



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan

December 2011

# Acton 2020

**Prepared for:**  
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Today. Tomorrow. Together.



## Foreword (by the Acton 2020 Committee)

In the course of working together as residents on the Acton 2020 committee, we've read a number of other Comprehensive Community plans. Many of these plans seem to start with a simple extrapolation of past trends put forth for the future, but looking back and then forward at the edge of our 20-year planning scope, we don't think this is the right approach for Acton. Instead, we are proposing something bolder, something that responds to the changes happening all around us.

Over the last sixty years, Acton has been defined by its rapid growth from a rural community to a bedroom suburb.<sup>1</sup> Growth was driven by the post-war boom in suburbia, the broad availability of state and federal support to build infrastructure, and the availability of relatively cheap land in Acton, and cheap energy everywhere. But now, land has become more scarce and fuel more expensive. Demographics and sensibilities are changing too - as the population gradually shifts towards more seniors and fewer children and as awareness and concern increase for environmental sustainability. From a fiscal standpoint, we also know that we can't rely on an ever increasing population to pay for ever

more services. And we are more aware that most new residential development now comes at an increasing cost:<sup>2</sup> more traffic, more risk to water supplies, more infrastructure to pay for and maintain, and more costs for services.

Actonians are pragmatic and smart. We see changes are coming, and we want to find a positive future. What we on the committee have learned during this planning process is that there is an emerging sense among residents of what sorts of shifts will be needed to navigate the coming changes in order to foster a resilient and vibrant community. Indeed, the feedback we've received from residents strongly reflects both a desire for an increased "sense of community" and concern regarding the "future resilience" of the town. These two themes really frame the whole of the plan.

As you read through this document, please keep in mind that the elements of the plan we have laid out do not comprise a simple wishlist that the residents expect the town to wave a magic wand to create. These visions are part of a picture of how to support each other, to create a different sort of town prosperity driven by the richness of social connection, a deep apprecia-

tion for the historic and natural realms in which we are embedded in Acton, and a commitment to a good shared future. And it will take a broad and deep resident participation to move in this direction: the town government itself can only do so much.

Meeting with many residents, boards, and committees, through numerous meetings and a number of public workshops,<sup>3</sup> a Roadmap for Guiding Growth with broad support has emerged that we feel strongly can create this kind of town prosperity. We invite you to join with town officials, volunteers, and residents to make this vision a reality.

- The Acton 2020 Committee

*Margaret Woolley Busse, Chair*

*Jim Snyder-Grant, Vice-Chair*

*Celia Kent*

*Paulina Knibbe*

*Charles Mercier*

*Sahana Purohit*



## Acknowledgements

- The planning department staff put the plan at the top of their very full work priorities. Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl, and Kim Gorman put countless hours in to attending meetings, document production and review, and, over and over, educating the rest of us by answering our questions about how the town works.
- The rest of the town's staff have decades of experience in Acton, and helped us improve the plan each time they engaged with our process.
- Our consultants at the Collaborative and Community Circle worked tirelessly on building the plan, and on nurturing the community-wide conversation that formed the basis of the plan.
- The volunteers of every town board and committee spent some time on parts of the plan, improving it with their deep knowledge of particular areas, out of their commitment to Acton.
- And most importantly, there was an unprecedented engagement by the citizens of Acton

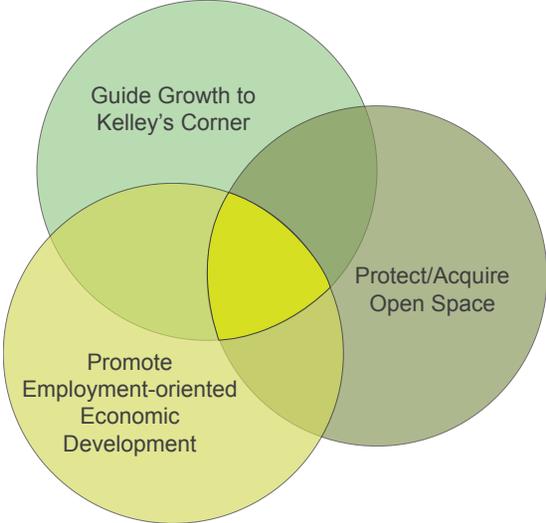
at each stage of the planning process. Your commitment and involvement in the future of this town is the key ingredient that gives us hope for Acton's future.



