



## **Acton Today, Tomorrow, Together**

### **Boards, Commissions, and Committees Session #1 June 25, 2008**

#### **Attendance**

- Terry Maitland            Conservation Commission
- Mike Gowing            Council on Aging
- Pat Clifford            Finance Committee
- Herman Karakoff       Finance Committee
- Steve Noone            Finance Committee
- Anne Forbes            Historic District Commission
- Michaela Moran        Historic District Commission
- Jim Snyder-Grant       Land Stewardship Committee
- Carol Holly            Water Resources Advisory Committee (formerly member of East Acton Village Planning Committee)
  
- Roland Bartl            Planning Director
- Daphne Politis        Planners Collaborative
- Jim Purdy              Planners Collaborative

#### **Missions, Goals, and Issues**

Members reported on their mission and the issues they are addressing

##### **Conservation Commission**

- Administers the Massachusetts Wetlands Act and Acton Wetlands Bylaw
- Town bylaw expanded setbacks in 2004 to 50 feet (no disturbance) and 75 feet (no structure)
- Problem exists of people building to the very edge of the setback, with later encroachment sometimes occurring
- Two subcommittees
- Open Space
- Land Stewardship
- Expect to make some “tweaks” in the bylaw but not major initiatives planned

- Enforcement is the key issue. Need adequate resources to identify and respond to violations of permits

### **Land Stewardship Committee**

- 12 stewards care for 16 open space parcels
- Goals
  1. Preserve biodiversity and habitat
    - a. Small, rare habitats more important in this respect than large common ones
    - b. Large tracts generally support more diversity than small tracts – fewer pests and invasive species. (The Committee did a survey of invasives and a management plan to control them).
  2. Capture carbon by encouraging tree growth
  3. Create experiences to foster a love of nature by providing a variety of trails suited to different people

Would like to document these more formally.

- Plan to do more to manage meadows and grasslands – need to do more research on how to do it properly

### **Finance Committee**

- Nine members
- Gives its opinion to Town Meeting on all articles that affect the budget
- Maintains a long-range financial plan with a three-year horizon
- The Committee's goal is sustained improvement of the budget process.
- Acton's budget process is different from most of the nearby towns, e.g., there is not a separate capital budget, partly owing to the regional school district
- Biggest issue is increasing costs and demand for services and facilities while revenues are limited, particularly by 2-1/2 percent ceiling on annual property tax increases
- However, there are some things that people want that don't cost a lot of money.
- At town meeting, one is likely to hear from people who haven't participated in outreach process
- "If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there." – So it's good for the town to have a master plan.
- The Finance Committee is important in the town's priority setting process.

## **Historic District Commission**

- Purpose: to maintain the historic character of Acton's three historic districts (Town Center, West Acton Village, and South Acton Village)
- Its mission is distinct from the Acton Historical Commission, which is concerned with the whole town and administers the Demolition Delay bylaw.
- The Town Center District extends through front yards all the way to Nagog Hill Road.
- The Commission is considering a demolition-by-neglect bylaw, perhaps paired with a fund for owners of historic homes to do maintenance and make improvements. (Cambridge is a model).
  - Needs careful consideration and drafting to address issues such as cost, form of financial assistance, and relationship to other town goals.

## **Council on Aging**

- Projections show 11 percent increase in population by 2030 but 60% growth in the people 65 and over.
- Aging in place
- Projecting "senior enrollment" statistically speaking
- Goals of the council:
  - Outreach
  - Socialization
  - keeping seniors in their homes, active, and engaged
- Hope to expand the Senior Center and its programs
- Surveying people 50-65 who will move into the senior population
- Want to do more sophisticated computer training for seniors and involve them in projects

## **Green Team**

- 9 participants, recently formed
- Goals are protecting Air and Water Quality
  - Land use and transportation are critical to this
- Would like town to consider density bonus for LEED certification
  - Develop local standards that mimic LEED but don't require bureaucracy and cost
- Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) provides bonus in exchange for moving away from stream

- Question to consider: how do we zone in terms of density and usage to protect air and water and still get village centers
- Need to evaluate projects – Design Review board
- Relationship with Water District, which owns well-head protection land.
  - Water Protection Bylaw
- Challenges – standardize the protection zones between state definition and zoning overlay
  - Work with Acton and organizations
- Communications
  - Acton Neighborhood Network – phone calls with info on town events
  - School email lists
  - Audix – capability to call all homes in Acton
  - Explore uses – e.g. can form networks for groups such as seniors

## **Prioritizing**

Potential issues were discussed, and then participants were given five sticky dots and asked to place up to three dots next to the items they feel are of highest priority.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Votes</b>
Preserving rural character	7
Enhancing neighborhoods	0
Enhancing village centers	1
Addressing high cost of living	4
Addressing the lack of walking/biking facilities	3
Addressing traffic issues	5
Addressing growth management and site and design review issues	3
Planning for sustainability	4
Improving the Senior Center or building a new one	3
Addressing public transportation	1
Protecting historic resources	9