



BiodiversityWorks

wildlife research, monitoring & mentoring

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Ms. Lucy Morrison, DRI Coordinator
Martha's Vineyard Commission
PO Box 1447
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557
morrison@mvcommission.org

August 22, 2019

RE: DRI 682A Meeting House Place Re-Design

Dear Ms. Morrison,

BiodiversityWorks is a Martha's Vineyard non-profit that promotes biodiversity conservation across the island through wildlife research and monitoring and outreach to our community. The land currently protected as conservation land or open space is not enough to ensure the future of our island's natural heritage (biodiversity and ecosystem health). Undeveloped habitat on private land plays an important role in providing habitat for many wildlife species as well as corridors that allow wildlife to move between tracts of conservation land and the ponds that ensure their survival. It is with this in mind that I provide these comments on the re-designed Meeting House Place Subdivision because the proposed development is in one of the last undeveloped forested areas of Edgartown that provides connectivity between the Jernegan pond area and Turkeyland Cove of Edgartown Great Pond (see Figure 1).

Psychologist Peter Kahn's work on Environmental Generational Amnesia is applicable to every DRI you review. Kahn describes how "with each ensuing generation, the amount of environmental degradation increases, but each generation tends to perceive that degraded condition as the nondegraded condition, as the normal experience." Over the last 50 -100 years, each generation of islanders has grown accustomed to a more and more developed island. We can rely on locals who are 60, 70, or 80 years young to tell us of the Edgartown and Martha's Vineyard they grew up knowing, but we can also look to maps to give us a clear picture of how much the island has changed in the last several decades.

The map of Edgartown in 1979 (Figure 2) shows a very different Edgartown than the map of Edgartown in 2018 (Figure 1). Over the last 40 years, development has claimed much of the open space north and east of Edgartown Great Pond, and the remaining undeveloped land is important as habitat for wildlife. Furthermore, Edgartown Great Pond is reaching a tipping point from nitrogen inputs that lead to algal growth, increased temperatures and low oxygen levels that kill fish and other aquatic life that support the entire food web.

Figure 1. Parcel map of Edgartown in 2018. The area highlighted in yellow shows an arcing swath of mostly undeveloped land that provides a corridor for wildlife between Turkeyland Cove and the Jernegan Pond area.

