

SECTION 10: COMMUNITY CHARACTER

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The magnificent scope of Ogunquit's natural resources (the seeds from which any settlement grows) is echoed by the spectrum of people who occupy it: 1,226 year-round residents who represent a broad variety of lifestyles; and thousands of others (the Town population increases about 10-fold) during the April-to-September tourist season, who range from day-trippers to vacationers to 2nd home dwellers.

Of those who live here, the majority are homeowners. Many own, or are employed at in-town tourist-related businesses. There are a high proportion of older retired people. There are relatively few children. The fisheries (primarily lobster and tuna, but also haddock, cod, clams) keep natural color and a continuity of tradition in the community, even after the demise of other traditional occupations (agriculture, lumbering, boat-building) that formerly provided livelihood and meaning to the townspeople.

Income data from the 2000 US Census show that year-round households are mainly in the middle bracket, with 56% earning in the range between \$25,000 and \$75,000. The median Ogunquit household income in 2000 was \$56,731, which was 110% of the York County median of \$51,419. Only 9% of Ogunquit households earned less than \$25,000. Higher income households earning between \$75,000 and \$200,000 represented 30% of the year-round residents; 5% of the households earned more than \$200,000. It is likely that many of the seasonal residents in houses near the shore are in the higher income brackets. Undoubtedly, some of the year-round residents in the higher income brackets were one-time seasonal residents who retired to their second home in Ogunquit.

With property prices and tax valuations gone beyond the reach of modest-income-level people, there is limited housing opportunity here for the workforce (both municipal and private sector employees) who are the fiber of any town: safety, health, education personnel; and in this town, hospitality-industry staff, developing artists and many native born, some tracing their origins to the earliest settlers.

Tourism has grown enormously since the 1880s when people were drawn here mainly because of a beach that is among the best in the world. By the turn of the century, Ogunquit became known for its art colony; it has flourished for over 100 years, and continues to attract and stimulate artists (though it does not nurture them as it did in the past). Among them, a few have been (and will be) the stuff of history.

The town is enhanced by the Ogunquit Art Association, 1928; the Ogunquit Museum of American Art, 1953 and several commercial galleries; plus the Ogunquit Playhouse, 1933 - one of the oldest continuously running summer theatres in the Country - a movie theatre and the historic Winn House, a town museum dedicated to the historic art colony and fishing community. A music series is presented every summer by one of the churches (of which there are three, two of them seasonal). Also, Ogunquit Performing Arts, a Town Committee, sponsors graphic and performing arts events throughout the year.

Individual philanthropists have enriched the community with the Ogunquit Memorial Library, 1897; the Marginal Way, 1923; the Ogunquit Museum of American Art, 1953; the Dunaway Center (community building and Town Offices), 1974; the Dorothea Grant Common, 2001 on the Jacobs Lot, 1976; and numerous other less-visible gifts.

The seaside-village character of Ogunquit has also been an attraction to visitors and immigrants, though less so now as its original attributes have been partially supplanted by features designed to appeal to the tastes of today's vacationer such as larger motels with indoor pools. More than 50% of year-round and seasonal residents who answered the Comprehensive Plan Update Survey (Summer 2001) favored preserving a small town, New England character for Ogunquit with community centers and a diversity of housing near stores and schools. Sixty percent (60%) of the Survey respondents favored a mixture of housing densities and patterns. Other concerns expressed were led by summer traffic congestion; taxes and school funding; commercial over-crowding by tourist rental lodgings; parking and pedestrian facilities. These issues formed a backdrop, which the Comprehensive Plan Visioning Session subsequently addressed (April 2002) in clarifying what was meant by the townspeople when thinking about our future desired community character.

Even as its little four-square-mile parcel of land is intersected by a major eastern-seaboard highway, the Town still retains its individuality and charm, with a mix of elegance and rusticity: a classic pillared mansion; an assortment of small cottages resembling an early 20th Century tourist court; a scattering of vintage dwellings and stores; a cluster of former fish shacks and artists studios at Perkins Cove turned into restaurants and shops overlooking a harbor of 86 moorings for 16 fishing vessels and 70 pleasure craft; meadows and gardens that slope to the sea at Beach Plum Farm (land trust land); craggy cliffs hosting the famous Marginal Way footpath and deep woods extending into, and perched above, the Village from the west of Route One; an estuary of fresh mountain-stream water mixing with the briny waters of the Atlantic Ocean that nurtures re-opened clam flats in 1997 alongside a mile of remnant dunes; comfortable public parks scattered throughout the Village anchored by the Dorothea Grant Common; and a populace that has often enough been visionary enough to establish and preserve the essentials of a good place.

