

The Island Plan – a quick (sort of) look

What follows is a summary of Island Plan recommendations, prepared by Martha’s Vineyard Commission staff, as of the end of July, this year.

Summary of Recommendations

Development & Growth

Current zoning, available land, and growth trends could create a very different Vineyard from the one we know today, and from what people say they want. We should manage future development and growth differently, in order to preserve the Martha’s Vineyard that we all treasure.

Based on available land and current zoning, this trend of spreading out development will accelerate in the future, with almost half of new development scattered across the countryside, compared to a quarter before 1970 and a third from 1970 to 2005.

The Island Plan prepared three scenarios outlining a range of possibilities for future growth, with varying amounts and locations of development.

- Present Trends – buildout based on present zoning on available land (78% more houses),
- Modest Growth – based on a reduction in development, especially in environmentally sensitive areas (30% more houses), and
- No Net Growth – with very little additional development, offset by “undevelopment” in other areas (0% more houses).

Comparing the impacts of these scenarios illustrates why continuing the trends of the past thirty years is not sustainable or desirable. Developing all available land as presently permitted under existing zoning would result in excessive growth that would undermine those characteristics of Martha’s Vineyard that residents and visitors treasure the most.

Preparation of the Island Plan involved extensive analysis and detailed mapping of the Island according to a variety of interrelated criteria (natural environment, water resources, built environment, hazard mitigation, housing suitability, and economic development suitability) to produce a Land Use Guidance Map.

KEY PROPOSALS

Preserve and reinforce the traditional settlement pattern of the Island.

This includes avoiding new areas of commercial development, new town centers or large, dense neighborhoods in other parts of the Island. We should also improve and restore problematic recent development by restoring destroyed or fragmented habitat and by transforming the newer car-oriented, single-use commercial areas into mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented areas better linked to the historic town centers.

Reduce the amount of future development, especially in environmentally sensitive areas.

Achieving this objective for the whole Island or for specific areas will involve using a combination of techniques dealing directly with density, such as adopting the Vineyard Land Use Guidance Map; changing minimum lot sizes; revising subdivision regulations; increasing tax incentives for land preservation, changing the rate of open space acquisition; extending infrastructure in growth areas while limiting infrastructure connections in conservation areas; setting up redevelopment programs for “opportunity areas” and considering setting up a system of Transfer of Development Rights. In addition, many of the other strategies throughout the Island Plan will also result in less overall new development.

Reduce the rate of development.

We should implement “rate of growth” regulations for several reasons. It would keep a steady rate of construction work without debilitating peaks or valleys. It would lead to more open space preservation by giving the community more time to acquire land before it is all developed. It could improve the quality of development projects by giving priority within an annual quota to desirable projects, such as affordable housing or locations served by town infrastructure. It would give the community time to absorb and adjust to the impacts of development and, if necessary, to modify growth management policies to deal with problems as they emerge.

Ensure that development and redevelopment projects are better planned and designed.

Other sections of the Island Plan discuss a variety of tools for improving projects,

such as by better protecting environmentally significant areas, increasing housing affordability, respecting community character, and minimizing visual impact in significant viewsheds and vistas. In general, these involve requiring: review for projects that might be more problematic or are in sensitive locations while streamlining desirable projects; providing density incentives for desirable development; and setting up a system of mitigation fees to reduce and offset a project's impacts.

Built Environment

Martha's Vineyard's unique, coherent, high-quality built environment is threatened by demolition of significant older buildings, construction of new buildings that are too big, don't fit their surroundings, and/or are not environmentally sound.

Martha's Vineyard's beautiful, historic, and cohesive built environment is among the most remarkable in the country and is an important part of the scenic beauty at the heart of the Island's character, identity, and visitor-based economy. We need to preserve this distinct character and promote environmentally sound building. This includes ensuring that each neighborhood and streetscape is reinforced, not undermined, by new development. It also means strengthening our dynamic, historic downtowns, and modifying our newer commercial areas with preservation and careful infill.

A TARGET

Ensure that new buildings fit their context by tailoring zoning to reflect each neighborhood's characteristics and by extending design review to all historic areas and traditional neighborhoods.

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Protect historic resources and ensure that new development is compatible.

