



# Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan

January 2012

# Acton 2020

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Today. Tomorrow. Together.





# Table of Contents

ii	<b>Foreword</b>	75	<b>Description of Existing Conditions</b>
02	<b>Executive Summary</b>		Population and Housing
06	<b>Introduction</b>		Economic Development
	History & Background		Natural Resources
14	<b>Roadmap for Guiding Growth</b>		Historic and Cultural Resources
	Background		Open Space and Recreation
	Planning for a Resilient Acton		Transportation and Circulation
	Implementation of the Roadmap		Facilities and Services
	Analysis of the Roadmap		Land Use and Zoning
25	<b>Plan Foundations</b>	130	<b>Process</b>
	Guiding Principles		Definition of Phases I and II
	Goals and Objectives		Acton Voices - Phase I
	Outreach - Acton Voices Phase I		Acton Voices - Phase II
	Outreach - Acton Voices Phase II		Public Workshops
	Key Opportunities and Challenges		
	Did You Know?		
38	<b>Implementation Program</b>		
	Key Implementation Strategies		
	Cost and Phasing		
	Detailed Implementation Program Tables		





FOREWORD

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

# Foreword

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, 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 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 residen-

tial 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 Comprehensive Community 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 residents expect the town can achieve by waving a magic wand. The Plan presents a vision of how to support each other by creating a different sort of town prosperity driven by the richness of social connection, a deep appreciation for the historic and natural realms in which we are em-

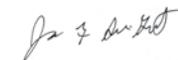
bedded in Acton, and a commitment to a good shared future. And it will take broad and deep resident participation to move in this direction; the town government itself can only do so much.

By communicating with many residents, boards, and committees through numerous meetings and a number of public workshops,<sup>3</sup> a Roadmap for Guiding Growth has emerged that we feel strongly can create 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



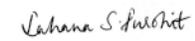
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**Acknowledgements**

- The Planning Department staff put the plan at the top of their very full work priorities. Kristin Alexander, Roland Bartl, and Kim Gorman contributed countless hours 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.

1. Rapid growth (p.1): See growth chart, page \_\_. 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, page 130.







## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# Executive Summary









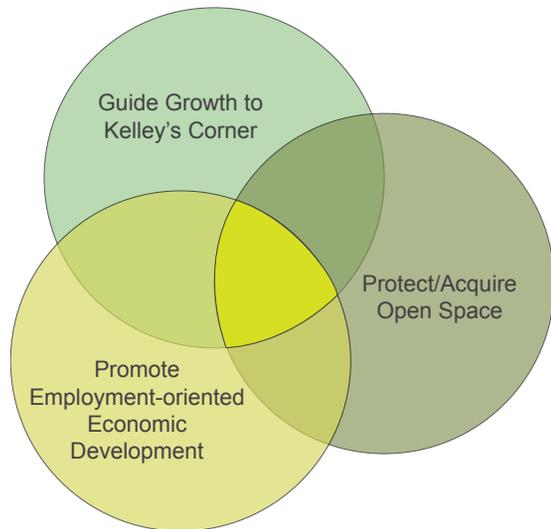
## INTRODUCTION

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# Introduction

The purpose of the Acton 2020 Plan is to guide the future growth and development of Acton. It is an opportunity to document those aspects of the town with Acton residents care about and to develop strategies to protect and enhance what's valued. It is also an opportunity to document residents' concerns and recommended changes that will improve the experience of living in Acton.

The Acton 2020 Plan is a **Roadmap** to navigate to the Plan's Vision, a decision-making tool, to



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

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**<sup>1</sup> that were expressed by Actonians, many of which are about growth and its consequences. With the recognition that growth can be guided, but not fully avoided, the main thrust of the Plan describes the **Roadmap** for addressing our Town's future growth. The **Roadmap**, while only a subset of the overall plan, represents its core and has three main parts. As shown below, these 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 15.

## How to Use this Report

The report begins with the background and history of planning in Acton.

The section on the Roadmap for Guiding

<sup>1</sup> See page 28.

Growth describes its main components and how they are interrelated, how it would affect future land use, and its effects on housing, open space, developable land, and the town's fiscal capacity.

The Foundations section describes the Plan's Vision, the Goals and Objectives, Opportunities and Challenges, and how the Plan deals with Future Contingencies. Vital Statistics are also presented.

The Implementation Program section includes Key Implementation Strategies, which are a summary of the highest priorities, followed by a much more extensive list of strategies and action steps that are listed in detail beginning on page 47. The full Implementation program is a database located at

<http://implementation.acton2020.info/>

The section also discusses costs and phasing of major investments.

The Process section documents the extraordinary level of public participation that went into the Plan.

A final section summarizes the research that was done; full inventory reports are included in Volume II.

# History & Background

## Brief History of Acton

Acton is an upper middle class suburban town in Middlesex County, Massachusetts (U.S.), located about twenty-one miles west-northwest of Boston along Route 2 west of Concord and about ten miles southwest of Lowell. The town’s population is 21,924 (2010 Census).

Prior to its settlement by farmers from Concord, the area that became present-day Acton was frequented by Nipmuck-related Native Americans who may have practiced some limited agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering. Many areas of Acton were good campsites especially areas along Nashoba and Fort Pond Brooks as well as Nagog Pond. Artifacts from early hunting and fishing villages have been found in Acton, especially in the area of Nagog Pond.

### What is A Comprehensive Community Plan?

- a basis for decision making regarding the long-term physical development of the municipality (MGL Ch 41 Sec 81D)
- a process that leads to a plan for action that is based on the town’s values and goals
- a set of priorities for addressing the full range of issues facing the town

Nearly all of present day Acton’s 12,990 acres is comprised of portions of four early land grants. The two largest were: Major Simon Willard’s Grant (known as Iron Work Farm), and the New Grant or Concord Village. Next to these grants was the praying Indian Township of Nashoba Plantation, which lay entirely outside present day Acton.

The early colonial landscape included large areas of meadows. These prime grazing lands were the reason Concord sought to annex these additional lands in 1655. The earliest European settler was John Law, Concord’s shepherd, who built his home in 1656 on School Street near Lawsbrook Road.

By 1730 there were at least two-dozen settlers scattered across the town. In 1735 Acton was incorporated as a town. A meetinghouse was built in the center of town with roads coming from the outlying farms. Although Acton was primarily an agricultural community in its early days, residents were involved in a range of other economic activities including sawmills, gristmills, the manufacture of barrels to store and ship foodstuffs, a pencil factory and even a woolen industry centered on the Faulkner Mills in South Acton; one of the first large-scale manufacturers



of woolen cloth in this country. Remnants of that original mill still exist.

Only with the arrival of the railroad did the villages really begin to grow, especially West Acton Village. It wasn’t until after the Civil War that the railroad finally went through East and North Acton. The rail beds remain today and are locations for the proposed Assabet River Rail Trail and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.

The 1890s brought a shift in population towards South and West Acton, which caused the precincts and school districts to be realigned. The North and East District Schools were combined into the Center District. Although the districts were officially changed the residents still thought of the villages as East and North Acton.

The 1990 Master Plan proposed to revitalize these areas and rebuild their village character.

At the turn of the century Acton was still an agricultural community, with five villages and a population of 2,120. Apples were Acton's main agricultural export being shipped not only to Boston but to Europe. Before modern refrigeration, space in the cellar of the town hall was auctioned off for storage. Apples were stored in the center of West Acton into the 1950s.

Improvements were coming however; a water district was formed in 1912 for West and South Acton; the Center was added later. A town fire department, starting in 1915 with West Acton, replaced the independent fire companies.

1950 marks the shift from apples to houses, with most of that development in the southern half of the town. There were 3,500 people in Acton in 1950; by 1974 there would be 17,000. The orchards and open fields turned into subdivisions; although Acton still kept its agricultural ties with apples being a major crop into the 1960s. The town was then three villages; Acton Center, West Acton and South Acton. The form of government remains Board of Selectmen - Open Town Meeting form as at the time of its incorporation.



South Acton Train Station



Horse and Buggy



Acton Center School



North Acton School



West Acton Center



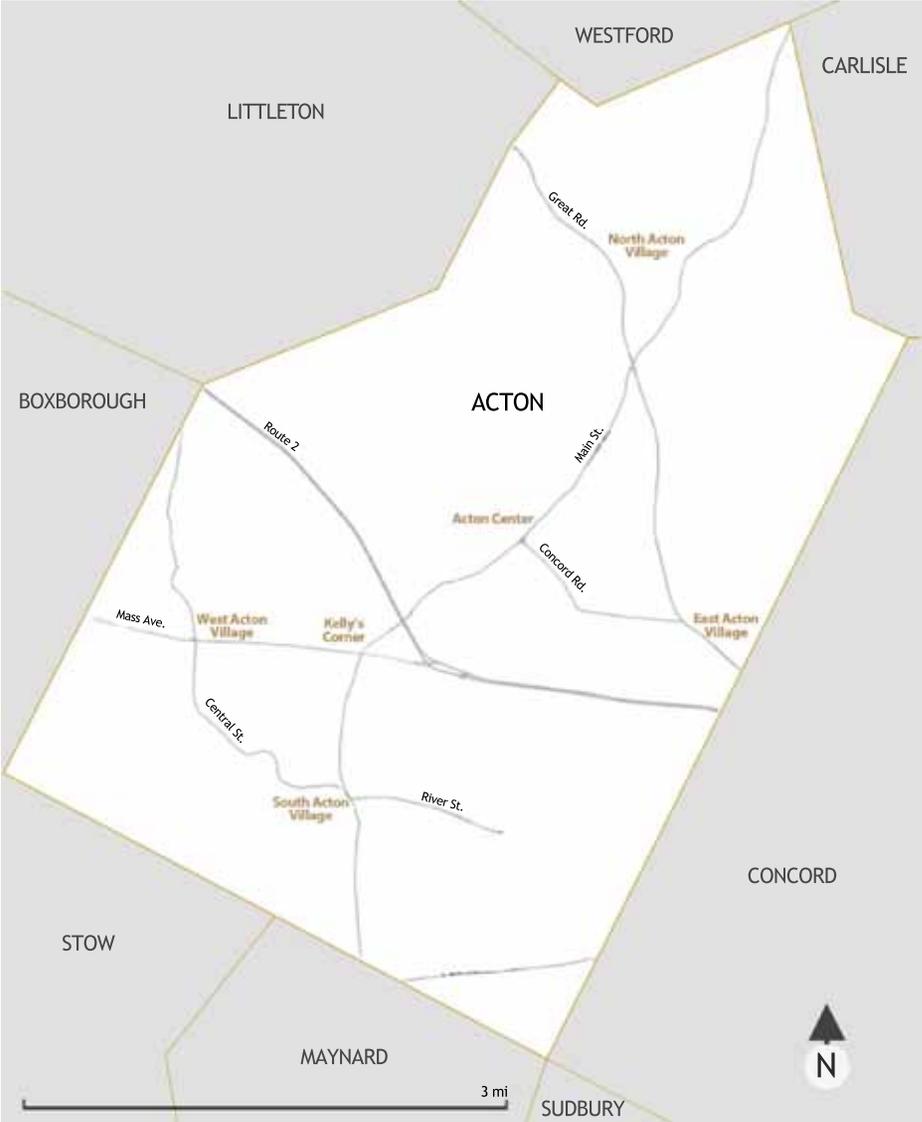
Acton Library

### The Five Village Centers<sup>1</sup>

While Acton Center has been the civic center of the town since the revolution, the four other village centers earned their nomenclature from the names of their corresponding railroad station.

- **Acton Center** is the civic center of the town and is the site of the town hall, the main public library, a children’s playground, an obelisk monument commemorating Acton deaths in “the Concord Fight” of the Revolutionary War, a fire station, a Congregational church, a 64-acre arboretum and conservation area, and the former post office. The modern post office and the police station are each located about one-half mile away in opposite directions along Main Street. Otherwise, Acton Center is generally a residential area.
- **West Acton** is an important commercial area of town, with shops and businesses centered along Route 111. It developed in response to the opportunities created by the Fitchburg Railroad in the 1840s. West Acton also has a fire station, a playground, a small public library, and two nearby elementary schools, and it is surrounded by extensive neighborhoods.

<sup>1</sup> From [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acton,\\_Massachusetts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acton,_Massachusetts)



- **South Acton**, also on the Fitchburg Railroad, used to be the most industrialized area of the town of Acton. Already in the 18th century, this area held many mills and other small industrial workshops that used water power generated by Fort Pond Brook. Today South Acton has a few small businesses and shops and includes the Faulkner Homestead (‘Faulkner House’), the oldest home still standing in Acton, Jones Tavern, Exchange Hall, a fire station, two playgrounds and ball fields, nearby conservation land, and many surrounding neighborhoods. The South Acton MBTA station is the only rail station on the Fitchburg line still active in Acton.



- **East Acton** was originally a small commercial area that grew up around the East Acton train station in the 19th century, also called Ellsworth. With the advent of the automobile, and the demise of this branch of the railroad, East Acton became a largely residential area with a sizeable commercial base that is disposed along the Route 2A corridor.

## Infrastructure

Public infrastructure grew to accommodate the increasing population. A Water District was established in 1912 and a town-wide Fire Department was established in 1913. In 2005 a new Public Safety Building was built that expanded space for the Police Department and provided for a Joint Dispatch area with the Fire

Department. The Acton Water District is a community public water supply that delivers drinking water to the majority (about 90 percent) of the residents of the town of Acton. Most homes and businesses in Acton (approximately 80%) use private on-site sewage systems (i.e. septic tanks). Higher density developments such as condominiums and apartment buildings (approximately 10% of the town) use private sewers that go to small-scale private treatment plants. In 2001, Acton completed its first public sewer system, which serves approximately 10% of the town, primarily in South Acton. Approximately 45% of Acton households are served with natural gas.

## Schools

“Schools” is among the top response to the question: “Why did you move to Acton?” and is a critical component of the experience of living in Acton and of building community. At the beginning of the century, each village in Acton had its own grade school, but until 1925, when the Towne School was built, Acton students were sent to Concord’s high school. In 1953, new schools were constructed to accommodate the growth in the student population. In 1954,

Acton and Boxborough created a regional school district for grades 7-12, replacing the Towne School. The Merriam School was constructed in 1958. Other schools quickly followed.<sup>2</sup> In 1967 a building was constructed for the junior high. In 1973 a large addition was added to this building and it became the high school; the junior high moved to the 1954 high school building. Both the junior high and high school were enlarged and renovated in 2000-2005.

Residents tend to place a high value on education and are very proud that the high school, Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, was named a Blue Ribbon School by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009.

Acton has a unique method of assigning students to elementary schools, called “Open Enrollment.” In contrast to surrounding communities which assign elementary schools by neighborhood district, first-time incoming kindergarten parents in Acton participate in a lottery-based selection process where the parents “choose” the school by listing their preferences in ranked order.

This method of school choice has a significant

<sup>2</sup> Douglas (1966), Gates (1968), and Conant (1971)

impact on the nature of the community. Acton is less oriented around neighborhoods than towns that have neighborhood-based schools. While neighborhood ties are reportedly strong and depending on the neighborhood people identify strongly with geography, school choice also results in providing students and their families additional opportunities to have social connections that are independent of their neighborhood. This may in part explain the strong desire expressed by residents for more opportunities to connect and gather with one another, (e.g. both because they would like more neighborhood ties than school choice affords them and because they have town-wide connections that they would enjoy experiencing outside of the school environment).

### Previous Planning Efforts

The town’s previous master plan was completed in 1991 and updated in 1998. The 1991 Master Plan addressed those issues that most concerned Acton’s residents at the time, mainly traffic, commercial growth management, environmental protection, and affordable housing. The Master Plan proposed strategies for managing commercial development and guiding it into exist-

ing village centers and Kelley’s Corner, and for preserving open space by employing the strategy of cluster development.

The 1998 Update was based on the 1991 Master Plan; it did not find that the community values, goals and/or development trends and issues had changed significantly. Instead the 1998 Update refined the main ideas in the 1991 Master Plan. The 1998 Update identifies two underlying and complementary objectives, that of promoting and enhancing village centers as growth areas, and that of preserving open space. The main themes of the Update were as follows:

- Control residential growth
- Preserve town character, particularly by strengthening the villages for both residential and business uses
- Encourage appropriate economic development to build the tax base and provide a greater variety of goods, services, and employment opportunities in Acton
- Protect the environment and cultural resources
- Calm traffic and encourage non-automobile transportation
- Provide pedestrian and bicycle connections

The recession and subsequent recovery in the early nineties undercut many of the assumptions made in the 1991 Plan. As a result growth assumptions had to be adjusted accordingly in the 1998 Update. The general direction was not altered, just the pace.

While overall, the 1998 Update was ambitious – it contained 12 goals, 65 objectives that articulated these goals more specifically, 126 strategies to achieve the objectives, and 143 actions – an impressive number of these (approximately



70%)<sup>3</sup> have been implemented. In several cases, implementation is ongoing; for example, the actions concerning East Acton and North Acton Village plans have been largely accomplished for East Acton, and the town intends to turn its attention to North Acton in the future.

### Changes since the 1998 Update

In some ways this Acton 2020 Plan has a similar relationship to the Master Plan 1998 Update that the 1998 Update had to the 1991 Master Plan in that there have not been any significant changes in the town’s core values or overall trends.

Residents are still concerned with preserving open space and are very interested in enhancing the village centers. They may, however, be more concerned with environmental sustainability and the economy than they were in 1998. As a result, many of the 1998 Update recommendations are reiterated and refined in the 2020 Plan. The Plan also identifies and supports on-going efforts to continue to implement the previous plan’s goals and objectives.

<sup>3</sup> Through discussion with the Planning Director and follow-up with the Natural Resources and Conservation Department, it was determined that 102 of the actions (70%) were addressed in some manner: 61 actions (42%) were fully implemented, 31 actions (21%) were partially implemented, and 7 actions (5%) were acted upon but not implemented by town staff, town boards/commissions, or Town Meeting.

### What has changed since the 1998 Plan

- **Demographics, primarily in the form of:**
  - an increase in the elderly population
  - an increase in the Asian population
  - changes in the projected school enrollments which in contrast to the period between 1991 and 1998 when they grew faster than forecasted growth (resulting in the need for a school expansion program), enrollments are instead expected to decline resulting in increased fiscal capacity (revenues)
- **Awareness with regard to planning issues including environmental sustainability, relationship between planning and health and wellness, smart growth principles, etc.**
- **Market trends such as growing demand for smaller housing units in walkable neighborhoods**
- **The public outreach conducted for the 2020 Plan was much more extensive so that it can be said that the 2020 Plan perhaps has broader understanding, support and political will to implement the recommendations**



**ROADMAP FOR  
GUIDING GROWTH**

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# Roadmap for Guiding Growth

Acton can't avoid all future growth. The 2020 Plan embodies a central concept or **Roadmap**, built on the Goals and Objectives and the input of Acton citizens. The **Roadmap** addresses the crucial issue of future development.

The **Roadmap** responds to people's widely expressed desires and concerns over the past four years. Chief among these are:

- Protecting Acton's character and preserving open space
- Creating vibrant walkable centers where people can live, shop, eat, and gather together
- Planning for a resilient and financially viable town
- Creating a plan that is responsive to environmental concerns

## Main Components

The Roadmap has three main components:

- ▶ **Guide Growth to Kelley's Corner and Key Village Centers** (such as West and South Acton), where smaller units will fit the growing market for empty-nesters and provide more options for young people. This type of development strives to be both fiscally and environmentally sustainable as described below.



Place-specific development guidelines and improved design review will help preserve village character and ensure that new development helps create successful places.

Guiding growth to village centers in smaller units helps to reduce future school enrollments, provides more affordable housing for empty-nesters who want to continue to live in Acton, and makes it feasible to create livelier walkable places for the whole community to gather.

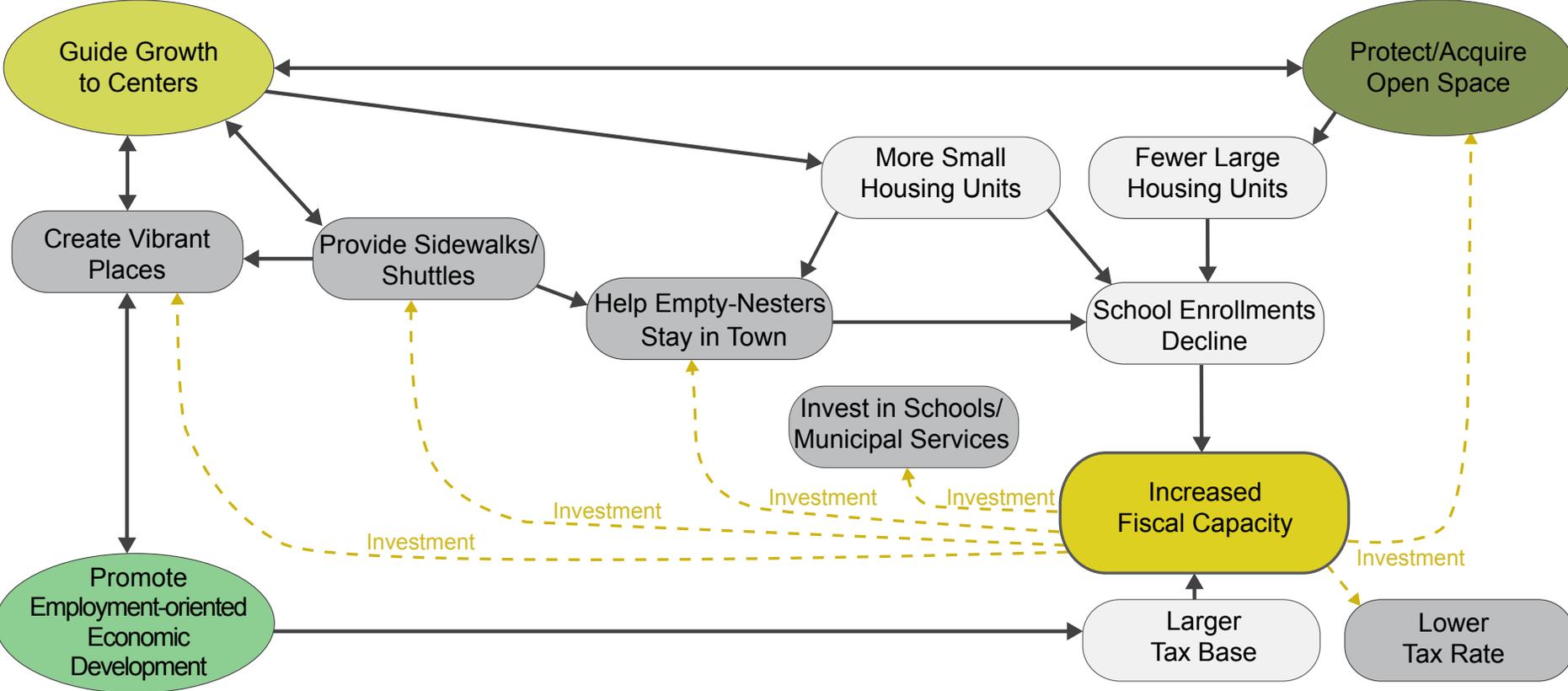
- ▶ **Protect, Acquire, and Improve Open Space** for conservation, farming, and recreation, using a combination of acquisition and zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) to move development away from open

land and to the key centers. This will help protect town character and the environment, as well as provide additional opportunities for recreation. Complementary to this is the continued purchase of open space with CPA funds.

- ▶ **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. Additionally, there will be local employment opportunities and reduced long distance commuting for some residents.



Relationships among Roadmap Components (colored ovals), Other Strategies (darker gray bubbles), and Fiscal Capacity (gold bubble)



# Background

In June 2011 a public workshop considered three alternatives for managing growth. One, Disperse Growth, was a continuation of current practices. A second, Limit Growth, emphasized aggressive acquisition of open space to reduce residential development and proactively encouraging employment-oriented economic development in limited commercial areas. The third, Concentrate Growth, emphasized directing growth to key centers such as Kelley’s Corner and some of the villages. The outcome of the workshop was a strong majority in favor of concentrating growth in mixed use centers but also stepping up the acquisition of open space and the promotion of economic development. These aspects form the **Roadmap for Guiding Growth**.

The **Roadmap** uses zoning incentives to attract growth to the centers, particularly Transfer of Development Rights, a technique that has been successfully used nationwide that allows a developer (or the Town) to acquire rights from owners of property that should remain open and using those rights in a targeted center, with an incentive in the form of additional development units or density.



Mixed use village center (Lexington)



Village Green (South Hadley aerial photograph)

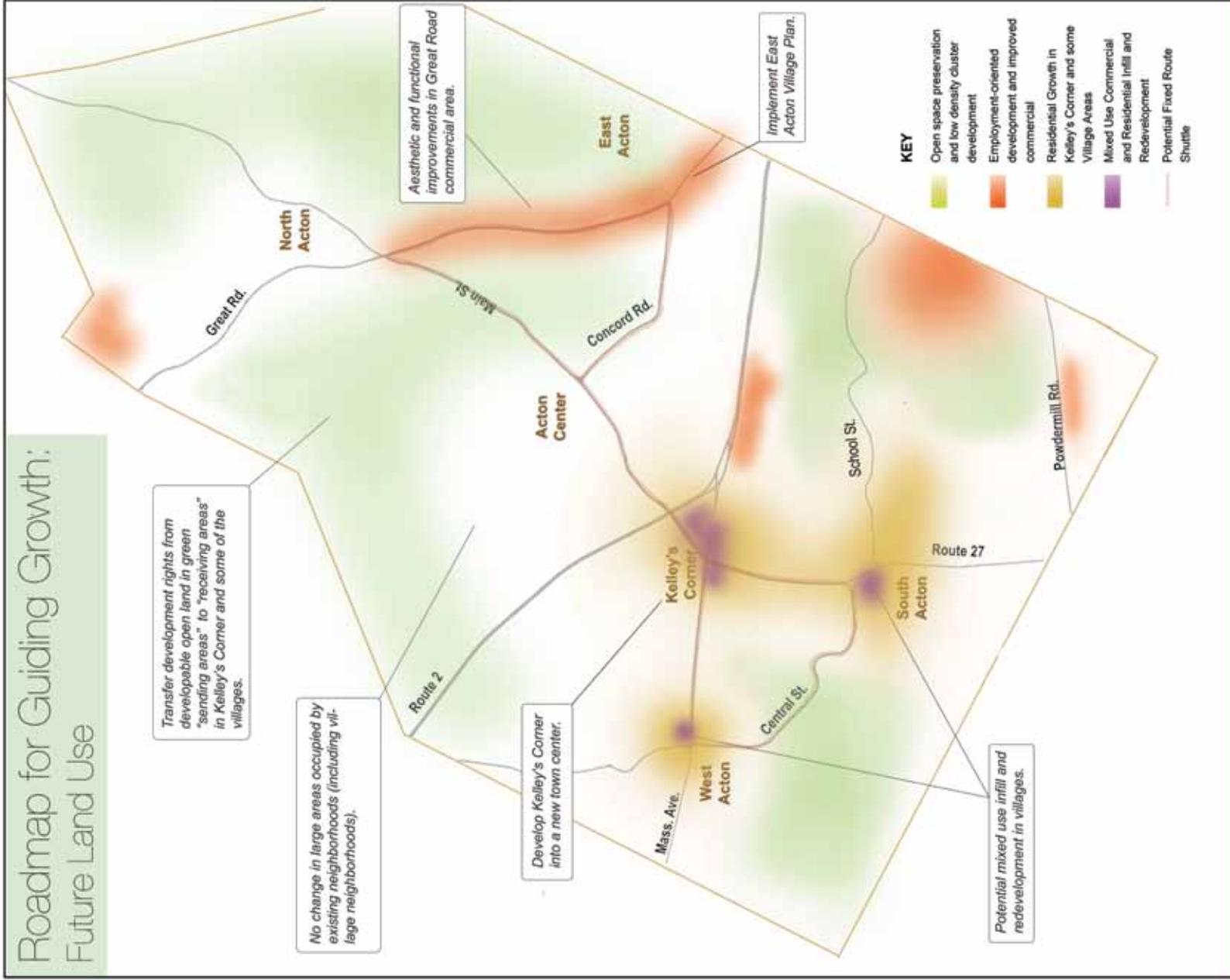


Village Green buildings located at the street edge and parking behind. Its site design includes public places for informal gathering. (South Hadley)

## Where the Roadmap Leads

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

# Roadmap for Guiding Growth: Future Land Use



All areas shown are illustrative only. They will be delineated as Action Steps in the Implementation Program.

# Planning for a Resilient Acton

While financial and environmental contingencies can't be predicted with certainty, it is prudent to act now to prepare for the town's future. The Acton 2020 Plan is an opportunity to do this.

