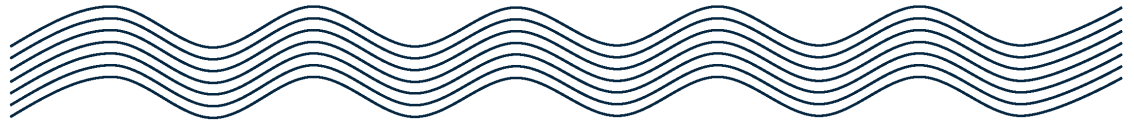




MVC Quarterly

Planning News of the Martha's Vineyard Commission



MVC Celebrates 50 Years

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the MVC, which Islanders voted to create on March 14, 1974. State legislation approved that summer formally established the MVC as the Island's regional planning agency, with unique regulatory powers over the land and waters of Martha's Vineyard.

Anniversary events this year include MVC@50, a monthlong exhibit at Featherstone Center for the Arts in Oak Bluffs exploring the Commission's past and present, including major milestones and archival material. All are welcome to an opening reception Sunday, March 10, from 4-6PM; and a special event Thursday, March 14, from 5-7PM to honor the many Islanders who have participated over the years.

The state bill creating the MVC provided an innovative alternative to the Islands Trust Bill, first proposed in 1972, which would have established Federal oversight over all development on the Vineyard and Nantucket. Based on extensive outreach with the Island community, the state bill aimed to preserve the Vineyard's "unique natural, historical, ecological, scientific, cultural, and other values" through regional planning and regulation. Islanders voted overwhelmingly to endorse the bill, which was signed in 1974 by Governor Francis Sargent and amended in 1977.

The new Commission spent much of its first year working with the community to formalize how the new planning and regulatory functions would be carried out. It also reincorporated the Dukes County Planning and Economic Development Commission, absorbing most of its staff and expanding its programs within the context of the new mission.

Other anniversary events this year will include a gathering to commemorate the signing of the legislation in July, and an exhibit at the Martha's Vineyard Museum in October. A series of oral histories with former staff, Commissioners, and others is also in the works.

Getting to 100% Renewable

An MVC report issued this month provides a comprehensive overview of the Island's energy landscape and a path toward eliminating carbon emissions by 2050.

Created by MVC Energy Planner Kate Warner, Getting to 100% Renewable highlights key steps to address the Island's goal of transitioning to renewable energy by 2040, and the state's requirement to decarbonize by 2050. The report draws from several Island groups and resources focused on climate change mitigation, including MVC Climate Action Task Force, Vineyard Power, Vineyard Sustainable Energy Committee, the Vineyard Climate Action Plan, and the Island Climate Action Network.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and shifting to renewable sources will require a major shift in how the Island powers its buildings and vehicles, and where it gets its energy. But as the report notes, "It also presents a huge opportunity to change our community for the better. By achieving 100% renewable, we can also have cleaner air, healthier people, and a more equitable and prosperous community for everyone."

The full report will be available on the MVC website, or by request at the MVC building. For more info, contact Kate Warner at warner@mvcommission.org.



MVC staff in 1976. Back, left to right: Bill Wilcox, Bob Komives, Simone Prada, Norman Friedman, Michael Wild, Marty Jaffe. Front, left to right: Zack Zandler, Karen (Belisle) Child, unidentified (likely Nick Nichols). Photographer unknown.



MVC staff in 2023. Back, left to right: Rich Saltzberg, Adam Turner, Bill veno. Next row (standing), left to right: Sheri Caseau, Liz Durkee, Kate Warner, Chris Seidel, Maggie Craig. Seated, left to right: Lucy Morrison, Mike Mauro, Curt Schroeder, Alex Elvin, Laura Silber, Dan Doyle. Photo by Lilian Robinson.

Climate Action News

2024 Climate Action Fair Highlights Resilient Landscapes

This year's Climate Action Fair in May will focus on landscaping practices, with a goal of providing simple, specific actions that anyone can take to help make the Island more climate-resilient.

All the Island's land is currently stressed by climate impacts, including rising temperatures and changes in precipitation. The use of native plantings as opposed to lawns is particularly valuable as a landscaping practice, since native plants require less maintenance and promote more biodiversity than a typical lawn.

The fair will also focus on the "landscape of life," including the human health impacts of climate change, climate-friendly farming and energy efficiency, waste reduction, the economic landscape, and renewable energy.

The Climate Action Fair will take place Sunday, May 19, from 12 to 4PM at the Agricultural Hall in West Tisbury. Portuguese translators will be present, and handouts will be offered in both English and Portuguese.

