

# Town of Orleans Governor Prence Inn Future Use Study

Submitted to:  
George Meservey  
Director of Planning & Development  
Town of Orleans

By:



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## Introduction

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On October 13, 2020, voters at a special town meeting in Orleans agreed to appropriate funds for an initial study to evaluate the potential for affordable housing and other compatible uses on the Governor Prence Inn property on Route 6A. Weeks later, at the beginning of December 2020, the Town of Orleans asked Barrett Planning Group LLC to conduct this assessment. The Town may have an opportunity to acquire the site and wants to explore options to provide some type of below-market housing, possibly in conjunction with public or community uses. The property includes the motel with fifty-seven guest rooms and two parcels with a combined total of about 5.5 acres and 450 feet of frontage on Route 6A.<sup>1</sup> In addition to its Downtown Orleans location, the Governor Prence Inn abuts the Cape Cod Rail Trail (Map 1). As a result, it offers ready access to amenities, goods, and services.

Before commissioning this study, the Town had already completed other pre-development work, notably a Phase 1 Site Environmental Site Assessment, lead and asbestos testing, and an appraisal of the two parcels. Some exploratory design concepts for Downtown Orleans, including the Governor Prence Inn, had been completed as well. All of this work provided a helpful foundation for the present study.

### Scope of Work

The work that Orleans envisioned for this assignment required a fairly rapid yet thorough and informative assessment of opportunities for a unique property. Submitting this report to the Town is the culmination of several tasks:







- **Meetings.** The consultants participated in meetings with the Orleans Select Board, Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board, Affordable Housing Committee, and other local officials on December 10, 2020 and January 12, 2021 to clarify the study's goals, understand community expectations, and review initial concepts for the property.
- **Community Survey.** An online survey was conducted between the first and second public meetings in order to gather public input about the property and the community needs its reuse could address. Town staff, board and committee members, and others quickly distributed the survey link even though the survey process commenced over the holidays. By the time the survey closed, 701 people had responded to it.
- **Housing Needs and Regional Market Conditions.** Data and other information from the 2017 Orleans Community Housing Study, the Cape Cod Commission, and sources such as the Multiple Listing Service (MLS) and the 2019 Design Feasibility Study for

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<sup>1</sup> The Town may decide to purchase only the larger of the two parcels, but it has an option to acquire both. For purposes of this report, we are treating the parcels as one site.



### Map 1. Town of Orleans & Site Locus

-  Governor Prence Inn of Orleans
-  Bicycle Routes
-  Water
-  U.S. Highway
-  State Route
-  Non-numbered Road



- Multi-Unit Community Housing at Cape Cod Five were reviewed and updated, where possible. Information about projects recently approved and in the pipeline was sought from surrounding communities, too. However, the pandemic's impact on town hall operations in many towns hampered the consulting team's ability to obtain timely data for this report.
- **Site Opportunities and Constraints.** Engineers and a landscape architect from Grady Consulting LLC evaluated the site for potential locations of housing, community uses, and possibly commercial space. They reviewed the existing buildings on the property and provided an order-of-magnitude estimate of the cost to bring them up to code. In addition, the prepared conceptual plans for the future use opportunities discussed in this report, including the co-location of housing and public/community uses on the site.

