

Steering Committee

Minutes of Meeting of March 10, 2007, MVC Offices

Present - Members: Jim Athearn(Chair), John Abrams, Tom Chase, Mimi Davisson, Ann Floyd, Henry Stephenson, Ned Orleans, Kerry Scott, Russell Smith, Bret Stearns, Susan Wasserman
Present – MVC Staff: Mark London, Bill Veno, Christine Flynn, Kristen Clothier, Chris Seidel, JoAnn Taylor
Present – Other: Robert Leaver, Rob Allen, Christina Brown

The meeting started at 8:30 am.

1. Integration – Ready-to-Go and Bold Initiatives

1.1 Work Group Reports

The Chair, Liaison, or a staff person representing each of the five active Work Groups presented preliminary descriptions of their emerging ready-to-go actions and their bold initiatives. The aims are:

- See where each group is at and whether it needs help,
- Look at cross connections between suggestions from different groups,
- Prepare short summaries of each idea to elicit feedback,
- Spin off the most promising ones for fleshing out.

Note: After the draft ideas were presented and put on the wall, attendees were given red dots with which to indicate their choices as a priority for follow up. In brackets after each idea is the category and the number of red dots the idea received.

Energy/Waste

- Have Island car-rentals include hybrids in their fleets (ready - 0).
- Have the Steamship Authority provide recycling containers on the fleet and at terminals (ready - 0).
- Require new pools to be solar heated (ready – 3).
- Change fifteen incandescent light bulbs to compact fluorescent in each Vineyard household (ready – 0).
- Require an energy audit and upgrade at sale of house (similar to Title 5) (bold – 2).
- Harness enough local renewable energy generation to meet electrical and hot water needs (bold – 5).

- Create a building materials reuse facility, and an Island-wide composting facility (bold – 8).
- Create new Island-based energy efficiency regulations for building code (bold – 5).

Housing

- Allow affordable accessory apartments as of right (ready – 2).
- Create an Island-wide application process for all affordable housing programs (ready – 2).
- Re-evaluate Island-wide zoning (bold – 0).
- Tax weekly summer rentals as a business (bold – 7).
- Create an Island-wide funding mechanism for infrastructure costs (bold – 2).
- Sale and rent control (bold – 0).

Livelihood/Commerce

- Support the local foods initiative (ready - 5).
- Set up food processing and production infrastructure (ready – 4).
- Establish an eco/cultural off-season tourism program (ready – 2).
- Set up incentives and mechanisms to preserve agricultural and commercial land (bold – 4).
- Establish a living wage ordinance (bold – 1).
- Set up a community-owned electrical utility (bold – 5).
- Set up a local currency to promote local production and reduce imports (bold – 1).

Natural Environment

- Support the local foods initiatives (ready - 2). (also in L/C)
- Prioritize and map integrated landscape zones to achieve viable habitat and regulate land use accordingly (ready - 3).
- Set up a Roadside Vegetation and Lighting Initiative to open up critical views of the ocean and fields while adding vegetative buffering in problematic roadside areas (ready - 4).
- Identify unused but legally available rights of way across the Island and to the shore (ready – 5).
- Set up a program of “Undevelopment”, using tax-exempt bonds to purchase remainder interests from willing sellers in integrated landscape zones (bold – 10).

Water Resources

- Identify major contributions of stormwater runoff (ready - 1).
- Prepare (contract) a comprehensive wastewater management strategy (ready - 0).
- Prepare presentations for pond associations and local town boards (ready - 0).
- Compile existing regulations for stormwater management (ready - 0).
- Incorporate review of wastewater and stormwater in permit-review process (bold - 4).
- Set up an Island-wide wastewater management authority (bold - 3).