## 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 even if the level of services remains constant, as healthcare and pension expenses increase. In order to address this, some combination of higher taxes, reduced costs or services, and a larger property tax base will be needed.

Increasing the property tax base will require growth, but people are concerned that too much development will negatively affect the town's character as well as put undue pressure on existing services.

The answer is to **promote economic development in appropriate locations, and to encourage fiscally beneficial residential development**. This can be done by shifting from large lot subdivisions that 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.

At the household level, rising energy costs strain family budgets, and the cost of living overall sometimes makes it hard for some seniors to remain in town. Smaller housing units in compact walkable centers cost less to buy or rent and save on both transportation and heating costs.

## Environmental Resilience

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 remedying impacts to the town's drinking water.

Shifting residential growth from large lot subdivisions to compact development in the centers saves energy owing to reduced 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.

## Future Contingencies:

A comprehensive plan should be resilient – it should continue to be a guide even if the unpredictable happens. The “wild cards” that Acton might have to face include:

- Prolonged economic downturn combined with escalating healthcare and pension costs.
- Weather events, such as more frequent storms and significant climate change.
- School enrollments that don't decline as expected.
- Revival of the housing market leading to a major residential subdivision proposed for a large tract of land.

The 2020 Plan has resilience in the face of such unexpected trends and events as well as the possibility of more or less development than anticipated, tighter budgets, or unforeseen infrastructure needs.

By guiding growth to the centers and protecting open space through transfer of development rights, the development of a large tract of land with consequent increases in school and other costs, can potentially be channeled into compact mixed use development with smaller units that generate less school cost and pay more taxes than their cost to service.

By emphasizing economic development, the most promising source of added tax revenue, Acton can do better than the similar towns that don't invest in attracting commercial growth, even in a prolonged downturn.

By calling for appropriate guidelines and more rigorous review of development in the centers, particularly Kelley's Corner where sewers are already in place, the town's water supply can be better protected from wastewater impacts, largely funded by new development. A key recommendation is a study of each center to develop place-specific design guidelines and evaluate potential impacts due to traffic and wastewater disposal.

# Implementing the Roadmap

## Residential

- Limit and guide growth geographically through infill and redevelopment in and around existing centers (West Acton, South Acton and Kelley's Corner).
- Utilize cluster zoning for most residential development outside the centers.

## Commercial

- Redevelop Kelley's Corner (KC) and village commercial areas into mixed use centers that improve KC and respect the existing village character.
- Promote employment-oriented development in areas that don't directly impact neighborhoods: Great Road, Nagog Park, Powdermill Road, W.R Grace property, and large commercial parcels on Rt. 2.
- Improve existing commercial areas with retail and restaurants.

## Protection of Village Character and Historic Resources

- Prepare strong design guidelines for Kelley's Corner and Villages to which growth is guided, with incentives dependent on preserving character and compatibility with historic resources.



- Use strong design review to protect historic character and natural resources.

## Open Space Preservation

- Provide incentives for transfer of development away from open land to desired growth centers (thus preserving the entire open parcel) and cluster zoning for the development that does occur outside the centers (thus preserving at least half of the parcel).
- Use tax income generated from economic development to accelerate purchases of open space.
- Develop opportunities for recreation near village centers and small vest pocket parks and tot lots in villages.

## Transportation

- Concentrate transportation investments such as sidewalks and traffic calming in and around the villages.
- Provide bicycle accommodation through both off-road paths and on-road improvements (e.g., bike lanes and wider shared lanes).
- Build MinuteVan shuttle into a more comprehensive system providing access between villages, Kelley's Corner, commercial areas, and the MBTA commuter rail.

## Water Resources Management and Protection

- Prioritize Kelley's Corner development, which has sewer service.
- Consider extension of sewer and/or advanced-package wastewater treatment in West Acton Village and other commercial areas to serve redevelopment of the commercial area on the north side of Massachusetts Avenue.
- Actively manage stormwater in new development.

## Fiscal Visibility

- Continue to fund ways to control costs, including regional options and cooperation with other towns.

# Analysis of the Roadmap

## Projections

- Analysis of the **Roadmap** rests on some assumptions about how much growth will occur over the next 20 years. Based on projections by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, this was expected to total approximately 1000 additional housing units. The **Roadmap** included the use of incentives to induce property owners to use the proposed Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) option and developers to meet stringent guidelines; these incentives would raise the total to approximately 1200 units, increasing Acton's total housing stock about 15 percent to 9,387 units in 2030. Population would increase approximately 14 percent to 25,000 people. (See charts on page 21.)
- The current economic downturn will delay the start of new development, but this simply pushes back the date when the projected totals will be reached. (In any case, growth would continue beyond the horizon of the Plan.)
- Commercial development is more difficult to project; therefore, projections are based on the assumptions that the real estate markets will revive, and that Acton will actively work to attract up to 1.5 million square feet of development.

## Fiscal Impacts

- The Plan Concept would result in 260 fewer school children than at present. This is the result of demographics shifts townwide and the lower school enrollments that result from smaller housing units compared with large single family homes. (The relationship between number of bedrooms and number of school children is statistical but it has been confirmed in many places, including the enrollments generated by the Acton Avalon development.)
- The result is that total revenues from all residential property in Acton will exceed total costs (including schools) by \$5.6 million. If the target for commercial development is reached, this would increase net revenues by another \$1.5 million. The net benefit in the last year of the projections would thus be \$7.1 million.
- The investment needed to fully implement the Plan would depend on whether wastewater treatment costs are borne by the town or by developers. Some additional staff would also be needed. Even carrying a contingency of \$1 million in annual bond costs, the Plan with all of components (see the section on Costs and Financing) would be fiscally positive.

## Land Use

- By concentrating residential growth in the centers, the total land consumed for all types of development would total 450 acres. This is approximately 20% of the roughly 2,200 acres of developable land that remained in 2010. Therefore, buildout would occur well beyond 2030.

## Open Space

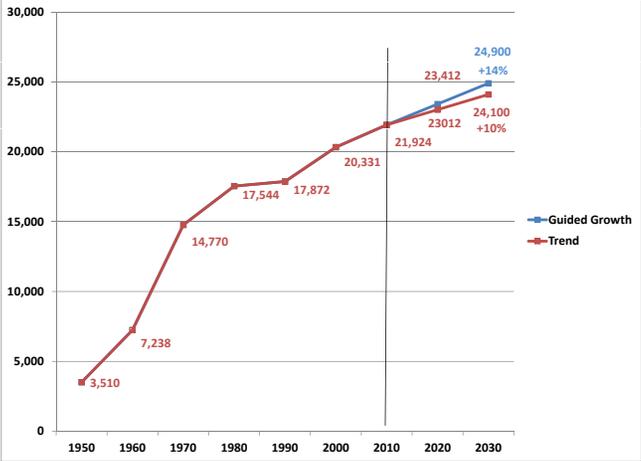
- The amount of land left for development at the end of the projection period depends on how much open space is protected. The Plan Concept is estimated to protect 800 acres through TDR and cluster zoning. This would increase Acton's protected open space from 1,837 acres to 2,637 acres. Purchase of an assumed 80 acres of open space could increase this amount to 2,717 acres. Developable land would be further reduced by 880 acres, leaving approximately 900 acres to address after 2030.

## Water

- The Acton water District currently supplies approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY). The Roadmap for Guided Growth would raise this amount to 684 MGY, which is less than the state permitted withdrawal limit of 708.1 MGY.

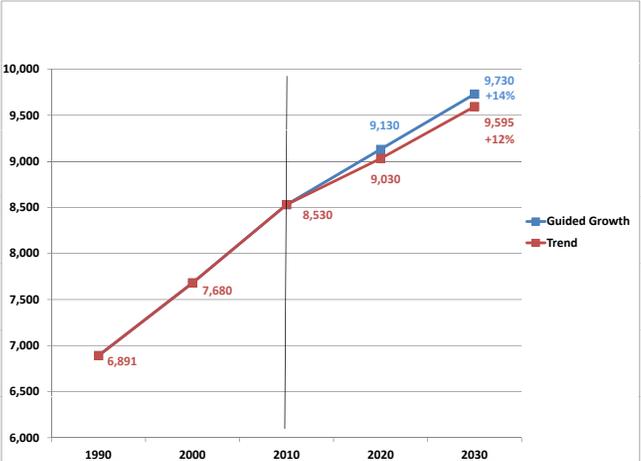
Acton grew rapidly in nearly every decade since 1950, but the rate of growth is projected to decrease, even after the current economic downturn ends. Implementing the **Roadmap** would result in slightly higher growth to provide an incentive to use TDR.

Population



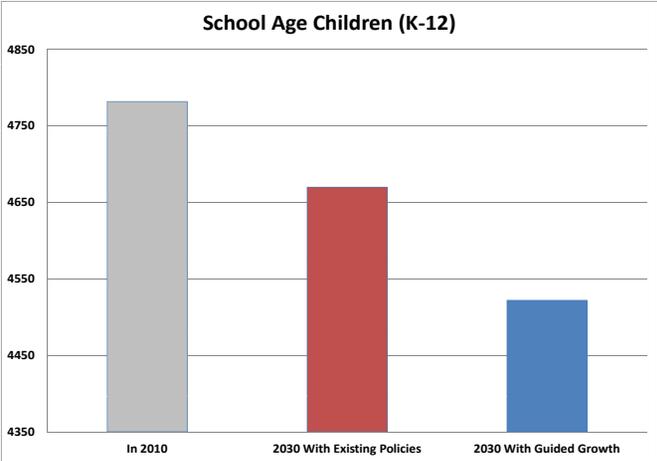
The growth of housing parallels population growth, except that demographic changes will result in fewer persons per household, and therefore more housing units in relation to the population.

Housing Growth



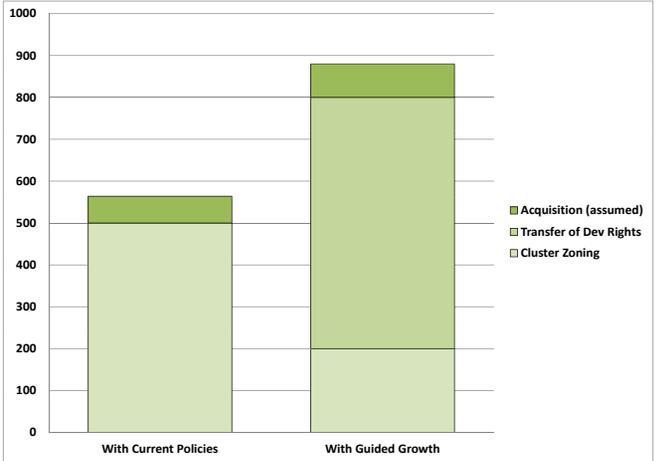
The number of bedrooms in the smaller housing units expected to result from implementing the **Roadmap** will result in a larger decline in school enrollments than under current policies.

School-age Children



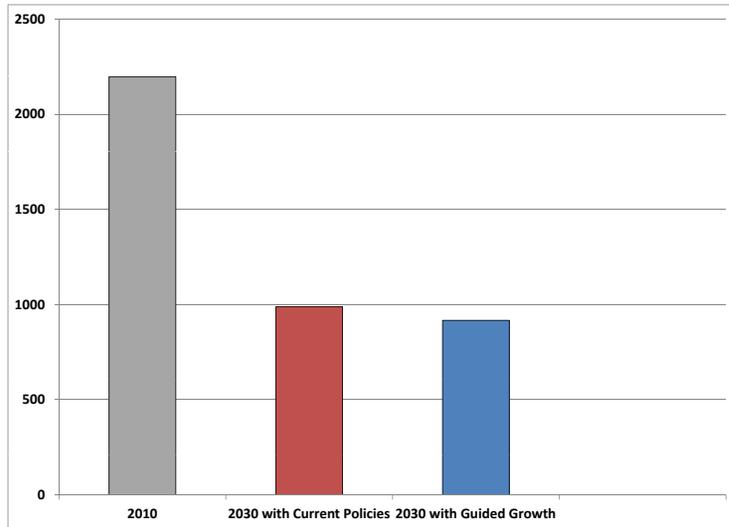
In addition to future open space purchase and open space set aside in cluster subdivisions, the use of Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) is expected to result in protecting substantially more open space.

Open Space



If current policies are continued, more than half of the Town's current developable land would be developed or added to the amount of protected open space; implementing the **Roadmap** would result in a higher percentage of developable land set aside as open space than under current policies.

Developable Land



Kelley's Corner

### Summary of Roadmap Analysis

	2030 with Current Policies	2030 with Guided Growth
Housing Units Added and Percent Increase from 2010	1,000 (12%)	1,200 (10%)
In Centers	Few	800
In Outlying Areas	Nearly 1,000	400
Average number of bedrooms in new housing	3.04	2.55
Change in Population and Percent Increase from 2010	Approx. 2,200 (10%)	Approx 3,000 (14%)
Change in Number of School Age Children	Decrease of 112	Decrease of 260
Acres of Residential Land Developed	645	400
Acres of Developable Land Remaining and Percent of Currently Developable	988 (45%)	917 (42%)
Added Acres of Protected Open Space and Percent of Currently Protected	564 (31%)	880 (48%)
Added Acres of Commercial Development	85	135
Water Demand in million gallons per year (MGY) and Relationship to Current Permitted Withdrawal of 708.1 MGY	675 MGY (33 under)	684 MGY (24 under)
<b>Net Increase in Fiscal Capacity by 2030*</b>	<b>\$5.0 million</b>	<b>\$4.9 million</b>

\* Excludes potential costs due to sewer or wastewater treatment infrastructure, which are uncertain and may be off-budget.



PLAN FOUNDATIONS

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# Guiding Principles

The Plan was developed on a strong foundation of extensive public input that resulted in a vision, set of goals and underlying themes, and on the results of research regarding existing conditions and future trends.

The following “guiding principles” are intended to guide future decision-making and form the foundation upon which the implementation plan was built:

- ▶ Vision statement
- ▶ Key underlying themes
- ▶ Planning goals

## A Vision for Acton (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
- Welcoming all its residents

## Vision Statement

The following vision statement describes a desired future as articulated by the hundreds of Acton residents who participated in this planning process.

*Let us plan so that in the future Acton has retained its uniqueness by preserving its rural and historic characteristics – with ample open fields and meadows, tree-lined roads with meandering sidewalks, ponds, farms, wooded areas, stone walls, and beautiful renovated historic buildings. Imagine a future Acton where growth is managed and developed in keeping with the Town’s character. A town that proactively strives for a sustainable future and where new residents continue to be attracted to: the excellent schools; as well as to a variety of recreational opportunities; welcoming, safe and lively neighborhoods; and attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas. In addition to sidewalks and bike paths, a Town shuttle connects people and places, providing alternatives to automobile travel. Residents are also connected by way of open communication and accessible information, and there are numerous opportunities for the community to gather.*

*In the future, Acton will have several vibrant village centers – each distinct in its character; and walkable for enjoyable and unique window shopping with locally-owned shops; stores to run to for daily errands and a variety of places to eat; and where you can run into people you know. Envision our ethnic communities enlivening our villages with cultural celebrations, music, and food from their countries of origin. The villages are “quaint but not cute;” they are authentically Acton.*

*Kelley’s Corner will become a walkable town center. It is vibrant with a wide range of shops and restaurants. Parking, sidewalks, benches, street lighting and signage are all oriented to the pedestrian. Redevelopment is guided by design guidelines and review so that all buildings are lovely and in keeping with Acton’s character.*

*Acton will continue to welcome all its residents – of all ages, socio-economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds – by providing a variety of housing choices and support services; communicating in multiple languages. Acton will increasingly invite all to contribute to Acton’s civic and social life by creating opportunities for intergenerational experiences and cultural celebrations to be shared and enjoyed by all.*

# Goals and Objectives

## Serving Acton's Goals

The Acton 2020 Plan is based on seven major goals that were developed through listening to nearly 2000 residents. Care has been taken to weave all of them together in a well thought out Implementation Program. Many of the recommended action steps serve multiple goals. For example, vital centers like the future Kelley's Corner permit more sustainable transportation to be effective, they provide the kinds of gathering places Actonians have asked for, they serve the goal of diversity and inclusion by increasing the stock of less expensive housing, and as analysis of the plan concept shows, they promote fiscal stability.

### GOAL 1: Preserve and Enhance Town Character

- Objective 1.1: Strengthen planning tools to manage growth pro-actively.
- Objective 1.2: Preserve and enhance village centers.
- Objective 1.3: Preserve rural characteristics and open space.
- Objective 1.4: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes.
- Objective 1.5: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.

### GOAL 2: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

- Objective 2.1: Protect the quality and quantity of Acton's water.
- Objective 2.2: Reduce waste and the accumulation of toxins.
- Objective 2.3: Reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.
- Objective 2.4: Move toward patterns of land use and land protection that support broad biodiversity, soil preservation, and healthy local agriculture.

### GOAL 3: Improve Connections

- Objective 3.1: Make walking and biking easier and safer.
- Objective 3.2: Improve transportation around town.
- Objective 3.3: Promote communication among town government, citizens, schools, and the business community.
- Objective 3.4: Support and strengthen neighborhoods.



**GOAL 4:**

**Provide More Opportunities for Community Gathering and Recreation**

- Objective 4.1: Provide a community facility large enough to accommodate a variety of uses and a wide range of programming.
- Objective 4.2: Provide more playgrounds, fields for team sports, parks, and conservation lands.
- Objective 4.3: Create new gathering spaces and make better use of existing ones.
- Objective 4.4: Support additional cultural activities.

**GOAL 5:**

**Support Inclusion and Diversity**

- Objective 5.1: Support residents of all ages.
- Objective 5.2: Support households of all income levels.
- Objective 5.3: Embrace cultural diversity.
- Objective 5.4: Support citizens with disabilities in participating fully in the life of the community.

**GOAL 6:**

**Preserve and Enhance Town-Owned Assets & Services**

- Objective 6.1: Protect Town-owned open space.
- Objective 6.2: Support excellence in schools.
- Objective 6.3: Manage the Town’s facilities efficiently.
- Objective 6.4: Provide high quality services that are responsive to community needs.
- Objective 6.5: Provide excellent public health and safety services.

**GOAL 7:**

**Maintain and Improve the Financial Well-Being of the Town**

- Objective 7.1: Promote fiscal responsibility.
- Objective 7.2: Promote economic development that supports other goals.
- Objective 7.3: Improve existing commercial areas.
- Objective 7.4: Support the ability of all residents to stay in Acton for a lifetime.

## Underlying Themes:

### An increased 'sense of community'

- **Community Gathering:** desire for indoor and outdoor places and events to meet and interact casually, spontaneously as well as in a planned, more formal fashion.
- **Town Character:** 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.
- **Connectivity:** desire for walking, biking, public transportation; traffic calming and improvements; increased opportunities for social networks and connections.

### The 'future resilience' of the Town

- **Environmental Sustainability:** concern regarding the survivability of the environment due to overuse, abuse and neglect.
- **Social and Economic Diversity:** concern regarding ability to accommodate a range of socio-economic levels as well as the ability to age in place.
- **Financial Viability:** concern regarding the ability of the Town to protect its assets and maintain a viable balance between taxes and services provided.

## What Makes Acton Unique?

One of the objectives of a Comprehensive Community Plan is to identify those features that make a community special and are treasured by its residents; and to protect the particular "sense of place" that makes a community unique and distinct from other communities. It is part of the role of a Comprehensive Community Plan to define these themes and identify measures and means by which to preserve and enhance them. These need to be taken into account when determining how to manage growth and mitigate related impacts.

Residents were asked several times and in a variety of ways to identify the features that make Acton unique. This is some of what they said:

- *"excellent schools, community commitment to education"*
- *"small town, close to Boston"*
- *"Not Your Average Wonderbread Town"*
- *"semi-rural/town and country suburb"*
- *"peaceful, quiet, family-oriented, friendly, safe, socially aware, livable"*
- *"location, access"*
- *"seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, picturesque, old barns"*
- *"good value"*
- *"sense of community, small town feeling, run into people you know"*
- *"history and historic New England architecture"*
- *"train"*
- *"degree of volunteerism"*
- *"village centers"*
- *"open space and recreation"*
- *"culturally diverse, accepting, welcoming"*
- *"good balance between nature and development"*
- *"high achieving, driven, ambitious"*
- *"community events"*
- *"charm, atmosphere"*
- *"its bucolic beginnings"*
- *"a great safe place to raise a family"*
- *"wonderful woodland trails"*
- *"the presence of the past"*

# Outreach - Acton Voices

**Outreach Highlights: Acton Voices from Phase I<sup>1</sup>**  
Phase I of the Plan involved intensive and extensive outreach to a wide range of residents, business owners and town officials. The intention was to understand what Actonians most appreciated about their town and to identify what they perceive as the most important future challenges. The Comprehensive Community Plan addresses these issues in the proposed **Roadmap** and Implementation Plan.

▶ **Most important assets**

- Schools
- Open space, conservation land, natural features
- Historic buildings/landscapes
- Town character (including rural and historic characteristics)

Also: sense of community, easy access/location, commuter rail, small town feel

▶ **Priority challenges**

- Need to control growth and development
- Need to plan for sustainability
- High cost of living (incl. taxes)
- Lack of transportation options (incl. walking/biking)
- Traffic

Also: lack of adequate opportunities for casual social interaction, town government issues, erosion of town character

<sup>1</sup> See Volume II (Phase 1) for a detailed documentation of public input.

▶ **If you could do one thing to make Acton a better place what would it be<sup>2</sup>?**

- Make pedestrian and bike-friendly
- Develop a sustainability plan
- Expand the commercial tax base
- Make traffic improvements
- Control development
- Protect and acquire open space
- Provide public transportation

▶ **If you could do one thing to make Acton a better place for teens what would it be<sup>3</sup>?**

- Movie theater
- Sidewalks

Also: a club for older kids, another park, plan for sustainability, provide public transportation, more restaurants, swimming pool, amusement park

<sup>2</sup> From Visioning Workshop 1 (March 29, 2008)

<sup>3</sup> From high school survey

▶ **What are your least favorite things about Acton that you feel are important to change<sup>4</sup>?**

- Traffic
- Lack of walkability
- No real town center
- Affordability (including housing)
- Lack of adequate site review, subdivision and design review
- Kelley’s Corner
- Biking and walking not safe
- Lack of growth management
- Poorly designed commercial areas
- Improvements needed at train station
- Lack of variety in places to go

<sup>4</sup> From Visioning Workshop 1 (March 29, 2008)



## Outreach Highlights: Acton Voices from Phase II<sup>5</sup>

Phase II continued the extensive outreach to Acton residents, business owners, and town officials. Acton 2020 provided multiple opportunities for public input and focused on specific questions; top responses to key questions are listed below.

- ▶ **If you could do one thing to address economic development issues in Acton what would it be<sup>6</sup>?**
  - Space for solo-preneurs
  - Village infill development
  - Create a land development corporation
  - Kelley’s Corner
- ▶ **If you could do one thing to address housing issues in Acton what would it be<sup>7</sup>?**
  - Mixed use pedestrian village
  - Sewers to villages
  - Increase density
  - Lower property tax
  - Mandatory design review
- ▶ **If you could do one thing to address transportation issues in Acton what would it be<sup>8</sup>?**
  - More sidewalks
  - Fixed route bus

- Finish Bruce Freeman Trail
- Kelley’s Corner redesign
- Create bike lanes and paths
- ▶ **Which scenario do you prefer to help guide growth and development in the future<sup>9</sup>?**

The large majority of participants preferred the scenario that guided growth to the villages, developed Kelley’s Corner into a town center, and preserved open space. What people seemed to appreciate most about this alternative:

- Villages with places to go and opportunities to gather and mingle, including opportunities for more theater and music
- Energy savings due to walkability
- Protection of open space in outer areas
- Efficient use of infrastructure

Also wanted to focus on: employment oriented development, limiting growth to protect rural characteristics, preservation of historic character and sidewalk/bikeway and public transportation improvement, among other things.

- ▶ **Which center should we focus on first: Kelley’s Corner or West Acton or other<sup>10</sup>?**

Most participants felt that the town should focus on Kelly’s Corner first; some felt that West Acton has more potential and should receive attention first.

- ▶ **How can the town of Acton and the residents of Acton start preparing now for what might happen if oil and other fossil fuel products become much more scarce and expensive over the next 20 years?**

Participants offered a range of recommendations including exploring alternative sources of energy, tracking the carbon footprint and planning for local capacity in terms of energy, water, food, etc. Most comments made connections between land use, planning and sustainability by focusing on mixed-use development, sidewalks, local shopping options walkable from neighborhoods, improvements to biking, clustering housing, and supporting employment oriented businesses.

5 See Volume II (Phase II) for a detailed documentation of public input.

6 From “Burning Issues” public workshop, March 3, 2011

7 From “Burning Issues” public workshop, March 12, 2011

8 From “Burning Issues” public workshop, March 9, 2011

9 From “Choose Your Own Acton” public workshop, June 23, 2011

10 From “How Do We Get There?” public meeting, Nov.9, 2011

# Key Opportunities and Challenges

Phase 2 of the Plan began with extensive re-research on all aspects of the Town, from natural resources to services and facilities; highlights of this research is presented in the last section of Volume I, and the full inventory report is in Volume II.

From this research several key opportunities and challenges stand out. (More detail is provided in the last section of this report.)

### External

External forces pose the challenges of a slow economy, rising gas prices, and climate change, so it will take longer to realize desired commercial development, and the Plan should aim at enabling less driving and reducing Acton’s carbon footprint.

At the same time, there are opportunities in changing public attitudes about the need for sustainability and the desire for alternatives to

driving. And the residential markets are shifting to demand for smaller units in walkable neighborhoods that are fiscally beneficial.

### Internal

Slower growth during the economic downturn is a challenge, because growth in commercial uses is needed to increase the tax base for fiscal stability. The downturn is also an opportunity to prepare for future growth of both residential and commercial uses.



*Future school enrollments are projected to gradually decline as demographics change.*

Acton’s population will include more seniors, and school enrollments will gradually decline, improving fiscal capacity.



*Stormwater management be an ongoing concern.*

Acton’s natural resources, especially water, are currently in good condition for the most part, but keeping them that way will require continued vigilance: managing wastewater and stormwater, and monitoring groundwater quantity and quality.



*Acton’s transportation system depends heavily on the automobile, as in most towns in the area.*

Transportation poses both challenges and opportunities. Despite the desire for alternative transportation, Acton is still highly auto-dependent, but there are many opportunities to promote and accommodate walking, cycling, and public transportation.

Acton’s transportation system depends heavily on the automobile, as in most towns in the area.



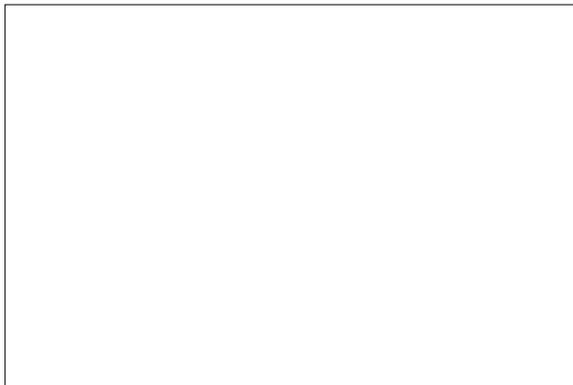
*The current Senior Center is too small and not designed to fully serve Acton’s growing senior population.*

Town facilities are in good condition and, except for the Senior Center, adequate for the future. A new building that serves seniors and the wider community would respond to this challenge. More study is needed of how best to provide emergency services to the north side of town.

# Future Contingencies

A Comprehensive Plan should be resilient – it should continue to be a guide even if the unpredictable happens. The “wild cards” that Acton might have to face include:

- Prolonged economic downturn combined with escalating healthcare and pension costs.
- Energy costs rise even more sharply than in recent years.
- Weather events such as more frequent and more violent storms and significant climate changes.
- School enrollments that don’t decline as expected.
- Revival of the housing market leading to a major residential subdivision proposed for a large tract of land.



There is also the risk that things don’t turn out as anticipated, e.g., more or less development pressure, tighter budgets, or unforeseen infrastructure needs.

