

Built Environment Work Group - Minutes

February 12, 4:30 p.m., MVC Offices

Present: Henry Stephenson (Island Plan Steering Committee), Patrick Ahearn, Ron Binney, Christina Brown, Chris Fried, Dan Greenbaum, Carole Hunter, Bruce MacNelly, Pat Manning, Darran Reubens, David Wilson

Staff: Christine Flynn, Paul Foley, Mark London, Ed O'Connell, Chris Seidel, Bill Veno

Note: Comments below represent individual opinions, and not the position of the Work Group unless otherwise specified.

1. Welcome and Background

Henry Stephenson, member of the Island Plan Steering Committee and liaison to the Built Environment Work Group, welcomed the participants to the second meeting of the Built Environment Work Group. Mark London, MVC Executive Director, gave a brief summary of the role of this group and distributed a paper copy of the PowerPoint presentation of the first meeting.

2. Comments on the Last Meeting's Discussion

Historic Districts and Established Neighborhoods

- Some districts could be enlarged. Others may already be too large and could be split.
- It would be useful that there be more exchange between Historic District Commissions and that the MVC provide technical assistance with issues such as: window types, how to deal with solar panels, use of plastic trim.
- People usually want to do the right thing, but are not adequately informed about how to do it.
- Mapping concentrations of historic buildings is instructive; however, it is up to each town to decide what the limits of their historic districts should be. The Work Group could historic areas not protected by historic districts, without going as far as recommending changing the limits; the analysis speaks for itself.
- If you walk around a historic district, it is usually pretty clear as to what the limits of the district should be.
- Oak Bluffs prepared a comprehensive inventory of historic structures, which has proven invaluable. Any proposed demolition or exterior alteration of a building identified as having historic significance outside of a historic district must be referred to the Martha's Vineyard Commission.

- Historic District Commission review of design and materials can help an architect deal with their clients, who sometimes favor inappropriate solutions despite their architect's advice.
- It would be useful to analyze the characteristics of historic areas and sub-areas, such as: alignment of buildings, relation to street, distance between buildings, presence of fences, volume, density, scale, materials, roof shape, windows and doors, etc. Simple diagrams could help explain relationships. Some characteristics are quite consistent in an area whereas others may vary.
- The Edgartown guidelines are relatively weak.
- In the historic areas of Edgartown and Oak Bluffs, the minimum lot size was changed to be larger than the historic pattern. This leads to larger and more expensive houses that don't fit into the traditional pattern and are less affordable. If we went back to the original lot sizes, it could create hundreds of additional lots, which could be reserved for affordable, or at least year-round, housing. Density can be a friend, not an enemy.
- The oldest parts of Oak Bluffs and Edgartown were built at a pedestrian scale, with buildings quite close together. Vineyard Haven is largely post-automobile with buildings spread farther apart, and so is less conducive to walking.
- It might make sense to define and give some protection to established neighborhoods, which would not be as strict as for historic districts.

Harmonious Character in Other Areas

- In these areas, it might be enough to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. Most people want to do the right thing and providing detailed information about the defining characteristics of a street or neighborhood, and how to go about designing a building that fits in, might be all that is needed.
- However, the great increase in property values in recent years has led to people trying to maximize development on a property, proposing oversized buildings that go right up to the legal envelope, whether or not they are appropriate for the area.
- Also, there is an increasing number of people with few ties to the Vineyard, who buy a property, hire an architect from a different part of the country, and come up with a design that has little relation to the Vineyard tradition or context.
- This Work Group could start the process of analyzing the character of several areas, as an example of how this could be done for the whole Vineyard. This should look at both quantitative and qualitative aspects. This could look at similar characteristics to those listed for historic areas. It could be done by neighborhood, with sub-areas with similar character.
- This is like the pattern books that are used with New Urbanism to generate communities with design coherence. However, here we have the real deal.
- This should also look at landscaping, especially the presence of street trees or other landscaping along the road. Towns have a responsibility to ensure that owners protect the street trees that form the distinctive canopy over many Vineyard roads. Towns could take the lead on planting and maintaining street trees. When the Charter School was built, the Town insisted on keeping a 200' no-cut zone along the road; then it built the Public Safety Building and removed most of the vegetation along the road.

