

ISLAND PLAN

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THE VINEYARD

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WORK GROUP

CHARACTER SUB-TOPIC

**(Monday March 5, noon to 1:30pm, bring your own lunch,
MVC, 33 New York Avenue, Oak Bluffs)**

AGENDA

1. Welcome and brief status report
2. Reaction and input to draft Character Summary (attached)
3. Wrap up

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT WORK GROUP SUMMARY CHARACTER SUB-TOPIC DRAFT 2/15/7 ml

OVERALL PURPOSE *what we hope to achieve for Character on the Vineyard*

Vision - The character of the Vineyard's natural environment becomes an overwhelming element in the "Vineyard identity". Even the casual visitor is impressed by the authenticity of the Island's landscapes, both working and wild, and senses the residents' commitment to wise stewardship. She leaves inspired to return, in part, to make her own home a better place to live.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The word "character" can mean many different things. In this context, we will refer to the character of the Vineyard's natural environment in two ways:

- The general sense of the authenticity and diversity of the landscape, its relation to the natural and historical forces that shaped it, and its ability to inspire a sense of discovery. In this sense, it relates to how we deal with the other three topics of the Natural Environment Work Group – the Island's bio-diversity (habitat) areas, its working landscapes, and its recreational areas – especially the emphasis on authenticity and sustainability in all our actions.
- The more specific sense of visual character, especially from public places such as roadside and coastal views and vistas. Note that, in the Visual Preference Survey conducted by the MVC, most people identified fields and stone walls as their most preferred places. This visual access contributes to the community's appreciation and stewardship of natural areas. [Note: the rest of this document deals primarily with issues of visual character.]

Goal: Protect the distinctive natural character of Martha's Vineyard as it exists today and restore where it has been lost if possible.

Objectives:

- Foster the maintenance of existing vistas and the creation of new vistas, as well as the restoration of vistas that have been lost over time from plant succession.
- Match the use of land to the land's natural and visual qualities. Preserve the appearance of openness and great space.
- Manage change and growth to enhance the traditional and natural landscapes of the Vineyard.
- Require that development plans fit the scale and quality of the inherited landscape so that generations to come will have views and open vistas to enjoy.

Strategies:

1. Protect Roadside and Coastal Views

- Identify the key views and vistas from public spaces and ensure that new construction or inappropriate vegetation doesn't block or disrupt them. Consider purchasing (outright or conservation easements) key parcels.
- Maintain the natural character and enhance the visual experience along the major Island rural roads (notably those in the Island Roads District of Critical Planning Concern) by limiting new roadside development (e.g. setbacks from the road, other dimensional or design specifications).
- Look for possibilities to open up views of roadside fields or other natural features, and also to increase vegetation to screen recent development (e.g. roadside no-cut zones).
- Consider adding roads to the Island Roads District.
- Look for opportunities to re-open critical lost views of the Island landscape.

2. Limit Light Pollution

- Discourage the proliferation of artificial lighting, which has impacted scenic resources, most notably the dark night sky, and has disturbed night vistas and interfered with navigation in Island harbors.

Obstacles

- There is a dilemma in that the public would like the view of roadside fields to be opened up, whereas property owners prefer keeping them shielded from the road. The degree of openness depends on whether they are privately or publicly owned.
- With adopting an excessively aesthetically motivated approach, there is a danger of becoming a Disneyland.

Threats to natural character include: (from Work Group in November)

- invasive plant and animal species, and non-native "suburban" landscaping
- "suburban influences" in general
- obtrusive infrastructure including power pads, transformers, cell towers, windfarms

EMERGING CONCEPTS (POSSIBLE BOLD IDEAS)

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