



Dukes County Avenue Area, Oak Bluffs Defining Characteristics



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It is generally accepted practice that new buildings be required to harmonize with the context of established older neighborhoods with respect its "Defining Characteristics", features such as building massing, height, roof form, materials, window and door design. This document outlines the main Defining Characteristics of the Dukes County Avenue Area in Oak Bluffs.

There is an established professional methodology in applying such criteria. Once it is determined that an area has a predominance of significant older buildings, the characteristics of these buildings are analyzed to determine what the Defining Characteristics of the area are.¹ Then, any new building is expected to conform to these criteria. If the Defining Characteristics include a range (e.g. heights between 3 and 5 stories, or materials in brick or stone, the new building should fall within that range).

The Island Plan Built Environment Work Group is identifying historic and significant older areas across the Island, based on the concentration of 100 year-old, or at least pre-World-War-II, buildings. A preliminary mapping of the Island indicates that this part of the Dukes County Avenue area is a significant older area. It constitutes a Character Area (see map on next page) made up of buildings with similar characteristics. MVC staff analyzed the buildings dating from 1870 to 1936, and identified the Defining Characteristics of this area.

It is important to harmonize with the Defining Characteristics of the specific area in question, not of other areas which may have different characteristics. For example, this area does not have the narrow cottages of the Campground, or the three-story-high

***Typical Criteria for
Preserving Community Character***

- *New development adjacent to or within historic districts, village centers, cultural landscapes, historic properties, or otherwise distinctive neighborhoods shall be designed to be consistent with the character of the area and to retain the distinctive features of the neighborhood. Elements of the distinctive area's character such as building mass, height, scale, roof shape, roof pitch, building materials, and proportions between doors and windows shall be maintained. Distinctive features of the area such as proximity to the street, views to historic structures, water and/or landscapes, and significant open spaces shall be preserved.*
- *The building and layout of parking lots shall reinforce the character of existing buildings and traditional village streetscape patterns. Parking shall be located to the rear or the side of a building or commercial complex in order to promote traditional village design in commercial areas unless such location would have an adverse or detrimental impact on environmental or visual features on the site, or is infeasible.*

Cape Cod Commission Policy Plan

¹ *In doing this analysis, relatively recent buildings or modifications to original buildings are generally not considered. For example, most buildings in Society Hill in Philadelphia are 2 to 4 story high brick buildings, but there are some 31 story high concrete condominiums; the latter would be excluded from calculating average heights or identifying typical materials. Similarly, if some older buildings were inappropriately modified with non-traditional windows, wall materials or other features, these changes would not be considered in identifying the Defining Characteristics of the area.*

vertical walls found on a few buildings in the heart of the town (lower Circuit Avenue, Lake Avenue, Oak Bluffs Avenue).

If in the course of future development of this area, the significant older buildings are renovated and possibly expanded, and new infill buildings respect the Defining Characteristics of the area, we will end up with a neighborhood that might have a substantially higher density than it has today – consistent with the idea of increasing density within smart-growth areas – but would be a coherent neighborhood whose character would be quite similar to what it is today.

Note that the zoning is reflective of the existing area character, in that there are business uses on Dukes County Avenue and some buildings are about 35' high, up to the ridge of sloping roofs. The fact that the B1 district allows a maximum height of 35' doesn't necessary imply that there is an expectation that new buildings would have three full floors, with three-story-high exterior walls.



Map of Dukes County Avenue Character Area - Pre-World-War II Buildings (centroids of lots) and buffers

Main Defining Characteristics

Summary of the characteristics of pre-World-War-II buildings.

1. Height

- 1.1. All buildings are 1 to 2½ stories high, and most are 1½ to 2½ stories high (the ½ floor represents occupied floor space within the volume of the sloping roofs, with windows in the gable ends and/or in dormers). A few buildings are 1 story high.
- 1.2. The ridge heights range from 18 to 38'.
- 1.3. The heights of the side walls range from 1 to 2 stories.

2. Building Mass and Setback

- 2.1. The width of the typical main facades range from 20' to 31'.
- 2.2. The height of the main façade is less than the width of the main façade.
- 2.3. The length of side wall of main building (excluding projections) ranges from 18- 42'.
- 2.4. The setback of the main façade (excluding one story projections) on the east side of Dukes County Avenue range from 20 to 25' from the road edge.
- 2.5. Virtually all buildings more than one story high have a one-story projection at the front, usually either an open porch or an enclosed sunroom.

3. Roof Shape

- 3.1. Most buildings have gable roofs with gable ends facing the road. A few buildings have hip roofs.

4. Building Materials

- 4.1. The exterior building materials are mostly naturally weathered cedar shingles. A few buildings have painted shingles or limited areas of natural wood siding. One building is wood siding.

5. Windows and Doors

- 5.1. Virtually all windows are double-hung (typically 2 panes over 1 pane, or 2 panes over 2 panes) with a height about double the width.

Note: dimensions of existing buildings are scaled from aerial photos and are considered accurate ±3 feet.

Typical Buildings



Somewhat Atypical Buildings

(Though still sharing basic defining characteristics)

