November 12, 2021

Dear Members of the Martha’s Vineyard Commission,

I am writing on behalf of the Island Disability Coalition (IDC) in support of the Island Grown Initiative’s (IGI) proposed development of year-round housing and new Education and Innovation Center. The vision of the IDC is that of an inclusive Martha’s Vineyard. IGI has signed on in support of this vision since the inception of the Coalition, and has been actively involved in a variety of projects and initiatives. IGI demonstrates a true commitment to weaving the philosophy of inclusion throughout their programming, ensuring access to community members of all abilities, across the lifespan.

The IDC works to build the capacity of community partners to provide inclusive and accessible programs and services. Our goal is to facilitate the development of sustainable inclusion practices within local organizations. In 2020, the IDC welcomed inclusion project proposals from local organizations. Island Grown was awarded funding to work directly with inclusion consultant Kat King on topics related to the proposed development of the Education and Innovation Center. IGI demonstrates their understanding that for an organization to truly embrace and facilitate inclusive programming and services, the philosophy of inclusion must be incorporated into the overall vision and mission of the organization. Senior leadership as well as members of the IGI board participated in various workshops and conversations facilitated by Kat King, to develop an inclusion statement for the organization going forward. IGI took the process a step further by connecting proposed project architect with Kat King, to ensure inclusion and accessibility were at the forefront of the planning process, including attending a workshop on Universal Design.

In addition to learning how to implement inclusive programming, IGI is committed to being an inclusive employer. Members of IGI senior leadership are participating in the Inclusive Employment Pilot Project sponsored by the IDC and in collaboration with Institute for Community Inclusion out of UMASS Boston. Island Grown is joining 12 other community organizations and businesses participating in six community of practice sessions facilitated by the Institute in which they will receive training in inclusive hiring best practices. Sessions will also allow for networking, sharing of experiences and ideas supporting the development of peer supports. The pilot project will also connect IGI with community, regional, and statewide resources to support their development as an inclusive employer.

Research is clear, inclusive practices do not just benefit individuals with disabilities. Planning with inclusion in mind creates environments and experiences in which community members can thrive, due to the removal of both structural and attitudinal barriers. IGI believes that every member of our community deserves access to healthy, locally grown food, as well as the opportunity to engage in the process of farming. The proposed development of the new Education and Innovation Center will create a space that is welcoming and accessible to members of our community of all abilities. In collaborating with the IDC, Island Grown is actively working to learn best practices of inclusion, and how to implement such practices into the future of IGI.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Beth Wike
Coordinator, Island Disability Coalition
Dear Commissioners of the MVC
Nov 1, 2021

I am writing today on behalf of Island Grown Initiative. Island Grown Initiative has been an integral part of our work from the beginning of our program services. For years IGI has been supporting the tribal community with freshly gleaned produce. We would distribute it as well as freeze some to help support community members in need during the winter months. Within just a couple of years, we had built additional partnerships and had developed a mini food pantry at our center. We would do monthly food distributions to anyone in the Wampanoag community who needed it. This was extremely useful not just for the obvious reason of helping to feed people, but it allowed us, a tribal domestic violence and sexual assault program, to move around the community in full view without any stigma being attached to our work. People could no longer just assume if they saw us with someone that they were a victim. It also allowed us to build trust with our tribal community, that they wouldn’t hear their business out in the neighborhood. As a small, tight knit community being able to achieve those two things was extremely important to us.

When the covid quarantine lifted we started weekly food distributions, largely supported by IGI. The food that was given to be distributed included veggies, ready made meals and soups, pork and beef. Additionally, we received Indigenous foods such as fish, shellfish, venison, goose, herbs and wild edibles. The Tribe received some USDA food boxes which contained dairy, fruit, veggies and protein. The quality of the food contained in the boxes was very low. We heard from many tribal members how horrible they felt when they received those boxes because they needed the food and it made them feel shame. They also said that they felt bad for even having the negative thoughts and they felt as though they should have just been thankful. Those same tribal members said that they love the food they receive from IGI and it is food that everyone would want to eat. The Indigenous foods were welcomed with great enthusiasm. To date we are still offering weekly food distributions even through the winter months.

This spring IGI also assisted us in developing our traditional 3 sisters community garden with our original variety of corn, beans, and squash. I think this was the first time in at least a hundred years that we had a garden like this as a community. While we had many challenges, we still were able to harvest enough to create a 3 sisters’ soup that will be distributed at our Thanksgiving food distribution.

We are currently looking to increase the access to Indigenous foods, the number of people using Indigenous foods, and the number of people who have the knowledge to harvest Indigenous foods. Of course, IGI has

A Program of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah, A Federally Recognized Tribe
offered to help in any way they can. There is so much that IGI has done, and yet so much more to do. One of the main obstacles we all face is being able to have enough staff considering the housing crisis. At the Tribe, the have been top levels of management that were unable to find housing even with their high salary rate. In the experience of our program, we have transitional assistance where we would pay first, last and security, rent and utilities until a program participant could get on their feet, however there was just no rentals available for families. Staff housing is a solution that would enable IGI to hire more people to accomplish the great work that they are doing. Without being able to offer housing to staff I can’t see how the work would be able to continue to grow. IGI has been there supporting our community and now we as an island need to assist IGI in meeting their needs.

