

## **Chilmark 2010 Community Development Strategy: DRAFT**

Chilmark is a community of 971 year-round residents located on the Island of Martha's Vineyard, Dukes County, Massachusetts. Known for its rolling hills, sweeping roadside vistas, stonewalls, rural landscapes and fishing village, Chilmark has all the advantages of small town living. The town values its historic structures, seashore, ponds, streams, wetlands, open fields, farms, and working harbor. To grow sustainably, the town must integrate protection of these sensitive environmental resources with responsible development of residential and commercial areas, and care for the physical and economic well being of all citizens.

Chilmark has produced this planning document to guide the development of its community, in concert with our Island neighbors. The six towns on the Island of Martha's Vineyard have long been committed to regional planning. Created in 1974, the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) is charged with safeguarding the Island's "natural, historical, scientific, and cultural" characteristics from inappropriate or harmful development while at the same time promoting sound local economies. In 2010, the MVC published the Island Plan that was a culmination of comprehensive planning with community input from the six Island towns.

Chilmark along with the five other municipalities on Martha's Vineyard seek to implement sustainable growth strategies in four areas: open space, housing, transportation and economic development. This Community Development Strategy centers on these four concentrations and contains input from numerous constituencies as well as planning documents and other studies. This document draws on the guidance of the 1985 Master Plan (as amended in 1992, 2002, and 2007), the 1996 Open Space Plan that are continually reviewed and currently in the process of being updated. The Board of Selectmen solicited the input from the Affordable Housing Committee, in addition to the Dukes County Regional Housing Authority and the Martha's Vineyard Commission. The guidance from the planning documents in addition to the input from local and regional boards was essential to produce the 2010 Chilmark Community Development Strategy which will be reviewed and updated annually.

### **Background:**

Economic Development encompasses many regional issues that affect the island of Martha's Vineyard. Issues such as housing, transportation, infrastructure, and the environment all play a role in the Island's ability to attract and sustain businesses, tourists, and the cultural continuity of the community. Economic Development and Affordable Housing are two interrelated and fundamental concerns on the Vineyard. Much of the local economy is driven by seasonal residents and visitors but in order for the Island to retain its economic vitality it is imperative that the Island preserve and protect its natural resources and the environment in addition to providing safe, decent, and affordable housing rental and homeownership options for its workforce.

Today seasonal residents (second homeowners) and hundreds of thousands of short-term visitors come to the island attracted by the unique natural, historical, and cultural values that define the beauty and character of Martha's Vineyard. As a seasonal and vacation destination, the number of people on the Island changes dramatically from the peak season to the off season. It is estimated that the year-round population of almost 15,000 (US Census 2000) swells to about 75,000 during the peak summer months of July and August.

The fact that 44% of the Island's housing stock is occupied year-round is testament to the tremendous demand for seasonal homes in a highly desirable vacation and retirement destination. This strong demand equates to high housing costs. The Island's median home sale prices from

1997 – 2006 more than tripled from \$205,000 to \$695,000. While the economic recession caused the median sale price to dip to about \$615,000 in 2009, this price would still require a purchaser to have an income of \$125,000. That is more than twice the Vineyard's median income of \$57,553 (2000 US Census). According to the 2008 Economic Profile for Martha's Vineyard, the average wages of year-round residents was 27% below the state's average, while according to a 2008 Cost of Living Study by the MVC, the overall cost of living on the Vineyard is about 70% higher than the national average and 26% higher than Boston. The simple fact is the second home buyers can out bid year-round residents for housing. The affordability gap is still too wide for those seeking to enter the Vineyard Housing Market. Thus lending credibility to the argument that the Island's housing problem is not a shortage of supply but a crisis of affordability.

The driving force of the island's economic base is the second homeowner. Vineyard towns are financially dependent on seasonal residents and second homeowners because they pay property taxes but do not require the most costly of services - education. However visitors do require higher levels of some town services, emergency services in particular. The extreme fluctuations from peak season to the winter season place severe strains on the Island's infrastructure facilities for water, sewer, solid waste, and especially the Island's road network. The tourist and seasonal nature of the Vineyard poses significant challenges to the Island towns to be able to balance the needs of a growing (and aging) year-round population while accommodating the needs of a seasonal population.

