

# PRELIMINARY PLANNING PROGRAM FOR OAK BLUFFS

## Overview

This booklet has been prepared for the Master Plan Update Committee and for Oak Bluffs residents interested in the formulation of a comprehensive Master Plan for Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts.

The following pages are intended to provide an overview of possible strategies and recommendations for inclusion in the Master Plan. The possible strategies and recommendations reflect:

- “listening sessions” hosted by the Master Plan Update Committee on different topics and themes,
- Independent research and analysis by the planning consultant helping with preparation of the Master Plan.

For this first draft, the possible strategies and recommendations are organized around four main themes (using color coded headers on the following pages):

**ENHANCING COMMUNITY CHARACTER**

**PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES**

**MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE**

**MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS**

**FIRST DRAFT – FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY**

These possible strategies and recommendations were assembled by the consultant and have not yet been reviewed or endorsed by the Master Plan Update Committee.

*“Planning is bringing the future into the present so you can do something about it.”*

Alan Lakein,  
Time Management Writer

## Importance of Character

In the community survey:

- 25% of participants indicated that community character was the main thing that attracted them to Oak Bluffs
- In a ranking of topics to be considered as part of the Master Plan, community character / appearance / maintenance ranked second

## Maintaining And Enhancing Community Character

Since humans tend to be “visual” in their assessment of places, community character is important:

- to residents because it enhances their feelings about their community and their quality of life,
- to property owners because it correlates positively to property values,
- to businesses since it contributes to higher visitation / desirability, and
- to visitors because it enhances their overall experience.

It is important to note that the 2010 Island Plan prepared by the Martha’s Vineyard Commission recognized the importance of the Vineyard’s unique character and ecology to the economy.

## Possible Master Plan Strategies

### Building Design

1. Encourage continuation of architectural provisions in place to protect the character of the Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association area.
2. With regard to the Copeland Plan District (Section 9.0 of the Zoning Bylaw):
  - a. continue to require Victorian architecture for residential properties,
  - b. revisit the boundaries of the Copeland District to ensure they are appropriate (see map in the 1998 Master Plan), and
  - c. revisit the “as of right” height allowance of 50 feet.
3. Consider extending design guidelines to business uses in the Downtown area.
4. Seek to preserve existing buildings / places that create a “sense of place” (including historic buildings / areas).
5. In order to minimize future conflicts over building maintenance, seek to maximize ways that maintenance-free products (such as composite siding) can be used when they maintain / enhance the desired character.
6. Encourage revisiting of the historic district criteria and standards to:
  - a. simplify the approval process,
  - b. avoiding becoming too rigid or formulaic ,e
  - c. ensure an appropriate focus on “character” rather than strict “authenticity”, and
  - d. promote consistency in outcomes.

## ENHANCING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

### Place-Making

7. Continue to ensure a clean, safe, and well-maintained Downtown area.
8. Continue to maintain “quality of experience” staff to clean public restrooms, collect garbage and recyclables, etc.
9. Establish strong gateways / edges that create a sense of entry.
10. Promote intuitive way-finding / logical organization / linkages.
11. Support / encourage unique places (MVCMA, Flying Horses, etc.).
12. Encourage / promote unique festivals / events / traditions.
13. Maintain pedestrian-friendliness and bicycle-friendliness.
14. Consider designating lighting “zones” and specifying fixtures for each district which will be “dark sky compliant” and enhance character.
15. Maintain North Bluff improvements (seawall, railings, cables, lighting)

### Property Maintenance

16. Promote improvement of properties showing evidence of deferred maintenance.
17. Consider adoption of a town-wide blight ordinance to help address some of the most visible and/or unsafe property maintenance issues while balancing individual property rights with neighborhood impacts.
18. Consider ways to enhance any blight enforcement program with a loan / grant / assistance program to help as appropriate.

### Scenic Elements

19. Continue to preserve and enhance scenic resources:
  - a. Scenic views (especially visual access to the water), and
  - b. Scenic areas (such as the Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association and neighborhoods of Victorian-style homes).
20. Continue to identify items of historic and cultural significance and encourage efforts to preserve them.
21. Maintain harbor area design guidelines (Section 9.0 of the Zoning Bylaw) intended to maximize views to the harbor.
22. Maintain the “island road” overlay district regulations (contained in Section 9.0 of the Zoning Bylaw) intended to protect the scenic character of Barnes Road, Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road, and Beach Road (east side) from around Farm Pond south.

Primary Visitor Area



## Enhancing The Downtown Streetscape

Downtown is the main activity center and focal point in Oak Bluffs for both residents and visitors.

While residents are very familiar with “downtown”, visitors (especially first time visitors) have to orient themselves to the community when they arrive. The map in the sidebar shows the likely extent of the “primary visitor area” in Oak Bluffs. While some visitors may take buses or ride services (taxi, shuttle, Uber, etc.) to other parts of Martha’s Vineyard, people who visit here would perceive this area in forming their overall impression of Oak Bluffs.

Impressions of community character are enhanced when there is a symbiotic relationship and reasonable consistency in terms of appearance, function, etc. between:

- ***The “public realm”*** - includes public streets, sidewalks, and other areas which are open to the public (such as the Martha’s Vineyard Camp Meeting Association), and
- ***The “private realm”*** – which encompasses other areas (generally privately-owned properties).

Improvements within the public realm generally occur through public funding including municipal budget (capital or operating) or grants. Although less common, public realm improvements can also come as a result of “improvement districts”, public-private partnerships, private development, or a combination of the above.

Improvements within the “private realm” are typically undertaken by property owners (and funded / financed by them) when it is:

- legally permissible (such as zoning bylaw or other limitations),
- physically possible (such as soil capability or utility capacity),
- appropriately supported (such as market need), and
- financially beneficial.

The Zoning Bylaw is instrumental in guiding the improvements within the private realm.

**The 2016 Streetscape Plan is hereby incorporate as a component of the Oak Bluffs Master Plan.**

# ENHANCING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

## Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to seek ways to upgrade and enhance the Downtown area.
2. Seek to reserve some sewage treatment capacity for strengthening of the Downtown area.
3. Continue to implement the 2016 Streetscape Plan for Oak Bluffs prepared with the assistance of Horsley Witten Group.
4. Continue to seek grants and funding for Streetscape recommendations:
  - a. Strengthening linkages / connections to and within the Downtown area.
  - b. Enhancing the North Bluff area.
  - c. Improving the Circuit/Kennebec pedestrian experience while maintaining / expanding parking.
  - d. Improving the Steamship Authority ferry arrival welcome experience.
  - e. Installing consistent streetscape materials, plantings, and furnishings to make the downtown more inviting and enhance character.
  - f. Investigating opportunities to incorporate “Green Street” principles.
  - g. Incorporating universal design to accommodate people of all abilities.
5. Experiment on Circuit Avenue with:
  - a. Closing the street to vehicles in the evening in the summer months,
  - b. Configuring the parking differently in different seasons, on different days of the week, and/or different hours of the day.
  - c. Changing the angle of the parking spaces (including using parallel spaces).
  - d. Widening the sidewalks to favor the pedestrian experience over vehicular circulation..
6. Seek ways to reinvigorate the Island Theater.
7. Seek an increase in the embarkation fee collected from the Steamship Authority to help fund downtown improvements.

Circuit Avenue at Healey Plaza



Crosswalk At Oak Bluffs Avenue



## Enhancing The Visitor Experience

Visitors to Oak Bluffs have unique needs. Past surveys found that about 31% of all visitors taking the ferry came for one day and another 25% stayed for only a night or two. In other words, Oak Bluffs has only a short window of time to make a positive impression on these visitors and entice them to return. Short term visitors might seek the following while they are here:

Consideration	What OB Has	What OB Could Provide
<b>Food / Liquids</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Food options in downtown</li> <li>• Beverage options downtown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More water fountains</li> </ul>
<b>Comfort Stations / Restrooms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three public restrooms (Steamship, Kennebec, Harbor) open and maintained from May to October / November)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend daily hours / months</li> <li>• Add comfort stations at beaches</li> </ul>
<b>Shopping Opportunities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many shopping options in downtown</li> </ul>	
<b>Recreational Activities (Including Sight-Seeing)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many options available in Oak Bluffs and nearby</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance tourist info</li> <li>• Could improve gateways / wayfinding (such as to MVCMA)</li> </ul>
<b>Waste Disposal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trash barrels located around downtown are emptied three times per day</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add recycling option, inspect more often, increase number of locations</li> </ul>
<b>Circulation (Bicycle Rental, Transit, Parking, Taxi, Etc.)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Options for bicycle rental in downtown</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make more provision for bicycle parking</li> <li>• Improve wayfinding for pedestrians / bicyclists</li> <li>• Provide “shelter” / maps at main OB stop / harbor</li> <li>• Provide for remote parking with shuttle</li> </ul>
<b>Cleanliness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clean streets</li> <li>• Lack of litter</li> </ul>	
<b>Safety</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defined and safe sidewalks / crosswalks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanded sidewalk areas</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Events / Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has events and resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve awareness and wayfinding</li> <li>• Expand events</li> </ul>

## ENHANCING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. If an opportunity arises, consider repurposing the former Town Hall (now Police Station) or another nearby facility as a Visitor Center.
2. Seek to expand / improve facilities which would enhance the visitor experience (see listing on previous page).
3. Seek to improve the island experience for visitors without cars.
4. Maintain and enhance coastal access since it enhances the overall quality of life in Oak Bluffs for residents and visitors public access (beaches, fishing, shellfishing, etc.),.
5. Promote extending “fall” seasons including ferry access to Oak Bluffs.
6. Review bus parking rental spaces. Possibly relocate bus spaces.

