

Town of Nantucket Master Plan



Inventory & Assessment



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Natural Systems

NATURAL RESOURCES

**OPEN SPACE &
RECREATION**

SUSTAINABILITY



NATURAL RESOURCES

Nantucket is endowed with coastal and inland land and water resources, open spaces, and wildlife habitat. These resources contribute to Nantucket's beauty and exceptional quality of life, and they have benefited from decades of careful stewardship by public and non-profit organizations. Nevertheless, Nantucket's natural resources are vulnerable to climate change, sea level rise, land use conflicts, and overuse. Tensions exist today between the quest to preserve everything that makes Nantucket special and meet the island's needs for homes, businesses, and community facilities and services.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Surface Waters.

Nantucket boasts seven Great Ponds—all protected under the Massachusetts Public Waterfront Act.¹ Nantucket and Madaket Harbors are some of the largest enclosed bays in southeastern Massachusetts and maintain relatively high water quality. Nantucket remains home to one of the most productive and competitive bay scallop fisheries in the nation, serving as the island's largest commercial fishery. Nantucket's waters also support lobsters, summer flounder, striped bass, bluefish, eels, black sea bass, tuna, sharks, cod, haddock, and other groundfish.²

Eelgrass plays a significant role in Nantucket's harbor ecosystems by stabilizing sediment, purifying water, improving water clarity, sequestering carbon, and supporting marine life and shorebirds.³ Significant eelgrass populations are found at the mouth of and in Nantucket Harbor, Madaket Harbor, and the northern side of Tuckernuck Island.

Nantucket's water resources attract visitors, maintain biodiversity, support water-dependent livelihoods and recreation activities, and contribute to the historic natural landscape and character of the island. Maintaining these conditions requires active protection through monitoring and management. Several stressors threaten the water quality of Nantucket's surface waters. Nutrient loading can degrade water quality, leading to algal blooms and an influx of invasive species. Pollutants and pathogens from development, septic systems, moorings, boat activity, vehicles, and fertilizer use frequently end up in waterways.⁴

Groundwater.

Nantucket's public water supply comes from a single source aquifer beneath the Island, so the town depends on one source of potable water for the community. This groundwater aquifer is replenished entirely by precipitation.⁵ Like many towns, Nantucket is concerned about groundwater contamination from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). Other potential groundwater contamination risks include natural hazard

events, saltwater intrusion, tanker leaks, hazard material spills, and stormwater or roadway runoff, particularly within the public wellhead protection area.⁶

Landscapes and Habitats.

All of Nantucket is low-lying, and strong winds and salt spray limit the height of vegetation.⁷ Nantucket has relatively few hardwood forests compared with the rest of New England, with most forested areas in the northeastern portion of the Island.

Nantucket hosts a diverse range of habitats, home to globally significant but threatened ecosystems that support endangered species. Nantucket holds 95% of the world's sandplain grasslands, mainly on the southern portion of the Island, while coastal heathlands make up much of the central and northern areas of the island.⁸ The Nantucket Barrier Beach and Wildlife Refuge at the island's northern spit was designated a National Natural Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior in 2024.⁹

Forty-one wildlife species of conservation concern designated as threatened, endangered, or of special concern call Nantucket home.¹⁰ Nantucket's shores also provide a home to many nesting birds, namely the endangered Piping Plover and the American Oystercatcher.

Wetlands.

Wetlands play a vital role in Nantucket's landscape, covering much of the island's open space in both coastal and inland areas. Once considered nuisances, wetlands are now recognized for their ecosystem services, especially in coastal areas. Rising sea levels are expected to submerge up to an additional 645 acres of wetlands on the island by 2070.¹¹

Agricultural Land.

About 150 acres of land on Nantucket have an agricultural land use.¹² Agricultural and farmland are limited and threatened resources on Nantucket that the town and other entities are working diligently to protect.¹³

Nantucket's Biodiversity

To guide conservation decisions, Mass-Wildlife and the Nature Conservancy developed **BioMap**, a comprehensive mapping tool establishing core habitats and critical natural landscapes.

- **Core habitats** are essential for the survival of rare species and resilient ecosystems.
- **Critical natural landscapes** are large, undeveloped areas that buffer these habitats and support connectivity and coastal resilience.

The entirety of Nantucket, including Tuckernuck and Muskeget islands, is recognized as core habitat and critical natural landscape.

Many parts of Nantucket, including the coastline, areas around the Great Ponds, and the land underlying Nantucket Memorial Airport, are also home to rare species of regional importance.

*Left: Piping plover | Adobe Stock
Right: American oystercatcher | Adobe Stock*



Invasive Species.

Invasive species of concern for Nantucket include marine algae, the common reed, green and Asian crabs, and the southern pine beetle. While deer are not considered invasive, the rapidly growing deer population raises concerns about environmental management and the spread of tick-borne diseases.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Expanding Capacity.

The town created a Natural Resources Department (NRD), and staff developed several plans to guide environmental stewardship, including the Coastal Resilience Plan (CRP), Eelgrass Management Plan, Sediment Transport Study and Dredge Plan, and Water Quality Management Plan. The NRD has a Sustainability Office and Coastal Resilience Division, and staff are working to pair sustainability and resiliency in the department to address natural resources more holistically.

The Sewer Department took over stormwater two years ago, creating a Stormwater Division to understand the condition and functionality of Nantucket's stormwater infrastructure, or lack thereof.

BioMap: Core Habitat



Water Quality.

The island-wide Water Quality Monitoring Program provides consistent year-to-year comparisons to evaluate management strategies, especially those targeting nitrogen loading in coastal waters and harbors and phosphorus in freshwater systems like the Great Ponds. The NRD and partner organizations also survey ponds for Harmful Algal Blooms during the summer and post warning signs.¹⁴

PFAS.

The Town actively monitors for PFAS contamination and has developed an island-wide PFAS management plan.¹⁵ Since FY 2020, the Town has committed \$15 million toward PFAS-related efforts.¹⁷ To date, the water samples have remained below the MassDEP's Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL), with most wells showing no contamination.¹⁶ In 2023, the Department of Public Health added a contamination specialist to address PFAS and other emerging contaminants.¹⁷

Endangered & Invasive Species.

Through their Endangered Species Program, the NRD protects species and habitats of breeding birds. Beach owners and managers on Nantucket use public education, temporary beach closures, and fencing to ensure Nantucket's shores remain a safe nesting area for migratory species.¹⁸ The town, non-profits, and the Land Bank actively manage invasive species.



The Creeks | Photo courtesy of the Town of Nantucket

LEADERSHIP

Nantucket's **Natural Resources Department** works to preserve, protect, and restore Nantucket's natural resources through management, research, education, and public outreach. Staff works on water protection and water quality, fertilizer management, beach management, coastal resilience, sustainability, and protection of wildlife and their habitats from shellfish to marine mammals to endangered species. The **Sustainability Office** is run through the Natural Resources Department.

The NRD's **Brant Point Hatchery** conducts controlled spawns and larval releases of bay scallops to support Nantucket's shellfisheries. Staff also conduct habitat assessments, eelgrass mapping, quahog seed releases, and oyster reef restoration work to establish a proof of concept for recycling shells from local restaurants for reuse by spawning oysters.

The **Nantucket Conservation Commission** enforces state and local wetland laws by reviewing project proposals, holding public hearings, issuing permits and waivers, and charging fees.

The **Harbor and Shellfish Advisory Board** supports the Town and nonprofits on shellfish population enhancement, water quality sampling, eelgrass bed restoration, and education efforts by making recommendations to the Select Board.

Several non-municipal entities contribute greatly to the stewardship and protection of Nantucket's natural resource areas, working with each other and town staff to address environmental concerns—**Nantucket Land and Water Council, Nantucket Land Bank, the Conservation Foundation, Maria Mitchell Association, Nantucket Resource Partnership, Inc., Sustainable Nantucket, Remain Nantucket**, and more.

KEY BYLAWS AND REGULATIONS

Wellhead Protection Areas.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection establishes protection areas around the recharge area of public water supply groundwater sources.¹⁹ Nantucket's zoning also establishes a Public Wellhead Protection District around the Town and 'Sconset wellheads.²⁰

Fertilizer Guidelines.

To reduce nitrogen and phosphorus loading, the NRD runs a Fertilizer Program to educate homeowners and landscape professionals on environmentally responsible fertilizer use. The Conservation Commission and the Nantucket Board of Health have incorporated Best Management Practices into educational materials.

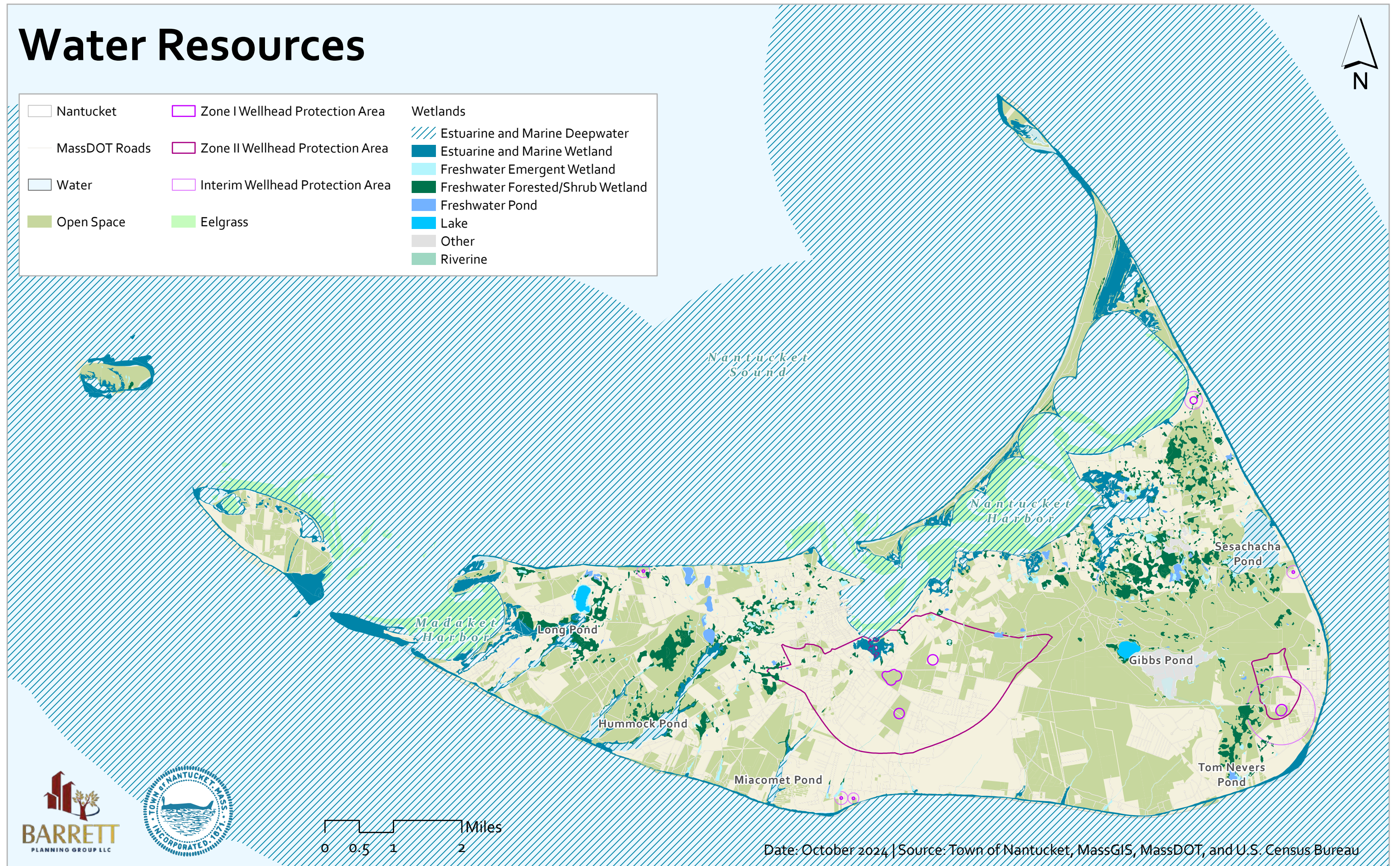
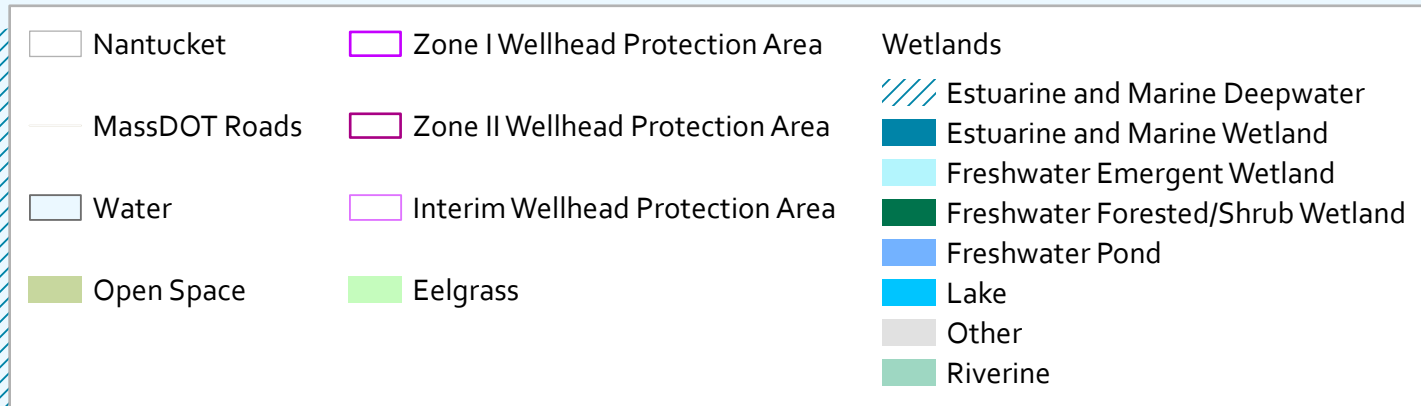
Wetlands Protections.

The Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act (310 CMR 10.00) guides municipalities in regulating and protecting coastal and inland wetlands. The Town's wetlands bylaw (Chapter 136 of the Code of the Town of Nantucket) exceeds the requirements of state's Wetland Protection Act. Updated wetland regulations took effect in January of 2025, adding resiliency as a new protected interest to all resource areas.²¹

Shellfish Regulations.

Both the Commonwealth and the Town regulate shellfishing under G.L. Chapter 130, Nantucket Bylaw Chapter 122, and the Town's recreational shellfish guide. Recreational shellfishers must obtain permits from the NPD before shellfishing in Nantucket's waters. Commercial shellfishing licenses are overseen by the NRD. The Shellfish Constable enforces rules regarding the quantity and quality of shellfish caught by species.²²

Water Resources



Date: October 2024 | Source: Town of Nantucket, MassGIS, MassDOT, and U.S. Census Bureau

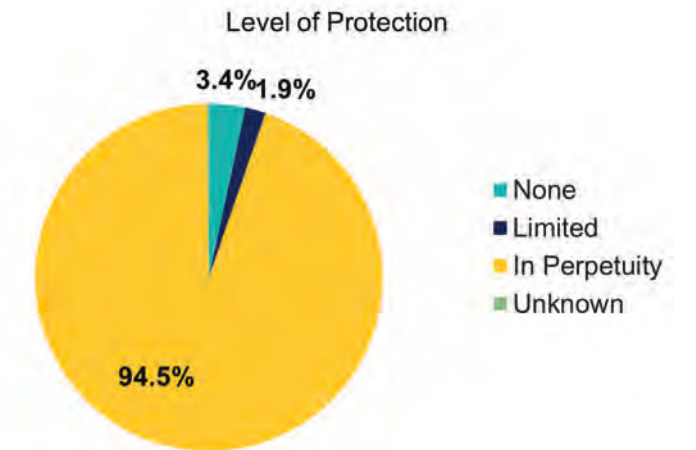
OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

The people of Nantucket have long understood the importance of protecting valuable open spaces, habitats, and animals. Today, more than half of the Island is dedicated to open space.

CURRENT CONDITIONS²³

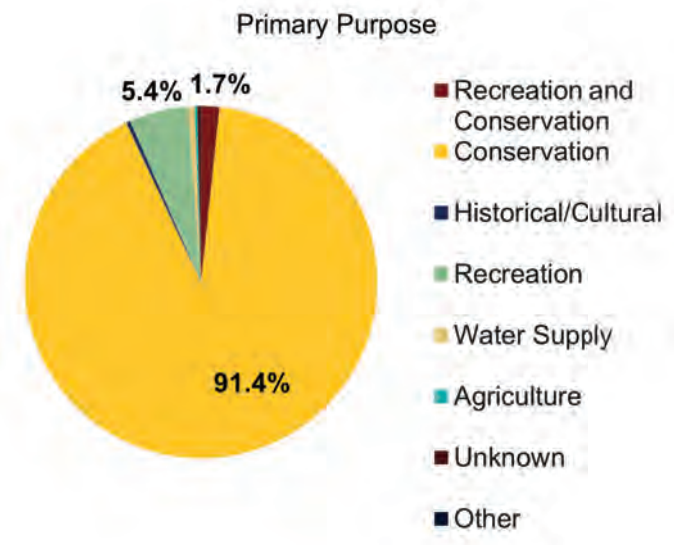
Open Space by Level of Protection.

More than 94 percent of open space on Nantucket is permanently protected from other forms of land use, as documented in deeds. Some areas have limited protection, e.g., cemeteries and municipal golf courses, which are traditionally used as open space and are likely to remain so. Open spaces with no protections are usually privately owned and, while currently used as open space, could be sold and converted to any other land use.



Open Space by Primary Purpose.

More than 91 percent of Nantucket's open space is conservation land, followed by recreational, cultural, and agricultural uses as well as lands protected for the Town's water supply.



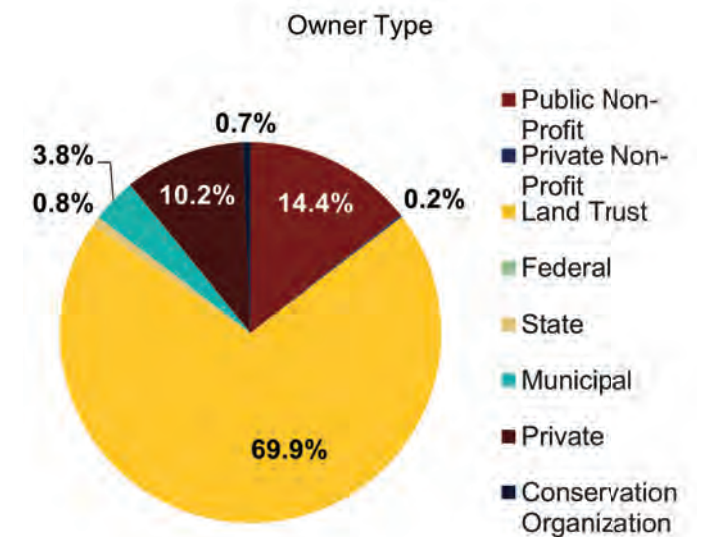
Open Space by Owner Type.

Several entities work together to steward and manage open space on Nantucket.

The **Nantucket Land Bank** (public non-profit) is funded by a two percent fee on real estate transfers enabled by a special act of the Massachusetts legislature. While not the largest open space landholder on the island, the Land Bank owns and maintains many well-known natural spaces across the island.²⁴ The **Nantucket Conservation Foundation** (land trust) is the Island's largest open space landowner and provides land stewardship, public access, and scientific research.