# Introduction

The purpose of the Acton 2020 Plan is to guide the future growth and development of Acton. It is a roadmap, a decision-making tool, to be used by town officials and citizens alike to understand and express a desired future and the steps that lead there. It is intended to help put the Town in a position to take advantage of opportunities as they arise and to have a strong sense of direction when moving forward on initiatives.

The Plan is based on underlying themes that were expressed by Actonians, many of which are about growth and its consequences. The



The three parts of the Roadmap intersect to provide more environmental and fiscal sustainability.

following pages describe the “roadmap” for addressing future growth – which can be guided but not avoided. The roadmap has three main parts; as shown below, they overlap to create a “sweet spot” that combines both environmental and fiscal sustainability. How those parts work together is explained on the following pages and in the diagram on page 6.

In addition to the roadmap for guiding growth, the Plan also contains Strategies to implement the Goals and Objectives listed on page 7. The key implementation strategies on pages 8 and 9 are a summary of the highest priorities in a much more extensive list of strategies and action steps that are listed in the full report and at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>

This Executive Summary and the full report answer questions such as:

- “How can we afford it?”
- “How is this different from the 1990s master plan?”
- “What about unpredictable future contingencies?”

A page of notes and references keyed to the text provides explanations and support for the report’s statements.

## Underlying Themes

An increased ‘sense of community’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Community gathering:</b> desire for indoor and outdoor places and events to meet and interact casually, spontaneously as well as in a planned, more formal fashion.</li> <li>• <b>Town character:</b> desire to preserve and enhance features – physical and other – including a commitment to excellence in education, rural and historic characteristics, and small town feeling, which make Acton unique and contribute to its sense of community.</li> <li>• <b>Connectivity:</b> desire for walking, biking, public transportation; traffic calming and improvements; increased opportunities for social networks and connections.</li> </ul>
The ‘future resilience’ of the Town
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Environmental sustainability:</b> concern regarding the survivability of the environment due to overuse, abuse and neglect.</li> <li>• <b>Social and economic diversity:</b> concern regarding ability to accommodate a range of socio-economic levels as well as the ability to age in place.</li> <li>• <b>Financial viability:</b> concern regarding the ability of the Town to protect its assets and maintain a viable balance between taxes and services provided.</li> </ul>

# Roadmap for Guiding Growth

Acton can't avoid all future growth, but it can guide the expected growth in a way that better fits with the town's goals. There are three major parts to this approach.

**Guide growth to Kelley's Corner and key village centers** (such as West and South Acton) where smaller residential units will fit the growing market and provide more options for seniors and young people. This type of development promises to be both fiscally and environmentally sustainable.<sup>4</sup> Place-specific guidelines and design review will ensure that new development helps create successful places.<sup>5</sup>

Guiding the majority of growth to the centers in smaller units helps to reduce future school enrollments,<sup>6</sup> provides more affordable housing for seniors who want to continue to live in Acton,<sup>7</sup> and makes it feasible to create livelier walkable places for the whole community to gather.<sup>8</sup>

**Preserve open space**, particularly by using transfer of development rights (TDR)<sup>9</sup> to guide growth away from the subdivision of large tracts of land and to the centers without having to pay for open space acquisition; TDR zoning offers an incentive to the property owner to leave the land undeveloped and instead participate in de-

velopment in the centers. This results in preserving the rural characteristics and open space so appreciated by Acton residents.

**Actively promote employment-oriented economic development**, which will increase the tax base and, along with the mixed use development in the centers, will produce more tax revenue than the cost of services for the new development<sup>10</sup> and also create local jobs and reduce commuting for more residents.