1.2 Comments on the Summary Documents and Short/Long-Term Proposals

- We need to think about what motivates us and what will motivate the general public;
- Ready-to-go or short-term actions can be implemented in the next three years without major societal change or political action;
- Bold initiatives are compelling long-term strategies that have a chance to make a real difference; they could be inspirational and somewhat audacious, not guaranteed of success though not clearly unrealistic;
- We should revisit the terms “ready-to-go” and “bold initiative”.
- Many of the proposals are not really clear. Lack of support in the prioritization exercise might reflect a lack of clarity as much as the content.
- It would appear that the housing group is least advanced; the water and energy/waste are most technical. The livelihood/commerce and natural environment proposals are most ready for the general public.
- Although the plan needs technical support, it also needs a “story” understandable to laymen.
- We need to differentiate between proposals involving regulations and voluntary/entrepreneurial initiatives.
- We need to think through land use regulations since these affect everything. Sometimes Board of Health regulations are as important as zoning in controlling development. New wastewater technology could allow higher density, and it is important to have alternate density controls in place.
- There are different degrees of ready to go. The decision to require that all Island car rental companies supply hybrid cars could be made by three boards of selectmen, whereas changing zoning regulations to allow affordable accessory apartments requires zoning changes in six towns. The eco/cultural tourism campaign just needs working out and implementation; without any regulatory change at all.
- The eco/cultural tourism program should not only be off-season. We also have to make sure that the community wants more year-round activity.
- There seems to be an assumption that we should or could get similar regulations and other actions across the Island. If we at least could get the towns and other entities to generally coordinate their efforts and not work at cross-purposes, that would be a win.
- Many proposals have a physical component that could be mapped and/or visualized.
- There is a lot of research to do both with respect to general information and specialized data.
- It would be useful to have measurable data (e.g. energy use) to allow coming back and monitoring progress.
- It is important that we credit and build on existing efforts in the community, and integrate this plan with what is already going on.
- We need to tailor the format and language of what we decide to do for different audiences. We need to make the technical information interesting.

- The summaries need a better explanation of the context. Some summaries list obstacles and interdependencies, but don't say why.

1.3 Connections and Mutual Dependencies

- Community-owned electrical utility - energy/waste and livelihood/commerce.
- Locally grown campaign – livelihood/commerce and natural environment.
- Commercial energy savings, reducing exterior lighting, reducing waste - energy/waste and livelihood/commerce.
- Composting facility – energy/waste and natural environment.
- Some connections are conflicts. The desire to create more farms can conflict with habitat protection.

1.4 Vision

- We have to clarify what we are and what we want to be. Who will be here in a generation, only seasonal visitors or our children and grandchildren?
- If we stay what we are, we condemn ourselves to becoming something else. If we keep doing what we do, we condemn ourselves to becoming something else.
- We haven't paid a lot of attention to who will experience the results of the plan, the next generation.
- We still have to address the issue of the Island's carrying capacity.
- The Island Plan should be out in front, and propose taking risks.

2. Development Management and Land Use

2.1 Exercise - Neighborhood Survey

Everyone filled out a four-page draft version of a neighborhood survey.

2.2 Presentation

Mark gave a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the results of the work of the development management and land use study group.

- The challenge of managing development involves three main questions:
 1. How much development should there be? (i.e. what should zoning allow at buildout; rate of development)
 2. Where should development take place? (i.e. where is it desirable, less desirable, and undesirable?)
 3. How can development best fit in to a given location (e.g. appropriate use, layout, design)?
- Step 1: Identify Significant Areas and Their Characteristics
 1. Natural Areas: Bio-diversity, Working Landscapes, Recreation, Character (and Scenic)
 2. Heritage Areas: Town and village centers, Other areas.
 3. Neighborhood Areas

4. Linkages – (neighborhood to natural areas, town to country, pathways, corridors, etc.)
 5. Other Considerations (sensitive watersheds, traffic, etc.)
- Step 2: Identify Areas Where Development is Desirable/Needed/Acceptable
 1. Commercial and Industrial Needs and Opportunities (Livelihood and Commerce Work Group)
 2. Community Housing Needs and Opportunities – (Housing Work Group)
 3. Areas Needing Remediation
 - Step 3: Outline Development Scenarios
 1. Projection of Current Trends
 2. Alternative Vision
 - Step 4: Identify Means to Achieve Chosen Vision

2.3 Discussion

Attendees broke into groups of threes and fours to share their survey responses and discuss them. The entire group reconvened and individuals offered the following comments.