This includes culturally significant buildings, streetscapes, and areas. We should enlarge historic districts to protect all historic areas and traditional neighborhoods and revise zoning in historic areas and traditional neighborhoods to conform to historic patterns.

Protect community character by ensuring that buildings fit into their context.

This is especially important along roads and public waters. It should be done in a way that also allows for some creativity and flexibility. We should:

- set up project review processes along Scenic Roads and Public Waters Viewsheds, and for high-impact buildings based on size or other criteria;
- revise zoning requirements in neighborhoods to conform to existing character, and
- set up municipal tree-planting programs.

Promote environmentally sound building.

We should implement “green-building” techniques:

- Setting energy/green-building standards for new construction and major renovations,
- Establishing a program to encourage energy/green-building standards for existing buildings, and
- Ensuring that renewable energy facilities are compatible with historic and community character.

We should also minimize the general ongoing environmental impacts of building usage on its surroundings, by:

- Requiring dark sky compliant lighting,
- Limiting use of toxins and nuisances, and
- Setting up new procedures to oversee the construction process.

Redevelop “opportunity areas”.

These are areas identified in the Plan where substantial change is anticipated that could positively transform their character (e.g. Upper State Road). The aim is to improve the quality of the physical environment, make them work more efficiently, and incorporate compact mixed-use. We should prepare an urban design plan for each area, modify zoning as required, make public improvements, and encourage private development.

Energy and Waste

Rising fuel costs and increasing environmental concerns make us more aware of the high costs and unsustainability of bringing virtually all our energy to the Island and transporting away virtually all our waste. Energy and waste offer huge potential to establish sustainable practices that will also generate local employment. The goal is to ensure the Vineyard community has reliable, secure, ample, and affordable energy supplies to meet its needs, obtains as much energy as possible from renewable sources, and transforms a maximum amount of our waste into useful resources.

A TARGET

CUT PROJECTED ENERGY USE BY HALF USING EFFICIENCY MEASURES FOR BUILDINGS AND TRANSPORTATION, AND PRODUCE OR OFFSET THE REST, MAINLY FROM COMMUNITY-OWNED, OFFSHORE WIND TURBINES. (E.G. ABOUT 50, 500-FOOT-HIGH TURBINES).

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Reduce energy used in buildings.

Buildings are the main source of energy consumption on the Island, using 30% for heating/cooling and 33% for electricity. Energy efficiency measures could reduce our usage by at least half. We should:

- Adopt standards in our building codes requiring greater energy efficiency in new construction,
- Institute energy audits and upgrades for commercial buildings and when homes are sold (supported through a revolving fund), and
- Implement energy pricing structures that encourage energy efficiency.

Pursue local generation of renewable energy at both utility and small scales.

The Vineyard's wind energy potential is among the best on the East Coast. The most efficient way we can harness this energy is with large, utility-scale wind facilities. We should:

- Develop a legal structure to allow for private investment in local energy generation facilities,
- Establish an electrical cooperative or Island utility company, and designate the best sites for clustering wind turbines, whether offshore or land-based.

At the small scale, we should:

- Ensure that new dwellings are sited and designed to incorporate renewable sources now or in the future, and
- Develop information and incentive programs for property owners to encourage on-site energy generation.

Reverse the growth in motor vehicle miles traveled and reduce the related amount of gasoline used.

Transportation accounts for a third of our energy use. This can be reduced by promoting transit, bicycle, walking, and encouraging people to drive less (see Transportation). Promoting the use of energy-efficient vehicles for cars and transit vehicles would further reduce our carbon emissions.

Generate less waste materials and convert most waste into useful resources with an integrated, Island-wide program of waste management.

- The first step in dealing with solid waste is to generate less. We should provide ways to reuse or re-purpose materials - including minimizing the demolition of homes - and make recycling easier.
- We should also develop a coordinated Island-wide waste management system to implement better waste treatment techniques such as an Island-wide composting facility to compost sewage sludge, construction debris and other organic wastes.

Housing

In the past decade, the cost of housing has soared to such levels that many year-round residents and seasonal workers are unable to find adequate housing. Businesses have increasing difficulty retaining the workforce they need. To maintain a healthy and economically diverse community, we need to continue to provide a full range of housing options, for the year-round population, including housing geared for low-income families, rental housing, and housing for the elderly.

