



Key Issues Report

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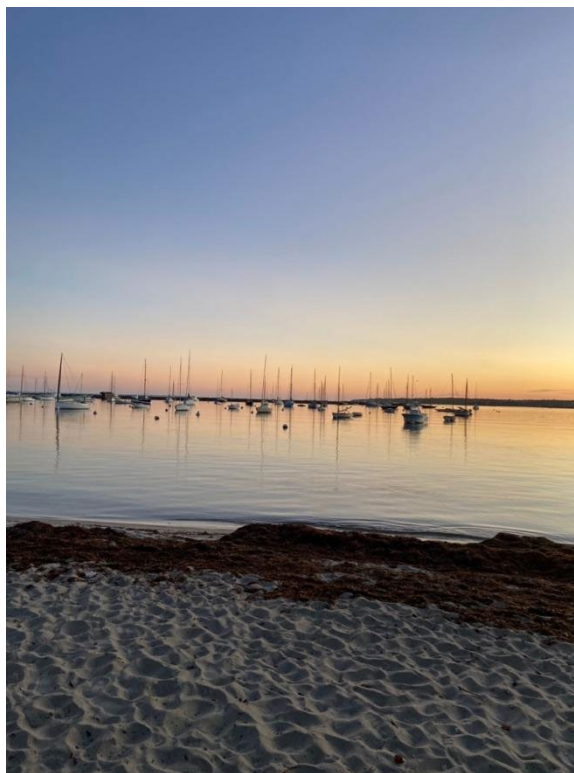
Key Issues

This document identifies a series of key challenges currently facing the Town of Tisbury. These key issues and related opportunities are essential to understanding and framing Tisbury's first town-wide Master Plan and preparing to develop its vision, goals, and strategies for the next ten to twenty years.

Natural Resources

The diversity, beauty, and recreational use of Tisbury's natural resources are all recognized as strengths contributing to the overall quality of life in town. Many community members have noted the multiple benefits natural resources provide, including recreational and economic benefits. Residents have named West Chop Woods, Lake Tashmoo, and the Town's public beaches as some of its most valued resources. Much of Tisbury's open space is protected in perpetuity, especially in western Tisbury, and offers significant benefits for recreation, wildlife habitat, and aquifer protection.

Despite these strengths, several challenges hinder the Town's ability to enhance and maintain high-quality natural resources. Tisbury's wastewater infrastructure serves a limited area around Vineyard Haven. It has a confined capacity to accommodate additional flows from existing connections, economic growth areas, and housing development, among other potential users. Development outside the service area relies on on-site septic systems, which are the primary driver of water quality impairments



for nitrogen in Lagoon Pond and Lake Tashmoo. The Massachusetts Estuaries Project (MEP), a partnership between MassDEP, the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, and southern Massachusetts communities, estimated that 76 percent and 80 percent of the total controllable nitrogen sources are attributable to septic systems in Lagoon Pond and Lake Tashmoo, respectively.¹ Eastern Tisbury neighborhoods, especially along State Road and in Vineyard Haven, have high concentrations of impervious surfaces that contribute to stormwater runoff within the watersheds. Stormwater runoff is an additional nitrogen source in both water bodies and contributes to the pathogen Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for Vineyard Haven Harbor. These water quality impairments degrade habitat quality, affect the economic viability of local shellfisheries, and impact recreational use.

The attractiveness of Tisbury's natural resources draws high levels of recreational use, which can contribute to environmental degradation. Traditional block and chain moorings (such as those allowed in Tisbury's waterways) and anchors for boats can disturb and destroy eelgrass beds when the chain or anchor drags across lake and ocean bottoms.^{2, 3} Concerns about eelgrass along with noise levels drove the Tisbury Select Board to vote to introduce a temporary moratorium on anchoring in Lake Tashmoo in March 2023.^{4, 5} The temporary moratorium will be in place until the Town has a policy to reduce the number of boats in the water body. The Town also needs to address wastewater pump-out service needs for vessels in Lake Tashmoo. The Town's existing pump-out boat for Lake Tashmoo was deemed past its service life in early 2023 and there are concerns that wastewater from recreators and boaters could introduce additional nitrogen loads into the water body.⁶

Additional community stakeholder concerns include the vulnerability of natural resources to climate change, particularly sea level rise. The lack of an extensive tree canopy cover in eastern Tisbury and Vineyard Haven, combined with unshaded impervious groundcover, is also a concern as average temperatures trend higher and Tisbury experiences more high-heat days.

Opportunities from recent planning initiatives locally and regionally can help guide and improve the management of natural resources. The Town's *Open Space and Recreation Plan* (OSRP), recently updated in 2019 with final edits in 2021, provides a comprehensive evaluation of ongoing and emerging challenges, such as climate change, and a set of goals, objectives, and actions for open space and recreation resource protection and management. Multiple projects are currently underway to determine the future of Tisbury's sewer system, including the Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan (CWMP) and the State Road Sewer Expansion project. Tisbury's completion of Phase

¹ *Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan: Phase 1 Needs Assessment*, (2021) 1, 41.

² Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, "DMF's Eelgrass Restoration and Monitoring," accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/dmfs-eelgrass-restoration-and-monitoring>.

³ Town of Tisbury, *Waterways Regulations*, (May 2017), 16-18.

⁴ Louisa Hufstader, "Anchoring Moratorium Begins in Lake Tashmoo," *The Vineyard Gazette*, March 22, 2023, <https://vineyardgazette.com/news/2023/03/22/anchoring-moratorium-begins-lake-tashmoo>.

⁵ Massachusetts Division of Marine Fisheries, *Lake Tashmoo, Tisbury, MA Eelgrass Survey*, (April 2022), 7-8.

⁶ Louisa Hufstader, "Tisbury Eyes Anchoring Moratorium in Lake Tashmoo," *The Vineyard Gazette*, February 10, 2023, <https://vineyardgazette.com/news/2023/02/10/tisbury-eyes-anchoring-moratorium-lake-tashmoo>.

I of a CWMP in 2022 builds off previous work assessing the link between development patterns, wastewater management, and environmental quality. It will serve as a guide to making environmentally and financially sound decisions about wastewater management infrastructure, including in the context of any future development. DPW's Impervious Cover Disconnection (ICD) Project will also help address water quality and flooding issues by prioritizing projects.

Tisbury also works collaboratively with partners across the island on natural resource planning and protection, including the Martha's Vineyard Commission (MVC), other island municipalities, and nonprofits like the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank. A recent effort led by MVC in partnership with all six island communities, the Wampanoag Tribe, and community stakeholders produced the *Climate Action Plan* for Martha's Vineyard in 2022, which establishes goals, objectives, and actions related to land use management, natural resource protection, and biodiversity that encourages the island towns to work together to address resources and issues that cross town boundaries. The Climate Action Fair in May 2023, hosted by the MVC Climate Education Committee and other local sponsors, focused on how the island communities, individuals, and other stakeholders can support and advance the Climate Action Plan's goals.⁷ Collaborations will help Tisbury meet limited staffing and funding capacity at the municipal level to address long-term challenges to improve water quality, wildlife habitat, and resilience of natural resources against climate change.

SUSTAINABILITY, RESILIENCY, AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Pursuing sustainability and resiliency will require the Town to strengthen its natural resources, including by minimizing negative impacts of land uses and policies, and mitigate current and future climate impacts to both the natural and built environment. As an island community, Tisbury is uniquely affected by the challenges of a changing climate, including sea level rise, increased frequency and intensity of severe storms, and extreme fluctuations in precipitation and temperatures. It must increase its resilience to the impacts it is already experiencing today and those it will experience in the future, which may be more costly and dangerous. As part of Tisbury's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Workshop held in 2018, community stakeholders identified hurricanes and Nor'easters, coastal flooding and storm surge, sea level rise, and intense rain and flooding as the climate change hazards most relevant to the Town.⁸ These hazards have high potential for damage to property and infrastructure, particularly in coastal areas. Sea level rise also threatens to reshape the Town's landscape with as little as 1-3 feet of sea level rise inundating low-lying critical facilities and infrastructure, residences, and areas of downtown Vineyard Haven (Map 4.1 and Map 4.2). With Tisbury projected to experience a 0.6-foot increase in sea level by 2030, 1.5-foot increase by 2050, and 3.3-foot increase by 2070 relative to 1990 sea level, future planning for and adaptation to sea level rise and its impacts on other coastal hazards are a priority.⁹

⁷ The Vineyard Way, "Climate Action Fair 2023," accessed March 23, 2023, <https://www.thevineyardway.org/category/climate-action-fair-2023>.

⁸ Town of Tisbury. 2018. Tisbury Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Workshop Summary of Findings. Prepared by the Horsley Witten Group, Inc., Sandwich, MA.

⁹ Martha's Vineyard Commission, Dukes County Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan Update (October 2021, amended May 2022), 38.

Flooding, water quality issues, and resource consumption exemplify the interconnectivity between Tisbury's natural and built environment. Wastewater infrastructure (grinder pump stations and lift stations) located within the floodplain is vulnerable to increased coastal flooding and can become inoperable when flooded, and on-site septic systems and leaching fields may also have compromised function during localized flooding events. Drinking water comes from wells accessing the underground aquifer, meaning preserving clean water quality is vital for both natural environment conservation and maintaining a high quality of life. A Groundwater Protection Overlay District, added in 1999, protects Tisbury's three well fields and corresponds with the Zone II Wellhead Protection Areas established by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection for drinking water supply protection. However, there are several high-threat land uses within the Groundwater Protection Overlay District that could lead to contamination issues, including several users of pesticide, hazardous materials storage, residential underground storage tanks, the Tisbury Town Landfill, and Carroll's Trucking on Edgartown Road.