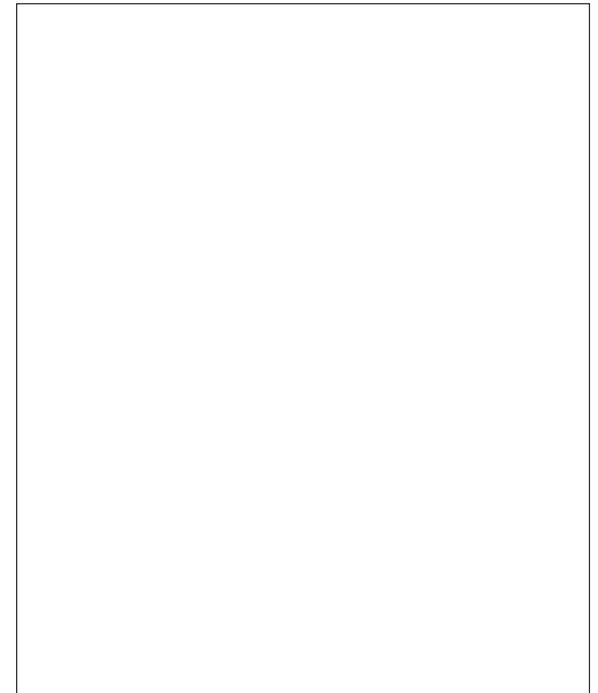
The 2020 Plan has resilience in the face of such unexpected trends and events.

By guiding growth to the centers and protecting open space through transfer of development rights, the development of a large tract of land with consequent increases in school and other costs, can potentially be channeled into compact mixed use development with smaller units that generate less school cost and pay more taxes than their cost to service.

By emphasizing employment-oriented economic development, the most promising source of added tax revenue, Acton can do better than similar towns that don’t invest in attracting commercial growth, even in a prolonged downturn.

By moving to more sustainable land use patterns, alternatives to the automobile become more feasible, reinforcing these patterns and enabling people to reduce their energy costs.

By calling for appropriate guidelines and more rigorous review of development in the centers, particularly Kelley’s Corner where sewers are already in place, the town’s water supply can



be better protected from wastewater impacts, largely funded by new development. A key recommendation is a study of each center to develop place-specific design guidelines and evaluate potential impacts due to traffic, wastewater disposal, and stormwater management.

And if town finances constrain desired improvements, the phasing of major investments can be adjusted to correspond to available resources. (See page 43.)

## Did You Know?

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 8,187 housing units in 2010, up 9% from 2000. 63% are single family houses.
- Projections by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council suggested that, based on current zoning, 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.
- Acton Public Schools spent \$11,246 per pupil in 2009-2010, the second lowest of the towns it touches<sup>1</sup>.
- 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

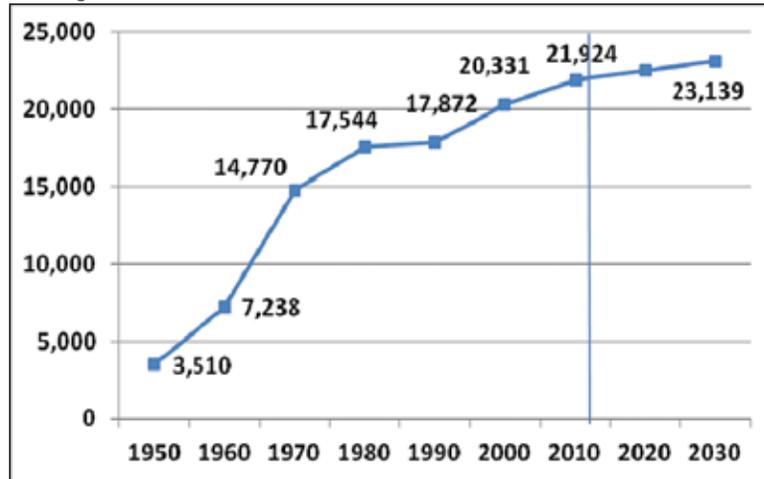
- All of Acton’s public water supply comes from groundwater wells.
- Water demand has been relatively constant over the past six years, approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY), reflecting water conservation efforts. Acton’s state permit allows up to 708.1 MGY.
- Residential water demand is estimated 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

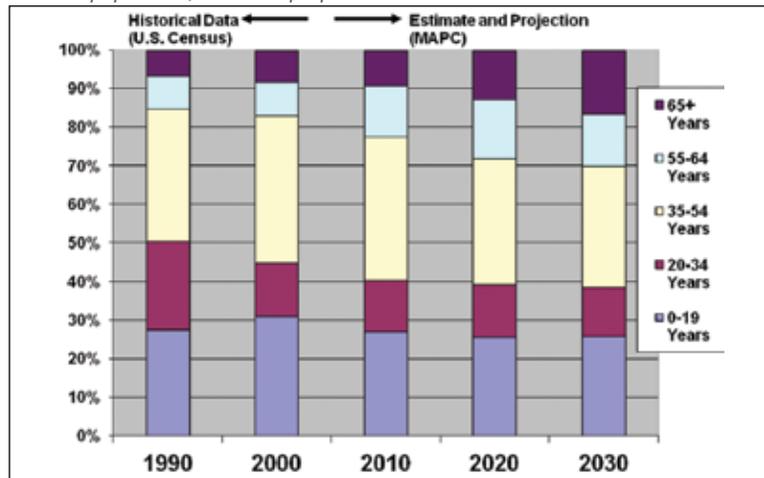
### Population: History and Projections

Growth slowed in the 80s, picked up in the 90s and proceeded at a slower rate since 2000. Boston Metropolitan Area Planning Council projected steady but slower growth to 2030.



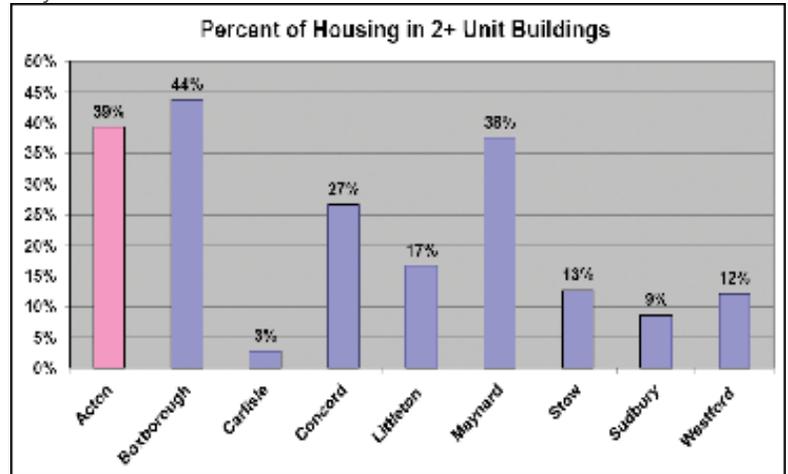
### Demographic Change

Seniors 65+ and “empty nesters” 55-64 are projected to increase as proportion of the total population, while the proportion of children will decrease.



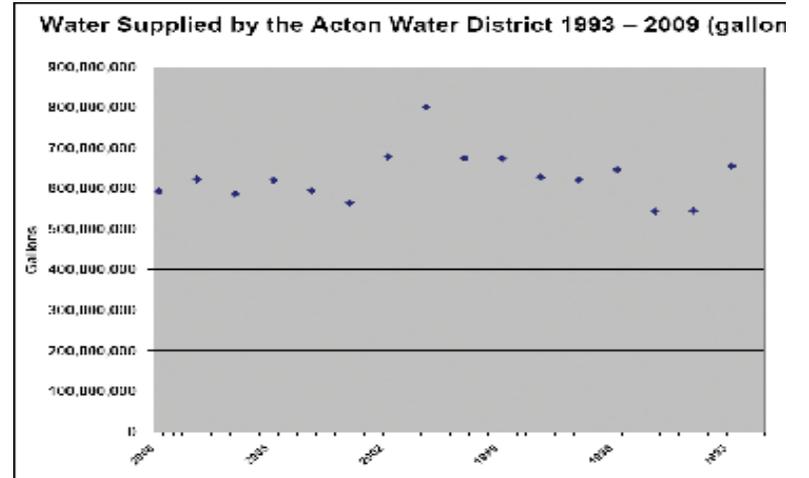
### Multi-Family Housing, 2010

Acton has a higher percentage of housing with two or more units in a building than six of the adjacent towns, but is in the same range as Boxborough and Maynard.



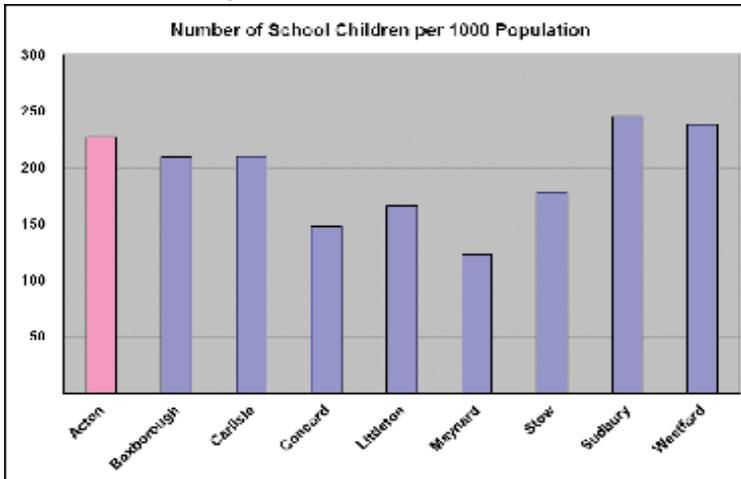
### Water Supplied by Acton Water District

Due to conservation efforts promoted by AWD, there has been little growth in water use since 2002.



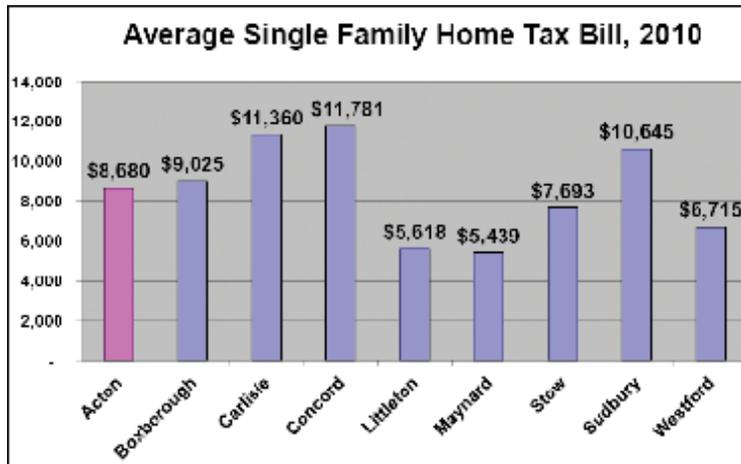
### Ratio of School Children to Total Population, 2010

Acton had 218 school children per 1000 population in 2010, which is in the middle of the adjacent towns, but still relatively high on a statewide basis, putting pressure on the town budget.



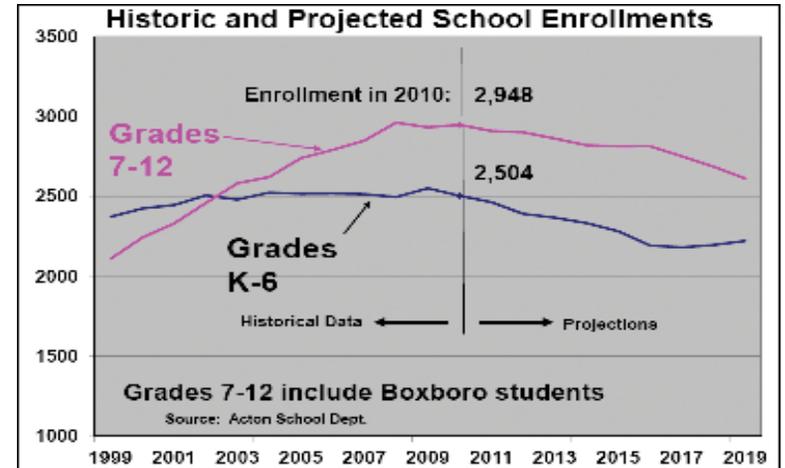
### Average Single Family Home Tax Bill

Acton has a high tax rate, but the average tax on a single family house is lower than four other adjacent towns with lower tax rates but more expensive houses.



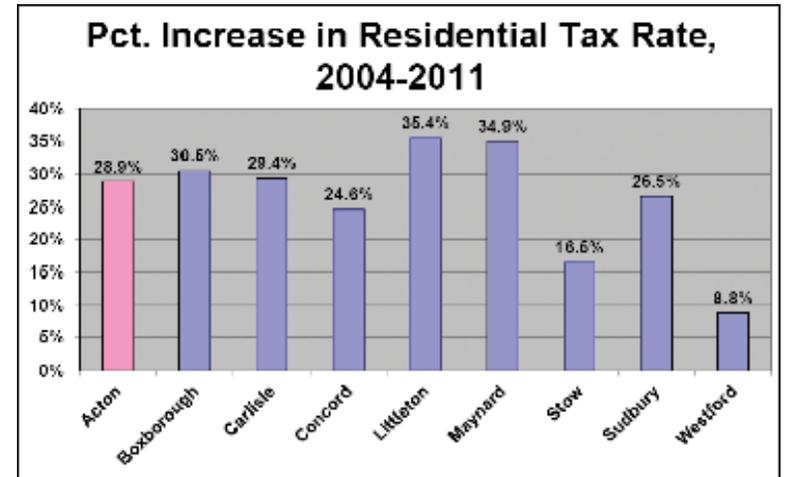
### Historic and Projected School Enrollments

Enrollments reached a peak in 2009, and demographic changes are projected to cause a steady decline even as the town grows.



### Percent Increase in the Tax rate 2004-2011

Taxes have increased everywhere during the past 8 years, but the increase in Acton was less than in four of the adjacent towns.







## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

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# Implementation Program

The heart of the Acton 2020 Plan is the Implementation Program that is presented in this section. It has been developed in order to achieve the Plan’s vision and goals. It consists of strategies comprising one or more action steps under each of the seven goals and their objectives.

The Implementation Program is organized by goal and objective because this most clearly shows how the proposed action steps relate to the things Acton residents have said they want.

In addition to the following pages of this printed Acton 2020 Comprehensive Community Plan, the Implementation Program is also an online database that can be viewed and searched at <http://implementation.acton2020.info/>

The Implementation Program is a roadmap for Phase III of Acton 2020, in which the action steps are carried out. The Board of Selectmen should create an Acton 2020 Implementation Committee and charge its members with the implementation and upkeep of this plan as well as giving the town annual “State of the Plan” updates.

## Priorities and Owners

The 1998 Master Plan update had 143 actions organized under 12 goals. Approximately 70

percent of those recommended actions had been addressed in some way by the beginning of the Acton 2020 process in 2007.

The Acton 2020 Plan has nearly 200 recommended action steps, each of which has a “lead owner” (i.e., the lead responsible party, such as the Planning Department), whose job it is to take the initiative and “other owners” (such as other departments, Boards, and Commissions) that need to be involved. All of the actions have been discussed with those owners.

The online database can be searched and sorted to create lists of actions for each owner.

The 2020 Plan has assigned priorities to 25 of the action steps, **20 highest priority** and **5 with second highest priority**: these are the things that are most important to accomplish. (The list of Key Recommendations on the following pages combines closely related action steps that in some cases are listed under more than one goal. This condenses the high priority actions to 15.)

Some of the highest priority actions involve significant expense, such as building a senior center or expanding the MinuteVan shuttle, and the most expensive actions includes wording like

“as town finances permit.” The following section on Cost, Phasing, and Financing discusses relative costs and the potential to phase these action steps for financial feasibility.

## Other Action Steps

In addition to the high-priority actions, there is a list of action steps that are relatively easy to accomplish and have immediate benefits, such as providing more bike racks or encouraging recycling and composting. These are called “**ripe apples**” and are listed in a sidebar in this section.

The many other action steps are intended to be implemented over the next 10 to 20 years by town staff, Boards and Commissions, and other citizens as opportunities arise and staff resources permit.

Several action steps acknowledge **efforts** that are **currently underway**; these actions steps contain the words “support” or “continue.”

The Implementation Plan is specific about what is intended to be done, and in many cases this requires a **sequence of steps**, e.g., do a Village Centers Plan to establish priorities, and then

conduct place-specific design studies to develop guidelines for the priority areas.

In some cases it is not possible to be specific without further work, and words like “explore” or “consider” are used.

Several action steps involve the need to raise public awareness or educate people about the advantages or importance of individual initiatives such as recycling or energy conservation.

### Master Plan Elements

At the end of this chapter is a summary of action steps by the nine master plan “elements” such as land use, housing, open space, etc. Eight of these elements are traditional and are specifically mentioned in the state law that governs municipal master plans, and a ninth element, sustainability, has been added because it is not fully covered by the other elements. The Implementation Program tables also identify the main element and other associated elements.

### Ripe Apples



Also called “Low Hanging Fruit” - low cost with significant benefit.

# Key Implementation Strategies

The Goals and Objectives and Roadmap for Guiding Growth 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

### ► Guide Growth to Kelley’s Corner and Villages

- Prepare a plan to improve Kelley’s Corner and to **preserve and enhance village centers**. The **Key Centers Plan** will set priorities for new development and redevelopment in centers. The plan should consider Kelley’s Corner and the villages as a system, 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 which incentives are most likely to create the desired changes. The **Kelley’s Corner Development Plan** will be part of the Key Centers Plan; it will provide the basis to proceed with zoning changes and infrastructure investments needed to begin the improvements at Kelley’s Corner and promote development and redevelopment of key parcels as soon as practicable.

*This action should be undertaken immediately to prepare for the*

*development of Kelley’s Corner. The Kelley’s Corner Development Plan component can be accelerated to expedite implementation.*

- **Develop Kelley’s Corner into a mixed-use town center and transportation hub** in conformance with a specific plan for the area. Encourage mixed use with people living in smaller housing units near vibrant shops and restaurants with opportunities for socializing, 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; they should be involved in the planning for the area.

*This is a major part of the Roadmap. Similar actions may later be taken to accommodate more growth in some of the village centers.*

- **Actively promote employment-oriented economic development** (e.g., R&D, high tech, office) to expand the tax base. This may also reduce commute time for some residents.



*This is a major part of the Roadmap and helps to pay for a whole range of town services by expanding the tax base. General locations are indicated in the Plan Concept map.*

- ▶ **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 protect town character and the environment, as well as provide additional opportunities for recreation.

*As town finances permit, acquisition of open space can utilize revenue from an expanded tax base in addition to Community Preservation Act funds.*

**Other Strategies**

- ▶ **Consider a sewer extension and/or advanced package wastewater treatment** with groundwater recharge in order to support an increase in small-scale commercial development and better manage wastewater in West Acton.

*Extension of sewerage is a topic that needs careful study and discussion; package treatment may be a more cost-effective alternative for supporting village development, potentially with improvements paid for in part by developers.*

- ▶ **Improve the transfer station to increase recycling and reuse.**

*The Implementation Program also encourages composting, and measures to address curbside recycling pickup by private companies.*

- ▶ **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 beneficial for the environment (by reducing car fumes).

*This action extends the current level of sidewalk construction and includes both bike paths and bike lanes.*

- ▶ **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.

*This action extends the current effort in energy conservation and use of renewable energy resources.*

- ▶ **Develop policies and strategies to keep empty-nesters in Acton.** As the senior population continues to grow they will need a number of facilities and services that meet their special needs.

*The type of housing envisioned for Kelley’s Corners and the villages would help to keep more seniors in Acton.*



- ▶ **Continue to fund, and later expand, MinuteVan** to build ridership with more frequent service between village centers, Kelley’s Corner, and the 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.

*The shuttle is one of the key features supporting the Road Map. It enhances the improvement of Kelley’s Corner and village centers and is an important part of environmental sustainability and improving connections.*

- ▶ **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 a meeting and gathering place for the community at large.

*Further consideration is needed on what the facility should contain and where best to locate it to support the Roadmap.*

- ▶ Prepare a proactive plan that encourages the **provision of a wide range of housing types** to meet the needs of empty nesters, 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 Acton’s local and regional housing needs.

*This plan should also address the town’s relationship to the 10% goal set by the state’s affordable housing law (Chapter 40B) but its purpose is to address Acton’s local and regional housing need.*

- ▶ 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 are a major magnet attracting people to the town and schools and school-related activities are a major community focus contributing to the culture of Acton.

*This action is one of the most important to Actonians.*

- ▶ **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

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. 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). Other priorities like a new building to serve seniors and the larger community, or an expanded shuttle system, are more expensive.

### Increasing Fiscal Capacity

One of the 2020 Plan's main goals is to increase fiscal capacity (the ability to pay for desired services and capital investments). It does this by promoting economic development, seeking special purpose state funding and grants, continuing to explore public-private partnerships for specific projects, and cooperation with surrounding towns to provide services more efficiently. 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 **Roadmap** 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. This analysis is described in the chapter on the **Roadmap**.

### Phasing of Major Expenditures

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

The diagram on page 45 illustrates the phasing of major expenditures. The timeline runs from 2012 to the point at which the **Roadmap** is realized, with the construction of 1,200 new dwelling units. This was originally projected to take 20 years from the date of the 2020 Plan, but the

current economic downturn will likely push this date out by several years.

The diagram lists major actions in the short term, mid term and long term. The arrows are a schematic indication of how long the expenditures go on; for example a new senior/community center would be financed with a bond, that would be repaid in annual increments over a period of perhaps 25 years, so the annual expenditures for this capital improvement would begin when town finances permit and continue through the time horizon shown in the diagram. Other investments, such as infrastructure improvements to support development of Kelley's Corner into a town center, could occur over a period of four or five years after the real estate market has improved; they may or may not be financed through a bond depending on circumstances at the time.

The diagram indicates the relative annual cost ranges of the major actions. The short-range actions that are essential to prepare for the desired improvements at Kelley's Corner and some of the villages would be relatively inexpensive and should occur as soon as the town can afford them.

## Tax Rate Implications

Since the timing of development that would expand the tax base is uncertain, the fiscal implications of the recommended major investments are calculated in relation to Acton’s current total assessed property value.

Each annual expenditure implies an increment of the tax levy to pay for it, and consequently an increment to the property tax rate. (It is assumed that residential and commercial property are taxed at the same rate as at present.) The tax rate impact is currently about 2.8 cents per \$100,000 of annual expenditure. This is applied to the average single family home value in Acton, which is currently approximately \$500,000; each \$100,000 expenditure would add approximately \$13.75 to the tax bill for the average home.

The table on the right shows the annual costs and tax bill implications for the major expenditures recommended in the plan. Not all items would be occurring simultaneously, particularly in the short term. The annual total would correspond to a cross-section of the Phasing diagram at a particular point in time. Costs for items like sidewalks and open space acquisition can be varied from year to year. In the long term, bond

payments would continue for investments in a senior/community center and infrastructure at Kelley’s Corner and potentially some village centers. However, fiscal capacity is expected to

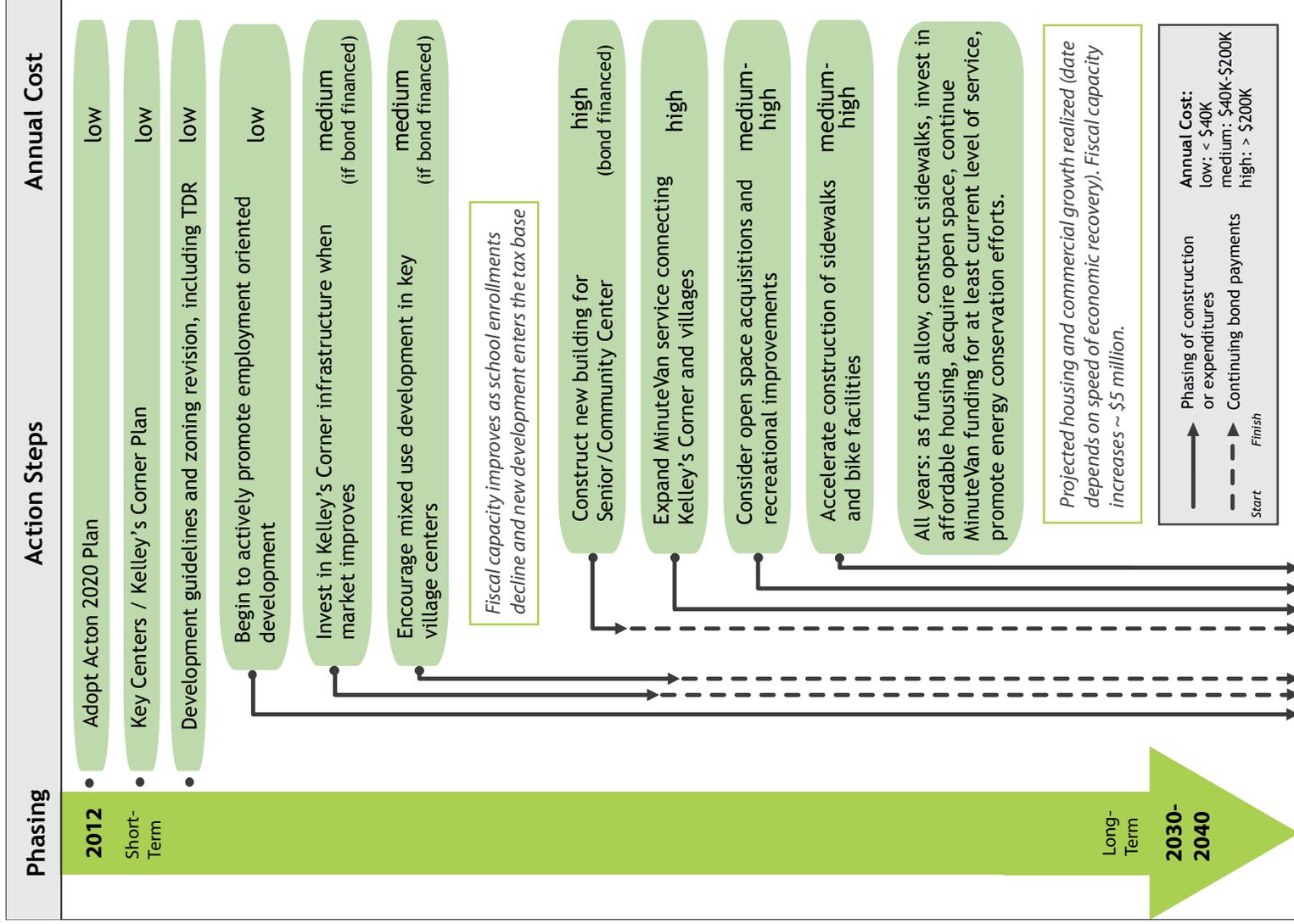
increase by several times this cost, and some of the current bonds would have been retired.

### Cost of Recommended Major Expenditures

RECOMMENDATION	Estimated Cost	Average Tax Burden per Year
Kelley's Corner Improvements (sidewalks, pedestrian crossings, landscaping)	\$2 million total Bond payments of approx. \$133 thousand per year for 25 years, = \$158,000 per year (could also be financed without bonding for approximately \$400,000 per year during the construction period)	\$22
Open Space Purchase and Park Improvements in addition to CPA funds	\$2.5 million total Average \$125,000 per year	\$17
Townwide Sidewalks & Bike Paths/ Lanes	\$2 million total Average \$100,000 per year	\$14
New Senior/Community Center	\$8 million total - Bond payments of approx. \$534,000 per year for 25 years	\$73 (if entire amount is from Town indebtedness)
Expanded MinuteVan Shuttle	\$350,000 per year	\$48
<b>TOTAL, ALL ITEMS</b>	<b>\$1.27 million/yr</b>	<b>\$174</b>

# Phasing Diagram

The following diagram is a proposal for phasing the Plan's recommendations over time.





# Detailed Implementation Program Tables

The complete Implementation Program is listed on the following pages. Strategies are organized under the planning goal(s) they help to attain. When a strategy relates to more than one goal, which occurs with some frequency, thus pulling together the various pieces of the comprehensive plan - this is so indicated.

The Strategies are arranged in table format under each objective with the following information:

- ▶ Strategy
- ▶ Short Name of Action Step
- ▶ Complete text of Action Step
- ▶ Priority
- ▶ Lead Owner

Following the tables organized by goal is a listing of the action steps sorted by master plan element (land use, housing, etc.)

A brief introduction to the implementation strategies describes the relationship of each goal to the vision, identifies priority action steps (those items related to increasing awareness), and lists some of the activities already underway.

**Key to the Implementation Program Tables**



Implementation Strategies for:

# GOAL 1

# Preserve and Enhance Town Character

**“ Goal Statement:**  
*We feel strongly about preserving and enhancing what makes Acton special and unique, including its rural characteristics, historic buildings and landscapes, and its village centers.* ”

### Relationship to Vision

The action steps under Goal 1 are designed to realize an Acton that has retained its uniqueness by preserving its rural and historic characteristics and by ensuring that growth results in the creation of successful places, with attractive, safe, and walkable shopping areas. Kelley’s Corner will become a walkable town center and there will be several vibrant village centers, each distinct in its character.

### Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Carefully review all current zoning Town-wide and its build-out potential to ensure that zoning supports the goals articulated in this master plan.
- Consider ways to improve the design review process.
- Develop Kelley’s Corner (KC) into a mixed use town center and transportation hub.
- Complete a Key Centers Plan to determine which villages should receive more concentrated growth and to assess the amount and type of new development that is appropriate. A Kelley’s Corner Development Plan is part of the Key Centers Plan; it provides the basis to proceed with the zoning changes and infrastructure investments needed to begin the process of improving Kelley’s Corner as soon as practicable.

- Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Provide incentives for Transfer of Development Rights away from open land to desired growth centers.
- Coordinate Historic District Commission review with development of design guidelines and BoS special permit review of development in historic village centers.

### Education and Awareness

While many of the action steps involve administrative, regulatory and policy changes, some involve increasing awareness and providing education to residents and/or business owners and town officials. The following steps are of this nature:

- Support the development of an organization to revitalize Kelley’s Corner such as a business association.
- Conduct outreach to private historic property owners to promote an understanding of their

# GOAL 1

## Preserve and Enhance Town Character cont.

building's place in Acton's history and to help with funding for preservation.

### Ongoing Activities

Acton has been very active in efforts to preserve its town character and has been successful to a large degree due to the efforts of many, town staff, as well as Committees and Boards such as the Historic Districts Commission, and other citizens. We would like to acknowledge and support their continued efforts and identify the following specific ongoing actions for support:

- Encourage continued regional cooperation on growth issues.
- Continue the existing practice of encouraging the use of cluster zoning for most residential development outside the centers.

Strategy/Action Step	Lead Owner	Priority
<b>Goal 1: Preserve and Enhance Town Character</b>		
<b>Objective 1.1: Strengthen tools to manage growth pro-actively.</b>		
<b>Strategy: Use the Plan Concept, affirmed at the June 23 2011 public meeting, to guide Acton's planning.</b>		
<p>Concentrate Growth: Guide as much as possible of any future growth to key town centers, to mixed use infill and redevelopment.<sup>1</sup> This includes a focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transforming new and redeveloped commercial space to fit each village or town center's character.</li> <li>• Emphasizing walking, biking, and public transportation.</li> <li>• Continuing open space acquisition/protection.</li> </ul>	Planning Department	Highest
<b>Strategy: Review and revise the Town's bylaws and planning process to support the 2020 Plan goals.</b>		
<b>Review zoning in light of plan goals and buildout potential:</b> Carefully review all current zoning and its build-out potential to insure that zoning supports the goals articulated in the master plan. Aim to simplify the zoning code to insure clarity of intent and to support the regulatory review process.	Planning Department	Highest
<b>Legislation to increase local control over development:</b> Support legislation that would increase the Town's control over local land use decisions. <sup>2</sup>	Selectmen	2 <sup>nd</sup> Highest
<b>New development bylaws:</b> Research further use of by-laws beyond those already in place (e.g. transfer of development rights, impact fees, etc.)	Planning Department	
<b>Regional cooperation on development issues:</b> Encourage continued regional cooperation; consider creating more formal structures for collaborating with neighboring towns to address common issues (including 40B developments, open space protection, etc.)	Manager Department	
<b>Planning staff:</b> Add a full-time position to the Planning Department to assist with plans for villages and key centers, development review, and economic development. This position would also fulfill the role of Economic Development Officer (EDO).	Manager Department	
<b>Index of developable parcels:</b> Prepare a database of developable parcels to better inform land use and economic development planning.	Planning Department	

Strategy/Action Step	Lead Owner	Priority
<b>Strategy: Develop a comprehensive site and design review process</b>		
<b>Extend Design Guidelines:</b> Further refine Acton’s Design Guidelines for Commercial Development <sup>3</sup> and extend the guidelines to include large multifamily and village center mixed-use development <sup>4</sup> .	Design Review Board	2 <sup>nd</sup> Highest
<b>Strengthen design review process:</b> Consider ways to improve the design review process, defining the role of the Design Review Board (DRB), and enhancing the coordination with the Planning Board and Board of Selectmen while reserving permit authority with these Boards as applicable, and implement improvements. <sup>5</sup>	Selectmen	
<b>Objective 1.2: Preserve and enhance village centers.</b>		
<b>Strategy: Enhance Village Centers</b>  (See Also: <a href="#">Be more business friendly</a> , Objective 7.3)		
<b>Village Centers Plan:</b> To determine which villages should receive more concentrated growth and the amount and type of new development, complete a <i>Village Centers Plan</i> that includes the recognized villages and Kelley’s Corner. <sup>6</sup> The Plan should include a review of the existing Village Plans and their outcomes to date, and identify the highest priority components for early implementation to help the Town realize the centers’ full potential as destinations.	Planning Department	Highest
<b>Zoning to support Village Centers Plan:</b> Develop and enact zoning, including Transfer of Development Rights, to guide growth through infill and redevelopment in and around existing centers in support of the <i>Village Centers Plans</i> . <sup>7</sup>	Planning Department	
<b>Town’s financial participation in key center development:</b> Explore the possible benefits and risks of the Town’s financial participation in the development of key centers, with the objectives of catalyzing desired development, increasing control over outcomes, and sharing the financial benefits. Financial participation could include the acquisition of developable parcels and/or the acquisition of development rights to be used in Transfer of Development Rights.	Selectmen	
<b>Village-specific sidewalk guideline:</b> As part of the Village Centers Plan update the Sidewalk Design Guidelines to include village-specific design guidelines.	Sidewalk Committee	
<b>Encourage developer contributions to town centers:</b> Encourage developer contributions of land and/or construction of public realm improvements in Kelley’s Corner and village centers, e.g., small-scale “vest-pocket” parks and playgrounds. <sup>8</sup> See Also: <a href="#">Pocket parks</a> (Objective 4.2)	Selectmen	

Strategy/Action Step	Lead Owner	Priority
<b>Strategic Plan for Commercial Properties:</b> Develop a Strategic Plan for Commercial Properties by developing an inventory of all such properties in terms of their existing and build out potential. Identify owners of multiple lots.	Planning Department	
<b>Strategy: Improve Kelley's Corner</b>		
<b>Redevelop Kelley's Corner:</b> Develop Kelley’s Corner (KC) into a mixed use town center and transportation hub. Prepare a design study of Kelley’s Corner. <sup>9</sup>	Planning Department	Highest
<b>Concentrate town investments in Kelley's Corner:</b> Concentrate Town investments such as sidewalks, landscape and streetscape improvements and traffic calming in Kelley’s Corner to make it more pedestrian-friendly and to serve as a gateway. <sup>10</sup> <b>Capital Investment</b>	Selectmen	Highest
<b>Design studio or competition for Kelley's Corner:</b> Collaborate with area universities to do a design studio that tests plans through design for their “place-making potential” and/or hold a design competition to develop an urban design vision for Kelley’s Corner.	Planning Department	
<b>Kelley's Corner Association:</b> Support the development of an organization to revitalize Kelley’s Corner such as business association that could in time become a Business Improvement District or Community Betterment Association.	Businesses and citizen groups	
<b>Strategy: Improve West Acton Village Center while preserving its historic character.</b>		
<b>West Acton □ Plan some growth:</b> Consider designating West Acton Village (WAV) as a “key center” to which some growth is guided <sup>11</sup> Prepare a design study of the village. <sup>12</sup>		
<b>Concentrate investments in West Acton:</b> Concentrate Town investments such as sidewalks, landscape and streetscape improvements, traffic calming, and wastewater treatment facilities in and around the village. <sup>13</sup> Capital	Selectmen	
<b>South Acton improvements:</b> Consider making improvements to South Acton so that it becomes a more walkable destination.	Planning Department	
<b>Objective 1.3: Preserve rural characteristics and open space</b>		
<b>Strategy: Document the rural characteristics that should be preserved. Develop a mechanism for prioritizing those elements which contribute to an appreciation for Acton’s history and the pleasure of living here.</b> <a href="#">(See also Village Specific Sidewalk Guidelines, Objective 1.2)</a>		

Strategy/Action Step	Lead Owner	Priority
<b>Scenic Roads Bylaw:</b> Consider expanding Acton’s Scenic Roads Bylaw to protect stone walls, mature trees, and other landscape features to other locations that have been identified as needing protection. <sup>14</sup>	Historical Commission Tree Warden	
<b>Freedom’s Way Landscape Inventory:</b> Support the further exploration/implementation of recommendations from the 2006 Freedom’s Way Landscape Inventory. <sup>15</sup>	Historical Commission	
<b>Strategy: Protect open space</b>		
<b>Implement OSRP:</b> Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) including its proactive strategy to anticipate and respond to open space in terms of protection and acquisition of parcels, as well as water resource protection. <sup>16</sup>	Open Space Committee	Highest
<p><b>Zoning to protect open space:</b> Use zoning to protect open space parcels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue the existing practice of encouraging the use of cluster zoning for most residential development outside the centers</li> <li>• Provide incentives for transfer of development away from open land to desired growth centers.<sup>17</sup></li> </ul>	Planning Department	Highest
<p><b>Funding of open space protection:</b> Consider multiple ways to fund the acquisition of desirable open space parcels so the Town is in a position to take advantage of opportunities when they arise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use tax income from economic development</li> <li>• Consider higher Community Preservation Act assessments and continue to use Community Preservation funds for purchase of high priority sites</li> <li>• Borrow funds for major purchases</li> <li>• Research other fund opportunities</li> <li>• Consider “purchase and develop part” strategies as a way of funding open space purchases</li> </ul>	Open Space Committee	Highest

Strategy/Action Step	Lead Owner	Priority
<p><b>Other tools for protecting open space:</b> Utilize other regulatory tools and incentives to protect open space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively support agriculture</li> <li>Provide tax incentives to protect open space</li> <li>Promote community gardens, country fairs and farmer’s markets</li> <li>Purchase agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs), with money coming from the Community Preservation Act funds, Transfer of Development Rights, and other sources.</li> </ul>	Natural Resources Department, Selectmen	2 <sup>nd</sup> Highest
<b>Objective 1.4: Preserve historic buildings and landscapes.</b>		
<b>Strategy: Develop preservation priorities</b>		
<p><b>Identify historic features:</b> Continue to define historic characteristics (buildings, views, landscapes, etc.) and work with relevant committees to actively preserve these.<sup>18</sup></p>	Historical Commission	Highest
<b>Strategy: Preserve historically significant buildings, landscapes and other historic features.</b>		
<p><b>Coordinate Historic District review process:</b> Coordinate Historic District Commission review with development of design guidelines and BoS special permit review of development in historic village centers. Consider giving HDC jurisdiction to review color choices.</p>	Selectmen	
<p><b>Protection outside of Historic Districts:</b> Explore options for protecting historic landscapes and historic resources located outside the established historic districts. (See Cultural Resources List)</p>	Historical Commission	
<p><b>Outreach to private historic property owners:</b> Conduct outreach to private historical property owners from the Town or preservationists to help with funding and encourage preservation.<sup>19</sup></p>	Historical Commission, Historic District Commission	
<b>Objective 1.5: Foster an understanding and appreciation for what makes Acton unique, including its history.</b>		
<b>Strategy: Promote an active interest in the past on the part of residents and visitors alike.</b>		

Strategy/Action Step	Lead Owner	Priority
<p><b>Town gateways:</b> Improve town entrances / gateways to be welcoming and reflect Acton’s historic heritage. See Also: <a href="#">Improve Kelley's Corner</a></p>	<p>Economic Development Committee, Historical Commission</p>	<p>2<sup>nd</sup> Highest</p>
<p><b>Tourist infrastructure:</b> Invest in tourist support infrastructure for certain key sites and publicize town features (historic site, nature trails, etc).</p>	<p>Historical Commission</p>	
<p><b>Historic celebrations:</b> Continue to support historic celebrations and efforts to increase awareness of Acton’s historic past (e.g. events, plaques, Historic Marker program, school curriculum).</p>	<p>Historical Commission</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Encourage activity by promoting a variety of uses at different times of day and night, such as grocery store, a variety of businesses, family restaurant, places for programmed events, pubs, movie house, etc.</li> <li>○ Support walkability in the centers by providing sidewalks along the street and well-lit and landscaped pathways to buildings and within parking lots. Provide parking on street and in combined lots behind buildings</li> <li>○ Encourage unique and fun window-shopping</li> <li>○ Support locally owned shops; develop “buy local” campaign</li> <li>○ Identify, seek, and support anchor with “pulling power”</li> <li>○ Provide more on-street parking to support businesses and help slow down traffic</li> <li>○ Plant flowers and trees to enhance village streets and contribute to traffic mitigation</li> <li>○ Encourage our ethnic communities to contribute vitality through cultural events, celebration, food, etc.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Include Native history:</b> Expand the telling of Acton’s history to include a wider time period and events including Native American history as well as European history of the town, (for example, the ‘Trail Through Time’ in North Acton).</p>	<p>Historical Commission</p>	

<sup>1</sup> For a more complete write-up of the results of the June 23 workshop see <https://doc.acton-ma.gov/dsweb/Get/Document-33530/...>

<sup>2</sup> This could include modifications to Chapter 40A (Zoning Enabling Act) and Chapter 40B and support of legislation that adjusts the “Dover Amendment” provisions of the Zoning Act (which prohibits restrictions on large daycare facilities) to give municipalities more control over their land use.

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<sup>3</sup> See current at <http://www.acton-ma.gov/DocumentView.aspx?DID=343>

<sup>4</sup> Add incentives dependent on preserving character and compatibility with historic resources. Make guidelines specific to targeted growth centers and other areas of town to make residential and commercial development consistent with other 2020 Plan goals. Single and two-family residential would not be included in design review.

<sup>5</sup> This may include providing decision-making authority to the reviewing board in certain cases (the Design Review Board is an advisory board currently). For special permits, expand and standardize the information required from developers, e.g., fiscal and traffic impacts of proposed development.

<sup>6</sup> The Village Centers Plan should consider all potential village centers as part of a system of centers. The plan should define the desired character for each village and prepare a development analysis (including density potential) as well as design guidelines. It should consider elements and qualities that contribute to the success of traditional villages throughout New England.

<sup>7</sup> The zoning should be specific to each center and should specify minimum performance standards and density incentives for meeting additional criteria, including Transfer of Development Rights from areas the Town wishes to preserve. It should address both buildings and landscape/streetscape. Examples of achieving vitality, attractiveness, and walkability include:

- Encourage activity by promoting a variety of uses at different times of day and night, such as grocery store, a variety of businesses, family restaurant, places for programmed events, pubs, movie house, etc.
- Support walkability in the centers by providing sidewalks along the street and well-lit and landscaped pathways to buildings and within parking lots. Provide parking on street and in combined lots behind buildings
- Encourage unique and fun window-shopping
- Support locally owned shops; develop “buy local” campaign
- Identify, seek, and support anchor with “pulling power”
- Provide more on-street parking to support businesses and help slow down traffic
- Plant flowers and trees to enhance village streets and contribute to traffic mitigation
- Encourage our ethnic communities to contribute vitality through cultural events, celebration, food, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Priority should be given to parcels identified in the Acton OSRP.

- <sup>9</sup> Based on this study:

- 
- Delineate areas that should receive development, infill, and redevelopment.
  - Determine desired density and type of use for these areas, e.g., wide range of shops and restaurants.
  - Prepare KC-specific design guidelines.
  - Create list of criteria to apply as incentives during special permit development review, e.g., provision by developers of outdoor seating; separating seating areas from sidewalk with plants, low fence, etc.
  - Consider Kelley's Corner gateway opportunities, i.e., what the design of this area should communicate to visitors and citizens as they drive into town.

<sup>10</sup> Such investments include sidewalks, benches, signage, landscaping, etc.; encourage the provision of outdoor seating; separate seating areas from sidewalk with plants, low fence, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Use this planning process to ensure we understand what makes West Acton currently a successful village so that efforts to enhance it don't threaten what contributes to its village identity and livability.

<sup>12</sup> Based on this study:

- Decide whether to guide growth to WAV.
- Delineate areas that should receive development, infill, and redevelopment.
- Prepare WAV-specific design guidelines.
- Create a list of criteria to apply as incentives during special permit development review.

<sup>13</sup> Sewer extension and package wastewater treatment plants are options to consider.

<sup>14</sup> Acton's Scenic Roads Bylaw regulates the removal of stone walls and trees within the right of way for 33 roads. Using this prioritization as a starting point, consider other locations where stone walls provide an important reminder of Acton's historical development and land use or contribute to our appreciation of the landscape.

<sup>15</sup> The *Freedom's Way Landscape Inventory* is a 32 page report prepared in June 2006 by Acton citizens in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Freedom Way Heritage Association. The report includes many recommendations related to preserving rural character. <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/recon...>

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<sup>16</sup> The OSRP is being updated in 2011. Based on the OSRP, define primary purpose of protecting open space and develop criteria for prioritizing parcels (e.g. conservation, views, active recreation, protection of water resources, etc.); create a short list of open space protection priorities and stay focused on that list. Ensure broad public understanding regarding which open space is not protected and to what degree protected space is indeed protected.

<sup>17</sup> Transfer of development rights can preserve the entire open parcel; cluster zoning usually preserves just over half of the parcel.

<sup>18</sup> Incorporate appropriate recommendations from 2006 Freedom's Way Heritage Landscape Inventory and refer to Mass Historic Commission Survey Forms. Consider desirability of expanding current historic districts to include older historic homes and historically significant structures (as listed in the Cultural Resources List)

<sup>19</sup> HDC is developing a revolving loan/grant program, potentially funded in part by CPA funds, modeled after the Town's revolving loan fund for septic system improvements.



Implementation Strategies for:

# GOAL 2 Ensure Environmental Sustainability



**Goal Statement:**

*As Acton residents, we recognize that our health and well-being depend on protecting the web of life of which we are a part. Therefore, it is vital that we live and work here in a manner that supports that web and the well-being of people everywhere, including future Acton citizens.*



**Relationship to Vision**

The strategies listed under this goal relate specifically to resident, business owner and town officials’ stated objective to take measures directly to save energy and reduce the carbon footprint. There are also a number of strategies listed under other goals that help to attain

the goal of environmental sustainability by, for example, providing alternatives to car travel.

**Overview of Priority Action Steps**

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- 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
- Provide advice to home-owners, businesses and contractors to undertake new building and renovation projects that reduce energy use
- Evaluate starting a “Transition Initiative,” a community-wide collaborative effort of citizens and Town government, using education, planning, and action steps to move Acton toward local resilience and energy autonomy

**Education and Awareness**

While many of the action steps involve administrative or even policy changes, some involve increasing awareness and providing education to residents and/or business owners and town officials. The following steps are of this nature:

- Provide broad-based education on how our water systems work; where our water resources are located, and how water flows through withdrawal, use, and disposal of wastewater; and promote sustainable use by residents and businesses
- Continue and expand on Acton Water District water conservation encouragement programs.
- Identify and encourage the replacement of all or part of home lawns with low-maintenance perennials or gardens.
- Encourage rainwater harvesting for irrigation.
- Encourage the revival of the Acton Stream Teams to have citizens periodically monitor

# GOAL 2

## Ensure Environmental Sustainability cont.

- and report on the state of streams in Acton
- Distribute information to residents on how they can reduce unwanted items
- Create a Zero Waste Committee to promote recycling, reduction, and reuse.
- Encourage the public to reduce the use of throw-away plastic (bottled water, single-use bags).
- Encourage local stores to implement packaging reduction incentives.
- Encourage sports teams to use reusable sports bottles.
- Educate, advocate, and encourage home composting, and provide inexpensive composting bins.
- Encourage the schools to explore options and develop a food composting program, starting at the central campus.
- Conduct e-waste education, and support events where cost effective certified e-waste specialist services are easily available.
- Encourage or require the use of white or light-colored shingling for roofing replacements.

- Allow white roofing in historic districts.
- Educate the public and enforce/encourage compliance with anti-idling laws, especially at schools and the train station.
- Educate and increase people’s awareness of the need to reduce their carbon footprint.
- Help promote utility and/or state sponsored energy-efficiency upgrade programs for appliances, lighting, and weatherization.
- Develop and implement a public education program on the role of native plants in supporting Acton’s biodiversity.
- Provide education and support the public and private planting and protection of large, long-lasting, carbon-sequestering trees.

### Ongoing Activities

Acton has already begun implementing measures to address the future sustainability of the town’s natural resources and dependency on energy. These efforts should be supported, expanded upon and continued; they include the following:

- Continue to monitor groundwater quantity (i.e. groundwater surface elevation and flow rates) and quality, and plan for necessary Acton Water District (AWD) service expansion, quality improvements, and well-head protection.
- Continue and expand on Acton Water District water conservation encouragement programs.
- Continue to retrofit existing public buildings to increase energy efficiency.
- Continue to leverage Green Community grants for energy-reduction activities.
- Continue to encourage air-drying of clothing, and advocate for the removal of any homeowner association restrictions on outdoor line-drying.
- Continue to discourage residential and commercial property owners and landscape contractors from planting invasive plant species.
- Support the plans of the Morrison Farm Committee.

Implementation Strategies for:

# GOAL 3 Improve Connections



**Goal Statement:**

*We recognize that a community that is connected is safer, stronger, and provides more opportunities for meaningful interaction. We envision supporting these connections through physical means including sidewalks, bike paths, trails and public transportation to connect people and places, and to support independent and safe travel for all. We also envision open communication as a means to further connect residents (e.g. through the web, cable TV, community bulletin boards, etc.)*



**Relationship to Vision**

Actonians expressed a strong desire to improve connections, both physical and virtual, so that they have safe and pleasant ways to travel and so that communication is improved. Residents recognized that extending sidewalks, providing safe biking and extending the town shuttle improve connections between people and places, provide opportunities to meet fitness and wellness goals, and takes better care of the environment. The strategies listed under this goal are ways of addressing these needs and desires.

**Overview of Priority Action Steps**

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Construct new sidewalks according to the sidewalk priority list. Follow the sidewalk design guidelines when constructing new sidewalks or updating existing ones.

- Develop guidelines for bike lanes and off-road paths. Identify locations and develop a plan for off-road, multi-use paths and bike lanes to improve peoples’ ability to bicycle to destinations in Town.
- Continue to fund the MinuteVan shuttle, and later expand the system with more vehicles, more frequent service, and longer service hours. Consider making it a fixed route system.

**Education and Awareness**

While many of the action steps involve administrative or even policy changes, some involve increasing awareness and providing education to residents and/or business owners and town officials. The following steps are of this nature:

- Increase the awareness of drivers and cyclists regarding their responsibility to share the road safely.
- Encourage and facilitate car-pooling for trips

## GOAL 3 Improve Connections cont.

to the train station and commuting trips.

- Disseminate information about existing Town resources and services, such as Dial-a-Ride and Social Safety Net, using the Town Website, mailings, and posters/flyers at locations such as the Senior Center, libraries, and on shuttle vehicles.
- Consider the formation of an Acton Citizens Academy providing classes, information, and events, where participants (both newcomers and established residents) learn about the different functions of local government including volunteer opportunities.
- Use town website and other Acton media to publicize volunteer opportunities.
- Encourage private efforts to organize neighborhoods, including communication among neighbors and group activities.
- Provide contact info for new residents to connect with organized neighborhood groups.
- Encourage the business community to revitalize the Welcome Wagon.

### Ongoing Activities

Acton has steadily increased the extent of its sidewalks, worked cooperatively to create two major shared use paths, and has made numerous traffic improvements. These efforts should be continued and supported and include:

- Continue to update the Sidewalk Construction Priority List. Emphasize projects that provide safe access to schools, recreation areas, the train station, and the villages, particularly the designated growth centers. As public transportation options grow, provide sidewalk access to transit access spots.
- Complete the construction of the Assabet River Rail Trail.
- Complete the construction of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail.
- Continue to make improvements to business access and transportation safety.

Implementation Strategies for:

# GOAL 4 Provide More Opportunities for Gathering and Recreation

**“ Goal Statement:**  
*We value the small town feeling and appreciate the sense of community that results from frequent opportunities for interaction. We support providing places for casual social interaction and organized events that bring members of the community together. We believe in offering opportunities for intergenerational experiences and for sharing of inter-cultural celebration, and we aim to provide recreational opportunities for all ages.* ”

### Relationship to Vision

As previously mentioned, the frequency and emphasis with which Acton residents stated their desire for more opportunities to meet with one another was striking. The strategies listed under this goal outline various ways of meeting this need in outdoor and indoor spaces, formal and informal places, and for a variety of ages.

### Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- When Town finances permit, seek town meeting approval to fund the planning, siting, and design of a building that can accommodate the Senior Center and the larger community. Construct the building when Town finances permit.
- Implement the recommendations of the 2011 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Develop a schedule to create conservation

land, maintain and improve existing public playgrounds (with priority to NARA), and create new playgrounds using both public and private funds.

- Explore methods to maximize the use of existing playing fields and create new playing fields.

### Education and Awareness

While many of the action steps involve administrative or even policy changes, some involve increasing awareness and providing education to residents and/or business owners and town officials. The following steps are of this nature:

- Continue to offer a wide range of community education / recreation programs that reflect the interests of Acton residents. Promote connections among participants through shared interests.

## GOAL 4 Provide More Opportunities for Gathering and Recreation cont.

### Ongoing Activities

Acton's libraries and Council on Aging, and the Acton Boxborough Cultural Council offer a range of programs that support additional cultural activities. These efforts should be continued and supported and include:

- Increase the coordination between the Acton Memorial Library, the West Acton Citizen's Library, and the Council on Aging. Continue to support programming geared to different age groups (particularly children and seniors).
- Continue to offer a wide range of community education / recreation programs that reflect the interests of Acton residents. Promote connections among participants through shared interests.
- Support the efforts of the Acton Boxborough Cultural Council and private organizations to provide local opportunities and publicity for theater, concerts, dance, and multi-cultural events and celebrations.

## Implementation Strategies for:

# GOAL 5 Support Inclusion and Diversity

“

**Goal Statement:**

*We value our diversity in all its forms, reflecting a range of ages and socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds. We wish to foster respect, promote interaction and actively encourage a wide variety of individuals to live, work, and play in our community.*

”

**Relationship to Vision**

This goal relates to community-building, to taking care to include and provide support specific to the needs of the different segments of the population. These include seniors who may be on a fixed income and need activities and services geared to them, youth who may need infrastructure to support their increasing independence, a

variety of newcomers, some of who may not be familiar with how to become involved with the town due to cultural and/or linguistic differences. Additionally, the town has expressed a desire coupled with the state mandate to provide a range of housing types including housing that is affordable to empty nesters wishing to downsize, town employees, young couples, and/or others with moderate income.

**Overview of Priority Action Steps**

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Provide more activities for teenagers that are accessible without an automobile, e.g. improved walking access from the schools to Kelley’s Corner and an expanded shuttle system; involve them in the planning process.
- Prepare a proactive plan to make rental and owner housing available at prices that Acton families of low and moderate income can af-

ford and at the same time provide a means to meet the 10% state requirement that frees Acton from 40B development. The plan should emphasize providing this housing at small, scattered sites near walkable business and service destinations, especially in proximity to village centers in a manner consistent with the planning for key centers. The plan should consider the Town’s participation in desired housing development.

- Create a new committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and other such groups in town whose main charge will include providing information to newcomers and organizing multi-cultural activities.

**Education and Awareness**

While many of the action steps involve administrative or even policy changes, some involve increasing awareness and providing education to residents and/or business owners and town of-

## GOAL 5 Support Inclusion and Diversity cont.

ficials. The following steps are of this nature:

- Conduct outreach to seniors (including newly arrived seniors who may speak languages other than English).
- In order to best address youth needs, conduct outreach to youth guide them to articulate their needs, and involve them in the planning process.
- Consider establishing a Diversity Awareness Day with diversity training materials and programs.
- Recruit volunteers from ethnic communities residing in Acton to act as the town's liaison, providing information on town resources and , and linguistic support (including help in translating relevant portions of the town web-site, etc.). They could also be encouraged to provide welcome guides to new residents which include contact people, welcome committee, reference guide to existing resources (such as ESL instruction), etc.
- Support and provide information on job train-

ing and career counseling opportunities for disabled individuals.

### Ongoing Activities

Acton has a reputation for being welcoming to newcomers. It also has a number of agencies and volunteers working hard to support those of more moderate income. These efforts should be continued and supported and include:

- Explore ways to continue and expand the conversion of existing below-market housing units to affordable units through purchase of deed restrictions.
- Continue to support agencies working to serve the needs of the Town's low and moderate income residents.
- Continue to support and provide Town space for celebration and cultural activities.

Implementation Strategies for:

# GOAL 6 Preserve and Enhance Town-owned Assets

**“ Goal Statement:**  
*We value our Town assets and wish to preserve and enhance them. These include our open spaces, schools, municipal properties and facilities.*”

### Relationship to Vision

This goal relates to community-building, to taking care to include and provide support specific to the needs of the different segments of the population. These include seniors who may be on a fixed income and need activities and services geared to them, youth who may need infrastructure to support their increasing independence, a variety of newcomers, some of who may not be familiar with how to become involved with the town due to cultural and/or linguistic differences. Additionally, the town has expressed a desire

coupled with the state mandate to provide a range of housing types including housing that is affordable to empty nesters wishing to downsize, town employees, young couples, and/or others with moderate income.

### Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Provide more activities for teenagers that are accessible without an automobile, e.g. improved walking access from the schools to Kelley’s Corner and an expanded shuttle system; involve them in the planning process.
- Prepare a proactive plan to make rental and owner housing available at prices that Acton families of low and moderate income can afford and at the same time provide a means to meet the 10% state requirement that frees Acton from 40B development. The plan should emphasize providing this housing at small,

scattered sites near walkable business and service destinations, especially in proximity to village centers in a manner consistent with the planning for key centers. The plan should consider the Town’s participation in desired housing development.

- Create a new committee composed of liaisons from the various ethnic and other such groups in town whose main charge will include providing information to newcomers and organizing multi-cultural activities.

### Education and Awareness

While many of the action steps involve administrative or even policy changes, some involve increasing awareness and providing education to residents and/or business owners and town officials. The following steps are of this nature:

- Conduct outreach to seniors (including newly arrived seniors who may speak languages other than English).

## GOAL 6 Preserve and Enhance Town-owned Assets cont.

- In order to best address youth needs, conduct outreach to youth guide them to articulate their needs, and involve them in the planning process.
- Consider establishing a Diversity Awareness Day with diversity training materials and programs.
- Recruit volunteers from ethnic communities residing in Acton to act as the town's liaison, providing information on town resources and , and linguistic support (including help in translating relevant portions of the town web-site, etc.). They could also be encouraged to provide welcome guides to new residents which include contact people, welcome committee, reference guide to existing resources (such as ESL instruction), etc.
- Support and provide information on job training and career counseling opportunities for disabled individuals.

### Ongoing Activities

Acton has a reputation for being welcoming to newcomers. It also has a number of agencies and volunteers working hard to support those of more moderate income. These efforts should be continued and supported and include:

- Explore ways to continue and expand the conversion of existing below-market housing units to affordable units through purchase of deed restrictions.
- Continue to support agencies working to serve the needs of the Town's low and moderate income residents.
- Continue to support and provide Town space for celebration and cultural activities.

Implementation Strategies for:

# GOAL 7 Maintain and Improve the Town's Financial Well-being

**“ Goal Statement:**  
*We believe it is critical for us to sustain and strengthen our town's financial well-being. This includes commercial and economic development that reflects the long-term goals of both businesses and residents of the community.* ”

### Overview of Priority Action Steps

The following were identified as priority action steps to meet this goal.

- Develop new policies (such as providing a new Senior/Community Center when Town finances permit and supporting the provision of housing that is appropriate to seniors, e.g., smaller units, located within walking distance of goods and services such as Kelley's Corner) that encourage seniors to stay in Acton in

- order to increase the taxpayer/student ratio.
- Actively promote employment-oriented development (e.g., high tech/R&D offices) in targeted areas.
- Improve the business permitting process, including implementing permit tracking software.

### Ongoing Activities

Acton has been involved in a number of activities focused on maintaining the Town's financial well-being. Several committees and boards (namely the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen) are in the process of developing a long term capital plan. These efforts are important and should be supported and applauded. Additional on-going efforts include

- Do more to promote economic development to enhance the commercial tax base in order to reduce the residential portion of the tax levy.

- Support ongoing efforts to balance the financial requirements of the school system and other town resources.
- Accelerate the process of long-range planning for major capital expenditures such as remodeling town or school facilities or constructing new buildings.
- Continue planning to cover long term obligations such as retiree health insurance and life insurance.
- Continue to scrutinize all budget items to ensure town services are a "good deal" for taxes paid.
- Continue the strategy of supplementing current revenues with sources other than the property tax, e.g., grants and fees.
- Continue to enhance the level of services that the Town can provide with existing resources through the evaluation of priorities and by incorporating improvements in technology.

# GOAL

Maintain and Improve the  
Town's Financial Well-being cont.

- Continue to seek federal, state, and private funding sources to supplement Town funds.
- Continue to consider incentives to encourage seniors to stay in Acton such as tax relief, preference in hiring for part time jobs with the Town, and a new Senior Center.



## DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

Today. Tomorrow. Together.



**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

Population  
and Housing

# Population and Housing

Population and housing are the prime measures and indicators of growth and stability in a community. If a community wants to be in control of its growth it takes steps to manage its rate of housing development – to slow or accelerate it, to encourage or discourage housing types, such as single- or multi-family housing, or steer housing to desired locations. Population, income, age structure and diversity are key indicators of community character. Type of housing stock is also an important community characteristic. Housing stock has various dimensions such as architectural types, density of residential development, and age, condition and historic importance of residential buildings.

Acton’s population is expected to continue to grow relatively slowly, as it has in the recent past, because it is running out of prime developable land and has wastewater disposal constraints (see Chapter 7, Facilities and Services). There are significant shifts in the age composition of Acton’s population. These shifts are important because they indicate what types of services and facilities and housing will be needed in the future. Households are expected to grow more quickly than population because house-

hold size is expected to continue to decline, a trend that has been observed since 1990. There are 343 lots ready for residential construction. Potential demand estimates for housing units by 2020 (213 new units) suggest that all new forecast units can be accommodated on lots already approved. Currently 7.2% or 548 units in Acton are considered affordable, using Commonwealth of Massachusetts statutory definitions.

## Summary of Key Points

- Acton has a moderate overall housing density of about 0.4 acre per housing unit. At current and projected rates of residential growth Acton will come close to, but not exceed its buildout capacity by the year 2030, based on existing zoning.
- In 2010 the average selling price of a single-family home was \$498,750. The average selling price of a condominium unit was \$280,000.
- About 5% of Acton’s housing stock is sold each year. This has averaged about 400 sales per year, but has fallen in recent years owing to the economic downturn.
- Forty-seven percent of Acton’s households

## Acton Voices\*

*“Mansionization makes housing not affordable and [negatively] affects town character.”*

*“There is a need for more site plan review and subdivision and design review of new housing developments.”*

*“Stop single-family development to reduce pressure on open space and to reduce pressure on schools.”*

*“We need a variety of housing types – to support people with different economic resources as well as different ages and needs.”*

*“Houses are expensive” (as response to “what are the three most important challenges you feel face Acton?”)*

*“There is more affordable housing than in other comparable communities.”*

*“My most important concern regarding aging, is aging in place in my home and being able to afford the taxes.”*

*“Control residential growth because it adversely impacts class size at the schools.”*

*Over one-third (37.5%) of the survey respondents said that would like to see more affordable housing in Acton, and more than half (69.3%) said that they would like to see more historic homes protected and preserved.*

*Over one-third (36.7%) of the respondents to a mail survey said they would like to see LESS of one or more of the following: “development,” “building,” “housing,” “construction,” or apartments.”*

*\* public input from Phase I of the planning process*



could not afford to buy an average priced house in town.

- Seven and two-tenths percent (7.2%) of Acton’s housing stock is classified as officially affordable, meaning it is deed restricted into perpetuity, and counts toward the Town’s 10%.
- Between 1998 and 2010, 375 units of affordable housing have been created, a rate of 31 per year. Residential uses pay 87% of all property taxes in Acton.

**Population**

- Population growth has slowed in recent years.
- There have been and will continue to be significant shifts in the age and ethnic structures of Acton.



- Acton’s population is highly educated.

**Housing and Households**

- There is likely to be a demand for about 1,000 new housing units over a 20-year period after the housing market revives. This may not be fully realized by 2030.
- There has been a shift in housing construction from 4 and 5 bedroom units to 2 to 3 bedroom units. This is likely to continue.
- The fastest growing category of households are those headed by females with children under age 18.

**Existing Housing Stock**

- Seventy-six percent of Acton’s housing stock has been built in the last 50 years.
- About 6% of Acton’s housing units are vacant.
- Acton’s housing stock is predominately single-family detached units. Since 2000 building permits for 773 new residential units have been issued.

**Housing and Land Use**

- Acton has a moderate overall housing density of about 0.4 acre per housing unit.

Table 1.5: Past and Projected Number of Households, Housing Size and Housing Units

	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
Households	6,600	7,495	8,415	8,909	9,316
Housing Units	6,891	7,680	8,963	9,176	9,595
Population per Household	2.74	2.69	2.64	2.59	2.57

Source: U.S. Census Bureau and the Collaborative

- At current and projected rates of residential growth, by 2030 Acton will come close to, but not exceed its buildout capacity, based on existing zoning.

**Housing Tenure**

- Seventy-four percent of Acton’s housing is owner-occupied.
- The average length of stay for a household in owner-occupied units is 17 years.
- The average length of stay for a household in renter-occupied units is 7 years.

**Housing Market**

- In 2010 the average selling price of a single-family home was \$498,750. The average selling price of a condominium unit was \$280,000.



- About 5% of Acton’s housing stock is sold each year. This has averaged about 400 sales per year, but has fallen in recent years owing to the economic downturn.

**Housing Affordability**

- Forty-seven percent of Acton’s households could not afford to buy an average priced house in town.
- Seven and two-tenths percent (7.2%) of Acton’s housing stock is classified as affordable, meaning it is deed restricted into perpetuity, and counts toward the Town’s 10%.
- Between 1998 and 2010, 375 units of affordable housing have been created, a rate of 31 per year. This includes public housing rental

units administered by the Acton Housing Authority and privately developed rental and ownership units.

**Taxes**

- Residential uses pay 87% of all property taxes in Acton.

**In conclusion,** Acton has a strong and diverse economic mix of activities that provides a base for further growth. While further strengthening its role as a sub-regional employment center, Acton can improve its visual character by better design in new and redeveloped commercial and industrial properties.

Table 1.13: Median Sales Price of Housing in Acton and Surrounding Towns through September, 2010

	2000 Census Year-Round Housing Units	Subsidized Housing Inventory Units	Percent
Acton	7,645	548	7.2%
Boxborough	1,900	24	1.3%
Carlisle	1,647	20	1.2%
Concord	6,095	363	6.0%
Littleton	3,018	245	8.1%
Maynard	4,398	365	8.3%
Stow	2,108	143	6.8%
Sudbury	5,582	280	5.0%
Westford	6,877	347	5.0%
Subregion Totals	39,270	2335	5.9%
Statewide Totals	2,526,963	243,630	9.6%

Source: The Warren Group, Banker and Tradesman

Table 1.13: Median Sales Price of Housing in Acton and Surrounding Towns through September, 2010

	All Housing Units	Rank	Single-Family Units	Rank
Acton	\$459,900	4	\$498,750	4
Boxborough	\$345,000	8	\$492,500	5
Carlisle	\$675,000	1	\$690,000	1
Concord	\$621,500	2	\$680,000	2
Littleton	\$389,250	5	\$400,000	8
Maynard	\$295,000	9	\$307,500	9
Stow	\$379,850	6	\$424,900	7
Sudbury	\$585,000	3	\$619,600	3
Westford	\$350,450	7	\$431,500	6

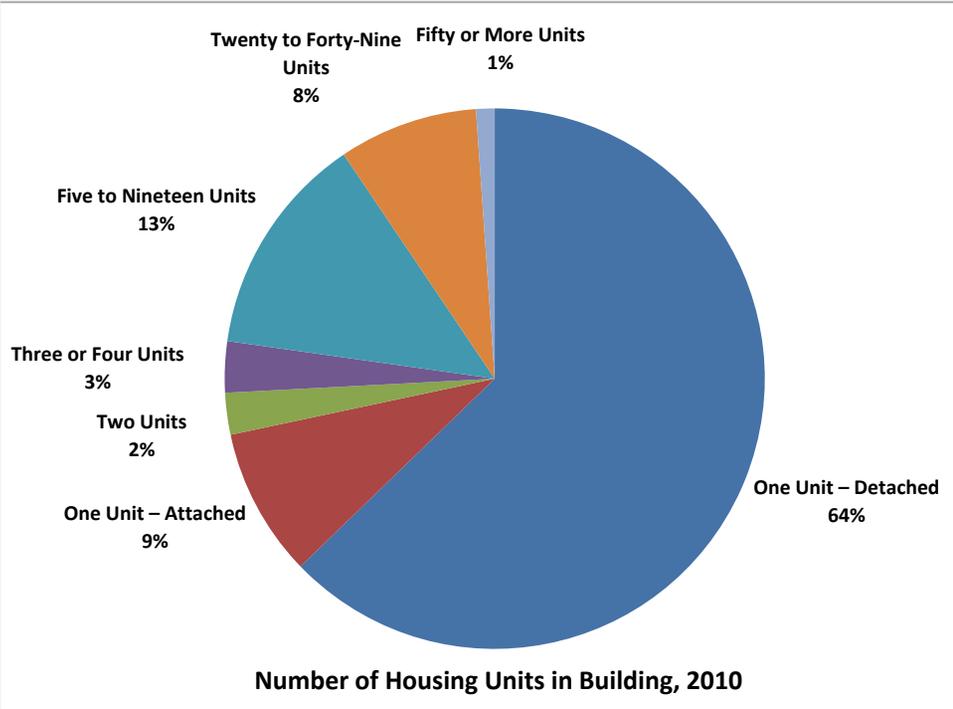
Source: The Warren Group, Banker and Tradesman

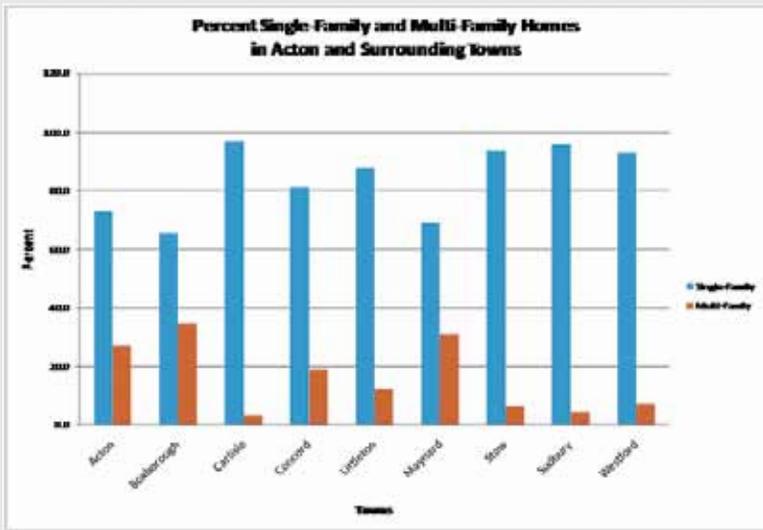
### Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Population and Housing Existing Conditions

- Creating affordable housing is both a challenge and an opportunity to retain residents.
- It is a challenge to get renters to stay longer than 7 years on average.
- Building up residential densities in and around village centers is a challenge.
- Assuring that new housing created best matches likely demographic changes will be challenging but also an opportunity to develop a land use pattern that may be more sustainable.
- Matching residential growth to town infrastructure and services capacities is a challenge.
- Creating more moderately priced market-rate housing and holding down municipal expenses to maintain or lower property tax rates will be challenging.

**In conclusion**, Acton is a very desirable place to live because of its schools and other municipal services, and the high quality of its

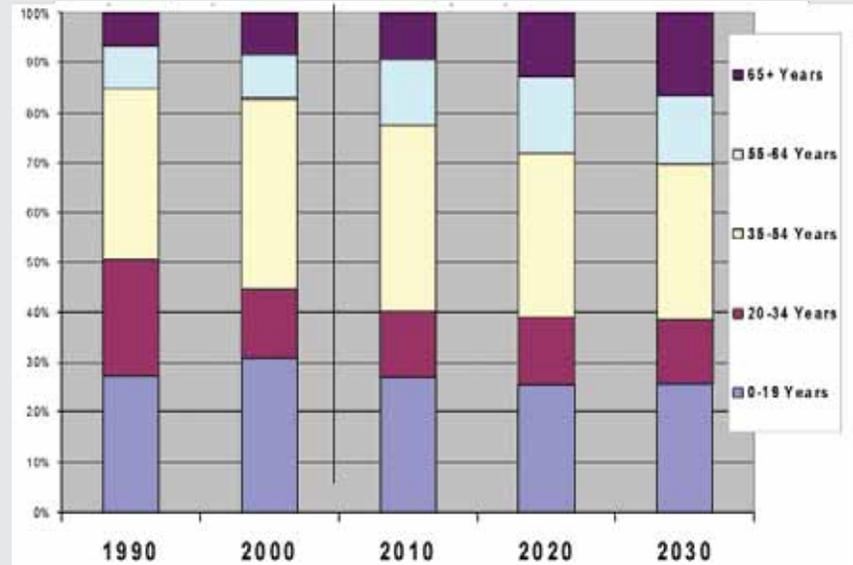
housing stock. Acton is, however, an expensive place to live, requiring relatively high household incomes to maintain the quality of one’s home, cover transportation costs, and pay the property taxes needed to support good quality town facilities and services.



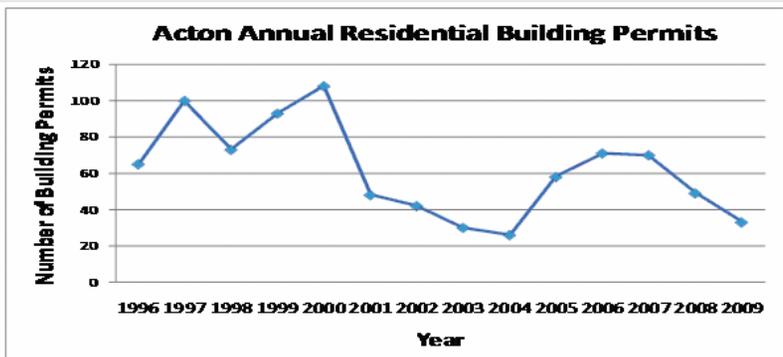


Source: 2000 Census of Housing updated with Building Permit data to 2010

Figure 1.3: Relative Shifts in Life Cycle Categories from 1990 to 2030



Sources: U.S. Census of Population, Acton Town Census for July 2010, and MAPC for future years



Source: 2000 Census of Housing updated with Building Permit data to 2010

**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**2**

Economic  
Development

# Economic Development

Economic development is important to achieving the Plan’s goals because employment is essential for economic well being, and because commercial areas contribute to the character of Acton. Providing opportunities to shop in Town may be important so people do not have to travel long distances to obtain essential goods and services. Finally, commercial development is a major source of tax revenue for the Town.

Employment has grown steadily in Acton when viewed over the long term. It is expected to continue to grow. Average establishment size is small (12 employees per establishment). There are about 11,000 people employed in establishments located in Acton. The town accounts for 18.5% of total employment in the nine community sub-region made up of Acton and its surrounding towns. Acton has the most retail employment and retail sales of any of the nine communities but it is apparent that considerable retail purchases of Acton residents are made out-of-town. While some Acton retailers attract out-of-town shoppers, all of Acton’s retailers only capture less than half of in-town resident’s retail purchases. Acton has two rapidly growing employment categories that provide a basis for

future strong growth (Health Care and Social Assistance and Computer Systems Design and Related Services).

There were 11,757 people in the Acton Labor Force in September, 2010. In that month 11,079 of those people were employed and 678 were unemployed, resulting in an unemployment rate of 5.8%. This is considerably lower than the statewide rate of 8.0% and the national rate of 9.0%. Acton’s lower unemployment rate results from its well educated and highly skilled labor force.

## Summary of Key Points

### Employment Based in Acton

- Acton is an important employment center in its nine town sub-region. Concord and Westford are the other important employment centers. Acton is expected to remain an important sub-regional employment center.
- In 2010, on average, 11,248 people were employed in jobs located in Acton.
- In 2000 (the most recent year for which data is available) only 20.5% of jobs in Acton were held by Acton residents and 79.5% by residents of other cities and towns.

## Acton Voices\*

*“It would be nice to have more places to shop and to eat to choose from.”*

*“We need more economic development to increase the tax base.”*

*“Improve regulations to encourage businesses (including permitting & signage.)”*

*“More needs to be done to improve the appearance of strip malls on Great Rd.”*

*“Reduce traffic and congestion and keep town character; don’t overdevelop.”*

*“Restaurants” was frequently mentioned as a response to the survey question “What would you like to see MORE of?”*

*“Development” was frequently mentioned as a response to the survey question: “What would you like to see LESS of?” (comments were mostly directed towards housing, but also included big box, fast food, and strip malls as undesirable.)*

*“If you could do one thing to address economic development issues in Acton what would it be?” Response: “Space for solo-preneurs.”*

\* public input from Phase I of the planning process



- Major categories of employment in Acton are retail trade, public administration including public schools, health care and social assistance, computer systems design and related services, education services (not including public schools), and eating and drinking establishments.
- Health care and social assistance and computer systems design and related services are the fastest growing categories of employment located in Acton (147% and 112% respectively, between 2001 and 2009).
- The average weekly wage in Acton establishments was \$938 in 2009, but it ranged widely from \$226 for used merchandise stores to \$2,346 for scientific research and development services.
- Average weekly wages ranged from \$226 (used merchandise stores) to \$2,346 (scientific research and development services).

**Acton’s Labor Force**

- In September, 2010 Acton had a labor force of 11,757 (Acton residents who hold jobs anywhere.)
- In September, 2010 5.6% of Acton’s labor force was unemployed (compared to a state-

wide figure of 8.0%)

- The largest number of Acton residents are employed in the high wage/high education categories of management, computer/mathematical, educational/training/library, sales related, and office/administrative support.

**Businesses**

- There were 795 establishments in Acton in the second quarter of 2010, according to data from the Massachusetts Office of Workforce Development.
- The number of businesses has varied by about 10% in recent years although the number in 2009 is about the same as in 2001 (780).
- There are about 500 home based businesses in Acton, many of them not included in the 795 establishments listed by the Massachusetts Department of Workforce Development.
- Acton is a town of small businesses, with an average of employees per business in 2009; this includes only businesses recognized by the Department of Workforce Development.
- The value of retail sales in 2007 in Acton was \$644,864,000.
- Motor vehicle and parts dealers and food and

beverage stores accounted for 58% of all retail sales in 2002 and 64% in 2007.

- Most of Acton’s commercial development is located along its numbered highways (Routes 2, 2A and 27) and in village centers.

**Taxes**

- Acton collects 87.1% of its property taxes from residential property and 12.9% from commercial and industrial property.
- For the last eight years, Acton has had the highest residential tax rate of all towns around it, except for Stow, which had a higher rate from 2003 to 2005.
- The average residential tax bill in Acton has been closer to the middle of the nine towns, but it has been consistently slightly above the average for these towns (See chart on page ?).



## Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Economic Development Conditions

- Floor-area ratios (the ratio of square footage in buildings to the area of the lot on which they are located) in industrial areas and the villages can be increased to obtain greater density and more intensive utilization of the land.
- It is possible to seek home rule authority to establish a differential property tax policy in order to encourage and retain start-up ventures, micro-business incubators, and micro-business cooperatives in Acton.
- A graduated commercial property tax increase, starting from a lower base, would make Acton desirable for start-up companies and entrepreneurs by reducing their operating costs for three to five years.
- Economic development and housing affordability are mutually dependent public policy issues. Businesses are attracted by a local labor force. Many businesses need lower skill workers with lower wages for maintenance, security, and clerical jobs. Affordable housing

helps to attract these kinds of workers and thus help economic development.

- Commercial development can be focused on creating more local opportunities to shop for goods and obtain services, and publicizing the shopping opportunities that already exist.
- Existing strip commercial development is un-sightly but presents opportunities to redesign and redevelop it.

**In conclusion**, Acton has a strong and diverse economic mix of activities that provides a base for further growth. While further strengthening its role as a sub-regional employment center, Acton can improve its visual character by better design in new and redeveloped commercial and industrial properties.

Table 2.3: Growth in Employment in the Largest Sectors of Acton's Economy

Sector	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	% Growth 2001-2009
Retail	1680	1868	1898	1866	1677	< -1%
Educational Services	1080	1230	1097	1157	877	-18.8%
Health Care and Social Assistance	568	762	1121	1286	1403	+147%
Public Admin. including Public Schools	1178	1281	1197	1374	1301	+10.4%
Food Services and Drinking Places	688	548	585	674	621	-9.7%
Computer Systems Design and Related Services	387	322	459	828	820	+112%

Source: Series ES-202 Employment Data from the Mass. Department of Workforce Development.

**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**3**

Natural  
Resources

# Natural Resources

Acton’s natural resources provide services to the citizens of Acton. Clean water and air are critical for the town’s future. Healthy ecosystems and habitats with a diversity of wildlife are indicators that families can live healthy lives and enjoy their surroundings. Measures to protect natural resources will be important strategies for the Comprehensive Plan. One of the primary ways to help preserve the Town’s character that was identified in developing a vision for Acton’s future was the preservation and additional acquisition of open space.

Acton has a varied topography and large forested and wetland areas supporting biodiversity, potentially including 9 state-listed rare plant or animal species. Surface waters are generally of good quality but are impacted by nutrients from storm water runoff, which the Town’s Storm Water Management Plan is designed to reduce.

## Summary of Key Points

### Geology and Topography

- The underlying bedrock is Nashoba Formation that dates back between 430 and 500 million years.
- Acton Granite, a younger intrusion into the un-

derlying formation, was a source of foundation stone for many older buildings.

- The topographic character of Acton is due to glacial activity that deposited glacial till, drumlins (Great Hill), kettle-holes (Grassy Pond), eskers (Acton Arboretum), kames (Forest Road west of Hosmer Street), and alluvial and swamp deposits along stream beds.
- The average elevation is about 230 feet, the highest point is 430 feet, and the lowest is 130 feet.

### Soils

- In general Acton soil groups are moist, rough and stony in character with many areas of sandy loam. Wet soils are located in stream valleys and certain areas have ledge.
- High ground water, stoniness, and excessively drained soils present challenges for location of underground septic systems in many areas, but 80% of Acton homes use these systems. (See Chapter 7 for further discussion.)

### Surface Water Resources

- There are two major watersheds – Nashoba Brook and Fort Pond Brook.
- Acton Stream Teams ([## Acton Voices\\*](http://www.acton-</a></li>
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*“Trees, open land, seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, rural feel...make Acton unique.”*

*“The rural character and natural features are my favorite things about Acton.”*

*“I wish there was more wildlife in Acton.”*

*“I think the Town should acquire or by other means preserve more open space.”*

*“Protect and enhance wildlife corridors, including conserving diverse ecosystems: meadows, woods, lowland, upland.”*

*“What I enjoy most visually in Acton is its nice rural area look.”*

*“Preserve rural and historic characteristics,” was identified as the number one priority in six public meetings.*

*“One of the main reasons I moved to Acton was the green – trees and conservation land.”*

*“The cost of open space is very high... we will need to prioritize parcels.”*

*Close to one-half of the town’s residents identified “rural character, agricultural land, and conservation land” as among the town’s three most important assets.*

*“I would like to see less growth taking over open space ...and more preservation of wooded areas.”*

*“Acton used to be rural; it is turning into a city.”*

*“Great wonderful conservation land, trails, ponds, woods... ”*

*\* public input from Phase I of the planning process*



streams.org) has done visual shoreline monitoring and educates the public about the town’s 36 streams (more than 32 miles).

- The state has classified Acton’s surface waters, with the exception of Nagog Pond, as Class B. This classification indicates the waters are generally suitable for primary and secondary contact recreation, may be used for water supply with appropriate treatment, and will provide good wildlife habitat.
- Nagog Pond (Class A) was assigned to Concord by the General Court in 1884 for its water supply.
- Excess nutrients are a problem in some of Acton’s surface water bodies. Much of the excess nutrients come from storm water run-off.



Drainage from impervious surfaces, parking lots, streets, and the roofs of structures impacts surface water quality. All of these sources of storm water run-off carry pollutants that end up in the town’s wetlands and waterways. In response to these problems the Town has developed a Storm Water Management Plan and a Nonpoint Source Control Program. These efforts identify sources of pollutants and steps to mitigate their impacts.

- Acton watersheds account for 65% of the recharge of its groundwater aquifers – the source of the town’s drinking water. The other 35% is contributed by watersheds that are not wholly within Acton.

**Major Wildlife Resources**

- Over the last 100 years, Acton, like many surrounding communities, has been transformed from a community dominated by fields and orchards, to a one dominated by suburban development and forests.
- Acton includes five “hotspots” for biodiversity identified in the state’s BioMap 2 Project
  - NARA/Wills Hole/Kennedy/Marshall Land/Nashoba Sportsman Club (partially



town-owned and Zone II Wellhead Protection Area)

- Grassy Pond (partially town-owned)
- Assabet River in southeastern corner of town, including portion of Zone II Wellhead Protection Area
- Heath Hen Meadow, a wetland area and wetlands along the town boundary with Stow and Maynard, including a portion of a Zone II Wellhead Protection Area, and
- Reformatory Fields/Weatherbee Conservation Land, including portion of a Zone II Wellhead Protection Area.
- Acton also has state-designated Priority Habitats of Rare Species.
- Acton has approximately 7,000 acres of forest

land (more than 50% of its total area). This total includes small private holdings such as back land on residential lots as well as larger forested areas on public open space.

