



DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Meeting Minutes

May 29, 2025

7:00 PM

Room 126, Town Hall – In Person

Present: Peter Darlow, (Chair), Tom Doolittle, David Honn, Richard Keleher, Jon Cappetta, Planning Board Liaison

1. Opening

Chair, Peter Darlow opened the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

2. Regular Business

A. Meeting Minutes:

April 17, 2025 minutes were reviewed and unanimously approved as amended. DH will submit to the Town Clerk for posting.

B. Citizen's Concerns:

1. Richard Keleher discussed his intention to send a letter to the Select Board to prioritize a study on what the town of Acton can do to address the urgent need to preserve “naturally occurring” affordable housing. There are many existing units of housing in the town that when placed on the open market, could be purchased by the town with the intention to increase the number of available affordable housing units. The board is sympathetic to the cause but members chose to take no official action.

2. David Honn brought a concern to the board that existing large scale commercial parking lots lacking in pervious landscape buffers and landscaped islands, as is presently required by zoning for new work, are typically not improved when an existing or new owner chooses to repave only via a standard as of right building permit, that does not fall under a town of Action special permit. Two very visible examples are the recently revised parking lot at the new Stop and Shop in Kelley's Corner and the parking lot at the Ace Hardware on Main Street. David and Peter will reach out to Kristen to review whether there are examples in other municipalities of opportunities to require parking lot upgrades when not otherwise required through a special permit application.

3. New/Special Business

A. Single Family Lot Width and Lot Area:

In 2021, the DRB proposed to the Select Board that the current definition of lot width and lot area for single family house lots within the zoning code had become problematic due to several extreme examples by subdivision developers to manipulate the shapes of lots to shoehorn in a maximum amount of house lots by minimizing lot widths to as little as 5



feet across.in order to link unusable portions of a land tract to buildable portions of the land track to establish the zoning required lot area. In the 2021 memo to the SB, the DRB pointed out how Acton's unusual definitions for lot width and area are out of step with most of the surrounding communities zoning on single family lot widths and lot areas. A citizen's motion to prioritize and study this topic was proposed and passed at the 2023 town meeting. DRB members agreed to send an updated memo to the Select Board to prioritize a rewrite of the pertinent sections of Acton's zoning language to normalize the definition of lot width and lot area for single family lots.

Documents reviewed:

- DRB memorandum dated July 31, 2021, titled Acton Zoning Bylaw Lot Width and Lot Area Discussion that was previously sent to the Select Board.
- The current town of Concord zoning code sections 6.1, and 6.2 specific to the definitions of lot width and lot area.

4. Adjournment

At 8:15 p.m. it was moved, seconded, and unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted, The DRB



TOWN OF ACTON
DESIGN REVIEW BOARD

Memorandum: Recommendations to Select Board
Odd-Shaped Lots – Lot Width and Area

June 1, 2025

The recommendations below are the result of a meeting of the Design Review Board on May 29, 2025.

Design Review Board (DRB) Members in attendance: Peter Darlow (Chair), David Honn, Thomas Doolittle, Richard Keleher, and Jon Cappetta, (Planning Board Liaison)

Proponents in attendance: None

Documents Reviewed:

Design Review Board Memorandum dated July 31, 2021 with the subject: Acton Zoning Bylaw Lot Width and Lot Area Discussion

BACKGROUND

The DRB is concerned that we keep seeing tracts of land that are gerrymandered to create odd-shaped lots to allow more houses than would normally fit on a lot or to make what should be unbuildable lots buildable. This increases the density and creates problems, such as inability to put up a fence on your own land or do maintenance on your land, such as tree removal due to the shape of the lot being too narrow (as little as five feet in some cases) to allow sufficient access. This can lead to unnecessary disputes between neighbors.

No nearby towns allow such lot manipulation. We recommend adoption of language similar to that used by Concord, Section 6, paragraphs 6.2.2 (lot area) and 6.2.5 (lot width), attached.

ACTION

The DRB recommended that the Zoning Bylaw be changed to address this problem in July of 2021 and a motion to this effect was passed by Town Meeting at the 2023 Annual Town Meeting. The DRB recommends that the Select Board put this on their priorities list for the current year, leading to an Article at the 2026 Annual Town Meeting.

Sincerely,
DRB

Section 6. Dimensional Regulations

6.1 DIMENSIONS

Minimum lot area, frontage, lot width, yard, and corner clearance requirements and maximum lot coverage, height and floor/area ratio requirements shall be as prescribed in Section 6, Table III, Dimensional Regulations.

6.2 INTERPRETATION

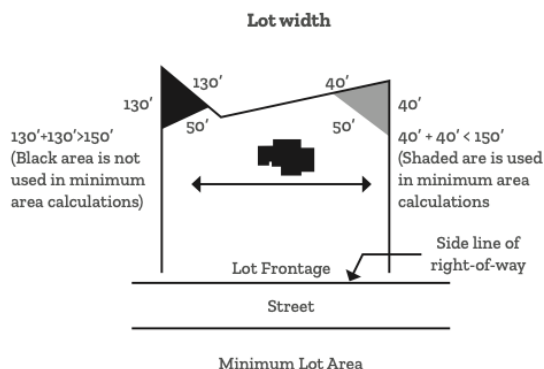
For purposes of interpretation the following shall apply:

6.2.1 Lot area: In determining lot area, no part thereof within the street lines or within a private way or right-of-way for travel by motor vehicles shall be included. Street lines shall determine lot boundaries.