- In Edgartown, if people want to build on non-conforming lots, the proposal has to be approved by the ZBA, which tends to comply with abutters requests, sometimes preventing construction of buildings that would have fit into the traditional pattern.
- In some cases, there could be changes to zoning regulations to prevent clearly incompatible buildings.
- We should also look at the impacts of large buildings, such as the view of large houses from the road or the coast
- Wellfleet has just adopted a revised zoning regulation that took three years to craft and was designed to be more responsive to neighborhood scale. It passed at Town Meeting by 90%.

Opportunity Areas

- We should identify those areas where it is likely or desirable that there be some change in the coming years.
- Identification as an opportunity area shouldn't imply that change is desirable or negative, it should just mean that it needs more attention.
- This would include suburban commercial areas and disturbed areas (e.g. pits).
- Beetlebung Corner has changed a lot in recent years, and might change more in the future.
- The area planned for the Martha's Vineyard Museum, and the West Tisbury flatlands might warrant closer attention.

Environmental Building

- This should look at existing buildings as well as new ones.
- This should not only look at environmentally sound construction practices – such as using ecologically friendly materials – but also the environmental impacts of buildings during and after construction, including noise, light pollution, utility lines, runoff, smoke, etc.
- Perhaps the Energy DCPC now being discussed should include environmental building practices.
- Rules on downlighting are not well enforced.
- How do we trade off historic and aesthetic concerns versus environmental ones, for example in deciding whether to allow solar panels or replacing small windows with large ones? One point of view is that environmental concerns should trump historic ones. Another point of view is that it is unproductive to force people to choose between two desirable goals: the vast majority of buildings on the Island are not historic, so we could focus on making them environmentally sound, and on environmental improvements to historic buildings that don't compromise their historic features.

3. Scope of Work and Work Products

- Mark London distributed a summary of the Initial Scope of Work of Work Groups (see appendix). Essentially, the aim is to outline goals and possible strategies by this spring, to share with the public over the summer.
- The Work Group should prepare two documents: a Synthesis which is a constantly changing outline of all material being worked on, and a four-page Discussion Paper at the

end of the spring.

4. Other Discussion

- It is unfortunate that there is no advocacy group related to the built environment on the Vineyard. If a historic building is threatened with demolition, there is no one to advocate for its preservation.
- It is essential that we have a clear idea of whether we want areas to be much like they are today, if we come back in a generation. If so, it is important that the zoning correspond closely to the existing situation. If the zoning is different, it is likely that the area will gradually change in the direction of what the zoning allows.

5. Formation of Sub-Groups

- It was agreed that we would set up small groups, of two to four people, to start outlining the goals, objectives, and possible strategies, for the following four sub-topics. Interested participants are indicated.
 - Historic Districts and Established Neighborhoods: Patrick Ahearn, Darran Reubens, Bruce MacNelly.
 - Opportunity Areas: Henry Stephenson, Paul Foley.
 - Other Areas: Ron Binney, Carole Hunter, Dan Greenbaum.
 - Environmental Building: (no one signed up).

The next meeting of the Built Environment Work Group will be held on Tuesday, March 11 at 5:30 pm at the MVC offices. It will feature a guest, Sarah Korjeff of the Cape Cod Commission. She will discuss that Commission's guidelines – *Designing the Future to Honor the Past*, and its new addendum dealing with how large projects could be sited and designed, as well as similar efforts by towns on the Cape.

Minutes prepared by Mark London.

Island Plan Work Groups – Initial Scope of Work

Updated: February 12, 2008

As part of the preparation of the Island Plan for Martha's Vineyard, the Steering Committee has created a number of Work Groups to focus efforts on specific topics. The purpose of each group is to:

- Identify overall goals for their topic area,
- Identify long-term measurable targets and short- and medium-term measurable benchmarks,
- Outline an implementation plan to reach these benchmarks with strategies such as policies, incentives, regulations, projects, and other actions.
- Assemble all data and information, possibly including additional studies, necessary to carry out the work.

