

Martha's Vineyard Commission
Rick Saltzberg
Subject: DRI #751 Vineyard Montessori School Expansion

My Husband and I moved to 75 N William street with our 2 young children in 1985. It is our only residence. Our property is on the corner of N William and Tashmoo Ave. Before 55 Tashmoo was built, Montessori was our neighbor.

Since the proposed Montessori expansion is in our neighborhood, I think the N. William St neighborhood needs a quick description. Most of the homes were built in the late 1940 and early 50's. Homes are modest in size and sit on .25 acre lots. I'm not positive, but I believe all but 1 home are year-round residences, many for generations. These neighbors are nurses, teachers, landscapers all island workers. In many ways it is an old-fashioned neighborhood, complete with young children, teens, working adults and seniors. Children ride their bikes, play basketball in the street. Neighbors chat daily with each other at their mailboxes.

N. William is a pedestrian street, used by neighboring streets as an access to town because Franklin and Main streets are busy, difficult to cross and the single sidewalks and many driveways are not designed for pedestrian safety. N. William and Tashmoo Ave do not have sidewalks. We do have a 4 way stop street on the Tashmoo/N William corners, requested by the neighbors, because there were too many near accidents between cars on Tashmoo and pedestrians and bikers on N. William. It has been much safer since that was installed.

Locust Lane is an old and quiet road, with a walking path connecting N. William to Locust. That area used to be very moist due to a water aeration pipe that used to drain in that area. That pipe is no longer there with the most recent Montessori building project.

We have concerns about this new proposal and I appreciate that you will take the time to review them.

Vehicle Safety: All Montessori traffic must come through Tashmoo Ave. The staggered drop off and pick up now used, works in theory. In reality, when the line to get into or out of the school is backed up, parents park and navigate their child to the Montessori parking lot which is ever snaking cars in and out. While this is happening, other cars and trucks are also driving on Tashmoo Ave since this is the one of the few 2way streets between Main and Franklin. Granted this congestion is for a limited time, but with the proposed increasing numbers and their future plan to raise the original building to create housing, vehicular traffic is a concern. Emergency vehicular being able to negotiate the traffic and narrowed roads is a concern for both the residents in the neighborhood and the school.

Pedestrian safety: The Montessori is tucked into a congested neighborhood. Residents are out walking their dogs, walking to town and Tisbury school, children and adults are on their bikes. We have learned to avoid that area during transitions, but the increase be dearly felt. Tashmoo Ave will be more hazardous. Public safety is an important aspect of this proposed development.

Neighborhood Environment: Since we are densely populated, septic and water flow is a concern and needs to be monitored. Climate change needs to always be considered. I worry that less dirt, more concrete, more toilets, sinks for 158 children and adults needs serious consideration. The present plan does away with one small playground, leaving a small, but adequate playground for toddlers and the present preschool playground for all the other students. That will be the only open space on the property, aside from the parking lot. Montessori is a year-round, full day program, including a summer program. I really doesn't matter how many septic systems you build, these large numbers will have an impact on our soil.

Also, the neighborhood environment will be dramatically changed when another potentially 35' high building towers over the 1 story cottages surrounding it.

We are advocates of education, our careers have been in education, our children attended this Montessori in the 1980's, and we were active members of the school. When the Montessori school first moved to its present location from Nathan Mayhew, it was one building with 2 classrooms with a large outside space and it incorporated itself into the neighborhood. Its playground would be respectfully used by neighbors on weekends, Montessori children took walks through the neighborhood and many walked to and from school with their parents. I don't know exactly when that changed, but now the "private property", "no trespassing", "surveillance cameras in use" along with security spotlights from the roof of the buildings clearly state that the school is not part of the neighborhood. Montessori has outgrown this small neighborhood.

In closing, I am acutely aware of the need for childcare on this island, Early Childhood was my career. Its exciting that Chilmark plans to build its own preschool. The Public-School Committees are also addressing universal Preschool. Child Care Providers, including Montessori, have been able to increase in size due to grants from MV Youth. As an island community, we need to find solutions where there can be childcare with generous, safe outdoor space along with quality education that is in keeping with our communities.

Thank you for your time,
Mary and Paul Brissette