

Steering Committee

Minutes of Meeting of February 7, 2008, MVC Offices

Present – Steering Committee: Jim Athearn (Chair), Tom Chase, Ann Floyd, Henry Stephenson, Ned Orleans, Richard Toole, Kerry Scott, Susan Wasserman

Present – MVC Staff: Christine Flynn, Mark London, Jo-Ann Taylor, Bill Veno

The meeting started at 5:40 p.m.

1. First Five Work Groups - Status

Natural Environment: Four subgroups – Biodiversity, Recreation, Working Landscapes, Character/Scenic – have been focusing on preparing maps of their topics. The Biodiversity group has been looking at the minimum viable area for habitat protection and restoration. The Core is meeting on February 8 to coordinate these efforts. This mapping will be used in the work on development and growth.

Livelihood and Commerce: The Core will be proposing to add a few new members. It will hold a half-day working session with John Ryan on March 3 to discuss his draft Economic Profile.

Energy and Waste: Paul Pimentel is making presentations in the community of the Work Group's analysis. The Vineyard Energy Project is looking at how to implement the Work Group proposals including facilitating small-scale renewable generation. It is looking at local resources and at needed organizational structures.

Housing: The Core has met several times so far this year, looking at the Promising Initiatives and how to either move ahead with implementation, or how to address concerns that were raised at the December workshop.

Water Resources: The priority is to hire a consultant to carry out the preliminary wastewater management study, a priority Promising Initiative.

2. New Work Groups

Built Environment: The Work Group held a first meeting on December 3, and looked at historic areas, established neighborhoods, Vineyard character, and green building.

Transportation: The Work Group held a first meeting on December 10. It discussed the objectives in the Regional Transportation Plan.

Social Environment: The Work Group held a first meeting on January 23. Out of the wide range of issues that this group will look at, it mainly discussed human services, interaction between diverse groups, and what defines the Vineyard way.

Governance: The Steering Committee discussed whether to set up a Governance Work Group soon.

- No one has addressed the issue of how the community governs itself in a comprehensive way, though the County Charter Study Commission has looked at some aspects of this.
- Looking at this would be useful in articulating a future vision for the Vineyard. It would also be useful as it relates to the proposals in the Island Plan. For example, the idea of favoring development in and near already built-up areas and discouraging it in rural and environmentally sensitive areas makes sense from a planning point of view, but the impacts on town services and taxes should be addressed.
- It should look not only at government, but also at all the ways the community gets things done, including non-profits. This could also include residents' associations, not only in subdivisions but also in other neighborhoods.
- It would be useful to look at the relation between taxes and services. The tax rate in different towns varies because they offer different services. It would be useful to clarify how much the presence of community facilities, such as the high school, hospital, and ferry terminals, adds to the tax bill of the towns in which they are located.
- Mark suggested that it would be useful to carry out a study that inventoried and analyzed the existing situation, as a basis for future efforts by the Island Plan and others. The MVC could fund a small initial inventory. Susan questioned whether it would be possible to get meaningful answers in a small study.
- The general feeling was that it would be useful to move ahead with this. The Process Committee will be asked to outline a proposal of what the Work Group might do.

3. Development and Growth

Mark outlined the draft work program of the Development and Growth Study Group (enclosed). The Steering Committee agreed that it was a good starting point, but expects that it will be updated regularly as we move along. It is important that this not just be an academic exercise, and that it involve the community.

Representatives of the Development and Growth Study Group and other members of the Steering Committee have met the Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, and West Tisbury Planning Boards. These meetings have been quite productive. Meetings with the other three towns will be scheduled soon.

4. Outreach

Since Linda Sibley is at a meeting of the County Charter Commission, Mark presented two suggestions from the Outreach and Communications Subcommittee.

