

The public can participate in preparing Nantucket's Master Plan

"On a good day they could make half a mile", said Edouard Stackpole of the early Nantucketers as they rolled their timber frame houses on logs with teams of oxen. Their decision to move the original settlement of Sherburne two miles west to the town's present location on the "new" harbor indicates a can-do spirit that is of this place, a spirit that may lend us perspective.

Today, Nantucket faces an equally tough challenge. Twenty years of growth have caused a range of problems, that today have put this fragile place we love at risk. What can we do? Questions whether to preserve or to develop Nantucket are so intertwined that any real solution will have to fairly address both. The question is not whether we will continue to develop, but how we will develop the island. The Planning Commission's decision this past winter to prepare and implement a Master Plan may be our best hope for a comprehensive solution to the growth that Nantucket anticipates into the next century.

Many of us have assumed that the island is "protected", maybe because of such special planning mechanisms as the Historic District Commission design review and the Land Bank for open space acquisition. Without a comprehensive plan, land use has

open space areas to existing developed areas. Transfer Development Rights (TDR) programs are working effectively in other communities to fairly compensate land owners, while protecting open space lands. These TDR programs can be a mix of regulations and incentives to encourage development to follow a desirable pattern. We need to learn more about TDRs to better understand how it may be suited to Nantucket.

The village concept has been present on Nantucket for 300 years, a traditional land use pattern that is both urban and rural. The suburban pattern that has resulted from our large lot zoning will not be remedied by new "cluster" subdivisions. The village plan applies the cluster idea to the entire island. Nantucket Town, Madaket, Cisco, Surfside, 'Sconset, Wauwinet and central areas could be given the pedestrian scaled features for increased self-sufficiency. These more condensed settlement areas will make infrastructure expansions more manageable and may relieve some congestion in Town.

The Master Plan process involves analysis of information, consensus building, translation into a plan and implementation. The process will be led by the Planning Commission and the Board of Selectmen and their staffs. This Regional Planning Agency working together with the

been determined solely by the zoning map and bylaw. In 1970 a Master solely Plan was drafted, but was not formally adopted by the town. Property owner's rights need to be balanced by the increasingly complex issues that the community faces together.

If roughly one third of the island is currently protected under conservation restrictions and one third has been developed, then the use of the remaining third has yet to be determined. If that remaining third were to be developed, then Nantucket would have half as much open space proportionally as it has today. The 1993 Open Space Plan showed that from 1987 to 1993 seven percent of Nantucket land was developed, while three percent was preserved. As prices rise, the stated open space goal of 50 percent of island-wide land will become more difficult to reach.

There are approximately 7000 houses on the island. Estimates of how many additional houses are possible under current zoning, known as the "build-out", vary from 8,000 to 18,000 new houses. There are many variables, such as second dwellings that affect a reasonable build-out figure, but even a most conservative estimate indicates that we need to be prepared for at least double the number of houses that exist today. Will we kill the goose that laid the golden egg?

town leaders will pursue a unified plan that will factor in all diverse interests in the community. For this reason the success of the effort is greatly dependent on community involvement. Everyone will be invited to speak up.

The 1990 Goals And Objectives For Balanced Growth was the result of two years of workshops with over 200 members of the community. Review of this document will serve as a starting point of the Master Plan process. Some people in the planning community believe that this may be our last opportunity to step back and ask what the real carrying capacities of the island are ecologically and to what extent our infrastructures may be expanded.

Does a sense of stewardship of the land, of this remarkable place play any part in this discussion? Or in retrospect, will we be the generation that dropped the ball? Can we overcome inertia and make the changes to our system to effectively save the spirit of this place? Thinking of those early settlers and that slow and steady pace of the heavy timber frame, central chimney and all, rolling towards the new harbor...

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PERSPECTIVES



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The demand for both seasonal and year-round homes has made for an enviable real estate market from which many of us have benefited. Because so much of our community is dependent on real estate sales and construction growth, any Master Plan solution will have to ensure growth to be politically viable. The so-called Village Plan, rather than limiting growth, proposes to shift growth from