

# ISLAND PLAN

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THE VINEYARD



## **Development and Growth Forum August 22, 2007**

### **Proceedings**

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Please consult the separate Appendix that includes the poster, the agenda, the discussion paper, and the presentations. The agenda included the definition of key terms such as density, buildout, carrying capacity, built environment, Emerging Directions, and Promising Initiatives.

The Development and Growth Forum took place at the M.V. Agricultural Society Hall in West Tisbury on August 22, 2007 from 7:30 to 9:30 pm

## **Attendance**

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A total of 135 people participated in this forum including members of the Steering Committee, the Network of Planning Advisors, Island organizations, town boards, MVC staff, and members of the general public.

Guest Speaker

Kurt Gaertner, Director of Land Use Policy, of the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs

Moderator

Pat Gregory, West Tisbury Town Moderator

Members of the Steering Committee

Jim Athearn, Henry Stephenson, Tom Chase, Ned Orleans, Sue Wasserman, Linda Sibley, and Kerry Scott

MVC Staff

Mark London, Chris Seidel, Donna Stewart, Chris Flynn, Bill Veno, Ed O'Connell, Paul Foley, and Sarah Raposa

Others (of those who signed in)

Miles Jaffe, William Stewart, Joanie Ames, Virginia Jones, Kenneth Ivory, Farney Pedler, Arthur Strang, Susan Puciul, Toni Hall, Raymond Buckley, Barbara Ravera, Jon Nelson, Christian Halby, Christine Doyle-Burke, Mimi Gibbon, Jerry Gratch, Ann Margetson, Irving Brager, Estelle Brager, Linda Thompson, Ralph Shunk, June Shunk, Ann Littel, John Littel, Sherrie Cutler, Bob Donahue, Deborah Medders, Tony Nevin, Mary Jane Aldrich-Moodie, Phil Henderson, Carolyn Henderson, Nick Peck, Kate Taylor, Ann Floyd, John Abrams, Linda DeWitt, Robert Green, G. Monka, Paul Pimental, Elaine Frost, Peter Cabana, Betsy Cabana, Holly Stephenson, Elizabeth Stead, Craig Stead, Chris Fried, Juleanne VanBelle, Tony Peak, Jean Kaye, John Ratt, Lisa Dodge, Melinda Loberg, Christina Brown, and Mimi Davisson

# 1. Introduction

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Pat Gregory opened the Forum by introducing himself as the moderator and by welcoming members of the public.

Mr. Gregory took a poll of the audience members by asking questions such as how many audience members were public officials (about 11), or whether they live on Martha's Vineyard year-round (about 40) or seasonally (about 34) or are visiting (one).

Mr. Gregory explained the format for the evening, namely a presentation by members of the Island Plan Steering Committee, guest speaker and MVC Executive Director, followed by an opportunity for feedback and discussion by participants.

Mark London, Executive Director of the Martha's Vineyard Commission, presented background on the Island Plan process. This evening's forum will deal with the questions:

- How much development should there be?
- Where should development take place?
- How can development best fit in to a given location, both with respect to natural and built features?

## 2. Presentations

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*Note that these Proceedings include a brief summary of each of the presentations. Readers are referred to the Discussion Paper as well as to the PowerPoint presentations in the appendix to these Proceedings for a more complete version.*

### **2.1 Background**

Mark London gave a presentation on the background and current situation with respect to development and growth on Martha's Vineyard.

History of Development: He outlined the main stages of development on the Vineyard, the population growth, the adoption of zoning in Island towns, and the Kennedy bill. He noted that development proceeded slowly until the 1970's for most of the Vineyard and dramatically increased in pace at that time with the construction of suburban subdivisions. He showed an animated view with dots representing each structure, including a projection of what might be built by the time of "buildout" (the theoretical limit when development has been completed).

Patterns of Development: He showed aerial photos illustrating different patterns of development, town, rural, and suburban.

Density of Development: He showed plans of the Island with the existing density and the density allowed under existing zoning as well as aerial photos illustrating the range of densities in different parts of the Island.

Available Land: He showed a slides illustrating how much land is developed, how much is protected, and how much is available, as well as slides showing two development scenarios, one in which all available land was developed, and one in which all available land was preserved. He showed the results of the Community Development Plan, a first stab at identifying which parts of the Island were most suitable for open space and for residential and commercial development. He mentioned that the Island Plan would be looking at construction trends, community needs for affordable housing, the

need for more commercial space. He also showed a map of the planning in Nantucket, which delineated "Town" and "Country" areas as a basis for several policies.

## **2.2 Overview of the Issues**

Jim Athearn, Chair of the Island Plan Steering Committee and owner of Morning Glory Farm, presented an overview of the issues, noting that the images and new technology are helpful, and will, along with the staff and participants, help to make this planning effort more effective than others in the past.