### **Objective One: Open Space and Recreation**

The Chilmark Open Space and Recreation Plan identified 146 acres of the town as protected open space. The major focus of the town moving forward will be the establishment and protection of buffer zones between developed areas and open space, including public access to waterways and roadside green belts. Water quality is a key issue and the town is dedicated to protecting surface water, watersheds, and public wells zones through conservation protection and education of the public on issues such as nitrogen loading, run off, Title V, and management of vegetation and invasive species. These programs will continue under the direction of the Wetlands Protection Act and Chilmark Wetlands Protection By-law. The town has identified sensitive parcels for additional conservation protection, including open space in under served areas.

Current work with the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank, Martha's Vineyard Commission, Dukes Conservation District, Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group, Martha's Vineyard Agricultural Society, and private land owners include:

- A. Develop Management Plan to address invasive species in Squibnocket Pond
- B. Continue to support and work with the Squibnocket Pond District Advisory Committee and Chilmark Pond Association to review development projects in nitrogen sensitive watersheds.
- C. Continue to provide town funding to participate in the Massachusetts Estuaries Project for Tisbury Great Pond and eventually Squibnocket and Menemsha Ponds will be added to the study.
- D. Evaluate capacity of the Chilmark Pond Sewer System
- E. Continue to provide town funding for Shellfish Propagation Program and Martha's Vineyard Shellfish Group
- F. Continue to support trial mussel farm off of coast of Chilmark
- G. Continue to support the Dukes County and Menemsha Commercial Fisheries and all their programs
- H. Strengthen the viability of local agriculture and sustainable food systems. Consider adopting a Right to Farm By-law
- I. Continue to support groups such as the Dukes Conservation District, Water Alliance, and Agricultural Alliance.
- J. Develop bike paths connecting existing paths in West Tisbury and Aquinnah to

- Chilmark. Utilize paths as a safe alternative transportation system.
- K. Addition of roads to the Special Ways District of Critical Planning Concern as developed by the MVC. This designation will expand protections for historic multi-use pathways linking island towns.

*Sustainable Development Principles: Protect Land and Eco-systems, Use Natural Resources Wisely, Plan Regionally.*

### **Objective Two: Housing**

In recent years, the towns and non-profit organizations have had great success in addressing various segments of Island's housing needs. In the year 2000, a very successful community housing forum helped catalyze significant public interest in housing affordability and resulted in the creation of several community housing organizations. Since 2001, there are more than 20 organizations and committees committed to addressing the Island's housing needs. There have been two housing needs assessment studies. Over the last 25 years, the towns and non-profit housing entities have created 608 subsidized housing (rental and homeownership) units on Martha's Vineyard.

Much has been accomplished within the last five years. There are now more housing options for working people that didn't exist a few years ago. But while there are more market and subsidized rental and ownership opportunities available, many households are unable to take advantage of these opportunities because of the economic recession. With the current economic recession and growing number of foreclosures, the demand for housing those earning less than 80% of the Area Median Income has become much greater along with a small but growing homeless population. Many individuals and families have had incomes reduced or are now unstable, therefore, those individuals are unable to meet lenders' and potential landlords' requirements. This is especially true for those with fixed, or with low and moderate incomes that are in increasingly distressing situations trying to meet monthly housing payments, childcare costs, and basic life needs on Martha's Vineyard not to mention needed critical home repairs and septic improvements.

The challenge for working people with lower means to purchasing a single-family home is further exacerbated by limited housing options. Ninety-one percent of dwellings are detached, single-family homes, creating a shortage of rental housing and of multi-unit housing to serve the needs of younger people starting out and older residents who can no longer maintain a home. Current zoning allows multi-family development on only a small part of the Island with very limited infrastructure for water and wastewater. The town of Chilmark does not have a public water or sewer system with the exception of the Menemsha Fishing Village. Development within the town has been at a low density and the probability of the town installing water or sewer systems is highly unlikely. The majority homes are on private wells and private septic systems and the on-going maintenance and upkeep of these septic systems are not only costly but also poses serious environmental impact to the Island's soul source aquifer for drinking water while threatening the health of the coastal ponds.

