



Appendix
Targeted Outreach Meetings



TARGETED COMMUNITY OUTREACH:
ACTON LATIN FAMILY NETWORK
Sunday, May 18, 2008
Clubhouse Village of Nagog Woods

Six members of the Latin Family Network participated in a focus group discussion as part of the Comprehensive Community Plan outreach process. Participants were attending an annual event organized by the Family Network. They were the only Acton residents at the event and sat together in a group to respond to the visioning questions. The discussion took place in Spanish and lasted approximately one and a half hours. Both men and women participated; all had small children. Those present estimated that there are approximately thirty Latino families living in Acton; they are mostly from the following countries: Argentina, Columbia, Mexico, Venezuela, Peru and Guatemala.

Participants pointed to the fact that they represented a particular socio-economic group and that the less affluent was not represented in the sample. They emphasized that those not present have very different needs and perceptions. They tried to make some comments on their behalf (e.g. the need for providing affordable housing and the need for identifying families in need of support).

Participants were asked the following questions. Shaded responses represent the group's priorities (they were asked to vote on the complete list of responses to the questions).

Why do you live in Acton/did you move to Acton? (Porque viven en Acton/fueron a Acton?)

-
- It is close to work
 - Schools (3)
 - More affordable housing than other comparable communities
 - Affordable for families

What do you like about Acton? (Que aspectos les gustan sobre de Acton?)

-
- Parks, open space, green
 - Safety
 - Schools
 - Has most things that I need
 - Centrally located
 - No significant traffic jams
 - Close enough to the city, has what we need, but without the major problems



***What don't you like about Acton and would like to see change in the future?
(Que aspectos no les gustan y quieren ustedes cambiar?)***

- Lack of center to walk around in, gather in, shop, eat, etc.
 - Need to beautify town (“only West Acton has had attention paid to it, what about the rest of the town?” Would like more vital, attractive village centers.
- Lack of public transportation within town, not even taxi service (what would one do in an emergency?)
- High taxes
- Douglas school building outdated
- Poorly maintained recreation facilities (need bathrooms, parking, need to update facilities)

If you could do one thing to improve Acton, what would it be? (Si pueden cambiar solamente un aspecto de Acton, cual estara?)

- Improve water quality – once a month the water is brown (“why are there no wells?”)
- Extend sewer to all homes
- Increase environmental measures related to sustainable development
 - Need for municipal trash pick up
 - Need for free recycling/transfer station
- Provide full-day kindergarten for all kindergartners
- Provide foreign language instruction starting at Kindergarten

What issues would you say are most important to the Latino community? (Que piensan ustedes son las temas mas importante en la comunidad de los Latinos en Acton?)

- Need for access to the schools for ethnic celebrations, language instruction, etc.
- Need for affordable housing
- Need to help identify families in need and connect them with existing resources. Often there are families who are in crisis but who are disconnected, they have no access to resources that could provide support, and often do not know where and how to get help, have language barriers and do not reach out.
 - The Latino Family Network would like to work with the schools and Town Hall to ***identify families who are potentially in need*** of support.



They have access to volunteers who could help these families once they are stabilized. They feel that often the issues are multi-faceted and are currently dealt with in a fragmented manner whereas a more holistic approach (e.g. tending to issues of education, employment, healthcare, etc.) is proven to be more successful. All participants felt the schools could play a larger role in helping to identify these families and connect them to resources.

- In addition they identified the need for a **welcoming committee for immigrant families**. They need information in their language and help with networking and accessing information and resources.

***What are some obstacles to your and other Latino families' participation in town activities and what could the town do to help you be more involved?
(Que pueden hacer los officios de Acton para ayudarse o apoyarse en participar en los actividades de la municipalidad?)***

The main reason participants cited for their lack of participation in town affairs was a lack of time as well as the fact that many of the **meetings take place during evening hours** which are difficult for families with young children. They also felt that for others the two main obstacles to participation were:

- **Language barriers** (they felt that even for those who speak English well if materials were translated into Spanish it would make people feel more welcome)
- Most immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries are not used to this kind of governance, they are **not familiar with the volunteer process** and do not really know what to do and how to enter the system.



**TARGETED OUTREACH MEETING:
Acton Indian Community**

On Sunday, May 4, 2008, Lauren Rosenzweig, Acton Selectwoman and Daphne Politis from Planner's Collaborative consulting team met with representatives of the Acton Indian Community. They described the process and opportunities for involvement in town government in general and in the community planning process more specifically. The presentation was followed by a visioning session conducted with the approximately 13 persons in attendance (one had to leave early). Participants were regular members of the Irep, an organization representing the Indian Community of Acton, estimated to be comprised of approximately 450 families. Those present have resided in Acton from 5 to 16 years, with most having moved to the Town approximately five years ago. Discussion was friendly and lively. There was a high degree of consensus regarding what participants wished to preserve in the future, how it could be improved, and how they felt the Town could respond to their needs as an ethnic community.