## How the Roadmap Addresses Key Concerns

**Financial Resilience.** Acton is currently financially sound with a top bond rating and funds in reserve, but the town budget is under pressure and costs are expected to rise as healthcare and pension expenses increase.<sup>11</sup> In order to address this, some combination of higher taxes, reduced costs or services, and a bigger property tax base will be needed.<sup>12</sup>

The Roadmap **promotes economic development in appropriate locations**, and encourages **fiscally beneficial residential development** by shifting from large lot subdivisions, which increase school enrollments and costs, to compact development with smaller units that have been

shown to have fewer school age children and therefore generate more tax revenue than costs.<sup>13</sup>

**Environmental Resilience.**<sup>14</sup> Acton is committed to reducing its carbon footprint and protecting its water resources. These efforts have some costs, but the investments will be repaid in lower energy costs and avoiding the need to later remediate impacts to the town's drinking water.<sup>15</sup>

## Where the Roadmap Takes Us

- Kelley's Corner becomes a busy, walkable town center.
- Villages become denser with redevelopment of non-residential parcels; stronger design review preserves and enhances existing character.
- School enrollments decline gradually, and school costs rise more slowly as the population ages and the housing mix in the new development provides smaller units for seniors and others.<sup>16</sup>
- The tax base is expanded by economic development.
- Home values (adjusted for inflation) outside the centers will be maintained; and those in the villages may increase.<sup>17</sup>
- Many large parcels of open land will be

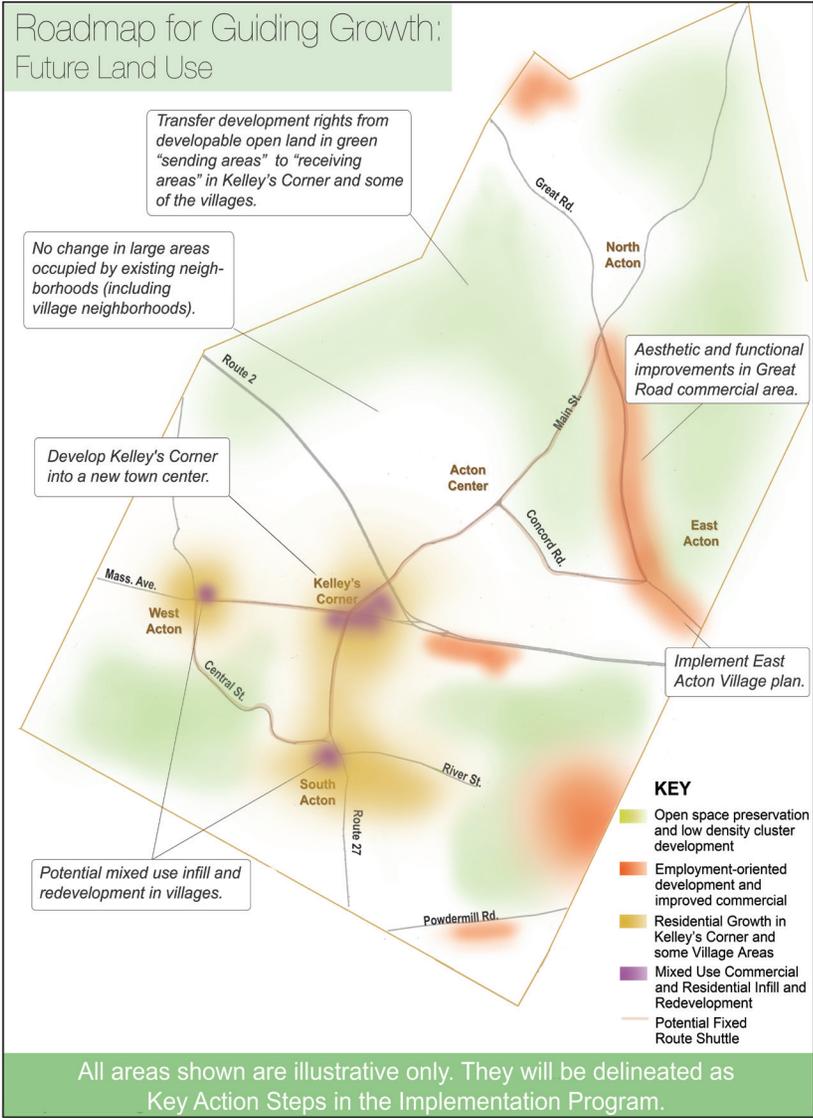


protected through acquisition and transfer of development rights to the centers; on those that do develop, part of the parcel can be protected through cluster zoning.<sup>18</sup>

- By concentrating growth, it becomes feasible to serve more of Acton’s population by public transportation, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, saving money for residents, and providing access for Actonians who can’t drive or don’t wish to be automobile-dependent. It also gives residents the opportunity for walking, which benefits fitness goals and increases sense of connection to others.

