

# THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD COMMISSION

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## *Martha's Vineyard Commission Minutes for the Special Meeting of May 2, 2002*

The Martha's Vineyard Commission (the MVC or the Commission) held a Special Meeting on Thursday, May 2, 2002, at a special time – 7:00 p.m. – in the first floor conference room at the Commission Offices in the Olde Stone Building, 33 New York Avenue, Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts. At 7:11 p.m., James R. Vercruysse – Commission Chairman and a member at large from Aquinnah – called the Special Meeting to order. The Chairman then turned the Meeting over to Kate Warner, the West Tisbury Selectmen's Appointee.

*[Commission members present at the gavel were: J. Athearn; J. Best; M. Cini; J. Greene; M. Ottens-Sargent; L. Sibley; R. Toole; J. Vercruysse; K. Warner; R. Wey; A. Woodruff; and R. Zeltzer. Commission Staff present at the gavel were: C. Flynn; I.M. Fyler; J. Rand; W.G. Veno; P. Webster; and W.M. Wilcox. Commission members Christina Brown and Michael Donaroma arrived at 7:16 p.m., and Tristan Israel sat down at 7:30 p.m. Staff member David Wessling came at 7:25 p.m.]*

### **Facilitation Session/Discussion: The Future of the Martha's Vineyard Commission.**

Ms. Warner explained that the process in which the Commission members and Staff would engage that evening was not one of mediation but rather one of facilitation. She introduced facilitator Roxanne Kapitan, who moderated the session.

Ms. Kapitan briefly described her background in government work and how she had come to realize that working well with other people was basic to all organizational activities. "What I look at," she observed, "is how to help organizations get help with what they're going through."

Ms. Kapitan related that the facilitation process would involve many people talking at the same time, with those participating responding to a set of 11 questions. *[See the Full Commission Meeting File of May 2, 2002 (the meeting file) for a copy of the questions.]* The group was seated in pairs in two lines of chairs facing one another, with 11 on one side and 11 on the other. The facilitator gave each participant two sheets of paper, with both sheets containing one of the 11 questions.

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Ms. Kapitan explained the first phase of the session. Each questioning cycle consisted of the following: a) one member of the pair asked the other the question on the sheet he or she had been given; b) the other member of the pair responded; and c) the first member wrote down the answer offered. Then the roles were reversed. The entire cycle was to take three to four minutes.

Having completed one cycle, the participants in the row closer to the north wall of the conference room moved eastward by one chair, with the participant easternmost in that row moving to the westernmost chair. Having thus established 11 new pairs, the cycle of question-and-response would be repeated until each person in the northerly row had been matched with each person in the southerly one.

Ms. Kapitan emphasized that the questioner should focus on interviewing his or her partner and not evaluate or edit the responses. Moreover, even if the next partner one questioned gave the same or a similar answer, one should nonetheless record that answer.

The Commission members and Staff set to work on this portion of the process, finishing at 8:20 p.m. *[It appeared that the process stopped one cycle short of the goal of each person in the northerly row having been matched with each person in the southerly one.]* Ms. Kapitan called for a short recess.

At 8:30 p.m. the process resumed. Ms. Kapitan divided the participants into four groups, with each group containing all those who had asked a particular question and with each group covering two or three questions. Within the groups, each participant was to report on the answers she or he had received. Then each question was subjected to what Ms. Kapitan referred to as "MVC Reflection Question Analysis." Said analysis asked for the following: 1) Summary of what was said; 2) What does it mean? (Implications); 3) Recommendations; and 4) Possibilities. The four groups worked on this step of the process for about 40 minutes.

At 9:15 p.m. Ms. Kapitan explained that the participants were to come up with what she referred to as an "elevator statement," which involved reporting concisely a summary of the Reflection Question Analysis for each question, concentrating of the summary and recommendations sections. This part of the process took 10 minutes. Ms. Kapitan then asked at random for the elevator statements that the participants had formulated.

Marcia Mulford Cini, a Commission member at large from Tisbury, reported on the results from Question A – "Describe the interaction between the Commissioners, the Staff and the Executive Director *as you would like it to be*. What obstacles stand in the way of effective interaction?"

Among the major goals Ms. Cini's group had isolated, she related, was the need for the Commissioners and Staff to show each other more mutual respect. Open dialogue should be encouraged, she continued, and the Staff should be permitted to be more vocal, while remaining neutral.

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To achieve its goals, Ms. Cini went on, the Commission had to be led by a strong Chairman as well as a strong Executive Director. And overall, she concluded, the Commission needed more and better communication.

