

Acton 2020 Committee
[DRAFT] Minutes
October 26, 2011 7:00 pm
Town Hall Rm 204

Attending:

Acton2020: Kristen Alexander, Daphne Politis and Jim Purdy (consultants), Sahana Purohit, Paulina Knibbe, Celia Kent (minutes-taker), Jim Snyder-Grant, Margaret Woolley Busse, John Sonner (BoS liaison)

Guests for Goal 6 Discussion: Ron Rose (HDC), David Barrat (HDC, HC), Mike Gowing (BoS), Dave Clough (BoS), Doug Tindal (FinCom), Dean Charter (Municipal Properties), Ann Chnaang (Library Trustee), Wayne Friedrichs, Dore Hunter, Ann Sussman (DRB), Janet Adachi (BoS), Pam Harting-Barrat (BoS), Jane Ceraso (OSC), Ryan Bettez (PB), KimMontella (PB), Susan Mitchell Hardt (ACT), Bob Whittlesey (AHA)

Additional Guests for Goal 1 Discussion (join group ~ 8:00): Derrick Chin (PB), Jim Chiarelli (HC), Jeff Clymer (PB), Holly Ben-Joseph (DRB), Victoria Beyer (HC/CPC)

Goal 6: Preserve and Enhance Town-Owned Assets

- I. Introductions – Margaret summarize purpose of meeting, overall timeline, and Nov. 9th public meeting
- III. Discussion of Implementation strategies
Jim Snyder-Grant added notes and suggestions from the discussion directly on the Goal 6 chart projected on screen. Comments/discussion included:

6.1 Protect Town-owned open space

*Add link to Morrison Farm Committee site.

*Dean Charter – there's a lot of town-owned conservation land that could be enhanced with logging and timber farm activities that are a form of agriculture. That could improve the biodiversity and mitigate risk of forest fires. And provide a revenue stream. Ann Chang – Brewster Conant logs his property. Dean - we have two town forests purchased in 40's for source of timber. Suggest add "agriculture *and forestry*". Jim Snyder-Grant – forest management recommendations are being developed now by a consultant. [*didn't catch – consultant to who? Timing? Anything else?*]

*Jane – the Open Space Committee has suggested that the Town consider conservation restrictions on its conservation lands – only a small amount of our lands have a cr. Jim S-G – most of our land was bought with state funds which require a cr in perpetuity, but the hurdle on maintaining passive recreation is somewhat low.

*Should reference town-owned active recreation lands here so people know it's not missing. (discussed in goal 4).

*Jane – suggest implementing an agriculture commission in Acton.

6.2 Support excellence in schools

- * Remove reference to commercial development in first bullet-too confusing out of context. Doug – there will be no increased fiscal capacity from commercial development in the life of this master plan so the first bullet is irrelevant.
- * Add Fin Com, School ctee, BoS to first two bullets.
- * Ann Chang - should mention general support of Minuteman Technical at least in footnotes (3rd bullet). Dore Hunter (Acton rep to Minuteman) cautioned that Acton currently only one of 16 communities that share the school and the towns don't all agree on scope/scale of facility renovation/capital maintenance. Ann – add Superintendent to the responsibility column.

6.3 Manage the Town's Facilities Efficiently

- * Dean – have to tie the tasks to the budget implications. Preventive maintenance work over \$25,000 is considered a capital investment in Acton which blurs the distinction between operating maintenance and capital projects; and recommended maintenance often isn't funded (i.e. replacing 40 + year old heating systems). Daphne –preventive maintenance was meant for situations where ongoing maintenance spending reduces future capital expenditures.
- * Doug Tindal – we should allude to the importance of developing and maintaining a long-term capital plan that includes the life cycle costs of all town assets. Fin Com is working on that. He added that the Town should not take on assets for which we don't have a use and for which we haven't developed a capital plan.
- * Ann Chang suggested that we borrow from Fodor's use of \$, \$\$, \$\$\$ symbols to tasks that cost money. Daphne indicated that they are doing that for big ticket items.
- * Dave Clough - use word "consider" rather than "create" for senior center reference.
- * Dean– the one stop mechanism for reserving space needs to be encouraged politically. School space is controlled by Commun Educ after 6 pm. Other space booked by Dean or Library, etc. Call it a first priority. It's not easy to do but it would have a lot of benefits.

6.4 Continue to provide high quality services that are responsive to Town needs

- * Ann Chang – can remove the reference to additional library staff box.
- * 3rd bullet should substitute "current" for "more recent".
- * Pam – what about regionalizing around a community center? Esp useful for facility like a pool. Other regionalization possibilities – senior centers and other services, building inspection and electrical inspection, nursing, and other town services. Provide more examples. Mike Gowing – we already do ambulance service regionally (that mentioned in 6.5). We should make the distinction between regional cooperation and regionalization. Both are worth mentioning. Pam – but we do have regional cooperation...thinks we cooperate very well. So add "explore further options for regionalization...".

