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TOWN CLERK, ACTON

# Acton 2020 Committee
# Meeting Minutes
# Sep 14, 2011

Committee members: Sahana Purohit, Celia Kent, Jim Snyder-Grant, Margaret Woolley Busse, Paulina Knibbe.
Consultants from the Collaborative: Daphne Politis, Jim Purdy
Town Staff: Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl
Other Attendees: Lesley Dokos, Rosemary Nicholson, Vincent Cuttone, Nancy Dinkel, Joan Meyer, Margherita Santoro, Chris Starr.

**Welcomes, agenda, and ground rules from Daphne and Margaret.**

The special focus of this first part of the meeting is on Kelly's Corner, and most of the attendees are owners or managers of Kelly's Corner businesses, and their full participation is encouraged. The emerging 2020 plan identifies Kelly's Corner as the most likely place in Acton for a rich mix of pedestrian-accessible shops and residences that can serve as a town center.

First go-round – things you like and things you don't like about Kelly's Corner (KC)

**Likes:**

- Love the mix of businesses and the concentration of stores. Example: get ice cream, and then get wine.
- Like the mix of stores, (with room for improvement).
- Like the schools nearby – customers.
- Like that there is some good places to go for kids, like Sorrento's Pizza.
- Lots of different kinds of people, which is good for a business.
- Good concentration & variety of stores.
- Glad that kids can get there.
- Proximity to school campus makes it a natural community spot.
- Likes how connected it is to other areas – easy on/off Rte 2, straight shot to Concord, Maynard, Boxborough. This is a regional center.

**Don't Likes:**

- Hate the accessways, both cars and pedestrians have a hard time getting around.
- Don't like the esthetics and functioning of some of the common area space.
- Roadway is dangerous – lots of traffic, right of way unclear to drivers & pedestrians.
- Roadway crossing is bad for kids.
- Congested.
- Sad that McDonald's gone -a black hole, and a loss for the kids.
- Sad that kids are congregating at Starbucks – too much coffee for 12-year-olds.

- Perhaps too many banks – certainly don't want more.
- Pedestrian access is not safe, esp for kids.
- No sidewalk on the Acton Dental side of 111 (south side)
- Likes Roland & the planning department.

**Other Wishes:**

- Wish there was parking on the street to slow down the traffic, and other more pedestrian-friendly things.
- Wish there was another way for cars to get in & out.
- Wish it was more accessible to pedestrian esp. the kids.

**More intro by Daphne:**

Back starting three years ago, the comprehensive community plan committee and the consultants started gathering data. Kelly's Corner kept coming up, as a place that people liked and cared about, AND as a place that they don't like. Strong feelings, high hopes.

**Then Daphne elicited visions of 'what could Kelly's Corner be', which widened in too many topics about Kelly's Corner.**

- -Good mix of professional services & entertainment.
- Vision: leave your kids somewhere safe & do your business in Kelly's corner.
- -Better cross-walks or bridges.
- -Some areas are a bit wild and unkempt – there is room for gardens and beautification.
- -A hub for family activities. The bowling alley is a good example – all ages fun.
- -Entertain your kids, get the chores done.
- -A wider variety of retail activities.
- -How can we coordinate the parking & pedestrian access?
- -Remembering the Belmont / Cushing square transformation: zoning changes, business changes. (Chris S. noted that he had helped with that change)
- -Dining out / eating. Acton Not Your Average Joe's has tons of families AND friends having a drink. One of the best units in the entire NYAJ chain.
- -Good sales projections are needed for a restaurant to move in. Projections heavily depend on liquor license. Many restaurants would like to move in, but they can't get can't a liquor license. Businesses are asking – how can I get one? When do they become available? BYOB is an option, but it isn't good for profit the restaurant
- -Lincoln center is nice. Concord center is nice. Both have a few licensed restaurants. Wine is popular.
- -Hmm..some daytime restaurants don't need liquor licenses – McDonalds, etc.
- -Open space is really nice, requires town money.
- -Landscaping is important in tweaking the center.
- -Long-term leases at the shopping center lock in some status quo that operators would

like to change, but existing leases require certain (non-)landscaping. So, we are a bit handcuffed a bit for now.