The **Nantucket Land & Water Council** (land trust) holds conservation restrictions, supports scientific research on rare and endangered species and water resources, and advocates for the Island's flora and fauna by monitoring proposals reviewed by the Planning Board and Conservation Commission.²⁵

The **Linda Loring Nature Foundation** (conservation foundation) owns 275 acres in Eel Point, serving as a living laboratory for ecological research and environmental education for residents and visitors of all ages.²⁶



Recreation Offerings.

As reported in the 2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan, Nantucket currently holds: about 16,000 acres of permanently protected open space, including areas for field and court sports, 16 public beaches, 39 miles of paved bike paths, and hundreds of miles of walking and off-road bike trails within town-owned open space.

Public recreational facilities and programs include six soccer/lacrosse/field hockey fields, public boat ramps, one football field, two softball diamonds, two baseball diamonds, two basketball courts, tennis courts, a running track, a pool, two public golf courses, three paddle tennis courts, three gymnasiums, a skate park, pickleball courts, and a motorized dirt bike/ATV track. The Land Bank also has a dog park. Private recreational facilities and programs include Nantucket Ice, the Boys and Girls Club, Strong Winds, Nantucket Community Sailing, and Sea of Opportunities by Egan Maritime Institute.

Connectivity and Public Access.

Nantucket has protected open space on a large scale, focusing on vast, connected landscapes rather than smaller, isolated parcels. This allows residents and visitors to immerse themselves in the natural landscape that seems to stretch as far as the eye can see. This scale also has ecological benefits. Much of Nantucket's open space is open and available to the public from dawn to dusk.²⁷ Waterfront access and water-based recreational opportunities are limited on the island, as much focus has been placed on land-based open space.

Dog Park Sign | December 2025



RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Ongoing Town recreation projects aim to maintain and utilize existing Town-owned recreation assets to their highest function. These projects include expanding fields at Nobadeer, providing active recreation opportunities for all ages, creating additional field space for youth sports, reconstructing tennis courts at Jetties Beach, replacing the playground at Tom Nevers, and adding a playground at Nobadeer. Large projects are funded through capital planning, while routine maintenance is built into the Division's budget. The Town's fields and facilities support various sports leagues and recreation programs.

Town open space and recreation work is guided by the **2022 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)** which aims to protect public conservation and recreational interests that support numerous ecosystem services, improve access to and connection between areas, preserve the island's sense of place, and integrate the OSRP into other planning efforts.

Completed in 2020, the **Parks and Recreation Master Plan** outlines recommended improvements for all municipal park and recreation sites. In response to climate projections outlined in the 2021 Coastal Resilience Plan, the Parks and Recreation Manager is revising certain projects.

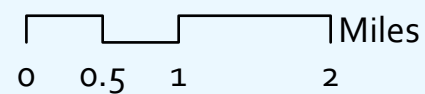
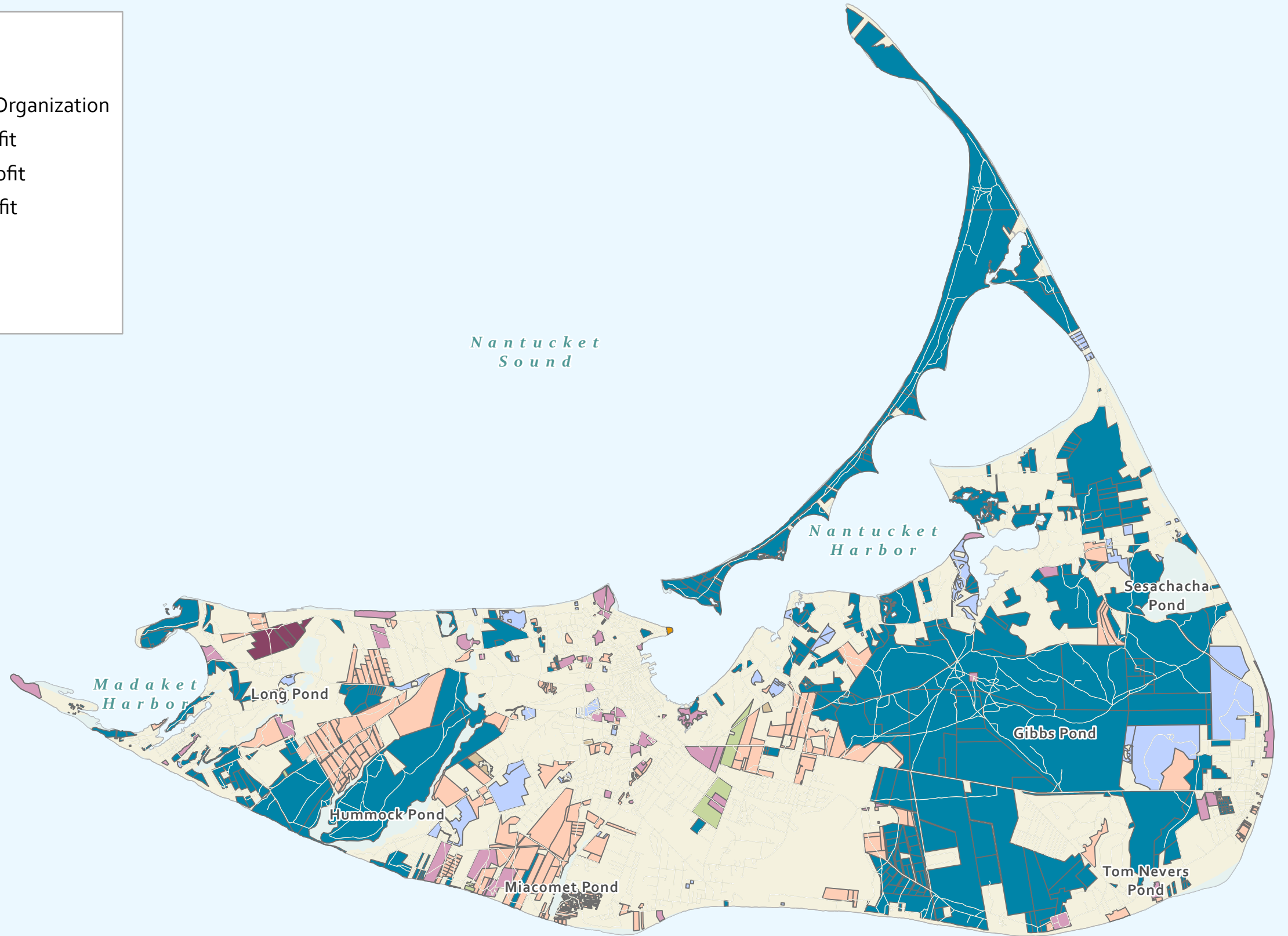
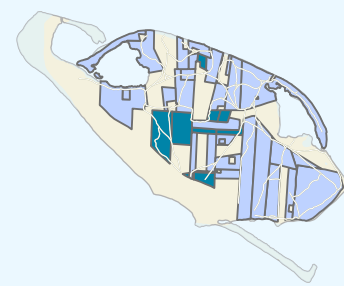
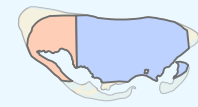
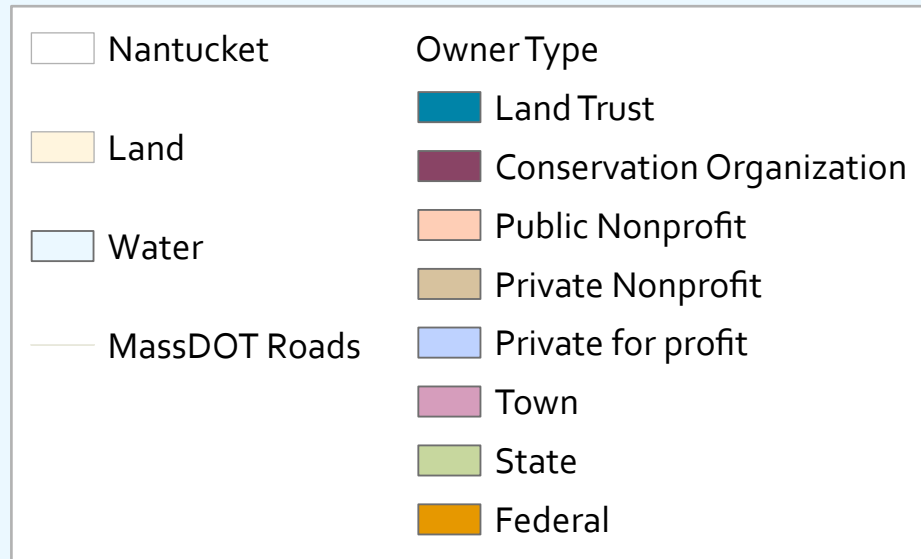
LEADERSHIP

In addition to the many conservation organizations stewarding lands with open space and recreation resources on Nantucket, the **Parks and Recreation Division** maintains fourteen Town-owned parks and seven Town-owned historic cemeteries. After a period without dedicated management, the Town hired a new Parks and Recreation Manager in 2021, who operates out of the Department of Public Works (DPW), works closely with the Grounds and Facilities Divisions, and is advised by the five-member **Parks and Recreation Commission**.

Altar Rock Conservation Area | July 2024



Open Space by Owner



Date: October 2024 | Source: Town of Nantucket, MassGIS, MassDOT, and U.S. Census Bureau

SUSTAINABILITY

“Sustainability is how the Town of Nantucket, with a focus on historic preservation, natural resources, hazard mitigation, solid waste management, energy, public health, and education, institutionalizes practices in municipal operations that support a balance of the economic, environmental, and social health of our island, which meet the needs of current residents and visitors without compromising the ability of future generations to meet evolving needs.”

- Adopted by the Nantucket Select Board in October 2018 (Updated October 2021)²⁸

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Nantucket’s primary climate impacts include extreme weather, coastal flooding, sea level rise, and erosion.

Sea Level Rise, Groundwater Table Rise, & Flooding.

Chronic flooding will likely occur in areas where stormwater and drainage infrastructure cannot handle storm surge compounded with predicted increases in sea and groundwater levels. Water management on Nantucket must also factor in the consistent submerging of outfall pipes along the coast, increasing the prominence of surcharge during heavy rainfall events.²⁹ Much of Nantucket’s northern and western land area, including areas around Madaket Harbor, Coatue, Downtown, and all of Tuckernuck Island, is projected to flood at varying depths during a 1% annual chance storm. In more inland areas, flooding is projected around existing waterbodies like the Great Ponds and Polpis Harbor.³⁰ The most at-risk area on the island for flooding is the Downtown, which invites great environmental, economic, social, and historical concern.³¹

The NOAA tide gauge on Steamboat Wharf has revealed a 0.16 inches of sea level rise per year on average since the gauge began recording data in 1963, and several busy streets in the Downtown area already experience problematic flooding, even on sunny days.³² Nantucket’s sole source aquifer is vulnerable to groundwater table rise and subsequent saltwater intrusion, overpumping, and contamination from a variety of pollutants. To increase resiliency within the water supply, and source the Town’s two water companies have installed standby generators and work to protect the aquifer and wellhead areas from contamination.

Extreme Weather.

Nantucket’s location in the Atlantic Ocean places it in the potential path of tropical storms and hurricanes. Nor’easters bring high winds and heavy precipitation, and cold-weather events can cause flooding and even freeze the harbor, cutting off access to the mainland. In the winter of 2018, Nantucket was hit by two nor’easters that brought



Erosion at Tom Nevers | September 2024

widespread flooding and damage to buildings, sewer mains, and the Town Pier.³³

Erosion.³⁴

The entirety of Nantucket’s south shore is vulnerable to erosion, but erosion rates range from 12.63 feet to 0.56 feet per year of shoreline loss as calculated by the Massachusetts Ocean Resource Information System. The Town’s Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan highlighted ‘Sconset and Madaket on the south shore and Cliff Beach on the north shore as areas of particular concern.³⁵ In 2021, the Localized Erosion Monitoring Program began establishing erosion rate monitoring stations at coastal banks around the island. This data will inform coastal projects in the future and help understand localized erosion rates.

Nantucket's Coastal Resilience Plan reports that by 2070...

...during high tide



up to 29 miles of public and private roads on Nantucket (11% of island-wide roads), will flood with more than six inches of water, including critical arterial transportation routes like Madaket and Polpis roads.

...during storm events



54 miles of public and private roads (23% of island-wide roads) will have a one percent annual chance of flooding

23 miles of public and private roads (9% of island wide roads) will be at risk of loss due to erosion.

...over 2,300 buildings will be at risk of coastal flooding and/or erosion.



84% of those buildings are residential homes of Nantucket's community members

50% of those buildings are considered historic.

Top Five At-Risk Essential Community Services

- Steamship Authority Terminal
- Coast Guard Station Brant Point
- Stop & Shop
- Hy Line Cruises Terminal
- National Grid Electrical Substation

Top Five At-Risk Historic/Cultural Institutions

- Whaling Museum
- Old Brant Point Lighthouse
- Nantucket Aquarium
- Artists Association of Nantucket Gallery
- Brant Point Lighthouse

(pictured below)



Infrastructure Impacts.

Future flooding, worsened by sea level rise, erosion, and the impacts of intense storms, poses a significant risk to roadways, essential infrastructure, and buildings on Nantucket due to the frequent high water and loss of service that could result. Crucial public facilities, including the Wastewater Treatment Plant and the airport, are at risk of erosion. See figure.

Energy and Utilities.

Nantucket was energy independent until National Grid laid the first undersea transmission cable to import electricity from Cape Cod in 1996, followed by a second cable in 2006. Nantucket Electric Company provides electric service to about 14,500 customers as of March 2024.³⁶ The two transmission cables can supply the island with 74 megawatts, and an additional 12 megawatts of electricity can be generated on the Island. The extreme peaks and valleys of Nantucket's population can lead to capacity issues for Nantucket's energy supply.³⁷ The highest historical peak demand was reported in August of 2023 at 58.2 megawatts.³⁸ National Grid anticipates the need for a third undersea cable by 2029.

Barges deliver diesel and gasoline, which are stored at a tank farm downtown and then distributed around the island. Propane and aviation fuel are brought via tanker trucks on the non-passenger freight lines operated by the Steamship Authority.

As a result of the logistical challenges of providing a consistent supply of energy to the residents of Nantucket, fuel prices are generally higher on the island than in the rest of the state. Decades of electricity infrastructure improvements, however, have resulted in lower average electricity costs on-island.

Stormwater Management.

Managing stormwater is essential for reducing nutrients and contaminants in Nantucket's water bodies. Within the Town, stormwater is managed within the Sewer Department by the stormwater manager. The Town funds its stormwater efforts through a stormwater enterprise fund created during the 2023 Annual Town Meeting. The Sewer

Department also maintains a large stormwater bypass pump at Children's Beach, used during storm events.³⁹ Several municipal and private projects and plans throughout the Town contribute to the island's stormwater management.

Green Infrastructure.

Green infrastructure includes the range of measures that use plant or soil systems, permeable pavement or other permeable surfaces or substrates, stormwater harvest and reuse, or landscaping to store, infiltrate, or evapotranspire stormwater and reduce flows to sewer systems or to surface waters.⁴⁰ This includes Nantucket's public shade trees (numbering between 1,000 and 2,000), the Land Bank's recently installed rain garden, and several rain gardens, beach and dune areas, permeable pavement areas, bioswales, pocket parks, and other recreational areas managed by the Town. The Town is pursuing a grant to maintain and increase Nantucket's tree canopy in downtown and Siasconset historic areas.⁴¹

Solid Waste Management.

As an island, effective solid waste management is a sustainable practice as much as a logistical requirement. The solid waste facility (SWF) includes collection sites for trash, recycling, and compost. In 2024, Nantucket made progress on several waste streams, including hazardous waste, latex paint collection, and books and textiles. Although most solid waste collected at the landfill gets shipped to the mainland, the SWF features a popular "Take It or Leave It" facility that encourages reuse.

Historic Preservation.

With its first MVP Action Grant in 2019 (see below), the Town started the Resilient Nantucket program, combining planning efforts to increase resilience of the built environment, protect historic character, and sustain natural resources. Several projects have come out of this program, including a 3D sea level rise visualization of historic Downtown, Flooding Adaptation & Building Elevation Design Guidelines, and a resilience toolkit. Nantucket's demolition delay bylaw also promotes sustainability by keeping building material out of the landfill and limiting new construction.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Seventy-five projects bridging seven Town departments and a dozen different topic areas officially make up the Town's sustainability efforts. From PFAS remediation at the airport to water quality testing at Nantucket Harbor, the topic of sustainability and efforts to make Nantucket a more sustainable and resilient place connect people across the Island. Inter-departmental sustainability and resiliency meetings draw participants from Administration, Communications, NRD, PLUS, Energy, Airport, Sewer, Culture & Tourism, and Public Works.

Nantucket participates in the Commonwealth's **Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Planning Grant Program (MVP)** and is a designated MVP Community through 2026. Completion of the MVP program and designation as an MVP Community make Nantucket eligible for MVP Action Grant funding and increase Nantucket's standing for other grant opportunities from the state.

Nantucket PowerChoice is an electricity aggregation program managed by the Town. This program appoints First Point Power as the island's electricity supplier while National Grid remains Nantucket's electric utility company that manages electricity transport and billing. Residents can choose between the Standard plan (13.967 ¢/kWh) or the 100 percent renewable sources PowerChoice Green plan at a higher cost (16.847 ¢/kWh).⁴²

In 2020, Nantucket joined 300 other municipalities in the state as a **Massachusetts Green Community**, committing to reducing municipal energy consumption and lowering emissions. Since establishing a baseline in 2018, the Town has successfully reduced its energy consumption each year through conservation and efficiency measures. \$477,488 in Green Community grants supported these results, funding high-efficiency heat pumps, LED lighting, and EV charging stations.⁴³

Several key recent planning efforts guide the town's sustainability efforts. Aimed to be a roadmap for Nantucket to reduce its risk and build resilience to

flood and erosion along the coastline, the **2021 Coastal Resilience Plan (CRP)** outlines island-wide and site-specific recommendations for the next ten to fifteen years and beyond. The **2020 Sustainability Assessment Recommendations Report** produced a Sustainability and Resiliency Filter Framework to assess any potential town programs, projects, actions, or initiatives to ensure it meets Nantucket's priorities and values as it relates to a more sustainable future. However, framework use has been limited.

The **2019 Town of Nantucket Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP)** identifies natural hazards and risks, infrastructure vulnerabilities, and strategies to prevent loss of life and reduce property damage. The HMP's five-year timeline ended in March of 2024, and an update is underway. The HMP lists five areas of concern: access to the mainland, isolation within the island, historic resources, power supply resiliency, and climate change.

LEADERSHIP

In 2023, the Town's Natural Resources Department opened a new Sustainability Office and filled the position of **Sustainability Programs Manager** to coordinate the growing number of Town efforts related to sustainability and resilience. The **Coastal Resilience Coordinator** develops and implements flood control and adaptation approaches that equip Nantucket to adapt to rising seas and eroding coastlines.⁴⁴ The Coastal Resilience Coordinator collaborates with the **Coastal Resilience Advisory Committee**, the **Coastal Resilience and Sustainability Interdepartmental Working Group**, and many other Town Departments, non-profits, and the community.

Operating out of PLUS, the **Energy Coordinator** in the Energy Office identifies and implements energy efficiency, conservation, and renewable energy efforts across departments and services.

Nantucket's solid waste management is overseen in the Department of Public Work's **Solid Waste Division**, which works with a **Long-Term Solid Waste Planning Work Group** to improve waste diversion and recycling initiatives. The division

also employs a **Recycling Coordinator**.⁴⁵

The intersectional nature of sustainability is reflected in the diversity of community groups that contribute to Nantucket's social, environmental, and economic resiliency—such as Remain, the Nantucket Clean Team, ACKclimate Nantucket, Sustainable Nantucket, and the Nantucket Resource Partnership.

