ACTON TOWN CENTER PLANNING

KELLEY'S CORNER IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

The Cecil Group | Greenman-Pederson, Inc. | Cambridge Economic Research | Byrne McKinney & Associates, Inc.

STAKEHOLDER INPUT

A Public Input

Public input was gathered from two public input sessions. On May 7th a public workshop was held from 7:30-9:30pm in the McCarthy-Towne School with approximately 55 attendees. On May 10th an open house was held from 9-11am in conjunction with a "Yard Sale" also in the McCarthy-Towne School with approximately 25 visitors.

Figure. Open House Booth on Saturday, May 10th

COMMENTS ORGANIZED BY THEME

The following comments were received from the public during the input sessions. All comments were recorded as received, and as such, do not necessarily represent the position of the Town of Acton or the consultants.

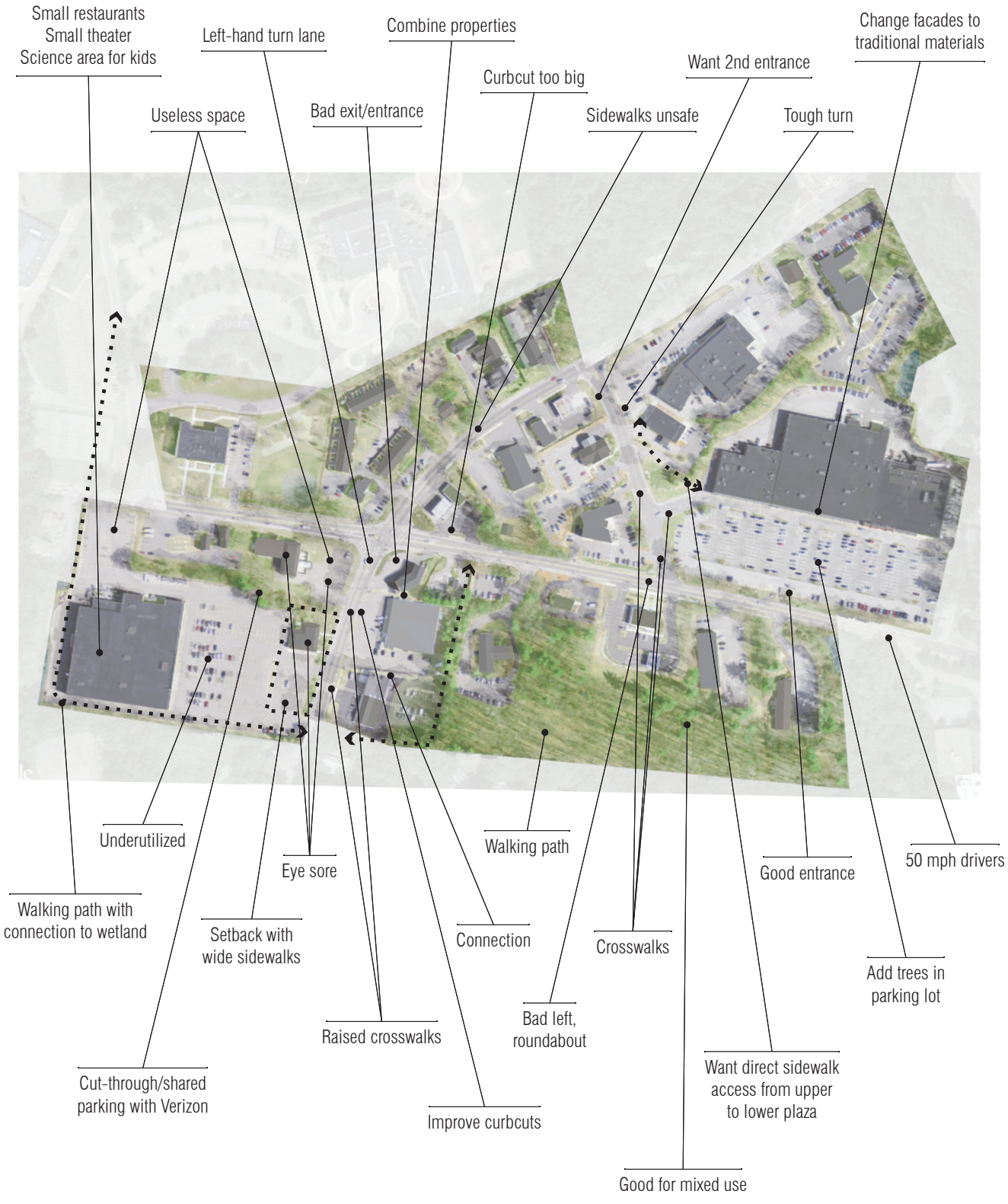
After collection, the comments were sorted in themes based upon what the public expressed. These themes are: desired amenities, walking and sidewalks, biking, Kmart redevelopment, urban design and landscape, traffic, land use and zoning, and parking. Similar comments were combined. In the cases when identical comments were made, a number follows the comment in parentheses representing the number of people offering that comment.

