



**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.