

From: [Margaret Woolley Busse](#)
To: [Ron Beck](#)
Cc: [Acton 2020 Committee](#); [Ann Sussman](#); [Barry Rosen](#); [Carol Holley](#)
Subject: RE: water resources and 2020 - some comments
Date: Sunday, December 11, 2011 6:33:29 PM

Ron—I appreciate your very detailed outlining of issues surrounding water quality. While I know Jim Snyder-Grant has worked extensively with WRAC to develop specific strategies and actions to ensure that water resources were an integral part of the 2020 plan, I understand that you have further concerns about ensuring that the water strategy is more holistic and reflects the rest of the plan. I will certainly pass on these comments to our committee and we will discuss them at our next meeting this Wednesday, December 14th.

Just as a clarification, I want to stress that our plan is not encouraging residential development. Rather, the plan is trying to guide development in a way that we see as being most beneficial to Acton and its residents, since, as you know, private property owners have the right to develop their property, regardless of whether the town wants them to or not. Thus, our plan tries to lay out ways to concentrate some of that future development by private landowners--who presumably will want to develop their land—into the village areas, both so such development will be able to utilize existing infrastructure and make the villages more vibrant, and also to be able to leave more open space in the outer parts of Acton. One way this can be done is by using a planning tool called Transfer of Development Rights. This tool provides incentives to landowners/developers who give up their non-village zoned land in favor of building in the village areas. This theme of concentrating development and building up the villages and especially Kelley's Corner really came from the feedback we received at our June 23rd public forum, where we laid out three different methods for managing/mitigating future growth in town.

Our plan does encourage more vibrant villages, which presumably means more retail shops, and it also encourages employer-oriented commercial development, which, if realized, would help reduce the residential tax burden as well as provide local employment opportunities for Acton residents.

I do agree we need to make sure we look holistically at the plan to ensure all of the pieces fit together and make a complete picture which is internally consistent.

Thank you for taking the time to share these thoughts with me. We really do value and need feedback from individual residents such as yourself.

Margaret

From: Ron Beck [mailto:squashtalk@verizon.net]
Sent: Saturday, December 10, 2011 6:13 PM
To: bussehome@comcast.net
Cc: 'ann sussman'; 'Barry Rosen'; 'cholley39'
Subject: water resources and 2020 - some comments

Dear Margaret,

I would like to take the opportunity to provide some citizen comment on the Acton 2020 draft plan. In particular, as regards water resources and environmental protection.

One of the aspects of a plan like this one is that while one reviews, comments on and participates in discussion about various pieces of the work going into Acton 2020, one doesn't see how it all fits together until near the end of the process. That is particularly important as regards water and the environment, because everything one does, or plans to do, relating to the town's development, land use, and infrastructure will necessarily have an impact on water resources and the environment.

I was pleased to see that the plan, as it stands today, has much more pertinent and balanced content with respect to water quality and waste mitigation than the earlier working materials had. Thank you for taking many people's input on that and working it into the plan. However it is **the INTERRELATIONSHIPS** of everything else, with water, that **NEED MORE WORK BEFORE THE PLAN IS FINALIZED**, as they are currently not well covered in the plan.

What is NOT recognized in the plan, is that future development, which is apparently encouraged in the plan, has a significant and increasingly crucial impact on water. That, is there is a clear relationship in Acton between residential and commercial development, water quality and quantity, and waste disposal. The interrelationships are key. If the plan is going to endorse or encourage growth, it must be equally strong in relating the amount and type of development to the ability to supply water and to the need to take action to better manage water quality and waste sources. We must be prepared to invest in sustainable water resources. If we are to allow development, such developers, and any government bodies enabling that development, should bear responsibility for ensuring the future viability of water in Acton. When individual projects are reviewed without adequate consideration of cumulative impacts, neither the developers, nor the elected or appointed officials, are taking that responsibility. As an example, cumulative impacts are clearly written into Acton's wetland bylaw. But I have never once seen them considered, evaluated, or enforced.

That is, any long range plan for Acton must recognize that further development will be directly linked to increased pressure on water supply, ability to handle wastes, and overall water quality. By extension water quality and quantity also directly impacts surface water body aesthetics and biodiversity. It is irresponsible to future residents of the town to produce a plan that endorses ongoing growth, and in fact encouraging it in some built up areas, without stipulating a strategy for a) **considering cumulative impacts** of development on surface and ground water – when each development is individually reviewed by citizen boards and committees the cumulative impacts are very easily masked and almost impossible to manage or even understand; b) **balance development pace and extent** with ability to **ensure adequate future water supply and quantity**. CONTINUED UNCHECKED DEVELOPMENT WILL CERTAINLY STRESS WATER AVAILABILITY; political statements are made that “we” will supply water to everyone who develops a piece of land, but there are limits which have not been taken seriously in this planning process; c) **proactively managing waste water treatment**, whether individually or centrally; it is nice to talk about running a sewer line to West Acton, but if the plan is going to call out such a specific point, it must have something to say

about the 80% of the town not covered by central sewers, and in particular the undeveloped land. The plan should take a more proactive role in understanding the relationship between continued development and increasing stress caused by more individual domestic waste disposal, and the relationship of that to ground and surface water quality and the cumulative impacts; d) more **actively managing citizen behavior and educating as to disposal of hazardous material**, ranging from domestic pharmaceuticals, to use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers all of which impact our water and e) investing in **a more systematic and sophisticated water quality monitoring program**, so we can understand what the trends are with regard to surface and ground water quality. Once of the reasons it is so challenging for the 2020 committee to incorporate this area is that such data is largely absent (except for places like the WR Grace and BOC sites) and therefore there is much opinion stated without the ability to back that up with data or facts. **Monitoring and reporting should be mandatory.**

Make no mistake about it, Acton cannot be as passive about water quality and quantity as other surrounding towns. Acton stand out among the west-of-Boston towns as one that has ALMOST 100% DEPENDENCY ON WELL WATER, THAT IS WATER TAKEN FROM THE AQUIFER. The aquifer's water quality and quantity is dependent on RECHARGE of the aquifer. And the ability to draw water out of a finite aquifer has limits. Acton also stands out as a town that is 80% dependent, today, on individual septic systems, for domestic waste treatment. Aside from some unenforced town rules about regular pumping of these individual systems, there is no organized management or measurement of the performance of these systems. Third of all, most of the commercial and industrial sites in the town are near water bodies or aquifers or both, presenting the obvious risk of commercial contamination. There some, but in my personal and professional opinion, completely inadequate monitoring of those areas, so we don't really know what is happening in those areas. Fourth of all, continued development will reduce overall open space, which puts pressure on all of the above.

Even more than such topics as sustainability, **water is a local issue, which local policy**, education and proactivity can have a very significant impact on our local quality of life.

Although I am a member of the WRAC and that committee has provided some point-by-point comments on certain sections of the plan, I would like make it clear that these are my individual comments. I write with some considerable background and credentials in the area (water and environmental protection) that I am commenting on. I spent ten years as a professional in the area of environmental analysis and policy analysis. As such, I was the project manager for the environmental impact aspects of a large area wide planning study of Nassau and Suffolk Counties water protection and studied these issues in depth. I also participated in and was program manager for a number of projects related to water and air quality policy and wetlands protection over that ten year period.

With my above comments, and with the benefit of my background mentioned in the paragraph above, I strenuously urge the **committee to make sure to stipulate much more proactive water protection, water supply planning, and trend monitoring in the context of any development that they endorse.**

Thank you,

Ron Beck,

Resident, voter and taxpayer on three properties in the Town of Acton