



Town of Orleans

19 School Road Orleans Massachusetts 02653-3699

Telephone (508) 240-3700 – Fax (508) 240-3388

September 30, 2022

TO: Select Board and Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board
FROM: Governor Prence Planning Committee
SUBJECT: Report on the Re-Use of the Governor Prence Motel Property

The Select Board appointed the Governor Prence Planning Committee to recommend how to redevelop the property at 66 & 76 Route 6A, formerly the Governor Prence Motel and an adjacent commercial lot. This report represents the final report of the Committee, accompanied by the consultant report prepared by the Barrett Planning Group.

INTRODUCTION: On May 22, 2021, the Orleans Town Meeting approved Article 23, authorizing the Town and/or the Orleans Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) to acquire for general municipal purposes, including but not limited to affordable housing, the land known as the Governor Prence Motel at 66 Route 6A and the land at 76 Route 6A. The acquisition provided the time needed to reach consensus on the best possible re-use to meet the Town's current and future needs. Following acquisition, the Select Board established a Planning Committee on September 1, 2021, to lead the planning process, and appointed seven (7) persons to the Committee. The Committee was charged to work with Town staff to hire a consultant to complete a study, community engagement process and planning, and make recommendations on development options and implementation strategies to the Select Board (see Charge at [link](#)). This report represents the culmination of that effort.

PROCESS: The Committee has spent the last thirteen (13) months carrying out its charge. The Town issued a Request for Proposal for a planning consultant and contracted with the Barrett Planning Group (assisted by sub-contractors Union Studio Architecture and Community Design, and Kirk & Company) in January 2022. The consultant conducted an in-depth analysis of the site, reviewed zoning and development regulations and policies, gathered market analytics for the Lower Cape subregion, reviewed Town plans and objectives, and compiled current and projected needs for affordable/community/workforce housing. The consultant developed a community engagement plan and conducted surveys, interviews, focus groups, and workshops. Through this extensive community engagement process, the consultants and Committee heard the views of many interested parties. The consultant developed and the Committee reviewed several development concepts, refining them and narrowing the range of options. The Committee arrived at recommended uses and development guidance for a future Request for

Proposals (RFP) for developers of the site. This guidance is incorporated into recommendations for the Select Board and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board. The Committee also discussed implementation strategies for moving forward with the plan that is ultimately approved by the Select Board and AHTF Board. The details of the study, the community engagement plan and results, the development options, and the implementation strategy are discussed more fully in the consultant report (see *link*).

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Planning Committee’s recommendations are laid out, along with summary explanatory comments, below. The Committee is prepared to discuss these recommendations fully with the Select Board and AHTF Board.

1. The entire 5.5-acre Governor Prentice site should be devoted to housing uses.

The Committee spent considerable time and effort looking at other municipal uses that could be accommodated on the site. Use for a new firehouse or library was put aside based on instruction from the Select Board. The Committee considered an option for a small public park with a small community building on one acre on the Route 6A frontage. The park was not considered to be value-added given several other parcels of open space/parkland are nearby. The Committee met with the Community Center Feasibility Task Force and discussed possible space on the site for some community center uses, but ultimately voted against that idea. During the planning process, the Committee received no formal proposal for a different specific use of the property. The Committee felt that affordable housing and housing for “missing middle” was of primary importance, urgently needed, and must be addressed as soon as possible.

2. The housing developed should be primarily affordable housing and qualify for federal and state low-income housing tax credits and maximum state grant funding. The developer should vigorously pursue maximum external funding and consider partnerships with other agencies to make the best project possible. The Request for Proposals (RFP) should be flexible to allow proposals that also accommodate housing for households above tax credit income limits, as well as homeownership. The Town should also consider creative proposals that include market rate housing to the extent that the overall project is most beneficial to the community.

Tax credits are the most significant source of funding for affordable housing and it would be advantageous to construct affordable housing with this funding source, as well as other State grants and mortgage financing (see consultant report for more discussion of affordable housing and tax credits). However, the Committee is in favor of serving a mix of incomes, recognizes the need for housing for a wide range of the Town’s working people, and would urge that the RFP provide flexibility for developer proposals that also provide housing for “missing middle” households and/or homeownership. The level of Town subsidy for the development has yet to be determined but would be commensurate with achievement of overall Town objectives.

