HISTORY OF SOUTH ACTON

Prior to its settlement by farmers from Concord, present-day Acton was frequented by Nipmuck-related Native Americans, who may have practiced limited agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering. Many areas of Acton were good composites especially areas along Nesheba and Fort Pond Brook as well as Nagoog Pond.

1600-1650
Early roads followed the brook where Native Americans had made trails.
Acton is incorporated in 1735
1864 the Fitchburg Rail Road passed through South Acton.

1800
1892
Morcos Leather Factory 1892

1900
A water district is formed for South and West Acton in 1912
Acton’s population grows to 3,511

1900s Apples are a major export industry

1950
Great Hill 192 acres
Acton’s population grows to 14,790

1955 South Acton Village Plan Adopted

1990
HAPC Creates 1982 South Acton Village Plan

2010
New 1995 South Acton Village Plan Adopted

1990
Construction of the Train Station is completed

Present
Stonefield Farm P1 51.5 acres

Select Board approves one-way traffic on River Street (Chadwick to School Street)

Assabet River Rail Trail connects Acton to downtown Maynard

Sources and Photos: Acton 2010 Master Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, Acton Historical Society, Iron Work Farm, Acton Reconnaissance Report, Housing Production Plan, Municipal Resources Guide for Bikeability
**GROWTH AND CHANGE OVER TIME**

**Housing Stock By Year Built in Acton Vs. State**

- **1990**
  - In 1990 the Town rewrote the Zoning Bylaw. At this time, multi-family housing was prohibited in all districts except for R-A district (pink area) by special permit. This district is located along portions of Great Road.

- **1985**
  - 1985 Acton establishes the South Acton Village District which allows a mixture of single family, business uses, motor vehicle repair shops, and office uses by right among others; requires a special permit for restaurants. In 1988 the Bylaw is changed to allow combined business and dwelling.

- **1970**
  - 1970 Acton amends the Zoning Map to include new districts: Light Industrial, and three different residential districts. Multi-family dwellings require a minimum lot area of 80,000 square feet.
  - Most of Acton’s existing multi-family housing along Great Road was constructed prior to 1970.
  - 1971 Apartments are no longer allowed in the Business District (green area).

- **1953**
  - 1953 Acton adopts the Zoning Bylaw and establishes three districts: Business, Industrial and Residential District (which also allows agricultural uses). At this time, single family and duplexes were allowed in all areas shown in white and multi-family housing was allowed in all areas shown in white by special permit. Apartments were allowed by right in Business Districts (areas shown in green).
# PAST PLANS AND GOALS

## 1982 Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan Goals</th>
<th>Updates on Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mixture of village businesses, offices, and residential use</td>
<td>Acton adopted Historic District Bylaw 1990; HDC has authority to approve all development design, demolitions and alterations in the SAV moving forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Emphasis on preserving the historic character of the Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Develop a clear commercial identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Creation of a sense of place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 1995 Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan Goals</th>
<th>Updates on Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Improve the village character to restore a sense of place and community focus</td>
<td>CPA projects funding restoration of historic buildings (Exchange Hall, Jones Taverns &amp; Faulkner Homestead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Preserve, maintain, and restore the historic buildings</td>
<td>Purchased 53 River Street, plans for historic park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clean up and improve the appearance of buildings, structures, yards, and public spaces</td>
<td>Sewer system created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Build a sewage collection system and treatment facility to alleviate the severe problem with septic systems, to help revitalize the village, and to clean up Fort Pond Brook</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Encourage small business development</td>
<td>Acton created a new position for Economic Development Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Promote a diversity of housing</td>
<td>Zoning is modified following the 1995 Plan to allow for multi-family with special permits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Improve and expand the system of sidewalks and improve pedestrian safety, convenience, and comfort. Build bike ways where possible.</td>
<td>Bike lanes were added on Main Street from the MBTA station to Mass Ave; ARRT is completed; sidewalks constructed on High Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Improve automobile traffic safety</td>
<td>2022 ATM approves funding to create a preliminary infrastructure improvement plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Maintain and improve the commuter parking lot and train services</td>
<td>MBTA train station is completed; additional parking added on Maple Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Protect and maintain existing public open spaces and the remaining farm land. Develop additional public open space and park land bordering Mill Pond and Fort Pond Brook.</td>
<td>Over 93 acres of land has been preserved for open space and parkland (53 River Street) since 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXISTING CONDITIONS OF SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE

Below is a map showing locations where various uses are allowed. This is not an exhaustive list of uses, but a sample of frequently discussed uses.

