

ISLAND PLAN

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THE VINEYARD



**Built Environment Forum
August 4, 2008**

Proceedings

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Presentation
3. Discussion

Readers are referred to a separate appendix to these proceedings, which includes four documents:

- Appendix 1: Built Environment Discussion Paper;
- Appendix 2: Forum Poster;
- Appendix 3: Forum Agenda;
- Appendix 4: Introductory Comments (Knabel)
- Appendix 5: PowerPoint presentation.

The Island Plan Built Environment Forum was held in the Union Chapel in Oak Bluffs from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Attendance

A total of 39 people participated in this forum including members of the Steering Committee, the Built Environment Work Group, the Network of Planning Advisors, Island builders and architects, town boards, MVC staff, and members of the general public.

<u>Moderator</u>	John Abrams, Island Plan Steering Committee
<u>Opening Comments</u>	Richard Knabel, West Tisbury Selectmen
<u>Presenter</u>	Henry Stephenson, Chair of Built Environment Work Group
<u>MVC Staff</u>	Christine Flynn, Paul Foley, Emily Lindsey, Mark London, Chris Seidel, Jane Talbot, Bill Veno
<u>Others</u>	Ron Binney, Matt Coffey, Rhonda Cohen, Peter Clark, Christine Conley, Chris Fried, Donna Gallagher, Mr. and Ms. Rich Greene, Dan Greenbaum, Emma Green-Beach, Phil Henderson, Ben Kellens, Patrick Lindsey, Bruce MacNelly, Marilyn Miller, Ned Orleans, Dick Pierce, Ed Pierce, Holly Stephenson, Linda Thompson, Dana Tibeau, Richard Toole, John Wiener

1. Introduction

John Abrams opened the Forum by introducing himself as the moderator and by welcoming members of the public. Mr. Abrams gave an overview of the Island Plan planning process. He pointed out that Discussion Papers are a summary of all of the work that has been done by the Built Environment and other Work Groups. He then gave an overview of the night's agenda and told the public about coming events this summer.

Mr. Abrams took a poll of the audience members by asking how many were affiliated with the following groups:

- Island Plan Steering Committee 2
- Island Plan Built Environment Work Group 3
- Island Plan Network of Planning Advisors 6
- Members of Town Boards: 3
- Martha's Vineyard Commissioners and Staff 7
- Year-Round Residents 21
- Seasonal Residents 3

Mr. Abrams explained the format of the evening, namely introductory remarks by Richard Knabel, a presentation by Henry Stephenson, Chair of the Built Environment Work Group, and a discussion.

Richard Knabel, West Tisbury Selectman, gave introductory remarks about the importance of protecting the built environment. He described the rural, agricultural, bucolic town north of New York City where he grew up, which had beautiful historic structures, a combination of year-round working people and summer residents, and generally had many parallels with Martha's Vineyard. In 1975, the pastoral character that had taken two centuries to create had been wiped out with 25 years of explosive growth, transforming the area into an ordinary suburb. We each index our sense of change from the first time we come to a memorable place, so if the change is slow enough, it becomes acceptable. He wishes that the Vineyard does not follow that lead of many American towns with suburbanization, which represents the allegiance to the automobile; he can see it with the strip development on Upper State Road and the construction of McMansions with their high visibility and the impact of the construction process. (See appendix 4 for the text of his remarks.)

2. Presentation

Henry Stephenson, chair of the Built Environment Work Group gave a PowerPoint presentation that summarized the issues, goals, emerging directions and promising initiatives as identified so far. The efforts of the Work Team and the proposals cover four topics:

- Historic and Significant Older Resources
- Community Character
- Green Building
- Opportunity Areas

Please refer to the discussion paper and the PowerPoint presentation in the appendix for the content of the presentation.

