

## Winning Over a Skeptical Community

### A Case Study in Offshore Wind Development

Led by the core team behind Vineyard Wind 1, Vineyard Offshore brings the unique perspective of having built collaborative relationships with community and other stakeholders, including those once vehemently opposed to offshore wind projects, and who are now among the project's best partners. That's especially the case with the town of

Barnstable, where the project's subsea cables come to shore at Covell's Beach and interconnect to the New England power grid. There, we spearheaded a collaborative approach to engagement that built a bridge with a once-resistant community – and which has become a core component of the Vineyard method of offshore wind development.

### Engaging Early and Often

Community leaders, residents, and town officials in Barnstable strongly opposed – and sued to stop – the Cape Wind project previously proposed for Nantucket Sound. During our preliminary due-diligence efforts to investigate potential landfall sites on Cape Cod, with Barnstable a likely candidate due to the location of key energy infrastructure, the Vineyard Wind project was viewed with a great deal of skepticism. We understood that it would require extensive engagement with town staff, elected officials, community leaders, and local residents to overcome initial perceptions and build strong working relationships with the community.

Beginning in 2016, more than a year before the start of the permitting process, Vineyard Wind initiated widespread outreach efforts, which provided residents time to become informed, ask important questions, and provide valuable input to the project.



Welcome sign at Covell's Beach

The project would ultimately host over a hundred public meetings, open houses, forums, and other events, holding them in libraries, senior centers, auditoriums and public spaces throughout the town of Barnstable. At these events, residents were able to meet directly with project staff and experts, and Vineyard Wind staff were given the chance to listen to local concerns, provide detailed information, and receive critical, neighborhood-level insights.

Frequent engagement with the town, elected officials, and town staff became a focused priority of our project team, which emphasized effective collaboration and communication throughout the project's development phase. We regularly presented updates to the Barnstable Town Council; provided monthly updates at Town Council public meetings; conducted direct outreach to Town Councilors; and held regular meetings with the Department of Public Works and Town Manager. Vineyard Wind also engaged directly with civic and community organizations in and around the town of Barnstable, giving presentations about the project and gathering feedback. We were also active in the community, regularly participating in events.



Meeting with local residents in 2019



Information Session on Covell's Beach

Later, when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the project team shifted to holding regular virtual meetings, which also helped to engage older residents, seasonal residents, and others who might not attend an in-person meeting; these continued after pandemic restrictions loosened. Taking a suggestion from local residents, we began hosting information sessions on Covell's Beach in the summer months.

The sessions, held onsite, resulted in dozens of discussions with residents, visitors and other beach users, many of whom were aware of the project but hadn't attended a public meeting. Supplementing the range of public meetings was an actively updated website dedicated to Barnstable residents, focusing on concerns most relevant to the local community.

## Host Community Agreement Unanimously Approved

In October 2018, the Barnstable Town Council unanimously approved the nation's first offshore wind Host Community Agreement (HCA) with Vineyard Wind. Under the HCA, the town receives funding to offset impacts associated with hosting Vineyard Wind 1's onshore facilities, with payments totaling at least \$1.5 million per year between property taxes and host community payments (HCPs). The HCPs will provide \$16 million in supplemental revenue to the town under a plan to support clean wastewater initiatives in the town. The HCA contains provisions to ensure enhanced communication and coordination between town staff and Vineyard Wind, efforts to minimize

disturbance during construction, and environmental safeguards and infrastructure improvements important to the town. The HCA also provides for like-new restoration of areas impacted by construction, including the beach parking lot, which needed repair, as well as funding for renovation of the bathroom/shower station at Covell's Beach.

As a result of Vineyard Wind's outreach, engagement, and HCA commitments, the town of Barnstable lent its support to the project throughout the permitting process. In an August 15, 2019, letter to the *Cape Cod Times*, Paul Hebert, a member of the Barnstable Town Council, wrote, "Vineyard Wind



has been transparent on every issue and has reached out to stakeholders to assure best practices.” At the groundbreaking in 2021, Andrew Gottlieb, executive director of the Association to Preserve Cape Cod, said, “One of the things I want to commend Vineyard Wind for is engaging in a meaningful, open way with the community.”

Thanks to extensive public engagement, of the 13,260 written comments submitted in the final federal review, 80% were in favor of Vineyard Wind 1.



## Collaborating on Construction for Savings

A critical test of project-town relations on Vineyard Wind 1 came in 2021, with the start of onshore transmission construction in Barnstable. It also presented a unique opportunity for further beneficial collaboration. By leveraging financial commitments from Vineyard Wind 1’s HCPs, the town was able to accelerate a sewer project critical to addressing a wastewater pollution crisis. And, by coordinating construction activities with Vineyard Wind, the town was able to minimize disruption and save money in the process.

Combining these complex construction projects required enhanced communication, planning, and community outreach by both parties. Vineyard Wind and town Public Works teams met several times per week on a range of topics, including traffic management. Vineyard Wind established a hotline to collect community concerns and provide rapid response and resolution. The outreach team went door-to-door in neighborhoods impacted by construction, sent mailings and provided public notices of activities, and followed up at the household level on restoration efforts, utility shutoffs,

detours, and other items important to residents. In the end, this collaboration helped to confine the impacts of both construction projects and saved the town an estimated \$3 million to \$4 million.

“Vineyard Wind faced a skeptical community when they first came to Barnstable, but they communicated openly and often, responding to a lot of tough questions and resolving conflicts in all areas,” said Town Manager Mark Ells. “I am pleased to say that the Vineyard team has partnered with the community, resulting in a successful project. They built a model of engagement that the whole industry should follow.”

Winning the support of a skeptical community with patience, communication, and transparency, and then partnering to address the community’s top environmental issue, was a special opportunity. But it is the kind of opportunity that Vineyard Offshore will continue to seek with future host communities. Our work in Barnstable set a standard of community engagement that is now central to the Vineyard method of offshore wind development.