Below is a map showing locations where various uses are currently located.

**Allowed Uses**
- Residential
  - Single Family
  - Multi-family
- Commercial
  - Restaurants
  - Retail/Shops
  - Vehicle Repair Shop

**Current Uses**
- Residential
  - Single Family
  - Two Family
  - Multi-family
- Commercial
  - Retail/Shops
  - Other Commercial
- Cultural
  - Religious
  - Historic Nonprofit
- Businesses
  - Office
  - Vehicle Services
  - Scientific/Office
- Other
  - Private and Public Protected Open Space
  - Public Facilities
  - Vacant Land

* Special Permit is required

1/2 mile radius from MBTA Station
MASS GENERAL LAW 40A SECTION 3A

What does the law require Acton to do in order to comply?
A minimum of 50 acres throughout Acton must be zoned to allow:
- Multi-family by-right,
- At a density of 1.5 units per acre,
- That allows for the option to construct a minimum of 1,383 units.

This law does not require the construction of any units, rather it mandates that zoning laws allow the option to construct multi-family units without discretionary permits.

The district(s) must be feasible for development. For example, a district that contains all wetlands or conservation land would not comply with the new law because it is restricted from development.

The zoning district(s) can be located in areas that are already developed, it does not need to be located on vacant lots. For example, an area could be zoned to allow for multi-family by-right even if there are already buildings on the lot(s).

Inclusionary zoning is allowed. Communities can require up to 10% of the units to be deed restricted to affordable to incomes at 80% of the Area Median Income.

Currently, Acton does not comply with the law.

What happens if Acton does not comply?
The Town will no longer be eligible for MassWorks, Local Capital Projects Fund, or Housing Choice Initiative. In the past three years alone Acton has received over 3.5 million dollars from these funding sources.

Examples of Local Capital Project Funds:
- Acton Water District would be eligible for the SRF loan discount program with the Town’s designation as a Housing Choice Community.
- Acton Housing Authority would lose 10% of their State public housing units fund in the amount of $60,000.
- Acton Waste Water Treatment Plant would no longer be eligible for the L5% loan discount for the MWTP rehab project.

The Multi-family district must be a "reasonable size"
What does "reasonable size" mean for Acton?
- A total of 50 acres throughout Town,
  ○ At the 15 acres, 15 acres must be within 1/4 mile of the MBTA station
  ○ The remaining 40 acres can be outside this area
  ○ At least one area must be zoned with a total of 25 contiguous acres
  ○ Any zones or overlay districts must be at least 5 acres in size

Green Square = Total area within 1/2 mile radius of the SAV train station (502 acres)
Grey Square = Total area actually developable with 1/2 mile radius of SAV (246 acres)
Block-Dashed Square = Total area required to allow multi-family in all of Acton (50 acres)
Blue Dashed Square = Total area required to within 1/2 mile of the train station in SAV (10 acres)

How could Acton alter zoning to comply? Acton could modify existing districts, create overlay districts or create new districts.

Multi-Family By-Right
What does By-right mean?
By-right means that a use and the development of that use is entitled to approval. Regulations on site design, layout and dimensions can be imposed, and site plan review can be required, but the use must not require a special permit.
CURRENT MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING

What is 40B?
Acton, among many other Massachusetts suburban communities and others nationwide, began changing local zoning in the 1960s to restrict multi-family housing which in turn began limiting the stock of housing units that were naturally affordable.

