BEST PRACTICES PRECEDENTS

Issue: "Village" Center

Concept: Reinforcing and strengthening the existing land use and socio-economic patterns of Acton's villages as the organizing structure and main setting for the town's social, economic and public life.

What do we mean when we use the word village?

The community has expressed an interest in continuing to pursue the goal of having a series of village centers as places to gather, shop, eat, and even live. What most people seem to desire is small-scale development with unique shops, coffee shops and restaurants and other places to gather. They would like these to be walkable and bicycle-friendly places located within walking distance of residential neighborhoods (see Acton Voices below for more detailed description of residents' thoughts). Actonians are also concerned about the compatibility of new development with the town's character.

How do we make existing and potentially new village centers more vibrant centers of town life?

Adding housing units above shops and in in-fill development in and around village centers results in a larger market for shops. Recruiting more and more diverse shops will result in more places to go. Ensuring that walking and biking is safe and pleasant and planning events in and around the streets makes for a livelier street life. Village centers need to become more of a destination with a distinct sense of place.

But focusing on village centers did not result in much after the last master plan…

According to the previous master plan: "Village-based planning was not supported mainly due to discrepancies between what wished for and what market has brought forward."[1] As a reaction to the fact that the previous master planning efforts did not bring about the desired results in terms of the degree of village-type development, this master plan is proposing more aggressive regulatory measures and stronger incentives.

Should we choose one or more village centers to work on first?

There seems to be a significant degree of consensus regarding the desire for a town center in addition to the set of village centers and many residents have pointed to Kelley's Corner as the most feasible and desirable location for this. This in addition to the fact that there are relatively few landowners and … may make it a prime candidate for the first phase of implementation. In terms of the village centers, >>>>>>>

What are some examples of village centers we can look to as models?

Concord, MA; Lexington, MA; Arlington, MA

Acton Voices: "What is an ideal village center and how can we enhance ours?"[2]

- *Walkability*
- *Events*
- *Unique and fun window shopping*
- *Locally-owned shops, "buy local" campaign*
- *Anchor with pulling power*
- *"quaint but not cute" – each village with its own distinct character*
- *Slow traffic, plant flowers and trees, move towards mixed use*
- *Invite ethnic community to contribute vitality through celebration and food*
- *Activities including parks, outdoor areas to congregate, grocery store.*
- *Family restaurant, benches, variety of businesses, parking in back of buildings, place to go at night, pleasant lighting.*

[1] Master Plan Update, Town of Acton, MA, Dec. 1998
[2] Responses by Acton residents in variety of forums held during Phase I of the planning process.

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Concord Center, Concord, MA

Desirable Features: ***(physical, programmatic)***	Feels like a destination. Signage is interesting, attractive, and "blade type", oriented to pedestrians; shops are one of a kind, small-scale; some housing over shops; diversity of shops and restaurants, plenty of accessible parking but tucked away in back.
Contributing Context:	surrounding residential community can walk to center, tourists brought by bus provide additional market
Strategies to Accomplish:	strong design guidelines and design review, strong sign by-law which promotes creativity, village overlay district, economic development officer ???…….
Cost: ***(monetary and/or other, if info is available/accessible)***	

Interesting, creative, and attractive signage oriented to the pedestrian contributes to the visual vitality of Concord Center

Concord Center, Concord, MA

Mixed Use: Housing above retail

Rear Entrances: the back side of buildings are welcoming

Pedestrian amenities

Connectivity: pleasant and accessible connection between parking and shops

Aesthetically pleasing, accessible parking tucked away behind buildings

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Lexington Center, Lexington, MA

Desirable Features:	Mixed use, infill, compact, interesting and aesthetically pleasing design with public walkways, outdoor gathering spaces, and parking located behind retail establishments.
Contributing Context:	Significant numbers of housing units within walking distance from center, some housing above retail (more recent development); variety of shops and restaurants, high school within short walking distance of center
Strategies to Accomplish:	Passed beer and wine liquor by-law allowing smaller restaurants without full liquor license, economic development officer hired with much focus on center activities, some parking shared with area institutions (e.g. churches)
Cost: ***(monetary and/or other, if info is available/accessible)***	

