

HISTORY OF SOUTH ACTON

 = Infrastructure/Transportation = Open Space and Land Purchases
 = Industry = Planning/Zoning

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

Trolley line brought people from South Acton to Maynard to bar hop and shop! Residents would rent a car and party on the way! The line terminated in Hudson.



1965
Rail line has brief 5 month interruption when the line changed from a private line to a fully public line



Acton adopts Historic Districts 1990

Simeone Caouette 10.22 acres

Assabet River Rail Trail connects Acton to downtown Maynard



Gabel Land 5.24 acres

53 River Street 7.29 acres

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



Early roads followed the brook where Native Americans had made trails.

Acton is incorporated in 1735

1844 the Fitchburg Rail Road passed through South Acton



Zoning is first Adopted in Acton 1953

Sewer District is established in a portion of South Acton 2002



1600
South Acton was the center of the early industrial activity with the first fulling mill and sawmill on Fort Pond in operation by 1706.



Acton sees a rise in population in Irish immigrants in the mid 19th century with the industrial expansion. Population increases to 1,726.

1700
Morocco Leather Factory 1892



1800
A water district is formed for South and West Acton in 1912



1900
1900s Apples are a major export industry



1950
Acton's population grows to 3,510



Great Hill 192 acres

Acton's population grows to 14,770

1970
MAPC Creates 1982 South Acton Village Plan



New 1995 South Acton Village Plan Adopted



Construction of the Train Station is completed

Stonefield Farm PR 51.5 acres

Piper Lane 6 acres

Voters approve funding for professional traffic planning and preliminary design services for South Acton (Main Street corridor from Central Street to High Street)

90 Martin Street 3.68 acres

Bike Lanes are constructed on Main Street from the MBTA station to Mass Ave.

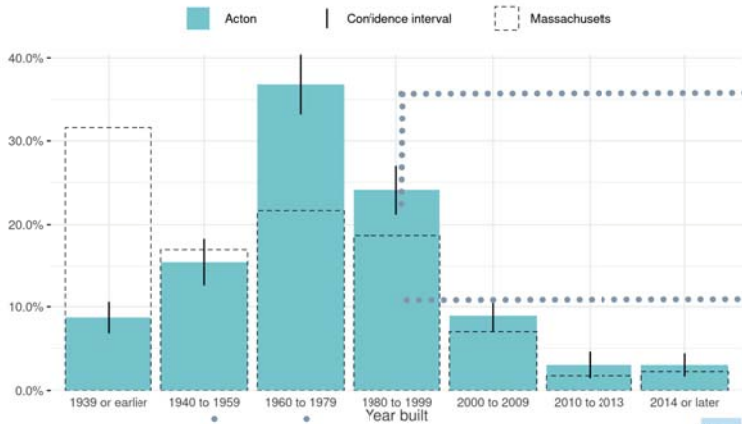


PAST

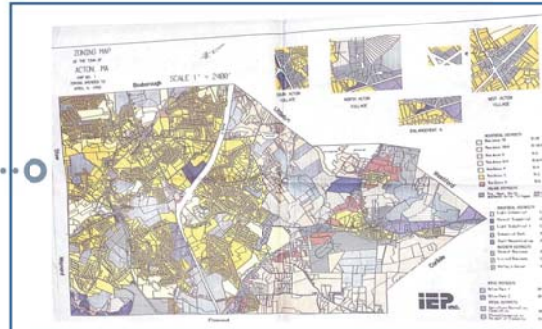
Sources and Photos: Acton 2020 Master Plan, Open Space and Recreation Plan, Acton Historical Society, Iron Work Farm, Acton Reconnaissance Report, Housing Production Plan, Municipal Resources Guide for Bikeability

GROWTH AND CHANGE OVER TIME

Housing Stock By Year Built in Acton Vs. State

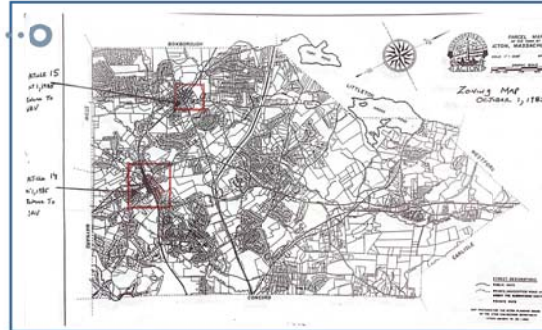


Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2016-2020 5-year estimates, Table S2504: Physical Housing Characteristics