- -Casa Stone purchase, in process, is a possible way to expand the vision with a new flexible lease.
- -Outdoor eating at Starbucks is a great hit, and drives new customers. It's good that Acton dropped the ban a year and a half ago. Maybe the Casa Stone replacement, or other new tenants could also add outdoor dining options. Really helps with creating the "pedestrian" feel.
- -Parking is the biggest thing. Coordination between landowners could create opportunities for shared parking. Businesses want parking.
- -McDonalds is the only restaurant with a meeting room – wish there was one in Kelly's Corner. Unused office space in Kelly's Corner was offered as a temporary solution for some meeting space needs.
- -Bridges would be awesome in KC to connect the corners.
- -The lights are not effective. Pedestrians have to wait a long time. Please have the town consider adjusting the timing on the right-arrow. Esp. at high pedestrian times such as school closing.
- -Pedestrian access to Great Hill conservation area from Kelly's Corner:. It's tricky now, but possible. Could be much better.

**Summary of some top and repeated themes, initiated by Daphne and reviewed by attendees:**

- Uses and activities for all ages / family oriented.
- Provisions of daily life
- Want to see safe connectivity and access. (for pedestrians and parkers)

Bridges
(or)
Safer / wider crosswalks, rebuilt with "faux brick" material. (Ex: Linden Square in Wellesley)
(or)
Better signalization / timing improvements

- Liquor license issues.
- More and wider range of dining options.
- Open space / Landscaping
- Outdoor dining
- Adequacy of Parking
- Coordination between landowners
- Need for additional meeting space
- Small Village look. Example – West Acton.
- Walking access to Great Hill conservation area.
- Better street lighting. Aesthetic (village look) and functional. Lights in landscaping. Coordinated and cohesive look.

**Next question for attendees: What can owners do / what can the town do:**

- For older buildings: wish it was easier to make changes to exterior, without fear of tripping non-conformance issues. If it were easier, would change lighting and signs.
- Some dead spaces (inactive landowners / zones between buildings) should be landscaped, turned in to accessways. But sometimes the issue is zoning / building codes. Sometimes it's inactive land owners. How can we incent the landowners to work together.
- A bigger vision: a business improvement district. Cooperation between town & landowners, agreed on guidelines for the aesthetics and functionality we are all aiming for.
- Another issue: state owns the road. There are dead trees, for example, which no one is cutting down. And odd curb-cuts and driveway locations are mandated by the state that do not support pedestrian ease.
- Sharing of knowledge about temporary open space that can be used creatively for short-term use. A barrier is codes that disallows certain uses without certain improvements.
- Annual Lions Carnival – how about make it more of a Kelly's corner event?
- Sidewalk sales. Easter egg hunt? Hosmer house on Patriot's day could be coordinated with a bunch of retail activity.
- Best of category Mom+Pop stores. Tertiary destination means you are typically drawing smaller local businesses anyway.
- Not a lot of daytime pop here (yet!).
- EdensAndAvant.com to see sample of how a demographic description is done for a shopping area. Noted that those stats don't capture the big school population (kids, parents, teachers).
- Synergy between stores. Roche and TJ Maxx are big drivers, because they bring weekly traffic.
- A better mix of more businesses means that people will come from farther away and dwell there for longer.
- A sign "shopping area" on Rte 2.
- Capturing more of the through-traffic.
- Maynard example: downtown restaurant selection rivals entire Acton selection.

**Next topic: The one big thing you would do:**
(+'s indicate agreement by multiple people)

- On-street parking: Town and State.
- More outdoor dining – need business to do it, town to assist in licensing.
- Sign restrictions relaxed – town.
- Kelly's corner business association – model: West Acton. Town would work with them to share & expand on the vision.++
- Free up some liquor licenses+++ (Board of Selectmen. Consider Beer & Wine access?)
- Mass Ave curb cut to access Roche Bros.