6.5 Provide excellent public health and safety services

- * Evaluating the nursing service is a critical activity but their budget problems will have to be resolved before Town meeting. Leave it in this document.

Goal I Preserve and Enhance Town Character

1.1 Strengthen tools to manage growth pro-actively

* Doug Tindal – add EDC to Responsibility column throughout. Mike Gowing – Indicate more clearly lead owner and other owners. Kim suggests just bold the lead.

* Doug – word “criticality” should be kept in reserve for the key strategy. Ann - review current zoning should be CRITICAL, should come first.

* Ann – worried about financial consequences. How do we compete with towns that aren’t growing beyond their infrastructure? We can’t have all that is in the plan and grow in population. As a counter example, Lexington has been 30,000 pop since 1965 so they are more stable and have the infrastructure in place to support that population . Daphne replied that Lexington is experiencing population growth trends. Acton2020 is calling out the infrastructure needs to support the goals. Ann – designing post housing bust is a more challenging financial task. She’s concerned that the master plan will read as if it’s just a wish list. Daphne replied that the strategies may not be achievable right now, but that we have to remember the plan is for the next 20 years. We can plan now so we’re poised for the opportunities when they arise and so that we recognize them.

* Ann - can we look at how we could have planned better in the past? We haven’t attached population growth to school needs in past plans. Acton pursued aggressive residential development unlike its neighbors and Ann suggests that is the reason it has the highest tax rate of those towns. There was some discussion about what are the current projections for population growth under current zoning and given the recommendations of the master plan.

* Margaret - the plan has to be written up in a way that acknowledges our current economic reality. Daphne – the plan should be framed in a way that shows expected population growth.

*Paulina – she is hesitant to extend design review of village center residential beyond what is already in the HDC scope. We should re-write the first bullet so that it is clear we are not recommending design review of single family residences.

*Janet – DRB authority has to be reviewed by BoS. We need to agree on the role of the DRB before we can talk about design guidelines. So: Re-write 2nd bullet to say “improve” rather than “strengthen”. The design review process (currently 2nd bullet) should be figured out before we refine or expand guidelines (currently 1st bullet). Ann suggested that it may be more effective if Planning Board reviews commercial development. In some towns it is the ZBA. So it doesn’t have to be DRB per se. Maybe Planning Board should be elected. Paulina suggest we should be vague – consider ways to improve the design review process (as it is currently written). Doug agrees that vagueness can be good. Suggests “Consider ways to strengthen the design review process and enhance coordination between the Planning Board and DRB. Ron Rose – but we don’t want to make it so vague that it disappears entirely. In the town where he grew up, authority rested in an elected board (or staff?) which helped to deal with the politics of saying

'no'. Daphne - we will work on wording, perhaps use word "explore" and provide examples of how design review is handled in other towns.

* Review all current zoning. Ann – re-writing zoning bylaw will require consultant fees. Pam Harting-Barrat – this should be the first priority. Then we should support legislation re 40 B. Doug – also mentioned the need to repeal or modify the Dover amendment (with respect to fight over the daycare development plan). We should support legislation that enables Town to control its own development. (He explained that the Dover amendment was developed to mitigate communities uniting against religious groups and crushing perfectly legitimate developments. Universities found it hard to meet their needs, so went to the legislature for protection. And simultaneously, there was an increase in daycare service needs as more women joined the work force. At the time, most daycare providers were Mom&Pop enterprises and Towns were zoning them out. Now daycares are commercialized and don't need that kind of protection. Acton's battle over the large daycare development in a sensitive part of town (major crossroads, difficult traffic, not geared to serve Acton needs) was an unintended consequence of the Dover amendment's good intentions. Wayne Friedrichs – zoning changes can lead to unintended consequences. And it's really hard to change zoning after the fact. Daphne commented that there is pending legislation that zoning should be aligned to master plans. Maybe split the bullet into two. Reviewing zoning and determining what zoning need to support plan goals.

* Remove the regionalization comment. It's in other places.

1.2 Complete a village centers plan.

*Paulina – is concerned that completing a Village Centers plan will slow us down since already have we have a series of village plans. She agrees we need to update plans for West Acton and South Acton. Jim SG – the value of a Village Centers plan is that it helps us understand the potential for TDR – to assess where and whether there is really a match for the density we need in order to make TDR work. Maybe it should be re-worded as a TDR plan so that the value is clear.