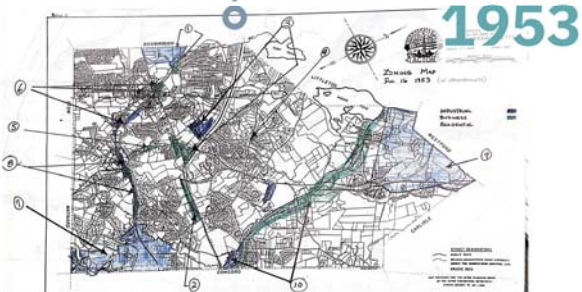
1990

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.



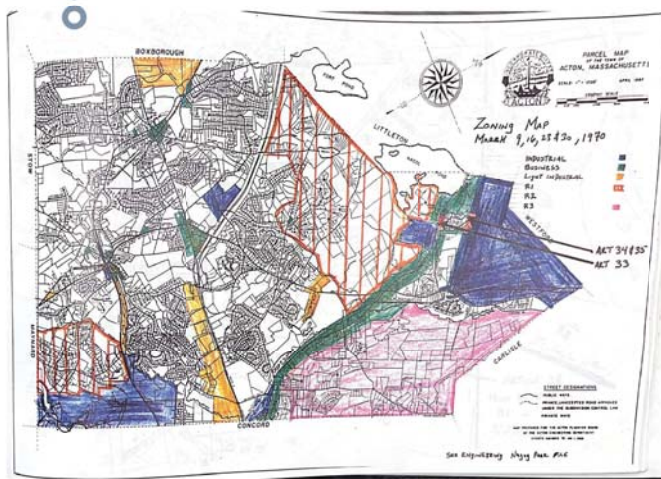
1985

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.



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).



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).