Illumination Night



## ENHANCING COMMUNITY CHARACTER

### Inkwell Beach

It is important to note that Inkwell Beach is a nationally recognized place.

Oak Bluffs has a long history as an African American summer resort community and Inkwell Beach became the gathering place for African-American residents and visitors.

## Maintaining And Enhancing The Beaches

Oak Bluffs is known for its beaches and having clean and attractive beaches is recognized as a key asset by residents and visitors.

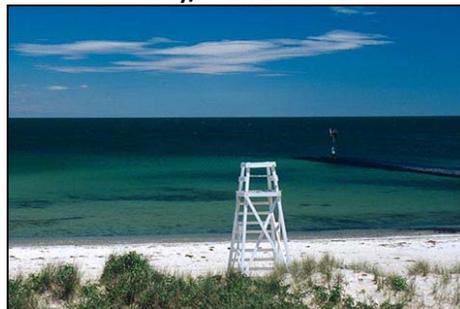
Beaches are subject to lateral transport of sand and the armoring of East Chop and North Bluff has created a situation where the source of natural replenishment of sand has been interrupted. As a result, Pay Beach and Inkwell Beach may get smaller over time if attention isn't paid to this reality.

In the past decade or so, material has been added to the some of these beaches to counteract the natural erosion. Some efforts have been considered more successful than others based on the characteristics of the material added (color, texture, rocks, pebbles, etc.). At the 2016 Town Meeting, residents supported purchase of a "beach rake" to help establish and maintain the quality of beach that people want and expect.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue efforts to ***retain and replenish the beach sand*** at Pay Beach and Inkwell Beach, as necessary.
2. Continue to ***use the beach rake*** at Pay Beach and Inkwell Beach to maintain beach quality for residents and visitors from Memorial Day to Labor Day.
3. ***Investigate opportunities to add amenities*** at Pay Beach / Inkwell Beach:
  - a. in space below a pedestrian plaza at sidewalk level (permanent),
  - b. seasonal (such as porta-potties, food trucks, etc. which can be removed in the off-season and when storms threaten)..
  - c. seasonal concessions for beach chairs, umbrellas, cabanas, and other amenities.
4. ***Renovate the waterfront sidewalks / railings*** at Pay Beach / Inkwell Beach.
5. ***Assign clear responsibility to a municipal department*** (such as the Parks Department) for maintaining and managing the beaches.

Pay/Town Beach



Inkwell Beach



## **Enhancing Gateways / Wayfinding**

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**Gateway Elements** - The predominant emotion for people who have never been to Oak Bluffs or Martha’s Vineyard (and even for people who have) is excitement and anticipation. When they arrive here, it would be nice to complement those emotions with a sense of greeting.

Gateways are community elements that promote a sense of arrival at a desirable place. Oak Bluffs should seek to establish gateway elements at key arrival points into the community.

**Wayfinding Elements** - While residents, for the most part, know their way around Oak Bluffs, visitors do not. Welcoming visitors to Oak Bluffs and sharing information on local destinations and activities (including where they are and how to get there) will enhance their overall visitor experience.

Wayfinding is the use of maps, signage, street elements, and other devices to help people feel oriented within a place and to guide them to their destinations (beaches, major destinations, walking trails, bicycle routes, parking areas, etc.).

### **Possible Master Plan Strategies**

1. Seek to establish gateway elements at key arrival points into Oak Bluffs.
2. Seek to establish wayfinding elements (maps, signage, pavement markings, etc.) within Oak Bluffs.

**Gateway Concept From Streetscape Plan**



**Wayfinding Concept From Streetscape Plan**



## Promoting Festivals / Events

Local festivals and events are key contributors to the overall attractiveness and ambience of Oak Bluffs. These festivals and events are also recognized as a key asset by residents and visitors.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to promote local festivals and events in Oak Bluffs.
2. Seek to encourage more festivals and events in non-summer months (September to May) in order to enhance the overall economy in Oak Bluffs and Martha's Vineyard.

Harborfest



Road Race



Illumination Night



Fireworks



## **Reinforcing Oak Bluffs “Brand”**

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For a community, branding is about how people perceive the community and the value they attribute to that. While it can be the product of a deliberate campaign, it is most valued when it is seen as an organic product of the entire community.

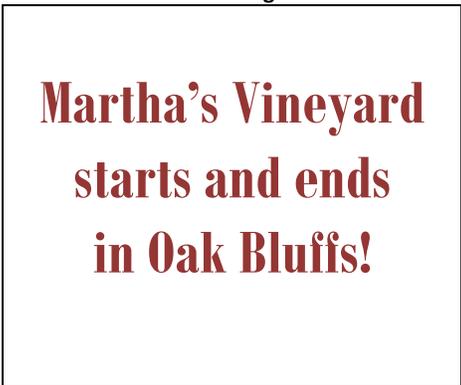
While Martha’s Vineyard has strong name recognition around the country, the overall “brand” in terms of what that means is not distinct. For most people, the name Martha’s Vineyard conjures up images from movies, news media, and other sources.

Oak Bluffs does not really have a distinct brand and this is something the community may wish to consider

**Possible Refreshed  
Town Seal**



**Possible Tagline**



### **Possible Master Plan Strategies**

1. Seek to define and strengthen Oak Bluffs as an important “brand” to help attract visitors and enhance property values.

## PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES

### Estuaries Project

In 2001, the Massachusetts Estuaries Project (MEP) was created to help determine current nitrogen loads to southeastern Massachusetts estuaries and evaluate reductions that would be necessary to support healthy ecosystems.

This information is used by MassDEP to calculate the maximum amount nitrogen that a waterbody can assimilate and still support a healthy ecosystem (i.e., meet surface water quality standards and support public health).

The MEP also provides technical guidance to support appropriate wastewater, watershed, and embayment management techniques to reduce nitrogen loading. This technical guidance is being used by communities to support the development of Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plans (CWMPs).

In Oak Bluffs, studies have been conducted for:

- Sengekontacket Pond
- Lagoon Pond
- Oak Bluffs Harbor
- Farm Pond

## Maintaining And Improving Water Quality

Water quality is important to overall environmental health and human well-being and this is especially important on Martha's Vineyard where fresh water is an "island" amid an ocean of salt water, replenished only by rainfall.

Groundwater on Martha's Vineyard shows evidence of heightened nitrogen levels and this comes from human activity (past studies have estimated that 79 percent of the nitrogen originates from septic systems).

