

What is Adaptive Reuse?

Practical Solutions for the Cape & Islands

June 2026

What is Adaptive Reuse: Practical Solutions for the Cape & Islands

A Case Study Guidebook that highlights design strategies, regulatory pathways, and financing approaches that make adaptive reuse a viable and effective housing tool on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket.

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ABOUT THE BOSTON SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTS & CIVIC DESIGN LABS

The Boston Society of Architects (BSA) is the eastern Massachusetts chapter of The American Institute of Architects (AIA), and is New England's largest building industry association. A 501(c)6 member-led association, the BSA is one of the oldest and largest chapters of AIA.

Through partnership and collaboration, the BSA's Civic Design Labs help make complex spatial issues more legible, actionable, and connected to practice. This guidebook was developed as part of that work: supporting informed decision-making around adaptive reuse, housing, preservation, infrastructure, and the future of year-round communities across the Cape and Islands.

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Introduction

A pressing question looms over Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket: Given the intense challenges of the regional housing market, how can we create and preserve more affordable and attainable housing for year-round residents?

With the compounded hurdles of extremely high land and construction costs, restrictive zoning, limited available land, and market pressures from speculative investors and owners of second homes, as well as nitrogen-loading challenges, there is a need for an alternative solution for housing creation. Thus, adaptive reuse, a scalable solution in which existing structures are repurposed for new uses, becomes an essential tool for addressing the region's housing and environmental needs.



Audiences for the guidebook, including, but not limited to:
design professionals, property owners, planners, developers,
and community advocates.

"Adaptive reuse strategies offer underused buildings and sites in transition a second life."



What Is Adaptive Reuse?: Practical Solutions for the Cape & Islands advances adaptive reuse as a practical, flexible, and increasingly necessary approach to housing development in seasonal communities. Adaptive reuse strategies offer underused buildings and sites in transition a second life: an opportunity to serve a different purpose to the community. This guidebook explores real and successful projects grounded in common building types that pair local housing goals with innovative design concepts. A former school becomes housing for older adults; a firehouse once filled with sirens now provides apartments for workers; a parsonage opens its doors again, this time as long-term housing for neighbors. These buildings, already woven into the fabric of their towns, now allow residents to remain rooted on the Cape and Islands.

This guidebook was created to support architects, property owners, planners, developers, and community advocates with an introductory understanding of adaptive reuse for housing development, offering replicable strategies to navigate the complexities of such projects. Utilizing case study examples, it explores how adaptive reuse can be applied to create housing solutions through real-world applications and lessons learned around financing, zoning and regulatory pathways, and design strategies.

Engaging climate responsiveness, land conservation, community resilience, and historic preservation, adaptive reuse offers a range of benefits that are well-suited for the Cape and Islands context, with such high demand for housing, limited land available, wastewater constraints, and a strong cultural landscape. Projects like these tend to be popular within the community, often moving forward with visible municipal support and community partnerships. Reusing previously developed sites can move a project to completion on a quicker timeline than new construction on undeveloped land, utilizing existing infrastructure and zoning pathways to put safe, healthy housing units into the community faster.

As one of the many pathways needed to address our housing crisis, adaptive reuse presents an opportunity to create more attainable and sustainable housing. By scaling and advocating for projects such as those shared in the coming pages, the future of Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket can preserve these treasured places and ensure their community members can still call this region home.

Glossary

Adaptive Reuse: the process in which existing buildings are reconfigured to serve in a different capacity than that of their original purpose. It is an effective strategy for preserving the design, cultural, and historical significance of a building while reducing carbon emissions from new construction in the built environment.

Affordable Housing: homeownership or rental housing that is restricted to occupancy by low- or moderate-income households of one or more persons and for which the sale price or rent is affordable as defined by the criteria for inclusion in the department's subsidized housing inventory or consistent with funding sources.

Area Median Income (AMI): the median income of a defined area, often used in housing designation in terms of percentages of AMI, defined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Attainable Housing: a year-round housing unit that is subject to a use restriction via a legally binding instrument that limits occupancy to an individual or household with income not exceeding 250% AMI or a lower limit as designated by a Seasonal Community.

Building Code: Massachusetts State Building Code, 780 Code of Massachusetts Regulation (CMR).

Chapter 40B: a state statute that enables local Zoning Boards of Appeals to approve affordable housing developments under flexible rules if at least 20–25% of the units have long-term affordability restrictions.

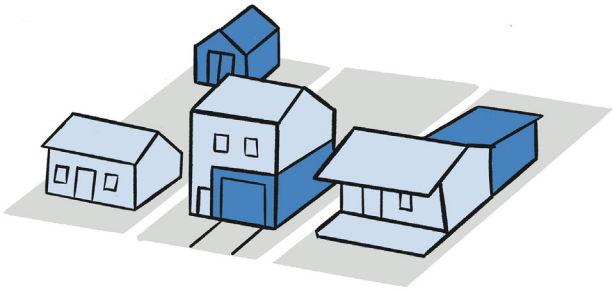
Community Preservation Act (CPA): a local adoption provision that enables a city or town to establish a special Community Preservation Fund (CP Fund), as authorized by Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 44B, which may be appropriated and spent for certain historic resource, community housing, and open space (including recreation) purposes.

Design Context: design integrating the history of the site and community values to guide appearance and form; physical requirements that consider neighboring existing building stock, including but not limited to setbacks, heights, and materials.

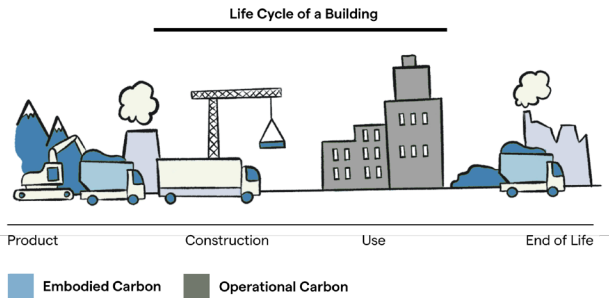
Deed Restriction: a legal covenant recorded with a property's deed—the official document that establishes ownership—that places conditions on the use of the property.[1]

Denitrification: a process regulating the removal of bioavailable nitrogen from natural and human-altered systems.

Dwelling Unit: a room or group of rooms within a residence used by an individual or household for living, sleeping, cooking, and eating. Additionally, an Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU), is a secondary house or apartment that shares the building lot of a primary home.



Examples of Accessory Dwelling Units



Embodied Carbon: the total greenhouse gas emissions associated with the production, transportation, construction, maintenance, and disposal of building materials.

Gross Square Footage (GSF): the total amount of square footage of a building.

Housing Cost Burdened: the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) term to describe households spending more than the 30% of monthly household income on housing. Households spending more than 50% of monthly household income on housing are considered Severely Housing Cost Burdened.

Infill: the use of land within the already-developed environment for the purposes of redevelopment or new development. In this guidebook, infill is defined as existing underutilized buildings on lots located between existing buildings in developed neighborhoods.

Island Shuffle: the period of time when year-round residents leave their winter rental and must find other housing, usually between May and September.[2]

Residential Density: the number of homes within a defined area of land, usually expressed as dwelling units per acre.

Seasonal Communities: a designation pursuant to MGL Chapter 23B, Section 32(b) for communities with substantial seasonal variations in population, employment, and housing demand. The designations support the development of policies and programs to help communities unlock production and preservation opportunities for affordable and attainable year-round housing.

Septic Systems: on-site wastewater disposal systems that treat wastewater flows. These include conventional septic systems, such as a septic tank with a leaching field, or the use of innovative/alternative (I/A) systems.

Short-Term Rental: a property where at least one room or unit is rented to an occupant or sub occupant for thirty-one consecutive calendar days or less.

Site: a specific location or area of an actual or planned structure or set of structures.

Title 5: Massachusetts State Environmental Code requiring the proper siting, construction, and maintenance of all on-site wastewater disposal systems (septic and/or I/A systems).

Year-Round Housing: a limitation on the use and occupancy of a dwelling unit through a legally binding instrument that limits occupancy to individuals or households who have an agreement with a seasonal community to occupy the dwelling unit for ten or more months of the year.

Year-Round Housing Trust: a trust established to create and preserve year-round rental units pursuant to MGL Chapter 23B, Section 32(d)(iv), including Regional Trusts.

Zoning: ordinances and bylaws, including base, underlying, and overlay zoning, adopted by cities and towns to regulate the use of land, buildings, and structures.

Regional Context



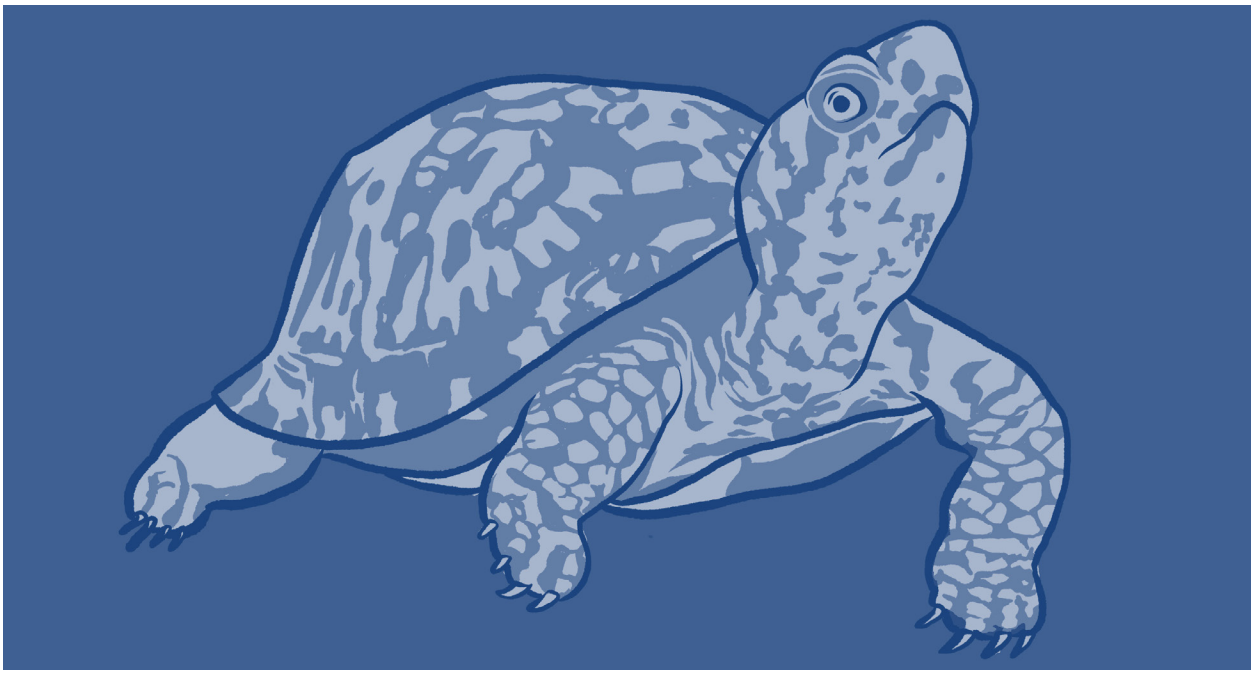
Cape Cod and the Islands

Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket, collectively known as the Cape and Islands, form one of New England's most distinct historic and ecological regions. They are also distinguished by acute housing challenges driven by seasonal tourism economies, high housing costs, limited infrastructure, and constrained development patterns. While only 4% of housing is seasonal in Massachusetts,[2] the share rises to 33% on Cape Cod,[3] 57% on Nantucket,[3] and 61% on Martha's Vineyard.[4] This concentration of second homes and short-term rentals significantly limits the supply of year-round housing for local workers and families.