Desired amenities

The public expressed many desires for additional amenities in the district.

- A place to linger: KC is currently it is a surgical strike place, not a place where to stay or meet. All of KC is a transition space, there is nowhere to linger. Desire a place to meet, like a park, with seats, and even an amphitheater. Lexington center could be a good model.
- Small good movie theatre and art center (4).
- Sit down / sit out restaurants (4).
- There are no restaurants within a 25 minute drive if Not Your Average Joe's is full.
- More places for kids to go, especially to walk to after school, appropriate shops.
- Night life.
- Specialty shops and fine restaurants to draw crowds. Thriving and vibrant retail and restaurant center.
- Make KC the downtown that it is currently acts as.
- Civic use, like a community center.
- Acton Jazz Café move to KC.
- Mixed use development with more apartments.

Figure. Spatial Comments Gathered at Public Input Sessions



- Redeveloped with a transport station.
- Fewer banks.

Walking and sidewalks

Walkability and especially safety were important concerns for the public.

- Want a Town Center where you can walk, better sidewalks. Improve with consolidation of businesses, local retail and dining destination. Improve connections across KC by foot.
- Very uncomfortable and unsafe to walk due to curb cuts and inconsistence of sidewalks.
- Currently inconvenient to walk between upper and lower plaza, could be improved with more direct sidewalks. More defined walkways and crosswalks.
- Fix inconsistent sidewalks and too large curb cuts, people don't know to slow down when entering driveways.
- Maintain a vegetated buffer between the sidewalk and the road for safety, especially with children. Landscape buffer on sidewalk will also be useful for snow storage.
- Use the potential of being next to the school for pedestrian flow.
- Path to connect to Synagogue from Kmart to Prospect Street.
- Pedestrian bridge across 111.
- Handicapped accessible.
- Walking through parking lots is a bad experience and not conducive for walking.
- Need crosswalks on No Name Street.
- CVS, TJ Maxx, Roche Brothers are currently walkable, when CVS moves, this will result in more driving.
- Want bollards protecting pedestrians on all four corners of the Route 27 and 111 intersection.
- Sidewalks are all too narrow – a stroller totally fills them.
- Keep and build more buffers between sidewalks and road.
- Improve walkways and setbacks.
- People actually move away because it is not walkable (for example to Newton.

Biking

Individuals repeatedly commented on how they would like to have cycling amenities such as lanes and parking for themselves as well as for their children.

- Want to be "Bike city of America", bicycle lanes (5).
- Add bicycle parking near businesses (2).

- Bike lanes should be safe for kids. Bike lanes that allow kids to go to stores by themselves.
- Bike from Acton Center to KC.
- See area more bikeable including the campus and train station.
- Bike path through backside of Kmart to schools.
- No bikes on the road.

Kmart redevelopment

As one of the largest perceived underutilized properties in the district, it was no surprise that the public repeatedly brought up the future of the Kmart plaza.

