

ISLAND PLAN

CHARTING THE FUTURE OF THE VINEYARD

Survey 1 Results

April – Mid-June 2006

Based on first 222 responses

June 23, 2006

Prepared by the
Martha's Vineyard Commission

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Introduction

The Martha's Vineyard Commission has initiated the preparation of an Island Plan that will chart — in simple but compelling ways — a course to the kind of future that the Vineyard community wants, and that prescribes a series of actions to help us navigate that course.

A twenty-member citizen Steering Committee has outline a planning process that seeks to involve through a variety of methods the public, town officials and organizations. Starting in April 2006, people were asked to complete an initial survey giving their comments on the purpose, priorities, and principles of the plan. The survey was available electronically on a website created for the planning effort (islandplan.org) and hardcopy versions were available at each of the six town libraries, where the surveys could also be deposited for collection.

This summary is of 222 responses in the survey database as of June 12, 2006. Since that cutoff time, some two-dozen more surveys have been submitted digitally or physically but are not included in this summary. [The distribution of answer to an April summary of the first hundred responses was very close to the distribution here of twice as many responses.]

The survey asked about similar issues in different ways in order to better understand the nuances of people's position on these perennial, fundamental issues facing the community. People were asked not just what they thought were the important issues of today, but which issues would be most important for the Vineyard in the long-term – midway through the 21st Century.

As often happens, however, responses raise more questions. One such apparent dichotomy in survey responses involves the high level of interest in limiting the rate of development. Forty percent ranked "limiting the rate of growth" as extremely important and just 8% thought it not at all important. Yet when asked directly about whether to limit people from moving to the island, nearly one-third were neutral and slightly more favored allowing anyone to come rather than imposing limitations. A topic for discussion, certainly.

This is the first of what is expected to be a series of surveys to collect ideas from the public and to float items back to the public. The complete written comments can be viewed at islandplan.org or in Island Plan Resource Binders at town libraries.

| Residence of Respondent | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Aquinnah | | 3.2% | 7 |
| Chilmark | | 13.1% | 29 |
| Edgartown | | 18.9% | 42 |
| Oak Bluffs | | 19.8% | 44 |
| Tisbury | | 20.3% | 45 |
| West Tisbury | | 25.7% | 57 |
| Other | | 1.8% | 4 |

| Type of resident/visitor | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Year-Round | | 84.7% | 188 |
| Seasonal | | 14.9% | 33 |
| Visitor (< month) | | 0.9% | 2 |

| Age of Respondent | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|--------------------------|--|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Under 18 years | | 0.0% | 0 |
| 18-30 | | 2.7% | 6 |
| 31-40 | | 5.0% | 11 |
| 41-50 | | 20.3% | 45 |
| 51-60 | | 31.5% | 70 |
| 61-70 | | 24.3% | 54 |
| over 70 | | 16.7% | 37 |

In order to help set priorities for the plan, please select up to 5 topics in each column that you feel are: - Most urgent now. - Most important over the next 50 years. - Not presently being adequately dealt with by existing efforts.

| Topic | Most urgent now (with % of column responses) | Most important over 50 years (with % of column responses) | Not being adequately dealt with (with % of column responses) |
|--|---|--|---|
| Housing (availability, affordability, development, etc.) | 153 16% | 74 8% | 115 17% |
| Water Resources (wastewater, groundwater, coastal ponds etc.) | 145 15% | 127 14% | 93 13% |
| Natural Resources (habitat, coasts, forests, farmland, etc.) | 118 12% | 115 13% | 52 8% |
| Energy, Solid Waste and Communications | 101 11% | 91 10% | 90 13% |
| Transportation (roads, traffic, transit, bikes, ferry, air, etc.) | 96 10% | 73 8% | 84 12% |
| Open Space (fields, trails, vistas, etc.) | 94 10% | 95 10% | 26 4% |
| Economy (tourism, construction, retail, fishing, farming, jobs, new commerce, etc.) | 72 8% | 93 10% | 58 8% |
| Health and Education (facilities and services) | 72 8% | 80 9% | 45 6% |
| Governance (towns, Island-wide, etc.) | 55 6% | 73 8% | 81 12% |
| Social and Community (people, traditions, culture, history, etc.) | 54 6% | 99 11% | 49 7% |
| Built Environment (roads, streetscapes, historic preservation, archeology, etc.) | 53 6% | 83 9% | 53 8% |
| Total column responses | 960 | 920 | 693 |
| Column percentage of 1110 potential responses | 86% | 83% | 62% |

The highest response for each column is in boldface. Responses of 10% + are shaded.