Land-Use Management Updates

Barnstable County Floodplain Specialist Shannon Hulst met with Island Planning Boards and Conservation Commissions in February to offer guidance on updating the Island's floodplain and wetland bylaws. Hosted by MVC Climate Change Coordinator Liz Durkee, the meeting focused on how towns can revise their bylaws to address current climate impacts and science. Ms. Hulst offered a menu of options for strengthening the town bylaws.

A new MVC Flood Risk Policy for the review of Developments of Regional Impact (DRIs) is also in progress. Using the latest MA Coast Flood Risk Model (MC-FRM) from the Woods Hole Group, UMass Boston, and MassDOT, the policy identifies areas at risk of flooding through 2070, and lists specific activities that are either encouraged or discouraged in those areas. A final draft is expected in the spring.

Both the town bylaw changes and MVC policy are identified as action items in the 2022 Climate Action Plan (CAP), which aims in part to protect the Island's biodiversity, natural resources, and public safety through better zoning and land-use practices.

High School Students Utilize Climate Action Plan

Liz met with science teacher Anna Cotton's Environmental Science Biosphere class at the regional high school in January to discuss the CAP and work with individual students on their projects. Each student chose an environmental challenge from the CAP to research, including causes, effects, and possible solutions.

Students or teachers seeking to learn more about the CAP may contact Liz Durkee at durkee@mvcommission.com.

MVC Launches Wildfire Awareness Website



Photo by Dan Doyle.

The MVC has published an interactive [Storymap website](#) that focuses on wildfire risk and mitigation on the Island. Created by MVC Special Projects Planner Dan Doyle, the website features information about recent fires, risk factors, and mitigation, including interactive maps, historical images, news coverage, and the latest MVC data.

The project follows up on the Community Wildfire Protection plan that the MVC completed with local and state partners in 2021, and is part of a larger effort to educate the Island public and help the Island become a fire-adapted community.

For more information, contact Dan Doyle at doyle@mvcommission.org.

New Plan Aims for Zero Roadway Fatalities

The MVC has joined with Regional Planning Agencies (RPAs) in Nantucket and Franklin Counties to develop Safety Action Plans for roadways. The RPAs will work with Kittleson & Associates over the next year to create a plan for each county, with a goal of completely eliminating roadway fatalities and serious injuries.

The partnership among RPAs will help ensure the plans use a rural lens in evaluating issues and identifying remedies. Each plan will include analyses of historical trends, existing conditions, and safety needs; and involve extensive input from the public. Based on this information, a set of projects and strategies, along with a timeline for implementation, will be developed. The plans will also increase each community's eligibility to receive funding for the recommended improvements.

Kittleson & Associates began examining crash data in February, and each RPA is working to establish a steering committee made up of regional stakeholders. Public outreach for the project is expected to begin in the spring.

Islanders Turn Out to Support Affordable Homes Act

Island Housing Planner Laura Silber joined more than a dozen Cape and Island housing advocates who traveled to the State House in January to support Gov. Maura Healey's Affordable Homes Act, which aims to direct \$4 billion toward affordable housing in the state.

Filed last October, the act would allow towns to collect a 2% transfer fee on some real estate transactions over \$1 million, which would be used to finance affordable housing, including (potentially) via the MV Housing Bank, which is also making its way through committee. Along with other measures, the act would also create a Seasonal Communities designation to provide additional funding sources and policy tools for resort communities like the Cape and Islands.

Dukes County Sheriff Robert Ogden, Island schools Assistant Superintendent John Stevens, Island Health Care Chief Public Health Officer Kathleen Samways, local real estate agents, and others testified in support of the act before the Joint Committee on Housing on Jan. 18. During her testimony, Silber asked that the legislation be amended to include a local option for the transfer fee to be paid by the buyer rather than the seller, in line with the original MV Housing Bank proposal in 2022. She also urged the senate to consider ways to publicly fund municipal workforce housing.

Cape and Islands Senator Julian Cyr, who has advocated for affordable and community housing in the district, highlighted the current housing landscape, where the median home price is now around \$1.4 million on the Vineyard and \$3.3 million on Nantucket.

Cyr had also met with the MVC Housing Action Task Force on Jan. 11 to discuss the pending legislation and answer questions. He was joined by his Chief of Staff, Kathleen Patron; and policy directors Eric Shupin and Ben Bryant of the MA Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). (Click [here](#) for a video of the meeting.)

The next steps for the Affordable Homes Act include further review by House and Senate committees, and possibly a legislative vote this summer. If approved at the state level, local adoption would then be voted on at town meetings. For updates on when and how to provide testimony on either of the proposed bills, visit cmvvhb.org.



Dukes County Sheriff Robert Ogden testifies in support of the Affordable Homes Act before the Joint Committee on Housing. Photo by Laura Silber.