Participants were asked the following questions:

- *Why did you move to Acton?*
- *What are your favorite things about Acton (and hope to preserve)?*
- *What are your least favorite things about Acton (and wish you could change)?*
- *Are there any issues affecting the Indian community specifically that you would like to bring up?*
- *Can you think of ways the Town can make it easier for you to be involved in Town affairs?*



Why did you move to Acton?

- Schools (12)
 - Reputation of school system
 - Cut off date for Kindergarten Sept. 1
 - Availability of pre-school childcare options
- Location and proximity to jobs (6)
- Safety
- Ethnic diversity (5)
- Housing affordability – more value for the money (2)
- Commuter rail (5)
- Warmth and welcome of Actonians
- Picturesque town
- Romance
- Small town
- No malls

What are your favorite things about Acton (and hope to preserve)?

- Small town feel
- No big malls
- Schools – keep as they are
- Hold real estate value because of schools
- Ability to choose schools (K-6)
- Green spaces
- History – homes and the stories behind them
- Safety
- Beautiful landscape
- Preserve land – keep balance of housing – big and small
- Small town, but close to everything
- Get to see your friends in the grocery store
- Values – sense of brotherhood, children growing up together
- Feelings of safety
- Can use resources, accessible/available , e.g. tennis courts
- Plentiful resources
- Don't have to lock your door, at least not until now



- Very friendly
- Try to keep green, countryside
- Preserve town center – keep its charm. History
- West Acton Center – keep it small – it has special feeling
- Have more festivals in Town Centers
- Chance social encounters
- Library – different ages go there, can share ideas
- Like-minded young professionals attracted to move to Acton
- Acton has “prestige”, “cache” – “Oh, you live in Acton?”
 - Rt. 2 fields – used to be outskirts, now known
- Would stay in Acton even if won the lottery
- Accepting community – felt welcome even when was the only Indian child in the class
- Availability of a variety of stores and restaurants for a small town (e.g. Italian, French, etc.). Now also Indian Market & restaurant
- NARA Park – green space from old Quarry
- Safety – people walk. Kids can walk to things safely, from schools, to McDonald’s
- Other Indian kids in classrooms, make children feel comfortable
- People are accepting, welcoming, attend Indian dance performance, etc.
- Friendly, no racial issues – e.g. can wear turbans comfortably; people are interested to learn about new cultures
- Diversity
- Location
- Train – keep, but improve, make cheaper
- Discovery Museum



What are your least favorite things about Acton (and wish you could change)?

- Lack of sidewalks – need more on Rt. 27
- Great Road – need more traffic lights, especially Brookside Shops/Staples shopping center
- Train – need lower cost, more frequent trains
- People drive too fast on residential streets – enforce speed limits
- People parking on street and blocking driveways and traffic, e.g. Windsor Road.
- More affordable shops
- Public transportation for children and grandparents (e.g. Lexpress and/or afterschool buses)
- Don't have good Town Center – want place defined, place to walk around. Tree-lined, village center, connected walking paths to and from Town Center and other places in town, e.g. rail trail
- More celebrations and town events
 - Schools do this, but not Town Hall
 - Need community center, a place to host a party, Diwali celebration
- Need bike path – roads too dangerous
- Try to expand tax base and attract high tech/bigger business to locate in Acton, provide incentives to locate here
- After a certain point seniors have to leave because taxes too high – can we help them age in place, stay in their home, at least in Acton?
- Need more town-sponsored after school programs/extended day for working parents
- Traffic patterns – left turns are difficult
- Speed limits should be lower and/or enforced better
- Would like to take a bus to things, to commuter station
 - Would like an hourly bus that goes around town
 - A bus can be an asset to the town
- Concord Rotary – backs up, need 40 minutes to get through, change pattern, need to fix, worst spot/reflects on Acton, can we fix?
- Train Station – not attractive, needs improvement, can't park after 7:18 Express



Are there any issues particular to the Indian community that you would like to bring up?

