

ACTON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY PLAN TODAY.TOMORROW.TOGETHER.



VISIONING WORKSHOP

Parker Damon Building
Saturday, May 31, 2008
1:30 – 4:30 pm.



A town-wide visioning was held at the Parker Damon Building on Saturday, March 31th, 2008 from 1:30 to 4:30 in the afternoon. Approximately eighty (80) residents (including children of the participants) attended. The workshop began with a presentation from the Consultants. Two members of the high school Student Council also presented a summary of a survey they conducted of their peers. This was followed by facilitated small group discussions. Each of the five groups were comprised of approximately twelve participants and all of the groups answered the same questions. There were many displays of information and exhibits of previous input into issues related to the comprehensive planning process, including an impressive array of exhibits of work completed by each of the Acton public schools.

The purpose of the workshop was to invite the Acton community to come together and listen to a preliminary report back, a summary of input received to date, and to begin to identify key elements of a shared vision, goals and the priorities within that vision. 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 questions regarding the following topics:

Preserving "Rural Character"
Open Space preservation
Enhancing neighborhoods
Enhancing village centers
Addressing Acton's challenges
Planning for Sustainability
Expanding the Senior Center/Creating a Community Center
Prioritizing Resources

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.



Reporting group priorities

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SUMMARY OF MAJORITY RESPONSE (OR WHAT MOST PEOPLE SAID)

PRESERVING AND ENHANCING ACTON'S ASSETS

Open Space

A large majority of participants were in favor of the town acquiring more open space.

Other means of preserving open space were also supported; these included:

- Zoning,
- Deed restrictions,
- Public education
- Use of Community Preservation Act funding
- Limiting development
- Providing tax incentives

Rural Character

Participants suggested ways of preserving rural character including through:

- Zoning
- active support of agriculture
- meandering sidewalks
- promoting natural environments
- preserving and promoting green space along roads
- in front of buildings
- protecting and promoting community gardens, stone walls, trees and country fairs,

Neighborhoods

Participants defined the characteristics of a good neighborhood and included such features as:

- Sidewalks
- Many ways of communicating and interacting among neighbors both casually and formally
- Addressing traffic issues
- Providing more activities such as playground, neighborhood swimming pool, coffeeshop, library, places to walk to

Village Centers

Participants defined the characteristics of an ideal village center:

- Activities including parks, outdoor areas to congregate, grocery store. Family restaurant, benches, variety of businesses, parking in back of buildings, places to go at night
- Walkability
- Events
- Character – “quaint, but not cute,” each village with its own distinct character
- Strategies – ease traffic, plant flowers and trees, use zoning, move towards mixed use

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ADDRESSING ACTON'S CHALLENGES

Participants offered suggestions regarding how to address the following challenges as addressed in the previous visioning session and the town-wide survey:

- High Cost of Living
- Lack of Walkable Facilities
- Traffic
- Need for growth management and site and design control

Participants also added the following challenges:

- Maintain Acton's culture
- Biking
- Address Climate Change
- Recruit more volunteers
- Attract more businesses to town
- Increase school involvement

Planning for Sustainability

The large majority of participants agreed that planning for sustainability is an important concern for the town's future. A large majority of participants also agreed that the Town should take actions to reduce greenhouse gases. Participants prioritized the kinds of actions they felt the Town should take. The top priority actions were:

- More walking/biking facilities
- Provide incentives for homes and businesses to become more energy efficient
- Provide public transportation
- Increase recycling
- Building and retrofitting energy efficient public buildings

Senior Center/Community Center

A large majority of the workshop's participants felt the senior center should be expanded and a significant majority felt that the larger center should have a portion dedicated to use by the community at large.

PRIORITIZING USE OF RESOURCES

Participants identified the following priority goals:

- Planning for sustainability
- Addressing the lack of walking/biking facilities
- Enhancing village centers
- Preserving rural character
- Addressing traffic issues
- Addressing growth management and site and design review issues

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DETAILED DOCUMENTATION OF GROUP RESPONSES

PRESERVING AND ENHANCING ACTON'S ASSETS

1. Preserving "Rural Character"

The number one feature that residents agree should be preserved is what they described as Acton's rural character, natural features, and conservation lands. An important element that residents felt contributed to this sense of rural character was the town's open space. About 13% of Acton's 20 square miles are protected open land (compared to, for example, Boxboro's 25%).

1.1. Do you think the town should acquire more open space?

Yes 39 No 5 No Opinion 3

1.2. What other means could be used to preserve open land?

- Zoning
 - purchasing conservation easements instead of land
 - Zoning – protect trees as well as land
 - Link density and town centers to green space
 - Open space vs. development – variety of ways to protect – zoning is one way.
 - "Set asides"
- Define Open Space Requirements
 - Require playgrounds for kids in developments as part of approval process
 - Cluster (PCRC's) – encourage
- Convert open municipal property to protected conservation status
- Deed Restrictions – conservation
 - Individual landowners protect via deed restrictions
- Education
 - Educate homeowners about land use
 - School Programs
 - Promote National Wildlife programs
 - Bio-diversity education
 - Make residents more aware of open space
 - When open space becomes available, do a better job of selling preserving it to the public – remember Robbins Mill Pond – need to understand cost/benefit ratio
- Use Community Preservation Act
 - CPA funds to buy/protect open space
 - Prioritize protecting lots that could be developed (Percable) – maximize use of C.P.A. funds for this.

