



Synopsis of Past Plans

EXCERPTS Regarding NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Note: This excerpt was prepared by the staff of the Martha's Vineyard Commission. The full document *Synopsis of Past Plans* is available at www.islandplan.org

Methodology

This synopsis was prepared from a set of Vineyard planning documents dating back to 1987. Topics and sub-topics have been organized in the following standard format:

- Issue: a brief statement of the challenge;
- Goal: a broad statement summarizing the overall goal;
- Objectives: a list of more specific objectives, each with a short sub-heading.

This document only includes the broader statements of issues, goals and objectives. Statements about specific implementation techniques or about which entities should be responsible for which actions, were not included.

The following is the list of source documents:

- ❖ Island-Wide Plans
 - ◆ Regional Island Plan – Policy Plan, 1990
 - ◆ Regional Transportation Plan, 2003 Update
- ❖ Master Plans
 - ◆ Chilmark Master Plan Supplement, 2003.
 - ◆ Edgartown Master Plan, April 1990.
 - ◆ Oak Bluffs Master Plan, June 1998.
 - ◆ West Tisbury Master Plan, July 1987
- ❖ Open Space Plans
 - ◆ Chilmark Open Space & Recreation Plan Update, June 1996.
 - ◆ Tisbury Open Space Plan, 1997.
 - ◆ West Tisbury Open Space and Recreation Plan, April 2000.
 - ◆ Oak Bluffs Open Space & Recreation Plan, December 2004
- ❖ Visioning Documents
 - ◆ Documents from all six Island towns, 1997.
- ❖ Community Development Plans
 - ◆ Plans from all six towns, July and August 2004.

Open Space

Issue: Open space is a fundamental determinant of the character of Martha's Vineyard. Since development of the Island is bound to continue, the Island's future economy and environmental quality depend on actions to protect open space in keeping with the pace of development. The most important lands needing protection are pond and ocean frontages, natural habitats, farmland, aquifer lands and buffer zones between developed areas. No agency can afford to buy all the land that needs protection.

Goal: Preserve and increase public and private open space to protect the Island's unique natural, historical, ecological, scientific and cultural values for future generations

Objectives:

Preserve Critical Areas as Open Space

- Use open space to protect farmland, wildlife preserves and hunting areas, to provide recreation and educational opportunities, to protect the water supply, to moderate the effects of flooding and erosion and as a buffer to reduce air and noise pollution.
- Preserve suitable agricultural land and make it available for farming and grazing. Protect lands with agricultural potential.
- Identify areas where public access to the water is limited (for swimming, beaching, boating, walking) and seek additional public coastal access.
- Preserve the Island's ancient ways, which represent a landscape feature of great historical, scenic and recreational value. Use a system of Special Ways to guide open space acquisitions and other land use decisions.
- Create linkages between parcels of open space and connect with corridors for wildlife and access.
- Coordinate open space planning with a transportation plan to maximize public access.

Favor Cooperation to Acquire and Manage Open Space

- Have regional agencies, Town Boards and conservation groups join in a major initiative to negotiate conservation easements, protect views and trails, and adopt land use controls for these lands to augment acquisition programs.
- Conserve and manage resources on an Island-wide basis for regional purposes, rather than solely within Town boundaries for local purposes.

Plan Open Space as a Part of the Development Process

- Make open space in developments serve meaningful functions for the neighborhood and community.
- Provide incentives to landowners who contribute meaningful open space for public benefit.
- Direct development toward lands with the capacity to sustain it and away from critical and vulnerable lands.
- Promote flexible zoning and cluster development where appropriate.

Scenic Values

Issue: The character of the Vineyard is derived to a great extent from how it looks from public spaces, including major roads and the water.

Goal: Foster the maintenance of existing vistas, creation of new vistas, and restoration of vistas that have been lost over time from plant succession.

Objectives:

Protect Roadside Views

- Encourage the opening of long views of the Island landscape.
- Protect scenic view easements.
- Identify and protect key parcels along roadsides in order to improve scenic quality.
- Review dimensional requirements of the Island Roads District and add design specifications appropriate to enhance the visual experience of the major Island roads.

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 small boat navigation in Island harbors.

Habitat

Issue: Habitats for species that are threatened, rare, or of special concern on Martha's Vineyard have regional significance in New England and nationally. Because natural fires have been suppressed by humans for decades, large portions of the sandplain have been allowed – against the natural pattern – to succeed into stands of oak woodland and mature scrub oak shrub with limited areas of grassland.

