

The Island Plan Steering Committee has begun examining the major issues of development, growth, and land use. This Discussion Paper outlines how we propose to tackle these important issues in the coming year.

How Much, and How, Should the Vineyard Grow?

Where should development take place? How can it best fit into the environment and character of a given location so that we can preserve the Vineyard's unique character, environment, and quality of life? To help answer these questions, the Island Plan Steering Committee proposes the following steps.

- **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.** The Island Plan will build upon and continue past efforts to analyze the natural environment. This is vital for understanding the capacities and limitations in which our human community can comfortably reside.
- **BUILT ENVIRONMENT:** Focusing on existing heritage buildings and neighborhoods will help identify how best to integrate new building into the unique contexts of each town and the life and character of the Island.
- **DEVELOPMENT NEEDS:** We must consider how much land will be needed to accommodate essential development, and what locations would be most appropriate.
- **ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS:** An exploration of these issues will allow identification of alternative scenarios for future growth.

All this will help indicate how much overall development there should be on the Vineyard. This can also be looked at in terms of carrying capacity, though that depends on what the criterion is. Is it the number of people we can feed with all locally grown food? The number of people we can move around without widening our two-lane roads? Present zoning would allow from 21,000 to 50,000 people, depending on how many homes were year-round – but zoning can be changed.

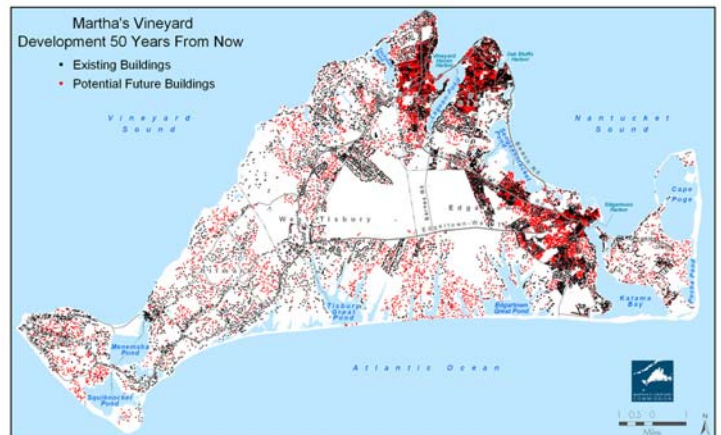
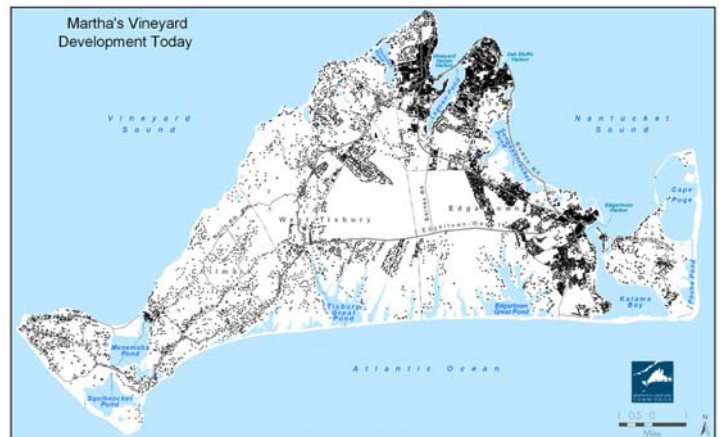
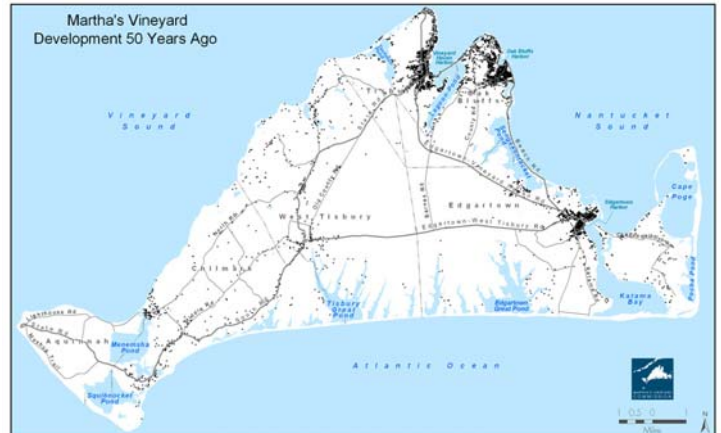
Houses on the Vineyard

