

Chapter VII

Public Facilities/Municipal Infrastructure

Acton is a fairly large town by York County standards, comprising an area of 37.8 square miles or 24, 192 acres. This makes Acton the 10th largest town geographically in York County. This is important as one looks at public facilities, governmental services and schools. The population density for Acton is 57 people per square mile. This makes it the fourth least populated town (by density) in York County.

This is notable for a few reasons. First, providing municipal services and infrastructure for a small population over a large area can be costly. Secondly, it makes wise facility and infrastructure planning more important. This section looks at some of the critical components of Acton's public facility and infrastructure framework.

Schools

Acton is somewhat unique for a town its size in that it maintains and operates its own school system. This is a critical issue for the town as it plans for the future. Students in Acton attend Acton Elementary School for grades K-8. Following this, the town has worked out arrangements with other communities to attend High School at various locations. Over the years this has included Wells High School, Noble, Sanford and private schools as well. However, within the past year Acton has reached an agreement with Sanford to send their high school students to Sanford High School only.

The following table provides a comparison of school enrollment figures for Acton for the years 1996, 2002, and 2003:

Grade	1996/97	2002/03	2003/04
K	21	25	35
1	33	34	28
2	31	33	33
3	33	35	36
4	36	29	36
5	29	38	33
6	40	20	38
7	38	45	21
8	24	32	41
9	37	30	34
10	11	29	29
11	21	47	48
12	17	27	26

Totals 373 432 446

Source: Maine Dept. of Education; Town Report

These increases account for a 20% increase in school age population from 1996-2003 and a 3% increase over the past year. If the town were to see a 3% yearly increase in school age population over the next ten years the school age population would rise to 599 students (about 60 students per year). If the town were to maintain their existing building cap of 35 units per year (and build to that amount) and the ratio of school age children to dwelling units were to remain the same over the next ten years, the town would see a smaller increase – approximately 45-50 students per year. Prior to the cap, the school had projected a fairly consistent ten -year increase of about 100 students.

The existing number of students at the K-8 level in Acton is about 300. The capacity of the school according to the school officials can be computed in different ways. Based on the Maine Department of Education guidelines for seating capacity based on per pupil square footage, the capacity of school would be 454 students. The second computation calls for a maximum class size for educational efficiency. This would result in a capacity of 320 students (roughly 16-20 students per class). The School department feels that many of the space issues are directly related to new programs required through Maine Learning Results and the No Child Left Behind Act. This has resulted in new needs for support services and specialized rooms. With these standards in place it is likely the town will need to expand the facility in the next 5-10 years.

The issue of school expansion is a critical issue for the community due to the potential costs involved. When the structure was built, it was believed that a second floor could be added for the additional capacity. It is clear more analysis and community discussion is needed to clarify the options for an expanded school.

School Assessments

The following is a summary of some of Acton’s results in the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) Test scores for fourth grade 2002/2003:

Reading

	Avg Scale Score	Does not meet Standard	Partially meets Standard	Meets standard	Exceeds standard
Acton	536	12%	58%	27%	4%
State	539	11%	40%	48%	1%

Writing

Acton	528	19	67	15	0
State	530	15	73	12	0

Math

Acton	525	50	30	13	7
State	532	50	30	13	7

Science/Technology

Acton	522	50	50	0	0
State	526	31	65	5	0

The eighth grade scores for 2002/2003 generally mirror this sample.

Recreation Facilities

Most of Acton's recreational facilities are located at the elementary school on Milton Mills Road, although the town is actively engaged in providing additional facilities at a site on Rte. 109 near "town center". The following table summarizes the town's existing inventory for facilities and compares it to national standards adopted by the National Recreation and Parks Association which uses facilities per 1,000 residents as a standard:

Existing Needs (based on estimated 2002 population of 2,000)
Active Recreational facilities

<u>Facility Type</u>	<u>Existing Inventory</u>	<u>NRPA Standards</u>	<u>Acton Needs</u>	<u>Deficiency</u>
Softball or Little League Field	2 plus soccer field	.75 per 1000 population	1.5	0
Baseball 90' Bases	0	.16 per 1000 population	Possibly 1	1?
Basketball Court	2	.50 per 1000 population	1	0
Tennis Court	1	.67 per 1000 population	1	0
Multi-purpose field for football, soccer, field hockey	2	.50 per 1000 population	2	0
Neighborhood Playgrounds,	1 with 1 planned	2-10 acres in size located within ½ mile of each housing concentration of 50 or more homes	2-3	1?

It should be pointed out that Acton has a number of passive and outdoor recreational opportunities at the Town Forest and along the many ponds in town.