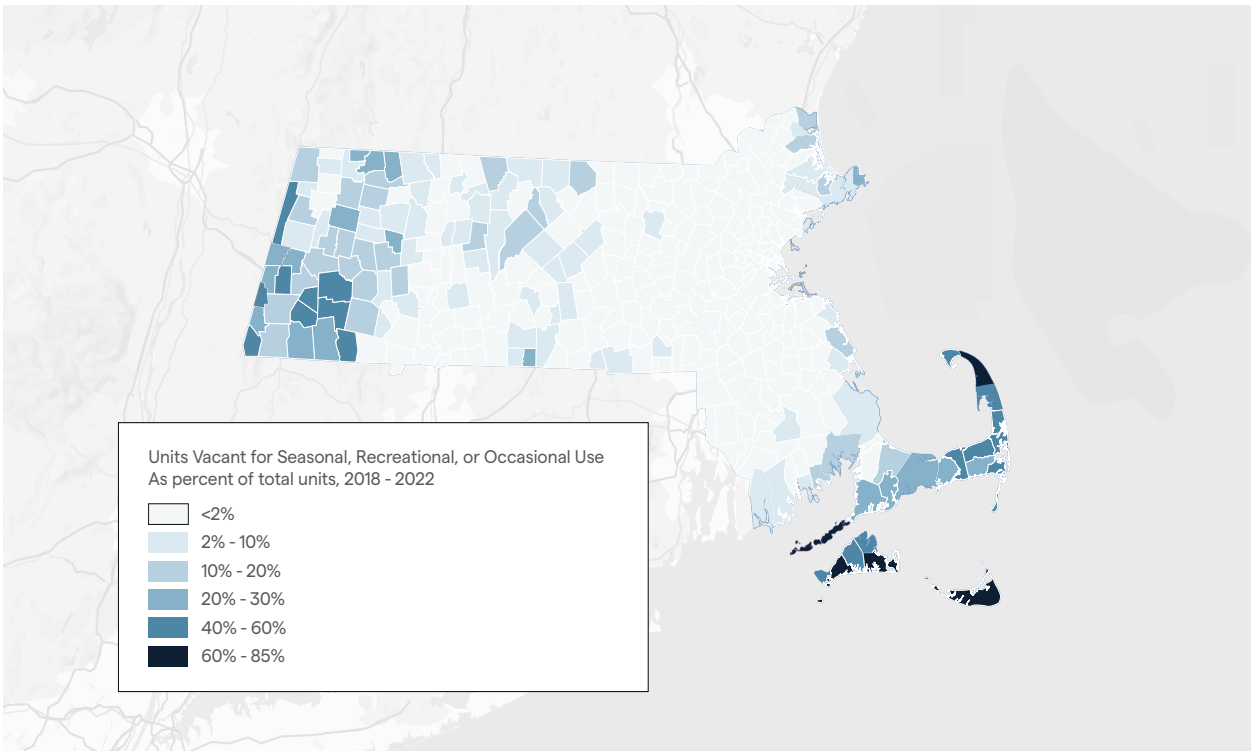
Infrastructure constraints further complicate housing production. Much of the region relies on traditional septic systems and zoning and wastewater regulations often limit residential density and restrict multifamily development. Geographic isolation increases construction costs as road access to the Cape depends on the Bourne Bridge and Sagamore Bridge. The Islands additionally rely on ferry and air transport for materials, equipment, and labor. These conditions, combined with a shrinking local workforce, make housing development particularly challenging.

In response, Massachusetts established the Seasonal Communities designation through the 2024 Affordable Homes Act to support communities on the Cape and Islands, as well as in Berkshire County, in expanding affordable and attainable year-round housing opportunities.[5] The designation enables tools such as year-round occupancy restrictions, zoning reforms, and grant funding for infrastructure and capital improvements.

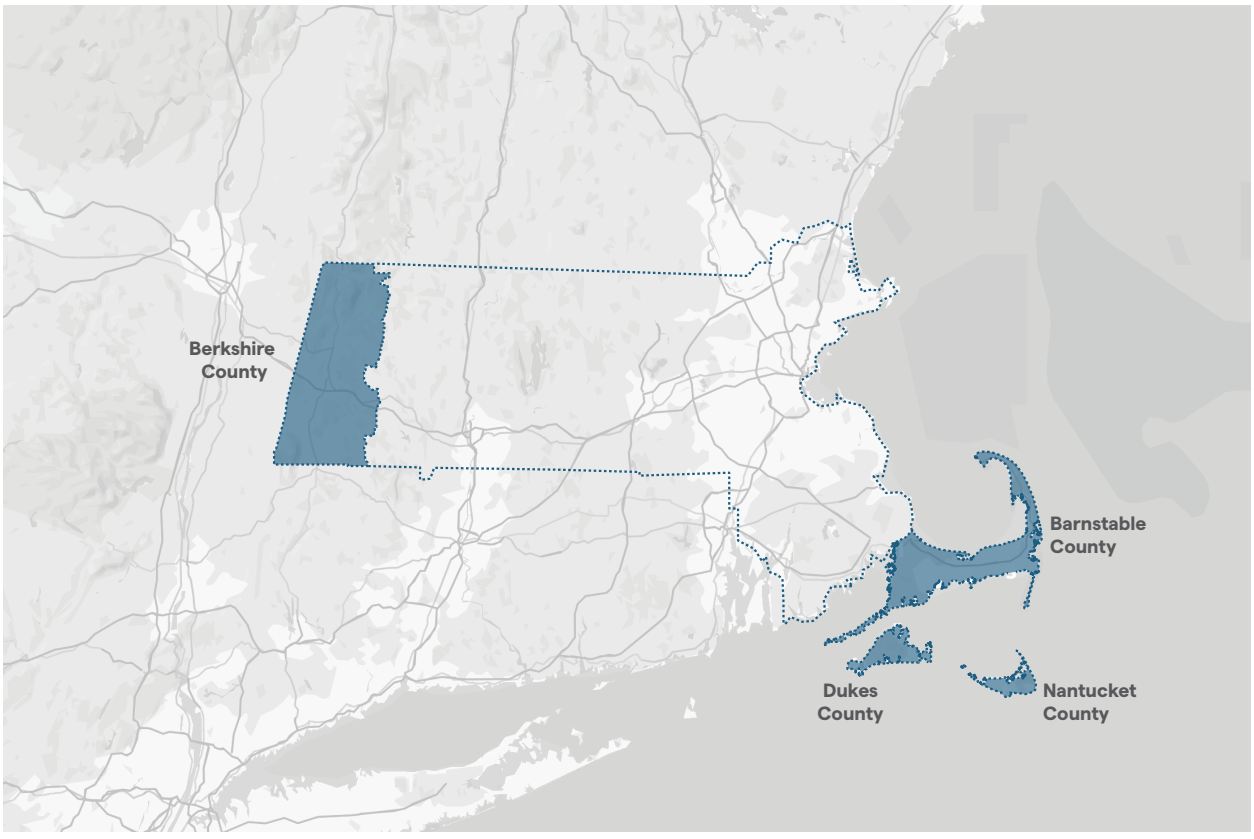
Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket are diligently working to balance housing production with environmental protection and historic preservation amid limited developable land. Recent zoning regulations and environmental protections are closely interconnected across the region to simultaneously address housing affordability and community resilience. In this context, adaptive reuse has emerged as an effective strategy for creating affordable and attainable year-round housing within the existing developed environment while preserving the historic, cultural, and architectural identity that defines the Cape and Islands. It also creates opportunities for collaboration among property owners, municipalities, and preservation-focused nonprofit organizations to address the region's most urgent housing needs without compromising its environmental and historic assets.



The Eastern Box Turtle habitat was preserved on-site during the development of the Old Bank Street Firehouse in Harwich.



Seasonal and Vacation Homes (%)



Seasonal Communities

Cape Cod

Barnstable County, otherwise known as Cape Cod, contains fifteen unique towns, dozens of villages, and four regions: Upper Cape, Mid Cape, Lower Cape, and Outer Cape.[6] Cape Cod's year-round population has been rapidly evolving over the last two decades. The increase in population and demographic changes have altered the housing needs of the community.[7]

Housing on Cape Cod has become more unaffordable for the year-round population as the rise in housing cost has rapidly outpaced the rise in income in this region. Due to this gap in price and income increases, housing cost burden is a common experience among Cape Cod residents, with 29% of owner households and 53% of renting households facing the challenge.[8] To afford a median-priced single-family home in Barnstable County, a family must earn over $217,527, and a total of 33.1% of housing units are seasonally occupied.[9] Renters in the community face the issue of a significant cost disadvantage of renting out a unit year-round in comparison to an average short-term rental as it takes just two months for income from an average short-term rental to exceed that of an average year-round rental.[10]

Land and infrastructure constraints also shape development patterns on the Cape. Approximately 86% of its land is already either developed or protected to conserve sensitive natural resources, leaving a very small amount of land to potentially redevelop new housing.[11] Also, zoning and septic requirements favor low-density developments like single-family homes, which further exacerbates the challenges of producing more units of housing affordable for year-round residents.

On Cape Cod, the combination of larger homes on large lots, septic system limitations, and restrictive zoning practices has significantly reduced opportunities for new development, contributing to rising housing costs across the region. Adaptive reuse for buildings, especially those in historic downtowns, encourages infill and increased density in community centers and responds to the desires of communities to maintain low density where it exists already.

Projects like the one in **Hyannis** provide much-needed workforce housing for employees of the nearby Cape Cod Hospital while creating new commercial spaces on the ground floor to anchor the building along Main Street.

Projects such as the **Old Bank Street Firehouse** were led by well-known community members and as such were able to work through the development process with little friction.

The **Coady School Residences** connected the community to the town's rich cultural history while providing affordable housing for seniors. Together, these projects demonstrate how adaptive reuse can provide flexible, community-centered housing solutions that expand affordability and reinforce the long-term resilience of Cape Cod.

Martha's Vineyard

Made up of six towns, Martha's Vineyard is a rural 100-square-mile island located three miles off the coast of Cape Cod, which has been home to the Wampanoag Tribe for at least ten thousand years. The island underwent a development surge in the 1980s and 1990s that doubled the number of housing units. By 2020, the population had increased to approximately 20,000 residents year-round, with a seasonal population of 95,000. Approximately three-quarters of the year-round population is concentrated in the Down-Island towns of Tisbury, Oak Bluffs, and Edgartown, each anchored by a vibrant commercial center, while the Up-Island towns of West Tisbury, Chilmark, and Aquinnah remain more rural in character.

