

Acton 2020 Committee and Board of Selectman meeting with the Commission on Disabilities (CoD), Sidewalk Committee, Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC), South Acton Train Station Advisory Committee (SATSAC), Council on Aging (COA) Board, Cultural Council, Senior Center Building Committee, and Recreation Commission

[DRAFT] Minutes

October 12, 2011 - 7:00 PM

Room 204, Acton Town Hall

Attendees

Acton 2020 Committee members:

Margaret Woolley Busse, Celia Kent, Paulina Knibbe, Jim Snyder-Grant, Charlie Mercier, Sahana Purohit

Selectmen:

John Sonner, Janet Adachi

Town Staff assigned from Planning Department:

Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl

Consultants from the Collaborative:

Jim Purdy, Daphne Politis

Members of the public, mostly from the town boards and committees listed above:

David Martin, Kurt Marden, Bettina Abe, Bengte Muten, Cathy Fochtman, Barb Tallone, Stephen Leo, Maya Minkin, Ann Corcoran, Steve Baran, Karen Jarsky, Barbara Willson, Lynne Osborn, Sharon Mercurio, Dean Charter, Laura Ducharm, Lisa Franklin, Franny Osman

Meeting opened at 7:05 PM with introductions and a review of the 2020 process.

Discussion about Goal 4: Provide more opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation

A detailed review and comment period that involved many of the attendees. Raw notes are here:

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-34400/NotesOnGoal4.doc>

Discussion about Goal 5: Support Inclusion and Diversity (NOT including discussion on affordable housing/housing for low to moderate income folks as this was discussed on 9-28-11)

A detailed review and comment period that involved many of the attendees. Raw notes are here:

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-34401/NotesOnGoal5.doc>

Discussion about Goal 3: Improve Connections

A detailed review and comment period that involved many of the attendees. Raw notes are here:

<http://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-34402/NotesOnGoal3.doc>

10:30 PM or so: meeting adjourned

Acton 2020 Committee 10/21/2011 – Notes on Goal 4 discussion

Margaret Woolley Busse reviewed Goal 4 strategies. Daphne reviewed the themes of the vision and subsequent feedback, and reviewed what sort of feedback we are looking for in particular.

Reviewed history of the senior center expansion / replacement project. 4 Years ago one committee looked at options & decided that building new is the best strategy – reconstruction would be expensive and not meet needs.

2010 census of seniors is higher than expansion committee predicted. Folks are staying in town more than expected.

17.4% seniors (60+) in 2010 federal census. 3900 seniors at last town census. Seniors are the fastest growing population in Acton.

Reviewed value of senior center: Creating connection reduces isolation, and depression. Building is packed first thing in the morning, but only two rooms. Multiple activities scheduled for large rooms, chaotic or noisy. More and smaller rooms would help to meet more needs. No place to sit and visit.

Offices are in back, so new visitors aren't greeted.

Query from Daphne: Can we conceive of a shared mixed-use facility?

Mike reminded us: The facility ideas at NARA park is a multi-use multi-age facility. A focus on recreation will bring in the younger seniors, and the male seniors. Recreation also will fill an unmet need among adults.

Parents with toddlers have no place to meet. No public pool. No indoor space for gathering. NARA park lake is only three feet deep, and gathers bacteria. Single-parent head of households are also a rapidly growing population in Acton. Seems like there's a way to combine those needs with those of seniors.

Some CoA discussion has focused on understanding good hours for senior activities and good hours for other activities. Their experience is that the morning hours are the key hours for seniors. After 2 or 4 PM looks best for other age groups.

Another way to mix the hours is to have mixed-age activities for those interested: chances for mentoring, mixed-age group education, etc.

There is certainly a block of seniors who would prefer that there be senior-only space and time. But don't overgeneralize. Many seniors also feel unwillingly isolated from the younger set.

History: before 1994 CoA was in corner of Acton Congregational Church. Having a real center really allowed the program to grow, and the sense of connection to grow. But now: the main constraint in planning is “do we have the space to do it”. The most popular event by far is the Exercise class. They all fill up, quickly. Exercises classes alone could fill the existing center.

“Pre-school PTA” could start in some existing space, such as a church basement. Maybe a toddler

space in the abandoned senior center after the new center is built?

Parents with toddlers are often in their first few years in Acton. It's the time in their lives when they are first getting to know Acton.

A town pool would be a big win for parents with kids.

The 2009 Senior center expansion plan was at the heart of a recent CoA vote in favor of a senior center.

That vote: "The Acton CoA board supports a new Senior Center based on the senior center expansion report completed in January 2009, and currently being updated. The center will be focused on the needs of seniors and available for the wider community use outside of the hours of senior center programs."

Part of the drive to have a combined facility is a financial one. Some is social / connecting.

Objective 4.2: Unmet needs for playgrounds used to be toddlers. More recently 5-12 age is higher priority.

Little League inclusion with kids for disabilities. Miracle Field is awesome, but lets not forget the need for inclusion.

Goward playground renovation is being driven by private fundraising. It does show up in the capital funding requests, but tends to get crowded out. Pent-up demand for playgrounds. CPA funds can no longer be used for renovation of existing facilities. Legislative struggle going on to fix that.

In the past, playgrounds have often been a mix of private funds, and some public funds, but rarely more than 50%. In 1990s, upgrades were done from 1940s - 1950s equipment.

Remember to think about shade trees in gathering areas.

No action steps related to NARA park: improvements & maintenance. Maybe in Goal 6??, but add a link back to this goal 4.

Maybe we need a funding system for playground maintenance. Town Meeting historically is more excited about capital expenses that create new shiny things, rather than maintenance of existing things.

A plan to create new things, such as parks, needs a plan and commitment for maintenance.