FUTURE NEEDS (based on 2012 population 2,500)

Facility Type	NRPA Standards	Acton Needs
Baseball 90' Bases	.16 per 1000 population	1
Basketball Court	.50 per 1000 population	
Tennis Court	.67 per 1000 population	1
Multi-purpose field for football, soccer, field hockey	.50 per 1000 population	
Neighborhood Playgrounds,	2-10 acres in size located within ½ mile of each housing concentration of 50 or more homes	1

In the end, due to the relatively small population base of the town there is not a tremendous need for recreational facilities. The Recreation Committee has proposed a ten year plan which would include:

- Development of a softball field at the Rte. 109 site
- A jogging or walking path around the facility
- Nature trails at or near the facility
- Additional parking

The development of these facilities will bring the town very close to recommended standards for recreational facilities as they move into the future.

However, these standards need to be measured in local community desires as well. The town may wish to consider the addition of the noted facilities as they examine the development of new subdivisions within the community. The town may also have opportunities to participate with other towns (*such as Shapleigh) in the development of facilities on a regional basis.

Town Equipment and Inventory

The following is an inventory of buildings and equipment which comes from the town of Acton Selectman's Office. The list forms a basis for evaluation of what may need to be replaced or maintained in the future.

ID No	Asset	Description	Account	Location	Date Acquired	Cost
1000	Building	School	School	Milton Mills Rd.	46,'57,'90	
1100	Building	Pub.Safety	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1998	500,000
1200	Building	Town Office	Municipal	H Road	1987	225,000
1300	Building	Town Hall	"	H Road	1830	Historical
1400	Building	Sand/Salt Shed	Hgwy.Dept.	Sanborn Rd.	1992	110,000
1500	Building	Tractor Shed	"	Sanborn Rd.	1990	35,000
1600	Building	Wood Stor. Shed	"	Sanborn Rd.	1950's	12,000
1700	Building	Commun.Tower	Pub.Safety	Blueberry Hill	1994	60,000
1800	Building	Library	Municipal	H Road	1886	Historical
1900	Building	Old fire station	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1969	20,000
2000	Building	Recycling Bldg.	Municipal	H Road	1995	35,000
2100	Building	Trans.Stat-Guardhouse	Municipal	H Road	1988	6,500
2200	Building	Trans.Stat-Debris roof	Municipal	H Road		7,500
2300	Building	Lincoln Schoolhouse	Municipal	Milton Mills Rd.	1884	Historical
2400	Land Imp	Recreation Dept.	Recreation	Route 109		
1001	Equip't	John Deere Tractor	School	Milton Mills Rd.	2003	lease/purc
1002	Equip't	Floor washer	School	Milton Mills Rd.	2000	4,000
1003	Equip't	Copy Machine	School	Milton Mills Rd.		
1004	Equip't	Copy Machine	School	Milton Mills Rd.		
1005	Equip't	Rizograph	School	Milton Mills Rd.		
1101	Equip't	Office Computer	Pub.Safety	Route 109		2,500
1102	Equip't	Office Phone System	Pub.Safety	Route 109		3,000
1150	Vehicle	Fire Truck	Pub.Safety	Route 109	2003	240,000
1151	Vehicle	Engine 1 Ford 750	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1976	
1152	Vehicle	Squad 1 Dodge	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1977	
1153	Vehicle	Forestry 1 GMC	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1984	
1154	Vehicle	Forestry 2 (refurbished)	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1970	
1155	Vehicle	Engine 2 GMC	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1988	
1156	Vehicle	Tank 1 GMC	Pub.Safety	Route 109	1989	
1160	Equip't	Extrication Equipment	Pub.Safety	Route 109	not purch104	20,000
1161	Equip't	Radio Equipment	Pub.Safety	Route 109	2003	3,553
1162	Equip't	SCBA	Pub.Safety	Route 109	2001	32000
1401	Hwy.Equ.	1946 D6 Bulldozer	Hgwy.Dept.	Sanborn Rd.		
1402	Hwy.Equ.	Bryant Hwy. Sander	Hgwy.Dept.	Sanborn Rd.		
1403	Hwy.Equ.	Bryant Hwy. Sander 2	Hgwy.Dept.	Sanborn Rd.		
1404	Hwy.Equ.	Hopper Sander	Hgwy.Dept.	Sanborn Rd.		
1405	Hwy.Equ.	Hopper Sander 2	Hgwy.Dept.	Sanborn Rd.		
1406	Hwy.Equ.	York Rake	Hgwy.Dept.	Sanborn Rd.		
1201	Equip't	Computer System	Municipal	H Road		
1202	Equip't	Furnishings	Municipal	H Road		
1203	Equip't	Copy Machines	Municipal	H Road		

Historically, the Road Commissioners have utilized their own equipment for maintaining and upgrading of the town roads. As noted in the equipment profile, the town only owns a few sanders, a York rake, and a 1946 bulldozer for highway equipment. The Road Commissioners are reimbursed for the use of their equipment using rates determined by the annual town meeting. The Road Commissioners and the operators of their equipment are all town employees. Road maintenance and upgrades are generally determined by the Road Commissioners. Historically, neither the Planning Board or Comprehensive Plan Committee has been involved with this process. With the possible development of a higher density village area and a less dense critical rural area the town may wish to examine a process which focuses roadway improvements based on this growth plan. A more formalized process may be suitable for the community at this time.