KEY BYLAWS AND REGULATIONS

Zoning serves as a tool to promote sustainable land use and the protection of critical natural resource areas. The TOD and COD hierarchy and the Flood Hazard Overlay District concentrate development where infrastructure already exists and limit development in flood-prone areas. The town also promotes conservation zoning, infill development, and redevelopment to limit the conversion of undeveloped land. Please see the Historic Preservation section for information on design guidelines and the Demolition Delay Bylaw.

The CRP also recommends several updates to current zoning to better coordinate the Town's coastal hazards, resilience goals, and zoning with the long-term planning goal of proactively reducing density and managing future investment in high-risk areas.

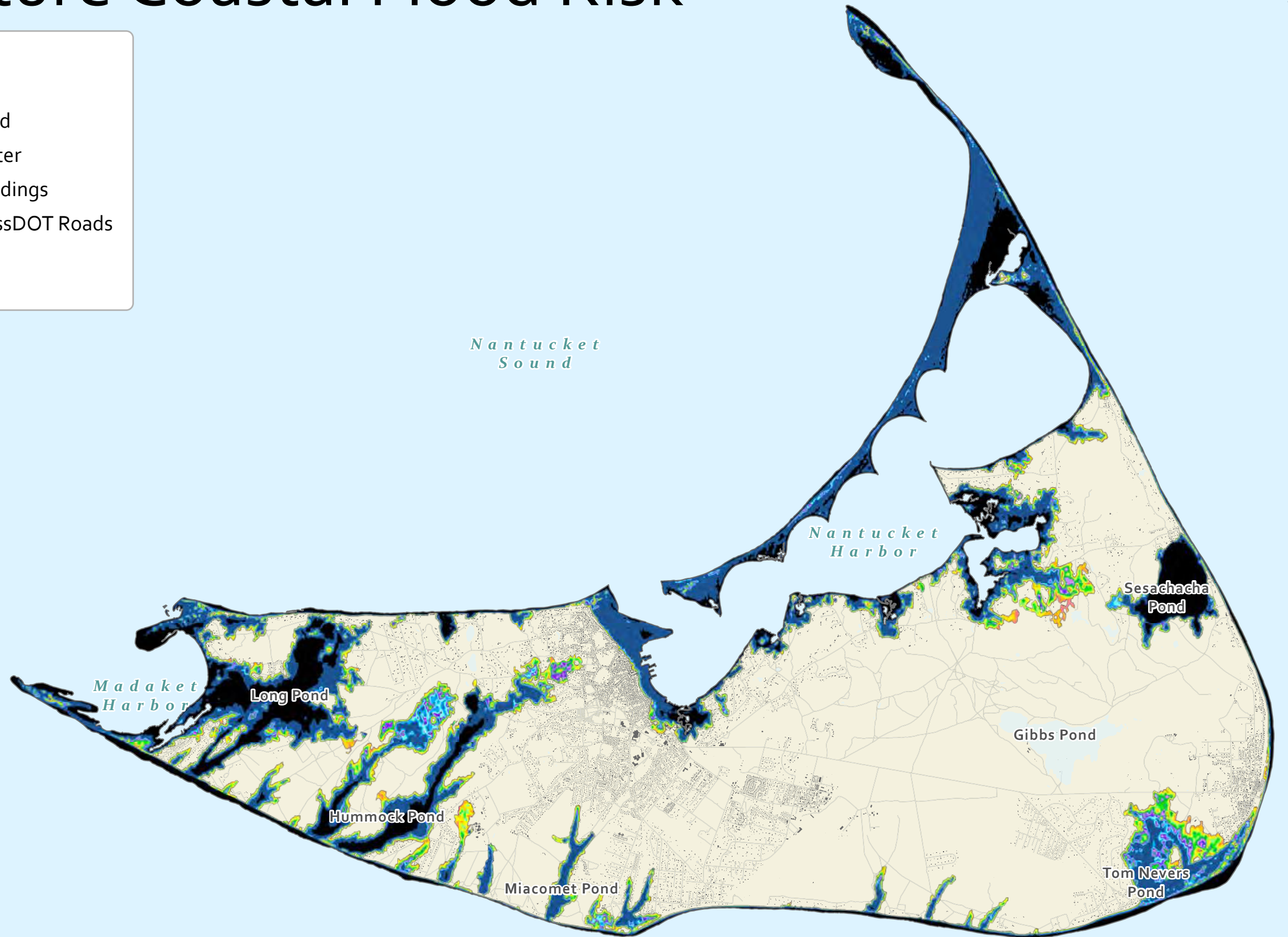
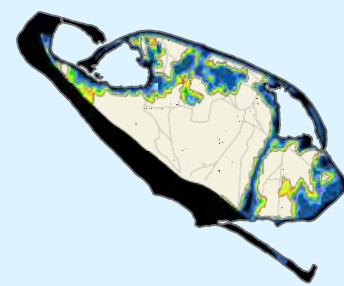
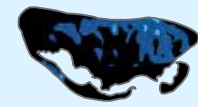
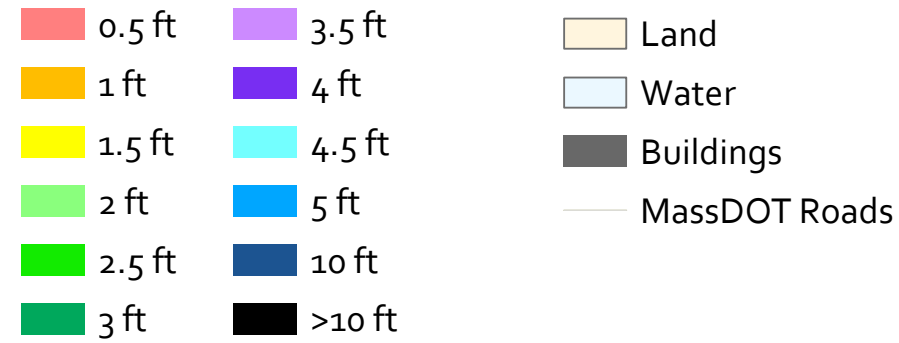
Houses along Old North Wharf | December 2025



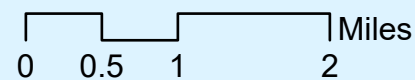
Estimated Future Coastal Flood Risk



1% Annual Coastal Flood
Exceedance Probability by 2070

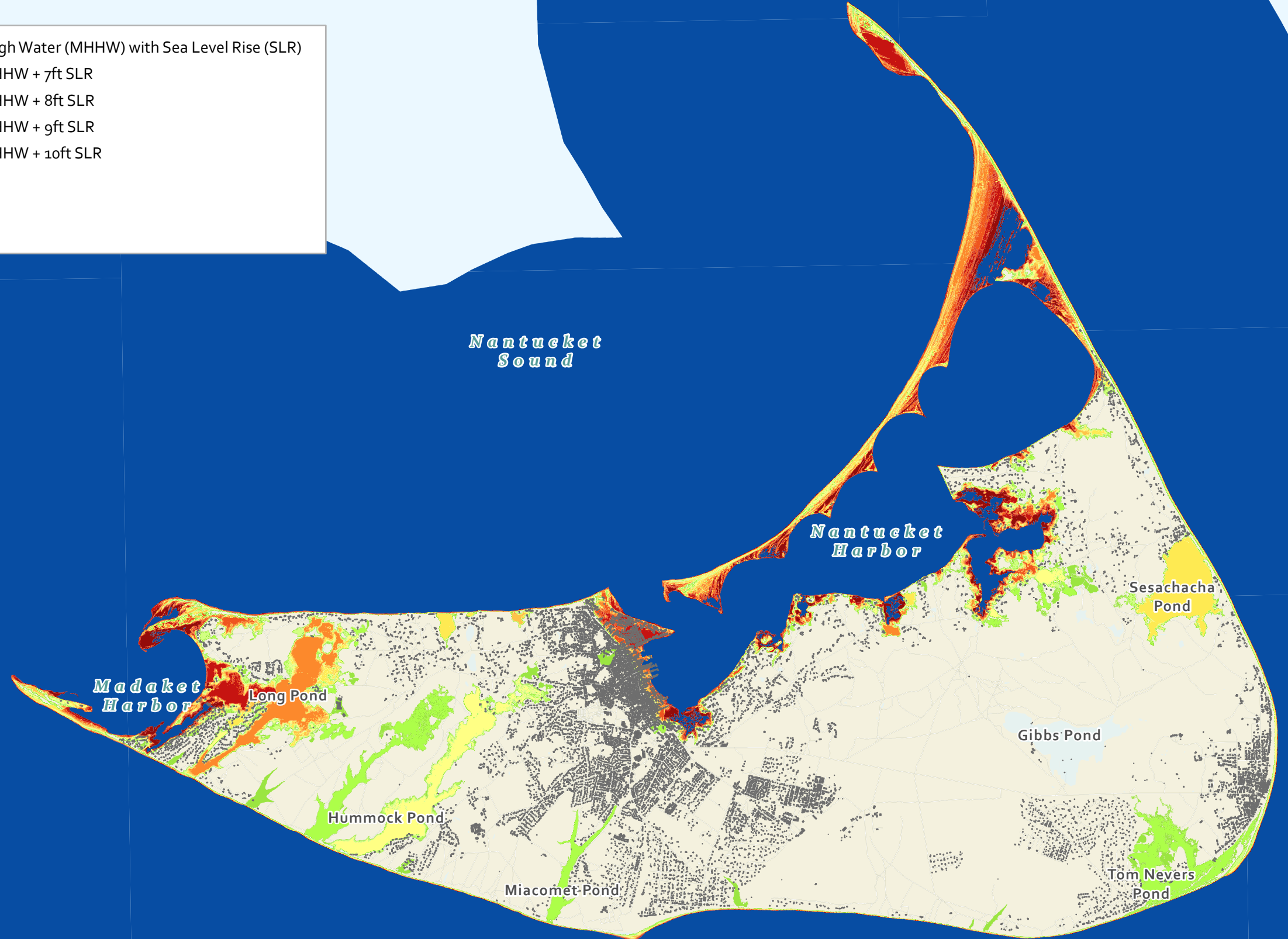
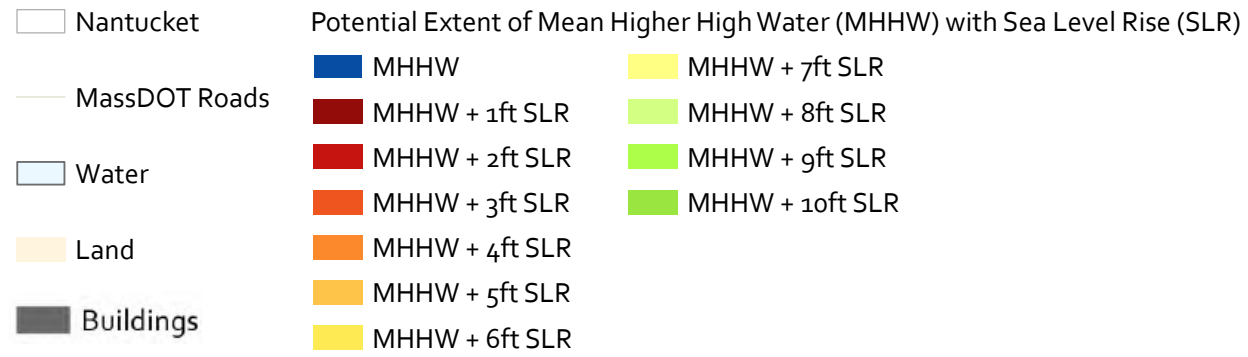


Note:
Projected flood extent is produced from the
Massachusetts Coast Flood Risk Model (MC-FRM) to
depict flooding risk due to sea level rise and coastal
storms.
Source: Woods Hole Group

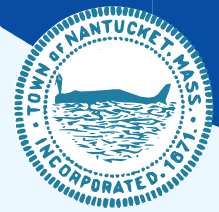


Date: April 2025 | Source: Town of Nantucket, MassGIS, MassDOT, Woods Hole Group, and U.S. Census Bureau

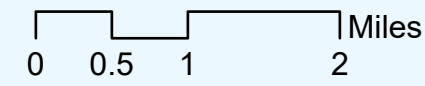
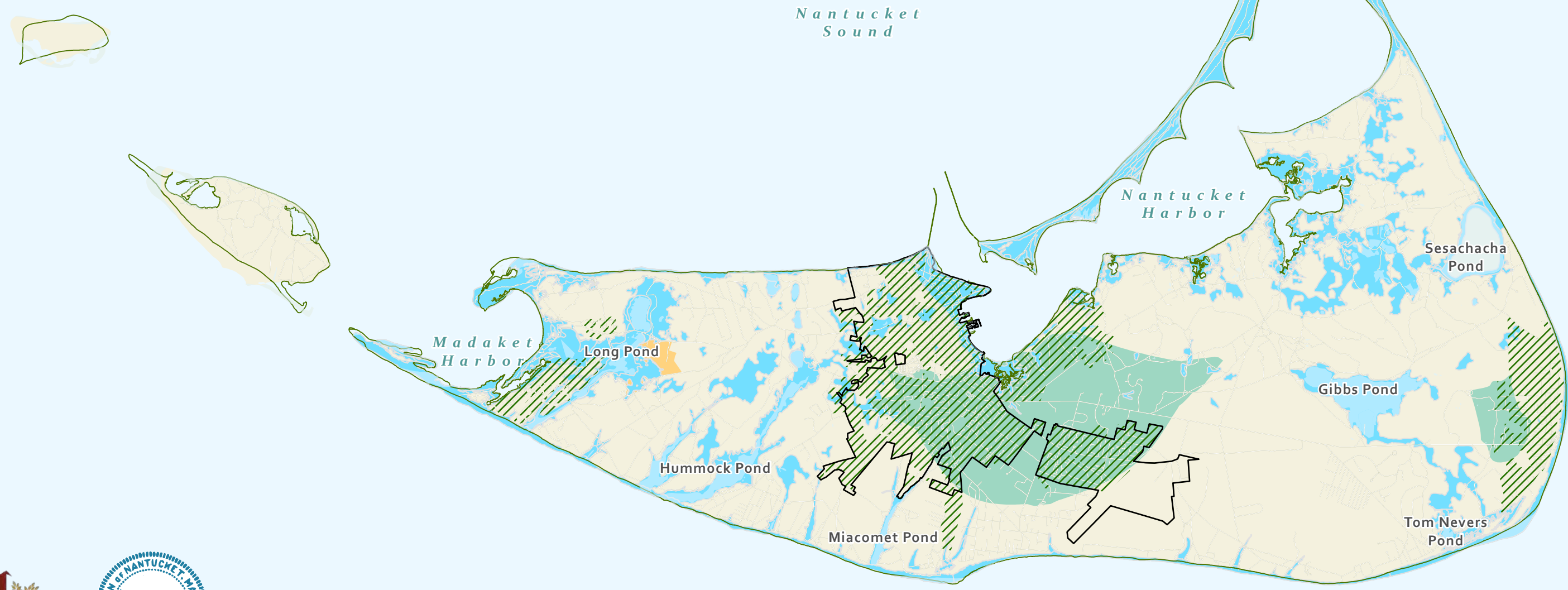
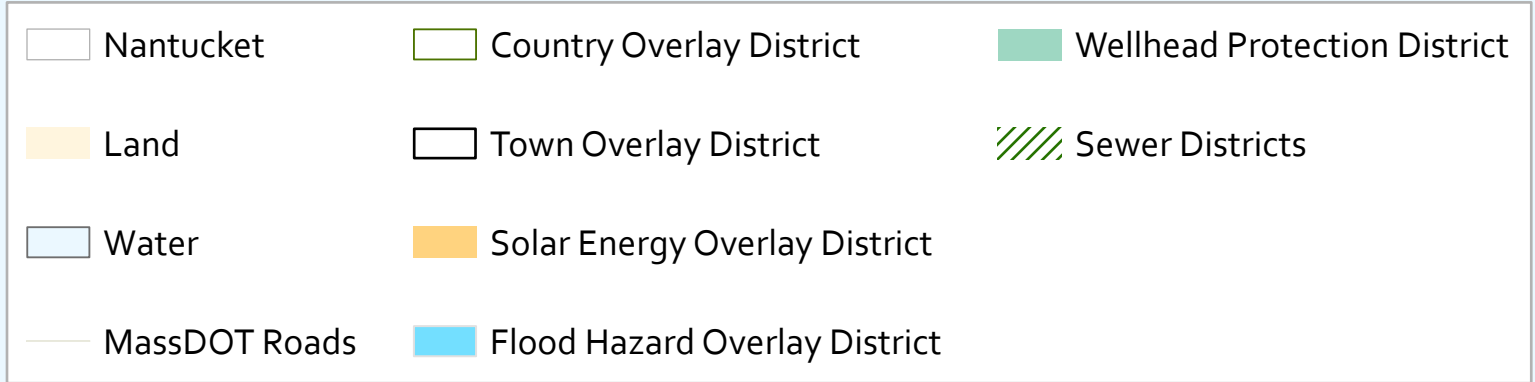
Projected Sea Level Rise



Note:
 Mean higher high water is the average of the higher of the two daily high tides.
 Source: NOAA



Zoning Protections



Date: October 2024 | Source: Town of Nantucket, MassGIS, MassDOT, and U.S. Census Bureau

Built Systems

LAND USE

TRAFFIC & CIRCULATION

**PUBLIC SERVICES &
FACILITIES**



Houses along Old North Wharf | Photo courtesy of the Town of Nantucket

LAND USE

Nantucket’s historic downtown and mid-island neighborhoods are concentrated activity centers with homes, businesses, and community institutions clustered around busy roadways. The rest of town - most of the island - has far less development and most of the protected landscapes residents cherish. Since tourism plays a central role in Nantucket’s economy, the Town works to balance the demand for housing with preserving the historic and natural features that draw visitors and seasonal residents. The town also has to balance the increasing challenges to safety, infrastructure, and uses that climate change, erosion, and flooding will have on existing and future land uses.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Preserving open space has been one of the driving land use patterns on Nantucket since the mid-twentieth century. Since the 1980s, the amount of tax-exempt land and open space has increased from 34 percent in 1987 to 61 percent in 2023. Over the same period, the share of developed land rose from 13 percent to 34 percent.¹ While the inventory of tax-exempt properties includes some religious, educational, and governmental uses, most of it is land preserved for conservation and recreation.

Residential Land Use Patterns.

Residential development is the island’s second most common land use. Most residential development is in Downtown Nantucket and the mid-island area, with smaller clusters in Tom Nevers, Madaket, and Siasconset villages. The housing stock in Downtown and along the harbor includes single- and multi-family residences. Single-family homes account for most residential properties in the mid-island and outlying villages.

With limited available developable land, housing development on Nantucket has shifted from primarily subdivisions to reconstruction or replacement of existing homes and infill development. The character of residential development has also changed over time, moving toward larger structures and smaller lots. Between 1980 and 1999, and 2000 and 2019, the average single-family building area increased by 25 percent in floor area while the average lot decreased by 31 percent.

Since the last Master Plan, most new residential units (52.2 percent) have been built in the Town Overlay District (TOD). Development in the Country Overlay District (COD) has primarily occurred in the more rural Limited Use General (LUG 1-3) districts, accounting for 35.1 percent of all new development.