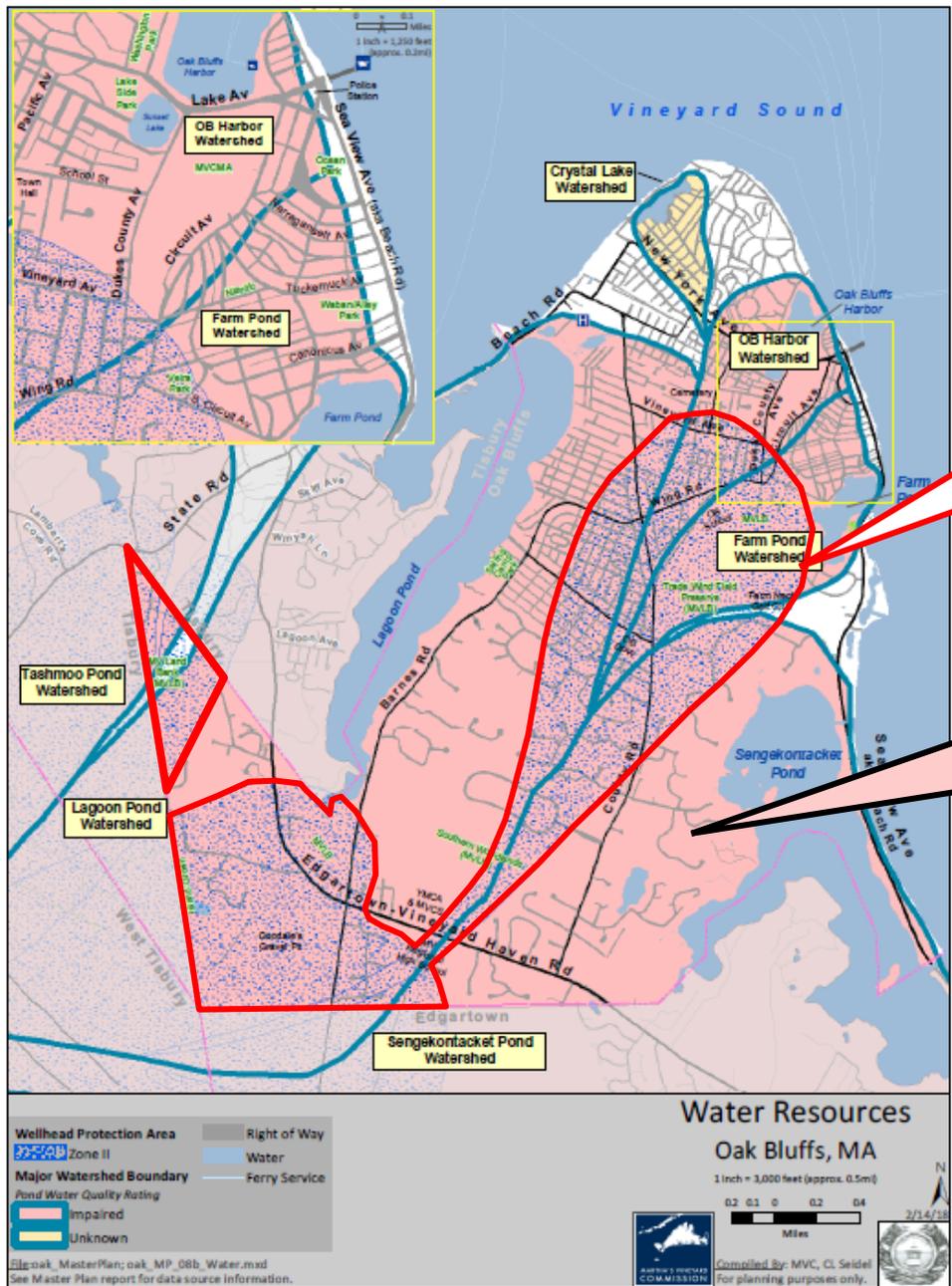
Coastal ponds and embayments are showing evidence of nitrification and this could have significant implications in the future for Oak Bluffs. About *three-quarters of the land area in Oak Bluffs* drains to a coastal pond or embayment and, if the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection formally designates these areas as "nitrogen sensitive" for purposes of 310 CMR 15.000 ("Title 5"), this could limit the number of bedrooms on lots served by septic systems (also see discussion of wastewater in the Master Plan).

A key issue for the Master Plan is to slow or stop degradation of water quality and seek ways to maintain and improve water quality.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Require innovative / alternative septic systems in Oak Bluffs for new construction or septic system replacement (standard septic systems remove bacteria but not nitrogen).
2. Expand the sewer system to treat nitrogenous waste, especially in sensitive watersheds.
3. Continue to discourage use of chemical fertilizer / pesticide.
4. Implement other nitrogen mitigation strategies (planting and harvesting of phragmites, permeable barriers, seeding of shellfish, apply a nitrogen "fee" related to the property use / septic type, etc.).
5. Improve the culverts at Sengekontacket Pond and Farm Pond.
6. Continue programs and efforts to improve stormwater quality through the use of "low impact development" (LID) and similar approaches.
7. Maintain the Water Resource Protection Overlay Districts (Section 8.2 of the Zoning Bylaw) to help protect water resources.
8. Maintain Districts of Critical Planning Concern related to:
  - a. Lagoon Pond
  - b. Sengekontacket Pond
  - c. Duarte Pond

# PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES



Red outline depicts areas currently subject to “nitrogen sensitive” limitations (“Zone 2” wellhead protection areas)

Pink areas are areas subject to “nitrogen sensitive” limitations in the future since they drain to a coastal pond or embayment which are nitrogen impaired

## Protecting Our Unique Ecosystem

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Protecting natural resource is important since doing so helps promote environmental health, preserve environmental functions, enhance community character, and enhance the overall quality of life. In addition, the 2010 Island Plan prepared by the Martha's Vineyard Commission recognized the importance of the Vineyard's unique character and ecology to the economy.

While Oak Bluffs seems to have good tools and organizations in place to protect natural resources the following strategies are recommended.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Encourage / require the use of native species in Oak Bluffs and discourage / prohibit the use of invasive species in Oak Bluffs.
2. Manage development in flood prone areas in strict accordance with the National Flood Insurance Program.
3. Investigate requiring that any substantial improvements in flood-prone coastal areas be elevated above projected flood levels by providing two feet of "freeboard" in such areas.
4. Continue to protect wetland areas (and wetland buffer areas) from development impacts and/or minimize any such impacts.
5. Continue efforts to manage coastal resources as they exist today and as they evolve in the future (such as salt marsh advancement) in response to sea level rise and climate change.

Water Quality



Coastal Resources



# PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES

## Maintaining And Improving Open Space Areas

When Oak Bluffs was first intensively developed in the mid-1800s, the plan prepared by Robert Morris Copeland reserved a number of areas as parks and open space to enhance the overall development. Although there was a time when these open spaces in Oak Bluffs were threatened, a seminal court case established the mandate that such areas were to be preserved. These areas continue to enhance Oak Bluffs today and will continue to do so into the future.

Overall, the open space strategy in Oak Bluffs is to prioritize upkeep of existing parks over expansion of parks or addition of new open space areas. This philosophy was continued in the 2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Still, there will be opportunities to preserve additional open space areas in the future as a result of:

- private philanthropy,
- acquisitions by the Martha’s Vineyard Land Bank (MVLB),
- open space set aside as part of a “flexible development” as allowed by Section 7.3 of the Zoning Bylaw, or
- a “right of first refusal” associated with any lands which obtained an assessment break in exchange for granting that right (MGL Chapter 61).

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to prioritize upkeep of existing parks over expansion of parks or addition of new open space areas.
2. Dedicate adequate resources (people and funding) to maintain existing parks.
3. Strive to improve recreation facilities and parkland.
4. Continue to seek opportunities to preserve open space in Oak Bluffs, including private philanthropy, working with other organizations, etc.
5. Consider encouraging the use of “flexible development” (as provided in Section 7.3 of the Zoning Bylaw) as a way for developers to preserve open space as part of a new development.
6. As appropriate, explore the possibility of acquiring Chapter 61 lands, should they become available, including partnering with the Martha’s Vineyard Land Bank and/or others.

### What Is “Open Space”?

The term “open space” can mean different things to different people.

For example, the definition in the “Open Space And Recreation Planner’s Workbook” issued by the Executive Office Of Energy And Environmental Affairs includes multiple elements:

- conservation land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways or any open area that is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation.
- undeveloped land with particular conservation or recreation interest [*i.e., private land*]. This includes vacant lots and brownfields that can be redeveloped into recreation areas.
- some open space can be used for passive activities such as walking, hiking, and nature study while others are used for more active recreational uses including soccer, tennis, or baseball.

## PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES

### Sustainability

The Town of Oak Bluffs has a fleet of electric passenger-type vehicles as a way to be more sustainable in terms of energy use.

Section 6.1 of the Zoning Bylaw contains provisions allowing wind energy installations under certain conditions.

Section 12 of the Zoning Bylaw contains provisions allowing solar energy systems under certain conditions.

MV Transit Authority has purchased electric buses and is intending to convert its entire fleet to electric buses in the future.

## Becoming A Greener Community

For the purposes of the Master Plan, “sustainability” refers to:

- the philosophy of encouraging activities that allow present generations to meet their needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.
- being efficient and economical in our use of resources using approaches that are economically viable, of social benefit, and environmentally responsible.

Some of the items to be considered as part of an overall approach to sustainability could include:

<b>Energy-Related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reducing energy use (and considering life-cycle costing)</li><li>• Becoming more efficient in use of energy resources</li><li>• Providing for alternative generation approaches (solar, wind, fuel cell, micro-grids, etc.)</li><li>• Consider establishing a carbon reduction target</li></ul>
<b>Water-Related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reducing water use</li><li>• Reducing water waste / recycling water</li></ul>
<b>Waste-Related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reducing waste (including food waste)</li><li>• Increasing recycling</li></ul>

## Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek to become a “greener”, more sustainable community in all areas.
2. Explore the Massachusetts “Green Community” designation.
3. Seek ways to reduce energy use by residents and visitors in Oak Bluffs and encourage energy options:
  - a. Investigate ways to provide electric car charging stations.
  - b. Consider solarizing bus shelters / adding phone charging stations.
  - c. Evaluate the potential for consolidating electrical charging for fleet vehicles (MVTA, FedEx, UPS, etc.).
4. Maintain sections in the Zoning Bylaw related to:
  - a. accessory wind generating facilities (Section 6.1).
  - b. solar energy systems (Section 12).
5. Encourage reduction in water usage.
6. With other Island communities, evaluate ways to reduce the waste stream, and increase on-Island recycling and composting,
7.
  - Educate residents and businesses about sustainability concepts.

# PROTECTING IMPORTANT RESOURCES

## Becoming More Resilient

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For the purposes of the Master Plan, “resiliency” refers to the community’s ability to:

- withstand and/or absorb impactful events.
- respond to and/or readily recover from sudden changes or adversity in an efficient and timely way.