Residential water use per capita exceeds the recommended usage by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The Town does not have a composting program to redirect organic waste from the solid waste stream. The transfer station diverts waste from the trash stream by accepting items, including furniture and hazardous waste. There is an opportunity to expand diversion by providing composting programs and strengthening existing programs. According to the recent *Climate Action Plan*, shipping food waste off the island between 2020-2040 is projected to cost more than \$19 million. The success of diversion programs has the potential to reduce the financial burden incurred by the town, as shipping waste off the island is expensive.

BUILDING LOCAL CAPACITY

The Town has participated in various projects and facilitated studies to understand the critical infrastructure, facilities, and places vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Impacts of Climate Change	
Climate Change	Most Vulnerable Areas and Physical Resources/Infrastructure
Rising temperatures	Areas with high impervious surface cover (e.g., Vineyard Haven Harbor, State Road area) Agricultural resources (e.g., farms)
Rising Sea Surface Temperatures and Ocean Acidification	Surface water bodies (e.g., Lake Tashmoo, Lagoon Pond, Vineyard Haven Harbor) Shellfisheries
Sea Level Rise	Coastal areas (e.g., downtown Vineyard Haven, Vineyard Sound coastline)

Table 1. Impacts of Climate Change

Changes in Precipitation Patterns	Flood-prone coastal areas and low-lying areas (e.g., downtown Vineyard Harbor, Five Corners) Surface water bodies (e.g., Lake Tashmoo, Lagoon Pond, Vineyard Haven Harbor)
Extreme Weather Events	Flood-prone coastal areas and low-lying areas (e.g., downtown Vineyard Haven Harbor, Lagoon Pond Road, Beach Road) Coastal infrastructure and facilities (e.g., Tisbury Steamship Authority Ferry Terminal, Packer Fuel Docks, Eastville Breakwater, Lagoon Pond Drawbridge) Electrical utility infrastructure

Source: Compilation of findings from Tisbury Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Workshop (October 17, 2018) and Martha's Vineyard Climate Action Plan (June 24, 2022).

Addressing these challenges requires increased local capacity, including staff and technical expertise, to secure funding and move projects through design and construction. Tisbury does not have a full-time conservation agent to help guide protection of Tisbury's sensitive natural areas and assure all state and local statutes are being sufficiently met.¹⁰ The Town's Open Space and Recreation Committee works without the aid of an administrative assistant or annual budget. However, Tisbury benefits from strong partners and partnerships across Martha's Vineyard that recognizes the unique climate, natural hazard, and energy challenges that an island setting creates, and plans for a sustainable future are already underway. The Martha's Vineyard Climate Action Plan is a comprehensive document that establishes goals, objectives, and actions for interrelated thematic areas, including energy transformation; transportation, infrastructure, and waste; and public health and safety, and outlines ongoing opportunities for collaboration between island communities and their partners. Continuing to foster collaboration on climate goals will require the Town to stay actively engaged in the Climate Action Plan's implementation. Locally, Tisbury can rely on the recent town- and district-focused planning initiatives as the foundation for understanding its vulnerabilities and resilience priorities. An ongoing challenge, however, is coordinating various related efforts involving different local and state government agencies and private entities. Several recent and ongoing projects in Tisbury focus on issues related to stormwater runoff, coastal resiliency, and wastewater management, but it can be challenging to share information and thus coordinate recommendations for action that are supportive and complementary to one another.

¹⁰ As of March 2023, Tisbury employs a part-time Conservation Agent for one day a week.

Zoning and Land Use

REGULATORY ISSUES

Tisbury's zoning bylaw has several significant issues that hinder the Town's ability to regulate land use and development effectively. First, there is a lack of clarity and organization in the bylaw. For example, it lacks a clear table of use regulations, the subdistricts of the Waterfront Commercial District are not delineated on the zoning map, and the parcel-by-parcel regulations for Lagoon Harbor Park are inappropriate for the bylaw as a single zoning district should have uniform regulations.

Beyond poor usability, the Town's zoning regulations sometimes limit or unduly complicate badly needed types of development. Many proposals are subject to multiple layers of discretionary review: special permits from the Planning Board, advisory opinions from the Site Plan Review Board, and sometimes additional review by the Martha's Vineyard Commission. Some local stakeholders reported that the Town relies too much on special permits, which, when applied inappropriately, can create needless delays, risks, and uncertainty for developers. The dimensional requirements for multifamily are also excessive and prohibitive. For example, a four-unit project in the Residential 20 district would require an 80,000-square-foot lot, which is nearly impossible to find in Residential 20 and is much larger than necessary to support that many units in the first place.

ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES

The Town lacks a full-time staff position dedicated to planning, zoning, or land use regulation. The building commissioner acts as a *de facto* staff contact for the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals but has many other duties and cannot devote the proper time to reviewing the zoning bylaw, supporting and building the capacity of volunteer boards, and handling development applications. Dedicated, professional staff support will be essential to implementing many recommendations of the master plan, not just those associated with land use.