The housing affordability gap between home costs and what families can afford has reached crisis proportions. Year-round residents are forced to do the “Island shuffle” – vacating their winter housing between May and September to look for temporary shelter. Considerable effort will be needed to respond to the pressing housing needs simply not met by the private market, namely general affordable/community housing, seasonal workforce housing, and housing for seniors and others needing assisted living.

A TARGET

MAKE 10% OF OUR YEAR-ROUND HOUSING STOCK PERMANENTLY AFFORDABLE TO PEOPLE EARNING LESS THAN THE AREA MEDIAN INCOME, AND ANOTHER 10% AFFORDABLE TO THOSE EARNING UP TO 150% AMI (ABOUT 650 DWELLING UNITS IN EACH CATEGORY FOR THE MODEST GROWTH SCENARIO).

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Allow additional density for new affordable and community housing in appropriate locations.

This would create hundreds of extra housing units that are permanently deed-restricted for affordable housing (under 80% of Area Median Income) or community housing (under 150% AMI). We should:

- Allow an additional “accessory” affordable housing unit on appropriate properties,
- Allow multi-unit community housing in certain areas,
- Adopt demolition delay bylaws to encourage house preservation or reuse, and
- Establish amnesty programs to address the issue of illegal apartments.

Increase funding for affordable and community housing.

Since much of this housing is subsidized, it needs additional reliable ongoing sources of revenue. We could accomplish much of this by:

- Encouraging each town to adopt a Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund.
- Creating the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank.
- Providing tax incentives to owners who rent housing units on a year-round basis.
- Seeking Island-wide cost-sharing for infrastructure and services,
- Requiring affordable housing mitigation for market development projects, and
- Considering taxing weekly housing rentals.

Streamline the planning and management of affordable housing efforts.

Several proposed methods include coordinating the affordable/community housing application process, and considering measures to reduce legal challenges to affordable housing projects.

Encourage public-private partnerships to address seasonal workforce housing needs.

Private and public sectors should work together to create dormitory or other housing for the influx of 5,000 seasonal workers. We could also consider revising zoning to allow more recreational camping.

Increase the supply of housing for seniors and others needing assisted living housing.

The huge increase in the number of elderly people on the Vineyard will mean we need to increase services to those who want to age at home (see Social Environment) and will also have to substantially increase the amount of elderly housing and assisted living communities for seniors.

Livelihood & Commerce

The main thrust of our effort should be to strengthen and balance the economy, to support local ownership, to replace imports by exports especially of such essentials as food and energy, and to increase year-round jobs with living wages.

The Vineyard economy is largely driven by its vacationers and seasonal residents, through their spending, donations, and taxes. We need to keep this part of the economy – hospitality, construction, and real estate - robust, vital, and responsive to changing needs. At the same time, a more diverse and stronger year-round economy would be good for Island residents. The goal is to help year-round residents live meaningful and productive lives and help build a vibrant economy that inspires, welcomes, and enables those who grow up here to stay or return.

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Promote business development to diversify and balance the economy and to generate interesting, meaningful, career path jobs.

We should start new businesses that provide good, year-round jobs, while strengthening and gradually realigning our traditional core industries.

We should develop the creative stewardship of the Island's rich natural resource base by expanding farming and fishing, by developing new strategies to harness local renewable energy resources, and by encouraging the business community to actively celebrate and support the Island's beauty and heritage, and its non-profit sector.

We should promote the expansion of other new business opportunities appropriate to the Vineyard, emphasizing initiatives that are environmentally benign or restorative by:

- Providing entrepreneurial training, mentorship, and technical support to sole-proprietors and micro-businesses in the for-profit sector;
- Creating new financial mechanisms such as a revolving loan fund to promote investment in local enterprise;
- Facilitating remote work and telecommuting;
- Strengthening the health and human service sector to meet the needs of an aging population and growing number of retirees; and

- Establishing and marketing a Martha's Vineyard "brand".

At the same time, we should strengthen and gradually re-align our core, visitor-based economic activities with the other purposes of the Island Plan. For example, we should create a world-class "heritage" tourism program. We should also consider the potential impact of chain businesses on the Island character and economy, and consider regulating them.