In 2015, the Martha’s Vineyard Commission prepared a Hazard Mitigation Plan for Dukes County and part of the plan focused on hazards specific to Oak Bluffs:

- Short term events (storm surge / flooding, hurricane, wildfire), and
- Long term events (coastal erosion, sea level rise).

The elements of being a resilient community can include:

<b>Avoidance-Related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identifying potential risks and ways to avoid / reduce impacts.</li></ul>
<b>Mitigation-Related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluating probability / risk scenarios</li><li>• Evaluating approaches (protection / adaptation)</li><li>• Balancing of cost / benefit</li><li>• Hardening infrastructure (e.g. burying utilities)</li><li>• Requiring resilient buildings in coastal areas</li><li>• Promoting grid independence / interconnected community</li></ul>
<b>Response-Related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pre-event education / training</li><li>• Pre-event response plans</li></ul>

## Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek to become a more resilient community in terms of:
  - a. recognizing potential risks,
  - b. avoiding and/or mitigating impacts, where feasible, and
  - c. responding to and recovering from impacts.
2. Continue emergency preparedness planning and preparation such as emergency shelters, equipment, and supplies.

**Addressing Housing Needs**

Oak Bluffs has almost 5,000 housing units and about 60 percent of these units are kept for seasonal use due to the high desirability of Oak Bluffs and Martha’s Vineyard. The island is commonly recognized as one of the top vacation / retirement destinations in the country and this is reflected in the housing market (both in terms of sale prices, rental rates, and seasonal rentals).

While market rate housing appears to be taking care of itself, there are a number of housing needs which have been widely recognized for some time:

- **Low/Moderate Income Housing**– housing units for people of low or moderate incomes (less than 80 percent of area median income).
- **Workforce Housing** – year-round housing options for people earning 80 percent to 125 percent of the area median income.
- **Elderly Housing**– housing that is appropriate for an older population (especially since this population is growing quickly).
- **Seasonal Employee Housing** – housing for the unique needs of the 5,000 or so seasonal workers that come to the Vineyard to support the summer’s busy tourist season
- **Other Housing Needs** –year-round housing options to support the needs of people with disabilities, and individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

These housing needs could be met through the following housing types:

<b>Might Occur Within Existing / Expanded Buildings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• converting larger single-family houses or other buildings to multi-family / affordable housing,</li> <li>• accessory apartments for year-round residents or seasonal employees,</li> <li>• home sharing (un-related people sharing a home), and</li> <li>• mixed-use “top-of-the-shop” buildings in commercial areas (adopted by Town Meeting in 2018).</li> </ul>
<b>Likely Require New Construction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allowing affordable housing on substandard lots,</li> <li>• townhouses / condominiums / apartments,</li> <li>• smaller homes (including tiny houses),</li> <li>• co-housing (private homes clustered around shared common space),</li> </ul>

**The 2017 Housing Production Plan for Oak Bluffs is hereby incorporate as a component of the Oak Bluffs Master Plan.**

## MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

Since most of the “northern tier” of Oak Bluffs was subdivided many years ago, this area of Oak Bluffs might best accommodate housing within existing / expanded buildings.

On the other hand, there are some parcels in the “southern tier” that are large enough to accommodate housing development types that will likely rely on new construction.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to seek ways to address identified housing needs in Oak Bluffs.
2. Continue to seek ways to implement the 2017 Housing Production Plan.
3. Seek to reserve some sewage treatment capacity for meeting local housing needs.
4. Collaborate with other Island communities to address housing needs including seasonal employee housing, emergency shelters and housing for the homeless.
5. Support expansion of local/regional affordable housing strategies (resources and funding) identified in the 2017 Housing Production Plan:
  - a. creation of a new Vineyard Housing Bank (similar to Nantucket),
  - b. dedicated real estate transfer fee,
  - c. taxation on seasonal rentals, and/or
  - d. property tax incentives for owners to rent housing units year-round to income-eligible households.
6. Review the Zoning Bylaw for ways to remove impediments to creating housing within existing / expanded buildings to meet local housing needs:
  - a. converting larger single-family houses or other buildings to multi-family / affordable housing,
  - b. easing the restrictions on accessory apartments (Section 3.4 of the Zoning Bylaw) so they might become available for year-round residents / seasonal employees and make more efficient use of the existing housing stock, and
  - c. home sharing (un-related people sharing a home).
7. Review the Zoning Bylaw for ways to remove impediments to new construction to meet local housing needs:
  - a. allowing affordable housing on substandard lots,
  - b. townhouses / condominiums / apartments (especially for an aging population),
  - c. smaller homes (including tiny houses) similar to MVCMA,
  - d. co-housing (private homes clustered around shared common space).

### Housing Issues In A Nutshell

The issue of a need for additional housing options on Martha’s Vineyard has been noted in planning documents for many years.

The 2013 Housing Needs Assessment summarized the Vineyard’s affordable housing problem simply:

- the Island’s average weekly wage was 71% of the state average,
- the median home price was 154% of the state average, and
- the median rent was 117% of the state average.

## Possible Implications

In a 2018 Boston Globe article:

*In the worst-case scenario, sea levels could rise more than 10 feet by the end of the century — nearly twice what was previously predicted — plunging about 30 percent of Boston under water. Temperatures in 2070 could exceed 90 degrees for 90 days a year, compared with an average of 11 days now. And changes in precipitation could mean a 50 percent decline in annual snowfall, punctuated by more frequent heavy storms such as nor'easters.*

According to information presented at the 2018 Martha's Vineyard Coastal Conference by Jeff Donnelly from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute:

*On our current emissions trajectory, we should expect global sea level to rise between 5 and 8 feet [on Martha's Vineyard] by 2100 if we include contributions from Antarctica.*

## Preparing For Sea Level Rise / Climate Change

There is growing awareness of the threats posed by sea level and climate change and greater interest in addressing them. For coastal communities like Oak Bluffs, sea level rise is an issue with serious implications and repercussions:

- Some key shoreline roads will be impassable in storm events.
- Some homes will be at risk.
- Some low-lying areas (harbor walkway) could be underwater.
- The ferry terminal will be affected.

In 2017, Moody's Investor Service advised communities that they will begin incorporating climate risk and potential exposure (including sea level rise) into their community evaluation and bond rating system.

Oak Bluffs received funds to participate in the "Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program" sponsored by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs which is intended to help communities build resiliency to climate change.

One area which could be affected in the future is the Martha's Vineyard Regional Hospital site and on the approach roads.

Hospital Site



# MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

## Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Complete the stabilization of East Chop Bluff.
2. Establish a framework for addressing coastal vulnerability so that:
  - The Town can begin to address sea level rise, and
  - Affected property owners will have some indication how the Town will address this issue so they can plan accordingly.
3. Establish a coastal vulnerability working group to consider a preliminary approach, including shared responsibility, regarding how some of the issues related to sea level rise / climate change might be addressed in the future.
4. Prepare a conceptual capital improvement program to balance fiscal capacity with coastal issues / needs.
5. Continue to work with regional, state, and federal agencies and other organizations to address issues related to coastal vulnerability (including ways to encourage property owners to retreat from vulnerable locations).
6. Make sea level rise a consideration in all decisions in vulnerable / coastal areas in the future.
7. Help the Martha's Vineyard Regional Hospital evaluate options and approaches to addressing sea level rise at the hospital site and on the approach roads.
8. Revisit the coastal regulations (contained in Section 9.0 of the Zoning Bylaw) to reflect issues related to sea level rise.

Sea Level Rise



More Frequent / Intense Storms



## Ferry Services

The Steamship Authority provides ferry service for passengers and vehicles between Oak Bluffs and Woods Hole from May to October (eleven ferries per day between June and September and four ferries per day in the shoulder seasons). The Steamship Authority provides ferry service for passengers and vehicles between Vineyard Haven and Woods Hole year-round.

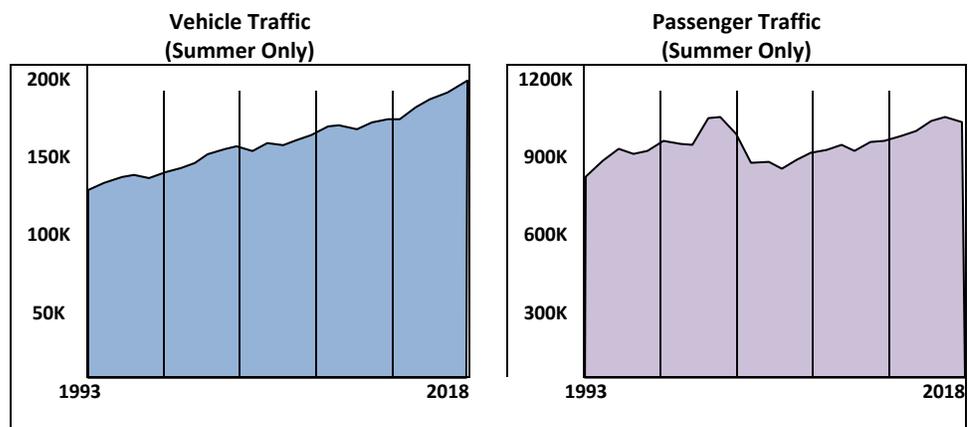
Other ferry services (generally passenger only) operate in the summer months between Oak Bluffs and:

- Falmouth (daily)
- Hyannis (daily),
- Nantucket (daily),
- New Bedford, MA (daily),
- North Kingstown, RI (daily), and
- New York City and New Jersey (weekly).

