

## Chapter I

### Economic and Demographic Changes in Acton 1990 – 2000

#### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

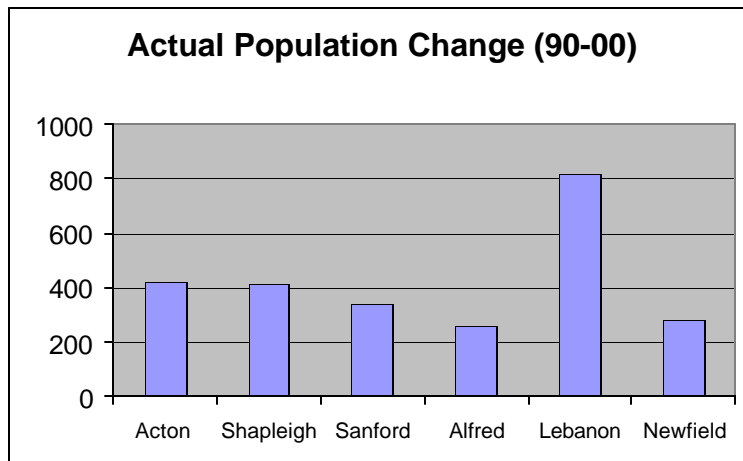
##### Population Growth

Similar to many of its neighbors, Acton grew at a rapid rate from the period 1990-2000. The period 1980-1990 also saw rapid growth (41%), and in fact was higher than the growth rate for the period 1990-2000 (24%). Yet the growth rate for the last decade made Acton one of the faster growing communities in York County (ninth out of twenty nine).

<u>1990 Population</u>	<u>2000 Population</u>	<u>2003 Estimate</u>
1,727	2,145	2,269

Of course this analysis does not necessarily tell us where Acton grew. That is a subject for a later chapter.

The growth in Acton seems to be part of a growing trend of more sustained development in the more rural parts of York County. The tables and charts below compare the growth of Acton to its neighbors:



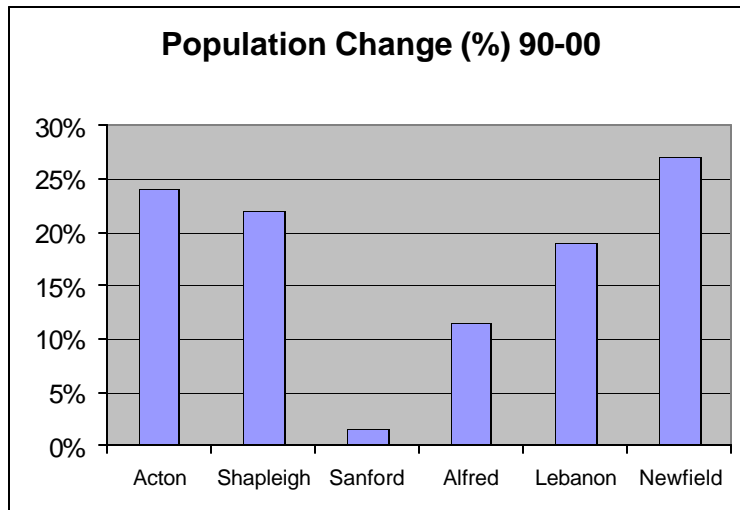
Notably, Acton grew in actual population faster than all but one of its neighbors, including Sanford (which is a community of 21,000). Only Lebanon, which grew by about 800 people during the 1990s added more people than Acton. However, on a percentage basis (as shown on the following page), Acton grew at a faster rate than did Lebanon, as Lebanon's 1990 population was 4,263—about 2.5 times that of Acton's 1990 population of 1,727.

Although this growth was rapid it was not as high as anticipated in the last plan. Population estimates from the 1991 plan called for three possible growth scenarios.

Scenario one called for thirty new homes per year = 2,850 people  
Scenario two called for a growth rate of about 60% = 3,275 people  
Scenario three called for a growth rate of 66% = 3,400 people.

The recession of the early nineties slowed down all growth rates for the region although evidence suggests they are once again on the increase.

The change by percentage for Acton in comparison to its neighbors is even more striking, as shown below.



This chart (as well as the one above it) speaks to the issue of sprawl and the regional nature of population movement. It is obvious that Sanford, even as a well populated service center is not growing nearly as quickly as Acton, Shapleigh, Newfield, and other surrounding towns. This has profound implications for the use of land and fiscal issues (such as Sanford closing a school while Acton goes about adding to one).