Top – fifty years ago (of those standing today)

Middle – today

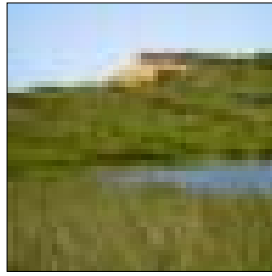
Bottom – projection in 50 years from now

(See table and explanation on page 3)



THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

The analysis of the natural environment is using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping to look at four factors: biodiversity, working landscapes, recreation, and character. This information will help identify which areas are most significant, which can contribute to the economy and quality of life, and which are most vulnerable to the effects of new building.



Biodiversity: This analysis started with the Commonwealth's map of core and supporting habitat for rare and endangered species. A parallel analysis will look at the minimum viable area to support various species.

Working Landscapes: This analysis is looking mainly at existing farms, at prime agricultural soils, and at existing and potential woodlots.

Recreation: This analysis is looking at public open spaces, beaches, and the network of trails and greenways linking open spaces and various parts of the Island.

Character: The final analysis includes a study of scenic values from public places, particularly the presence of open space and natural areas as seen from the Island's main roads and from the coast.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Since the Vineyard is a largely established community, a critical issue is how new development fits into existing settlement. An increasing proportion of development is teardowns and replacement of older buildings. The existing built environment is being looked at from two main points of view: heritage and neighborhoods.



Heritage: This analysis is looking mainly at the age and characteristics of buildings.

Neighborhoods: This analysis is partially based on objective data such as the density, the building age and characteristics, the seasonality, and the patterns of roads, subdivisions, buildings, and landscaping. In addition, a Neighborhood Survey is being carried out this summer to better understand how residents identify their neighborhoods and their defining characteristics.

OTHER FACTORS

The combination of constraints related to protecting the significant features of the natural and built environments, along with other factors such as the sensitivity of watersheds, can help us identify where additional development is undesirable, where it is acceptable, and whether it could be better managed.

DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

The analysis of the Vineyard described above will also identify those parts of the Island where additional development would not pose significant problems.

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.

At the same time, we need to identify how much land is needed for foreseeable future development. Different scenarios of population growth can be used to estimate how much additional land would be needed, if any, to accommodate commercial and industrial needs and community housing.

It might be possible to supply needed goods and services in existing or new buildings, without expanding existing commercial and industrial 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.

QUESTIONS ABOUT DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH

Here are some of the questions that have been raised about development, growth, and land use. (Note that specific topics such as housing and water quality are being discussed in detail by Work Groups. See last page.)

- How much development should there be?
- How many people can the Vineyard house year-round and seasonally while maintaining a sustainable resort industry, open space for nature, farming, recreation, hunting and fishing, and the lifestyle Islanders feel is the reason they live here?
- Where should development take place?
- How much of the 21% of the Island that is presently "available" should be developed and how much protected as open space?
- Can we ensure that new development fits into existing neighborhoods?
- Can we better protect significant natural areas?
- Can we better protect our heritage buildings and streetscapes?
- What settlements on the Vineyard possess their own unique qualities that deserve protection, even if they don't rise to the level of "historic districts"? What characteristics of these neighborhoods should be protected?
- Can future development be more in the traditional pattern, when most people lived in compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly town and village areas?
- Should there be new villages and, if so, where?

ALTERNATIVE SCENARIOS

Existing zoning provides one context in which future development can take place. It outlines how many new homes and other buildings could be built, and where.

A projection of how many buildings could be built under current zoning indicates that about 6,000 new homes could be added to the present 16,000. If we maintain the current ratio of 56% seasonal homes to 44% year-round, this would translate into a year-round population growth from the current 15,000 to about 21,000. If all seasonal homes became year-round, the year-round population could grow to about 50,000.