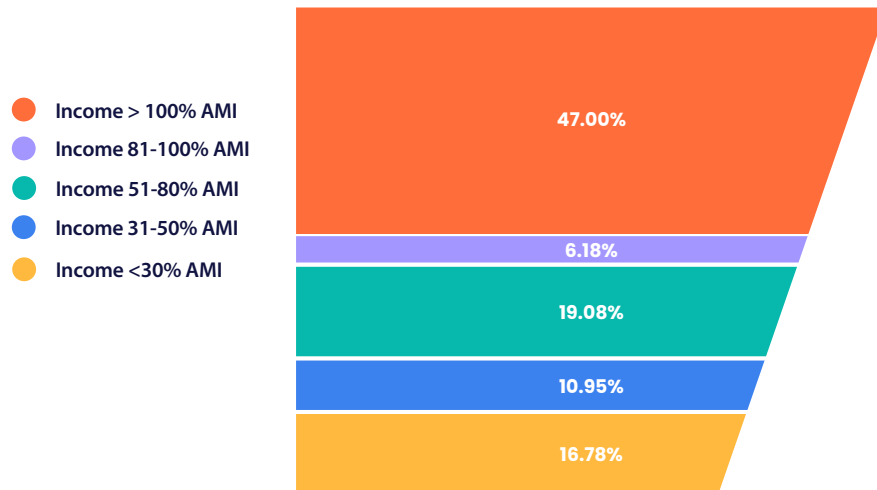
## Findings & Conclusions

- **Significant Public Benefits Potential.** The Governor Prence Inn site offers a unique opportunity for the Town of Orleans to meet several public benefit objectives in one location: housing, public or community uses, and possibly commercial space as well. At roughly 5.5 acres of developable land that will soon have access to sewer service, the Governor Prence Inn property has ample capacity for mixed-use/multi-purpose development.
- **Costly to Renovate Existing Structures.** If the Town acquired the site with the intention of preserving the existing buildings, considerable investment would be needed to meet current code. The approximate capital cost to bring them to code for residential use is \$5.7 million, or \$100,000 per unit. Bringing them into code compliance for their present use would likely cost about \$12,000 per unit less, or \$88,000 per unit, i.e., slightly more than \$5 million. These are order-of-magnitude estimates for advisory purposes only, and based on what can be gleaned from exterior conditions.
- **Housing Affordability: Key Policy Decision.** In the Lower and Outer Cape subregions of Cape Cod, the gap continues to widen between market housing prices and what year-round households can afford. The overwhelming majority of Orleans households with severe housing cost burdens have extremely low and very low incomes (82 percent). By contrast, high housing cost burdens affect only 13 percent of households with incomes at or above the median household income for Barnstable County. A case can be made for using some of the land at the Governor Prence site for moderate-income affordability, especially where Orleans has also been working to address very-low-income housing needs. However, a moderate-income rental development may not be feasible because of subsidy program priorities and requirements. And, year-round market-rate rents on the Cape are not high enough to "cross-subsidize" affordable units. Public subsidies have to be secured to create deeply affordable units that can actually address existing needs.



### HOUSEHOLD INCOME DISTRIBUTION IN ORLEANS

(Source: Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy Data)



If the Town wants to accommodate a range of incomes in this setting, consideration could be given to a homeownership model. Many of the respondents to the community survey for this project said the Town should prioritize housing for families and young working people – a reflection of Cape-wide concern about strengthening the regional economy with a wider range of jobs that can support year-round living. Nevertheless, it is important to note that almost half the existing households in Orleans have incomes at or below 80 percent of the regional median, and as noted above, the incidence of housing cost burden for the lowest-income bands is very high.

- **Development Impact.** A modest townhouse development, such as that depicted on the suggested concept plan in this study (Concept C),<sup>2</sup> would have little more than a de minimis impact on the Town. The estimated traffic impact for the twenty-four units shown on the plan is 175.68 (176) trips per day and sewage flows, 5,280 gallons per day (gpd), assuming the average number of bedrooms is two per unit. By contrast, a single-family home development such as that shown in Concept A (forty-nine units) would be a higher traffic generator at an average of 9.44 trips per day, or 462.56 trips.<sup>3</sup>
- **Community Center.** There appears to be quite a bit of interest in Orleans to create a community center, perhaps inspired by the successful facility in Harwich. The possibility of a community center on some of the Governor Prence land captured the second highest level of support from respondents to the survey conducted for this study. Other public use prospects such as a new library or fire station, or private commercial space, attracted relatively little interest.

<sup>2</sup> See Attachment I, Concept Plans. Concept C most closely reflects the range of interests expressed to the consulting team.

<sup>3</sup> Based on Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE) Trip Generation, 10<sup>th</sup> ed.



## Existing Buildings & Infrastructure

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The Governor Prentice Inn consists of one main building in the center of the property with four smaller structures in the rear, all of which contain guest rooms. There is also an outdoor swimming pool and open green space with a gazebo, centrally located for easy access by guests. Currently, the existing buildings are in a state of relative disrepair, with noticeable moisture and rot on rooves and weaknesses in foundations. The architecture does not appear to have any unusual historic or aesthetic qualities beyond that of a typical mid-century motel. The site has two vehicular access points along Route 6A as well as a paved loop road that runs along almost the entire perimeter, allowing the entire property to be accessed by car. It is also served by existing gas and water connections.



*Image 1: Two accessory buildings at different elevations; existing loop road.*



Image 2: Note building condition, visible moss growing on roof.



Image 3: Existing open space in center of property on the middle "terrace."

## Topography

The site has a large, mostly flat front yard leading back to the main motel building that crowns the property's highest point. Behind this building, the property slopes downward until it meets the Cape Cod Rail Trail at the rear lot line. Some buildings have been designed to accommodate the slope, i.e., situated on flatter areas. The shape of the property resembles three flat terraces separated by steeper slopes. The highest has the main building, the middle has the pool and open space, and the lowest is at the level of the Rail Trail. As a result, the front part of the site functions as a visual and auditory barrier from Route 6A for the back part.



