

INTRODUCTION

As we enter the next millenium, the Cape has embarked on a journey to determine its future and to put in to place the tools that will help implement the vision now being developed in each Cape Town. In a time of rapid change brought about by the modern and evolving technology revolution, the local comprehensive plan will need to be updated every five years. Yet some things remain constant; the need for an individual sense of community; for a place to call home, where we enjoy a quality of life that we want to pass on to our children and grandchildren. We wish to protect our natural, cultural and historic resources for them, as they must cope with changes beyond our imagination.

Dennis is one of fifteen (15) towns on Cape Cod (Barnstable County). It is located within the mid-cape area bordered by Cape Cod Bay to the north, the Towns of Brewster and Harwich to the east, Nantucket Sound to the south and by the Town of Yarmouth to the west. Bass River and Chase Garden Creek are tidal streams that separate most of Dennis from Yarmouth. Dennis comprises 20.66 square miles or 13,222 acres. The town covers 7.5 miles north to south and ranges from 1.5 to 4 miles in width.

Dennis has chosen to develop its own comprehensive plan, as has each of the other Cape towns. The plans are an expression of shared aspirations for the future of the Cape Cod. They recognize the Cape as a fragile and beautiful place. They also recognize that we need good year round jobs to support our needs and affordable housing for all our residents. They address such issues as Land Use/Growth Management; Natural Resources; Economic Development; Community Facilities and Services such as Transportation, Solid and Hazardous Waste Management, Capital Facilities/Infrastructure; Open Space and Recreation; and Heritage Preservation and Community Character. Each town considers these issues at the town level and it is at the town level where many of the goals will be implemented.

The Process for the Town of Dennis

In the spring of 1994, the Local Planning Committee (the Committee), with the assistance of the Town Planner and the Cape Cod Commission, held a series of community workshops, led by a professional meeting facilitator. In addition, a multiple page questionnaire was sent out to 6,500 Dennis residents. The results of these workshops and the survey can be found as Appendix A. From the responses received at these workshops and the responses of the questionnaires, the Local Planning Committee began the process of developing the Dennis Local Comprehensive Plan (the Plan). The process included: development of a community "vision" in the form of a statement; preliminary assessments of problems, issues and needs; identification of goals; development of background information; identification of objectives and policies; and development of an implementation strategy.

The Dennis Local Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for local decision making. The plan includes an *Inventory* of the Town's resources, an *Analysis* of present and future concerns, and *Goals and Policies* that will guide Dennis in protecting those qualities that are cherished by

those who live and work here. Finally, the plan identifies specific actions designed to allow for the *Implementation* of the goals and policies of the plan. To insure that the implementation items are carried out the very first action that must be taken is the appointment of an Implementation Committee. It is also important to point out that implementation has already begun. Zoning is being reviewed, pathways are being considered, roads are being studied and land purchases are being acted upon.

A committed committee, with the support of the Dennis Planning Office and the Cape Cod Commission, created working groups that also involved people from the community, town employees and representatives from other town committees and boards. The process also included a broad representation of all who might have an interest in the plan, such as housing advocates, economic development advocates, bankers, environmentalists, to name a few. In addition there were numerous meetings with community organizations, newspaper articles, pamphlets and television programs to spread the word. The Town Administrator was continually informed of the Committee's activities and the Board of Selectmen reviewed each element of the plan upon completion by the Committee. The Cape Cod Commission's continuing input, as the plan developed was invaluable. The Committee also met with its counterparts in neighboring towns, Yarmouth, Brewster and Harwich, to share information.

The Public Outreach Process

As mentioned earlier, the Committee held a series of outreach workshops and sponsored a town-wide survey. It was through these that the vision for the Town was derived and ultimately the plan in its entirety. As each element of the plan was being prepared, drafts were sent out to various groups, town departments, etc. for their input and comment. Upon the completion of each element the Committee held a public hearing to present the section and to solicit additional comments. Following the Committee's public hearing the element was sent to the Board of Selectmen for their review and sign-off. But again, it all began with the vision statement that expressed the vision for the future of the town.

COMMUNITY VISION STATEMENT

This is our community vision statement. It reflects the broad views of the townspeople – how Dennis is seen now and how it will be viewed in the future. This statement is based on efforts to learn the public mind, including forums and opinion surveys, timetable for completion, estimates of costs and their effect on the tax base.

