

## 2012 Community Development Strategy for the Town of Harwich

The 2012 Community Development Strategy for the Town of Harwich begins with the vision of the 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan:

*Our vision has efficient and effective delivery of Town services as the top priority. It directs us to optimize the economic potential of all Town owned assets. Safety and security for all is paramount. We must have a superlative educational system for our students and rewarding activities for our seniors. We cannot fail to recognize, protect and enhance the vitality of our cultural, recreational and natural assets that are so essential to our residents, non-resident taxpayers, and seasonal guests alike.*

*To be effective, Harwich must be supported at the County, State and Federal levels. Harwich officials are charged with ensuring that the Town receives fair and equitable treatment and with pursuing legislative remedies when needed.*

*Pursuit of this vision pays homage to our unique coastal environment and vibrant New England traditions of independence and self-determination.*

To implement this vision, the Town of Harwich pursues a variety of strategies related to employment, housing, population, protection of open space, and growth management. Strategies are detailed in the 2010 Housing Production Plan (HPP), 2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) and 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan (LCP).

### Employment

Harwich faces unique challenges with its beautiful natural setting and a population dominated by retired residents, second home-owners and seasonal visitors. Though property values are high, the 2009 median Harwich household income of \$53,607 is well below the state average of \$64,496 (LCP p5). Many residents rely on retirement income and social security rather than jobs (LCP p6).

The character of Harwich as a seasonal and retirement community is well-documented. The 2005 year-round Harwich population of about 12,500 more than doubles to a summer population of almost 30,000 (LCP p5). The percentage of age 60+ residents in the total population was 38.5% in 2008, and projections by the Council on Aging indicate that this percentage will increase dramatically in the next decade (LCP p4). The seasonal and retirement nature of the community creates jobs, particularly in the construction and service sectors – landscapers, painters, repairmen, restaurant workers, retail clerks, etc. However, younger workers are challenged to raise families on income from jobs that often are less than year-round. Much of the public sector's focus is on jobs that will pay higher wages and will provide full-year employment.

Particular attention has been given recently to the Open Cape Telecommunication Infrastructure project (LCP p40). With approved funding, Open Cape is now building an open access network to support the economic, educational, public safety, and governmental needs of Cape Cod. Technological improvements, such as Open Cape, seek to attract both companies that will choose to locate in our beautiful setting and individuals who can conduct business via computer connections from their primary or second home.

### Housing

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has established a 10% housing affordability goal for each town. A Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) lists housing units that meet eligibility standards. Through May 2010, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) certified 292 total SHI units, or 4.98% of the town's total of 5,862 year-round housing units (LCP p28).

In accordance with Massachusetts guidelines, the town adopted a Housing Production Plan in the fall of 2009 and Massachusetts DHCD subsequently approved it in January 2010. As stated in the summary, a major goal of the HPP is to eventually meet the state's 10% affordability goal. However, another important goal is to serve the range of local housing needs, even if a housing initiative does not result in additional SHI affordable units. Examples include promotion of "workforce housing" (defined as housing for those earning between 80% and 120% of area median income) and accessory apartments.

The Housing Production Plan offers a wide range of housing strategies. The HPP states, "It is important to note that these strategies are presented as a package for the Town to consider, prioritize, and process, each through the appropriate regulatory channels" (HPP p9).

Recognizing that housing strategies evolve from year to year, the 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan established three priorities to be pursued initially (LCP p28):

- 1) Encourage re-use of existing housing stock rather than development on vacant land. In a weak housing market, more opportunities exist to buy or rent existing housing units at a reasonable price.
- 2) Encourage development of village housing rather than in outlying areas. If new housing units are created, it is preferred to locate those units in established villages. Techniques may include accessory apartments or higher density. Current limitations of wastewater treatment capacity may hinder new village development in the short term. However, if development is proposed for outlying areas, it should be directed away from sensitive resources.
- 3) Provide rental assistance rather than subsidized home ownership. A far greater number of residents may be assisted by vouchers and other rental assistance than by large subsidies to individual homebuyers. Seasonal workers and year-round residents with modest incomes are common in Harwich and would benefit from rental assistance.

### Population

Harwich's community development strategy focuses on a wide range of population sectors. The predominance of seniors in the year-round population is noted above in the employment

section. The Local Comprehensive Plan emphasizes standards for providing essential emergency medical and other public safety services that are of particular importance to seniors (LCP p10). Equally important is provision of senior services and activities both at the Community Center and through outreach programs. A study is now underway to consider expansion of the Community Center and the services it provides to the entire range of age groups (LCP p12).