- Complex with a movie theater, art, small shops, restaurants, senior center, and community center.
- Smaller scale stores and cafes, shuttle from other parts of town, public transit of some sort.
- Kmart block redeveloped with an official road cutting through.
- Buildings developed along route 27 with parking behind the buildings, like a real downtown.
- Site senior center at plaza.

Urban design and landscape

Several comments were made regarding specific urban design and landscaping considerations.

- Street trees and parking lot trees (3).
- Walkable, bikeable, friendly, wider sidewalks.
- Restaurants, retail / clothes (such as Derby Street in Hingham).
- Fewer vacant buildings.
- Identity gateway as you approach Roche Brothers.
- Cohesive and unified development, rather than current incoherent and haphazard development.
- Street lights for pedestrians (too dark right now).
- Daylight brooks (the one coming down from Acton Medical and the one leaving the wetlands behind Kmart).
- Maintain Colonial feel.
- Install fountains (to hide road noise).
- All the utilities underground.
- Pocket assembly places, hangout spots.
- Limited access for traffic to flow through (tunnels, etc).
- Old Meineke building gone (2).

- KC is not a town center, it is not Concord center.
- Existing Bank of America move to old CVS, open that spot up for redevelopment.
- Currently two Bank of Americas, do not need this repetition in the area.
- Rebuild on the McDonald's site.

Traffic

Traffic was highlighted as a problem for the public for several reasons.

- Traffic is currently impossible. Need traffic flowing more freely (5).
- Traffic calming (2).
- Discourage pass-through with calming techniques.
- Alternative road for shoppers versus those passing through.
- Timing of lights needs to be improved.
- Installation of lights at Medical Office left turn from South Acton onto route 111.
- 15-seat public vans between villages, the train, and schools.
- Public transit vans, especially at 4:30pm, from school to other villages, so not everyone has to drive to the school to pick up kids.

Land use and zoning

The public has specific recommendations regarding policy in the district.

- Not a destination off of Route 2, this is a place for local uses.
- Maintain 30' setback for new development along State routes.
- Multi-use buildings, infill development, two-story, mixed use.
- KC as Central Park.
- Fewer large format stores, consolidation of parking, and separation from residential uses.
- Incentivize private sector to change according to town consensus.
- Try to limit vacancies in retail.
- Take advantage of the new sewer.
- Lower tax rate to activate businesses.
- Simple permitting process to boost business.
- Mixed use around the Bowladrome corner.

Parking

A mix of feelings came forward about the future of parking in the area.

- Moving from seas of parking to puddles of parking with pockets of green.
- Parking behind shops.

- Underground parking to facilitate pedestrian district.
- Interconnected parking lots.
- Access to satellite parking lots with businesses around the lots.
- Trees in parking for visual impact and shade.

VISUAL PREFERENCE SURVEY

During the public input sessions that were held on May 7th and 10th, 61 visual preferences surveys were completed by the public. Respondents were asked to rate each image from 1 (worst) to 5 (best) for desirability in the future of Kelley's Corner. The survey consisted of eight categories with four images each. Images were selected to represent a diversity of structures and visual qualities. The results were tabulated and the averages are shown on the following series of figures.

Figure. Photograph of Public Input Session.

RETAIL

The most popular retail option is a single-story, colonial-style building with human-scale architectural features on the ground floor and a gabled roof.

OFFICE

The winner by a small margin is an office building with traditional materials and a gabled roof setback from the road. The close second is a similar but smaller-scale development.

PARKING

The most popular parking lot arrangement has plentiful small-scale trees acting as a barrier between travel lanes and the parking bay also providing shade. The runner-up is also has vegetation, with mature interspersed trees.

MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL

The winning multifamily residential (by a landslide) has 2.5 stories with a large green setback yard and ground floor articulation.