Is it too late?: Jim noted that the Island Plan is just starting to look at the critical issues of how much, where, and how should the Vineyard grow, including the question "Is it too late to alter the pattern of development on Martha's Vineyard?" Jim suggested that the presence of so many interested Vineyarders is testament that we don't believe that it is too late. He doesn't believe that either. He has spoken with many others over the years who are convinced that it is too late. However, he believes that we still have the choice to do the planning and make the commitments necessary to do something about it, rather than letting history happen to us.

Sustainability and Carrying Capacity: Jim recalled that the Steering Committee has formulated principles, including the key value of sustainability, which he defined as: "a practice is sustainable if it can be carried on indefinitely into the future without consuming the resource that supports it". He added that energy, tourism, farming, fishing and water use are all things that can be done sustainably or in a manner that depletes the resource and forces us to adapt to the loss of that resource. Building, like mining, is something that consumes a resource, the land. When we analyze how we want to live, we have a pretty good idea of what our values are. How many people can live on this Island and still sustainably conduct their lives according to those values. How many people can go to the Great Pond and dig clams? Or drive to town without traffic delays? Or keeping small class sizes in our schools? Or to know more than half the people at Town Meeting? Or to be able to find a house to live in? Or be able to leave that house unlocked and go away? These are things that we value, and as population grows they will change. As a farmer, Jim is used to asking himself what is the carrying capacity of a piece of land, and knows what happens if the carrying capacity is exceeded. Development on the Island can happen the same way.

How to bring about change: Jim reiterated that we know that we have to change. Kurt Gaertner has come to tell us about some techniques being used in the Commonwealth. Maps of the Island have been examined, and town boards will get together to decide what lands must be saved, what lands could be developed, and what to do with our village centers. We've looked at examples like the Town and Country pattern on Nantucket. He added that we will need the political will to make these changes. Once the background work is done, with good conversations and new techniques, we will make proposals that will hopefully be voted, so that we can alter the pattern of development to what we want.

## **2.3 Natural Areas**

Tom Chase, Director of the Nature Conservancy's Islands Program, and a member of the Steering Committee and Natural Environment Work Group Core, presented key parameters regarding Natural Areas.

He discussed two concepts that have been identified by the Natural Environment Work Group Core:

- Ecosystem Services – Conditions and processes through which nature sustains and fulfills human life. These products and services provided to humans by the natural environment include recreational areas and clean drinking water. Some of those services are restricted as to where they can be provided – A particular watershed provides the water supply for an individual pond where we might want to harvest shellfish, for example. We should integrate uses, using the same area for habitat, recreation, etc.
- Minimum Viable Area – This is the overarching concept tying them together, namely the least area that will support the most restricted species involved in the ecosystem targeted for protection.

He reviewed the four main subtopics identified by the Natural Environment Work Group Core and listed the Emerging Directions for each:

- Habitat,
- Working Landscapes,
- Recreation,
- Natural Character (and scenic values).

He stressed that it is important to not just collect the leftovers from development for conservation, but to bring together viable tracts of land and to “undevelop” the previous poor choices. He discussed strategies of acquisition, restoration and management, and mitigation.

## **2.4 Built Areas**

Henry Stephenson, architect, member of the Tisbury Planning Board and member of the Steering Committee, made a presentation regarding Built Areas. In order to be able to evaluate whether new development would fit into the existing built environment, we need to clearly understand the characteristics of existing buildings, streetscapes, and neighborhoods.

Impact on Scenic Values: He presented examples of the impact of various buildings:

- From major public roads and other public spaces,
- From the water,
- Of the water.

Impact on Historic Preservation: He presented examples of significant historic buildings, a map showing the concentration of older buildings on the Island, and detailed maps showing which parts of older areas in Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, and Tisbury are protected by historic districts.

Neighborhood Conservation: He showed a map of higher density neighborhoods, which could be protected by measures to protect their character. He showed a case study of what might happen to a row of buildings on upper Circuit Avenue in Oak Bluffs if they were replaced by new buildings as allowed under existing zoning.

Development to Remediate Problem Areas: He noted some areas where development might be advantageous to improve the character of existing areas such as Upper State Road in Tisbury, the Triangle area in Edgartown, and the Middletown area in West Tisbury.

He ended by showing several examples of possible roadscape and streetscape improvements such as tree planting, roadside vegetation, elimination of overhead wires, and inviting people to join the Built Environment Work Group, which will be forming this fall.

## **2.5 Best Practices**

Kurt Gaertner, Director of Land Use Policy, of the Commonwealth's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, presented Best Practices that various communities have used to better manage growth and development.

Smart Growth Toolkit: He spoke about the Smart Growth Toolkit which includes a website ([http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart\\_growth\\_toolkit/](http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/)) and CD containing integrated materials on twelve smart growth techniques using case studies, including a suburban, rural and urban examples, as well as providing model bylaws. He then discussed several of these techniques.