Use the community's buying power to keep more dollars circulating within the local economy.

We should keep more money from our expenditures circulating on-Island to multiply positive impacts on the community's overall economic health. An integrated "buy local" campaign should include the significant non-retail sectors (e.g. financing and insurance). We should establish an Island-based buying coop to provide Islander discounts for products and services that must be obtained off-Island.

Locate commercial activities appropriately and ensure there is sufficient commercial land for future needs.

This involves:

- Keeping retail activities and visitor services concentrated in vibrant, walkable, areas within town centers,
- Ensuring each town center has a full range of essential anchor businesses,
- Ensuring there is sufficient land to satisfy the range of needed commercial activities,
- Ensuring home businesses are compatible with their surrounding neighborhoods.

Natural Environment

Over 40% of the open space we take for granted on the Vineyard could be developed. Some favorite vistas could be blocked, wild stretches of tree-canopied rural roads could become rows of houses with front lawns, and farm fields could

become subdivisions. Over time, areas of open land still large enough to support a rich population of plants and animals could be so fragmented – with a road here, a house and lawn there – that their biodiversity, and even the survival of some extremely rare species, is threatened. We need to better protect the remaining open spaces, vistas, farms, and habitat; we can also go a long way to restoring areas that have been compromised in the past.

Targets

Double the natural habitat in the five Eco-Regions critical for biodiversity. Create a continuous greenway/trail network that extends from one end of the Vineyard to the other, with cross links to the north and south shores. grow enough food to meet at least 20% of our year-round needs.

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Safeguard the most important natural areas of the Island as open space.

Strategies to increase acquisition of open space include: establishing clear standards for MVC and local regulatory boards to require partial open space protection as properties are developed; working with property owners and public entities to restore and manage their lands in ways that further open space goals, giving tax abatements for open space preservation; and establishing a program allowing long-term voluntary undevelopment of critical natural properties.

Restore and maintain conditions to support viable populations of the Vineyard's native species.

To protect Minimum Viable Landscapes in the Island's five eco-regions, we should adopt performance standards to maintain their biodiversity, including limiting habitat destruction and fragmentation, and specialized management techniques such as prescribed burnings. We should cultivate a culture of stewardship; by establishing a program facilitating Landscaping the Vineyard Way, and promoting stewardship to students and the public.

Provide recreational enjoyment of natural lands and waters.

We should increase opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy open

space by: setting up an Access Revival Initiative to re-establish public shoreline access and securing new access; extending the Greenway/Trail network from Gay Head to Chappaquiddick with cross connections to the north and south shores; encouraging landowners to allow more access; ensuring there is a public open space within walking distance of town-dwellers and bringing the greenway network close to neighborhoods; providing continuous waterfront access in the centers of the Down-Island towns.

Protect and restore the distinctive natural character and scenic values of Martha's Vineyard.

We should protect roadside and coastal vistas and viewsheds by carefully managing developments with significant visual impacts. Site plan review is an effective tool, along with some numeric standards and outright prohibitions. Public buildings and grounds should be made to lead the way, showcasing good examples instead of bad.

Increase farming, fishing, and food production.

We should increase efforts to protect and increase farmland by setting up an Agricultural Commission to facilitate all aspects of farming, increasing food production per acre, using value-added techniques to transform some harvested crops into other food products, and facilitating distribution, promotion, and marketing of local food. We should increase fishing by restoring pond health, by expanding aquaculture and seeding ponds, and by providing dock space and infrastructure for commercial fishing.

Prepare for climate change.

In addition to doing our share to reduce climate change, we must plan how to adapt to its inevitable impacts. This includes limiting construction in risk-prone areas, retrofitting existing structures and infrastructure, and carrying out comprehensive pre-disaster planning and mitigation.

Social Environment

Vineyard life reflects small-town America. It is marked by strong community connections, a high level of public involvement and empowerment, strong

attachment to the land and sea, and a special relation between year-round and seasonal residents. Behind the rural façade is a community of great sophistication. The Vineyard's insularity and desirability as a place to visit and live are both a strength and a challenge. We will need a concerted effort to maintain a viable, diverse, year-round community. We also should not only provide good health, educational and human services, but also give the community opportunities to make healthy living, lifetime learning, and cultural expression integral parts of daily life.

