

To: Members of the Martha's Vineyard Commission

Written Testimony re: Proposed Meetinghouse Way Development 2<sup>nd</sup> Re-Design (Edg (DRI 682B)), Public Hearing on June 4, 2020

As long-time residents of the Vineyard, we write to express our extreme opposition to the proposed Meetinghouse Way development that is the subject of today's public hearing before the Martha's Vineyard Commission. Even with the developers' proposed changes to the project, its detriments far outweigh its benefits.

The proposed development is another example of over-building run amok on the Island, damaging the Island's character and threatening endangered species and natural habitats. The last thing the Vineyard needs right now is another set of luxury houses, built on yet more newly-cleared land, catering to overly wealthy seasonal residents. To the extent that such residents would like to purchase a home on the Vineyard, there is already a glut of luxury homes on the market, including many newly built - ostensibly on spec. In fact, the number of high-end, large-square-foot homes built on the Vineyard in the last two decades already threatens the character and environment of the Island and has made it increasingly difficult for any but the very wealthy to own a home here. If we fail to act, the Island will soon no longer be the place we have all loved for generations – from a social and environmental perspective.

We believe that the answer to MVC Chairman Sederholm's comments on the project from last fall is clear: "At what point does this body take action to prevent the total suburbanization of Martha's Vineyard? If we decided that another large subdivision for vacation homes of 4,800 square feet each is going to have a negative impact on the quality of life here ... at what point do we draw the line? At what point do we say enough is enough?" We, along with many Vineyarders say, "enough." This is where we should begin to draw the line. We hope the Commission will reject the proposed development. We would also refer the Commission to Jeff Agnoli's excellent letter to the editor, published May 28 in the MV Times, and referenced in whole below, which makes all of the relevant points better than we.

Susan and Elizabeth Phelps  
West Tisbury

Martha's Vineyard Times, May 28, 2020

To the Editor:

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 share with Islanders the renewed effort by Utah developers to

build a luxury housing development a short distance from Edgartown Great Pond. The application for this proposed project, the Meetinghouse Way development, is once again before the Martha's Vineyard Commission. It will be the subject of a virtual public meeting on June 4 in Oak Bluffs. This application presents a clear danger to a sustainable and recognizable Martha's Vineyard, and needs to be denied.

Last September, after lengthy public hearings and presentations by agents of the developers, the LUPC, a subgroup of the commission, recommended to deny the application by a decisive 7-2 vote. The application was then to be voted on by the entire commission. This final vote has 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.

The pandemic has served to clarify the terms "essential" and "nonessential." 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 nonprofits 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 payout 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 (titled DRI 682B on the MVC website) that can be viewed, if you are interested. 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 proposals such as this one. In this case, there are no real benefits, and a long list of detriments. Please consider attending the public hearing, in whatever form it will take. This is a turning point for the Island. Let's head in the right direction, starting with denying this proposal once and for all.

Jeff Agnoli

Edgartown