3. Discussion

Before beginning the discussion, John Abrams determined the sense of the room by asking for a show of hands for each of the Emerging Directions and Promising Initiatives, indicating whether people had the following preliminary opinion:

- **Blue:** Agree – High Priority
- **Green:** Agree
- **Orange:** Generally agree but have concerns (including wording)
- **Red:** Disagree

Then, audience members discussed the proposals.

Built Environment Forum - Voting Tally				
	Agree - Priority	Agree	Agree - Concerns	Disagree
Overall Goal				
Preserve the distinct character of Martha's Vineyard and promote environmentally sound new construction.	9	5	2	0
Emerging Directions				
B1. Better protect historic resources - such as culturally significant buildings, streetscapes, and areas - and ensure that new development is compatible.	20	2	0	0
B2. Protect general community character by ensuring that buildings fit into their context, especially from the public way, while allowing creativity and flexibility.	13	5	3	0
B3. Encourage use of environmentally sound building "green-building" techniques and minimize the negative environmental impacts of building.	17	4	2	0
B4. Redevelop "opportunity areas"- presently problematic areas- to improve the quality of the physical environment, to make them work more efficiently and possibly to incorporate mixed-use, compact development.	13	8	4	0
Promising Initiatives				
P50. Set up project review processes in roadside corridors, scenic vistas and views from ponds and the ocean.	14	8	2	0
P51. Set up a design review for high-impact buildings based on size or other criteria.	15	5	1	1
P52. Revise zoning dimensional requirements in	14	7	2	0

neighborhoods to conform to existing character.				
P53. Produce a publication for property owners and building designers on what defines the Vineyard's distinct built environment and how to protect it, on historic areas, and on green building.	13	5	4	0
P54. Set energy/green building standards for new construction.	16	5	2	0
P55. Enlarge historic districts to protect all historic areas.	9	9	3	0
P56. Outline redevelopment programs for Opportunity Areas.	10	14	2	0

Note: The following is a summary of comments made by individuals at the forum. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of all the people in attendance, of the Built Environment Work Group, or of the Island Plan Steering Committee.

OVERALL GOAL

Preserve the distinct character of Martha's Vineyard and promote environmentally sound new construction.

- It should say "environmentally sound building", since it also applies to existing buildings as well as new ones.
- The two ideas could be separated into two sentences. We could refer to "characters", since the Island has many.
- The challenge is how to define character, how to decide what to preserve. We all have it in our hearts. Can it be done quantitatively?
- We shouldn't use the Nantucket approach [where they require that all new buildings throughout the island replicate historic buildings].
- Kevin Lynch's Looking at the Vineyard included a pattern language about defining Vineyard character.

EMERGING DIRECTIONS

B2. Protect general community character by ensuring that buildings fit into their context, especially from the public way, while allowing creativity and flexibility.

- This is looking at physical character. We also have to think about the social and demographic. We have to think about the impact of this on ensuring livable neighborhoods including people with a diversity of incomes.
- The aim is not to make everything the same; diversity is important.

B3. Encourage use of environmentally sound building "green-building" techniques and minimize the negative environmental impacts of building.

- We need to understand the consequences of using green building techniques and minimize their impact. Her view is now of the huge electric panel for the heat pump of the new building next door.
- Implementing green building techniques is okay, provided it doesn't conflict with the preservation of historic character. A hundred years ago, buildings were pretty sustainable, so these two goals are not necessarily in conflict.
- Retrofitting should be addressed.
- We should look at community renewable energy techniques, say a single larger wind turbine serving twenty homes. Now, one person can put in a wind turbine at the back of their property, and block the million-dollar view of their neighbor. We should ensure that if a wind turbine is to be erected, there is a careful look at the site, the views, landscaping, and the impact on resources.
- LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) is getting broader, looking at transportation and community issues.
- We also need to look at the negative environmental impacts of buildings such as noise, odor, and smoke.

B4. Redevelop "opportunity areas"- presently problematic areas- to improve the quality of the physical environment, to make them work more efficiently and possibly to incorporate mixed-use, compact development.