Existing Land Uses by Acreage	
Land Use	Percent of Total Land (excluding water)
Open space, public land, or institutional (tax exempt)	60.70%
Residential	28.50%
Single-family	13.90%
Multiple houses on 1 lot	13.10%
Two or more units	0.70%
Other	2.30%
Undeveloped	5.30%
Developable	4.40%
Undevelopable	0.70%
Recreation	1.80%
Open land	1.40%
Mixed-use	1.00%
Commercial	0.90%
Industrial	0.20%
Agriculture	0.20%
Total	100%
Source: MassGIS Land Use Data for the Town of Nantucket FY2024	

Commercial & Industrial Land Use Patterns.

Commercial and industrial uses provide essential services for residents and visitors, but make up just over one percent of Nantucket’s total land area. Commercial uses are concentrated in Downtown and mid-island, with smaller pockets of commercial activity in village centers.

Since 2000, Nantucket has experienced minimal commercial land development. Only 16 percent of commercial structures on the island were built after 2000, the same share as those built before 1925.

Town & County Zoning Overlay Districts

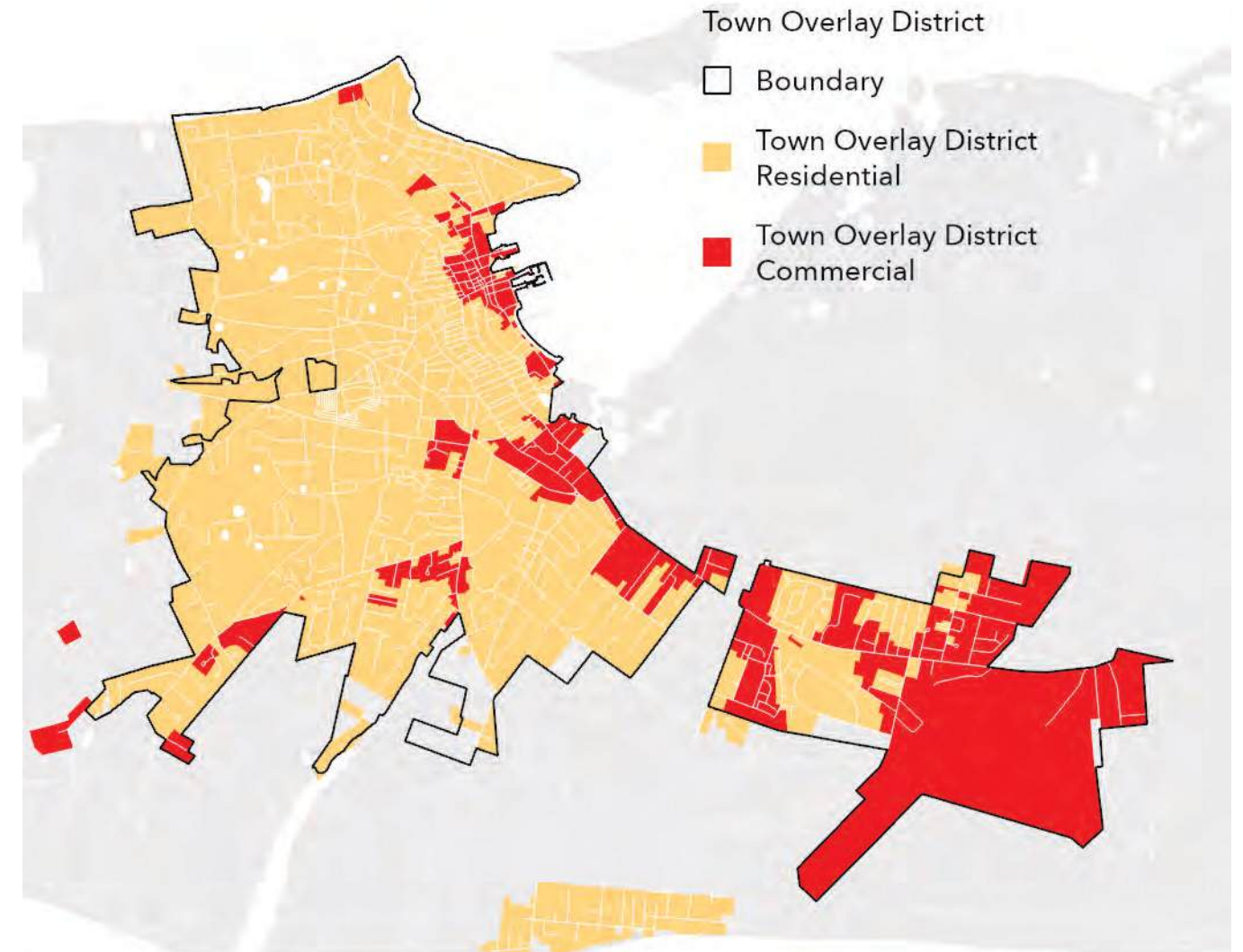
The **Town Overlay District (TOD)** permits higher density and encompasses the traditionally built-up areas of Downtown and mid-island. The TOD comprises 12% of the island.

Left: Example of residential uses in the TOD on Center Street in Downtown Nantucket.



The **Country Overlay District (COD)** comprises lower-density areas outside of Downtown and mid-island. The COD comprises 82% of the island, along with the outlying villages.

Left: Example of residential uses dispersed in the COD at Pimnys Point, with the TOD visible in the background. Photo courtesy of the Town of Nantucket.



Existing Zoning.

Early preservation efforts and land conservation work drove most of the island's regulatory development framework until the Town formally adopted zoning in 1972. As a result, much of Nantucket's historic land patterns evolved without consistent direction and planning. Nantucket adopted its current zoning system in 2006 to guide and shape development.² In addition to any required zoning review, all projects altering the exterior of property anywhere on the island must go before the Historic District Commission for its review.

Nantucket's approach to zoning is somewhat dated. The Town has established an unusually large number of use districts - twenty-eight districts, each with dimensional requirements and allowed uses.

The districts follow a hierarchical system based on the desired use types and intensity of development, with the Town and County Overlay Districts at the top (see below). Within each overlay district, the use districts are categorized as either residential or commercial.

Other Regulations.

- **Lot Regularity Formula.** In addition to any bulk requirements imposed on development through minimum lot areas and frontages, Nantucket requires that all lots meet the Town's lot regularity requirement, intended to create an orderly and regular land development.
- **Major Commercial Development.** Nantucket requires a Special Permit for any major commercial development, defined as any new construction for a commercial use exceeding 4,000 sq.ft., requiring 20+ parking spaces, or seating 100+ people.
- Nantucket's Zoning Bylaws provides several options for conservation zoning through use districts to promote open space preservation in developments: **Cluster Residential Development, Flex Development, and Open Space Residential Development.**
- **Special Permits for Secondary and Tertiary Year-Round Residential Lots.** To encourage the creation of year-round resident housing, Nantucket allows the division of a lot into up to three lots by Special Permit if the dwelling created is deed-restricted for year-round residents earning 150 percent or less of the area median income.

- **Workforce Housing.** Nantucket allows two workforce housing development options by Special Permit: a workforce homeownership housing bonus in the R-5 and R-10 districts and a workforce housing rental community option in the CN and CMI Districts. Under these programs, the Town requires major site plan review, requires that the units be eligible for Nantucket’s Subsidized Housing Inventory, and mandates affordability for the maximum period allowed by law.

Resiliency and Land Use.

The threats to Nantucket caused by climate change will have a significant impact on the way Nantucket uses land. The Nantucket Coastal Resiliency Plan includes a number of zoning and land use-related recommendations on how the Island can rethink its relationship with land uses in light of climate change. The Town also maintains an internal working group composed of the Natural Resources Department, Planning and Land Use Services, Coastal Resiliency Advisory Committee, and the Planning Board to incorporate coastal resiliency into the Zoning Bylaw.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Since the previous Master Plan, the Town has created the **Planning and Land Use Services (PLUS) Department.** Supported by PLUS staff, the Planning Board has made considerable progress implementing the land use section of the 2009 Master Plan. This has been made possible by consistent efforts at the Annual Town Meeting to rezone as well as the development of area plans, overseen by the regional planning agency. Changes have supported the town’s town and country development pattern, pushed forward in the 2009 Master Plan.

LEADERSHIP

Please see the **Public Services & Facilities** section for the many town entities that oversee land management and development on Nantucket.

Siasconset Market | September 2024



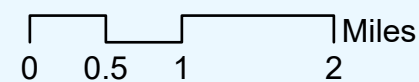
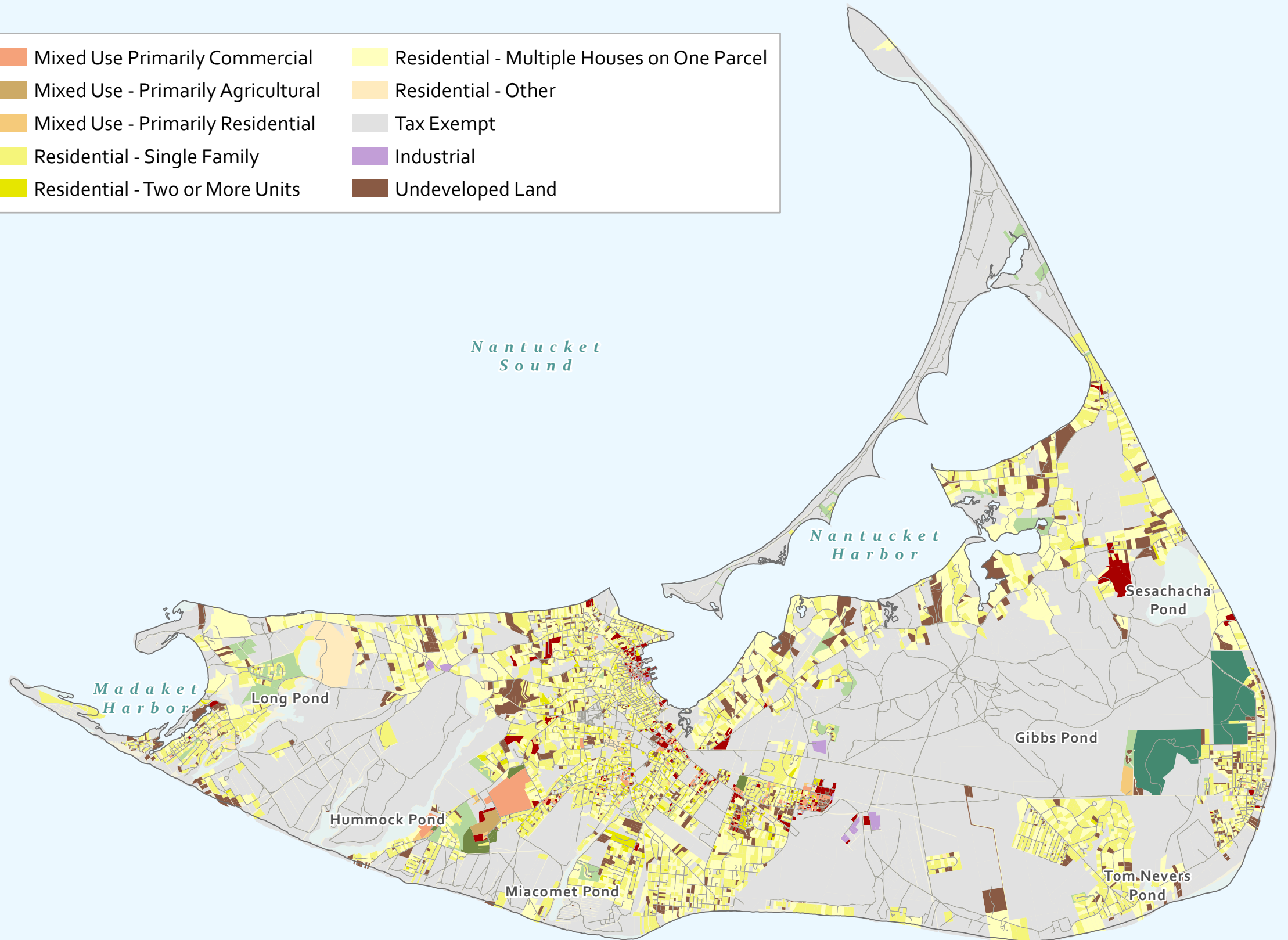
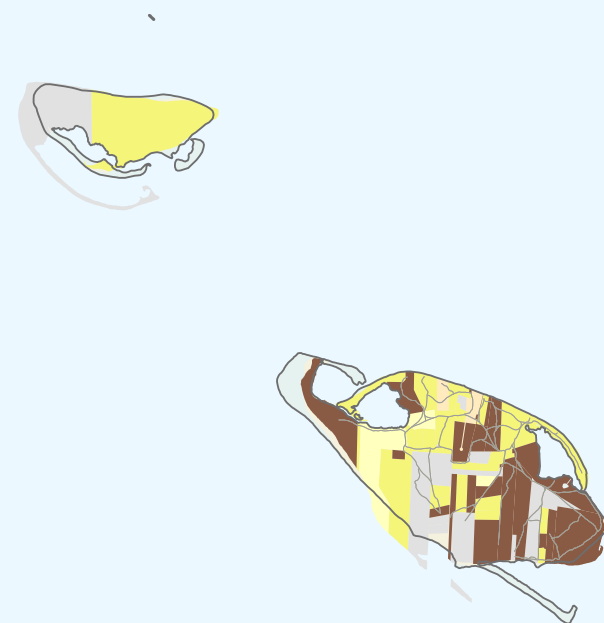
Seasonal workforce housing on Waitt Drive | December 2025



Land Use

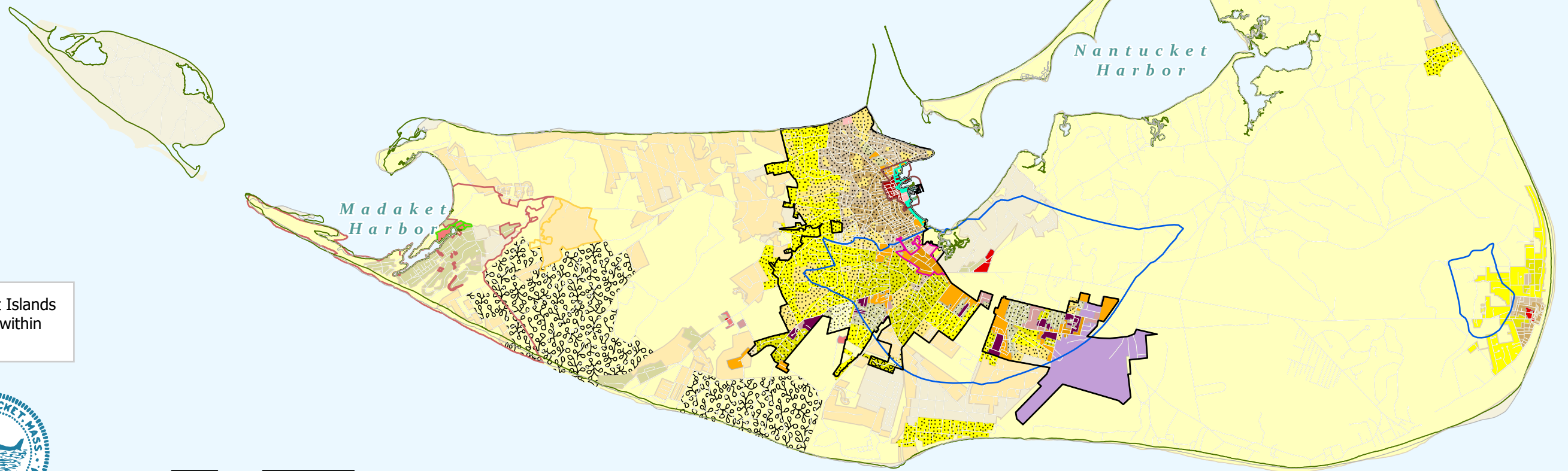
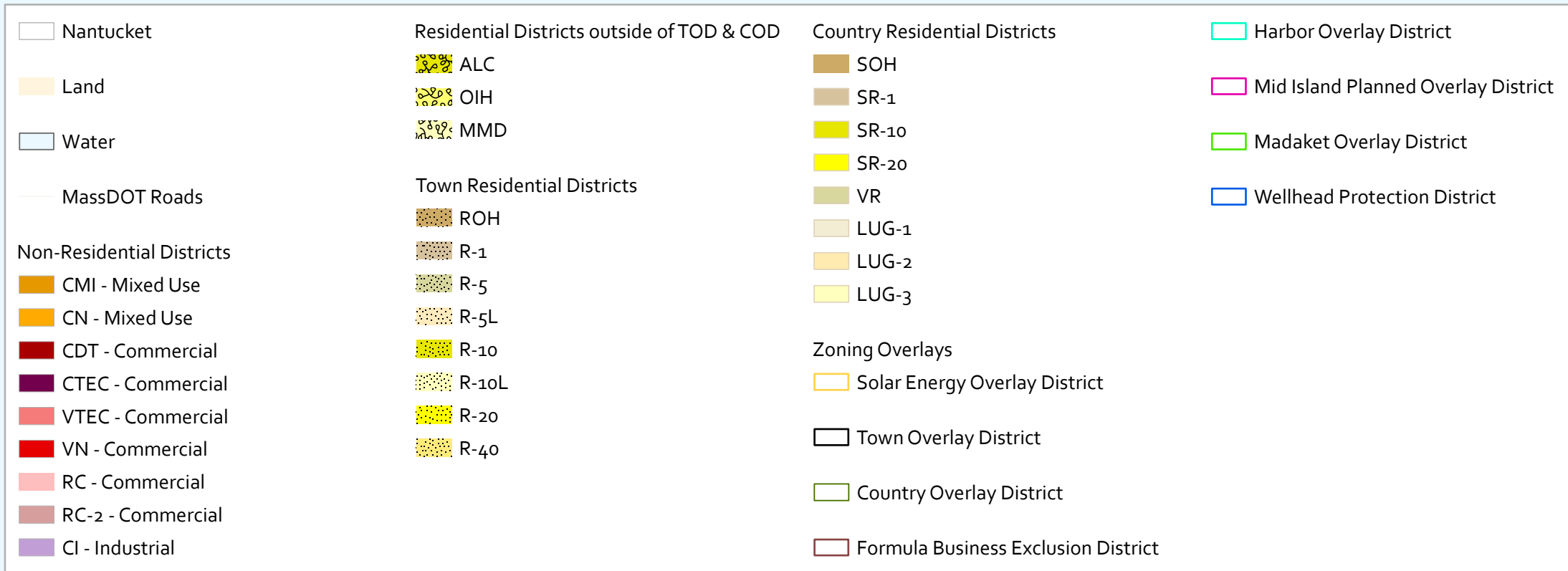


Nantucket	Land Use	Mixed Use Primarily Commercial	Residential - Multiple Houses on One Parcel
Water	Open Space	Mixed Use - Primarily Agricultural	Residential - Other
MassDOT Roads	Agricultural	Mixed Use - Primarily Residential	Tax Exempt
	Recreational	Residential - Single Family	Industrial
	Commercial	Residential - Two or More Units	Undeveloped Land

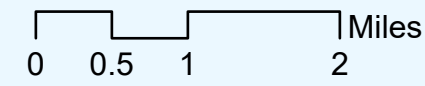


Date: October 2024 | Source: Town of Nantucket, MassGIS, MassDOT, and U.S. Census Bureau

Zoning



Note: Tuckernuck and Muskeget Islands are not zoned. Both islands are within the Country Overlay District.