### Age Profile

The age composition of Acton has also changed. The median age in 1990 was 33.7. It is now 41.1. This represents a fairly dramatic increase in the median age of 22%. As far as school age population is concerned the following table highlights changes from 1990-2000 (the Census age groups from 90-00 do not match making a comparison difficult):

Age Group	1990	2000
Under 5	120	119
Under 18	435	544

Thus there was a 25% increase in the school age population between 1990 and 2000. This will be explored more fully in the Public Facilities section

### **Future Population Growth Scenarios**

The State Planning Office (SPO) has developed a population forecast for use in Comprehensive Plans. Its projections are as follows for Acton:

2000 Population	2005	2010	2015
2,145	2,335	2,476	2,607

The possible change from 2000 to 2010 represents an increase of 15%, much smaller than either the 1980s or 1990s. This estimates assumes an increase of 226 housing units in Acton over that fifteen year period.

Another way to look at possible growth is to take the town's building cap into account. Assuming that on average the town distributes 35 permits per year, we can multiply that by the average household size (2.51) and project an additional 878 people living in Acton in ten years (an increase of 41%). This represents a much greater increase than SPO has projected.

### **Seasonal Population**

In considering existing and future development patterns in Acton, its status as a popular seasonal lakeside community must be considered. As of 1994, the last year for which seasonal populations were estimated in York County, Acton's seasonal population was pegged at nearly 4,000 people, more than twice that of its year-round population. For the current year, it might be assumed the summer population is close to 4,300.

## ECONOMIC ISSUES

### Income Data

For a rural town, Acton's income levels in the 2000 Census were fairly strong. Its per capita income as of 2000 was \$19,447 and its median family income was \$45,353. Although these figures ranked below countywide and statewide averages, they exceeded the levels of Acton's neighboring towns, as shown in the table below. Of towns near Acton, only Alfred had a higher median family income than Acton, and none of the four other towns in the vicinity had higher per capita income levels.

### Income Levels, 2000 Census

	Per Capita Income	Median Household Income	Median Family Income
Acton	\$19,447	\$39,036	\$45,353
Alfred	\$19,337	\$40,583	\$47,625
Lebanon	\$15,503	\$40,021	\$41,713
Newfield	\$16,280	\$38,654	\$41,563
Sanford	\$16,951	\$34,668	\$43,021
York County	\$21,225	\$43,630	\$51,419
Maine	\$19,533	\$37,240	\$45,179

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Acton's median household income level in 2000 was not as strong—at just \$39,036, it trailed both Alfred and Lebanon in this category. The disparity between Acton's high per capita income level and fairly modest median household level can be explained by the town's relatively small average household size of 2.51, whereas its average family size was 2.91.

Looking at income levels by category, Acton's households are strongly concentrated in the middle-income ranges.

As the table to the right shows, 61 percent of the town's households earn between \$25,000 and \$75,000 per year, compared with 54 percent of all households in York County and just 52 percent of all households in Maine.

### Income Profile, 2000 Census

	Acton	York County	State of Maine
Under \$15,000	14.5%	13.5%	17.8%
\$15,000-24,999	10.6%	12.7%	14.8%
\$25,000-34,999	17.5%	12.9%	14.2%
\$35,000-49,999	23.4%	18.1%	18.3%
\$50,000-74,999	20.2%	23.3%	19.4%
\$75,000-99,999	5.7%	10.6%	8.4%
\$100,000+	8.1%	8.8%	7.1%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Acton has a lower share of high-income households than do the county and state, as just 14 percent of the town's households earned more than \$75,000 in 2000. For all of York County, 19 percent attained this income level, and 16 percent of all households in Maine did so as well. However, Acton's share of very high-income households (over

\$100,000) was fairly substantial, at 8.1 percent, due in no small part to its concentration of waterfront properties.

**Employment by Town**

Acton is a primarily residential town with a very small employment base.

According to the Maine Department of Labor, 177 people were employed full-time in the town as of 2000.

While this number is very small, it has grown since 1990, when the town's employment base was 122.

This represents a growth rate of 45 percent.