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- Limit development
 - Less single family houses. Encourage business and employees to settle here. Open space is both public and private
 - Stop single family development to reduce pressure on open space AND to reduce pressure on schools.
 - Limits on building permits (time limits to this)
 - Decrease population density
- Tax incentives
 - Reduce taxes on open land so incentive is not for development
 - Tax square feet of lawns
 - Tax incentives to donate land
 - Restructure taxes
 - Tax incentives for farmers
- Preserve waterways
- Don't know a lot about ways to save open space.
- Sometimes families need to cash out – how to balance that against protecting open space.
- Open space is a spectrum, includes transport corridors, business use, rec use, and more.

1.3. What else should the town do to preserve its “rural character”?

- Zoning laws
 - laws regarding signage (no neon signs)
 - Reinstate PUDs
 - More adherence to existing zoning bylaws; fewer variances issued
 - Address snob zoning
- Support agriculture
 - Farmer's markets
 - CSAs
 - Create Agriculture Commissions
 - Establish “right to farm”
 - Preserve old farms
 - Community farming
- Sidewalks
 - as means to preserve character – meandering
 - Do not widen roads for driving (but add sidewalks)
- Promote natural environments
 - Inter-municipal cooperation to preserve wildlife corridors
 - No plan for preserving space even though parcels are prioritized – no concept beyond visual – biodiversity, wildlife corridors
 - Promote natural environments on private land
 - Don't turn everything into lawns
 - Encourage tree growth – street tree program and planting of “native plants”

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- Ways to maintain rural character without open space – building placement, parking lot landscaping
 - Green spaces along roads
 - Better building codes – remember Meineke
 - Prevent clear-cutting – preserve wooded areas
 - Take great care – design review, no McMansions
 - Increase set back—more greenery, planting by the roadside
 - More green/less visibility of blacktop
 - Improve 40B developments
 - Targeted and cooperative 40B development more centralized so it's not spread out over town
 - 40B – curb it
 - Work with state on affordable housing legislation to eliminate unforeseeable consequences

- Problem with lack of large open parcels – QRCC
- Common deed restriction by seller of property limiting what is developed
- Target parcels town wants restricted and develop plan to acquire said parcels
- Better planning when existing property is replaced (ie. after a fire, etc)
- Create county fairs
- Promote community gardens
- Preserve and promote physical presence : trees (not dumpsters), stone walls, streetscapes, old trees



Small group discussion

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2. *Enhancing Neighborhoods*

Many of the survey respondents and participants in the previous visioning session mentioned the sense of community, neighborhood feeling and the village centers as being important features that make Acton unique and that residents wish to preserve. An interesting comment on Acton's neighborhoods is that well over half of the survey respondents (61%) reported that they know three of their neighbors "very well" or "well." Let's think about works about Acton's neighborhoods and what could be better.

Define the elements or characteristics of an ideal neighborhood. (e.g. What does it look like? What is in the neighborhood?, What can you walk to?, Is there such a neighborhood in Acton?, What do you want to make sure to preserve in Acton neighborhoods?, What would it take to make your neighborhood more desirable?)

- Sidewalks
 - More sidewalks.
 - Meandering sidewalks are good.
 - Sidewalks away from street.
 - Weston has small sidewalks that can wiggle around trees
 - Pedestrian access, more sidewalks to encourage people to be out and about
 - Enhance accessibility within communities
 - Footpaths/bikepaths

- Communication/Interaction
 - everyone getting to know each other well...better communication in neighborhoods
 - Acton Day NARA—break up into neighborhood units
 - Block parties
 - Neighborhood newsletter
 - Make renters feel more included
 - Gathering place – functions and meetings
 - Close streets for block parties
 - Neighborhood email lists
 - (e.g. Indian Village)
 - Email lists a la Beth Petr – link to Beth's list on Town website
 - Neighborhood book group and other activities
 - Promote neighborhood gathering (town promotion)
 - Bring generations together
 - South Acton community organization – hears there is one but can't find it
 - Acton Neighborhood Network enforced communication
 - Neighborhood organizations
 - Mutual aid/assistance blog
 - Neighborhoods have different characters due to demographics – kids and older kids and no kids, etc. – empower neighborhoods to decide what works for them
 - EAV, SAV, WAV, NAV, Center and many subdivisions with own complexion – define areas
 - Neighborhood pools competition, etc.
 - Subdivision wet sites for facilitating communication
 - Point people in each area/neighborhood

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- Walking groups in neighborhoods
- “Neighborhood networks”
- “School bus society”
- Establish community projects and activities

- Addressing Traffic
 - Less traffic
 - Speed bumps to slow traffic – like Windsor Ave.
 - Safety for children, speed bumps, sidewalks, other ways to quiet traffic
 - Safe roads
 - Non-through streets and dead ends
 - “no residential cut-through” signs
 - Promote driver courtesy
 - Encourage school bus use

- Activities
 - Have places to walk to
 - Common land – forever wild
 - Neighborhood swimming pool
 - playground
 - Nearby walkable coffee shop for small gatherings
 - Coffee shop in library

- Aesthetics
 - Reduce traffic signage clutter
 - Parking BEHIND stores – stores lining streets – like West Concord.
 - Interesting open space with new structures like bridges and sculpture. Concord as good example.