Transfer of Development Rights (TDR): He spoke about a means to concentrate development in appropriate areas while preserving open space, historic structures, and agricultural land. This involves the owner in a "sending" area (where the community wants to limit development) selling the right to develop to an owner in a "receiving" area (where the community wants to encourage development). This has worked successfully in Groton, Massachusetts and in the Pinelands of New Jersey.

Traditional Neighborhood Development: He spoke about how to encourage village-style development, keeping compact centers with mixed commercial, residential and civic uses. He presented principles associated with this type of development, namely: clarifying and reinforcing the town center and neighborhood edges, ensuring connectivity and walkability, favoring mixed uses and mixed housing, promoting compatible architecture and community oriented urban design.

He spoke about why it is difficult to stop simply growth, particularly because of the property rights and expectations of property owners. Available tools include land acquisition and zoning regulations such as cluster zoning and Transfer of Development Rights.

## **3. Discussion**

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Pat Gregory opened discussion to questions from the audience.

Craig Stead asked Jim Athearn what he thinks the "number" is, regarding carrying capacity. Jim responded that the Island Plan has not yet identified a specific number. It depends on what the criterion is. For example, it could be possible to estimate how many people could get half their food on-Island.

Julianne Van Belle asked Kurt Gaertner how the tools would be adopted. He responded that most are to be voted by the municipalities. Mark London added that the MVC could do things beyond what the towns can, creating Districts of Critical Planning Concern, for example.

Henry Stephenson asked Kurt Gaertner whether TDR could allow transfers between towns, and how to tell the receiving areas that TDRs are a good idea, such as convincing Tisbury to accept more development to keep it from other parts of the Vineyard. Kurt Gaertner responded that TDR's have not been transferred out of a town, in the Commonwealth, but may soon be for the first time between Newbury and Newburyport.

Ann Margetson disagrees that growth can't be stopped. She recalled an earlier MVC study that found that a sustainable number for the Island is 14,000 families, and wondered what has happened to that study.

Mark London responded that he is unfamiliar with the report, but that number goes beyond the current projection for buildout population. It is hard to know what population is sustainable. Economic and technological changes might make it feasible to develop properties that were not viable in the past; high property values mean that it will become economically viable to install sewers or other wastewater treatment to allow construction on an otherwise unbuildable lot. Manhattan is a quarter of the size of the Vineyard and has a population of 1.5 million, so theoretically the Vineyard could house 6 million people. What is the limiting factor? It might be the number of people that can be sustained with our two-lane rural roads, since widening them would dramatically change the character to make it not "the Vineyard" anymore.

Jean Kaye asked about regulating big houses. Henry Stephenson explained that Massachusetts law does not permit municipalities to regulate the size of a house. However, towns can regulate things like a floor area ratio, preserving streetscapes with a no-cut zone, planting street trees, etc.

John Ratt asked, as a seasonal resident, why the towns haven't done more with zoning. Henry Stephenson responded that the level of analysis that is needed has not been done, but now that the Island Plan is providing those things, it should be more feasible. He added that the Vineyard has resisted large-scale subdivision projects, but is behind in working on zoning regulations.

Tony Peak, Tisbury Planning Board member, added that much of that has to do with difficulties with the Massachusetts General Laws, but that there is movement to improve that situation. There are limits to what the towns can do. Jim Athearn added that the Town of Aquinnah made the whole town a District of Critical Planning Concern, giving that town more control, so there may be more done with Districts of Critical Planning Concern.

Seasonal resident Estelle Brager said that the voters are in control.

A woman spoke about air traffic as impacting her more than car traffic. Tom Chase responded that the Natural Environment Work Group Core has noted that noise needs to be addressed.

Dr. Lisa Dodge would like to start a medical center here on the Vineyard, to study and treat chronic illnesses like Lyme.

William Stewart noted a sense of entitlement that needs to be changed. He believes that to be the essence of the challenge.

Miles Jaffe asked if the Island Plan will set goals, where the input comes from, and can the MVC implement any of the strategies? Mark London responded that Work Groups have set goals and objectives and also specific strategies, some in the form of regulations, some in the form of incentives. He hopes that this plan will include detailed strategies.

Ginny Jones believes that we are already over the limit for growth. She asked if we are looking at how to keep a sustainable year-round economy, diversified enough to make a living wage year-round, not just in the summer. Jim Athearn explained that the Livelihood and Commerce Work Group is looking at that, studying leakage of various ways that money leaves the Island rather than remaining to circulate here. He suggested a need for balance, so that a vibrant year-round economy does not bring more hustle and bustle than many of us want. He suggested that we should model our society so that we can get by on a little less and be happier.

Pat Gregory concluded the forum by pointing out that there are more meetings coming up and suggesting that people consult the website [www.islandplan.org](http://www.islandplan.org). He closed the forum at 9:30 p.m.

*Meeting notes were prepared by Jo-Ann Taylor and Mark London.*



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