

Acton Outreach Steering Committee Visioning Notes¹

June 11, 2008

Preserving Rural Character

Town should acquire more open space? Yes 6 No 0

Other means to preserve open land and preserve rural character

- Preserve land by limiting development
- Change zoning to require more open space on site
 - Visual and habitat preservation
 - Form-based zoning
- Encourage owners to sell conservation restrictions
- Limit extent of sewerage
- Forest management chapter 61
- Water withdrawal cap could be a limit to development
- Incentives for less lawn and more preserved woods in new development; less change in existing land cover
- Not comfortable with limiting development – need the additional tax base
- Develop growth areas with existing infrastructure rather than large lots on open land
- Tree warden should identify specific trees in ROW that merit preservation
- Sustainable development to preserve rural character
 - Support business development
- Expand ROW to encompass large trees
- But balance open space goal with affordability so today's kids can stay in Acton
- Tree planting fund, not just tree cutting
- Plant saplings today – will be mature tree crowns tomorrow (like the elms that once grew on main St)

¹ Two members who had to leave mid-way through the visioning sent their responses to topics 5-7; they are included in the counts and brainstorming items.

- Many fights in the 1990s about the word “rural” – town is now suburban
 - Don’t see a rural look on a daily basis
 - Rural vs. suburban is partly semantics
- Design new development to have the desired look

Enhancing Neighborhoods

Ideal Neighborhood

- Intimate feel
- Sidewalks
- Interaction – informal or through neighborhood association

Physical Characteristics

- Gazebo
- Houses close enough to see neighbors
- Sidewalks are key (unless traffic so low you can walk in the street safely)
- Tradeoff: trees vs. sidewalks, ROW issues
- Each neighborhood addressed case by case – e.g., historic district has different solutions – not one broad brush solution for all
 - River Street has same zoning as S. Acton village but shouldn’t
- Central neighborhood space – play space, neighborhood swimming pool, etc.
- Town should support neighborhoods associations, event calendars, etc.
- West Action village – walk to activities,
 - Doesn’t want sidewalk on her dead-end street, but need them in the village
- Avalon development appalling, a “ghetto”, can’t walk to much from it (except NARA and a couple of Nagog Woods shops) – result of 40B

Making My Neighborhood More Desirable

- Microbrewery
- Traffic mitigation on high St
- More grocery shopping opportunities in walking distance
- Sidewalk

- Microbrewery
- Lighting restriction on outdoor house lighting
- Safer way to cross Main St
- Sidewalks and non-pizza eating place
- Restaurant/pub on corner

Enhancing Village Centers

Ideal Village Center

- Coordinated architecture
- Gathering places, restaurants, shops
- Shared understanding of village theme – bohemian, chi-chi, or other style
- Cafes with outdoor seating
- A little park space
- Benches
- But, not Disneyland (design controls ok, though)
- Wayland new town center on Raytheon land is good example
- Mixed residential/business
- Employment opportunities
- Wide sidewalks with benches
- Trees and landscaping – European model outdoor “living room”
- One-stop parking and walk around village
 - Behind buildings? Is this what killed Maynard Center?
 - (some disagreement about Maynard)
- Breckenridge Colorado model – main street of shops with flowers everywhere
- Design quality is important
- Gates-Douglas wetland boardwalk
- West Action vs. other villages: the town controls the street, not MassHighway
- Parallel parking calms traffic – maintain on-street parking
- Calm traffic
- Need visual and social anchor use (like a mall has an anchor store) – e.g., Exchange Hall in South Acton

- Tools needed: how does the town control the form of development, pull it together?
- Avoid drive-thru uses (e.g., car wash in East Acton)
- Demolition-by-neglect bylaw needed
- Benches, coffee shop
- Night life
- Grocery, pharmacy (neighborhood-oriented, not CVS)
- Architectural lighting
- Restrict chain stores (constitutional issue) or store maximum size
- Apartments above stores – lots of them to support the businesses
 - But, apartments can be located around village perimeter, not just within center

Challenges

After discussion of the potential challenges Acton faces and potential ways to address them, each participant was given five sticky dots and asked to vote by placing up to three of the dots on the flip chart next to the items they consider the most important challenges.

Votes	Challenge	Ways of addressing
4	High cost of living	Prioritize, balance against desired improvements Develop local tourism, e.g., driving tours on CD, information, connections to regional network
3	Lack of walking facilities	
0	Traffic (especially on Saturday)	Ability to get to recreation facilities located all over town on Saturday morning Alternative transportation – shuttles, etc.
8	Need for growth management and site and design controls	Make site plan review binding, not advisory, and with input from residents
1	State of emergency response (public safety, EMS, fire)	
2	Providing sewers, consistent with growth management	
4	Large wooded tracts of land – preserving habitat and experience of nature	Incentives for owners to preserve from development - tax breaks, etc.
2	Keeping our elders in town	
4	Off-grid alternative energy and other planning for sustainability	Regional wind and solar energy Alternative transportation
3	Holding on to sense of community	
2	Getting the boards/committees on board Implementation/prioritization	Accountability Resources and priorities Plan as framework
5	Town governance “on the precipice”	Town council form of government

Planning for Sustainability

Important for town's future? 8 yes, 0 no

Take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? 7 yes, 1 no

As in the section on challenges, ways to plan for sustainability 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 most important.

Types of action	Votes
• Increase recycling (e.g., swap section at town "dump")	8
• More walking/biking facilities, e.g. on Rte 2A; rail trail	7
• Building/retrofitting public buildings	2
• Incentives for residential and a business energy efficiency	6
• Get Nagog Pond back from Concord	2
• Conservation restrictions and development controls – type, size, and amount	4
• Concentrate uses to reduce auto dependency, in-fill	1
• Trees in front of shops	6
• Pursue regional solutions with other towns	1
• Municipal energy generation (esp. at transfer station site)	1

Senior Center

Improvements

- Expand, add second floor
- More parking (garage?) and transportation to (shuttle)
- Better layout with reception, wayfinding
- More creative use of landscaping
 - Aromatherapy garden (good for Alzheimer's patients)
 - Tactile garden (for people with low vision)
- Daycare for seniors
- Less institutional look
- More after-hours activity
- Signage

Expand existing facility? 7 yes, 0 no

Combine with community center? 7 yes, 0 no

- Cost-effective
- Keep seniors from being isolated
- Continues community cohesion in multi-generational
- Mixed generation interactions build community
- Helps build community support
- But, must be in convenient location
- Danny's Place is too small; however, location is critical to a teen center
- Original vision for Danny's Place was to be multigenerational

Prioritizing

As in the previous sections, 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.

Issue	Votes
Preserving rural character	5
Enhancing neighborhoods	1
Enhancing village centers	5
Addressing high cost of living	3
Addressing the lack of walking/biking facilities	3
Addressing traffic issues	1
Addressing growth management and site and design review issues	10
Planning sustainability	6
Improving the Senior Center or building a new one	1
Promoting economic development	5