

## **Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grant Case Study**

**Municipality:** Water Supply District of Acton

**Project Title:** 549 Main Street Acquisition

**Award Year (FY):** FY24

**Grant Award:** \$ 1,505,414

**Match:** \$ 2,566,500

**Match Source:** \$1,000,000 in Community Preservation Act funds from the Town of Acton; just over \$25,000 in revenue generated from the District's solar land leases; water user rates; over \$7,500 of District staff in-kind hours for project management and community engagement

**One or Two Year Project:** One year project

**Municipal Department Leading Project:** Water Supply District of Acton

**Project Website URL:** <https://actonwater.com/549Main>

### **Community Overview:**

- What is the population size of your community and where is it located?
- Do you have any [Environmental Justice](#) or other Climate Vulnerable communities? (Think about both those who live and work in your town.)
- Other unique traits of your municipality like who the top employers are, geography, history, etc.

The Water Supply District of Acton is a community public water supply that delivers high quality drinking water to about 95% of the residents of the Town of Acton. As of the most recent Town census, the population is approximately 21,874. Acton is in Middlesex County and is bordered by Westford and Littleton to the north, Concord and Carlisle to the east, Stow, Maynard, and Sudbury to the south and Boxborough to the west.

The project is immediately adjacent to an area of Acton that is identified as a minority Environmental Justice community due to having greater than 55% minorities residing here. Households living in this area have a direct link via Brook Street and the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail to access the trails on the property. Approximately 30% of Acton is made up of renters, which is relatively high compared to other similarly sized suburban cities and towns in Massachusetts. Additionally, English isolation is experienced by community members, with the top language being simplified Chinese.

On April 19, 1775, the Acton Minutemen were the first company to cross the North Bridge in Concord, led by Captain Isaac Davis. The line of march they followed has largely been lost to development but over 2,000 feet of this path are protected as part of this project. Captain Davis is considered the first officer to die in the war while defending the United States. The Town of Acton has been working since 2023 on celebrating the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the start of the American Revolution in 2025.

## **Project Description and Goals:**

- Where was the project located?
- What climate change impacts did the project address?
- What were the specific goals and tasks of the project as stated in your application?
- Did your project meet the goals set forth in your application in terms of:
  - Employing nature-based solutions
  - Improving equitable outcomes for and fostering strong partnerships with EJ and other Climate Vulnerable Populations
  - Providing regional benefits
  - Implementing the public involvement and community engagement plan set forth in your application
  - Finishing the project on time

The underlying goals of this project were to diversify the community's water supply and increase resiliency and drought preparedness by acquiring and permanently protecting the 56.85-acre parcel of land located at 549 Main Street in Acton. This land acquisition was also intended to support equitable public access to green and open space in Acton while providing several environmental co-benefits to the community by preserving this ecologically diverse property in its minimally disturbed state, including flood mitigation, a managed forest and meadow, carbon sequestration, cooling shade during extreme heat, and preservation of priority habitat of rare species.

The project was successful in meeting the goals outlined in the project application. Nature based solutions related to carbon sequestration, cooling, and flood mitigation will be realized through the healthy mixed age forest. The land is connecting an isolated housing community built in an industrial park with other areas of Acton with amenities. EJ populations are able to access the property by bike or walking on the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail and public ways in the area. By protecting 700 feet of Nashoba Brook as it flows through the property, a regional watershed scale benefit is being realized in the SuAsCo basin. The connection to the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail also provides a regional recreational benefit and connects the rail trail corridor to sidewalks along Main Street. Businesses including a Post Office, daycare, and a collaborative therapeutic day school on Post Office Square will also have access to the property and the rail trail, leading to amenities along Great Road and potentially reducing car trips between these areas.

The public involvement plan was largely executed in the grant period. Although it was challenging to directly reach members of the community that reside in apartments, the Town and District will continue to make the public aware of the availability of the property for passive recreation and the specific rules and regulations governing the use of the property. Due to delays in the Conservation Restriction being recorded, the final public opening of the property will occur later in 2024.

## **Results and Deliverables:**

- Describe, and quantify (where possible) project results (e.g. square footage of habitat restored or created, increase in tree canopy coverage, etc.). Report out on the metrics outlined in your application.
- Provide a brief summary of project deliverables with web links, if available.

