

Report on Chilmark Master Plan Survey of Town Boards, Committees, Departments

The Planning Board Subcommittee produced a survey in 2023 as a step in the process of the Master Plan update. The survey's purpose was to gain insight to a key subsample of Chilmark, employees and volunteers who serve on Town Boards, Committees and Departments. The scope of the survey was to gather qualitative information to inform next steps.

The Planning Board is grateful to participants in the survey and to the Town Hall community for all they do to promote the well-being of Chilmark.

Background

The Town's Master Plan was completed in 1985 and important supplements were added in 1990 and 2000/2003. In 2016, the Planning Board completed a thorough study and Master Plan document for Menemsha.

The Chilmark Planning Board formed a subcommittee tasked with updating the Town's Master Plan, an important document that forms a basis for decision-making regarding the long-term physical development of the Town.

The Planning Board has some funding to hire a consultant for the next steps of information gathering for the planned update. Warrant Article 24 at the 2022 Annual Town Meeting secured \$20,000 for a consultant. The Martha's Vineyard Commission has offered to help find a consultant and grant opportunities.

It is hoped that the findings presented here will help inform the consultant who will be selected to work with the Planning Board to create visioning sessions in the coming summer months and a town-wide survey in the autumn of 2024.

Method:

The first step was to create a survey and reach out to the Town's 49 Boards, Committees and Town Departments to gather input. Eighteen (18) entities responded to the survey.

The survey looked at areas of interest, reflected in the four questions:

- 1) A snapshot description
- 2) Key issues or challenges
- 3) Short-term and long-term goals and to identify those that involve collaborative efforts with others
- 4) Request for topics to include in a broader survey.

One-hundred forty (140) distinct responses were tallied and studied from the 18 surveys returned. The focus was on responses from questions 2 and 3. [Note: Information from questions 1 and 4 will be addressed in future information gathering projects.]

Once the responses were received, the method used was qualitative content analysis, to seek themes and classification of responses:

- 1) Prepare and organize the responses
- 2) Review and explore responses
- 3) Create initial codes
- 4) Review, revise and combine
- 5) Present themes.

The subcommittee tallied these responses and established five groupings of responses. The comments reflect thoughts of the respondents, not the research team. These responses represent themes which some key stakeholders feel is important. Selected quotes of responses are included here.

See Appendices for further details.

- A. Timeline
- B. Complete list of the Boards, Committees, Departments contacted.
- C. Letter requesting participation
- D. Survey
- E. Spreadsheet of responses

Considerations:

It is a qualitative study, conducted to examine the responses of a subsegment of Chilmarkers. The subsample is Town Hall employees and volunteers.

It is hoped the directional trends in responses will provide guidance for the development of larger studies and surveys of the community. Because of the small sample size, and the subsample studied, findings are neither projectable nor representative of a wider sample.

Results: Summary and Detailed Findings

Summary:

Chilmark Town Hall Employees and Volunteers are devoted to the well-being of our Town, now and in the future. They wish to improve governance and to preserve the town character. They feel that there are challenges ahead, specifically in the increasing access to information and procedures for the community and in the workplace. They see the need to address climate change, energy use, housing for community members and workers. Concerns about short-term rentals were mentioned.

Their thoughtful comments reflect a strong concern for doing the best job possible of serving Chilmark, working within Town and on island-wide issues.

Detailed Findings:

Comments were grouped into subjective categories by the subcommittee. Some comments fall into more than one of the five categories. Four fall outside of the five categories.

The five groupings with subcategories were:

- 1) Improving Governance
 - a. Consistent application of bylaws
 - b. Efficiency of online forms and procedures
 - c. Digitization and technology
 - d. Interdepartmental collaboration
 - e. Staffing of employees and volunteers
 - f. Updating Zoning by-laws and regulations
 - g. Governance and Space needs
 - h. Commercial Considerations

- 2) Preserving Character
 - a. Town Character
 - b. Preservation
 - c. Infrastructure/Building
 - d. Long term planning
 - e. Commercial Considerations
- 3) Increasing Community Access
 - a. Community Outreach
 - b. Island Collaboration
- 4) Considering Climate and Energy Use
 - a. Climate Change
 - b. Infrastructure/Buildings
 - c. Sustainability
 - d. Energy
 - e. Town owned Electric Vehicles
- 5) Addressing Housing Issues
 - a. Housing
 - b. Short-term rentals
- 6) Uncategorized, mentioned once
 - a. Access-Emergency Services-Public health
 - b. Public restrooms
 - c. Waste stream management
 - d. Aging populations
 - e. Education

A selection of quotes by respondents include:

Site Review Committee: “The challenge in keeping the rural character of Chilmark while making it safer and more functional, specifically in the center of town.”