Forums/Charettes: The Subcommittee proposed holding a second series of forums organized by town – in the form of town-wide charettes – this winter and spring. The aims would be to reach out to new people, to look at issues on a geographic rather than topic basis, and to get feedback on possible trade-offs between objectives, especially in relation to development and growth. After an introduction, most of the session would consist of having groups of people work on maps of their town, making proposals about areas to be developed, conserved, etc. Members of the Steering Committee and Work Group Cores from each town could help identify key people to invite, and reach out to them. Sessions could be held on Saturday mornings.

Main Dilemmas: It was also suggested that it would be useful to identify the key dilemmas that are emerging, and focusing on them to stimulate a public discussions in the newspapers, magazines, and on the website, etc. However, this should be done carefully to avoid polarizing people into extreme positions. The emphasis should be on commonality of purpose, and how we can work together to sort through the trade-offs the community faces.

The Steering Committee agreed with both proposals.

The meeting ended at 7:00 p.m.

Notes prepared by Mark London.

Development and Growth Work Program

The following is an outline of the steps to look at development and growth on the Vineyard, looking at constraints, potential, and demand, and then articulating and analyzing several scenarios.

[Comments are in italics, in square brackets. We will need to identify who will do each task, both the staff member, and the Work Group or committee. The tasks described below do not represent all the work that a Work Group would do with respect to each topic; they describe only those components needed for the Development and Growth Work Program. Note that much of this work program is conceptually similar to what was done in the Community Development Plans EO418 a few years ago, but with a much greater degree of precision. Staff has started figuring out who would do what, also indicated in italics and square brackets.]

1. Constraints and Potential

A series of five analyses, each resulting in a map, would look at different factors that could impact the amount of development that might take place in a specific area. Note that these analyses will help indicate the development in specific geographic areas based on existing resources and uses; they do not address general issues of how much overall development might be appropriate given more general concerns about traffic, quality of life, etc.

1.1 **Natural Environment:** This analysis should identify those significant natural areas that are the highest priority for preservation as open space for one or more of the following reasons:

- Bio-diversity – habitat for local and migratory species;
- Recreation – publicly accessible open spaces, trails;
- Working Landscapes – mainly farming;
- Character/Scenic – views from the road, the coasts, and other public places; special natural features.

A map for each of these topics would be combined into an integrated Natural Environment Plan, indicating the priority for open space preservation. Presumably it would have several categories of recommended protection, from high to low, and would indicate why each area is important. This identification of priority areas can serve as guidance for possible acquisition, regulation, or other programs. *[The Natural Environment Work Group and staff are actively working on the analysis. The aim is to have a draft map by mid-February. This should be discussed with town Conservation Commissions, the Land Bank, and conservation groups. For a more detailed draft work program, see Appendix 1.]*

1.2 **Built Environment:** This analysis should identify and categorize those significant built areas where the amount and nature of development should be managed to preserve the character of the existing areas, or where other aspects of the existing built environment influence development potential. *[Bill Veno will work with Planning Boards on a delineation of all areas across the Island with similar characteristics, including the following categories. He will work with Planning Boards on identifying the areas and their main characteristics.]*

- Historic Areas – where there is great community interest in carefully preserving the existing character. *[Chris Seidel has mapped buildings more than 100 years old and will delineate areas where the concentration is greater than 60%]*
- Older Neighborhoods – where there is some community interest in preserving the general existing character. *[Chris Seidel has mapped buildings more than 75 years old, and will delineate areas where the concentration is greater than 50%]*

- Post-War Subdivisions – where it is unlikely that changes to the present development pattern would be accepted.
- Opportunity Areas – where some additional development could be desirable to improve the character, including recent commercial areas.

[Staff has started working on this. This should be discussed with Planning Boards and Historic District Commissions, as well as the Built Environment Work Group. For a more detailed draft work program, see Appendix 2.]