As a response, in 1949 the State enacted M.G.L. Chapter 40B to help address the shortage of affordable housing statewide by reducing barriers to development of multi-family housing created by local approval processes, local zoning, and other restrictions.

If a community does not have at least 10% of its housing stock deed restricted and available at 80% of the area median income (or less), individuals can opt to utilize this section of State law to develop housing. 25% of all units in a 40B development are required to be deed restricted at 80% area median income. Acton is currently at 8.7% and is not in "safe harbor" which means the Town cannot outright deny a 40B project.

40B developments can go anywhere in town and are not bound by the Acton Zoning Bylaw.

Why is there multi-family housing outside permitted zoning districts?
Multi-family housing currently located in districts where it is not allowed was either constructed through Chapter 40B or was constructed at a time when the Zoning Bylaw allowed for multi-family. For example, when Acton’s Zoning was originally adopted, multi-family was allowed in all Residential Zoning Districts. This use would now be classified as "pre-existing, non-conforming."
**SOUTH ACTON VISION SURVEY SUMMARY**

In November 2022, the Town sent a postcard to all residential mailing addresses to solicit survey responses for the South Acton Vision and Action Plan. 972 Responses were received. Below is a sample of questions and responses. A full report of the survey is also available.

### General Uses

Which of the following commercial land uses would you like to have in South Acton? Select all that apply.

- Retail
- Restaurants
- Office Space
- Entertainment
- Community Center
- Industrial
- Other

### Housing

Which of the following housing uses would you like to have in South Acton? Select all that apply.

- Single Family
- Townhouse
- Condominium
- Multi-Family
- Other

### Priorities

As we embark on this planning initiative, please indicate how important you feel the following priorities are in creating a vision for South Acton.

- Preserve South Acton’s historic buildings and character:
  - Important: 359
  - Nice to have: 222
  - Unimportant: 78
  - Neutral/Undecided: 32

- Promote small business development:
  - Important: 474
  - Nice to have: 180
  - Unimportant: 54
  - Neutral/Undecided: 32

- Improve infrastructure for walking and biking:
  - Important: 518
  - Nice to have: 186
  - Unimportant: 58
  - Neutral/Undecided: 29

- Integrate sustainable features into new development:
  - Important: 438
  - Nice to have: 186
  - Unimportant: 58
  - Neutral/Undecided: 29

- Concentrate growth and mixed-use development in village center:
  - Important: 328
  - Nice to have: 231
  - Unimportant: 74
  - Neutral/Undecided: 71

- Improve and expand sewer collection system:
  - Important: 348
  - Nice to have: 197
  - Unimportant: 67
  - Neutral/Undecided: 94

**FUTURE**
What's next for the South Acton Vision and Action Plan

**Phase 1**
- Website "go-live"
- Town wide survey
- Focus Groups (Acton Water District, Acton Engineering Department, Building Dept., ACHC, AHA)
  - **Existing Conditions Analysis**
  - **SAV in person "Past, Present and Future" Open House**
  - Focus Group (Neighbors, Developers and Engineers)

**Phase 2**
- Visioning
  - Reviewing public feedback and creating draft vision and goals
  - Public workshop finalize vision and goals
- Mapping and modeling
- Focus Groups
- 3A Compliance Modeling
- Feasibility Analysis
- Public workshop on findings and feedback
- Draft Zoning Recommendations
- Public workshop - Zoning Recommendations
- Infrastructure preliminary design services commence
- Public Engagement
- Town to consider Zoning Changes 2024 ATM

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**Zoning and Infrastructure Planning is an Iterative Process**

The Town appropriated funds at the 2022 ATM (Article 6D) for professional traffic planning and preliminary design services to identify suitable and effective improvements along the Main Street corridor from Central Street to High Street. The objective is to enhance the operation and safety along the corridor and at the intersections, preserve the historic character of the South Acton Village Historic District, minimize the potential impacts for the commuter rail parking and nearby residential neighborhoods.

This study will be coordinated to coincide with the findings and recommendations from the South Acton Vision and Action Plan.