- Wetlands, both forested and non-forested, comprise nearly 13% of the Town's area and are important habitats.
- There are 23 certified vernal pools and 142 potential vernal pools – important habitat for wood frogs, salamanders, etc.
- Acton includes habitats for 9 state-listed rare plant or animal species. These habitats are concentrated along the major brooks.



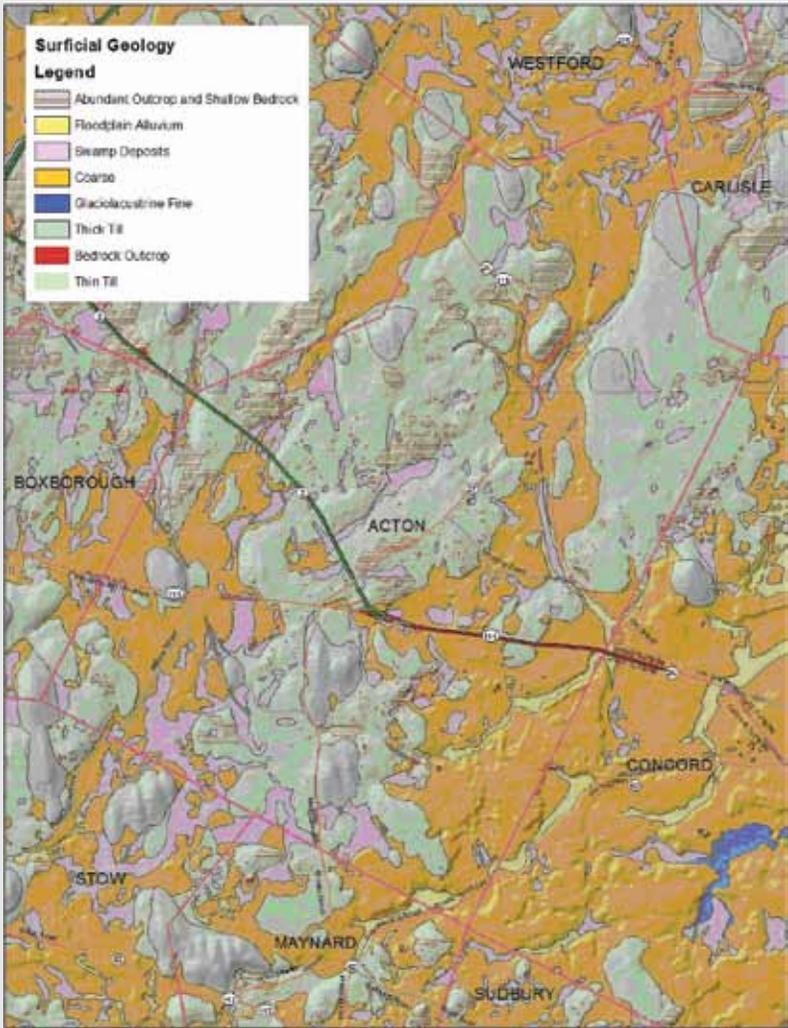
### Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Natural Resource Conditions

- Despite development, Acton has many important natural areas that enrich residents’ lives and contribute greatly to the town’s character. The challenge will be to continue to protect those areas and resources.
- Acton soils represent a challenge for the operation of septic systems. The Board of Health will need to continue to be diligent in enforcing their regulations in order to protect water resources. (See the discussion of water and wastewater in Chapter 7.)
- Protecting surface water resources from pollutants in storm water will be a continuing challenge.
- Adding to already protected conservation land is an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity to protect additional wildlife and water resources and create connections between protected areas is contrasted with the increasing costs of acquiring land.

- Existing privately owned forested areas represent an opportunity to increase the size of existing protected forested areas.

**In conclusion**, Acton has a wealth of natural resources that contribute to the town’s character and help to preserve biodiversity and water quality, but which require on-going effort to protect and preserve.

Figure 3.1: Surficial Geology



# Natural Resources

Figure 3.3: Major Habitats



**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**4**

Historic and  
Cultural Resources

# Historic & Cultural Resources

Acton’s many historic and cultural resources are important and valued attributes that help establish the character of the Town and past efforts to preserve, promote, and enhance them attest to their value to residents.

Historic and cultural resources include both physical resources (buildings, landscape features, landscapes, and archaeological sites) as well as non-physical resources such as organizations, clubs, programs, and traditions, both of which contribute to the Town’s quality of life.

Acton’s rich history is well represented by the Town’s three historic districts (Acton Center, West Acton Village, and South Acton Village), and by individual houses, other structures, historic landscapes, and stone walls in many parts of town. The Acton Historical Commission and the Acton Historic District Commission have been successful in preserving many of these resources, and with non-profit organizations such as the Historical Society, in educating people as to their importance. Acton also has a diversity of modern cultural resources through the Town’s libraries, churches, museums, theater and cultural societies, groups, and clubs, as well as the Acton Boxborough Cultural Council.

## Summary of Key Points

### History

- Native Americans pre-settled the area for hunting, fishing, gathering, and some agriculture – especially around Nagog Pond.
- Concord shepherds settled the area that would become Acton (in 1655) because of its prime grazing lands.
- Mills were developed on Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook as early as 1670 – several mill sites remain.
- In 1735, Acton incorporated as a town and a meeting house was built in Acton Center.
- Railroads came in 1843 with stations in South Acton and West Acton that became village centers; A branch line connected South Acton with Marlborough in the 1850s, and by the 1870s another rail line went through East Acton and North Acton.
- By 1900, the population in the 5 villages was 2,120, and apples were the major export.
- In 1925 Acton population was large enough to sustain its own high school.
- The Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inven-

## Acton Voices\*

*“The historic, New England architecture describes Acton’s character.”*

*“In addition to the historic architecture, there is a pride and awareness of our local history (e.g. Isaac Davis, Crown Resistance Day, Patriots Day).”*

*“I want more historic homes protected and preserved.” (according to 69.3% of respondents)*

*“Preserve rural and historic characteristics,” was identified as the number one priority in six public meetings.”*

*“Most residents are unaware of our history.. they are here for the schools and will not stay.”*

*“I would like a community center, more restaurants, cultural activities and a movie theater.”*

*“If I could do one thing to make Acton a better place to live I would get us a movie theater!”*

*“There is not enough variety in activities, places to go, entertainment for all.”*

*“If I could do one thing to make Acton a better place to live I would create more centers for congregating.”*

*Approximately one-fifth (19.8%) of Acton’s residents reported that history and historic architecture were among Acton’s three most important assets.*

*When asked if they would like to see more cultural activities in Acton, almost 40% (39.4%) of respondents to a mail survey reported wanting more theater, art exhibits, concerts, etc. in town.”*

\* public input from Phase I of the planning process



tory lists Conant Farm, Grassy Pond, Miller Farm/Station Master’s House, Nagog Pond, Nashoba Brook, Rt. 2 Gateway Agricultural Fields, South Acton Village, Stonefield/Simeone Farm, and Wetherbee Street Woods as significant cultural landscapes.

- Historic stone walls contribute greatly to the town’s character.

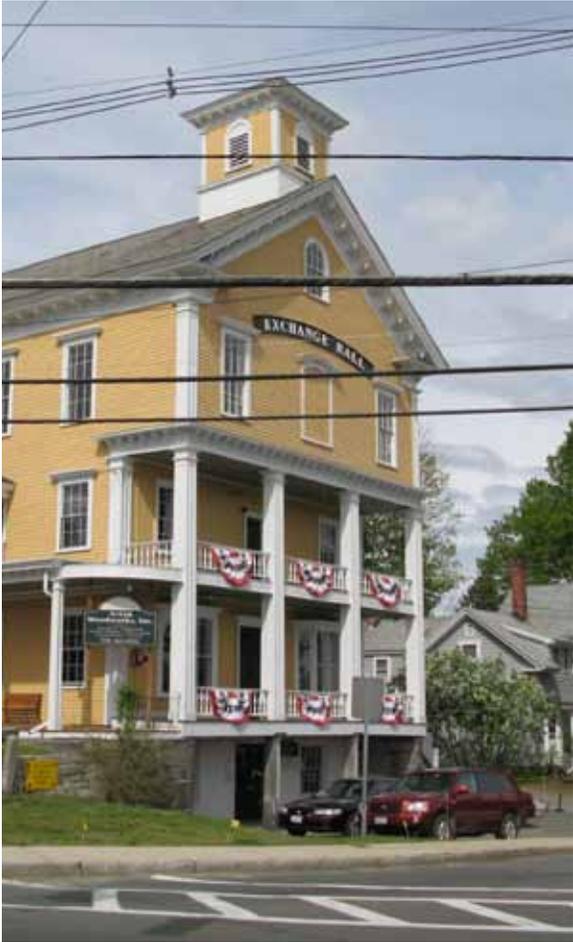
**Cultural Resources**

- Acton boasts a culturally diverse population.
- Acton-Boxborough Cultural Council and Acton Recreation Department list variety of cultural events – ethnic, musical, film festivals, theatre, arts & crafts, storytelling, and dance.
- Theatre III, the Open Door Theater, and Theatre with a Twist are non-profits dedicated



to promoting the performing arts through education and high-quality, reasonable priced performances.

- The Acton Recreation Department hosts a long schedule of events, most at NARA Park, throughout the year.
- Acton Memorial Library hosts an active schedule of events and community meetings including storytelling, book discussions, historic site explorations, musical events, movies, English language conversation groups, art exhibits, computer training, etc.
- Several of Acton’s churches and a number of businesses host cultural events.

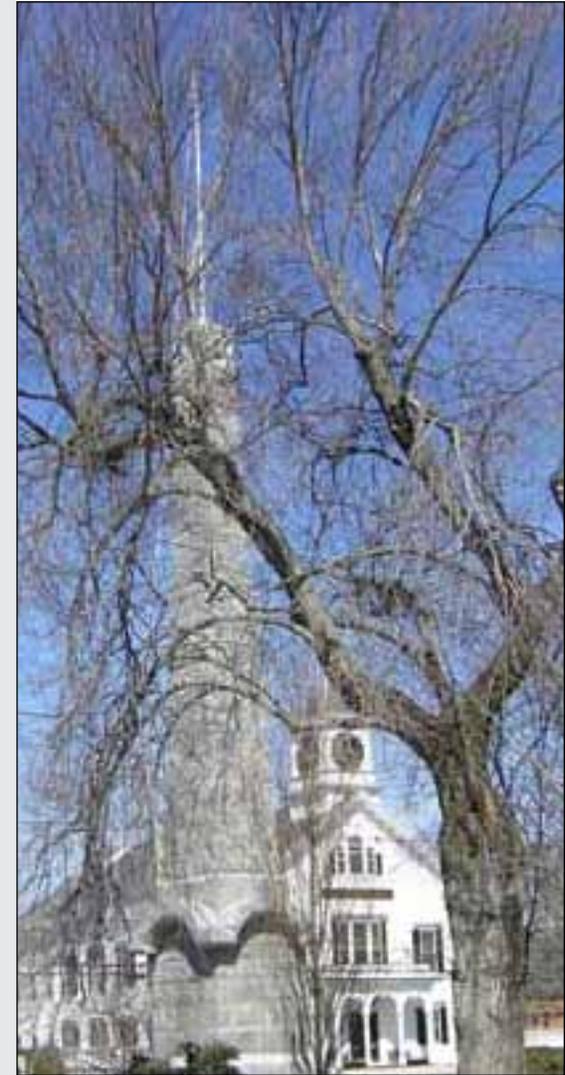


### Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Historic and Cultural Resources Conditions

- Efforts to update the inventory of historic resources are continuing.
- Farms that were central to Acton's history are slowly disappearing or are threatened.
- Acton retains many historic barns, reflecting the Town's agricultural past. They represent an opportunity for reuses that would help preserve character. Current measures to ensure their long term protection and productive use may not be adequate.
- Acton's many stonewalls that contribute to the Town's character are often threatened by new development.
- Traffic through the villages has increased and is a threat to the safety of pedestrians and detracts from the appeal of the villages.
- Some development along Massachusetts Avenue, Route 2A/119, and elsewhere does not complement the historic character of Acton.
- Acton's design requirements within the existing zoning regulations (for commercial development) do not always achieve the

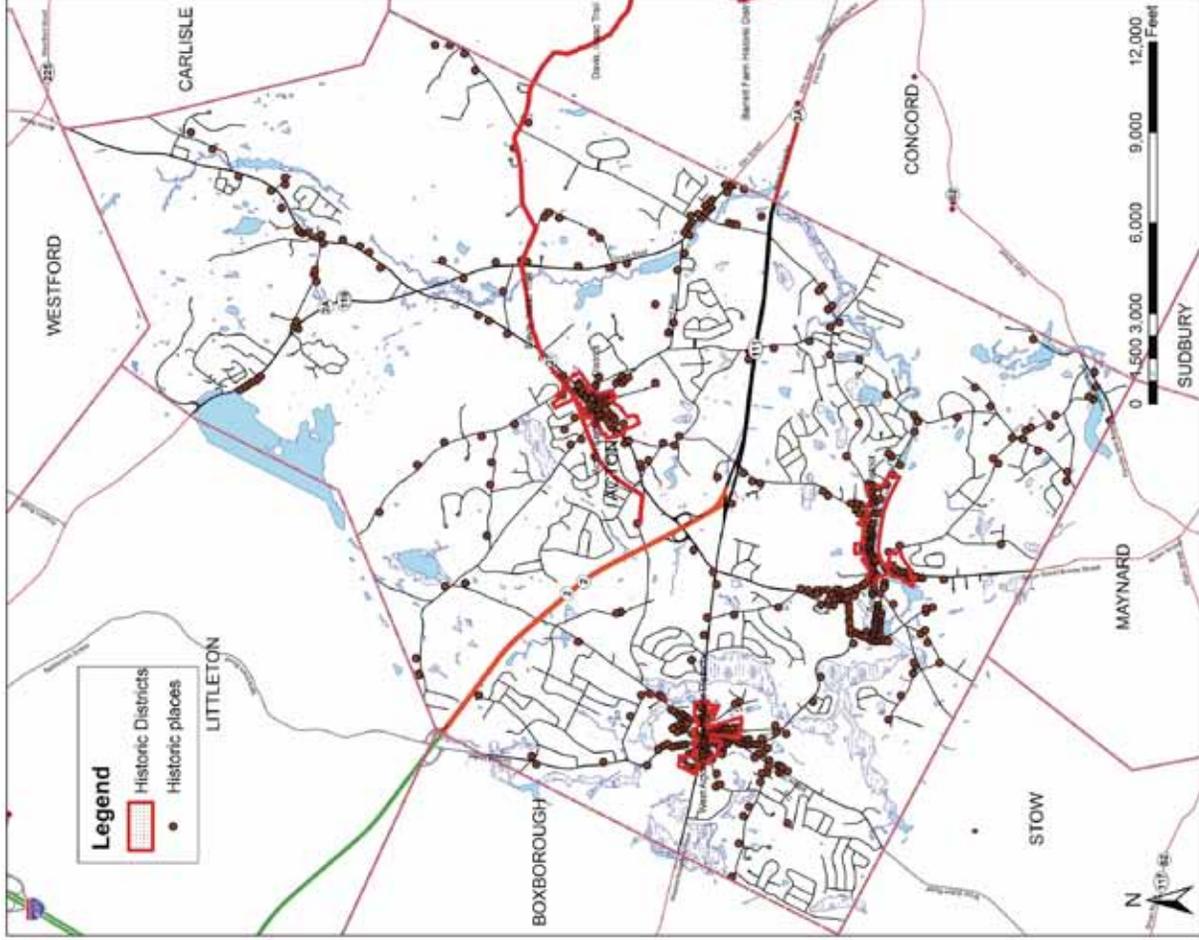
look and feel desired.

- Public utilities can sometimes overwhelm the character of the villages.
- The town has not developed a strategy for managing technological developments (such as cell towers) and ensuring these developments are implemented in a way consistent with and harmonious with the rural character of the Town.
- Acton has a number of sites of archaeological interest and many have not been researched, documented, and protected from destruction from land development.
- There has been ongoing discussion of expanding the historic districts to include more of the historic resources and revising the design guidelines.
- Much of the historic path of the Line of March (Isaac Davis Trail) is not protected.
- **In conclusion**, historic and cultural resources are strengths of the town and an important ingredient in creating its unique character and supporting diversity. Ongoing effort is needed to preserve the past and to provide opportunities for cultural involvement by all.



## Historic and Cultural Resources

Figure 4.6: Historic Resources



The Map of Historic Resources shows the Existing Local Historic Districts, the Isaac Davis Trail, National Register Properties outside the districts and the historic places listed in the Acton Historical Commission's and Massachusetts Cultural Resources inventory lists.



**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**5**

Open Space  
and Recreation

# Open Space and Recreation

Acton was settled by European colonists in the 1600s because it had many open meadows for grazing. To this day Acton’s open spaces and natural resources provide the Town’s rural characteristics of protected natural areas with trails, tree-lined roads, stonewalls, ponds, meadows, wetlands, forests, wildlife habitats, and farmland. These characteristics and areas for recreation, help define its sense of place and contribute greatly to the quality of life of its residents.

One of the primary ways to help preserve the Town’s character that was identified in developing a vision for Acton’s future was the preservation, protection, and additional acquisition of open space.

Potential conflicts may exist between identified goals related to open space and natural resource protection and other components of the Plan, such as traffic and economic development.

## Summary of Key Points

### Open Space Resources

- Approximately 29% of Acton’s 13,000 acres of land (3,717 acres) is in some form of public open space or recreation use. This is a higher percentage than Chelmsford, Westford, Box-

borough, and Littleton, but less than Concord, Carlisle, Maynard, and Stow.

- More than 2,000 acres are considered permanently protected (Conservation Commission – 1,642 acres, Water District – 395 acres).
  - There are over 6 miles of paved paths and 15 miles of trails in Acton including a portion of the Bay Circuit Trail – a 200 mile greenway corridor between Rt. 495 & Rt. 95.
  - Some of the major open spaces include: Acton Arboretum, Great Hill, Camp Acton, Spring Hill, Grassy Pond, Wills Hole, NARA Park, and Nagog Hill – All have trail systems and maps available on-line (see <http://www.acton-trails.org> ).
  - Many of the Town’s open spaces protect important natural resources, as well as historic and geological features.
  - Many privately owned open spaces (common land, back land, etc.) contribute to the Town’s sense of nature, and some create important corridors. Open space in cluster developments
- Recreation Resources
- Recreation Department has an active and varied program of activities and events.
  - Recreation Department manages activities at:

## Acton Voices\*

*“Farms, conservation lands, NARA Park, Arboretum, and the commitment to preserving open space” were cited as responses to the question: “What Makes Acton Unique?”*

*“I would like a big town pool that only Acton people and their guests can go to.”*

*“Recreational facilities are poorly maintained and there is a need for more bathrooms and parking.”*

*“I want more activities other than sports and school.”*

*“NARA Park should be free for all residents.”*

*“One of my favorite things about Acton are the recreational resources such as the tennis courts.”*

*“I would like to see more parks and places to play for young children...”*

*“I would like more open space (including trails, meadows, woods and recreational areas.” (according to 82.7% of respondents)*

*“The rural character, NARA Park, conservation land & the Arboretum are among my favorite things about Acton.”*

*“Soccer at school and at Teamworks on the Great Road are one of the things we most like about Acton.”*

*“There is an increasing demand on existing recreational facilities, including athletic fields, and more demand for local recreation.”*

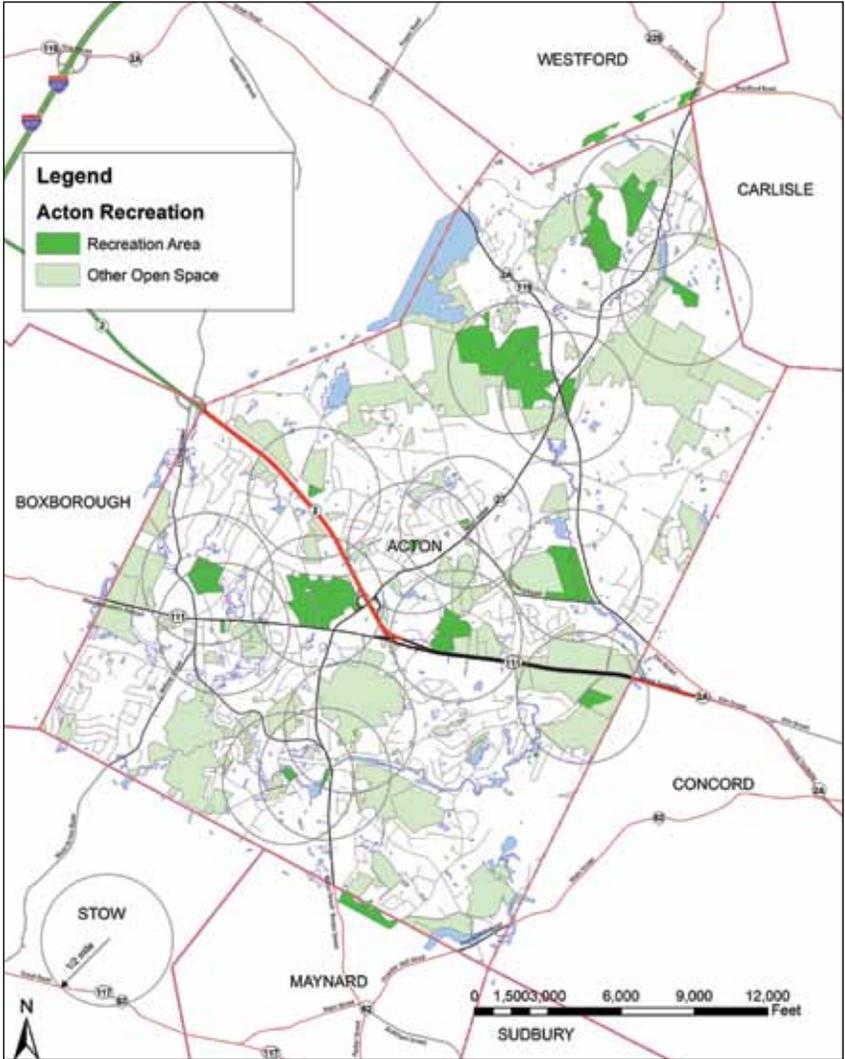
*Almost three-fourths of Acton residents (74.4.%) said they would like to see more open space preserved in Acton.*

\* public input from Phase I of the planning process



- o 7 baseball/softball fields
- o 9 soccer fields
- o 1 outdoor basketball court
- o 7 playgrounds
- o 2 practice fields
- o 2 fishing areas
- o 1 swimming beach
- o 1 amphitheater
- o a skate park
- o 3 picnic areas
- Schools have fields and indoor recreation facilities.
- There are two Community Garden sites – North Acton Community Gardens and Morrison Farm Community Gardens.
- Major recreation sites include NARA Park, School Street Field, Veteran’s Field, Elm Street Fields, Great Hill, Jones Field, and Gardener Field.
- There is one golf course in town and several in adjacent towns.

Figure 5.2 Acton Recreational Resources



## Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Open Space and Recreation Conditions

- Acton still has some small privately owned and operated farms producing produce sold in local markets. These agricultural areas are highlighted in the Open Space and Recreation Plan as important assets deserving of protection. They also that help provide some diversity of habitat. These scattered agricultural areas have value for wildlife and help provide some of the distinctive character of the town. They also have a greater value as sustainable, local sources of food.
- Much of the town’s wildlife diversity is a



result of its variety of habitat types. The challenge of maintaining that diversity will require protection of both small and large areas like those identified in the Priority Habitats and BioMap Core Areas and areas of different habitats; non-forested wetlands, forested uplands, open/vacant areas, grasslands, and open space corridors that make connections between areas.

- Protection of Priority Habitats and BioMap Core Areas is an important conservation priority for the region as well as the town. These areas include several already protected areas. There is an opportunity to expand protection of these important resource areas.
- Part of the town’s scenic quality is due to the visual impact of broad vistas and more intimate views. Retaining that quality will be an on-going challenge and opportunity.
- The 2011 Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan is being developed by the Open Space Committee. It contains a priority list of open space parcels for acquisition or protection.

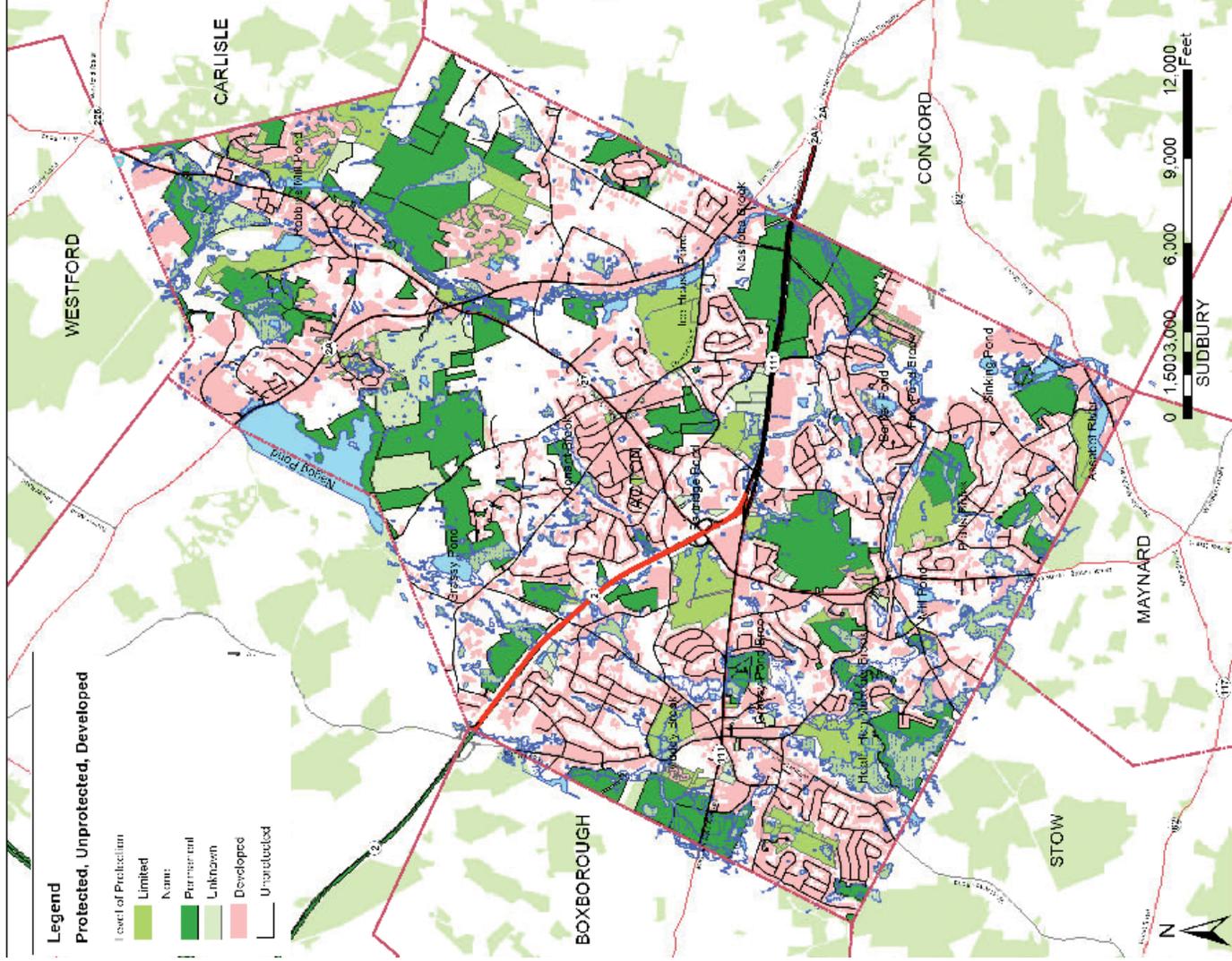
Table 5.1: Open Space Acreage

Owner	Total Acres
Town of Acton (includes School Dept. & other)	773
Town of Acton Conservation Commission	1,642
Town of Acton Water Department	395
Commonwealth of Massachusetts (includes Department Of Corrections)	192
Non-profit Land	78
Private Land (includes golf course, common land & other)	6,659
Other Town (Maynard, Concord) Land	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,810</b>

**In conclusion,** Acton has done an admirable job of preserving and managing open space and recreation resources, but continuing investment and effort to manage these resources will pay dividends in the Town’s quality of life, help to preserve its character, and advance the goal of ensuring environmental sustainability.