| How important is it that the Island Plan address each of the following issues? | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Issue | Not important | Somewhat important | Very important | Extremely important | Response Average |
| Protecting water quality in coastal ponds | 3% (7) | 5% (11) | 26% (58) | 66% (146) | 3.55 |
| Preserving open space | 5% (11) | 11% (24) | 36% (81) | 48% (106) | 3.27 |
| Promoting a sustainable, local economy | 3% (7) | 12% (27) | 39% (86) | 46% (102) | 3.27 |
| Promoting recycling and composting of waste | 2% (5) | 16% (35) | 35% (78) | 47% (104) | 3.27 |
| Maintaining small-town quality of life | 4% (8) | 15% (34) | 36% (80) | 45% (100) | 3.23 |
| Ensuring adequate health and educational facilities and services | 3% (6) | 14% (32) | 41% (92) | 41% (92) | 3.22 |
| Protecting significant habitat | 5% (11) | 12% (27) | 41% (90) | 42% (94) | 3.20 |
| Assuring housing affordability at all income levels | 7% (15) | 17% (38) | 30% (66) | 46% (103) | 3.16 |
| Zoning and tax incentives that encourage the qualities we want | 5% (12) | 18% (41) | 40% (88) | 36% (81) | 3.07 |
| Greater Island-wide collaboration | 7% (16) | 18% (39) | 36% (81) | 39% (86) | 3.07 |
| Providing viable alternatives to the automobile | 5% (11) | 22% (48) | 35% (77) | 39% (86) | 3.07 |
| Preserving roadside character, views and vistas | 5% (10) | 19% (42) | 43% (96) | 33% (74) | 3.05 |
| Promoting energy independence | 8% (17) | 21% (46) | 31% (68) | 41% (91) | 3.05 |
| Preserving historic character | 4% (8) | 21% (47) | 43% (95) | 32% (72) | 3.04 |
| Preserving/revitalizing farming and fishing | 5% (12) | 22% (48) | 37% (83) | 36% (79) | 3.03 |
| Determining a reasonable carrying capacity based on essential resources | 10% (22) | 15% (33) | 38% (84) | 37% (83) | 3.03 |
| -- table continued -- | | | | | |

| How important is it that the Island Plan address each of the following issues? [continued] | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Issue | Not important | Somewhat important | Very important | Extremely important | Response Average |
| Limiting the rate of growth | 8% (18) | 25% (56) | 27% (60) | 40% (88) | 2.98 |
| Limiting the construction of very large houses | 17% (38) | 16% (36) | 23% (51) | 44% (97) | 2.93 |
| Replacing suburbanization with traditional village and country development patterns | 10% (23) | 20% (44) | 36% (81) | 33% (74) | 2.93 |
| Improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities | 5% (12) | 29% (65) | 37% (83) | 28% (62) | 2.88 |
| Increasing public access to beaches | 12% (27) | 30% (67) | 30% (67) | 27% (61) | 2.73 |
| Limiting cars | 13% (28) | 29% (65) | 30% (67) | 28% (62) | 2.73 |
| Increasing the quantity and quality of public spaces | 6% (13) | 35% (77) | 40% (88) | 20% (44) | 2.73 |
| Preserving/revitalizing our maritime heritage | 7% (15) | 35% (77) | 41% (90) | 18% (40) | 2.70 |
| Promoting economic development | 14% (31) | 39% (87) | 35% (77) | 12% (27) | 2.45 |
| Making the Vineyard a more year-round community | 20% (45) | 36% (80) | 28% (62) | 16% (35) | 2.39 |
| Making improvements to roads to ease traffic | 19% (42) | 39% (87) | 28% (62) | 14% (31) | 2.37 |
| Serving the needs of the seasonal community | 15% (33) | 51% (113) | 29% (65) | 5% (11) | 2.24 |
| Promoting short-term tourism | 49% (109) | 36% (81) | 9% (21) | 5% (11) | 1.70 |

The highest response for each issue is in boldface. Shading highlights the more frequent responses.

Generally, all issues were cited as having some degree of importance to the plan. Other than about half the people saying that Promoting short-term tourism was not important, no more than 20% held out that another issue was not important (the median was 7%).

