North Bluff Streetscape Improvements

Circuit Avenue Extension & Seaview Avenue Extension

Town of Oak Bluffs

Description of Proposed Development and Summary of Impacts

Martha's Vineyard Commission

DRI Application (Revision to DRI 659)

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Project Description

1. Context

North Bluff, at the northernmost point of the Oak Bluffs Downtown, is a center for passenger, cargo, bus, bike, and vehicular travel for Oak Bluffs and the island of Martha's Vineyard. Ferry pickup and drop-off, truck loading, queueing areas, and a desire for additional green space all compete for limited area. Overcrowding is typical for busy loading times, with different types of traffic chaotically getting in each other's way. The disorganization leads to unsafe conditions for pedestrians and vehicles. Asphalt pavement fills the area, making the site visually uninviting. This redevelopment plan aims to organize vehicular circulation, shorten waiting times, improve vehicular and pedestrian safety, reduce impervious area, improve stormwater recharge, and beautify the aesthetics of the area to enhance the experience of both ferry passengers and Oak Bluffs pedestrians.

The effort to enhance North Bluffs coincides with streetscape improvement projects throughout Oak Bluffs downtown, such as at Circuit Avenue, Kennebec Avenue, and Lake Avenue along the harbor. Planning and design of Oak Bluffs Downtown Streetscape improvements dates to 2014, with a public outreach effort resulting in a Streetscape Master Plan being adopted by the Town in July 2015. A Streetscape Subcommittee of the Oak Bluffs Planning Board was formed, holding multiple public meetings and public forums. Advanced concept plans for North Bluff were presented in public forum from 2016-2017, with a concept plan receiving overwhelming support at the forum held in February 2017. The plans in the project application are an outworking of the February 2017 plan.

The site parcel 9-58 was reviewed for Martha's Vineyard Commission DRI #659 (North Bluff Sea Wall), so in coordination with MVC, this project is proposed as a modification to DRI #659.

2. Site

The North Bluff area is owned by the Town of Oak Bluffs. The site is predominantly bituminous concrete roadway paving, with a concrete walkway along the sea wall, and assorted brick paving and landscaping strips. The area is used for vehicular traffic, parking, and as a waiting area for the ferry boats. Rows of benches made of wood and concrete line the ferry waiting areas.

The area possesses scenic views of both Oak Bluffs Harbor and Nantucket Sound. However, the site is not an inviting destination due to its being a 'sea of paving'. The site connects to the boardwalk along Sea View Avenue, which runs from North Bluff to the SSA Ferry Facility in Oak Bluffs. It also connects to the harborside walk that runs south and west along Oak Bluffs Harbor.

3. Access, Traffic and Transportation

North Bluff is at the terminus of Circuit and Seaview Avenue Extensions. Exit from the area is only via Seaview Avenue. Because of the confluence of vehicles at this point, the existing vehicular circulation

during busy periods such as ferry arrivals is disorganized and slow. The rush of cars picking up and dropping off passengers from the ferries tends to result in disorganized queuing, ad-hoc and double parking. There are no crosswalks or curbed sidewalks in the area, so passengers disembarking from the ferries tend to spill off into the roadway, creating safety hazards.

Existing and proposed traffic patterns are summarized in the Traffic & Usage diagrams. The proposed design shifts parking out of the main circulation lane, to be replaced by a landscaped roundabout. Active lanes serve drivers making drop-offs or pickups from the ferry boats. Taxis have been given a dedicated taxi stand island away from the main circle, and tour buses have been given a pull-off lane along Seaview Avenue Extension. This separation of activities will greatly reduce vehicle congestion and improve pedestrian safety. In addition, the creation of traffic lanes, as opposed to pull-in spots, for cars, taxis and buses greatly reduces the number of backing-up movements by vehicles, further improving pedestrian and vehicular safety.

The Turning Study diagrams demonstrate how fire trucks, tour buses, and small trucks would perform key movements at the site, such as turning around the roundabout and entering loading areas. The widths and locations of travel lanes have been calibrated to fit these movements.

The Parking Diagrams summarize the changes in parking spaces. Parking for general vehicles has been slightly reduced in favor of greater accommodation for active drop-off and pickup during the busiest traffic periods. 2-hour parking during workday hours along Seaview Avenue Extension has been reduced to provide space away for tour bus parking. However, these spaces are often used by vehicles waiting for the ferry drop-off, a function which will be accommodated by the active drop-off lanes. In addition, (38) of these parking spaces will remain between North Bluff and the SSA Terminal.

