

Background



Windmill Park

2. Background

2.1 History of Orleans Development

The area now known as Orleans has literally been a crossroads since geological times. The prehistoric trans-cape trails of native inhabitants merged in Orleans. Physically, Orleans is the intersection of the Cape Cod Bay Lobe and the South Channel Lobe of the retreating Wisconsin Glacier 15,000 years ago. In other words, the town is located at the elbow of Cape Cod's famous bent arm shape.

Orleans was settled by Pilgrims who were dissatisfied with the poor soil quality and small land grants of "Plimouth." Governor Prence received a large land grant from the Plymouth Colony in 1644 and established what was first known as the "Second Pilgrim Colony" and renamed "Nosset." This area stretched from Yarmouth through Wellfleet. The name was later changed again to Eastham and was divided into the Southern Parish (Orleans) and the Northern Parish. As early as 1717, the people of the Southern Parish expressed the desire to become an independent entity. Orleans was finally incorporated as a town on March 3, 1797 after separating from Eastham. Orleans' population at the time was more than 1,700 residents.

Most of Orleans during the colonial time period was composed of farms that were large and dispersed. East Orleans in particular had soil which was very fertile for producing grain. The South Orleans area was also reserved for the Nauset Indians in 1660 as their Potanunquit (or Portanimitut) village. According to the Massachusetts Historical Commission this was one of the three most important tribal settlements on Cape Cod during colonial times.

Most colonial Cape Cod settlements developed along a harbor and the roads leading to it, and commerce congregated in these areas. Orleans was no exception. Its development emerged around Rock Harbor on Cape Cod Bay, and along Main Street. East Orleans developed the first church in the village center in 1718. The small business core was located at the juncture of Main Street and County Road, which is now known as Cranberry Highway or Route 6A. This area remains a vital part of the community, as it is still the Village Center and serves as the downtown.

Because of the high quality of the soil, Orleans was Cape Cod's premiere grain-growing town during the 1800s. However, much of the farming was done simply to sustain the population; therefore, only a small surplus was produced that could be traded with other towns. Because of the abundance of water resources, many residents turned to fishing and whaling as a means of commerce. Shipping was conducted out of Rock Harbor- its location on Cape Cod Bay made it the best location in Orleans for ships to depart to and arrive from Boston. Rock Harbor was a marginal port capable of servicing only coastal packets and shallow draft vessels because of the tidal creek's narrow width and extensive flats. Still, the harbor flourished as the local port of trade through the 18th and 19th centuries. Pleasant Bay and the Nauset Marsh systems were more important for local activities and resources such as finfish, shellfish, fowl and salt hay.

These areas are located on the south side of Cape Cod, where the distance to Boston combined with hazardous inlets and channels did not make them suitable for trade.

In the 1800s salt made in Orleans' saltworks became an important industry, which emerged out of the need to preserve the large quantities of fish that were caught and distributed to other markets. Saltworks sprang up in many inlets and coves around Orleans. Salt remained a strong industry until approximately 1847 when salt mines in New York offered an inexpensive alternative to the saltworks in Orleans.

By the 1860s, the salt industry had all but disappeared and had been replaced by the cranberry industry. Cranberry bogs were formed in a number of locations as cranberry cultivation became an important agricultural activity in Orleans during the late 1800s.

The shipping industry also grew in the 1800s in order to keep up with salt and fishing activities. "Packet" boats out of Rock Harbor brought goods to Boston and returned with supplies not available on Cape Cod.

The completion of the Old Colony Railroad in 1865 and its extension in the 1870s to the lower Cape improved the transport of goods through Orleans. Packet boats and salt-making faded out of existence and were replaced by freight trains which provided an inexpensive form of transport.

By 1870, Orleans' population had declined to 1,300. Like most other Cape Cod towns, this was due to an economic recession and the decline of the maritime industry around the Civil War period. However, the addition of the Old Colony Railroad in Orleans helped establish the future growth of the town. The railroad led to the development of a small garment industry and also prompted the formation of more service-oriented businesses. As the Old Colony Railroad brought visitors from Boston and other cities to vacation in Orleans, the tourism trade proved to be lucrative and the town's economy moved in that direction.