Martha's Vineyard's ecological, cultural, and historic resources are central to its identity and long-term resilience. More than 40% of the island is permanently protected, and these conservation efforts preserve critical natural landscapes and ecological systems.[12] As a result, only 15% of land is potentially available for development. The presence of large minimum lot sizes in many areas and high land acquisition costs constrain opportunities for new housing production. Between 2018 and 2023 alone, the amount of available developable land on the island declined substantially, further intensifying development pressures.[13]

The island also contains a significant and aging historic building stock where approximately 2,000 buildings are more than one hundred years old, with another 1,500 constructed before the end of World War II.[14] As development pressures continue to increase, many of these long-standing structures face growing risks of demolition, deterioration, or incompatible redevelopment.

The Vineyard's economy also contributes to significant housing challenges. During the summer months, Martha's Vineyard's population increases 4.6 times, placing additional demand on housing availability. More than 60% of the island's housing stock is classified as seasonal, limiting the availability of year-round homes for local workers, municipal employees, families, and older residents seeking to remain in their communities. In 2022, the median home price on Martha's Vineyard reached approximately $1.5 million, while rental costs continued to outpace local incomes, underscoring the growing need for affordable year-round housing options.[15]

Adaptive reuse is especially well-suited to Martha's Vineyard as it aligns with the island's development patterns and community values. Many existing structures, which include former religious and large residential properties, offer opportunities for sensitive conversion into housing within already-developed areas, tapping into already existing infrastructure. Projects such as the **Old Gay Head Parsonage** and **Daggett Avenue**, led by long-standing Vineyard residents and organizations committed to sustaining the year-round community, illustrate how adaptive reuse can support housing production, historic preservation, and neighborhood continuity simultaneously. Together, they point toward broader opportunities to leverage Martha's Vineyard's existing built environment to address urgent housing needs while preserving the qualities that make the island unique.

Nantucket

Nantucket, comprised of a single town and county located approximately thirty miles south of Cape Cod, is one of the most geographically constrained housing markets in Massachusetts.[15] The island faces mounting pressure to balance year-round community needs with extremely limited land availability and ongoing development demand. With virtually no capacity for outward expansion, the preservation and strategic reuse of existing buildings is increasingly central to the island's long-term resilience.

Nantucket's increasingly diverse population and workforce is estimated to be around 18,600 year-round residents.[16] Although the official census data reports that slightly over 71% of Nantucket's population is white, the public school system reports that majority of their students identify as non-white.[17] The year-round households continue to face significant economic and accessibility barriers tied to the island's exceptionally high housing costs.

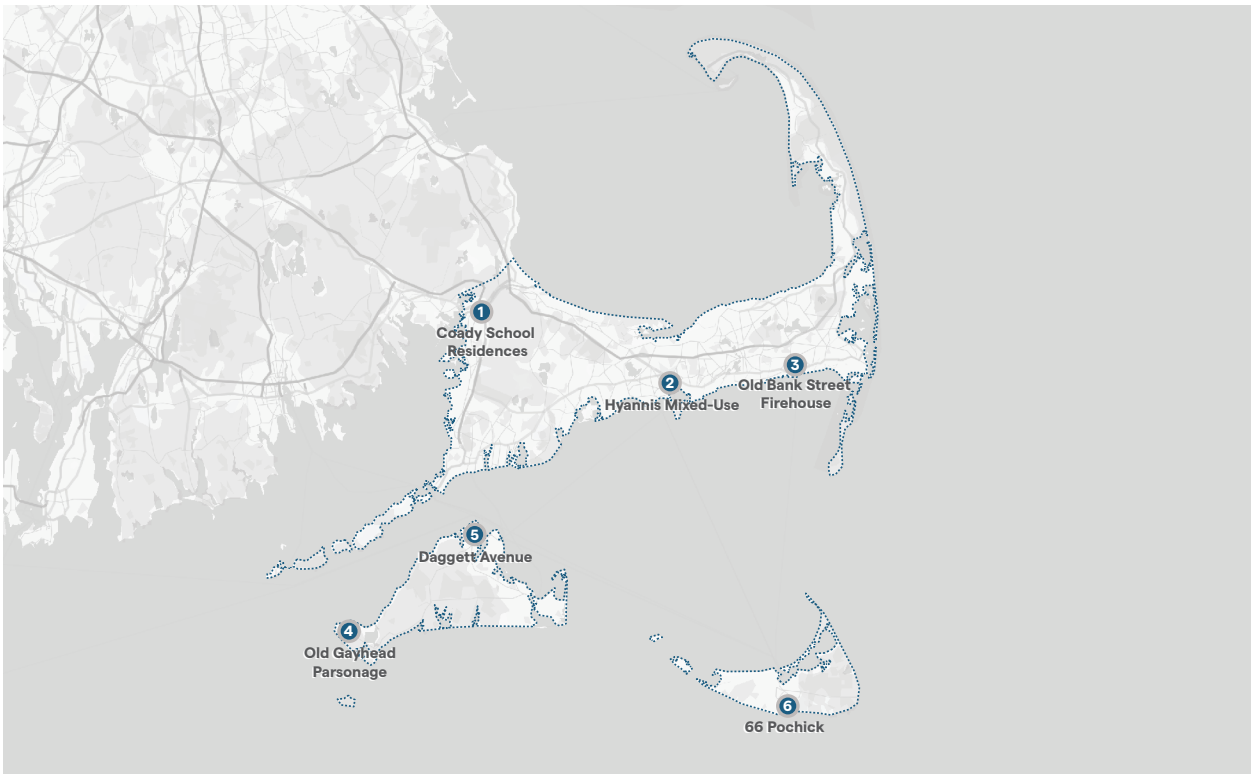
Today, approximately 57% of the island's housing stock is for seasonal or temporary use,[18] thus limiting housing supply for year-round residents. The loss of renter-occupied housing and the growing reliance on shared living arrangements have contributed to rising overcrowding and reduced housing stability for low- and moderate-income households.[19]

Housing affordability challenges on Nantucket are among the most severe in the state. In 2024, the median home price reached approximately $3.7 million, with very few homes selling for less than $1 million.[20] Even households earning well above the median income often cannot access ownership due to limited supply, while rental costs place significant strain on essential workers in education, healthcare, municipal services, and the local economy.

Land constraints further limit development, with 40% of land already developed[21] and over 50% of land rightfully protected by conservation trusts,[22] making large-scale new housing production difficult. Existing housing developments are at risk as rising land values have increased pressure to demolish smaller homes for luxury redevelopment, reducing affordable housing options for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

Within this context, adaptive reuse and building relocation are critical strategies for expanding housing supply without new land consumption. Reusing existing structures aligns with Nantucket's preservation values, reduces environmental impacts, and maintains historic development patterns. Efforts led by organizations such as Housing Nantucket demonstrate how buildings like **66 Pochick Avenue** can be rehabilitated or relocated into year-round housing. In addition, Remain's growing material reuse and deconstruction initiatives, through which salvaged building components are donated and repurposed, have the potential to extend these principles beyond buildings themselves, further reducing waste and supporting a more sustainable built environment and resilient community.

Case Studies



Case Studies Map

Across the Cape and Islands, adaptive reuse is already being implemented through a range of building types that reflect the region's civic, cultural, and residential fabric. While each project individually responds to its local design context, together they demonstrate how existing structures can be reimagined to meet year-round housing needs while reducing development pressures, working within limited land availability, and repurposing buildings that are often beloved by the communities in which they are found.



Academic

A municipal building dedicated to education, separate from student or staff housing.

Coady School Residences: *fifty-eight residential units for active seniors situated among a variety of communal spaces rich with the historic character of a former elementary school.*



Commercial

A building maintained as a venue for businesses and business-related activities.

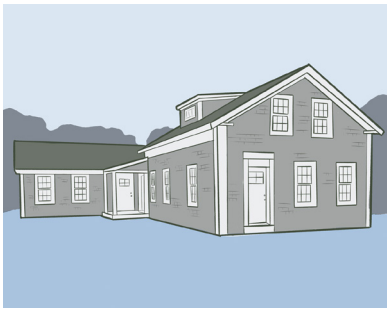
Hyannis Mixed-Use: *a converted dance hall and commercial space, home to small businesses and ten residential units, in downtown Hyannis.*



Firehouse

A municipal building that provides a structure for firefighting apparatus and a station for firefighters to work and wait for emergency calls.

Old Bank Street Firehouse: *an inspiring partnership project between Harwich's Fire Association and Conservation Trust, generating three units for local workforce and a shared community space and trail.*



Faith-Based Properties

A building used to support, host, or house parts of a religious community. This includes buildings such as a parsonage, which houses religious leaders in the community.

Old Gayhead Parsonage: *an affordable two-unit project funded by congregation donations and owned by the Gay Head Baptist Church, which houses members of the local Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah).*



Single-Family Home

A standalone building built on its own property for one household or person to occupy.

Daggett Avenue: *a two-acre property downsized to a cottage onsite, with two homes created for families by subdividing the existing single-family house.*

66 Pochick Avenue*: A 1996 single-family home that was donated, relocated, and expanded into a two-bedroom home through a basement addition on Nantucket.*

Coady School Residences

Bourne, MA

Previously: Elementary School, 1905 (enlarged in 1935)

Completed Reuse Year: 2017

INFORMATION	
Number of Units	58 Units
Unit Types	1- and 2- bedrooms
Size	76,399 GSF
Time of Construction	14 months
Total Development Cost	$20,441,000
Cost per Unit	$352,431
Team	
Architect	ICON Architecture
Owner/Developer	SCG Development
Construction	Dellbrook | JKS
Civil/Landscape	CHA Consulting
Geotech	McPhail
MEP/FP	Wozny Barbar&Assoc.
Structural	Souza True & Partners
Historic Consultant	VHB
Environmental	Fuss & O'Neill
Property Manager	Hallkeen Management
Project Manager	Design Technique

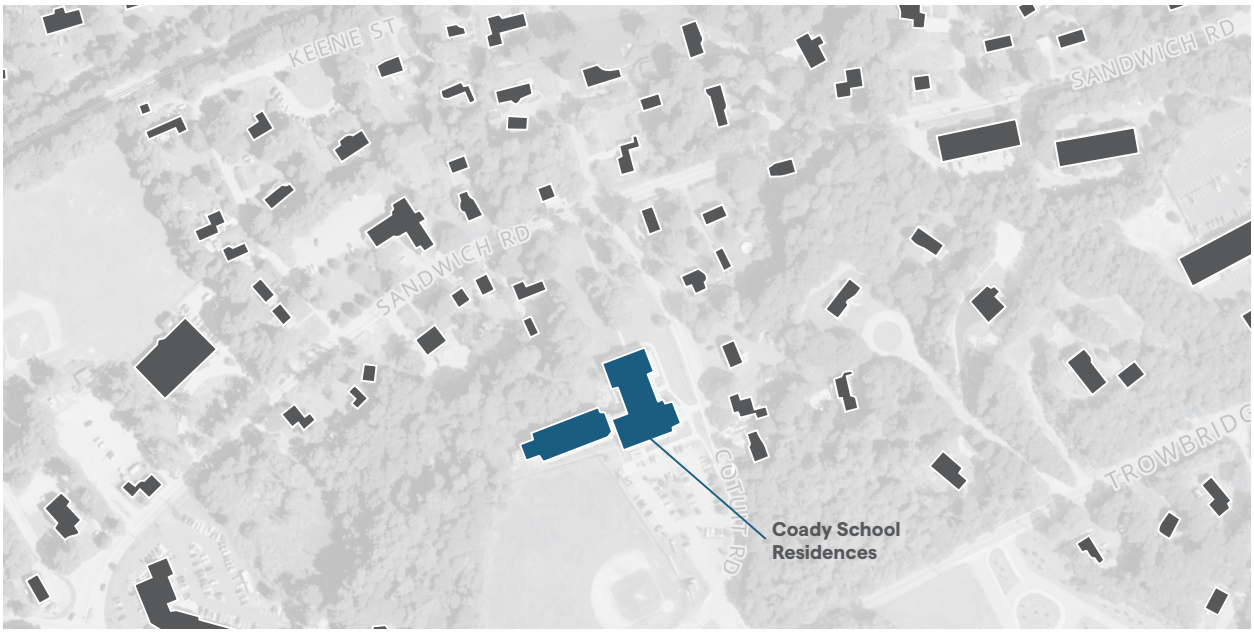
ENABLERS	
On-site Infrastructure	New amphidrome small wastewater treatment plant system (below parking lot) with new building. Includes reuse of the existing leaching field with all new sewer components. System was designed to provide enhanced nitrogen removal
Zoning Leverage	Chapter 40B project - whereas Bourne did not meet criteria for 10% affordable year round housing requirements, certain regulations may be waived to a certain extent to make construction of low or moderate income housing financially feasible
Funding Sources	Historic Tax Credits (State and Federal), Affordable Housing Tax Credits