Protecting the coastal ponds received the strongest backing of importance (66% cited it as Extremely Important) and was the only issue to garner a clear plurality of responses in any of the four importance classifications.

| To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following planning principles? | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| Planning Principles | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree | Response Average |
| We should be planning for the long term, 50 years or more. | 0% (0) | 2% (4) | 8% (17) | 37% (82) | 54% (119) | 4.42 |
| We have the power to make significant changes in how the Island evolves, and should be prepared to do so for the sake of future generations. | 2% (4) | 4% (8) | 4% (8) | 41% (90) | 50% (112) | 4.34 |
| The issues and solutions facing the Vineyard towns are closely interrelated and must be dealt with in an Island-wide way. | 2% (5) | 3% (7) | 9% (20) | 35% (77) | 51% (113) | 4.29 |
| The fact that we are an island means that we have to accept some limitations. | 5% (10) | 5% (12) | 13% (28) | 43% (96) | 34% (76) | 3.97 |

The highest response for each issue is in boldface. Shading highlights the more frequent responses.

There is strong support of all four of the planning principles that will guide development of the Island Plan. The only principle not to receive a majority of people strongly agreeing may have to do with imprecise wording or examples of the "limitations" to be accepted by Islanders (as cited in several respondents' notations on the surveys).

| The following is a range of statements, described as a choice between two extremes. Select where on this continuum you think the Vineyard should be. | | | | | |
|--|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| Continuums | Stongly Favor A | Favor A | Neutral | Favor B | Strongly Favor B |
| A) Allow widespread development. B) Require development to locate in certain areas. | 4% (9) | 2% (4) | 9% (19) | 38% (84) | 48% (106) |
| On the Island: A) Growth is better for business. B) Growth management is better for business. | 4% (9) | 2% (4) | 10% (23) | 35% (78) | 49% (108) |
| The one third of the Island that is currently unprotected and undeveloped: A) should all be protected as open space. B) should all be developed. | 37% (83) | 36% (80) | 20% (45) | 4% (9) | 2% (5) |
| Issues can be most effectively dealt with: A) By each of the six towns. B) On an Island-wide basis. | 5% (10) | 8% (17) | 16% (35) | 39% (86) | 33% (74) |
| A) If the lack of stable, affordable housing leads some people to leave, that's okay. B) We should provide stable, affordable housing for all year-rounders. | 6% (13) | 12% (27) | 17% (37) | 33% (74) | 32% (71) |
| A) Allow anyone who wants to live on the Island to move here. B) Strictly limit population growth and development. | 14% (32) | 22% (48) | 31% (68) | 18% (41) | 15% (33) |

The highest response for each issue is in boldface. Shading highlights the more frequent responses.

Responses to the pattern of development, business growth, and use of remaining undeveloped/unconserved lands all are consistent – each implying less consumptive use of land for new development.

One in five respondents expressed no preference (neutral) in the disposition of the nearly one-third of the Island that remains to be either developed or conserved.

More than one-third did not agree with providing stable, affordable housing for all year-rounders.

The ambivalence concerning limiting growth is inconsistent with responses to other survey questions: 40% said limiting the rate of growth is extremely important: just 8% savina the growth rate was not an important issue for addressina in the plan.

What defines the character of the Vineyard?

The 181 responses to Question 5 display a powerful consonance, clustering around a small, recurring set of ideas describing the Vineyard's visual character, way of life and human community.

The responses refer to the Vineyard's beauty, environment, scenery or views a total of 76 times; 20 of these references occur in the phrase "natural beauty." Specific references to beaches, waterfront access and coastal resources appear 36 times. Open space is cited 23 times as a defining characteristic of the Vineyard.

References to the Island's six unique towns (55) are cited as a positive defining aspect of the Vineyard, often linked with references to people (47) and community (46). The word "small" comes up 38 times in the responses, most frequently as a modifier for "town" or "village." The responses are peppered with references to "quality of life," "pace of life," "way of life," "village life," "rural lifestyle," "simple life." The modifier "rural" is used 18 times by respondents to describe the character of Vineyard life. The Vineyard's community of artists and its cultural offerings are mentioned by nine respondents as defining aspects of Island life.

The Island is described 18 times as unique, and its history or heritage is cited 21 times as a defining characteristic; often the respondents juxtapose the idea of uniqueness against the image of mainland chain stores and homogenization. Twenty-three respondents cite diversity – of population, architecture or ecosystems – as important in defining the Vineyard's character. The idea of "island ness," of being set apart as a defining quality of the Vineyard, is brought up in 26 of the responses. The assertion that the Island's bounded nature includes limits appears in the responses nine times.

References to the importance of the seasons appear 13 times in the responses. Nine respondents specifically mention the dynamic interplay of the Island's summer and year-round populations.

Farms or farming are mentioned 18 times as defining aspects of the Vineyard. The responses include 10 references to fishing, four to recreational sport fishing and six to commercial fishing as a traditional Vineyard enterprise.

If you had three wishes for the Vineyard, what would they be?

