

ACTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN TODAY.TOMORROW.TOGETHER.



VISIONING WORKSHOP

Parker Damon Building
Saturday, March 29, 2008
1:30 – 4:30 pm.



A town-wide visioning was held at the Parker Damon Building on Saturday, March 29th, 2008 from 1:30 to 4:30 in the afternoon. Approximately one-hundred and seventy-five (175) residents participated. The workshop began with a presentation from the Consultants followed by facilitated small group discussions. Each of the ten groups were comprised of approximately ten to twelve participants and all of the groups answered the same six questions.

The purpose of the workshop was to invite the Acton community to come together and generate ideas that will create a shared vision for Acton's future. This in turn will be used as the foundation for an action plan that will outline the steps necessary to attain this vision.

Participants were asked the following questions:

- “What are your favorite things about Acton (that you would want to ensure be preserved in the future)?”
- “What are your least favorite things about Acton (that you feel are important to change in the future)?”
- “What words and/or images would you use to describe Acton's character?”
- What makes Acton unique?
- What do you see as challenges and/or potential obstacles to positive change facing Acton now or in the future?
- “If you could do one thing to improve Acton, what would it be?”

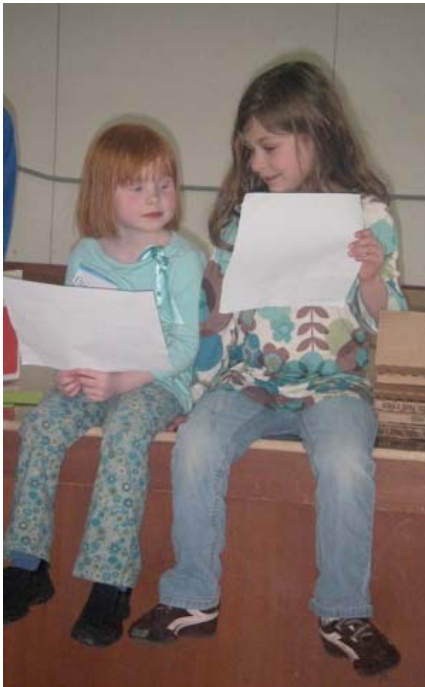
The following is a summary of these discussions.

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DEVELOPING A SHARED VISION OF ACTON'S FUTURE

Crafting a vision statement is a way of understanding and describing the desired future as envisioned by a group of people. The input of those who participated in this visioning workshop will be combined with the input of residents gathered in other meetings and solicited through other means including a town-wide survey to craft a vision statement and goals for the future of Acton. The following represent the key elements to include in the vision statement as identified by the participants of the workshop. An action plan will be developed at a later part in the process; it will be based on this vision. The plan will outline steps necessary to reach the shared vision.

The following represents a compilation of ideas suggested by the participants who attended the visioning workshop who contributed the elements of a desired future for the town. The elements included represent those around which relative consensus was reached and/or seemed consistent with other thoughts as outlined by the workshop participants.



Two of the youngest participants waiting their turn to present their input regarding what they would like to include in the vision of Acton's future.

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KEY ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE IN A VISION & GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

- Preserve and protect rural character
 - Natural features, open lands, ponds, natural habitat
 - Conservation lands
 - Tree-lined roads
 - Farms
- Preserve sense of community
 - Small town feel, family-friendly
 - Casual social interaction, run into people you know on the street
 - Friendly, helpful, welcoming, town spirit
- Improve experience for walkers and bikers
 - Safety, pleasant
 - Connections, system of sidewalk, paths, trails
 - Provides alternative mode of transport
- Continue to provide excellent education
 - Community commitment to education, translate to facilities
 - Community education and use of schools after hours
 - Relationship to local businesses and town
- Protect and enhance distinct village centers
 - Make more walkable
 - Provide more activities
 - Improve Kelley's Corner
- Create a town center
 - Need for town center identity
 - Place to gather, walk, socialize
- Improve functioning and aesthetics of commercial areas
 - Great Road – safety, visual appeal, pedestrian experience
- Manage and control development
 - Enforce existing zoning and design review
 - More proactive planning of development
 - Protect open spaces
- Protect and enhance historic buildings/sense of history
 - Historic preservation of buildings (e.g. Exchange Hall)
 - Historic celebrations, (e.g. Crown Resistance Day, Patriots Day) -- “presence of the past”
- Plan for Sustainable Development
 - Renewable energy sources in public buildings
 - Recycling