Zoning Analysis and Housing Needs Assessment Updates

Barrett Planning Group has begun to update the MVC's 2014 Affordable and Community Housing Zoning Analysis for the Island towns. The project will include a revised analysis of each town's bylaws as they relate to housing, including how various policies have been enacted, and easy-to-reference model bylaws.

A team from Barrett met with the Joint Affordable Housing Group and town officials in February to discuss the project and collect input from the community. (Click [here](#) for a video of the meeting.) Owner and Managing Director Judi Barrett, who also attended the meeting, previously helped develop official Housing Production Plans for each Island town, and the Tisbury Master Plan.

The 2013 Martha's Vineyard Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) by Karen Sunnarborg Consulting, is also in the process of being updated. The new version, also by Sunnarborg, will provide extensive data and analysis to allow the Island to better quantify current housing needs and target solutions.

The updated HNA is expected in March, and the updated zoning analysis later in the spring. For more info, contact Laura Silber at silber@mvcommission.org.

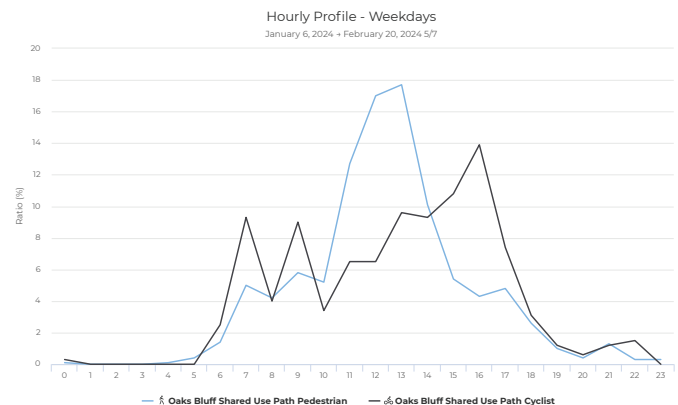
First Permanent Shared-Use Path Traffic Counter Installed Near Hospital

Even in the heart of winter, the Beach Road shared-use path (SUP) in Oak Bluffs saw significant use this year, with about 1,590 cyclists or pedestrians between Jan. 6 and Feb. 20. This is according to data from the MVC's first permanent SUP traffic counter, installed in January.

The counter is located in front of the Martha's Vineyard Hospital, on a new stretch of SUP constructed as part of the Beach Road project. According to the first round of data, about 75% of all users were pedestrians, and 25% cyclists. The peak day was Feb. 17, with 144 users, due largely to the MV Winter Classic 20-Miler and Amity Relay race.

MVC staff will continue to monitor the data this year. Depending on funding and logistics, additional SUP counters may be installed in the future.

For more info, contact Dan Doyle at doyle@mvcommission.org.



The first month of SUP data show that pedestrian traffic was generally busiest around noon, and bicycle traffic in the early evening.

Mapping and GIS Updates

Island Vegetation and Wildlife Corridors

The MVC is working with Thomson Environmental Consultants of England, Nantucket Conservation Foundation (NCF), and others to develop a comprehensive vegetation map for the Vineyard and Nantucket.

MVC GIS Coordinator Chris Seidel and NCF Research Program Supervisor Jen Karberg are managing the project, which will use 2021 aerial images along with 2020 data from the state Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP). The project will also maintain continuity with existing data from The Nature Conservancy. Ground-truthing will be performed by local conservation groups and the Woodwell Climate Research Center in Falmouth.

A related project with BiodiversityWorks to identify wildlife corridors (the landscapes wildlife passes through as it moves from one core habitat to another) is also in progress. The resulting map will be reviewed by local conservation groups in relation to flooding potential, and used to help identify climate-resilient ecosystems. (See sample at right.)