For pedestrians, the extended pedestrian area by the ferry docks provides greater pedestrian capacity during deboarding events without spilling out into the roadway. Furthermore, the existing layout has no crosswalks for pedestrians to walk across the triangle of the roadway and parking area. The proposed layout features several crosswalks to channel pedestrian traffic from the ferry docks to the various transportation areas, and to cross the two streets.

During boarding events, the queuing areas for the Vineyard Fast Ferry and Island Queen ferry have been designed to allow for long and orderly queues between the benches. The extended pedestrian area also provides a clear walking lane along the roadway curb for non-ferry pedestrians to walk around the queue lanes when they are full.

Communication and Coordination with Ferry Companies and Other Users

The various usages at the site are summarized below, along with a summary of communication and coordination with each entity. The Town and Waterfield Design Group (WDG) will continue to coordinate with the users throughout the design and construction process.

- Ferry Companies
    - Island Queen Ferry - The Island Queen is the largest of the ferries at North Bluff, with a passenger capacity of 522. It sails between Falmouth and Oak Bluffs. It operates seasonally from late May to early September. In spring and fall, they operate 3 to 5 arrival/departures per day. In summer they operate 7 to 8 arrival/departures per day.
        - Charlie Bardelis Jr., owner of the Island Queen, emailed the Town Planning Board after the initial public forum in 2016 with comments which focused on maintain the boarding area patterns for both Island Queen and Rhode Island Fas Ferry. He included diagrams showing the Island Queen's typical boarding procedures and queue lines. These comments were incorporated in to the 2017 concept plan as well as the current plan.
    - Rhode Island Fast Ferry – The Rhode Island Fast Ferry has a passenger capacity of 400. It sails between Quonset Point, RI, and Oak Bluffs. It operates seasonally from to mid-June to late September/ early October. There are generally 1 or 2 arrival/departure events per day.
        - WDG spoke to Charles Danardio, owner of Rhode Island Fast Ferry in May 2022. His initial comment was to ensure that his dock and queuing area receives similar amenities and queuing space to the Island Queen. The current plan addresses this by providing benches and planters out into the Fast Ferry waiting area, and maintaining their queue line along the harborside walk.
    - Patriot Boat – The Patriot Party Boat operates both passenger service and freight delivery. Passenger capacity is 40. It sails between Falmouth and Oak Bluffs. It operates year round. From spring to fall, they operate 8 arrival/departures per day. They also operate as a 24-hour water taxi.
        - WDG spoke to Jim Tietje, President of Patriot Part Boats, in June 2022. His primary concern was to maintain access for trucks to back up to their dock to pick up freight. The vehicles that pick up freight from his boat are typically pickup trucks or small box trucks. The current design accommodates a 24' long box truck to back up into their dock area.
- Taxi
    - Currently (6) head-in parking spots are reserved for taxis, by the Island Queen dock. The taxi area is proposed to be moved to a dedicated taxi stand island outside of the main confluence of traffic. This will reduce congestion and hazard in the area by removing the pull-in/back-out movements of the taxis. The taxi stands have the length to fit (8) vehicles in total.
    - The taxi stands would not be for drivers for ridesharing companies such as Uber and Lyft. Because these drivers are supposed to arrive on request, they would use the active dropoff/pickup lanes instead.

