

Chilmark Housing Production Plan **Executive Summary**

Introduction

Affordable housing poses unique challenges in Chilmark, as it does for Martha’s Vineyard as a whole. As with other coastal communities, housing prices have been steadily increasing, widening the affordability gap and straining moderate and low income households seeking to live in the town. Compounding matters, year-round housing stock, including rental opportunities for moderate and low income households, has declined as the number of seasonal homeowners has increased. The Martha’s Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment, upon which much of the information in this HPP is based, determined that “the challenges of establishing a secure residence on Martha’s Vineyard for those who grew up here, many skilled workers, and older households of moderate income, are quickly becoming insurmountable.”¹ As one of the three original towns on Martha’s Vineyard, Chilmark, which was incorporated in 1694, recognizes that this Housing Production Plan (HPP) is an opportunity not only to increase year-round housing in the town, but also to be part of a broader plan to address the affordable housing crisis on the island.

Based on data from the 1985 Chilmark Master Plan (updated in 1992 and 2002), Chilmark residents value the rural character and open space that define its physical beauty. Preserving its natural landscape, its democratic social structure and roots as an agrarian and fishing-based economy are most important.² Chilmark is proud of its small-town identity, rural atmosphere, and topographical diversity- the seashore, ponds, streams, woods, fields, flatlands, and hills are to be defended and protected.

“Let’s be cautious of creating a place where we no longer need to know our neighbors.”

- Chilmark Voter, Chilmark Master Plan Questionnaire, 2002.

The legacy of Chilmark’s agrarian and fishing past is evident in its stonewalls, the openness of the remaining farms, the roadside vistas, the continuity of its historical architecture, the town center with its Beetlebung trees, and Menemsha with its commercial fishing harbor. Menemsha remains to this day a working commercial fishing port just as it has since the 1700s. Menemsha is the only harbor on the island that retains the quality of a small fishing port. As with much of the town, the small scale of the harbor and village is determined by its unique geography.³

A key challenge of this HPP is to preserve this rural quality while proposing increasing the number of affordable housing units. Density, scale and appearance will be important factors to consider in any final plan. Therefore, a successful HPP must be one that balances density with open space and development with environmental protection in a way that evinces the values of the town and provides adequate year-round housing for the future.

¹ Martha’s Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment, Summary Findings, 2013 p1

² Chilmark Master Plan p XXX

³ Chilmark, Town of, Chilmark Master Plan. April 1985, p 18.

Chilmark has a long history of making housing affordable to young people in the community. A zoning bylaw allows for the creation of a “Youth Lot” for Chilmark residents under 30 years old (plus other qualifications) to build their homes on undersized lots. Since 1976, over two-dozen young working families have established their homes in Chilmark through this program. Half of the home sites were acquired through arrangements with private property owners. The other 50% were acquired through requirements of the Planning Board with developers of larger subdivisions.⁴ These lots were awarded by the town at a nominal price and may be sold at full market value after 10 years. In more recent years, Chilmark has created Resident Home Sites for young families in which the land, either town- owned or through private agreement, is restricted for future use. These are important programs and should be continued, as they are a vital way of retaining working, year-round families.

With every housing opportunity awarded, Chilmark has affirmed its commitment to maintaining an economically diverse population and to preserving its democratic social structure. However, even with all of the progress over the past 40 years, Chilmark now faces a scarcity of available land, rising property values and an influx of seasonal homeowners that threaten its housing tradition. Today, Chilmark has reached a point where if it truly wants to make an impact for future generations it must build and maintain a stock of affordable housing units.

While these programs have been a success for the town, they have fallen short of producing the volume of affordable housing necessary to keep pace with current housing needs and rising property values. Youth Lots do not have an AMI limit and Resident Home Sites have been awarded to individuals and families earning up to 150% AMI, making them technically not affordable housing. Moreover, the fact that Youth Lots can be resold at full market value after 10 years allows them leave the town’s subsidized housing inventory (SHI). Currently, there are 7 units in Chilmark that the Commonwealth recognizes as

“Chilmark [is] a dying town. [It has] a school with no children, store with no winter patrons, library [that is] an up-island video store.”

- Chilmark Voter, Chilmark Master Plan Questionnaire, 2002.

affordable. Chilmark will need to produce 35 affordable housing units to meet the current needs.⁵ This HPP proposes a range of strategies to meet this goal, including the creation of 10 rental units for those earning at or below 80% of AMI.

