

TISBURY COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS VISIONING

This document contains a written vision statement for each commercial district along with a list of big ideas contained in each vision statement and an explanation of the reasons behind the big ideas. The document is based on the full master plan process, especially the “Vision Principles” chosen by the Steering Committee.

DOWNTOWN

Vision

Downtown Vineyard Haven will continue to be a year-round downtown for Tisbury and the Island. Over the coming decades the downtown will retain its central role in the town’s economy and civic life while its historic character and sense of place are strengthened, making it an even more walkable and wonderful downtown. Its dynamic mix of businesses, homes, parks, and civic spaces will support a high quality of life for Tisbury residents and an enjoyable experience for visitors from other Island towns and afar. The downtown will balance its crucial role in the Island’s transportation system with the need for safe, efficient, and comfortable streets for people on foot, on bicycles, and in cars and trucks. Improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities will be woven into the existing fabric of the downtown providing legible and continuous pathways that connect all parts of the downtown and link it to the ferry terminal, the waterfront, Beach Road, the Martha’s Vineyard Museum, the B2 District and nearby neighborhoods. Existing and new outdoor spaces will be designed and maintained to provide delightful places to rest and gather. Selected streets and parking areas will become more multi-functional, providing additional space for temporary events and flexible uses. Stormwater management will be upgraded using advanced techniques that clean stormwater and reduce flooding. Historic buildings will be maintained and upgraded. Obsolete structures will be replaced with appropriately scaled new buildings that reflect the downtown’s unique character while meeting contemporary business and housing needs and expanding the town’s tax base. Over the coming decades, improvements to the downtown will make it an even more functional, livable, and enjoyable heart for the town of Tisbury.

Big Ideas

- Make the downtown easier to access and navigate by improving intersections, improving streetscapes and pathways, making it easier to find parking, improving wayfinding, and separating trucks from general traffic, pedestrians, and bicycles.
Why? A more accessible and legible downtown will be more enjoyable for residents and visitors, will reinforce Vineyard Haven’s sense of place, will strengthen the local economy, and will encourage trips by walking and bicycling instead of driving.
- Make the zoning for the downtown more predictable and eliminate barriers to productive use of properties for commercial, residential, and mixed-uses.
Why? Revised zoning will strengthen the local economy, expand opportunities for attainable housing, incentivize property maintenance and improvement, improve predictability for property owners and citizens of Tisbury, and expand the town’s tax base.
- Expand the use of shared parking, both private and public. Shared parking should be prioritized on the edges of the downtown and in the adjacent Waterfront District in locations that are accessible but not visually dominant. Encourage shared vehicles like Zip Car and a bike share system.

Why? Shared parking will improve the utilization of parking spaces—minimizing the total amount of land needed for parking. Shared parking will support local businesses and housing while advancing the transition to a more pedestrian-focused downtown. Shared parking is also related to climate change adaptation; as properties become infeasible for structures due to climate-driven flooding, they can be reused for shared parking, which will in turn reduce the need for parking in upland areas so they can be used more efficiently. Shared vehicles and bicycles will help reduce the overall need for parking and will help reduce the number of vehicles coming to the island via the ferry.

- Use public spaces more flexibly. For example, streets can shift back and forth from being vehicle-oriented to pedestrian-oriented at different times of the day, week, or the year. Parking areas can be used for events and temporary businesses.

Why? Flexible public spaces will enable the town to make better use of limited space, make the downtown more dynamic and interesting, and will provide a testing ground for new ideas.

WATERFRONT

VISION

Over the coming decades, the Waterfront District will adapt to climate change and sea level rise in ways that make it more resilient, more attractive, and more environmentally sustainable—improving the area’s critical transportation systems and making it easier for water-dependent uses to succeed. The town will work proactively to prepare critical infrastructure for sea level rise and increased stormwater flooding. The town will collaborate with private property owners, MassDOT, the Steamship Authority and others to ensure that water dependent uses—like the ferry terminal, shipbuilding and repair facilities, marinas, and shipping terminals—will continue to be able to serve critical Island-wide needs. Meanwhile the town will begin to prepare for a time when some non-water dependent uses are no longer viable in the Waterfront District. The Town will proactively make regulatory changes and infrastructure improvements in the downtown and B2 so those areas can accommodate additional businesses and places to live. In the Waterfront District, the town will ensure that remaining businesses and the natural environment are prepared for sea level rise. The town will continue long-term efforts to improve water quality, protect water resources, and increase public access to the harbor, with a focus on working with willing partners. Visitors who arrive by water will be welcomed with more efficient systems for mooring and harbor management. The town will support efforts at expanding aquaculture and businesses and institutions related to maritime heritage. Recognizing the Waterfront District’s central role in the Town- and Island-wide transportation network, the town will continue to improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities and vehicle circulation. The experience of arriving at the ferry terminal will become more welcoming and the connection between the ferry terminal and downtown will become more legible and enjoyable. Congestion, safety, and flooding at Five Corners will be improved. A continuous system of paths will link Lagoon Pond Road and Beach Road and connect to adjacent areas. Selected streets, open spaces and parking areas will become more multi-functional, providing additional space for events and temporary and flexible uses. The Waterfront District will rise to the challenges it faces, maintaining its role as a working waterfront, a transportation hub, and beautiful harbor.