At least one alternative scenario will be prepared that accommodates our needs and protects our natural and built environments better than simply continuing current trends.

To help analyze and visualize all these issues, MVC staff will take a small, representative selection of areas across the Vineyard and zoom in to show more detail. This will include 3-D visualizations of how areas might change under various scenarios.

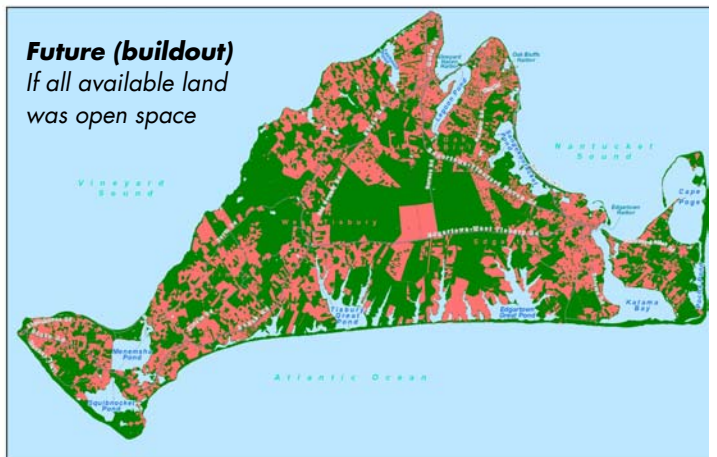
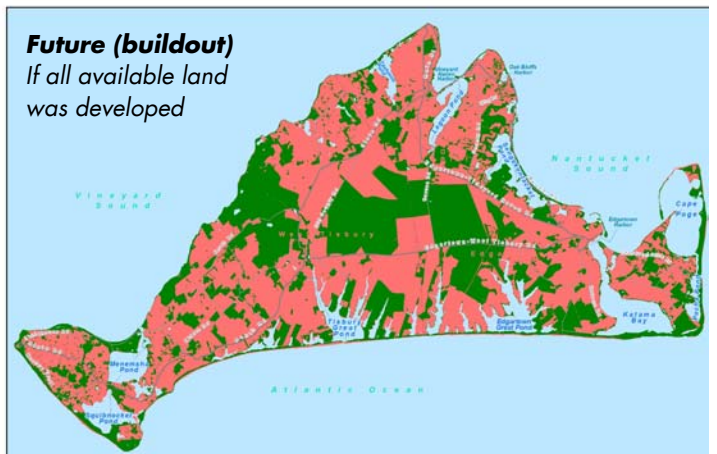
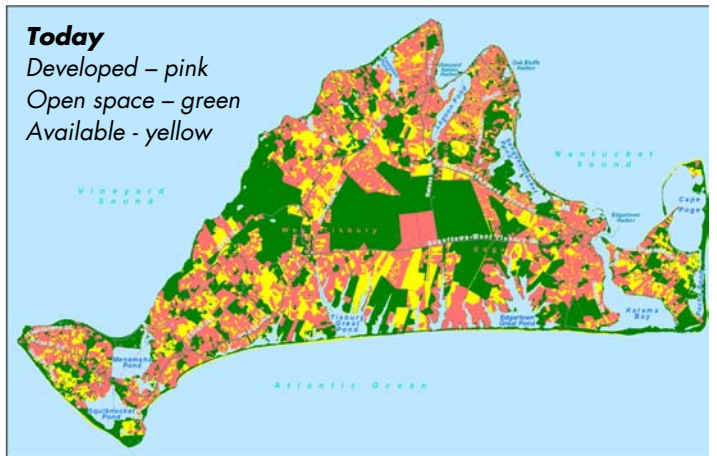
If, as a result of this process, a community consensus emerges that we want a pattern of future development that departs from current trends, we would then have to analyze existing zoning and other policies to see whether changes would be useful.

Nantucket, for example, divided the island into two categories – town and country – and then tied various policies, including extension of municipal water and sewer infrastructure, to this distinction. The Vineyard community could consider also various zoning techniques, such as allowing the transfer of development rights from conservation to growth areas, or the refinement of zoning regulations to better reflect the defining characteristics of neighborhoods.

