



Social Environment Work Group - Preliminary Identification of Issues

Kick-off meeting on Wednesday, January 23, 7:00 pm; Oak Bluffs Senior Center

The following is provided as example of some issues that may be covered, but the Social Environment Work Group will ultimately determine which issues to address.

Social: The Vineyard is a uniquely diverse community with a high level of social interaction among ethnic, professional and socioeconomic groups, a quality cited by many as key to Vineyard character. Ethnically, the community today includes the still vibrant Wampanoag Tribe, the descendents of early English and Portuguese settlers, one of the country's first Afro-American resort communities, and the offspring of other waves of people coming to the Island, artists, hippies, summer residents, the recent influx of Brazilians, and a whole range of people attracted by work opportunities and the Island's unique qualities. Demographically, the year-round community includes a smaller than average proportion of young people, and a quickly expanding retired community.

- Is the continuity and diversity of the year-round community endangered and, if so, why? Is it only the cost of living, or is social and environmental change a factor?
- Who is leaving and why do they leave? Who is coming and why? Does it matter? Can we do anything about it? Do we want to do anything about?
- Is quality of life good for Islanders? Is it getting better or worse? What can we do to improve it?

Health, Education, Social and Recreational Services: Community infrastructure is essential to sustaining the community and enhancing its quality of life. We presently have generally high quality facilities and services, but further improvements can be made and we need to plan to meet future needs. Note that these topics will likely be largely handled in subgroups.

- What improvements are needed to existing facilities and services?
- What changes are needed to deal with the growing and changing population?

Culture: This deals with culture in the anthropological sense -- our values, beliefs and traditional behaviors -- as well as the artistic sense. It includes things like fishing, farming and hunting; the Island's role as year-round and seasonal home to writers, actors, musicians and artists; the relationship between year-round residents and summer workers; our love of the land and the water; our tolerance, perhaps love, of insularity and isolation.

- In what ways is our community culture different from the rest of America and how can we keep those distinctions that the community believes are important?
- How can we maintain fishing, farming, hunting, and other traditional activities?
- How can we preserve our artistic heritage, and encourage artistic creation in the future?

Note that all of the above issues interact with issues that are being addressed by other Work Groups including Livelihood and Commerce (which is looking at employment and cost of living) and Housing, as well as the Development and Growth Study Group. Social and cultural change is driven by and influenced by the economy, the cost of living and changing land use patterns.