Finance Committee: “To preserve for future generations of the Chilmark our predecessors have left for us; For example, Menemsha Harbor’s deeded legacy as a commercial fishing port; a rural farming community where farmers can still make a living farming; a vibrant year-round community with a robust school population (and one of) all ages; a summer community which respects and enhances the Town’s values.”

Zoning Board of Appeals: “Shortage of Housing needs to be addressed, short and long term; less restriction on accessory apartments and detached bedrooms; undersized lots to be used for affordable housing.”

Police Department: “Like most jobs on the island, we are affected by the lack of affordable housing.”

Cemetery Commission: “Upgrade our records, switch to digital.”

Board of Health: “Projects in town are getting more complex especially with the majority of “basic” parcels already built upon. We are seeing more need for variances due to land constraints, and, as such, the need for consultation with town counsel is increasing. What we are charged to oversee or work in unison on is also getting more complicated and time consuming—water quality in coastal ponds, cyanobacteria, tick-borne diseases, recycling, composting, nitrogen, fertilizers, etc.”

Energy Committee: “To develop a long-term energy plan for municipal building and other infrastructure that emphasizes the transition of our energy system to meet The Commonwealth’s and our Town’s energy goals over the next two decades; to inform and engage the Citizens of Chilmark in these efforts—as a trusted source of energy-related information and especially the financial implications of carrying out our mission.”

Conclusions:

This report is a meaningful first step in the wider study of current Town thoughts and feelings. These data, when shared with the consultant, provide a steppingstone. The broader groupings offer areas of concern, which will be considered when developing discussion points and future survey questions. The insights reflect a town governing structure that is committed to both a wider Town way of life and a governance structure that is transparent and efficient.

Projected Next Steps and Timeline:

April and May 2024: Summary Report presented to Planning Board and then Select Board.

June and July 2024: Search for and select consultant.

August and September 2024: Visioning Sessions.

October and November 2024: Develop survey for town residents, taxpayers and voters.

Please contact the Planning Board or Master Plan Subcommittee should you have questions or comments. You may contact Jennifer Christy at (508)-645-2107 or by email at jchristy@chilmarkma.gov

Planning Board Subcommittee:

Peter Cook, Catherine Thompson, Ann Wallace, Janet Weidner

Appendix A:

Timeline:

1. May-September 2023: Subcommittee met twice monthly to develop survey and method.
2. August 28, 2023: Survey and letter submitted to and approved by Planning Board.
3. September 12, 2023: Survey approval by Select Board.
4. October 3, 2023: Surveyed emailed to 33 Boards, Committees and Departments.
5. October 16, 2023: and January 12, 2024: Follow-up reminders sent to those who hadn't responded. Intermittent reminders in person.
6. October 2023 to February 2024: 18 Responses were received, a 50% return rate.
7. October 2023 to February 2024: Collated responses via qualitative content analysis and create broad groups of responses.

Appendix B:

Complete list of the Boards, Committees, and Departments contacted:

Departments:

Accountant
Animal Control Officer
Assessors
Building Inspection & Zoning Enforcement
Chilmark School
Collector of Taxes
Constable
Emergency Management
Moderator
Facilities
Fire Department
Harbormaster
Highway Department
Police Department
Shellfish Department
Surveyor of Wood, Lumber & Bark
Town Administrator
Town Clerk
Town Counsel
Treasurer
Tri-Town Ambulance

Boards & Committees:

Beach Committee
Board of Assessors
Board of Health
Cable TV Advisory Board
Cemetery Commission
Chilmark Energy Committee
Chilmark Free Public Library Trustees
Community Center Advisory Committee
Community Preservation Committee
Conservation Commission
Fence Viewers
Finance Advisory Committee
Harbor Advisory Committee
Historical Commission
Housing Committee
Human Resources Board
Martha's Vineyard Land Bank Town Advisory Board
Molly Flender Affordable Housing Trust
Parks & Recreation Committee
Planning Board
Registrars
Select Board
Shellfish Advisory Committee
Site Review Committee
Squibnocket Pond District Advisory Committee
Tri-Town Ambulance Committee
Up Island Council on Aging (UICOA)
Zoning Board of Appeals

Appendix C:

Master Plan Survey Letter:

CHILMARK MASTER PLAN 2023 UPDATE

SURVEY FOR CHILMARK BOARDS/COMMITTEES/DEPARTMENTS

The Chilmark Planning Board is updating Chilmark's Master Plan. The first Chilmark Master Plan was published in 1985. Supplements to the Chilmark Master Plan were developed in 1990 and 2000/2003. The generally-agreed-upon "best practice" for keeping master plans current is to revisit them every five years or so; clearly, an update of Chilmark's Master Plan is due.

