

# Martha's Vineyard Commission

## Executive Director



*Profile*



**EDWARD J. COLLINS JR. CENTER FOR PUBLIC MANAGEMENT**  
JOHN W. McCORMACK GRADUATE SCHOOL OF  
POLICY AND GLOBAL STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

## Introduction

The Martha's Vineyard Commission has retained the services of the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at the University of Massachusetts Boston to assist in the recruitment of a new Executive Director. This Profile draws upon our discussions with Commissioners, staff, local officials, residents and other stakeholders. It describes our understanding of the organization, the challenges that lie ahead for the successful candidate, and the professional and personal characteristics an ideal candidate will possess.

## Martha's Vineyard

Martha's Vineyard is a 100-square-mile island located seven miles off the coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Its topography, in fact its very existence, results from its location at the southern extremity, or terminal moraine, of the part of North America covered by ice during the last Ice Age. Home to the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah), it was settled by Europeans in the mid-17th century.

The Island consists of six towns, each of which has its own unique character. Three-quarters of the Island's population is concentrated in the three "Down-Island" towns: Tisbury, Oak Bluffs and Edgartown, each with a busy commercial town center. Vineyard Haven in Tisbury serves as the Island's main port, seconded by Oak Bluffs in the summertime. The three "Up-Island" towns, West Tisbury, Chilmark and Aquinnah (formerly called Gay Head) are more rural in character.

The population of Martha's Vineyard began to grow dramatically in the 1970's and doubled in the last quarter of the 20th century. In the past decade, the year-round population went up by over 10% compared to an increase of only 3% in all of Massachusetts. The year round population of about 17,000 swells in the summer to over 60,000; the largest town has a year round population of 4,527.

## The Martha's Vineyard Commission

The Martha's Vineyard Commission is the regional planning agency of Dukes County, which is made up of the six towns of Martha's Vineyard – Aquinnah, Chilmark, Edgartown, Oak Bluffs, Tisbury and West Tisbury – as well as the town of Gosnold on the Elizabeth Islands.

The Commission was created in 1974 by an act of the Massachusetts Legislature in response to the threat of unchecked development on Martha's Vineyard. The Legislature adopted the Martha's Vineyard Commission Act, which created a system of regional planning and regulation in order to protect the "unique natural, historical, ecological, scientific, [and] cultural"

qualities of the Vineyard. The MVC's mission is to help carefully manage growth so that the Vineyard's unique environment, character, social fabric and sustainable economy are maintained as development takes place. The MVC is comprised of 21 Commissioners, 9 elected by Vineyard voters, 6 appointed by the Boards of Selectmen of the six towns on Martha's Vineyard, 1 appointed by the Dukes County Commission, and up to 5 appointed by the Governor.

The Commission occupies its own building in central Oak Bluffs. Most meetings of the Commission, subcommittees, and with town boards and the public take place in the evenings. More information about the Martha's Vineyard Commission is available on the Commission's website: [www.mvcommission.org](http://www.mvcommission.org)

In addition to the planning responsibilities of a typical regional planning agency, the MVC also has important regulatory functions, designating Districts of Critical Planning Concern and reviewing Developments of Regional Impact.

The Executive Director, who is appointed by the Commissioners, is the chief executive officer of the Commission, and is responsible for the overall management of the organization. This includes planning and regulatory activities, staff, finances, as well as relations with public entities, the media and the public.

## Finances

The MVC is funded from a combination of town assessments, grants, and other sources of revenue. In FY2015 the MVC's funding source allocation is 70% assessments, 26% grants and 4% other sources. The Martha's Vineyard Commission Act outlines the formula for apportioning town assessments based on each town's equalized valuation. Major grants come from the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development. The MVC Finance Committee assists the Executive Director in preparing the proposed budget for the coming fiscal year. The FY2015 MVC budget is approximately \$1.4 million.

## Challenges for the Executive Director

- **Promote the Professional Image of the MVC.** It will be important for the Executive Director to "market" that the MVC offers a broad range of planning services to the towns and the Island and explain that its regulatory activities are an asset to the community and its economy. The Executive Director will need to reach out to all towns, the business community and other stakeholders to build positive relationships and improve the understanding of all the MVC has to offer.

- **Communication.** Well-developed communication skills are essential. Open, accurate and timely communication by the Executive Director with Commissioners, staff, boards of selectmen, the County, the press and the public must be an integral part of the culture and practice of the MVC. The Executive Director must be skilled and comfortable serving as a public spokesperson for the MVC and actively participate with the Commissioners to shape a strategic message to the Towns, stakeholders and the business and development communities. The public communication role of the Executive Director is critical to maintaining a high level of confidence and trust in the MVC's mission.
- **Staff Development and Morale.** The MVC has a highly educated and experienced staff of ten, including eight planning professionals with different specialties. Planning and administrative operations are working well; however, staff tends to operate independently. Effort will be required to foster a collaborative organizational approach to fulfilling the MVC mission. Maintaining staff morale, fully utilizing the considerable talents of staff and maintaining high performance standards is critical to the success of the Executive Director. The Executive Director will need to delegate when appropriate and be an advocate for the work of the staff.
- **Leadership.** The Executive Director will need not only to manage the activities of the MVC, but to be a leader. The incumbent will need to engage Commissioners, staff, towns and the community at large in an on-going dialogue about the critical issues that face the organization and help frame both an internal and external strategic plan of how to achieve the goals, objectives and mission of the MVC. To that end, it is desirable that the Executive Director have a basic understanding of the wide range of planning areas that the MVC deals with, including transportation, water quality, coastal planning, affordable housing, economic development, community character and historic preservation, and regulation of development, as well as an integrative approach to these planning concerns.
- **Adjusting to Life on Martha's Vineyard.** Working and living on Martha's Vineyard has its own unique benefits and challenges. While not a statutory requirement, practically, the Executive Director is expected to live on the Island. The Island offers a beautiful environment, as well as renowned recreational activities, especially in the summer. The pace and feel of the Island changes dramatically from summer to winter. The schools are small and excellent; the local hospital is affiliated with Massachusetts General Hospital. The Island is sustained and energized by numerous small, local businesses, many of which cater to visitors. There are virtually no chain stores or chain