BIG IDEAS

- Prioritize water-dependent uses in the Waterfront district. Revise the zoning to make it easier for water dependent businesses to adjust their operations to respond to economic

opportunities and climate change. Ensure that town infrastructure supports the continued viability of water-dependent uses. Engage in public-private partnerships as opportunities arise. *Why? Maintaining and expanding water dependent uses will ensure that critical Island-serving functions remain viable, support one of Tisbury's unique economic clusters, and will continue the town's maritime heritage.*

- Continue to work toward expanded public access to the harbor and waterfront. Improve the utilization of moorings and the experience for visitors arriving by water. Focus waterfront access efforts on areas near the Steamship Authority and the downtown and where property owners are open to public access. Support efforts to expand businesses, institutions, and events related to maritime history and culture.

Why? Tisbury's beautiful harbor is one of its defining features and has been at the center of the community's history. Public access to the harbor will improve quality of life for all who spend time in Tisbury. Tisbury has an existing cluster of businesses and attractions related to maritime history and culture; encouraging its development will strengthen the local economy and enhance its sense of place. Visitors who arrive by water can support local businesses without adding cars to the streets.

- Plan for sea level rise—develop a plan for medium-term protection of low-lying areas that are vulnerable to more frequent coastal flooding events (for example, nor'easters). Prepare for long-term accommodation of sea level rise and selected retreat. Seek funds to advance the design of resiliency projects that will be well-positioned for larger sums of state and federal funding. Explore regulatory changes for climate resiliency.

Why? Planning for sea level rise will help the town and property owners prioritize investments, avoid costly losses, inform regulatory change strategies, and ensure that natural resources are preserved.

- Provide pathways for non-water-dependent uses to shift away from the Waterfront over time. Ensure that enough land in the upland is zoned for commercial uses to make up for space that may become unviable in the Waterfront District. Ensure that infrastructure in upland receiving areas supports additional development.

Why? The Waterfront District is largely made up of low-lying land, including a barrier beach and former wetlands. The area is predicted to experience more frequent flooding as climate change accelerates. In the long term, it may not be feasible for some uses to continue operating in the Waterfront District. Providing alternative locations for these types of uses to voluntarily establish or relocate will improve the continuity of the town's economy, housing base, and tax base and reduce the risk of catastrophic losses from flooding.

- Improve stormwater management—with a focus on practices that clean and infiltrate rainwater close to where it falls. Upgrade public stormwater infrastructure, including along Town and state roads. Update stormwater management regulations in the town's zoning and/or general bylaws so that stormwater management is improved on private property over time.

Why? The Waterfront District already experiences frequent stormwater flooding, especially at Five Corners. This is likely to worsen with larger and more frequent climate-change driven storms. Improving stormwater management will reduce flooding, increase recharge of the aquifer, and also reduce pollution flowing into Tisbury's waterways. Note: improving stormwater management in the upland areas that feed into the Waterfront District is a crucial part of this strategy.

- Expand the use of shared parking, especially in areas that are not viable to use for other purposes due to flooding risk. Develop continuous, attractive paths that link shared parking to destinations in the Waterfront and Downtown Districts.

Why? Shared parking will improve the utilization of parking spaces—minimizing the total amount of land needed for parking. Shared parking will support local businesses and housing while advancing the transition to a more pedestrian-focused downtown. Shared parking can be part of the town’s climate change adaptation strategy. As properties become infeasible for structures due to climate-driven flooding, they can be reused for shared parking. That will also enable more efficient use of adjacent upland areas.