- Diwali – would like to have children have day off from school to help with cooking and decoration preparations. Even a half day would be good. Also ask that teachers be aware and not schedule important tests, etc. Include Diwali in the discussions of the “Festival of Lights.”
- Need for space for cultural activities
 - Currently have to rent from the Maynard Elks
 - Need a function hall for parties, celebrations for up to 500 people
 - Need space for the arts (dance, drums, etc.) – currently rent space, but is expensive
 - What about the use of school space?
 - Ideal would be a large hall with adjacent small spaces – would like to use on Saturday mornings and some evenings for a nominal fee/custodian
 - Would like the use of a gym for dance classes
 - Currently there is no space to rent./not affordable or not available
- Need more for teens to do
 - Nothing for teens to be able to walk to/have to drive them everywhere
 - Need movie theater
 - Game arcades
 - Acceptable/appropriate activities – recreation/entertainment
- A more vibrant town center
- Public transportation – many Indian families have seniors living with them.

Participants were asked to vote for their top two priorities from the above responses. The following documents the group’s priorities:

Space for celebration and cultural activities --- 12 votes
Public transportation for seniors and teens – 12 votes
More vibrant Town Center – 3 votes
Time off from school for Divali --- 2 votes
More for teens – 2 votes

Participants also mentioned that Acton could be a regional center for the area Indian community. They estimated that between Westford, Acton and Boxborough there are approximately 600 Indian families.



Can you think of ways the Town can make it easier for you to be involved in Town affairs?

- Indians come from a place that is much less wasteful, is conscious of recycling and could share these values and contribute to the Acton community (schools, seniors).
 - Movable art – demonstrating renewable energy sources
 - Transfer station – use as a model for sustainable development, including exhibiting trash as art
 - Help to develop a Town Strategy for sustainable development
 - Solar energy

- Town website – should be maximized, kept more up to date, more informative, should be more dependable, more of a community bulletin board
- Need for a community bulletin board
- A more involved library /community bulletin board there
- Provide contact people – who to contact for different communities including Chinese, Indian, Brazilian, etc.



Town of Acton
Comprehensive Community
Plan Outreach
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720
Telephone (978) 264-9636
Fax (978) 264-9630
outreach@acton-ma.gov
www.ActonOutreach.com

Date: 2 April 2008

TARGETED COMMUNITY OUTREACH: ROTARY CLUB

Fifteen Rotary Club members attended the weekly Rotary Luncheon (held at the Scupperjacks Restaurant in Acton) and participated in a mini-visioning session as part of the outreach process of the Comprehensive Community Plan.



Participants were asked to briefly introduce themselves. Approximately half of the members present live or have lived in Acton and operate a business here. The other half conduct their business in Acton, but live out of town. Occupations included: CPA, consulting product safety engineer, attorney, Acton Police Chief, real estate/vending business, marketing services, paralegal, chemical sales, restaurateur, real estate, hotel sales manager, electrical engineer manager, retired police officer/author, and an owner of a clothing store.

The following is a summary of participants' responses to a number of questions.

***Why did you decide to conduct your business in Acton? How was it easy?
How was it hard?***

- Family connections
- Moved to town for the school system
- Five minute commute from my home
- Open spaces are being cultivated
- Senior services are being developed
- It is more lucrative to do business in MA than in NH (where he was before)
- A good quality of life



What could town do to make it easier/better for new businesses? What could the town do to support existing businesses?

- The taxes are driving me out
- My house is too big
- The permitting process is too difficult
- Growth control policies of the Town are good, attracting the kind of people that support our businesses
- Licensing (especially Board of Health) – very difficult
- Signage regulations (especially Historic District) – too strict
- Lack of parking is an obstacle to the growth of businesses (as patrons cannot park) – especially in South Acton.
- Traffic safety is a serious obstacle to attracting customers
- Since people move here for the schools, they need to support the overrides as these support the school system which in turn preserve the real estate values.
- The fact that “visual pollution” is controlled is a good thing (e.g. no billboards, neon, etc.) – but it is a balancing act.

The Town is interested in attracting a diversity of businesses, and would very much like to fill current vacancies. These do not do benefit anyone.

What can the Town do to attract new businesses to fill vacancies? How can the Town best market Acton?

No ideas offered.

What do you think would complement the existing business mix, what’s missing that could ultimately attract more people to your businesses as well?

- There seems to be an anti-brand name attitude in town (most seemed to feel this was good, preserving a level, a quality of businesses, some disagreed thinking that the Town was excluding some possibilities as a result).
- It was noted that Home Depot was chased out of town – participant simply observed fact -- not sure whether this is a good thing or a bad thing
- Have to travel forty minutes for large shops (department stores, Linens & Things, Best Buy, Home Depot)



One of the difficulties of being a small business in a town is competing with the area malls. It seems that towns that have been able to compete best with the malls are those that try to make shopping an experience, that make their town into a place, not just a row of shops.

Do you have any ideas about what kind of improvements could be made in order to improve both the aesthetics and the functioning of commercial areas in Acton?