- More diversity in people – skin colors and languages and cultures.
- More affordable.
- Good neighborhood examples: Windsor Ave. and Gates School (i.e. local geographically defined school, not one based on politics or philosophy)



Small group discussion

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3. *Enhancing Village Centers*

In all participation venues residents expressed a high degree of appreciation for the town's village centers. However, there were also significant numbers of people calling for improvements to the existing centers and/or for additional centers.

Let's think about the ideal village center. (What does it look like? (can use examples from other places to describe or give description of physical features), What does it include? (what kind of uses, what kind of retail, does it include housing), How can existing village centers be enhanced? Should any new village centers be created?

- Activities
 - Theater. Constellation of shopping.
 - Kiosk, grass.
 - Parking in back.
 - Artists lofts.
 - Shop for basics. Bakery. Affordable shopping. 2nd hand clothing. West Concord as a model.
 - Family restaurant. Examples: Ichabods, Not Your Average Joe, etc.
 - Place where people can gather
 - Benches
 - Reasons such as shops/services to go there—run into people
 - A commons/green space
 - Focal point-variety of uses-commercial/gathering places, restaurants
 - Parking
 - Outdoor seating
 - Train Stop
 - Variety of businesses
 - Small restaurant/pub – outdoor cafes
 - Grocery store
 - Hardware store
 - Library
 - Places open at night
 - Groton – green space, room for gathering mixed-age group
 - South Acton Village – Exchange Hall
 - Parks to define village center (open spaces)
 - Open space with gazebo, surrounded by businesses
 - Amenities around train station
 - Outdoor areas where people can congregate, e.g. park, sidewalks where there's something to be there for
 - Parking in village areas – well landscaped, not visible

- Walkability
 - Fewer cars.
 - Walkable bikeable.
 - benches

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- Events
 - Parades.

- Character
 - Should have personality.
 - “Quaint, but not cute”
 - [side bar, contributed to by many:] Acton's culture and character: not snobby. well-run town. Egalitarian. Intelligent. Volunteerism. Proactive. value community. less entitlement than in within-128 towns. schools reflect [all of] this. healthier environment for kids. Example: coming together for Danny's place. C.A.F.Y.
 - No commuter traffic
 - West Acton Village
 - West Concord
 - Concord Center – ideal center
 - Architectural homogeneity in village centers
 - Acton’s villages are 5 very different places – nothing to build around to make them village-y
 - West Concord around train station –nothing in S. Acton

- Strategies
 - Replace Kelly's corner – could be ideal town center. (2)
 - Plan to acquire property around train station
 - Carefully crafted zoning
 - Village centers versus sewer systems – Title 5 constraints on creating town center
 - More parking (e.g. S. Acton)
 - Move village centers (e.g. N. Acton)
 - Ease traffic (e.g. S. Acton)
 - Plant flowers and trees
 - Small park with benches, bike racks & outdoor lighting with W. Acton
 - Move towards mixed use with higher/increased floor-area ratios
 - Create store parking behind the buildings (out of sight)



Small group discussion

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ADDRESSING ACTON’S CHALLENGES

4. Important Challenges

Looking at both the survey and the previous visioning session, residents identified what they considered to be Acton’s most important challenges. These included the following. (Keeping in mind that we are trying to identify those challenges that will be most important or significant to the town’s future, is there anything else that you would add to this list? Do you have any ideas regarding how to address any of these challenges?)

CHALLENGE	WAYS OF ADDRESSING
<i>High cost of living</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education – Energy Efficiency • Town-based energy – Energy Cooperative • Retain middle age and elderly population • Affordable housing (not necessarily 40B) • Taxes – Efficiency (fiscal responsibility) • Encourage volunteerism • Green Energy. Wind Turbines + Municipal Electric Company. Denser, more affordable housing. Preserve open space. Town and School sharing resources with each other; people, software, services. • Broader tax base. Localized commercial development • Encourage more business development • Surtax for families with school-age kids (not favorably regarded by others) • User fees for school • Limit size of homes • Decrease tax rate based on longevity of residency • Certain age – 65+ - cap on taxes until property changes hands • Due to nature and income level in town • Commuting alternatives • Bring business into town • Telecommute – high speed internet • Recycle existing housing for affordable to meet 40B requirements (deed restriction) • Build and manage movie theatre using high school kids as labor, as an educational opportunity • Federal state, other grant funds – town grant writer • Diversity in planning for commercial areas to include entertainment – more and smaller stores in shopping areas such as Brookside, instead of large stores • Split tax rate business/residence • Shift school costs • Adopt pay for services (e.g. trash) • Increase business tax rate
<i>Lack of walking facilities (sidewalks, trails)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercially contract sidewalk development • Increase Town Meeting participation • Walking paths/trails vs. sidewalks • Investigate alternate surfaces/designs • Link sidewalk planning to Town Centers