Another important focus is support of families. The town's vision of a "superlative" educational system has led to formation with Chatham of the Monomoy regional school district. Voters in both towns have approved a new high school, and construction of the facility across from the Community Center on Oak Street is well underway. A further emphasis is support of youth services. Recognition is given to the combined efforts of Harwich schools, library, Community Center, recreation and Youth Services Committee. Action item 2.5.1 (LCP p11) recommends a coordinated effort by all Town entities currently providing youth services to jointly prepare a plan of activities, facilities, staffing and funding sources.

A major element of family support is provision of adequate and affordable child care. For many years, the town has provided its own funds and has sought outside funding to assist families in need in obtaining regular child care. In combination with employment opportunities and affordable housing, the provision of child care is one of the key components to allow families to live and grow in Harwich.

Protection of Open Space

The Town of Harwich contains 20.93 square miles (13,395 acres) of land area and 10.9 miles of tidal shoreline. As documented in the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the town includes extensive Town-owned land and other open space:

Owner/Manager	Parcels	Acres	Per Cent
Board of Selectmen	188	670	5.0%
Conservation Commission	172	958	7.2%
Other Town Departments	50	683	5.1%
State of Massachusetts	36	266	2.0%
Conservation Trusts	94	347	2.6%
TOTAL	540	2924	21.8%

The Open Space and Recreation Plan describes a number of environmental challenges: (1) protection of water quality and habitat in the Pleasant Bay watershed, a designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern, (2) soil erosion and/or accretion along the shoreline of Nantucket sound, (3) impact from new development and a move toward public sewerage and treatment of wastewater, (4) protection of critical habitats – coastal plain ponds, cedar swamps, salt marshes, barrier beaches and vernal pools, and (5) protection of wildlife habitats and corridors including fish runs.

The initial 1998 Open Space and Recreation Plan focused heavily on acquisition of open space land. Use of Cape Cod Land Bank and Community Preservation Act funds enabled the town to acquire significant land between 1998 and adoption of the latest Open Space and Recreation Plan in 2010. Many of the goals and objectives of the new plan are related to management of

town-owned open space land (LCP p16). In the past two years, the Town has actively followed Action item 3.4.1 (LCP p17) by preparing a number of land management plans including the top two priority town-owned parcels – Bells Neck and Island Pond Conservation Areas (OSRP p58).

Along with a new focus on land management, further purchase or other acquisition of open space remains important. Action item 3.5.1 (LCP p17) calls for a review of parcel rankings and other criteria for land acquisition. A recent focus of the Real Estate and Open Space Committee is to identify priority areas of town and specific parcels that would contribute to the town's open space goals.

### Growth Management

Harwich's growth is village-based. Complete descriptions of the town's seven villages are available at the Town of Harwich website. A broad-based community planning effort is seeking to strengthen village qualities in East Harwich with compact, pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use development surrounded by lower density clustered residential development and open space. Recent planning efforts in Harwich Port seek to take full advantage of beach and harbor amenities and to provide stronger links between these amenities and the village center. Village planning in Harwich Center has focused more on cultural and historic strengths complemented by moderate commercial activity (LCP p19).

Growth must be supported by appropriate infrastructure. A major planning effort is nearing completion – the Harwich Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan. The plan includes: (1) evaluation of water quality in Harwich estuaries/watersheds, (2) review of potential sites for wastewater treatment/recharge, (3) review of shared use of Chatham wastewater treatment facilities, and (4) evaluation of other measures to address excessive nitrogen loading, e.g. increasing the diameter of a culvert under Route 28 to increase tidal exchange between Muddy Creek and Pleasant and providing natural attenuation at the Bank Street bogs.

Recent improvements to transportation infrastructure include the current reconstruction of Route 137 which will improve vehicular traffic flow, provide shoulders for shared bicycle use, and add new sidewalks for pedestrian travel to and through the center of East Harwich.

Recent attention has focused on bicycle paths and sidewalks, intending to enhance Harwich's character as a bicycle and pedestrian-friendly community. A 2011 study reviewed safe and effective pedestrian and bicycle facilities between the rail trails and Route 28 with a specific focus on a connection between Harwich Center and Harwich Port.

Another recent effort has focused on two of the town's key assets, Saquatucket and Wychmere Harbors in Harwich Port. A study is looking at ways to upgrade and reorganize the harbors to meet the existing needs of commercial fishermen, passenger/tour boats and recreational boaters along with accessibility improvements for the general public.

### Implementation

The 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan is focused on implementation efforts. A series of goal statements and objectives are further defined by approximately 50 action items, all listed in an Implementation chapter and assigned to a "responsible party" – board, commission,

department, etc. (LCP pp 41-43). Planning Staff has provided several implementation progress updates to the Planning Board since adoption of the Local Comprehensive Plan in May 2011.