Continuing effort is still needed to allow the Vineyard to respond to the pressing housing needs that are simply not met by the private market. This should favor creating more affordable housing units, either with existing housing stock or through new construction. The Vineyard should also look for ways to help affordable housing projects, deal with zoning regulations, the costs of meeting the wastewater treatment, energy efficiency, home and septic repairs in addition to other objectives identified by Island towns.

Participating in the Community Development Block Grant program for affordable housing rehabilitation has become a priority for the town of Chilmark. Income eligible residents can apply

through the program to rectify code and safety violations in their homes. A true advantage of the program is the ability to rehabilitate existing housing stock which is in keeping with sustainable growth objectives espoused by the town. The CDBG's Childcare subsidy programs have enabled many Island families to continue working or seek employment opportunities which have had a direct benefit to sustaining the year-round workforce and the Island's economy. The Town of Chilmark recognizes the importance of supporting low and moderate income residents to ensure future sustainability within its workforce and a growing elderly population. The town has done and will continue to do the following to promote affordable housing:

- A. Encourage the town to establish a Septic Repair Program
- B. Participate in DHCD's Community Development Block Grant Rehabilitation Program
- C. Participate in DHCD's Community Development Block Grant Childcare Subsidy Program
- D. Continue with the development of Middle Line Road Project which is a town initiated housing project. The project consists of 12 units: 6 rental and 6 homeownership units.
- E. Support the newly created Chilmark Municipal Affordable Housing Trust Fund
- F. Continue to support the town's Resident Assistance Program
- G. Continue to review and update Chilmark's Zoning By-laws in order to promote affordable housing
- H. Continue to provide financial support for the Administrative Services of the Dukes County Regional Housing Authority through CPA Funds
- I. Continue to provide financial support for the Dukes County Regional Housing Authority's Rental Assistance Program through CPA funds
- J. Seek funds to update the 2005 Housing Needs Assessment Study.
- K. Continue to work with other Island towns, entities, the Dukes County Regional Housing Authority and the Martha's Vineyard Commission as well as other affordable housing groups to address the Island's affordable housing needs.

*Sustainable Development Principles: Expand Housing Opportunities, Advance Equity, Concentrate Development and Mixed Uses, Plan Regionally*

### **Objective Three: Economic Development**

Tourism and the second home industry is the Island's economic base. Therefore the town must formulate Economic Development strategies that support tourism and development/service sector industries without degrading the town's natural resources and rural character. The town of Chilmark has taken key steps in promoting the local economy sustainably in areas of aquaculture, commercial fishing, and farming. This includes providing residents with the support they need to actively participate in the workforce, such as childcare subsidies, and find ways to insure that there are adequate workers to support year-round and seasonal businesses.

The town has supported Island commercial fishermen by establishing the Dukes County/Menemsha Commercial Fishermen's Association. The Association is an advocacy group for local fishermen in dealing with state and federal fishing regulations as well as responsible for conducting education and out reach programs to the general public. The Chilmark in conjunction with West Tisbury is participating in a Trial Mussel Farm Program to cultivate mussels within town coastal waters off shore. The town has supported the preservation of active farmland through agricultural and conservation restrictions.

Since the recession, the unemployment rates for the past two winters ('09 and '10) have exceeded double digits which peaked in January 2010 at 13.4 percent exceeding Massachusetts' rate at 9.5 and the US's rate at 9.7 for that month. Island businesses struggle to cope with the current recession more acutely in areas of retail, construction, and hospitality because of the Vineyard's

visitor based economy. The spending habits of year-round, seasonal residents and visitors have changed dramatically. Chilmark has taken proactive steps to in response to the Island's rising unemployment rates and the demise of the construction industry.

Last year, the town sponsored a workshop with the Massachusetts Division of Capital Assets and Management (DCAM) in an effort to create job opportunities for Island contractors and sub-contractors. The town set a priority of hiring members of the local workforce and business community when opportunities arise particularly for Municipal Development Projects like the Middle Line Road Affordable Housing Project. The town is also seeking ways to assist working parents or those looking for employment with childcare subsidies.