- We shouldn't take funding away from affordable housing or other goals.
- This could unintentionally fund the people who did a bad job in the first place.
- These areas could be good locations for affordable housing, in that they could have more compact development, are close to transit, and the land might be less expensive. These are areas presently without much character, which could be transformed into 21st Century villages
- We must be sure to include controls on noise, light, and air for this type of tight development.

PROMISING INITIATIVES

P51. Set up a design review for high-impact buildings based on size or other criteria.

- A woman disagreed with this initiative all together. The Vineyard has many beautiful, big houses; there would be an outcry if someone tried to build them today.
- The conversation is increasingly about re-development, rather than new development, as evidenced by the dramatic changes in Edgartown in the past five years.
- The proposal is not to ban large buildings, it is simply to ensure that they are reviewed.
- The trigger to initiate review might vary by neighborhood, rather than a single trigger for the Island. It might be good to define this relative to lot size.
- How do we define high impact? If it is not visible and conforms to the neighbors, it could be okay, though we might also want to look at hydrology and the carbon footprint. The overall goal is to have a sustainable community.
- We should use the term "project review" rather than "design review".
- Zoning is a blunt instrument. It is impossible to legislate design quantitatively through zoning. Zoning says that anything you do is okay, unless it is would be totally egregious.

- A design review process is absolutely the most effective way to make buildings compatible with their surrounding areas.
- A design review process needs community input. Applicants should have a responsibility to explain how their project conforms.
- As we go along, it would be useful to develop individualized criteria for each area, since there are different patterns in different neighborhoods. One size doesn't fit all.
- We have to make sure that the project review committee is not political. There should be consistency in decision making, so a similar project a year later would get the same decision.

P53. Produce a publication for property owners and building designers on what defines the Vineyard's distinct built environment and how to protect it, on historic areas, and on green building.

- This should include how to integrate environmental concerns in existing properties.
- There is such a movement towards green building and energy that this will all happen because of decisions off the Vineyard.

P54. Set energy/green building standards for new construction.

- What takes precedence...green building or historic character? John Abrams felt that buildings can be made more energy efficient without destroying their historic character.
- Building materials that can be used for historic restorations are becoming more eco-friendly. In time, it will be even easier to comply with both preservation of historic character, and environmentally friendly building techniques.
- John felt that the most important decision about the West Tisbury Town Hall, was to keep the historic building, and that was an environmentally friendly choice compared to new construction.

P55. Enlarge historic districts to protect all historic areas.

- Some might object to enlarging historic districts, unless Historic District Commissions are more flexible about modern materials and windows.
- Some buildings should be carefully restored, but in other cases, it might be possible to sensitively renovate them. Not every building should be a museum. This has to be determined on a case by case basis. We might want to distinguish between the historic buildings/areas, and significant older buildings and neighborhood conservation areas.

P56. Outline redevelopment programs for Opportunity Areas.

- The area around Five Corners is an historic area, where we anticipate considerable change in the next few years. We should clarify what we want.

General Comments

- We should open this up to the design community.
- The next step is to outline an implementation strategy, working with town boards.
- John remarked that other Work Groups, such as Housing, Livelihood & Commerce and Energy & Waste, are already working on implantation with the help of various Island groups.
- There has been extraordinary success in using revolving funds for preservation, such as buying façade easements from willing owners, leaving them freedom to do what they want in the invisible parts. This can be combined with expanding historic districts in a graded way, with

various levels of public control depending on the degree of public interest. It is similar to what the Trust for Public Land and Nature Conservancy do in the natural sector.

- We should look at the use of districts and tax increment financing. Recreational districts are springing up across the country, to pick up liability management and loose ends in recreational facilities. This, with revolving funds, allows getting serious bond ratings for minimal cost.
- We should address the issue of public access to the waterfront.
- It is too bad that there was no town presence at this forum.

These proceedings were prepared by Emily Lindsey and Mark London.



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