## Managing Ferry Services

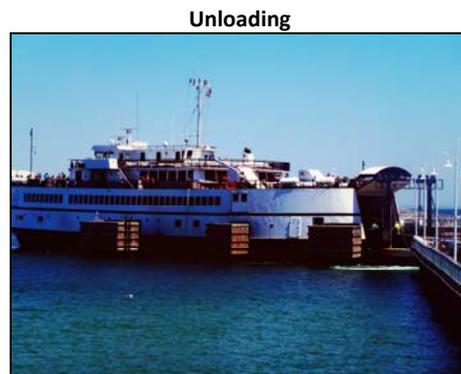
For many years, there has been discussion about the capacity of Martha’s Vineyard to accommodate all those who want to come here.

This discussion may continue since 2018 broke the record for the number of cars and trucks transported to the Vineyard. The following charts illustrate the growth in vehicle traffic and passenger traffic in the “summer months” (June 1 to August 31) since 1993 according to data from the Steamship Authority (SSA). This data does not include other ferry services (Island Queen, Hy-Line, Seastreak, etc.).



For the summer of 2018 (June 1 to August 31), the SSA carried:

- 157,114 cars (an average of about 870 trips/day each way),
- 38,792 trucks (about 220 trucks/day each way), and
- 1,034,008 passengers.



## MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

According to the SSA, the increase in vehicle traffic resulted from capacity they added by scheduling the freight ferry *Sankaty* for an additional 15 trips per week due to “demand.” The SSA reported they did not have places to berth more vessels beyond this.

During the summer months, half of the 22 scheduled trips between Woods Hole and Martha’s Vineyard are to Oak Bluffs (there are 22 return trips also). Since some trips can be diverted to Vineyard Haven due to weather, the actual number of trips to Oak Bluffs is less than half.

However, assuming that Oak Bluffs gets half the vehicles and passengers, this could mean an influx of:

- over 78,000 **vehicles** arriving and departing in the summer months (an average of about 870 vehicles per day with about 40 vehicles per arriving and departing ferry, and
- almost 520,000 passengers arriving and departing in the summer months (an average of about 260 passengers per arriving and departing ferry).

This level of activity supports the local economy and is part of what makes Oak Bluffs unique but it also can have impacts on the community.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Investigate ways to increase the embarkation fee to help support services provided in Oak Bluffs for visitors to Martha’s Vineyard.
2. Support efforts to increase the fee for non-residents to bring a vehicle to the island.

### Lessons Of History

According to the *Vineyard Gazette* (September 13, 2018):

*Historically, growth in ferry traffic and capacity on ferries has been a sticking point for Islanders. In 1997, voters in every Island town passed a nonbinding referendum to restrict cars carried on SSA ferries to 1995 levels. Numbers released this week show that 368,539 cars were carried that year [for the entire calendar year, not just the three summer months].*

*In 2003 the topic surfaced again when the boat line began planning for the replacement of [a] ferry ... with ... a vessel with more carrying capacity (76 cars compared to 50 ...). At the time, [SSA] assured residents that the authority would remove other vessels from the route to keep carrying capacity the same.*

*What eventually happened was different. [SSA] said this week that every year from 2010 to 2017 the SSA added more trips on the Vineyard route ... [1,200 additional trips] to accommodate demand.*

# MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

## Cost Of Living

Growing the economy on Martha’s Vineyard is a challenge since an economy needs workers and workers need housing and goods/services.

Since the cost of living on Martha’s Vineyard was estimated in 2006 to be about 57 percent more expensive than the national average (and about 12 percent more expensive at that time than the cost of living in Boston).

## Strengthening The Economy

Oak Bluffs would like to strengthen the local economy and increase the activity levels in the non-summer months (September to May). The 2010 Island Plan prepared by the Martha’s Vineyard Commission also recommends transitioning to a stronger, more diverse, and more balanced year-round economy. In Oak Bluffs, strengthening hospitality (food and accommodations) and retail would be the main economic elements in strengthening the local economy.

It is not anticipated there will be any expansion of the business zoning districts and so strengthening the local economy will mean doing more in the existing business areas in more months of the year. To do this, Oak Bluffs could:

<b>Expand Marketing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inform people that Oak Bluffs is “open” in other seasons</li> <li>• Attract more cruise ships in the shoulder seasons as they reposition between Europe and the Caribbean</li> </ul>
<b>Enhance Accessibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extend Steamship Authority service to Oak Bluffs longer</li> <li>• Extending other ferry services to Oak Bluffs longer</li> <li>• Add a shuttle in off-months to and from Vineyard Haven</li> </ul>
<b>Expand Lodging</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding lodging options / conference capabilities (the 1998 Master Plan advocated for “a resurgence of grand Victorian hotels”)</li> </ul>
<b>Increase Events / Activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get merchants to stay open longer</li> <li>• Keep residents here over the winter</li> <li>• Book entertainment at performance spaces / venues</li> <li>• Expand events / activities</li> </ul>

## Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek to strengthen the local economy by adding more shoulder season and off-season activities (such as a Christmas Stroll or a First Night / New Year’s Eve fireworks, etc.).
2. Focus retail activities and visitor services in the Downtown area.
3. Do not expand the B-1 / B-2 zoning districts beyond their current extent.
4. Re-evaluate the distinction between the B-1 and B-2 zoning districts and whether having one district would remove some limitations.
5. Continue to recognize the importance of an adequate supply of affordable housing to strengthening the local economy.
6. Continue to be receptive to the possibility of a “grand Victorian hotel” as recommended in the 1998 Master Plan.
7. Continue to maintain home occupation regulations.

# MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

## Managing Regional Burdens

In the past, there have been discussions that Oak Bluffs bears a higher burden than some other Island communities with regard to the following facilities / services that serve the entire Island:

Facilities / Services	Possible Higher Burdens	Possible Benefits
<b>Martha’s Vineyard Hospital</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency response (police, fire)</li> <li>• Loss of taxable land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity for services</li> </ul>
<b>Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency response (police, fire, medical)</li> <li>• Dedication of sewer capacity</li> <li>• Loss of taxable land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity for events, activities, services</li> </ul>
<b>YMCA / MV Arena</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency response (police, fire, medical)</li> <li>• Dedication of sewer capacity</li> <li>• Loss of taxable land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity for events, activities, services</li> </ul>
<b>Churches / Social Service uses / MVTV</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emergency response (police, fire, medical)</li> <li>• Loss of taxable land</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proximity for events, activities, services</li> </ul>

### Ferry Services

Oak Bluffs also has some burdens associated with the ferry services:

- Traffic congestion
- Emergency response (police, fire, medical)
- Harbor / dock space

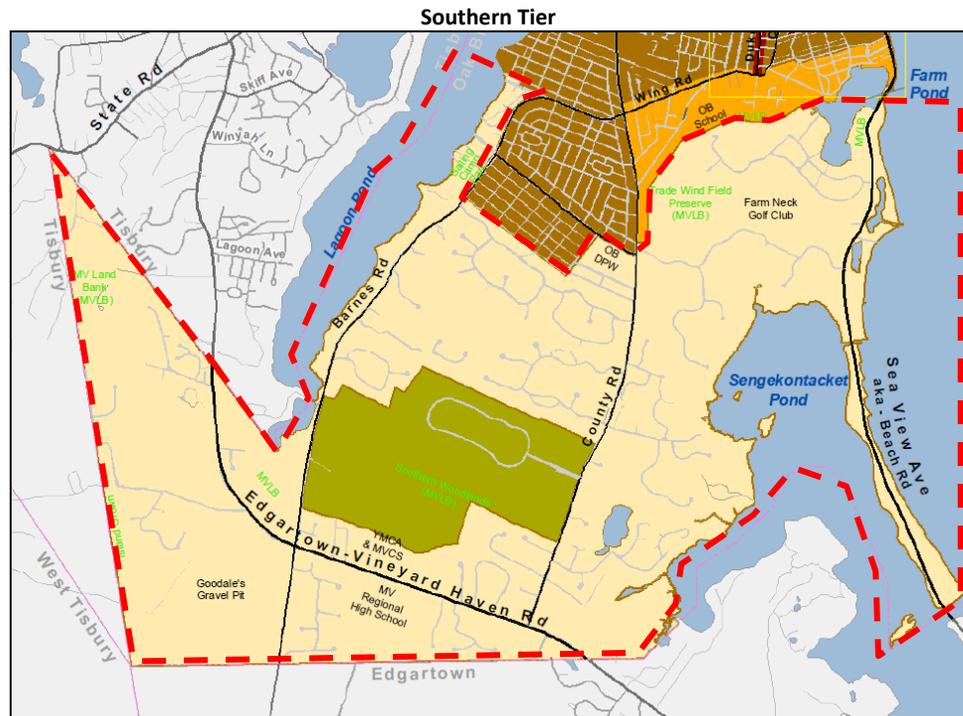
While some of these burdens can be offset by embarkation fees and dock space fees, it can still be a burden at certain times.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Consider undertaking a “host fee” study to understand the impact on Oak Bluffs of providing services but receiving limited revenue from so many Island-wide facilities.
2. Seek ways to have non-profit organizations and other Island communities contribute to payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (PILOT) for regional facilities / services hosted by Oak Bluffs:
  - a. Martha’s Vineyard Hospital
  - b. Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School
  - c. YMCA
  - d. Social service uses
3. As recommended in the 1998 Master Plan, discourage additional uses that use Oak Bluffs services while providing no tax revenue unless:
  - a. reasonable PILOT payments will be made,
  - b. Oak Bluffs residents obtain some tangible benefit (such as reduced user fees or preferences on waiting lists), and/or
  - c. Other benefits are apparent and provided.