Wayne – the village plan needs a traffic study (agreed – that's in the footnote). Ann – use South Acton as a case study – understand what didn't work. Pam HB commented she and Dore were both on South Acton revitalization ctee in the 70's. She said we had wonderful ideas but no parking. You can't have a successful business without parking.

Jim P– These are the kind of issues we imagine the village centers plan will address. He pointed out that the strategy includes review of the existing Village Plans and outcomes.

*Doug – ideally want to buy the land, then can control what happens. Mike - How should we foster cooperation between town and developer – purchase of purchase of development rights is one way. Doug - TDR to some extent means you've failed. Mike – if Kelly's corner is important to us, then the Town needs more of an investment than zoning gives us. Holly – but what is the vehicle to get the funding? Mike – there are options, but we can only purchase land with a 2/3rds vote at town meeting. Doug – make an Acton Land Corporation – then can bond

it. Wayne – that’s the EDIC, but problem is that there is no structure in place to fund it. Problem is moving quickly. Daphne – we’ll ask at November 9th meeting about what people are willing to pay for.

* Ron – Agrees that you can’t design by relying on zoning. Design studies are important to test ideas. Need to test all the village plans through design studies. Can be done economically if can link to educational institutions who use the opportunities as training for their grad students. By doing this you identify which parcels are particularly important (strategic possibilities in making a village place). Planning and design studies need to be feedback loops. Also a competition is a great way to do it (architects always looking for work). In the process, you identify the kind of buildings and uses which bring village vitality. For instance, a Senior Center would be a great way to populate the village all times of day. What about looking at the next phase of WAVE for a senior center, which would be a long-term lease opportunity rather than capital outlay.

1.3 Preserve rural characteristics and open space

* Dean- the scenic roads bylaw is a state law and very specific. It’s not the best vehicle to link the first bullet to as you are often dealing with private property. Add Municipal Properties in Responsibility column.

* Margaret – how do you know if walls are historic? She’s wary of putting too many restrictions on private property. Maybe we need to define the criteria better for those rural characteristics that should be protected and highlight Acton’s interest in the preservation of these elements.

* Are there incentives to discourage clear-cutting?

* Dean – he works as a consultant for a developer in another town. That town recently passed a tree protection bylaw but Dean thinks it will be hard to enforce. Is the Town liable if it makes value judgements about trees on private property, esp on the long-term health of a tree, which then are proved wrong? It is not an exact science and the Town won’t fund the effort properly. An alternative approach may be requiring re-planting. Daphne – they’ll look at some precedents. Ann mention Tree canopy bylaw in Boxborough. Holly – in Dunstable they have tree protection bylaws in place for larger subdivisions that seems to work and which don’t put the town at risk.

1.4 Preserve historic buildings and landscapes

* Daphne acknowledged that there have been suggestions to organize strategies for landscape preservation and improvement into its own section which isn’t reflected in the documents yet.

* Paulina – asks what does a “historic landscape” mean and how do we preserve it if not town owned?

* David B – we should consider ways to expand HD purview over individual historic properties which are currently not part of the district. A starting point might be the cultural resources list. Ron – the HD designation option would have to be assessed on a property by property basis.

1.5 Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history

Doug – an EDO will be consumed by planning dept needs [note an EDO is referenced in the Responsibility column for the strategy of developing tourist support infrastructure for certain key sites]. EDO role may make no sense until economy improves. Paulina – could hire a consultant to put together the plan to define the EDO and planner job/scope; that approach is cheaper, more efficient and will help make case for the FTE.

Internal Committee Meeting

VII. Postpone approval of minutes till next meeting (but won't make copies)

VIII. Plan for Nov. 9th meeting

TASKS:

1. Fill in outreachcontacts list when we've emailed our contacts about the Nov. 9th meeting.
<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AgKqrxT707i5dFRBS1dDV29vaDVtTUVGRVRManZJYIE&authkey=CNGpqZQK>
2. M will create a pdf of her email to send to schools. M – McCarthy Towne, Sahana - Gates, Conant, Charlie - Douglas , John S – Merriam
3. Transfer Station – Celia and John will hand out postcards this Saturday. Margaret will go the next Saturday.
4. M and J SG will meet with Daphne and Jim P to review ppt before 9th.
5. Margaret will prepare a final email on Friday Nov 4th which references new material on the web.
6. Everyone should review their Goal and prepare with the key issue for that goal.
7. Everyone should review the proposed handouts which the consultants sent to us last week. They request feedback by Wednesday.
8. Jim P will send revised goal sheets to committee on Thursday
9. Margaret will ask Bill to man Connections booth. John will be cost counter.
10. Agenda for next meeting will include:
 - a. lightning round to cut down/review what are the highest priority strategies (no discussion).
 - b. Committee test the \$ bill "voting" process