*Image 4: Looking up from the lowest point of the property towards the main building.*

## **Transit & Connectivity**

The Governor Prence site is uniquely well connected, with easy access for walking, biking, and driving. The property has frontage on State Route 6A to the south and east, which connects to U.S. Route 6 at the nearby Orleans Rotary. These significant highways run the length of Cape Cod. To the west and northwest, the property borders the Cape Cod Rail Trail, a popular bike path, allowing convenient access to the rear of the property for cyclists and pedestrians. The front of the property is also easy to reach by foot, with sidewalks running along either side of Route 6A. This sidewalk system creates connections between the Governor Prence Inn and Downtown Orleans, as well as various retail, restaurant, and grocery establishments. However, while walking along Route 6A is easy, crossing is not: there are few crosswalks, and the road is wide and heavily trafficked.



*Image 5: Existing access to the Cape Cod Rail Trail.*

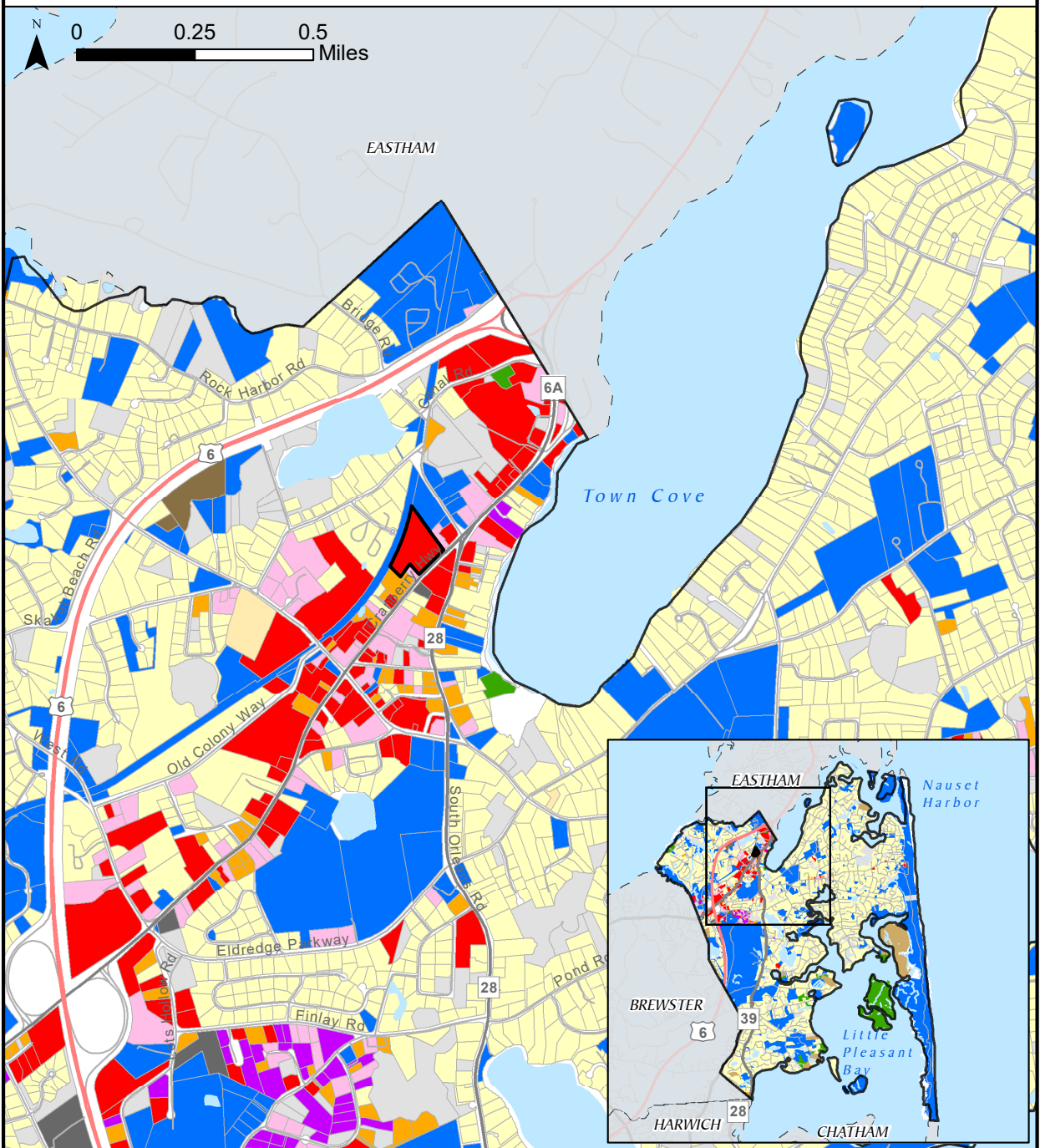
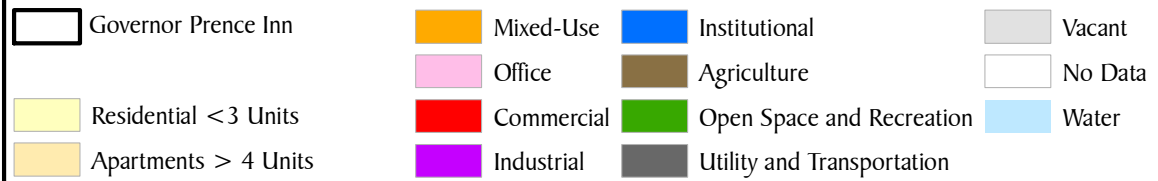
## **Neighborhood Character**