B2

VISION

Over the coming decades, as private property owners and the town make improvements in the B2 District, the area will become more organized and efficient—enabling businesses to grow, change, and succeed; expanding opportunities for year-round attainable housing; reducing conflicts between disparate uses; and making the district more attractive and enjoyable. As opportunities arise, State Road and the area’s streets, lanes, and paths will be improved and connected, so that the area is easier to navigate by car, truck, on foot, or by bicycle. The town will work toward the establishment of a new complete street that connects State Road with Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road. Wastewater capacity will be expanded—opening opportunities for housing and businesses and protecting water quality. As sites are redeveloped, environmentally friendly site design will expand tree cover and reduce runoff and pollution. More connected sidewalks and trail networks will reduce dependence on cars and enable people to experience the natural areas in and adjacent to the district. Zoning changes will undergird many of these changes, enabling property owners to do more while ensuring high-quality buildings and site design. Through a combination of public investments and private initiatives, the B2 district will mature into a more coherent and appealing place, expanding the town’s tax base, strengthening its economy, serving every day needs, reducing congestion, expanding walking, bicycling, and using transit, and providing much needed housing.

BIG IDEAS

- Build a new street connecting State Road with Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road.
Why? A new street will provide a safe and convenient route for all modes of transportation, connecting the two major roads. It will enable more direct travel to the B2 District and allow some trips to avoid congestion at the intersection of State Road and Edgartown-Vineyard Haven Road near Look Street. The new street will also expand the town’s pedestrian and bicycle network.
- Expand opportunities for mixed-use and small-scale multi-family housing through wastewater treatment improvements and zoning changes that enable modest amounts of additional housing in appropriate locations within the B2 district.
Why? Many Tisbury residents lack stable housing that they can afford. This has a human toll and profoundly impacts the culture and demographics of the town. It also limits the success of local businesses who have difficulty finding employees. The B2 District is one of Tisbury’s most suitable locations for diverse housing. The B2 district is within walking distance of goods and services, the Tisbury School, public transportation, local trails, and natural areas. Much of the area has already been disturbed by development and the impacts of additional housing would be minimal compared to existing uses in the area. Mixed-use buildings and small-scale multi-family buildings

in the B2 District could provide diverse unit sizes and costs, opening opportunities for people who do not want to live in a single-family house, or cannot afford to. In particular, there appears to be demand for multi-family housing among households in the 65-74 and under 35 age brackets (FXM Supplemental Memo).

- Balance service, retail, entertainment, light industrial, municipal, and residential uses in the B2. Establish performance and design standards through zoning to minimize conflicts between different types of uses.

Why? The economic analysis for this plan projected continued demand for additional commercial space in Tisbury (FXM Supplemental Memo), but Tisbury (and the Island as a whole) has limited land that is zoned for these uses. Tisbury's downtown commercial district is largely built out with strong historic character, so it is unlikely to experience much development or redevelopment. The Waterfront District is vulnerable to sea level rise and increased flooding and so may not be a wise place for long-term investments. That leaves the B2 District as the most viable location in Tisbury for additional commercial space. At the same time, the B2 District has been identified as potentially suitable for mixed-use and multi-family housing. As the B2 continues to develop and redevelop, improved zoning provisions can ensure that disparate uses are designed to minimize conflicts between uses. This can be accomplished by steering potentially conflicting uses to different parts of the district and/or by strengthening performance standards for noise, dust, outdoor lighting, screening, and other topics.

- Make the B2 District more walkable, connected, efficient, and environmentally sustainable by strengthening zoning and site plan review standards for the B2.

Why? The B2 District is a complex area that has grown organically over the past decades into a mix of retail, restaurant, service, entertainment, and light industrial businesses, town facilities, transportation infrastructure, and housing. Like many areas that grew without an overall plan, the area has a mixed character and functional challenges, including congestion, unsafe conditions for people walking and bicycling, inefficient parking, and inconsistent signage and building design. These challenges can be addressed over time through the process of zoning site plan review. Site plan review is triggered when an applicant wants to make certain changes to their property. Site plan review provides an opportunity to ensure that sites are safe to use, do not harm the environment or adjacent uses, and meet minimum aesthetic standards. Site plan review is especially useful for coordinating improvements on different properties over time. In the B2 District, improved site design standards can promote consolidating curb cuts on State Road, encouraging cross access between properties and shared parking. Site plan review standards can encourage or require pedestrian paths and sidewalks, especially for public serving uses. In addition, zoning standards for parking could be revisited to ensure that the required number of spaces reflects typical parking demand, to allow more flexibility for shared parking, to add more detail to parking lot design standards, and to clarify requirements for the outdoor storage of commercial vehicles, equipment, and used yard parts and salvage yards.