REGIONAL LAND USE NEEDS

Tisbury is a major port of entry and commercial center for Martha's Vineyard, and thus the needs of the entire island drive development pressure and shape the Town's land use needs. Many local stakeholders expressed concerns that Tisbury is developing and maintaining roads, housing, and commercial areas to benefit the whole Vineyard without support from the other towns. Tisbury should pursue increased coordination and cooperation regarding land use decisions and development impacts with the other five municipalities, taking advantage of the MVC's assistance and resources.

Open Space

Issues of primary concern and strategies to manage and care for parks and open space are well documented in the Vision Planning Summary for Parks, Beaches, and Open Space.¹¹ This summary also includes the importance and perceived need for village parks and street improvements in the Vineyard Haven waterfront and business district.

There has been success with collaboration and diversity of entities that contribute to protecting open space. Opportunity exists for the town to continue collaborating with nonprofit conservation groups and increase its role in the effective stewardship of properties. A challenge is to improve accountability for routine maintenance, such as removing sand from bike paths and trash, as responsibilities are unclear.



Several challenges have been identified in the realm of open space planning and preservation. It is unclear who is responsible for accomplishing the work specified in the *Open Space and Recreation Plan*. More staff-level support specifically for the Open Space and Recreation Committee would help. Another challenge is identifying land that could lose protected status and ensuring that significant properties are not lost to development. Acquiring the funds to manage and maintain the parks is a challenge. Making sound decisions and investments is difficult without empowering a planning department or parks committee to take responsibility for comprehensive, long-term planning.¹² Figuring out a way to coordinate planning, maintenance, and stewardship of all town open space and recreation resources is a challenge and an opportunity for the town going forward.

To protect open space lands that face “repurposing” or development, the Town can establish a review process with evaluation criteria that would enable a rigorous and fair review to document the anticipated benefits to conservation and community recreation.¹³

Opportunities are plentiful to improve education about natural and cultural resources in existing open spaces. To increase public awareness about available open space resources, the Town may clarify where public access is allowed and improve mapping and signs at town parks and open space properties. The Town could build on the well-attended First Fridays to host more community events in parks and open space areas.

¹¹ Vision Planning Summary – Parks, Beaches, and Open Space, 2014.

¹² Tisbury Planning Board, *Tisbury Open Space and Recreation Plan*, March 2019, 70.

¹³ Ibid.

In addition to connecting open space by developing trails between natural areas and improving pedestrian and bike routes in developed areas of the town, Tisbury also has opportunities to join some of the open space areas on Lagoon Pond and Lake Tashmoo by water routes. Creating a more robust recreation program could increase physical activity among town residents, contributing to improved health and providing opportunities for social engagement.

WATERFRONT ACCESS

Increasing and improving waterfront access to beaches for swimming is a challenge. The growing interest in kayaking and paddle boarding also creates a greater need for small boat storage and launching areas. For many years community members have expressed a desire for public access and a boardwalk along the waterfront. In addition, improved pedestrian walks from Main Street to an accessible waterfront would benefit residents and tourists by connecting cultural resources, recreation, and commercial activities to help strengthen the Vineyard Haven Harbor Cultural District.¹⁴

Increasing public access to the waterfront will require creative approaches and collaboration between the town, nonprofit groups, and private landowners. There may be an opportunity to increase public access as a condition of waterfront development and through Chapter 91 licensing. Through Chapter 91, the Commonwealth seeks to preserve and protect the rights of the public, and to guarantee that private uses of tidelands and waterways serve a proper public purpose. There may also be an opportunity to acquire additional waterfront open space when development retreats from the shoreline due to climate change, increased storms, and rising sea levels.¹⁵

Housing

PROTECTING EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

Tisbury has several key advantages for housing a substantial year-round population that the Town should recognize and preserve. The Town has a high proportion of rental units compared to the rest of Martha's Vineyard. Rental units are often smaller and less expensive on average than homeownership units. Areas like Vineyard Haven have existing residential density and access to utilities, amenities, and transit. Tisbury has also worked successfully with nonprofit partners like the Island Housing Trust to produce dozens of permanently affordable units.

However, significant challenges threaten Tisbury's role as a center for the Vineyard's year-round population. The growth in housing costs affects both year-round residents and many of the seasonal residents whose families have owned homes on the island for a long time. The proliferation of short-term rentals throughout the Cape and Islands region concerns both year-round and long-time seasonal residents. Over the next 5 years households in the 65-74 age bracket will comprise by far the largest relative growth of all age cohorts within a 20-minute drive of Tisbury, its primary market area for rental housing.

¹⁴ Tisbury Planning Board, *Tisbury Open Space and Recreation Plan*, March 2019, 68.

¹⁵ Ibid.