- Walking access from NYAJ lot to Roche Bros lot.
- Focus on traffic / pedestrian issues. A real big puzzle. Capture through traffic. Traffic management. +++
- More pedestrian connection so that shoppers can realistically park in one place and shop in multiple stores.
- A balance between open space & parking to attract businesses.
- More restaurants/entertainment.
- Slow the traffic down.
- Parking & pedestrian plan. If you can park & walk to multiple businesses, then you have a PLACE.
- Town and state cooperation on improving the roadways for the vision of a walkable place.
- A tagline that expresses the vision, and a large sign that says welcome to kelly's corner and has the tagline.
- A large water fountain, or other big public/private water feature.
- Improve the path and crosswalk from schools to opposite Dunkin Donuts through the Hosmer House property.

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**Second Part of the Acton 2020 Meeting Sep 14, 2011:**

Committee members: Sahana Purohit, Celia Kent, Jim Snyder-Grant, Margaret Woolley Busse,
Consultants from the Collaborative: Daphne Politis, Jim Purdy
Town Staff: Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl

Previous minutes approved unanimously.

Decided to skip the part 1 debrief.

Fin Com report: Margaret went. She noted some skepticism on their part re: costs, and the possibility of changes. We'll keep the dialog going – committee knows a lot, and cares about these topics. They'll be back on the 21st.

Jim P + Daphne have sent out versions of most of the revised strategies aka "Working draft" Next round of complete revisions by Friday mid-day. Margaret + Jim S-G to send out sets right away to the committees and groups with special expertise on goals 2 & 7.

Questions to send on to relevant groups with the strategies for their review:

What's missing?
What's superfluous, or not a good idea, and why?
Think about timing and priority, Specifically: what's the few that should be the highest priority? Choose three?

General timing for meetings: 7:00 PM for part I / 8:15 for part II / 9:30 for brief committee business. (affordable housing is a single topic).

Sep 21 – Goal II then VII

Sep 28th – meeting is all about affordable housing.

Oct 5 library – committee business.

Oct 12: 7:00 PM Goal IV / 5.1 / 5.3 / 8:30 Goal III / Committee business 9:30.

Oct 19: (committee business – place TBD)

Oct 26: 7:00 Goal VI / 8:00 Goal 1

Agreed to schedule a formal vote to approve changes that have emerged in goals and objectives.

Affordable Housing materials to be distributed before Sep 28 meeting – need to get feedback – Kristin will send to Kelly & Nancy.

Comments on draft Precedents doc from collaborative– some labeled mixed use are all residential –

Collaborative to review those.
Still looking for good precedents for Kelly's corner: not a traditional 'New England' look. Maybe contemporary materials? Mixed residential & retail.

Title of November meeting brainstorm notes – two main candidates emerged, no final decision made.

1. How do we get there? Strategies for Acton.
2. Strategies for ~~Action~~ Acton [yes, the strike-out is deliberate]

10:08 Adjourned.

Documents distributed to committee as background for this meeting can be found at https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/View/Collection-4471 and are listed below:

Title
00 - 09-14-11 Acton 2020 Committee Meeting Agenda
010 - I. - Kelley's Corner Meeting Agenda
012 - I. - Acton 2020 Economic Development Meeting Summary - 3-3-11
014 - I. - Acton 2020 Public Workshop Summary - 6-23-11
016 - I. - Open Neighborhood - Kelley's Corner Project (Tufts Univ.) - Summary - 5-25-10
017 - I. - KC Buildings Roads Wetlands 11x17 Map - 9-14-11
018 - I. - Kelley's Corner Buildings Roads Aerial 11x17 Map - 9-14-11
020 - II. - 09-08-11 Acton 2020 Committee Meeting Minutes - Draft
040 - IV. - Schedule of Meetings - Implementation Strategies - 9-7-11
044 - IV.b. - Affordable Housing Handout - Draft - DP - 9-14-11
046 - IV.c. - Village Precedent Pages - Draft Formatted - 9-14-11
047 - IV.c. - TDR handout - Draft - JP - 9-14-11
048 - IV.d. - Purpose of Fall Meetings Document - Draft - DP - 9-14-11