With Thanks

Jennifer Randolph
Program Manage
Safe Harbor for the People of the First Light
A Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Program of
The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head Aquinnah
November 4, 2021

Re: Support for IGI request for funding

Dear Martha’s Vineyard Commission,

IGI has been a valued partner of the First Congregational Church of West Tisbury in addressing food insecurity on the island. Our church participates in a gleaning program whereby we send volunteers to harvest extra produce. We process and store fresh vegetables and fruit to make soups, stews, and sauce. These products are either distributed immediately or they are frozen and distributed throughout the year. As an example, we recently provided frozen soups to the West Tisbury library for distribution in the aftermath of this fall’s violent storm. When IGI organizes summer community lunches, we also provide volunteers to prepare and serve these lunches to the community. When we offer workshops on food waste and other sustainable food programs, IGI has stepped up and helped us prepare content.

These are only a few of the many valuable offerings that IGI provides to the island. IGI offers community vegetable plots, community composting and regenerative agriculture modeling and instruction, to name a few.

Under the leadership of Island Grown Initiative, the Food Equity Network was established about five years ago. This network brought together many island organizations which had been working separately and without coordination to address food insecurity. IGI brought us all together, inviting us to share, collaborate and network. As a result our island was so much better prepared to work together to get food to those in need when the pandemic arrived. The IGI farm organized extra planting of food to share with all of the organizations. Our church continues to be an active participant in this Food Equity Network, and we deeply appreciate IGI’s leadership in this effort.

Education is a key component of IGI’s work, and to successfully execute its programs, IGI needs better facilities on its farm to host visitors, school groups, community gardeners, and volunteers. Currently, IGI lacks accessible bathrooms and adequate meeting facilities. Because of the lack of affordable housing on the island, IGI needs housing in order to be able to hire and retain the staff that it needs.

How wonderful would it be if IGI had a beautiful, energy efficient Education and Innovation Center to host all their programs? How much easier would it be to be able to hire staff if it could offer affordable housing? Our collaboration with IGI would be greatly enhanced.
Our church is committed to help reduce food insecurity as well as to proactively address climate change. We know that food insecurity continues to be significant on the island. We also know that food growth and food waste are key components to the existential climate crisis which we all face. IGI has the expertise, the leadership, and the inspiration to address these problems. But perhaps more importantly, it has the vision to partner with farms, schools, organizations, and churches such as ours to multiply the effects of its work.

We strongly endorse IGI’s application for funding from the Martha’s Vineyard Commission for its Education and Innovation Center and for its housing request. We hope that you will support them.

Kind regards,

Jana Bertkau, Council Chair
Marjorie Peirce, Coordinator, Community Suppers and Food Outreach
Sydney Mullen, Coordinator, Community Suppers and Food Outreach
First Congregational Church of West Tisbury
October 30th, 2021

Dear Martha’s Vineyard Commission,

I am writing in strong support of Island Grown Initiative’s (IGI) application for new developments that will support their regenerative farming, education and food equity programs at the IGI farm.

IGI is an invaluable organization on our island, one that Vineyarders from all towns turn to for food resources, education and more. From their Mobile Market, Food Pantry, gleaning program to education outreach, they provide necessary services to all ages and abilities across our island.

Here at the West Tisbury Library, IGI has been a trusted and valued partner for many years. We partner with IGI to distribute lunches over the summer and school breaks. The IGI Community Lunch Program, which serves free lunches during school vacation weeks and the summer school vacation, is just one example of the innovative programs IGI runs for food equity and justice. IGI works with community partners to not only provide food for all, but a sense of community and connection as well.

We are a distribution point for compost buckets offered through IGI, which also offers compost drop off at their farm. We have collaborated with IGI to offer take-home garden kits, and countless workshops and programs, ranging from storytimes and regenerative garden talks, to cooking classes for kids and families. The creativity, dedication, flexibility, and passion of everyone at IGI is clear through their cooperative, friendly teamwork on any project we work on together.

We have also partnered with IGI on the creation of the Community Seed Library, a cabinet here at the library where anyone can come “check out” free seeds for their garden, attend free workshops on seed saving, and get free seedlings and seeds at our annual seed and seedling swaps. Developing a locally adapted collection of seeds is an important part of long-term community food security, as we saw clearly at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, when seeds were unavailable commercially and we gave away thousands of seeds from our library to our community.
IGI has hosted countless meetings and public forums in the Library community room, on everything from SNAP and WIC access to regenerative backyard gardening to home composting. Having a space of their own would enable them to serve an even larger group in so many more creative and needed ways.