Properties along Route 6A on both sides of the Governor Prence are mostly commercial, with the occasional residential or vacant structure. Surrounding businesses tend to be small, local entities, although a major commercial plaza with a Stop & Shop and TJ Maxx can be reached northward on Route 6A. To the south, Downtown Orleans is only a short walk away, hosting numerous local businesses. (See Map 2, Existing Land Uses.)





## Map 2. Existing Land Uses





*Image 6: Neighboring low-density commercial use.*

### **Natural Features**

The site contains several mature trees and large boulders that would be worth preserving as scenic amenities. Its northern tip remains undeveloped and appears as though it may play a role in drainage.



*Image 7: Undisturbed trees and foliage at the northern tip of the site.*

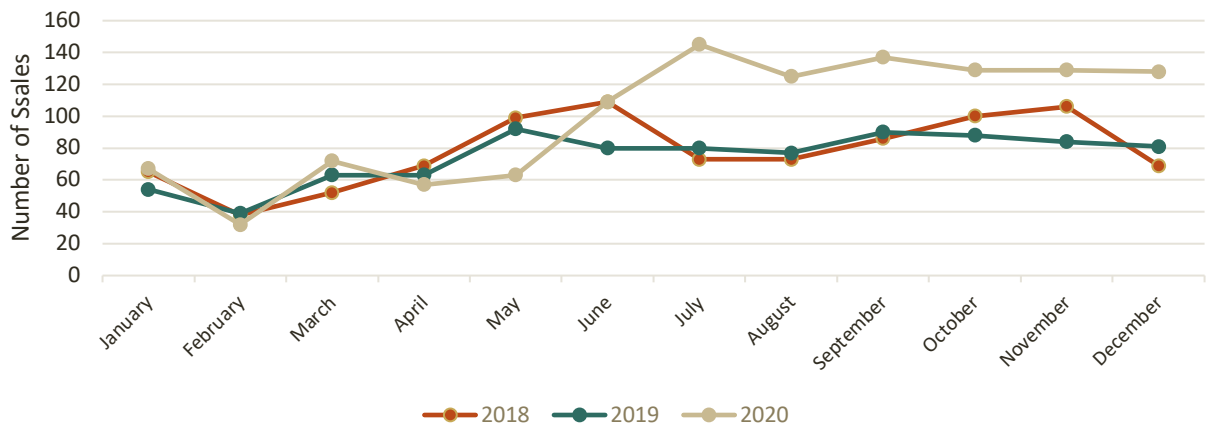


## Housing Demand

Housing demand in Orleans, Brewster, Chatham, Eastham, and Harwich has increased considerably since the outbreak of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Before March 2020, new MLS listings, pending sales, and closings in the area followed seasonal trends, but as telecommuting and remote work become the norm, the Lower and Outer Cape are becoming even more attractive communities for buyers. Between 2018 and 2019, the average inventory of available single-family homes in these five communities each month was approximately 500 homes, but in 2020, there were an average of 330 homes available, and when evaluating only the figures from after March, there was an average of fewer than 300 homes collectively available in the five towns each month. In Orleans, more houses were listed for sale in 2020 than in either 2018 or 2019, but there were fewer homes available in October, November, and December 2020 than at any point in the preceding two years.

