

Social Environment Work Group Kickoff Meeting – Minutes

January 23, 7:00 p.m., Oak Bluffs Senior Center

Present:

Erik Albert	Leslie Clapp	Diane Jetmund	Linda Sibley
Marie Allen	Judy Crawford	Jean McCarthy	Russell Smith
Sally Barkan	Tad Crawford	Jerry McCarthy	Jim Weiss
Julie Bayer	Maria Danielson	Deborah Medders	Dedie Wieler
Christina Brown	Judy Fisher	Ned Orleans	
Polly Brown	Alan Ganapol	Sandra Polleys	
Julia Burgess	Joyce Ganapol	Sandy Ray	

Staff: Mark London, Ed O'Connell, Chris Seidel, Bill Veno

Note: Comments below represent individual opinions and not the position of the Work Group unless otherwise specified.

1. Welcome

Linda Sibley, member of the Island Plan Steering Committee and liaison to the Social Environment Work Group, welcomed attendees to the initial Island Plan meeting looking specifically at the human side of the Vineyard – the Social Environment. The purpose of the meeting is to preliminarily identify the characteristics that comprise the Vineyard's social fabric and help make the Island a distinctive community, and to think about what role the Island Plan might play in protecting and improving the social environment.

2. Background

Mark London, MVC Executive Director, gave a brief PowerPoint presentation summarizing the Island Plan process, its current status, and ongoing activities (about one-third to one-half of the attendees indicated having no previous involvement with the Island Plan). He also touched on historical population growth, distribution, and age and race characteristics. [See www.IslandPlan.org for the PowerPoint and the population and housing profiles.]

3. What is the Social Environment?

Attendees identified components and issues related to the Vineyard's society and culture (see attached Appendix for list). Many items related to the seasonal variation in the Island's population and economy, and the changing dynamics of the year-round population. It was pointed out that some issues, such as seasonality and affordability, cut across all components, as well as overlap with other Island Plan Work Groups.

Comments revolved around several sub-topics:

1. Social and health services: keeping up with changing needs of a changing population.
2. Small "c" culture: the rural community; the "Vineyard Way"; the intangibles.
3. Quality of life and affordability: the cost of living on the Island and the impacts on lifestyle – relates to concerns about retaining a middle-class and families with children.
4. Interaction of various groups: having more social interaction between diverse groups.

4. Breakout Groups

Attendees broke into discussion groups around sub-topics 1, 2 and 4. The groups were given several questions around which to discuss their sub-topics for 45 minutes:

- What are the principal resources? (Organizations, people, facilities, data)
- What are the principal issues? Do trends differ from the past? Are they different from the mainland?)
- What are the long-range goals? Looking 25-50 years out, what changes should the community hope to see changed or unchanged?
- How can we improve areas that are presently problematic? What is not adequately addressed? Where are the holes or blockages in our systems?
- What might be the most promising actions the community could take in the near term to improve the situation? Who would be responsible for making this happen?
- What role might the Island Plan play in addressing these issues and directions?

5. Group Reports

Each sub-topic group reported out to the entire group a summary of main points, focusing particularly on what roles the Island Plan might play.

(Complete transcriptions of each group's table notes appear at the end of these minutes.)

SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES

Issues:

- Loss of middle class
- Marginalized people, substance abuse
- Demographic change: aging population, immigrants
- The Island as a "safe harbor;" a supportive community

Roles of Plan:

- Coordinate demographics - gather information, all of our agencies use demographics to use strategic planning
- Identify services are not yet being done.
- Look at the sustainability of non-profit organizations over time; track trends of non-profit fundraising, largely from summer people, to help consider long-term viability.
- Articulate how high quality human services help define our values.

CULTURE AND THE VINEYARD WAY

Principle resources:

The distinctive character of each of towns; volunteerism; land conservation and Islanders' close association with our natural environment; agriculture; schools; the Tribe,

Long-range goals:

- Maintain inclusiveness of our community as population changes and new infusions of people bring different cultures.
- Maintain community involvement, volunteerism
- Maintain the natural environment

Principal issues:

- Orient newcomers on the Vineyard Way, whether visitors or people moving here (e.g. flyers for people getting off the ferry).
- Promoting access to beaches and public lands; there is a history on MV of being able to go anywhere – or at least a sense of that.
- Bridging what some perceive as a socioeconomic divide between the haves and have nots.
- Cultivating downtown village Main Street culture.

