

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Hire an Economic Development Officer to proactively recruit and retain desirable businesses and to help to coordinate the business community
  - Encourage an increase in development of shopping and eating options
  - Expand Acton Day
- Make improvements to access and transportation
  - Reduce traffic congestion (e.g. traffic improvements and increasing options through sidewalks, shuttle, interconnected paths, etc.)
  - Provide more parking
  - Increase safety, especially at entries of commercial areas
  - Improve connections between strip malls, especially along Great Road
- Be more business friendly
  - Improve the permitting process
  - Include business owners in events and notices
  - Be more welcoming to new businesses
  - Increase flexibility on sign allowances
- Improve the aesthetics of shopping areas

Objective 7.2: Promote economic development that supports our other goals

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Redevelop village commercial areas into mixed use that respects the existing village character and that provides opportunities for gathering and socializing
- Promote employment-oriented development (e.g. high tech/ R&D offices) in areas that don't directly impact neighborhoods: Great Road, Nagog Park, Powdermill, and large commercial parcels on Rt. 2

Objective 7.3: Achieve a balance of services and taxes

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Ensure that all development is coordinated with and takes into account the impact on town services and facilities
- Promote economic development to enhance the commercial tax base (in order to pay for needed services)

Objective 7.4: Support the ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime

**Ideas for Strategies**

- Develop a housing plan that includes the preservation and creation of a wide range of housing types.
- Use zoning incentives in Kelley's Corner and the villages to provide housing units that are suitable for empty nesters, seniors, and young families.