Date: October 2024 | Source: Town of Nantucket, MassGIS, MassDOT, and U.S. Census Bureau

TRAFFIC & CIRCULATION

Due to Nantucket’s position 30 miles offshore, transportation to and from the island is a critical concern for the life and livelihood of every resident. Additionally, Nantucket’s success in establishing itself as a place people want to live and tourists want to visit has had the unintended consequence of increasing traffic congestion. Much of Nantucket’s recent work has been focused on creating robust alternatives to personal cars to get around the island, which have seen mixed success. Despite this, Nantucket maintains a wide array of transportation options.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Commuting.

Nantucket’s commuting patterns reflect the island’s separation from the mainland. Driving alone makes up the largest share of commuting and has increased over time. Compared to the state, driving alone and walking to work are more common, and working from home or using public transit to get to work are less common on Nantucket.³ There is also much less inter-community commuting than on the mainland—67% of Nantucket workers work on the island, and over 75% of the island’s workforce are residents.⁴

Automobiles.

Cars play a critical role in Nantucket’s transportation network. Despite efforts to reduce personal vehicle trips, both the number of cars and vehicle miles traveled on the island continue to rise.⁵ The number of cars per household on the island is noticeably higher than on the mainland, contributing to high amounts of congestion.

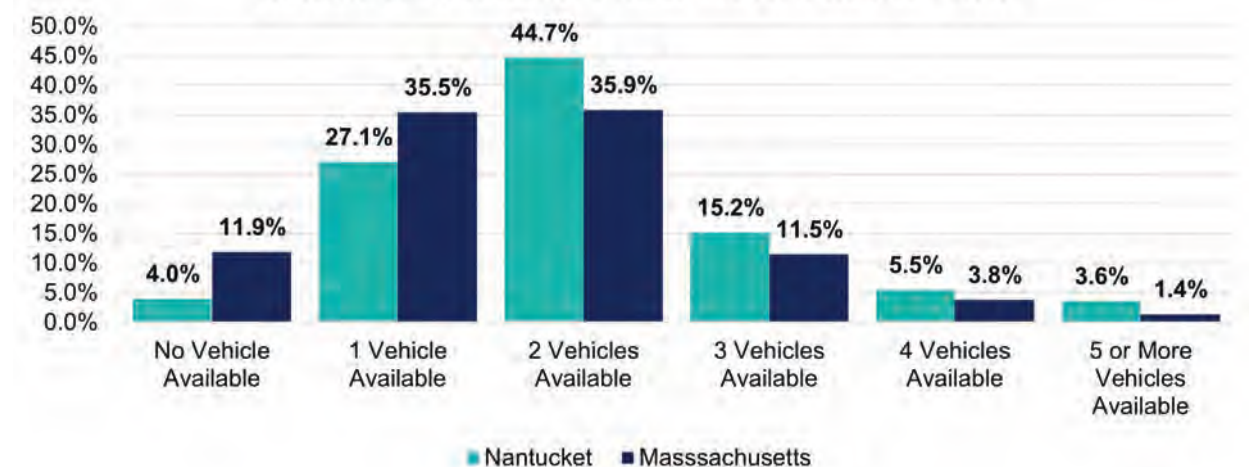
Parking.

Parking is a major concern for Nantucket. Nantucket’s seasonal tourism creates an incredibly high but temporary demand for parking during the summer. Many of the traffic concerns are based around downtown, due to its high concentration of destinations and ferry access, and the mid-island, one of the main year-round communities close to downtown. Nantucket also has limited options for long-term parking, posing challenges for residents without off-street parking and workers with commercial vehicles who live off-island.

Active Transportation.

Non-motorized transportation has been a major focus of recent planning efforts. Nantucket has approximately twenty-six miles of sidewalks, covering nineteen percent of the town’s roads.⁶ The historic street and building patterns in downtown combined with vehicular needs only allow for very narrow sidewalks, and many are in poor condition or abruptly end. Nantucket has a designated bike path Downtown marked to indicate the shared lane. Approximately thirty-five miles of multi-use paths are open to cyclists, pedestrians, and other active transit users across the island. Class three electric bicycles (e-bikes) are not allowed on multi-use paths but have become common and pose safety hazards.⁷

Households by Vehicles Available in 2022
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2018-2022, Table B08201



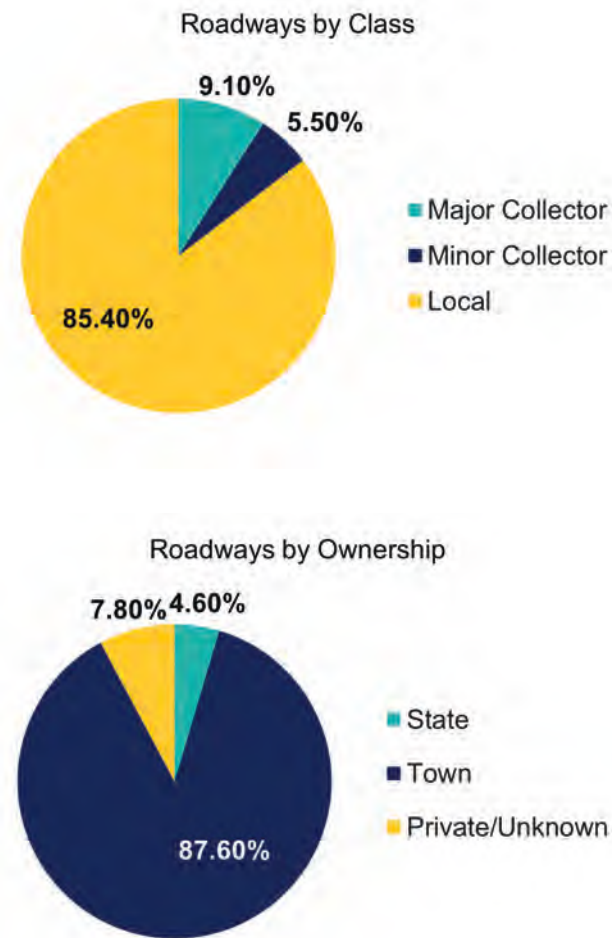
Public Transit.

Public transit services are critical to the lives and livelihoods of residents, as they are the only ways goods and people can enter or exit the island at scale.

- **Bus.** The Nantucket Regional Transit Authority (NRTA) introduced year-round service for the Wave bus system on several key routes in 2018 and offered free ridership between April 1 and December 31 in 2024. Service expansion and price reduction have led to a tremendous increase in usage, with the highest ridership in over ten years in 2024.
- **Ferry.** As an island, ferry services are integral to Nantucket’s accessibility and economy, with 83 percent of all travelers reaching the island by ferry in 2022.⁸ Since 2014, the total number of passengers across all ferry services has increased by 22 percent. Together, the Woods Hole, Martha’s Vineyard, and Nantucket Steamship Authority (SSA) and Hy-Line Cruises provide 93.7% of passenger trips.⁹ All ferry services land at Nantucket Harbor in downtown Nantucket, providing excellent access for passengers but introducing traffic flow problems.
- **Air Travel.** Air travel also plays an important role in connecting Nantucket. The island’s regional, Town-owned air facility, Nantucket Memorial Airport (ACK), becomes the second busiest airport in Massachusetts during the summer. Until the late 1990s, air travel accounted for approximately half of all passengers coming to and from Nantucket. By 2022, airlines only accounted for 17.3 percent of passengers.¹⁰ Regardless, during peak season, the terminal often experiences long lines, requiring additional gates operated out of a semi-permanent tent.¹¹

Roadways.

Nantucket’s roadways are a critical component of the Island’s infrastructure. Several planning studies have found that the conditions of Nantucket’s roads are a major concern for residents. The 2023 Pavement Management Report rated the overall quality of the town’s roads at 81.13 out of 100, representing a decline in road quality from five years previously. The report also estimated that the total backlog of road repairs on the island amounts to \$49.4 million.¹²



Safety and Crashes.

Nantucket prides itself on its status as a town with no traffic lights. Instead, Nantucket prioritizes rotaries, which increase traffic flow better than lights and tend to have fewer serious accidents than four-way stops. Crashes in Nantucket are highly seasonal, disproportionately involve pedestrians and bicyclists, and are heavily concentrated downtown and at intersections (especially three-legged intersections). Results from a Traffic Safety Action Plan survey show that while Nantucket is perceived to be safe for vehicular traffic, perceived safety for other transit modes is significantly worse, and is especially unsafe for vulnerable groups like children, seniors, and people with disabilities.¹³

Orange Street, Downtown Nantucket | December 2025



Freight Transportation.

Freight cargo arrives in Nantucket through ACK and the SSA. Distribution of freight across the island is accomplished by way of the designated freight route. The reliance on ferries makes Nantucket extremely susceptible to disruptions in supply chains. Storms, unsafe sailing conditions, and vehicle failures can prevent goods and supplies from reaching Nantucket for days at a time.

Resiliency and Disaster Preparedness.

Preparing for coastal risks is critical to Nantucket’s transportation infrastructure. Many of Nantucket’s roads are at risk from coastal erosion and flooding. By 2050, up to twelve miles of roads could be lost to erosion, and twenty miles will be at risk of flooding.¹⁴ Key routes, such as Madaket and Polpis roads, and island bridges face increased flooding, which could cut off access during emergencies and isolate residents. Downtown Nantucket, especially the ferry terminals, is particularly susceptible to flooding. As early as 2050, Steamboat Wharf could be cut off from surrounding roads at mean monthly high tide, with frequent disruptions projected even by 2030. Other areas, such as Sheep Point Road, are already experiencing partial failure due to erosion. Some of these roads will need to be entirely relocated to provide continued access for residents.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mode Options.

PLUS has worked to give people more mode options by constructing new bike paths, prioritizing routes to the ferries, improving intersections on the truck route, launching a traffic data dashboard, undertaking public education campaigns, and instituting fare-free buses. The Department of Public Works includes annual repair plans in its budgeting, and sidewalk repairs have recently been conducted downtown.¹⁵

Parking.

The Town completed a portion of the parking management system, created satellite parking lots to alleviate congestion downtown, and adopted a Parking Benefit District, allowing funds from parking payments to be used on parking and active transit improvements. The Town is also working to raise awareness of e-bike allowance and safe operation.

Airport.

ACK's progress in recent years includes improvements and expansion in air service operations, PFAS remediation, a new employee housing project, and construction of a new terminal. To accommodate larger aircrafts, the airport also undertook a ramp extension project with a sound wall and created a Ramp Management Plan.

Resilience.

The Town is actively working on a number of projects to better prepare the town's transportation infrastructure for climate impacts.

Several plans guide this work: Nantucket Long-Range Transportation Plan, Parking Management Plan, Downtown Parking Study, Nantucket Memorial Airport Master Plan, Coastal Resilience Plan, Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan, Comprehensive Regional Transit Plan, Pavement Management Program, Traffic Study & Strategy for the Mid-Island Area, and several intersection studies, road safety audits, and proposed bike path expansions.

LEADERSHIP

Nantucket Regional Transit Authority (NRTA) is the regional transit authority for Nantucket with a state-mandated responsibility to develop, finance, and contract for the operation of transportation facilities and services on Nantucket.

Woods Hole, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket Steamship Authority (SSA) serves Nantucket both as a ferry service provider and as a state-created regulatory body tasked with providing a boat line between Hyannis, Nantucket, and Martha's Vineyard. The SSA is also tasked with licensing and regulating private freight and passenger carriage operations and is governed by a five-person board, appointed by the governing body of each area served.

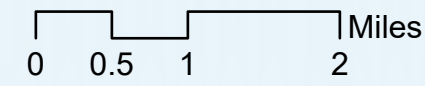
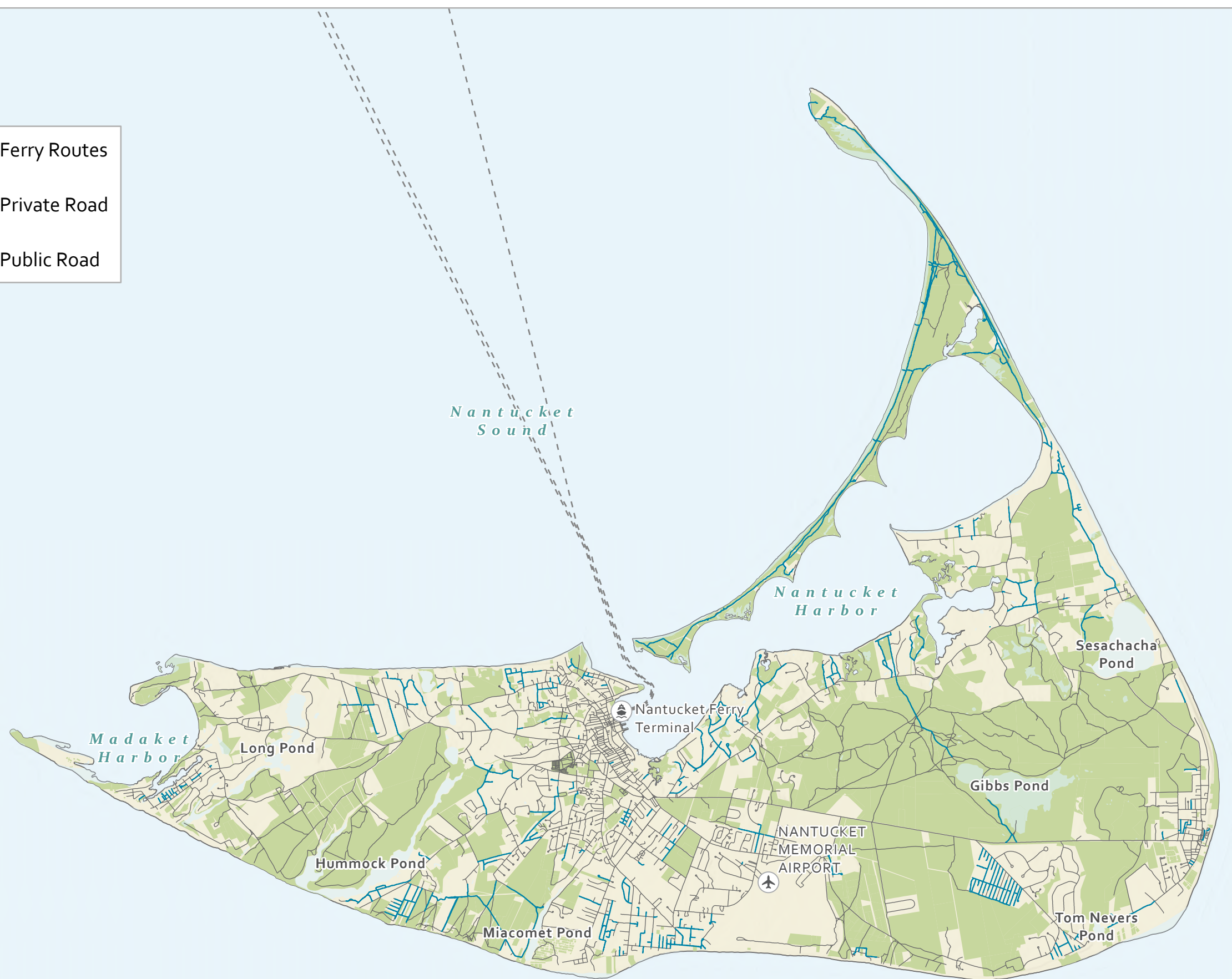
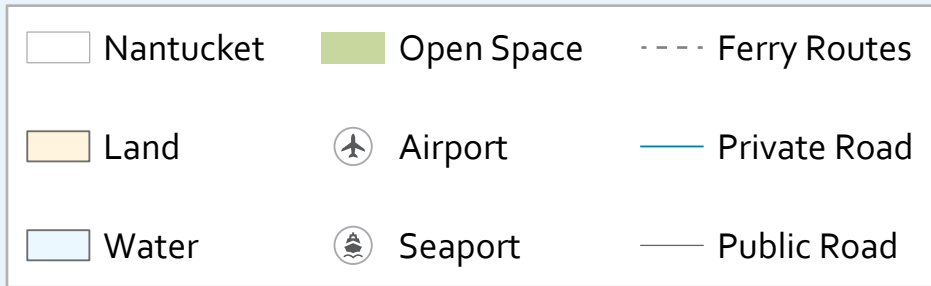
Town staff in the **Planning and Land Use Services, Culture & Tourism**, and Police (**Harbor Master**) Departments are responsible for transportation-related work on the island.

- The **Nantucket Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory, Capital Program**, and **Roads and Right of Way** committees hold transportation-related responsibilities and powers.
- The **Nantucket Memorial Airport Commission** is the governing body of the Nantucket Memorial Airport, tasked with day-to-day administration of the airport and enterprise fund management.

Ferry line at Straight Wharf | July 2024



Transportation



Date: October 2024 | Source: Town of Nantucket, MassGIS, MassDOT, and U.S. Census Bureau

PUBLIC SERVICES & FACILITIES

The Town of Nantucket provides a wide range of services for residents, businesses, and visitors: public safety, public works, K-12 public schools, and more. However, the physical boundaries of Nantucket, Tuckernuck, and Muskeget islands correspond to three overlapping jurisdictions – town, county, and regional planning agency – with overlapping facilities and services, creating a wholly self-contained government on the island. This grants some municipal officers and departments additional powers and responsibilities that similar positions on the mainland do not have. On top of this, the Commonwealth maintains a presence on the island for important functions such as a Registry of Motor Vehicles and a court system. These state-level offices operate out of Town-owned buildings.

Although Nantucket is a relatively small town, its location requires a degree of self-sufficiency that is unmatched in any other Massachusetts community. It has the decentralized organization of a New England small town and the complexity and responsibilities of a city. Meeting all of its unique obligations means Nantucket's town government is a highly complex organization with many boards, commissions, and departments. Providing for the sheer number of people employed by the town and school department or serving in volunteer roles requires not only adequate operating funds but also significant capital investment: municipal buildings, school buildings, recreation facilities, water and sewer infrastructure, stormwater facilities, and a well-functioning circulation system.

ORGANIZATION OF TOWN GOVERNMENT

Administration & Finance.

Nantucket has a **Select Board-Town Manager-Open Town Meeting** form of government authorized under a Town Charter adopted in 1996 and amended several times since then.¹⁶ The Select Board controls the executive powers of the Town, and the Town Manager is the chief administrative officer. Select Board members also serve as County Commissioners. The Town holds Annual Town Meeting every spring, when voters acting as the Town's legislative body approve and appropriate funds for the annual operating and capital budgets and adopt or amend local bylaws. Additional special town meetings are held at the call of the Select Board.

- The **Finance Committee** reviews and makes recommendations on the Town's proposed annual operating budget and on all spending and non-spending articles included in the warrants in advance of town meetings. FinCom serves a dual role as the County Review Committee.
 - The **Finance Department** handles the Town's finances – the collection of revenue, grants, and other funding, and spending oversight; led by a Director of Municipal Finance.
 - The **Capital Program Committee** maintains five- and ten-year capital improvement plans to align major construction and other projects with future planning efforts. Responsible for reviewing and recommending annual capital expenditures.
 - The **Assessor** and staff assign a value and regularly re-value all real and personal property on the island. They work closely with the Select Board and Town Manager to set tax rates every year. The value of the island's property and the tax rate generate the bulk of the municipality's revenue.
 - Other: Town Clerk, Human Resources, Information Technology & GIS, Treasurer, Abatement Advisory Committee, Town Collector, Audit Committee.
- Land Management, Development, and Conservation.**
- **Planning & Land Use Services** encompasses most of the land management and use functions of the Town. Led by a Director of Planning, it includes divisions such as the Building Division, responsible for enforcing the Town's zoning code and inspecting buildings; a Planning Division, developing long-range plans for the island; the Energy Office. PLUS staff also support several key land use boards. Notably, PLUS staff are employees of the Nantucket Planning & Economic Development Commission (see below) rather than the Town. This is the most significant overlap between the Town and County governments at the staff level.
 - The elected **Planning Board** operates under G.L. c. 40A and has jurisdiction over subdivisions of land, site plan approval, and some special permits. It is also responsible for preparing and periodically updating the Town's Master Plan.
 - The **Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)** operates under state law and has responsibility for various special permits, variances, appeals of decisions by the Building Commissioner, and changes to nonconforming buildings and uses. It also has authority over comprehensive permits under G.L. c. 40B.
 - The **Historic District Commission (HDC)** is the Town's regulatory architectural review board that covers the entire island as well as Tuckernuck and Muskeget. All proposed changes to a property visible from a public way must be approved by the HDC.
 - Other: Community Preservation Committee, Historical Commission, Sign Advisory Council, Natural Resources (Sustainability Office, Conservation Commission, Coastal Resilience Division), Agricultural Commission.