- 3. It is extremely important that the overall development be attractive, consistent with community character, environmentally responsible, and a long-term asset to the Orleans community. The RFP process should encourage design quality and adequately funded maintenance. Building design should be inspired, building upon the history of architecture in the town. It is important that the housing incorporate energy efficient design.**

The Committee felt strongly that this unique and visible site within the Village District, with outstanding locational advantages, should be a source of pride for the Town well into the future. Design quality, of the site as well as buildings, is paramount and should be valued during the RFP process to find a developer. At the same time, the development must be financially viable for the full financing term.

- 4. The site should be developed at the highest density allowed under zoning to maximize the number of housing units that are constructed. Buildings should generally be multi-family, up to three stories in height. The site design should aim to reduce site coverage and paved areas, retain internal open space and natural buffers to adjacent properties. Parking spaces should be the lowest number needed at this location, since it is adjacent to the bike trail and within walking distance to downtown, shopping, and potential employment, to minimize paved area. The project should abide by local zoning bylaws, but the Request for Proposals (RFP) should allow developers to propose features that require variances (or 40B waivers).**

The site has significant topographic change and developers should be asked to creatively design a site plan to take full advantage of its unique development potential. The development should generally conform to zoning limits, but the Town should entertain site and building plans that may require variances or waivers to height limits, required parking, and number of units per building, among other provisions. Current zoning allows up to 14 units per acre and the RFP should ask for full utilization of allowed density. (See the consultant report for site analysis and discussion of site and building design considerations.)

- 5. The development should embody features that create a livable neighborhood with adequate internal open space, places to interact with family and neighbors (such as a clubhouse or neighborhood center), connection to the Rail Trail for commuting and recreation, and adequate infrastructure along Route 6A and internal to the site. Building design elements should provide for privacy and allow for individual expression. Public use of areas, such as open space adjacent to the Rail Trail should be encouraged to the extent such use does not impinge on the privacy of residents; to that end public access between the Rail Trail and Route 6A through the site should not be encouraged. Adequate storage for the needs of residents should be provided.**

The Committee values the creation of a residential neighborhood that connects to the larger community while providing amenities for a healthful and peaceful home for the residents.

Mixed income housing should be integrated so as not to physically distinguish between affordable housing and households over income limits.

6. **The Town should seriously consider issuance of a Request for Expressions of Interest (RFI) that ask key questions of the development community regarding what would make the Request For Proposals (RFP) for development of the property most attractive, to craft an RFP which is the best balance of specificity and flexibility. The Town or AHTB should consider contracting with third-party independent experts to provide advice on the soundness of proposers' financial plans (especially for tax credit projects) and on review of the quality of proposed site and architectural designs.**

The Committee discussed the consultant's Implementation Strategy and the specific recommendations to expedite the implementation process. The Committee feels that all but one of these recommendations are worthy of consideration by the AHTB and Select Board. The Committee does not feel that undertaking zoning by-law changes for a new 40R overlay district is advisable, given the lack of Town experience with the Village Center District, and would take significant time and effort. The Committee agrees with the recommendation on use of an RFI and on hiring of third-party experts on financial analysis and architectural and design review. On the issue of land disposition by ground lease vs. fee conveyance, the Committee takes no position.

Members of the Governor Prence Planning Committee appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this effort to meet Town needs and objectives through optimal utilization of a unique and valuable site in the Town. We look forward to seeing the fruits of our work.

Respectfully submitted,

Governor Prence Planning Committee:

John Sargent, Chair, member at large
Mark Mathison, Vice-Chair, Orleans Select Board
Debra Oakes, Recording Secretary, Planning Board
Alexis Mathison (succeeding Katie Wibby), Affordable Housing Trust Fund Board
Fran McClennen, Affordable Housing Committee
Hadley Luddy, member at large
Tina Shaw, member at large