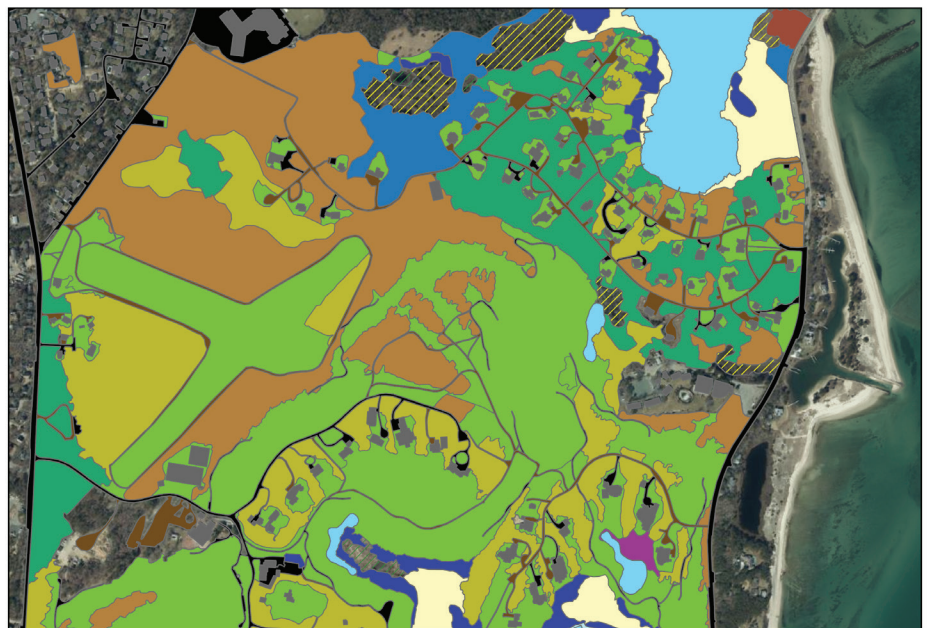
MVC Open Space Guideline Map

Among other projects, the MVC is also in the process of updating its Open Space Guideline Map, which was first established in 2006. Based on 23 factors such as soil type, flooding potential, and habitat designation, the map delineates areas of the Island according to their open space significance (exceptional, important, advisable, and suitable). The MVC's Open Space Policy, also from 2006, relies on the map for evaluating certain Developments of Regional Impact.

Although it uses the same methodology as in 2006, the revised map shows a moderate increase in exceptional and important open space, which corresponds in part to updated land-use designations at the local and state levels.

The Commission discussed a draft update at their meeting on Feb. 15 and is expected to vote on a final version in April.

Click [here](#) for more information and to compare the previous and revised maps.



Vegetation Communities (DRAFT; data still under development)

- Impervious (buildings and parking lots, but not surfaced roads)
- Roads (surfaced)
- Roads / Tracks (unsurfaced)
- Manicured Grasses
- ESTUARINE Coastal Salt Pond Community
- ESTUARINE Marine Intertidal Gravel/Sand Beach Community
- ESTUARINE Salt Marsh
- PALUSTRINE Shrub Swamp
- PALUSTRINE Shallow Emergent Marsh
- TERRESTRIAL Coastal Forest/Woodland (in deciduous woodlands)
- TERRESTRIAL Maritime Juniper Woodland/Shrubland (in coniferous woodlands)
- TERRESTRIAL Pitch Pine - Oak Forest/Woodland
- TERRESTRIAL Maritime Shrubland
- TERRESTRIAL Pitch Pine - Scrub Oak Community (may be > 25% pitch pine)
- TERRESTRIAL Maritime Dune Community
- TERRESTRIAL Sandplain Grassland

Biochar Project Expands Network

The MVC Biochar Fellowship, led by Maggie Craig, gave a flame-cap kiln demonstration at Native Earth Teaching Farm in February, using brush from storm blowover, prunings from landscapers and arborists, scrap wood from South Mountain Company, and invasives collected by the Biodiversity Works Invasive Plant Brigade. The farm will host other biochar demonstrations on March 16, and at the Climate Action Fair on May 19.

Batches of biochar are getting “charged” with nutrients in several ways: chicken feed and bedding, urine, fish fertilizer, and compost slurry. These techniques will be tested on calendula beds in the Island Grown Initiative orchard. (To donate clean five-gallon buckets, please contact Maggie at craig@mvcommission.org.)

Flame-cap kiln emissions and carbon sequestration data was presented to MassDEP, and the fellowship is exploring a potential forest thinning pilot project with Sheriff's Meadow Foundation and Friends of Manuel F. Correllus State Forest.

The fellowship is also exploring biochar in septic applications with the Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Test Center in Falmouth, where a urine diversion pilot project is underway; and it visited Bob Wells's New England Biochar in Eastham to see a mid-scale biochar retort kiln that can liquify smoke into wood vinegar, a non-toxic pest treatment. Several landscapers on the Cape use Wells's biochar-compost mix in lieu of fertilizer.

Like most non-chemical agricultural techniques, biochar has roots in indigenous wisdom and technology. Elders of the Aquinnah Wampanoag Tribe are providing insight into the history of fire on the Cape and Islands. Linda Coombs, historian and former program director of the Aquinnah Cultural Center, described how the Wampanoag used fire to create habitat for hunting, clear understory and support fire-dependent plants. Her cousin Kristina Hook recalls their family gathering annually to burn the garden, and her grandfather burning forest huckleberry and blueberry patches regularly.