Housing Office & Affordable Housing Trust.

The Housing Office initiates projects and develops programs to achieve the goals of the Select Board and the Nantucket Affordable Housing Trust. While its staff reports to the Town Manager, the Housing Department works closely with PLUS.

Public Safety.

The Nantucket Police Department (NPD) includes the chief, 50 full-time employees, and seasonal Community Service Officers (40) and lifeguards (60). NPD also includes the Division of Marine Safety, managed by the Harbormaster, to enforce waterway laws and regulations, assist boaters, provide transportation for first responders, and issue permits for the Town’s marina. As of 2023, the Fire Department employs thirty-one full-time staff. In addition to emergency response, the Fire Department conducts inspections and provides public education.¹⁷

Public Works.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) encompasses five divisions – Operations, Facilities, Central Fleet, Solid Waste, and Parks and Recreation – that manage public services and assets. These include public roads, sidewalks, bike paths, trees and vegetation, parks and fields, buildings, facilities, parking lots, and public beaches.

Sewer & Water.

The Sewer Department operates as an enterprise fund, governed by the Sewer Commission and Select Board. It manages Nantucket’s wastewater conveyance and treatment systems, which include two wastewater treatment facilities, seventeen pump stations, and over eighty-five miles of sewer mains. The Town’s Water Department staff manages the Town’s public water supply.

Other Advisory Committees.

The Town Manager appoints fifteen members to the **Advisory Committee of Non-Voting Taxpayers**. Members represent non-resident taxpayers’ issues and concerns to the Select Board and meet throughout the year. The Select Board is advised on certain real estate matters by the **Real Estate Assessment Committee**, which provides a

written report to the Select Board on any matters it is requested to review.

Schools.¹⁸

The Nantucket Public School (NPS) budget, approved annually at Town Meeting, is funded through taxation and government revenues based on a state formula. Enrollment has generally increased steadily over the past ten years by 12.7 percent. The greatest decline in enrollment (-2.0%) in the past ten years occurred between the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. Another notable trend in NPS enrollment over the past 10 years is the district’s racial diversity, shifting to a majority-minority student population. The dramatic shift suggests a disparity in access to alternative education options, as students enrolled in private schools are overwhelmingly white. After eighth grade, many private school students continue their education at other private high schools throughout New England, though some matriculate into Nantucket High School.¹⁹

Nantucket’s public schools experience challenges serving their diverse student population. In the 2023-2024 school year, 49.7 percent of the district’s students spoke English as their second language and 34.6 percent were low-income. This requires many additional support resources to accommodate students and provide equal access to education.

County of Nantucket Administration.

Although many counties in Massachusetts have been abolished and no longer operate the way counties do in much of the rest of the country, the county government of Nantucket still exists. Many of the county functions overlap with municipal functions, and thus municipal officers, employees, boards, and commissions serve roles at both the local and county level.

Nantucket Planning & Economic Development Commission (NP&EDC).

The entire island is wholly within the region of the NP&EDC, one of thirteen regional planning agencies in the state, but the only one with a single town in its service area: Nantucket. Established in 1973, NP&EDC is responsible for

the preparation of comprehensive plans for the physical, social, and economic development of the county and town and must make recommendations for actions to implement plans to the responsible county and town agencies.²⁰

In yet further overlap between jurisdictions on the island, the NP&EDC board is composed of the Town of Nantucket Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Housing Authority members. The municipal staff of PLUS is technically employees of the NP&EDC, with a Memorandum of Understanding between the Town and NP&EDC allowing PLUS staff to operate as the Town’s planning staff. Citizen warrant articles presented at Town Meeting in 2023 and 2025 sought to amend the NP&EDC enabling legislation and revise the Commission’s makeup through a home rule petition. A compromise between the NP&EDC and article authors was reached ahead of the 2026 Town Meeting, and a revised article will seek approval in May.

PLUS Building | September 2024



Finance Building | September 2024



MUNICIPAL AND COUNTY FACILITIES

Assessor’s records show that the Town owns over 600 parcels of land across the island. This includes everything from conservation land to properties taken via the tax title process to the actual municipal buildings that provide office space for Town departments and services for residents and visitors. In addition, the County of Nantucket owns almost fifty pieces of property with a similar array of uses.

The municipal buildings most frequently used by residents and visitors include the Town & County Building, Public Safety Facility, Public Works Facility, Health & Human Services and Natural Resources Department at 131 Pleasant Street, the Finance Building, and PLUS Building. The following table lists the Town’s primary public services buildings and their condition as reported by Town staff during interviews for this master plan. As shown, Town departments are spread across the island.

Town Building Annex | December 2025



Nantucket Elementary School | September 2024



Nantucket Municipal Facilities		
Facility	Address	Condition
Atheneum	1 India Street	Satisfactory
Community School	30 Surfside Road	Satisfactory
Cyrus Peirce Middle School	10 Surfside Road	Satisfactory
Finance Building	37 Washington Street	Unsatisfactory
Harbor Master	34 Washington Street	Unsatisfactory
Health & Human Services and Natural Resources Department	131 Pleasant Street	Unsatisfactory
Our Island Home	9 East Creek Road	Unsatisfactory
Nantucket Cottage Hospital	57 Prospect Street	New
Nantucket Elementary School	30 Surfside Road	Satisfactory
Nantucket Intermediate School	30 Surfside Road	New
Nantucket High School	10 Surfside Road	Satisfactory
PLUS Building	2 Fairground Road	Unsatisfactory
Public Safety Facility	4 Fairgrounds Road	New
Public Works Facility	188 Madaket Road	Unsatisfactory
Sheriff's Office	20 South Water Street	Satisfactory
Sewer Department	81 South Shore Road	Satisfactory
Town & County Building	16 Broad Street	Satisfactory
Veteran's Services	22 New South Road	Satisfactory
Visitor Center	25 Federal Street	Satisfactory
Water Department	1 Milestone Road	Satisfactory

Explanation of Unsatisfactory Condition:

- **Finance Building.** The facility is not fully accessible to individuals with disabilities because it lacks an ADA-certified access ramp from the parking lot to the building and accessible paths outside.
- **Harbormaster Building.** For several years, planning has been underway to replace the facility due to deteriorating conditions and flood risks in the area. The proposed facility would be built on the same site but raised to meet updated flood standards. However, permitting delays and effects from the pandemic resulted in the budget exceeding the allocated funds of \$3.5 million. The project remains on hold until more funding is procured.
- The **Health & Human Services and Natural Resources Department Building** is the former fire station. Since the facility lacks designated meeting rooms, a meeting trailer was added, containing two rooms

- with a maximum capacity of thirty people each. These rooms are used by staff and other committees, but their open layout and limited technology make them unsuitable for collaborative meetings.²¹
- The Town operates **Our Island Home**, a skilled nursing facility operating as an enterprise fund. The facility was built in 1981 and has outgrown its current capacity.²² The Town has been planning for its replacement, but has failed to pass a Town Meeting vote.
 - The **PLUS Building**, built in 1969, initially served as a warehouse for the Nantucket Electric Company. Although a planning study initially recommended replacing the building, over the course of several years, Town departments moved into the building. Increasing use has stretched the building's capacity, with staff increasing from eight in 2005 to twenty-five in 2024. A warehouse portion lacks climate control, and the exterior of the building is in disrepair. Due to a lack

of meeting space at 2 Fairgrounds Road, all boards and commissions staffed by PLUS personnel meet in other public facilities.²³

- **Public Works.** Following the results of a 2017 study highlighting deficiencies at the DPW site, the Town is hoping to construct a new Public Works Facility on a 27-acre site at 1 Shadbush Road.
- **Sewer Department.** The Surfside Wastewater Treatment Facility (81 South Shore Road) is one of the Town's two wastewater facilities and houses the Sewer Department's main office. Necessary improvements are likely to increase based on capacity and other issues.
- **Town & County Building.** Constructed in 1964, Nantucket's Town & County Building is the seat of government on the island, housing both Town and County services: Town Administration, Town Clerk, Housing Office, Real Estate Division, Human Resources, County Courts, Registry of Motor Vehicles, and Registry of Deeds. The building is ADA-compliant.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Nantucket adopted a Select Board Strategic Plan, which has successfully been operationalized and is updated yearly. The town has also added several items to its charter, including real estate, communications, housing, solid waste, human resources, natural resources, culture and tourism, and stormwater. These additions have resulted in new departments and expansions to existing departments, adding seventeen new positions in the last two fiscal years (FY24 & FY25) in response to growing demands for town services and issues associated with island living. The town has made significant progress towards digitizing archives, maintaining digital records, and supporting online permitting. This all contributes to government transparency with the public.

The town built a new school, the Nantucket Intermediate School, to accommodate an increase in student enrollment. Nantucket public schools (NPS) are more diverse than ever, and the schools have changed their hiring process to encourage more bilingual staff and more staff overall, including English language teachers and special education teachers.

The town constructed a new public safety facility. The NPD implemented a targeted traffic enforcement program and a body-worn camera program, increasing transparency with the public. The Fire Department has tripled in size in recent years, working to improve occupational health and safety for employees, increase inspectional services capacity, overtake emergency management responsibilities from the NPD, add advanced life support services, and undertake several efforts to manage growth and act more environmentally consciously. The department faces issues with recruitment and housing, especially given the lack of mutual aid.

A huge accomplishment for the town from a financial perspective is its reception and maintenance of a Triple-A Bond Rating. Nantucket is one of only fourteen communities in Massachusetts to achieve and maintain this rating, reserved for the most financially sound institutions, and allows the town to borrow at a lower rate.

Community Systems

HOUSING

HISTORIC & CULTURAL
RESOURCES

COMMUNITY HEALTH

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



HOUSING

Few topics ignite more tension on Nantucket than housing. Set 30 miles out at sea, Nantucket operates in a global real estate market comprised of people, institutions, and investors, all vying for homes in a town with remarkably scarce land. Affluent seasonal homeowners, corporations, and year-round residents with a broad range of incomes all play a role in a dilemma that has plagued Nantucket for several decades: too many markets competing for the same inadequate supply. Today, that inadequate supply is further strained by demand from visitors and vacationers for short-term rentals, resulting in years of litigation and loss of housing for year-round workers. The mismatch between housing supply and demand also contributes to overcrowding in some Nantucket neighborhoods, especially for low-wage workers in the hospitality and tourism industries.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Nantucket's housing inventory includes approximately 12,500 homes, most concentrated in the neighborhoods extending from downtown in Nantucket Harbor southward to Surfside. The same general area houses Nantucket's public facilities, schools, services, and shopping areas. Served by public water and connected to Nantucket's wastewater collection system, the core of Nantucket is more densely developed than any other part of the island, and the density is intentional. Decades ago, Nantucket adopted a "town" and "country" land use plan to control the spread of new growth. Except for pockets of density in neighborhoods like Sconset, the rest of Nantucket's housing is sparsely developed. Single-family homes comprise the vast majority of homes in these outlying areas, and most are vacation homes.

Nantucket's rate of housing growth is fairly low compared with many communities, though it may not seem that way to residents who see change happening around them, especially in mid-island neighborhoods. Although the official federal census reports that Nantucket gained 551 units between 2010 and 2020, housing counts taken during the COVID-19 pandemic (April 2020) may be incomplete. There has been an uptick in housing production since 2000, in part due to the Town's efforts to create new affordable housing and larger-scale developments such as Richmond's Great Point. Building on Nantucket may involve multiple approvals and permits, and all construction must be reviewed and approved by the Nantucket Historic District Commission (NHDC).

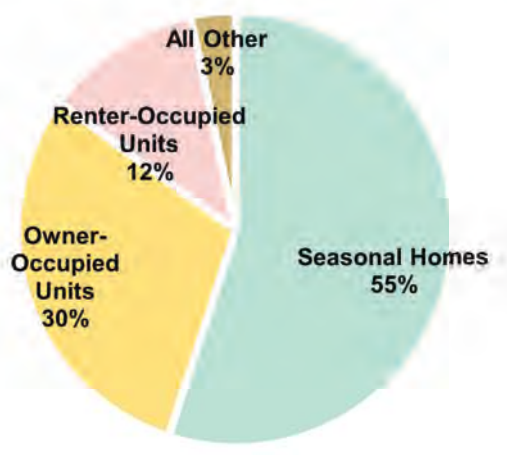
Wiggles Way | December 2025



Housing Typologies

Most Nantucket homes are detached single-family dwellings (79 percent). There is a limited mix of attached one-unit dwellings, such as townhomes or two-family homes, and over the past ten years, small-scale multifamily units – sometimes called “missing middle housing” – have increased more than other housing types, though the actual numbers remain small. The supply of rental units is similar, with single-family homes and missing-middle types serving most renters. Single-family homes by far make up the largest share of vacant seasonal units.¹

Nantucket Housing Inventory
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2020-2024

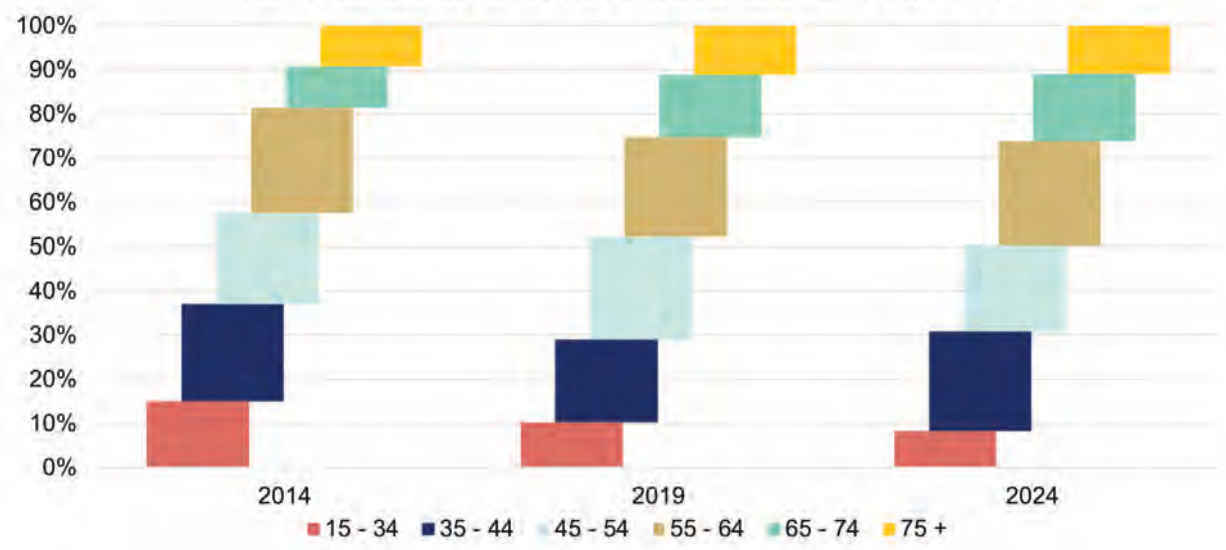


Seasonal Housing

Well over half of Nantucket’s housing stock is vacant most of the year. While the Census Bureau reports a slight drop in the number of seasonally occupied units over the past 10 years, some speculate that federal census data and surveys distort the picture of conditions in seasonal and resort areas. Even if Census 2020 or its annual counterpart, the American Community Survey (ACS), presents an imperfect profile of Nantucket’s total housing count, the very small shift from seasonal to year-round households has a de minimis impact on the overall profile of Nantucket’s housing market.

Market-rate sales to year-round buyers represent a very small fraction of homes sold, so it is no surprise that, compared with other East Coast resort communities, Nantucket has an unusually large percentage of long-time year-round homeowners, i.e., people living in the same house for 30 or more years (about 80 percent). Young homeowners are hard to come by because they have been priced out of the market. In 2025, the median single-family sale price on Nantucket was \$3.5 million. Sale prices jumped significantly during the pandemic and have remained over \$3 million since 2022. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that most householders under 45 years rent where they live.² Nantucket has experienced a dramatic decline in the number of householders under 35

Trends in Householder Ages: 2014-2024
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2014, 2019, 2024



over the past decade. Most communities have experienced shifts in population and householder ages, but the loss of young households is far more pronounced on Nantucket, and the cost of housing likely plays a role in the difference.

Unlike most Massachusetts towns, Nantucket’s population has grown faster than the total number of households. It ranks third out of all 351 cities and towns in the state for population growth and ninth for household growth from 2014-2024, and all but one of the top ten are seasonal communities – i.e., towns with a large percentage of seasonal or vacation homes.³ What sets Nantucket apart from other high-growth towns is its isolation. There are no neighboring towns with which to share goods and services, connected routes to ease traffic congestion, nor a wider variety of housing options and prices.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In 2015, Remain Nantucket agreed to fund a part-time housing consultant to help the Town address its workforce housing needs. That investment helped the Town create a municipal housing office that has transformed Nantucket’s housing role from zoning and permitting to housing policy, investment, and development. To date (2025), Town Meeting has authorized \$151 million for the Nantucket Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) to fund various housing initiatives, from acquiring land and buildings for permanently affordable homes

to supporting new development by non-profit and for-profit organizations.

Housing Affordability

Between strategic efforts by the Housing Office and the AHT’s investments, Nantucket has made significant progress toward meeting the statutory goal of G.L. c. 40B (Chapter 40”), the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Law, which obligates cities and towns to provide at least 10 percent of their year-round housing as affordable for low- or moderate-income households. Nantucket’s Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI) currently includes 497 units, or just over 8 percent of the official year-round housing count in the most recent decennial census (6,184). In 2015, Nantucket’s SHI barely exceeded 2 percent.⁴ The Town’s track record with affordable housing production is primarily due to the work of the Municipal Housing Office and Affordable Housing Trust, coupled with the Town’s funding commitments that support private development.

On Nantucket, “affordable housing” has multiple meanings. The AHT has the authority to invest in units that are affordable well above the income limits established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and for good reason. Many community members have incomes too high for Chapter 40B units but nowhere near as high as necessary to afford market-rate homes. The table illustrates the vast difference between Chapter 40B-eligible units (at 50 and 80 percent of Area Median Income, or “AMI”) and the incomes of many year-round families with

Affordable and Attainable Housing Income Limits					
% Median Income	Household Size (Number of People per Household)				
	2	3	4	5	6
50%	\$66,250	\$74,550	\$82,800	\$89,450	\$96,050
80%	\$104,640	\$117,720	\$130,800	\$141,264	\$151,728
100%	\$130,800	\$147,150	\$163,500	\$176,580	\$189,660
120%	\$157,000	\$176,600	\$196,200	\$211,900	\$227,600
150%	\$196,200	\$220,750	\$245,250	\$264,900	\$284,500
175%	\$228,900	\$257,550	\$286,150	\$309,050	\$331,950
200%	\$261,600	\$294,300	\$327,000	\$353,200	\$379,350
240%	\$313,950	\$353,200	\$392,400	\$423,800	\$455,200

Sources: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2025 Income Limits, and Town of Nantucket.

professional, government, non-profit, finance, real estate, and other higher-wage employment – earnings more than twice the median income for Nantucket. Housing units that meet the needs of higher-income workers are often called “attainable housing.”

