

Finance Committee Meeting

August 12, 2025

7:30pm

Acton Town Hall, Room 204

Present: Scott Sullivan (Chair) Alex Lenz, Corinne Hogseth, Allison Jones, Greg Jarboe (remote), Roland Bourdon, Jason Cole, Steve Noone (remote)

Mr. Sullivan called meeting to order at 7:31 PM

Public Comment: None

Intern Presentations:

Mr. Sullivan welcomed the Interns. Each intern presentation was allowed approximately 5 minutes with a 10-minute Q&A.

Aiden McLaughlin - Rising Junior:

SUBJECT: Using AI to forecast AB enrollment

Used New England School Development Council as data points.

Summarized issues with chart components such as model lacking adaptability.

A couple examples of factors presented:

Housing costs in Acton are a factor.

Population forecasted to grow.

A couple examples of observations presented:

Current enrollment is significantly below long-term expectations

Expect a post-COVID-19 rebound

Q&A:

Ms. Hogseth - Looked back 10 years? Answer: Only to 2022

Mr. John Petersen - Parse elementary from High School? Could School Committee close a school for a period of time? Answer: Model could be adapted to take these questions into consideration.

Mr. Sullivan - 200 student difference? Answer: 29 student difference

Ms. Friedrichs - We tend to use historical trends to predict the future. But, we can change policy to change the future. Could adapt to look at different scenarios? Answer: Yes

San Kulsick- Rising Sophomore at Babson:

SUBJECT: Transportation Services for Seniors in Acton

Town-provided transportation is relied upon by resident users.

Hi-lighted the health and well-being of riders.

Usage is increasing compared to relatively low costs.

While not back to pre-COVID levels, demand is rising.

Projected demographic changes will require increased budget adjustments.

Discussed meeting transportation needs with dignity; for example, his elderly grandmother.

Q&A:

Mr. Cole - Did San calculate average cost of trip? Answer: Didn't calculate that cost.

Mr. Bourdon commented 2023 to 2024 ridership decreased. Useful to know “x” number of riders. Answer: Provide a census survey to Seniors and find out their needs.

Ms. Hogseth - 2018 numbers jump and stay constant 2019 and 2020, but then decreased, why? Answer: Still haven’t reached the peak from pre-COVID.

Mr. Cole - Less than half for trips post versus pre-COVID. What is this mainly attributed to? Answer: Acton Seniors can easily get sick, have to think about the population.

Ms. Friedrichs - Take note: need to normalize for ARPA funding and other funding sources. Answer: Go back to what is the need.

Mr. Jarboe - Heard this same message a year ago, thank you.

Michelle Tendo- Rising sophomore:

SUBJECT: MBTA Communities Act

Requires 177 communities served by the MBTA to create zoning districts.

Special permits are no longer required for many steps.

Discussed the financial impact, the Municipal cost and infrastructure needs. For example, net costs of \$4,500 - \$15,000 per apartment unit.

Summarized lessons learned from Comparable Massachusetts towns, concentrated on Lexington and showed the net fiscal impact was lowered.

Summarized the Projecting Acton’s financial future, how can people afford to live in Acton.

Q&A:

Ms. Hogseth - \$2,200/student cost. How does that compare to the \$18,000-\$22,000/student in the budget? Answer: A typo, should be \$22,000.

Mr. Cole - take 2 top-line numbers (\$4,500 - \$15,000), the population increases has the ability of increasing property tax: but, won’t keep up with net costs? Answer: Agree

Ms. Friedrichs - Growth isn’t the best way to reach affordability. Cost basis on current budget? Answer: Last year’s budget

Adithya Sharma - Rising Freshman:

SUBJECT: Commercial Tax Rate

\$17.15/thousand in this calendar year compared to Concord is \$12.40; Westford \$13.50
70% of Massachusetts communities are lower than Acton’s tax rate.

Not having a commercial tax rate is a disservice to the businesses and residents of Acton.
There are currently 712 businesses in Acton.

29 businesses per 1,000; compared to 36 in Westford

Concord businesses rose by 43% over the past few years.

Decline in retail trade shows an economic downturn and higher home rates.

Proposed a financial model

\$6.5m generated revenue in taxes last year.

Presented a chart showing \$10 to \$16 range for a tax rate.

Lowering the tax rate, though, shows a decrease in revenue.

There is currently 165,000 sq. feet of available retail space in Acton. This space could accommodate 83 small businesses, equals \$800,000 in revenue.