The wish most often expressed by the 191 respondents to Question 6 was for the preservation of the Vineyard's natural resources and open spaces. A total of 51 respondents expressed a wish to protect the Island environment, frequently in the context of a desire for greater public access. (Another eight respondents specifically wished for protection of the Island's water resources.) Among the wishes:

- "Protect the environment through any means necessary (limiting growth, acquisition of open space, water protection policies, zoning/tax reform, etc.)."
- "More public access to natural spaces, walking trails, bike trails, water."
- "My first wish would be that the environment and natural beauty of the Island be preserved forever."
- "That there will always be lots of woodlands, meadows, beaches that anyone can walk and hike on."
- "Legal protection in place for all of the Island's remaining rare habitats and species, ponds and beaches, farms, and views and vistas."
- "Cooperative planning throughout the towns with emphasis placed on conservation of natural resources."
- "That the natural landscape would be allowed to thrive, along with native plants and animals."
- "I would wish that owners of the last remaining undeveloped land realize its value as open space habitat and either make an outright donation of the land to a land preservation group or work with those groups to enter into conservation restrictions to protect it for the future."

The second most popular wish (49 respondents) was for a solution to the high cost of housing and of living on the Island. Some expressions of this wish:

- "Affordable LIVING – not just housing. I have a house but it's incredibly expensive to just live here."
- "Affordable housing for those here who can no longer afford to live here."
- "Affordable housing on the English 'council house' model or the New England 'triple decker'."
- "Adequate affordable housing for those who provide essential services in the trades."
- "To provide sufficient housing so people of a wide range of economic means can live on the Island."
- "That ways be found for open space and affordable housing to co-exist, for example, by targeting areas appropriate for development and those that are not, through even more rigorous regulation that favors the creation of mixed use zoning and new villages designed to cluster new development, counterbalanced with open space protection."

- "Creating a critical mass of affordable housing opportunities to sustain the Island community's civic life, local economy, and cultural vitality."
- "Affordability: Prices, on everything from food to energy to housing, are driving away our permanent residents and our work force."

A wish expressed by 34 respondents is that the pace of Island development could be slowed or even stopped. Some sample wishes:

- "An end to property development (remember the Kennedy Bill) except in specific areas, where real low-income housing would be allowed."
- "Less building and development. There is ample opportunity to accommodate our housing and business needs through remodeling and preservation."
- "Freeze all new building."
- "Ideally to stop all growth. Realistically to limit and aesthetically plan future growth, remaining growth areas."
- "Strong controls in place to reduce the amount and control design of development, and political leaders with the wisdom to use them."
- "Undevelopment would win over development."
- "End to all speculative housing development other than affordable."
- "Stricter controls on development and mega-homes, and undevelopment of highly sensitive areas where homes should never have been built, such as barrier beaches, i.e., Crystal Lake, Moshup Trail."

Thirty-three respondents expressed the wish for a stronger regional perspective – in Island government, in cooperation among towns and provision of services. Sample wishes:

- "I wish we could function as an Island instead of as different towns."
- "Towns MUST work together on their common problems."
- "Island-wide government with six neighborhoods."
- "That we regionalize necessary services that don't directly impact the unique personalities of the six towns. (e.g.: solid waste management; fire and ambulance services)."
- "Centralized Island services such as police, fire, EMT, etc., for stronger and more efficient services – to save money."

- "For our residents to remember this is one Island with six towns and not six towns that happen to be located on one Island."
- "One government Island-wide, with a mayor."

The idea of sustainability, often in the context of a year-round economy less dependent on the tourism industry, made the wish lists of 26 respondents. Some sample expressions:

- "1. A larger year-round community vs. seasonal influx. 2. Better job opportunities for year-round residents. Most current jobs are service oriented."
- "That a sustainable economy could be developed not so reliant on the tourism industry."
- "A concerted effort to develop a sustainable local economy – opening to new & different options."
- "That it remains a real place for Island residents of a middle class to be able to live and work and that the Island could have its own viable economy."
- "More year-round jobs that provide benefits (health insurance). Less reliance on tourism."

Twenty-four of the respondents spent one of their wishes to reduce traffic on Island roads. While they were at it, 10 respondents wished for better Island bicycle paths and eight asked for better public transportation. They wrote:

- "No more widening of roads or accommodation given to more cars and trucks. Limitation of motor vehicles and enforcement of speed limit."
- "Fewer cars rather than roads built for cars. Trails that connect every conservation area, village and important site."
- "Better bike paths, less cars."
- "Ban nonresident automobiles."
- "That it is possible to walk or ride a bike to any town safely from any house on the Island."
- "Make it a whole lot less convenient to drive a car and a whole lot more convenient to use alternative transportation."