It is important for the town to ensure it has adequate infrastructure for a growing year-round population. The town's water, solid waste, public facilities, and roads are placed under tremendous pressure during the summer months. The town's public facility buildings such as the town hall, police, fire, library, and school buildings are in or will need repairs and on-going maintenance as well as the town's road network. As mentioned previously, Chilmark does not have public water or sewer services. Chilmark and the entire Island is facing a critical problem protecting its water resources because of the nitrogen loading primarily from residential septic systems. One option to better manage the nitrogen loading problem is to establish a Septic Repair Program.

The Chilmark Planning Board has also pursued an interest in reconciling protection of the town's rural character with the promotion of emerging alternative energy generation technology projects. The town is actively working with an island-wide work group to create regulations for the development of wind turbines while safeguarding nearby residents and significant community resources. An alternative energy project is being pursued through the Up-Island Regional School District. The Planning Board has created an Energy Subcommittee and the town is represented on the Cape Light Compact (CLC). The Cape Light Compact has been instrumental in providing stable energy prices to residents of Chilmark. CLC's energy efficiency programs such as energy audits, lighting, and energy retrofits in town buildings, rebates for the purchase of energy efficient appliances, and conservation education in the schools has resulted in a town-wide energy savings. To ensure economic and environmental viability of town residents, particularly those with low and moderate incomes, the town will continue to expand these initiatives. The Energy Subcommittee continues to promote the expansion of energy efficiency and renewable energy technology in town buildings, town affordable housing projects i.e. Middle Line Road project, and within the community at large.

*Sustainable Development Principles: Concentrate Development, Mixed Uses, Plan Regionally, Use Natural Resources Wisely, Increase Job and Business Opportunities*

#### **Objective Four: Transportation**

As an Island, Martha's Vineyard faces unique transportation challenges. By continuing our partnership with our neighboring towns, Chilmark can resolve some of these issues. The Martha's Vineyard Regional Transit Authority (VTA) provides transit services to the six Island towns and has surpassed ridership in excess of 1 million passengers this past year. The VTA also offers year-round specialty medical transport and weekly van service off-island to Boston area medical services. Voters in Chilmark expressed interest in expanding the VTA routes to include Middle Road and Tabor House Road to have town-wide coverage of public transit.

The Island Councils on Aging have also worked to alleviate transportation issues for senior citizens by offering Taxi service from the Woods Hole Ferry Terminal to medical facilities in Falmouth, Mashpee, and Sandwich. The town has also worked to alleviate traffic congestion and parking needs during the summer by considering parking alternatives in the Peaked Hill area. The town in

the past has considered expanding its bike paths to encourage non-vehicular transportation. The town also works with the VTA and MVC on regional transportation issues through the Joint Transportation Committee.

*Sustainable Development Principles: Plan Regionally, Concentrate Development, Provide Transportation Choices, Use Natural Resources Wisely, Advance Equity*  
Development Priorities:

1. Secure Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Funds to assist income eligible homeowners to make necessary repairs to their homes while retaining the existing affordable housing stock.
2. Seek CDBG grant funds to assist income eligible residents with needed childcare costs while providing a more stable year-round workforce.
3. Continue to work on plans to development Middle Line Road Affordable Housing Project.
4. Continue to work with state agencies like the MA Division of Capital Assets and Management to promote Island economy.
5. Continue to support the town's Shellfish Propagation Program
6. Curtail nitrogen loading into Squibnocket and Menemsha Ponds by encouraging the town to create Septic Repair Program. Continue to participate in the Massachusetts Estuaries Project
7. Support the Trial Mussel Farm Project
8. Support the Dukes County / Menemsha Commercial Fisheries
9. Update and revise zoning by-laws to promote Affordable Housing and Historic Preservation
10. Establish advisory committee to guide plan's treatment of natural resource preservation, water quality, coastal hazards, public access, beach access, shell fishing, erosion and beach nourishment.