- Figure out what to do with the traffic.
- Where are the sidewalks?
- Review model such as the Gateway area of Salt Lake City with an “outdoor mall” that revitalized that part of the city
- Kelley’s Corner has much potential
- Some merit to the past suggestion of closing off Rt. 111 to cars and making it pedestrians only.
- Meineke Building, built second story without permit—Town should have made him tear it down - - now it is an eyesore
- There needs to be quality control and oversight of the town budget and operations as well as those of the schools to ensure efficiency and effectiveness
- Need for a 10-story parking garage at the train station. People would come to park there to use the train and then find there is more to do in Acton.
- Roche Brothers parking lot re-design is a disaster.

9.. Do you think that having a shuttle bus take people around town would help your businesses?

Most seemed to support this idea

10. Do you have any creative ideas about how these improvements could be funded?

Unfortunately there was no time for this question.



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11 April 2008

SENIOR CENTER

There were approximately forty (40) participants in a mini-visioning session held at the Senior Center. Seniors were asked to respond to a number of questions, some of them were the same questions asked of other groups in town, others were related specifically to being a senior in Acton.

Participants were asked to briefly introduce themselves; the number of years they have lived in Acton ranged from one (1) to sixty-one (61). They were then asked the following questions:

1. What are your favorite things about Acton (and would like to make sure are preserved in the future)?

Senior Center/COA
Train Station
Hospital
NARA park
Acton Public Health Nursing Service
Library
Arboretum
Rural character
Schools
Discovery Museum
Police & Fire
Actonians
Theater 3
Variety of churches
Close to highways
Conservation lands
Acton Women's Club
History



2. What are your least favorite things about Acton (that you would like to see changed)?

40 B - lack of control
Too many apartments (not rural character, strain on schools)
Traffic
High taxes
No one center of town
Not enough public transportation
Insufficient parking at train station
Meineke Muffler building
Telephone poles in the street
Access to the dump (difficult)
Access to malls (need stop lights, e.g. 2A)
Roche Brothers parking lot

3. What has been lost from Acton (things that were here in the past that you wish could return)?

Very rural, small population
Town Fair (real)
Used to go down 27 on her horse
Family restaurant (not pizza)
 Used to be a place called the “Actonian”
 Used to be more gathering places
Farms – more of both the rural “look” as well as working farms
Peace and quiet
Elm Trees in Acton Center and Main Street (came down during the hurricane)
Dairy Whip Ice Cream
Drive-in movie
Christmas Carole singing at Town Hall
Unpolluted brooks and streams
Movie theater
Local newspaper (focused solely on Acton news)



4. Do you feel that Acton adequately meets the needs of its senior residents and what could the Town do better? (health care, fitness/wellness programs, transportation, housing, home delivered meals, emergency care, information regarding available services)

Handicap parking in West Acton (5)

Town Meeting & Election Day (for local, state & national) should be held on Saturday all day (preferably with a nice lunch break) – (10)

- Nine of the participants in this discussion now attend Town Meeting, the rest said they would if it were held during the day.

Reduce taxes for seniors (abatements are not adequate; they are difficult to qualify for) – (36)

Need more public transportation (the senior van is limited in terms of when & where it goes) - (8)

No public transportation to Logan

- Used to be a bus from Greenfield
- Used to be a helicopter to Logan

Fitness programs are oversubscribed

5. As a member of the Acton senior community, what do you consider to be your most important aging concern?

Loss of independence

Aging in place/in your home and to be able to afford the taxes

Tax break for seniors

Cost of prescription drugs

6. If you could do one thing to make Acton a better place to live, what would that be?

Lower taxes

Get rid of eyesores, e.g. Muffler Building

Renovate Exchange Building

More parking at train station

Through zoning control mega-mansions

Get rid of Concord Rotary

Complete system of sidewalks so seniors can walk

Maintain existing sidewalks

Dollars to purchase open space (CPC funds) should be used for this purpose

No need to provide sidewalk from NARA to the post office



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TARGETED COMMUNITY OUTREACH MEETINGS

Meeting With: Sandy Cambell, Executive Director

Representing: United Way

Date: 6 March 2008

NOTES:

Daphne Politis and Lauren Rosenzweig
Location of meeting: Café Ziba, 2:00 p.m.

MEETING NOTES:

Serve Acton/Boxborough indirect service to population; fund social service needs:

- Hunger
- Affordable housing
- Domestic violence
- Elder care
- Children and youth
- Mental health
- Developmental disabilities

Serve approximately 1,500 – 2,000 people served

Do their own fundraising plus regional funding campaign

The number of people served is increasing due to:

- Greater awareness of services
- Expanding new initiatives and outreach to immigrant groups
- Baby boomers are getting older
- More outreach to adolescents

Emerson Hospital did a study of at risk youth behavior (larger geographic area).