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- Protect and enhance retail mix
 - Support local businesses
 - Attract more family restaurants
 - Enjoy lack of malls and big box
 - Increase commercial tax base
- People, Diversity
 - Support variety in population – age, economic, ethnic, religious
 - Support tolerance
- Train
 - Some improvements, esp. to parking
 - Consider commuter rail shuttle
- Recreational opportunities for youth and adults
 - Outdoor and indoor (e.g. x-country skiing, Nara Park, tennis courts, ice skating)
- Arts and culture
 - Community Theater
 - Create more opportunities
- Neighborhoods
 - Walkable to services
 - Safe
 - Moderate density; Green space
- Importance of community gathering
 - Libraries
 - Senior Center
 - Community center?
 - Teen center?
 - Movie theater and family restaurants
- Provide range in housing types
 - Affordable to empty nesters, workforce and young families
 - Need for accessible units
 - Ensure that all design be compatible with community character
- Traffic and Circulation
 - Reduce congestion, increase safety at intersections, traffic calming
 - Provide public transportation option & bike and pedestrian lanes
 - Improve parking
- Town Governance
 - Improve communication
 - Creative solutions
 - Culture of volunteerism (build on, attract more)
 - Strike balance between affordable taxes & provision of town services

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What makes Acton unique? How would you describe Acton's character?

- Trees and open land
- Excellent schools, community commitment to education
- Sense of community, small town feeling, run into people you know
- “Seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, picturesque, old barns”
- Historic, New England architecture
- “Not Your Average Wonderbread Town”
- “semi-rural/town and country, suburb”
- villages provide focal points
- no town center
- “peaceful, quiet, family-oriented, friendly, safe, socially aware, livable”
- “rural meets suburban conflicts”
- “good value – schools & town economically efficient”
- culturally diverse, accepting, welcoming
- high achieving, driven, ambitious
- threatened, at a turning point
- high degree of civic involvement
- small town close to Boston – good mix
- good balance between nature and development
- strong dog culture

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES OF INTEREST

The following strategies were suggested by participants to address protecting what they liked and/or improving aspects that they felt could be better. They are recorded here so as to be reviewed a later stage in the master planning process.

- Develop a youth master plan
- Develop a non-profit semi-government organization to revitalize town centers
- Start a “Transition Town Project” toward self sufficiency and energy autonomy
- Create a Town Committee charged with protecting the environment and implementing practices to reduce greenhouse gases in public buildings, businesses and homes
- Turn the dump and/or Grace site into a renewable energy power plant (also use yard waste)
- Develop a Comprehensive Transportation Plan for commuters (including rail schedules/parking), cars, bikes, pedestrians (sidewalk planning & implementation) and shuttle service
- Reduce the amount of land required to keep horses and other animals in order to protect rural character.

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DETAILED DOCUMENTATION OF GROUP RESPONSES

1. “What are your favorite things about Acton (that you would want to ensure be preserved in the future)”?

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Comments</i> | <i># of groups</i> | <i># of dots¹</i> |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Rural character, natural features, conservation lands | -Farmland, Arboretum, conservation land, open land, ponds -Woods and trees; hiking trails -Tree-lined roads, water resources -Fresh air, lack of pollutants, peaceful -Natural habitat, deer -Meet co-environmentalists/social consciousness, environmental aware | 10 | 65 |
| Schools | - Commitment to education - Community education - Also good relations b/w schools and local businesses and town - Appreciate value of education | 10 | 55 |
| Village centers | West Acton center walkability Variety of areas with distinct character WAV, SAV, Acton Center – vestige of past, “diamonds in the rough, not from scratch” village sense | 8 | 25 |
| Sense of community, | - Small town feel, Feeling of connection, social contacts on the street; “town spirit” - Laid back, not formal, welcoming - Helpful, friendly - Neighbors, hospitality | 9 | 21 |
| People, Diversity | Diverse conomic, ethnic, age, housing type Eclectic array of people Middle-class, not snobby, accepting | 7 | 13 |
| Variety & Convenience of retail and services | Good retail balance opportunities available to shop locally historic and contemporary not a lot of chain stores; no malls | 8 | 11 |
| Train | Commute to city | 5 | 9 |
| Culture of volunteerism | Caring community | 5 | 8 |