Concerns have been raised about community changes, such as increased polarization by income, the threatened loss of the middle class, the rapidly aging population and the decrease in the number of families with children. Poverty, mental illness, and substance abuse incident rates exceed levels in much of the Commonwealth. The low population density leads to heavy car use, less walking, and more isolated living situations. The isolation and limited population of the Island make it difficult to offer a full range of medical services and educational services and, combined with the high cost of housing and living, makes it hard to attract, train, and retain specialized personnel.

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Maintain the Vineyard's strong sense of community and inclusiveness, preserve the economic continuum, and increase understanding among groups.

Measures to preserve the diversity of Vineyard in terms of year-round/seasonal, income, age, ethnicity, color, and understanding between groups should include:

- improving coordination among institutions and town boards to deal with social environment issues,
- reaching out to the Brazilian community, and
- providing information to new residents and visitors about Vineyard services and practices.

Make Martha's Vineyard a healthy community.

The aim is to create a healthy and supportive environment in which people develop physically, mentally and socially and to improve human and infrastructure capacity to provide necessary health and human services that are seamless, complementary, coordinated and accessible by:

- Providing more education to and support of family caregivers,
- Improving availability of daycare,
- Creating a structure to address public health issues Island-wide,
- Creating walkable neighborhoods and communities.

Turn the whole Vineyard into a school-without-walls.

This involves opening schools to the community and the community to broader education by providing excellent quality, community-based K-12 education for students in the school system, and encouraging and enabling all residents and visitors to pursue education throughout their lives. Strategies include:

- Providing greater vocational training in schools geared to employment opportunities on the Island and away,
- Providing more opportunities for community-based education for school students,
- Increasing professional development programs, and
- Providing more post secondary education for residents and visitors.

Increase coordination-and support of the arts and culture community.

Martha's Vineyard has a strong arts community that would be improved by bringing various groups together to foster cultural expression, to support the diverse for-profit and non-profit arts sector, to promote Vineyard culture to the local and visiting community, and to increase cultural tourism, by creating an Arts/Cultural Collaborative to support and coordinate cultural activities (with projects such as a Vineyard Arts website and setting up an Island-wide Arts Festival) and offering more courses and workshops.

Transportation

We must take measures to accommodate the increasing number of people coming to and moving around the Island, including the summer influx, without altering

the network of two-lane rural roads essential to the Island's character. The goal is to reduce dependence on private automobiles and promote alternate modes of travel – bus, bicycle, and walking – for both residents and visitors.

The relatively spread-out settlement on much of the Island makes it more challenging to offer alternative means of transportation to the car, especially outside town centers. Nevertheless, we've done well in promoting alternative transportation, such as expanding the VTA from a seasonal shuttle service carrying 71,000 people in 1997 to a year-round service carrying over a million in 2008. We need to do more to improve transit, biking, and pedestrian facilities, including better promotion and using mitigation fees on development projects.

A TARGET

WE SHOULD EXPAND THE USE OF ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF TRANSPORTATION TO ABSORB ALL FUTURE GROWTH, SO THERE IS NO OVERALL INCREASE IN CAR USE.

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Improve the efficiency and promotion of the Island's buses, taxis, and ferries.

We should:

- Create public-private alliances to improve and promote alternative transportation,
- Develop plans to expand bus service including uptown-downtown shuttles,
- Implement a hybrid taxi/bus service,
- Better integrate the Steamship Authority into Island transportation planning initiatives,
- Offer detailed trip planners,
- Improve taxi regulations, training, quality, and dispatching, and
- Consider rebranding the transit system.

Make town and village areas more pedestrian and bicycle friendly and expand and enhance a safe and efficient network of off-road bicycle paths, on-road bicycle routes, and walking trails.

We should

- Create a working group in each town to outline and implement a pedestrian/bicycle improvement program, including sidewalks and crosswalks, and bike parking.
- Require public review of road repair and improvements to ensure that they include opportunities for pedestrian/bicycle improvements.
- Fill in the gaps in the current 37-mile network of off-road bike paths (Shared User Paths) and improve the safety of existing ones with better buffers and signage.
- Carry out safety improvements for on-road biking, such as wider shoulders, and should extend the network of walking trails.