# Open Space and Recreation

Figure 5.1: Acton Open Space





**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**6**

Transportation  
and Circulation

# Transportation and Circulation

Almost everyone needs access to transportation resources on a daily basis. Because those who cannot get around easily are often disconnected from the rest of the community, transportation access and circulation becomes an essential component of community comprehensive planning.

Acton's transportation system is primarily a network of roadways, most of which were not designed for today's traffic volumes. At the same time, many Acton residents are interested in better public transportation, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities. Efforts by Acton's TAC and its Sidewalk Committee, and interested citizens have resulted in a new shuttle service to the South Acton Train Station, a better station design, and new, well-designed sidewalks and sidewalk design guidelines. Two major shared use paths, the Assabet River Rail Trail, and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail are moving closer to construction. However, Acton does not have a bicycle committee, and in general, the Town lacks staff dedicated to encouraging public transportation use and bicycle improvements other than the rail trails.

## Summary of Key Points

### Overview

- As the cost of transportation continues to increase (both driving and using public transportation), the cost of commuting will likely be an important factor in residential and employment decision making.
- As with neighboring communities, the 2000 Census showed that nearly 90 percent of workers living in Acton drove or road in a car to work and 4.5 percent used public transportation.
- While car travel and to a lesser extent regional commuter transit will continue to predominate in the Town, participants in the planning process have expressed a desire for other viable alternatives.

### Roadways

- Acton's principal roadways were never designed to carry high traffic volumes. Also, because of the historical importance of some roads, maintaining their visual character is an important element in how the community views and considers roadway improvements.
- Many of the intersections along these corridors

## Acton Voices\*

*"Acton should provide more safe bicycle and walking trails/lanes and sidewalks."*

*"You can't turn left in most places in town due to traffic congestion."*

*"There is a lack of public transportation and too much dependence on cars."*

*"Easy access to highways and commuter rail are important assets to the town."*

*"Expand parking at South Acton Train Station."*

*"I don't like that there isn't a traffic light near my house at the intersection. If there were, then driving would go a lot more smoothly."*

*"Build the sidewalk ALL along Main St., one end of town to the other."*

*"We need public transportation for those who cannot drive."*

*"One of my favorite things about Acton is the commuter rail (especially the "super express" from Acton to Porter Square)."*

*"The senior van is limited in terms of when and where it goes; we need more public transportation."*

*"Traffic safety is a serious obstacle to attracting customers."*

*Almost 1/2 (46.4%) of respondents cited traffic as one of Acton's three most important challenges.*

\* public input from Phase I of the planning process



are uncontrolled, which means that left-turning traffic creates backups; left-turns entering from side streets can also be difficult. This is particularly challenging along Great Road (Route 119) where multiple driveways permit entries and exits that can result in conflicts and potentially in crashes.

- Speeding is a problem on many of the Town’s roadways, particularly on road segments between congestion hot spots.

**Public Transportation**

- The MBTA recently began improvements to the Fitchburg Line, which include extending double tracking from Boston to Ayer to increase train speeds and on-time performance. The project also includes renovating the South



Acton Train Station (SATS). In March 2010, the MBTA adopted the design alternative proposed by Acton residents. The Acton Historic District Commission has approved the latest design proposal from the MBTA (details here).

- The MBTA is working on improvements to the Littleton/495 commuter rail station. When construction is completed, express service currently available at SATS will be moved to the new station, thereby relieving some parking congestion at SATS.
- Although the MBTA provides commuter rail service to Acton, the town is also part of the Lowell Regional Transit Authority (LRTA) service area for paratransit service to Acton’s senior and disabled communities. LRTA does not provide fixed route bus service in Acton.
- In 2009, Acton received \$95,188 in federal funding to initiate the MinuteVan shuttle service between the SATS and a 22-space satellite parking lot behind the West Acton Fire Station.
- The MinuteVan shuttle also offers dial-a-ride service outside of the commuter service hours to any destination in Acton and to seven locations in adjacent towns.



- The Acton Council on Aging also provides shuttle service for Acton residents 60 years old and older and for residents with disabilities as space allows.
- Yankee Line, Inc. provides weekday morning and evening charter-bus trips between East Acton, Concord Center, and Copley Square in Boston.

**Pedestrian Facilities**

- Acton’s sidewalks often exist on only one side of the street. With the notable exception of recent sidewalk projects, most of Acton’s sidewalks are narrow. Often, for reasons that include avoiding historic stone walls, large street trees, or property takings, sidewalks

sometimes shift from one side of the street to the other.

- Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations require developers to provide pedestrian improvements as deemed necessary by the Planning Board. They also require local streets to have a sidewalk on at least one side, while collector and arterial streets must have sidewalks on both sides.
- The town's Sidewalk Committee helps set priorities for pedestrian improvements, and Acton has recently completed construction of many sidewalks.
- Since one of the challenges to providing pedestrian facilities is the perception of many



residents that they are inconsistent with the town's rural character, it is noteworthy that the Sidewalk Committee has published design guidelines for sidewalks that address this concern.

### **Bicycle Facilities**

- Acton has many two-lane roads that are ideal for recreational cycling during off-peak times. However, these same roads are less than optimal for cycling when vehicular traffic volumes are higher and there are no marked bicycle lanes in the Town.
- At present, there is no bicycle committee or TAC (Transportation Advisory Committee) subcommittee on bicycling.
- Acton is directly involved in two major rail trail projects: The Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) Phase 2 is under design, which would provide an important commuter link to SATS, and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT), for which the Town has selected a design firm for final design.
- The Acton Subdivision Rules and Regulations also address bike paths as deemed necessary by the Planning Board.



The Bruce Freeman Trail will be extended through Acton.



## Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Transportation Conditions

- Some improvements in conditions on Acton’s roadway network are possible, but the areas in which Acton can improve transportation most appear to be in public transportation, walking, and bicycling. These improvements would ultimately help to reduce traffic (as would housing and economic development choices that would reduce commuting and would make walking, biking, and use of public transportation more feasible for many people by reducing the distance one needs to travel to shopping, work, and other destinations).
- As the cost of transportation continues to increase because of the increasing fuel prices and public transportation fares, the expense of commuting will likely be an increasingly important factor in residential and employment decision making.
- Federal and state funding for the MinuteVan is expected to decline in future years, and Acton will need to decide how and whether to continue funding these services.
- The addition of the MinuteVan Dial-a-Ride (DAR) service has shown that a more locally tailored service is popular. Discussions with adjacent towns and Montachusett Area Transit Authority (MART) are underway regarding MART provided contracted transportation services, which could be more locally tailored than the service currently provided by LRTA.
- The market for the MinuteVan service exists, but to maximize use, the current pricing options for parking and using the shuttle should be evaluated (annual subscription, ten-ride passes, and pay-by-the-day hangtags), and options such as schedule improvements and route extensions should be explored.
- Although controlling traffic speeds, particularly in residential areas through design (“traffic calming”) and enforcement, and managing traffic entering principal roads are both challenges, these initiatives may be worthwhile in terms of improvements in safety and livability.
- Sidewalk maintenance, particularly in winter months, is an ongoing challenge, owing to its cost.

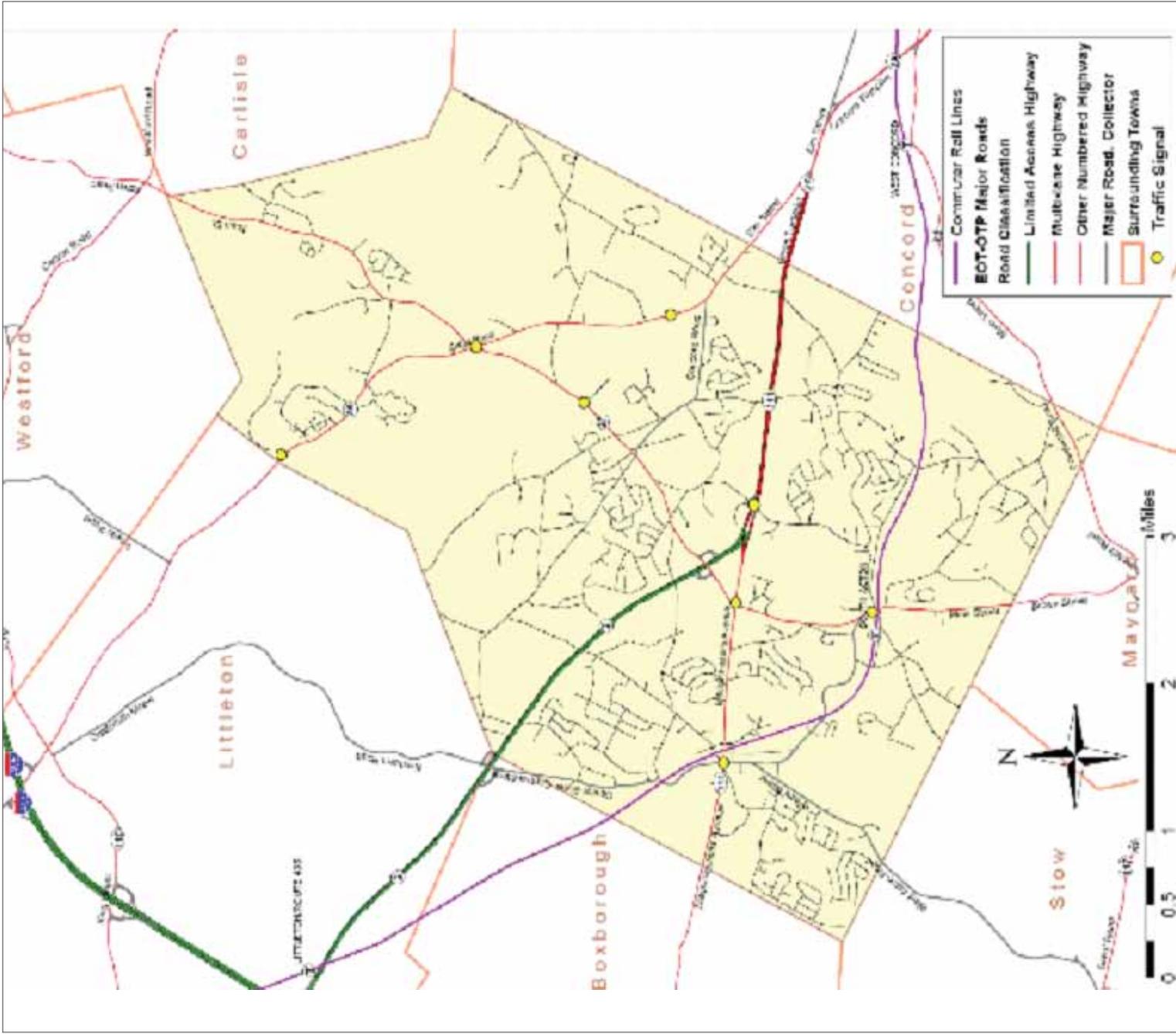
- Pathway linkages can be explored, particularly where connections can be made between adjacent parcels and from residential areas to commercial areas.
- With two shared use paths in development and bicycle parking program expansion, there is an opportunity for the Town to form a bicycle committee, either independently or as part of the TAC.

**In conclusion**, some improvements in conditions on Acton’s roadway network are possible, but the areas in which the Acton 2020 plan can improve transportation most appear to be in public transportation, walking, and bicycling.



# Transportation and Circulation

Figure 6.1: Acton's Multimodal Transportation Network



**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**7**

Facilities  
and Services

# Facilities and Services

Facilities and services are the core functions of town government. The way they are provided determines what residents and businesses get from the town and, conversely, what taxpayers must pay to provide those services and facilities. Particularly for capital facilities such as schools and other town buildings, the level of investment today affects Acton’s ability to provide the services Actonians desire, and today’s investments have implications for future budgets.

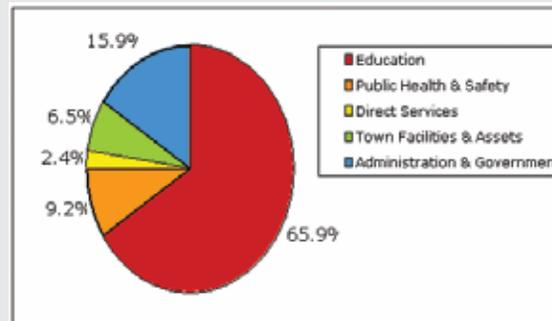
Acton provides a high quality set of services and facilities in return for the taxes paid by property owners. The Town’s facilities are generally in very good condition and are for the most part adequate in size to serve the needs foreseen over the 20-year horizon of this comprehensive plan; the possible exceptions are the proposals to build a larger Senior Center and a new fire station. While not perfect, the Town’s water supply meets enforceable standards and is adequate in capacity to serve all but summer outdoor watering needs. Stormwater is well-managed in accordance with federal and state regulations. The Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan identified 15 Areas of Need, 14 of which need appropriate action to manage wastewater in

a manner that preserves the quality the ground-water that supplies most of the Town’s drinking water.

## Summary of Key Points

- Acton provides excellent services to its residents and businesses, of which education and public health and safety are major parts with substantial costs.

Figure 7.1: FY 2009 Expenditures by Purpose



Source: Massachusetts Department of Revenue

- Since FY 2004, Acton has had the highest residential tax rate of all towns around it (except Stow in FY2004 and FY2005). However, the tax bill, which is the tax rate times the assessed value, is more significant than the tax rate itself; on this basis Acton is in the middle of this group of towns.

## Acton Voices\*

*“Schools” were cited as among the top three “favorite things” about Acton.*

*“We need to improve the senior center, provide more activities, better transportation, and opportunities for intergenerational interaction.”*

*The needs of “teens” and “active seniors” are the most unmet.*

*“It would make people who speak languages other than English at home, feel more comfortable and welcome if materials related to town services were translated.”*

*“We need full day Kindergarten for everyone, the lack of neighborhood schools, and some overcrowded classrooms are my concerns.”*

*“We need a place to hold cultural celebrations.”*

*“The town website should be kept up to date & we need a community bulletin board.”*

*“Allow all tax payers (including non-citizens) to vote on town issues.”*

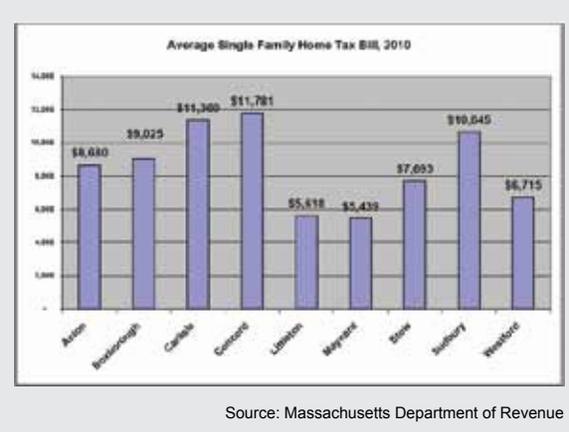
*“There is an increasing demand for ‘virtual’ town services.”*

*“The Library, an important gathering space for the community, is facing a number of challenges including changes in technology and diversity of languages.”*

*“Transportation” (31.5%), “trash” (18%), senior” services (14.5%), “sidewalks” (6.4%), “parking” (5.8%) or “sewer” (5.8%) were services most frequently mentioned as unmet.*

*Schools were cited by 3/4 (75%) of respondents of a mail survey as being among Acton’s three most important assets.*

\* public input from Phase I of the planning process



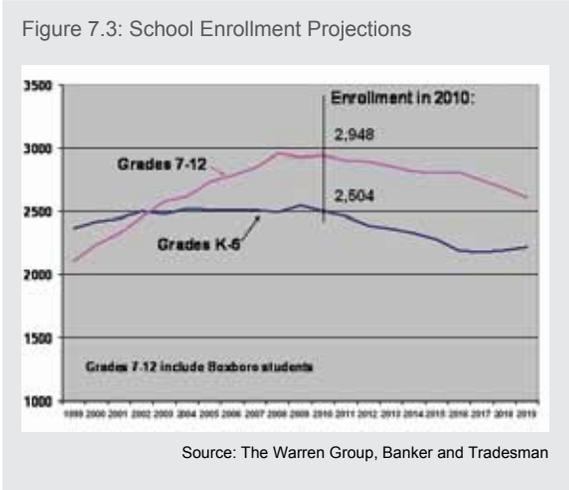
- Acton does not use a separate tax rate for commercial and industrial property.

**Schools**

- Acton’s schools provide high quality education at a lower cost per pupil than most school systems of comparable quality.
- The portion of the municipal budget that goes to education is large in Acton, as is the case in most communities.
- Acton has made substantial investments in two elementary schools, and the ABRSD junior high school and high school; three elementary schools were built in 1965 and 1970. Although ongoing improvements are needed, particularly in the three older schools, the School

Department has regularly maintained and improved the school buildings.

- Based on detailed enrollment projections, Acton’s schools are currently at peak student population and enrollments are expected to gradually decline, making expanded school facilities unnecessary.
- Many families undoubtedly move to Acton because of its good schools, and while some of them leave the Town when their children have graduated, many others plan to stay; this is not unusual for a town with relatively affordable housing and topnotch schools.



**Municipal Buildings**

- Along with the school projects described above, several other major facility needs identified in 1991 have been fulfilled.
- The Town buildings are generally in good condition. The Municipal Properties Department, which maintains these buildings, has made a series of improvements to make them more energy efficient.
- The primary municipal facilities issues and constraints are the amount of Town Hall office space for town departments, insufficient public meeting space, the amount of space in the Senior Center, and the Fire Department’s proposal to build a new facility in North Acton to improve response times.

## Water Supply

- Water supply and wastewater management are both partly dependent on Acton’s soils, subsurface geology, aquifers and groundwater. These natural resources are as much a part of these systems as the public and private infrastructure that supplies water and treats wastewater.
- The Acton Water District has supplied approximately 600 million gallons per year (MGY), which is equivalent to 1.64 million gallons per day (MGD) over the past six years; the trend is essentially flat because conservation and use of private wells offset increases in demand due to growth.
- Water demand varies seasonally because of outdoor water use in the summer.
- Maximum daily demand is often greater than 2.0 MGD and in the summer months reaches 2.6 MGD, the District’s self-imposed limit. As a result, summer watering bans have been instituted.
- The water supply system is composed of groundwater wells, water treatment facilities, storage and pumping facilities, and water mains.

- The water being supplied meets the primary standards promulgated by the U.S. EPA, as the law requires. Secondary standards are currently not required to be met, but should these become enforceable, additional treatment facilities may be needed.
- The wells are surrounded by protection zones. Land uses in the protection zones around the wells are limited through Acton’s zoning bylaw to protect the quality and quantity of the groundwater resource.
- The capacity of the water system is limited by the capacity of the individual wells and well-fields, but more importantly, by state regulation. The current withdrawals are well within the permitted amount.
- The Water District has identified the replacement of aging water mains as a priority and has been doing so on an ongoing basis.

## Wastewater Management

- Wastewater management involves a combination of private-on site disposal systems as well as the public “centralized” Middle Fort Pond Brook wastewater treatment plant on Adams Street in South Acton.

- There is additional capacity available at the Middle Fort Pond Brook Plant of approximately 50 percent of that which is currently used.
- An additional 10 percent of properties are estimated by the Health Department to be served by clustered on-site septic systems or package treatment plants.
- The remaining 80 percent of properties have on-site systems.
- The majority of these on-site systems are believed to function well. Nonetheless, the proportion of systems that require variances is an indication of the limitations of many Acton’s soils for wastewater disposal.
- The town’s water supply and its wastewater treatment and disposal exist within a compli-



Middle Fort Pond Brook Wastewater Treatment Plant

cated system that has multiple interactions between stormwater, surface water bodies (ponds and brooks), and groundwater both within and outside Acton’s borders.

- Innovative/Alternative (I/A) systems are now allowed for replacement of conventional systems (sometimes for new construction), which assists in finding solutions for difficult lots.
- The Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan (CWRMP) concluded that over 90% of the existing on-site wastewater systems can remain as on-site systems for the planning period (which extends to 2024), with approximately 3.5% of these requiring I/A technology.
- In summary, on-site treatment is viable for most, but not all, residential lots in Acton; meeting on-site treatment standards on some lots may involve additional cost, compared to lots that have soils that are considered “good” for on-site disposal.
- The great majority of on-site wastewater systems identified for replacement has been through the mandatory inspection requirement when a house is sold.
- The Phase II CWRMP completed in 2006

identified 15 wastewater planning “Areas of Need” and categorized five of those as high priority needs areas.

- The initial implementation of the CWRMP has focused on evaluating which Areas of Need could feasibly be served by the existing wastewater treatment plant and identified priority areas for sewer extensions. There is additional capacity available at the Middle Fort Pond Brook Plant of approximately 50 percent of that which is currently used.
- The CWRMP identified Wastewater Management Districts (WMD) as the primary or secondary solution to be considered for most of the 15 Needs Areas.

**Stormwater Management**

- Management of stormwater includes both measures to reduce the rate of flow and to improve quality through settling or other means. Together these measures are known as Best Management Practices (BMPs). The 2003 Acton Stormwater Management Plan (SWMP) contains recommendations for managing stormwater to reduce quality impacts and comply with federal regulations.
- Acton has had bylaws and regulations since



the late 1980s that embodied what are now called BMPs, and these regulations have been modified as necessary to comply with Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection MADEP standards under the permit.

- The Town has implemented all of the measures identified in the SWMP, including outreach, public education, and regular maintenance and cleaning of stormwater structures such as catch basins.

### Services for Seniors

- The number of Acton residents 65 years or older is expected to increase over the next two decades. The Acton Council on Aging believes that a larger senior center is needed to serve current and future needs and provide a fuller range of programs.

### Libraries

- Demand for Acton’s libraries is steadily increasing and meeting it requires more resources; however, the library buildings are generally adequate for the future.

### Public Safety

- The recently constructed Public Safety Building is adequate for the future needs of the Police Department.
- Acton’s Fire Department has three fire stations built 40 or more years ago. With the steady growth of the northern part of the town, there is a case to be made for a new fire station in North Acton replacing one of the existing stations, but there are other means of improving response time, such as cooperation with other towns.

### Posed by Existing Facilities and Services Conditions

- As in all towns concerned with high quality schools and other public services, there is an on-going tradeoff between what the town provides and the cost to taxpayers.
- Acton has a generally very good inventory of schools and other town buildings that are adequate in capacity for future needs, but on-going improvements are needed, particularly in the older buildings.
- The water supply system is expected to be adequate in quantity for future needs, but on-going improvements in the distribution system are needed, and ongoing efforts are needed to preserve quality.
- Water quality is an issue both in terms of land uses in the areas surrounding the groundwater wells and protection of the larger groundwater aquifer that supplies them but receives 90 percent of the town’s sanitary wastewater.
- Because of the limitation of much of Acton’s soils, better management of on-site wastewater disposal and/or some extension of the Fort

Pond Brook wastewater treatment plant may be needed in identified Areas of Need.

- Acton’s growing population of seniors would be better served by a new senior center large enough to accommodate seniors and the larger community.
- Ways of improving Fire Department response times in North Acton should be studied.
- Acton’s libraries are key resources for cultural information and as public gathering places; while adequate in size, they will continue to need more resources to serve demand.

**In conclusion**, Acton is fortunate to have excellent schools, very good facilities, and high quality services. Prudent budgeting to resolve competing priorities and maintain financial well-being is a continuous process that is well served by Town Government but requires the ongoing effort of officials and citizens. Continuing effort is needed to manage risk to the Town’s water supply and surface water quality.

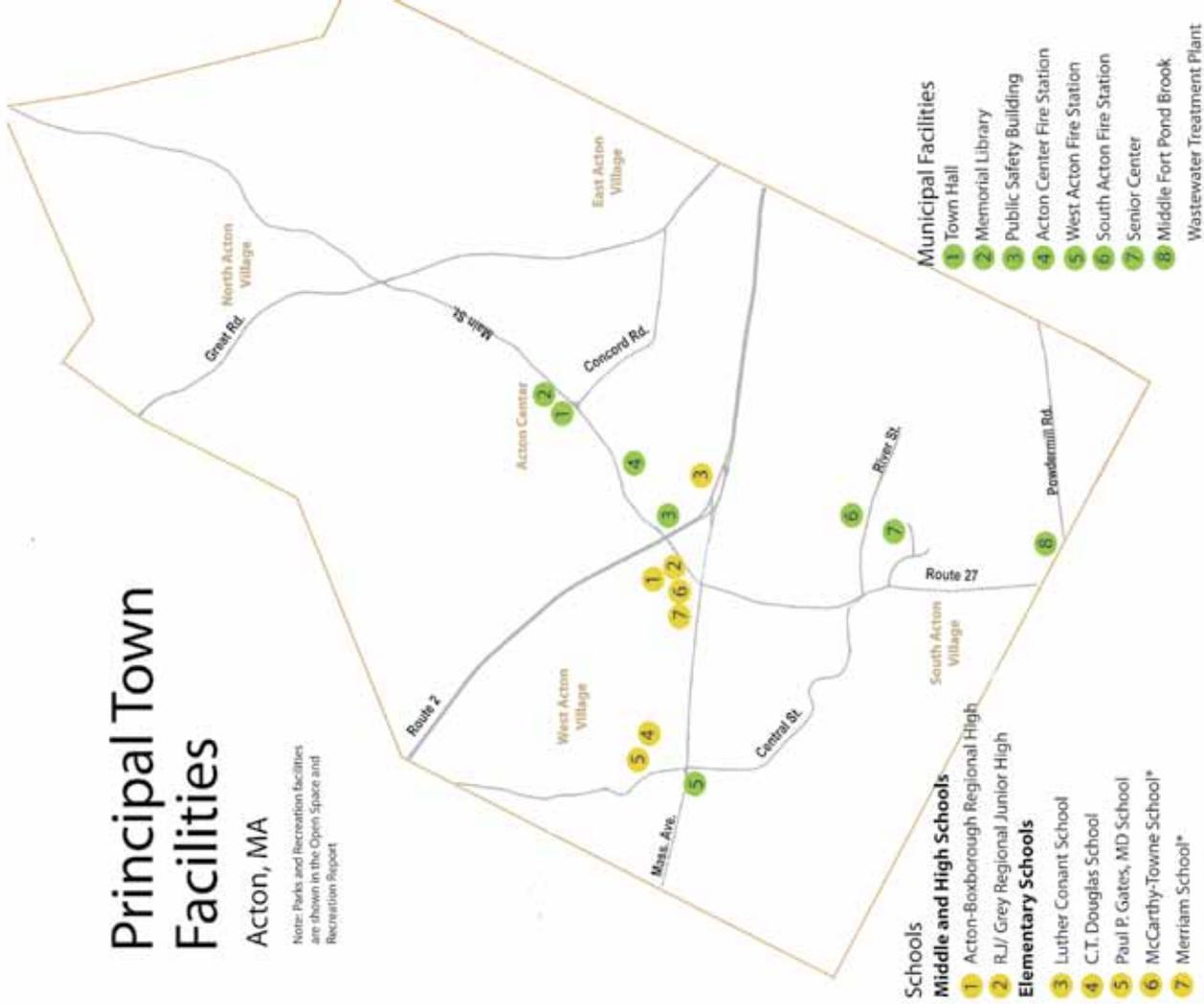
## Opportunities and Challenges



## Facilities & Services

### Principal Town Facilities Acton, MA

Note: Parks and Recreation facilities are shown in the Open Space and Recreation Report





**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**8**

Land Use  
and Zoning

# Land Use and Zoning

Land use and zoning are critical elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Land use planning defines the location of uses within the community. Where people live, work, shop, play, and educate is reflected in the land uses. Existing land use reflects past decisions about the locations of these activities and is the basis for future decisions. Zoning and subdivision regulations are among the town’s legal tools for enforcing where and in some ways how these activities are located and built.

## Summary of Key Points

### Land Use

Major Land Use Categories, 2008	
<b>Residential</b>	26.7%
<b>Commercial/Industrial</b>	5.1%
<b>Open Land*</b>	63.7%
<b>Water &amp; Wetland</b>	4.8%
	100%

\* Includes agricultural, recreation, forest, forested wetlands, open wetlands, cemetery, and other relatively undeveloped land.

- Key Centers are Kelley’s Corner and the five villages: Acton Center, West Acton, South Acton, and, less well defined, East Acton, and North Acton.