¹ All participants were asked to respond to this question. Once all group members had contributed their ideas, each participant was given 5 dots and asked to get up from their seats and “vote” on which they felt was most important by placing the dots next to the words on the large pads. Each participant was requested to use all of their dots, but instructed not to place any more than 3 dots on any one item. *Two of the ten groups did not vote on their responses, however their comments are recorded.*

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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Lead to better run schools & better run local government Civic minded town | | |
| Recreation | Outdoor opportunities, e.g. x-country skiing, Nara Park Tennis courts | 4 | 7 |
| Location | Accessibility to Rt.2, Rt. 95, Rt. 495, Commuter train Small town w/proximity to Boston | 5 | 7 |
| The arts and culture | Community Theater | 3 | 7 |
| Neighborhoods | Layout of subdivisions create neighborhoods; moderate density Walkable services | 4 | 6 |
| Good balance b/w development & nature/land preservation | Green space in developed areas Combination b/w nature and shopping | 3 | 4 |
| Libraries | | 5 | 3 |
| Family-friendly | Committed & involved citizens and parents; resources such as Discovery Museum, Acton Family Network | 4 | 3 |
| Biking access | Sidewalks to ride bikes on Streets bikable | 3 | 3 |
| Slow permitting process | | 1 | - |
| “Can do” attitude | “if we believe in something, we can do it” | 1 | 2 |
| History and historical architecture preservation | AHS and Acton’s past | 6 | 2 |
| Bowladrome | | 1 | 1 |
| Idylwilde Farm | | 2 | 1 |
| Businesses | Limits thereto | 1 | - |
| Safe | Relatively minor problems | 2 | - |
| Community services | e.g. Police Dept.; domestic violence unit | 1 | - |
| Affordable, attractive housing | | 1 | - |
| Accessibility/responsiveness of town government | Competent High quality town staff Town Meeting | 3 | 1 |
| Old McCarthy School bldg. | Visually prominent but empty | 1 | - |

Individuals in at least half of the groups (five or more) mentioned the following as favorite features:

Rural character, natural features
Schools*
Village centers
Sense of community
People, diversity
Variety & convenience of retail*

*Train
Culture of volunteerism
Location
Libraries
History/historic preservation*

**Individuals in all ten groups referred to these features*

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2. “What are your least favorite things about Acton (that you feel are important to change in the future)?”

| Response | Comments | # of groups | # of dots² |
|--|---|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Traffic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Congestion, speed; 2A too narrow - Need bike & pedestrian lanes - Unsafe intersections - Lack of transportation planning - Potholes, Signalization improvements needed, impossible to cross roads - Cross through traffic - Need for traffic calming - Rt. 2/Piper Road intersection - Difficult to get around town & in & out of shops; Roche Bros. esp. difficult | 10 | 37 |
| Lack of walkability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of sidewalks - Need sidewalks to connect centers -Need sidewalks to/ around Town Hall - Too dangerous to cross Rt. 2A on foot - Not enough areas for “passive walking” & shopping & hanging out - Sidewalk construction too slow - Sidewalks too close to road | 8 | 29 |
| No real town center | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No town center identity - Lack of restaurants, theaters, social centers; no place for adults to gather - Doesn’t encourage hang out, enjoyment | 7 | 24 |
| Affordability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Town staff cannot afford to live in town - Elderly forced to leave; too expensive - Mansionization – not affordable & affects neighborhood character | 5 | 22 |
| Lack of adequate site review, subdivision design & design review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Laws regarding bldgs not flexible enough regs for configuring bldgs. - Current lot size & zoning don’t prevent crowding – new houses showing up behind /front in odd ways | 7 | 21 |