PAST PLANS AND GOALS

1982 Plan

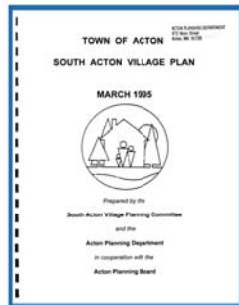


Plan Goals

Updates on Goals

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

1995 Plan



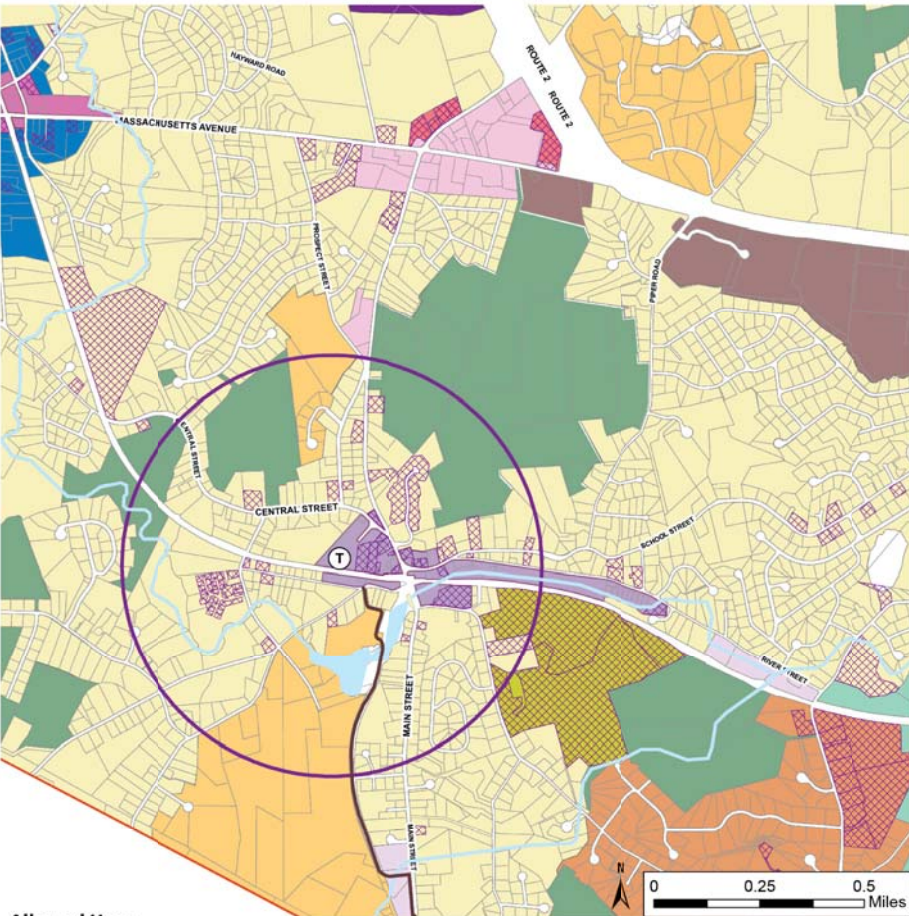
1	Improve the village character to restore a sense of place and community focus	
2	Preserve, maintain, and restore the historic buildings	<i>CPA projects funding restoration of historic buildings (Exchange Hall, Jones Tavern & Faulkner Homestead)</i>
3	Clean up and improve the appearance of buildings, structures, yards, and public spaces	<i>Purchased 53 River Street, plans for historic park</i>
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	<i>Sewer system created</i>
5	Encourage small business development	<i>Acton created a new position for Economic Development Director</i>
6	Promote a diversity of housing	<i>Zoning is modified following the 1995 Plan to allow for multi-family with special permits.</i>
7	Improve and expand the system of sidewalks and improve pedestrian safety, convenience, and comfort. Build bike ways where possible.	<i>Bike lanes were added on Main Street from the MBTA station to Mass Ave; ARRT is completed; sidewalks constructed on High Street</i>
8	Improve automobile traffic safety	<i>2022 ATM approves funding to create a preliminary infrastructure improvement plan</i>
9	Maintain and improve the commuter parking lot and train services	<i>MBTA train station is completed; additional parking added on Maple Street</i>
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.	<i>Over 83 acres of land has been preserved for open space and parkland (53 River Street) since 2010</i>