Project Description

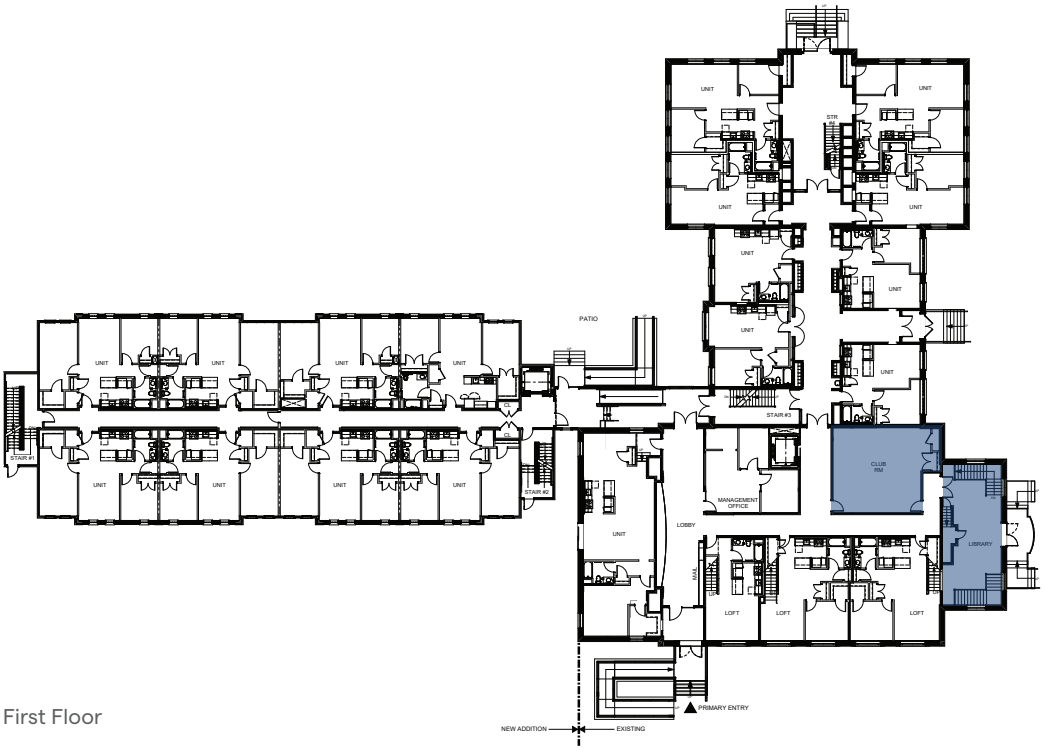
Coady School Residences in Bourne connects the community to the town's rich cultural history with affordable housing options set within the former elementary school.

Fifty-eight residential units for active seniors are situated amongst a variety of communal spaces rich in historic character retained in the renovations: original open stairs, full proscenium at the entry lobby, and science greenhouse restored as a sunroom – all washed in natural daylight through the large, restored windows. Connecting corridors between the school and new addition frame intimate outdoor resident gathering spaces. The new construction portion is a 3-story, wood-framed structure with a basement, adding approximately 38,000 SF. The addition is clad in fiber cement lap siding and masonry veneer and is sensitively sited to the rear of the historic school.

Receiving Historic Tax Credits, the project rehabilitation scope was designed to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards through full window and door replacements matching historic configurations, sensitive modifications to building entries to improve accessibility, and envelope improvements via interior insulated furring while restoring the historic exterior masonry facade. The design team introduced new contemporary apartments within former classrooms and maintained the wide corridor volumes and original stairs, while preserving all historic character defining features, including corridor glazing, lockers, glazed wall tile, and millwork. Other unique features, including the sunroom at the former science classroom, were also restored. The project preserved the significant double-height volume of the former gymnasium near the original stage and proscenium, while subdividing remaining portion to accommodate additional lofted dwelling units and amenities supporting the aging-in-place community. A stick-framed addition was constructed to support the inclusion of new homes and an elevator, while framing a new outdoor space for the residents between the historic and new buildings. The project is affordable to households earning between 60% and 120% of the Area Median Income.

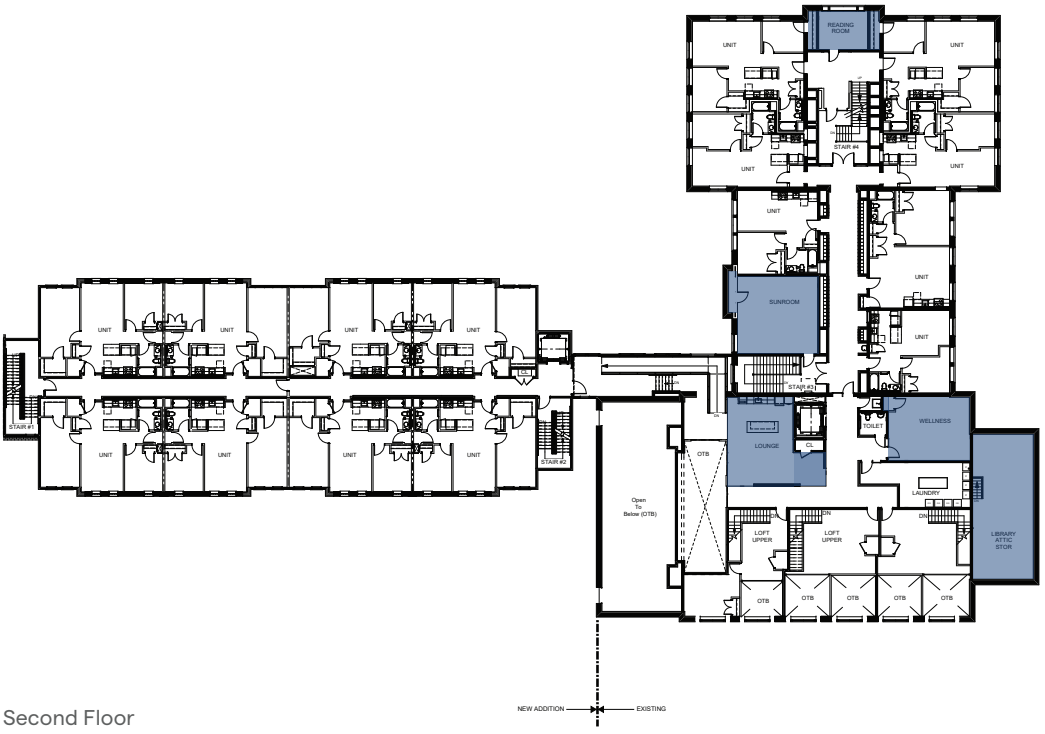


Floor Plans



First Floor

The historic school structure is partially retained for shared amenities, with new housing was added within and behind the building.



Second Floor

Before





After





Hyannis Mixed-Use

Barnstable, MA
Previously: Social Club, 1910
Completed Reuse Year: 2020

INFORMATION	
Number of Units	10 Units
Unit Types	1- and 2- bedrooms
Size	14,739 SF
Time of Construction	3 years
Total Development Cost	$2 million
Team	
Architect	Union Studio Architecture & Community Design
Owner/Developer	CapeBuilt
Contractor	Mosaic and Associates

ENABLERS	
On-site Infrastructure	Connected to town sewer
Zoning Leverage	New use requested for deli/cafe/restaurant with retail component. The project is located in the Growth Incentive Zone (GIZ) Overlay District, so it did not have to go through regional regulatory review. The team submitted applications to the Hyannis Main Street Waterfront Historic District Commission for additions and alterations including the demolition of the storefront and rear addition

Project Description

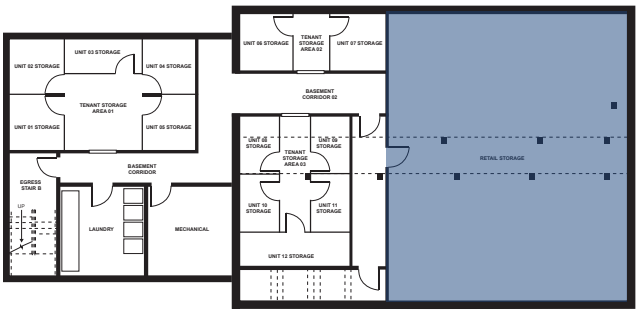
Originally built in 1910, 255 Main Street, also known as the Furman Building, was home to the “Saturday Night Club”, a space where members of the Hyannis Board of Trade went to discuss business. At first used purely for social gathering by the members, it eventually became the ‘Barnstable Board of Trade’, organized in June
of 1913.

After decades of commercial use, CapeBuilt realized the potential for mixed-use development on a thriving Main Street. The rehabilitation of the building included: site improvements, a new storefront similar to the original, reconstruction of the foundation, reinforcement of the roof, a new addition at the back of the building, a complete gut renovation of the interior, and 10 new one- and two-bedroom apartments on the upper floors. In addition to restoring the original egress servicing the first and second floors, a new second set of stairs was created to connect the two stairs with a common corridor. Townhouse style apartments on the second floor were designed to utilize the large existing attic and third floor of the new addition. Apartment entry doors were located on second floor with internal stairs that lead to the third floor, allowing the egress stairs to communicate between two floors, not all three.

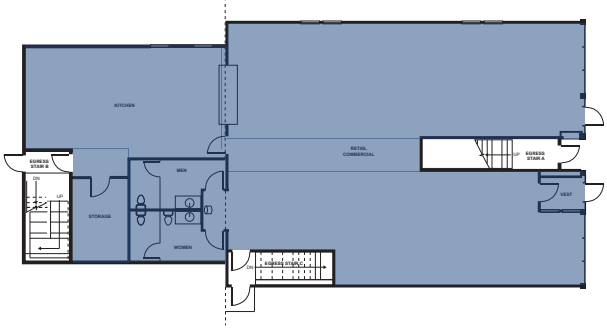
The small, well-appointed apartments today offer much-needed workforce housing for young professionals and employees of the nearby Cape Cod Hospital. Additionally, the two new commercial spaces on the ground floor anchor the building along Main Street.