Acting Principal Planner William G. Veno reported on the results from Question C – “What actions should the MVC take to improve its public image and increase the community’s confidence (in the MVC)?”

Foremost, Mr. Veno related, was the need for more outreach to the Towns, with an emphasis on promoting a better understanding of Chapter 831. In addition, the Commission should be asking Town Boards and other groups what they needed and wanted from the MVC. Moreover, both the Commission itself as well as the Town Boards should seek to understand better the mission of the MVC.

As for concrete recommendations, Mr. Veno continued, the consensus lay in the direction of further outreach to Town Boards, perhaps meeting once or twice with at least each Planning Board. The televising of Full Commission Meetings, he said, was also seen as a way to increase the public’s confidence in the MVC.

Next, Ms. Warner reported on the conclusion reached regarding Question E – “What should the Commissioners, Staff and Executive Director increase their focus on? What should they decrease their focus on?”

The emphasis, Ms. Warner related, should be on long-range planning, with the additional goal of improving the lines of communication with the community at large. The Executive Director, she said, should exhibit strong leadership qualities. In addition, the possibilities for new funding sources should also be pursued.

Finally, Ms. Warner concluded, the ED, the Staff and the Commissioners ought to go out into the community to find out what the Towns needed and wanted and then develop ways to satisfy those requests.

Planner Christine Flynn reported on the results for Question G – “What improvements could the MVC make in terms of its relationship with the Towns?”

Ms. Flynn described how the Commission needed to initiate better communication with the Towns and to show more respect for the members of Town Boards. One possibility would be for Staff to offer educational opportunities to the Towns, not only promoting a better understanding of Chapter 831, but also disseminating information about the services offered by the Commission. The primary emphasis, she concluded, should be on effective, positive communication.

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Acting Executive Director Irene M. Fyler provided the elevator statement for Question I – “Who and what does the MVC currently represent? Who and what should the MVC represent?”

Ms. Fyler reported that the impression had emerged that a majority of those questioned shared a concern that too often the Commission represented the special interests of conservation organizations and approached issues from a very specific – and perhaps fixed – point of view. As an antidote to this, she said, it had been recommended that the Commissioners strive to be more open-minded and more flexible in their consideration of the issues before them.

Tisbury Commission member at large John Best summarized the conclusions reached from Question B – “How should the roles of the Commissioners, the Staff and the Executive Director change, if at all?”

Mr. Best reported that in general it was agreed that the Staff members' roles were currently “fine.” As for the Commission members, a consensus had emerged that they should become more active as community planners and concern themselves more with “the big issues” and less with “the details.” The Executive Director should not be egotistical but should lead with strength and vision, Mr. Best concluded.

Mr. Veno provided the elevator statement for Question D – “Reflecting on your year(s) with the MVC, what would you have done differently in terms of actions, decisions, positions, your thinking, et cetera?”

The majority of the respondents, Mr. Veno related, had said that they would not change anything. Also voiced was the belief that some Commission members came to Public Hearings with their own perspective on the issues and were not necessarily open to input on other viewpoints. In addition, a number had said that although they would not change their positions, perhaps in some cases they would have stated their views differently.

Aquinnah Selectmen's Appointee Megan Ottens-Sargent delivered the elevator statement associated with Question F – “What are the unique values and qualities of the Vineyard that will always be the MVC's responsibility to protect?”

Ms. Ottens-Sargent related that she had written down long lists of the values and qualities the participants had come up with. Primary among them, she noted, was farming. Overall, she continued, the group wanted to protect the unique aspects and qualities of the Island as defined in Chapter 831. On the other hand, Ms. Ottens-Sargent concluded, some of the values and concerns seemed to compete with one another.

Ms. Fyler reported on Question J – “Describe the major contributions of the MVC. What would the Island be like without the MVC?” There appeared to be agreement, she said, that the Commission had kept the Island “unique and a special place.” Without the MVC, it had been emphasized, the Island would look like Cape Cod or worse.

Water Resources Planner William M. Wilcox provided the elevator statement for Question H – “How should MVC Meetings change? What should there be more of/less of? In what ways should the process of Public Hearings change? Define your thinking behind your rationale.”

The consensus reached, recounted Mr. Wilcox, was that Commission Meetings should be more disciplined and civil. Moreover, Public Hearings should incorporate the input of Town Boards and the public to a greater degree and at a point earlier in the process, he stressed.

Lastly, Ms. Fyler reported on the results from Question K – “It’s the year 2005 and you’re about to read a news article about the MVC. What do you read that makes you proud to be a part of the Commission? Think about your vision of what you want the Commission to be.”