- Tour Bus
    - The tour company MV Sightseeing contracts with the Town for (2) spaces by the Island Queen dock for their tour buses. Many passengers from the ferry boats board the buses to go on tours around the island. The bus parking is proposed to be moved out of the main confluence of traffic to spaces on the side of Seaview Avenue Extension. These spaces would revert to general vehicle parking in the evening and early morning.
        - WDG spoke to Scott Dario, owner of MV Sightseeing, in June 2022. Mr. Dario desired a location for the buses that is closer to the ferry docks than the tour bus area that is shown on the current plan. However, a location for example at the taxi stand island would not be able to safely accommodate the long queue of passengers waiting to board the buses. The location shown in the current plan provides ample queuing space along the Seaview Ave Ext. harborside walkway. An area next to an abutter such as the property at #26 Seaview Avenue Extension was considered; however, large standing buses could bring negative impacts to that abutter. Lastly, space in the main traffic area is limited, and priority was given to smaller-vehicle traffic such as passenger cars and taxis, so that they can pass more quickly through the site.
        - Mr. Dario expressed concern that at the tour bus spaces shown on the current plan, the buses would get stuck in traffic at the roundabout when leaving the site. However, it is anticipated that the active pickup lanes and taxi stand island will reduce general congestion in the main circulation area. Furthermore, a full bus of passengers leaving the site is likely to depart towards the end of a ferry event, given the time required to load the bus. By this time, roundabout congestion is anticipated to alleviate.
        - Mr. Dario stated that the bus shelter shown on the 2017 concept plan was not necessary for his usage. It has been removed from the current plan.
- Oak Bluffs Harbormaster
    - The Harbormaster's office maintains an office and fuel station along Circuit Avenue Extension.
        - WDG walked through the plan with a supervisor at the Harbormaster's office in June 2022, and corresponded through email with the Harbormaster. Their comments were to maintain their reserved parking above their concrete fueling pad, and to maintain the loading area for commercial fishing boats to load and unload. These elements are provided in the plan.

4. Buildings and Structures

No buildings or roofed structures exist or are proposed for the site.

5. Landscaping

The project aims to create new planting areas that will beautify the area multi-seasonally. Existing landscaping at the site is minimal, consisting of plant beds with only Rosa rugosa (beach rose) shrubs. The new plantings, as shown in the proposed landscaping plan, would provide greater landscaped area in the midst of a 'sea of pavement', as well as provide a more diverse and pleasing plant palette. We have consulted with Tim Boland, executive director of the Polly Hill Arboretum, for suggestions on plant types. Mr. Boland recommended installing all shrub plantings (no trees or perennials), which we have followed. Shrubs are expected to perform better in the windy, salty environment, and would require less maintenance than perennials. We also used the Polly Hill Arboretum's Plant Finder website to select for the criteria of salt and wind tolerance. The species chosen are all either native to Martha's Vineyard or are categorized by the Arboretum as "Island Appropriate". The plant palette was selected to show flowers throughout the spring and summer, foliage colors in fall, with evergreen and red-twigged species for winter interest. Form-wise, the plant beds are designed as mounded forms to provide vertical elements within a mostly flat paved area.

The plant beds are to be contained on one side with granite seat wall benches to provide extra seating space for the waiting area. Granite curb will border the rest of the planter. To give the plant beds additional functionality, they will also be used as stormwater planters. Stormwater runoff would be diverted from the Town drainage system into the plant beds for watering the plants and improving groundwater recharge. See description of the proposed stormwater system below. The plant beds are designed so that the parts of the plant bed that would receive the most stormwater are also appropriate for rain garden-type environments.

6. Infrastructure

The existing storm drainage system collects stormwater in catch basins that then discharge through a series of pipes into the Oak Bluffs Harbor. The Town does not have record drawings of the drainage pipe network. The exact locations of the pipes will need to be determined prior to construction. The proposed system will collect stormwater runoff from the roadway in new catch basins placed along the roadway curbing. These catch basins will tie into the existing drainage system. Stormwater runoff from a portion of the new concrete plaza will be collected through curb gutter inlets and directed to stormwater planters where the runoff will be infiltrated and treated by the vegetation. In this way the plants in the planters will receive water, and the stormwater can also infiltrate the groundwater table. The stormwater planters will also clean the runoff of particles and pollutants through infiltration and through breaking down nutrients in the plant life cycle process. Overflow from the planter areas will be collected through raised area drains located in the planters. Other portions of the concrete plaza not able to be collected by the curb inlets will be collected by catch basins located throughout the plaza.

All areas collected by the catch basins will be treated by proprietary separators prior to leaving the site and being discharged into the Harbor.

Currently the site is almost entirely impervious surface. The proposed design reduces impervious area by approximately 1,500 SF. See table on the Conceptual Drainage Plan.

With the exception of electrical lighting, no other utilities are used by this redevelopment. Changes to site lighting will connect to the existing light pole electrical system, which is addressed separately the in the Lighting and Signage section below.