6.2.2 Minimum lot area:

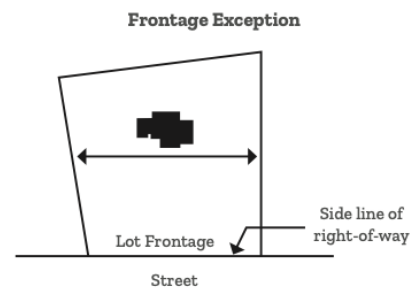
6.2.2.1 When computing minimum lot area for any lot laid out and submitted for approval by the Planning Board, in accordance with Chapter 41 of the General Laws, after September 1, 1991, a minimum of fifty (50) percent of such lot area required in that zoning district shall be provided by land located outside of the Floodplain Conservancy District and Wetlands Conservancy District.

6.2.2.2 When the distance between any two (2) points on lot lines is less than fifty (50) feet, measured in a straight line, the smaller portion of the lot which is bounded by such straight line and such lot lines shall not be considered in computing the minimum lot area unless the distance along such lot lines between such two (2) points is less than one hundred fifty (150) feet.



6.2.3 Frontage: Frontage, as defined in Subsection 1.3.11, shall be measured in a continuous line along the sideline of the street between the points of intersection of the side lot lines with said sideline of the street.

6.2.4 Frontage exception: A dwelling in Residence AA, A and B Districts may be constructed on a lot having eighty (80) percent of the minimum lot frontage, provided that the lot width at the nearest point on the front wall of the dwelling to the sideline of the right-of-way shall not be less than the minimum lot frontage and that the angle formed by the intersection of the side lot line and the sideline of the right-of-way shall not be less than 45 degrees.



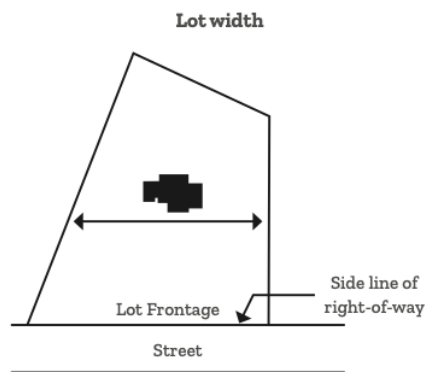
Lot Width: (not less than Required frontage)

Res. AA	200'
Res. A	150'
Res. B	125'

Frontage Exception: (not less than 80% of required frontage)

Res. AA	160'
Res. A	120'
Res. B	100'

6.2.5 Lot width: Each lot shall have, in addition to the required frontage, a width of not less than eighty (80) percent of the required frontage at all points between the sideline of the right-of-way along which the frontage of the lot is measured and the nearest point on the front wall of the dwelling upon such lot, and the angle formed by the intersection of the side lot line and the sideline of the right-of-way shall not be less than 45 degrees. Such width shall be measured along lines which are parallel to such sideline.



Lot Frontage:

Res. AA	200'
Res. A	150'
Res. B	125'
Res. C	80'

Lot Width:

Res. AA	160'
Res. A	120'
Res. B	100'
Res. C	64'

6.2.6 Front yards: Front yards shall be measured between the sideline of the right-of-way and the nearest point of any structure, with the exception of uncovered steps and ramps or the construction of walls and fences. In all cases, corner lots shall be considered to have two (2) front yards and two (2) side yards. A lot having frontage on two (2) streets shall have two (2) front yards, each of which shall comply with the requirements of the front yard provisions.

In the West Concord Business and West Concord Village Districts, there shall be a maximum front yard of ten (10) feet, that is, no portion of a building shall be set back from the front lot line by more than ten feet unless a special permit is granted to allow a greater front yard depth. A special permit shall be granted by the Planning Board only upon a written determination as provided in Section 11.6 and that the larger front yard serves a public purpose.

6.2.7 Side yards: Side yards shall be measured from the nearest point of any dwelling or structure to each side lot line, provided that nothing shall prevent the projection of uncovered steps and ramps or the construction of walls and fences. In the residential districts or for single-family dwellings in the Business or Medical-Professional districts, the width of one side yard may be reduced by an amount not to exceed three (3) feet if the width of the other side is correspondingly increased. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a building of accessory use may be placed not less than five (5) feet from a sideline so long as such building is not to be located nearer the sideline of the right-of-way than the rearmost point of the dwelling or any structure attached thereto.

In the Residence C and Residence B Districts, any part of the principal structure that extends into the three (3) foot side yard exception area shall be no greater than fifteen (15) feet in height as defined in subsection 6.2.11. The Board may grant relief from the fifteen foot height limitation in the three (3) foot side yard exception area provided the Board finds that there are no reasonable alternatives available and that the desired relief may be granted without substantial detriment to the neighborhood and without derogating from the intent and purpose of this Bylaw.

6.2.8 Rear yards: Rear yards shall be measured from the nearest point of any dwelling or structure attached thereto to the rear lot line provided that nothing shall prevent the projection of uncovered steps and ramps or the construction of walls and fences. In the residential districts or for single-family dwellings in the Business or Medical-Professional districts, no building of accessory use shall be placed nearer to the rear lot line than five (5) feet.

6.2.9 Landscape buffer: Side yards, rear yards and the other lot lines noted in Table III shall be suitably landscaped. Such landscaping shall be designed to reduce the visual impact of the principal use upon adjacent property by the use of trees, shrubs, walls, fences, or other landscape elements. Where the developed area adjoins land developed for residential use, suitable landscaping shall consist of a substantially sight-impervious screen of evergreen foliage at least eight (8) feet in height or planting of shrubs and trees complemented by a sight-impervious fence of at least five (5) feet, but not more than eight (8) feet, in height, or such other type of landscaping as may be required under site plan approval. In all developments, to the extent practicable, existing trees shall be retained and used to satisfy the provisions of this Section 6.