EXISTING CONDITIONS OF SOUTH ACTON VILLAGE



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



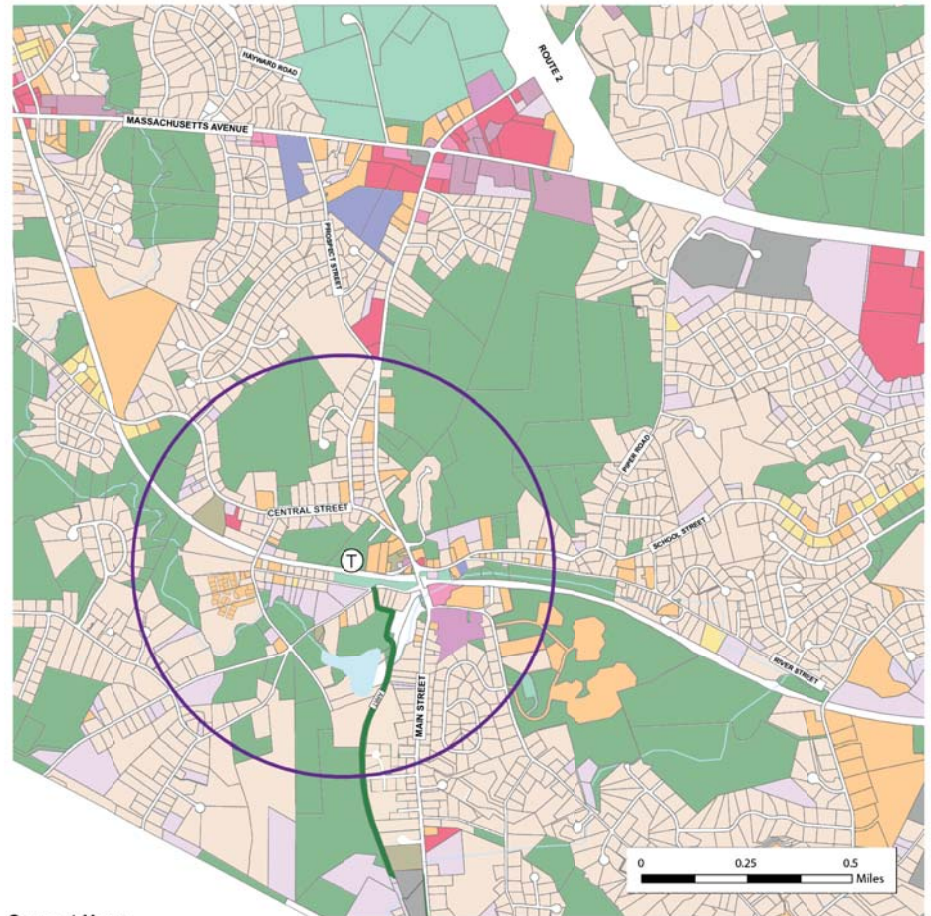
Allowed Uses

Residential	Commercial	Business
Single Family	Restaurants	Office
Multi-family	Retail/Shops	Vehicle Repair Shop

○ 1/2 mile radius from MBTA Station

* Special Permit is required

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



Current Uses

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

○ 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 15 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 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 not 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 1.5% loan discount for the WWTP rehab project.

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.**

What could 15 units per acre look like?



255 Arlington St.
17 Units per Acre (12 Units on .77 Acres)

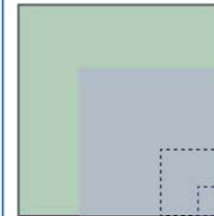


9 School St.
18 Units per Acre (6 Units on .33 Acres)

The Multi-family district must be a "reasonable size"

What does "reasonable size" mean for Acton?

- A total of 50 acres throughout Town,
 - Of the 50 acres, 10 acres must be within 1/2 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)

Black 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)

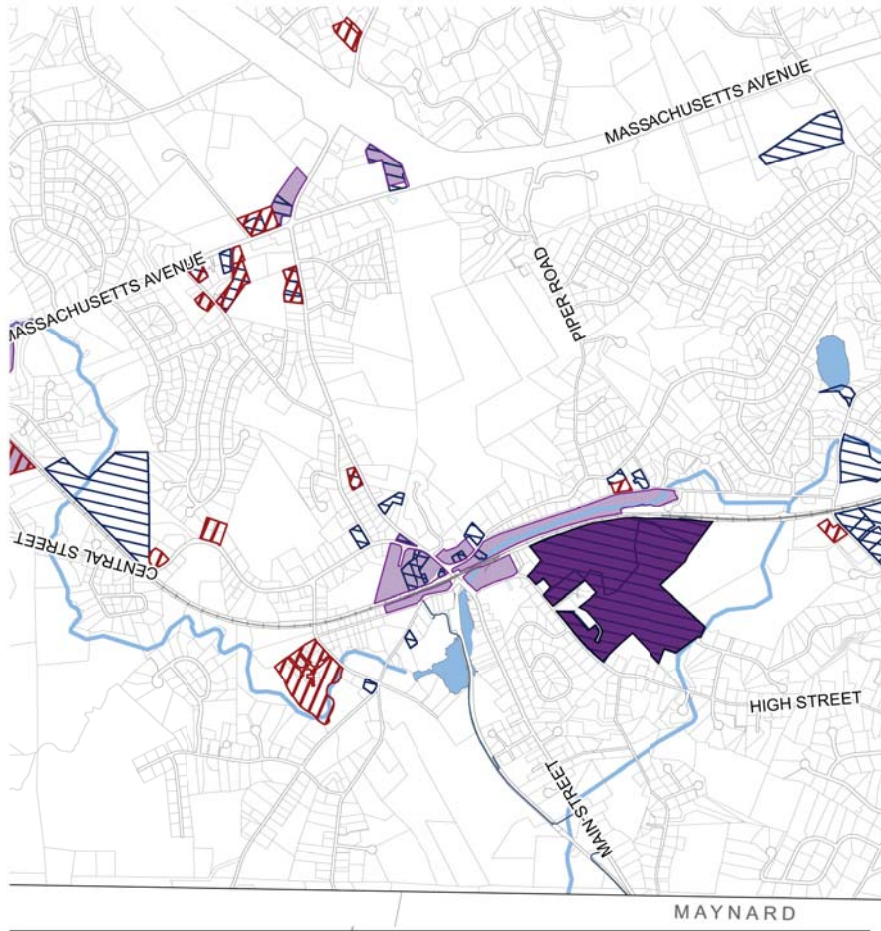
How could Acton alter zoning to comply? Acton could modify existing districts, create overlay districts or create new districts