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bike trails – bike racks • Start sidewalks in Town Centers and train access • Comprehensive sidewalk plan • Finish bike trail • Sidewalks to preserve green • Inducement for landowners to allow sidewalks deeper onto property • Continue sidewalk committee • Grants for sidewalks and bike trails • Link bike and sidewalk networks – all part of non-motorized transportation • Integrated plan and dual use • Different contexts/uses – safety & transport vs recreation • Bike trail/walkway – connectivity, not in isolation • Pedestrian connectivity for town as comprehensive part of master plan • Walking for recreation vs walking to get somewhere • Upgrade & maintain existing infrastructure • Network (connect) existing trails & paths, incl. easements to connect same • Build path parallel to train tracks
<p><i>Traffic</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central place for carpooling • Town website/phone for carpooling • Shuttle – ActonExpress (train/school) • Discourage students driving to H.S. • Limit or charge more for parking • Provide late bus • More bike trails • More food stores in villages • Design to coexist with bikes and pedestrians. Bus system, esp. at commuter hours to trains. Bike locker use. Encourage train use. • Public transportation; encourage double track on commuter rail • Town Shuttle • Dedicated corridor-electrified system (Freeman and Assabet) rails with trails • Speed bumps in the center • Shuttle bus from train • Public transportation – long term plan – rights of way should be bought • More bike racks to encourage use • Keep traffic flowing along main roads – especially Main St. – don't allow stopping to let people from side roads in or across • Get cars off the road • Bypass town center • Increase motor vehicle excise tax to discourage cars • User fee for driving in center • Encourage other towns to develop transportation

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> options • Decrease our population • Increase alternative roads
<i>Need for growth management and site and design control</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning control • Restrict type of development • Encourage design review. Commercial strip management (2A). Implement East Acton Village Plan. Cluster uses. • Upgrade zoning, increase lot sizes (may be self correcting) • Cluster housing with smaller houses • Building codes – more restrictive • Too easy to get a project built in this town – should be design review for all projects not a single home • Incorporate all other issues discussed in review • No more 40B • Revise 40B (look at Wayland for example of managing 40B) • Mixed use zoning (cluster housing, Davis Rd. example)
<i>OTHER</i>	
Maintain Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and celebration of what we have
Biking	
Address Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete street light program • Town to investigate individual electric power • Town should encourage individuals to adapt new conservation awareness program • Town committee to centralize effort to be proactive to see what Acton can do to look into creating Acton Municipal Light Dept.
Recruit more volunteers	
Attract more businesses to town	
Increase school involvement	

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5. Planning for Sustainability¹

A significant number of people responding to the mail survey and participating in the visioning session indicated the lack of planning for sustainable development was a significant concern for them. Sustainable development is taking care to use resources in such a way so as to ensure that future generations can continue to meet their needs.

5.1. How many of you agree that planning for sustainable development is an important concern for the town's future ? 39

How many disagree? 7

(should not be focus, don't nickel and dime, cost/benefit analysis needed)

5.2. A large number of respondents to the survey supported the idea that the Town should take actions to reduce greenhouse gases.

How many of you agree that the Town should take such actions? 25

How many of you disagree? 2



Small group discussion

¹ Only four (4) of the five (5) discussion groups documented their discussion of this topic.

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5.3. The following are some actions being considered by other municipalities.

Are there any actions you would add to this list for consideration?

Action for a more sustainable Acton	# of dots²
More walking/biking facilities	46
Providing incentives for homes and businesses to become more energy efficient	35
Increase recycling	18
Buildings and retrofitting energy efficient public buildings	14
OTHER³	
Provide public transportation	20
Different ways to educate on larger issues/action – organized campaign	8
Rail-trail multi-purpose	8
Selectmen leadership	7
Manage water resources	7
Work closer to home	6
Other ordinances and laws	2
Anti-idling laws	2
Education of kids	1
Fewer people	1
Support carpooling	2
Add public water fountains	1
Sewering	1
Increase attractiveness of local shopping & entertainment so that people shop locally	1
Change school schedule to 4 days a week, longer days	1
Increase number of hazardous waste days	N/A ⁴

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.

³ Each group was asked to add actions for consideration; votes for those actions in the “other” category were only voted on by one group at a time with the exception of “Provide public transportation” which was added by three of the five groups.

⁴ This action was proposed in one group, but not voted on.

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6. Senior Center/Community Center

A large number of respondents felt that more services were needed for the elderly population. Others felt that more community gathering places were needed in general.

6.1. Do you ever use the Senior Center ? Yes 16 No 24

6.2. In what ways do you think the existing Senior Center can be improved?

- Move it to an Acton center. Transportation to and from.
- Use kitchen for more types of groups and activities.
- More centralized location
- Add pool
- Combine with Community Center
- Location
- Integrate into community
- Publicize – newsletter
- Open to all ages
- Improve poor design and space
- Improve inadequate transportation, parking and slope
- Shuttle
- Make larger community center/multi-age use, more community involvement
- Make more accessible to people – transport

6.3. Do you think the senior center should be expanded?

Yes 35 No 7 No Opinion 3

6.4. If the Town builds a new building to hold a larger senior center, should portions of that building be available for other community needs, or should the building be dedicated solely to the use of Acton seniors? Community 42 Seniors Only 3

6.5. WHY?

- Whatever we do, let's make sure there are enough activities for seniors. Let's learn from good models in the northwest US and Scandinavia
- Good for commingling of multi-generations; each group benefits and learns from each other; need to maintain amenable community for town's elderly so they will stay; need to do more to encourage seniors to be part of community.
- Link Senior/Community Center to Town Centers

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7. PRIORITIZING USE OF RESOURCES

*As we move forward in developing goals and objectives we will be trying to prioritize which issues to address first in terms of spending time and money and attention.
The following issues were discussed today.*

7.1. Is there anything you would like to add to the list of important issues to be addressed – both in terms of preserving and enhancing existing assets as well as addressing challenges in the future.

