

June 3, 2020

Dear Martha's Vineyard Commission

We are in uncertain times, with many aspects of daily life changing. In the midst of change, one thing that remains constant is the threat to our island's environment, and our way of life. I am writing to voice, once again, opposition to with the renewed effort by Utah developers to build a luxury housing development a short distance from the Edgartown Great Pond. The application for this proposed project, the Meetinghouse Way development (DRI 682B) presents a clear danger to a sustainable and recognizable Martha's Vineyard, and needs to be denied.

I wish to remind the Commission that last September, after lengthy public hearings and presentations by agents of the developers, the LUPC, recommended to deny the application by a decisive 7-2 vote. Public opposition to the proposal was nearly unanimous, and this recommendation by the LUPC to deny was met with island wide approval. The application was then to be voted on by the entire Commission. This final vote has unfortunately been delayed since early last fall. In the meanwhile, the developers have come back with a minimally altered plan, one that still envisions building 27 luxury houses, of up to 4,200 square feet each. There are some trimmings, mostly in the form of 14 townhouses affordably priced, but these are crumbs off a table laden with profit for the developers. In no way do the few little "gifts" being offered by the developers offset the project's enormous detriments. The loss of a big part of wooded habitat, serving to mitigate in its small way the effects of excessive carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, is alone reason to turn the proposal down.

The pandemic has served to clarify the terms "essential" and "non-essential." Almost needless to say, the impact of building a huge number of luxury houses, with lawns and pools, in the Edgartown Great Pond watershed, can hardly be deemed essential. Essential is towns and non-profits partnering to build affordable, ecologically sensitive housing in a post-pandemic island. We need to house our truly essential population, the year round residents working our farms, stores, restaurants, in our schools and medical facilities, in our law enforcement agencies, and other first responders. This can be done, without depending on the "generosity" of developers who balance the small pay-out for mandated affordable costs against enormous profit, and make a simple business, hardly an altruistic, decision to include some "affordable" element. Standard operating procedure.

Also essential is all of us working to protect our natural environment, while allowing for sensible and equitable housing. This 54-acre parcel of mature woodlands, contiguous with tracts of conserved land around the Great Pond, should become part of what's preserved by our conservation organizations, to be shared now, and by future generations as an integral part of our natural world.

There are clear and well-reasoned arguments against the Meetinghouse Way application. Traffic, nitrogen, water, destruction of habitat, increasing suburbanization and inequality, are all major and unanswered concerns. The MVC is charged with weighing potential detriments against benefits in determining the fate of of proposals such as this one. In this case, there are no real benefits, and a long list of detriments. This is a turning point for the island. Let's head in the right direction, starting with denying this proposal once and for all.

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