On a personal note, it was the employee housing at Morning Glory Farm that enabled me to move to the island over 12 years ago. As our housing crisis hits a critical peak, employee housing is a necessity to attract and retain workers who could otherwise not afford to live here.

I have full trust that IGI will work with South Mountain Company and the larger community to create sustainable and climate-forward buildings for housing and for the planned Education Center. As IGI continues to serve our island communities it is clear that more comprehensive, accessible, and safe facilities at the farm are needed. Having a Education Center and employee housing at the IGI farm would open up a new range of possibilities for IGI to feed, educate, and serve our community. We hear from patrons that they would love cooking classes, but the library lacks a kitchen. It is exciting to think of the possible program collaborations we could do at the IGI Center in the future.

I strongly encourage you to support IGI’s efforts to expand in these sustainable and necessary ways. Please don’t hesitate to reach out for more information, and thank you for your consideration of their proposal.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Pratt

Director
West Tisbury Free Public Library
apratt@clamsnet.org
508-693-3366
Dear Martha’s Vineyard Commission,

It is my pleasure to write this letter on behalf of Island Grown Initiative as they hope to promote regenerative farming, education, and food equity programs with a new Education Center at the farm. The Martha’s Vineyard Public Charter School has been working with IGI in some capacity for close to a decade. We, therefore, enthusiastically support their efforts to build this new space on their farm.

With the arrival of COVID-19 in 2020, the school’s relationship with IGI took on added importance. In an effort to get our students off Zoom and to connect our students to a project-based experience, we reached out to IGI to see if they could accommodate our students with hands-on learning opportunities. IGI enthusiastically welcomed our students on Grades 5-12 every week from October-June to help with orchard cultivation, gleaning, and food regeneration. The experience was invaluable for students and staff alike. Not only did they learn about how precious food resources are grown on the island, but our students also worked collaboratively on large projects. This allowed our kids to get off a screen, breathe the fresh Island air and be part of something larger than themselves. The social and emotional benefit to our students was absolutely critical. It was also great to see the gleaned food from IGI being used by the Charter School kitchen. It was such a success, that the program has continued again this year with our Middle School students.

As an International Baccalaureate World School, we offer the Career-Related program for students who may be interested in pursuing agriculture, aquaculture, elementary education of culinary arts. There are only 280 IB Career-Related program schools in the world. The Charter School is one of them. We believe that if IGI were to receive additional classroom space, our students, and especially our students in the IB culinary program, might truly benefit from gaining expertise in a farm-to-table experience. We hope that our students might also be able to gain the skills to actively contribute to the Island food and garden education program. As many of our students seek summer opportunities, this new space might allow them to participate in the Island summer lunch program and to continue our active involvement with school gardens throughout Martha’s Vineyard.

This year, the Martha’s Vineyard Public Charter School celebrates 25 years. One reason for our continued sustainability is our partnerships with island organizations such as IGI. As we look forward to the next 25 years, we hope that this initiative to provide a comprehensive, accessible, and safe facility IGI would greatly benefit our Charter School students and Martha’s Vineyard as a whole. We, therefore, support this effort to bring additional education spaces to IGI. Our school looks forward to collaboratively working with IGI, and their new space, for years to come.

If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me at the school.

Sincerely,

Pete Steedman, Ed.D.
Director
Martha’s Vineyard Commission
January 4, 2022

Dear Commissioners,

I write to you today in support of DRI 212M for Island Grown Initiative (IGI) which includes the construction of a new Education and Innovation Center and two new buildings for worker housing at IGI’s Farm at 80 Stoney Hill Road. Martha’s Vineyard Hospital partners with IGI to ensure that everyone on the Island has access to good, healthy food which enhances the overall health and wellness of our community members. Food is at the core of good health and an important part of disease prevention and management.

IGI has established itself as the “go to” organization for all things food. Their educational programming for children in our schools and early childhood centers helps develop good eating habits in our next generation. They teach children how to grow food, prepare healthy meals and recycle any food waste into compost. IGI has significantly impacted the quality of food in the school cafeterias. During summer vacations, IGI provides lunches to children in need through the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, English language learning camp, early childhood education programs and a variety of other programs.

IGI’s farm provides produce and protein products to Islanders facing food insecurity on the Island. Farm production is dependent on workers. Without the staff, there would be no ability to feed those in need. I can speak firsthand to the difficulties of recruiting and retaining excellent staff on the Island. The high cost of living generally and the lack of affordable housing are a huge barrier for any employer. We at Martha’s Vineyard Hospital have invested in employee housing and I applaud IGI for doing the same.

Their work on regenerative agriculture, biodiversity, and access to community garden plots for Island people are all important for the present and future food security of our Island. The IGI Farm should be a place where people of all ages and abilities can come learn about regenerative food production. Their climate-forward design for the housing units and the Education and Innovation Center will help the farm serve our community better.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Denise Schepici
President & CEO
Martha’s Vineyard Hospital
Windemere Nursing and Rehabilitation Center