Positive Attributes of Working in Acton

A lot of people are interested in working for the betterment of others
Big on volunteerism throughout the Town.

Challenges of Working in Acton

Funding

Denial (affluent community)

Shift to more cause-oriented philanthropy (e.g. school, cancer-research, etc.)

Needs:

- Community Services Coordinator (start out part time)
- Local transportation especially for vulnerable populations
 - Elders
 - Kids after school
 - Immigrant populations (multiple generations, some only have one car, some do not have MA driver's license)
- More counselors in the schools
- More services need for seniors
 - Variety (especially art classes and computer classes)
 - Social interaction
 - Physical fitness
- Address domestic violence prevention
 - Education
 - Teen violence
 - Cultural issues
- More English As A Second Language Classes
 - one-on-one tutoring (organization: English At Large out of Medford)
 - community education has classes
 - need for support – transportation and support to keep at it
- Combat hunger
 - Several programs exist currently
 - Food Pantry, Hot Meals, and Meals on Wheels (some seniors, some ethnic groups)
 - Household Goods Recycling Ministry : take in donations of furniture and appliances and make available to those in need. Have their own facility on Main St. Approximately 30,000 pieces are placed yearly. Individuals need to be referred by a social service agency or clergy.



- Support for people with disabilities
 - Need transportation
 - Concord-based Minuteman ARC provide some
 - FISH – call and volunteers will come
 - Need for job opportunities (CASE provides training, e.g. in supermarket)
 - Need for greater acceptance
 - Support for school-aged population with special needs
 - A high number of autism based special needs



TARGETED OUTREACH MEETING:

Chinese Language School Comprehensive Community Plan Seminar

On Sunday, February 24, Lauren Rosenzweig, Acton Selectwoman and Daphne Politis from Planner's Collaborative consulting team presented at the Acton Chinese Language School Seminar Series. They described the process and opportunities for involvement in town government in general and in the community planning process more specifically. The presentation was followed by a visioning session conducted with the approximately 10-15 persons in attendance (some had to leave early). Participants were regular members of the Chinese Language School; residency in Acton ranged from 1 – approximately 10 years (with one participant residing in Acton for 38 years). Participants were asked to place a colored dot on a map to indicate where they live; the individuals lived in neighborhoods throughout the town. Discussion was lively; there was a general sense of agreement regarding what most considered the attributes of the Town as well as regarding which issues they felt needed to be addressed in the future.



Participants were asked the following questions:

- *Why did you move to Acton?*
- *What are your favorite things about Acton (and hope to preserve)?*
- *What are your least favorite things about Acton (and wish you could change)?*
- *If you could do one thing to improve Acton, what would it be?*
- *Can you think of other ways in which the Chinese community can be involved?*
- *What are some reasons that might limit your involvement*
- *Can you think of ways the Town can make it easier for you to be involved?*



Why did you move to Acton?

- Schools (12)
- Commuter rail (3)
- Reputation
- Friends living here (2)
- Location convenient to work (8)
- Peaceful setting (2)
- The town welcomes multi-culturalism (2)
- Housing is affordable (5)
- Green – trees, conservation land (3)
- Existence of a good-sized Chinese community

What are your favorite things about Acton (and hope to preserve)?

- School system (2)
- Town open to listening
- Balanced development/growth
- Preserved open land/conservation
- Safe community – walking, biking, kid-safe
- Commuter rail (e.g. “super express” from Acton to Porter Square)
- Good library programs (multi-cultural, story time, child-oriented)
- Park programs
- Chinese school, the fact that the town lets us use the facility, creating a regional center
- Family resources (including library, parks, private indoor sports facilities & after school programs)



What are your least favorite things about Acton (and wish you could change)?

- Parking at commuter rail, especially in the winter is a problem, sometimes have to use non-resident parking and even that fills up (some ideas to address the issue included providing a shuttle bus to the station, encouraging people to walk and bike to the station by improving the sidewalk system which is not continuous, in need of repair and not adequately sized).
- Tap water – not drinkable, has a bad taste and a yellow tinge (high mineral content, needs better filtration, some neighborhoods are worse than others)
- No trash collection (choices are take your garbage to the dump or pay for a private service)
- There is no central Town Center (instead there are smaller village centers such as West/East/South Acton) – would like a central place for all the Town to meet (e.g. summer town fair, eat outside, small stores, control traffic)
- Some small businesses are leaving town (need to attract and keep small businesses in Acton, especially family-oriented services)
- Lack of swimming facilities (would be nice to have an indoor pool e.g. Sudbury, more family time in school pool which now rents out too much time to private organizations)
- NARA park should be free for residents
- Tax-overrides are too many – need for better fiscal planning
- Too much housing development - control the development of housing because of its impact on schools
- People leaving after children are done with school... *“What can we do to keep people here after their school-aged children complete high school?”*
- Taxes too high

If you could do one thing to improve Acton, what would it be?