Themes for developing preliminary goals	# of dots⁵
Planning for sustainable development	37
Addressing the lack of walking/biking facilities	35
Enhancing village centers	24
Preserving rural character	23
Addressing traffic issues	23
Addressing growth management and site and design review issues	23
Improving existing senior center or building new one	19
Addressing the high cost of living	10
Enhancing neighborhoods	5
OTHER⁶	
Encourage use of renewable energy in public buildings & private homes ⁷	11
Preserve culture	8
Transform Kelley’s corner to village center	8
Providing public transportation	7
Upgrade aging schools	5
Encourage controlled economic development	3

⁵ 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.

⁶ Each group was asked to add actions for consideration; votes for those actions in the “other” category were only voted on by one group at a time, that is the count represents the number of individuals in one group who voted on the goal.

⁷ In addition to Sustainability being the number one goal based on the number of priority votes it received (37), the “Encourage use of renewable energy in public buildings and private homes” , a very related goal, received an additional 11 votes.

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The following questions were on the back of participants agendas. Forty-one (41) participants responded.

Variety in Activities and Opportunities to Socialize.

In previous participation venues, many residents expressed what they see as a need for more variety in places to go; they specifically listed wanting more opportunities for gathering and more cultural activities in Acton. What kinds of activities would you be interested in the Town developing and/or supporting?

<i>Community Center</i>	<i>Restaurants (what kind?)</i>	<i>Cultural activities (what kind?)</i>	<i>Movie theater</i>
20 if it includes senior center (2) include a movie theater include a pool - can we use the senior center on weekends?	17 indoor/outdoor homemade food café, soup/salad a gathering place ethnic: Vietnamese mid-level: Not Your Average Joe's mid-low leve: Paneras fine dining, sit down casual, but not pizza pub-like, wine bar neighborhood-based Chinese, Middle Eastern, Brazilian Outdoor seating; Porches Small bistro type, ethnic foods W.Acton would be perfect if it had sewers More atmosphere	8 - festivals - like W.Newton cinema - only if self-funded - music - theater (drama), concerts, dance - more classical music opportunities	20 - independent, art films - walk to outdoor café & nighttime gathering places - community theater with film capability - most important - the movie theater in Maynard suits us fine - via tax break

OTHER:

- Town Travel Day
- Sharing community center
- Recreation & social & housing for the mentally disabled
- More arterial sidewalks, including north along Main Street
- The Town Hall has little influence on specific businesses
- Kelley's Corner village variety of restaurants
- Neighborhood centers : meet and discuss your neighborhood with your neighbors
- Smaller sitting parks – outdoor gathering areas in walking village areas
- Schools already have so much community space available (no need for a community center)
- Go to Maynard for a movie theater
- Senior center on school campus in old brick Town building

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Train Station Improvements

Do you use the train station? Yes __17__ No__15__ (one “no, but planning to use next month” one “no, but my wife does”)

Residents have suggested a number of improvements to the station. What do you feel would be the most important improvement to make?

<i>More parking</i>	<i>Provide train station building</i>	<i>More overhang on canopy (to protect from rain an snow)</i>	<i>Shuttle bus to and from station</i>
13 multi-story yes, but where?	6	16	24

OTHER:

- Use WR Grace property for a parking lot; if need be, more the train station
- Shuttle buses from neighboring towns that also pay for the service
- Parking in outlying areas with shuttle bus
- Stop in West Acton – people could walk or bike to this train station
- More frequent trains leaving Acton M-F b/w 6:45 and 8:30 a.m. and leaving Boston & Porter Square M-F b/w 5:30 and 7:00 p.m.
- Save the current level of train service – which is threatened if Grest and General Court doesn’t relieve MBTA of other purpose debt load.
- Give more parking to locals to help force surrounding towns to develop shuttles
- There was a train station building similar to West Concord’s – should be rebuilt
- Safe bike lane on 27th Central Street so that I can bike to it!
- Encourage walking/cycling to train
- Supportive retail – pharmacy, cleaners, bakery/coffee shop, liquor store, etc. – “walking errands”
- Create transit link to station using existing rail corridors
- How about a “zip car” business, where small autos are shared?
- Design the area by the train station as a mini-mall for mixed use shopping, cafes, attractive and organized
- I use the West Concord Station

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Taxes

Which of the following would you be willing to increase taxes to pay for:

<i>New senior center</i>	<i>Acquiring open space</i>	<i>Green-house gas reduction</i>	<i>Shuttle bus</i>	<i>Cultural Activities</i>	<i>Walking facilities⁸</i>	<i>Biking facilities⁹</i>	<i>OTHER</i>
<i>13 community center for all ages (3)</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>18 - only from train station</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>30 sidewalks only most important</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>Train station Cultural center Upgrade aging schools Improved town center</i>

OTHER:

- Greenhouse gas reduction is a great side effect of sustainable development
- Concept of a true town center – with community center (indoor & outdoor) incorporated
- Bikes on our narrow roads always force cars over double yellow lines --more bikes without wider roads equals more danger. Don't encourage more bikes.
- No New Taxes
- Biking on roads safely; design roads so that cyclists are respected
- Reduce the School budget and have more money for other uses
- Community Center should include senior center and cultural activities
- No more taxes, I can barely afford to live here, as it is! Must move out of town in a few years.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- Upgrade aging schools
- Rail trails and connections to pedestrian and bike paths and sidewalks continue to be highest priority

⁸ Sidewalks, trails

⁹ bike paths, bike racks

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COMMENTS PAD

Several “comment pads” were available for participants to write their answers to specific questions. The questions and the participants’ responses are listed below.

