
Focus Group 1: Business Environment

Summary Notes

Assets/Strengths “What’s Working?”

- Business owners have chosen to locate in Orleans due to a mix of factors, including access to water and natural resource (particularly for marine sector), quality of life (schools, sense of community, family ties, historic homes), and its built environment.
 - Drawn to Town Center (one of the only communities on the Cape with a town center)
 - Marine economy is clustered in East Orleans and Town Cove
- Anchors/Destination Drivers for Orleans
 - The Beaches (Nauset and Skaket Beaches)
 - Cape Cod Rail Trail
 - About 60% of visitors in the summer use a bike
 - Orleans is the middle marker on the bike trail (provides easy access in both directions of the trail for recreational cyclists)
 - Other open spaces
 - Compared with the rest of the Cape, Orleans is less of a tourist town. It is a commercial hub for locals: Stop & Shop, Shaw’s Grocery, Friends Marketplace, Staples, Post Office
- The Town’s calendar of events features cultural and sports events that drive foot traffic for local businesses
 - Concerts at the Beach, Bonfire at the Beach
 - Orleans Firebirds baseball games
 - Live music at the Farmers Market
 - Church of Transfiguration (Elements Theater)
 - Summer concerts on the Village
 - Academy playhouse productions
 - Snow Library events
 - Orleans Historical Society concerts
 - Annual summer police block party
 - (Former) Cape Symphony by the Cape Cod Foundation
- Orleans is very centrally located and it’s easy to get to/from other towns on the Cape
 - There has been an increase in visitors and vehicular traffic due to COVID
 - Outdoor recreation is increasingly popular for tourists (customers come from long distances to take advantage of access to the water)
 - Traditionally, the peak seasonal economy runs from Mid-May to Mid-September
 - Residents know to modify their driving habits during peak season – so it does not present issues
- Customer Base for businesses in Orleans
 - Local (close enough to drive) – 10-15 minute drive (beyond Orleans town boundaries)
 - Mostly retired, aging community
- COVID has had positive impact on some businesses

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- Local markets have been increasing local products (through local agriculture producers)
 - Many business adjusted their hours to accommodate for new/existing customers
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 - COVID has had negative impact on some businesses
 - Businesses had to renegotiate leases

Challenges & Lessons Learnt

- Provincetown, Wellfleet, Harwich, Chatham are walkable shopping districts – this geography is lacking in Orleans Village Center and is affecting shopping patterns (downtown is even empty in the summer at times – it can be dark at night for pedestrians, no cluster of open businesses past 8pm)
- Access to labor for service sectors has been challenging for businesses in Orleans, largely due to limited availability of seasonal/affordable workforce housing.
 - Businesses typically cannot pay enough to their employees to find a place nearby to live in the summer. As a result, businesses end up employing children of families with summer homes – lack training, skills, longevity.
 - Affordable housing rentals are mostly one-bedroom apartments that are unsuitable for employees with families
- Limited promotion and market efforts across all events – therefore, limited coordination with store operating hours during events
 - Local newspaper used to be a critical way that residents received information about local events but they are currently undergoing a revamp. The Town website has served as an informational hub for the time being.
 - Businesses who are members of the Chamber primarily communicate through the organization and others might communicate through social media.
- Parking Restrictions are being placed on the majority of landings downtown
 - This severely limits access to the water and marine/fishing activity in Town (there will be no program in place to access the landings and use kayaks/paddleboard/fishing – they will have to pay \$160, cuts off access to visitors/tourists)
 - Visitors are often undervalued by the Town
- Orleans does not attract young residents because they typically cannot afford to live here creating a limited customer base.
 - Only a small number of younger residents/families that are able to work remotely have moved to Orleans through the pandemic. Remote workers are not the workers that are needed in this community – service workers are needed and these are the people that will diversify the Town's resident customer base

Community Priorities

- Remove impediments on business success (regulations and restrictions)
- Town staff training in being business-friendly

Best Practice

- East Harwich – housing developments with 2-3 bedroom rentals suitable for families

Focus Group 2: Arts & Culture

Summary Notes

Assets/Strengths “What’s Working?”