Goal: Ensure that plans for development affecting critical habitats or species acknowledge that they are extremely vulnerable and require strictest protection.

Objectives:

Support Wildlife

- Sustain the rich wildlife resources of the Island and provide protection for the rare, threatened and endangered plant and animal species.
- Employ early planning and review of development projects under the Wetlands Protection Act and other laws in order to protect rare species, their habitats, and significant natural communities.
- Focus especially on larger, contiguous parcels of land, which are important from the standpoint of many animal species.

Encourage Sandplain Restoration

- Establish an active sandplain acquisition and restoration program to limit woodland encroachment.

Manage Wooded Lands

- Encourage public and private landowners to manage wooded lands for health and productivity.
- Allow opportunities for residents to gather and use dead wood where appropriate.

Protect Marine Habitat:

- Minimize adverse effects on marine flora and fauna and wildlife habitat while promoting safe navigation on Island waters.

Protect the State Forest

- Be strong against encroachments that will diminish its value as habitat.
- Work with DEM to review and update management plans for the State Forest.
- Re-establish sandplain environment in the State Forest.
- Explore proposals for new productive uses of State Forest land including agriculture, woodlot management, coppicing and different combinations of tree species.

Coastal Resources

Issue: On Martha's Vineyard, lands close to the ocean are particularly important to preserve as open space. They serve as storm damage prevention for the interior wetlands and built areas, as recreation, scenic vistas, and habitat. The primary economic activities on Martha's Vineyard occur in the down-Island town centers, each of which is located around its own harbor and waterfront area.

Goal: Preserve opportunities for public access and maritime uses of the waterfront.

Objectives:

Maintain and Promote Maritime Uses

- Where appropriate, encourage water-dependent maritime industrial uses of coastal land.
- Encourage the development of waterfront zoning by-laws that are protective of coastal environments and their traditional island uses.
- Ensure that each Town Harbor has an adopted Harbor Management Plan compatible with Mass-CZM guidelines to ensure the most productive and environmentally sound use of these limited public resources.
- Maintain the scenic quality of the Island's harbors.

Protect and Increase Access to Beaches

- Share the responsibilities and privileges of beach use among all towns.
- Coordinate planning to meet beach needs for all towns and avoid concentrating impacts in anyone location.
- Emphasize the natural beauty of the Island's beaches and dunes while providing for public access and enjoyment of these resources.

Preserve the Island's Distinct Character and Environment

Issue: Martha's Vineyard possesses unique natural, historical, ecological, scientific, cultural, and other values and there is a regional and statewide interest in preserving and enhancing these values.

Goal: Protect and conserve the land and water resources that are essential to the Island's economy, character and quality of life. Manage change and growth to enhance traditional and natural landscapes. Preserve and enhance the rural quality of life and the unique, peaceful, small-town character of each of the six Island towns

Objectives:

Protect Critical Lands

- Whenever possible, avoid developing "critical lands" including critical habitats, agricultural land, lands affecting the sole source aquifer, and lands needed for community needs such as health and social services, government, housing, drinking water, waste disposal, education and recreation.

Preserve the Island's Character

- Carefully consider visual factors in order to preserve Island character.
- Preserve diversity as a principal visual characteristic of Martha's Vineyard. Match the use of land to the land's natural and visual qualities.
- Protect and enhance the visual experience of the major Island roads.
- Encourage the maintenance of historic streetscapes and Victorian or New England town character (See also section 6.1 Community Character.)

Protect Open Space

- Preserve and increase public and private common lands.
- Preserve the appearance of openness and great space, which is appreciated by Islanders and visitors.
- 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.

Protect Man-Made Resources

- Identify and protect historic, cultural, archeological and aesthetic resources of Martha's Vineyard through overlay districts, site review, design guidelines and restrictions.

Protect the Aquifer

- Land uses affecting the Island's sole source aquifer should be managed to preserve the purest possible groundwater and surface water.

Protect the Social Landscape

- Foster a diverse Island housing stock in order to have a healthy and economically diverse community.

Manage the Pattern and Rate of Development

Issue: Some types of growth are welcome, necessary and unavoidable.

Goal: Ensure that new development fits the land – respecting and reinforcing traditional land use pattern and uses – and manage growth rates in the best interest of all Vineyarders.