This project permanently protected 57 acres of diverse open space and protects a million gallon per day drinking water supply source. Public access has been granted to the trail network via a Conservation Restriction granted to the Town of Acton Conservation Commission and the Sudbury Valley Trustees. Signage has been installed at the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail entrance to the property and additional QR codes will be installed as the trail network is blazed. A dedicated website about the project and the property has been created and is available at <https://actonwater.com/549Main>.

## **Lessons Learned:**

- What lessons were learned as a result of the project? Focus on both the technical matter of the project and process-oriented lessons learned.
- What is the best way for other communities to learn from your project/process?

The District learned how to effectively leverage multiple funding sources and partners to achieve a highly desirable community and environmental outcome. Understanding both the process and constraints of project partners is an important lesson learned, such as making sure that the people able to make decisions and provide technical support are in the room at the same time or that appropriate authority is delegated to minimize delays and revisiting decisions.

Utilizing multiple benefits, including protecting and diversifying water supply, is a lesson other communities can take from our project. Leveraging the high ranking for protection of this property with the community water needs and climate benefits, provided an easier path to public approval of the acquisition during a fiscally challenging time for the community.

## **Partners and Other Support:**

- Include a list of all project partners and describe their role in supporting/assisting in the project.

Town of Acton – provided technical and financial assistance through its Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Community Preservation Committee, Selectboard, and Town staff to negotiate the land purchase, obtain favorable votes to utilize Community Preservation Act funds, and to be one of the Conservation Restriction grant holders.

Sudbury Valley Trustees – provided technical support in negotiating the land purchase, advising on grant funding opportunities, and to be one of the Conservation Restriction grant holders.

Acton Conservation Trust – provided technical support in identifying the land protection opportunity, providing a gift of funding to the Town of Acton for the Conservation Restriction administration, and partnering on outreach and education about the project, including get out the vote drives for the District and Town meeting votes required to acquire the property.

The Conant Family – offered the District the opportunity to explore the property for potential well locations resulting in an off market conservation sale. The family provided extended closing dates to accommodate the public acquisition process and purist of grant opportunities. The property was also sold for a below market rate price enabling the public and conservation partners to successfully gain public support for the acquisition and infrastructure improvements.

Department of Conservation Services – provided additional grant funding through the Drinking Water Supply Protection grant program and shepherded the Conservation restriction through the review and adoption process.

MassDEP – cooperated in advancing the project through the Drinking Water, Waste Site Cleanup, and Water Management Act programs. Provided timely approvals and reviews, including the passive recreational uses on the public water supply land.

#### **Project Photos:**

- In your electronic submission of this report, please attach (as .jpg or .png) a few high-resolution (at least 300 pixels per inch) representative photos of the project. Photos should not show persons who can be easily identified, and avoid inclusion of any copyrighted, trademarked, or branded logos in the images. MVP may use these images on its website or other promotional purposes, so please also let us know if there is someone who should receive credit for taking the photo.



Project sign along the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail entrance to the property (Photo Credit A.Wahlstrom)





Bedrock well casing (Photo Credit M.Mostoller)





Open meadow in winter (Photo Credit M.Mostoller)





Public walk on existing trail network (Photo Credit M.Mostoller)





Historic Isaac Davis trail traverses property (Photo Credit B.Conant)





Trail network through woods (Photo Credit M.Mostoller)





Potential Vernal Pool (Photo Credit M.Bassett)





Mowed meadow (Photo Credit M.Mostoller)





A herd of deer (Photo Credit M.Mostoller)





Nashoba Brook runs through a portion of the property (Photo Credit M.Mostoller)