Initiatives to Support Year-Round Housing

In 2001, long before the Town established its own housing department, Nantucket launched a program that with the Nantucket Housing Authority (NHA) that allows owners of a lot with two units to place them in separate ownership as long as one of the units is deed-restricted as an affordable home for year-round residents. (Property owners can also create a separate lot for new construction that would be protected by the same kind of deed restriction.) Even 25 years ago, local officials were wrestling with differences between what the state defines as “affordable housing” and the reality on the ground on Nantucket – that housing affordability problems affected many residents with earnings above the income limits set for Chapter 40B developments. The Nantucket Covenant Program, as it is known today, has created 120 deed-restricted affordable units for year-round residents with incomes up to 150 percent AMI.

The Town has recently embarked on other projects to increase the supply of affordable, year-round housing. For example:

- A year-round housing deed restriction program designed to purchase restrictions on existing homes and reserve them for year-round residents;
- Acquisition of housing for municipal employees;
- Closing cost assistance for homebuyers with incomes up to 175 percent AMI;
- Funding for a “Lease to Locals” program, which provides payments to property owners who agree to rent their apartments to year-round residents;
- Sewer connection fee waivers for affordable housing.

LEADERSHIP

Nantucket benefits from leadership both within the Town government and the community at large.

- **Municipal Housing Office.** The Housing Office has grown from a part-time housing specialist in 2015 to a staff of four in 2025. The department is focusing on a long-term plan to develop municipal employee housing while also supporting the efforts of other organizations working to develop a permanent supply of year-round housing.
- **Select Board.** The Nantucket Select Board has adopted and periodically updates a Strategic Plan that includes goals for affordable and attainable housing. The plan prioritizes creating housing for municipal and school employees and continuing to work toward the 10 percent statutory minimum under Chapter 40B.
- **Planning and Land Use Services (PLUS).** The PLUS department is a comprehensive planning and development organization with professional and administrative staff in planning, zoning, permitting, code enforcement, and historic preservation. PLUS staff support the Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Historical Commission, and Nantucket Planning and Economic Development Commission (P&EDC), the designated regional planning agency for Nantucket.
- **Planning Board.** The Planning Board reviews and acts on all subdivision plans, applications for site plan approval, and most special permits. As such, it plays a significant role in the permitting process for most types of housing. Over the past several years, the Planning Board has sponsored articles at town meetings to enable neighborhood-scale housing growth by relaxing some dimensional requirements and making it easier to create infill housing.
- **Community Preservation Committee (CPC).** The CPC has consistently proposed appropriating Community Preservation

Act (CPA) funds for the AHT’s use to create more affordable housing on Nantucket.

- **Housing Nantucket.** Housing Nantucket is a local non-profit organization that administers the Covenant Program. It operates homebuyer education classes, oversees 63 rental units, and generally serves as an advocate for affordable homes serving moderate-income and workforce needs. Housing Nantucket played an instrumental role in promoting inclusionary zoning, which ultimately passed at Town Meeting in 2025. The organization’s most recent project, Wiggles Way, is a 22-unit rental development funded by the AHT.
- **Nantucket Housing Authority.** The Housing Authority owns and manages a small portfolio of public housing units for families and older adults. In addition, it played an instrumental role in Sachem’s Path, a 37-unit homeownership development created through a partnership between the Housing Authority and the Housing Assistance Corporation of Cape Cod (HAC).
- **Nantucket Land Bank.** Established in 1983 primarily to preserve open space, the Land Bank has worked with the AHT to relocate existing homes for affordable housing use. Funded through a real estate transfer fee under a special act of the legislature, the Land Bank exempts first-time homebuyers from the transfer fee for the first million dollars of a home purchase price. Today, the Land Bank is exploring other opportunities to work on housing issues with the Town while remaining consistent with its original mission.
- **Nantucket Community Land Trust.** A new organization for Nantucket, the Land Trust’s mission is to create attainable housing by acquiring existing residences and offering them for sale via a ground lease to year-round residents.

KEY BYLAWS AND REGULATIONS

Nantucket’s zoning is the regulatory mechanism that controls housing growth, but the Town also has other bylaws and regulations in place. Some examples of zoning tools to provide for market-rate and attainable housing:

- Nantucket recently adopted an Inclusionary Housing bylaw that requires developers to create attainable housing as part of new development projects.
- Nantucket allows two-family dwellings in most districts in the Town Overlay.
- For years, Nantucket has allowed secondary dwelling units in every zoning district and, more recently, adopted zoning to allow tertiary units as well. Due to a new state law and state regulations that require towns to allow accessory dwelling units as a permitted use, the Town is rethinking its tertiary unit program in order to control overall density in single-family neighborhoods.
- The Town allows senior residential facilities in all residential districts in the Town Overlay and most districts in the Country Overlay, but only by special permit.
- Nantucket has a unique demolition delay bylaw that requires anyone proposing to demolish an existing structure to offer it to any interested party prior to receiving a demolition permit. The notice period to delay demolition is 30 days unless an interested buyer comes forward, in which case the delay period extends to 180 days.

HISTORIC & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Visitors and residents recognize that Nantucket’s historic character encompasses much more than just buildings; it includes the context, artifacts, visual qualities, and settings that contribute to its rich heritage.⁵ Nantucket’s historic resources blend the natural landscape with the built environment, creating a unique cultural, historical, and economic tapestry that showcases architectural styles of national importance, including Colonial, Federal, Greek Revival, Romantic, and twentieth century designs.⁶

Whether you arrive for the first or the thousandth time, many people describe coming to Nantucket as a journey back in time. Gray shingled roofs and cobblestone streets lead to expansive, preserved natural landscapes. Separated from the mainland, Nantucket preserves a sense of calm and serene escapism from modern hustle and bustle. Since the late nineteenth century, people have been attracted to this “Nantucket feel” and the economy has built up around tourists, retirees, and second-home owners.⁷ Today, Nantucket remains an exquisite example of a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century New England seaport town, rich in architectural and environmental heritage. Maintaining the historic and natural resources that create the fabric of Nantucket, including structures, waterbodies, streetscapes, and habitat alike, in the face of changing conditions is crucial to ensure Nantucket’s healthy and prosperous future.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Nantucket’s nationally-significant built landscape has been recognized and protected as such since the mid-twentieth century. A sharp economic downturn following the height of whaling in the 1840s preserved the island’s eighteenth and nineteenth century fishing village landscape. As the island grew in prominence as a vacation destination in the mid-twentieth century, the Town, state, and National Park Service recognized the need to protect the island’s unique historic resources. Portions of the island were one of the first locally-designated historic districts in 1955, with the designation extended to the entire island in 1971. The whole island was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1966.

This regulatory landscape has protected the island’s historic resources for over seventy years, but has also caused growing pains as tourism and second home ownership drastically increased through the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. Today, Nantucket’s Historic District Commission operates under the framework of a decades-old Special Act, often struggling to keep up with the caseload of a full town subject to design review.

Following the decline of whaling, the island became a destination for artists and others looking to get away from more urban areas. Since the early twentieth century, cultural organizations have flourished on the island, from history organizations such as the Nantucket Whaling Museum to reminders of the island’s early twentieth century art history such as the Artists Association of Nantucket. The Nantucket Community School offers educational and cultural programs to residents and visitors year-round, including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and professional and workforce development classes. The concentration of arts and culture organizations led the Massachusetts Cultural Council to designate the Nantucket Cultural District in 2016, with the designation renewed in 2021.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The National Park Service designated the Town a **Certified Local Government (CLG)** in 2021, opening up additional grant funding opportunities through the Massachusetts Historical Commission. Using these additional funds, the Nantucket Historical Commission commissioned an historic resources survey plan and has begun comprehensively updating the island’s historic resources inventory.

Additional historic resources documentation work has been completed in conjunction with Preservation Institute Nantucket, an initiative of the University of Florida since 1972.

Nantucket’s African and Black history has been recognized in recent years with the growth and development of sites and events dedicated to telling the stories of these longtime residents. The Museum of African American History operates the **African Meeting House** and **Seneca Boston-Florence Higginbotham House**, with the Boston-Higginbotham House highlighting the history of the island’s eighteenth century free Black community. Beyond the museum’s buildings, the Black Heritage Trail stops at sites with connections to the island’s African and Black residents. The historic resources survey and documentation work undertaken by Preservation Institute Nantucket has focused on the New Guinea neighborhood, a center of African and Black settlement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The Town’s **Culture & Tourism Department (C&T)** grew out of the former Visitor Services & Information Bureau and has expanded service, working to establish the **Nantucket Cultural District** to serve as a central hub for resident and visitor life. C&T has added planning and event coordination (overtaken from the NPD) and handles all tourism elements of the island and Town businesses. The department now offers passport processing, providing an essential service to the island population that previously required people to travel off island. The department maintains an information desk near the airport to welcome visitors arriving during the summer.

LEADERSHIP

The Town established the **Nantucket Historical Commission (NHC)** under G.L. c. 40, §8d in 2005. The NHC serves as an advisory board to the Town and Select Board on matters of historic preservation. Unique to the island, where the entire town is already protected as a local historic district and National Historic Landmark, the NHC has been working on finding its place in the community in recent years. The NHC has been spearheading efforts to document the island's historic resources.

The Town's **Historic District Commission (HDC)** administers the local historic district, covering the entire island (see below). Per the Special Act of the state legislature that established the HDC, five of the members are elected while three are appointed by the Select Board. The HDC reviews all changes to properties that are visible from a public way, and reviews changes to buildings of any date - eighteenth century through new construction. This generates a significant amount of work; in 2023, the HDC reviewed 1,750 Certificates of Appropriateness. The HDC currently has no administrative or staff approval process and must review all proposed work in a public hearing. The HDC's main set of design guidelines were written in 1992 and have not been comprehensively updated since then. Guidelines related to specific topics, such as solar and HVAC systems, have been developed since 1992, as have other area-specific design guidelines.

In 2020 and 2024 both the NHC and HDC worked with the **National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC)** on a review of the island's preservation program. NAPC ultimately recommended several changes primarily to the HDC's Special Act legislation and processes. Some of these have been implemented while changes to the Special Act have not moved forward.

Staff within PLUS support the Town's two preservation commissions, specifically a **Preservation Planner** and a **Land Use Specialist**.

Two private organizations, the **Nantucket Historical Association** and **Nantucket Preservation Trust**, support public history and preservation

activities. The Historical Association functions as a local historical society, operating several historic buildings and maintaining collections and rotating exhibits. The Preservation Trust focuses on the built history of the island, advocating for the island's historic resources and holding a number of perpetual preservation restrictions on buildings. Recently, the Preservation Trust commissioned a study reviewing the amount of construction debris leaving the island, as part of advocacy efforts related to extending the demolition delay period and encouraging the rehabilitation of the island's historic structures.

KEY BYLAWS AND REGULATIONS

National Historic Landmark.

The island was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) in 1966. The regulations inherent to NHL designation do not impact day-to-day operations on the island or what property owners may do to their property. However, if a project will involve federal or state permitting, licensing, or funding, there is a consultative review process to see if historic resources will be impacted, and if so, if the impacts can be mitigated. Examples of projects might include alterations to the Steamship Authority's docks, roadwork undertaken by MassDOT, and the permitting of offshore wind projects.

Local Historic District.

Along with Beacon Hill, the state legislature designated Nantucket's downtown and 'Sconset as Massachusetts' first local historic districts in 1955. The designation was extended to the entire island in 1972. Unique to Nantucket, no other community is entirely a local historic district.

Demolition Delay Bylaw.

The entire island is a local historic district, and the HDC can outright deny the proposed demolition of any building. Yet the Town also has a demolition delay bylaw, allowing for a pause before demolition to explore alternatives to demolition. Nantucket's demolition delay bylaw varies in a few key ways from other demolition delay bylaws in Massachusetts. It is codified in the zoning, rather

than general, bylaws; it applies only to residential structures; and the Building Commissioner manages the bylaw, rather than the NHC.

When the HDC approves a building for "move off" or demolition, notice must be posted in a local newspaper. Interested parties have thirty days to respond to the notice and 180 days to physically move the building.

This bylaw continues a long history of moving and reconstructing buildings on the island, where building materials have always been scarce and expensive. Today, the relocation and reuse of historic buildings also lessens the amount of construction waste that must be moved off-island. The island sees several building moves each year, and in some cases buildings are found to be on their third or fourth move within the island.

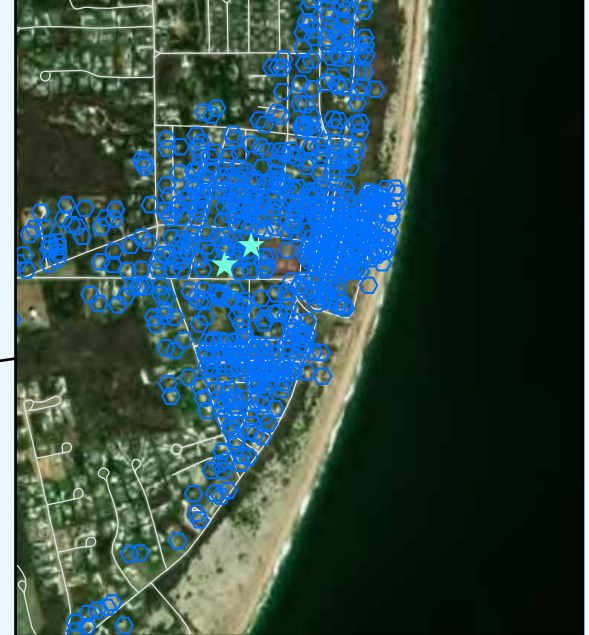
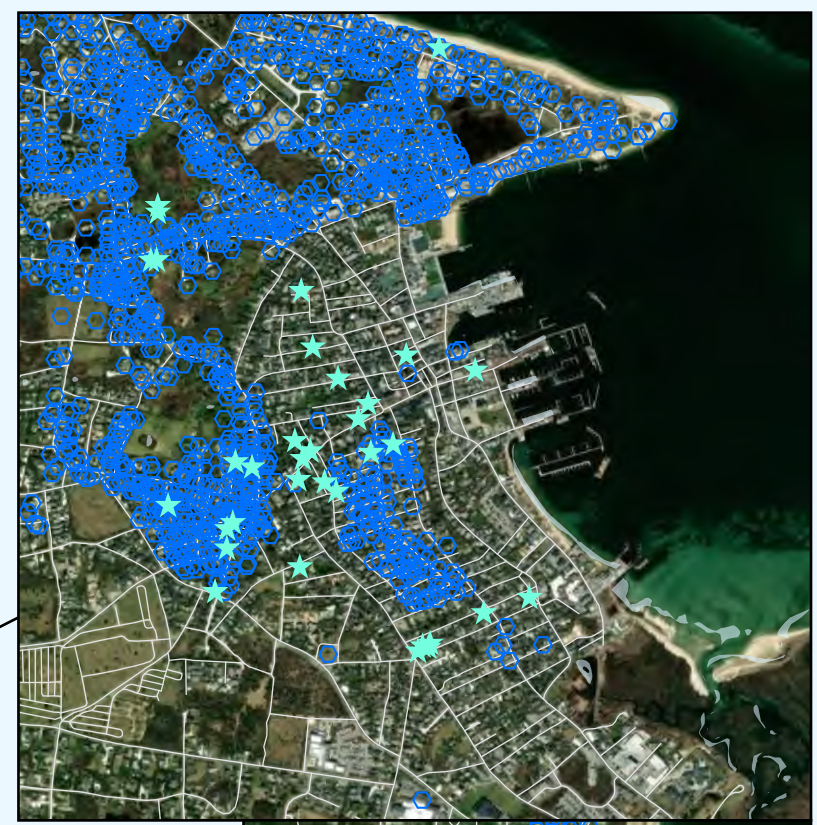
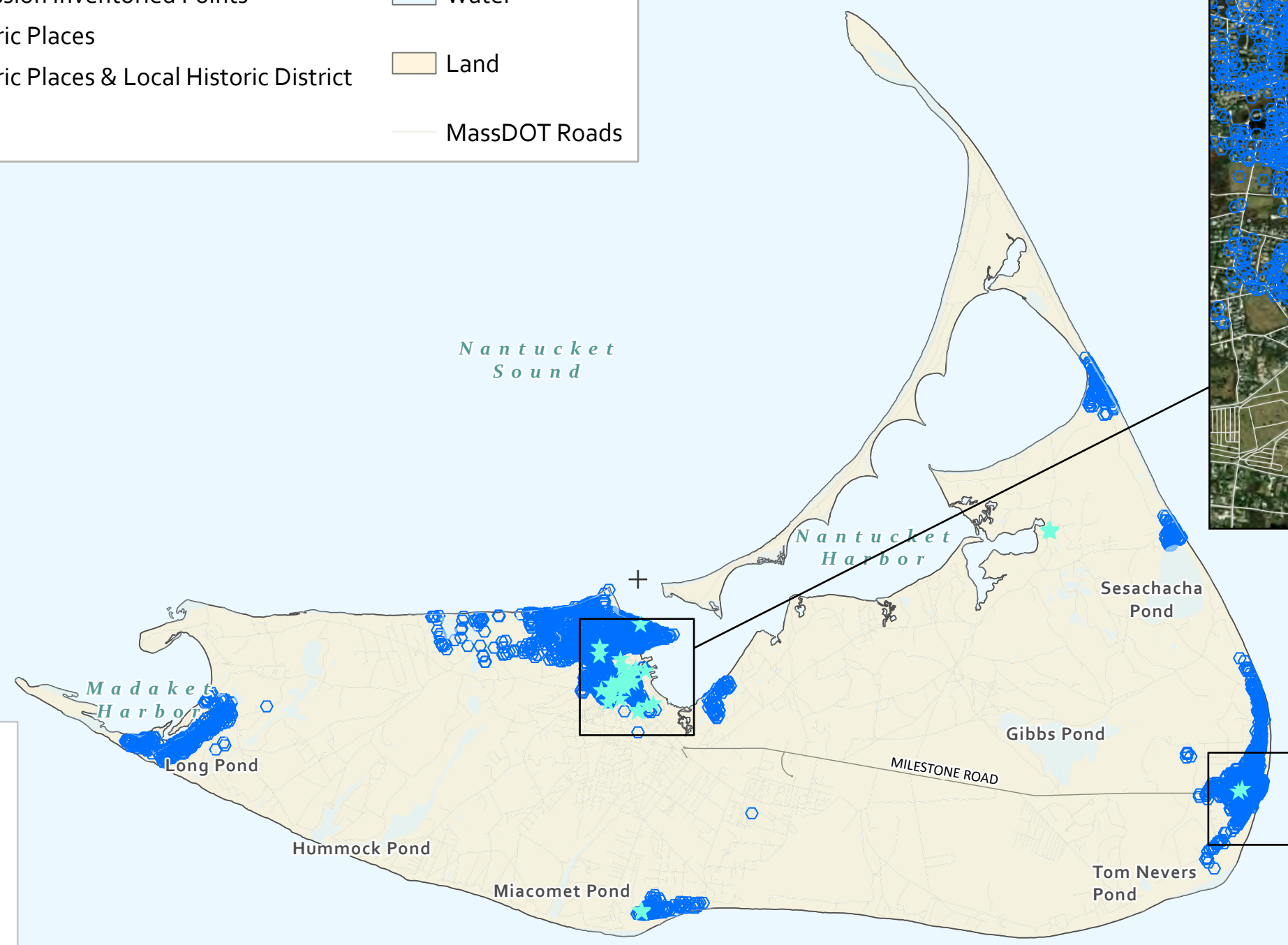
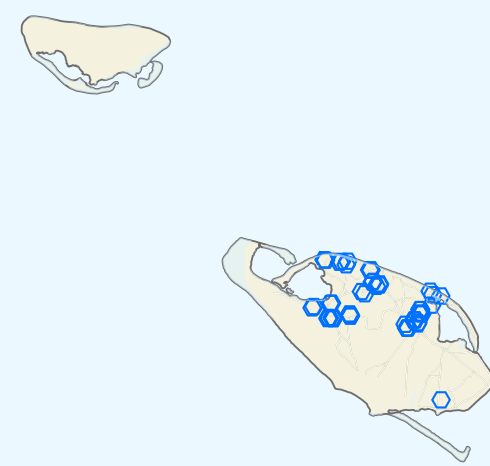
Whaling Museum | December 2025



Historic Resources



Massachusetts Historic Commission Inventoried Points	Water
+ National Register of Historic Places	Land
National Register of Historic Places & Local Historic District	MassDOT Roads
Preservation Restriction	



The entirety of Nantucket Island, along with Tuckernuck and Muskeget Islands, is a Historic District designated as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). It is listed in the National and State Registers of Historic Places and is a local historic district (LHD).
 Source: Nantucket Historic District Commission

0 0.15 0.3 Miles



0 0.5 1 2 Miles

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Community health is “a multi-sector and multi-disciplinary collaborative enterprise that uses public health science, evidence-based strategies, and other approaches to engage and work with communities, in a culturally appropriate manner, to optimize the health and quality of life of all persons who live, work, or are otherwise active in a defined community or communities.”⁸ Health can be driven by environmental factors that are less known, unavoidable, or at least very difficult to manage at an individual level. The responsibility to manage public health conditions lies with local institutions, governing bodies, and higher-level institutions.



