



**Town of Acton  
Open Space Committee**

Meeting Minutes

April 4<sup>th</sup> 2025

8:00 AM VIRTUAL and in Person

Acton Town Hall Room 9, 472 Main Street, Acton, MA 01720

**Committee Members Present:** Karen O'Neill (Chairing Meeting Co-Chair, Full Member), Bettina Abe (Full Member), Michaela Moran (Planning Board Liaison), Matt Mostoller (Full Member, AWD), Amy Green (Full Member)

**Committee Members Absent:** Terry Maitland (Co-Chair), Brandon Comstock (Full Member)

**Non-Committee Members Present:** Olivia Barksdale (Conservation Agent), Susan Mitchell-Hardt (ACT), David Martin (Select Board - Liaison), Jody Harris (ACT), Joe Cooney (ACT), Meredith Houghton (SVT), Alissa Nicol (Select Board), Kristen Guichard (Planning Director), Kalia, Corey Godfrey (AWD)

**Meeting Open**

8:02am. Karen O'Neill, Co-Chair called the meeting to order and conducted roll call.

**I. Regular Business**

**1. Review meeting minutes March 2025**

- a. 8:02am. No minutes to review.

**2. Status of property Conservation Restrictions (any changes)**

- a. 8:05am. The Piper CR is delayed and during the annual monitoring visit an issue was identified at the Gable CR (woodchips on the boundary line). The Wetherbee CR is with the state legal department and the property is closed to the public.

**II. New Special Business**

**1. Presentation re :Habitat for All**

- a. 8:11am. Karen O'Neill introduced the Habitat for All presentation. She mentioned that an Acton Resident was concerned that the proposed Habitat for All bylaw would increase density throughout the town; as well as increase land prices, negatively affecting the Town's ability to purchase and protect land. Kristen Guichard, the Planning Director, gave a presentation on the Habitat for All initiative. She explained that the project has been ongoing for about a year and a half and has resulted in proposed changes to the zoning bylaw called the Open Space Residential Development. Kristen highlighted that this article will be



considered at the upcoming town meeting. Kristen presented slides comparing the current standard subdivision process with the proposed open space development method. She emphasized that the current by-right method often results in clear-cutting entire tracts of land, creating long roads with extensive impervious coverage, and incentivizing the construction of larger homes (5,000 to 8,000 square feet in recent years). The proposed open space development would allow developers to build homes on a certain percentage of the lot while preserving the remainder as open space or resource land. Kristen noted that this approach is being prioritized by state conservation organizations, including Mass Audubon. Kristen provided statistics on land preservation through Acton's current Planned Conservation Residential Community (PCRC) bylaw, which has protected about 628 acres (5% of Acton's land) since its adoption 30 years ago. She contrasted this with 208.3 acres developed without resource land protection under the standard subdivision method during the same period. Addressing concerns about land valuation, Kristen reported conversations with appraisers who did not see the proposal as significantly impacting land values. She explained that cluster developments typically yield slightly lower valuations, often offset by reduced construction costs. The presentation also covered inclusionary zoning aspects of the proposal, which would allow for higher density (up to 7 units per acre) if 10% of units are deed-restricted as affordable housing and all units are smaller than 1,500 square feet.

Committee members and attendees raised several questions and concerns:

1. Matt Mostoller asked about the town's ability to negotiate and guide projects under the new by-right process. Kristen explained that the public notice and review process would remain the same, and the town would still have opportunities to request modifications within reason.
2. Michaela Moran expressed concern about the density bonus and its potential impact on the character of neighborhoods. She requested a study of how recent PCRCs might have looked under the proposed zoning change.
3. Bettina Abe and Susan Mitchell-Hardt emphasized the value of preserving open space, even if it's not accessible to the public, citing examples of meadows and scenic landscapes that contribute to the town's character.
4. Amy Green raised concerns about allowing leaching fields in open space areas and suggested stricter controls in the rules and regulations.
5. Tarra Frederick voiced several objections, including concerns about "greenwashing," the need for written comparisons and appraisals, and the potential for the proposal to allow destruction of protected land. She urged the committee to take more time to study the impacts before moving forward.

The discussion concluded with Kristen addressing some of the concerns raised and emphasizing that the proposal aims to create a more thoughtful development process while preserving open space.



**2. Status update of the Wetherbee/Moritz property and CR (land cleanup)**

- b.** 9:02am. Karen O'Neill reported that the cleanup of the Wetherbee/Moritz property has been completed. However, she noted that the land is still not open to the public until after the closure of the sale. The matter is currently in the hands of the state's legal department. Susan Mitchell-Hardt announced that the Acton Conservation Trust's \$100,000 donation towards the purchase cost of the land is on the consent agenda for the upcoming Select Board meeting. She mentioned that there would be a photo opportunity before the meeting with the check presentation to the town manager. Susan also highlighted the extraordinary community support, with over 62 donors contributing to the cause.

**3. Updated on any other land other parcels (42 Taylor)**

- a.** 9:04am. Bettina Abe reported that the 42 Taylor Road ANRAD permit was approved by the Conservation Commission on Wednesday night. Karen O'Neill mentioned that Olivia would have a map available for those interested in viewing it. A question was raised about Triangle Farm Lane off Pope Road, near Camp Acton and Carlisle Conservation Land. Kristen Guichard stated that nothing had come in regarding that property, but suggested checking with Olivia for any recent updates.

**4. Next Meeting/ Meeting Times/ Meeting Location**

- a.** 8 am, Room 9, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2025

**III. Consent Items**

- 1. None

**IV. Next Meeting:**

- 1. May 2, 2025

- a.** 9:06am. Meeting closed