

WAMPANOAG TRIBE OF GAY HEAD (AQUINNAH)



Project Title:	Wampanoag Land Use Master Plan Project
Award Amount:	\$114,339
Type of Grant:	Social and Economic Development Strategies
Project Period:	Sept. 2008 – Sept. 2010
Grantee Type:	Tribe

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

- 1 job created
- \$50,000 in leveraged resources
- 2 partnerships formed

BACKGROUND

Aquinnah (formerly known as Gay Head) is a small town on the island of Martha’s Vineyard located six miles off the Massachusetts coastline. Aquinnah in particular and Martha’s Vineyard in general are home to a sizable fraction of the Wampanoag Tribe. Of the 1,104 enrolled tribal members, 302 live on Martha’s Vineyard, with 125 in Aquinnah where the tribe’s reservation is located. Another 400 tribal members live on the Massachusetts mainland. In recent decades, many Wampanoag have moved away from Aquinnah to seek better employment opportunities. Tribal members still residing there live in relative isolation, experiencing a lower level of community cohesion than previous generations of Wampanoag.

Until recently, there was little outside interest in the land around Aquinnah, owing to the poor agricultural potential of the soil. Recently, however, this condition has changed dramatically with the influx of non-

tribal, part-time and full-time residents. Real estate values have skyrocketed, often beyond the ability of Wampanoag members to pay property taxes. This has hindered efforts by the tribe to purchase more of its ancestral land in and around Aquinnah.

In 2005, the Tribal Council adopted a strategic plan (TCSP), to revitalize Wampanoag culture and history through the exercise of inherent sovereign powers, and promote self-sufficiency via viable economic development ventures and the active involvement of all tribal members. To reach these goals, the TCSP identified land use, resource accessibility, and land purchase issues as key matters to address. The Tribal Council sought to tackle these issues and respond to new realities, particularly those related to zoning and preservation of open spaces, through a new Land Use Master Plan (LUMP).

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this project was to enable the Wampanoag tribal government to expand its capacity to govern and manage its ancestral homelands and resources for the benefit of future generations.

The key objectives of the project were: 1) updating the 1993 Aquinnah Wampanoag

Land Use Master Plan (LUMP); 2) conducting a land needs assessment survey of the Wampanoag general membership; 3) providing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) training for tribal personnel; and 4) creating policies for land acquisition in line with the 2005 Tribal Council strategic plan.

In the first year of the grant, the project team encountered a major challenge, struggling to find a consultant to begin project activities. Because the project called for the consultant to carry out the objectives, the project got off to a very late start. Project leaders made the decision to request a no-cost extension from ANA to accomplish the first year’s objectives, and return the funding for the second year. This request was granted.

To accomplish the first objective, the tribal administration staff advertised for and hired a lead consultant and project coordinator, who began accumulating and organizing data on land ownership in Aquinnah and information from the tribe’s previous strategic planning endeavors. Next, the team formed a LUMP Task Force (LUMPTF); hosted a meeting involving LUMPTF and the tribal council; and held a general kick-off meeting open to all tribal members to discuss land acquisition strategies, the land use survey planned for objective two, and other project-specific issues.

For objective two, the project team devised a land needs assessment survey, asking tribal members for their opinions and feedback on land use, natural resources, housing, development, and quality of life issues in Aquinnah. The team then mailed the survey to all tribal reservation households in Aquinnah and approximately 30 tribal members, or 20 percent of tribal members there, responded. Analyzing the survey responses, the project team learned much about community thoughts and attitudes on

land use, resource accessibility, and land purchase issues.

Project staff did not submit any reports to ANA beyond the second quarter of year two. Therefore, ANA is not able to determine if the project team was able to complete objective three, which was to provide GIS training for tribal personnel. Because these reports were not submitted, ANA also is unable to determine whether the LUMP Task Force completed the updated Land Use Master Plan (objective one), and whether the project team was able to analyze the results of surveys collected (objective two).

OUTCOMES AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

A database of land ownership in Aquinnah is being created with information from assessors and deeds registries catalogued. GIS overlays also are being created but ownership information has not been entered fully.

The project has resulted in the formation of two new partnerships, the Martha’s Vineyard Commission (MVC) and the Town of Aquinnah. The MVC and Wampanoag Tribe have agreed to share information and resources. In addition, officials from the Aquinnah town government have met with the tribe, and the town assessor has provided maps and other information to assist in this project. The town has indicated a willingness to help provide further information as needed.

With these partnerships in place, the tribe has established a valuable network which will sustain any continuation of the tribe’s future efforts in developing the Land Use Master Plan.