

## **Natural Environment Work Group**

Meeting Notes of November 20, 2006, 12:00 noon, Wakeman Center

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### Present - Members:

John Abrams	Will Geresy	Julie Schaeffer
Harriet Barrow	Roxanne Kapitan	Susan Shea
Suzan Bellincampi	Margaret Logue	Leah Smith
Ali Berlow	Janet Messineo-Israel	Matthew Stackpole
Tim Boland	Marilyn Miller	Jack Street
Christine Brissette	Dave Nash	Richard Toole
Polly Brown	Brendan O'Neill	John Varkonda
Tom Chase	Ned Orleans	Nancy Weaver
Kristen Clothier	Matt Pelikan	Alan Wilson
Judy Crawford	Edo Potter	Bob Woodruff
John Dropick	Lil Province	Ron Zentner

Present – MVC Staff: Mark London, Christine Flynn, and Bill Veno

Meeting Facilitator: Anne Gallagher

### **1. Welcome**

Anne Gallagher welcomed attendees at 12:10 at this, the first meeting of the full Work Group. She asked attendees, "Who had previously attended one of the two Island Plan forums earlier in the year?" Approximately half had. She reviewed the agenda and that her role was to move the meeting along, especially during the break out session.

### **2. Island Plan Overview**

MVC Executive Director Mark London gave a PowerPoint presentation briefly outlining the need for a new guide for the future and the process to produce the Island Plan. The emphasis of the plan is to explore how different sectors of the island community are intertwined.

### **3. Work Group Structure**

Tom Chase, Acting Chair of the Work Group, explained that dozens of people have expressed interest in one or more of the plan's ten topics; more than 130 for the Natural Environment Work Group alone. Therefore, the Steering Committee felt it necessary to identify a small "core" – 8 to 10 people – of Work Group members to be responsible for making sure the group executes its charge from the Steering Committee. Core members have agreed to a more involved role in the planning process, meeting more frequently and being responsible for content that reflects the input from the entire Work Group.

#### **4. Break Out Session and Reports**

Anne instructed attendees to separate among four tables:

Biodiversity – Restoration; management; compatible use; abatement of impacts; ecosystem services.

Character – Indirect economic benefits; authentic v. generic landscapes; educating the public; vistas and viewsheds

Recreation – Hunting; trails; beaches; birding

Working Landscapes – Especially agriculture and forestry; economic, environmental, quality of life and compatible use issues

Anne instructed each table to identify goals for their topic as it applies to land that is already developed, land that is protected from development, and land that is neither developed nor protected. They were also to identify goals in light of anticipated interactions with the other work groups (water resources, housing, livelihood/commerce, energy/waste, built environment, health/education, culture/history, transportation, and governance).

#### **5. Topic Reports**

After meeting for 40 minutes, each topic group reported to the entire meeting its top goals or points:

**Biodiversity** (Harriet Barrow, Ron Zentner, Marilyn Miller, Nancy Weaver, Susan Shea, Lil Province, Julie Schaeffer, Matt Pelikan, Richard Toole, and table reporter Tom Chase)

- Restore sustainably harvestable populations of native shellfish in our Great Ponds and bays. Assumption is that this goal captures the full range of ecological functions for these habitats.
- Restore and maintain viable populations of all native species in all ecosystems (e.g., estuarine, freshwater, and terrestrial).
- Quantify the minimum viable patches and total area of each habitat to maintain our native species, and use those goals to coordinate management of contiguous conservation lands (e.g. habitat type, fire management, or invasive species removal). Assumption is that fewer, larger plots have greater value than equivalent acreage in more, smaller plots.
- Establish incentives and regulations to encourage compatible use practices in developed lands (e.g. native plant landscaping, avoidance of pesticides and fertilizers, and removal of invasive species, etc.).
- Promote a culture that stewards local resources and sets an example for global responsibility as well (e.g. minimal lawns and fewer leaf blowers).
- Monitor the results of all strategies towards all our goals, contrast them against objective baseline data, and report the results to improve progress towards goals.

**Character** (Suzan Bellincampi, Christine Brissette, Judy Crawford, Mark London, Dave Nash, Ned Orleans, Matthew Stackpole, Jack Street, Alan Wilson, and table reporter Brendan O'Neill)

The group sought to define Island Character long-term goals recognizing the distinction between developed, protected and vacant land categories. Their summary statement:

Protect the distinctive natural character of Martha's Vineyard as it exists today and restore where it has been lost if possible, and integrate that goal with the other pieces of the Island Plan puzzle.