Many residents have identified the schools as being one of Acton’s key assets. Do you agree? If yes, what about the schools do you feel merits such top ranking?

- I’m always impressed with the precociousness I see in the students
- Excellent staff
- The School Committee did an exceptional job moving towards more state funding. These people should be more publicly applauded!
- Almost too good
- Absolutely central to the quality of life and our economic strength
- The school system draws in new families and will support the vibrance of the town.
- Yes, but more, much more, needs to be done so people don’t get pushed out of town by school-related tax increases
- Schools and Town should combine some “back room” services and be more transparent to each other’s leadership groups.
- Lower class sizes – why do we have some of the highest in the state?
- Make certain that all students are grounded in knowledge of their Natural Environment – the best chance for protecting our natural landscape and biodiverse health (e.g. not only subdivisions).
- Capable students, involved parents, varied activities for kids to participate in (Jr. High and High schools). Good education with one of the lower per pupil costs in the area. Strong volunteerism on the part of parents.
- I’ve been very impressed with the schools, very happy with Meriam’s emphasis on learning how to work with others in groups. We need to develop better skills in conflict resolution – to deal with all the challenges our country (and planet) faces. Also need to develop skills for understanding the impacts of decisions and practices – integrative thinking.
- Mostly due to educational level of parents and parents willingness to pay for schools
- Lower class size!
- Yes, educators are top notch. Curriculum has breadth and depth.

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*Many residents were displeased with the lack of a “real town center.”
Do you agree? How would you address this issue?*

- Why just one? We have several...
- We need a commercial town center, like West Concord, that supports the town and is a place for people to meet. Is it too late?
- Encourage the redevelopment of Kelley’s corner to accomplish the above
- I second that
- Yes, and get rid of that horrible Meineke building!
- The previous Kelley’s Corner plan was the answer
- Any way to create this near 111/27 corner?
- Agree!
- Me too!
- Also what are the opportunities along 2A so that it is not just a a car-oriented passage?
- Not sure where, but agree that town center similar to West Concord would be nice
- Yes, indeed!
- How about diverting rush-hour/through traffic away from Acton Center and creating a larger “common” (green space). Maybe a round-about (rotary) concept would help by Town Hall area.
- I love our town center as it is. We have the library, playground and open space – perfect!
- Actonians already speak of “West Acton Center” and other existing centers – why not develop those – so that they are accessible by walkers –multiple town centers – rather than one giant traffic/parking nightmare. We can’t preserve rural character if we create giant central spaces.
- No – out Town Center as it is reflects the historic importance of Acton.
- Town Center could be improved without losing character. There is a cement or stone object which obstructs the view of on-coming traffic on 27. The object needs to be moved back. There is not enough signage to make a significant area of the Center.

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Do you think there is a need for more variety in the types of housing in Acton? If yes, what kinds of housing is needed and for whom?

- Enough – no more 40B. We have plenty of affordable housing within the price range even though it may not be designated affordable – 40B just puts dollars in developers pockets.
- Need a balance – fairness balances with preservation of town character. Conclusion: meet the needs of 40B with enthusiasm, but stop there.
- Yes, we need a variety of housing types – to support people with different economic resources as well as different ages and needs (e.g. condos and smaller apartments within walking distance of shopping for bank needs, allows people to remain independent longer even if can't afford a car or can't drive. Those types of housing opportunities create vibrant "centers."
- Acton has plenty of housing, and quite a variety. What is missing entirely are play areas safely designated for children within housing complexes. Acton needs a bylaw requiring all builders of multiple housing to set aside common, easily accessible play areas (grass) as well as common playgrounds.
- More accessible units should be required in 40Bs and restrict defacto affordable housing density within walking distance of commercial.
- Enough 40B housing units.
- No more 40B projects
- Limit house size – no McMansions

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**CONNECTING ACTON’S ASSETS: GETTING AROUND
*Walking and Biking***

Significant numbers of residents suggested making Acton more accessible to walkers and bikers by providing sidewalks, walking facilities such as trails and bikeways.

How would you rate each type of facility in relation to each other? In other words if you could decide in which order the Town should undertake to extend these which order would you choose? Please place tally marks so that if you think Sidewalks should go first place one tally mark under “first”, if you think bikeways should be third, place one tally mark under “third.”

	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD	COMMENTS
SIDEWALKS	7	3	2	No Yes, including the post office square to 2A, foolishly voted down at 08 TM
TRAILS	4	2	7	
BIKEPATHS	9	6		- Not just “for fun”- encourage use of bicycles as transportation (train, etc.) requires multiple small commercial centers - I second the above – very important - Third here! - Bikepaths are also sidewalks along roads. - Keep bikes off dirt paths + woods + meadows

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Participation in Town Activities. What can the town do to make it easier for you to be involved in town activities in general?