Sidewalks with pedestrian amenities for resting, meeting and greeting

Lexington Center, Lexington, MA
Continued

Mixed Use: Housing over retail

Depot Square: open space near bus stop with benches and grassy areas for gathering; concerts are held here in warm months

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Concord Commons, Concord, MA

ACREAGE and DENSITY:	56 unit condominium development in 2 buildings 2.3 acres, 24 dwelling units per acre
LOCATION:	On the western edge of West Concord Village, located on Conant Street just north of, and adjacent to, the MBTA commuter rail line
BUILT:	2006
DEVELOPER:	The Boynton Company/The Tambone Investment Group
APARTMENT UNIT PRICES:	$315,000 - $550,000 (current prices; a block of 25 units was sold at discounted prices at auction in 2008)
ASSESSED VALUE (2011):	$24,220,000 (Average per unit = $432,500)
ESTIMATED PROPERTY TAXES:	$319,460 (Average per unit = $5,700)
	The 56 units consist of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom luxury condominiums in four story buildings with elevators. Units range in size from 1,269 to 1,814 sq. ft. in floor area. There is very little open space on the site of Concord Commons. Some of it is occupied by open parking. There is additional covered parking under the buildings.

Concord Commons Aerial View

Ground Views of Concord Commons

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Concord Greene, Concord, MA

ACREAGE and DENSITY:	220 unit condominium development in 31 buildings 25 acres, 8.8 dwelling units per acre
LOCATION:	On the eastern edge of West Concord Village, between Route 62 (Main Street), Route 2, Baker Avenue and the MBTA Commuter Rail Line
BUILT:	1976 - 1978
DEVELOPER:	Comeau Development Company
APARTMENT UNIT PRICES:	$284,000 - $422,000
ASSESSED VALUE (2011):	$77,600,000 (Average per unit = $352,700)
ESTIMATED PROPERTY TAXES:	$1,023,500 (Average per unit = $4,650)
	The 220 condominiums consist of 1- and 2-bedroom apartment-type units and 3-story townhouses, ranging in size from 1,070 to 1,593 sq. ft. in floor area. In addition to the buildings, Concord Greene has three small ponds made from damming a stream that meanders from the Assabet River, under Route 2, through a marsh and Concord Greene, under Baker Avenue, and back into the river. There is also a small apple orchard, a rock grotto, and a plot of community gardens with a mixture of vegetables and flowers. There are also two tennis courts, a club house with an exercise room and a swimming pool.

Concord Greene Aerial View

Concord Greene Units

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Russell Place, Arlington, MA

ACREAGE and DENSITY:	a 40 unit, 11 building condominium 4.5 acres, 9 dwelling units per acre
LOCATION:	On the edge of Arlington Center, between the Minuteman Bikepath and town- and church-owned recreational playfields
BUILT:	2002 - 2004
DEVELOPER:	Collins Development
APARTMENT UNIT PRICES:	$350,000 to $600,000
ASSESSED VALUE (2011):	$15,824,800 (average per unit = $395,620)
ESTIMATED PROPERTY TAXES:	$196,386 (average per unit = $4,910)
	There are a variety of floorplans available in units at Russell Place. Large three-level townhouses have garage bays underneath with additional driveway spaces, some units are primarily on one level with loft-style rooms above, other flats have finished lower level space. Features available in some units include fireplaces, skylights, cathedral ceilings, and decks or porches. The units have central air conditioning and varying levels of finishes in the kitchens. Some have hardwood floors throughout, others have a combination of wood floors and carpet. Information about recent sales at Russell Place follows. Data includes asking price, sale price, original price when the unit was first sold, and date of sale. Garage parking is noted by a "G" and a plus sign indicates that there is additional driveway parking.