1.3 Water Resources: This analysis should identify areas where development impacts should be reduced in order to protect water resources, namely:

- Critical watersheds, where nitrogen levels in coastal ponds are at, or are projected to reach, critical levels. The aim would be to reduce development impacts in these areas by: limiting the amount of development, utilizing wastewater treatment measures, using low-impact development techniques, using stormwater management, or other approaches to protect the resources. *[Bill Wilcox and Chris have completed the map of critical watersheds. Bill will prepare a map showing areas of potential future sewerage.]*
- Aquifer sustainability for public wells, including identifying future public well sites and required zones of protection as well as future private well service areas and measures to assure a sustainable, high quality groundwater resource. *[Jo-Ann and Chris Seidel will produce a map]*

1.4 Business Areas: The aim is to understand existing development patterns, as a basis to project future growth and to assess the capacity to accommodate it. Is it possible to supply needed goods and services in existing or new buildings, without expanding existing commercial and industrial areas; which areas are most suitable for development or expansion; are there too many commercially zoned areas? A big challenge is finding places for such “messy” businesses as construction, landscaping, recycling and composting, which often need large areas for outdoor storage and truck parking. Ideally, these would be away from prime locations. This analysis of existing commercial and industrial areas should include size of lots and buildings, types of business, seasonality, land use (site coverage, areas used for outdoor storage and display, trucking and parking, land-extensive uses, etc.). It also identify businesses and areas considered worthy of protection, such as water-dependent uses, traditional business centers. *[Much of this information was compiled for four towns by interns two years ago; Christine Flynn will pull out this material; John Ryan could help with the analysis. Chris Seidel will map relevant information.]*

1.5 Residential Areas: The aim is to understand the development capacity based on existing zoning. It will include:

- Map and table of already subdivided and buildable lots, showing whether they are grandfathered or buildable under current zoning,
- Map and table of subdividable lots based on existing zoning.

2. Demand

This analysis should identify what the likely demand for new development will be, based on an analysis of past trends, and on other factors. *[John Ryan will likely help to pull much of this material together.]*

2.1. Nature of Recent Development: The aim is to understand the location and pattern of recent development as a basis for projecting future development trends. Data will be analyzed for three periods: before 1950, 1950-1990, after 1990.

- Subdivisions – locations, parcel sizes; *[Ed will look for the dates of DRI approval for subdivisions. If not available, we can use the date of construction of the first house in the subdivision.]*

- House construction – parcel sizes, number of bedrooms, and floor area, year-round or seasonal, type of construction (stick or modular). *[Christine Flynn has the Oak Bluffs’ digitized building permit data, will get the same for West Tisbury, and will meet Building Inspectors of other towns for their qualitative evaluation. Chris Seidel has mapped ages of buildings, to highlight areas of recent development. Chris Seidel will use assessors’ data to analyze, parcel size, number of bedrooms, seasonal vs. year-round, floor area. If the data permits, we could map different data sets to see what kind of development takes place in what areas, e.g. by town, or differentiating between in-town, fringe, and rural.]*

2.2. Demographic and Housing Change: The aim is to get a better understanding of the dynamics of how the population and housing stock is changing, both year-round, seasonal, and the relation between the two. Anecdotally, real estate agents say that almost all recent sales are to off-Island seasonal residents and we see declining school populations. To what extent is this being offset by seasonal residents moving here, perhaps to retire. Comparing data on real estate sales (about 340 per year), new home construction (about 225 per year), and permanent population change (several hundred more each year until recently estimated leveling off) would be useful. Though it would be useful to undertake research in this area (e.g. an exit poll for people leaving the Island), we will have to rely on readily available information for now, including:

- 1) Census Information – population, homes and home occupancy; *[Christine Flynn to compile]*
- 2) Land Bank information about transactions including number of exemptions for first-time home buyers; *[Bill Veno to inquire about availability]*
- 3) Analysis of tax rolls, including address to which bills are sent;
- 4) Real estate sales;
- 5) Building permits;
- 6) Steamship Authority and Airport – net monthly arrivals and departures to estimate number of people on Island;
- 7) Interviews with real estate agents.