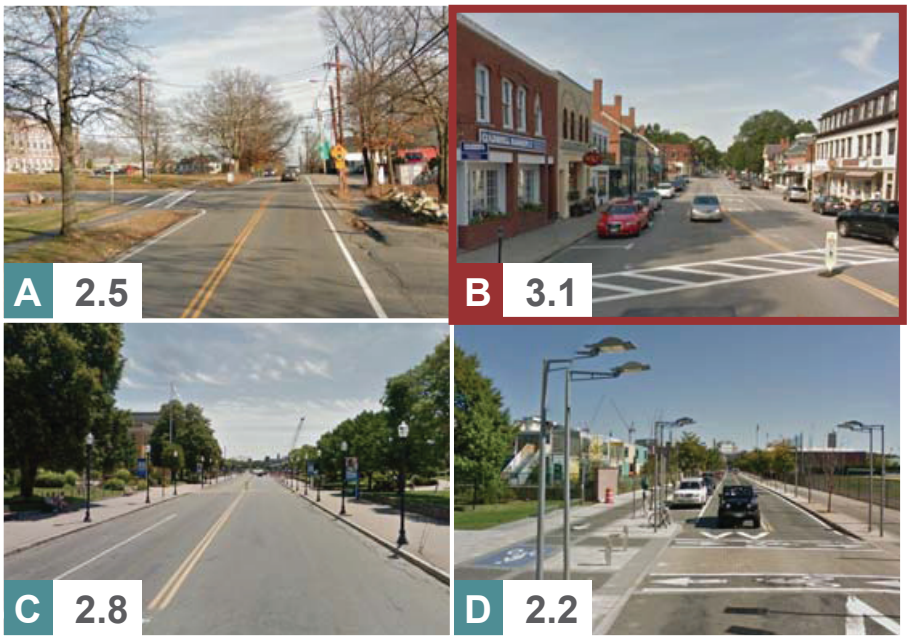
MIXED USE

Like the winning multifamily, office, and retail, the most popular mixed use building is also a mid-rise, gabled building with ground level articulation.

SIDEWALKS, BUFFERS AND STREET EDGE

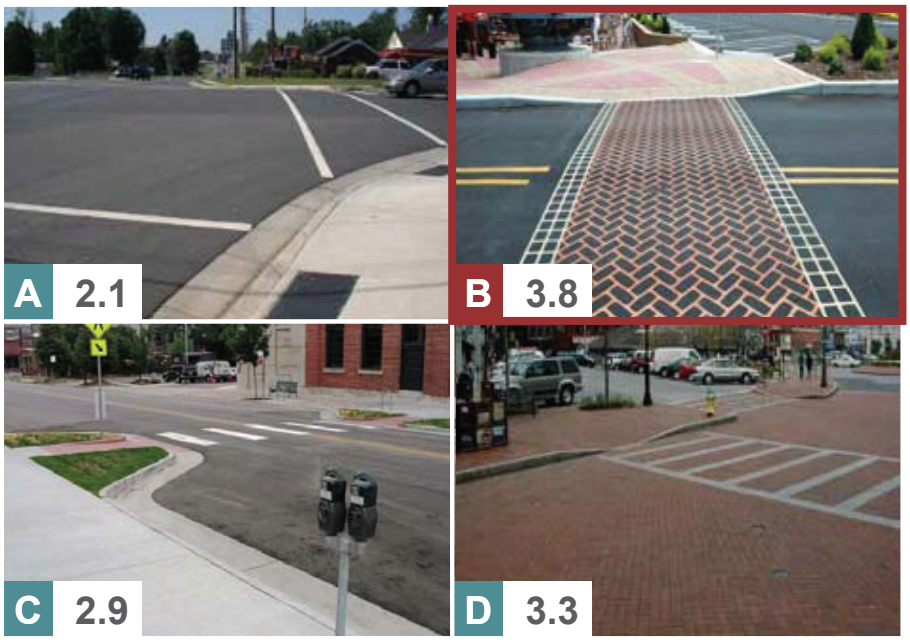
The respondents preferred a wide streetscape with outdoor amenities. The lease attractive option did not include a buffer between the sidewalk and the road, which reflects the public comments on the issue.

SETBACK AND STREET CORRIDOR



As was apparent in the public comments, there is a strong preference for a walkable downtown. The winning image shows small-scale shops with crosswalks and on-street parking.