## Guiding Land Use Activities In The Southern Tier

The “southern tier” of Oak Bluffs refers to the land generally located south of Linden Avenue / Grovedale Road / Pennsylvania Avenue and then the northern edge of Tradewinds Preserve / Farm Neck Golf Course. This area is entirely zoned residential (R-3 or R-4) requiring a 60,000 square feet lot size. Land along Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road has evolved into a mixture of public and non-profit services, residential and other land uses, as well as significant amounts of undeveloped land.



With regard to this area, the 1998 Master Plan indicated:

- This area faced considerable development pressure with no discernible plan and this was resulting in subdivisions with cul-de-sacs and circular roads (in contrast to the planned nature of development of the “norther tier”).
- There was interest at that time for purchase of the area by the Land Bank and/or the Town.
- There was interest at that time for preserving as much of this area as possible for open space use including a golf course, wooded tracts with walking trails, a picnic area, and modest, nonintrusive recreational elements.
- The Planning Board wanted to discourage continued development of this area for community uses that place a burden on the services provided by the Town of Oak Bluffs without producing any tax revenue for the Town.

## MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

In 2017, the Oak Bluffs Planning Board engaged the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC) to assess the potential demand for development in the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road corridor, and evaluate the implications for zoning, public infrastructure and services.

The MVC prepared an inventory of maps and regulations for the area (Phase 1) and recommended that further phases evaluate at least three issues:

- Quantify the existing **water and sewer usage** and the potential demand for these public services,
- Examine improving **safe circulation of pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and motorists** in acknowledgement that this is a primary transportation corridor for Martha's Vineyard,
- Evaluate the **fiscal implications** of expanded or improved public infrastructure and effects on the study area's tax base.

Subsequent phases of this work have not been completed.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

#### **General**

1. Continue to investigate opportunities for purchase of land in this area by the Land Bank and/or the Town.

#### **Protecting Important Resources**

2. Retain the low intensity approach in this entire area in order to:
  - a. Minimize impacts on water quality in this area (Lagoon Pond, Sengekontacket Pond, Farm Pond, Duarte Pond, and groundwater quality in general).
  - b. Maintain an option for future water supply well sites.
  - c. Avoid extending sewers to this area unless it provides an identifiable benefit for Oak Bluffs.
3. Due to the sensitive water resources in this area, require that any new septic system (or replacement septic system) in the entire area be an innovative / alternative system as provided in Title 5 to minimize further nitrogen impacts on water quality while allowing reasonable development.
4. Seek to preserve as much of this entire area as possible for open space use including a golf course, wooded tracts with walking trails, a picnic area, and modest, nonintrusive recreational elements.
5. Investigate the opportunity to acquire any Chapter 61 lands where the Town is given an opportunity to act on a "right-of-first-refusal" in accordance with Massachusetts General Laws (including in conjunction with the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank).

## MANAGING GROWTH AND CHANGE

### Managing Growth And Change

6. Investigate the potential of lands in and near the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road corridor to accommodate housing to meet identified housing needs.
7. Discourage continued development of the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road corridor area for community uses that place a burden on the services provided by the Town of Oak Bluffs without producing any tax revenue (or other identifiable benefit) for the Town.
8. Consider reserving sewage capacity for affordable housing developments in the Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road corridor area which will help meet identified local housing needs.
9. Investigate the potential along Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road to allow for small service and storage uses (including contractor businesses) provided appropriate environmental safeguards are in place.
10. Do not allow any retail or restaurant or lodging uses in this area since such development has the potential to adversely affect the character of this area and compete economically with Downtown.

### Meeting Community Needs

11. Continue to provide safe circulation of pedestrians, cyclists, transit users and motorists in acknowledgement that these roads (Beach, Seaview, Barnes, County, Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road) are primary transportation corridors for Oak Bluffs and for all of Martha’s Vineyard.
12. In the “triangle” west of Edgartown – Vineyard Haven Road, consider:
  - a. a possible future public water well site.
  - b. a possible future water tank site since the ground elevation (150’) will facilitate providing water service to uses in the southern tier (which suffer from low pressure at present) and the higher elevation will facilitate flow to the existing tank in period of high demand.
13. Investigate additional opportunities to place other public water well sites in this entire area.

Southern Tier



## Community Facilities

For the Master Plan, the term “community facilities” refers to the buildings and properties used to provide a range of municipal services including:

- Police,
- Fire,
- Emergency Medical,
- Public Works,
- Solid Waste,
- Town Hall,
- Education,
- Library,
- Recreation, and
- Other facilities.

## Enhancing Community Facilities / Services

Community facilities contribute significantly to Oak Bluffs’ community character and quality of life.

Most Town facilities in Oak Bluffs are in good conditions and the Town will strive to maintain them in good to excellent condition.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Replace the existing Town Hall (currently in process).
2. Repair and renovate Oak Bluffs Elementary School (currently planned).
3. Address system failures at the library (roof, boiler, sprinklers, etc.).
4. Upgrade the main public works building (sheathing, roof, interior) to meet current and future public works needs.
5. Monitor utilization of the Senior Center in order to anticipate possible future space needs (including parking needs).
6. Enhance lighting of parking areas for facilities in use at night (Town Hall, Library, etc.)
7. Continue to maintain adequate staffing and funding for maintenance of:
  - a. Downtown.
  - b. public buildings.
  - c. public grounds (including cemeteries).
  - d. park and recreation facilities.
  - e. Town beaches (also see discussion elsewhere in Master Plan).
8. Continue efforts to maintain / enhance radio system / emergency communications (police, fire, emergency medical).
9. Seek to maintain adequate public safety personnel (police, fire, emergency medical) to meet community needs.
10. Consider providing housing options (or off-shift bunk space) for:
  - a. Public works staff (year-round and seasonal)
  - b. Fire / emergency medical staff who commute from off-island
11. To accommodate future expansion, consider acquiring one or more properties (should the land become available) adjacent to:
  - a. the Senior Center.
  - b. Oak Bluffs Elementary School.

### Maintaining / Enhancing The Harbor

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The harbor is a facility that supports:

- commercial fishing operations,
- residents who keep boats there,
- transient boaters (boaters from elsewhere visiting Oak Bluffs), and
- travelers who utilize the ferry services to and from Oak Bluffs.

The harbor operations generate approximately one million dollars annually for the Town of Oak Bluffs (fees for slips and moorings, fuel sales, docking fees, etc.). Oak Bluffs will seek to maintain and enhance this facility in the future as needed.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to maintain and enhance the harbor by:
  - a. replacing pilings at the marina facility, as needed,
  - b. dredging the entry channel as needed,
  - c. raising the height of the stone jetties at the harbor entry and evaluating the installation of a “dogleg” to provide for storm protection (especially for nor’easter type storms), and
  - d. addressing sea level rise by raising the walls around the harbor, as appropriate.
2. Continue to maintain facilities to support boating access to the water.

**Harbor**



**Ferry Services**



# MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

## A Tale Of Two Seasons

During the “off-season” (say October to April), the roadway system in Oak Bluffs generally works like a charm. Intersections are generally congestion free and parking is typically available where people want it.