Existing Multi-Family in Acton permitted through Acton Zoning (non 40B)

PRESENT

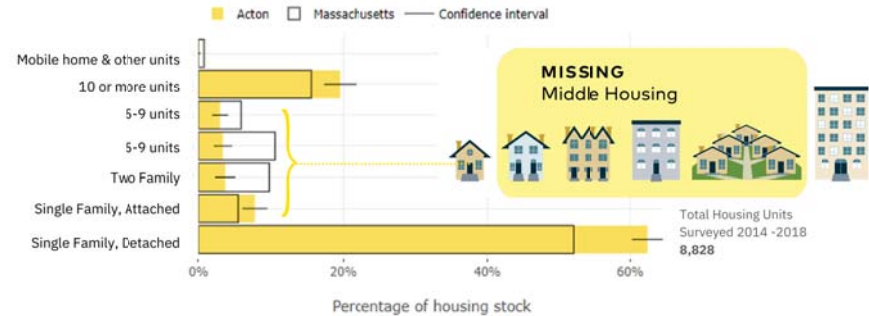
CURRENT MULTI-FAMILY HOUSING



- Multi-family is allowed under Acton's Zoning Bylaw through a special permit
- A cluster development where multifamily is allowed through a special permit and 60% of the land is required to be open space
- Location of other multi family
- Location of 40B projects

Sources: 2014-2018 American Community Survey, US Census, Opticos Design

Housing Units by Building Type Acton Vs. State



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, 2015-2019 5-year estimates Table S2504: Physical Housing Characteristics for Occupied Housing Units

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 1969 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?

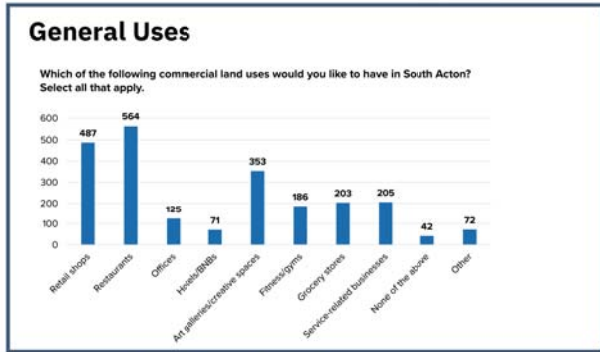
Multi-family housing currently located in districts where it is not allowed was either constructed through Chapter 40B or was constructed at a time when the Zoning Bylaw allowed for multi-family. For example, when Acton's Zoning was originally adopted, multi-family was allowed in all Residential Zoning Districts. This use would now be classified as "pre-existing, non-conforming."