CROSSWALK



The most popular crosswalk type was asphalt with a highly visible imprinted brick pattern.

B Individual Stakeholder Input

About twenty-five conversations with about twenty individuals were conducted over the period of several weeks as a part of the fact-finding tasks. Following are quotes from those interviews. A number of the conversations were requested to be confidential so the quotes are not attributed to any individual.

IMPROVEMENTS/DEVELOPMENT

A general question was posed as to what improvements were appropriate for the area. Typical responses were both general and specific.

- 'Don't want to see all the parking areas first thing. The cars dominate.'
- 'The CVS project is piecemeal – needs to be unified.'
- 'Need development that promotes a "Main Street" feeling.'
- 'The whole area should have a charming New England center feeling.'
- 'Plazas not susceptible to change.'
- 'Add nice restaurants and expensive places to eat.'
- 'Show the monetary benefit for improvement of places.'
- 'The neighbors don't want to look at trash in the back and deal with noise.'
- 'Kmart could be the anchor of growth and change.'
- 'Look at West Acton as part of the big picture.'

IMPROVEMENTS/ACCESS

The issue of access and walkability was a common focus of the responses.

- 'Should start with the simple things, ADA, sidewalks, cleaning up the basics.'
- 'Missing all infrastructure related to walkability.'
- 'Put pathways (instead of sidewalks on street) that connect neighborhood-to-neighborhood, creating a nice environment.'
- 'Include wayfinding to West Acton.'
- 'Improve accessibility and public transit.'

OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

Public versus private ownership was considered by several as a unique aspect impacting redevelopment.

- 'One of the biggest challenges is that Kelley's Corner is all privately owned.'
- 'Kelley's Corner is at the intersection of two state roads over which the town has little control.'

TRAFFIC

As expected, traffic issues were a common thread with some solutions suggested.

- 'Traffic backups are a big issue, but there is nothing that can be done.'
- 'The traffic on 27 in the morning and evening is problematic.'
- 'Hard to get out of parking areas onto 111 or 27 due to congestion.'
- 'The traffic enables the thriving economy.'
- 'Traffic is a problem, try to calm it so that people feel comfortable walking or driving through the center.'
- 'Put a raised median on Rt 27.'
- 'Look at the ways to get on and off Rt 2. Want to get traffic, but also have to keep it moving.'

GOVERNMENT

There were points and counterpoints raised on the role and function of local government. These quotes come from developers and property owners.

- 'Town Hall needs to treat developers as customers.'
- 'There is a design review board in Town, but there is no authority.'
- 'There is now a more reasonable Design Review board; they advise the Selectmen, who hold the power.'
- 'The Town has been doing well working with property owners.'

ZONING AND INCENTIVES

For those who had experience with the local regulations or were familiar with the zoning, there were several comments and suggestions.

- 'The land owners have not put the right things in there, and zoning has not encouraged the correct development.'
- 'Create opportunities to entice owners to rebuild their buildings.'
- 'Why do we set a minimum and not a maximum parking?'
- 'Shared parking is a big opportunity.'
- 'Parking behind the building is essential.'
- 'Reduce parking requirements.'
- 'Parking can't be done properly under the current regulations. Need to think of other ways besides on-site parking.'

ATTITUDE/NEGATIVE

One finding was the extreme negativity of some of the comments. While these must be considered in context with the individual and their experience,

the comments are included here as a note that not all people are hopeful of a positive outcome.

- 'Nothing is going to change.'
- 'Small initiatives have come forth, but there have been no proactive planning.'
- 'Town has done nothing right for Kelley's Corner.'
- 'Historically, it is a disaster zone.'
- 'No specific ideas for improvement, only negative feelings.'

ATTITUDE/POSITIVE

In balance to the previous category of comments, there were those who offered their positive opinions.

- 'Vibrant, exciting, commercial center of town.'
- 'There is a good balance of restaurants, pharmacy, and grocery store.'
- 'Care deeply and have bought into the dream that it could be a great Town Center.'