restaurants. Access to a broader range of commercial and other services may mean taking the 45 minute ferry ride to the mainland. The Island has an excellent transit system for a rural community. Along with the extensive list of positives of Island life, it is not for everyone and potential candidates need to understand and consider all factors when applying for the Executive Director position.

## The Ideal Candidate

The MVC seeks an Executive Director who is an experienced manager in an environment of similar complexity who possesses strong organizational, planning, communication and community leadership skills. The successful candidate will possess the skill, energy, creativity and experience to achieve the MVC's goals.

The Executive Director should be willing to commit to a tenure long enough to build a multi-year approach to moving the organization forward. The Executive Director must work with the towns to support island-wide discussion and solutions with the goal of producing sound outcomes and minimizing polarization.

The following attributes have been determined important for the Executive Director.

### *Professional Attributes*

The Executive Director must be:

- In possession of a Master's Degree in Planning or a related field (or relevant Degree) and at least 5-10 years of experience in a leadership role in a planning organization (AICP membership preferred). A candidate may also be considered who has a Master's Degree in Public Administration and relevant experience with a government entity or another executive position that oversees the operations of a complex public entity governed by an elected/appointed regulatory or policy body that makes decisions in public. The MVC will consider a candidate with outstanding relevant work experience who does not hold a Master's Degree.
- A professionally stable person with a record of tenure and consistent career growth. The MVC seeks a committed management professional willing to stay for a significant period and who is willing to take risks to improve the organization.
- Have expertise and experience with as many as possible of the planning areas that the Commission deals with including transportation, historic preservation, water quality, coastal planning, affordable housing, economic development, open space protection, community character, scenic values, GIS, and development regulation. Have the ability to deal with planning, development, and environmental challenges in an integrated, balanced way.

- Have a proven ability to successfully apply for and secure grants.
- In possession of the skills and interest to identify and promote opportunities for collaboration.
- Able to delegate while maintaining strict accountability.
- Both strategic and tactical. The candidate must be experienced in working effectively in a political environment providing seasoned and impartial guidance to Commissioners to identify and address the long-term strategic needs of the organization and the short-term tactical steps necessary to sustain service delivery.
- Effective at keeping Commissioners comprehensively informed, while staying detached from the political process and ensuring that staff maintains a similar detachment.
- Familiar with highly participative local government environments with dynamics similar to Martha's Vineyard.
- Comfortable working with and managing an organization in a political context often characterized by vigorous debate among well-informed stakeholders who are active in local decision-making processes.

### **Personal Attributes**

The next Executive Director needs to be:

- Able to demonstrate unquestionable integrity in all interactions with Commissioners, staff, state, federal and local officials, businesses and residents.
- Able to communicate effectively with all elements of the community.
- Able to work cooperatively with the Commission on the establishment of annual goals and objectives for the organization; update the Commissioners and staff on progress and actively participate in the annual review of results and operations.
- Able and willing to play a highly visible role in the community. The ideal candidate must participate broadly across the leadership structure of the Island and be a champion of the MVC. However, the Executive Director must adhere to the standard of absolute non-participation in political activities of any kind.
- Comfortable engaging directly with all stakeholders. The Executive Director must have sufficient direct engagement with the civic community so that he/she can gain a thorough understanding of the culture.
- Able to be a vocal and positive spokesperson for the MVC's agenda at meetings, public forums, state agencies and with the media. The successful candidate must be able to use the status inherent in the Executive Director's position to advance the organization's goals, objectives and mission.

- Able to assume a strong organizational management role. The Executive Director needs to delegate, while maintaining strict accountability. The successful candidate must be direct, facilitative, and clear.
- Able to create and sustain a goal-oriented environment by establishing, maintaining and promoting effective policies and initiatives. The Executive Director should be a genuinely inclusive leader capable of highlighting the positive attributes, role, and successes of the MVC's mission to all stakeholders.

## **Process**

The Commission has formed a Search Committee to oversee the process and conduct preliminary interviews. The Search Committee is expected to review the applications of candidates recommended by the Collins Center in February and complete preliminary interviews in March. The Search Committee is scheduled to present finalists to the full Commission for in-person interviews in late March. A decision is expected in early April with the selected candidate beginning work in August. Only the finalists' names will be released by the MVC.

## **Salary**

Salary is negotiable based upon the candidate's background and experience.

## **How to Apply**

Applications should be received by February 13, 2015. Applications must be submitted electronically. Please send your resume with a cover letter addressing the job requirements to [recruitment.umb@gmail.com](mailto:recruitment.umb@gmail.com). Please combine all of your documents in a single file, preferably PDF, and include **MVC** and your **LAST NAME** in the subject line.

Should you have any questions regarding this opportunity, or a recommendation of a colleague, please contact: Mary Flanders Aicardi, Associate, at 508-215-8992 or at [Mary.Aicardi@umb.edu](mailto:Mary.Aicardi@umb.edu)

*To learn more about the Edward J. Collins Jr. Center for Public Management at UMASS Boston, please visit: [www.collinscenter.umb.edu](http://www.collinscenter.umb.edu)*