- Preserve excellence in school system
- Control residential growth (because it adversely impacts class size at the schools)
- Balance growth
- Control density
- Improve parking at the commuter rail (short term goal)
- Keep safe (crime-free)
- Provide transportation options to youth and seniors
- Allow all taxpayers (including non-citizens) to vote on town issues
- Compare tax rate to other comparable communities and understand why different, hopefully reduce



Participants were asked to think about the following questions and get back to us with comments as we ran out of time (the children's language classes were dismissed and parents had to go and retrieve their children).

Can you think of other ways in which the Chinese community can be involved?

Let's talk about reasons that might limit your involvement:

Too busy/not enough time
Not sure exactly what I can do
Not sure how to find
information

Language
Lack of transportation
Not use to the idea
Other: _____

Can you think of ways the Town can make it easier for you to be involved?



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15 July 2008

Targeted Outreach Meeting: Brazilian Community

After several efforts to gather a group of Brazilian residents together to have a mini-visioning session were unsuccessful, we conducted an interview of two Brazilian residents willing to be representatives of their community. The meeting took place in DiCapri's pizzeria.

Andre Abreu
Renato Amorim

Linda Chance, a member of the Outreach Committee and her husband Gabe, both of whom speak Portuguese attended and participated in the meeting.

Why do you think most Brazilian's moved to Acton?

- jobs (e.g.. pizza places)
- schools
- other Brazilians (including that there are two Brazilian shops selling Brazilian goods)
- business community is educated

What do you think most Brazilians like about Acton?

- Schools
- Landscape – trees, open space
- Feel very welcome in the community – people are educated, some have been to Brazil, know about Brazil, etc.
- Indoor soccer (at Teamworks on Great Road in Acton)
- Soccer in school

What do you think most Brazilians dislike about Acton?

- Hard to commute – limited parking at train station
- Need more computers at the library
- Need for more Portuguese language books at the library
- Expensive – rent + taxes



What would you say are the main issues facing the Brazilian community in Acton?

- ESL for children and adults
 - Need for more ESL after school (volunteer program)
- Would like more entertainment (nightclub, food, music, dancing).
 - Jazz Café used to have Brazilian night once a month, unsure if it still does
 - Acton/Boxborough Cultural Council had “Day in Brazil” – could have more
 - Capoeira – martial arts/dance (slave dance developed in Brazil) taught in South Acton
 - Some Brazilians would love to have a carnival in Acton
 - A Brazilian restaurant would be a good thing (pizza place tried to add Brazilian items to the menu but was not successful – no marketing).

If you could do one thing to make Acton better for the Brazilian community, what would it be?

- Town wide shuttle bus (many Brazilians do not have a driver’s license)
- ESL teachers at school do not speak Portuguese (children are assigned a Spanish-speaking teacher)

Why do you think most Brazilians do not participate in town government (main obstacles)?

- Perception that they are here only “temporarily” (going back to Brazil even if it doesn’t eventually turn out to be true, it is in their minds)
- Estimated 70% of Brazilian population in Acton is undocumented
- They are not used to the idea of participation – attitude is more traditional of “leave it up to the government to decide.”
- Language

What can the town do to increase participation on the part of Brazilians in town government?

- Have a Portuguese-speaking staff person at Town Hall
- Have a person(s) represent the Brazilians and speak on their behalf

The two individuals interviewed found it difficult to estimate the number of Brazilians in Acton; they guesstimated approximately 500. Most can be found at the Baptist Church in Acton and the Catholic Church in Maynard. Networking tends to be done by “word of mouth” and there are no formal networks currently in place.

NOTE: Linda Chance and Renato Amorim exchanged e-mails and talked about the possibility of organizing a Brazilian carnival some where in Acton next winter. Because of the cold weather, they both agreed to look into possible indoor venues.