2.3. Off-Island Comparisons: Development trends in other similar communities.

2.4. Projection of Current Trends: The aim is to project:

- The number of year-round and seasonal residents and households,
- The number of Newly-Developed Lots and teardowns/replacements,
- The number of buildings and bedrooms,
- Commercial and industrial development.

It would be useful to compare these projections to previous projections of Conservation Partnership and Built-Out Study.

2.5. Community Needs: An estimate of how much land and development is needed to accommodate certain community needs, whether or not this is in line with past trends, namely:

- Community housing;
- Infrastructure – wastewater treatment, waste management, public works, etc.
- Public facilities – health, education, recreation, etc.
- Commercial and industrial development. *[perhaps]*

3. Scenarios

The overall aim is to identify and analyze several possible development scenarios.

3.1. Identify Conceptual Options: The Steering Committee should identify scenarios based on different assumptions about the pattern and rate/amount of development. In addition to looking at the current trends, we could look at a few alternative scenarios, past discussions by the Steering Committee suggested developing a Sustainable Development (smart growth) alternative approach. There could also

be a set of options that looks at the possibility of a new town somewhere, though in earlier discussions, the feasibility of such a radical change was questioned. The scenarios could be the following.

- 1) Continuation of Current Trends: This would involve projecting continuing the current pattern and rate of development.
- 2) Sustainable Development: This would involve a modified pattern of development based on optimistic but realistic about ways to decrease development in rural and environmentally sensitive areas, while maintaining or increasing the development potential in smart-growth locations (mainly in or close to existing towns or in other developed areas) especially for community housing. There could be three variations.
 - A. Decrease Overall Population Potential: Restrictions in environmentally sensitive and rural areas only.
 - B. Maintain Overall Population Potential: Restrictions in environmentally sensitive and rural areas offset by increases in smart growth areas; either by matching downzoning in some areas with upzoning in others, or by setting up a system of transfer of development rights.
 - C. Increase Overall Population Potential: Increase potential in smart-growth areas only.
- 8) No Growth: This scenario could be outlined for comparison purposes.

3.2. Estimate Development by Scenario: The aim, for each option, is to look at build-out as well as the likely development pattern over time. We could tie this into specific times, say the next 10-50 years, or tie it into amounts of growth, without tying it into a specific timetable. The challenge will be estimating growth not only as limited by zoning regulations, but also other restrictions on development, such as wastewater regulations, and covenants. For the Continuation of Current Trends, and the basis of other scenarios, involves updating build-out projections to identify the maximum amount of development could theoretically take place based on: (a) construction on already subdivided lots, main buildings and accessory buildings where permitted; (b) additional subdivision of larger lots and construction on them; (c) Additional bedrooms as a result of teardowns and replacements. *[Hopefully, it will be possible to do this using the Community Viz software.]*

3.3. Zoom-In Areas: Looking at a representative selection of areas in greater detail will help in evaluating their potential as well as the possible impacts of various scenarios.

3.4. Evaluate Scenarios: The aim, for each option, is to evaluate the quantitative and qualitative impacts, including:

- 1) Traffic/Transportation,
- 2) Infrastructure Needed,
- 3) Health, Education, Social and Recreational Facilities and Services,
- 4) Water Quality,
- 5) etc.

Appendix 1: Natural Environment

This analysis should identify significant natural areas which should ideally be preserved as open space for one or more of the following reasons: bio-diversity, recreation, working landscapes, character/scenic, and critical watersheds.

A1.1 Bio-Diversity: The aim is to identify which habitat is the most important to protect and restore, not only for currently rare and endangered species, but also for the full range of existing and future native species, both resident and migratory.

There are four main Eco-Regions and Sub-Regions on the Island. These were delineated based on geology and soil. Beaches are considered with the terrestrial regions they abut, though in many ways they are distinct systems.

Eco-Region 1 – Sandplains: distinctive Sandplains geology and soils; generally low, flat, and dry. Within this region, barrier beaches, estuaries, and frost bottoms are identified.