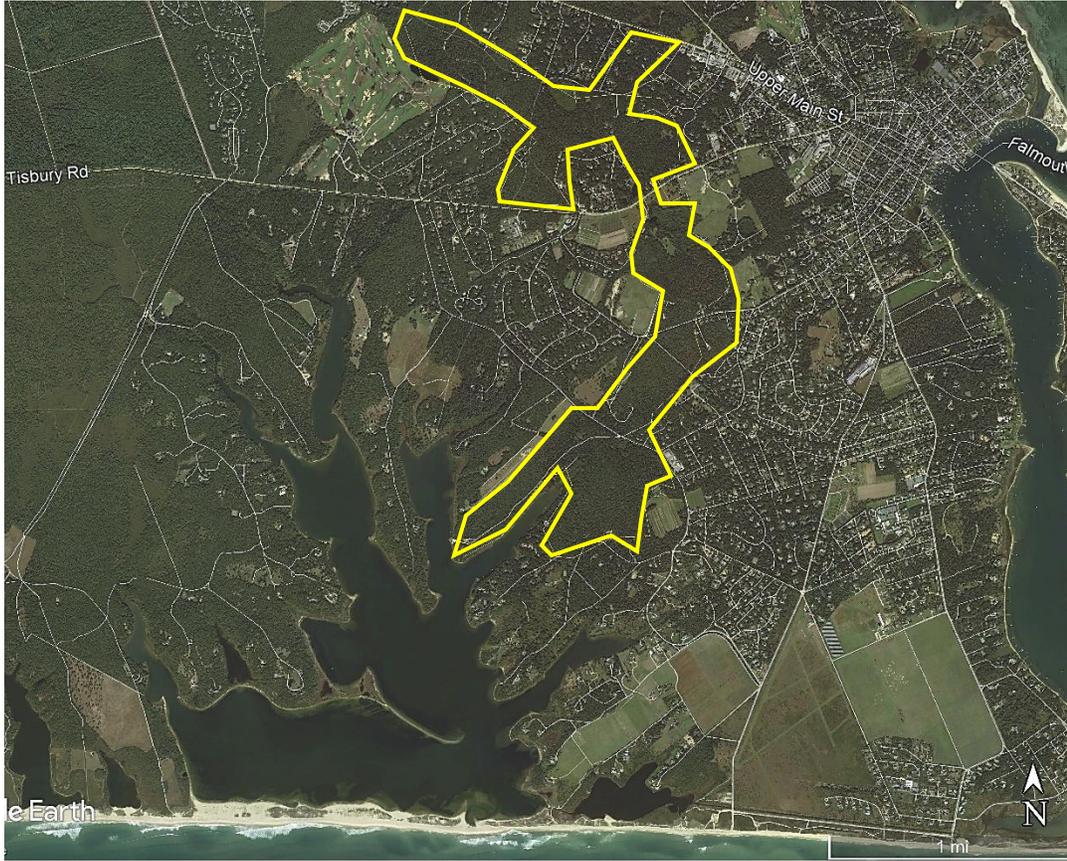
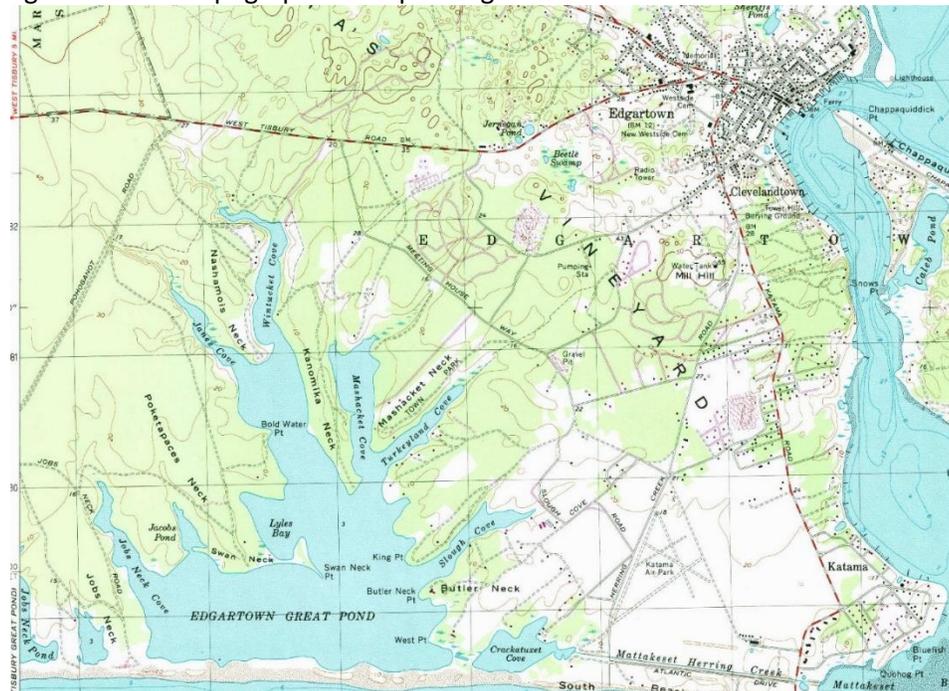


Figure 2. USGS Topographical Map of Edgartown in 1979



We understand that the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program has reviewed the revised plan favorably, with reference to the amount of habitat set aside for the priority species, the imperial moth (*Eacles imperialis*). Indeed, the revised plan, setting aside open space in a contiguous tract verses fragmenting it across the development is an improvement. However, the Martha's Vineyard Commission's mandate is to preserve the island's biodiversity; inherent in that mandate is the responsibility to prevent common, native species from becoming rare and to preserve water quality in our ponds that support people, fish, and wildlife.

The 54 Acres at 139 Meeting House Way is part of a wide corridor of forested habitat that extends from Caroline Tuthill Preserve to Edgartown Great Pond. This forested corridor is excellent habitat for a variety of wildlife species, but the trees and shrubs in that corridor also play a vital role in taking nitrogen out of the groundwater before it reaches the pond. This development will be adding nitrogen to the pond's watershed, a pond that is near its tipping point.

With an affordable housing development on the horizon in this area, it is imperative that the Commission consider the cumulative watershed and biodiversity impacts as well as the increased traffic for the neighborhood.

Thank you to the Commission members and staff for your service to the island community and for taking the time to read and consider these comments.

Respectfully yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Johnson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Luanne Johnson, PhD
Director/Wildlife Biologist