

## Memorandum

To George Meservey, Director of Planning & Community Development  
 Michael Domenica, PE, Program Manager

CC Betsy Shreve, AICP, AECOM Project Director  
 Sia Karplus, Science Wares, Inc.  
 Anamarija Frankić, PhD, University of Massachusetts Boston, Green Harbors Project  
 Mark Begley, MT Environmental Restoration  
 Paula Winchell, AECOM

Subject **Town of Orleans, MA**  
**Water Quality and Wastewater Planning**  
**Task Number 10.1.B.1 – Demonstration Projects-Design and Implementation –**  
**Shellfish/Aquaculture – Town Cove Exploratory Mailing Summary Report - Final**

Project Number 60476644

From Thomas Parece, P.E., AECOM Project Manager

Date February 27, 2017

Approvals	Date	Signature / Initials
George Meservey, Orleans, MA Director of Planning & Community Development		
Michael Domenica, PE, Water Resources Associates, Program Manager	March 8, 2017	MD

### 1. Purpose and Background

#### A. Overall Purpose of Shellfish Demonstrations

The overall purpose of the Town's shellfish demonstration projects is to monitor the nitrogen-removal impacts of both *Crassostrea virginica* (oysters) and *Mercenaria mercenaria* (hard clams) and utilize these measured results to develop full-scale plans for shellfish cultivation that help meet regulatory standards for nitrogen. The Town must achieve specific, quantitative goals for removing nitrogen within each of its estuaries to meet the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL). The design of a full-scale shellfish project for a particular waterbody to meet a prescribed nitrogen-removal target must be based on certain site-specific values, such as total annual growth in shellfish biomass and enhanced denitrification rates. The size and spatial configuration of a full-scale project are directly related to the values measured through these demonstrations.

Demonstrations are designed to:

- Evaluate the efficacy of oysters and quahogs in achieving reduced nitrogen concentrations within the Town's impaired waters;
- Determine the most advantageous approaches for growing the quantities of shellfish prescribed to meet nitrogen removal goals; and
- Develop realistic cost estimates for the preferred approaches to growing shellfish to meet nitrogen removal goals in specific waterbodies.

These demonstrations will help determine the role of shellfish in the overall strategy for reducing the nitrogen loads within the Town's impaired estuaries as was presented in the Town's ACWMP (2017).

## **B. Background of Exploring Enhanced Shellfish Propagation in Town Cove**

Expanding both quahog and oyster biomass in Town Cove was first described in the shellfish component of the Orleans Consensus Agreement (2015), and was further discussed during the Town-sponsored June 2015 Shellfish Forum where scientists, engineers, growers and regulators met to review the shellfish component of the Consensus Agreement. The outcomes of the Shellfish Forum are documented in the Phase I: Orleans Shellfish Operations and Program Expansion Plan dated June 2015, available on the Town's website. Based on this prior work and field investigations with the Shellfish Constable, the AECOM technical team recommended a shellfish demonstration in Town Cove that built on the Town's existing quahog propagation efforts including the areas and quantities of seed planted. This analysis is documented in Draft Technical Memorandum on Site Characterization (Draft Tech Memo) prepared by the AECOM Technical Team, which includes representatives from AECOM, Science Wares, Biomimicry New England/UMass Boston, and MT Environmental/Beach Point Shellfish.

The second phase of evaluating locations for shellfish demonstrations included a peer review of the Draft Tech Memo to finalize the sites that should be included for shellfish demonstration projects. This in-depth critique involved review and comments from several outside experts as well as several meetings with a Town of Orleans Shellfish Working Group (SWG) that consists of the Shellfish Constable/Harbor Master and representatives from the Shellfish and Waterways Advisory Committee, Orleans Marine and Freshwater Quality Task Force, Orleans Pond Coalition, Citizens Peer Review Committee, and Orleans Water Alliance.

Outside experts that reviewed the Draft Tech Memo included:

- Diane Murphy, Barnstable County Cooperative Extension;
- Josh Reitsma, Barnstable County Cooperative Extension;
- Sandy MacFarlane, former Orleans Shellfish Constable;
- Henry Lind, former Eastham Shellfish Constable;
- Chatham Shellfish Propagation Department; and
- Dave Slack, Shellfish and Waterways Committee.

After this two-step, detailed evaluation process, four demonstration programs were selected, including exploring the potential for expanded quahog propagation in Town Cove. These four demonstrations are described in detail in the Technical Memorandum on Final Site Characterization and Evaluation for Aquaculture/Shellfish Propagation (evaluation criteria and ranking) dated March 13, 2016. Written comments from the outside experts and responses from the Shellfish Technical Team are included in Appendix A of the Final Site Characterization Technical Memorandum.

### C. Specific Purpose of Preliminary Town Cove Questionnaires

Based on input from some members of the SWG, the AECOM Technical Team was encouraged to begin to gauge interest in gear-based oyster aquaculture as part of overall shellfish planning in Town Cove, in addition to the quahog demonstration project. To learn the perspectives of two key stakeholder groups with respect to gear-based aquaculture in Town Cove, two separate questionnaires were prepared.