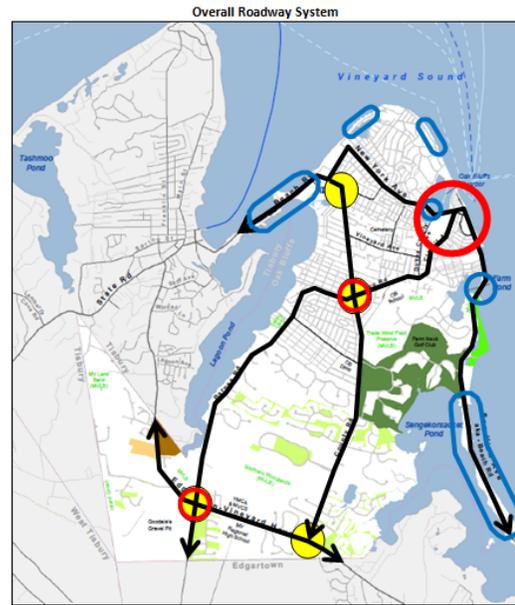
In the summertime, the situation is reversed as population swells to 20,000 residents and thousands of visitors. On top of this, every day, the Steamship Authority could deliver or pick up 1,000 vehicles in Oak Bluffs and this is on top of the traffic of people who are already on the Island and are visiting Oak Bluffs.

## Addressing Vehicular Circulation

As might be expected for being a resort community, traffic conditions and the roadway system are common topics of conversation in Oak Bluffs in the summer months. Issues for consideration in the Master Plan include:

- reducing vehicular traffic (thus reducing congestion),
- addressing traffic safety issues (accident concentrations), and
- addressing impacts of sea level rise on the roadway system.

-  Possible Congestion Problem Areas
-  Possible Coastal Vulnerability Areas
-  Notable Accident Incidence Areas



## Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek ways to reduce vehicular traffic and congestion, especially in the summer months.
2. Investigate ways to reduce the need for cars (walking, biking, transit, golf carts, transit passes with seasonal rentals, etc.).
3. Work with Mass DOT to address threats to main roads from sea level rise:
  - a. Beach Road to and from Vineyard Haven (especially since this roadway provides access to the Martha’s Vineyard Regional Hospital for much of the Island)
  - b. Seaview Avenue to and from Edgartown (both at Farm Pond and Sengekontacket Pond).
4. Address areas with accident concentrations.
5. Support intersection improvements at Eastville / County / Temahigan (near the Hospital).

### Addressing Vehicle Parking

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Part of the reason for traffic congestion in the downtown area is that many people want to come to Oak Bluffs and they want to find parking when they get here. It is not uncommon to see vehicles circling the block in the summer months as they travel south on Circuit Avenue, north on Kennebec Avenue, west on Oak Bluff Avenue, and then back onto Circuit Avenue.

Parking availability can be a significant issue in and near downtown and the beaches and was recognized as a common “sorry” in the community survey. Although police patrol the main streets during the summer and manage parking time limits, it is reported that people have been observed moving their car around to avoid the limits. Some parking spaces may be occupied by employees of local businesses. Parking spills over into residential neighborhoods where the streets were not designed to accommodate vehicle parking.

The Downtown Streetscape Study looked at ways to widen sidewalks in the downtown and to retain / expand the supply of parking in and near the Downtown area. It appears feasible to do this by putting diagonal parking on Oak Bluffs Avenue in front of the harbor.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek ways to expand the supply of parking in and near Downtown while maintaining the character of the Downtown area (such as establishing diagonal parking on Lake Avenue in front of the harbor).
2. Evaluate ways to provide for park-and-ride lots to reduce parking demand in downtown (funds from paid parking and annual payments as per Section 5.1.5 of the Zoning Bylaw could be used to fund the shuttle bus to the park-and-ride lots).
3. Consider “pay parking” (meters) in the downtown area or lots.
4. Consider implementation of a resident parking system in order to discourage parking on residential streets by non-residents.
5. Maintain parking mitigation approaches for development in the Downtown area.
6. Consider establishment of a business improvement district where property owners and businesses in the Downtown would help fund the remote parking lots and shuttle service (and consider eliminating the parking requirements downtown in return).

## MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

### Promoting Pedestrian Travel

While areas in and near Downtown are recognized as walkable, more can and should be done to improve the pedestrian experience for residents and visitors.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek ways to widen sidewalks in and near Downtown (including the harbor, North Bluff, and along Seaview Avenue) to enhance the pedestrian experience.
2. Seek ways to extend sidewalks in areas outside the Downtown and close gaps where they may exist.
3. Maintain and expand off-road trails as well.
4. Seek ways to improve ADA accessibility (ramps, crosswalks, etc.) as part of any streetscape improvements in the Downtown area.
5. Maintain a working group addressing pedestrian / bicycle issues.
6. Promote walking in town and support this with better maps and signage (see wayfinding discussion elsewhere in the Master Plan).

Narrow Sidewalks / Conflicts



### Promoting Bicycle Travel

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Martha's Vineyard has undertaken a number of projects over the years to provide for bicycle paths in key locations on the island and this has helped the Island get a reputation as a bicycle-friendly place.

Oak Bluffs should continue to build on this and improve the bicycle experience for residents and visitors.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek ways to expand the use of bicycles as a form of transportation and recreation in Oak Bluffs.
2. Seek to provide visible and designated bicycle lanes in the Downtown, to the Downtown, to the ferry docks, and elsewhere.
3. Support the creation of more bicycle lanes (and similar accommodations) where feasible.
4. Seek ways to create a system of bicycle routes that would be of interest to visitors (including mapping and signs):
  - a. To East Chop lighthouse.
  - b. To Eastville Beach / Lagoon Pond (a "shared use path" from the Lagoon Pond drawbridge to the Oak Bluffs Harbor is recommended in the MVC Transportation Improvement Plan).
  - c. To Joseph Sylvia State Beach.
  - d. Along Barnes Road.
5. Consider easing local restrictions on bicycle use on Circuit Avenue.
6. Seek ways to provide bicycle racks / fixtures in places where bicyclists want to park their bicycles, especially in the Downtown area (even replacing some parking spaces with bicycle racks).
7. Maintain a working group addressing pedestrian / bicycle issues.

### Promoting Transit Service

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Martha's Vineyard has an extensive transit system and this helps support an environment where cars are not needed for many trips.

Oak Bluffs should continue to build on this and improve the transit service for residents and visitors.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Support the Martha's Vineyard Transit Authority and their efforts to provide transit services and mobility within available roadway capacity.
2. Encourage and support improvements to bus transit in order to improve its viability as an alternative to automobile use.
3. Seek to retain the four bus routes currently serving Oak Bluffs.
4. Establish a bus shelter on the brick patio area at Ocean Park.
5. Seek to expand the number of bus stops with shelters and/or benches.
6. Consider providing a shuttle bus service connecting:
  - a. Downtown to remote park-and-ride lots (employees and visitors).
  - b. Downtown and the ferry docks to public beaches (visitors) as recommended in the 1998 Master Plan.
  - c. Downtown to each ferry in Vineyard Haven in the months that ferry service is not provided to Oak Bluffs (an "Oak Bluffs Express").
7. Maintain the "dial-a-ride" service and "Medivan" service operated by the Transit Authority for those who need them.
8. Continue to manage "on-demand transit" such as taxis, Uber, Lyft, and other services which may become available.
9. As recommended in the 1998 Master Plan, promote implementation of a beach shuttle to reduce parking and traffic congestion at Sylvia State Beach.

### Maintaining An Adequate Water Supply

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Oak Bluffs has an adequate supply of water for community needs (domestic and fire) although the capacity of the system can be stressed during the summer months. The Water District has moderated the growth in water usage by:

- an increase in billing rates,
- billing based on actual usage, and
- education regarding the need for conservation.

At the same time, the Water District has been seeking additional well sites to help meet the summer demand and provide a margin of safety. Sites have been considered in or near the Tradewinds Preserve, the State Forest, and/or the Southern Woodlands (County Road at Woodlands Drive).

There has been some concern that additional well sites will result in the expansion of land use restrictions in the well recharge area (known as Zone 2) but this may happen anyway if the coastal embayments are designated by Mass DEP as “nitrogen sensitive.”

While the Water District has about 4,000 customers, some properties in Oak Bluffs rely on on-site wells for their water supply. There are no known issues with on-site wells.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Support efforts by the Water Department to *maintain an adequate supply of water*.
2. Continue to support and *encourage water conservation* efforts.
3. Consider *implementing a formal water use policy* (or water use restriction bylaw) with different voluntary and mandatory restrictions depending on water conditions, including limitations on lawn irrigation.
4. Support efforts to *bring one or more additional wells on line*.
5. Support efforts by the Water Department to *protect the Lagoon Pond well-field from sea level rise* and salt water intrusion.
6. Continue to *improve the water system* by replacing older pipes where needed and interconnecting water lines to improve service and flow.
7. *Maintain water interconnections* with the Edgartown and Tisbury water systems.

# MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

## Addressing Septic Systems

If there are 4,000 housing units in Oak Bluffs and 700 of them are connected to the sewer system, that means 3,300 housing units (about 82% of all units in town) are not.

Even if Oak Bluffs doubles the sewage treatment capacity and doubles the number of properties connected, there will still be about 2,700 properties still on septic systems and **about two-thirds of all nitrogen discharged** in septic waste will still be going into the groundwater table and eventually to the coastal embayments and coastal ponds.

## Managing Wastewater Disposal

Approximately 700 properties in and near Downtown are served by public sewer. In addition, sewer service has been extended to include Martha’s Vineyard Hospital, the Martha’s Vineyard Regional High School, the YMCA, Woodside Village, and the Ice Arena.