REGULATORY BARRIERS

Tisbury's zoning bylaw should be updated to reflect the types of residential development that the Town will need going forward. Local regulations could do more to facilitate and encourage the production of needed year-round affordable housing. Many of the zoning issues described in Chapter 5, "Land Use," make it difficult to pursue the multifamily housing developments that are most likely to produce affordable units. Tisbury has a few regulations explicitly aimed at creating income-restricted units (see "Zoning Regulations" section above); these could be expanded and made easier to utilize.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

The towns of Martha's Vineyard have recently demonstrated a newfound desire to cooperate on island-wide housing issues through initiatives like the Martha's Vineyard Housing Bank and an upcoming study on short-term rentals. The Island Housing Trust successfully combined CPA funds from multiple towns in exchange for building local preference into the design of the housing marketing plan. Tisbury houses about 23 percent of the island's year-round population and should continue cooperating with the five other Vineyard towns and the MVC to pool resources and funds to address housing issues affecting the entire island.

Economic Development

From an economic development perspective, Tisbury has several strengths and opportunities. The year-round ferry access is a competitive benefit for Tisbury. The regular service of this crucial transportation link means that Tisbury maintains a year-round economic activity and vitality that other towns on the Vineyard lack. Employment and economic activity are steadier throughout the year, which attracts a more significant labor force and a business community that caters to the daily needs of local residents and visitors. The strength of the local, year-round economy and the ferry terminal allows Tisbury to continue leveraging its role as the Vineyard's hub and commercial center - to islanders and visitors, no matter the season.

Tisbury also faces its fair share of weaknesses and challenges. While less seasonal than neighboring towns, the economy is still seasonal compared to other regions of the state. To a degree, Tisbury's vitality is far more beholden to fluctuations in tourism than one would find in a more diverse economy. The high cost of living on the island also makes it hard to attract and retain new community members. While there may be jobs, the high cost of housing means groups like service workers, young people, and new families simply cannot find housing they can afford. Living in Tisbury is increasingly unattainable for the next generation, and this has already had an impact on the local economy. Many people have observed that the ferry pier and Main Street require aesthetic and circulation improvements to encourage a sense of welcome, ease mobility, bring in visitor dollars, and create a better environment to build businesses. On top of these, Tisbury faces the generational challenge of climate change and sea level rise. These forces will increasingly affect the Main Street business district and the town's critical economic lifeline, the waterfront. Finally, many in the community perceive the



local government as a hindrance or obstacle. The Town government will need to be more proactive as a force of positive change in the face of these challenges.

HIGH ISLAND COST OF LIVING AND STAFFING CONSTRAINTS

While Tisbury departments have many dedicated staff members, the Town has struggled to hire and retain staff in recent years. The unaffordable cost of living is the most significant barrier to adequate staffing, as expressed by the library, Tisbury School,

wastewater, emergency services, and the fire department. Some Tisbury School staff commute daily from Falmouth due to a lack of affordability on the island. The library struggles to find qualified librarians and support staff on the island; for example, cybersecurity concerns at the library require an experienced IT professional. The wastewater and emergency services departments noted that general worker shortages in licensed professionals and paramedics contribute to the existing hiring challenges. Town staff members have considered opportunities for alleviating the housing burden by creating affordable housing on town-owned land.

GROWING AND CHANGING SERVICE NEEDS

Tisbury town services evolve as the needs of residents, businesses, and visitors change. In recent years, town services have responded to a population with higher needs cohorts such as an increasing senior population, year-round population, and limited English-speaking population, increased storm events, changing requirements for short-term rentals, and regional housing shortages. The emergency services department has experienced increased off-season calls, calls involving older adults, and trauma-related calls. These calls increase the physical and emotional burden on staff members needing to carry older adults and process traumatic experiences. The department currently has one ambulance but foresees needing two ambulances in the future as calls continue to increase. More intense storm events have also required emergency services staff to work additional hours and longer shifts. More regional collaboration for emergency services should be considered to meet the growing needs.

The schools, police, and library need bilingual staff and resources. The police already provide bilingual information on their website, the schools connect limited-English families with health services, and the library has mentioned a desire to hire a staff member who speaks both English and Portuguese. The increase in fire inspections required by new short-term rental policies strains fire staff capacity. Regional housing shortages and a growing number of seniors increased the needs of the Senior Center, which was, as of 2022, working to hire an outreach specialist to connect seniors with external resources, including housing and transportation services. Future development in Tisbury requires expanding the sewer system and additional staffing at the wastewater plant.

SEWER SYSTEM CONSTRAINTS

Tisbury's wastewater system and sewer are underbuilt, especially vulnerable in the commercial areas in town. Currently, Tisbury's sewer system only serves 130 connections. In areas without sewers, new multifamily housing developments need to build septic systems, which inhibits development. Reliance on on-site wastewater systems results in nitrogen pollution, potentially contaminating the water supply. Expansion to the wastewater system and investment in nitrogen-reducing septic systems can potentially reduce the risk of nitrogen pollution; however, the sewer system can only experience a limited expansion without a costly expansion of the wastewater treatment plant. Multiple projects are currently underway to determine the future of Tisbury's sewer system, including the Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan and the State Road Sewer Expansion project.