### How is this concept different from the village focus of the 1991 and 1998 Plans?

- There is now increased awareness of sustainability and wellness and expressed desire of residents for compact mixed use centers.
- Both demographics and the housing market have changed to favor this type of setting.
- The 2020 Plan has much stronger tools such as TDR to make it happen and integrated transportation strategies to reinforce more desirable land use patterns.
- The Plan proactively uses the tools to reduce growth in areas that should be preserved and increase fiscal capacity.
- Acton residents and the business community now have the political will to make it happen because of a sense of greater urgency that there may not be another chance to achieve their goals





# Goals and Objectives

<b>GOAL 1:</b>	<b>Preserve and Enhance Town Character</b>	<b>Objective 4.2:</b>	Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands.
<b>Objective 1.1:</b>	Strengthen planning tools to manage growth pro-actively.	<b>Objective 4.3:</b>	Create new gathering spaces and make better use existing ones.
<b>Objective 1.2:</b>	Preserve and enhance village centers.	<b>Objective 4.4:</b>	Support additional cultural activities.
<b>Objective 1.3:</b>	Preserve rural characteristics and open space.	<b>GOAL 5:</b>	<b>Support Inclusion and Diversity</b>
<b>Objective 1.4:</b>	Preserve historic buildings and landscapes.	<b>Objective 5.1:</b>	Support residents of all ages.
<b>Objective 1.5:</b>	Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.	<b>Objective 5.2:</b>	Support households of all income levels.
<b>GOAL 2:</b>	<b>Ensure Environmental Sustainability</b>	<b>Objective 5.3:</b>	Embrace cultural diversity.
<b>Objective 2.1:</b>	Protect the quality and quantity of Acton’s water.	<b>Objective 5.4:</b>	Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community.
<b>Objective 2.2:</b>	Reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins.	<b>GOAL 6:</b>	<b>Preserve and Enhance Town-Owned Assets and Services</b>
<b>Objective 2.3:</b>	Reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.	<b>Objective 6.1:</b>	Protect Town-owned open space.
<b>Objective 2.4:</b>	Move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.	<b>Objective 6.2:</b>	Support excellence in schools.
<b>GOAL 3:</b>	<b>Improve Connections</b>	<b>Objective 6.3:</b>	Manage the Town’s facilities efficiently.
<b>Objective 3.1:</b>	Make walking and biking easier and safer.	<b>Objective 6.4:</b>	Continue to provide high quality services that are responsive to Town needs.
<b>Objective 3.2:</b>	Improve transportation around town.	<b>Objective 6.5:</b>	Provide excellent public health and safety services.
<b>Objective 3.3:</b>	Promote communication among town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.	<b>GOAL 7:</b>	<b>Maintain and Improve the Financial Well-Being of the Town</b>
<b>Objective 3.4:</b>	Support and strengthen neighborhoods.	<b>Objective 7.1:</b>	Promote fiscal responsibility.
<b>GOAL 4:</b>	<b>Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation</b>	<b>Objective 7.2:</b>	Promote economic development that supports other goals.
<b>Objective 4.1:</b>	Provide a community facility large enough to accommodate a variety of uses and a wide range of programming.	<b>Objective 7.3:</b>	Improve existing commercial areas.
		<b>Objective 7.4:</b>	Support the ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime.



# Key Implementation Strategies

The Goals and Objectives will be implemented through a number of strategies that involve one or more action step. Fifteen key recommendations stand out as highest priority among the more than 200 proposed action steps; the full Implementation Program is in the body of the report and online at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>. They are not listed in priority order.