Overall, related Ms. Fyler, the participants had agreed that in the future the Commission should emphasize its leadership in the area of planning. The time was 9:35 p.m.

Ms. Kapitan explained that the final phase of the facilitation process would be a round-robin of statements from the participants on their reactions to what had transpired that evening. This step was informal, she stressed, and only those who wished to speak should do so.

County Commission representative Roger Wey said that what had struck a chord in him was that “the most important thing is respect for each other.”

Christina Brown, a Commission member at large from Edgartown, observed that she was grateful that all the Island Commission members had been willing to participate in the session that evening.

Ms. Cini stated that she was “more than a little disturbed” that the majority of participants had responded to Question D in the negative, that is, that they would not have done things differently, had they the chance. “I’m concerned about rigid positions and the lack of an ability to learn from other Commissioners,” she remarked.

Edgartown Selectmen’s Appointee Michael Donaroma said that he agreed with Ms. Cini. However, he went on, “this is a great move forward ... It’s really time to open up and accept one another and take a new look at things.”

Ms. Warner pointed out that it was hard for her to take a long view since she had not been a Commission member for very long. Something about Question D, she felt, had made it hard to answer. (Two or three members murmured agreement.) In conclusion, she stated, “I came to do broad-based thinking and regional planning, and I’m hoping that we can look at issues on a broader level than merely the local.”

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Tisbury Selectmen's Appointee Tristan Israel observed that he brought his own sensibilities and life experiences with him to the Commission Meetings. "If someone disagrees, fine," he said, adding, "I have respect for other viewpoints."

Mr. Israel continued, "We've been subjected to a lot of nastiness and divisiveness recently, and most of all, I wish we could do more planning." He remarked that he thought the DRI process could be further streamlined to provide more time for planning. On the other hand, he said, the Commission had had to review "huge projects" over the last few years, and he doubted that much could be done to tighten up the process in those cases.

"What I hear a lot is that that Commissioners and the Staff really care," commented Ms. Fyler. "Everyone is concerned." It was clear to her, she went on, that all the participants wanted to make the Commission work. "If there's the willingness to change," she concluded, "there's the possibility to change."

Linda Sibley, a Commission member at large from West Tisbury, observed that she had been struck that evening by the importance of listening. "Part of respecting each other more is listening to each other more," she said. Ms. Sibley continued, "The Island is a special place, and I wonder if we don't need to continue to explore with each other what those things are that we came to the Commission to protect."

Andrew Woodruff, another at-large member from West Tisbury, related that he had enjoyed the year and a half he had been serving on the Commission. "I've been impressed by the brain power and the compassion I've seen here." He tried, he said, to respect viewpoints different from his own.

He was feeling "a little upset," Mr. Woodruff went on, due to the recent discord within the Commission. But he realized, he said, that some of what the Commissioners had to deal with was subjective, so some disagreement was to be expected.

James Athearn, a Commission member at large from Edgartown, remarked that he was impressed with the qualifications of the people involved with the Commission. "With this much talent and so many people, sometimes things don't get done," he noted. It was important that the Commission have a strong Chair and a strong Executive Director, he said, and he suggested that the Meeting Agenda have a standing item to do planning.

Mr. Best commented, "This is a Commission more open to input from other members than I've seen in my 12 years here." He described how when a group of equals, all of them intelligent, came together, there was bound to be occasional discord. He did not believe, he went on, that the Commission was a dysfunctional institution. Rather, the number of huge, controversial DRI projects over the past few years had been particularly stressful. "We disagree sometimes," he stated.

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"There have been some shifts in the membership and viewpoints," Mr. Best concluded, "and it will continue to shift around."

Ms. Ottens-Sargent pointed out that part of why there had been so much conflict at the Commission was because it did not reflect the community, which was almost evenly divided, for instance, on the issues surrounding the three golf course proposals. She recalled the Nobnocket controversy and how that too had reflected the Island community. "Politics are inevitable," she remarked, "that's part of our experience here. We have to be able to talk openly and honestly ... It's about politics, it's about big issues."

Ms. Ottens-Sargent also spoke of the need for respect not only for each other but also for the institution itself.

Robert Zeltzer, a Commission member at large from Chilmark, declared, "I frankly thought that what we heard in the first part of this process we already knew." He agreed, he said, that it was important to communicate. "My concern is that during our sessions, there are some Commissioners – on both sides – who by their questions clearly are trying to make a point."