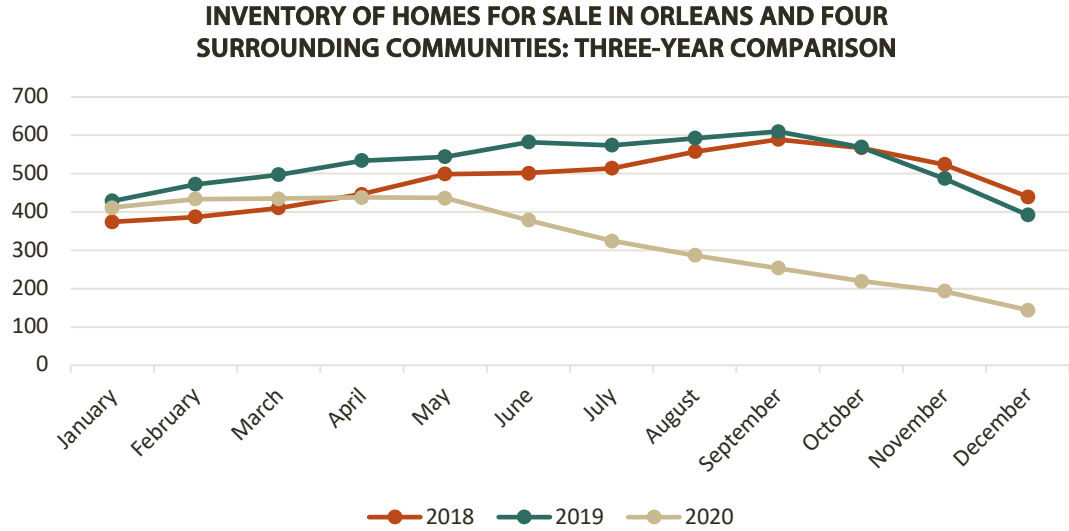
### HOUSING SALES IN ORLEANS AND FOUR SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES: THREE-YEAR COMPARISON

(Source: MLS)



Since March 2020, homes in Orleans have averaged seven days on the market, which is less than half the average time homes spent on the market in 2018 and 2019 (18 and 19 days, respectively). With fewer homes available and with homes selling fast, buyers in Orleans have been paying an average of more than 90 percent of seller's asking prices since March 2020. This trend exists throughout the area, and over this interval, buyers in Orleans and the surrounding communities have paid average prices between 93 percent and 99 percent of list price, and this represents the longest sustained period of prices paid exceeding 95 percent since before 2018.





Condominiums are also seeing record-low availability since March 2020, and they too are selling for prices very close to list price. However, condos are not selling as quickly as single-family homes. Since March 2020, condos in Orleans, Brewster, Chatham, Eastham, and Harwich have remained on the market for an average of about 24 days, which is faster than either the 2018 or 2019 averages. In Orleans specifically, the relatively small condo market does not have clear seasonal trends in the same way that the market for single-family homes does because of the large impact of individual sales, but the price trend in 2020 is considerably higher than 2018 or 2019, and the average median sale price for 2020 was higher than any individual month's median sale price in 2018 or 2019.

Officials in Eastham and Harwich report that single-family residential construction accounts for most of the current and recent construction activity in their communities. Affordable and mixed-income housing developments in Eastham and Brewster have both been completed recently, and both of these communities, as well as Orleans, anticipate leasing additional units for a variety of ages and income levels in the next few years.



## Community Concerns

An important part of this study involved gathering input from the community: officials, the general public, and people knowledgeable about housing conditions in Lower Cape communities. A survey, numerous interviews, and two public meetings produced a profile of local concerns about and hopes for the Governor Prence Inn property. While most people interviewed for this project, and most respondents to the survey, expressed support for affordable housing, not everyone agrees – and even within the agreement for affordable housing, there is some tension about the level of affordability to be pursued. Below is a summary of information gleaned from these efforts with selected quotes from interviews and open-ended comments on the survey.

### Affordable Housing

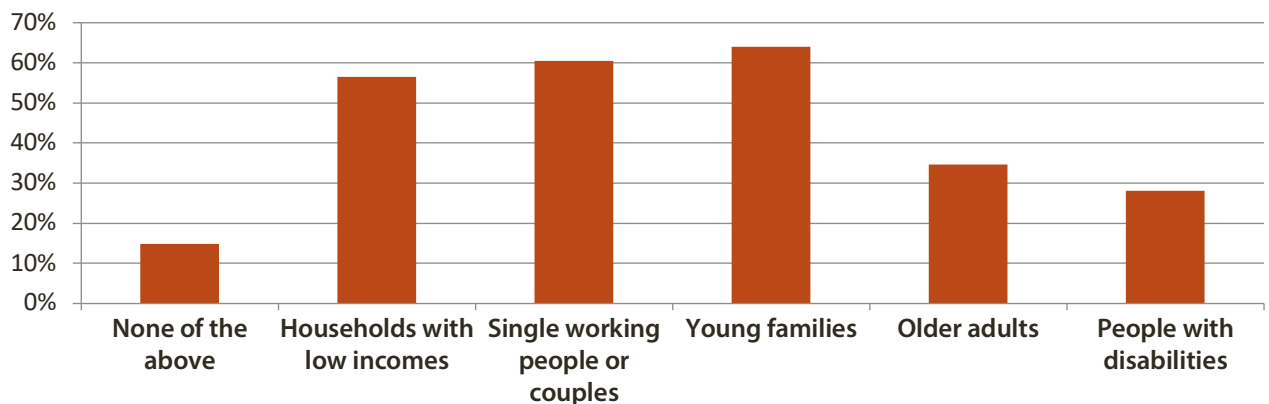
Interviewees had much to say about approaches to affordable housing on the site, and they saw a variety of possibilities. The range of ideas is best captured in segments of the consultants' interview notes. In many ways, what interviewees said is mirrored in the results of the community survey.