Aerial View

Ground Level View

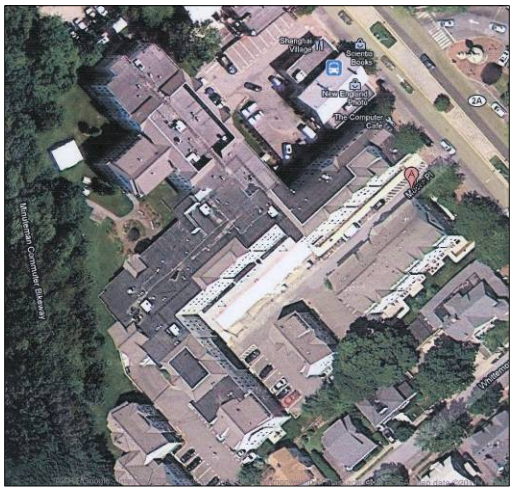
#	Style	sq.ft.	Rm	Br	Ba	Pkg	Ask $	Sold $	Orig. $	Date
44	2Lvl	1226	4	1	2.5	1	425,000	420,000	349,900	06/05
28	2Lvl	1236	4	2	2.5	1	449,900	449,900	359,675	07/05
2	TH	2285	6	3	2.5	2G+	649,000	637,500	601,850	10/05
14	TH	2092	6	3	2.5	2G+	639,900	610,000	600,250	03/06
10	Flat	987*	6	2	2	2	479,000	475,000	422,500	03/06
29	Flat	987	5	2	2	1	429,000	415,000	392,725	10/06
5	Flat	1198**	3	1	2.5	2	409,900	391,000	368,615	11/06
13	Flat	1267**	4	1	2.5	1	359,000	350,000	369,900	11/06
23	TH	2077	6	3	2.5	2	539,000	513,800	428,525	04/08
35	TH	1921	5	2	2.5	2	519,000	530,000	404,175	06/08