So, reduce tax rate to \$15, but could generate more revenue with businesses coming to Acton and being more competitive with our neighboring communities.

Q&A:

Mr. Lenz - If lower tax rate to \$15 where does it put Acton percentage-wise in relation to rest of state? Answer: Just used a few towns as an example, don’t know exact number, but would make Acton more competitive.

Mr. John Petersen - Businesses have a variety of expenses, how do taxes factor into profitability of a business? Answer: Taxes is one of the higher costs for a business

Liette Letourneau - Rising sophomore Trinity College:

SUBJECT: Chapter 70 Federal funding for Acton Boxborough

Federal funding is based on various factors.

Chapter 70 was revised by the Student Opportunities Act a few years ago, however ongoing concerns.

Required local contribution plus Chapter 70 = full funding

Fill the Gap- can vary district to district. AB has a fairly high contribution compared to other Districts. Partly based on real estate prices.

Ch 70 increased by 4.5% (FY23 & FY24)

“Hold Harmless” clause - when District is suffering, for example a decrease in enrollment, “Hold Harmless” is meant to keep funding consistent in previous years.

“Hold Harmless” causes concerns because it’s based on historical data, gives aid and money to schools that could be going elsewhere.

Impact on ABRSD: Calculation may not account for all rising costs, eventually can lead to an override.

Q&A:

Ms. Hogseth - “Hold Harmless”, is there a certain number of years? Answer: Started in 90’s and no.

Mr. John Petersen - Burden on community and local property tax. Should more funding be coming from State? Answer: Dependent on town. Acton doesn’t get as much commercial funding as it should. Slight increase beneficial, but other factors should be considered.

Ian Ryan - Rising Junior at Colgate University:

SUBJECT: Cost Calculator for Scaling Essential Public Services

Ian did a quick overview of the product. The product takes into consideration population, housing costs, hiring costs, etc.

The Calculator frames the subject as a capital project.

Part A: Looks at targeted staffing levels

Part B: Fiscal Impact

Example of Part A: Cost and Staffing of Fire Department analysis

Then Part B: Fiscal Impact and Comparable Projects Analysis

Another example: For Police Department: Currently 1.79/1,000 Police Officers. If change to 2.25, would need 5 more Police Officers.

Q&A:

Mr. Cole - Excited to look at this tool.

Mr. Lenz - with Amortization 2.7% inflation factor, can be altered? Answer: Yes

Ms. Fleckner - Factor in health insurance? Answer: No, but could be added

Mr. Petersen - How can model address aging of capital base? Answer: Did not go into assets, or lifespans of those assets, for departments.

Mr. Jarboe - Excellent work.

William Pharo - Rising Junior at Sacred Heart University:

SUBJECT: Financial rejuvenation of Local Businesses

Objective to attract new businesses and revive current businesses

Concentrated on Grocery Stores and Automotive Industry.

Market Basket in Littleton, Maynard and Westford takes away from Acton grocery stores.

Many residents shop out of town.

Acton Ford - only 10% of sales comes from Acton residents

“Shop to Score” program - Business donates “\$x” to the schools.

Organize tours of local businesses to create conversations of future career paths.

Ban on plastic bags - digs deep into already slim profit margins.

If 150 households shift \$200/month to local shops, it results in \$360,000/year in new local revenue

Estimated \$18,000 - \$25,000 in added tax revenue

Boosts jobs, retention, reinvestment in Acton.

Q&A:

Mr. Bourdon - What was the impact of Stop ‘N Shop moving? Answer: would be interesting to know.

Mr. Lenz - Enjoy shopping local, gave an example.

Ms. Alissa Nicol - Estimated added tax revenue? Answer: calculation specific to groceries. Took added revenue to the business and then calculated the added tax revenue.

Mr. Jarboe - Kudos to this project.

In closing, Mr. Sullivan stated any statements or corrections should be discussed by the Finance Committee at a future meeting. Interns worked independently, came to their own conclusions.

Liaison Reports:

Economic Development Committee:

Greg Jarboe - Reported out of upcoming Restaurant Week in October. A “Challenge” is being drafted of Finance Committee to Select Board. He and Mr. Charter drafted a letter that may be shared with Acton Exchange. Mr. Jarboe will share this letter with the Committee for review and discussion.

Mr. Sullivan is going to hold remaining of Liaison reports to next meeting.

Mr. Lenz made motion to adjourn, Mr. Bourdon seconded

Passed unanimously, 8-0-0

9:12PM

Shared Documents: Intern presentations