Eco-Region 2 – Moraine: generally uplands and wet, including these Sub-Regions:

Sub-Eco-Region 2A - Squibnocket/Aquinnah: morainal geology and soils, with considerable salt-spray influence, coastal scrub, and perched wetlands;

Sub-Eco-Region 2B - Western Moraine: morainal geology and soils;

Sub-Eco-Region 2B - Northern Moraine: morainal geology overlaid with sandplains soils.

The target is to establish or reestablish at least five large and interconnected Primary Habitat Areas. Three would have a minimum of approximately 5000 acres each – two in the Sandplains and one in the Western Moraine – and two somewhat smaller ones at Squibnocket/Aquinnah, and in the Northern Moraine. The protection and restoration of habitat areas of these dimensions would permit the long-term survival of a robust and varied “source” population of a wide range of species, the exact composition of which might evolve over time. (See the paper xxx, by Matt Pelican, for a more complete explanation of the scientific basis of this approach.)

Within each of the Eco-Regions, there would be an identification of three categories of importance.

Category 1 - Critical Core Habitat: In each of the five Habitat Areas, there are a few portions that are especially critical. In these areas, there should preferably be no development whatsoever and these are the highest priority areas for restoration. They include: (a) beach habitats, (b) frost bottoms, (c) areas more than 2000’ from buildings or roads, and (d) connections between one Habitat Area and another.

Category 2 – Core Habitat: Most of the five Habitat Areas would be considered core habitat. Here, development should be strictly limited, and mitigation and undevelopment are a high priority. These core areas include existing “islands” of development surrounded by significant habitat, as the presence of these areas creates certain problems for the habitat, such as increasing edge conditions and limiting the possibility of using fire as a management tool, especially important in the Sandplain Grasslands. We should identify

Category 3 – Supplement Habitat Areas: This category includes habitat areas too small to be considered Core Habitat, as well as areas on the edges of the core areas where a limited amount of development would be acceptable provided that measures are taken to protect or restore a certain level of native habitat.

These areas are being mapped by identifying a number of factors, including State-identified Priority Habitat, distance from buildings or roads (more than 300’ for core, or 2000’ for deep core), areas centrally located for that ecosystem. For information purposes, maps will also show Priority Habitat as designated by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. The clusters of organisms in each area, as well as the key ways to ameliorate their habitat, should be identified.

The following are strategies for protecting or restoring habitat. The highest priority for their use is in the Critical Core areas, but eventually, they could be useful in all areas. *[Note: parts of this discussion should be modified and moved to a more general discussion of possible strategies for all open space preservation and restoration, not just habitat.]*

- Limitation on New Development: Prohibiting or minimizing development through acquisition, by locating development on parts of a large parcel in the less critical area, or by transferring development rights to a less critical area. Those properties that are developed should preserve a significant part of the property as native habitat.
- Restoration of Native Habitat: Ensuring that public, non-profit and private properties use Best Management Practices to restore as much native habitat as possible, eliminate barriers to species

movement, limiting use of pesticides, limiting exterior lighting, etc. This would involve a program of education, technical assistance, and possibly financial aid. The first priorities would be land held by the public and non-profit

- Undevelopment: Establishing a program allowing long-term voluntary acquisition of critical natural properties by purchasing remainder interests ("life estates") from willing sellers in prioritized areas. At the end of the owner's lifetime, remove/recycle the house, restore the land to native vegetation and/or provide public access.

A1.2 Recreation: The aim is to identify natural areas that are presently accessible to the general public or citizens of a town – including parks, nature reserves, greenways, multi-use paths (MUPs), and trails – and those that ideally would be preserved and made publicly accessible in the future. The main goals are to link various green spaces into a continuous network allowing people to move through the Island within these spaces. In some cases, MUPs or trail links would be in a non-"natural" context, in order to provide vital links.