Appendix
Town Government Focus Group



Town of Acton
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Plan Outreach
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720
Telephone (978) 264-9636
Fax (978) 264-9630
outreach@acton-ma.gov
www.ActonOutreach.com

ROUNDTABLE: TOWN STAFF/DEPARTMENT HEADS June 4, 2008

Participants:

Karen Kucala - Asst. Finance Director
Stephen Barrett - Finance Director
Marcia Rich - Library Director
Corey York - Asst. Engineer
Mark Hald - IT Director
Catherine Fochtman - Recreation Director
Merrily Evdokimoff - Nursing Administrator
Dean Charter - Director of Municipal
Properties & Tree Warden
Robert Craig - Fire Chief

Roland Bartl – Planning Director
Doug Halley - Health Director
Russell Robinson - Highway Super.
Frank Ramsbottom - Building Inspector
Steve Ledoux - Town Manager
Frank Widmayer - Police Chief
Tom Tidman - Director of Conservation
Jean Fleming - Director of Council on Aging
Jennifer Friedman - Director of Citizens Library
John Murray - Asst. Town Manager

Purpose of meeting: *To get a preliminary sense from Department Heads of what their realities and informed perceptions are regarding Acton's assets and challenges. As we move forward to identify priority issues it is important to have input from those "on the ground", dealing with issues day to day with insight into what works and what doesn't work and why. Additionally department heads were asked to identify potential future challenges.*

What in your experience makes Acton a good place to live and/or work?

- Nice to work near where you live (3)
 - Walk to work
 - Enjoy living and working in the same place, nice being close to home
- Well-run town
 - Town sees the big picture
 - Willingness to support projects
 - Allowance for dissenting voice to be heard
- Town staff responsiveness to community goes above and beyond (2)
- Location – before you hit the commuter traffic going to Boston (3)
 - Non-stressful commute



- Professionalism of staff (6)
 - Staff are really industry leaders, experts in their field, very high caliber
 - Town attracts good staff
 - Weekly staff meeting important and useful – even for those who don’t see each other on a regular basis, knowing that Wednesday morning meeting is there keeps the staff communicating.
 - Staff are “thoroughbreds”
 - All chip in and solve the problem (don’t have the attitude of “that’s not my job...”)
 - Not afraid to take on new tasks

- Support within community and within Town Hall

- The longevity of the employees is very significant leading to depth of understanding of issues (3)
 - Know each other well which leads to smooth working relationships

- Cooperative spirit, very helpful, lots of support, willingness to work together
 - Results in being able to do a lot in-house
 - “The people I work with are really wonderful and cooperative”

- High-end professional volunteers tremendous
 - If they want it, they pass it
 - High level of volunteerism – working hard, smooth running

- The Town is generous to the needy
 - Supportive to the elderly too

- The Departments feel supported
 - E.g. small W.Acton library probably wouldn’t exist in another town, but received a lot of community support

- Town’s population
 - Is very educated (including high school kids on committees)
 - Diversity of town’s population (poses some language problems but is a plus)
 - Is passionate
 - Greening of Acton
 - Multi-culturalism
 - Compassionate towards the needy (e.g. social worker position voted to be funded at Town Meeting)



What in your experience is your least favorite aspect of living and/or working in Acton?

- Too much funding goes to the schools without enough left over to do what needs to be done in terms of the other town services
 - Results in a fight for resources
 - More funding is needed
 - Divisive : “schools group” vs. “non-schools group” – large chasm and division among the population
 - Acton is at the bottom 3% of towns in the state regarding the amount of money devoted to municipal government
 - Schools have “emotional advantage” and grass roots support like PTOs
- Need more volunteers that will take leadership roles
- The pressure of the community’s high expectations (without the financial support to be able to provide the level of service they expect)
 - Unrealistic expectations from the part of residents
- Inequity in funding levels makes it very hard to meet expectations
 - The pressure of being asked to do more for less is felt at the departmental level but also the organization as a whole is too stretched
 - Not enough hours in the day to do all that is needed to be done
 - Seems to be more people worn out, asking for more sick days
 - Newcomers seem to be higher income with higher expectations sometimes with a sense of entitlement
- The system and structure of Committees often makes it difficult to get decisions to move forward
 - (often re-visit decisions -- e.g. recent examples: street lights, sidewalks-- when a decision had already been reached to move forward).
 - When a project is clearly not desired a Committee is formed to study it anyway wasting resources (response to perceived “hysteria”)
- It is sometimes a challenge to have to do what the community wants when it goes against what you believe.
- There seems to have been a lot of turn-over until recently
- Administering to a politically-entitled group
- The public process can sometimes derail projects that have had a lot of support because just when you get started another group comes along and opposes what you thought was a go-ahead.
 - Allowing for the dissenting voice is sometimes too much – it ends up creating the perception that it is a more majority opinion than is the reality