Over the next one hundred years, (1870–1970), Orleans' growth was based mostly on the tourism industry. A number of inns, hotels, small stores and shops were opened. In addition, vacation homes were built around Tonset and Nauset Heights, and other scattered locations near attractive natural resources. Since 1950, development has spread throughout the town, geared towards seasonal visitors, retirees, and residents who are attracted by Orleans' quality of life. They appreciate the small town character and natural resources that contribute to the community's sense of place.

In 1962, the Cape Cod National Seashore was created. The creation of a national park on Cape Cod resulted in increased interest in the entire area. Cape Cod became a desirable vacation spot for visitors from all over the country and overseas. Orleans, in turn, experienced a significant increase in commercial growth. In continuing with the crossroads tradition of the area, Orleans today is considered the lower Cape's business center where three major highways—Route 6, Route 6A, and Route 28—meet.

Since 1970, the population of Orleans has more than doubled, from fewer than 3,000 to more than 6,800. The majority of growth since the 1970s was and continues to be associated with an influx of well-educated and affluent retirees. This has had a positive influence on the economic stability of the Town. From 1970 through 1989, 2,378 new housing units were constructed. From 1990 to 2000, 429 more units were constructed. Most of these new units were single family homes on a minimum lot size of 40,000 square feet, a requirement that was adopted in 1973. This type of building resulted in a suburban style of development in many areas, as opposed to the traditional compact style of earlier neighborhoods. Orleans, while a vacation destination, has a relatively high year-round population compared to other outer Cape Cod towns. The seasonal population influx is a major factor in the economic base of the town.

The Town has absorbed the increase in population, and has been able to provide adequate public services. The potential population increase from 2006 to buildout¹ represents a 52% percent increase in the Town's population. Coupled with the large influx of seasonal residents and visitors, such growth will adversely impact the quality of life and the character of the community, by adding to the congestion of roads and recreation areas, and by increasing the demand on public services. It is therefore vitally important that the Town anticipate growth and work to carefully plan appropriate responses in order to safeguard the quality of life of its residents.

2.2 Demographics and Growth Trends

2.2.1 Population Growth

Population Characteristics

Since 1970, Orleans has had a fluctuating rate of population growth. In the 10 years after 1970, the population more than doubled. The rate of population growth has moderated significantly in the 1980's. In the last 5 year period Orleans year-round population has not increased significantly, even though many new homes per year have been constructed. In the last ten years the town has averaged 53 new dwelling units per year. At approximately 2 people per dwelling on average, this would add 106 residents per year. The Town has not seen this population growth reflected in its town census which would indicate, over the short term, that the Town remains highly seasonal in nature.

¹ The buildout analysis is discussed in the Land Use & Growth Management Chapter

Table 2: A: Population and Growth Projections, 1970-2015

Year	Population	Total Change	Percent Change (5 yr. intervals)
1970	2,579	--	
1975	3,605	1,026	40%
1980	5,543	1,938	54%
1985	6,115	572	10%
1990	6,061	-54	-1%
1995	6,085	24	0%
2000	6,900	815	13%
2005	6,495	-405	-6%
2010*	7,017	522	--
2015*	7,379	362	--

Source: Orleans Town Clerk

* Projections from Cape Cod Commission

Based upon a buildout analysis performed by the Orleans Planning Department, the projected population at buildout is projected to be between around 9,000 and 10,400 by the year 2040. The buildout analysis is discussed in detail in the Land Use and Growth Management chapter.

More than 37% of Orleans population is over the age of 65. Half of the population is over 55, which ranks Orleans as the oldest community in the Commonwealth. New homes in Orleans are typically occupied by retirees and seasonal residents. Young families are finding it increasingly difficult to buy or rent a home in Orleans because of high costs and a scarcity of condominiums and apartments. Therefore, while new homes are being built, the population will not increase as quickly as it would if the new homes were being occupied by young families. This assumption is reflected in the buildout analysis. If Orleans were to become more of a bedroom community to emerging business centers in Hyannis and Plymouth, the population at buildout could be higher than is estimated above.

Seasonal Population

Orleans is subject to a huge seasonal population influx. U.S. Census data does not provide information on seasonal population. The Town estimates the seasonal population is triple the year-round population. According to this estimate, the total population in the summer of 2005 was near 20,000.

Other trends in population which are expected to continue include the following:

- The percent of population over 65 will continue to be the highest represented and this segment will have a higher than average income.
- The average household size will remain around 2.0 to 2.5 people per home.