- The dominant residential type is a single-family home on a variety of different sized lots.
- Multi-family homes are principally concentrated along Great Road and also at Kelley’s Corner, and in parts of South Acton. A multi-family assisted living community is also located in North Acton. Other multi-family homes are dispersed throughout other parts of town.
- Since the late 1980s most subdivisions of more than five lots have been cluster subdivisions (either Planned Conservation Residential Communities or Open Space Developments).
- Commercial uses are concentrated along Great Road, Massachusetts Avenue (around Kelley’s Corner), and along Powder Mill Road (Rte. 2) in Acton’s southeast corner along the Assabet River, with smaller commercial areas in West Acton, South Acton, and a few other sections of town.
- Industrial uses are concentrated in North Acton, along Massachusetts Avenue east of Kelley’s Corner (mixed with commercial/office uses), and in Acton’s southeast corner, with a few smaller industrial areas located in other parts of town.

### Acton Voices\*

*“What we are really missing is a town center. It would be so great to turn Kelley’s Corner into such a place.”*

*“There needs to be more thoughtful planning of development and commercial zoning limits.”*

*“Focus on: open space, town center, designated walkable shopping areas”*

*“I would like to see more strict zoning.”*

*“I would like to see less growth in town and in the schools, Acton feels like Framingham did 20 years ago and look at it now.”*

*“Need to attract more business (light industrial or office), perhaps on Route 2 corridor to help offset the heavy taxes homeowners pay; A senior center more centrally located.”*

*“I would like to see less new housing and retail development overtaking historical and environmental necessities.”*

*“I would like to see more restaurants, retail shops, small stores, not big box stores (Walmart), florists.”*

*“Less inappropriately developed land and less traffic.”*

*“I want more [swimming] pools and wish there were more places to buy Pokemon cards.” (1st grader)*

*“No more “40B” condo/apartment/truck housing.”*

*In a mail survey one third (31.7%) of Acton’s residents felt that the diversity of activities, including open and wooded land areas, homes and businesses was among Acton’s three most important assets.*

*\* public input from Phase I of the planning process*

## Zoning

- The town has nine residential districts, five village districts, two office districts, three business districts, five industrial districts, two special zoning districts, and four overlay districts.
- More than 60% of the town is zoned for residential uses: 58.1% for single-family homes, and 1.7% for multi-family homes.
- A Village Residential District (VR, 0.5% of the town's area) allows mixed residential and commercial uses.
- Two provisions of the zoning ordinance allow Open Space Development (OSD) and Planned Conservation Residential Community (PCRC), to encourage the preservation of open space, thus facilitating the preservation of significant land, water, historic, archeological, and natural resources. They are special permit options for residential development in all the single-family residential districts (R-2, R-4, R-8, R-8/4, R-10, R-10/8).
- Multi-family dwelling units are allowed under the provisions of the Residence A district (5 units/acre) and Residence AA district (15 units/acre).
- The five village districts comprise 1.2% of

the town's total area. They allow a mixture of business and residential uses and have a number of provisions to encourage compact development including transfer of development rights from the Great Road corridor to the North Acton and East Acton Village Districts (NAV and EAV), and within these village districts.

- Office and business zones comprise 6.9% of the land in Acton and are located along some of the key transportation corridors in the town, including Routes 2A (Great Road) and 111 (Massachusetts Avenue).
- There are three office parks, one located in the northwest corner of town and two along Massachusetts Avenue (Route 2 and 111).
- The main business zones are located along Great Road, at Kelley's Corner (KC), and the Powder Mill district (PM), with other business located in West Acton and the other villages.
- Industrial districts comprise 6% of the town's area and are located in North Acton, along Post Office Square and Hayward Road near Acton Center, the southern end of Main Street, and in the Powder Mill area in the southeast corner of Acton.

- The Technology District (TD) is located in the southeast corner of town off Independence Road and Knox Trail.
- The Agriculture-Recreation-Conservation District (ARC) (14.1% of the town's total area) applies exclusively to land owned by the State, the town, and the Acton Water District. It excludes all residential, office, commercial, and industrial uses. Agriculture, conservation, recreation, municipal, educational and religious uses are allowed by right.
- There are four overlay districts:
  - Affordable Housing – encourages the development of affordable housing in new development.
  - Flood Plain – regulates development in flood-prone areas.
  - Groundwater protection – regulates the development in the town's water supply protection areas.
  - Open Space Development – encourages the preservation of common land; significant natural, historical and archeological resources; scenic vistas; rural character; village clusters; water supply resources; and better overall all site planning.



- PCRC is the preferred method of land development and may be applied to any of the single-family districts in Acton.
- Full buildout of all developable land would result in an increase from Acton’s current 8,350 housing units to an order-of-magnitude total of 10,300 units, depending on the assumptions used in the analysis. A key point is that residential buildout is unlikely to be reached in the next 30 years.

### Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Land Use and Zoning

- Agriculture and some other relatively undeveloped land is challenged by continuing development.
- The use of Open Space Development and Planned Conservation Residential Community provisions in the last 20 years has provided a considerable amount of common land that is an opportunity for maintaining much of the Town’s character.
- Concentrations of automobile-oriented businesses, especially along Great Road, result in congestion.
- The mixture of residences, businesses and industries provides some residents with an opportunity to live and work in the same community.
- Several relatively innovative zoning provisions encourage open space and a mixture of uses in some areas of town.
- There is very little space in several districts available for new development.

- Pressure for redevelopment will increase as areas for new development are filled.
- Kelley’s Corner and some of the villages, especially West, South, and East Acton are opportunities to concentrate future development and leave more land open at the periphery of town.

**In conclusion**, zoning and future changes in zoning, along with the provision of services, can guide future land use. What future land use will be depends on the desires of Acton’s residents and their determination to make and implement choices about the town’s future.

	1971		1999	
	Acres	Percent	Acres	Percent
<b>Agriculture</b>	830.3	6.4	582.3	4.5
<b>Undeveloped</b>	7,724.4	59.6	6,329.7	48.8
<b>Developed</b>	4,411.5	34.0	6,054.2	46.7
<b>Total</b>	12,990	100	12,990	100

Table 8.1: Major Land Use Categories, 1971 to 1999



## Zoning

Figure 8.1 Acton Existing Land Use



**EXISTING  
CONDITION**

**9**

Sustainability

# Sustainability

Traditional comprehensive community plans are comprehensive in the sense that they address all important aspects of a town, from housing and economic development to transportation and public facilities. But it has become clear that the world is rapidly changing and that climate, energy and resource use are interrelated topics that have enormous implications for our children and grandchildren but have not traditionally been part of a comprehensive community plan. As discussed below, water quality is addressed in traditional plans, but because it has characteristics similar to climate and energy, it is also a subject of this element.

Acton has made a serious commitment to sustainability in its membership in ICLEI and its certification under the Massachusetts Green Communities Act. The Town has completed a benchmark survey of its energy use in schools and other public buildings and is working to improve the energy efficiency of these buildings and to encourage behavior that reduces energy use.

## Summary of Key Points

### Water Quality and Quantity

- Preserving water quality and quantity includes measures to ensure that well-fields are protected from development that would lead to contamination or depletion; ensuring that on-site wastewater disposal (which is used by approximately 90 percent of properties in Acton) is properly managed and regulated; and managing storm water to maintain the quality supply of both surface water and groundwater. All of these functions are being performed by the Town and the Acton Water District. More than 2,000 acres are considered permanently protected (Conservation Commission – 1,642 acres, Water District – 395 acres).

### Agricultural Land

- Farmland, which was once the predominant land use in Acton (including most areas that are now forested), has become scarce with the replacement of farms with houses and business areas.
- Local agriculture has importance to human ecology as well as serving as habitat. Active farms illustrate our connection to the land and recall Acton’s history as a farming community.

## Acton Voices\*

*“Publicize sustainability issues to promote greater public awareness of the problem and potential solutions.”*

*“Eliminate idling vehicles.”*

*“Turn the transfer station into a renewable energy power plant (also use yard waste).”*

*“Re-think how Town staff works and commutes.”*

*“Involve the ethnic communities; many come from cultures that have a history of sustainability.”*

*“Use the transfer station as a model for sustainable development, including exhibiting trash as art.”*

*“Organize web based car pooling.”*

*“Explore the use of renewable energy sources.”*

*“Look to other countries for models.”*

*“If there were more options for public transportation and easier and safer biking and walking, that would help a lot.”*

*Almost two-thirds (74.4%) of respondents to a mail survey replied: “Yes” to the question: “Should Acton actively reduce greenhouse gases?”*

*Over two-thirds (79.4%) of respondents to a mail survey replied: “Yes” when asked: “Are you willing to support taking action as long as it doesn’t cost too much?”*

*Slightly over half (55%) of the business owners responding to the mail survey responded favorably to the idea of using “green construction techniques.”*

*\* public input from Phase I of the planning process*

- Local farming also serves the sustainability goal by connecting us to the source of our food, which in modern American society has become a matter of long-distance transport.
- Many communities have encouraged local farming through community-supported agriculture (CSA).
- Community gardens are another way of connecting people to the land, furnishing fresh produce to families, providing a healthy and creative use of leisure time that can involve people of all ages, and educating children regarding where our food comes from. Acton has community gardens in North Acton and at Morrison Farm.

**Biodiversity**



- Acton contains major wildlife resources including five “hotspots” for biodiversity identified in the state’s BioMap 2 Project.
- Protection of biodiversity within Acton is primarily a matter of protecting land from development and ensuring that land which is developed is developed in ways that preserve natural habitat.

**Reducing Waste and the Accumulation of Toxins in our Environment**

- The number of households using the Transfer Station is approximately 4,000, (roughly half of all households). The other half of Acton’s households are served by private solid waste disposal firms. In calendar year 2008, Acton reported a recycling rate of 22 percent of its solid waste. This is similar to Littleton but substantially less than the other adjoining towns, five of which exceed 40 percent.

**Conserving Energy and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

- Acton’s contribution of carbon dioxide from energy use is clearly a small part of the worldwide problem of global warming and climate change. However, mitigating the problem by reducing carbon emissions requires that all



energy users be part of the solution. Acton is already engaged. The Town has taken the step of becoming a member of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. In addition, Acton has been awarded Green Community status under the Massachusetts Green Communities Act. These sustainability commitments are the foundation of an ongoing program to carry out the Green Community commitments and the ICLEI milestones.

- As a result of its Green Community status, Acton was able to receive a \$150,000 grant for capital improvements and education programs to reduce municipal building energy use.
- Electricity use per square foot varies widely among Acton’s public buildings.

- Acton’s public buildings also vary considerably in natural gas use per square foot.
- Acton recently converted all of its street lights to energy conserving metal halide luminaires.
- Since 2006 residential electric use has declined by 10.6 percent, which may reflect consumer awareness of the need to conserve and particularly the replacement of incandescent lighting with compact fluorescent lamps.
- However, even with the recent reduction, households in Acton had an average electricity use of approximately 8300 kWh. According to NStar, the average residential customer uses 6,000 kWh per year, indicating that Acton households use substantially more than the average, possibly owing in part to the 10-11%



of households that use electricity for home heating.

- Non-residential use of natural gas for heating (which includes public buildings as well as private business and industry) is of roughly the same magnitude as for all residential customers.
- Although the sources of data differ, the estimated average Acton household uses approximately 830 to 894 therms of natural gas each year. NStar’s average residential gas heating customer uses 850 therms per year.
- Approximately 27 to 29 percent of Acton households use oil heat.
- The largest use of energy by residents of Acton is for transportation, accounting for an estimated 43 percent of the Town’s carbon footprint and 59 percent of the residential portion of the carbon footprint. 80.8 percent of Acton residents commuted to work in 2000 by driving alone; another 7.4 percent used car pools, and 4.5 percent used public transportation; the remaining 7.7 percent walked, biked, or worked at home.
- Electricity and home heating fuel each account for approximately 20 percent of the residential portion of the carbon footprint. Acton house-

holds had the third lowest vehicle miles traveled among the nine adjoining towns, averaging 76.0 miles per day for all trip purposes. Nonetheless, driving is the single largest component of Acton’s total carbon footprint.

- Trips for shopping, entertainment, socializing, medical appointments, and other purposes outweigh commuting trips by more than four to one. This is significant because even those residents who use modes other than driving alone to commute are likely to drive to most other destinations. Energy saving modes such as public transportation and shuttle bus, walking, and bicycling are highly dependent on favorable land use patterns that provide enough density to make public transportation feasible and destinations close enough together to make walking and bicycling reasonable alternatives.

### Opportunities and Challenges Posed by Existing Conditions

- Preserving water quality involves the opportunities and challenges described in Chapter 7, Facilities and Services, including measures to implement the Comprehensive Water Resources management Plan.
- Acton’s public open space including conservation land and Morrison Farm provide opportunities to preserve biodiversity and to promote local agriculture.
- There may be opportunities to provide pick-up points for Community Supported Agriculture in locations like the farmer’s market in West Acton village.
- Water supply for irrigation may be a challenge in expanding community gardening.
- Since farmland is generally well-drained and easily developable, development pressure on private agricultural land is a challenge to sustaining its use. Community Supported Agriculture is a potential opportunity for promoting local agriculture.
- The fact that Acton does not have public curbside trash pickup is a challenge to

increasing the rate of recycling of solid waste; however, there is an opportunity to facilitate recycling at the TCRP by exploring single stream recycling, and some aspects of keeping material goods out of the waste stream can be served at the TSRC, for example setting up swaps of usable goods from one household to another.

- Providing financial incentives such as free disposal of recyclables while charging on a per-bag basis for non-recyclables would be an opportunity to improve the recycling rate.
- Acton’s baseline/benchmark data can be the basis of ongoing efforts to encourage progress in saving energy, both in public buildings and in Acton’s households and businesses.
- Acton households’ use of substantially more electricity than average NStar customers will be a challenge to reducing energy use.
- Energy prices worldwide are expected to trend upward over the next decade. This is an opportunity to encourage energy conservation by households and businesses. Currently low interest rates increase this opportunity by shortening the payback period on investments such as household energy improvements. This

is therefore an opportune time for Town programs to encourage home and business energy improvements.

- Acton’s low density land use pattern makes encouraging less driving a challenge; however, there are opportunities to strengthen (and emulate) existing villages which are more amenable to reducing vehicle miles traveled.

**In conclusion**, Acton is on the path to environmental sustainability, but continued effort is needed to reach the goal. In the area of reducing energy use (and therefore carbon emissions) there is much more to do, but the Town has made a strong start with its Green Community Status and commitment to the ICLEI milestones.







PROCESS

Today. Tomorrow. Together.

# PROCESS

The plan was developed in two phases:

## Phase I

was comprised of extensive and intensive outreach to the Acton community accomplished by providing multiple opportunities for input from residents and the business community. This unprecedented extensive public input (which included visioning sessions, focus groups and town-wide mail surveys) 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

included completing an inventory of the Town’s existing resources as well as identifying future trends and issues. The unprecedented degree of public participation begun in Phase I, was continued in Phase II in a variety of ways including organizing a number of innovative public workshops and providing continuous opportunity for update and response through the internet on the Acton2020 webiste, a blog and Facebook page (see pages that follow).

An Implementation Plan was developed which identifies the strategies and action steps recommended to attain the vision and goals as articulated in the first phase and refined in Phase II.

Phase III is the next phase where town officials, residents, business owners and developers use this document to meet the vision, goals and objectives articulated by the Acton2020 Committee.



# Definition of Phases I and II

## Phase I: Visioning for the Future of Acton

Articulating a shared vision is the first step in developing a Comprehensive Community Plan. The Vision describes the kind of community participants would like to strive towards. In early 2008, nearly two-thousand Acton residents participated in a six-month long process to develop an “Emerging Vision” and set of Goals for the Town’s future.

A concerted effort was made to reach out to a broad range of Acton residents and to include diverse points of view in the community discussion. People gave their opinions in written form, in verbal form, as part of small groups where they decided on their group’s priorities as well as individuals in surveys or in targeted outreach meetings. These ideas were carefully documented. See sidebar for an overview of the process and a summary of the public’s input.

## Community Conversation: Phase I

In early 2008, nearly two-thousand Acton residents participated in a six-month long process to develop an Emerging Vision and Goals for the Town’s future.

This degree of public outreach and participation is unprecedented in Acton. The following is a partial list of the opportunities that were provided to the public to participate in the community conversation:

- 12 Outreach Committee meetings
- 7 Targeted focus groups
- 5 Presentations to varied organizations
- 3 Town-wide Visioning Sessions
- 3 Focus groups with Town Boards, Committees and Commissions
- 2 Locations with a Comment Board (for public comment)

- 1 Roundtable Discussion with Town Department Heads
- 1 Town-wide mail and web survey to all Acton residents (15.6% response rate)
- 1 Town-wide mail and web survey to all Acton businesses (5.4% response rate)
- 1 Phone survey of a random sample of 366 Acton residents
- 1 Meeting with the Student Council at the High School
- 1 web site for dissemination of information and taking survey
- Many opportunities for all Acton students to participate by conducting surveys, drawing, writing, creating movies and songs regarding their vision for the future of Acton



## Phase II: Creating a Comprehensive Community Plan

Phase II involved the following major activities:

- Developing an **Inventory of Existing Conditions** 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.)
- Continuing the **Community Conversation** regarding the Comprehensive Community Plan begun in Phase I by organizing a number of public forums inviting both the public at large, the business community, as well as specifically targeting relevant Town Boards and Committees.
- Developing an **Implementation Plan** is a prioritized and phased proposal for moving forward to fulfill the vision and goals. It outlines the recommended strategies and action steps necessary to do so and identifies the lead responsible party (“owner”) and potential partners charged with overseeing the implementation of each strategy. The Plan also provides guidance for the prioritization and sequencing of steps.

## Community Conversation: Phase II

Phase II continued the unprecedented degree of public participation in Acton and included the following venues:

- **50 Acton 2020 Committee Meetings**
- **7 public workshops, including**
  - one workshop for participants to review results of inventory and revise planning goals and objectives
  - three thematic workshops (housing, open space and transportation) where Committee members represented the seven planning goals and through role play “performed” these by reacting to a scenario; this was followed by discussion with “experts” and the public at large
  - one workshop to review three alternatives for guiding future growth in Acton
  - one workshop to review implementation plan where participants were asked to comment on major action steps and “spend” Acton dollars in an exercise intended to identify participants spending priorities.
- 10 roundtable discussions with Town Boards, Committees and Commissions
- 1 movie to generate excitement and inspire

residents to get involved in the process <sup>1</sup>

- 1 focus group with business owners in Kelley’s Corner
- Several articles in the Acton Patch and Beacon announcing and describing related events
- Many opportunities for all Acton residents to participate continually by logging on to the internet and communicating to the Committee and others by:
  - Website <http://acton2020.info/>: continuous updates on the planning process as well as an opportunity for residents to comment on the Plan.
  - Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/acton2020>): continuous updates on the process and an opportunity for public comment.
  - Blog: <http://acton2020.info/blog/2011/02/21/two-openings-on-acton-2020-committee/>: a direct extension of the community conversation where issues are posted for public comment and discussion.

<sup>1</sup> The Acton 2020 Committee collaborated with local writer, Leigh Davis Honn and local director, Christo Tsiaras, to film the funny and informative film about getting Acton residents excited about planning for the future of the town. See movie, “It’s A Wonderful Acton”: [http://acton.patch.com/articles/its-a-wonderful-acton#youtube\\_video-6516131](http://acton.patch.com/articles/its-a-wonderful-acton#youtube_video-6516131)

- **Research of Precedents.** A number of best practice precedents (“how is it done elsewhere?”) were researched including urban planning and design ideas regarding village

development, mixed use, pedestrian-orientation, etc. as well as regulatory precedents for Transfer of Development Rights.

# Acton Voices - Phase I

## Community Conversation: Phase I Residents and Business Owners – Top Responses

### Acton Voices

The following is a summary of the on-going conversation with the Acton community which began in 2008 and that will continue on-line on the Acton 2020 website even after the publication of this Plan. The summary below identifies the areas where residents seem to agree most about what they wish to preserve, what they would like to change, what they hope to improve, how they would describe a desired future, and the steps they would support as being the most effective ways of getting there.<sup>1</sup>The “Emerging Vision” and Goals form the basis upon which the implementation plan that outlines steps of how to get to the desired future as articulated by the participants was developed.

<sup>1</sup> Please see Volume II (Phase I) and Volume II (Phase II) for a more detailed documentation of public input into the Comprehensive Community Plan.

Public Forum	Favorite Things about Acton	Least Favorite Things About Acton	If You Could Do One Thing...?
<b>Visioning Workshops</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rural character, natural features</li> <li>Schools</li> <li>Village centers</li> <li>Sense of community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Lack of walkability</li> <li>No real town center</li> <li>Affordability</li> <li>Lack of adequate site plan, subdivision &amp; design reviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make pedestrian &amp; bike-friendly</li> <li>Create centers for congregating</li> <li>Plan for sustainable development</li> <li>Expand the commercial tax base</li> </ul>
<b>Resident Mail Survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools</li> <li>Diversity of activities &amp; uses</li> <li>Conservation land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High cost of living</li> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Lack of continuous pedestrian/bike paths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open space</li> <li>Historic homes protected &amp; preserved</li> <li>Affordable housing</li> </ul>
<b>Business Mail Survey</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools</li> <li>Town character</li> <li>Open character</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Taxes</li> <li>Parking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[More] development</li> <li>[More] business</li> <li>[More] walkable</li> </ul>
<b>Seniors (Mini-Visioning Workshop)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Senior Center</li> <li>NARA Park</li> <li>Nursing service</li> <li>Rural character</li> <li>Actonians</li> <li>Hospital</li> <li>Library</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too much housing development</li> <li>Traffic</li> <li>Taxes</li> <li>No one town center</li> <li>Not enough public transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lower taxes</li> <li>Hold Town Meeting &amp; Election Day on Saturday</li> <li>More public transport</li> <li>Provide handicap parking West Acton</li> </ul>

## Community Conversation: Phase I Residents and Business Owners – Top Responses cont.

<p><b>Focus Groups (Targeted Outreach)<sup>8</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Parks, open space</li> <li>• Proximity to jobs</li> <li>• Friendly, welcoming</li> <li>• Small town feel</li> <li>• Safe</li> <li>• Family-orientation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of walkable center</li> <li>• Poorly maintained recreation facilities</li> <li>• Lack of sidewalks &amp; public transport</li> <li>• Traffic issues</li> <li>• No trash collection</li> <li>• Poor water quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do more to plan for sustainability</li> <li>• Provide full day K for all</li> <li>• Space for cultural celebration</li> <li>• Public transportation for seniors &amp; teens</li> <li>• Preserve excellent schools</li> <li>• Improve parking at train</li> </ul>
<p><b>Teen Themes (Acton Students)<sup>9</sup></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Arboretum</li> <li>• Sense of community</li> <li>• Trees, horses</li> <li>• History</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not enough to do</li> <li>• Need to plan for sustainable future</li> <li>• Need for walking</li> <li>• Too much traffic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Movie theater</li> <li>• Sidewalks</li> <li>• Bike paths</li> <li>• Public transportation</li> <li>• Club for older kids</li> </ul>

# Acton Voices - Phase II

## Community Conversation Continued: Phase II

In Phase II, the community conversation was continued by holding six public workshops, at least ten meetings with Town Boards and Committees, and countless meetings with the Acton2020 Committee. Additionally a variety of on-line opportunities provided continual access to the process; a blog, facebook page, and website with opportunities to comment on all phases of the plan and throughout the process. The following are some highlights of this public input.

### Public Workshop #1:

Participants confirmed and refined the “emerging vision” statement and goals and objectives that had been developed in Phase I. At this workshop participants were also presented with a preliminary list of key issues, opportunities and challenges and they offered their thoughts on how to address these. Please see box for a summary of participant input.

### “Burning Issues” Public Workshops (3):

Three public workshops were conducted on what the Acton 2020 Committee identified as being “burning issues: these were housing, transporta-

tion, and economic development. Participants included invited “experts” on each subject as well as the public at large.

### “Choose Your Own Acton” Public Workshop:

Participants were asked to select from three development alternatives that were each designed to meet the planning goals in different ways and in different degrees.

### “How Do We Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on (“Implementation Plan”) Public Workshop:

Please see box for a listing of the strategies that participants felt were most important.

### “Fall Implementation Plan Meetings”, Fall 2011:

A series of meetings were held with Town Boards and Committees to carefully review the implementation plan and solicit input into the strategies. It was also an important opportunity to invite “owners” to take the lead responsibility for specific strategies and to identify any relevant potential partners.

### On-going Opportunity for Plan Updates and Public Input:

Use of the internet both to disseminate informa-

tion 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).

### List of Phase II Outreach Venues

- Revisit, Refine Vision and Goals: October 20, 2010
- Burning Issues
  - Economic Development: March 3, 2011
  - Transportation: March 9, 2011
  - Housing: March 12, 2011
- “Choose Your Own Acton”: Alternatives: June 23, 2011
- Fall Meetings: Input from Committees, Boards, etc.
  - Kelley’s Corner: September 14, 2011
  - Sustainability, Financial Well-being: Sept. 21, 2011
  - Affordable Housing, Inclusion/Diversity: Sept. 28, 2011
  - Connections, Community Gathering: Oct. 12, 2011
  - Town Character, Town-owned Assets: Oct. 26, 2011
- “How Do we Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on: Proposed Implementation Plan/Prioritization: November 9, 2011
- Presentation of Proposed Plan (March >>>>>)
- Blog
- Facebook Page
- Website

# Public Workshops (Phase II)

## Public Workshop #1: Review, Refine and Revise Goals and Objectives October 20, 2010

Representative workshop participant quotes responding to Emerging Vision and Goals and Objectives developed in Phase I.

- *“Sustainability goals and objectives should be more action-oriented”*
- *“There should be more emphasis on the preservation of natural resources”*
- *“Ensure that historic preservation encompasses landscapes as well as buildings”*
- *“Reiterated strong desire for increased opportunities for community gathering, both indoor and outdoor, formal and informal; continued conversation about community/senior center”*
- *“Need for regional approaches to address shared issues”*
- *“Concentrate efforts on village centers”*
- *“Emphasis on improving non-car transportation (e.g. sidewalks, bike paths, public transportation)”*
- *“Improve town entrances”*
- *“Want a town center”*
- *“Provide better social connections for newcomers”*
- *“Need better communication of existing resources and events”*
- *“What are we doing for our aging population? Elderly moving out of town because cannot afford to live here”*
- *“Are you able to live in Acton no matter what your race, age, ability, economics?”*
- *“Connections are easier with people who have children”*



## Summary of Key Themes from Burning Issues Workshops

### Housing

There seemed to be general consensus regarding a desire to focus on meeting Acton’s specific housing needs rather than 40B requirements (especially not in one large development) and that small, scattered and integrated sites of “affordable” housing is more in keeping with the town’s character and attitudes. Many thought that infill in and around village centers was a desirable and appropriate location for smaller, more affordable housing units.

### Transportation

There was a strong interest expressed in reducing auto travel by providing alternatives including walking facilities (significant interest was expressed in extending the sidewalks system), bike lanes/paths, town shuttle, and by reducing driving to the schools.

### Economic Development

There was relative consensus regarding the fact that what seemed both more desirable as well as most feasible in terms of future development was small-scale – mostly in the form of restaurants and shops – in-fill development in the village centers and Kelley’s Corner. The discussion also focused on the importance of understanding how to attract and retain desirable businesses (e.g. providing incentives, investing in infrastructure, streamlining permitting etc.). Participants also emphasized the importance of supporting small and home-based businesses.

### Choose Your Own Acton” Public Workshop

There was a high degree of consensus regarding which was considered to be the “preferred alternative” and it was a composite combining features of the alternatives. “Alternative 3,” the alternative which proposed concentrating growth in village centers, was preferred for the following features:

- Community gathering, qualities including vibrant people-oriented villages with places to go and opportunities to gather and mingle, including opportunities for more theater and music
- Energy savings due to walkability
- Protection of open space in outer areas
- Efficient use of infrastructure

Participants seemed to also want to focus on:

- Open space preservation/acquisition
- Preservation of historic character through historic preservation efforts and strong design review
- Employment-oriented development
- Limiting growth and protecting rural characteristics
- Sidewalks/bikeways/public transport (Minuteman van), traffic calming/mitigation



### “How Do We Get There? Strategies for Act(i)on Public Workshop

The top priority strategies are listed in the participants priority order as follows:

- Create a building that can accommodate the Senior Center & the larger community
- Support the implementation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- Continue to support & achieve the high educational standards of Acton’s schools.
- Preserve historically significant buildings, landscapes & other historic features.
- Protect the quality & quantity of the water
- Increase opportunities for safe biking.
- Provide & encourage public transportation.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive site and design review process
- Build more sidewalks

Also high priority were:

- Increase the Town’s fiscal capacity to implement all goals by proactively recruiting new businesses and retaining existing ones throughout the Town.
- Increase recycling and reuse.
- Reduce energy use in existing buildings.
- Review and revise the Town’s bylaws and planning process to support the 2020 Plan goals.