Social Determinants of Health.
Source: *Healthy People 2030*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Community health is largely defined by the five social determinants of health that go beyond just diseases to encompass a truly healthy community.

Chronic Disease.

Nantucket residents’ susceptibility to chronic diseases, at the core of the social determinants of health, can be attributed to protective factors (those that support health) and risk factors (those that contribute to chronic diseases). Nantucket’s

isolated island setting contributes to both the protective and risk factors identified on the island.⁹ One of the biggest risk factors is the island’s limited access to reliable medical care. When compared to the state as a whole, the island has fewer primary care and mental health providers and dentists.¹⁰ Many residents must travel off-island to receive necessary care, and the island’s increased summer population exacerbates the condition, bringing additional patients and vacation-related illnesses to the island.

Protective and Risk Factors for Chronic Disease in Nantucket	
Protective Factors	Risk Factors
Easy access to healthy & affordable food	Lack of medical specialists
Lots of safe space for recreation	High rates of poor mental health
Availability of economic opportunity (jobs)	Excessive use of drugs and alcohol among youth and adults
Access to public and private schools	Lack of affordable housing
Very limited fast food options	High cost of childcare
Strong sense of community	Potential need to work multiple jobs

Source: Nantucket Health Department, Nantucket Chronic Disease Report, 2020.

Some of the island's chronic disease rates are notably higher than the rest of the state. Tick-borne illnesses - primarily lyme disease, babesiosis, and anaplasmosis - are found in much higher rates on the island than they are on the mainland.¹¹ The prevalence of open space, outdoor recreation among residents and visitors, and a high deer population all contribute to this elevated number. Asthma rates in general are low on the island, with the exception of asthma-related emergencies, which are high compared to the rest of the state (98.8 vs. 57.2 average crude rate of visits per 10,000 people).¹² Islanders also experience behavioral and mental health concerns, and substance abuse issues, at higher rates. Cancer rates are higher as well: 526.1 vs. 459.1 cases per 100,000 people on the island as compared to the state).¹³ This may be due to the presence of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in the island's drinking water, a recent concern especially in areas around the airport where contaminated wells have been found.¹⁴

Food Insecurity & Homelessness.

Social livability issues - food insecurity and homelessness - also impact island residents but are difficult to measure. While the census estimates that 2.8 percent of households on Nantucket receive SNAP benefits, lower than the statewide rate of 12.9 percent, local organizations believe the rate of food insecurity is much higher. Approximately 15 percent of the island's year-round population receives support from the Nantucket Food Pantry each year, while 46 percent of public school students qualify for food subsidies.¹⁵ The annual point-in-time count of homeless residents on January 23, 2024, found three unhoused individuals on the island, but that does not account for individuals not located, living in cars, or in temporary accommodations with family or friends.¹⁶ While an individual might not be truly "homeless," housing conditions on the island can make it very difficult to find safe, affordable, year-round housing on the island.

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Town's Health and Human Services Department (HHS) has worked to update human services delivery, focusing on funding, collaboration, and coordination. It expanded the Town's fiscal support for human services, especially for non-profits working to improve and expand social services. The Town also now has a PFAS Task Force to oversee the town's response to PFAS contamination and testing as well as an Environmental Contamination Administrator. The department has revised the local grant-writing process and helped modernize grants to non-profits for human services. The department has expanded public-private partnerships, such as the Town's work with the Nantucket Community Foundation. They launched a Comprehensive Needs Assessment and joined several inter-municipal associations, improving regional collaboration. Notably, between 2020 and 2022, the HHS Department vaccinated 18,000 people on the island.

LEADERSHIP

The professional staff of the Town's **Health and Human Services Department (HHS)** manage a wide range of issues relating to the health of Nantucket residents and visitors. HHS monitors the spread of disease on the island and provides vaccinations for major concerns such as flu and COVID-19. The department also enforces a variety of state and local regulations related to health, housing, food, and other issues.

Appointed by the Select Board, the **Board of Health** members fulfill a regulatory role under G.L. c. 111 and the Town's own bylaws and regulations. The BOH regulates a wide range of health-related issues such as housing standards, food service establishments, septic systems, fertilizer use, and many other concerns.

The appointed members of the **Council for Human Services (CHS)** directs the work of the HHS staff. The CHS conducts studies, advises the director of HHS, and reviews proposed legislation that may impact human services on the island.

The Town's **Council on Aging (COA)** supports the island's senior residents, primarily through programs, events, and services at the Saltmarsh Senior Center. The COA is supported by the private friends group, the Nantucket Center for Elder Affairs, which published *Aging on Nantucket: A Community Needs Assessment* in 2018.

The Town's appointed members of the **Commission on Disability** coordinate with the state Office of Disability and advocates for improved access locally.

Nantucket Police Department statistics show that over the past five or so years, cases of drug arrests and complaints, and domestic violence cases, have been increasing. While this may be a result of increasing issues on the island, it could also be attributed to improved victim protection programs and reporting systems.

The only skilled nursing facility on the island, the Town has operated **Our Island Home (OIH)** since 2007. OIH offers forty-five beds primarily in shared rooms with a few private "special care" rooms. Staff provide 24-hour supervision and support residents

through meal preparation, housekeeping, personal hygiene, and other services. Over the past several years, the Town has debated the financial impact of efforts to repair, expand, or build a new space for OIH as the building ages.

Mass General Brigham (MGB) operates **Nantucket Cottage Hospital**, the island's primary healthcare provider and the only hospital on the island. While MGB connects island patients with a wide care network off-island, recent layoffs have impacted MGB's operations on the island.

A number of other organizations on the island support various aspects of community health. **The Warming Place** provides year-round day and night shelter space within three different island churches in addition to housing assistance, meals, and grocery assistance. **A Safe Place** supports domestic violence victims, while **Fairwinds Therapy** offers mental health and substance abuse treatment. Finally, **Nourish Nantucket** and the **Nantucket Food Pantry** provide meals directly to families and through a variety of support organizations, such as to the other organizations mentioned above.

Our Island Home | September 2024

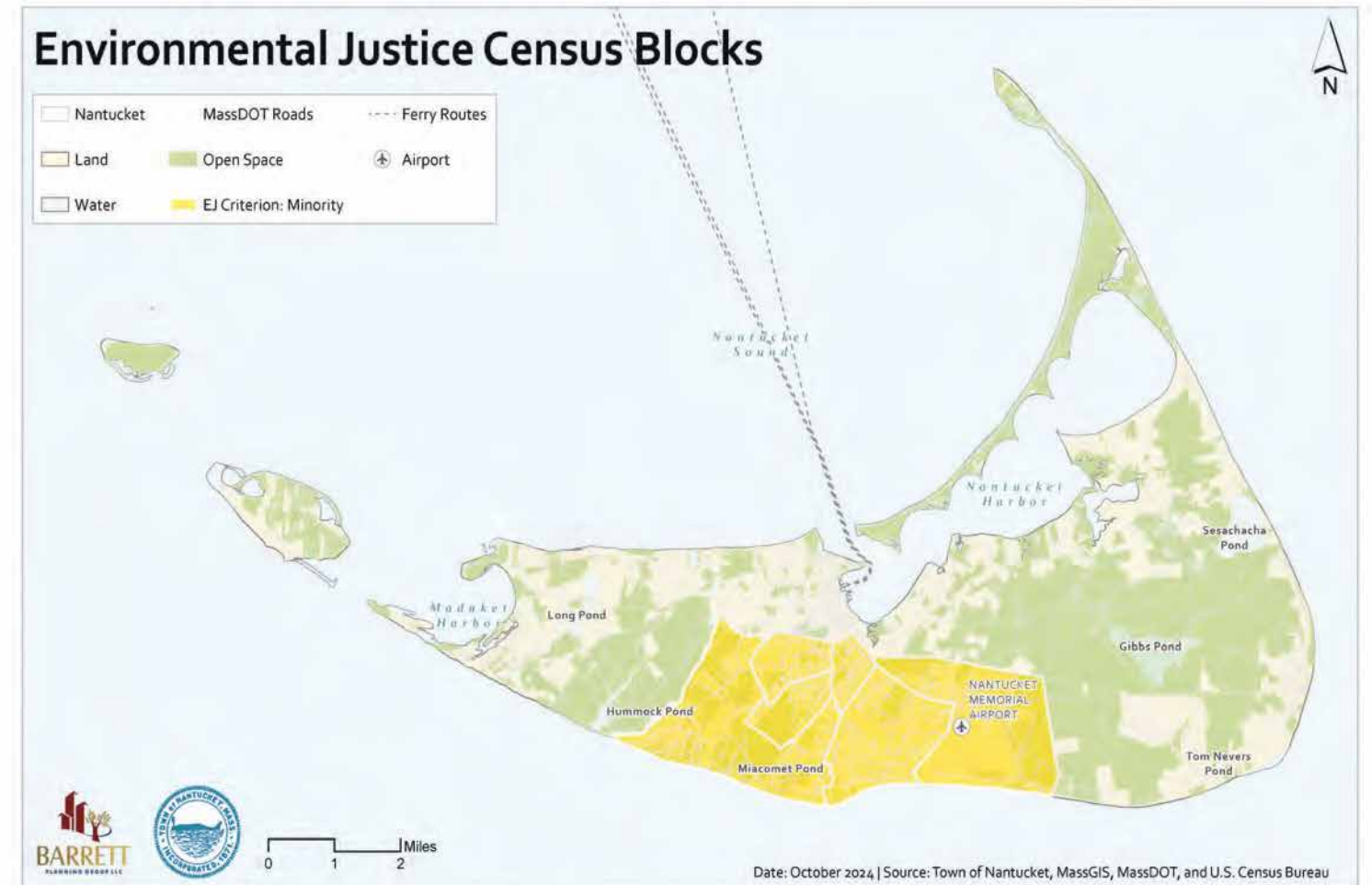


KEY BYLAWS AND REGULATIONS

The Town has adopted a number of health and safety related bylaws that are enforced by the Town's Board of Health and HHS staff.

Health and Safety Bylaws		
Topic	Section	Summary
Board of Health	Ch. 223	Provides structure to the Board of Health's enforcement of enacted regulations.
Water Quality		
Dumping of sewage in island waterways	Ch. 278, Art. I	Prohibits the dumping of waste in island waterways and establishes a fine for violations.
Hummock Pond Watershed	Ch. 288	To manage nutrient loading in the watershed, establishes regulations for inspecting existing and future septic systems within the watershed.
Madaket Harbor Watershed	Ch. 303	To protect the water supply in Madaket and nutrient loading in Madaket harbor, establishes regulations for inspecting existing and future septic systems within the watershed.
Nantucket Harbor Watershed	Ch. 309	To manage nutrient loading in the watershed, establishes regulations for inspecting existing and future septic systems within the watershed.
Septic systems	Ch. 327	Outlines septic permitting requirements and allows for the continued use of failed septic systems in areas that may be served by sewer in the near future.
Sewage disposal and treatment	Ch. 332	Detailed septic and other sewage disposal system regulations.
Wellhead protection district	Ch. 382	Allows for septic system installation on lots within the Aquifer Protection District; related to an undated expansion of the Aquifer Protection District.
Wells	Ch. 386	Regulates the installation, maintenance, and decommissioning of private wells.
Food & Environmental Safety		
Biodegradable packaging	Ch. 220	Requires all packaging added to or supplied by a vendor in the town to be biodegradable, reusable, or recyclable.
Fertilizer	Ch. 252	Establishes fertilizing composition and application requirements to limit nutrient loading in the island's waterways.
Food service establishments	Ch. 265	Regulates features of food service restaurants such as outdoor areas, toilets, and grease traps.
Single-use plastics	Ch. 125A	Eliminates, with sunset dates in the early 2020s, the sale and commercial use of a number of single-use plastic products.
Toxic and hazardous materials	Ch. 371	Regulates the storage and handling of toxic materials.
Underground tanks	Ch. 363	Establishes requirements for installation, maintenance, and removal of underground gasoline and fuel oil tanks.

Health and Safety Bylaws		
Housing & Community Health		
Housing standards	Ch. 283, Art. II	Adopts 105 CMR 410, Minimum Standards of Fitness for Human Habitation, to regulate housing.
Cluster and major residential subdivisions	Ch. 358, Art. I	Proposals for cluster and major residential subdivisions require a master plan of septic systems and well locations that is submitted to the Board of Health for review.
Boats used as residences	Ch. 283	Requires permission of the Board of Health to use a boat or other water-borne conveyance as a residence.
Public Health		
Body art	Ch. 229	Regulates establishments that perform piercing and tattoo services.
Smoking and tobacco products	Ch. 345	Regulates the sale and use of smoking, tobacco, and marijuana products.
Recreational & Agricultural		
Cows, ducks, and swine	Ch. 211, Art. I	The keeping of some farm animals requires a Board of Health permit.
Fishing and shellfishing	Ch. 260	Activities related to fishing and shellfishing, including their harvesting and sale, are regulated by the Board of Health.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Nantucket's economy is defined by the seasonal, tourism-focused nature of the island, with several notable dynamics at play within the island's jobs and labor force. The changing of the seasons brings drastic swings in employment, while businesses cater to tourists and second home owners - sit-down restaurants, art galleries, landscaping businesses, and property maintenance companies - rather than the day-to-day services that support year-round residents. Potential efforts to expand the economy and provide for all of the island's residents and visitors may be hampered by the limited amount of land dedicated to commercial and industrial uses.

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Industries and Wages.

The tourism industry has created a services-based economy on Nantucket, with 83 percent of jobs on the island in the service industry. Construction; Arts, Accommodation, and Food Services; and Retail Trade are the most prominent industries. This leads to an interesting dynamic when it comes to wages. Retail Trade; Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation; and Accommodation and Food Service workers are the three lowest-paid industries on the island.¹⁷ While their wages are comparable to those industries statewide, because the categories make up such a large portion of the employment base, this leads to the island's average weekly wages being lower than that of the state as a whole (\$1,448 vs. \$1,727).¹⁸

Labor Force.

Nantucket's labor force - residents of the island over the age of sixteen currently working or seeking work, regardless of where they work - is slightly higher than that of the state (70.3 percent vs. 67.0 percent) and more educated (57.4 percent vs. 45.9 percent with a Bachelor's degree or higher). Nantucket residents are also more likely to work for themselves, with a quarter of the town's labor force self-employed.¹⁹ The unemployment rate is comparable to the state as a whole, but hides the seasonality of employment on the island; the unemployment rate spikes in the winter months and drops back down during the summer. For example, in 2022, the number of jobs on the island was at its lowest in January at 5,588 jobs, rising to 11,109 jobs in July.²⁰

Employers.

The Town of Nantucket is the largest employer on the island, with almost 700 employees in 2021. This is likely due to a few factors: as an island, the Town must provide all of its own services, it cannot share any with a neighboring community; and the Town also functions as the County government, with a few overlapping roles and duties. Other major employers include Nantucket Cottage Hospital, Nantucket Island Resorts, the Marine Home Center, and Stop & Shop.²¹

Sixty-seven percent of Nantucket residents stay on the island for work, with the most commuters leaving for Boston, Barnstable, and New Bedford, likely due to ease of travel via plane or ferry. Among the workers on the island, a little less than a quarter (23.3 percent) commute from off island, again from places that are easily accessible to the island by plane or ferry such as Barnstable, Boston, and Falmouth.²²

RECENT MAJOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In recent years, the Town has focused on the improvement and redevelopment of Harbor Place, the area bound by Main, New Whale, Commercial, and Washington streets. A waterfront location with a mix of industrial, year-round, and tourism businesses, Harbor Place is an important asset in the downtown area. The Town recently worked to move out a fuel tank farm and has plans to develop a more robust transportation center that would connect ferry riders to the island's transportation services.

The tourism industry has been supported by the designation of the Nantucket Cultural District and the creation of a new Town department, Culture & Tourism, to provide tourism-related services and information.

LEADERSHIP

The **Nantucket Planning & Economic Development Commission** has prepared a number of area and neighborhood plans over the years to encourage and direct growth at different points around the island.

Supported by revenues from local option room occupancy excise collections, the **Department of Culture & Tourism (C&T)** welcomes visitors to the island and provides many tourism-related services for the Town. C&T supports the efforts of the Nantucket Cultural District, provides passport processing services on-island, and staffs a welcome booth at the airport in the summer.

With more than 650 member businesses, the **Nantucket Island Chamber of Commerce** promotes the island as a year-round destination. It offers marketing, networking, and educational opportunities to its diverse members. The Chamber also serves as the state-designated Regional Tourism Council for the island, receiving funding from the state to prepare advertising, public relations, and other materials for the island.

KEY BYLAWS AND REGULATIONS

The island's main commercial areas and nodes have zoning designed to encourage mixed-use and commercial development. These include the tourism-focused downtown waterfront area; mid-island, which developed into a hub for year-round businesses beginning in the 1970s; and the area around the airport.

Because of the space constraints inherent on an island, and because of the tourism-based economy, much of Nantucket's land area is dedicated to residential development, rather than commercial or industrial development. Currently, only 1.1 percent of the island's land is used for commercial and industrial purposes, and 1 percent is used for mixed-use. Thus, 89 percent of the Town's property taxes are collected on residential properties, meaning that any increase in taxes will largely be borne by residential property owners.

The Town does offer a residential tax exemption for year-round residents, shifting the tax burden from some of the lower valued properties to those used as seasonal homes by nonresidents.

As home businesses are allowed by right in all zoning districts, given the limited industrial zoning on the island, many trades, construction, and landscaping businesses operate out of owners' homes, scattered across the island. With the limited amount of land zoned for commercial or industrial uses, these home businesses are one of the only ways commercial and industrial businesses can grow and operate.



Fourth of July celebration | Photo courtesy of the Town of Nantucket

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