## Roadmap Strategies for Guided Growth

- ▶ **Preserve and enhance village centers** and Kelley’s Corner. The first step is to prepare a focused Village Centers Plan to set priorities for new and redevelopment in the centers. Consider Acton as a system of villages, build on existing strengths in each, identify necessary aesthetic and functional improvements, assess capacity for density incentives, and prioritize and sequence which areas to work on first. This plan would include a quantitative analysis of a transfer of development rights (TDR) system, to verify that the incentives are most likely to create the desired changes.
- ▶ **Develop Kelley’s Corner into a mixed use town center and transportation hub.** Encourage mixed use with people living in smaller housing units near vibrant shops and restaurants with opportunities for meeting and greeting, running errands, dining, and community gathering. Creating more activities and a safe and pleasant pedestrian environment will also attract teens from the nearby school complex.
- ▶ **Actively promote employment-oriented economic development** (e.g.,

R&D, high tech, office) to expand the tax base. This may also potentially reduce commute time for some residents.

- ▶ **Protect, acquire, and improve open space** for conservation, farming, and recreation, using a combination of acquisition and zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to move development away from open land and to the key centers. This will help to protect town character and the environment, as well as provide additional opportunities for recreation.

## Other Strategies

- ▶ In order to support an increase in small-scale development and better manage wastewater in West Acton, **consider a sewer extension and/or advanced package wastewater treatment** with groundwater recharge.
- ▶ **Improve the transfer station to increase recycling and reuse.**
- ▶ **Construct more sidewalks and facilities for safe bicycling, in centers and townwide.** This will help connect people and places and provide



opportunities for fitness while also being good for the environment (by reducing car fumes)

- ▶ **Reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote townwide energy conservation.** Support joint community/town efforts to reduce reliance on fossil-fuel energy sources and to explore shifting to renewable sources.
- ▶ **Continue to fund, and later expand, MinuteVan** to build ridership with more frequent service between village centers, Kelley’s Corner, and rail station. This will connect various places in town and also provide a service to those who cannot drive as well as to those wishing to use public transportation when convenient.
- ▶ **Construct a new building to accommodate the Senior Center and larger community**, when finances permit. This will serve to provide space for expanded programming for an increasing senior population as well as provide a meeting and gathering place for the community at large
- ▶ Prepare a proactive plan that encourages the **provision of a wide range of housing types** to meet the needs of seniors, town employees, young couples, and those of moderate income, by locating housing **in small, scattered sites near walkable service and business destinations**, especially village centers. Consider possible Town participation in desired housing developments. The plan should address the town’s relationship to the state’s affordable housing law (Chapter 40B), but its purpose is to address housing need.



- ▶ **Develop policies and strategies to keep seniors in Acton**, for example by creating or finding new facilities for the Senior Center, supporting the development of appropriate housing, etc. As the senior population continues to grow, if they are to live in Acton, they will need a number of facilities and services that meet the spe (seniors place less costly demands on town services mainly because they do not add children to the school system. Also, increasing the average length of stay of residents of Acton increases the depth of the social fabric.
- ▶ Create a new **committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and language groups in town** to provide **information to newcomers and assist with organizing multi-cultural activities**. This will help build bridges, knitting the community closer together, and it will provide guidance to those unfamiliar with the town and its resources
- ▶ **Continue to support and achieve high standards of excellence in Acton’s schools.** A majority of residents when asked “Why did you move to Acton?,” respond: “because of the schools.” The schools and school-related activities are a major community focus contributing to the culture of Acton.
- ▶ **Continue to work to control cost**, planning for future financial responsibilities like pension costs and finding new ways to reduce current costs, such as regionalization and cooperation with other towns.

# Cost and Phasing of Major Actions

Town finances are being squeezed between the desire for services (excellent schools and other Town priorities) and a limited tax base, reduced state aid, and unfunded liabilities. Fortunately many of the Plan’s top recommendations can begin to be implemented with existing Town staff and relatively small additional expenditures (e.g., small-scale studies to prepare for appropriate growth in the centers).<sup>19</sup> Other priorities like a new building to serve seniors and the larger community, or an expanded shuttle system, are more expensive.