7. Lighting and Signage

Existing lighting at the site consists of 10' height cast iron poles, with fluted sides and acorn globe light fixtures. These light poles are installed throughout the downtown streetscape. The poles are well-liked by groups in the Town, such as the Friends of Oak Bluffs. In the 2022 Circuit Avenue Streetscape project, the existing pole bodies were retained, and new fixtures were installed atop the poles. The globe lights were replaced with Dark Sky approved LED fixtures that reduced glare and light pollution. The proposed North Bluff design would do the same: retain the existing poles, touching up the exterior paint, and replace the light fixture with the same acorn-shaped LED fixture used at Circuit Avenue. New poles would be installed at new pedestrian areas in the design as shown on the plan.

See attached Pavement Markings and Signage Plan for the design of roadway signage, parking signs, and pavement markings. Two new wayfinding signs are anticipated for the project- one near the RI Fast Ferry dock and one near the Island Queen dock. These will be similar in style to wayfinding signs installed throughout Oak Bluffs downtown in the past few years. These signs will provide directions and maps to waiting areas within North Bluff, such as the taxi stand and tour bus areas, as well as to destinations in Oak Bluffs. See right for an example near the Harbor Master's dock.

Project Impacts

1. **Impact on the environment**

   We anticipate the proposed development will have a beneficial impact on the environment. The proposed stormwater planters will reduce impervious area, increase stormwater infiltration, and bring a diversity of island-native plants to the site.

2. **Impact on persons and property**

   We anticipate the proposed development will have a beneficial impact on persons and property. With respect to traffic and transportation, the proposal provides improved traffic flow and better separation of vehicular and pedestrians, including new crosswalks. This will improve pedestrian and vehicular safety for island visitors and residents. The creation of dedicated zones for different types of vehicles will reduce congestion during the busiest periods of the tourist season.

   Parking for general vehicles has been slightly reduced in favor of greater accommodation for active dropoff and pickup during the busiest traffic periods. See chart on parking diagram. 2-hour parking during workday hours along Seaview Avenue Extension has been reduced to provide space away for tour bus parking. However, these spaces are often used by vehicles waiting for the ferry dropoff, a function which will be accommodated by the active dropoff lanes. In addition, (38) of these parking spaces will remain between North Bluff and the SSA Terminal.

   With respect to scenic values, character, and identity, the proposed development will greatly enhance the area, a location that marks visitors' first and last impressions of the island. The proposal breaks up the paved area with large attractive planting beds. The plantings are in character with natural and ornamental island vegetation. Granite seat walls and new benches will also enhance the scenic value. The updated light fixtures will reduce glare and light pollution, and will be in the same style as other light poles throughout the downtown streetscape.

   With respect to impact on abutters, abutters should benefit from the anticipated reduction in congestion and standing traffic, and the road blockages and pollution associated with it. The North Bluff area necessarily receives many vehicles during ferry events due to the hundreds of passengers riding the ferries. However, the proposed design will allow vehicles to move through the area more efficiently, reducing the ferry events' impact on abutters. The proposal does not place large vehicles such as buses in areas abutting private property.

3. **Impact on supply of low and moderate-income housing**
   We anticipate the proposed development will have no impact on the supply of needed low and moderate-income housing for Island residents.

4. **Impact on municipal services and burden on taxpayers**
   We anticipate the proposed development will have minimal impact on the provision of municipal services or burden on taxpayers.

5. **Efficient use or burdening of other (non-municipal) public facilities**
   We anticipate that the proposed development would use efficiently and not unduly burden existing non-municipal public facilities. The anticipated reduction of congestion at the intersection will benefit public use in the North Bluff area and adjacent roadways. Tour bus and taxi spaces, while being moved slightly farther from the ferry docks, are accommodated within reasonable walking distances in the area.

6. **Consistency with and ability to achieve town, regional state plans and objectives**
   The proposed development achieves objectives set forth in the Oak Bluffs Streetscape Master Plan, dated July 2015. The master plan for North Bluff sets objectives for removing buses and taxis from the main circulation space, reducing roadway and increasing pedestrian area, and enhancing the ferry queuing area with enhanced seating and landscaping.

7. **Conformity to zoning**
   The proposed development conforms to Town zoning. We anticipate the proposed development does not interfere with the ability of the municipality to achieve the objectives set forth in the municipal general plan.

8. **Conformity to DCPC regulations**
   We anticipate the proposed development would not contravene land development objectives and policies developed by regional or state agencies.