Among the aspects of our future addressed within this statement are HERITAGE PRESERVATION and COMMUNITY CHARACTER, LAND USE and GROWTH MANAGEMENT, PRESERVATION of NATURAL RESOURCES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TRANSPORTATION, OPEN SPACE, COMMUNITY SERVICES and FACILITIES, AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

This statement is intended to be a blueprint for another chapter, a future chapter, in the history of Dennis. It aims for continuity of development. Many of the expressions of community vision declared within this document speak of preserving the town's character. What are some of the items of the character of Dennis?

- This is a waterside place, a place surrounded by shoreline and defined by the water in, around and under us. Preservation of boating, fishing and shellfishing are vital to preserving the character of Dennis.
- As a residential town it is essential to preserve and promote its peace and quiet, spaciousness, its safety, and the ease of travel.
- Dennis is a town of natural and man-made beauty. To ensure that this is not lost it is necessary to protect our natural resources and to give continuity to building design.
- Dennis is a resort town and it is intended to continue to be attractive to our visitors and part-time residents who help pay our bills and who expect our community to change, but to be unsullied by uncontrolled development.
- Dennis is a town with views and vistas seldom seen anywhere in the world.

Development consists overwhelmingly of single family dwellings. Recreational facilities – beaches, golf courses, parks, ball fields, etc., occupy much of the land already set aside for them. A population increase is envisioned in the next 20 years and will be taken into consideration. It is not intended that Dennis becomes a metropolis or a suburb, rather to preserve its small town character.

Change in community facilities and services are inevitable, expensive and not always welcome. Highways will change to improve safety and traffic flow. Alternatives such as better and more walk and bike ways, trolley or bus service should be encouraged. Recycling is here and necessary. Public and private sewer systems must be designed to preserve current and future water quality standards. Harbor facilities are very limited in relation to the general desire for access to water. By the year 2015 these facilities may be developed to their fullest capacity. Retaining their natural beauty while accommodating both boaters and their boats is essential.

Dennis also faces the important issue of economic development. The existing business base must be supported and expanded. The nature of the business should determine what part of town it can locate in, according to appropriate zoning by-law. Issues such as what it should look like and how it will effect employment and transportation systems should be addressed. Pre-permitting and creating new areas of opportunity that not only help the business community, but also the town as a whole, are to be encouraged.

The purpose of this plan is to identify the changes that must be made. It is recognized that no plan will be perfect, but it must be adaptable to changes and improvements as necessary. Finally, it is the purpose of this plan to leave a clear vision for our future children and grandchildren who will be fortunate to reside in the Town of Dennis.

POPULATION & SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

Since 1885 the Town has experienced lows and highs in the area of year round population. In 1885 the population was 3,497. This dropped to a low of 1,536 in 1920. The Town did not regain its 1885 population count until after 1955. From 1980 to 1999 the Town has experienced a population growth rate of approximately 4% using population numbers established by the local census. Table A shows the population trends from 1855 to 2000. The population from 1990 to 2000 increased by 15%, the fourth lowest growth rate on Cape Cod. It should also be noted that between 1990 and 2000, the town of Dennis grew at a rate faster than it did between 1980 and 1990. Table B expresses population trends since 1980 within the Town of Dennis as well as comparisons with our neighboring towns, Barnstable County as a whole and the State of Massachusetts.

TABLE A
Population Trends of the Town of Dennis 1855 – 2000

YEAR	POPULATION	YEAR	POPULATION
1885	3,497	1955	3,322
1900	2,335	1960	3,727
1915	1,822	1965	4,374
1920	1,536	1970	6,454 (7,443)
1925	1,749	1975	9,309
1930	1,829	1980	12,709 (12,360)
1935	2,017	1985	13,040
1940	2,085	1990	13,236 (13,864)
1945	2,015	1995	13,493
1950	2,499	2000	(15,973)

SOURCE: Annual Town Reports (U.S. Census)

TABLE B
POPULATION CHANGES AND PROJECTIONS 1980 - 2000
Comparisons with State, County and Other Towns

	Mass.	Barnstable County	DENNIS	Brewster	Harwich	Yarmouth
Census 80	5,737,037	147,925	12,360	5,225	9,971	18,449
Census 90	6,016,425	186,605	13,864	8,440	10,275	21,174
Growth 80-90	4.9%	26.1%	12.2%	61.5%	14.5%	14.8%
Census 2000	6,349,097	222,230	15,973	10,094	12,386	24,807
Growth 90-2000	5.5%	19.0%	15.1%	19.6%	20.5%	17.2%

Source: Massachusetts Institute for Social and Economic Research (MISER), UMASS-Amherst, 1994.