The group started by identifying desirable attribute of Island character worthy of preservation including:

- clean air and water and dark skies and the "sensory element" experience of MV (nature sounds like frogs and birds as well as elemental sounds like waves and wind)
- vistas from public roads and open landscapes and other "collective community resources"
- working landscapes including maritime (working waterfronts), aquatic (fin and shellfish), terrestrial (agriculture and hunting)
- the distinct historical and architectural character of individual island towns
- free access to open space, trails, beaches and other community resources
- desirable special events and defining activities of the Vineyard calendar year
- physical MV icons like the lighthouses and "postcard images"
- strong regulatory and policy guidance environment

Threats to Island character were also listed including:

- invasive plant and animal species and non-native "suburban" landscaping
- "suburban influences" in general
- too-powerful "outside influences"
- obtrusive infrastructure including power pads, transformers, cell towers, windfarms
- large houses and modular houses requiring extensive lot clearing
- vinyl siding proliferation, particularly on modulars
- private swimming pool proliferation
- no-trespassing blight

Two additional themes ran throughout: the interconnectivity of these subjects to other Plan areas, and the importance of education and advancing public awareness of this process as it unfolds.

**Recreation** (Polly Brown, John Dropick, Chris Flynn, Will Geresy, Janet Messineo-Israel, Bill Veno, and table reporter Leah Smith)

[The breakout group acknowledged that its members leaned more towards fishing and they fondly recall the Vineyard of the late 1960s before significant growth and change.]

Nostalgia for the Vineyard as it was back in the 1960s-early 1970s, in terms of community and access to open land, beaches, fishing places, etc. bears some relation to the Vineyard's historical character of hunting, gathering, and fishing. The importance of the landscape and recreational activities in that landscape to residents' and visitors' sense of this place is a fundamental appeal of the Vineyard as a place to live or visit.

#### Pertaining to Developed and Available Lands:

- **We would like landowners to allow more use by responsible individuals, who would respect private land ("use it gently").** This may require educating newcomers, especially those with large or strategically located land, to the culture of the Vineyard and the interdependence of the land and those who live here.
- **The public should have greater access to the shoreline for a variety of recreational activities.** Specifically, we would like to have more access to the shore, for activities from fishing to birding to swimming to walking. Shoreline accessibility varies with the

type of activity and should be consistent with the area neighborhood's character, but should be available at regular intervals (e.g. every five miles). Fishing access should have vehicle parking for just a few vehicles fairly close to the water. There is no part of the shoreline that should be off limits for consideration of public access. There is considerable misunderstanding of Massachusetts's laws regarding access to ocean shores and great ponds, which makes for potential conflict. Also, towns should provide more access to non-residents to town beaches, perhaps by making walk-on access available to all, recognizing the limitations of parking spaces now available.

- **Trails connections are important.** Trails should connect neighborhoods and provide increased use for companion dogs. Keeping areas open through frequent trail use will also reduce dumping in out-of-the way places.

#### Pertaining to Protected Lands

- **Whenever conservation restrictions are created, public access should be allowed.** Many areas of the Vineyard are now protected from development but remain off limits to the public.

In short, we need more access to shorelines for all sorts of recreational activities, more trails that continue across long reaches, better understanding of the Vineyard culture of freedom to travel responsibly across private land, and more respect for the land and Vineyard traditions among newcomers.

**Working Landscapes** (John Abrams, Ali Berlow, Tim Boland, Kristen Clothier, Roxanne Kapitan, Margaret Logue, Edo Potter, John Varkonda, Bob Woodruff, and table reporter Dick Johnson)

- Increase the Islands food self-sufficiency and ensure that there is enough permanently protected productive cropland to feed the Vineyard's year-round population.
- Identify and map all of the Island's prime agricultural soils and other important agricultural land.
- Ensure that it is economically possible to make a living as a farmer or by harvesting cordwood and other wood products (mostly by reducing cost of land).
- Develop a strategy for creating "value added" wood products (cabinets, furniture, etc.) from local lumber and increase public awareness of the value and availability of these projects.
- Have complete involvement of Vineyard landscaping industry in sustainable landscapes.

## **6. Next Steps**

Mark London said the information from today's meeting will be compiled and distributed to the Work Group members via the islandplan website. Soon thereafter, the group will need to decide how it will proceed.

Anne Gallagher thanked people for their active participation and adjourned the meeting at 1:40 pm.

*Meeting notes prepared by Bill Veno from topic summaries from Tom Chase, Dick Johnson, Brendan O'Neill and Leah Smith.*