While the sewer system has a discharge permit from the State for 350,000 gallons per day (GPD), operational limitations in the system limit the ***effective*** treatment capacity to about 275,000 GPD. Existing flows to the treatment facility are about 250,000 GPD.

An updated comprehensive wastewater management plan (CWMP) is being prepared to evaluate ways to:

- eliminate or reduce operational limitations,
- reduce ecologic impacts (nitrogen loading in estuaries - see water quality discussion elsewhere in the Master Plan),
- address community needs and desires (economic development, downtown redevelopment, affordable housing, etc.), and
- address overall water quality / public health.

Wastewater management solutions (including nitrogen management) being considered as part of the CWMP may include a combination of approaches:

	Could Reduce Nitrogen Loading / Address Water Quality	Could Address Community Needs And Desires	Could Address Operational Limitations
• Wastewater collection and centralized treatment	☑	☑	☑
• Innovative/alternative on-site septic systems	☑	☑	
• Alternative approaches to reduce nitrogen (shellfish, permeable reactive barriers, etc.)	☑		

While there are several ways that nitrogen reduction can be accomplished, the public sewer system may be the only way to effectively accomplish other goals of the community:

- Improvement / expansion of the Downtown business area,
- Provision of affordable housing, and
- Support for key institutional uses (such as the hospital).

## MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

At the present time, the Town is contemplating utilization of zero percent (0%) loans from the State of Massachusetts to fund the improvements recommended as a result of the CWMP process. Eligibility for such loans requires that the Town establish a “flow neutral” outcome meaning that a property connecting to the sewer would have to demonstrate that it could accommodate the proposed development with a Title 5 compliant septic system. Then, the property would be allowed to connect that amount of development to the sewer system. This approach is intended to ensure that development is controlled and wastewater flows are managed (and not accelerated or expanded) as a result of the availability of sewers.

**Additional research is being conducted about which Title 5 limit would apply in the event that additional portions of Oak Bluffs were designated as “nitrogen sensitive.”**

Oak Bluffs should address the thousands of properties on septic systems. Since these properties continue to discharge nitrogen rich wastewater and offset the effectiveness of any improvements to the sewer system, Oak Bluffs should consider requiring that any new development (or any replacement septic systems) install an innovative/alternative on-site septic system that reduces nitrogen and other nutrients.

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Complete and implement the comprehensive wastewater management plan (CWMP).
2. Seek to reserve capacity in the sewer system improvements being considered in the CWMP for:
  - a. Improvement / expansion of the Downtown business area,
  - b. Provision of affordable housing, and
  - c. Support for key institutional uses (such as the hospital).
3. Consider requiring that any new development (or any replacement septic systems) be required to install an innovative/alternative on-site septic system that reduces nitrogen and other nutrients.
4. Consider adoption of a septic management ordinance or other approach to enhancing oversight of septic maintenance.

### Which Title 5 Limit?

The “flow neutral” approach requires that a property connecting to the sewer demonstrate that it could accommodate the proposed development with a Title 5 compliant septic system. Once that was done, the property would be allowed to connect that amount of development to the sewer system.

However, there are a couple of Title 5 standards:

- The regular standards (which applies today to most of OB)
- A limitation of 440 gallons per day per acre if in a Zone 2 area or if in a watershed designated as nitrogen sensitive (could be 660 GPD/acre with an innovative/alternative approach)

So if parts of OB were designated by Mass DEP as “nitrogen sensitive” watersheds, would houses be effectively limited to 440 GPD/acre regardless of sewer?

### Maintain Adequate Storm Drainage

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Due to the sandy soils on Martha's Vineyard, there are few major stormwater drainage issues. Oak Bluffs is applying "low impact development" approaches to stormwater drainage, when and where appropriate, and this has the potential to help address stormwater quantity and stormwater quality issues.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to apply "low impact development" (LID) approaches to stormwater drainage, when and where appropriate, to help address stormwater quantity and stormwater quality issues.
2. Begin to prepare for the possible future application of regulations for municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) and the requirement to develop, implement, and enforce a stormwater management program (SWMP).

### Encourage Resolution Of Electricity Supply Issues

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Martha's Vineyard has an adequate supply of electricity for current needs. However, with increasing electrical demand on the island, some electrical supply concerns have arisen:

- Peak demands in the summer that can stress the overall system,
- Voltage spikes / drops that can affect sensitive electronic equipment,
- Reliance on essentially one underwater electrical cable.

Electrical distribution in Oak Bluffs generally involves overhead wires although there are some areas (such as Downtown) where the electrical wires are contained in underground conduits. Over the years, significant progress has been made in improving the reliability of the electrical distribution system although there can be service disruptions during major storms due to damage from trees.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to work with electrical providers to strengthen the electrical supply system.
2. Support the possible introduction of a battery storage system, fuel cells, solar panels, wind turbines, and other generation sources to help meet demand.
3. Support periodic tree trimming to help minimize power outages due to storm events.

### Enhance Communications Infrastructure

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There is adequate land-line telephone and cable communication (television and internet) service in Oak Bluffs although higher speeds and greater capacity to serve the needs of residents and businesses are desired by some people.

Many people are using wireless phones and other devices (some people are relying exclusively on them) and the capacity of the wireless system is an important consideration. There can be challenges in Oak Bluffs due to:

- A limited number of telecommunication towers,
- Differing antennae locations for different providers, and
- High seasonality of use / demand.

Since it may be difficult to site additional telecommunications towers in Oak Bluffs, it may make sense to consider supporting deployment of a distributed antenna system (DAS) along major roads in order to eliminate gaps in existing coverage and provide better coverage town-wide for data and voice.

#### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Continue to work with communication companies to strengthen communications infrastructure.
2. Support efforts to achieve higher internet speeds and greater capacity to serve the needs of residents and businesses.
3. Support efforts to improve wireless coverage and capacity in Oak Bluffs.
4. Consider supporting deployment of a distributed antenna system (DAS) along major roads in Oak Bluffs in order to eliminate gaps in existing coverage and provide better coverage town-wide for data and voice.
5. Review the provisions of the Wireless Communications Overlay District (Section 8.3 of the Zoning Bylaw) to ensure that provisions (and locations) reflect current technologies and approaches.

# IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

## Implementation (Funding, Revenue, Staffing)

Implementation of the master Plan is a key part of the overall process. Planning is most effective if:

- policies are implemented,
- action steps are taken, and
- results are achieved.

Implementation could include the following:

<b>Regulation Changes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Planning Board (and/or other entities) could adopt regulations to accomplish important strategies</li></ul>
<b>Municipal Approvals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Planning Board (and/or other entities) could seek to accomplish strategies when approving local activities</li></ul>
<b>Operating Expenses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Town and Town Meeting could dedicate funds in the operating budget to accomplishing Plan strategies</li></ul>
<b>Capital Expenses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Town and Town Meeting could dedicate funds in the capital budget to Plan strategies</li></ul>
<b>Revenue Sources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Town could seek additional revenue sources to accomplish Plan strategies (embarkation fee, etc.)</li></ul>
<b>Staffing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Town and Town Meeting could provide for staffing to accomplish Plan strategies (Town Planner, etc.)</li></ul>
<b>Implementation Oversight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Planning Board and/or Board of Selectmen could oversee and guide Plan implementation</li></ul>

### Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Increase local capacity for planning
2. Redo the Zoning Bylaw
3. Revisit the Zoning map
4. Support establishment of a short term rental fee ordinance.
5. Support an increase in the embarkation fee.

## Seek Inter-Municipal Collaboration

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There are six municipalities on Martha's Vineyard occupying a total of about 87 square miles of land area. The island is only reachable by sea or by air so all the communities are tied together by this geographic fact.

Most services on the Island are provided by the individual Island municipalities to the residents and properties within their borders including (but not limited to) the following:

- Public safety (police, fire, emergency medical, etc.)
- Public works (road maintenance, drainage, etc.)
- Elementary school education
- Library
- Park and recreation
- General government

There is some level of inter-municipal cooperation including (but not limited to) the following facilities / services:

- Secondary school education (Martha's Vineyard Regional High School)
- Mutual aid fire response
- Public safety communications / dispatch
- Water supply interconnections
- Affordable housing

Some services are provided by state and regional organizations such as:

- State Police
- Dukes County (courthouse, etc.)
- Martha's Vineyard Transit Authority
- Martha's Vineyard Commission
- Martha's Vineyard Land Bank
- Many other volunteer and non-profit agencies serving the Island as a whole.

## Possible Master Plan Strategies

1. Seek opportunities to collaborate with other Island communities (and agencies) where it will result in greater economy and/or efficiency.

## Possible Opportunities

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Opportunities for enhanced inter-municipal or regional cooperation might include such things as:

- Trash collection
- Recycling
- Trash disposal
- Water supply
- Sewage disposal
- Internet capacity
- Beach management
- Public safety services (police, fire, medical)
- Harbor management
- Emergency communication
- Affordable housing