Projection of Future Development				
	Today	Projected New Houses in Fifty Years	Projection in Fifty Years	Possible Increase
Aquinnah	496	450	946	91%
Chilmark	1,304	750	2,054	58%
Edgartown	4,617	2,944	7,561	64%
Oak Bluffs	3,817	1,342	5,159	35%
Tisbury	2,801	1,400	4,201	50%
West Tisbury	2,098	1,150	3,248	55%
	15,133	8,036	23,169	53%

This table corresponds to the second and third maps on page 1. The Island Plan has projected how many houses would be built in the next fifty years, if current zoning is maintained and past rates of construction continue.

Note: It does not account for limits on potential development on some properties from conservation restrictions or agricultural restrictions. Nor does it account for possible additional development on properties from comprehensive permits or zoning changes.



Present and Future Land Use

Our future lies between the second and third maps above showing build-out with all “available” land either developed (middle) or preserved as open space (bottom). In addition, some already developed land could be undeveloped.

NEXT STEPS

The ambitious program outlined here for looking at development management and growth on the Island can succeed only with the close cooperation of the Island's six planning boards, who know best the specific qualities, challenges, and opportunities of each Island town. Also critical are the many other town boards, public entities and not-for-profit organizations who not only have great expertise, but who would be responsible for implementing specific aspects of whatever vision the community chooses.

Presently, there are five active Work Groups: Energy & Waste, Housing, Livelihood & Commerce, Natural Environment, and Water Quality. Five more groups – Built Environment, Transportation, Culture and History, Governance, and Health & Education – will form in the fall. The Steering Committee will continue to coordinate the overall effort and the efforts dealing with development, growth, and land use.

THE ISLAND PLAN

The Island Plan is charting a course to the kind of future that the Vineyard community wants and is outlining a series of actions to help us navigate that course. It breaks new ground while incorporating the best lessons of the present and the past. It is not something to wait for, but something to work with, now and in the future.

The planning process began in 2006, and still has a long way to go. The summer of 2007 is time for the first mid-course correction, to get feedback from the broader community on the ongoing work of the Steering Committee and Work Groups.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The following documents are available on the website at public libraries, and from the MVC.

- **Regional Island Plan:** The first comprehensive plan for the Island was prepared by the MVC in 1991.
- **Community Development Plans:** In 2004, the MVC worked with each Island town to prepare a Community Development Plan which synthesized the community's main goals and objectives and included land use suitability maps indicating what areas were most suited for open space, housing, or commercial development, based on a series of criteria. The methodology proposed for the Island Plan is similar, but more detailed. (Note: These documents are not on the website, due to their large size; they are available at libraries and the MVC.)

FORUMS

Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m.

Housing - June 27, Tisbury Senior Center
Energy & Waste – July 11, Katharine Cornell Theatre
Water Resources – July 25, Old Whaling Church
Natural Environment – August 8, Sailing Camp Park
Development & Growth – August 22, Tisbury School
Livelihood & Commerce – Sept. 5, Harbor View Hotel

GET INVOLVED



The Island Plan is a community effort to confront the issues that will shape our future. Here are some of the ways you can join in.

- **FORUMS:** Come to the Development and Growth Forum on August 22. There

will also be forums on the five Work Groups topics.

- **WEBSITE:** The Island Plan website offers you many ways to give your input or to find more useful information including:
 - A mini-survey about these proposals,
 - A Neighborhood Survey about your neighborhood,
 - Discussion papers about the other topics,
 - A way to join the Network of Planning Advisors and Work Groups, or to get on the mailing list,
 - Background documents, results of forums and surveys, meeting minutes, etc.

The same information is available in all public libraries or directly from the MVC.

The facilitator for the Steering Committee's Development Management and Land Use Study Group is Henry Stephenson. Other members are Jim Athearn, Christina Brown, Tom Chase, and Ned Orleans.

The primary contact for the Development Management and Land Use Study Group is Mark London 508-693-3453 ext 11 or london@mvcommission.org.

The Island Plan is an initiative of, and is coordinated by, the Martha's Vineyard Commission.