- The salary issue is in the process of being addressed (this will be good when parity issue is addressed).
- Need to do public relations campaign re: town services, etc.
 - Lay people don't understand the budget process
 - Needs to be more discussion in group and public settings
 - It would be interesting to ask residents: "How important is Town government in your day-to-day lives?" (as opposed to town services)
 - Town needs to do more advocacy -- think of "quantitative arguments" regarding need for and impact of services.
 - No time to do PR, education campaign, too busy trying to get work done
 - Need to educate residents as to the value of town services
 - Schools need to be part of the marketing plan and PR effort
 - Need to reiterate the purpose of town services
 - Bad press (e.g. re: Boston police officers) is generalized and people have misperceptions regarding reality
 - Example of how PR has worked in the past – tours of the police and fire stations made people realize how much a new municipal safety building was needed.
- Town Meeting process is "broken"
- No way of achieving consensus, currently often undemocratic way of deciding priorities
 - Chair of BOS gives direction without full consensus of Board and no one dares say "no" (hope that with new Board this will change)
 - Board membership changes and then review the same thing over and over again.
 - It is hard to protect departments from having to go down rat holes
- Overcrowding in the Town Hall
 - Need to address space needs

Can you identify any future challenges or changes (e.g. demographics, technology) that may affect your Department's buildings and/or services?

- Increasing traffic
 - has meant need for sidewalks and lights – trying to provide and failing due to lack of funding and lack of support
 - increase on demand of police parking lot
- Rental projects
 - are bringing in lower income residents, gang members and causing a variety of problems
 - 40B housing projects impact on services



- Diversity of population
 - Asian community, higher income, but not necessarily connected
 - Brazilian community, lower income, not plugged in
 - Need for bilingual services
 - Need to get used to different accents
- Demand for youth services
- Aging population: Increasing 60+ population (approx. 3,400 residents now)
 - Senior Center expansion project is being studied by a Task Force, exploring options for both outdoor and indoor space.
 - Projected future population: 6,000 seniors in 2030
 - Challenge to respond to needs for physical exercise, intellectual stimulation, and need for socializing
 - Increasingly culturally diverse group of seniors, language, culture
 - More requests for evening and weekend usage results in increased cost for staffing and utilities
 - Increasing traffic results in van driver driving for longer hours than before
 - Increasing real estate taxes is an issue for seniors on a fixed income
 - Fire Department feels the impact of the increasing aging population in an increase in EMS calls. Additional assisted living and senior housing projects is expected to increase these further.
- What about water and waste water services – what do people think about the need for these?
- Predict increasing demand for virtual town services in the future
 - This will save staff a lot of time if residents can take care of more and more on-line, especially researching records
 - May result in more need for public relations as town staff will be even more invisible than now
 - Need to reorganize due to changes in communications technology (e.g. shift from phones to e-mail); need to retrain staff
 - New challenges (e.g. keeping up with amount of e-mails)
 - Need to decide: “What are the core services we provide?” (e.g. safety net, public safety, etc.)
 - Document management systems
 - GIS will be a large self-service tool for staff, the public and real estate agents
- Increasing interest in “green” and sustainable development
 - is going to cost a lot more (and there doesn’t seem to be additional sources of funding in the foreseeable future).
 - It also impacts the staff’s workload.
 - How will we save energy? (streetlights, walking, etc.) and other such decisions that are difficult to make



- Aging infrastructure will need attention
- Desires regarding historic preservation and taking into account community character take time and there is not enough staff time available.
- It will be a challenge to complete Comprehensive Community Plan in such a way so that it is not just a “wish list”
 - Need to address action items in a realistic way
 - How can the town as an organization work most effectively and efficiently so that they don’t get sidetracked from individual agendas and stay focused on larger goals
- Due to increasing cost of building there has been a recent trend which is expected to continue of more renovations than new construction. This requires a lot of staff time in helping to research issues.
- Cost of open space is very high
 - Need to prioritize parcels
 - Perhaps buying portions of properties is an answer
 - Fiscal impact analysis sometimes demonstrates that purchasing the parcel as open space is more cost effective than allowing it to develop as housing
- Increasing demand for recreation, increased demand on facilities, Nara, etc.
 - More and more recreation wanted locally
 - Demand for athletic fields
- Challenge to incorporate additional development, esp. 40B
- Challenge of public process derailing projects
- Need to respond to next generation and ways of communicating
 - Use of computers
 - 3-D imaging
- Library facing challenges including
 - Aging workforce
 - Need for more staff due to growing usage
 - Changes in technology are rapid, need to communicate these to staff and the public
 - Need for more opportunities for staff development
 - Language/diversity issues
 - Fear of vandalism and other behaviors (are increasing at the schools)
- Need for more schools – town cooperation
 - Should be more community service from the schools
 - Business class – could help out at town hall (a couple of people who grew up in Acton worked on the town census as students)



- “We need to focus on tomorrow’s problems”
 - “We are reactive, spending too much time solving yesterday’s problems”
- Need to do succession planning
 - “How will we attract younger people to do public service?” (used to be considered noble and dignified, no longer as much)