² All participants were asked to respond to this question. Once all group members had contributed their ideas, each participant was given 5 dots and asked to get up from their seats and “vote” on which they felt was most important by placing the dots next to the words on the large pads. Each participant was requested to use all of their dots, but instructed not to place any more than 3 dots on any one item. *Two of the ten groups did not vote on their responses, however their comments are recorded.*

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|---|--|---|----|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More planning needed for development - Eroding aesthetics, too much tenement style housing being built on main roads - Eyesores, e.g. Meinike building, new condos opposite JHS - 40B development control - Need for more stringent tree-cutting rules - Cluster dev. detracts from individual appeal | | |
| Kelley's Corner | A wasted opportunity Ugly & hard to navigate; odd set of businesses | 6 | 15 |
| Biking and walking not safe | Hard to commute on Rt. 2A Lack of bike lock locations around retail areas; lack of trails No crosswalks, hostile environment | 5 | 15 |
| Lack of growth management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of open space - Town is more reactive than proactive - Need to follow town rules - Houses being cramped into open spaces - Too easy for developers to get approval | 5 | 15 |
| Poorly designed commercial areas | Strip malls, parking in front, no downtown feel, no village feel Too many signs Great Road: how it feels, looks, traffic, no sidewalks/crosswalks | 6 | 15 |
| Improvements needed at train station | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No parking at commuter rail - Also no train station building - Need for commuter rail shuttle - Commuter rail not convenient for weekend & evening activities in Boston - No nice place to spend time nearby - Lack of privacy | 6 | 13 |
| Divisions b/w competing interests | b/w schools & municipal government too much emphasis on schools/kids adversarial town politics | 3 | 12 |
| Taxes are too high | Concern @ future property taxes relative to other Boston-area towns Suboptimal delivery of services | 5 | 12 |
| Schools | Overcrowded conditions Too much focus on school sports Schools need to be more inclusive to support diverse/SPED population, class size issues; Over-programmed kids Lack of neighborhood schools Full-day K is only available for 1/3 of those entering (3 votes) | 3 | 11 |
| Lack of variety in activities/ places to go | Lack of restaurants Not enough for families No place for adults to gather | 5 | 10 |

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|--|--|---|---|
| | Lack of multi-age community center Need better senior center Lack of movie theater No place for teens to have fun Need healthy food choices near schools | | |
| Lack of public transportation | Lack of intra-town public transportation Reliance on cars | 7 | 8 |
| Lack of planning for sustainable development | Lack of renewable energy especially in public buildings; need better recycling Investigate use of windmills Implement power alternatives Overuse of chemicals on lawns Environmental concerns, e.g. W.R. Grace, toxic waste site | 6 | 7 |
| Lack of preparation for pandemic illness | | 1 | 6 |
| Exchange Hall | Ugly; has lost original splendor Appearance & safety | 2 | 5 |
| Town Hall communication | Not candid; hidden agendas | 1 | 5 |
| Commute (Acton to Maynard) | “is a nightmare. We used to have these towns connected by rail. Railroad rights of way should be reserved for public transportation, light rail in the future, not recreation Leominster commuter rail line seems slower than others Distance from city | 3 | 3 |
| Library | Children’s area not the best atmosphere | 1 | 3 |
| Road side obstacles | Affect vehicles & bikes; trees, boulders, stone walls, utility poles need to be moved back from road | 1 | 3 |
| Water quality | Discoloration of AWD water | 1 | 2 |
| Lack of community communication | No radio; poorly read local paper | 1 | 2 |
| Lack of diversity | Ethnic and income | 2 | - |
| Issues of government Lack of planning | - Nagog Pond goes too cheaply to Concord -“Acton rate” delivery charges are higher to Acton than Littleton from -- - Concord even though Acton closer – - Town is run by “squeaky wheels” – - - Reactive process of government - Town relies too heavily on volunteers - Visioning process too long | 4 | 1 |
| Lack of parking | Esp. West Acton | 1 | 1 |
| Good intentions in town planning not working out | e.g. Rt. 2A | 1 | 1 |
| Bedroom community | No time to do things in town | 1 | - |
| High turn over of residents | | 1 | - |
| Need for more accessible apt | For people with disabilities | 1 | - |