Floor Plans

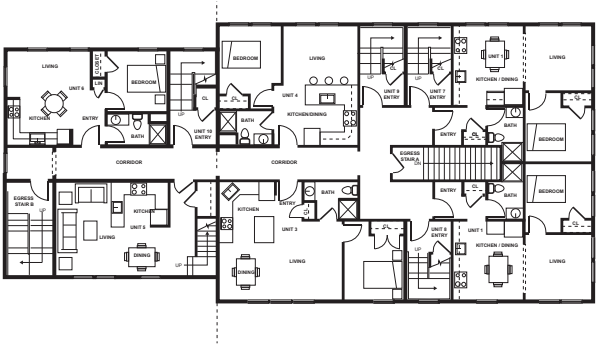


Basement

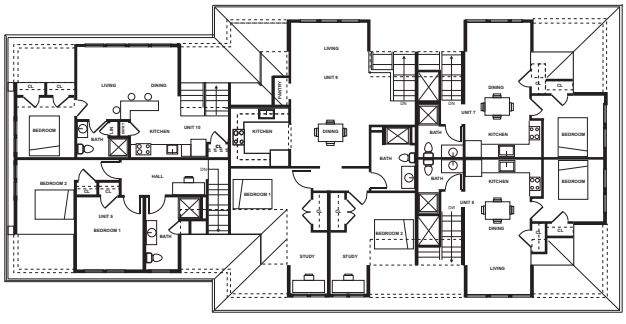


First Floor

Upper floors are converted to **housing**, while ground-floor commercial space maintains Main Street activity.



Second Floor



Third Floor

Before



After





Old Bank Street Firehouse

Harwich, MA
Previously: Firehouse, 1929
Completed Reuse Year: 2025

INFORMATION	
Number of Units	3 Units
Unit Types	1-bedrooms
Size	6,500 GSF
Time of Construction	<2 years
Total Development Cost	$1.5 million
Cost per Unit	$115,000
Team	
Owner	Harwich Fire Association
Partner	Harwich Conservation Trust (HCT)
Contractor	Bruce Young
Construction	Dellbrook | JKS
Environmental	Conservation Trust
Engineering	BSC Group

ENABLERS	
On-site Infrastructure	Septic system
Zoning Leverage	Residential Rural (RR) 40,000 sq. ft. minimum lot size, 150 ft. road frontage
Funding Sources	Town Community Preservation Act (CPA), Town Affordable Housing Trust Funds, and Donations

Project Description

Co-created by the Harwich Fire Association and the Harwich Conservation Trust, the Old Bank Street Firehouse & Cold Brook Trailhead Project resulted in a community space on the first floor of the firehouse, with three one-bedroom affordable apartments of about 650sf each on the second floor and a shared laundry space for employees year around. The average rental cost of the housing is $1,805 per month. For years, the former fire station was used by various town departments and eventually the Harwich Fire Association & HCT purchased the structure, planning to restore the historic building and house the 1928 Maxim fire engine that originated there. The building itself is made up of brick arches, unique Florian and blue tiles, and the renovation was a community effort made possible through fundraising and donations of tiles for all bathrooms, backsplashes, as well as granite countertops.

Adjacent to the Old Bank Street Firehouse, HCT led a partnership-driven ecological restoration of the 66-acre Robert F. Smith Cold Brook Preserve, transforming a retired cranberry bog into a wildlife oasis. The rewilding project added a half-mile All Persons Trail, restored 44 acres of wetland and a mile of stream habitat. Now home to a variety of animal life and flourishing native plants, the area has become a popular hiking and nature-watching destination.

An important goal of the Cold Brook eco-restoration was to help naturally remove nitrogen from the waterway – a common byproduct of commercial and residential development, and a significant issue Capewide. The project potentially saved over $6 million in sewering costs by naturally reducing nitrogen that otherwise could have impacted Saquatucket Harbor on Nantucket Sound and required expensive sewering to remediate. The overall firehouse project was completed in just under 2 years, when originally planned for a construction timeline of 4 years.



Floor Plans



First Floor

A first-floor community space is retained, with three affordable apartments added above.



Second Floor

Before





After





Old Gayhead Parsonage

Aquinnah, MA
Previously: Parsonage, 1856
Completed Reuse Year: 2025

INFORMATION	
Number of Units	2 Units
Unit Types	1- and 3-bedrooms
Size	600 SF and 1,100 SF (bedrooms)
Time of Construction	12 months
Total Development Cost	$1.3 million
Cost per Unit	$500,000
Team	
Design	Derrill Bazzy, MV Engineering & Design
Developer	Dukes County Regional Housing Authority
Energy Consulting	Marc Rosenbaum, energysmiths

ENABLERS	
On-site Infrastructure	Septic system
Zoning Leverage	Existing town of Tisbury duplex bylaw requiring AMI restrictions on the units; by Special Permit from the Planning Board. Project experienced a good deal of support from the community
Funding Sources	Private Donations

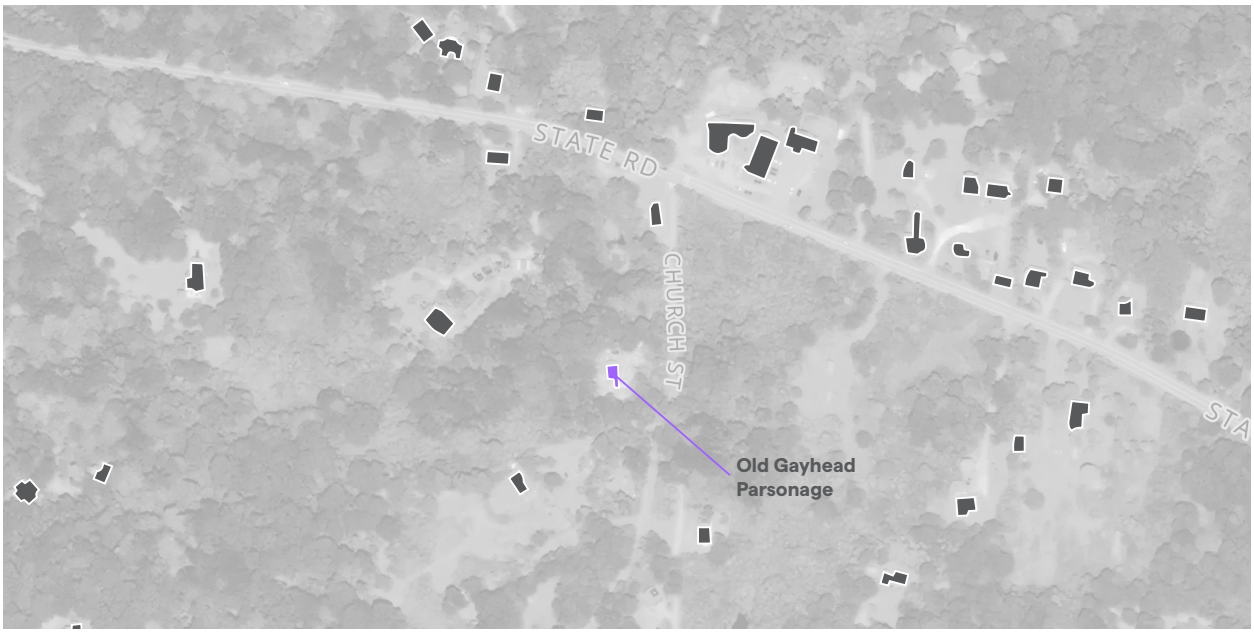
Project Description

Believed to be the nation's longest continually worshipping Native American Congregation, the Community Baptist Church of Gay Head completed the renovation of its 169-year-old parsonage into affordable housing units. The parsonage was originally built in 1856, before being moved to Church Street in 1907.

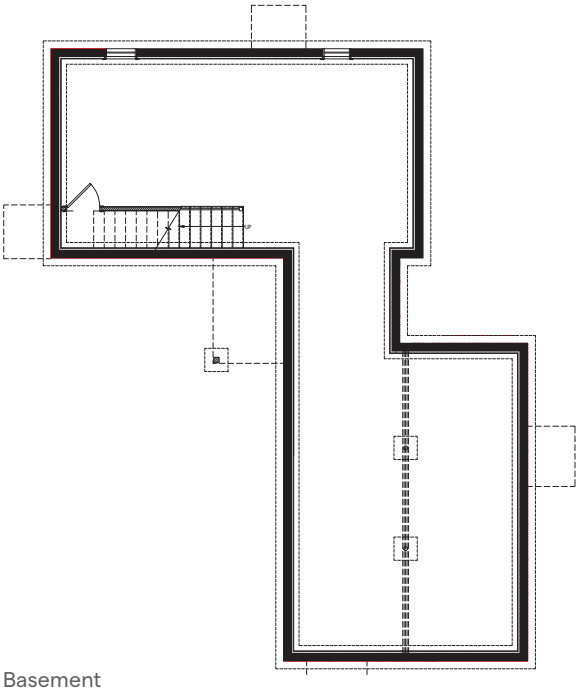
The church holds a tender place in the heart of some Aquinnah residents, and its historical documents played no small part in the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) gaining federal recognition in 1987. A member of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) and a tribal family moved into the two units created on site.

The project serves as a model for combining historic preservation with affordable and attainable housing. Eligibility for the units is limited to those earning 120% of AMI. The renovation preserved approximately 70% of the original exterior in accordance with Martha's Vineyard Commission requirements, as well as maintaining compliance with local historic overlay regulations. An anonymous church member generously pledged to cover the costs of the historic renovation, and by not using State or CPA funds, it allowed the Church the option in the future of housing a pastor there if ever needed.

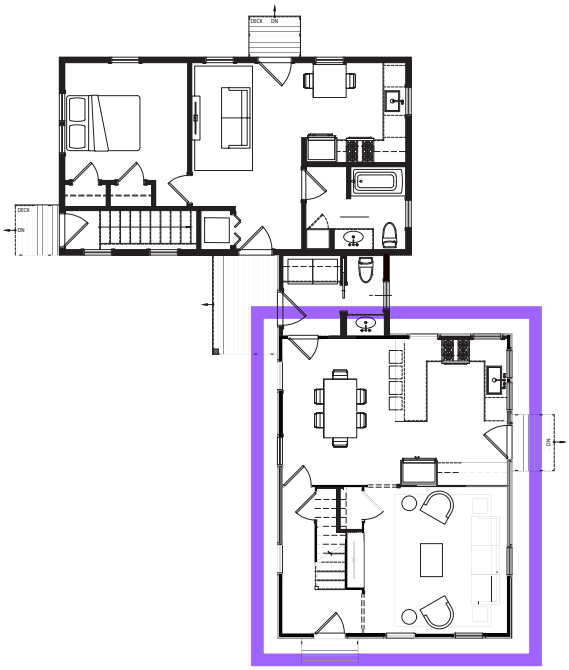
Changes to the interior wall layout were made to facilitate the construction of the second unit, and insulation was added throughout the building to improve energy efficiency. Additional support came through donated solar panels, and the project overall had strong community backing throughout the planning and public engagement process.