* Not including finished lower level ** Includes finished lower level

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

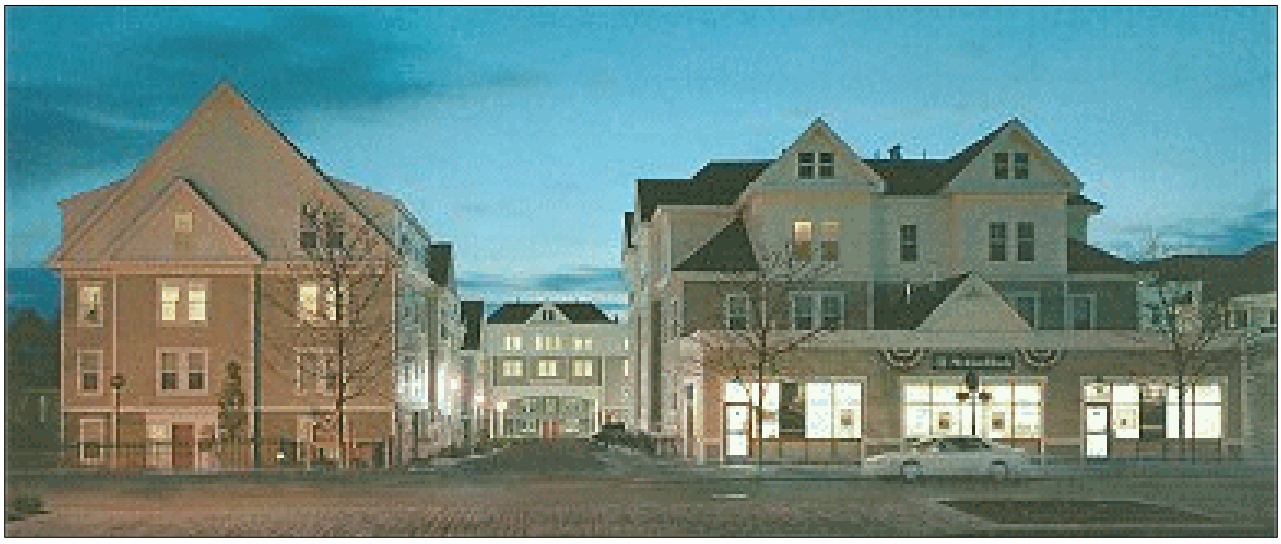
The Legacy Apartments, Arlington, MA

ACREAGE and DENSITY:	134 rental unit project in 4 buildings 2.75 acres, 49 dwelling units per acre
LOCATION:	Directly in Arlington Center, between the Minuteman Bikepath and Massachusetts Avenue.
BUILT:	2000
DEVELOPER:	Diversified Funding Inc./Mirak Management Co.
OWNER:	Mirak-Bendetson Development , LLC
APARTMENT UNIT PRICES:	From $1,500/mo. for a 1 bedroom unit (773 to 939 sq. ft.) From $1,850/mo. for a 2 bedroom unit (1,061 to 1,744 Sq. ft.)
ASSESSED VALUE (2011):	$23,237,200
ESTIMATED PROPERTY TAXES:	$288,400



Legacy Apartments Aerial View

Legacy Apartments Ground Rear View



Legacy Apartments Ground Front View

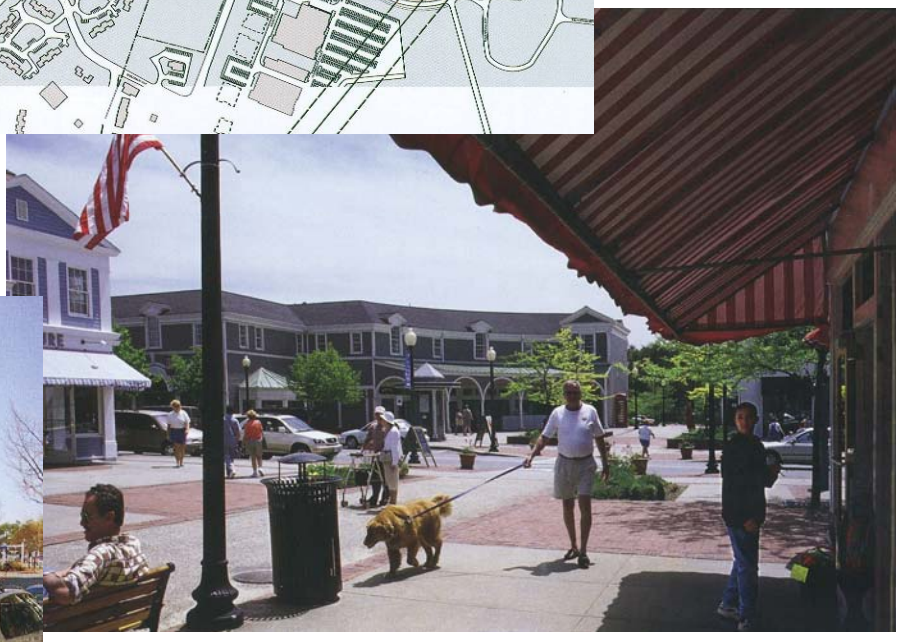
PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Mashpee Commons, Mashpee, MA

ACREAGE and DENSITY:	
LOCATION:	
BUILT:	
DEVELOPER:	Cornish Associates Limited Partnership
OWNER:	
APARTMENT UNIT PRICES:	
ASSESSED VALUE (2011):	
ESTIMATED PROPERTY TAXES:	

2007 master plan indicating approved street and block locations for the Jobs and Whitings residential neighborhoods

Typical view of pedestrian street at the corner of the Commons.



