

ISLAND PLAN

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THE VINEYARD

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Natural Environment/Livelihood and Commerce Brainstorming Session on Working Landscapes Subtopic

Meeting Notes of February 13, 2007, 5:30 P.M. South Mountain Company

Present –Work Group Members: Dick Johnson (Natural Environment Core) (lead on Working Landscapes), Tim Boland (Natural Environment Core), Arnie Fischer (Natural Environment), Matthew Goldfarb (Natural Environment), John Abrams (Livelihood and Commerce Core), and James Athearn (Livelihood and Commerce Core)

Present - Others: Simon Athearn and Tom Turner

Present – MVC Staff: Jo-Ann Taylor

1. Collaboration, vision

- The Natural Environment and the Livelihood and Commerce Work Groups have determined that there is sufficient overlap to collaborate loosely on the subtopic Working Landscapes.
- The vision for Working Landscapes should come from the people who are involved in farming, lumber, etc. and can relate their needs and desires as well as invaluable knowledge from the field. Several have been invited to meet with members of the two Work Group Cores for a brainstorming session.

2. Homegrown lumber industry

- White pine is not native, but grows well, could be harvested for lumber; red pine is south of its range and does not do well, 70% of those planted in the state forest have died. Native lumber from the state forest is much higher quality than people think, especially pitch pine. It has many uses and the forest's quality could be increased.

3. Farming

- Affordable farmland is one of the major concerns for farmers
 - A number of mechanisms exist to help bring down the cost, such as Conservation Restrictions (permanent), Chapter 61A (not permanent); farmers lease from Land Bank, etc. – value as farmland is only about \$3,000 per acre – even land with a restriction has a market value beyond the means of most farmers
 - On Prince Edward Island, actively producing farmland is not taxed at all (*sample idea to consider importing*)

- The City of Burlington, Vermont opened up unused city land for farmers, who now produce food there (*sample idea to consider importing – possibly use our landfills, when the restrictions on them have expired, etc.*)
- The Commonwealth’s idea of agriculture is very broad, including nurseries, etc. Our Land Bank and others could be implored to adopt policies that agricultural land should produce farm animals or food for people or for farm animals.
- There is no one watching for farmland purchasing opportunities, like there is for land for housing.
 - The best soils and locations should be identified and should be included in trigger mechanisms for DRI review or town site plan review.
 - A group could be formed to watch for good farmland on the market and strategize acquisition.
- Size is important – large properties are particularly attractive for farming.
- Farmers need housing too, and face all the other financial challenges of Vineyard living (high cost of goods and services)
- Supply and demand for locally grown products
 - In order to reliably supply restaurants and grocers, the farmers would have to plant too much.
 - Need a means to resolve the supply and demand quandary, such as a way to sell surplus that may or may not be there after supplying the market.
 - Need a strong “buy local” campaign to encourage consumers to ask for or demand locally grown when they shop or eat out.
- There is agriculture infrastructure that we need, like:
 - meat processing facility
 - dairy co-op (like there was on MV from 1946 – 1961)
 - greenhouses for winter growing

4. Lifestyle

- There was a discussion of the need to keep farming and lumbering, etc. visible parts of the landscape – people expect to see farmland on the Vineyard.
- There was a discussion of the need to keep certain lifestyles like farming and fishing alive, as archetypal parts of our nature – fishing and farming satisfy primal needs of all our unconscious selves – these lifestyles should not be allowed to disappear from the Vineyard culture.
 - Not that money young people want to go into farming, although that is changing. There is still the “eerielaackawanna” phenomenon – a mysterious lack of desire.

- There was a discussion of the need for a Vineyard pride in producing food, such as is found in other parts of the world where food production and its noises, odors etc. are better accepted by neighbors – the Vineyard could become a food destination.
 - If we spread agriculture widely, there will be less reaction from neighbors, less NIMBYism, it will be more commonplace. Right now some farmers feel that they have “implied setbacks” where there are close neighbors.

5. Next Meetings

- Natural Environment Core – Wednesday, March 7, 11:00 A.M., upstairs at MVC – review work group progress
- *Natural Environment - Biodiversity meeting subsequently set for February 23, 12-1:30 at MVC*
- *Natural Environment - Character meeting subsequently set for March 5, 12-1:30 at MVC*

Notes prepared by Jo-Ann Taylor