Transportation, Public Facilities and Services

BUILDING, VEHICLE, AND ASSET CONDITION

Tisbury's Water Works building, Senior Center, and Police Station are all in generally good condition with minimal issues. The Fire and Emergency Services building was built in 2012 and is in generally good condition but needs some improvements including air conditioner/dehumidifier; removal of mold on the roof, and repainting. For the most part, the town vehicle fleets are also in good condition with ongoing planned maintenance. The Library, Harbormaster building, Town Hall, and Town Hall Annex fail to meet the Town's needs. The Library does not have sufficient programming space and is currently undergoing a capital campaign to identify potential funding strategies for an addition. The Harbormaster building has insufficient storage and lacks necessary shower facilities. The Town Hall Annex is in a trailer needing replacement due to outdated HVAC and general deterioration, while the Town Hall does not have sufficient space for office staff. Separate Town Hall Annex and Town Hall locations make cross-departmental coordination a challenge. An ongoing renovation to the Tisbury School aims to address long-standing building concerns, but has had a financial impact on the town. The Town recently underwent a Water Distribution System Capital Improvement Plan, offering recommendations for storage and distribution facilities improvements after realizing the severity of water distribution storage deficits.

DOWNTOWN VINEYARD HAVEN'S MULTIMODAL DEMANDS

The Steamship Authority Ferry Terminal and surrounding roadways experience extreme congestion, parking challenges, and multimodal conflicts, particularly around ferry departure and arrival times in the summer months. The Vineyard Haven ferry terminal is the most heavily used on the island, meaning Tisbury must accommodate freight, vehicle, and transit traffic to other towns while also providing multimodal access to local destinations. Town staff and residents identify the Five Corners intersection as a significant bottleneck location that impacts mobility, connectivity, and safety for all travel modes and users, including long vehicle queues on Beach Road towards Oak Bluffs. Other transportation issues in the downtown area include, the Town parking lot next to Stop and Shop, and the VTA bus terminal as areas with frequent multimodal conflicts and congestion. Insufficient loading docks, confusing roadway patterns, and narrow sidewalks contribute to these concerns. To address these

issues will require the collaboration of public and private realm integrated partners including the Town, MVC, VTA, SSA, Post Office, Stop & Shop, and Cumberland Farms, and others.

Town officials recognize the importance of Vineyard Haven's commercial activity and the existing strain on the roadway system. Town residents and staff considered redirecting barges carrying freight vehicles to the RM Packer location in the harbor and redirecting vehicles headed to Vineyard Haven to the Park & Ride lot to reduce vehicles in the area. The Town must continue to work with regional partners, including the VTA, the Steamship Authority, and other transportation providers, to create a more welcoming multimodal gateway.



SEASONAL DEMAND ON TRANSPORTATION RESOURCES

Severe and frequent congestion affects the Vineyard Haven area and roadways across town. Traffic conditions are exacerbated in the summer season. Congestion town-wide lengthens travel times for personal vehicles, transit vehicles, and emergency vehicles and impacts the quality of life for residents, businesses, and visitors. The intersection of State Road and Edgartown Vineyard Haven Road experiences long vehicular queuing and delays on most intersection approaches during the high summer season and shoulder spring and fall seasons. Vehicle queues at this intersection can extend back towards West Tisbury. The poor operation of this intersection has a significant impact on the mobility and safety of all vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists. The level of congestion also creates noise and air quality impacts which affects the quality of life for residents.

Town residents and the Martha's Vineyard Commission have considered ways to limit the number of vehicles and freight entering the town to ease the burden on Tisbury's roadways without changing the town's character. Options for reducing vehicle burden on the town include actively monitoring and regulating the number of vehicles (not visitors) entering and exiting through Steamship Authority ferries, restricting the number of vehicles at vacation rentals, increasing bike share options, and modifying the existing reservation and pricing system for bringing vehicles to the island.

While Tisbury has shared-use paths, sidewalks, and bike lanes, critical gaps in the network inhibit movement by people walking, biking, scooting, or using a wheelchair. The Town's existing bicycle and pedestrian connections to the town's beach areas and waterfront are limited. Sidewalk networks in town are incomplete, with missing sidewalks leading to important destinations, including the Senior Center. State Road, the major east-west running arterial in town, does not have accommodation for people riding bicycles. Some sidewalks in downtown Vineyard Haven are narrow (Water Street) and many have obstructions (utility poles and signs) which reduce the effective sidewalk width and do not

support the existing pedestrian volumes. No safe biking option exists for children going to the library after school. There are several private dead-end roadways throughout town that limit connectivity and access for all modes, increase vehicle miles traveled and increase emergency response times.