Floor Plans

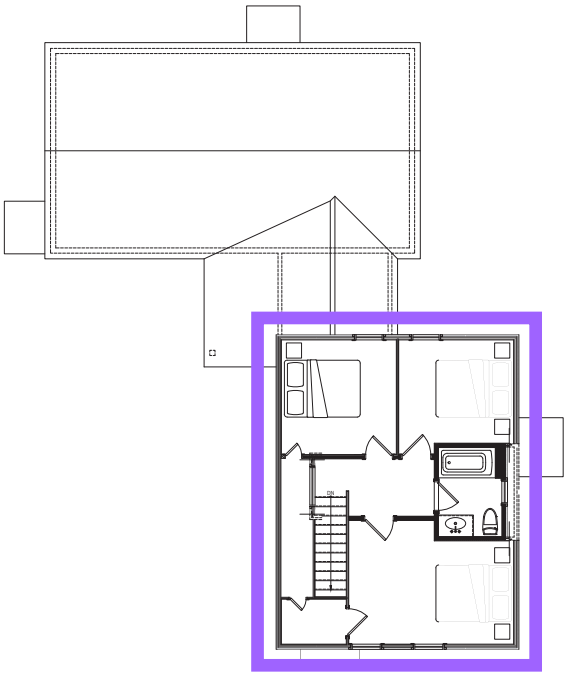


Basement



First Floor

The building's historic exterior is preserved, while the interior is reconfigured into two homes.



Second Floor

Before



After



Daggett Avenue

Tisbury, MA
Previously: Single-Family House & Guest House, 1970 & 1999
Completed Reuse Year: 2020

INFORMATION	
Number of Units	3 Units
Unit Types	3-bedrooms
Size	1,291 SF, 2,904 SF, 1,162 SF
Time of Construction	6 months
Total Development Cost	$1 million
Team *Design, Owner, and Developer*	Island Housing Trust

ENABLERS	
On-site Infrastructure	On-site enhanced septic system – NitROE Waste-Water Treatment System
Zoning Leverage	Project secured a multi-family special permit zoning approval from the Tisbury Planning Board
Funding Sources	Island Housing Trust Donors, Tisbury CPC Grant, IHT's Make It Happen Fund (social impact investment acquisition bridge loan)

Project Description

A model for “downsizing”, Daggett Avenue is a project made possible via the owner of a 2-acre property and single-family home who downsized to the existing guest house on the 1-acre portion of the property. The Island Housing Trust in turn transformed the main house into two 3-bedroom homes that were sold to two income qualified homebuyer families (80-120% AMI).

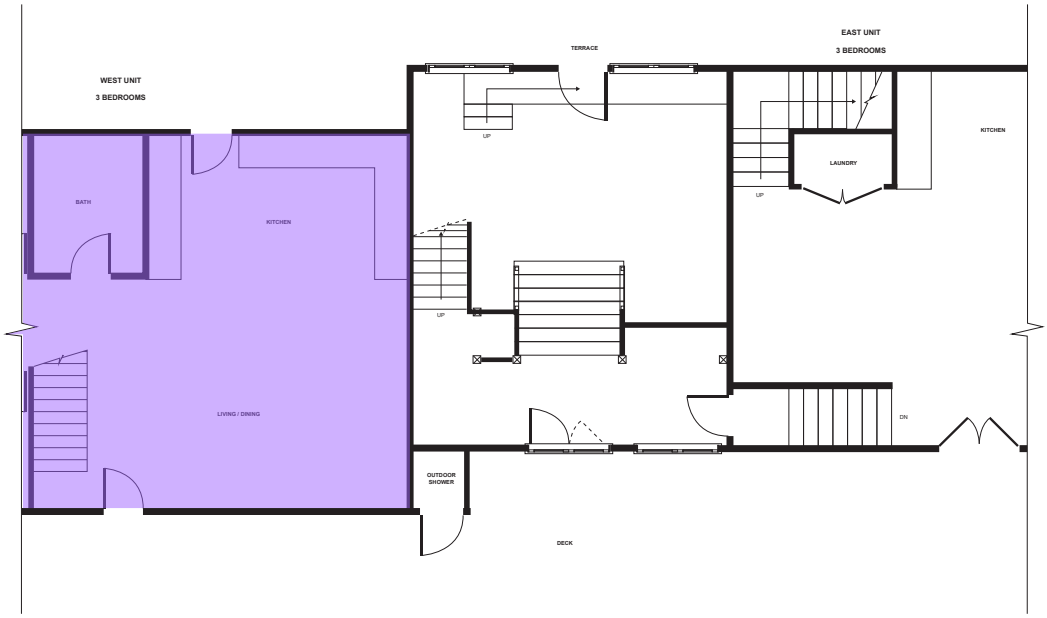
Initially, owner Gary Birge was preparing to sell his home when Island Housing Trust expressed interest in creating more homes on the site, a mile away from the center of town. Through a public hearing process involving the Tisbury Planning Board with input from neighboring property owners, the property is now ground leased to three separate homeowners to accommodate all on site. This includes the existing single-family house that was repurposed into two 3-bedroom duplex units and the existing guest house that was retained by Birge.

The project makes use of a NitROE Waste-Water Treatment System, which is designed, fabricated, and installed locally by KleanTu LLC of Edgartown. The installation of this product is designed to produce highly treated water that achieves more than 90% total nitrogen removal and 98% reduction of coliform pathogen bacteria. IHT also Installed Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) for heating/cooling and hot water.

This downsizing story was produced into a short film with the help of the MV Film Festival. Click here to view the video.

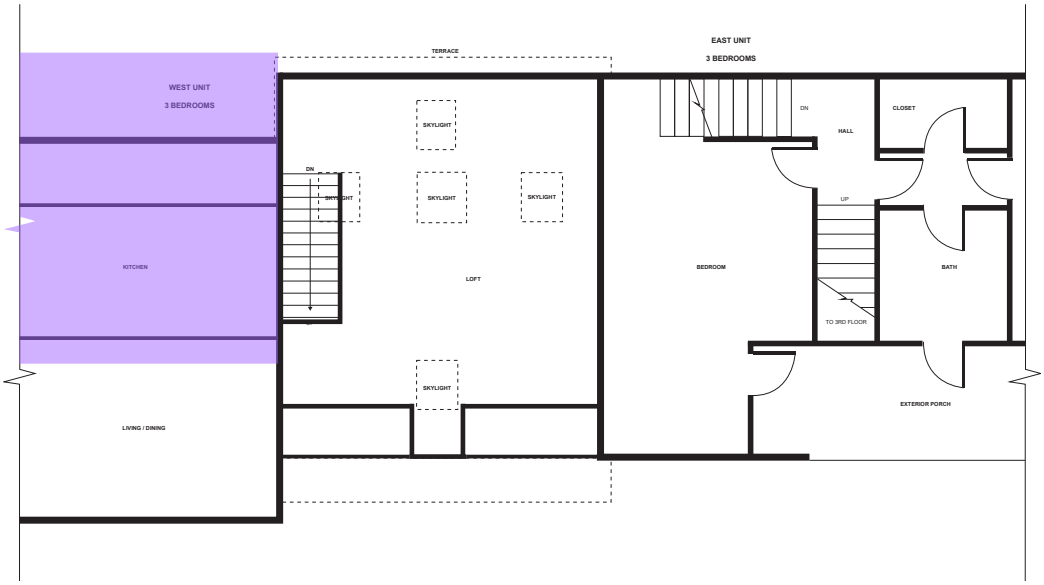


Floor Plans



First Floor

An existing property is subdivided and ground-leased to create multiple year-round homes.



Second Floor

Subdivided Home





Cottage





CASE STUDY: SINGLE-FAMILY HOME

66 Pochick Avenue

Nantucket, MA
Previously: Single-Family House, 1996
Completed Reuse Year: 2025

INFORMATION	
Number of Units	1 Unit
Unit Types	2-bedroom 2-bath
Size	~1,419 SF
Time of Construction	6 months
Total Development Cost	~$560,000
Team	
Architect	Chip Webster Architecture
Owner/Developer	Housing Nantucket
House Movers, Foundation and Excavation Work	Barrett Enterprises
General Contractor	Mercatus Builders

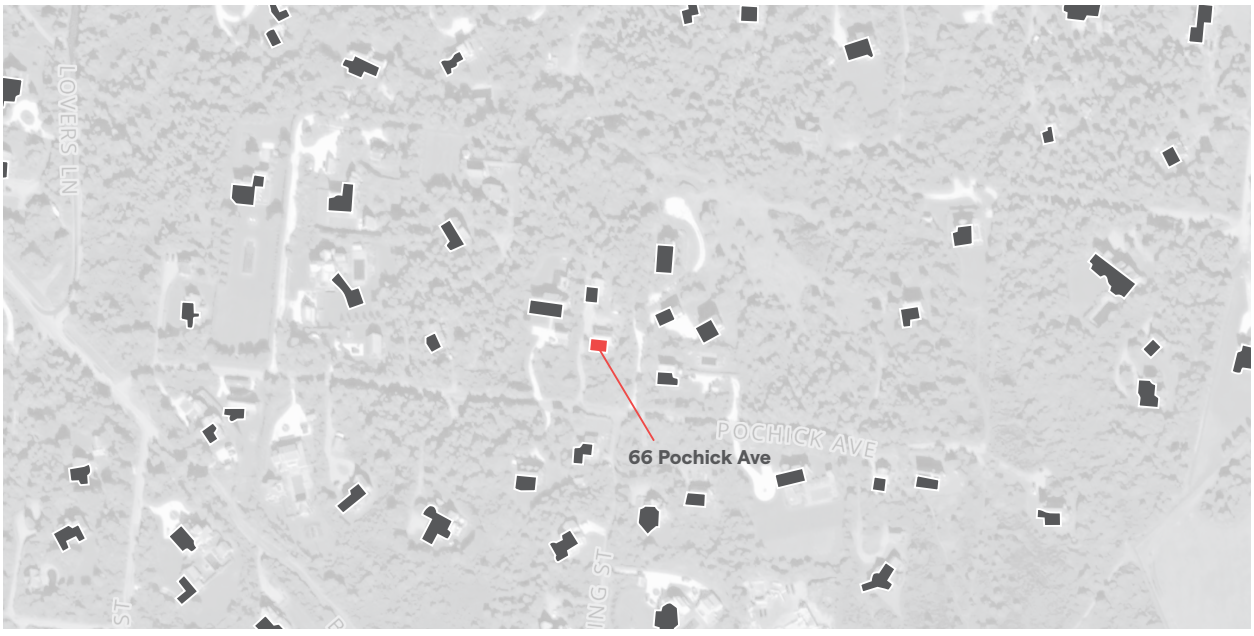
ENABLERS	
On-site Infrastructure	Septic system (with updates)
Zoning Leverage	Tertiary Dwelling Unit (Special Permit by Planning Board)
Funding Sources	Town of Nantucket Affordable Housing Trust; Community Foundation for Nantucket; Housing Nantucket equity; 2 Dukes Road homeowner