Mr. Zeltzer continued, "With some there is no real open-mindedness." He himself felt that if you had not changed your mind 25 times during the course of a drawn-out Hearing process, then surely your mind could not possibly be open to other viewpoints. "There are some really strong pre-opinions here," he said.

Moving on to his second point, Mr. Zeltzer stated, "I ask that people listen attentively and not ask the same question six different ways to make a point." Moreover, he continued, he was tired of listening to people "thinking out loud" when they spoke instead of taking a few notes and drawing their conclusions first. "That would reduce Meetings by at least an hour," he said, adding, "I don't need to hear thought processes."

His third point, observed Mr. Zeltzer, was "a bit of sour grapes," and that was that he still thought the Commission's *By-Laws* and *Regulations* needed to be amended and that Commission Committees should not be open, with members attending meetings whenever they felt like it.

Mr. Woodruff offered another comment. He proposed that Commission members rotate where they sat at the Meetings to avoid having fixed groups form.

Staff Secretary Pia Webster related that she felt sad about the recent discord in and around the Commission. She referred to an altercation between two Commission members that had occurred earlier in the evening and remarked that this sort of thing made her sick. Also distressing to her, she went on, were the snide comments made during Meetings when certain Commission members were trying to speak.

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Ms. Webster also expressed the opinion that too much Commission business was being discussed outside of the Commission Offices, including in the press, and that when there were disagreements, they needed to stay at the Commission and get worked out. Finally, Ms. Webster appealed to the members to think carefully before they spoke.

The time was 10:00 p.m. Ms. Kapitan remarked that in her work over the last 20 years she had never come across a group that did not need help from time to time. "I'm happy everyone stayed until the end," she said. She recommended that the notes taken that evening be compiled and re-evaluated sometime in the near future.

**Discussion: Resolution Adopting Search Process for Executive Director.**

Chairman Vercruyse took the gavel. A brief discussion ensued about whether to vote to adopt the search process for a new Executive Director that had been suggested by Commission Counsel. Ms. Greene pointed out that in its meeting earlier in the week before the Search Committee had decided that the Resolution Adopting a Search Process for Executive Director should be voted on by the full Commission at the earliest possible opportunity. Mr. Wey said he agreed that the Commission should vote on the Resolution that evening so that the search process could go forward. Mr. Donaroma noted, "I think we were in full agreement at the [Search Committee] meeting. Let's do it." It was agreed to proceed.

The Staff Secretary distributed to the members a packet containing a letter from Commission Counsel Eric W. Wodlinger regarding Executive Director search procedures as well as the proposed text of the Resolution. *[See the meeting file for copies.]* Ms. Greene provided a synopsis, moving through each of the Resolution's clauses and checking at each point if the others had any questions. She emphasized that the adoption of the Resolution and its acceptance by the Assistant District Attorney would allow the Search Committee to conduct the preliminary interviews in Executive Session.

Mr. Wey made a **Motion That The Commission Adopt The Procedure As Presented In The Resolution Adopting A Search Process For Executive Director**, duly seconded by Mr. Zeltzer.

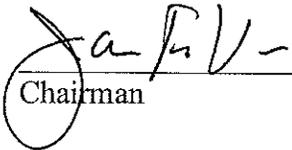
Ms. Ottens-Sargent clarified with Ms. Greene that if the Search Committee wished to have a second interview with a candidate, that interview would have to be in Open Session.

Mr. Donaroma inquired, "If we publicize this process, then that stops all the questions?" The Chairman replied that once the Resolution was signed, a copy would be sent to the Assistant District Attorney for his agreement that this constituted a valid and lawful framework for the search process.

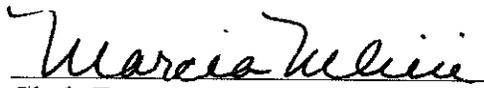
The Chairman then conducted a Voice Vote on the Motion, which carried unanimously, with 15 Ayes, no Nays and none Abstaining.

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Mr. Israel made a Motion To Adjourn, duly seconded. The Special Meeting adjourned at 10:09 p.m.

  
Chairman

24 June 2002  
Date

  
Clerk-Treasurer

24 June 2002  
Date

PRESENT: J. Athearn; J. Best; C. Brown; M. Cini; M. Donaroma; J. Greene;  
T. Israel; M. Ottens-Sargent; L. Sibley; R. Toole; J. Vercruysse;  
K. Warner; R. Wey; A. Woodruff; and R. Zeltzer.

ABSENT: A. Bilzerian; E.P. Horne; J.P. Kelley; C.M. Oglesby; and R. Taylor.

*[These Minutes were prepared by the Staff Secretary using the notes she took during the Special Meeting.]*