Promising actions

- Involve the Chamber of Commerce and real estate agents in promoting the Vineyard way of life and culture.
- Interact with people from off-Island to describe, define the Vineyard way of life.

SOCIAL INTERACTION AND INTEGRATION

Resources:

- Schools; religious, civil rights, and ethnic organizations; Youth Task Force, YMCA, Boys to Men

Principle issues:

- Prejudices - overt racism (e.g. in hiring practices), homophobia, anti-Semitism.
- People's lack of ability to embrace change; misconceptions people have (including those that other cultures have regarding the Vineyard culture, organizations).
- Economic stratification, distinctions between year-round and seasonal populations, ethnic groups, and income levels are barricades to interaction.
- Youth may be more open to change than parents.

Long-range goals:

- Have a strong sense of community, so people identify more as part of the Vineyard community rather than as members of particular groups.
- Preserve the economic continuum.
- Find ways to increase understanding among groups

Role of Island Plan:

- Promote all-Island identification – realization that the Island is stronger together than when broken into parts.
- Utilize media to inform - need welcome packet for new residents (need to identify organizations who could do this).

Judy Crawford picked up on the idea of orienting newcomers to the Island way of doing things, saying that the Blue Pages booklet distributed in the community and left in rental homes was a

similar action. The booklet explains why the Island has to protect its waters and specific steps the reader can take to make a positive impact. Feedback has been positive.

In discussing how to move forward, Mark London summarized that the role of the Island Plan for the sub-topics discussed appears to be mostly informational. We need to report on the state of the social environment, identify specific goals and identify agents who can act on those goals. Many of the health and human service agencies are already involved.

6. Next Steps

Attendees will receive draft minutes of this meeting for review before the minutes are finalized and distributed to the entire Work Group. The Island Plan's Steering Committee will be forming a core group of members from the Social Environment Work Group who will be much more active in pursuing preparation of a report for the rest of the work group to review and respond to. Mark asked people to indicate to him or Bill Veno if they are interested in serving in such a capacity. Once the Core is identified, it will convene to strategize how to proceed, starting with the context of this meeting.

Adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Minutes prepared by Bill Veno and Mark London from table notes and assisted by the notes of Polly Brown.

Appendices

A1	Components of Social Environment
A2	Human Services Table Notes
A3	Culture – “The Vineyard Way” – Table Notes
A4	Island Groups and How They Interact – Table Notes

A1 Components of the Social Environment

From the discussion (agenda item #3) of what comprises the Vineyard’s social environment.

- Loss of middle class
- Neighborhoods with kids
- Connectedness, social capital, knowing other people in the community
- Social interactions between different groups
- Change in services as population changes
- Overcome cultural and language barriers
- Preserve farming
- Preserve traditional fishing and hunting (need access and open space)
- Access for all to beaches
- Balance public use and environmental sensitivities; sometimes public access is not desirable
- Culture and the arts
- Educate newcomers to the Vineyard Way, what life is here so they don’t try to make it more like where they came from
- Social service safety net for those in need, including physical and mental health, food, shelter, etc.)
- Councils on Aging; we need more services for the current and projected aging population, especially assistance to allow aging at home
- Social, recreational, and health services for young and old (YMCA)
- Community Services
- Fair play practices in employment, business, housing, education, etc. (NAACP)
- Maintain perception of rural culture (keep out franchise businesses and traffic lights, keep vistas open)
- Role of occupations in defining culture and lifestyle; it used to be farmers and fishermen; now there are more people wearing suits (attire that previously would have only been worn to church, a wedding or a funeral).
- The stress that comes from the economic situation, leading to multiple jobs and the “Vineyard shuffle”
- Youth culture, services, facilities
- Dealing with the transitions through categories: young to old, seasonal to year-round)
- Services for seasonal residents, especially long-term summer residents who are very much a part of the community