Project Description

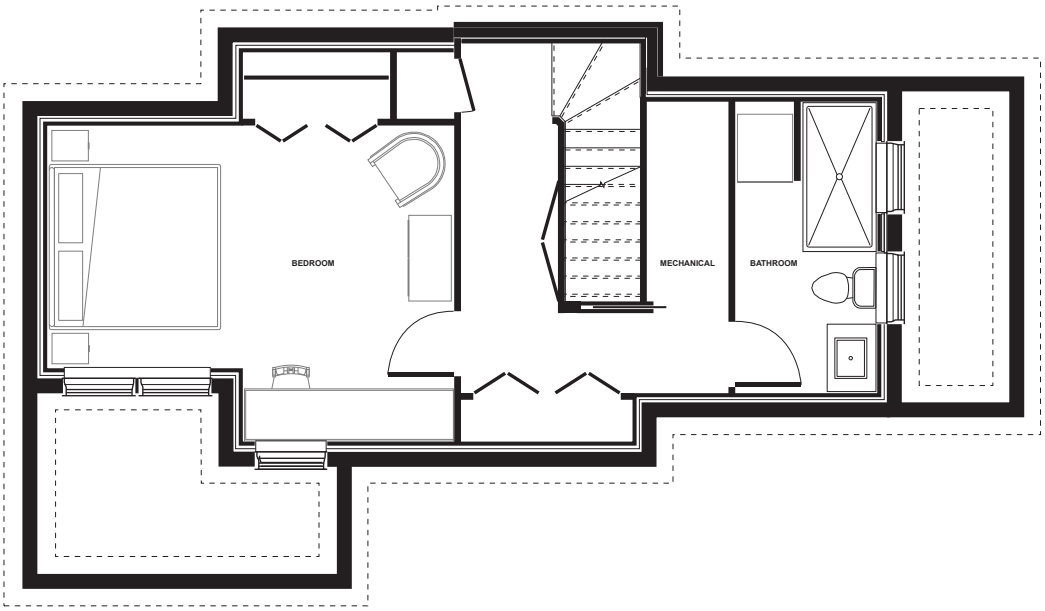
House moves, a longstanding practice on Nantucket since the 1600s, have been an effective strategy for preventing home demolitions and providing homes for residents on the Island. Since 1994, Housing Nantucket, a nonprofit dedicated to creating affordable housing opportunities for year-round residents, has utilized house moves through its House-Recycling Program to create affordable rental homes for the island community.

To ensure logistics involving the relocation of the structure went smoothly, the owner's architect and lawyer were involved throughout the permitting and design process. n the fall of 2023, Housing Nantucket identified its property at 66 Pochick Avenue as suitable to receive a relocated dwelling. The 1.1-acre parcel already contained two existing 2-bedroom single-family homes occupied as affordable rental units. Housing Nantucket installed a six-bedroom Innovative/Alternative Septic System to accommodate two additional bedrooms on the site. Shortly after, a 1-bedroom, 1-bath cottage slated for demolition became available for relocation. Approximately four miles from the subject site, the building was constructed in 1996 and was in very good condition. The homeowner donated the dwelling to Housing Nantucket's House-Recycling Program, along with funds or the move and rehabilitation work.

Following relocation, Housing Nantucket expanded the cottage into a 2-bedroom, 2-bath home totaling approximately 1,419 square feet by adding a full basement. This substantially increased the usable square footage without expanding the visible footprint of the home, while doubling the housing capacity and preserving the scale of the original home. While the project still required substantial upgrades—such as constructing a full basement, reinforcing structural elements, and updating building systems to meet current codes—the ability to repurpose an existing structure reduced both material and labor costs overall. This approach allowed Housing Nantucket to create new housing capacity more efficiently while extending the life of an existing home. Electricity produced by solar panels located on the property is utilized to help power the cottage through a net-metering arrangement. Recorded deed restrictions will ensure this dwelling will house low and moderate income residents in perpetuity.

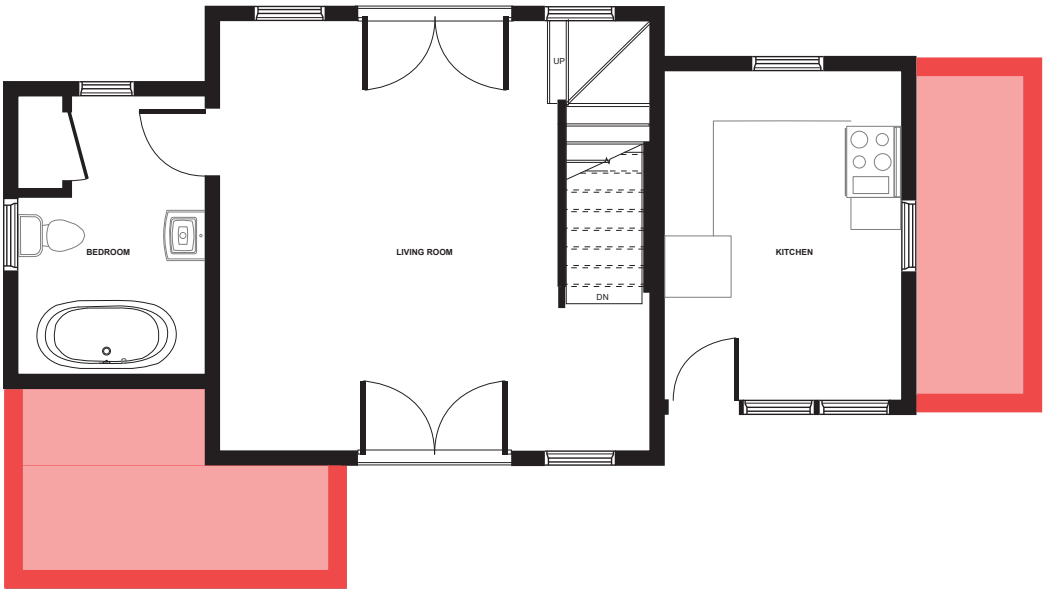


Floor Plans



Basement

A donated house is relocated and expanded above a new basement for year-round housing



First Floor

Before





After

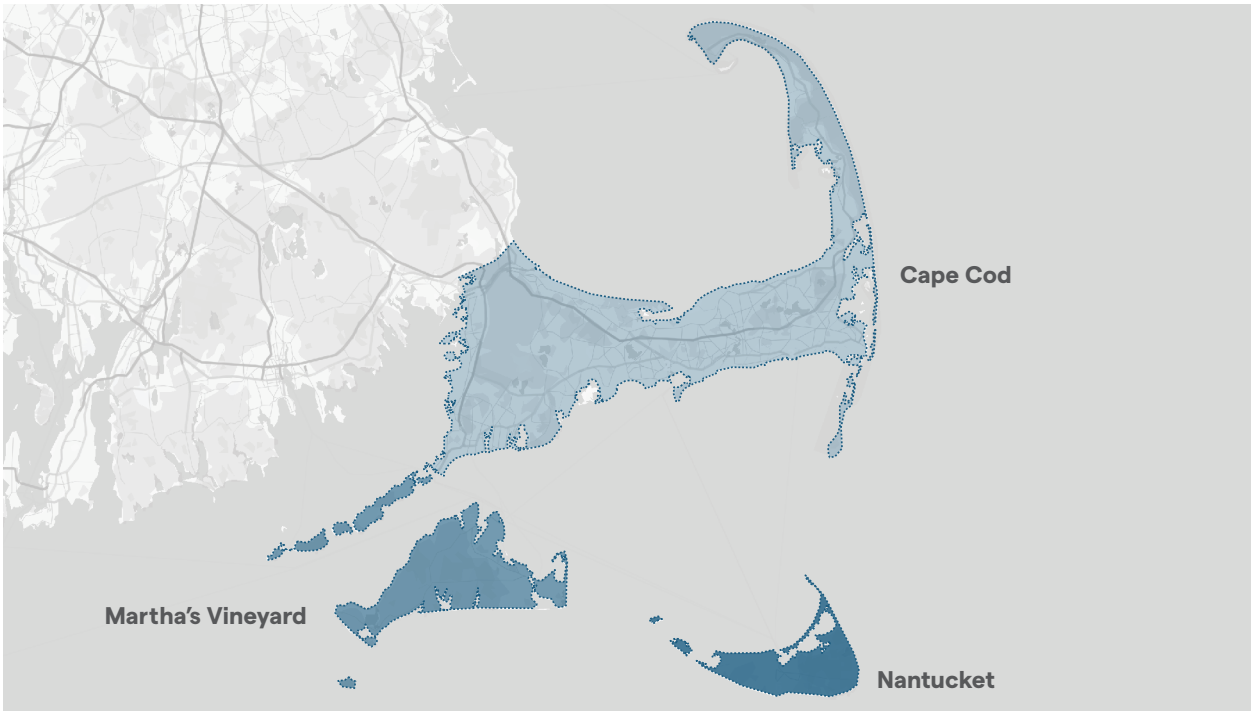




Conclusion

What Is Adaptive Reuse?: Practical Solutions for the Cape & Islands set out to be a case study analysis to demonstrate successful and replicable adaptive reuse projects that can be scaled across the region. It showcases how these stories are rooted in different areas and communities, shaped by different structures and equally varied outcomes. Highlighting these six specific adaptive reuse case studies, including academic, commercial, firehouse, faith-based property, and single-family home, the guidebook uncovered not only different obstacles and processes, but previously unimagined opportunities and triumphs for housing creation. It also underscored a quiet truth:

We cannot simply build our way out of today's challenges.



"Collaborative partnerships were the through-line for all the case studies; without effective alliances, these projects would have never succeeded."

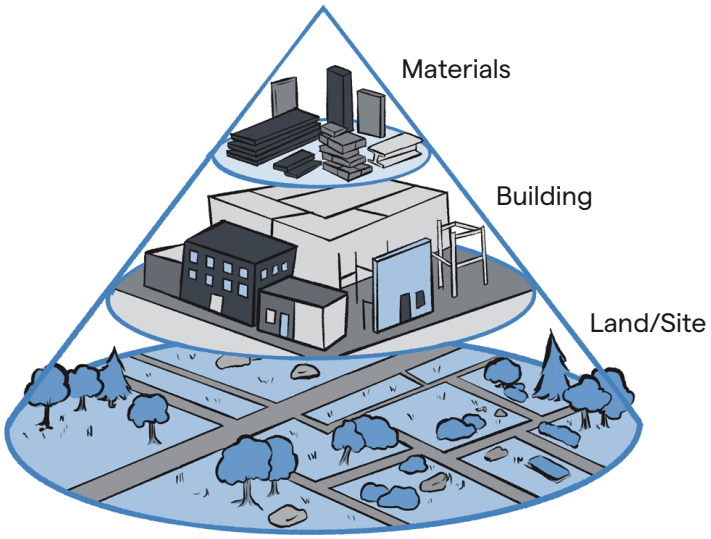


Adaptive reuse can measure against new construction not just in dollars but in memory, identity, and sense of place. These are structures people have walked by every day on their way to work or school, and their renewal to the community offers a way to meet the intersecting urgencies of historic preservation, climate responsibility, natural resources conservation, and housing needs. Adaptive reuse has the flexibility to support sustainable development at all levels, including land, material, and building reuse, while not erasing what came before and providing for generations to come. This is one approach among many, but it is a powerful one for this region and can be scaled when supported by thoughtful design, strong partnerships, and aligned policy.