**Economics.** "There is a lack of understanding about... mixed-income rental housing and the economics of that. The reason we can't do it exactly the way it's done in Boston is because we don't have market-rate rents that are \$3000/month. We have market-rate rents that are \$1500/month, and so that produces a huge financing gap to even build the market-rate units, let alone have those market-rate units subsidize some of the affordable units."

#### IF HOUSING IS CREATED ON THE SITE, WHAT HOUSING NEEDS SHOULD BE THE PRIORITY?

CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY.

(Source: Community Survey)



**The Widening Gap.** "I don't know anyone who wants Orleans to become a town that is all either really well-off people or empty houses of the summer people. And that's kind of the direction we're heading in unless we do something."



**Focus on Families.** “I don’t think it’s the right place for affordable housing. We should be looking at building homes to draw young working families. Families want homes with yards. We need to look at creating a more dynamic downtown so that we can attract and keep young families in Orleans.”

**Co-housing Model.** “Co-housing needs to be looked at: intergenerational mixed housing, with common areas. All development needs to build in gardening and food gardening space. We need housing that builds community, potentially solving multiple social problems.”

**How Much is Too Much?** “...housing should be specifically all-ages, because Orleans has a large senior population, but that they aren’t economic generators. The Town is aggressively pursuing affordable housing and is close the 10 percent threshold. I don’t know if making Orleans the Affordable capital of the Cape is a great economic use...”

**What’s Missing?** “The real problem in Orleans housing is the absence of the ‘missing middle.’”

**Build and They Will Come?** “It is very important to increase housing stock, but also a ‘build the housing and they will come’ approach might not hold up in Orleans.”

## **Public Purposes**

**Community Center.** “It seems like a place where some really good creative thought could produce either a community center (which would be fabulous or if we really need a new library, I think that would take precedent, and there is a way to make a combination space.”

**YMCA and Library.** “The best use of the Governor Prence Motel site is a YMCA branch with library. A Town-run community center would be a burden to the community, but Orleans does need facilities that accommodate intergenerational linkages.” \

**Using the Pool.** “There is a more pressing need for a community center than there is for a library. ... The pool on the property was renovated two years ago and it could be enclosed for year-round use. Parents from Orleans bring their kids to the Hyannis YMCA for swimming lessons, so there is a need for a pool in town. Perhaps the YMCA could manage it?”