Municipal Buildings and Services

Aside from the issue of schools, Acton has recently examined the issue of space and storage needs at the town hall and other municipal buildings. The Town Hall lacks storage space, private meeting space and large meeting space, and also possibly additional parking. A study committee recommended some of these storage and space needs could be resolved through a reorganization of space at the Town Hall. It does appear however that the issue needs further analysis as the town continues to grow – particularly in light of additional space needs elsewhere in town (and discussed below).

The Public Safety Building is fairly new (completed in 1998). Storage concerns however, have led to the use of the old Fire Station and Town Garage for the storage of some equipment. Additionally, the lack of office and meeting space has made training more difficult and limited attendance at meetings. This training is particularly important for a volunteer Fire Department such as Acton's. In effect while the building is only six years old there appears to be needs which will arise over the upcoming decade. Similarly, some equipment is aging as well. It would appear some vehicles, a new engine and a Thermal Imaging System will be needed in the next ten years as well.

Finally, there is the issue of personnel both for public safety and in Town Hall. While Acton's population does not immediately call for staffing at either place, the Fire Department in particular, has described a need for full time personnel or full time equivalents. This may need to be consideration in upcoming staffing and budget deliberations.

The salt sand shed was built in 1992, although there have been recent problems with the foundation which may need repair. The Transfer Station appears adequate to meet the needs of the town for the near future. It is possible an examination of the library and it's needs might be conducted in the short term. However, it is also true many residents use the libraries in Sanford/Springvale for some needs – the Sanford/Springvale Library is about eight miles from the center of Acton. The town may wish to examine cooperative arrangements with surrounding towns for library use.

Solid Waste

Acton is part of the group of towns who dispose of their trash at the Maine Energy Recovery Company (MERC) site in Biddeford. A recent study by the communities using the MERC site have shown MERC to be by far the most cost efficient method of disposal in the region (and perhaps the state). The towns disposal costs are likely to fall (based on recent negotiations) from about \$63 per ton to somewhere below \$52 per ton.

Acton has done a good job of recycling since the inception of the program in 1993. Acton falls in the middle of the pack as far as recycling rates for York County communities. The tables and charts on the following page highlight the town's efforts at recycling over the years:

Emergency Services

Acton built a new Public Safety building in 1998 which houses the Fire and Rescue Squads. A new fire truck was purchased in 2003. The standard service radius for a fire station is about two miles – which does not cover the entire town. However, the town maintains mutual aid agreements with surrounding towns and has also been meeting with a ten town group in northern York County to discuss ideas on consolidation and cooperation. A fire substation, which might be combined with rural needs in the towns of Shapleigh and/or Newfield, is certainly a possibility. In 2002 the Acton Fire Department responded to 52 fires, 1 explosion, 57 rescues, 20 hazardous conditions calls, 16 service calls, 13 good intent calls, and 2 other calls for a total of 167 calls. In 1988, the department responded to 98 calls. The department is staffed by volunteers in a manner similar to many Maine towns. A stipend system is presently implemented. Additionally a small salary (approximately \$2,500 a year) is provided to the Fire Chief.

The ambulance and rescue services are provided by an association to which the town contributes \$10,000 per year. The remainder of their costs are funded by private donations and fundraising.

Police

The State Police and York County Sheriffs department provides police coverage in Acton. With a population of just over 2,000, Acton is not yet in a position to need their own police force or police personnel. In fact, with more discussions on regionalization, the options of more efficiently using both the county and state police forces has merit. The town should monitor ongoing discussions at the county level about how much and how to pay for county police service.

Summary Discussion

Acton is somewhat unique in the sense that for a small community the town must not only care for concerns related to the typical municipal operations (highway, etc) but also must deal with the school as a town function. This will necessitate a comprehensive community discussion in the near future about how best to meet the needs of Acton's children. Right now it is not clear when or how that process will proceed.

As issues of growth and development in Acton become increasingly complex (storm water management is an example), coordination of the Road Commissioners efforts will be an important part of the Board of Selectman's or Capital Improvements Committee's role. Roadways and their maintenance, have the potential to be a huge investment for the town in the next decade – particularly as growth continues in the rural parts of town.

The town might also explore (through their participation in the Ten Town Group of Northern York County) opportunities to jointly share resources and services. For instance, sharing resources related to the library and possibly personnel might serve the town in a more cost effective manner. Similarly, the growth of recreational facilities at the school has enabled the town to provide more recreational opportunities in a cost effective manner (by meeting both school and town needs).

The town would seem to need a clear and concise analysis of space, organizational and storage needs in the near future. This might also take into account personnel needs. Studies have shown that as towns move into the 2,500-3,500 population range, increased personnel and service costs become an issue. It is likely better to plan for those costs now than in the future.

It does seem clear the town needs to examine any and all capital needs (including road improvements) through a reinvigorated CIP Committee or a newly formulated committee. This plan might serve as the basis for that committee to examine many of the issues described in this section and outlined in the Capital Investment Strategy outlined in this plan as well.