

Natural Environment Work Group Core

Meeting Notes of January 18, 2007, noon, MVC Offices

Present – Core Members: Tom Wallace (Chair), Tom Chase, Judy Crawford, Brendan O’Neil

Present – MVC Staff: Mark London

Present – Work Group Members: Harriet Barrow, Susan Shea, Megan Ottens-Sargent, Katherine Colon

1. Meeting Time

It was agreed to change the meeting time to 11:30 A.M. We will likely change the date of the first meeting in March to avoid School Vacation week.

2. Character

In previous meetings, the Core has started working on the visions and obstacles for Bio-Diversity and for Recreation. Before doing this for Character, we need to better define what it means.

- Throughout the discussion, “authenticity” was stressed as a character essential.
- The word character is vague and means different things to different people. In the broadest sense, it includes the social character of the community. Even with respect to the more narrow definition of physical or visual character, the concern for this work group is limited to character as related to the natural environment.
- It might be desirable to either qualify the term, as “natural character” or to use another term that is more precise.
- One aspect of character is the overall sense one gets from all the Vineyard’s natural areas.
 - This includes the Island’s bio-diversity (habitat) areas, its working landscapes, and its recreational areas.
 - It is related to the form of the landscape which comes from the geological and other natural forces that shaped it, as well as from human settlement patterns. Even seemingly totally natural areas derive from past human settlement; certain habitat areas owe their bio-diversity to the fact that the areas were cleared and farmed several generations ago, and have since regrown.
 - In this general sense, the key elements are the diversity of the landscape, its relation to history, its ability to inspire, the sense of discovery.
 - Perhaps “character” in this broad sense should be part of the general goal, and is part of everything that we do for bio-diversity, working landscapes, and recreation.
- A more specific aspect of character is visual character.
 - This includes roadside and coastal views and vistas.
 - In the Visual Preference Survey conducted by the MVC, most people identified fields and stone walls as their most preferred places.
 - There is a dilemma in that the public would like the view of roadside fields to be opened up, whereas property owners prefer keeping them shielded from the road. The degree of openness depends on whether they are privately or publicly owned.

- With adopting an excessively aesthetically motivated approach, there is a danger of becoming a Disneyland.
- In general, dealing with character will mainly involve protecting what is there rather than creating something new. However, there might be some instances where intervention is needed to enhance or restore features related to character, such as adding roadside vegetation to restore the character of rural roads.
- Providing visual access to natural areas is not only an end on its own, but is also a way to foster stewardship by the general population of areas of bio-diversity and working landscapes.
- Defining the character is an important first step in figuring out how to protect.
 - A key part of the Vineyard's character is the diversity, from lawns surrounded by white picket fences in Edgartown to open dunes in Aquinnah.
 - Another key feature is authenticity – landscapes are real habitat areas, or real farms.
 - The presence of the ocean is also critical.
 - MVC staff will send the committee a copy of the results of the Visual Preference Survey as well as of the survey question dealing with character.
- It might be harder to do the vision statement for character, and easier to do the goals.

Next Meeting: Thursday, February 1 at 11:30 A.M., dealing with Working Landscapes.

Notes by Mark London