

*MVC Climate Resilience Committee (CRC)*

*Stakeholder Listening Session #10: Town Administrators*

*September 16, 2020, on Zoom*

CRC members present: Liz Durkee, Alex Elvin, Tristan Israel, Ben Robinson, Kate Warner

Town administrators present: James Hagerty (Edgartown), Jen Rand (West Tisbury)

***Key points***

GENERAL

- The biggest concern in West Tisbury is the state forest and wildfire
- The biggest concern in Edgartown is flooding around Edgartown Harbor and pumping stations
- Edgartown conservation agent Jane Varkonda is working on a municipal infrastructure study that includes the Chappy Ferry and access roads
- Chappy residents are considering a private feasibility study to determine the cost of adapting to sea-level rise
- Church Street charging station is an example where more public education could have swung the vote
- The Climate Resilience Plan should focus on strategies more than impacts, and outline funding sources

STATE FOREST

- West Tisbury does not have the authority to do forest maintenance, even though it owns a brush breaker
- The forest manager's vacancy is only part of the problem, since managing the forest requires a staff and machinery
- The selectmen, county, MVC, and fire chiefs should work together to facilitate an Islandwide message to the state in regard to forest management

FUNDING

- Funding for adaptation projects in Edgartown is coming largely from taxpayers, while West Tisbury projects are more grant-driven
- Cost estimates and prioritization of which are projects are most urgent are essential for adaptation planning

## ***Summary of discussion***

### I. Current impacts and funding

The town administrators discussed climate change impacts their towns are facing, and current efforts to address them. Jen Rand said the biggest concern in West Tisbury is the state forest and wildfire, while James Hagerty pointed to flooding around Edgartown Harbor and the Dock Street pumping station as key issues. He noted that the Edgartown Yacht Club recently raised its building for about \$11 million, and the town is planning to raise Memorial Wharf for about \$3 million, with a follow-up project expected to cost another couple million. Protecting the Dock Street pumping station may also cost somewhere in the millions. Town conservation agent Jane Varkonda is working on a municipal infrastructure study that includes the Chappy Ferry and access roads, and James meets with the Chappy Island Association and a Chappy steering committee. He said Chappy residents are considering a private feasibility study to determine the cost of adapting to sea-level rise.

James said Edgartown has about \$32 million in capital improvement projects over the next few years, and a consultant will be hired to look at converting the capped landfill to a solar field. A town committee is also exploring options for a VTA electric bus charging station, after a town meeting article proposing a station on Church Street was tabled due to the concerns of abutters. Upgrades to the Dunham Road pumping station are also in the works.

Liz Durkee mentioned plans to hire a full-time climate planner for the MVC, and asked if such a position would be useful in the towns as well. James said Edgartown relies mostly on the conservation agent for that type of work, since she is already involved in environmental and planning issues.

James said funding for adaptation projects in Edgartown is coming largely from taxpayers, since there is no time to wait for grants to be awarded. He agreed it was better to be proactive about adaptation, although town meeting is a funding source for projects that require immediate action. The town also puts money in a stabilization fund every year. Large projects will often have multiple funding sources. James said accurate cost estimates and prioritization of which are projects are most urgent are essential for adaptation planning.

Jen said West Tisbury is generally less susceptible to climate impacts like flooding, and the town's funding for projects tends to be more small-scale and grant-driven. She said the town's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness process was well received, and people tend to be onboard about funding resilience projects if there are grants involved.

Kate Warner said there may be future projects in West Tisbury that do require town meeting appropriations, such as for solar arrays and battery storage, but Jen said those would likely not be a hard sell, as long as there is some grant funding to back them up. On the topic of public education, James pointed to the Church Street charging station as an example where more public education could have swung the vote. That project will return to town meeting in the spring. He saw the project as low-hanging fruit, but if simple projects can't get passed, then complex ones will be even more difficult.

## II. Further discussion of state forest

The state forest lies almost entirely in Edgartown and West Tisbury, which presents an opportunity for the towns to work together on forest management. Jen said the Department of Conservation and Recreation has chronically understaffed the forest, and the town does not have the authority to do maintenance, even though it owns a brush breaker. But even if the town did have the authority, it wouldn't necessarily have the money. She said the state needs do more to handle forest management. She was unclear as to why the DCR will not allow anyone to live in the house at the state forest, since the Varkondas lived there when John Varkonda was the forest manager. She added that the manager's vacancy was only part of the problem, since managing the forest requires a staff and machinery.

Tristan Israel said he was working with the County Commission to address the issue with the state. Kate warned that a bad fire in the forest could spread to the homes at Dodger's Hole and along Old County Road. Jen said she and James would discuss the forest issues in more detail. Ben argued that the selectmen, county, and MVC should work together to facilitate an Islandwide message to the state in regard to forest management. Kate said the fire chiefs should be included as well.

## III. Main features to include in a Climate Resilience Plan (CRP)

Jen said she would like the CRP to present specific strategies, since people already know what the problems are in general. However, Ben argued there is still a need for better information and education regarding the impacts. He said a study underway by Woodwell Climate Research Center will provide a starting point, and the Island needs to be more forward thinking so we can prepare for the impacts. He stressed the need for the CRC to lay out funding sources, since adaptation projects will likely depend on funding from the towns. Liz said the goal was to be both proactive and innovative in our approaches to adaptation. She hoped this listening session would be the first of several conversations with town administrators as the planning process continues.