- There are so many things it is almost impossible to do all that might interest one. Keeping up with kid activities takes up much family time and energy
- Encourage schools to add volunteerism to their curriculum, i.e. Jr. High School donations to food band, etc.
- Too busy – too pulled in multiple directions – kids, work, home maintenance
- I have attempted to participate in issues that interest me and have been personally attacked by other group members who seem to be part of an inner “clique” of people close to Town Hall. I hope that a new Selectmen’s composition will no longer make this possible. It’s a major deterrent; that and the nasty, negative rumor mill. Acton should be ashamed of its past in this respect!
- Second this comment
- Third this comment
- I fourth this comment and agree with comments on the next page.
- Very busy schedule, volunteer at school, but would like to get more involved at Town level.
- Transportation is sometimes a problem.
- There is a fundamental flaw with Acton’s volunteering process which makes the creation of new/temporary committees subject to unfair discrimination. (I don’t know about this, but I do know that existing committees “hire their own.”) For example, Selectmen (and existing Committee members) can “stack” committees with members that only they choose. The flaw is that the Volunteer Coordinating Committee does not process ALL volunteers! Many time the Selectmen just choose who they want with no screening involved, by an independent entity. I strongly recommend that the VCO be the foal point for ALL volunteers for committees in the future. Anything else is a joke.
- Another thing – regarding selecting Committees: there are no standards for how they function (and for diverse views to be aired) - except the most minimal. Ostensibly, committees are formed to permit a forum for public involvement. BUT there is no standard in place requiring committees to advertise when they are meeting (in addition to the problem potentially unfair of committee appointments, as noted above). So, a committee head can say, quite openly and without guilt, “we don’t have to inform the public about anything we are doing.” Amazing, but true. I know at least one committee (too many) whose members boldly scorned all public input, only to write up a report based almost entirely on one members “vision.” This makes a mockery of Acton’s committees process.

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Additional Comments

- Get Boxboro to do this too!
- Climate change, climate change, climate change! Go local :
 - Food
 - Transportation
 - Reduce consumption (products, fuel)
 - Reduce waste
- More commercial property to expand tax base – goes with the going local
- Pedestrian-oriented shopping, etc. at Kelley’s Corner
- Local food sources
 - CSA’s
 - “green” transportation
 - reduce waste
- Yes I would definitely take advantage of CSAs
- Complete Rail Trail – need bike routes on most main roads
- Don’t forget our wildlife! – our health depends on a healthy, intact ecosystem.
- Help make Acton a dog friendly environment! Don’t exclude dogs and their owners from events – make Acton a welcoming place for pets (Have you been to Oregon? They allow dogs everywhere, and it works beautifully). Prejudice against dogs should be forbidden – it’s not nice!
- Improve parking (increase it) at train station. Parking garage with green space and retail space?
- I’d like to see Acton develop an awareness of our connections and participation in larger constructs. Where do we fit into the local watersheds. We should know more about the biodiversity of our landscape. There was a funny comment in our discussion group today and several other people joined this person in wanting to get rid of the deer, turkeys and other wildlife, in their yards. Our “rural character” has brought these animals back to share our environment. I don’t want Acton to become “faux rural” – I want more real rural – as much as I can get in the suburbs.
- To have a real rural village quality requires multiple smaller centers, accessible by walking, and a tolerance and support of biodiversity and choices that support sustainability rather than continuing growth. Sustainability requires multiple age groups to be able to afford to stay here – not just families with children who move away once the children are through school. Education and community for all ages – not just children and families. Thanks for reading!
- One thing to change – pedestrian
- Didn’t focus on top items from last survey
- We have to be proactive to protect Acton’s remaining farms as our neighboring communities (Concord, Westford, Littleton, Sudbury) are doing to protect theirs. It must be a priority or in the future we will lose them. The same thing goes for Acton’s remaining parcels of open space.

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YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Each of the Acton schools in the Acton public school system participated in the visioning process in their own way. Students and teachers prepared a large number of varied ways of expressing their concerns and desires for the future. These included a significant number of surveys at every grade level, drawings, movies, a song, posters, a mural, etc. These were displayed at the visioning session and will be available for viewing at the library during the month of August, 2008.

The following are the lyrics from a song developed from a teacher-led brainstorm with the 6th grade students and written by the Music Department.

This Town is Your Town

Melody: "This Land is Your Land"

Chorus/Refrain

This town is your town; this town is my town,
From the edge of Boxborough to the Concord
border.
From the pine tree forests to the Nagog waters,
This town will change with you and me.

Install some streetlights and maybe sidewalks.
I've walked past litter and don't enjoy it.
Add many trashcans to make it cleaner,
Then Acton will be a better place.

Chorus/Refrain

As I was walking around Acton
I saw we needed bike paths and park space,
A community center, more ethnic restaurants.
This town should change; don't you agree?

Chorus/Refrain

Stop building condos and houses, too.
Let's make it greener for me and you.
Use solar panels and biofuel.

If we unite it will come true.

Chorus/Refrain

Stop driving SUV's,
Help plant some more trees.
Recycle paper, glass, plastic, too.
Acton's the place for me and you.

Chorus/Refrain

Get rid of Styrofoam as our lunch trays
Compost the food scraps, don't fill the landfills!
Stop chopping down trees upon the highways
This town should preserve the greenery!

Chorus/Refrain

I like my school, And the library
From Dunkin Donuts To Starbucks coffee
From Hybid Farm to Friendly's ice cream
Acton's the place for you and me!

Chorus/Refrain

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In addition to this song, the children who attended the session came up with their own song and sang it to the adults in attendance. The lyrics are written below:

I've got my sights set on Acton
And I'm ready for change
I've got some great ideas that will never be tamed.
I know that Acton is special 'cause everyone's nice
And I'm so glad I live in Acton.