Use physical traffic calming techniques to slow traffic and improve safety in neighborhoods.

We should create work groups in each town to outline and implement measures such as road narrowing, safety islands, and speed humps.

Minimize road congestion and improve safety without compromising road character and scenic roadside views.

We should address problems at the Island's most dangerous and congested road locations, favoring management rather than physical solutions. We should also address the shortage of parking in town centers during the summer.

Water Resources

We are fortunate to have a vast supply of fresh groundwater many times the amount we can foresee ever needing. More problematic is the deterioration of the water quality in our fragile coastal ponds as a result of excessive nitrogen, coming

largely from wastewater. The goal is to maintain the quality and quantity of our water resources, from our taps to our ponds.

The Island's twenty-one coastal ponds are important for commercial and recreational shellfishing, for boating, and as habitat. Their 290 miles of waterfront provide public and private beaches, and highly desirable settings for homeowners. We must protect groundwater quality where we draw drinking water and ensure that public water supply pumping and distribution infrastructure keeps pace with demand. Wastewater regulations are designed to protect public health, but since ponds are more sensitive to nitrogen than humans, we will have to bring nitrogen levels down far more to restore the health of ponds and other surface waters. The wastewater from our rapid growth over the past generation has degraded the quality of some of our groundwater and surface waters so that of our 21 coastal ponds, 8 are now impaired, and 5 are compromised. Eelgrass health is the best indicator of good quality surface and ground water; the roughly 3000 acres of eelgrass in the 1950s has now plummeted to about 1500 acres.

SOME TARGETS

RESTORE THE HEALTH OF OUR COASTAL PONDS BY LIMITING GROWTH IN SENSITIVE WATERSHEDS, BY IMPROVING WASTEWATER TREATMENT THROUGH INCREASED USE OF PUBLIC SEWERS OR SMALL-SCALE NEIGHBORHOOD TREATMENT SYSTEMS, AND BY INCREASING POND WATER CIRCULATION THROUGH DREDGING AND MORE FREQUENT OPENINGS TO THE SEA.

SOME KEY PROPOSALS

Expand public water supply and protect supply recharge areas.

We should plan for expansion of public water supply – presently serving 2/3 of homes – especially to areas with more than one house per acre. Future water demand will require identifying and protecting new public well sites, mainly in and around the Correllus State Forest. In less dense areas unlikely to be served by public water, we should strengthen regulations and monitoring of private wells to protect water quality.

Treat and dispose of wastewater in a manner that protects our water resources.

Wastewater is the largest source of nitrogen pollution that can be controlled at the local level. It is the cause of declining water quality in our ponds. We need to treat wastewater to support sustainable drinking water supplies, protect public health, and protect surface water resources. We should prepare a Wastewater Management Plan, preferably Island wide or, at least watershed-based to identify the most cost-effective solutions, which will probably include: A combination of expanded sewers -- offering centralized or package wastewater treatment -- in higher density areas, and cluster treatment systems in more isolated areas. Possibly using individual on-site systems with advanced nitrogen removal in some areas. The cost will likely be more than \$100 million to deal with the present situation, and could be several times that with future growth.

Minimize direct discharge of stormwater runoff into sensitive water resources.

By retaining stormwater on site and allowing for infiltration to replenish groundwater instead of running it directly into coastal waters, we can largely remove bacteria, silt, oil products, heavy metals and even nitrogen from stormwater discharges at relatively low cost.

We should set up a program to identify and correct problematic stormwater discharges from roads and other public lands; to require development and redevelopment projects to maximize treatment and infiltration in order to retain all stormwater on site; to incorporate Low Impact Development techniques into project review; to enforce impervious surface lot coverage limits, and to put in place stormwater system design and maintenance programs to limit treatment and disposal problems.

Increase management of coastal ponds and their watersheds to reduce nitrogen loads and allow eelgrass recovery.

As sound data becomes available from the Mass Estuaries Project we should set up management committees to prepare plans for each coastal pond that would find the most cost effective ways to restore pond health, such as improving water circulation through dredging, removal of tidal restrictions and increased managed openings to the sea, increasing shellfish production in coastal ponds by increasing habitat area and quality; and reducing bacterial contamination that closes shellfish beds.