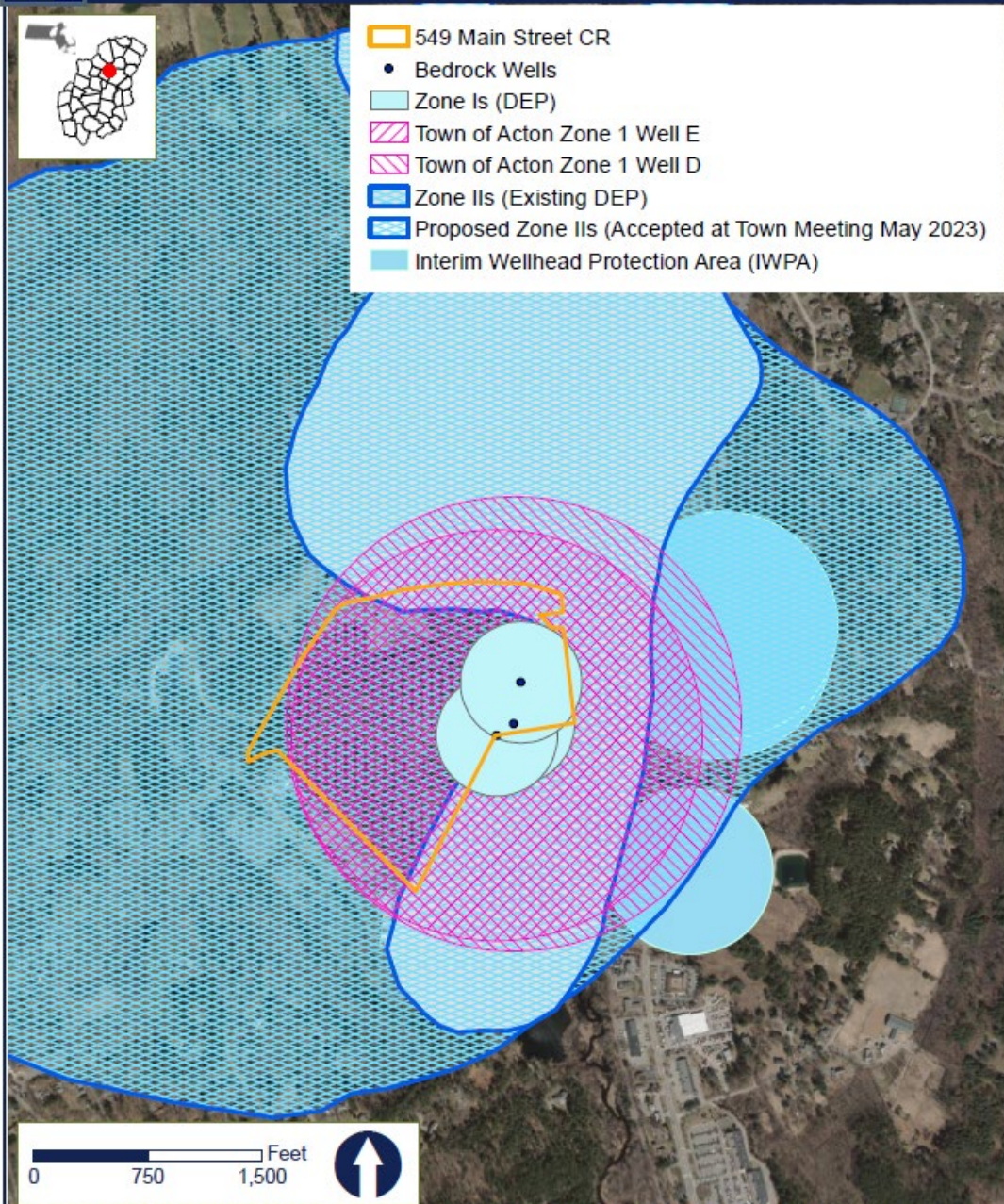


## 549 Main Street CR Water Protection Areas

Acton, MA



- 549 Main Street CR
- Bedrock Wells
- Zone Is (DEP)
- Town of Acton Zone 1 Well E
- Town of Acton Zone 1 Well D
- Zone IIs (Existing DEP)
- Proposed Zone IIs (Accepted at Town Meeting May 2023)
- Interim Wellhead Protection Area (IWPA)



Map produced by Sudbury Valley Trustees. Data provided by Office of Geographic and Environmental Information (MassGIS), Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. This map should be used for reference only. Boundary lines are approximate.

Sudbury Valley Trustees - 18 Wolbach Road - Sudbury, MA 01776 - 978-443-5588 - [web@svtweb.org](mailto:web@svtweb.org) - [www.svtweb.org](http://www.svtweb.org)