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|---|--------------------------------|---|---|
| No local arts association | | 1 | - |
| Above ground electrical/phone/cable wires | Ugly | 1 | - |
| Dogs in cemeteries | Lack of animal law enforcement | 1 | - |

Individuals in at least half of the groups (five or more) mentioned the following as least favorite features:

| | |
|---|--|
| <p><i>Traffic*</i></p> <p><i>Lack of walkability</i></p> <p><i>No real town center</i></p> <p><i>Affordability</i></p> <p><i>Lack of adequate site review/design review</i></p> <p><i>Kelley’s Corner</i></p> <p><i>Biking & walking not safe</i></p> <p><i>Lack of growth management</i></p> | <p><i>Improvements needed at train station</i></p> <p><i>Poorly designed commercial areas</i></p> <p><i>Taxes are too high</i></p> <p><i>Lack of variety in activities/places to go</i></p> <p><i>Lack of public transportation</i></p> <p><i>Lack of planning for sustainable development</i></p> |
|---|--|

**Individuals in all ten groups referred to this feature*

Additionally:

- *The category of comments counted under “no real town center” (twenty-four votes in seven groups) are related and have some overlap with those in “lack of variety in activities and places to go” (ten votes in four groups).*
- *The category of comments counted under “lack of walkability” (twenty-nine votes in eight groups) are very closely related to those in “biking and walking is not safe” (fifteen votes in five groups).*

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3. “What words and/or images would you use to describe Acton’s character?” ³

Qualities of Place

Trees and open land

Great open spaces

Arboretum

Conservation land

Environmental awareness

Good schools

Open enrollment – each has its own personality

Seasonal changes, stone walls, foliage, scenery, “steepled” churches, postcard picture, old barns, picturesque

Lots of big houses

Historic, Classic New England

Exchange Hall, Town Hall

Visually attractive, e.g. Arboretum

It’s next to Concord

Disjointed, no town center

Not overly commercial

Traffic congestion

Mix of housing & green space

Sense of Place

Beautiful

Neighborliness, friendly

Semi-rural/town and country

Bedroom community, commuter town

“Not your average Wonder bread town”

Suburb of Boston and Cambridge

Spread out

Villages

Quiet, peaceful, sleepy

Family-oriented, family-friendly, kid-friendly

liveable, enjoyable

Convenient

Socially aware

Safe community

Nourishing and supportive community

The presence of the past

Rural –meets – suburban conflicts

Efficient town government

More proactive than other towns

Volunteer-oriented

Solid corps of volunteers; limited participation of others; “shrinking population” for volunteering; community participation/activism

Good value – schools and town economically efficient

People

Lack of diversity culturally and economically and racially

Upwardly mobile, middle-class/eco diversity

Culturally diverse

Middle upper class

Sense of community, supportive people

Outreach, i.e. libraries deliver books if needed

Competitive in everything: education, sports, leisure Driven, ambitious

High achieving

Academic and athletic competitiveness

Girls soccer champs

Educated

Self-aware

Stress

Education as a shared value

At a tipping point - development

On the edge of being a disaster

Congested

Overextended

Financially unplanned – taxes not prudently allocated

Sustainability in question if current growth rate leads to 35,000 with current services & infrastructure -- Threatened

Adhoc planning and development

Infrastructure doesn’t support

connectivity

Strip mall

³ Only 9 out of the 10 groups contributed input to this question.

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- *What words or images describe what used to be Acton's character (and you would like to bring back)*
-

Less populated
Farmland, "the sticks"
Used to be more rural

- *What words or images do NOT describe Acton's character (could exist & you wish it didn't)?*
-

ACTON IS NOT/DOES NOT HAVE:

overcrowded
urban
Snobby, passive
Commercialized
Walkable/bikeable (except West Acton)
nightlife
affordable for new families
mobility to Boston

ACTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN TODAY.TOMORROW.TOGETHER.