Seasonal population counts are much more difficult to establish. For the purposes of the Licensing Board the average seasonal population is estimated at somewhere around 43,000. Other figures as high as 65,000 have been estimated.

Age Distribution

In 2000, the median age in Dennis increased to 49.4 years according to the U.S. Census, compared to a median age of 44.6 years for Barnstable County, and 36.5 for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In contrast, in 1990, the median age in Dennis was 44.5 years according to the U.S. Census compared to a median age of 39.5 years for Barnstable County and 33.6 years for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. In 1980 the median age in Dennis was 43.7 compared with 37.1 years of age for Barnstable and 31.1 years of age for the Commonwealth.

In 1970 the largest two age groups in Dennis were the 5-14 and 15-24 age brackets, the so-called "Baby Boomers." It is interesting to watch these age groups as they pass through the following three decades, as they not only continue to represent the largest age groups (in ten year increments), they also are increasing in numbers, these increases represent the in-migration of new residents to the town. The 1970 15-24 year old age bracket had 748 people. In 1980, when these had grown into the 25-34 age bracket there were 1,694 people an increase of 946 new residents. By 1990, when this group had reached the 35-44 age bracket, there were 1,822 people an increase of 128 new residents. Finally, and in 2000 there were 2,300 people in the 45-54 age bracket and additional increase of 478 new residents.

The fastest growing segment of Dennis population, for growth rates, for the period 1970-2000 is between the 35-44 and 45-54 age brackets. These age groups grew by over 200% in that thirty-year period. However, the 65+ age bracket is the fastest growing segment of the population in

real numbers, having increased by nearly 3,000 people over the last thirty years. The working age population of Dennis has increased over the thirty-year period 1970-2000 relative to the population as a whole and now comprise approximately 50% of the total population, up from about 43% in 1970. Relative to other age groups in Dennis, there are fewer children in Dennis now than in the past, this based on the 2000 U.S. Census.

Education Trends

In 1990, 88.4% of Dennis residents aged 25 or older had a high school or college degree as compared to the state average of 80%, see Table C. .

TABLE C
Educational Attainment of Dennis Residents aged 25+, 1990

Grade Level Achieved	Number
Some high school	230
High school graduate	981
Some college	3387
Associate Degree	2222
Bachelor Degree	1798
Graduate/Professional	837
TOTAL	10,402
% H.S. grad or higher	88.4%
% Bachelors Degree or higher	25.3%

Source: U.S. Census, 1990

Income Trends

In 1989, based on the 1990 U.S. Census, the median household income in Dennis was \$27,900 compared to \$31,766 for Barnstable County, a difference of 14%. For the purposes of “household” this is defined as an individual, or group of individuals not necessarily related by blood living in a single dwelling unit. Dennis median income is 32% below the state median of \$36,952. The 1990 Federal Census showed that 44% of the households in Dennis had incomes below \$25,000, while the county rate was 38%. In 1993, based on the U.S. Census Bureau estimates, the estimated median household income for Barnstable County increased to \$33,432, while the state median income increased to \$37,432. Estimated median incomes are not available or broken out by town after 1989.

Sex and Race

In 1990, the U.S. Census found that the female population in Dennis outweighed the male population. There were 7,525 (54.3%) women and 6,339 (46.7%) men. These numbers increased proportionately in 2000 with there being 8,606 (53.9%) females and 7,367 (46.1%) males. The majority of the population in Dennis is white at 15,173 (95%), based on the 2000 U.S. Census. There were 308 (1.9%) Blacks; 59 (0.4%) American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut; 59 (0.4%) Asian or Pacific Islander; and 140 (0.9%) classified as “other race”. Of the overall total races, 264 (1.7%) were also of Hispanic Origin.