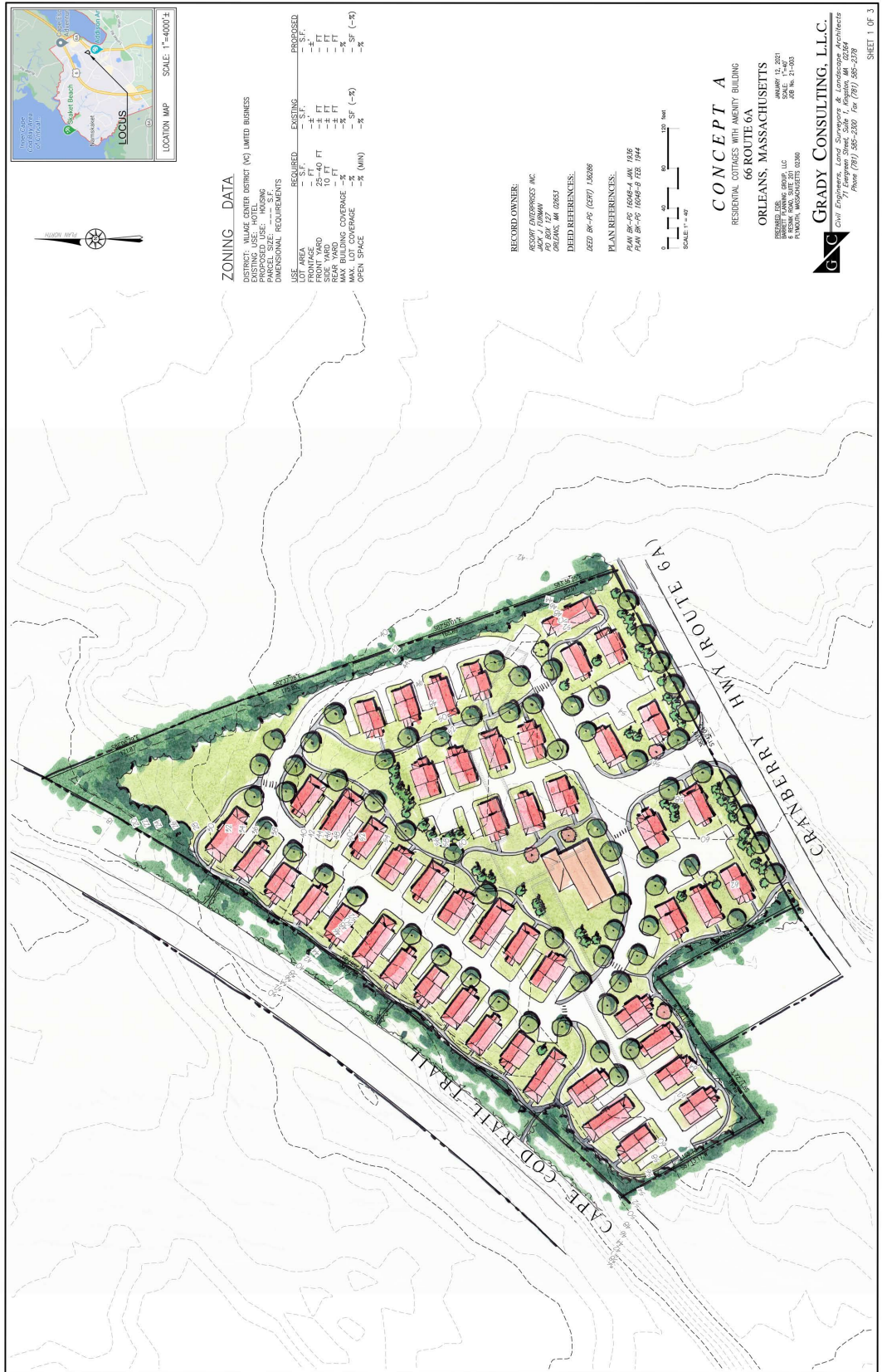
## **Attachments**

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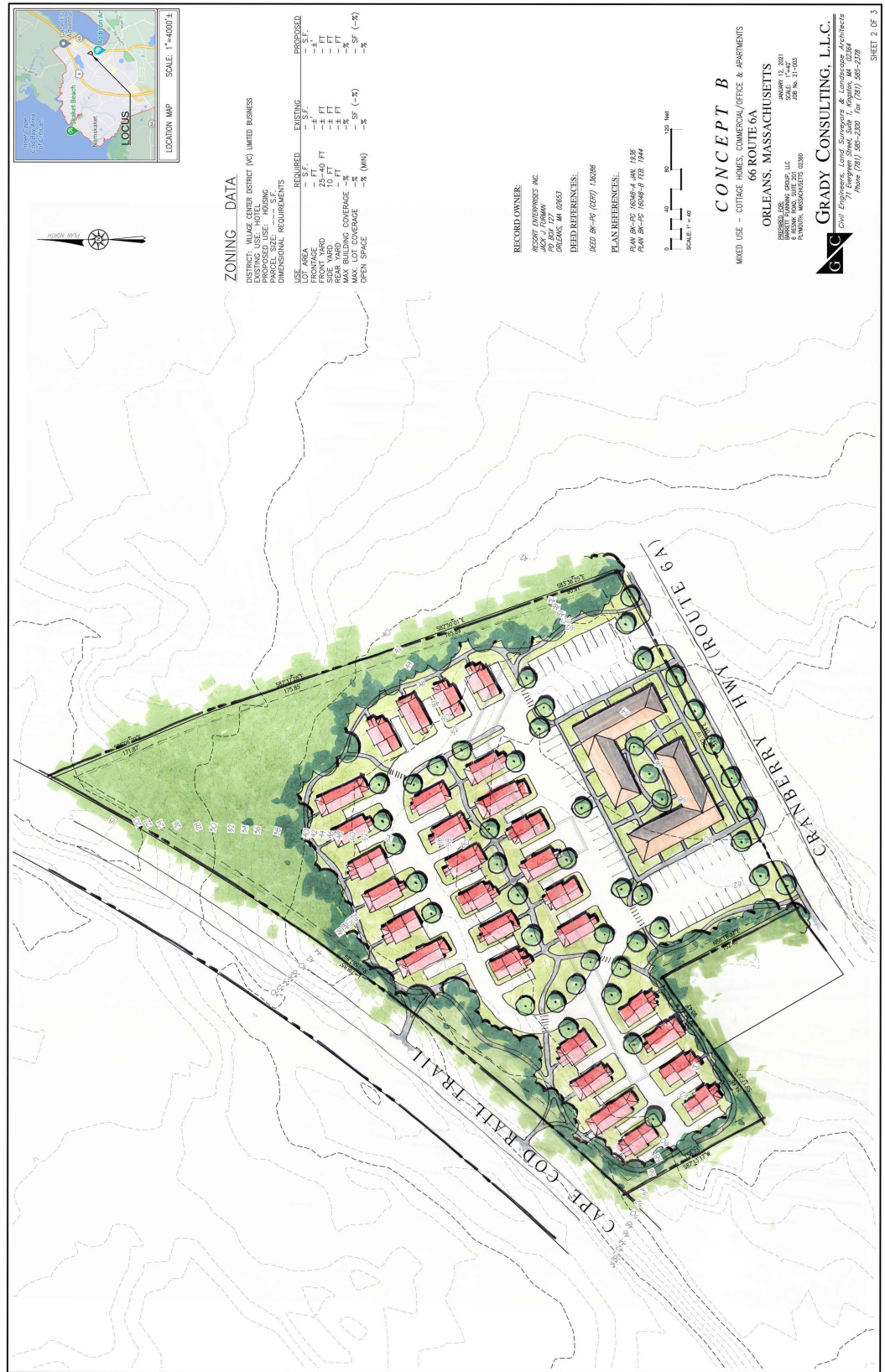
**Attachment 1: Concept Plans A, B, and C**