PRESENT

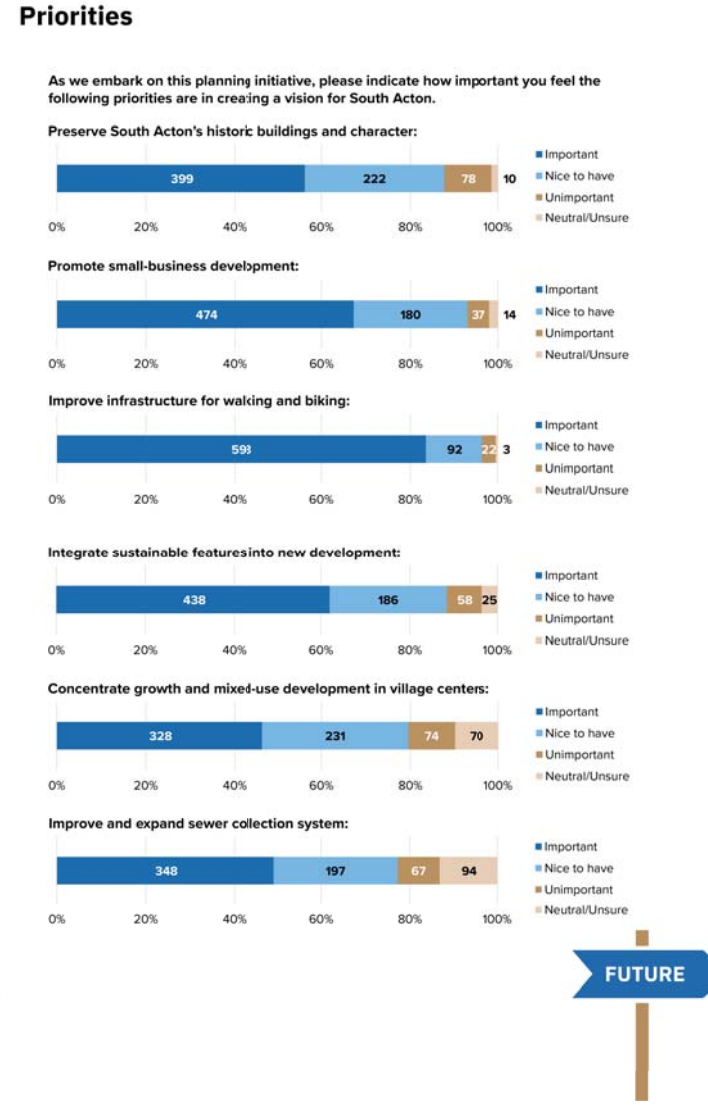
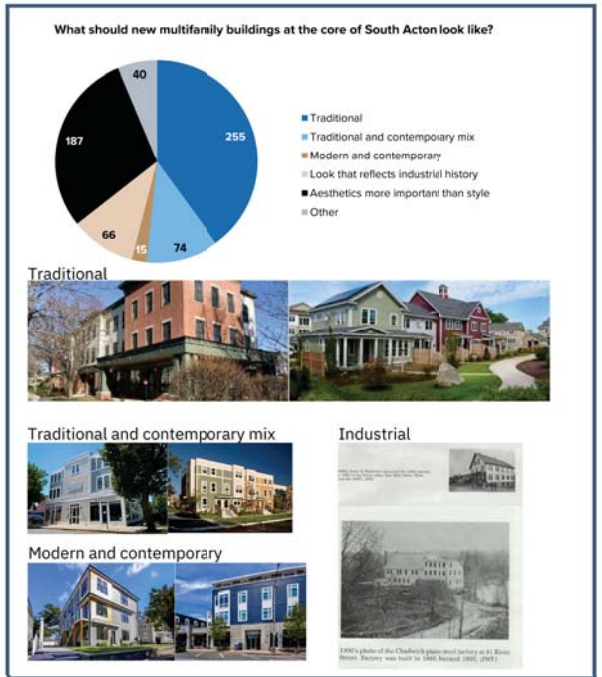
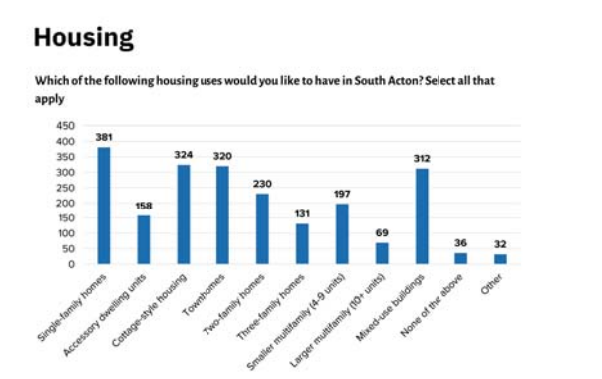
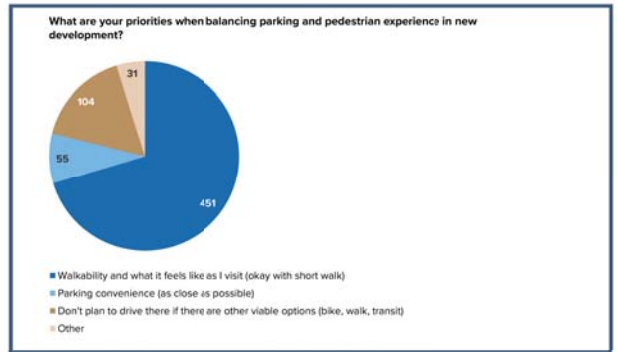
SOUTH ACTON VISION SURVEY SUMMARY



In November 2022, the Town sent a post card 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.



What are areas of opportunity that the Town and others should explore? Use the map to pinpoint up to five areas and describe them in the box below the map.



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**

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.



FUTURE