- The percent of year round residents will remain around 60 to 65%
- The seasonal influx of tourists and summer residents will continue to have a major impact on the local economy and municipal services.
- The summer seasonal population peaks will begin to reach a perceived capacity and these peaks will spread to other adjacent months.

2.2.2 Socio-Economic Characteristics

Education

In comparison to the rest of the Commonwealth, Orleans residents are better educated, as shown in the table derived from the 2000 Census. The percentage of adults holding a 4-year college degree is significantly higher than the County and State figures.

Table 2: B: 2000 Educational Attainment

	Percent Bachelor's Degree or higher	Percent Graduate or Professional
Orleans	44%	18%
Barnstable County	24%	13%
Massachusetts	33%	14%

Source: 2000 US Census

Income

Household Income

Orleans households have had a higher per capita income than Barnstable County or the Commonwealth as a whole between 1980 and 2000.

Table 2: C: Per Capita Income 1980-2000

	1980		1990		2000	
	Income	% change	Income	% change	Income	% change
Orleans	\$8,958	88%	\$19,249	115%	\$29,553	54%
Barnstable County	\$7,428	121%	\$16,402	121%	\$25,318	54%
Massachusetts	\$7,457	118%	\$17,224	131%	\$25,952	51%

Source: U.S. Census 2000

Ethnicity

The ethnicity of Orleans residents does not exhibit any significant degree of diversity. The non-white population is significantly less than the County and State figures.

Table 2: D: 2000 Minority Population

Orleans	2%
Barnstable County	6%
Massachusetts	15%

Source: 2000 US Census

Occupations

The percent of adults who are active in the workforce is lower in Orleans than in the county or state. This is representative of our population in town that is older and predominantly made up of retirees. Further information on occupations and other economic statistics may be found in the Economic Development chapter.

Table 2: E: Percent of Adults in Labor Force

Orleans	47%
Barnstable County	59%
Massachusetts	66%

Source: 2000 US Census

School Trends

As an older age community, Orleans has a lower school enrollment than the County average.

Table 2: F: School Enrollment, 2000

	% of Population Enrolled in School
Orleans	16%
Barnstable County	21%

Source: US Census 2000

A review of recent enrollment figures shows that enrollment has been fairly stable. The figures of school age children at present has shown a decline in the upper grades, and stable enrollment in the future. High housing costs in Orleans make the town less affordable for young families than other nearby towns. The trend toward a greater retiree component of the population suggests that school enrollment will not escalate.

Development Trends

Over the last 20 years, more than 1,100 homes have been built. Homes constructed since the 1990s exhibit a trend toward being larger even though they are often for seasonal residents or retirees. The average size of a home in Orleans is 1,876 square feet. However, new residences constructed in the last 10 years have averaged 2,400 square feet in size.

Sales prices of homes in Orleans have also undergone dramatic changes. In 2005, the average sales price of a single family home was \$700,000. The cost of land and housing in Orleans continues to preclude working families from settling in town. If the Town wishes to maintain a diverse population, it must continue to find ways to provide moderately priced housing opportunities, for both residents and seasonal workers.

A noticeable shift has occurred in the year-round/seasonal housing ratio. Over the past 20 years, the ratio has changed from 40% year-round and 60% seasonal to the current ratio of 61% year-round and 39% seasonal. The seasonal influx is still very important to the local economy, as many year-round homes are more densely occupied in the summer months. Nevertheless, many businesses that began by targeting tourists are now profitable on a year-round basis.

Town Government and Services

Orleans operates under a Home Rule Charter, with a five-member elected Board of Selectmen and an appointed Town Administrator. Municipal government is considered by most residents to be stable and to provide a good level of service. The Town has just over 100 full-time employees, and hires a large number of seasonal workers to meet the demands of the summer season.

The public water system supplies nearly all homes and is highly regarded by residents and officials of the Commonwealth. Wastewater disposal is entirely by on-site septic systems, and the Town is part operator of a septage disposal facility.

There are more than 100 miles of roadway in the Town, more than half of which are private. Three State highways pass through Orleans, presenting the Town with many traffic management problems.

The tax rate in Orleans has been relatively stable. The Town Budget for FY2006 was over \$23 million. Town debt is low, and the Town's bond rating is excellent. The Town faces some major capital expenditure in the immediate future if it is to maintain a high level of public services. For example, a new Highway Garage is needed, and the Town is in the process of developing a comprehensive wastewater management plan. These issues are addressed in the Community Facilities and Services Chapter.