A Master Plan guides a community's policy development, resource allocation and decision-making. It helps identify the community character and what's meaningful to preserve. Section 81D of the Massachusetts General Laws states "A planning board established in any city or town under section 81A shall make a master plan of such city or town or parts thereof as said board may deem advisable and from time to time may extend or perfect such a plan." (<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/Part1/TitleVII/Chapter41/Section81D>)

Another way to think of a Master Plan is that it is a marker in time, a way of looking at our community with consistency and vision. The 1985 Master Plan is our foundation. However, things have changed. With a new Master Plan we may ask "If we knew then what we know now, what would we have done differently?" and "What would we like Chilmark to be like in twenty years?"

We are now looking to kick off the effort again. The questionnaire here is the first step in a comprehensive process. What do we expect the process to look like? Through a series of surveys and public forums, we will identify:

- Key issues facing our community (the options and opportunities they pose);
- Goals for the future (near and long term);
- Actions to achieve those goals.

As a first step, we are asking for input from town boards, committees and departments. The Planning Board wants to understand the issues and perspectives of the variety of town entities that work to make Chilmark the special place it is. That's where you come in. Your input is essential. We want to know what is working and what is not working.

Please respond to four (4) survey questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

We ask that each entity (Board, Committee, Department) submit one set of responses.

Please provide responses to our administrative support, Jennifer Christy, at jchristy@chilmarkma.gov.

Thank you for providing necessary input during this important Town Master Plan process.

Chilmark Planning Board Master Plan Subcommittee

Janet L. Weidner, Chairperson
Ann Wallace
Catherine A. Thompson
Peter B. Cook

Appendix D:

Master Plan Survey Questions:

CHILMARK MASTER PLAN SURVEY

OCTOBER 2023

Dept/Board/Committee Name

QUESTIONS:

1. One aspect of a Master Plan is to develop a snapshot of the town government structure. Please provide a brief description of your Board, Committee or Department. What are its primary responsibilities?
2. Please identify key issues or challenges affecting your board, committee or department.
3. Please describe achievable goals and objectives that your board, committee or department could strive for in the next five years (short term) and the next twenty years (long term). Identify those areas that require local and regional collaborative efforts with other boards, committees and entities.
4. We are developing a broader survey for town residents and property owners in 2024. Please provide any questions or topics which you feel we should include in the wider survey.

Appendix E:

Master Plan - Boards and Committee Survey Responses

	Assessors Board of	Beach Committee	Building Department	Cemetery Commission	CCC Advisory Com.	Energy Committee	Finance Committee	Harbor Adv. Committee	Health - Board of	Historical Commission	Housing Committee	Human Resources Board	Library Trustees	Police Department	Site Review Committee	Squibn. Pd District A. C.	Up-Island C. on Aging	Zoning Board of Appeals	TOTALS
Interdepartmental Collaboration	1		1	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	1	1	1		1		1	14
Island Collaboration	1		1	1	1	1			1		1		1	1		1	1	1	12
Long-term Planning				1	1	1	1	1	1		1		1	1	1	1			11
Community Outreach			1	1		1			1	1	1		1	1		1			9
Staffing-employee & vol.		1	1						1	1		1	1	1		1	1		9
Town Character				1		1	1	1	1	1					1			1	8
Infrastructure-building				1	1	1	1	1					1	1			1		8
Climate Change		1		1		1			1						1	1		1	7
Preservation				1		1	1	1	1	1					1				7
Housing							1				1		1	1			1	1	6
Digitization-technology			1	1		1			1				1				1		6
Zoning Bylaws,Other Regs.- Update			1					1	1		1					1		1	6
Commercial Considerations			1				1	1	1	1									5
Menemsha							1	1	1									1	4
Town Center					1		1		1									1	4
Efficiency-online forms & procedures			1						1			1							3
Space Needs				1									1	1					3
Traffic								1							1			1	3
Short-Term Rentals											1							1	2
Consistent Application of Bylaws			1															1	2
Access-Emergency Svs.(Public Health)									1								1		2
Energy						1							1						2
Sustainability						1													1
Governance												1							1
Education																		1	1
Miscellaneous			Town Elec. Vehicle		Public Restr'ns				Aging Pop., Waste Stream Mgt.										