One questionnaire was sent to waterfront property owners to learn their opinions on aesthetic, use conflicts and other potential concerns related to gear-based systems for growing shellfish in Town Cove. A different questionnaire was sent to wild commercial harvesters to learn their opinions regarding areas that might be suitable for gear-based aquaculture in Town Cove. The intent was to identify areas that were not considered productive by wild harvesters so that these locations could be further evaluated for aquaculture license sites (known in Orleans as grants). An additional goal of the questionnaires was to increase public awareness of the nitrogen pollution problem in Town Cove and to explain the possible role of shellfish as a solution.

This information complements the shellfish survey currently being planned for Town Cove through UMass Dartmouth School for Marine Science and Technology (SMAST). The goal of this survey is to identify current populations of quahogs and other organisms in order to determine target numbers for enhanced quahog propagation efforts. Local commercial harvesters will conduct the survey under the guidance of SMAST staff members who will train these harvesters in the appropriate survey protocols and methodologies to be used.

## 2. Information Gathering Approach and Results

Two questionnaires (Appendix A and Appendix B) were developed and disseminated to two initial stakeholder groups:

- Waterfront property owners; and
- Commercial harvesters of wild shellfish.

### A. Waterfront Property Owners

To communicate with waterfront property owners, a questionnaire was developed by the AECOM Technical Team and reviewed carefully by the SWG. The purpose of this questionnaire was to learn how neighbors feel about the concept of gear-based aquaculture, for the purpose of growing oysters for water quality improvement. This mailing was sent to over 180 addresses. Each envelope was hand-addressed by members of the SWG because it was felt that this personalized approach would yield more responses. The three questions asked in the mailing were:

1. How do you feel about shellfish farms located in Town Cove (away from moorings and navigation channels)?
2. How do you feel about shellfish farms in proximity to your property?
3. How do you feel about seeing shellfish farms within your view scape?

Six property owners responded to the questionnaire within the deadline, five by phone, and one by email. Five responded positively to the idea of gear-based aquaculture near their property and within their view scape. Navigation was listed as a primary concern with respect to siting gear-based aquaculture. One respondent was interested in additional information on the Town's wastewater planning initiatives in general. There were no negative responses. The property owners that responded positively are located at various points along the length of the eastern shore of Town Cove (Figure 1).



## B. Commercial Harvesters of Wild Shellfish

After the questionnaire to the shorefront property owners had been completed, the SWG suggested that other stakeholders be asked for their input. Commercial wild harvesters were high on the priority list because their livelihood depends on access to the wild fishery in Town Cove. It was important to understand where they fish and to learn whether they thought there might be less productive areas that could be utilized for gear-based oyster aquaculture. The timing was fortuitous in that commercial shellfish licenses were being renewed, and it was thought that a questionnaire could be included with renewal paperwork. A different questionnaire was developed for the commercial wild harvesters to ask for their perspectives on increased gear-based aquaculture in Town Cove, and to learn where areas that are not currently harvested or productive might be located. The five questions asked in the mailing were:

1. Would you be willing to talk in person?
2. If new or expanded oyster aquaculture leases were allowed in Town Cove, where would you suggest they be located to minimally impact where you typically harvest and to minimally impact productive bottom? Please indicate several areas on the Town Cove map provided.
3. Approximately how far from shore do you typically do your fishing (wader depth or is boat used)?
4. Which shellfish species do you harvest commercially?
5. Do you have other comments and/or suggestions?

No written responses to the questionnaire were received, but several individuals attended the February 6, 2017 SWG meeting. Comments made during this meeting indicated that commercial harvesters believe that much of Town Cove is currently productive for quahogs, but populations have decreased over the years. The overall consensus amongst commercial harvesters was to increase quahog propagation in this waterbody. Another outcome of this meeting was to schedule a kick-off meeting with these commercial harvesters and SMAST to plan for the quahog survey. During this survey, areas that are potentially suitable for aquaculture because they are unproductive for quahogs and other species may be identified.

## 3. Summary and Recommendations

Based on the comments received from commercial harvesters, and discussions during SWG meetings, the recommended approach for increased shellfish propagation in Town Cove should focus on planting quahogs and possibly other native species. Gear-based aquaculture could be evaluated at some future point after the potential for quahog bottom-planting for commercial and recreational harvest and associated nitrogen removal is quantified.

## 4. Next Steps

The next steps include:

- Integrating the results of these surveys with the upcoming quahog inventory and shellfish assessment being conducted by SMAST (in collaboration with local commercial harvesters); and
- Focusing on bottom planting of commercially-important species in Town Cove, with gear-based aquaculture considered only after the potential for bottom-planting is determined.

Future planning for Town Cove will continue after the results of the quahog survey are evaluated. Nothing other than bottom planting commercially important species should occur in Town Cove without an overall plan for aquaculture in the estuary.

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**Appendix A**  
**Questionnaire Sent to Waterfront Residents**

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**Appendix B**  
**Questionnaire Sent to Commercial Harvesters of Wild Shellfish**

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