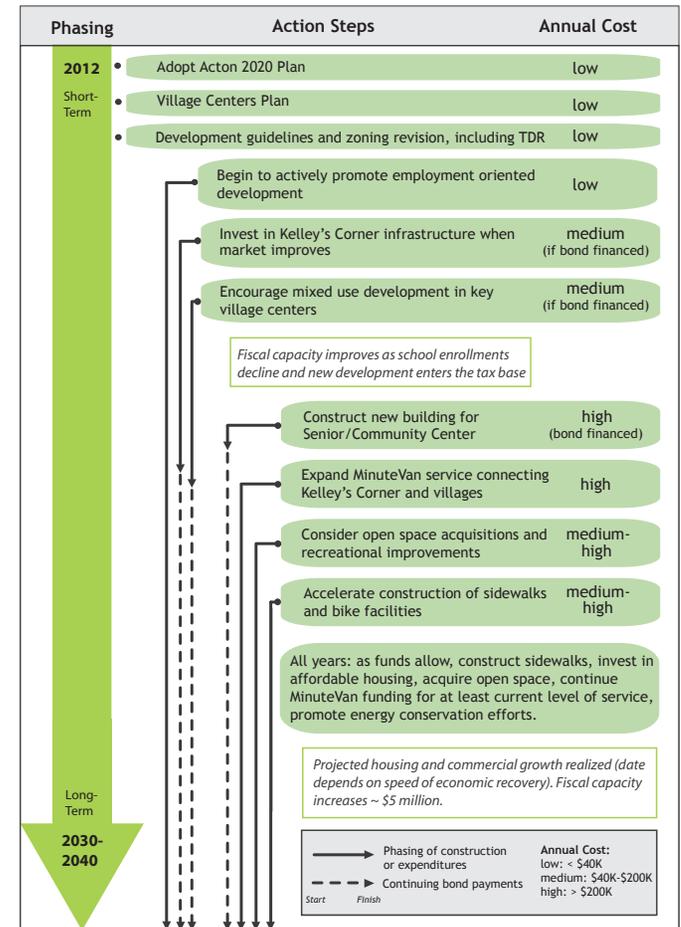
The solution to this challenge is to **phase the major actions as finances permit**. This can include some open space acquisition<sup>20</sup> and investment in pedestrian and bicycle facilities each year as can be afforded, continuing to fund the MinuteVan at current levels<sup>21</sup> until expansion becomes possible, phasing improvements to support desired redevelopment in Kelley’s Corner as the market revives, and planning for a new senior/community center<sup>22</sup> but putting off construction until it can be afforded.

In the meantime, Town fiscal capacity can be improved by promoting economic development, seeking special purpose state funding and grants,

and continuing to explore public-private partnerships for specific projects and co-operation with surrounding towns to provide services efficiently. Also, the current economic slowdown is an opportunity to complete the initial planning steps so that the town is poised for action when opportunities arise and/or the economic climate changes. The recommendation to reduce energy use in Town buildings and promote townwide energy conservation will pay for itself and also help to save money for residents and businesses.

It is significant that a fiscal analysis of the Plan Concept concluded that by the time 1200 new housing units and 1.5 million square feet of commercial space have been built (longer than 20 years because of the current economic downturn), Acton’s fiscal capacity will be increased by nearly \$5 million per year compared to a business-as-usual scenario where no growth strategy is implemented. More detail on costs is presented in the body of the report.<sup>23</sup> In addition to the major investments, the Plan also identifies actions that don’t cost much

## Phasing Key Investments:



to implement but have significant benefits; these “ripe apples” are identified throughout the implementation program.<sup>24</sup>

# Process

The plan was developed in two phases.<sup>25</sup> The first, Phase I, comprised extensive and intensive outreach to the Acton community through a variety of means including town-wide visioning sessions, focus groups with town boards and committees and other specific stakeholder groups, town-wide mail and telephone surveys of all households and businesses and multiple opportunities and input for and from the town's youth. This extensive public input resulted in an "Emerging Vision Statement" and a set of Goals and Objectives that encapsulated what residents and business owners envisioned for the town's future.

Phase II involved the following major activities:

- Developing an inventory of existing condi-



tions of the town's resources (including housing, transportation, public services and facilities, open space and recreation, cultural and natural resources, economic development, and land use.)