The Work Group is made up of anyone who wishes to participate in the work on this topic including people invited by the current Work Group to add their expertise or point of view. A Work Group core will be named by the Steering Committee on the basis of seeking a breadth of know-how, perspective, and authority. Each group will include at least one member of the Steering Committee who will have a special responsibility to act as liaison between the two groups, and will act as chair for the first few meetings, after which the group Core may select a new chair. Each Work Group will receive direction and feedback from the Island Plan Steering Committee.

The specific products are:

- A Synthesis Document including the material below. Previous Work Groups assemble all material into a single working copy that is constantly changing.
- A Discussion Paper: A four-page summary of the key ideas will be used for the intensive public input period in the summer.

Once each group starts to work and learn, it can flesh out this scope in more detail, or modify it as necessary, in consultation with the Steering Committee.

Mandate

The following are the main elements of the work group's mandate.

- 1) Mission:** *(What the Work Group is doing)* Describe the primary expectation and the overall philosophical direction for the Work Group's efforts, its reason for being or the ultimate intention or result.
- 2) General Discussion:** *(Overview of the Topic Today)* Outline the current and emerging conditions. Define the full picture of the current reality surrounding the topic as you now understand it. State the truths and the facts that describe the current and emerging conditions. What is absent from the picture of conditions? Where are the gaps?
- 3) Overall Goal:** *(What We Hope to Achieve for the Vineyard)* State the broad qualitative goal. Think of this goal as a timeless statement. For example with housing it could be: "Ensure a full housing continuum on Martha's Vineyard with housing at all price points reflecting the diverse needs of Island residents."

The following sections should be addressed for each sub-topic.

- 4) Goal:** *(What We Want to Achieve Long-Term)* State the specific goal for the sub-topic.
- 5) Discussion:** Outline:

- The current status (*Where We Are Now*),
 - The Underlying Obstacles (*What's In The Way*) What are the primary obstacles on the path? What is in the way of success? What are the most likely ways to overcome these obstacles? Where may end runs be required?
 - Momentum/Leverage. What is already in motion or planned that the community can capitalize upon to achieve the goals, benchmarks and target? This could include recent successes, a champion, a project underway, a project planned, or results from another project.
- 6) Objectives:** (*The Issue and the Aspiration*): To reach this qualitative goal, what are the three or four most important specific objectives, including performance standards or measurable targets to be achieved within 50 years. With each target, what are the 5-, 10-, and 20-year benchmarks for the Island to pursue?
- 7) Strategies:** (*How To Do It*) For each objective, state and describe what strategies the group proposes to reach the goals, targets, and benchmarks. These can include policies, regulations, incentives, programs, and/or projects to be implemented by various public and private entities. For each proposed strategy, indicate:
- Authority - What entities would be responsible for, or involved in, implementing the proposed strategies, and do they have the required authority?
 - Resources - What resources will the community need to implement the strategies?
 - Timetable - What is the proposed timetable for implementation?
- 8) Interdependencies:** (*Primary Relationships With other Topics*) Identify specific areas where the work group will have to collaborate with the Steering Committee, with other *Island Plan* work groups, and also with other Island projects. This would include identifying how its topic affects and is affected by each of the other topics. The Steering Committee will facilitate coordination with other work groups for areas of interdependency.
- 9) Information:** (*What We Need To Know - optional*) Identify what additional information is needed to finalize recommendations or to act on them.
- 10) Emerging Concepts** (*Ideas Not Yet Ready for Prime Time - optional*). In this section, list proposals which are not ready to be included in the main proposals, but which have not been rejected.

Role of the Work Group and Core: The Work Group Core is the main driving force, moving the process forward. Some activities should involve the entire Work Group, all of who should have the opportunity to provide input throughout the process. During the course of its efforts, the Work Group and Core may identify the need for additional members. The Work Group can invite other people to join it. The Core can recommend to the Steering Committee that additional people be added to the Core. It is not necessary to have every required resource represented in the Core. People can provide important input though they participate in a limited number of meetings or do not attend meetings at all. People can come and go as the tasks demand, and not be permanent group members.

Based on the work of New Commons