Traditional urban configuration of apartments and offices above shops

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Highlands Garden Village, Denver, CO

ACREAGE and DENSITY:	27 acre site, 291 homes, as well as 200,000 square feet of commercial and live/work space, 140,000 square feet of open space. Average housing density for the project is 13 dwelling units/acre.
LOCATION:	
BUILT:	
DEVELOPER:	Perry/Affordable Housing Development Company
OWNER:	
APARTMENT UNIT PRICES:	
ASSESSED VALUE (2011):	
ESTIMATED PROPERTY TAXES:	

Plan view

The Elitch Theater which occupied the site in its former use as an amusement park was preserved as an arts and performance space.

Ground views

PRECEDENTS: Village Center

Photo Gallery Illustrating Village-Type Developments

Duplex Infill Housing, Arlington, MA

An Alley Converted to a Pedestrian Court, Adams, MA

Discount Shopping Mini-Mall in Manchester Center, VT

Gift Shop with Flower Garden in Woodstock, VT

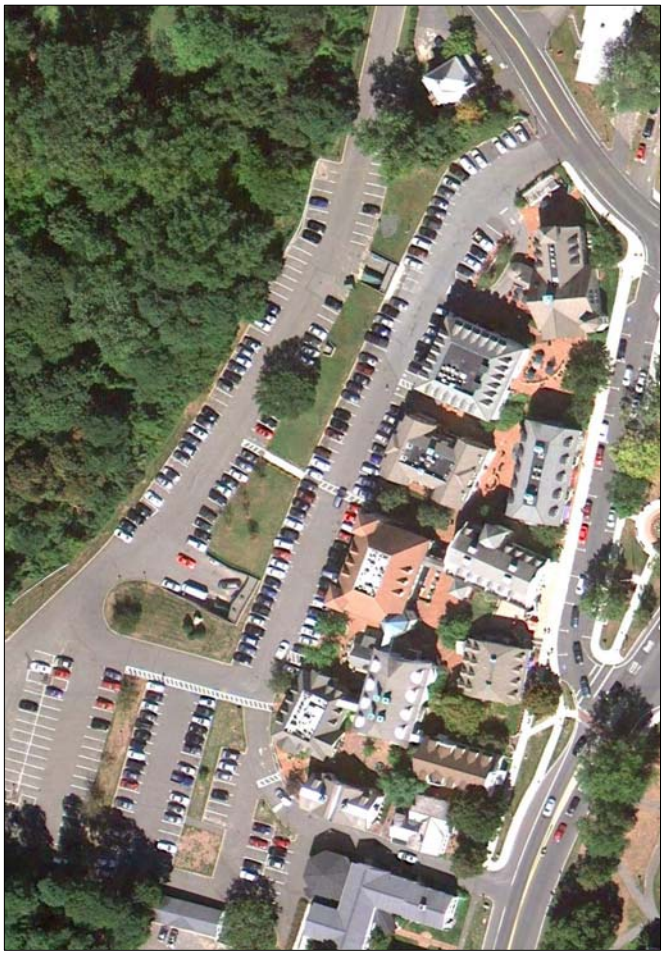
Outdoor Concert in Village Center, Stratton, VT

Outdoor Seating Area/Cafe in Arlington Center, MA

PRECEDENTS: Mixed Use Development

The Village Commons, South Hadley, MA

Desirable Features:	Mixed use, infill, compact, interesting and aesthetically pleasing design with public walkways, outdoor gathering spaces, and parking located behind retail establishments.
Contributing Context:	Main corner opposite town green and Mt. Holyoke College
Strategies to Accomplish:	Redevelopment of college-owned parcel
Cost: ***(monetary and/or other, if info is available/accessible)***	



Aerial View

Building along the street edge, parking in rear

Informal gathering place

Acton 2020
Today. Tomorrow. Together.

The Village Commons, South Hadley MA
Continued

Directory of businesses and tenants

An entrance through an outdoor seating area