A1.3 Working Landscapes: The aim is to identify areas presently or potentially used for working landscapes. The scope will be limited to farmland, in three categories:

- 1) Farms: Land currently in food production,
- 2) Former Farms: Other land that was in food production since 1971,
- 3) Open Areas: Fields and other areas that are not heavily wooded,
- 4) Prime Agricultural Soils: Categories I and II, as well as Categories III and IV,
- 5) Parcels over 20 acres:

A1.4 Character/Scenic: The aim is to identify those areas which reinforce the natural character of the Island, namely:

- 1) Roadside Viewsheds: Viewsheds along major Island roads including a depth of 100' along wooded areas, all fields close to roads, and important vistas from overlooks or other locations. *[This analysis was done for most of the Island by an intern two years ago.]*
- 2) Coastal Viewsheds: Views from the coast. *[methodology to be defined],*
- 3) Special Natural Features: Natural areas not already covered by previous items, such as frost bottoms and frost pockets, kettle holes, and cranberry bogs.

A1.5 Water Resources on the Land: The aim is to identify natural areas that are significant based on their relation to water. (Note: this is different from #3, which deals with ground and drinking water.)

- 1) Surface waters: Ponds, streams, and buffers around them. *[How wide should the buffers be?]*
- 2) Wetlands:
- 3) Vernal pools: *[are there other features?]*
- 4) Critical Watersheds: All other things being equal, it is better to preserve open space and reduce development in a critical watershed. *[We should decide whether this needs to be introduced here, since it could impact the preservation of open space, or whether it can simply be part of section 1.3.]*

A1.6 Combined Natural Environment Plan: Combine the previous five maps into one integrated Natural Environment Plan, indicating the priority for open space preservation based on all of the above. Presumably it would have several categories of recommended protection, from high to low, and would indicate why each area is important.

Appendix 2: Built Environment

The overall purpose is to identify and categorize those significant built areas where the amount and nature of development should be managed to preserve the character of the existing areas.

- A2.1 Historic Areas:** The aim is to identify significant historic areas – whether or not they are in historic districts, where there is a strong community interest in preserving existing historic resources and character. Presumably development will be limited in these areas, and new buildings should carefully conform to existing defining characteristics. The Built Environment Work Group might end up proposing that historic districts be expanded to cover these areas. *[Chris will try to delineate those areas where a high concentration of buildings, say 60%, are more than a certain age say 100 years, either using census blocks or coming up with an algorithm to do this. We then should adjust the edges to logical limits such as roads.]*
- A2.2 Older Neighborhoods:** The aim is to identify older neighborhoods where there is a community interest in maintaining the overall character, though there is more flexibility with respect to change than in Historic Areas. Presumably development will be somewhat limited in these areas, and new buildings should generally conform to existing defining characteristics. These areas might call for either zoning revisions that better reflect the existing character or for the creation of Neighborhood Conservation Areas with Site Plan Review or some other kind of review less strict than Historic Areas. *[Chris will try to delineate those areas using a similar methodology to that for Historic Areas, however using a lower concentration of buildings, say 50%, and not so old, say before 1950.]*
- A2.3 Post-War Subdivisions:** In these more recent residential developments, although there is not a strong community interest in preserving the existing characteristics, there is a clear development pattern and it is likely that that will be especially strong resistance to changing this pattern, say by changing the zoning regulations to allow smaller lots or multi-family buildings. Identifying these areas would help in developing potential growth scenarios.
- A2.4 Opportunity Areas:** Development could be seen as positive for some locations, for example transforming the Upper State Road area into a more pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use, and beautiful area. There are “disturbed” areas, such as sand pits, former landfills, or otherwise scarred land, where development could be an improvement to what is there now. Areas where some additional development could be desirable to improve the character include recent commercial areas such as Upper State Road, the Upper Main Street / Triangle area, and possibly the West Tisbury Business District. *[Henry and Mark will delineate using, among other things, the identification of problematic areas on maps at forums and the results Visual Preference Survey.]*