One of a variety of implementation strategies is pursuit of outside funding sources such as CDBG grants. The recent partnership with the Town of Dennis and the selection of Harwich Center as a target area continues to serve Harwich well. Harwich Center is one of the principal village centers in the town. It is the location of vital Town facilities (Town Hall, Brooks Library, Community Center) and will be the new home of new regional facilities (Monomoy High School). Recent infrastructure efforts include the construction of new ball fields adjacent to the Community Center and a survey of all parcels in the center. The existing historical character is being protected by CPC grants and will soon be supplemented by the restoration of the Crowell Barn adjacent to Brooks Museum. The continued housing rehabilitation program and social service programs including childcare assistance for low and moderate income Harwich Center residents are important supplements to Town efforts to maintain facilities, expand infrastructure and provide services.

In addition to the economic benefits, the development of a residential component in the Town's Village Centers could lead to a broadening of the available housing opportunities in Harwich. Currently, the town has a limited number of affordable units available to a non-elderly population, and several areas of the town where there is almost no affordable housing. The Town's Housing Plan approved in 2010 sets a number of goals, including the creation of 29 affordable units each year (with 70% of those units being rental housing), through new construction or acquisition of existing dwellings; the development of funding sources and income streams to support affordable housing development; and the continuing review of by-laws and other regulations to facilitate the development of affordable housing.

While non-Town entities have been responsible for all affordable housing developed in recent years, all of the housing has been developed by private and quasi-public not-for-profits. The Town currently lacks incentives through zoning and other means for the development of affordable housing by private developers. The town's successful partnering with the Town of Dennis to secure funding for a housing rehabilitation program through a DHCD CDBG grant, has inspired additional programs in the target area. The housing rehab program is designed to rehabilitate existing housing stock with serious code violations. Childcare subsidies will assist our large number of single parent households return to the workforce. Harwich Center has been targeted once again for the FY 12 application based upon resident requests.

#### Massachusetts Sustainable Development Principles

The 2012 Community Development Strategy for the Town of Harwich is compatible with the Massachusetts Sustainable Development Principles:

1. Concentrate Development and Mix Uses - Harwich's historic development and growth planning is village based. In particular, planning for East Harwich encourages mixed-use development.
2. Advance Equity - The 2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan and 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan describe efforts to advance affordable housing and child care programs, provide services to the elderly, and communicate with all sectors of the population.

3. Make Efficient Decisions – Efficiency of government is a high priority for Harwich as evidenced in Chapter 2, Delivery of Town Services, and Chapter 4, Intergovernmental Relations, of the 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan.
4. Protect Land and Ecosystems – Beginning with the vision statement of the 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan, protection of Harwich’s natural assets permeates the town’s planning documents and implementation efforts. Establishment of wetland buffers, protection of drinking water, management of public lands, and protection of critical habitats are just a few of the many town actions.
5. Use Natural Resources Wisely – More than 20% of land in Harwich is protected by public ownership and conservation restrictions. Village growth planning, resource protection districts, and environmental development standards all provide further contributions to protection of natural resources.
6. Expand Housing Opportunities - Harwich’s efforts to provide affordable and workforce housing are well documented in the 2010 Housing Production Plan and 2011 Local Comprehensive Plan.
7. Provide Transportation Choice – Two public bus routes are in operation through Harwich. The State-funded improvements to Route 137 in East Harwich, now in progress, include new sidewalks and shoulders suitable for bicycle travel along the entire length of the corridor.
8. Increase Job and Business Opportunities – Harwich’s efforts at providing employment opportunities are documented in an earlier section of this report.
9. Promote Clean Energy – Harwich has supported solar energy projects at the landfill, public services building, and at other town facilities. The town also proposed a wind-energy facility in North Harwich, but this facility was not approved at Town Meeting.
10. Plan Regionally – Growth planning for East Harwich considers impacts on the abutting towns of Brewster, Chatham and Orleans. The lead option for wastewater management is connection to the existing sewer plant in Chatham. Harwich is in the process of joining regional dispatch services and a regional e-permitting system.

#### Priorities

1. Complete construction of the Monomoy Regional High School.
2. Complete the Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan and begin implementation efforts.
3. Finish preparation of zoning regulations for East Harwich and agree on one proposal to be brought to Town Meeting for approval.
4. Continue efforts to protect natural resources including new public land management programs.
5. Support efforts to provide year-round employment, housing and child-care for all segments of the population.

6. In the area of housing, support rental assistance and rehabilitation of existing housing stock.
7. Continue provision of facilities and services for the growing senior population.
8. Support the economic health of Harwich's existing villages.
9. Provide a variety of transportation facilities. Complete the Route 137 project, prepare plans for the Route 124 project, and support new bike and pedestrian facilities throughout town.
10. Maintain and improve public amenities, notably beaches and harbors, that provide enjoyment for residents and attract visitors to Harwich.