

Martha's Vineyard Commission
33 New York Ave
Oak Bluffs, MA 02557

July 1, 2020

RE: DRI 682B, Meeting House Way Subdivision

Dear Martha's Vineyard Commissioners,

We are grateful for the role that you play giving thoughtful process and great care to the planning and ultimate future of the Island. Along these lines, we sincerely hope that your deliberation will result in the denial of the proposed Meeting House Way subdivision.

As an Island community our geographical limits are clearly defined by our shores. But we must also realize the limits that accompany this geography -- how finite our resources -- how delicate the balance that keeps our waters clean and our open space vibrant enough to support habitat, farming and spirit. And in the case of the land and resources of this particular Island, how rare they are, and how truly special. As residents we delight in the benefits of living in such a place, but we are also tasked with the burden and responsibility of striking a balance between our pursuits and the preservation of one of the truly remarkable parts of the world. It is a tall order.

We are at a time when our towns, and specifically your organization, are grappling with how to make our community sustainable and resilient in the face of climate change and over development. Our newspapers report regularly on the stresses of traffic, the issue of nitrogen in our ponds, the unaffordability of housing, the loss of biodiversity, and the notion that we have reached a "tipping point". In light of all of these factors and more, this project does not demonstrate the community benefit that could justify its approval. Far from benefit, the realization of this proposal would greatly exacerbate all of these already potent stressors.

It is easy to see the short, and maybe even some longer term economic gains the project might lend the community. There will be houses to be built (although will this be local labor?). There will be landscapes to be planted and thereafter lawns to be mowed and paint to be repainted. It is nice that the project has made overtures to affordable housing and solar energy. But it is simply not enough to outweigh, the maybe less easily seen, detriments that the project also brings to us. What happens to Edgartown's real estate and ecosystems if the Great Pond watershed is further impaired? What stress does the project put on the waste water system? What inequities exist in how this project is being prioritized for sewer connection versus other nearby neighborhoods that have been waiting for years? What happens to the Great Pond when these other communities remain without hookup and continue to present a nitrogen burden? What happens to wildlife when we loose this habitat? How does the project add to already snarled traffic? Why are we using open space for luxury housing when the housing we really do need should be

affordable? And why are we using a large block of unblemished open space at all? How many undeveloped tracts of 50 acres still exist on the Island? We know that resilience for our human community means living among robust natural ecosystems that can withstand predicted future changes. Every large open piece we take away makes our systems, and our future, more fragile.

Even in strictly economic terms this project does not make sense. Visitors do not flock here because it looks and feels like every other suburbanized place. They come for the qualities that are hard to find elsewhere. We are at a crossroads. We can protect this gift we have been entrusted with or watch it slip away. It should be an easy decision. We are lucky. We can have our cake and eat it too. Protecting this beautiful place means protecting our economy, since the first drives the second. We are not faced with mining our mountains or felling our trees to feed our industry. We need to keep our beaches wild and beautiful, our hills green and rolling, our vistas inspiring and there is no better insurance of our economic future. We just need to look more than one project out.

This is a pivotal moment and critical decision for the Commission and the Island. We are on the cusp of losing this place and the qualities that make it special. Developments such as this risk not only our environment and economy, but the very culture of our community. There will be continued development on the Island, but it need not look like this. It is easy to feel that one more project will be fine. But there really is a point in time when we have lost too much, and our environment and our economy will both suffer the resulting loss, not to mention our spirit. Please show the rare courage and wisdom to protect this rare place. You are in the privileged position of defining our future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Samantha Look and Kristian Strom
West Tisbury residents