Purpose of Project

The Chilmark Planning Board, in coordination with the Chilmark Housing Committee, the Island Housing Trust, and the Martha’s Vineyard Commission, has prepared this Housing Production Plan in order to meet its 10% Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) target per Massachusetts Housing and Community Development (DHCD) guidelines. This HPP identifies the current gaps in housing and recommends a strategy to develop affordable

⁴ Chilmark Master Plan Supplement 1992 p 242

⁵ See IHT Chart on p 26

housing in a way that reflects Chilmark's stated values and goals as a community. Chilmark's HPP will be included with the 5 other island towns in an island-wide HPP. This HPP is an opportunity for Chilmark to preserve its year-round population as a community that is one of the fastest aging towns in Massachusetts⁶ and under strain from economic factors associated with rising property values and an influx of seasonal homebuyers. Today, 74% of all Chilmark homes are seasonal, according to the Martha's Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment. The right HPP can provide housing solutions for the aging population in Chilmark who are on a fixed income as well as for young individuals and families interested in living and contributing to the town. As the island's housing crisis grows and Chilmark's window of opportunity to act closes, the town risks becoming a place where people from all economic and social backgrounds are shut out of being able to call Chilmark home.

Today, Chilmark has an affordability gap of \$440,000, the highest on the Island.⁷ This gap is the difference between what a median income household can afford (\$385,000) and the median priced unit (\$825,000). This analysis demonstrates how very challenging it is to afford to live in Chilmark. Given these figures, even those earning above 150% of AMI (or \$125,000) are virtually shutout of the private housing market with only a few exceptions.

Chilmark, like many seasonal destination spots, has seen its year-round economy shift from farming and fishing toward service and seasonal jobs. However, even with the shift toward a more seasonal economy, the population continues to grow, fueled mainly by those buying second homes and retirees. The population was 866, according to the 2010 US Census, and grew to 1,183 residents by October 2012, representing a recent growth rate of 36.6%. The town accounts for 6.5% of the Island's population.⁸

The town's population continues to grow older. It has the highest average age on the Island of 50.7 years, among the highest in the Commonwealth. This is due to its relatively high number of residents 55 years of age and older (43.2%), and almost one-quarter (23%) of Chilmark's residents were 65 or older. It has the lowest percentage of those aged 5 years and below on the island.⁹ With fewer and fewer families able to afford a home in Chilmark, these percentages will likely continue to reflect an increasingly aging population.

“Housing programs should be guided by data demonstrating need, not just opinion.”

- Chilmark Voter, Chilmark Master Plan Questionnaire, 2002.

This HPP is more than a way to meet the 10% SHI threshold mandated by the Commonwealth, it is an affirmation of Chilmark's commitment to building a sustainable and healthy year-round community and to preserving the authenticity and character that define Chilmark as a people and not merely a destination. A healthy, sustainable town is not only where one visits, but where one lives.

⁶ Martha's Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment

⁷ Karen Sonnarborg, pp XX

⁸ Martha's Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment

⁹ Martha's Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment, Part I, 2013 p 81

Housing Challenges

This effort will face many challenges. Some of these challenges include geography, environmental sensitivity, an unfavorable perception of development, lack of transportation and minimal infrastructure. Keeping building density low and evenly distributed while minimizing environmental impact are important in Chilmark. However, in order to get the most affordable housing most efficiently, a clustered development, as one part of the overall housing effort, seems the most reasonable approach. Yet how does Chilmark build a clustered development without violating the principles of its rural character? A smart growth approach, one that combines density with open space and allays environmental concerns, is the best solution. By clustering units around open spaces and employing the latest green technology to minimize environmental impact, this can be accomplished.

On an island, available, open land is limited. In order to maintain its rural character and protect its open spaces, Chilmark has adopted strict bylaws aimed at limiting the type and size of growth by passing 3-acre zoning per home and the “big house bylaw” which is intended to limit the size of new home construction. These bylaws and other initiatives are central in preserving the traditions and values of Chilmark as a small, rural town. In order to build affordable housing units, zoning bylaws will have to be introduced that enable increased density. This has already been accomplished with Resident Home Site lots and Youth Lots and will be necessary for any future affordable housing units.

“When large tracts [of open land] are purchased for conservation, designate some lots for affordable housing.”

- Chilmark Voter, Chilmark Master Plan Questionnaire, 2002.