Traffic calming measures on Tisbury's residential roadways present an opportunity to slow vehicles and improve multimodal connections. The existing right of way below the power lines provides an opportunity for formalized pedestrian and bicycle trails through coordination with utility companies. Existing underutilized roadways, like Beach Street Extension, present the opportunity to pilot pedestrian-only streets at certain times of day. In addition, the Town is eligible for \$500,000 in Complete Streets funding through MassDOT and has already completed the Complete Streets Prioritization Plan. The current Prioritization Plan was completed in 2017 and should be updated to reflect current needs and projects.

SAFETY AND SUSTAINABILITY

There are existing safety concerns for people walking, biking, driving, and taking transit affect quality of life. The issues identified by town staff and residents include visibility for turning vehicles, speeding vehicles on residential roadways, and abandoned vehicles at the Tisbury Park & Ride lot. Residents at a public meeting mentioned the need for bicycle accommodation on State Road in response to a severe bicycle crash occurring within the last fifteen years. MassDOT has identified State Road at Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road, Five Corners, and State Road at North Main Street as high crash intersections, and South Main Street and State Road as an HSIP Crash Cluster between 2017-2019. The Town is currently reinstituting the Traffic Safety Committee, including the DPW director, the police, and one select board member to discuss town-wide road safety issues and collaborate on solutions. So far, the police have implemented speed feedback signs. Along with safety concerns on town roadways, Tisbury's coastal roadways are susceptible to flooding from storm events and eventual sea level rise. Specifically, Beach Road and the Five Corners intersection experience severe flooding during storm events and long-term sustainability is in question. Many services and goods must be brought from the mainland to the island. Interruptions in the supply chain impact the ability of Tisbury residents and businesses to sustain shipments of goods and services.

COLLABORATION

The Town of Tisbury departments work together with other Martha's Vineyard towns and regional organizations to provide emergency services, senior services, drinking water, and public schools. The Harbormaster and police department respond to water emergencies together when necessary. The Senior Center works with Healthy Aging Martha's Vineyard and the Island Housing Trust to connect residents to transportation and housing. Oak Bluffs and the Town of Tisbury offer mutual aid when responding to emergencies requiring an ambulance. The Sewer Advisory Board, Public Works, and the Select Board coordinate sewer-related decisions. This collaboration is key to the provision of services to island residents.

Community Health

It is important to recognize that community health is linked to employment and income security, housing affordability, transportation needs, or other issues that local decision-makers can impact. The following highlights key issues specific to public health, but it will be important to talk about community health impacts when addressing cross-cutting themes of the Master Plan. Key issues associated with community health are also not unique to Tisbury or contained within the boundaries of Tisbury, and therefore must be tackled in collaboration with the municipalities and organizations of Martha's Vineyard.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE AND SERVICES

Health care services and treatment are limited island wide. Clinics and health care providers cite capacity challenges associated with staffing, funding, and space to provide services. Top needs focus on dental services, mental health care, and substance abuse treatment. Assistance and programs for the uninsured and underinsured to get health care is also limited due to state and federal financial resources to support these programs. Islanders most at risk are young adults, the homeless, isolated seniors, seniors with fixed incomes, people with disabilities, and children and youth who have experienced family and housing instability and other adverse life events.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In general, the environmental conditions of Tisbury and Martha's Vineyard do not appear to have an adverse effect on the public health of residents, although higher rates of heart attacks and hospital visits related to asthma call for further investigation. However, the Martha's Vineyard Board of Health reports that lone star ticks, believed to be the main cause of Alpha-gal Syndrome, continue to spread throughout the island. They are found in a variety of habitats from open grassy areas to dense forest with leaf litter, and therefore lone star ticks in residential mowed lawns are the greatest concern island wide.

Over time, the impacts of climate change, including increased temperatures, changes in precipitation, more frequent and intense storms and other weather events, and sea level rise, can change environmental conditions and increase risks. These changes can impact the health of all residents, but the community's more vulnerable residents are most at risk. They are the elderly, young children, pregnant women, those with chronic illnesses, people with lower incomes, and people with limited English proficiency. Changes in a person's physical health or surrounding environment can lead to stress and anxiety, which can be most impactful for those with existing mental health conditions. Table 2 provides a summary of the impacts of climate change on public health.

Table 2. Impacts of Climate Change on Public Health		
<i>Climate Change</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Most Vulnerable or At-Risk Residents</i>
Temperature-related Changes	Increased number of hotter days Longer heat waves (consecutive days) Urban heat island effect Tick/pathogen adaptation and shifts or expansion of geographic ranges	Elderly People with chronic respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses Lower-income people
Air Quality Changes	Increased temperatures leading to increased air pollutants like PM2.5 and ozone Changes in spring pollen season (earlier, longer)	Elderly People with chronic respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses
Extreme Weather Events	Limited access to food and other commodities Infrastructure damage (roads, bridges, utilities, etc.) Water quality impacts Evacuation and emergency preparedness needs Creating/worsening mental health impacts such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder	Elderly Isolated individuals People with disabilities People with mental health conditions Lower-income people People with limited English proficiency
Sea Level Rise and Increased, Prolonged Flooding	Infrastructure damage (roads, bridges, utilities, etc.) Habitat loss Personal property damage/loss	People living in low-lying areas and along the coast Lower-income people
Source: "Climate Effects on Health," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.		