Objectives:

Reinforce Existing Development Patterns

- Ensure that new land uses conform to the traditional land use pattern and enhance traditional uses.
- Guide development to fit into neighborhood patterns, based on settlement pattern, functional relationships, and character.
- Ensure that development proposals contribute to the rural quality of life on Martha's Vineyard. Reject qualities that are "suburban" and "urban."

Concentrate and Cluster Development

- Direct growth to locations that have the capacity to absorb the impacts of development.
- Channel residential development into neighborhood hamlet areas with green zones between (neighborhood clusters with services). Use the hamlet concept to increase open space, create commons and maintain rural character.
- Where private development of critical lands is unavoidable, preserve the capacity of the land for agriculture, water supply, habitat or community needs to the greatest extent possible through cluster development and by limiting the intensity of uses.

Manage Growth Rates

- Use growth rates to manage the pace of development and to ensure that buildout does not lead to economic stagnation. Developments which offer overwhelming positive social or economic benefits to the Island should be allowed to develop rapidly. Proposals whose detriments to the community as a whole are only slightly outweighed by the advantages should be made to grow slowly. Different growth rates are needed for different sectors of the economy: business growth, construction growth, vehicles, SSA foot passengers, housing.
- Encourage affordable housing development, as well as development that results in public access to recreation and to the water.
- Justify growth rates based on impacts and capacity of services and infrastructure.
- Rates should be based on percentages of the remaining capacity of resources so that no single development consumes too large a portion of remaining capacity.
- Tie growth management programs to capital planning to link the pace of development to the capacity of support systems.

Manage Growth in Relation to Carrying Capacity

- Ensure that development does not exceed road capacity. Use the Island Road District as planning unit to estimate capacity for increases in traffic and identify critical corridors.
- Use watersheds as planning units for estimating carrying capacity for water quality impacts such as nutrients and runoff. Predict buildout and set targets for levels of development within sub-watersheds.

Use an Island Development Plan to Manage Development

- Develop an Island land use plan for future development of remaining land. Include areas for commercial and industrial growth, housing, community facilities, infrastructure, open space, agricultural use, etc.
- Guide development so that more of the characteristics that Vineyarders feel have high value are protected and promoted, and that those characteristics considered to have lower value are avoided.
- Review use and management of publicly owned lands including designated open space.
- Plan sufficient land for community needs including health and social services, government, housing, drinking water, waste disposal, education and recreation and dedicate lands for those uses.
- Develop guidelines for appropriate locations for types of housing, commercial and industrial development. Set criteria for optimum densities and layout.

Balance Six Towns and One Island

Issue: The six Vineyard towns each have their own character and traditions, but are vitally interdependent since many issues are regional in nature.

Goal: Seek a balance between best interests, the home rule, preservation of the special character of each town, and regional cooperation to deal effectively with Island-wide issues.

Objectives:

Deal with Regional Issues in a Regional Way

- Define issues that have regional impact, including but not limited to: issues which affect the health, safety or general welfare of more than one town, issues which affect the public use of State, Federal, or County-owned resources, any action affecting the quality of public drinking water or marine waters, actions affecting the public's use of Mass. State Highways, actions with negative effects on natural (and particularly coastal) resources, cultural or historic resources of statewide significance, other actions deemed regionally important by local or State agencies.

Coordinate Regional and Local Actions

- Ensure that the towns and Commission act jointly to strengthen efforts of the towns to provide for their futures.
- Bring local and regional plans into agreement. Amend zoning by-laws, subdivision rules and regulations, and board of health regulations so that they comply with master plans.
- Towns should use the tools available to them through the MVC (including DRI, DCPC and master planning) to accomplish local and regional planning goals.
- Regional agencies should take the initiative to involve town boards in regional decision-making.
- The MVC should assist towns and other agencies in defining their planning needs. Town officials should make use of the planning tools available to them through regional agencies.
- Regional agencies should coordinate grants, funding and capital planning as a service to towns including start-to-finish grant assistance including grant-writing, administration and follow-through.

Coordinate with Related and Off-Island Entities

- Strengthen communication between regional agencies and the Steamship Authority (SSA). Coordinate with towns on the other side of the water.
- Develop working relationships with the Cape Cod Commission and its member towns, the Southeast Regional Planning and Economic Development District, its member cities and towns, and Nantucket on issues of mutual concern.

Foster Civic Engagement

- Increase public involvement and participation in local government.
- Encourage participation in town boards.
- Boost voter registration.