- Revising and finalizing the Goals and Objectives.
- Identifying Key Issues, Opportunities, and Challenges and developing a preliminary list of ways to address them.
- Developing a comprehensive Implementation Plan that provides a prioritized and phased proposal for moving forward to fulfill the vision and goals.
- Undertaking an extraordinary level of public involvement, including
  - Using the internet both to disseminate information regarding the process and the content of the plan as well as to provide an additional opportunity for people to interact with the content of the plan (blog, Facebook, and interactive posting of the entire Implementation Plan).
  - Holding six major public forums and more than 10 public meetings with special outreach to specific town boards and committees.

## Components of the "Emerging Vision" (from Phase I)

- *Preserving the rural and historic characteristics*
  - *A sustainable future*
  - *Excellent schools*
  - *Recreational opportunities*
  - *Lively, safe neighborhoods*
  - *Attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas*
  - *Sidewalks and bike paths*
  - *A town shuttle*
  - *Open communication and accessible information*
  - *Opportunities for the community to gather*
  - *Vibrant village centers*
  - *Kelley's Corner as walkable town center*
  - *Welcomes all its residents*
- 
- Producing a movie "It's a Wonderful Acton" to raise awareness and increase turnout to a key forum.

# Notes and References

The notes below provide sources and explanations for the statements in the report that are flagged with the corresponding numbers.

1. Rapid growth (p.1): See growth chart in full report, page 31. Acton's population has grown at a rate of over 3,000 persons per decade since 1950.
2. Increasing cost of new residential development (p.1): See Fiscal impact research in Appendix \_\_, Volume III, Harrison and French, Introduction to Fiscal Impact Analysis, UNH; and Kotval and Mullin, Fiscal Impact Analysis.
3. Number of public forums (p.1): See Process section in full report, p. 124.
4. Fiscally and environmentally sustainable (p.3): fiscally sustainable because of smaller units and more compact development easier to serve with town streets and infrastructure. Residential development can be fiscally positive (p.1): the main reason residential development in the past has cost more than the taxes it generates is added burden to the schools, which comprise over 2/3 of Acton's budget. Even though there are individual instances of many children in a small housing unit, on average, the number of school children is strongly correlated with the number of bedrooms in the new housing. This has been substantiated in the number of new school enrollments generated by the Avalon Acton housing development. Smaller units have fewer school children and generate more taxes than costs to the town.
5. Place-specific guidelines (p.3): a key strategy is to do design studies for Kelley's Corner and village centers to set priorities and determine what kind of development is compatible, then make these guidelines part of the zoning review process.
6. Smaller units reduce school enrollments (p.3): see note 4.
7. More affordable housing for seniors (p.3): in the sense that smaller units that seniors may desire will cost less than single family homes; "affordable" does not necessarily refer to state housing definitions and goals but could include some of this type of units.
8. Livelier walkable places (p.3): compact mixed use development with pedestrian amenities has been shown to create lively places where people want to be.
9. Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) (p.3): TDR is a zoning mechanism that has been used across the United States; a property owner in a designated "sending area" can work with an owner in a "receiving area", e.g. Kelley's Corner, to sell the rights to development of the sender's property to the owner in a receiving area; there is no cost to the town except development review, and the sending property is protected from any future development.
10. Economic development produces more taxes than costs (p.3): This is mostly due to the fact that commercial development does not add to school costs. (See references cited in note 2).
11. Healthcare and pension expenses increase (p.3): Acton, like most Massachusetts towns needs to prepare to pay for obligations to teachers and employees who will retire over the next 20 years.
12. Bigger property tax base needed (p.3): it is preferable to raise property tax revenues to pay for increasing costs from new development of the type that is fiscally positive instead of higher taxes on existing residential and commercial property; see notes 4 and 10.
13. Fiscally beneficial residential development (p.3): development with smaller units that consequently generate fewer school enrollments overall; see note 4.
14. Environmental resilience (p.3): Shifting residential growth from large lot subdivisions to compact development in the centers saves energy owing to reducing auto dependency, and it enables wastewater to be handled better via sewers or advanced package treatment plants, while leaving more open space undeveloped. Dealing with existing and anticipated stormwater issues in the centers can be planned for now, instead of waiting for worsening conditions.
15. Town's drinking water (p.3): Acton's public water supply comes from groundwater wells; therefore it is essential to protect the groundwater from sanitary wastewater and other contaminants and to recharge stormwater to the ground.
16. Smaller units for seniors and others (p.4): the compact development that would be encouraged for Kelley's Corner and, potentially, other village centers would be mixed use with apartments and condo units in low-rise buildings, suitable for seniors, empty nesters, and small families.
17. Home values (p.4): Acton homes would keep their value as the town's character and excellent schools are preserved; village-specific plans and development guidelines would make them desirable places and potentially increase the value of existing homes.
18. Cluster zoning (p.4): in areas away from villages, Acton's current zoning permits new housing units to be concentrated on approximately half of a residential parcel, leaving the other half in deeded open space.
19. Small-scale studies (p.9): These relatively inexpensive studies (less than \$40,000) are the key to determining development priorities and developing guidelines to create successful places, preserve existing character, and minimize impacts.
20. Open space acquisition (p.9): the town would continue to use Community Preservation Act funds to acquire open space when it becomes available; when finances permit, additional land acquisition can protect more open land and pre-empt large-lot subdivision that is likely to increase school costs more than it contributes in property taxes; see note 4.
21. MinuteVan (p.9): this shuttle is currently subsidized by MassDOT; continuing this service is important to moving toward a more sustainable transportation system that provides an alternative to car travel and serves the town's key centers.
22. Senior center (p.9): the current center is not large enough to fully serve today's seniors; as the population ages, a larger center will be even more needed. The limited hours scheduled for use by seniors would permit the larger community to be served by the same facility.
23. Fiscal analysis of Roadmap for Guiding Growth (p.9): see page 19 of the full report.
24. "Ripe apples" (p.9): also called "low hanging fruit," i.e., relatively low cost for the benefits provided.
25. Two phases of the 2020 Plan (p.10): see "Process" section of full report, beginning Page 124. Both phases involved extensive outreach.