**Jobs by Town, 1990-2000**

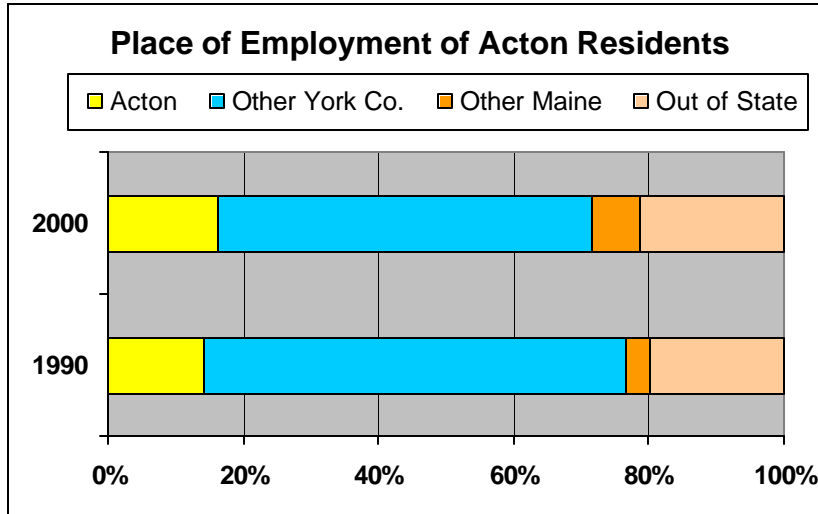
	1990	2000	Number Change	Percent Change
Acton	122	177	55	45.1%
Alfred	498	594	96	19.3%
Lebanon	340	359	19	5.6%
Newfield	55	72	17	30.9%
Sanford	8,546	9,284	738	8.6%
York County	57,845	60,295	2,450	4.2%
Maine	525,363	574,257	48,894	9.3%

Source: Maine Department of Labor

Acton is part of the Sanford Economic Summary Area (ESA), as defined by the Maine State Planning Office. Sanford is the major employment center for inland York County, as it had a base of nearly 9,300 jobs as of 2000. Sanford's employment level grew by 8.6 percent during the 1990s, as 738 jobs were added to the 1990 base of 8,546. Sanford's job growth rate outpaced York County as a whole, which only grew by 4.2 percent during the decade, but lagged slightly behind the state's growth rate of 9.3 percent.

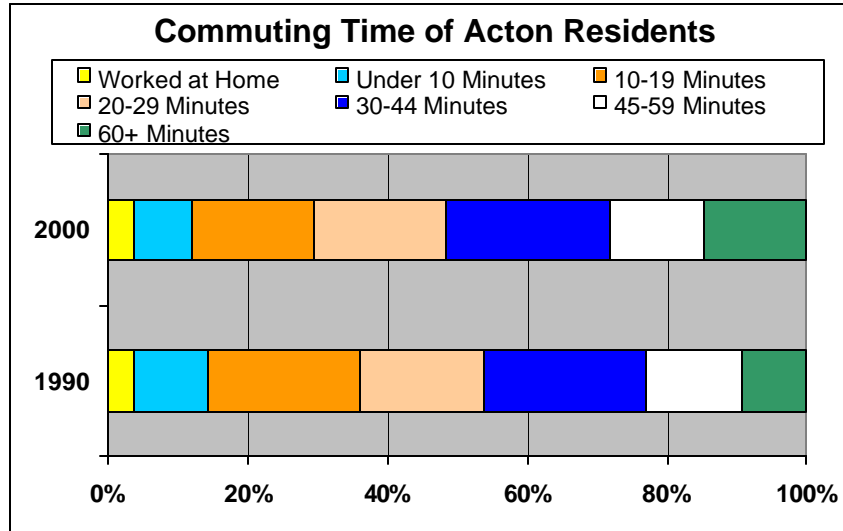
**Commuting Patterns**

Acton is increasingly evolving from a rural town with a primarily seasonal population base to an outlying bedroom community for employment centers like Sanford, Rochester, NH, and even coastal areas. The chart below compares the places of employment of Acton residents in 1990 versus 2000.



During the decade, a number of trends took place. First of all, the sheer number of employed residents of the town increased dramatically, from 789 in 1990 to 942 in 2000, an increase of 19 percent. Secondly, the share of Acton commuters who worked outside of York County jumped from 23 to 29 percent. At the same time, the share of Acton residents who also worked in the town increased during the 1990s, from 14 to 16 percent. Of the four geographic areas, only the remainder of York County lost share, as the percentage of Acton residents working elsewhere in the county dropped from 62 to 55 percent.

Commuting times of Acton residents also displayed major changes during the 1990s. In 1990, the mean commuting time of Acton residents was 28.1 minutes; by 2000, the mean time was 36.1 minutes, representing a 28 percent increase. This mean was influenced greatly by the share of Acton residents commuting more than 60 minutes each way to work. In 1990, just nine percent of the town's commuters traveled this far to work; by 2000, the share traveling more than an hour jumped to 15 percent.