Other wishes that were popular, but expressed by fewer than 20 respondents, were:

- Stop or curb the building of excessively large houses (18).
- Pursue energy independence for the Island (18).

- Sustain the qualities of the Island's social community (14).
- Improve public beach access (14).
- Preserve the Island's rural character (11).

What suggestions would you make about the planning process, including issues for future surveys?

The 133 respondents to Question 7 included many who strayed from what was asked, taking the opportunity to weigh in on favorite Island issues, from comments on the location of the Martha's Vineyard Hospital to such statements as "improve the roadsides" and "Land Bank out of control."

Even among those who spoke to the question, the responses were so varied that they do not lend themselves well to generalizations. That said, the one chord struck most frequently in these responses was an appeal to the Martha's Vineyard Commission to involve the public more deeply and broadly in a conversation about the community's future. Eighteen of the respondents urged the Commission to be creative about ways to engage the public. Some of the comments:

- "This well-written survey should be used in conjunction with other public participation efforts such as visioning sessions (that can validate the results of the survey), planning sessions where experts from around the nation are brought in to share their knowledge, and use of more interactive web-based tools like this one so residents can participate on their time and in the comfort of their homes."
- "Involve all Islanders from the bottom up – educate the seasonal residents on the REAL issues, not the fact that they can't get a plumber or ferry reservations or a ticket to Possible Dreams Auction."
- "If Island citizens are well informed on planning issues of many concerns and projects, an informed and involved community will be receptive to future changes and planning."
- "Try to get everyone to do it – be a bit in your face – stand and pass these out at Stop and Shop for a week; everyone goes there."

- "Keep all segments of our towns involved: Discussion forums, Television coverage, press articles. Long, weekend, potluck meal discussion groups like the last West Tisbury visioning weekend are very useful."
- "I think it's important to encourage a wide range of Vineyarders to participate in surveys like this. Bring in immigrants, old timers, newlyweds, business people, teachers and retired folk. They make up the community and their input is invaluable."

Six respondents suggested making an effort to survey specific subgroups of the Vineyard community – longtime residents, seasonal property business owners, ferry passengers, voters, working people, residents who have left the Island, and children were among the groups mentioned.

A dozen respondents emphasized the importance of follow-through – continuing to listen to the community, keeping the goal in view, showing leadership in building consensus, making sure the insights gleaned from this survey don't end up gathering dust on a shelf. Among the comments in this group:

- "Be goal oriented, not process oriented. It's easy to get caught up in the process and feel that something is being accomplished. There is some intrinsic value in process, but planning and surveys should generate strategies that will result in quantifiable actions."
- "We want a focused process with realistic deadlines. We don't want a 'shotgun' approach to the planning process – select an issue, resolve it and move to the next issue."
- "Create a long-range vision of what the Island can be, and identify the immediate steps we must take to move toward it. Make the long-range planning a permanent, funded and staffed process at MVC, and not a spasmodic process we do every 20 years or so. Do an annual 'report card' of progress toward (or away from) our long-term visions, and tell us every year what our successes were, and what our failures were (and name names)."
- "I would like to see leadership for building consensus around the various issues, as well as tapping into the many talents and skills of our residents. We should be able to come up with creative solutions to our many challenges, be a model for our type of community."
- "Keep the process simple and make sure the process doesn't stop with findings and recommendations but continues into an action and implementation phase(s)."

Four respondents urged the Martha's Vineyard Commission to set its sights high and "take a strong stand" in applying the results of its survey; two respondents urged the Commission to be cautious and not divide the community by trying to accomplish too much. One respondent urged the Commission to think long-term as it considers its policies and plans, observing, "It is easy to talk about moderate rates of growth or slowly increasing nitrogen inputs into groundwater when one's perspective is short-term; but 'moderate' trends actually have enormous impact if you trace them far enough into the future." But another called for a shorter horizon, arguing, "planning for more than a few years is dreaming."

Four respondents accused the Commission of bias in its design of the survey. Wrote one: "This survey is a joke. It completely favors the answers the MVC already wants." Suggested another: "Have the survey written by disinterested professionals. They do exist."

One respondent considered Question 7 and lamented: "Too many people have given up. Economic forces appear to be stronger than planning. They have already destroyed our social fabric by making housing unaffordable and converted the Island into an economy that exploits cheap immigrant labor. They (the economic forces) will eventually destroy our environment through overdevelopment. You cannot even cultivate a sense of urgency unless you can convince people that it is actually possible to take control of the Island's destiny. We should explore the tools available and (once public awareness is properly engaged) find out what people would be willing to do – what extremes would they go to – to save this Island."