4. *What makes Acton unique?*

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Village nature of various parts of town</p> <p>Mix of residential and village centers</p> <p>North Acton, West Acton, South Acton, Center</p> <p>Walkability of West Acton</p> <p>Schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School choice/open enrollment School innovations Parent involvement in the schools , sports & recreational programs Innovative management of schools keeps pupil cost low for quality Very heavily school-aged population [the advent of MCAS has reduced the diversity of the elementary schools] priority on education school system as sole draw best schools for cost of living people attracted to teaching positions excellent schools that produce excellent students School choice leads to community cohesiveness <p>Commitment to children; Danny’s Place</p> <p>Open Spaces and Recreational Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farms; Idylewilde Farms Arboretum Conservation lands Commitment to preserving open space High regard for open space Nara Park Accessibility <p>Historic --Architecture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historic celebrations (e.g. crown resistance day, patriots day, etc.) Awareness of local history Deep history, Isaac Davis <p>Settle differences with civility</p> <p>Lack of town center</p> <p>Limited (controlled) development</p> <p>High quality town staff</p> <p>Majority of town on septic system</p> <p>W. Acton Citizens’ Library</p> <p>Community Supper</p> <p>Household Goods Recycling Ministry</p> <p>Interesting light industries</p> <p>Town dump/Transfer Station</p> <p>Train</p> <p>Recreational opportunities such as ice rinks</p> | <p>Rich set of activities for adults and children</p> <p>NARA, library, indoor sports, theater/music)</p> <p>Variety & convenience of services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unique retail options, e.g. Hopscotch, Idywilde Range of theater group options Acton Jazz Café <p>Conveniently located</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close to high-tech employment Access to both the country (conservation land) and the city (commuters) Good access to transportation (commuter rail) <p>Volunteerism in town, school and sports activities; people are strongly civic-minded</p> <p>Community involvement and access to variety of cultural activities</p> <p>Cooperation among residents</p> <p>Community events such as Oktoberfest</p> <p>Diversity of population (for a suburb)</p> <p>large Indian & Chinese population</p> <p>Multiple faith opportunities</p> <p>Chinese Language School</p> <p>Diverse income levels</p> <p>Educated/progressive</p> <p>High tech professionals</p> <p>Not an elitist community</p> <p>Warmth</p> <p>Suburban area - open spaces, balanced land uses</p> <p>Benefits of “snob” town without the sense of barriers or entitlement</p> <p>Good value</p> <p>Relatively affordable compared to surrounding towns with good schools</p> <p>Good results despite lower costs</p> <p>Good corporate citizens; Generosity of local businesses</p> <p>Transitional community – in between suburban and rural community</p> <p>Cleaner, not polluted</p> <p>“strong dog culture”</p> <p>Good mix – small town and close to Boston</p> <p>Don’t have or want big box retail – can drive elsewhere for it</p> <p>Different from other towns in the area</p> <p>Balance – nature/development</p> |
|---|---|

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5. What do you see as challenges and/or potential obstacles to positive change facing Acton now or in the future?

| Response | Comments | # of groups |
|--|---|--------------------|
| Limit to ability to limit growth & development | Landowners have development rights Multiple owners, lack of coordination of development, e.g. Kelley's Corner Limited power of town to change course Lack of public control over dev; zoning Population Way to guide new development w/compliance to state laws; 40B Business growth could jeopardize existing businesses Regional development pressures - high cost of land discourages conservation land purchases; encourages large expensive homes | 10 |
| Money/budget | Economic downturn; recession; lack of capital Prioritizing budget needs State shortfalls & uncertainty How to do good things w/o raising taxes Funding education via property taxes | 9 |
| Achieving consensus difficult | On priorities On positive change Vision may die if not championed to completion Divisiveness School/municipal turf & budget wars Conflicts b/w newcomers & old-timers Changing demographics, ethnicity | 5 |
| Taxes | Striking balance b/w affordable taxes & town services Including structure of taxes Reliance on property tax rather than progressive income tax | 4 |
| Approach of town government | Lack of strategic problem solving; Need creative solutions Backroom politics – should be more transparency Ability to implement plans, e.g. Kelly's corner plan; redesign/redeployment of space; attitude that residents cannot change looks or goals of space Lack of communication – lack of trust/quality of info | 4 |
| Volunteerism | Town committees meet only at night - Limits involvement Need to pro-actively recruit new volunteers Fewer volunteers - Due to economic pressure Due to older households leaving | 3 |
| Lack of walkability in many parts of town | Physical layout limitations Makes making centers more difficult Too many cars compete with bikers & walkers | 3 |
| Limited public transportation | Access to commuter rail, more parking or shuttle bus; reliance on car | 3 |