The table below compares the top commuting destinations for Acton residents in 1990 and 2000. Although Sanford remains the top destination for Acton commuters, it is far less likely to be the place of work of Acton residents. In 1990, 36 percent of Acton commuters worked in Sanford, but by 2000, just 21 percent did so. An increasing number of Acton commuters work within the town, as the number staying put for work grew from 112 in 1990 to 152 in 2000.

Other increasingly popular commuting destinations for Acton residents include Saco/Biddeford (22 commuters in 1990, 72 in 2000), Portland/South Portland (12 in 1990, 30 in 2000), and Rochester/Dover, NH (45 in 1990, 77 in 2000). Sharp increases were also seen in commuting to other towns in York County such as Kennebunk, Wells, Alfred, and Lebanon. Far fewer Acton residents now commute to Kittery, which saw its share drop from 41 in 1990 to just 15 in 2000.

**Places of Work of Acton Commuters, 1990-2000**  
**Sorted by 2000 Place of Work**

Town	State	1990		2000	
		No. Employed	% of Total	No. Employed	% of Total
Sanford	ME	287	36.4%	204	21.7%
Acton	ME	112	14.2%	152	16.1%
Rochester	NH	29	3.7%	52	5.5%
Saco	ME	3	0.4%	47	5.0%
Wells	ME	16	2.0%	36	3.8%
North Berwick	ME	30	3.8%	32	3.4%
Kennebunk	ME	7	0.9%	28	3.0%
Biddeford	ME	19	2.4%	25	2.7%
Dover	NH	16	2.0%	25	2.7%
Lebanon	ME	7	0.9%	21	2.2%
Shapleigh	ME	22	2.8%	20	2.1%
Portsmouth	NH	10	1.3%	20	2.1%
Alfred	ME	4	0.5%	19	2.0%
York	ME	11	1.4%	17	1.8%
South Portland	ME	0	0.0%	16	1.7%
Kittery	ME	41	5.2%	15	1.6%
Portland	ME	12	1.5%	14	1.5%
Ogunquit	ME	14	1.8%	14	1.5%
Waterboro	ME	6	0.8%	10	1.1%
Other Maine		41	5.2%	70	7.4%
Other out-of-State		102	12.9%	105	11.1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>789</b>		<b>942</b>	

Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing

**Summary Discussion**

Acton is still primarily a rural community. However, the data from 1990-2000 indicates this may in fact be slowly changing. The region grew at a faster clip, both in real and percentage terms than nearly all it's neighbors. Perhaps the most significant comparison is when one looks at the growth of Acton as compared to Sanford. Acton grew faster even in real population increase than a town which is nearly eight times its size. This is evidence of the regional nature of sprawl and population growth in the region. Sanford, as a service center for the surrounding communities lags behind them in population growth (and is closing neighborhood schools).

Like the rest of the nation the population of Acton is growing older. Within Acton, the rate as an average is actually more rapid rate than the region as a whole. This is significant for a few reasons; elderly residents may demand different types of services than non-elderly; they are sometimes more hesitant to spend limited income on public and municipal services such as schools and recreation; yet they may also desire some services to be located within the



community. While perhaps not an issue at this time the town may need to recognize this demographic change in the years ahead.

Part of this change may be related to the change of what were once seasonal homes and vacation cottages to year round dwellings. It is possible many residents who once vacationed in Acton for summers are now choosing to live there as their principal residence during retirement. This change from seasonal to year round residence may become more evident in the years ahead. Currently, the town does require a change from seasonal to year round home to come under the provisions of the town Growth Ordinance.

Economically, Acton is still tied to Sanford for the most part, although this has changed during the last decade (possibly due to a number of layoffs in the Sanford manufacturing sector). While in 1990 about 50% of Acton residents worked in Sanford or Acton, that number today is 37%. The rest of the residents drive to a number of different locations. Acton is basically a rural bedroom community where people drive fairly long distances for their employment. Based on survey responses, it seems clear that residents do not want large scale commercial/industrial development, although they would like opportunities to buy essential goods within the town and also have the opportunity to develop home based and small business opportunities (with town encouragement). This is relatively consistent of the way rural communities would like to see their town develop from an economic standpoint. Of course, Acton also has an advantage of having highly taxable waterfront properties as part of their municipal revenue base.

It appears that with a growth cap in place, Acton might grow from 800-900 people over the next ten years. This would represent a growth rate of 41%, which is rapid in both percentage and real terms. This would raise the population of Acton to 2,900-to 3,000 people. What this may mean is discussed in following chapters.