Comments on the Neighborhood Survey - Content

- Some people identified their neighborhood as their immediate surroundings. Others as the larger community or the functional area where they go in the course of a day. Some people defined their neighborhoods by the surrounding natural features, like ponds and trails
- There seems to be at least three types of neighborhood: older areas in town, newer subdivisions, groupings of housing in rural areas (“people isolated in the woods”).
- People talked mostly about the social aspects: neighbors, noise. The few references to physical characteristics are about the proximity to nature, especially for those in rural areas.
- It would be interesting to ask whether people are in those neighborhoods by choice, or because it is all they could afford.
- We could ask – in the survey or in a conversation afterwards:
 - Why people chose the boundaries they did.
 - Whether crime affects how they feel about their neighborhood.
- We should ask about the physical environment (scale, character).
- The porch culture of Oak Bluffs contributes to neighborhood character.
- Barriers have been erected that prevent circulation from one neighborhood to the next.

Comments on the Neighborhood Survey - Process

- The Committee was very positive about the survey and thought it should be widely used.
- It would be desirable to apply this survey in small groups, as was done with the Steering Committee. The real value is to have people think and interact on these issues. It

provides a good lead-in to discussion of other land use issues. It could be a warm-up exercise before visioning meetings in various towns.

- It is preferable to have people draw maps. However, there might be situations where people could describe their neighborhood and its boundaries in words.
- The survey may be a little too long. It will presumably take less time to fill out when the open-ended questions are transformed into multiple-choice questions.
- It would be good to develop a version to use in schools.
- We could send it to the people who signed the Mullen Way DCPC petition as well as people on affordable housing waiting lists.

Discussion of Proposed General Approach

- The analysis of neighborhoods should be based not only on the survey results but also on an analysis of the existing scale and character.
- The Livelihood and Commerce Work Group will work on defining needed agricultural and commercial land. The analysis of needed commercial space depends on how much overall growth we will have. Also, it is not clear that we need more commercial land. It might be possible to accommodate additional commercial needs by using existing commercial land more intensively.
- The Housing Work Group will work on needed community housing. We could try to figure out where is the healthiest place to be living. We will not focus on needed market housing, assuming the market will take care of itself, within the framework of priorities set for natural, heritage, and neighborhood areas. We don't need to affirmatively decide where market housing goes but rather to clarify where it shouldn't.
- At the end of this work, there should be fewer default areas, and more areas with a clear vision of what they should be.

Overall Amount of Development

- How should we deal with the overall issues of carrying capacity and population limits?
- In the 1980s, about 400 houses a year were built on the Vineyard, using largely imported labor. Now we are building about 200-250 houses a year. In Nantucket, the builders association proposed a building cap to limit development to the rate that could be handled by the local industry. Building sites are a limited resource that shouldn't be used up too quickly. A steady rate of growth would avoid boom-and-bust.
- On the Vineyard, a recession coincided with enactment of building caps, so it is hard to see how they might work.
- To define carrying capacity, we would need to agree on the parameters. Is it to ensure that 50% of the Island remains as open space? Is it that everyone can draw safe well water? Is it so half the population can get three bushels of clams each year in the great ponds? Is it to locally grow a certain percentage of the population's food?
- We will need to discuss this at a future meeting.

Future Scenarios

- We should focus on the ideal; reality will impose itself soon enough.

- At what point should we put out our projections of current trends. This can interest, even inspire, some people, but might alienate others.
- It would be good to identify specific examples of how parameters will affect people, e.g. water quality in specific ponds, the view along specific roads.

3. Next Steps

- The aim is to pull together material by May, then move into a different mode, with fewer but larger meetings to reach out to the general public. The key ideas should be on a new version of the flyer and exhibit/poster at the Steamship Authority and grocery stores. Tell it as good stories and put in intense resources to bring it alive.
- It would be useful that the Steering Committee meet all the Work Groups, perhaps two at a time, before we finalize the material for the spring.
- Each Work Group should prepare a 100-word summary of each of the draft short-term actions and bold initiatives so people can better understand and react to the proposals. They should be sent to the whole Network, asking for comments.
- The Work Groups are currently holding a series of meetings on specific sub-topics such as recreation, character, farming, fishing, affordable rental housing, workforce housing, etc. to which all members of the Work Groups are invited.
- Different Work Groups Cores have different senses of when they are ready to go public.
- We need effective outreach and communications to members of Work Groups and the whole Network now. We should put draft material on the website as soon as possible and ask for members of the Network to comment.
- With respect to elected officials, we are in the process of meeting Boards of Selectmen and should meet Planning Boards soon. We should aim to make all members of both boards, members of the Network.

The meeting adjourned at noon.

Notes prepared by Mark London.