- There are two key audiences for the arts & culture industry:
 - Audiences with discretionary income, mainly local customers – visit galleries
 - Audiences looking for free events, or general visitors – in Town for baseball games or the beach
- Key arts & cultural organizations in Town
 - Cultural District (has received a grant from Mass Cultural Council to distribute walking maps that identify murals and public art)
 - Historic Commission/Historical Society (currently in the process of establishing a historic district from Main Street to Barley Neck Inn)
 - Snow Library
 - Orleans Chamber of Commerce (connected to Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce)
 - Conservation Trust
 - Local galleries (Galley West, Addison Art Gallery)
 - Artist Cottages
 - Orleans Improvement Association
 - Community Foundation
 - Arts Foundation Cape Cod
 - Community Development Partnership
- Orleans' arts and culture sector is a “hidden gem”. There are 46 cultural assets that include:
 - CG36500 (third most visited site in Town after the beaches – Nauset Beach parking Roots & Blues Festival)
 - Snow Library (life-long learning programs and the Gallery at the Library)
 - French Cable Station Museum
 - Academy Playhouse
 - Church of the Transfiguration (Elements Theater, chorus, public tours of the property)
 - Coastal Craft Co-Op
 - Kemp Pottery (world-renowned pottery) + various other individual galleries
 - Parish Park (outdoor performances) + Ponds of Cape Cod + Village Green (the stage is small and not covered)
 - Firehouse (18-20 artists weekly in the gallery – focus on emerging and local artists)
 - Charles Moore Skating Rink + skating park by the Middle School field
 - Jonathan Young Windmill site
 - Hydrangea Festival (master gardeners in Town, garden tours during season)
 - Historic architectural sites with plaques identifying these buildings (by Historical Society, e.g. Depot Square, Snow Library)

Challenges & Lessons Learnt

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- The Town is not currently an 'evening destination'. It needs an anchor venue/community center that can host major performances/troupes (theater space, dance venue, maker space) that is located in an accessible location to businesses
 - The library could serve this purpose but it's run-down and will need significant renovations/expansions
 - Lack of concerted effort to consolidate branding, promotion and marketing efforts across mix of organizations operating across town
 - What is Orleans' brand?
 - Town needs a marketing plan to unify the efforts across organizations (combined itineraries, single events calendar to limit competition across organizations). A marketing lead needs to be identified for the business, arts and culture sectors.
 - Note: Event organizers that participated in the focus group shared their average attendance rates to events were below 100 each (in fact, mostly below 50)
 - Although the Chamber of commerce is connected to the Cape Cod Chamber, there is still more that can be done to get the word out about Orleans to Cape Cod Chamber (the Regional Tourism Organization)
 - Limited collaboration across commercial nodes
 - Would an arts & culture coordinator role (similar to Barnstable) solve for this?
 - Missing arts/cultural offerings for young families and teenagers (e.g. after-school programs in accessible locations)

Best Practice

- Chatham Arts Center
 - Provides space for collaboration – unlike a gallery that just sells artwork
- Brewster Rehearsal Center

Focus Group 3: Environment/Conservation

Summary Notes

Assets/Strengths “What’s Working?”

- The Town has managed to maintain a good balance between its built environment and natural environment
 - 500 acres of beaches, 600 acres of town landings and open spaces
 - There has been a concerted effort in Town to be ‘cleaner’
- Key organizations leading environmental clean-up in Town and advocating for environmental conservation include the Orleans Conservation Trust, the Town's Conservation Commission, Agriculture Commission, Marine Fresh Water Committee, Orleans Pond Coalition (Chatham, Harwich, Brewster, Eastham, Orleans), Firehouse Conservation Trust, AmeriCorps Cape Cod, and other local water ways advocates and volunteers
 - Town water quality testing is conducted by volunteers
 - Businesses are also very supportive of environmental efforts (when included)
 - UMass Extension students volunteer frequently through Barnstable County partnerships
- The Town's landscape features a variety of natural resources – beaches, ponds, estuaries, marshland, etc.
 - The biodiversity that supports a range of wildlife locally is what people come to Orleans for
 - However, Town Cove's biodiversity is in rapid decline. The Town Cove needs dredging – fishes lack oxygen needed to survive.
 - The Cape Cod Rail Trail has been taken for granted
 - Mainly due to unsafe intersection at Main St/Trail – especially in the Summer when vehicular traffic is at its peak. The current crossing doesn't function for pedestrians and cyclists (as bad as Mill Stone Rd in Brewster).
- The Town leads in alternative wastewater systems
 - Advanced in solving nitrogen problem through oyster farming
- There is a large and growing local farming tradition – including Putnam Farm (26 acres)
 - Funded by Community Preservation Act