A2 Human Services (Social and Health Services) - Notes from Break-out Table

Deborah Medders (table facilitator), Joyce Ganapol (table recorder), Leslie Clapp, Polly Brown, Dedie Wieler, Tad Crawford, Sandra Polleys, Sandy Ray, Julie Bayer, Jim Weiss, Judy Fisher, Julia Burgess, Joy Annapol, Mark London

Resources: Health Council, Vineyard Village at Home, Camp Jabberwocky, MVCS, MV Hospital, Hospice, Island Studies, Foundation for Island Health, Johns Hopkins study, Youth Task Force (did youth behavior study), School does annual demographics study (superintendent will provide), Access to health insurance, Brazilian, demographics from hospital, Sheriff's office has data on demographics of incarceration, Council on Aging (uses mainly Census data)

Issues – Trends:

- Large number of Brazilians.
- Increasing polarization by income and loss of the middle class.
- The economically challenged have difficulty advocating for themselves.
- A counter-culture sector in the community that is "outside the system" by choice – don't immunize their children, reject social services.
- "Marginalized" – mentally ill and/or substance using who are not comfortable with the health care system.
- Increase in autistic spectrum disorders.
- Increase in number of older people needing services, even over 90. Polly Brown did market study finding about half would be interested in a continuous care community, and half want to stay at home.
- Though some people are moving off-Island, people with disabilities are moving here because of the high quality of our services. The Vineyard is seen as a safe harbor in a world that has gone astray.
- The high quality of health, education, and other human services is a plus for the Vineyard, and helps to attract and keep people here.
- Year-round services and not-for-profits are largely supported by the generosity of seasonal residents. Will we be able to sustain the current level of services?

Role of Island Plan:

- Documentation of demographic change that drives all agencies' planning, and coordination of demographic studies.
- Inventory and analyze existing services (assets); what is being done well.
- Identify gaps in human services; what is not yet being done.
- Track trends in non-profit fundraising vs. needs. How much money is raised each summer?
- Help articulate that this is a fundamental defining value of what we are, a community where people take care of each other.

A3 - Culture – “The Vineyard Way” - Notes from Break-Out Table

Erik Albert, Sally Barkan, Diane Jetmund, Christina Brown, Russell Smith, Ed O’Connell (table recorder), Bill Veno

Resources: Distinctive town characters, schools, MVC, churches, Ag. Society, Tribe, town governments, Councils on Aging, conservation groups, volunteerism

Issues/Concerns:

- Changing population, differing cultures, new influences
- Close association with natural environment
- Maintaining inclusiveness of community

Long-range Goals:

- Maintain inclusiveness
- Promote/facilitate volunteerism
- Valuing the natural environment

Improve Problematic Areas:

- Orientation for newcomers
- Promote access to beaches/walk anywhere
- Bridge socio-economic divide
- Cultivate downtown/village, main street culture

Promising Actions:

- Ensure public access to public land, i.e. Lambert’s Cove Beach
- Chamber, realtors to disseminate “Vineyard Way” materials

Role of Island Plan:

- Promote action items/initiatives

A4 - Island Groups and How They Interact – Notes from Break-Out Table

Judy Crawford, Maria Danielson, Marie Allen, Allan Ganopol, Linda Sibley, Chris Seidel (table recorder)

Resources: Schools, churches/synagogues, fitness clubs, civil rights organizations, Food Pantry, ethnic clubs (P A Club), Youth Task Force, YMCA, large employers, media (radio, newspapers), grocery, 'Boys to Men'

Data Resources:

- Youth surveys, Island Plan

Principal Issues:

- Racism – employment/hiring; hiring practices; police
- Language Barrier
- Not-well-off year-round residents vs. summer residents
- Homophobia
- Economic Stratification
- Anti-Semitism

Long Range Goals:

- Sense of community for Everyone
- Preservation of Middle-class and Economic Continuum (not allow division into "servant/master" community)

Improve Problematic Areas:

- Increase understanding about 'other' groups of people – Cultural Education
- Recommend that groups open their doors to others
- Obstacles: - Ability to Embrace Change
 - Overcoming Misconceptions (ex. Brazilians joining NAACP)
 - Youth is more open than the older generation

Role of Island Plan:

- Ways MVC can mobilize cultural activities
- Promotion of "All-Island"
- Promote ideal that the Island is stronger together than its parts
- Utilize media
- Welcome packet for new residents