While grounded in the Cape, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket, this work has broader implications. Many rural, suburban, and coastal communities across eastern Massachusetts and beyond face similar constraints. By documenting what's already working in the Cape and Islands, this guidebook aims to serve as a resource that can be adapted, expanded, and replicated across regions.

The path forward calls for collaboration with design professionals, allowing experts to reimagine the possibilities and opportunities that stand before them. It calls for deeper relationships between sectors that can result in meaningful community engagement and contributions. Collaborative partnerships were the through-line for all the case studies; without effective alliances, these projects would have never succeeded. Nevertheless, to increase the number of adaptive reuse projects to meet the region's demands, sustained advocacy is essential to advance incentives, funding opportunities, and shape policy at every level, local, state, and federal.

The future of this region will not be built from scratch but will be carefully and imaginatively rewritten from what already stands.



Resources

Interested in exploring adaptive reuse in your community? The resources below offer a starting point for further learning and exploration. While not exhaustive, this list highlights key tools, examples, and references related to themes explored in this guidebook.

Architecture and Design

BSA Architect Directory: a list of architects and firms with interest in or experience designing adaptive reuse projects. Architects with expertise in residential and adaptive reuse are essential to facilitating the permit and construction process.

Building with Nantucket in Mind: guidelines to assist property owners in the preservation of the island's architectural heritage and the conservation of its landscape.

Design Guidelines for Cape Cod: a design manual that includes comprehensive information on site planning, landscape design, lighting, and architecture.

Housing Nantucket's House Recycling Program: a program where houses slated for demolition are "recycled" by moving them to new locations and renting them to year-round residents.

Remain's Salvage and Reuse: a project that explores systematic advances in deconstruction and repurposed materials to foster a circular economy and a more responsible future for Nantucket.



Weatherization: insights from the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center to support homeowners in creating a more insulated home to save money on operating costs and reduce carbon emissions throughout the year.

Funding and Financing

BSA Penciling Out Report: a BSA report providing insights into financing strategies for making green, decarbonized, and affordable housing a feasible reality. Pages 20–23 outline financial resources to support housing creation, including but not limited to statewide climate incentives and federal tax credits.

Cape Cod 5's Construction Loan: a resource offering one-step financing for the construction of a new home or rehabilitation of an existing home.

Community Preservation Act Funds: a resource to identify if your town has been distributed CPA funds to pursue funding for adaptive reuse projects.

Housing Trust: a public entity or dedicated fund established by state or local governments to create, rehabilitate, and preserve affordable housing. Look up your local housing trust to identify ways to support financial support for adaptive reuse projects.

Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC): a federally authorized program for nonprofit and for-profit developers to promote the construction and rehabilitation of affordable rental housing.

Massachusetts Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit: a pilot program with $110 million currently available annually for certified rehabilitation projects. The rehabilitation is required to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Mass Save Rebates: a resource to discover how our energy-saving services, products, and offers can help you save more and live better.

Regulatory

Cape Cod Commission's "A Design-Driven Housing Model Bylaw": a model bylaw for design-driven housing (re)development on Cape Cod. With some adaptation and local decision-making, this text could be adopted as a standalone district within a local zoning bylaw/ordinance for Cape Cod towns. The model bylaw sets out to increase the supply of diverse and attainable housing options, encourage development in areas served by infrastructure and amenities, complement existing villages and neighborhoods, encourage adaptive reuse, and provide a more walkable mixed-use environment on commercial corridors.

A Framework for Form-Based Codes on Cape Cod by the Cape Cod Commission and Union Studio: a form-based code framework that highlights a series of context-appropriate prototype designs that could deliver needed housing options at densities between the typical single-family, detached house and the large format, multifamily, corridor building, which are the dominant forms of residential development today.

Cape Cod Mixed-Use Model Bylaw by the Cape Cod Commission: a model zoning amendment that allows mixed-use development (residential over retail) for Cape Cod towns. This model bylaw envisions a range of mixed-use developments that could be appropriate in certain areas of Cape Cod.

Cape Cod Model Single-Family Conversion Bylaw: a draft of a zoning amendment designed to allow Cape towns to convert some single-family homes into multifamily units while preserving the region's housing character and open space.

Chapter 40B: a guide to Chapter 40B planning and information to assist planners and developers in their affordable housing efforts.

Code of the Town of Nantucket: the official ordinances, bylaws, and regulations governing the island's operations and community standards.

Community Land Trust: a nonprofit organization that allows land to be held "in trust" for community needs, outside of the influence of market pressures. Local examples include the Island Housing Trust on Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Land Trust on Nantucket.

Martha's Vineyard's Commission Edgartown Zoning Bylaw: a zoning bylaw intended to promote the health, safety, convenience, and welfare of the inhabitants of Edgartown and to provide the benefits and protection authorized by Chapter 40A of the Massachusetts General Laws.

Tisbury Zoning Bylaw: a zoning bylaw intended to promote the health, safety, convenience and welfare of Tisbury and to provide the benefits and protection authorized by Chapter 40A of the Massachusetts General Laws.

Hyannis Regulatory Approval Flow Chart by Union Studios: an illustrative example of how to navigate the regulatory process of Barnstable. See Figure A in the Appendix.

Infrastructure

Approved Title 5 Innovative/Alternative (I/A) Technologies: a webpage that includes all technologies approved for use under the Title 5 Regulations (310 CMR 15.000). Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MASSDEP) must approve any innovative/alternative septic-system technology before it can be used in Massachusetts.

Cape Cod Commission Innovative/Alternative (I/A) Septic System Information Sheet: a resource outlining the benefits and examples of the use of I/A septic systems on Cape Cod, which are relevant to the region overall.

Eco-Toilet Systems: a webpage created by the Massachusetts Alternative Septic System Test Center (MASSTC) that highlights eco-sanitation systems on Cape Cod. "Eco-San" is a sanitation strategy that aims to manage human waste in ways that sustainably maximize resource value and protect the health of people and ecosystems.

Falmouth Urine Diversion Project: a urine diversion project for watershed management planning developed by MASSTC and the Town of Falmouth. This project will evaluate the feasibility of using urine diversion (UD) eco-toilet systems in watershed areas to reduce nutrient pollution and help the Falmouth meet regulatory water quality targets.



Nantucket Septic Loan Program: a 2% fixed interest rate over twenty years Betterment Loan for qualifying homeowners of residential properties whose septic systems have failed in an environmentally sensitive area documented by a Massachusetts Title 5 System Inspector.

Appendix

Sources

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Page 8 | Cape Cod and the Islands, John Ross MacDonald

Page 10 | Seasonal and Vacation Homes (%), Legislatively designated seasonal communities, EOHLC

Page 19 | Coady Schools Before | Dellbrook JKS

Page 19 | Coady Schools After | Sarah Winchester Photography

Page 23 | Hyannis Mixed Use Before | Union Studio Architecture & Community Design

Page 23 | Hyannis Mixed Use After | Union Studio Architecture & Community Design

APPENDIX

Page 27 | Old Harwich Firehouse Before | Gerry Beetham

Page 27 | Old Harwich Firehouse After | Gerry Beetham

Page 31 | Old Gayhead Parsonage Before | Derrill Bazzy

Page 31 | Old Gayhead Parsonage After | Derrill Bazzy

Page 35 | Daggett Avenue Subdivided Home | Island Housing Trust, Randi Baird

Page 35 | Daggett Avenue Cottage | Randi Baird, Island Housing Trust

Page 39 | 66 Pochick Before | Housing Nantucket

Page 39 | 66 Pochick After | Housing Nantucket

Page 48 | Town of Barnstable Regulatory Approval Flow Chart | Originally created by Union Studio Architecture & Community Design, redrawn by Jillian King

Hyannis Mixed Use Commercial Project: Regulatory Approval Flow

STEP 1

New Project

Site Plan Review: The interdepartmental review provides advice to the Barnstable Building. Commissioner on whether a proposed plan meets site plan development Standards. ***See Town of Barnstable Code, §§240-98 through 240-105, and 250-24.1-10***

Building Commissioner will determine if development meets Cape Cod Commission District of Regional Impact (DRI) Thresholds.

Submit: *Site Plan Review Application*
Where: *Building Commissioner, 2000 Main Street, Hyannis, MA*

THE FOLLOWING MEETING WILL THEN BE SCHEDULED:
SITE PLAN REVIEW

Building Commissioner with representative(s) from Town Departments, Planning, the Board of Health, the Department of Public Works, and other departments requested to participate.

IF NO
Continue to Town approvals process

IF YES
See Section 12(h) of Cape Cod Commission Act

Project Referred to Cape Cod Commission
Project will continue under Commission Review

If the Hyannis Village Zoning Districts are designed as a Growth Incentive Zone, after the effective date of the town's Regulatory Agreement Ordinance (The Code §168), the negotiation of a tri-party agreement between the town, the applicant, and the Cape Cod Commission will be available as an alternative DRI review.

Once Commission approval is granted project returns to Town approvals process

STEP 2 (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Hyannis Mixed Use Commercial Project: Regulatory Approval Flow

STEP 2

Is the project within the Hyannis Main Street Waterfront District?

See Town Code §§112.23-112.36

IF NO

Submit: *Plans, Request Materials*
Where: *Regulatory Review, 200 Main Street, Hyannis, MA*

THE FOLLOWING MEETING WILL THEN OCCUR:

Design Review

IF YES

Submit: *Plans, Request Materials*
Where: *Regulatory Review, 200 Main Street, Hyannis, MA*

THE FOLLOWING MEETING WILL THEN OCCUR:

Historic District Commission Review

Hyannis Main St. Waterfront Historic District Commission

Project receives a certificate of appropriateness, certificate of non-applicability, or certificate of hardship

STEP 3 (CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Hyannis Mixed Use Commercial Project: Regulatory Approval Flow

STEP 3

Is zoning relief necessary? (Building Commissioner and Site Plan Review will have already determined this for you.)

IF NO, FINAL STEP

Submit: *Building Permit Application*
Where: *Building Commissioner, 200 Main Street, Hyannis, MA*

IF YES, STEP 4

Apply to either the Planning Board for a Special Permit or to the Zoning Board of Appeals for a Variance or Appeal from Administrative Office Decision

See the Code §§ Section 240-24.I-2(E)

Submit: *Special Permit Application*
Where: *Regulatory Review, 200 Main Street, Hyannis, MA*

THE FOLLOWING MEETING WILL THEN OCCUR

Planning Board Review
Barnstable Planning Board

See the Code §§ 240-125B

Submit: *Special Permit Application*
Where: *Regulatory Review, 200 Main Street, Hyannis, MA*

THE FOLLOWING MEETING WILL THEN OCCUR

Zoning Board of Appeals Review
Barnstable Zoning Board of Appeals

1) Is project is in compliance with all other applicable local, state, regional, or federal permit, approvals or requirements (i.e. order of conditions, state building code, etc.)?

2) If the project creates ten or more residential dwelling units, submit proof of compliance with the Inclusionary Affordable Housing Requirements (The Code §9).

IF COMPLIANT

Building Code Granted



BSA

Civic Design Labs

2026