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|--|--|---|
| Aversion to bringing new businesses into town to reduce residential tax burden | No big box stores such as Walmart or Home Depot “acceptable” | 3 |
| Provide entry level homes within town character | Maintain historic character in new development | 2 |
| Dependence on oil | Need to find & implement alternatives Expense of gas in a car-oriented town | 2 |
| Traffic | Transportation needs improvement Traffic Management | 2 |
| Infrastructure | Roads, sewers | 2 |
| Schools | SPED not responsive to pupils with special needs Classroom size an issue | 2 |
| Lack of civic involvement | Need new leaders Apathy | 2 |
| Attitudes | Inertia, consumerism, Short term view/tunnel vision Lack of learning from other town’s experiences | 2 |
| People who are here only for schools | Leave when children finish with schools Not committed to community | 1 |
| Stagnation | Certain things are stagnant & will not change because its the way its always been | 1 |
| Lack of past open space commitment | Lack of purchase in the past Risk of development of private wooded space | 1 |
| Reputation as an affluent town | | 1 |
| NIMBY | | 1 |
| Structure of town government | - Inefficient management structure; paradigm shift needed’ new ideas, open meeting laws are challenged - Need staff to implement Community Plan & be held accountable | 1 |
| Jurisdiction issues | e/g/ Rt. 2 is controlled by Mass Highway | 1 |
| Limited control over outside influences | Rt.2, taxes, gas costs | 1 |
| Lack of public/private partnership | Should share costs for facilities such as playing fields | 1 |
| Lack of local jobs | | 1 |

Individuals in at least half of the groups (five or more) mentioned the following as potential challenges or obstacles to making improvements:

*Limit to ability to limit growth & development**

Money/budget

Achieving consensus is difficult

**Individuals in all ten groups referred to this obstacle/challenge*

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6. “If you could do one thing to improve Acton, what would it be?”

| Response | Comments | # of groups | # of dots⁴ |
|---|--|--------------------|------------------------------|
| Pedestrian-orientation Bike friendly | More promenades Complete the bike access network Sidewalks; “build sidewalks everywhere” | 6 | 38 |
| Create centers for congregating, | - Develop non-profit semi-gov. organizations to revitalize town centers - More walking distance independent restaurants/pubs - Sidewalks, bike access, public transport - Look for land to create public space, esp. near water bodies - Create intergenerational community center | 5 | 27 |
| Sustainable Development | - Start a “Transition Town Project” toward self sufficiency, energy autonomy - Be on the leading edge of green, environmentally positive practices – energy, chemicals, blds etc. - Create town committee charged with protecting environment & implementing practices to reduce greenhouse gases in public bldgs, businesses and homes - Educate youth in practical ways on how environment impacts their lives - Turn the dump and/or Grace site into a renewable energy power plant to make cheap energy. Also use yard waste - Develop sustainable design standards – turn Acton into a “green town” - Incorporate ideas such as plastic bag ban at grocery stores, energy efficient street & field lighting) - More access to natural gas pipelines - Encourage/systematize recycling | 8 | 25 |
| Expand the commercial tax | Attract new businesses that fit within the | 5 | 20 |

⁴ All participants were asked to respond to this question. Once all group members had contributed their ideas, each participant was given 5 dots and asked to get up from their seats and “vote” on which they felt was most important by placing the dots next to the words on the large pads. Each participant was requested to use all of their dots, but instructed not to place any more than 3 dots on any one item. *Two of the ten groups did not vote on their responses, however their comments are recorded.*

**ACTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN
TODAY.TOMORROW.TOGETHER.**

| | | | |
|--|--|---|----|
| base | rational plan to offset residential tax burden Attract low impact businesses Make decisions that reduce taxes Revise tax system for equity | | |
| Traffic improvements | - Re-work key intersections - Traffic calming to reduce impacts of thru traffic; review traffic patterns; develop comprehensive transportation plan - Develop a Comprehensive Transportation Plan for commuters (rail schedules/parking) cars, bikes, pedestrians (sidewalk planning & implementation) & shuttle services. | 3 | 19 |
| Control development | - Stop development of open space -Confine development to redevelopment - Moratorium on new projects until - Comprehensive Plan is complete | 4 | 16 |
| Support for open space | - Reduce the amount of land required to keep horses & other animals - Identify & acquire land abutting conservation areas | 2 | 15 |
| Public transportation | Intra-town transportation Community shuttle | 5 | 12 |
| Improve town government | Improve Town Meeting, e.g. change to representative; Limit # of items/times for discussion; Make more efficient/new paradigm | 1 | 9 |
| Need to be friendlier to local businesses | | 1 | 8 |
| Design Review of new housing | Define the character of unique areas Be mindful @ type of growth in each area | 2 | 8 |
| More family restaurants | Also micro-brewery , pub | 1 | 8 |
| Financial planning | | 1 | 7 |
| Create balance b/w seniors & school age families | | 2 | 6 |
| Improve Kelley's Corner | Blow up Meineke Muffler Visual and traffic improvements needed Create a village center | 3 | 6 |
| Develop a youth master plan | | 1 | 5 |
| Forge consensus on future | Plan | 1 | 3 |
| Improve train station | Need more creative ways to solve parking & traffic problems | 1 | 3 |
| Blow up Concord Rotary | | 1 | 2 |
| Market Acton | As tourist destination; more relevant/visible | 1 | 2 |
| Create a town center | | 1 | 2 |
| More state aid | | 1 | 2 |
| Sewers | | 1 | 1 |
| Affordable housing | To promote diversity | 1 | 1 |
| Increase participation | Don't complain: Act! | 1 | - |
| Hire a Social Worker | | 1 | - |

**ACTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN
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Individuals in at least half of the groups (five or more) mentioned the following being the one improvement they would make to Acton (if they had to choose one):

Pedestrian-orientation/bike friendly

Create centers for gathering

Sustainable development planning

Expand the commercial tax base

Provide public transportation

Also:

- *The issue of providing public transportation is also brought up under the need for making traffic improvements*
- *The comments counted under the need to create centers for congregating (twenty-seven votes in five groups) is also related to the comment that there is a need for more family restaurants (eight votes in one group).*

ACTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN
TODAY.TOMORROW.TOGETHER.

Town-wide Visioning Session: Kids Visioning

Several high school teens led visioning sessions with younger children in a room down the hall from where their parents were envisioning the town's future. This is some of what they came up with:



**ACTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN
TODAY.TOMORROW.TOGETHER.**

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE FOR ACTON IN THE FUTURE

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Fat cats (mangoes) | Lollipop forests |
| Aquarium | More flags (old-style colonies' flags) |
| Coldstone Creamery | Kids-only swimming area |
| More playgrounds | More sports fields |
| More bike paths | More historical STUFF |
| More swimming areas | Movie theatre – Chunky's |
| Candy store | |

LEAST FAVORITE THINGS ABOUT ACTON

Far drive to hospital
Lack of sidewalks
Trees being cut down

CAPTIONS TO KIDS DRAWINGS

Kids Only

Big town pool that only Acton people or their guests can to to
I think there should be more flowers in Acton and more colorful buildings
I wish there were more candy stores (Charlotte, 6 ³/₄ years old)
I wish there were more playgrounds (Bronwyn, 6 ¹/₂ years old)
West Acton Center should be more friendly toward pedestrians and shoppers. The sidewalks should be much wider with benches, trash cans, etc. There should also be more parking available.

I wish Acton had more bookstores because I love reading books.
I think there should be more barrels for cigarettes so that they won't be all over the street.
I wish there as more wildlife in Acton (Liam, 8 years old)
I wish lollipops grew out of the ground.