The townspeople built bridges across the estuary to access the beach in the center of town in 1887 and at the northerly end in 1950. They dynamited and dredged safe anchorage at Perkins Cove in 1857 and 1938. They attained village-corporation rights in 1913 and town status in 1980. They succeeded in litigation in 1923 to regain the beach, which had been bought from the State by a developer. Ogunquit Beach subsequently became one of the few town-owned beaches along the entire Maine coast. The Town sued the federal government in 1975 to rescue the Beach's dune system from the effects of a USDA flood-control dike (which resulted in a draw). The Town adopted zoning in 1958, updating it often (and trying still to keep pace with the changes of the 21st Century).

A footnote: The fabled humorist Marshall Dodge (co-author and narrator of Bert and I) came downeast by way of Ogunquit. His name already synonymous with Maine (though he was a product of New York City and Yale University), he visited here in the 1970s, liked what he

saw (which he called a genial mix of the bohemian and the bourgeois) and decided to move in (settling near Portland actually and then founding the Maine Festival). That this town made him want to be in Maine and with the people he had tweaked (with affection) for years before experiencing the phenomenon firsthand is a metaphor that serves to distinguish Ogunquit.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS FROM COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Ogunquit has two community characters. On the one hand, there are still scattered aspects of its historic 19th Century character as a coastal fishing, farming, boat building settlement overlaid with its early 20th Century arts colony, summer hotel and summer home ambiance. These characteristics may be found primarily east of Route One in the older residential neighborhoods along the shore within which a number of historic homes and inns have been preserved and in Perkins Cove in which some of the original fishing character remains. On the other hand, there is the late 20th Century motel strip along Route One north and the hotel strip along Shore Road that reflect the character of contemporary automobile-based vacationing.

The major issue is how best to balance these two community characters, even integrate them. During the 1990s, based on the 1993 Comprehensive Plan, the Town attempted – quite successfully – to reconcile the two town characters through zoning and design review ordinances. These confined new hotel/motels to the Route One North strip while allowing for preservation of historic buildings in the Route One and Shore Road business areas by the design review process administered by the Planning Board.

In the 21st Century, the aging of the population in general is likely to continue to bring more retired people to live in Ogunquit either year-round or partial-year, some having been local summer home owners in the past. It may be assumed that this increasing retiree population would be more interested in the historic community character of Ogunquit than its hotel/motel tourist trade character, but not exclusively. The tourist trade helps support local museums, theatre and makes possible good restaurants in town, all of which also benefit the residents. The overlapping benefits of the historic village and the resident's historic housing, in turn, contributes ambiance to the tourist trade and a congenial setting for contemporary hotels and motels. There are, indeed, elements within both community characters that may form the basis for better integration of the two.

The Planning challenge will be to, in fact, better affect the integration of the two communities while preserving the ambiance of the quiet historic residential neighborhoods in the Village. Whereas the 1990s saw the application of the regulatory approach (through zoning, etc.), the 2000s will need to apply a capital improvements approach. This will need to include design and implementation of such public facility developments as new or rehabilitated sidewalks, cross walks, pathway maintenance and integration of town parks, trolley route extensions and possibly satellite parking lots. The design review process coupled to the enlightened stewardship of historic properties by both the residential and business communities will be needed if the historic character of the community is to be preserved and, more importantly, contribute to the contemporary resort character of Town.

As part of pursuing a balance between, and integration of, the two community characters of Ogunquit, the tourist population along with the residential population provides the opportunity to capitalize more on the Town's historic assets including its museums and theatres to develop more cultural tourism. The traditional tourist benefits principally for families and youth from the recreational enjoyment of the beach, the restaurants, shops, and clubs that cater to a younger crowd, may, perhaps, be better balanced with more amenities aimed at the tourist and resident: museums, theatres, parks, walkways and the like.

Long-term preservation of the historic community character of Ogunquit will depend on being able to use the remaining historic artifacts so that they pay for their upkeep – an empty museum or playhouse does not pay for itself. On the other hand, the contemporary resort character of Ogunquit represented by hotels, motels, inns and B&Bs will continue to respond to the changing vacation market. Again, the Town will need to attend to the community infrastructure such that the beach and estuary maintain the water quality upon which the entire resort economy is built. Upon environmental quality maintenance, the other community infrastructure elements may be evolved successfully: sidewalks, pathways, parks, landscaping, trolley service and the integration of all these elements to hospitality lodging, the beaches and the cultural amenities in Town.