# Vital Statistics

Extensive research was done by the consultant team and by the 2020 Committee and additional information was contributed by some members of the public.

The “snapshot” on this page is largely drawn from the Inventory Report, which is summarized in the last section of this volume and presented in full in Volume II.

## Housing and Population

- Acton’s 2010 U.S. Census population was 21,924, up 8% since 2000.
- The percent of residents 65 and older is expected to nearly double over the next 20 years from less than 10% to over 18%.
- Over the same period the number of school-age children is expected to decline slightly even while the total population increases.
- Acton had 8,530 housing units in 2010, up 11% from 2000. 63% are single family houses.
- Projections by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council suggested that, based on current policies, population will increase by 10% by 2030 and housing units will increase by 1000 units or 12%.

## Schools and School Enrollments

- In 2010 there were 218 students (K-12) per 1,000 population, the third highest of the towns Acton touches.<sup>1</sup>
- Acton Public Schools spent \$11,246 per pupil in 2009-2010, the second lowest of the towns it touches.
- Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009

## Land Use

- Acton’s land area is approximately 13,000 acres (20 square miles).
- 29% of Acton’s land area is open space (lower than five of the towns it touches). Roughly 1/3 of this open space is not protected from development.
- There are about 2,200 acres of developable land (vacant and not wetland).
- Based on 2008 land use data, approximately 1,800 additional housing units could be built on land now zoned residential, bringing the total at build-out to 10,300, or 22% more than today. This would take more than 30 years at projected growth rates.

<sup>1</sup> These are Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Littleton, Maynard, Stow, Sudbury, and Westford

## Water and Wastewater

- All of Acton’s public water supply comes from groundwater wells.
- Water demand has been relatively constant over the past six years, approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY), reflecting water conservation efforts. Acton’s state permit allows up to 708.1 MGY.
- Residential water demand is estimated by Acton Water District to be roughly 55 gallons per bedroom per day, substantially lower than the norm of 70.
- 80% of Acton’s homes have on-site septic systems, a high ratio for a town of Acton’s population. The other 20 percent use sewers or package treatment to dispose of wastewater.

## And...

- The average household in Acton drives 76 miles per day, the lowest of the adjacent towns except Concord.
- 87.5% of town revenues come from residential property, in the middle of the group of towns it touches.
- Acton was named the 16th Best Place To Live among small towns in the country by Money Magazine in 2009 and in 2011