Challenges & Lessons Learnt

- Cape Cod as a whole faces climate change risks and disaster events. In Town, low-lying roads are at highest risk.
 - At highest risk are seniors/older population – for example, the Orleans Senior Center is located in a low-lying area
 - Refer to Cape Cod Commission studies for more information.
- As out-of-town visitor numbers grow, the Town will need to find ways to manage the balance between visitor and local enjoyment/access to natural resources
 - Consider visitors' contribution to wastewater in Town. Currently, the lack of a septic system is resulting in poor water quality – this will likely change with new sewers in Village Center.

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- Swimming programs in the ponds have been discontinued due to water quality
 - Geographic areas of concern: Town Cove and Mill Pond
 - Lack of water flow: dredging needed to support wildlife and to prevent boats getting stuck
 - Limited Town capacity to effectively manage environmental conservation issues. Volunteer-based organizations make up majority of manpower (limited full-time employees).
 - Current process: conservation commission (volunteers) conducts field surveys and reports any issues/needs to Department of Public Works

Best Practice

- **Eastham:** The local harbor master has been helpful to local fishing/marine businesses and visitors with boats – leads to thriving blue economy.
- **Voluntourism opportunities:** To support environmental protection as part of tourism

Focus Group 4: Commercial Real Estate

Summary Notes

Assets/Strengths “What’s Working?”

- Seller's residential market – there is currently limited inventory due to high performance through COVID.
- Orleans is considered the “commercial hub for outer Cape”
 - Gaps/opportunities in services in commercial districts: assisted living, 'warehouse' and 'storage' for marine industries, medical services
 - Cape Cod Healthcare is expanding in outer Cape and will be opening an outpatient/urgent care facility in Village Center (presents opportunities for more year-round residents employed by the healthcare system but they'll need a mix of housing products)
- The Village Center zoning supports mixed use development, multi-family residential development and can support more density
 - Key restrictions posed by Board of Health and Building height restrictions

Challenges & Lessons Learnt

- Younger generations are leaving the community for more affordable communities
 - Factors of out-migration: higher taxes
 - Indicator: increase in residential sales through estates
 - Many are leaving for places with similar lifestyle but lower cost of living: Maine, Carolinas
- Short term rentals are growing and impacting local residential community despite high tax levies (state and local taxes)
 - Factors for growth: summer rental rates are too attractive compared with year-round rental rates, limited inventory of formal lodging rooms (i.e. hotel and motel rooms), property management companies are increasingly buying up properties to lease weekly during summer months (\$1,500-\$6,000/week and can go up to \$10,000 depending on acreage and property amenities)
 - Increased strain on Department of Public Works (wear and tear on infrastructure) and Public Safety during peak months (e.g. rescue calls for seasonal visitors, noise complaints, parking complaints, etc.)
- Work from anywhere trend has primarily impacted in-migration of senior/management professionals nearing retirement – looking for bigger homes to spread out
 - Restricted ability to hybrid commute in to Boston (requires a two-part commute from Orleans to Boston, train from Hyannis)
 - Carpooling would be a more viable option to commute into Boston
- There are currently no available resources to support tenant improvement
 - Cost of renovations is high in the Cape (e.g. \$400-600/SF x 1,000 SF storefront, plus debt service) – labor (construction workers cost \$15-25/hour) and distance to transport materials – so the return on investment is almost insurmountable.
- Key area of concern for commercial vacancies: near Staples and Shaw's

Best Practice

- **Chatham, Hyannis and Yarmouth:** new multi-family housing developments