Maybe a citizen-led playground maintenance initiative to get energy in to maintaining our playground.

Objective 4.4

Report from Paulina talking with ABCC.

Appreciative of money from state and town(s) A+B. Space is an issue. Don't want to run a movie series.

ABCC doesn't have a lot of requests for the 2020 plan – Council is already at the edge of their

organizational capacity.

Remember -a bunch of cultural events happen at NARA.

Remember: cultural events have town staff time impact, which creates costs.

At every BoS meeting, donations for Rec & NARA programs – lots of external funding for rec is part of the basic plan.

Acton 2020 Committee 10/21/2011 – Notes on Goal 5 discussion

(will NOT include discussion on affordable housing/housing for low to moderate income folks as this was discussed on 9-28-11)

Link together the transport items (teens, disabled, senior) & objective 3.2.

Link to Kelly's corner strategy from all ages section, with respect to kids.

Lisa noting her experience of anti-Chinese sentiment in town, and how depressing that is. What can be done?

Ages – link to playground.

Link between item re: new older folks who don't speak English as a native language and supporting all ages.

And many more links & glue between these sections and all other goals, esp. 3,4,5.

Make sure we include pre-school kids as an underserved population in the 'serve all ages' section.

Town Social Worker: Poor Singles are often isolated. Rent and transport costs are so high, that they are typically spending most time on meeting economic necessities. “Agencies”? Not so much. There's a town social worker. Assistance for poor folks is NOT in Acton – folks have to go to Lowell for one thing, Worcester for another, Framingham for others. We are at the edges (or outside) of most catchment areas. More stuff in to town mailings. Maybe stuff on cable? Info going out via churches, and library. More public awareness or funding on “Safety Net” a new growing and cohesive group of staff and volunteers and committee members and citizen groups to deal with unmet needs of town. Third Thursday of each month. More info on the town website.

Link to the goal about consolidating and simplifying

Inclusive community space? Maybe free or cost reduced for those that need it.

Add CoA to responsibility list.

Reminder: folks don't want to see themselves as 'needy'. We all need connections.

Dispatchers of vans and the drivers also serve as an informal communicator about individual needs.

Fixed route public transit also helps end isolation.

How to counter-act prejudice? Education. No Place For Hate committee. Some of it caused by lack of interaction. Some of this is made stronger in economic hard times. Reminder: in Phase I, we found many folks who were proud of the diversity in town, and new residents of various backgrounds reporting that they felt welcome.

Encourage: cultural activities that connect people of different cultures.

Educational values difference? Concerns about pressure-cooker education, and the perception that Asian families are reinforcing that or making it worse? School committee is wrestling with this now.

Education in the schools. Facing History and Ourselves in the High School. 8Th grade has a good educational stuff on China and India. But how to address the specific differences (or perceptions of differences) in communities living in Acton now.

Indian community does gather for festivals, but it's in paid space, and space for large crowds is expensive. Community Center fits in here.

We have lost our “ADA compliance transition plan”. We used to be required to do this for federal requirements. Find it or recreate it. Municipal Properties? Spaces for public meetings. Time for open Meeting records request for ADA transition plan to move the issue along?

Biggest problem is in schools. Elementary schools.

Making town kid leagues be inclusive. Little League uses town facilities, so town could require that leagues using fields have an inclusion policy.

Model: open Door theater is explicitly exclusive. And not all theaters do that. So maybe we encourage the creation of a league that explicitly encourages wide participation. There might be legal requirements.

Accessibility for playgrounds.

Acton 2020 Committee 10/21/2011 – Notes on Goal 3 discussion

Sidewalk committee history: reviewed the history and thinking behind the priority list.

Money comes from appropriations, and from developers.

CPA funds probably can't be used for sidewalks. Some towns do, but so far the Town's CPC has not gone that way.

An exception: sidewalks built at the same time as part of a larger project that is CPC eligible.

Add action item to explore the possibility of doing more with CPC and sidewalks.

Maybe we need to increase the sidewalk contributions from developers?

TAC definitely is responsible for biking and biking issues. TAC needs some bike fans on their committee to help move this forward.

Connect the two rail trails with a good bikeable route.

Prioritize paths that connect neighborhoods.

Betterment fees to pay for sidewalks? Challenging politically. Bicycle-friendly requirements for developments and businesses – bike racks? – zoning changes. Accessibility issue to get from sidewalks to businesses – usually requires going over the same route as cars, not safe.

No little lane to get to Goward field or the library – bikers and walkers go through the parking lot – scary & not safe.

Complete streets & complete design that includes pedestrians/bikes/strollers/wheelchairs.

Some times banks have community investment funds, that might be used for pedestrian and bike improvements.

2001 report – most intersections were already at level F. 80% of the traffic at rush hour does NOT originate in Acton.

Reducing traffic through Acton. How about using right of ways in unused railways as actual trains again. ARRT and BFRT as multi-use corridors, to have both a train system AND a bike path. Or put fixed rail on 495? The issue is the circumferential transport. Action for town would be to approach the MPO, and get the conversation started now before BFRT goes further

Take control of Rte 2A and slow it down so that more through-drivers use Rte 2 / Rte 495 instead?

Reuse existing transportation corridors to connect (especially) circumferential towns, to help reduce the big through-car-travel.

Encourage carpooling would help

Increasing the parking for Acton residents at the train station would encourage more people to ride the rail. But road structure there doesn't support the traffic for more people. How about incentives for carpooling like cheaper parking?

Engaging developers and businesses in helping to fund transport to & from train station.

Is rail Shuttle in there? Make it more explicit. In first item under 3.2?

Consider forming a new RTA – neighboring towns agree we are underserved by existing RTAs – we are at the edges of all of their service areas.

3.4 make links to business communication stuff under goal 7.