I love Nara Park
And all the old houses

I s-s-stuttered when I saw the pretty nature
It's like I couldn't breathe
You asked what's wrong with me
I said: "I wish there were more flowers"

I don't like the traffic
And off of the construction

My heart can't rest till change
Oooh oooh oooh....
I – I can't wait to see the new Acton!



"The Acton singers"

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The following are some sample quotes from surveys of Acton students in different grades:

“If I elected myself mayor of Acton I will make Acton a better place by stop littering in rivers because animals can get hurt or die. I would also like more people to recycle because trees get cut down and animals sometimes lose their homes. I would like to try to put most of the polar bears in captivity because in the artic the temperature is rising and polar bears need a cold habitat. What about cleaning. If you clean you have fun and people don’t bother. Also listen to your parents and teachers. Thank you”

Extended Day, Grades 1 and 2

“I want more animals and wildlife”

Claire, Gates Elementary School , Cindy Hollis Class, Grade 1

“I would like Acton to have more parks. One reason why is because family’s can bond.” Also kids needs exercise like doing sports at the parks. It ‘s so fun for everybody. Kids are all over Acton. What if all of them wanted to go to a park and there’s only one – they can’t all fit!”

Claire, Gates Elementary School , Cindy Hollis Class, Grade 1

Student Survey – Stratified Random Sample
7 Green, RJ Grey Jr. High School (5/27/08)

Are you interested in making Acton a more environmentally conscious town?

49% YES

41% Maybe (it depends on the changes being made)

8% No

When you stay after school for extra help or an activity, how do you get home?

Walk 19.6%

Bike 6.1%

Carpool with a friend 16.7%

I get picked up in the family car 60.8%

Other (roller blades, scooter) 2%

If Acton had a clean, modern movie with affordable prices, how often would you go?

One or more times per week -34%

About one time per month -- 51%

About one or two times in six months – 11%

About one time per year 3%

Never -- 3%

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R.J. Grey Junior High School, Grade 7

“I enjoy all of the parks and playgrounds around town it makes it look friendly and inviting.”

“A nice new mall, a movie theater with a lot of colors, and restaurants...”

Pretty stuff:

Town center monument

Arboretum

Nara Park

Amanda

Clouds

Gardens

Duck Pond

Nature

Great Road stuff

Not Pretty Stuff::

Kmart

Condos

Litter

Libby's fence

Want:

Mall ((girls say and guys agree)

“I don't enjoy how many houses there are in Acton that ruin the scenery.”

“Plant more trees..”

“What I enjoy most visually in Acton is its nice rural area look.” – Christian

“We could make malls, better-bigger brand stores to make visually exciting”

“Not cut down trees and stuff, not build ugly houses, conserve the environment.”

“the thing that is least appealing is the old automobile shop on the corner near the bowling alley.”

“I don't like downtown West Acton. The stores look very ... almost run down – as well as the house next to the Fire Department...”

“I love the parks – Nara Park and the design of the neighborhoods and houses.”

“Acton needs flashing neon signs along the border saying: Welcome to Acton.”

“I like the old colonial look.”

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8th grade surveys

What are THREE most important assets you feel Acton has (qualities you like).

“It is a tight community that is very loving. The people in Acton are very nice and are loving to their neighbors. Also is has almost no pollution.”

*School is very educational
Great sports program
good schools
low crime rate
good neighborhoods
nice people
Small town
Caring community
The history
Fun things to do/activities
“riding horses”
“Danny’s Place”*

What are the THREE most important challenges you feel face Acton (qualities you do not like):

*Way too competitive
Get up too early to go to school
Not enough sidewalks
Houses are expensive
Amount of litter
Drugs, smoking and bullying at school
Loss of small town feel
“Really bad school lunches.”
“Taxes are too high”*

What makes Acton unique?

*“It is a tight community that is depending on each other that builds a great community.”
“Acton is very woody and does not look like your average town.”
“friendly people”
“has lots of different activities”
it’s history”
close to cities but rural
close to the Cape
“The people who live in it”*

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How well do you know at least three of your neighbors?

“My friend Phoebe lives next door she is in my wind and I sit with her on the bus. Rachel is in 8th grade and I talk with her at the bus stop. Carol is someone my mom uses in case of emergency.”

“I know my neighbors well enough to be their friends.”

“very well”

“I see and play with them everyday.”

“Very well, we talk a lot, we’re relatives”

“not very well”

What would you like to see more of in Acton?

“More green and open spaces because I really like nature, forests and large open fields that are left untouched by humans because you don’t see those types of things often anymore.”

Activities for teens

More eco-friendly opportunities

Restaurants and clothing stores

Sidewalks

Less big companies, more local ones

grass

“Programs to know more others less fortunate/elderly”

“A downtown area.”

“I would like to see more parks and places to play for young children, because I, as a young child, loved to play around outside, and I don’t want Acton to turn into a city with only houses and buildings.”

“More activities other than sports and school.”

What would you like to see less of in Acton?

Less sports competition on Sundays

Development

loss of open space

Litter

People going to fast food places like McDonald’s and Dunkin Donuts

Pollution

Drugs and smoking kids

“I hate all the trees being cut down and having more and more townhouses/condos”

roads

“Less frivolous spending by town committees (stained glass window in high school instead of fixing mold in Douglas)”

“Bad substitute teachers.”