**Attachment 2: Estimated Cost to Bring Buildings to Code**











February 1, 2021

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Barrett Planning Group LLC  
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Duxbury, MA 02332

E-MAIL: [judi@barrettplanningllc.com](mailto:judi@barrettplanningllc.com)

RE: Feasibility and Preliminary Cost Estimate to Renovate Existing Buildings at  
Governor Prence Motel – 66 Route 6A, Orleans, MA

Dear Judi:

In response your request, we are providing this feasibility opinion and preliminary cost estimate to renovate the units within the existing buildings to apartments at the above referenced address.

#### General

We understand there are five (5) existing buildings constructed in 1959 with fifty-six (56) hotel rooms of various sizes and one (1) large manager's office that can also be converted into an apartment for a total of fifty-seven (57) units. There is a question of whether the converted units will work architecturally but we will assume this is a possibility for the purposes of this report.

Building Codes have changed dramatically since 1959 especially with regard to energy codes and ADA compliance. Items that would need to be updated should a renovation/conversion of the existing buildings/units to apartments include.

- ADA accessible routes including doors and hallways.
- Energy efficient windows and doors.
- New roofing and siding.
- Insulation (it will be difficult to meet current insulation requirements within the existing framing so modifications will be needed to increase spaces for insulation and will likely require closed cell foam to minimize changes).
- Fire protection and associated alarms.
- Egress compliance.
- New electrical services.
- New kitchens and baths.
- Energy efficient heating and possibly air conditioning.
- Air exchange systems.
- Energy efficient appliances.
- Energy efficient lighting.
- New finishes such as flooring, trim and paint.

### Preliminary Cost Estimate

We anticipate the work needed to bring the fifty-seven (57) units into compliance with current code requirements to be approximately \$100,000 per unit x 57 units = \$5,700,000.

This is an estimate for planning purposes and will require further evaluation should renovation of the existing buildings be under further consideration. We had preliminary conversations with a local construction firm who performs this scale work for similar projects on Cape Cod and while they did express interest in providing preliminary cost estimates as well but were unable to meet the tight schedule available for this report.

This estimate also does not yet take into consideration site work such as sewer connections, water main upgrades (especially for fire protection), utility upgrades, drainage, paving, lighting, landscaping, signage or other site improvements.

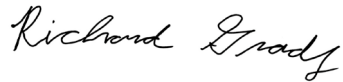
### Recommendation

Based on the age of the buildings, work needed to bring them into compliance with current codes under a renovation scenario and the resulting architecture, we recommend razing the existing buildings and designing/building new units in full compliance with current codes.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

GRADY CONSULTING, L.L.C.



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Richard Grady, P.E.  
Principal Engineer

Massachusetts Registered Professional Civil Engineer No. 38072  
Massachusetts Construction Supervisor CS-046196