As the Town plans for mitigation and adaptation to climate change, it has not to date considered how to address the public health and social impacts of climate change.

FOOD SECURITY

In Martha's Vineyard food security is a key issue for the Brazilian population, the chronically ill, and the island's older residents, but it is also important to recognize that food insecurity impacts all communities

and individuals of all ages. More than half of the students in the Tisbury School District are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and many families do not participate in food assistance programs.

EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In Tisbury, environmental justice areas cover much of the western side of town, as shown in Map 11-1. These neighborhoods meet three criteria: household income is 65 percent of statewide annual median income or less, residents identifying as a minority make up 40 percent or more, or those identifying as a minority make up 25 percent of the population and household income is 150 percent or less of the statewide annual median. Additionally, populations that speak English as a second language are significant in Tisbury, with nearly 9 percent of residents reporting they do not speak English very well and their primary language is Portuguese or Portuguese Creole.¹⁶ DESE reports that during the 2022-2023 school year English was not the first language of 56.6 percent of students in the Tisbury School District, and 33.8 percent were English language learners (English is not their primary language and are unable to perform ordinary classwork in English).¹⁷

Households with lower incomes or with limited language proficiency often experience poorer health outcomes. Many cannot afford health insurance or are underinsured, and some will not seek preventative care or get medications if money is needed to put food on the table or pay rent. As noted earlier, assistance programs are limited on Martha's Vineyard because of capacity and availability resources. Having limited English can also deter people from seeing a health care professional because they cannot understand what is said or materials are not translated. Increasing access to assistance programs and overcoming language barriers are key issues. Agencies and health care services on the island understand that language is a key issue in offering services to the Brazilian population.

¹⁶ Languages spoken by persons who do not speak English well, by Census Tract. Source: American Community Survey, Table B16001, 2011-2015 5-year estimates. Acquired from MA Executive Office Energy and Environmental Affairs, <https://mass-eoea.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=dffdbf9c109647fc9601f7524c1fd9f4>.

¹⁷ MA DESE, Tisbury School District Profile, Select Populations (2022-23). See <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgtypecode=5&leftNavId=305&fycode=2023&type=DISTRICT&orgcode=02960000>.

Governance

In 2012, the Town commissioned a town government organizational assessment. The study intended to identify where Tisbury performed well and where it needed to make organizational or structural changes to improve. The CDM Smith consultants who led the study found that at the staff level, Town employees value public service, teamwork, and transparency, and they shared a sense of responsibility to control costs. At the same time, they said Tisbury's fragmented decision-making, lack of a long-term vision, problems maintaining adequate full-time staff, and lack of standard operating procedures all created significant vulnerabilities for the Town. Several recommendations came out of the study, including:

- Establish the positions of Human Resources Director and IT Coordinator;
- Establish a uniform information management system so that Town staff can share information and transfer data across departments;
- Adopt documented policies and procedures and formalized job descriptions;
- Conduct a gap analysis of current services; and
- Collaborate with other towns on Martha's Vineyard to create a regional full-time Fire Department or establish a full-time Fire Department within Tisbury.

CDM's organizational assessment team also found that Tisbury's decentralized government may seem democratic and inclusive but suffers from the lack of a transparent chain of command and the inability to make timely decisions. Another challenge noted in the report was that Tisbury's reliance on several independent boards made it difficult for local government to operate cohesively. The fragmentation of oversight and



services identified by the consultants led to recommendations in the report to reduce the number of Town committees, relocate all Town departments to a single administration building, and hold regular staff meetings. These changes led to, or in one way or another were associated with, losing volunteers and creating frustration among those who have stayed on as volunteers.

In 2023, Tisbury is trying to function as a year-round town that has *big* challenges with the human, financial, and organizational capacity of a small hamlet. It has dedicated volunteers and staff, but the staff have very limited authority, and this weakens their effectiveness. At times, residents and officials say town government should be able to do more, but Tisbury's general bylaws provide no clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the Town Administrator or other Town departments, or for many of the boards and commissions that rely on volunteers. As a result, Tisbury relies on the Commonwealth's antiquated statutes for municipal organization – statutes that long pre-date the movement toward professional town government that for small communities like Tisbury only began in earnest in the

1980s. In some ways, what is remarkable about Tisbury is not what the Town has trouble accomplishing, but rather what it manages to accomplish despite its decentralized government and unclear lines of departmental authority. Just as the Town needs to overhaul its land use regulatory framework, it also needs to take a hard look at whether the system of government it has today is up for the job of leading, managing, and making the tough decisions that have to be made – and made soon. The choices Tisbury makes about how it governs will have an indelible impact on how well the Town can address issues that cut across every element of the Master Plan.