The relative lack of public transportation and year-round infrastructure will impact what type of affordable housing is suitable for Chilmark. According to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) guidelines, an HPP should offer a mix of housing, consistent

with community a needs that: (a) Is affordable to households at or below 80% AMI (\$66,720), and more than 80% but not more than 150% AMI; (b) Provides for a range of housing, including rental, homeownership, and other occupancy arrangements, if any, for families, individuals, persons with special needs, and the elderly; and (c) Is feasible within the housing market in which they will be situated.¹⁰ Chilmark currently offers a wide range of homeownership opportunities for those between 80%-150% AMI and therefore could benefit from the creation of affordable housing for those earning at or below 80% AMI.

¹⁰ Department of Housing and Community Development, “Guidelines, Housing Production Plans (HPP),” December 2014.

Housing Goals

If approved by the town and accepted by its voters, this HPP will provide a roadmap for the town to help meet its 10% affordable housing goal. This HPP has been created to work in accord with, and not replace, existing local housing initiatives such as the Youth Lot, Resident Home Site, Accessory Apartment bylaw and Rental Assistance Program, all of which are popular in the town. Chilmark's housing goals include:

- To promote affordable housing consistent with town needs and be part of an island-wide effort to create adequate housing for the island community.
- To produce a total of 35 affordable housing opportunities over the next 10 years by using town-owned land, existing homes and contributing, where possible, to other towns' affordable housing initiatives that would count toward Chilmark's subsidized housing inventory (SHI).
- To produce 10 affordable rental units on town-owned land over the next 10 years.
- To promote a "smart growth" approach to affordable housing development that provides lasting housing solutions for future, as well as current needs, minimizes density, and preserves open space and rural character in the town.
- To encourage 25 homeowners to take advantage of the Accessory Apartment bylaw as a way to reinforce the town's inventory of subsidized housing.
- To develop the regulatory process and permitting necessary to achieve these goals.

By creating 35 affordable housing opportunities and raising the total number of affordable, year-round units to 42, the town will have achieved its goal of 10% of the 418 year-round homes that currently exist in Chilmark. It also should be noted that the town may reserve up to 70% of its affordable units in any new development for those who have a connection to Chilmark, as defined by the Commonwealth and referred to as "community preference" units.

The addition of rental units will help Chilmark maintain a reliable stock of affordable housing well into the future. Unlike other housing initiatives in the town, rental units will always be included as part of the SHI and their affordability status will never expire. This is important as available land becomes more scarce and housing needs more acute.

Summary of Strategies

This HPP continues Chilmark’s tradition of providing housing opportunities with the goal of creating year-round workforce rental units for individuals and families. This population includes those who work in education, healthcare, town management, public safety, small business and building trades. These areas are the backbone of the year-round economy. The timeline of the proposed plan is 10 years, with an average of 2 units produced per year. As the town moves forward, there are resources essential to good planning through the expertise of the Martha’s Vineyard Commission and the Dukes County Regional Housing Authority as well as data and strategies in 3 documents: The Island Plan, the MV Housing Needs Assessment and Zoning Analysis.

Town Action	Year	Type of Unit	# of Units	Location	SHI Eligible
Youth Lot bylaw	1976-present	Ownership	30+	Various	No
Resident Home Site	2005-present	Ownership/ Rental	14	Pasture Road, Middleline Road and Nabs Corner	3 units are eligible
Dukes County Rental Assistance Program	2003	Rental	4	Various	4 units are eligible
Accessory Apartment bylaw	2015	Rental	0	Various	Yes
FUTURE GOALS					
Make town owned property available for affordable housing	2018-2028	*Rental	10	Peaked Hill	All 10 would be eligible
Create more rental opportunities through the Accessory Apartment bylaw	2018-	*Rental	25+	Various	At least 25 would be eligible
Support the production of housing in other towns that would be included in Chilmark’s SHI	2018-2028	*Ownership/Rental	TBD- would be part of an island-wide HPP	Other towns	All would be eligible
Total					42

* These proposed rental units will bring the total number of Chilmark’s SHI eligible units to 42. To maintain a sustainable inventory of affordable housing opportunities, Chilmark should seek to maintain at least 25 rental units through the accessory apartment bylaw. In addition, the town should also participate in an island-wide affordable housing effort and explore ways that it can help other towns produce housing that would qualify as part of Chilmark’s subsidized housing inventory (SHI).